

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**JANE SWEEN LIBRARY - SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**

## **Guide to the Town of Somerset Collection**

**Lesley Anne Simmons - Chair of the History Committee, Town of Somerset**

**June 19, 2007**

Montgomery County Historical Society  
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## GUIDE TO THE TOWN OF SOMERSET COLLECTION

<b>Collection Name:</b>	Town of Somerset Collection
<b>Collection Type:</b>	Communities and Municipalities
<b>Location:</b>	Sween Library, Montgomery County Historical Society 142 West Middle Ln. Rockville MD 20850, USA
<b>Size:</b>	1 c.f. in 2 document boxes
<b>Dates:</b>	1890 - 2006
<b>Finding Aid Author:</b>	Lesley Anne Simmons
<b>Date:</b>	June 17 2007
<b>Abstract:</b>	The Town of Somerset Collection is an artificial collection of photographs, brochures, maps, research notes, records, press clippings and memorabilia documenting the Town of Somerset, in Montgomery County, Maryland. The collection was originally created by Mrs. Dorothy O'Brien, first Town Historian, and additional material has been added.

### Table of Contents

Historical Notes.....	2
Scope and Contents of the Collection.....	3
Provenance.....	4
Processing Notes.....	4
Using the Collection.....	5
Other Resources.....	5
Container List.....	6
SERIES I: TOWN AND SCHOOL, 1890-2006.....	6

### Historical Notes

The Town of Somerset is a municipality of some 400 homes, first settled in the mid-1890s and incorporated in 1906. Today the Town government consists of an elected Mayor, five elected Town Council members, a Town Clerk, and several maintenance personnel. Developed by five scientists who all worked for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Somerset was one of the early trolley suburbs of the District of Columbia.

The five USDA scientists who purchased Somerset Heights in 1890 were Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, Dr. Charles A. Crampton, Dr. Daniel E. Salmon, Miles Fuller and Horace Horton. Each built a home, subdivided the remaining lots and built on them for speculation. Mr.

Horton's interests were soon assumed by Dr. E. A. deSweinitz. By 1905, thirty-five families were living in the community and a Citizens Association petitioned the Maryland Legislature for municipal powers. The Charter was issued in 1906, and on April 5, the community of Somerset Heights and some surrounding farms and land was incorporated as the Town of Somerset.

Women played an important role in Somerset throughout its history. The first woman's club was organized in 1902 and called the Wednesday Club. By 1916 the Somerset Woman's Club was formalized and became part of the Federation of Women's Clubs. Club members took on many civic and social causes and had significant impact on the development of the Town. The Club led the campaign to get the Somerset Elementary School built in 1928. The Somerset Elementary School building was added to in 1949, 1951 and 1958, and was demolished and rebuilt in 2004. It has become one of the most respected and successful elementary schools in the County. The Women's Club disbanded in 1980.

From 1950 to 1960 the Town's population quadrupled to 1,444 residents as fields and woodland were developed with new California-style bungalows and split level homes. One of the Town's most controversial periods ran from the 1960s through the 1980s when a parcel of land, known as the Bergdoll Tract, was going to be developed into a mixed commercial/residential use. The fight to stop that development ultimately failed with the building of the Somerset House high-rise condominiums in the late 1980s. However, the Town won twelve acres of park land that now buffer Somerset from the high-rise condominiums of Somerset House and the Village of Friendship Heights. This park provided space for the Town swimming pool to be built. The townspeople also won a reduction in the height and density of the planned buildings. In 1988 the Town de-annexed eighteen acres on which the first of three high rise condominium towers was being erected. The extant residents of Somerset, all of whom lived in single family residences, feared that condominium residents would outnumber the single families and take over the Town government to pursue their own priorities.

Town residents have celebrated their history throughout the years with festivities, including for its Diamond Jubilee, 80<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of incorporation as well as during the United States Bicentennial celebrations.

