

# **Communal Vegetarianism: The Sacred Diet of Mary's City of David**

*By Julieanna Frost*

Imagine a vegetarian restaurant using the freshest local produce located in a resort town by a lake, run by a collective of dedicated people. They even publish a cookbook of their recipes that goes through numerous printings. One might be transported mentally to the early 1970s to Moosewood Restaurant in Ithaca, New York. However, this description also accurately illustrates both Mary's Café and Mary's Restaurant of Benton Harbor, Michigan, establishments that predated Moosewood by nearly forty years. The earliest vegetarian restaurants in the United States were not from the hippie counterculture, as one might assume, but instead sponsored by Christian sects dating back to the nineteenth century. Michigan was home to a quite few of these Christian vegetarian groups.

When Mary Purnell discerned that she and her spouse, Benjamin were the seventh and final messengers of the Christian Israelite faith, she knew that they would have to leave their home in Detroit. They had served as missionaries of the God's House sect for five years spreading the gospel.<sup>1</sup> But as the leader of the colony, Michael Mills, also considered himself to be a messenger, this led to some understandable tensions in the commune. Eventually, the Purnells would permanently settle in Benton Harbor, Michigan, with their House of David community in 1903.<sup>2</sup> Sister Mary and Brother Benjamin continued the teachings of the earlier messengers,<sup>3</sup> but also expanded the message to make it their own. One was the expectation that members of the Ingathering would be vegetarian. After a schism in the House of David organization, Sister Mary headed the City of David beginning in 1930, located just down the street from the House of David. Her new commune continued to support the practice of vegetarianism not only for her followers, but also for the greater town by opening vegetarian restaurants and publishing vegetarian cookbooks. This study will analyze the history and theological understanding of vegetarianism for this Christian communal group from data collected

through archival studies and oral history interviews.

Christian vegetarianism has an organized tradition which dates back to the tenth century.<sup>4</sup> Gnostic sects such as the Cathars and Manicheans abstained from eating flesh as a form of ascetic practice. Historian Tristram Stuart explained it thus: “By imposing strictures on the body, it was believed, the souls would be regenerated and cleansed of sin. And it was meat and alcohol, above all, that were identified as the principal items of luxury.”<sup>5</sup> Although some prominent churchmen like Saints Jerome and Benedict were vegetarian, medieval Gnostic sects were persecuted by the Inquisition due to the view that their belief systems could destabilize the Church, and many were executed as heretics.

Christian vegetarians fared slightly better during the Protestant Reformation in that they were not typically hunted down and massacred, but they were still rejected by the majority of Protestants and often jailed. The center for this subculture of Christian vegetarianism was England. Influenced by the Radical Reformation and the Glorious Revolution, for many of these separatist Protestant theologians the argument for the adoption of a vegetarian diet was, not surprisingly, based upon the Scriptures,<sup>6</sup> especially Genesis 1:29, which described the Edenic diet: “Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.’” For Thomas Tryon, who influenced the Society of Friends, the eating of flesh was connected to the Fall. Humans became sinful and developed unsavory appetites, including the desire to eat meat. In Tryon’s view God’s permission for meat-eating after the Flood was an act of divine vengeance,<sup>7</sup> causing humans to die prematurely. No longer did humans live to the age of Methuselah (969 years according to Genesis 5), but only to seventy due to their sinful, unhealthy, omnivorous ways. Stuart explained that, “vegetarianism was part of a radical critique of mainstream culture, and it latched onto the multifarious significances of diet. Luxury was a sign of inequality and a cause of economic oppression; killing animals was a symbol of cruelty in society; and anthropocentrism was the legacy of a power-hungry Judeo-Christian priesthood.”<sup>8</sup>

Some later Radical Protestant theologians added a Millennial worldview to the importance of a vegetarian diet. As Stuart has noted, “Disillusioned radicals turned for solace to the Bible. The Church had always promised that the Messiah would come again to establish a new heavenly kingdom after a period of violence and turmoil. Millenarian

groups began to predict that Jesus' second coming was nigh."<sup>9</sup> Religious leaders, such as John Robins, connected with the Ranters, urged people to get ready for this event that would change the world. They pointed to the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah, who foretold of the peaceable kingdom:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.<sup>10</sup>

Upon Jesus' return, he would restore humans to their pre-fall status and diet, so members of sects, such as the Ranters, Behemists, and Radical Pietists, believed they should become vegetarians to prepare for the Second Coming.

