

commentary

from other pens...

Clara Barton's search for missing soldiers

On a summer day five years ago, a government carpenter crawled into a dark and dirty attic and gave history a nudge.

Near the edge of piles of Civil War-era letters, abolitionist publications, old photographs, bandages and period women's clothing he found a square tin sign inscribed with gold letters on a black background.

It read: "Missing Soldiers. Office. 3rd Story. Room 9. Miss Clara Barton."

Richard Lyons, an employee of the General Services Administration, had discovered a virtual time capsule — sealed for nearly 130 years — bearing on the early career of one of the 19th century's most interesting women, Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross.

The third floor of 437 7th St. NW, near Pennsylvania Avenue, halfway between the White House and the Capitol, did have a Room 9. The number was printed on the door. Rolls of white satin wallpaper in the attic matched wallpaper clinging in tatters to the walls of the room. In her Civil War journals, Barton reported hanging white satin striped wallpaper.

Gary Scott, chief historian for the National Park Service's National Capital Region, soon had the evidence to show that Barton had lived and worked in the 7th Street apartment from 1861 to 1868. It was her headquarters and refuge as she organized relief efforts for the wounded on the battlefields of the war. She continued to live there, sleeping in an area partitioned off from the rest of the long room, as she led the government's search for thousands of missing Union soldiers.

"In delighted amazement we literally crawled through a thick layer of historical papers, publications and clothing, all dating from the mid-to late 1860s, none later than 1868," Scott wrote in "Washington History," the journal of The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

The founding of the American Red Cross would come long after Barton left Room 9. But her life and work there was clearly an important step in that much longer story.

At the time Lyons popped his head into the attic, Barton's red-brick building and the structure on the corner next door were scheduled for demolition. Because of his discovery, both will be saved and restored.

As part of the agreement between Congress' General Accounting Office and the developers, Room 9 and the stairway from the 7th Street sidewalk will be returned to their 1860s appearance and opened to the public.

When work is completed at the end of 2003, the two buildings will become the focal point for a complex of luxury apartments and a theater.

When the Civil War broke out in the spring of 1861, Clara Barton was a 29-year-old former school teacher working as a clerk at the U.S. Patent Office. When the first Union troops arrived in the city in 1861 she helped provide supplies for them.

The success of this effort led to a far broader enterprise to distribute medical and humanitarian supplies to wounded and sick soldiers that continued until the fighting ended.

President Lincoln authorized her to organize the search for thousands of missing soldiers, making her the first woman to head a federal agency.

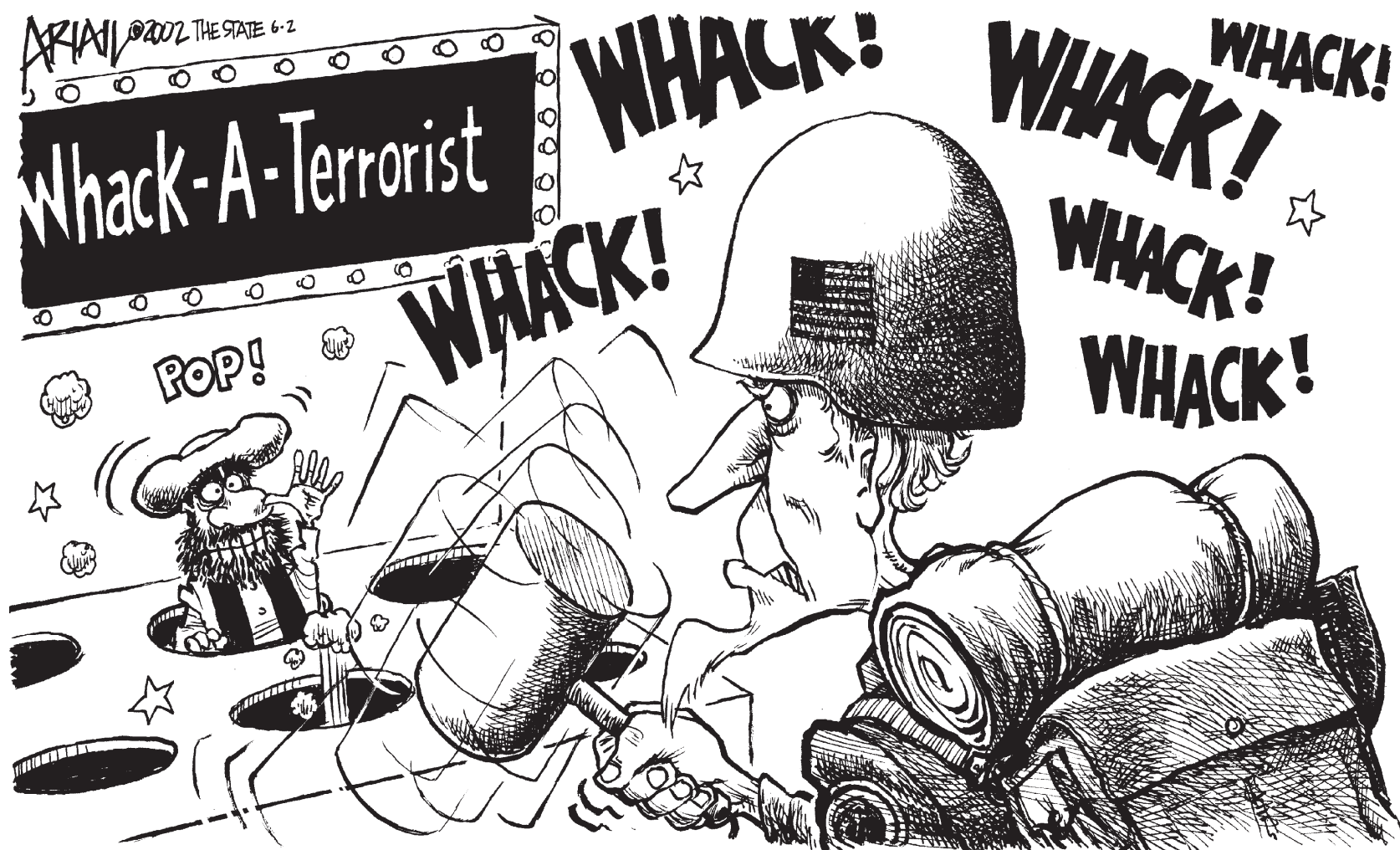
When it closed in 1868, the Office of Correspondence with Friends of the Missing Men of the United States Army reported it had received 63,182 inquiries, written 44,855 replies and identified some 22,000 of the estimated 62,000 missing men. Most had died of wounds or disease.

