

1978

Cyrus Teed and the Lee County Elections of 1906

Elliott Mackle



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Mackle, Elliott (1978) "Cyrus Teed and the Lee County Elections of 1906," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 57 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol57/iss1/3>

CYRUS TEED AND THE LEE COUNTY ELECTIONS OF 1906

by ELLIOTT MACKLE *

DR. CYRUS R. TEED seldom used a single word when an ornate phrase would do. By temperament he was an orator. The length of his sermons was cut to nineteenth-century fashion. His lectures on scripture were notable not only for novelty of doctrine and idiosyncrasy of interpretation but for supreme grandiloquence. Nor did his style differ much in private discourse. Conversation was to him but the beginning of monologue. Simple questions invariably called up complex answers.

Like most orators also, like a speaker in any debate, he never said all that he thought. And what he did not say, the subject which he did not raise, during his first visits to Fort Myers, in early January 1894, is of particular importance to a consideration of his career. He did not speak of local politics. He exchanged compliments with the editor of the paper, he recorded a real estate transaction at the Lee County courthouse, he preached twice on Sunday at the Baptist church. "Those who attended," said the *Fort Myers Press*, "were well pleased with the doctor's remarks, and no one, as far as we have heard, takes any exception to his religious teachings or beliefs."¹

Dr. Teed's reticence was not without purpose. Had he been closely questioned on the matter of politics, and had he been disposed to answer candidly, he would have admitted his intention eventually to rule the county. Less than two months previously, in the pages of his religious magazine, *Flaming Sword*, he had revealed to his followers a plan to gather together a group of six to ten million blacks and whites, and with them to build a "Wonder City" in a place which, though unnamed, was unmistakably intended to be Lee County.² And before the

* Mr. Mackle recently received a Ph.D. in American Studies from Emory University.

1. *Fort Myers Press*, January 11, 18, 1894.
2. "The Destiny of the Black Race," *Chicago Flaming Sword*, November 25, 1893, 322; *Fort Myers Press*, October 26, 1893.

year was out, when the provision for black colonists had been dropped, and only a few dozen pioneers had arrived, he reaffirmed his intention to rule.³ But in January 1894 in Fort Myers, he would have been prudent; he would have denied even the thought of such plans.

His sights were set much higher than a courthouse. Newspaper headlines in the 1890s referred to him as the Chicago Messiah. His followers addressed him as Koresh. He did in fact claim to be a messiah, one cast into the world to proclaim a scientific gospel for a modern age. He claimed also to be the prophet Cyrus reincarnate: Koresh, he said, was but the transliteration of that earlier, biblical name. He was founder and leader of the Koreshan Unity, a community of religious and celibate socialists. He numbered his adherents by the thousands, but it is safe to say that by the middle 1890s he held the allegiance of perhaps 200 souls.⁴

In 1892 Dr. Teed had proposed a union of the Koreshan Unity with other utopian societies—the Shakers, the Harmonists, and Thomas Lake Harris's Brotherhood of the New Life. Newspapers made much of the idea, warning that Dr. Teed meant to form a celibate trust and charging that his sole interest lay in the assets of the Harmony Society and the United Society of Shakers. The union was never effected. Leaders of the other groups, though willing to accept Teed as a follower or even as an equal, were quite unwilling to unite behind his banner.⁵

The warnings and charges were in a sense correct. Dr. Teed did intend to acquire the property of the celibate societies, just as two years later he planned to secure ultimate control of the political machinery of Lee County. Teed, speaking as Koresh the Prophet, proposed that everything—politics, business, society, sexuality—be united under the leadership and direction of the Koreshan Unity and of himself, Koresh.

All leaders of utopian groups, all prophets, draw plans for the radical reorganization of society. All propose to lead men out of the darkness, through a sort of apocalypse, and into a

3. Estero *American Eagle*, December 1975.

4. For further information on Koreshan history and doctrine see Elliott J. Mackle, Jr., "The Koreshan Unity in Florida, 1894-1910" (M.A. thesis, University of Miami, 1971).

5. See, for example, the coverage given by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 26, March 11, 12, 17, 1892.

millennium of righteousness, justice, and light. Such leaders hope ultimately to convert the world, or a significant part of it, to their own particular beliefs, and to rearrange that world according to their own priorities. The few who are blessed with an ability to attract followers (and Teed, in a minor way, was one of these) nearly always attempt to organize communities which are both models for, and microcosms of, the future society. In nineteenth-century America the typical model was the rural utopian town.

