An important part of the long-term mission of The Philanthropy Roundtable is cataloguing and celebrating America’s crucial institutions of civil society. These entities don’t wield government’s coercive authority. Nor are they fueled by the profit incentives of the commercial sector. They exist in a third sphere independent of those two poles of social action, fixing problems where neither power nor money are adequate to the task.

Voluntary community-building organizations are some of the most distinctive elements of our civilization. One could say they make America America. Many date back hundreds of years; others are just recently born. Compared to other countries, they are extraordinarily numerous, and they exist and thrive only because they work, and propel us forward.

Again and again, in sector after sector, these civic associations have demonstrated their capacities to make our lives richer, healthier, kinder, happier, and more beautiful. And for that, they are loved by everyday Americans (though sometimes taken for granted). The reason we willingly hand over to these institutions—every single year—more than $400 billion, and at least that much more in the value of our volunteer time, is because we recognize their power to make our society better in multiple ways.

Over the next several years, I hope to chronicle many of these organizations. More specifically, I’ll map them by geography, in region-by-region guides. So any time you want to get to know a place, you’ll be able to quickly pull up all the descriptions and practical information needed to immerse yourself in the distinctive elements of that area’s civic culture. Museums, glorious parks, special schools, potent churches, restaurants where you can eat a meal served by a former convict or prostitute or homeless person, venerable athletic organizations, priceless medical nonprofits, civic music halls, impressive community-boosting charities, public art, historic libraries—you’ll find all of these and more.

As a sneak peak at this new prospective work, the following pages present a sketch of civil society in one of America’s oldest and culturally richest cities: Philadelphia.

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Libraries for the Common Man

Benjamin Franklin was a supreme example of a distinctively American “type”—the self-improver. The tenth son of a soapmaker who had only enough money to send Ben to school for one year, Franklin had to train his mind himself and blaze a personal path to achievement. After running away from home at age 17 he found himself hundreds of miles from all friends or family, without any sources of assistance or advantage. If he was going to prosper in life, it would have to be by the wit, character, and diligence he developed on his own.

When he turned 21 Franklin began his first experiment in using voluntary association with other citizens as an aid to individual success. He pulled together a group of similarly hard-working friends in what he called “a club of mutual improvement.” One of the 12 members was affluent, but the others all toiled in trades like cobbler, glazier, clerk, bartender, and cabinetmaker. They called their circle the “Junto,” and met every Friday evening for dinner and discussion. Franklin drew up club rules which required them to think out loud together about both intellectual topics and practical subjects—like how they could assist each other’s success, and what the group should do to elevate their growing city.

The Junto helped popularize the kind of individual striving and community-mindedness that eventually became common in America, but when Franklin and his friends began, this was a novel approach. In mother Britain and more class-conscious parts of the American colonies, like the cavalier South, the prevailing view was that citizens were born either as “gentlemen” or “serviles,” and that those who worked with their hands could not aspire to a life of the mind or engage in public service. Franklin and his friends, and many other Americans like them, exposed the foolishness of that view.

Members of the Junto lent Franklin the money he needed to buy the Pennsylvania Gazette and turn it into the most popular and innovative newspaper in the colonies. Other members of the group were likewise boosted into professional and personal achievement through the support of their clubmates.

The other half of the formula behind this little voluntary association was to methodically do civic good. Junto members organized a pathbreaking volunteer fire brigade. They led campaigns to pave, clean, and light the public streets, and to improve health conditions. They spawned the colonies’ first learned group.

These efforts inspired others. As members of the Junto thrived, Franklin encouraged each of the dozen to set up similar small groups with a fresh membership of earnest self-improvers. This set the template for America’s dense growth of voluntary communal organizations through which participants simultaneously refine themselves and enrich the larger society.

One of the most valuable social contributions of Franklin’s Junto was its creation of the public lending library. Members of the group found they often had to consult books to settle questions raised during their discussions. To make this easier, they first agreed to pool in one place all of the reference volumes they owned as individuals. (Books were then very expensive and possessed only in small numbers even by striving readers.) But they found that members borrowed books then forgot to return them.

So Franklin suggested a refinement: Members of the Junto and as many friends as they could convince to join...
them would form a new book group that anyone willing to pay a modest deposit could join. Records would be kept, and if someone failed to bring back a book, a fee would be taken out of his deposit. Pooled funds would also be used to buy new books suggested by the members.

The 50 initial joiners who set this up in 1731 called it the Library Company of Philadelphia. This was a breakthrough in making reading material broadly available to the public. Average citizens who would otherwise have no hope of being able to read and study suddenly had resources for sharpening their minds. This fit beautifully with Franklin’s belief in the diffusion of knowledge to give all people opportunity.

The public lending library spread across America during the 1740s, and later across the world. Many other philanthropists like Judah Touro, Peter Cooper, Enoch Pratt, and Andrew Carnegie followed in Franklin’s steps by offering easy access to books as their best attempt to help poor but ambitious people sharpen their capacities. Carnegie, for instance, gave funds for the construction of nearly 30 public libraries in Philadelphia alone. Today the city’s Free Library is one of the largest public systems in the world, with 54 branches, over 2 million books, and 125 live author events per year.

And Franklin’s original Library Company is also very much alive and well. It still shelves every one of the million works it acquired in its nearly three centuries of existence. The initial subscription library grew big enough to serve as the Library of Congress during the decades when Philadelphia was the national capital. It continued to grow as an open lending collection and was the largest set of books in the U.S. until the 1850s. In the 1950s it was transformed into a research library, opening its many rare volumes to investigators of all sorts.