## **Scope and Contents of the Collection**

The collection consists of photographs, newspaper clippings, deeds, records, scrapbooks, Town Journals and Directories, maps and prolific notes. The collection contains original documents from as early as 1890, including the promotional brochure for the soon-to-be-developed suburb, early tax records, and the original Papers of Incorporation of the Somerset Heights Water and Power Company. The collection also contains copies of land patents and surveys of "Friendship" dating from 1711 and 1713. Newspaper clippings include obituaries of Somerset residents, events in the development of the town, and extensive coverage of the opposition to the development of the Bergdoll Tract and subsequent de-annexation of the Somerset House property.

The collection was created and maintained by Mrs. Dorothy O'Brien, and many of the items include her handwritten notes. Dorothy and Joe O'Brien moved into Somerset in 1946, with their two children. In the course of her residence she was a member of the Somerset Town Council, a member and two-term president of the Somerset Woman's Club, and the first Town historian. Throughout her residence in Somerset, she collected memorabilia, photographs, maps and other documents, and recorded memories of the residents. In 1956, Dorothy wrote a history of the Town, sponsored by the Somerset Woman's Club and the Town Council, to help celebrate the Town's 50<sup>th</sup> year of incorporation. In 1976, as part of the Bicentennial events, Dorothy and Joan Weiss conducted further research and collected additional material by correspondence and personal interviews with town residents. The result of this work was an exhibit about the Town's history, that was shown at the Somerset Elementary School, and also at Montgomery Mall. In 1977, Dorothy and Helen Jaszi wrote an updated history of Somerset, published in *The Montgomery County Story*. She continued to maintain the collection until she moved away from Somerset in 1979.

Dorothy O'Brien died in 1994 at age 86.

The collection is divided into two series. Series I - "Town and School, 1890-2006" contains photographs, documents, newspaper clippings, and other materials that document the history of the Town, the residents, the homes, and the Somerset Elementary School. Series II - "Somerset Women's Club, 1916-1980" contains minutes, reports, membership lists, and other records of the Club. This series also contains copies of material that is kept in the Somerset Town Hall archives.

## **Provenance**

The collection was developed, maintained, and held by Dorothy O'Brien until 1979, when she donated the collection to the Montgomery County Historical Society (MCHS). She sent several subsequent items to MCHS that were added to the collection. Several other materials about the Town might have been added to the collection from 1979 to 2006 by MCHS staff or Somerset residents. Copies of documents from the Somerset Woman's Club dated 1959-1977 and several items celebrating the Town's Centennial were added to the collection in 2007 by Lesley Anne Simmons. The original records of the Somerset Woman's Club are housed in the Town of Somerset archives.

## **Processing Notes**

The collection given to MCHS comprised of a set of envelopes and file folders was stored in a box and accordian file until 2006, when it was processed by Lesley Anne Simmons. All rusted fasteners were removed, sometimes replaced with plastic fasteners, or simply identified as being together by page numbering or wrapping with a sheet of archival paper. The documents were refoldered, wherever possible to reflect Mrs. O'Brien's original order and organization scheme. In some cases, loose material that had no apparent arrangement were rearranged with similar materials. Newspaper clippings were photocopied onto archival paper and the originals discarded. Scrapbook pages were separated with archival

paper. Loose photographs were inserted into archival protective sleeves. Newspaper clippings are organized chronologically by date and obituaries, alphabetically, by last name. A few older items in fragile condition were photographed digitally and the originals marked "restricted".

## Using the Collection

The Town of Somerset collection is available to researchers at the Jane Sween Library of the Montgomery County Historical Society. Directions to the library and hours of operation are available online at <http://www.montgomeryhistory.org>. There are no restrictions on using the collection, other than several original documents that are too fragile to handle. Digital images of the restricted documents will be made available on request. Photocopies and/or camera reproduction of materials in the collection for personal and research use is at the discretion of the librarian/archivist, based on condition of the item in question. Reproduction of materials for publication will require advanced permission from MCHS, and copyright clearance will be the responsibility of the researcher. MCHS does not hold copyright for any materials in the collection.

In order to make the collection available to patrons, MCHS recommends an advance request by telephone to use the collection. On weekdays, a telephone call one hour in advance of the desired time of access to the collection is sufficient. For weekend access to the collection, an advance request call must be received at MCHS by 2:00 PM on the preceding Friday. The collection will not be available on weekends without an advance request.

