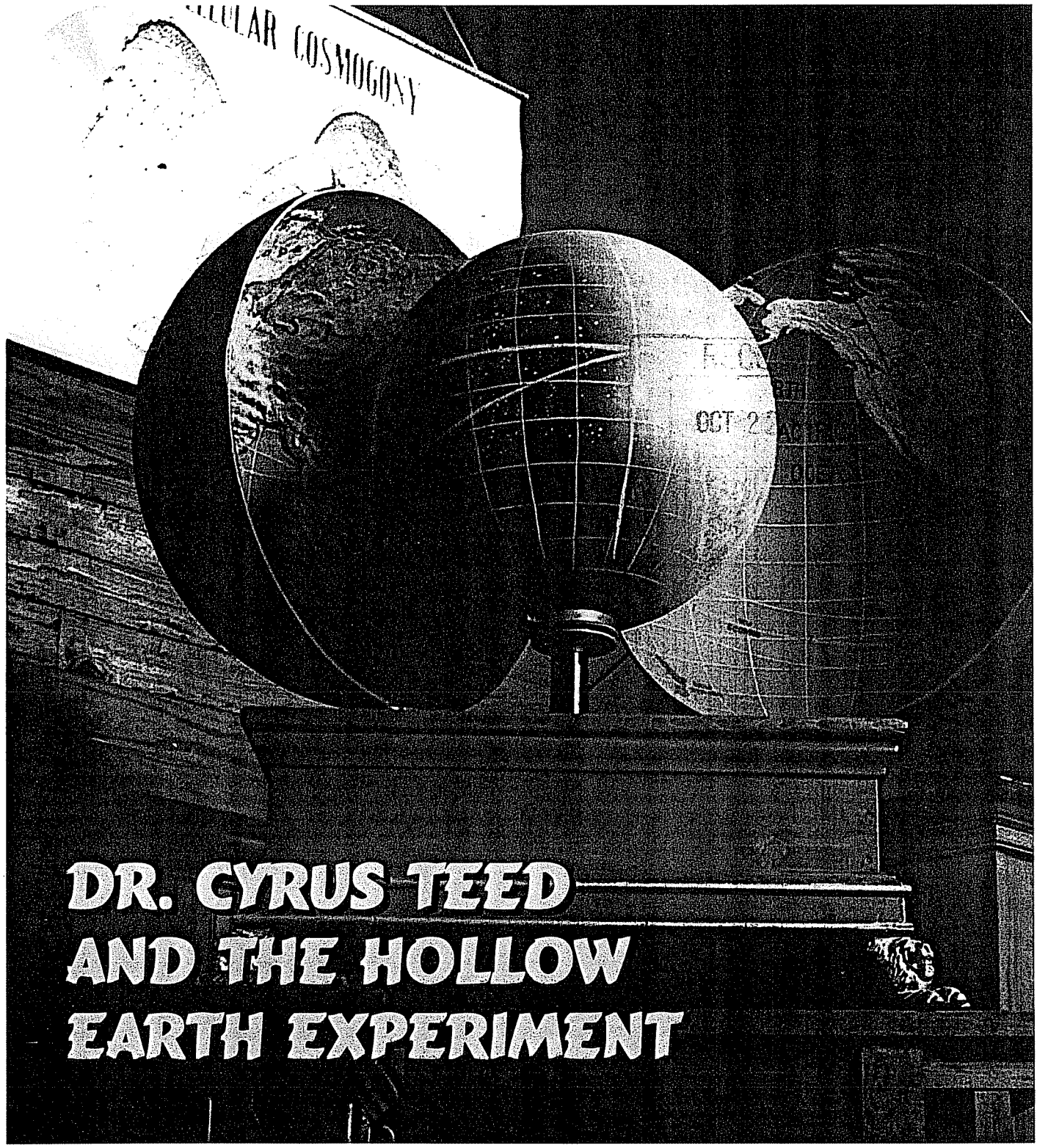


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South Florida History

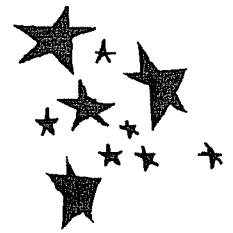
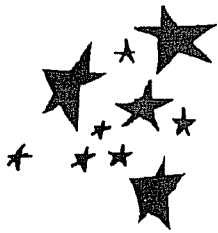
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DR. CYRUS TEED
AND THE HOLLOW
EARTH EXPERIMENT

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A Century Ago In Estero Florida, Dr. Cyrus Teed Tried To Prove We Live In A Hollow Earth

