

Tabby Tattler

Volume 1, Fall 2003

Dataw Historic Foundation Newsletter

BOTOX AT THE RUINS

We have read/heard a lot about people have Botox shots to remove wrinkles and make the skin look better and younger. Well, what do you do if your skin is over 200 years old?

The Sams House has a skin of stucco that is starting to slough off--if you were over 200 years old I'm sure you would be doing more than sloughing..... Where I am going with this--to the next conservation project for the Dataw Historic Foundation that Rick Wightman will begin in early December.

According to Colin Brooker the main Sams House preserves large areas of original and/or early stucco on its exterior facades. Originally this material was burnished and scored in imitation of ashlar to give the impression of an expensive stone structure rather than a less expensive tabby dwelling. Early stucco on tabby is rarely preserved, especially on a scale such as still exists at the Sams site. But, over recent years fairly large portions of the stucco have become loose and in some instances have fallen from various facades. While this is expected in a ruin, it now seems advisable to conserve and stabilize the stucco which remains in relatively good condition on the east facade

Letter from the President

We introduced our first DHF Christmas card which was made possible by the Golobics. Dick photographed the special setting, and Mariann took care of the printing, packaging and distribution. I am happy to report that the project was a huge success, and we have completely sold out. Many thanks to Dick and Mariann,

As you read through the newsletter, you will see that many other activities have been going on including a very well received fish fry in October and the ongoing redesign of the signs at the ruins. Conservation work at the ruins stopped over the summer while our master craftsman worked at Auld Brass and Palmetto Bluffs. He will return in December.

Cathy Crocker, President

and in poor or loose condition elsewhere. Work will involve repairing tabby walls where necessary, patching the old stucco with new oyster shell based mortar and feathering the edges of the old stucco to minimize moisture penetration behind the historic finish coats.

Brenda Norris, Ruins Conservation Chair

Fish Fry

The first DHF fish fry was held on October 6 at the Gazebo, and as anyone who was there can tell you, it was a huge success. The weather was perfect; there weren't even any gnats! Steve Brown catered the event with your choice of fried cod or flounder accompanied by hush puppie--all cooked on site. There was also a selection of salads, including a delicious pasta salad with shrimp. Steve provided two enormous dishes of apple cobbler that looked as if they would feed all of Dataw. There was not a lot left at the end of the evening.

Attendance was limited due to the size of the Gazebo, and we were sorry we had to tell a lot of people that there was no more room. Make your reservations early next year!!

Kathee Schmit
Fundraising Chair

Membership 2003

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| Members @ \$25 | 187 |
| Supporters @ \$50 | 62 |
| Patrons @ \$100 | 17 |
| Benefactors @ \$250 | 5 |
| Total | 271 |

Mark Your Calendars

March 8th, 2004

5th Annual Oyster Roast

Our annual Oyster Roast will be held on March 8 on the grounds behind the Cannery. Reeves Outdoor Catering will supply the oysters. Other food selections will be available including hot dogs, soup, cornbread and desserts prepared by DHF members.

The Oyster Roast is our primary fundraiser. Profits help defray the cost of the preservation of our tabby ruins.

New Signs in the Ruins Update

The DHF signage program, as mentioned in the last issue, continues to make progress. To date five of the anticipated total of twenty signs have been completed including two map signs of the plantation complex, one on the B.B. Sams Family, one on the plantation home and one on tabby construction.

A number of our members are working on this project and we thank them for their ongoing efforts. It is a fun project, but the historic details, (particularly the graphics) that we want to communicate are difficult and time consuming to obtain.

When the majority are completed, we will have any unveiling - probably in early spring.

