

TABBY TIMES



DRONE SURVEY OF THE COTTON DIKE

“Cotton Dike” and “Dataw” are almost synonymous, given the golf course and road of the same name. But what exactly is—and where is—the Cotton Dike?



In the early Nineteenth Century, the Lowcountry’s Sea Island Cotton was a vast economic driver. This long-staple strain of cotton was highly desirable, as it could be woven into a silk-like cloth—considerably less expensive than silk from China. Given that Sea Island Cotton was priced 32 cents higher (\$10 in today’s value), there was a desire to plant as much of the crop as possible. Once the highland areas of the islands had been cultivated, planters looked to the marshlands for expansion. Sometime in the late 1820s and early 1830s, our own Berners Barnwell Sams set out to reclaim the marshlands south and northwest of Oak Island (areas not visible from the island).

Sams’ son, James Julius, wrote in his memoir, “getting near what had been a pond ... which opened into a creek I heard ducks quacking.” According to a report to the Dataw Historical Foundation by Benjie Morillo, AIA, of Frederick and Frederic Architects, and Colin Brooker, of Brooker Architectural Design Consultants, both of Beaufort, “The creek mentioned must surely be Sparrow Nest Creek (another familiar island place-name), a tidally influenced source of freshwater that flows from a point between Oak Island and Dataw Island roughly north and northwest into the Morgan River.” (continued on back page)



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Marilyn Peck

DHF has been very busy since our last newsletter in the fall.

We have developed a relationship with The American College for the Building Arts in Charleston to fund a scholarship for a student who is studying plastering. The scholarship is being funded by the generous gift left to us by Joanne and Allen Moses, and we are looking forward to having a long relationship with this wonderful institution.

The Preservation Committee's latest project was to do another drone flight over Jenkins Creek to inspect the cotton dikes and to see how well they have stood the test of time. [Editor's Note: see accompanying article.] The cotton dikes proved to be in very good conditions and gave us a lot of information about the growing of rice and cotton on the island there is a video of the drone flight on our web page DatawHistory.org.

In April we were so very lucky to have Natasha Boyd, the author of *The Indigo Girl*, come and speak to the island about her process of writing this wonderful book.

I want to thank all of the hearty members who came out for the Low Country Boil considering the weather was somewhat rainy. Rabi Brunson, who has taken over Jimmy Fitts Catering, did a great job. The food was wonderful, as was "The Sometime Later Band" for playing through the rain drops.

Our goal is to have every resident a member 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 efforts to ensure Dataw's historic structures and its artifacts are always preserved. Dataw Island remains a unique and beautiful place to live and I feel very lucky to be a part of it.



The Great Storm of 1893

The morning of Sunday, August 27, 1893, began as most mornings in the Lowcountry. Bright sunshine with a steady breeze gave no inkling of what was to come.

To be sure, word from Charleston came of reports from Nassau, Bahamas, of a tropical storm of “huge proportions.” But the Lowcountry had not experienced a major tropical storm for 20 years—almost a generation. The National Weather Service was in its infancy, having been established just three years prior, and not yet having established a network of reporting stations. Word came from ships at sea and affected offshore areas with little knowledge of direction or measured intensity.

RESIDENTS OF THE SEA ISLANDS WERE ABOUT TO CONFRONT, FOR THAT TIME, THE WORST NATURAL DISASTER TO IMPACT THE UNITED STATES IN RECORDED HISTORY. TODAY, IT IS SECOND ONLY TO THE GALVESTON HURRICANE OF 1900.

Soon, the double-gale warning flags were raised up and down the coast from Charleston to Tybee Island.

By afternoon, dark storm clouds were visible offshore as the first bands of the storm began to appear. Nightfall found the barometer reading 29.325 inches and winds steady at 72 miles per hour.

Inhabitants of the Sea Islands had no idea of the unspeakable horror they would endure 130 years ago this August 28-29.

Low tide was at 2:00 p.m. that Sunday. For the next six hours a storm surge the likes of never before would devastate the barrier islands of Lady’s, Warsaw, Coosaw, and Dataw. A tidal wave of 20 feet swept over the Sea Islands. Houses were swept away and whole families drowned without notice.

Many Sea Islanders survived only by climbing to the tops of the live oaks, clinging on for dear life.

