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Boomer estate evokes area's past

By CHAD GILLIS, Staff Writer
January 31, 2004

From the Estero River, Mirasol looks like a mirage of sorts, a picturesque vision of what Florida was like a century ago when citrus barges and shipping boats plied south Lee County waters.

A quaint, plantation-like homestead nestled along the northern edge of the river, the estate was built by one of this region's most influential families: the Boomers. And although the name may not measure up to the likes of Edison, Ford or even Estero's beloved Hornes, the Boomer family played an influential role in bringing the utopian Koreshans to Southwest Florida.

For nearly 100 years, the Boomer family has maintained the riverside property, all the while staying out of the historical limelight that's swept through south Lee in recent years. Now the home is being considered for public purchase by state and county preservation groups.

Just as the Koreshan Unity faded from a prominent community that controlled politics, printing presses and even electricity in this area around the turn of the 20th century, the Boomers' last stronghold may soon wane from family estate to a historical structure.

And if the public sale is eventually finalized, the Boomer name may at last take its place among the ranks of Koreshan founder Cyrus Teed and Gustave Damkoehler, the first recorded homesteader in the Estero area.

The Boomer story starts with the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, a disaster that destroyed much of the Midwestern hub. Among the ruins was the home of Lucius and Berthaldine Boomer.

"When she went back into the house, she found a deed to a property," said Mimi Straub, president of the Estero Historical Society. "She asked her husband if she could sell the land and give the money to (Cyrus) Teed. It was that money that financed the original trip to Estero in 1894."

Berthaldine was a member of the Koreshan Unity during the society's early years in Chicago. Koreshan leader Cyrus Teed, who promoted himself as the second coming of Christ, planned to create a utopian communal society in Southwest Florida. Berthaldine helped Teed purchase a boat and traveled with the charismatic cult leader to the banks of the Estero River.

"It was the Boomer money that allowed them to buy the sloop Ada," Straub said. "That was the most important Koreshan purchase because the only way to get to Estero was by boat. It was the Boomer money that allowed Teed to get to Estero."

Teed, Berthaldine Boomer and a handful of other Koreshans made their way up the Estero River on the Ada and met with Damkoehler. The German settler had read Koreshan literature posted in the Fort Myers area and decided to give the group several hundred acres of land along the river.

Berthaldine took on the role of Matrona, a quasi-government/religious term that essentially meant she was a part of the society's ruling class.

"The Boomers were one of the early families in the Unity that put up the finances to get things started," said Kate Anthony with the Koreshan State Historic Site. "And obviously Berthaldine was instrumental in the community. The closest we can get is she was the figurehead of the ladies."



Submitted

A black and white copy of a painting of the Mirasol home shows the unique estate along the Estero River. One of the region's most historical homes, the estate traces its roots back to the Great Chicago Fire.

Although the Koreshan religion was based on celibacy, Lucius and Berthaldine had four children. A son, also named Lucius, built the Mirasol home in 1917 for Berthaldine, who lived at the estate until her death in 1935.

The younger Lucius was also a successful businessman and was famous for his tenure as president of the luxurious Waldorf Astoria in New York. His son, George Boomer, lived in the home until his death in 1999 at the age of 77.

Nowadays, the home is a relic, a direct connection to one of Southwest Florida's historical roots.

State and county preservation groups want to purchase the home and place it in public ownership. There has also been talk of adding the Boomer estate to the Koreshan State Historic Site.

Park manager Jon Robinson said Mirasol would be a nice addition to the park because the structure represents the only Koreshan residence in existence that was built as a family home.

"I think it would be a great addition, and I'm still hopeful that at some point it will be added to the park," Robinson said. "The fact that it's been maintained by the same family all these years is another historical aspect."

George's wife, Nola Boomer, currently lives in the home. If the land is eventually sold to a public entity, Nola has requested permission to live at Mirasol the remainder of her life.

(Contact Staff Writer Chad Gillis at 213-6040 or cegillis@naplesnews.com)

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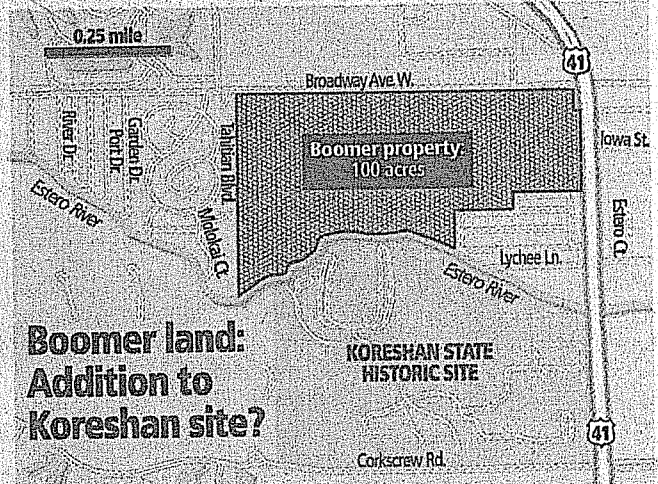


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**Boomer land:
Addition to
Koreshan site?**

Sources: ESRI; GDT; Lee County, Lands Division

Karl Rumore/Staff

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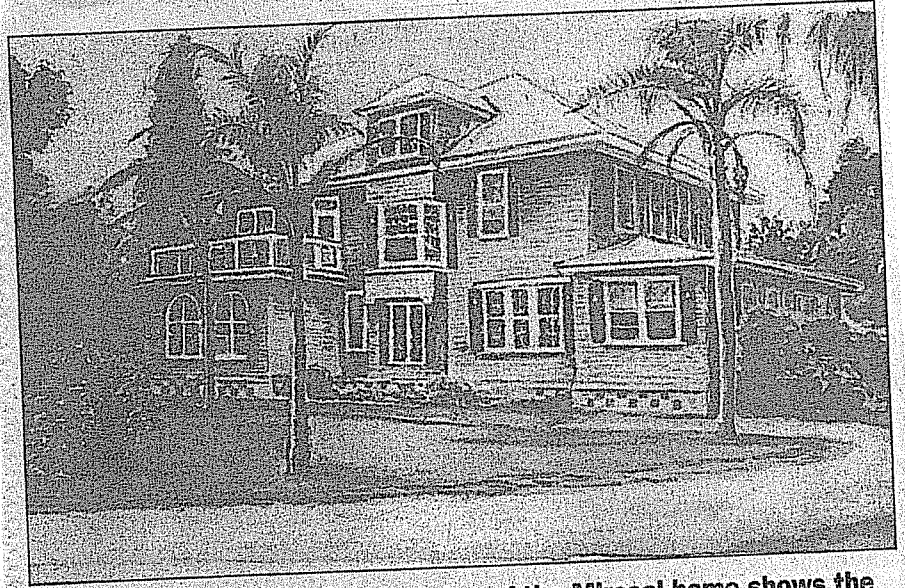
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A black and white copy of a painting of the Mirasol home shows the unique estate along the Estero River. One of the region's most historical homes, the estate traces its roots back to the Great Chicago Fire. The Boomer family has maintained the home since 1917. Photo courtesy of the Estero Historical Society



Berthaldine Boomer. Photo special to the Banner