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## Life inside the Earth: The Koreshan Unity and Its Urban Pioneers, 1880-1908

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

LIFE INSIDE THE EARTH:  
THE KORESHAN UNITY AND ITS URBAN PIONEERS, 1880-1908

By

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To Robert,  
the Albert to my Alberta

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a social and cultural history of the Koreshan Unity from its official beginnings in the 1880s to its decline in 1908. Founded by eclectic medical doctor Cyrus R. Teed, the Koreshan Unity emerged as yet another utopian experiment during the late-nineteenth century. While many utopian communities have been established in the United States since the colonial period, the Koreshans were a community unique in ideology and social practices. Founded on ancient Christian beliefs, science, and communal standards, the Koreshan Unity has become known throughout the American utopian historical narrative as the utopian community that believed humanity lived inside the earth.

While Koreshan beliefs are important in recording the community's history, a more personal history has often been left out of the scholarship on this topic. This thesis seeks to investigate the human side of the Koreshan Unity by tracing the life of Cyrus Teed and providing a glimpse into the everyday lives of the Koreshan members in their settlement in Estero, Florida. Utilizing the Koreshan Unity papers located at the State Archives of Florida, this material culture represents how the Koreshan members tried to realize Teed's and their utopian dream. While the Koreshan Unity began its decline after Teed's death in 1908, its members still portrayed their utopian experiment as a success because they found a haven in the religious and communal opportunities the community supported. Currently, this view of the Koreshan Unity is being preserved at the Koreshan State Historic Site (KSHS), located on the once Koreshan settlement grounds. While scholars who have contributed to the American utopian historical narrative have defined "success" based on numbers and general cultural trends, this thesis proves that only the participants in the movement can truly define what success really means.

## INTRODUCTION

During the 1880s, an eclectic physician named Cyrus R. Teed founded the Koreshan Unity, a religious-based utopian community. Teed, known as Koresh by his adherents, combined elements of his Baptist upbringing, knowledge of science, and an illumination he experienced in 1869 to establish a community based on what he believed to be ancient Christian values and new scientific truths. In public memory, the Koreshan Unity is perhaps most infamous for its adherence to the idea of cellular cosmogony, which stated that life lives inside the earth, that the earth itself encases inner space. Teed considered this to be a scientific fact. This belief in cellular cosmogony ordered every aspect of Koreshans lives from their social organization, communal living, and even their own government. Up until the early 1900s, the Koreshan Unity attracted hundreds of followers throughout the country interested in Teed's teachings of a science-driven religious revolution.

The initial years of the Koreshan Unity were plagued with trying to find a location to safely experiment with their beliefs. First attempting to find a home in various cities in New York, Teed and his few followers found it difficult to practice their beliefs in the state that once fostered religious revivalism during the Second Great Awakening. After failing to convince his medical patients to join his cause in New York, Teed continued to look for another place to call home for himself and his Koreshans. In 1886, Teed relocated his movement to Chicago, where the Koreshan membership truly began to blossom. This growth, however, did not go uncontested. Like in the cities of New York, Teed began to face criticism in the Chicago press and from other local Chicagoans. Newspapers incessantly found ways to belittle the Koreshans, claiming Teed was a manipulative and hypocritical leader. The press also characterized his teachings as strange.

In 1894, Teed again moved his followers, but this time to a more secluded destination. After traveling for years to find a homestead where they could practice their beliefs of

Koreshanity, Teed motioned his followers south from the urban landscape of Chicago to Estero, Florida. Located in Lee County, Florida, Estero and its surrounding communities only consisted of approximately 3,000 citizens. Consisting mainly of farmers and farm laborers, the south Florida lifestyle was one that the Koreshans were not accustomed to.<sup>1</sup> Even in this swampy and foreign environment, the Koreshans established a cultural oasis and an urban center in south Florida that Teed promised would become the capital of the world. By the early 1900s, the Koreshan Unity became a sustainable community of around 200 followers and also provided important agricultural and cultural resource for locals in Fort Myers.

Although the first months in Estero, Florida, proved difficult for the Koreshans, they ultimately established a very successful community not just by utopian standards, but as a south Florida community. Known as New Jerusalem, Teed intended the newly acquired land along the Estero River to become the world capital of his movement. The Koreshans cleared hundreds of acres of land and built numerous buildings to house its members and perform their tasks. Buildings such as the Old Store, the Bakery, the Guiding Star Publishing House, and the Art Hall contributed to the Koreshan Unity's economic stability. Known locally for their yeast bread and nationally for their publishing endeavors, especially their periodicals titled the *Flaming Sword* and *American Eagle*, the Koreshans found numerous ways to not only maintain their community but to also propagate their beliefs to the public.

Although the Koreshans moved to a rural area of Florida, they did not seek to abandon all of their urban ways of life. While they sought the land in Estero, Florida, as a means of seclusion to practice their utopian experiment and their Koreshan beliefs, they still engaged with the locals in Fort Myers. Their contact with Fort Myers extended beyond commercial exchange. Known for their musical and theatrical performances, the Koreshans often performed many shows to the public on the Bamboo Landing or in the Art Hall. The Koreshans also encouraged the public to join them for lectures and to inform those interested in Koreshanity. Famous individuals such as Thomas Edison and Henry Ford visited the Koreshans on numerous occasions. While the public viewed their utopian neighbors as quirks, they apparently enjoyed the cultural milieu they fostered.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900. Population, Florida*. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1900). Other occupations prominent in the census data included fisherman, sailor, and stock herder. In this census, the Koreshans only recorded 36 members who were "assistants" to Emma Norton, Cyrus Teed's sister. Another fascinating observation is that the two leaders of the Koreshan Unity, Teed and Annie Ordway, were not even listed.

While the Koreshan Unity did experience a short period of prosperity, the utopian community eventually, and perhaps inevitably, faced its decline. Beginning in 1906, the relationship between the citizens of Fort Myers and the Koreshans began to diminish as Teed and other members became involved in local politics. Their participation caused friction between the two communities. Eventually, this tension turned into violence when Teed was struck by local officials during a confrontation. Another decisive blow to the Koreshans was the death of Teed in 1908. Throughout the years, Teed had become the bond that joined all of the Koreshans together in the quest for a better life and a better understanding of the truths of the universe. Once Teed died, the era of prosperity vanished and the Koreshan Unity began to spiral downward as members vanished and a celibate way of life began to take its toll on membership numbers. In 1982, the “last Koreshan” died.

Even though the Koreshan membership vanished, Koreshan memory has continued through historical interpretation. In 1961, Teed’s New Jerusalem became the Koreshan State Park. There the physical structures Teed and his adherents built in Estero, Florida, still stand. Now known as the Koreshan State Historic Site (KSHS), the once home for the Koreshans has become a tourist destination for many visitors to the southwest region of Florida. Preserved and maintained by the State of Florida, the KSHS has found numerous ways to interpret Koreshan history. While still labeled as the unique utopians who believed we “live inside the earth,” the KSHS has focused mainly on the ingenuity, industriousness, and cultural diversity of the Koreshan Unity. From artifact exhibits to various outreach programs, the KSHS has effectively found ways to preserve Koreshan memory and allow the public to access that history.

This thesis will focus on the Koreshan Unity from its official beginnings to Teed’s death (1880-1908), highlighting the social and cultural history of the utopian community. Previous scholarship on Cyrus Teed and the Koreshan Unity has provided an analysis that places this group within the context of national trends. This thesis builds on this work in writing the history of American utopias. My unique contribution lies in the sources I use to analyze the Koreshan Unity. Instead of focusing only on the Teed’s writings and the official newspaper, I used other Koreshan print culture, ephemera, letters, and other unpublished manuscript material to document the perspective of the members of the Koreshan Unity. In addition, while most scholars have approached the question of success or failure based upon how long a society

maintained active membership, my work looks at success from the perspective of a society's ability to use its material culture to perpetuate a public persona long after its members had died.

### ***Since the 1950s: Understanding Utopias as a Barometer of Change***

While unique in the particulars, Teed's Koreshan Unity was not the first utopian community in the United States. Throughout American history, people have formed communities based around religious, economic, and intellectual ideals, at times combining all three objectives. According to some historians, the formation of utopian communities in America dates back to the Pilgrims, when they sought refuge in the New World to create a "city upon a hill."<sup>2</sup> The majority of utopian communities, however, emerged during the nineteenth century. As the market economy began to transform the nation's social and economic structures, Americans responded with different coping mechanisms. Some, however, searched for a way out from the changing society. To escape from the new status quo of everyday life in the United States, many Americans created or joined utopian communities.

The main purpose of this historiography is to examine scholarly analysis of America's utopian societies. While scholarship on the subject varies by time period and group, there are some overarching questions that everyone addresses in their work: why and how did these communities begin? Who did they attract? Overall, did the utopian communities succeed in establishing an ideal environment in an otherwise seemingly sinful society? Historical analysis of utopian communities has changed over the last fifty years from a broad national narrative to a more comparative point of view of utopias. This historiography examines these changes and then looks in-depth at the literature on the Koreshan movement. Juxtaposing the broader national narrative of the American utopian movement to the more localized movement of the Koreshan Unity helps illuminate differences and similarities. In placing the Koreshan story into context, one can better understand the motives and intentions of an otherwise seemingly outrageous group of individuals.

From the 1950s to the present day, scholars have studied utopias as a means to understand people's reactions to fundamental changes in society. In particular, changes brought about by a transformation of the American economy in the nineteenth century. The rise of a market economy, especially the advent of industrialization, changed the dynamics of people's

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur Eugene Bestor, Jr., *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian Origins and the Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1950), 1.

work, home, and leisure. However, the way in which historians have formulated their analysis on the topic of utopias has varied. Initially, historians focused on the story of utopian communities from the time of the Pilgrims up until the 1850s. Most argued that the movement toward an ideal society declined after the late-nineteenth century. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, a renewed appreciation of communal living emerged when members of the hippie generation embraced this idea in response to what they believed was a troubled, Cold War America. At the same time, scholars recognized this as an area for legitimate inquiry and formed organizations to promote the historical study of utopian communities.<sup>3</sup> These groups began to reformulate the questions of analysis. For instance, they moved away from structuring the problem as one of simply success or failure. They also moved away from focusing on the antebellum period, which was when the most well-known groups such as the Shakers and the Oneidas were established. Instead, historians began to ask: what influenced a leader or a group of people to form a communal group in America? What was the basis, if any, of their beliefs? Over the last twenty years, historians have also extended the time frame for studying the emergence and development of utopian societies in the United States, especially in the post Civil War period. This thesis contributes to our understanding of the formation of utopian communities at the turn of the twentieth century.

Even with this noticeable shift in historical analysis on American utopian history, all historians within the past fifty years have asked the same question: is it really worth analyzing the American utopian movement as a separate event in our nation's history because so many of these communities failed in their ultimate goals? The unanimous answer is yes. Historians argue that utopian communities both reflected and shaped American culture in the nineteenth century. By examining how some people attempted to turn their religious, intellectual, and economic ideals into practice, utopian societies provide means to understand anxieties brought about by the rise of a capitalistic market economy.

Historian Arthur Eugene Bestor set the stage for these discussions in 1950, with his groundbreaking publication *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian Origins and the Owenite Phase*

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<sup>3</sup> Center for Communal Studies, "Preface," in *America's Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), xv. After 1975, three organizations were created and "facilitate[d] the sharing of communal and utopian information by means of conferences, journals, and newsletters." Those organizations were the National Historic Communal Societies Association (NHCSA), which was then renamed to the Communal Studies Association (CSA) in 1990. In 1976, the Society of Utopian Studies was established; and in 1985, the International Communal Studies Association (ICSA).

*of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829*. In the beginning, explains Bestor, many Europeans viewed the New World as a sort of utopia. During the Reformation of the seventeenth century, Bestor argued, Protestants developed a concept of the “communitarian ideal,” which led many to establish religion-based communities.<sup>4</sup> In moving to the Americas, these idealists viewed the land as a frontier where they could practice their religious freedoms. Bestor contended that the Puritans viewed communitarianism as the most attractive method of reform, in contrast to the alternatives of individualism or revolution.<sup>5</sup>

According to Bestor, there were three major appeals to the communitarian approach. First, joining a communitarian effort was a voluntary act. Rather than being pressured to join a revolutionary cause, Bestor believed that members decided on their own whether they wanted to contribute in an effort toward a better life and world. Second, communitarians considered their communities as experiments toward social or economic reform. No one group proved they had the single answer to the problems inherent in current society but, instead, they relied on trial and error to find the best means toward a better future. This method of trial and error is the third appeal Bestor describes. During a time when class warfare and social upheaval became a common occurrence, many sought a communitarian way of trial and error as a means to better society without violence.<sup>6</sup> Rather than basing motives and actions on historical trends, communitarians focused more on inventing their own solutions to social problems.<sup>7</sup> For these reasons, according to Bestor, communitarians appealed to Americans in both the seventeenth century and into the nineteenth century.

Where Bestor draws distinction is in motives. He argued that while religion proved the primary reason for communitarianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, secular motives played a greater influence in nineteenth century communitarianism. He argued that this change was the result of industrial capitalism. According to his research, Bestor found that many Americans during the nineteenth century faced increased insecurities as the relationship between employers and workers became more separate. He argued that Americans established utopian communities out of fear of “class warfare” and in an attempt to create “social harmony.”<sup>8</sup> Bestor used the story of Robert Owen and his quest for utopia in the United States in the early-

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<sup>4</sup> Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 12-15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 16. 60.

nineteenth century to argue that communitarianism efforts became more focused on social factors. Studying Owen's writings, Bestor determined that he tended to be driven more by educational, ethical, and psychological principles than religion in his hopes to foster a better social arrangement in American society.<sup>9</sup>

Published at almost the same time, Mark Holloway's *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America 1680-1880*, made some similar arguments to Bestor but also provided a more critical analysis on the innate American desire toward idealism. Holloway agreed with Bestor that utopian communities were experiments toward religious, social, and economic reform. Holloway, however, disagreed with Bestor's contention that the initial communitarian effort in America was focused on religion. Using John Smith to illustrate his point, Holloway argued that not all incoming colonists and settlers sought religious freedoms. Smith, he contended, was motivated by economic reasons.<sup>10</sup> He also disagreed with Bestor's interpretation of the late-nineteenth century. Holloway found evidence to support the idea that utopian efforts shifted back to a more religious endeavor. He argued that overall working conditions were improving and, hence, many Americans found the efforts of economically-based communities irrelevant. Holloway maintained that of those utopian communities established in the late-nineteenth century, many faltered due to the lack of "faith, the unconquerable pioneering spirit, and the rigid moral purpose of the early settlers."<sup>11</sup>

A decade later, historians revisited the topic of the American utopian movement. Although Bestor and Holloway disagreed on the specific motivations for utopian communities both portrayed their inception as a reaction to an American population at a loss to respond to the impersonal nature of industrialization. Historians in the 1960s, however, began to see utopias as an outcome of optimism instead of pessimism. Maren Lockwood reset the tone in her 1965 article titled, "The Experimental Utopia in America." Lockwood described nineteenth century utopians as people who believed that "man could improve himself socially and morally."<sup>12</sup> She

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Holloway, *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America 1680-1880* (London: Turnstile Press, 1951), 31.

<sup>11</sup> Holloway, *Heavens on Earth*, 211, 213.

<sup>12</sup> Maren Lockwood, "The Experimental Utopia in America," *Daedalus* 94, no. 2 (Spring, 1965): 401. Although Lockwood did not mention the Koreshan Unity in her article, it is apparent that the Koreshans can be considered an optimistic utopian community. In relating the Koreshans to Lockwood's argument, the Koreshan Unity did express a "legitimate hope" in their experiment and believed that "utopia could exist." Hopeful in their cause to free humanity from an ever-growing capitalistic society, the Koreshan Unity, especially Cyrus Teed, never publicized any doubts in their utopian experiment prior to their leader's death.



argued that their optimism was rooted in Enlightenment thought, religious fervor, and the “prosaic enthusiasm for practical application.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, according to Lockwood, many Americans sought to establish ideal communities in attempt to reform the society around them.

While utopians presented themselves as social reformers on the quest for a better society, Lockwood explained that not all Americans accepted the optimistic utopian mentality. According to Lockwood, many utopians resorted to detachment “from the worldly society,” which implied that they wanted to escape the world around them rather than attempt to reform society as a whole. In the quest for “freedom and seclusion,” Lockwood argued, many utopians looked west, focusing mainly on sites west of central New York and Pennsylvania and east of the Mississippi River. Not only did these regions prove to be less expensive, but the lands also enabled utopians to escape from the “conservative East Coast [which] inhibited innovation and experiment.”<sup>14</sup> In comparison, Bestor argues that communitarians essentially wanted to become role models for a lost American public. In Bestor’s words, utopians “in all earnestness” wanted to be “guides and pathfinders to the future.” While each utopian community had different motives and beliefs, all served as “a lever to exert upon society the force necessary to produce reform and change.”<sup>15</sup> While Lockwood portrayed the utopian movement of the nineteenth century as a fleeting attempt in social reform, Bestor argued that the communitarianism spirit was more enduring.

In 1968, a historical sociological study shed some light on some of these historical questions. In particular, the study helped to explain issues of motivation. Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s findings were published in an article titled, “Commitment and Social Organization: A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities.” In it Kanter described the importance of measuring commitment in social organizations to see how it influenced the success and failure of utopian communities between 1780 and 1860. Although Kanter does not specify the “historical sources” she used throughout the study to come up with the data, the statistical information still provided an essential look into how utopian communities either encouraged potential members to join or how they ensured their members stayed.<sup>16</sup> According to

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<sup>13</sup> Lockwood, “The Experimental Utopia in America,” 402.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 402, 404.

<sup>15</sup> Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Rosabeth Moss Kanter, “Commitment and Social Organization: A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities,” *American Sociological Review* 33, no. 4 (August, 1968): 502-503. The empirical study consisted of 91 utopian communities that Kanter categorized into 3 categories: 11 successful, 79 unsuccessful, and 1

Kanter's definition, commitment consisted of the "willingness of social actors to give their energy and loyalty to social systems." In a utopian setting, she argued, commitment proved difficult; not only did members have to feel a willingness to contribute to the utopian cause and a sense of belonging, but leaders had the difficult task of also implementing "organizational requisites" in order for their social experiment to stay afloat.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout Kanter's research, she defined three specific "commitment mechanisms" that utopian communities utilized. One, a mechanism of continuance either required an incoming member to either sacrifice or invest, whether financially or through physical labor, their efforts to a community. Kanter found that communities that implemented continuance practices tended to succeed more than others that did not because members tended to stay longer either from a sense of true commitment to a community's cause, or obligation. Utopian communities that practiced cohesion commitment mechanisms allowed members to feel that they were part of a group. Kanter noted that with this increased sense of "one-ness," however, forced members to give up previous attachments. Lastly, Kanter isolated control mechanisms that dealt with mortification and surrender; in many instances, leaders felt that members should fully appreciate and "experience the great power represented by the organization, so that he will attach the meaning of his life to the carrying out of the demands of power."<sup>18</sup> Through empirical analysis, Kanter deduced that those communities that adhered to one or more commitment mechanism proved more likely to be successful versus those that did not.

Similarly, sociologists Karen and G. Edward Stephan conducted a survey in 1973 that explained the importance religion played in providing a cohesive bond, which resulted in the longevity of certain utopian communities between 1776 and 1900. Stephan and Stephan asked the question, "What factors affect the chances for survival of communes?" Utilizing five well known histories written by scholars such as Bestor and Holloway, they studied forty

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unclassified. Kanter only looked at communities within which some sort of centralized power, whether by means of a constitution, a leader, or both. In order to be considered "successful," a community needed to be established and running for at least 25 years. Out of the population, Kanter created a sample of 9 successful communities and 21 unsuccessful. The sample was chosen based on the amount of information provided of each community, time period in which they existed, and so forth. In 1972, Kanter published *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), which expounded on this study along with other findings based on her own experiences in communes during the late-1960s. Throughout the book, she compares and contrasts utopian communities from the nineteenth century to the then modern utopian movement in the United States.

<sup>17</sup> Kanter, "Commitment and Social Organization," 499.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 504-510.

communities. They noted that physical setting, economic autonomy, and population control all influenced the longevity of a community. The sociologists also argued that historical scholarship tended to repeat “all the bizarre features of communal history (many of which *are* entertaining), while neglecting discussion of such mundane topics as commune’s population, acreage, allocation of tasks, and so on.”<sup>19</sup> In the end, Stephan and Stephan determined that even though their research question could not be answered “systematically” due to the lack of analysis presented in past works, they believed that religion played an essential role in the survival of utopian communities. They based their conclusion on statistical findings, which suggested that religion-based communities survived longer than secular ones. Admitting to the inclusivity of their findings, they expressed the hope that other scholars would take their data into consideration and elaborate on the hypothesis, either supporting or refuting the survey’s findings.<sup>20</sup>

Written two years after the Stephan and Stephan study, historian Robert S. Fogarty’s “American Communes, 1865-1914” also criticized past histories written by scholars on the American utopian movement. Like Bestor, Fogarty examined the optimistic intentions of the American utopian movement. Fogarty argued that utopian communities actually had a “strong social purpose and a serious intent to respond directly to emerging social conditions.” He also argued that scholarship needed to be redirected from the Puritans to the late-nineteenth century. While the response toward communalism may not have been as noticeable during the late-nineteenth century, he contended, that did not mean Americans did not actively seek a communal way of life.<sup>21</sup> According to Fogarty, the American utopian movement persisted as a quest to solve society’s problems by “standing on a common ground” by way of adhering to communal life.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Karen H. Stephan and G. Edward Stephan, “Religion and the Survival of Utopian Communities,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 12, no. 1 (March, 1973): 90.

