

George McGovern, punctuate the influence that the ideals and ideas of the Midwest have had on a general American culture. In the end, generations of scholars have viewed their subjects through filters created in the Midwest.

*Julien Dubuque: Portrait of a Pioneer*, by Robert F. Klein. Dubuque: Loras College Press Center for Dubuque History, 2021. vi, 191 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, appendices, index. \$24.95 hardcover.

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Julien Dubuque is a famed but enigmatic figure in Iowa history. His eighteenth-century lead mines, the “Mines of Spain,” are touted as one of the earliest European settlements in Iowa, but they were first discovered and worked by Meskwaki people. Few primary sources shed light on Dubuque’s personal character or relationships. The handful of business and legal documents that survive are the basis of this new biography. Local author Robert F. Klein discusses Dubuque’s life and work in eight thematic chapters, including sections on family life, fur trading, farming, mining, and real estate. The result is a portrait of Dubuque that illustrates the range of his activities as a settler entrepreneur, but which unfortunately makes little use of contemporary scholarship to contextualize and interpret well-worn primary accounts.

In a chapter on family life, Klein summarizes an array of speculative theories about Dubuque’s possible marriages. Dubuque left behind no formal marriage record, but evidence suggests that he had marriage ties to the Meskwaki community who invited him to their lead mines. Klein endorses prior research by James Hanson and Lucy Murphy indicating that Dubuque probably entered a common law marriage with Josette Antaya, a Prairie du Chien woman of mixed French and Meskwaki ancestry. Although this section unearths no new documentation, it synthesizes evidence from previous publications in an accessible form.

The book is less successful when evaluating Dubuque’s role in negotiating between colonial and Indigenous cultures. In burnishing an image of Dubuque as a pioneer, Klein refers repeatedly to life in “the wilderness.” This description neglects the extensive cultivation and mining already conducted by Meskwaki people (whom Klein refers to using the exonym “Fox”). Meskwaki women discovered and worked the so-called “Mines of Spain,” but Klein makes little effort to represent Meskwaki

voices in this account. This biography also omits any discussion of the lead trade carried out by earlier French colonists in the Mississippi Valley, such as Nicholas Perrot and Phillippe Francois Renault. Without this context, it is impossible to make a fair appraisal of Dubuque's relative significance as a participant in an established trade network.

The lack of diverse perspectives is especially problematic when analyzing Dubuque's contested land claims. Dubuque procured Meskwaki x-marks on a written mining agreement in 1788, and he obtained a Spanish grant in 1796. He maintained peaceful possession of the mines throughout his lifetime. Following Dubuque's death in 1810, creditors arrived to take control of his estate, but Meskwaki leaders testified that they had never intended their agreement with Dubuque to extend to others. They destroyed Dubuque's buildings and barred entry to outsiders. A U.S. commission declined to recognize Dubuque's Spanish grant in 1811, and after decades of legal wrangling, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1854 that Dubuque had only ever acquired lifetime rights to the mines.

Against the consensus of other scholars including William Peterson, Thomas Auge, and Bethel Saler, Klein suggests that Dubuque's creditors should have received a valid title to the mines. He re-litigates their case by pointing to the wording of Dubuque's land agreements, but these documents present only one side of the dispute. As Meskwaki people indicated, Dubuque's contract, written in French legal jargon, might easily have mistranslated their oral, relationship-based recognition of land and resource rights. A balanced interpretation would need to take seriously the testimony of Meskwaki speakers that was reported by U.S. Indian Agent Nicholas Boilvin in letters from 1811–15. Klein also resuscitates the argument of nineteenth-century attorneys who held that the doctrine of discovery, a legal precedent that discards Native land ownership in favor of European colonial sovereignty, meant that Dubuque's Spanish grant constituted a perpetual title regardless of Meskwaki opinion. The Supreme Court, however, ruled without dissent that this grant did not fit the definition of fee simple land ownership under the laws of Spain. Klein gives little weight to the different codes governing contracts and land grants in Meskwaki, French, Spanish, and American legal cultures, leading to a spurious depiction of property rights during this period.

Researchers may find this text's bibliography and appendices with printed translations of Dubuque's land contracts and estate inventory to be helpful. Klein uses these sources to provide detailed descriptions of the material culture and business operations that characterized Dubuque's life. Even so, as the first stand-alone biography of Julien Dubuque since 1922, this was a missed opportunity to update Dubuque's story with new research in colonial history and Indigenous studies.