



### **Episode 804, Story 1: Clara Barton Letter**

Eduardo Pagán: Our first case asks how this letter might be connected to America's early efforts to honor its war dead. 1864: for three grim years, Confederate and Union forces have clashed on the battlefield. Troops are constantly on the move, and communications are chaotic. With casualties in the hundreds of thousands, accurate records of battlefield dead and injured are virtually non-existent. How can worried family members learn the fate of missing loved ones? Are they dead, injured, or snared in a prisoner-of-war camp? Now, almost one-hundred-fifty years after the war's end, Bill Kruczek from Osceola, Indiana, holds a letter about one such soldier...And it appears to have been written by Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross.

Bill Kruczek: I think it could be a very important piece of Civil War history.

Eduardo: I'm Eduardo Pagán, and I'm meeting Bill Kruczek to learn more about this letter.

Bill: Come on inside.

Eduardo: Thank you. Where did you get the letter from?

Bill: I was at an estate sale in Hummelstown, Pennsylvania. I bought a box full of books. Some of the books were water damaged, so I started to throw them away and as I was throwing them away I came across this letter.

Eduardo: At first, Bill didn't recognize Clara Barton's name. It was the contents of the letter that he found intriguing.

Bill: The letter talks about a soldier who died.

Eduardo: For Bill, the fate of American soldiers is personal; he is a former marine. His son is a cadet at the Air Force Academy. He also has an ancestor who died at the notorious Confederate prison camp in Andersonville, Georgia.



Bill: While I was reading about Andersonville I came across the name Clara Barton several times and I was wondering is it the same Clara Barton who signed this letter?

Eduardo: What questions can I pursue for you?

Bill: Well I'd like to know if you can tell me a little bit more about the men that the letter is written about, and if this letter was written and signed by Clara Barton the founder of the American Red Cross.

Eduardo: This letter appears to be quite old and it's in fragile condition. "Office of Correspondence with Friends of the Missing Men of the United States Army, Washington D. C., July 30th, 1866." We know that that was immediately following the American Civil War. "I am in receipt of communication from the Adjutant General of Pennsylvania which says Israel Brown, Company C, 184th Pennsylvania, died November 10th, 1864 at Florence, South Carolina." It doesn't say how he died. The letter finishes off, "I'm very truly yours, Clara Barton." Now looking at the envelope, it looks equally old, but very clearly in preprinted form, it says in the upper left, "Clara Barton general correspondent." And then in handwriting it is addressed to "J. Blair Welch, Burnt Cabins, Pennsylvania." I'd like to know how this Union soldier died. But first, I need to figure out if Clara Barton wrote this letter.

Eduardo: Elizabeth Brown Pryor is the author of the book *Clara Barton: Professional Angel*. She asks me to meet her in Washington D.C., at the original site of the Friends of the Missing Men office, the same office listed on our letter. It was also Clara Barton's boarding house room. Elizabeth, do you think it's possible that this letter was produced here in Clara Barton's office?

Elizabeth Brown Pryor: Well it's certainly on the stationary, the form letter that they used from this office.

Eduardo: Now I suspect you've seen Clara Barton's signature many, many times.

Elizabeth: Many times.

Eduardo: What do you think? Did she sign this letter?



Elizabeth: Well I'm not a handwriting expert, but Clara Barton had a very distinctive autograph.

Eduardo: Elizabeth shows me a letter with an authenticated Clara Barton signature, and the differences are unmistakable. Now that is a different signature.

Elizabeth: It's much more constrained, isn't it? And it's really quite distinctive; her signature doesn't change throughout her life. Clara Barton probably didn't sign this letter. Somebody with her blessing had signed on her behalf.

Eduardo: What exactly was the purpose of this office?

Elizabeth: Well, the purpose of the office was, in essence, to try to piece together information about those who were listed as missing during the Civil War, of which there were tens and tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands.

Eduardo: Elizabeth explains how the Massachusetts-born Clara Barton founded the Red Cross in 1881. But her motivation and reputation had been drawn from her experiences in Washington during the Civil War, more than a decade earlier.

Elizabeth: When the war broke out Lincoln called for volunteers to defend the city and some of the first that arrived came from Massachusetts.

Eduardo: Clara had started her career as a teacher in Massachusetts.

