

## **Excerpts from the Intro, Chapters One and Two (of Six) of:**

### **Somerset: One Hundred Years a Town**

Written by Lesley Anne Simmons with Donna Harman for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006

#### **Introduction**

Originally set down among Maryland tobacco fields, the town of Somerset now rests like an oasis of tranquility between the bustling apartments, shops and restaurants of Friendship Heights to its south and Bethesda to its north. The town retains an image of gentility, with swathes of parkland and green space buffering it from its more developed neighbors; narrow, tree-lined streets; a little red town hall; and a warm and neighborly atmosphere. But that gentility belies a century of effort – first to develop the town and bring its citizens the services that modern-day living required and later to stem the tidal waves of urban development that periodically threatened to overtake it...

#### **Chapter One**

The land on which Somerset is built had long been a unit. It was part of the original Friendship Tract containing 3,124 acres, which was patented in 1711 by the fourth Lord Baltimore to Col. Thomas Addison and James Stoddart. An early Philadelphia atlas map, dated 1801, shows a 211 acre tract of land known as Friendship that belonged to farmer Richard Williams. One of the most important transactions, as far as the town is concerned, was in 1890, when entrepreneur John Beall and his partner Dr. Ralph Walsh, who then owned some 217 acres of the southwestern part of Friendship, sold 50 acres to five gentlemen for the princely sum of \$19,000...

The town founders, all with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, were Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, Dr. Charles A. Crampton, Dr. Daniel E. Salmon [for whom the bacterium Salmonella is named], Miles Fuller, and Horace Horton. Together they formed the Somerset Heights Colony Company...Not only did the founders want to provide pleasant homes for their families, they also fully expected to make money on their venture...

Only about one-third of the 35 families who lived in the community could be relied upon for cash or work contributions for the common good, so, in 1905, the citizens association decided to petition the legislature of the state of Maryland for municipal powers to enable

them to levy taxes in order to equalize the burden of providing essential services for all.

## **Chapter Two**

The charter was issued in 1906, and the community of Somerset Heights, along with some surrounding farms and land, became the town of Somerset.

The first town council was elected on May 7, 1906, and Dr. Charles A. Crampton became the first mayor. Meetings of the town council were held in the mayor's home or the home of the town clerk-treasurer. The most pressing task was to develop an orderly and fair way of assessing taxes on property within the town boundaries. A board of assessors soon achieved this, and the tax rate was set at 50 cents on each \$100 of taxable property. The total expenditures for 1907-1908 were to be \$511, of which \$350 was for maintaining and lighting streets and sidewalks. This soon proved to be inadequate, and the subject of a general reassessment was heatedly debated over several months. The attempt failed...A more modest revenue-raising measure, a \$2 per head tax on dogs, was established instead.

*Somerset: One Hundred Years a Town* is available at Amazon.com or from Arcadia Publishing at <http://arcadiapublishing.com>.