Additionally, many of these religious groups expected to be judged as belonging to the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation.<sup>11</sup> Their understanding was that upon his return Jesus would only protect 144,000 people in the end times. The book of Revelation was utilized to support their radical diet, saying, "They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."<sup>12</sup> Connected to the concept of the Peaceable Kingdom, not only will humans have no pain or death, but all animals will be spared from such suffering.

Whether Edenic or Prophetic, both types of Christian vegetarians were concerned with the issue of purity. A vegetarian diet was thought to help cleanse both body and soul. Proponents believed that abstinence from meat would cause one to become less violent and more spiritual. For example, in utopian groups like the Ranters, many members avoided foods that had been forbidden in Leviticus, such as pork. Shakers also avoided pork, and the dietary avoidance of meat was recommended by the Central Ministry in 1820, with an outright ban instituted from the late 1830s, which lasted for twelve years.<sup>13</sup> A strict interpretation of Leviticus 11:41 would make only certain seafood kosher, avoiding any animal that walked upon the earth. The work *Eating in Eden* notes that, "like other utopian

groups, the Shakers adopted meatless diets to encourage spiritual purity, to promote simple living, and frugality, and to uphold the communal principle.”<sup>14</sup> Through unblemished food choices a Christian could become more pleasing to God and a better representative to serve the Kingdom.

So though there is a longstanding tradition of Christian vegetarianism, it has remained well outside the norm, being expressed most characteristically in communal religious societies. In the United States, avoidance or prohibition of meat was primarily practiced among the Shakers, Quakers, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, House of David, and Mary’s City of David. Religious historian A. Leland Jamison also noted that such sects often had a strong belief in perfectionism, millennialism, universalism, and the personal enlightenment,<sup>15</sup> which was true of the House of David.

After the Purnells left Detroit, they continued as itinerants preaching about the Christian Israelite faith for seven years. Sister Mary recalled:

We walked and preached from one to three times a day, in open streets and different churches, halls, etc., and we never knew where to lay our heads at night. We often spoke of the Scripture, “The foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the Son of man hath no where to lay His head to rest.” But that divine spirit was with us and would show us where we could stop to rest, and they would so quickly get interested and keep us, and in the morning when we would leave they would shed tears at our departure.<sup>16</sup>

The Purnells continued many of the beliefs of the earlier messengers, such as communalism, millennialism, and mysticism, but they also advocated a vegetarian diet, which had not been a traditional teaching. Perhaps this was a natural progression of the philosophy of the second messenger, Richard Brothers. In his 1801 publication, *Description of Jerusalem*, he argued, “To eat also of fish, flesh, or fowl, clean and unclean, ever was and ever will be lawful, when distress or hunger requires it for human preservation. But if there was, or is, not any necessity to do such things, then indeed the crime becomes presumptuous and the sin of the blackest nature.”<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the wife of the sixth messenger, Clarissa Jezreel (also called Queen Esther), attempted to have her community become vegetarian after the death of her husband, theoretically to save money. This could have been an influence on the Purnells as well.<sup>18</sup> It is also likely that their extensive travels in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Illinois would have exposed them to other diverse communal societies which may have influenced their teachings. It

is uncertain as to the exact date when the Purnells discerned this creed on diet, but with their publication of the *Star of Bethlehem* in 1903, a meatless diet was considered essential for the Ingathering.

Although we cannot be certain as to all of the influences upon the Purnells in their vegetarian philosophy, they did state that this dietary revelation was based upon Scripture. This puts them squarely in the tradition of many earlier Protestant vegetarian sects. They specifically pointed to the book of Exodus 20:13 (King James Version), “Thou shalt not kill. Even the life of the beast will be required at thy hands. Why make your throat an open sepulcher<sup>19</sup>, and your belly a graveyard to bury dead flesh? Come out from the wilderness and cross over and help us in the land of promise.”<sup>20</sup> *The Star of Bethlehem* announced that the time for the Ingathering of the elect had begun at their community, which had relocated to Benton Harbor, Michigan. They considered themselves to be a part of the redeemed 144,000 and as such were reminded

to obey the law as given to my servant Moses, and that ye should eat that which is called clean; and in the same communication that we shall live and walk as Jesus Christ, who is our pattern and waymark ... He shows that meat eaters shall not live—which we understand, shall not live in immortal life ... So the commandments of Moses are to be spiritually discerned, as it is given of that which should afterwards be revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

