

HISTORIC OTTERBEIN

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How Do You Pronounce “Barre Street”?

by David Safier

If you’ve taken ballet lessons, or if you’re an English teacher like me who knows his phonics, you would look at the Barre St. sign and say, “It’s pronounced ‘Bar’ Street.” But you and I would be wrong. The proper pronunciation is “Barry Street.”



Barre Street is named after Isaac Barré (1726-1802), a British politician. While he was in the British Parliament, Barré was a staunch defender of the rights of the colonies, especially in their opposition to taxes imposed by the British. He coined the term “Sons of Liberty” referring to the colonists, who adopted it while fighting against the Stamp Act.

Barré was the son of Huguenot refugees who escaped to Ireland. The accent on the final “e” would make the name sound like Bah-REH in French. That was Anglicized to “Barry.”

Barre, Virginia, and Wilkes-Barre, Massachusetts, are also named after Isaac Barré, and both are pronounced “Barry.”

So Barre [Barry] Street it is.