

DATAW HISTORIC FOUNDATION Spring Edition 2025

# TABBY TIMES

—THE—  
**Ice Man**  
*cometh*

Find us on the web: [www.DatawHistory.org](http://www.DatawHistory.org)



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# THE Ice Man *cometh*

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**Behind the main house at the  
B.B. Plantation ruins,**

there is a small structure featuring a  
unique and rare tabby roof,  
recognized as the only intact tabby roof  
in the United States.



Frederic Tudor (1783-1864)

**T**he room under this preserved roof is known as the Ice House or the Cold Room. Legend has it that B.B. Sams designed the Cold Room to store large blocks of ice to preserve dairy products and other perishables produced in the adjacent Dairy Room/Blade House. The thick tabby walls and roof insulated the room from the intense summer sun of South Carolina. A double-walled, tight-fitting door and a below-ground-level floor were created to slow the melting process. Shelves for storage lined the walls, and a central drain collected runoff.

But where did this ice come from before electric refrigeration existed? One man with Yankee ingenuity and a knack for entrepreneurship found the answer. Frederic Tudor (1783-1864), the son of a wealthy Boston lawyer, realized after visiting the Caribbean that a fortune could be made by exporting ice from Massachusetts' freshwater ponds to warmer climes. He discerned that ships arriving in Boston from southern ports laden with cotton and indigo could return south with a load of ice as ballast. Tudor purchased and outfitted a ship to transport

Massachusetts ice southward. In 1806, Tudor's ship, *Favorite*, was launched from Charlestown, MA, bound for Martinique, filled with ice cargo. His first venture failed, and he landed in a debtors' prison. By 1816, he had developed a method of harvesting ice blocks from freshwater ponds on the outskirts of Boston and loading them in stacked blocks covered with sawdust. In 1817, Tudor's ship, *Milo*, was bound for Charleston, S.C., where he had built a double-shelled structure at Fitzsimmons Wharf to house 150 tons of ice. As the ice could be sold for \$.08 a pound, Tudor became a wealthy man, and he became known as the Ice King. His business became international, and he shipped ice as far as Calcutta, India. Later, Tudor speculated in coffee production and was responsible for planting 4,000 trees in his native Nahant, Massachusetts.

While it is uncertain whether the Sams family shipped their cotton to Charleston or Savannah, the small coastal ships that arrived at the Sams Plantation dock at Big Landing unloaded crystal blocks of Yankee coldness, which landed in the still-existent Ice House before taking on bales of sea island cotton.

*This article was adapted from "The Iceman Cometh!" By John Colgan, Tabby Tattler, Volume III, Spring, 2006.*



**WE ONLY HAVE ONE PAST.  
ONCE DESTROYED,  
IT IS GONE FOREVER.**

Please help support the efforts of the Dataw Historic Foundation as we preserve the historical charm of the island we all love.

We are 100% dependent on the financial contributions of our members to maintain our historic treasures as well as share our past through our History & Learning Center.

We hope all of you who recognize the importance of preserving the past, so it can be enjoyed now and in the future, will join today!

We appreciate and thank you for your past and future support.

**QUESTIONS?**

Contact Pete Bongiovanni  
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bonpete69@gmail.com

To learn more about the Dataw Historic Foundation, please visit us at our website:  
[www.DatawHistory.org](http://www.DatawHistory.org)

**YOUR DHF MEMBERSHIP IS IMPORTANT!**

Your support of the Foundation assures preservation of Dataw's historic tabby structures, the plantation site, artifacts found and all related archives. We are grateful for those of you who have generously supported us in the past, and we hope you will continue to do so.

For those of you new to Dataw or unfamiliar with the work of the Foundation, we hope you will recognize the importance of membership contribution and join today.

● SPONSOR (\$500) ● BENEFACTOR (\$250) ● PATRON (\$100) ● SUPPORTER (\$60) ● MEMBER (\$40)

Name (s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone# \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

***DHF special events will be open to DHF members only.***

The Dataw Historic Foundation is a non-profit, all volunteer organization. Your membership contribution represents a tax-deductible donation.

*Please make check payable to Dataw Historic Foundation*

Drop off location: Peter Bongiovanni, 59 South Boone Road

Or mail: Dataw Historic Foundation, PO Box 819, Beaufort, SC 29901

**THE MYSTERY WAGON *at the Shed***

Did you ever wonder if the wagon tucked under the storage shed in the Cannery/History and Learning Center/Community Gardens compound is a relic from the Sams Plantation era? Did you think the wagon carried cotton bales from the fields to the dock at Mink Point in the 1800s?