Elizabeth: And a lot of her pupils were in that regiment. And she went up there to visit them and found out that they had very few of the basic necessities that they needed. They didn't have socks. They didn't have food. The Union army really was totally unprepared, certainly at that stage. She just took it upon herself to say, "I'm going to close the gap." So she started collecting supplies and distributing them.

Eduardo: Clara then tended to the wounded during some of the worst fighting of the war.



Elizabeth: At one point at the battle of Antietam when she offered to help a surgeon who was amputating limbs, and they had run out of bandages, they were tying them up with green corn leaves. He said, do you think you can stand it, because all of his assistants had run away at that point. And she said, "If you can stand it, I can stand it." And they were being directly bombarded by artillery in this little hospital at that point in time. So she was quite remarkably courageous.

Eduardo: Well then how did she go from the battlefield to this office?

Elizabeth: She saw that dying soldiers were very nervous about the fact that they might die in obscurity. That their family wouldn't know what happened to them. And so her notebooks are filled with these little jottings of names and addresses to tell people what had happened, what the fate of this soldier was.

Eduardo: President Lincoln ordered the army to help Clara, and the Friends of the Missing Men office became a clearing house, connecting family members with information about their loved ones. How did she acquire information to respond to the letters that she received?

Elizabeth: She would put together these very long lists of names and have them printed in the newspaper, have them put up in post offices, in hopes that somebody would come back to her with information. She was receiving about 150 letters a day. Sixty-three thousand she claims by the end of the time that she was working here.

Eduardo: Elizabeth explains how Clara had gotten crucial and early help in her career from a young soldier, Dorrance Atwater, who had firsthand experience of one of the most horrific prison camps of the entire Civil War.

Elizabeth: Dorrance Atwater had been taken prisoner quite early on and had been set to Andersonville. Where he had been assigned to copy the death rolls there, and as he saw what the level of atrocity was at Andersonville, he made an extra copy every day and he hid it in the lining of his coat. And when he was finally released in 1865 he took this copy of the death roll, which had 13,000 names on it.

Eduardo: I'm trying to wrap my mind around that figure. Thirteen thousand deaths?



Elizabeth: Thirteen thousand deaths. So when Clara Barton saw this she recognized its significance on many levels.

Eduardo: What about the men mentioned in these letter? Israel Brown and J. Blair Welch. The owner wanted to find out something about them.

Elizabeth: I couldn't tell you exactly who they were. But it would seem to me that the person that the letter is being sent to, J. Blair Welch, is somebody who has inquired about Israel Brown.

Eduardo: Who was this soldier, and how did he die? Well here I see that the 184th Regiment of Pennsylvania was involved in some major campaigns, but these were all fought on Virginia soil and we know that Israel Brown died in Florence, South Carolina. Had Israel Brown been captured elsewhere, and perhaps held as a prisoner of war? Here's a list of Andersonville Prison records and if I type in Israel Brown's name. It says that he was held at Andersonville and survived. And this is interesting, too: it seems that, in 1864, Confederate officials dispersed thousands of the Andersonville Prisoners to camps throughout the south. One of these locations was Florence, South Carolina. Did Israel Brown die at that camp? I want to confirm that. But first, exactly who was Clara Barton writing to in Burnt Cabins, Pennsylvania? I'm meeting local historian Ken Keebaugh in Burnt Cabins, the home of J. Blair Welch. I love this place; it has a great historic feel to it.

Ken Keebaugh: Yeah, I love it here too. My family's lived in this area since about 1773.

Eduardo: Can you tell me anything about these men, Israel Brown and J. Blair Welch?

Ken: We're standing right in front of J. Blair Welch's store right now. It was a dry goods store and it dates back to the 1850s. I have something here I want to show you. This is an atlas of Burnt Cabins store in the 1800's and you can see here where the Brown family lived and over here you can see where the Welch family had their store.

Eduardo: So they were neighbors?



Ken: Yes. There was only about five doors between them and in a small community everyone knew one another.

Eduardo: Can you tell me anything about Israel Brown?

Ken: Yes. Israel Brown was about 38 years old near the end of the Civil War in 1864. He was a father of six children, three of whom died in one month, about a year before he enlisted.

Eduardo: Ohh. That must have been a very difficult time in his life.

Ken: Yes. A lot of children in this area died of diphtheria during that time period.

Eduardo: Ken has made an additional discovery, which he offers to show me at the Fulton County Library.

