



# Jules Stein, MD

## Ophthalmologist, Entertainment Magnate, and Advocate for Vision

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**Purpose:** To report the lifetime activities and accomplishments of Jules Stein, MD.

**Design:** Retrospective review.

**Methods:** Assessment of published and unpublished biographical material.

**Results:** Jules Stein combined his love of music and medicine with organizational skills to achieve successive careers as a musician, an ophthalmologist, an entertainment magnate, and an advocate for vision. To preserve vision, he founded Research to Prevent Blindness, founded the Jules Stein Eye Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, and led a multiyear campaign to establish the National Eye Institute.

**Conclusions:** With successive careers and extraordinary achievements, Jules Stein created an enduring legacy of benefits to ophthalmology, vision research, and the prevention of blindness. *Ophthalmology* 2016;123:908-915 © 2016 by the American Academy of Ophthalmology. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Jules Stein, MD, combined a love for music and medicine with his unique talent for organization and advocacy for preventing blindness (Fig 1). His lifetime illustrates successive careers and outstanding accomplishments.

On April 26, 1896, near the dawn of the transformative 20th century, Jules Stein was born the second son of Louis and Rosa Stein, recent immigrants from Lithuania, who owned a general store in South Bend, Indiana, and lived in the house next door. From an early age, Jules Stein was determined to be a doctor. He was an excellent student and skilled at mathematics. To accelerate his education, he took high school classes at Winona Academy 50 miles from his South Bend home, immediately enrolled in college, and graduated from the University of Chicago with a Bachelor's Degree (PhB) in 1915 at age 19 (Stein J, unpublished autobiography, 1978. Jules Stein Eye Institute Archives, University of California, Los Angeles).<sup>1-3</sup>

But there were other dimensions to Jules Stein. While living in South Bend, he worked each day after school at the modest family store and became skilled in bargaining and business finance. By his early teens, he was managing the business and financial affairs of several nearby stores.<sup>2,3</sup> As a further dimension, when Jules Stein was 8 years old, his mother bought him a mandolin from a fast-talking traveling salesman and paid \$16 for lessons. At age 11, he acquired a violin, and 1 year later, Jules was playing violin on stage between feature films at the Nickelodeon in downtown South Bend (Fig 2). At 15, Jules learned to play the saxophone and formed, with others his own age,

a 6-piece band that played for a fee at birthday parties, picnics, and weddings.<sup>2</sup> With these musical talents, Jules obtained free tuition and supported himself through his years of study at Winona Academy and the University of Chicago.

For 1 year after graduation from the University of Chicago, Jules Stein worked fulltime as leader of his own band, lived the lively life of Chicago's nightclubs, and played musical backup for performers including Mary Jane West, who became better known after she changed her name to Mae West. From these activities, he earned enough money to start as a scholarship student at Chicago's Rush Medical School.

One Saturday evening while a student at Rush Medical School, Jules experienced a turning point. He had mistakenly double-booked his band to play 2 simultaneous engagements. Instead of canceling one gig, he negotiated for another band to play the second gig and retained a 10% commission. From this experience, Jules learned that instead of organizing a band, rehearsing, and working with the band for a full evening, he could make just as much money by picking up the phone, scheduling another band to do the work, and retaining a 10% commission. His band-booking flourished thereafter, providing sufficient funds for Jules to graduate from medical school and travel to Europe for 1 year of ophthalmology study under renowned Professor Ernst Fuchs at the University of Vienna. Thereafter, he returned to Chicago and completed his ophthalmology residency at Cook County Hospital.

