

What is the Red Cross - By Clara Barton

1878

The following was transcribed from *The Red Cross of the Geneva Convention. What It Is*
(A primary source: <http://www.nps.gov/clba/historyculture/rcwhat.htm>)

A confederation of Relief Societies in different countries, acting under the Geneva Convention, carries on its work under the sign of the Red Cross. The aim of these societies is to ameliorate the condition of wounded soldiers in the armies in campaign on land or sea, and to furnish relief in cases of great national calamity.

The societies had their rise in the conviction of certain philanthropic men, that the official sanitary service in wars is usually insufficient, and that the charity of the people, which at such times exhibits itself munificently, should be organized for the best possible utilization. An International Public Conference was called at Geneva, Switzerland, in 1863, which, though it had not an official character, brought together representatives from a number of governments. At this conference a treaty was drawn up, afterwards remodeled and improved, which twenty-five governments have signed.

The treaty provides for the neutrality of all sanitary supplies, ambulances, surgeons, nurses, attendants, and the sick or wounded men, and their safe conduct, when they bear the sign of the organization, viz: the Red Cross.

Although the convention which originated the organization was necessarily international, the Relief Societies themselves are entirely national and independent; each one governing itself and making its own laws, according to the genius of its nationality and needs.

The sign of the Red Cross was adopted because it was necessary for recognizance and safety, and for carrying out the general provisions of the treaty, that a uniform badge should be agreed upon. The Red Cross was chosen out of compliment to the Swiss Republic, where the first convention was held, and in which the Central Commission has its headquarters. The Swiss colors being a white cross on a red ground, the badge chosen was these colors reversed.

There are no "members of the Red Cross," but only members of societies whose sign it is. There is no "Order of the Red Cross." The Relief Societies use, each according to its convenience, whatever methods seem best suited to prepare in times

of peace for the necessities of sanitary service in times of war. They gather and store gifts of money and supplies; arrange hospitals, ambulances, methods of transportation of wounded men, bureaus of information, correspondence, &c. All that the most ingenious philanthropy could devise and execute, has been attempted in this direction.

In the Franco-Prussian war this was abundantly tested. That Prussia acknowledged its beneficence, is proven by the fact that the Emperor affixed the Red Cross to the Iron Cross of Merit.

Although the societies are not international, there is a tacit compact between them, arising from their common origin, identity of aim and mutual relation to the treaty. This compact embraces four principals, viz: centralization, preparation, impartiality, and "solidarity."

1st-CENTRALIZATION. The efficiency of relief in time of war depends on unity of direction, therefore in every country the Relief Societies have a common central head to which they send their supplies, and which communicates for them with the seat of war or with the surgical military authorities, and it is through this central commission they have governmental recognition.

2d-PREPARATION. It is understood that societies working under the Red Cross shall occupy themselves with preparatory work in times of peace. This gives them a permanence they could not otherwise have.

3d-IMPARTIALITY. The societies of belligerent nations cannot always carry aid to their wounded countrymen who are captured by the enemy; this is counterbalanced by the regulation that the aid of the Red Cross societies shall be extended alike to friend and foe.

4th-"SOLIDARITY". This provides that the societies of nations not engaged in war may afford aid to the sick and wounded of belligerent nations without affecting any principle of non-interference their governments may be pledged to. This must be done through the Central Commission, and not through either of the belligerent parties-this insures impartiality of relief.

That these principles are practical, has been thoroughly tested during the fifteen years the Red Cross has existed.

