

**LADY FRANCES CULPEPER STEVENS BERKELEY LUDWELL  
(1634-1695): A 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY VIRGINIA WOMAN CLEARLY  
“AHEAD OF HER TIME”**

Having ruled Virginia for more than twenty years, sixty-four-year-old Colonial Governor Sir William Berkeley must have been “feeling his oats” in 1670. In April of that year he took for his second wife (he had married first in 1650, but the lady’s name and fate remain a mystery) a thirty-six-year-old woman whose politics and personality were a match for his own. The widow of former Carolinas Governor Samuel Stevens, “Lady” Frances Berkeley would loyally support her increasingly irascible and truculent second husband during the final years of his tenure in office, culminating in the violent 1676 mutiny known today as “Bacon’s Rebellion.”

Frances Culpeper successfully ignored most of the conventions expected of women of her class in 17<sup>th</sup> century Virginia. An early portrait reveals an attractive young woman with reddish-blond hair and blue-gray eyes. A cousin of Governor Sir Thomas Culpeper, Frances apparently married rather late in her life, and none of her marriages produced any children. In addition, she was careful to make sure that her marriage contracts included favorable long-term financial arrangements. For example, the estate she inherited from her first husband included a valuable plantation in Warwick County, and upon Berkeley’s death she maintained title to the Governor’s mansion at Green Spring (which she rented to two succeeding governors), as well as the annual income from Berkeley’s “proprietary” holdings in the Carolinas.

As Sir William’s consort for seven years, Lady Frances had a powerful influence upon the 1670-1674 expansion, and (in the wake of damage caused by its occupation by “rebels” during Bacon’s Rebellion) the post-1677 repair and restoration, of the Green Spring Governor’s Mansion. During the Rebellion, Lady Frances actively supported her husband’s cause, even after a Royal Commission and one thousand troops arrived to restore order and escort Berkeley to England to face an official inquiry. However, Sir William died in late 1677 before his wife could join him in London to help with his appeal.

Within three years of Berkeley’s death, Lady Frances had married one of his lieutenants, Philip Ludwell I, and nine years later she helped arrange Ludwell’s appointment as Governor of The Carolinas. She died sometime after May, 1695, having managed to live for more than a decade in the Governor’s Mansion at Green Spring, a residence which she famously described to a relative as “...the finest seat in America (and) the only tolerable place for a Governour...” Buried first at Green Spring plantation, the remains of Lady Frances were later removed to the cemetery of Jamestown Church, where fragments of her tomb cover are still on display near