The elect lived communally and led a life of purity. The House of David extensive properties included fruit orchards, vegetable gardens, natural springs, a bakery, dairy, and hen houses. The majority of the community was not vegans, but lacto-ovo vegetarians. As taught by the earlier messenger, John Wroe, believers should also abstain from alcohol. Meals were prepared for the members, and if newspaper accounts are accurate when they traveled they brought and prepared their own food.<sup>22</sup> This would indicate that an unadulterated diet was of the utmost importance for the elect.

The Purnells sent dozens of missionaries to three continents to help find the elect. The colony also published many pamphlets and books that outlined the faith. There was not an open admissions policy to the community, one had to be called. As Brother Benjamin biographer Clare Adkin noted, “Receiving the call gave prospective Israelites a sense of being chosen, of being important and distinctive. After all, according to

the book of Revelation, only 144,000 could be chosen. The chosen people of the House of David felt very special. Each new member was well versed in the faith before joining the colony.”<sup>23</sup> Admission to the community included accepting its dietary restrictions. For example, Fern Baxter’s family was called to come to Benton Harbor in 1935. Her parents had become vegetarian in 1922 as required by the faith, which was probably not the easiest choice in Oklahoma. Fern recalled, “We had preachers (that) came out and they explained it all to us and we believed it ... my parents did. I had never tasted meat in my life. I had never had a bite. In fact someone gave me a bite in school and it made me sick ... very sick. I guess they didn’t do that any more. I guess I was more careful after that also, when anybody gave me anything.”<sup>24</sup> With the elect living together, including eating together, it made it so much easier to live all of the tenets of the faith to ensure purity of the body and soul.

In 1909, Brother Benjamin and Sister Mary separated out one hundred acres of the colony to serve as a tourist attraction, called Eden Springs. Eden Springs became a regional attraction and along with other business ventures, helped the colony to be financially secure. The park contained a zoo, gardens, miniature trains, pavilions, ice cream parlor, and a vegetarian restaurant. During the park’s inaugural week, five thousand people visited Eden Springs,<sup>25</sup> and an estimated two hundred thousand visited per year by the 1930s. This spirit of self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship would be extremely important given that the community would grow to approximately one thousand members. Sister Mary and Brother Benjamin capitalized on the public’s curiosity regarding the sect and successfully showcased their faith for many years. They also highlighted that Christian vegetarians were healthy and vital, sponsoring baseball clubs, jazz bands, and theatrical groups. The House of David published a cookbook that showcased recipes from the Eden Springs Park restaurant in 1912, the same year that the restaurant was expanded to better meet demand. This cookbook would have numerous reprints.

Though certain earlier Christian vegetarians, such as John Robins and Thomas Tryon, claimed that this eating style would create peaceful human beings living in a New Eden, unfortunately this was not to be the case for the House of David. With increased growth, came increased tensions in the community. Adkin believes the roots of the final schism can be traced back to June 14, 1920, with the addition of Brother Harry Dewhirst to the Ingathering.<sup>26</sup> It appears that in a relatively short period of time Brother

Benjamin replaced Sister Mary as his most trusted advisor with Brother Harry. By 1922, the by-laws were revised and Sister Mary lost her financial oversight of the colony.<sup>27</sup>

The claims of sexual and financial improprieties that dogged Brother Benjamin also took a toll on the whole House of David. When Brother Benjamin died in 1927, a power struggle ensued between Brother Harry and Sister Mary. Eventually, after much legal wrangling, they divided the assets of the community in 1930, with 215 elect leaving with Sister Mary to the Israelite House of David as Reorganized by Mary Purnell,<sup>28</sup> also known as the City of David.

