



Time Sifters Archaeology Society Newsletter February 2015 Timesifters.org

A Theme for Archaeology

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Themes and Theming

Vacation spots have themes. Restaurants have themes. Malls have themes. Theme parks are, by definition, themed. Sociologist Mark Gottdiener in a 1996 book *The Theming of America: Dreams, Visions and Commercial Spaces* brought a term for consideration of social experiences: theming. Professor Gottdiener noticed the use of symbols and signs to integrate experience at a place. The most famous and successful example of theming is the Disney World theme park, with the mouse ears recognizable seemingly across all generations and social groups. Driving on I-4, the transmission tower is easily recognizable and connected to Disney World. That is successful theming.



Transmission Tower near Celebration, Florida

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hidden_Mickey#mediaviewer/File:Mickey_Mouse_shaped_transmission_tower_Celebration_FL.jpg

Archaeology is a source for theming. Archaeological artifacts invoke history and adventure. So Busch Gardens, which is a theme park using Africa for inspiration, has a subsection for its Ancient Egypt area as seen in the Egyptology restaurant, gift shop, playground, and exhibit. Egyptology is just the most popular of archaeo-themes for theme parks.



Egypt at Busch Gardens (Photographs by Uzi Baram)



Archaeology as Theme at Legoland (Photograph by Uzi Baram)

Theming is not just for American theme parks. For the tourists to the famous archaeological site of Troy in Turkey, there is a replica of a horse. There has been a horse at

Troy for decades; in 2004 after the Warner Brothers film, a new replica for tourists to photograph and climb was donated to stress the Homeric theme for the location.



A View of the Archaeological Site and the Replica Horse at Troy
(Respectively <http://www.mutanteggplant.com/agog/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/troy.JPG> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troy_\(film\)#mediaviewer/File:Brad-Pitt%27s-horse-in-Canakkale.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troy_(film)#mediaviewer/File:Brad-Pitt%27s-horse-in-Canakkale.jpg))

Archaeology is a source for themes but archaeology is also themed. In the Middle East archaeological expeditions have been named after benefactors for decades, and many have logos that go nicely on tee-shirts. In the USA, the excavations are focused to highlight particular issues although most present the titles as informative for the research focused on the place or time period. In a 2005 essay in the *SAA Archaeological Bulletin*, I raised concerns over the competing demands of heritage tourism, with its want for themes, and academic research. But even then I realized themes do help with communication, clarifying the intent and goals for a research project in a concise manner.

Themes for Heritage Interpretation

I learned to appreciate theming as a member of the interdisciplinary public anthropology program Looking for Angola <<http://lookingforangola.org>>, the search for material remains of an early 19th century maroon community. At first when I presented on the project, I would start with a long discussion of the time period and then the meaning of the term maroon. The

questions from the audience focused on techniques and the challenges of excavations. But when I heard historian Carter Brown Jr. in Vickie Oldham's 2006 video *Looking for Angola* invoke the project in terms of freedom, I realized the clunkiness dissolved. An archaeology of freedom allowed concise, productive presentations. At public presentations where I explained the goal of freedom in early 19th century, the questions raised by audiences brought out the details of the larger historical context and a concern for the descendant communities – a more satisfying dynamic, more in line with the anthropology of the program and the social justice goals of the project.



Historians have recognized the significance of narratives for presenting the results of their archival research. Archaeologists have followed the lead of Hayden White, a historian who delved deeply into literary criticism to show that history is most meaningful when narrated. Most of popular archaeology focuses on destruction because the most dramatic material evidence comes from disasters. Pompeii is famous because a volcano destroyed the city, preserving even a dog chained to a wall; Ozette on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State and Joya de Cerén in west-central El Salvador similarly are impressive archaeological sites because homes and daily life were covered over – human tragedies. Across the Middle East, ancient mounds such as Megiddo and Tel Hazor, have burn layers indicating great fires marking the end of an era. Such narratives focus on destruction, the sudden and nearly complete of a community. Reading popular books on such archaeological finds, a reader assumes death, destruction, and mayhem as the dominant themes in human history. Recently Barbara Little wrote in a 2013 issue of

