

**All the World Loves a Baby:
Breaking the Two Pound Barrier**

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Individual Documentary
Process Paper: 498

Process Paper

From the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, I knew that I wanted to participate in History Day. I chose a topic and began to work on researching that topic, but as I learned more about it, I began to realize that it did not interest me. I asked my Gifted Facilitators if they had any topic ideas and they recommended looking into a man named Martin Couney. They loaned me the book *The Strange Case of Dr. Couney: How a Mysterious European Showman Saved Thousands of American Babies*. Couney's story was remarkable and interesting, and it was clear that Couney broke barriers in history, so I decided that I would research him for my project.

I began my research by looking for information on the internet. In addition, our group took a field trip to the Topeka Shawnee County Public Library and the Kansas State Historical Society Research Library. I learned a great deal about the process of researching and the numerous different types of primary sources available. The most valuable resource to me throughout the research process was the book *The Strange Case of Dr. Couney*. It provided a detailed account of Couney's story. After reading the book I wanted to interview the author, Dawn Raffel. When I did interview Ms. Raffel, she was able to explain clearly several of the barriers Couney faced and how he broke them. I am grateful for her expertise and her willingness to assist me in my work. I was also able to interview Beth Allen, whose life was saved in one of Couney's incubators. She was one of the babies who broke the two-pound barrier, so I am thankful that she was willing to share her memories of Couney and the sideshows with me.

Last year, I competed in the exhibit board category. But this year I wanted to do something different. I decided to try a documentary, thinking it would be interesting and new. I

wrote the script and then recorded it using WeVideo. This process took longer than I imagined. The recording process was time consuming and I realized that making a documentary was not going to be a piece of cake. I finalized the project by adding music and credits. After a final edit I was ready to present my project to an audience.

Before 1943, the survival of premature infants was grim. American hospitals did not have the technology to keep these babies alive and premature infants were tragically left to die. Dr. Martin A. Couney worked to save the lives of premature infants for over forty years. Couney worked tirelessly on an incubator, along with other specific techniques, to break the two-pound barrier that was so important in the survival of premature babies. In order to be able to save the lives of the babies, Couney put the incubators- and the babies- in sideshows and charged admission. Couney eventually broke the two-pound barrier and managed to save the lives of thousands of premature babies.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

“A Woman Looks in an Incubator.” *New York Public Library: Biblion*,
<http://exhibitions.nypl.org/biblion/worldsfair/image/2k5>

I used this image in my documentary.

“An Advertisement for Dr. Alexandre Lion's Incubator Show.” *The times of israel.com, The Times of Israel*, 30 Sept. 2018,
https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2018/09/17_AlexandreLion-1024x640.jpg

I learned that Couney used Lion's incubator. It was really the techniques Couney used and the expertise of his nurses that saved the babies, not the type of incubator.

“The Aftermath of the 1911 Dreamland Fire at Coney Island.” *The times of israel.com, The Times of Israel*, 30 Sept. 2018,
<https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2018/09/dreamland-fire-pg-124-e1537173581995-1024x640.jpg>

All of Couney's incubator babies were miraculously rescued from the 1911 Dreamland Fire. This shows how terrible the aftermath was, and how great the heroics were of the nurses and doctors who saved them.

Astrinsky, Elinoar. “Beth Allen Recounts Her Origins as an ‘Incubator Baby’ in Dr. Martin Couney's Sideshow.” www.coneyislandhistory.org/oral-history-archive/beth-allen. Accessed 12 Feb. 2020.

This interview was very important for my project. Hearing an account from a former Couney patient herself was very eye-opening. I learned a wealth of information from Ms. Allen, especially about the experiences of the families of the incubator babies.

“Babies On Display: When A Hospital Couldn't Save Them, A Sideshow Did.” *National Public Radio*, 10 July 2015.

An interview with Lucille Conlin Horn, one of the former “incubator-babies.” I discovered that nobody believed premature babies could survive, other than Martin Couney.

