



# TABBY TATTLER

Dataw Historic Foundation Newsletter

[www.DatawHistory.org](http://www.DatawHistory.org)

Spring 2017

## 10 *Really* Good Reasons to Join the Dataw Historic Foundation

- 1) Dataw Historic Foundation has been designated by the DIOA as the Custodian of all Dataw historic structures, artifacts and archives. Since its inception as a Foundation in 1998, DHF and its membership have funded nearly \$200,000 in structural preservation efforts.
- 2) The Sams Plantation Complex Tabby Ruins is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the most complete example of an antebellum plantation in the U.S.
- 3) The rich history of Dataw Island and the Sams Plantation Ruins adds unique historical significance and charm to Dataw Island and is one of the top reasons why new residents move to Dataw.
- 4) The DHF History & Learning Center (built in 2016 and located next to the ruins) offers a wealth of history of Dataw Island dating back thousands of years. Currently there are many artifacts and photos on display, with more exhibits being added by DHF in the near future.
- 5) You can visit the website for Dataw Historic Foundation at [www.datawhistory.org](http://www.datawhistory.org) and watch a video tour and learn more about its important historic timeline.
- 6) DHF has produced three impressive publications including *Dataw, No Ordinary Place*, a beautifully illustrated coffee table book about the rich history of Dataw Island. A DHF brochure features the history of Dataw Island; and *Step Back in Time* is a walking tour guide of the Sams Plantation complex. Both the brochure and the walking tour are available for free at the History & Learning Center.
- 7) DHF sponsors two very popular dinner events each year – the Oyster Roast in the spring and the Lowcountry Shrimp Boil in the fall. Because space is limited, these events are for DHF members only.
- 8) Annual fundraising is essential to maintain and preserve the structural integrity of the ruins, as well as to expand and create more displays in the History & Learning Center.
- 9) DHF is the largest volunteer organization on Dataw Island. Membership is available at several levels, starting at \$40 per household. Your membership contribution is a tax-deductible donation to a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.
- 10) Your membership will help us continue to be a responsible custodian of the historic treasures we have here on Dataw Island.

This is your opportunity to join the Dataw Historic Foundation, an exceptional organization that has made a very significant contribution to this island through its preservation efforts. A membership form is located on page 4.

Our history makes us unique among residential communities, and our efforts to preserve and display that history are fun, educational and important to our future.

**Your support is important to us!**

Not yet a member of DHF?  
Fill out the MEMBERSHIP FORM on page 4 of this newsletter.

**Help support our efforts to preserve this beautiful island that we all love!**

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## History & Learning Center Opened One Year Ago

April 19 marked the first anniversary of the dedication of the Dataw Historic Foundation's History and Learning Center. Since opening last year over 400 visitors have signed our Guest Book. Residents as well as visitors from as far away as Australia have taken the opportunity to explore and learn more about Dataw's historic past.

The building is open to the public every day from 8:00 AM–8:00 PM. We encourage everyone to take advantage of this priceless gem. The exhibits in the building speak for themselves and walking tour booklets for the Sams Plantation Ruins and Sams Family cemetery are available in the building free of charge.

Organized docent-led tours are also available for individuals and groups. To arrange for a tour, call Diane Roney (843-838-4972) or John Colgan (843-838-6748).

If you are interested in becoming a docent, call Diane Roney.

**The History & Learning Center decorated for the holidays!**



## SAVE THE DATES!



**Lowcountry Boil**  
**October 23, 2017**

**Oyster Roast**  
**March 12, 2018**



## Cotton Dike Cemetery

Ca. 1785

Initially begun as a final resting place for field slaves in antebellum times, this cemetery served generations of Dataw Island residents through the Reconstruction period and well beyond. The last recorded burial occurred in 1967.

This historic and sacred burial ground contains the remains of African slaves, free African-Americans, and their descendants who contributed greatly to the economic, social and religious life of Dataw (Dataw) Island and the greater Beaufort area.

Cotton Dike Cemetery is a tangible reminder of the dependence of many large farmers on slave labor from the mid-1700's to 1864. It is a reflection of the many traditions of the African-American slave population. Death rituals and shoreline burial practices formed an important part of those traditions and death itself carried great significance among slaves throughout the South.