"We found glass inkwells and boxes of small steel pen points," Scott wrote. "We found office signs in the attic for dentists, doctors and lawyers who also had offices in the building." There were women's straw hats and fans "and a great deal of funeral bunting, perhaps used at the time of Lincoln's funeral."

"The apartments in their tattered, faded shape give a haunting feeling of what it must have been like living in a crowded, middle-class rooming house during the Civil War," Scott wrote.

Outside on 7th Street a steel mesh fence surrounds the construction site and the two surviving buildings. Taped to a third-floor window, a photograph of Clara Barton peers down at the street she once knew well.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Lawrence L. Knutson has reported on, the White House and Washington's history for 34 years for The Associated Press.



New job adds some extra pounds

I've put on a few pounds lately.

Not that you would know it by looking at me. I'm one of those guys who turns sideways and disappears. Except for the nose. It kind of sticks out. The rest of me disappears, though.

I can use the extra weight. It's good for those Kansas winds which pop out of nowhere and knock you off your feet. Well, they knock me down. I told you I need the weight.

What I don't need is for it to gather around my waist. Nothing is sadder than a skinny guy with a pot belly, except for maybe a skinny guy with a pot belly and a comb-over. Give me a few years on that one.

I noticed my new condition one morning when I tried to put on my pants. Shrank a little in the wash, I thought. Strange. Hey, they all shrank. Amanda, what did you do to my pants?

The wife let me know that she hadn't done anything to them, and she offered me several imaginative ideas of what I could do with them if I questioned her again. That's OK. I forgave her. She's not a morning person.

When I came home from work that day, I got pinched and prodded, and once I fought my way



doug stephens

• wisdom from babes

free, I got the verdict.

"Quite a gut you got on you, honey," I was told.

No way. Me? Not a chance. Did you get into the sauce? I need to check this out myself. See?

I hate it when she's right.

I blame it on work. I get to the office and sit in front of the computer until lunch. I don't just sit, though. Sometimes I pick up the phone. On a busy morning, I drive the car somewhere, take a picture or talk to someone, then drive back to the office and my desk.

It is an exciting job, and it can be stressful, but it isn't exactly strenuous. My previous jobs kept me on my feet for hours on end and I've never had to worry about gaining weight before.

I thought I had one of those miracle metabolisms which lets you eat whatever you want and not get any bigger. Wrong. So I actually started working

out a few weeks ago, and even turned down an extra hamburger at lunch today.

Poor me, huh?

A perfect day

Last week Amanda asked me what I wanted to do for Father's Day. Absolutely nothing, I said.

It's OK, she said. We should be able to afford something. You don't have to be noble about it.

No seriously, I don't want to do anything, I told her. I'd like to sit back, relax, read a little, and play with the kids all day. If I had a hammock, that's where I would have been.

