



*M. M. Haver*

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

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## THE FIRST WHITE MAN IN IOWA.

BY HON. M. M. HAM.

The first white man who lived in what is now the state of Iowa, was Julien Dubuque. He came to the lead mines in the year 1788, and continued to reside there until his death in 1810. He was but 26 years of age when he came here, and was only 48 years of age at the time of his death, a comparatively young man. He was never married; he possessed a good education; was a sharp, shrewd, intelligent man; evidently a keen reader of human nature; a natural leader among those with whom he was associated; and altogether a not unworthy founder of the great state in which he was the first to cast his fortunes. The first thing that impresses one who attempts to study his life is, how little is known of him. As for records, there are practically none; and even the traditions are not only vague, but scarce and of little value. This comes in part from the fact that he left no family, no connections, no papers, no business relations, none of those things that usually keep alive the memory of a man. But little is really known of Dubuque, and even what little there is has never been sifted out from the rubbish, and put in shape

for preservation. So far as I am aware, no one has ever attempted a sketch of his life, even of the most meager proportions. Within the past year I have gathered together a number of facts about him not generally known, and it may not be entirely without interest to group them together in a connected manner. It is a fact that some of the plainest facts about him are still matters of dispute among the people who dwell in the city which bears his name, and who would naturally be thought to know the most of him: whether he was a native of France or of Canada; whether he spelled his name Dubuque or Du Buque; whether he had one or more Indian wives and children, or none at all; and whether at his death he left a large estate, or a small one, or none. It is believed that such facts as are herein presented are entirely reliable, and can be substantiated by proper authorities.

Julien Dubuque was born in the village of St. Pierre les Brecquets, county of Nicolet, on the south bank of the St. Lawrence river, about fifty or sixty miles above Quebec. He was of Norman origin; and the records show that his ancestry spelled the name variously as Dubuc, Dubucq and Dubuque; but he himself always adhered strictly to the latter form. His great grandfather, Jean Dubuque, came from the parish of Trinity, diocese of Rouen, France, and was married to Marie Hotot at Quebec in 1668. His son, Romain, was born in 1671, and was married to Anne Pinel in 1693. His son, Noel Augustin, the father of Julien, was born in 1707, was married to Marie Mailhot in 1744, and died in 1783, about the time his son left home for the west. Meanwhile, the Dubuque family had removed from Quebec to the district of Three Rivers, where Julien was born in the village and county named, on the 10th of January, 1762. He was well educated for those days, probably in the parish schools and at Sorel, and was always able to express himself intelligently and even fluently both by speech and in writing.

He early turned his thoughts and soon his steps to the west. As early as 1785, when only 23 years old, he was established at Prairie du Chien. He was soon engaged in trade with the Indians across the river, at or near where McGregor is now situated, along with Basil Giard and Pierre Antaya. More than twenty years after this, in the year 1808, Dubuque presented a claim to the United States government for 7,056 acres of land where he had traded in 1785, and where McGregor is now situated. He claimed that he had bought this land in May, 1805, from Francois Cayolle, who had obtained a grant for the same from Don Carlos Dehant Delassus, Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana. He brought two witnesses who affirmed that Cayolle had cultivated this Clayton county land for many years; but the government commissioners, to whom claims of this character were referred, promptly threw it out and refused to recognize it.

It is a rather remarkable fact that of all Dubuque's French Canadian companions, the name of Basil Giard is the only one preserved in all this section, so far as I am aware. One of the townships of Clayton county adjoining McGregor, is named Giard. After Dubuque obtained his concession from the Indians in 1788 to the lead mines, he immediately removed here, and took with him as laborers ten Canadians who resided at the mines with him until his death. But, so far as I know, the name of no one of them is preserved either in the geography of this section or in any of the old families. It is probable that some of these were persons who signed his Indian contract as witnesses in 1788, as Teren, Quirneau, Fontigny, Antaque, and afterwards the witnesses to his alleged purchase from Cayolle, Bellissime and Perrant. Col. Forsyth, who established Fort Snelling in 1819, mentions an interpreter by the name of Lucie, who was absent from Canada for more than twenty-five years, and spent a good share of this time in the lead mines as an employe of Dubuque. None of these

names are preserved in any way in this section, although among the oldest families are many of French names, but these for the most part seem to have come originally from Missouri. Dubuque's white companions were all driven away from the mines immediately after his death; and if any of them had married Indian wives these latter with their half-breed children staid with the Indians, and must have gone with them when they abandoned the mines in 1828. The children, if any, went with the savages, instead of the whites; and at least never made any claim to property hereabouts acquired through their Canadian fathers.