Sister Mary envisioned her community, to use Winthrop's phrase of as being a "City upon a Hill" in comparison to the House of David, though they were only two blocks apart. Her Israelites must stay on the straight and narrow path, as she often said, living the true faith of Jesus Christ. Sister Mary wrote, "and to become like Him we must walk the same narrow path, with the Law on one side and with the Gospel on the other, which is the golden Key that will open the two-leaved gates into the transparent City, wherein peace and happiness shall forever abide."<sup>29</sup> She further encouraged her faction stating, "But I tell you for a truth, Jesus Christ will not sow that holy seed only in those prepared by the washing of His Word until their bodies are pure and clean, for no unclean thing can enter that Holy Mother Jerusalem Above."<sup>30</sup> Even with the upheavals in her life, Sister Mary continued to preach the Israelite tenants as she had for over thirty years as the seventh messenger. This included of course, vegetarianism.

Similar to the practices of the House of David colony, meals at Mary's City of David were eaten communally by members. Though they did not have an amusement park to bring in revenue, Sister Mary's community operated a hotel in downtown Benton Harbor which she had received in her financial settlement. This hotel had both a vegetarian restaurant and a bakery. In addition, Sister Mary opened a summer resort, Paradise Park, which catered to orthodox Jews. Advertising posters written in Hebrew were sent to the Jewish communities of Chicago.<sup>31</sup> This was during a time in U.S. history when racial and religious segregation was the norm in various accommodations, and Jews were not welcomed at every establishment. By 1938, Paradise Park also included a synagogue.<sup>32</sup> The vacationers at Paradise Park were mainly from the lower class because the Paradise Park resort was affordable.

The restaurant that she opened at the resort was vegetarian and thus kosher. Patricia Knight, great-granddaughter of Brother Benjamin and Sister Mary, recalled the community, “There wasn’t anything that they didn’t have ... they had their own little restaurant up here on the corner and across from that was a little ice cream stand. And it was busy all of the time. And I remember going into the bakery when we were kids and they would give us a handful of nuts or raisins or a fresh roll.”<sup>33</sup> Community member Fern Baxter remembered the business enterprises as being very successful.

First I was thirteen years old when I worked up at the restaurant. We had this large restaurant. I washed dishes and then I was put into the dining room at the fountain. We had ice cream and that sort of stuff. And then when I got old enough I was a waitress. Then later I was...we had a café downtown ... and I went down there and stayed about ten years. I worked in that café about ten years. And also we had a bakery down there and I worked in the bakery for two or three years also. And that is just about all I ever done (laughs). Outside of cooking, I do cook you know.<sup>34</sup>

It may seem unusual that one town could support three vegetarian restaurants, but these businesses were patronized not only by tourists, but also by the Seventh Day Adventist population of Berrien County, as well as the locals. The food was very affordable, as colony members continued the practice of growing the produce themselves on their farms, thus keeping costs down. The meals were very simple at Sister Mary’s establishments, such as potato pancakes with applesauce or a peanut butter sandwich. Reviewing the menus from both colonies, it is obvious that the fare was much simpler at the City of David than at the House of David restaurant,<sup>35</sup> but Mary’s restaurant also undercut their prices on average by a nickel. By 1934, Mary’s City of David published its own vegetarian cookbook, which included more elaborate and involved recipes, such as “Macaroni Milanaise” or “Mock Chicken Croquettes.” In the foreword to this book, Sister Mary also explained her vegetarian philosophy in greater detail than in many of her other writings.

Analysis of Sister Mary’s cookbook highlights three main reasons for the community’s diet. Sister Mary’s understanding of vegetarianism was undergirded, of course, by Scripture, like that of all Protestants. She expanded upon the Edenic focus of the House of David, and added the



MARY'S CAFE	
BREAKFAST MENU	
SPECIALS	
Wheat Cakes with Fried or Boiled Eggs and Coffee <del>30c</del> 35c	
Wheat Cakes with choice of Fruit in Season and Coffee 30c	
Wheat Cakes with Eggs, Fruit and Coffee 45c	
Eggs, Toast and Coffee 30c	
Breakfast Cereal or Fruit with Eggs, Toast and Coffee 40c	
Toast, Fruit and Coffee 30c	
French Toast with Coffee 25c	
French Pancakes with Jelly and Coffee 40c	
OMELETTES	
Plain Omelette 25c	Cheese Omelette 30c
Spanish Omelette 35c	Asparagus Omelette 30c
Tomato Omelette 25c	Jelly Omelette 30c
Mushroom Omelette 40c	
EGGS	
Fried Eggs 20c	Boiled 20c
Poached 25c	On Toast 30c
Scrambled 20c	
HOT CAKES	
Served with Syrup and Butter	
Wheat Cakes 20c	Whole Wheat Cakes 20c
Corn Cakes 20c	Potato Pancakes 30c
With Jelly 5c extra	
Belgian Pancakes with Jelly 35c	
French Pancakes with Jelly 35c	

