

# TABBY TIMES

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- Visit [DatawHistory.org](http://DatawHistory.org)
- Click once on the JOIN US
- Click on CHECK MEMBERSHIP



*Southern half of Dataw Island, with Oak Island, during early Alcoa development. September 6, 1983*

**OAK ISLAND IS A 32-ACRE NATURAL BEAUTY** sitting right next door to Dataw Island. Native Americans frequented the island about 1,000 years ago. Fast forward 800 years to the BB Sams / LR Sams plantation era, and it was as an adventure spot for James Julius Sams and his brothers Horace and Donald. As Sea Island cotton took off as the “finest in the world”, BB Sams decided to build a system of dikes between Dataw Island, Oak Island, and the two marsh hummocks to the north (Pine Islands). According to JJ Sams, these dikes were designed to exclude water and to reclaim land for cotton cultivation—it didn’t work. The elder Sams eventually converted the dams to a water retention system and created a series of ponds to attract migratory birds for hunting, with a more successful outcome. After the war, Oak Island, along with Dataw Island, moved through a myriad of owners. Fortunately, none disturbed the island, save for one ‘historic’ use some years after prohibition!

Oak Island is located in the high marsh west of lower Dataw. Off its northern shore are two hummocks, the Pine Islands referred to by James Julius Sams. It is made up nearly entirely of Williman soil (loamy marine sediment.) I threw that technical term in for the Conservancy crowd out there.) The island has six historical sites surveyed by professional archaeologists back in the 1982–1988 timeframe. Evidence revealed that Native Americans frequented the island in the Late Woodland period (1000–1200 A.D.) They found shell midden piles and pottery shards on Oak Island, as well as extensive evidence of Native American presence next door on Dataw Island. The central part of Dataw Island is dominated by a broad southwest to northeast oriented ridge. This high and well-drained ridge is a prime location for settlement, and evidence for Native American transient occupation was confirmed. We have artifacts in the History & Learning Center, but no ‘ruins’ of these thousand-year-old settlements remain today. What they did find back in 1988 was substantial evidence of a “still operation” on Oak Island.

In addition to extensive physical evidence of a former still, the 1988 report says, “A local informant has stated that a still was operated here during the 1950s, and that it was put out of business by

## OAK ISLAND CHAIN OF OWNERSHIP

### Before Alcoa:

Oak Island goes back to the Dataw Island plantation era. In his memoir, Rev. James Julius Sams, D.D., born in 1826, and who grew up on Datha, describes many adventures on Oak Island.

In 1860, Oak Island was owned jointly by Rev JJ Sams and his brother Horace Hann Sams. DHF does not have complete records about Oak Island during or after the Civil War, but we do know it was part of the purchase of Dataw Island by Kate Gleason in 1927.

On her death in 1933, Kate Gleason willed Oak Island along with Dataw Island to Elizabeth Sanders Rowland. Libby’s will passed them to her sons Richard and Lawrence Rowland.

### Alcoa South Carolina, Inc. (ASCI) 1983–2007

#### 1983

Rowland brothers sold Dataw Island, including Oak Island, to Alcoa South Carolina, Inc. (ASCI).

#### 1987

Master Land Use Plan dated June 1, 1987 shows 60 lots on Oak Island.

#### Before 1991

Bridge and dock built.

#### 1991

Offered for sale; widely advertised in US and England. Bill Cochran (Alcoa VP) stated no intent to sell to developer, rather to a family compound or a small community. Discourage building more than ten houses. No offers received.

#### 1995

Effort made to sell as a retirement/assisted living community; no offers received.

#### 1998

Oak Island Estates, L.I.C. (Joe & Steve Mix) buy Oak Island; stated they had no immediate plans for Island. Bridge ownership passed to DIOA. DIOA not responsible for dock.

#### 2004

Oak Island Covenants and Restrictions were recorded giving DIOA the right of first refusal in any future sales. In addition, it reduced the number of buildable lots from 30 to 18.

#### 2006

Oak Island sold to GEJ Oak Island, LLC (Gary Juster) after the right of first refusal to the DIOA was granted and the DIOA membership voted not to purchase.

