

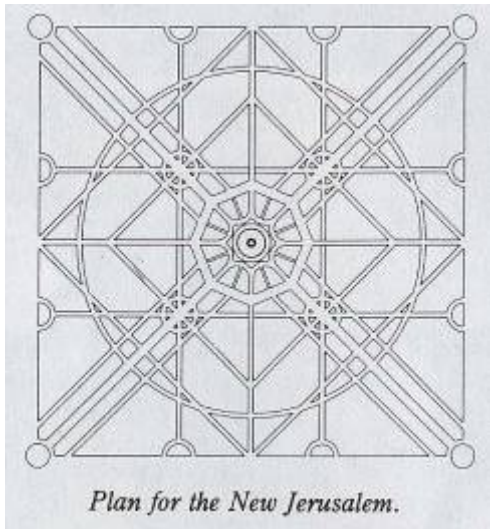
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KORESHAN UNITY SETTLEMENT: PRESERVING FLORIDA'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

"It will contain ten million people, white and black, and will become the greatest city in the world."
(Dr. Cyrus Reed Teed)¹



In 1894, Dr. Cyrus Reed Teed and his Koreshan disciples migrated from their Chicago headquarters to Estero, Florida with ambitions of creating the "New Jerusalem." Advocating communal living and the "hollow earth" theories of cellular cosmogony, their community would reach two hundred and fifty inhabitants and forty-seven structures during the "golden years" of 1903-1905.² The original structures at Koreshan were in the wooden vernacular style, constructed from native pine and cypress lumber produced by four Koreshan-owned sawmills. In 1905, the community opened a concrete works, with hopes of creating a "more enduring" architecture.³ Regardless, several of the structures would succumb to termites, water damage, fires, hurricanes, and the encroachment of Highway US-41.⁴



Upon its demise in 1961, the Koreshan Unity donated 350 acres of land to the State of Florida Parks Service, responsible for the "restoration, preservation and interpretation of resources."⁵ In 1976, the Koreshan Unity Settlement Historic District was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, with eleven remaining buildings and approximately 5000 artifacts.⁶ The creation of a Restoration Study ensued in 1977. Produced by Glendon Herbert and I.S.K. Reeves for Florida's Department of Natural Resources Division of Recreation and Parks, the report featured a complete site analysis and recommended restoration strategy. Abell Garcia Architects of Tampa proposed a revised master plan for the 10 acres of original "home grounds" in 1990, and currently work is being conducted by Stevenson Architects of Bradenton.⁷ With funding by the Park's Citizen Support Organization and grants from the Florida Department of Historic Resources, this restoration has been ongoing for the past ten years. The Koreshan preservation movement involves the collaborative efforts of the Florida Park Services, Koreshan Unity Alliance, College of Life Foundation, Americorps Volunteers, local citizens and park professionals.⁸



DAMKOHLEH HOUSE



Gustav Damkohler, a German settler, originally homesteaded the Estero site in 1882, eleven years prior the arrival of Dr. Cyrus Reed Teed.⁹ His residence was one of the earliest structures in the Koreshan Settlement, built 1892. Originally located on a projecting ledge of the Estero River, this one-room wood frame building was moved to its current location by 1900.¹⁰ Its east and west facades featured covered porches and horizontal wood siding; the north and south sides were covered in vertical wood siding. A Palmetto thatched roof sheltered the entire structure and its attic sleeping loft. By 1906, this roof had been replaced by tin, and in the 1950's a bathroom and kitchen were added to the southern side.¹¹

In the 1977 assessment of Damkohler House, Herbert and Reeves deemed it "in need of immediate renovation," requiring replacement of exterior wood, porches, and ceilings.¹² They recommended the removal of the 1950's addition and restoration of the historic palmetto roof and wood siding.¹³ In 1994, Damkohler was repaired to its current condition.¹⁴ Park personnel, with professional guidance, executed the restoration, occurring mainly on the entry porch facade. This included interior renovations and the replacement of eastern horizontal siding, windows and doors. Meanwhile, the original west porch is still missing, and north and south elevations are stripped of their early vertical siding. Today, it is restricted from public access, but exterior windows offer views into a fully-furnished interior.¹⁵



FOUNDER'S HOUSE



Founder's House (1896), a central two-story wood-frame structure, functioned mainly as Cyrus Teed's residence. Its original features include north and south porches eight to ten feet deep, horizontal wood siding, a cypress shingle roof, and two interior stairs.¹⁶ From 1903 to 1905, a long wooden porch was attached to the west, and a circular tower thirty feet in diameter was added to the north-west corner. In 1908, all porches were removed, and a four-inch veneer of brownstone was added to the first floor elevation; a single-story colonnade of concrete arches was constructed surrounding the building.¹⁷ Following, Teed's Death, between 1909 and 1960, these arches were removed. A small porch with an ornate spindle railing was added to the east elevation, and the second story wood siding and windows were replaced. Finally, 1976 saw the collapse of the northeast wall upon removal of vines from the veneer.¹⁸ This brownstone siding has since been removed.