<sup>20</sup> Stephan and Stephan, “Religion and the Survival of Utopian Communities,” 94. Another work to compare to Stephan and Stephan’s research is Ira L. Mandelker’s *Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). While researchers such as Stephan and Stephan support the theory that religion-based utopian communities tended to be more successful versus other established communities in the United States, Mandelker believed that religion and a community’s tendency to associate it with all facets of life, including economic and politics, contributed to the inevitable decline of various American utopian communities, such as the Oneidas.

<sup>21</sup> Robert S. Fogarty, “American Communes, 1865-1914,” *Journal of American Studies* 9, no. 2 (August, 1975): 146.

<sup>22</sup> Fogarty, “American Communes, 1865-1914,” 162.

Throughout his article, Fogarty also elaborated on the different kinds of utopian communities founded in the United States during the late-nineteenth century much more so than previous scholarship. According to Fogarty, American utopian communities could be divided into three categories: co-operative colonizers, charismatic perfectionists, and political colonizers. While the three he defined closely follow the emphasis on religious and secular functions of certain communities explained by previous scholars, Fogarty believed that past generalizations needed to be expanded upon.

Co-operative colonizers comprised of those who believed that through communal living, colonists could improve the “economic and moral condition” they faced in American society.<sup>23</sup> Charismatic perfectionists groups consisted of members who relied on a forceful leader. According to Fogarty, those communities with a strong leader survived for the longest periods of time because leaders often played a critical role in regulated membership.<sup>24</sup> Political pragmatists found refuge in communal settings in order to experiment and publicize their social and political principles. Often political pragmatists relied on socialism as the answer to solving all of society’s problems. Unfortunately, explains Fogarty, political pragmatist communities often resulted in “short-lived and volatile” social experiments.<sup>25</sup> Fogarty believed the historians had concluded that America’s utopian communities were failures because they had forgotten one important factor in their analysis: the utopians assessment of their own experiments. Fogarty argued that many of the utopians believed in the success of their own social experiments because of their ability to practice their ideals to promote self-sustainability.<sup>26</sup>

Like Stephan and Stephan, historians and other scholars during the 1980s criticized the early literature for its lack of rigorous analysis. New historical scholarship would subject American utopian communities to examination through a number of different lenses, in particular, legal history and cultural history. Each of these works examined demonstrates how scholars approached the question of utopian communities by narrowing the scope of their research to delve into greater depth on a particular facet of history.

Carol Weisbrod’s *The Boundaries of Utopia*, for instance, provided a unique legal perspective on utopian communities. She placed her discussion within the larger context of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 162.

changes to the market economy in the nineteenth century. During this period, contracts proved essential in mediating economic endeavors among multiple levels of society. What was unique about Weisbrod's work is that she found that contracts were also an important means for utopian communities to solidify social order in their ideal societies. Weisbrod argued that of the four religious communities she examined, all were more likely to win in legal litigation against former members who believed the communities breached their contracts. Unlike other histories that had been written on the utopian experience, Weisbrod portrayed a "dark side of the American communitarian experience."<sup>27</sup>

Taking a cultural approach, Charles J. Rooney, Jr.'s, *Dreams and Visions: A Study of American Utopias, 1865-1917* delved into the American utopian writers of the nineteenth century. Throughout his research, Rooney contended that the term "utopia" needed to be redefined. According to Rooney, the use of the term "utopia," in fictional works, "present[ed] an alternative way of life from the status quo by describing an ideal society."<sup>28</sup> Those who wrote about utopia, he argued, attempted to write about a "heaven on earth" in what they believed was an otherwise misguided American society.<sup>29</sup> Rooney closed his argument by saying that utopian writers not only attempted to fight against the status quo, but the utopian movement itself could be considered "a part of the general protest at the end of the nineteenth century against the forces of disintegration and decay," in hopes of reaching the innate goodness and idealism in all Americans.<sup>30</sup> Hence, Rooney's work viewed utopias as spaces for optimists, not pessimists.

One work in the 1980s, however, did not follow this trend of specialization. In attempting to write a book for the general public as well as students, Yaacov Oved's *Two Hundred Years of American Communes* attempted to create a starting point for people wanting to learn more about the utopian movement in the United States and to "include cases that would serve as a basis for study and debate."<sup>31</sup> By pulling in his own experiences in a Jewish kibbutz and his own research on utopian communities in the United States, Oved argued that the utopian

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<sup>27</sup> Carol Weisbrod, *The Boundaries of Utopia* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), xi, 211. Weisbrod examined legal battles from "four of the most famous of the nineteenth century American utopia communities": Shakers, Harmony Society, Oneida, and the Zoar.

<sup>28</sup> Charles J. Rooney, Jr., *Dreams and Visions: A Study of American Utopias, 1865-1917* (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Greenwood Press, 1985), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Rooney, *Dreams and Visions*, 21-24, 171.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>31</sup> Yaacov Oved, *Two Hundred Years of American Communes* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), vii.

communities in the United States were a unique case in the quest for an ideal way of life. Nowhere else in the world, Oved contended, did a utopian movement exist continuously for 250 years. Despite this point, Oved contended that overall utopian communities were “incidental and peripheral” to the history of the United States. He argued that the movement only influenced a few individuals rather than the nation and its society as a whole.<sup>32</sup> Oved explains that:

They [utopian communities] existed on the byroads of history. Social, political, as well as spiritual and intellectual struggles took place far from the boundaries of communal settlements. Even when they flourished, the commune and its revolutionary lifestyle never endangered the trend of American society.<sup>33</sup>

While this argument does not concur with most of the historical analysis provided by other scholars, including my own, Oved’s work proved useful for researching this thesis because he provided in-depth statistical data for utopian communities between 1663 and 1984. Not only are communities identified by their “religious” or “socialists” standings, but Oved also included key descriptions to determine if a community expressed beliefs associated with the Shakers, Fourierists, and/or Owenites. Oved also incorporated a chart depicting each state’s commune density, or the number of communes that inhabited each state between 1663 and 1920. From the data it is apparent that a wave of utopian activity in the United States emerged by the 1840s. During the 1880s, the time period that the Koreshan Unity formed, Oved’s data displays that the Koreshans were not the only ones seeking utopia at this time. Instead, many Americans turned to utopias in the 1880s in response to changes in the form of capitalism and immigration.<sup>34</sup>

Oved’s dismissal of the movement did not stifle historical scholarship. In the 1990s, historians again took up the question of the meaning and influence of utopian communities for the history of the United States. Expanding on many of the details he presented in his article in the *Journal of American Studies* in 1975, Robert S. Fogarty’s *All Things New: American Communes and Utopian Movements, 1860-1914* redefined the terms of the debate. While many

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<sup>32</sup> Oved, *Two Hundred Years of American Communes*, xiv.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 485-493. According to Oved’s statistics, the Koreshan Unity was not the only utopian community seeking refuge in Florida. In fact, three other groups called Florida their home: the Narcoossee (Shakers), the Apalachicella, and the Order of Theocracy, the later being a community established by one-time Koreshan Annie Ordway, or Victoria Gratia, after Teed’s death. Of these utopian communities, the Koreshan Unity lasted the longest from 1894 to 1980.

historians and sociologists related utopian trends of altering religious beliefs to the economic fluctuations in the United States during the nineteenth century, Fogarty believed otherwise. Instead of formulating conclusions based on these “generalizations,” Fogarty concluded that many utopian communities were established and witnessed growth as a result of “personal and private crises.” For many Americans, the answer to their personal troubles and overall distaste in nineteenth century American society could be found in settling in a communal environment.<sup>35</sup>

In direct contrast to Fogarty’s argument was geographer Brian J.L. Berry’s belief that long-term economic fluctuations did in fact influence the rise and fall of utopian communities in the United States. In *America’s Utopian Experiments: Communal Havens from Long-Wave Crises*, Berry provided numerous charts and statistical data showing how upsurges in capitalism and business correlated to the establishment of utopian communities.<sup>36</sup> In utilizing mainly secondary sources and providing brief histories of various American utopian communities, Berry argued that those Americans who feared the greed of business and society during the nineteenth century led many to seek security. Once in a community, members could “antithetically” practice economic values which mainstream American society utilized.<sup>37</sup> Although providing useful visuals and a seemingly sound argument, historians such as Robert S. Fogarty have criticized Berry’s work, explaining that the geographer’s attempt to tie economics and historical trends lacked original research and made too many generalizations.<sup>38</sup>

Self-proclaimed humanist Seymour R. Kesten further contradicted Berry’s research in his work *Utopian Episodes: Daily Life in Experimental Colonies Dedicated to Changing the World*. He argued that while a rising and falling American economy might have contributed to some people entering utopian communities in the United States, most people who joined utopias expressed “disgust from the values that had developed in society.”<sup>39</sup> According to Kesten, scholars needed to more clearly define the different types of utopian communities created during the nineteenth century. Rather than broadly defining communities based on religious and secular

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<sup>35</sup> Robert S. Fogarty, *All Things News: American Communes and Utopian Movements, 1860-1914* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 21.

<sup>36</sup> Brian J.L. Berry, *America’s Utopian Experiments: Communal Havens from Long-Wave Crises* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1992), xv.

<sup>37</sup> Berry, 18, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Robert S. Fogarty, review of *America’s Utopian Experiments: Communal Havens from Long-Wave Crises*, by Brian J.L. Berry, *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (April, 1994): 635.

<sup>39</sup> Seymour R. Kesten, *Utopian Episodes: Daily Life in Experimental Colonies Dedicated to Changing the World* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 3.

values, Kesten examined various utopian establishments based on the concepts of “individual salvation” and “social reorganization.”<sup>40</sup> While the former sought eternal and spiritual happiness more through religious doctrines, the later expressed a desire for happiness in the physical world. While colonies that stressed individual salvation linked sin and the vices of modern American society to the economy, those communities that stressed social reorganization felt evil spawned from social grievances such as poverty, ignorance, and inequality.<sup>41</sup>

Through his research and writing, Kesten wanted to clarify some of the many generalizations and “egregious misreading” of utopian communities that he believed had led numerous scholars to oversimplify the historical narrative of the American utopian movement of the nineteenth century. He was especially troubled by the trend to write this history in a quantitative rather than qualitative manner. According to Kesten, historians, sociologists, and other scholars had reduced the individuals who established and settled in these communities into statistics. In disgust, Kesten stated, “as if the deepest yearnings of the soul could be reduced to the terse efficiency of an Einstein formula.”<sup>42</sup> Like Stephan and Stephan’s study in 1973, Kesten also pointed to past scholars’ tendency on focusing on the “foibles and stupidities” of the various American utopian communities. In an effort to humanize the thousands of American utopians, Kesten portrayed the everyday life and cultural experiences of various communities, associating their efforts toward change as heroic acts. In this way, however, Kesten’s analysis is perhaps not as different as he portrays it to be from early scholarship. He is intrigued by the anecdotal story. Still, Kesten’s work provided a humanistic approach to the American utopian historical narrative.

Over the past decade, scholars have continued to analyze the history of the American utopian movement of the nineteenth century. In 2003 and 2004, historian Robert P. Sutton published two books on the secular and religious aspects of utopian communities established in the early nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Agreeing with Oved, Sutton argued that scholars tended to portray the American utopian historical narrative as segmented by which he meant that scholars discussed these as independent entities that did not interact with the surrounding community or even with other utopian communities in the United States. Sutton sought to step away from this

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<sup>40</sup> Kesten, *Utopian Episodes*, 5-7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Robert P. Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Religious Communities, 1732-2000* (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Praeger Publishers, 2003). Sutton also published in 2004 with the same publishers, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Secular Communities, 1824-2000*.



common portrait and to bring to light the fact that “the utopian tradition is an unbroken motif, not an erratic and fragmented experience.”<sup>44</sup> Although he discussed almost sixty-five different American utopian communities, Sutton brought the stories of each community together to form a more cohesive narrative. In the end he demonstrated the continuity between communities throughout the nineteenth century.

The question of how to define “utopia,” which was first raised by Rooney in 1985, has continued to engage scholars. In *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective*, anthropologist Susan Love Brown again redefined what constituted a utopian community. Rather than use the terms “ideal” or “utopian” because they resembled “anything but ideal,” Brown argued that certain Americans “intentionally” established communities to find order in an otherwise chaotic and unorganized society.<sup>45</sup> Rather than seeing communitarianism or utopianism as a sort of protest or plan of action like Rooney previously argued, Brown and other anthropologists viewed the American utopian movement as an intellectual movement. She suggested that although utopians and their leaders had a plan of attack on how to establish their communities, often times those actions led to failures as a result of their intellectual ideas being more suited to staying as visions rather than becoming realities. Rarely, Brown contends, did utopian visions ever come to full fruition.<sup>46</sup> These anthropological findings were useful for historians looking to explain how individual communities interacted and even influenced society around them.

Taking a slightly different approach, John Gray’s *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, argued that utopia was never meant to be practiced effectively in the real world. Gray insists that “utopian projects [were] by their nature unachievable.”<sup>47</sup> Rather than consider utopians revolutionary intellects in American history, Gray portrayed them as dreamers attempting to attain the impossible. He also argued that each movement needed to be considered separately since they were fleeting reactions to episodes of hardship and societal downturns that were often resolved or dissipated.<sup>48</sup> In direct response to Gray’s analysis, John Hoffman’s *John Gray and the Problem of Utopia* offers a counter argument. Accusing Gray’s argument as being

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<sup>44</sup> Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Religious Communities*, ix.

<sup>45</sup> Susan Love Brown, ed., *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> Brown, *Intentional Community*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 17.

<sup>48</sup> Gray, *Black Mass*, 21.

one-sided, Hoffman argued that utopias were created in direct association with their surroundings. He argued that utopia was a concept that “embrace[d] change, [was] rooted in the present and cease[d] to have the status of an ultimate society.”<sup>49</sup>

In sum, since the 1950s, scholars have recorded and analyzed American utopian history during the nineteenth century with different interpretations. In most cases, scholars have focused their arguments on the importance of American utopianism as a social reform movement.<sup>50</sup> Most scholars disagree with Yaacov Oved’s contention American utopianism played no integral role in influencing American social history. This being said, scholars have created slightly different arguments over the years as to why it is important to incorporate this history into the larger narrative of United States history. According to Maren Lockwood and Robert S. Fogarty, utopianism during the nineteenth century provided a sense of optimism for those wanting a return to an older society. In contrast, Arthur Eugene Bestor, Jr., Mark Holloway, and Susan Love Brown viewed the American utopian movement during the nineteenth century as a religious, economic, or intellectual approach for looking forward to a new society. In many instances, scholars have emphasized the importance of secular and religious characteristics in certain utopian communities in order to establish a sort of labeling system. While some communities displayed different approaches, scholars have found it convenient to emphasize some utopian settlements as “secular” or “religious.” Even with these differing arguments, all of these scholars came to the conclusion that utopians were an important historical story.

An underlying theme among most of these works was the question of success and failure of various established utopian communities. In some instances, scholars such as Rosabeth Moss Kanter and Karen H. and G. Edward Stephans argue outright the success and failure of certain utopian communities based either on cultural trends or commitment mechanisms. Others, such as John Gray, take a broader approach to the question and argue that all of these groups were doomed from the start. Like Seymour R. Kesten and Robert S. Fogarty, I believe that some of these analyses on the success and failure of American utopianism are too superficial. I think Fogarty described utopianism during the nineteenth century best when he stated:

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<sup>49</sup> John Hoffman, *John Gray and the Problem of Utopia* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 27.

<sup>50</sup> Like many other utopian communities, the Koreshan Unity practiced social reform within its settlement by adhering to certain beliefs such as celibacy, equal rights, and a communal way of life. While the Koreshans actively recruited members to their utopian settlement, they did not impose their different social beliefs to the public.

Whereas the American world after the Civil War was fluid, the community appeared solid; whereas the world was quixotic and changing, the colony seemed true to its promises (or at least promised to be so); whereas the world was unsettled, the program offered was reassuring and provided a place from which either self or society could be altered.<sup>51</sup>

In many of these scholarly contributions, they have missed what utopianism meant to those who participated in the movement. Rather than have Fogarty and Kesten's understanding of the human element involved in this portion of American history, others have relied on numbers and generalizations to compose the American utopian historical narrative. While essential information, there is still a hole in the story. This thesis seeks to do what Kesten and Fogarty have urged scholars and students to do for years: provide a utopian point of view of this portion of American history. By analyzing the Koreshan Unity and the community's records, not only is this one utopian group's history being better defined, but a more humanistic approach is included to this portion of American social history.

### ***Writing Koreshan History***<sup>52</sup>

Since the 1950s, historians and students alike have briefly analyzed the history of the Koreshan Unity. Like the writings on other American utopian communities, the Koreshan historical narrative has unfortunately been plagued with some personal and scholarly biases. By focusing on the community's belief on cellular cosmogony—the belief that life lives inside the earth—scholars have tended to sensationalize the Koreshan story rather than provide an objective history. In Robert Fogarty's introduction in the Porcupine Press's edition of Teed's *Cellular Cosmogony: The Earth as a Concave Sphere*, he described the Koreshan leader as “a lunatic, a fraud and swindler.” Fogarty's description of Teed is a far cry from his other, more measured statements he made about other utopian leaders. In addition he does not provide any evidence to demonstrate that either Teed was mentally unstable or that he defrauded his followers. Fogarty's analysis of Teed's adherents was similarly colorful, as he described the Koreshans as the

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<sup>51</sup> Fogarty, *All Things New*, 225.

<sup>52</sup> Sheila Kasperek, “Part II: The Koreshan Unity,” *American Communal Utopias and the Koreshan Unity: A Bibliography*, <http://faculty.mansfield.edu/skasperek/Restricted/koreshan.html>. Along with her valuable bibliography on the sources related to the history of American utopianism, Kasperek also included a listing and brief summary of other scholarly works on the Koreshan Unity. Kasperek's bibliography on the Koreshans is a good starting point for those who are just starting to research on the topic.

“gullible” followers of Teed’s teachings, as if the members themselves had no say in whether or not to join the Koreshan Unity.<sup>53</sup> While he presents general, yet valuable information on the Koreshan Unity and on the basics of cellular cosmogony, it is difficult to understand why Fogarty found it necessary to include personal biases in telling Koreshan history.<sup>54</sup> The question should not be whether Teed’s arguments are true or false but rather why did he and so many find cellular cosmogony an appealing way to understand the universe.

Prior to Fogarty’s work, other scholars contributed their research and analysis on the Koreshans. Carl Carmer’s 1949, *Dark Trees to the Wind: A Cycle of York State Years*, appears to be the earliest. In it, Carmer includes a chapter on the Koreshan Unity and Teed. He focused on the evolution of the utopian community while also providing historical background on the Koreshan leader. Carmer also included conversations he had with members such as Laurence Bubbett and Hedwig Michel, which brings to light some of the important personalities associated with the Koreshan Unity.<sup>55</sup> In 1959, Russell H. Anderson’s article “The Shaker Community in Florida” provided insight not only on the Shaker presence in Osceola County, but also helped explain the interest many Koreshan members expressed toward Shakerism. Why a group of Shakers decided to settle in Florida was uncertain to Anderson, other than to find a secluded religious haven and to perform a social experiment free of capitalistic greed. Like the Koreshans, Anderson explained that the Shakers performed commercial enterprises in fishing and fruit cultivation. Although the Shakers corresponded with the Koreshans, the community remained “sympathetic but cautious” toward the Koreshan Unity and its different beliefs.<sup>56</sup>

During the 1970s, numerous publications related to the Koreshan Unity emerged. In 1972, Howard D. Fine’s master’s thesis “The Koreshan Unity, Utopian Community: We Live Inside the World,” provided another look at the basics on the creation and establishment of the

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<sup>53</sup> Cyrus R. Teed, *Cellular Cosmogony, or the Earth as a Concave Sphere* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975), [i].

<sup>54</sup> In 1990, Fogarty clarified his biased remarks in his book *All Things New* (72-83). According to Fogarty, many people have dismissed the workings of Teed and his followers on the “presumption that some people will believe anything, the cynical view that it is the gullible who inhabit the earth, not the meek.” In response to this “cynical view,” Fogarty (although he does not admit his own previous and very similar views toward Teed and the Koreshans) explains that the Koreshan story is an important look at a “curious nineteenth-century response to changing social and scientific conditions.”

<sup>55</sup> Carl Carmer, *Dark Trees to the Wind: A Cycle of York State Years* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), 260-290.

<sup>56</sup> Russell H. Anderson, “The Shaker Community in Florida,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (July, 1959): 35-37.

