

INSIDE:



Will Naples students be a part of this world? Page 11

■ **FLORIDAYS:** Capt. Ray Bearfield scratches beneath the surface on mosquito spraying. Page 3

EXPRESS

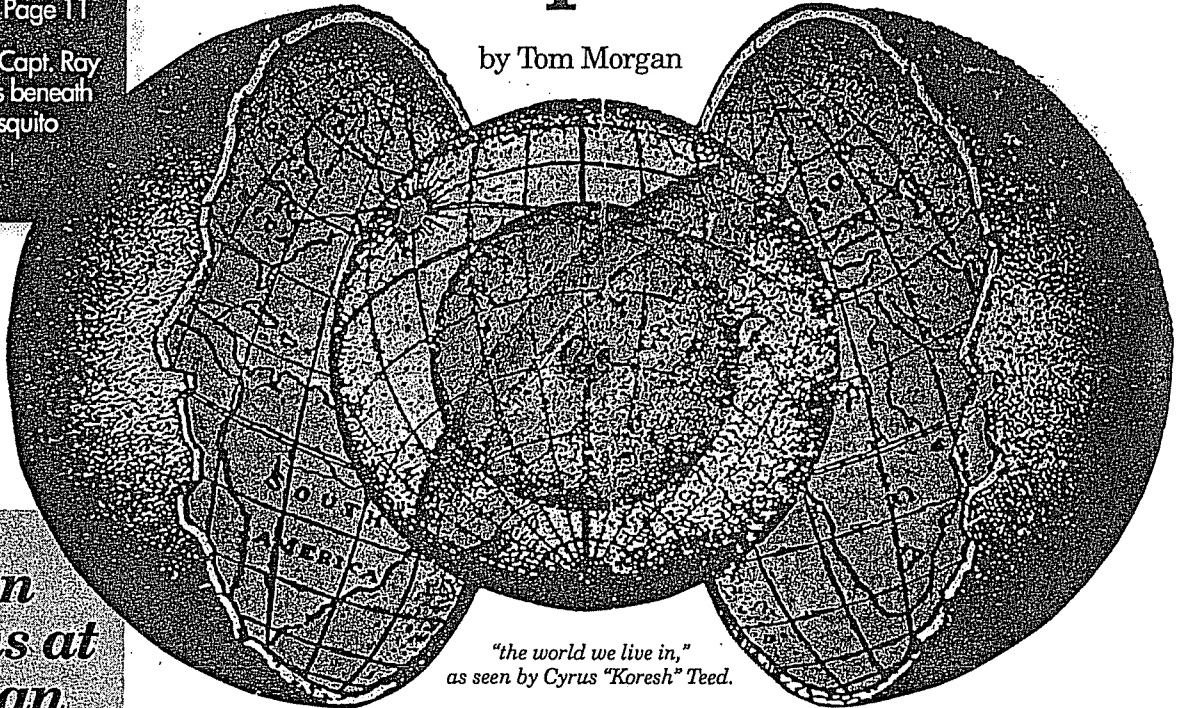
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The world outside-in on Naples beach

by Tom Morgan



"the world we live in," as seen by Cyrus "Koresh" Teed.

A vision remains at Koreshan State Park

THERE IS A definite sense, as one enters the partially restored compound at Koreshan State Park in Estero, of utopia. Walking beneath the arching branches of palms, pines and other trees and coming out to the central grounds, it is easy to imagine the botanical splendor that once must have been here.

This New Jerusalem envisioned by Dr. Cyrus "Koresh" Teed and begun by his followers may have fallen upon hard times, but the remains of their grand experiment are fascinating and inspiring, particularly considering the conditions under which they worked and the prejudice they

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It was March 18, 1897, a day which will live forever in Naples history, even if nobody now remembers it. A group of weary, sweating men had just proved to their own satisfaction and, more importantly, to the satisfaction of their leader - that piercing-eyed dominant person standing erect at Gordon's Pass - that the world's outside was in, not inside out.

