

Honoring Sop-Ho-Kab

Early Native American East Dubuque resident honored with historical marker of her own

By Jan Smith

“I am excited about this unveiling,” said Chuck Splinter speaking to the 200 or so people in the audience at the unveiling of the historic marker for Sop-Ho-Kab, otherwise known as Indian Kate, on Saturday, Sept. 30.

An estimated 50 or so direct descendants of Sop-Ho-Kab, one of East Dubuque’s earliest residents, attended the unveiling at the East Dubuque District Library. Some came from as far away as Texas, Oregon and Wyoming.

“This was way more than we expected, the fact that we have such a solid group of citizens is amazing,” said Splinter after the unveiling. “We knew it was going to be pretty good crowd, but this was awesome!” Pearl Rosemeyer, who helped with the project, noted, “What impressed me the most was the great distance that so many people came so many distances to be there. Without Chuck’s dedication and the fact that he led the charge, it might not have come to fruition.”

Splinter, who was instrumental in making this day happen, was on the board of the Frentress Homestead Foundation. When that group disbanded, it focused on Sop-Ho-Kab, asking the question, “Why can’t we do something for her?”

She and Peosta (Julien Dubuque’s wife) were the only two Native American women portrayed with early settlers of Dubuque from 1830-1860. At one point Sop-Ho-Kab lived in Dubuque.

The group decided to raise funds



Rich Lange, left, and Joe Kingsley East Dubuque Boy Scout Troop 14 leaders unveil the historic marker.

Photo courtesy Jan Smith

and send an application to the Illinois State Historical Society for a grant.

East Dubuque Boy Scout Troop 14 assisted with the unveiling, as did two members of Sop-Ho-Kab’s family.

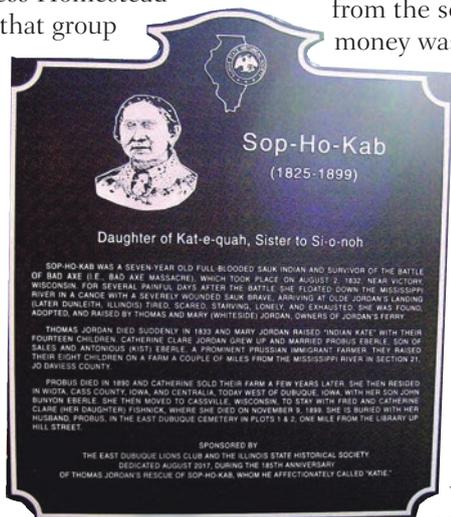
Stu Fliege of the Illinois State Historical Society also attended the ceremony, noting that funding came from the society and no tax money was used; it was locally supported by donations. “It was one of the smoothest ones we have done,” said Fliege.

After the ceremony, Judy Irish Buss, Sop-Ho-Kab’s great-great granddaughter, narrated a Power Point presentation, which featured the Bad Axe Massacre of 1832, as well as Sop-Ho-Kab’s genealogy. Sandra Cleary, author of the book “White Moccasins: The Story of Katie,” was present for a book signing.

Sop-Ho-Kab’s journey

Locally, Sop-Ho-Kab was known as Indian Kate. She was just 7 years of age at the Bad Axe Massacre, at Victory, Wis. She and a young injured brave escaped and found their way to Dunleith (now East Dubuque) after canoeing down the Mississippi River for several days. John Jordan, a ferry operator, was hunting on Jordan’s Ferry Landing when he came upon little Sop-Ho-Kab. John and his father, Tom, took the girl and the brave back to their home. After arriving at the home, Mary Ann Jordan, took care of the young brave’s 11 gunshot wounds to his face and neck. Sop-Ho-Kab said she had three sisters and four brothers.

An undated article in the Dubuque newspaper said “A steamboat loaded with Indian prisoners came down the river from Prairie du Chien, Wis. where they had been taken and stopped at the ferry on the way to Rock Island. Her brother and sister were on the boat and was recognized by her and she by them. But the



officer would not take her on board to be transferred to Rock Island.”

It is said that the sister told her not to come aboard for fear that she may be harmed. The young brave returned to his tribe, apparently taking the boat at Jordan’s Ferry.

Researchers believe that Blackhawk was her grandfather, his son, Lightning Eagle, was her father. It is said that Blackhawk came to take her home but she hid and refused to go with him, because she liked living with the Jordans.

The Jordans took in “little Katie,” the name they gave her, and in time adopted her and raised her along with their own 14 children.

A search for her roots

Buss began her geology research when she was a young mother. “For 50 years I have been working on this,” she said. She remembers after she dropped her husband off at his job in Dubuque, Iowa, she stopped at the local grocery store in East Dubuque. She and the clerk began talking and she said she was working on her family tree.

The Eberle name was mentioned and was told by the clerk about an Eberle that was buried in the East Dubuque Cemetery. To her surprise she found what she had been searching for, the grave of her great-great-



Chuck Splinter shares a few comments with the 200 people attending the dedication and unveiling ceremony honoring Sop-Ho-Kab on Saturday, Sept. 30. To his right is Judy Buss, the great-great granddaughter of Sop-Ho-Kab, locally known as Indian Kate. With her are her three granddaughters, from left, Madison Horkheimer, Riley and Kylee Buss.

grandmother, Catherine Eberle, otherwise known as Sop-Ho-Kab.

Catherine “Kate” Clare Jordan, 1826-1899, married Probus Eberle, a German immigrant. The couple farmed a few miles east of the Mississippi River. They had eight children, three girls and five boys.

In 1859, as a result of a treaty with the Sac and Fox Indians, Sop-Ho-Kab was paid \$672 for her share of the settlement for the Native American land. Splinter, who is an avid

Blackhawk War Memorabilia collector displayed many Blackhawk artifacts at the library. He spent many hours working on this project. “The East Dubuque Lions Club was also very supportive,” Splinter said.

This is the 185th anniversary of finding Sop-Ho-Kab at Jordan’s Ferry Landing.

Many locals knew of her existence years ago but never did anything to honor her. “Something of this importance should have been done 100 years ago,” Splinter said.

Rosemeyer, a former East Dubuque District Library board member was also involved, helped Splinter raise money for the memorial. Local merchants and private individuals donated to the cause.

Another \$6,000-\$8,000 is needed to complete the project and purchase a grave marker to be placed at Kate’s gravesite at the East Dubuque Cemetery. Donations can be sent to the East Dubuque Lions Club Foundation, Box 92, East Dubuque, IL 61025. Indicate “Indian Kate” on the check. 

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From left, Alex Rath, Jacob Lange, and Joe Kingsley from East Dubuque Boy Scout Troop 14 participate in the ceremony.