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-WW1, 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
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.”

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

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
New item, new insight.

When Darnell Wilson visited the White House to accept the National Association of Black Nurses, he wasn’t expecting much. "I was just there to accept the award," he said. "I didn’t expect to see any celebrities or anything." But when he arrived, he was surprised to find that the event was being held in the grand ballroom of the White House.

"It was a big honor," he said. "I was so happy to be there." Wilson is a retired nurse and a member of the National Association of Black Nurses, an organization that was founded in 1946 by a group of black nurses who were tired of being discriminated against in the workplace.

The association has since grown to become a powerful force in the fight for equal rights and the advancement of the nursing profession. "We have come a long way," Wilson said. "But there is still work to be done."