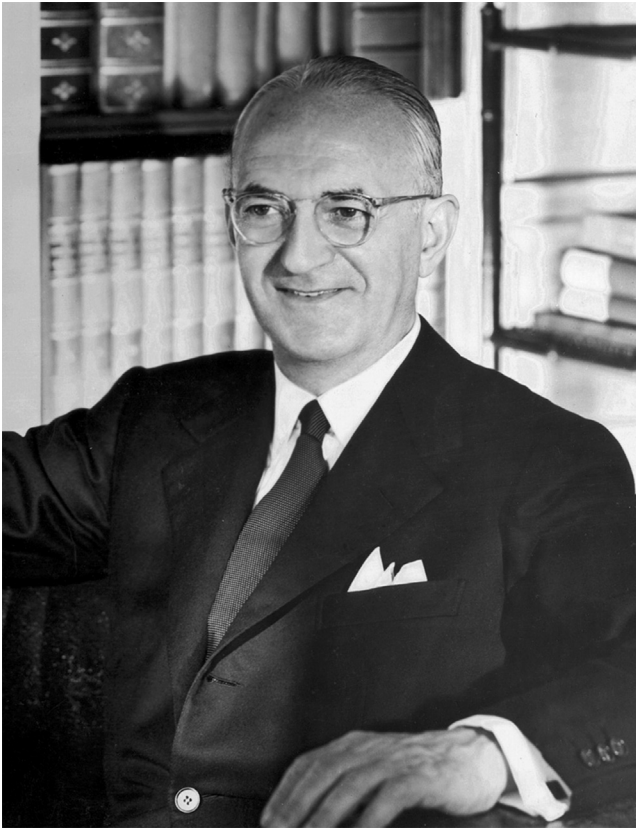


Figure 1. Jules Stein, MD, 1896–1981.

After residency and certification by the American Board of Ophthalmology, Dr. Stein was invited to join the ophthalmology practice of Harry S. Gradle, MD, Chicago's leading ophthalmologist and cofounder of the Pan-American Association of Ophthalmology. With the agreement of Dr. Gradle, who became a lifelong friend, Jules had a separate phone line installed in Dr. Gradle's office and, with a "hush phone" that enabled private conversations, booked musical groups in hotels, cafes, and clubs while performing refractions and caring for patients. Soon Jules Stein, the agent, was earning far more money than Dr. Jules Stein, the ophthalmologist, but the intensity of 2 demanding careers became overwhelming.

In 1924, at age 28, Jules Stein took a leave of absence from the ophthalmology practice of Dr. Gradle and incorporated Music Corporation of America (MCA) with capital totalling \$1000. The first years of MCA were stressful and highly competitive in the turbulent era of Prohibition, the Chicago Mafia, and aggressive musician union rules. When warned that he was a target for kidnapping by the Mafia, Jules made no change in his daily activities, but did negotiate an insurance policy with Lloyd's of London that would pay the ransom for his release if kidnapped. Union problems were overcome by special dispensations approved by James C. Petrillo, a loyal friend and head of the American Federation of Musicians. With persistence and good business practices, band-booking steadily increased (Stein J, unpublished autobiography, 1978).

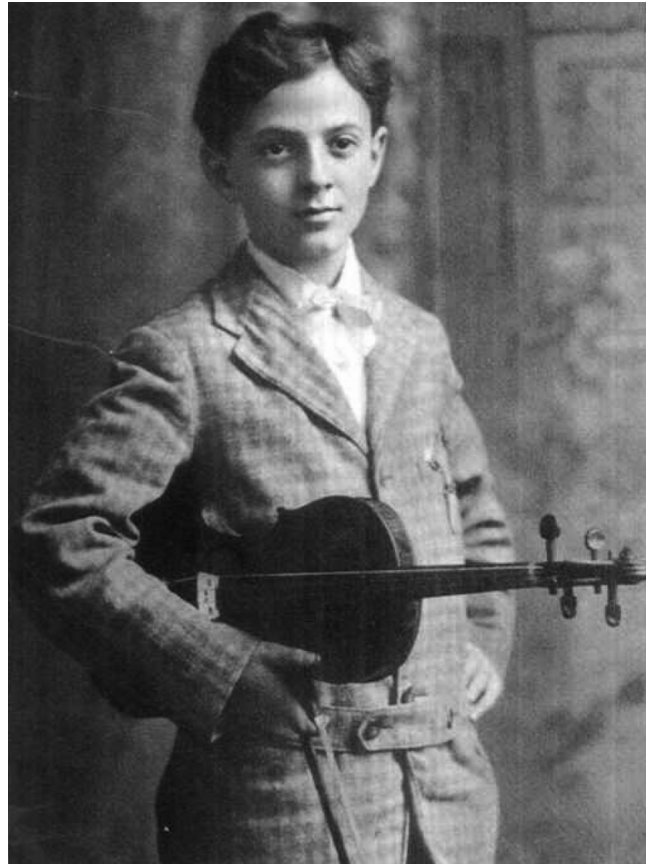


Figure 2. At age 12, Jules Stein played violin on stage at the Nickelodeon in South Bend, Indiana.

