

the church's tower. Lady Frances is remembered to this day as the only woman in Virginia history to marry three Colonial Governors.

**LADY FRANCES CULPEPER STEVENS BERKELEY LUDWELL ):  
THE “FIRST LADY” OF 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY VIRGINIA POLITICS**

Most visitors to the 1639-1645 brick church on Historic Jamestown Island walk right past a pair of time-worn horizontal gravestones located a few yards south of the church's south wall without a glance. The larger of the two slabs, that of Elizabeth Drummond, who died in 1699 at the age of 58, is in relatively good condition. The other gravestone consists of only a few large pieces of marble held together by concrete. The marble shards contain only a few disconnected words and letters (...YETH THE BODY OF...LADY FRAN...KLEY...RUARY) to give us a clue to the identity of the person originally buried beneath that gravestone. The shattered condition of the marble slab is symbolic of how little we actually know (from both historical and archaeological “bits and pieces”) about the most ambitious, colorful, and politically powerful woman in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Colonial Virginia.

The earliest known portrait of the woman who eventually became “Lady Frances,” Berkeley (actually “Dame Frances” in British English usage) was painted when the subject was in her teens or twenties, and reveals an attractive blue-eyed blonde, wearing a gold necklace, a lavender dress, and a Mona Lisa smile. Even though she was a member of one of Virginia's great Colonial families, the Culpepers, none of her 1650s acquaintances would have predicted that this demure young woman would go on to marry three Colonial Governors and become a major player in the politics of Colonial Virginia during 1670-1695.

The reputation of “Lady” Frances as an ambitious and manipulative power broker has been both lauded and condemned by various generations of American historians. Few personal or official documents of hers have survived to this day, and we do not even know the precise dates of her birth and death. But the limited evidence we do have indicates that, by any measure, in her day “Frances Culpeper Stevens Berkeley Ludwell” was clearly a personality and a political force to be reckoned with. Thus, her private life and political career—both of which revolved around people and events associated with the Colonial Governor's Mansion located until 1699 at Green Spring Plantation—is certainly deserving of further study and analysis.