

Mary Musgrove (ca. 1700-ca. 1763)

Imagine a time before Georgia was even a colony, much less a State. It was a territory up for grabs, and the competitors were the British Empire, the Spanish Empire in Florida, and the French Empire in the Mississippi Valley. But there was another party to this competition: the Creek Nation, the Native American inhabitants of the territory. None of the European empires could succeed in annexing this territory without first making its peace with the Creeks.

Mary Musgrove was a half-breed Yamacraw Indian of the Muscogean Tribe. Born in 1700, at Coweta Town on the Ockmulgee River. Her Indian name was Coosaponakesee among the Creek Indians,. Her father was a English white trader named Edward Griffin and her mother a Creek Indian princess.. Mary's mother was a sister of Emperor Biem and Chigelli, two Creek leaders who had tried to drive the white man out of the southeast in the war of 1715,

She spent her first ten years among her mother's people, becoming thoroughly acquainted with their language and ways. Then she was brought to Charles Towne, South Carolina to spend some years with her father's people. There she was christened into the Church of England and given the name Mary and adapted herself to English colonial society. She spent most of her childhood straddling the two worlds of her Creek village, Coweta, and the colony of South Carolina. During these years she learned to speak the Creek language of Muskogee as well as English, and she learned firsthand about the deerskin trade and the different customs and expectations of colonial and Native American societies. This double allegiance, to the Creek Nation and the English Crown, was to make her a vital figure in the colonial settlement of Georgia. She was ten years old and in her own words "there baptized, educated, and bred up in the principles of Christianity." Mary returned to Coweta in 1715 after the Yamasees revolt was put down. Despite her mixed heritage Mary was considered a full member of Creek society and the Wind Clan. In this matrilineal society children took the clan identities of their mothers. Later in life she would claim royal heritage, a claim few scholars have accepted.

Mary Musgrove served as liaison between colonial Georgia and her Native American community in the mid-eighteenth century. Mary took advantage of her biculturalism to protect Creek interests, maintain peace on the frontier, and expand her business as a trader. She was a tiny woman about five feet tall, wore her hair in two long braids with a band of beads across her forehead, and a feather stuck into the band. The Governor of South Carolina commissioned Colonel John Musgrove a Carolina Indian agent in 1716 to visit the Creek Nation and effect a treaty of peace. John Musgrove Jr. the half-breed son, a well-educated member of the Charleston gentry, and an English trader accompanied his father. He fell madly in love with Mary who was about 16 years old, he in his early twenties, and immediately married her and the two of them set out to build a trading enterprise in the Georgia territory. Her knowledge of Creek language and customs was an invaluable aid to their success. They lived with the Creeks until 1725, then after the birth of their first child, they moved to the **Musgrove** estate at Pompon, South Carolina.

Soon John and Mary established a trading post, "The Cowpen", near the mouth of the Savannah River. Neither realized they had placed themselves squarely before the vanguard of English expansion into what was to become the colony of Georgia. By 1730, they had a prosperous trading post on the Yamacraw Bluff, overlooking the Savannah River and Savannah was founded on this site a year later. It was 17 years after their marriage in 1733, when General James Oglethorpe brought the first English colonists to Savannah. The Yamacraws were less than pleased with the founding of Savannah much less Georgia. The ink was not yet dry on the treaty establishing the Savannah River as the limit of white expansion to the south and west.

In November 1732, the ship Anne sailed from Britain to South Carolina carrying 114 colonists, including General James Oglethorpe. Even before the ship set sail from England, James Oglethorpe, the leader of the new colony, instituted a set of rules he called prohibitions to make the place as "perfect" as possible. They were:
Prohibition 1: No rum, brandy or spirits - though wine, beer and ale were allowed.
Prohibition 2: No lawyers (Oglethorpe felt that each man should be able to speak for himself or through a friend, and that lawyers were unnecessary)
Prohibition 3: No black slaves or negroes (Although Georgia was the only free colony, people still "borrowed" slaves from South Carolina for construction work)
Prohibition 4: No Catholics (But everyone else had the right to freedom of religion)
In his mind, these prohibitions were essential if Georgia were to succeed. Alcohol would demoralize the colonists, while Catholics would endanger them. The Catholics, he felt, would ally with the Spanish (who occupied Florida at the time) if the Spanish were ever to attack, because they shared a common religion. As for why the ban against blacks and lawyers...well, that depends on who you talk to!

