

# American Communal Utopias and The Koreshan Unity: A Bibliography

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## **Part II: The Koreshan Unity**

See also Part I: [American Communal Utopias](#)

"We live on the inside"

### **Introduction**

The Koreshan Unity was "quite possibly one of the most bizarre" communal utopias developed in the nineteenth century according to Dr. Lynn Rainard. This community, founded in Chicago, moved to Estero, Florida in 1894 to begin building the New Jerusalem. This was to be the city of God that ushered in the millennium of peace on earth. The founder of the community was Cyrus Teed, who took the name Koresh, which is Hebrew for Cyrus. His illumination and scientific discoveries were the basis for the community which were called the Koreshans or the Koreshan Unity.

The chief postulates of the Koreshans were cellular cosmogony, reincarnation and immortality, celibacy, communism, and a belief in Teed's inspired leadership. Cellular cosmogony is the idea that the earth is a concave sphere in which we live. Celibacy was used as a scientific method to obtain immortality. These ideas and Teed's charisma lead to a growing community. The community reached a peak population of around two hundred, and at one time claimed over four thousand financial supporters. The community, unlike other communal societies of the times, had its basis in religion, science and communism, and membership was allowed for non-believers who were willing to work communally. The community began to fragment soon after the death of its leader in 1908, and its last member, Hedwig Michel, died in 1982, but not before turning over the settlement's land to the state to become a historic site. The settlement has been partially restored to its early twentieth century appearance and is open for visitors.

## Scope

The following information is intended to provide the reader with information about the Koreshan Unity from the early years of Cyrus Teed to the death of the 'Last Koreshan.' Information and sources will cover the history, beliefs, central figures, and controversies surrounding the community.

## Library of Congress Subject Heading and Classification Statement

BP605.K6 Koreshanity

## Search Techniques

There are also several names that are used for finding information by or about the Cyrus Teed. He is listed both under Teed, with variations of first name or initials, or under Koresh. There is also discrepancy in the spelling of his middle name. Some sources spell it 'Read' and others 'Reed.' In the following citations, I have used the spelling used by that source.

When searching for materials on the Koreshan Unity in an electronic database, it is important to note that different items can be located using the author 'Teed, Cyrus' and 'Koresh'. The later of these often presents a problem, as David Koresh, the leader of the Waco, TX community, often results. When searching for titles by Koresh, if the search engine allows Boolean searching, try using the phrase 'not David', i.e. 'Koresh not David'.

## The Story of the Koreshan Unity

Landing, James E. "Cyrus Reed Teed and the Koreshan Unity." In *America's Communal Utopias*, edited by Donald E. Pitzer. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

This chapter of the book covers the Koreshan Unity in a fairly balanced informative way. It provides a good overview of the beliefs and history of the community. It includes the diagrams by Teed of the organization of the community and of the cellular cosmogony. Also extremely useful is the chronology of the community and a useful bibliography. This book is probably the most complete and balanced overview of the Unity. As many of the sources in this bibliography are older and harder to locate, this is a useful starting place for an in-depth look at the community.

Melton, J. Gordon. *Biographical Dictionary of American Cult and Sect Leaders*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1986.

The entry for Cyrus Read Teed, the leader of the Koreshan Unity, includes an overview of his life. This is presented chronologically and, though it is fairly complete in presenting the major events in his life, none of the events are covered in any detail. Teed was born in 1839, spent his youth working on the Erie Canal, studied medicine, and was a private in the 27th Regiment of the New York Volunteers before his illumination that led to the development of the cellular cosmogony.

Carmer, Carl. *Dark Trees to the Wind*. New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949.

Chapter 14 (pp. 260 – 289) "The Great Alchemist at Utica" is the story of the author's visit to the Estero in the 1940's to meet the remaining Koreshans. The members related to him the story of the community, in particular Teed's "Illumination". He was visited by an angel and was directed "to redeem the human race." This visitation led to Teed developing the Koreshan Unity. Daily life of members of the settlement and the evolution of the settlement are also presented.