The 1977 report declared Founder's House "in need of extensive repair."¹⁹ It recommended reconstruction of the southern porch, removal of concrete block siding and east porch, restoration of windows and interior, and a new roof of split cedar or cypress.²⁰ In 1992, Abell Garcia Architects worked to restore Founder's.²¹ The single-story north and south porches were rebuilt, with a new handicap ramp included in the south porch. New siding, windows, and doors were also installed at the entry porch level. The original stairs and room partitions were established on the first floor, and a new pine shingle roof was erected. While upstairs access is restricted, the first floor houses a display of historic photographs and a short film on Koreshan Unity history.²²



PLANETARY COURT



The Planetary Court (1904), the two-story wooden frame “gem” of Koreshan, housed the community’s seven managing women.²³ Surrounded at both levels by a continuous wooden porch, the Planetary Court’s exterior walls originally consisted of “widely spaced horizontal wood lath covered in rosin paper.”²⁴ It featured a central circulation core, with 4 rooms on both the first and second floor; a small room and porch at the third level comprised a cupola at the center of the cedar shake roof.²⁵

Alterations to the structure occurred in 1921, when a hurricane moved the building 6 feet to the west of its pier foundations.²⁶ Prior 1933, during a roof replacement, the cupola decks were removed and the cupola’s east elevation modified. The building’s exterior paper facing was also changed to horizontal wood siding. In the 1940’s, a 6’X30’ addition was made to the second floor’s east exterior, including a closet, restroom, kitchen, and sewing room.²⁷

In 1977, the Planetary Court stood in good condition, having already undergone significant, though historically inaccurate, renovation.²⁸ The Restoration Study proposed to replace the metal roof, add the original roof element, repair the porch structure, and remove the additional porch bathroom and exterior stair.²⁹ Subsequently, in 1988, new cedar shakes were added to the main roof, and a “5V crimp metal roof” was installed above the porches.³⁰

Stevenson Architects undertook restoration efforts in 2001, proposing to restore the Planetary Court to its 1920’s condition.³¹ Their specifications included restoration of the building’s original quadrangle of shell paths and axial plantings, removal of plumbing, rewiring of the building, and demolition of the second floor exterior addition. The building would not receive climate control, but was subject to ADA accessibility requirements, met by a wheelchair lift at the south façade.³² To strengthen the structure, Stevenson Architects added supporting cross members to rafters, hurricane straps, new foundation footings, and new porch deck and posts.³³ Today, only the first floor porch and interior hall are accessible to the public. All rooms are fully decorated and furnished with displays of period pieces and artifacts.



ART HALL



The Koreshan Art Hall (1905) was the scene of lectures, concerts, plays, education, religious ceremonies, and art display within the community. This single-story wood-frame building, raised 18 inches on piers, featured an 8-foot wide covered porch on the north, south, and east facades. The hall was distinguished architecturally by ornamental wood brackets supporting the flat porch roof, and by a small roof cupola for ventilation. The roof was of hand-split cypress shakes, and the building was clad in horizontal wood siding. On the interior, it boasted a 300-person seating capacity, narrow backstage area, and raised stage platform.³⁴ In 1969, a renovation by the Florida Board of Parks and Historical Structures added a detached restroom facility to the west, removed the roof vent, and rebuilt the porches inaccurately.³⁵

The 1977 report by Herbert and Reeves declared the Art Hall structurally sound but proposed to remove the recent restroom addition and restore the missing roof element.³⁶ A new preservation plan was proposed by Stevenson Architects in 2001. Though intending a full 1920's-era restoration, funding only covered the replacement of the HVAC system and roof shingles.³⁷ Currently, the north and south porch roof brackets have been restored, the roof cupola was recently rebuilt, and the interior was remodeled with its original stage. However, the restroom addition will remain until it can be relocated.³⁸ The structure ultimately continues to be threatened by any potential widening of the adjacent Highway US-41.³⁹ Today, the Art Hall is the primary welcome area for Koreshan State Historic Site, featuring displays of artifacts and lectures on Koreshan history. The walls contain original paintings by Douglas Arthur Teed, Cyrus Teed's son.

