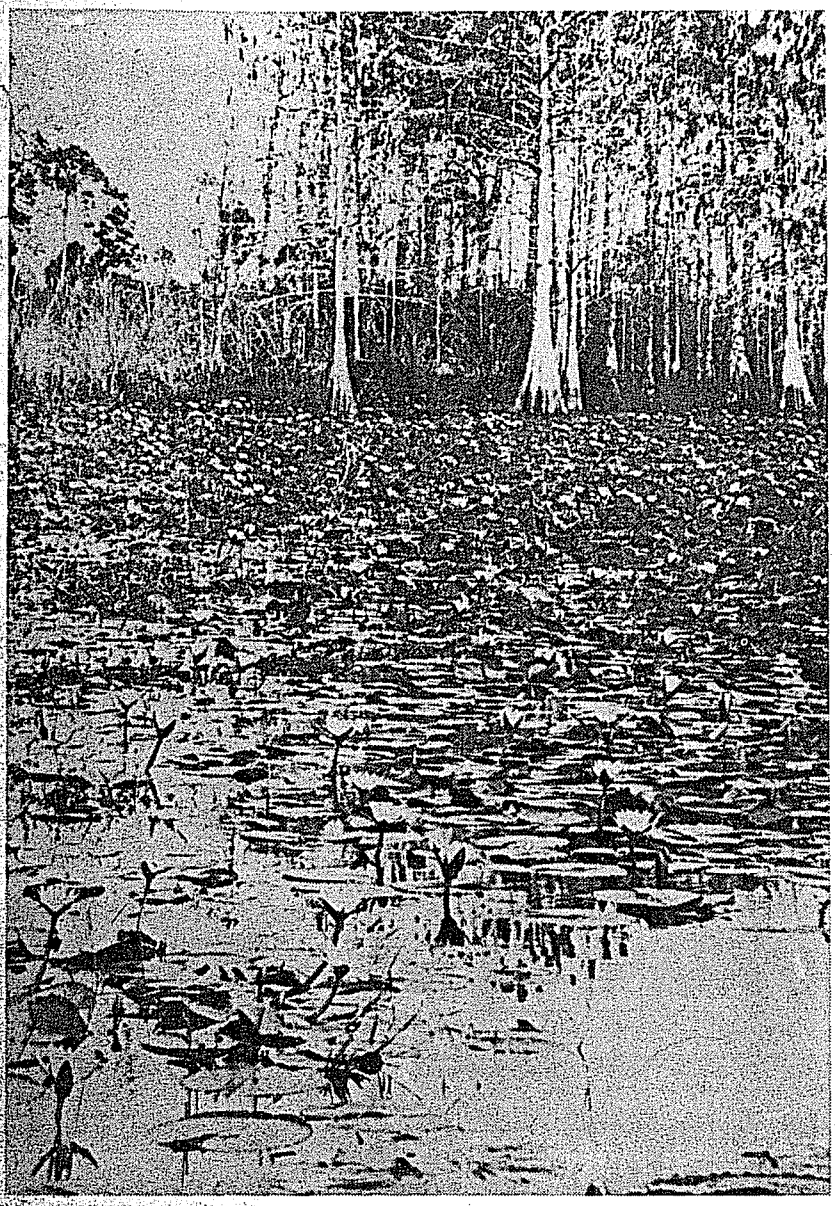

ESTERO

the life and times

Coddington

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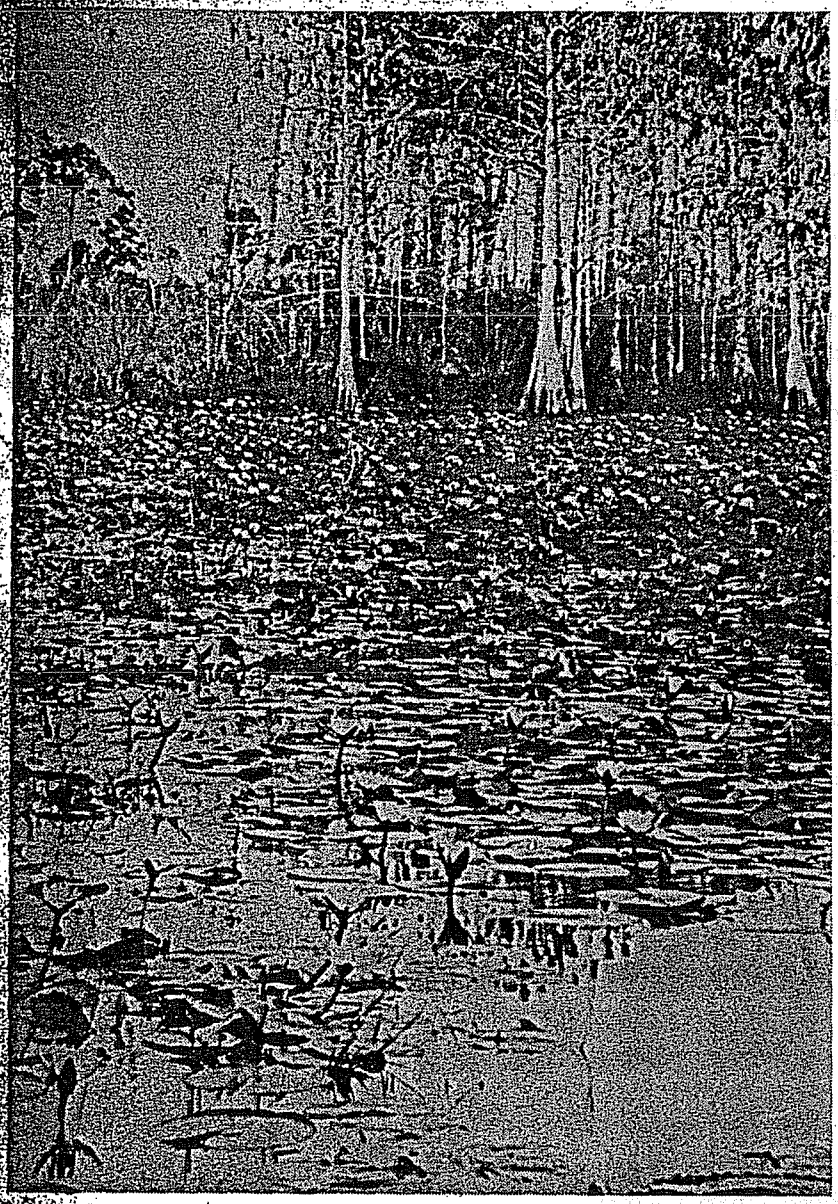

ESTERO

the life and times

Coddington

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A Note To Readers

This booklet is not the complete history of Estero, nor was it intended to be.

We feel that Estero has an exciting, colorful history locked in the memories of our pioneers and old-timers.

These memories will not live forever.

Unless, of course, someone takes it all down, on paper, in a book, on tape, by photographs or the old standby, word of mouth.

What we have attempted to do is to preserve a small fraction of the vibrant history of Estero, and in doing so, we hope to get our point across.

We couldn't talk to everyone.

We only print a sampling of what we have gathered.

Let's all keep our history straight and know where our grandparents came from. Let's get out, find out, and help remember all of this for the next generation.

