

John Easterbrook and the War of 1812 British Soldier, American Soldier -- He was both!

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*Battle of the Thames and the Death of Tecumseh,
painted in 1833 by William Emmons; Source: Wiki, PD*

John Easterbrook, born in England in the eighteenth century, was a colorful character. Information from various public sources suggests that John had a strong independent streak. From time to time, this got him into trouble with authority figures. Clearly, his passion was music; he made it his career. What makes the man especially interesting is that he served on both sides of the conflict in the War of 1812. After the close of the war, John settled in Ohio where he raised his family and taught music in the schools.

The War of 1812, was a 2 ½ year conflict waged between the United States on one side and Great Britain and her allies on the other. On October 5, 1813, the Battle of the Thames, near present-day Chatham-Kent, Ontario, Canada, took place. American forces, under the leadership of General William Henry Harrison, primarily men of the 28th Infantry Regiment from Kentucky, attacked the British 41st Regiment of Foot, under the command of Major-General Henry Proctor. At this point in the war, the British soldiers had been reduced to half-rations. They were ill, exhausted, and demoralized. The regiment was easily routed by Harrison's mounted riflemen who charged through a single line of British soldiers and dismounted to assault the British from the rear. In the face of the onslaught, a majority of the men of the British 41st Regiment surrendered and were taken prisoner. (Proctor escaped, along with a few members of his staff; he was later severely criticized for his inept leadership.) The battle also resulted in the death of Tecumseh, the Shawnee leader of the Native American Confederation and an ally of the British. The Battle of the Thames was considered a decisive victory for the United States in the War of 1812.

John Easterbrook was one of those men of the British 41st Regiment who was taken prisoner. At this point, he was middle-aged and married, with a family in Canada. He had been with the Regiment since 1799 and had served in Canada for more than a dozen years. John had come to North America with the 41st Regiment, sailing on the transport ship *Asia* when it departed from the British Isles on August 17, 1799. It arrived in Quebec on October 24, 1799.

British War Office records, available at the British National Archives at Kew, London, England, together with a letter written to an Easterbrook descendant by a secretary at the Public Record Office on Chancery Lane in London, dated September 26, 1936, provide a snapshot of Easterbrook's military history. (A copy of the letter is in the possession of Susan McNelley.) According to these documents, John Easterbrook enlisted in the 41st Regiment of Foot, First Battalion at Rathkeale, County Limerick, Ireland on January 6, 1799. Easterbrook was promoted to sergeant the next day, but was reduced to private on May 13, 1800. The regiment went out to Canada in October of 1799. From September 1805 onwards, he is shown in the pay lists as serving with the band of the regiment. Easterbrook was promoted to corporal December 28, 1809; reduced to private December 3, 1810; again promoted to corporal September 25, 1812. He was taken prisoner at the Battle of the Thames on October 5, 1813. Easterbrook is listed as a deserter on November 24, 1813.

Toward the end of 1814, the prisoners from the 41st Regiment of Britain were exchanged and/or released and returned to their regiment. John Easterbrook, however, had chosen not only to stay in the United States but also to serve with the American forces. Other men of the 41st Regiment also chose to settle in Canada or in the United States, rather than return to Europe with their regiment. The record book shows that thirty-one other soldiers also deserted between October 25 and November 24, 1813.

Eamonn O'Keeffe, a military historian, observed that "good musicians were valuable commodities, and were typically treated well and awarded extra pay by a regiment's officers. Easterbrook may well have decided that service in the U.S. Army on such favorable terms was greatly preferable to a dreary existence in a POW camp." He also noted that Easterbrook was Corporal of the Band (second in command) and that only three of the 41st Regiment's eleven musicians evaded death, capture or serious injury during the War of 1812.

According to a U. S. Army Register of Enlistments, on July 1, 1814, John Easterbrook enlisted as a private in the 28th Regiment of the U.S. Infantry, under the command of Captain Joseph C. Belt, at Olympian Springs, Kentucky for a term of 5 years. It was noted that he was born in England and that he served as a musician. A physical description of John was included in his enlistment record. He was 5 feet, 3 1/2 inches tall, with blue eyes, dark hair, and a fair complexion. John Easterbrook was discharged on April 30, 1815.