BAKERY



The two-story wood frame Bakery (1903) served Koreshan with an output capacity of 500-600 loaves of bread per day. Its bake ovens were located in an adjacent structure to the south, with a cistern for rainwater collection at the north. Structural wood columns at the first floor supported a second story with women's quarters. On the exterior, the walls were clad in horizontal wood siding, and the roof originally featured cypress shakes. These were shortly replaced by tin.⁴⁰ In renovation work around 1965, the exterior was painted and screen doors were repaired. A report from this same time indicates the outstanding need for new pipes, clean mechanical equipment, and repairs to woodwork and cistern.⁴¹

By 1977, the Bakery was generally in good condition, having received new wood siding. However, a bathroom had been added to the second floor hall, threatening potential water damage, and the bake oven structure had been removed.⁴² The Restoration Study suggested renovating the restroom to prevent further water damage, replacing the metal roof with shingles, and reconstructing the ovens.⁴³ In 1985, with siding already deteriorating, it was recommended that the existing wood gaps be filled or replaced. In 1997, the Bakery was repainted.⁴⁴

Today, preservation plans are currently underway by Stevenson Architects, who wish to restore the building to its 1903-1908 condition.⁴⁵ Their reports note water damage to siding, roof eaves with missing boards, siding repaired incorrectly, windows boarded with siding, water infiltration, and damage to plaster and "patched repairs" in the ceiling.⁴⁶ The second floor bathroom had already been removed prior their involvement. Additionally, they've documented several assets in the Bakery restoration, including existence of the original windows, wood flooring, and sideboards.⁴⁷ They currently await grant funding from the Florida Department of Historic Resources, to be matched by the Koreshan Unity Alliance.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the building features a new display of historic kitchen artifacts located behind plexi-glass walls.

LARGE MACHINE SHOP



As a one-story wood frame structure, the Large Machine Shop (1904) contained “drill presses, shapers, power metal saw, grinding machines and emery wheels, forge and brazing tools.” It also supplied steam power to the adjoining laundry building.⁴⁹ While the laundry has since been demolished, its roof outline is still visible on the north façade of the Large Machine Shop. Likewise, on its southern side, a concrete slab indicates a previous building extension removed in the late 1940’s to early 1950’s. Other alterations have included rebuilding of the small northwest room, removal of a roof vent, and addition of tin panel siding.⁵⁰

1977 found the Large Machine shop in “poor condition,” open to the elements after the removal of the north and south walls. Windows were missing or damaged, but some original equipment remained, including a laundry crank shaft mounted at the ceiling.⁵¹ Herbert and Reeves advised restoration of original windows, construction of north and south walls, replacement of the metal roof with wood, reconstruction of the roof vent, replacement of siding, and the addition of previous adjacent structures.⁵² Today, the Shop still stands much as it did then, with a jagged, broken cement foundation and fences replacing north and south walls. It houses a display of heavy machinery.⁵³

SMALL MACHINE SHOP



The Small Machine Shop (1905) was responsible for manufacturing specialized tools, kitchen items, and performing clock and watch repairs. It was a modest one-story building with horizontal wood siding and a cypress shingle roof, later replaced by tin. In its history, it experienced only minor alterations, including a small metal addition to its southwest corner, and modification of the entry doorway.⁵⁴

In 1977, the structure was deemed to be in “fair condition,” with much of its original equipment.⁵⁵ Restoration plans called for reparation of windows, replacement of the roof, and the removal of the southwest addition.⁵⁶ Currently, it features bowstring roof trusses in good condition and wood-clad siding. Original artifacts are held on display behind plexi-glass walls set beyond the doorway.

GENERATOR BUILDING



The Generator Building (1908), Koreshan's first wood-frame building with metal sides and roof, supplied electricity for the entire community in the 1920's.⁵⁷ Originally a rectangular shed, the building's present L-shape was adopted in 1925 to accommodate the introduction of the first generator engine. This installation necessitated a higher structural addition at the building's southeast corner and the overhead mounting of an I-beam for lifting machinery. A water-cooling tower of heavy-timber construction, thirty feet tall, was also placed at building's east.⁵⁸ When monetary issues forced the Koreshans to sell their generator equipment in 1946, the building began to fall into disrepair.⁵⁹

In 1977, Herbert and Reeves found the Generator Building in use as a storage facility for furnishings and in need of structural repair.⁶⁰ Today all that remains of the original water tower are 4 concrete footings. A small wooden water-cooling structure has replaced it to the east.⁶¹ Within the past ten years, the Florida Flywheelers' Antique Engine Club has supported the Fairbanks Morse Restoration Project, led by volunteers and park officials. A 1929 Fairbanks Morse 80 hp engine, fitting the footprint of the original generator, was re-installed in the Generator Building. It is on display for viewing, with demonstrations held every Sunday. The building also contains an old mechanical pipe that functions as a collection box for "Historic Site Donations." This money is applied "directly to the ongoing restoration of the Koreshan Historic Site buildings and displays."⁶²

