



CAROL STUART WATSON

*The Beall-Dawson House, c. 1815
home of the Montgomery County Historical Society
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CLARA BARTON'S GLEN ECHO HOME FROM PAST TO PRESENT¹

by Joan Caravaggio

Clara Barton no longer walks among friends as she did in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but her name will forever be remembered by those of us who enjoy a walk through her last living quarters at Glen Echo, Maryland. It is indeed a house holding much history for its frequent tourists and history enthusiasts. Often visitors to Clara Barton's Glen Echo home wonder why Clara Barton had come to choose this particular location for the last home she was to abide in before her death in 1912. It certainly has changed since Clara Barton's time as can be seen from the scrapbooks kept at her house. A little background on Clara and her reasons for choosing the location may help to clarify some questions so many may have on their minds while visiting her home at Glen Echo.

1. This paper won first prize in the 1976 contest sponsored by the Montgomery County Historical Society for students enrolled in the History 105 course at Montgomery College.

Clara Barton, the name she preferred to be known by, was born on December 25, 1821, at North Oxford, Massachusetts. She was actually christened Clarissa Harlow Barton.² She was the fifth and last child born to Captain and Mrs. Stephen Barton, who were themselves both of old New England stock.³ Clara and her two brothers and two sisters were sent out to work at an early age by their father, who was a New England farmer. Clara's father kept her in public school to prepare her for a career as a school teacher, which was about the only job open to a woman of her size - she was only about five feet tall. She had a small physique as well as plain looks, which were accented only by heavy businesslike features. Because of her size and lack of strength, she was, of course, not suited for a career which would require manual labor.



CLARA BARTON

2. Edward T. James and Janet Wilson James, Eds., Notable American Women 1607-1950 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971), p. 103.

3. Ibid.

Clara seemed to be very capable as a teacher so, in order to better prepare herself for a more challenging teaching job, she enrolled in the Liberal Institute at Clinton, New York, in 1849.⁴ Upon leaving the Institute, she founded a free or public school for children at Bordentown, New Jersey.⁵ At the age of 33, however, Clara had to give up teaching because of a throat illness. She went to Washington, D.C., where she became a copyist in the Patent Office, but not for very long.

In April 1861, Fort Sumter fell, and the Civil War began. When President Lincoln called for volunteers, Clara found herself now working for the Union cause. She was able to give Massachusetts soldiers care right there in the capital. After the battle of Bull Run, Clara advertised in the Worcester Spy newspaper in Massachusetts to try to collect provisions for the wounded.⁶ Clara eventually accumulated enough supplies so that she and a few friends were able to distribute them to needy hospitals and camps on the battlefields. Clara, with her abounding spirit, was seen nursing the wounded at Cedar Mountain, Second Bull Run, Chantilly, South Mountain, Antietam, and Fredericksburg.⁷ Again, because of ill health, Clara was advised by her physician to rest, and so she went to Geneva, Switzerland, in 1869.⁸ There she learned of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which had been organized in 1863 under the leadership of Jean Henri Dunant.⁹ In 1864, eleven governments ratified the Geneva Treaty which gave official status to the Red Cross.¹⁰ Clara was very much impressed, but, when she returned to America in 1873, she went to live in Dansville, New York, in semiretirement. At the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War in 1877, Clara's interest in the Red Cross revived, and so it was at this time that she carried on a campaign for the organization of an American Red Cross Society.¹¹ It was not until March 1, 1882, that President Arthur signed the Geneva Treaty, which was ratified by the Senate two weeks later. However, Clara, along with others, had already organized the American Association of the Red Cross in May 1881, and she had been chosen its first president.¹² In 1893, the Red Cross was chartered in the District of Columbia, but it was not granted a federal charter by Congress until 1900, after much effort by Clara.¹³

In 1884, there was a disastrous flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The Red Cross went into action to build barracks to house the temporarily unsheltered families. After the homes had been rebuilt, the Red Cross had planned to dismantle the barracks and sell the lumber. It was not able to do so, however, because of protests by local merchants, who were against what they called "unfair competition."¹⁴ Clara Barton made the final decision: the lumber would be sent to Washington and eventually used to construct her home in Glen Echo, which would also serve as a Red Cross headquarters.

4. Ibid., p. 104.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 105.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., p. 106.

