

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM
THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND TECHNOLOGY:
PAPER 50

RED CROSS AMBULANCE OF 1898
IN THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND TECHNOLOGY

Herbert R. Collins

CUBA	170
PUERTO RICO	173
LONG ISLAND CITY	173
GEORGIA	174

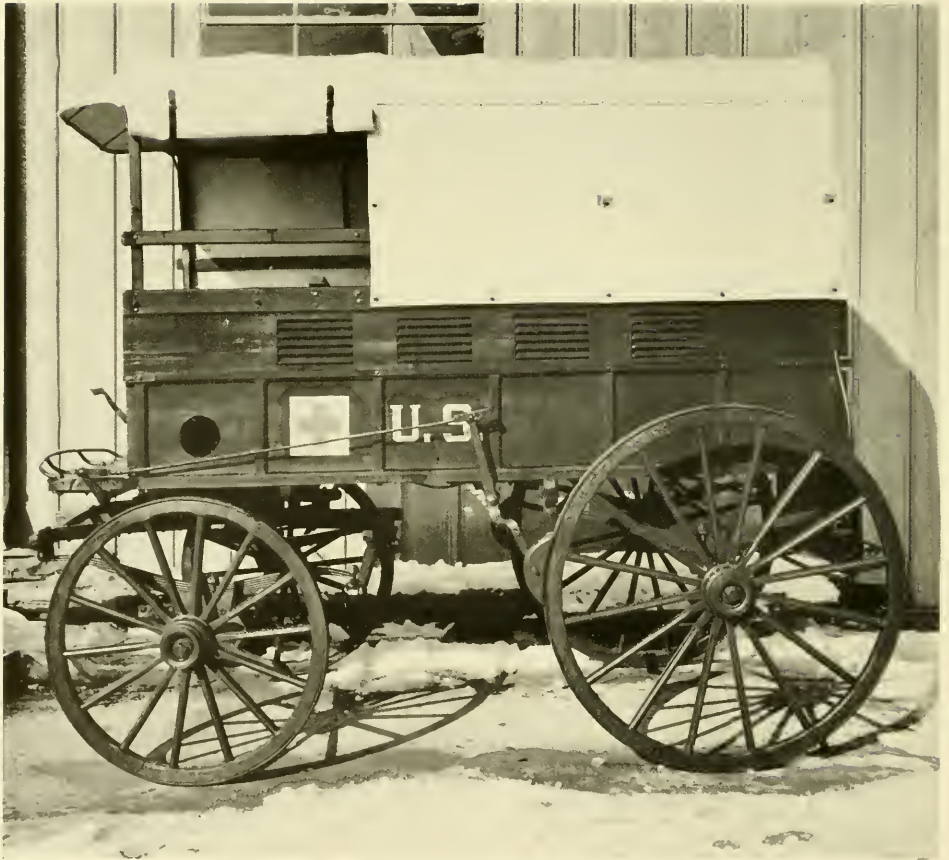


Figure 1.—THE AMBULANCE AS RESTORED FOR EXHIBITION in the Museum of History and Technology. (Smithsonian photo 50890.)

RED CROSS AMBULANCE OF 1898

IN THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND TECHNOLOGY

Ambulances marked with a red cross were furnished by the German Army Quartermaster Corps as early as 1870, in the Franco-Prussian War. This paper tells of the first concerted effort of a civilian corps to provide ambulances at any battle-front. The enterprise is significant, for while the six ambulances sent by the American Red Cross to Cuba in 1898 did not serve their intended purpose, the five sent to Puerto Rico and to Army installations within the United States, did prove worthwhile and effective.

Among the latter, one sent to Camp Thomas, Georgia, carried both Red Cross supplies and sick soldiers. It is most fitting that this particular ambulance, now restored for display in the Smithsonian's Museum of History and Technology, has been placed on exhibit where millions of Americans can view with pride the achievements of such a notable group of citizens.

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A FEATURED OBJECT in the new Museum of History and Technology of the Smithsonian Institution is a completely restored Red Cross ambulance of the period of the Spanish-American War. One of eleven ambulances procured by the American Red Cross for use in this conflict, it was acquired several years ago by the American Red Cross and is now on loan to the museum.

This ambulance, only known survivor of the eleven, had been sent to Camp Thomas, Georgia, where it served to convey sick soldiers and personnel. Following the war, it was shipped to Miss Clara Barton in Glen Echo, Maryland, and was later acquired by a local vegetable peddler. Over the years, the ambulance received several coats of paint and became badly weather-beaten, but its essential elements re-



Figure 2.—WAGON BED OF THE AMBULANCE being restored for exhibition by Charles H. Rowell.
(Smithsonian photo 50890C.)

mained intact and, even in 1962, pieces of the original canvas still clung to the hood. These pieces, discovered during the restoration, were copied in replacing this part of the ambulance.

