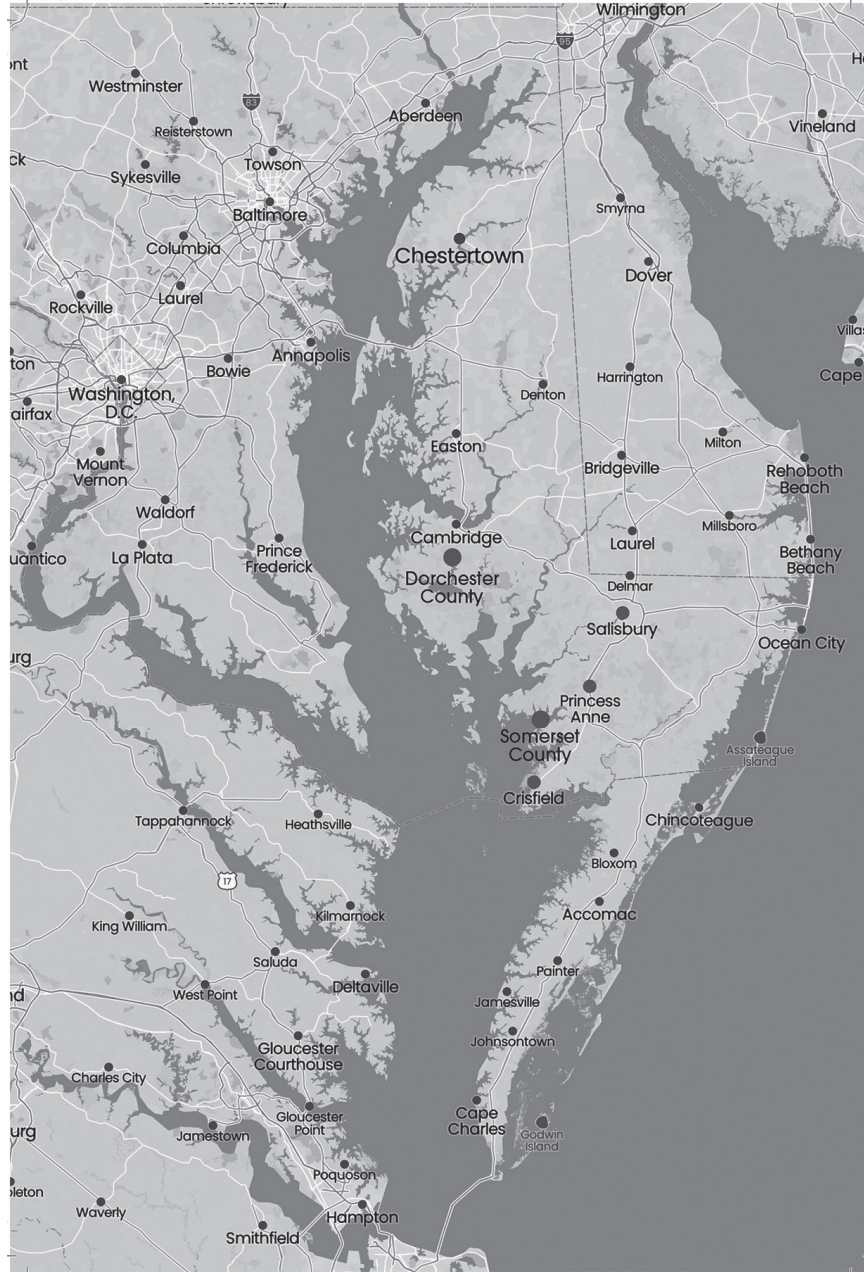


Contents

Preface	ix
Acknowledgements	xiii
Introduction: A Place in Time	1
Chapter One: Antebellum Somerset: Slavery and “Free Negroism”	11
Chapter Two: War and Emancipation	45
Chapter Three: The Freedmen’s World	71
Chapter Four: Part Arcadia, Part Wolf	97
Chapter Five: Strange Fruit	113
Chapter Six: These Low Grounds	145
Chapter Seven: Riots, Fire Hoses and Dogs	163
Chapter Eight: The Black College Down the Road	185
Chapter Nine: <i>Semper Eadem</i>	203
Chapter Ten: Afterword	219
Index	223



The Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Introduction:

A Place in Time

I Soil and Sea

Away down on Maryland's Eastern Shore there is a place called Somerset County. For over three centuries the people of this tide-water community have earned their living from farming and the wildlife of Chesapeake Bay. The county, part of the Delmarva Peninsula (Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia) has a gentle marine climate. The growing season averages two hundred days with an annual rainfall of forty-two inches; and many farmers can harvest two crops a year on their land. The sandy soil is good for vegetable crops and the low lands of the county provide good pasturage. Apple and peach orchards and rich fields of strawberries have conditioned Somerset's agricultural story. Somerset is rich in timber and ample reserves of pine, oak, and maple have historically fostered a vibrant local shipbuilding industry. Until recently, a boatyard could be found on every river and navigable stream in the region.

The Eastern Shore has often been referred to as the land that time forgot. Stretching from Cecil County in the north, the region follows Chesapeake Bay southward to form a diamond of tidewater counties shaped over the millennia by the sand deposits of the Susquehanna River. Most residents identify more with the region as a social entity than as its being part of the state of Maryland. Settled in the seventeenth century, the Eastern Shore is the oldest or "most American" of populations. Most of the people on the Eastern Shore can trace their roots to the colonial migrations from England and Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries or to

the African slave trade. The Eastern Shore of Maryland has always loomed large in the popular imagination of the Atlantic seaboard. In the 1870s big city writers like John Williamson of *Century Magazine* wrote romantic tributes to the Eastern Shore. It was for them an enchanted region of beautiful sea-kissed ports, colorful manor houses, genteel traditions, and pleasant living. Today, publications like the *National Geographic* and the *Washington Post* continue to describe the region in Edenic terms. It is a region of small towns and villages like Princess Anne, Salisbury, Cambridge, and Chestertown. Until recently, the Eastern Shore was one of the most geographically isolated regions of the United States. The building of bridges across the Bay since 1952 have connected the region somewhat to metropolitan centers. But the Eastern Shore is still a feisty, politically conservative, provincial, and self-absorbed region. Over the centuries, the Eastern Shore has retained its great natural beauty; but this beauty has often masked the darker currents of racism and violence that are also part of the region's culture.

Throughout history Somerset County's environment has been harsh. Hurricanes and floods lash the region. The county's swamps and marshlands have provided fertile breeding grounds for mosquitoes bearing yellow fever and malaria. Fierce summers sap human vitality. As the community has long been isolated from other areas of the state, Somerset remains suspicious of outsiders.

II Origins

Somerset's origins are the fabric of Maryland history. As early as 1634, when the first Englishmen on board the *Ark* and the *Dove* arrived to settle Lord Baltimore's proprietary grant, fur traders doing business in beaver pelts with the local Manokin Indians already traveled Somerset's marshes and forests. In the seventeenth century Somerset was contested territory. Lord Baltimore and a Virginia adventurer named William Claibourne struggled for mastery of this region. Operating from a base on Kent Island up the Bay, Claibourne was eager to protect his trading relationships with the Indians and to merge Somerset into the growing Virginia colony.

In 1635 the first naval battle in American history took place in the Pocomoke Sound between the vessels *St. Helena* and *St. Margaret* owned by the Calvert family, and William Claibourne's sloop, *Cockatrice*. The battle was a victory for Maryland but was inconclusive in terms of the territorial feud. Claiborne was one of many schemers and opportunists who contested Lord Baltimore's authority in the New World. By 1660 political conditions in England permitted the Calverts to pursue their rights to Somerset and Cecil Calvert, the proprietor, encouraged local settlers to emigrate to the colony to protect his Eastern Shore border from further encroachment by the Virginia colony.

III Settlers

Lord Baltimore was able to attract settlers to this region after Virginia passed a drastic law against Quakers that forced them to pay for an established Anglican Church. Although the Calverts were Catholic, they pursued a policy of religious toleration. And Quakers, because of their religious views and clannishness, were unpopular. According to Virginia authorities at that time, Quakers were an "unreasonable and turbulent sort of people . . . Teaching lies, miracles, false visions, prophecies, and doctrines tending to disturb the peace, disorganize society and destroy all law and government and religion." While mostly concocting politically erroneous views, Virginia was annoyed by Quaker disapproval of slavery and forced servitude and eager to have the dissenters leave.

