

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## CLARA BARTON AMERICAN RED CROSS FOUNDER



Whenever disaster strikes, the faithful volunteers of the Red Cross are there to help. After a flood, fire, hurricane or other disaster, they distribute food, water and supplies to get the victims back on their feet. To many people, the Red Cross is a light of hope during the darkest days. Would you be surprised to know that the American Red Cross started with a shy, tiny woman who barely weighed one hundred pounds? Her name was Clara Barton.

Clarissa Barton was born on December 25, 1821 in North Oxford, Massachusetts. As the youngest of five children, young Clara often felt as if she had six parents instead of two. Her older sisters were schoolteachers when Clara was born. They taught her everything they knew and found the little girl to be an eager pupil, always asking questions.

As a child, Clara Barton was painfully shy, partly because she had a speech impediment called a *lisp*, which made it hard for her to pronounce the letter “s”. She would later write that she remembered “nothing but fear” about her childhood. It was a problem her family couldn’t seem to help her overcome.

Her family decided Clara should attend boarding school. It would help her learn to talk to people, and to stop being afraid. While Clara was eager to be off on this adventure, it soon ended in disappointment. Clara was too afraid to talk to any of the other girls. When several of her classmates made a joke, pretending Clara had borrowed one girl’s bracelet and asking to have it back, she fainted. Soon, she was on her way home. Once again, her family was worried. What would become of Clara? What would she do with her life?

Clara had always been close to her brother David. He taught her to ride horseback, explore caves, and swing from the beams in the barn. When David was injured in a fall, Clara surprised her family by offering to care for him. The doctor decided to use leeches to “cure” David. It was a common treatment of the day; doctors thought that leeches, a kind of bloodsucking worm that live in ponds, could be used to suck the “bad” blood from a sick patient. No one expected shy Clara to take on this awful job, but she did. While taking care of her brother, Clara forgot to be afraid. It was a solution Clara would use throughout her life. If she “forgot” to think about herself, she was not afraid.

After David was well, Clara tried school again. This time, shy Clara overcame her fears and had a wonderful time with her classmates. She also got a reputation as a “little nurse” for her help with injured animals and sick cousins during a diphtheria epidemic.

By the time she was seventeen, Clara had begun to wonder what to do with her life. Her parents consulted a phrenologist to find out what she should do. A *phrenologist* was a person studied the shape of a person’s head to make predictions about what they were suited for in life. “Clara should be a teacher,” he advised.

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***CLARA BARTON, CONTINUED***

In 1839, seventeen-year-old Clara began teaching at a one-room schoolhouse in North Oxford, Massachusetts. She had forty pupils and enjoyed her school days as “Miss Barton”. After teaching for ten years, she looked around for another challenge. She enrolled at the Clinton Liberal Institute in Clinton, New York, where she studied French, German, ancient history, and science.

She later taught in New Jersey, but left the profession after a bitter disappointment. When a new school was built in Bordentown, Clara Barton felt she had earned the right to become principal. The job went to a man instead. Sick, discouraged, and suffering from a loss of enthusiasm for life, Barton decided she needed a drastic change and moved to Washington, DC.

In July 1854, Barton became a clerk in the Patent Office. She was paid ten cents for every one hundred words she copied from patent applications, requests, and research. It was work she enjoyed, but Barton felt she could do more with her life. She wanted a greater purpose, a bigger challenge, a way to follow her father’s wise counsel, “Serve your country, honor God, and love mankind.” It wasn’t long before Barton would find a way to serve.

In April 1860, the Civil War began. From the beginning, Barton wanted a chance to help the wounded soldiers. She asked the War Department if she could go to the battlefield to distribute medicine and food. Imagine their shock! No unmarried woman had ever gone to the battlefield before. It was out of the question. But Barton was determined to go and she wouldn’t stop until someone gave her permission. That someone was Colonel Daniel Rucker. With six wagons loaded with food, medicine, blankets, water, and other supplies, Clara Barton had found a way to serve her country.

It wasn’t long before Clara Barton earned another nickname: “Angel of the Battlefield.” To wounded soldiers, she must have seemed like an angel as she passed out cups of cool water or pieces of bread. When people criticized her for helping soldiers from both the North and the South, she replied, “I am a United States soldier.” It didn’t matter to Barton which side a soldier had fought for: if he was wounded, he received any help she could give.

During the war, Barton often criticized the Army about the lack of food and supplies for the fighting men. She came to be known as a troublemaker among some officials. But in 1864, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton called her to help his Sanitary Commission on the battlefield.

