

SHIPBUILDING IN THE LOW COUNTRY: THE BLOODY POINT SHIPYARD ON DAUFUSKIE ISLAND

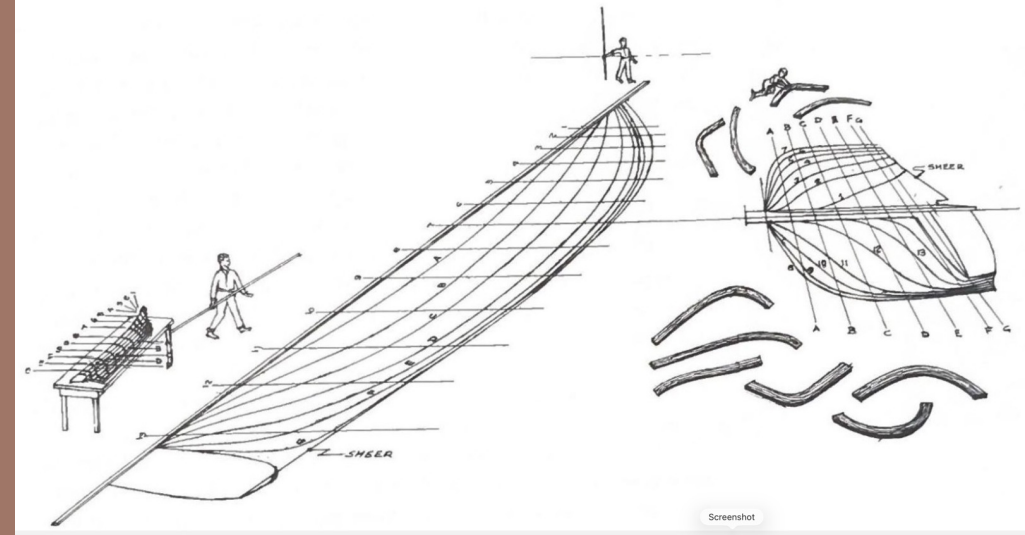
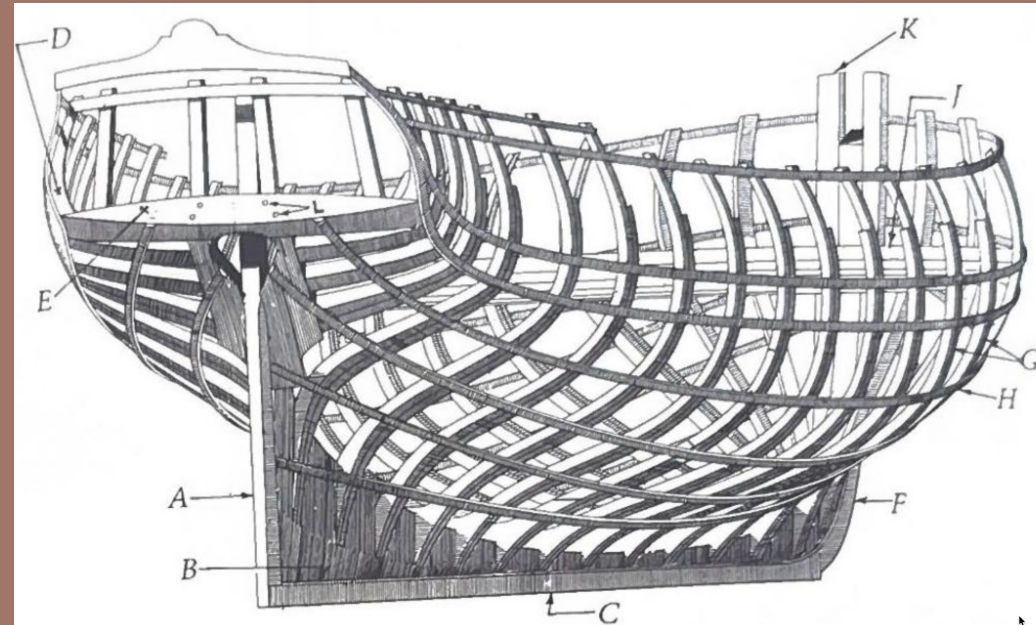
Presented by

