

# MASSANUTTON NEWS

## THE GREAT MASSANUTTON MYSTERY OR WHAT'S IN A NAME

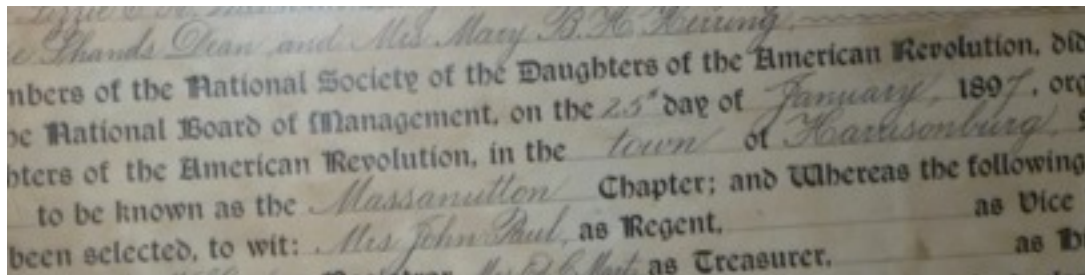
Why is our chapter named Massanutton and not the more common spelling Massanutten? Regent Brenda Babcock decided to find out. When she put this question to Ann Hunter, Historian General, Ann did some sleuthing and reported “ I am convinced that 079Va has always been Massanutton Chapter.” She cited some letters from Katherine Paul, founding member and 1st regent, that referred to Massanutton Chapter. Ann mentioned that the papers of Massanutton Chapter were on file at James Madison in the “Special Collections” and might have an answer.

That knowledge sent Brenda on a quest to the JMU Carrier Library and the “Special Collections” section accompanied by Penny Cummiskey and Linda Dinsmore. From deep in the stacks, the librarian pulled five boxes of Masssanutton papers, another of scrapbooks and...the framed original charter signed by twelve charter members including Mrs. Paul which declares us to be the Massanutton Chapter.



Mrs. Katherine Paul

Apparently the spelling has been a point of controversy before. It was Mrs Paul in a letter to founding members that proposed adopting the name Massanutton. Later articles suggested she simply misspelled it.



Our Charter says “Massanutton”

We found numerous letters and articles with explanations for the spelling. Dr. Powell an ethnologist from the Smithsonian proclaimed the name to be from the Delaware Tribe of the Algonquians meaning “Great Mountain Yonder” and used the “on” spelling. Professor William Wallace Tooker, an expert on Indian dialects from New York said it was the “Great Lookout Mountain” and was Shawnee also an Algonquian tribe. But he concluded that the Algonquian language was so difficult to translate that it could have been any of the vowels, even “an”.

Billie Jo Monger, our chapter’s local expert, offered the following explanations.

“Regarding the chapter’s name, Mrs. Paul wanted it to be distinct from the mountain’s spelling yet to reflect the mountain which was such a vital part of this part of the Shenandoah Valley’s history. The Massanutten Mountain just rises up from the Valley floor “like a ship at sea,” in Rockingham County.

Mrs. Paul fell back on what was then commonly believed to reflect the Native American pronunciation of the mountain, but as our Native American population had left the area ca. 1756 due to the French and Indian Wars this was merely a “guess” when our chapter was actually founded in the 1890’s.

If I remember correctly, Mrs. Paul and Mrs. Conrad asked Dr. Wayland who consulted with Harry Strickler about a suitable spelling and they suggested the spelling be the same which our chapter has always used, Massanutton.

Articles also appeared in the local newspapers supposedly from “authorities” telling about our Valley’s local history. One such appears on the 23 Nov 1921 in the Daily News Record stating that the word Massanutting now Massanutten was composed of two Indian words, ‘massa,’ meaning ground and “nutta” meaning potato and when the two were put together meant Potato Ground and that this was consistent with the condition in which the early settlers found this land. This author, a Mr. L. J. Heatwole said that he obtained this information from a special work issued by the U.S. Government Printing Office entitled, *Origin of Some Place Names in the United States* by Henry Garnett. This is a possible explanation it must be remembered that this was published several years after our chapter was formed.

Also, I have always understood that Massanutten meant Great Lookout Mountain which is also an Indian name. We do know that it was used as a lookout mountain by the Native Americans who lived within the confines of the Shenandoah Valley.

Another point should also be made, the earliest name for this mountain which we know as Massanutten was actually the Peaked Mountain pronounced “*Peeked Mountain*” or at one other time Buffalo Mountain as the wood buffalo abounded in this area. If one checks all of the early maps these are the names one will find for this particular geological projectile.

In many of the earliest deeds of white settlement this spelling varies from Mesanutten, Mesanoten, Mesanothen, etc. One must also

remember that at this time in history words were spelled as they sounded to the person doing the writing in their own language and that all vowels were used interchangeably. . . so you see, Masanutton is most probably an old spelling which was actually used on an old deed of record.”

Whichever explanation you prefer, the name on our charter is Massanutton.



Brenda Babcock and Linda Dinsmore hold the original charter