The exercise undoubtedly had baffled all the 10 permanent Naples residents who lived in Palm Cottage, the Haldeman house and the massive and nearly new 20-room Naples Hotel up at 12th Avenue, South, and the beach.

The men had taken a set of three heavy mahogany and brass frames their leader called rectilineators and dragged them seven miles along the shining white sands of Naples beach. There they set up a frame, levelling and plumbing it for accuracy, then mounted another next to it, and a third, so they could sight along the tops and prove the central fact of the new "Cellular Cosmogony"...that we live inside a hollow world that curves up

at the edges and not down!

The upward curve was the central truth of a new religion, Koreshanity, named after its inventor Dr. Cyrus R. Teed, who claimed Koresh was the Greek form of his name. The religion merged Christianity with the new communism and just a hint that Koresh might be the second coming of Christ.

Teed's religion taught that the world is a hollow sphere and we're all inside, so China is straight overhead, or is that Australia? We can't tell because the sun gets in the way. The beach exercises "proved" his teachings, he said.

Born in upstate New York's Delaware County, in 1839, Teed studied "eclectic medicine," a do-it-yourself form of medical knowledge, under his uncle. He did so well he served as a surgeon with the Union army. After the Civil War he began to instruct himself in science and then formed his own religion based on what he called the "cellular cosmogony," the idea the universe is made up of cells and the world is just a big cell.

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Dr. Cyrus R. Teed (Koresh)

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Teed's own explanation of how to solve anything otherwise incalculable was, "The easiest way to find a solution is to jump to a conclusion." He moved from New York to Chicago, where his religion and its attendant idea of a communist sharing of the wealth went over big, especially with wealthy widows - some of whom later complained they had found themselves to be still widows but not wealthy.

An older resident of Bonita Springs who had lived in Chicago then,

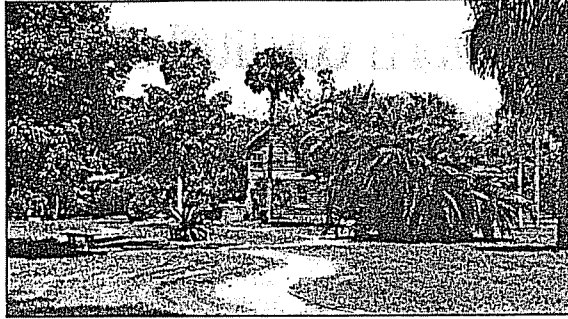
next door to the Koreshan cult headquarters, reported that he saw the police raiding the doctor's temple late one night and the doctor fleeing through the back door in his nightshirt. The old man gave no explanation for the raid except to say, "There had been complaints about what was going on." Apparently that was reason enough for police action.

Whatever the reason, Teed led an exodus of the faithful to Estero in 1893 where they hooked up with a Jr. Ted German gentleman named Gustav Damkohler, who held title to acreage from Estero to the Gulf of Mexico, including the south end of what is now Fort Myers Beach. His lands were later given to the colony.

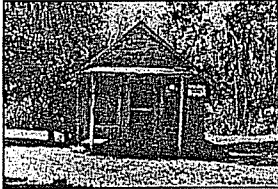
On that site Teed established the "New Jerusalem" and made no effort to deny he might just possibly be the second coming of Christ. He also made no surviving statement explaining his lady assistant "Victoria Dei Gratia."

His city dreams were vast with streets to be 300 feet wide, a symphony orchestra whose members included one of the Lucius Boomer family (famous as owners of New York's Waldorf-Astoria hotel), and plans for riverfront gardens to rival Babylon. Unfortunately, he soon ran into trouble - but not over his religion nor his proof on Naples beach that the world is really hollow. His troubles were more practical.

The Koreshans represented a bloc vote which threatened the Democratic political establishment and therefore was not trusted. The Fort Myers Press, as it then was, chronicled



Teed's home was centrally located on the well-manicured grounds of the Koreshan settlement.



