

Construction of Tamiami Trail Cost Millions in the '20s; Put South Florida on the Map

by Sue Roper

The historic Tamiami Trail runs between the Koreshan State Historic Site and the Koreshan Library/Museum at Estero. Most Florida tourists and new residents call it U.S. 41 and in Fort Myers, it's Cleveland Avenue.

The only U.S. highway between Tampa on Florida's west coast and Miami on the east coast, is best known as U.S. 41, but long-time Floridians call it "The Trail." It is one of the State's most important highways and opened up south Florida to thousands of new residents and the tourist industry.

Many Florida visitors by-pass it for I-75, a few miles to the east, to reach "Alligator Alley," a stark road that cuts a straight path across the Everglades from Naples to Dade County.

Trail Touches Base

The Trail meanders near the coast from Tampa through busy Bradenton, Sarasota, Punta Gorda — rails end when the Koreshans came to Estero in 1894 — Fort Myers and Naples where it turns sharply east on its way to Miami.

Near its final destination the Trail makes a wide bend because, according to legend, it was built from Naples east and Miami west, and the two ends would have bypassed each other.

First talked about in 1915 by a Captain J.F. Jaudon of Miami, president of the Chevelier Corporation, owner of vast acreage in northern Monroe County, the road was delayed by World War One.

No Survey Here

Jaudon had proposed a road across the trackless Everglades — haunt of Indians, Bald Eagles, panthers, bears and exotic birds. The thought stirred the imagination — the idea of driving a car where only Indians and U.S. soldiers in the Seminole Wars had trod was a contemporary version of "Wagons, Ho!"

Politics and wealthy individuals such as Barron Collier (for whom Collier County is named) entered the picture with visions of cash registers ringing in their heads. But it wasn't until April 4, 1923 that a cavalcade of ten cars (nine were Fords) left Estero on their epic journey across the 'Glades.

Trail Blazers

They called themselves "The Trail Blazers" because the proposed road had been termed the Tamiami Trail since 1917. The adventurers ranged from 15 to 65 years of age and employed two Seminole Indian guides to lead them across the wild Everglades.

They started from Tampa and their arrival in Fort Myers on April 3 was duly celebrated. William R. Spear, editor emeritus of The Fort Myers News-Press, was at the time a young reporter for the Fort Myers Tropical News (an early local newspaper) and covered the gala event.

Koreshans Made Trek

On April 4, they picked up four men at Estero. They were: Koreshans Frank S. Lewis (the only Trail Blazer to keep a daily record of their cross-the-Everglades odyssey), Alfred Christensen, Charles Hunt and Allen Andrews, editor of The American Eagle, the Koreshan newspaper.

Lewis and his wife, Anna, later retired to the little white bungalow just north of the Koreshan Library/Museum. Their harrowing journey took much longer than anticipated, ending April 21 in Miami.

The Trail Blazers proved an apt name — although they encountered none of the hazards of the wagon trains crossing the waterless plains and rugged mountains to colonize the American West.

Mud, Bugs and Heat

What they faced, according to Lewis' diary, published in the April 22 Miami Herald, was mud and mire, fire, heat and bugs, cypress swamps and rough palmetto prairies. They became lost and were reduced to searching for potable water and hunting wild game.

A survey crew from a lumber camp

rescued them and brought supplies and large cans of gasoline. By this time, the trek had attracted the national news media, and later in their trip, a plane sent by the Miami Chamber of Commerce dropped welcome bread and canned goods to the hungry pioneers.

The Miami Herald Reports

But they drove on, braving the swamps and heavy marl until they reached the Miami end of the grade. Finally, according to Miami Herald files, "seven muddy Model T's chugged down Flagler Street (a major city street) to a reception at the waterfront park."

They were singing their theme song to the tune of "Tipperary" — beloved of the British Tommy — but with these words:

"'Tis a long way to Miami
It's a long way to go.
It's a long way to Miami, o'er a trail
we did not know.
Goodbye Fort Myers, Estero and
Naples, too.
'Tis a long way to Miami,
But we went right through!"

