

# Be Free! Rebel On!

A Self-Guided Driving Trail of the Middle Shore  
About the War for Independence in Accomack County



## *About this trail:*

**Where do you start?** We suggest you start in Onancock, as the Trail tells a story about a Colonial family, the Croppers.

**How long will it take?** We ask, "How long do you have?" The Trail is divided into seven centers of activity: Onancock, Pungoteague, Wachapreague, Folly Creek, Accomac, Parksley, and Gargatha. The Trail is designed to relish the scenic Accomack county by exploring back roads, creeks, "necks," cuisine, picnic spots, shops, hiking and biking trails, waterways, and even places to just sit and appreciate the moment. You can spend a whole day at each section of the Trail.

**But if I just drove it?** It is about 50 miles.

**How will I know what else to do in each section?** In addition to reading the text of the Trail, at the bottom of each stop's narrative, there is a section, "What else is there to do?" that will give you ideas. The Visit ESVA app also has suggestions.

**How should I prepare to be free and rebel on?** Relax! You will enjoy the journey. We do suggest:

- Downloading a map or bringing a road map as gps does not work in all places.

- Consider bringing: binoculars, camera, insect repellent, sunscreen, sunglasses, sun hat, extra water, walking and/or water shoes, cash, and a full tank of gas.
- Plan ahead for lunch, as sit-down restaurants may not be nearby or open, if off-season or limited hours. Look for our take-out and picnic suggestions on the Trail.
- Be respectful of private property, cemeteries, and places of worship. The stops on the trail are not residential properties, but some are private.
- Bring waves and smiles. Do not bring honking horns and please do not litter.

**One final note:** Be advised that you may get more adventuresome than you expected and you will experience more than you planned. *Welcome to the freedom of the rebellious Shore!*

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## ONANCOCK

### Stop 1. Accomack in the Revolutionary War

Ker Place, 69 Market Street, Onancock

*"27 Jun 1775 "Covington Corbin Gent. having produced a Commission from his Excellency the Governor appointing him Colonel of the Militia of this County took the Several Oaths of Government and repeated and Subscribed the Test" (Acc Orders, 1774-1777, p. 363)"<sup>1</sup>*

Accomack and Northampton Counties are neglected in the casual study of the American War for Independence (April 19, 1775 – September 3, 1783). Most Americans now refer to the war as the Revolutionary War. The British called it the "American Rebellion." In their mindset, the thirteen Colonies were rebelling. The "Be Free! Rebel On!" Trail is the story of our rebels who helped found the United States of America.

No major battles were fought on this soil, which locally we call "The Shore." Some battles were fought in the Chesapeake Bay; most notably, the Battle of the Capes (1781) and the Battle of the Barges (1782). The peninsula was very important, however, as it served as the breadbasket for the Colonies and Continental Army by providing food and other resources. This place also provided key smuggling ports for supplies as traders avoided the British blockade at the mouth of the Chesapeake. Merchants and farmers had grave concerns about invading British soldiers.

By the 1760's, the "Accomack Naval District" was supplying 30% of the corn imported into the New York and Pennsylvania colonies. Fifteen percent of the wheat exported

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<sup>1</sup> MilesFiles

from Virginia to northern colonies came from the Eastern Shore. Additionally, the Shore prospered in shoemaking, salt production, and ship building industries during the war. Shore merchants also imported rum, molasses, and sugar from the West Indies.<sup>2</sup> Keeping the ports open for business was critical for both rebel and loyalist merchants.

British Navy and Maryland Tory raiding parties were a constant threat to county residents, as well as, to merchant vessels in the Chesapeake Bay and seaside. Farmsteads were historically located by creeks to allow for easy shipment of their products, however, this made them particularly vulnerable during the war. Another threat to the farmers' assets was the theft and/or recruitment of their enslaved farm workers by the British and privateers. Many enslaved workers were lured to escape by the British promise of freedom. Others were kidnapped. Farmers also could not trust Loyalist residents, as they often assisted the pirate raiders, acted as spies, and/or provided provisions.

Ker Place was built by John Shepherd Ker (1768-1806) in 1799. His wife was Agnes Drummond Corbin (1775-1814), whose grandfather was Colonel Covington Corbin (1711-1778), owner of Corbin Hall in upper Accomack County. Col. Corbin was the Commanding Officer of Accomack County's militia. His son, George Corbin (1744-1793), Agnes's father, became the County Lieutenant.<sup>3</sup> As you will learn later, **General John Cropper\*** (1755-1821), the rebel hero of this story, was George's nephew, as his mother was Sabra Corbin Cropper (1738-1776), the sister of George. John and Agnes were cousins. One can imagine that the Rebellion was an intense topic at family dinners!

*\*Of note, we warn you ahead of time that Cropper's rank changes throughout the war. He rose to the rank of General in the War of 1812....which is another story.*

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<sup>2</sup> Hast, p. 34-35

<sup>3</sup> Barnes, p. 2, 3



*Chincoteague Farm, now known as Corbin Hall, built for George Corbin on land in Accomack County purchased by his father in 1745. Fire destroyed it in 2000<sup>4</sup>.*

*Photo c1933. Source: Library of Congress*

### *What else to do*

- Inside of Ker Place is a special exhibit about John Cropper with some of his personal items.
- The large log canoe to the right of Ker Place is of a style used in the Colonial period---worth seeing!
- **Be Calm!** There is a period herb garden with seating in the back, left of Ker Place. The pines (part of the property) behind Ker Place also provide a nice stroll.

## **Stop 2. Militias and Continentals**

Town Square Market Street, Onancock

Drive west on Market Street, 0.3 miles. There are parking spaces on East Street.

*"Soldiers are flocking from every part, which I hope will put an End to the War this Winter, if our People behave as well as they have." ---John Cropper to his wife, Peggy, January 12, 1777*

The Eastern Shore was protected by both local militias and Continental soldiers. At the December 1775 Fourth Virginia Convention, the Eastern Shore's 9th Virginia Regiment was created. The Central Committee of Safety sent three companies to the Shore, each made up of 68 men, rank and file, totaling 272 men. Later in 1776, the 9th Regiment swelled to 476. The Central Committee also issued a certificate to an assigned captain, entitling him to a "commission." The original company captains were John Cropper, Levin Joynes, and Thomas Snead. In December 1776, the 9th Regiment marched out of Accomack County, having been ordered to New Jersey.

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<sup>4</sup> DHR, 001-0007

Militias existed prior to the Revolutionary War. Accomack and Northampton each had a “County Lieutenant” in command of their county militias. In the duration of the war, Accomack’s County Lieutenants were sequentially Colonels Southy Simpson (until 1779), George Corbin (1779-1781), and John Cropper (1781-1821). By March 1781, Cropper was not on active duty in the Continental Army having resigned as a Lieutenant Colonel in the 11<sup>th</sup> Regiment. A Colonel (field officer), Lieutenant Colonel, and Major reported to the County Lieutenant.<sup>5</sup> By July 1777, the Accomack militiamen, also known as “minutemen,” were divided into two “Battalions,” one for upper Accomack (1<sup>st</sup>) and one for lower (2<sup>nd</sup>). For this tour, we are concerned with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion which was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Parramore.<sup>6</sup>

**Custis Bull (1761-1851)** started serving in the Accomack militia at the age of 14. He was a drummer during the Revolutionary War. He attended all alarms and during the time guard was kept, which could be constantly if no other drummer was available. He was stationed mainly at Colonel Cropper’s blockhouse and the barracks at George Parker’s mill. In his pension application, he stated that he believed he was the only drummer in the Accomack militia regiment after the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment left to go north.<sup>7</sup> Bull married Frances Fitzgerald (c1770-?) who bore him eight children.



*Drummer of the Continental Army. Musicians traditionally wore the reverse colors of their regiments, making them easier for an officer to spot if he needed to give a signal. 1975 Illustration by Don Troiani.*

*Source: National Park Service*

## What else to do

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, during that time, women would not officially serve in any military.

