

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Madeleine Thompson, site administrator for the Clara Barton Missing Soldiers Office Museum in Washington, D.C. Now, I feel like Clara Barton is one of those names that people, at least in the US, may recognize, but they probably don't actually know much about her. So first, could you introduce us to her work and the impact that it had?

MT: I think that the way that most of us know Clara Barton is through the American Red Cross, of course. She establishes the American Red Cross in 1881 in the United States and is the founder and very first president from 1881 until 1904, during which, we could do hours and hours of Red Cross work specifically, but a quick highlight reel of Clara Barton's involvement probably has to include Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Galveston, a lot of those turn-of-the-century disasters that happen in the United States, the American Red Cross is on site for, and that is really what they become known for. The Red Cross, prior to Clara Barton's involvement, including internationally, was actually exclusively focused on wartime relief. It was a relief agency for military units. However, Clara Barton was having a little bit of trouble getting that approved in post-Civil War America, and so she decided to incorporate peacetime relief into the American Red Cross. That eventually is incorporated into the International Red Cross as well, and it's usually called the American Amendment, but it's also sometimes called the Clara Amendment, which I love. Usually when you see Clara Barton's name, you can practically see the little Red Cross logo right behind it. She's synonymous with the organization in a lot of ways, but I don't focus on the Red Cross hardly at all. It is an absolutely incredible history, but what I primarily focus on is her Civil War work.

She is living in Washington, D.C. at the onset of the Civil War. She moves into the building where the Missing Soldiers Office is now located in 1861, the very same year that the Civil War begins. Her actions at the start are pretty standard, honestly. She'll start collecting supplies and doing really basic things that a lot of other women in D.C. were doing around this time, but when she goes and visits some of the wounded soldiers that had been brought in at the very start of the war, she recognizes that one of them was from her home state of Massachusetts and that she actually taught them in school previously. Now, that makes her jump into action in a way that was totally unprecedented. A lot of her work during the Civil War is focused on on-the-battlefield wartime relief. She is on-site and providing aid to wounded soldiers. She gets the title of the Angel of the Battlefield during this time, which comes from her experience at the Battle of Antietam in Sharpsburg, Maryland in 1862. There's so many stories that come out of Antietam, especially incorporating Clara Barton, but the most famous one and the one that really, really sums up her work at the front lines is that she was so close to the action that while she's providing water to a wounded soldier, a bullet will go through the sleeve of her dress and kill the man that she was providing water to instantly. She never mends the dress. She keeps it for the rest of her life and will often question whether or not any fellow soldier would be able to mend something like that. Also at Antietam, she provides her very first surgery, which I'm sure we'll talk more about it throughout this episode, but Clara Barton is not a surgeon. She's not a medical professional in any way. She was really just a woman that had some spare time and some spare supplies and demanded to make a difference. And so when she comes across a man that was shot in the cheek, she does what she knows best. She takes her pocket knife out and she pops the bullet out of his cheek, which he does survive this.

There are many, many battles that she'll go to throughout the Civil War, namely she's at Battery Wagner. She's at the Wilderness. She's at Fredericksburg. Of course, she's at Antietam. Very first battle that she'll go to is the Battle of Cedar Mountain. She's really all over the front lines during the Civil War, but her true work, at least in my eyes, is immediately thereafter with the Missing Soldiers Office. At the close of the Civil War, she really uncovers that there is almost a larger problem happening. No one is being told where their missing loved one is. No one has any details. There's no notification system. There's not even dog tags or anything to identify people that were mortally wounded on the battlefield. And so she'll open the Missing Soldiers Office at her home in D.C. in 1865 with presidential approval from Abraham Lincoln himself. Of course, just prior to his passing that spring of 1865. And she will be flooded with inquiries. There are 63,000 letters of inquiry that pass through that office. And that is with a team of up to 21 people trying to identify these people 24 hours a day,

day and night, all seasons for years and years and years on end. Out of the Missing Soldiers Office, there are 22,000 people in total identified, including about 13,000 at Andersonville.