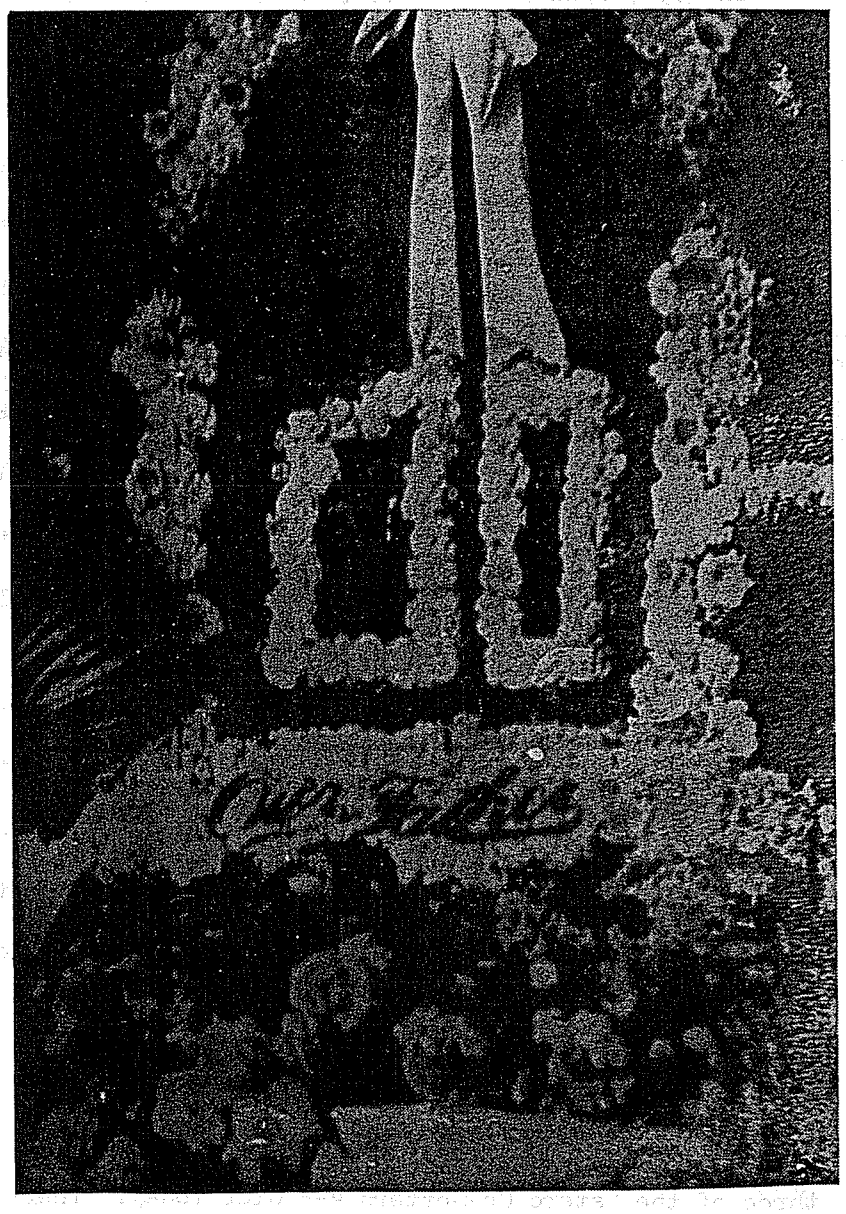
The people written about in this booklet are our heritage.

We are our children's heritage.

What do we give them?

The Estero Go-Getters 4-H Club

Cyrus Teed, also known as Koresh
Founder of Koreshan Unity



Teed's burial

The Spanish word astillero (ăs tē yă rō) means ship-building place.

On early maps, there is a place called "Mosquito Creek". Gustave Damkohler, a German who homesteaded there in 1882, asked the people along the coast what the name of it was, and was told that the island entrance was called "astillero". To Damkohler, this sounded like "Ĕs tĕr ō", and he named the creek, the little village, and his son, Estero Ostego Damkohler, after this.

In 1894, Damkohler was 77 years old and all alone except for one son. He found an interest in religion and through his interest became aqquainted with a man named Cyrus Teed, also known as Koresh. Teed was living in Chicago at this time. Through correspondence, Teed and three women came to visit Damkohler's homestead in Estero and almost at once, Damkohler joined with them. He deeded his property to the communal organization. In October, 1894, Teed and fourteen followers from Chicago moved to Estero where they cooked outdoors, and slept on palm and pine pallets. To Damkohler's original 300 acres, the Koreshans added 1000, and planned to build "the New Jerusalem" which was supposed to accommodate 8 million people. In 1898, they set up a sawmill on the south end of Estero Island (Ft. Myers Beach) where they planned to build their port city. The commune practiced celibacy strictly, so separate dwelling places for men and women were built. Two other Estero settlers at that time were Ernest Franz and Charles Weiland, who were citrus growers. In 1898, the huge A.D.G. Floweree Grove was planted. Citrus was harvested from this grove until 1974. By 1908, Floweree had became the largest citrus grove owner in the U.S., having some 60 thousand trees. Although the Floweree Grove in Estero is still producing somewhat today, it does so only by nature. It is no longer worked. It is now in the hands of a land-holding company and plans are being made to sub-divide it into five-acre homesites.

In 1900, a group of Portuguese fishermen settled on Mound Key. Among them was King Alvarez, Anton Fernandez, Joe Soto, and Charles Leuttich. From this group descend three of the Estero Go-Getters 4-H Club today. There was a palm-thatch school on Mound

Key, with Mrs. T. Henderson as teacher. Later, Gustave Damkohler built a second school on Mound Key.

By 1900, some of the Koreshan converts had become dissatisfied and wanted to leave the Koreshans, but had signed away everything they owned when they joined the commune and could get nothing back.

The local paper and the major political party opposed all Koeshans and in one election, all Koreshan votes were thrown out and Koresh was hung in effigy from a telegraph pole in Ft. Myers.

In 1907, the local paper reprinted a Chicago scandal regarding Koresh. The Koreshans retaliated by printing the American Eagle, in addition to their Flaming Sword, and ran thier own printing plant in Estero to tell their side of the news. Then, the legislature abolished "the town of Estero" and Koresh claimed it was "a conspiracy of the press."

In due time, the Koreshans regained their voting rights and the American Eagle became a horticultural paper.

In 1908, Cyrus Teed, Koresh, died,,claiming to be immortal and promising to rise again.

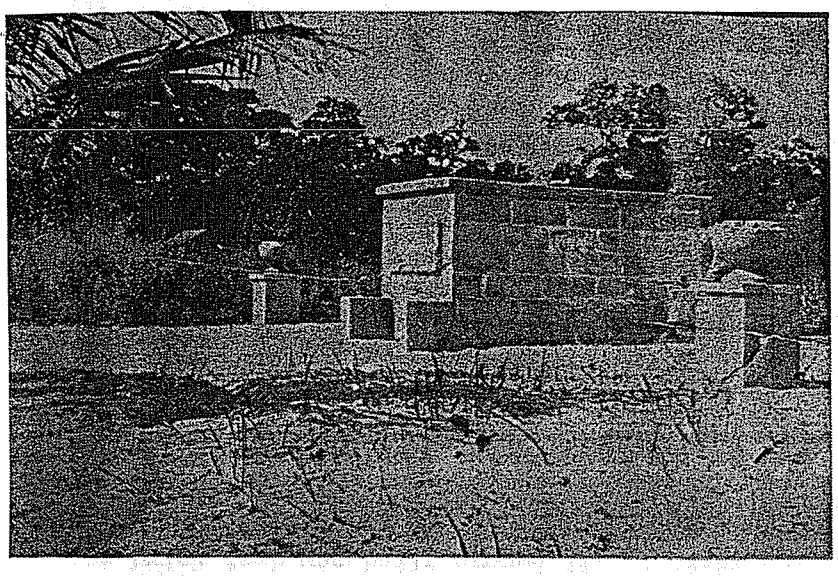
His more avid followers truly believed this, and waited by his bier. As nature took her course, even tho most fanatic of the Koreshans agreed that Koresh's body should be buried, so his remains were placed in a tin bathtub at the end of Estero Island, and a brick tomb was built around it. A light was kept burning and a guard was on duty all the time. On October 26, 1921, a hurrican washed all but a few bricks and plaque which is in the Gardens today, out into the Gulf of Mexico. Some devout Koreshans beleived the hurricane had been sent to cover Teed's exit from Earth and entrance to Heaven.