Among the first Virginia emigrants to settle in Somerset were Virginia dissenters like Randall Revell who quickly amassed land warrants from the Calverts for 2,325 acres of land on the Annemessex River. By 1666 the population of this area had grown considerably and Cecil Calvert added a new county to his proprietorship named Somerset in honor of his sister, Lady Mary Somerset.¹

Those who came to the Somerset wilderness in the late seventeenth century left names of the land indicative of their aspirations and experiences. Men with faith in the new land entitled their plantations "Make Peace," "Rest," "What You Please," and

"Chance." Others more realistic about life in a harsh frontier environment named their tracts accordingly "Purgatory" "Self Preservation" and "Damned Quarter." The introduction of the Presbyterian faith in the county by Reverend Francis Makemie with its doctrines of individual salvation underscored a rough-hewn democracy that would take little direction from British authorities. Also free men and women of color, attracted by reasonable land prices for farming and mindful of Virginia's changing conservative and racial political climate moved to Somerset. That the first African Americans in Somerset were free men has been ably documented in the book, *Myne Owne Ground* and the research of others.² In the late seventeenth century there were many free Blacks living in the county.³

From whence came these free Blacks? Anthony Johnson, originally named "Antonio, a Negro" and his wife Mary, were probably part of the "twenty negars" recorded by John Rolfe in Jamestown in 1619. Some like the Johnson, Driggus and Cane families had been transported as slaves probably from the African Portuguese colony of Angola. They worked themselves out of slavery and purchased their wives' freedom as well in the 1619-1624 period. By 1650 the Johnsons owned 250 acres of land in Northampton County and at least one slave. Also by that time they had two grown sons, John and Richard.

John Johnson was in the Accomac County Court in Virginia courts on a charge of bastardy by siring a child from a white woman whom he had to support. As he had attained the status of planter with an estate of several hundred acres and cattle and was recognized as an Englishman and a Christian, he was treated no differently than the White men with whom he did business. John Johnson was a "freeman," an important designation. In 1666 free Blacks Anthony and Mary Johnson migrated from Virginia and settled a tract of three hundred acres called "Tonies Vineyard" on the south side of Wicomico Creek. Like most free Blacks, the Johnsons entered Somerset from Northampton County, Virginia. During this period free Blacks of either gender were not treated much differently than their fellow Whites. For example Mary Puckham at this time acquired a plantation and the Puckham brothers established successful carpentry businesses. Anthony Johnson and his

family members handled their own legal matters and sued in court. As late as 1685 there appeared to be little proscription of the rights and privileges of free Blacks. They held land, paid taxes, had access to the courts and transacted freely with White planters. Like the contentious group of White men who settled in early Somerset, the Johnsons regularly appeared in criminal suits. John Johnson sued Randall Revell, his creditor and planter mentor and was regularly called upon to swear oaths in court, something even few White men were able to do.⁴

Manuel Driggus anglicized his name to Emanuel Driggus. His wife became Mary Driggus. Over time the Driggus clan established a kinship network in Somerset County that sold sweet potatoes, pork and chickens in the Somerset community. Free in status, some were former indentured servants probably brought up from the British Caribbean to work their time in Virginia's fields. The term "cowboy" so redolent of the culture of the Wild West originated on the Eastern Shore when free Blacks served as "cow boy" herders of cattle in local forests and pastures. Others came under the auspices of Spain and Portugal whose possessions in the western hemisphere encouraged emigration and settlement. Most were Black and tan in color and identified with European culture—a far cry from African slaves transported by force as the eighteenth century dawned. Miscegenation in seventeenth century Virginia was not uncommon and free Blacks mixed with both Whites and local Indians. A small number of people at this time constituted an interesting racial mosaic – Black men with Indian wives, White indentured women with slave husbands, others of undetermined racial origin like members of the Driggus family who could and did pass for White. (A persistent belief in both the tidewater and Appalachia is that some people are "Melungen," part of a historic tribe of Turkish, and European gypsies who intermarried with Indians. The term "Melungen," however, is mostly mythic. Recent DNA studies have shown that Melungens are descendants of free Blacks, slaves, Indians and poor Whites. These people were known for their tan skin and straight hair.)