Dubuque obtained a valuable concession from the Fox Indians, giving him the sole right to work the lead mines. This was obtained from the Fox chiefs and braves at a council held at Prairie du Chien, and signed on the 22nd of September, 1788. It is probable that Dubuque had visited the lead mines after his arrival at Prairie du Chien in 1785; and with his usual shrewdness appreciated the full value of the important concession. The Foxes, from whom he obtained the grant, were originally a powerful tribe in Canada, but were always turbulent, quarrelsome, and at war with their neighbors. They had been driven first to the vicinity of Mackinaw, afterwards to Green Bay and along the Fox river that bears their name, and finally at the time of the advent of Dubuque, they were settled along both banks of the Mississippi between Prairie du Chien and the Rock River. Their principal villages were two at Rock Island, one at Dubuque, and one at the mouth of the Turkey river. Of these the village at Dubuque was one of the largest, consisting of fourteen lodges and one hundred and fifty souls. When Schoolcraft, the celebrated explorer among the Indians, visited the village in 1820, he said the village consisted of nineteen lodges built in two rows, pretty compact, and had a population of two hundred and fifty souls. He also summed up the

character of the Foxes in a single sentence, when he said: "They still retain their ancient character, and are constantly embroiled in wars and disputes with their neighbors, the results of which show that they have more courage in battle than wisdom in council." In 1788 they did not have, all told, over one hundred warriors.

These were the men with whom Dubuque was to pass the rest of his life. After the treaty was signed in 1788, he removed at once to the mines, taking with him ten Canadian followers, full of adventure and spirit as he was himself. He established himself at the Indian village, called the village of the Kettle Chief, from the name of its principal man. Dubuque himself was known among the Indians as Little Cloud. This village was at the mouth of the Catfish creek, called by some of the early explorers the Black river, where it empties into the Mississippi. The point is well known. It is about two miles below the present city, and now is an open field without a single resident upon it. It is just at the southern limits of the incorporation, just below the valley where the Illinois Central Railroad turns west from the river, and its front street along the Indian lodges is now traversed by the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad on its way down the right bank of the river. It is a curious fact that Julien Dubuque never lived on the site of the town which bears his name. He often traversed it, in going back and forth to his mines, some of which were included within the present limits of the city, and especially the famous Peosta mine. But Dubuque himself always made his home at the mouth of the Catfish, at the Fox village of the Kettle Chief. He made improvements upon the land, cleared a farm, built fences, constructed a house for his own use, as well as a horse-mill, dug lead, and erected a smelting furnace on the north side of the point now known as the Dubuque Bluff, on which he was buried, and which furnace was alongside of the present Illinois Central track, and

close by the Lorimier furnace well known to all the early settlers.

Dubuque acquired great influence among the Indians, as great, in fact, it is believed, as was ever possessed by any white man who ever lived among them. He made himself familiar with all their superstitions, and it must be acknowledged that he did not hesitate by means of ingenious artifices and what he called magic conjurations, to impose upon them to such an extent that he became to them a veritable idol, and his ascendancy over them exceeded that of their own sorcerers and medicine men. He claimed to possess an antidote for the bite of poisonous snakes, and handled them without fear. One of the local traditions about him is that on a certain occasion when he had got into some controversy with the Indians, and they were not disposed to concede his demand, he threatened if they did not he would set the Catfish on fire! He had one of his men empty a lot of oil into the river above the bend, and by the time it had floated down to the village he applied some fire, and away went the whole surface of the stream in a big blaze. This terrified the Indians, and they at once conceded to such a great magician all he asked, and more too. It is certain that he acquired a tremendous influence with them, however obtained, and he exercised it to his own advantage throughout his life. At the same time, he was just to them, deciding their disputes with fairness and justice, or he would soon have lost his power. His influence extended both to the Winnebagoes on the east side of the river, and to the Foxes on the west side, and as a result their disputes were largely referred to him for settlement, and from his decision they took no appeal.