Sam Waters, Vice President

Daufuskie Island Historical Foundation

October 13, 2026

Americas Boating Club





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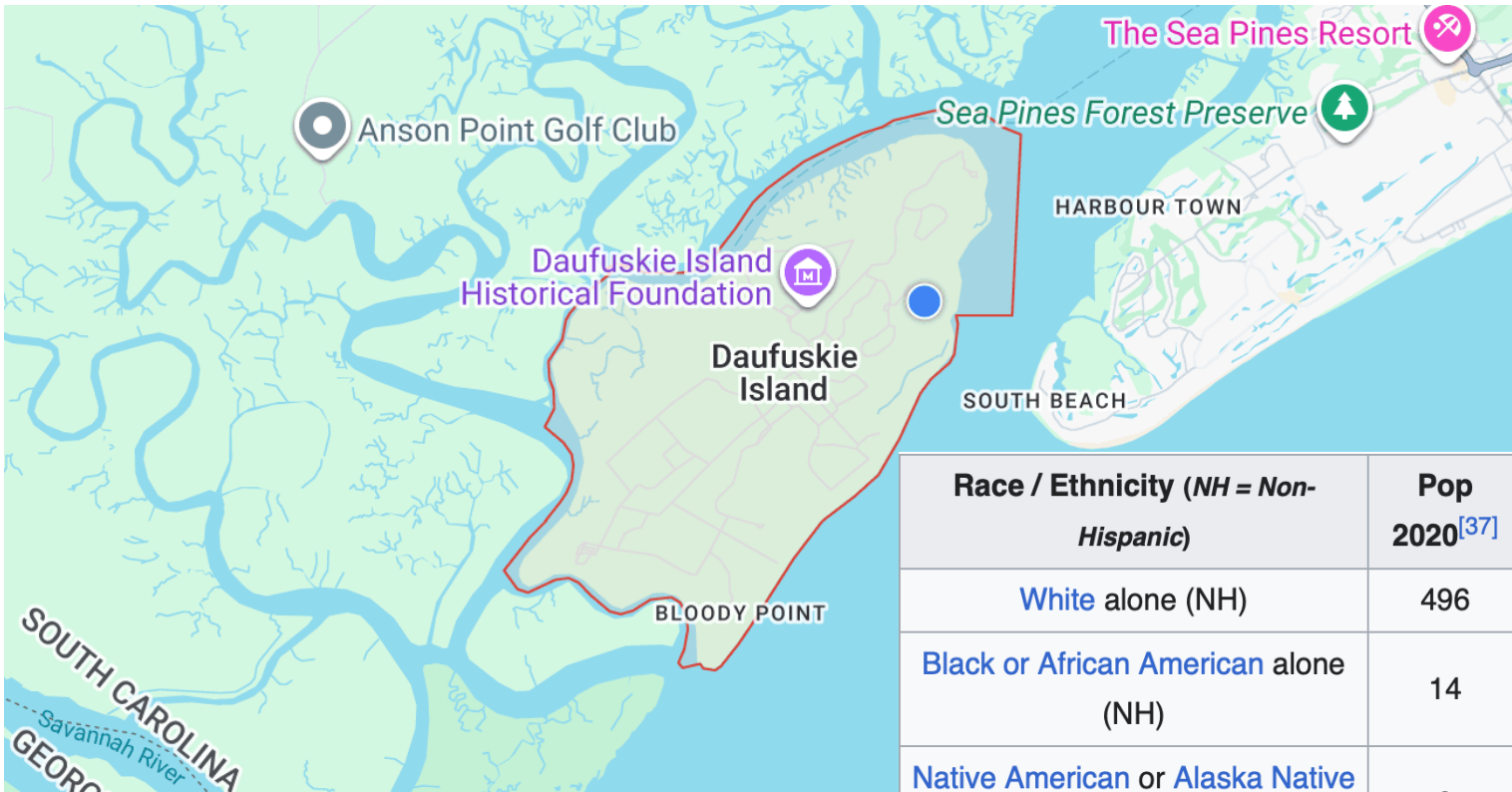