Fogarty, Robert S. *All Things New: American Communes and Utopian Movements 1860 – 1914*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

A portion of this text (pp. 72 – 83) looks at the history of Teed and his illumination. Teed received his degree in 1868 as an eclectic physician, a branch of medical science that received less training than regular physicians. In the following year he discovered that the Copernican theory of the world was wrong; that the world was concave and limited in space. He saw the universe as all one substance emanating from a single source, God. This was confirmed by a vision of the "Divine Motherhood" which confirmed his beliefs and brought science and religion together. This vision told Teed that he was destined to redeem the human race and carry on the work of Jesus Christ. His ideas kept patients away and he was forced to move frequently. He tried to begin communal communities in Moravia and New York City in the 1880's and failed. His big break came when he was asked to speak at a convention of the National Association of Mental Science in 1886. Here he gained a wide following and opened several communal homes, including Beth-Ophrah, which were the earliest beginnings of the Koreshan Unity.

Fine, Howard D. "The Koreshan Unity: The Chicago Years Of A Utopian Community." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 68 (1975): 213-227.

Founded in New York State in 1880 and located in Chicago during 1886-1903, the Koreshan Unity moved to Estero, Florida in 1903. Many of the members were women

bound to observe the celibate rules of the communal group. Cyrus Teed encountered some obstacles in the early years of the organization. The belief that celibacy was important was not followed by all. There are accusations that Teed himself did not follow his own rule, and was sexually active with members of the Koreshan Unity. This article looks at some of the lawsuits brought against him for alienation of affections by irate husbands of female members.

Arndt, Karl J. R. "Koreshanity, Topolobampo, Olombia, and the Harmonist Millions." *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 56 (January 1973): 71-86.

Teed was in contact with several other communities and many of them supported his beliefs. Included in these were the Shakers and the Harmonists. This article documents Teed's contact with the Harmonists and indicated that some of the Harmonists believed in Teed's teachings. Teed attempted and failed to merge with these groups, in part because there was no agreement on who had an authentic connection with God.

*Scientific Colonization: Plan for the Immediate Relief of the Masses: New Jerusalem at Estero, Florida.* Chicago: Guiding Star Publishing House, 1985.

This booklet was written in part to convince people to join the Koreshans in Estero in the forming of the New Jerusalem. It includes plans to bring ten million people to the area and how to organize the city and bring commerce there. Free housing is offered to anyone who is willing to become a member and work for the Unity. Religious belief was not a requirement. A tri-level system of membership was explained. The outer level was made up of these non-believers. Called the Society Arch-Triumphant, this group could marry and participate in the secular communal aspects of the Unity. The middle group, the Marital Order, allowed for marriage, but allowed sexual relations only for the purpose of reproduction. The inner, core group, was the Celibate and Communal group that did not allow marriage and practiced celibacy. This booklet also explained the communal system in which money was done away with. The Bureau of Equitable commerce handled the transactions of 'units' that were earned through work at the Unity.

Rea, Sara Weber. *The Koreshan Story.* Estero, FL: Guiding Star Publishing House, 1994.

This book, written to explain the history of the Koreshan Unity, creates a clear timeline of events for both Teed and the community. It begins with the illumination of Teed, through the legal incorporation in New Jersey in 1903, and ends with the death of Hedwig Michel. This book does not cover in detail any of the ideas or beliefs of the community, and it does not cover any controversial issues related to the

community. Lawsuits, problems with the local community, and the failed resurrection of Teed are absent. It contains numerous photographs of the Estero community, its buildings, activities, peoples and landscape. Some of the information that is covered here that is lacking in other sources is the daily life of the Estero community. The business enterprises included a sawmill, post office, bakery, apiary, machine shop, concrete works, print shop, general store, boat building, blacksmith, plumbing shop, and power plant. The power plant provided electricity for the settlement and the surrounding areas years before it was available elsewhere in Southwest Florida. The community was also active in agriculture, fishing, building its own buildings and schools as well as some cultural pursuits including plays, concerts and lectures.

Mackle, Elliott. "Cyrus Teed and the Lee County Elections of 1906." *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57 (1978): 1-18.

This article discusses Teed's plan to unite the whole society under his leadership through political influence. In 1906, he formed the Progressive Liberty Party. This consisted of Koreshans, socialists, Republicans, and dissatisfied Democrats who voiced political sentiment through their newly formed newspaper, the American Eagle. Although defeated politically, Teed still retained followers after the election. His political influence did not fair well with the locals in nearby Fort Myers.

