

Naming a Geographic Place in Missouri

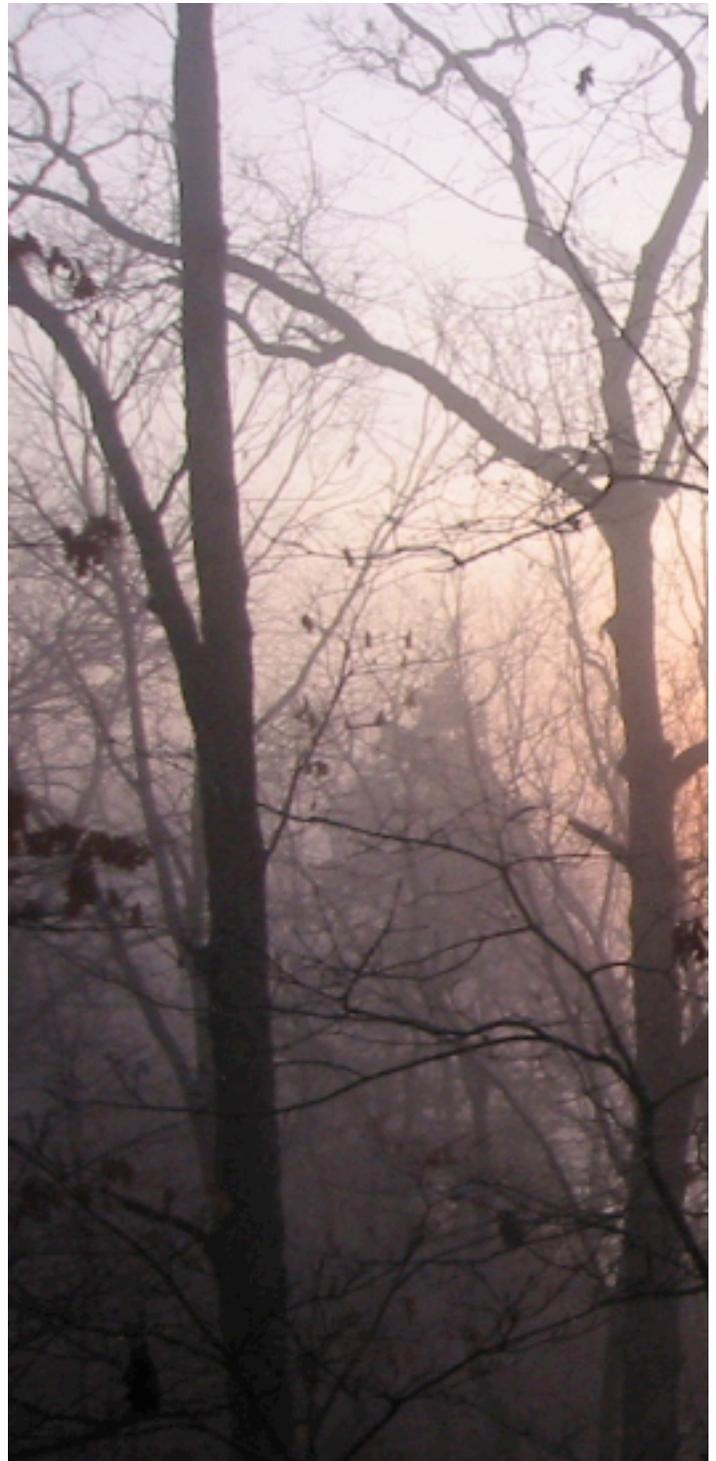
By far the easiest way to officially name a geographic place is to define its physical borders, and gather support to incorporate the place as a city or village .(1). The chosen name is then automatically added to maps, and other reference materials over time.

However, it's no small task to gather support to incorporate a place. And while there are benefits to incorporation there are also numerous requirements which need to be met. And that subject is best left to another time and another discussion. (2).

Our goal here is to describe our step by step experience relating to **officially naming** the area now known as **La Barque Creek, Missouri.**

It all started some years back (2004) when several Missouri State Agencies, Jefferson County officials and East West Gateway convened a series of meetings in which a large number of property owners and NGO's were invited to participate. The purpose being to convey the pristine character of the area and begin developing a set of guidelines for future protection and enhancement of the **La Barque Creek Watershed.**

As a result of these meetings several planning and action goals were identified and on October 28, 2009 **the La Barque Creek Watershed Conservation Plan** was signed and became the official guideline document for preservation and conservation in the watershed.



Naming a Geographic Place -
La Barque Creek, Missouri

1. Name Selection -

The area known as the La Barque Creek Watershed is located entirely within northwest Jefferson County, Missouri and is part of the greater St. Louis metropolitan area. It comprises approximately 13 square miles and has a population of about 1300 residents. However, the area is known mostly by mailing addresses which include some five zip codes and municipalities and parts of three counties. Thus confusion existed and still exists over the geographic location of the 1300 residents.

