

**Foundations of the Lewis Reeve Sams House, Datha Point, Beaufort County, SC  
Report concerning Drone Survey, February 2022.**

Colin Brooker Dip. Arch., M. Arch.

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The following report describes results of an exploratory drone survey of the ruined Lewis Reeve Sams House located near Datha Point, Dataw Island, Beaufort County SC conducted by Benjie Morillo, AIA (Frederick and Frederick Architects, Beaufort, SC) under the writer's direction for Dataw Historic Foundation on February 28, 2022. Subsequently (March 31, 2022) the site was again inspected by the writer to verify interpretation of structural details revealed by photographs taken during the drone flight.

Overall our object was to expand upon knowledge of the ruin previously surveyed in April 2010 and establish if remains of any additional historic structure or structures exist in its vicinity. Here it should be noted that the site is largely underwater except at low tide and heavily overgrown by marsh grasses, factors which severely limit access and visibility. Our activity was therefore scheduled to coincide with times when exposure of the site was near maximum relative to local tides and dormancy of marsh vegetation.

Close examination of still photographs taken during the drone flight failed to reveal the existence of any previously unrecorded structure or architectural features in intertidal areas adjacent to the known house ruin. However, these photographs establish that although partially displaced, incomplete and heavily eroded, significant portions of the ruin's lower story tabby exterior wall survive. Indeed, when visible these now disassociated fragments are still coherent enough to define an outline (see Plate 1) - albeit imperfect- of the original building footprint their being nothing to support Drucker's contention that surviving features have been transported and "*secondarily deposited*" into the intertidal zone of the Morgan River from some point inland by "*erosional attrition.*" Rather, inspection indicates that while heavily disturbed and part undercut by tidal action, some elements of the original dwelling remain more or less *in situ.*

Of particular interest are portions of the lower north facade which at some unknown time fell outwards, the tabby splitting horizontally along original pour lines and gradually sinking into marsh created by shoreline encroachment into previously habitable areas. Today preservation is such as to establish that tabby was poured in 1'-10" high vertical increments to a width of about 9 inches. (Plate 2). There is no evidence for window or door openings in those portions of the exterior wall examined which indicate the building's lower storey was sparsely fenestrated at best. This coupled with the relatively thin tabby strongly suggests that the Lewis Reeve Sams House incorporated a single-storey main living area raised on an above ground basement defined by 9" thick tabby walls standing something over 7' high.

Given the slenderness of surviving wall fragments, their relatively coherent distribution and (as far as can be ascertained) uniform thickness, we judge that the upper storey- now entirely lost- was timber framed, existing tabby not having sufficient structural capacity to be carried up to full eaves height and support loads generated by living accommodation plus roof construction.

Extant foundations attest a masonry end chimney (featuring tabby brick raised upon tabby base as the east example still demonstrates) stood at the building's east and west extremities. Overall the house measured approximately 39'-9" east/west excluding the two end chimneys. North/south, the dimension is far less certain being estimated something near 20' excluding likely porch construction which has disappeared without trace.

Although apparently similar in size, plan and organization, this hypothetical reconstruction differs from what is known of the original Phase I William Sams House on Dataw, since the latter featured tabby exterior walls at both a lower and upper level. But, our notional reconstruction does link the L.R. Sams house with a Low Country domestic building type well exemplified by several mid or late eighteenth century dwellings on Wadmalaw Island (Charleston County), which feature a single timber-framed living storey with end chimneys and habitable gabled roof space all raised over a tabby basement and fronted by open porches or verandahs.

Probably erected before 1776, the Micah Jenkins House (which measures about 32 feet east/west x 18 feet north/south excluding porches and chimneys) is one of the best preserved, its water front - which has changed little since originally built- offering a model for any hypothetical reconstruction of the Louis Reeve Sams House on Dataw Point.