The original manufacturer's plate bearing the name Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Co., South Bend, Indiana, as well as other identifying Studebaker marks, remain on the ambulance. Intended to be drawn by a pair of oxen or mules, it is similar in design and construction to the delivery wagons made by Studebaker in 1898, and in some cases the latter were supplied when ambulances were not available. The ambulance is $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet high overall, 7 feet wide including the wheels, and 11 feet long. The floor of the ambulance is 38 inches from the ground, and

the height of the sides, excluding the canvas and hoops, is 27 inches. The canvas is supported by seven hoops which are connected with crossbars. The tailgate is $13\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, and the back step is 36 inches long and 9 inches wide. The diameter of the back wheels is 49 inches and of the front wheels $37\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The front wheels appear to have been cut down for greater maneuverability. The hubs are 7 inches in diameter. A foot lever at the driver's right operates the rear-wheel brakes. A water cask is under the driver's seat, the spigot projecting slightly through the side of the body. The body rests on platform springs which provide greater comfort than ordinary wagon springs. The various portions of the wagon are made of different woods, depending on

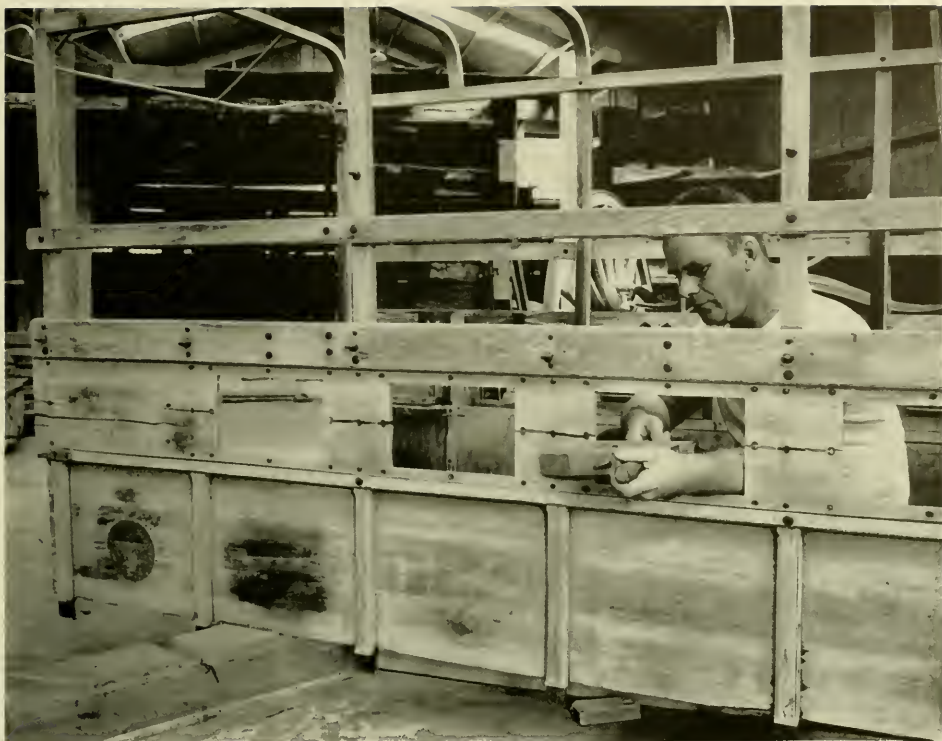


Figure 3.—RESTORING BODY OF RED CROSS AMBULANCE during final restoration. (Smithsonian photo 50890 B.)

their function: white oak for the sills, crossbars, studs, rails and floorboards; ash for the back, curtain rails, bows, and cleats; yellow poplar for the side panels; and hickory for the woodwork of the running gear.

This type of ambulance was equipped with four stretchers, two at the top and two at the bottom. The bottom two were hinged so that they could be made into seats for carrying personnel. The upper two were not hinged, but were suspended from the top and were attached to the side when not in use. By the time the U.S. National Museum acquired the ambulance, only one of the original stretchers had survived, and the other three had to be copied for replacement.