In the late 1920s, Jules Stein was quick to recognize the growing popularity of national radio. Crystal radio sets were being purchased in large numbers, radio stations were developing loyal audiences, and the stations were desperate for content to fill the evening hours. Sensing the opportunity, Jules arranged for nightly radio broadcasts by the Coon Sanders Band, performing at the Muehlenbach Hotel in Kansas City, and used the band's radio popularity to promote a lucrative tour that initiated the "one night stand" of popular dance bands at communities throughout the United States. By 1936, MCA was the dominant agency for band-booking, with 90% of the big bands under exclusive contract, including Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Guy Lombardo, Kay Kyser, and hundreds of others.<sup>1-3</sup>

With success in band-booking and agency offices in Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, and New York, MCA moved its world headquarters to a new white marble building in Beverly Hills, California, in 1938 and began to represent movie stars, directors, and writers. Among the first MCA-represented movie stars were Betty Gable, Errol Flynn, Bette Davis, and Judy Garland. As events led to World War II, Lew Wasserman, MCA Movie Division Head, negotiated a \$1 million contract for Ronald Reagan that would commence after the actor returned from military service.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the war years, Jules Stein and MCA led the Hollywood Canteen in Hollywood, California, to



Figure 3. Jules Stein (left) and Alfred Hitchcock (right) at the Jules Stein Eye Institute, 1966.

phenomenal success. On opening night, October 3, 1942, MCA client Eddie Cantor was Master of Ceremonies, MCA musicians the Kay Kyser Orchestra provided music, and MCA comics Abbott and Costello entertained. On an average evening, 2000 or more military service men and women enjoyed free food, music, entertainment, and the hope of dancing with Hollywood stars such as Bette Davis and Hedy Lamarr. After Bob Hope and Jack Benny closed the final curtain on November 22, 1945, the generously supported Canteen transferred assets to the Hollywood Canteen Foundation and distributed funds to charities for many years (Stein J, unpublished autobiography, 1978).<sup>2</sup>

Throughout World War II, MCA expanded agency representation into every aspect of the entertainment business. As agent, MCA greatly increased the earnings of Hollywood stars, directors, and writers by negotiating long-term contracts, establishing personal corporations for clients, and even negotiating for a percentage of the gross receipts from productions. As a result, MCA enriched its clients, including Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, Grace Kelly, Fred Astaire, and thousands of others.<sup>2</sup>

As public television emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the movie industry at large resisted this new medium, even as television production and acting jobs moved from Hollywood to New York. Rather than resist the new medium, MCA embraced television and obtained an unprecedented waiver from the Screen Actors Guild that enabled MCA—from July 14, 1952, through October 31, 1959—to produce television at its subsidiary, Revue Productions, and

engage MCA-represented actors, directors, and writers to create these productions. With a similar waiver from the Writers Guild, production at Revue expanded at a furious pace and new stars such as Audrey Hepburn, Gregory Peck, Lana Turner, and Alfred Hitchcock towered over television<sup>2</sup> (Fig 3).

Throughout this period of growing success and revenue, Jules Stein owned 100% of MCA. But that changed on March 15, 1954, when Jules invited 9 of his long-term associates and their wives to an exclusive dinner at the private dining room in MCA's Beverly Hills headquarters. During the evening, he gave each of the 9 associates an identical portfolio of MCA stock and each associate became an instant millionaire with a powerful incentive to remain at MCA and grow the corporation profits. Jules gave 57% of the MCA voting stock to his 9 trusted executives and to 5 unique profit-sharing trusts that benefited MCA employees. Jules retained 43% of the MCA stock but, as he predicted, his 43% was soon worth far more than the original 100% (Stein J, unpublished autobiography, 1978).<sup>2</sup>

With intense program production, MCA Revue Productions became the principal occupant of Universal International's movie studios. Consequently, on December 13, 1958, MCA bought Universal International's 430-acre property and production facilities in West Hollywood, California. By 1960, MCA television production controlled 45% of prime time for the major networks, more than any other entity.<sup>1,2</sup>



Table 1. Ophthalmology Research Facilities Supported by Research to Prevent Blindness Construction Campaigns

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Alan C. Woods Research Building
Wilmer Eye Institute
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland
Jules Stein Eye Institute
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
Los Angeles, California
Cullen Eye Institute
Baylor College of Medicine
Houston, Texas
Lions Eye Institute
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky
Eye Institute
Medical College of Wisconsin
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Casey Eye Institute
Oregon Health & Science University
Portland, Oregon

