How is "Missouri" Pronounced

Travel in Missouri and you'll notice natives and visitors alike have a common problem - they can't agree on how to pronounce the state's name. Is it "MissourEE" or "MissourAH"? The matter has been taken up in barroom brawls and scholarly dissertations, but it's never been officially resolved.

The debate has been going on since at least the late 1800s. It likely will continue far into the future. As with many controversies, discussion on this seemingly minor point generates more heat than light. For those who enjoy argument, this is the ideal subject - both sides are right, and both sides are wrong.

According to a survey by the Automobile Club of Missouri, 66 percent of Missourians prefer the "ee" ending. The pronunciation also splits along geographic and age lines. The eastern half of the state leans toward the "ee" sound, yet many western Missourians claim to live in either "Missouruh" or "Missourah." A great majority of residents under the age of 45 say "Missouree," but there's more difference of opinion among older Missourians.

Dictionaries, gazetteers and stylebooks are used by both sides to prove that their pronunciation is correct. In 1803, Noah Webster's "Spelling Book" offered the best solution to the problem: "The true pronunciation of the name of a place is that which prevails in and near the place." In spite of that common-sense dictum, you can be sure that however you say Missouri, you'll find someone who's sure you're wrong.

By the way, anthropologists suggest it should have been "May-sue-ray" all along.