

JANE CARSON ON LADY FRANCES BERKELEY

“An important event in (Governor Berkeley’s) personal life took place in 1670, when he married Frances Culpeper Stephens. She was thirty years his junior, the widow of Samuel Stephens, whose family had been prominent in Virginia since 1623. The exact date of the wedding is not known. Samuel Stephens had been a member of the Virginia Council and the second Governor of Albemarle (North and South Carolina), and his widow followed the example of her mother-in-law and married the current Governor of Virginia within a few months of her first husband’s death.

Her contemporaries said that she was beautiful and proud. (A later) portrait, painted a decade after her second marriage, presents a graceful, stately woman with regular but heavy features, a lady more impressive and formidable than pleasant and attractive. It is significant of her pride that her tombstone bears the title “Lady” though she should have dropped the title when she married Philip Ludwell after Berkeley’s death. Whatever her nature, she gave Governor Berkeley her whole-hearted support during the last difficult years of his life and defended him after his death. Whenever he mentioned her name, he expressed affectionate regard for her and complete confidence in her judgement.”

From Ms. Carson’s 1951 Doctoral Dissertation (University of Virginia), entitled Sir William Berkeley, Governor of Virginia: A Study in Colonial Ploicy.