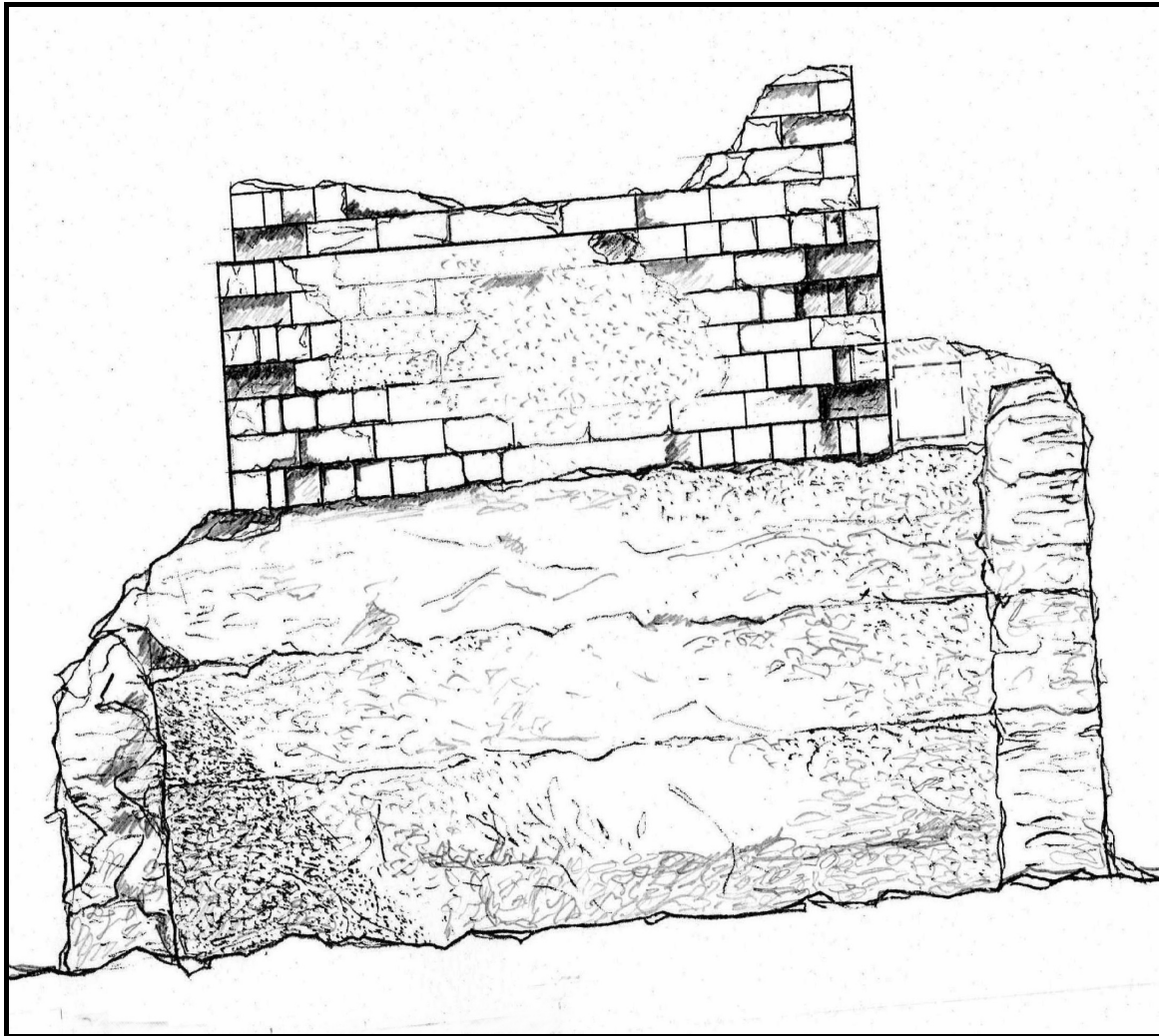


**Figure 1** Micah Jenkins House, Wadmalaw Island, Charleston, SC. Before 1776.

Nothing new has emerged to establish the latter's initial construction date although it seems clear that the dwelling closely conforms to local coastal building traditions in terms of form, construction and organization established before the American Revolution as attested by the Phase I William Sams House, Dataw Island and Micah Jenkins House on Wadmalaw Island

