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Koreshan Unity Settlement

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Background Information

Koreshan Unity Settlement in Estero housed between 1893 - 1961 a unique religious community that advocates the following lifestyle: communal living, communal ownership of property; farming, cottage industries, publishing, botanical pursuits, and cultural activities that include cultivation of the fine arts and music. They had a peculiar spiritual belief, that the earth is concave and we exist on the inside of the earth. The promulgation of celibacy and division of its governing council on a particular heirarchical structure based on the number seven are other curious beliefs followed by the Koreshans. The entire complex has an underlying mathematical precept that draws on a higher spiritual unity, in which there are several days of creation and belief that God has distinct seven wills, which are used to bind man to God, whom the Koreshans believe, also, has seven wills. They published their beliefs in *The Flaming Sword*, a religious magazine, *The American Eagle*, a newspaper, and in Koresh's private writings published through Guiding Star Publishing House. Koresh's strong belief in the mystic talismanic quality of the number seven extends even to placement of buildings, and division of his planetary court into seven leading ladies who made up the Planetary Council but referred in all matter to Koresh and his wife Victoria - Board of Directors of the Koreshan Unity.

Dr. Cyrus Reed Teed, or Koresh, had a specific game plan in mind when he built his community based on the number seven, everything inside and outside must unite to form a center of spiritual force. The buildings include an Art Hall, a Planetary Court, the Founder's Home, a bakery, Vesta Newcomb's cottage, a Membership Cottage and a mini complex of a tool shed, laundry and electric generator building, or power house. This preoccupation between mathematics and divine order is best exemplified in a painting of *The New Jerusalem* in The Art Hall by Moses C. Weaver, donated to the Koreshans in 1925. It illustrates the Holy City as the wellspring of spiritual force and foundation of peace in which Koresh devoutly believed. "Squares, diagonals and circles detail principal streets, a luminous band runs from east to west divides the painting into two, and signifies there will be no night; twenty-four roads meet the same number of terminals; the interior temple is surrounded by six structure all connected by colonnades into a central structure which stands on a circular island 1600 feet in diameter. A crystal sea 300 feet wide surround the temple and divides the sacred and secular ground. Around the water an octagonal wall is built where an administrative building called the Arcadium stretches over a mile long." (From exhibit).

The Art Hall, built in 1905, also serves as a meeting place for concerts, plays, and general discussions. In addition to the painting of *The New Jerusalem* that illustrates a circular cosmogony, the room has a hollow globe which opens up to show a hollow earth made of gases in which circle the sun, moon, stars, and planets. To the left of the globe is an instrument call a rectilineator built by Pullman Works of aged mahogany and brass for Dr.

Teed. It was used in the great experiment of 1896 in which he sought to prove the earth is concave. To the far left, a banner proclaims that Koreshanity defends the faith of the Jew (Old Testament) and the Christian (New Testament). Around the corner from the Art Hall is The Planetary Court, made up of seven bedrooms which housed the governing council, named after the seven known planets. In this order, the children are stars, the leading lady the Moon and Dr. Teed the Sun - Koreshan Unity had a well structured familial base. The bedrooms were used for relaxation and sleeping as they had no closets due to taxation of home rooms; therefore, clothing was stored in chests and trunks. An old copy of the Bible, antique furniture, rugs and old fashioned pitchers and washbowls gave the place a musty, authentic veneer.

The centrally located third building, an impressive two story brownstone structure served as the Founder's Home. It was heated by two wood burning stoves and divides into a series of rooms with two interior stairs that access the living units on the second floor. The entrance has been blocked for further renovation, but a notice board depicts the lineage of Dr. Reed and his core family of believers. At the south end of the trail from Dr. Reed's quarters, in an area marked by four large rocks: the foundation of the Dining Hall. An impressive three story structure that served as both dining hall and place of assembly, it had a seating capacity of two hundred and twenty-five. In 1949 the structure had to be pulled down as it constituted a fire hazard. Close to the Dining Hall lies the grave of Hedwig Michal (1892-1982), president and spiritual leader of the Koreshan Unity which proclaims an interesting epitaphy "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for Humanity" (from exhibit). Like his life, his death too was idiosyncratic-laid out for burial on the beach his body disappeared, snatched up and whirled away in the throes of a tropical hurricane.

Around the grave, the trail winds to a beautiful arboretum with softly flowing vines beyond which lies an old fashioned Bakery capable of baking 500-600 loaves of bread daily. They planted a tropical garden to landscape the grounds of their settlement and to produce exotic fruits for internal consumption. Additionally, they developed a brisk market in jams and jellies to sell to the local community. Close by is Vesta Newcomb's cottage, it now houses an exhibit for several old photographs: those of the settlement, its founder, a picture of the rectilineator, articles on Koresh's philosophy of the seven wills of God and Man, and copies of The Flaming Sword and Koresh's writings.

The last part of the trail constitutes a mini complex: a tool shed, which contains lathes, drills, presses, shapers, power saws, grinding machines, emery wheels, a forge and braising tools. The laundry also served as a storage for agricultural implements and a printing press, powered by steam, the laundry employed six people and served the settlement's two hundred members. The Power House, built in 1908-1909 was constructed of corrugated metal sides and roof and housed an electric generator: most of this equipment was sold in 30's and 40's to help maintain the settlement.

Many of the buildings the Koreshans erected still remain, and have been preserved by the State of Florida to their original appearance during the Golden Years 1904-1907. The state also conducts guided tours that enhance our perspective of this local religious community.

Lesson Plan Outline

Grade Level: 7

Time: 50 minutes

Geographic Theme/Concept:

Development of an understanding of local communal living religious sects.

Generalization/Overview:

Presentation of salient features of this peculiar religious sect.

Materials/Resources:

- Information on the settlement
- pictures of the buildings, grounds
- hollow concave globe that exemplifies Koresh's religious belief
- pictures of vertebrates identified at Koreshan
- Map of it's location in Lee County.

Objectives/Goals:

Students find the location of Koreshan Unity settlement in Florida.

They learn the meaning of communal living religious sects. List examples of others.

Identify the main points of Koresh's religion. Compare and contrast it with other religions.

Procedures:

1. Initiating Activity: Teacher defines communal living religious sects.
2. Questions students information base, to see if they can identify common features.
3. Establish criteria on these kinds of religious sects.
4. State Koresh's personal philosophy, give class the main features of his religion.
5. Strategies: Divide students into groups: each with a recorder and spokesperson, make each group choose one of Koresh's beliefs and analyze it, state why they think it is good or bad. (They need to give at least three reasons.) Each group presents their material to the class.
6. Culminating Activity: Each Group leader writes down one main point on the board, class votes on whether it is a good or bad belief, using "G" or "B".
7. Class votes by counting the G's and B's on their decision about Koreshan Unity Settlement.

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