## Other Resources

Town of Somerset Website - <http://townofsomerset.com/>

"The Town of Somerset" by Dorothy O'Brien and Helen H. Jaszi. *The Montgomery County Story*, vol. 20, no. 2, Winter 1977 (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Historical Society).

*Somerset - One Hundred Years a Town* by Lesley Anne Simmons with Donna Kathleen Hannan (Charlestown, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005).

## **Container List**

### **BOX 1**

#### **SERIES I: TOWN AND SCHOOL, 1890-2006**

- Somerset Heights Land Co. Booklet produced by Somerset Heights Land Company, 1890 [Restricted]
- Original Papers of Incorporation of the Somerset Heights Water and Power Company, 1902
- Original Tax Records, 1910  
Includes Dorothy O'Brien's notes, 1964
- Correspondence to Dorothy O'Brien about Memories of Somerset, 1956, 1976
- Research Papers, 1711-1906  
Contains copies of: First Survey of "Friendship", 1711; Original patents of "Friendship", 1713; Act to Incorporate Town of Somerset, 1906; Section of Bethesda District No. 7 Map, 1878.
- Research Papers, 1888-1889  
Contains: Copies of deeds assembling land; Dorothy O'Brien's notes on original land purchase and early history.
- Research Papers, n.d.  
Contains: Copies of deeds of early Somerset houses; Dorothy O'Brien's research notes and title searches on early houses.
- Cast of "A Country School" from the "Spirit of Montgomery County," 1928  
Contains 3 photographic prints.
- Early Somerset Photographs from Mrs. Edwin Reynolds, 1907, 1913, 1922, 1976, n.d.  
Contains: 17 photographic prints, 3 negative strips; Related correspondence.
- Early Photographs of Warwick Place Children from Mrs. Edwin Reynolds, 1906-1909, n.d.  
Contains: 5 photographic prints; Related correspondence.
- The Crampton House (4805 Dorset Avenue) and Crampton Family, Mrs. O'Brien's Notes on Photographs 1893, 1935(?), 1984  
Contains: 3 photographic prints; 2 negatives.
- Frank Garfield, 1977  
Contains: 4 photographic prints.

BOX 1      SERIES I: TOWN AND SCHOOL, 1890-2006

Mayors of the Town of Somerset, 1906-1975

Contains 10 photographic prints, with Dorothy O'Brien's Notes. See Appendix 1 for a name index of Mayors.

Town Elections 1986, 1988

Contains: Candidate flyers; Correspondence; Press clippings.

Town of Somerset Charters, 1930, 1959, 1965

Town of Somerset Official Journals, 1937-1982

Contains 12 issues. Incomplete coverage of the date range.

Town of Somerset Telephone Directories, 1963-1981

Contains 8 directories. Incomplete coverage of the date range.

Town Histories, 1956, 1977

Contains copies of the following documents

"History and Government," 1956

"The Town of Somerset, Maryland" by Dorothy O'Brien and Helen H. Jaszi, 1977.

Somerset Heritage Exhibit, Scrapbook compiled by Joan Weiss, 1976

Diamond Jubilee, 1981

House Tours, 1980-1996

Contains programs and/or correspondence about the following events:

Somerset House Tour, 1980

Maryland House and Garden Pilgrimage, 1986

80th Birthday Celebration and "Town Walk," [1986]

90th Birthday Garden Tour, [1996]

Somerset Centennial Celebration, 2006

Maps

Contains the following items:

Map of Somerset, 1947, annotated by Dorothy O'Brien with the names of property owners in 1911 and 1912

Plat of Survey "Gift" and "Option" to Town of Somerset, 1963

Site Development Plan of Somerset Park, 1964

Map of Chevy Chase, including Somerset, n.d.

BOX 2      SERIES I: TOWN AND SCHOOL, 1890-2006

BOX 2

Mrs. Jesse (Rebecca) Swigart's Diary, 1920-1956

A scrapbook that documents the Somerset Woman's Club including event invitations, programs, special event documents, and press clippings. The scrapbook itself is restricted due to condition. Digital images of the scrapbook pages are available.

