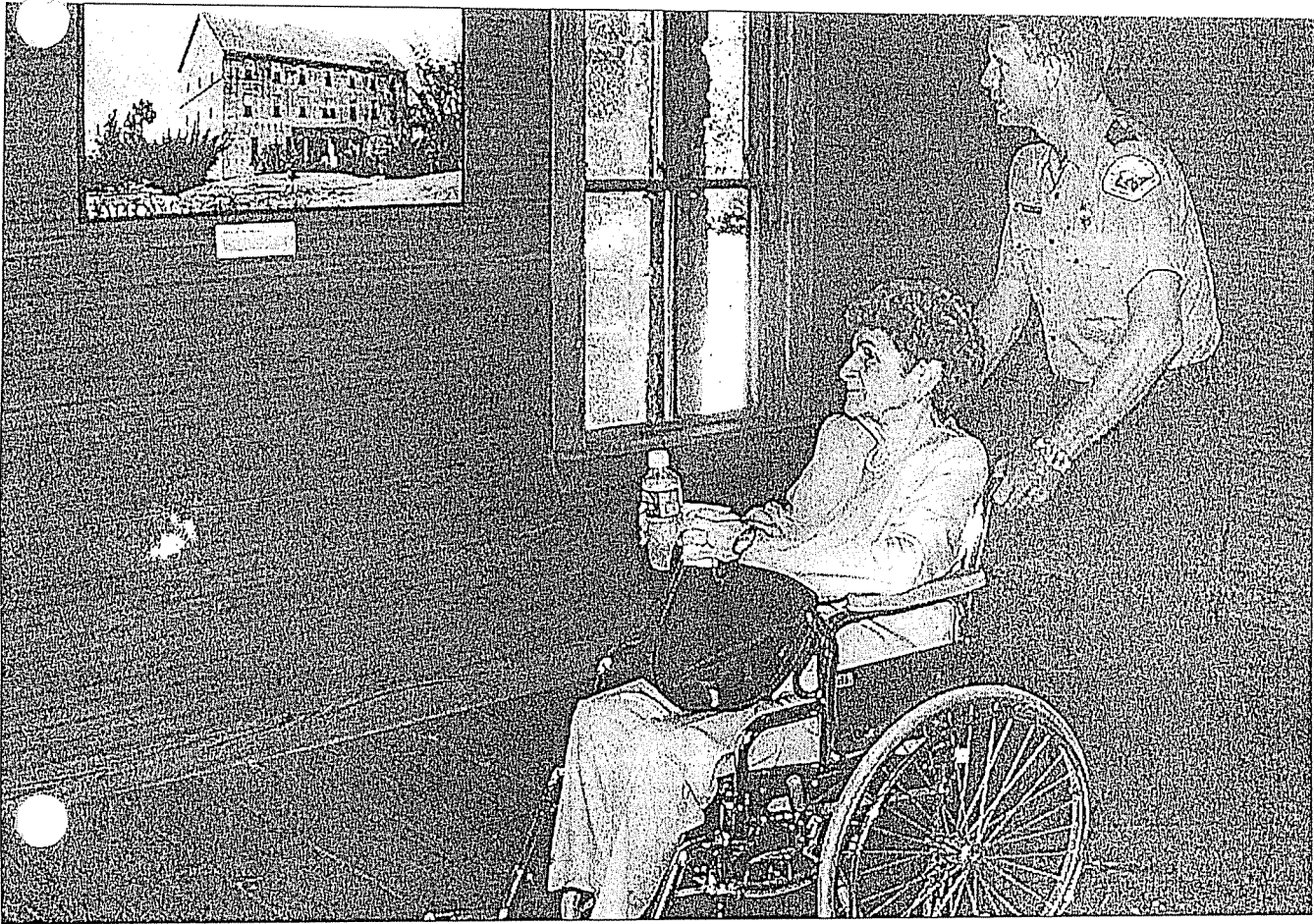


Bonita / Collier



ON DISPLAY: Jo Bigelow, left, president of the Koreshan Unity Foundation, tours an exhibit of old photos Thursday in the Founder's House at the Koreshan State Historic Site in Estero. Earlier, the foundation officially donated artifacts from the Koreshan settlement to the state.

Photos by
MARC BEAUDIN/
News-Press

Koreshans donate artifacts to park system

Precedent-setting gift hinges on how items are handled by state

By **ANDI ATWATER**
News-Press staff writer

ESTERO — Perhaps even more interesting Thursday than Bonita Springs Historical Society president Jane Hogg dressed as the last survivor of the Koreshan settlement was the first-of-its-kind agreement between the state and the Koreshan Unity Foundation.

In a precedent-setting conveyance agreement, the foundation essentially handed Florida State Parks more than 900 artifacts belonging to the original Koreshans that settled in Estero in the late 1800s.

What makes this agreement special, though, is the six-year factor.

"It's conditional," said Jennifer Jerrett, museum education program specialist at the Koreshan State Historic Site.

"Depending on how the state acts toward the artifacts, the foundation makes the final decision on whether

we keep them at the end of a six-year term."

The artifacts have been under state care for years already, said foundation president Jo Bigelow.

Items such as wash basins, tools, machinery and original Koreshan houses have stayed on land given over to the state in 1961.

"They can take care of it with state money. We're not enough of an organization to keep up with everything," Bigelow said.

Now, with official ownership — even if conditional for the next six years — the state can apply for grants and other money for preservation and conservation efforts.

Until state park officials own the artifacts outright, all preservation efforts will be coordinated with the Koreshan foundation.

Regardless, both sides say they are excited, enough so to plan a celebratory signing ceremony Thursday in the Art Hall at Koreshan State Historic Site.

Hogg dressed for the occasion as Hedwig Michel, the last surviving member of the Koreshan settlement, who died in 1982.



TIME OUT: Sarah Straub, 10, left, enjoys a bite of food with state park officials after Thursday's ceremony.

"It means a tremendous amount to state employees because it really allows us to commit ourselves and act as the stewards we'd like to be," Jerrett said.

This is about the largest gift ever

given to the state, Bigelow said. "We gave them the artifacts because they already have them; they should use them where they have been used before — the historic site," she said.