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The Shell Builders: Tabby Architecture of Beaufort, South Carolina, and the Sea Islands

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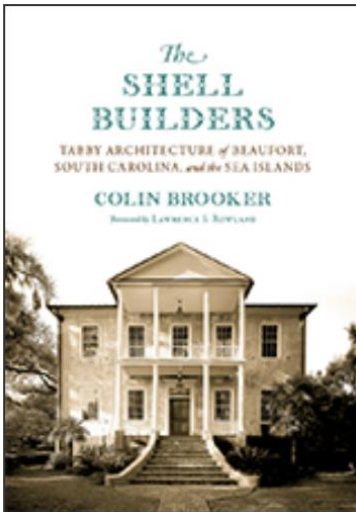
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Abstract

Jennifer P. Smith reviews *The Shell Builders: Tabby Architecture of Beaufort, South Carolina, and the Sea Islands*, by Colin Brooker with a forward by Lawrence S. Rowland.

The Shell Builders: Tabby Architecture of Beaufort, South Carolina, and the Sea Islands

Colin Brooker
University of South Carolina Press, 2020, \$39.99
ISBN: 9781643360713

The sight of white-walled ruins among palm fronds and Spanish moss is both alluring and romantic and always speaks of old Southern charm. If, like me, the sight of those crumbling edifices sparks your imagination, this detailed account of their history may be just the book for you. *The Shell Builders* takes the reader on a tour of South Carolina's history and beyond to learn of this uniquely southern building style.

The author, Colin Brooker, is a self-made expert on the subject. Having bought and restored his own tabby mansion in Beaufort, South Carolina, and working on numerous tabby structures along the coast, Brooker brings his expert knowledge to the page. Brooker takes the reader on an in-depth historical tour of the history of tabby from its roots in North Africa up to modern day research and restoration.

This book is written in a scholarly tone and is intended for the more serious researcher and Southern historian. Brooker leaves no questions unanswered in his meticulous research. The book includes several examples of tabby, or tabiyah, structures dating back to the early twelfth century. Brooker takes great strides to explain the use of tabby construction in creating the first military

installations along the southern coast. He explains why this style of construction was preferred in the deep south during its early days, strives to explain the makeup of this remarkable building material and the reasons it can still be found today.

Brooker spends a great deal of time detailing the history of tabby in Beaufort, South Carolina particularly. He provides abundant examples of various historic buildings in the Beaufort area, as well as providing black and white photos and building plans. This book, though mainly focused on tabby architecture, also provides the reader with other historical facts and fascinating information about the South Carolina coast and its sea islands. Brooker follows the historical end of the use of tabby architecture to the Bahamas. In his final statements, Brooker expresses his concerns for the future of tabby structures still remaining and his hopes to, “inspire new generations to ensure that knowledge of [tabby architecture] is not lost, but expanded and preserved” (248).

Despite its more formal tone, I found the book to be full of interesting tidbits about historic sites here in South Carolina and further abroad. I enjoyed learning new information about locations I was familiar with already and discovering many more that I now want to explore. Take this book as your opportunity to explore your local landmarks and as a rich field guide to the hidden treasures and rich heritage of South Carolina.

Jennifer Smith is Technical Services Librarian for Dorchester County Library in St. George, South Carolina. She enjoys discovering new things while spending time with her family, including exploring and learning about local history.