*If so, you are mistaken.* The wagon, with the mysterious name Piedmont painted on the side, has a far stranger provenance.

Dataw legend has it that the turn-of-the-century wagon was purchased from North Carolina. We know that Bill Cochran, the former general manager during the Alcoa days, bought the wagon in the late 1980s with a plan to hitch it to a mule team and drive it around Dataw's then-dirt roads while showcasing the island to prospective buyers. He believed that he could also

feature the wagon in Beaufort parades. The mules were to be housed in the shed. Bill's bubble burst when he realized that the mules would cost \$1,000 each, along with additional maintenance fees. Furthermore, he could find no one willing to care for the mules. Archived reports indicate he came within an "eyelash" of purchasing the mules.

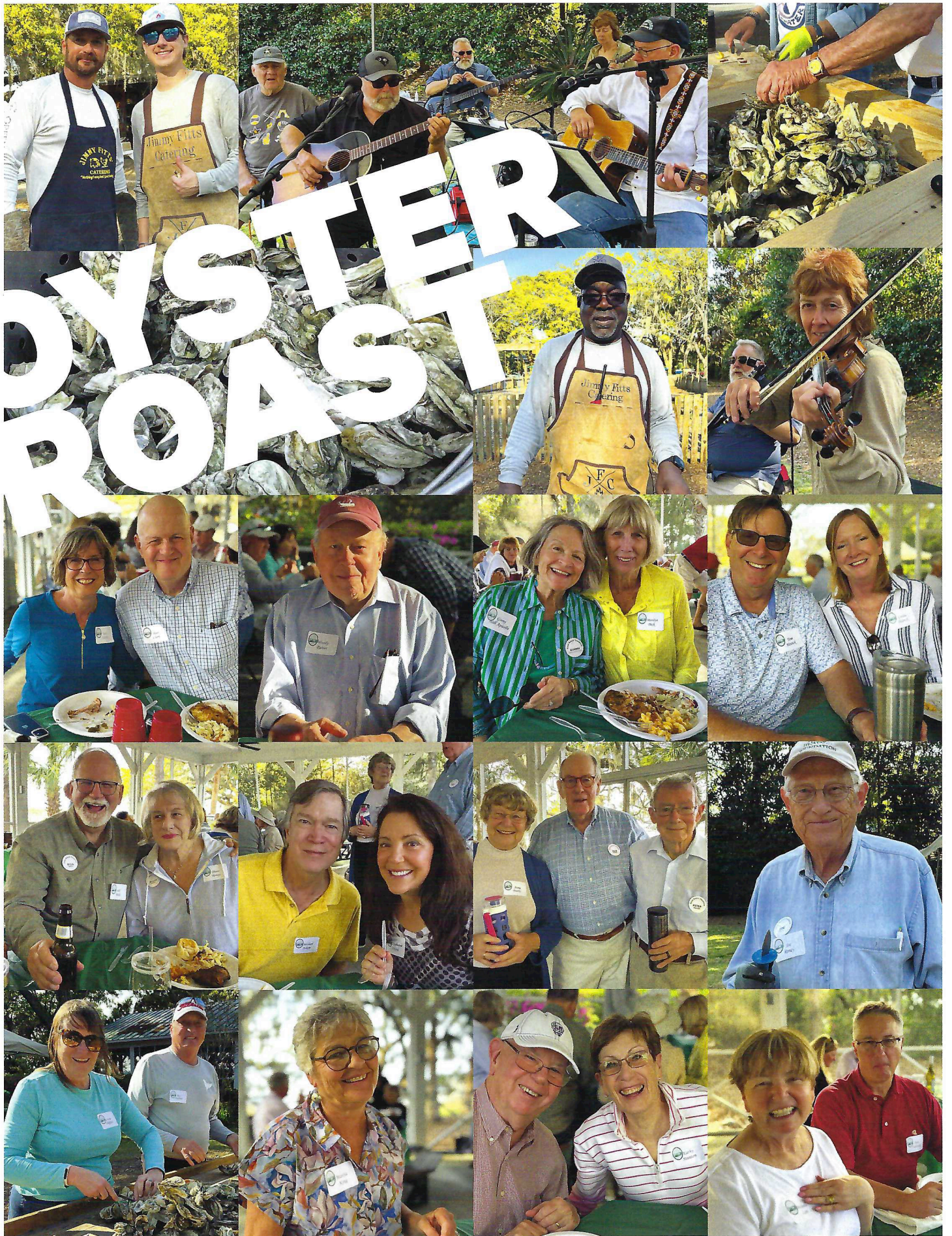
Former resident John Rotelli repaired the wagon and shortened the tongue so it would fit under the lean-to roof. He placed the metal-rimmed wheels on concrete pads.