Warren Dickson

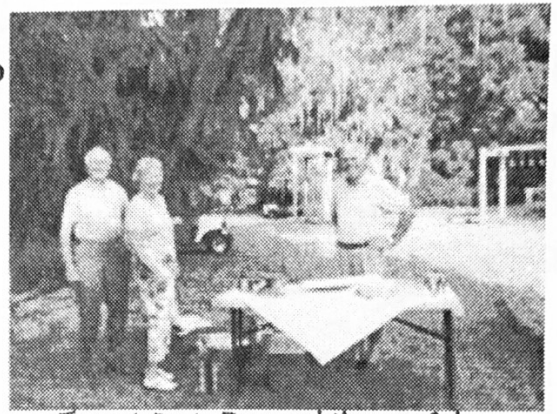


Mariann Golobic and Kathee Schmit coordinated the food

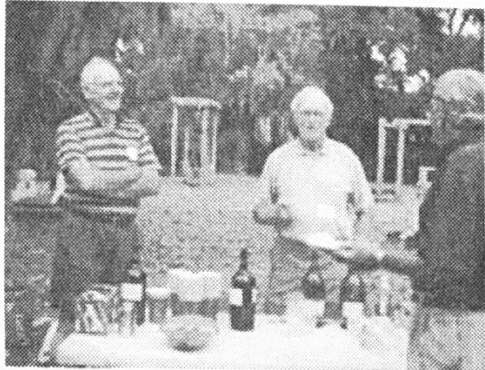
October 6, 2003 at the Gazebo

Fish Fry

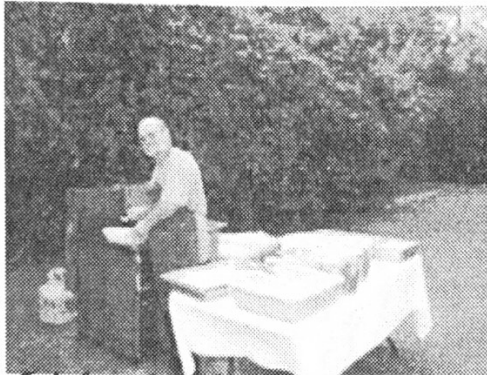
Fish--tasty
Food & beverages--plenty
Friends--130 gathered
FUN--had by all



Jerry & Doris Ryan and Herman Schmit setting up beverage stand



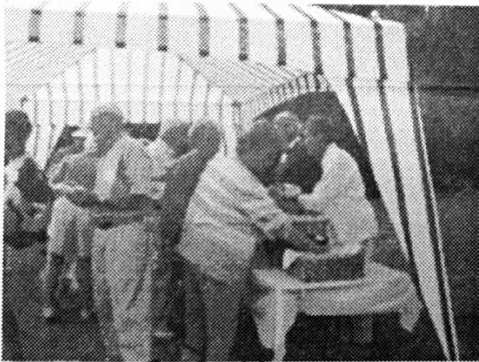
Bar tenders Bob Farmer & Jerry Ryan



Fish fryer from Steve Brown's Catering



So many choices. . .



The food line



Dessert ladies Cathy Crocker & Carol DeStefano



Enjoying the fare

Among those attending. . .



Phyllis & Bob Rose



Robbie Foote, Doug & Harriet Gallow



Marilynn & Jim Koerber



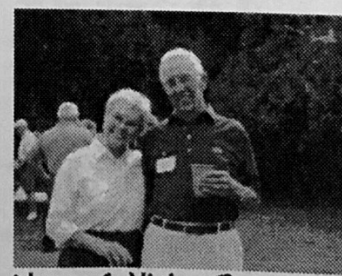
The Cavanaughs & the Morrrows



Martha Frakes & Sue Asselin



Paul Baughman, Katie & Doug Campbell, Dottie Wilks



Nancy & Victor Brinkman



Jeanette & Jay Fickes

An Interview with Colin Brooker

Colin Brooker is an architect who serves as a consultant to the Dataw Historic Foundation on the preservations of the Sams plantation ruins. I had the good fortune to interview him in early November. We talked for nearly an hour and rather than cut it down, I chose to divide it in half with the second part to be printed in the spring. Cathy Crocker

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

CB: When Alcoa bought this property, they signed a memorandum of agreement with South Carolina State Archives and History. In exchange for various permits associated with the development of the island, they were under an obligation to discover, locate and document the historic sites on Dataw. It turned out there were a great many, and the components go all the way from the Prehistoric period right up to the 20th Century. I was called in for two reasons: a) I happened to know a little about tabby, not a lot it turned out but something which was more than anybody else at that point, and b) I had a background in the preservation of historic structures.

CC: How did you acquire this background?

