

The Koreshan Unity Collection at FGCU

About FGCU

Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) is a relatively new public university located in Lee County, FL. Opening its doors in 1997, the school expanded two years later becoming a full-fledged university. FGCU currently serves over 16,000 students and has three satellite campuses in Naples, Punta Gorda, and the Atrium in Ft. Meyers. Environmental sustainability is of paramount importance to the university with 400 acres dedicated solely to environmental preservation. FGCU only receives 18% of their power from Florida Power & Light Co, the rest is provided by their 15-acre solar field. Campus buildings are cooled from chilled water from an ice thermal storage plant that circulates through a loop underground (Wikipedia, 2026, paras. 17-19). The campus is a modern marvel of renewable energy technology.

Archives and Special Collections

A glance at the University Archives and Special Collections page at Florida Gulf Coast University shows a variety of subject matter including *The Shape of Orchids: An Eternal Love Letter*, *The Black Experience in Lee County*, and *Florida Railroads: The gateway to Flowers, Oranges, and Alligators*. For this report, I will be focusing on the Koreshan Unity Collection kept in the archives of the William G. Bradshaw Library. These publications and artifacts from the Koreshan Unity were donated to the library through the generosity of The College of Life Foundation, an organization dedicated to preserving the history of South Florida with a focus on the communal sect known at the Koreshan Unity (FGCU, n.d., para. 4).

Who were the Koreshans?

The Koreshan Unity were the followers of Cyrus Teed, a self-proclaimed messenger of "Divine Motherhood" (Wynne & Knetch, 2016, p. 16). Teed and his followers believed in the Concave Earth theory (Wynne & Knetch, 2016, p. 25). In 1899, Teed published *The Cellular Cosmogony*, which stated that our universe is a shell made up of seven metallic

layers. Within the shell are three atmospheres, the first being a mix of oxygen and nitrogen. Human beings live on the “inner habitable surface of land and water water (Wynne & Knetch, 2016, p. 13). In the 1890s, the group moved to Estero, FL to set up their New Jerusalem (Wynne & Knetch, 2016, pp. 23-24). The few remaining members of the Koreshan Unity opted to donate their land to the state of Florida to build a state park (Wynne & Knetch, 2016, p. 27). You can still visit it today.

The Digital Archive

The digital archive of the Koreshan Unity is impressive with a total of 1,072 digital scans of photos, publications, letters, banners, and sheet music. The College of Life had donated over four hundred boxes of materials to FGCU back in 2009. This was the beginning of a massive digitization project of the part of Melissa Minds VandeBurgt, FGCU’s Archives, Special Collections and Digital Initiatives Librarian and her team (Gates, 2015, paras. 9-12). Click on any the digital archives will provide users with a jpeg for view or download. These are some of the items that stood out to me including the Cellular Cosmology Gold Banner which helps illustrate Teed's theory of a Concave Earth.

The CELLULAR COSMOGONY

Discovered by KORESH in 1870

PUBLISHED BY
The Guiding Star Publishing House
Centerville, Iowa University, February



Cellular Cosmology Gold Banner

THE EARTH NOT CONVEX.

The Earth's Curvature		2 Miles 32 in.	5 Miles 16 ft 8 in.	8 Miles 42 ft 8 in.	15 Miles 150 ft	30 Miles 600 ft	60 Miles 2400 ft	Eight Inches per Mile
3	6 ft	6	24	9	54	40	1066	
4	10 in.	7	32	10	66	50	1266	80



SO CALLED PROOF OF CONVEXITY.




HALF MAST DOWN TO NAKED EYE.
HULL RESTORED WITH TELESCOPE.

SO CALLED PROOF OF CONVEXITY REFUTED.

