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Mary Mahoney [00:00:00] From Trinity College. This is Hidden Literacies.

Mary Mahoney [00:00:18] Welcome to Hidden Literacies, the podcast. On this show, we'll hear from contributors to the Hidden Literacies Anthology on the sources they've selected, how they became hidden, the lessons we can learn from them, and what they reveal about the stakes of each contributor's scholarship.

Mary Mahoney [00:00:34] My name is Mary Mahoney and I'm the Digital Scholarship Coordinator at Trinity College. On this episode it's my privilege to bring you a conversation with contributor Caroline Wigginton. Professor Wigginton contributed an indenture to Hidden Literacies that offers significance for its time and our own. To begin, I've asked Caroline to introduce herself.

Caroline Wigginton [00:00:55] My name is Caroline Wigginton. I'm an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Mississippi, and I'm one of the contributors to the Hidden Literacies Project.

Mary Mahoney [00:01:03] Caroline's contribution and commentary, which she's titled "Visions, Versions and Deeds of Creek Sovereignty and Coosaponakeesa legal writings" investigates an indenture, specifically a legal document from 1760 in which one person relinquished rights to two islands off the coast of Georgia while maintaining their claim to a third. Coosaponakeesa, a Native American diplomat, articulated these land claims in this indenture to the British towards the end of her life. Now, legal documents are not known for being the most exciting kinds of reading, as Caroline points out, describing a recent conference where she had colleagues read through some of these land documents, Caroline notes.

Caroline Wigginton [00:01:46] During our conference, I had everybody, I read it to everybody and everybody, you could tell their eyes were glazing over with its legal language, but it hides this really dramatic and spectacular and long battle. So it's like it seems like this simple document. But hidden beneath it is decades of documents and relationships and activities and and adaptations and actions on her part.

Mary Mahoney [00:02:11] Now, here is one of the most famous figures in Georgia state history. Coosaponakeesa, an 18th century Native American diplomat, also known as Mary Musgrove, Mary Matthews and Mary Bosomworth the, quote, spectacular and long battle Caroline mentions refers to Coosaponakeesa's diplomatic efforts to help colonial powers in the region and native peoples communicate, and her difficulty in getting British acknowledgment of the lands she was gifted as compensation for her labor. But first, some background on Coosaponakeesa.

Caroline Wigginton [00:02:46] She is utterly essential to the founding of Georgia. She was waiting for the first colonists when they arrived and settled Savannah. She had set up a trading post with a different husband, her first husband at the time, and they were on the bluff overlooking the river. When the first Georgian colonists showed up, she'd establish a trading post, which was part of what Georgia was there for. It was originally a colony not for like wealthy, rich colonists, but for a sort of the poor and the landless of England. So it was really, really going to be a buffer between English colonies and French and Spanish colonies. And also kind of like a pressure valve for England as a whole place to send some of their excess population, right, like it was a place of opportunity. And one of the things

people wanted to do was to get deerskin. And so the trading post is for native people to bring their deer skins to a place and get goods. And so it's also central to the market of Georgia. So a really important place. So she's waiting. And then she's also speaks Creek, she speaks English, she speaks what appears to be some kind of trade language in the area. I'm not a linguist, so I'm not keen on all the the details of language. But through those roles, through her diplomatic relations, she helps organize and negotiate and ease and in general acts as a diplomat between all the different native nations and the Georgian colonists for the first decade or so of colonial Georgia. Almost first, actually, first twenty years.

Mary Mahoney [00:04:17] Her actions produced conflicting responses between indigenous and colonial authorities with whom she work. Creek leaders, she claimed, gifted her the three islands off the Georgia coast in acknowledgment of her leadership. Colonial male leadership, Caroline argues, did not have the same respect for her efforts.

Caroline Wigginton [00:04:36] Colonial male leaders do not like dealing with a native woman. And so as she starts to demand monetary compensation and starts demanding recognition of a leadership role, starts asking for recognition of her property rights to these islands, they start really, really disliking her and they throw her in jail, all kinds of stuff. So it interests me about this indenture is that this is at the very end of her life. She she dies soon after. And it's really the culmination of a long legal battle that she has been been fighting and a long battle for recognition that she's been working on.

Mary Mahoney [00:05:09] This brings us to the document Caroline Wigginton takes up in her commentary in The Hidden Literacies Anthology, in which Coosaponakeesa signs using an Anglicized name.

Caroline Wigginton [00:05:19] Mary Bosomworth is what she signs her name, but she's a Creek woman and her Creek name is Coosaponakeesa says that she is giving up rights to, it confirms that she is agreeing to the to the document itself.

