

# TABBY TIMES



## NAVIGATING HISTORY

### *The Legacy of the Bateau in Lowcountry Waterways*

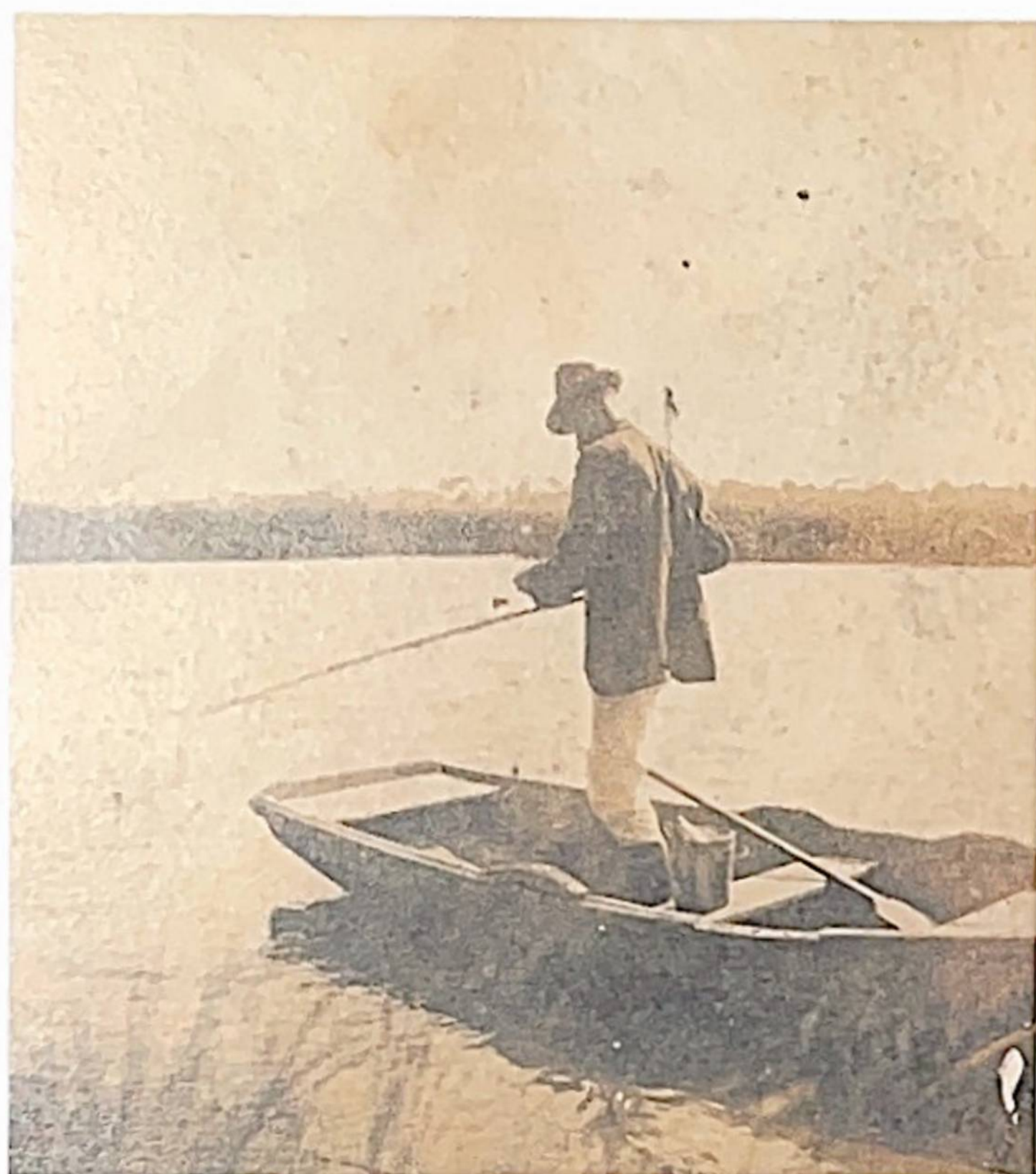
**D**ataw is an island surrounded by other sea islands. In the early days of colonial settlement, the only way to travel from one island to the next island was by boat. The indigenous people used dugout canoes. Upon encountering them, Christopher Columbus said they were wonderfully shaped from a single tree trunk, large enough for fifty men or small enough for one man, and navigated with oars shaped like a baker's paddle. However, they could easily be overturned, flipping the passengers into the water. A more stable boat was needed. Enter the bateau (plural: bateaux).

