

John J. Clark

By Patrick Jones (2024)

John J. Clark would probably not be mentioned in drum and fife history were it not for the writings of Daniel Decatur Emmett:

48

Daniel Decatur Emmett,

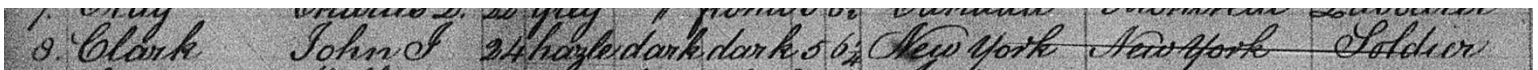
At the early age of 17, I enlisted in the U. S. Army as a fifer, and was stationed at Newport Barracks, Ky., the then school of practice for the western department. For one year, or more, I practiced the drum incessantly under the tuition of the renowned John J. Clark, (better known as "Juba"), and made myself master of the "Duty" and every known "side beat" then in use. Being transferred to the 6th U. S. Infantry, then stationed at Jefferson Barracks, Mo., I was retained as "leading fifer" until discharged. In the meantime I continued my drum practice, which was then taught according to the *School of Ashworth*. In after years I travelled as Small Drummer with the celebrated Edward Kendall while he was leader of Spalding and Rogers' Circus Band. I benefited from his superior qualifications as a drummer, and with the foregoing experience, I humbly submit my "Standard Drummer" to those who wish to become adepts in the art of drumming.

THE AUTHOR.

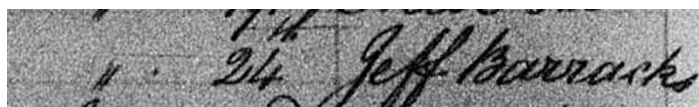
Daniel Decatur Emmett, Author of Dixie by Charles Burleigh Galbreath, 1904

Some have claimed that Clark was an African-American and was even responsible for the rudiment known as the flamacue today. The following facts and details will put these wild claims to rest, hopefully, and set the record straight.

Information about Clark's early life is hard to come by. According to the 1829 "Historic Register of Enlisted Soldiers of the Army," John Clark was born in New York, New York and was aged 24 years, which puts his birth around 1806. He had hazle eyes, dark hair, a dark complexion, and stood five feet six and one-quarter inches tall.



8. Clark	John J.	24	hazle	dark	dark	5 6 1/4	New York	New York	Soldier
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24	Jeff Barracks
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From what may be his first enlistment, Clark was assigned to the Jefferson Barracks as a “soldier,” which differs later in his career as we will see. The Jefferson Barracks were established on October 23, 1826 in modern day St. Louis. The barracks were set up to be what was called an “Infantry School of Practice.” Today, we would call it a basic training camp. Interestingly enough, the site had originally been called Vide Poche, which is French for “Empty Pockets.” As most of us know, Empty Pockets is a fife tune included in the Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide of 1862, of which Emmett would have been the contributor. Was this a “tip of the hat” to Emmett’s military beginnings, maybe, but that it best left for another writing.

Some of the fantasy created about Clark’s ethnicity seems to stem from the description of his complexion as “dark.” However, upon looking at the whole register, one quickly realizes that there were few adjectives used for this category: fair, light, dark, sandy, ruddy. During this time period, if Clark was of African descent, he would have been labeled as “negro” or “black.”

In the spring of 1829, headquarters of the 3rd Infantry was moved permanently to the Jefferson Barracks. This corresponds to the register notes that are part of Clark’s enlistment. Below shows his enlistment in the 3rd Infantry Company K, as well as his discharge on the 36th of March 1832 for what must have been some medical reason as “On Surgeon’s Certificate” is recorded. The original length of service was five years, so this discharge was approximately two years early.

A close-up of a handwritten entry in a military register. The text is written in cursive and reads: "3rd Inf Co. 36th March 32. On Surgeon's Certificate".

However, it does appear that John J. Clark reenlisted at Fort Jesup in Louisiana. Unfortunately, there is no indication of a date or year.

A close-up of a handwritten entry in a military register. The text is written in cursive and reads: "Re-enlistment At Fort Jesup. La.".

On October 28, 1833, Clark enlisted again in the army, this time as a musician. Undoubtedly the same John J. Clark from the 1829 enlistment since the physical descriptors are identical, along with the place of birth. This enlistment took place in Newport, Kentucky and lasted three years.

