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# ***Communal Societies***

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Flo Morse. *The Shakers and the World's People.*  
*Hughie Lawson* 86

John A. Hostetler. *Amish Society.*  
*Ruth Shonle Cavan* 87

## Cyrus R. Teed, Koreshanity, and Cellular Cosmogony

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### Abstract

The Koreshan Unity was founded in the 19th Century by Cyrus Read Teed, a New York physician. The Unity was based on a complex synthesis of pseudo-science, social economics, and fundamental Christianity, but became most well known for Teed's espousal of the "hollow earth" theory. The study documents the early development of the movement in New York, then follows the growth of the Unity through three distinct stages in Teed's later life: a formative period, largely related to the City of Chicago; the cosmological investigation period, overlapping the location of the movement in Chicago and later in Florida; and the period of social reformation, dealing with the community in Estero, Florida, and the aftermath of Teed's death in 1908. Teed's "illumination," the source of his inspiration, is examined in relation to known accounts as well as in the context of Teed's basic belief structure as it seems to have been in the mid-19th century.

The emergence of communal life in 20th century America has brought increasing attention to earlier attempts to found utopian communities. Although all such groups have individual histories, a few, at least, seem to have been founded by leaders increasingly confounded by religious, technological, and social developments of the 19th century. The emergence of newer forms of Biblical criticism and theological expression, the rise of the scientific method of analysis as exemplified in Darwinian biology, and the scale of social change emanating from industrial capitalism, among others, had upset what was, to many, the established order of things. Disturbed by the conceptualization of an infinite universe, of an organic evolution stretching backward into a vast unknown, and of social rearrangement only yet dimly understood, there was, to some, comfort to be found in finiteness, boundedness, order and less complex arrangements.

Emanating from the unique circumstances of the late 19th century, a host of individual perspectives arose, making an effort to reconcile such discomforts: a flat earth or a hollow earth, with the safety of known limits; a definite time and place in which creation became manifest; a social structure and social life which, at one and the same time, could take advantage of the new but remain rooted in the old. In short, a simple universe which by mental analogy was one with beauty, symmetry, ordered arrangement and, not the least important, godliness. Perhaps this is a frame of reference for beginning an understanding of Koreshanity and its founder, Cyrus R. Teed. For it was not so much in the uniqueness of any single belief as it was in the integration of science, religion, and social economics that the movement of Teed became known.

#### Cyrus Read Teed

In 1839 Cyrus Read Teed was born near Trout Creek in Delaware County, New York, the second son in a family of eight.<sup>1</sup> Soon after his birth the family moved to Utica and at eleven, Cyrus left school for a job on the Erie Canal. His parents were apparently, devout Baptists and Teed was urged to study for the ministry because of his powers of oratory. Instead, in 1859, he began the study of medicine in the office of Samuel Teed, his uncle, in Utica. He married Delia M. Row, was father to a son Douglas (who later became of some renown as an artist in the Binghamton area<sup>2</sup>), and joined the Union Army medical service during the Civil War where he was attached to a field hospital.<sup>3</sup> After the War Teed continued his medical studies at the New York Eclectic College, graduated, and in 1868, established his own practice in Utica, just one year before the remarkable experience that was to transform not only his life, but also that of countless followers to come.

Teed was a learned man full of curiosity but his training in medical science began to learn more to the occult and he was preoccupied with alchemy. According to his own account these pursuits were not without reward, because he immodestly claimed to have discovered that which had eluded the sages of countless centuries prior to his own work:

I had succeeded in transforming matter of one kind to its equivalent energy, and in reducing this energy, through polaric influence, to matter of another kind . . . The "philosopher's stone" had been discovered, and I was the humble instrument for the exploitation of so magnitudinous a result.<sup>4</sup>

According to Teed, it was near midnight on an autumn eve in 1869 as he sat in his "electro-alchemical" laboratory pondering his successes and hoping to perfect further the laws of transmutation when an even more singular incident occurred. In Teed's words one can feel the creative force of his prose, recognize the scientist at work, and come close to his very self.

