

Cyrus Teed

By Peter Hicks
Koreshan State Historic Site

1. Cyrus Read Teed was born on October 18, 1839 near Trout Creek, Delaware County, New York. He was the second son born into a family of eight children.

As early as 1637, Teeds had lived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. By 1757, they had migrated to Tompkins township in Delaware County, New York, settling near Trout Creek in an area that was known as Teedsville, fifteen miles from Walton. His father, Jesse Sears Teed, was born there on June 24, 1814 and died at the Koreshan Unity home in Chicago, Illinois on March 9, 1899.

On his mother's side, he was directly descended from John Read who came to America in 1630, settling in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. His great grandmother Lydia married the Reverend Oliver Tuttle of Bristol, Connecticut. His mother, Sarah Ann Tuttle was born on October 27, 1815 in Bristol, Connecticut and died at Moravia, New York, October 25, 1885.

Shortly after Cyrus was born, the family moved to New Hartford, New York on the land of grandfather Oliver Tuttle. At the age of eleven, Cyrus quit school and went to work on the tow path of the Erie Canal. His family wanted him to become a Baptist minister like his grandfather Tuttle, but Cyrus chose to follow another relative and began studying medicine with his uncle, Dr. Samuel F. Teed (a twenty-five year old allopathic physician) in Utica, New York. At this same time on April 13, 1859, he married his second cousin, Fidelia M. Rowe of Merideth, New York. Delia was the daughter of William and Polly Maria Tuttle Rowe.

2. On February 21, 1860, a son, Douglas Arthur Teed was born. Cyrus moved his small family to New York City in 1862, living in Brooklyn and continuing his medical studies.

He enlisted in Company F, 127th New York Infantry of the New York volunteers as a corporal on August 9, 1862 at the age of twenty-two. On April 12, 1863, he was assigned to Brigade Headquarters. While on the march near Warrenton Junction, Virginia on August 1, 1863, he suffered sunstroke which led to paralysis of his left arm and leg.

He was assigned to Ward 2, bed 71 at the General Hospital in Alexandria, Virginia where he was treated for sixty-one days until his release (August 7, 1863-October 16, 1863). He was granted a discharge from the army and returned to New York City to complete his medical studies at the Eclectic Medical College of the City of New York, graduating in February, 1868.

He returned to Utica and rejoined his uncle. Below their office, they hung a sign in foot high letters which said "He who deals out poison, deals out death". They were referring to drugs - a very busy pharmacy, the Watford Drug Store, an half block away shows no record of the Teeds ever writing a prescription. However, below the doctors' office was a tavern, and people found this reference to poison very humorous. This was a brief, happy time.

In 1869, he lived in Deerfield, just outside of Utica. Next to his home he set up a laboratory.

3. In the autumn of 1869, Cyrus had what he later referred to as his "Illumination". While working in his laboratory, he claimed to have changed lead into gold - alchemy. He called this knowledge the "Philosopher's Stone". Later that evening he had a vision in which he saw God in the form of a beautiful woman and learned the secret of the Universe and his place in it (Isaiah 11:10, Isaiah 44:28). The Koreshan God had a male-female aspect. Later Koreshan prayers would be to the Mother-Father God.

He was told that he would interpret the symbols of the Bible for the scientific age. The nature of the Universe was revealed to him. The Earth was enclosed and we live on the inside - the Cellular Cosmology (Isaiah 40:12). Others have held the hollow earth view before him - Dr. Edmond Halley, Sir John Leslie, John Cleves Symmes, Jules Verne in "Journey to the Center of the Earth" in 1864, and W.F. Lyons in "The Hollow Globe" in 1868. The experiment on Naples beach from March through April, 1897 was an attempt to prove the Cellular Cosmology.

These beliefs - about the nature of God and the nature of the Universe were very important to the Koreshans in later years. Annie G. Ordway became the helper promised to Cyrus in his illumination. He gave her the title of "dual associate". Women were major factors in the development of the Koreshan Unity. Evelyn Bubbett ran the printing house in Chicago and established a Woman's Mission there. "We live inside" was a popular way Koreshans addressed themselves.