NEW STORE



The New Store (early 1920's), built to take advantage of growing automobile traffic on US-41, was the first wood frame and stucco building at Koreshan. It featured an ornate entry canopy on its east façade and a gable roof behind a stepped parapet.⁶³ The first floor comprised a country store, the "Riverview Inn" restaurant, and a Koreshan Unity office; the second floor contained male housing.⁶⁴ In 1956, major alterations were made when the widening of US-41 by the State Road Department brought the highway within 4.8 feet of the east façade. Consequently, the front 8-inches of the building were removed to satisfy the new right-of-way, along with the entry canopy.⁶⁵ When decreasing revenue closed the restaurant and store in 1963, the building began to fall into disrepair. Roof alterations and a wooden structure added to the west further compromised the building's historic accuracy.

In 1977, the New Store was used primarily for storage of archives and historic documents, but still possessed enough structural stability to house visiting guests. Herbert and Reeves recommended interior and exterior renovations and reconstruction of the east façade based on historic photographs.⁶⁶ A 1989 Updated Master Plan proposed the following additional modifications: create a waterproof roof, establish identity of building along US-41, remove wooden addition from west to allow public access, replace electric service, restore windows and doors, re-establish commercial use and provide exhibit space, install an HVAC system, and retain original room partitions.⁶⁷

Stevenson Architects have produced the latest Preservation Plan, in 2001, including a complete structural analysis by Pyper Engineering of Ft. Myers, Florida. The primary problems it identifies are extensive water damage and lack of bracing or strapping in roof rafters.⁶⁸ They propose many of the earlier recommendations, with additional instructions to treat water damage and termites, restore the adjacent fountain and pond, repair siding and stucco, repair triangular pediment of parapet and stucco details, replace foundation footings and columns, add hurricane clips and window shutters, and replace walls and ceilings.⁶⁹ This project currently awaits funding. Meanwhile, the New Store remains off-limits to public access and nearly excluded from Koreshan Site Guided Tours. Today, it is the only Koreshan building visibly prominent on US-41.

VESTA NEWCOMB COTTAGE



The Vesta Newcomb Cottage (date unknown), is a wood frame structure with horizontal wood siding and an original wood shingle roof, later replaced by metal.⁷⁰ This member's house, divided into two separate living spaces, was originally erected near Corkscrew Road in Estero. Between 1906 and 1930, it was relocated to a site east of US-41, just South of Koreshan, and utilized as a rental building and barber shop. It was finally moved to its current location at Koreshan in the 1930's.⁷¹

Today, the left portion of Newcomb Cottage is under restoration and closed to the public. The right side features a fully furnished room displayed behind a plexi-glass wall. Upon completion of the left room, a door currently covered by boards will rejoin the two sides.⁷²

MEMBER'S HOUSE



Member's House (date unknown), originally a pioneer residence in the Estero area, was relocated to Koreshan in the early 1930's. It exemplifies the typical Koreshan houses, which were constructed by individual citizens using different materials and varying styles. Its single-story vernacular wood frame, steep pitched roof, open beam ceilings, "untapped" wood, and large overhangs were typical of most members' houses in the community. The structure was raised on concrete blocks and adjoined by a shed-like structure to the west.⁷³ A pump and well system has also been discovered at ground level below the porch.⁷⁴

The House was in need of extensive repair in 1977, suffering from termite damage.⁷⁵ Restoration plans required reparation of exterior siding, replacement of a metal roof with wood shingles, replacement of an added concrete entry landing with wood, and renovation of the interior.⁷⁶ To date, only the front porch has been reconstructed. Meanwhile, the building is used as storage, with plans for a future interior exhibit displayed in the porch window.⁷⁷



LANDSCAPING



When the Koreshans arrived in Estero, the landscape consisted primarily of native scrub oaks, palmettos, pines, and red mangrove swamps. Before Teed's arrival, Gustav Damkohler had cleared only a small portion of land, importing and planting exotic Australian trees, including eucalyptus, pomegranates, key limes, sapodillas, and guavas.⁷⁸ The Koreshans cleared the remaining native bush, creating elevated mounds, terraces, and sunken gardens. They established a complete system of crushed shell paths with wooden curbs, and added trees, shrubs, bridges, benches, trellises, planter urns, and gazebos to the landscape.⁷⁹