Koreshan Unity, the belief system of Koreshanity, and the personal and political life of Teed.<sup>57</sup> To supplement his thesis, Fine published “The Koreshan Unity: The Chicago Years of a Utopian Community” in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*. In his article, Fine discussed the early years of the Koreshan Unity and the controversy surrounding the community during its stay in Chicago.<sup>58</sup> Another master’s thesis written by Robert Lynn Rainard, “In the Name of Humanity: The Koreshan Unity,” further followed the general history of the Koreshan Unity while also linking this story to that of the religious revivals held in the “burned-over district” in New York earlier in the nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Lastly, Elliot Mackle published an article “Cyrus Teed and the Lee County Elections of 1906” in *The Florida Historical Quarterly* in 1978. Mackle explained the importance Teed played in establishing the Progressive Liberty party after being disfranchised from local politics during the 1906 presidential elections. At the same time, Mackle showed how the public in Fort Myers responded unfavorably to Teed’s actions not only as a political activist, but as an urban quirk in the pioneer southwestern Florida city.<sup>60</sup>

Other important works related to the Koreshan Unity discuss more specialized topics that demonstrate the rationales organizing Koreshan society. Sally L. Kitch’s *Chaste Liberation: Celibacy and Female Cultural Status*, for instance, delved into the sexual and marital practices of the Koreshan Unity, the Shakers, and the Sanctificationists. Relying on various Koreshan publications, Kitch examined the complex male and female dynamic of the Koreshan Unity and how the Koreshans ultimately “supported female political and economic rights, both within the community and without” as a result of the belief in a dual sex God.<sup>61</sup> James E. Landing’s chapter “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, connected Teed’s belief system to that of Christian Science. Landing explained how Teed applied these religious beliefs not only to his religion but to his social ideals as well. Landing also provided an in-depth analysis on the social structure of the Koreshan Unity, which provides a much clearer

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<sup>57</sup> Howard D. Fine, “The Koreshan Unity, Utopian Community: We Live Inside the World” (MA Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1972).

<sup>58</sup> Howard D. Fine, “The Koreshan Unity: The Chicago Years of a Utopian Community,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 68, no. 3 (1975): 213-227.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Lynn Rainard, “In the Name of Humanity: The Koreshan Unity” (MA Thesis, The University of South Florida, December, 1974). In 1981, Rainard published an article in the *Tampa Bay History* entitled “Conflict Inside the Earth: The Koreshan Unity in Lee County” (vol. 3, no. 1: 5-16), presenting similar findings and research from his master’s thesis.

<sup>60</sup> Elliot Mackle, “Cyrus Teed and the Lee County Elections of 1906,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (July, 1978): 1-18.

<sup>61</sup> Sally L. Kitch, *Chaste Liberation: Celibacy and Female Cultural Status* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989, 10).

picture of the society than its description in Teed's own writings.<sup>62</sup> Anthropologist Sarah A. Tarlow's work also helps illuminate the everyday life in the Koreshan community. Her article, "Representing Utopia: The Case of Cyrus Teed's Koreshan Unity Settlement," suggested that the material culture left behind conflicts with popular imagery that portrays the community as chaotic.<sup>63</sup> Irvin D.S. Winsboro also found evidence that contradicts stories that represent the Koreshans as disordered. Winsboro's article, "The Koreshan Communitarians' Papers and Publications in Estero, 1894-1963," focused on the print culture of the Koreshan Unity and the importance of the Guiding Star Publishing House in disseminating Koreshan beliefs to the public.<sup>64</sup>

Despite this research into the Koreshans, these works fail to fully analyze the history of the Koreshan Unity within the context of American utopianism in general during the late-nineteenth century. This thesis seeks to address that gap. It also, seeks to address the question of success in a more complex fashion than previous historians have posed. Rather than rely on statistics and generalizations, the group's records prove that the Koreshan Unity was a successful utopian community. From this collection of documents, it is obvious that the Koreshans defined their community as successful based on their ability to be self-sustaining while also providing a refuge for hundreds of people who could not cope with the societal and economic changes of the turn-of-the-twentieth century. Upon looking through the various correspondence, administrative records, and print culture, I found it fascinating the undying faith and passion many of the members shared when referring to their title as a Koreshan. Even when the decline of the Koreshan Unity seemed imminent, the Koreshans found ways to ensure that their beliefs and contributions would be recognizable to future generations. While scholars have provided a glimpse into the everyday life of the Koreshan Unity, a historical gap has persisted when trying to portray the individual opinions and feelings of Cyrus Teed and his Koreshans. By referring to these records, it is apparent that the historical interpretation of the Koreshan Unity goes far beyond the group's major publications. Instead, the Koreshan historical narrative is complex and historical analysis on this utopian group should delve more into the particulars of the Koreshan

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<sup>62</sup> James E. Landing, "Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity," in *America's Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 375-395.

<sup>63</sup> Sarah A. Tarlow, "Representing Utopia: The Case of Cyrus Teed's Koreshan Unity Settlement," *Historical Archaeology* 40, no. 1 (2006): 89-99.

<sup>64</sup> Irvin D.S. Winsboro, "The Koreshan Communitarians' Papers and Publications in Estero, 1894-1963," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2004): 173-190.

Unity along with its place in American utopian history. As a movement surrounded by emotion, controversy, and ingenuity, it is essential that American utopian history, including Koreshan history, be recorded with the opinions of its participants, and opponents, to realize that the definition of success can only be accurately defined by the members of the utopian communities.

Several questions inform this study. How should Cyrus Teed be included into the national narrative, as a successful or unsuccessful religious utopian leader? Was Teed that different from other American utopian leaders? Looking beyond the group's belief system and more toward their cultural and social practices, was the Koreshan Unity a unique case in utopian experimentation? Can the Koreshan Unity even be considered a successful American utopian community? Even though there are no longer any practicing members of the Koreshan Unity, how has their memory been preserved? Is the public presentation of that memory an accurate representation of their history? While each question poses different topics of discussion, in answering them it is clear that both leaders and followers must be interpreted for the richest possible history to be written on American utopianism.

Chapter one focuses on Cyrus Teed and his rise to power as a successful charismatic leader of the Koreshan Unity. By comparing scholarly works on charisma to Teed's actual life, it is apparent that Teed's rise to power did not occur accidentally, but was due to a series of events that fostered his influence as "Koresh." Even after multiple hurdles, Teed remained resilient, a trait that his followers valued in establishing a successful and sustainable community. In the end, Teed's own enthusiasm for his movement fueled the passion of his followers. To the Koreshans, Teed was their influential "Master" and symbol of hope for eternal salvation.

Chapter two describes the intellectual beliefs of the Koreshan Unity and how its members adhered to these teachings in everyday life. Relying heavily on his scientific findings, Teed sought to instill the beliefs of cellular cosmogony into every facet of the lives of his followers. From social hierarchies to a community governmental system, Koreshanity became a way of life. Although they lived strict lives based upon Teed's science-based Christianity, the Koreshans still valued cultural and educational enrichment. From establishing their own school to forming their own orchestra, the Koreshans lived an eventful life. Leisure was also an important aspect of their everyday existence. Members often picnicked on the beach and took tourist trips around the country. In doing so, the Koreshans presented a different kind of utopia than many of its predecessors: Koreshans embraced elements of modernity. In this way they brought an urban

sensibility to the rural landscape of Fort Myers, Florida. Not only did the members of the Koreshan Unity help create a successful utopian community based on their economic and cultural endeavors, but the members influenced the development of southwestern Florida.

The last chapter focuses on the State of Florida's involvement with the Koreshan State Historic Site (KSHS) and how it seeks to preserve the utopian community's history. Acquired by the state in 1961 after the last four Koreshans donated the property, state officials, park rangers, and volunteers have been left with the task of preserving Koreshan memory and interpreting that history to the public. As a southwest Florida destination often known for its camping accommodations and nature activities, the KSHS's historical importance would seem to be a secondary attraction. Even though the KSHS does provide numerous recreational activities, a large number of people come to the park to learn more about the Koreshans and their utopian community. At the site, visitors learn about how the Koreshans were a sustainable community and how they influenced the Fort Myers area with their ingenuity and cultural diversity. Through preserved grounds and buildings, along with artifacts and interpretive plaques, the State of Florida has successfully preserved Koreshan memory.

A major goal of this thesis is to provide a better, more in-depth understanding of the Koreshan Unity through the use of the community's records. The information presented here is meant to complement the histories previous historians and other scholars have written about the Koreshan Unity. At the same time, this thesis makes use of unique records. While scholars have relied heavily on the *American Eagle* and other major publications of the Guiding Star Publishing House, I challenged myself to dig through the unorganized records (while also adhering to my archival training of order and preservation, of course) to find those documents that could prove beneficial to complicating the Koreshan story. From letters written by Cyrus Teed to unpublished manuscripts to member correspondence, the collection is a gold mine not only in portraying the history of the Koreshan Unity, but as an essential source in telling the overall national narrative of the American utopian movement. While I do have access to the Koreshan records, it is also important to realize that there is still the reality that for practical purposes many of the records are still inaccessible. Since there is no real sense of original order in the collection and since the collection is only in the initial stages of arrangement and description, it is difficult to navigate through the papers. What is presented in this thesis is only



a glimpse into the Koreshan Unity's fascinating history and will hopefully influence other historians and students to continue researching on the subject.

## CHAPTER 1

### BECOMING KORESH: CYRUS TEED AS A CHARISMATIC UTOPIAN LEADER

Many utopian communities established in the United States during the nineteenth century began as personal visions. At the heart of almost every movement was a “charismatic leader,” who not only created their own religious creed, but managed to attract a faithful following. Cyrus Teed was no different.

Inspired primarily by life events and a personal illumination, Cyrus Teed (1839-1908) convinced himself and a group of followers in the 1880s that he was a prophet destined to save society from its sinful ways. He named his movement the Koreshan Unity and Koreshanity became a national phenomenon. While his following only reached the various regions of the United States, Teed always intended to gain adherents around the globe. Yet, Teed’s quest proved to be a difficult one. Like many other utopians societies that were created in the nineteenth century, the Koreshan Unity attracted publicity that was not always favorable; members did not always stay. Still, Teed never wavered from his beliefs and his goal of creating a utopian community.

Can Teed be identified as a successful utopian leader? How is “success” even possible when the seeds of a community’s demise are planted in its founding creed? Teed preached celibacy, which meant that the community had to rely on the difficult task of recruitment rather than reproduction to sustain itself. Like other utopian communities established in the United States during the mid- to late-nineteenth century that adhered to similar tenants, the Koreshan Unity witnessed a decline in members by the early 1900s. Even with this trend of collapse persistent in American utopianism, scholars have attempted to find ways in which communities could, in fact, be defined as historically successful. In particular, longevity and impact serve as two measures of identifying a movement’s significance. While no Koreshan exists today, Teed’s

charismatic leadership proved successful in appealing to sizeable number of people whose investment in their community outlived their own lifetime.

### ***Charismatic Utopian Leadership***

Scholars of history and psychology have attempted to explain why some people become utopian leaders. At the center of their analysis is charisma. Many historians who specialize in American utopianism rely on sociologist Max Weber's definition of "charismatic leadership" when describing the various founders of utopian communities. Rather than labeling charismatic leaders as one particular kind of person, Weber contends that a "value-free sense" of the term needs to be applied.<sup>1</sup> According to Weber, no one leader is exactly like another. Not only is each leader's mission uniquely defined by their own personal message, but charisma itself is "self-determined and sets its own limits." According to Weber, only the charismatic leader can determine and influence his/her message, membership base, and ultimate outcome of his/her movement through his/her ability to grab the attention of society and to carry-out his/her promises.<sup>2</sup> A consistent trait charismatic leaders have displayed throughout history is their ability to exude an "extraordinary" personality.<sup>3</sup> Rather than continuing with the norm of everyday life, charismatic leaders thrive on the "supernatural" and finding ways to better society. Their cause often stems from times of social, political, or economic distress. Charismatic leaders shun "traditional and rational norms" and replace them with values and beliefs contingent on their own visions of an ideal world.<sup>4</sup>

Len Oakes offers another useful means for analyzing the concept of charismatic leadership. In *Prophetic Charisma: The Psychology of Revolutionary Religious Personalities*, Oakes examines the peculiarities of charismatic leaders and how various stages in a person's life influenced his/her development as a religious leader. Throughout his argument, Oakes utilizes Weber's ideas on charisma. He also conducted interviews with self-proclaimed religious leaders. Lastly, he had special insights into the topic because Oakes himself had been a member of a religious cult. Focusing mainly on behavior characteristics, Oakes concluded that many charismatic leaders possessed innate narcissistic qualities. Originating in childhood, explained Oakes, a narcissistic personality became the "core of the cult leader's distinctiveness . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 1113.

<sup>2</sup> Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1112.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1111.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1115.

characterized by grandiosity, manipulativeness, a need for control of others and inner congruence, but also by paranormal empathy, confidence, memory, autonomy, detachment, and islands of social and personal insight.”<sup>5</sup> He also found that many charismatic leaders express contradictory emotions, such as a love and hate relationship with their cause. Through his/her teachings, according to Oakes, a leader is able to “vent his hatred, to criticize, oppose, attack, and destroy” the vices he/she sees present in society.<sup>6</sup>

A major argument Oakes poses is that charismatic leaders do not spontaneously become powerful individuals. Instead, he determined that a majority of leaders experienced a sequence of five life changes starting from childhood that ultimately made them who they became as religious leaders: early narcissism, incubation, awakening, mission, and decline or fail. Throughout a person’s life, he/she retains his/her childhood narcissism as a result of an “excessively devoted” parent.<sup>7</sup> At some point in his/her childhood, a leader realizes other people do not share his/her sheltered views and establishes a charismatic persona; not so much as a result of society’s ostracizing his/her values, but as a security mechanism against the views of popular opinion.<sup>8</sup> As an adult, a leader’s “childish hopes” transform into “utopian visions.”<sup>9</sup> From these visions, a charismatic leader experiences, according to Oakes, an “incidental” and “mystical or quasi-religious” awakening that solidifies his/her motives to improve society with his/her beliefs.<sup>10</sup> With these beliefs and developed leadership skills such as “good communication skills, future vision, acting as change agents (risk-taking) . . . [a] ‘giving’ orientation, an interpersonal style of generosity, warmth, optimism, and inclusiveness,” a charismatic leader recruits followers by arousing faith and trust in other individuals receptive to his/her cause.<sup>11</sup> Although a charismatic leader is able to appeal and influence a small, sometimes large, group of people for a time, Oakes explains that almost all end up having to face an

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<sup>5</sup> Len Oakes, *Prophetic Charisma: The Psychology of Revolutionary Personalities* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997), xi.

<sup>6</sup> Oakes, *Prophetic Charisma*, 190.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 45-49. When explaining the “early narcissism” stage of a charismatic leader’s life, Oakes mainly relies on the research of psychologist Heinz Kohut. While Kohut believes that charisma is established in a leader’s character as a result of a single, eye-opening experience of the caregiver failing to continue with his or her devotion of the child, Oakes believes that this sense of “eventism” is not the case. Instead, other innate characteristics such as intelligence, a special relationship with the primary caregiver, and preserving this relationship by attempting to be God-like determine a leader’s charisma.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 99, 110.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 115.

inevitable decline or fall of their leadership and their cause. Sometimes it is because of dwindling numbers as the movement loses its appeal over time. Sometimes a leader's demise is hastened by his/her egocentric actions.<sup>12</sup>

Both Weber and Oakes's analysis on charismatic leadership contextualizes Cyrus Teed's quest in becoming the utopian leader, Koresh. His life supports much of Weber's argument about charismatic leaders. Teed proved to be an extraordinary individual, who developed his own unique message of achieving eternal salvation and happiness by adhering to his own science-based Christian beliefs and communal way of life. Even though Oakes used examples from the 1960s and 1970s, some of the life stages he presented fit easily into Cyrus Teed's own journey toward becoming "Koresh of the Koreshan Unity." Although Teed's progression toward becoming a charismatic leader may not totally mold to Oakes overall argument, applying the psychological analysis to Teed's life is useful for explaining parts of his story. While there is no sense of early narcissism in Teed's childhood, his experiences in the Civil War and his awakening influenced how he propagated his beliefs. It took a lifetime for Teed to become Koresh and that life was filled with personal triumphs and hardships from the time he was a child growing up in western New York to his death on Estero Island in southwest Florida.

On October 18, 1839, Cyrus Read Teed was born in Teedville, a small settlement in Delaware County, New York, to Jesse and Sarah Ann Teed. Shortly after Teed was born, his family moved to Utica, New York, where at the age of eleven he dropped out of school and began working on the tow path on the Erie Canal.<sup>13</sup> Not only was this area of New York known for its commercial opportunities, but as the scene of numerous religious revivals from the 1790s to 1840s. Responding to the changing dynamics of the market economy, many sought guidance from evangelical religion. The spectacle of outdoor assemblies gave voice to unorthodox views. In *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, Robert H. Abzug connected the religious zeal of the first and second Great Awakenings. Abzug attributed the religious zeal of the time to "the vast social, political, ideological, psychological, and economic transformations afoot" prior to the American Revolution and how those ideals "provided the earthly stage for the birth of reform and in a hundred ways shaped [the country's]

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>13</sup> Sally Teed Foust, *The Teed Tree: A Genealogical Exchange for the TEED Family and Allied Families* 10 (Summer, 1996): 101. Sarah Ann Teed's maiden name was Tuttle; James E. Landing, "Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity," in *America's Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 376.

development.”<sup>14</sup> By the end of the Revolution, the region of New England became a hotspot for religious fervor in response to a changing economy. In the “western frontier” of New York, explained Abzug, many Americans and immigrants moved to the commercial and industrial cities such as Rochester, Troy, and Utica, for job prospects and a “freer environment.” According to Abzug, the “heterogeneity and the ever-expanding geography” of these cities jeopardized the sense of community many of the citizens were used to in their former communities.<sup>15</sup>

Many began to experiment with different religious beliefs as the sense of community diminished. Defined by Abzug as “dissenters,” these Baptists, Methodists, and other unorthodox Christians began to redefine the traditional ways of life and applied religion to all facets of their everyday lives. In *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*, Mary P. Ryan supports Abzug’s analysis, arguing that families in the city of Utica “did not express their family concerns in economic terms . . . but rather in the language and central ideological structure of their time, that is, in an essentially religious mode of thought.”<sup>16</sup> Many people in this region of New York applied unorthodox Christian values to family life and began to question their neighbor’s beliefs. As a result of the “special virulence from the social and familial dislocations that accompanied the closing of the frontier and the encroachment of market capitalism,” the Second Great Awakening took force in the form of the “burned-over district” in New York. An evangelical movement supported heavily by young individuals, especially women and their children, many Americans established organizations to support the religious revivals. According to Ryan, the “evangelical enthusiasm” and “fire storm” surrounding the burned-over district and other areas of upstate New York during the Second Great Awakening “had a transforming effect” on society as a whole. Teed’s birth came at the end of this movement but the legacies of the Second Great Awakening lived on in the land of his youth.

Not only did the commercial possibilities influence Teed and his family, but the religious fervor did as well. Growing up, Teed was urged to study for the ministry because of his oratorical skills. Raised in a Baptist family, Teed’s grandfather was even a Baptist minister. In 1859, Teed went against his family’s wishes and began an apprenticeship with his uncle Dr.

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<sup>14</sup> Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 33.

<sup>15</sup> Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 58.

<sup>16</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 65.

Samuel F. Teed, an allopathic physician. Nonetheless, he believed he was gifted in “natural oratorical ability” that could be used for a variety of professions.<sup>17</sup> Teed explained his childhood reasoning in December 1892:

He came from a long line of Baptist preachers, and his friends were anxious in his younger days that he should enter the ministry, but he could not feel that it was the call of God to him, hence he chose the other profession [medicine], although in his childhood days he made three prayers; one was that he might be an orator, another, that he might be a minister, and lastly, that he might be a publisher.<sup>18</sup>

Oakes description of an incubation period is a useful means to understand Teed’s young adulthood. First, Teed married his distant cousin Fidelia M. Rowe in 1859. Throughout their marriage, Fidelia, or “Delia,” “never wavered” in her support toward her husband’s work. However after twenty-six years of marriage, Delia died from tuberculosis, an event that brought “great sorrow” to Teed. A few years before she got sick and died, the Teeds had a son, Douglas Teed, but because Teed was always traveling the two were never close.<sup>19</sup>

A second major event that shaped Teed’s perspective on society was his status as a Civil War veteran. Teed enlisted in the Union Army in 1862 as a physician. Yet, just fifteen months later, the Union Army discharged Teed from his post after he suffered sunstroke that caused paralysis of his left arm and leg. According to Teed, his experiences tending to wounded soldiers changed him and he “no longer lived the life of an ordinary complacent person.”<sup>20</sup> Modern weaponry was used in the Civil War, leading to new kind of wounds and possibilities for infections that outpaced traditional medical responses. The war opened up opportunities for advances. According to Sarah Weber Rea’s *The Koreshan Story*, Teed felt that he had made a new discovery. He believed that those patients who displayed an “abiding faith in a power greater than themselves” recovered quicker than others. From these observations, Rea argues Teed began to find ways to heal his patients through metaphysics.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Foust, *The Teed Tree*, 101. Landing, “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity,” 376.

<sup>18</sup> “A Synopsis of Discourses Delivered by Dr. Cyrus Teed of the Koreshan Unity, on Dec. 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, at Mt. Lebanon, N.Y.,” *Manifesto*, March, 1892.

<sup>19</sup> Rea, *The Koreshan Story*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Foust, *The Teed Tree*, 102.

<sup>21</sup> Rea, *The Koreshan Story*, 1.

Following his involvement in the war, Teed attended the Eclectic Medical College of the City of New York in 1867. Eclectics were one of several different organized alternative medical sects in the nineteenth century to allopathic (or regular) medicine. According to historian William G. Rothstein, medicine became a profession by the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> People, he explains, had several different kinds of doctors that they could see at their disposal: homeopathic, regular, and eclectic.

