

The Double A's



Before their friendship disintegrated into a bitter political and personal rivalry, Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton were an accomplished fiddling duo. “Alex and Aaron” – or, sometimes, “Aaron and Alex” or even “The Double A’s” – played countless country fairs, medicine shows and chamber music festivals, first in the New York metropolitan area, and later venturing out as far west as the Indiana Territory. Many musicologists called them the first crossover band because they peppered their performances with both classical and old-timey music. The duo slid effortlessly from elegant renditions of The Poltergeist Polka to the ram-bunctiously rockabilly “Harriett was a Harridan” without missing a beat. They turned “Alknomook,” the death song of the Cherokee Indians, into a toe-tappin’ bergamasca. And they invariably had audiences whoopin’ an’ hollerin’ when they blended “My Poor Dog, Quantoo” with the patriotically over-the-top song, “The Federal Constitution and Liberty Forever.” At a benefit concert for a stocks manufacturer in Boondock, Connecticut, the duo was discovered by the Flederer Family Circus, which was in residence there. And it was there that their sparring began in earnest. Al and Aaron both fell hard for Lintlady, who was an antecedent of Yarngirl (though much less successful in terms of public acceptance). Typically, the two men would begin a set, catch sight of Lintlady in the audience, and immediately attempt to impress her by upstaging the other fiddler. Trouble was, neither was quite good enough of a musician to pull off a decent improvisation. As a consequence, their performances suffered. And each player, naturally, blamed the other. The Flederer at the time was an upstart young circus going against more established brands and any dissension within its ranks could harm its long-term growth strategy. So The Double A’s were demoted from the center ring to the sideshow and warned to “get a grip.” Instead, they griped, incessantly. Neither management nor the customers were amused, so Al and Aaron were fired. They both went their separate ways, only to meet one last time on a fateful, foggy morning in 1804 on a high wire stretched over the Weehawken Inlet to the New Jersey Sea. Which, naturally, is another story.