By 1924, the Tamiami Trail had pushed through Estero and the Koreshans, dwindling in number, were almost forgotten.

By 1922, the railroad had made it's way through Estero.

During the late 1930's, almost all that remained of the New Jerusalem was lush tropical fruit trees and exotic gardens. The few remaining members of the cult did not live in harmony. Mrs. Edith Trebell opened up her shop where she made jelly and preserves of the tropical fruits.

The Marshall Brothers opened up their citrus stand at about the same time.



Teed's (Koresh's) Tomb, Ft. Myers Beach

Tomb after Hurricane in 1921

THE ESTERO UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Estero

The Estero United Methodist Church was organized about sixty years ago and services were held in a one room school house on Frantz Avenue which is now known as Highland Avenue.

We did not have a regular minister at the time we statrted. Once a month, we had a minister from Ft. Myers who came in by freight boat on Saturday, spending Saturday and Sunday nights at different homes and returning to Ft. Myers on Monday. On the remaining Sundays we had local men filling the pulpit.

Sunday School was held every Sunday. People came on horseback, by horse and buggy or by foot. It was always a good day for our community. We had song service every Sunday night, as well as occasional dinners, which were enjoyed by all. As the community grew, our Church and Sunday School grew.

Rev. Willie Page was our first pastor, who joined us in 1919. We shared him with Bonita Springs.

In March 1929, Joe and Rosa Soto gave the Estero Methodist Episcopal Church a lot for the first Methodist Church to be built in Estero. A small church was built with donations from the community, and help from the Conference.

In August, 1934, R.L. Graham exchanged property with the Church by giving us two lots, #9 and #10, of the Oak Ridge Subdivision, for the one on which the Church was built in 1929.

In August, 1934, R.L. Graham exchanged property with the Church by giving two lots, #9 and #10, of the Oak Ridge Subdivision, for the original lot given in 1929. The Church was moved, and changes were made to make a bigger and better church.

In March, 1959, a Sunday School building was built. On June 17, 1959, and adult Bible class was organized and had Frank Godbey as president. The called themselves the "Loyal Hearts".

In June, 1960, lots #1-4, Block B, of the Oak Ridge Subdivision were donated by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas H. and Alice Atkinson. The present church was built on these lots.

On September 10, 1960, hurricane "Donna" damaged the Church beyong repair. Plans were made to build a larger church. A drive for community pledges was made.

During the 1940's, the time of war and gas rationing, there was very little traffic on the Tamiami Trail through Estero. During this time, Allen Andrews became president of the Unity and he compiled all of the papers of Dr. Henry Mehrling and published The Plant World in Fla. and My Garden in Fla. Andrews was awarded the Thomas Barbour medal for Outstanding Horticultural Service.

In the late war years, Miss Hedwig Michael joined the Koreshan Unity, coming from war-torn Germany. She quickly became an officer in the Unity. Around 1948, I.N. Bubbet was made president and Miss Michael became secretary-treasurer because they were the youngest members. Allen Andrews, at 77, was replaced after 32 years as president. His printing plant was destroyed by fire in 1951, and Andrews died soon after that.

When the Tamiami Trail was renamed U.S. 41, and was widened through Estero in the 1950's, many tropical trees and plants were destroyed.

In the late 1950's, Thomas H. Atkinson purchased a large tract of land west of U.S. 41 in Estero. The old Seaboard railroad at one time went through this property and there was a spot that old-timers called the "sand flats" because they could catch fiddlers there for fish bait. Mr. Atkinson developed this land into Estero's first subdivision since the boom of the 20's. There are now many families living in the Estero River Heights, which once was a favorite Saturday afternoon fishing spot.

Shortly after Mr. Atkinson began developing his property, mobile homes became popular for retirement in Florida. There are now two large mobile homes devoted to retirees only on the river side of Broadway and one mobile home park for families on the north side. Estero proper has three other mobile home parks for retirees or travelers and two more for families along U.S. 41.

The Estero School closed in 1949 when almost all schools were consolidated in Ft. Myers. Most of the parents of our 4-H Club members started school in Estero. Today, the school is being converted into a private home by Mr. Dan Noble and his family.

In 1961, Miss Michael donated 100 acres of Koreshan land along U.S. 41 to the State of Florida for the Koreshan State Recreation Area and 100 acres on Mound Key which were also Koreshan property.

Mrs. Jen Lesher McKeown
Bonita Springs

"We arrived in Estero on Thanksgiving Day, 1927. We spent the night there and went to Coconut, landed a job beginning the next Monday. We stayed in Coconut two years. Times were getting hard and some of the fish houses were not buying mullet anymore. This was election year, 1928, Coolidge was president and Hoover was elected that year. Coolidge insisted that Prosperity was just around the corner, although many hundreds of people were out of jobs.

"We moved to Estero just before school started in 1929. They built a dock and fishhouse that year, which were owned by a fish company in Ft. Myers. The school at that time had four teachers and 100 kids, grades from beginners up to 10th grade. We called the road Tin Can Alley in my day. Mrs. Soto was where she is right now.

"There were about 125 Koreshans at that time. It was virgin timber from Ft. Myers on down to Estero. Stanley Hanson, Sr., lived where Calvin Collier does now, he was county commissioner at that time. Estero was a nice quiet little town to live in.

"Hub Johnson and his family lived on Hickory Island then, his mother, Grandma Johnson, lived at the sand flats.

"I can remember the Estero River was and is the most beautiful river in the world."

On November 5, 1961, the new church was dedicated. Dinner was held with 137 attending. The dedication was presided by Dr. H.H. Wallter, Dist. Superintendent, and the Rev. C.A. Webb was minister.

In 1962 Fellowship Hall was built, later named Godbey Hall in memory of Frank Godbey. Used for various club and church functions, the building is a recognized hurricane shelter. Through generous local efforts, the building was built for less than $100, paid out for labor.

On March 12, 1968, Thomas and Alice Atkinson generously gave the Church Lot 8, Block 3 in the Estero River Heights for the purpose of building a parsonage. It was this year the Church became the Estero United Methodist Church.

Through donations, the organ was bought in December, 1969. The Church was air conditioned in 1970.

In August, 1971, the Church bought an acre of land from Mr. and Mrs. W. S chwarze. Membership increased so an extra parking lot was graded.

In June, 1973, a grand piano was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Buswell. Carpeting was installed in December of the same year.

In 1974, the building fund reached $23,000. In April, Mr. E. Young suggested that the standing church be enlarged, in lieu of building a new one.

Plans were drawn up and were approved by Dr. G. T. Hamilton in May, 1974.

In 1974, Rev. H.L. Costolo became Director of Christian Education and Parish Activiies.

In the spring of 1975 the Church addition was built. During the summer several local men worked on the worship area. On Novermber 23, the building was consecrated by Dr. P. Hartsfield. The total cost of expansion was approximately $55,000.

