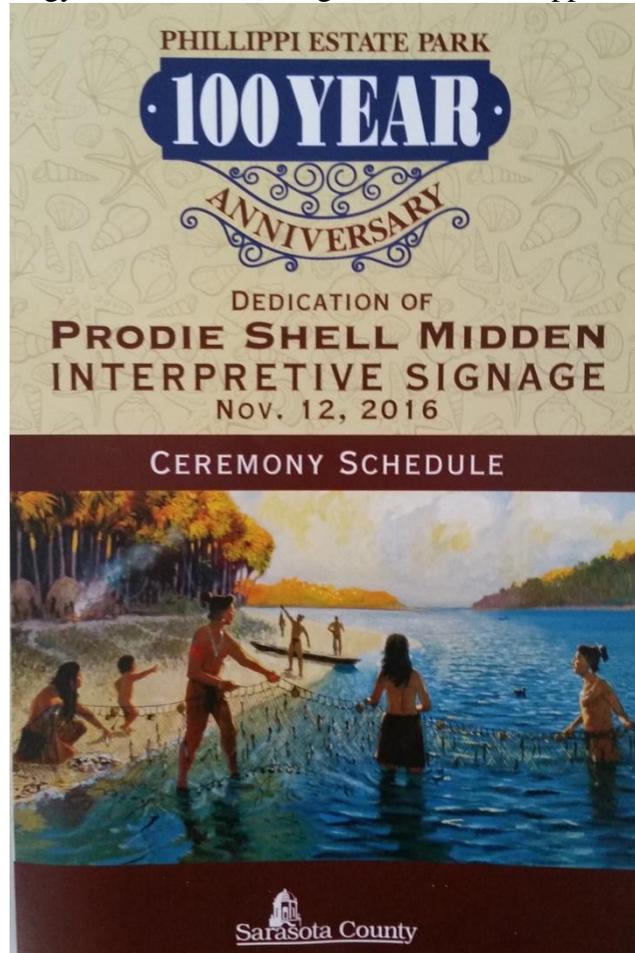


# The Many Histories Along Phillippi Creek

Uzi Baram

November 12, 2016

Remarks for Dedication of the Heritage Interpretation Signs for Archaeology and the Archaeological Eras at Phillippi Estate Park



Part of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Edson Keith Mansion Celebration at Phillippi Estate Park, Sarasota, Florida

## The Setting

We can see Phillippi Creek from here.

A beautiful stream, it runs seven miles through Sarasota.

It is easy to miss, moving in a diagonal while our road system is a north/south, east/west grid. But once you notice the River, you will appreciate how it runs through our town.

And we are not the first to appreciate these waters.

Beneath our feet are the remains of previous inhabitants who engaged this place. And remembering those histories and its peoples matters for Sarasota and for us.

Yet too often, visitors to this 60-acre park came and went without recognizing the history beyond the 100-year-old Edson Keith Mansion.

Until now.

### Phillippi

When I first heard the name of this park and the Creek, I was curious about Phillippi. I was surprised to learn about the Cuban Fishing Rancho period for this region – and I sought out information. I knew of, and could visit historic sites for the ancient peoples; I knew of the Seminoles and of the pioneers and could visit museums for their places that created Sarasota and Bradenton. But there are only a few place names that remain from the ranchos.

Phillippi was Felipe Bermudez. Maybe born in 1805; he came to what is today Sarasota and Manatee around 1820, just at the end of the period of Spanish rule. He was a fisherman. We know very little about him but that he had social connections to most of the named people of this region in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. His last appearance in the archival record comes in 1858, when his third wife Polly left him to go on the Trail of Tears with the Seminoles.

Many Cuban-based fishermen came to the Florida Gulf Coast from the 1770s to 1840s. They came, first seasonally then year-round, to gather the rich marine resources and bring the fish – dried or salted – back to Havana for the world market.

Felipe was one of many between Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor.

He had a cabin several miles north of this Creek but there was no one between his home and the river so his name lives on.

### Trust in the Past

For those who know the local history, in 1841 Felipe brought Josiah Gates and Miles Price to the Manatee Mineral Spring, where they found cleared fields. Two decades before, maroons – escaped slaves and free blacks – created a community called Angola, one destroyed in 1821.

