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Hampton Dunn
SITE OF KOORESHAN CULT NOW STATE PARK

By HAMPTON DUNN

ESTERO --- Cyrus Reed Teed dreamed big.

He envisioned that one day Estero would be larger than Chicago or New York, that it would have a population of eight to ten million. Its streets would be 400 feet wide.

For this was the "New Jerusalem" for his cult, known as the Koreshan Unity. Fantastic as were some of its beliefs, Dr. Teed had a following, though much smaller in number than he had expected would flock to him.

The vision of himself as a new messiah came one night in 1869, back in Utica, N.Y. This was the seed for a new religion. He decided that while the world is round, as Columbus discovered, the fact is we live inside of the earth. People are like seeds in a grapefruit. Teed operated a non-atheistic communistic community, his followers signing over all their worldly goods to him. He also required celibacy and separated the sexes.

After operating from Chicago for a while, he came to this lower Gulf coast community in 1894 and eventually acquired several hundred acres of property for his cult.

Teed died on Dec. 22, 1908. His followers refused to bury him because he had preached he would rise again. A day or so after Christmas local health authorities ordered the messiah interred anyway. His followers buried him under a concrete slab at the end of Fort Myers Beach. In 1921 a hurricane swept away his remains. Today the art center is one building left and the property has become a State Park.