



- *Interpreter*
- *Trader*

TIMELINE

1716 – Marries trader John Musgrove

1732 – Establishes prospering trading post on the Yamacraw Bluff

1733 - General James Oglethorpe arrives in search of area to settle

Mary Musgrove Bosomworth

1700–1765

Inducted 1993

Mary Musgrove Bosomworth was born some time around 1700. Her father was an English trader from the South Carolina colony and her mother was a Creek Indian of royal blood—a niece of the emperor of the Creek Nation. Mary was given the Indian name Coosaponakeesa. She spent her first 10 years among her mother's people, becoming thoroughly acquainted with the Creek language and ways. Then she was brought to South Carolina to live among the English, where she was christened Mary and adapted herself to colonial society. This double allegiance—to the Creek Nation and the English Crown—was to make her a vital figure in the colonial settlement of Georgia.

In 1716 Mary married a Carolina trader named John Musgrove. John was her second husband. 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. By 1730 they had a prosperous trading post on the Yamacraw Bluff, overlooking the Savannah River, near the place where General James Oglethorpe brought the first English colonists to Savannah in 1733.

Oglethorpe employed Mary as a negotiator to secure the peaceful cooperation of the Creeks in land settlements and trade. A shrewd businesswoman, she required payment for using her broad acquaintance among the Creek leaders to secure cooperation and support for the settlers.

Mary played a key role in keeping the Creeks on the English side, helping them maintain control over the colony against Spanish invasion.

“Tomochichi’s interpreter was one Mrs. Musgrove. She understands both languages, being educated amongst the English. She can read and write, and is a well-civilized woman. She is likewise to teach us the Indian tongue.”

– John Wesley, 1736

In 1737, after the

1733 – Oglethorpe hires Mary as intermediary / interpreter for negotiations with Indians

1745 – Marries Thomas Bosomworth

1747 - Mary and Thomas secure grant of St. Catherine, Sapelo, and Ossaba Islands from Creeks

1760 - Mary settles back-pay claims and clear title to St. Catherine Island from British courts

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death of her second husband, Mary married Thomas Bosomworth. There is no record of her having any children who survived.

Throughout her lifetime, Mary was socially prominent and successful in trade. Her home in Savannah was visited by important Indian visitors who came to call on colonial authorities. John Wesley, rector of the English Church, was one of many famous guests. Over the years, Mary 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. She received land grants from the Creek tribes for her assistance as an interpreter and peace negotiator. These land claims brought her into extensive litigation in British courts. At one point in 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 died in 1765. Her service to General Oglethorpe and the English Crown played a vital part in the founding of the Georgia Colony.

Additional Resources

Georgia Historical Society

Savannah, GA 31401
(912) 651-2125

Doris B. Fisher, Mary Musgrove: Creek Englishwoman

Emory University: Ph.D. dissertation 1990