Beyond his help founding what is today Bradenton, his home centers an intriguing moment in Florida history.

In 1849, from July to October, John C. Casey – representing the US military – and Billy Bowlegs, Holata Micco of the Seminoles, created a peace based on events that started near here.

After the murders of American on the Indian River, on the Florida east coast, a peace token was left on Felipe's cabin, with a range of dates on which to meet.

At that time, a meeting between the US military and any Seminoles was a danger to both. Only seven years earlier, the Second Seminole War was declared over – it had been a terrible conflict, with great pain for both sides.

As Lieutenant John Gibbon would write 35 years later in a memoir of those 1849 events, and specifically of John C. Casey’s relationship with the Seminoles:

“He never deceived them; never told one of them a lie; and never made a promise he did not fulfill, if within his power.”

As one of our current residents, who is a folk singer, James Hawkins, titled a song about Captain Casey: He was “An Honest Man.”

That peace token led to a meeting between John Casey and his commanding officer General David Twiggs and Billy Bowlegs in Charlotte Harbor. The negotiations happened because John Casey and Billy Bowlegs could trust each other – this was a time of war, when each side had reasons to fear the other. But Casey and Bowlegs sought peace, and convinced their people to work toward justice rather than restart hostilities.

Billy Bowlegs represented the Seminoles, a Native American group whose ancestry goes deep into the history of this region. John Casey, for whom Casey Key is named, represents the Anglo-American history that ends up dominating this region.

Two trajectories for this region, both representing centuries of human activities.

Thinking about that history along Phillippi Creek animated research at Phillippi Estate Park, and encouraged archaeological research to reveal and to represent the many histories in northern Sarasota County through heritage interpretation signs.

### Trust

I can point to the places where archaeological excavations have revealed ancient belongings, artifacts from thousands of years ago as well as artifacts from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, associated with the inhabitants of the majestic house.

Some archaeologists worry that knowledge of sites can lead to looting of sites.

On one hand, the shell tools and lithic flakes are not financially valuable so it is hard to imagine looting for profits.

But, more importantly as a professional, I trust people.

Once the public knows that the artifacts are informative when excavated in a controlled manner, when they are analyzed and documented in a lab setting, and the insights are shared in an engaging manner – like the heritage interpretation signs and the display in the farmhouse – I trust the vast majority will be good stewards for the archaeological record, will protect the sites from those who wish private gain and hopefully share the histories.

Trust is a theme that runs through the heritage interpretation program that has raised the profile for the archaeological history on this property.

### The Program

Two years ago, then Sarasota County Archaeologist Ryan Murphy took me up on the challenge of finding a relevant project for what we called CHAMP – Community Heritage Awareness and Management Program.

After meeting with county stakeholders, Priscilla Brown enthusiastically embraced the heritage interpretation program – she wanted the public to know about the archaeology for this property, information that has been available since 1988.

Our goal: make the past accessible to the interested public and support preservation efforts for the future.

I started by sending New College students to the park, to engage in participant-observation.

Then we worked through the archaeological site reports and archival information. Information on the history of the property rests in history books, the Sarasota County Historic Resources archives, archaeological reports and the archaeological record; scholarly articles, oral histories, and stories shared by community members and descendants of those who lived there. But it had been organized only for specific purposes. And generally, very little of the rich heritage of this region is readily accessible to the public. Not for lack of trying by wonderful professionals and volunteers but because people do not know to ask about the archaeology and history.

Yet when I gave lectures on the histories along Phillippi Creek, the presentations were received with great enthusiasm. At Gulf Gate, a surprising number of people came to hear me speak on a July day. There seems to be much interest in the river that runs through Sarasota.

There were questions for the archaeological record, so we – Sarasota County Archaeologist Steve Koski, George Luer, PhD, Ryan Murphy, and me as co-directors - excavated with community volunteers and New College students in January 2016. An impressive number of residents and visitors – we counted more than 500 over the two mornings - came to see the archaeology in the sunshine and more learned about the ancient peoples via newspaper accounts and videos.

After washing and processing the artifacts, we held an open lab in June here at the mansion, and more people came to see archaeology in action.

