

## CLARA BARTON



Clara Barton was honored during her lifetime and is still honored as one of the great women of America. She was a true pioneer. She began teaching school at a time when most teachers were men. She won the right to have a desk job in an office of the federal government in Washington. Previously, women had been required to carry their work home.

Her greatest pioneering began when she was nearly 40 years old. Soon after the outbreak of the Civil War, Miss Barton's eyes were opened to the needs of people in distress and to the ways in which she and other volunteers could give help. This vision dominated the rest of Miss Barton's long life. By the force of her personal example, she cleared the path to new fields of volunteer service - especially volunteer service by women - for people in trouble.

An intense devotion to the aim of serving others led her on to enough achievements to fill several ordinary lifetimes.

### **Civil War Service**

Miss Barton was working in Washington when the first units of federal troops poured into the city in 1861. The war was young, the troops newly recruited, the population alarmed and confused. Miss Barton saw the need for immediate personal service to the men in uniform. Some were wounded, some hungry and some without bedding or any clothing except what they had on their backs. She collected some of the necessary articles herself, appealed for more and learned how to store and distribute them. Miss Barton paid equal attention to giving personal services to keep up the men's spirits by reading to them, writing letters for them, listening to their personal problems, praying with them.

She kept after leaders in both the government and the army until she was given a pass to carry volunteer services to battlegrounds and field hospitals. After the battle at Cedar Mountain, she appeared at a field hospital at midnight with a four mule team load of supplies. Wrote the surgeon, "I thought that night if heaven ever sent out a holy angel, she must be the one - her assistance was so timely." Thereafter, she was known as "The Angel of the Battlefield."

At Fredericksburg, she tended Confederate wounded and then, crossing the Rappahannock on a bridge shaken by artillery fire, went to help a Federal surgeon. A bursting shell tore her clothing. On reaching the field hospital, she gave comfort and care to the wounded and dying through the night and into the next day. At Antietam, by ordering the driver of her supply wagon to "follow

the cannon," she brought food, dressings to the surgeons who had none left and lanterns to light the work of the medical staff at night. She herself nursed, comforted and cooked food for the wounded. She wrote, "The point I always tried to make was to succor the wounded until medical aid and supplies could come up. I could run the risk. It made no difference to anyone if I were shot or taken prisoner."

Her interest in her "soldier boys" as individuals and the multitude of services she performed for them gave her a great deal of information about the men and the regiments to which they belonged. Toward the end of the war, she was writing many letters to families who had inquired about men reported missing. Again, she had realized a need and had set out to do something practical in response to it. President Lincoln wrote the following note in the month before he was assassinated - "To the Friends of Missing Persons: Miss Clara Barton has kindly offered to search for the missing prisoners of war. Please address her at Annapolis, giving her the name, regiment and company of any missing prisoner." The service anticipated one of the worldwide operations of today's International Red Cross.

One further achievement climaxed Miss Barton's Civil War activity. She proposed that a national cemetery be created around the graves of the men who died in Andersonville Prison and that the graves be marked where names were known. She also proposed that the unknown be memorialized. Here she anticipated the honor now symbolized by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. After Miss Barton had helped to raise the flag over the Andersonville grounds at their dedication in 1865, she wrote, "I ought to be satisfied. I believe I am." Coming events were to show, however, that she would never be satisfied except by responding again and again to the call of human need.

### **The International Red Cross**

When Miss Barton sailed for Europe in 1869 in search of rest, she found a still wider field of service. Friends in Geneva, Switzerland introduced her to the Red Cross idea and she read for the first time the famous book *A Memory of Solferino* by Henri Dunant, founder of the Red Cross movement. That movement called for international agreements for the protection of the sick and wounded during wartime without respect to nationality and for the formation of voluntary national societies to give aid on a neutral basis. The first treaty embodying Dunant's idea had been drawn up in Geneva in 1864. This has been called the Geneva Treaty, the Red Cross Treaty and the Geneva Convention. Later, Miss Barton fought hard and successfully for the signing of this treaty by the United States.