On February 12, 1733, Oglethorpe and 10 of the pioneers sailed with four small boats down the coast and up the Savannah River to arrived at Yamacraw - soon thereafter called Savannah - and were cordially and ceremoniously greeted by Tomochichi, his Yamacraws, and John and Mary Musgrove, Indian traders. The Musgroves greatly assisted Oglethorpe in his early relations with the Indians.

Georgia was established to help the poor, protect South Carolina against the Spanish in Florida, and produce materials such as silk and olives for England. It issued each colonist 50 acres of land, and its motto was "Non Sibi Sed Allis," which means "not for themselves but for others" in Latin. Thousands of people signed up to go - so many that the people in charge (called the Trustees) had to set up a committee to interview prospective settlers. The colonists who couldn't pay their way over had to work as "indentured servants" for 5-7 years before receiving their allotted plot of land.

In Georgia, things would be different. People would live simply and fairly, without fear of religious persecution. They would produce raw materials for the King of England, while working off their debts on their allotted plots of land. And they would live by a moral code that included a ban on alcohol and slaves. In short, life would be good!

And why not? Life in England in 1732 wasn't exactly a bowl of peaches, especially for those in debt and the poor. When people couldn't pay their bills, they were sent to jail. The jails were terrible places that lacked even the most basic creature comforts. For them, packing up and moving to the "New World" meant new opportunities, especially in a colony as ambitious and idealistic as Georgia.

Mary and John essentially had a trading monopoly as whites were forbidden to settle in this area and both the Indians and Charleston merchants used their services to facilitate trade. Mary Musgrove helped her husband as an interpreter and probably used her kin ties to attract clients.

This provided the Musgroves an opportunity to expand their role on the southern frontier. On February 12, 1733, Oglethorpe and his settlers landed at Yamacraw Bluff with a charter from King George II allowing him to establish a new English colony south of the Carolinas and north of Spanish Florida. In an example of some of the earliest "Southern hospitality", they were greeted by Tomochichi, the mico (leader) of the Lower Creek Indians the Yamacraws, and Indian traders John and Mary Musgrove, whose traditional name was Cousaponakeesa (she was about 33 years old at this time). Many of the first meetings between colonizers in other areas and Native Americans were far from friendly, but this one was all smiles! Tomochichi wanted to ensure that his relationship with Oglethorpe was productive, not destructive.

John and Mary were interpreters for the first meeting with the Yamacraw Chief (or Mico), Tomochichi, an imposing man six feet tall and 90 years of age. The city of Savannah was founded on that date, along with the colony of Georgia.

(Tomochichi was very interested in Oglethorpe's gun, which he called a "fire stick". He remained a fast friend to Oglethorpe until his death in 1739.)

In 1734, after John Musgrove and a group of Creeks accompanied James Oglethorpe on a trip to England, the Trustees officially granted John Musgrove some land at Yamacraw Bluff on the Savannah River, four miles upriver from Savannah itself. John Musgrove died in 1735, and Mary Musgrove subsequently moved the trading post to Yamacraw Bluff. The post, known as the Cowpens, became a major commerce site and was probably the center for the English-Indian deerskin trade.

The arrival of Oglethorpe and the settlement of Georgia presented an unprecedented opportunity for Mary to advance her fortunes both socially and financially. She basked in the limelight and assumed the position of an important person both with the Indians and the colonists.

John Musgrove served as interpreter for John Wesley and Tomo-Chichi. John Wesley was a frequent visitor to Mary's plantation on the Savannah. Mary owned the fairest and broadest acres in Georgia and supplied the struggling colonists with meat, bread & liquor. Mary put the traders and Indian couriers in her employ at the disposal of Oglethorpe.

