

2 The South Bend Tribune

ST. JOSEPH

Monday, November 17, 1997

House of David commune continues its long traditions

Round Table
hears about
group's mission

By JUNE BOURDON
For *Homestead*

They're still there. If you're based at the House of David at all, you probably think the vicious commune based in Benton Harbor disbanded, disappeared or disintegrated decades ago.

Not true, said Ron James Taylor. He's one of 20 members — ages 12 to 80 — still carrying the banner for that group, known mainly for its men's long beards.

If you don't believe him, you can tour the House of David grounds on weekends and make plans to visit the museum and gift shop, which will open in the near future.

Taylor joined the colony 25 years ago at age 21, long past the House of David's heyday.

In his recent presentation, Taylor attempted to bring the American Heritage Roundtable up to date on this unusual colony of deep believers.

He also spoke of his book, "Mary's City of David," which outlines the colony's history for many years. The House of David was shrouded in mystery and misconceptions concerning its bearded, long-haired residents.

The hermitic House of David actually started in 1760 with six churches in England.

The seventh (American) church was founded by Benjamin and Mary Purnell during the late 18th century in Richmond, Ind.

It eventually its way to its permanent home in Benton Harbor in 1860. Beginning with just six members, including the Purnells, the colony grew to a membership of 1,000 within the next 15 years.

Taylor explained that the members follow the standard Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible and they have a strong belief in the second coming of Christ. Com-



Ron James Taylor of the House of David shares his book with William Groves and Richard Schroeder of the Heritage Round Table.

munal living is their way of life — one pocketbook, and sharing everything.

The growing of long hair and beards, maintaining a vegetarian diet, and practicing celibacy is an important element.

The House of David did not live quietly separate from the world. Its "barbaric" living "haunted" homes and renewed large bands compelled the hermits into the national spotlight during the 1950s and 1960s.

The picturesque Eden Springs Amusement Park in outsiders, who also would extend about the colony's activities.

It was an early version of Disneyland, said Taylor, with something for all ages to enjoy.

A ballroom entertained visitors for over 20 years on the stage in Eden Springs. A large auditorium with seating for 200 provided year-round wholesome entertainment.

A zoo was formed in the park with many animals coming mainly from Australia, where the group had religious ties. Nine small mammals ran until 1960 throughout the park and are in fact, Taylor said, still living today one of them by his status.

The park thrived even through the Depression, as people could be entertained

without spending lots of money sitting listening to music and singing.

The men's hand was an eye-catcher just each member having waist-length hair, Taylor said.

They would begin their presentations with their backs to the audience. When they turned in unison, the audience would be surprised to learn they were not young men, but bearded young men.

The colony bought High Island in Lake Michigan in the early part of the 20th century and shipped lumber and produce all over the country. The colony built camps on the island and purchased their own ship, the "Rising Sun."

They became very self-sufficient because of High Island and its production.

Mr. Purnell's death from tuberculosis began the breakup of House of David. Mary Purnell now depended upon financial support from Judge Dewhurst, who came from California to help Mary run House of David.

But conflicts arose and Mary formed her own "Mary's City of David," while Judge Dewhurst continued with House of David. Mary and her followers rebuilt much of the colony, including a successful hotel and bakery in Benton Harbor. A small hospital also was opened.

But in 1950 Mary Purnell died and the colony has divided sadly since her death, Taylor said.

The colony decreased rapidly in the 1960s with the advent of a more permissive society. Young people were not willing to abide by the colony's rules, and the park eventually had to close in 1974.

Today, Taylor and his small group are restoring many of the crumbling buildings. He also hopes to bring the colony back to some up-to-date usefulness to visitors, such as a music camp, like the school in North Michigan. As music was always a driving force at House of David he hopes to include that spirit and have it flourish once again.

Taylor's book containing an assortment of historic photographs and documents is available for purchase locally at Mackey's Card and Book Store, Town and Country and at North Village Mall.

Museum pass now a library offering

By KEN BRADFORD
For *Homestead*

You go to a library to check out books.

Somewhere along the way you find out you can check out magnifying glasses, compact discs, videos and computer games.

