

# Richard Somers, USN

Our hero, **Richard Somers**, served in the Navy in the Mediterranean under the command of Edward Preble. This young officer is credited with conceiving a courageous plan. While in command of the *Nautilus*, he proposed to fit up the ketch *Intrepid* as a fire ship and sail her into the Tripoli Harbor and explode her amongst the enemy ships. Commodore Preble accepted the plan, and the *Intrepid* was fitted with 1500 pounds of gunpowder, a quantity of shells, shot, broken iron, and combustibles. Combustibles were connected by a tube with the powder as a fuse. It was intended that the crew sail the vessel into the harbor under the dark of night close to the pirate ships, ignite the combustibles, and quickly row to safety in the rowboats by the time the flames reached the powder. The expectation was that much of the enemy flotilla would be destroyed by the explosion.

All men, knowing this mission could mean their death, volunteered. They included: Lieutenant Henry Wadsworth, Joseph "Pickle" Israel, William Harrison, Robert Clark, Hugh McCormick, Jacob Williams, Peter Penner, Isaac W. Downs, James Simms, Thomas Tompline, James Harris, and William Keith.

On the eve of September 3, 1804, the *Intrepid* sailed into Tripoli Harbor. Upon entering the harbor, several shots were heard by the waiting fleet of Commodore Preble outside the harbor. Watching and waiting, a sudden explosion was seen. Preble's fleet kept vigil throughout the night, but no sign of Richard and his crew appeared.

According to the journal of a seaman in the squadron, "...the Ketch *USS Intrepid* got under way and was sent into Tripoli as a fire ship. Commanded by Capt. Somers, he had our green

cutter to make their escape from her. At  $\frac{3}{4}$  past 9 she blew up, in which unfortunately perished Capt. Somers, Mr. Wadsworth, Mr. Israel, Midshipman and 10 men. It is supposed that she took fire in the magazine sooner than was intended, or that they attempted to be boarded by the Tripolitans and blew her up sooner than suffer themselves to fall into the hands of the Tripolitans, as she had 100 barrels of powder on board. The loss of those brave officers and men are much to be regretted by their country and friends. Capt. Somers was as brave and enterprising an officer as ever stepped on the deck of a ship, possessing every virtue that the human heart is susceptible of..."

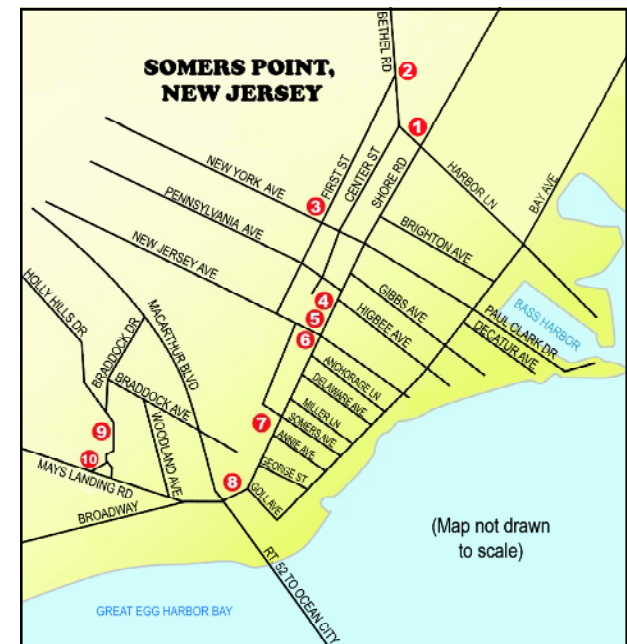
Richard Somers was born at the intersection of Bethel and Shore Road, Somers Point.

## A Short History of Somers Point

Somers Point was originally settled by John Somers, an Englishman and practicing Quaker, who bought the land from Thomas Budd. Early names for the area were Somerset Plantation, Somers Ferry, and Somers Plantation, named after the first settlers in 1693. The land purchased originally covered all of Somers Point, part of Linwood, and went into Egg Harbor Township. In the early years it was part of Gloucester County, because Atlantic County had not yet been named.

