



Julien Dubuque was born on the banks of the St. Lawrence river on the 10th of January in 1762. He was a fur trader when he arrived in Prairie du Chien in 1783, and he built a respectful relationship with the Meskwaki of Catfish Creek as trading partners. Julien eventually became interested in the lead mines the Meskwaki were working, and was invited down to the village to see them in 1788. They were not mines as we know them today; they were more like holes in the ground that followed vertical veins of lead down from the surface.

The Meskwaki called Julien Dubuque "The Little Night" because Dubuque sounded like the Meskwaki word for night, and because Julien Dubuque was said to be short and stocky and of dark complexion. They granted him the right to mine lead near the Catfish Creek village in a written agreement that became the first real estate deal in Iowa. The Supreme Court later ruled that the agreement granted The Little Night permission to mine and to take all the contents he could find, but did not grant ownership of the land. When The Little Night sought recognition of his claim from the Spanish, he called his holdings The Mines of Spain.

According to the agreement, The Little Night began mining in a location discovered by the wife of Peosta, who is said to have been a chief. The Meskwaki did not have a central authority or administrative figure unless one was needed for a crisis situation, so the chief was a primarily symbolic figure. It was fundamentally a society of equals.

The Little Night fell in love with a Meskwaki woman named Potosa, who is said to have been Peosta's daughter. Though Dubuque's family is reluctant to acknowledge it, their marriage was one of the great romance stories of the Old West, and lasted until The Little Night's death from pneumonia on March 24th of 1810.

It is said that The Little Night literally stole Potosa from the camp of Tamatonsa, the son of a Menominee chief. Apparently, Tamatonsa had been courting Potosa, and had invited her to spend some time in his camp in what is now Southwest Wisconsin. Julien Dubuque, in his early 20s at that time, escorted Potosa out of the camp under the cover of darkness. Tamatonsa, understandably, was enraged, and appealed to his father to attack the Meskwaki village at Catfish Creek. He hoped to retrieve his bride-to-be and to exact revenge. The chief, who was much wiser than his son, refused to authorize the suicide mission.

It is said that Tamatonsa ran from his father's presence into the forest screaming like a wild man and was never seen alive again. Some say that his ghost haunts the Southwest Wisconsin woods, and that when the moon is right, you can hear the screaming and a large body crashing through the brush.

The Meskwaki had great respect for The Little Night--perhaps it was his extraordinary generosity in taking care of his friends and of those who worked for him; perhaps it was his ability to dance and play the fiddle. When he died, they conducted elaborate ceremonies, such as would be reserved for a chief. His grave accumulated a pile of stones because the Meskwaki believed that it is bad luck to pass a grave without placing a stone on it. The Meskwaki burned down The Little Night's house and fences to prevent them from being desecrated by the living. It is said that the Meskwaki kept a lamp burning over The Little Night's grave for a period of years after his death.



By 1897, the legends and traditions connected with Julien Dubuque were in such doubt, that Richard Herrmann and Capt. M.E. Erwin of The Early Settlers Association of Dubuque decided to settle the question by digging up the traditional grave sight on the bluffs south of the present city of Dubuque. Not only did they find the remains of Julien Dubuque, and those of a Meskwaki chief, presumed to be either Peosta or another chief closely linked with The Little Night, named Aquoqua, but they also found the remains of a woman. Because it was a violation of custom for women to be buried with chiefs, the burial of

a woman in The Little Night's grave, who had to have been Potosa, is testimony to the power of their love and the strength of their marriage. The remains were reburied, and the monument rebuilt. Visitors to Julien Dubuque's monument can sometimes feel the presence of the loving couple.