The model must be built before the world can be converted. It is both instrument and practical demonstration. Dr. Teed taught that it must also be a capital from which to rule once the conversions and the apocalypse have taken place. Koreshans believed that Dr. Teed's gospel contained the keys to meaningful existence on earth and to immortal life. This immortality, according to his interpretation of the Bible, was to be achieved through a sharing of goods; through organization into quasi-military, quasi-monastic groupings; through celibacy; and through acceptance of a peculiar cosmographical thesis whereby the world is seen to be hollow, with men, the sun, and the universe contained inside. The celibate, socialist Koreshans who had been personally converted by the messiah were to become the leaders of the apocalyptic revolution and were to erect with their own hands the model city from which they would rule. In 1893 most of them were housed in apartments and in a mansion, called Beth-Ophra, in the Chicago suburbs. Chicago was already a developed city and only in very small measure Koreshan, and it was not a model town at all. Thus, after failing to acquire property from the Shakers or Harmonists, Dr. Teed looked about for a rural spot, one which would be far away from the notice of newspaper reporters. In October 1893 he inspected an abandoned hotel on Pine Island in Lee County, but he could not reach an agreement with the owners. After returning to Chicago, he was offered an undeveloped tract in Lee County as a gift, and he returned to Florida to inspect it. After checking the site and acquiring it early in January 1894, he decided that his city upon a hill would rise by the banks of the Estero River, some fifteen miles south of Fort Myers.⁶

6. *Fort Myers Press*, October 26, 1893, January 4, 1894; *Estero American Eagle*, June 30, 1927.

The city, to be called New Jerusalem, was conceived as the focal point of the universe, the seat of commerce, education, government, and, particularly, religion. The grandiosity of Koreshan dreams is suggested in the following passage drawn from a Unity pamphlet of 1895: "The construction of the city will be of such a character as to provide for a combination of street elevation, placing various kinds of traffic upon different surfaces; as for instance, heavy team traffic upon the ground surface, light driving upon an elevation of its own, pedestrianism upon a plane distinct from either, and all railroad travel upon distinct planes, dividing even the freight and passenger traffic by separated elevations. There will be no dumping of sewage into the streams, bay, or Gulf. A movable and continuous earth closet will carry the *debris* and offal of the city to a place thirty or more miles distant, where it will be transformed to fertilization There will be no smudge or smoke. Power by which machinery will be moved will be by the utilization of the electro-magnetic currents of the earth and air, independently of steam application to so-called 'dynamos.' Motors will take the place of motion derived from steam pressure. The city will be constructed on the most magnificent scale, without the use of so-called money. These things can be done easily when once the people know the force of cooperation and united life, and understand the great principles of utilization and economy."⁷

Work began early in February 1894 when a band of about twenty Koreshan pioneers arrived to cut trees, clear land, and build cabins.⁸ But New Jerusalem did not rise from the sandy soil. In 1903, when the headquarters of the Unity were transferred from Chicago to Estero, as the place had come to be called, the settlement looked very much as it does today in 1978: a collection of woodframe houses, dormitories, an office, a store, a dining hall, a saw mill, cabins, barns, and outbuildings.⁹ Dr. Teed and the early Koreshans nevertheless did acquire property as if to build a city housing several million. By 1907

7. Frank D. Jackson and Mary Everts Daniels, *Koreshan Unity. Communitistic and Co-operative Gathering of the People* (Chicago, n.d.), 3.

8. *Estero American Eagle*, June 30, 1927.

9. See the recent survey of Estero development, G. M. Herbert and I. S. K. Reeves, V, *Koreshan Unity Settlement, 1894-1977* (Winter Park, 1977).

they owned or controlled more than 6,000 acres of Lee County land.¹⁰

The removal of Unity headquarters to Estero was in fact a consolidation. Furniture and personal goods of Chicago Koreshans were brought south in carload lots. Printing presses used for the production of tracts and magazines were installed in a print shop near the river and publication resumed.¹¹ The population grew to about 200, a peak never significantly surpassed during Dr. Teed's lifetime. Meanwhile, however, the Koreshans' relations with nearby property owners, which had been relatively free of friction since 1894, began to change. Neighboring small farmers, alarmed at the influx of people into a sparsely populated district, began to speak out against Koreshan plans to build railroads and elevated boulevards through their fields. As a precaution against interference, therefore, Dr. Teed decided upon municipal incorporation of Estero. A meeting of registered voters and affected property owners was held on September 1, 1904. Incorporation was approved, municipal organization and ordinances voted, and officers, all of them Koreshans, were elected. The town's corporate limits conformed to plans for New Jerusalem: 110 square miles were contained within Estero's boundaries. The property of several non-Koreshans who objected to incorporation was not included within municipal limits.¹²