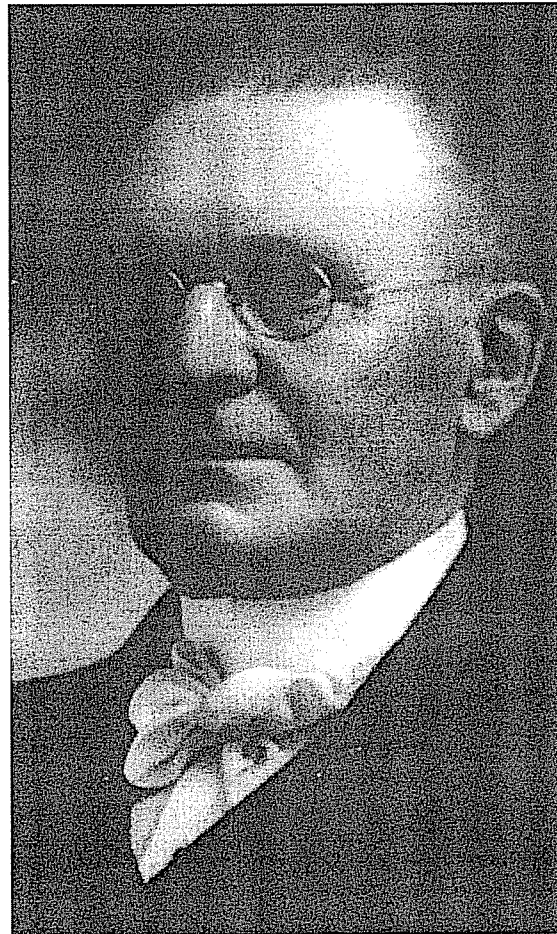
By: Dr. Irvin D. Solomon

In 1894, the charismatic religious leader, Dr. Cyrus Teed, began a utopian experiment of national significance in the back country of Lee County, Florida. Teed's community, the Koreshan Unity, occupied some 302 acres in Estero and eventually grew into one of the state's and nation's most significant and widely recognized utopian experiments. The story of the Koreshan's "scientific" effort to prove their hollow earth theory constitutes one of the most interesting and least known aspects of South Florida history.

Dr. Cyrus Reed Teed, known to his followers by the biblical name Koresh, was possibly the first notable American to express the idea of an inverted, or hollow earth. Teed's "cellular earth" theory placed all of the cosmos inside a hollow sphere. His version of the hollow earth located humanity on the inside of the concave sphere as well.

For Teed and his followers, "cosmogony," or the concave earth theory, gave a universal element of control back to humanity.

Under this paradigm of metaphysics, humanity now lived in a finite, decipherable universe rather than in the prevailing scientific model of an infinite, unknowable one. Teed's brand of cosmogony not only embraced the hollow earth concept but, unlike many earlier theories of a concave earth, also merged the pseudo-science of cosmogony with religious beliefs. In Teed's words: "To know of the earth's concavity and its relation to universal form, is to know God; while to believe in the earth's convexity is to deny him and all his works. All that is opposed to Koreshanity is Antichrist."



Dr. Cyrus R. Teed (Koresh). *Photo courtesy of the Koreshan State Historical Site.*

So thoroughly did Teed integrate the hollow orb theory into Koreshan theology and dogma, that he even rewrote "The Lord's Prayer" for the benefit of his followers:

