

Historical Marker - S717 - Israelite House of David / Mary's City of David (Marker ID#:S717)



Front - Title/Description

Israelite House of David

Based on the teachings of the Christian Israelite tradition begun by Joanna Southcott in England in 1792, Benjamin and Mary Purnell founded the House of David communal religious community in Benton Harbor in 1903. At its peak the colony had one thousand members, including artists, businessmen, and inventors. During the 1920s the colony used Michigan's growing auto tourism industry to fund its development. One of the largest landowners in southwest Michigan, it operated prize-winning farms, an amusement park with miniature trains, an ice cream parlor, and a zoo. The House of David baseball teams, with their long hair and beards, were popular fixtures on the national barnstorming circuit in the 1920s and 1930s.

Significant Date:

Industry and Invention (1875-1915)

Registry Year: 2009 **Erected Date:** 2010

Marker Location

Address: 1158 East Britain Avenue

City: Benton Township

State: **ZipCode:**

County: Berrien

Township: Benton

Lat: 42.10867005 / **Long:** -86.42964184

Web URL:

Back - Title/Description

Mary's City of David

After the death of Benjamin Purnell in 1927, the Israelite House of David religious community split over spiritual direction and accumulation of assets. Purnell's wife, Mary, left and founded Mary's City of David on this adjacent site in 1930. She retained control of four large farms and a ninety-room hotel next to Benton Harbor's expansive fruit market, which provided income for the colony. Between 1930 and 1950, members designed and constructed this complex of vernacular buildings. At a time when resorts were restricted by race and ethnicity, the colony welcomed Jewish visitors by building cabins and a synagogue to accommodate them and opening vegetarian restaurants that attracted Orthodox Jewish vacationers from Chicago.