

Origin of the name “Baraboo”

Rabault

John T. De La Ronde, in a personal narrative, wrote that Baraboo River received its name from an Officer Rabault who in 1832 was in charge of a military force where said river joins the Wisconsin River.

Barbeau

In October of 1890, Mr. R. J. Wood wrote to Myron W. Scranton of Saulte Ste. Marie, Michigan, asking for information in regard to the matter in which the city got its name. Mr. Scranton delivered the letter to his son, Gilmore G., asking him to reply, which he did after some delay of which he gave an acceptable explanation.

He replied to Mr. Wood, enclosing a copy of the Chippewa County News, issued October 21, 1882. Following are some extracts from the letter and News, beginning with the news.

“Died on Tuesday morning, the 17th in this village, of heart disease, *Hon. Peter B. Barbeau*, age 83 years.

* * *

Mr. *Barbeau* engaged in the service of the Hudson Bay Co. when 17 years old. Was afterwards employed by the American Fur Company and while thus engaged came to Saulte Ste Marie 60 years or more ago. Was married in 1830. Had three daughters, the second one, (the mother of my correspondent,) is well known to our people as the wife of one of our leading citizens, Postmaster Myron W. Scranton. While Mr. *Barbeau* was in the employ of the American fur company he was stationed for a time at Lac de Flambeau, Wisconsin. He was the first white man that ever lived in Baraboo, which name he gave to that flourishing young city, the nearest approach the Indians could make to pronouncing his name being Mr. Baraboo.

Mrs. Myron W. Scranton was the first white child born there.

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Judge Barbeau was honored time and time again with nearly every office of trust in the gift of our people, all filled with credit to himself and honor to his constituents.

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Will now give some extracts from Mr. Gilmore G. Scranton’s letter, explaining again that he is the grandson of Judge Barbeau.

“My grandfather has told me that he made several trips from here to Baraboo visiting the trading posts of the American Fur Company on the way and trading with the Indians, and made quite a lengthy stay at Lac de Flambeau as he called it. He said that the Indians called him Baraboo and that your city was called Baraboo as his trading post was there. My mother was born there in 1834; but, of course, only knows what grandfather told us all.

My grandfather received a letter sometime in 1876 or 1877 inviting him to attend a re-union of old settlers in Baraboo, but he was sick at the time and delayed answering till he got the letter to my mother sometime afterward with the remark that “it might interest her as she was born there, that the town was named after him, and that he had neglected to answer the letter as he was sick.”

I will make no comments; take this for what you think it's worth
(Baraboo Republic, 3/9/1893)

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More on the origin of the name “Baraboo”

A Note from Colonel R. M. Strong
Omaha, Neb., March 11, 1893

To the Editor of the Republic:

I see in your issue of March 9th, an article relating to the name of the city of Baraboo. Some years ago while a resident of your city, I made quite a search in the same direction, and the results you will find in the published reports of the State Historical Society of 1872 or 73, I think. My investigation is somewhat at variance with the article of Mr. R. J. W
Strong

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Baribeau, or Baribault

The collections of the State Historical Society for 1872, referred to by Colonel Strong, are now accessible. In the collections for 1880-82, an article was contributed by the late Colonel B. W.

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Brisbois, of Prairie du Chien, who was born there in 1804, respecting the traditions and recollections of Prairie du Chien, and on page 301, of volume nine, of the report, the Colonel says:

Jean Baribeau, or *Baribault*, was the name of an old Canadian French trader, who had his trading post on what is now known as Baraboo River, and which stream took its name from him. As M. Brisbois, Sen'r, knew him well, and often spoke of him, he must have traded there the latter part of the last century, or early in this. Mr. Brisbois does not know what became of him or anything further of his history.” (Baraboo Republic, 3/16/1893)

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In 1912, Miss Louise Kellogg of the State Historical Society furnished the following. The name *Baribeau*, first appears in New France. *Francois Baribeau* was born in 1854, probably in France although records do not indicate so. He was married in 1669 and when he died, he left a number of children, who spelled the name in various ways, *Baribaut*, *Baribault* and *Baribeau*. The pronunciation is the same in every case and should be given a long “O” as in “robe.” All of this proves nothing except there was a family of that name in Wisconsin.

“*F. Baribeau*” mentioned in the Mackinac Register (1747) was probably *Francois*, for the progenitor of the family. *Francois* (3) was married in 1742 in Montreal, and was probably the signer at the baptismal service as written in the 1747 register.

