

Nonprofit/Independent Sector in America Prior to 1763

Scot's Charitable Society of Boston (1657)

The Scots Charitable Society of Boston, founded in 1657, was the forerunner of associations whose purpose was partly charitable. These associations helped to smooth the path of emigrants from Scotland. Its purpose is to give help to Scots in need.

St. Andrew's Society of Charleston, South Carolina (1730)

Named for the patron saint of Scotland, it lends assistance to widows, orphans, and others in need of help.

The New York Society Library (1754)

In 1754, when there was no library in the city open to the public, the New York Society – a group of six civic-minded individuals – formed the Library in the belief that a subscription library which anyone could join, which offered a broad range of books, "would be very useful as well as ornamental to the City." It opened in a room in the old City Hall, on Wall Street facing Broad Street, and for a century and a half – until the founding of the public library system – and was known as "the city library," which in fact is what it was.

Library Company of Philadelphia (1731)

In 1731 Ben Franklin founded America's first circulating library so that people could borrow books to read even though they might not have been able to afford to buy books. The library was private and members paid a fee.

Masonic Lodge (1715)

In 1715 John Moore, Collector of the Port of Philadelphia, wrote in a letter that he had "spent a few evenings of Masonic festivity with my Masonic Brethren". This was the first Mason reporting informal Masonic meetings in America.

First Orphanage – New Orleans (1729)

The first orphanage in the United States was founded in 1729 by an Ursuline convent in New Orleans, after an Indian attack left many children without parents.

Harvard University (1636)

Harvard College was established in 1636 by vote of the Great and General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was named for its first benefactor, John Harvard of



Charlestown, a young minister who, upon his death in 1638, left his library and half of his estate to the new institution. Harvard's first scholarship fund was created in 1643 with a gift from Ann Radcliffe, Lady Mowlson.

During its early years, the College offered a classic academic course based on the English university model but consistent with the prevailing Puritan philosophy of the first colonists. Although many of its early graduates became ministers in Puritan congregations throughout New England, the College was never formally affiliated with a specific religious denomination. An early brochure, published in 1643, justified the College's existence: "To advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches."