Founded by Wooster Beach, eclectic medical doctors used botanical remedies like many other physicians, but they also used other cures as well, hence the term “eclectic.”<sup>23</sup> Because eclectic medicine was never defined for one specific type of remedy, it became known not for its differences in therapeutic offerings, but in its distinction in what kinds of doctors practiced eclectic medicine and the demographic who visited these doctors. According to Rothstein, eclectics tended to practice in small towns and villages and were often the only practicing medical professionals in the area. Eclectic physicians mostly came from poorer families, which translated into their education. When compared to a regular physician, eclectic doctors received fewer years of schooling and were often times “poorly educated.”<sup>24</sup> After completing a two year curriculum himself, which was above average by the standards of the day, Teed partnered with his uncle and opened his own practice in Utica, New York. He took his medical practice further than most eclectics, however, when he set up an “electro-alchemical” laboratory to experiment in metaphysics. He wanted to solve the mysteries behind transmutation, or the act of changing states of matter and energy. In particular he wanted to discover a means for humans to achieve eternal life by transmuting from a physical state to a state of energy.<sup>25</sup>

Teed worked in his laboratory, performing experiments as if he were on a mission. Wanting to find a cure not only for injuries but other life-threatening conditions, Teed wanted to save humanity from the reality of death without resurrection. Teed viewed science as a solution to human weaknesses and he intertwined his faith in science with his religious faith. In 1869, Teed experienced a vision one autumn evening that was brought on by his scientific endeavors. Prior to his “hour full of destiny,” Teed explained:

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<sup>22</sup> William G. Rothstein, *American Physicians in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: From Sects to Science* (Baltimore, Maryland, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 160.

<sup>23</sup> Rothstein, *American Physicians in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, 218.

<sup>24</sup> Rothstein, *American Physicians in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, 228-229.

<sup>25</sup> Foust, *The Koreshan Story*, 102.



For some hours previous to this I had been experimenting, in the hope of discovering some occult or hidden principle or power which I believed lay at the foundation of a better control and regulation of the life forces than had ever yet been vouched to mortals, even in that profession [medicine] in which, of all others, should have been acquired the direction of human destiny.<sup>26</sup>

Guided by his “sacred obligation to the great principle and cause of philanthropy,” Teed continued conducting experiments in his electro-alchemical laboratory in his quest to figure out the process of transmutation. Teed wanted to know the intricacies of transmutation in order to achieve “victory over death.”<sup>27</sup> While performing his experiments, Teed partially achieved his goal by altering various metallic samples into gold dust, or so he claimed. According to Teed, he had discovered the “Philosopher’s Stone” and he became the “humble instrument for the exploitation of so magnitudinous a result.”<sup>28</sup>

After his discovery, Teed sat on a couch in his laboratory in a “thoughtful attitude,” where suddenly he went into a trance. He recounted that he had “no tangible sensation” and he “felt that [he] departed from all material things.” Although he could not fully sense his physical presence in his vision, Teed could see “the most fascinating, gloriously regal and majestic vision possible to human conception and contemplation.”<sup>29</sup> In his vision, Teed heard a woman he dubbed “Motherhood” say that he, her “Son,” had been “chosen to redeem the race.” Motherhood also explained to Teed that he would face three full weeks of struggles and hardship in preparation for his role as the redeemer. Throughout his journey, explained Motherhood, Teed would be saving the “surging mass of human woe” present in society.<sup>30</sup> Resolved to face the oncoming hardships and trials, Teed promised Motherhood that he would “achieve the victory over death, not for myself, but for those to whom I come as sacrificial offering.”<sup>31</sup> Coming out of his trance, Teed believed he had acquired an ability to transfer energy from the

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<sup>26</sup> Koresh, *The Illumination of Koresh: Marvelous Experience of the Great Alchemist at Utica, New York* (Estero, Florida: Guiding Star Publishing House, undated), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Koresh, *The Illumination of Koresh*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

realm of the tangible to the realm of the spiritual. He thought he could use his ability to solve the “great mystery” of transitioning between life and death.<sup>32</sup>

Once Teed had his illumination, he immediately began preaching his own utopian ideology and attempted to gather a following. Between 1869 and 1880, Teed developed a creed he named Koreshan Universology and those who followed it were known as the Koreshan Unity. Cellular cosmogony—the belief that the earth is contained in a cellular structure and that life itself lives inside the earth—was central to Koreshan ideology. Known as the “hollow earth belief,” Teed organized all aspects of Koreshan life around this purportedly scientific principle. In addition, he incorporated many of the aspects other utopias used to arrange their societies: communal living, abolition of private property, celibacy (although only among a certain faction within the membership), and a sense of millennialism.<sup>33</sup> By 1880, Teed had donned the name “Koresh,” or the Hebrew translation of Cyrus.<sup>34</sup>

During the 1870s, Teed moved from one city in New York to another, preaching his ideology and “zealously administering to the souls” of his medical patients. Unfortunately for Teed, from Utica, to Sandy Creek, to Moravia, to Syracuse, to New York City, Teed failed to convince his patients to follow his cause. According to historian Robert Lynn Rainard, many of Teed’s patients deserted him because of his outlandish beliefs.<sup>35</sup> Historian James E. Landing, argued that despite being a site of religious fervor in the early-nineteenth century that by the time Teed attempted to proselytize in the area these New Yorkers from the “burned-over district,” “held little tolerance for what they believed was another expression of deviance.” Teed was aware of the problem. In correspondence from Teed to his friend and one of his first adherents, Dr. A.W.K. Andrews, Teed contended that the community in Sandy Creek was attempting to sabotage his efforts. At the end of the letter, Teed told Andrews “they are fighting hard here to worst me.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>33</sup> James E. Landing, “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity,” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 378.

<sup>34</sup> Landing, “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity,” 392. The dates given are from a “Chronology” section after Landing’s chapter on the Koreshan Unity.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Lynn Rainard, “Conflict Inside the Earth: The Koreshan Unity in Lee County,” *Tampa Bay History* 3, no. 1 (1981): 6.

<sup>36</sup> Cyrus Teed to “Abiel,” December 2, 1878, Koreshan Unity, Cyrus Teed Personal Files, Correspondence, Cyrus Teed to ‘Abiel,’ 1878-1880, State Archives of Florida, Florida Department of State, Tallahassee, Florida (hereinafter labeled as “SAF”). Since it is still in its initial stages of arrangement and description, there are currently no box or folder listings in the Koreshan Unity papers at the State Archives of Florida. The information provided in

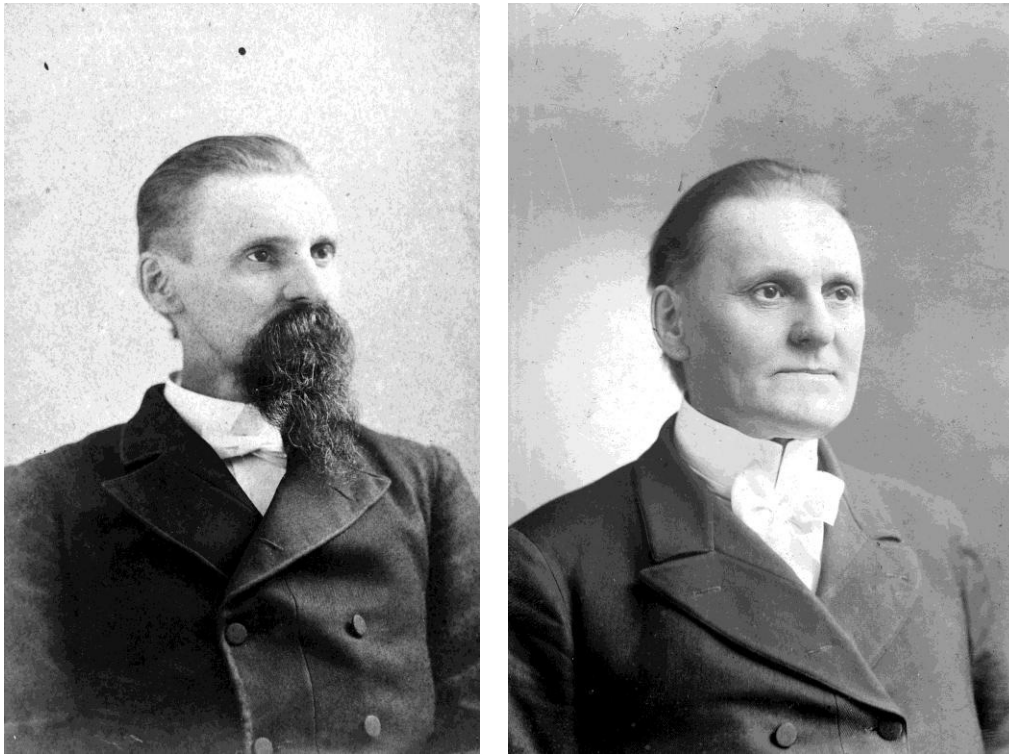


Figure 1.1: Cyrus Teed at the beginning of his leadership (left) and toward the end (right). (Koreshan Unity. Papers, ca. 1887-1990. Photographs. State Archives of Florida.)

“Discouraged and disillusioned” from his failure in trying to convert his patients, Teed moved to Moravia in 1880, where he took over his parents mop-making business. According to Rainard, Teed’s family might have handed over the business to him in “an attempt to draw his attention away from the religion his father never accepted.”<sup>37</sup> As one former follower explained, Teed’s father did not “accept him as the Messiah” and his father had a “very poor” standing toward his son’s movement.<sup>38</sup> Teed, however, did not prove successful and the business closed

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the citation gives the record group information along with the series topic, such as “Administrative Files,” or “Cyrus Teed Personal Files.” “Abiel” is thought to be Dr. A.W.K. Andrews, one of the first members of the Koreshan Unity. Andrews, his wife Virginia, and children all became members of the Koreshan Unity and followed Teed to Estero, Florida, in 1894. Not only is their correspondence important in further explaining Teed’s journey toward becoming Koresh, but it also documents the sickness and death of his wife, Delia. From the correspondence, it is obvious that Andrews helped Teed in determining what medicines Delia needed to take in hopes of overcoming tuberculosis.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Lynn Rainard, “In the Name of Humanity: The Koreshan Unity,” MA Thesis, The University of South Florida, December 1974, 12.

<sup>38</sup> “Cyrus’ Teed’s Ways,” *The Daily Inter Ocean*, September 13, 1891.

within a couple of years. Fortunately for him, he had begun to attract members to the Koreshan Unity.<sup>39</sup>

In 1886, Teed began to have better luck. While visiting New York City, Teed ran into a Mrs. Thankful Hale, an influential member of the National Association of Mental Science. Inspired by one of Teed's lectures, she invited him to speak at the association's next convention in Chicago. Like Hale, the rest of the association displayed a tremendous interest in Teed's scientific-religious beliefs. As a result of this event, the association elected Teed as its next president. Teed accepted and moved himself and his small following to Chicago to a mansion he named Beth-Ophra. In Chicago, Teed established the College of Life. The school's curriculum focused on the beliefs of Koreshanity, science, and medicine.<sup>40</sup> According to an advertisement in Chicago's *Daily Inter Ocean*, a newspaper that attracted an upper-class audience, the College of Life provided the "complete and only solution of being." He was not alone in attempting to attract students. On the same page a school of Christian Science promised to teach the "cure[s] of sickness and all forms of moral evil." Teed, however, attempted to distinguish his creed. He exclaimed that his curriculum provided "the true knowledge of being as contra-distinct from Christian Science, and all other isms which pretend to deal with the great problem of life." According to the advertisement, those wanting to take classes at the "School of Koresh" would be accepted "upon very reasonable terms, and by methods which insure rapid progress in the acquisition of the cult of the science."<sup>41</sup>

Within a few years, the Koreshan Unity grew to 126 members, of which three-fourths consisted of women.<sup>42</sup> Whether women were swooned by Teed's infamous charm or they possessed the same evangelical spirit women had during the Second Great Awakening it is uncertain. According to Sally Kitch's *Chaste Liberation: Celibacy and Female Cultural Status*, Teed's teachings of celibacy as a means of sexual equality between men and women appealed to women. Like the Shakers, the Koreshan Unity believed that the sexual attraction women had toward men was an original sin. According to Kitch, this original sin required a woman to become "subject to man primarily because she was directed to focus her desire upon him." Through celibacy, women were able to "short-[circuit] the curse of gender hierarchy by attacking

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<sup>39</sup> Landing, "Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity," 378, 380.

<sup>40</sup> Rainard, "In the Name of Humanity," 13.

<sup>41</sup> C.R. Teed, "Koreshan Science: The School of Koresh," *The Daily Inter Ocean*, October 13, 1887.

<sup>42</sup> Landing, "Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity," 383. Rainard, "In the Name of Humanity," 13.

its cause, female sexual desire.”<sup>43</sup> Women also held administrative positions in the Koreshan Unity. In line with the Koreshan belief of a dual sex God, Teed established both male and female Pre-Eminent positions. While Teed was the male Pre-Eminent, Annie Ordway, or Victoria Gratia as he later named her, became his counterpart.<sup>44</sup>

Whether man or woman, many people throughout Chicago and even the United were attracted by Teed’s “oratory, powers of persuasion, and doctrines.” According to Landing, Teed’s allure secured followers throughout the country.<sup>45</sup> In 1893, the U.S. Bureau of the Census released Church Statistics which recorded that the Church Triumphant, the religious sect of the Koreshan Unity, existed in four states: California, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Oregon. The membership in Illinois had the most with 160 members, while the other three states each had 15 members.<sup>46</sup> This growth in membership gave Teed confidence in his movement.

In attempt to gain more followers to his revolutionary cause, Teed often relied upon the printing services of the Guiding Star Publishing House. Through print, he believed, he could provide the masses with access to Koreshan beliefs. Similar to his belief in science, Teed viewed technology as an aid in establishing a utopia. Beginning in 1889, Teed circulated a magazine called the *Flaming Sword*.<sup>47</sup> According to one advertisement, the *Flaming Sword* was “the most advanced, original, and distinctive religio-scientific journal in existence.” Rather than relying on the “usual stiff impersonality” of conventional journalism, Teed argued that his magazine “adjust[ed] itself to the level of sympathetic association with its readers.” In addition to articles on questions of interest in standard science, such as geology, each issue consisted of “Some of

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<sup>43</sup> Sally Kitch, *Chaste Liberation: Celibacy and Female Cultural Status* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 125.

<sup>44</sup> Kitch, *Chaste Liberation*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Landing, “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity,” 383.

<sup>46</sup> Henry K. Carroll, “The Census of Churches,” *The Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social, and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 45, no. 2318 (May 4, 1893): 22.

<sup>47</sup> Sara Weber Rea, *The Koreshan Story* (Estero, Florida: Guiding Star Publishing House, 1994), 8. Prior to the *Flaming Sword*, the Teed and the publishers circulated another monthly magazine called *The Guiding Star*, which began in 1884. According to “The Koreshan Communarians’ Papers and Publications in Estero, 1894-1963,” (*Florida Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2004): 173-190) Irvin D.S. Winsboro explained that the *Guiding Star* was a “tabloid publication . . . [that] became the Koreshans’ new voice to communicate their new ideas to the world.” With most articles of “faith healing,” the pamphlet-sized circular printed fewer articles on cellular cosmogony once the community established itself more. Instead, the Koreshan Unity began to publish information “emphasiz[ing] such issues as social equity for women and blacks and discussions about how to create and manage successful businesses.” (176-177) By 1906, the Koreshan Unity began circulating a newspaper called the *American Eagle*, a publication established as a result of the Koreshan Unity’s involvement with Fort Myers local politics.

the Fundamental Principles of Koreshan Universology” which provided basic information to both followers and the public alike.<sup>48</sup>

Even though the *Flaming Sword* proved to be Teed's primary publication for expressing his beliefs and reaching the masses, he also published other pamphlets and booklets in the hopes of turning Koreshanity into a global movement. In publications such as “The Koreshan Unity: General Information Concerning Membership and its Obligations” and “Scientific Colonization: Plan for the Immediate Relief of the Masses,” Teed and other assemblies from the Koreshan Unity spelled out the details of their utopian society. A common thread between many of these publications is the image of the “pioneer life” of the Koreshans, especially in settling their home base in Estero, Florida. While the Koreshan Unity had urban beginnings in New York and Chicago, the inhabitants of their founded “Capital City” lacked many of the luxuries and amenities present in their former residences. According to Teed, many Koreshans “left the attractions of the worldly existence” and in its place adopted a life of “strenuousness and sacrifice.”<sup>49</sup> In response to criticisms that Koreshans were “cranks, visionaries, [and] impracticables,” members used their publications to foster a sense of strength about their commitment.<sup>50</sup>

While Teed relied heavily on the printed materials to propagate Koreshan beliefs to potential members, he also discovered a myriad of other ways to attract followers. In 1901, Teed and two other Koreshan members attended the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, to advertise the Guiding Star Publishing House and the Koreshan Unity. Displaying a hollow globe and other cellular cosmogony-related items, Teed intended to influence people to join his revolution amidst the commemorative and introspective atmosphere of the Exposition that existed because of the assassination of President McKinley that occurred at the event. In a handout Teed distributed to visitors, he expressed the hope that people would “examine the great Koreshan System, as the opportunity is now so significantly offered to you.”<sup>51</sup> Teed’s lecture

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<sup>48</sup> Koreshan Unity, Guiding Star Publishing House, *Flaming Sword*, Advertisement, “Flaming Sword: The Most Advanced, Original, and Distinctive Religio-scientific Journal in Existence,” Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>49</sup> Koreshan Unity, Koresh, Booklet, “The Koreshan Unity,” Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>50</sup> Koreshan Unity, Bureau of Equitable Commerce, Booklet, “Scientific Colonization,” Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>51</sup> Koreshan Unity, Guiding Star Publishing House, Handout, “Exhibit of the Guiding Star Publishing House,” 1901, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

tours also peaked people's curiosity. Speaking on topics such as “Cosmogony the Basis of All Scientific Truth” and “Reason and Illumination, Not Inspiration, the Guide to Knowledge,” Teed's effective oratory skills grabbed many people's attention.<sup>52</sup> In many cases, people attended his lectures because he promised to heal them. According to one handout, “No person should lose the opportunity of hearing the greatest Scientist in earth.”<sup>53</sup>



Figure 1.2: Cyrus Teed (right) and fellow Koreshans at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, 1901. (Koreshan Unity. Papers, ca. 1887-1990. Photographs. State Archives of Florida.)

The story of Marie McConnell is useful for examining the depth of Teed's magnetism. Recounting her childhood before and during her stay at the Koreshan Unity, Marie McConnell

<sup>52</sup> Koreshan Unity, Guiding Star Publishing House, Lecture Pamphlet, “Universology,” Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>53</sup> Koreshan Unity, Lecture Handout, “The Functions of the Brain,” January 4, ?. Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

described her father as a religious man who “eagerly investigated any new creed” in the hopes of “seeking something more ideal than life as a rule seems to offer.”<sup>54</sup> After listening to one of Teed's lectures, McConnell's father offered Teed lodging. Afterwards, McConnell's father convinced his wife and children to move from their home in Riverton, Pennsylvania, to Chicago to join the Koreshan Unity. At first McConnell's mother hesitated. She was worried about the Unity's celibacy practices and that her children would become, essentially, property of the Unity. Her mother also questioned whether this new community had a sense of family orientation. Despite his wife's misgivings, McConnell's father ultimately handed over all his assets to the utopian community and, according to his daughter, the entire family eventually became enthralled with the Koreshan way of life.<sup>55</sup>

The move to Florida was both a choice and a necessity. While the Koreshan Unity increased in its numbers in Chicago, it also faced significant criticism. Chicagoans began to question the legitimacy of Teed's success in their urban community. According to Rainard, the relationship between Chicago and Teed was an ironic one: “success drove him from his home.”<sup>56</sup> The *Chicago Herald* and *The Daily Inter Ocean* consistently reported sensational stories on Koreshan beliefs and practices. Articles titled “He kisses pretty women” and “Queer beliefs of the Koreshans,” rarely gave an objective point of view.<sup>57</sup> Accompanying cartoons also lampooned this religious sect. For instance, in one illustration the artist drew a halo over Teed's head but then had his arms wrapped around two women. This was not the only expression of skepticism about the Koreshan belief of celibacy. The *Daily Inter Ocean* accused Teed of creating “violent outbreaks of jealousy” among the female members as they competed for their Master's love, insinuating Teed himself did not totally follow his doctrine of a celibate life.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Koreshan Unity, Marie McConnell, Unpublished Manuscript, “Growing-Up Days in a Celibate Community,” 24, June 1976, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Member Files, (SAF).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>56</sup> Rainard, “Conflict Inside the Earth,” 6.

<sup>57</sup> “Cyrus' Teed's Ways,” *The Daily Inter Ocean*, September 13, 1891. “Cyrus is Their Messiah,” *Chicago Herald*, July 9, 1890.

<sup>58</sup> “Cyrus' Teed's Ways,” *The Daily Inter Ocean*, September 13, 1891.





**PLATONIC INSTRUCTION.**

Figure 1.3: Sensational cartoon depicting “Teed’s Ways.” *Daily Inter Ocean*. September 13, 1891.

