

**Winter in Petersburg Letter**



(Letter to Georgia Strother, March 1865, Accession #6760a, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia)  
Petersburg, VA.  
March 1865

My Dear Sister,

Your letter received yesterday shows that you have missed all the letters I have written you from here.

...

Next morning Dr. Fair and Colonel Hunt came for us in an ambulance and took us across the Appomattox River to Mr. Hamilton's where they had engaged rooms for us. Here we have been very comfortable. I have a very good servant. Army rations are issued to us; then we can buy chickens, eggs, and vegetables.

The weather has been continually cold-very- all the winter, tho' we had only one heavy snow. Over here we have good wood in abundance, and keep roaring fires all the time. I wish our soldiers on the lines were as fortunate. Wood is scarce there and then only green pine, for which they have to go some distance into the country.

One day we spent most pleasantly with the Hunts who are at a boarding-house near the lines. We crossed the river on a pontoon bridge and went the rest of the way in an ambulance.

Another day, the Huots, Hunts, and we went to the lines to visit Colonel Newton Brown of Anderson. We had a fine dinner in his tent. From the door of the tent could be distinctly seen the

Yankees constructing a tower along their lines to enable them to see over into ours. Apparently it was only about a mile away.

Last Sunday we attended service at an Episcopal Church in Petersburg, where we saw General Lee and his staff march in. Colonel Marshall was the only one we knew. General Longstreet, A.P. Hill, and Wilcox sat not far from us. General Lee's face bespeaks the character of the man. He seemed to all appearances oblivious of everything except the sermon and the service.

Edwin is urging me to make my plans for leaving. He seems uneasy for fear, that if I continue here much longer, fighting may begin in earnest and then I can't get away.

You know I brought a quantity of woolen yarn from home. I wish I had kept an account of the number of pairs of sox I have knit for the soldiers. Then too, I have done lots of patching and mending for them. It takes a good deal of work and planning to keep our own clothes presentable.

You ask if I have heard a battle. Only once since I came has there been one, and tho' General Lee said of it: "Our loss was small; that of the enemy not great." Nevertheless several were killed on our side, one of them being Pegram of Virginia. His young bride who was in Petersburg, knowing that he was in the neighborhood of the firing, went out when it ceased, to meet him, as she supposed, flushed with success. Instead she met his dead body being borne back.

I shall see Mrs. Hunt in a few days and will then write you when to expect me.

To Miss Georgia Strother Fruit Hill, South Carolina

## Washer Women in the Civil War



Source Civil War Times

In the Union Army's 1861 Military Handbook and soldier's Manual of Information there is listed the one job women could apply for an no Civil War army unit wanted to be without; that of the company laundress. Each woman was "required to have a certificate of good character from headquarters before she could assume duties within the lines." This was a hard working woman who kept the soldier's clothing clean; she cleaned officers and enlisted men's clothing alike. She was the only woman granted official status in army camps. The presence of the company laundress continued an army tradition established in 1802, as noted within the records of the war.

Appointed by the company captains, laundresses received housing, a daily ration of food and the services of the company surgeon. The laundress was usually married to a man in the company in which they served. The laundresses' quarters were of course set apart from those of the company. Washer women, while not treated exactly like soldiers, were nevertheless expected to follow a semblance of military discipline and they were subject to army justice.

Wherever the company went, so did the laundresses. This meant sharing potential hardship and danger as women of the company. Some officers grumbled about having to transport laundresses, considering them an unnecessary hindrance. For the washer women, this life on the road and in tent cities was no pleasure excursion. A laundress needed a lot of equipment to keep up with her work and that equipment had to be carried wherever the army moved. It also required company maintenance. A 25-gallon oak tub weighed about 35 pounds without water-and a laundress needed at least two such tubs. Other necessary tools were buckets boilers, laundry sticks, scrub boards, soap crates, starch, bluing, ropes, fire grates and basic household items.

Once source stated that "an energetic washer woman could earn \$40 a month." A full company of 100 men was authorized four laundresses or one for every 25 men. At fifty cents from each man, a laundress could make \$12.50 if every man had his laundry done.

In addition to cleaning services, the laundresses provided other services by bringing along home remedies to treat illnesses and injuries and often assisted surgeons during surgery. For many soldiers, the laundresses were reminders that there was a world beyond the war, where men lived for peace with friends and family they loved. This reminder gave them hope.

**Clara Harlowe Barton**

(1821-1912)



Clara Barton was born on December 25, 1821 in Oxford, Massachusetts. She was the youngest of 5 children in a middle class family. Barton was educated at home and at 15 she started teaching school. Her most notable antebellum achievement was the establishment of a free public school in Bordentown, NJ.

In 1861 Barton was living in Washington, D.C. working at the Patent Office. When the 6<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts regiment arrived in the city after the Baltimore Riots, she organized a relief program for the soldiers. Clara Barton's lifetime of philanthropy began as a result of this relief program. When she learned of the many wounded at Bull Run, Barton advertised for donations in the Worcester, Massachusetts and began an independent organization to distribute goods to the wounded. The relief operation was successful, and the following year U.S. Surgeon General William A. Hammond granted her a general pass to travel with army ambulances "for the purpose of distributing comforts for the sick and wounded, and nursing them."

By the end of the war Barton had performed most of the services that would later be associated with the American Red Cross, which she founded in 1881. She resigned as head of the organization in 1904. She retired to her home in Glen Echo, outside Washington, D.C. where she died April 12, 1912.

Source: "Historical Times Encyclopedia of the Civil War" edited by Patricia L. Faust.