

DATAW HISTORIC FOUNDATION

# TABBY TIMES

## THE GREEN TAFFETA

# Silk Dress

The Dataw Historic Foundation is fortunate that Sams descendants have entrusted us with several family heirlooms. One such item is a green taffeta silk gown. This gown has been in the possession of the DHF since 1998, when the owners, Norman Ralph Pippin, Jr. and his sister Pauline Sams Pippin Sanders, donated it to us. *This year we discovered its secrets.*

According to Norman and Pauline, the gown belonged to Carrie Lee Lawton, wife of Duncan Sams. They believed she had the dress in the mid-1880s, or a bit earlier. She and Duncan were married in January 1886. Their daughter Emmie Caroline Sams Pippin was Norman's and Pauline's mother. When Emmie passed away in the early 1990s, they began thinking of donating the gown to the "Sams of Dataw."

For Week 24 of the "52 Sams in 52 Weeks" series of articles, I wrote about the green silk taffeta dress. Dataw resident, Ginny Hall-Apicella, shared the article with Kim Poovey, author, storyteller and Victorian reenactress. Kim has a passion for 19th Century women's clothing, and the expertise to date items. She took one look at the photo of the dress and said, "That wasn't sewn in 1880. It's from much earlier." We invited her to examine the gown and help us refresh the preservation setting.

Kim came to our History and Learning Center to do a hands-on inspection of the gown. She determined that the dress dates to 1859-1861. She brought reference books that clearly illustrate that "our" dress has all the classic style elements of the 1860 period: 'elliptical flared skirt,' 'waist-line of the bodice,' and 'coat sleeves.' Our gown is also not similar to the fashions of later periods with their bustled skirts and long bodices. Upon close inspection, Kim also discovered that the dress has never been worn.

First, the dress not only has no fasteners of any kind to hold the bodice front together, there is no evidence that it ever did.

The dress could not be worn in this state of completion. Second, the dress does not show the perspiration stains that would be expected if the gown had been worn at all. We don't know why the dress was not completed, but we have several clues. We knew the dress had been in the Duncan and Carrie Sams family. Duncan Sams is the son of Miles Brewton Sams (1811-1894) and Caroline Oswald Sams (1819-1898) of Beaufort and the grandson of Lewis Reeve and Sarah Fripp Sams.

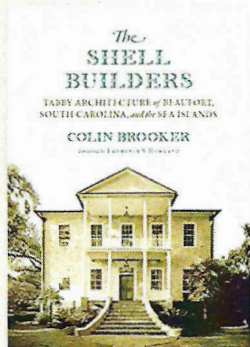
When we received the gown back in 1998, someone noted in our DHF files that the dress may have been made for Mrs. Miles Brewton Sams (that is, Caroline Oswald Sams). Now that we have more accurately dated the dress, this indeed seems likely. She probably grabbed this prized possession in its state of incompleteness when they fled Beaufort at the outbreak of the Civil War. Twenty-five years later, Caroline Sams would become the mother-in-law to Carrie Lee Lawton Sams when Carrie married Duncan Sams. Carrie likely received this dress from her mother-in-law.

The green silk taffeta from which the dress is made is incredibly fragile. Several years ago, Nancy Hahn, a Dataw resident, learned from Jan Hiester, Textile Curator of the Charleston Museum, that silk of the 1800s was weighted with metallic salts to give body to the fabric and add the desired rustle when the woman moved. The salt crystals embedded in the silk are like shards of glass, sharp and jagged. Over time, the



Nancy Hahn and Kim Poovey examining the dress





## The Shell Builders

by Colin Brooker

*A Book Review by Bill Riski*

*The Shell Builders* is a non-fiction account of tabby architecture history in the Lowcountry of southeastern United States. Mr. Brooker does a masterful job of weaving the origins of tabby use worldwide with historical events to explain its popularity in Lowcountry structures. He describes why so many local 18th and 19th-century structures, from military forts to privies, were made of tabby.

