

## **THE GREEN SPRING CONSPIRACY OF 1650-1652**

Many bizarre events--from political hi-jinks to public hangings--took place at Historic Green Spring during the twenty-seven years of Sir William Berkeley's tenure as Governor of Colonial Virginia. Perhaps the strangest of these was the conspiracy by Berkeley and some of his Royalist cronies to prevent Oliver Cromwell and his Commonwealth government from gaining control of the Colony of Virginia. This effort lasted more than two years and involved dozens of recently-arrived "Cavalier" refugees from England's Civil War. One of the principal conspirators was Governor Berkeley's friend, Colonel Francis Lovelace, a Royalist officer secretly dispatched by young King Charles II from his Government-in-exile in France. Only the belated arrival of three heavily-armed Commonwealth ships at Jamestown in March of 1652 prevented Berkeley's colonial "mutiny" from succeeding.

By the summer of 1650, the English civil war had been a major factor in the internal politics of the Virginia Colony for nearly a decade. From the outset, Virginia's gentry had largely sided with the Royalists and thus supported Governor Berkeley's policies. According to historian Steven D. Crow, "...Governor Berkeley apparently got the Burgesses to reaffirm their support of the Stuarts whenever he wanted. At his bidding the colony periodically rejected friendly overtures from Parliament, it proclaimed Charles II King in 1649, and it refused to recognize the Commonwealth." Berkeley's generosity to newly-arrived Royalists was well-known, and his mansion at Green Spring became the colony's principal social hub and refuge for supporters of the Stuart dynasty.

During the late 1640s Governor Berkeley's pro-Royalist efforts had been strengthened by Parliament's clumsy attempts to regulate the trade of Virginia's planters, who were selling tobacco to the Dutch and preferred to ignore directives from London designed to maintain English monopoly control of their business. By 1650 the frustrated Commonwealth, having failed to wean the Virginia traders from the Dutch, had resorted to economic coercion by outlawing English trade with Virginia. Combined with shock over the beheading of Charles I in 1649 and doubts about the staying power of the Commonwealth government, these economic pressures enhanced Governor Berkeley's efforts to preserve the colony for the Stuarts by strengthening the Virginia elite's determination to resist Parliamentary control. Their political viewpoint is reflected in the following toast, which was popular in Virginia during that period:

*Though for a time we see Whitehall  
With cobwebs deck'd around the wall  
Yet Heaven shall make amends for all  
When the King enjoys his own again!*

However, in the long run Governor Berkeley failed to keep Virginia in the Royalist camp. As Steven Crow has described it, “Few Virginians were ideologists and fewer still carried such deep-seated affection for the Stuarts that they would risk life and estate for Charles I or his son.” When Cromwell’s Commissioners arrived with a fleet in March of 1652, Virginia’s gentry ignored their Governor and grudgingly signed the Northumberland Oath, which forced them to swear allegiance to the Parliament of England without the King or the House of Lords. Thus, at the end of his visit to North America, Colonel Francis Lovelace returned to France with news that no doubt pleased both of the parties contending for future political control of England: although Virginia’s leaders remained sympathetic to the cause of the Stuart dynasty, they had no interest in openly resisting the Commonwealth’s assertion of control over their colony.