“Baby with Madame Louise Recht's Diamond Ring around Its Wrist.” Neonatology on the Web, Aug. 1979, www.neonatology.org/classics/silverman/silverman1.html#Fig14.

I observed how Madame Recht would slip the baby's hand through a diamond ring to demonstrate scale.

“Beth Allen, Held by Martin Couney (Left), and Beth Allen, Present Day (Right).” *New York Post*, *New York Post*, <https://thenypost.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/072318-couney-allen-index.jpg?quality=80&strip=all>

This picture showed me the real effect that Martin Couney had. Beth Allen, who is in both pictures, is only alive because of the lifesaving care she received from Couney and his nurses.

Brisbane, Arthur. “The Incubator Baby and Niagara Falls.” *Cosmopolitan*, 1901.

A very interesting article comparing the wonders of Niagara Falls with the babies. I learned how wondrous it seemed, back in 1901, that these tiny babies were alive.

“Brooklyn Bridge.” *Tenement Museum*, www.tenement.org/blog/a-star-studded-performance-for-the-fourth-of-july/.

I used this picture in my documentary.

Catton, Frank. “How the World's Smallest Doublets Are Nursed in a 'Peanut Roaster'.” *Scranton Tribune*, 10 Sept. 1939, www.nursing.upenn.edu/nhhc/nurses-institutions-caring/care-of-premature-infants/.

This newspaper article helped me to understand that Couney knew it was not just the incubator that helped the preemies survive, it was the method of care that he designed and that his nurses administered that truly helped the infants live. I used a clip of this article in my documentary.

“Children Visit the Incubator Display.” *The Times of Israel*.com, *The Times of Israel*, 30 Sept. 2018. https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2018/09/23_TerryVisiting-640x400.jpg

In this picture, children look at the incubator babies. I learned that the visitors to the incubator display were occasionally children, who seemed to be fascinated with the tiny wonders that are the incubator babies.

“Couney's Attraction at Dreamland.” *Atlas Obscura*, *Atlas Obscura*, 27 Sept. https://assets.atlasobscura.com/article_images/lg/59413/image.jpg

This is a picture of Martin Couney's infant incubator attraction at Dreamland in Coney Island. It was helpful to see one of Martin Couney's better known attractions.

**“Couney's Attraction at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, 1901.” *Atlas Obscura*,
Atlas Obscura, 27 Sept. 2018,
https://assets.atlasobscura.com/article_images/lg/59446/image.jpg**

From this picture, I learned what the inside of the incubators exhibit looked like. It is from Buffalo, New York, in 1901. This picture is a reliable example of an incubator exhibit.

**“Couney’s Infant Incubator Building at the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair.” *Atlas Obscura*, t.
2018, https://assets.atlasobscura.com/article_images/lg/59450/image.jpg**

This image from the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair shows the sideshow as part of a larger fairground. This helped me see what the sideshow actually looked like from the outside, and from a different angle.

**“Dr. Julius Hess.” *BMJ Journals: ADC Fetal & Neonatal Edition*,
fn.bmj.com/content/85/2/F141.**

I used this picture in my documentary.

**“Dr. Martin Couney, with Hildegarde, Holding a Young Boy as They Look at a Baby in an Incubator at the New York World’s Fair.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks,
12 Sept. 2018,
www.history.com/news/baby-incubators-boardwalk-sideshow-medical-marvels.**

From this image, I learned how friendly Couney was with the visitors. He is holding a young boy up to look in one of the incubators, while Couney’s daughter, Hildegarde, stands nearby the incubator. He took time to meet with and talk to all of the visitors to the sideshow.

**“Entrance to Dreamland, Coney Island.” *Brooklyn Museum*,
www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/181512.**

This website provided me with a picture of the entrance to Dreamland at Coney Island, which housed one of Couney’s incubator baby sideshows.