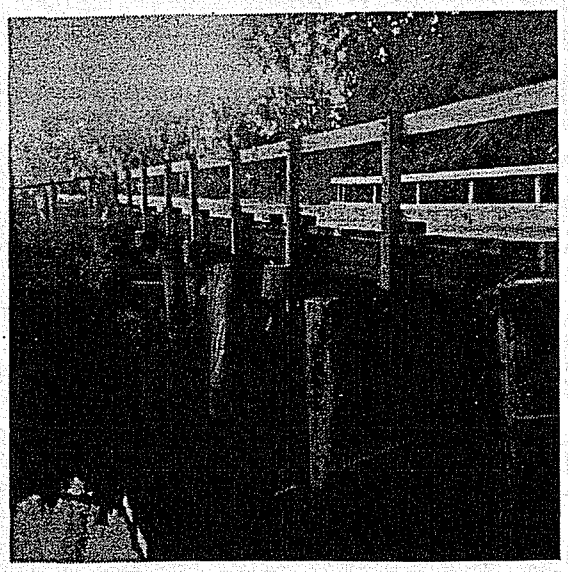
Dr. Wesley H. Bransford, the minister for several years, held his last service on May 16, 1976. The present minister is Rev. H.L. Costolo.

Condensed from The History of the Estero United Methodist Church written by Mrs. Della Smith, Mrs. Cora Horne, and Mrs. Helen Horne, 1975.

"These are the Trailblazers. They went on their trip in '22 or '23, I really don't remember. Dad had two cars in that group, but Stanley Hanson was the ringleader. He was the one who got them all together. Alan Andrews was in that, and the Florida Growers man. About two-thirds of them, I'd say, had never used an ax in their life. They had two Indians with them, Abe Lincoln was the younger one. They were going to be gone four days and clear a trail down through the Everglades. They made it to Everglades City after three weeks. Alfred Christiansen was in that group, he was the one that Raymond studied under. He was about the closest thing to a father that Raymond had. Well, Raymond wanted to go, but they said he was too young. So Alfred left Raymond in charge while he was gone."

"The Boomers had one of the first cars around here. They bought it and Dr. Richards drove it. Now, I don't know what kind of a doctor he was, he was an Englishman, that't all I know. But he was sweet on Bertie Boomer. Dr. Richards and Bertie rode in the front, and old Mrs. Boomer sat in the back and kept an eye on things."

"Estero hasn't changed a lot on the highway for a while... but off the highway, I can hardly belive it!"



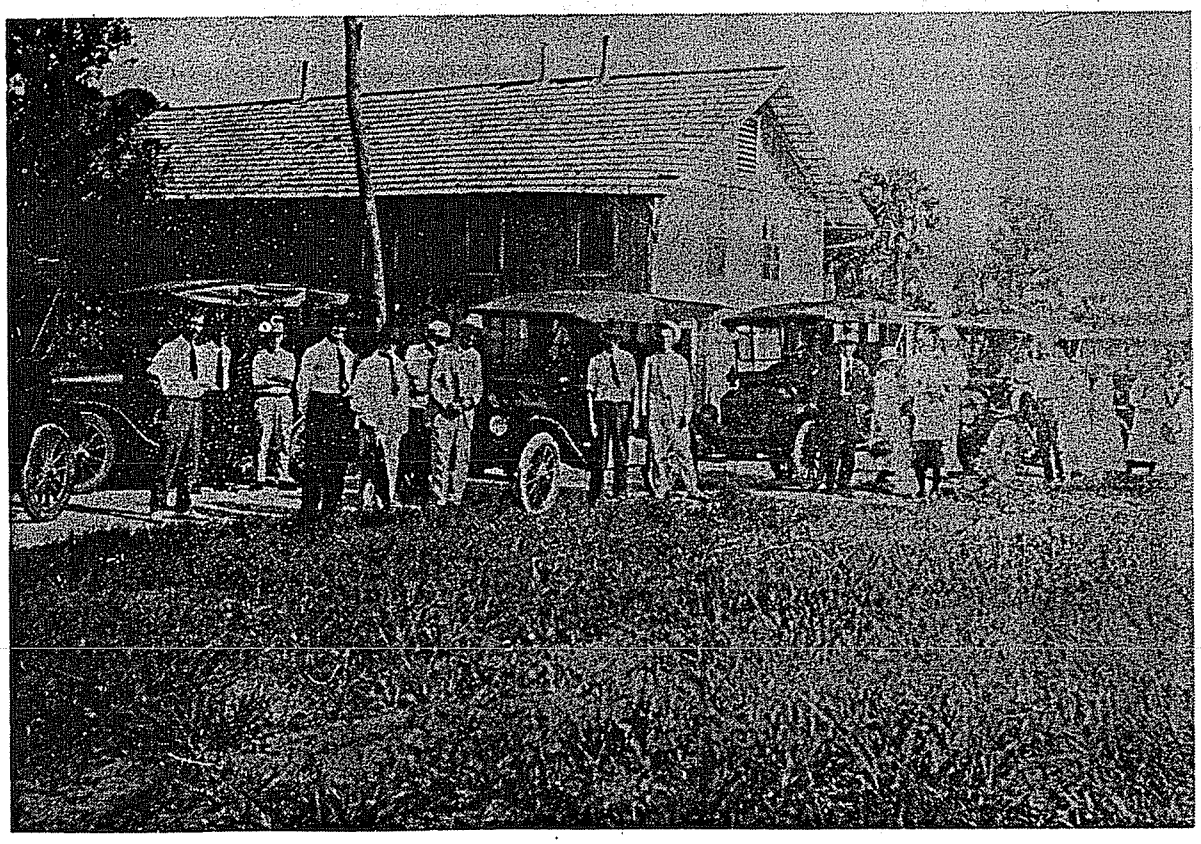
Sandy Lane Bridge, Estero River

Mrs. Alma Hill Trebell
Estero

"I can remember that big flood. You don't know about the flood? Well, it was in 1936, because Raymond and I got married in '35. Well, anyway, we had five days of rain. Real rain, like we used to get. The water ran in and out of these windows. Edith had all of those turkeys, and when the water started to come in, so did they. We had everything up on the tables, and the turkeys right up there with the rest. And we also had a real bad freeze in the winter of 1934.

"Now, at that time, the roads were just real sandy dust. The Koreshans used boats almost all of the time to get around, and they did all of their shipping that way.

"To get here, when we got to Jacksonville we got on a train to Ft. Myers, and then from Ft. Myers to Estero by boat.



The Trailblazers

Evelyn Leuttich a few years back

Fernandez Family in 1952. Pictured (L. to R.) Rosa Fernandez Soto, Dora Fernandez Leuttich, Joe Fernandez, Lena Fernandez Lesnett, Lenore Fernandez Whistler, Mary Fernandez Skinner, Buck and Lewis Fernandez

Mrs. Evelyn Leuttich Horne
Estero

"I was born on Mound Key, an island near the mouth of the Estero River. We lived in a 40-foot houseboat until 1925 , when we moved to Estero.

"In 1926, we weathered one of Florida's worst hurricanes in a new 1926 Ford. Our two-story house was blown off its foundation.

"In 1927, I started school in Estero's new schoolhouse on Broadway Road. R.M. Bailey was the contractor. Miss Minnie Lee was the first grade teacher.

"As a child, I remember Thomas A. Edison and Henry Ford stopping by for Sunday afternoon visits with my father, Charles Luettich. We had a huge Banyon tree and many tropical fruits and ornamentals that they were interested in.