Visit our museum to learn about island history, then follow the Rob Kennedy Historic Trail

Museum Hours
Tuesday-Saturday 10-2
(843) 842-2435

Preserving the Island's Historical and Cultural Heritage

DAUFUSKIE ISLAND BY THE NUMBERS



Population: 557 (2020 census)
 Land Area: ~ 9.81 sq. miles (5 x 2.5 Miles)
 ~ 5,200 acres
 Elevation: 10 ft.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Race / Ethnicity (NH = Non-Hispanic)	Pop 2020 ^[37]	% 2020
White alone (NH)	496	88.05%
Black or African American alone (NH)	14	2.51%
Native American or Alaska Native alone (NH)	0	0.00%
Asian alone (NH)	5	0.90%
Pacific Islander alone (NH)	0	0.00%
Other race alone (NH)	2	0.36%
Mixed race or Multiracial (NH)	21	3.77%
Hispanic or Latino (any race)	19	3.41%
Total	557	100.00%

DAUFUSKIE TODAY IS

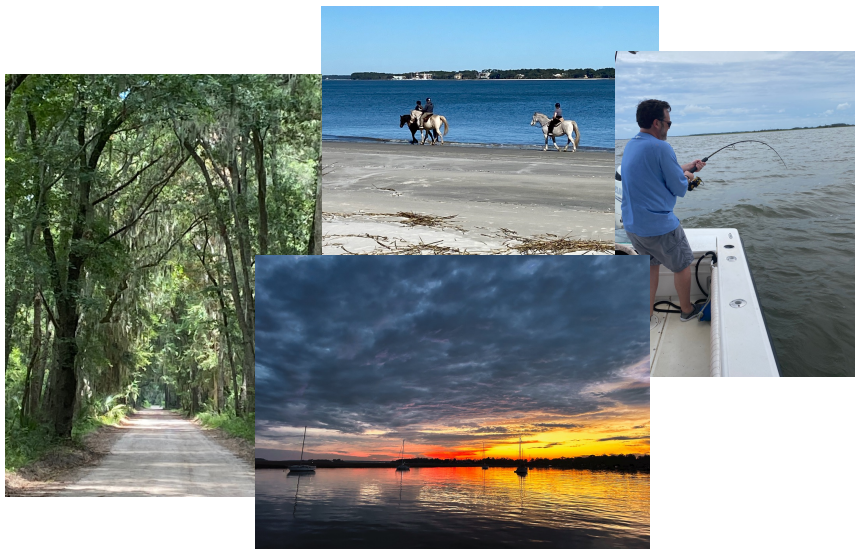
A historic site



A nature preserve



A tourist destination



Home



SHIPBUILDING IN THE LOW COUNTRY

THE BLOODY POINT SHIPYARD ON DAUFUSKIE ISLAND

- The American shipbuilding industry leading up to the Revolutionary War
- Shipbuilding spreads southward to South Carolina
- The growth of building in the Port Royal and Beaufort areas
- "Shipyards" on Hilton Head and Daufuskie Island
- Robert Watts and the Bloody Point shipyard
- The impact of the War on Daufuskie/lowcountry shipbuilding

SHIPBUILDING IN THE LOW COUNTRY

THE BLOODY POINT SHIPYARD ON DAUFUSKIE ISLAND

The American shipbuilding industry leading up to the Revolutionary War

- By the early 1770s, **one out of every three merchant ships** flying the British flag worldwide was built in American shipyards.
- New England, specifically Massachusetts (Boston, Salem), Connecticut and Maine dominated the market. Major yards were also prominent in Philadelphia and the Chesapeake region, including Norfolk, Virginia
- By 1772, annual production reached 26,000 tons.

