

# TABBY TIMES

DATAW ISLAND

## DRONE EXPLORATION



The wind was blowing at ten knots, the tide was low, clouds hovered over the Morgan River when the Dataw Historic Foundation entered into a new research project using 21st century technology. On that blustery February day, with a contingent of the DHF board watching, a drone flew high and wide to photograph and record the ruins of the Lewis Reeves Sams home which history suggests stood on that spot. Any Dataw golfer has long seen the massive remnants of “The Chimney” peeking out of the marsh grass on MR-14 but no structure was visible. An earlier theory hypothesized that the building stood about 200 feet from the banks of the Morgan River and that the devastating Hurricane of 1893 wiped out the shoreline.

DHF hired Deep South Divers in 2008 to examine the site from underwater to determine the structural layout. The divers found little of historical significance and no other building footprints in the area. Colin Brooker, Dataw’s Historic Preservationist Consultant, did a detailed study in 2010 and concluded that the remains indicated human occupancy because of the chimney. He speculated that it was built at the same time as the middle house of the B.B. Sams tripartite home.



In 2019, Mr. Brooker suggested a survey using drone technology and new photography techniques to solve some of the lingering questions and provide detailed photographic records of a structure likely to be damaged, if not destroyed, by future storms and changes in sea level. COVID-19 interrupted that plan. On February 28, 2022, the project, coordinated by Tom Watkins, DHF's Ruins Preservation chair, and Colin Brooker, the drone took flight. With Benjie Morillo (Frederick and Frederick Architects) at the controls, the drone flew for over two hours taking 176 still pictures and a seven minute video.

The data obtained led to Mr. Brookers's April report.\* He concluded that the lower story of the building's exterior walls survive and are coherent enough to define an outline. Although the north wall has collapsed outward, there was enough structural evidence to suggest that the building was approximately 40' x 20' and some original elements lie in situ. No evidence of windows or door openings are present suggesting that this was a foundation wall standing 7" high with a 9" depth. Unlike the middle building in the B.B. Sams house, there were no upper tabby walls. The dwelling incorporated two stories. The lower one with its tabby walls was probably used for storage, while the upper timbered-framed story was used for living space which eventually disintegrated leaving no tangible trace.

Given the new evidence, Mr. Brooker sees a resemblance of the building with lowcountry designs built on Wadmalaw Island in the 1770s. The Lewis Reeve Sams house may have been similar to the Micah Jenkins House (circa 1776) with a timber-framed, single-storied structure built on a tabby foundation with end chimneys and a gabled roof space. If this holds true, the chimney and the now known outline were constructed in the 1770s, earlier than had been previously thought. Mr. Brooker's report describes the chimney itself built with its enduring tabby walls and bricks. The construction demonstrates a surprising level of sophistication and skill for a domestic dwelling. Headers, stretchers, quoins, and queen closers are all apparent in its construction.

DHF has learned a great deal with the assistance of new technology and professional consultation applied to a very old question.

*—Ginny Hall-Apicella*

*Special thanks to Colin Brooker, Tom Watkins and Benjie Morillo.*

\*Foundations of the Lewis Reeve Sams House, Datha Point, Beaufort County, SC. Report concerning Drone Survey, February, 2022, Colin Brooker, Arch., M. Arch., April 2, 2022

DHF PRESENTS  
**LOWCOUNTRY BOIL**



**Monday, October 24**  
MARK YOUR CALENDARS

### *Generous Gift*

The DHF Board wishes to express its extreme thanks to the estate of Mrs. Joanne Moses for her generous bequest to the organization. Mrs. Moses, was a long time resident of Dataw and a supporter of the Historic Foundation. The Board may use this donation to support scholarships for local college students with history majors.



# JOIN DATAW HISTORIC FOUNDATION

*Dear Dataw Neighbors,*

*Dataw Island is a welcoming place whether you are newly arrived or have been here for many years.*

Dataw attracts people because of its natural beauty, its Southern charm, and its many activities such as golf, croquet, tennis or boating. One of the main draws is the history of the island. The Dataw Historic Foundation (DHF) has spent over 25 years exploring, archiving and insuring that the past is recognized and preserved.

If you have walked through the historic ruins of the Sam's Plantation, stopped at the History and Learning Center or attended a discussion of how this island has evolved over time, you can see the efforts of this organization. DHF is committed to preserving, protecting and sharing our history. The Sams Plantation Ruins are on the National Registry of Historic Places.

Please join us in supporting the DHF! Remember, DHF is a 501(3)(c) organization and is 100% dependent on the financial contributions of our members.