During the eighteenth century, however, the status of free Blacks deteriorated markedly as local planters began to use slaves to harvest the economically lucrative cash crop of tobacco. Tobacco as

a plant required constant work and attention; and several hundred White indentured servants were in the county by 1670. Randall Revell, like many of the large landowners in the county at this time, built his tobacco empire on the backs of White indentured servants. Between 1690 and 1700 a majority of these servants came from Ireland and Newgate Prison in London. Most servants had to serve at labor for five years and were treated harshly. By 1690, indentured servants constituted ten percent of the county's population.

Slavery was introduced in Somerset in the eighteenth century when the supply of White indentured servants began to diminish because of improved economic and social conditions in England. Slave ship captains touted a captive labor force inured to climate and easily controlled in a White society where the militia and the courts and growing anti-Black public prejudice kept Africans in a tight political and cultural grip. By 1750 African slaves with their strange customs and transmogrified English were part of Somerset's thriving commerce with the Caribbean.⁵ Slave labor produced tobacco, barrel staves, shingles, planks and ship timbers. Scotch-Irish settlers who came to the county at this time had little access to Somerset's engrossed farmlands. Instead, they found profit in lumbering and acquired slaves as their fortunes grew. Further, slaves came to Somerset as imports from the West Indies, particularly Barbados. While it's difficult to ascertain with precision, some scholars estimate that by 1776, slaves comprised forty-five percent of Somerset's population. By the mid-eighteenth century tobacco had ceased to be the main cash crop of the county. The soil on the lower Eastern Shore, especially in Somerset was not as well suited for tobacco growth as it was for corn or wheat. Writes historian Lois Green Carr, "only a fifth of present Somerset could ever produce high yields of tobacco and that quality was generally low."⁶

Tobacco growing in this area simply did not make sense when corn and wheat could be grown more efficiently. Corn especially would make Somerset a "feeder" to slave-oriented communities that were evolving in the far South and in the Caribbean where tobacco, sugar, and rice monocultures were firmly established. And how did the transition from tobacco to grain affect slavery in Somerset? After 1750 local planters used their captive labor force for a variety of purposes in the lumber, farming and shipbuilding econ-

omies. Lumber planks and shingles and corn produced by slave labor showed that the slave system was as adaptable to economic change as free labor and was far cheaper.

Agricultural diversification in the early years of the county freed the community from a dangerous reliance on one crop and a network of trade between Somerset, southern plantations and the Caribbean sugar islands evolved to give Somerset a modicum of prosperity. Schooners and sailing rams manned by coasting captains with Black crews sailed the Atlantic coast to Jamaica and other sugar islands carrying produce, grain and lumber and returned with cargoes laden with molasses for rum distilleries. In order for this diversified market to really take shape, much labor was required. Racial slavery in a region starved for White farm labor fit the bill.⁷

III

Politics, Methodism and Slavery

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, Somerset became a religious battleground between Presbyterians and Methodists fighting for converts and taking hard positions on subjects like political independence of the American colonies and slavery. The most influential minister in the community was Francis Makemie, the founder of the Presbyterian Church in America (1658-1708). Makemie's faith was a fiery distillation of predestination and hatred of Quakers and abolitionists. Makemie was an early protester against imperial authority. To those restive under British rule Makemie's message was clear: freedom from British taxes and restrictions. Mackemie was briefly arrested by British authorities for preaching without a license, a fact that endeared him to his parishioners. Somerset Presbyterians gathered around the Maddox plantation to hear Makemie's particularly unique blend of championing freedom and independence for Whites and perpetual servitude for Blacks. Makemie was also a travelling merchant who sold housewares to local farmers along with Presbyterian doctrine. When Manokin Presbyterian Church was constructed in Princess Anne, it contained a "slave loft" where Blacks could listen to versions of an on-going sermon usually referenced to the Biblical injunctions of St. Paul and St. Peter – "slaves obey your masters." Meanwhile

bewildered Anglican parsons of the British established church who assumed that they would be kept in a manner benefiting their office received a rude awakening by Somerset's angry non-conformists. The large number of transported English convicts in the county at this time also tended to add law and order to a community that also had a worrisome slave population. Further, it was a community experiencing economic difficulties because of high British duties on Maryland wheat. Late in 1775 Somerset's angry farmers led by Peter Chaille, Selby Webster, Joseph Dashiell and Zadoc Hinman would issue the Declaration of the Association of Free Men of Somerset, which would be a harbinger of the Declaration of Independence.