I bent myself to the task of projecting into tangibility the creative principle. Suddenly, I experienced a relaxation at the occiput or back part of the brain, and a peculiar buzzing tension at the forehead or sinciput; succeeding this was a sensation as of a Faradic battery of the softest tension, about the organs of the brain called the *lyra*, *crura pinealis*, and *conarium*. There gradually spread from the center of my brain to the extremities of my body, and, apparently to me, into the auric sphere of my being, miles outside of my body, a vibration so gentle, soft, and dulciferous that I was impressed to lay myself upon the bosom of this gently oscillating ocean of magnetic and spiritual ecstasy. I realized myself gently yielding to the impulse of reclining upon the vibratory sea of this, my newly-found delight. My every thought but one had departed from the contemplation of earthly and material things. I had but a lingering, vague remembrance of natural consciousness and desire.<sup>5</sup>

As Teed luxuriated in his plane of astral projection he suddenly saw a "light of dazzling brilliancy"<sup>6</sup> which slowly materialized into the form of a beautiful woman who addressed him: "Fear not, my son, thou satisfactory offspring of my profoundest yearnings! I have nurtured thee through countless embodiments."<sup>7</sup> A lengthy dialogue followed, but two statements of the celestial vision which had visited Teed's laboratory stand out as being of special significance:

- 1). "Offspring of my most potential desire, thou art chosen to redeem the race,"<sup>8</sup> and,
- 2). "I have brought thee to this birth to sacrifice thee upon the altar of all human hopes, that through thy quickening of me, thy Mother and Bride, the Sons of God shall spring into visible creation."<sup>9</sup>

There was no doubt that Teed was to be the new Messiah.

As a result of this illumination Teed began practicing medicine in conjunction with preaching. Finding some succor from his immediate family he soon began to preach to his patients. But Utica was, at that time, not the scene for a doctor to begin espousing strange doctrines, for it lay in that psychically fertile earth of a broad mystic highway running

across New York State."<sup>10</sup> New Yorkers, already having met with the Rappites, Joseph Smith and his Mormons, the Oneida Community of John Humphrey Noyes, Anna Lee's Shakers, the Society of True Inspirationists, and the strange beginnings of American spiritualism at the Fox home in Hydesville, held little tolerance to what, they believed, was another expression of deviance. Teed's medical practice languished and he drifted from one New York town to another, discovering that his patients preferred doctoring to his style of strange preachings.<sup>11</sup> In 1880, discouraged and disillusioned, he moved to Moravia where he took over the operation of his parent's small mop-making business and established his first group following. Known to many as "Cyrus the Messenger,"<sup>12</sup> Teed himself Hebraized his given name into the pseudonym "Koresh" and went by this name until his death, forsaking it only once when he authored a work of visionistic fiction under the

It is difficult to reconstruct just exactly what it was that Teed taught in the early days. Although many writers,<sup>14</sup> and Teed's later followers,<sup>15</sup> claim that his teachings had been revealed to him that strange night in his laboratory, one searches in vain Teed's account of his "illumination" for any specific doctrine, religious or secular, other than vague references to reincarnation, ascendancy to the astral plane, immortality, and the annunciation of Teed's messiahship. Teed, himself, made mention of the fact that his discovery of the laws of transmutation and his "illumination" were separate events. By 1880, however, several basic doctrines crystallized which would later be refined and better articulated. Among these were the communalization of the social order, abolition of private property, the sanctity of celibacy, and a vague awareness of the coming of the millennium. Teed's communal ideas may have developed as a result of his contacts with the Shakers, the Perfectionists at Oneida, and especially the Rappites or Harmonists who had returned from Indiana and established their new communal order at Economy, Pennsylvania.<sup>16</sup> At one time the Harmonists and the followers of Teed contemplated some sort of merger, but the demise of the society at Economy prevented this from taking place.<sup>17</sup> Celibacy was a major tenet of the Shakers, but Teed especially emphasized chastity as a means of preserving sexual energy, a doctrine which may have owed much to the Oneida colonists. The millennial doctrine, of course was a common religious topic of the nineteenth century.

These were not, however, the doctrines that made Teed's movement distinctly different. He integrated them into a unique universal structure held together by the concept for which he has become most noted, that of the hollow earth. Teed, pondering the significance of Isaiah 40:12, ". . . who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the

earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?," became convinced that man lived "in" the earth rather than "on" it and was impressed by the key scriptural words "hollow" and "enclosed." It was, apparently, this attack on the Copernican view of astronomy that earned Teed the appellation in central New York of "that crazy doctor."<sup>18</sup>

Teed revealed this idea, which he termed the "cellular cosmogony," in conjunction with his ideas on the nature of the social order and referred to his beliefs as Koreshanity or the Koreshan Universology. One can only speculate on the origins of the hollow earth concept in Teed's mind, but the basic idea had illustrious proponents before his time. One was the Scottish physicist Sir John Leslie, known for his works on the properties of heat. Even earlier, Dr. Edmund Halley, of comet fame, had theorized such a possibility as did the Swiss inventor of binary logarithms, Leonhard Euler.<sup>19</sup> Such an idea had also been espoused by Cotton Mather; but the most devoted apostle, prior to Teed, was a veteran of the War of 1812, Captain John Cleves Symmes, who spent a fruitless life trying to convince the world that the interior of the earth was habitable and could be reached through two large entry holes located at the poles.<sup>20</sup> A copy of Symmes' work appeared in 1868 under the name of Professor W.F. Lyons, entitled *A Hollow Globe*, published just a year before Teed's illumination. Jules Verne's fictionalized version of the hollow earth first appeared in 1864. Doubtless Teed was influenced by some of these writings.