Philadelphia is also home to many specialized libraries created for the public good. These range from one of the country’s largest family-history and genealogy collections, offered by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (where you can also see treasures like the first draft of the U.S. Constitution and the earliest known American photograph), to America’s deepest trove of books about freemasonry, which can be accessed at the Masonic Temple.

Philadelphia has more statues, sculpture, and other pieces of art on its streets than perhaps any city in the country. A private association is the big reason for that.

Public Art Everywhere
Philadelphia has more outdoor statues, sculpture, and other pieces of public art on its streets than perhaps any city in the U.S. A big reason for that is the private organization known as the Association for Public Art—created in 1872 by locals who wanted to beautify their hometown parks. It was our country’s first charity aimed at making art accessible to city dwellers.

The group immediately began commissioning striking pieces from artists like Alexander Stirling Calder, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Daniel Chester French, and Frederic Remington, then installing them all over Philadelphia. Its very first gift, a lovely piece called “Night,” can still be viewed in West Fairmount Park. On a busy boulevard in the main arts district you’ll find a glittering Joan of Arc astride her horse in full battle armor, which was initiated by leading Philadelphians to honor their city’s connections to France. The downtown
Back in the 1980s, Philadelphia had a serious graffiti problem. This resulted not only in ugly streetscapes but also disorder and crime (which often surge when a neighborhood looks like no one cares, as the “broken windows” research of that era demonstrated). Civic leaders formed the Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network, which first worked to stop the spray painting and remove existing eyesores. Many thousands of properties were cleaned by a Graffiti Abatement Team (with some of the labor done by “taggers” assigned to that work by judges after they were caught defacing property).

Simultaneously, local artist Jane Golden was hired to create a program that would take young people, including many arrested for vandalizing, and train them to create handsome murals on walls that had previously been scarred. Beginning in 1984, the effort produced 60-100 murals annually, many of them visually dramatic. Soon, more than 1,500 young people were learning, working, and earning artist fees in the program every year, redirecting their energies from destructive acts into construction of new works of art (along with restoration of previously painted wall art).

There are now around 4,000 large public murals scattered throughout Philadelphia, many of them enlivening tired old industrial districts and campus. Just to the left he is operating his printing press, at life size, in an outdoor plaza by the Masonic Temple.

Philadelphia’s most charming celebration of Franklin is a bronze bust sitting next to one of Philly’s engine-and-ladder companies. To honor Franklin’s invention of volunteer firefighting companies for fending off urban conflagrations, local firehouses accumulated 1.8 million pennies donated by schoolchildren. They also collected 1,000 old keys for the artist, who cast them right into the surface of the sculpture to give it a wonderful texture. Crowdsourced in this way, the friendly and bemused visage of Franklin reminds viewers of the democratic roots of the republic he helped create.

Another community project with hundreds of donors is the Irish Memorial. It was unveiled at the 150th anniversary of the famine that killed a million people in Ireland and pushed that many more to emigrate—many to the U.S. where they became the kernel of today’s 34 million Americans with Irish heritage.

One popular Philadelphia sculpture allows a little audience participation. “Freedom” was created with a $1 million grant from a local retiree, and placed on the street in front of what is currently a charter school for the arts. It depicts a figure tearing himself free from a sticky wall and springing joyously down the sidewalk—an allegory encouraging escape from personal traps. The human-shaped cavity left behind by the sprite is now a favorite spot for people to be photographed unsticking themselves.
knit together neighborhood residents, co-workers from the docks and firehouses, and multiple generations of the same family.

If you can make it to Philly on New Year’s Day, you’ll see a street show that exists nowhere else in the U.S. If you’re unable to be present then, the Mummers Museum will give you a taste during the rest of the year. You can even rent the museum for your wedding reception, provided you’re willing to leave your celebratory firearms at home.

Brother’s Keepers

Among the ten largest cities in the U.S., the one with the highest poverty rate is Philadelphia, at 26 percent. Yet Philly has one of the lowest rates of homeless people per capita. That paradox can be explained to a considerable degree by the success of Project HOME, the Philadelphia charity that has helped get thousands of people off the streets, in the process becoming one of the nation’s most influential and admired organizations for battling homelessness.

The organization was launched with a $100,000 check from the Connelly Foundation, after three daughters of foundation creator John Connelly went to visit a feisty nun and a newly minted MBA who they had been told were planning an attack on homelessness in their mutual hometown. Sister Mary Scullion and Joan McConnon went on to build an efficient and business-like charity with about 350 employees (many of them formerly homeless), hundreds of volunteers, and a reputation for getting things done.

Project HOME has collected some of the largest donations ever made to an organization aiding the homeless, including $30 million
World’s Most Influential Prison

In its first two centuries, Pennsylvania tried harder than almost any place in the world to find better ways of administering justice. This began with William Penn himself. After becoming a Quaker he was several times jailed by the English for blasphemy, including one stint in Newgate prison and another in solitary confinement in an unheated cell of the Tower of London.

When Penn later established his commonwealth in the new world, he forbade criminalization of religious views, and guaranteed broad liberty to residents. He insisted on basic rights for suspects, guarantees of bail, protection of the independence of juries, bans on torture and branding, and a limiting of capital punishment to cases of murder and treason. (At that time, people in England could be hung for more than 200 offenses, including minor thefts and other small crimes.)