**“The Entrance to One of Couney's Sideshows.”
<https://d3i6fh83elv35t.cloudfront.net/newshour/app/uploads/2015/07/BethAllen-1-292x300.jpg>**

From this picture, along with a few other sources, I took part of the title for my project, All the World Loves a Baby. This sentence, Couney’s slogan, is written outside this sideshow.

**“Hildegarde Couney.” *The Times of Israel*,
www.timesofisrael.com/as-hospitals-prematurely-spurned-incubators-this-carnival-s-howman-saved-lives/.**

I used this image in my documentary.

**“Hildegarde Couney Holds Baby Carol Boyce Heinisch.” *BBC News*, BBC, 23 May 2016,
<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36321692>.**

Martin Couney’s daughter holds one of the babies. She worked at many of her father’s exhibits over the years.

“‘Incubator Babies’ Praise Doctor Who Saved Lives.” *YouTube*, Associated Press, 30 July 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLBTOLrrubA.

In this video, Beth Allen talks about her gratitude towards Couney for saving her life. I used a clip of this interview in my documentary.

**“Incubator Designed by Dr. Julius Hess.” *The Times of Israel*, The Times of Israel, 30 Sept. 2018,
https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2018/09/34_HessIncubator-300x480.jpg**

Dr. Julius Hess was a close supporter of Couney and a renowned Chicago pediatrician. He is now known as “the Father of American Neonatology”. He invented his own incubator, improving upon the old European models.

“‘Incubator-Doctor’ at the Time of the New York World's Fair, 1939-1940.” *Neonatology on the Web*, Aug. 1979, www.neonatology.org/classics/silverman/silverman1.html#Fig1.

Martin Couney at the time of the New York World’s Fair. This picture showed me what Martin Couney looked like near the end of his career running sideshows.

**“Les Couveuses D'enfants (intérieur) - Digital Collections - National Library of Medicine.” *U.S. National Library of Medicine*, National Institutes of Health,
collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101667815-img.**

From this archive I was able to find a picture of French nurses observing and assisting newborn infants at an incubator exhibit of Exposition universelle internationale de 1900 in Paris, France.

“The ‘Living Babies in Incubators’ Exhibit at Chicago’s Century of Progress World’s Fair on Aug. 26, 1934.” *Chicagotribune.com*, Chicago Tribune, 2 July 2019, www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-ae-strange-doctor-couney-kogan-sidewalks-0826-story.html.

This picture showed me how the incubator exhibit would look to anyone who was seeing it from the street. It was a very clean and orderly-looking building.

“Madame Louise Recht with an Exhibit Baby in 1939-1940.” *Neonatology on the Web*, Aug. 1979, www.neonatology.org/classics/silverman/silverman1.html#Fig16.

Madame Louise Recht was the babies’ nurse. I could not find many pictures of her, so this picture was valuable in learning about Madame Recht.

“Martin Couney Holds Prematurely-Born Beth Allen.” *Smithsonian.com*, 19 Aug. 2016, Smithsonian Institution. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/man-who-pretended-be-doctor-ran-worlds-fair-attraction-saved-lives-thousands-premature-babies-180960200/>

Martin Couney with Beth Allen, one of the “Incubator Babies”. Beth Allen was born three months premature in 1941. I learned that she was one of the babies who weighed less than two pounds at birth. She is still alive today. This proves that Martin Couney broke the two-pound barrier.

McNab, Sally. “18 Years Ago, They Bet She Wouldn't Live; Lillian Mandel's Collecting That Bet Today.” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 30 Jan. 1937, p. 5, www.nursing.upenn.edu/nhhc/nurses-institutions-caring/care-of-premature-infants/.

This newspaper article was about Lillian Mandel surviving because of Couney’s incubators and methods to care for premature babies. I used a clip of this newspaper article in my documentary.

“Nasal Spoon-Feeding of Baby ‘Ann.’” *Neonatology*, Aug. 1979, www.neonatology.org/classics/silverman/silverman1.html#Fig17.

I found out that the baby would be fed through the nose if it couldn’t swallow.