Relations between Estero and Fort Myers, which had not always been cordial, improved considerably at about the same time. There was a Unity booth as part of the Lee County exhibit at the South Florida Fair in Tampa in 1904. The extension of the railroad south from Punta Gorda that same year made Fort Myers the principal link between Estero and the outside world. Koreshan boats began to run regularly between the projected New Jerusalem and the county seat, and members of the Unity were often seen in the streets and stores of Fort Myers. In May 1905, upon the opening of the Unity's new auditorium, the Art

-
10. 1907 Tax Book, Lee County, *passim*. I am indebted to Caroline H. Crabtree, St. James City, who scanned these tax records for me; her typewritten summary is in my possession.
 11. Chicago *Flaming Sword*, October 16, 1903; Allen H. Andrews, *A Yank Pioneer in Florida: Recounting the Adventures of a City Chap Who Came to the Wilds of South Florida in the 1890's and Remained to Grow Up With the Country* (Jacksonville, 1950), 38-39.
 12. *Fort Myers Press*, September 8, 1904; Lee County Incorporation Record Book 1, 10-15.

Hall, citizens of Fort Myers and other towns and villages visited Estero for a showing of paintings by Dr. Teed's son, Douglas Arthur Teed. The *Fort Myers Press* began to publish an Estero community events column written by a Koreshan. This and other editorial favors were given in return for Koreshan support of the *Press's* editor, Philip Isaacs, in the 1904 election for county judge. The Koreshans bloc-voted, helping to elect Isaacs and other candidates nominated by the county Democratic ring.¹³

Dr. Teed's relations with the press had not been very amicable. Reporters had portrayed him as a pompous schemer and a fraud. Teed often had turned such insults to good account by using them as excuses for playing the martyr in the pages of his own publications. Lee County, however, had now become his base of operations and the home of the Unity. Posturing was easily detected, and laughed at, in a small community like Fort Myers. Prudence was required; he wanted good publicity, and he also wanted treaties, however temporary, with the powerful. Isaacs's role as editor, coupled with his elevation from town councilman, his last official position, to the bench, must have made him seem an influential person. In fact he was controlled, as were both the Democratic party organization and the newspaper, by the wealthy Hendry family.¹⁴ The treaty between Teed and Isaacs lasted two years. Teed brought disaster on himself, and on Isaacs, by neglecting to form some new arrangement. And Isaacs, like Teed, misjudged the power of his position, thereby contributing to his own undoing.

These personal disasters, which accompanied a severing of public ties between Estero and Fort Myers, were occasioned by the events of the election of 1906. The seeds of the conflict had been sown two years earlier. Municipal incorporation had entitled Dr. Teed and his officials to claim a share of county road tax funds, but they found that county officers were loath to divert dollars from their own projects, particularly those in Fort Myers. There was also, in some quarters, a resentment against the northern newcomers who sought to establish what might become

13. Estero *American Eagle*, October 18, 1906; Estero *Flaming Sword*, June 13, 1905, November 13, 1906; Guiding Star Publishing House Visitors' Record, unpaginated, Koreshan Unity Collection, Estero.

14. Karl H. Grismer, *The Story of Fort Myers: The History of the Land of the Caloosahatchee and Southwest Florida* (St. Petersburg, 1949), 154-55.

a rival county seat, who boasted that they would revolutionize the world and turn it inside out, and who followed a messiah other than Christ.

County officials, needing a bargaining chip, looked back to the records of the Democratic primary election of May 1904, when Koreshans had been permitted to register and to vote.¹⁵ In the November general election, however, the Koreshans had voted for Republican Theodore Roosevelt, rather than the Democrats' nominee. Although the Koreshans had otherwise supported the ticket, this defection provided an excuse to disenfranchise them for the election of 1906.¹⁶

The instrument of this disenfranchisement was a pledge which participants in the first Democratic primary of May 1906 were required to sign if challenged. It stated that the voter would support all Democratic nominees of 1906, and that he had "supported the Democratic nominees of 1904, both state, county, and national."¹⁷ Based upon laws passed to deny blacks the franchise, this pledge was so worded as to exclude those who had voted for Roosevelt and those who had not been in Lee County in 1904 and had therefore not voted. The Koreshans stubbornly refused to be intimidated. They appeared at the Estero precinct polling station on the day of the first Democratic primary, protested against the pledge, but then signed it after crossing out certain of the qualifications, and bloc-voted for the candidates of their choice. The Democratic executive committee, of which Philip Isaacs was chairman, thereupon threw out the entire vote of the Estero precinct, including eight votes by the non-Koreshan electors, and instructed election inspectors to bar Koreshans from voting in the second primary. Isaacs and the party had not found it necessary to curry Dr. Teed's favor. The Democratic candidates for county office could be elected without Estero support, and the Koreshans were ineligible to participate in Fort Myers municipal contests—a bond referendum, an election for town aldermen, in which Isaacs was a candidate, and the elevation of a Hendry to the office of mayor.¹⁸ But the action