For some context on Andersonville, because it's absolutely essential to the Clara Barton conversation, Andersonville is a prison camp that was in Andersonville, Georgia. There's really not a place that you'd like to be during the Civil War, at least in my opinion. But this is probably the very last place that I would want to end up during the Civil War. It was built to house about 10,000 men. However, at the highest point, it was three times overpopulated, absolutely absurd, just disgusting conditions in this space. Most of the men pass away due to conditions, lack of nutrition. Although a lot of them also pass away because there was a line at the edge of this lot, again, already a very overcrowded lot, where if you stepped even one toe over the line, you would be shot instantly.

Now, people were moderately aware of Andersonville, but it doesn't really solidify until a young man named Dorence Atwater, who was 18 years old when he was imprisoned, returns back to the North. He was a Union soldier that was imprisoned in Andersonville, and he reveals that he kept a secret ledger of all of the men that had passed away, their cause of death, and the number under which they were buried because none of the men that passed away during his time received a proper burial. Now, he creates this ledger because that was partially his job in the prison, but he has a suspicion that the Confederacy will try to hide the documents that he was creating, so he'll copy it and try to take it to the federal government, and eventually it lands in the hands of Clara Barton. Now, she will go down to Andersonville, Georgia with him and identify, again, just about 13,000 men that were otherwise in unmarked graves. And I think that this really brings national attention, sometimes even international attention, to the crisis that's happening here. The federal government does not have any way to identify missing people. This is not a scale that they've ever dealt with at this point, and so Clara Barton is able to step in and really try to guide that process during this time.

Now, with all of that being said, I did mention she has no experience in this at all prior to the Civil War, which is something that we talk about even less. She was first a school teacher, and then she founded the very first free public school in the state of New Jersey. Casual, of course, and then she becomes within the first five to ten female federal employees overall, and the very first woman to work at the United States Patent Office, which is now where the Portrait Gallery is in downtown D.C. So there are so many things that probably warrant Clara Barton getting her own museum, as it is, but she almost couldn't stop herself from helping. She always noted that during her younger years, she really was not fully sure what she was supposed to do with her life, exactly where she was supposed to be heading, until she is able to align herself with the Union soldiers following the Civil War. I always mention this too, just because we're talking about her life's work, and especially talking about the impact that it had. This is a fun one. Clara Barton is also part of the National First Aid Association, which that is now part of the American Red Cross. It's been incorporated into ARC at this point, but it teaches basic first aid to the average American person, things that you and I probably would never have to think about, how to cool down a fever, how to wrap a bandage, all of these things that I think I learned probably in sixth or seventh grade. These were not widely understood at the time. She becomes involved in 1905, shortly after leaving the American Red Cross. That is her life's mission at that point. For almost another decade, she's working with the National First Aid Association. And they're also a key reason why we have first aid kits. So on top of giving us free public education in the state of New Jersey, women employed by the United States federal government, women on the front lines, the American Red Cross, we also get first aid kits from Clara Barton. So I just think she's really cool.

AT: So I'd like to rewind real quick because you sort of touched on this and moved on. Could you tell us more about her school in New Jersey and I guess more broadly, just her life prior to the Civil War?

MT: Absolutely. Before we talk about the school, I'll back up just slightly so that we have some context on Clara Barton's upbringing as well. So Clara Barton was born on Christmas Day, December 25th in 1821. She was born in North Oxford, Massachusetts. Her family had a farm. They were relatively well established, but by no

means massively wealthy. And so she grew up relatively middle class. She had four older siblings and there was actually about a 10-year age gap between her and her next sibling. So sometimes they would call her Tot, which, I am personally the oldest in my family. So I think that is very cute. I'm not sure if younger siblings would feel the exact same way and I don't think that Clara Barton felt the exact same way. But she grew up in Massachusetts and was extremely close with her father. He was a veteran himself of the War of 1812 and the American Indian Wars in Ohio and Michigan. She would even say, "the patriot blood of my father was warm in my veins," which really, really inspired a lot of her work during the Civil War and thereafter. She herself actually wanted to be a soldier and would reference that repeatedly, although that was not legal during the Civil War, so she never had that opportunity. And she'll grow up in Massachusetts. She'll start teaching in Massachusetts when she is a very young adult and she'll teach there for about a decade before she herself will decide to go to college for one year. She goes to school for just one year at the Clinton Liberal Institute, which is in Clinton, New York, and she actually has to drop out. Her mom passes away during that time and she is low on funding. Again, she was not extravagantly wealthy by any means.