And in the places where persons convicted of crimes were kept, Penn instituted humane reforms. He stopped the practice of charging prisoners for food, and for basic services like unlocking their irons for court appearances. In his lockups, men shaped wood, and women spun yarn. Instead of being dungeons, he insisted, prisons should be workhouses and places that aimed to rehabilitate. He hoped that through his reforms “an example may be set up to the nations as...a holy experiment.”

In subsequent generations, Quakers and other Pennsylvanians continued to seek better ways to punish and avert crime. The great humanitarian Benjamin Rush and some friends created the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public

Despite very high poverty (26 percent), Philly has one of the lowest rates of homelessness—thanks to this charity.
Prisons in 1787. (Under the evolved name of Pennsylvania Prison Society, the group still exists today!) They held their first meeting in Benjamin Franklin’s home, and proposed to shift prison design and operation toward individual penitence and inner change, rather than humiliation. That marked the birth of a new word, and concept—the penitentiary.

This changed thinking climaxed in the opening of a radically new prison in Philadelphia—the Eastern State Penitentiary—in 1829. Up until then, prisons were large holding pens where adults and children, murderers and petty thieves, men and women, were all tossed together in common rooms, and left to sort out their own rules, pecking orders, and living conditions. When guards and authorities did intervene it was often in harshly physical ways.

Under the influence of Quaker ideas, ESP operated completely differently. Every inmate had his own separate cell with a skylight and a small personal exercise yard outside. There was no mingling or conversation whatsoever. Solitude and silence were thought to be the best way to get criminals to think through their deeds and change their hearts. Each cell had running water, a flush toilet, and central heat. In that same year, even the White House had none of those things, never mind the average American home.

The carefully designed hub-and-spokes facility was one of the most expensive American buildings in its day, and it became a world-famous attraction. There were regular open-house hours, and in many years more visitors toured its corridors than visited Independence Hall. Famous men like Alexis de Tocqueville, Lafayette, and Charles Dickens were among those who came to inspect the marvel. More than 300 copycat prisons were erected all around the world, spreading what became known as the “Pennsylvania Model.” Dozens of these duplicates are still in use today on other continents.

As the years passed, the solitary confinement system was gradually abandoned. The prison became crowded, and decrepit. The city of Philadelphia had long since grown up all around the facility—pressing daily bustle up against what looked like the walls of a medieval fort.

In 1970 Eastern State Penitentiary was finally abandoned. After the last inmate left the grounds, it became a spooky ghost town. But when the city announced plans to demolish the historic building, there was a public uproar. Instead, a nonprofit was created to control the site. Grants from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the William Penn Foundation, and other donors weatherized the building, created informative exhibits, and allowed the premises to be opened to visitors—who lined up in droves to tour the anachronism.

The goal of the operating nonprofit is to preserve the building “as a stabilized ruin.” Some areas have been tidied up, but much of the property remains a forbidding wreck. It is a time capsule of nineteenth-century social dreams, overlaid with some twenty-first-century yearnings—in the form of art installations that have been created in many cells and public areas. Most of these transmit the “aren’t prisons a bummer” message. One, though—a cell decorated with images of dozens of people killed by folks who ended up behind bars here—reminds us why incarceration exists.

Every day of the year you can rent an audio guide, get a group tour, or just stroll the grounds on your own (there is an abundance of informative signs). There are unexpected twists to the place, like the synagogue that once served more than 80 Jewish inmates at a time. The amazingly atmospheric spaces have been used to film dozens of movies and television shows, and you are likely to commit felony-level overphotographing as you wander.

**Urban Cavalry**

The gray stone armory looks like a Hollywood castle, but it extends back a full city block right in the heart of Philadelphia, and inside you will find modern humvees and heavy weapons. Welcome to the home of possibly the oldest active military unit in the U.S.—and the only private branch of our Army. First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry is altogether the most quirky fighting force in America.

As you wander this atmospheric former prison you are likely to commit felony-level overphotographing.
The group began operating in 1774, before we were even a nation. First Troop is the last military group still operating from America’s first two centuries when our country was protected by regional militias—democratic community entities raised, paid for, and commanded by local leaders. Because this throwback force was formed before the Militia Acts of 1792 and 1903, it enjoys original rights and privileges that none of the other local military units subsequently pulled together into our National Guard were able to retain.

So, for instance, First Troop City Cavalry is the only military body in America where soldiers are enrolled via ballot. It is the only unit that elects its own officers by democratic vote! All of its councils and meetings are governed by Robert’s Rules of Order.

This is the only U.S. military body that owns its armory. And the only one with a long tradition of members voluntarily turning over all of their National Guard pay to the unit, for operation and maintenance of the facility. They are the only soldiers with the right to wear their traditional dress uniform that dates back to their founding. (The chest braid and plumes and bearskin helmets make the troopers look a lot like West Point cadets in their historic parade dress.) This cavalry unit even still keeps horses on a nearby West Chester farm and requires members to become competent in the saddle and with a saber.

It’s a wild combination of precious tradition, martial spirit, and citizen independence. The troop made a healthy evolution during the 1970s when the standard National Guard discipline of one weekend per month of drills, plus two weeks of exercises during the summer, was overlaid on top of the old ceremonial-dinner and horse-parade schedule. Individuals now need to have prior military service or an enlistment in the Pennsylvania National Guard before they are even considered for enrollment. One First Trooper recently earned the coveted Army Ranger tab—which only about ten soldiers per year from the Pennsylvania National Guard manage.