The Cotton Dike Cemetery was considerably larger than what you see before you today. Over the years, water erosion has reduced the cemetery to its present size. A survey completed in 2006 indicated that there are 38+ grave sites still intact.

If you have not visited the Slave Cemetery located at the end of Cotton Dike Road, you have missed a unique piece of history on our beautiful island. The Dataw Historic Foundation has added two new historical markers showing the location of 38 known graves along with additional information about the site. Many of you living here in 2007 may remember the rededication that year of the Slave Cemetery with members of the Robinson family attending.

The Slave Cemetery was used from 1785 up until 1861 to bury plantation slaves who worked on the Island. After 1863 and into the 1900s, freed slaves along with farmers and slave descendants were buried here. The last grave shown is in 1967. Unfortunately, no written records were kept on the number of burials along with names and exact dates.

When Africans were brought over to America, they maintained their burial customs. Although most plantation owners were Christian, African slaves came from many different regions and practiced many different religions. Plantation work was demanding physical labor. Slaves suffered from disease without receiving medical care and malnutrition was prevalent. Life expectancy for males was 35; for females 40. Ninety percent of all children died before reaching 16.

Slave cemeteries were located on marginal land as plantation owners wanted to maximize their property for crops and cattle. Many were hidden away in brush in remote spots or adjacent to the marsh. Unlike cemeteries for plantation owners and their families, slave cemeteries were not separated by fencing and few mainly wood burial markers were used. Family plots did not exist. Funerals were held at night as this was the only time slaves were not working. There were no mourning days and funerals were held shortly after the death. Coffins were roughly made by other slaves or bodies were simply wrapped in shrouds. A procession carrying torches carried the body to a shallow grave where handfuls of dirt were thrown onto the body. A short prayer and/or song was offered with the slaves then returning to their quarters. Owners usually did not attend these funerals.

Slaves were buried east-west, with the feet pointing east towards their homeland of Africa (the grave locations on Cotton Dike clearly show this). Slaves had no hope of returning to their homeland so death was seen as a way of going home. There was a strong belief in life after death. Another custom was to mark the grave with either plants or shells and to place personal objects related to the person on the grave. Items such as cups, eating utensils, cans, and pocket knives were used.

Funeral customs were one of the few areas of Black life where plantation owners did not interfere. A funeral allowed for slaves to meet together, something their owners discouraged for fear of uprisings.

Over time, many of these slave cemeteries have simply disappeared into the landscape leaving no record. At Dataw, almost all markers are gone, and the cemetery probably looks much like it did in the 1700's. History tells us that on Dataw, there were over 100 slaves at any given time, and many were buried here. Unfortunately, a majority of the graves have been reclaimed by the marsh over the years.



We are fortunate to have such a valuable piece of history here on Dataw, and it is important to preserve it. When you visit the Cemetery, you can read more about its history. With the help of nearby caring Cotton Dike neighbors, the DHF Grounds Committees is responsible for the upkeep of the Cemetery.

Looking west—this view is probably similar to the one in the 1700's.



## President's Report

... MARILYN PECK

This year we had some changes to the DHF Board. Joel Holden and John Huntley retired after many years of service, Diane Rooney became a Vice-President, Valerie Hatcher joined our Fund-raising Committee, Peter Pearks took over Ruins Preservation and Kathy Kelenski and Barbara Titus became Directors-at-Large. Over the years we as an organization have been very fortunate to have such dedicated members.

Sadly, last year we lost Mel Brown, who was one of our most ardent supporters. Her contributions and support will be missed by all of us.

This year we have been working on adding more displays to the History and Learning Center and exploring new ways to use the Center for social and educational purposes.

I want to thank all of our DHF members for their financial and volunteer support. For those of you who are not yet members, I encourage you to join us in our ongoing effort to preserve Dataw's historic structures and its artifacts for, as you will read in this addition of the Tabby Tattler, the ruins have great significant not only to us but also to the state of South Carolina. Dataw Island remains a unique and beautiful place to live and I feel very lucky to be a part of it.

### In Memoriam

*The DHF Board was saddened by the passing of Mel Brown, wife of long-time DHF Board and Past President, Jack Brown. Mel passed away at their home in Lake Bluff, Illinois, on December 18, 2016. In addition to Jack, Mel is survived by two children and three grandchildren. Mel had many talents and interests and was active in both her Lake Bluff and Dataw communities. Mel's background in journalism enabled her to assist with the writing of many DHF documents.*



## Fall to Spring with the DHF

### November Fireside Chat – “Santa Elena: America’s Untold Story”

With an interesting slide presentation, Dr. Andrew Beall, Executive Director of the Santa Elena Foundation, told the fascinating story of the 1566 Spanish Settlement that has been uncovered on Parris Island.