And then, thanks to the Friends of Sarasota Parks, through the leadership of Roxanne Williamson, Florida Humanities Council funded four heritage interpretative signs.

You will see them in few minutes.

### The Results: Many Histories

As a collaborative partnership, several organizations and many individuals contributed to building up a dynamic perspective on the rich heritage for the property, from the earliest Native American inhabitants through the Manasota peoples to the Cuban fishing rancho era and the Seminole Wars to the founding of the modern city of Sarasota.

Archaeology recovers material culture – often called artifacts, more properly known as belongings. To whom did the artifacts belong? Who were the people who lived among Phillippi Creek?

The research has provided the start of the answer to that question.

The earliest people left lithic traces on this property – evidence of working stones into tools. We know those people moved over the landscape, gathering and hunting. Their lives are listed as 6000 years ago.

The Park has a midden, named after Mae Prodie who lived on the property from 1942 to 1986. The Prodie mound is identified with the Manasota period – between 2500 and 1300 years ago.

The Manasota name comes from Sarasota and Manatee.

The people – we do not know what they called themselves – were coastal inhabitants, creating settlements even though they were still mobile.

Information on the Manasota period comes from fragments, only stone, shell, and ceramics sherds remain from those people. But archaeological research has pieced together a model of their lives.

We know of them from their shell architecture; excavations show that they fished and hunted, and we assume they gathered; that they buried their dead on the keys; that they used canoes to travel along the coast.

We need to learn more about them, and this Park is a great location.

They matter as part of the vast history for this region and as the ancestors to some who live or visit Sarasota. And they matter because they settled after the last era of rapidly rising sea levels. Their lives potentially offer lessons in resilience for our communities dealing with rising sea levels and climate change.

Their immediate descendants were part of larger cultural phenomena radiating out of Tampa Bay; we have archaeological evidence across the region for the Safety Harbor way of life. But after that, we have archaeological silence. The Spanish conquerors bypassed these shores.

The next era starts in the 1770s. The archives tell of Cuban fisherfolk coming to Sarasota Bay. One of those fishermen was Phillippi; others were involved in the large-scale fishing industry. Some of their hamlets included dozens of people, notably those inhabitants were Cuban,

Seminole, Native American Catholics, free blacks, and others. The ranchos were on the coast – very little have been recovered but their legacy includes helping settle the core areas for Bradenton and Sarasota.

Then pioneers and ranchos gave way to development schemes. Modern Sarasota starts in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and in 1916 – a century ago – Edson and Nettie Keith have this house built for them. They threw their broken and otherwise discarded belongings into the river, and archaeologists found them, cleaned them, and curate them.

We know the lives of those early 20<sup>th</sup> century inhabitants of this property from their ceramic dishes and glass bottles, which, just like the ancient belongings, tell of life on Phillippi Creek. But for the more recent people, we know their lives were more than those artifacts and we can build up our understandings of their times by combining memories, artifacts, and archives. We can imagine the same robust world for the previous generations.

Archaeology reveals the distant past and the recent past, and Phillippi Estate Park is entrusted with sharing the information with the public.

### The Signs

I have organized the information for scholarly purposes but this project was not directed just toward adding to the pile of archaeological sites reports. We planned a public presentation and the signs are the physicality for the commemorations. The Park has four of them, representing archaeology, the Manasota Period, the Rancho period, and early Sarasota.

## Discovering History Through Archaeology

Traces of the past are buried beneath the ground of Phillippi Estate Park. Today we see a well-maintained park, a flowing river and an historic mansion and farmhouse. It is hard to imagine the thousands of years of previous habitation and activities on this property. For the period before the Spanish sighted Florida in 1513, an archaeological study is the main route for discovering the many different histories along Phillippi Creek.

### Excavations 1988, 1995 and 2016

Archaeology opens an avenue to the activities of the ancient peoples who lived and used this land.

In 1988, Archaeological Consultants, Inc., identified three archaeological epochs on this property – the Archaic, the Manasota and the early 1900s. Thousands of years separate the epochs, but this landscape unites them all.

The 1995 excavations attempted to determine the size of the Manasota-period site.

In 2016, Uzi Baram of the New College Public Archaeology Lab and Steve Koski of Sarasota County Historical Resources, along with many volunteers, led excavations that expanded public interest and exposed more information on the Manasota period for the property.