His life during the twenty-two years he resided among the Indians was for the most part uneventful. He was a trader and miner. He sold goods, trinkets, beads, and such things as the Indian taste craved; and at the same time con-

ducted his mining operations, exchanging his goods for mineral. His ten white companions were teamsters, overseers of the mines, smelters, helpers in the store, woodsmen, and river men. The mining was done entirely by the old men and women among the Indians, the warriors and young men considering it beneath them. The work at the diggings was of the most primitive character. No shafts were sunk, and the windlass and bucket were unknown. They ran drifts into the hills as far as they could conveniently go, and brought the mineral out in baskets, in which they took it to the smelting furnace. They employed the hoe, the shovel, the crowbar, and the pickaxe, but no gunpowder.

Twice a year Dubuque went to St. Louis with his mineral, which he exchanged for goods for his Indian trade. It would take two or three of his boats to carry the heavy loads, and of course, several of his Frenchmen to man them. Sometimes he was accompanied by the chiefs and great warriors. His arrival in St. Louis, usually in the spring and fall, was a great event in that frontier village, and he was treated with distinguished consideration by the leading men of the town, for he was one of the great traders from up the country. Up to a few years ago there were two aged men living in this vicinity, Thomas McKnight of Dubuque, and James G. Soulard of Galena, who recollected distinctly of seeing and conversing with M. Dubuque in St. Louis, when they were boys. Mr. McKnight at the time was a clerk in Chouteau's store, where Dubuque did most of his trading; and Mr. Soulard was the son of a prominent citizen of the place. Mr. Soulard told the writer once that he recalled Dubuque very distinctly. He described him as a man below the usual stature, of black hair and eyes, wiry and well built, capable of great endurance, and remarkably courteous and polite, with all the suavity and grace of the typical Frenchman. To the ladies he was always the essence of polite-

ness. Mr. Soulard said he well remembered that on the occasion of one of his visits, a ball was given in his honor, attended by all the prominent people of the place. It was held in a public hall, in the second story of a building, and he as a small boy had crowded in to see the sights. At one point of the festivities, M. Dubuque took a violin from one of the performers, and executed a dance to the strains of his own music, which was considered a great accomplishment, and was received with tremendous applause.

But with all his business activity, Indian trading and monopoly of the mining, he was not a successful business man. The Chouteaus evidently could drive a better bargain than he; so that in October, 1804, he conveyed to Auguste Chouteau seven-sixteenths of all the great tract of land that he claimed to own, with a provision that at his death all the balance should go to Chouteau. His affairs, instead of improving, grew no better, so that at the time of his death in 1810 he was pronounced a bankrupt, and entailed a long, expensive and vexatious litigation upon those who were to come after him.

This lawsuit in its day was one of the most celebrated in the whole United States, because it involved the title to all the land in an entire city, and its terrors are well remembered by all early settlers. It was the only legacy Dubuque left the people who were to come after him, except his name. He made claim to all the land not only where the city stands, but for seven leagues up and down the west bank of the Mississippi river and for three leagues back. This is a distance of twenty miles in length and nine miles deep; and included all the lead mines, all the farms and homes of the people settled upon it. It was a source of great vexation and annoyance, and so continued for twenty-three years after the first settlement, and until it was finally settled by a decision of the supreme court of the United States in 1853, in favor of the settlers and against the Dubuque claim.

Without entering too much into detail and a recital of legal complications, the main facts of the claim may be briefly given. On the 22nd of Sept., 1788, Dubuque, then a young man, obtained from "a council of the chiefs and braves of the Fox Indians," as they describe themselves, a permit or concession to mine for lead at this point. This instrument, in French, is still in existence. The council was held at Prairie du Chien, where Dubuque resided for three years. Being a shrewd man he appreciated the value of the mines. He afterwards claimed that he paid the Indians full value in goods at the time; but, if so, nothing is said of it in the written document. The Indians always claimed that it was simply a permit to mine, and as soon as Dubuque had died they drove off all his white companions.