A close-up of a handwritten entry in a military register. The text is written in cursive and reads: "207 Clark, John J 27 hazle dark dark 5'6 1/2 No. Y. N. York Musician".

During his time at the barracks, John Clark married, perhaps for the first time. It is amazing that this small piece of paper survived almost 190 years, which is seen on the following page, granting Clark permission on November 16, 1835.

*John J. Clark, a Musician in the Army of
the United States, has my permission to marry.*

*Newport Barracks Ky.
November 16th 1835*

*Alex W Thompson
Major Eng*

The Newport Barracks is well known to those fascinated with military music from the 19th century. The barracks was established in 1803 by General James Taylor. During its time, it served as a prison, mustering location for militia, hospital, supply depot, and recruiting depot. This is where the young Dan Emmett first met John J. Clark and learned a great deal about rudimental drumming. Emmett referred to Clark as “Juba,” which also has been incorrectly interpreted. First of all, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Juba was a dance performed by slaves on southern plantations. Another, and probably more relevant definition, is “a style of rhythmic accompaniment.” I propose that the nickname given to Clark was more of a term of endearment that was related to his rudimental abilities, as opposed to some ethnic distinction. Along these lines, the 1840 census of Newport, Kentucky lists a John Clark in the category of “FREE WHITE PERSONS” between the ages of 30-40, which would correspond to Clark’s age at the time and location of where he was serving.

(No. 4.)

SCHEDULE of the whole number of persons within the division

NAMES OF HEADS OF FAMILIES.	FREE WHITE PERSONS, INCLUDING HEADS OF FAMILIES.																						
	MALES													FEMALES									
	Under 5	5 under 10	10 under 15	15 under 20	20 under 30	30 under 40	40 under 50	50 under 60	60 under 70	70 under 80	80 under 90	90 under 100	100 and upwards	Under 5	5 under 10	10 under 15	15 under 20	20 under 30	30 under 40	40 under 50	50 under 60	60 under 70	70 and upwards
<i>Amos Fleming</i>	25	205	197	157	268	182	111	49	26	13	2			238	172	157	123	177	116	71	49	26	1
<i>John Clark</i>	1				1									142	146	189		185	115				

Another enlistment for John J. Clark appears on June 1, 1842 for a period of five years. Again, the physical descriptions are almost identical to previous records, but on this particular enlistment his place of birth is listed as "Ireland" in the town of "Louth." I am unsure if this was a clerical error, or if bounty money or some other opportunity was afforded to him to provide another birth place.

He enlisted at Newport, now 34 years of age, and was discharged from there as well on June 1, 1847, ending his term of service.

NO.	NAMES.	Age	Eyes	Hair	Complexion	Feet	Inches	State, Empire, or Kingdom.	Town, County or Province.	Trade or Occupation.	When.	Where.	By whom.
		Years.											
95	Clinton James M.	28	grey	dark fair		5	11	No. Y.	Albany	Cooper	May 27	New Orleans	Lt. Ayers
6	Bunningham Francis	24	blue	chestnut		5	10	Pa	Philadelphia	Laborer	June 3		
7	Clark John J.	34	hazel	black dark		5	5	Ireland	Louth	Musician	1	Newport	Capt. Macrae
8	Cade John	25	"	brown rufous		5	5 1/2	Va	Frederick	Waggonmaker	3		
9	Conlough James	27	blue	"	dark	5	6	Ireland	Donegal	Laborer	6	Shipola	Van Horn
100	Cassady John	25	grey	dark		5	4		Cavan		7	Albany	Lt. Field

6 At Newport Barracks, N.Y. (A Musician)

This was not the end of Clark's service in the military. He enlists again in 1853 for another five years at the age of 52, once more at the Newport Barracks! When this term was completed, he enlisted for a fourth time. Unfortunately, that document was not found during my research.

28.

Descriptive and

NO.	NAMES.	WHERE BORN.		AGE.	Trade or Occupation.	ENLISTED.			
		Town, County, or Province.	State, Empire, or Kingdom.			When.	Where. (Town and State.)	By Whom.	Period.
45	Clark	New York	New York	52	Musician	1853. Sept. 3	Newport, Ky.	Col. Hoffman	years 5
6	Clark	Monteville, N. Y.	Kentucky	14					

At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Clark resumes his military role as a musician at the age of 60 for no less than three years, mustering in at Cincinnati. He was attached to the 15th Infantry Regiment.