“Outside One of Martin Couney's Incubator Exhibits.” *The times of israel.com*, The Times of Israel, 30 Sept. 2018, <https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2018/09/baby-incubators-p.-202-e1537174383765-1024x640.jpg>

I used this picture of one of Couney’s sideshows in my documentary.

**“Patrons View the Incubators and Their Occupants at the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair.” *Atlas Obscura*, Atlas Obscura, 27 Sept. 2018,
<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/infant-incubator-coney-island>**

Viewers take a look at the incubators and their occupants in Couney’s 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair attraction. I used this image in my documentary.

**“Premature Baby Feet in a Blue Blanket.” *Abott*,
www.nutritionnews.abbott/news-research/expert-views/feeding-the-worlds-smallest-most-fragile-babies/.**

I used this image in my documentary.

**“Queen Elizabeth in New York Harbor.” *Monroe Gallery of Photography*,
www.monroegallery.com/photographers/detail/id/57.**

I used this picture of a ship in a New York harbor in my documentary.

Raffel, Dawn. *Strange Case of Dr. Couney: How a Mysterious American Showman Saved Thousands of American Babies*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2018.

Many primary sources, notably pictures, were found in this book. This was extremely helpful to me because I could see what the sideshow looked like and what Couney looked like. The following pictures were found in *The Strange Case of Dr. Couney*.

“Inside of Incubator Exhibit”- Title Page

“Kathryn Ashe’s Baby Incubators Diploma”- Page 9

“Eugenics Introductory Panel”- Page 12`

“Coney Island and the Elephant Hotel”- Page 34

“Martin Couney in front of an Incubators Exhibit”- Page 37

“The Chicago World’s Fair: A Century of Progress Poster”- Page 52

“One of the Infant Incubators Buildings”- Page 67

“Coney Island from the Air”- Page 85

“Hildegarde and Annabelle Maye Couney”- Page 110

“Dr. Julian Hess”- Page 116

“A Baby Being Placed into an Incubator”- Page 127

“The Grave of Amelie Louise Recht”- Page 130

“Louise Recht with a Baby at the New York World’s Fair”- Page 188

“A Premature Baby Being Cared for by a Nurse”- Page 203

“September 26, 2015- Former Incubator Babies Carol Heinisch, Barbara Gerber, Beth Allen, Katherine Meyer, and Lucille Horn, along with Dawn Raffel and Barbara Horn”- Page 221

Reed, Allison. “Interview with Beth Allen.” 12 May 2020.

Beth Allen was one of Couney’s patients, and one of the first babies to break the two pound barrier. I am grateful that she was willing to answer my questions. One interesting fact I learned during our interview was that the doctors in the hospital where she was born were convinced that Couney was the only one with the knowledge and expertise to care for her.

**“Tarnier-Martin Couveuse.” *Neonatology on the Web*,
www.neonatology.org/classics/silverman/silverman1.html#Fig2.**

I used this image in my documentary.

Stevens, Cyrus Lee. “President’s Address.” Vol. XXIII, October 1919, pg 587.

This journal article helped me to understand how the medical community viewed premature babies. It was shocking to read that they viewed the babies as “weaklings” and wanted to prevent their births. I used a picture of part of this article in my documentar.

**“Three Coney Island Nurses Holding Six Babies Weighing an Average of Two Pounds.”
Neonatology on the Web, www.neonatology.org/pinups/coneyislandnurses.html.**

I learned from this image that Couney helped many babies that weighed under two pounds, as some of these babies weigh less than two pounds.

Secondary Sources

“Amazon Music.” *Amazon Music*, 14 Feb. 2012,
music.amazon.com/albums/B0079KLXNM?ie=UTF8&ref_=nav_youraccount_cldplr.

I decided to use acoustic lullabies as the background music to my documentary to continue with the baby theme in my documentary. I used the following songs in my documentary:

- Hush Little Baby, Track 1
- Itsy Bitsy Spider, Track 6
- Softly and Tenderly, Track 7

Barry, Rebecca Rego. “Coney Island’s Incubator Babies: Yes, You Read That Right.” *Daily JSTOR*, 15 Aug. 2018, <https://daily.jstor.org/coney-islands-incubator-babies/>.

