

# Famous New Yorker Edward John Noble

Edward J. Noble sought new ways to sell things throughout his career. Along the way he became a candy magnate and drug store tycoon before he changed the face of American broadcasting.

Edward Noble was born in Gouverneur, St. Lawrence County, on August 8, 1882. He worked his way through school at jobs ranging from fruit picker to newspaper reporter. After graduating from Yale in 1905, he entered the advertising business. Advertising had become a major force in the American economy, but Noble struggled to land accounts in a highly competitive field.

Clarence Crane of Cleveland was an especially hard sell. In 1913 Noble wanted to advertise Crane's Life Saver Peppermints, a hard candy made with a pill machine. Inspired by the candy's resemblance to donut-shaped floatation devices, Crane saw his mints as a summertime treat that wouldn't melt. The public rejected them, however, and candy stores had stopped carrying them by the time Noble came along.

Crane was ready to give up. Rather than hire Noble to advertise his mints, he offered the ad man and his partner J. Roy Allen the entire business. For \$2,900 they had a chance to show how well they could sell a product that had already failed.

Noble learned that Crane's cardboard packaging made the mints go stale quickly. He solved the problem by wrapping them in tinfoil rolls. Since candy stores remained skeptical, Noble and Allen had to find new markets for their renamed Pep-O-Mint Life Savers. Concentrating their limited resources on New York City, they discovered that men liked to use Life Savers as breath mints. Targeting places with a mainly male clientele, they convinced a wide variety of businesses, from bars to bowling alleys to shoeshine stands, to sell the mints. Once Noble and Allen conquered New York, candy stores everywhere embraced Life Savers.

Edward J. Noble became a major force in the candy business after World War I. He opened new plants and added new flavors to make Life Savers one of the most popular candies in the country. Seeing the importance of candy sales for drug stores, he eventually became the head of United Drug Inc., whose Rexall stores were the best known pharmacy chain in the country.

Noble also recognized the selling power of broadcast media. He saw a unique opportunity when the federal government ordered NBC to sell one of its two radio networks. Noble led a group that acquired the smaller "Blue Network" in 1943 and renamed it the American Broadcasting Company. While ABC struggled under his leadership, Noble laid the groundwork for its emergence as a media giant in the TV age.

As a public servant and philanthropist, Edward J. Noble looked beyond the bottom line. In 1938 he became the first chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Administration, responsible for training pilots as World War II approached. He later became Undersecretary of Commerce, accepting a token salary of one dollar a year. As a private citizen, Noble built hospitals in Gouverneur, his summer home of Alexandria Bay, and the town of Canton. After his death on December 28, 1958, the Edward J. Noble Foundation continued his philanthropic work. After making many brands household names, Noble's own name became a honored brand itself.



**Edward J. Noble, pictured here with his plane (1938)**  
Photo courtesy of Johnson Newspapers Archives



**Gouverneur** is located about 36 miles northeast of Watertown. The town was named after statesman and landowner Gouverneur Morris.

*To learn more about Edward J. Noble and family visit the Gouverneur Museum or go online to <http://www.gouverneurmuseum.org/articles/people/noble/noble.html>. This is one of a series of Famous New Yorker profiles written by Kevin Gilbert for the NYNPA Newspaper In Education Program. All rights reserved 2015.*