



Montgomery County *Commission for Women*

**Clara Barton
(1821-1912)**



Founder of:

- [The American Red Cross](#)
- **The National First Aid Society**

School teacher, women's suffrage advocate, Civil War nurse, pioneering humanitarian

Clara Barton was born in December 1821, in North Oxford, Massachusetts. She was the daughter of a farmer and miller who was a believer in abolitionism and the importance of education, and of a mother who was outspoken on women's rights. Barton was educated at home and began teaching at the age of 15, when she established a school for the children of the workers at her father's sawmill. She attended the Liberal Institute at Clinton, New York (1850-51), and in 1852 she established in Bordentown, New Jersey, a free school, being a supporter of the public school movement. From 1854 to 1857, she was employed by the [U.S. Patent Office](#) in Washington, D.C. During the Civil War, Barton worked independently to organize facilities securing medicine and supplies for men wounded in the Union Army at Cedar Mountain, Bull Run, Chantilly, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Hilton Head, the Wilderness, and Petersburg. Barton got permission to pass through the battle lines to distribute supplies, search for the missing, and nurse the wounded. In the beginning, she performed her work initially without government support or assistance. She became known as "The Angel of the Battlefield." In 1864, Barton was appointed Superintendent of Nurses for the Army of the James. In 1865, at the request of President Lincoln, she set up a bureau of records to aid in the search for missing men.

Historians say that Barton tracked down 22,000 men from 1865 to 1868. Barton also delivered lectures on her war experiences. She met Susan B. Anthony and began a long association with the women's rights and suffrage movement. Barton also became involved in the work of Frederick Douglass, a prominent abolitionist.

In 1869, Barton went to Europe, becoming associated with the [International Red Cross](#), distributing supplies in France and Germany during the Franco-Prussian war. She was honored by the German Emperor with the Iron Cross of Merit for her efforts. After her return to the United States in 1873, Barton campaigned for the United States to sign the Geneva Agreement on the treatment of the sick, wounded, dead in battle, and the handling of the prisoners of war, and focused on creating an American Red Cross. She carried out this enterprise practically alone, educating the public through brochures and speeches, and calling cabinet heads and members of Congress. Her hard work paid off, and in 1881, she established the American Association of the Red Cross, known after 1893 as the American National Red Cross.

John D. Rockefeller donated money to create a national headquarters in Washington, D.C., located one block from the White House. Barton served as its president until 1904. While presiding over the Red Cross, she realized that its services could be utilized as well in peace time as in war. She then wrote the American amendment to the constitution of the Red Cross, which provided for the distribution of relief not only in war but in times of calamities such as famines, floods, earthquakes, cyclones, and pestilence. Today, the Red Cross continues Barton's message of bringing relief and help wherever it is needed.

Barton devoted her life to the cause that she created, soliciting contributions, and taking to the field with relief workers as late as the Spanish-American War in Cuba, when she was 77 years old. She also spent six weeks on the scene of the Galveston, Texas floods, at age 79. In 1904, at the age of 82, she resigned from her post. After she retired from the Red Cross, she organized the National First Aid Society.

Barton spent the rest of her life at Glen Echo, in Montgomery County, Maryland. This house served as her home, the first permanent headquarters for the American Red Cross, and a warehouse for disaster relief supplies. In 1975, it was established as the [Clara Barton National Historical Site](#). Barton died at the age of 91 in 1912. She was inducted into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame in 1987. The purpose of the Hall of Fame is to honor Maryland women who have made unique and lasting contributions to the economic, political, cultural, and social life of the State, and to provide visible models of achievement for future women leaders.

SOURCES

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