In appearance, this type of ambulance differs only slightly from the regular Army Red Cross ambulance furnished by the Quartermaster Corps, a principal difference being that of color. Analysis of the original paint reveals it to have been Prussian blue and chrome yellow, rather than the olive drab used on the Army Red Cross ambulances. Specification for the Army ambulances may be found in great detail in the National Archives, but because this type was purchased by a civilian organization, the exact specifications have not been preserved. Eleven ambulances, completely equipped, were purchased in 1898 by the American Red Cross and, of these, six were shipped to Cuba, two to Puerto Rico, one to Camp Thomas, Georgia, and two to the Long Island

City Relief Station. The story of the eleven, how they were used and misused, is a fascinating one in which the personality of the founder of the Red Cross, Miss Clara Barton, is revealed.

Cuba

The summer of 1897 had brought reports of great suffering among the unfortunate people in Cuba, who were then in armed revolt against the Spanish, and by the close of the year President William McKinley had issued an appeal to the people of the United States to contribute money or materials in an effort to relieve them. This assistance program was carried out by General Fitzhugh Lee, U.S. consul general in Cuba, but despite all the successes achieved the program fell short of being adequate.

With the approach of 1898, Miss Clarissa Harlow Barton (Clara Barton, as she was popularly known) decided to offer the services of the American Red Cross. Although Miss Barton early in 1897 had become interested in the Cuban revolt, she had avoided doing anything until the end of that year, largely to avoid provoking international complications which might lead to war between the United States and Spain. At the end of 1897, however, she was moved to secure permission from the Spanish military authorities to perform Red Cross work in Cuba.

Miss Barton met with the President and the Secretary of State at the Executive Mansion, and at this conference it was decided to form in New York a committee whose primary mission would be to solicit from the general public money and material to be shipped to Cuba in an effort to relieve the suffering that was mounting daily. The U.S. Government was reluctant at first to accept the services of the Red Cross. It was not until a month after the declaration of war against Spain on April 25, 1898, that the U.S. Government officially accepted the proffered aid of the American National Red Cross.

The Committee, having been called in the name of the President, was originally established as the "President's Committee for Cuban Relief," but later became known as the "Central Cuban Relief Committee." Upon the recommendation of Miss Barton, the Committee selected as its chairman Stephen E. Barton, nephew of Miss Barton, who had served for

some time as second vice president of the American Red Cross. Others selected for the Committee were Charles Schieren, treasurer, and Louis Klopsch, as a third member. Such notable individuals as Chauncey M. Depew, J. Pierpont Morgan, Levi P. Morton, and John D. Rockefeller were soon added to the Committee. Shortly after the formation of the Central Cuban Relief Committee, a subsidiary of that Committee was organized as Auxiliary no. 1 under the title of the "First New York Ambulance Equipment Society." Its purpose was to purchase and equip ambulances, and its president was Mrs. W. S. Cowles. By May 22, 1898, the *New York Daily Tribune* was reporting its success, saying that three of the eleven ambulances had been ordered, and that the Society treasury had collected over \$36,000 although more money was needed. The ambulances were ordered from the Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Co. of South Bend, Indiana, and were to be the same as the Tooker ambulance, a type formerly built by Studebaker for the Government. Each ambulance was equipped with supplies in New York by the Society, and since each must have a name, those given by individuals were named after or by the donors.

The list of contributors of \$2,000 for one ambulance each (the total was \$24,000), consisted of Perry Belmont, Mrs. Royal Phelps Carrol, Mrs. Bayard and Mrs. Fulton Cutting, Mrs. Robert Goelet, Levi P. Morton, D. O. Mills, J. P. Morgan, Miss Emily Trevor, Mrs. A. E. Wood, Mrs. M. Orme Wilson, and William Cutting, Jr. (\$4,000). An additional 136 persons contributed amounts of less than \$500 each. Composed of such wealthy society and business leaders as Mrs. Anna Roosevelt Cowles, J. P. Morgan, Mrs. Whitelaw Reid, J. R. Roosevelt and others, the auxiliary continued collecting and in the meantime provided eleven equipped ambulances at a cost of \$280.00 each and forty mules from the funds gathered by the Society. It is not clear why only 11 were purchased instead of 12 as planned.

Miss Barton left Washington for Cuba via Jacksonville, Tampa, and Key West, and landed in Cuba on February 9, 1898. Immediately upon her arrival, she set about surveying the needs in the area and making improvements that would best relieve the suffering. On March 2, 1898, Stephen E. Barton wrote her from New York that the Central Cuban Relief Committee had five ambulances stored in their warehouse in Brooklyn and that the First New



Figure 4.—OFFICE OF THE CENTRAL CUBAN RELIEF COMMITTEE in New York, 1898. Left to right: Stephen E. Barton, chairman; Hon. Chas. A. Schieren; Miss Mary Agnes Coombs; Geo. C. Bolt; and Fred L. Ward. (Photo courtesy Library of Congress.)