"In 1943, I recieved a War Emergency teaching certificate after taking State Teachers exams in Bartow, Fla. I taught school for four years during the war at the Estero school.

"I have worked at the Koreshan Unity for the past 30 years, in the K.U. grocery store, the River View Inn resturaunt, the Botanical Gardens, and caring for elderly members. I now work in the Koreshan Unity office, where we publish The American Eagle, a monthly paper, "for the wise use of Natural Resources".

"Then, daddy got to making a little more money, and after a while we got to have a pretty good place over there.

"Mama and daddy got a little shack over here, and then I got married. I was just a kid, I didn't what marriage was or anything.

"It's terrible when you get to thinking about it....I used to think about it a lot at night.

"We sure did go hungry. I sure hope nobody has to go hungry like we did.

"Then, we bought this place and built the house.

"And I'm still here!"

"Aunt Rosa"... a while ago

Mrs. Rosa Fernandez Soto
Estero

"On the way over, daddy got sick and we stopped in Cuba, where they had a doctor for him. We stayed there maybe a month and then went to Key West for a month or so.

"Then, Old Man Gomez got so mean to daddy and mama, so we got on a boat there and went to Punta Rassa. We stayed there and the mosquitoes were so bad!

"Daddy couldn't talk, mama couldn't talk. They just had us three kids.

"We stayed there for a while and this fisherman came along and got daddy. We went to his camp. We were starving to death, and we didn't know anything.

"Old Man Gomez put us out on this little island. We was eating the bark off the trees and getting the water off the leaves in the morning. Well, daddy couldn't stand that, so he swam off, hoping to get somewhere where somebody could see him.

"Then, this old Joe Alvarez came along, and saw daddy, picked him up, and, after daddy told him about us, he picked us up. He took us to his camp and told the men at the store to give daddy anything he wanted and he (Alvarez) would pay for it. That was Joe Alvarez.

"Then, Old Man Gomez come again, and daddy went with him again.

"So..... we come to Mound Key."

"Mama was working in an onion field, and old Laura got so mean. Mama was sick and she told Laura that she couldn't go to work that day, so Laura took the axe and hit mama over the head with it. Mama was crying and daddy was fishing in Hockory. Laura said she was going to burn us up in the little shack, so she come along with a five-gallon can of kerosene. She thought mama was asleep, but she wasn't.

"So.... here we go, through the woods on Mound Key. We went to Grandma Johnson's. We finally got there, crying and hurting. We had went through the sandspurs and the prickle pears. Well, she took us in and the next morning she sent one of her sons, Hub, to get daddy. She gave daddy five acres of land on Mound Key. Daddy built a palmetto shack.

"When Joe was born we didn't have any sheets, or daipers, or anything. Old Grandma Johnson, she tore up her slip and used it and the belly band to make a daiper. Joe was born there on the shells at Mound Key.

JUST REMINISCENT
by Mrs. Eva Driggers

As George Simpson and wife came across the river in Estero, they were greeted by Mr. Lou Staton, "What do you mean having the American Eagle on your trailer?"

This was in front of the store, still standing but not used. We had our canoe on top of the car, and said we were going down the river, which we did. The Estero River is one of the most beautiful I've ever seen. An hour later, on the way back to the trailer, we wre met by Mr. Allen Andrews, the President of the Unity and editor of the American Eagle.

"Why not spend a few days here?", he asked us. We did, and not just for a few days, but for months.

We were invited to have supper with all of the brothers and sisters, as they called themselves. George sat with the men: John W., Theodore N., George and Charlie H., Conny S., Jessie P., Dr. Richards, George D., Alfred C. and a very dear little Irishman called Mac. I sat with the ladies: Etta S., Emma N., Vestz N., Bella A., Ada P., Ida F., Marie F., Rose G., Florence G., Emma G. and more. We had such a good time and the grounds were so pretty at night.

Early the next morning, we were all over the grounds, which made up a real paradise with all of the different plants and trees, a few bridges and a cottage here and there. Brother Theodore was the nurseman, and he made many kinds of pots out of the bamboo. The place was lovely with the azaleas everywhere and the bamboo making music in the wind.

Then we went to Mary's home. She took care of the chicken. There were not very many, as there were not very many members anymore. There were only two cows in the dairy barn. There were quail everywhere, dozens under the Mulberry trees.

After several days of enjoying this easy life, we met some of the people of Estero: Mr. amd Mrs. Harris, who ran the Texaco station, and then Uncle Jack and Aunt Susie Hall, and their family of seven girls and their son, Henry, whom we became very fond of.

Mrs. Mary Leitner Alvrus
Bonita Springs

My first memory of Estero is the day we moved to Bonita Springs from Estero in the early summer of 1911.

Mother was driving the first horse and wagon in our party. She had her three little girls, one, 1½ and twins, 3 years old. In her wagon, she had the iron cook stove with the blue and white granite coffee pot sitting on it. Dad was driving the

Dad was driving the second wagon, loaded with the rest of the furniture. With him was his 4 year old son.

About a half mile from our new home, it started raining. The wind blew the umbrella wrong side out, so mother arrived at her new home with three screaming, wet little girls.

Today, we would be driving our air-conditioned Buick and our furniture would be in a Mayflower moving van...

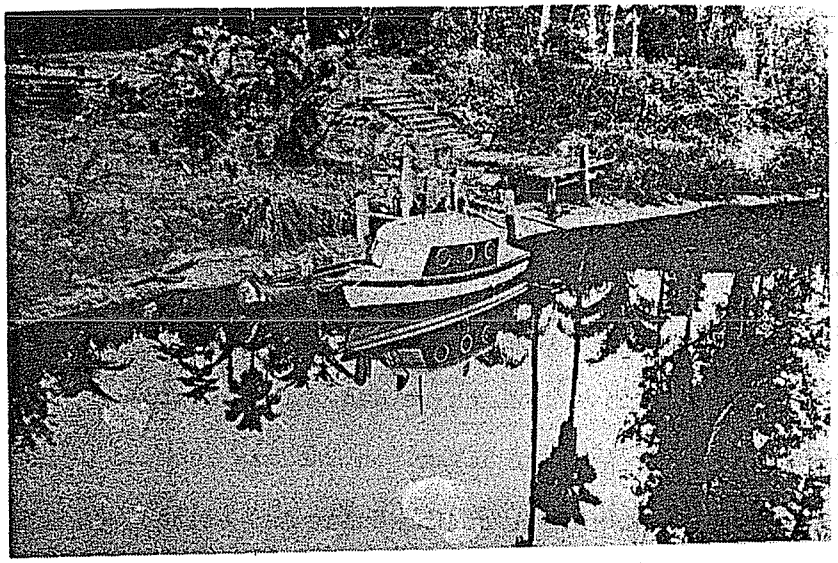
In the winter of 1937-38, we helped to clean up the mess on the river, where they built their Post Office, barber shop, dentist's chair, and living quarters. It had burned down during the summer, and there was a lot to do.

In the fall of 1938, we brought down our boat, the Sea Witch. In Jan. 1939, we put her down in Venice and made the trip to Estero. It was a beautiful trip, with porpoises jumping all around us. A large yacht pulled up to see if we needed any help, our being only 16' with a 5½' beam. The name of the yacht, by the way, was the Sea Foam. Tugging through Gasparilla Pass, which was especially nice to us, the water was just choppy enough to really enjoy it. We then went through the islands, across Pine Island Sound to Black Rock Island, where we tied up for the night. During the night we heard a most peculiar sound, which were told was a school of drum fish under the boat. We saw the coons playing on the banks.

