

Conservation

Until a few years ago there was little thought given to conservation of our natural resources. The water and islands changed but little, the fish were always there and the birds were undisturbed.

However, late in 1960, the application for a bulkhead line in Estero Bay, involving an immense amount of fill from outside that line, aroused the people as never before. Fearing that seawalling the north side of the bay, dredging the bay bottom and dumping fill on some of the small islands, would destroy the fish and bird breeding areas and ruin local fishing, sportsmen acted promptly.

To protest this destruction, a hastily formed Conservation Association quickly enrolled nearly four thousand members from all over Lee County. Petitions of this group were presented to the County Commission who responded by setting the bulkhead line at one foot from the shore line in accordance with the wishes of the association. Ace Lee of Fort Myers Beach was president the first year; since then the association has been ably directed by Bill Mellor of Fort Myers, who has spend unlimited time and money to promote conservation interests. Mellor, formerly of the Beach, has had a great deal of help from Roland and Libby Roberts, as well as from many other people.

The controversy over the bulkhead line was the catalyst, perhaps, that gave us the Koreshan State Park. Some ten or twelve years ago, Miss Hedwig Michel, president of the Koreshan Unity, hoping to save the old landmarks and records of the Koreshans for future generations, offered much of the Unity's holdings to the state. At that time the park board director showed no interest in the offer and nothing was done about it.

This was not known by the people of Fort Myers Beach and, during the agitation to preserve our natural resources, the Bulletin came out with the idea of turning all of the Estero Bay waters and islands into a state park. This proposition received favorable reception from park officials as it seemed to entail merely transfer of state owned property from one department to another, but no action was taken at that time. It did, however, revive the interest of the park board in this area and in the earlier offer of Miss Michel, and negotiations late in 1961 resulted in the state accepting a gift of 290

acres from the Koreshan Unity. This included 100 acres in Estero, the site of the old Koreshan hall and museum and art buildings which will be the park headquarters, seventy acres on both sides of the mouth of the Estero River and 120 acres of Mound Key.

The State recently announced that Estero Bay would become a fish and wildlife management area as a pilot program which could be duplicated in other parts of the state. It is said that under this plan there will be more flexibility for public use than if the area were administered solely as a part of the Koreshan State Park.

Mound Key is, without question, the most interesting of all the islands in this area being covered with shell mounds, believed to have been erected by the Caloosa Indian tribe, and used for their ceremonial rites. Rolfe Schell, local author, has gone into the story of this Island quite thoroughly in his booklet, "1000 years on Mound Key."

The founder of the Koreshan Unity was Dr. Cyrus Teed who established the headquarters in Estero and largely colonized Mound Key, Estero and Black Islands, starting in 1894.

Dr. Teed died in 1908 and was buried on Estero Island in a concrete tomb near the west end of the Big Carlos Pass bridge. In 1921 a hurricane destroyed the tomb and changed the shape of that end of the Island.