The various structures on Dataw Island that played a role in the plantation operations and domestic life make a prominent appearance in this book. The Dataw Historic Foundation and ALCOA before us relied on Mr. Brooker over the years to investigate and preserve our Sams Plantation Tabby Complex. He has taken these results to a new level when focusing on our island in Chapter 7, "Tabby in the Domestic Architecture of the Sea Islands" before the American Revolution. Further, this scholarly book is the first I have seen that mentions the Dataw Historic Foundation.

Brooker is an Architectural Historian, an international expert in tabby building methods, and a resident of Beaufort, South Carolina. A long-time and active preservationist in Beaufort, Brooker has applied his scholarship to almost every historic building in the National Historic Landmark District in Beaufort County. He has examined most tabby structures in Beaufort County at some point in his career. My anecdotal evidence of this is the tabby privy in town behind Ting Sams Colquhoun's house (page 87 of *The Shell Builders*). Only a master like Mr. Brooker could explain the significant building technique used in this structure.

### *Green Taffeta Silk Dress continued*

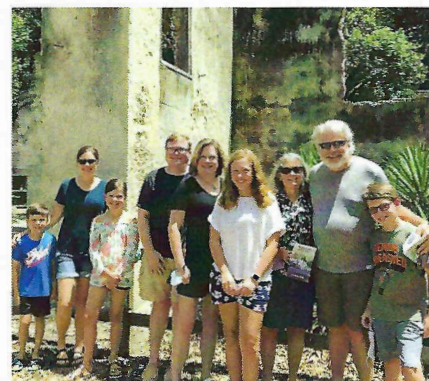
salt shards' abrasive actions cut the silk fibers when the garment is handled or worn. Almost any type of movement causes the shattering of the silk fibers. The dress is now on display in the History & Learning Center.

A few weeks after these discoveries, we had the honor to give a ruins tour to a Sams descendant, Kathryn O'Shields Hunter, and her family. When Kathryn mentioned that she was descended from Lewis Reeve Sams through his son Miles Brewton Sams, I discovered that she is the GGGG Granddaughter of Lewis Reeve Sams. Kathryn was able to see the green taffeta silk dress made for Caroline Sams, the wife of her GG Granduncle, 160 years earlier.

—Bill Riski

*Pictured upper right: Kathryn Hunter with the Green Taffeta Silk Dress*

*Right: Hunter family visiting the Sams Plantation Tabby Complex*



**MONDAY, DECEMBER 14**  
**LUMINARY NIGHT**  
*Starry, Starry Night*

An island-wide celebration of a 30 year Dataw tradition  
with beautiful sights to see on every street around the island!  
Come and celebrate the season!

The historic ruins of the Sams plantation house and outbuildings  
will be illuminated by hundreds of luminaries—a spectacular display—  
from 5:30 to 8:00 PM



# WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

## AND CONNECTIONS WITH DATAW ISLAND

*Bill Riski and Kathy McShane*

### ***This year, 2020, marks the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment***

to the U.S. Constitution, which declared that a person's right to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the U.S or any state on account of sex. The passage of the amendment took place after almost 100 years of lobbying the government and protests. Even with the ratification of the Amendment in 1920, it was many years before federal and state laws were synchronized. South Carolina did not ratify the 19th Amendment until almost 50 years later, in 1969. *There are at least four individuals with connections to Dataw Island who also have connections to the 19th Amendment.*



#### **Sarah Barnwell Elliott**

Sarah Barnwell Elliott (1848-1928) was a distant cousin of William Sams, who purchased Dataw Island in 1783. Any direct Sams' descendant alive today is related to her. Elliott studied at Johns Hopkins University and became an accomplished author. She

wrote six novels, a work of non-fiction about Sam Houston and any number of short stories. Her most successful novel, *Jerry* (1891), recounts the story of a man who is a folk hero until an unexpected inheritance corrupts his ambition. Elliott was active in the women's suffrage movement, serving as President of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association from 1912-1914.