80	Collier John	Wexford	Ireland	20	Laborer	Burlington, Vt.	Capt. M. Hatch	3	Grey	Slight	Slight	5 10
1	Clark John J.	New York	New York	60	Musician	Cincinnati	St. Smith	3	Dark	Grey	Dark	5 6 1/2
				14		Albany	Capt. Clay	3	Blue	Slight	Slight	5 7


The 15th Infantry Regiment of the Regular U.S. army was organized in May of 1861. It originally was attached to the Army of the Ohio and later became part of the 14th Corps. The 15th saw service at numerous key locations during the war such as Shiloh, Perryville, Stone's River, Chickamauga, and Chattanooga to name a few.

Amazingly, Clark enlists for the last time in 1864 at the ripe old age of 63! Little did he know the war would end before his enlistment, and he would be discharged by reason of "disability" in 1865.

R 3300 Coy	Joseph Johnson Co	Indiana	30 Soldier	"	2 Grand	St. Ia	"	Goodruff	"
R 1 Clark	John J	New York	New York	63 Mission	"	3 Albany	"	King	"
R 2 Foreman	Thomas	Indiana	Indiana	34 Soldier	"	5 St. 1	"	Pitt	"

As for the claim that Dan Emmett invented the flamacue, or John J. Clark somehow taught Emmett a style of syncopated drumming akin to the "Juba" rhythms performed on southern plantations is quite a stretch. First of all, the flamacue that appears in The Drummer's and Fifer's Guide published in 1862 by Bruce and Emmett contains two accents. Some have incorrectly interpreted the notation as containing examples of only one accent appearing in certain tunes. What is forgotten is the fact that each roll ends with an accented note. This is explained when Bruce describes how to play the 5-stroke roll.

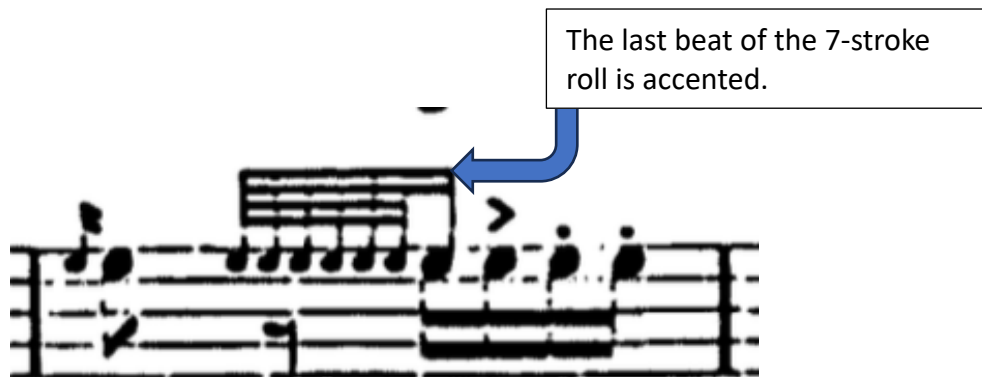
ROLL OF 5 STROKES

After learning the Long Roll, the pupil will commence the 5 stroke roll ; it is beat from hand to hand, the last stroke (which is a single one) being made a little harder than the four preceding, until brought to a close. This and the following lessons are written without regard to time ; the mark thus :  indicates the finish of a roll or beat.

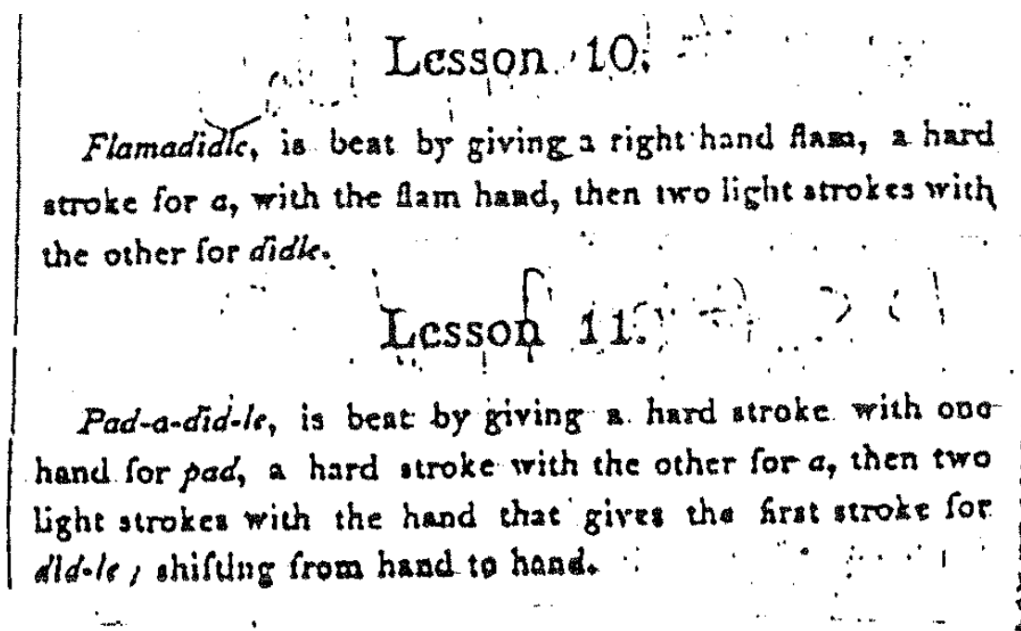
Furthermore, on page 10 and 11 of the manual under the title "RECAPITULATION OF THE PRECEDING ROLLS AND BEATS. AND THEIR APPEARANCE WHEN SET TO MUSIC." an example is provided of the "flamamacue" as thus:



