

Baby incubator sideshow display opens at the Wonderland Exhibit in Seattle on November 4, 1906.

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On November 4, 1906, what is almost certainly Seattle's first sideshow-style exhibition of living human infants in baby incubator machines opens as part of the so-called Wonderland Exhibit at 906 2nd Avenue in downtown Seattle. The exhibit features three incubators and is heavily advertised in local newspapers in an attempt to create an emotional connection between ticket buyers and the babies, and encouraging repeat business.

All Day, Almost All Night

The baby incubators at the Wonderland Exhibit appear to have been Seattle's first such public display: *The Seattle Times* called the attraction "something new in the exhibit line for the Pacific Coast" (October 28, 1906). The Wonderland Exhibit was produced by what the paper called "well-known local theatrical men," and also featured a full-size mockup of a Northern Pacific Railway observation car furnished in mahogany and plush. Visitors to this train car enjoyed what the paper called "remarkable scenes of the world ... with a change of program weekly." These were most likely glass slides projected with a magic lantern -- an early type of image projector that utilized concave mirrors. Later newspaper reports indicate the use of filmed travel adventures, including a trip up San Francisco's Market Street the day before the April 18, 1906, earthquake and subsequent fire.

The three baby incubators held (according to the *Times*) "chubby little infants under the care of experienced physicians and nurses." An orchestra played nearby. The Wonderland Exhibit was open daily from 9:00 in the morning until 11:00 at night. The cost to view the travelogues and the baby incubators was 10 cents.

Step Right Up

Infant incubators were invented by French physician Stephane Tarnier in 1880. The model used in early baby incubator exhibits was patented by French physician Alexandre Lion in 1889. Dr. Lion set up what he called incubator charities on busy Paris boulevards and charged spectators admission, perhaps as a way of offsetting the cost of manufacturing the machines and perhaps for publicity purposes -- as a way to introduce the new invention to the public. The Lion incubators were ideal for viewing infants within -- their glass walls create an almost proscenium-like viewer experience. Such displays became popular features of

expositions, carnivals, and sideshows throughout Europe during the later decades of the nineteenth century.

In America, live babies were displayed to the public in incubators beginning in 1898, when Frenchman Martin Couney (1870-1950) mounted an exhibit at Omaha's Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition. Within a few years, a baby incubator exhibit was drawing crowds at New York's Coney Island. It took many years for baby incubators to gain widespread use in hospital settings.

How premature and/or medically compromised the babies displayed in these exhibits actually were remains an open question. Certainly extremely small infants would have drawn larger crowds. The death of such infants, however, would almost certainly have resulted in public disapproval and possibly legal consequences for the promoters. It seems telling that the Wonderland Exhibit infants are described as being chubby -- not an attribute associated with prematurity.

An Early Exception

One Seattle hospital -- Monod Hospital, located at 2815 1st Avenue in Seattle's Belltown neighborhood -- apparently utilized a primitive form of baby incubator as early as 1901. On November 9, 1901, *The Seattle Times* reported, "There are three babies in incubators at the Monod Hospital ... there, wrapped in warm flannels and laid away in a box within a box, surrounded with bags filled with warm water, and apartments filled with warm air, which is at all times kept at an even temperature by a heating apparatus underneath, repose the little ones" (p. 10).

Dr. Adrian Monod immigrated to America from Paris in 1891, establishing an office in Seattle in 1898. It is possible that he knew Dr. Tarnier and another early proponent of incubators, Dr. Pierre Boudin, and probable that he knew of their work with premature infants. Adrian Monod drowned in 1902, and the hospital was sold in 1904. It is unclear for how long these early incubators were in use at this facility.

First Portland, Then Seattle

Portland's 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition featured a baby incubator exhibit, and this may have been the first such display in the Pacific Northwest. Many Seattle residents traveled to Portland to see the exposition, and quite possibly the baby incubator exhibit, which was a popular concession. Such shows always included an educational component -- usually a doctor or doctoresque lecturer discussing the logistics of caring for premature infants.

