



Carousels, Coasters, and
Cutthroat Competition:
Coney Island Amusement
Association, 1907

CONEY

MUNUC 37

Model United Nations of the University of Chicago

CHAIR LETTER

Dear delegates,

Welcome to MUNUC 37! I'm Lucas, and I'm super excited to be your Chair for the Coney Island committee! Elliot, Abby, and I have put tremendous effort into researching and bringing this committee to life for you, and we hope you'll come out with a newfound appreciation for all things Coney Island, just as we have!

But before I go into why we chose this committee topic and why we're so excited for it, I should introduce myself a bit! I'm a second-year double majoring in economics and geography/urbanization. I grew up in the DC area, but my family is from Brazil. Outside of MUN, I sail, and take part in the Brazilian student association and outdoor adventures club. In my free time I love hiking, biking, and exploring Chicago neighborhoods!

As part of that, I've always been interested in how places, cities and neighborhoods evolve, and Coney Island is no different. Like many other American tourist destinations, it's had its ups and downs, but for Coney Island, the "height" of its ups and how far it crashed from there is especially jarring. The island also played a significant role in shaping the US' amusement culture and views on sin, and so beyond Coney Island, the actions of this committee have the potential to make a significant impact on American culture as a whole. Besides that, the sheer ludicrousness of what was built at Coney Island so far will make delegates' ambitious ideas fit right at home. Because of this, Coney Island will be the perfect backdrop for you all to harness the island's rich history to craft creative solutions. As you do so, be sure you are familiar with MUNUC ethics guidelines and general crisis mechanics!

I'm looking forward to a great weekend, and please reach out if you have any questions!

Your Chair,

Lucas

lucaszr@uchicago.edu

CRISIS DIRECTOR LETTER

Dear Delegates,

My name is Elliott, and I couldn't be more thrilled to be a part of this committee as one half of your Crisis Directors. Alongside my fellow CD, the tremendous Abby Langer, and the top-notch Chair known as Lucas Ribeiro, I'd like to welcome each of you to MUNUC 37 and especially to Carousels, Coasters, and Cutthroat Competition (the Quadruple C Committee, if you will).

First, however, just a little bit about me. I'm a second-year Classics major here from sunny San Diego, California. I've been fanatic about MUN ever since high school, and I'm involved in UChicago's competitive MUN team as well as running committees for both MUNUC and ChoMUN. When not modeling United Nations, you can usually find me with a nice cup of tea and some good jazz, reading up about history or politics. There's nothing I love more than a long Wikipedia rabbit hole (yes, despite what your teachers may say Wikipedia is just fine as a jumping-off point for serious research.)

And speaking of jumping-off points, 1907's Coney Island is home to some of the most colorful characters history has to offer. Us CDs can't wait to see where you take the cast of characters we've plucked from the streets of the World's Playground, and we're tremendously excited to watch your ideas for Coney's future develop, adapt, and unfold. Crisis can be hectic, confusing and taxing (and I should know, I'm a crisis delegate myself) but please know that all of us on committee are cheering for you. There's nothing we want more than to see you succeed in committee- and each and every one of you can. If you have any questions about committee, please reach out.

Your CD,

Elliott Husseman

ehusseman@uchicago.edu

CRISIS DIRECTOR LETTER

Hi everyone!

I'm Abby, and I'm delighted to be your second CD for the Coney Island Committee! Much like the roller coasters on the island, I hope this committee will be one heck of a fun ride. As a Crisis Director, we'll be responding to everything happening in the backroom, such as your crisis notes and breaks - and be assured that we'll make it a committee to remember.

A little bit about myself: I'm a second year student from Indianapolis, Indiana (go Hoosiers!), currently planning to major in Global Studies with a potential minor in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. I was an Assistant Chair for the Ad-Hoc Committee the Council of Magnitogorsk along with Elliott, and outside of MUN, I'm also in UChicago's improv group Off-Off Campus, and in my free time I love watching TV shows, talking about politics, and eating good food.

Throughout the course of Carousels, Coasters, and Cutthroat Competition, you'll immerse yourself in one of the biggest business ventures in history, and also one of the most riveting; we're so excited to see how you address these problems and turn Coney Island around for the better! As much as I love crisis, I know that it can be intimidating, so I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the mechanics of crisis committees and carefully review the background guide, so that you're familiar with the flow of the committee. Me and my fellow chairs will also be here to guide you through the course of committee, so please don't hesitate to reach out with questions, and we look forward to seeing you learn and grow as delegates! Best of luck, and we can't wait to see you at the conference!

Your CD,

Abby Langer

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SENSITIVITY STATEMENT

Dear Delegates,

While we hope and intend that this committee will be filled with fruitful discussions, open debate, and a healthy amount of scheming, it is of paramount importance that we maintain enforceable rules and expectations for our delegates regarding ethics. First among those is a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for all delegates. As we mentioned in our Chair Letters and will discuss throughout the rest of our background guide, the history of Coney Island cannot be separated from the discriminatory sentiments that characterized America when the amusement parks were coming into fruition. Many of Coney Island's initial attractions included racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric, including blackface as a part of vaudeville shows and exhibits that showcased racist portrayals of Indigenous societies. This reality of Coney Island does not permit delegates to engage in racist, homophobic, or other forms of discriminatory rhetoric during committee. We will not accept any harmful speech or resolutions mocking or targeting minority groups, or planning Coney Island exhibits that include these discriminatory practices.

Similarly, in the backroom, delegates cannot target minority communities with discriminatory language or practices to try and gain public support or create attractions of this nature. It should go without saying that bigotry in any form, whether intentional or unintentional, will not be tolerated, and disciplinary action will be taken as necessary. Historical accuracy is not an excuse for any unacceptable or discriminatory behavior, and we expect the modern standard for morals and ethics to be exhibited despite the historical character of the Coney Island Community. If you have any questions about what is appropriate, feel free to send a note to the backroom or ask the dias. If at any point you are made to feel uncomfortable, please feel free to speak to your Chair or Crisis Directors so that we can address any problems that may arise.

That being said, our ultimate goal as Chairs and Crisis Directors is to make every delegate feel comfortable and welcome to engage in debate and have fun, which is why these expectations are necessary. We look forward to meeting you and we're so excited to see the wonderful debates and solutions that you will bring to the Coney Island Committee!

~The Dais

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND MECHANICS

Coney Island will be run as a continuous crisis committee, which means that it will contain both frontroom and backroom elements. The frontroom will be chaired by John “The Boss” McKane (alias Lucas Ribeiro), the Commissioner of Common Lands for Gravesend, which covers the “West Brighton” part of Coney Island. McKane’s commission is responsible for renting out large tracts of land and leasing it to high bidders, so he has decided to gather the most trusted and influential figures of Coney Island to garner the most profit out of the land. As delegates in this committee, you will serve as the members of McKane’s team. We are aware of the fact that, historically, McKane died by the year in which the committee is set, but for the purposes of this simulation, we will imagine him as alive and well. Though your different roles may have individual relations to McKane, all delegates will hold the same power in frontroom and backroom - delegates will all have equal opportunities to succeed in committee based on their creativity, not on their connection to McKane. As members of committee, you will each have different interests and backgrounds as described in your roster biography, which will inspire your work as delegates throughout the course of the committee.

