

Pompion Chapel or Pumpkin Chapel?

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The “Chapel of Ease” adjacent to Middleburg Plantation where Benjamin Simons (1672-1717) and his wife Mary Esther Dupre (1674?-1737) are buried, is known by two names: Pompion Chapel and also Pumpkin, or Pumpkin Hill Chapel. Several theories have been postulated for the dual names, however the references presented here should settle the issue. (Incidentally, there is a video of Pompion Chapel included in the SC-ETV Southern Manors and Chapels program that can be viewed online.)²

In 2004, while researching Middleburg, Holland, the author read *An Account Of Several Travels Through A Great Part Of Germany*, by Edward Brown, M. D., 1677 where Dr. Brown gave an account of his visit to Middleburg as follows:

*Middleburg is the chief Town in the Island Walachria, seated almost in the middle of it, being well built, large, rich, and Populous, it is the fourth Port for the East-India trade: hath a large, broad Water within the Town, and a streight cut through the Land to carry Vessels out to Sea, the whole is very well Fortified, the Officers here are chosen by Strangers or Foreigners, the Churches are many and remarkable, the new Church is of an eight-square figure with a Cupola, the Tower of the old great Church very high, the Stadthuse with the old statuas, about it, the round Piazza, and many private buildings are Considerable, and the whole Country about it is fruitful; either divided into Gardens and Orchards, or Planted with Madder, **Pompions**, or Grain and Fruits.* ³ [Emphasis not in original.]

Since Benjamin Simons spent his childhood in Middleburg, it is likely that he was familiar with the Pompion plant growing in gardens there.

The Pompion plant can be found in several old botanical books, including John Gerard’s *Herball* (1633 edition) where there is a wood block carving printing of the “Pumkin (Pepo maximus rotundus. The great round Pompion)” as shown in Figure 1.⁴

Pompion is an early French word for Pumpkin. The Latin for gourd or melon is *pepo*. The Greek word *pepon* means melon. In Medieval French, *pepo* became *pompon/pompion*. The French word entered English twice. Here we are concerned with pompion in its literal sense - a kind of melon or a pumpkin.⁵ Pumpkins were growing on the small hill where Pompion Chapel was built, and the old French word for Pumpkin was generally used for Pompion Chapel by Huguenots.



Figure 1: Pumkin
(Pepo maximus rotundus.
The great round Pompion)⁶

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² The Pompion Chapel segment that is included in the 2003 SC-ETV Southern Manors and Chapels program can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKckP-ITCDU>

³ Edward Brown, M. D., *An Account Of Several Travels Through A Great Part Of Germany* (London, 1677). The text is available online at <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/travels/travels1.html>

⁴ John Gerard, *The Herbal or General History of Plants* (London, 1663). The most complete reprint is probably *The Herbal or General History of Plants*, Dover Publications (1975).

⁵ Mike and Melanie Crowley, *Take Our Word for It*, Issue 177, page 1, The Institute for Etymological Research and Education, <http://www.takeourword.com/TOW177/page1.html>

⁶ The Pompion wood block carving image by John Gerard is from <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/history/lecture39/27.html>