FRUITS IN SEASON		
Sliced Oranges 10c	Sliced Bananas 10c	Orange Juice 10c
Stewed Prunes 10c	Grapefruit 10c	Apple Sauce 10c
Cantaloupe 10c	Home-canned Peaches 10c	
Berries in Season 10c		
The above fruits with Cream 20c		
Fruit Salad 25c		
TOASTS		
Buttered or Plain Toast 10c	Cinnamon Toast 15c	
Milk Toast 15c	French Toast 20c	Cream Toast 30c
CEREALS—with Milk		
Corn Flakes 10c	Roll'd Oats 10c	Bran Flakes 10c
Cream of Wheat 10c		
Shredded Wheat 10c		
Wheaties 10c	All Bran 10c	Grape Nuts 10c
The Above Cereals with Cream 20c		
HOME-MADE ROLLS		
Served with Butter		
Plain Rolls 7c	Cinnamon Rolls 7c	Butter Rolls 7c
Butterfly Rolls 7c	Radio Rolls 7c	
Home-made Bread with Butter 7c		
DRINKS		
Milk or Buttermilk 5c	Hot Milk 10c	Coffee 5c
Boston Coffee 10c	Postum 5c	Pot of Tea 10c
Iced Tea 10c		
Cocoa 10c		
Small order of Cream 10c		
Full order of Cream 20c		

Mary's Cafe Breakfast Menu, ca. 1943.  
(Mary and Benjamin Purnell Collection, Hamilton College Library)

Diet of the 1,000 Year Reign, what I call the Prophetic Diet. Sister Mary also pointed to other New Testament texts such as John 6:50, "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die," as indicative of sanctified eating. She was not proselytizing that all should adopt this diet, only those members of the Ingathering at the City of David, because as she pointed out in Galatians 5:24, the Apostle Paul said, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Perhaps most unusual in her explanation of Christian vegetarianism at the City of David was her allusion to the Wisdom of Solomon 2:24, "Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it." In short, those that follow Satan eat a sinful diet, which leads to death. For most Protestants, this work is considered as part of the apocrypha, and as such is not Scripture. Some Protestant sects did consider the apocrypha recommended reading, but it was not authoritative canon. Since 1826, one would be hard pressed to find Protestant Bibles that even included the apocrypha. However, when John Wroe founded the Christian Israelite Church in the 1820s, his teachings

# MARY'S RESTAURANT

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*CITY of DAVID*

Britain Ave.

Benton Harbor, Mich.

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Mary's Restaurant Menu (cover), ca. 1940-1943.  
(Mary and Benjamin Purnell Collection, Hamilton College Library)

# MENU

## SOUP

Vegetable 15c  
Mushroom and Barley 15c      Cream of Tomato 15c

## SPECIALS

Mock Meat 25c, with Potato and Gravy 40c  
Mushroom with Scrambled Egg 50c  
Mushroom plain 40c, in Cream 50c  
Spaghetti in Tomato Sauce 25c      Beet Borscht 15c  
French Pancakes with Jelly 30c  
Potato Pancakes 35c, in Butter 40c  
Boston Baked Beans 20c  
Toasted Cheese on Toast 30c

## VEGETABLES

Asparagus Tips plain 30c, in Cream 40c  
Spinach plain 15c, with two Eggs 35c  
Garden Peas 15c      Stewed Corn 10c  
Young Cabbage 15c      String Beans 10c  
Fried Onions 15c      Stewed Tomatoes 10c

## POTATOES

Plain Boiled 10c, with Sour Cream 15c 20  
Potatoes in Cream 15c      Mashed 10c      Lyonnaise 15c  
Hashed Brown 15c      Shoe String 15c  
Yankee Fried 15c      Cottage Fried 15c      French Fried 15c