After he had resided here for eight years, he came to believe that this permit to mine was in fact a full transfer to him of all the realty—a deed, and not a permit. Accordingly in October, 1796, he presented to the Baron de Carondelet, governor of the territory of Louisiana, at New Orleans, a petition asking him to confirm to him the title to all the domain he had received from the Indians. In this petition he sets forth his claims, but they include many things not mentioned in the council with the Indians. He says he "bought the tract of land;" that it was a tract of seven leagues up and down the river by three leagues back, "from the margin of the little river Maquanquitoris to the margin of the Mesquabysnonquis," names of streams emptying into the Mississippi on the west, the former now known as the Little Maquoketa, and the latter the Tete des Morts, and about twenty miles apart. In the petition he refers to himself in a modest manner; calls the tract "the Mines of Spain," in memory of the government represented by Carondelet; and ends up with flattering allusions to his excellency and to his good health, all of which shows that Dubuque was not only shrewd, but a diplomatist of no mean ability. These two documents and their proper legal

interpretation furnished the entire basis of the great suit. The question with which commissioners, congresses, cabinets, and courts had to contend for forty-eight years was this, — Was the grant which Carondelet confirmed to Dubuque in 1796, a complete title, making the land private property, and therefore exempt from the territory of Louisiana conveyed to the United States by the treaty of Paris, on the 30th of April, 1803? The supreme court said, "No."

In the course of time Dubuque became largely indebted to Chouteau; and being pressed for a settlement, in October, 1804, conveyed to Auguste Chouteau of St. Louis, seven undivided sixteenth parts of this body of land, said to be about 73,324 acres. It was also provided that at the death of Dubuque, all the remainder of this tract should become the property of Chouteau or his heirs. In 1807 Chouteau sold one-half of this to John Mullanphy of St. Louis, it is said for \$15,000. On the 17th of May, 1805, Dubuque and Chouteau as his assignee, jointly filed their claim with the government for possession. Thereafter for a period of forty-eight years the claim was knocked about before councils, commissions, cabinets, congresses and committees of the same, the courts higher and lower, the decisions sometimes being one way and sometimes another, but none of them ever agreeing at the same time. It was finally put in the shape, by agreement, of a suit of ejectment against Patrick Molony, a farmer of Table Mound township, who held his land by patent from the United States. This suit was tried before that learned jurist, Judge John J. Dyer, of the United States district court for Iowa, and judgment rendered for Molony. The case was appealed to the supreme court of the United States, where in March, 1853, it was finally decided, the judgment of the lower court being affirmed. This opinion, an elaborate and able one, was delivered by Judge J. M. Wayne of Georgia. Chouteau was represented by able attorneys from St. Louis, and by Reverdy Johnson of

Maryland; while the Dubuque settlers were represented by T. S. Wilson, Platt Smith and attorney general Caleb Cushing. All the members of the court at that time, all the attorneys, all the claimants, are now dead, the last one being Judge T. S. Wilson, who died less than two years ago.

The decision turned largely upon the old Spanish land laws, which were discussed in full, and which the court construed against Dubuque and Chouteau. Another point, over which the attorneys wrangled a good deal, was the proper translation of the grants from the Indians in 1788 and again from Carondelet in 1796, both in French. The court of last resort determined that Dubuque's contract with the Fox Indians was a grant of the right to work the Peosta mine, with its appendages, and with the privilege to search for other mines throughout these coasts, in the event that ore was not found in that mine; and that the order of Carondelet was not intended to secure him the ownership of the land. Dubuque held from the Indians a permit to mine, but not a title to the realty. In this connection it may be stated that letters are frequently received to this day from people in Canada, in France, and in the United States, claiming to be descendants and heirs of Julien Dubuque, inquiring about their claims in his estate, which has been represented to them to be of vast extent. Of course there are no such valid claims, for Dubuque had no descendants, and the supreme court of the United States has given decision against the only claim he had, and even that had been transferred to Chouteau.