<sup>6</sup> Barnes (*Militiamen*), p. 2

<sup>7</sup> Nottingham, p. 36

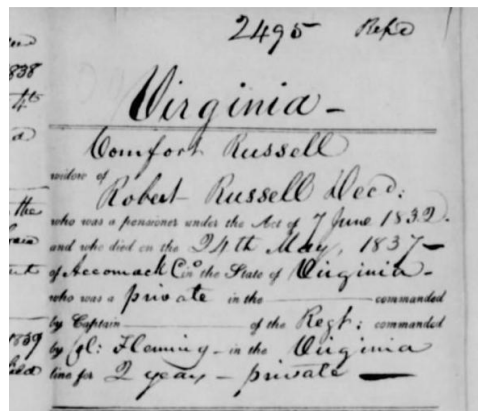
- **Scott Hall Cemetery** – Location of the final resting place of Maryland's Commodore Whaley, who was killed in the Battle of the Barges just outside of the mouth of Onancock Creek in 1782. The battle was the last naval action of the Revolutionary War. Access is via the driveway at 10 Market Street. This is private property, but you can access the cemetery.
- **Eat!** Onancock and nearby Onley have a variety of dining experiences. Many provide take-out or outdoor dining.

### Stop 3. The 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment Moves North

Onancock Wharf, 2 Market Street

Continue driving west on Market Street down to the wharf. Street parking is available as well as selected places in the town lot.

*"Alarm of a Tender coming into Onancock."* --- John Cropper diary, May 25, 1779<sup>8</sup>



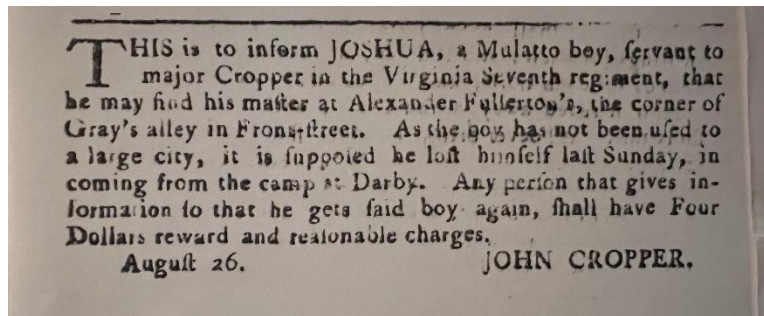
**Robert Russell (1757-1837)**<sup>9</sup>, of Hunting Creek, enlisted in the Continental Army in 1776 in Captain Thomas Snead's Company of Infantry and was then moved to the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment. He marched north with the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment from Accomack, through Maryland and Delaware, to Philadelphia. The Regiment then went to join the Continental Army under General Washington in Trenton, New Jersey. He served in the Battle of Brandywine, with Cropper, then Chestnut Hill, and Iron Hill. At the Battle of Germantown, he was severely wounded in the groin, taken prisoner, and put in a new jail in Philadelphia. He was later (one would hope after he recovered from his injuries) put on a prison ship and taken to New York where he was kept until he was exchanged. He continued to serve in the Brigade commanded by General Mullenburg until he was honorably discharged.<sup>10</sup> He had seven children with his wife, Comfort Parks (1768-1844).

<sup>8</sup> Wise, p. 16

<sup>9</sup> MilesFiles

<sup>10</sup> Nottingham, p. 45

Major John Cropper was also in the Battle of Brandywine, September 11, 1777, in Pennsylvania. Cropper was in command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment at this time which was assigned to Chad's Ford. General Wilhem von Knyphausen's Hessian troops attacked at Chad's Ford. It was at this battle that the Marquis de LaFayette took a musket ball in the leg and Major Cropper, in hand-to-hand combat was pierced in the thigh by a British bayonet. The next day, having lost the regimental flag, Cropper took a musket ramrod and tied a red handkerchief to it, to serve the purpose as he led his men to Chester.<sup>11</sup>



An ad from the August 26, 1777 *Pennsylvania Evening Post*.  
Not only did Cropper lose his flag, it seems he also was missing his enslaved servant.

### What else to do

- You can take a ferry from here in the Onancock marina to **Tangier Island**. During the war, the residents of the island traded with the British. In February 1777, the Virginia Navy stationed a galley (unnamed) in the area to help prevent the trading. Apparently, further measures were needed, as Governor Jefferson ordered the Navy to "strip the inhabitants of Tangier Island of their surplus food."<sup>12</sup> Tangier residents were at the mercy of the British.
- **Titlow Creek Loop** – 2.5 mile kayak. The dinghy dock launch is across Mt. Prospect Road Street from the marina parking lot in a little park. Reserved parking is available in the west side of that lot.
- **Bike or Walk!** A nice bike ride is up Mt. Prospect, left on Meadville Drive, left on Division Street, down to the creek, right on Crescent, merge onto Ames St. and go over the other bridge, back to Market Street. Make a jog to the right to North Street. Turn left on King Street, which will take you back down to the marina.
- **Picnic!** The little park by the kayak launch has picnic tables.
- **Be Calm!** The little park has a nice heron sculpture and bench.

### Stop 4. Living Free. Remembering.

Historic Onancock School, 6 College Ave.

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<sup>11</sup> Barnes (*Militiamen*), p. 25-27

<sup>12</sup> Hast, p. 148

Return to downtown on Market Street. Turn right onto College Avenue and the school is a short way on your right. It is usually open during the day. Artist shop hours vary.

Colonial schools did not look like this building which was built by 1918. Cropper's brothers were sent away to boarding school. This is the third school operating on this site. Atlantic Female College, a Baptist school, was here from 1860-c1870. Margaret Academy was moved here in 1893 and closed in 1902. Onancock High School educated local students here from 1918 to 1984.<sup>13</sup>

In 1786, the General Assembly granted a charter to nine petitioners for establishing Margaret Academy, a boarding school for elementary classical education. Seven trustees from Accomack County and five from Northampton oversaw the school. The petitioners and the original trustees were George Corbin, Isaac Avery, Thomas Evans, Littleton Savage, Levin Joyns, George Parker, John Harmanson, Edward Ker, and John Cropper. The Academy was not built until 1807 and was originally located on Bobtown Road, north of Pungoteague. The brick building was funded with donations and proceeds from the sale of the "glebe farms" of the Church of England parishes. In 1802, the Virginia General Assembly passed a law requiring the sale of the church glebes, the properties used by the priests, as part of the dissolution of the state church system after the revolution.<sup>14</sup> The Academy was named in memory of General John Cropper's wife, Margaret "Peggy" Pettitt Cropper (1755-1784), who's life will unfold in this Trail.



*Margaret Academy*<sup>15</sup>

## *What else to do*

- **Historic Onancock School (HOS)** – HOS houses artists' working studios, entrepreneurs, clubs, and a Waterman's Museum. Hours for each vary.

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<sup>13</sup> Turman, p. 197

<sup>14</sup> Turman, p. 161

<sup>15</sup> Whitelaw, p. 733



- **Onancock Native Plant Nature Trail** – Located behind HDS, to the right of the parking lot, this scenic trail takes you around the edges of Onancock Creek. Standing at the overlook, it's common to see herons wading through the marsh.
- **Play!** In addition to the playground, the school grounds have a disc golf course.
- **Bird!** The overlook is a great spot to bird watch.
- **Be Calm!** The overlook is a lovely, secluded place to view the water.
- **Picnic!** The playground has picnic tables.

## PUNGOTEAGUE

Directions from Onancock: Take College Avenue south to the end. Turn left onto Liberty Street. Turn right onto Route 718, also known as Hill Street, which turns into Cashville Road. Drive 0.6 miles and turn LEFT onto Savageville Road, which remains Route 718 (if you had continued straight, Hill Street becomes Cashville Road). Drive 6 miles to the village of Pungoteague.

Pungoteague (Algonquin), was named for the creek that borders the northern side of “Hack’s Neck.” Nandua Creek is the southern boundary of the neck. Pungoteague village is at the eastern base/head of the neck. Both creeks flow to the Chesapeake Bay.<sup>16</sup>

### **Stop 5: A “Very Bad Man”**

St. George’s Episcopal Church, 30118 Bobtown Rd.

*“As to the case of the Rev. John Lyon, I beg leave to make the following observations: There was not much in testimony against him as was expected, but from character, he is certainly a very bad man.”* -- Col. John Cropper to Col. William Davies, August 25, 1781. Davies was the Virginia Commissioner of War.<sup>17</sup>

Under Colonial rule, Eastern Shore residents had to pay tithes to the Church of England, even if they practiced the faith of Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, or Presbyterians. In October 1776, the Virginia General Assembly changed that requirement, releasing Protestants of that obligation.