## EGGS

Two Eggs with Toast 30c  
Two Eggs with Bread and Butter 25c  
Fried Eggs      Boiled Eggs      Scrambled Eggs  
Poached Eggs 30c      Poached Eggs on Toast 35c

## OMELETTES

Plain 30c      Jelly 35c      Cheese 35c      Spanish 35c  
Mushroom 50c      Onion 35c      Tomato 30c

## TOAST

Plain 10c      Buttered 10c      Milk 15c      Cream 20c  
French 25c, in Butter 35c      Cinnamon 15c

## DESERT

Homemade Pie or Cake 10c      Jello 10c      Pudding 10c  
Ice Cream 10c      Pie A'la Mode 20c      Short Cake 20c  
Sundæes, all flavors 15c



### PANCAKES

With Syrup and Butter 20c      Pure Honey 5c extra  
Wheat Cakes 20c      Whole Wheat Cakes 20c  
Corn Meal Cakes 20c      Belgian Pancakes 30c  
French Pancakes 30c      Potato Pancakes 35c, in Butter 45c

### CEREALS

With Cream 20c      With Milk 10c  
Oatmeal - Cream of Wheat - Farina - Ralston - Grape Nuts  
All Bran - Shredded Wheat - Corn Flakes - Puffed Rice  
Puffed Wheat - Rice Krispies - Pep - Wheaties - Bran Flakes

### SALADS—RELISHES

Combination 30c      Potato and Egg 25c      Chow Chow 10c  
Sliced Tomatoes 15c      Sliced Cucumber 10  
Pickled Beets 10c      Head Lettuce 10c, with Dressing 15c  
Cottage Cheese 15c, with Sour Cream 20c  
Farmers' Chop Suey with Sour Cream 20c 35

### SANDWICHES

All Sandwiches Toasted 5c extra  
Pimento Cheese 15c      American Cheese 15c      Fried Egg 10c  
Peanut Butter 10c      Tomato 10c      Mock Meat 10c 5  
Tomato and Lettuce 15c      Egg Salad 25c 5

### HOME MADE BREAD or ROLLS 5c

Butterfly Rolls 5c      Cinnamon Rolls 5c      Graham Crackers 5c  
Radio Rolls 5c      Hard Rolls 5c      Carmel Rolls 5c

All Dishes Fried in Butter 10c extra

### FRUIT JUICES

Orange 10c      Prune 10c      Grape 10c  
Tomato 10c      Pineapple 10c      Grape Fruit 10c

### FRUITS—In Season

Prunes 10c      Sliced Oranges 10c      Fruit Salad 30c  
Sliced Bannas 15c, with Cream 20c      Half Grape Fruit 15c  
Home-canned Peaches or Pears 10c

### DRINKS

Coffee 5c      Milk 5c      Boston Coffee 15c      Kaffie Hag 15c  
Half and Half 20c      Butter Milk 5c      Postum 10c  
Hot Milk 10c      Tea 10c      Ice Tea 10c      Cocoa 10c  
Malted Milk 15c      Chocolate Milk 10c  
Pop, all flavors 5c      Ice Cream Soda 15c

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came from both Scripture and the apocrypha.<sup>36</sup> Grant Underwood stated that for this group, “Mosaic codes were to be fulfilled to the letter, including circumcision, the eating of kosher food, the wearing of beards, and even the learning of Hebrew.”<sup>37</sup> Sister Mary, as a follower of Wroe, carried on many of the traditions. Member Ron Taylor has indicated that the City of David believes that the King James Version (1611) is the authoritative version of the Bible, including the apocrypha.<sup>38</sup>

Another reason for the diet at Mary’s City of David was that eating meat not only leads to spiritual corruption, but also bodily corruption. References to God’s grudging permission to eat meat after the flood is noted, but also that life was drastically shortened by this allowance.<sup>39</sup> The Ingathering with the Law of Life also followed Mosaic law. Sister Mary wrote:

Dead things we are forbidden to touch - much less eat. Furthermore, we do not care to eat even vegetables second-handed, as the animal and bird eat vegetable substance, and it goes into the life of the beast, and they kill the beast and eat it as second-handed or second process. No wonder they soon go to corruption—and in fact, some are a mass of corruption while still walking about.<sup>40</sup>

She also stressed that a vegetarian diet had to be properly balanced.