York Ambulance Red Cross Equipment Society, in addition to the five just presented, had two more with harness and other equipment. Stephen Barton suggested sending these latter two ambulances to Cuba to aid in the hospital work being carried on in the Havana area. Instead of two ambulances, however, six were sent by the New York Committee aboard the *Port Victor* in July 1898. Later that month, the Committee purchased forty mules in New Orleans and sent them to Miss Barton to enable her to distribute supplies. These mules, with fodder and ten sets of harnesses, were purchased by the First New York Ambulance Equipment Auxiliary Committee and were to be used in drawing the ambulances. The animals, pack mules weighing from 1100 to 1200 pounds each, were shipped in transport no. 2, U.S.A. Quartermaster's Department, for Guan-

tanamo or Santiago under the direction of Red Cross agent, Charles D. Cottrell.

Meanwhile the six ambulances arrived in Cuba July 22, 1898, aboard the *Port Victor*. Loaded under other goods they were finally discharged, after a 47-day delay, and, as the result of an urgent appeal from the Secretary of the Navy to the Quartermaster's Department, were immediately reloaded on the schooner *Mary E. Morse* at Santiago on September 7, and sent to the northern coast of Santiago Province. There they were landed at Baracoa and Gibara on September 22, 1898, by the agents of the Red Cross.

Owing to the delay in unloading, the six ambulances could be put to no use in Cuba, and on October 24, 1898, following the signing of the armistice, Stephen Barton directed that they be brought back to New York. The feelings aroused by the Army's



Figure 5.—AMBULANCE ALONGSIDE SHIP DOCKED in Brooklyn, New York, at Nye's Elevator, where the Red Cross maintained a warehouse. (Photo courtesy Library of Congress.)

holding these vehicles was displayed in a letter dated October 11, 1898, from Miss Barton to her nephew:

I am glad the ambulances go back to New York, and it perhaps would have been quite as well if the other hospital stuff which he found there had also gone; but he had no orders for this, and not knowing what was there, I could not tell him . . . I must have told you what a good understanding remained between us; blessed old mules they would have worked, if they could have gotten anything to work in! But army orders were agin us and we kept the mules close by us and sent them safely home. Not a piece of harness, nor an ambulance was ever used or ever gotten at.¹

Shipped to Brunswick, Georgia, on board the *Morse*, the ambulances were discharged and sent by the steamer *Princess Anne* to New York. Mr. Barton had suggested that they be sent to Washington, D.C., for storage, but since no warehouse was available there, they were kept in New York, where they remained for a short time outside the Red Cross warehouse in New York, with no protection whatever from the weather. Later, they were disassembled by

¹ Clara Barton Papers (Library of Congress accession 10357, box 37, folder 2).

Studebaker Brothers at a cost of \$14.80 and stored inside (see fig. 5).

By November 1898, official protest was being made by the Red Cross to the U.S. Government for its having delayed delivery of the ambulances until they were no longer needed and for having seized ten thousand dollars worth of supplies. One of the most substantial complaints was found in a letter from the chairman of the Central Cuban Relief Committee, to the then Secretary of State John Hay:

Our object in referring these reports to the Department is to inform you of the arbitrary seizure by the Army of the United States of a large and valuable lot of supplies belonging to this committee, and to enter our complain against such an insulting and unwarranted act, with the request that suitable action shall be taken . . . We cannot believe that any conditions (especially in time of peace) could create a Military necessity for the forcible seizure by the War Department, and yet we are informed by our Agents that the plea of "Military necessity" was the only excuse given for this arrogant indignity against us . . . We beg to call your attention to the large quantity of hospital furnishings and delicate foods included in this seizure, articles which are of no use at Gibara, except to add to the personal comfort of the officers of the Army, but which are sadly needed in



Figure 6.—PATIENT BEING UNLOADED FROM A RED CROSS AMBULANCE in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. (Photo courtesy National Library of Medicine.)

Santa Clara, Matanzas and Havana Provinces, where the Red Cross physicians are establishing hospitals for us and where we were to have sent supplies.²

This complaint was forwarded by the Secretary of State to the Secretary of War.

Puerto Rico

On July 23, 1898, two ambulances and mules were shipped from Tampa for use in Puerto Rico. That the two ambulances were of great service is evidenced by the Rev. Horace F. Barnes, field agent at Ponce, Puerto Rico, who wrote to Stephen Barton: "Our ambulances have proved invaluable. They are in hourly service, mostly in emergency cases, and the Government stables and feeds the mules free of expense to the Red Cross."