Behind some vestiges of fancy-dress-and-highball silliness, First Troop Cavalry has avoided decaying into clubby anachronism, and worked to maintain itself as a useful and intriguing piece of American civil society. Members have made personal sacrifices to keep their unit functioning as an active force, and it has been a respectable combat detachment over the last generation—with members deployed to Bosnia, Egypt, Kuwait, Iraq, and other theaters. And give credit to any organization that gets bankers, realtors, grad students, lawyers, and MBAs involved in military service today (with all of them coming in as privates, not officers).

In addition to the personal time and family separations First Troopers offer the unit, the occasional perils they face, and their tradition of turning over all pay received from the government to maintain the organization, members also donate generously via annual giving and bequests to the 501c4 that is now the legal foundation for their volunteer military service. There’s nothing else like this organization of citizen-soldiers anywhere.
Master of the Organ Universe

John Wanamaker was a commercial genius who built his department store into the most alluring emporium of its type ever created. It was a marble palace, the first retail property lighted by electricity, boasting 8,000 sales attendants staffing 12 stories and 45 acres of floor space—a regular wonderland where shoppers could purchase everything from boots to feathered hats, dime-novels to pianos, with lunch at one of the store’s three restaurants tucked in between.

And you could also take in a concert. Lots of concerts. In the Egyptian auditorium. In the Greek-themed performance hall. Or merely while shopping in one of the galleries that surround the Grand Court pictured above—home to the world’s most astonishing organ. (That’s the organist at lower left—tucked in amongst the ladies’ dresses.)

John Wanamaker loved music, and his Wanamaker Musical Organization included a orchestra, chorus, military band, and bugle corp. He was also a religious man, and considered the organ the king of musical instruments, a tool for simulating heaven on earth. So after the St. Louis World’s Fair closed, he and his son bought the massive organ created specially for that event. Shipping it to Philadelphia required a 13-car train. The organ was soon booming recitals through the central heart of the store, several times a day.

This was Wanamaker’s effort to offer everyday people both daily enjoyment and a glimpse at the possibilities of a deeper inner life. And he was not a man for half steps. So not long after installing the World’s Fair instrument—which was already the largest in the world, at 10,059 pipes—he began to expand it. He hired the organ’s original maker and 40 full-time craftsmen, gave them a workshop carved out of menswear and other sections of the store, and ran an invisible factory right in the heart of his store that fabricated legions of metal and wooden pieces, pumps, controllers, wires, and pipes. When the men finished working 20 years later, the organ weighed 287 tons. It had six stacked keyboards, 42 pedals, and 897 voice controls. And it now possessed 28,628 pipes—far more than any other instrument on the planet—giving it an astonishing voice.

The Wanamaker department store has long since been overtaken by history. The operation was bought out by other retailers multiple times, and at present Macy’s sells department-store goods from three floors of the building. Yet, amazingly, the organ endures, and continues to give daily concerts and beloved holiday shows. A local NPR station aired a Wanamaker Organ Hour for years, until 2017.

This is one, John Wanamaker’s unsurpassed musical instrument really did turn out to be his greatest creation for Philadelphia.

And the corporate philanthropy did not end with Wanamaker. Despite the financial pressure in retail today, Macy’s continues to employ a team of craftsmen in a third-floor shop solely to manufacture small parts and make repairs to keep this gigantic sound machine, and its hundreds of thousands of pieces, in good working order.

Who knows how much longer that will last? So go hear one of humanity’s sonic wonders while you can.

Musical Metropolis

In Philadelphia, you can run into rarified music even in the little pasta joints. The Victor Cafe has been a family business since 1918, squeezed in among gritty row houses and mom-and-pop stores in south Philadelphia. The original operation was a gramophone shop run by an Italian immigrant who was crazy about opera. He was a sociable guy and attracted lots of fellow music lovers, to whom he started serving espresso and spumoni. When the Depression made record money scarce, the proprietor purchased a wine-and-beer license and
America’s First Hospital

In 1751, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Bond got together to create the first generally available hospital in America, and one of the first in the world. Franklin put up a large personal donation and solicited friends to pull together the funds needed to create this novel institution “to care for the sick poor...and care for lunatics.”

At a time when many medical facilities were designed simply to isolate the ill from the community, the Pennsylvania Hospital aimed to restore people to active health. Toward this end it connected, from its very beginning, medical care and medical teaching.

Franklin bought equipment for its doctors when he was in Europe. He gave additional money to the hospital’s endowment, and solicited more donors. The Penn family eventually donated an entire city block so the hospital could expand.

The institution’s seal depicts the Good Samaritan helping the roadside victim, and reads: “Take care of him and I will repay thee.” This hospital repaid its backers many times by coming up with hundreds of innovations in doctoring. Most radical were its early efforts, led by Benjamin Rush, to sweep the mentally ill off streets and out of basements and attics and treat them via occupational training, walking and swimming, conversation, and “moral stimulation.”

Astonishingly, the Pennsylvania Hospital is still a bustling medical center based in its original building. And if things go south for you, it’s about as good a place to be treated for illness as anywhere you could pick. It can also be visited, though, by strappingly healthy members of the public who are just interested in its illustrious history and fine artifacts.

Inside the so-called Pine Building, which all subsequent additions have radiated from, you can take a self-guided or guided tour of the Great Court, the historic library which contains works dating back to the fifteenth century, and the first surgical amphitheater—where up to 300 people (a mix of medical students and gawkers) would watch surgeons snip off gallbladders or limbs.

The Pine Building also contains some fine art. The trustees of the Pennsylvania Hospital wrote to Benjamin West, who was then historical painter to King George III, with a highly unusual request. Would he “paint something” and donate it so the charity-hospital could use it to raise funds? West agreed, influenced by the fact that his beloved wife Elizabeth was a Philadelphia native, and by the arguments of local merchant Joseph Wharton (great-grandfather of the philanthropist who established the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania), who traveled to France to urge the artist to create the gift.