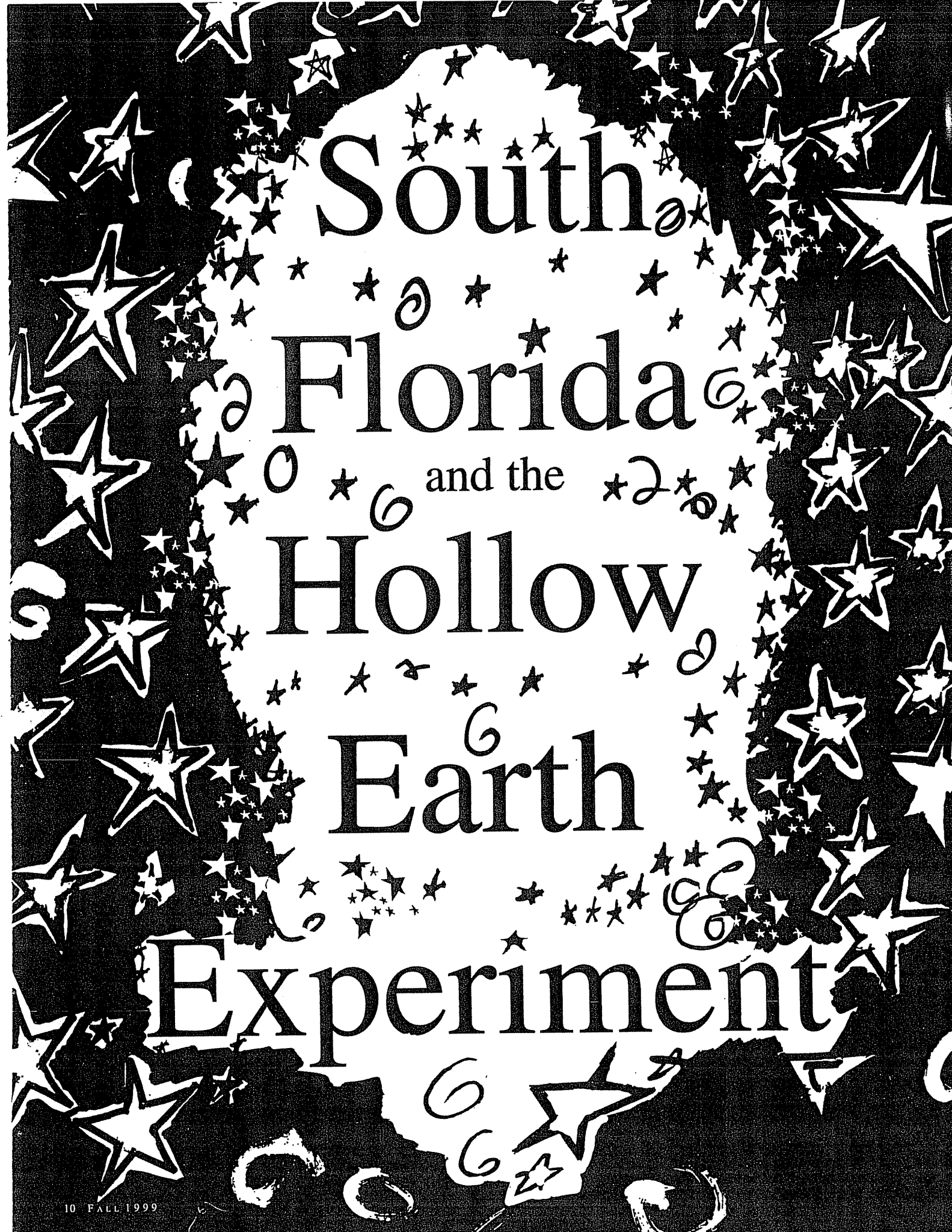
*Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
In [Teed's new translation] earth
as it is in heaven.*

Thus, Dr. Cyrus Teed set in motion an idea which spawned a religion, fostered a community of followers, and sent the sciences of his era into new controversy.

In order to prove his "scientific" cellular cosmogony, Teed sought a means through which the concavity of the earth could be irrefutably demonstrated. He felt certain that nonbelievers, faced with some form of indisputable evidence of the hollow earth thesis, would rush to embrace Koreshan doctrines. Thus, Teed conceived the idea for a "hollowcell authenticator" mechanical device, which could prove the veracity of cellular cosmogony. This movable authenticator lab would be called the "Geodesic Rectilineator."

Teed's Early Days

Cyrus Teed was born in 1839 in New York. He was raised in the western part of the state, an area once known as the "burned over district" for its recurring religious movements. In 1858 he married Miss Fidelity Rowe of Meredith, N.Y., to whom one son was born, Douglas Arthur Teed, who later attained distinction as an artist and portrait painter.



South

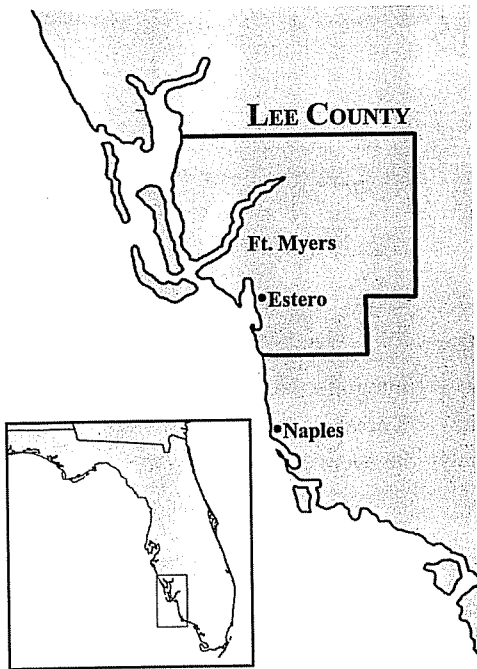
Florida

and the

Hollow

Earth

Experiment



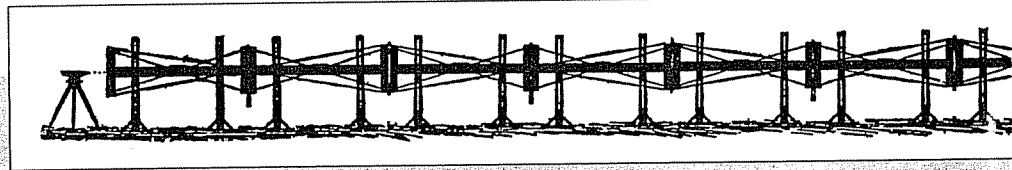
Following service in the Union Army Medical corps, Teed became interested in eclectic medicine, a field of medical endeavor in the 19th century that blended homeopathy, orthodox medicine and herbal remedies.