Your execs will explain in more detail about the workings of a crisis committee at the beginning of the conference, but we will provide an overview about frontroom and backroom: the two main facets of a crisis committee. Front room is the side of crisis where you work together with other delegates in committee, moderated by your chair Lucas, where you will write and give speeches, create directives (plans for solutions to problems), and vote on solutions together. In frontroom, though you will be part of different parks and interests, you will simulate a committee that works for the interests of all the parks and the profit of Coney Island as a whole. Thus, it is in your best interest in frontroom to work with other delegates to solve problems - the strength of many is much more powerful than the strength of one! Frontroom is also where you will receive crisis updates, where your chairs notify you of a new problem that has arisen, which you will solve through passing directives. Backroom,

run by your crisis directors Abby and Elliott, is where you will carry out your personal plans based on the background of your character. This side of crisis is more individualized; you will write crisis notes (letters written to people you have connections with) to the backroom, asking them to carry out specific actions to achieve your personal goals. Start with your biographies to begin thinking about your “crisis arc”, or what you want to achieve personally by the end of the committee. We encourage you to be creative with your backroom notes - you can write notes that secretly go against McKane, or attempt to sabotage other parks, just as a few ideas. The sky’s the limit!

If your crisis notes are detailed and compelling, the backroom may choose to “break” your note in a crisis update, where the backroom will come into the committee and act out an update potentially based on your actions in backroom, which begins the start of the “crisis cycle”, or the period from the update to a solidified directive. After a crisis update, delegates will call for “moderated caucuses” to give speeches on ideas for solutions. Delegates can also suggest “unmoderated caucuses”, where you’re given the opportunity to move around the room and talk to other delegates to write “directives”, combining your ideas into comprehensive solutions that address the problem. After directives are created, delegates will present their directives and often give speeches in favor of or against solutions, and then a simple majority vote will be used to decide what directives to pass. The passing of directives signifies the end of a “crisis cycle”, and another update will then break in the room, beginning the cycle anew with a fresh issue to address.

One of the most important parts of crisis is the ability to multitask: while you’re passing notes to other delegates, writing speeches, and drafting directives in frontroom, you’ll also need to be preparing your crisis notes for backroom, which will be collected after a set period. In this committee, we’ll be using the two-notepad system, which means that you’ll be writing notes on one notepad while the backroom is responding to your previous note on the other, after which they will return the previous notepad and collect your new one. You will only be able

to work on one notepad at a time. The Coney Island Committee will not have any special mechanics beyond the typical crisis committee. We're excited to see how you succeed and craft creative ideas in both frontroom and backroom, and please reach out if you have any questions!

HISTORY OF COMMITTEE

Introduction

This committee explores a setting where, instead of competing with each other to the point of bankruptcy, Coney Island's three mega-parks of the early 1900s decided to form a committee to resolve the island's issues together. Although this committee never took place in real life, the characters and interests that we plan to bring to life are all very real. To help delegates better understand the different parks, people, and interests, as well as the state of Coney Island in 1907, this section will provide an in-depth look at the history of the island's three parks.

Early History

To explore the rich story of the parks of Coney Island, we must first begin with the history of Coney Island itself. A small island off the southern coast of Brooklyn, Coney Island was separated from Brooklyn by a creek until 1829, when the first bridge, a crushed shell road, was constructed.¹ Development continued on the island in the form of hotels and resorts, which aimed to attract New York's elite to the eastern beaches of the island: Brighton Beach and Manhattan Beach. Prominent business tycoons such as Austin Corbin and William Engemann built opulent hotels in the area, hoping to entice wealthy New Yorkers. The rest of Coney Island, soon dubbed West Brighton, catered to a starkly different audience—mostly the working and middle class—and boasted showy and risqué attractions such as brothels, beer gardens, and even a giant elephant-shaped hotel. The Commissioner of Common Lands at the time, John McKane, turned a blind eye as pickpockets and unethical

¹“Historic Highlights | American Experience | PBS,” n.d.
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/historic-highlights/>.

business owners operated freely on Coney Island.² In its early days, Coney Island was home to one of America's first roller coasters and was potentially even the birthplace of the hot dog!

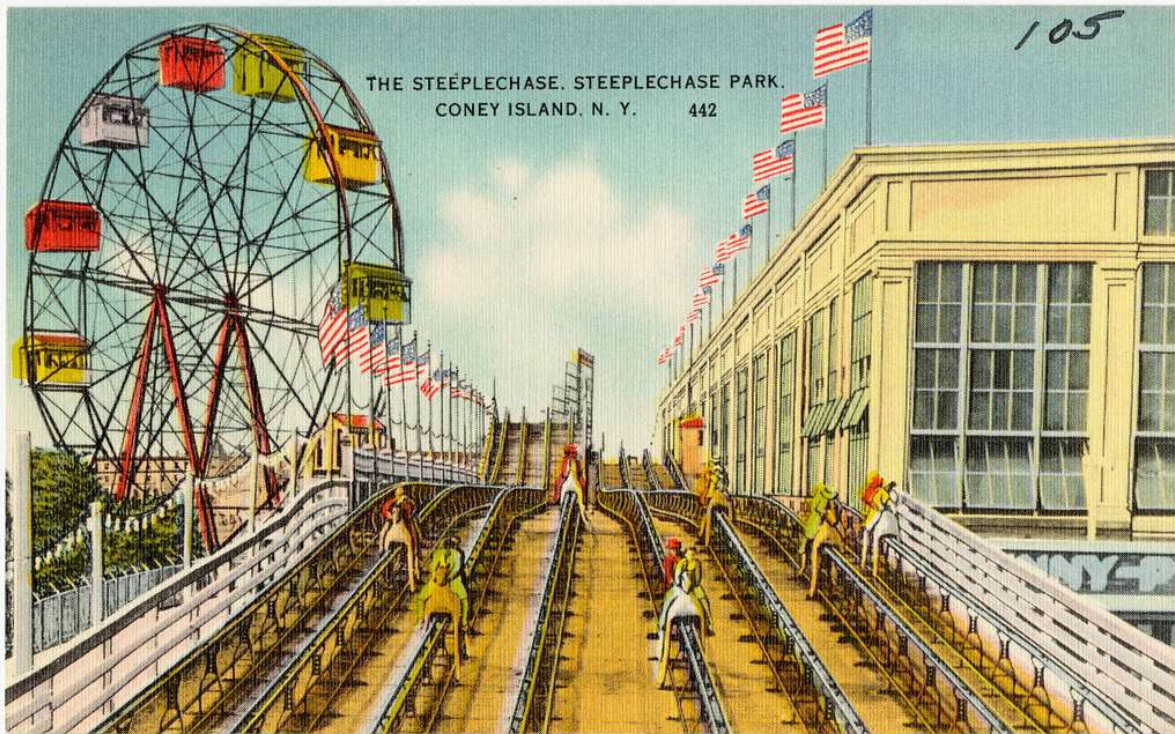
The First Amusement Opens: Sea Lion Park

Although Coney Island had many separate attractions at the time, its first enclosed amusement park was not created until 1895, when eccentric adventurer and acrobat Paul Boyton opened the aquatic-themed Sea Lion Park (now Luna Park). Boyton had gained fame for his stunts of long-distance water travel wearing only a rubber suit. He used his knowledge to create Sea Lion Park on Coney Island, featuring the signature attractions Shoot-the-Chutes and the Flip-Flap Railway, North America's first looping coaster. Boyton pioneered the model that would come to define the modern amusement park. Unlike other contemporary operations where parkgoers paid per ride, Boyton's park charged a single admission fee, granting access to multiple attractions that could be enjoyed repeatedly. The concept proved immensely popular, and Sea Lion Park soon drew the attention of tourists and the curiosity of nearby entrepreneurs.³

²“The People of Coney Island | American Experience | PBS,” n.d. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/coney-people/>.