And so she moves back in with her dad at her family farm at this point. And honestly, she's having a lot of the same feelings that we might have now. I personally moved back in with my parents for a few months in between graduating grad school and getting my life together. And Clara Barton actually feels the exact same way. She's essentially trying to figure out, "what it is that I want to do with my life. Where do I want to be? What do I want to do? What is my purpose?" All of these very simple questions that I think anyone would ask during that time period. And so she's kind of driving herself up the wall, figuring out what to do when she decides to write to a friend that she had met at the Clinton Liberal Institute and says, can I please just come stay with you in New Jersey? This is of course not a direct quote, but she'll ask if she can come visit her family in New Jersey, really just needing out of the house, needing something to do. And when she's in New Jersey, she sees that there are hundreds of kids just running around, just chaos in the streets, if you can imagine.

Now in Massachusetts, where Clara Barton grew up, they have a very long history of free public education. So that was sort of a given. Children would have been in school at this time. It was not something that Clara Barton really heavily questioned. But in New Jersey, they did not have free public education at this point. So Clara Barton just sort of started teaching. She picked a building and she opened the doors. On the very first day of school, she had six kids, just six, and she lets them go for lunch and she doesn't think that they will come back. She was actually totally convinced that they'll be gone for the day and that that's the end of her teaching career. But instead, they bring back a bunch of friends.

Now within the first year of her having this school, which I have visited the location myself, it is still preserved. It's in Bordentown, New Jersey. It is a teeny tiny, technically one room schoolhouse, although there is a very, very, very teeny tiny crawl space above it, which I just can't imagine any students getting up there, admittedly. So for all intents and purposes, one-room schoolhouse where over 200 students were being taught out of, within the first year. They were being taught on a rotating schedule. She had several additional teachers helping out. And of course, Bordentown, New Jersey, the city itself, will take notice of this. And they decide to raise \$4,000. This is the 1850s, by the way. That's good money. And they will build a brand new two-story, fantastic schoolhouse. Now, Clara Barton has just essentially set up this school. And so you're probably thinking, "oh, of course, Clara Barton will continue teaching. She'll continue running the school. That seems like the natural progression of events." Wrong, of course. Clara Barton was a woman, and it was the 1850s. And so they decided to hire a man to be the principal of the school. Clara Barton is offered a job still. She was working for free, primarily, to start. So I guess that would have been the ideal arrangement. But the school's best and final offer was to demote her to a female assistant and offer her \$250 a year to work there, which even for the 1850s is really pitiful. So Clara Barton, of course, promptly quits.

And that actually inspires her to move down to DC for the very first time. She'll be living with her sister, and she'll pretty quickly get a job at the Patent Office during that time. But the school part almost gets forgotten in Clara Barton's history because she does so much thereafter. But it's really such a pivotal moment in her own story. She immediately leaves education. She feels totally burned by this experience. She leaves the Northeast

as a whole and officially moves down to DC, and then really reevaluates what her life will be like there again.

AT: And you also mentioned her work for the federal government, which was also not all sunshine and rainbows, shall we say.

MT: That is a good way to put it. No, it certainly wasn't sunshine and rainbows. She did get a job at the Patent Office, and she was pretty satisfied with it for a time, even though, again, I mentioned she's one of the very first female federal employees overall. It was not the most accepting environment. Her male colleagues would spit tobacco on her. They would spread rumors about her. It was really just not a safe environment for her to work in all the time. And so she would actually, in the 1850s even, work from home. If you can imagine it, she would take her Patent Office work and work from her home. And that did continue to work for a while, actually. But President Buchanan was inaugurated, and he was of the opposite party. So her job was let go, along with all of the other Republicans that were employed at this time, really. That was relatively standard. Buchanan also took great issue with female federal employees, specifically, and didn't really want women in the workforce overall. And so she was double-fired for those reasons, essentially. Strike one: of the opposite party. Strike two: you're a lady. You got to get out. And so she will actually move back up to Massachusetts for a time after being fired from the federal government then, too, until Abraham Lincoln is inaugurated in 1861, and she is able to move back down to D.C. She does work for the Patent Office again, for a moment, but she really quickly is swept up in caring for soldiers on the front lines of the Civil War. So we don't get a ton of additional Patent Office content, I guess you could say, thereafter. Although I always like to note that when she says, "I shall never do a man's work for less than a man's pay," when she is fired from the school in New Jersey, she sticks to that, and she is actually making equal pay during the 1860s, about \$1,400 a year at that time. So that makes the \$250 offer in New Jersey look extra, extra pitiful.

