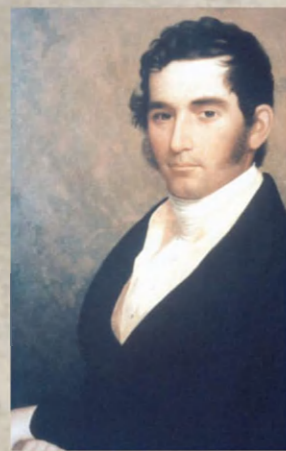


# The Sams Family at Dataw

## Purchase of Dataw



Berners Sams.

William Sams, grandson of Colonel John “Tuscarora Jack” Barnwell, was born in South Carolina on April 18, 1741. With the fall of Charleston and Beaufort during the American Revolution, William was forced to leave his home on Wadmalaw Island and purchased Dataw Island in 1783. At

Dataw, he began to grow Sea Island cotton. It was cotton that made the Sams family wealthy and the Beaufort region “the exclusive home of the most exclusive few of that most exclusive aristocracy.”

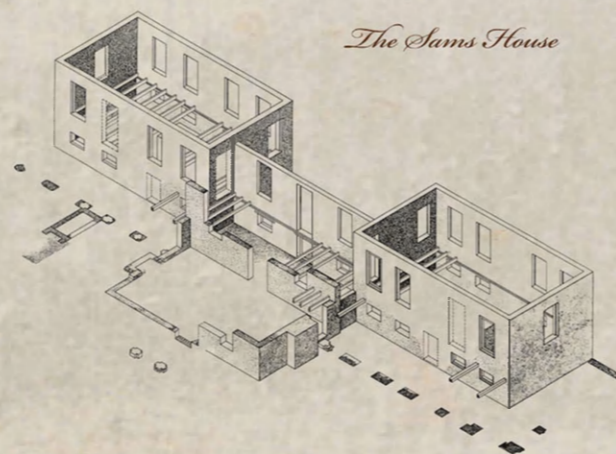
William Sams died in 1798 and left Dataw to his wife and three youngest sons, Edward, Berners, and Lewis. Berners and Lewis bought their brother’s share and divided the land equally. Lewis Reeve Sams established his home on the northern end of the island. Berners Barnwell Sams moved into his father’s home on the southern end of the island. B. B. Sams expanded the house with the addition of two wings, a walled compound, slave quarters, and other service buildings. By 1850, Lewis and Berners Sams were two of the largest planters in St. Helena Parish. They owned nearly 350 slaves and had amassed a fortune greater than \$400,000.

Both men died within a year of each other: Berners Sams in 1855 and Lewis Sams in 1856. Neither man witnessed the dramatic changes that came to Dataw Island when civil war divided the nation. When Beaufort and the Sea Islands fell



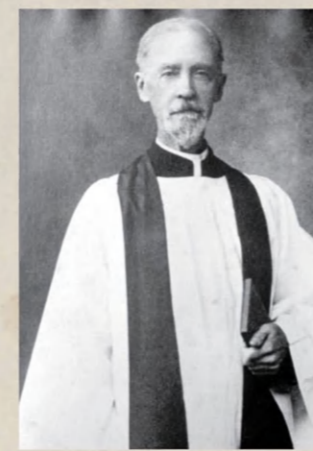
Sketch of Sams Plantation.

to Union troops on November 7, 1861, the area’s wealthy families fled, leaving their belongings behind. Many families never returned. The institution of slavery was overthrown and thousands of enslaved African Americans were released from bondage. The sons of Berners and Lewis Sams—Horace, James, Richard, and Thomas—lost Dataw in 1863 when it was confiscated by the Federal government for nonpayment of taxes.



An isometric drawing of the plantation ruins. (Courtesy of Colin Brooker)

## Memories of Dataw



James Julius Sams.

We are fortunate to have James Julius Sams’ memoir of life at Dataw and a sketch map of the southern portion of the island, possibly drawn by his wife. While the ruins help us understand the buildings and the archaeological data provide a glimpse into the material life of the Sams family, the map shows us how the plantation was organized, including the layout of the main house, the roads and boat landings, the acreage of fields, and the crops grown in each field. When we combine this information with James’ descriptions of sycamore, walnut, orange, and pear trees, we can imagine the house 175 years ago.

*“The middle house was the old and original home. It was much older than my grandmother’s time. It consisted of two rooms, a narrow passage between, two attic rooms above and two cellars below.”*

*James Julius Sams*

## Evolution of a House

The B. B. Sams residence is made up of the middle house, the west wing, and the east wing. Each section was connected by a passageway that ran across the back of the center house. The front façade was unified by a large covered porch supported by columns. Originally, historians believed the middle house was constructed by William Sams after 1783. Archaeological and architectural study of the ruins points to an earlier construction date in the 1760s or 1770s, perhaps by Robert Gibbes or Lewis Reeve.