4. The 1870's were unsettled times for Dr. Teed. Following his illumination, his medical practice declined and he was no longer able to support his family. He was known as the "crazy doctor". He moved to Binghamton, New York and established a practice there. He was aided by Dr. A.W.K. Andrews. Dr. Andrews and his wife Virginia became lifelong friends and could be counted among the first Koreshans.

In 1873 Cyrus and Dr. Andrews visited the communal home of the Harmony Society in Economy, Pennsylvania and were entertained by Father Henrici and the Board of Trustees. He saw first hand the everyday workings of a communal society, a model of celibacy and communism. Unfortunately, at this time Mrs. Teed's health began to fail.

From 1874-1876 he practiced medicine in Equinunk, Wayne County, Pennsylvania. By 1878, he was back with his parents in Moravia, New York. In the winter of 1878-1879 he had a successful practice at Sandy Creek (between Syracuse and Watertown) except people were slow to pay him. He edited a daily newspaper there called "Herald of the Messenger of the New Covenant of the New Jerusalem". ~~None of these have survived although a few articles were reprinted in the Flaming Sword on October 18, 1901.~~

In 1878 Dr. Teed was admitted to membership in the North Family of Shakers at Lebanon, New York. His contact with the Shakers and the Harmonists was laying a foundation for his own communal group.

During this time, he also practiced medicine in Binghamton, Trout Creek, Connorsville, and Deposit in Delaware County. By August 20, 1880 he was back in Utica and by the end of the year he had established a communal home in Moravia and was running the family mop business.

Members of this first group were his mother and father, his sister Zanetta, his sister Emma and her husband Albert E. Norton, his brother Oliver, Mrs. Sarah E. Paterson, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Merto, and Ellen and Ada Deane.

By this time, his wife was an invalid due to tuberculosis. She went to stay with her sister, Mrs. Wickham, in Binghamton. Her son went with her.

5. After two years the mop business failed. The communal home was also criticized when Mrs. Ellen M. Woolsey left her husband to join the group. It became necessary for Cyrus to leave Moravia and begin practicing medicine again. This time, he went to Syracuse, New York.

By 1883, his practice was thriving and he was joined by his brother Oliver, who had graduated from the Philadelphia National Eclectic Medical Association in 1868, and by his sister Emma. Their medical office "The Syracuse Institute of Progressive Medicine", located at 1 Wolf Block, West Onondaga Street, attracted the best people.

The good times came to an end on August 9, 1884 when he was sued by Mrs. Charles Cobb and her mother, Mrs. Willis of Camden, New York. He was accused of obtaining money from them by saying he was the second Christ.

Dr. Teed answered the suit by saying he considered the money a donation and that he would gladly return it. The amount was \$25.00 (\$5.00 from Mrs. Cobb's son's piggy bank) which was returned and the matter dropped. Cyrus gave a public lecture on August 31, 1884 titled "The Science of Immortal Life".

However, things were never to be the same in Syracuse and he soon left for New York City. His residence there was a third floor flat at 135th Street near 8th Avenue in a communal home with four ladies - one his sister and another his cousin.

Hard times forced the end of this small group. By 1886, he was not able to continue. Then he received an invitation to speak at the convention of the National Association of Mental Science in Chicago. Mrs. Thankful H. Hale, who had known Dr. Teed in New York, got him an invitation and also sent him money for the trip.

The convention was held at the Church of the Redeemer on Washington Boulevard from September 8th through September 13th. Dr. Teed spoke on Saturday and on Sunday, the last day of the convention, he gave a lecture entitled, "The Brain" followed by faith healing. He cured a woman who couldn't walk and was a great success.