During the 1890s, Teed faced many legal problems and these became an even more important impetus than bad press for the community’s exodus from Chicago. One case in particular involved Sidney C. Miller, the president of the National Publishing Company, who accused Teed of the crime of alienation of affection. According to historian Howard T. Fine’s account of the court case, Miller blamed Teed of convincing his wife to live a celibate life and avoiding him altogether in hopes of fulfilling one of Teed’s prophecies in 1892. While Fine focused his analysis of Miller’s accusations in relation to Teed’s beliefs about women’s rights, Fine also noted that the Koreshan Unity’s Guiding Star Publishing House was Miller’s main business competitor. Just days after Miller filed suit against Teed, another Chicago husband charged the Koreshan leader of committing adultery with his wife.<sup>59</sup> Although the courts dismissed both cases, the accusations surrounding them blossomed into a notorious stereotype of Teed as a seducer. Even before the court cases, newspapers noticed Teed’s ability to persuade the opposite sex toward his cause. After an extended stay at the San Francisco branch of the Koreshan Unity in 1891, a *Chicago Herald* article announced the return of the charismatic

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<sup>59</sup> Howard D. Fine, “The Koreshan Unity: The Chicago Years of a Utopian Community,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 68, no. 3 (1975): 222.

leader, while also noticing that “many a Chicago husband’s heart will quail at . . . Teed’s return.”<sup>60</sup> Whether it was Teed’s personality or creed that attracted women to join, the sect offered women autonomy over their bodies that proved attractive and spoke to larger questions of women’s rights that were being debated throughout the nineteenth century.

As a result of the “insurmountable” opposition surrounding Teed and the Koreshan Unity in Chicago, he began to search for a “New Jerusalem.”<sup>61</sup> He widened his lecture circuit and always left literature behind in the hopes of finding a more amenable community. In early December 1893, his strategy worked. While Gustave Damkohler, a German man who owned land along the Estero River just south of Fort Myers, did not attend Teed’s lecture at Punta Gorda that December, he obtained a number of the publications left behind and became fascinated with Teed’s teachings. After discovering that the Koreshans wanted to find a new home, Damkohler wrote to Teed stating he had the land the Koreshan Unity needed to start their new dispensation. On Christmas day in 1893, Teed and several of his followers travelled to Florida to meet Damkohler. By 1894, the land that Damkohler spoke of in his correspondence to Teed became the Koreshan Unity’s New Jerusalem. As a result of their transaction, Teed and his members obtained 300 acres of land for \$200 in exchange that the Koreshans would provide an education for Damkohler’s son.<sup>62</sup> The Koreshan homestead would become the permanent base for the Koreshan Unity. There they established a self-sustaining community and an initially tolerable relationship with the local Fort Myers community.

Like many other utopian communities established in the United States, the Koreshan Unity began to decline after Teed’s death in 1908. But his death was not the only reason the utopian community lost members. According to historian Elliott Mackle, Teed’s involvement in local politics and a physical confrontation with a local official during the Lee County elections in 1906 impacted how Koreshans viewed their once seemingly invincible leader. Teed had always molded his propaganda and, to some extent his beliefs, based upon how society received him. Still, when the Koreshan Unity first arrived in the Fort Myers area in 1894 Teed remained reserved on the subject of politics. Instead, Teed attempted to find ways to gain acceptance of

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<sup>60</sup> “Cyrus is Coming Home,” *Chicago Herald*, August 30, 1891.

<sup>61</sup> Rainard, “Conflict Inside the Earth,” 6.

<sup>62</sup> Rea, *The Koreshan Story*, 20-23. After the transaction, Damkohler retained 20 acres of his land for himself and his son’s, Elwin, own use.

the Koreshan Unity as a friendly new neighbor. In 1904, the Koreshans participated in the South Florida Fair in Tampa. They also opened their Art Hall and arts performances to the public.<sup>63</sup>

Controversy began to emerge in 1904, when Teed sought and gained municipal incorporation for Estero. A possible rival to Lee County, local officials became weary of the Koreshans, their Master, and the possibility of their initiative to “revolutionize the world and turn it inside out” becoming a reality.<sup>64</sup> As a result, local officials moved to disenfranchise the Koreshans. They used the rules of partisan politics to do so. According to Mackle, Lee County voting records from 1904 showed that the Koreshans had registered and attended the Democratic primary elections but months later in the general election had voted for the Republican nominee Theodore Roosevelt. During the early twentieth century, the Democratic party was allowed by law to control its membership under the guise that it was a private organization and hence, it, could determine who was eligible to join. African Americans found themselves shut out. Now too did the Koreshans. In retaliation, Teed and local Socialists, Republicans, disappointed Democrats, and others formed the Progressive Liberty party (PLP) in Lee County. To propagate the political beliefs and party platform of the PLP, the Koreshan Unity supplied printing services at the onsite Guiding Star Publishing House and established the *American Eagle*, one of the Koreshan Unity’s most successful publications.<sup>65</sup>

In October 1906, events became more dramatic and violent as a result of a misunderstanding between Fort Myers’ local J.I. Sellers and Ross Wallace, a Koreshan and candidate for county commissioner. While in town, Wallace and Sellers confronted each other to settle their disagreement when Teed showed up and joined the group. Trying to protect Wallace and hopefully dissipate the scene, explained Mackle, Teed interjected and “could not resist the temptation to preach.” Mackle suggested that “perhaps [Teed] felt himself already the master and peacemaker of Lee County.” Still frustrated, Sellers punched Teed in the face. Teed responded by raising his hands in front of his face although it was unclear whether he did this either for defense or in preparation to strike back. Town marshal S.W. Sanchez arrived on the scene and arrested Teed during which he reportedly also hit the leader in the face.<sup>66</sup> Defined by Rea as a “small incident” with a “tragic aftermath,” many historians mark this event as the

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<sup>63</sup> Elliott Mackle, “Cyrus Teed and the Lee County Elections of 1906,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 57, no. 1 (July, 1978): 5-6.

<sup>64</sup> Mackle, “Cyrus Teed and the Lee County Elections of 1906,” 6-7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-14.

beginning of the decline of the Koreshan Unity.<sup>67</sup> The quarrel resulted in bitter relations between the Koreshans and the locals in Fort Myers. In addition the Koreshans often attributed Teed's declining health in the two years afterwards to the physical blows he suffered during this incident.

Teed died on December 22, 1908.<sup>68</sup> Days prior to his death, Teed and other prominent members of the Koreshan Unity remained on Estero Island in an attempt to keep Teed's debilitating condition a secret from the other members and surrounding community. Those closest to Teed expressed anxiety about their ability to sustain the community after the death of their charismatic leader. During the last several days of Teed's life, Koreshan member "Christine" relayed her Master's condition and her anxiety in personal correspondence to her sister "Jennie:" "the people are lovely and patient, though I hear that there are some whose faith are tried." Christine herself felt pressured and exhausted by the whole event: "The worse [sic] part of a matrons [sic] work in the K.U. is to listen to so many, and varied disagreements, as well as woes—without being able to relieve, and then I feel it such awaist [sic] of time."<sup>69</sup> Days later, Christine described Teed's condition having "reached the point where he can not raise his head without help, but when out of suffering (and even when in it) his mind is as clear as ever." According to Teed, the spiritual world revealed to him that a large influx of followers were about to migrate to Estero, and he "urged the necessity for a speedy organization" of Koreshan forces to prepare for the event. Christine and her fellow Koreshans interpreted Teed's request as a manifestation of his internal battle between good and evil and evidence of the transference of his energy from the physical world to the spiritual world.<sup>70</sup> Even though their Master was in a vulnerable physical state, his followers attempted to remain optimistic and faithful to their leader as they awaited his return for their promised eternal salvation.

After Teed's death, many Koreshans wrote to one another to confirm their beliefs. Christine's correspondence, for instance, indicates that she still had utter faith: "We have never comprehended the greatness of His mind and work, but only now get the faintest glimps [sic] of what it means. He is the great alchemist—have now entered the crucible, and

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<sup>67</sup> Rea, *The Koreshan Story*, 56.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>69</sup> Christine to Jennie, December 8, 1908, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Member Files, (SAF). Koreshans often referred to fellow members as "Brother" or "Sister," so whether Christine and Jennie are biological sisters or both just Koreshans is uncertain.

<sup>70</sup> Christine to Jennie, December 16, 1908, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Member Files, (SAF).

become the sacrifice by which the world is to be transformed.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Virginia Andrews informed her friend Evelyn Bubbett that though the Koreshan Unity felt distressed, members tried to remain positive, convincing one another that they had been “not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed.”<sup>72</sup> Rather than view Teed’s death as his total departure from the physical realm, faithful Koreshans believed that he would return to save them. Some Koreshan members argued that his decomposing body proved that their Master had begun to experience the steps necessary toward reincarnation. According to Koreshan Dr. J. Augustus Weimar, the form Teed’s body became had never “occurred with any other person whom I have seen in the state of death.” Weimar explained that as Teed’s body began to decay, hieroglyphics began to appear underneath his transparent skin and a new arm began to form on his left forearm. Weimar interpreted this as evidence that Teed was able to transform himself into an immortal state.<sup>73</sup> These documents demonstrate that Teed had a faithful following even after his death. Still, over the course of the next five decades, the strength of the Koreshan Unity dissipated as it split into several factions. Like other American utopian communities, consequently, once the Koreshans’ charismatic leader fell, so did their cause.



Figure 1.4: Koreshans next to Teed’s tomb. (Koreshan Unity. Papers, ca. 1887-1990. Photographs. State Archives of Florida.)

<sup>71</sup> Christine to “kind friends,” December 29, 1908, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Member Files, (SAF).

<sup>72</sup> Virginia Andrews to Evelyn Bubbett, December 24, 1908, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Member Files, (SAF). Although Bubbett was a Koreshan herself, she lived outside of Estero and corresponded often with other members along with her daughter, Imogene Bubbett. The Koreshan Unity papers contain numerous correspondences written by the Bubbetts, which most all have been transcribed and placed in binders.

<sup>73</sup> Dr. J. Augustus Weimer to Brother DeCoursey[?], December 30, 1908, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Member Files, (SAF).

### ***“Koresh” a Success?***

Although there are no Koreshans practicing today, Teed had a faithful following for almost thirty years. Does that mean it was a success? Some scholars argue that success should be defined by the charisma of a utopia’s leader. According to historian Robert S. Fogarty, those utopian communities founded and lead by “charismatic perfectionists” tended to last longer because they provided more immediate results than communities working toward economic or political salvation. Compared to the “co-operative colonizers” and “political pragmatists” in Fogarty’s argument, those communities lead by charismatic leaders tended to be more stable as a result of their ability to be flexible when it came to social, political, and economic concerns surrounding the community.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, Fogarty contended that “the heat of co-operative passion is often insufficient to sustain a community through later problems of crowded circumstances, changing perspectives and weak natures.”<sup>75</sup> Utopians had a difficult time actualizing their grandiose ideals.<sup>76</sup> The experience of Teed and the Koreshan Unity supports many of Fogarty’s assessments.

Still, some scholars have found evidence that charismatic leadership can also be very volatile and cause a community to fail. According to anthropologist Christoph Brumann, some utopian members become “so dependent on this key figure that they [are] unable to maintain a vital social institution” without their charismatic leader.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, anthropologist Lucy Jayne Kamau described the expediency of charisma and its ineffectiveness in helping establish a long-lasting and sustaining utopian community. While charismatic leaders offer their adherents promises of miracles and revelations, Kamau explains that “rhetoric itself is not enough.” Although charisma has the potential to appeal the masses, gather people together, and, in the case of American utopianism, becomes a way to express a set of beliefs and a way of life, it should not be the foundation to grow a community on.<sup>78</sup> This analysis of utopian communities also applies to the Koreshan Unity.

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<sup>74</sup> Robert S. Fogarty, “American Communes, 1865-1914,” *Journal of American Studies* 9, no. 2 (August, 1975): 148-150.

<sup>75</sup> Fogarty, “American Communes, 1865-1914,” 145.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 162. In reference to this sense of naivety, Fogarty relies on a Ralph Waldo Emerson quote inspired by the writer’s own observation of a utopian community: “They look well in July. We will see them in December.”

<sup>77</sup> Christoph Brumann, “The Dominance of One and Its Perils: Charismatic Leadership and Branch Structures in Utopian Communities,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56, no. 4 (Winter, 2000): 433.

<sup>78</sup> Lucy Jayne Kamau, “Liminality, Communitas, Charisma, and Community,” in *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective*, ed. Susan Love Brown (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 22.

Teed possessed the power of persuasion. His charming and magnetic personality convinced approximately 200 people to become Koreshan and flock to the swampy lands of Estero, Florida. While there were a few Koreshan Unity branches located in Chicago and elsewhere around the country, by 1903 most members had moved to Estero.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, Teed's charismatic persona ultimately established an unstable and bitter relationship between the Koreshan Unity and its neighbors.

Although the Koreshan Unity no longer exists, Teed's movement fulfilled many of his goals. During his corporal existence, he was a revered leader. He managed to realize his vision in a self-sustaining community, which for Florida in the early 1900s was not insignificant. While many members did leave after his death, a core group remained committed to his vision. The following chapter investigates the perspective of the members and how they measured success.

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<sup>79</sup> Rea, *The Koreshan Story*, 41.

## CHAPTER 2

### SCIENCE AS A WAY OF LIFE: KORESHANITY AND ITS BELIEVERS

Throughout American history, many individuals founded utopian societies based on different ideals of religion, politics, and economics. During the late-nineteenth century, this quest for idealism continued as people began to form utopian communities in hopes of changing the sinful and competitive nature of an increasingly industrial and capitalistic American economy. By the 1880s, leader Cyrus Teed and his utopian community, the Koreshan Unity, set themselves apart with their unique beliefs system based on science and ancient Christianity. The most unusual aspect of their belief system was the tenet in cellular cosmogony. According to Teed it was a scientific fact that humans and their environment live inside the earth. Koreshans used this belief to organize their society.

Yet, while cellular cosmogony played an integral role in defining the intellectual and cultural history of the Koreshans, they also engaged in a few other unique practices that distinguished them from other utopian communities. For instance, they had their own interpretation of celibacy that dictated its practice among only certain members of the community. They also constructed their own approach to government and economics. Koreshanity was not only a theology, but a way of life. During the late-nineteenth and into the early-twentieth century, members practiced Koreshanity in hopes of achieving both individual salvation and, at the same time, creating an ideal society.

Even though the Koreshans lived strict lives in accordance to Koreshanity, Teed also believed in a leisure lifestyle. Having first originated in the cities of New York and Chicago, the Koreshans carried with them an urban culture that stood out among the pioneer landscape of south Florida. From theatrical performances to orchestra concerts to festivals, the Koreshans celebrated their utopian way of life not only amongst each other, but allowed the outside community to participate as well. From the Koreshan Unity's beginnings in the 1880s to the



community's demise in 1908 after Teed's death, they experienced a Golden Age in which their beliefs and way of life proved successful internally as a utopian community, and externally as an influential and sustainable community in the southwest Florida city of Fort Myers.

This chapter seeks to better understand what it was like to be a Koreshan and how his/her everyday life might have been. In placing the uniqueness of the Koreshan experience into perspective, the chapter is mapped out in a specific way which shows the sequence of events a person might have gone through in becoming Koreshan. Initially, a potential adherent would have learned about the ideology of the Koreshan Unity before committing his/herself to the utopian community. Upon becoming a contributing member of the utopian community, a Koreshan became indoctrinated to accept that work would be arduous. This was offset by a deep appreciation of cultural diversity as a means of leisure activity. In addition, although they pursued a utopian lifestyle, Koreshans did not totally ostracize themselves from the outside world. In fact, they were completely the opposite. Once the Koreshan Unity arrived in Florida, they introduced to the region a more modernized way of life.

### ***Cellular Cosmogony and Koreshanity***

After his divine illumination in 1869, Teed sought to teach a truer understanding of science and religion against what he felt had been their “perver[sion].”<sup>1</sup> In the realm of science, Teed objected to the Copernican system of astronomy and provided what he believed to be a more accurate explanation of the universe. Since the early 1500s with the publication of *De revolutionibus*, or “Concerning the Revolutions,” Copernicus' theory of a heliocentric universe had been distributed, known, and debated by astronomers. To broadly define the theory, Copernicus believed that the earth, a planet with a convex surface, and other planets in the universe revolved around the sun. While based on “naked-eye observation,” Copernicus' presented these revolutionary findings during a conservative period.<sup>2</sup> According to astronomer Owen Gingerich, Copernicus not only wanted to explain the peculiarities of the universe, but he also hoped to apply the regularity of his system to his daily existence. While Copernicus believed it was essential to modify and even refute the idea of the Ptolemaic system (of a

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<sup>1</sup> Cyrus R. Teed, *The Cellular Cosmogony, or the Earth a Concave Sphere* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975), 1. The first edition of the book was published by the Koreshan-operated Guiding Star Publishing House in 1898. Rather than publishing his name, Cyrus Teed wrote under the pseudonym and his name among other Koreshan Unity members, Koresh. This edition of the book is referred to throughout the paper because the importance of the Foreword written by historian Robert S. Fogarty, a published scholar on the topic of American utopianism.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Dewitt, *Worldviews: An Introduction to the History and Philosophy of Science* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 126. More specifically, Dewitt is a professor in history and the philosophy of science.

universe centered around the earth), he hoped to find a link between the predictability of planetary motion to other aspects in life.<sup>3</sup>

In rebuttal to the Copernican system of astronomy, Teed wrote *The Cellular Cosmogony, or the Earth a Concave Sphere*. While Copernicus believed the earth had a convex surface, Teed responded with the opposite, saying that the earth had a concave surface. To support his claim, Teed and a group of Koreshan surveyors performed a geodetic survey in 1897. Conducted in Naples, Florida, the survey sought to disprove the “naked-eye observations” of the Copernican theory. Utilizing equipment created specifically for Teed’s experiment, the Koreshan Geodetic Staff measured the curvature of the earth’s surface.<sup>4</sup> According to Teed, the findings of the survey concluded the concavity of the earth’s surface; life does live inside the earth.

Along with the findings from the fieldwork in Naples, Teed also claimed that he had made a number of other scientific breakthroughs related to the makeup of the earth and the rest of the universe. According to Teed, the earth contained seventeen layers, creating an outer shell that was 100 miles thick. The earth also had three atmospheres consisting of “the sun and stars, also the reflections called the planets and the moon.” All of these components combined to create one contained cellular body 8,000 miles thick. Also, Teed explained that while the universe did contain both an “alchemico-organic world (kosmos)” (the Earth) and a “corresponding kosmos” (space), both bodies became “co-ordinately one” to make one larger body.<sup>5</sup> Rather than rely on scientific conclusions based on assumption and optical illusions, Teed felt the scientific facts behind cellular cosmogony proved “irrefutable.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Owen Gingerich, *The Eye of Heaven: Ptolemy, Copernicus, Kepler* (New York: The American Institute of Physics, 1993), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Teed, *The Cellular Cosmogony*, 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 6.

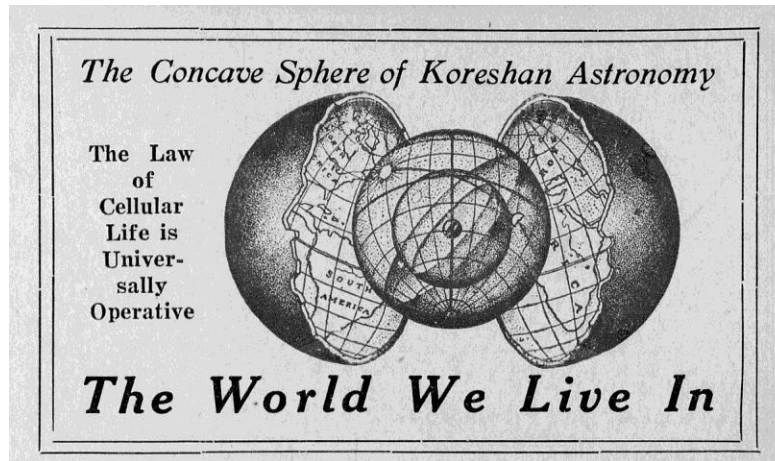


Figure 2.1: Cellular cosmogony handout printed by the Guiding Star Publishing House. (Koreshan Unity. Papers, ca. 1887-1990. Administrative Files. State Archives of Florida.)

While Teed's *The Cellular Cosmogony* described the scientific facts behind his teachings, other printed materials published by the Koreshan-operated Guiding Star Publishing House did as well. According to one advertisement, Teed had not only "overthrown" the Copernican theory of astronomy, but his findings also surpassed modern science. While also publicizing Teed's book, the advertisement describes his findings as "mark[ing] the greatest epoch in all science" as cellular cosmogony "completely upsets all modern science."<sup>7</sup> Another unique way the Koreshans disseminated their beliefs in cellular cosmogony came in the form of a card game called "The Cosmic Cell: A Game of the Cellular Cosmogony." A trivia game based on special topics related to cellular cosmogony, players played three cards and attempted to answer questions on the cards correctly. If players could not answer the questions correctly on a specific card, then they would have to start an "ignorance pile."<sup>8</sup> From books to advertisements to even card games, Teed and the Guiding Star created an extensive print culture in attempt to reach the masses.

While Teed had an interest in propagating his teachings about the scientific findings of cellular cosmogony, he also expressed the importance of understanding the universe in its relation to the betterment of society. Like Copernicus, Teed sought to discover order in the

<sup>7</sup> Koreshan Unity, Guiding Star Publishing House, Advertisement, "Modern Astronomy Overthrown," undated, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>8</sup> Koreshan Unity, Guiding Star Publishing House, Card game, "The Cosmic Cell: A Game of the Cellular Cosmogony," undated, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

universe in attempt to understand the world around him. Once he obtained the knowledge of the universe, Teed believed he and others would gain a better appreciation for its Creator. According to Teed, “mankind is ignorant of God until his handiwork is accurately deciphered.”<sup>9</sup> In James E. Landing's essay “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity,” he argues that there existed no separation between the geography of the earth and the religious beliefs of the Koreshan Unity.<sup>10</sup> According to Teed, “science means knowledge, nothing more, nothing less.”<sup>11</sup> By associating science with religion, Teed believed that there remained no question as to the accuracy and factualness of religion. In the case of the Koreshan Unity, both cellular cosmogony and Christianity remained synonymous, as one belief.