15. *Fort Myers Press*, October 4, 1906; Kenneth Edwin Anderson, "The *American Eagle*: A Unique Florida Weekly Newspaper" (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1970), 17.

16. *Estero American Eagle*, June 14, 1906.

17. *Fort Myers Press*, May 31, 1906.

18. *Ibid.*, May 17, 24, 31, 1906; *Estero American Eagle*, June 7, 14, 1906; Grismer, *Story of Fort Myers*, 203.

against the Koreshans was also, of course, the party's answer to Estero's claims on county road tax revenue.

Dr. Teed decided to retaliate by opposing the Democrats in the November general election. The Koreshans, not staunch Democratic loyalists in any case, ignored the few powerless Republicans and turned first to the Socialist party. A union seemed to offer much. The Socialists possessed a following and a not dishonorable name in the politics of the period. The Lee County Socialists appeared to lack only an effective means of public communication. The Koreshan Unity, which had no following, owned printing presses and counted professional writers and printers among its membership. Teed quickly discovered, however, that the Socialists were not only without a press but without any real political organization. Union was therefore discarded in favor of the formation of a new party, one in which Koreshans, Socialists, Republicans, dissatisfied Democrats, and other dissidents-but no blacks-could band together in opposition to the ring. The party was called the Progressive Liberty party and it, too, needed an organ of communication. The Koreshans correctly assumed that the *Press* would not favor the opposition with full and unbiased coverage. Thus was "hatched" the *American Eagle*.¹⁹

The first issue of the *American Eagle* was published at Estero on Thursday, June 7, 1906. Thursday, not incidentally, was also the *Press's* day of publication. This initial edition gave notice that the paper was to be no ordinary country weekly. Printed on sixty to seventy pound book-quality paper, and hand set by Koreshan experts, the *Eagle* displayed typographical innovations not found in metropolitan dailies until years later, and was far superior in every way to the weekly Florida newspapers of the period.²⁰ Allen H. Andrews, a printer with no editorial experience, was chosen editor by Dr. Teed, and he was assisted by associate editor Rollin W. Gray. Most of the early articles and editorials were written by Andrews, Gray, John S. Sargeant, U. G. Morrow, and Teed.

Because the *Eagle* was begun as a means of rallying independents to the political banner of the Progressive Liberty

19. *Fort Myers Press*, May 31, 1906; Estero *American Eagle*, June 7, 21, 1906.

20. Anderson, "American Eagle: Unique Florida Weekly," 1, 29-33.

party, the only reference to Koreshan non-political beliefs in the first issue was the motto, "Riches and Poverty Cease where the Commonwealth Begins," which ran just below the paper's nameplate. More expressive of the paper's early intentions was the wording of the masthead: "The *American Eagle*: Exponent of Purity in Politics." The first issue ran four pages, and the editorial content was almost entirely politically partisan. The tone was set in the lead-off editorial: "As heat is one of the necessary factors in incubation, so from out of the heat of the recent political strife has been hatched *The American Eagle*, full-fledged and strong of beak. His flight is lofty-no place, though high, escapes his keen, far-seeing eye. From time immemorial the eagle has been the symbol of liberty from the thralldom of the oppressor's yoke, therefore *The American Eagle*-friend of the downtrodden and oppressed-is an adversary to be reckoned with by those who 'are thirsting for power' and dominion over others."²¹

Several features which were to continue in use appeared in this issue, including political cartoons and "The Week's News Boiled Down," a wrap-up of state, national, and international news items. Twenty-four business card advertisements appeared on the back page, each set in a different type face. Only two of these ads were placed by residents of Estero. Eleven of the remaining twenty-two were placed by financial and community leaders of Fort Myers and Lee County. Although the Koreshans were in dispute with the county's politicians they enjoyed the respect of other elements of the population.²²

The *Eagle* was an immediate success. By July 12, circulation was 532, and a month later it had risen to 668-this in a county with about 1,000 voters. Subject matter was broadened with succeeding issues but remained in line with Dr. Teed's views. *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair's expose of the meatpacking industry, was favorably reviewed in the fourth issue, and muck-raking articles on national, state, and local questions followed. The same issue introduced the use of color. The first page was printed over the drab green silhouette of an eagle with outstretched wings. Community events columns from the county's small towns also began appearing with that issue. The *Eagle*

21. Estero *American Eagle*, June 7, 1906.

22. Anderson, "*American Eagle*: Unique Florida Weekly," 30.

went up to six pages on August 23 with the inclusion of a supplement page.