Two days before the convention, on September 6, 1886 a communal home was organized in Chicago. In a very short time the Guiding Star Publishing House, the Assembly of the Covenant (Church Triumphant), and the World College of Life - a school of metaphysics - had been established, mostly with members of the Mental Science Group. Mrs. Annie G. Ordway, who was to be a key figure in following years, became the head of the Society Arch Triumphant (general membership) in 1887.

Dr. Teed's message was attractive to middle class, educated women. Another communal home was begun at 2-4 College Place, the corner of 33rd Place and Cottage Grove Avenue opposite Groveland Park. This building had been occupied by the Seventh Day Adventists. The Koreshans signed a three year lease.

6. 1890 began with Dr. Teed seeking to expand his community. Mrs. Mary Singer started a colony in California at 218-20 Noe Street in San Francisco. It was dissolved in 1892 and moved to Chicago with twenty-five people. Henry Silverfriend was sent to Economy, Pennsylvania to live with the Harmony Society for a year. It was a dream of Dr. Teed's to unify the many utopian communities into a "Confederation of Celibate Societies". He was in contact with Thomas Lake Harris of the "Brotherhood of the New Life" at Fountain Grove, near Santa Rosa, California, Frederick Evans of the Shakers, and John Duss of the Harmony Society. In the Spring of 1892, Koresh and three Sisters visited the Shakers. Annie Ordway was made a member of the North Family of the Shakers at Mt. Lebanon, New York.

Dr. Teed was described at this time as 5'6" tall weighing 165lbs. Up until 1891, he had never shaved. After that date, he was clean shaven and always wore spectacles. His hat size was 7 and his neck size was 15". He had a deep voice and a penetrating stare. He spoke in a forceful manner and his lectures and sermons rarely lasted less than two hours. In 1891, he began to write and refer to himself as Koresh.

On May 1, 1892, the Koreshans rented an estate at 99th and Oak in Washington Heights, Illinois that they named Beth Ophra (home of Gidion^{Judges} 6:11). There was a mansion and seven cottages on eight and a half acres of land. A printing office was established in what had been the barn. In later years, it would be remembered as a place with beautiful flower beds and tree lined walks. Two ponds were perfect for ice skating in the winter. And there was enough room for Annie Ordway to take over one of the cottages for her cats. At this time there were one hundred and ten members, of which eighty-three were women.

Two lawsuits were brought against Dr. Teed at this time - Miller V Teed, Case G 103382, Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois and Cole V Teed, Case G 103461, Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois. Both suits had the same attorney, William H. Hill, and the same wording, dealing with Dr. Teed's views on woman's rights. They were dropped, the first on March 13, 1894 and the second on June 23, 1897. On May 25, 1892, he was sued by A.A. Exline, Case G 104606, for \$200.00. This was settled for \$59.00 and costs. These suits were mostly harassment, but they had an effect.

In 1893, Koresh was riding a train from Pittsburgh to Chicago after a speaking engagement when a fellow traveler told him about a development for sale on Pine Island in Southwest Florida. Rail passes were available for those interested and Koresh was able to get three. On December 6, 1893 he got on the train from Chicago to Punta Gorda, accompanied by Annie Ordway and Berthaldine Sterling Boomer. They met a Mr. Whitehead who showed them the property at St. James City. The cost was too much for the Koreshans, \$150,000.00. They regretfully returned to Chicago. But before they left, Koresh left copies of the Flaming Sword at the cable station at Punta Rassa.

Gustave Damkohler came to pick up his mail and read the Flaming Swords. He wrote Koresh and invited him down. The letter was sent in a Watchtower of Zion envelope, covered with prophetic sayings, and even though Damkohler had written in German and it took time to get the letter translated, they felt it contained good news.

