

# Brockington

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15 September 2006

Cathy Crocker  
Dataw Historic Foundation  
413 Island Circle East  
St. Helena, South Carolina 29920

Re: Recent Archaeological Investigations in the Sams Family Cemetery,  
Dataw Island, South Carolina

Dear Ms. Crocker:

On Wednesday, 21 June 2006, Dr. Eric Poplin undertook limited archaeological investigations within the Sams Family Cemetery on Dataw Island, South Carolina, to determine if the large marble fragments found in the southern end of the cemetery could be the elements of a crypt. A presumed 1840s sketch of the cemetery shows a crypt in the approximate location of the burial of Sarah Sams. Currently, a large engraved marble slab covers this grave. Two rectangular marble slabs, one square marble slab, and two square morticed marble posts have been found along the southern wall of the cemetery, west of the chapel.

These investigations include a review of GPR data collected in 2005 to see if marble fragments could be seen in the upper 0-2 feet of fill within the cemetery, the excavation of small test units on the north and side south sides of the Sarah Sams grave marker and two smaller tests on the west and east end of the grave marker, and probing along the south wall to search for buried marble fragments. Dr. Poplin also measured the marble pieces and the grave marker.

Briefly, the marble pieces along the south wall undoubtedly are fragments of a crypt. In all likelihood, they are pieces of a crypt that once stood above the grave of Sarah Sams. The dimensions of the slabs, the square posts, the mortices in the posts, and mortices in a marble slab that lies beneath the engraved marker all suggest that these pieces all represent fragments of the same structure. A more detailed discussion of the results follows, along with recommendations for future management of these pieces.

In early June, Inna Burns reviewed the GPR data originally collected in 2005 to see if disturbances near the ground surface could be marble fragments. She directed particular attention to the southern end of the walled cemetery. Here, a rectangular marble slab, and square marble slab, and one square marble post lay on the ground surface when the GPR data were collected. During efforts to stabilize the cemetery wall, another rectangular slab (identical in size to the one on the surface) and a second post were uncovered near the south cemetery wall. The GPR data indicated no recognizable anomalies where the marble fragments were found nor any other anomalies that could be other fragments of marble.

Dr. Eric Poplin probed the southern end of the cemetery, 6-10 feet north of the southern wall, and in a 10-foot-wide band between this area and approximately 5.0 feet beyond the west end of the Sarah Sams grave. Dr. Poplin inserted the steel probe at 0.5- to 1-foot intervals throughout this portion of the cemetery. The attached plan shows the location of the probed area. Probing encountered no masonry fragments that were large enough to impede the steel probe. Roots were encountered in several places, and some shell or brick fragments were encountered as well.

Dr. Poplin excavated four small test units at the edges of the Sarah Sams grave marker in an effort to determine the nature of the underlying monument/structure. Units on the north and south sides of the marker measured 1 by 2 feet, with the long axis along the marker. Units at the west and east ends of the marker measured approximately 0.5 by 0.5 feet and exposed a sufficient portion of the underlying brickwork to ensure that it extends beneath all edges of the marble grave marker.

Tests to the north and south of the marker exposed the structure that stands above the Sarah Sams grave. The engraved marble slab rests atop another marble slab. Both of these slabs are approximately 6.2 feet long, 3.0 feet wide, and 0.15 feet thick. The lower marble slab rests at the current ground surface. Two courses of dry-laid brick lie beneath the marble slabs, presumably creating a 9-inch wall. The upper course is all headers with the lower course all stretchers. The bricks are approximately 8 by 4 by 4 inches. The marble slabs rest atop the bricks, with approximately 0.2 feet of brick extending beyond each edge of the slabs. An attached plan illustrates this configuration.

Fill in these tests includes a dark gray fine sand A horizon at 0-0.5 feet below surface, underlain by a mottled brown and yellow fine sand at 0.5-1.9 feet below surface. Shell and brick fragments occur throughout the mottled fill. Screening of the excavated fill recovered one nail fragment from the southern test. Probing through the bottom of the test revealed soft fill to a depth of 4+ feet below the ground surface. All fill and the nail were replaced in the test units after the profile of the southern unit was drawn. This drawing appears on the attached plan.