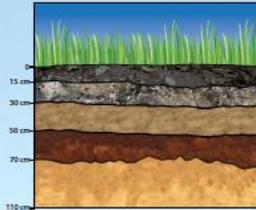
The 2016 excavations unearthed pieces of pottery, shells and shell tools. These are part of a coastal way of life that lasted for centuries. Research indicates the peoples of the Manasota period (2,500 – 1,300 years ago) found ways to use Phillippi Creek and this land as part of a network of camps, villages and cemeteries that extended along Sarasota Bay. For thousands of years people lived on Phillippi Creek, their lives making history.



Shell tools from 1988 excavations.  
Pottery sherd from Manasota period.



Replica of a Native American shell hammer and fishing hook.



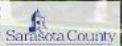
Chronological Table for Phillippi Estate Park		
Time Period		Evidence
Archaic	8,000 years ago	Stone flakes
Manasota	2,500 - 1,300 years ago	Shell, shell tools, fish bones, pottery sherds
Spanish arrival	500 years ago	None
Rancho	200 years ago	Historical documentation
Modern Times	100 years	Documents and oral histories



2016 Excavation Site



Funding for the program was provided through a grant from the Florida Humanities Council with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this program do not necessarily represent those of the Florida Humanities Council or the National Endowment for the Humanities.





## Manasota Period at Phillippi Creek

**L**ifeways: From archaeological excavations, the evidence points to the Manasota people being able to adapt to the coastal environment. The major sites are located on the shores of Sarasota Bay with interior locations being short-term camping sites. The Manasota people used the rich resources of the waters for fishing, gathering shellfish and canoe travel. The majority of the archaeological evidence for the time period is shells, material that lasts through centuries.

**A**rtifacts: The shellfish of coastal waters provided the Manasota people with food and also with the raw material for tools. In a region with few natural outcroppings of stone, an alternative material is shell. Shells were modified to be scrapers, hammers, adzes and net sinkers. Some materials used by the ancient peoples, such as wood, skins and plant fibers did not preserve. Other materials, like ceramics, did preserve although usually only in fragments that archaeologists piece together to reveal the original bowls and pots.



Manasota-period plain ceramic container



Shell hammer



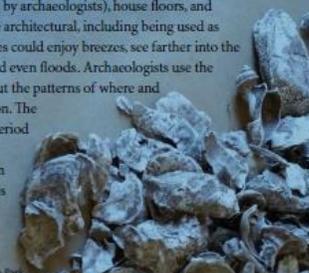
"Market Reef" by Erik Spruyter (Courtesy of the Adler Field Lighthouse & Museum)



### Definition of an Archaeological Culture

Archaeologists define prehistoric cultures based on geographical regions where sites are located. These sites contain artifacts and other remnants that vary within and between regions and through time. For a period from 2,500 to 1,300 years ago, the distinctive way of life represented in the archaeological record found from Tampa Bay to Charlotte Harbor is defined as the Manasota culture, combining the names of the two local counties: Manatee and Sarasota.

**T**he Shell Midden: Phillippi Estate Park has raised ground that holds the material remains of ancient peoples. A Manasota-period (2,500-1,300 years ago) midden contains shells, pottery, charcoal, animal bones, stone tool fragments, and much more from the daily life of Native peoples. Many shell middens contain remains from fire pits, architecture (seen as post molds by archaeologists), house floors, and even burials. Some shell middens are architectural, including being used as elevated ground where Native peoples could enjoy breezes, see farther into the distance, and escape some insects and even floods. Archaeologists use the location of shell middens to figure out the patterns of where and how ancient people lived in the region. The consistent placement of Manasota-period middens near the shores of the river and bay indicate the close connection between the people of those centuries and the maritime ecology. Shell middens are important sources of information on past ways of life.



Excavated shells from midden at Phillippi Estate Park.



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## How Phillippi Creek Got Its Name



Starting in the 1770s, fisher folk would sail from Havana, Cuba to the Florida Gulf Coast and set up temporary camps, known as ranchos. In the early 1800s, some ranchos became year-round settlements. The Cuban fishing industry, connecting Cuba and Gulf Coast Florida, lasted into the 1840s, declining with the Second Seminole War (1835-1842).