I learned that onlookers would question whether the babies were alive.

Blakemore, Erin. “Baby Incubators: From Boardwalk Sideshow to Medical Marvel.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 12 Sept. 2018, www.history.com/news/baby-incubators-boardwalk-sideshows-medical-marvels.

When first invented, the incubators were so unusual that doctors would not use them. I also used a picture of Couney holding twin premature babies from this website in my documentary.

Burgess, Anika. “When Infants in Incubators Were a Sideshow Attraction.” *Atlas Obscura*, Atlas Obscura, 27 Sept. 2018, www.atlasobscura.com/articles/infant-incubator-coney-island.

I ascertained of several places where Couney ran the attraction, also what years. This website had several excellent pictures which I used in my documentary.

“Care of Premature Infants.” • *Nursing, History, and Health Care* • Penn Nursing, www.nursing.upenn.edu/nhnc/nurses-institutions-caring/care-of-premature-infants/.

From this website I acquired a picture of a nurse taking care of a newborn preemie baby to use in my documentary.

Filippino, Marc. “The Fake Doctor Who Saved Thousands Of Babies.” *News*, 6 Sept. 2018, www.wgbh.org/news/science-and-technology/2018/09/06/the-fake-doctor-who-saved-thousands-of-babies.

This website explained that Couney was not actually a doctor.

“From Weaklings to Fighters.” *American Babies: Their Life and Times in the 20th Century*, by Elizabeth Ann Reedy, Praeger, 2007, pp. 67–77, www.google.com/books/edition/American_Babies/JCaU7VuXKGUC?hl=en&gbpv=1&kptab=publisherseries.

In the 1920s, the general consensus remained that two pounds was the limit of viability. Couney broke this barrier by being able to save babies that weighed under two pounds. While there were other incubator baby sideshows, Couney was the first to break the two pound barrier and the most successful in America.

Getlen, Larry. “Fake Doctor Saved Thousands of Infants and Changed Medical History.” *New York Post*, New York Post, 24 July 2018, <https://nypost.com/2018/07/23/how-fake-docs-carnival-sideshow-brought-baby-incubators-to-main-stage/>

Through this website, I discovered that Martin Couney was “the only medical hope” for premature infants and their families.

“History of Medicine: The Incubator Babies of Coney Island.” *History of Medicine: The Incubator Babies of Coney Island* | Columbia University Department of Surgery, Columbia University Irving Medical Center, columbiasurgery.org/news/2015/08/06/history-medicine-incubator-babies-coney-island.

The incubator was not immediately accepted by hospitals because doctors thought the practice was pseudo-scientific and outside the range of standard care. They needed proof that the incubator could save lives, and only Martin Couney was able to provide that proof.

“How One Man Saved a Generation of Premature Babies.” *BBC News*, BBC, 23 May 2016, www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36321692.

This website has many excellent pictures. Also, it explains that Couney charged admission to make up for the fact that he did not charge the parents of his “patients”.

Kogan, Rick. “Mysterious 'Doctor' Couney Saved Thousands of Premature Babies- and Put Them on Display at the Fair.” *Chicagotribune.com*, Chicago Tribune, 2 July 2019, www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-ae-strange-doctor-couney-kogan-sidewalks-0826-story.html.

I learned a lot about Julius Hess from this website.

Liebling, A. J. “A Patron of the Preemies.” *Neonatology on the Web: Liebling 1939, 1939*, www.neonatology.org/classics/liebling.html.

This article, originally published in 1939, also helped me discover the slogan “All the World Loves a Baby”.

Prentice, Claire. “The Man Who Ran a Carnival Attraction That Saved Thousands of Premature Babies Wasn't a Doctor at All.” *Smithsonian.com*, Smithsonian Institution, 19 Aug. 2016, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/man-who-pretended-be-doctor-ran-worlds-fair-attraction-saved-lives-thousands-premature-babies-180960200/.

