

## WHO WAS PEOSTA?

BY HON. M. M. HAM.

This is a question frequently asked of the Dubuquer, and either not answered correctly, or more often not answered at all. It is the name of an Indian or of his wife who is believed to have discovered the original lead mine, and is the only name of an Indian resident preserved in the nomenclature of the place. But the traditions have played havoc with it, and assigned the name to various personages. The most popular of these stories is that Peosta was the name of the Indian wife of Julien Dubuque. But there is nothing to this, for it is a well established fact that Dubuque had no wife, either Indian or white. And besides Peosta was the name of a man who acquired whatever fame he had through an act of his wife.

The most reliable statement relative to Peosta is contained in the conveyance or permit given to Dubuque at the council held at Prairie du Chien, on September 22, 1788, with the chiefs and braves of the Fox Indians. This document was in the French language, and was a grant of the right to mine for lead, but which Dubuque in after years claimed to be a conveyance to him by the Indians of all the tract of land for twenty miles up and down the river, and which was the basis of his claim, and gave rise to the great lawsuit after his death. In the final decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, in 1853, the original grant to Dubuque from the Indians is set out in full in the original French, as well as the official translation into English made for the use of the court. Here is the expression relative to Peosta: "Moreover, that they cede and abandon to him all the coast and contents of the mine discovered by the wife of Peosta, so that no white man or Indian shall

make any pretensions to it without the consent of Mr. Julien Dubuque," etc. The French phrase here translated "of the mine discovered by the wife of Peosta," reads, "de la mine tobure par le femine Peosta." Whether this is a correct translation or not, the French scholars must determine; at any rate, it was the one accepted by the Supreme Court and by the general public. "Par le femine Peosta" is "by the wife of Peosta," and such it has remained for over a hundred years.

The fact that the mine was discovered by the wife of Peosta instead of by Peosta himself, is rendered more probable by the well known fact that the working of the lead mines in after years was given over almost entirely to the squaws, for the Indians consider it beneath their dignity to labor at mining or any thing else. All manual labor was cast upon the women, and if they did the work they probably discovered the mine where the work was to be done. Tradition fixes the date of the discovery of the first lead mine by the wife of Peosta at 1780, but it is probable that the existence of lead in those bluffs was known before that date.

Of Peosta himself nothing is known except through the glory cast upon him by the discovery of his wife. He was a brave or warrior of the Fox village near by, possibly a lesser chief or sachem, but he was not the head chief of the band, for that was the Kettle Chief, a long-time and constant friend of Julien Dubuque. He has been referred to as "Peosta Fox," but that was incidentally only in allusion to the fact that he belonged to the Fox tribe, the Messrs. Les Renards, as the politic Dubuque referred to them in his original contract.

The original mine discovered by the wife of Peosta and always known as the Peosta mine, is situated in the northern part of the city of Dubuque, in what is known as Heeb's Hollow, about five miles from the Kettle Chief's village at the mouth of the Catfish. It has not been

worked for many years, and in the early days of lead mining was abandoned for more profitable and better mines discovered by white men and worked to better advantage than could be done by the primitive methods employed by the Indians. The name of Peosta has been preserved in this section, the most of any next to that of Dubuque himself. It is easy-flowing, lingual and quite as poetic in its sound as any of those introduced by Longfellow into Hiawatha. There is a village of Peosta twelve miles west of Dubuque, and Peosta avenues, drives, and hotels in the city itself. We had a Lake Peosta in the upper part of the city, not far from the famous mine, formed by an arm of the Mississippi, but of late years it has been drained and the city has taken hold of it with the intention of filling up its bed and transforming it into a park. At the last session of the Legislature a bill was passed granting whatever title the State might hold in the bed of the lake to the city for park purposes. When completed it will, of course, be named Peosta Park.

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STEAMBOATING ON THE DES MOINES RIVER.—Since our last issue the steamboats have had fine times on the Demoine. The Globe, Sangamon, Col. Morgan, Julia Dean, Time and Tide, J. B. Gordon, and Alice, have all made trips up, some of them going as high up as Fort Demoine and intermediate points. All of them returned to the Mississippi with loads as heavy as they could bear. \* \* \* \* The Julia Dean, Captain Logan, is now on the way to Fort Demoine, having left here Monday evening. \* \* \* \* Although we have had numerous boats running on the Demoine this spring, and a vast amount of produce has been carried away, still a large portion of the surplus products of the country remain unshipped; and boats could make it profitable if there was water enough, to run the whole season.—*Des Moines Courier, (Ottumwa), June 15, 1854.*

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