

The Julien Dubuque Monument: A Centennial Reflection

By Robert C. Wiederaenders

The Julien Dubuque Monument, like a medieval castle turret, has stood watch over the Mississippi River for one hundred years. And for 87 years before that, the tomb of Dubuque's namesake had been marked with a stone house and a red cedar cross proclaiming to all who approached from up or down the great river that Julien Dubuque, lead miner, entrepreneur, and friend of the Mesquakie Indians, is buried here.

A Landmark

When Julien Dubuque died in 1810, his Indian friends laid his body out full-length on top of a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River and piled a mound of earth over it. His French-Canadian friends built a stone shelter over the grave and set up a cross of red cedar, properly inscribed.

A story that Julien Dubuque was buried in a lead casket arose early along the Mississippi. When Julien's friends built the little shelter over his grave, they put a lead-covered door on it. There is no evidence that Dubuque was buried in a lead coffin, but that did not keep people from circulating the story.

The first mention of the cross came in 1827. Colonel Thomas L. McKenney of the U.S. Army, and Superintendent of Indian Trade wrote: "Over the grave was a stone, covered with a roof of wood. Upon the stone was a cross on which was carved in rude letters, 'Julien Du Buque, died 24th March 1810, aged 45 years.'"

The little shelter over the grave with the big cross beside it (or on top of it) was still in place in 1830, when a group of prospective lead miners crossed the Mississippi and began to look for lead outcroppings. The U. S. Army post in Prairie du Chien sent a detachment down to Dubuque and forced the would-be miners to go back across the river. Entry into

what would be Iowa would not be legal until June 1, 1833.

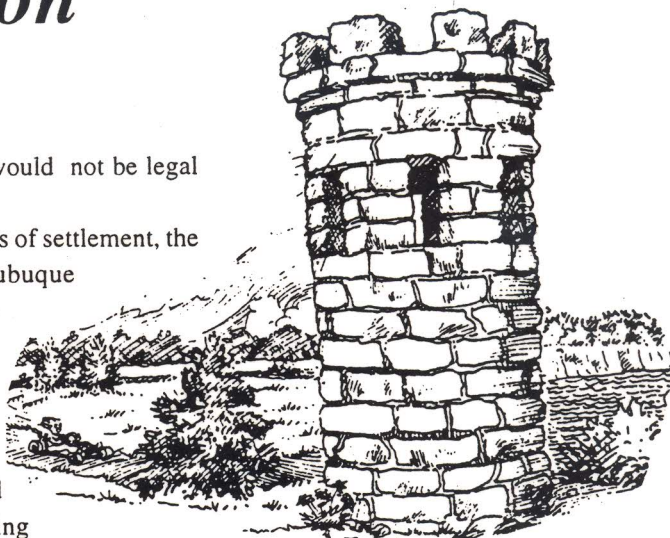
For the first 20 years of settlement, the memory of Julien Dubuque was not held in high esteem among the people living in the town called by his name. Before

Dubuque died he had sold much of his mining land, and bequeathed the rest of it to Auguste Chouteau, a prominent businessman of St. Louis. But long after Dubuque died in 1810, the United States government land arbitrators, still sorting out the many conflicting claims to land in area of the Louisiana Purchase, were still trying to decide whether Dubuque owned the land, and therefore had the right to sell and bequeath it to Chouteau, or whether the Indians just allowed him to use the land while he lived. This question was argued all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Many of the early settlers in Dubuque, realizing that they did not have a clear title to the land they thought they had bought from the government, blamed Julien Dubuque for getting them into this situation.

A famous court case was Chouteau vs. Maloney. Maloney was a settler of Dubuque whose name and situation were used to illustrate the situation of everybody in Dubuque who wanted to know if the land they were living on was theirs or did it belong to the heirs of Auguste Chouteau, of St. Louis. In 1854 the U.S. Supreme Court finally settled the case in favor of Maloney and the citizens of Dubuque.

Relic Hunters

Among the first generation of white people settling on Indian land, a popular



CONTRIBUTED GRAPHIC

sport was relic hunting. Farmers, even today, occasionally dig up arrowheads, stone axes, and even bones.

One story of relic hunting at Julien Dubuque's grave involved a Caroline Dexter.

Caroline Dexter had come to Dubuque with her husband in 1835, and taught school in a little building on the corner of Sixth and Locust. She had classes in reading, arithmetic, writing and needlework. The following story is told in the 1880 History of Dubuque, five years after Caroline Dexter had died:

"One morning it was told among her neighbors that the grave had been robbed. Mrs. Dexter, among others, went to the spot and found that the leaden coffin had been carried away. Around the grave, with the debris of dirt, stones and boards, were scattered the bones of the illustrious miner. Dishonest cupidity had vandalized all the sacred associations of the sleeping dead in order to grasp the metal which so appropriately urned the remains of one who had sought it as the chief object of his life. Mrs. Dexter, selecting the jawbone... took it home with her."

This story would probably not have been taken seriously; but when in 1897 Julien Dubuque's skeleton was dug up prior to being reburied under the monu-