AT: So wait, even if she was making equal pay the second time around, I'm guessing she wasn't the first time she worked at the Patent Office, given what you were telling us about her experience there.

MT: "I shall never do a man's work for less than a man's pay" is something that she says when she's fully 80 years old. She says it of her time in Bordentown. That's her final decision that she makes after having the experience in Bordentown. So Clara Barton originally moves down to Washington DC for the very first time in 1854, following her leaving Bordentown, New Jersey the year prior. She does get a job at the Patent Office the same year when she moves down, and even though she is within the first five to ten female federal employees and is seemingly making good money, it is practically impossible to tell what her pay rate was at that time, at least that I've seen, and it's very difficult to tell what the order she falls in is. One of the super fun parts about trying to figure out what women in federal service were doing at this time is that they are not showing up on any of the ledgers. We do know the very first two women that are employed in federal service, however thereafter things get kind of murky. They're not being listed on employment roles or anything like that because the federal government is not being particularly transparent about hiring women at this point. It was extremely controversial, and you can probably tell that by her fellow co-workers spitting tobacco on her and making her life incredibly difficult. So in some ways it almost feels like protection too, of not providing the details of these women, but also not giving them their proper identification, not giving them their proper pay work even in the same way that their male colleagues would have had.

AT: On a previous conversation with Deanne Blanton about women in the US Civil War more broadly, we talked about how this was a period of nursing becoming a profession. So could you speak to Clara Barton's role in that transition?

MT: Oh yeah, definitely. First of all, listen to that episode. Deanne Blanton is

[Listen to DeAnne Blanton on women in the US Civil War](#) or [read the transcript](#).

incredible and wrote a fantastic book which has continuously inspired several programs that we've had at the museum, and it's just like fantastic. All good things to say, and I'm sure it's a beautiful episode too. Clara Barton is absolutely pivotal to nursing as a profession. Prior to the Civil War, there are no official female nurses. You can technically be a female doctor. There are a couple of medical schools that will exclusively allow women, of course. They're not really having men and women being taught simultaneously, but you're still not able to practice as a doctor. Nursing is really up in the air at this point. Nursing is not really a stable industry even. You're not going to go to school to be a nurse at this point in history, and if you were a nurse, you're usually a male nurse, or you're a nurse in the privacy of your own home or within your own community without having any sort of official training or titling. However, Clara Barton really establishes herself as a nurse during this time. She identifies very much so as that way, and Civil War nursing has to be outsourced to women because so many men are at the front lines. So many men are wounded during this time, and so we really see a lot of women come into the conversation during this point when they're unable to serve themselves, and so this is the capacity that they tend to serve in. Clara Barton though was not necessarily the most traditional woman, certainly not the most traditional nurse, and so she decides not to join the nursing corps that was created by Dorothea Dix. Instead, she is essentially acting solo. She does travel very often with the Army of the Potomac. She is head of various hospitals during the Civil War, but she never is officially involved in any sort of federal position. In a lot of ways, she's even kind of like a pest that keeps appearing, which is kind of silly to think about when we talk about how often she's providing these services, but it was core to Clara Barton's belief that this was making a difference. She saw it happening on the front lines. She knew that she was able to provide care for these people, and so she was going to do it regardless of whether or not the federal government wanted her to. It didn't matter what they thought.

In that way, Clara Barton's perspective was very different from other contemporaries like Dorothea Dix and like Florence Nightingale even, who probably take a more traditional approach to things. They're very much so involved with their respective governments and are even respectful of some of the policies that they set forth. Those things Clara Barton just doesn't agree with. For example, Dorothea Dix is very specific in the way that she's recruiting nurses at this time. They have to be married. They have to be a little bit older. They have to be maybe less attractive, a little bit, that conversation is certainly there. Clara Barton really throws all of that out of the window. Clara Barton's nickname, the Angel of the Battlefield, it was said of her by a surgeon named James Dunn at the Battle of Antietam. He does say "homely" angel of the battlefield in a letter to his wife, which we're pretty sure knows would be published, so that's fair. Clara Barton will change that to Holy Angel of the Battlefield and then will drop that off entirely. So she definitely did not want to symbolize this matronly figure. That was not something that she agreed with or felt represented her, but it almost didn't matter to her nursing skills at all. She was absolutely able to nurse effectively and respectfully around sometimes even younger, maybe handsome, unmarried men. It was totally regardless to her. It did not matter at all, which was really unconventional during the Civil War and is honestly even called into question sometimes now. These conversations are still coming up, so Clara Barton: trendsetter.