Mary also established a trading post called Mount Venture on the south side of the Altamaha River one hundred and fifty miles above its mouth in order to keep an eye on the Indians and the Spanish.

From the colony's inception Musgrove placed herself in the center of Oglethorpe's dealings with neighboring Creek Indians. As interpreter for Oglethorpe and Yamacraw Indian chief Tomochichi, Mary Musgrove was instrumental in the peaceful founding of Savannah, and by extension, the Georgia colony. She served as Oglethorpe's principal interpreter from 1733 until 1743, receiving financial compensation for her assistance and the prestige that accompanied her position. Her yearly salary of one hundred pounds sterling, which in that day was equal to a great deal more than five hundred dollars. But, Mary earned all that was paid to her and more. General Oglethorpe regarded Mary as a valuable interpreter. During this period she repeatedly used her connections to foster peace between the British and the Creeks. Oglethorpe obtained most of his understanding of the Creek Indians directly from Musgrove.

John Musgrove died in 1735, leaving his widow the wealthiest woman in Georgia. Her influence with both whites and Indians continued to grow. The Indians granted her large tracts on the Savannah River, along with the sea islands of Ossabaw, St. Catherines and Sapelo. She was asked by Oglethorpe to establish a trading post closer to the Florida border to keep a sharp eye on the Spanish. Mary located her new settlement on the Altamaha River, and named it Mount Venture.

Mary Musgrove promptly remarried in 1737 to John Musgrove's indentured servant Jacob Matthews. Public opinion of Jacob was mixed.

They found the Musgroves already there, operating a prosperous enterprise, and Mary soon became Oglethorpe's main interpreter and a trusted emissary in his dealings with the Indians of the area. Her influence among the tribes helped the English to establish their colony with minor difficulty. The Creek warriors fought on the British side in several battles against the Spanish, including Oglethorpe's attack on San Augustín in 1740, and the Battle of Bloody Marsh on Isla San Simón in 1742.

Mary remained loyal to the British, but was faced with increasing pressures from both the French and the Spanish to join their side as they exhorted the Creeks to desert the British. She continued to be effective as a negotiator between the several contestants, however, and at the age of 49 married Thomas Bosomworth, the chaplain of the colony and a Church of England clergyman. Unfortunately, Bosomworth seems to have been something of a scoundrel who was more interested in profit than piety; he abandoned his clerical duties and took up cattle raising on St. Catharine's Island in Georgia, which was among the properties Mary had induced the Creek council to grant her, along with Ossabaw and Sapelo Islands.

Bosomworth also managed to obtain appointment as Agent to the Creek Indians. But, as a climax to his persuasive efforts, he got Mary to title herself “Empress of the Creek Nation,”—an entirely fictitious role, since the Creek people at no time had established any royalty. But Mary seemed unable to retain any sense of independence or realization of these manipulations of her position. Bosomworth had purchased his cattle on credit, and to pay for them, he got Mary to enter a claim against the English colonists for her past services. She claimed that, as Empress she was the sovereign ruler of the Creek Indians and not a subject of the King of England; in 1749 she brought a band of warriors to Savannah to press her claims in a more forceful way. The terrorized population of colonists prepared for battle, but managed to get the Indians to agree to a council, during which they were able to demonstrate how absurd Bosomworth’s position really was.

The Creek listened, and finally withdrew, realizing that they had been used by Mary and her husband for selfish purposes. Abandoned, the couple stormed and threatened, but to no avail; the colonists refused the claim, but did allow them to go to England to present their case to the Crown in person. At that distance, Mary had an easier time, and in 1759 was paid a modest compensation, and allowed to sell Ossabaw and Sapelo. The pair returned to St. Catharine’s, where Mary tried to reestablish her earlier good relations with the Indians and the colonists, but she died shortly afterwards, in 1763, and was buried on the Island

With the assistance of her husband, Jacob Matthews, Musgrove established another trading post at Mount Venture on the Altamaha River.

Jacob Matthews died on May 8, 1742 and Mary third and last husband, the renegade Anglican minister, Reverend Thomas Bosomworth was even more worthless than Jacob. Mary married Thomas about three years after Jacob's death.