Once completed, West’s dramatic composition “Christ Healing the Sick in the Temple” created such a stir in England that the aristocracy insisted it should be purchased by the Prince Regent (for the highest amount ever paid for a new painting at that time) to become the first work of art hung in a proposed new National Gallery. So West painted a second version,

This business leader went to great trouble to create the world’s most astonishing organ, then used it to offer everyday citizens of his hometown free daily doses of inspiration.
which he considered “improved” by the addition of a “lunatic boy” to the right side of the image—his homage to the role of the Pennsylvania Hospital in providing some of the first humane care for the mentally ill. When this portrait arrived in Philadelphia, it caused another sensation, as the first piece of fine art available for viewing by the general population in America. In the first 12 months it attracted 30,000 paid visitors, and admission fees ultimately raised over $15,000 for the hospital, a great deal of money in the early 1800s.

You can see it today for free.

Child-friendly Medical Care
Way back in 1855, Philadelphians figured out something no one else had yet discovered: children need different kinds of hospitals. Mid-nineteenth-century benefactors put up $4,000 to hire three doctors, set up 12 beds and a drug dispensary, and invent a hospital for the young. By a half century later they were able, when need called, to raise half a million dollars in donations in a matter of days. Their creation administered the first vaccines for diseases like whooping cough, mumps, and flu, and started the use of closed incubators and intensive care units for babies.

Medical care for the young is not just about cutting-edge technique. The warmth and family-friendliness of a facility are crucial. Here, Philadelphia’s children’s hospital spawned an equally innovative charitable ally.

It all began back in 1969. Fred Hill had a three-year-old fighting leukemia, and he and his wife were sleeping in chairs in their child’s room, living off vending-machine food, keeping vigils with their frightened preschooler—and wishing there was a better way.

Hill later held a fundraiser to support leukemia treatment, and he got lots of help from friends and workmates, thanks to his highly visible job. He was a tight end for the Philadelphia Eagles football team. Fellow players, fans, and team owner Leonard Tose were generous, and soon Hill had an independent charity with money in the bank.

Dr. Audrey Evans, a pediatric oncologist at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, suggested a productive place to invest it. Families of critically ill children, many of them from out of town, needed a local place they could be supported and inexpensively housed. Fred Hill and the Eagles management bit hard on the idea. Along with putting up their own funds, they recruited the local McDonald’s restaurant owners to donate. By 1974, the first Ronald McDonald House was up and running in the University City neighborhood.

The local creation went global. There are now 365 separate Ronald McDonald Houses in cities everywhere, plus RM respite rooms right within nearly all children’s hospitals. The families of 3.6 million children use them every year.

Thanks to their philanthropic support, most houses charge visitors nothing, or ask for a donation of $25 per day or less. No family is turned away. This saves families $900 million annually in lodging and meals. The McDonald’s Corporation still makes seven-figure annual donations, along with dozens of other corporate sponsors, and hundreds of thousands of individual donors. The group also harnesses 590,000 annual volunteers.
The Mother of All Anatomical Museums

Thomas Mütter was another of the enlightened Philadelphia physicians who labored to advance medicine and the training of doctors. In 1858 he donated to the College of Physicians 1,700 objects of medical interest that he had collected during his career, along with $30,000 in cash to hire a curator, fund annual science lectures, and create a building to house all of this. Thus was the Mütter Museum born.

Through additional acquisitions over the years, the collection swelled to more than 25,000 objects. These include some real anatomical doozies. Like pieces of Albert Einstein's brain. The tallest human skeleton in North America. A collection of 139 skulls illustrating ethnic variations. Shrunken heads from Ecuador (one authentic, one “forged”—you’ll have to ask). The plaster death cast of Chang and Eng, the famous Siamese twins co-joined at their livers.

And those are some of the least weird and creepy items. There is also the Chevalier Jackson Collection. Dr. Jackson was an ear, nose, and throat specialist who saved every foreign object he extracted from any patient’s throat, airway, lungs, nose, or ear canals during his almost 75-year career. You can paw through drawers housing these vaguely disturbing objects, which include nuts, pins, coins, six-pointed jacks, bones, screws, dentures, and various small toys.

One treasure of the Mütter Museum is the tumor taken out of President Grover Cleveland. Though he was one of our more honest politicians, he didn’t want the public to know what was going on after he discovered a cancerous ulcer in his mouth (just where he liked to place his tobacco cud, back when the White House was full of spittoons). The country was in a recession, you see, and Cleveland was worried about spooking Wall Street.

So he spooked his doctors instead—asking them to meet him on the Oneida, a yacht owned by a friend, which he told the public he was taking on a four-day fishing trip. Once out on the rolling seas, six physicians labored to cut out the tumor, along with five teeth, the President’s upper left palate, and part of his jawbone. Then they jammed a rubber prosthetic in the hole. At Cleveland’s request the entire operation was completed from inside his mouth, and his beloved trademark mustache was unharmed.

Somehow, the President was not killed in the process. His voice was mighty funny when he landed, though, which he explained as the product of a toothache. He was able to negotiate with a special session of Congress over the financial crisis, however, without anyone thinking of him as unpalatable.

And, history be praised, the gelatinous sarcoma his tempest-tossed surgeons removed from his mouth was saved in a glass bottle. Thanks to the Mütter Museum, this lumpy artifact of high-wire American politics is available for you to gaze upon.