There was great rejoicing in Dubuque when the news of the favorable decision of the supreme court reached the town. The bells were rung; bon-fires were kindled; the orators congratulated the people; and all felt glad, for now for the first time, all the settlers felt that their homes were their own.

One of the most accurate pieces of information we have of Dubuque, does not come from him direct, but from

Lieut. Zebulon M. Pike who conducted the expedition up the Mississippi river in 1805. It will be recalled that at the time Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark on the exploration up the Missouri river and down the Columbia to the Pacific, to ascertain all possible relative to this portion of the Louisiana purchase, he at the same time organized another party to the head waters of the Mississippi, which like the other started from St. Louis, and got off shortly after Lewis and Clark had taken their departure. Among the matters on which Mr. Jefferson gave Lieut. Pike definite instructions, was an order to find out all he could relative to M. Dubuque, his life among the Indians, the extent and situation of his mines, the amount of lead produced, and the like. Pike arrived at the mines during the forenoon of the 1st day of September. Dubuque doubtless knew of his coming, for he received him with distinguished honor, including a salute from a small field-piece that belched forth a noisy welcome as the boats pulled up at the landing; the Indians and the miners were on hand, and Dubuque gave the representative of the government a most cordial greeting, in which he showed himself to be the keen diplomatist he was.

Lieut. Pike notes in his report all these profuse demonstrations in his honor; but at the same time while acknowledging the hospitalities shown him, did not by any means lose sight of the information that was wanted. But Dubuque, wary and polite, under one excuse and another, deferred the furnishing of the facts desired. Pike urged, and Dubuque with many bows and compliments evaded the answers. Pike was told that the principal mines were five or six miles distant up the Catfish, nearly due west and in and near the valley up which the Illinois Central Railroad now winds in its ascent from the banks of the river to the prairies beyond; while other of the mines, including that discovered by the wife of Peosta, were about the same distance north, in what is now the northern

part of the city. Dubuque pleaded that he had no horses; that the mines were a long distance; and as Pike was suffering from a malarial fever he, perforce, submitted to Dubuque a series of questions in writing, and announced that he must depart up the river the day following. When he left, Dubuque fired another salute, made many protestations of fealty and friendship, and accompanied him in boats up for several miles. When ready to leave and return to his village, Dubuque handed to Pike what he said were the answers to his questions. After his effusive and polite host had gone, Pike opened the slip of paper, and here is what he found. The questions of Pike and answers of Dubuque are given in full:

1. What is the date of your grant of the mines from the savages?

Ans. The copy of the grant is in Mr. Soulard's office, at St. Louis.

2. What is the date of the confirmation by the Spaniards?

Ans. The same as to query first.

3. What is the extent of your grant?

Ans. The same as above.

4. What is the extent of the mines?

Ans. Twenty-eight or twenty-seven leagues long, and from one to three broad.

5. Lead made per annum?

Ans. From 20 to 40,000 pounds.

6. Quantity of lead per cwt., of mineral?

Ans. Seventy-five per cent.

7. Quantity of lead in pigs?

Ans. All he makes, as he neither manufactures bar, sheet-lead, or shot.

8. If mixed with any other material?

Ans. We have seen some copper, but having no person sufficiently acquainted with chemistry, to make the experiment properly, I cannot say as to the proportion it bears to the lead.

J. DUBUQUE.

Z. M. PIKE.

Lead Mines, 1st September, 1805.

It will be no source of surprise now at this late date that Pike referred in his official report to the proprietor of the mines as the "polite but evasive M. Dubuque."