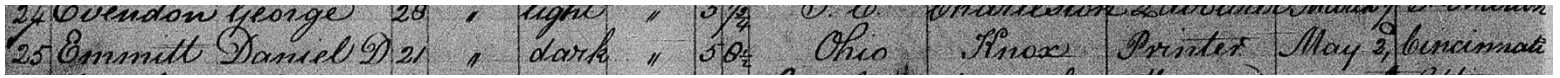
It is plain to see the accent pattern intended, but when the various rolls were placed for printing on the staff, no accent mark was needed since that note would naturally be accented anyway. One example of this is in the beating for the tune “THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME.” I am certain that the intent was for the performer to accent the first and second 16th notes of beat two, but the stems of the 7-stroke roll don’t leave enough room to place an accent. What also needs to be taken into account, and not really addressed in other writings that I’ve read, is the specialized type and complexity of the setting needed to print such a work. There are obvious errors in some of the notations, but it is amazing that something as musically sophisticated as this was produced at that time.



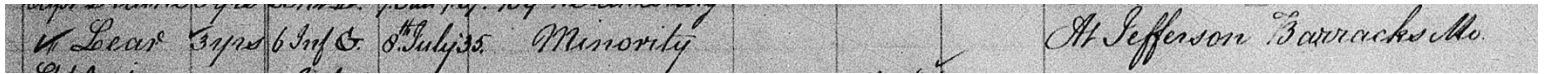
Now, accenting the first two notes as described above was nothing new to martial drumming in the United States. As early as 1817, David Hazeltine published, Instructor in Martial Music. This fife and drum manual contained no written notation for drum music, everything was explained in plain English. This is exceedingly helpful in terms of determining the accenting of the various beatings. As seen below in the descriptions of lessons 10 and 11, both the “Flamadidle” and “Pad-a-did-le” begin with two hard strokes, followed by two lighter strokes, identical to the latter termed flamacue. Regardless of sticking, the accent pattern and structure would be consistent.



In conclusion, John Clark undoubtedly was a proficient and experienced musician serving in the military for over three decades. He must have been a magnificent musician, even early in his career, when Dan Emmett first encountered him in 1834.



Handwritten military register entry for Daniel D. Emmett. The entry is on a lined form with columns for name, age, height, weight, color, hair, eyes, birthplace, occupation, and date of enlistment. The text reads: 25 Emmett Daniel D. 21 1 dark 5 8 1/2 Ohio Knox Printer May 2 Cincinnati



Handwritten note on a lined form. The text reads: 1st Lieut. 3 yrs 6 mts 8th July 35. Minority At Jefferson Barracks Mo.

He most certainly would have had an influence on him. Unfortunately, to say that it was Clark that invented the flamacue, or that he was a black man, is just pure nonsense that is not supported by the historical record.

Sources:

<https://www.fold3.com/sub-image/300846296/clark-john-j-us-army-register-of-enlistments-1798-1914>

Webb, Henry W.. "The Story of Jefferson Barracks." New Mexico Historical Review 21, 3 (1946).

Daniel Decatur Emmett, Author of Dixie by Charles Burleigh Galbreath, 1904

The Drummer's and Fifer's Guide by Dan D. Emmett and George B. Bruce, 1862

Instructor in Martial by David Hazeltine, 1817