This marriage provided an opportunity for Mary Musgrove to further increase her power. The couple probably met when she interpreted for Bosomworth, who was sent to the young colony as a Christian missionary. When the marriage was announced, however, few Georgians believed it to be true. Musgrove's marriage signified a rise in status that few had foreseen. Musgrove, who had earlier married among the lower branches of the colonial order, now connected herself to "respectable" society. The daughter of an Indian trader and a Creek mother had risen to the upper echelon of colonial society.

Bosomworth's status paired with Musgrove's skills formed a powerful combination. Together they traveled into Creek villages with messages from Oglethorpe and the English king, brought back speeches from various Creek leaders, and hosted Creek and American visitors at their home. They occasionally taught Christian missionaries the Muskogee language, and otherwise tried to mediate interactions between Creeks and colonists.

Thomas had come to Georgia to make his fortune in 1741 as a clerk to William Stephens. Stephens recommended Thomas as Register of Savannah but the Trustees had already filled the position. Stephens then promised him the Recordership when it fell vacant. The

Trustees, however, appointed him Secretary to the Indian Affairs. This position was not important enough for Thomas so he determined to be a warrior and went to Frederica to help Oglethorpe destroy the Spanish.

Thomas soon tired of camp life and had an "Ambition of being an Author" and of writing essays on religion. According to Stephens, "his sprightly Temper, added to a little Share of classical Learning, makes him soar" high. He wrote a long and meaningless discourse, on the "Glory & Lustre" of charity, to the Trustees in 1742 attempting to show that the Bethesda Orphans Asylum was being perverted. Thomas also wrote Lyrics but took umbrage at the accusation of having "Ambitions to be an Author." He wrote the Trustees, "I am sorry to find that my good intentions are so far perverted as to be imputed to an Ambition of appearing as an Author."

Thomas next felt a call to preach and went to England for Holy Orders in March 1743. He was appointed minister to Georgia for a term of three years on July 4th and returned to Georgia on December 2nd. He soon tired of preaching and Mary. He returned to England in 1745 without notice or providing for the church in Savannah declaring that he would not return. The Trustees ignored the complaints he attempted to bring to their attention so he decided to again become a warrior and go against the Rebels in the North but was back in Georgia in early 1746.

He was, however, no longer the minister. One report was that he cast "aside his Sacredotals"; but another had it that the Trustees had torn them from him. His successor, the Reverend Mr. Zouberbuhler, discovered that Thomas had stripped the parsonage of all furniture and he was forced to live in an unfurnished house for some time.

Thomas lost no time in developing a new scheme. He and Mary set up a trading post at the Forks (the confluence of the Ockmulgee and Oconee Rivers). Thomas openly brought six slaves to the Forks.

Mary and Thomas secured a grant of St. Catherine, Sapelo, and Ossaba Islands from the Creeks in addition to a tract of land lying between Savannah and Pipe maker's Creek. Chief Malatchee entered into this agreement on the "4th day of ye (1) Windy Moon called ye month of January by ye English" in 1747 in return for promises of cloth, ammunition, and cattle.

July 20 1749 - Mary Musgrove declares herself Empress of the Creeks and marches on Savannah with a Creek Army to either collect moneys due her for services rendered during the War of Jenkins' Ear or to drive the whites from Georgia. The Creeks are satisfied with a few presents and some rum. Mary's claims are settled by London for £2,100 and title to St. Catherine's Island.

Mary & Thomas contacted Heron, the new commander of the regiment at Frederica, and raised in him fears of an Indian uprising and also promised him a share of any loot they could wring out of Georgia or the British government.

Heron formally recognized Malatchee as supreme King of the Creeks, collected a load of documents setting forth Mary's claims and sent them to the Trustees in London by Abraham Bosomworth.

Thomas purchased vast herds of cattle on credit in South Carolina and turned them loose on St. Catherine Island. Mary and Thomas then pressed Mary's claims in order to secure working capital. Thomas even drew drafts against the expected settlement.