#### 2007–2011

Gary Juster, working with DIOA and Beaufort County, got approval for density change to 42 units.

#### 2016

After unsuccessful attempts to sell lots or the island as a whole, Gary Juster deeded Oak Island to The Nature Conservancy.

#### 2020

Dataw GM reports, “Dataw to Acquire Oak Island: Anonymous Donors “Gift” Oak Island to the Dataw Island Owners Association”! Immediate jubilation ensues on DatawNet.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

*Marilyn Peck*



There are some exciting things happening at DHF that you will be reading about in this issue. We have a newly designed website that is much easier to navigate and features a beautiful new color palette. I want to thank Marj Shymske and Bill Riski for all their hard work to improve the site, making it more enjoyable and user-friendly.

This issue debuts the new name Tabby Times and a fresh new look. Co-editors Kathy Kelenski and Kathy McShane and graphic designer, Lisa Costigan, created the Spring edition.

I also want to congratulate Peter and Anna Pearks for becoming a Lifetime Members of DHF. (see next page for more on the Pearks)

At the beginning of every year we start our membership drive—our goal is to have every resident of Dataaw become a member. The ruins and history of the island are a vital part of Dataaw Island, but also for Beaufort County and the State of South Carolina.

I want to thank all of our DHF members for their ongoing financial and volunteer support. For those of you who are not yet members, I encourage you to join us in our ongoing effort to ensure Dataaw's historic structures and its artifacts are always preserved. Dataaw Island remains a unique and beautiful place to live, and I feel very lucky to be a part of it.

### 2020 DHF BOARD OFFICERS

President: *Marilyn Peck*  
Vice President/Treasurer: *Susan Converse*  
Recording Secretary: *Kitty Trice*  
Corresponding Secretary: *Joe Roney*  
Vice President/Volunteers: *Diane Roney*

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Technical Consultant: *Larry Rowland*  
DIOA Board Liason: *Steve Wexler*

### TABBY TIMES

*Tabby Times* is a publication of the Dataaw Historic Foundation, Dataaw Island, SC  
Editors: *Kathy Kelenski, Kathy McShane*  
Layout/Design: *Lisa Costigan*  
Photography: *Bill Riski*

*If you are interested in working with the DHF, please contact any of the Board members.*

## *Oak Island continued*

government agents..." The report concludes, the site is "...ineligible for the National Register. The site is a relatively common type in the region and has been purposely destroyed. The mechanics of this industry are fairly well understood and this site cannot contribute further significant information."

As the sign on our golf course says, "This Dataaw Island golf course, designed by Tom Fazio, is named for the earthen dikes or dams that were built here in the western marsh between 1850 and 1860 to increase the acreage for the valuable Sea Island cotton crop. Unfortunately, soil conditions were not favorable, and the area was converted to duck ponds to attract migratory fowl." From a broader perspective, the 1988 survey concluded these dikes were unique. They were massive in scope, encompassing about 60 acres of marsh, and have historical significance today. The 1988 report found, "It is the largest known example of 19th-century Sea Island salt marsh land management practices. Its outline is relatively well preserved and stable, and it is a unique element of the 19th-century plantation system."

You can still see remnants of the dikes today when looking from the southwestern shore of Dataaw Island (from Cotton Dike # 5 and #6), looking north from the Oak Island bridge, and soon (we hope) when standing on the northwestern shore of Oak Island. If you know what you're looking for, you can even see most of their footprint on Google maps.



### **Ted Bartlett honored with Heritage Walk Brick**

In December 2019, Ted Bartlett, Dataaw Island's General Manager, was honored with a permanent brick on the Dataaw Historic Foundation's Heritage Walk. Emblazoned with his name and the year Bartlett began his tenure at Dataaw, the brick represents a heartfelt thank you for his eleven years of service to Dataaw Island and its residents.

The idea to honor Bartlett with a permanent brick was initiated by Joel Holden, who reached out to a number of the major clubs on the island to see if there was any interest in supporting this award. Indeed there was. Eleven clubs enthusiastically joined in the effort to honor Bartlett, including Dataaw Historic Foundation, Dataaw Conservancy, Dataaw Cares, DIGA, DWIGA, the Croquet Club, DITA, Dataaw Quilters, the Visual Arts Club, the Garden Club and the Yacht Club.