John Easterbrook's life and military career has been outlined in three U.S. publications of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His story is found in a biographical sketch of John's grandson, Joseph M. Easterbrook, of Bellflower, Illinois in the *Portrait and Biographical Album of McLean County, Illinois* (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1887. p. 516-517.) It reads:

[John] was born in the city of London and was a leader in Gen. Proctor's band during the Irish rebellion; he also figured prominently in the War of 1812, having come to the

United States during its progress. He was captured by the troops of Gen. Harrison during the Battle of the Thames. He had been forced into the English army when quite young, against his own wishes, and after his capture by the Federals he foreswore allegiance to the King and joined the colonists, being given a Captain's commission by Gen. Harrison. After peace was declared he located at Cincinnati, Ohio, and followed the profession of music in the school of that city for a number of years, until he became quite aged. His death occurred in Fayette County, Ohio, after he had attained the advanced age of ninety six years.

Later in the article, the author notes that John Easterbrook

was left an orphan when quite young and was taken in charge by his uncle, Rev. Joseph Easterbrook, who was a minister in the Church of England. This gentleman gave him a father's care and sent him to school. About three months prior to his graduation he was out with other students 'sky-larking' in Lincoln, and he with six others were found with the King George sixpence in their pockets, and were forced to leave school and go into the army.

The author reports additionally that John's son George W. Easterbrook,

was born on the Atlantic Ocean while his parents were on their journey from England to the United States [should have been Canada]. . . . George was reared in Cincinnati and Ross County, and having received a good education, adopted school-teaching as a profession, which he followed nearly all his life.

The following sketch of John Easterbrook was published in *The Daily Pantagraph*, Bloomington, Il, dated November 19, 1938. (A similar article appeared in the same publication on May 31, 1941):

“John Easterbrook served as a clarinet player and a band leader for the British in the Irish rebellion. He later was captain of the marine band.”

“On October 5, 1813, John Easterbrook was taken prisoner by the Americans in the Battle of the Thames. when the exchange of prisoners was made between England and General Harrison, he refused to be exchanged and he finished the duration of the war on the American side, playing as a musician in the army band.”

During William H. Harrison's campaign for president, several bands were to meet the general's stage coach one mile out of Shelbyville, Ohio. There, General Harrison was to hear each band play one piece, then choose the one to lead him into the city. John Easterbrook's band without uniform and in an old wagon was last to play. John stood up, gave a bugle call on the clarinet and led his band. Immediately Harrison said, “that's Easterbrook's clarinet.” He climbed out of the stage coach and got in the wagon and rode into town with the band.”

“General Harrison brought all the prisoners back from the Battle of the Thames and the army was released at Cincinnati, Ohio and John remained there. He sent to Canada for his family. George, the son came but the mother and a daughter remained there. He never heard of them afterward. . . . John and his son settled in Ross County, Ohio, going from

there to Fayette county, near Washington Court House. John devoted his time to teaching band music.”

It is challenging to distinguish between fact, fiction, and unsubstantiated family lore in these published stories. There are a number of statements that public records have proven wrong. The veracity of other parts of the stories relies on family memories. In the absence of public documents, circumstantial evidence supports some accounts. On other points, family historians might have confused or forgotten details. With respect to Easterbrook’s musical abilities, the story concerning his meeting with General Harrison is delightful, even if unproven.

In the articles in *The Daily Pantagraph*, John Easterbrook’s clarinet is described as an E flat light-colored boxwood clarinet with ivory rings for trim. It had only 5 keys, as opposed to modern clarinets which have 17-19 keys. The clarinet has been a cherished family heirloom. It passed from John to his son George, and then to his grandson Joseph. In the first quarter of the 21st century, it remains in the custody of an Easterbrook descendant.

No public records have been discovered documenting any military service prior to Easterbrook’s enlistment with the 41st Regiment in January of 1799. This includes service in the Irish Rebellion, which lasted from May to September of 1798. However, there are some facts that add to the credibility of the story. First, this young man from Bristol enlisted in the 41st Regiment of Foot in Rathkeale, Ireland, just a few months after the end of the Irish Rebellion. He may have served in one of the British line regiments or fencibles sent to Ireland during the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and from there went on to enlist in the Forty-first Regiment of Foot. Second, the fact that he was promoted from private to sergeant the day after he enlisted in the 41st suggests he had significant military experience prior to joining.