Garden Club Celebration

In 1982 Periwinkle Garden Club, Fort Myers, re-enacted a portion of the local celebration. Antique cars paraded down the Trail from the Fort Myers Historical Museum (in the old downtown railroad station) to the just-opened Bell Tower Mall at Daniels Road, access to I-75 from the Tamiami Trail.

The club dedicated a large, elevated historical marker in the presence of Grover Hackney of Tampa — the last surviving "Trail Blazer" and grand marshal of the parade.

A host of local and state dignitaries and garden club officials from Miami and Tampa were special guests. A congratulatory telegram from President and Mrs. Ronald Reagan was read. At the gala reception which followed, Hackney told many a tale and sang the Trail Blazer song for the invited guests.

62 Years Ago

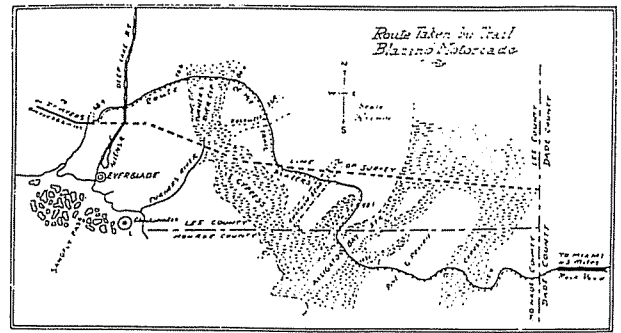
Spear, who spoke during the ceremonies, said, "It is difficult today (1982) to conceive that as late as 1920 well within the lifetime of older inhabitants, there was no road from Punta Gorda to Fort Myers or to Naples and Miami."

The Trail, as we know it today, was literally blasted from the floor of the Everglades with 20-tons of explosives at an estimated cost of \$13 million in 1920 dollars.

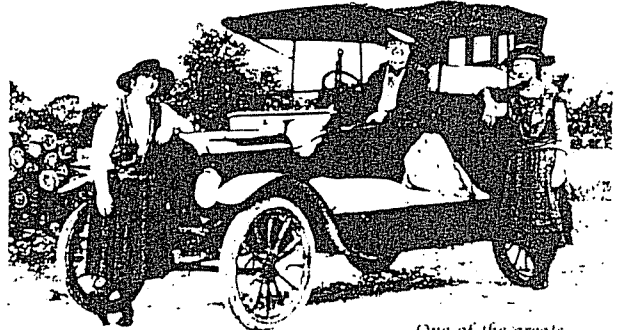
Two Miles A Month

According to Spear, who was assigned to cover the early construction of the Trail: "Road building in the 'Glades required drilling holes for dynamite in the solid underlying rock; loading and setting the blast; dredging up the loosened rock to form a grade; then leveling, scarifying and paving this grade. The maximum rate of progress was two miles per month."

One of the "walking dredges" used in the Trail's construction is at the Collier-Seminole State Park just east of Naples. A Park Ranger who has studied the building of this road has a talk with some very interesting old slides which he showed at a Monday Morning Conversation at the Koreshan Library/Museum recently.



This map of the route taken by the first group to drive automobiles across the Everglades in April 1923 is taken from "A Yank Pioneer in Florida" by Koreshan Allen Andrews, one of the Trail Blazers who made the history.



One of the area's first cars.

The "Trail Blazers" were not the only venturesome Koreshans! Women in the Koreshan settlement had equined and mastered the art of driving a motor car early on. The Koreshans owned some of the first automobiles in Lee County — a welcome change from sailboats and horse and buggy.

Rare Photo Postcards Sold only at Library/Museum

Sepia-toned Koreshan post cards made from original photographs in the Koreshan Library/Museum archives are popular with collectors, students, historians, winter residents and visitors.

