

# TABBY TIMES

According to historian  
Henry Louis Gates,

“

Reconstruction is one  
of the most important  
and consequential  
chapters in  
American history ...

”

## Reconstruction Era on Datha Island

When Union Commodore Samuel DuPont and his Navy fleet sailed into Port Royal Sound on November 7, 1861, they decisively defeated the Confederate forces at Fort Walker on Hilton Head and Fort Beauregard on St. Philips Island. Control of Port Royal Sound, the deepest natural port in the southeast, was essential in establishing a naval blockade to prevent supplies from reaching the Confederacy. The Union occupation of Beaufort and surrounding islands, which historians cite as the beginning of Reconstruction, followed in December 1861 and ended the slave-based economy. The plantation period collapsed as the owners fled and abandoned their properties. The 10,000 formerly enslaved on St. Helena's Island became free men and women. Among the freed were the 116 African American residents on Datha Island. The challenge of Reconstruction was the inclusion of these people into the nation's educational, social, economic, and political systems.

At the onset of the Civil War, both B.B. Sams and his older brother Lewis Reeve Sams were deceased. Ownership of the southern end of the island, known as Datha Inlet, belonged to brothers James Julius and Horace Hann Sams, while cousins Richard and Thomas Fuller Sams owned the northern end, Datha Point. Avid secessionists, three of these Sams men enlisted in the Confederate Army. When these brothers and cousins fled, their lives, and those of their former slaves, changed forever.

On March 10, 1863, the U.S. government foreclosed on the abandoned Datha plantation lands for non-payment of taxes specifically levied on the "insurrectionary districts." The Federal government eventually sold the land at auction but not without controversy. General Saxton, the military governor in Beaufort, wanted to give the freedmen and Union soldiers "preemption" or the ability to petition the tax commission for specific lots from the sales list to be set aside with a down payment. Saxton feared that without preemption, the land would wind up in the hands of northern "speculators" and "capitalists." Some of the tax commissioners, however,



### *Reconstruction Era on Datha Island continued*

questioned the legality of preemption and wanted the freedmen to bid against other potential landowners, including businessmen, politicians, and military officers from the North. The controversy was unsolvable until President Lincoln sent instructions to the commissioners instructing them to subdivide specific properties on St. Helena, allowing a freedman "head-of-household" the ability to purchase a 10-to-20-acre plot for \$1.25 per acre. In addition, members of the Army, Navy, or Marine Corps were allowed to buy land at one-quarter of the appraised value. Lincoln's compromise balanced preemption and an open auction.

### **Datha Island was sold off piecemeal to both freedmen and Union soldiers starting February 24, 1864.**

Among the early owners were Messrs. Case, Andrews, Kellam, and Calkin. Some of these buyers defaulted, leading others to purchase their debt. William Irwin bought land at the north end of Datha and established 10-acre crop lien arrangements with eight African American farmers. These included W.L. Brown, Nelly Scott, Hampton and Stepney Mitchell, Tony Moultrie, Phoebe Bryant, Sam Middleton, and Boson Johnson. According to that year's census, they were unable to fulfill their liens since their names do not appear on property records. The 1880 census reveals 65 people living on Datha. These farmers cultivated cotton, corn, and sweet potatoes. Based on oral history, the remaining roofless rooms of the Lewis Reeve Sams plantation house were used as livestock quarters. Some of the outbuildings in the main B.B. Sams complex remained in use; the eastern wing of the house was reportedly used for church services. The 1900 Census recorded three tenant structures located in the northeast corner of the island, with one designated as a schoolhouse. At that time, original tenants, Scott and Moultrie were still living on Datha. Even though the formerly enslaved knew they were free, they struggled with a lack of education, previously forbidden to them, and unfamiliarity with life outside the plantation. Some Datha individuals may have attended the Penn School and benefitted from the Port Royal Experiment, a Federal government coalition with northern religious societies whose goal was to help the freedmen become self-sufficient.

According to historian Henry Louis Gates, "Reconstruction is one of the most important and consequential chapters in American history ... though tragically short-lived, this bold democratic experiment was a brief moment for African Americans when they could advance, achieve education, exercise their right to vote, run for and win public office." (Gates, 2019) **Unfortunately, when the Federal troops withdrew in 1877, many freedmen lost the civil rights to which they were entitled. Some officials focused more on building the economy and allowed the newest citizens to be intimidated and exploited by the new subversive laws known as Jim Crow. The many gains made by Black people during Reconstruction were lost by a new system of segregation.**

*Thank you to Jane Griffith and Bill Riski.*

*Photo Illustrations from: Face of an Island, Leigh Richmond Miner's Photographs of St. Helena Island. Dabbs, Edith M. (Editor), Charleston: Wyrick & Company, 1970.*

*References available on request. See a complete list of the owners at [datawhistory.org/datawh-island-history/datawh-island-chain-of-title-1682-1983/](http://datawhistory.org/datawh-island-history/datawh-island-chain-of-title-1682-1983/)*



# Three Maidens Treasure

## BROOCH -or- BUTTON?

by Bill Riski

Earlier this year, relic hunter Erik Stevens found what we thought was a brooch in the Sams Plantation House ruins. Unfortunately, the two-inch decorative object has no maker's mark. However, it appears quite old. To research the origins, Joe Roney took this decorative item to Stan Hudson, a professional jewelry appraiser in Beaufort and a Dataw resident. To our surprise, the brooch is a decorative pewter shoe button that dates to the 1780s or 1790s.