*Pete Bongiovanni, Membership Chair*  
www.DatawHistory.org

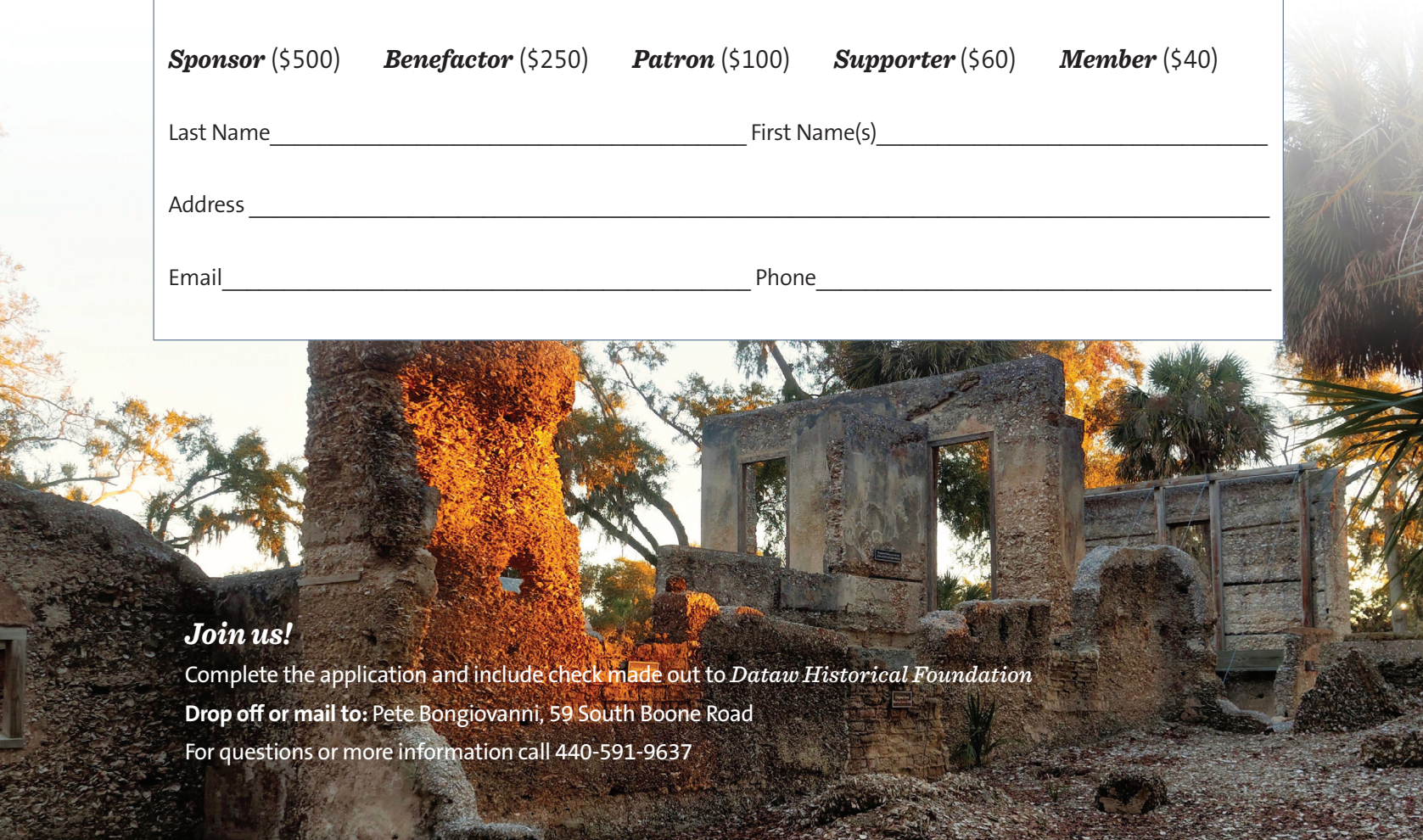
**PLEASE CIRCLE THE MEMBERSHIP YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT:**

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

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***Join us!***

Complete the application and include check made out to *Dataw Historical Foundation*  
**Drop off or mail to:** Pete Bongiovanni, 59 South Boone Road  
For questions or more information call 440-591-9637



## On the Street Where You Live

— THIRD IN A SERIES —

# Westbrook Road and Malilly Run Road

Have you ever walked, biked, or driven down Westbrook Road and noticed that the street was not on the westside side of the island and there was no brook splashing along the roadside? There is a very good reason for that: the street was named for a man and not a gift of nature.