13. Ibid.

14. Charles Hurd, The Compact History of the American Red Cross (New York: Hawthorn Book, Inc., 1959), p. 69.

While Clara and others were busy with the activities of the Red Cross, Edwin and Edward Baltzley were making arrangements to obtain land in Maryland along the Potomac River for development. By 1889, the brothers had managed to acquire land on the Potomac, which stretched from Cabin John Creek east to the Walhonding Road area overlooking Sycamore Island.¹⁵ On this property, later to be known as Glen-Echo-on-the-Potomac, the brothers had hopes of building a center of culture.¹⁶ The name "Glen Echo" was chosen because of the echo in the glen where an amphitheater was later built.¹⁷

On March 24, 1891, the Baltzley brothers and their wives deeded 80 acres of their land to the "National Chautauqua of Glen Echo," which had been incorporated in West Virginia. The first "Chautauqua"¹⁸ was organized by Lewis Miller, an Ohio manufacturer and Sunday school teacher, and John H. Vincent, a minister and later Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. They had many objectives with the organizing of the Chautauqua, but their main purpose was to unify the different groups within Protestantism. In 1874, the first assembly met on the shores of Lake Chautauqua in New York and thus it received its name.¹⁹

The National Chautauqua of Glen Echo had developed a plan which called for many structures to be arranged within a carefully organized campus that would be subdivided into lots with streets named after universities.²⁰ The structures would include several schools, an amphitheater, the Chautauqua literary and scientific circle as well as a woman's department.²¹ The woman's department had been organized specifically for the "advancement of woman, improving and enlarging her scope of usefulness."²² To guide the work of this department, a woman's executive committee was appointed, and Clara Barton was made president.

It was the National Chautauqua of Glen Echo which offered land to Clara Barton. She bought a lot of 7,684 square feet for \$2300.20 on July 31, 1891.²³ It was on this land that she would have the Red Cross headquarters and home for herself built. The house was actually being constructed before she even purchased the land. Clara's house would come to be known as "Red Cross."²⁴

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15. Benjamin Levy, Glen Echo - Chautauqua on the Potomac (National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior Division of History, 1967), p. 8.
 16. Ibid.
 17. Hattie Leister, "Clara Barton's Mercy Ship," Daughters of American Revolution Magazine, (June-July 1963), p. 525.
 18. Levy, op. cit., p. 2.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Ibid., p. 9.
 21. Ibid.
 22. Ibid., p. 10.
 23. Clara Barton and Dansville, Compiled by the Clara Barton Chapter No. 1, The American National Red Cross (Dansville, New York: Press of F.A. Owen Publishing Co., 1966), p. 514.
 24. Marshall W. Fishwick, Illustrious Americans: Clara Barton (Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett Co., 1966), p. 88.

The house was constructed with the hemlock planks from Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The barracks in Johnstown had been dismantled; the lumber was then shipped to Cumberland, Maryland, and floated by barge down the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal to Glen Echo. The house was originally built for use as a warehouse to hold supplies for disaster and war relief.

The building was designed by Dr. Julian B. Hubbell. Dr. Hubbell, who had studied medicine at the University of Michigan, had been Clara's chief field agent and good friend. He had acted as Clara's aide since the 1880's, working with her during 22 major flood, fire, and other disasters. He had been brought up in Mississippi so he decided to design the house as a Mississippi riverboat. Riverboats were familiar sights on the river, especially during flood disasters when they carried relief supplies to aid flood victims. There are only two similar "steamboat" houses in the United States today.²⁵ It had been Clara's intention to make this warehouse in Glen Echo a summer refuge, but, by the end of 1897, she found herself making it her home. It also served as Red Cross headquarters until she retired from the Red Cross in 1904.²⁶

"Red Cross" is a three-floor structure which cover a ground area 48 feet by 84 feet. It is right next door to the Glen Echo National Park and, from the rear of the house, the Maryland section of the heavily used George Washington Memorial Parkway and the quiet Chesapeake and Ohio Canal are visible. Clara had always enjoyed the view from her home of the canal as well as the fine oak, hickory, and sycamore trees that grew on her land. She was most proud of her strawberry beds, her garden, and her shrubs, so much so that she entrusted their care to Dr. Hubbell, who throughout his life had great success with gardening.²⁷ Cows were also raised on the land, and Dr. Hubbell also took charge of adding to the stock.²⁸

The area has changed, but the house is still set back among many tall trees. The gardens are run down for lack of an experienced person to work on them. As the house is viewed from the outside at some distance, it is noticeable that the white clapboard structure with two steep-roofed turrets is indeed in the image of a steamboat. The Victorian frame house features huge white columns, balustraded balconies, and diamond-shaped windows. Standing on the front porch, looking at the huge flagpole in the yard, gives one a feeling of being on the bow of a boat.

The interior of the house suggests a boat as much as the outside does. It is apparent that Clara strove more for utility than for comfort. The mid-Victorian style house is designed to resemble the main salon of a riverboat with a large central hall of paneled walls, open decks, and captain's quarters. From the captain's quarters most of the interior of the house can be viewed. The captain's quarters is a

25. Clara Barton House - Preservation Project 1963-1975 (Glen Echo, Maryland: The Friends of Clara Barton, Inc., 1975), Montgomery County Historical Society.