Mary and Thomas came to Savannah on July 24, 1749, accompanied by Malatchee and two other chiefs. Malatchee announced that he was "the present and only reigning Emperor" and that all Creeks were his loyal followers. Malatchee also announced that 200 more chiefs and their warriors would be in Savannah within eight days.

The President and Council's first concern was to secure an interpreter as they were not convinced that Mary could serve as an unbiased interpreter. Mary stirred the pot by upbraiding Stephens for lack of hostility. She pointed out that the Indians always entertained visitors with the best they had and that Malatchee had been in town for six days and had not yet been invited to Tea much less a State Dinner. The Council invited the Indians to dine on July 28th. This dinner quieted the Indians for a while but by August they were again becoming restless. The vanguard of the Indian invaders were now approaching Savannah and the Council were becoming concerned.(2)

The council sent two horses laden with food to the women & children encamped near Fort Argyle. The Indians knew that the Georgia Regiment had been disbanded and they came down the river, "Firing their Guns all the way in menacing and insulting Manner." on the night of August 9th. Terror ran rampant in the streets of Savannah.

The council invited the chiefs to dinner on the 10th of August. Mary and the Council then began a game for the Indians support or lack thereof. The chiefs were wined & dined. Captain Noble Jones gathered about 170 militiamen and horsemen from the surrounding area. Noble Jones invited the Indians to lay down their arms. The Indians discharged their weapons. The militia considered this to be a salute and fired their weapons. A procession into town was then organized. The militia headed the parade. Thomas followed in his Canonical Habit along with Mary, Adam (his brother), Malatchee, and the rest according to their Custom to the Parade. Abraham Bosomworth & Mary were arrested temporally.

Malatchee played his role to the hilt. He continually suggested that they "Spend the Evening with the Beloved Men in Mirth." That is in the tavern. The farce wound down on the 19th after several more "Evenings with the Beloved Men in Mirth." Savannah's "reign of terror" was over. The Indians asked for food and boats home.

Mary resorted to the courts in London. She settled her claims for 2,100 and clear title to St. Catherine Island in June 1760. Mary died in 1763 and is buried on St. Catherine Island.

Despite her central role in Georgia's Indian affairs, Mary Musgrove is more often remembered for her controversial land claims in Georgia. The controversy began in 1737 when Yamacraw chief Tomochichi granted her a plot of land near Savannah. The claim was unsettled when Musgrove married Bosomworth. In the following years Lower Creek chief Malatchi granted the Bosomworths three of the Sea Islands that the Indians claimed as their own—Ossabaw, Sapelo, and St. Catherines. British officials, however, refused these claims on the grounds that a nation can cede or grant land only to a nation, not to individuals.

Musgrove pursued her claims to the lands for the next decade. In 1749 more than 200 Creeks accompanied her to Savannah to support her claim. With Georgia officials unwilling to accept the grant, Musgrove eventually traveled to England to plead her case. In 1754 the Board of Trade heard her case and referred it to the Georgia courts. When she returned to Georgia, the disputed land had come under Georgia control. In 1760 a compromise was finally reached—in return for the right to St. Catherines Island and £2,100, Musgrove relinquished her claims to the other lands. Afterward Musgrove ceased to play a central role in Georgia-Creek relations. She died on St. Catherines Island sometime after 1763.

Generally peaceful relations prevailed until the end of first year the Spanish threat and in 1763, the French. Following that period Native Americans were no longer courted as potential allies against other Europeans by the English. Further, they usually maintained minimal contact with the ever-growing numbers of English colonists. Native American population in the area steadily declined as European/American contact increased. While some of the Creeks left because of warfare, most simply moved away toward the interior. In addition, exposure to European disease took a terrible toll on their numbers, as well.

For Oglethorpe to have any hope of success, it was essential for him to secure the peaceful cooperation of the Creeks. He had to win their agreement to land-settlements and trade. He had to win their support against Spanish and French attempts to acquire land. He had to be sure that Creek warriors would resist Spanish incursions from the South. He needed a network of intelligence agents and negotiators who could communicate with the Creeks and win their trust.

