

ARTICLE

■ Continued from A1

suitable for development once drainage work is complete.

Bill Grace of Fort Myers, a descendant of the Koreshans, recently obtained Manley's documents, including the story, and turned them over to the Koreshan State Historic Site on Oct. 6.

"The article that we got is really eye-opening and answers a lot of questions about the relationship between Ford and the Koreshans at least in the short period of time mentioned in the article," Grace said.

"We're always looking for proof that there's a connection."

Michael Widner, archivist at the Koreshan State Historic Site, agrees.

"This article is the first thing that I've found that really mentions yes, he was here," he said.



ANDREW WEST/THE NEWS-PRESS

■ Kate Anthony, Koreshan State Historical Site curator, and Florida Gulf Coast University history intern, Alex Jordan, 23, hold up a 1931 Fort Myers Press article stating Henry Ford visited the Koreshans in the winter of that year.

VISITED ESTERO 5 TIMES

The newly discovered article reveals the automobile manufacturer visited Estero five times during the winter of 1931.

"This year he spent more time at Estero than any other place in this section, except of course his residence next to the Thomas A. Edison estate here," the article states.

The Koreshans had established themselves in Chicago before moving to Florida.

Teed chose Estero, then a sparsely populated area, intending it to become The New Jerusalem. He expected membership to grow to 10 million people.

One of the group's beliefs was that people lived inside the Earth because it was a hollow sphere engulfed by a hard shell, along with the rest of the universe.

Teed died in 1908, the year of Ford's first Model T. Membership dwindled in the following decades, and in 1961, the four remaining members deeded their land to the state. It became a park in 1982 after the last member died.

Ford bought "The Mangoes" house on McGregor Boulevard in Fort Myers in 1916 to be next door to his friend, Edison. Ford

would usually spend about two weeks there every year.

Widner said other records indicate Edison and his wife, Mina, visited the Koreshans' tea garden.

The article doesn't say whether Ford and Edison visited the Koreshans together.

It says Ford got a complete set of Koreshan literature the previous winter (1930).

The story states his first visit to the Koreshans in the winter of 1931 was Saturday, May 7, which must have been March 7, because May 7 was a Thursday and March 7 was a Saturday that year.

Plus, he had already returned to Michigan when the article was published on March 29.

On that first tour of the settlement, Ford met Henry Silverfriend, one of the original Koreshans. Silverfriend was the protector of the seven women of the Planetary Chamber, the governing council that administered the community's businesses.

According to the article, Silverfriend introduced Ford to Dr. and Mrs. James Russell Price, the Rev. George Bassett and Samuel Armour, all of whom he conversed with.

"It was during this conversation that many of the manufacturer's beliefs about reincarna-

tion and science were revealed," the article states.

Ford discussed with them their hollow globe theory that everything existed inside a shell. He was not convinced although his mind was open to it.

"He told the Koreshans . . . he would investigate both their belief and that of modern science."

He did share their belief that people are reborn:

"Ford said he agreed with the Koreshan idea that everyone now here has lived before and that the people that are in the world now always have been but in a different form."

The Henry Ford's Benson Ford Research Center in Dearborn, Mich., has a letter sent to Ford in 1943 — the year his only son, Edsel, died — from a psychologist in California stating she sent him her book on reincarnation because of his interest in the subject.

Ford's personal papers in 1943-45 also include an essay, "A Short View of Great Questions" by Major Orlando J. Smith that supports the theory of reincarnation.

The 1931 story describes how Ford almost agreed to have his palm read by Silverfriend, an authority on palmistry, during one of his visits to the Koreshan society:

"Ford himself appeared willing but his secretary, Frank Campbell (the correct spelling is Campsall), convinced his employer it might be the better part of wisdom not to have it done."

The article says Ford stopped at the Koreshan Unity for the last time that winter at 2 p.m. before going to Naples to get on his train to head home.