Influenced by the boatbuilders of West Africa, France, and England, the bateau became the workhorse of the creeks and rivers of the Lowcountry. Wikipedia defines the bateau as "a shallow-draft, flat-bottomed boat ... traditionally pointed on both ends." Although they could be built larger for a specific purpose, the typical bateau or skiff was 14-16 feet with a 4-5 foot beam with a squared-off stern for easier loading and unloading. The open deck allowed the boats to be loaded high with produce or cotton during the plantation era. Bateaux became the primary means of transporting people and goods to other islands or the mainland. The first bridge that connected Lady's Island to mainland Beaufort was not built until 1927.

Because of the shallow draft, bateaux were perfect for the islands' tidal creeks with soft mud bottoms. Although double oars could be used, the bateau was commonly sculled with a single oar over the stern. The trip was quicker at high tide, and a skilled boatman avoided the pluff mud, sand bars, and oyster-covered banks. *continued*>



In the post-Civil War era, when many Gullah Geechee people remained isolated on the sea islands, the bateau was used to bring produce to market, oystering, and casting nets for fish and shrimp. A bateau with a larger beam was used to gather the muddy, sharp-edged oysters from the creek banks. The boatman might drag the boat while depositing oyster clusters inside. Later, transoms were altered to hold a small motor. In the early 20th century, local farmers turned oystermen in the winter and supplied several canneries that opened on Lady's and Saint Helena Islands.



In the 1880s, the bateau was transformed again by adding a mast and sails. A fleet of more than fifty boats called the Mosquito Fleet, piloted by freed black men, plied the waters of Charleston harbor for yellowtail, amberjack, flounder, and porgy. The men used landlines and hooks, not rod and reel, to keep the Charleston citizens supplied with seafood.

With the invention of fiberglass and large motors, the bateau has become a relic of the past, but its utility will long be remembered.

*Photos courtesy of  
Donner Collection,  
Beaufort County Library*

**CONTEMPORARY BATEAU BUILDER:**

*John Kamara, a Penn Center employee and a native of Sierra Leone, is familiar with bateaux construction and usage. In a recent interview, Mr. Kamara shared his knowledge of the wooden boat's form and function.*



**Mr. Kamara sailed the Atlantic Ocean in a replica of the Amistad built in Mystic, Connecticut, in 2000 and was the Sierra Leonean representative on the Nina and Pinta replica's crew, which docked in Beaufort in 2017.**

Enslaved people brought from West Africa knew boat building and rice cultivation. At low tide, a bateau was used to plant rice plants; at high tide, the rice was harvested. Because of the bateau's "arrow-head" and shallow draft, it could maneuver the shallow straight canals enslaved people dug for rice cultivation.

Mr. Kamara, a certified able seaman, learned about boat building from his carpenter grandfather and the fisherman of Murray Town, his hometown, in coastal Sierra Leone. (Murray Town is a suburb of Freetown founded for liberated enslaved Africans who were transported there by the British Royal Navy in 1829.) He commented that the typical sea island bateau's transom and frame were made from oak, with pine or cypress used for the planked sides. More modern construction may use other available rough woods. Pitch tar or waxed oakum pounded between the planks and kept the boat watertight. Mr. Kamara stated that the vessel was used not only for cargo and passengers but also for piracy and smuggling. Runaway people could find freedom because the bateau could be brought silently close to shore at night for escape. The bateau could also be turned upside down for shelter. A plank from shore would connect to the boat to facilitate boarding so passengers could keep their feet dry. —Ginny Hall-Apicella



*Featured above, this bateau was built by craftsman Sam Moultrie of St. Helena Island. He was renowned for building bateaux used for navigating the waterways around South Carolina's Sea Islands. The bateau is on loan from the Penn Center, the African American historical and cultural institution that evolved from the Penn School, a school for formerly enslaved people. (Images above: Ginny Hall-Apicella)*



## SHADED BY HISTORY

# The Tale of Datha Island's Entry Oaks

Exploring Datha Island unveils a journey through time, where remnants of a once-thriving plantation community still tell tales of bygone eras. Informative signs from our Foundation serve as windows into the island's rich past.