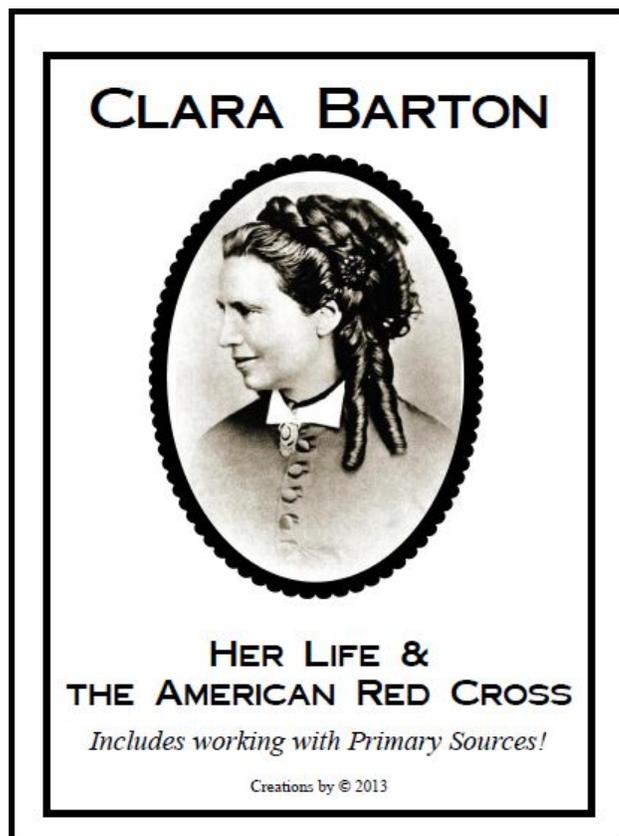
The "Convention" of Geneva does not exist as a society, but is simply a treaty under which all the relief societies of the Red Cross are enabled to carry on their work effectually. In time of war, the members and agents of the societies who go to the seat of war are obliged to have their badges vized by the Central Commission, and by one of the belligerents- this is in order to prevent fraud. Thus the societies and the treaty complement each other. The societies find and execute the relief, the treaty affords them the immunities which enable them to execute.

It is further a part of the *raison d'etre* of these national relief societies to afford ready succor and assistance to sufferers in time of national or wide-spread calamities, such as plagues, cholera, yellow fever and the like, devastating fires or floods, railway disasters, mining catastrophes, &c. The readiness of organizations like those of the Red Cross to extend help at the instant of need, renders the aid of quadruple value and efficiency to that gathered together hastily and irresponsibly, in the bewilderment and shock which always accompanies such calamities. The trained nurses and also attendants subject to the relief societies, in such cases would accompany the supplies sent, and remain in action as long as needed. Organized in every State, the relief societies of the Red Cross would be ready with money, nurses and supplies, to go on call to the instant relief of all who were overwhelmed by any of those sudden calamities which occasionally visit us. In case of yellow fever, there being an organization in every State, the nurses and attendants would be first chosen from the nearest societies, and being acclimated would incur far less risk to life than if sent from distant localities. It is true that the government is always ready in these times of public need to furnish transportation, and often does much more. In the Mississippi flood, a few years ago, it ordered rations distributed under the direction of army officers; in the case of the explosion at the navy-yard, it voted a relief fund, and in our recent affliction at the South, a like course was pursued. But in such cases one of the greatest difficulties is that there is no organized method of administering the relief which the government or liberal citizens are willing to bestow, nor trained and acclimated nurses ready to give intelligent care to the sick; or if there is organization, it is hastily formed in the time of need, and is therefore comparatively inefficient and wasteful. It would seem to be full time that, in consideration of the growth and rapidly accumulating necessities of our country, we should learn to economize our charities, and insure from them the greatest possible practical benevolence. Although we in the United States may fondly hope to be seldom visited by the calamities of war, yet the misfortunes of other nations with which we are on terms of amity appeal to our sympathies; our southern coasts are periodically visited by the scourge

of yellow fever; the valleys of the Mississippi are subject to destructive inundations; the plains of the West are devastated by grasshoppers, and our cities and country are swept by consuming fires. In all such cases, to gather and dispense the profuse liberality of our people without waste of time or material requires, the wisdom that comes of experience and permanent organization. Still more does it concern, if not our safety, at least our honor, to signify our approval of those principals of humanity acknowledged by every other civilized nation.

Assignment: Using Clara Barton's description, create a Red Cross poster which represents the essence of the organization.

This assignment was taken from a larger unit on Clara Barton, Her life and the American Red Cross. CHSH Download Club subscribers can download the entire unit @ <http://www.christianhomeschoolhub.com/pt/American-Red-Cross--Clara-Barton-Resources/wiki.htm>



Preview the entire unit @ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/christianhomeschoolhub/sets/72157633550758732/>