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<sup>16</sup> Mears

<sup>17</sup> Wise, p. 22



*Section of "The Liberty Window," Christ Church, Philadelphia.*

*Source: Library of Congress*

The Church of England organized its churches by dividing them into parishes, St. George's Parish, being one. John Lyons became the parish Rector in 1773, having moved from Delaware. A widower with four children, he married Sarah Smith of Onancock. As the Rector, he lived on the "glebe farm" owned by the parish, which was on the north side of Occohannock Creek. In addition to his pastoral duties, he farmed and traded tobacco to supplement his salary. Apparently, Lyons retained allegiance to the throne and was brought before the County Lieutenant to be court martialed, with Colonel George Corbin acting as Judge Advocate. He was charged with "furnishing the enemy with provisions, giving them aid and comfort, and dissuading the militia from doing duty in defending the State."<sup>18</sup>

Lyons was sent to the Governor to be sentenced, however, parishioner letters pleaded for leniency. Lyons was put under a heavy bond and permitted to return to his parish where he served until his death in 1785.<sup>19</sup>

## **Stop 6. Valuable Labor and Property**

St. Paul's African Methodist Episcopal Church, 30118 Bobtown Road.

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<sup>18</sup> Wise, p. 23

<sup>19</sup> Turman, Bicentennial Collection, p. 11



On the Chesapeake Bay, enslaved watermen harvested crabs and oysters in addition to working on fishing boats. Enslaved watermen stood for hours in boats harvesting oysters using hand tongs—long, scissor-like wooden poles with rakes on the end that would pull oysters off the bottom of the bay when drawn together. According to Richard H. Edmonds in his *Review of the Oyster Industry* (1887), before the Civil War, “the oystermen of Virginia were composed of Negroes working for their masters and a very rough class of whites.”

Enslaved African Americans also could be found working as boat pilots, guiding fishing and cargo boats up and down Virginia’s waterways and around the Chesapeake Bay. Some skippered boats owned by their enslavers and others were hired out for the season to the owners of the boats. Enslaved “pilots” also were hired out to guide boats passing through tricky stretches of navigation, with their enslavers being paid for their knowledge of local waterways. Enslaved mariners served as crew on cargo boats and in a variety of maritime trades, such as ship’s carpenter or caulkers responsible for sealing the joints in a vessel’s hull.

Even before the Revolutionary War, work on the water gave enslaved laborers access to potential routes to freedom, as documented by advertisements seeking the return of enslaved fishermen or mariners who fled enslavement. Such advertisements sometimes noted that the enslaved had “been used to the sea” to alert slave catchers that the enslaved person may attempt to escape by boat or use their skill handling watercraft to pass as a free person.

African Americans in Virginia were often highly skilled seamen and craftsmen. The British often used workers escaped from enslavement in their Navy, privateering

vessels, and military camps.<sup>20</sup> Some acted as informants, supplying critical local geographic information to the British, as well as information about the plantations and their assets. As we shall see, such activity included the Eastern Shore.

### **Stop 7. A Bayside Raid**

St. Paul's African Methodist Episcopal Church, 30118 Bobtown Road.

*"The county was very much exposed and frequent alarms were given." -- Edmund Read<sup>21</sup>*

On July 1781, Captain Robinson, a British privateer, sent four barges loaded with 100 men up Pungoteague Creek. Many of these "invaders" were African American. Guns were fired. Farms were robbed. The militia did respond quickly, however, with Colonel George Corbin (Cropper's uncle) leading the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, coming by land. A battle ensued and one African American raider was killed.

Militia continued to arrive on the scene resulting in the invaders fleeing to their barges. They headed to Watts Island, which is between Tangier and Onancock. Colonel Corbin rounded up 150 militia and 25 small craft within two days. They proceeded to pursue the enemy, even after the British began to sail further north. For four days and nights the chase continued on the often rough waters of the Chesapeake Bay.

Captain Robinson and his barges managed to escape, however, the pursuit was not in vain. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment found a sloop and schooner anchored in Hooper's Straits, Maryland, which is a little north of Deal Island, present home of the Skipjack Museum. The Virginia militia captured the vessels and turned them over to Captain Zedekia Whalley (1738-1782) of the Maryland Navy.<sup>22</sup> Whalley was the Commodore who perished in the Battle of the Barges, November 30, 1782, and is buried in the Scott Hall Cemetery in Onancock.

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<sup>20</sup> Encyclopedia Virginia

<sup>21</sup> Barnes/Pungoteague, p. 4

<sup>22</sup> Barnes (*Militiamen*), p. 24



*Edward Ker's House Shepherd's Plain, now a private residence, was a likely target of pirates. Shepherd's Plain, also known as Melrose, is a historic home located near Pungoteague. It was built between 1755 and 1775. It was built for Edward Ker, a prominent Accomack County planter and politician. Source: Library of Congress, dated 1933.<sup>23</sup>*

### *What else to do*

**See Harborton** (7 minute drive) – Heading south, turn right onto Route 178, Harborton Road. Drive 2 miles. Turn right, which remains Harborton Road. Continue to the end of the road, which bears left and becomes Shore Drive. Continue to the end. *Porta-potties only are available. There are no stores.*

**Shop!** Eva's is a unique little self-serve farm stand on Harborton Road about a mile from town.

**Be Calm!** Harborton's marina has benches.

**Picnic!** Bring your own blanket or just sit on the benches. This is a wonderful spot to picnic. You can likely pick up fresh baked goods at Eva's or the Village Store in Pungoteague.

**Kayak!** You can launch from the boat ramp or on a small beach to the right of it.

**Bike!** Explore the backroads down Hack's Neck. Light traffic.

**Bird!** This is an excellent site to look for water fowl. Both churches (Stops 5 & 6) are nicely wooded and a good place to spot songbird.

## **WACHAPREAGUE**

Directions from Pungoteague: Go back north on Route 718, Bobtown Road, and turn right at the curve onto Michael Hills Road. Take this to the end and turn right onto Hollies Church Road. You will pass Hollies Baptist Church on your left. Take this 1 mile and turn left onto Route 734, Adams Crossing Road. Another church is on that corner. Take this to Route 13. Cross at the light and continue on Wachapreague Road into town. Note: Roads near the creek can flood at high tides. Do NOT drive through the salt water.

### **Stop 8. Fighting on the Home Land**

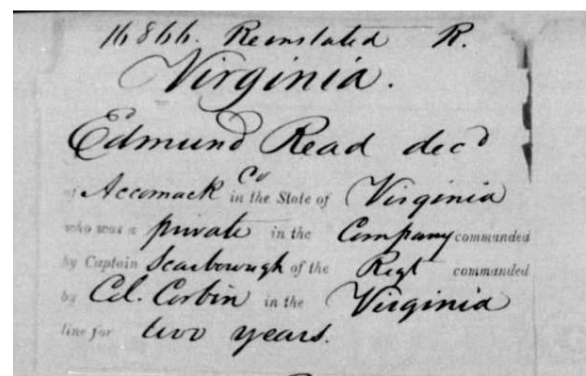
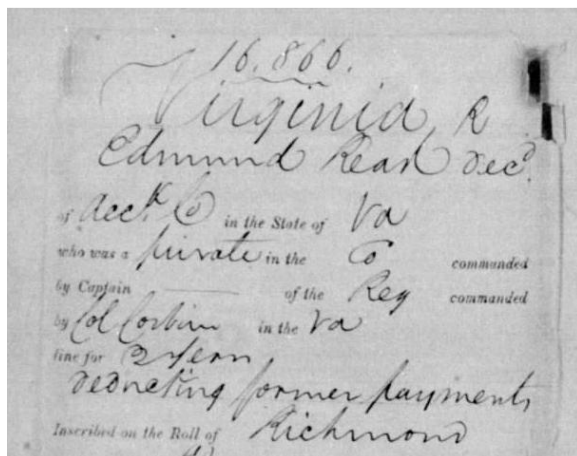
Read Cemetery, Herbert Powell Memorial Park, Park Avenue

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<sup>23</sup> DHR 001-0032

As you enter town, turn right onto West Street and then right onto Park Avenue. *Walk to the southwest side of the park, past the playground equipment. You will find a small cemetery.*

**Edmund Read** started serving in the militia at the age of 16. During the Revolutionary War, he served for two years in Captain Augustine Lecatt's and then Captain Americus Scarborough's Company. He was mostly stationed on the seaside and the Chesapeake Bay, serving principally in Pungoteague and Andua (both on the bayside). On Parramore's landing, he was involved in a skirmish where the British captured a brig belonging to Caleb Teackle. Another time, he was taken prisoner by the British on Parramore's Beach (a place off-shore from here that comes into our story again later), but was released soon after.<sup>24</sup> Read served with Adam Mason, Jacob Edwards, Custis Bull, Daniel Bull, John Harrison, and Bowdoin Snead. Custis Bull and Bowdoin Snead we will learn more about on this Trail.<sup>25</sup>



Excerpts from Edmund Read's Revolutionary War pension records.