The Progressive Liberty party (PLP) was organized at Estero by Dr. Teed and Unity members. A proposed party platform had appeared in the first issue of the *Eagle*, and the first official meeting of the Estero Voters' League had been held on June 15. In order to arouse interest among independent voters, however, a PLP organizing convention was held in Fort Myers on June 24. The proposed platform was amended and adopted, the *Eagle* was named official organ of the party, and a slate of candidates was elected. The elections to be contested included those for state representative, county commissioners, school board members, tax assessor, tax collector, and treasurer. Only one nominee, W. Ross Wallace, candidate for county commissioner from the Estero district, was a Koreshan. The others were generally friendly to the Koreshans and to their ideas of political independence from the county Democratic leaders.²³

The *Eagle* printed editorials on several political issues, including drainage of the Everglades and tax equalization, and the paper continually alleged corruption and political favoritism in reports on Lee County affairs.²⁴ These seem to have hit their marks. The *Eagle* reported receiving threats of a visit to Estero by armed men if the reports continued. The Koreshans replied that their own guns were ready and that they would continue to expose corruption, incompetence, and nepotism—the last a charge to which the Hendry family was particularly vulnerable in public affairs.²⁵

The general election was set for November 6, and the PLP campaign intensified in September with a series of rallies in most of the small towns and villages of the county. Democratic candidates were invited to attend and debate PLP nominees, but none appeared. Speeches were given and music was provided by the Unity brass band which accompanied the PLP caravan from town to town during September and October. A genuine interest in the party was aroused among the citizens of the smaller settlements. Lee County politics was certainly no better than it should have been, and the practical and equitable ideas of the ambitious

23. Estero *American Eagle*, June 7, July 26, 1906.

24. *Ibid.*, August 2, 9, 1906.

25. *Ibid.*, August 16, 1906.

reformers were not lost on the less wealthy members of the population.²⁶

The PLP platform contained many objectives which, although suspect to Florida conservatives of the period, were subsequently written into law. Other concepts gained support in the country as a whole, but were never totally adopted. These proposals included public ownership of utilities, taxation on an equitable basis, "government in the sunshine," free schooling, extension of good roads, equalization of wealth, and government conservation of resources and protection of the environment.²⁷ None of these differed significantly from contemporary demands made by radicals and socialists.

Much of the PLP's campaign invective was aimed at Philip Isaacs. The apparent conflict of interest in his roles as county judge, journalist, and political committeeman was made symbolic of the corruption in Lee County Democratic affairs. Among the uncomplimentary nicknames applied to him by the *Eagle* were "Fillup Isaacs" and "Judge (and Jew-ry)."²⁸ The editor, who was, in fact, a Methodist and a Mason, struck back, aware that the PLP campaign was making serious inroads in the strength of the Democratic regulars. Isaacs referred in print to the Koreshans as "sneaking," "underhanded," and "dupes," and called Teed "voracious," "this schemer," "this Koreshan humbug," and worse. One of Isaacs's strongest objections to Koreshan participation in the May primary had been that they bloc-voted, thus breaking "into the calculations of many." In early October, however, he lashed out in an editorial blasting Dr. Teed's alleged financial, moral, and political intrigues and irregularities, singling out for special wrath the Unity's practice of bloc-voting for benefit. The editorial, headed "Shall Koreshan Ideas Prevail in Lee County?" ends, ironically enough, with the statement that it is the duty of "Democrats and all other citizens" to bloc-vote against the PLP.²⁹

Isaacs and his fellow politicians were thoroughly alarmed by the intrusion of the PLP into their heretofore inviolate garden.

26. *Ibid.*, September 20, October 4, 18, 1906; Andrews, *Yank Pioneer in Florida*, 43.

27. The full text of the revised and adopted platform is given in Estero *American Eagle*, September 27, 1906.

28. *Ibid.*, June 7, October 4, 1906.