On December 26, 1893, Koresh, Mary Mills, Berthaldine Boomer, and Annie Ordway left Chicago for Punta Gorda. Mrs. Boomer sold some land that she owned and used the money to finance the trip. The party took the train from Chicago to Punta Gorda and then took a boat to Punta Rassa. They spent the night at the abandoned cattlemans' hotel there and were met by Damkohler and his son Elwin the next morning. Damkohler borrowed a boat (the "Guide") from a friend and they sailed on to Mound Key where they ate supper. Then they transferred to two rowboats to proceed up the Estero River, arriving at what is now Bamboo Landing at 10:00PM on January 1, 1894. On January 7th, Dr. Teed spoke at the Baptist Church in the afternoon and evening. IN Ft. Myers,

They stayed with Damkohler for six weeks, and he agreed to sell his 320 acres to the Koreshans. Title was transferred on November 19, 1894. Meanwhile, the first group of Koreshans left Chicago on January 11th and arrived on January 20th (five people), followed by a group of twenty who left Chicago on January 31 and arrived February 6th. The new colony was in full swing. Dr. Teed also bought land from William T. Dodd in 1894 at what was to become Horseshoe Bend (Lee County Closed Index of Deeds, L-Z Grantee from 1887 - July 1, 1922). Dodd's house had fallen apart and was known as Skeleton House. Later, the Koreshans put their first cemetery there.

7. The Florida colony grew and became more important than Chicago. On September 23, 1903 the Koreshan Unity was incorporated using the structure of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey as its model. Capital stock in the amount of \$1,000.00 was issued with Evelyn Bubbett having 45 shares, Henry Silverfriend having 45 shares, and Dr. Teed having the remaining 10 shares for a total of 100 shares. Later, capital stock was increased to \$200,000.00 with Dr. Teed having 289 shares, a majority.

On November 17, 1903 the last Koreshans left Chicago, bringing with them fifteen train car loads of possessions and equipment. There were two hundred people at Estero as 1904 began. On September 1, 1904 a meeting was held to incorporate Estero. The Koreshans had fifty-eight registered voters, many more than the twenty-five needed. At that time there were forty-nine

Republican voters and four hundred forty-six Democrats in the county. One hundred ten square miles of land was included in Estero, eight of them water. Between 1894-1908, the Koreshans acquired 5,736 acres of land at a cost of \$3,310.

Businesses at Estero included; Utilities and Electrical Works, Sculpture and Concrete Works, Tin Works, Mattress Making Shop, Hat and Basket Weaving Shop, Shoe Shop, Blacksmith Shop, Print Shop, Laundry, Dining Hall, Saw Mill, and Boat Works. They bought a furniture plant in Bristol Tennessee in 1906 for \$75,000.00 and were negotiating with the government of Honduras for a grant of 200,000 acres of land for colonization. They bought the San Carlos Hotel in St. James City as a possible site for the World College of Life. However, it burned down on July 26, 1905 while it was being remodeled. Acreage on Mound Key was bought from Frank Johnson.

Political problems arose and the American Eagle newspaper was begun June 7, 1906. The Koreshans felt that they weren't getting their fair share of road taxes and ran a slate of candidates in the election of 1906. They were prevented from running in the Democratic primary because ^{they caucused} separately and they had voted as a block for Teddy Roosevelt in the 1904 election. It began as fun with the Koreshan band playing and the newspaper attacking the other candidates, but this changed on October 13, 1906.

While meeting the 1:30PM Atlantic Coast Line train from Baltimore, a group of Koreshans got into a fight in front of R.W. Gillams grocery store in Ft. Myers. Dr. Teed tried to break it up, but was attacked by town Marshal S. W. Sanchez. Dr. Teed was injured and arrested along with Richard Jansch and Claude Rahn. They were taken to the Lee County Bank at the corner of 1st and Hendry Street where they posted bond of \$10.00 each. They chose not to return for trial and the matter was dropped. However, Koresh's condition from the beating worsened as time went on and was believed to be the cause of his death two years later.

He died on December 22, 1908 (the Winter Solstice). Many of his followers believed that he would be resurrected on Christmas Day. Annie Ordway returned to Estero from Washington, D.C. where a new Koreshan colony had been begun. Dr. J.E. Brecht pronounced him dead and made the Koreshans bury him. He was entombed at the southern end of Estero Island on December 27, 1908.

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Koreshan Unity
Biography