In the beginning, the accommodations were rough and cramped, as evident at the membership cottage



In the Art Hall visitors can view this bust by an unidentified Koreshan artist and a painting by Moses Weaver detailing the grand plan for the New Jerusalem.

the threats and the faults of the Estero settlement so minutely and fully that the colony by 1906 had to set up its own steam-powered press and began printing its own newspaper, the American Eagle (still published twice yearly).

Then the "immortal" Koresh died on Dec. 22, 1908. His death was a problem for the faithful, who refused burial until the Lee County health officer required it. The story went that the leader was entombed in a tin bathtub in a brick vault at the southern end of Estero Island, with a faithful member of the colony sweeping the sands around it nightly so the "immortal's" footsteps might be seen if he walked in the night. There he remained until the great hurricane of Oct. 17, 1910, which swept vault and all away.

The faithful held on in dwindling numbers, led by Allen H. Andrews, editor of the Koreshan paper, and a distinguished botanist. He turned the paper into one of Florida's first plant journals and pushed for new growth such as mangos and the now-hated melaleuca, which he hailed as turning unusable wetlands into bird-sheltering tropical forests.

Andrews' varied interests included joining the Trailblazers, that brave group of 26 men in 10 touring cars, who set out to drive from Fort Myers to Miami along the uncharted route of the proposed Tamiami Trail. The trip took 11 days and brought worldwide publicity that helped Barron Collier's push to complete south Florida's first cross-state highway.

Andrews also helped Florida knowledge grow by publishing the papers of Dr. Henry Nehrling of Naples, whose botanical collection is now the Caribbean Gardens.

Andrews' most notable success was his campaign to get the cows off Florida roads. In those days cattlemen had control and under the "no-fence" law could let their cows roam across highways. If you hit one, you paid for it. Andrews' greatest satirical "Order of the Sacred Cow" in 1925 but only got the cows banned in the late 1940s.

Sadly, Andrews' greatest honor and worst tragedy came within a month of each other. The honor came first in January, 1948, with the award of the first Barbour medal for excellence in the aid of Florida horticulture. It was followed the next month by

his ouster as head of the Koreshan Unity. His newspaper was shut down, and the plant eventually burned. Andrews died soon after.

The changeover came after the arrival from Germany of a new convert to Koreshanity, possibly the first in 40 years. She was Hedwig Rose Michel Levy, who claimed to have discovered the religion while studying in a Frankfurt library.

As a personable, capable younger recruit - about 40 years old in a colony whose 12 surviving members were in their 70s - Levy was welcomed by Andrews, who turned over the operations to her while he went out on the road seeking garden news and pushing his paper.

In a lawsuit seeking to restore his position, Andrews said Levy had found some trustee stock in the colony safe and used it to remove him and vote herself into office. The stock gave whoever held it controlling power, and

the court ruled against Andrews, although Circuit Judge Frank Lynn Gerald admitted he could not go further into the argument because he couldn't tell where the religion began and the colony's communist corporation left off.

During this time Levy also filed for divorce from her German husband on grounds of desertion. He countered that she was the deserter because he had been in a British prisoner of war camp when she took the family's modest fortune and left for the

United States. The judge ruled the counter-complaint had been filed too late to be effective.

Hedwig Michel, as she was now known, guided the colony with a sure hand, selling the southern end of Fort Myers Beach for \$65,000 and trading off much of the Estero property to the state to become the Koreshan State Park. She died soon after, but she left Florida the great legacy of the Koreshan State Park, forever safe from the development which is raging unchecked all around it.

She also left a shrine to the memory of Koresh, who was perhaps the biggest fake ever to hit Florida. The only missing piece is a memorial on Naples Beach where his reclineators proved we live in a hollow world.

Footnote: This account of the founding and growth of the Koreshan colony at Estero by Tom Morgan was based on readings from Allen Andrews' autobiography "A Yank Pioneer in Florida," on Dr. Cyrus R. Teed's "The Cellular Cosmogony," and on Morgan's 44 years in Naples and Fort Myers (during which time he interviewed dozens of pioneers such as Andrews and Henry Silverfriend, the last Koreshan Unity survivors, along with Hedwig Michel and Circuit Judge Frank Lynn Gerald), six years study of the combined files of the Fort Myers Press and the Tropical News, and efforts as a founding member and former officer of the Collier County Historical Society and Collier County Museum.