A newly erected sign at the southern end of Longfield Drive invites visitors to delve deeper into this enthralling history.

### Sign's Significance: Tracing Paths of the Past

The freshly erected sign pays tribute to the enduring presence of two ancient 'Entry Oaks,' standing tall for over 250 years along an old road on Datha Island. These venerable trees witnessed the island's acquisition by William and Elizabeth Sams in 1783, serving as reminders of the past and honoring the land's history and complexities.

A glimpse into the past comes alive through May Whittle Sams' 1902 map of the southern half of Datha Island, which delineates the sprawling grounds of the Datha Inlet Plantation. Owned by Dr. Berners Barnwell Sams for much of the 19th century, this plantation included 'Mink Point' and 'Long Field' planting lands, stretching across the width of Datha save for the path traversed by the old road. Remnants of this ancient road leading to Dr. B.B. Sams' plantation house offer a tangible link to the island's storied past.

This thoroughfare, likely in use before William Sams acquired Datha Island, meandered from the boat dock at Mink Point on the southern tip of Datha northward along the western shoreline before veering eastward towards the grand plantation house. Research on the middle house of the ruins suggests a lineage predating even the American Revolution. The story of the old road and these Entry Oaks is deeply intertwined with the lives of many, including enslaved individuals whose labor shaped the landscape.

### Southern Live Oaks:

#### Practical Icons of Plantation Culture

The stately Southern live oaks gracing plantation entrance roads symbolize more than mere adornments. Beyond their aesthetic allure, these trees embody the South's intertwined histories of wealth, power, and struggle. While they visually evoke the luxury of plantation life, their roots delve deeper, acknowledging the labor and resilience of enslaved individuals whose contributions often remain unspoken.



Southern live oaks were nature's guardians, shielding plantations from the elements. Their dense foliage provided respite from sweltering summers and sheltered against the fury of coastal storms. Moreover, their robust root systems stabilized the soil, safeguarding against erosion in flood-prone regions. By lining plantation entrance roads, these majestic trees not only enhanced the aesthetic appeal but also contributed to preserving the surrounding landscape for generations to come.

### Take A Journey Through Time

Embark on a nostalgic voyage from Gleason's Landing, tracing the footsteps of ships that once graced the shores of Mink Point. Follow the meandering path to encounter the historic Entry Oaks, standing as silent sentinels marking the entrance to B.B. Sams' Datha Inlet Plantation. This scenic journey offers an opportunity to immerse oneself in the history and natural splendor of Datha Island, where every whispering breeze carries echoes of a bygone era. —Bill Riski





## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Marilyn Peck

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

Just a few weeks ago DHF celebrated the 40th Anniversary of Dataw Island. I want to thank all of the people that participated in the three panel discussions—especially Larry Rowland—talk about the wonderful history of the Island, telling us stories of their experiences being the first Alcoa employees and residents. It was such a treat

For those of you who are not yet members, I encourage you to join us in our ongoing effort to ensure Dataw's historic structures and artifacts are preserved and interpreted for future generations.

to have so many of them join us for what turned out to be a fabulous afternoon. The success of this event was due to all the hard work done by members of the DHF Board, particularly Diane Roney and Bill Riski, with the help of the Dataw Island staff, and all the Dataw Island residents who attended.

We have several events planned for the Island, including the Spring Author's Luncheon on April 24th with Cassandra King, as well as the annual Lowcountry Boil this fall and Fireside Chat next January.

**Our goal continues to be that every resident become a member of the Foundation!** The ruins

and history 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. Dataw Island remains a unique and beautiful place to live, and I feel very lucky to be a part of it.