Barton found another challenge for herself during this time, too. She asked President Lincoln if she could help find missing prisoners of war. So many families were writing to ask her help, and Barton felt she could not refuse them. With permission from President Lincoln, she received a title: General Correspondent for Friends of Missing Prisoners. After the war ended, Secretary Stanton enlisted her help to place markers and identify the dead at the infamous Andersonville Prison. Barton had placed markers on 12,500 graves by August 1865. During the time spent searching for missing prisoners, Barton had answered over 63,000 letters and identified 22,000 missing men. With these acts of personal heroism and giving, Barton felt her Civil War duty was finally fulfilled.

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**CLARA BARTON, CONTINUED**

After the war, Barton went on a tour of Europe to rest and recover. While visiting Switzerland, she saw Red Cross workers. Barton was very interested in the organization and wanted to join. When France declared war on Prussia and its German allies in 1870, Barton served with the Red Cross. She taught homeless refugees in France how to sew, helped them sell the garments they made, and collected money for relief efforts. *If only*, Barton thought, *we could start something like this in the United States.*

In May 1877, Barton wrote to Louis Appia, head of the Red Cross in Geneva. She asked if she could start a Red Cross organization in the United States. Mr. Appia appointed Clara Barton to be the head of the newly formed American Red Cross. While Barton was happy to be the founder of such a humanitarian organization, she faced many trials along the way. Fighting against her old enemy, shyness, Barton went on the road, touring from town to town and talking about the Red Cross. She explained that it was an international organization that helped the wounded during wartime, and helped people affected by natural disasters such as fire, flood, or disease epidemics. Audiences loved her but had to be convinced the Red Cross was a good thing. People thought, *Isn't the war over? Why stockpile supplies and collect money when there are no disasters?*

In September of 1881, the American Red Cross got a chance to show people what it could do when it sent money and supplies to aid Michigan as forest fires raged across the state. Each time a new disaster struck, Barton and the American Red Cross were ready for action. In 1884, Secretary of State Frederick Frelinghuysen asked Barton to represent the United States at the Third International Conference of Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland. Imagine Barton's pride at being only one of four women who were asked to attend!

The American Red Cross opened a building in Washington, D.C. in 1893. Barton found herself in trouble over her recordkeeping, this time with the Red Cross board members. Complaints about her paperwork went all the way back to her days on the Civil War battlefields. She'd endured many criticisms for scribbling records and accounts on stray scraps of paper. Trying to defend her policies, she published a book in 1899, *The Red Cross in War and Peace*. An investigation was launched and Barton faced a Senate committee hearing in March 1904. In May of that year, eighty-two-year-old Clara Barton resigned her position as president of the American Red Cross. Despite the difficulties at the end of her presidency, Barton is credited as the leader of the movement that brought the Red Cross to the United States, where it is still a vital organization today. Her leadership skills are undisputed.

From a shy little girl who talked with a lisp, Clara Barton became a teacher, government clerk, battlefield nurse, finder of missing persons and founder of one of the country's largest humanitarian organizations. She died on April 12, 1921, at the age of ninety-one. The American Red Cross, her greatest achievement, lives on.

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**Answer the questions below.**

1. What was Clara Barton's worst problem in childhood? How did she overcome it?

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2. What were two of Clara's nicknames during her life?

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3. Who told Clara she should become a teacher? Do you think this person's advice was a good reason to choose a teaching career? If you agree, why? If not, why not?

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4. What did Clara want to do when the Civil War began? Why couldn't she accomplish this job right away?

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5. Can you name the three government officials who helped Clara during the Civil War?

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**ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ABOUT *CLARA BARTON***

6. Where did Clara first learn about the Red Cross?

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7. How did Barton start a Red Cross organization in America?

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8. What was the first disaster where the American Red Cross went to offer help?

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9. Clara Barton had five careers in her life. Can you name them all?

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10. Is the Red Cross important today? If you answered yes, why? If you answered no, why not?

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**Answers to *Clara Barton***

1. Clara's worst problem in childhood was her shyness. She later found if she 'forgot' herself, she wasn't afraid. *Answers relating to lisp receive half-credit.*
2. "Little Nurse" and "Angel of the Battlefield".
3. A phrenologist. Answers for the other questions will vary.
4. Barton wanted to go help the injured soldiers on the battlefield. She wanted to give them food and medicine. The War Department refused to allow a woman to go to the battlefield alone. No unmarried woman had ever gone alone.
5. President Abraham Lincoln, Colonel Daniel Rucker, and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton.
6. Switzerland.
7. She wrote to Louis Appia, head of the Red Cross in Geneva, and asked. Appia appointed her as the head of the newly formed Red Cross in America.
8. Forest fires in Michigan in 1881.
9. Teacher, government clerk, battlefield nurse, finder of missing persons, and founder of the American Red Cross.
10. Answers will vary, but children should be aware of the American Red Cross work during recent hurricanes, tsunamis and other natural disasters.