

The Civil War**Biography**

Clara Barton

1821–1912



WHY SHE MADE HISTORY Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross. Her care for wounded soldiers during the Civil War earned her the name "Angel of the Battlefield."



As you read the biography below, consider the unique nature of Barton's accomplishments before, during, and after the Civil War. How did Barton's life differ from other women of her day?



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Women in the North and South made important contributions during the Civil War. Some actually enlisted to fight disguised as men. Some served as spies. Others worked in factories, farms, and businesses, providing food and supplies for the war effort. Thousands of women worked as nurses in hospitals caring for the wounded. Clara Barton went one step further, caring for wounded soldiers on the battlefield.

Clara Barton was born in 1821 in Massachusetts. Barton's early family life was unstable. Later in life she remembered her childhood as an unhappy one. A shy girl, Barton's parents encouraged her to become a schoolteacher. Barton taught for 10 years; then completed her studies at the Clinton Liberal Institute in New York. When Barton returned to teaching in New Jersey in 1852, she was asked to start a system of free public schools. As school attendance grew, townspeople felt it was no longer proper for a woman to serve as principal. Barton was replaced by a man. As a result, she suffered the first of a series of nervous breakdowns.

In 1854 Barton moved to Washington, D.C., and took a job at the Patent Office. Once again, she excelled in her work. Barton demanded and received pay equal to that of male employees. Barton was in Washington at the start of the Civil War and was determined to support the Union. She collected supplies for soldiers stationed in the capital. Her determination to help on the front lines grew as she heard about conditions there. The War Department did not want women on the battlefield. However, Barton, with the help of some important politicians, got permission to go.

From 1861 to 1865, Clara Barton tended the wounded and dying at some of the Civil War's greatest battles. In her words she worked "anywhere between the bullet and the hospital." Barton fed the wounded, ran supply lines, removed bullets, and held the hands of the dying. During the Battle

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of Antietam, she assisted in surgery and dressed wounds with green corn leaves when there were no more bandages. The chief surgeon wrote that, "In my feeble estimation, General McClellan, with all his laurels, sinks into insignificance beside the true heroine of the age, the angel of the battlefield."

Barton worked until the end of the war, traveling with the army as far south as Charleston. In 1865 President Lincoln asked her to set up a bureau of records to help search for missing soldiers. When she traveled to Switzerland to rest in 1869, Barton learned about the International Red Cross. In 1870 she worked with the Red Cross to distribute relief supplies to victims of the Franco-German War.

When Barton returned to the U.S. in 1873, she worked to organize the American Association of the Red Cross. Barton served as president of the Red Cross from its founding in 1881 until 1904. During the Spanish-American War, Barton, at the age of 77, went to Cuba to supervise Red Cross efforts. Clara Barton died at the age of 90 in her home in Maryland. She is buried less than a mile from her birthplace.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Identify** How did Clara Barton serve the Union army?

2. **Contrast** How did Clara Barton's life differ from the lives of most women who lived during the late 1800s?

ACTIVITY

As a class, watch part of a film about the Civil War. Before viewing, list three or four questions you have about the war or things you expect to learn from the film. As you watch the movie, write down any answers you learn about your questions. When the movie is over, discuss your questions and comments as a class. What did you learn that was new or surprising?