Mary Musgrove was ideally suited for this task. She was tireless and fearless in the missions she undertook, and she required fair pay for her work. Her broad acquaintance among the leaders of the Creek nation was unmatched.

The same was true of her shrewdness in inter-tribal negotiations and land-grants. She made countless trips between Savannah and Frederica to gain intelligence about the Spanish and to assure the support of the Creek tribes for the English garrison. Remember the Battle of Bloody Marsh on Saint Simons Island? That marked the most dangerous Spanish venture against the colony and a narrow escape by the English. We need to

remember that the Spanish might have won if they had had the support of the Creeks. No one played a greater role than Mary Musgrove in keeping the Creeks on the English side. During these years she was also socially prominent and successful in trade. Her home in Savannah was the residence for important Indian visitors who came to call on the colonial authorities. Incidentally, one evening guest in her home was the young rector of the English Church, John Wesley.

There is no record of her having any children who survived.

She continued to expand her trading business, with a thriving trading post at "The Forks," where the Ocmulgee and Oconee Rivers join to form the Altamaha. All this time, she was receiving land grants from the Creek tribes for her assistance as an interpreter and peace negotiator. These land grants brought her into extensive litigation in the British courts concerning her claims. At one point in this legal battle, she declared herself Queen of the Creeks and made a demonstration of force to show the support she had among the tribes. When the courts finally ruled in her favor and granted her claims, she became Georgia's largest landowner by grant from the Crown. Her holding included the islands of Sapelo, Ossabaw, and Saint Catherines.

Mary Musgrove (born Coosaponakeesa) died in 1765 at a ripe old age for her time. Her service to General Oglethorpe and the English Crown played a vital part in the founding of the Georgia Colony. Without her help, it might well have failed.

The first property transfer in the new colony of Georgia involved Ossabaw. Gen. James Edward Oglethorpe made a land deal with Tomochichi, the mico of the Yamacraws, receiving the tidewater region between Savannah and the Altamaha in exchange for granting Ossabaw, St. Catherines, and Sapelo islands to the Indians in perpetuity. The Indians made a subsequent deal, granting the hunting islands to Mary Musgrove, an interpreter of mixed Indian and European parentage, who was considered princess of the tribe. Musgrove, and her second husband Thomas Bosomworth, were granted the Indian hunting islands "as long as the sun shall shine or the waters run in the rivers, forever." Not much happened with the islands until Georgia lifted its ban in 1749 on slavery, which was necessary to operate profitable plantations in the south. Musgrove moved to establish plantations on her three islands, but the Royal Trustees protested the legality of her title to the islands. Despite the dispute, the Bosomworths built a home and planted fields on St. Catherines, and raised cattle on Ossabaw. After 11 years, the case was settled by granting them St. Catherines, and Sapelo and Ossabaw were put up for public auction with the proceeds going to the Bosomworths.

Not only did she interpret for General Oglethorpe, but she also aided in concluding treaties and aided in securing warriors from the Creek nation in the war that occurred between the colonists and the Spaniards who occupied Florida.

When Oglethorpe left Georgia in 1733 (1742 ?) he gave Mary a ring from his finger. After malaria claimed four of Mary's sons and her husband John, she married a man named Matthews, who also died. In 1744 she married Thomas Bosomworth, who was previously the chaplain to Oglethorpe's regiment. Reverend Bosomworth was a very shrewd individual. Up until her marriage to Bosomworth, Mary had never closed to labor

for the good of the colony. After her marriage to Thomas, her conduct was such as to keep the whites in constant fear of massacre and extermination.

Bosomworth set about winning the Creek Indians to his devious ways. He convinced Malatche (brother of Mary) to have himself proclaimed as emperor of the Creek nation. Then he procured from the Creek emperor a deed of conveyance to he and Mary of the islands of Ossabaw, Sapelo, and St. Catherine. Thomas then convinced the Creek nation to proclaim Mary as the "Empress of Georgia." He used Mary's influence and previous rapport to his own good.