With the findings of cellular cosmogony in hand, Teed became inspired and established utopian ideals based on his science. According to Teed, cellular cosmogony was a “scientific religion which must embrace scientific social organization, [and] will proceed from an astronomical basis.”<sup>12</sup> Known as Koreshanity, the system “includes the science of religion, founded upon an accurate knowledge of the structure and function of the cosmic organism.”<sup>13</sup> While Teed’s goal of melding science, religion, and utopianism together proved a unique endeavor in the late-nineteenth century, his hope was not original. In Nell Eurich's *Science in Utopia: A Mighty Design*, she explains that many “utopists,” or the leaders of utopian communities, found inspiration for idealism in science. From Plato to Sir Thomas More, science influenced the imaginations of many utopists as the field and its findings both symbolized and embodied progress.<sup>14</sup>

Utilizing cellular cosmogony as his source of inspiration and innovation, Teed began by establishing a “cosmic” governmental structure. According to its Constitution, the Koreshan Unity consisted of three main divisions, or cells. Within each division there existed three systems based on social needs. Each division consisted of a Secular System, a Commercial System, and an Educational System.<sup>15</sup> First, the Pre-Eminent Unity consisted of both male and

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<sup>9</sup> Teed, *The Cellular Cosmogony*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> James E. Landing, “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity,” in *America's Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 387.

<sup>11</sup> Teed, *The Cellular Cosmogony*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Nell Eurich, *Science in Utopia: A Mighty Design* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 5, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Landing, “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity,” 381.

female officials, which operated three separate departments: Church of the New Covenant, the Koreshan University, and the Society Arch-Triumphant.<sup>16</sup> In all, these departments sought to “apply the laws and doctrines of life as to insure the universal happiness of the race,” the laws being those established by Teed himself.<sup>17</sup> This central portion of the Koreshan administration was also the only sector in which all members lived a celibate lifestyle.<sup>18</sup>

The second and third departments of the Koreshan order removed themselves from the central Pre-Eminent Unity in different ways. The Department of Equitable Administration oversaw the commercial and industrial aspects of the Koreshan Unity. Like the Pre-Eminent sector, this department consisted of three groups: the Marital Order, the Bureau of Equitable Commerce, and the Department of Industrial Science. Unlike the Pre-Eminent Unity, the Koreshans in this cell were allowed to marry and, according to Landing, “chose not to live in a communal fashion.”<sup>19</sup> The outermost division, the Patrons of Equation, consisted of officials elected by members. Within the Patrons of Equation, an Investigative Court, the Department of Industrial Cooperative Union, and the Department of Industrial Economy existed. According to Landing, the members of the Patrons of Equation “believed in Korshanity but chose not to live in the colony and those who were demonstrating interest in the group and seeking information.” While all three divisions played an important role in establishing the Koreshan Unity throughout its existence, Landing explains that only the Pre-Eminent Unity “maintained any recognizable identity” once the utopian community moved to Estero, Florida.<sup>20</sup> While each division performed their own tasks, Teed argued that each worked cohesively to create a united, bounded effort toward his vision of a better society.

From a social perspective, Koreshanity recognized three specific orders based on marital status and/or occupational function. The top order in Koreshan society consisted of members who chose celibacy in preparation for immortal life. Known as the Ecclesia, Teed believed that by retaining sexual energies, men and women could form stronger spiritual bonds, than those created through physical intimacy. In *Chaste Liberation: Celibacy and Female Cultural Status*, Sally Kitch explained that Teed believed that the passion often associated with sexual desires and

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<sup>16</sup> Koreshan Unity, Beth-Ophrah, Booklet, “The Constitutions of the Koreshan Unity and Its Departments,” 1, 1896, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>17</sup> Koresh, *Koreshan Science and Its Application to Life* (Chicago: Guiding Star Publishing House, 1896), 25.

<sup>18</sup> Landing, “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity,” 381.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 383.

activities prevented an individual from obtaining a higher understanding of the spiritual world.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Teed went so far as to argue that procreation as a result of “wasteful, lustful reproduction” symbolized hypocrisy of traditional religion because these men and women were allowed to channel their energies into something other than a mutual bond toward religious understanding.<sup>22</sup> The second order consisted of members who were allowed to marry and propagate, but only under the pretenses that any sexual activity be reserved for producing children rather than eroticism, or what Teed considered prostitution. The final and lowest social group in the Koreshan Unity allowed marriage without constraint. Many of these members conducted most of the industrial work of the community. Rather than seeking fellowship through the understanding of the religious doctrines of Koreshanity, this co-operative and secular group mainly joined the Koreshan Unity for its employment, education, and industrial incentives.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Appealing to the Masses: Why Become Koreshan?***

During the late nineteenth century, Americans from all walks of life sought to reform the social, political, and economic aspects of their ever-changing society. According to Ronald G. Walters’s *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, many Americans “became reformers out of quite diverse motives and that their commitments satisfied a great range of personal, social, and cultural needs.”<sup>24</sup> From evangelicals to proponents of prohibition, reformers during the Progressive Era tackled the issues of the day. Of these reformer actions, explained Walters, utopianism was “among the least popular expressions” when considering the number of participants involved. Even with these low numbers, Walters argued that the importance of utopian communities and its members went far beyond numbers, but in the “genuinely radical” nature of the movement. In providing a “heaven on earth,” utopians also aimed in “creating a totally new order rather than improving the old one.”<sup>25</sup> A vulnerable time in American history, many men and women sought refuge in the utopian beliefs of communal living and uncompetitive economics. According to anthropologist Susan Love Brown, economic change was the “usual catalyst” in the formation of utopian, or “intentional,” communities during the

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<sup>21</sup> Sally L. Kitch, *Chaste Liberation: Celibacy and Female Cultural Status* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 58-59.

<sup>22</sup> Kitch, *Chaste Liberation*, 59.

<sup>23</sup> Koreshan Unity, Bureau of Equitable Commerce, Booklet, “Scientific Colonization: Plan for the Immediate Relief of the Masses,” 15-16, 1895, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>24</sup> Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), xii.

<sup>25</sup> Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, 40.

nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> In this confusing time Teed preached his teachings and searched for people to join the Koreshan Unity. It would be this group of individuals that would follow Teed's utopian movement and become Koreshan.

According to historians who have analyzed the history of the American utopian movement, there were two specific types of ideal communities established by individuals that emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth century. One kind of community appeared as a result of those people who searched to find ways to escape capitalism and find refuge in communal living. Known as secular communities, these establishments often solely relied on socialism as the main antidote to the economic problem of capitalism and the greed associated with it. According to historian Robert P. Sutton, secular communities often lacked a charismatic leader; instead of depending on one person to preserve fellowship among a group of people, members, or "coworkers" as phrased by Sutton, relied on one another and the promise for a better society based around communism.<sup>27</sup>

The second type of utopian community centered on religion. In many cases, religious utopian communities believed in millennialism, or the fascination and anticipation of the second coming of Christ. In Theodore Olson's *Millennialism, Utopianism, and Progress*, he explains that ideas of millennialism stemmed from particular periods of crisis at the beginning of Christianity when "new events seemed to cast doubt on the adequacy of past formulations" of Jewish theology. When referring to millennialism, Olson explains that it is a dramatic history with a beginning and a "climactic end state." Each story is surrounded by conflict which often takes the shape of a revolutionary movement. In comparison, Olson defines utopianism as a state of mind, as an illusion propelled by "material passions and ambitions."<sup>28</sup> While these theories present two different ideas on religion and society, one based on historical events and the other on cognitive ideals, both reach toward progress.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Love Brown, *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 7. Rather than call them "utopian" communities, Brown and the other contributing anthropologists in the book use the term "intentional" because the communities are far from being ideal as a result of their own inherent problems caused by their own unique ideals.

<sup>27</sup> Robert P. Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Secular Communities, 1824-2000* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 2004), x.

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Olson, *Millennialism, Utopianism, and Progress* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 15.

<sup>29</sup> Olson, *Millennialism, Utopianism, and Progress*, 234.

Americans during the nineteenth century faced many economic and social changes and some relied on religious doctrines for answers. During this time, newly established utopian communities utilized the idea of millennialism as a means to bring people together in the quest for an ideal society. Keeping in mind Olson's analysis of millennialism versus utopianism, it is essential to understand that late-nineteenth century Americans did not seek idealism through a better understanding of the apocalypse. Instead, both the quest for utopia and a new age of religious reawakening emerged during this hurried industrialization period in the United States. As a result, many vulnerable Americans sought refuge in religious utopian communities in hopes that joining a fellowship of people could answer personal questions and better educate the public about the peculiarities of religion.

Religious communities possessed other characteristics that differentiated them from secular establishments. In comparison to secular communities, religious utopian communities relied heavily on a charismatic leader, one who often claimed direct contact with God. While communism played an important role in religious communities and its members, it did not provide *the* answer to society's problems like those in secular utopian communities believed it could. Instead, religious community members believed that faith in their leader's teachings and in God would ultimately solve all the world's problems.<sup>30</sup>

So who gravitated to the Koreshan Unity? Did Teed attract people seeking a secular or religious haven? In response, historians have concluded that the Koreshan Unity essentially encompassed both types of utopian communities. While historians are in agreement as to what type of community the Teed created, some have differing views as to whether the Koreshan Unity remains a unique case. According to historian Robert Lynn Rainard, the Koreshan Unity “in many ways [resembled] an archetype utopian community” because of its expressed ideals in communism and millennialism. Comparing the Koreshan Unity to other utopian communities such as the Oneida, the Shakers, and the Mormons, Rainard explained that all formed as by-products of the religious enthusiasm present in the burned-over district in New York during the early 1800s.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, historian James E. Landing presented the viewpoint that Teed's Koreshan Unity provided an answer to those who sought not only “finiteness,

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<sup>30</sup> Robert P. Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Religious Communities, 1732-2000* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 2003), x-xi.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Lynn Rainard, “In the Name of Humanity: The Koreshan Unity” (M.A. Thesis, University of South Florida, 1974), 2.



boundedness, order, and less complex arrangements” in a community, but also a unique religious experience and leader who possessed an appreciation and the integration of “science, religion, and social economics” to his communal beliefs.<sup>32</sup>

A look at Teed’s teaching on capitalism provides a better explanation of the religious and secular ideals present in Koreshanity. A major concept in Koreshanity, Teed and his fellow Koreshans believed that the root of all evil in society existed in the concept and practice of capitalism. Reflective of the industrial driven American society of the late nineteenth century, Teed believed that “there is no love in the competitive system but the love of self.”<sup>33</sup> According to the Koreshan Unity capitalists were “a horde of money kings,” and many wage laborers were beginning to realize that if the capitalists remained in control they would inevitably cause society’s downfall. Rather than letting the system of capitalism ruin society, Teed called forth his followers to concentrate all efforts to destroy the enterprise and in its place substitute a message of brotherly love and Christian values. On the subject of capitalism and the Koreshan Unity’s quest to rid of the current economic system, the Guiding Star circulated a handout which stated:

Despite the fact that gold is the one and only god apparently approved of men, there remains one body of people [the Koreshans] whose interests are for men; and it is the purpose of this people to provide a spot in earth where shall begin that influence which will destroy the power of gold.<sup>34</sup>

To remedy the situation of capitalism and greed, the Koreshan Unity established their own commonwealth known as the Bureau of Equitable Commerce which kept track of all the financial and commercial operations of the community. While the Koreshans did have their own economic program, it consisted primarily on a “units of labor” system.<sup>35</sup> Upon joining the community, new members worked their assigned jobs and rather than being paid per hour, one would gain labor credit which could be exchanged for goods within the Koreshan Unity.

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<sup>32</sup> Landing, “Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity,” 375-376.

<sup>33</sup> Koresh, *Koreshan Science*, 20.

<sup>34</sup> Koreshan Unity, Bureau of Equitable Commerce, Booklet, “Scientific Colonization: Plan for the Immediate Relief of the Masses,” 3, 1895, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

According to Teed, Koreshans needed to view their community as “*our* Institution, not *mine*.”<sup>36</sup> Like a secular community, the Koreshan Unity found effective ways around capitalism through a system of commonwealth; like a religious community, they also relied on Teed’s teachings toward a society ultimately centered on Koreshan theology.

Obtaining membership into the Koreshan Unity involved more than just new members handing over all of their belongings to the community. According to Teed, he wanted religious followers who embraced and lived by the Koreshan way of life. Rather than attracting “irreligious people” to enter the Koreshan Unity, Teed specifically wanted “the fruit of the age only . . . people who love the Lord and who, if they do not know and love him now, can be induced to love him through the power of regeneration.”<sup>37</sup> As a revolutionary group, Teed urged newcomers of the Koreshan Unity to “come as soldiers [and] enter the regular army,” the Army of Revolution.<sup>38</sup> In a more welcoming tone, the Koreshan Unity’s Bureau of Equitable Commerce explained in a handout that the community would “welcome to our midst the sober, industrious, and orderly people who wish to make a home among such as entertain new hopes, highest purposes, and a fellowship of common brotherhood originating in the common and universal parentage of man.” Individuals who showed interest in joining the Koreshan Unity first needed to acquire a blank Application for Membership card from the Secretary. Upon entering the community, new members not only handed over their belongings, but vices such as “whiskey, beer, tobacco, and opium” needed to remain outside the Koreshan Unity. Confident in the imminent growth of the community, the Bureau explained that “our city will grow rapidly enough without admitting these disgusting and degrading elements.”<sup>39</sup>

### ***Life at the Koreshan Unity***

According to historian Mark Holloway, utopian communities can be considered as boring establishments “utterly devoid of humor.” Mainly adhering to a “utilitarian outlook,” utopian communities created in the late-nineteenth century often sacrificed individuality and amusement in an effort toward communal living. Rarely did utopian communities associate leisure with

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<sup>36</sup> Koreshan Unity, Koresh, Booklet, “The Koreshan Unity: General Information Concerning Membership and its Obligations,” 10, undated, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>37</sup> Koreshan Unity, Koresh, Booklet, “The Koreshan Unity,” 5, undated, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 15; Teed, *The Cellular Cosmogony*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Koreshan Unity, Bureau of Equitable Commerce, Booklet, “Scientific Colonization: Plan for the Immediate Relief of the Masses,” 13, 1895 Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

idealism.<sup>40</sup> In comparison to Holloway's remarks, historian Landing considers the Koreshans a "gay lot."<sup>41</sup> While members of the Koreshan Unity established a sustainable community in Estero based on hard, industrious work by practicing special trades, they succeeded in also having considerable leisure time. From orchestra and band performances to plays, the Koreshan Unity made time for music and arts in attempt to better understand the world around them while also acting as a mode of public outreach.

Estero, Florida, in the 1890s was the epitome of pioneer living. Unlike Chicago with its metropolitan area and urban development, Estero lacked roads and people relied on ox teams to clear land and to get around the southwest region of the state.<sup>42</sup> By the 1880s, Fort Myers, just north of Estero, became the largest settlement in the southwest region of Florida.<sup>43</sup> In the more rural parts of the town, there remained a few Spanish who herded cattle that came in from Cuba. The channel of rivers and access to the Gulf of Mexico not only appealed to inhabitants as a means of transportation and commerce, but for aesthetic purposes as well.<sup>44</sup> Even with these developments in this portion of Florida, wildlife and mosquitoes proved to be another obstacle.<sup>45</sup> While Koreshan members originated from more urban backgrounds, they surprisingly adapted to the wilds of Florida.

Once in Estero, members performed various jobs at the Koreshan Unity. Printing became one of the first occupations offered by the Koreshan Unity to its members in Chicago and later the press was transferred to the community's New Jerusalem. Members often learned the printing trade once they arrived. Printing became an essential business for the Koreshan Unity as the group relied heavily on their printed materials as ways to reach the public and other members throughout the country living in other settlements. When the Koreshan Unity moved to Estero, Florida, in 1894, a series of other jobs presented members with new opportunities. Upon arriving in Estero, a group of Koreshans worked to clear the land for housing. They also eventually planted nurseries. Allen H. Andrews, a Koreshan since childhood, even recounted

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<sup>40</sup> Mark Holloway, *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America 1680-1880* (London: Turnstile Press, 1951), 17, 220.

<sup>41</sup> Landing, "Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity," 388.

<sup>42</sup> Donald O. Stone, *The First 100 Years: Lee County Public Schools, 1887-1987* (Fort Myers, Florida: Department of Printing Service, School Board of Lee County, 1987), iv.

<sup>43</sup> Florence Fritz, *Unknown Florida* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1963), 93.

<sup>44</sup> Fritz, *Unknown Florida*, 96.

<sup>45</sup> Stone, *The First 100 Years*, iv.

hunting loggerhead turtles.<sup>46</sup> By around 1895, the Koreshans purchased their first sawmill which supplied the Koreshan Unity with the ability to begin constructing more housing and boat ramps along the Estero River.<sup>47</sup>

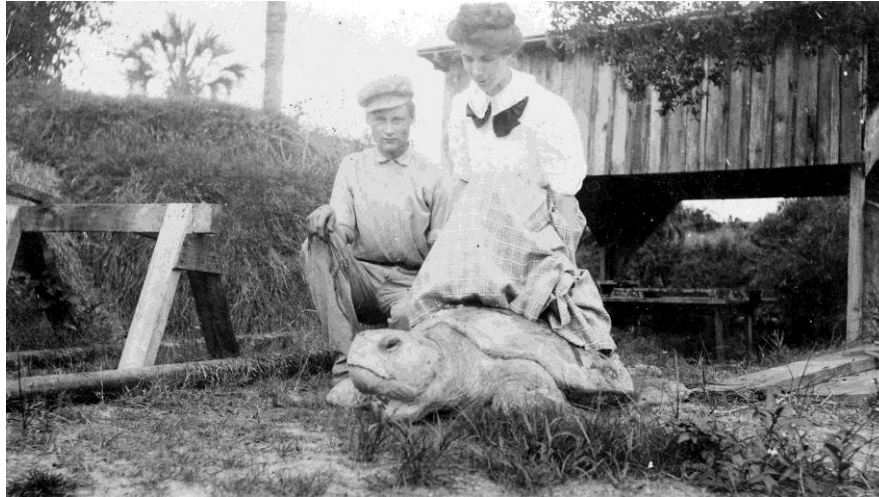


Figure 2.2: Two Koreshan members and a turtle. (Koreshan Unity. Papers, ca. 1887-1990. Photographs. State Archives of Florida.)

Not only did the Koreshans perform jobs to sustain their community, but they also engaged in business exchanges with the local community living in the Fort Myers area. Occupations included laundry services, post office and general store clerks, boat makers, bakers, and teachers. In *Koreshan Unity Settlement, 1894-1977*, Glendon M. Herbert explained the importance of the Old Store as playing “a major role in the settlement’s growth.” Located on the Koreshan Unity’s property along the Tamiami Trail, according to Herbert, “the store sold various goods to the public and travelers, and, as a retail outlet, was able to purchase goods not produced by the Koreshans at wholesale prices.”<sup>48</sup> The Koreshans also participated in boat building and other marine endeavors. According to Herbert, boat construction as a source of commercialism

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<sup>46</sup> Allen H. Andrews, *A Yank Pioneer in Florida: Recounting the Adventures of a City Chap Who Came to the Wilds of South Florida in the 1890's and Remained to Grow Up With the Country* (Jacksonville, Florida: Douglas Printing Co., Inc., 1950), 11-12.

<sup>47</sup> Rea, *The Koreshan Story*, 33-34.

<sup>48</sup> Glendon M. Herbert, *Koreshan Unity Settlement, 1894-1977* (Winter Park, Florida: Architects Design Group of Florida, 1977), 31.

enabled the Koreshans to “transport goods manufactured by various settlement departments, to harvest food from the sea, and to sell new and refurbished boats to the [local] community.”<sup>49</sup> Although pioneer life in Estero proved difficult, the Koreshans were still able to establish a self-sustaining community throughout its Golden Age.

Children also performed their designated duties at the Koreshan Unity. As far as chores, boys often chopped firewood while girls helped Koreshan women sort clothes at the Koreshan Unity's laundry facility. Both boys and girls also gardened and helped prepare food in the kitchen. In many cases, children helped their mothers at the Guiding Star Publishing House as printers. For example, Ella Graham, a Koreshan who first joined the community in 1888, had two children who practiced the printing trade and eventually opened their own printing business in Miami after they married. Evelyn Bubbett, another Koreshan, had her three children work as printers.<sup>50</sup>

While children performed various jobs and chores to help in the everyday work schedule of the Koreshan Unity, education played an important role in acculturating children to becoming disciples of Koreshanity. In one Koreshan Primer, teachers are shown how to teach children the basics of cellular cosmogony. Providing “easy lessons for beginners, adapted for all classes of students,” children learned the relationship between science and religion as well as the findings of the Geodetic Survey performed in 1897.<sup>51</sup> By the early 1900s, the Koreshan Unity established the Pioneer University in Estero. According to one advertisement, the university provided “unparalleled opportunities for learning useful trades, arts, and sciences, under the direction of intellectual, practical Instructors.”<sup>52</sup> In Donald O. Stone's *The First 100 Years: Lee County Public Schools, 1887-1987*, it is explained that the Koreshans made “very real and unique contributions,” including to education. According to Stone, the Koreshan Unity School became the first school in the Estero area. While children from the surrounding community were welcomed and attended the school, it was never incorporated into the Lee County public school system because of its “differing beliefs which the school board could not embrace.” After interviewing several people who had attended the Koreshan Unity school, Stone concluded that

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<sup>49</sup> Herbert, *Koreshan Unity Settlement, 1894-1977*, 35-36.