29. Francis P. Fleming, *Memoirs of Florida* (Atlanta, 1902), II, 571; *Fort Myers Press*, October 4, May 17, 1906.

It may be that the Fort Myers regulars were looking for an excuse for violence; certainly there were those who wished to cause Dr. Teed and the PLP more acute embarrassment than was possible through the medium of intemperate editorials. The excuse came by telephone.³⁰

A man named W. W. Pilling who was, among other things, a song writer, had arrived in Fort Myers on September 24 on his way to Estero. Finding no Unity boat at the municipal docks he went to the post office and sent a note to Estero announcing his arrival. He then retired to the Florida House, a hotel operated by Mr. and Mrs. J. I. Sellers, for the night. Someone at Estero called the hotel by telephone at 7:00 the next morning asking for Pilling but was apparently told by Mrs. Sellers that "he is not here." Whether she was unaware that Pilling was registered or whether she meant that he had not yet come downstairs is unclear. A few hours later she again spoke to the voice from Estero and then called Pilling to the phone. Before summoning him she was asked by the voice, "I thought you told me no one by that name was stopping there," or words to that effect. A few more words may have been exchanged, but Pilling later recalled that Mrs. Sellers had not seemed upset by anything that might have been said.

Three weeks later, however, on October 13, Sellers met W. Ross Wallace in a Fort Myers street, accused him of calling Mrs. Sellers a liar, and physically attacked him. Wallace, the Koreshan candidate for county commissioner, was at that time unaware of the telephone incident. He had been campaigning at Caxambas, fifty miles south of Estero, on the day of the alleged insult and had clearly taken no part in the conversation with Mrs. Sellers. After attempting to defend himself, and after failing to secure protection from the mayor of Fort Myers who was standing nearby, Wallace fled.

Dr. Teed, meanwhile, had come into town to meet a group of Koreshans and their supporters due to arrive from Baltimore on the afternoon train. In front of Gilliam's grocery store, on his way to the station, he caught sight of Ross Wallace, Sellers, and the town marshal, S. W. Sanchez. They were, at Wallace's re-

30. The account which follows is drawn from Estero *Flaming Sword*, June 12, 1906; Estero, *American Eagle*, October 18, November 8, 1906; *Fort Myers Press*, October 18, 25, 1906.



Dr. Cyrus R. Teed, circa 1906. From the Koreshan pamphlet, *The Koreshan Unity Co-operative* (1906).

quest, discussing the telephone incident and Sellers's subsequent attack. Wallace told Sellers that he had not been in Estero on the day of the call and asked him to explain his actions. Sellers had just replied that he had heard that the caller was Wallace when Dr. Teed approached the group. Had the doctor kept silent the quarrel might have ended there. But Teed could not resist the temptation to preach; perhaps he felt himself already the master and peacemaker of Lee County. Observing that telephone conversations were often misunderstood, he repeated to Sellers what several people said they had heard the caller say. No one, he stated with finality, had insulted Mrs. Sellers.

Almost before the words were out of his mouth, Sellers yelled, "Don't you call me a liar," and hit the doctor three times in the face. Sanchez, the town marshal, did not move to stop the attack. Dr. Teed quickly stepped forward and raised his fists. Whether he actually struck back or, as he later said, moved to protect his face and spectacles is disputed.

A crowd quickly gathered around the four men. The train had by that time arrived, and the Baltimore party, escorted by the mayor of Estero and by a young Koreshan named Richard Jentsch, had begun walking toward a hotel in the center of town. Upon meeting the crowd they recognized Dr. Teed. Jentsch sprang forward to defend his messiah, and was followed almost immediately by the three Koreshan boys in his charge—Claude Rahn, Roland Sander, and George Danner.

Jentsch struck Sellers and was then himself struck down by blows from the crowd. Claude Rahn, trying to separate Sellers and Dr. Teed, was hit in the mouth by a stranger. George Danner, seeing this, ran forward, kicked Rahn's attacker, and then retreated. The man yelled, "Grab the kid." Someone did, and Danner was knocked into the crowd.

Roland Sander was pushed about by the milling people. His valise was pulled from his hand and thrown to the ground. When a stranger asked him if he was a Koreshan and he answered, "yes," he received a blow in the face that sent him sprawling into the gutter. From there he saw Sellers draw a knife on Dr. Teed, but another man seized Sellers's arm and forced him to put the weapon away.

Marshal Sanchez, who had been standing no more than four feet from Sellers and Teed, but who had not hindered

Sellers's attack, is reported to have then seized the doctor by his coat and to have said, "You struck him and called him a liar."

"I did not strike him," Dr. Teed replied, "nor call him a liar."

