

# Nursing History Is His Passion

Delaware RN enjoys sharing his extensive collection of nursing artifacts

**Suzanne Hauser Holland, RN, MSN**

After spending years nursing wounded soldiers on bloody battlefields during the American Civil War, Clara Barton felt called to another mission. Thousands of soldiers were buried in unmarked graves; thousands more were missing and presumed dead. With President Lincoln's endorsement, Barton sought to account for these missing men. She spent the next two years traveling, writing letters, and lecturing until her voice gave out. She and her assistants ultimately identified 22,000 of the missing men.

To gain information, Barton compiled a series of "Roll Call" lists of the missing. She had these printed and sent to post offices across the country. The lists urged people to contact her with information about the missing men.

Chris Foard, RN, a physician's liaison at Bayhealth Medical Center in Dover, Del., owns the first roll of 1,500 missing soldiers posted by Barton. Foard also has letters describing her cause and the only existing poster signed by Barton that advertises one of her lectures.

Foard is a passionate collector of historic nursing artifacts. He says he has always enjoyed learning about the history of nursing. His collection began 20 years ago,

when he started noticing historical nursing-related items at antique shows.

"My wife and I would come across photos of nurses," he says. "Then we said, 'Hey, let's start collecting something related to our profession.'"

Foard's collection has grown. "Every time I saw a nurse photo or item, I'd buy it," he says. "My collection is all pre-WWI, even going back before Florence Nightingale." He has books, letters, documents, uniforms, medals, nursing caps, and instruments. He also has rare nursing photographs, including an outtake when Nightingale posed for a portrait in 1854.

## A look at nursing's roots

The focus of his collection is the Civil War because, Foard says, that is when nursing

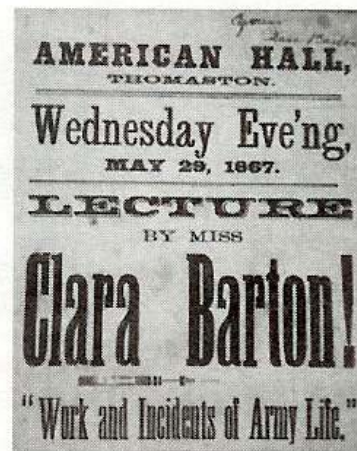


PHOTO COURTESY BY  
CHRIS FOARD

**Chris Foard, RN owns the only existing poster about a lecture by Clara Barton, signed by Barton in the top right corner.**





may have touched their lives.”

The California Association of Health Facilities named Ahern Nurse of the Year for innovations, inspiration, and leadership in improving quality of care for the elderly, and the facility earned the Governor’s Quality Award for skilled nursing care. “Compassion is kindness extended in a holistic way to another human being,” she says. “Healing is both an art and a science. I will always be proud to tell people, ‘I am a nurse.’ That speaks volumes; it means I care about people and giving them — for whatever part of their life that crosses



mine — every aspect of healing, with quality and dignity.”

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*Wendy L. Bonifazi, RN, CLS, APR, is a senior staff writer for NurseWeek.*

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**Top photos, from left: Mary Lou Ahern, RN (far right), spends quality time with the facility dog, Cody, resident Thomas Grey, and his daughter Lisa Cranfield; Ahern engages in occupational therapy with resident Verda Webb, who used to model for Ralph Lauren; Ahern enjoys a visit with resident Rose Perrello; right: Ahern with her California Association of Health Facilities’ 2006 Nurse of the Year Award.**

**All photos by David Hartig**

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really took root in the United States “Nurses went above and beyond in their job during the Civil War,” he says, adding that becoming nurses gave women a new sense of worth. “Women had more opportunities in nursing, and training schools opened, many started by Civil War nurses,” he

## New item, new insight

With every artifact Chris Foard, RN obtains for his collection, he gains more information about the nurses who shaped the profession.

One of his most recent purchases was a scissors case that belonged to Clara Barton. Inside the case is an inscription: “My Dear Miss Barton, Yours Hannah.” A note that accompanies the case says, “Given to Miss Clara Barton from my Great Aunt Hannah Palmer, Nurse in the Civil War” (see photo, right).



For one year, Palmer was under the direction of Dorothea Dix, the Union’s superintendent of female nurses, Foard says. “On Jan. 1, 1865, [Barton] was invited to the White House, where she met President Lincoln.” Palmer, the first secretary of the National Association of Civil War Nurses, was at the White House when Barton visited.

says. “Civil War nursing also contributed to the push for equal rights and the women’s movement.”

As a member of the Association for the History of Nursing (AAHN) and the Society for Women in the Civil War, Foard welcomes the opportunity to exhibit his collection. “I believe that when nurses and the public see items up close during exhibits ... they have a better understanding of the history,” he says. He emphasizes that he uses his collection to educate nurses about how the profession came to be what it is today.

This is in line with the AAHN’s mission. “History offers not only contextual perspective, but also enlightenment,” says an AAHN position paper. “Nursing does not exist in an unpredictable vacuum. The social pressures that have shaped nursing in the past persist today in new forms. Today’s challenges are not easily understood nor addressed in the absence of such insight.” The position paper and many other resources are available at AAHN’s website at [www.aahn.org](http://www.aahn.org).

## Sharing his knowledge

On April 20, Foard shared much of his collection with nurses who attended the Delaware Nurses Association’s Spring Conference. Rebecca M. Patton, RN, MSN, CNOR, president of the American Nurses Association and the keynote speaker at the conference, was among the nurses who visited Foard’s exhibit. “Meeting Becky Patton was a highlight,” he says. “She represents

every nurse in the United States. She’s on Capitol Hill — just like Clara Barton and Dorothea Dix were — fighting for nurses.”

Foard has no plans to deposit his collection with a library, archive, or museum. He is working on plans to exhibit the collection at a national nurses conference this summer in Washington, D.C.

Foard’s wife, Marianne, RN, MS, HCA, professional recruiter and retention specialist at BayHealth, supports his dedication to collecting and shares an interest in nursing his-

tory — even if she isn’t as passionate about it. “My wife says my first love is Florence Nightingale, and she comes after,” Foard jokes. Their daughter, a sophomore nursing student at Catholic University of America, is not a nursing history buff yet. “But,” he says, “she’s getting to know the names Barton, Dix, and Nightingale quite well.”

*Suzanne Hauser Holland, RN, MSN, is a contributing writer.*

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