A common mistake is to have too great a variety at each meal. It should always be the study of the cook to make a change in the daily menu; and in preparing the combinations the nutritive value of each should be considered. What is lacking in one article of food is supplied in another. Fruits, grains, and vegetables supply all these necessary elements each in their own particular sphere. There is ample opportunity given for a frequent change in the daily menu, when the many different vegetarian products are taken into consideration. Fruits and grains make an excellent combination, also grains and vegetables. Avoid the use of complicated combinations. Do not regard cooking from a standpoint of taste only. Endeavor to use the various food materials to the best possible advantage—carefully preserving their nourishing qualities and maintaining their true value.<sup>41</sup>

Sister Mary believed that vegetables had healing properties and included a section at the end of the cookbook that described specific fruits and vegetables as resources to heal certain ailments.<sup>42</sup>

A final point highlighted by Sister Mary was that killing God's creatures for food was cruel. In the series, *The Comforter*, she often used the imagery of a Peaceable Kingdom. In this work, she also used the imagery of pure food as an allegory of the ministry of the spirit that should be at the City of David.

Therefore dear beloved Israel let us through the power of our ascended Master go on to draw out of the Rock—the Rock Christ—the milk and the butter, and the Honey forthcoming. The milk is the Law; the butter is the Gospel; and the Honey forthcoming is Immortality; which makes us mild and sweet and of a peaceable spirit, according to the prophecy which has been declared: “Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell in unity.”<sup>43</sup>

Sister Mary did not expect or desire to convert the whole world to her view. She noted in the pamphlet, *Questions and the Ingathering of Israel*:

The soul is saved by the blood of Jesus, meat or no meat, but for the life of the body, the Law of Life cuts it off, as we will show. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats, and God will destroy both it and them (1 Cor. 6:13), but not the soul. As to forbidding marriage or eating meats, we wish to say that we do not forbid either ... to Jews and Gentiles who only want the soul saved after death, we forbid them not; for such Jesus died.<sup>44</sup>

Only the members called to the Ingathering, 144,000, were to follow the Law of Life, which included vegetarianism. Sister Mary practiced what she preached and successfully led the City of David until her passing at the advanced age of ninety years of age in 1953.<sup>45</sup>

The examination of archival materials related to the City of David underscores that this community held many of the customary beliefs of Christian vegetarians. As Sister Mary succinctly explained, “We from a faith standpoint, see meat eating feeds lust and corruption, shortens life and is altogether cruel.”<sup>46</sup> In the Protestant tradition, Scripture along with faith formed the foundation of the Christian Israelite's understanding of the world. Sister Mary Purnell drew from both Edenic and Prophetic texts in support of the proper diet for the Ingathering. The major divergence of the City of David sect from other Protestant groups was its inclusion of texts from the apocrypha to support their vegetarianism. More study is necessary to understand how the apocrypha may have influenced other

teachings of Sister Mary. The communal ethos of the City of David encouraged the production of pure food for colony members to support their belief in immortality. The various business enterprises used to support the colony, such as the restaurants, resorts, and publications, also made available to the larger community Sister Mary's vegetarian philosophy. This was a philosophy to which she adhered even through the upheavals during her life, especially the split between the House of David and the City of David. Sister Mary did not believe that everyone could become one of the Elect, but proclaimed the faith so that those meant to be a part of the 144,000 could come to the colony in Benton Harbor. As she once explained, "the laws of purity are for the Elect sons of God who wish to serve under the Law of Christ, for the promise is the redemption of our body."<sup>47</sup>

The unique history of Sister Mary Purnell and the City of David adds to the historiography of U.S. vegetarianism, communal studies, regional studies, and biography. The particular focus on Christian vegetarianism of this paper highlights the theology of this Michigan community and their understanding that a vegetarian diet increased purity, longevity, and decreased wickedness for the Ingathering. As Sister Mary envisioned:

This great ingathering is for God's Elect, whom He foreknew and predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus, the first-born among many brethren, who are to be made manifest—who are to have their vile bodies changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body, which is life-without-death, for they are to be redeemed from among men, and not from the grave. My reward is with Me and My work is before Me.<sup>48</sup>

Drawing from Edenic, Prophetic, and Apocryphal texts, as well as earlier messengers, Sister Mary was inspired to create a vegetarian resort, restaurant, café, and publications to support this aspect of her religious worldview to lead to the restoration of Israel.