Rainard, R. Lyn. "Conflict Inside the Earth: The Koreshan Unity in Lee County." *Tampa Bay History* 3 (1981): 5-16.

This article focuses on lawsuits against the Koreshan Unity by private citizens. These went unnoticed by officials in Lee County until the Koreshans tried to enter politics. As the Koreshans became more involved in local politics and began block voting, problems arose with the locals. Eventually, Teed was attacked by a citizen and the town marshal. He never recovered from these injuries and died in 1908.

Webber, Everett. *Escape to Utopia: the Communal Movement in America*. New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1959.

The brief section on the Koreshan Unity (pp. 353-359) portrays Teed and the Unity in a negative light. "Nothing at the place was conducted with any degree of sanity, [and] for months at a time everyone might go without actually enough to eat" except Teed and a small number of his favorite members, who happened to be female. Problems with members leaving the community and attempting to sue to be reimbursed for their donations and failed are examined. The man, Gustav Damkohloer, who originally sold the first 300 acres to Teed, sued and won half of the original land back. This land was then promptly given to the lawyers in payment of their fees. There is also a description with the situation of his death and burial. Before Teed's

death in 1908, he had spoken of his coming back from the dead. Members of the Unity refused to bury him after his death. Four days after his death law enforcement officers arrived and forced the burial of the "putrid remains." Thirteen years later the grave washed away and the body disappeared in a hurricane.

Michel, Hedwig. *A Gift to the People*. Estero, FL: n.p., 1961.

After a brief outline of the Koreshan Unity's history, this booklet discusses the activities that were part of the daily life of the community and the transfer of the Unity's land and property to the state of Florida to become a state park. Some of the activities at the settlement included agriculture, a sawmill, blacksmith, and machine and print shop. There were also recreational pursuits that included the Koreshan Orchestra that was said to be "the finest musical organization south of Tampa," tennis and a baseball team. In 1952 the Unity decided to offer its lands to the state for a historical and botanical monument. It was not until 1961 that the transfer took place. The State took over 230 acres of land and created what is now called the Koreshan State Historic Site.

### **The End of the Koreshan Unity**

After Teed's death, there were many disagreements about the Unity and its leadership. Several groups split from the Unity including the Order of Theocracy that split in 1910 and relocated to Fort Myers, FL. The beliefs were similar the Koreshans, and the community lasted until 1931.

The population declined from its peak population of around two hundred in 1903 to thirty-five in 1940 when Hedwig Michel joined the unity. She helped revitalize the community, repair the structures and was responsible for the land becoming state property. She is known as the 'Last Koreshan', and the community is said to have ended with her death in 1982.

### **The Religious Aspects of Koreshanity**

Teed, Cyrus. *The Immortal Manhood*. Chicago: Guiding Star Publishing House, 1902.

This deals with man and his relation to his God. This book, along with the Cellular Cosmogony, "served as the pivotal point of the Koreshans' teachings."

Andrews, A.W.K. *The Identification of Israel*. Chicago: Guiding Star Publishing House, 1882.

When God cast the Israelites out of his sight, he dispersed them throughout the

racess on the earth. They cannot be identified by outward appearances or nationality but by spiritual life and power. Andrews discusses the misconception that Jews are the chosen people. His position is that the Anglo-Saxon Christians are more inwardly the chosen people than the Jews, and that God will fulfill his biblical prophecies to these Christians. God will bring His people back together in their own land where He will cleanse them. This process is the identification of Israel. The discussion of the chosen people centers on the idea of reincarnation. The original Israelites are still present today in the bodies of their ancestors and will be called back together. The premise involves being able to trace our ancestors because "we are in those ancestors." This book is the basis for the Koreshan belief in reincarnation and its importance in building the New Jerusalem.

Kitch, Sally L. *Chaste Liberation*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

This book compares and contrasts the Shaker, Koreshan and Sanctificationist communities. It is helpful in putting the role of celibacy in perspective as a characteristic of utopian communities. It is one of the best explanations of the Koreshan reasons for celibacy and a description of the concept of the biune. "The Koreshans felt that the being who results from spiritual reproduction, induced by celibacy, is biune, both androgynous and hermaphroditic."