³Charles Denson. “Paul Boyton,” Coney Island History Project. May 22, 2015. <https://www.coneyislandhistory.org/hall-of-fame/paul-boyton>.

Steeplechase Park: The Competition Begins



An illustration of The Steeplechase within Steeplechase Park, early 1900s.⁴

Inspired by the success of Sea Lion Park, American entrepreneur George Tilyou erected his own amusement park, called Steeplechase Park, in 1897. Tilyou had been involved with Coney Island early on in his career, creating one of the main walkways called “the Bowery” at the age of twenty. However, after testifying against McKane when he was investigated for bribery and fraud, Tilyou faced backlash from McKane and was forced out of the area until McKane was imprisoned for election fraud. Drawing inspiration from the Ferris Wheel he had observed during his visit to the Columbian World’s Fair and an elaborate mechanical horseback ride he had seen in England, Tilyou centralized his attractions and created his amusement park, which would grow to rival Sea Lion Park.⁵

⁴ Boston Public Library. “Public domain photo of vintage New York postcard, Coney Island.” <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/>. Accessed September 3, 2024

⁵ “The People.” PBS

During the rise of Steeplechase, an unlikely partnership formed between Frederic Thompson and Elmer Dundy, the soon-to-be masterminds of the second park in Coney Island. Thompson and Dundy initially found themselves showcasing rival attractions at the 1898 Trans-Centennial Exposition. Thompson then conceived the "Trip to the Moon" attraction, a novel show that would take the audience on a journey to space and back. After reuniting with Dundy at another exposition, the two decided to collaborate on popularizing the attraction.⁶ The attraction was a success, and Thompson and Dundy set their sights on bringing it to Coney Island. They negotiated a deal with Tilyou, the owner of Steeplechase Park, to bring "Trip to the Moon" and some of their other attractions to the island in exchange for paying Tilyou forty percent of their profits.⁷ The Trip to the Moon would prove immensely profitable during the rainy, overcast 1902 season, becoming one of Steeplechase's most popular attractions.

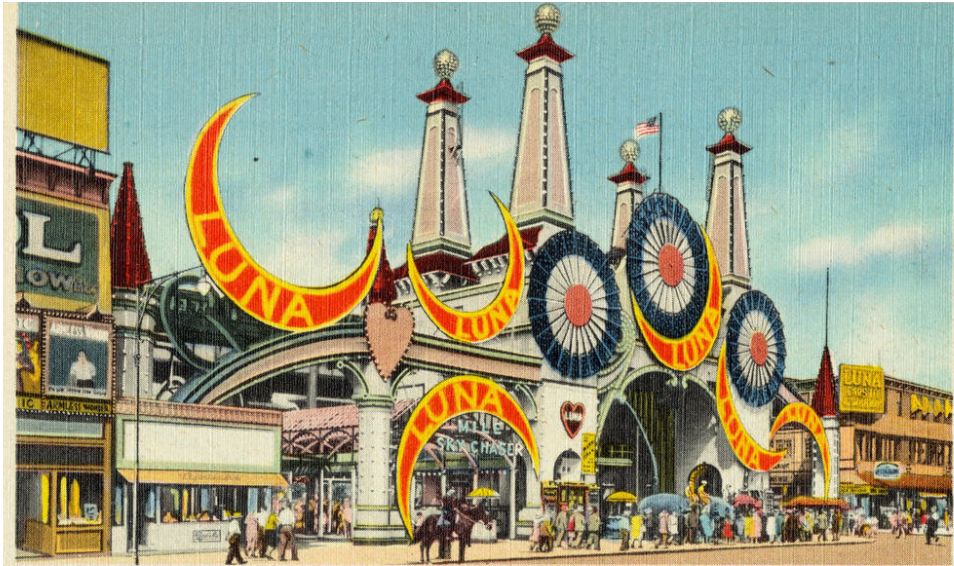
Sea Lion Park Becomes Luna Park

Fed-up with paying forty percent of their profits to Tilyou, Thompson and Dundy chose instead to expand their vision and operate their own park, buying out Sea Lion park from Boyton in order to do so. With this, they gained all of the attractions and animals the park had boasted, including Topsy the elephant, an animal that had become famous for killing a spectator who had abused her. Thompson and Dundy named the park Luna Park after the airship in the "Trip to the Moon" ride, and thus, Coney Island's perhaps most famous park was born.⁸

⁶ "The People." PBS

⁷ David Sullivan. "Coney Island History | Luna Park." Heart of Coney Island. Accessed August 12, 2024. <https://www.heartofconeyisland.com/luna-park-coney-island.html>.

⁸ Ibid.



An illustration of Luna Park's elaborate entrance, Linen era, circa 1940.⁹

Dreamland Park

Luna Park's success also drew in imitators, who wanted a cut of the Coney Island profits. One of the businessmen seeking a part in the amusement park venture was former New York State Senator William Reynolds. Reynolds was also a real estate developer, who had worked on many of Brooklyn's neighborhoods in the 1890s.¹⁰

In 1904, Reynolds along with his investors would open Dreamland. The land on which the park was built was seized from McKane after his imprisonment and was won in an auction held by the sheriff's office where Reynolds revealed that the winning bidders were actually working for him. After solving a rezoning problem on Dreamland's West 8th Street, Reynolds and his partners got to work on building the \$3.5 million park, allotting

⁹ Yesterdays-Paper. "Vintage New York - Luna Park, Coney Island Antique souvenir scenic view postcard. Accessed August 30, 2024.

¹⁰ David Sullivan. "Coney Island History | Dreamland." Heart of Coney Island. Accessed August 13, 2024. <https://www.heartofconeyisland.com/dreamland-coney-island.html>.

a huge amount of labor into the park in a short period of time.¹¹ Dreamland sought to be better than Luna Park in every way; it boasted a 375-foot beacon tower, taller than any building in New York City at the time, along with attractions like “Coasting Through Switzerland,” a sled type roller coaster that took one through replicas of the icy Alps and villages of Switzerland, and even a re-enactment of fighting a fire called “Fighting the Flames” with actors who played firemen and screaming people. The park copied the most successful attractions of Luna (“Fighting the Flames”, for example, was a veritable replica of Luna’s “Fire and Flames”), adding on bigger and flashier additions with their own flair. Reynolds also hired Sam Gumpertz, a famous acrobat and performer, as a general manager around 1908.¹² Gumpertz was transformational for the park: he recruited animal showman Frank Bostock to create awe-striking animal performances, created a miniature city in the park, and advertised human oddities and circus attractions that drew in huge crowds. However, Dreamland struggled to make back the money it had spent. The park’s financial problems only compounded as expensive renovations continued for the new attraction “Creation” in 1905, an illusion-based show which retold the Biblical story of Genesis and the creation of the Earth. Despite its numerous attractions, Dreamland stayed in a deadlock for supremacy with Luna Park in the coming years, with neither park emerging as the clear winner of best amusement park on Coney Island.