The name Somers Point was adopted in 1750. It was a seafaring town and sloops, schooners, and barges were built in the many shipyards located along the Greate Egg Harbor Bay, Greate Egg Harbor River, and Patcong Creek. The Sooy Boatworks was located on Shore Road, and the completed ships were rolled on logs down Shore Road to Delaware Avenue, and then down to the bay. Shipbuilding and life along the waterways was a very important part of life in early Somers Point.

# The Trail of Richard Somers



### **1. Birthplace of Master Commandant Richard Somers, USN**

Marker shows the birthplace of Richard Somers—born 1778, died 1804. Numerous memorials were given to Master Commandant Somers, including the honor of having seven ships named USS Somers, and a monument at the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD.

### **2. Site of Colonel Richard Somers Tavern and Homestead, circa 1771, later called the Deborah Jane Somers Anderson House**

Col. Richard Somers was prominent in the Revolutionary War, engaging in privateering, holding interest in several schooners and the militia. The present home served as an inn and tavern, and was later the home of Deborah Jane Somers Anderson, daughter of Richard L. Somers, the last Somers to own the Mansion. Go inside to see where the old structure connects with the new by means of a glass atrium. County and city historical plaque.

### **3. Colonel Richard Somers Family Burial Plot / New York Avenue School**

Original gravestones of the Col. Richard Somers family, circa 1790, are in the south wall. The monument in the center of the plot, erected in 1850, is dedicated to Master Commandant Richard Somers, USN, who died September 4, 1804, in the Battle of Tripoli. New York Avenue School, built in 1912, replaced a small wooden schoolhouse adjacent to the burial plot. It is used today as Administration Offices, as well as Pre K and K classes.

### **4. Somers Point Historical Museum (745 Shore Road - next to City Hall)**

This building, originally the West Jersey Baptist Church, was built in 1886 on land donated by Jesse Somers. The one-story frame structure is Colonial-style architecture, with a small belfry

and plain glass windows. It now serves as the local historical museum. Phone for hours: (609) 927-2900. County and city historical plaque.

### **5. Somers Point City Hall / Richard Somers Display**

This 1985 building houses municipal offices and police headquarters. In the council chambers is a permanent photo exhibit from the US Naval Archives honoring Richard Somers, naval hero.

### **6. Richard Somers Monument and Park (Future Mural Project)**

The monument dedicated to Barbary War hero Richard Somers, who died in the explosion of the *Intrepid* in Tripoli, Libya, was dedicated in 2013. The bronze bust duplicates the bust from Somers, New York, sculpted by Luigi Badia.

### **7. Atlantic County Historical Society (907 Shore Road)**

The Atlantic County Historical Society has been preserving the history of Atlantic County and southern New Jersey since 1913. Volunteer staff is available to assist visiting researchers and genealogists in the library, which is the largest repository of historical and genealogical documents in the county. Free, guided tours are offered in the museum, where more than 20,000 pieces of local history are waiting to be discovered. Library and museum hours are Wednesday - Saturday, 10 AM to 3:30 PM (609) 927-5218.

### **8. Historic Somers Mansion**

Built between 1720 and 1726 by Richard Somers, son of John Somers, the first area settler, it is Atlantic County's oldest house still standing. It is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Owned by the State of New Jersey; Call for hours: (609) 927-2212.

### **9. Somers Family Cemetery**

The headstones in the small family plot mark the graves of early members of the Somers family through the 1800s. The large monument marks the resting place of Richard L. Somers and his wives, the last Somers' owners of the Mansion.

### **10. Job's Ferry Marker**

This location was named for John Somers' 11th child. In 1695 John Somers was granted permission to join Great Egg Harbor and Cape May County by means of a ferry across the Great Egg Harbor Bay near this location. A flat boat with tiller and oar ferried people and merchandise. A single crossing cost 12 pence per person.

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*For more information visit:  
[www.somerspointhistory.org](http://www.somerspointhistory.org)  
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