

# JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT: A HISTORY

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a personal account  
of managing change  
from drill press  
to computer

by  
Joe Francomano

and  
Wayne & Darryl Lavitt

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I wish to thank my wife, Charlotte, and our children, Ron and Cathy, whose continuous support of me throughout my 50 years with Junior Achievement made my career possible. I made the commitment-they made the sacrifice!

-J.F.

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-D.L. & W.L.



## Special Thanks

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-W.L.



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## Preface

Joe Francomano retired as Executive Vice President of Junior Achievement Inc. in June, 1980. He first joined the staff of New York City JA in March, 1936. His involvement as an Achiever in the early 30s, his present post-retirement consulting services to Junior Achievement, and his 44 years on staff, add up to over a half century of service. An individual who has given that much time to one organization is a rarity, rarer perhaps than a gold dollar coin.

Joe is regarded as a symbol of what Junior Achievement stands for. Among several distinctions is his pivotal role in getting JA established on a national scale. Another distinction is a role that over time defaulted to Joe – that of being historian of JA. Headquarters staff came more and more to rely on his files, especially in the 1970s when it was evident that Joe had given more years of service than anyone else in JA.

Retirement would not be a time for Mr. Francomano to head south and relax. Rather, he anticipated these years as a time to achieve the objectives that had gotten pushed aside over the years. His first priority was to give more time to his family – to have leisure time with his wife on Long Island and be with his children and grandchildren. The second, among numerous other planned projects, was to write a history of the organization, which he had so long served. Karl Flemke, President and CEO of Junior Achievement Inc., gave Joe his wholehearted support and approved funds to publish the work in time for it to stand as a landmark to the accomplishment of a significant organizational goal – reaching one million students in a single year.

Joe then assembled a history, relying on recollections from his personal experience, old minutes, files, and news articles. The headquarters staff is to be thanked for assembling his work into typewritten manuscript form.

Darryl and I found this joint writing project to be a refreshing experience. We credit much of this to Betty Hofle's expertise. Betty, as Manager of Communications at Junior Achievement Inc., and editor of its *Partners* newsletter, lent her eye and ear for grammar, factual accuracy, and tone of the text, besides managing the back-and-forth flow of information and opinions.

The phrase "A History" was chosen in the title to indicate that this in no way is a complete history of Junior Achievement. Though at times biographical in the telling, we believe the outcome is an informal history relative to one of Junior Achievement's significant figures.

How is "joint authorship" done? There are varying degrees of cooperative efforts. If this effort is compared to home construction, we might say: Joe laid the foundation, framework, some walls and a roof; we provided windows, interior and exterior work, and some essential appliances.

Specifically, some chapters were written from scratch – e.g., Chapters 1-6 (W.L.) and Chapters 20-24 (D.L.). In these instances, Joe's manuscript and our library research and phone interviews were referenced. In other parts of the book, Joe is quoted verbatim – e.g., all of Chapters 7-9. Here and in other places we thought the first-person account best expressed those times. Still other chapters were given a significant reworking on the basis of Darryl's interviews and Wayne's research.

We have been as thorough as possible in checking factual accuracy. A work like this is never "done." Real world constraints of time and budget prevent the exhaustive research we would have preferred. However, we believe we have arrived at a true account that can serve as a basis for future editions.

Please feel free to call or send in comments about this work. Any documentation you send regarding JA's history will be considered and faithfully stored for future reference. Junior Achievement will keep making history, and undoubtedly it will have to update this work within a decade!

–W. & D. Lavitt

Comments or documentation to:

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Attn: Vice President-Communications

**Part I**

**1916 - 1929  
A SOLID  
FOUNDATION**

## Chapter 1



# Birth

1916 might readily be remembered as the year before the United States entered World War 1.

Some may recall it was the year Woodrow Wilson was re-elected, that it was another in an almost century-old battle for women's suffrage (finally to become Amendment 19 of the Constitution in 1920), or the year Boston won its fourth World Series in five years. Others might say 1916 was the year of the Easter Rebellion in Ireland, the last year of Czarist rule in Russia, the year that Mexican bandit chieftain Pancho Villa took 16 American lives and successfully eluded federal troops. Or was the year a Ford Model T could be purchased for less than \$500 and an auto worker averaged \$20 a week.