In 1868, Teed graduated from the Eclectical College in New York City and began to practice medicine in Utica, New York. The practice of medicine, however, quickly fell by the wayside, after Teed embraced millenarian theories so prevalent to the era and his background.

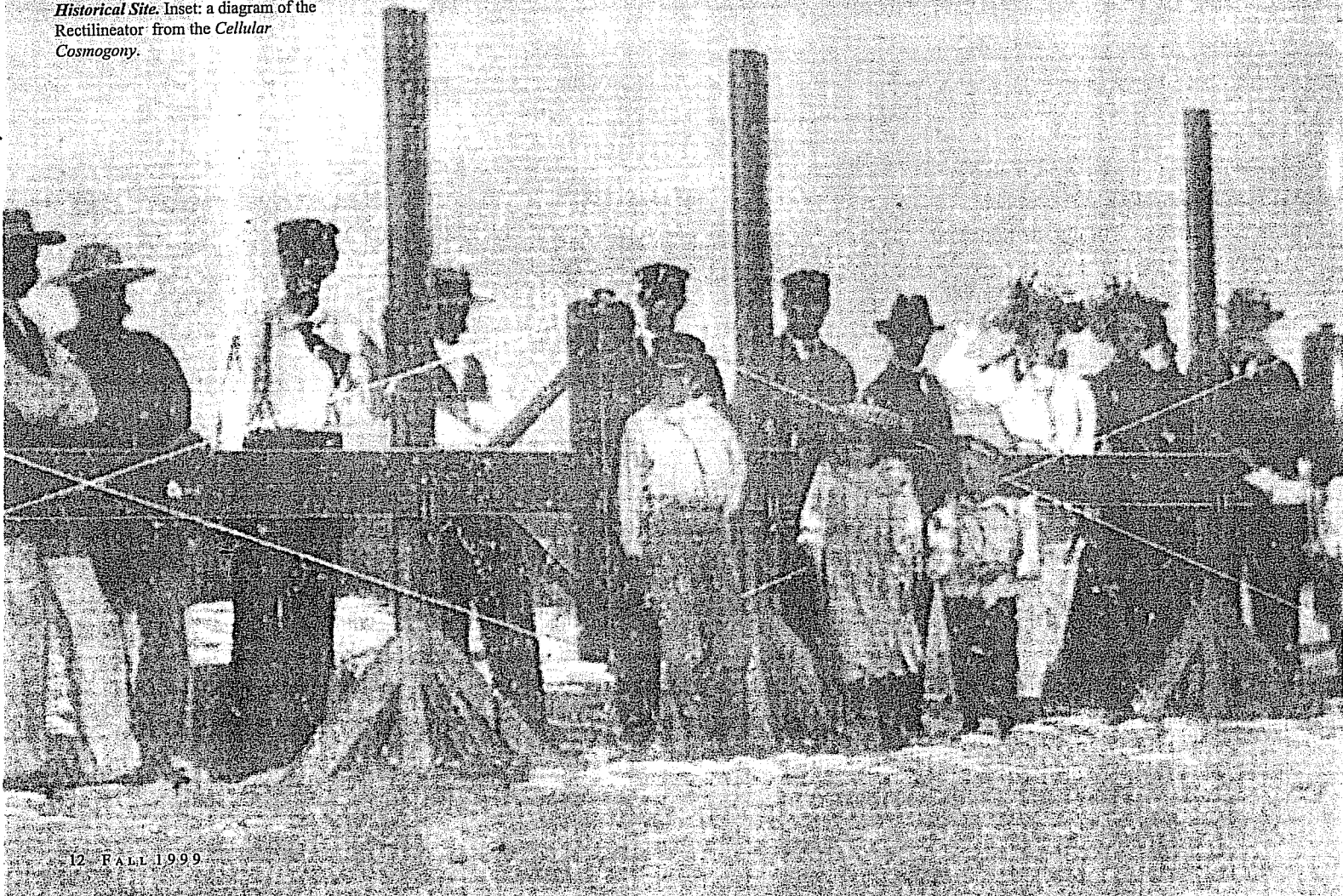
Teed displayed great interest in science and electricity. Late in 1869, he set up a laboratory to experiment with "electro-alchemy." Through his

subsequent experimentation, Teed thought he had stumbled upon a process of transmutation which exposed the secrets of immortality. Teed later recounted this discovery of the secrets of the cosmos in his proselytizing essay, "Illuminations of Koresh." Following his transmutation, Teed adopted the Biblical name Koresh, Hebrew for Cyrus.

It is interesting to note that Teed was a distant cousin of Joseph Smith, pioneer and founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormon church. Both Koreshan and Mormon doctrine called for a redefinition of the Christian faith. The need for redefinition, in both cases, grew from revelations through divine visions and called for a return to the "true nature of Christianity."