CB: I had worked with UNESCO in the preservation of classical structures in the near east. I liked working on temples—the bigger the better—because the problems they produced were interesting to me. I had worked on two sites in Jordan, Petra and Jared. The Jordanian government wanted to make these two sites into a national park, and what emerged was that certain structures needed preservation desperately if they were going to be visited by everybody. I came to Dataw with this background. The Jordanian structures were unstable mainly as a result of age and earthquakes. There is no history of earthquake damage on Dataw, but the results of hurricane damage are very similar, so I was fairly comfortable with the territory.

CC: Describe your first experience on Dataw.

CB: When I first came to Dataw there was no bridge, and it was a wild, uninhabited place. When they finally did get a bridge, they had this monstrous lorry which was our only mode of conveyance. There was one road that led to the ruins, and we would go along through mud, chiggers and everything else. What was interesting to me when I first saw the site was that it looked like a Mayan site in Central America. It was very difficult to determine what was there because it was so overgrown. It was obvious there was a structure but one could not really get a notion of what was there. To clear the structure, my wife bought a chain saw, and I had an ax; and together with Larry Lapionka who was doing archeological work, we cleared the site. Alcoa came in and cleared out the big trees, but the buildings looked so fragile and sensitive, we really didn't want somebody who didn't have a modicum of training working on them.

CC: How did you acquire your knowledge of tabby?

CB: My wife and I were foolish enough to buy a tabby house in Beaufort in the seventies. We didn't know much about

tabby, but we both had architectural training so we thought we could cope. It turned out to be a mystery. I would trot around to so called experts, but they knew nothing. Yorkminster Church in England was very close to collapse in the early seventies and an engineer friend of mine had gone in an stabilized it, so he knew what he was doing. I asked him to come consult on our house; and when he saw it, he threw up his hands in horror and said "this should not be standing!!" From that point on we tried to work out the protocols of making tabby structures stand. We had some very close calls.

CC: What happened?

CB: Tabby is a terrible building material because it looks as if it has the same properties of concrete, but it's similar to unreinforced concrete, which means that if you keep loading it up vertically, that's fine. But the moment you get any shift, it will split, fall apart, disintegrate or even explode. So when we were working on the house, I learned the biggest lesson I ever learned about tabby. There was a major support beam in the roof that had to be replaced, and so I rented a crane at incredible expense. We had men working up there taking the old joist down as I happened to be in the basement talking with the engineer. The basement had some tabby walls which supported other parts of the structure; and while we were standing there, there was a crack. It was like a lightning flash which zigzagged through the wall. If the engineer had not been there, I think we would have lost the building. He realized that if you shift a load in one place, you get a ripple effect that goes right thorough the building. We were lucky enough to have crew who were able to cast a concrete wall immediately with steel in it that held everything together.

CC: Any change creates another change?

CB: The problem with ruins structures is that you have lost so much integrity, so you are always on the edge of total disintegration. Look at the old Sam's house—you have lost two porches on the wings which were propping up the walls; you have lost the floor joists which helped hold in the walls; and you have lost the roof which was a big weight that held everything together.

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

CB: What was started under Alcoa and continued by your organization is a program that has evolved—to put back strength and continuity in the structure. The problem is that any ruin is intrinsically unstable. I come back every few months to see what has moved, shifted or fallen out. Right now we're stabilizing on a continual basis - it's an ongoing operation. We have doing this for nearly 14 years and haven't had a major loss at the Sams plantation. That's a measure of good faith—first of Alcoa and then the residents of Dataw who have put their money into this.

NEXT ISSUE: Rubble and digs - where do we go next?

The story behind the name - BB Sams Drive

Bernard Barnwell Sams was born on Datha in 1787, one of six sons of William Sams and Sarah Fripp. He inherited, upon his majority at the age of 26, the southern half of Datha which includes Dataw's present day Plantation Complex. At the time his property contained a small house known as 'old house.' He was a well educated man who became a medical doctor as well a successful planter of cotton and rice.

He married Elizabeth Hann Fripp in 1812, and they lived in the 'old house' from 1812-1816. During those years, B.B. excavated a basement under the 'old house' and added two connecting identical wings to the main house. B.B., Elizabeth and their 15 children lived in this larger section of the house. B.B. died on Datha March 15, 1855, and he is buried in the Sams Cemetery. His heirs fled in 1861 as the Union troops approached, and they never returned.

Around 1876, whether by design or accident the B. B. Sams home burned. It was reported that there was rejoicing on the island of St. Helena.

Cynthia Lanphear



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