#### **Kate Gleason**

Catherine "Kate" Gleason (1865-1933) purchased Dataw Island in 1928. When she died, her obituary noted that she was the first woman president of a national bank, the first woman to be appointed a receiver in bankruptcy, and the first woman to be a

member of the American Society of Engineers. She did much to help the Beaufort area during the depression. As an example, she hired a grandson of BB Sams, H. Reeve Sams, to oversee the construction of a causeway between St. Helena Island and Polowana Islands and between Polowana and Dataw Islands, which she paid for. Gleason's mother, Ellen McDermott Gleason, was friends with a number of women suffragettes, including her Rochester NY neighbor, Susan B. Anthony. Gleason later attributed her success in life to Anthony's inspiration. Gleason's father, William Gleason, was also supportive of women's suffrage, encouraging his daughters to take their rightful place in what was then a man's world. Although not a women's suffrage activist, Gleason was a known supporter of the cause; an account of the 1912 National American Woman Suffrage Association mentions Gleason as having promised \$1,200 to the work of the suffrage movement, one of the largest pledges.

#### **Fanny Henrietta Sams Bell**

Fanny Henrietta Sams Bell (1890-1920) is the great-great granddaughter of William and Elizabeth Sams (the William Sams who purchased Dataw in 1783). Her branch of the family left South Carolina in the early 1870s to make a new life in Florida. Her father, Mikell Seabrook Sams, walked 400 miles from South Carolina to Florida, where he settled on North Merritt Island, and became prosperous in the citrus industry. Fanny was



known as an independent and progressive woman. She loved to wear trousers and was active in the operations of her father's citrus groves. She became a suffragette at an early age and worked for women's voting rights. Unfortunately she died at the age of 29 from complications arising from her pregnancy, only a few months before the passage of the 19th amendment.

#### **Conway Whittle Sams**

It is perhaps self-evident that Women's Suffrage had its opponents, some of them extreme. Conway Whittle Sams (1864-1935) was one of them. A great grandson of William and Elizabeth Sams, Sams was born in South Carolina, graduated from the University of Virginia and lived most of his life in Virginia practicing law. He authored several books on the early history of Virginia as well as *Shall Women Vote?: A Book for Men* (1913). Sams called women being allowed to vote, "one of the greatest afflictions that could happen to any State." He also said, "Laws benefiting women deserved to be cataloged in a Museum of Legal Curiosities." According to a December 13, 1913 editorial in the St. Joseph News-Press, "The writer is bitterly opposed to women's suffrage, and to the present development of womenkind..." The article goes on to say that "Mr. Sams represents the swinging of the pendulum backward from the course of the modern feminist movement. But so intense and illogical is his partisanship that he will no doubt win recruits for the suffragettes, instead of for the antis."



ADD YOUR PERSONAL BRICK TO THE

# Dataw Heritage Walk

*This holiday season would be the perfect time to join the island's rich history by adding your name to the Heritage Walk!*

Purchase a brick now and become a part of the Dataw Heritage Walk—a living legacy to those who have made Dataw the very special place it is today. The engraved bricks represent residents who came to Dataw Island 30 years ago, and up to and including our most recent residents.

To purchase a brick, please use the form below. Forms are also available in the History and Learning Center or on our website at [www.DatawHistory.org](http://www.DatawHistory.org).



## ORDER FORM

Brick Cost \$150 | Please use one order form per brick

**FILL IN THE SQUARES WITH A LETTER OR A SPACE**

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Line 1 and Line 2: Limit of 15 characters per line, including spaces

Line 3: Year of property acquisition or move to Dataw or employment

— EXAMPLES —

John & Jane Williams 2001	The Williams Family 2001	John Williams Family 2001	John Williams 2001
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Ordered by:

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*Please make check payable to Dataw Historic Foundation*

Drop off location: Peter Pearks, 1148 Palmetto Point, Dataw Island | Or mail: Dataw Historic Foundation, PO Box 819, Beaufort, SC 29901



# BB Sams Drive

— ORIGIN OF THE NAME —



**Do you live on BB Sams Drive?** If you do (or even if you don't), you might be interested in the origin of the street name. BB Sams Drive is named for Berners Barnwell Sams, MD. BB Sams inherited one-third of his father's Datha plantation in 1808. He and his older brother, Lewis Reeve Sams, bought their brother Edward's share and split the island in two. BB Sams became the owner of the southwestern half, called Dataw Inlet, which he owned until his death in 1855. Sams was married twice; he had 15 children with his two wives, Elizabeth Hann Fripp and Martha Edwards. He not only was a successful Sea Island cotton plantation owner, he was also a graduate of Charleston Medical College. Sams died of pneumonia in 1855; he is buried, along with his two wives, in the Sams family cemetery on Dataw Island.