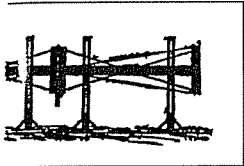


The Rectilineator and the Koreshan die hards on the beach near Naples. *Photo courtesy of the Koreshan State Historical Site.* Inset: a diagram of the Rectilineator from the *Cellular Cosmogony*.



Perhaps it was through his ties with Smith that Teed developed his desire to begin a religious commune centered around his revolutionary teachings.

Teed first attempted to establish a commune in Chicago in 1888, but was met with resistance and ridicule from the local establishment. Finally he succeeded in placing his small band of devoted followers in an old mansion, which he called Beth-Ophrah. At this curious and improbable urban site, the new "Koreshan Unity" quickly grew to 126 members.



To know of the earth's concavity and its relation to universal form, is to know God... All that is opposed to Koreshanity is Antichrist.

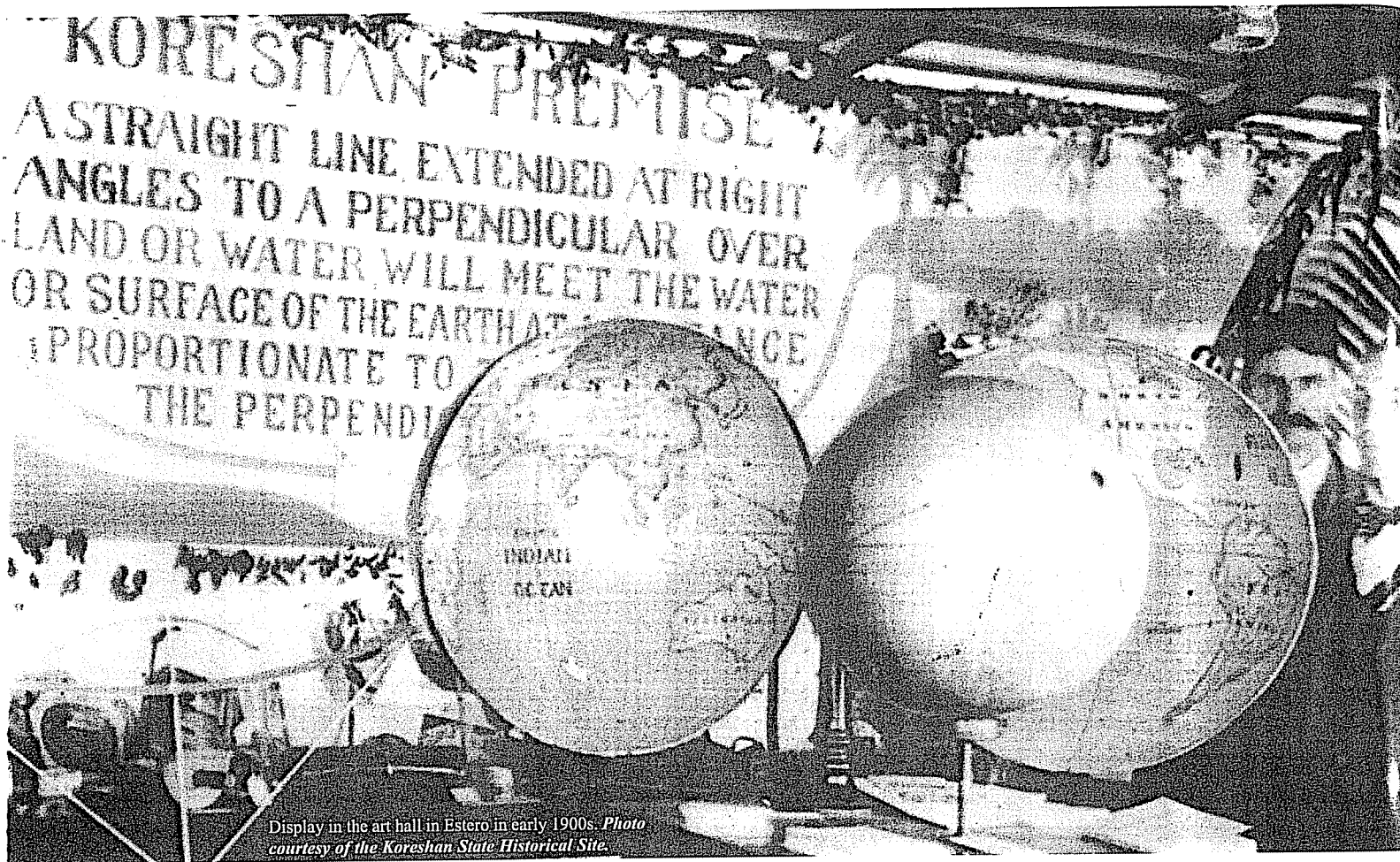
The Dream

The hollow earth theory emerged from an "illumination" at Beth-Ophrah which once overtook Teed as he meditated. In this experience Teed presumably went into a trance and encountered a beautiful woman, who revealed several "cosmic truths" to him. The theory of cellular cosmogony, or a hollow earth, sprung from this experience. He soon set out to create a large following to promote this new understanding of "our place" within the hollow earth. "The earth is the great womb of natural development" Teed professed, "hence we all are living within it." Teed convinced his Koreshan followers that if they could prove their inverted earth theories, all of the other elements of Koreshan doctrine would gain

widespread acceptance. They, like many other celibate communal groups, required converts as their lifeblood. The struggle to prove the earth's concavity became the driving force of Koreshanity from its inception.