AT: I'm just trying to wrap my head around this idea that these nurses can't be attractive lest they *inspire lust* in the hearts of these young men, but the men are wounded, right? They're injured or sick badly enough that they need to be in a hospital, so presumably they're also not physically fit enough to be doing anything even if their lust is inspired.

MT: That's a totally fair question, and I think that's probably Clara Barton's perspective, too, and the modern perspective would probably be, "why does this matter? What comes first would be caring for the wounded that you are treating," but of course, respectability politics does come in, and during the Civil War, it was probably a little bit more present in that women were not even allowed to go somewhere without an escort for miscellaneous fear of lust. It also was partially out of concern for sexual violence. You are really prioritizing virginity and the sanctity of marriage and things like that, and so the worst-case scenario, which is still true,

although for different reasons, is sexual assault or rape, anything along those lines, which that does occur during the Civil War too, they're thinking, "if you are less attractive, maybe we can prevent some of these things," even though, of course, we know that's not the case. We know that is nonsense, but that's still something that people talk about today. We're still having conversations about it now, so you can only imagine how 1860s folk felt about it.

AT: So it's probably not so much the patients that they're concerned about as the able-bodied men who would be around, whether that's officers, other soldiers, doctors, etc.

MT: Oh, yeah. Clara Barton is, again, as I've mentioned repeatedly, on the front lines, and hopefully, and usually most of the time, that means that most of these men are not actually wounded. They're still actively fighting or very often in camp. Clara Barton would also stay in camp with other men. Now, she would still have an escort with her, but you have a lot of down time in camp where hanky-panky is perhaps a little bit more likely. Dorothea Dix's nurses were not really in camp in the way that Clara Barton was. They were largely in hospitals, so there is that difference there as well.

AT: This is also reminding me of a conversation that I had with Bianca Taubert from the Adjutant General's Corps Museum in the UK, where we were talking about women at war more broadly from a UK perspective. And one of the things that we discussed was this misconception that any woman, even if she's there with an official unit, she's in uniform, she maybe even has a military rank, some people will still have this idea that any woman in an area that is predominantly occupied by men is inherently sexually available to those men, which, of course, we know is a ridiculous assumption to make. It's more of that victim-blaming nonsense. But I also would assume that some of these women did end up falling in love and marrying soldiers that they met under these conditions.

[Listen to Bianca Taubert on the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps](#) or [read the transcript](#).

MT: Right. It's the same conversation that we still have right now, basically just a couple years beforehand. It always repeats in that way. While I would hope that we've progressed a little bit past victim-blaming and being concerned about what people were wearing, it is the exact same concept here too. And I'm sure that a lot of them did probably fall in love and get married to fellow soldiers. Being involved in combat is absolutely naturally a bonding experience. That's something that you cannot explain to anyone that has not experienced it, although Clara Barton and many, many, many others have tried to explain it. There's a natural understanding with people in those scenarios that I think would absolutely allow them to have a beautiful partnership that has nothing to do with any of these strange concerns.

AT: Also, if you've got any women who are really concerned that their husband or boyfriend is going to fall in love with a pretty nurse on the battlefield, they could always do what several women from the conversation that I had with Deanne Blanton did and dress up like a guy and go with him.

MT: There is a story about Clara Barton interacting with a disguised soldier, actually at Antietam, which I love this story. The young woman was disguised and she was wounded. And she was really not excited to have any of the male surgeons inspect her wound or take care of her, understandably so. And so they bring Clara Barton over. She cares for the wounds and is essentially like, "oh, what?" Discovering things. And of course, the young woman will share her story. She was actually at the battle trying to find her partner as well. And I believe that they are reunited. I even want to say that they have a child together named Clara as a result of Clara saving this young woman's life and being able to reunite them in that way, which is really, really, really special. There are quite a few children named after Clara Barton as a result of her wartime relief. But I just love the women soldiers more than anything. Clara Barton probably would have preferred to do that even, but illegal. So she took a slightly less illegal route, but still very controversial.