Relation To Committee

Together, these parks and the people involved in them form the bedrock of this committee. Representatives for each park may include founders, investors, ride-designers, managers, and more! Others who have a stake in Coney Island, such as media personalities, concerned residents, representatives from the city government and the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company (which was building a rail line to Coney at the time), will also be present. Using this background guide, together with other resources, delegates will be expected to

¹¹Paul Brigandi and Nancy Brigandi, “The Ultimate ‘Dreamland’ Park on Coney Island,” CarouselHistory, June 13, 2015, <https://carouselhistory.com/coney-islands-dreamland-park-history/>.

¹² “The People.” PBS

understand each park and stakeholder's unique positions and interests, and use this in order to craft effective solutions and build creative arcs. We also believe that delegates should—to the best of their abilities—embody the creativity, scale, ambition and spirit that these parks expressed, and which helped turn Coney Island into an icon. With your research, ambition, and a little bit of creative liberty, we can't wait to see how you'll rewrite the history of Coney Island.

History of the Problem

Running a successful business of any kind is a daunting proposition. Running a successful business on an island filled with flammable buildings and re-inventing the very concept of amusement in the process is nearly impossible, and this reality had become all too obvious to park owners in their ever-growing race for more. But the amusement arms race between Coney's triad of major parks is just the latest iteration of a war for tourist dollars that has existed ever since the first gullible New Yorkers arrived on Coney's shores.¹³ From the earliest independent hotels and amusements to emerge on Coney Island's beachfront to the massive park operations running at the time of the committee, Coney Island's businesses have always been in a race to build bigger and better, hoping to attract more visitors.

Pier Pressure, Budding Businesses, and the Beginnings of Competition On Coney Island

The Coney Island story of competition began, most visibly, in the 1870s. William Engeman, an investor who'd grown rich from the civil war, had begun slowly growing a hotel empire on the island, beginning with the 1870 Ocean hotel. Other investors began to take note. Notably, a number of railroad companies, including Culver and Sea Beach, built railroads to the island along with large beachfront complexes consisting of hotels,

¹³ Jeffrey Stanton. "Coney Island History Site" Accessed September 12, 2024.
<https://www.westland.net/coneyisland/articles/steeplechase1.htm>.

plazas, palaces, and more. The Culver and Sea Beach companies continued to expand in order to outdo one another and attract tourists. At one point, the Sea Beach company built a 1,300-foot pier extending from their seafront complex into the ocean, complete with restaurants, ballrooms, and a theater. The Culver company responded by building a 1,500-foot pier two years later. The companies continued to engage in fierce competition, adding pharmacists, parlors, and even military bands to greet incoming passengers. And thus, the attractions on Coney began to grow ever more ludicrous.¹⁴

But the culture of competition at this early stage of Coney's development extended far beyond large seafront complexes and the companies that operated them; it permeated every aspect of business on the island. At a much smaller scale, swindlers, street vendors, showmen, and other small business owners all had to fight for a limited share of tourist dollars—and fight they did.

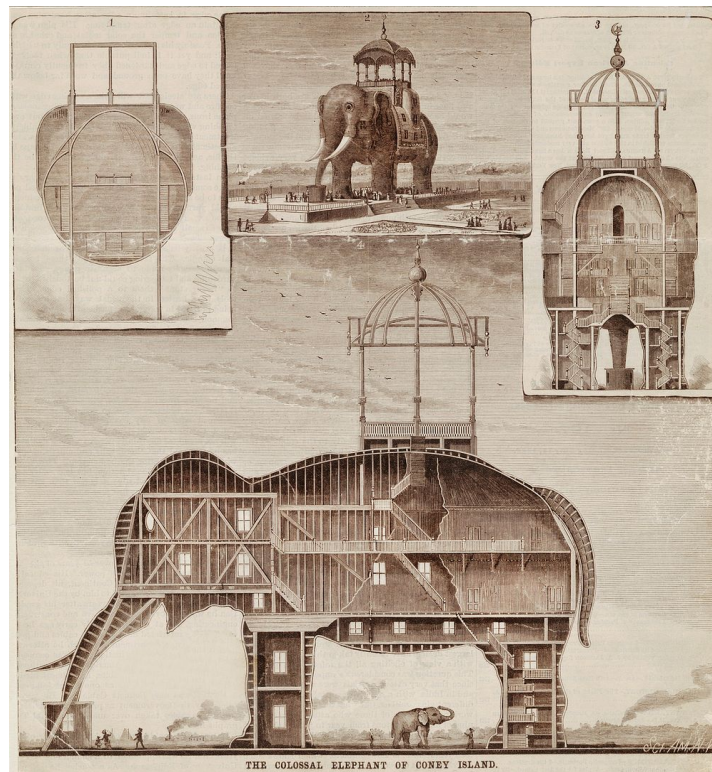
In this case, fighting meant finding any way to set themselves apart from the competition: being louder, more visible, and grander. James Lafferty believed the way to do this was to embrace the next great step in architecture: designing buildings in the shape of animals, birds, and fish. Lafferty began this innovative architectural journey in 1875, when he designed a cow-shaped drink stand, the "Inexhaustible Cow," for businessman Paul Bauer. The cow-shaped drink stand was hugely successful at differentiating itself from other non-cow-shaped drink stands, and Lafferty decided to grow his idea—quite literally.

Notably, in 1885, Lafferty found investors and built the 31-roomed, 176-foot-tall, 203-foot-long Elephant Hotel. The hotel was quite popular for about two years, when the novelty began to wear off and visitorship to the hotel declined. As a result, the hotel took a turn toward moral depravity, with the opening of popular cigar shops at the elephant's feet and a rumored brothel operating within the elephant.

¹⁴ David Sullivan, "The Comprehensive History of Coney Island"

Seeing the declining state of his beloved elephant hotel and not wanting to let his investment go to waste, Lafferty partnered with businessman Lorenzo Shaw to give his elephant a makeover; in this case, by surrounding it with a three-loop, 75-foot-tall roller coaster, operated by Shaw's company. The coaster opened in 1889 and, like the elephant hotel, was hugely successful at first, but it quickly found itself competing with Coney's major amusement parks, the first of which opened in 1893... but more on that later..

After a few more years of mixed success, the elephant and coaster burned down in 1896.¹⁵



Multiple angles showcasing the iconic Coney Island Elephant, 1885.¹⁶

¹⁵ David Sullivan, "Coney Island Elephant Hotel and Roller Coaster."