The first attempts to prove the cellular cosmogony theories took place in the Koreshan community's home state of Illinois, where early experiments focused on the concavity of a body of water. At an old drainage canal on July 25, 1896, three Koreshan "scientists" fixed a target disk 22 inches in diameter to a post. They drove the post into the bottom of the canal leaving the center of the disc above the water. The team then rowed

their boat three miles up the canal. From this vantage point, an accurate view of the target could be obtained. Measurements and observations were taken at both the three and five mile marks. The observations of the team supported Koreshan doctrine and according to their mathematical calculations lent credibility to the concave earth theory. The Koreshan faithful performed several additional experiments in Illinois and on the waters of Lake Michigan. Although the followers of Koreshan doctrine accepted these experiments as proof of cellular cosmogony, Teed still needed irrefutable evidence for the rest of civilization. Therefore, the success of the Geodesic Rectilineator became of paramount importance to Teed and his communal movement. The demonstration of the earth's concavity by this mechanical means would subsequently provide Teed with "irrefutable proof of the truth of Cellular Theory..."



Display in the art hall in Estero in early 1900s. Photo courtesy of the Koreshian State Historical Site.

The “New Jerusalem” in Florida

Teed understood that his movement needed room to grow, and the membership needed to be away from the ridicule and prejudice of his Chicago neighbors. Through yet another mystical experience, Teed told his followers that he had been ordained by God to build a “New Jerusalem,” a thriving community of more than ten million inhabitants. In order to escape the critical eye of the more populated north, Teed eventually selected a location in the “wilds” of South Florida near present-day Estero Bay. Upon close inspection, Teed considered the site ideal because of its size and remote location some fifteen miles south of the county seat, the frontier town of Fort Myers. With plans for such a large number of citizens, the schematics for the layout of the New Jerusalem were, indeed,

revolutionary. The shape of the city was to be octagonal and at the center of the city was to be a 36-square mile series of grid-like streets and avenues. The central feature of the square was to be a temple celebrating “the great fame of the Koreshans.” New Jerusalem’s expansion would follow the development of worldwide networks of maritime commerce and industry, centered at the Gulfshore waters of Estero Bay. Teed’s vision included a trans-Florida ship canal to promote worldwide shipping and trade to and through his New Jerusalem. Utilizing these networks of trade, the New Jerusalem would surely prosper and become the center of a new world order, or so Teed persuaded his hundreds of followers who relocated with him to Estero.

The critical event for the attraction

of converts to the New Jerusalem would be the Koreshans’ ability to “scientifically” prove their theory of cellular cosmogony, or hollow earth. Teed, ever the master orator and promoter of Koreshian propaganda, convinced his followers in Estero that the Rectilineator experiments would provide the undeniable evidence that would bring “Northern brothers and sisters” flocking to the city of New Jerusalem. The Koreshian leader trumpeted: “For sometime past there has been developing ... a desire that the fundamentals of our system — be demonstrated naturally and in such a way that rational minds would be forced to acknowledge their truth and its source.” Thus, Teed conceived a new geodesic survey in South Florida, one that would prove the earth’s concavity through mechanical means.

The "Airline" Experiment

In late 1896, Teed confidant Professor Ulysses G. Morrow supervised the construction of the Geodesic Rectilineator. It would conduct "airline" experiments (the goal of the experiments was to demonstrate that a projected straight time line within a hollow sphere would intersect at two points) that were to redefine the sciences of the day. The Rectilineator was built to Koreshan specifications by the Pullman Palace Car Co. in Pullman, Illinois. The apparatus consisted of a horizontal bar at both ends of twelve-foot cross members. Each of the three sections was braced from corner to corner with steel tension rods; the mahogany used for the general construction of the Rectilineator had been seasoned for twelve years. The use of seasoned mahogany coupled with the meticulous plans for construction and assembly were to ensure accuracy. Each piece of lumber was checked and rechecked, confirmed to be straight and true.

Upon the successful completion of the Rectilineator experiments, the Koreshans were to begin a campaign of propaganda against modern science. "It is expected that several months will be required to satisfactorily make the demonstrations after which most of the party will ... take part in the campaign against modern science," stated expedition supervisor, Ulysius G. Morrow.