The colonies proved to be the most cost-effective place in the world to produce ships, with an abundance of old growth white pine and white oak

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Shipbuilding spreads southward to South Carolina

- The explosive growth of the plantations producing indigo and rice drove a massive demand for shipping to markets in England and the West Indies.
- The large numbers of vessels frequenting the Charleston and Georgetown harbors created local economic growth supporting vessel maintenance, cargo hauling and fleet expansion.
- The lowcountry provided abundant timber resources, with live oak and cypress far superior to European (and New England) wood and pine forests provided tar, pitch, turpentine and rosin for caulking and waterproofing.
- Shipbuilding became a primary driver of the South Carolina economy, second only to rice and indigo.

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Shipbuilding spreads southward to South Carolina

- The abundance of live oak was one factor in drawing shipbuilding into South Carolina.
- One historian stated: “ this was a luxury timber. It far surpassed white oak in durability being rated at from 40 to 50 years when properly seasoned.”
- In 1771, the *South Carolina and General Gazette* proclaimed that the South Carolina live oak was earning a reputation across the Atlantic, with many orders from England for large ships proving “the goodness of vessels built here and the superior quality of our live oak timber to any wood in America for shipbuilding.”
- English shipbuilder Roger Fisher noted the quality of live oak and recommended it to the British admiralty, stating it would be “ the greatest utility to Great Britain’s navy”.

Source: The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Volume I, 1514-1864, Rowland, Moore and Rogers, 183

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The growth of building in the Port Royal and Beaufort areas

- The first oceangoing vessel built in the Beaufort area was a fifteen-ton schooner, the St. Joseph, built in 1740.
- Between 1740 and 1760, sixteen small vessels were built, mostly schooners averaging around 18 tons. These vessels primarily served local planters to transport crops and produce to market and supplies to the Plantations. (Coastal vessels)
- Between 1763 and the Revolutionary War, shipbuilding in the Beaufort area grew rapidly, with the Port Royal Sound area becoming the principal shipbuilding center in the Southern colonies.
- The sea islands, like Hilton Head and Daufuskie, provided ideal locations for construction, with deep creeks and access to abundant live oak and pine populations. Between 1764 and 1774, at least 30 ships were built in the sea islands.

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The growth of building in the Port Royal and Beaufort areas

The transition of shipbuilding activity from the Charleston and Georgetown areas may have been due, in part, to the inefficient and wasteful construction practices in use at the time.

- Using a ship's design, a scale model was constructed with all pieces of the hull in miniature.
- Full size templates were made of the structural pieces of the hull from paper or cloth.
- The templates were taken into the woods and laid against live oak trees to find the exact size, shape and curve of the structure. Due to the density of live oak, it could not be formed into the proper shape using the traditional steaming method.
- A single tree might be cut down for a single piece of the ship's structure .

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Largest Ships built in the Beaufort area 1765-1775

Year	Ship	Tonnage	Builder	Owner(s)
1766	Rose Island	240		Samuel Grove
1766	St. Helens	170		Francis Stuart
1766	Udny	240		Thomas Middleton
1768	Peggy	100		Thomas Rutledge
1771	Pallas	200		Roger Smith +++
1773	Countess of Dumfries	120		Master R. Eason +++
1773	Atlantic	260	James Black	Richard Maitland +++
1774	Georgetown	100	James Black	James Bonneau
1774	Ashley-Cooper	200	James Black	Jos. Nicholson Wm. Maskall (London)
1775	Live Oak	200	Enoch Laurens John Russell	“some gentlemen of Glasgow”

+++ Additional owners not listed

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"Shipyards" on Hilton Head and Daufuskie Island