In most of Europe this "late Baroque" period, more appropriately called Rococo, was ornate, elaborate, and often contained precious stones. France and Britain, influenced by the Enlightenment, resisted this excess and adopted a purer, Neo-classical style. They revived ancient Greek and Roman themes. The jewelry was in low-relief with flower wreaths and symmetry. The characteristic shapes were oval, rectangles and polygons. The unearthed shoe button has a Greek motif of three maidens in modest robes dancing. The two outer women are holding a wreath over the head of the lady in the center. In this period, a wreath most often depicted victory. In Greek mythology three women together often portrayed the three graces or charis, symbolizing charm, beauty, and fertility. In Christian lore, they would have been faith, hope, and charity.



During the late 18th century, shoes began to have decorative metal buttons. Someone on Dataw either lost the button or left it and the shoe behind. It's interesting to imagine who it might have been. Two women come to mind: Sarah Reeve Gibbes or Elizabeth Hext Sams. Both owned Dataw Island at different points during this era. We know that Elizabeth lived here, at least part of the year, between 1783 and 1798. It's also possible she handed the button down to a daughter-in-law who lost it. Various descendants of Elizabeth and Williams Sams's lived here until the fall of 1861. Perhaps, it dropped through a floorboard or fell off while the woman was dancing in the house's east wing at a Christmas time gathering.

The fact that we have the shoe button is remarkable. Given that the Sams Plantation House burned and collapsed over 140 years ago, it is incredible and lucky that this item was found nearly two centuries later!

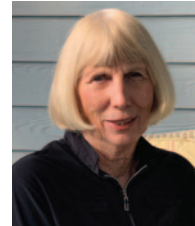
*Epilogue: As a sad footnote to this story, the relic hunter who found this item (and others) died recently. The Dataw Historic Foundation Board had just recognized Erik Stevens as an Honorary Member of the DHF. Our condolences go out to his parents Ed and Trudy Stevens, long-time Dataw residents.*

## Luminary Night

An island-wide celebration! The historic ruins of the Sams plantation house and outbuildings will be illuminated by hundreds of luminaries—a spectacular display!

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 13**

**5:30 to 8:00 PM**



### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Marilyn Peck

Welcome to the fall addition of the Tabby Times. I especially want to welcome our new residents and those of you who have chosen to become members of the DHF.

Dataw Island, whose history can be traced to the late Pleistocene era, is also the caretaker of the Sams Plantation Complex, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is DHF's mission to preserve that history and the ruins for future generations. As an organization, we are constantly learning new things, finding additional artifacts, and meeting new generations of the Sams family and the descendants of the formerly enslaved African American people and those buried in the Cotton Dike Cemetery. It is the present and future members who help us maintain and examine this past. If you have yet to become a member, I encourage you to join us in our ongoing efforts.

DHF held another successful Oyster Roast on October 18. Thanks to all who attended to support our goals. My special thanks to Rosemary Patterson and Marti Johnson who spearheaded this fabulous event. I'm grateful to all the volunteers and to Dataw's own musical artists, the RK's (Tracy Anderson, Steve Faulkner, Peter Zamuka and vocalist, Beth Inabinett). The next Fireside Chat, featuring historian Charles Bailey, will be held on January 20, 2022. Mr. Baxley's topic is: Francis Marion: Becoming the Swamp Fox. Details will be coming soon.

Get ready for another Oyster Roast on March 28, 2022. Mark your calendars for great food and drink, music, and lots of camaraderie.

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### TABBY TIMES

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Editor: Ginny Hall-Apicella  
Layout/Design: Lisa Costigan  
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## On the Street Where You Live

— SECOND IN A SERIES —

# Old Lanes of Dataw

by Joe Roney

**When Alcoa began to name streets during the island's development, they derived many street names from past residents or property owners. There were existing roads before Alcoa's time.**