Whatever the background of his thinking, Teed's later years appear to fall into three distinct periods, although overlapping chronologically: an early, or formative period, centered largely around cosmological ideas and contemporary science; a middle, or investigative, period, during which Teed and his adherents made prodigious attempts to validate his beliefs empirically; and a late, or social, period during which he synthesized his ideas and translated them into a new form of religious movement and social order.

### Teed in the Formative Period

Within two years the mop-making business at Moravia had failed, and Teed with several followers, went to Syracuse for a short time. Failing to receive converts, they moved to New York City in a third floor flat near 135th Street and Eighth Avenue.<sup>21</sup> Here Teed established a Koreshan colony consisting of himself and four ladies, including his sister and a cousin. They were about to abandon New York when Teed was asked to address the National Association for Mental Health in Chicago in September, 1886. His oratorical powers must have been at their best for he was elected president of the association and invited to present more lectures. Immediately, Teed and his devoted little band moved to south Chicago.

The next seventeen years were extremely productive ones for Teed. Organization was rapid. A communal, celibate colony was established in a large mansion, called Beth-Ophra, in the suburb of Washington Heights (now part of Chicago). In the Englewood District of south Chicago, he also established a central office; the Guiding Star Publishing House; and the College of Life, soon renamed the Koreshan University. Teed was also able to purchase several small businesses on the west side of Chicago through which he hoped to demonstrate the fallacies of the capitalistic system.

The rationale for this system of organization was beautifully articulated in Teed's typical neat and tidy manner in a schematic diagram in which the universal and earthly systems are woven together to form the Koreshan Unity.<sup>22</sup> The triangular, tripartite organizational systems are obvious. Within the Koreshan Unity were to be three hierarchies of followership: the pre-eminent unity, which included the communal, celibate followers; the department of equitable administration, which included the non-communal and married followers; and patrons of equation, which consisted of those believing or interested in Koreshanity but choosing not to live according to Koreshan precepts. These three hierarchies were further subdivided into three aspects of the social order; the secular system, the educational system, and the commercial system, each of which was further subdivided into three units based on the hierarchies of followership. Within the secular system the Society Arch-Triumphant included the communal, celibate followers, the others being the marital order (monogamic), and the investigative court. Within the commercial system the Church Triumphant was to be the Koreshan agency which would take charge of the communalization of all business. The other commercial systems were the bureau of equitable commerce and the industrial co-operative union. Within the educational system the Koreshan University was pre-eminent, the others being the department of industrial science and the department of industrial economy.<sup>23</sup>

With the establishment of the Guiding Star Publishing House the Koreshans began sending forth a steady stream of literature, practically all consisting of Teed's writings. The first issue of their weekly journal, *The Guiding Star*, was published in 1887, but the name was changed in November, 1889, to *The Flaming Sword* (" . . . and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life," Genesis 3:24). One list of Teed's publications included 31 titles, and it was not complete.<sup>24</sup>

Teed's oratory, powers of persuasion, and his doctrines apparently had appeal for south Chicagoans, and his number of adherents grew.

Within a few years he had 126 members at Beth-Ophra and at other locations in Englewood.<sup>25</sup> Before the turn of the century the Koreshans claimed to have 10,000 members, of whom 505 were members of the Society Arch-Triumphant (celibate, communal). They had a communal branch in San Francisco, and organized groups in Baltimore, Boston, Pittsburgh, Denver, Ogden, Tacoma, Portland, Lynn, and Springfield.<sup>26</sup>

In 1891 Teed gave a talk in Pittsburgh in which he captivated his audience with some of the practical applications of the power that would be unleashed when the governments of the world had fallen under his leadership. He proposed to employ a million men to build a six track railroad from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts, to construct a pneumatic tunnel that would carry persons on non-wheeled vehicles from New York to San Francisco in twelve hours, and claimed to have applied for a patent for a device by which he could sit in his office in Chicago and set type by wire for every newspaper in the country.<sup>27</sup> Although some see in Teed's words the delusions of grandeur, it is just as easy to see a sort of technological prophecy akin to that of Jules Verne.

