

Ocmulgee Mounds

National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior

Ocmulgee Mounds NHP



The Georgia Colony



A COLONY IS BORN

In 1732 James Edward Oglethorpe along with 20 associates obtained a royal charter to set up a new colony to be named after Britain's King George. Oglethorpe, a British aristocrat, a member of Parliament, and former soldier, had been stirred by the plight of a friend who died in an English debtors' prison. His plan was to establish a colony in the New World for the poor, individuals suffering religious persecution, and anyone else who wished for a fresh start.

The British government backed the colony of Georgia to establish a barrier between the prosperous colonists in Charleston and the Spanish in Florida. However, obtaining the support of England could not guarantee the success of the colony, or its safety. For that Oglethorpe had to seek out the Creek Indians who lived in the region he wished to occupy, so in 1739 he traveled to the Chattoochee River for a meeting that would influence the future of the Creek Confederacy and the fledgling colony of Georgia.



(JAMES OGLETHORPE)

TOMOCHICHI

Oglethorpe's decision to visit the Chattahoochee villages was prompted, in part, by two of his closest advisors, Tomochichi and Mary Musgrove, both of whom were trusted by the Creek Confederacy and may have been born along the Chattahoochee. After landing in 1733, Oglethorpe and an advance party sought to find a place to build Savannah, the first town of the new colony of Georgia. They landed at Yamacraw bay and soon met Tomochichi the mico, or chief, of the Yamacraw Indians who lived nearby. Almost six feet tall, Tomochichi impressed Oglethorpe with his intelligence, wisdom, and eloquence. A few days after their first encounter, Oglethorpe returned with the rest of the original 114 settlers. Tomochichi presented Oglethorpe with a buffalo robe and said, "We have come to welcome you, as I promised. I have brought you a present. This is the skin of a buffalo, which is the strongest of all beasts.

Inside, you see painted the head and feathers of an eagle, which is the swiftest of all birds and flies furthest....The eagle's feathers are warm and soft and signify love. The buffalo robe is warm and signifies protection. Therefore, love and protect our little families."

Tomochichi and Oglethorpe became friends and worked side by side to secure peaceful relations between the colonists and Indian groups, including the Lower Creeks. Tomochichi arranged meetings among different chiefs and Oglethorpe who impressed the Indians by treating them as equals instead of inferiors as most other Europeans did. He proposed that the natives be allowed to testify in colonial courts and that their words be given equal weight to those of European witnesses. Officials in England overruled Oglethorpe, but Indians respected his attempt.

MARY
MUSGROVE

The second advisor influencing Oglethorpe was Mary Musgrove. Considered by many early colonial settlers to be an Indian princess, Musgrove, who was half-white, was related to one of the Creek leaders. She served often as Oglethorpe's chief Indian translator. When he needed a sensitive message dispatched to Indian leaders, Musgrove was often the messenger.

Both Musgrove and Tomochichi urged Oglethorpe to travel to the Chattahoochee villages in July 1739 to cement ties with the Creeks and other Indians. The French were gaining influence along the Gulf Coast, and the Spanish were again attempting to expand their power. Tomochichi and Musgrove knew that important Indian leaders were to gather at the villages of Kawita (Coweta) and Kasita (Cusetta), providing an ideal opportunity for the Englishman to gain their favor.

THE LONG
JOURNEY

Oglethorpe's 250-mile, dangerous horseback trip across the wilderness passed along a series of paths known as the Lower Creek Trail. Native people followed the same route for hundreds of years seeking game and contact with each other. In the future, the Lower Creek Trail evolved into a key artery for white settler migration. But as Oglethorpe and his armed escort of 25 men slowly wound their way toward the Chattahoochee, they couldn't have imagined how the sometimes barely visible path would someday expand into a roadway. Their major concern must have been reaching their destination alive.

Led by Indian guides, the Englishmen rode horseback under a hot summer sun. They were plagued by mosquitoes and other pests and forced to be alert for poisonous snakes, alligators, and other dangers. The narrow foot trails curved through dense thickets and woods. There were no bridges over the many rivers and wide creeks they encountered. They forded those they could on horseback and built rafts to cross others. Sleeping in the open air, with a few tree limbs laced together overhead to provide shelter from rain, Oglethorpe fell ill with fever but was determined to continue.

Near the end of July, they reached the top of a hill offering a fine view of the surrounding rolling countryside. Off in the distance they saw a column of smoke. Indian scouts moved silently ahead to investigate. They discovered a smoldering campfire, apparently left behind by Spanish horsemen. What a coup it would be for the Spanish to capture or kill the leader of the

new colony of Georgia, which maintained such a tenuous toehold along the coast. The colonists became even more alert. Oglethorpe and his convoy crossed the Chattahoochee river on August 8 after ten hard days of travel and entered the village of Kawita (Coweta).

Impressed by the white men's bravery in making the journey, the local mico, or leader, welcomed Oglethorpe in the main square. The Indian held a small English flag as a sign of friendship. Children presented the visitors with gifts of venison and wild turkey meat, muscadine grapes, and melons. Oglethorpe reciprocated with gifts he had brought.

The Indians called the Englishman White Chief and invited him to sit with their most important members on benches covered with bearskins. Proceedings began with the ritual smoking of a pipe, then drinking from a large seashell of a hot brewed drink, called A-cee or black drink, containing a great deal of caffeine.

Oglethorpe met with the Indian leaders at Kasita for nine days. The resulting peace treaty, signed on August 21, 1739, guaranteed that a wide section of land along the Atlantic coast belonged to the colonists, although the Indians still maintained exclusive hunting rights in some of the area. Most of what constitutes Georgia today still belonged to the Creeks and their allies under the treaty. Oglethorpe agreed that the colonists would never settle further west and would never again encroach on lands the Indians considered exclusively theirs.