Available only at the Koreshan Library/Museum at Estero, the cards are sold individually, in packaged sets of 20 different cards or a complete collection of four sets. No duplications are in any set.

The historic postcards show life at the Koreshan's turn-of-the-century settlement at Estero. Now the Koreshan State Historic Site, its 10 acres with old-style Florida buildings, is one of the first Lee County properties listed on the prestigious National Register of Historic Places.

The Koreshan Unity Foundation headquarters in the "World's College of Life" building, 8661 Corkscrew Road, Estero, is just east of the Tamiami Trail (U.S. 41) opposite the entrance to the

Koreshan State Historic Site. The building houses the Koreshan Library/Museum open to the public year-round from 1 to 4 p.m. weekdays for personalized talks given by staff members.

The property is owned by The Koreshan Unity Foundation, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to the preservation of Koreshan history.

Many 100-year-old books covering a wide range of topics from medicine and science to Waverly novels, and horticulture are in the stacks in the library.

They may not be handled because of their present condition. Some unusual pieces of Koreshan furniture and artifacts are on display.

Organized groups accommodated with prior arrangement.

A free-will donation is asked.

The building can also be reached via I-75 at Exit 19-W.

—Honoree of the—

Original Tamiami Trail Blazers

Commemorating Opening of
The Edison Bridge, Fort Myers, Fla.
(link in Tamiami Trail)
Feb. 11, 1931

List of the Original Trail Blazers

Maurice Ayer.	Russell Key.
A.H. Andrews.	Frank S. Lewis.
Oris E. Chapin.	George B. Prime.
J.P. Casden.	Cyril Shawcross.
Alfred Christensen.	George P. Smith.
George W. Dunham.	Clark Taylor.
Fred C. Garmon.	Milton D. Thompson.
Grover C. Hackney.	Frank Whitman.
W. Stanley Hanon.	L.A. Whitney.
*Fred B. Hough.	L.J. VanDuyf.
Chas. H. Hunt.	

*Little Billie and Abe Lincoln.
(Billie Cornpachee) (A.S.umbachee)
Seminole Indian Guides.

* (Deceased) (over)

Why the Tamiami Trail Blazers?

SEVENTY YEARS ago the fate of the famous Trail was sealed. How little! (Spear's correspondence with Lewis the "center Koreshan" is published in the book "The Trail Blazers" by Allen Andrews, with program notes and historical notes. Complete information may be had from the office of the Koreshan Unity Foundation, 8661 Corkscrew Road, Estero, Florida. Telephone 335-1111. It is the hope of the author that this book will be the first of many to be published in the series "The Trail Blazers" by Allen Andrews, editor of "The American Eagle".

During the latter part of the 19th century, as the Koreshan settlement was made on April 18, 1894, the first group of automobiles to cross the Everglades was made up of ten cars, nine of which were Fords. The cars were driven by the "Trail Blazers" and were accompanied by two Seminole Indian guides. The trip was a long and arduous one, and it was not until April 21, 1923, that the cars reached Miami. The trip was a landmark event in the history of Florida, and it was the beginning of the Tamiami Trail. The trail was built by the Florida State Road Department, and it was the first road to be built across the Everglades. The trail was built by the Florida State Road Department, and it was the first road to be built across the Everglades. The trail was built by the Florida State Road Department, and it was the first road to be built across the Everglades.

If it is not too late for a request to be made, the Koreshan Unity Foundation, 8661 Corkscrew Road, Estero, Florida, would be glad to supply you with a copy of the book "The Trail Blazers" by Allen Andrews, editor of "The American Eagle". The book is available for \$2.00, and it is a must for anyone who is interested in the history of Florida. The book is available for \$2.00, and it is a must for anyone who is interested in the history of Florida. The book is available for \$2.00, and it is a must for anyone who is interested in the history of Florida.

1988

This postcard type memento was given to people attending the opening of the Edison Bridge.