The information on John’s family is decidedly inaccurate. John and Julia were the parents of four known children: John, Jr., Grace, George, and Harriet, all born between 1799 and 1808. Canadian church records, available on Ancestry.com, yield some important information. On May 5, 1801, Grace was baptized in the Anglican Christ Church Cathedral in Montreal. On her baptism record it states that she was the "daughter of John Easterbrook, musician in the 41st Regiment, and his wife, Julia." This is the only record found for Grace Easterbrook; she likely died in childhood. A burial record has surfaced in the archives of the Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral in Quebec. "John Easterbrook, son of John Easterbrook musician in His Majesty's Forty-First Regiment of Foot and of Julia his wife, aged four years, died October 29th and was buried October the 31st in the year of our Lord, one thousand, eight hundred and three." This suggests that John Jr. was born in Ireland, on the Atlantic crossing, or shortly after arrival in Canada. Harriet’s baptism is recorded on January 10, 1808 in the "Early Records of St. Marks and St. Andrew's Churches, Niagara," published by the Ontario Historical Society. No baptism record has been found for George. The reference in previous biographical sketches to his being born on the Atlantic Ocean might have referred to his older brother John. George Easterbrook’s obituary states that he was born in Toronto (At the time that George was born, the town was named York). This is more likely his place of birth.

The above church records confirm that Julia was with John Easterbrook in Quebec by 1800 and that in all probability she accompanied him on the troop transport in 1799. It is to be noted that every regiment in the British army set up limits on the number of soldier's families they were

willing to support. In 1799, the War Office established a limit for the number of families allowed to accompany a regiment abroad. The order stated: "*the lawful wives of soldiers* are permitted to embark in the proportion of Six to One Hundred Men, including Non-commissioned Officers." (Henderson, *A Soldier's Family*) With respect to John Easterbrook, it suggests that he lawfully married Julia before he departed Ireland in 1799 and that he was one of the lucky men who was allowed to bring his family to Quebec. No marriage record for the couple has been found. We also do not have Julia's surname. Unfortunately, the majority of Irish records were destroyed by fire in the Irish Civil War of 1922.

All three published biographical sketches state that John's wife Julia and daughter Harriet stayed in Canada and that only their son George followed his father to Cincinnati and settled in the United States. There are a number of records that show that Julia and Harriet also followed John to the United States and settled in Ohio. In the obituary for son George, it states that his parents emigrated with him to Ross County, Ohio, in 1813.

In the U.S. Census of 1820 for Union Township in Ross County, Ohio, there is a John Easterbrook listed as a head of household. There are four people in the household: 1 white male over age 45, 1 white female over age 45, 1 male age 10-15, and 1 female age 10-15.

John Easterbrook is listed as a teacher on page 43 of the 1829 *Robinson and Fairbank Cincinnati Directory*. (Source: The Virtual Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.) He is again listed as a school teacher in the *Cincinnati City Directory* of 1834. (Source: Ancestry.com, accessed on September 15, 2017)

Many years earlier, John Easterbrook appears in the records of Niagara Library, near Fort George, where the 41st Regiment had been stationed. (This library is recognized as Upper Canada's first circulating library.) John's name is listed among those who made payments to this subscription library, presumably to be able to check out and read the books it contained. (Source: Janet Carnochan, "Niagara Library, 1800-1820") Clearly, John was better educated than most individuals of that era.

In the U.S. Census of 1850 for Adams Township, Defiance County, Ohio, a John Easterbrook, age 87, listed as a music teacher, born in England, and Julia Easterbrook, age 78, born in Ireland, are living in the household of John (49) and Harriet (41) Hively and their children. Harriet is listed as born in Canada. There is a marriage record for Harriet Easterbrook and John Hively, dated July 25, 1826, in the Marriage Records of Ross County, Ohio, 1798-1849.