- Shipbuilding was highly itinerant in the Beaufort District
- Locations included Spanish Point near Beaufort, Skull Creek on Hilton Head, Factory Creek on Lady's Island and Bloody Point on Daufuskie Island.
- One established yard may have been "Old Point" or "Black's Point" (Beaufort)

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”Shipyards” on Hilton Head and Daufuskie Island

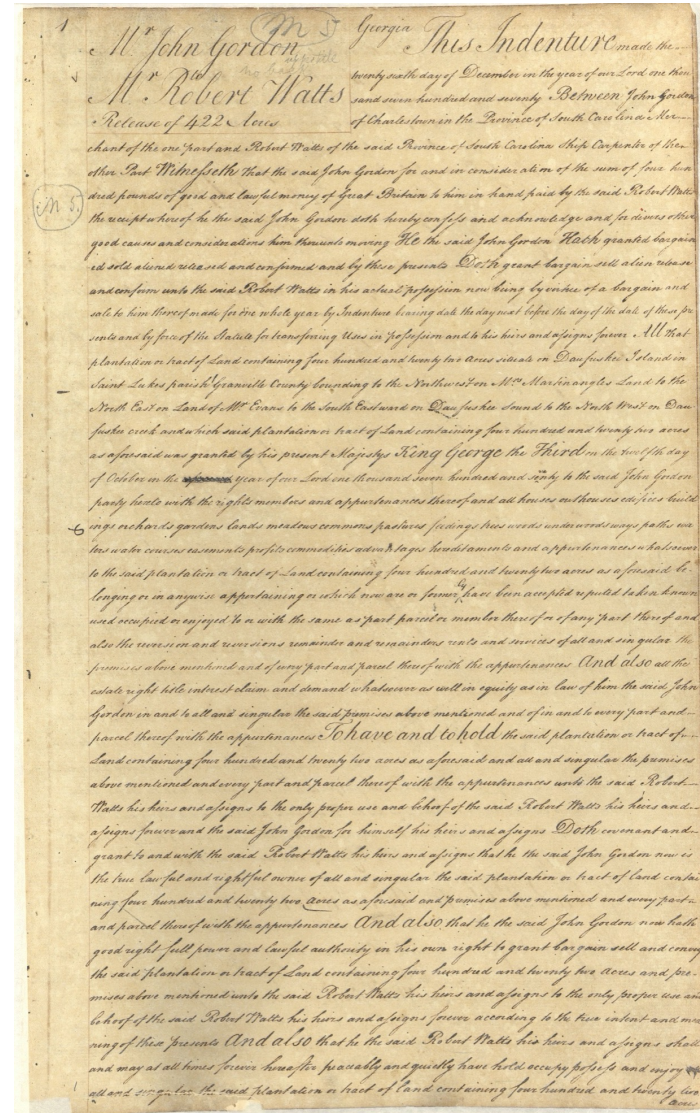
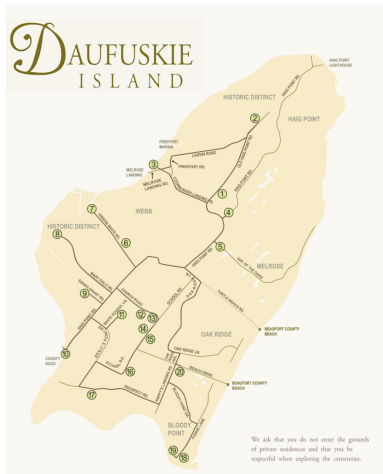
- Temporary shipyards were established but never became sites for permanent settlement. Camps probably disappeared as soon as a ship was launched.
- Shipbuilders advertised for skilled workers like shipwrights and carpenters, blacksmiths and loggers.
- Plantation slave laborers were trained as carpenters, sawyers, boatswains, caulkers, riggers and blacksmiths.
- No significant archaeological evidence was found in pre-development surveys on Daufuskie.