When the station closed in Puerto Rico, negotiations to dispose of the ambulances were begun. After a deal to sell them to the Express Company fell through, they were sold to a Mr. Hersey for \$200.00. On December 24, 1898, General W. T. Bennett sent

the New York headquarters \$118.50, the sale price less \$81.50 withheld by him for salary and expenses. The painted emblem and name of the American National Red Cross were removed before the ambulances were turned over to the purchasers.

In her book, *The Red Cross*, Clara Barton states that these ambulances proved of great value in emergency cases requiring quick transportation for both soldiers and supplies, but she further says "it must be admitted, however, that they proved also a delicate responsibility, as everybody seemed to regard them as free pleasure coaches in which the Red Cross was eager to take the town to ride."³

Long Island City

The Red Cross Relief Station at Long Island City was opened on August 29, 1898, in a 3-story structure supplied to the Society by Patrick J. Gleason, ex-mayor of Long Island City. Mrs. A. G. Hammond was in charge, with trained nurses supplied by Auxiliary no. 3, and two ambulances supplied by Auxiliary no. 1. Approximately \$7,000 were expended

² Clara Barton Papers (Library of Congress accession 10357, box 52).

³ *The Red Cross*, p. 446 (see bibliography).



Figure 7.—RED CROSS HEADQUARTERS AT CAMP THOMAS, GEORGIA, in 1868, showing the ambulance now in the United States National Museum. (Photo courtesy American Red Cross.)

in carrying on the work of the Station.

Located near the railroad depot, the Red Cross Station was used as a stopping point for soldiers too sick to be transported long distances. As soon as they recovered sufficiently, sometimes after several days, they were sent on their way. As Clara Barton described the station: "to the soldier himself, weakened by illness and the fatigue of the journey, the place seemed a veritable haven of rest."⁴ With the removal of troops, the relief station at Long Island City ceased to exist and the ambulances were transferred therefrom, one being sent to Miss Chauncey's Home for Convalescents at Pelham, while the other was sent to the Atlantic Highlands Convalescent Home.

Georgia

Sometime about the middle of June 1898, Red Cross work was started at Camp Thomas, Chickamauga Park, Georgia, by Dr. Charles R. Gill, who

⁴ *The Red Cross in Peace and War*, p. 505 (see bibliography).

was later joined by Mr. Elias Charles Smith. About \$15,785 in cash, besides supplies, was furnished this camp.

On August 10, 1898, Mr. Smith telegraphed to New York, stating his immediate need for one army wagon with mules and harnesses. Since the Auxiliary had an ambulance in stock and did not have a light delivery wagon, the ambulance was sent in its stead. Mules were not sent with the ambulance, since it was determined that the Georgia station could hire a pair at less expense. The ambulance arrived at the depot in nearby Chattanooga on August 25. After having had the ambulance for 12 days, Mr. Smith proudly reported that they then had "the best looking ambulance and team in the Park and that the ambulance had been of great service to him and had also carried several sick soldiers."⁵

Prior to the closing of the facilities at this camp, an inventory of the Red Cross property was taken and Stephen Barton suggested that the ambu-

⁵ Clara Barton Papers (Library of Congress accession 10357, box 50, folder 3).



Figure 8.—AMBULANCE BEFORE BEING RESTORED FOR EXHIBITION. Used at Camp Thomas, Georgia, and later by Miss Clara Barton at her home in Glen Echo, Maryland, it was acquired by the American Red Cross from private owners and loaned to the U.S. National Museum. (Photo courtesy American Red Cross.)

lance, harness, and saddle be sent to the Red Cross headquarters at Washington, while the other supplies be sent to Havana, via Tampa. Acting on his own suggestion, in a letter to Clara Barton he asked if she might not like the ambulance sent to Washington for use at the headquarters. To this, Miss Barton replied that she would like very much to have the ambulance sent to her in Glen Echo and that it would be very useful, provided it was not needed somewhere else. Her check sent to pay for the expense of transporting the ambulance was returned, and in acknowledging receipt of the ambulance on December 9,

1898, Miss Barton said: "It was most gracious and lovely of you to send back that check of freight for the ambulance. I did not know anything about it myself, only that I sent the money and had the ambulance brought up, and your check comes to replace it. I have not even had time to look at it yet; but I think it is a very nice, strong thing to have, especially out in the country where one does their own teaming and besides, one can get sick very officially. Again I thank you for it all."⁶

⁶ Clara Barton Papers (Library of Congress accession 10357, box 37).

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