

Background Information on Museum Objects

Stapler: Staplers fasten several sheets of paper together and are useful in the organization of paperwork and to prevent papers from getting out of order. The American Red Cross volunteer staff performed clerical duties assisting with reports, financial records, correspondence and paperwork. Staplers were regularly used to organize paperwork.

Ink well and pens: These were writing tools when Clara Barton lived in the Glen Echo home. Pencils were also used, but most of the handwritten documents were written in ink. Writing tools were essential to do clerical and office duties. Volunteer staff assisted with letter writing, addressing envelopes, and sending mail. The Glen Echo offices received and sent over 100 letters a day. The ink well held a small supply of liquid ink and the volunteer dipped the pen tip into the ink well repeatedly to write a single letter, as they did not have a built-in container to hold and store the ink. This type of pen was more economical to buy and use than the newer pens with glass tubes to hold and store ink. The American Red Cross did not have a budget for office supplies at this time, so Clara Barton or the volunteer staff purchased supplies.

Copy Press: Clara Barton owned copy presses, also called letter presses, in order to make copies of documents. These machines copied handwritten ink documents and typed documents, but produced one copy at a time. There were hundreds of letters and other papers produced in the operations of the Glen Echo offices. Volunteers used the copy presses to make and file copies. The original document was placed under the pressing plate with a piece of moistened copying paper or a copy book on top of it. The screw handle was turned, lowering the pressing plate onto the documents with a firm, flat pressure. This caused an imprint to transfer to the copying paper. The copy produced was reversed from the original, but the copying paper was thin enough for the ink imprint to be read through the paper. This saved time so that writing or typing the same document twice was not necessary. Clara Barton even had one in her bedroom, so that she could work late after the volunteers had gone to bed.

Typewriter: The use of typewriters began in the 1870s. This created opportunities for women to work in offices outside the home as typists. Typing saved time as it was faster than writing and made documents look neat and professional. Clara Barton learned how to type and she owned several typewriters. A volunteer needed to be an excellent typist to complete American Red Cross documents and letters, because if they made a typing mistake, they would have to start the document over again. If they were unsure about how to spell a word, they looked it up in a dictionary. The American Red Cross mailed hundreds of typewritten letters.

Report of Red Cross Relief Galveston Texas: This document was the official report of the American Red Cross relief following the Galveston, Texas hurricane of 1900. Barton published reports for all American Red Cross relief efforts. She also wrote pamphlets, other reports, and two books on the work and history of the American Red Cross with the help of her staff. Volunteers did research, assisted various relief committees, and processed donations, financial reports; filing; typing and organized information for reports. These reports spread the word about what the organization, how it helped people in times of need, and how donated funds were used.

Photograph of the American Red Cross office entrance with the coal stove circled: The offices, when occupied by working staff, used the stove to heat the room during cold weather. Clara Barton used 12 stoves and one fireplace to heat all the rooms in the house. Mrs. Hines, who also worked as an American Red Cross secretary, was the housekeeper. She assigned volunteers kept fires built up, cleaned the stoves and other household chores.