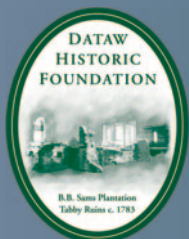
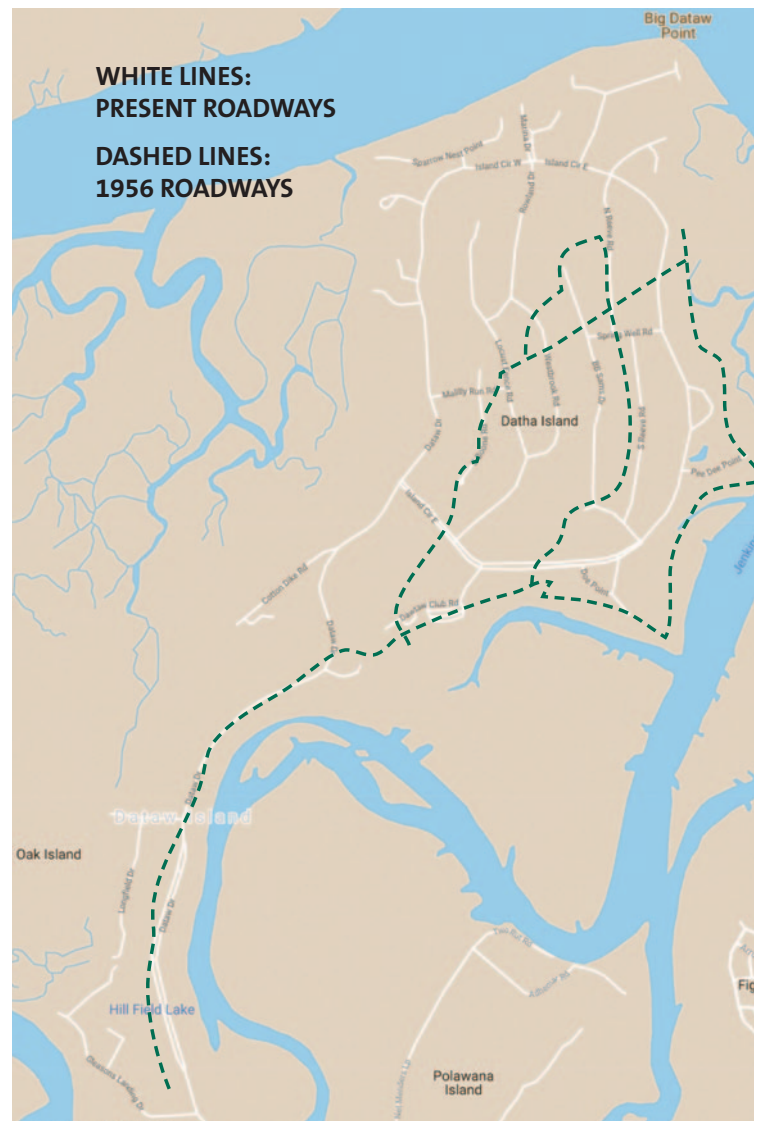
During the 1800's plantation era, access to the island was by boat. Residents and visitors arrived over the water at the wharf on Mink Point. This deep-water dock, where the boats could land even in low tide, was located on the southwestern part of the island at approximately today's 1442 Gleason's Landing Drive. The

visitor would be met by a carriage and driven between two large live oaks. These massive entry oaks continue to grow at the cul-de-sac on the south end of Longfield Drive, marked by a DHF sign. Today, we estimate their age at about 330 years old; they were here long before the Sams arrived on Dataw.

The carriage would continue through a long field of cotton, which stretched from west to east and gave its name to the current Longfield Drive. Turf dams and hedges separated Mink Point, long field, and a corn field. Longfield Pond and Hillfield Lake did not exist; they were dug during Alcoa's development. The road continued north and curved east at approximately CD-3 and the present Cannery towards B.B. Sams plantation home.

Soon after Kate Gleason's 1928 purchase of the island, she built causeways between Dataw, Polowana, and St. Helena islands, allowing for the first vehicle and non-water access. From 1930-1960 there were four primary roads. Dataw Road, now Dataw Drive, was the main road leading from the causeway bridge to the Sams Cemetery, where it veered right. The three other lanes merged here. Center Lane went north through the middle of the island, corresponding to the current Locust Fence and Westbrook Roads. Bateson Boulevard traveled north between the present B.B.Sams and North and South Reeve Road. Finally, River Road hugged the island's eastern side to an area known as Doe Point. It overlooked Jenkins Creek and continued to Pee Dee Point. It followed a path that is similar to Island Circle East but was closer to the river. These old roads (dark dashes) are shown here on a 1956 map, overlaid on Dataw today (white roads.)

Who was the Bateson who had a now-defunct street named for him? According to Larry Rowland, R.H. Bateson cleared the right-of-way after Larry's mother, Elizabeth "Libby" Sanders Rowland, inherited the island from Kate Gleason. He was the husband and brother-in-law of Lois and Betty Bean, Libby's lifelong friends, and fellow "Smith girls."



*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.*

**Not sure if you have renewed your membership for 2022? Here's how:**

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

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## **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.

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

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

*Thank you!*

# DHF OYSTER ROAST

DHF held its annual fundraising Oyster Roast on October 18, 2021. Over 160 celebrants enjoyed tables full of traditional southern fare: steaming oysters, fried chicken, corn bread, and peach cobbler. The Roast, located on the grassy field behind the Cannery, was accompanied by music, libations and a glorious full moon.