On April 22, 1853, a U. S. War Bounty Land Warrant (#7455) consisting of 160 acres near Defiance, OH was issued to "John Easterbrook musician in 27th U.S. Infantry, War of 1812" in recognition of military service.

Julia Easterbrook died on September 1, 1854 and was buried in the Spring Grove Cemetery of Cincinnati, Ohio. Her burial card notes that she was born in Ireland in 1770, that she died of "old age," and that she was the "wife of John." John and Julia had been together for more than fifty years! (Find A Grave and Spring Grove Cemetery Websites)

In the U.S. Census of 1860 for Union, Fayette County, OH, John Easterbrook (94) is living in the household of his son George Easterbrook. The aged musician died on November 8, 1861 and is buried in the Sugar Grove Cemetery in Fayette County, Ohio. (Find A Grave Website)

According to his gravestone, he was 96 years and two months when he died. Based on this information, he was born in September of 1765. However, John Easterbrook was not consistent in reporting his age. On the U.S. Army record of enlistment in 1814, he stated that his was age 36, indicating that he was born in 1778. In the U.S. Census of 1850, his age is given as 87, meaning he was born about 1763. In the U.S. Census of 1860, John's age is given as 94, suggesting that he was born in 1766.

Two items in the documents and published biographical sketches gave vital clues which enabled me to trace John Easterbrook's English roots. The War Office record #25/1768 includes the fact that he was born in Bristol and was a clerk by trade. In the *Portrait and Biographical Album of McLean County, Illinois* (compiled many years after John's death) it states, in error, that John Easterbrook was born in London. The McLean County biographical album also states that John "was left an orphan when quite young and was taken in charge by his uncle, Rev. Joseph Easterbrook, who was a minister in the Church of England. This gentleman gave him a father's care and sent him to school." This latter statement appears to be true. A fairly exhaustive search was made of existing public and church records of Bristol and the surrounding area. Indeed, John was orphaned at an early age. Unfortunately, the Rev. Joseph Easterbrook, who served as a father figure to John, died in 1791, at the age of 41. John, in his teens or twenties, must have felt very alone in the world. Given all of this information, one can understand his strongly-independent character. With a fair amount of certainty, John's ancestors can be traced back to his 2x great-grandfather Jacob Easterbrook who was born about 1650 and died on November 5, 1681 in Taunton, Somerset, England. John Easterbrook's English ancestry is the subject of another story!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Eamonn O'Keeffe and Eric Easterbrook for their contributions to this update of the Easterbrook story. Eric Easterbrook is a descendant of John Easterbrook through John's grandson Joseph Easterbrook. Eamonn O'Keeffe is a military historian currently researching the band of the 41st regiment.

SOURCES:

Casualty Lists, Records of the War Office, British National Archives, accessed in July, 2017: WO25/976 John Easterbrook's name, date of enlistment, and years of service are listed. WO 25/1270 John Easterbrook's name appears 3 times on pg 53 of the record. The following information is recorded on the ledger: On May 13, 1800 he was reduced from sergeant to private. On December 28, 1809 he was promoted to corporal. On December 3, 1810, he was reduced to private. On September 25, 1812, Easterbrook was promoted to corporal. Easterbrook is listed as a prisoner of war on October 5, 1813. WO25/1768 Information on John Easterbrook includes the fact that he was born in Bristol and was a clerk by trade, John Easterbrook is listed as deserted on November 24, 1813. Thirty-one other soldiers also deserted between October 25 and November 24, 1813. The record is faint and difficult to read. Easterbrook is listed as 4th from bottom.

Muster and Pay Lists, Records of the War Office, British National Archives, accessed in July, 2017:

WO12/5407 Pay list 1798-1799 John Easterbrook is listed as a sergeant beginning in January of 1799 and continues to be listed as a sergeant on the monthly pay lists through to the end of the year.

WO12/5408 Pay list 1800 John Easterbrook is listed every month. He was demoted from sergeant to private on May 13, 1800.

Registers of Enlistments in the United States Army 1798-1815. Original data from the National Archives. Published on Fold3 in 2013. Publication # M233. Record Group 94. Roll #4. Downloaded in 2014.)

