

11-1-1926

# The Lead Mines of Dubuque

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## Recommended Citation

Catlin, George. "The Lead Mines of Dubuque." *The Palimpsest* 7 (1926), 346-348.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol7/iss11/4>

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## The Lead Mines of Dubuque

I hauled my canoe out of the water at Dubuque a few days later, where I joined my wife again in the society of kind and hospitable friends, and found myself amply repaid for a couple of weeks' time spent in the examination of the extensive lead mines; walking and creeping through caverns, some eighty or one hundred feet below the earth's surface, decked in nature's pure livery of stalactites and spar — with walls, and sometimes ceilings, of glistening massive lead. And I hold yet (and ever shall) in my mind the image of one of my companions, and the scene that at one time was about him. We were in "Lockwood's Cave," my wife and another lady were behind, and he advancing before me. *His* ribs, more elastic than mine, gave him entrance through a crevice, into a chamber yet unexplored; he dared the pool, for there was one of icy water, and translucent as the air itself. We stood luckless spectators, to gaze and envy, while he advanced. The lighted flambeau in his hand brought the splendid furniture of this tessellated palace into view; the surface of the jostled pool laved his sides as he advanced; and the rich stalagmites that grew up from the bottom reflected a golden light through the water, while the walls and ceiling were hung with stalactites which glittered like diamonds.

In this wise he stood in silent gaze, in awe and admiration of the hidden works of Nature; his figure, as high as the surface of the water, was magnified into a giant, and his head and shoulders not unfit for a cyclop. In fact, he was a perfect figure of Vulcan. The water in which he stood was a lake of liquid fire, he held a huge hammer in his right hand, and a flaming thunderbolt in his left, which he had just forged for Jupiter. There was but one thing wanting, it was the "sound of the hammer" which was soon given in peals upon the beautiful pendants of stalactite and spar, which sent back and through the cavern the hollow tones of thunder.

Dubuque's Grave is a place of great notoriety on this river, in consequence of its having been the residence and mining place of the first lead mining pioneer of these regions, by the name of Dubuque, who held his title under a grant from the Mexican Government (I think). He settled by the side of this huge bluff, on the pinnacle of which he erected the tomb to receive his own body and placed over it a cross with his own inscription on it. After his death, his body was placed within the tomb at his own request, lying in state (and uncovered except with his winding-sheet) upon a large flat stone, where it was exposed to the view, as his bones now are, to the gaze of every traveller who takes the pains to ascend this beautiful, grassy and lilly-covered mound to the top and peep through the gratings of two little windows which have admitted the eyes, but

stopped the sacrilegious hands, of thousands who have taken a walk to it.

A visit of a few days to Dubuque will be worth the while of every traveller, and for the speculator and man of enterprize it affords the finest field now open in our country. It is a small town of two hundred houses, built entirely within the last two years, on one of the most delightful sites on the river and in the heart of the richest and most productive parts of the mining region, having this advantage over most other mining countries, that immediately over the richest (and in fact all) of the lead mines the land on the surface produces the finest corn and all other vegetables that may be put into it. This is certainly the richest section of country on the continent, and those who live a few years to witness the result will be ready to sanction my assertion that it is to be the *mint of our country*.

GEORGE CATLIN