

"Bowman's Folly" (General John Cropper House)  
North side of Folly Creek, southeast of Accomac  
Accomac Vicinity  
Accomack County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-625

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

"BOWMAN'S FOLLY" (GENERAL JOHN CROPPER HOUSE)HABS  
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Address: North side of Folly Creek, southeast of Accomac, Accomac Vicinity, Accomack County, Virginia.

Present Owner and Occupant: Brigadier General Beverly F. Browne, Front Royal, Virginia.

Present Use: Residence; when above named is on Eastern Shore.

Brief Statement of Significance: One of the finest mansions on the Shore and once home of Brigadier General John Cropper, famous Revolutionary War officer; personal friend of George Washington and General Lafayette.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: 1815, General John Cropper; 1821, Thomas R. Joynes; 1858, Edward S. Joynes; 1869, Thomas H. Bayly Browne and Mary Browne; 1875, Catherine Elizabeth Cropper for life; then 1930 to General Beverly F. Browne for life. General Browne is in his 80's and in poor health. When he dies the property goes to his nephew, Bayly Turlington, who now teaches at Sewanee.
2. Date of erection: 1816, by General John Cropper.
3. Original plans, construction, etc.: Frame construction with brick ends. Handsome paneling. Consists of big house, little house, colonnade, and kitchen. General Browne may have original plans.
4. Notes on alterations and additions: Restored in 1930 by General Browne. Absentee ownership is resulting in slow deterioration of this handsome home.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Home of Brigadier General John Cropper, Revolutionary War officer and of Thomas R. Joynes, member of Virginia House of Delegates. Many prominent Virginians of past years have visited and have been entertained at Bowman's Folly.

C. Sources of Information: Court records; personal inspection; William and Mary quarterly; talks with General Browne; Ralph T. Whitelaw, Virginia's Eastern Shore, A History of Northampton and Accomack Counties, 2 vols. (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1951).

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D. Supplemental Material: The following copy was prepared in connection with a Garden Week on Virginia pilgrimage about ten years ago. This article is reasonably accurate but the date 1745, for the small dwelling on the property is questionable:

"A grant of land on Folly Creek in Accomack County was made to Edmund Bowman in 1663. There he built a house and lived with his family. He became Sheriff, Burgess and Justice in the Colony. The death of his son and the marriages of his daughters decided him to return to England, leaving 'Bowman's Folly' to his daughter, Gertrude, and her husband, John Cropper. Successive generations of Croppers inherited the plantation. John Cropper, born in 1755, owned it at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in which he fought under Washington, attaining the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. During the war he became a close friend of Lafayette who, incidentally, on his last visit to the United States, was a guest at 'Bowman's Folly.'

"During the War of 1812 Colonel Cropper was appointed a Brigadier General, and commanded the militia of Accomack County. A British gunboat sailed up Folly Creek, the crew landed and burned down 'Bowman's Folly' on account of the prominence of the owner. The present house was built in 1816 on the site of the earlier one. Before building commenced, slaves hauled earth from the shore to form a large mound on which the house stands high and safe from the storm tides which occasionally flood the creek banks. In addition to the elevation for his house, the General created a roomy boat basin, which must have been a great convenience; however, time has filled in the basin until now it is only a shallow pool at high tide.

"The house is typical of Eastern Shore architecture: 'Big House, Little House, Colonnade and Kitchen;' all one room deep to insure free passage of the sea breeze in summer. The main house has three floors, with ten unusually pretty dormer windows in the third floor and a deep, wide cornice. The outside is identical whether approached by water or by land. Beautiful little porches with brick steps and brick floors, arched ceilings and intricately carved cornice, both inside and out, lead to the matching doors at each end of the wide central hall. Over each of these porches is an ornamental, triple window, the casings of which repeat the elaborate carving of the porches.

"The two rooms on the first floor of the main house are large and well proportioned, with cornices, paneling and handsome mantels. The same carving and paneling are repeated in the hall, and the staircase is a really unique feature of the house. A long flight goes up by the east wall to a landing which crosses above the north entrance, thence a short flight reaches the second floor. Steps continue up by the east wall to a landing, which, as it crosses the large ornamental window, is suspended from the ends, and has railings along both sides like a bridge. At the west end of this landing are a few more steps

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to the third floor. Looking up from below, the carving and many turns are striking, but it is the suspended landing which is the most interesting feature of the stairway.

"In the story and a half 'Little House,' the downstairs room was a bedroom, or perhaps an office, in the early days. An interesting accordian partition, which when folded back gives free circulation of air, may be unfolded dividing the room and forming a passage to the colonnade. There is a quaint little bedroom above this, reached by winding stairs, with four dormer windows and a tiny fireplace.

"At right angles to the 'Little House' is the one story 'Colonnade' leading to the old kitchen with a great fireplace, a brick floor and a ladder-like stair to an upper room.

"A little distance to the east of the main house is a charming smaller house, also of the Eastern Shore type, which dates from about 1745, and there are several old outbuildings.

"In 1930 'Bowman's Folly' was left to General Beverly F. Browne by Miss Catherine Cropper. General Browne is a great-great-grandson of the Revolutionary General. It is unfortunate that he has not been able to make the place his home; a handsome house, so well preserved and with such lovely surroundings, deserves a happier fate than to stand empty most of the time, although it is completely furnished, and contains many things of real interest. It is being opened to the public for the first time in many years during Historic Garden Week."

Prepared by Commander John A. Upshur  
Consultant, Colonial Williamsburg  
January 1962.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Mansion of the "Big House, Little House, Colonnade and Kitchen" type with well-designed exterior wood trim.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

### B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: Two-and-a-half storied main house with one-story, L-shaped wings.

2. Foundations: Brick.

3. Wall construction: Wood frame covered with clapboards.

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4. Porches: Wood porches at each end of central hall.
5. Chimneys: Brick with corbeled caps.
6. Openings: Double-hung windows, eight over eight light sash with louvered shutters. Palladian windows at second-floor level of central hall.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gabled roofs covered with asphalt shingles.
  - b. Cornice: Molded cornice with pendant-type consoles and carved bed mold.
  - c. Dormers: Gabled dormers; circular-headed dormer windows with eight over eight light sash.
- C. Interior: not accessible.
- D. Site
  1. General setting and orientation: House faces Folly Creek to south southwest. Land has gradual slope to creek.
  2. Enclosures: Fenced in with picket fence with house complex forming southeast corner.
  3. Outbuildings: Unusual privy, corn shed and dovecot.
  4. Landscaping: Some formal plantings but not well kept.

Prepared by Archie W. Franzen, Architect  
National Park Service  
March 1960.