The northeast corner of the marker is broken. Dr. Poplin lifted this fragment and exposed a mortice in the top of the lower slab. The mortice is approximately 0.2 feet from each edge of the slab and extends approximately 0.02 feet into the slab. The entire mortice could not be observed without lifting or moving the engraved marker. The corner was replaced. Dr. Poplin then measured the marble fragments that currently rest near the south wall of the cemetery. The two square "posts" are approximately 0.5 by 0.5 feet and 1.88 feet long. A tenon extends 0.02 feet from the center of the base of each post. Two adjoining sides of each post are carved to create gothic arches. The opposite sides are morticed along the length of the post; the mortices begin approximately 0.1 feet from the finished edge and are approximately 0.22 feet wide and 0.03 feet deep. Small holes are present on the top of each post in line with the mortice.

The square slab measures approximately 1.8 feet wide by 1.85 feet high and is 0.15 feet thick. The presumed upper surface of the slab has small holes identical to those on the top of the post. If the slab were inserted into the mortice in the post, the holes in the top of each piece could accommodate a U-shaped brass or iron pin that would tie the pieces together. The rectangular slabs are 4.85 feet long, 1.87 feet high, and 0.15 feet thick. The top of each slab also has holes identical to those seen

on the other slab and the posts. The outer surfaces of the slabs all are carved with sunburst patterns in the upper corners and the center portion recessed in an oval configuration. Gothic arches decorate the outer surfaces of the posts. Photographs of these panels are attached.

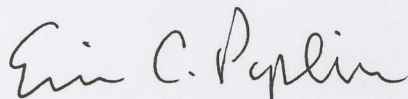
The presumed 1840s sketch shows the panels with oval recessed central areas, very similar to the designs that appear in the panels found in the Sams cemetery today. A very similar structure stands today in the St. Helena Church Yard in Beaufort (see attached photograph). This crypt has been rebuilt with one side wall missing. According to Colin Brooker, local historical architect, such crypts usually did not contain the remains of the interred; they were merely decorative structures built atop the grave.

Given the information collected on 21 June 2006, I believe that the marble fragments in the southern portion of the Sams Cemetery are portions of a marble crypt that once stood over the grave of Sarah Sams. There are two side walls, one end wall, and two corner posts. The engraved top marker and the bottom slab remain at rest atop the brick foundation that once supported the entire structure. One of the side walls is broken near the same point where it also is broken on the north edge of the engraved marker. This may indicate an event that resulted in damage to the crypt. Possibly, the walls and corners were removed after this damage, and the engraved slab was then placed directly atop the base slab. Given the similarity of the elements of this crypt to the one in the St. Helena Church Yard, it is unlikely that the remains of Sarah Sams actually were placed within the crypt. Most likely, she was buried in a grave atop which the marble crypt was then erected.

The Dataw Historic Foundation may wish to reconstruct the crypt, either atop the grave of Sarah Sams or at another location within the cemetery minus the top and bottom elements. Reconstruction atop the grave will require the acquisition of one end wall and two corner posts identical to those that are present and the repair of the broken side panel and the engraved top panel. Reconstruction at another locale, with an interpretive panel, could include reconstructed elements as well. Alternatively, you could erect the existing pieces and stabilize them with wooden supports to demonstrate what the crypt looked like when it stood atop the grave the Sarah Sams. Obviously, there are varying costs involved in any of these approaches. Reconstruction of the crypt atop the grave of Sarah Sams should include notice to her descendants, with an opportunity to reject the proposed activity, to prevent claims of desecration.

