

Dataw Historic Foundation Honored

Written by Editor

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The Dataw Historic Foundation has received a major preservation award from Historic Beaufort Foundation in recognition of its work in preserving the Sams Plantation historic site and creation of an interpretive center, both located centrally on the 867-acre community of Dataw Island.

Historic Beaufort Foundation Trustee Rob Montgomery and Executive Director, Maxine Lutz, presented the “Preservation Honor Award” to the Dataw Historic Foundation, accepted on the group’s behalf by their president, Marilyn Peck.

“The good people of the Dataw Historic Foundation are celebrating 20 years of preservation and conservation efforts and recently expanded their efforts with a new interpretive center,” stated Montgomery and Lutz. “From the beginning, their focus was to preserve the significant tabby ruins that comprised the BB Sams Plantation complex and to foster the island’s history among residents, prospective residents and historians.”

The Dataw Historic Foundation has now received three prestigious awards from BHF in recognition of its preservation efforts: in 2016, the Danner Lifetime Achievement Award; in 2011, the Preservation Award for preservation/stewardship of Sams Plantation Ruins and listing on National Register of Historic Places; and in 2018, the Preservation Honor Award.

Now a private gated community, the island’s rich history dates as far back as 12,000 years ago, when it was inhabited by Native Americans, and it has continued to lure Lowcountry residents to call it home. Its more recent history picks up in 1682 when the Lords Proprietors of Carolina granted Dataw Island to Caleb Westbrook, who ran a deer-fur trading post. After several transactions of the land, it was purchased in 1783 by William Sams, who built the home that still

stands today. He began cultivating Sea Island Cotton, ushering in the Antebellum Period. As the family grew and the land was divided amongst the generations, the various other structures were constructed. The island flourished until the mid 1800s, when the Civil War divided the nation.

Since its purchase by ALCOA for development as a gated community in 1983, attention has been given to maintaining and protecting the historic ruins on Dataw Island. In the mid-1990s, a small group of Dataw members united to protect and preserve the island's ruins and rich history through overseeing the collection of artifacts, compiling records and working on preservation efforts at the ruins. In 1998, the group became the non-profit Dataw Historic Foundation and has since grown to include nearly half of the island's residents. The successful funding of over \$140,000 for preservation/restoration projects has primarily been possible due to the enthusiastic and growing support of DHF members.

While preservation of the historic structures remains a major goal, the Foundation strives to make the rich 300-plus year Dataw history more meaningful for all residents. A walk through the Sams Plantation area and the cemetery reveals over 30 preservation projects to the original structures along with new signs and an antebellum garden. Signage projects reveal the original layout and look of the plantation house complex, how the house was constructed, and how each of the structures was used between 1786 and 1861. Recent preservation projects include reinstallation of floor beams at the plantation house, stabilization of the cemetery wall, reconstruction of the well and restoration of a historic crypt. New signs identify several historic areas of interest around the complex as well as around the island including the former slave cemetery on Cotton Dike Road.

The opening of the History and Learning Center in 2017 is a capstone in the educational and preservation effort of the DHF. Built through fundraising efforts of the DHF, the Center houses the island's historic artifacts and offers interpretation: some of the highlights are a display of the history of Dataw from the Native Indian Era up to the present and a scale model of the plantation house.

Historic Beaufort Foundation recognize projects who meet their high standards of preservation through hands-on projects, public advocacy, education, and protecting our historic resources. Congratulations to the Dataw Historic Foundation for the recognition of your efforts, and thank you for all that you do!