Newspaper coverage of the Wonderland Exhibit note that "Professor" Harry Spaw delivered lectures about the babies, and stated that he had been in charge of the baby incubator exhibit at the Portland fair. Harry Spaw's tenure in Seattle was evidently brief: Polk's Seattle City Directory carries a listing for someone of that name in 1907, but no other year near that. William Spaw, a steamfitter, shared Harry Spaw's 813 4th Avenue abode, according to the directory.

Babies In Wonderland

The babies at Wonderland apparently pulled in the crowd. On November 11, 1906, *The Seattle Times* reported, "The incubator annex has been thronged every afternoon and evening by persons of all classes, including doctors and scientific men and women who had never before seen the remarkable machines in actual service Prof. Spaw says that the object of bringing incubators to the coast cities is not alone for the purpose of getting the public's money by charging an admission to see them, as many believe, but primarily to educate the people as to the value of saving child life" (p. 58).

The Wonderland Exhibit's management offered to take babies with no cost if the parents were indigent, indicating that at least some of the babies on display in the incubators were paying for the privilege. Physicians were invited to send their premature patients to Wonderland, with the promise that they would be "permitted to visit the room any time they see fit, as they would a patient in a hospital" (*The Seattle Times*, November 11, 1906).

Eden Musee

The Seattle Times carried a weekly blurb promoting the Wonderland Exhibit throughout late 1906 and early 1907. On March 26, 1907, the paper announced the creation of a new downtown amusement arcade, the Eden Musee, located in the Stewart & Holmes building at Cherry Street and 1st Avenue. Admission to the four-story building, the *Times* stated, would be free, "patrons taking the elevator to the top floor in which are housed the various concessions. From the top floor the visitor will descend from one floor to another, each one presenting a different novelty calculated to catch the eye of amusement seekers. Among the features of the show will be the optical illusion, 'The Garden of Eden,' and a colored troupe of jubilee singers" ("Eden Musee To Open Soon").

By the time Eden Musee was in the planning stages, the Wonderland Exhibit was closing or had already closed. At some point during this period, the baby incubators were either sold to the Eden Musee, or the Eden Musee purchased their own baby incubators. The babies were not mentioned in early Eden Musee ads -- which boasted "The Passion Play, Historical War Museum, the Double Man, the Bearded Woman, the Educated Horse, the Fire Eater, the Hindoo Magician, the Chamber of Horrors, the Japanese Battle, Famous Wax Works, the best vaudeville bill in the city" (*The Seattle Times*, December 21, 1907) -- but had joined the freak show throng by January 1908. Other new attractions included "Mlle. Hardy The Snake Charmer and Harry S. Harrison The Human Ostrich" (*The Seattle Times*, January 5, 1908). Harrison, a later article explained, "baffles physicians by his strange appetite for sharp-pointed tacks, nails, razor blades, and broken glass" (January 14, 1908).

At some point during this transitional period, *The Seattle Times* reported the frantic journey of J. W. Davis, a desperate father who rushed through downtown Seattle from saloon to saloon clutching his premature infant, who had been placed on a pillow and wrapped in a shawl. "I must save this baby, he said, if there is any chance on earth. Can't someone tell me where an incubator can be found?" The anxious man was directed to the Wonderland Exhibit In this place he rushed madly only to learn that the incubators had been taken away several days ago" ("Father Begs For Incubator To Save Baby"). The baby's mother had apparently given birth prematurely in a Seattle hotel room while visiting the city with her husband. The

Times reported that Davis, stymied in his search, had rushed off into the night. "Whether he found an incubator last night could not be learned" (*The Seattle Times*, January 14, 1908).