Melton, J. Gordon, ed. *The Encyclopedia of American Religions, Religious Creeds: a compilation of more than 450 creeds, confessions, statements of faith, and summaries of doctrine of religious and spiritual groups in the United States and Canada*. Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1988.

This book contains the "Synoptical Outline of Koreshan Theology," which is an attempt to state the Koreshan religious perspective without mentioning the controversial concept of the cellular cosmogony. Some of the basic beliefs expressed are that God is not omnipresent, but the focal point of the cosmos, that the Decalogue is the key to immortality, and that the love of God, as manifest in the love of others is the essential element in harmony on this earth.

Koreshan Foundation. *Koreshanity, the New Age Religion*. Miami: Center Printing Company, 1971.

This book reprints the four different publications of the Koreshan Unity: "The Divine and Biblical Credentials of Koresh," "Reincarnation or the Resurrection of the Dead," "The Science of the Decalogue," and "Synoptical Outline of Koreshan Theology." The purpose of the book is "to acquaint the reader with the principle tenets of Koreshanity and to interpret the character and true identity of Dr. Cyrus R. Teed (Koresh)." "The Divine and Biblical Credentials of Koresh" by Dr. J. Augustus Weimar

is a collection of eighty biblical quotes with explanations as to how Teed fulfill these biblical prophesies and is therefore the "Messiah of the Aquarian or Koreshan Age." "The Science of the Decalogue" by Teed is his interpretations of the Ten Commandments. Teed's explanation of Honor thy Father and Mother: "The father and mother in this passage denotes the Father-Mother God, to be honored by supreme devotion to the inherent law of immortal being, which transforms the life from the mortal to the immortal state." This book is somewhat difficult to read as it is written in flowery religious language, heavily laden with Biblical allusions and enigmatic quotes.

### **The Scientific Aspects of Koreshanity**

Morrow, Ulysses G. *Scientific Experiments on Lake Michigan: Surface of Water Demonstrated by Ocular Evidence to be Not Convex; Specific Tests by means of the Telescope*. Chicago: Guiding Star Publishing House, 1899.

This was the result of the first attempt by Morrow to dispel the Copernican 'myth' of the Earth's convexity. The hypothesis was that over a distance of several miles, that the arc of the Earth would obscure the base of an object if the Copernican system was accurate. If the base of the object could be seen, then the Earth could not be convex. This was tested at Lake Michigan, and the target object, a lighthouse at a distance of eight miles could be seen clearly. "The action of the waves against the wall was clearly observed." This evidence leaves the Copernican system "without a shadow of evidence for support." The conclusion is that since the Earth is round, then it must be concave. Koreshanity is given as the system to replace the 'outdated' ideas of the Copernican system. "Koreshanity is conducting a scientific crusade against fallacy."

Teed, Cyrus R. *The Cellular Cosmogony...or...The Earth a Concave Sphere*. Philadelphia, PA: Porcupine Press, 1975.

This reprint of the 1905 edition is the most complete explanation of the theory and experiments with the concavity of the earth. The common belief that the earth is convex is explained away as geolinear foreshortening (objects vanish at a distance because of limited optics). This book contains the detailed explanation of the principles and execution of the tests at Naples, FL to prove the concavity of the earth. A rectilineator was constructed that demonstrated that the earth curved upwards at a rate of eight inches to the mile. The Koreshan description of the earth is also given:

The sun is an invisible electro-magnetic battery revolving in the universe's center on a 24-year cycle. Our visible sun is only a reflection, as is the moon, with the stars reflecting off seven mercurial discs that float in the sphere's center. Inside the earth there are three separate atmospheres: the first composed of oxygen and nitrogen and closest to the earth; the second, a



hydrogen atmosphere above it; the third, an aboron atmosphere at the center. The earth's shell is one hundred miles thick and has seventeen layers. The outer seven are metallic with a gold rind on the outermost layer, the middle five are mineral and the five inward are geologic strata. Inside the shell there is life, outside a void.

