

REDISCOVERING THE MISSING SOLDIERS OFFICE

IN 1997, RICHARD LYONS, a carpenter for the General Services Administration, was hired in Washington, DC, to prepare a vacant late-nineteenth-century government building for demolition. While inspecting the building, Lyons noticed something sticking out between the wall and the ceiling on the third floor. He dislodged the item, which was a metallic sign that read: "Missing Soldiers Office, 3rd Story, Room 9. Miss Clara Barton." What Lyons had discovered was the location of the Missing Soldiers Office, which had been established by Clara Barton in 1865 to help families locate missing loved ones serving in the American Civil War. The office closed in 1868, and the building was repurposed over the years until its identity as the Missing Soldiers Office was long forgotten.

When Lyons searched the building's attic, he discovered a wealth of nineteenth-century artifacts, including clothing, Civil War-era newspapers, and documents related to Barton's Missing Soldiers Office. When the discovery was made public, the National Park Service took action to save the building from demolition and restore it to its nineteenth-century appearance. Thanks to a partnership between the General Services Administration and the National Museum of Civil War Medicine, the space was eventually reopened in 2015 as the Clara Barton Missing Soldiers Office Museum. Today, the museum, which is located at 437 7th Street NW in Washington, DC, is open to the public for guided tours.