In 1893 the World Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago. The impact of presentations on eastern religions, metaphysical philosophies, occult topics, and the personal appearance of teachers from throughout the world, was enormous. Some writers claim that Teed borrowed most of his basic ideas from various doctrines discussed at the Parliament,<sup>28</sup> but this would imply that he came to Chicago in 1886 without having some well-developed system of his own. His activities in south Chicago between 1886 and 1893 seem to belie this, although his interest in mediumship seems to have emerged from contact with Swedenborgianism at the Parliament.<sup>29</sup>

In 1894 the Koreshan group in Chicago had become, in a small way, a success. It was at this time Teed entered the second, or investigative, period of his movement.

### Teed the Cosmological Investigator

Although Koreshanity appeared to be in the ascendancy, Teed was not without his critics, and he readily admitted that many did not believe.

In this effort we have been held up to insolent ridicule and most bitter persecution, consonant with the public sentiment is subject . . . We have pushed out claims to a knowledge of cosmology until the advocates of the spurious "sciences" begin to feel their insecurity . . .<sup>30</sup>

It is small wonder that scientists of the day were not responsive to Teed's teachings. In addition to his denial of Copernican astronomy he rewrote Huttonian geology. To Teed the earth's surface was concave and contained the entire universe. Outside the earth was nothing. The crust of the earth was composed of 17 layers and was but 100 miles thick. The "inner" five layers were geological strata which were underlain by five mineral layers. The "outer" seven were layers of the noble metals, the outermost one being pure gold. Beyond gold, the most noble of the noble metals, there could be nothing.

Within the earth's surface was found the central sun, always half-lit and half-dark, thus explaining day and night, and this was the power battery of the entire universe. Our sun, however, was only a projection of the central sun and followed the path of the ecliptic. The planets were reflections of mercurial "disci" floating in space between the various layers of the crust, and the moon was a sphere of crystalline energy forming an X-ray picture of the earth's surface which was radiated to us on the surface through the moon's own energy radiation. Stars were focal points of light and mere reflections of the mercurial disci.<sup>31</sup> Energy was matter and matter was energy, energy flowing into and out of the central sun, materializing into matter in the crust, and re-energizing and re-radiating back to the central sun.

It had long been Teed's opinion that persons assumed the earth's surface was convex only because they did not understand the principles of perspective and the laws of optics. Social and scientific pressure soon convinced Teed that explanations of the laws of optics were not enough to convince a cynical public of the truths of Koreshanity, and he began a diligent search for empirical proof of his beliefs, a search which had two major dimensions. The first, to find an area suitable for his construction of a New Jerusalem where he could gather the Society Arch-Triumphant in a single body under his leadership and vindicate his views through living example. The second, to scientifically validate his theory that the earth's surface was actually concave, thus vindicating the principles of Koreshan Universology. The two searches were inextricably intertwined.

Whether coincidence, revelation, or messianic destiny, Teed received in 1893 a letter from Gustav Damkohler, a German immigrant who had settled along the Estero Bay area of Florida south of Fort Myers on the Gulf Coast. Damkohler had accidentally come across some of the writings of Koresh and this strange German, who had also claimed to have received celestial vibrations of some sort,<sup>32</sup> invited Teed to come and investigate the area. Accordingly, on January 1, 1894, Teed and three Koreshan women from Chicago reached Damkohler and were greatly impressed by Estero. Teed concluded this section of Florida was

"the vitellus of the cosmogenic egg, the vital beginning of the new order."<sup>33</sup> Estero was to be the site of the New Jerusalem. The first search had ended.

In the meantime, plans were made to conduct experiments on the nature of the shape of the earth's surface. Teed's major assistant in this work was Professor U.G. Morrow, about whom little is known except that he was an "astronomer and geodesist."<sup>34</sup> The first experiments were conducted in July, 1896, along the Illinois and Michigan beaches in south Chicago and Roby (now part of Hammond), Indiana. Encouraged by the work, Teed and his group decided to complete the experiments along the flat, sandy beaches near Naples, Florida, close to the site of the Estero settlement which had attracted a score of residents.

The Koreshan geodetic staff arrived in Florida on January 2, 1897, established headquarters at Naples on the property of Col. W. N. Holdeman, owner and publisher of *The Courier Journal* of Louisville, Kentucky and under the direction of Morrow, began their work. Morrow had developed a surveying device known as a "rectilineator" and extended an "air line" (a horizontal line rather than a line following the curvature of the earth's surface) for four miles along the Naples beach. Near Gordon's Pass they discovered that the surface of the ocean, when viewed through a telescope with a hair-line had actually curved upward above the "air line" rather than downward as would be believed by most surveyors and engineers.