All of the surveying equipment, as well as the cumbersome Rectilineator itself, had to be transported from Chicago to the survey site on a beach in remote Naples. Teed selected this South Florida site because of its proximity to the Koreshan compound in Estero and its relatively straight, extended waterfront line. On January 2, 1897, the geodetic staff completed the final 21-mile leg

from Fort Myers to the survey site in remote Naples aboard the sloop *Ada*. The sea voyage often proved hazardous. During inclement weather the *Ada* was often forced to anchor just beyond the outer sandbar of south Naples and "ride out" the storms. In one instance, Captain Gilbert of the *Ada* was "knocked senseless" by the mainsail boom which suddenly swung around and nearly carried him overboard. During favorable conditions, the *Ada* moored at a long dock owned by General W. N. Haldeman, a former publisher of the


Louisville Courier Journal and a prominent Naples landowner. Haldeman provided a campsite just below his house for the use of the geodesic survey team.

The Koreshan encampment consisted of "several tents ... for sleeping quarters and a palm-thatched shack to serve as a dining room and general meeting place." The geodesic survey team found Haldeman a willing supporter but the people of Naples shy and nervous about the "newfangled"

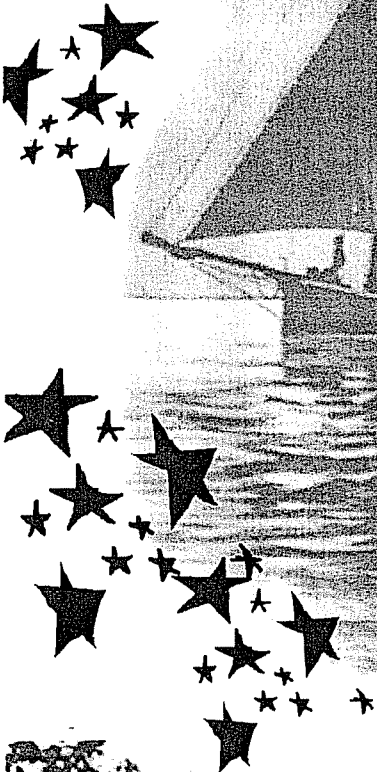
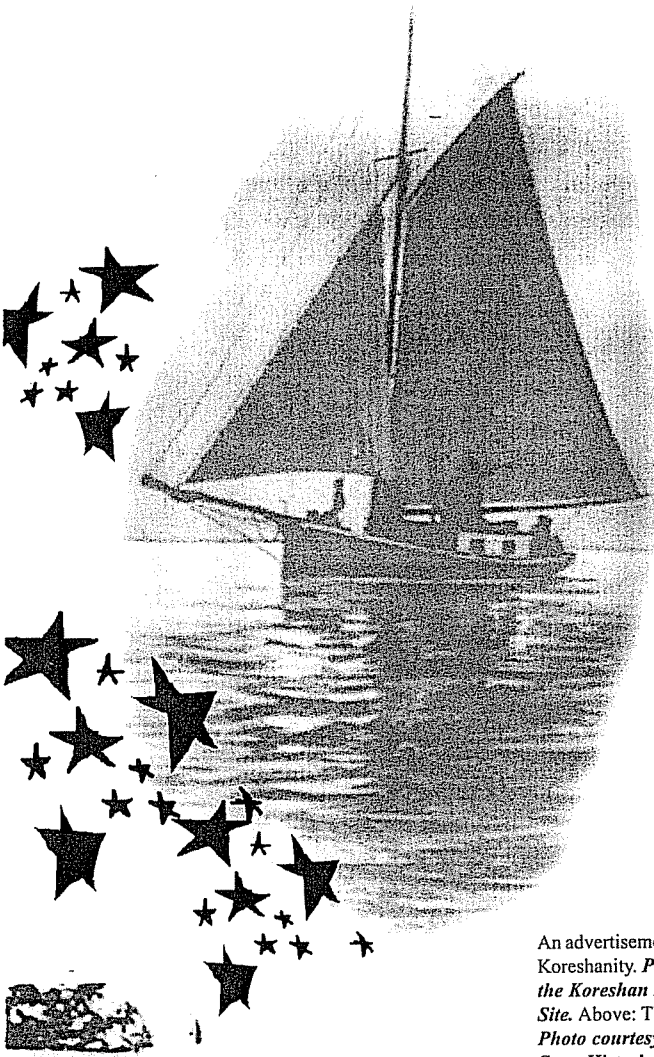
Rectilineator.

After several weeks of preparation and deliveries of supplies via the *Ada*, the work of proving cellular cosmogony and, thus, Koreshan doctrine itself, commenced in January, 1897. To the amazement and sometimes bewilderment of locals, the Rectilineator moved "in caterpillar" style, section by section down the beach of Naples, across Gordons Pass, and finally after four and one-eighth miles, terminated in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Morrow took great pains to ensure the accuracy of his measurements. Careful preparations were made before the experiment commenced and copious notes were compiled documenting the numerous measurements taken.