The brick was presented to Bartlett at the open session of the Dataaw Island Club's Board meeting in December. Bartlett described the surprise award as "truly humbling". "Dataaw Island is really a special place, and nothing embodies that more than our members' genuine appreciation for the service of staff."

The Heritage Walk was started in 2009 as a fundraiser for the History & Learning Center, which permanently houses our collection of artifacts and Dataaw history. The brick walk is located between the BB Sams Plantation Ruins and the Cannery parking area. Currently there are 293 bricks along the pathway engraved with the names of past and present Dataaw residents and employees and the years they first came to Dataaw. Some were purchased by the residents themselves to celebrate their time here; some were purchased by others to honor someone they admire—as Dataaw Island clubs did for Bartlett.

***Bricks are still available and cost \$150 each. To dedicate one or purchase one for yourself, visit the Dataaw Historic Foundation website at [dataawhistory.org](http://dataawhistory.org)***

### **JOIN TODAY SO THE HISTORY OF DATAAW CAN BE SHARED NOW AND IN THE FUTURE**

The Dataaw Historic Foundation is committed to preserving, protecting and sharing our history. The financial resources needed to execute on our mission is 100% dependent on our members.

#### **JOIN US!**

Stop by the History & Learning Center or visit [dataawhistory.org](http://dataawhistory.org) to secure a membership form

#### **QUESTIONS?**

Please contact Membership Chair, Marj Shymske at 630-335-1485 or [marjshymske@gmail.com](mailto:marjshymske@gmail.com)



## INTRODUCING OUR NEW WEBSITE:

DatawHistory.org



If you enjoy learning about the rich history of Dataw Island, we have exciting news for you! After months of planning and redesigning, our new website has launched and includes many useful features to make it easier for you to explore every aspect of Dataw's history.

We focused on making the website easy to navigate and interesting to explore for residents, potential new residents and visitors. We have 1800 residents who live on Dataw either full or part-time, and have had over 2900 visitors to our History & Learning Center from all 50 states and ten foreign countries. *The website is organized by three essential areas:*

**Learn**—Understand the mission and offerings of the Dataw Historic Foundation.

**Explore**—Discover the rich history of Dataw at your own pace.

**Join Us**—Visit our History & Learning Center, have a tour of the historic areas, get involved, or become a member and support this worthy cause.

DHF owns a huge library of archives and has organized the online content into the same areas you see on the wall in the History & Learning Center. The website features a search capability that can look into all the nooks and crannies of our archives.

*Since the inception of this new website—we've already had an average of over 500 users per month! Come visit us at [datawhistory.org](http://datawhistory.org) and see how much fun learning can be!*



### Peter and Anna Pearks Elected Lifetime Members of the Dataw Historic Foundation

In March 2020, the DHF Board unanimously voted to elect Peter and Anna Pearks as "Lifetime Members" of the Dataw Historic Foundation. Lifetime Members are defined as those who have shown a long-term commitment to DHF and whose contribution to DHF is \$5,000 or more as recognized and approved by the Board. The Pearks are only the fourth family to join this prestigious list. The Pearks moved to Dataw in

1998 and joined the DHF a year later. Since then, Peter has directed a number of major projects recognizing how important they are to DHF's success. These projects include: creation of all signage for the historic sites, management of the Heritage Walk with 293 bricks in place since 2009, oversight of grounds maintenance of the historic sites, as master carpenter, creation of two moveable display cases for the History & Learning Center, and the five best magical Luminary Nights as co-director with Anna.

*The DHF is honored to have the Pearks as its newest Lifetime Members.*

## 52 Sams —in— 52 Weeks

Bill Riski, Historic Chair of Dataw Historic Foundation and history buff extraordinaire, has embarked on a 52 week project, *52 Sams in 52 Weeks*. Riski's project is a weekly series of articles about members of the Sams Family whose plantation ruins are a key part of the historical charm of Dataw Island. Each article provides us with fascinating insight into the history of Dataw Island and the Sams family.