## What else to do

- **Explore another Colonial cemetery!** The grave of Lieutenant Arthur Teackle (28 Feb 1755 – 31 Jan 1791), mentioned in the story of Robert Russell, is located at the Teackle house, 17 Atlantic Avenue, near the marina.
- **Play!** The park has pickleball, tennis and basketball courts. There is a playground and dog park.
- **Walk or Bike!** Wachapreague's grid layout makes it easy to explore. There are many historic homes. There is a [walking history tour](#).
- **Picnic!** Enjoy the park with a picnic! You can pick up take-out at the Wachapreague General Store or the Island House.

## Stop 9. The Virginia Navy

Seaside Park, Atlantic Avenue

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<sup>24</sup> Nottingham, p. 34

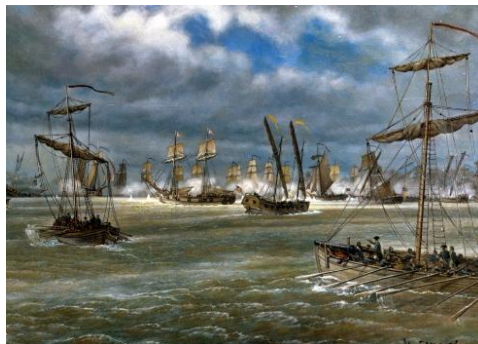
<sup>25</sup> Nottingham, p. 45

Go to the end of Park Avenue and turn left onto Bayview Avenue (at the tennis courts). Drive east to Atlantic Avenue. Turn left and Seaside Park is the grassy area on the right. *May be flooded in high tide. If flooded, back up and turn left onto Center Street, go to Main Street, turn right and then turn right onto High Street and park at the Town Park in front of the Town Hall. There is a nice gazebo and benches there.*

*On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, "Peggy and I dined on board the diligence galley."<sup>26</sup> July 4, 1779, the third year of Independence, was celebrated with a ball at the courthouse, to which they attended. ---John Cropper's Diary.*

Because the British Navy blockaded the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, ports were created on the seaside at Metompkin and Chincoteague inlets. A small fort on Parramore Island guarded the inlet between that island and Cedar Island. The rebels transported the goods overland to the bayside in order to ferry them to the western shore, what we now know as Hampton Roads and the Northern Neck.

The Virginia Convention of May 1776 created the Virginia Navy. The building of two galleys to defend the Eastern Shore was authorized by the General Assembly. The *Accomack* and the *Diligence* were built on Muddy Creek, in northern Accomack County on the bayside. William Underhill captained the *Accomack* and Johannes Watson, the *Diligence*.



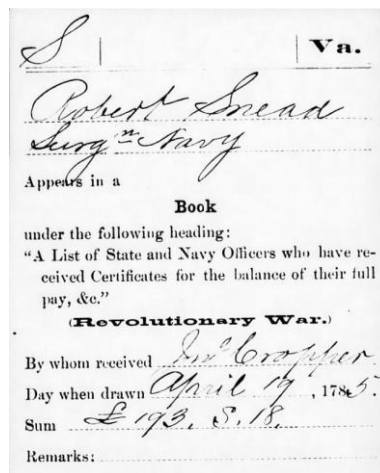
*Galleys were sailing ships that could be rowed.  
Source: Naval History and Heritage Command*

A galley is an oared gunboat, which dates back to classical times in the Mediterranean. The *Accomack* has records indicating it had about 43 seamen on board that included, a Lieutenant, "Master," pilot, midshipman, carpenter, surgeon's mate, gunner, cook, quartermaster, privates. It lists "negroes" with the roles of private. In addition to the men, the galley had to be loaded with guns, ammunition, cookware, uniforms, navigational equipment, and provisions, not to mention rigging and tackle. The *Accomack* and the *Diligence* were launched July 1, 1778, two years after they were

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

authorized to be built. Civilian boats were also pressed into service and the *Northampton*, a “brig,” often provided protection for the Shore.



**Robert Snead (1751-1814)** - was a Surgeon on the galley *Diligence*<sup>27</sup> as attested by John Cropper. He is also the brother of Bowden Snead.

The Shore was protected by three “galleys”: the *Accomac*, the *Diligence*, and the *Henry*.<sup>28</sup> Conversely, the Shore was harassed by British “barges” encamped on Hog Island and “sloops,” like the *Thistle Tender*, the “Bermudian built sloop” that attacked Bowman’s Folly, John Cropper’s homestead. Cropper later refers to the *Thistle Tender* crew as “the New York Privateer.”<sup>29</sup> The British hired Captains with vessels to plunder and harass their enemy (the rebel Colonists) and these “privateers” soundly profited from these raids. The British needed provisions for their crew and the contracted pirates would steal livestock, poultry, and other food, then unfortunately, burn the houses they plundered. As we will see, John and Peggy’s bravery during a dramatic raid saved the house.

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<sup>27</sup> Stewart, p. 248

<sup>28</sup> Fold3

<sup>29</sup> Wise, p. 20





Virginia's unconquered sloop "Liberty"<sup>30</sup>

A Virginia Navy version of the type of ship that invaded Cropper's property.

## **Stop 10. The Thistle Tender**

Seaside Park, Atlantic Avenue

*"A motley crew of pirates, in the service of Britain, belonging to the Thistle Tender, a Bermudian built sloop commanded by the infamous tar, Capt. Thomas Byron Williams (the surgeons name Gramble) came up and beset my house, and then plundered, pillaged and broke to pieces my property, as well as insult and savagely threaten my wife."*<sup>31</sup> --- John Cropper diary, February 12, 1779.

Such was the combat experience of Cropper that his writing of the house invasion and robbery comprised but one sentence in his diary. If the writings of Peggy were to survive, we expect the details and drama would have been differently recorded. What we know of the incident mostly comes from other writings, with the incident likely repeatedly told over peach brandy and billiard tables.

From Barton Haxall Wise's writings of his ancestor in the book, *Memoir of General John Cropper* (1892), we learn one version that is written over one hundred years later. Let's imagine the story from the point of view of Peggy.

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<sup>30</sup> U.S. Naval Institute

<sup>31</sup> Wise, p. 12



*Bowman's Folly (1930), Source: Library of Congress*

It is February 12, 1779, a very cold time on Folly Creek. John had recently returned home and was enjoying his time away from the battlefield. The couple had settled for the night, as he is in his “underclothes.” Suddenly, there was a ruckus outside and before either of them could react, the “pirates” with fixed bayonets were banging on their chamber doors. Cropper was allegedly locked in a closet while the others of the “motley crew” began smashing crystal and furniture. They threw insults at young (pregnant) Peggy and demanded liquor. “By this time, having collected her courage, (Peggy) managed to talk the marauders into leaving the house. Outside some of the British began trying to talk Colonel Cropper’s Negro servants into deserting and had already taken about thirty to the nearby landing barges. Other troops were taking furniture and valuables from the Bowman’s Folly house to the barges.”<sup>32</sup>

During this havoc, John managed to unlatch the closet door and jump over his captors, (who were by then drunk), and get out of the house. He slipped away into the darkness to get help. Peggy and their infant daughter were left alone in this chaotic scene.<sup>33</sup> We can only hope some of their enslaved servants remained with her. Perhaps the elderly ones were unwilling to run away in the dark in February with the “motley crew”.

Cropper ran two miles to his neighbor’s house, still clad in his undergarments, (remember it is February). He convinced his neighbor, “a soldier of the war,” to return with him and guns. Cropper was likely very fit, but still, Peggy and her daughter were held captive at her own house for a long time. Upon approaching the house, the neighbor lost his nerve and high-tailed it back home, leaving Cropper with two

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<sup>32</sup> Barnes (*Cropper*), p 53 and Wise, p. 13

<sup>33</sup> Barnes (*Cropper*), p. 54

muskets. He moved up to the house and cried out, “Come on, boys, we have got them now!” and fired his (two, single shot) guns in quick succession. This frightened the pirates enough to leave the house and run to their boat to escape what they thought was a group of militia.

