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A Photograph of the 1908 Print Shop at the Israelite House of David

Brian Ziebart



Fig. 1: *The interior of the second Print Shop at the Israelite House of David, Beneton Harbor, Michigan, prior to its destruction by fire in 1908.*

Collection of the Israelite House of David

A very important part of the early success of the Israelite House of David was the print shop. Benjamin and Mary Purnell utilized printed copies of the *Star of Bethlehem* to attract and convert followers of the Fifth (Wroeite) and Sixth (Jezreelite) churches. Once they moved to Benton Harbor, Michigan, in 1903, setting up a print shop was a top priority to facilitate the growth of the colony. The first official print shop was located in the first structure built by the colony called the Ark. After obtaining more machinery, a larger space was needed and a new building was constructed behind the Jerusalem building on the north side of Britain Avenue. A wonderfully detailed photo of this second print shop (fig. 1) was recently scanned at extremely high resolution by Hamilton College. Sadly, this building was

lost to fire in 1908. Another was built on the site and also housed the Art Shop and Machine shop. This building lasted until 1965 when it also was destroyed by fire. The equipment and operations were then moved to the south side of Britain Avenue in an old garage. This Print Shop is still used today to publish the monthly *Shiloh's Messenger of Wisdom* (fig. 4). The print shop not only produced religious books and pamphlets, it also printed items for various colony commercial endeavors, and provided printing services to the local customers.

This early photo shows the second print shop before its destruction in 1908. When captured at high resolution the image yields many amazing details. Sister Mary and Brother Benjamin are at right center checking on progress in the shop. Sister Mary's confidant, Cora Mooney, is behind them, her image hidden from the glare coming through the window (fig. 2). This image was not taken by the famous colony photographer, Harry Kirkham, who took over the duties in the teens. The importance of the print shop can be understood by counting the colony women and men who are working. On the table to the right are items that were produced in the printshop, including paperweights made of glass with photographs encased inside that were sold to colony visitors. These paperweights are very rare and only depicted in early images of the colony. They may have ceased production of these souvenirs due to the 1908 fire (fig. 3). Even before the Eden Springs amusement park opened people stopped in to meet and observe colony members, fascinated by their long hair and beards, and different religious beliefs. Benjamin saw the opportunity to make money to help finance the colony and this led to the opening of the amusement park the same year that the print shop burned. An early painting or drawing of the park is hanging from the center beam. (fig. 5). The drawing is in the style of Benjamin's artworks. This most likely was his first draft of ideas for the park. There is a bearded man in the lower right of the work with a cane (fig. 6). Benjamin included himself in many of his works of art. Sadly, this painting was lost in the fire.

This image illustrates two important aspects of the Israelite colony and faith. 1) Men and women worked side by side in an industry that would have been predominately male at the turn of the century (figs. 7 and 8). Women were treated as equals in the colony and had the right to hold positions in the leadership and also vote on colony issues. 2) When asked by Mary or Benjamin to learn and perform a certain job, colony members did the task as if they were doing it for God, understanding that all things were for the faith.



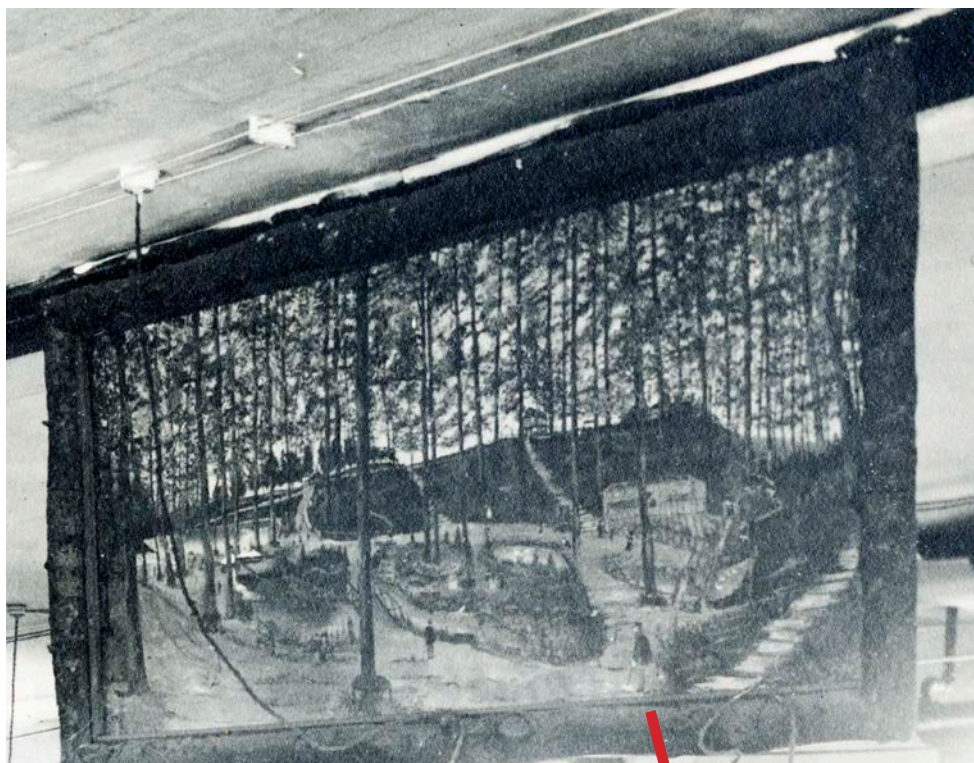
*Fig. 2: Sister Mary Purnell and Brother Benjamin Purnell, touring the Print Shop.
Sister Cora Mooney is in the background.*



Fig. 3: Souvenirs for sale in the *Print Shop*, including glass paperweights manufactured with photographic images of the colony inside.



Fig. 4: A poster urging visitors to subscribe to the *Israelite's* monthly periodical *Shiloh's Messenger of Wisdom*.



Figs. 5 and 6: *A painting, possibly by Brother Benjamin Purnell that likely shows his early plans for the Eden Springs Amusement Park. A bearded figure, possibly Benjamin himself, is visible at lower right.*





Fig. 7: Compositors and Pressmen at work in the Israelite Print Shop.



Fig. 8: *Folders and Stitchers at work in the Israelite Print Shop.*