

## 1896 Armenian Relief Letter of Thanks

**From: Missionary Clara H. Lee**  
**To: Arthur Fletcher Whitin**



Clara H. Lee

LEE  
HAMLIN, CLARA H. (≡≡≡) B. Mar. 3, 1853 <sup>Abbott Academy 1873</sup>  
Sailed fr. N. Y. July 12, 1879 <sup>Taught in Princeton N. J. '74-'79</sup>  
Arr. Coushik Aug. 22, 1879 Ret. N. Y. Aug. 7, 1887 - Aug. 4, 1888  
Arr. Coushik Sept. 1888 married Sept. 5, 1889 to Rev. L. O. Lee.  
arr. Marash Oct. 1889 Oct. N. Y. May 17, 1898 - Oct. 18, 1899  
arr. Marash Dec. 2, 1899  
Died of pneumonia, Marash, Jan. 23, 1902

#2

daughter of Cyrus & Harriet Lovell Hamlin

Margaret Caroline  
(m. Prof. C. E. Lyles)  
b. Sept. 1, 1890  
d. Dec. 18, 1932  
in Boston, Mass.

Shown above: **Missionary Clara Hamlin Lee\*** (1853-1902) and her **Personnel Card\*\*** from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Note that she taught in Princeton from age 21-26, married the Reverend L.O. Lee at age 36 and died of pneumonia in 1902 at the age of 49. The Thank You Letter below was written in 1896 when she was 43 years old.

(photo sources: \*Theological Commons: The Missionary Herald, Vol. 98, Issue 4, 1902, Page 151.

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Shown above: **Arthur Fletcher Whitin** (1846-1928), the **Bloody Sultan Abdul Hamid II**, and an Armenian woman and her children, **refugees** of the 1894-1897 Hamidian Massacre of the Armenians.

**Below is a transcription of a thank you letter written to Arthur Fletcher Whitin in 1896 from Clara H. Lee, an American missionary working on Armenian relief in Turkey. Whitin donated \$200 to Armenian Relief. \$200 has a relative inflated value of \$6,600 today.**

**The letter speaks of the suffering of Armenians under the rule of the Bloody Sultan.**

**Transcribed by Carol H. Brouwer, Northbridge Historical Society.**

Constantinople, June 29th, 1896

Dear Mr. Whitin,

Some three months ago I received word from Mr. Peet our treasurer of \$200.00 contributed by you for the sufferers in Marash. My father also wrote me about your gift about the same time. I am filled with shame that I did not write to you without delay to thank for the contribution and to tell you how it was spent. I can only ask you to pardon me for my tardiness which was not intentional.

The press of work all through this sad winter and spring has been such as I had never before known in my life. Children and household affairs have been neglected in a way which would have very wrong but for these peculiar circumstances, and letters which ought to have been written have been deferred like this one, from week to week and even month to month.

I have at last run away from Marash for the summer's rest and am now with my little Carrie at Kennedy Lodge, Henrietta's beautiful house at Hissar. We shall doubtless have another hard winter next year, and I hope to go back to the work with new energies, after this refreshing change and rest.

I devoted the whole of your \$200 to clothing the poor wretched refugees who poured down from Zeitoun to Marash as (?) as Zeitoun was open. There were already about 9,000 people in Marash who were dependent on relief funds, and when these 1000 refugees poured in, we did not know what to do with them. For about four weeks 450 of them were crowded into a large building that had been erected for public exercises of an Armenian school. The floor was of stone, all the windows were broken, and it was midwinter.

The refugees were with very few exceptions destitute of bedding, and they had worn the miserable rags on their backs without change or washing for four months. They were swarming with vermin and I had never before beheld such misery as the convoys of refugees came in under guard(!) from Zeitoun on several successive days the Muslims of Marash turned out to meet them, and showered them with stones and beat them with sticks as they passed through the streets, their guards making no objection, but rather enjoying the fun. Some were killed thus in the streets. Most of the Zeitoun refugees were men though there were a few women and children. Thousands of these must have perished from want and cold in Zeitoun. We went to work immediately to relieve these poor people, and Marshlis, needy and suffering as they themselves were, came forward nobly to help. Some contributed boards to cover the stone pavement, some brought soap, rice, dishes etc. and the windows were all covered with paper.

Mrs. Macallum worked the bedding department, and turned out "yorgans" or comfortables as fast as possible, while I employed 70 women at making clothes, and it was thus that I used your money. It not only helped to cloth the refugees, but gave employment to 70 poor widows. You would be touched if you could have seen how these widows are for work. Though we did our best, some weeks had passed before the refugees were supplied with the needed bedding and clothing. I used to feel sad indeed as I went to bed these winter nights with the bitter north wind was raging around us, and thought of the refugees stretched out on the stone floor- which had not yet been fully covered with boards- without any warm covering.