In Somerset, however, revolutionary talk was cheap. Few men in Somerset were willing to enlist in the continental army. Most of the Methodist preachers in the area were Tories and the revolutionary Maryland government in February 1777 dispatched General Henry Hooper and an armed force to quash a Tory insurrection in the county and restore order. To add to Somerset's problems, many slaves deserted the plantations in droves and joined the British army. Lord Dunmore promised freedom to all slaves who joined the Loyalist cause. Historian Ira Berlin writes that "between 1755 and 1790, the state's free Black population grew 300 percent to about 8,000. And in the following ten years it more than doubled."⁸ While slaves and their allies hammered away in their struggle for freedom during the Revolution, slavery and freedom seemed to evolve along a parallel course. After the Revolution, Somerset's economy would stagnate as county merchants were denied access to markets in the British Caribbean. By 1807 distressed farmers were willing to believe in miracles and flocked to the anti-slavery evangelistic crusades of a thirty-year-old waterman named Joshua Thomas, nicknamed "Parson of the Islands." Methodism with its concern for human freedom and toleration would leave its mark on the county. Over a century of tobacco cultivation had exhausted the soil. Yet during hard times in the 1840s many small Methodist farmers were forced to sell their lands and leave the county for the western part of Maryland. Quakers found their barns aflame at night and received threats of bodily harm. They, too, left the county by the time the Anglicans and Presbyterians had formed alliances with the planter class to tighten their grip on

the community. A resurgence of demand in the Caribbean for flour and barrel staves bolstered the maritime and agricultural economy as ship captains like Littleton Long bought farm produce and lumber in Somerset. Blacks, after the long tobacco recession, were worth something on the market and the churches almost in chorus intoned, "Slaves Obey Your Masters." The region's early history suggests that Methodism, antislavery and a free Black community had been subdued by an economically powerful planter class dependent upon slavery and racial control for its prosperity. In the Chesapeake a two-caste system with rigid divisions between Black and White came to exemplify the region. In an age of revolution and social change, unlike the North, slavery on the Eastern Shore did not crack. Slavery in Somerset County and on the Eastern Shore would remain firmly entrenched.

The primary purpose of this book is to follow and interpret the currents of racial domination of Blacks in the region from this time onwards. As we shall see in this investigation the historical transit from slavery to freedom was neither direct nor linear. In terms of race relations on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, there were progressions and retrogressions. By looking at racism at a local and regional level we can see those forces that helped to give the American South its social and cultural identity.

Notes

- 1 For an excellent history of Somerset during its early formative period consult Clayton Torrance's classic work, *Old Somerset on the Eastern Shore*, Richmond, 1935. While an Episcopal minister in Princess Anne in 1930s, Torrance discovered a treasure trove of local documents pertaining to Somerset history. Prior to his ordination, Torrance was a bibliographer and editor of *The William and Mary Quarterly*.
- 2 T.H.Breen and Stephen Innes, *Mine Owne Ground, Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640-1676*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 3 Ross M. Kimmel, "Free Blacks in Seventeenth Century Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vol. 71, No. 1 Spring, 1976. See also Mary Olive Klein, "Rediscovering Free Blacks in Somerset County, Maryland, 1663-1763," Unpublished Master's Thesis, Salisbury State University, 1993, National Park Service Ethnography Program, *Africans in the Chesapeake*. Pamphlet, n.d.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Lois Green Carr, "Diversification in the Colonial Chesapeake: Somerset County in Comparative Perspective," in Lois Green Carr ed., *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

7 Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone, The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, Cambridge, 1998, p.281.