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Listed in 1959 as a public company on the New York Stock Exchange, MCA was booming with revenue from domestic television production, foreign distribution, talent commissions, and studio residuals. The only cloud on the horizon was an investigation by the United States Department of Justice, led by Robert Kennedy as Attorney General, regarding the alleged violation of federal antitrust laws. To resolve this

inquiry, MCA elected, in July 1962, to spin off the agency business to former employees and, in September 1962, accepted a consent agreement stipulating that MCA would not acquire any television, movie, or recording companies without Justice Department approval for 7 years.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this ongoing investigation, MCA bought Decca Records and Universal Pictures on June 18, 1962. With this single move, MCA became the world's largest entertainment conglomerate. With further expansion, MCA, led by Jules Stein as chairman and Lew Wasserman as president, produced more than 19 000 hours of television content each year; produced feature films such as *Jaws*, *Earthquake*, and *Jurassic Park*; and opened theme parks in Hollywood and Orlando. MCA's annual revenue exceeded \$1 billion.<sup>2,4</sup>

The focus of Jules Stein, however, shifted increasingly to ophthalmology. Encouraged by Doris Jones Stein, his beautiful and public-spirited wife, he visited the Lighthouse for the Blind in New York in 1959. After this visit, he asked himself: "Why are these people blind? What can be done to prevent blindness?" In response, Jules Stein initiated 3 major actions (Stein D, "We Just Kept Going," unpublished autobiography, 1983. Jules Stein Eye Institute Archives, University of California, Los Angeles).<sup>5</sup>

First, in 1960, Jules Stein founded, with cofounder Robert E. McCormick, a New York attorney, and endowed Research to Prevent Blindness (RPB). Led by Dr. Stein as chairman and David F. Weeks as president and chief executive officer, RPB recruited Thomas D. Duane, MD, to



Figure 4. Doris Stein and Jules Stein (center) dedicate the Jules Stein Eye Institute with University of California, Los Angeles, Chancellor Franklin Murphy (left) and Jules Stein Eye Institute Director Bradley Straatsma (right) on November 3, 1966.



**Figure 5.** Jules Stein Eye Institute on the University of California, Los Angeles, campus in 2015: Edie and Lew Wasserman Building (left), Jules Stein Building (center), and Doris Stein Building (right). Photograph by Reed Hutchinson.

conduct a survey of ophthalmology at more than 100 medical schools throughout the United States.<sup>6</sup> Based on the results of this survey, RPB acted (1) to support university ophthalmology departments in the United States by awarding annual unrestricted research grants, (2) to expand ophthalmology research facilities by aiding the building programs at 6 medical schools (Table 1), and (3) to advocate for an increase in ophthalmology and vision research funding by creating a National Eye Institute within the National Institutes of Health (Weeks DF, Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology/RPB narrative, personal communication, April 22, 2015).

Illustrating the continuity and dimension of RPB support, in 2014 with Diane D. Swift as chairman, RPB awarded a total of \$10.7 million for 47 unrestricted research grants to ophthalmology departments throughout the United States and 31 vision research grants and funds to improve national eye health. From its founding in 1960 through 2014, RPB has invested a total of \$326 million in vision research and prevention of blindness.<sup>7</sup>

Second, in 1961, Jules Stein responded to a request from the ophthalmology faculty for aid with construction and founded the Jules Stein Eye Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. Made possible by the philanthropy of Jules and Doris Stein and imbued with their concepts of classic design, the Jules Stein Eye Institute, with Bradley R. Straatsma, MD, as director, was dedicated in 1966<sup>8,9</sup> (Fig 4).

In 2014 with program expansion, the Jules Stein Eye Institute and Department of Ophthalmology, led by Bartly J. Mondino, MD, as director, occupies a 3-building complex

on the University of California, Los Angeles, campus (Fig 5). Current activities include expanded scientific research through affiliation with the Doheny Eye Institute, outreach to teaching hospitals and patient care centers throughout greater Los Angeles, and education and research programs of major substance.<sup>10</sup>

Third, from 1960 through 1968, Jules Stein, David Weeks, and RPB recognized that the visual sciences needed greater recognition and led an 8-year campaign to establish the National Eye Institute as a separate entity within the National Institutes of Health.<sup>6,11,12</sup> To increase public support, RPB commissioned a Gallup poll that showed that Americans feared blindness more than any other physical affliction except cancer.<sup>11,13</sup> To provide national scientific endorsement, RPB supported formation of the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology in 1966.<sup>14</sup> At the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology's initial meeting, the first major item of business was to enthusiastically approve formation of the National Eye Institute (Weeks DF, personal communication, April 22, 2015).