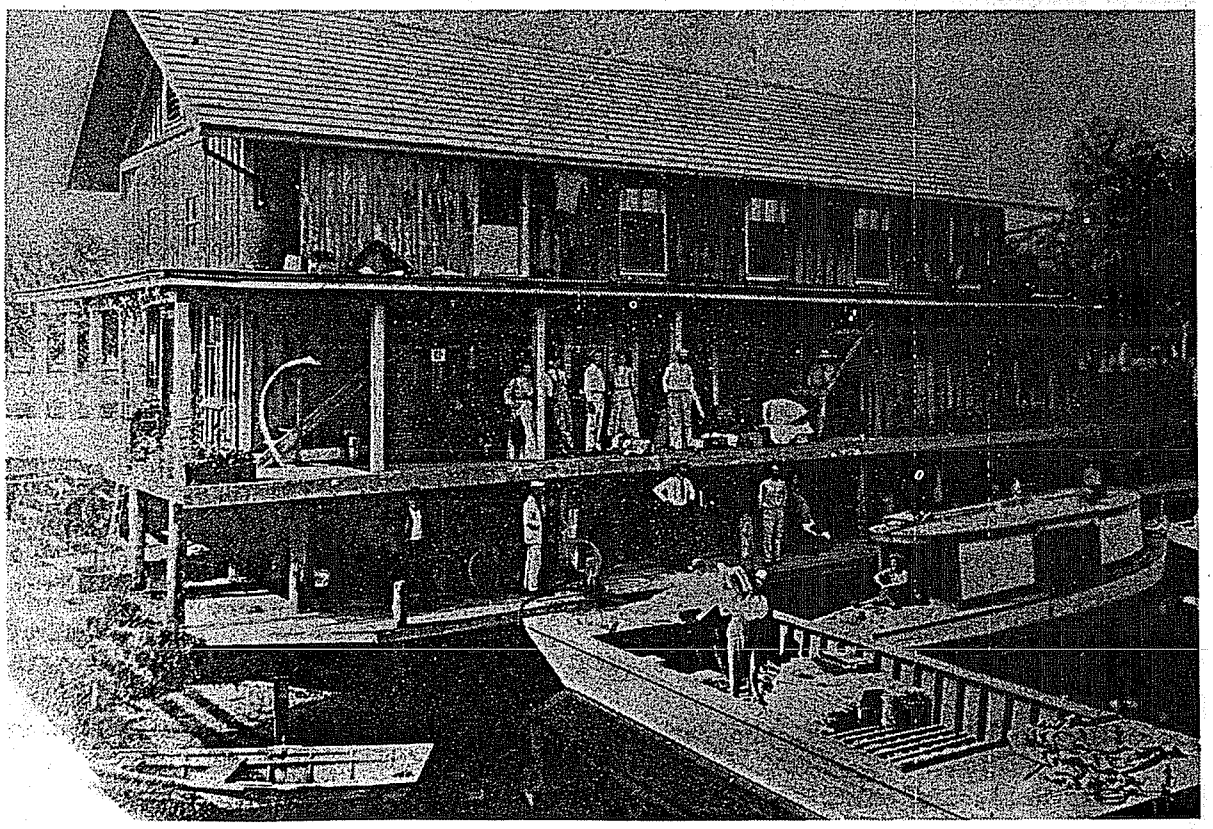
The next morning, we went across Estero Bay to the river into Ft. Myers. To our suprise the let our little boat dock there. After a few hours, we went back up the river to Estero. We docked at the dock we built in the spring of 1939, near our Sunken Gardens. The Gardens were ever so pretty.

One day, Joe McKeown came up to us, wanting to show us an alligator hole. With the aid of a long bamboo pole, and axe, and our hands, we were able to capture an 8' alligator. After showing everyone our catch, we took the alligator to Bill Piper at the Wonder Gardens, who was very happy to get it. A few days later, he told us that it was a female.

We did make a lot of little trips around here. Once, we had the privilege of going into the Everglades for a week with the Indian Agent, Mr. S. Hanson and Mr. A. Andrews. We drove out to Sam Jones' old fort. There was nothing there, just a stone, but you could see that people had been there. There were several sour orange trees around. We visited with the Seminoles, who could not talk very well, but who could laugh a lot. We taught a few of the young people to play Chinese Checkers.



The "Ten Mile Ditch"



Building on Estero River housing the Post Office, Dentist's Office, Barber Shop, and Hotel, as well as boat dock.

Mrs. Della Alvarez Smith
Estero

"I was born on Mound Key, then a small fishing village about seven miles from Estero. My father was a commercial fisherman.

"When I was two years old, my mother, my three brothers, and myself moved to Estero, as my oldest brother was ready for school. On the weekends, my father would come and stay with us. The only transportation we had was by boat, so my father came up the Estero River. Lots of times, we would spend the weekend on Mound Key, which we all enjoyed.

" We all went to school in a one-room schoolhouse, grades 1-8. We had a big pot-bellied wood heater in the middle of the schoolroom. The boys would take turns keeping wood in the heater.

"As time went on, more children became school age, so an additional room was added. Later, there was another added.

"We all had fun at school. We had spelling bees and games. There was always some kind of fun going on. As a kid, I really enjoyed myself.

"We had our church and Sunday School in the schoolhouse. I remember always dressing up on Sundays. You didn't wear your school clothes that day. You wore your best.

"We used to have box suppers. The girls would dress up the box real pretty. We would have real good food in our box. All dressed up, we hoped that the boy we liked best would bid on our box supper. Then, we would get to eat supper with him. Good times were had by all.

"We never had the frills the boys and girls have today. But, to me, we enjoyed as much or more than the younger generation does today."

VESTA - A Tribute
by her Canadian Friend

I met Vesta while on one of my innumerable walks. She appeared on the road, a straight, spare figure, walking easily but carrying a cane for safety's sake. Her silver-grey hair, piled high on top of her head, framed a pair of piercing bright eyes. Her blue and white gingham dress was immaculate. And, I being me, and she being her, we struck up an immediate friendship. And now, after various visits, we have a thing going between us. And I would like Vesta to tell you her own story.

"Yes, I am Vest, ninety-five years old and the last living member of the

"Yes, I am Vesta, ninety-five years old and the last living member of the
original Koreshan Unity here in Florida. Where do you come from, my dear? Canada! My, you speak good English; you enunciate so clearly. My mother was a Canadain from near Ottawa. My father? He was a schoolmaster from England who had the wanderlust. His name was Martin Newcombe and when he immigrated to Canada he met Harriet, whom he married. Because of Hattie's health and his itchy foot, they moved from island to island in the Pacific, settling in the Fiji Islands. There they lost their first child, a little girl. Mother grieved so much that father decided to leave that island of memories and start afresh. They spent some time in Hawaii, and finally made their way to San Francisco, thence to Stockton. North of there, quite close to the big trees, in 1878, I was born.

My mother was an idealist with a religious turn of mind. My father was more down to earth. It is from him I get any common sense I may posses. First, mother became interested in Spiritualism and father went along to humor her. Then she heard of the Koreshan Unity and took us to all those meetings. "Mr. and Mrs. Newcombe and family" were just about to be recieved into the Unity when father was killed in a train accident. He was forty-two years old. The older members of the sect advised mother to carry on with her plans, which she did. We traveled to

Chicago where we spent two horrible, horrible horrible winters. It was the memory of those winters, I suppose, that kept me content with life in Florida.