¹⁶ Scientific American. 1885. *The Colossal Elephant of Coney Island*. New York public library.
<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/>

What the Boss Says, Goes: Coney Island Under John McKane

While the stories of the elephant and coaster highlight the more exciting elements of Coney Island's competition culture—creative ideas and ambitious plans—Coney Island competition had a darker side too: that of corruption and political connections. Enter John "Boss" McKane, investor and owner of a construction company that had acquired lands throughout Coney Island. Frustrated at how long permitting was taking him for his projects on Coney Island, McKane saw an opportunity—a position as a Commissioner of Common Lands for the county of Gravesend (the municipality Coney Island was located in.)

Now you may be thinking: why would a successful businessman want a position in local politics? Well, McKane had spotted an opportunity. At the time, half of Coney Island's land was jointly owned by the 300 heirs of the original settlers of Gravesend County and leased out in parcels for 7-year terms through a bidding process. This entire bidding process was controlled by the county Commissioner of Common Lands. No one at the time had realized quite how much power this gave the commissioner until McKane read the fine print. He ran for the position, largely uncontested, and won.

With his position, McKane would grant leases only to his cronies and others with whom he had a good relationship. These leases were given well below market rate (often \$6-\$10 per year for land that was worth around \$3,000 per year at market rates). Because of his immense power in influencing land distribution, McKane's construction company was able to gain a near monopoly on Coney, with McKane only leasing land to those who contracted with his company. Eventually, over two-thirds of constructions in Coney were done by McKane's company, making him extremely wealthy. Beyond mere riches, his stranglehold over land distribution on the island yielded him extreme control over what businesses and businessmen could operate there, and he used this

control both to enrich himself – taking bribes and forcing lucrative construction deals – and to shape the future of the island as he saw fit.¹⁷

The stories of McKane and Lafferty highlight the diversity of ways businesses and businessmen on Coney could gain a leg up, from creativity to corruption. And this spirit of competition continued throughout the park's history.

The Highest Form of Flattery: Competition in the Three-park Era

Throughout its storied history, Coney Island saw competition flourish in myriad forms. The spirited tradition of one-upmanship drove much of Coney Island's expansion from a niche upper-crust beach resort to a playground for tens of thousands of New York's middle and working classes. McKane's political strong-arming of Coney Island land ushered in an era of sleazy management and backroom dealing that led Coney to develop an unsavory reputation as a hive of vice and villainy. However, with McKane's fall from grace, a third style of competition would emerge at the turn of the twentieth century. The founders of Coney Island's three major parks would unite the best of both worlds, combining shady government connections with a healthy dose of creative imitation to create a trio of parks unlike anything before seen.

When Paul Boyton's Sea Lion Park opened in 1894, it represented a paradigm shift in entertainment. The concept of a mechanized amusement park with a single admission fee was, at the time, revolutionary. So revolutionary, in fact, that it would go on to serve as the direct basis for its two greatest competitors. It was the continued success of Sea Lion Park that convinced George Tilyou of the viability of Boyton's model and ultimately led him to open Steeplechase Park three years later, finding successful rides from around the world and importing them to Steeplechase.¹⁸

¹⁷ David Sullivan, "The Rise and Fall of John 'The Boss' McKane."

¹⁸ Julia Berick, "Summer Escapism: Coney Island Dreaming"

Though Sea Lion Park enjoyed considerable popularity in its first few years, it did suffer from several disadvantages which hindered its ability to compete in an increasingly crowded Coney Island. Specifically, Sea Lion Park's unfortunate location away from the naturally occurring footways of the Bowery and popular bathhouses, combined with a torrentially rainy 1902 season, would lead to its eventual buyout by Frederic Thompson and Skip Dundy.

Steeplechase and Luna: A Healthy Coexistence?

The next few years were met with many changes in Coney's park landscape, which reveal a lot about the nature of competition on Coney Island. As you'll recall from the history of the committee, Steeplechase Park was opened as a competitor to Sea Lion Park in 1897, and Sea Lion Park was bought by Thompson & Dundy, improved, and converted into Luna Park for the 1903 season.

One might expect that the opening of Luna Park would hurt Steeplechase. After all, the spirit of competition is often thought of as a zero-sum game, with one business's gain in visitors as another's loss. But, to everyone's surprise, this was not what happened. Instead, Steeplechase became more popular after Luna opened, with more visitors going to Coney overall. Effectively, Steeplechase and Luna's attractions, put together, created enough publicity for a boom in tourism that greatly benefited both parks. This wouldn't last long, though.

Dreamland: Bigger, Better and Bad For Profit

Just when it seemed like Coney Island was finally in balance, William Henry Reynolds decided to take what was in many ways a quintessentially Coney Island course of action: surreptitiously buy a plot of land that, tellingly, had once belonged to John McKane, leverage city connections to get rid of a troublesome public road on the property, and open an improved recreation of the currently most popular and sophisticated attraction on the island, Luna Park.

However, whereas the men behind each of the previous parks (Sea Lion, Steeplechase, and Luna) were lifelong showmen who shared a passion for entertainment, Reynolds was a profit-focused developer who saw a lucrative and growing Coney Island amusement industry, and decided he wanted a piece. While Dreamland spared no expense in its blatant plagiarism of Luna Park, its management failed to understand that Coney Island was already stretched to a limit with two major amusement parks and dozens of independent rides and restaurants.¹⁹

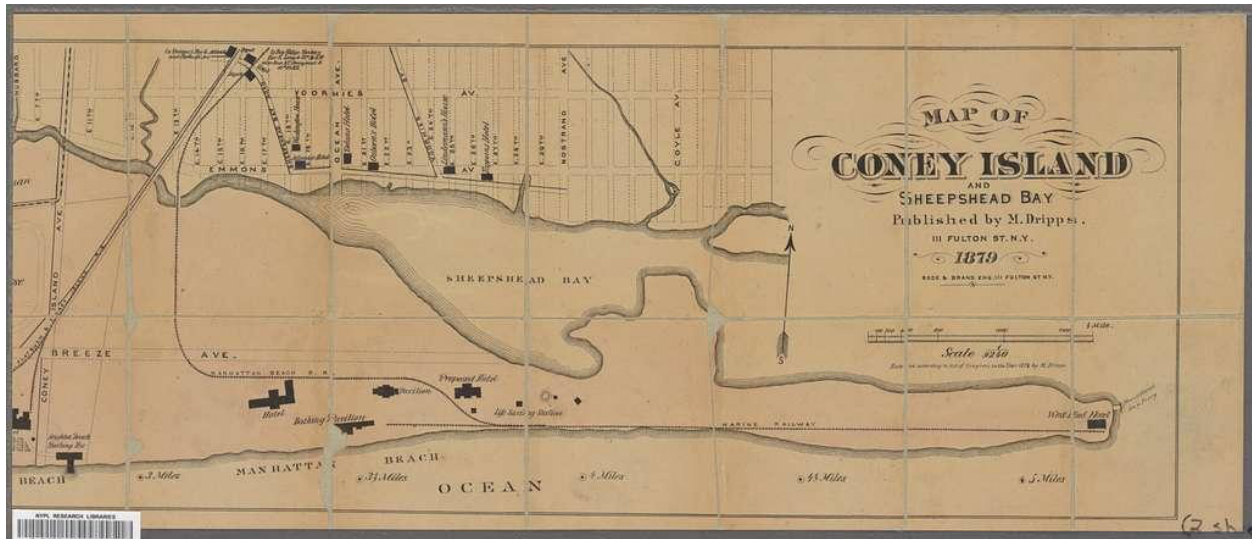
Previous competition had largely been iterative, with new parks taking the best ideas from predecessors and making them their own. However, the construction of Dreamland began a period of brutal back-and-forth spending where Luna Park and Dreamland were forced to upgrade at an unnaturally rapid pace in order to remain relevant.²⁰ A relentless cycle of change was built not on creative progress but on economic warfare. If Luna Park built a tower with a quarter of a million lights, you can very well expect that Dreamland would soon construct a tower with four times as many lights. In fact, Dreamland did just that, building upscaled copies of all Luna Park's most popular attractions. Even Steeplechase Park, which had long subsisted on simple, reliable, and low-maintenance rides, was forced to invest heavily in park enhancements simply to stay afloat in a Coney Island moving ever closer to all-out war between the two titanic rivals.²¹