Mary, having won support of all the Indians, made instant demand for surrender of all the lands that had belonged to the Upper and Lower Creek Indians. In August 1749 while meeting in Savannah, Mary and Thomas were privately arrested due to debts Thomas owed in South Carolina for cattle. The Indian Chiefs and council president met on several occasions to negotiate the return of lands to the Indians. Bosomworth repented of his folly, wrote to the council president apologizing for his wanton conduct.

During this time Thomas continually fought to secure the money owed Mary for her services when she was working for General Oglethorpe. Around 1759 (1757 ?), Governor Ellis settled Mary's claims by giving her 450 pounds sterling for goods she had expended in the King's service. She was also allowed 1650 pounds sterling for her services as agent. In addition, she was given 2000 pounds sterling from the auction sale of Ossabaw and Sapelo. A grant of St. Catherine Island was also made to Mary Bosomworth for her many good deeds she did for the Colonists in her better days before her mind had been poisoned by Reverend Bosomworth. The Bosomworths lived there for the rest of their lives and are buried there.

By 1732, the Musgroves has established a successful trading post among the Yamacraw Indians on the southern banks of the Savannah River. In early 1733, John and Mary met James Oglethorpe, who had come looking for a place to settle the first Georgia colonists. On this occasion and the arrival of the colonists (Feb. 1 O.S., Feb. 12 N.S), John acted as principal interpreter for talks between Oglethorpe and Yamacraw chief Tomochichi. In 1734, Musgrove accompanied Oglethorpe and a Yamacraw delegation on a trip to England to serve as their interpreter. For his services, the Trustees granted Musgrove a 500-acre grant of land just north of Savannah. On May 15, 1735, the Trustees awarded Musgrove an exclusive license to trade with the Yamacraw and Yuchi Indians. However, in less than a month, Musgrove died near Savannah.

The name Georgia came from King George II.

Indian Trading Post: Home of Mary Musgrove State Historical Marker Located on U.S. 17 at the former Savannah Sugar Refining Co., Savannah 32°08.552, 081°09.428

INDIAN TRADING POST: HOME OF MARY MUSGROVE

During the first years after the founding of the Colony of Georgia in 1733 these lands (now owned by the Savannah Sugar Refining Company) were known as the "Grange" or "Cowpen" plantation. Along the Savannah River, about one mile East of this marker, was located the home of John Musgrove and his wife, Mary, who engaged there in the Indian trade and in farming and cattle raising.

Mary **Musgrove**, famed in **Georgia** history for her services to James Edward Oglethorpe as interpreter, was a half-breed whose Indian name was "Cousaponakeesa". She was a niece of Old Brim, Emperor of the Creek Indians. The **Musgrove** house was a seat of hospitality. Among the important visitors entertained here was the celebrated John Wesley.

During the nineteenth century these lands were known as Colerain Plantation. They were extensively cultivated. Colerain was one of the largest rice plantations on the **Savannah** River. In Ante-Bellum days near the former site of the **Musgrove** house stood one of the finest mansions on the River, the home of James Potter, owner of Colerain.

The erection in 1916 of the **Savannah** Sugar Refining Company plant on this property marked the beginning of the transition from **Savannah's** cotton and naval stores economy to that of a leading industrial seaport.

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Several years later the Creeks invited the British to build a trading post in Creek territory, and requested that it be run by an Indian. The British chose Coosaponakeesa and her husband John **Musgrove**. In 1730 they moved to Yamacraw, a village founded by Coosaponakeesa's relative Tomo-chi-chi in 1725. Tomo-chi-chi had provided land north of Yamacraw on the Altamaha River for the trading post. He also gave Coosaponakeesa 500 acres of land on which to build her house, making it clear that the land was hers (British law at the time prohibited women from owning property). This 500 acres eventually grew into the city of **Savannah, Georgia**.

Coosaponakeesa spoke Muskogean (Creek), English, and the Mobilian trade language. She acted as interpreter for Tomo-chi-chi in any talks with the English. In early 1733 James Oglethorpe arrived at Yamacraw and began discussions with the Creeks that led to the establishment of a colony there, to be settled by debtors from England.