Press Clippings, Obituaries, 1962-1988, 2007

Press clippings of obituaries of residents of Somerset. See Appendix 2 for a name index to this folder.

Press Clippings, General

Press Clippings, Somerset Residents

See Appendix 3 for a name index to this folder.

Press Clippings, Zoning and Development Issues, 1954-1984

See Appendix 4 for an article title index to this folder.

Press Clippings, Zoning and Development: Bergdoll/Somerset House, 1985-1988

See Appendix 5 for an article title index to this folder.

"The Boundary Monuments of the District of Columbia" by Marcus Baker, 1897

Old Bethesda by Doree Germaine Holman and Bethesda Not So Old by Gertrude

D. Bradley, 1956

Contains one volume that is a reprint of the two books.

Somerset School 1928-1988

**SERIES II: Somerset Woman's Club, 1922-1977**

Somerset Woman's Club, 1923-1965

Contains a list of Club Presidents, photographs of Club Presidents, and miscellaneous correspondence. See Appendix 6 for a name index.

Somerset Woman's Club, 1916-1923

Contains Club By-Laws, a list of charter members, minutes from meetings, press clippings, a list of officers, and an account of the Woman's Club, ca. 1940. Some items include annotations and notes by Dorothy O'Brien.

Somerset Woman's Club, 1924-1959

Contains minutes for 1924, 1925, 1955, 1956, and 1957; treasurer's reports for 1950; reports for 1934-37, 1939, and 1940; member lists ca. 1960, 1964; By-Laws, May 1949 and 1960; notes, 1925; resolutions, 1935, 1959; Correspondence regarding Zoning Amendment petitions, 1957; Correspondence regarding Security Storage, 1957; Correspondence regarding Zoning, 1959.

BOX 2      SERIES II: Somerset Woman's Club, 1922-1977

**Somerset Woman's Club, 1959-1970**

Copies of material held in the Somerset Town Hall Archives. Contains By-Laws, member lists, invitations, reports, budgets, minutes of meetings, programs of events and trips, correspondence.

**Somerset Woman's Club 1971-1973**

Copies of material held in the Somerset Town Hall Archives. Contains By-Laws, member lists, invitations, reports, budgets, minutes of meetings, programs of events and trips, correspondence.

**Somerset Woman's Club 1974-1977**

Copies of material held in the Somerset Town Hall Archives. Contains By-Laws, member lists, invitations, reports, budgets, minutes of meetings, programs of events and trips, correspondence.

**APPENDIX 1 - Name Index to "Mayors of the Town of Somerset, 1906-1975"**

Swigart, Jesse E (1910-1912)  
Moore, Charles S (1916-1919)  
Horne, William B. (1938-1940)  
Stohlman, J. William (1919-1938)  
Day, Irving M. (1940-1954)  
Betts, William F. (1954-1956)  
Turnbull, Frederick (1956-1958)  
Vinton, Warren J (1958-1969)  
Goldberg, Jerald F (1969-1975)  
Behr, Walter (1975-

**APPENDIX 2 - Name Index to "Press Clippings, Obituaries, 1962-1988, 2007"**

Albritton, Dr. E. C.  
Arick, Mary C.  
Arnold, E  
Behr, L  
Berman, C  
Bouchet, C  
Brady, Mary R  
Bricker, K  
Capello, James  
Crampton, Carl, G  
Cremins, R  
Crump, Kathleen  
Day, Irving  
Downs, Bill  
Frankel, Jack  
Garfield, Marjorie, H  
Gibson, Kasson  
Gibson, Ralph  
Gish, Edna M  
Gish, Olier H  
Goldberg, Mayor Jerald  
Jaszi, Helen H.  
Norling, Victor  
Novick, Ylda  
Rice, Jane Prioach, David  
Ringland, Arthur  
Taliaferro, Olive S  
Taliaferro, Richard, N  
Turnbull, Mayor F.W.  
Vinton, Mayor W.J.  
Werner, August  
Williams, Jean H  
Williams, K.B.