The scientific cause for this discrepancy resides in the optical illusion referred to above, namely, that on one side of the visual line there are two factors entering into the formation of a picture on the retina, as follows: The perpendicular post producing the effect of retinal impression, is shortened or elongated proportionably to the distance of the object in perspective; and in addition to this the geolinear foreshortening (the line along the earth's surface) induces a corresponding effect upon the retinal membrane. We confront, then, two kinds of foreshortening — the one geolinear, the other perpendicular — in all geodetic observations' and an optical phenomenon which should be attributed to the principle of perspective foreshortening is ignorantly attributed to curvation.<sup>36</sup>

With the work of Morrow, providing satisfaction for Teed's basic contentions, the two published the accounts of their experiments in

1899.<sup>37</sup> Needless to say, the activities along the beach at Naples did not fail to attract the attention of the contemporary press.<sup>38</sup>

The work of Koresh and Morrow, *The Cellular Cosmogony . . . Or . . . The Earth A Concave Sphere*, remains the basic text for all Koreshan belief. It is divided into two parts: the first, by Koresh, explaining the principles of Koreshan Unity; and the second, by Morrow, describing all the survey experiments. The dedication of the volume well describes Teed's philosophy.

This little work is part of the skirmish line of the Army of Revolution; it shall never cease its influence until every vestige of the fallacies and evils of a perverted science and religion shall have been relegated to oblivion. To the first fruits of the Resurrection, offspring of the Lord, I supremely dedicate it; thence to all men in all grades of progress in their liberation from thralldom to ignorance and the hells of the competitive system.<sup>39</sup>

But it is an inconspicuous paragraph in the book's introduction that provides the synthesis between concavity and Teed's view of the social order resulting in the Koreshan Unity or Universology.

To know the Lord Christ absolutely, is to be in the consciousness of the Deity; and to become like him is to sit upon the throne of his glory. This knowledge is so related to the structured alchemico-organic macrocosm, that 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.<sup>40</sup>

The fabric was completely woven. The geography of the earth became the religion of Koreshanity, and the religion of Koreshanity became the geography of the earth. There could be no separation. "The secret is claimed to have been found, the 'philosopher's stone' is being applied, the circle has been squared, baser metals have been transmuted into gold, the Bible is now understood, and its laws clearly analyzed by the founder of Koreshanity."<sup>41</sup> Teed now moved into his life's final period structuring the social order at the New Jerusalem site along the Estero River.

### Teed the Social Reformer

Within a month following the arrival of Teed on the Estero River, and after receiving a gift of land from Damkohler, 24 eager Koreshans journeyed to the site of the New Jerusalem. They built a log shelter to

house themselves as they began their work. Teed envisioned a star shaped city with streets 400 feet in width. It was to be the greatest city "in" the earth.<sup>42</sup> Teed's own description is undeniably ecstatic.

. . . like a thousand world's fair cities, Estero will manifest one great panorama of architectural beauty, one great system of orderly activity, where every obstruction to the free motion of every human orb in its circle of progress will be removed. Here is to exist the climax, the crowning glory, of civilization's greatest cosmopolitan center and capital. We may stand upon the site of ancient Babylon — in the present wilderness of Assyria — and wonder at the existence of one of the world's greatest cities of the past. We may stand upon the site of the Greater Estero-to-be, and think not of the past with its ruins and its dead, but of the future when, through the influence of scientific truth in its application to life and human relations, there springs into the world a new element of human progress, which shall loudly call to all the world for millions of progressive minds and hearts to leave the turmoil of the great time of trouble, and make their homes in the Guiding Star City.<sup>43</sup>

For a decade, 1894 to 1903, the Koreshans diligently worked to develop their colony sixteen miles south of Fort Myers. When construction reached a point to accommodate Teed's followers, he liquidated his Chicago holdings and the Society Arch-Triumphant moved as a body to its new home.

The work had not been easy. Lacking any experience in such a venture the Koreshans literally hacked the New Jerusalem out of the palmetto wilderness of western Florida. They dredged the Estero River, dug drainage ditches, straightened ravines, landscaped, and constructed more than 35 buildings. By 1906, the Koreshan Unity acquired nearly 7,000 acres of land and figured their capital assets at nearly a quarter-million dollars.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike many communal societies the Koreshans were a gay lot. Although there were never more than about 200 resident Koreshans in the colony at a time, Teed's intellectual bent placed great emphasis on such activities as music, art, and dancing, and the colony had a renowned band and orchestra. Teed ruled this theocratic state jointly with one of his most devoted followers from Chicago, Mrs. Annie G. Ordway, whom he designated as Victoria Gratia, Pre-Eminent. She was, Teed claimed, the embodiment of the celestial vision which had provided him with his illumination. The governmental structure was cosmic, with Koresh and Victoria Gratia being the central duality, a