*Above right top to bottom:*

*DHF vice president Bill Riski conducted a tour of the B.B. Sams Plantation ruins for students of the American College of Building Arts. The Foundation established a scholarship for the college in memory of Joanne Moses.*

*Victoria Smalls (left) was the Fireside Chat speaker on January 11 to kickoff the DHF 25th anniversary year. She's joined by Foundation President Marilyn Peck and Beaufort Mayor Philip Cromer.*

*DHF sponsored three panel discussions as part of the Dataw Island 40th Anniversary on March 13. The leadoff presentation featured historian and Dataw resident Larry Rowland (right) and former State Representative Edie Rodgers. The other two panels consisted of individuals who participated in the early development of Dataw and island administrators.*



### 2024 DHF BOARD OFFICERS

President: Marilyn Peck  
Vice President/Volunteers: Diane Roney  
Vice President/History: Bill Riski  
Treasurer: Steve Wexler  
Corresponding Secretary: Joe Roney  
Recording Secretary: Kitty Trice

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Ruins Preservation: Kevin Mack  
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Public Relations: Rosemary Patterson  
Director-At-Large:  
Peter Pearks, Marti Johnson, Ginny Hall-Apicella  
DIOA Liaison: Susan Emons  
Technical Consultant: Larry Rowland

### TABBY TIMES

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

### WHO KNEW?

## On the Street Where You Live

Bill Riski's informative article about the *Entry Oaks* notes their location on Longfield Drive. As a point of fact, the drive's name derives from the plantation's "long field of cotton". So, to be accurate, the street's name should be two words.

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

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





# SAVE THE DATE

**October 21, 2024**  
**DHF'S ANNUAL LOWCOUNTRY BOIL**

DETAILS TO FOLLOW

**JOIN THE DATAW HISTORIC FOUNDATION TODAY  
SO THE HISTORY OF DATAW CAN BE SHARED NOW AND IN THE FUTURE**

## **2024 Oyster Roast Raffle Winners**

The following individuals won prizes at the March 18 roast: Mike Marba (\$600 Dataw Island Club round of golf for four), Laurie Shannon (\$500 Alibi's private concert), Robin Hoffer (\$300 The Kitchen gift basket and certificate), Arleen Cassutti (\$200 Dataw Community Center certificate), Dina Curley (\$128 Beaufort Tours), Marcia King (\$100 Breakwater Restaurant certificate), Susan Blackburn (\$100 Red Cap certificate), Bobbi Weber (\$100 Grayco gift cards), Lynn Faulkner (\$80 Wild Birds Unlimited bird feeder, Lowcountry stitch and SC ball cap), Pat Stanton (\$75 Morgan River Grill gift card), Mary Ann Wells (\$75 Madison's Restaurant gift card), Nancy Sadler (\$68 Shades of Red Salon beauty package), Mark Stein (\$55 Salon 705 gift card), Peggy Sikes (\$65 Dataw Tennis & Lawn Sports tennis or pickleball lesson), Karen McCue (\$75 Stellar Ice Cream & Beedo's "Dine Around Beaufort"), and Joe Nicola (Wine & Book Basket compliments of Cindi Crane).



