



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the JUNIOR BIRDMEN OF AMERICA 1934-1940s



Compiled and Written by JS (072011), Reformatted by JS (04/2012)

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Junior Birdmen of America

The Junior Birdmen of America (JBA) was formed in 1934 by William Randolph Hearst, leading newspaper publisher of the time. George Hearst was National Commander of the JBA, and Lawrence Shaw served as National Director.

According to their brochures, the JBA was "an organization of air-minded boys and girls sponsored by ... nationally known newspapers... Its aim is to guide and sponsor activities for youth of the nation interested in model plane building and increase the importance of their ambitions. It further aims to direct, into useful channels, this vast model building interest of its members, making it possible for them to turn the knowledge gained through their model work into actual aviation careers and thus become participants in the branches of aeronautics for which they are best suited."

The 17 Hearst-owned newspapers, or "Wings," that sponsored JBA members included the New York American, Chicago Herald & Examiner, Los Angeles Examiner, San Antonio Light, and Omaha Bee-News. A Junior Birdmen column appeared in these, daily or on Sundays, depending on the newspaper.

In their first year, JBA already began to hold local and national competitions in model airplane proficiency. That year, all of the 17 Junior Birdmen Wings conducted Outdoor Model Plane Derbies on Saturday, July 7, celebrating National Junior Birdmen Model Plane Day. Then, on Saturday, July 28, those who had won the local derbies received an all-expense paid trip to Fort Meyer Field near Washington, D.C., for the National Junior Birdmen "All-America" Model Plane Championship Contest (as well as won a Miniature Wing Championship Trophy.)

Events were divided by all-balsa gliders, "single-propelled" models, and "double-propelled" models. First prize at the National contest was the William Randolph Hearst Trophy and either a scholarship for an aviation ground course up to a \$500 value or a trip to Europe. Second and third prizes were similar, at \$300 and \$150, respectively. By 1937, though, the cash prize was down to \$250 for first place, \$100 for second, and \$50 for third place.

Membership to the JBA cost a dime, and in return, they received a membership card, brass pin, and club information. They also could receive a series of Aeronautical and Junior Aeronautical Handbooks in the Junior Birdman Library Series, available at an additional cost from the JBA Library Bureau in New York City.

Members of the JBA could create their own Flight Squadrons. These were groups of eight or more youth model enthusiasts who could stage their own competitions and other events. Flight squadrons received a charter certificate, officer bars, and a rules and regulations booklet, all for 25 cents. Leaders of the Squadrons were called Commanders and Captains, and attached their designated bars to their membership pins. Members could also receive an Eagle bar, depending on test results, and an Ace bar, the top member rank, depending on how they competed at contests.

At one point, national membership was estimated at half a million members. The competitions continued for some years, but as the World War II loomed, the participation waned. At some time in the 1940s, the JBA was no more.

If you have materials from your days spent in the JBA that you would like to donate, please write to the National Model Aviation Museum via the address below.

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