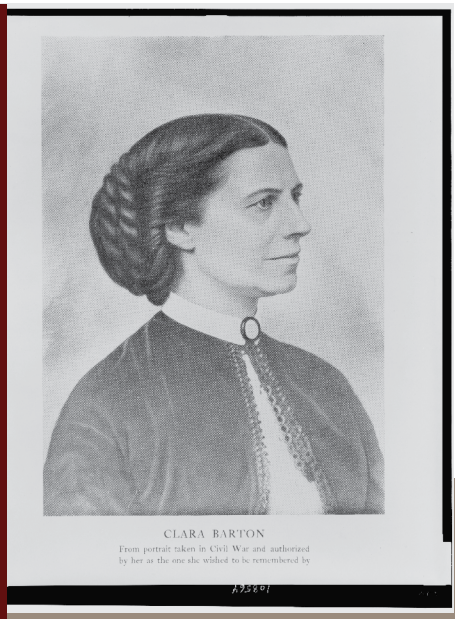

106 SUCCESS STORY

Collaboration Saves Hidden Treasure: Clara Barton's Office and Home

Washington, D.C.

"The Clara Barton Missing Soldiers Office Museum is a true time capsule and special experience. The GSA did an incredible job of preserving and returning the space to Barton's time. You can feel her presence as we tell her incredible story in the very rooms where she lived and worked for years."

—DAVID PRICE
National Museum of Civil War Medicine Interim Executive Director

Photos: Above, portrait of Clara Barton during the Civil War (photo courtesy Library of Congress); Right, the original façade, removed during Metro construction, was replicated via public-private partnership; original office sign (photos courtesy GSA)

THE STORY

Clarissa "Clara" Harlowe Barton, before founding the American Red Cross, dedicated herself to caring for Union troops in the Civil War and later conceived of and headed the Office of the Missing Soldiers to help families locate unaccounted loved ones who served in the war. The Office responded to more than 63,000 inquiries with more than 100,000 handwritten and form letters. Barton operated the Office from rented space in downtown Washington, D.C. From 1865 to 1868, she and her small staff provided information to families about the fate of more than 21,000 men.

THE PROJECT

In 1996, the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation's real estate holdings were transferred to the General Services Administration (GSA) for management and disposition. The holdings included an 1853 building with shops and professional offices on the first and second floors, and boarding rooms on the third floor. Just prior to the property's sale and anticipated demolition for residential redevelopment, a GSA employee discovered artifacts that indicated Barton had lived on the third floor of the building. In 1997, a National Park Service historian confirmed Barton resided in and worked out of Room 9 and other adjacent rooms between 1861 and 1868, during and immediately after the Civil War. GSA commenced consultation to determine next steps.

THE 106 PROCESS

GSA was the federal agency responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. In the process, federal agencies also must consult with parties that have an interest in the property when adverse effects may ensue. Given the newfound historic significance of the property and its pending transfer and redevelopment, GSA reached out to consulting parties to resolve adverse effects.

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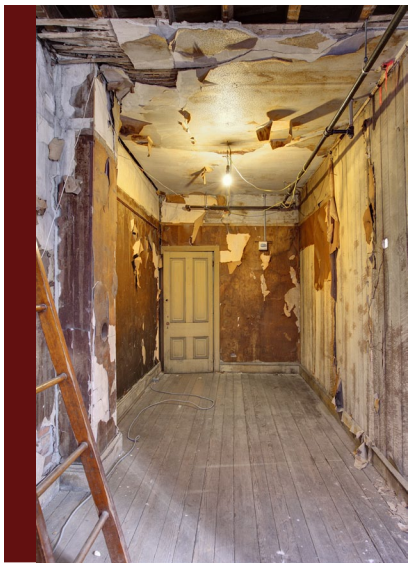

Photos: Left, the parlor before restoration (photo courtesy OLBN/GSA); Above, conservators found enough wallpaper fragments on the walls and in the attic to recreate the Civil War-era character of Barton's rooms (photo courtesy GSA); Right, the parlor after restoration (photo courtesy OLBN/GSA)

Original elements of Room 9 include interior doors and walls, piping for gas lighting, a chimney for a potbelly stove, and fragments of wallpaper selected by Barton and installed during her residency. A wood plank wall divided Barton's sleeping parlor from a large open space she used to store her battlefield supplies and later as the Missing Soldiers Office. Original hand-painted signage denoting the "Missing Soldiers Office" and boxes of Civil War-era documents were discovered in the attic above Room 9.

In 2000, GSA and consulting parties executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to ensure that the spaces associated with Barton on the third floor would be preserved in perpetuity in situ. According to the MOA, GSA stabilized the significant areas and, pursuant to a preservation covenant it attached to the deed, oversaw an $8 million improvement effort by their private development partner, Jefferson at Penn Quarter, L.P. Between 2001 and 2006, the developer assumed responsibility for building systems, safety upgrades, and other improvements to support a future museum use. Under the covenant, GSA retains a perpetual easement to access, perform maintenance, and conserve and interpret significant spaces, while the developer funds base building utilities.

In 2012, GSA executed a management agreement with the non-profit National Museum of Civil War Medicine. Following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, GSA completed utility work, restored interior finishes, and rehabilitated the museum reception area with proceeds from the property's earlier sale. Work included gaslight and wallpaper restoration, and ensured that evidence uncovered during construction was incorporated. Concurrently, museum personnel developed a marketing program and installed exhibits for the new Clara Barton Missing Soldiers Office Museum.

Consulting Parties:

General Services Administration

ACHP

District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer

Jefferson at Penn Quarter, L.P. (JPI Apartment Development, L.P.)

National Capital Planning Commission

THE SUCCESS

Due to a timely discovery and diligent GSA compliance with Section 106, museum visitors can experience Barton and her meaningful work in the restored original venue. The valuable partnership among the federal government, a private developer, and a non-profit museum was able to restore this important historic property which will continue to inform the public about Barton's efforts and the Office of the Missing Soldiers.

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to **www.achp.gov**

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