Now you can even check out a museum.

It's a new program at the St. Joseph County Public Library. On any given day you can borrow a free pass that will get a family of six into the College Football Hall of Fame, the Northern Indiana Center for History or the Shaker Museum.

The idea came from Susan Cost, a reference librarian for the past three years.

There a friend who visited the Benton area and was able to get museum passes from one of the libraries there, she said. "It sounded like something we could do here."

Some ideas take a long time to implement. This one sort of snowballed.

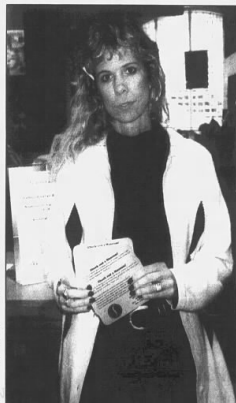
"I came up with the idea in August and got a chance to present it to the library board," she said. "The goal is to provide access for people who might not be able to afford to take their families to these places."

The library board was receptive, and the Check Out a Museum program went into effect on Nov. 1.

The library bought two passes to each of the three museums, Amy St. Joseph County Public Library card holder can check out one of the passes. They are available at the Main Library, 303 S. Main St., six days a week after noon and after 2 p.m. on Sunday.

The passes must be returned to the Main Library by noon the following day. Only one pass is allowed per household per day and they are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

At this point, Cost said, the li-



Susan Cost hopes library patrons will be interested in visiting local museums.

brary won't take reservations for the passes. People have to come after noon to see if they are available.

"This is a new program," she said. "We may change the rules later after we see how the passes are used."

You might think the museums would be concerned about not collecting admission fees when visitors use the free library passes.

That isn't the case. "They're all very enthusiastic," she said. "They're happy to do whatever they can to get people to come."

The museum pass program may

help patrons change the way they look at libraries.

These days, the mission statement doesn't even mention lending out books. It says, "The St. Joseph County Public Library provides literary materials, information services and programs to solve problems, spark curiosity and inspire dreams."

Since libraries connect to the Internet, it makes sense that they connect to local museums as well. "We look at ourselves as an information center," Cost said. "We providing access to information and knowledge."

NEW BOOKS

St. Joseph County Public Library

Non-Fiction

Cyberways: Espionage on the Internet, by Jean Guisard.

Angels Among the Way, by Della Rose.

The Celestine Vision: Living the New Spiritual Awareness, by James Redfield.

James Herriot's Animal Stories.

Original Meetings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution (Pulitzer Prize winner), by Jack Rakove.

World's Worst I Wrote, by Robert Fulghum.

The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The Rebin Williams Scrapbook, by Stephen

Fiction

Sagami.

Rachel Carson: The Life of the Author of "Silent Spring," by Linda Lee.

The Healing of America, by Marianne Williamson.

Victim, by Anne Rice.

Luck, by Max Brand.

Propeller One-Way Night Coach, by John Travolta.

Holy Terror in the Hebrides, by Jeanne DuPrau.

The Old Religion, by David Morrell.

Timequake, by Kurt Vonnegut.

The Maltese Crossbones, by Robert Ludlum.

Flower Net, by Lisa See.

Medicine Hat, by De De Colomsmith.

Blood Red Roses, by Deborah Crombie.



Sara Hicks receives the Reserve AMHA Youth of the Year award.

Horse association gives award to Sara Hicks

Sara Hicks, a member of the German Township 4-H Horse and Pony Club, won the Reserve Youth of the Year Award from the American Morgan Horse Association last month.

She was among 15 contestants, each having won a

regional qualifying contest. They competed at the Morgan World Championship in Oklahoma City.

As her prize, Sara will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to visit the home town of her choice, Ellen Beth-Holmby of Grass Valley, Calif.



90th birthday surprise

Arvin Thompson had a special surprise for her 90th birthday this year. She had a visit from her great-grand-granddaughter, Thompson, who lives in Muskegon, Okla. From left are Mrs. Thompson, daughter Mary Maryfield, grand-daughter Judy Rowland, great-granddaughter Debbie Thompson and Brandon.