With so much attention focused on the Bonnet Carre spillway recently, we were wondering if you could let us know how the project got its name.—J.O.M.

To start things off, “Bonnet Carre” means “square bonnet.” Historian and cartoonist John Chase says the owner of the long-departed Bonnet Carre plantation near LaPlace gave his plantation that name after he noticed the river looked like a square bonnet at that point. (Of course, it no longer does—just as Pointe a la Hache isn’t very hatchet-like any more). The spillway was named after the plantation. The landowner may have gotten his “square bonnet” image via an old legend the Corps of Engineers volunteered: “Square bonnet” was the nickname the French settlers gave the German settlers in the area because of the shape of their ladies’ hats.

Anyway, the spillway is pronounced BONNY CARRY if you’re a Yankee or BONE-NAY CARE-RAY if you want to be more or less French.

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