

B0188
COPY-3
AC-0048

Koreshan community members' letters recount wreckage of hurricanes

Winds of the Past



The young fellows in the canoe were probably happier than adults in the Koreshan commune following the 1936 hurricane — floating down the street was a treat for them, not for the folks who owned the waterlogged car at front and the delivery truck barely visible at right rear.



Near tidal waves and mountains of sand they brought in from the gulf in a devastating 1910 hurricane took their toll on this home on Estero Island owned by the Koreshan Unity. Photos courtesy of Koreshan Unity Foundation archives



This rubble was all that was left of Koreshan leader Dr. Cyrus Teed's tomb after a fierce hurricane in 1921.

As 1997 storm season approaches, locals can learn from eyewitnesses

■ Hurricane Section, 5-8A

By RACHEL KEARNS
Staff Writer

To a layman, there's no accounting for the winds and the weather, high atmospheric pressure and high tides that devastate like a wall of water.

Not that it makes much more sense to weather pros who make their predictions based on such scientific stuff as Nino currents, millibars and cumulo-nimbus clouds.

But if you're a betting person, it sure looks like we're long overdue for a killer storm to hit Southwest Florida this year. We were the target of direct hurricane hits — right in the eye of the storm — in 1910, 1921, 1935, 1936 and 1960, says Sean Milks, operations officer at the Koreshan Unity Foundation.

If you're laying odds, lay in a supply of canned food, batteries and bottled water and get set for the big blow. This could just well be the year.

Have a healthy fear, even with today's sophisticated early warning system and shelters on high and dry ground. Learn from horror stories of past storms written by members of the Koreshan Unity in Estero, its archival foundation maintaining an extensive — if not the only — eyewitness account of hurricanes that struck here early in the 20th century.

Imogene Bubbett, member of the Koreshan commune that thrived in Estero just after the turn of the century, wrote of the ferocious 1910 hurricane to her sweetheart (later her husband) Claude Rahn, then living in Maryland. Her first letter is dated Oct. 23, 1910, six days after the hurricane took dead aim on south Lee County

Disaster stickers become hot ticket in North Naples

By RACHEL KEARNS
Staff Writer

Maybe it's because of heightened publicity, maybe because hurricane season is drawing close, but North Naples residents have been coming in droves to pick up disaster stickers from the sheriff's office substation.

The program got off to a slow start, with only 350 of the free decals picked up the first three weeks they were available. But now more than 3,000 are in the hands of residents of the area, who will need the identifying seals on their cars to re-enter their neighborhood after evacuating in the face of an emergency.

See **STICKERS**, Page 10A

on Oct. 17, 1910.

"The terrific storm that led up to the final crisis, which was about midnight when the Planetary Court (a women's dwelling in the commune) was blown off its foundation, was accompanied with such awful crashes and shrieks and moans. It seemed

See **PAST**, Page 10A

BONITA BANNER
5/24/97 P. 1

PAST

Continued from 1A

as if the house would crush us all to death any minute and oh, the long hours of agony waiting for daylight.”

Imogene — her letters were signed with her nickname “Gene” — wrote to Claude Rahn again on Nov. 2, 1910, referring to a home the commune owned on Estero Island (Fort Myers Beach).

“The old piano is buried in the sand with just the keys sticking up. The Island people saved all their clothes. But they had the terrible experience of watching the waves roll higher and higher until they burst into the house and washed the front side entirely away.”

“Gene” Bubbett finds just a little humor, even in the face of ruin wrought by the storm. She writes to Claude: “You would laugh if you could see our bed, rather bedstead. You remember the desk we used to use for the typewriter; well, we have put Mother’s trunk next to that, then the table that was in front of the curtain in the corner. Then we pile books on the trunk to make it even with desk and the table. That is our bed, not very comfortable, but then it had a roof over it which we were very thankful for.”

By Oct. 25, 1921, Gene and

Claude had left the Koreshan commune in Estero, so it was left to her mother Evelyn to inform them of another hurricane that had struck the area. (Hurricanes weren’t given names in that era.) The 1921 storm was not as bad as the one in 1910 which, said Sean Milks of the Koreshan Unity Foundation Inc., was about as bad as 1960’s Donna which struck here with winds estimated at 150 miles an hour and took three lives, two men washed out to sea and another suffered a heart attack in the storm’s aftermath.

The Koreshans in Estero were devastated in October of 1921 that a hurricane-spawned tidal wave washed away the above-ground tomb of commune founder Dr. Cyrus Teed. He had died in 1908 at a cottage on Estero Island and was buried nearby.

Evelyn Bubbett wrote her son Lawrence, daughter and son-in-law about a male member of the Koreshan commune who “saw it (the tomb and cottage alongside) struck by an immense wave about 7 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 25 as he stood in the door of the cottage, with the water rushing in volumes and him trying to keep the door open so the water would not strike the house broadside and carry it away. It would come in at the front door and go out the back door ’til it rose to his armpits and by that time he was almost exhausted and chilled to the bone.”

Evelyn’s letter describes neighborliness of those living on Hickory Island who boated over in fierce winds to rescue Koreshans trying to save “the Master’s” tomb. They looked for “the receptacle the Master was in,” but to no avail. Though it’s said some of Teed’s bones (and his skull) were recovered, leaders of the Koreshan Unity Foundation say they have unearthed no clear written evidence of such a discovery — or what was done with remains if they were found. However, Teed’s headstone was found among wreckage of the tomb; it now is on display at foundation headquarters at the northeast corner of U.S. 41 and Corkscrew Road.

Among the mother and daugh-

ter’s recountings of the horrors of nature’s watery wrath and its miserable aftermath there is a poignant request from Imogene Bubbett to Claude Rahn. Perhaps it gives hope that life — and a certain amount of healthy vanity — go on when the dark clouds clear.

“Well, my dear, when you wanted to get something for me,” she wrote on Nov. 2, 1910, “I thought perhaps you would replace my hand mirror. I lost it in the storm and I miss it very much. Now just get the simplest kind of one, won’t you Sweetheart? I would not have allowed you to get me even that, only you insisted so, and I could not resist you.”