The recent discovery of the 1566 Spanish Colony of Santa Elena has generated a great deal of interest among those living in the area as it is on its way to changing American history books. In 1568 Pedro Menendez, Spanish admiral and conquistador, began settling civilian farmers and artisans at Santa Elena. By 1569, there were 200 settlers living in the community composed of about 40 houses. Menendez made Santa Elena the Spanish capital of Florida (over Saint Augustine) and in 1571 his wife moved here. By 1572, Santa Elena was a small struggling community with a total population of 179 settlers and 76 soldiers. Settlers were primarily farmers, who were growing a variety of crops and raising livestock. Menendez died in 1574 during a trip to Spain. After years of problems with disease epidemics and Indians, Santa Elena was abandoned in 1587. Extensive archeological research on the Parris Island site continues to reveal more about this settlement. An excellent exhibit can be seen at the Santa Elena Museum at 1501 Bay Street in Beaufort.



(Left) Santa Elena Foundation Chairman and CEO, Dr. Andy Beall, and (right) Executive Director Megan Meyer, pose with Marilyn Peck, DHF President at the Fireside Chat.

### Open House at the History & Learning Center

The DHF held an Open House at the H&L Center on December 27. Visiting family and friends joined Island residents as they enjoyed hot cider and cookies while browsing the exhibits. John Colgan conducted a tour of the ruins. Afterwards, many of the visitors picked up a copy of the **Walking Tour** of the Ruins, planning to return again and tour on their own. (Copies of the **Walking Tour** are available for free in the H&L Center.)



John Colgan leading a tour of the Ruins at the DHF Holiday Open House

### 2017 Oyster Roast – Big Success!

Co-chairs Kathy McShane and Valerie Hatcher coordinated a memorable 19<sup>th</sup> DHF Oyster Roast in the Ruins on March 27. Oysters were sweet and plentiful as were an assortment of additional dishes. Once again beer and wine were included along with a beautiful array of desserts served in the Cannery. The “Sometimes Later” band played throughout the evening. Twenty-one raffle prizes were awarded to lucky winners. Most prizes were donated by talented Dataw artists and artisans along with generous DHF members giving of their time and services.

The DHF thanks all those who assisted in the planning, setup and serving along with everyone who supported this major fund-raiser.

The oysters were clean, fresh, plentiful and delicious!



Bartenders Cindy Pescoe, Joe Roney and Peter Pearks took their job seriously!



Oyster Roast Co-Chairs Valerie Hatcher (left) and Kathy McShane (right)



Gene and Kathy Kelenski were in charge of the fabulous desserts set up in the Cannery.

Marketing Director Laura McCarthy and Club Manager Ted Bartlett joined the festivities.



Rain did not dampen their spirits! The Harbor Masters entertaining the crowd at the Gazebo.



### Rain Cancelled the Luminary “Light up the Ruins”

On December 5, DHF volunteers, under the direction of Peter Pearks, were ready to assemble the luminaries and place them in the ruins as part of the Dataw Garden Club’s “Light up the Night” celebrations. Heavy rains forced all activities to be moved to the Gazebo. This included Christmas Carols sung by the Harbor Masters, which was to be part of the celebration in the ruins. With everyone gathered in the Gazebo for corn bread, chili and desserts, it turned out to be an evening of good food and drink with plenty of holiday cheer in spite of the weather. Hot toddies served by the Dataw Island Yacht Club (*rebounding from Hurricane Matthew’s marina devastation*) also contributed to the success of the evening.

### DHF Hosts Two Group Tours of the Sams Plantation Ruins

On January 11, the 2017 Senior Leadership participants met in the History and Learning Center. Joe Roney gave an introductory presentation before the group explored the ruins and the cemetery. Several DHF docents were on hand to answer questions.

On April 5, with rain threatening skies, 26 people showed up for the Spring OLLI tour. John Colgan gave an informative presentation of Dataw’s history followed by a Q & A. The audience was amazed by DHF’s extensive efforts in documenting Dataw’s history and in preserving the ruins. Afterwards, docents lead tours of the plantation and cemetery.