Dubuque as early as 1796 gave to his diggings the name of the Mines of Spain, as he declared in his petition to the Baron Carondelet, asking him to confirm his title to the grant from the Indians. He stated in his petition that he had so named them in memory of the government to which he belonged and of which Carondelet was the representative. But as these mines belonged to no less than three governments during the twenty-two years in which Dubuque lived there, that of Spain, France, and of the United States, this name was very soon an evident misnomer, although Dubuque stood by it to the last, and had it inscribed upon his tomb. Soon after his death, however, the name was dropped and that of Dubuque's Lead Mines took its place. This was soon abbreviated to Dubuque's Mines, and Schoolcraft who visited here in 1820, says they were then known by that name. After the settlement of the place in 1832-3 the name was still further abbreviated by dropping the word Mines, and calling the village simply Dubuque, and such it has been ever since.

The common spelling is just as he always signed his name. At first many were inclined to use the "Du" as the ordinary French prefix, and wrote the word Du Buque; but this by general consent has been dropped as incorrect, for Dubuque himself never used it. The names of Julien and Dubuque are naturally very common in this vicinity. The principal hotel of the city is the Julien; and so of one of the principal avenues, as well as one of the suburbs; and of one of the townships. Dubuque has been appropriated by the county, the oldest with Des Moines of any in the state; by one of the outlying townships, and by the city itself. There is also a Dubuque Bluff, and various other cases where it is used geographically. And then for commercial and business purposes, there is no end to the use of the name. Between four and five pages of the city directory are used up by business concerns which have appropriated the name, until it is

prefixed to building and loan associations, insurance companies, furniture and manufacturing establishments, banks, schools, opera houses, packing and malting companies, musical institutions, saw-mills, street railways and all kinds of incorporations. No name is so common here as that of the first pioneer of the place; it is Julien here and Dubuque there, and very appropriately too.

Dubuque continued to work actively at his mines until death suddenly surprised him in the early spring of 1810. He died on the 24th of March of that year, it is said from pneumonia or lung fever, induced by exposure and a severe cold. His death produced a veritable consternation among the Indians. They regarded him as a friend, a counselor, protector, a great medicine man, who had gained their unalterable affection. They treated his remains with the most distinguished honor, and their burial ceremonies were of the most elaborate character. His obsequies were held with extraordinary pomp. They gathered from all sides to attend, and their most distinguished chiefs and warriors disputed with each other for the honor of carrying him to the grave. They were followed by hundreds of men and women, who advanced with slow and measured step to the sound of their funeral chants. At the grave their greatest chiefs and orators vied with each other in paying their tribute of praise and admiration, and his virtues were eloquently recited in the ornate and figurative language always employed by them. After the funeral orations were finished, they sang the death-song of a brave, and then betook themselves silently and mournfully to their villages. The Indians kept his memory alive among them as long as they remained in the country that had known him. The Sacs and Foxes made it a duty to visit his grave every year; and other tribes at least once in a lifetime. It was a pilgrimage to Mecca, and the pilgrims threw small stones upon his grave as a mark of respect to his memory. Many of them believed that some day he would reappear and be their guide.

The place of burial was well chosen. It was near the point of a precipitous bluff, 200 feet above the river and close to its edge, so that a stone can be easily cast from the spot into the bosom of the Mississippi below. The bluff is immediately to the north of the Kettle Chief village, across the Catfish, and two miles or more below the city. It is one of the most conspicuous points around Dubuque; before it lie three great states of the Union, and its summit is easily seen from every train and steamboat and almost every road that leaves the city. There is talk of erecting a lofty monument over the grave in memory of Dubuque, and it certainly should be done. The tomb over his remains was an elaborate affair, partly of rock, partly of wood, and the whole surmounted by a cedar cross, with this inscription graven in large letters: "Julien Dubuque, miner of the Mines of Spain, died March 24, 1810, aged forty-five years and six months." Near the tomb was the grave of a principal chief, who had asked to be buried near his friend. George Catlin, the celebrated writer on the Indians, says the tomb and inscription were prepared not by the Indians, but by Dubuque before his death, and this is not at all improbable. It will be seen that the inscription places his age at 45 years and 6 months, which would have made the date of his birth in the year 1764. But the baptismal register in Canada places the date of his birth on January 10, 1762, and I have followed this as more probably correct. This would have made his age 48 at the time of his death, instead of 45.

DUBUQUE, IOWA, MARCH, 1896.

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