Sounds like a perfect Father's Day, doesn't it? Actually, it sounds like a perfect day, period.

Amanda would have liked to get me a card, a present or two, and maybe balloons and streamers. She'd like to have taken me to dinner, and make a big deal out of the day.

That would have been excessive, and totally off the mark of what Father's Day is supposed to be. What could be better than a day where I did nothing but play with the kids all day?

Maybe a day where I didn't have to change any diapers.

It'll happen one of these days.

Democrats field strong slate of contenders

TOPEKA — Democrats began this year looking downtrodden, even for the party traditionally out of power in Kansas politics.

While Republican circles buzzed with word of potential candidates for statewide office, Democratic ones were relatively quiet. Democrats seemed to be struggling to find good candidates.

Yet, when the filing deadline had passed, Democrats found themselves with a strong ticket for the top executive offices in Kansas government. All five general election races look competitive, and Democrats stand a reasonable chance of winning three or four.

"The Democrats did a good job of recruiting a slate of statewide candidates," said state Republican Chairman Mark Parkinson. "We have a horse race in every single slot."

For months, the presumed Democratic nominee for governor has been Insurance Commissioner Kathleen Sebelius. Her lieutenant-governor running mate is John Moore, executive vice president at Cessna Aircraft Co. in Wichita.

The other Democratic candidates are Geary County Attorney Chris Biggs, of Junction City, for attorney general; House Minority Leader Jim Garner, of Coffeyville, for insurance commissioner; public health lobbyist and advocate Sally Finney, of Olathe, for state treasurer; and Sen. David Haley, of Kansas City, for secretary of state.

The one downer for Democrats was their inability to recruit a candidate for the U.S. Senate against incumbent Republican Pat Roberts. The one candidate who could have been truly competitive — former U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman — decided against it after the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

But in the five other statewide races, Democrats have credible candidates who can win the races they've entered under the right circumstances, despite Kansas having almost 286,000 more registered Republican voters than registered Democratic ones.

"I feel very good about this slate," said state Democratic Chairman Tom Sawyer. "If things go right, we could sweep all five."



john hanna

• ap news analysis

The most difficult contest belongs to Haley, who is taking on two-term incumbent Republican Ron Thornburgh in a race that typically gets little attention.

The crushing weight of history is on Thornburgh's side. Republicans have held the office for 98 of the past 100 years, and legend has it that the last Democrat, Larry Ryan, elected in 1948, won only because voters confused him with Republican incumbent Frank J. Ryan.

But the race is worth watching for several reasons.

Haley is the nephew of "Roots" author Alex Haley. His father, George, was the first black state senator, elected as a Republican in 1964, and later served in five presidents' administrations, including as ambassador to Gambia under President Clinton.

If he were elected, he would be the first black candidate to win a statewide executive branch office since Edward P. McCabe was re-elected state auditor in 1884.

Those facts are likely to gain his campaign attention and prevent it withering from a relative lack of interest.

Sally Finney's name also creates visibility for her race. She is the eldest daughter of the late Gov. Joan Finney, who was treasurer in 1975-90.

The former governor's death last year from liver cancer resulted in an outpouring of fondness from many Kansans, and their recollections of her ability to connect with people appeared to wash away memories of the controversies from her one term as governor.

Again, the race is likely to receive more attention than it otherwise would have.

In the insurance commissioner's race, Garner is a relatively prominent figure who is running on

Sebelius' record, banking on her reputation as a consumer advocate.

He also has declared he won't take contributions from the insurance industry, which is likely to set him apart from any Republican nominee.

The GOP also must reckon with its past 96-year hold on the office. Sebelius toppled the dynasty in 1994 by portraying it as inefficient, corrupt and beholden to the insurance industry it regulated.

Biggs' main asset in the attorney general's race is his 13 years as an elected prosecutor, something that helps candidates for that office, even though they do more administrative than courtroom work.

Two of the Republican hopefuls, Sen. David Adkins, of Leawood, and former Rep. Phill Kline, of Shawnee, have never been elected as a county or district attorney. The third, Charles McAtee, a Topeka attorney, has years of experience with the FBI and as an assistant U.S. attorney but plans to run a low-budget, low-key campaign.

Finally, there is Sebelius, the gubernatorial nominee. She's won two statewide elections and, without a primary opponent, can focus on raising money for a general election campaign.

To win, all of them will have to raise enough money to get their messages to voters, something that is usually a tougher task for Democrats than Republicans. The Democratic candidates also will need GOP dissension and must attract support from unaffiliated voters.

But Democrats are at least off to a good start, and all five races will be worth watching.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Correspondent John Hanna has covered Kansas politics and government for The Associated Press since 1987.

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