<sup>50</sup> Koreshan Unity, Evelyn Horne, Historical Interpretations, “7 Sisters Who Lived in Planetary Court,” undated, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Member Files, Evelyn Horne, (SAF).

<sup>51</sup> Koreshan Unity, Moses G. Weaver, School Primer, “Koreshan Primer: The A.B.C. Of the Science of Universology,” undated, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Education, Koreshan Primer, (SAF).

<sup>52</sup> Koreshan Unity, Koreshan University System, Advertisement, “The Pioneer University of Koreshan Universology,” undated, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Administrative Files, (SAF).

the Koreshans provided and “excellent” education for many children in the Lee County area. Not only did the school focus on academics, but the Koreshans also preached the importance of learning trades, which according to Stone “was a rather advanced educational concept for its time.”<sup>53</sup>



Figure 2.3: Students at the Koreshan school. (Koreshan Unity. Papers, ca. 1887-1990. Photographs. State Archives of Florida.)

While Koreshans, both young and old, labored throughout the day, they also found time to participate in leisure activities. A majority of the extracurricular activities the Koreshans participated in related to the arts. Many of the Koreshans participated in the community's orchestra and band. From Wagner to Beethoven, the Koreshans played not only to their fellow members but to the public as well. Members also participated in plays such as original productions of “The Bees in Flowerland” and “Facing the Music.” Often conducted at the Art Hall at the Koreshan Unity, members donned full costumes and utilized props. In Sara Weber Rea's *The Koreshan Story*, she explains that Teed purposely focused on the arts in attempt to bring the cultural life of Chicago experienced by many of the members to the pioneer life in Estero.<sup>54</sup> While Teed's introduction of the art provided a sense of comfort to the Koreshans as they explored the swamps of southwest Florida, he also grounded his reasoning on Koreshanity.

<sup>53</sup> Stone, *The First 100 Years*, 419-420.

<sup>54</sup> Rea, *The Koreshan Story*, 51.

According to Teed, one of the curses men and women faced during the late-nineteenth century revolved around the “common drudgery” of industrial work. In order to prevent the laboriousness of work and to sway the desire of greed associated with capitalism, Teed believed men and women should experience “culture, recreation, or amusement . . . all of which are essential to social, moral, and spiritual progress.”<sup>55</sup>

Not only did Koreshan children participate in the community's orchestra, band, and plays, but they also explored the wilderness of Florida. Once McConnell reached Estero with her family in 1894, she and the other children often played outdoors “for there seemed so much of interest to do outside.” From swimming in the Estero River to gathering wild huckleberries, Koreshan children participated in many activities. At one point when she first arrived in Estero, McConnell and several other children came across an alligator nest and each collected an egg to see if it would hatch. After placing her egg in a box filled with wet sand, her new pet baby alligator Impie hatched.<sup>56</sup> McConnell also explains that young people at the Koreshan Unity dated one another. Although dating was forbidden, she argues that the Koreshan children remained “together in groups and I believe really had much more fun than most of the young folks outside [the community] who were supposed to be more privileged.”<sup>57</sup> Although the children, and adults, of the Koreshan Unity had unique social and religious ideals, these beliefs did not prevent them from living a life almost comparable to middle-class Americans not living in utopian societies.

From the 1880s to 1908, the Koreshan Unity experienced what historians have called their Golden Age. A utopian movement first started by Cyrus Teed, the Koreshan Unity eventually became a community of followers hoping to find the answers to the ideal society. Based on Teed's scientific findings of cellular cosmogony, Koreshanity intertwined Christian beliefs with the science of the universe. From celibate social orders to a government organized according to the cosmic order, the Koreshan Unity provided unique solutions for those seeking freedom from the drudgery of an ever increasing industrial economy and inquisitive religious rhetoric. While the Koreshans did partake in commercial and everyday work, they based their actions on wanting to contribute to Teed's revolutionary global movement instead of a wage or

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<sup>55</sup> Koresh, *Koreshan Science*, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Koreshan Unity, Marie McConnell, Unpublished Manuscript, “Growing-Up Days in a Celibate Community,” 95, 97, June 1976, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Member Files, (SAF).

<sup>57</sup> Koreshan Unity, Marie McConnell, “Growing-Up Day in a Celibate Community,” 87, (SAF).

salary. Whether tempted through one of Teed's lectures, publications, or exhibits, the Koreshan Unity did see its membership increase during its Golden Age.

By adhering to their beliefs and the quest for a utopian way of life, the Koreshan Unity succeeded in establishing an ideal community during its Golden Age. While Teed in his publications admitted to some internal problems within the community, those conflicts did not totally impede the everyday operations of the Koreshan Unity. In the end, the Koreshan Unity experienced success as a sustainable community and providing a new hope for vulnerable individuals. Although Theodore Olson describes utopianism as a cognitive state rather than reality, to those loyal Koreshans living in the community at the time, they had found their ideal society. While the Koreshan Unity never reached Teed's vision of a worldwide civilization, many of the members remained faithful to their Master's teachings and ideals throughout their lives.



Figure 2.4: Group of Koreshans and Teed (second row on left wearing a hat). (Koreshan Unity. Papers, ca. 1887-1990. Photographs. State Archives of Florida.)



## CHAPTER 3

### PRESERVING KORESHAN MEMORY: THE STATE OF FLORIDA AND THE KORESHAN STATE HISTORIC SITE

While scholarly publications make an important contribution toward a better understanding of the Koreshan Unity and its leader, another mode of historical interpretation exists that hundreds of members of the public rely on. In 1961, the state of Florida acquired the lands of the Koreshan homestead and turned it into a park. Since then, visitors from around the country have gathered at the Koreshan State Historic Site (KSHS) located on the same grounds the Koreshans carried on their everyday lives over one hundred years ago in Estero, Florida. The park provides a glimpse into Koreshan history by preserving and in some cases restoring original buildings, exhibiting artifacts, and by preserving the original landscape. The KSHS interprets the Koreshan Unity history from the 1880s to 1908, which was the high point of the movement. For those who might desire more than an historical experience, the KSHS also provides recreational activities indicative of a Florida State Park, such as canoeing, camping, fishing, and hiking.

So how has the State of Florida preserved Koreshan memory? Of the 34 parks located in the Southwest Region of the Florida State Parks system, 16, including the KSHS, are labeled as historic sites. Out of these historic sites, only three have museums. Again, the KSHS is one of those.<sup>1</sup> Rather than focus on the Koreshan belief of cellular cosmogony, the KSHS interprets on the utopian community as an example of a sustainable and modern community during the pioneer days of south Florida. From the beginning, the state acquired the Koreshan property not to criticize the utopian qualities of the community, but to actively preserve a unique portion of the state's history. Although the KSHS is known for its outdoor recreational activities, many visit the site each year to learn about the fascinating history of the Koreshan Unity. By engaging the public in how the Koreshans lived rather than focusing on why they lived the way they did,

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<sup>1</sup> Florida Division of Recreation and Parks, "Statewide: Florida State Parks Guide, Introduction," *Florida State Parks*, <http://www.floridastateparks.org/resources/statewide.cfm>.

the KSHS has become an essential tool in preserving Koreshan memory in the sense that it humanizes rather than ostracizes the utopians from Florida's history.

While the KSHS does successfully inform visitors the importance the Koreshans played influencing the southwest region of the state, the site does a disservice to the public by leaving out much of the utopian and ideological aspects of the group. By abandoning a true explanation of Koreshanity, the KSHS prevents visitors from receiving a full historical account on the Koreshan Unity. Even with this disadvantage, the KSHS does present an important part of Koreshan that would otherwise be overlooked by numerous members of the public. Through historical interpretations of the grounds and buildings, artifacts, and various outreach programs, the State of Florida has succeeded in establishing and maintaining a one-of-a-kind historical experience for many visitors.

### ***Florida's Involvement Inside the Earth***

By the late 1950s, the membership of the Koreshan Unity was rapidly dwindling. The combination of members adhering to Teed's teachings of a celibate lifestyle and the reduction in numbers made by those who left Estero, made the ultimate demise of the Koreshan Unity imminent. Historians attribute the tenacity and dedication of Hedwig Michel (1892-1982), or the "last Koreshan," in keeping the cultural programs and history of the community alive. According to Sara Weber Rea, Hedwig did not want Koreshan memory to vanish and as a result "insist[ed] that some of the grounds be retained as a historical site open to the public." Through her "valiant" efforts, the lands owned by the Koreshan Unity would become the community's "gift to the people."<sup>2</sup>

On November 2, 1961, the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials (Board) acquired a portion of the Koreshan Unity's land "for and in consideration of the sum of \$1.00 and other valuable considerations" from Michel and the three other surviving members, Vesta Newcomb, Alfred Christensen, and Conrad Schlender. According to the paperwork, the members wanted the State of Florida to acquire the land "for the use and benefit" of the Board and others. In the Deed and Trust Agreement signed by both sides, the remaining members of the Koreshan Unity held the Board responsible in promoting and operating the newly acquired land for the "enjoyment and benefit of the people of Florida and its visitors, for general conservation and park purposes." The Board also agreed to the Koreshans' stipulations and

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<sup>2</sup> Sara Weber Rea, *The Koreshan Story* (Estero, Florida: Guiding Star Publishing House, 1994), 71.

allowed the four members to continue living on a portion of the land until the last member's death. Upon that date, the state would have full custody of the land. The very last condition the Koreshans stated inferred that "all lands conveyed hereunder and affected hereby shall be named and referred to as 'Koreshan State Park'."<sup>3</sup> Teed's New Jerusalem now belonged to the State of Florida.

From the beginning, the state recognized the historical importance of the KSHS. In line with the agreement made in the contract with the Koreshan Unity, the Florida Park Service (FPS) promised its constituents and state visitors that it sought to "edify and benefit" all who visited the "rich history" of the park.<sup>4</sup> State officials believed that the Koreshan's unique beliefs, especially cellular cosmogony, would draw tourists. According to the FPS Director W.A. Coldwell, the park had the potential to "attract untold thousands of patrons."<sup>5</sup>



Figure 3.1: Tourists visiting the Koreshan State Historic Site in the 1970s. (Florida Park Service Collection. State Archives of Florida.)

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<sup>3</sup> Koreshan Unity, Inc. and the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, Deed and Trust Agreement, November 2, 1961, box 4, folder 9, Florida. Board of Parks and Historic Memorials. Public Relations and historical files, 1934-1964, (SAF).

<sup>4</sup> Florida State Parks, "Koreshan State Park," box 1, folder 20, Florida, Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, Public Relations and historical files, 1934-1964, (SAF).

<sup>5</sup> Director of the Florida Park Service W.A. Coldwell to Barrett R. Brown, December 5, 1961, box 1, folder 20, Florida, Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, Public Relations and historical files, 1934-1964, (SAF).

When the state sought ways to advertise the Koreshan State Park, however, it focused more on the recreational activities of the park rather than the presence of a historical interpretive area at the Koreshan settlement. In 1967, the Florida Park Board (FPB) circulated a handout describing the park. The only mention of Koreshan culture was in the beginning paragraph, where the FPB explains the belief of cellular cosmogony in detail. The only mention of historical interpretation the handout offers about the KSHS was the fact that the remaining buildings left on the grounds “stand [as] a credit to the Koreshans’ craftsmanship,” and the botanical garden was a “focal point of the area.” Rather than briefly state the historical significance of the structures or the grounds as a testament to American utopianism or even as a reminder of the uniqueness of Florida’s historical culture, the remaining information on the handout focused on the recreational aspects and rules of the park.<sup>6</sup> In another instance, the Division of Recreation and Parks distributed a brochure in 1975 entitled “Florida Camping and State Parks Guide” as a visual and informational tool to the state park system. Advertising that Florida has “Sun Thing for Everyone!,” the brochure focused on the available campsites around the state. While the KSHS is categorized in a listing of the parks as a “Special Feature Site” with a historical attraction, it is labeled on a map of Florida as a “Recreation Area.”<sup>7</sup> These documents make it clear that the state did not initially intend to capitalize on history to promote visitation to the KSHS.

In the 1980s, the FPS began to more clearly define the state’s stance on the historical significance of the KSHS. According to a Management Criteria Statement, the FPS explained that the Koreshan Unity “had a considerable impact on the political, cultural, and economic growth of southwest Florida.”<sup>8</sup> While the initial years of the park emphasized the most unusual aspects of Koreshan history, state officials began to reinterpret that history of the site to highlight the connections between the Koreshan Unity and the surrounding community of Fort Myers and the rest of Lee County. The change reflected a rise in domestic tourism, as Florida sought to

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<sup>6</sup> Florida Park Board, “The Florida Park Board Welcomes You to Koreshan State Park,” 1967, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Koreshan State Historic Site, (SAF).

<sup>7</sup> Department of Natural Resources, Division of Recreation and Parks, Brochure, “Florida Camping and State Parks Guide,” 1975, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Koreshan State Historic Site, (SAF).

<sup>8</sup> Florida Park Service, “Koreshan State Historic Site: Management Criteria Statement,” undated, box 4, folder 9, Florida Park Service, State park management criteria statements, 1979-1987, (SAF). While the date of the document is uncertain, a portion of the text suggests that the report was written pre-1982, or before Michel died. In describing the state’s role in maintaining a portion of the park, the report states, “Upon the death of the last member the property will become an active part of the Koreshan State Historic Site.”

convince its own residents to vacation within the Sunshine state. Within twenty years of the state's acquisition of the Koreshan homestead land, the historical interpretation evolved from a singular interpretation of the Koreshan Unity to one that was more comparative and appreciative of the community's influence in developing the region.

More recently, the Florida State Parks (FSP) system has returned to focus on the sensational aspects of the Koreshan Unity. While the overall goal of the FSP is for their sites to "stir your imagination and leave you with a greater appreciation for the people, places and events that have shaped this great state," KSHS is used to represent an oddity.<sup>9</sup> Located in the Southwest Region of the state, FSP advertises the KSHS as being the home of "probably the most unusual" pioneers Florida ever encountered. The FSP also still focuses on cellular cosmogony as the extraordinary historical tidbit associated with the Koreshan Unity. In the advertising of the recreational activities at the KSHS, FSP tells its visitors that they "can fish, picnic, boat and hike where Teed's visionaries once carried out survey experiments to 'prove' the horizon on the beaches curves upward."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) jumpstarted a campaign called *Rediscover Florida—100 Ways in 100 Days* in 2009 by suggesting that parents take their kids to the KSHS to "hear the story of Cyrus Teed's colony," which fulfilled one of the one hundred ideas of the *Rediscover Program*, "Meet a character."<sup>11</sup>

Once visitors reach the KSHS, what awaits them? How do they go about learning the history of the Koreshan Unity? FSP staff and volunteers use three different means of interpretation: the grounds, the buildings and the artifact exhibits inside them, and outreach programs performed and operated by park officials and volunteers. Through all of these features, visitors can catch a glimpse at the everyday life of the Koreshans and develop an appreciation of how they created a one of a kind community.

The visitor's first encounter with the KSHS is the grounds. In 1894, Teed supervised the creation of manicured landscaping, gardens, and shell paths. According to the self-guided tour booklet provided at the KSHS, Teed decided to incorporate many fruit and nut plants into the

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<sup>9</sup> Florida Division of Recreation and Parks, "Statewide: Florida State Parks Guide, Introduction," *Florida State Parks*, <http://www.floridastateparks.org/resources/statewide.cfm>.

<sup>10</sup> Florida Division of Recreation and Parks, "Statewide: Florida State Parks Guide, Southwest Region," *Florida State Parks*, <http://www.floridastateparks.org/resources/statewide.cfm>.

<sup>11</sup> Florida Department of Environmental Protection, "Rediscover Florida This Summer," *The Post* 9, issue 24 (June 19, 2009). "Meet a character" was #83 on the list.

design because these flora were mentioned in the Bible.<sup>12</sup> Teed believed that through the landscape he and his followers were creating a New Jerusalem.

While the grounds had a symbolic meaning to Teed and the other Koreshans, the KSHS also interprets the landscape as evidence of the hard work and resourcefulness of the Koreshan Unity's leader and members. In particular, FSP offers an interpretation about the ability to achieve sustainability. When the Koreshans first arrived in 1893, the region was covered in palmettos, pine trees, and other native Florida plants. Over the years, the Koreshans successfully cultivated vegetable gardens, orchards, and decorative Victorian gardens. In the vegetable gardens, the Koreshans sowed plants that grew well in the sandy soil, such as tomatoes, cow peas, sweet potatoes, greens and beans. They grew avocados, lemons, and other fruits in the orchards. With their crops, the Koreshans grew food for themselves and sold produce to the local community. The Koreshans maintained Victorian gardens as places "for nourishing the spirit rather than the body."<sup>13</sup> Other grounds features such as the Sunken Gardens, Mounds, and Shell Paths are explained in the self-guided tour booklet, but are not necessarily described for their function.<sup>14</sup> Instead, the KSHS has preserved these features according to how they looked in period photographs, another way in which the park has ensured historical authenticity of the site.

In 2003, the Division of Recreation and Parks compiled a unit management report of the KSHS that discussed the importance of the grounds and landscaping portion of the park. While much of the historical information echoes the self-guided tour booklet circulated to visitors, the report details the logic of FSP's preservation. In particular, it shows what FSP defines as essential for interpreting Koreshan history. According to the report, caring for plants original to the site are FSP's top priority. When possible, the state argues, employees and volunteers should mark the location of these plants and watch over them, unless the plant endangers a historic structure or building. As far as those plants installed under Teed's supervision during the 1905 landscaping project, the report states that these materials represent a connection with the local Fort Myers area. Through their study, these flora can explain how the Koreshans interacted with outside influences. The report also stresses the importance of preserving the cement works of the ornamental gardens. Where there has been deterioration beyond repair, FSP advocates using

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<sup>12</sup> Koreshan Unity Alliance, Inc., *The Koreshan Unity Settlement* (Estero, Florida), [3].

<sup>13</sup> Koreshan Unity Alliance, Inc., *The Koreshan Unity Settlement*, [4].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, [7], [10]

casts to make replicates.<sup>15</sup> The KSHS site, therefore, follows best practices advocated by historic preservationists, who maintain that a historic site is more than a structure but the grounds upon which it sits.

<b>Table 3.1: Structures at KSHS Built before 1908 and their Historical Significance</b>		
Structure	Date Constructed	Historical Significance (Member(s), Function)
Damkohler House	1882	Member, Function
Bamboo Landing	1894	Function
Founder's House	1896	Member, Function
Dinner Bell (Dining Hall)	1896	Function
The Laundry	1903	Function
Bakery	1903	Function
Conrad Schlender Cottage / Membership Cottage	1903	Member, Function
Planetary Court	1904	Members
Large Machine Shop	1904	Function
Art Hall	1905	Function
Small Machine Shop	1905	Function

The KSHS contains a collection of original buildings and structures, eleven of which were constructed by 1908.<sup>16</sup> Not only are these buildings testaments to Koreshan craftsmanship, but they also tell individual stories about the Koreshan community's members and their societal organization. In creating an interpretive history of this utopian community, the FSP attributes historical significance to each house or structure according to two different categories. Some

<sup>15</sup> Florida Division of Recreation and Parks, *Koreshan State Historic Site: Unit Management Plan*, 26-27.

<sup>16</sup> Not included in the table is the Electric Generator Building. Although built in 1908, the building did not serve its main purpose until the 1920s when the Koreshans used the building to house their newly acquired Fairbanks-Morse diesel engine. An integral structure to the park, visitors can watch KSHS volunteers demonstrate how the Koreshans would have operated the machinery while also informing the audience the significance electricity played in connecting the Koreshan Unity to the Fort Myers community and even Thomas Edison.

buildings are associated with an important member of the Koreshan Unity. Others are historically significant because they served a special function or purpose for the Koreshans, such as meeting places or buildings which housed Koreshan commercialism. In Table 3.1, these eleven buildings along with their historical significance are defined. In front of each structure, the KSHS has placed panels to explain its importance to the Koreshan Unity. At the Planetary Court, visitors are provided a glimpse into the lives of several prominent Koreshan women and one Koreshan man. Outside the panel gives a brief explanation as to who lived there. Inside, visitors can peer beyond the ropes into the various bedrooms of Berthaldine Boomer, Virginia Andrews, and Evelyn Bubbett. In each room, Kate Anthony, former curator of the KSHS, created reproductions of how each Koreshan woman may have organized her room and included personal items to provide a glimpse into the life and interests of each. In Boomer's room, Anthony placed a wheelchair in the corner, which tells the park visitor of Boomer's physical disabilities she experienced late in life. Anthony equipped Andrew's room with a sewing machine, informing visitors of her interest in the craft. With these personal touches, visitors to the KSHS are better able to understand individual Koreshans. By associating certain hobbies or physical conditions to each member, the KSHS subtly suggests that visitors should view Koreshans as average Floridians, rather than dismiss them as quirky utopians.



