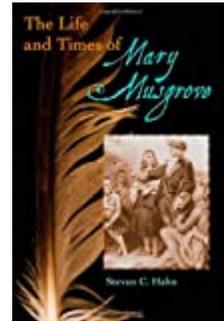




Steven C. Hahn. *The Life and Times of Mary Musgrove*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012. 272 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-4221-3.



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Getting to Know Mary Musgrove

Scholars of the colonial Southeast, and many Georgia schoolchildren, are nominally familiar with Mary Musgrove. Apart from a few well-documented and oft-related moments in her life, however, few can say they truly *know* Musgrove (aka Mary Griffin, Mary Mathewes, Mary Bosomworth, and Coosaponakeesa). Historian Steven Hahn has taken the time to try and learn about Mary in all her complex manifestations. Graciously, Hahn shares his insights in *The Life and Times of Mary Musgrove*, a thorough and refreshing take on Mary's entire life from childhood through her twilight years (1700-64).

This book adds context to Musgrove's more famous, or infamous, moments by exploring the cultures, events, and people which helped to shape her as a person. Hahn successfully demonstrates how the assumption of situational identities and outright self-interest fueled Musgrove's actions as a wife, trader, peacemaker, and at times, troublemaker. Needless to say, Hahn's work transforms Mary Musgrove from a superficial acquaintance into a more comprehensive historical actor.

Organizing his book chronologically, as with most biographies, Hahn divides Musgrove's life into recognizable phases beginning with her formative years. Chapters entitled "Creek Beginnings" and "The Reeducation of Mary Griffin" emphasize the importance of her mixed-race ancestry, attempting to reconstruct Mary's girlhood combining the few primary source references to her youth with cultural analysis of eighteenth-century Creek and South Carolinian societies. As the daughter of a Creek woman, whose identity remains unknown, and Edward Griffin, an English trader, Mary spent approximately the first seven years of her life in the Creek town of Coweta. In Coweta, Hahn speculates, Mary would have lived much like other Creek children, learning the importance of generosity and kinship ties while being allowed the freedom to think and even make mistakes of her own accord. She would have been exposed to Creek gender norms, listened to elders impart their acquired wisdom through the telling of stories and myths, and been witness to Indian slavery and the horrors of frontier warfare.

Perhaps the death of her mother prompted Edward Griffin to move Mary, and probably her brother, to Colleton County, South Carolina, where she was educated in the small settler community of Pon Pon. Hahn notes this abrupt transition would have been a traumatic event in the young girl's life, requiring her to learn English, adjust to a literary education, as well as study and adopt the Anglican faith. Quite the culture shock for sure. Yet, like historian Michael Green and many others, Hahn astutely points out that the physical and cultural boundary between the English and the Indians was porous from the very beginning (p. 51). Mary did not jettison her Creek identity in favor of her British ancestry, as frontier life produced a milieu of overlapping sociocultural relationships.

At the conclusion of the Yamasee War (1715-17), in which her father was killed, Mary's racial origins became more consequential as the conflict generally exacerbated Anglo-Indian relations. Unfortunately, the historical record between 1715 and 1732 is scant as to Mary's activities, forcing Hahn to make several educated guesses (p. 56). Probably in late 1716 or early 1717, Mary wed the first of her three husbands, John Musgrove, himself the son of a colonist father and Creek mother. The trading post they established at Yamacraw Bluff in 1732, a seminal event in Georgia history, became a southern frontier hub in which Anglos and Creeks freely socialized, thus continuing the tradition of biculturalism as before the war (p. 74). Simultaneously, Hahn convincingly argues, the Musgroves gradually began identifying more with their Anglo neighbors as the couple sought to improve their socioeconomic standing in the increasingly race-conscious colonies. In their quest to rise within colonial society the Musgroves diversified their economic interests, raising livestock, claiming property, and cultivating rice, in addition to continuing their trade with the local Native population. Furthermore, John and Mary became more involved in public affairs after the establishment of Georgia in 1733, when they accepted James Oglethorpe's request to serve the new colony as interpreters. In short, prospects were bright for Mary Musgrove as her bicultural heritage seemed to promise economic and social success.

It is here, in the first thirty-some years of her life, that Hahn finds the source of Mary's future problems. In his estimation, Mary's maturation and experiences as both Creek and English illuminate her subsequent financial woes, her infamous outburst during the Savannah incident, and her protracted struggle with Georgian officials over questionable land claims. Hahn asserts that in

working to secure her future, Mary sought to sustain the racially fluid frontier communities of her formative years not as a function of an abstract reverence for multiculturalism but for more practical and often self-serving reasons (p. 7). While many historians have blamed Mary's second husband, Jacob Mathewes, or more frequently her ambitious third husband, Thomas Bosomworth, for her problems in Georgia, Hahn disagrees. He persuasively argues that the deaths of John Musgrove and her two sons, James and Edward, followed by a subsequent reversal of economic fortune in the mid-1730s, were the roots of her problems and not the character of Mary's later husbands (p. 83). Following these tragic events, Mary spent the remainder of her life conflating her own interests with those of Georgia and the Creek Nation as she tried to extricate herself from debt and secure her socioeconomic standing.

Examples of Mary's cultural dexterity are put on display in the second half of the book where Hahn tackles her more well-documented activities as a go-between and translator. In one of the signature achievements in her eventful life, Mary used her position as a cultural broker to protect her Lower Creek kinsmen and earn financial rewards from South Carolina in the fall of 1752 (p. 189). Having fallen on hard times in Georgia, Mary volunteered her services to South Carolina governor James Glen as he sought to redress the murder of several Cherokee men. Hahn dissects the historical record of this event, using his knowledge of eighteenth-century Creek society, to demonstrate how Mary navigated internal Creek sociopolitical networks to facilitate the execution of Acorn Whistler, an Upper Creek man who was eventually fingered for the murders. In this way, Mary shifted blame away from her Lower Creek relatives who were originally accused of the deed. Working within the Creek clan system Mary was able to stem a wider conflict between South Carolina and the Creek Nation, while exploiting the rivalry between Georgia and South Carolina to revive her pending land claims and economic prospects. Through astute analysis like this, Hahn makes the case that Mary's shrewd self-interest and cultural know-how enabled her to traverse an ever-changing world of interdependent familial, colonial, and imperial relationships.

Hahn largely succeeds in his mission to provide a candid picture of the personal life of one of Georgia's earliest Indian traders and diplomats. Basing his arguments on archaeological evidence, widespread archival research, and relevant secondary works Hahn offers the most intimate portrait yet of Mary Musgrove. Neverthe-

less, the historical record reveals a frustrating lack of personal details at times, particularly during Maryâs youth, which Hahn emphasizes as critical to our understanding. While some may disagree with parts of the authorâs analysis, Hahn never allows himself to stray into mere conjecture. His engaging writing style and informed insights

will make this book of interest to scholars working on issues of race and gender, the colonial Southeast, and the Atlantic world. Having been acquainted with Mary Musgrove for so long, itâs time we all got to know her a little bit better.

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