1916 was also the year when the concept for Junior Achievement was first hammered out on paper.

Three hundred agricultural and business leaders attended a conference hosted by the Eastern States Agricultural and Industrial Exposition (ESAIE) in Springfield, Massachusetts, in August, 1916. The idea, "To work for the general advancement of boys and girls activities," was only *one* of numerous recommendations, and might have easily been lost in the conference agenda. The most pressing concern was the rural-to-city exodus of the populace. The emphasis at the conference was the improvement of farm production and marketing. Yet, *all* recommendations were treated seriously and amended to the existing corporate charter of the ESAIE. Committees were formed to meet later on and raise funds for implementing solutions.

The United States' entry into the First World War on April 6, 1917, would alter ESAIE's plans. Nevertheless, one committee, the Boys' and Girls' Bureau, was set on an aggressive course. The man behind this movement was Theodore Vail, president of American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T). Vail served on the committee from the start, and was chairman from January, 1918, until October, 1920.

What would motivate a busy executive to take time out for such a committee? Why would Mr. Vail involve himself in these matters when management of his company's resources during a major war put great demands upon him?

Shortly after the war's end, Mr. Vail talked about his ideals for the Boys' and Girls' Bureau in a speech at the Glory club in Springfield, Massachusetts:

*The future of our country depends upon making every individual, young and old, fully realize the obligations and responsibilities belonging to citizenship ... The future of each individual rests in the individual, providing each is given a fair and proper education and training in the useful things of life...*

*Habits of life are formed in youth...What we need in this country now...is to teach the growing generations to realize that thrift and economy, coupled with industry, are necessary now as they were in past generations.*



Mr. Vail further stated that teaching youth this country's economic way of life and showing them the benefit of hard work would give them a self-reliance and independence. This, he believed, would have a positive impact on their future and even help safeguard American democracy.

The Boys' and Girls' Bureau Committee met January, 1919, in New York City, to draw up a plan of action. The committee members were influential business and agricultural leaders of the New England area. Other meetings followed, and by September, a fulltime director for the Bureau had been hired on a five-year contract. By the end of that year, the 22 members of the Committee had subscribed, for the next five years, a sum of \$250,000 (in 1985 dollars, over \$5 million!).

These first commitments chiseled the year 1919 into Junior Achievement's cornerstone. From humble beginnings it would take nearly seven decades to fully evolve into a unified organization reaching more than one million students nationwide – most of those right in the classroom. This is the story of Junior Achievement, largely seen through the eyes of one man, Joe Francomano, Mr. Junior Achievement, who witnessed more than 50 years of the history chronicled here. Together with his associates, they paint the picture of Junior Achievement.

The Bureau's first hire was Mr. O. H. Benson, a man long on experience who would put the pledged monies to work. Prior to his new job, Benson was Director of Agricultural Extension with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Before that he had worked with young people in Iowa as Superintendent of Schools and had been a major force in 4-H Club development in that state. He had also pushed for federal legislation supportive of 4-H, the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 which allowed federal money to assist states in organizing 4-H Clubs. Benson was very enthusiastic about developing a "learn by doing" program for the Boys' and Girls' Bureau. He immediately began writing up procedures and policies for a program in the New England area. To get him started, the Committee provided Benson with a staff of one assistant and one secretary, and a headquarters office in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Theodore Vail, Horace Moses, and Senator Murray Crane were the motivators in the Boys' and Girls' Bureau Committee meetings. Senator Crane, of Massachusetts, was an asset with his Washington experience and political contacts. Moses, president of Strathmore Paper Company, was to have a far-reaching impact upon the organization.

On February 27, 1920, the Executive Committee of the Eastern States Exposition voted to change the name of Boys' and Girls' Bureau to *Junior Achievement Bureau*.

On October 19, 1920, Horace Moses succeeded Theodore Vail as Chairman of the Junior Achievement Bureau. Mr. Vail and Senator Crane, men in their 60s, passed away in 1920 and 1921. Moses went on to lead and serve another 27 years.

It was the financial commitment and the hiring of the first Bureau staff in the fall of 1919 that marked the birth of Junior Achievement. The dynamic leadership of Vail, Moses, Crane, and Benson had moved this organization from paper to a working reality!

