

ABDELKADER'S MESSAGE

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The French Occupation of Algeria began in 1830 and lasted until 1962. Abdel Kadir Bin Muhieddine al Jazairi was a military and political leader who led the struggle against the French colonizers for 15 years. Eventually he conceded defeat and surrendered in 1847, and was imprisoned for 5 years. During his struggle, Abdel Kader was known for his benevolence to his French prisoners, often taking better care of them than his own troops. He negotiated with the French clergy, and arranged prisoner exchanges. After his release from prison in 1852 he settled in Damascus with other Algerian exiles. His reputation as a peacemaker was consolidated when in 1860 he negotiated safe passage of Maronite Christians in Damascus who had become embroiled with the Druze of Mount Lebanon in a civil war. As a result of his intervention some 12,000 Christian lives had been saved. For this action the French government increased his pension to 4000 Louis and bestowed on him the Grand Cross of the Légion d'honneur. He was also honored by Abraham Lincoln for this gesture towards Christians with several guns that are now on display in the Algiers museum. Much like today, he was a figure viewed as freedom fighter by his countrymen, and a terrorist by the occupiers.

In 1846, Timothy Davis, a lawyer and one term US representative from Iowa's Second Congressional District, with his partners John Thompson and Chester Sage, concluded a business venture to build a flour mill north of Dubuque. They laid out a new town plan centered around the future mill. Davis had been following closely with interest the exploits of an Algerian leader



leading his people in their resistance against the French. This he found reminiscent of the struggle of America against the British. Thus he and his partners named the new settlement after Abdel Kader, shortened to modern day Elkader.

Can we envision in our current world naming an American town after an Islamic leader? Hardly. This is unlikely for many reasons. As it should be, our world is much different to that of 100 or 150 years ago, and not necessarily all for the better. Much rebuilding is necessary by both the East and West to replace mistrust and suspicion with reconciliation and cooperation. A mutual understanding and respect of all faiths and cultures is overdue.