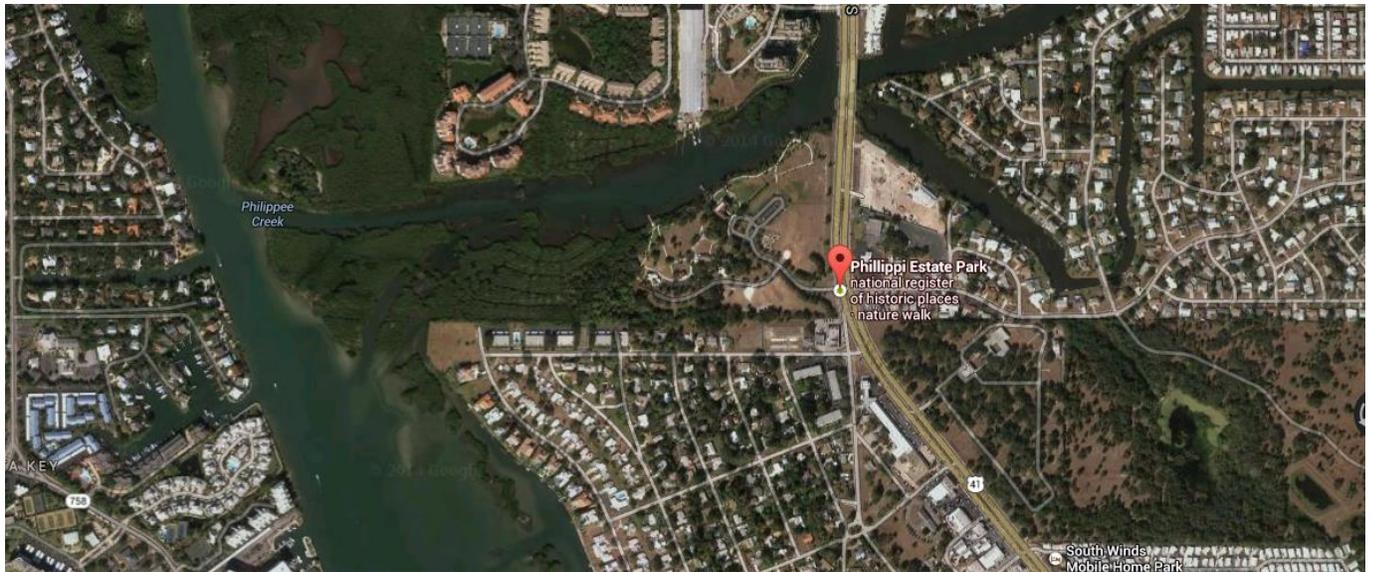
Historical Archaeology of the possibilities for reversing the narrative, to tell of peace instead of warfare, coexistence instead of conflict. The choice of theme is significant.

So as I plan my next public anthropology program in partnership with Sarasota County, at Phillippi Estate Park, there are multiple steps before engaging the public but I am thinking about themes as well. The first step for an archaeological project is the background research to develop the scientific research questions. There have been archaeological excavations on the property, and those reports need to be examined carefully and thoroughly. The history for the property needs to be organized toward the research questions. Because the program is a partnership with the park, with Sarasota County, and other collaborators, there will be lots of discussions that will create the timeline and concerns. There will be ethnographic research, archival research, excavations, artifact analysis, and heritage interpretation.

The program in heritage interpretation at Phillippi Estate Park is meant to raise the profile of the archaeological remains on the property and bring forward the many chapters of history at the shores of Phillippi Creek. With a beautiful location on the south side of Phillippi Creek, the property has a history that includes a lithic scatter, a Manasota midden, a rancho run by Felipe Bermudez (whose first name became Phillippi, and the name of the Creek), the Edson Keith Mansion built in 1916, among other histories. Encompassing all this history is a challenge.



The Edson Keith House and its Historical Marker at Phillippi Estate Park (Photographs by Uzi Baram)



Phillippi Estate Park, on the south side of Phillippi Creek. Google Earth

So the project will have a theme based on events that took place close to the park's land. Even as I write this descriptive essay, I am haunted by the critique of theming. Theming can contribute to the expansion of the commodification of the past, to making archaeological products subject to even more consumerist intentions, yet there is also the potential for expanding participation in archaeological research and more partnerships through more engagement. Many archaeologists have advocated making archaeology more democratic, open to more diversity and accessibility is a necessary step toward that goals. So, in those interests, here goes: the theme for the heritage project at Phillippi Estate Park is trust, the archaeology of trust at Phillippi Creek.

What is the archaeology of trust at Phillippi Estate Park? Interesting social and historic dynamics occurred near the park's property in the 19th century, a convergence of peoples and interests that should be better known. And the convergence brings together Seminoles and Anglo-Americans, bridging the thousands of years of indigenous history of the property with the expansion of American settlement that ultimately leads to today's Sarasota. I realize focusing attention on what occurred close to the park property, rather than directly on the park property, is

worth critiquing but the goal is appreciation of the heritage of the region, not a demarcation of specific events on a bounded property.

The Archaeology of Trust

The trust comes from the relationship between U.S. Captain John Casey and Seminole leader Billy Bowlegs. The two men were able to negotiate in a troubled time, and reach agreement. The trust between them allowed several years of quiet on the Florida frontier. It was not a time of peace but neither of active warfare. The trust matters.