By this time, Peggy and the baby had been locked in an out-house, and “a train of powder was being laid to blow up the main dwelling.”<sup>34</sup> John was able to prevent the explosion and release his beloved and very distraught Peggy and baby Sarah.



*The privy, still standing at Bowman’s Folly, though not likely the one Peggy was locked in during the raid. Source: Library of Congress*

In addition to the loss of household furnishings, provisions, and liquor, about thirty of his enslaved workers were “bound and carried to the boats.” Given the promise of British manumission, we cannot know whether all of these African Americans left in bondage or their own free will. Cropper certainly counted them as some of his greatest financial loss in the raid.

The next day, some of the militia came to his house. A few days later, John and Peggy Cropper left Bowman’s Folly with little Sarah to a house closer to Accomac and farther up the Folly Creek. It was called “Latin House.”<sup>35</sup>

## **Stop 11. Cropper Seeks Revenge**

Wachapreague Town Marina, Atlantic Ave.

Drive north on Atlantic Avenue to the town marina, which is on your right. You can park along the road or in the public lot on the left. If there is a flood tide, take High Street north which turns into Brooklyn Avenue. After house number 21, there is a driveway into the public lot.

Lt. Colonel Cropper sought “satisfaction,” a.k.a. revenge, shortly after the British plundered his house on February 12, 1779. Within twelve days, he began planning to intercept the *Thistle Tender* and its Captain Thomas Byron Williams. On Friday, February 26, Cropper rounded up 35 militiamen and headed to Cedar Island, which is visible from the Wachapreague harbor. He landed with a 4-pound brass cannon on the

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<sup>34</sup> Wise, p. 13

<sup>35</sup> Wise, p. 14

north end of the island, unfortunately with less men than he started with, as several deserted on the way. One can imagine the cold on the seaside during February!

Cropper was unsuccessful and returned home due to increasing desertions and his own fatigue. He then learned that his uncle, Colonel George Corbin, was on Parramore Island, which is just south, across the inlet from Cedar Island. Corbin also had a 4-pounder. Cropper rounded up some neighbors and met up with Corbin on Sunday with a 4-pound gun. He later wrote, "3 o'clock, the tenders made sail and engaged the fort on the beach, and passed out after an obstinate struggle, one of them having her hull and rigging torn to pieces."<sup>36</sup> The privateers made it out of the inlet, however, it sunk with all hands on board, as the Accomack rebels watched from Parramore beach.

### *What else to do*

**Eat!** Dine with a view of Parramore Island from the deck of the Island House.

**Shop!** The town has galleries and a general store. The Island House has a gift shop.

**Kayak!** You can park in the town lot across the street and put in on the boat ramp. It is a nice, easier paddle to the left up the creek. Bathrooms available.

**Take an EcoTour!** Seaside Ecotours provides birding boat tours through the marshes and out to Cedar Island. By appointment.

**Explore!** Take a drive---or bike---south to **Quinby**, another seaside town that also has a public boat ramp. Head west on Wachapreague Road and turn left at the edge of town onto Bradford Neck Road. Take the scenic drive right into Quinby. Turn left onto Harbor Point Road to get to the marina. The drive, bike, or walk all the way south on the neck is nicely wooded and peaceful.

**Be Calm!** There are beautiful bronze sculptures by David Turner outside of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. It is nice view to just walk out to the end of the public dock.

**Bird!** Particularly at low tide, there is much shore bird and waterfowl activity along the banks of the creek. Eating at the Island House? Bring your binoculars and ask to be seated on the deck outside.

## **FOLLY CREEK**

From the Wachapreague marina, drive north and turn left onto Willis Avenue. Take an immediate left onto Brooklyn Avenue and drive back to Main Street. Turn right onto Main Street and drive back out of town. Turn right on Route 821, Drummondtown Road. Drive 7 miles north. Turn right onto Custis Neck Road. Drive 2.5 miles and take a slight left onto Folly Creek Road, which take you to the boat ramp.

### **Stop 12. Rescued from the Muck**

Folly Creek Boat Ramp, Folly Creek Road (Off Custis Neck Road)

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<sup>36</sup> Wise, p. 14'

*"Pretty day. Wm. Pettit and myself dividied our negroes." January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1779*

*"Peggy and I went from mr. Wilkin's to Accomac Courthouse. I bought old Jacob and hired three of my brother Tom's negro's." January 2, 1779 –John Cropper's Diary*

Looking to your right across the creek is Bowman's Folly. Further on, out the creek, on this side, is Henry's Point, now a residential development.

Around Christmas 1779, a year after the diary entries above, Colonel Cropper had another run-in with the British, farther out of Folly's Creek at Henry's Point. Cropper, now commanding the Accomack Militia, was not surprised this time and was able to gather a group of defenders with muskets along with some small pieces of ordinance. In the ensuing skirmish, in his zeal, Cropper sunk into the marsh mud up to his knees and could not retreat with his fellow militiamen. Heroically, an African American enslaved soldier "extracted Cropper from the miry mess and hauled him to firmer ground, just ahead of the charging band of British troops."<sup>37</sup> Cropper's savior was George Latchom, who was purchased and manumitted by Colonel Cropper, "who befriended him in every way he could, as an evidence of his gratitude, till Latchom's death."<sup>38</sup>



*Artist Roy LaGrone's rendering of Latchom.*

One November 7, 1775, [John Murray, Earl of Dunmore](#), the [governor of](#) Virginia, declared martial law and emancipated all enslaved people and indentured servants willing to fight for the British. After the Revolutionary War, an Emancipation Act, passed during the October 1783 session of the General Assembly, granted enslaved people their freedom in recognition of their military service on behalf of free people during the American Revolution. A year earlier, in May 1782, the General Assembly passed [a law that allowed enslavers to manumit their slaves at will, without](#)

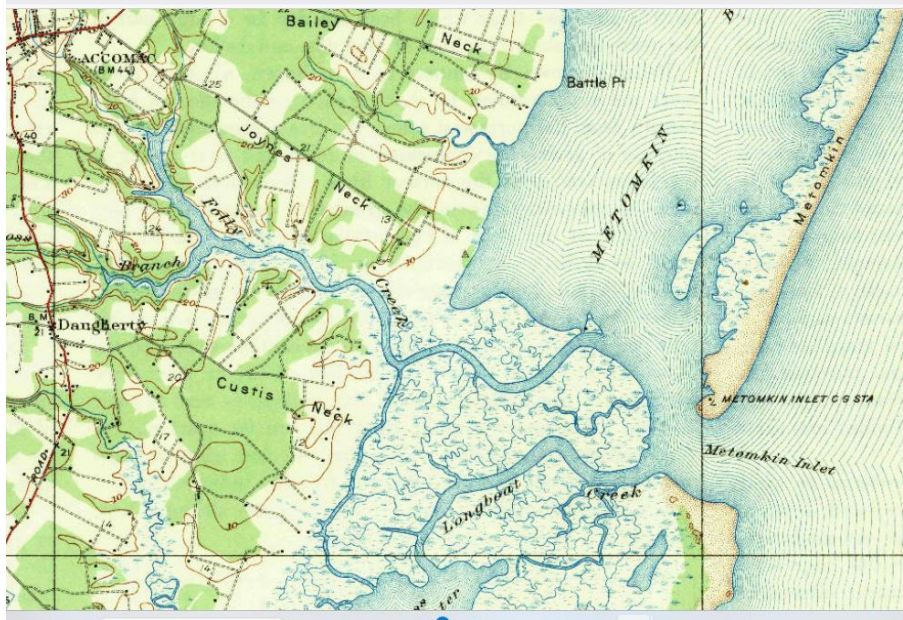
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<sup>37</sup> Barnes, p. 62

<sup>38</sup> Wise, p. 25

[government approval](#). During the Revolution, thousands of enslaved people fought for the British after they [were promised freedom](#) for their service, and beginning in 1783, more than 3,000 of these soldiers and their families were resettled in Nova Scotia.