## Chapter 2



# A Sound Structure with Able Leaders

The first program of the Junior Achievement Bureau was developed by the Bureau Committee and their first director, O. H. Benson. The Committee outlined the program intentions, based on the ideal first expressed at the 1916 exposition of agricultural and business leaders. Benson, now on salary, was delegated the task of detailing program particulars. Their blueprint created a foundation and organizational structure that in the coming decades was to weather radical social changes, national catastrophes, even ignorance and indifference.

Springfield, Massachusetts, was the location of the Bureau's first headquarters office, and was considered a good central location for their plans to expand the program throughout New England. Mr. Benson began his five-year contract in September, 1919, and his initial staff of two was expanded as funds were provided by patrons and corporate grants.

Initially the program focused on girls and boys in the 8-12 age group. The new clubs would have adult leaders and be organized somewhat like a business. A group would be certified as a Junior Achievement Club if they agreed to the following requirements:

1. They would hold regular meetings--six or more would have been held prior to applying for certification.
2. Have at least five members-average club size was 12.
3. Ensure the leadership-have elected officers and a regular adult leader.
4. Plan a program around a club enterprise.
5. Develop the enterprise:
  - make articles for- sale or use;
  - exhibit products if requested by the area director; and
  - study local industries or the industry related to their enterprise to gain an understanding of production and sales methods.
6. Form departments in the club to run the enterprise-Purchasing, Production, Sales, Advertising.
7. Optionally, raise capital through the sale of shares.

Once certified, club members, under adult club leader guidance, would hold elections. The girls and boys would elect one another to these positions:

President  
Secretary-Treasurer  
Production Manager

Purchasing Manager  
Sales Manager  
Publicity Manager

The managers and officers reported to the president (two of these positions would be combined if only five members). The adult leader of course would oversee and emphasize the joint corporate effort so that no one child got carried away with the importance of his or her office. At the same time, the adult leader would take care not to run all aspects of the club and so defeat the "learn by doing" process that Benson intended.

What would a certified and organized club do? Think and plan, acquire supplies for manufacture, build and produce, advertise and sell. From simple rag collection efforts to sell to local paper manufacturers, to assembly-line turnout of antique-bottle lamps, doll clothes, race car models, book shelves, bird houses, residential name plates...these were among the enterprises of early Junior Achievement clubs.

Where did the club conduct business? Sometimes in basements and garages of the adult leaders. More often it was in facilities provided by sponsoring agencies, such as YMCAs, Girls Clubs, schools, and churches.

These *sponsoring agencies* in fact were an integral part of that blueprint drawn up by the Bureau Committee and Benson. To build clubs in the Springfield area, Junior Achievement would work with and through existing organizations that worked with youth. These were:

schools and churches,  
Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts,  
Girls Clubs, Boys Clubs,  
YMCAs, YWCAs,  
playground associations,  
settlement houses, and  
local or unorganized groups.

Sponsorship involved providing a meeting place, enlisting an adult leader, and recruiting boys and girls for club membership. Implicit to this arrangement:

*the sponsoring agency would NOT provide funds for the program, nor were fees or dues collected from participating children.*

From the start, Junior Achievement was funded solely by contributions from corporations and individuals!

In return for sponsorship, Junior Achievement provided: instructional material for club organization and for carrying out the club's enterprise; records forms; training of club leaders; club certification; and periodic exhibits and contest meetings in which the local clubs could participate.

Benson and his staff assistant were the first Junior Achievement "salesmen" to the community. The secretary, of course, provided the important follow-up letters and telephone calls. The 22 committee members had already "sold" the program to area companies, as evidenced by their initial \$250,000 subscription. Now Benson and his staff were doing the leg work needed to implement the program. Some resistance was expected. But when directors of the various organizations examined the credentials of the men behind the program, the serious financial backing by area industrialists, the long-term commitment, and the fact that it required no negative cash flow from their already tight budgets, they were generally agreeable, often enthusiastic about it.

The New England Rotarians were among the first to provide full-scale community support and sponsorship. This backing was reported March 31, 1920, in the Springfield, Massachusetts paper, *Springfield Daily News*. Portions of the article appear below; the first paragraph was the lead paragraph of the article.