The Earth is not Convex banner

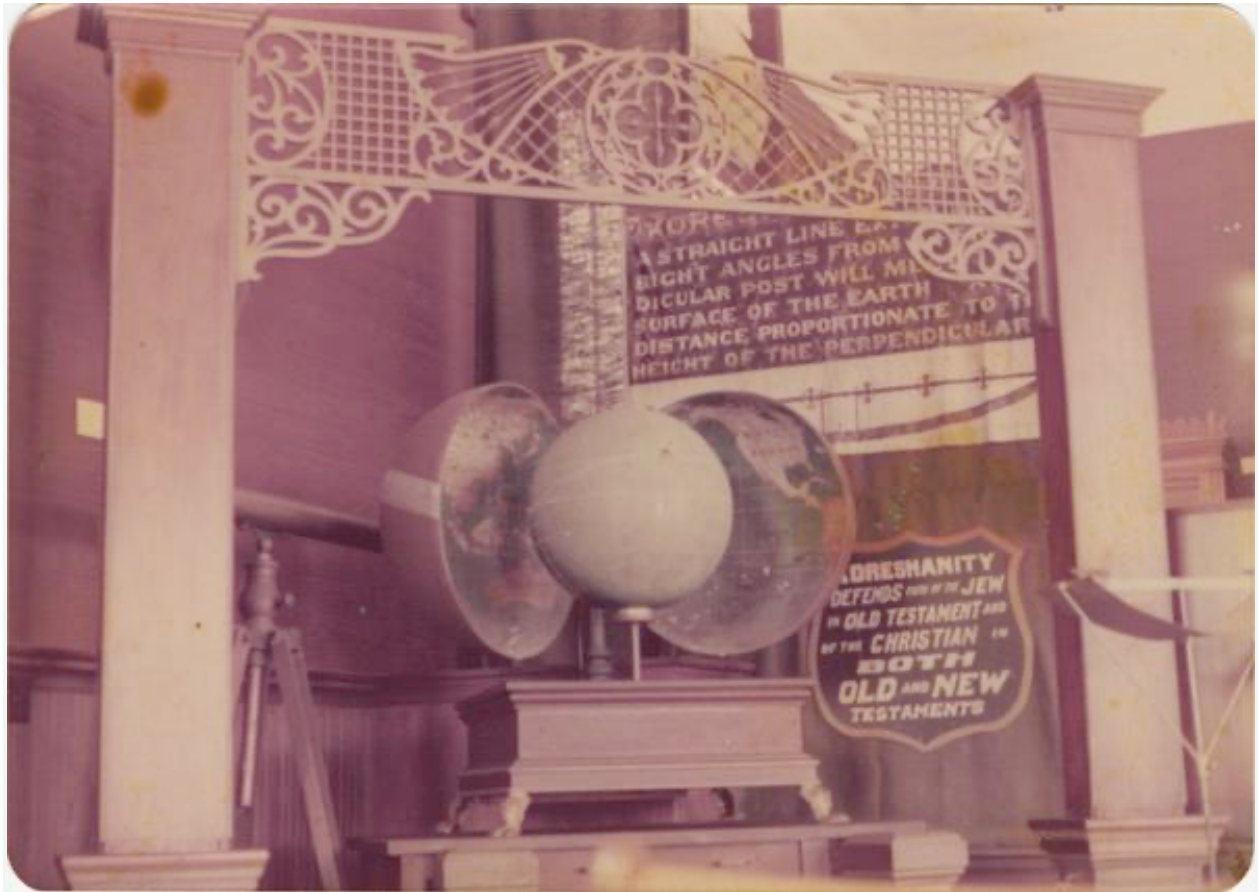


Photo of the Concave Earth Globe Model



If you will forget the pleasures of the world, and stand together as a unit of energy and power, the graves may be stirred, and the dead made to hear the Voice of the Resurrection.

*CYRUS,
Shepherd of Israel.*

Teed Portrait with Quote

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DigitalFGCU: Special Collections

DigitalFGCU provides open access to materials from the University Archives and Special Collections that showcase the history, culture, and environmental ecology of Florida Gulf Coast University and Southwest Florida.

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Collections (36)

America in the Depression Years

Americana Collection

Aquila: Student Research Journal

Big Cypress Collection

Bower School of Music Recitals

Bradshaw Library Events

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I had no issues navigating the Special Collections website of FGCU. We have a total of 36 collections. Each one has a corresponding image and is available with a single click.

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DIGITALFGCU: SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Koreshan Unity Collection

The Koreshan Collection presents documentation of Koreshan settlement in Southwest Florida. Founded by Dr. Cyrus Teed, a former Civil War surgeon who later translated his name to the Hebrew version, Koresh, the Koreshan Unity was a faith-based group first established in Chicago. Teed's intention was to create a permanent residence, which was later constructed in Southwest Florida. Located in Estero, the commune quickly grew into a self-reliant township complete with a functioning economy and source of electricity. In 1961, the remaining members donated the land site to the State of Florida for historic preservation. The Koreshan State Park is open to the public. This collection consists of publications produced by the Koreshan Unity (notably The Flaming Sword and American Eagle), Koreshan Unity members' records, personal papers, photographs, correspondence, monographs, sheet music, musical instruments, paintings, and personal belongings and writings, as well as scholarship and research produced on the Koreshan Unity, and documentation post the property being managed by the Florida State Parks, 1850-1999. The finding aid is available [online](#).