By 1783, Bowman's Folly did not have the "servants" the Cropper family needed for the farm as many had gone with the British or were taken by them.<sup>39</sup> In 1785, as a Virginia Delegate, he voted against an Act to repeal the allowing of manumission of enslaved persons.<sup>40</sup>



*Folly Creek in relation to Metompkin Island. Source: 1935 USGS Topographic map.*

## *What else to do*

**Kayak!** You can launch at this public boat ramp and paddle with up the creek or out toward the bay. If the tide is right and you know your way, it is possible to paddle to Metompkin Island (for experienced kayakers only).

**Bird!** Waterfowl can be viewed from the boat ramp area or you can walk back on Folly Creek Road and enjoy songbirds on this wooded road.

**Bike!** Park here and bike Custis Neck Road.

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<sup>39</sup> Barnes, p. 83

<sup>40</sup> Barnes, p. 91

**Picnic!** While there are no public picnic tables, you can enjoy a fun tailgate picnic with this beautiful view. Numerous take-out options and a grocery store are in nearby Onley.

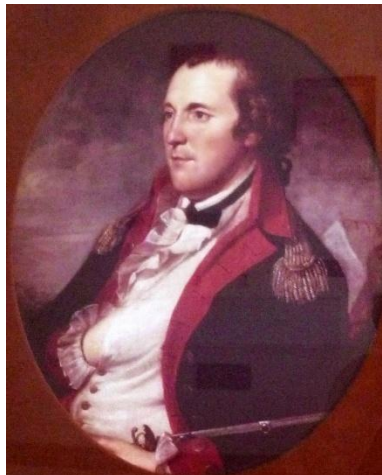
## ACCOMAC

Directions from Folly Creek: Return to Drummondtown road, turn right, and continue north into Accomac. Turn right onto Business Route 13, Front Street. Proceed a short distance and the Courthouse Green will be on your left.

### **Stop 13. From Continental Officer to Politician**

Accomac Courthouse Green, 23316 Courthouse Avenue

*“Went Court. Caned Wm Dunton and John Kellam.”* – John Cropper diary, February 23, 1779.



*General John Cropper*<sup>41</sup> by Charles Willson Peale, painted 1793 when he was 37 years old. The original painting is in the Smithsonian's collections.

In the account of the *Thistle Tender* raid, it is mentioned that the Captain had “entered into an agreement with a Tory named Dunton to pilot them to Bowman’s Folly.” Was William Dunton this Tory? Did Cropper get some satisfaction from Court and be the one to cane the Tory?

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<sup>41</sup> Stuart



In May 30, 1780, John Cropper qualified to become a Magistrate to preside over Accomack County Court with other leading citizens. A little over a year later in August 1781, Cropper was commissioned as County Lieutenant by the Governor. He then commanded the militia for Accomack County in that role.

When Cropper was handling the Tory case of Rev. Lyons, rector of the church in Pungoteague, he made clear his feelings toward Tories by saying, “a halter would hardly be too severe for the Parson.”<sup>42</sup> Given the caning he meted out the year before, we can guess that Cropper the Magistrate dealt harshly with Tories in court. Perhaps because of his soldiering on the battlefield, which some of his co-Magistrates did not experience, Cropper took a harder line in the court room.

Interestingly, Edward Ker was considered a friend, even though he was a suspected Tory. Ker lost his judgeship after 1777 because of his loyalist leanings.<sup>43</sup> Ker lived at Shepherd’s Plain farm on the bayside south of Pungoteague (previously mentioned).

John Cropper continued his public service after being elected in 1783 into the House of Delegates, therefore being in a position of helping to craft the legal system of a new country. Having dined with the future president, fought with the Marquis de Lafayette, and led soldiers from beyond the boundaries of Accomack County into enemy fire, he represented a vision of freedom unlike many others.

The Croppers were living in a complex time. John Cropper was a passionate patriot who often chose the fight for liberty over his family and business affairs. What was he fighting for, this Son of Liberty? He has demonstrated he sought revenge. He kept people in bondage, while knowing he had the power to release them from enslavement so they could live free. Cropper detested Tories, yet they were his neighbors and friends. He owned and lived on property that had been with his family for since 1664.<sup>44</sup> Men like John Cropper could have quietly waited out the Revolution and let it die like a damp ember on a cold night. Why didn’t he?

### *What else to do*

- **Walk!** Accomac has a town history walking tour, available online. See if you can find the Bicentennial tree!
- **Eat!** You can dine outside of the little café on Front Street and enjoy soup and sandwiches.

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<sup>42</sup> Barnes, p. 68

<sup>43</sup> Barnes, p. 84

<sup>44</sup> Whitelaw, p. 1039



- **Be Calm!** Enjoy quiet moments at any of the three churches in town. Makemie Presbyterian Church on Back Street has a nice little garden with a statue of the founder of Presbyterianism in the United States.

## **Stop 14. Being Absent**

Edgehill Cemetery, the site of Latin House.

Head north on Front Street and turn right on Joynes Neck Road as you leave Accomac. Edgehill Cemetery is 0.5 miles on the right and Sawmill Park is across the street on your left.

*"Peggy and I returned to Bowman's Folly to live, the gally diligence[sig] Captain Watson having arrived in Metompkin for the place's protection."*<sup>45</sup>—John Cropper diary, April 24, 1779.

In late July, Cropper rode north to visit several camps and fellow officers. On August 16, 1779, Lieutenant Colonel John Cropper wrote a letter to John Jay, President of the Continental Congress, to inform him he was resigning from the Continental Army. He then returned home.

It was a good thing that he was home. On September 18, 1779 Peggy gave birth to their second child, Sabra Corbin Cropper. The little girl died six days later.<sup>46</sup> September 18, 1781, thirteen days after the Battle of the Barges, another girl was born, also named Sabra. Tragedy struck again on October 27, 1783 when this third child, died at the age of two.<sup>47</sup> Peggy was pregnant again in the beginning of 1784. The Croppers must have been very anxious as only little Sarah had survived, now being four years old. On May 13, 1784, Margaret Pettitt Cropper was born.

John Cropper was away in Richmond serving as a Virginia Delegate. A little over five weeks later, on June 23, Peggy passed away. It is suggested that her death was from complications of childbirth. Mail being slow at the time, Cropper did not hear of the death for days and by the time he arrived back to Bowman's Folly, Peggy had already joined her two little girls in the family cemetery at Bowman's Folly. John was devastated. He must have felt tremendous guilt, for in the family Bible he entered the baby's birth and then, *"her mother died when she was three weeks old, and while her father was absent in the Gen.l Assembly of Virginia."*<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Wise, p. 15

<sup>46</sup> Barnes, p. 60

<sup>47</sup> Barnes, p. 84

<sup>48</sup> Barnes, p. 86

John Cropper had spent his life thus far protecting his country and the civil liberties of its citizens. He fought alongside the giants of the Revolution, leading men to the front lines of a founding nation. Yet, he was not there when his beloved Peggy left his world.

### *What else to do*

- **Play!** Sawmill Park, across the street, has a playground, pickleball courts, a walking track, and more. Public bathrooms are available.
- **Picnic!** Lots of picnic tables. Grab take-out from the café in Accomac or some fried chicken from the gas station on the corner of Courthouse Road and Route 13.
- **Bike!** Continue on Joyner Neck Road for a pretty bike ride.
- **Birding!** Sawmill Park has woods along its border, which is a good place to look for songbirds. The cemetery is also a good spot.
- **Take a Calming Stroll!** Edgehill Cemetery has beautiful monuments and is a safe, quiet place to stroll.

## **PARKSLEY**

From Accomac, return to the Courthouse Green and take Courthouse Road west to Route 13. Cross the highway at the light and continue to Greenbush. Turn right onto Route 316. Drive north into Parksley. Turn right onto Bennett Street and then an immediate left into the town parking lot. Across the driveway is the railway museum. We suggest sitting on one of the benches at the little ticket office building, facing south.

### **Stop 15. No railroads in this War.**

Eastern Shore Railway Museum, 18468 Dunne Ave.