Figure 3.2: Berthaldine Boomer's wheelchair in her room in the Planetary Court. (Photo taken by Katherine Adams)



The FSP uses structures to communicate an interpretation about the capability of a community to be self-sustaining. At the Bakery, visitors are able to peer through plexi-glass walls and glance at some of the tools and ovens used by the Koreshans. According to the self-guided tour booklet, the Koreshan bakers were known to produce 500 to 600 loaves of bread per day not just for members but to be sold to the public at the Koreshan-operated store located on the Koreshan property. At both the Large and Small Machine Shops, volunteers at the KSHS demonstrate how various original pieces of machinery operated, while also emphasizing the importance the Koreshans played in creating their own small, manufactured tools. In this manner, FSP uses the popular form of living history to capture the public's attention.

Another site open to the public, which aids in complicating historical understanding of this community is the Art Hall. Constructed in 1905, the structure provided the Koreshan Unity with a center for cultural activities not only for the community but for the wider region as well. The Art Hall became a well known venue for locals in the Fort Myers area where people gathered to watch the Koreshans act plays and perform musical scores in their orchestra. Today, FSP displays artwork and artifacts in the building. Guests to the park can view original paintings by the Koreshan Unity leader's son, Douglas Teed, see some of the musical instruments played by Koreshan members, and analyze a replica of U.G. Morrow's rectilineator used during the Koreshan geodetic survey, the tool which was used to determine the earth's concavity.



Figure 3.3: Replica of the rectilineator in the Art Hall at the KSHS. (Photo taken by Katherine Adams)

In some cases, the FSP has deemed a building significant both for its association with an important Koreshan member and for its function as a meeting place or lecture hall for the Koreshans. An example of a structure that served multiple purposes is the Founder's House. According to the self-guided tour booklet, the Koreshans also called the building the Teed House and the Children's School reflecting the various functions the Koreshans had used it for during the community's peak years of existence. Built in 1896, the Founder's House is the oldest structure still standing that was built by the Koreshans. Although the Koreshans renovated the building themselves in 1909, placing a stone veneer on the exterior walls, the KSHS chose to restore the building to its original 1896 appearance in 1992.<sup>17</sup>

The 2003 unit management report by the Division of Recreation and Parks provides slightly different information about the structure's creation and use, including the assertion that it was built in 1895 and that it was also known by many more names: Master's House, Brother's House, and Ordway's House. It is also unclear whether Teed had supervised the plans for remodeling the house. If he did, it should impact the historical interpretation of the structure. The report details that the Koreshans removed the porches on the building, installed a "series of imitation brownstone walls and arches," and created "a circular tower or turret on the northwest corner that was 30 feet in diameter."<sup>18</sup> During a guided tour, Park Ranger Mike Heare explained that Teed intended the addition to be his observatory where he could glimpse at inner space.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., [7].

<sup>18</sup> Florida Division of Recreation and Parks, *Koreshan State Historic Site: Unit Management Plan*, 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> Mike Heare, Park Ranger-Guided Tour, January 30, 2010.



Figure 3.4: View of Founder's House and incomplete circular tower remodel. (Photo taken by Katherine Adams)

The general public will probably not spot the inconsistencies in information, which makes this public presentation of history troubling. In many cases, those who visit the site have never heard of the Koreshan Unity and trust the state to provide an accurate depiction of the utopian community's history. If Teed played a role in designing the house it tells us about his beliefs. If the Koreshans changed the house after his death, those changes tell us about their beliefs. If historical authenticity is key to the KSHS, a better look and edit of their interpretation is needed to establish an accurate analysis.

While the KSHS relies on materials such as its self-guided tour booklet and state reports to portray the history of the Founder's House and other aspects of the settlement, the different exhibits housed inside the building are essential tools in interpreting the history as well. Upon entering the building, visitors gravitate toward an exhibit of Teed's sitting room. Relying on old photographs, KSHS curator Anthony reproduced a scene filled with original Koreshan artifacts and period pieces for visitors to better understand Teed's "personality and interests."<sup>20</sup> Even though the Koreshans lived in a very rural area of Florida, Teed still surrounded himself with opulent fabrics, furniture, and a bust of Napoleon, a historical figure he idolized. While showcasing Teed's interests, the exhibit also suggests that these utopians valued the accouterments of an upper-class urbanite.

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<sup>20</sup> Koreshan State Historic Site, exhibit label, "Cyrus Teed's Sitting Room, Circa 1908."

Another important element located in the Founder's House is the video on the Koreshan Unity. Currently, visitors to the KSHS can view "Koreshan Unity: A Quest for Utopia," a short documentary which highlights Teed's role as Koresh, the community's members, and significant events in the Koreshan historical narrative. Part of WGPU's Public Media's *Untold Stories* series, the documentary is one of many which seeks to preserve the rich history of Southwest Florida.<sup>21</sup> With recorded accounts from Koreshan descendents, historians, and park rangers, the video focuses on all aspects of the Koreshan Unity. From Teed's illumination to the group's ultimate decline, visitors are given a concise, but accurate depiction of Koreshan life. Like the rest of the KSHS, the video spends more time talking about "New Jerusalem" and its industrial and commercial influences on the Fort Myers area. At the end of the video, a portion on "Utopia Today" informs guests on present day efforts to keep the park intact and the importance of revitalizing the arts and culture of the Fort Myers area in the Koreshan spirit of cultural diversity.

Public programs play an integral role in attracting visitors to the KSHS and they also provide the FSP with another means to incorporate historical interpretation into the site. Since the state's involvement with the Koreshan lands, visitors have relied on multiple guided tours to better understand and appreciate the KSHS. Currently, the historic site offers two routine tours, the "Guided Tours of the Historic Settlement" and the "Guided Plant Tour."<sup>22</sup> While popular among visitors, tours are only offered on specific days of the week. The KSHS also offers programs that encourage adults and children alike to participate. In the Koreshan Bread Baking Program, visitors meet in front of the Bakery and learn how to cook the famous Koreshan bread recipe over a campfire in a Dutch oven. In this program, the importance the Koreshan Bakery played in sustaining the Koreshan Unity is emphasized. While volunteers admit there is no proof that the Koreshans cooked with Dutch ovens, the cooking programs provided at the historic site engage visitors to participate in cooking recipes that the Koreshans did use. This demonstration is again, however, a source of historical confusion by presenting the utopians as having used antiquated methods of cooking at the turn of the nineteenth century rather than having an interest in modern technology. The last major program occurs once a year, when the volunteers at the historic site act as former Koreshan members in the KSHS's Koreshan Heritage Ghost Walks. Held during the evening and by candlelight, visitors are guided throughout the settlement and

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<sup>21</sup> WGPU Public Media, "Untold Stories," *Southwest Florida Public Radio & Television*, <http://wgcu.org/programs/untoldstories/default.aspx?PageIndex=2>.

<sup>22</sup> Koreshan State Historic Site, Flyer, "Programs, Events and Tours," 2010.

listen to the actors as they act out their designated Koreshan member. A favorite stop in the Ghost Walk is the Bakery, where visitors get a chance to taste cookies made from an original Koreshan recipe.<sup>23</sup> Through its various outreach programs, the KSHS ensures that Koreshan history is accessible to the public but perhaps also plays into people's stereotypes of utopian communities as out of touch with modernity.

### ***Public Opinion of the KSHS***

In *Presence of the Past: Popular Use of History in American Life*, David Thelen explains that among all the modes that history is communicated and taught to the public, the majority viewed museums and historic sites to be the most trustworthy sources of information. While the people Thelen interviewed in his research considered sources such as eyewitness accounts, college history professors, and high school teachers as reliable, most preferred museums and historic sites because they believed they were the least mediated spaces for learning history.<sup>24</sup> To some, museums allowed them to the ability to interpret history without having to "step around all the agendas" of what they considered biased historians. In other situations, people expressed a "believing is seeing" mentality, saying that they had a connection with displayed artifact collections. According to Thelen, artifacts served as bridges between the past and the present, allowing visitors to catch an authentic and actual glance at a certain event or portray a historical figure from the past.<sup>25</sup> Considered by Thelen as a "remarkable finding," the public's reliance, in obtaining history through museums and historic sites helps explain the draw of a place like KSHS.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, since the KSHS's inception, the public has expressed mixed opinions toward the site. When the Koreshan Unity first handed the property over, those who spoke out about the park tended to praise the State of Florida and its acquisition of a piece of the state's history. In contacting the FSP, Fort Myers native Barrett R. Brown commended the agency in their action to preserve "the efforts and beliefs of the early white settlers of this area."<sup>27</sup> In an Eastern Air Lines press release, Bill Wooten described the Koreshan State Park as "an enduring monument to a dynamic leader." In particular, Wooten admired how the park showed how the Koreshans

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<sup>23</sup> Lance Shearer, "'Ghosts' explain Koreshan Settlement Under Cover of Dark," *The Banner*, February 2, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 91.

<sup>25</sup> Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, 106.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>27</sup> Barrett R. Brown to the Director of the Florida State Parks W.A. Coldwell, November 29, 1961, box 1, folder 20, Florida, Board of Parks and Historical Memorials, Public Relations and historical files, 1934-1964, (SAF).

brought their urban ways of life an acculturated an otherwise “culture-starved early Florida.” Wooten explained that visitors would leave the park “impressed by [the Koreshans] selflessness and their sincere belief in ‘the Godliness of humanity and the devine [sic] humanity of God.’”<sup>28</sup>

By the 1970s, sentiment toward the KSHS changed as a result of U.S. Highway 41 road construction. In 1979, the Department of Transportation presented a plan to widen the road. Worried about the “sanctity” of the KSHS, several state officials voiced their concerns and urged the government to instead extend and widen the road at a different location, keeping the site free of disturbance. While a legitimate concern, park officials assured the concerned state officials that the widening was not an issue, that the KSHS would remain intact and unharmed. Still, officials at the state and federal level continued to argue, halting the progression of the road project.<sup>29</sup> In response, residents in the surrounding communities in Fort Myers, Estero, and Bonita Springs expressed their frustrations to Florida’s Governor Robert Graham. In most of the letters, correspondents explained simply that they wanted to see the road widened at its current location for safety reasons. As Estero local John Rodney explained, “many have been killed [on U.S. Highway 41] and it is pretty much of a dailey [sic] occurrence to see another crash with the emergency vehicles hurrying to help.”<sup>30</sup> Others, however connected this issue to KSHS. Estero resident JoAnn Robinson, questioned the state’s validity in wanting to protect its history rather than those who currently use the road. Expressing her distress, Robinson mentioned “Koreshan Who??” and argued that “4 laning Route 41 thru Estero is much more important to the people living today—than to keep this as a historic site—What Good Does That Do Anyone?”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Marguerite Lipps exclaimed “this seems to be an example of human lives vs. an historic site!”<sup>32</sup> Although an important part of the state and local history, the public had no problem compromising history for safety and convenience. Eventually, the government approved for the road to be widened at its current location, minimally jeopardizing the integrity of the KSHS.

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<sup>28</sup> Bill Wooten, Eastern Air Lines, “Florida Park is Monument to Koreshan Unity and Belief We Live Inside Earth,” circa 1960s, Koreshan Unity, Papers ca. 1887-1990, Koreshan State Historic Site, (SAF).

<sup>29</sup> “Another Shot Fired in the U.S. 41 Fiasco,” *Naples Daily News*, March 20, 1979.

<sup>30</sup> John and Ruth Rodney to Governor Robert Graham, March 26, 1979, box 13, folder 16, Florida, Office of the Governor (1979-1987: Graham), Governor Bob Graham’s issue correspondence, (SAF).

<sup>31</sup> JoAnn Robinson to Governor Robert Graham, April 2, 1979, box 13, folder 15, Florida, Office of the Governor (1979-1987: Graham), Governor Bob Graham’s issue correspondence, (SAF).

<sup>32</sup> Marguerite Lipps to Governor Robert Graham, March 29, 1979, box 13, folder 16, Florida, Office of the Governor (1979-1987: Graham), Governor Bob Graham’s issue correspondence, (SAF).

Since the U.S. Highway 41 controversy, the local community and visitors to the park have expressed more of an appreciation for the site's interpretation of Koreshan history. A useful source in gauging the public's opinion on the historic site is travel websites. Like visitor logs at a historic site or museums, travel blogs and websites provide a unique and sometimes critical truth to how the public views these sites. Fortunately for the KSHS, past guests praise the park as a must see destination when visiting southwest Florida. While most reviews refer to the camp grounds of the park, some travelers do comment on the historical interpretation of the historic settlement. According to one reviewer, the KSHS is a "surprise gem." A self proclaimed "religious history buff," the reviewer "loved finding the 1900 utopian religious commune," and commends the park rangers and volunteers for their eagerness in answering questions and informing guests on other background information on the Koreshan Unity.<sup>33</sup> In comparison, another reviewer explained that the KSHS "is not devoted to promoting the religious beliefs of the former community." Instead, the reviewer appreciated the wildlife and asked questions related to the site's grounds. Not everyone has had a positive reaction. According to one reviewer, the historic site is more geared toward preserving the native ecology than it is to preserving an accurate history of the Koreshan Unity.<sup>34</sup> As described by Thelen, each visitor tends to obtain different experiences with what they see based on their interests or their previous experiences.

Overall, the State of Florida and its Koreshan State Historic Site has played an important role in preserving Koreshan memory. Since 1961, Florida State Parks has allowed the public physical access to the grounds and buildings and fostered an historical interpretation that mainstreams this utopian community into a larger narrative of the development of southwest Florida. Like published scholarly works, the historic site has contributed towards general understanding of the Koreshan Unity and its members. Unlike history books and journal articles, the KSHS provides a more personal, firsthand experience where visitors can view original buildings and artifacts, attributing more humanistic qualities to these utopians. Rather than focus on the decline of the Koreshans, the KSHS has provided a different interpretation of this utopian community. As shown in various exhibits and buildings, the park portrays a more industrious

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<sup>33</sup> A Yahoo Contributor, "Travel Guides: Estero, FL, Koreshan State Historic Site," *Yahoo Travel*, [http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-2840135-koreshan\\_state\\_historic\\_site\\_fort\\_myers-i](http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-2840135-koreshan_state_historic_site_fort_myers-i).

<sup>34</sup> Sfharp, "Koreshan State Historic Site," *IgoUgo.com*, [http://www.igougo.com/attractions-reviews-b43381-Fort\\_Myers-Koreshan\\_State\\_Historic\\_Site.html](http://www.igougo.com/attractions-reviews-b43381-Fort_Myers-Koreshan_State_Historic_Site.html).

and self-sustaining group of people not only internally, but externally in the Fort Myers local community. At buildings such as the Art Hall, it is also explained to the public that the Koreshans were a culturally diverse group of people which the local community responded to in positive ways.

Even though the KSHS successfully portrays the social and cultural impact the Koreshans had on the southwest portion of the state, the site does have its share of disadvantages. For one, it does lack in explaining the impact the Koreshans had in American utopianism as a whole. Since the state has consciously avoided the ideological and utopian beliefs of the Koreshans in the KSHS's interpretation, the public cannot obtain a true sense of the historical significance of the Koreshan Unity not only at the local and state level, but at the national level as well. Why the state has chosen this pragmatic approach of interpretation is uncertain. Are state officials trying to play it safe by not introducing and associating a possible controversial theology to the state? Does the state doubt the public's ability in trying to fully understand the complexities of Koreshanity? As a historian, it is common sense to come up with these inquiries and to ask why state officials, who are more than likely not historians, have not pursued a more objective historical interpretation of the Koreshan Unity. By incorporating more of the Koreshan beliefs into the historical interpretation of the site, the public would be able to obtain a better understanding why the Koreshans performed the tasks they did in relation to their dream of utopia and why being a part of Southwest Florida society became an important aspect in Koreshan livelihood.

The state's tendency to portray the Koreshan Unity as a group that had a tremendous impact on a portion of Florida's history is also misleading. According to state officials, the Koreshan Unity contributed many "considerable" and positive influences to the southwest region of Florida. While the Koreshans did play a part in their local community, their influence was not necessarily as great as the state portrays. The people living in Fort Myers did not solely rely on Koreshan bread for sustenance and on Koreshan plays as their primary source of entertainment. Without the Koreshans, the southwest region of the state would still have existed. Rather than continue to portray the Koreshans as a dominating cultural force that overwhelmed Southwest Florida, state officials should focus on how the Koreshan Unity contributes to the dynamic heritage of Florida. Where else can you find Native Americans, pirates, mermaids, and utopians all in one state? While a humorous question to pose, this statement provides a more relevant



stance on how the Koreshan Unity should be more accurately portrayed and appreciated as a unique group of people who considered Florida their home.

While the KSHS's historical interpretation is less than perfect, its efforts to educate the public about the social and cultural aspects of these utopians should not be totally discounted. Instead, the KSHS should be recognized as another way in which a portion of Koreshan history has been preserved. Through historical analysis, exhibits, historical preservation, and the efforts of park rangers and volunteers, Koreshan memory is still alive. Even though the Koreshan membership disappeared in 1982 with the death of Hedwig Michel, the beliefs and history of the Koreshan Unity still live on today. Although most people would reject the notion that we all live inside the earth, they still gravitate toward learning about the KSHS community. In particular, it is their success as a self-sustaining community that holds the greatest public interest and it is that which has come to dominate the park service's historical interpretation.

## CONCLUSION

During the late-nineteenth century, Dr. Cyrus R. Teed established his own utopian community called the Koreshan Unity. Influenced by many different events, Teed became the charismatic religious leader his friends and family knew he would become. Although first recruiting followers proved difficult, Teed eventually gained more adherents once he moved from the confines of New York and into the midwestern city of Chicago in the 1880s. While there, the Koreshan Unity began to blossom as branches of the community started around the country. Whether interested in a communal or celibate way of life, or even a life devoted to the better understanding of God's universe, hundreds of people flocked to the Koreshan Unity as a safe haven from the instability showcased by a capitalistic-driven American society during the nineteenth century. Although a safe place for many Americans, in Chicago the Koreshan Unity still faced many hardships in the form of sensational journalism and local criticism. In 1894, Teed moved the Koreshan Unity to Estero, Florida, where another chapter began in the community's brief history.

During the late-nineteenth century, Teed and the Koreshans were able to establish a sustainable "New Jerusalem" in Estero. Urban pioneers themselves, they brought many of the cultural and social practices from the North and Midwest to this tropical location. Not only were they able to practice their utopian ideals in their established community, but they were able to start commercial and industrial sects of their community that influenced both the Koreshans and the local community in Fort Myers. The Koreshans even provided different forms of entertainment to the locals in southwest Florida. From concerts to plays, the Koreshans contributed to the cultural diversity of the area. While relations between the locals and the utopians initially remained on good terms, by 1906 the dynamic soured. As a result of the Koreshan Unity becoming involved in local politics, people in the Fort Myers area began to view the Koreshans as a potential threat to their way of life. After Teed's involvement in a physical

confrontation with a Fort Myers marshal spurred on by political agendas, the Koreshan Unity began to decline. Teed died in 1908, and so did the active movement to recruit new Koreshan membership.

Overall, the Koreshan Unity proved to be a unique utopian following. With its leader and its members heavily influenced by the religious and reform fervor of the nineteenth century, these utopians, like all others, sought a “heaven on earth.” Although founded on the same principles as many other American utopian communities of the time, the Koreshan Unity practiced various social and religious beliefs that set them apart. With beliefs such as Koreshanity and cellular cosmogony, Teed presented a relationship between religion, science, and social practices that no other utopians had previously done. If the universe could be understood, organized, and explained through science, other facets of life could be clarified and made better.

The Koreshans further complicate the American utopian historical narrative as a result of their major influences in Florida. A movement usually concentrated in the Midwest or New England, Florida was by no means the first location for a vision of utopia to be acted upon. The Shakers, for instance, had a presence in Osceola County around the same time the Koreshans moved to Estero. However, the Shakers were more “cloistered” than their counterparts.<sup>1</sup> Although he wanted to escape the negative press in Chicago, Teed mainly moved south to Estero as a means to spread out and grow his “New Jerusalem.” In the process, he did not urge seclusion to his followers. Instead, the Koreshans were often seen in public in Fort Myers and picnicking on Estero Beach (now Fort Myers Beach). Even though the relationship between the locals and the Koreshans worsened in the early-1900s, the urban and cultural influences the Koreshans brought to Florida became important not only at the local level, but state level.

In the end, the Koreshan Unity was a successful community. While the Koreshan membership numbers cannot even begin to compare to those of the Shakers and Harmonites, success should not be defined by generalized statistics and other trends of membership and longevity. Instead, the Koreshan Unity can be defined as “successful” based on the fact that Teed helped establish a “heaven on earth” for approximately 200 adherents. Even though Teed fell incredibly short of his goal of a worldwide following of 10 million, he still managed to

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<sup>1</sup> Russell H. Anderson, “The Shaker Community in Florida,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (July, 1959): 38.

spawn a small, but otherwise national presence. Although his utopian movement was relatively small, Teed still established a group of people who displayed nothing but utter faith in their Master.

Another aspect that has contributed to the success narrative of the Koreshan Unity is the State of Florida's involvement with the Koreshan State Historic Site (KSHS). Since 1961, the physical history of the Koreshan Unity has been accessible to the public. While the Florida State Parks does not necessarily propagate the Koreshan beliefs of cellular cosmogony and other utopian ideals, they enable the public to interpret and understand the importance the Koreshan Unity had in the Fort Myers and Estero area. Even though the Koreshan ideology may have become an ephemeral part of the Koreshan historical narrative at the KSHS, the state has made moves and decisions toward preserving the social history of this utopian community. While the public may not be visiting the site to convert to Koreshanity, Teed's vision of a utopian dream is still being circulated to hundreds of people each year. Although they may chuckle at the notion of us "living inside the earth," his voice, along with the other Koreshans, still lives on.

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