Mary Mahoney [00:05:34] Her choice of name in this document is important. As Caroline explains.

Caroline Wigginton [00:05:38] I think it is important to see her as a woman who was making amazing changes and impact in her area and in her time through documents, through writing.

Caroline Wigginton [00:05:52] She's a translator. She's an interpreter. She is a writer. She is a very deft and skilled and practiced author who's doing interesting things. And because she leaves behind a decent amount of stuff, you can trace and see all the different adaptations she's doing.

Mary Mahoney [00:06:09] In this document, Coosaponakeesa adapts to the literary environment she finds herself in by using an English name. This isn't her only adaptation. By tying herself to her husband and using an Anglicized name, she frames herself in this British document as having rights to her lands through her marriage. After all, this was during a period when coverture defined colonial marriage, meaning a man's rights covered that of his wife. Her property became his upon marriage and could be passed down through patrilineal inheritance. As Caroline notes in her commentary however, this was completely at odds with how Coosaponakeesa and her Creek kin imagined land rights and systems of kinship. Creek leaders gifted the islands to Coosaponakeesa, not her husband.

Mary Mahoney [00:07:00] As Caroline argues in her commentary, quote, The validity and power of her claims were instead attributable to her Creek maternal inheritance, her service to the Creek confederacy and to various documents wherein Creek leaders averred that they ceded these islands to her. Coosaponakeesa knew to frame herself in terms legible to the British in a document that would affirm her rights to at least one of the islands she'd been gifted shows just one aspect of her literacy. As Caroline argues, these kinds of literacy Coosaponakeesa embodies in both this legal document and others in which she makes land claims drawing on European ideas of natural rights, in other language designed to persuade the audience she's hoping to reach, demonstrates her significance not just as a historical figure but a literary one.

Caroline Wigginton [00:07:51] She's important not only as a historical figure, but as a as a literary figure for Georgia, for the Creek nation, for American and Native American history and literary studies.

Mary Mahoney [00:08:04] Her value comes in part from the invitation her archive offers for how we might rethink literacies.

Caroline Wigginton [00:08:10] As far as for us today, I think that we tend to privilege print as the ways that ways people make impact through writing and where meaningful writing occurs. And because of that, that long history of privileging print, figures like Coosaponakeesa and like a lot of the other people in this this project, that's one of the reasons why their literacies have been hidden, not because they were hidden at the time that they lived, but because our world has tended to privilege a different kind of literacy in a different kind of writing. But if we return to these other forms of text use, text creation, these other literacies, we can see a much more expansive and rich and layered history that I think helps us also understand the ways that the text are being used today in ways that are maybe not according to the expectations that we would have had for where important literacies are occurring 50 years ago.

Mary Mahoney [00:09:08] Using a legal document, an indenture in a way other than it may have been originally intended, helps us appreciate Coosaponakeesa's talents as a writer, reader, translator and interpreter. This helps us appreciate the value of a more expansive understanding of literacy. It may even fool us into thinking we can recover the identities of those marginalized peoples who appear in legal documents, for example. But as Caroline reminds us, this piece invites us to think about what we'll never know about Coosaponakeesa, or others whose literacies we examine in this way. This not knowing has a kind of liberating quality, as Caroline explains, using a question she posed at the end of our conversation.

Caroline Wigginton [00:09:52] What do you think? We'll never know about this person. And I think almost everything we will never know. And that is OK, right? Like to go into it knowing that she's not or and none of these materials are transparent or easy or retaining everything within them. It kind of frees us, right, to both speculate and understand materials and items of the past as worthy of continuous and repeated engagement. As we find clues, as we think about things differently, that we're not just figuring out what's the key to unlock something, to figure out everything. No, it is an ongoing process that is often both about the past and about our present. Like what are the questions that are important to us now and what are the speculations and curiosities and ways of looking at things that will serve us in our moment in our future.

Mary Mahoney [00:10:54] Caroline Wigginton is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Mississippi. Readers can learn more about her work from her first book *In The Neighborhood: Women's Publication in Early America*. We can also look forward to her next book, *Indigeneity, Native Craftwork and the material of early American books*.

Mary Mahoney [00:11:15] *Hidden Literacies* is a production of Trinity College, edited by Hilary Wyss and Christopher Hager with support from the English Department and Information Services with technical support by Mary Mahoney, Joelle Thomas and Cait Kennedy. This podcast was produced by me, Mary Mahoney, with the support and permission of the contributors to *Hidden Literacies*. For more information on *Hidden Literacies* and to explore the text and commentaries described here, please visit www.hiddenliteracies.org