George W. Easterbrook Obituary, *The Central Christian*, undated, no other details on the publication; a copy of the obit is in the possession of Susan McNelley.

Janet Carnochan, "Niagara Library, 1800-1820," *Niagara Historical Society*, No. 6, Niagara: Niagara Presses, 1900. p. 19. Accessed on Archive.org, September 20, 2017.

John and Julia Easterbrook Burial Records, *Find A Grave* and *Spring Grove Cemetery*, accessed online on September 26, 2017.

Land Warrant #7455, *U.S. War Bounty Land Warrants, 1789-1858*, NARA, Accessed on Ancestry.com September 15, 2017.

Portrait and Biographical Album of McLean County, Illinois. Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1887. p. 517.

Robert Henderson, "A Soldier's Family in the British Army during the War of 1812" *Access Heritage: Putting History in Your Hands, War of 1812*. Accessed online on September 20, 2017.

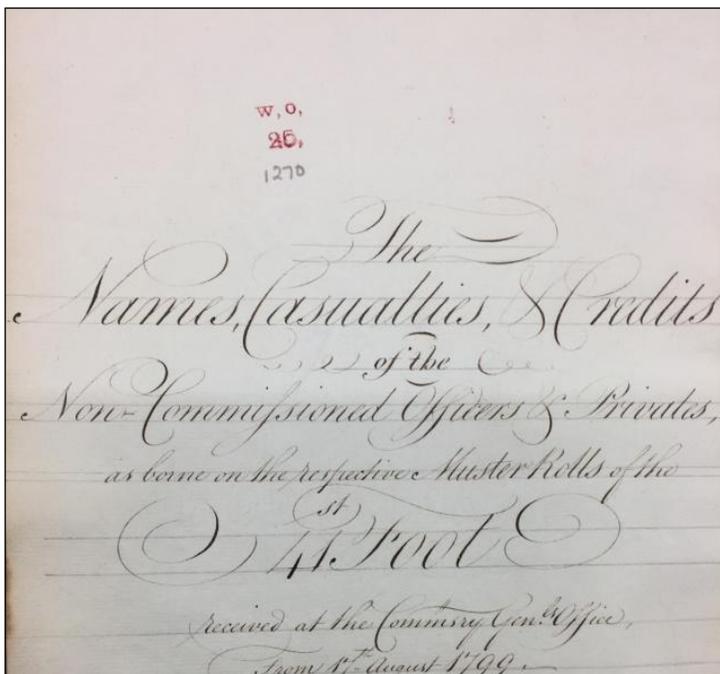
Tom Fournier, "The 41st Regiment of Foot: A Brief History of its Early Service Including the War of 1812 and an Overview of the Re-Created Military Living History Group." Pub: *The War of 1812 Magazine*, Issue 13. June 2010. Accessed online on September 20, 2017.

Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection) 1621-1968, Quebec Anglican Cathedral Holy Trinity, 1801-1803. Accessed on Ancestry.com, September 12, 2017.

"Clarinet Played in Many Wars," *The Daily Pantagraph*. Bloomington, Il, November 19, 1938.

"Select Final Winners in Relic Hunt Contest," *The Daily Pantagraph*. Bloomington, Il, May 31, 1941.

British 41st Regiment of Foot: War Office Record 25/1270



John Easterbrook's name appears four times on page 53 of this record. The following information is recorded on the page: On May 13, 1800 he was reduced from sergeant to private. On December 28, 1809 he was promoted to corporal. On December 3, 1810, he was reduced to private. On September 25, 1812, Easterbrook was promoted to corporal. At the bottom of the page, Easterbrook is listed as a prisoner of war on October 5, 1813. (Source: British National Archives)

