

CLARA BARTON

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BASIC BIOGRAPHY

Clara Barton (1821–1912) grew up in North Oxford, Massachusetts. She began her career as a teacher at age 15. She moved to Washington, D.C. to work as a clerk at the U.S. Patent Office. As the Civil War broke out, she collected supplies for soldiers. In 1862, the U.S. Army granted her permission to bring food and medical supplies to field hospitals on the front without government support, earning her the nickname, “Angel of the Battlefield.” In 1864, General Benjamin Butler appointed her superintendent of the nurses. Following the war, she established the Bureau of Records of Missing Men of the Armies of the United States, locating over 22,000 missing men and reuniting them with families. In 1869 she traveled to Geneva, Switzerland as member of the the International Committee of the Red Cross. She returned to the United States and founded the American Red Cross in 1881. She remained president of the organization until 1904.

KEY EVENTS

U.S. Civil War, Bureau of Records of Missing Men of the Armies of the United States (1865), American Red Cross (1881)

KEY PEOPLE

Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After the Civil War, the U.S. faced unprecedented numbers of men killed, wounded, and disabled. Many organizations developed to help raise money to honor the memory of those killed and support men who survived. Clara Barton wrote the following poem as a toast to women who served in the Civil War. It was first presented at a gala dinner held in 1892 by the Women’s Relief Corps (the official auxiliary organization for the Grand Army of the Republic) and was later printed in many newspapers and magazines. The goal of the members of the Women’s Relief Corps, many of whose husbands had served in the Civil War, was to ensure that all Civil War veterans were honored and remembered. They helped maintain battlefields and cemeteries and erected many monuments to Union troops.

FUN FACT

The original intent of the Red Cross was to serve as a neutral aid provider during armed conflicts. However, Clara Barton believed the American Red Cross should also provide aid to natural disaster victims. In 1884, at the Third International Red Cross Conference, the Geneva Treaty was amended to allow the Red Cross to provide aid to natural disaster victims. This amendment became known as the “American Amendment.”



Clara Barton, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing left, c. 1870, Library of Congress (93513632), <https://www.loc.gov/item/93513632/>

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

- Make and distribute one copy of the poem to each student.
- Ask each student to read the poem silently. As they read, ask them to highlight five examples of perseverance by women described in the poem.
- Share findings/responses with a partner prior to a whole-class discussion.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

- Ask each student to assume the role of a woman in the audience at the time of Barton’s reading the poem.
- Engage the class in a deep-dive of the document using the noted sections as a guide with the following questions:
 - » What were the common assumptions about women and battle during war (lines 1–23)?
 - » How did the Civil War change these assumptions (lines 24–29)?
 - » What actually became the role of women in battle (lines 30–69)?
 - » How should we view the women of the Civil War (lines 70–81)?
 - » How did Barton connect women’s courage to the Red Cross Movement (lines 82–91)?
- Ask students, *The role of women in the U.S. military has changed substantially since the Civil War. How do you think men and women serving in today’s armed forces would react to Barton’s poem?*



Miss Clara Barton (named after the Red Cross founder) was a nurse from Grand Rapids, Michigan who cared for wounded World War I American soldiers at American Military Hospital #5 in Auteuil, France. Photograph by Lewis Wickes Hine, September 1918, Library of Congress (LC-DIG-anrc-17328), <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2017682327/>

Learn more about the Geneva Treaty and Clara Barton's role here: <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2014/12/17/remembering-the-geneva-convention-through-the-words-of-clara-barton/>.

LOCAL CONNECTION

You can visit Clara Barton's home, Glen Echo, in Maryland, where she spent the last 15 years of her life. Her home served as the first headquarters for the American Red Cross. To learn more, go to <https://www.nps.gov/clba/index.htm>.

You can also visit the Missing Soldiers Office Museum in Washington, D.C. where Clara Barton set up headquarters after the Civil War to help soldiers reunite with their families. To learn more go to <http://www.clarabartonmuseum.org/>.