AT: Regular listeners will know that one of my favorite topics to get into is the complexities of problematic icons. And so with that in mind, could we discuss Clara Barton and African Americans?

MT: Yeah, definitely. So Clara Barton is in her own description, an abolitionist. She's also a suffragist and she will treat the 54th Massachusetts, the very first Black regiment in the United States Army, following Fort Wagner. On the roles of missing men, you will see Black soldiers appear on these lists as well. Her personal opinion is that if you are on the front lines, you are to treat someone regardless of what race they are, what gender they are, what side they fall on as well. She certainly nursed Confederates during the Civil War too. It did not matter. It was about care. However, it's the 1860s, and Clara Barton is, I think problematic icon is a great word for it. One of the things that I think we really talked about beforehand was Clara Barton's very close friend, actually, honestly, a maternal figure from her that she meets in 1863 when she is nursing the 54th Massachusetts, her friend, Frances Dana Barker Gage. I think that Allison would love to tell you about Frances Dana Barker Gage, one of your very favorite ladies, huh?

AT: So if you've listened to either my episode with Carrie Gibson about who tells the stories of enslaved women or with Dana Rubin about women's speeches, you will have probably heard my Frances Dana Barker Gage rant as Madeline clearly has. Specifically, it irks me extremely the way that she mangled Sojourner Truth's speech that is known as the Ain't I a Woman speech. This is literally what the Wikipedia page is called. And it is called that because Frances Dana Barker Gage took the original speech, which we do have a version of. We have a printed copy that was published in a newspaper a few days after the speech, I believe. My understanding is that Sojourner Truth was friends with the editor, so she probably signed off on it. And so this is the closest that we have to what I would consider the accurate approved version. Then there's Frances Dana Barker Gage's version. And yes, I'm going to say every single one of her names, like she's a frickin' serial killer. (laughs) Her version comes out, I think, 12 years later, and she has given Sojourner Truth's words this Southern enslaved person patois, like basically the white lady's version of what she thinks a formerly enslaved woman "should" sound like. Now, the thing is Sojourner Truth was born into slavery in New York. Her first language was Dutch. She would not have talked like that, even if we didn't have the original version. And so this is just one of those examples that really bugs me, because even if Frances Dana Barker Gage had the best of intentions, it really is indicative of how well-meaning white people have this mindset of thinking that they know better than the people they are meant to be advocating for, and really do this disservice by essentially erasing, in this case, a formerly enslaved woman's own words with what Frances Dana Barker Gage thought was a better version of that speech.

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MT: Now this is, again, basically a maternal figure to Clara Barton and an extremely close friend of hers. I think on the first time that they meet, in 1863, Clara Barton even says, "she has such large and full opinions that I so agree with." I'm definitely mangling that quote, but something like that. Essentially, "I wholeheartedly agree with this woman," which, now that you've heard the rant that I love, yeah, I don't know if I agree with this woman.

AT: Well, something that I got more into with Carrie Gibson on that episode about who tells the stories of enslaved women, and, spoiler, the answer is often well-meaning white ladies. We talk about how there is this certain type of racism, right, where it's a charitable racism, in the sense that these people are genuinely trying to end slavery, and they are thinking that they are doing what is best for people, but they still do not want those people that they are trying to save, it's very much the white savior complex. They do not see those people as equal, they do not want them to be equals. And that's sort of the impression that I get from Clara Barton as well. She is very adamant about, Black patients deserve to be treated, but she doesn't necessarily want African-American women being nurses in her organization, she certainly doesn't seem to want them in

leadership positions. And I think that's where it gets into this problematic aspect of what I've been referring to as the well-intentioned white ladies.