"A Mr. Donaldson had a one hundred-sixty acre homestead in the state of Florida which he deeded over to the Lord represented by the Koreshan Unity. So, in 1893, a group of men, women, and youngsters (I was only fifteen) started out on this great adventure. My mother and brother James came four years later.

"Anyway, we travelled by train to Punta Gorda, and from there down the southwest coast in a hired sloop. This was a one-sail vessel with no motor. We tackled with the wind, this way and that way, and we were all sick. We landed at Mound Key, where we were met by an Indian woman (a half-breed, I would say) dressed in the native costume: short dress, bare feet,with long, black braids down her back. She offered to help us in any way she could. She proved to be a most wonderful person and a most true friend.

"From there we rowed in the tow-boat to Halfway Creek. Thence we struck north through the bush carrying, as well as our own belongings, a parrot in a cage. We finally reached an ox-team trail, turned south over a rustic bridge and there we estabilished our settlement.

"I'm listening, my dear. What is it you want to know? How did we make out at first? Well, I will tell you. We pitched tents and all slept for teo months on the ground. We cooked and ate around a bonfire. I could still show you the exact spot. You know, of course, that this was a group of clever people, intelligent, and capable of doing any job. Why, just look at me! (tongue in cheek) The Brothers built a huge dormitiory in a quadrangle, one hundred by twenty feet, three stories high. This was for the Sisters. The Brothers had a log house at some distance and there was no crossing the line. About 1901, I would say, the Unity was at it's peak.

"You have children, I suppose, my dear. Three? Well, I had seventeen and I am an old maid. I decided when quite young that marriage was not for me. You see, I had a sharp ear (still do) and I often heard things I wasn't supposed to. Although all of the women were celibate, some had been married and widowed, and

they would be talking over their marriage experiences. Being young and impressionable, I wanted none of that. Oh, there was nothing abnormal about me. I was all girl.

"Oh, the seventeen childre? That was when I was teaching. The older members educated me, and we pitched in where most needed. I cooked. I nursed, but at that I rebelled. But I did enjoy teaching. One little boy I can recall was quite a handful to control; so, when I took the seventeen children swimming, I would tie a rope around Carl's waist, give him lots of leeway and tie the other end around my waist. Then, I could pull him in whenever necessary.

"I swam and dove like a duck and was very much at home in the water, I can remember playing with my dog in the river down beyond the lower landing. We were having a gay time when, out of the corner of my eye, I caught sight of an alligator making straight for me. I scrambled up the muddy bank just in time, but I feared for my dog. The next time we went swimming, we went to the upper landing. Even here, the alligator appeared, and I escaped just in time. So there was no more swimming until the river was cleared of those animals.

"Oh, yes, the Unity expanded until it was entirely self-supporting. Much more land was purchased and many buildings erected. One big house was called Hotel De Swamp, but it burned down. Although we grew the food we needed, there were times we went hungry. One winter, we survived on peanuts. The castor beans were put out to dry on the floor of the top story where Sister Bella and I slept. We had been warned that they were poisonous, but one night we were so hungry we decided to chew a few, spitting the hulj out the window (which wasn't hard to do, as there were no panes). Well...I can tell you that they made us sick all right. The next thing I knew I came to on the floor with people working over me. There were always the fish to eat, of course. Do you know what a fire-boat is, my dear? You don't?

"Well, in the prow of a small boat a fire was lit; it was pushed from behind by a steamer. The mullet would jump toward the flame and land in the boat. It was then my job to stand on the deck of the steamer, cook the mullet on a kerosene stove, and serve them on slabs of bark to the hungry people.

"That is enough reminiscing for now. I do so enjoy your company. Come again and come often. I must admit, my dear, you have stolen your way into my heart."

Vesta, a woman, head and shoulders above many, my friend.

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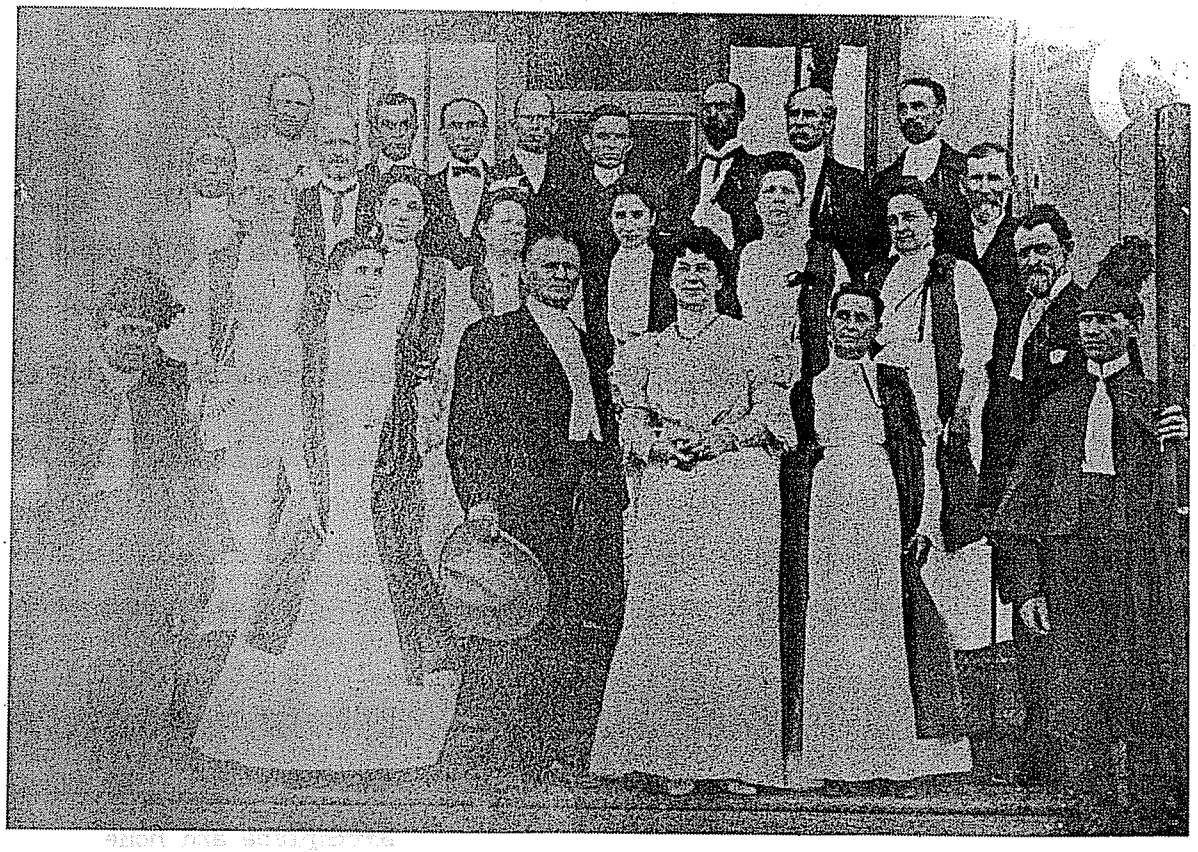