That winter of 1931 was Ford's last visit to Southwest Florida because Edison died the following October.

LOVE OF MACHINES

Another thing Ford had in common with the Koreshans was a love of machines and a spirit of innovation.

The Koreshans were industrially savvy, self-sufficient people who had a large machine shop and a small one, a laundry, a sawmill and a generator building.

Fascinated by machines since he was a boy, Ford had fixed steam engines, run a sawmill and become chief engineer of the Edison Illuminating Co. (that's how he met Edison) in Detroit before starting the Ford Motor Co. in 1903.

The Fort Myers Press reported the car builder

bought two steam engines during his second visit to the Koreshan settlement for his museum in Dearborn.

One was about 30 years old, the other a quarter century. It said one was used with a cut-off saw to make firewood at the Koreshans' sawmill and the other powered their laundry.

Ford traded a small electric motor for one and paid \$75 for the other.

The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn does not have the engines.

"Henry Ford kept terrible museum records," said Linda Skolarus at The Henry Ford's Benson Ford Research Center.

Skolarus suspects the engines ended up on one of Ford's farms in Michigan.

Ford also checked out the building where the Koreshans generated electricity.

They had built a generator building on their grounds in 1908 and began producing their own electricity with a steam engine in 1916. In 1925, they started using a Fairbanks Morse 80 horsepower diesel engine and produced power for themselves and nearby Estero residents until FPL took over in 1946.

GARDEN CONNECTIONS

The Koreshans farmed and supposedly grew gardens in depressions and made mounds with the excess dirt. They had many experimental plantings and exotic plants.

This was an interest Edison and his wife as well as Ford shared.

One of the myriad fruits the Koreshans grew were papayas.

The article mentions Ford talked with the Koreshans about the tropical fruit with the yellow skin and the red inside grown in Estero.

He told them about experiments dietitians were doing in his Dearborn laboratory to identify the ultimate food, meaning that every child would develop equally if fed identical food.

After his first visit, Ford took a supply of papayas and canned products. The article reads:

"He suggested that if they are as helpful as the investigation of his dietitians had shown, a big industry should be established at Estero."

TOP HEADLINES

Top headlines of the Fort Myers Press on March 29, 1931:

■ Sudden Cold Wave Comes Down Valley—New Low Records Are Forecast In South (Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas), 36 degrees predicted for New Orleans

■ Ban Johnson Of Baseball Fame Passes: Connie Mack may be asked to fill the position of president of the American league

■ Five Children Freeze To Death In School Bus Stalled In Snow During Blizzard — Driver Dies Going For Aid (Colorado)

■ Three Brothers To Be Named In Court Charges — "free-for-all fight" Thursday night and fist fight earlier in the day

■ Search Reveals Bags Of Booze Hid In Garage

■ Edison To Be Honorary Member of Three Quarter Century Club Here

■ Legislature Faces Task Of Lowering Real Estate Taxes

■ Will Rogers Opens Big Week At Arcade Theatre Here

FORD EXAMINES KORESHANS

Ford examines the Koreshans' laundry and gets dirty:

Ford became enthralled with the Koreshans' laundry building as well, which included a "dryer" that wrung water out of clothes with a centrifugal force so it could then be hung on clotheslines.

The March 29, 1931, Fort Myers Press published:

"Ford clambored beneath the laundry building on one occasion to watch a coupling joint in action, getting his clothes pretty well messed up by crawling on the ground in the limited space beneath the plant but emerging with a smile and satisfied with the exploration."

FORD'S INTEREST IN AVIATION IN ESTERO

Ford showed an interest in aviation in Estero:

A newly discovered March 29, 1931, Fort Myers Press article states:

"While inspecting the Koreshan Unity electric light and power plant, he and his secretary spotted a helicopter airplane under construction by a local enthusiast.

"Ford looked it over and made only one comment, saying that helicopters took six times the lifting power the ordinary airplane requires."