Slowly, word of the devastation spread across the nation. While

Savannah and Charleston escaped relatively unscathed, news reports in early September from Beaufort indicated 1,500 dead and 15,000 starving.

The American Red Cross mission in Beaufort was established by September 20, which estimated some 30,000 were homeless, in need of food and medical treatment. Clara Barton, founder of the Red Cross, stayed until January the following year. By that time, the mission had raised more than \$23,000 (nearly \$837,000 in today’s value). Oddly,



Left: top to bottom

- Along the Beaufort River waterfront
- Bay Street looking west
Photo courtesy Parris Island History Museum
- Beached paddlewheeler and other boats

Right: top to bottom

- Wrecked boat with the Verdier House in the background
Photo courtesy Parris Island History Museum
- Devastation on Bay Street, looking toward the river
Photo courtesy Parris Island History Museum

the State of South Carolina failed to contribute any funds to the effort. The lasting effects of the storm devastated the Beaufort economy. The phosphate mining industry—the county’s largest economic base in its entire history—was almost totally destroyed.

By the end of the decade, the Sea Islands suffered four more hurricanes, but none were as severe as the Great Storm of 1893.

On the Street Where You Live

This edition of
Tabby Times
is a **double-header**
in place-names.

As detailed in the article on the drone fly-overs in the area between Oak Island and Dataw Island, Cotton Dike Road (as well as the golf course) honors an effort made by Bernard Barnwell Sams to impound marshland with the purpose of cultivating cotton.

Although the existence of dikes for the purpose of raising cotton may have been implied, the origin of Sparrow Nest Creek came as a bit of surprise. Who would have thought a freshwater creek and associated ponds flows in the marsh between the two islands?

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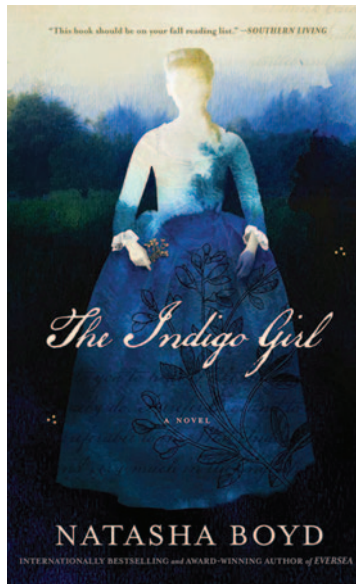
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Editor: *Jamie Millard*
Layout/Design: *Lisa Costigan*
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Drone Survey of The Cotton Dike

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With that location in mind, Morillo and Brooker set out to confirm the location using drone fly-overs of the area. Their report to the Foundation concluded that the “imaging has revealed enough physical evidence to document changes in historical agricultural practice involving the cultivation of cotton and, most likely, rice which altered part of Dataw Island’s natural landscape.” Furthermore, “storms, hurricanes, and tidal incursions have ... impacted Dataw’s landscape, both natural and man-made, so much so in the case of its reclaimed marshlands that the system of impoundments [dikes] imposed by Berners Barnwell Sams has almost eroded away.”

While no record exists as to whether or not B.B. Sams’ endeavor was a success, one might presume that failures are rarely recorded for posterity. In any event, the venture would come to a halt three decades later when the island was abandoned with the outbreak of war.



Author of The Indigo Girl Speaks to Island Audience

Natasha Boyd, the author of *The Indigo Girl*, was the guest speaker at the Dataw Historic Foundation Author’s Luncheon in early April, organized by Rosemary Patterson, DHF Publicity Chair and powerhouse extraordinaire.

Natasha treated approximately 190 guests to an engaging presentation about her inspiration and writing process for *The Indigo Girl*. Marilyn Peck, DHF President, welcomed us to the event and thanked Natasha and her husband, Stephen, for taking a break from visiting family in Charleston to come down to Dataw Island. Several Dataw residents, Carolyn Tedeschi, Lori Thompson, and Bill Riski, began the afternoon event by commenting on their passion for indigo and its connection to Datha Island. Rosemary Patterson then told the story of how she connected with Natasha to pull this off.

Natasha Boyd and her husband Stephen at the Sams Plantation Ruins. Later, Natasha spoke to a packed house in the Carolina Room about her book, The Indigo Girl.