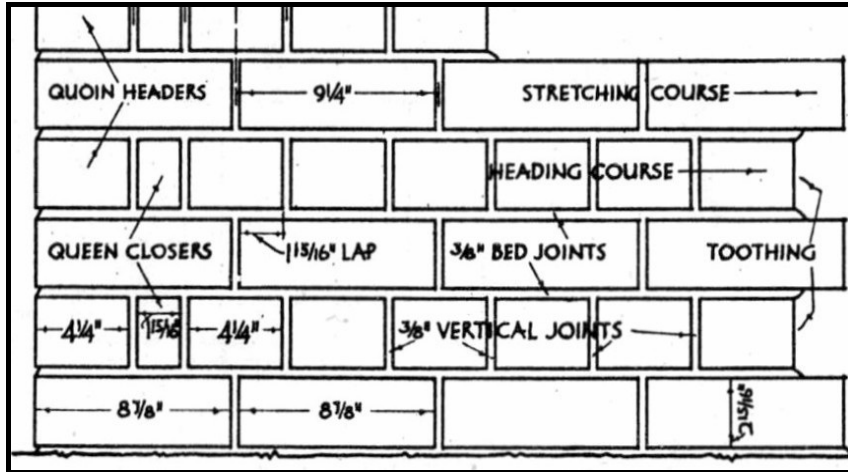
(where coincidentally or otherwise William Sams owned property). But such traditions persisted into the post - Revolutionary Period and decades beyond making it difficult to establish chronologies based upon architectural and stylistic characteristic alone, a fact which leaves the date of the Lewis Reeve Sams House open, though the writer accepts a date in the 1770's as being more probable than a later one.

The following description of the East Chimney and its foundation (now the most prominent architectural features of the Lewis Reeve Sams House to survive) taken from our earlier report is included for completeness.



**Figure 2:** East Chimney Base, west (internal) face . (Sketch by Colin Brooker, April 2010)

The east chimney base is a massive affair comprising a tabby foundation measuring approximately 11' -2" north/ south x 9'-8" east/ west and standing 4'-0" high. This supports the truncated stump of a tabby brick chimney, measuring 6'-10" north/south x 4'-1" east/west overall (Fig.2). It is possible that the foundation now extant was constructed in two phases, a smaller one being enclosed by larger one in the interest perhaps of maintaining stability. If so, the second phase introduced what may have been a covered tank or cistern on the feature's east side.



**Figure 3:** Diagram of typical English bonding as executed in standard fired brick. (McKay, Building Construction. I: 56. London, 1946).

Unfortunately, erosion is such as to obscure most construction details though it is clear that tabby of the foundation was cast in three successive vertical stages using timber formwork ranging between 1'-3" and 1'-6" high .

What remains of the chimney stack has broken or been demolished at a level below that of the original hearth, its construction appearing solid insofar as preserved. Nine courses of tabby brick survive almost intact, with the lowest one bedded directly onto the tabby foundation. Above the seventh course (measured from the bottom) there is a small setback (1 1/2" -2") on three of the stack's four sides (north, south and east). The west side, without setback is presumed to have faced into the building's interior. Tabby bricks (nominally 9" x 4 1/2" x 3") are expertly made and carefully laid up in English bond, that is with alternate courses of headers and stretchers, an expensive but exceptionally strong solution. In each heading course, a queen closer is placed next to the quoin (i.e. end) brick to ensure that joints in the stretcher course above are centered over every alternate header. Closers appear purpose made rather than fabricated from cut brick, indicating levels of expertise and sophistication unexpected in what is essentially a vernacular mode of construction.