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KORESHAN VISION *Continued from page 1.*

must have encountered.

"Dr. Teed was a genius," says Jo Bigelow, president of the still existing Koreshan Unity. "He was one of the first to say women had any sense, and this (settlement) was something that was done by individuals based on religious beliefs and scientific beliefs."

It was in 1893 - those days of long dresses and hot, starched collars - that the followers of Koresh began the building of their settlement. Before they were through they had established a self-sufficient community, complete with its own general store, printing plant, electric generator, laundry, bakery and shoe shop. Bridges of intricate design spanned the river, and tropical plants flourished on decorative mounds.

Despite the communistic structure of the settlement, life for the Koreshans was not all work and no play, Bigelow reported. An art hall served not only as a central gathering place but as the site of concerts, plays and other artistic endeavors, for Teed believed his faithful should be well rounded.

"He appealed to the intellectuals," Bigelow noted, "and some of those people were very accomplished."

The art hall is among those

buildings already restored to its former state, and visitors can ponder what it must have been like for those early settlers. A watercolor painting detailing the grand plan for the New

Jerusalem graces one end of the stage, while a replica of the hollow earth and the rectilineators used to try to prove that theory stands at the other.

"Dr. Teed had that (idea) from an illumination," Bigelow explained. "He'd built up a medical practice in Utica, N.Y., and one night he had this illumination. An angel appeared to him and told him secrets of the universe, including that we live on the inside of the crust of the world. The angel also said the Bible is written in symbols, and every so often a prophet is sent to interpret those symbols."

When Teed began to recount his illumination, he lost most of his patients, Bigelow continued, but the chance to address a metaphysical group in Chicago prompted more favorable response. From there it was on to



Florida for Teed and his converts.

For a time all went well, with building proceeding according to plan. The group was governed by Teed, who was referred to as the "sun," and a council named after the seven known planets. This celestial hierarchy continued with children termed "stars" and the leading lady known as the "moon."

With Teed's death, however, the halcyon days came to an end. Various splinter groups took off to re-settle elsewhere and eventually dissipated.

"After you had followed a genius, it was hard to settle for anything less," Bigelow explained.

The original pioneers who followed Teed and carved a

home out of a virtual jungle have all passed away. Still, the legacy of Koresh survives.

Hedwig Michel, who joined the community in the 1940s, began the task of keeping this spirit alive, Bigelow says, by

donating 305 acres of the community's property to the state. Today, the state park nestled along U.S. 41 and Corkscrew Road is a designated historic site, and the state department of natural resources has taken on the task of restoration.

"There's been a lot of deterioration over the years," acknowledged park manager Valinda Nichols, "but we've put a lot of effort into stabilizing the buildings when we can't yet restore them. Because it's listed on the National Historic Register, we have to have the architectural plans approved ahead of time. But we're getting some good funding now."

Currently restored and open to view are the art hall, the bake shop and the laundry and tool shed. A few smaller buildings

have been partially refurbished and can be glimpsed through the windows. This year, the DNR will tackle the founder's crumbling home.

The eventual plan, Nichols explained, is to restore all of the remaining buildings and recreate at least some of the intricate landscape. There is even some talk of re-establishing the decorative bridges.

Across the highway, Bigelow and the other members of the Koreshan unity are also working to keep Teed's grand experiment alive. In a circular building that recalls the religion's central tenet, they have gathered the books, pictures, furniture and personal belongings of the original settlers. Bigelow also talks of restoring the group's printing plant and creating a combination working plant and historical exhibit.

For a time, Teed believed he might have been the Messiah, Bigelow added, but eventually he realized he was simply another prophet.

Teed and his original followers may have been sorely disappointed when his person proved to be mortal. But there is, perhaps, some consolation in knowing his spirit is alive and well.

—Janina J. Birtolo

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