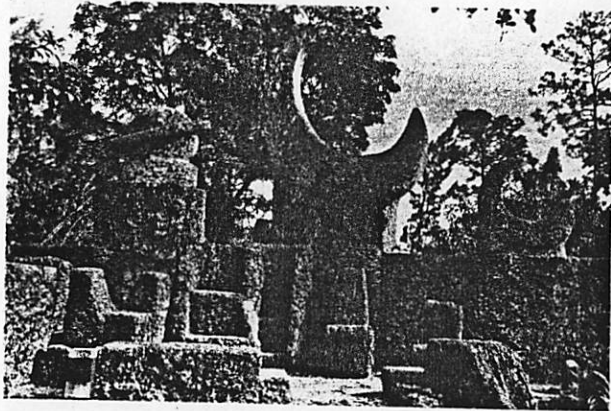

• **A SEPARATE REALITY** •

• FLORIDA ECCENTRICS •

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An immigrant from Latvia, Edward Leedskalnin (1887-1951) came to America to soothe a broken heart. His wanderings brought him in the late 1910s to Florida where he settled on the edge of the Everglades near Florida City. As a monument to the woman who had jilted him, "Sweet Sixteen," Leedskalnin built Coral Castle, near Homestead, Florida.

Leedskalnin began Coral Castle while in Florida City. He quarried and carved Florida's native Oolitic Limerock into various shapes. When the area near his Florida City home became too populated, Leedskalnin purchased a ten-acre tract of land near Homestead and moved his completed sculptures in a neighbor's truck to their new surroundings.

At this new site, Leedskalnin completed his life's work, what he called "Ed's Place," or "Rock Gate Park." He sculpted and carved over 1,100 tons of coral rock, with many of the pieces weighing over 30 tons each. How Leedskalnin—a five-foot, 100-pound man—moved and lifted such incredible

amounts of coral using only handmade tools is unknown; no one ever saw him work. An avid reader of books on science, astronomy, and Egyptian history, Leedskalnin claimed to understand cosmic laws and ancient truths. He certainly must have understood weights and levers.

Each individual piece of Coral Castle is intriguing. A nine-ton gate, which rests on an automobile gear, can be moved with one finger. A 20-ton, 20-foot tall Polaris telescope can be used to calculate the earth's path around the sun, and Leedskalnin's sun dial at Coral Castle accurately tells time and indicates the solstice and equinox dates. As an ultimate act of devotion to the fiancée who jilted him years before, Leedskalnin also sculpted a 5,000 pound heart, listed on Ripley's Believe It or Not as the world's largest valentine.

In 1984, this inspiring vision of dedication and love was placed on the National Register of Historical Places. And today, Coral Castle can be visited year-round.

Edward Leedskalnin

see intro