



Clara Barton at Andersonville



Clara Barton raising the flag at Andersonville
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After the Civil War, Clara Barton accompanied the U.S. Army's expedition to Andersonville to mark and identify the graves. Her work notifying the families of the dead and to raise public awareness about the prison has made her an integral part of the Andersonville story.

Notifying Families

During the Civil War there was no official system in place to document missing or dead soldiers. As the war ended Clara Barton, the "Angel of the Battlefield" who had achieved fame as a nurse during the war, took it upon herself to fill this void. She began to

receive letters from family members trying to find out the fate of their loved ones who had not returned home. Each of these letters led to a painstaking process of researching the whereabouts of these missing soldiers and to respond to the family members' inquiries.

At Andersonville

Barton's search for missing soldiers led her to accompany the army's expedition to Andersonville in July and August of 1865. In just a few weeks at the site, she poured through thousands of letters from families of missing soldiers, and began to search for these men in the Andersonville Death Register and captured hospital records. While laborers worked to erect headboards in the cemetery, Barton wrote dozens of letters informing families that their

loved ones had died at Andersonville. In addition, she met with local civilians, including recently freed slaves, and gathered relics from the prison site for the purpose of displaying them on a national lecture tour.

At the end of the expedition, Barton was given the honor of raising the American flag for the first time over the recently established Andersonville National Cemetery.



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The Missing Soldiers Office

Clara Barton's work extended beyond Andersonville. At the end of the war she established the Missing Soldiers Office and hired numerous clerks, including Dorence Atwater, to respond to the more than 60,000 letters that she received. By 1867, Barton and her staff had identified more than 20,000 missing soldiers, including nearly 13,000 who had died at Andersonville Prison.

To raise money for the Missing Soldiers Office, Barton went on a national lecture tour, sharing with the American public the story of Andersonville.



National Museum of Civil War Medicine

The entrance sign to Clara Barton's Missing Soldiers Office.

Dorence Atwater

Dorence Atwater was one of nearly 300 prisoners at Andersonville paroled to work at the prison. He was one of several prisoners charged with maintaining the death records in the hospital. Suspecting that his captors would not turn the list over to the U.S. government, Atwater began to secretly copy the document. He smuggled this copy of the Andersonville death register out when he was released and turned it over to the U.S. Army.

The U.S. Army Quartermaster's Office quickly organized an expedition to establish a national cemetery at Andersonville. Atwater, having seen Barton's lists, contacted her to offer his assistance in identifying the missing soldiers. Atwater's death register helped Barton notify countless families of the Andersonville dead. He eventually worked for her in the Missing Soldiers Office and traveled the country lecturing on Andersonville.



Dorence Atwater

22 June 1865

*Miss C. Barton,
Can you send me one of your lists of missing men to me? I can inform you of a good many of them. I noticed a list in the Post Office this evening for the first time. I brought a copy of the Death Register from the Rebel Prison at Andersonville, GA containing the names of 12,658....*

Dorence Atwater

Legacy

Barton's connection to Andersonville is through her work in the Missing Soldiers Office and her support of Dorence Atwater. Atwater was court-martialed and jailed in the fall of 1865 in a dispute over the ownership of the Andersonville Death Register. It was through Barton's efforts that he was finally released and in 1866 she helped him get the register published in the New York Tribune.

Because of her work notifying the families of the Andersonville dead, Barton was hailed as the "Heroine of Andersonville." She went on a national tour to display the relics she had gathered at the prison site. The Andersonville Survivors Association even inducted her as an honorary member. In 1915 the Woman's Relief Corps dedicated a monument in her memory at the prison site.

Barton's legacy at Andersonville is far more complicated than simply

establishing a cemetery or claiming credit for identifying the dead, neither of which she actually did. Rather, Barton's efforts to research individual soldiers and notify their families brought closure to people who in some cases had waited years for information.



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Clara Barton collected relics at Andersonville and went on a national speaking tour raising awareness and funds for her work at the Missing Soldiers Office.