

VISIT AMERICA

Reconnecting With America's Heroes

(NAPSA)—Since September 11, 2001, Americans have learned what it means to be a hero. We have seen heroes in action, watched them on our TVs, seen what we believed were ordinary people face up to extraordinary challenges. We have seen them die heroic deaths so that others might live. Knowing of their sacrifices, we feel a little smaller as individuals and a little bigger as a nation.

When we think of America's heroes, we remember those who rushed into the burning buildings of September 11 and those who braved the enemy cockpit of a doomed aircraft, and also Americans of the more distant past, such as those who died in the wars commemorated on holidays such as Veterans Day and Memorial Day.

Today, we can still walk in the footsteps of America's heroes, touch the remnants of these real people who rose to unreal heights, shaping our nation and ourselves. We find inspiration in where they lived and worked, and we protect these places for all generations as part of the National Park System.

For example, Clara Barton's home in Glen Echo, Maryland, is preserved as a national historic site, commemorating her work as the founder of the American Red Cross. Barton's life speaks to us of how adversity can reveal our strengths. The Civil War transformed her from a schoolteacher and government clerk into a force of compassion, traveling the front lines with the Union Army, tending to the ill and wounded and raising donations of medical supplies. In the 1870s, while providing medical aid in France during the Franco-Prussian War, she learned about the International Red Cross and subsequently



Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, lived in this house from 1897 until her death in 1912. It is now under the care of the National Park System, which protects more than 100 national historic sites.

founded the American version. As its head, she showed up at floods, earthquakes, forest fires—anywhere that emergency help was needed. She remains an inspiration to those who seek to help suffering humanity.

Inspiration finds us, too, at the national historic site that was the Washington, D.C. home of a man born into slavery who died wealthy and respected: Frederick Douglass. A journalist who focused on racial issues and spoke for the equality of all people before the law, Douglass provided counsel to presidents and fought for the end of slavery. His autobiography still offers hope to anyone struggling against overwhelming odds. He was born the property of another man, but left behind a legacy of freedom.

California hosts a different type of park, one that reminds us of the heroic efforts of ordinary

people doing ordinary work at a dangerous and critical time in our history. The Rosie the Riveter National Historical Site is dedicated to the women who fought on the home front during World War II, armed not with weapons of destruction but of industry, building ships and other needed supplies without which the war effort would have collapsed.

The historic sites of the National Park System have become the touchstones of the heroic spirit. For information on these parks, how to get to them, and what you'll find there, visit www.eparks.org, the Web site of the National Parks Conservation Association, America's only private, nonprofit, national-park-advocacy organization. At times of commemoration, visit the parks for inspiration and for contact with the hopes and aspirations of America.