26. Ibid.

27. Charles Hurd, The Compact History of the American Red Cross (New York: Hawthorn Book, Inc., 1959), p. 110.

28. Editor's Note: Clara Barton had acquired additional land adjacent to her original lot.



EXTERIOR VIEW OF CLARA BARTON'S HOUSE

suspended room with no visible means of support located in the center of the house overlooking the floors below. This is now the only room left in the house with the original white canvas ceiling. On the third floor, located behind and down the stairs from the captain's quarters, is a room referred to as the flag room which offers a good view of the land in the rear of the house. To the front of and again down the stairs from the captain's quarters are the Red Cross rooms, so called because of the Red Cross insignia in the front windows which allow sunlight to pour through the red stained glass. These rooms are also set in the lantern-type roof of the house as is the captain's quarters.

On the second floor were located the library and living quarters used for Clara's assistants and friends.²⁹ Each room had a number on the door like a ship's cabin would have. The balcony railing was covered with Clara's flag collection, which she displayed proudly.³⁰ Toward the rear of the house is Clara's sitting room, which offered her a view of the canal. Here she worked late at night and made daily entries in her diary. Her narrow bed, which was actually a soldier's cot, was kept nearby. The table next to it held a candle, some paper, and a pencil.³¹ Since she often suffered from insomnia, Clara would sometimes prop herself up in bed and write for hours by the light of the candle.³² She would, however, rise early every morning at five.

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29. Clara Barton and Her Glen Echo Home (Glen Echo, Maryland: The Friends of Clara Barton, Inc., 1967), Montgomery County Historical Society.
30. Ishbel Ross, Angel of the Battlefield (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1956), p. 211.
31. Fishwick, op. cit.
32. Ibid.

Down on the first floor were the Red Cross office to the rear, and the reception and dining rooms. From this office Clara directed the affairs of the Red Cross organization. There were also servants' quarters, a room with a secure walk-in vault for valuables, and a kitchen. The original house had only one bathroom in it, on the second floor.

Not all of the furniture now in the house belonged to Clara, but it is representative of the period. The rooms are filled with the various gifts and treasures that Clara received on her many journeys, such as a gold settee from the Grand Duchess Louise and an onyx-topped gold-leaf table.³³ Other treasures include oriental rugs, silks, and trophies from all over the world. As you enter the front door, there is a painting of Clara's cat "Tommy" done by Antoinette Margot.³⁴ Tommy was like part of the family to Clara. As you stand in the doorway looking up the feeling of being in a boat is again experienced as the upper decks with their railings are visible. On these paneled walls, Clara hung her many diplomas and testimonials from all over the world.³⁵ Now there are cases which hold valuables belonging to her, such as a tea set and a doll belonging to a relative of Clara. There are also pictures of her home in Oxford where she was born. A bookcase holds a collection of old books. The Glen Echo home still holds the large oak desk on which Clara used to write letters and do much of her Red Cross work.



INTERIOR OF CLARA BARTON'S HOUSE

33. Ross, op. cit.

34. Clara Barton and Dansville, op. cit., p. 140.

35. Fishwick, op. cit.

William E. Barton, who was Clara's cousin as well as her biographer, had once thought that the house had a "camplike interior."³⁶ Even Clara's neighbors realized that the house was built more for convenience than for looks. Clara had built a house where she could do the things she had always wanted to do, being both a mistress and a very hospitable hostess. It was a house still handy to Washington where the Red Cross was located. According to Blanche Colton Williams, Clara still owned property in Washington, a house at 947 T Street, N.W., that she had purchased in 1878.³⁷

Originally the house had 36 rooms and 72 concealed closets, but the number of closets today is 38.³⁸ In these closets Clara kept such things as blankets, malted milk, canned goods, and emergency supplies such as bandages and clothing. The house does indeed have the looks of a relief ship heading towards a disaster area.

Clara did much to occupy her time while living in Glen Echo, even though she was 75 year old when the house was built. Clara proved herself an able hostess when a group of Spanish-American War veterans, attending a convention in Washington, came to pay their homage in 1903.³⁹ In February 1904, Clara had prepared her house to receive 400 suffrage delegates who were then gathering for the annual convention of the American Woman Suffrage Association. From 1904 to 1923, Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt was president of the International Women Suffrage Alliance, and, on this day in 1904, she stood by Clara's side to introduce the guests.⁴⁰ From Glen Echo, Clara went forth to direct relief in the Spanish-American War and in the hurricanes in Galveston, Texas. She also went to St. Petersburg, Russia, to represent the American Red Cross at the International Red Cross Convention in 1903. Clara wrote three of her four books while residing in Glen Echo. Her home came to be a refuge for the needy, a resting place for sick soldiers, worn-out war nurses, and needy neighbors. Clara had hoped her home would become a great educational center.