¹⁹ Kevin Perjurer, "Defunctland: The History of Coney Island"

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Statement of the Problem



A map of Coney Island circa 1879.²²

And so we are met with the situation in 1907. The endless growth in visitation and spending spurred by ever more ludicrous attractions has, frankly, reached its limit. The revenue from current visitors to Coney Island is insufficient to cover any of the three parks' costs, and all are struggling as a result. To make matters worse, parks are each slashing prices in order to attract visitors, leading to a race to the bottom that hurts all parties.

But there is hope—all three parks still have modest, albeit dwindling, financial reserves: Steeplechase Park and Luna Park from their years of profitable operation prior to Dreamland's opening, and Dreamland from the still-hopeful investors that funded its construction. These financial reserves have meant that, to date, the parks have largely weathered this crisis without needing to close, lay off employees, or defer upkeep on attractions. But as all three parks hemorrhage money and reserves dwindle, it's unclear how long this can continue.

²² New York Public Library. 1879. "Map of Coney Island." NYPL. 1879. <https://nypl.getarchive.net/media/map-of-coney-island-and-sheepshead-bay-d256da>.

What makes this situation even more delicate is the other businesses and services that depend on the parks' well-being to survive. Highly profitable rail lines, hotels, eateries, and piers are all in large part sustained by visitors who come to Coney to see the wonders of Dreamland, Steeplechase, or Luna parks.²³ The demise of the parks could very well spell the demise of Coney Island as we know it.

Relief to the parks' fiscal crisis could come in various forms, each one with its benefits and drawbacks. These are a few potentials, though not exhaustive, approaches. Delegates are encouraged to find creative solutions, both within and outside of these, to ensure a prosperous future for the island.

Increasing Visitation to the Island

While the availability and scale of parks seems to be outsized compared to visitation right now, it's possible things could change if more visitors were convinced to go to Coney Island. Fare sales on the railroads, better advertising, and more could all play a role in both attracting new visitors and encouraging current visitors to return to the island more often. Another factor is that the vast majority of visitors to Coney Island originate from the city of New York, with most direct railroad service from the island terminating within the city. If the island could devise ways to attract more visitation from other population centers in the area, like Newark and Bayonne in New Jersey, perhaps with new ferry services or direct through-running railroads, that could help increase visitation. Coney Island could also look for ways to draw overnight visitors from cities further away, including Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Haven, and Boston.

Increasing Visitor Spending

Most visitors to Coney Island only visit for the day and only visit one park. As such, their daily spending on the island is largely limited to a roundtrip train ticket, a single park admission, and a meal. Policies that

²³ Stanton, "History Site."

encourage traditionally stingy Coney Island visitors to open their wallets would certainly be welcome for the islands' parks and attractions, so long as visitation is not sacrificed. Increased visitor spending could come through coordinated price increases of Coney Island's parks and attractions, but could also be achieved by encouraging visitors to do/spend more during their visits, or perhaps visit more than one park in a day (think bundle deals, multi-park passes, more).

Whatever the policies considered, Coney Island stakeholders must realize the delicate balance that exists between the island's attractions. If the large amusement parks raise prices, for example, visitors may have a smaller sum left over and be less willing to spend on smaller independent attractions and restaurants. The same may occur if railroad fares increase. Or, seeing a price increase, visitors may forgo the large parks entirely and opt to visit only the smaller independent attractions. Or they might choose not to visit at all. In any case, delegates must realize that the price and quality of each park and attraction affects visitation to every other attraction.

Closing Attractions

If the issue in Coney Island is that there are far too many businesses competing for few visitor dollars, a model where a number of attractions are closed could help in ensuring the rest of the attractions receive enough business to survive sustainably. It's likely that if no action was taken, this would happen naturally (and in reality, it did), but by the time that enough attractions fail to allow the rest to operate profitably, the rest of the park's businesses would have suffered years of losses. This also risks giving Coney Island a reputation as run down, with empty lots and abandoned attractions potentially impairing visitation. If certain parks or attractions were to close for the benefit of the rest of the island, this would ideally take place sooner rather than later, and in an organized way (replacing closed attractions with a public park, field, or something that isn't an eyesore).

Bailout

Many of Coney Island's businessmen are well connected with local politicians, as well as with the greater elite of wealthy investors and railroad tycoons. With a cash injection from one of these sources, Coney Island businesses could in large part ignore their current financial woes, at least temporarily.²⁴

As delegates consider these and other approaches to the problem of ensuring financial stability for Coney Island parks, it is pivotal to ensure the spirit of Coney Island is not lost in the process. Coney Island's history has been defined by extreme risk-taking, both successful and not. While the ludicrous attractions that were built here so far may not all have been sound financial decisions in themselves, they've led Coney Island to contribute more innovation in amusement than perhaps anywhere else on earth, past and future. Your challenge as a committee, then, is to balance the grit and innovation that defines Coney while bringing the stability and rhythm necessary for parks to turn a profit.

²⁴ "The People." PBS

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

Note: All characters below were real people who played a role in Coney's tapestry. And while some of these individuals may have passed away prior to 1907, for the sake of the committee, we are to assume that they are still alive. After all, this is a roleplaying activity.

ANDREW CULVER, RAILROAD OWNER

Andrew Culver adored model trains. As a child, he would build dozens of miniature engines, setting them across miles of tiny tracks laid across his bedroom floor in a jumble of lines and stops. But if there was one thing he loved more than his replica railroads, it was profiting off of them. Younger siblings would be charged five cents apiece for passage of their dollies and teddy bears on the Culver Express. Andrew soon realized that the more railroads he built, the more money he would earn. This simple apothegm would become his motto going forward, as Culver grew older and his focus shifted from model trains to real ones. Nothing brought him more joy than seeing one of his railroads stretch into the boundless horizon, and the thought of the dollars those tracks would bring him.

Culver devoted his life to the railroad industry, quickly gaining notoriety across New York City as a man driven by an all-consuming desire to build tracks as fast and as far as he could. He soon invested in a train line connecting Coney Island's burgeoning entertainment scene to the greater New York area, and it is this interest that brings Culver to the table today. Though Coney's businesses are struggling financially, the island is still prime ground for transportation lines that could bring in thousands more tourists. Culver believes that if you simply build the lines, the tourists will follow, and he's willing to go the extra mile to prove that sometimes the answer to a problem is simply more trains.