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Robert Watts and the Bloody Point shipyard

It is uncertain when Robert Watts first moved to the lowcountry from Philadelphia, probably around 1761. In 1770, he purchased the Bloody Point plantation (422 acres) on Daufuskie Island. He was joined by his cousin Charles in the shipbuilding business in 1763, and Charles moved to Daufuskie in 1771.



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Robert Watts and the Bloody Point shipyard

A new Ship named the St. Helena, belonging to the Estate of Francis Stuart, Esq; deceased, said to be the best ever built in this Province, and will carry a Thousand Barrels of Rice, was last Week launched at Beaufort, Port-Royal, by the Builder Mr. Robert Watts.

The South-Carolina and American General Gazette (Charleston, South Carolina) · Fri, Oct 24, 1766

There have been lately built and launched here, a fine Brigantine for Mr. Cornelius Dewees, for Captain William Thomson; and another Brigantine, by Mr. Wallis, for Capt. John Wright; both designed for the West-India Trade, and now near ready for the Sea. Three fine large Ships are also in such Forwardness on the Stocks, that they will be launched early this Fall: one of them, building by Messrs. Begbie & Manson, for Capt. William White, in the London Trade, reckoned a very complete Vessel; the second, building by Mr. James Black, for Captain James Bailey, also in the London Trade, full as complete; and the third, building by Mr. Robert Watts, for Captain William Carter, in the Bristol Trade, not less complete than the others.

The South-Carolina Gazette (Charleston, South Carolina) · Thu, Aug 8, 1771

Saturday last was launched at Bloody-Point, a fine new Ship, called the Georgia-Planter, built by Mr. Robert Watts for the London Trade.

The South-Carolina Gazette; and Country Journal (Charleston, South Carolina) · Tue, Mar 3, 1772

Ship-Building is still carried on with Spirit at Beaufort, Port-Royal, where a fine Brigantine of 180 Tons, for Captain Ruffel, was launched last Thursday, by Mr. James Vance; and a large Ship is on the Stocks, by Mr. James Black, for Capt. John Maitland. Another large Ship, and a Schooner 50 Feet Keel, are also building by Mr. Robert Watts, at Hilton Head, near Port-Royal.

The South-Carolina Gazette (Charleston, South Carolina) · Thu, May 14, 1772

The same Day, another Ship, upwards of 400 Tons Burthen, was launched at Hilton-Head, built by Mr. Robert Watts, for the Jamaica Trade, also allowed to be a very fine Vessel. And, Two other Ships are set up at Beaufort, one to be built by Mr. Black, the other by Mr. James Vance; besides several schooners.

The South-Carolina Gazette (Charleston, South Carolina) · Mon, Feb 15, 1773

The same Day was launched at Hilton Head, a fine Ship, of 420 Tons, built of Live-Oak, by Mr. Robert Watts, to be commanded by Captain Caldwell, and is also esteemed a complete Vessel.

The South-Carolina Gazette; and Country Journal (Charleston, South Carolina) · Tue, Feb 16, 1773

Robert Watts was the lead builder in a number of ships launched in the area, including, from Port Royal (the St. Helena in 1766), from Bloody Point (the Georgia Planter in 1772), from Hilton Head in 1772 and 1773.