Map of Florida, 1849 S. Augustus Mitchell. Credit: State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/266994>

The history is centered by the relationship between the Indian Emigration Agent Captain John Casey (yes that is the Casey for whom Casey Key is named) and Holata Micco, otherwise known as Billy Bowlegs. In 1835-1842, the Second Seminole raged across Florida. US government policy was removal and an uneasy peace existed between colonial settlers of the Florida frontier and the Seminole peoples. In July 1849 five Seminole men entered the Indian River settlement and murdered one Anglo-American and wounded another; the members of the

community fled and, when they returned, a house was burnt down and others looted. Those same men killed two and wounded another at the Kennedy and Darling trading post on Payne's Creek of the Peace River. War between the US and the Seminoles seemed inevitable. Holata Micco, seeking a diplomatic solution, left a peace token at the rancho residence of Phillippi Bermudez. The letters from Captain Casey to Fort Brooke recognized the white flag, made of heron feathers with a token of beads and tobacco, as an invitation to resolve the matter. Captain Casey met with Holata Micco and agreed to allow the Seminoles to punish the murders, who were considered outlaws. Three were brought to the US military in Tampa and evidence that the fourth was dead. The trust between the two prevented warfare - even if it was an uneasy peace - across Florida for a few years. Captain wrote to General D.E. Twiggs at Fort Brooke on October 19, 1849:

The affair is now completed to our satisfaction. The Indians had redeemed their promises, and, I believe, for the first time in their history, yielded one of their number, by a solemn act of the nation, to the justice of whites. Having expressed my high sense of the worthy manner in which they acted, I proceeded to submit to them the question of emigration, and to urge it by every argument at my command.



Billy Bowlegs, 1852. Credit: State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/24913>

The Seminoles were in an untenable colonial situation; their leadership acted honorably but could not stop the goals of the USA government. General Twiggs reported to the US Secretary of War, George W. Crawford, in a November 10, 1849 letter that the prisoners became

guides for the military. The Secretary of War concurred with the decision to use them, in the hope that the Seminoles would move to Indian Territory.

The theme as the archaeology of trust – still working on it to make sure the theme will resonate – brings together the long Native American history, represented by the Seminole peoples, and Captain John Casey, with his connection to the Anglo-American history that leads to the contemporary Sarasota we know today. The research project is planned for two years, including ethnographic, archival, cartographic, and archaeological investigations and then heritage interpretation. There are other themes possible – including discovery, the most common theme for an archaeological project – but that’s the nature of theming. Focusing on the mid-19th century history allows the bridge from the ancient peoples, the Native Americans, who lived on the land in the modern era and on to the present, and it focuses attention on an aspect of the past that is rarely acknowledged. Starting a heritage project with a theme is a new step for me, and still a bit uncomfortable, but the theme should help integrate the community goals, community service learning for the students, and the research questions for the past on and around the property.

Trust Yesterday and Today

Archaeological excavations cannot uncover trust. But archaeology, as anthropology, employing multiple sets of information, from the physical landscape to archival sources, from artifacts to oral traditions, can recover social dynamics such as trust. It will not be easy but should be worthwhile.

And the trust being sought for the 19th century should resonate with the public today. One of the central ethical concerns in American archaeology today is stewardship. As the past from

Phillippi Estate Park is being recovered, the professionals will have to trust that the interested public will be stewards of the sites and landscape. There are many people who care about the park, notably organized as Friends of Phillippi Estate Park. The Friends of Sarasota County Parks < <http://www.foscp.org/>> help with the weekly Farmhouse Market; Friends of Phillippi Estate Park < <https://www.scgov.net/RecreationCenters/Documents/PEPFriendsPoster.pdf>> give tours, organize exhibits, and so much more. The archaeology of trust should expand their support and encourage even more people to learn about the rich heritage at the park and contribute to ensuring future generations can enjoy the south side of Phillippi Creek.

Suggested Readings:

Uzi Baram 2005 A New Route in Heritage Tourism on Florida's Southwest Coast. *SAA Archaeological Bulletin* 5(3):20-22.

Uzi Baram 2013 Partners in Search of History. *Time Sifters Archaeological Society Newsletter*. https://www.academia.edu/4736370/Partners_in_Search_of_History, accessed January 28, 2015.

Andrew Frank 2013 Preserving the Path of Peace: White Plumes and Diplomacy During the Frontier Panic of 1849-1850. *Journal of Florida Studies* 1(2) <http://www.journaloffloridastudies.org/files/vol0102/02frank.pdf>, accessed January 28, 2015.

Cornelius Holtorf 2007 *Archaeology is a Brand!: The Meaning of Archaeology in Contemporary Popular Culture*. Left Coast Press.

Barbara Little 2013 Reversing the Narrative from Violence to Peace: Some Thoughts from an Archaeologist. *Historical Archaeology* 47(3):124-129.

Ann Shank n.d. Phillippi Estate Park: Creek has had Varied Past. *Sarasota History Alive!* <http://www.sarasotahistoryalive.com/stories/journals-of-yesteryear/phillippi-estate-park/>

Matthews Janet Snyder 1983 *Edge of Wilderness: A Settlement History of Manatee River and Sarasota Bay*. Coastal Press, Sarasota

Vickie Oldham 2006 *Looking for Angola* [videorecording]. Available at the Sarasota County Public Library, Call Number: 975.962 LOO

Yorke Rowan and Uzi Baram, editors, 2014 *Marketing Heritage: Archaeology and the Consumption of the Past*. AltaMira Press.