## Notes

1. "Tearing the Veil of Secrecy," *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, May 13, 1923, 82.
2. Benjamin and Mary Purnell, *The Star of Bethlehem: The Living Roll of Life* (House of David: Benton Harbor, 1903).
3. The House of David and Mary's City of David consider the earlier messengers to be: Joanna Southcott, Richard Brothers, George Turner, William Shaw, John Wroe, and James Jezreel.
4. Kerry Walters and Lisa Portmess, eds., *Religious Vegetarianism: From Hesiod to the Dalai Lama* (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2001), 123.
5. Tristram Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 7.
6. Sola Scriptura—Scripture alone is the authority for a Protestant.
7. Stuart, 61.
8. Stuart, 338.
9. Stuart, 16.
10. Isaiah 11:6-9
11. Revelation 14:1-5
12. Revelation 21:3-4
13. Caroline Piercy and Arthur Tolve. *The Shaker Cookbook: Recipes and Lore from the Valley of God's Pleasure* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Gabriel's Horn Publishing Company:, 1984), 13.
14. Etta Madden and Martha L. Finch, *Eating in Eden: food and American utopias*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 111.
15. Kurt Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell, and Marsha MacDowell, *Religious folk art in America: reflections of faith*. (New York: E.P. Dutton in association with the Museum of American Folk Art, 1983), 48.
16. Mary Purnell, *Mary and Benjamin's Travels*, (Benton Harbor: Israelite House of David, as re-organized by Mary Purnell, 1931), 3.
17. Stuart, 63.
18. W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens below; Utopian experiments in England, 1560-1960* (London: Routledge And K. Paul, 1961).
19. This may a reference to Psalm 5:9: For [there is] no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part [is] very wickedness; their throat [is] an open sepulcher; they flatter with their tongue.
20. Benjamin Purnell and Mary Purnell, *The Star of Bethlehem*, 30.
21. Benjamin Purnell and Mary Purnell, *The Star of Bethlehem*, 113-14.
22. "Lost Children," *Reading Eagle*, August 13, 1905.
23. Clare Adkin, *Brother Benjamin: A History of the Israelite House of David* (St Joseph: Clare Adkin, 1990), 300.
24. Fern Baxter, interview with author.
25. Joseph Price, *Rounding the Bases: Baseball and Religion in America* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 56.
26. Adkin, 248.
27. Ibid., 199.
28. Ibid., 354.
29. Mary Purnell, *The Comforter*, vol. 5 (Benton Harbor: Israelite House of David as Re-organized by Mary Purnell, n.d.), 113.



30. Ibid., 39.
31. Mary's City of David resort, poster included in cookbook.
32. Adkin, 256.
33. Patricia Knight, interview with author.
34. Fern Baxter, interview with author.
35. House of David Restaurant Menu. House of David Museum, Addison, Michigan.
36. John Wroe *An Abridgement of the Life & Journal of John Wroe: With Divine Communications Revealed to Him ....* 4th ed. (Fitzroy: Christian Israelite Church, 1998), 67.
37. Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 133.
38. Ron Taylor, e-mail correspondence with author.
39. Mary Purnell, *Questions and the Ingathering of Israel* (Benton Harbor: Israelite House of David, as Re-Organized by Mary Purnell, [n.d.]), 11.
40. Mary's City of David, *Vegetarian Cook Book*, (1934; repr., Benton Harbor: Israelite House of David, as Re-Organized by Mary Purnell, 2010), 2.
41. Ibid., preface.
42. Ibid., 141.
43. Mary Purnell, *The Comforter*, vol. 5, 94.
44. Mary Purnell, *Questions and the Ingathering of Israel* (Benton Harbor: Israelite House of David, as Re-Organized by Mary Purnell, 1953), 10.
45. "Reveal Death of Queen at House of David Colony," *Chicago Tribune*, August 22, 1953.
46. Mary's City of David. *Vegetarian Cook Book*, 1.
47. Mary Purnell. *Questions and the Ingathering of Israel*, 12.
48. Mary Purnell. *Mary and Benjamin's Travels*, 31-32.