There could not be any doubts concerning the validity of the survey team's findings. The Rectilineator experiment had to hold up under scrutiny of the public-eye.



Our Father
who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done
IN earth as it is
in heaven.



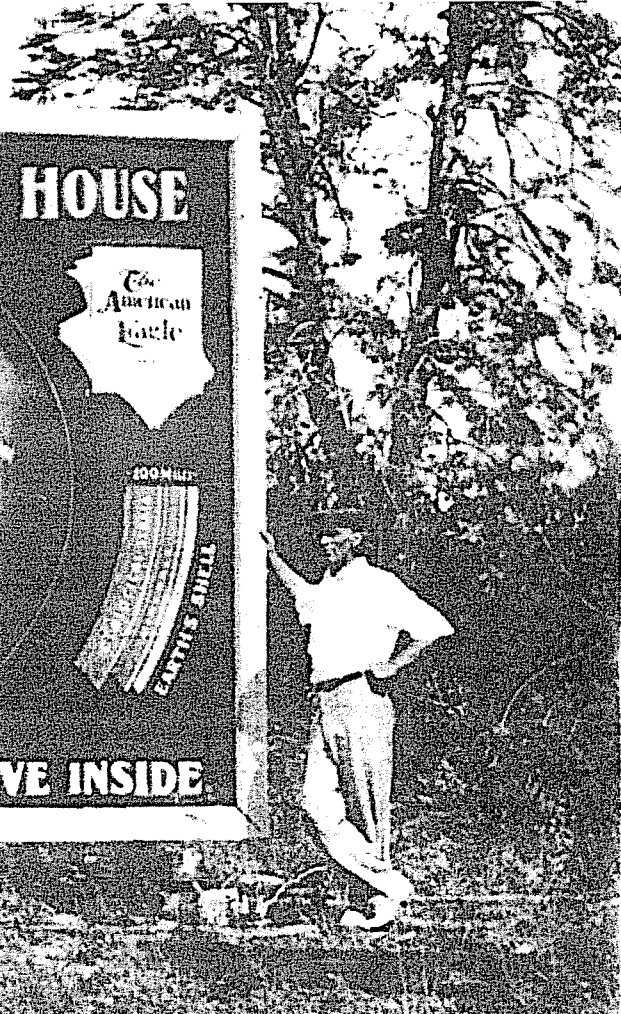
An advertisement of Koreshanity. Photo courtesy of the Koreshan State Historical Site. Above: The sloop *Ada*. Photo courtesy of the Koreshan State Historical Site.

A Success?

After five months of maneuvering the Rectilineator up and down the beaches of Naples, the geodesic survey staff declared its work a success. Even though the airline projections proved faulty, Morrow and his staff simply reasoned that a "mistake" in their calculations actually verified the concavity of the earth.

Koreshan logic interpreted the geodesic survey's results as "irrefutable proof" that the earth was, indeed, a hollow shell on whose inner surface reposed all of humanity. If the planet were convex, the "airline" created by the Rectilineator device would have terminated in space rather than beneath the Gulf's waters. Armed with this "proof," Teed envisioned new mass conversions to Koreshanity. "A large class who cannot accept through analogy or by statement of the laws of optics the basis of Koreshan doctrines would be reached by a proof of this kind," the Koreshan leader stated to his flock at the New Jerusalem in Estero.

To Teed's satisfaction, the team had proved through scientific information that the earth was, indeed, concave and that humanity reposed on the inner shell. So thoroughly did Teed and his followers come to embrace the pseudo-science of the Rectilineator, that they incorporated detailed reports of Morrow's results in their new proselytizing handbook, *The Cellular Cosmogony*, released in



1899 by the Koreshan Guiding Star Publishing Company. Major newspapers around the county reported both popular and scientific interest in the "peculiarity" of this experiment, but the historical record reflects that only the Koreshans took the results seriously.

Thus, by the early 20th century, the eyes of the nation focused on South Florida as Dr. Teed and his followers campaigned in the popular media for a new concept of the concavity of the earth. Though not met without ridicule and scorn, this new Koreshan proselytizing tactic based on the unique Rectilineator experiment on the beaches of South Florida did serve to solidify Koreshan loyalty to Teed and to attract modest numbers of new followers to his South Florida utopia.

Both the Koreshans and their theory of a hollow earth waned rapidly in the early 20th century, yet their unique experiment with the Rectilineator in South Florida would continue to intrigue people from throughout the nation for decades to come, as reflected in a 1949 *Newsweek* article, titled "The Hollow World." Even today thousands of curious travelers annually visit the Koreshan State Historical Site in Estero to marvel at Teed's mock-ups of the hollow earth and the intricate model of the Geodesic Rectilineator that at one time so sensationally focused the popular and scientific eye on the wild frontier of South Florida. -SFH

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