A primary Koreshan landscape feature is Bamboo Landing, a 42'X12' dock of cypress posts and planks erected in 1894. It is surrounded by a semi-circular pathway lined with shrubs and bamboo shoots obtained from Thomas Edison in Fort Myers. Originally, the landing received goods and supplies by boat, and was later used extensively for concerts and festivals until construction of the Art Hall in 1905.⁸⁰ At this time, its wood steps were replaced by concrete of an oyster shell aggregate, and covered with tinted concrete for smoothness. In 1907, a white trellis backdrop of palm trunks was added to the dock and curved walkway.⁸¹ The Department of Natural Resources Division of Recreation and Parks reconstructed the dock in the 1970's. The 1977 Restoration Study detailed further restorations, including the addition of original benches and rain barrels, replacement of walkway hedges, reconstruction of trellises, and the recreation of the amphitheater effect through clearing of vegetation.⁸² These plans have largely been executed today, though the trellises remain to be built.

Adjacent Bamboo Landing is Monkey Puzzle Island, featuring imported Australian "Monkey Puzzle Trees." Two ornate wooden bridges once led to this island: "Rustic Wooden Bridge" and "White Victorian Bridge," built 1904-1905. By 1977, both had been destroyed, and the new Master Plan specified their reconstruction. Only "Rustic Wooden Bridge" exists today, recently rebuilt by park volunteers and completed in March 2004.⁸³ It is based very closely on the original cypress bridge design, which was six feet wide, fourteen feet long, and with curved sides six feet high at the center. It also featured a side diamond pattern, "saw-toothed" design at top, and "end posts with wood turned finials."⁸⁴

Another key landscape element at Koreshan is the "Petronian Fountain," terminating the path by the New Store. Of imitation brownstone, it consists of 2 columns flanking a cast-concrete lion's head with a waterspout and basin. At one point, an additional third column was added behind the fountain, topped by a planter urn, but was later removed.⁸⁵ The 1977 restoration plan recommended replacing the brownstone, reconstructing the basin, and restoring the fountain to working condition.⁸⁶



Many of the general specifications made in the 1977 Master Plan for Restoration have been carried out today. These stipulated the “authentic interpretation, or adaptation, of the settlement buildings and grounds,” with intentions of capturing and interpreting the Koreshan lifestyle and philosophy.⁸⁷ As specified in the report, this has been accomplished by “living history” displays of artifacts and furnishings. Additionally, according to the proposal, individual tour areas have been established, with self-guided tours and published pamphlets available.⁸⁸ Signage systems have also been designed as recommended, labeling each building and occasionally offering detailed information. While a public visitor’s facility to house public bathrooms still awaits necessary funding, the State Park Services is considering future plans for a welcome center near the parking lot adjacent the Art Hall.⁸⁹

¹ Glendon M. Herbert and I.S.K. Reeves, Koreshan Unity Settlement, 1894-1977 (Winter Haven: Architects Design Group of Florida, 1977) 19

² Site Visit Observations and Tour, Koreshan State Historic Site, Estero, Florida (17 March 2004)

³ Herbert 92

⁴ Herbert 30

⁵ “Koreshan State Historic Site: Settlement Buildings,” Internet Resource (Accessed on 22 February 2004) <www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/ncr/restoration.htm>

⁶ Catherine Anthony Ohnemus, “Dr. Cyrus Teed and the Koreshan Unity Movement,” CRM 24.9 (2001): 11

⁷ Rocco Ceo and Joanna Lombard, Historic Landscapes of Florida (Miami: Deering Foundation and the University of Miami School of Architecture, 2001) 22

⁸ Ohnemus 12

⁹ “Koreshan State Historic Site: Settlement Buildings,” <www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/ncr/restoration.htm>

¹⁰ Herbert 113

¹¹ Herbert 46

¹² Herbert 46

¹³ Herbert 46-47

¹⁴ Herbert 139

¹⁵ Ohnemus 12

¹⁶ Site Visit Observations and Tour (17 March 2004)

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¹⁸ Herbert 58-60

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²⁰ Herbert 62

²¹ Herbert 139-140

²² Linda Stevenson, “Koreshan,” E-mail to Leah Harper (19 March 2004) Ohnemus 12

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²⁴ Stevenson Architects, “The Planetary Court, Koreshan State Historic Site: A Restoration Approach and Preservation Plan,” Final Report (1 May 1996) II-1

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- ⁴⁴ Stevenson Architects, “History of the Bakery Building” I-4
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- ⁴⁷ Linda Stevenson, “Koreshan,” Email to Leah Harper (21 March 2004)
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