Joe Roney getting ready to lead a tour of the Ruins for the Senior Leadership participants.

**DHF Board Retirements**

On January 21, the Board held a dinner at the Community Center to honor retiring Board members Joel Holden and John Huntley. The Foundation would not be what it is today without the hard work and dedication of these two members. Each spent countless hours on DHF projects.

Joel served on the Board in many capacities including a term as President. His love of history and total immersion into Dataw's history made him a prime authority on the Sams' family and the Island's interesting past. His computer expertise brought the Foundation into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Two of Joel's most notable accomplishments were getting the Dataw ruins placed in the National Register of Historic Places and coordinating the construction of the History & Learning Center.

John was largely responsible for keeping the ruins in good repair, closely monitoring all the plantation structures through careful inspections. He worked with Colin Brooker and other experts to determine the best means to complete effective repairs within budget limitations. Repair projects involved hiring competent analysts as well as experienced craftsmen. John's major goal was always to maintain the integrity as well as the stability of all the structures.

President Marilyn Peck thanked each of them for their many accomplishments through the years. Publicity Chair Susan Jorgensen arranged the wonderful dinner.

**History Committee Report**

by John Colgan

With the departure of Joel Holden from the DHF board at year's end, John Colgan was appointed DHF's new History Chair. John welcomed Joe Roney, Lenda Jablonski and Tom Watkins to the committee. They set four initial goals for the year:

- (1) Develop a power point presentation on Dataw's history to be used for groups touring the Ruins
- (2) Plan and execute two exhibits for the H&LC
- (3) Revisit all historical artifacts in storage at the H&LC for use in these future exhibits
- (4) Research and purchase appropriate additional museum display cabinets for the H&LC.

Two of the goals have been met (*Artifacts review and Power point presentation*) and the group is now focused on themes for the new exhibits later in the year.

**By Laws Updated by John Colgan**

Recently, board members Marianne Beck, John Huntley and John Colgan undertook the somewhat daunting task of reviewing and updating DHF's By Laws. The changes include mission statements for board committees formed or restructured since the last review five years ago. Articles were added which outline the duties of board committee directors and the process for replacing them. Finally, the shared responsibility of the DHF and the DIOA was carefully researched and restated with regard to effectively preserving Dataw's rich history.

**DHF Board 2017**

**Officers**

President: Marilyn Peck  
 Vice President/Treasurer: Ron Jacobs  
 Recording Secretary: MT O'Brien  
 Corresponding Secretary: Joe Roney  
 Vice President/Volunteers: Diane Roney

**Board Committees Chairmen**

Fund Raising Co-Chair: Kathy McShane  
 Fund Raising Co-Chair: Valerie Hatcher  
 Ruins Preservation/Grounds Chair: Peter Pearks  
 Historic Chair: John Colgan  
 Long-Range Planning Chair: Jack Brown  
 Membership Co-Chair: Susan Converse  
 Membership Co-Chair: Dawn Schuster  
 Public Relations Co-Chair: Susan Jorgensen  
 Public Relations Co-Chair: Cindy Schafer  
 Tabby Tattler Editor: Ann Craigmile  
 Tabby Tattler, Layout/Design: Cindy Schafer

**Directors At-Large**

Kathy Kelenski  
 Barbara Titus

**Other**

Technical Consultant: Larry Rowland

If you are interested in working with the DHF, contact any of the DHF Board members.

**TABBY TATTLER  
 Spring 2017**

The Tabby Tattler is a publication of the Dataw Historic Foundation, Dataw Island, SC

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**Your DHF Membership is Important!**

*The vision of the DHF is that the rich Dataw Island history will become an important part of the total experience among all residents of the island.*

Your support of DHF 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. Those of you new to Dataw or unfamiliar with the work of the Foundation, please recognize the importance of your membership contribution.

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

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

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Make check payable to Dataw Historic Foundation, Inc.**

*This form may be returned by mail to:*

Dataw Historic Foundation, PO Box 819, Beaufort SC 29901 **OR** placed in Susan Converse's mailbox, 488 B.B. Sams Drive

**QUESTIONS? Call Membership Co-Chairs Susan Converse at 843-838-5581 or Dawn Schuster at 843-838-2460**