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Barbue

A competing theory states that the word Baraboo is derived from the French “**Barbue**”, meaning *Catfish*, of which there was a plentiful bounty in the Baraboo River at one time. (BIS, p. 9)

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Bonibau's Creek or Baribaut's Creek

John Farmer, a historian and cartographer of Detroit, was the first to attempt anything like an accurate mapping of the new parts of

the territories of Michigan and “Ouisconsin.” In one of his maps issued in 1830 is noted “*Bonibau's Creek*” (Baraboo River.)

Another map as early as 1817, labeled it “Baribaut's Creek.”

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In 1973, John Cole wrote an interesting letter to the editor of the Baraboo News Republic, of which a portion thereof follows:

I now wish to refer to information taken from the book, “Field Geology,” by F. B. Labee, Assistant Professor of Geology, Massachusetts' Institute of Technology, 1961. In referring to topographical forms such as mountains, plateaus, etc., he also mentions the word “Baraboo.” According to his definition, a baraboo is a monadnock, which has been buried by a series of strata and subsequently re-exposed by the partial erosion of these younger strata. The word monadnock refers to a residual of the old topography standing above the plain.

According to Webster's Third New International Dictionary, the word “baraboo” is defined as a disinterred monadnock and specific reference is made to the Baraboo Mts., Wisconsin.

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Belle Chasse

A “*Sixpenny Map of the United States*” which was brought from Glasgow, Scotland in 1842 by John Dickie, shows a river bearing the name *Belle Chaase*, occupying a position nearly where the Baraboo River is. Dickie believed that the map was published as early as 1817. Its English would be “*beautiful chase*”, meaning “*fine hunting grounds*”

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Mahlenak

Upon an old map of “*Long's Second Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*” in 1823, it is called *Mahlenak*.

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Captain Barebeau

Another thought on the subject was given by a Frenchman , *John De laRond*, who settled at Fort Winnebago in 1828 and later lived with his Winnebago wife upon the banks of the Baraboo River, six miles from Portage. LaRond claimed the river got its name from a *Captain Barebeau*, who was in Moran’s Expedition against the Indians, and who wintered at the mouth of the river.

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Barnabeau

In 1860 or thereabouts, on *Champlain’s map*, the river is called *Barnabeau*.

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Bonibeau

Upon Farnum’s “Map of the Territories of Michigan and Ouisconsin” published in 1830, it is called *Bonibeau’s Creek*.

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Baraboo

Morse and Brees “Map of Wisconsin” published in 1844, is the first to call it *Baraboo*.

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Ocoochery

The Winnebago Indian name is *Ocoochery*, signifying “*plenty of fish*.”

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Wau-Bun

Mrs. John H. Kinzie was the author of that entertaining volume of reminiscences of life at frontier posts, *Wau-Bun*. She writes regarding her stay at Fort Winnebago at portage in the 1830’s. The Indians of the area depended upon the stores of the fort for

subsistence during the scant months. Mrs. Kinzie writes, “The noble old De-kau-ry came one day from the Barribault [Baraboo] to apprise us of the state of his village.”

Note: De-kau-ry is spelled and pronounced today as “Decorah”.

Barrabou, Barriboo, Barraboo

In May of 1844 a letter to from Indian Commissioner Crawford to Governor Chambers of Iowa speaks of the *Barrabou River*. In 1846 a letter from John C. McLemore to Col. G. Talcott regarding copper discoveries in the territory the area was referred to as the *Barriboo*. In August of 1846, another letter from John C. McLemore regarding copper ore in the territory mentioned the *Barraboo*.

A Pause

A pause is due at this juncture..there are many opinions on the reason the city and river are called “Baraboo”, in fact too many for me to continue with at this point. One has to draw his or her own conclusion, if possible. At a later date I will attempt to carry on. The reader may find more data in the book “*History of Sauk County*”, published about 1880 and compiled by C. W. Butterfield. “*Origin of the Name Baraboo*” begins on page 519.

Also, depending on which book or map one refers to, the spelling of the name of which seems to be the same person appears to differ; this further complicates research.

Also a book, *A Man Called Baraboo*, written by M. Richard Tully published about 2009 brings forward Tully’s opinion of why the river is called the Baraboo and the reasons for his conclusion.

This writer, at this moment, shares Tully’s conclusion based on research to this date, in particular the writings of Mrs. John Kinzie in her book *Wau-Bun*.

However, it is all conjecture at this point.