Public support, professional endorsement, and the initial submission of Congressional legislation by Representative Frederick Rooney (Democrat, Pennsylvania) led Representative Harley Staggers (Democrat, West Virginia) to introduce HR12843, establishing the National Eye Institute in 1967.<sup>15</sup> However, the legislation was opposed by the director of the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness, the director of the National Institutes of Health, the surgeon general, and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (renamed the Department





17

**Figure 6.** Jules Stein (center) leads testimony by ophthalmologists in support of establishing the National Eye Institute at United States House of Representatives committee hearings in 1967. Published with permission from Research to Prevent Blindness, New York, New York.

of Health and Human Services in 1979) because they feared public initiatives that could lead to fragmentation of the National Institutes of Health.

On October 31 and November 1, 1967, the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Public Health and Welfare of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce held hearings on the proposal for a National Eye Institute. Surgeon General William H. Stewart, MD, National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness Director Richard L. Masland, MD, and others registered opposition. Research to Prevent Blindness collated testimony in support of the National Eye Institute by Drs. Ralph Ryan, Herbert Kaufman, A. Edward Maumenee, David Cogan, Michael Hogan, Frank Newell, Thomas Duane, and Bradley Straatsma. Jules Stein, as the final speaker, testified that “the lack of a far-reaching, concerted attack on the causes of blinding diseases amounts to a national disgrace”<sup>15</sup> (Fig 6). With further lobbying and more than 100 000 letters and telegrams to Congress organized by the Lions Clubs in support of the new entity, the bill to establish the National Eye Institute cleared the Committee and passed both Houses of Congress by unanimous voice vote.

At this point, proponents of the National Eye Institute learned that President Lyndon Johnson intended to veto the legislation. Jules Stein traveled to the President’s Texas ranch with a personal friend of President Johnson. The President was persuaded to approve the legislation, and the bill to establish the National Eye Institute became law on

August 16, 1968.<sup>15</sup> With an appropriation of \$682 million in 2014, Congress has committed a total of \$14.8 billion for National Eye Institute programs to preserve, improve, and restore sight.<sup>16</sup>

Recognizing the pivotal advocacy of Jules Stein in establishing the National Eye Institute, Paul A. Sieving, MD, PhD, Director of the National Eye Institute, in 2014 accepted as a gift from RPB a bronze bust of Jules Stein for placement in the director’s office (Fig 7). Referring to the Institute’s major scientific advances, Dr. Sieving wrote: “The creating of the National Eye Institute by Congress in 1968, under the umbrella of the National Institutes of Health was a seminal event for vision research. This act of Congress has yielded tremendous benefits to preserving vision for millions of Americans and countless millions more across the globe.”<sup>17</sup>

Reflecting his accomplishments, Jules Stein received honorary doctoral degrees from the University of California, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Louisville, and the Medical College of Wisconsin. Additional honors include the Humanitarian Award of Variety Clubs International (1968), an Honorary Fellowship in the American Academy of Ophthalmology (1972), the Albert Lasker Public Service Award (1975), the Lions International Humanitarian Award (1976), and the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (the “Oscar,” 1976).<sup>4,5,17</sup>

Jules Stein died on April 29, 1981, at the age of 85.<sup>5,18</sup> His extraordinary achievements as a musician,



**Figure 7.** Dr. Paul Sieving, National Eye Institute Director, accepts a gift from Research to Prevent Blindness, Inc. (RPB), of a bust of Jules Stein by Jacques Lipchitz. From left: Ambassador William vanden Heuvel (RPB board member), Ms. Katrina vanden Heuvel (RPB board member and granddaughter of Dr. and Mrs. Stein), Dr. Brian Hofland (RPB president), and Dr. Paul Sieving. Published with permission of Research to Prevent Blindness, New York, New York.

ophthalmologist, entertainment magnate, and philanthropist created an enduring legacy of benefits to ophthalmology, vision research, and the care of countless people at risk for vision loss and blindness.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms:

**MCA** = Music Corporation of America; **RPB** = Research to Prevent Blindness; **UCLA** = University of California, Los Angeles.

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