**APPENDIX 3 - Name Index to "Press Clippings, Somerset Residents"**

Brady, Father John  
Jaffe, Dr. Sidney  
Jaszi, George  
Maury, Margaret and Jesse  
Rowen, Hobart  
Vinton, Mary  
Wiley, Dr. Harvey

**APPENDIX 4 - Article Index to "Press Clippings, Zoning and Development Issues, 1954-1984"**

- "Clinic Plan May Chart Future of Wisconsin Avenue Strip," *The Evening Star*, Mar. 24, 1954
- "Rezoning Urged in Somerset Approach," *The Evening Star*, Mar. 25, 1954
- "Clinic Proposal Brings Sharp Opposition," *The Evening Star*, Mar. 26, 1954
- "Somerset: A Genteel Town Full of Fighters," *The Sentinel*, Jan. 29, 1976
- "New Plans in Cards for Bergdoll Tract," *The Montgomery Journal*, Sep. 16, 1976
- "Dorset Corp. Won't Pay Tax Bill," *The Tribune*, Sep. 24, 1976
- "Somerset to Fight New Development," *The Montgomery Journal*, Mar. 10, 1977
- "Condo Complex Planned For 18-Acre Bergdoll Tract," *The Washington Post*, May 2, 1981
- "Somerset, Metro Feud Over Creek," *The Montgomery Journal*, Dec. 13, 1982
- "Choice Tract Still Vacant After 25 Years of Battle," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 22, 1983
- "Wisconsin Avenue High-Rise Approved," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 27, 1983
- "The Long War by R. H. Melton," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 30, 1984
- "Somerset Council Will Appeal High Rise Plan," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 1984
- "Dust Settling In Fight Over Bergdoll Land," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 27, 1984

**APPENDIX 5 - Article Index to "Press Clippings, Zoning and Development:  
Bergdoll/Somerset House, 1985-1988"**

- "Developer Clears Bergdoll Tract for High-rise Condos," *The Montgomery Journal*, Jan. 11, 1985
- "Bergdoll Saga May at Last Be Near End," *The Washington Post*, Apr. 20, 1985
- "Luxury Somerset House Reports Brisk Sales," 1986
- "Somerset Officials May Push Planned High-rises Out of City," *The Montgomery Journal*, Apr. 8, 1986
- "Somerset May De-Annex Parcel," *The Washington Post*, Apr. 19, 1986
- "Somerset Condo Breaks Ground," Aug. 1, 1986
- "Grand Opening," [Somerset House ad.] *The Washington Post*, Sep. 26, 1986
- "Park Avenue Washington Style," [Somerset House ad.]
- "Somerset Residents Are Wary of New High-Rise Development," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 22, 1986
- "It's the Density, Not the Price," [Letter to the Editor from Mayor Walter Behr] *The Washington Post*
- "A Condo in Sleepy Somerset," *The Montgomery Journal*, Feb. 2, 1987
- "Chevy Chase Condo Sells Out First of Three Buildings," *The Journal*, Oct. 16, 1987
- "Somerset May Dump Condo Project," *The Montgomery Journal*, Jan. 7, 1988
- "Living in the Lap of Luxury and Lunacy," *The Montgomery Journal*, Jan. 8, 1988
- "De-annexation Is Issue in Town of Somerset"
- "Somerset's Building Controversy by Beth Kaiman," *The Washington Post*, Mar. 10, 1988
- "Md. Town of Somerset Expels High-Rise Project From Borders," *The Washington Post*, Mar. 22, 1988
- "Somerset Shrinks Borders to Exclude High-rise," *The Montgomery Journal*, Mar. 23, 1988
- "Somerset Casts Off Condo Complex," *The Washington Post*, Apr. 2, 1988
- "Luxury Condos Win Price Exemption," *The Washington Post*, Apr. 30, 1988
- "Ultimate Condominium Residences," [Somerset House ad.] *Regards*, Mar. 1988

**APPENDIX 6 - Name Index to a Snapshot of Club Presidents in "Somerset Woman's Club, 1923-1965"**

Champlin, Alice P (1963-1965)

Martin, Lucille, (1959-1961)

Stern, Frances (Hostess)

Rowen, Alice (1961-1963)