Unless some enterprising real estate agent wants to hitch the wagon to a star or perhaps a golf cart, the Piedmont will stay where it is. Prospective buyers must find other ways to peruse the island besides a mule-drawn wagon.

*Adapted from the Tabby Tattler, Vol. II, Spring, 2004*







DHF SPRING 2025



## *Tabby Whispers: Colin Brooker's Dataw Discoveries*

Colin Brooker, an architectural consultant for the Dataw Historic Foundation since the early 1980s, has preserved the Sams plantation ruins. Cathy Crocker, our DHF President from 2002 to 2005, interviewed him in November 2003. Here's an abridged version of her interview as a tribute to our 30th Anniversary.



Colin Brooker  
(circa 2011)  
at the Cold House,  
Sams Plantation  
Tabby Ruins Complex,  
Dataw Island

### **CC: Tell us how you first became associated with Dataw Island.**

CB: When it bought the property, Alcoa signed a memorandum of agreement with South Carolina State Archives and History. In exchange for permits, they had to find and document the historic sites on Dataw. I was called in because I knew more about tabby than anyone else at the time and had experience preserving historic structures.

### **CC: How did you acquire this background?**

CB: I worked with UNESCO to preserve classical structures in the Near East, particularly temples. I found the challenges of safeguarding larger structures intriguing. I'd worked on sites in Jordan, including Petra and Jericho, where age and earthquakes had caused instability. Dataw, unlike Jordan, had no history of earthquake damage, but the hurricane damage was similar. I came to Dataw with this background.

### **CC: Describe your first experience on Dataw.**

CB: Intrigued by the overgrown Sams plantation ruins, which resembled a Mayan site in Central America, my wife and I cleared it with Larry Lepionka, an archeologist. Alcoa cleared the large trees, but we hesitated to hire untrained workers to preserve the fragile buildings.

### **CC: How did you acquire your knowledge of tabby?**

CB: My wife and I foolishly bought a tabby house in Beaufort in the seventies (Elizabeth Barnwell Gough House, 705 Washington Street). We had architectural training and thought we could handle it. York

Minster Church in England was near collapse, and an engineer friend stabilized it. He consulted on our house and horrified us, saying, "This shouldn't be standing!" We tried to figure out tabby structure protocols, having close calls.

### **CC: What happened?**

Tabby, resembling concrete but similar to unreinforced concrete, exhibits instability under vertical loading. It splits, falls apart, disintegrates, or even explodes when subjected to shifts. During our home restoration, I learned this lesson when a primary roof support beam needed replacement. I rented a crane while the men removed the old joist. As I conversed with the engineer in the basement, a crack appeared in a tabby wall supporting the structure. The crack zigzagged like lightning, threatening the building's collapse. Fortunately, the engineer's presence prevented this. Our crew promptly cast a concrete wall reinforced with steel, stabilizing the structure.

### **CC: Any change creates another change?**

CB: Ruins are always on the brink of complete collapse. The old Sams house has lost two porches supporting the walls, floor joists holding in the walls, and the roof, a major weight that held everything together.

### **CC: Is there something more that DHF should be doing?**

CB: A program has evolved over the years to restore strength and continuity in the structure. I visit periodically to assess changes. Currently, we're stabilizing continuously. This ongoing operation has been successful for nearly [36 years] without significant losses at the Sams plantation. This reflects Alcoa's good faith and the residents of Dataw's investment.

### **CC: Would it be worthwhile doing another archeological dig?**

#### **Where?**

CB: Yes, within the yard area defined by the low wall. Dataw is likely the plantation site in Beaufort County with the most knowledge. Dataw's unique feature is a defined yard in front of the building, indicated by the tabby foundation. The Sams house is symmetrical, but the yard is not centered. This could be due to a late 18th-century building overlaid and redeveloped in the early 19th century by Dr. Berners Barnwell Sams. The yard may have pre-existing buildings that have been demolished, leaving a record in the ground.

