

ANGEL OF THE BATTLEFIELD

Clara Barton (1821-1912) had begun her career as a nurse early, ten years old to be exact, treating her brother who fell from a barn roof. Barton, persuaded by her parents to become a teacher to overcome her shyness, would become a teacher in 1839 at just 17 years old. Not content with that she enrolled herself at the Clinton Liberal Institute of New York, where her work was praised by her instructors and peers within the community. Her work led her to be contracted to found the first free public school in the State of New Jersey located in Bordentown. The school was a huge success, however the schoolboard thought it was inappropriate for a woman to serve as principal and so she was demoted to 'female assistant' in favor of a man elected by the schoolboard. Faced with this new adversarial environment, she was soon consumed by stress and left the position due to failing health. She would move to Washington DC where she faced discrimination a second time when male clerks were upset she was being paid equal to them in the US Patent Office where she worked. After taking a pay cut and demotion to copyist, she would be fired by the future President James Buchanan for her ties to the abolitionist movement, which the Executive Branch was trying to actively purge from all Federal Positions at the time.



"You Can Help" Poster, American Red Cross, 1918



"Spirit of America" Poster, Digital Commonwealth, 1919

OVER A CENTURY OF SERVICE

What exactly does the Red Cross do? The American Chapter of the Red Cross is just one arm of an international humanitarian aid organization with the goal of alleviating human suffering across the world. The Red Cross provides support in medicine, supplies, and welfare in the event of emergencies or natural disasters and maintains neutrality in armed conflicts, supporting people on both sides of any given war regardless of nationality. Primarily the Red Cross is funded by people just like us through voluntary donations. A core element of the red cross is their blood drives, ensuring that there are ample banks of every blood type in case of emergencies. Per their official website, the Red Cross assists more than 25,000 individuals a day, responds to 65,000 disasters each year, has distributed nearly 4 million meals in the year of 2024, and provided more than 2.3 million people with temporary shelter within the same year. When people think of disasters, earthquakes or hurricanes might come to mind, but the number one 'disaster' related threat in the United States is actually house fires. While something as destructive as a house fire is unthinkable to most of us, in reality they occur roughly 358,000 times a year in America, with more than 30 people suffering injuries every day. Since 2014, the Red Cross's Home Fire Campaign has worked to install over 3 million smoke alarms in people's homes.



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DMAVA CELEBRATES THE LEGACY OF THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

Winds would change when Abraham Lincoln was elected to the office of the Presidency. Barton would return to her position of a copyist in an attempt to make way for more professional roles for women in government. Clara Barton began her outright humanitarian work during the Civil War, bringing medical supplies and care to wounded soldiers directly on the battlefield. Her fearless service earned her the title "Angel of the Battlefield." She was appointed by General Benjamin Butler as the 'lady in charge' along the front of the Army of the James. After the war, she expanded her relief efforts and was introduced to the International Red Cross while traveling in Europe. Moved by its mission, she returned to the United States determined to bring the organization's principles home. In 1881, Barton co-founded the American Red Cross with the help of Adolphus Solomons, a prominent Jewish philanthropist and civic leader. Together, they established a foundation for organized disaster relief and emergency assistance that continues to serve the nation today.



image source: western michigan university



"Volunteer for Victory" Poster, Ross Art Group, 1944



"Put Your Money Where Your Boys Are" Poster, Nate Dean Sanders Group, 1969

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How did the American Red Cross get to where it is today? The organization saw rapid growth in the years after the Civil War, leading into the 20th Century and some of the most devastating humanitarian crises in human history. WWI was the American Red Cross's first big test since the Civil War and by the end of the conflict they had increased from 100 local chapters to 3,800, recruiting some 20,000 nurses for military service. During WWII soon after, the scale of the conflict demanded five times as many recruits, with them acquiring over 104,000 of them. During the war the American Red Cross would ship over 300,000 tons of supplies overseas. 1941 was the year they first started their National Blood Drive Program and they collected over 13 *million* pints of blood for victims of the war. Later that decade the program would expand to the civilian population; by 2017 the Red Cross provided 40% of the United State's total blood reserves. The transition from simple battlefield support to an arm of national infrastructure is what allowed the Red Cross to be an enduring pillar of humanitarian aid in the world, having supported hundreds of millions of people by expanding into national disaster relief both domestically and abroad. From the HMS Titanic, to Hurricane Katrina, or more recently with the COVID-19 Epidemic, the nation as we know it would not be recognizable without the Red Cross. And they continue to adapt to carry forward a legacy 144 years in the making. For more information please visit the official Red Cross Website.