Planetary Chamber consisting of six women, a Stellar Chamber of four men, and a Signet Chamber of six men and six women. This represented a synthesis, through what was termed a process of "correspondential analogy," of the cosmogony and social order as Teed preached it. A friendly Shaker visited Estero about this time and left the following account:

The buildings are mostly set in a park along the right bank of the Estero River for about a mile. This park contains sunken gardens filled with flowers, banana trees loaded with fruit, paw-paw trees in fruit, palm trees of many varieties, the tall and stately eucalyptus, the bamboo waving its beautiful foilage, and many flowering trees and shrubs. Mounds are cast up, and crowned with large urns or vases for flowering plants. Steps lead down into the sunken gardens and to the water's edge at the river. This land, where the park and the buildings are located, was at times overflowed with water before the Koreshans came. They expended \$3,000 or more in dredging the river, besides making a deep ravine to carry off the surplus water into the river. This ravine is now beautified with Para and Guinea grasses, both natives of Cuba, and is crossed by several artistic foot-bridges made of bamboo and other woods. Almost every kind of tropical fruit possible to grow in Florida can be found in this delightful garden, flowering vines cover the verandas of the houses and the foot-bridges in the park. Steps leading down to the boat landing, made of concrete colored with red clay, are quite grand, and were made and designed by the brethren. In fact, all the work in this magnificent garden is the product of home brains and industry. Koresh says he intends parking the river on both sides down to the bay, a distance of five miles.<sup>45</sup> A conservatory, a library, and a new Koreshan University were being planned.

The sudden influx of several hundred Chicagoans who voted as a block was a great disturbance to the politicians of Fort Myers and Lee County. Soon efforts were made to disenfranchise the Koreshan group and the customary rumors that surround all communal orders — immorality, drunkenness, occult and bizarre doings — began to circulate. In defiance of the Democratic machine Teed inaugurated his own political party, the progressive Liberty Party, and began publishing a secular newspaper, *The American Eagle*, which had no small influence on nearby Florida voters. It was 1906, an election year, and the county politicians were unhappy with Teed since his influence had made the

election outcome uncertain. On October 13, as the Koreshans tell the story, Teed was attacked and struck down by the town marshal of Fort Myers and suffered grievous injuries from which he never recovered. A painful nervous disorder developed and Cyrus Read Teed of Trout Creek, Cyrus the Messenger, Koresh, the Messiah, and the founder of the City of the Guiding Star, died at Estero three days before Christmas in 1908.

The immediate aftermath provided no less. Despite his own prediction, made in 1892, that he would suffer martyrdom at the hands of a "people who professed the religion of Jesus Christ the God," Teed was also a believer in his own immortality and reembodiment. The Koreshans were divided. There were those reconciled to his death, but the majority took Teed at his word and mandated that no burial be allowed for three days so that the body of Koresh could materialize. Christmas came, Christmas went, but Koresh made no move. Finally the county health authorities ordered burial and the Koreshans placed the remains of their departed leader in a concrete mausoleum on Estero Island, engraving on the front simply, "Cyrus, Shepherd Stone of Israel."<sup>46</sup>

The death of their leader resulted in disunity among the Koreshan Unity. One Gustav Faber claimed that on his deathbed, Teed had requested that he assume leadership. Victoria Gratia claimed supreme authority. Others rejected both, quietly awaiting the return of their prophet. These demanded to be allowed to investigate the status of Teed's remains. Denied, they attempted to raid the tomb and a watchman had to be assigned. Just how long the watch was kept is unknown, but it became unnecessary after a still October day in 1921. A terrific windstorm blew across the landscape of Estero Island and swept the tomb of Koresh into the Gulf of Mexico. For the true Koreshans the messianic destiny had been fulfilled. Koresh was freed from his mortal prison and would soon return.

### Estero After Teed

Disunity was no stranger at Estero. The early days of development had been hard ones and many became disillusioned and left the group. Since their possessions belonged to the colony some just left to get away, but a number sued in the Lee County courts. Even Gustav Damkohler, the benefactor of the site of New Jerusalem, sued the Koreshans for return of his land, but the courts granted him only half.<sup>47</sup>

The mainstream of the colony were the celibates. Without Teed's leadership converts to the Society Arch-Triumphant declined, and even the families of the marital order began to drift away. When historian



Carl Carmer visited the Koreshans shortly after World War II he found only six men and six women left, supported by a trust established around the Koreshan business activities and landholdings. They ran a general store on the Tamiami Trail, a main north-south artery, a gasoline station, a curio shop, and a trailer court leasing much of their land.