WILLIAM H. ANDERSON, SUPERINTENDENT OF THE NEW YORK ANTI-SALOON LEAGUE

Born in the sleepy Illinois town of Carlinville, William Anderson didn't have much to do as a child. Bored and looking for a thrill, in sixth grade Anderson was convinced by a few friends to knock back a few bottles of root beer behind the local pharmacy. Given that root beer contains negligible amounts of alcohol, the effects were nonexistent. Nonetheless, Anderson and his friends went on to knock over one of the town's prized potted flower vases outside City Hall on the sugar rush, an experience he would deeply regret. Anderson figured if a drink with absolutely no alcohol in it could spur such behavior in otherwise well-behaved teens, any alcoholic beverages must have catastrophic effects. He swore that nothing stronger than a glass of milk would touch his lips for as long as he lived, and had soon talked his friends into promising the same.

While the logic behind such thinking was questionable, Anderson's newfound commitment to temperance was not. He received his law degree from the University of Michigan Law School and immediately sought to wield it against the forces of alcoholism, joining the Anti-Saloon League as a lawyer. The League, an influential temperance organization, soon promoted Anderson to superintendent of their New York division. From his newfound position, he soon set his sight on a district notorious for its excesses of consumption - Coney Island.

Anderson's crusade against the debauchery and dangers of Coney are backed up by the League's formidable legal and political apparatus, not to mention a growing movement for abstention from alcohol. With his righteous conviction and dogged determination, there is little that can stand between William Anderson and his goal to totally liberate Coney Island from the civil menace of the bottle.

CAPTAIN PAUL BOYTON, SHOWMAN AND MEDIA PERSONALITY

The Fearless Frogman is not happy. Paul Boyton has had a career that would have exhausted a dozen lesser men - and that's not just a line from one of his many promotional posters. After amazing the world with his

astonishing feats of endurance performed in his signature rubber “frog” suit, crossing oceans and swimming rivers for weeks on end, you would think even an ambitious showman might be willing to call it quits. But not Boyton.

After a brief stint in the Peruvian Navy earned him the title of “Captain,” he took it upon himself to reinvent the world of amusements as we know it today. Boyton’s Shoot the Chutes ride, and the Sea Lion Park would eventually headline and revolutionize the way the industry thought about leisure. It raked in a considerable profit for a man already known the world over as a true entertainer and entrepreneur, right up until an unfortunate turn of weather and geography forced Sea Lion to close. Boyton grudgingly sold Sea Lion and went into retirement, having managed a truly impressive list of accomplishments and safe in the knowledge that Sea Lion Park and Coney Island were firmly on the “up and up.”

But with Luna Park (Sea Lion’s successor) teetering on the edge of ruin and Coney Island nearing shambles, Boyton has had enough. The young know-nothings running today’s parks need to be taught a lesson, and Paul Boyton is just the man for the job. Though his retirement has faded his celebrity status slightly, Boyton is still a force to be reckoned with. With a knowledge of the industry second to none and a considerable worldwide star presence, he’s going to restore Coney Island to the glory he helped give it; or else his name isn’t Captain Paul Boyton, the Fearless Frogman.

E.J PERRY, SILHOUETTE ARTIST

From as far back as he could remember, E.J Perry was fascinated by lights and shadows. He’d spend hours wandering the streets of his South Carolina hometown, watching the way the moon traced pale outlines of the tall willows that lined the streets. No one ever seemed to notice the slight, quiet boy walking alongside them, and Perry often overheard conversations that exposed him to secrets he wasn’t meant to know.

Eventually, Perry’s love of shadow led him to silhouette portraits, a skill he quickly mastered. He moved to New York City, where he soon found work drawing the shadowy likenesses of, among others, the famed horror

writer H.P Lovecraft. While his portrait commissions took him all across the city, he would gain lasting fame from the decades he spent at Luna and Dreamland parks at Coney Island, setting up his light and easel and waiting for passersby to draw near. The bright shine of the island's countless rides and amusements was an endless source of wonder and inspiration for the developing artist, and he came to love the way Coney Island toyed combined gaudy lights with a shady underbelly that never ceased to fascinate him.

Perry still has his love of shadows, and he's quick to notice small details hidden in the dark that most would ignore. Over a long and prominent career, thousands of New York's most influential individuals have sat for an E.J Perry silhouette, and many have let slip enigmas that Perry keeps tucked away for future use. With so many notables from around New York City gathered to discuss the future of Coney Island, Perry is in the perfect place to use his artistic skills and trove of hidden knowledge to fight for the island he loves- from the shadows, of course.

PELLEGRINO MORANO, BOSS OF THE CONEY ISLAND CAMORRA GANG

Pellegrino Morano has a habit of making people offers they can't refuse. Originally a humble barber from the Campania region of Italy, Morano crossed the Atlantic in 1892 to seek a better life in the United States of America. Unfortunately, it seems that Morano may have left his moral compass back in his native Italy, as the first money he made upon arriving in New York came from the sale of stolen horses.

Eventually, Morano would come to see the error of his ways, opening up a small restaurant on Coney Island as an honest businessman. At least, that's the story Pellegrino Morano gave the public. Regrettably, it was not a true story. Morano's Santa Lucia restaurant, besides serving up the finest margherita pizza in Brooklyn, is mostly just a front for his criminal gang, which runs a host of very profitable rackets ranging from vanilla gambling to lotteries to even a conspiracy to corner the artichoke market.

Morano isn't happy about all these big players coming into his home turf to talk about the future of Coney Island. He's used to handling business in a less, shall we say, formal manner. But he's willing to play nice... for now. He's got plenty of underworld connections among Coney's seedier side, if push comes to shove, and he's not afraid to play every dirty trick he's got to make sure his criminal enterprises stay safe from meddling bureaucrats and sanctimonious reformers. Anyone who crosses him is bound to learn that revenge, like the finest caprese salad, is a dish best served cold.

MARY E. DILLON, PRESIDENT OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH GAS COMPANY

Mary Dillon has had enough of your nonsense, thank you very much. Second in a family of eight siblings, she started at the Brooklyn Borough Gas Company at the age of seventeen to replace her tuberculosis-afflicted older sister. If Mary wasn't putting food on the table, who would? And Mary E. Dillon knew how to put food on the table. Beginning as a simple junior clerk, she rose through the ranks of the BBGC at a meteoric pace, going from office manager to vice president and eventually becoming the chairman of the company at the age of just thirty-five. She quickly ran her company through a breakneck series of reforms, transforming the modest utility provider into an efficient, effective, and respected player in the gas industry.

Mary Dillon doesn't have time for games. Her utility supplies the gas that powers not just Coney Island's many restaurants and stores, but also hundreds of thousands of Brooklyn residents. If there's one thing she can't stand, it's instability in a market, and Coney Island is just about the dictionary definition of the word. She's here to ensure that the businesses of Coney Island get their act together if they have any intention of keeping the gas flowing to their operations. With the backing of her company and a take-no-prisoners attitude, it's her intention to get the bickering players on the island to get their acts together or die trying.