Caleb Westbrook was a Scotsman who was most likely involved in the founding of Stuart Town on the Port Royal coast in the 1680s. The Carolina Proprietors invited the Scottish Presbyterians, who were being persecuted in England, to come to the new world with the promise of land and Indian trade. Westbrook took them up on their offer. By October 24, 1682, the Lord Proprietors granted Westbrook a warrant for two hundred and sixty acres on a navigable river. That property that he was given or selected was the island now known as Dataw. Westbrook renamed the island for himself and established an Indian trading post which is thought to be at Mink Point, now Gleason's Landing.

Westbrook aligned himself with the Yemassee Indians, indigenous people who had moved to the Carolinas from Georgia twenty years earlier. History records that he incited them to attack Spanish colonies and Spain retaliated by destroying Stuart Town. Westbrook not only traded with the Indians for deerskin and furs but he sold native people. He encouraged the Yemassee to raid other tribal villages and he would buy the captives to sell into slavery. At the time, there was a thriving slave trade and many of the conquered native people were sent to Barbados to work in the sugar industry. Legend has it that Westbrook was killed by a Savannah Indian who discovered that Westbrook had sold natives to pay his debts.

*Perhaps a kinder namesake for a Dataw street is Ma Lilly. During the plantation era, trustworthy older women took care of the young children while their parents worked in the fields or performed other essential trades on the island. Lillian Robinson or "Ma Lilly" was one of these special women.*

The 1870 census of St. Helen Island records her name and age as 75, indicating that she was born in 1795 and was probably born into slavery. Arthur Robinson, a descendant of the enslaved on Dataw who has assembled a detailed record of his ancestors, suggests that Ma Lilly was his great, great grandmother. Ma Lilly lived in a small house at the junction of today's North and South Boone. Besides her home was a small stream or run, which emptied into a pond. This was later dammed by Alcoa to create the bubbling Malilly Pond seen on Island Circle West. Larry Rowland, Dataw's emeritus historian, confirms that his mother told stories of Ma Lilly. —Ginny Hall-Apicella



# Tabby Conservationist *Extrodinaire*

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## NOT EVERY BOY RAISED ON A FARM IN MICHIGAN GROWS UP THINKING HE'S GOING TO BECOME A HISTORIC PRESERVATIONIST AND TABBY ARTISAN,

*but one who had a librarian father and a collection of National Geographics dating from the 1880s might.*

*Still it might take travel, adventures, skills, and finding a new home town to do so.*

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Richard (Rick) Wightman, Dataw's tabby preservationist boarded a plane two days after high school graduation. On the third day he found himself atop the massive Spanish fort of San Felipe in Cartagena, Columbia. That awakened a desire to see more of these historic structures and the cultures that spawned them. In the following years, Rick traveled throughout Central America and Mexico to examine the Mayan ruins of Palenque, Uxmal, Chichen Itza, Copan and Tikal. He commented, "I guess that's how I got interested in ruins for sure." And eventually, the preservation of ruins from other cultures.

Rick first saw Beaufort while crewing on his uncles's boat on a voyage from Michigan to the Bahamas. After that trip, he returned to Beaufort in 1980 and never left. He was working as a carpenter on historic homes on the Point when a friend put him in touch with Colin Brooker, the well-know architect, historian, engineer, tabby expert, and author of *The Shell Builders*, who had begun preservation of the Dataw ruins soon after the island was purchased in the early 1980s by Alcoa. Rick and Mr. Brooker have worked together for the past 40 years in the preservation of the former Sams plantation.

When Rick first stepped foot on Dataw, it was via a temporary structure as a bridge strong enough for vehicles was not completed. He described the scene: "The golf course was being shaped and the Club being built. The roads were all sand ... a quiet time out here." He described hearing the thrum of hammers from the men working on



building of the nearby Club as he was working at the ruins. "There were no tennis courts and no houses built yet."

The first project Rick tackled was re-framing the rotted out windows of the Sams' tripartite house using the mortise and tenon construction of earlier centuries. He replaced the lintel of the outdoor kitchen's fireplace. Together with Mr. Brooker, he experimented with the right proportions of lime from burned shells, water, sand and aggregate (oyster shells) to repair and cap the still existing walls. On Dataw, Rick commented, that although the aggregate is mainly shells, he has also seen Indian pottery, animal bones, bottles, pieces of brick and charcoal, broken hoes and dishes all thrown into the mix to strengthen it.