### **Leadership of the Koreshan Unity**

Annie Ordway 1903-1909

James H. Bubbett 1909-1924

George W. Hunt 1925-1929

Allen H. Andrews 1929-1949

Lawrence Bubbett 1949-1960

Hedwig Michel 1960-1982

Jo Bigelow 1982-present

### **Periodical Publications of the Koreshan Unity**

These publications were produced by Teed and the Koreshans. They are important historical documents, and this listing is provided to help explain what was published and when.

*Salvator Scientist* - Published starting in 1886.

*Herald of the New Covenant* - Published starting in 1876, this was a broadside written by Teed. Five copies were published, but only three are known to exist.

*The Guiding Star* - Published from December 1886 to November 1889, this was a monthly periodical printed in Chicago that was replaced by the Flaming Sword.

*Plowshare and Pruning Hook* - This was first published by the San Francisco Koreshan community from 1891 to 1892. The community and the publication merged with the Chicago community in 1892, and the Plowshare and Pruning Hook was printed there from 1892 until 1895, when it was incorporated into the Flaming Sword.

*Flaming Sword* - This was published from November 1889 until January 1949. It has taken the form of a weekly, monthly, and quarterly publication. The editions published after Teed's death are primarily reprints of his writings.

*American Eagle* - Publication began in the 1906 as a newspaper for the Estero, Florida community. It has published continuously since then, except for the period 1949 to 1965. It is now printed as a house organ for the Koreshan Unity Foundation.

## **Newspapers covering the Koreshan Story**

Fort Myers Press 1894-1912

New York Times 1884-1908

Tampa Morning Tribune 1900-1910

## **Publishers of Koreshan Materials**

Guiding Star Publishing House

A Division of the Koreshan Unity Foundation, Inc.

PO Box 97

Estero, FL 33928

The major publisher of material is the Guiding Star Publishing House. This was part of the Koreshan Unity in Chicago and moved to Florida with the community.

## **Dissertations and Theses**

Berrey, Richard S. *The Koreshan Unity: an economic history of a communistic experiment in Florida*. (Thesis) University of Florida, 1928.

Fine, Howard David. *Koreshan Unity Utopian Community: we live inside the world*. (Thesis) Notre Dame University, 1972.

Hutchings, Barbara. *Utopian geography of Estero, Florida*. (Thesis) Florida Atlantic University, 1999.

Mackle, Elliot James, Jr. *The Koreshan Unity in Florida, 1894-1910*. (Thesis) University of Miami, 1971.

Rainard, Robert Lynn. *In the Name of Humanity: the Koreshan Unity*. (Thesis) University of South Florida, 1974.

## **Pamphlets**

*The Koreshan Unity Settlement*. Koreshan State Historic Site. Estero, FL.

This pamphlet is used as a guide to the settlement grounds, which are part of the state historic site. There is a map of the grounds and surrounding area that locates the places of importance to the Unity, when it existed, as well as the remaining buildings. Art Hall, with its miniature rectilinear and model of the cellular cosmogony, the Planetary Court, home of the governing body, and Founder's Hall, the common house and group dining facility, are among the buildings open to

visitors. Photos and descriptions of the community buildings and their uses are the bulk of this twelve-page pamphlet. This can be obtained by contacting: Koreshan State Historic Site, FLDEP, Division of Recreation and Parks, PO Box 7, Estero, FL 33928, (941) 992-0311.

## **Oral Histories**

### *Hedwig Michel*

An oral history of the Koreshan Unity was recorded of Hedwig Michel, the "last Koreshan" and president of the Koreshan Unity from 1960 to 1982. This is available only at the Koreshan Unity Foundation, PO Box 97, Estero, FL 33928, (941) 992-2184.

## **Internet Resources**

The "unofficial" site of the Koreshan State Historic Site, located in Estero, FL

<http://koreshan.mwweb.org/>

This includes history, photographs, and a link to an annotated index to the Koreshan State Historic Site's manuscript collection.

Koreshan State Historic Site

<http://www.floridastateparks.org/koreshan/>

This state park is located at the site of the Koreshan Settlement in Florida. A number of the settlement buildings and portions of the grounds have been restored to their appearance of the 1900's and are open for visitation. The park charges an admission fee.

## **Part I: [American Communal Utopias](#)**

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