*The adoption of resolutions to have Rotary clubs of New England cooperate with the junior achievement bureau (sic) of the Eastern States industrial and agricultural league, and the pledging of sums of money to stimulate the boys' junior achievement work of the bureau, were events of the business meeting to-day (sic) of the conference of Rotary clubs of the 2d district which may go far in the future to solve the country's food problem...*

*The meeting to-day opened at 9 o'clock in the Auditorium with District Governor Charles W. Lovett of Lynn presiding. A contest and demonstration by boys in the junior achievement work preceded the passage of the resolutions pledging money to the cause.*

*The enthusiasm of the Rotarians in the work was evinced by the money prizes that various clubs presented to the boys. Such prizes had not been scheduled. An address by O.H. Benson on the purpose of the junior achievement bureau, (etc.), were features of the meeting.*

*In indorsing (sic) the achievement work as outlined by Mr. Benson, director of the junior achievement bureau of the Eastern States industrial and agricultural league, the resolution adopted calls for the appointment of a committee of seven to find ways and means for active co-operation of the Rotarians with other organizations behind the movement ...*

The consensus was that Junior Achievement was right for the times.

Mr. Benson saw his position as National Director of Junior Achievement as a mission, not just another job. His past experience of building 4-H Clubs, motivating parents as a school superintendent, and interacting with business, agricultural, and political leaders in his previous government post gave him a knowledge base and unique qualifications for building this new organization that brought the business world to youth. He worked long hours with a high spirit, and motivated his staff to do as well.

Benson and staff, of course, could not go it alone. The 22 committee members were not without influence in their own communities. Yet these things took time, Benson and his associate were quite bogged down from the beginning since they marketed the program, trained the club leaders, followed up on club development while coordinating headquarters business such as writing and printing club manuals. The secretary was dealing with an increasing avalanche of correspondence, calls, and administrative functions. These constraints prevented the fullest possible growth of the organization in its first several years.

The Committee, however, was not slack in raising more financial backing. Thus, by the mid-1920s, Benson was able to: expand the national staff to 12 people, including two directors; hire a director of publicity; and establish several departments-Research & Development, Information & Statistics, and Field Department.

Horace Moses, now Chairman of the Junior Achievement Bureau, worked with an able, responsive Committee. He first steered members into a greater commitment. Moses also shaped the committee into a board of directors – he wanted the organization to be run like a business. Indeed, the board had a responsibility to its “stockholders,” i.e., the companies and individuals who had entrusted them with financial backing.

The close of 1924 – the end of the first five-year program – saw Junior Achievement operating on an expansive scale throughout New England. A brief, dated February 1925, reported Achiever membership at 4,859 in 26 centers in six states. The brief, "The Field of Junior Achievement Club Work" is reproduced in Appendix A.

The board of directors looked ahead to the next five years and envisioned national expansion. Their financial goal was ambitious: to raise \$1.5 million!

The drive was launched April 13, 1925, at a luncheon at the White House, hosted by none other than President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge. Horace Moses, president of Strathmore Paper Co., was a man to put action behind his words; and so, before a group of 60 New England business leaders, he pledged \$100,000. Other pledges followed quickly, giving the drive a significant start. Eventually everyone moved on to a reception on the White House lawn to view a JA exhibit put on by "four members of the Work and Win Textile Achievement club of Holyoke, America's first junior textile club and the most productive organization of its kind now in existence..." (*Springfield News*, April 13, 1925).

The President's endorsement gave Junior Achievement national attention and new respect, besides bringing in new people and fresh sources of funds. As the President Coolidge put it, "Junior Achievement is a first class proposal – very much worthwhile."

## Chapter 3



# A Prosperous Decade

Robert Goddard's first efforts at getting a rocket off the ground were a source of ridicule, almost comic, creating scenes that might have easily fit into Chaplin movies. Goddard was able to finance most of his early experiments and did not have to answer his critics. Without question, his eventual success proved crucial to rocketry and the space program.

The growing popularity of the low-priced automobile in the early 1900s made the screen headdress for women and driving goggles for men profitable items for garment or auto accessories manufacturers. But the introduction of affordable closed-top autos in the early 1920s marked the decline of demand for those accessories. Any company that did not shift to new products soon enough closed down. A collector's delight was often some manufacturer's demise.

Critical to the success of a new invention or new program are available resources and the dedication of the man or woman or persons behind it. Also, the *need* for that new product is critical to its success and longevity.