LEARN MORE

PRIMARY SOURCES

Clara Barton Papers
Library of Congress
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/clara-barton-papers/about-this-collection/>

Clara Barton Papers
Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries
<https://digital.lib.umd.edu/archivesum/actions.DisplayEADDoc.do?source=MdU.ead.histms.0015.xml>

SECONDARY SOURCES

Clara Barton
American Red Cross
<http://www.redcross.org/about-us/who-we-are/history/clara-barton>

Clara Barton
National Women's History Museum
<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/clara-barton>

CLARA BARTON, “THE WOMEN WHO WENT TO THE FIELD,” NOVEMBER 18, 1892

The women who went to the field, you say,
The women who went to the field; and pray
What did they go for? just to be in the way!-
They'd not know the difference betwixt work and play,
What did they know about war anyway? 5
What could they do? - of what use could they be?
They would scream at the sight of a gun, don't you see?
Just fancy them round where the bugle notes play,
And the long roll is bidding us on to the fray.
Imagine their skirts 'mong artillery wheels, 10
And watch for their flutter as they flee 'cross the fields
When the charge is rammed home and the fire belches hot;-
They never will wait for the answering shot.
They would faint at the first drop of blood, in their sight.
What fun for us boys, -(ere we enter the fight;) 15
They might pick some lint, and tear up some sheets,
And make us some jellies, and send on their sweets,
And knit some soft socks for Uncle Sam's shoes,
And write us some letters, and tell us the news.
And thus it was settled by common consent, 20
That husbands, or brothers, or whoever went,
That the place for the women was in their own homes,
There to patiently wait until victory comes.

But later, it chanced, just how no one knew,
That the lines slipped a bit, and some 'gan to crowd through; 25
And they went, - where did they go? - Ah; where did they not?
Show us the battle, - the field, - or the spot
Where the groans of the wounded rang out on the air
That her ear caught it not, and her hand was not there,

Who wiped the death sweat from the cold, clammy brow, 30
And sent home the message; - "'T is well with him now"?
Who watched in the tents, whilst the fever fires burned,
And the pain-tossing limbs in agony turned,
And wet the parched tongue, calmed delirium's strife
Till the dying lips murmured, " My Mother," " My Wife"! 35
And who were they all? - They were many, my men:
Their record was kept by no tabular pen:
They exist in traditions from father to son.
Who recalls, in dim memory, now here and there one.-
A few names where writ, and by chance live to-day; 40
But's a perishing record fast fading away.
Of those we recall, there are scarcely a score,
Dix, Dame, Bickerdyke, - Edson, Harvey and Moore,
Fales, Wittenmeyer, Gilson, Safford and Lee,
And poor Cutter dead in the sands of the sea; 45
And Frances D. Gage, our "Aunt Fanny" of old,
Whose voice rang for freedom when freedom was sold.

And Husband, and Etheridge, and Harlan and Case,
 Livermore, Alcott, Hancock and Chase,
 And Turner, and Hawley, and Potter and Hall, 50
 Ah! the list grows apace, as they come at the call:
 Did these women quail at the sight of a gun?
 Will some soldier tell us of one he saw run?
 Will he glance at the boats on the great western flood,
 At Pittsburgh and Shiloh, did they faint at the blood? 55
 And the brave wife of Grant stood there with them then,
 And her calm, stately presence gave strength to his men.
 And Marie of Logan; she went with them too;
 A bride, scarcely more than a sweetheart, 'tis true.
 Her young cheek grows pale when the bold troopers ride. 60
 Where the "Black Eagle" soars, she is close at his side,
 She staunches his blood, cools the fever-burnt breath,
 And the wave of her hand stays the Angle of Death;
 She nurses him back, and restores once again
 To both army and state the brave leader of men. 65
 She has smoothed his black plumes and laid them to sleep,
 Whilst the angels above them their high vigils keep:
 And she sits here alone, with the snow on her brow -
 Your cheers for her comrades! Three cheers for her now.

And these were the women who went to the war: 70
 The women of question; what did they go for?
 Because in their hearts God had planted the seed
 Of pity for woe, and help for its need;
 They saw, in high purpose, a duty to do,
 And the armor of right broke the barriers through. 75
 Uninvited, unaided, unsanctioned ofttimes,
 With pass, or without it, they pressed on the lines;
 They pressed, they implored, till they ran the lines through,
 And this was the "running" the men saw them do.
 'T was a hampered work, its worth largely lost; 80
 'T was hindrance, and pain, and effort, and cost:

But through these came knowledge, - knowledge is power.-
 And never again in the deadliest hour
 Of war or of peace shall we be so beset
 To accomplish the purpose our spirits have met. 85
 And what would they do if war came again?
 The scarlet cross floats where all was blank then.
 They would bind on their "brassards" and march to the fray,
 And the man liveth not who could say to them nay;
 They would stand with you now, as they stood with you then, 90
 The nurses, consolers, and saviours of men.

Clara Barton, "The Women Who Went to the Field," November 18, 1892, Clara Barton National Historic Site, National Park Service