## DHF Donates to St. Francis Center



The Dataw Historic Foundation was happy to present a check for \$1,224.00 to Sister Canice of the St. Francis Center Food Pantry on St. Helena Island on October 24. This amount represented a portion of the ticket sale revenue from our Oyster Roast normally held in the

spring. As a result of Covid-19, the event had to be cancelled. We offered all ticket buyers a refund, but many told us that wasn't necessary.

The DHF decided to "pay it forward" and donate those funds to a deserving local charitable organization. We chose the St. Francis Food Pantry. The St. Francis Food Pantry has done a remarkable job during this difficult period, distributing 4,565 bags of food that provided approximately 8,972 meals for residents of St. Helena Island and the surrounding area during the seven month period from March 17—October 21.

*Above L to R: Kathy Stanton, DHF Fundraising Chair, Sister Canice, Marilyn Peck, DHF President, and Diane Roney, DHF Vice President.*

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### TABBY TIMES

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

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

*Marilyn Peck*



This year has been like no other. Like all of you, DHF has been affected by the Covid-19 virus. Unfortunately, we had to cancel both our annual Oyster Roast in the spring and Low Country Boil in the fall. However, we are looking forward to being able to gather with our members and friends in 2021.

The Board has been busy planning for 2021. As happens with every organization, there will be some changes in January. We have a number of board members leaving at the end of this year. I want to thank each of them for all the hard work and contributions that they have made to DHF during their tenure. The Board members leaving are: John Colgan, who has been a tireless contributor to DHF for more than 10 years as our President and History chairman; Kathy Kelenski and Kathy McShane, who have brought you the Tabby Times for the last three years and also were our fundraising chairs for a number of years; Marj Shymske, our membership chair, who, along with Bill Riski, is responsible for our wonderful new website; Kathy Stanton and Lenda Jablonski, our fundraising chairs; and MT O'Brien, who has worked on many different projects, including membership.

I want to congratulate two couples, Margot and Terry Eld and Robin and John Colgan, for becoming Lifetime Members of DHF. Lifetime is the highest level of membership, acknowledging those who have shown a long term commitment to DHF and whose contributions to DHF are \$5,000 or more, as recognized and approved by the DHF Board of Directors.

At the beginning of every year, we start our membership drive. Our goal is to have every resident a member of DHF, since the ruins and history of the island are such a vital part of Dataw Island, 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 Dataw's historic structures and artifacts are always preserved. Dataw Island remains a unique and beautiful place to live; I feel very fortunate to be a part of it.

Not sure if  
you have renewed  
your membership  
for 2020?

HERE'S HOW  
VISIT  
DatawHistory.org

Click once on the  
JOIN US button,  
then click on  
CHECK MEMBERSHIP



# 2020 DATAW HISTORIC FOUNDATION MEMBERS

## MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

Visit [DataawHistory.org](http://DataawHistory.org)

### Lifetime Member (\$5,000 +)

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 DHF Board of Directors.

### Honorary

Limited to those with an ancestral connection to Dataw Island—includes Sams Family descendants and family descendants of other prior owners of Dataw Island.

### Friends of DHF

Those who have made a significant contribution to or have a special connection to DHF.

**Sponsor** (\$500)    **Benefactor** (\$250)    **Patron** (\$100)    **Supporter** (\$60)    **Member** (\$40)

*Join today so the history of Dataw can be shared now and in the future.*

*Dataw's history makes us unique among residential communities. Our 2021 Membership Drive will start in January. Please support our efforts to preserve the history of this beautiful island that we all love.*

*Your DHF membership assures the preservation of our historic tabby structures, plantation site, artifacts found, and all related archives—100% of our funding is dependent on membership.*

*We are grateful to all who have generously supported DHF in the past, and hope you will continue. Thank you!*

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