In 1947 a dispute broke out among the surviving Koreshans which threatened the continued existence of Estero. As a result of lawsuits, land had to be sold and the aged management was forced to consider new alternatives for perpetuation.<sup>48</sup> Recognizing that young people were not interested in Estero, and some wished only a place to live, leadership passed into the hands of Laurence W. Bubbett, whose parents had been early Teed converts in Chicago. Bubbett spent most of his life in New York City as a copyreader, but returned to the scene of his boyhood to take over the affairs of the colony. He was determined that Estero would not become an infirmary for the aged.

Bubbett was authorized to approach Florida state officials about the possibilities of perpetuating the remnant of the Koreshan landscape as a historical monument. Discussions commenced in 1952 but it was not until 1961 that the State of Florida accepted from the Koreshans, "in the name of humanity," 305 acres of property to be designated as the Florida Koreshan State Park. Most of the colony buildings are now within the Park and the large Art Hall, one of the earliest structures erected at the New Jerusalem, is now a combination art and Koreshan museum, containing many paintings by Teed's son, Morrow's rectilineator, Teed's Koreshanic charts, and his globe showing the continents on the inside.

The Koreshan Unity, Incorporated, is still a functional entity at Estero. With Hedwig Michel as President, her presence is evidence of Teed's teachings. Working as a Headmistress in a Jewish school in Germany in the 1930's, she hired Peter Bender, a wounded aviator of World War I days, to teach mathematics. Bender had read Teed's cosmogony and was successful in converting Miss Michel. Bender himself became so infatuated with the cellular cosmogony that he soon came to believe that he was the reincarnation of Koresh. Just before the war Miss Michel headed to Estero and Peter Bender's messianic destiny ended in a Nazi concentration camp.<sup>49</sup>

The Koreshans still publish their monthly journal, *The American Eagle*, now largely devoted to historical and conservation articles related to the local area. *The Flaming Sword* was last issued in October, 1948, a fire shortly thereafter destroyed the Guiding Star Publishing House. But the magazine did not die with a whimper. On page 11 of that

issue is a copy of the letter that Bubbett sent to the editor of *Life* magazine pointing out his error in interpreting a high altitude photo of the Bonneville salt flats as revealing the earth's convexity. To the Koreshans, we still live "inside."<sup>50</sup>

## Notes

<sup>48</sup>H. Michel, *A Gift to the People*, Koreshan Unity, Inc., Estero, Florida, no date, p. (2); an extensive account of Teed is that of C. Carmer, *Dark Trees to the Wind: A Cycle of York State Years*, D. McKay Company, Inc., N.Y., 1949, reprinted 1956, pp. 260-289, 368; see also, R.S. Fogarty, Introduction in the reprint of C.R. Teed, *The Cellular Cosmogony . . . Or . . . The Earth a Concave Sphere*, Porcupine Press, Philadelphia, 1975; an excellent interpretation of Koreshan religious belief is found in E.T. Clark, *The Small Sects in America*, Abingdon Press, N.Y., 1949, pp. 147-150.

<sup>49</sup>Carmer, op. cit., p. 262. It should also be mentioned that Teed may have been a distant cousin of Joseph Smith of Mormon revelation.

<sup>50</sup>M. Gardner, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*, Dover Publications, N.Y., 1957, pp. 22-23.

<sup>1</sup>*The Illumination of Koresh: Marvelous Experiences of the Great Alchemist Thirty Years Ago, At Utica N. Y.*, The Guiding Star Publishing House, Chicago, no date, c. 1899, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup>Carmer, op. cit., p. 260. For a development of the mystic belt of New York see W.R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*, Harper Torchbooks, N.Y., 1965.

<sup>11</sup>Carmer, op. cit., pp. 268-269; Fogarty, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup>F. Webber, *Escape to Utopia: The Communal Movement in America*, Hastings House, Publishers, N.Y., 1959, p. 355, a rather shallow and cynical piece of work.

<sup>13</sup>Lord Chester, *The Great Red Dragon*, The Guiding Star Publishing House, Estero, Florida 1909. Since Teed died in 1908 this was published posthumously.

<sup>14</sup>Examples are: Clark, op. cit., p. 147; and, Gardner, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>15</sup>Michel, op. cit., "this illumination was the revelation of the mysteries of life and death, of the form and character of the universe, of the relation of man to God and man's ultimate destiny in God. It was the revelation of universal knowledge," p. (2). See the excellent account of W.A. Hinda, *American Communities and Co-operative Colonies*, 2nd revision, C.H. Kerr and Co., Chicago, 1908, p. 480. Since Teed's published writings began to appear only in the late 1880's much of his account of the earlier days was probably apocryphal.