Ken: This is the *Daily Evening Bulletin* from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania dated June 1, 1866, and here is a list of missing soldiers.

Eduardo: The Missing, by Clara Barton. "Each name here enrolled is taken from the letter of some relative or friend who have written to me asking my aid in their painful search. And in their behalf, I appeal to you to give such facts relative to the fate of these men as you may recollect or can ascertain." And there are a list of names and there he is, Israel Brown, 184th Regiment. So Clara Barton must have added his name to this list after she received a letter from J. Blair Welch. Israel Brown had only been in the army for six months before dying. Mark Buyck is Chairman of the Board of the Friends of the Florence Stockade in Florence, South Carolina.

Mark Buyck: Hello Eduardo. Welcome to Florence.

Eduardo: Thank you. It's nice to meet you. Now we know that Israel Brown mustered into the 184th Pennsylvania Regiment. We know that he was a prisoner of war in Andersonville Prison, but that he died in Florence, South Carolina. Can you tell me how that might have happened?



Mark: The Confederate prison officials at Andersonville realized that if that if Sherman should capture Atlanta, that there were these 35,000 men there that could potentially be rearmed and fight against the south. So they developed this plan to build additional prisons -- one was right here in Florence.

Eduardo: Mark walks me to a peaceful spot where the grim prison once stood. What was it like here?

Mark: It was a twenty-three and a half acre enclosure that held between 15 and 18,000 men.

Eduardo: Eighteen thousand men? Right here?

Mark: Right here. There was very little in the way of sanitation. Shelter was improvised. The prisoners would build what they called "shebangs". They would dig a hole maybe two, three, four feet deep. Find whatever kind of cloth or maybe pine boughs that they could stretch over the top and there would be four or five men that would live in these holes.

Eduardo: It sounds at best conditions were horrible.

Mark: Twenty-eight hundred Union troops died here in the approximately four or five months that the stockade was in operation. Most of them were buried in what is now the Florence National Cemetery.

Eduardo: I'd like to see that. Thank you.

Mark: Let's go look.

Eduardo: I see row, after row, after row of unknown soldiers buried here. Many of them have over a hundred soldiers in each row.

Mark: There's sixteen trenches, each one containing over a hundred men and then they would be placed side-by-side in these trenches and then their remains covered.



Eduardo: Had Israel Brown been buried here?

Mark: I have a record here from a document found in the National Archives...

Eduardo: It's time to report back to Bill. After looking at many, many documents, I am confident that this letter came out of Clara Barton's office for the Friends of the Missing Men of the United States Army.

Bill: Wow.

Eduardo: The letter was likely signed on behalf of Barton, but it had compelled me to learn more about Israel Brown and J. Blair Welch. We know that they were neighbors. Israel Brown enlisted in the army in May of 1864 and six months later he had died in Florence, South Carolina. We don't know the exact battle that resulted in his capture, but there is one thing that we do know for sure.

Mark: It's a roll of federal deaths at Savannah, Georgia and Florence, South Carolina, during October and November of 1864. There is an Israel Brown, Company C, 184th Pennsylvania infantry, who died in Florence, South Carolina on November 10, 1864.

Eduardo: So you think it's possible that he could be buried here?

Mark: I do believe he is buried here and through the efforts of Clara Barton and her office, the Brown family and Israel Brown's friends were able to secure some closure and know that he in fact had died in Florence, South Carolina.

Eduardo: I tell Bill that our best assumption is that – in such a small town as Burnt Cabins – Welch surely passed news of Brown's death on to his family. Your letter represents the efforts of people like Clara Barton who worked to bring closure to the families of those who had served on behalf of our nation. But it also reminds us of the horrible and devastating costs that that war had where there are still thousands who remain missing.



Bill: I'm a little overwhelmed, I mean, to think that this letter written 140 some years ago has survived. This soldier is still being remembered even today.

Eduardo: After four tireless years at the Friends of the Missing Men office, doctors persuaded Clara Barton to take a rest. She left for Europe...but did not rest. Instead, Barton offered her services to the International Red Cross – a relief organization founded just seven years earlier. After caring for the wounded during the Franco Prussian war, she returned to the United States in 1873. On May 21, 1881, Barton held the first meeting of the American Association of the Red Cross in her apartment on I Street in Washington, D.C. Barton continued her work as a professional angel until her death, at the age of 90, in 1912.