Thereupon Sanchez is said to have replied, "Don't you tell me you did not strike him," while at the same time giving Dr. Teed a slap which dislodged his glasses. The marshal then told Teed and Rahn that they were under arrest, but before he could proceed, he was hit in the face by Jentsch who had freed himself from the crowd. Felling Jentsch with his billy-club, the marshal was heard to say, "You hit me again and I will kill you."

The free-for-all then ended. Other Koreshans hurriedly collected the younger boys and took them to the Hill House Hotel. Marshal Sanchez arrested Teed, Jentsch, and Ross Wallace, forcing each to post \$10.00 bond against an appearance in Fort Myers municipal court the following Monday.

The Koreshans wisely forfeited bond and postponed and then cancelled a PLP rally scheduled to be held in Fort Myers.³¹ Other rallies were held, however, in the smaller towns and villages-Sanibel, Marco, Caxambas, Buckingham, Alva.³² In the small settlements there were voters who would listen to PLP charges of political corruption and lawlessness in the county seat. The pages of the *Eagle* were full of the charges: PLP candidate wrongfully attacked by Fort Myers Democrat; Dr. Teed beaten while Fort Myers officials were refusing to intercede; Koreshan political activity was resulting in arrests by Democrats; Lies were filling the pages of Isaacs's slanderous *Press*.³²

The *Press* and the Democratic regulars replied in kind. The account of the altercation in Fort Myers was headed "Teed Starts a Street Fight!" Marshal Sanchez and the mayor of Fort Myers both swore that Dr. Teed had been the aggressor in the affair.³⁴ The *Press* began running a series of years-old expose articles, reprinted from Chicago newspapers, under such provocative titles as "Came Near Lynching Teed" and "For the Price of a Wife."³⁵ These reprints, though they dealt with allegations which, with one or two exceptions, had been dis-

31. Estero *American Eagle*, October 18, November 1, 1906.

32. *Ibid.*, October 18, 1906.

33. *Ibid.*, October 18, 25, November 1, 8, 1906.

34. *Fort Myers Press*, October 18, 1906.

35. *Ibid.*, October 18, 25, 1906.

missed by Chicago courts years before, were initially presented as news items.

Progressive Liberty party candidates won no elections. In several races, however, the results were extremely close. One PLP candidate for the school board ran ahead of his Democratic opponent in unofficial returns, but when the results were certified by the ring-dominated election board a number of votes were thrown out, and he lost.³⁶

The Fort Myers results made the difference. Although the PLP received a surprising twenty per cent of the vote in that town, the large number of voters in Fort Myers, together with mixed returns in about half the smaller settlements, was more than enough to offset PLP majorities in Denaud, Immokalee, La-Belle, Wulfert, Captiva, and Estero. Although the PLP won no races, the campaign was one of considerable achievement. The hastily-organized party captured at least one-third, and usually much more, of the vote in every race contested.³⁷ The *Eagle*, in a post-election editorial, congratulated itself upon its successes and predicted PLP victory in the elections of 1908. Publication would continue, readers were assured, and the paper's muckraking policy would remain unchanged.³⁸

Meanwhile, although Isaacs and the ring still controlled county affairs, the Koreshans and the politicians seemed to have concluded another uneasy truce, and the Koreshans returned to their more normal routine of work. Dr. Teed, convalescent from the beating in Fort Myers, began to write a book—a fiction in which Koreshanity triumphs over the world.³⁹ Picnics were held near Estero, and Dr. Teed often conducted Sunday services in the Art Hall. The Unity brass band played at a private garden party and at a public dance in Fort Myers and gave a concert at Immokalee.⁴⁰

The winter seemed quiet. There was a momentary editorial interruption in February when Philip Isaacs accused the Koreshans of child-stealing. The *Eagle* carefully and at some length ex-

36. Estero *American Eagle*, November 15, 1906, January 24, 1907.

37. *Ibid.*, November 15, 1906.

38. *Ibid.*, November 8, 1906.

39. Publisher's Note, *The Great Red Dragon, or, The Flaming Devil of the Orient*, by Lord Chester [Cyrus R. Teed], (Estero, 1908), 6.

40. Estero *American Eagle*, December 27, 1906, February 14, 28, March 28, 1907.

plained the facts of the case to the "little Judge-editor," and the truce seemed to have resumed.⁴¹ In March, however, it became apparent that Isaacs was not content with the situation.

