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Book Review - The Life and Times of Mary Musgrove

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Off the SHELF

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

The story of Mary Musgrove, as diplomat, businesswoman, and liaison between her native Creek people and the colonial government of Georgia, particularly James Oglethorpe, is well known in its broadest outlines. Being of mixed Creek and English descent, she was uniquely positioned to mediate in the relationship and disputes between the natives and the English colonizers at a crucial time in Georgia's founding. What Steven C. Hahn has done, in his beautifully written and well-researched biography, *The Life and Times of Mary Musgrove*, is to give a more complete, and complex, portrait of a woman who played a pivotal role in colonial Georgia history.

Although she is frequently mentioned in historical documentation, Hahn's book is the first study of the woman herself; her birth and upbringing in a Creek village near present-day Macon, Georgia, where she is called Coosaponakeesa; her move to Charles Town (Charleston), South Carolina, to live with her father in the "English" colony; her extensive career as a successful businesswoman, running a trading post on the Georgia/South Carolina frontier, as well as her work with (and land

disputes with) the nascent colonial Georgia government.

Hahn gives a rich portrait of the society, especially of colonial South Carolina, where relationships between the native population

and the English were at once closer and less stratified than is commonly assumed. He pays particular attention to the matrilineal structure of Creek society in contrast to the English customs, and uses that contradiction to argue that Musgrove was much less a "hybrid" Creek/Englishwoman, and much more as having a sort of situational identity, dependent on what outcome she hoped to achieve.

Throughout the book, Hahn relies on rigorous scholarship and a detailed examination of source materials to provide a sensitive portrait of a complex,

contradictory individual, one who was at once extraordinarily atypical and yet so surely a product of her life and experiences. This book is strongly recommended for academic libraries, and for public libraries that collect in the subject areas of colonial Georgia and South Carolina history.

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