



A taconite mine
on the
Mesabi Range

By EDWARD W. DAVIS

TACONITE

The Derivation of the Name

IN MINNESOTA geology, "taconite" is the name applied to the sedimentary rocks that make up the iron formation of the Mesabi Range. These are very old pre-Cambrian rocks, containing from twenty to thirty-five per cent iron. They were given the name "taconyte" in 1892 by Newton H. Winchell, state geologist of Minnesota, because they make up what he called the "Taconic strata." Many references to "Taconic" and "taconyte" occur in Winchell's *Annual Reports* of the Geological and Natural History Survey of Minnesota for 1889 and 1891. In the *Eighteenth Annual Report* (p. 68-86, 184) he includes a lengthy explanation of Ebenezer Emmons' Taconic theory and its application to the older rocks of North America. Emmons was connected with the New York geological survey from 1838 to 1842, and in 1851 he became geologist of North Carolina.

Of the Mesabi iron formation comprising "the beds immediately overlying . . . the granite and greenstone of the Giant's range" Winchell writes as follows in the survey's *Twentieth Annual Report* (p. 4): "This

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whole series, by its stratigraphic position, its fauna, lithology, and its accidental features, is bound in one grander group, and resembles that which is known as Taconic." On page 124 of the same volume Winchell adds that "This rock is widely spread over the whole length of the Mesabi, and being different from anything found elsewhere and peculiar to this horizon of the Taconic, has been called *taconyte* by the writer."

When Winchell published this statement a dispute was in progress among leading Eastern geologists regarding Emmons' proposal of 1842 to introduce a new rock classification into the early Cambrian series. For this classification, he proposed using the name "Taconic," for the Taconic Mountains in western Massachusetts and Vermont, where this geologic series was first recognized. His classification has now been generally rejected, but Winchell accepted Emmons' proposal and classed the sedimentary rocks of the Mesabi iron formation as Taconic.

It is, therefore, obvious that the name "taconite" can be traced directly to that of the Taconic Mountains. A search of the literature for the source of the name produced ample proof that it was derived from

an Indian name for a portion of the Berkshires, or perhaps for a particular hill, now known as Mount Washington, which was called "Tachanick" by the Indians.

The first recorded use of the Indian name known to the writer is found in a petition dating from the spring of 1685 for the right to purchase land in western Massachusetts. It contains a reference to "a Peece of Land Lyeing upon ye Same Kill called by the Indians Tachkanick behinde Patkook about Two or 300hund acres." From a *Documentary History of the State of New York*, the petition is quoted by Franklin Leonard Pope in an article on "The Western Boundary of Massachusetts," which appears in the Berkshire Historical and Scientific Society's *Papers*, 1:48 (1886). The same author (p. 62) quotes a letter addressed to Robert Livingston, Jr., of the town of Mount Washington in southwestern Massachusetts on March 24, 1752. His correspondent, Ol'r Partridge, reports that "to lay out Equivalents in the Province land, I have begun on the East side of Tackinick Barrick, and laid out a large Farm."

After recording that a Massachusetts "township was incorporated under its present name of Mount Washington in 1779," Pope adds (p. 83): "It is to be regretted that in their determination to sweep away every vestige of the hated manorial proprietorship, the inhabitants should have gone to the length of replacing the significant and beautiful name of Taconic, by the patriotic but nevertheless inappropriate one of Mount Washington. It is to be hoped that we may yet witness the restoration of the ancient and historical name of the oldest settlement of Berkshire."

The author supplies information about the earlier name in the following footnote on the same page: "*Taghkan'nuc, Taughkaughnick, mod. Taconic* Mts. The name has been said to mean 'Water enough' and to have been taken from a spring on the west side of Mount Tom in Copake, N.Y., which was a favorite resort of the Indians. (Hough's Gaz. N.Y., 249) This interpretation is certainly

wrong, but of a dozen more probable ones that might be suggested, it cannot be affirmed that any is certainly right. The least objectionable is 'forest' or 'wilderness,' the Delaware *tachanigen* which Leisberger translates by 'woody,' 'full of woods,' but literally 'wild land,' 'forest.' A sketch of Shekomeko, (Dutchess county, N.Y.), drawn by a Moravian missionary in 1745, shows in the distance eastward a mountain summit marked 'K'takanatschan, the big mountain,' (Moravian Memorial, 62,) a name which resolves itself into ket-takone-wadchu, great woody mountain, i.e. great Taconic mountain. (Trumbull's Indian Names of Conn.) The name is spelled twenty or thirty different ways in the Archives of New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut."

A few of these spellings follow:

Tachkanick (1685)	Taghconic
K'takantshan (1745)	Tachanizen
Tackinick (1752)	Tocconuc
Taughkaughnick	Taghonic
Toghconnuck	Taconick
Toghconnuc	Tacon'ic (modern)
Taghkan'nuc	Taconyte
Taghkanick	Tac'onite

From these and other records, it seems obvious that taconite, our name for the iron formation of the Mesabi Range, came, via Winchell and Emmons, from the Indian name of a mountain or a range of mountains on the western border of Massachusetts. One of the earliest names for these geographic features was "Tachkanick," probably meaning "forest wilderness" in the Delaware tongue. An earlier suggestion that taconite came from the Greek word *Tako*, meaning "to melt," is untenable.

RESERVE Mining Company's Babbitt plant





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