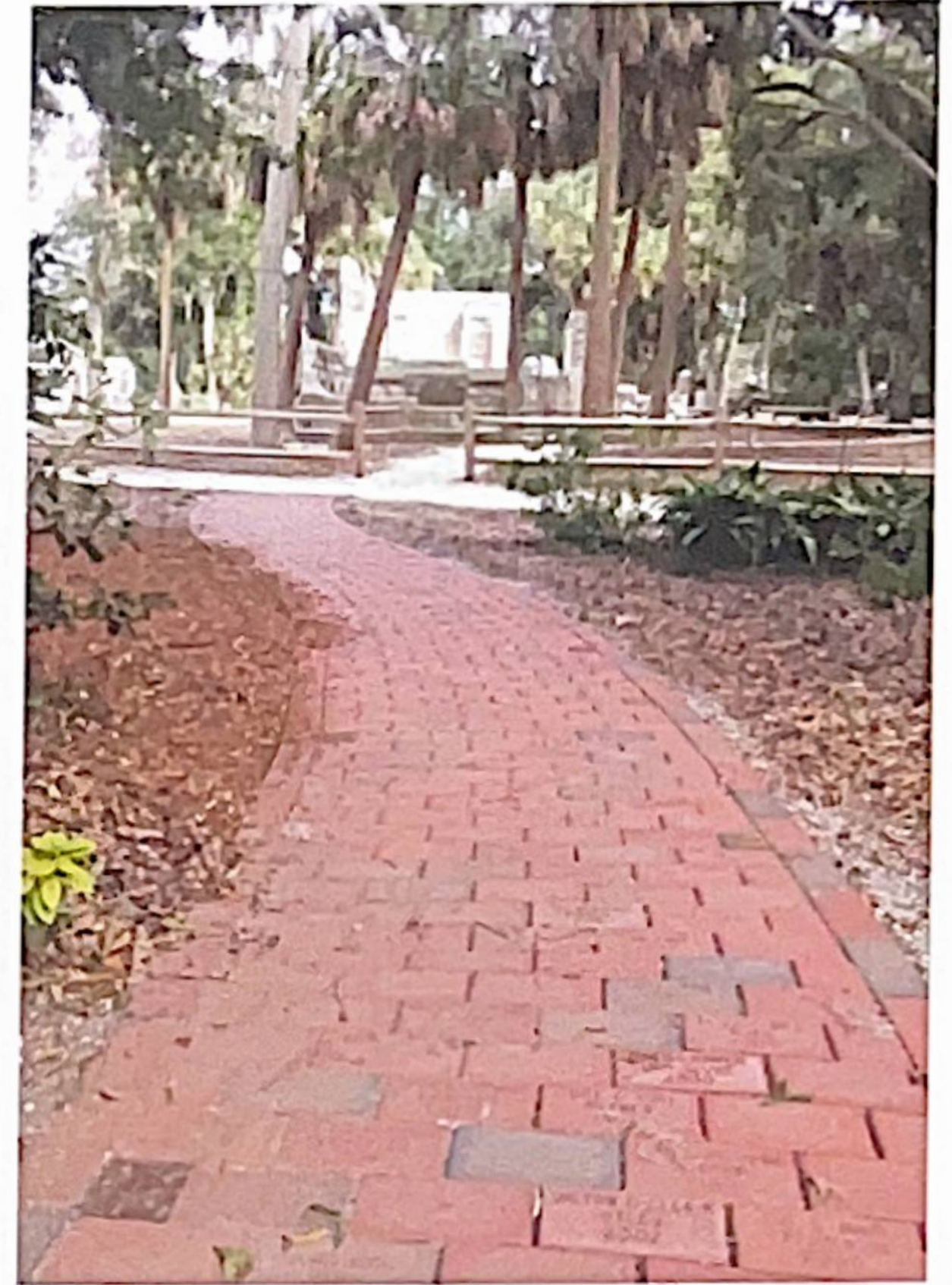
ADD YOUR PERSONAL BRICK TO THE

# Dataw Heritage Walk

*This holiday season would be the perfect time to join the island's rich history by adding your name to the Heritage Walk!*

Purchase a brick now and become a part of the Dataw Heritage Walk—a living legacy to those who have made Dataw the very special place it is today. The engraved bricks represent residents who came to Dataw Island 30 years ago, and up to and including our most recent residents.

To purchase a brick, please use the form below. Forms are also available in the History and Learning Center or on our website at [www.DatawHistory.org](http://www.DatawHistory.org).



## ORDER FORM

Brick Cost \$150 | Please use one order form per brick

FILL IN THE SQUARES WITH A LETTER OR A SPACE

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Line 1 and Line 2: Limit of 15 characters per line, including spaces

Line 3: Year of property acquisition or move to Dataw or employment

— EXAMPLES —

John & Jane  
Williams  
2001

The Williams  
Family  
2001

John Williams  
Family  
2001

John  
Williams  
2001

Ordered by:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

*Please make check payable to Dataw Historic Foundation*

Drop off location: Peter Peaks, 1148 Palmetto Point, Dataw Island | Or mail: Dataw Historic Foundation, PO Box 819, Beaufort, SC 29901