Names	F. Casualties	Credits
John In ^o	Died 19 Sept: 1799	
Easterbrooke In ^o	S. To Priv. B. May 1800	
Coast Will ^m	Deserted 20 Aug ^r 1803	
Covert In ^o	Disch ^d 4 " "	
Edwards W ^m	To C 25 Feb ^r 1805	
Easterbrook In ^o	D ^o 28 Dec 1809	To P 3 Dec: 1810
Alamore Tho ^s	D ^o 5 July 1810	To P 26 Oct ^r
Ember Tho ^s	Died 13 Oct ^r " Montreal	
Elme Tho ^s	D ^o 27 Dec " "	
Evett In ^o	Deserted 20 May 1812.	
Easterbrook In ^o	To C 25 Sept: "	
Ellick John	Pris. of War 27: May 1813. America	
Osby Ja ^s	Missing since 2: Aug " D ^o	
Elkes Ja ^s	Pris. of War 30 Dec " , rejoined 23 Ap ^r 1814.	
Edmonds In ^o	To D 23 Ap ^r 1814	To P 12 July 1816.
Evenall Will ^m	Killed at Fort Erie America 15 Aug ^r 1813. Rejoined from pris. of War 1815	

1 st Battalion 1813 Cont ^d		
Encwright Dan ^o	Pris. of War	10 Sept ^r 1813
Easterbrook In ^o	C D ^o	5 Oct ^r "
Emery Ja ^s	D ^o	" " "

Canadian Church Records

Forty first Leaf
P. 40 B.

Easterbrook buried John, Son of John Easterbrook, Musician in
His Majesty's Forty first Regiment of Foot,
and of Julia his Wife, aged four years,
died October the Twentieth ninth, and was
buried October the Thirty first, in the
year of our Lord, One Thousand eight
Hundred and Three
by one Sattor Schomahat Inmountain
Deputy Chaplain to the Garrison of Quebec.

Present In. Easterbrook Father
Julia Easterbrook Mother her mark Y

Ann K Smith
marks

Easterbrook captized. Grace, daughter of John Easterbrook, Musician in the
41st Regiment, and Julia his Wife born on the 7th of May,
of. 1799, one thousand eight hundred and one, and
baptized on the 17th of May following

H. Mountain
Rector

John Easterbrook
Julia ^{her} Easterbrook
mark
Joseph Hony, by. W. Hony
Agnes Biggers
Luanna Pomer

The records of John Jr. and Grace provide evidence that John Easterbrook was serving as a musician with the 41st Regiment as early as 1801. They also strongly suggest that Julia came with her husband to Canada in 1799. These are the only records found for John Jr. and Grace Easterbrook. It is believed that Grace as well as John Jr. died in childhood. John Jr.'s burial record, dated October 31, 1803, was found at the Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral in Quebec. Grace was baptized at the Christ Church Anglican Cathedral on May 17, 1801 in Montreal. Source of records: Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection) 1621-1968, Accessed on Ancestry.com, September 12, 2017.

Bounty Land Grant issued to John Easterbrook in 1853

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The United States of America,
To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting:

Whereas, In pursuance of the Act of Congress, approved September 28th, 1850, entitled "An Act granting Bounty Land to certain Officers and Soldiers who have been engaged in the Military Service of the United States," Warrant No. 7455 for 160 acres, issued in favor of John Easterbrook Musician in Company Seventy United States Infantry War 1812

has been returned to the GENERAL LAND OFFICE, with evidence that the same has been duly located upon the South East quarter of Section Fourteen in Township Three North of Range Eleven East in the District of Lands subject to sale at Defiance Ohio containing One hundred and Sixty Acres

according to the Official Plat of the Survey of the said Lands returned to the GENERAL LAND OFFICE by the SURVEYOR GENERAL: Which has been assigned to John Wensel

Now Know Ye, That there is therefore granted by the UNITED STATES unto the said John Wensel

the tract of Land above described: TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said tract of Land, with the appurtenances thereof, unto the said John Wensel and to his

heirs and assigns forever.

In Testimony Whereof, I, Franklin Pierce
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, have caused these Letters to be made Patent, and the SEAL OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE to be hereunto affixed.

GIVEN under my hand, at the CITY OF WASHINGTON, the
Twenty Second day of April
in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred
and fifty three and of the INDEPENDENCE
OF THE UNITED STATES the seventy-seventh

SEAL



Source: Military Warrant Accession #MW-0664-426, Document # 7455 for the State of Ohio, issued on April 22, 1853. Downloaded from the website of the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management General Land Office Records on January 22, 2011. As noted above, and for reasons unknown, the 160 acres were returned to the Land Office and reissued to John Wensel.