As Riski found when he started this project, there are several thousand Sams ancestors in the family tree—so he will only be able to scratch the surface. Riski has already completed ten weeks of captivating stories, the most recent of these *Strong Women*. The story acquaints us with four women who came from very different times and backgrounds, but who had at least one thing in common—their perseverance through the challenges of their circumstances.

For those readers on the Dataw Net, each Tuesday, Riski sends a link to his most recent of article—if you are not on the Dataw Net, or missed an article and want to catch up, view the series online at [datawhistory.org/52-sams-in-52-weeks/](http://datawhistory.org/52-sams-in-52-weeks/).



*Some of you have already discovered our new website when you accessed Bill Riski's "52 Sams in 52 Weeks" series of true tales of the fascinating Sams family and the ruins of the plantation home that you see adjacent to the History & Learning Center.*



## A T A L E O F T W O C E M E T E R I E S

*Historic Cotton Dike Cemetery*

This is an excerpt from John Colgan's recent History Talk.

The entire presentation can be found on our website at [www.datawhistory.org](http://www.datawhistory.org)

**T**he tabby ruins at the Sams Plantation Complex stand as mute evidence of a bygone era. There were two distinct ways of life which coexisted in the antebellum South, the Plantation Owner and his family and the Slaves. In this article, we focus on the Slaves.

The Slaves were captured by European slavers who forcibly removed them to North and South America from all over West Africa. They were taken from many tribes. Captives spoke a variety of languages; they had differing religious beliefs, tribal customs and culture. They had different skill sets and came from various stations in life. Slaves often found themselves thrown together with total strangers, unable to communicate with one another.

Into this place they carried their memories and languages, their drums and musical styles, their habits and cuisine, their gods, their immune systems and their DNA. They were immigrants, changing as they survived. Despite it all, here on Dataw Island and throughout the Lowcountry, they managed to forge a new civilization they called *Gullah*.

One of the most direct manifestations of African influence on the culture of African-Americans in the United States is found in the social behaviors centered on funerals. In many rural graveyards across the South and many urban cemeteries in the North and far West too, Black Americans mark final resting places of loved ones in a distinctive manner. While standard markers or floral arrangements are used, the personal property of the deceased is often placed on the top of the grave. This can range from a single emblematic item like a pitcher or a vase, to an inventory of the dead person's household goods. Such a collection establishes a connection to customs and practices known not only on Southern plantations but also in West and Central Africa.

Despite the massive conversion of Africans to Christian faiths, they retained many of their former rituals associated with the respect of the dead. Bodies were laid to rest in an East-West orientation confirming the belief that as the spirit rose from the grave, it would be facing back toward Africa where it would return home.

The Cotton Dike Road Cemetery served as the final resting place for generations of field slaves from circa 1785 until 1861. Thereafter, the cemetery served the free African-American farming community on Dataw until 1967 when, it is believed, the cemetery ceased to be used. The Cotton Dike Cemetery was considerably larger than what we see today. Tidal action and tropical storms, notably the Great Sea Island Hurricane of 1893, have eroded much of it away.

Fortunately, the Cotton Dike cemetery escaped the fate of many unmarked slave cemeteries. Instead of being plowed over or built upon in the ensuing years, this cemetery survived and was set aside as such by Alcoa when they created the plat maps for Dataw Island. In this cemetery at the end of Cotton Dike Road we have identified 38 graves to date, thanks largely to Andrew Robinson, a former resident of Dataw, and his nephew Nathaniel, but there surely were many more graves at one time. Those that have been identified include: Dennis Robinson (born 1790 and the first person buried here) along with members of the Chaplin, Allen, Brisbane, Brayn, and Polite families.

In 2007, DHF led a rededication of the Cotton Dike Cemetery. Over 60 members of the Robinson family attended. It was a very satisfying moment to see mothers and fathers pointing out to their children the names of long lost family members and connecting them at last to their heritage.

*To learn about the Plantation Owner and family and their cemetery at Dataw, as well as more about the Slaves, visit [www.datawhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/Tale-of-Two-Cemeteries-with-script.pdf](http://www.datawhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/Tale-of-Two-Cemeteries-with-script.pdf).*