

English 101



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Clara Barton Thousands of people in the United States have benefited from the organization known as the American Red Cross. When disaster strikes, such as the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the sign of the red cross on a white field tells people where to go for the help they need and they are reasonably sure of receiving it. The reason such a wonderful organization exists today is because of a woman named Clara Barton and the experiences she had during her lifetime.

Clara Barton was born in 1821 to a family that already had two sons and two daughters, all at least twelve years older than she (Barton, 1907: 16). This provided her both with few playmates and multiple teachers, so that she learned to read, write and compute mathematics early and without apparent effort. However, she credits the youngest of her older brothers for the life-giving lessons of how to sit a wild horse on a wild ride in the middle of a battlefield. “ Sometimes, in later years, when I found myself suddenly on a strange horse in a trooper’s saddle, flying for life or liberty in front of pursuit, I blessed the baby lessons of the wild gallops among the beautiful colts” (Barton, 1907: 20). After a relatively common childhood for her time period, marked by particular attention to her education thanks to the influence of brothers and sisters, Clara’s first brush with the field of nursing came as she was helping her brother, David Barton, recover from a fall that had him incapacitated for approximately 2 years (Barton, 1907: 79-88). From this experience, the young girl began moving ever closer to the nursing profession.

Following the Battle of Bull Run near the beginning of the Civil War, Barton began her work as a nurse, organizing the collection and distribution of necessary medical supplies and gaining permission to ride behind the lines

and in the mobile ambulance wagons to provide medical assistance to wounded soldiers on the field. Her tireless efforts earned her the nickname of ‘Angel of the Battlefield’ and she was eventually appointed the superintendent of nurses in 1861. By 1869, though, she was taking her skills to Europe to help in the Franco-Prussian War. It was in Switzerland that she first learned of the European organization already in existence there called the Red Cross. Although an attempt had already been made to establish a branch in the United States well before Barton went to Europe, this was her first time to hear of it and she spent the rest of her time in Europe learning more about it. When she finally returned home in 1873, she was well armed to take up the cause. “ She was not one among many good women working for this common end. She was not a member of a committee or other organization beginning feebly ... Alone she learned of the Red Cross; alone she brought tidings of it back to her own country; alone she wrote of it, talked of it, brought it to the attention of distinguished men, carried her faith in it from desk to desk in Washington, and cherished the hope of it through long years” (Barton, 1922: 3). The first official branch was established in the United States in 1881 with Barton as the first president. She served in this position from 1882 to 1904.

Through her efforts, Clara Barton managed to install a helpful organization within America’s borders with a tradition of helping civilians as well as soldiers. Moving beyond the strict confines of the battlefield, Barton led the organization out to help with a yellow fever epidemic that broke out in Florida in 1877 and again to assist with the Johnston Flood of 1889. The traditional approach Barton established through these types of actions has ensured that the organization continues to come to the aid of any and all

victims of disaster, whether man-made or natural, even today.

Works Cited

Barton, Clara. *The Story of My Childhood*. New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1907.

Barton, William Eleazer. *The Life of Clara Barton: Founder of the American Red Cross*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922.