

Jules C. Stein Bust Unveiling
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Dr. Jules Stein: One Brilliant Man, Two Legendary Careers

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On behalf of Research to Prevent Blindness and the Board of RPB, it's our pleasure to give to the National Eye Institute this bust that will be unveiled shortly of Dr. Jules Stein.

Dr. Stein's life story is really quite a fascinating one. He was born in 1896. He was trained as an ophthalmologist. He was Chief Resident in Ophthalmology at Cook County Hospital in 1923, and then he went into private practice in the Chicago area with a highly regarded ophthalmologist, Dr. Harry Gradle.

In 1924, he published a research paper on telescopic spectacles and magnifiers as aides to poor vision that was considered a definitive manual on the topic for a number of years. That same year, at age 28, he created the Music Corporation of America, or MCA, which, with its eventual acquisitions of Universal Pictures and Decca Records, became the largest and most successful entertainment conglomerate of its time.

You see, Dr. Stein was an accomplished musician, and he formed his own band in college as a way to make money to pay his way through college and medical school. He was responsible for booking the band's gigs, and he discovered that he was so good at it that he began arranging bookings for other musical groups. 1924 was when his business took off, and in 1925, he gave up the practice of medicine to focus his attention solely on guiding the growth of MCA.

Dr. Gradle told him, "Jules, you need to make a decision. Are you going to be an ophthalmologist or are you going to be a band booker?" and he chose the band business because it was just taking off.

MCA represented most of the big name bands of the era, and then it grew to provide representation for the leading film stars, directors, writers and musical artists. Dr. Stein's business skill and success are legendary, as Dr. Tabak alluded to. But medicine was always dear to his heart, and the latter part of his life was devoted to stimulating and supporting the eye research environment in the United States.

In 1960, he founded and donated millions of dollars to Research to Prevent Blindness, which became a catalyst for eye research in the United States. In ways that were similar to those he had used at MCA to nurture, leverage and unleash the talents of performers in the entertainment business, Dr. Stein, through RPB, helped nurture and leverage the talents and skills of ophthalmological researchers.

RPB also drove the creation of departments of ophthalmology across the United States, and as Dr. Sieving alluded to, we still provide unrestricted support to departments of ophthalmology throughout the country, as well as making individual awards to researchers. RPB really fostered the growth vision research and helped to shape or influence nearly every major scientific advance in the field.

Then, in 1966, with his wife, Doris, Dr. Stein founded the Jules Stein Eye Institute at the UCLA School of Medicine, which became and remains one of the top eye institutes in the country.

In 1968, using RPB as a vehicle, Dr. Stein led a dogged, eight-year campaign that resulted in the passage of legislation to establish the National Eye Institute as a separate entity within NIH.

I have to confess that I'm in awe of Jules Stein because he was so very successful on two completely different fronts. First, as a financial genius in his business life who built the careers of so many creative talents and who made a great deal of money while he was doing that. Secondly, in influencing and advancing the entire field of ophthalmology, making possible the careers of the most talented vision scientists. In fact, he accomplished far more to advance ophthalmology as a philanthropist and an advocate than he ever could have as a practicing ophthalmologist.