The Communal Societies Collection of the Hamilton College Library is now home to the world’s most extensive collection of materials relating to the House of David and Mary’s City of David communities. Founded in Benton Harbor, Michigan, in 1903 by Benjamin and Mary Purnell (collectively the seventh messenger in the Christian Israelite tradition), the House of David was the locus for the ingathering of the 144,000 members of the tribes of Israel. This ingathering was to trigger the second coming of Christ. The community at the House of David grew to more than one thousand members, with followers of John Wroe (the fifth messenger) traveling to Michigan all the way from Australia. Following Benjamin Purnell’s death in 1927, a legal battle ensued that resulted in Mary and 217 followers leaving the House of David and founding the Israelite House of David as Re-Organized by Mary Purnell, today called simply Mary’s City of David.

The House of David and Mary’s City of David became popular tourist destinations beginning in the 1910s. The exotic appearance of members—which long hair and beards were in accordance with Nazarite law—served to differentiate them from the general public. Additionally, members were celibate, vegetarian, and refrained from the burial of their own, again citing Nazirite precedent. Both the House of David and Mary’s City of David communities sent barnstorming baseball teams all over the United States. The House of David had an amusement park, beer garden, motel, preserve industry, cold storage facility, greenhouses, art studio, traveling band, and basketball team. Mary’s City hosted a large contingent from Chicago’s Jewish community each summer in their resort cabins, and built a synagogue specifically for their use. Mary’s City also operated
a large hotel in downtown Benton Harbor, and both communities ran vegetarian restaurants.

The collections at Hamilton College consist of materials from both the House of David and Mary’s City of David, including hundreds of imprints, thousands of photographs and postcards, hundreds of examples of ephemera, hundreds of manuscript letters, the writings of Mary Purnell and Francis Thorpe, records of the cold storage and preserve industries, general business records, thousands of newspapers printed by both communities and outside newspaper accounts of the communities, records from the baseball teams, video taped interviews with community members, original art works, and extensive printed material relating to Joanna Southcott (the first messenger), Richard Brother (the second messenger), John Zion Ward (one of two successors to Joanna Southcott), John Wroe (the fifth messenger), and James Jezreel (the sixth messenger). The collections are currently being organized and conserved, and photographic materials are being digitized. The following pages contain some examples of ephemera from the House of David.

Sign, possibly from the House of David’s Grande Vista Motel, ca. 1940s.
Promotional flyer for House of David traveling baseball team, ca. 1935.

(front)
A FEW COMMENTS ON PLAYERS APPEARING IN LINEUP FOR
HOUSE OF DAVID TRAVELING CLUB

“PEP” BRANNON
Shortstop. The fastest man on the club, and can cover more ground
than a dust storm. He is one of the hardest hitting shortstops in
independent baseball, and has a strong accurate throwing arm that
many a major leaguer would envy. Once on base he will test the
speed and accuracy of any catcher’s arm.

DAVE HARRISON
Veteran Third Baseman. His playing ability in the hot corner and
consistent hitting has made him one of the most colorful and out-
standing players on the House of David Club for over twelve years.
His baseball career dates back to 1914, when he was batboy, when
the Colony organized its first baseball club. Since 1923 he has traveled
approximately 18,000 miles annually, and played in practically every
state, and in Canada. He has played against many major and minor
league clubs, and during this period has had a remarkable batting
average of over .345. This can be verified, as he has kept almost a
complete record of his diamond activities. Harrison is also middle
man in the “pepper game”.

AL LITFIN
Only 19 years old but a veteran when playing 2nd Base. Is a terrific
slugger, getting more three base hits than any man on the club. Bats
third position and hit .396 last season. This is his second year with
the club, and already thinks a razor is something to peel potatoes with.

EDDIE DEAL
Captain and Catcher, since 1929. Had previous experience with Decatur
of the 3-1 League, and Waterloo and Cedar Rapids of the Mississippi
Valley League. His powerful and efficient arm has caught many a
base stealer, and his consistent hitting always makes him a dangerous
man at bat. In one of the “pepper” players, and his antics during the
game will keep most of the fans in an uproar of laughter. Eddie is
the “New Deal” the fans have been waiting for.