Sort Items by Relevance

Search

Items (1072)

View







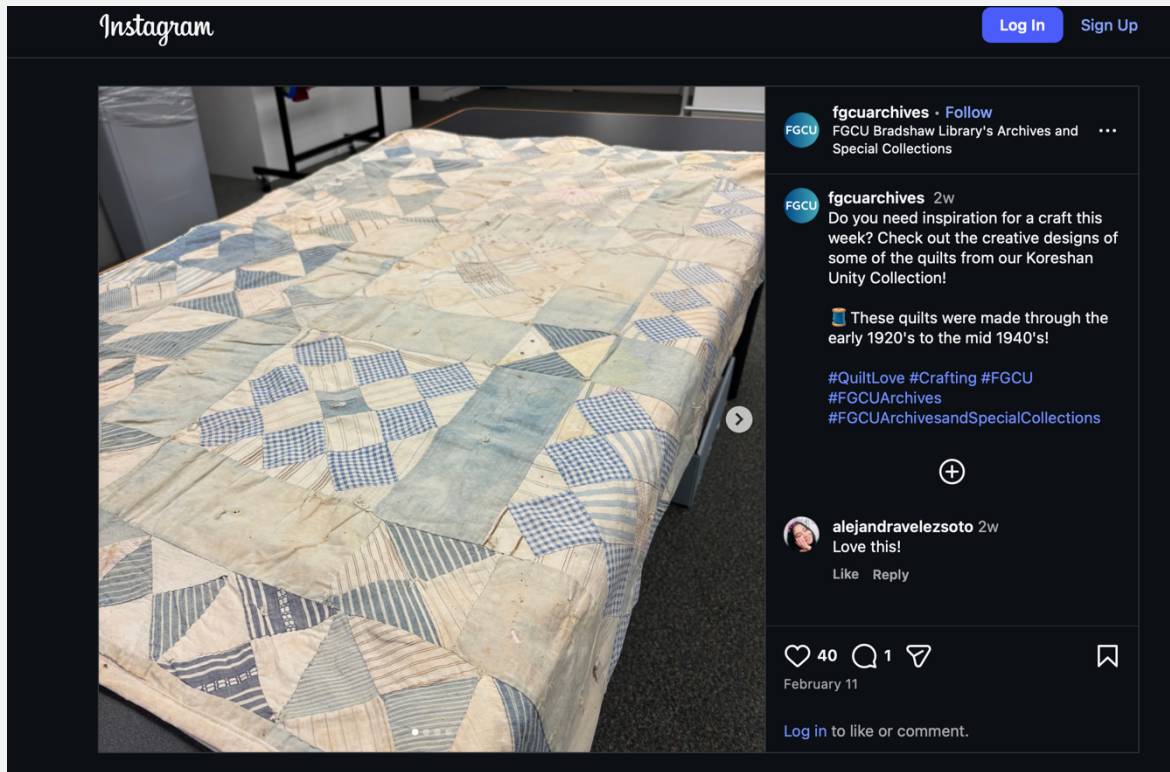
TEXT RESOURCE

Letter From Cyrus Teed to George Hunt, 1902-09-18

!

Click on Koreshan Unity Collection and all 1072 items can be seen simple by scrolling down the webpage. A search bar is available if you're looking for something specific.

Media Presence



As for promotion of the Special Collection, its presence on Instagram is significant, offering snapshots of what is available through the Special Collection. This posting of a quilt from the Koreshan Unity Collection garnered 40 likes and a response.

Less impressive is their X (Twitter) presence which is seemingly nonexistent. The FGCU Library YouTube page also hasn't had a posting in three months and videos regarding the special collections are sporadic. Facebook presence is decent with regular postings about

the library and archive work. There's even a posting about the Koreshan Unity Collection from last October.

FGCU Bradshaw Library's Archives and Special Collections's Post



on display now in Nature's Canvas: Works of the Southwest Florida Environment!

Douglas Arthur Teed
Mound Key, ca. 1900
Oil on canvas on panel

Florida Gulf Coast University Archives and Special Collections. Koreshan Unity Collection. Gift of Koreshan State Park.

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I did find some great articles revolving around the Special Collections at FGCU. An article from 2025 involved the Koreshan Unity Collection. Meredith Gailbraith (2025) of WGPU wrote about an FGCU professor researching the music performed by the Koreshans (para. 1). Dr. Thomas Cimarusti, a professor of musicology, discovered that Koreshans created hymns by matching their original lyrics to classical music (para. 6). A total of 17 songs were reconstructed by his marrying of Koreshan lyric pamphlets to music (para. 4).

Collaborations.

The FGCU Special Collections have worked with organizations for various exhibitions. They once worked with the Lee County Black History Society to showcase an exhibition titled "The Black experience in Lee County." The archivists sought out Jarrett Eady, the former chair of that organization as an advisor because the archivists wanted the voices of that community to tell the story. Many of the items on display were loaned by the Lee County Black History Society and other members of the community (Henderson, 2022, paras. 1-6). Another exhibition titled *To Life: The Liberation of Ravensbrück* highlighted the voices of holocaust survivors. For this, FGCU's Wilson G. Bradshaw Library teamed up with FGCU's Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies, Sarasota-based non-profit Better Futures, and Sweden's Lund University and Malmö Museum. In this case, their Swedish partners loaned photographs, journals, art, clothing, and other materials from those liberated from Nazi concentration camps. (Melendez, 2020, para. 1).