You don’t get tips like that every day.
argued that with Irish immigration swelling Catholic church ranks, it was time to throw off the Quaker and Puritan restraint that kept other local sanctuaries dressed in plain white and clear glass. His new house of worship would “make all the bishops of all the churches jealous” and “expose the godly Presbyterian to the danger of squinting, in his efforts to look the other way as he passes.”

Over the next 50 years, the Philadelphia diocese went on to create a stunning portfolio of glorious sacred spaces. As the city de-industrialized in the twentieth century, though, and many ethnic Catholics moved out of their old neighborhoods, some of even the most impressive churches have become threatened, repurposed, or abandoned. For a sample of what is at stake, see hiddencityphila.org/2015/06/taking-inventory-with-the-philadelphia-church-project.

The Catholic priest wanted to build a church so beautiful it would “expose the godly Presbyterian to the danger of squinting, in his efforts to look the other way as he passes.”
on behalf of the Continental Congress and its military.

Then Morris became the primary financier of the Revolution, arranging for the vast majority of its wartime expenses—many billions of present-day dollars. At a time when U.S. currency had no value, he showed enormous inventiveness in finding money to pay Washington's soldiers. Late in the Revolutionary War, when all other financial means had collapsed, he kept our military and nascent government afloat with his personal funds and lines of credit, earning George Washington's undying admiration and friendship.

Morris was a Pennsylvania delegate at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, and after the national capital moved from New York to Philadelphia, Morris offered his home to Washington as the executive mansion. It filled that role for our first and second Presidents, until the White House opened in the new federal district. Washington asked Morris to be the first Secretary of the Treasury but he suggested Alexander Hamilton and served in the new Senate instead.

Morris's extensive debts eventually caught up to him, and the man who had been one of the wealthiest in America was imprisoned for them from 1798 to 1801. This broke his health, and with his financial reputation ruined he never worked again after his release. He and his wife lived off a small annuity she worked after his release. He and his wife lived off a small annuity she worked again after his release. He and his wife lived off a small annuity she worked again after his release. He and his wife lived off a small annuity she worked again after his release. He and his wife lived off a small annuity she worked again after his release. He and his wife lived off a small annuity she worked again after his release. He and his wife lived off a small annuity she worked again after his release. He and his wife lived off a small annuity she worked again after his release.

Hundreds of men from Duffield's church bore arms in the Revolution. He served as a chaplain to the Continental Congress, and then chaplain to the army during the winter at Valley Forge.

The British put a price on Duffield's head—50 pounds, dead or alive—and destroyed his sanctuary when they occupied Philadelphia. Their final little present was to bury 100 Hessians in his churchyard. The mercenaries, however, are outnumbered in the greenspace ringing “the patriot church” by the graves of 200-300 Revolutionary War enlistees. A series of clever little plaques leads visitors through a self-guided tour of the property, which remains an active Presbyterian church.

Parishioners at Pine Street have also created an absorbing public tribute to their liberty-loving early pastor. A Norway maple tree that was pushing over the churchyard's iron fence was chopped off, and its tall stump carved into a folk statue depicting George Duffield preaching. He looks every bit as unstoppable now as he must have then.

The Mikveh Israel Cemetery is a good place to remember Philadelphia's Jewish achievers. This is the burial spot of Rebecca Gratz, the beautiful daughter of a prominent merchant, who never married after losing her heart to a Gentile. Gratz was beloved by many contemporaries for her grace and goodness. At the tender age of 20 she created a charitable organization to assist impoverished women and children. She was a principal funder of the city's Orphan Society, and founded the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society which still does good charitable work today. She nursed sick neighbors, performed good deeds across the city, and offered aid to poor Philadelphians who were suffering without help. One of her admirers convinced Walter Scott to model the heroine of his novel Ivanhoe, called Rebecca, on Miss Gratz.

Another Rebecca resting in the Mikveh Israel Cemetery is Rebecca Phillips. She labored for many of the same charities that Gratz contributed to, and she also bore 21 children, many of whom became leading citizens. A grandson of hers, Uriah Levy, was one of the more interesting figures in early America. He ran away to sea at age ten, then worked his way up through the U.S. Navy to the rank of commodore, the first Jew to reach that pinnacle. He later had a successful career in New York City real estate.

Uriah Levy was a passionate admirer of Thomas Jefferson and his vision of American liberty. Because Jefferson was as incompetent at finance as he was gifted in writing, there was no money to keep up his home Monticello after he died, so it fell into disrepair bordering on ruin. When Levy discovered this, he bought the property in 1836 and restored it as a tribute to its creator. His nephew Jefferson Levy later put additional hundreds of thousands of dollars into rebuilding the home. In all, the Levy family owned Monticello for nearly 90 years—far longer than Jefferson himself. They saved the property for future generations of Americans, and eventually transferred it to a private foundation that still owns and operates it for the benefit of the public.

A final Jewish patriot now at rest in Philadelphia soil is Haym Solomon. He
joined the Sons of Liberty while working as a financier in New York, became friendly with George Washington, and was twice imprisoned by the British. He escaped on the second occasion the day before he was to be executed for spying. A master of several languages, he used his German to talk a Hessian jailer into fleeing with him to Pennsylvania for a new life.

In Philadelphia, Salomon became a right-hand associate of Robert Morris, the financier of the American independence struggle. Salomon hustled to arrange favorable loans, gave of his own resources to pay soldiers and Continental officials, made interest-free loans to leaders like Madison and Monroe, and offered special gifts to patriots he considered heroes, such as Army surgeon Bodo Otto, who used up all of his own money buying medical supplies for wounded soldiers.