LOUIS CATO
Star Outfielder, and one of the fastest men on the club. He has over
six years experience playing organized ball in the Southern States.
A heavy hitter and a smart outfielder who can judge a fly ball while
the pitcher is still winding up.

BOB DEWHIRST
Outfielder and Business Manager. Has played steadily and consist-
ently on team since 1925, and when he connects with the ball will
make a marathon runner out of an outfielder. He is also a musician
and can make a Saxophone talk. Is a recognized artist on the Vibra-
Harp, and as member of the Colony Band has played in the leading
vaudeville houses, radio stations and ballrooms over the country.

TOM PEARSON
Flashy First Baseman, playing his second year with the club. His
long drives, clever fielding ability, and smart base running, makes
him a dangerous man at all times. Is one of the “pepper” players,
and his luxuriant growth of beard would be the envy of a new deal
gold prospector.

NOEL RATHBUN
Pitcher. Formerly with Denver, of the Western League, and Oakland
in the Pacific Coast League. He also plays outfield, and keeps his
batting average well over the .300 mark. He has just signed for his
first year with the team, believing, as Grover Cleveland Alexander
once put it, “If you want to see the world, join the navy; but if you
want to see America First, join the House of David Traveling Club.”

Promotional flyer for House of David traveling baseball team, ca. 1935.
Promotional flyer for House of David traveling baseball team, ca. 1935.
BASEBALL CONTRACT

Poster for House of David baseball team, ca. 1925.
This rare poster advertises the HoD traveling club as well as Francis Thorpe’s Michigan Midgets.
Labels for House of David grapes and grape juice grown at the community’s Lakeside vineyards. ca. 1950s.
Labels for products of the House of David Preserve Department, ca. 1950s.
APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

To the **Israelite House of David**:

**We**, the undersigned, hereby make formal application to be received as members of the **Israelite House of David**, to abide by the rules and by-laws of the said **Israelite House of David**, and we are now ready to turn over to the **Officers of the said Israelite House of David** all money, deeds or personal property which we now possess, or which we may become possessed of in the future, and we each of us do pray that we may be accepted as members of the said **Israelite House of David**.

**We hereby set our hands and seals this**..............................................................
day of..............................................................A.D., 19..........................

at Benton Harbor, Michigan, U.S.A.

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**Witnesses**

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Menu from the Eden Springs Hotel and Vegetarian Restaurant, ca. 1910s.

In 1848, David R. Lamson published his account of the Hancock Shaker Village community, *Two Years’ Experience Among the Shakers*. Although written by a man who had turned against the Shaker community in which he had once lived, Lamson’s book presents accurate detail about life in a community at the height of the Shaker movement. This reprinting of Lamson’s classic account includes a biographical essay about this enigmatic Jacksonian Era reformer and his experiences, both with the Shakers and the Hopedale Community, as well biographical information on all of the individuals mentioned in his landmark Shaker account. Additionally, this volume reprints for the first time, Lamson’s editorials and a rare published sermon, presenting, in total, the most complete exploration of the thought of this controversial figure. Frequently referenced by Shaker scholars, Lamson has, until now, remained in the shadows; the present work brings the contradictory figure of David Rich Lamson into the light.

At the age of fifty-three, Aquila Massie Bolton joined the Shakers at Union Village, Ohio. His decision to do so was influenced by over twenty-five years of spiritual seeking in which he tested Quakerism, Owenism, and Swedenborgism. Bolton brought to his Shaker experience the same independent-mindedness and contentiousness that he had exhibited throughout his entire lifetime. He also brought his poetic talent, which he used to praise Shakerism and recruit Believers. In time, he challenged the beliefs of Shaker leaders, which inevitably led to controversy and his apostasy. Surprisingly, years after Bolton apostatized from the Shakers, his testimonial poetry promoting Shakerism was published by a Shaker brother. Tracing Bolton’s spiritual journey and accomplishments reveals much about him and the Shakers as well.