Coosaponakeesa acted as interpreter in these discussions, which led to the establishment of the British colony of **Georgia**. During the colony's early years, her plantation was one of its main food suppliers.

In 1734 Oglethorpe planned a trip to England and invited Tomo-chi-chi and a delegation of Creeks to go along. Coosaponakeesa was to go as interpreter, but her parents fell ill before the ship sailed, and John **Musgrove** went in her place.

After his return from England in 1735 Tomo-chi-chi ordered the construction of a school near **Savannah** where Creek children would be taught to read and write English.

Coosaponakeesa, who had taught Tomo-chi-chi's nephew Toonahowie to read and write, helped teach in the school. But her husband John died later that year, and she had to run their trading post, Mount Venture.

She became wealthy and influential among the Creeks and Georgians. When the **Georgia** colony produced its first silk in 1739, it was sent to England to be woven into cloth. One bolt was sent to the British queen, another was sent to Coosaponakeesa. Britain and Spain went to war in the same year, and the Creeks sided with the British, due in large part to Coosaponakeesa's influence. She supplied the British with money, gunpowder, and weapons. The British won the war.

The Creeks had given Coosaponakeesa thousands of acres of land along the **Savannah** River and, Sapelo, Ossabaw, and St. Catherine's islands off the **Georgia** coast. But Britain refused to recognize her land holdings. Coosaponakeesa was Creek, but her husband was

a British subject. Under British law individuals could not accept land grants from Indians, and women couldn't own property.

The Creeks considered the British position towards Coosaponakeesa's lands as an insult to Creek sovereignty. The land was reserved for the Creeks in the treaties that allowed the formation of the Georgia colony, and since Coosaponakeesa was Creek they had every right to grant it to her.

Jacob Matthews died in 1745 and Coosaponakeesa married Thomas Bosomworth in 1747. When Bosomworth assisted her in pressing her claims to the land, he was accused of treason by Georgia, aggravating the situation even more. In 1749 Coosaponakeesa and Bosomworth led a group of Creeks, including Malatchi, then chief mico of the tribe, in a protest march on Savannah. Coosaponakeesa and Bosomworth were arrested, but they were later released after apologizing to Savannah officials. They then traveled to England and presented her claim to the British Board of Trade. Eventually a compromise was reached in 1759 in which Sapelo and Ossabaw islands would be auctioned off, with the proceeds going to Coosaponakeesa, and she would get title to St. Catherine's Island from the British Crown "in consideration of services rendered by her to the province of Georgia".

Coosaponakeesa had spent more than 20 years trying to get the British government, to which she had provided so much invaluable aid, to recognize her claim to land that had been given to her by her people, the Creek Nation, which had also been an ally of critical importance to the British. She settled on St. Catherine's in 1760. When Coosaponakeesa died 5 years later, St. Catherine's Island was inherited by her British husband, in accordance with British law.

Georgia Ports Authority
Donates \$10,000 for
Mary Musgrove Exhibit

Generations of Georgians will be able to see artifacts from the Peach State's earliest colonial days, thanks to a recent donation from the Georgia Ports Authority. On Friday, July 9th, GPA Executive Director Doug Marchand presented the Coastal Heritage Society with a \$10,000 check. The money will be used to create a new exhibit to display artifacts from the Mary Musgrove site, which was discovered on port property in 2002. The site is the 1730s trading post of Mary Musgrove, one of the most influential women in Georgia's colonial history. Archaeologists discovered artifacts from the 1730s through mid-1800s at the site. CHS Executive Director Scott Smith and Vice President Walter Wright, Collections & Exhibits Co-Chairman, accepted the check from the Ports Authority. Artifacts are currently being processed and preserved, and the final archaeological report upon which this exhibit will be based is still being written.

Interesting Perhaps for your coastal Georgia and historic Savannah Georgia travels? THE 1717 TRADING POST OF JOHN & MARY MUSGROVE WAS DISCOVERED IN RECENT YEARS ON THE SAVANNAH RIVER LANDS OF GEORGIA PORTS AUTHORITY AS THEY WERE EXPANDING OPERATIONS.