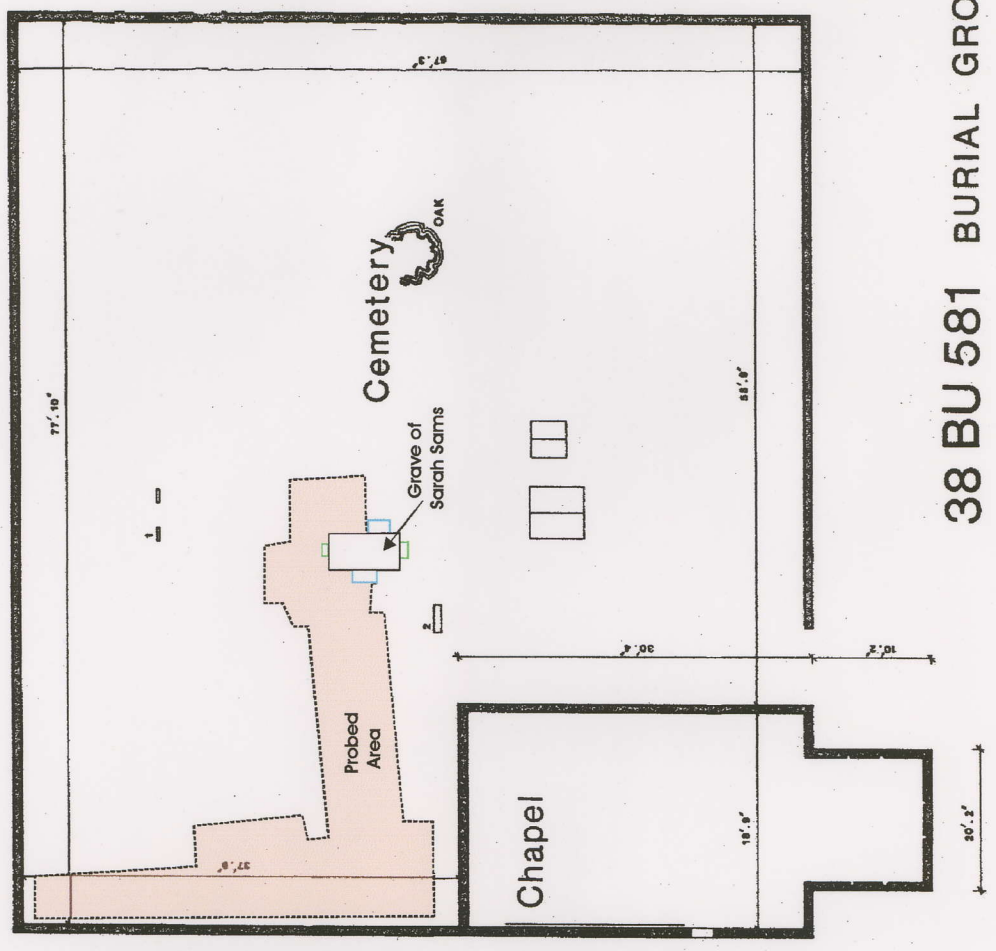
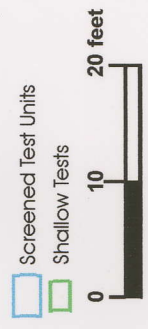
Thanks again for your support during this project. If I can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely yours,