After Rick and Mr. Brooker discovered the best formula, it was used to reform the wall around the Sams plantation area and all 15 buildings in the compound. Following construction of walls, Rick applied a stucco which was scored to give the appearance of cut stone. Ricks states that he particularly enjoyed working on the roof of the outdoor kitchen because he was amazed at the workmanship that is still intact over 200 years later. He loved working on the ice house because it is so unique. "It's the only tabby roof that's know to exist here in the south east," he commented.

In addition, to the Dataw ruins, Rick has preserved tabby structures in 25 different sites including Spring Island, Hilton Head, Edisto, Wadmalaw, and the Bahamas. —*Ginny Hall-Apicella*

**The tabby construction method traveled from the Moors of North Africa to the Iberian Peninsula and was ultimately brought to the New World by the Spanish and Portuguese. It uses the resources available in the area. On coastal Carolina, that was mainly oyster shells, sand and water. A slurry is made from the above materials and poured into a mold or cradle to harden and cure. The wooden frame is then removed and repositioned for subsequent pourings. It is a labor intensive process that was accomplished in this area by enslaved people.**

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

*Marilyn Peck*

**EARLIER THIS YEAR, DHF** completed the drone project and learned new information about the Louis Reeve Sams Plantation ruins located in the Morgan River. We are excited about these findings and images, a few featured in this issue.

The Board has been busy putting together our goals for 2022. We will be working on continuing our education of residents and visitors on the history of Dataw through the centuries—providing tours, lectures and articles. We are creating a *Dataw History Channel* with monthly slideshows showing at the H&LC. The drone project was so successful that we are planning another exploration of the cotton dikes off of Oak Island.

I want to thank Rosemary Patterson, her committee and all the volunteers for a wonderful Oyster Roast and Silent Auction, and also to the Hatchers and Roneys for sponsoring the music.

At the beginning of every year we start our membership drive—our goal is for every resident to become a DHF member. I encourage you to join us in our ongoing effort to ensure Dataw's historic structures and its artifacts are always preserved. The ruins and history of the island are a vital part of Dataw Island, Beaufort County and South Carolina. Thank you to all of our DHF members for their ongoing financial and volunteer support. Dataw Island remains a unique and beautiful place to live and I feel very lucky to be a part of it.

### 2021 DHF BOARD OFFICERS

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### TABBY TIMES

*Tabby Times* is a publication of the Dataw Historic Foundation, Dataw Island, SC  
Editor: *Ginny Hall-Apicella*  
Layout/Design: *Lisa Costigan*  
Photography: *Bill Riski, Ginny Hall-Apicella, Rosemary Patterson*

## *Elizabeth Hext House Update*

In the Spring of 2021, timbers in the attic of the Elizabeth Hext House were tested to determine their age. Unfortunately, we could not date the oldest wood found in the cellar due to its deteriorated condition. The dendrochronology analysis of the rafters proves these hand-hewn timbers were felled in the winter of 1799. However, the home may be older. We have copies of land records showing a Hext family member-owned a lot in Beaufort in October 1759. In conversations with a local expert on the restoration of historic homes in Beaufort, he noted that the Elizabeth Hext House is one of the very few historic homes in Beaufort that is largely authentic inside and out. Whatever its exact age, it is a beautiful home still lived in, loved, and cared for by its owners. —*Bill Riski*

## *Dataw Garden Club plants tree at the History and Learning Center*

Every year for National Arbor Day, the Dataw Garden Club gifts a tree to a setting on or off island. This year, DHF was the



recipient and the tree was planted in front of the History and Learning Center. This year marks National Arbor Day's 150th anniversary of planting trees across America. The intent of this day is to inspire people across the country to plant, nurture, and celebrate trees to make the world greener and healthier.

Rosemary Patterson, who holds positions on both the Garden Club and DHF boards, coordinated the project with Marilyn Peck, DHF President and Cindy Hooper, Garden Club President, to select a saucer magnolia (*Magnolia x soulangeana*) for the space. This hybrid magnolia is a deciduous tree which bears large white flowers with pink and maroon shading. The flowers appear in early spring on bare limbs. Later, dark green, oval-shaped leaves emerge.

This is not the first time that the two clubs have worked together. Each year the Historic Foundation assists the Garden Club with Luminary Night by making a donation and placing luminaries around the Sams Planation Ruins to help light up the night. Several years ago, the Garden Club donated an orange tree to the Historic Foundation which was planted in the historic garden adjacent to the area where the Sams family established a fruit orchard. On that occasion, DHF board member Joe Roney gave a presentation on the Sams contribution to the early citrus industry in the country.

