



Clarissa Harlowe Barton was born December 25, 1821, in North Oxford, Massachusetts. Her father, Captain Stephen Barton, was a farmer, horsebreeder, and respected member of the community. Her mother, Sarah, managed the household and taught Barton the importance of cleanliness.

Barton was the youngest of five children, and her two brothers and two sisters assumed much of the responsibility for her education. Her sister, Dorothy, taught her spelling, Stephen taught her arithmetic, Sally taught her geography, and David coached her in athletics. With their help, Barton received a vast and diverse education. By the time she started school at age 4, Barton could already spell three-syllable words. She found school to be quite easy and studied such subjects as philosophy, chemistry, and Latin. Barton's only handicap was her extreme shyness.

At 17, Barton became a teacher in Massachusetts's District 9, located in Worcester County. During the next 6 years, she taught in several schools, before establishing her own school in North Oxford. At the age of 29, after teaching for more than 10 years, Barton yearned for a change. As a result, she entered the Liberal Institute in Clinton, New York, an advanced school for female teachers. Among her other studies, Barton worked on her writing and took private classes in French.

After a year in Clinton, Barton accepted a teaching position in New Jersey. She subsequently opened a free school in Bordentown, and the school's attendance grew to more than 600 students. When the school board refused to offer Barton the high paying position to head the school and hired a man instead, she found herself at a crossroads. Following a period of physical and emotional exhaustion, Barton moved to Washington DC, where she worked as a clerk in the U.S Patent Office.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Barton resigned from the Patent Office to work as a volunteer. She advertised for supplies and distributed bandages, socks, and other goods to help the wounded soldiers. In 1862, Barton was granted permission to deliver supplies directly to the front, which she did without fail for the next two years. In 1864, Barton was given the position of superintendent of Union nurses. After the war, she received permission from President Lincoln to begin a letter-writing campaign to search for missing soldiers.

During the years following the war, Barton lectured about her war experiences, continued her work at the Office of Correspondence, and worked with the suffragist movement. However, by 1869, Barton had worked herself into a physical breakdown. She followed her doctor's orders and traveled to Europe to rest and regain her health. It was during this trip that Barton learned about the Treaty of Geneva, which provided relief for sick and wounded soldiers. Twelve nations had signed the treaty, but the United States had refused. Barton vowed to look into the matter. During this time, Barton also learned about the Red Cross. She observed the organization in action while traveling with several volunteers to the front of the Franco-Prussian War.

When Barton returned to the United States in 1873, she began her crusade for the Treaty of Geneva and the Red Cross. After spending time at a spa in Danville, New York to improve her health, Barton moved to Washington DC to lobby for her causes. Due to

her efforts, the United States signed the Geneva Agreement in 1882. In addition, the American Red Cross organization was formed in 1881, and Barton served as its first president. Several years later, she wrote the American amendment to the Red Cross constitution, which provided for disaster relief during peace time as well as war.

Barton remained Red Cross president until 1904. During her tenure, she headed up relief work for disasters such as famines, floods, pestilence, and earthquakes in the United States and throughout the world. The last operation she personally directed was relief for victims of the Galveston, Texas flood in 1900. In addition, she served as an emissary of the Red Cross and addressed several International Conferences.

In 1904, Barton was forced to resign her position as president. She experienced increasing criticism of her leadership style, and many felt it was time for the organization to be led by a larger, central administration. On May 12, Barton resigned. For the next 8 years, she lived in her home at Glen Echo, Maryland. Barton enjoyed good health and remained quite active, riding her horse and keeping abreast of current events.

Clara Barton died on April 12, 1912, from complications of a cold. The mission of her life can be summed up in her own words, "You must never so much as think whether you like it or not, whether it is bearable or not; you must never think of anything except the need, and how to meet it."