Clara, in 1903, introduced the earliest first aid kit to be used in the United States and, with her own money, bought sample kits and distributed them to many.⁴¹ She later organized the National First Aid Association of America and started first aid training programs after her retirement in 1904.⁴² Clara also became fascinated with the fad of spiritualism and devoted her attention to its ideas.⁴³

Many controversial happenings led Clara to sever her connections with the Red Cross completely in 1904, although the main reason for her resignation from the Red Cross was a dispute over the handling of funds.⁴⁴ Many people had made use of the fact that she was advanced in age, stubborn, and at times unwilling to cooperate with

36. Ibid.

37. Clara Barton and Dansville, op. cit., p. 509.

38. Clara Barton House - Preservation Project 1963-1975, op. cit.

39. Hurd, op. cit., p. 112.

40. Clara Barton and Dansville, op. cit., p. 442.

41. Fishwick, op. cit.

42. Hurd, op. cit., p. 119.

43. Ibid.

44. Leister, op. cit.

different committees to try to push her out of her position as president.⁴⁵ There was also the fact that she was held idle for two months on her ship, the "State of Texas," and continually found it necessary to go out to the field to direct war relief instead of being in Washington where the Red Cross headquarters was located.⁴⁶ On January 5, 1905, the Red Cross came under government supervision with the signing of an act of Congress by President Roosevelt.

Clara managed to stay active with many things even after her retirement. She was even able to see electric lights installed at Glen Echo in 1908. On her 88th birthday in 1909, she signed a thousand greeting cards.⁴⁷ Clara was also confronted by reporters at her home and asked to make comments and give her opinion on a wide range of subjects of the times.

At the age of 91, Clara saw her home at Glen Echo for the last time. She died on Good Friday, April 12, 1912. According to the doctor's report it was simply from old age.⁴⁸ A small funeral service was held at Glen Echo with only a few close friends attending as Clara had wished, but there was a public memorial tribute in Oxford, Massachusetts, on April 16.⁴⁹

The Glen Echo house had been deeded to Dr. Hubbell by Clara in 1908, thus, when she died, the title to the house went to him. Dr. Hubbell had also gotten interested in spiritualism with Clara some years before. They had both come to know Mrs. Mabelle Rawson Hiron, whose grandfather had been the Barton family doctor in Massachusetts.⁵⁰ At one time, after Clara's death, Mrs. Hiron told Dr. Hubbell of a message she had received from Clara in the spirit world in which the doctor was directed to transfer the title to the Glen Echo property to her.⁵¹ Thus he did so. Later, things were again put into order, and, after Dr. Hubbell's death in 1929, his two nieces, Miss Rena Hubbell and Mrs. Park Chamberlain, inherited the property at Glen Echo.⁵²

Mrs. Josephine Franks Noyes, who was a friend of the Hubbell sisters, was able to purchase the house in 1942.⁵³ Her four sisters - Miss Frances Franks, Miss Henrietta Franks, Mrs. Sara Rhodes, and Mrs. Katherine Bronson - came from Iowa later to join her. She willed the property to Miss Frances and Miss Henrietta Franks. The four Franks sisters kept up the property during their ownership and tried to arouse interest in Clara Barton and her home by permitting tours and inviting national leaders.⁵⁴

45. Ross, op. cit., p. 222.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., p. 259.

48. Ibid., p. 267.

49. Clara Barton and Dansville, op. cit., p. 517.

50. Ibid., p. 141.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., p. 565

54. Ibid., p. 566

In 1963, Clara's house was put up for sale by the four sisters, who found it physically impossible to keep up the house. With the condition that it be preserved as a memorial, the house was to be sold for \$15,000 less than what would have been obtainable on the open market.⁵⁵ At this time, "The Friends of Clara Barton, Inc." was organized in Maryland to raise funds for the purchase of the house. On January 23, 1964, the house was purchased. Half of the \$35,000 price was paid, and a mortgage was arranged for the rest of the purchase price.⁵⁶ The group also agreed to pay \$4,600 for the furnishings which had belonged to Clara Barton.⁵⁷

The Montgomery County Historical Society, along with the Maryland House and Garden Pilgrimage, dedicated, on September 19, 1964, a historical marker at the intersection of MacArthur Boulevard and Oxford Road where the house is located.⁵⁸ On October 14, 1964, it was suggested that the Clara Barton house be made a National Historical Landmark. In April 1965, the Clara Barton house was designated as a National Historical Landmark by the United States Department of the Interior.⁵⁹ The house was donated by The Friends of Clara Barton to the National Park Service in April 1975.

The National Park Service makes a handout available to all those who visit the house explaining some of its history. The house is located at 5801 Oxford Road in Glen Echo, Maryland, although, if Clara were to visit it today, she probably would not even recognize her own home.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., p. 566-567.

59. Ibid., p. 567.