After decades of frustration with the inability of the city school bureaucracy to reform itself, public-spirited Philadelphians responded with new offerings that about half of all families now take advantage of.

Salomon is thought to have provided more than $600,000 to the war effort—the equivalent of tens of millions today. When Washington trapped British General Cornwallis near Yorktown but lacked the means to move and supply his army for the final battle of the Revolution, he cried “Send for Haym Salomon”—who quickly scratched together $20,000 under great pressure.

Salomon died at age 45 shortly after the war ended—from tuberculosis he contracted in the British prison—leaving his widow and four children penniless. You can honor this American luminary at the Mikveh Israel Cemetery. Though his body lies in an unmarked grave, admirers have installed a granite tribute at the cemetery gate.
result, 50,000 children of modest means get a chance every year now to attend an independent school on scholarship.

In 2010, Philadelphia civic leaders, businesspeople, and philanthropists launched another local response to school disappointments. They created the Philadelphia School Partnership with a simple premise: Rather than focusing on what kind of institution a school is, or who runs it, or how it is managed, Philadelphians should simply support what works, and open up more seats in the places that are effective. The partnership supports conventional public schools, charter schools, independent schools, and religious schools alike. With support from local groups like the William Penn Foundation, the Yass family, and the Lenfest Foundation, they run initiatives to attract excellent teachers to Philadelphia, develop promising principals for all types of schools, and so forth. The Partnership has invested more than $80 million in local education to this point.

The PSP has long urged the city to create a single school-application portal where parents can put in their information once and apply for all available schools. After much resistance from the public-school bureaucracy, the partnership raised about half a million dollars and created its own website in 2018 that allows one simple application to 73 different schools serving low-income families. They received more than 120,000 applications in the first year, and aim to expand the portal to cover more of Philadelphia's schools in the future.

A final bright spot in Philadelphia schools has been a recent renaissance among the Catholic schools that serve many of the city’s poorest and most heavily minority neighborhoods. A nonprofit called Independence Mission Schools was formed to rescue 14 Catholic schools about to be closed by the archdiocese. Mixing philanthropy, the state tax credits, and low tuition rates, IMS revitalized campuses and expanded enrollment from 3,800 students in 2012 to more than 5,000 today, and still growing fast. Another impressive nonprofit called Faith in the Future took over management of another couple dozen Catholic schools and put them on a path to stability and excellence. Recently the Catholic education charity Seton Education Partners set up high-quality options in computer-enhanced education at Philly Catholic schools serving disadvantaged children.

As a result of these civic innovations, over a third of all Philadelphia children now attend public charter schools, another 10 percent are in Catholic schools, and many others are using donor-funded scholarships to learn in private academies. This is putting pressure on the district schools to improve as well.

The most acclaimed network of charter schools in Philly—the locally created Mastery Schools chain—now operates 24 campuses educating 14,000 students. Its results have been so impressive that the city has asked Mastery to take over some of its most dysfunctional district schools and turn them around. At nine poorly performing campuses that were made over into charters, teachers and principals far more than doubled the school rankings on Pennsylvania’s standardized tests of reading and math, in just a few years. This powerful record caught President Obama’s interest. “If a school like Mastery can do it, every troubled school can do it,” he commented.

Philadelphia hosts some very interesting institutions of higher education. The University of Pennsylvania, despite its name, is not a state institution but a private college. It was the first college on the continent to become a university—which included starting the first medical school in America, and the first college in the world focused on practical commerce (the philanthropically created Wharton School of Business).

Penn began in 1740 as a house of worship and “charity school for the instruction of poor children gratis” inspired by evangelist George Whitefield—perhaps the greatest orator in American history, who could hold 20,000 listeners spellbound in an era with no voice amplification. In 1749, the Whitefield campus was acquired by a group of Philadelphia philanthropists led by Benjamin Franklin, to become a “useful” college that would train students for “professions,” not just philosophical speculations. Today Franklin’s university has 26,000 students and a donated endowment of $14 billion.

An even more thoroughgoing experiment in making higher education practical, and available to working men, was Philadelphia’s Temple University. It was founded by a charismatic Baptist minister and social entrepreneur named Russell Conwell, who had moved to Philadelphia to take over a Baptist temple in a factory district after becoming famous for orations on the secrets of self-improvement. (He delivered his “Acres of Diamonds” speech—in which he prescribes loyalty to your own community and family, plus hard work, as the reliable paths to success in America—more than 6,000 times.)

Conwell used his soon-booming church to help poor Philadelphians in the north of the city develop the habits and skills needed for life
success. In 1884, a poor printer asked the pastor for advice on educating himself, and Conwell volunteered to tutor him. The printer started bringing friends to their lessons, and soon the classes (held at night because the students were all laborers) had to be moved from Conwell’s home to the Baptist temple. In 1887, Conwell announced he was forming a college within “walking distance to factories employing 30,000 workmen.” Today, Temple University—a public school with private origins—educates 40,000 students per year.

A third Philadelphia innovation in making higher education relevant and democratic was Drexel University. With a powerful vision and a gift of about $80 million in current terms, Anthony Drexel created an institute in 1891 to train young men and women who came from outside the upper classes that typically populated colleges, so they could find productive spots in our newly industrial society. A successful financier and generous philanthropist, Anthony believed that alternating periods of study with periods of intensive employment was the best way to learn. From early on, Drexel University has been built on “cooperative education” that mixes schooling with on-the-job experience. The university’s commitment to this experiential learning continues to be so strong that even its law school trains its enrollees using this cooperative model, alternating student time between classrooms and working law offices.