Reading Room Visit

FGCU's Archives and Special Collections Reading Room is located on the third floor of the Wilson G. Bradshaw Library. I made an appointment to look at some of the physical items of the Koreshan Unity Collection. I had to preselect the items ahead of time so the archivist, Vic Jones, could prepare them for my visit. I chose a mix of materials from writings to ephemera.

To locate these items, I used the FGCU's Archive Space Public Interface. From here, you search by keyword, title, subject, etc. for what you're looking for. You can search by record types (collections or digital materials). Type in Koreshan under collections and you're brought to another page with tabs collection overview, collection organization, and container inventory. This allowed me to find exactly what I was looking for and where it was specifically stored. I was able to relay that information to the archivist to prepare for my visit.



Seminole Doll from the Koreshan State Historic Site (Box: 83)



Bee Brood Chamber (Box: 88),

6
they would become thoroughly soaked with your dirty den
and never dry - how about Cy Baldwin? he said he
was "soaked" clear through, I think you must have gotten
some of your other trash with it so that the realism would be
do its work. Where are the "Thunder Thighs"?

Edwards Turner, Ball, Mealy, Watson, Williams & Hunter
I think you have one character left, there are the men who
were at the "Rock Camp" when I lived near there? a few
of the Incurable Insane are still keeping body and soul
together by selling kindling wood in Myers, they would get out
if they had money to pay their way.

Made much gold lately at 800 per ton?
Don't you think it about time to make a hole through the
earth to let the air in? You blasted fool.

A Mr Henderson of Myers went through the act
of Poor Gustave when you were going to part the ship and bring
the parts together again, Mr H - performed this act on
board a steamer going from Myers to Punta Gorda in the
presence of quite an audience, I related some experience
which "brought the house down".

They had many hearty laughs at my condition
expose, how they laughed at the "A. B. Business" from
Oct 18th 1889, Then I had fun for them in my stories
of a character which I dubbed "Old Vic" poor old maid
woman - I saw her on her knees on your 56th birth day
she was praying to you - pretty near as big a fool as you are.
For shame - making poor Mrs Mary Esther Stobler lie
to accomplish some of your nefarious ends - this is a black
mark against you which may some day cut your figure.

7
That letter of Mrs Harriet G. Wright's which was published
in the Fort Myers Free of Jan 19th 1889 is a most heavy
blow to your already rotten character, I have had it
printed and intend getting other articles printed.

Are you in the "Napoleonic" role now?
a runt like you with this face could
pass better as "Punch". The man
who lives with or near your nephew Vermilion
says you could pick cherries with both hands hanging on to
the limb by your "short stick". Mrs W - says that when
you kissed her she smelled your foul catarrhal breath and
she wonders how "Old Vic" could stand so much of it, she
then relates some of your quarrels and makes up with
RISSES &c

"Face of Judah's Lion" or "Face of Punch"?

Edwards Turner - now married - tells some things about you which
"give you away" badly. In the list received from Ebers there
are but 4 who were there when I was there the few others are
new entrants, George Ordway became "Lord" before he married
I felt sorry for Leila Williams.

I am going to have that post card "Your Hater" &c &c
printed that has not had much circulation & it will be
blatantly disgusting.

You and your rotten friends are the
ends of their strings. You are about as good as
just as a freak in a Chicago State Museum &c &c to be sent
of an Insane Asylum. I have proof for all I can tell you
of. You told me a big lie once but I did not know it was a lie
after one of your long harangues on your "condition".

To Mr. Teed, A Slander Letter, Anonymous, Signed "Your Hater" (File - Container: Box
90, Folder: 2)

This reading room also happens to double as an exhibition space. The current exhibition is titled Nature's Canvas, and it draws "inspiration from the region's wetlands, coastal landscapes, rich wildlife, and native flora, the exhibition will feature an evocative blend of mediums, including paintings, photographs, postcards, poetry, film, and more."





This record display includes a QR code that when scanned by a phone will send you to a YouTube video playing the song “Tamiami Trail” by Gene Austin recorded in 1926: [Tamiami Trail](#)[Links to an external site.](#)

Final Thoughts

I used to dismiss the Koreshans as just another misguided cult, but this assignment has forced me to look at them in a new light. Whatever folly might have existed in this sect, they had a desire for a better tomorrow, one that championed equality between the sexes. And even if the Concave Earth theory is somewhat nonsensical, it does show the power of the human imagination. As for the FGCU archives themselves, I am very impressed with how they've adapted to space limitations by having their reading room double as an exhibition room. We should always remember that rooms can serve dual purposes.

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