*“We take the star from Heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty.” --- George Washington*

The Treaty of Paris was signed September 3, 1783. One hundred years later, the New York, Philadelphia, and Norfolk Railroad, a subsidiary of the powerful Pennsylvania system, extended its line south through the Eastern Shore of Virginia.<sup>49</sup> One of the most visible and tangible testaments to the freedoms the new states had after Colonial rule is the transformation unleashed across America with the building of roads and canals, then later the railway system

Parksley, incorporated in 1904, was a planned community built in its location because of the railroad. All the other towns on this tour were built by wharves, because waterways

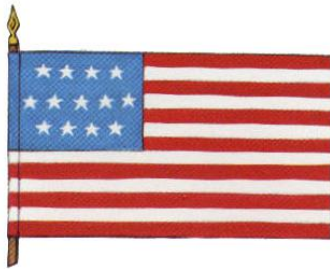
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<sup>49</sup> Thomas, Barnes, and Szuba, p. 1

were the main mode of commercial and passenger transportation at the time. "In 1885, Eleanor S. and Benjamin F. Parkes sold 160 acres to Rev. J.A.B. Wilson of Philadelphia and Henry R. Bennett and Samuel T. Jones of Dover, Delaware. Later that year, these three owners incorporated as the Parksley Land and Improvement Co. The land was surveyed and laid out into lots."<sup>50</sup>

Sitting by the Railway Museum, one sees these iron monuments to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century heyday of the Eastern Shore. You can also see the Veterans Memorial and, across the street, the Confederate monument. Both recognize the lives lost in wars fought on both foreign and domestic lands. Where is the monument to the Revolutionary War?

Actually, it is in the middle of the Veterans Memorial, hoisted proudly at the top of the pole. The flag of the United States of America is the perfect memorial representing all that the Colonial rebels fought for. The flag even has its own protections under the Constitution. Its stripes represent the thirteen original Colonies. Its stars represent each of the states, united on a field. Its red, white, and blue colors have meaning. It is a living monument in that it has changed since its first design during the Revolutionary War. The flag can be raised, lowered, moved, laid on caskets, and properly cremated when it is worn out. It can move to new locations. It is accessible to all as it can be many sizes, from handheld to flying on top of a skyscraper. It has even been to the moon. Even though it has no plaque on it or signage, everyone who sees it knows its story and what is expected of them when viewing it. Being a flagbearer is one of the highest honors a citizen or soldier can have.



The first official flag adopted by Congress, June 14, 1777.<sup>51</sup>

### *What else to do*

- **Tour!** The Eastern Shore of Virginia Railway Museum is open by appointment or at the hours posted.
- **Shop!** Parksley has many shopping options, including the historic Jaxon's Department Store. "If you can't find it, you don't need it." There is a farmer's market on Saturday's.
- **Eat!** Downtown has many food options as well.

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<sup>50</sup> Burton,

<sup>51</sup> SAR

- **Explore!** The Regional Library and Heritage Center, on Bennett Street, has rotating exhibits and a local history room.
- **Walk or Bike!** The town has a history walking tour, available online.
- **Be Calm!** Just sitting on a bench by the railway station is very calming as you contemplate small town life. Sit facing south and enjoy a beautiful sunset.

## **Stop 16. The Last Revolutionary Widow**

Parksley Town Park, Corner of Mary Street and Wilson Avenue

From the Railway Museum, exit east onto Dunne Avenue. Turn left and drive to Adelaide Street. Turn left, cross over Route 316 (Cassatt Avenue), and turn left onto Wilson Avenue. The Town Park will be on the next block.

*"...our attention is drawn with peculiar interest to the surviving officers and soldiers of our Revolutionary army, who so eminently contributed by their services to lay its foundation... It is believed that among the survivors there are some not provided for by existing laws, who are reduced to indigence and even to real distress. These men have a claim on the gratitude of their country, and it will do honor to their country to provide for them."* -- President James Monroe, December 1817<sup>52</sup>

As late as 1902, a widow was still receiving a Revolutionary War pension earned by her husband. She was Mary Powell Snead (1815-1902), of Parksley, who was married to Private Bowdoin Snead (1760 – 1841). They married January 26, 1841 when she was aged 26. In 1900, she was living near here in the Metompkin census district with her sister.

By 1867, all of the 57,623 veterans who had received a pension under one of the Federal laws had died. By then, the Federal government had paid \$46,178,000 to Revolutionary War veterans and family members who qualified for pensions.

In 1869, Mary hired an attorney in Washington, DC, Samuel Niles, in order to restore her claim to the pension rolls. The application to apply for a war pension could be a lengthy process. That application plus the legal documents from the later part of the century include over 100 pages of documentation. These pension applications are valuable oral histories of the Revolutionary War and provide important genealogical information. Soldiers from privates to generals testify in writing of their battle details, where they were stationed, who was with them, and more. Pension records are available on FamilySearch and Ancestry databases, accessible at the public library here in Parksley.

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<sup>52</sup> NPS

3-1081,  
(Old No. 3-608.)

PENSIONER DROPPED.

United States Pension Agency,  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

*Oct. 1, 1902*

Certificate No. *3501*

Class *Widow*

Pensioner *Mary Sneed*

Soldier *Bowdoin Sneed*

Service *U. S. Ar. War, Va. Line*

The Commissioner of Pensions.

SIR: I have the honor to report that the  
above-named pensioner who was last paid  
at \$30 to *4 June 1902*  
has been dropped because of *death*  
*June 29-1902*

Source: Fold3

## What else to do

- **Explore!** Drive or bike to Hunting Creek. Go west on Bennett Street and turn left onto Big Road. Take an almost immediate right onto Wanney Rew Road. Turn left onto Justisville Road and drive to the end. Turn right onto Hopkins Road. Drive to the end. There is a long public dock there.
- **Picnic!** The town park has picnic tables and grills.
- **Play!** Enjoy the vintage and modern playground equipment. There is a pickleball court. Maybe you might catch a street hockey game!
- **Walk!** The grided street design makes for easy walking.
- **Bird!** Hunting Creek has wonderful spots to bird. Because of the mature tree growth, a walk around town is sure to find some interesting songbirds.
- **Kayak!** Johnsons Landing has a public boat ramp. You can paddle up the creek or out towards the bay.
- **Be Calm!** Nearby St. Thomas Methodist Church has a labyrinth. Near there is a very spiritual spot on Parker Landing Road, at the end of the road.

## GARGATHA

### Stop 17. Rebelling on.

Gargatha Landing, Route 685 off Metompkin Road

From Parksley, drive east on Bennett Street, Route 176, to Route 13. Turn left at the light and an almost immediate right onto Route 679, Metompkin Road. Drive north about 3.6 miles and turn right onto Gargatha Landing Road. Drive east to the end of the road.

JAMES CAMPBELL TO THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS.  
Chincoteague, Virginia, September 8, 1776.

SIR: I have the pleasure to inform you that the *Enterprize*, privateer, of Baltimore, under my command, is arrived safe in this inlet, having taken during my cruise the following prizes, viz:

The *Lancashire*, ship, a Guineaman in ballast, now in *Sinapazent*, in Maryland—4 guns, 16 men;  
The *Betsy*, brigantine, of Jamaica, from *Guadaloupe* for *Halifax*, having on board 120 hogheads and tierces of molasses, now in this inlet;  
The *Black River*, ship, from *Dominica* for *Bristol*, having on board 158 hogheads sugar, 58 hogheads rum, 60 hogheads molasses, *Egg-Harbour*;  
The sloop *Jenny*, of Lancaster, from *Antigua*, having on board 100 hogheads sugar, 171 bales of cotton, 2 hogheads rum, 14 tierces and 47 barrels sugar, and 50 tons fastick, 33 men—not yet arrived;  
The brigantine *Betsy*, *Guernsey*, from *St. Cruz*, having on board 240 hogheads rum, not yet arrived—expected this day;  
The sloop *Moderate*, of Dartmouth, in England, from *Barbadoes* for *Newfoundland*, 30 hogheads and 4 tierces rum, and 20 barrels sugar, arrived yesterday in *Sinapazent*.  
The schooner *Liberty*, of New Scotia, from *Montserrat* and *Anguilla*, having on board 1,000 bushels salt, 14 hogheads rum, and ten casks nails;  
A sloop from *Tortola*, with a small cargo of salt and rum. Dismissed, with thirty prisoners, being quite outnumbered by them.

When I sailed, I had fifty-three men and boys, twenty-nine of whom never were at sea. I suffered much in my health, and sprung both my masts; but expect to get better soon, and be out again before the Winter. I shall send your honourable Congress a survey of this inlet when my health permits, it being of great importance, and ought to be fortified, for which four guns would be sufficient. In it is fifteen feet water, and among the shoals without, a ship of any size may find shelter till lighted.

