

Problem rooted out! Rare tabby ruins saved from tree roots on Daufuskie Island

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Rare tabby ruins on Daufuskie Island were saved from imminent collapse Wednesday when Bartlett Tree Experts barged over a 45-ton crane to remove trees whose roots had cracked the fragile, historic structures.

One of the four remaining slave dwellings near Haig Point's landing could have collapsed at any time and another could have been compromised if the four towering hackberry trees had continued growing, said Colin Brooker, an architect who specializes in historic preservation and has written extensively about tabby. Brooker, a St. Helena Island resident who estimated he began studying Daufuskie's tabby ruins in the 1980s, said the roots had grown into the dwellings over the years because tabby retains moisture. Brooker said the dwellings were part of a larger settlement built in the early 1800s when Daufuskie was a cotton plantation. They probably housed slaves who worked in the nearby home of the plantation's owner.

Tabby, a mix of whole and crushed oyster shells, lime, sand and water, once was a common building material on the Southeast coast, where few stones and little clay suitable for bricks were available, Brooker said. Few tabby slave structures remain in Beaufort County and fewer still are made entirely of tabby as Daufuskie's are.

The tree removal project began about six months ago when Brooker and county historic preservationist Ian Hill visited Daufuskie, which is accessible only by boat, to check on the structures, said Nancy Ludtke, Executive Director of the Daufuskie Island Historical Foundation.

When Brooker and Hill suggested removing the trees, the foundation asked Haig Point to find out the cost, she said. Haig Point approached Bartlett, and the company volunteered to do the work for free.

Michael Roberts, who oversaw the project for Bartlett, estimated its value at \$12,000 to \$15,000. "Bartlett is very proud to be trusted with a project of this magnitude in order to help preserve the history of these barrier islands," Roberts said.

Brooker said the delicate, nerve-racking operation went smoothly. "It was a high-risk job, and it was completed successfully thanks to the professionalism of Bartlett," he said. Hill and Ludtke also commended Bartlett. "It wouldn't have happened without them," Hill said. "They need to be thanked for their effort."

The foundation provided \$1,200 worth of scaffolding to protect the tabby from any falling debris Wednesday and plans to raise money to repair previous damage from the trees.

Hutton Brothers Contracting Co. volunteered to take the trees to the island's community farm, where they will be milled to build a welcome center, Ludtke said.

Read more: <http://www.islandpacket.com/2011/05/04/1643941/problem-rooted-out-rare-tabby.html#ixzz1LySMcpuC>