



CLARISSA “CLARA” HARLOWE BARTON



As Portrayed by Sue Sodomini

Clarissa Harlowe Barton was born on December 25, 1821, in Oxford, Massachusetts, to Stephen and Sarah Barton. She was the youngest of five children. Clara’s father was a farmer and horse breeder (who also served as a captain in the French and Indian Wars), while her mother Sarah managed the household. The two later helped found the first Universalist Church in Oxford. When Clara was eleven, her brother David became her first patient after he fell from a rafter in their unfinished barn. Clara stayed at his side for three years and learned to administer all his medicines, including the “great, loathsome crawling leeches”. She was in Washington and nearly 40 years old when the war broke out. The Baltimore riots which injured “her Massachusetts boys” inspired her to collect supplies for the soldiers. She received permission from Sen. Henry Wilson and Col. Rucker to go directly to the battlefield to distribute supplies to the soldiers. Her diligent and mer-



ciful care earned her the title of “Angel of the Battlefield.”

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln placed Clara in charge of the search for the missing men of the Union Army.

Barton then achieved widespread recognition by delivering lectures around the country about her war experiences until 1868, when her voice gave out. Clara then sailed to Europe to recover, where she was sought by the leaders of the International Red Cross who urged her to introduce the Red Cross to America. In 1881, the American Red Cross was incorporated in the United States and Clara remained as its head until 1904.

Clara was a very complex person. She was incredibly shy and frequently plagued with self-doubt. An extremely hard-worker, Clara labored, while often jeopardizing her own health. She was almost 91 years old, when she died at her home in Glen Echo, MD on April 12, (Good Friday), 1912.

Introduced to “Living History” by her daughters, Sue Sodomini has been a living historian for several years. An avid history buff, Sue chose to portray Clara Barton in order to bring to life the “whole person” of the founder of the American Red Cross, not just the well known icon that accomplished so much in her lifetime.