Replica of the peace token left by Billy Bowlegs' messengers at Bermudez's Rancho. (Courtesy of the New College Public Archaeology Laboratory)



Billy Bowlegs, 1810 - 1852 (Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida)

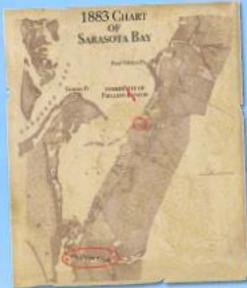
### 1849 John Casey and Billy Bowlegs at Felipe Bermudez's rancho on Sarasota Bay

In the mid-1800s, Sarasota was a frontier. Only a few places were cleared. On Sarasota Bay was the rancho of Felipe Bermudez, a place known to the United States military and to the Seminoles. In 1849, seven years after the United States declared the end of the Second Seminole War, the trust between U.S. Captain John Casey and Seminole leader Billy Bowlegs averted military clashes for a short while. The two men were able to negotiate in a troubled time and to reach agreement.

The history is centered by the relationship between the Indian Emigration Agent Captain John Casey (for whom Casey Key is named) and Holata Micco, otherwise known as Billy Bowlegs. In July 1849, five Seminole men murdered an Anglo-American and then attacked a trading post. War between the U.S. and the Seminoles seemed inevitable.

Holata Micco, seeking a diplomatic solution, sent messengers to leave a peace token at the rancho residence of Felipe Bermudez. The letters from Captain Casey to Fort Brooke described an invitation to resolve the matter - a flag made of white heron feathers and three dashes followed by a circle then three more dashes drawn on Felipe's cabin. Three days after the full moon, Casey agreed to allow Holata Micco to punish the murderers, who the Seminoles considered outlaws. Three were brought to the U.S. military in Tampa along with evidence that the fourth was dead.

As Casey wrote to General D.E. Twiggs at Fort Brooke, "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." The Seminoles were in an untenable colonial situation; their leadership could not stop the goals of the U.S. government; however, they acted honorably.



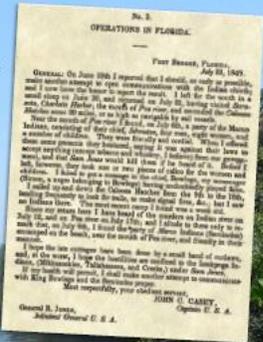
### Felipe (Phillippi) Bermudez

One of the Cuban fisher folk was Felipe Bermudez. The 1850 census has Bermudez listed as age 45 with birthplace in Spain; the last mention of him in the archival record is 1858 when his third wife, Polly Bermudez, is sent on the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma with 3,000 other Seminole Indians.



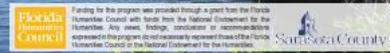
Rancho Fisher (Courtesy of the Florida Public Archaeology Network)

An 1847 map has the Bermudez rancho on Sarasota Bay, north of Phillippi Creek; in 1849, the cabin became the site of a peaceful exchange between U.S. Captain John Casey and Seminole leader Billy Bowlegs. The name Felipe became Phillippi because of his interactions with Anglo-Americans. Phillippi Creek is named for him; while he did not live on the river, his cabin might have been the closest home to the waterway.



### The Fishing Industry

The fish from the bay and gulf waters, dried or salted for Havana, allowed the ranchos to prosper. The ranchos included Native Americans, Seminoles and Spanish Indians (who were baptized Catholic in Cuba), and maroons (known in Florida as Black Seminoles), who were integrated into the rancho life.





## Creating Phillippi Estate

Sarasota is ever-changing, with the current day transforming the landscape. In 1883, the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey documented the depths for Sarasota Bay and Phillippi Creek. That year W.I. Drumwright, a farmer and beekeeper, acquired forty acres on the south side of the creek. George H. Matheny and his son purchased the property in 1910, dredged the waters and developed a subdivision called Phillippi Park. Mabel Linn, a Chicago socialite, purchased parcels but sold them to Edson Keith in 1915. The first building erected on the site in 1916 was a clapboard farmhouse; then Nettie and Edson Keith built their mansion. The farmhouse and their Italian Renaissance home still stand today.