Typhoid fever and dysentery ere raging among them, and we were obliged to open a hospital for them. The disease proved so contagious that of the 43 who worked in the hospital, including, doctors, nurses, servants, all but one, became ill and ten of them died. All the time we were caring for the refugees, we were also distributing aid to 9,000 Marshlis, and also thousands more in the surrounding villages. This was a large family to clothe, was it not? And as I had the charge of the clothing department, I have had enough to do all these months. In March the first boxes of clothing came from Constantinople and were a great help. It is a subject for thankfulness that all

*the boxes sent in from Constantinople and other places have reached us safely. Not one has been lost.*

*The refugees have at length nearly all returned in fear and trembling to their ruined villages. The Red Cross people are giving valuable aid in the line of implements, dishes and seed. If the government would only protect these villages there would be hope that in the course of time they would be able to take care of themselves, though they will certainly need aid for a while. But the prospects are very gloomy for acts of violence and cruelty are still very frequent and no Muslims are punished for such deeds.*

*And in Marash itself, while there is no new special fear or excitement, business is crushed. Strong able-bodied men sit listlessly at home because there is no work to be had, and the widows and orphans lead a hopeless cheerless existence from day to day.*

*Our relief funds are given out, at the rate of 5 cents a head, every week! Food is cheap in Marash, but this only enough to buy dry bread, nothing else. The outlook for the next winter is dark indeed. If even these funds fail, hundreds will die of starvation before our eyes. I look forward to the winter with unspeakable dread, and feel selfish longing sometimes to run off somewhere, where I could not know of the terrible misery, that I cannot relieve.*

*Perhaps it is unkind of me to trouble you with this picture of suffering, but when I get started on it, I don't always know when to stop. I know that you pray for these sufferers and though our faith is sorely tried, we must believe that God reigns, and sometime there will be a change. Tell them we hope to hold on and do what we can.*

*With all good wishes,*

*Clara H. Lee*

## **Background: Bloody Sultan**

Christians were always considered second-class citizens under the Ottoman Empire, which was by majority Muslim. By 1890, the Ottoman Turks had ruled over the Christians in their ancient homelands for over 400 years. The Christians asked for equal rights, but to Sultan Abdul Hamid II (Muslim ruler of the Ottoman Empire), asking for such rights was a threat, since he believed the Christians would want their ancient lands back.

In 1890–91, Sultan Abdul Hamid II gave semi-official status to Kurdish bandits who were already actively mistreating Armenians in the provinces. Made up of Kurds (as well as other ethnic groups such as Turcomans), and armed by the state, they came to be called the "Hamidian Regiments".

The Hamidians were given free rein to attack Armenians, confiscating stores of grain, foodstuffs, and driving off livestock, and confident of escaping punishment as they were subject only to court-martial. Abdul Hamid II did not hesitate to use the local Muslims (in most cases Kurds) against the Armenians.

As a result of such violence, 300,000 Armenians were killed, and 50,000 children orphaned in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-1890s, in what became known as the Hamidian massacres.

Although the massacres were aimed mainly at the Armenians, they turned into indiscriminate violent riots aimed at the expulsion of Christians.

News of the Armenian massacres was widely reported in Europe and the United States and drew

strong responses from foreign governments and humanitarian organizations alike.

Abdul Hamid II was referred to as the "Bloody Sultan" or "Red Sultan" in the West.

Sultan Abdul Hamid II is remembered for his brutality against Christians, especially the Armenians. His brutality against Christians set off an eventual chain reaction that led to the Adana Massacre in 1909 to the Armenian Genocide that lasted from 1915 to 1923.

By WW2 and the Jewish Holocaust, the Bloody Sultan's reputation was almost forgotten along with the Armenian Massacres and Genocide. However, in the early part of the 21st century, talk of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the Armenian Genocide came back into the open and is now officially recognized by the United States.

## **Armenian Massacres (1894-1987)**

The massacres began in the Ottoman interior in 1894, before becoming more widespread in the following years. The majority of the murders took place between 1894 and 1896. The massacres began tapering off in 1897, following international condemnation.

The harshest measures were directed against the long persecuted Armenian community as calls for civil reform and better treatment from the government went ignored. The Ottomans made no allowances for the victims' age or gender, and massacred all with brutal force.

The telegraph spread news of the massacres around the world, leading to significant coverage in the media of Western Europe and North America. In Turkish historical memory, the 1890s events are seen as a struggle against Armenian revolutionaries and considered a prelude to the supposed Armenian insurrection cited to justify the 1915 Armenian genocide.

## **Armenian Relief**

In early February 1896, the National Armenian Relief Committee sent \$35,000 to the International Committee at Constantinople, a group composed of:

- British consular officials,
- American missionaries, and
- other men in whom there was confidence.

In March 1896, the committee followed up with \$10,000 to the same International Committee in Constantinople.

By November 1896, Armenian Relief had cut into popular consciousness. That Thanksgiving, an appeal was launched nationwide, and many Americans gave thanks by sending money to Armenian widows and orphans of the massacres.

Clara Barton prodded Americans that fall: "Unless the open hands of charity be reached out and across the access be secured, hunger and cold will gather victims by the tens of thousands and bury them like the falling leaves beneath the snow."

Americans donated a total of \$300,000 in the year 1896.  
\$300,000 has a relative inflated value of about \$10 million today.

Those donating included:  
\$200 from Arthur Fletcher Whiting;  
John D. Rockefeller;  
\$700+ was collected by 2,500 schoolchildren in Minneapolis;  
the Worcester Relief Committee;  
the Ladies Relief Committee of Chicago;  
the Citizens of Milton, North Dakota;  
the Davenport Iowa Relief Committee;  
\$95,000 was raised in New York City;  
\$40,000 in Boston;  
\$15,000 in Philadelphia.

## **Red Cross**

On advice from missionaries stationed in Constantinople, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, with headquarters in Boston, decided early in December, 1895, that the American National Red Cross was the best possible agency for distribution, having the experience of working in the recent Russian famine of 1881.

By December 1895, Clara Barton was being recruited intensely by the National Armenian Relief Committee to administer the funds through the Red Cross. In 1896, she went from the United States to Constantinople to administer the funds of the National Armenian Relief Committee.

Barton stipulated that the Red Cross would go into the field only if there was an assurance of sufficient funds and that agents in Turkey must have complete authority and not to be divided with the missionaries.