A Portion Of The Koreshan Unity

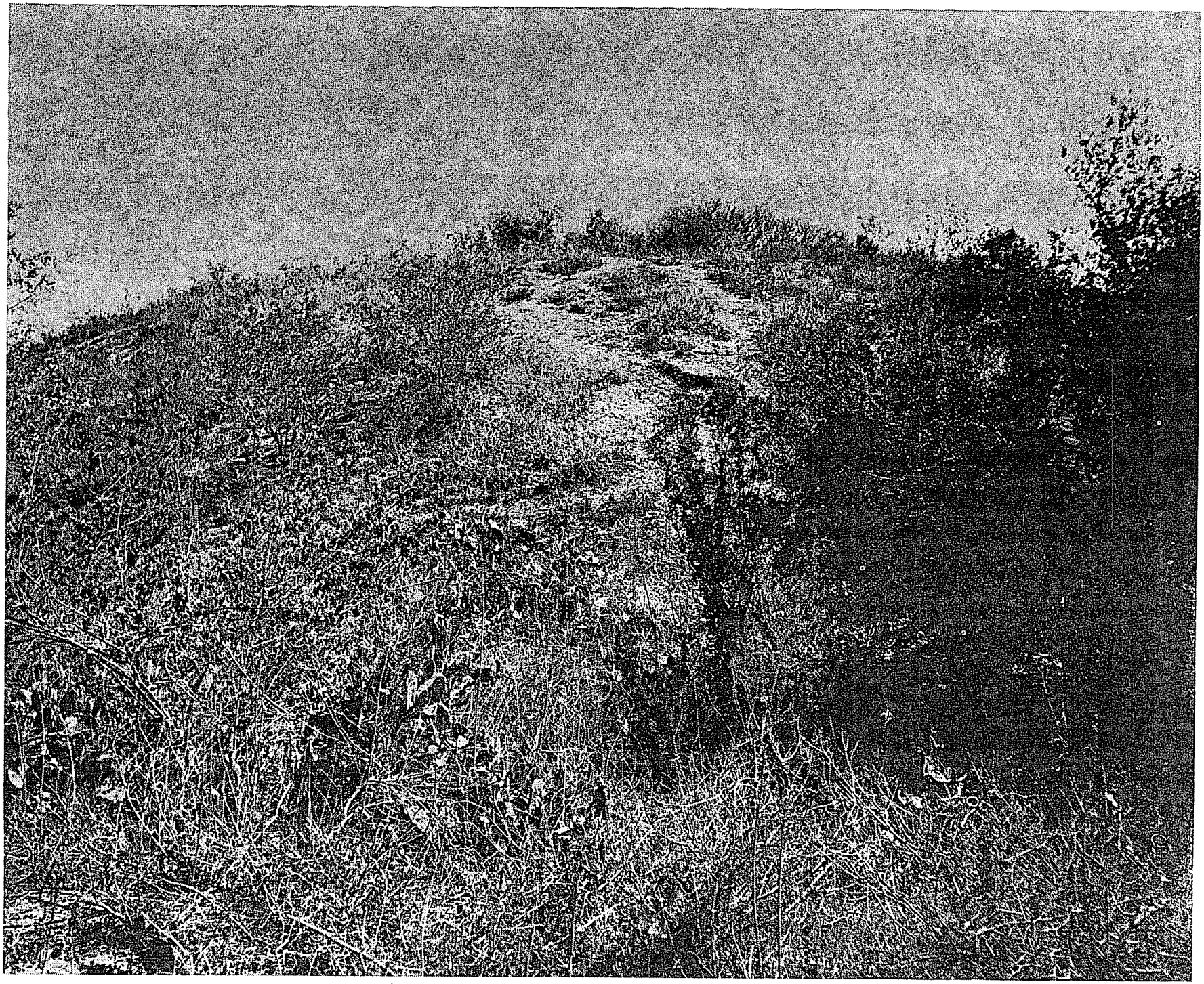
Following pages:

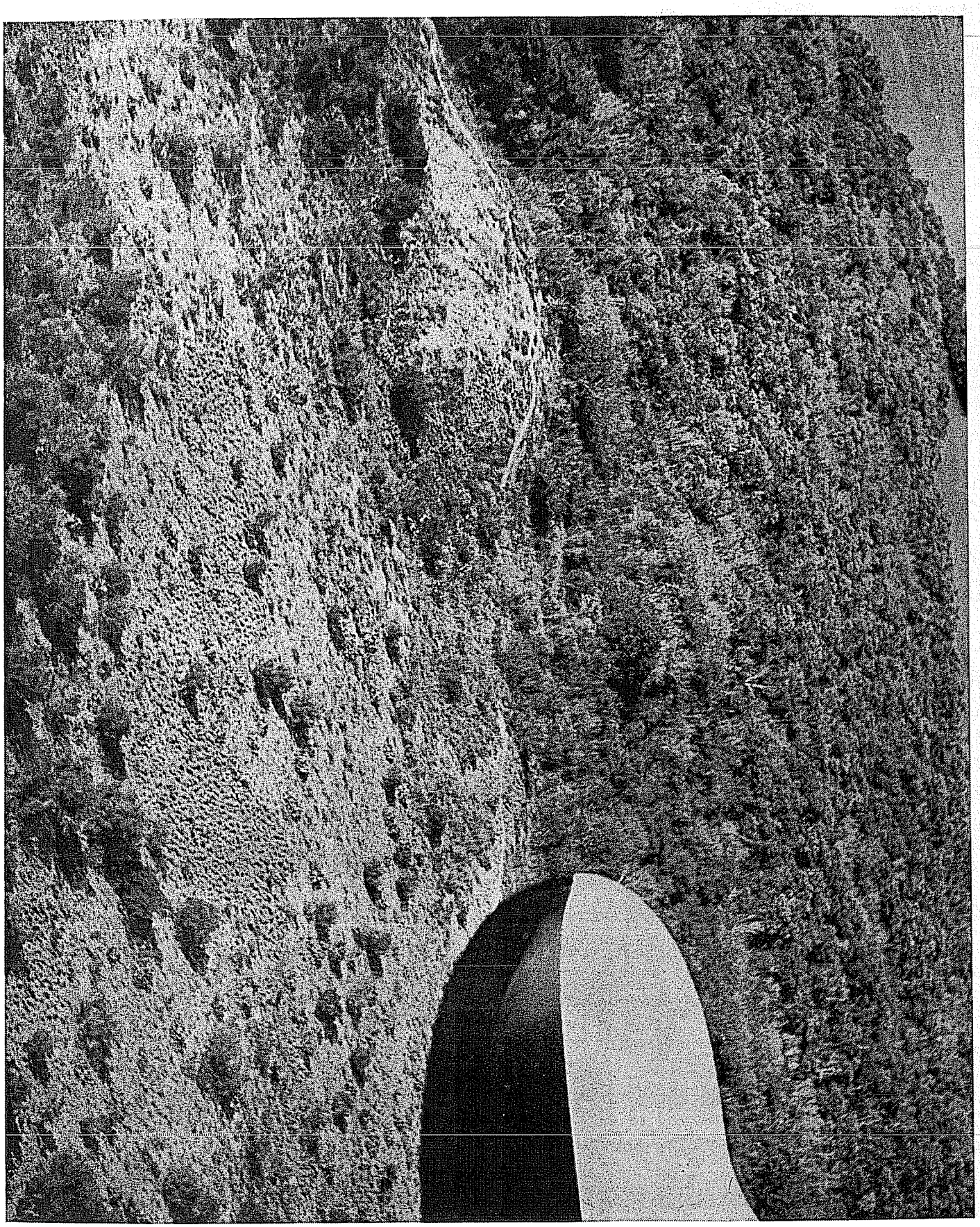
Mound Key in Estero Bay.

Birthplace and home

for several Estero

settlers





Fair Time

Terry Park in Ft. Myers.

Before "The Himalaya" came along...

A Sunday afternoon cruise on the Estero River