Nettie Keith and her son Frederick on the dock at Phillippi Creek.

The Keith family created a self-sustaining estate. The grounds included wide lawns, ornamental plantings and a formal rose garden as well as vegetable gardens, a citrus grove and fields for hay and fodder; they kept chickens, cows and a mule on the property. Beyond their Italian Renaissance mansion, the farmhouse, laundry and dock marked the landscape visible from the newly created Tampa to Miami road, called Tamiami Trail, which opened in 1928, fueling the boom in South Florida tourism.



Edson and Nettie Keith flanked by son Frederick and grandson Fred Keith, Jr. in the 1930s.

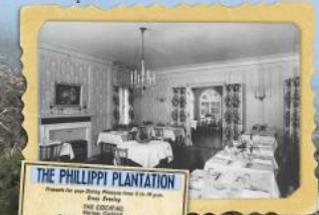
Sarasota, platted in 1880, grew to the north of the estate. In the 1910s, Bertha Palmer and the Ringling Brothers along with other civic-minded residents expanded the town and its reputation. After the boom times, tourism and retirement fueled growth in what had been a fishing and agricultural community. Many of the large homes followed the Keith's architectural style and a neo-Mediterranean landscape evolved.



Excavations recovered artifacts from the modern estate. (Courtesy of the New College Public Archaeology Lab)

Edson Keith died in 1939; Nettie sold the estate in 1942 to Mae Hansen and her husband Charlie Prodie. While Mae went to the Far East to set up factories to produce wardrobes for Barbie dolls, Charlie ran the elite Phillippi Plantation Inn and Restaurant. The restaurant served meals in the living and dining rooms of the mansion, while upstairs bedrooms as well as rooms in the farmhouse became overnight accommodations. Later, Mae Prodie rented the Keith Farmhouse to artists who held Sunday afternoon art shows on the lawn.

After Mae Prodie died, Sarasota County purchased the property to be a 60-acre natural areas park, one with a rich heritage. As Sarasota matures, so does the interest in its past. The history for this region includes thousands of years of human activities, from the earliest native inhabitants to the ones who created contemporary Sarasota. From the fragments of pottery, shell tools, bottles, and architecture, whether midden or mansion, the archaeology of this landscape tells the tale of those lives that make up this region's heritage.



Phillippi Plantation Restaurant and Inn, ca. 1930.



Phillippi Plantation Restaurant and Inn featured in 1953 newspaper ad.



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While engaged in this project, I was asked why bother with signage? And I had to think about it. We are in an era of signs – can find them cropping up in so many locations. These commemorative signs are a form of informal learning, opportunities to share information.

Why put information on signs? I had to look deep inside to find the answer. Turns out I was modeling my efforts on my childhood, on my experiences.

My parents were immigrants; they took me to historic places. They did not know the details and nuances for the places we visited so I read signs that explained landscapes, objects, and structures. I learned from these signs. I want the next generation to have even greater opportunities.

And we now have signs here at Phillippi Estate Park, to intrigue the public about the history beneath their feet. Hopefully these signs will generate the questions that lead to research and produce history.

The signs convey the specific histories as well as the continuities for the inhabitants of Phillippi Creek. They should encourage collective memories of life on the coast through the ages for current residents and visitors.

### History Matters

To wrap up:

Phillippi Estate Park is a beautiful park. I am glad the County purchased the property in 1986 and has managed it so well. Its potential is still growing, meeting civic needs in a time of growing mutual misunderstandings and hopefully confronting the expanding xenophobia, racism, and other hatreds which should not be our future.

By exposing the many histories for the place, more visitation and greater understanding of how Sarasota grew into the present will be exposed. Expanding public access to the past facilitates communal identity and civic inclusion of diverse communities.

Here Community Heritage Awareness and Management is encouraging public interest in the multiplicities of histories, including Native American, Cuban fisherfolk, and the workers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century estate.

The heritage interpretation signs, the continuing use of the mansion, the renovated farmhouse, and the grounds themselves are being developed into a civic place of gathering and learning.

As places of heritage, the histories can become the social glue that connects diverse communities together. Using heritage locales to bring people together is the goal for heritage interpretation. I hope it works for Sarasota.

Thank you