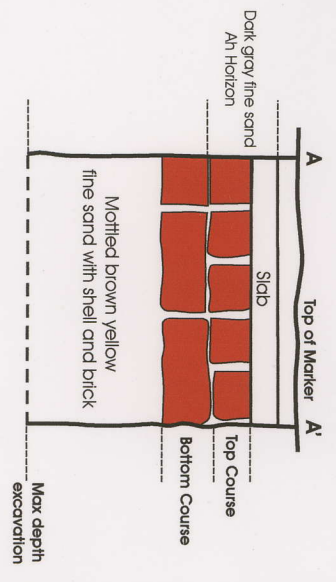
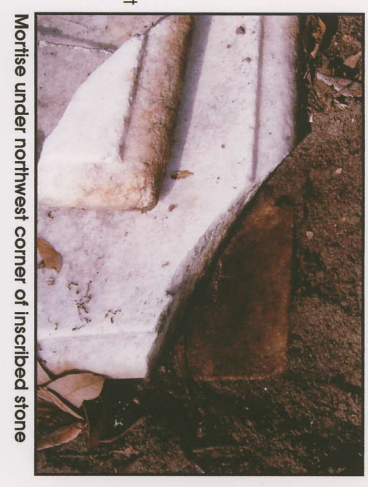
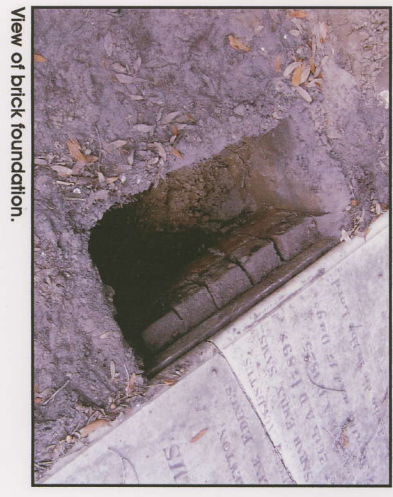
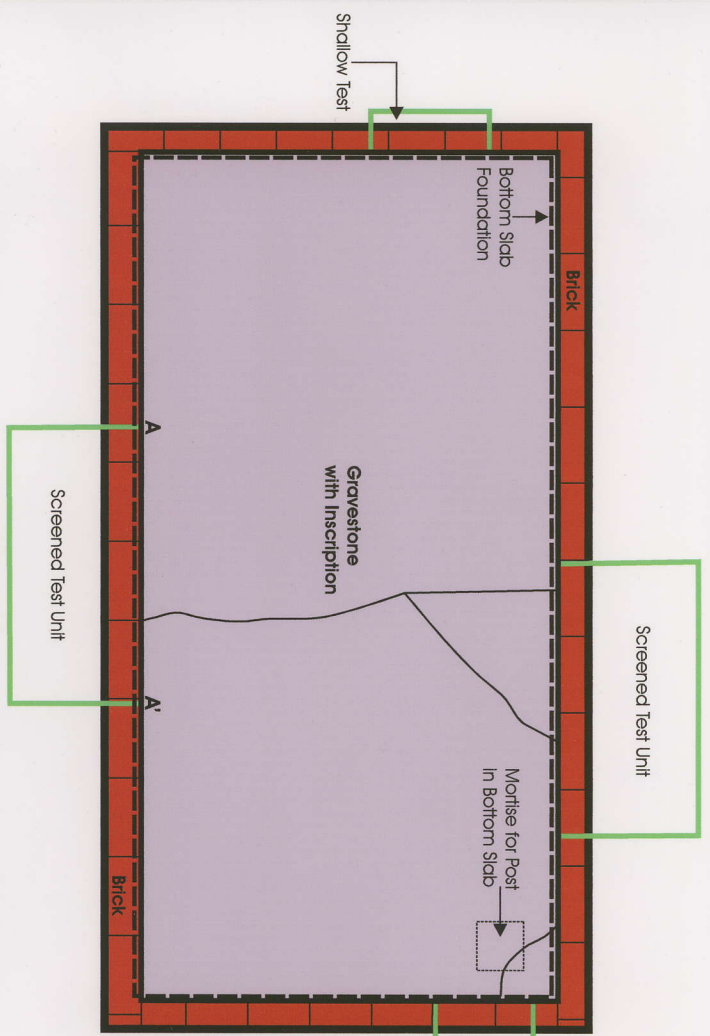
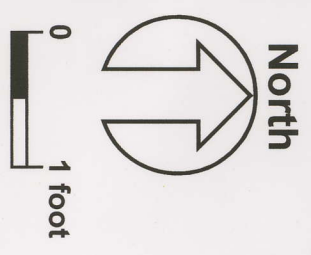


Eric C. Poplin, Ph.D., RPA  
Senior Archaeologist

1. William Sams d. 1798
2. Berners Barnwell Sams d. 1855



**38 BU 581 BURIAL GROUND & CHAPEL**





**Crypt at St. Helena Church Cemetery.**



**Long wall of Sarah Sams' crypt on Dataw Island.**



**View along the Sarah Sams' crypt.**



**Pin holes in top of corner post.**



**Tenon on base of corner post.**

Jan 18 1893, sketch by Eugenia Sams?