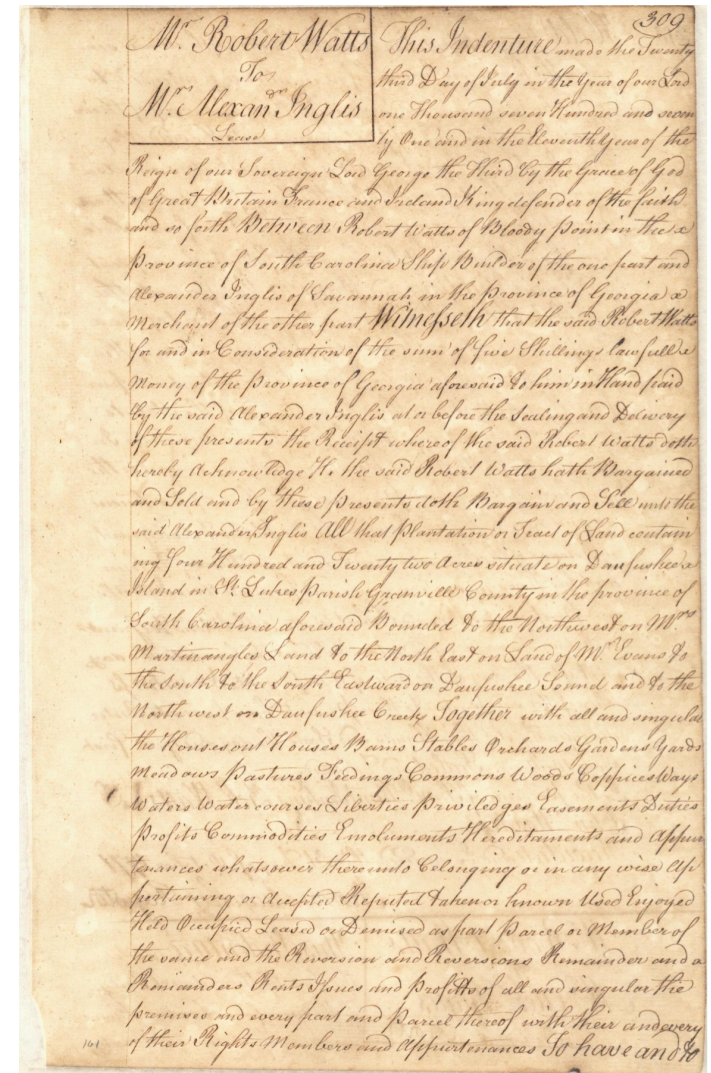
Watts appears to have launched at least three other ships from Bloody Point, the Georgia Packet in 1768, the Cowles, around 1770, and the Friendship, a 260-ton ocean going vessel, in 1772.

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Robert Watts and the Bloody Point shipyard

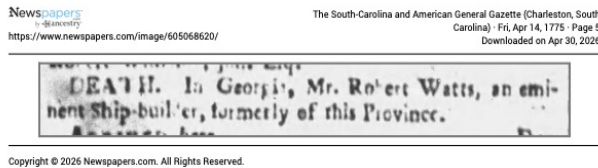
- It appears that Roberts Watts mortgaged the Bloody Point property in 1771 to Alexander Inglis.
- In 1777, the property appears in a Beaufort County sheriff's sale, sold to Edward Davies along with other Watts properties. (Confiscated property? This was two years after Watts' death.)
- At some point, Bloody Point returned to the ownership of Watts' daughter Sarah. (Sarah married John David "Money" Mongin who came to own 10 of the 11 plantations on Daufuskie.)



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The impact of the War on Daufuskie/lowcountry shipbuilding



- Robert Watts died at the outset of the war in 1775.
- Watts' cousin Charles refused to sign an oath of loyalty and was allegedly tarred and feathered and banished from Daufuskie by a local rebel committee, returning to Georgia.
- A majority of residents on Daufuskie were loyalists, and Daufuskie came to be known as Little Bermuda. During the War, loyalist properties were confiscated and their owners banished.
- James Black (patriot), who had purchased property on Daufuskie, died serving in the American militia in 1779.

DAUFUSKIE ISLAND HISTORICAL FOUNDATION



The Daufuskie Island Historical Foundation is a 501(C)3 organization founded in 2001, which seeks to preserve the history and culture of Daufuskie Island, South Carolina. To further public knowledge and appreciation of the area, we have undertaken the following efforts:

- Acquired and Restored Historic Buildings
- Established an Island History Museum
- Created a Self-Guided Trail of Historic Island Sites
- Began an Island History Archive Center

Website: daufuskiemuseum.org