### **CC: If we did another dig, we might find another house in the 1700s.**

CB: You might find other outbuildings in the 1700s. The dairy's mystery lies outside the yard, with evidence of rebuilding that changed



*Elizabeth Barnwell Gough House*

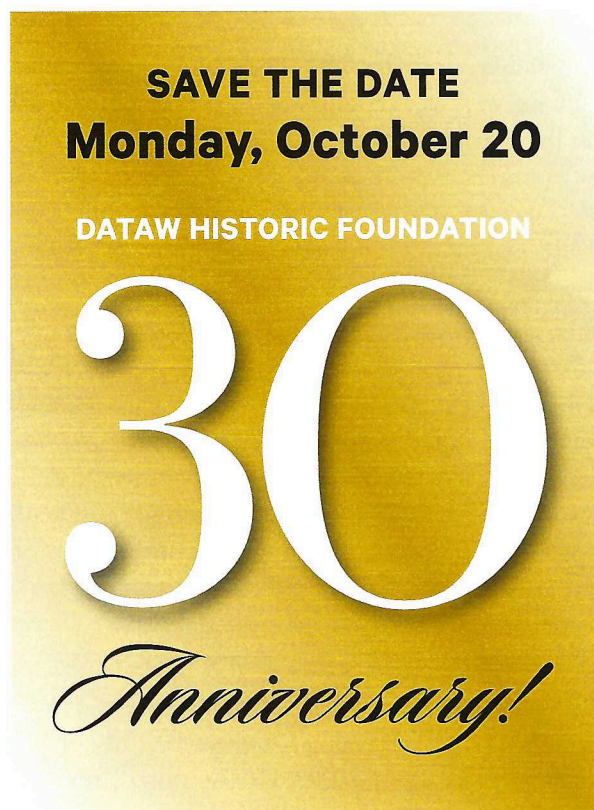


*Tabby Whispers: (continued)*  
*Colin Brooker's Dataw Discoveries*

its functions at least once or twice. That intrigues me. There are also outbuildings near the main house beyond the yard, mentioned in Julius Sams's diary. Some match, but others are unclear, suggesting we're missing something.

**CC: Can we talk about you a little bit?**  
**And how you came to be here.**

CB: Trained as an architect in England, I worked on university buildings in London. Entranced by Louis Kahn's lecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects, I secured a scholarship to his master's class at the University of Pennsylvania. Living through the late 60s riots in Philadelphia was an exciting experience. Another great professor in Oriental studies inspired me with her five inspiring slides. Raised in the International style, I still love its austerity, cleanliness, and newness. Kahn viewed historical buildings as resources, not just as buildings to be reinvented. He created fresh buildings that offered insights into the place and life. Unlike recall buildings that lacked purpose, Kahn's buildings provided a profound understanding of place. He bridged the gap between the 20th and 19th centuries, making the 20th century more relevant.



**PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

*Marilyn Peck*

*Spring is finally here, and before long many people will be going on their summer vacations.*

In this letter, I would like to emphasize the importance of all Dataw residents becoming DHF members.

Do you remember when you first heard about Dataw Island? Was it during a visit, or did you discover it while searching for your planned retirement

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**Our Historical Foundation**  
**preserves, protects,**  
**and showcases our**  
**historical treasures for both**  
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**across the United States.**

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community? If so, you were likely intrigued by the images of our rich history and natural beauty. Our history dates back to the original Indigenous peoples of North America. To our knowledge, Caleb Westbrook, a Scottish trader, was the first European to settle on "Datha" Island. Subsequent owners, including the Boones, Odinsells, and the Sams family, followed Westbrook. Our Historical Foundation preserves, protects, and showcases our historical treasures for both ourselves and all our visitors, many of

whom come from across the United States. DHF is responsible for maintaining the artifacts of previous inhabitants and the remaining historic sites on the island, particularly the ruins of the Sams family plantation. We offer several membership categories for you to choose from. If you are not currently a member, **please consider joining us in our essential mission to safeguard the present for the enjoyment and education of future residents. It's easy to join by visiting our website: [www.datawhistory.org/joinus](http://www.datawhistory.org/joinus).** Download a membership form and select your level of support. Membership forms are also available at the History and Learning Center across from the Cannery.

Our goal is to have every resident a member since the ruins and the island's history are a vital part of Dataw Island, Beaufort County, and South Carolina. I want to thank all DHF members for their ongoing financial and volunteer support so our structures and artifacts are preserved. Dataw Island remains a unique and beautiful community, and I feel very lucky to be a part of it.

**2025 DHF BOARD OFFICERS**

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**TABBY TIMES**

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

**Visit [DatawHistory.org](http://DatawHistory.org)**