The adult leaders of communities and industries in southern New England saw that Junior Achievement met a need. They were sold on it. Quite a chunk of time and money was invested into launching the program in its first decade, the 1920s.

Ironically, the market for whom the program was intended was not "buying" – youth were not joining on any large scale. Mr. Moses and the Junior Achievement Board realized that the response of young people was not proportionate to the gargantuan effort behind the JA clubs. So the economy was rolling, companies were flush with cash, and corporate giving was on the rise...so what? If a very youthful market was shunning this "product," then Junior Achievement would die. If leaner times were ahead – as indeed they were – then corporate givers would examine the bottom line with a critical eye. Flat or declining enrollment *could* precipitate an exodus of contributors.

What the Junior Achievement Bureau was discovering was an ancient phenomenon that in the 1920s had no school of thought to explain it, only a vestigial body of knowledge to tell how to deal with it. It was that phenomenon of fey, unpredictable youth. Even with the sophisticated market survey tools of today, it is unlikely the Bureau could have accurately predicted the early results of JA clubs.

The board and their staff, however, were in this for the long run. Reassessment and adjustments were needed...soon! So the board, with Benson and staff, took on the challenge of adjusting the program to fit the needs of youth while maintaining the intent of the original blueprint. This responsiveness to their market was to become a trademark of Junior Achievement in coming decades.

The program was certainly enjoying certain success. By the late 1920s there were nearly 800 JA Clubs with some 9,000 Achievers in 13 cities in Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Headquarters offices had expanded. In Springfield, a Junior Achievement Training Institute had been built – it was a facility for training staff and advisers and for local clubs. Horace Moses built Achievement Hall on the grounds of the Eastern States Exposition in Springfield where it stands today. This two-story brick building, nearly the length of a football field, housed exhibits during Exposition Week and provided facilities for year-round training of

JA leaders and members. A conference and exhibit center was built in Essex County, New York, at a cost of \$25,000 and was given to Junior Achievement. And a building in Holyoke, Massachusetts was bequeathed to JA for its programs.

Moses and the Board, however, saw beyond these immediate successes. In 1928, they directed headquarters staff to study what changes were needed to accelerate enrollment and keep youth interested and excited about the program. By early 1929, the Board had made a decision on a new approach.

The study determined that the 8-12 year age group was too young for the Achievement program. It was the opinion of staff that children at this age did not care to become serious about any adult activity, like business, for long periods. Some parents motivated their children into serious pursuits – e.g., music lessons – but these were a small minority, 10% at best. Thus, an older age group was recommended Junior Achievement would have a broader appeal to 16-21 year olds: This age group was more group-oriented, and was interested in activities away from home where they could establish their own "adult" identity.

The study also suggested that the program be centered in metropolitan centers as opposed to the semi-agrarian communities where it was previously focused. Towns and cities offered a larger youth population and more neighboring businesses. And there was the marketing logic of not competing for enrollment of youth in the sparser agrarian burghs where the growing 4-H seemed best suited.

Mr. Moses selected from JA Headquarters' staff two directors, Miss Marion L. Ober and Mr. John S. Mendenhall, to carry out these recommendations in an experimental program. With a grant of \$10,000, he sent them to New York City to open a JA program, recruiting young men and women 16-21 years old. Already in that city were several successful Achievement clubs at New York's West Side YMCA. As reported in an August, 1927, *New York Times* article: "More than sixty boys belonging to the 'Y' rose up en masse and asked for the (Achievement) clubs. And they got them." They would, as before, operate through existing youth agencies. However, they would put major emphasis on business practices – as it stood, a great majority of JA clubs operated as handcraft units with minimal business procedure. To signify the difference, the New York City units would be called Junior Achievement *companies*. The program would be chartered in the State of New York as a separate corporate entity, but would remain affiliated with Junior Achievement as a franchised area.

Miss Ober and Mr. Mendenhall, working as co-directors, opened the junior Achievement office in New York City at 25 W. 43rd Street in October, 1929. They immediately proceeded to call on the contacts provided by Mr. Moses and other board members in order to form a local board of directors.

On October 29, 1929, the stock market crashed, the first in the chain of events known as The Great Depression.

What a time to launch a new project! What a time for an organization that depended solely on donations from corporations and individuals!

What a time it was...What a time it would be!