MT: Right, and they're certainly not holding leadership positions within the early American Red Cross. Actually, most of the ways that African Americans have shown up within Clara Barton's diaries or letters, especially throughout the Civil War, is really in service positions. I was actually reading a passage this morning of her immediately following the Battle of the Wilderness. She's in Fredericksburg, and she stays at a hotel, and she is speaking about the maid at the hotel and a young Black woman that works at the hotel rubbing her feet. That is all that she really mentions about them, other than that she paid ten cents for the room, I believe, and tipped the young Black woman three cents for the foot rub. She has a recurring Black maid that will come to her boarding house as well. You're not seeing her wish for enslavement of these people, of course, but they're really only going to appear in this capacity. She doesn't very often give names to these people. She doesn't very often give personalities or any sort of character to these individuals. It's more so like, "oh, this is the person that rubs my feet. This is the person that cleans the kitchen." Which, of course, falls exactly in line with that. I definitely think that this has lasting impacts on the American Red Cross as well. Even though Clara Barton left the organization in 1904, we're, again, not seeing any leadership from any African American person throughout the early Red Cross. Frederick Douglass is a supporter of the early American Red Cross and does sign the Articles of Incorporation in 1881. But that is about it, honestly. The very first African American woman that is even accepted into the Red Cross's nursing service is, I believe, it's in 1918, and that is Frances Reed Elliott. She was denied for years, for years on end before they allowed her into service. So we're certainly not seeing any representation within the American Red Cross. And some of that is not exclusively Clara Barton's fault, but she certainly doesn't establish an organization that is especially progressive in that way at all.

AT: So something that you've mentioned to me previously is that you feel like Clara Barton has often been overlooked, which might be weird for anyone who's thinking, "but she has her own museum." So what do you mean by that?

MT: Overlooked is an interesting word for it. I will say I don't think I learned about her in school. My grandma was a nurse, so I knew a little bit about nursing history from her. And I also, of course, as so many people do, grew up with a History Channel father and grandfather, so it is genetic. I'm predisposed to be a total nerd. And so I felt like I learned about her through channels that either I created myself or my family did, rather than in the traditional elementary or middle school setting. So I, on a nearly everyday basis actually, have people come in and say, "who is Clara Barton? Why is she on your sign? Who is this?" And when I talk to people out in public, they'll say, "oh, what's your job?" I'll share what it is, of course. And they'll say, "oh, that's so great. Can you tell me who Clara Barton is? I don't remember her." So I honestly think even though she is one of the only household names that we have in women's history, at least that was how I understood her, she is still not as educated on as she should be. And this is immediately following us having very, very, very many critiques of her, which is necessary, but it's still important that we talk about her work and the changes that occur thereafter. I also think, and again, this is following us being critical, but there are a lot of conversations that focus on whether or not she is lying, whether or not she is over-exaggerating her work, a lot of questioning of her validity at all. It's just not something that we're doing with any of these other male historical figures, at least not to the same extent. And so by overlooked, I mean that she would not have these same questions and be pushed basically into the dark if she were a man. I think she even has a quote later on where she's like, "if I did even one of the 10 jobs that I had done but I were a man, I would have been the president."

AT: Given that my work is so broad, like I'm looking at all women ever pretty much, I'm always curious when I talk to people whose own work is heavily focused on a single individual or maybe a small group of people, and what is it that made you want to apply for a job where you were going to go to work every day and be working

on the legacy, I suppose, of this one person and her work and her impact. And I guess sort of in the same vein, given that the museum is in Washington DC, which is a city known for all of these incredible cultural institutions, many of which are free. In that context, if someone is visiting DC, why should they be sure to include the Clara Barton Missing Soldiers Office Museum on their list of places to visit?