On to A-Y-P

Despite its many attractions, the Eden Musee was out of business sometime prior to April 12, 1908, when a *Seattle Times* classified advertisement offered the entire 637 1st Avenue building by floor or in total on a five year lease. By spring 1909, the Luna Park amusement park in West Seattle featured a Baby Electrobator Exhibit. *The Seattle Times* described an electrobator as simply "a new baby incubator" (May 17, 1909).

On June 1, 1909, the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (A-Y-P) opened, drawing more than three million people over the next four and a half months. The Paystreak -- A-Y-P's carnival midway area -- featured numerous rides, concessions, and amusements, including a number of attractions based on human display. These human display exhibits presented paid performers demonstrating examples of their native culture -- of their otherness -- to fair goers. Most popular at A-Y-P were the Igorrote Village, the Eskimo Village, and the Baby Incubator Exhibit, which sold some 28,800 tickets, generating \$7,200 in gross receipts.

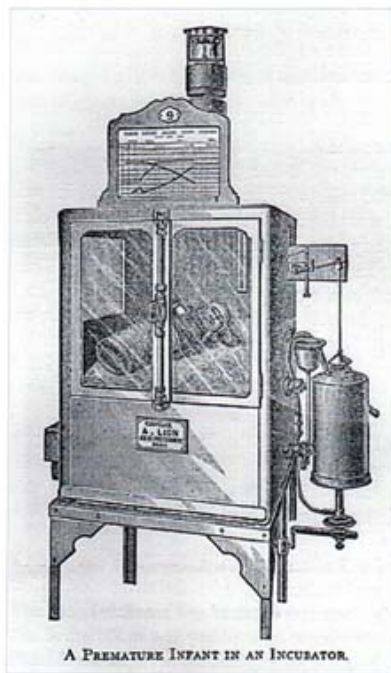
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Wonderland Exhibit Baby Incubator Display, Seattle, November 18, 1906

Courtesy *The Seattle Times*

The Lion Incubator



Baby incubator designed by Alexander Lion, France, 1906

Courtesy *The Machine In The Nursery*



Luna Park Baby Electrobator Exhibit, Seattle, 1909

Courtesy MOHAI (Image No. 1983.10.8281.2)



Baby in incubator, Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition Baby Incubator Exhibit, Seattle, 1909

Courtesy UW Special Collections (Image No. AYP536, Nowell x2762)

Sources: Polk's Seattle City Directory (Seattle: R. L. Polk & Co., 1907); "Seattle Is To Have a New Touring Car," *The Seattle Times*, October 28, 1906, p. 10; "To Save Seattle Infants By Using Baby Incubators," *Ibid.*, November 18, 1906, p. 58; "New Bill At Wonderland," *Ibid.*, November 19, 1906, p. 5; untitled, *Ibid.*, November 25, 1906, p. 40; untitled, *Ibid.*, December 9, 1906, p. 42; Wonderland Exhibit display advertisement, *Ibid.*, December 12, 1906, p. 17; "Eden Musee To Open Soon," *Ibid.*, March 26, 1907, p. 7; "Father Begs For Incubator To Save Baby," *Ibid.*, May 19, 1907, p. 1; Eden Musee display advertisement, *Ibid.*, December 21, 1907, p. 4; Eden Musee display advertisement, *Ibid.*, January 5, 1908, p. 31; "At the Eden Musee," *Ibid.*, January 14, 1908, p. 10; "For Rent, Stores," *Ibid.*, April 12, 1908, p. 45; "Sunday at Luna Park," *Ibid.*, May 17, 1909, p. 13; Babies in Incubators," *Ibid.*, November 9, 1901, p. 10; ; *HistoryLink.org Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History*, "Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition: Baby Incubator Exhibit and Cafe" (by Paula Becker), <http://www.historylink.org/> (accessed June 6, 2013); Jeffrey P. Baker, *The Machine in the Nursery: Incubator Technology and the Origins of Newborn Intensive Care* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1996); *Secretary's Report of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition* (Seattle: Gateway Printing, 1911), p. 29-36.

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