A more immediate call to action came to her with the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. Though not yet allied to the Red Cross, she knew the needs of war and went to the war zone with volunteers of the International Red Cross. To protect herself with the internationally accepted symbol, she used a red ribbon she was wearing and made a cross to pin on her coat. It was characteristic that the first Red Cross symbol she wore was one she made herself. She helped to distribute relief supplies to the destitute in the conquered city of Strassburg. She also opened workrooms where the inhabitants of the city could help themselves by making new clothes, thus anticipating the production of great quantities of clothes and comfort articles by today's American Red Cross. Later, she distributed relief in many French cities.

## **Founding and Leading the American Red Cross**

After her return to the United States, Miss Barton corresponded with Red Cross officials in Switzerland. They looked on her as the natural leader for carrying the Red Cross movement to this country and for influencing the United States government to sign the Geneva Treaty. In 1877, the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross sent her a letter addressed to the President of the United States, asking her to present it. Although she presented the letter, the administration of President Hayes looked on the Geneva Treaty as a possible entangling alliance. She was determined and kept up her efforts until President Arthur signed and the Senate ratified the treaty in 1882.

In 1881, Miss Barton and a group of supporters formed the American Association of the Red Cross as a District of Columbia corporation. Reincorporated as the American National Red Cross in 1893, the organization was given charters by the Congress in 1900 and in 1905. The 1905 charter and its amendments provide for close working relations between the federal government and the American Red Cross.

The American Red Cross, with Miss Barton at its head, devoted itself largely to disaster relief for the first 20 years of its existence. The Red Cross flag was flown officially for the first time in this country in 1881 when Miss Barton was appealing for funds to aid victims of forest fires in Michigan. In 1884, she chartered steamers to take supplies down the Ohio and Mississippi to help flooded families. In 1889, she helped to relieve Johnstown, Pennsylvania after its great flood. In 1892 she organized assistance for Russians suffering from famine and, in 1896, directed disaster relief operations in Turkey and Armenia.

Miss Barton introduced the idea of Red Cross disaster relief to many other national societies, and many foreign countries honored her with decorations. She was one of three United States delegates to the Third International Red Cross Conference in Geneva in 1884 - the only woman delegate present. Her personality and prestige influenced the proceedings of numerous other International Red Cross Conferences.

The most significant act of Miss Barton during her closing years as head of the American Red Cross was to take Red Cross supplies and services to Cuba during the Spanish-American War on a specially chartered ship. Aid was given to the American forces, to prisoners of war and to Cuban refugees. This effort was the first step toward the broad programs of service to the armed forces and to civilians during wartime that have become traditional in the American Red Cross. On resigning as president of the organization in 1904, Miss Barton left an impressive foundation of service to humanity for others to build upon.

## **A Life of Contrasts**

Clara Barton, born in North Oxford, Massachusetts, lived from Christmas Day 1821 to April 12, 1912. She spent her last days at her home in Glen Echo, Maryland.

In addition to leading the Red Cross, Miss Barton interested herself in other fields - education, prison reform, temperance and womens' suffrage. Her force and independent spirit created opponents. Her high principles, good sense, tenderness and charm attracted and held many friends. Periods of illness sometimes struck her down, but she revived again and again. When she

was well, she rose before dawn and worked until late at night. As a child, she was timid in some ways but bold in others such as riding horseback. She was slight in body. Though rather plain in looks, she had bright brown eyes. She liked dashes of bold color in her clothes. Even before she began wearing a red cross, she preferred a touch of red in her costume. "It's my color," she is quoted as saying.

Miss Barton had a talent for words. She was ready to spell three syllable words when she started school at the age of four and wrote prolifically throughout her life. Although she disliked public speaking, she learned how to stir great audiences. She overcame the shyness of her youth so that she could gain the attention of generals and presidents. By her actions, she spelled out the meaning of mercy. By her words, she impressed her cause and her personality upon her country and upon the world.