According to this article, we can not be certain that Couney had a medical degree. It is more likely that he was a technician.

Prescott, Stephanie, and Michelle C. Hehman. “Premature Infant Care in the Early 20th Century.” *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2017, pp. 637–646., doi:10.1016/j.jogn.2016.09.008.

Reading this journal article gave me background knowledge on the care given to premature babies in the early 1900s. I also used a picture of a nurse and premature baby from this article in my documentary.

Raffel, Dawn. *Strange Case of Dr. Couney: How a Mysterious American Showman Saved Thousands of American Babies*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2018.

This book was my original inspiration for this project. It was one of the best sources I found. I learned who Martin Couney was and what he had done for 6,500-7,000 infants and their families.

Reed, Allison N. “Interview with Dawn Raffel.” 11 Feb. 2020.

One of my most important sources for this project was my interview with Dawn Raffel, author of *The Strange Case of Dr. Couney*. She gave me valuable information about the barriers Martin Couney faced and also was able to clarify some of the more obscure details of his life.

Reedy, Elizabeth A. “Historical Perspectives: Infant Incubators Turned 'Weaklings' into 'Fighters'.” *The American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 103, no. 9, 2003, pp. 64AA–64AA. JSTOR, https://journals.lww.com/ajnonline/Citation/2003/09000/Infant_Incubators_Turned_Weaklings_into.34.aspx. Accessed 10 Feb. 2020.

According to this article, infant incubator shows helped advance premature infant care.

Rivard, Laura. "America's Hidden History: The Eugenics Movement." *Nature News*, Nature Publishing Group, 18 Sept. 2014, www.nature.com/scitable/forums/genetics-generation/america-s-hidden-history-the-eugenics-movement-123919444/.

From this website, I learned about the American eugenics movement. Though preemies were not a direct target of the movement, one of the barriers the Couney overcame was the idea that premature babies were "weaklings" who didn't deserve to live.

Silverman, William A. "Incubator-Baby Side Shows." *American Academy of Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics, 1 Aug. 1979, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/64/2/127>.

This obituary sparked Silverman's interest in Couney. He was one of the first people to research Couney and much of what I know is due to his work, along with the research of Dawn Raffel.

Silverman, William A. "Incubator-Baby Side Shows." *Neonatology on the Web*, Aug. 1979, www.neonatology.org/classics/silverman/silverman1.html.

This article has many good pictures of Couney, the incubators, the babies, his daughter, the nurses. I used them in my documentary.

Tenorio, Rich. "As Hospitals Prematurely Spurned Incubators, This Carnival Showman Saved Lives." *The Times of Israel*, 30 Sept. 2018, www.timesofisrael.com/as-hospitals-prematurely-spurned-incubators-this-carnival-showman-saved-lives/.

I learned a lot about Couney's early life.

Uenuma, Francine. "'Better Babies' Contests Pushed for Much-Needed Infant Health but Also Played Into the Eugenics Movement." *Smithsonian.com*, Smithsonian Institution, 17 Jan. 2019, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/better-babies-contests-pushed-infant-health-also-played-eugenics-movement-180971288/.

I learned about the eugenics movement in America, especially the "Better Babies" contest. One of the barriers Martin Couney had to overcome was the mindset that premature babies were "weaklings" who didn't deserve to live.

University of Sheffield. "National Fairground and Circus Archive." *History of Freak Shows - Research and Articles - National Fairground and Circus Archive - The University of Sheffield*, 23 Oct. 2015, www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/researchandarticles/freakshows.

From this website I acquired a picture of the Atlantic City sideshow to use in my documentary.

**“World's Smallest' Surviving Premature Baby Released from US Hospital.” *BBC News*,
BBC, 30 May 2019, www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48458780.**

This article taught me about the smallest premature baby ever to survive. It was interesting to see how far incubator technology has come since Martin Couney.