Nonprofit Newspapers

The advent of the Internet and free news has been devastating for newspapers, and for local reporting in particular. As dailies desperately groped for viable new business models, Philadelphia uber-philanthropist Gerry Lenfest tried something dramatically different in his hometown.

As in every city, the Philadelphia papers were struggling mightily at the dawn of the new millennium. To save them from collapse, Lenfest (who gave away $1.3 billion during his lifetime) purchased, in 2014, the Philadelphia Inquirer (America’s third-oldest newspaper), the Philadelphia Daily News, and their companion shared website Philly.com, for $88 million. Then he donated all three properties, along with a $20 million endowment, to a nonprofit entity. He later added an additional $40 million to the endowment of the Lenfest Institute for Journalism, matching a further $40 million of donations given by other local concerned citizens.

Earnings from the resulting $100 million endowment have so far been applied to improving the use of technology by the papers, and a fellowship for recruiting reporters. The publications will continue to operate as for-profit businesses, adapting as necessary to balance their bottom lines. But the hope is that having a nonprofit ownership umbrella over them, yielding special funding for innovation (especially high-quality local reporting), will allow the newspapers to survive and contribute to Philadelphia’s civic life for years to come.

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This is now one of the most closely watched experiments in American journalism—a “lab for local news innovation,” as the institute director puts it, and a test of the traditional American view that an energetic local press is fundamental to the health of civic life. Given the declining circulation that has
undercut all newspapers, it’s clear that hard choices lie ahead even with this lifeline. But thanks to a generous local son, the Philly papers have a fighting chance. And given the city’s many firsts in journalism, “where better than Philadelphia”—as Lenfest himself put it before his death—“to invent the future of a free press?”

**Benevolent Bistros**

The Rooster is a diner that turns problems into opportunities. It is run by two restaurateurs who operate a chain of eateries around Philadelphia whose popular fried chicken involves butchering hundreds of chickens every day. That means hundreds of leftover backs and bones with no good use. Get out the soup kettles!

The owners decided to use the chicken parts to make different varieties of broth they would sell to downtown workers and residents at a new luncheonette. And 100 percent of any earnings from the eatery would be donated to a local homeless ministry.

The restaurant’s partner is the Broad Street Ministry. From a previously abandoned Presbyterian church in the heart of downtown, it provides meals, a clothing closet, personal care packages, Sunday worship, Bible study, medical and legal services, housing assistance, dental-and mental-health screenings, plus conversation, music, and hospitality for needy locals—3,000 of whom use the church as their mailing address.

The Rooster aims to help pay for some of that assistance. A Kickstarter campaign raised $180,000 to renovate the restaurant space. Then in its first year of operation the luncheonette netted $16,000. That donation allowed Broad Street to provide 7,000 meals to its clientele. In its second year, the Rooster’s chef-owners changed its menu, hoping to increase profitability, but chicken-based soup remains a staple. Open for lunch and dinner seven days a week.

Another unusual benevolent bistro you can patronize in downtown Philadelphia is EAT Cafe, created by the Center for Hospitality and the Center for Hunger-free Communities at Drexel University in partnership with a local high-end restaurant group, plus local supermarkets, bakeries, and churches that donate about 15 percent of its food supply. When you finish your meal at the EAT Cafe, you get a piece of paper listing a “suggested price.” You can leave that amount, more, less, or no payment at all. The idea is to feed needy people in a mix with normal restaurant customers, hoping that charitable patrons will pay enough extra to cover the cost of the 20 percent or so of visitors who end up paying little or nothing. (The cafe is open selected weekdays for standard-price lunch, and selected weeknights for pay-what-you-can dinner.)

EAT is one of about 60 “pay what you can” restaurants that have grown up across the country over the last two decades with support from an Ohio-based nonprofit that inaugurated the practice. These currently serve 1.4 million meals a year, and more cafes are in development. Volunteer workers and donors allow the formula to work, but keeping menus and business operations as close to a for-profit restaurant as possible is central to attracting the middle-class diners who make these entities completely different from free soup-kitchens.

In a world where 60 percent of all restaurants go bust in their first year even without this pricing variable, it’s a tricky formula. One way some “pay what you can” restaurants keep things working is by asking diners who can’t pay to instead provide an hour of volunteer labor. Philadelphian Dorothea Bongiovi, who founded two such eateries with her husband, rock musician Jon Bon Jovi, says trading an hour of work gives clients “a sense of dignity and belonging, where they have participated in their meal in some way.” These stints offer low-income people a chance to work alongside middle-class volunteers, and get some practical experience and training that can lead to paid employment in the hospitality business.

Some food establishments have been created specifically to hire individuals who’ve had a hard time getting a foot on the job ladder. The Monkey & the Elephant is a coffee house formed to employ former foster children as they age out of the system. Foster-care alumni are at much higher risk of joblessness, reliance on public assistance, incarceration, and living on the street. This cafe aims to circumvent those outcomes.

There are also more traditional eateries in Philadelphia that fold charitable kindnesses into their normal business operations. At Rosa’s Fresh Pizza, any customer who donates $1 can stick a Post-It note on the wall. Later, any hungry person without the funds to pay can retrieve one of those Post-Its and redeem it for a slice of pie. About 50 to 100 such transactions take place every day.

Schmear It has a main restaurant, pop-up branches, and a food truck that all hawk bagels. And every two weeks it allows customers to nominate their favorite nonprofit—to which a portion of profits are then donated.