I am, sir, your most obedient servant,  
JAMES CAMPBELL.

To John Hancock, Esq.

Looking north, you will see Wallops Island and the launch pads of NASA's Wallops Island Flight Facility and the Virginia or Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport. Two hundred and fifty years ago, this was an important port for seagoing vessels, as described in a letter by privateer James Campbell on September 8, 1776. He recently had commandeered British vessels with their booty and docked them at Chincoteague, Wallops' neighboring island. A fort was soon after established at Wallops.

On September 4, 1779, Colonel Corbin writes to the newly elected Governor Jefferson, "I have had convincing proof that my fears were not imaginary." Corbin then reported of a British raid and capture of the Wallops Island fort. Corbin and his militia arrived the next day to a fort abandoned by the British, who were frightened off by the militia. Corbin was able to secure the return of the Wallops prisoners. The British did take off with booty and a sloop.

The seaside of Accomack and Northampton counties had to remain vigilant in protecting their shores. "Pilot boats" of the Virginia navy were small, fast sailing vessels that patrolled coastal water ways on the look-out for British privateers and Navy. Few were armed and the sailors had to endure extreme and dangerous weather conditions. They also piloted friendly traders, particularly ones from foreign countries, safely past the shoals and reefs. So valuable were their services that on May 13, 1778,

Governor Patrick Henry authorized bonuses, in addition to daily pay, for every foreign or state (non-local) ship brought safely into port.<sup>53</sup>

The Wallops Island raid is not mentioned by Cropper in his diary, but a few days later his entries speak of hunting curlews, receiving shipments of new Winsor chairs (likely to replace the ones broken by the raiders), and attending Muster day at the Courthouse.<sup>54</sup> Shortly before that, on August 16, 1779, Colonel Cropper wrote to “His Excellency, John Jay Esq. President of Congress” to resign from the Continental army. He provided a list of five reasons that included the raid on Bowman’s Folly (reason number 5) and his need to attend to the affairs at home (4). Higher ranked reasons included: (1) his young family, (2) his pay, and (3) high Virginia taxes. From his diary entries and this letter, Cropper was ready to come home and attend the homefront.

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<sup>53</sup> Ames, p.162

<sup>54</sup> Wise, p. 21

On the 15<sup>th</sup> ult<sup>o</sup> a british privateer anchored off Wollops Island a few miles to the Southard of the Fort, sent a Boat on shore with four french men who were personally known to the Islanders, the french men under the character of trading friends invites an Island man, who was a good pilot, on board to receive some small presents. the invitation being cheerfully accepted of, the Islander went on board, and he says, the Cap<sup>m</sup> of the privateer drew from him every circumstance concerning the Fort, and two vessels which lay near the fort, before he undeceived him—that night they landed 30 men, marched to the back of the Island, and surprised the fort, having passed the centinels without interruption, being guided by the Islander, they then maned two crafts, and under the character of fishermen rowed along side of the Sloop, being the only one of the two, that was armed, and boarded without opposition—made prize of both, and proceeded immediately down to the bar; but getting aground with the Sloop. I went on the Island the next day with a party of the Militia, took possession of the Fort, which the enemy left (upon being informed by the Islander, as he says, that we were well armed with field pieces) after spiking up the Guns—this was a very unlucky circumstance on our side, the Sloop & Schooner then lay within musket shot of the Fort, with a strong tide ahead, the wind also ahead but very light—We proceeded to unspike the Cannon as far as possible, which the Enemy perceiving, immediately began to warp their vessels down, by their Anchors and Cables, and before we got one of the cannon open, they were near a mile distant from the fort—many guns were fired at them, but did them little damage except cutting some of their small riging—when the tide favoured them, they went safe over the bar, took the load out of the schooner, being chiefly flour, set her on fire & turned her adrift—the sloop they carried off, tho' they got no booty with the sloop, she having just discharged her inward cargo—

1779  
September 4th

Discussion of  
the enemy on  
Eastern Shore

They took eight of the Substitutes in the fort, one of which made his escape—I passed a receipt to the Cap<sup>m</sup> for the other seven, which he accepted of, and discharged them—

If I have done wrong in this particular please advise me—Altho' we were worsted as I have above mentioned, together with the loss of a considerable quantity of Stock: Yet the Enemy suffered a small loss—the boat they landed in, with one Swivell, 2 Muskets, a brass blunderbus and several other small articles being left at a distance down the Island 6 men chiefly Islanders, took and carried into the next Inlet to the Southward—the effects sold for upwards of three hundred pounds, which I agreed should be divided amongst the captors—The Substitutes are very bare of clothes, and desire to know when they are to receive their wages, Clothes, and Blanketts—you may depend they suffer much—

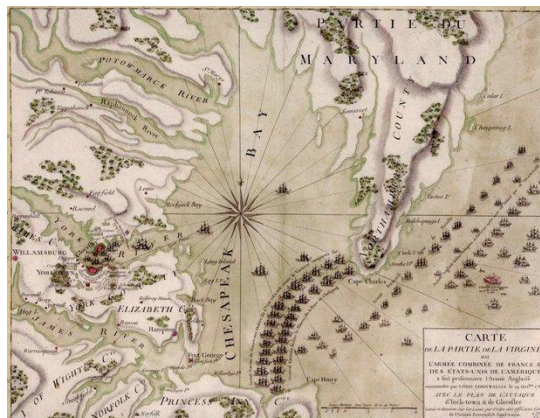
Your Obed<sup>t</sup> Serv<sup>t</sup>

&c &c

*Excerpt from September 4, 1779, Colonel Corbin letter to the newly elected Governor Jefferson.*



## Continuing to “Be Free! Rebel On!”



A 1781 French map of their navy blockade during the Battle of the Capes.

We close this story of Colonel Cropper looking out to Metompkin Island on a cold day in November. Here is the transcript of the 1781 letter written by the Colonel describing another raid, this time by the Accomack Militia. (While at this time he is the County Lieutenant, he is referred to as a Colonel when in the field or because he retained his Continental Army rank.) The letter is written to Colonel William Davies, Virginia's Secretary of War. Keep in mind this is two months after the Battle of the Capes at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, a decisive blow to the British. The siege of Yorktown ended less than a month before.

*"Inclosed I send you a letter\* from Lord Cornwallis to Gen: Clinton Nov'r 11th which was sent from York Town for N. York by a Mr. Gordon Murray (mate of the brigantine "Defiance" of the Q. M. General's Department) and seven sailors in a small boat, armed with one swivel & nine muskets: they called at Metompkin on the seabord of this county, for provisions, and were captured hy the militia of my neighborhood, after a chase of three or four leagues to sea: the militia has a small whale boat & four canoes — The sailors being partly Americans, and having a great desire seemingly to sail from the port of Philadelphia, after several days imprisonment, I gave them all passes (except the Captain & one Englishman) for that place, letting only two go together, and keeping the others ignorant of their destination for some time after. I took upon myself to exchange Mr. Murray for a usefull sea-Captain of this shore taken prisoner at St. Eustatia, James Powell." \* \* \* \* In great haste I am Dear Colonel, with Sincere Esteem, Yr: most hble Serot." --- Col: John Cropper to Col: Davies, November 11, 1781<sup>55</sup>*

Other correspondence to Davies stresses the need for supplies of ammunition and food on the Shore, which is likely why the Militia felt the need to raid passing British vessels.

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<sup>55</sup> VSP, vol. 2

Accomack and Northampton families and farms continued to be harassed by the British until the Treaty of Paris was signed September 3, 1783, eight years after the war started, was well after the Battle of Yorktown, in October 1781.

Colonel John Cropper and his fellow rebellious patriots on the Eastern Shore continued to defend their homes, lands and families, while somehow managing their farms and businesses, raising families, and creating a government for a brand-new country. The story of John Cropper and his family is one of strength, determination, canniness, and, also, pain. His is an American story. He chose to be free and rebel on.

### *What else to do*

- **Kayak!** This is a public boat ramp. Be mindful of tides as the current is strong.
- **Bird!** Lots of waterfowl here and the marsh comes alive at sunset.
- **Be calm!** Enjoy a sunrise or sunset here.
- **Explore!** Continue driving north on Metompkin Road. It is a beautiful drive through historic towns up to Chincoteague.

\* *The End* \*