It so happened that one of the early stated planning objectives was to help establish a "**sense of place**" in the watershed. This led to the concept of "officially" naming the area. It was agreed that it made sense to name the area after the watershed which had already been identified as an "official geographic feature". The name La Barque Creek, Missouri was then agreed upon.

2. The Naming Process -

Officially naming a geographic place is something none of us had done before. So we started at square one. In this case square one seemed logically to be the **Director of Planning, Development and Code Enforcement for Jefferson County**, Martin Toma. Mr. Toma thought it might be a good idea to contact the US Bureau of the Census to see if that agency could help. So we contacted the Bureau of the Census in Kansas City and explained our request. And the timing could not have been better. We received a prompt reply requesting information about our area so Census Bureau geographers could delineate La Barque Creek watershed area as a "Census Designated Place" and part of the 2010 Census. (3). The willingness of the US Census Bureau to work with us was both a pleasant surprise and a big boost. We then furnished aerial photos and maps and all other related data available. We stressed that the entire watershed lie within one county -Jefferson County and not parts of three counties as is the case with our zip codes.

The **Postal Service** was also contacted. First, the Postmasters of each of the five zip codes serving parts of our area were contacted by letter stating the desire to have La Barque Creek, MO recognized as an official mailing address. Many weeks later, a reply came from the St. Louis office that our request was under consideration. Much later we received a letter from the US Gateway District office stating that our request would be granted "administratively" but cautioning that the new name may slow mail delivery at times. Further they stressed the need to have La Barque Creek, MO recognized as having a legal boundary description or other legal status (4).

In pursuit of further legal recognition we then contacted the office of the **Secretary of State** in Jefferson City to learn of other requirements to be addressed in having La Barque Creek, Missouri become the official designation for our area. We were advised that the **Missouri Board on Geographic Names** (MOBGN) was the appropriate agency to contact and we were put in touch with the secretary of that commission.

MOBGN functions as a commission, (and is the Missouri branch of the USGS), which makes recommendations in favor or opposed to new geographic names in Missouri. Its membership of some 18 persons is made up of Geographers, Historians, Civil Engineers, University Professors and a range of others with encyclopedic knowledge of the state of Missouri. We were duly impressed with this board and the comprehensive nature of its review of each proposal received.

We were asked by the secretary to the commission to fill out an appropriate form which was available on line. And then to submit as much information as possible in support of the proposed geographic name. Particular emphasis was placed on having support of the proposed name by Jefferson County officials and other agencies as well as letters of support from area property owners.

Following the November 2009 hearing of our case by the Commission and its favorable recommendation. Our request together with the MOBGN recommendation was then forwarded to the United States Geographic Survey (USGS) board in Washington DC for final acceptance.

Even when everything goes well, as in this case, it is to be expected that some months will elapse between official approval of a new geographic name and the appearance of that name on maps, reference materials and other printed documents.

But for those of us who reside in the watershed you may be pleased to know that we no longer live in an area without a name. **La Barque Creek, Missouri** is almost totally official. But we still need to hear from the USGS in Washington, DC.

In the meantime you can use **La Barque Creek MO** as your address. Your existing zip code will remain the same. You can also use your old address -(e.g., 23 Hillside Dr. Pacific, MO 63069). Mail will be delivered to either designation but for some official documents like your tax return it's best to stay with the old address for a while longer.

We will continue to provide updates as new information becomes available.

Notes:

*(1) In Missouri **Villages** are places which incorporate with a population of less than 500 persons. If the population is greater than 500 the area must incorporate as a **City**. Interestingly, "Villages " may at times be referred to as "Towns" but under Missouri statutes "Towns" do not exist. (Source: Wikipedia - list of towns and villages in Missouri 4/24/09)*

(2) It should be noted that unincorporated areas do appear on maps and are recognized as geographic places. This is usually the case of older settlements which have become known first to local persons then later to the greater geographic area. Names such as Cedar Hill, High Ridge, Dittmer, Imperial, Morse Mill, etc. refer to unincorporated places in Jefferson County which are shown on maps.

(3) The boundaries of the La Barque Creek Census Designated Place (CDP) are slightly larger than the boundaries of the La Barque Creek Watershed. The Census Bureau fixes boundaries to roads, property lines and other similar features, whereas boundaries of a watershed are the result of natural conditions which would include hillsides for example.

(4) It's important to note that the days of having your own small post office set up in your area or even a new zip code are pretty much over. The Postal Service is operating at a deficit and looking for ways to economize. Therefore, we will see more post offices being consolidated and regular postal rates increases to fulfill their mission.

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