<sup>16</sup>Michel, op. cit., p. (3); Fogarty, op. cit. The possible fact that Teed and Anne Ordway were novitiates in the Shaker colony at Mt. Lebanon, N.Y., is puzzling without more detail (information in a letter from T.W. Beasley, December 19, 1979).

<sup>17</sup>Michel, op. cit., p. (3).

<sup>18</sup>Carmer, op. cit., p. 268.

<sup>19</sup>W. Ley, "The Hollow Earth," *Galaxy*, March, 1956, pp. 71-81; Gardner, op. cit., p. 21; W. Smith, *The Hidden Secrets of the Hollow Earth*, Zebra Books, N.Y., 1976.

<sup>20</sup>Ley, op. cit.; Gardner, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup>Carmer, op. cit., p. 269.

<sup>22</sup>Koresh and U.G. Morrow, *The Cellular Cosmogony . . . Or . . . The Earth A. Concave Sphere*, The Guiding Star Publishing House, Chicago, 1899 (anno Koresh 60), p. 191. Republished, with addenda, by the same house at Estero in 1905 and 1922. Reprinted, 1975, by Porcupine Press (see footnote 1).

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 1899.

<sup>24</sup>M. Burnham (ed.) *The United States Catalog: Books in Print January 1, 1928*, 4th edition, H.W. Wilson Co., N.Y., 1928, p. 2814.

<sup>25</sup>Unfortunately for the historical and geographical urbanist all tangible evidence of Koreshan existence in south Chicago is gone. All the Englewood buildings were removed for the development of the Dan Ryan Expressway, and Beth-Ophra has been replaced by a rail line.

<sup>26</sup>Carmer, op. cit., p. 270; Hinds, op. cit., pp. 473-474.

<sup>27</sup>Carmer, op. cit., pp. 270-271.

<sup>28</sup>CLark, op. cit., p. 147; R.R. Mathison, *Faith, Cults, and Sects of America from Atheism to Zen*, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis, 1960, p. 87; see also footnote 15.

<sup>29</sup>Koresh, *Emanuel Swedenborg: His Mission, and What Constitutes Mediumship and Materialization*, The Guiding Star Publishing House, Chicago and Estero, n.d.

<sup>30</sup>Gardner, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>31</sup>Teed's ideas are fully explained in *The Cellular Cosmogony*, op. cit.

<sup>32</sup>Carmer, op. cit., pp. 271 ff.; Michel, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup>Hinds, op. cit., p. 472.

<sup>34</sup>*The Cellular Cosmogony*, op. cit., title page.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Some examples of feature stories: *The Times-Herald* (Chicago), Dec. 4, 1896, July 24, 1897, July 25, 1897; *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville), May 2, 1897, July 25, 1897; *Chicago Journal*, Oct. 8, 1896, Oct. 17, 1896; *The Pittsburgh Post*, May 2, 1897. Other newspapers throughout the nation carried stories on the work of the Koreshan Geodetic Staff.

<sup>39</sup>*The Cellular Cosmogony*, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>42</sup>Webber, Op. cit., p. 256.

<sup>43</sup>Hinds, op. cit., pp. 472-473.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 472.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 477. Early landholding figures must be interpreted with care. Although it is frequently cited that Estero was incorporated as the fourth or fifth largest city in area in the U.S. the Koreshans never filed a plat for a village nor did they incorporate (personal letter, D.T. Farabee, Clark of the Circuit Court, Lee County, Florida, July 23, 1971).

<sup>46</sup>Carmer, op. cit., p. 280. Most accounts contain no version of Teed's beating.

<sup>47</sup>Webber, op. cit., p. 357.

<sup>48</sup>Carmer, op. cit., pp. 283-285; *Newsweek*, Dec. 6, 1948, p. 26.

<sup>49</sup>Carmer, op. cit., pp. 284-285.

<sup>50</sup>The hollow earth concept did not die with Teed. In 1914 and 1920 M.B. Gardner published works espousing the idea in great detail (Ley, op. cit., p. 81; Gardner, op. cit., 1957). A German, Karl Neuper, revived Morrow's work under his own name in 1925 and noted high officials in Nazi Germany had been influenced by the teachings of Peter Bender (Gardner, op. cit., 1957; G.S. Kuiper, *Popular Astronomy*, series, 1946; L. Pauwels and J. Bergier, *The Morning of the Magicians*, Avon Books, N.Y., 1968, p. 266). During World War II radar experiments were conducted on the island of Rugen based on the hollow earth concept by German scientists (Pauwels and Bergier, op. cit., pp. 265-267). Two other accounts of the hollow earth were put forward as recently as 1947 (*Time*, July 14, 1947, p. 59).