A journal in the state capital, the *Tallahassee Sun*, printed a sensational article on Dr. Teed on March 2. Some of the facts cited were incorrect, the scandalous articles reprinted by the *Press* in October were used as part of the writer's background material, and the general tone was hardly unbiased. The article, "Here's Koresh King of Fakirs," despite its inaccuracies, was a devastating indictment nonetheless. The *Unity* and the *Eagle* exploded editorially and, when it became clear that Isaacs had assisted the reporter for the *Sun*, the *Eagle* began a fresh campaign against both the "Judge" and his colleague in the capital.⁴² Isaacs soon proposed to Dr. Teed that he would "forget that you are living" if his opponent would agree to stay out of Lee County affairs.⁴³

Isaacs and the Democratic regulars were not willing to stay out of Estero's affairs, however. On May 1, the county commission petitioned their state senator and representative to introduce a bill in the legislature abolishing the town of Estero or reducing it to smaller size. The reason given was that the "present charter covers so much actual unnecessary territory, and only seems to give them [the *Unity*] a claim for one-half the road tax assessed in said boundaries." The charter was, therefore, "a farce and a sham."⁴⁴ Obviously, the county politicians were still unwilling to forfeit the road tax money, but it is reasonable to assume that the petition was as much a retaliation for Koreshan political activity as it was a means of retaining tax revenue. The Florida legislature duly abolished the charter by unanimous vote. Governor Napoleon Broward, over *Unity* protests, allowed the bill to become law without his signature. Eventually, however, the bill was found to be constitutionally flawed, and thus null and void.⁴⁵

41. *Fort Myers Press*, February 14, 1907; *Estero American Eagle*, February 21, 1907.

42. *Estero American Eagle*, March 7, 14, 28, 1907.

43. *Fort Myers Press*, March 28, 1907.

44. *Estero American Eagle*, May 16, 1907.

45. *Laws of Florida*, 1907, Chapter 5801; *Fort Myers Press*, May 23, 1907; *Estero American Eagle*, May 23, June 6, July 4, 1907; Koresh [Cyrus R. Teed] and E. B. Webster, *The Koreshan Unity, Co-operative* (Estero, 1907), 56.

Estero remained. Philip Isaacs was defeated. He was perhaps weary of political war; he had certainly been stung by the well-aimed barbs of the *Eagle*. But he had also beaten himself by confusing the power of his patrons with his own authority. His mistake, in fact, had been committed in the 1906 election. Isaacs had helped defeat the bond issue for the improvement of Fort Myers. The Hendrys, as it happened, were at that time in favor of the issue. Isaacs had also lost his race for city alderman. He had then tried to recover his standing by driving Teed from the county, and he had failed. On April 4, 1907, he printed a fresh attack on bond issues. The ring, and Mayor Hendry, came to a decision. Isaacs had proven himself an untrustworthy, incompetent servant. He was allowed to sell his interest in the *Press* and to depart quietly for the North.⁴⁶

The *Eagle* bade him farewell with a sharply satirical editorial in which his rise and fall were compared to the flight of Icarus: "Thus the Judge, soaring upon the pinions of fame, flushed with success and ambitious to break the record, attempted still higher flight and sought to deprive a community of citizens of one of the highest privileges guaranteed them under the Constitution (the right of franchise), but in so doing he also ran up against a warm proposition, the wax fastening of his wings melted, and he fell with a dull, sickening splash into the sea of oblivion."⁴⁷

If Cyrus Teed was defeated politically, he did score a different kind of victory; he did not sink into so dark and total an oblivion as did Isaacs. He had often prophesied that he would die at the hands of Christians. Many of his followers believed that only martyrdom would prove his claims to divinity. Thus, when soon after the attack in the Fort Myers street he began to suffer violent pains and headaches, it was taken as a sign. When he died, two years later, on December 22, 1908, the agony of loss for his followers was mixed with the elation of triumph. A prophet had died in order to bring on the apocalypse. Korshanity would soon rule the world. The faithful waited three days for Koresh to rise from his bier. When he did not, a simple tomb of concrete blocks was hastily prepared, and he was immured in it.⁴⁸

46. Grismer, *Story of Fort Myers*, 203; *Fort Myers Press*, October 3, 1907.

47. Estero *American Eagle*, October 10, 1907.

48. Estero *Flaming Sword*, January 15, February 15, 1909; private source;

Dr. Teed's oblivion was not total because he left followers behind. Some drifted off, many died, but a few-even today-believe in his divinity and in his teachings. The settlement at Estero, now Koreshan State Park, is a monument to him. Koresh suffered disaster; yet he won. He has not been forgotten. His efforts, his preaching, his writing, his political campaigning, even his garrulity, did, after all, accomplish that.

Fort Myers Press, December 24, 1908; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 25, 1908.