MT: I, as I mentioned, was familiar with Clara Barton, but was not necessarily a Clara Barton scholar. I think through this job rather than beforehand, I've really come to know her and at times love her, at times less, but she is such an incredible woman in the way that she's able to describe her wartime activities and I so see the vision of her with the Missing Soldiers Office especially and its impacts on our daily life today. We don't even have dog tags until officially World War I. There were dog tags a little bit beforehand. That doesn't happen without Clara Barton. We don't have first aid kits without Clara Barton. The Red Cross today still handles missing in action people. And of course, there are so many organizations that focus on that as well that so much of their history comes back to the Missing Soldiers Office too. It makes it a national conversation. And I just think for any of the problems that I've had with Clara Barton, her impact on especially American history is just unbelievable. She shows up everywhere. She was recently in *The Gilded Age*. She's still kicking it. And she just pops up in every single part of history from the time that she's born until she passes away in 1912. Again, I said she's almost like a pest on the battlefield. She's almost a pest in American history during this period too because she is such an influential figure. I just think she's so impressive in so many ways. But I actually didn't come at it from that perspective at all. I really was not all that interested in Clara Barton's personal history. I was really interested in the building. For some context on my background and how I ended up here, I did my master's dissertation partially on medieval bedrooms and was really invested in architecture and how women specifically were decorating their rooms and how they owned these, technically, it's property. But it's by no means the actual house or anything like that. It's like the curtains. And when I realized that I could have the opportunity to once again study a woman's bedroom, I just thought that was so incredible. I never, ever, ever thought that my master's would be able to be useful. It's the building itself. There's absolutely nothing like it in DC or beyond it. It's totally unique compared to every single museum I've ever been to. It is a fully recreated 1860s boarding house. When you walk in, it's almost what Clara Barton herself would have seen. So much of it was able to be preserved, partially because the building was lost. How do you lose a building? Well, after the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire happened in 1911, fire codes naturally update and the owner of the building had a decision to make. Essentially, you could either put in a fire escape, which costs money, so thumbs down on that, and instead decided to board up the third floor. Now, it's a three-story building that's originally constructed in 1853 prior to Clara Barton moving in, and the first and second floor were still accessible during this time, but the third floor is walled off after 1911, and so it's essentially just sitting up there. You don't have these very normal human activities going on, like hanging up picture frames, painting the walls every few years, scraping chairs along the floor. Try not to do that now as well, but because of that, it's essentially a little time capsule that's up there. There's wallpaper dating from when Clara Barton was living there, and I think the latest swatch is in 1913, just prior to that wall going up where it closes up sometime between 1913 to 1914 when it's walled off. And again, no matter where I go, I just have never seen a space that's preserved in quite this way. When you go into a museum, it's usually actively been a museum for years and years and years on end, and there's a lot of renovations that have happened, or it's a newer museum and it was someone's personal home for years and years on end. However the history of the site went, usually it's not just sitting there. It's very rare to lose a building.

The way that the building is discovered is because a carpenter named Richard Lyons goes up to the third floor, he's inspecting the building, and actually the General Services Administration had purchased the building with plans to tear it down. They were remodeling downtown DC in the mid-'90s, and so in 1996 he goes in, and he's exploring the third floor, peeking out of a window, and he says that he feels a tap on his shoulder, which the entire reason that he went to that back section was because he claimed that he heard a woman crying as well in this abandoned building, which if it's me experiencing any of this, I am out. But luckily he stayed, and when

he felt that tap on the shoulder, he started scanning the room with his flashlight, trying to figure out who or what might have touched his shoulder. He finds this crawl space in the ceiling that's basically just above him, but it's sort of covered over, and there was a little envelope dangling from the ceiling. Now he pulls the envelope down, it's addressed to a man named Edward Shaw, which he does not recognize the name immediately. That's totally fair, he's not a historical figure that comes up all that often unless you're me. But he decides to make a decision that, again, I would absolutely never, ever, ever make and would not recommend to any listeners. He takes a ladder and he crawls up into the ceiling. Yuck. But when he's up there, as he's exploring, he finds the original Missing Soldiers Office sign, which says Missing Soldiers Office, Third Story, Room 9, Miss Clara Barton. And of course he recognizes Clara Barton's name, so he takes that to his supervisor at the General Services Administration and is essentially like, "uh, we need to figure this out." Supervisor says, "yeah, no thanks, we're gonna tear the building down." And Richard Lyons does not take no for an answer, and instead and instead will bring historians to the building and basically make such a ruckus about this that he saves the building. Now, it's Missing Soldiers Office, Third Story, Room 9, and as they're exploring the space, they start to realize, oh, the original Door 9 is still here. It still has, today, when you come and visit, it still has the hand-cut mail slot in the Door 9 that received 63,000 letters of inquiry to the office. It's just incredible how they were able to bring that space back to life. It's renovated in a way that I've never seen before, and I'm just so impressed by it every single time I go upstairs. I've cried about it before. I'll cry about it again. It's an incredible space.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women Podcast and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.