WILLIAM F. MANGELS, MACHINIST AND SCHOLAR

William Mangels doesn't suffer fools gladly. Actually, he doesn't suffer fools at all. Though he's a brilliant inventor of amusement park rides, Mangels is known in the industry less for his skill and more for his extremely demanding standards of quality. Carrying on the meticulous approach to discipline practiced by his German craftsman ancestors, Mangels' factory is run with military-grade precision. Though this control-freak nature doesn't make him the biggest hit at factory parties, Mangels' rides are considered a gold standard throughout Coney Island. With hit designs like the Whip and the Tickler, mechanical thrillers crafted by the Mangels workshop are in high demand from operators all across the island.

That's not to say that Mangels doesn't have a whimsical side, though. When not holding his workforce to the highest standards of perfection, he's an amateur scholar of amusements. The only thing that Mangels enjoys more than creating fun (or having any fun in his factories) is learning about it. His Museum of Public Recreation houses displays from all eras of amusement history, and he'll spare no expense to acquire new items for his collection.

Like many business owners who supply Coney Island with its rides and attractions, Mangels is concerned about the declining fortunes of the island's major parks. Park closures mean fewer customers for his immaculately engineered rides, and that's an imperfection Mangels simply can't stand. With his methodical attention to detail and a burning desire to get the job done right, Mangels is ready to engineer a perfect solution to the island's woes. Maybe he'll even find a few more pieces to display in his museum while he's at it.

CARRIE NATION, TEMPERANCE ADVOCATE

No one knows exactly who invited Carrie Nation to this meeting, if in fact she was invited. However, the fact that she brandishes a large and very sharp hatchet has proven a very convincing argument to all the delegates gathered to discuss the fate of Coney Island, and it is clear that Carrie Nation is here to stay. A notorious temperance advocate, Carrie Nation's saloon-busting career began when her Union Army doctor of a husband

became an alcoholic. After he drank himself to death within sixteen months of their marriage, a twenty-two year old Nation decided enough was enough.

She went from the owner of a well-run Kansas hotel to a national figurehead of Prohibition, drawing friends and foes alike for her fiery rhetoric and especially for her ax-wielding escapades where she single-handedly destroyed entire saloons. Naturally, a figure like Nation was bound to be invited to Coney Island. On the offer of none other than George Tilyou of Steeplechase Park, Nation headed to what she called “The most iniquitous resort in America” to give a lecture series. While her speaking engagements were less than popular, Nation hasn’t forgotten Coney Island and the vices it represents. With news of the island’s dire financial straits, Nation is back and out for blood. She’s determined to reform Coney, no matter how many axes she has to use in the process.

SAMUEL GUMPERTZ, SHOWMAN AND DREAMLAND GENERAL MANAGER

Born in Washington, D.C., in 1868, Samuel Gumpert's life has had no shortage of excitement. At just nine years old, he left home to join the circus, performing as an acrobat before moving on to sing at San Francisco’s Tivoli Opera House by age twelve. His adventures didn’t stop there—he tried his hand at ranching in Texas and even joined Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show as a Rough Rider. A true Renaissance man, Gumpertz also produced Shakespearean plays, managed two theaters, and launched the career of Harry Houdini. But Gumpertz isn’t done.

His varied experiences and showmanship made him the perfect fit for Dreamland, where he now presides as General Manager, bringing his flair for the spectacular to one of Coney Island’s most iconic attractions. If anyone can help steer Dreamland back on track, it’s the man who’s done everything there is to do in show business- and more.

MARCUS CHARLES ILLIONS, CARVER OF CAROUSELS

In the world of carousel carvers, there are many fine and talented carvers. And then there's Marcus C. Illions. Hailed as "The Michelangelo of Carousel Carvers" by the New York Times, the Lithuanian-born sculptor trained in England before establishing his New York City workshop. Illions' outfit would be amongst the workshops credited with establishing the Coney Island style of carousels- naturalistic, strong-looking animals with windswept manes and open mouths. A perfectionist by nature, Illions' Ocean Parkway workshop on Coney Island is a temple to artistry and craftsmanship.

With carousels from Illions' workshop held in such high regard by Coney Island's major parks, he holds a vested interest in ensuring that they stay in good financial condition so that Illions' beautiful carousels can be appreciated in the majestic settings they deserve. Nothing irks this proud artist more than the thought of Coney Island degrading into a place unfit to house his carousels, and his workshop is more than ready to fight for the dignity of Coney and its amusements.

GRANVILLE T. WOODS, TRANSIT INVENTOR

Even his bitterest rivals would be hard-pressed to deny that Granville Woods has class. Born a poor waiter's son in Columbus, Ohio, the young Granville was a scholar from the very beginning. Unable to access his local libraries due to the prevailing racism of his time, Woods would ask friends to check out books on his behalf. While his peers mucked around during the muggy Columbus summers, Granville Woods was bent over texts ranging from physics to aerodynamics. His neighbors dubbed him "the Professor" on account of his studious nature and elegant bearing, a distinction Woods was keen to encourage.

As a young man, Granville Woods moved to New York City in order to pursue studies in engineering and electricity, convinced that the future would be defined by advancements in these technologies. And he wasn't wrong- an early invention of his, known as telegraphony, was bought by none less than Alexander Graham Bell's company. It would go on to revolutionize railroad communications, and the profits from its sale allowed Woods

to pursue inventing full-time. When not spending his time inventing, Woods developed a reputation for his chic, all-black wardrobe of tailored suits, and his refined sensibilities earned him the respect of clients and passersby alike.

Woods' successes, however, painted a large target on his back as imitators and patent thieves aimed to cash in on his genius. Ironically, for a man often called the "Black Edison," Woods found himself battling Thomas Edison's company for attempting to steal one of Woods' patents. Though he eventually won the case, the ensuing legal struggles drained much of the young inventor's financial reserves. Woods, fed up with mainland New York, has recently moved to Coney Island, where the Figure Eight roller coaster prominently features his "third rail" electric propulsion system. He's decided to turn his genius to the embattled island, and if there's anyone who can invent a way out of the mess Coney is in, it's Granville T. Woods.

WILLIAM J. WARD, BATHHOUSE OWNER

It's getting a little boring to be William Ward, to be honest. When you're running a profitable Coney Island bathhouse named after your father (who you inherited it from), and are also the newly appointed president of the Bank of Coney Island, life starts to lose a little bit of its luster. But it wasn't always this way. Growing up, young Billy Ward loved the mechanical wonders of his home island more than anything. Each trip to the boardwalk was a glimpse at marvels that fascinated the growing boy. What Ward wanted, more than anything in the world, was to live the kind of life promised by the gaudy greasepaint signs and balloons, a life of wonder and enchantment. Instead, he was groomed for an existence of banal comfort, poised to inherit his father's world of expense tables and benefit dinners.

Though he's become every bit the successful businessman, Ward's heart still lies with Coney Island's potential to be a place that lights smiles on the faces of children like the boy he was so many years ago. He's decided

to finally put his talents to work for a cause he truly believes in, and throw himself into the struggle to keep Coney Island afloat and magical for decades to come.

FRANK BOSTOCK, LION TAMER

If animal trainers had royalty, Frank Bostock would certainly be a king- a lion king, that is. Bostock's family had been handling exotic beasts since 1810, when his grandfather George Wombwell started his traveling menagerie in England with fifteen wagons of creatures from across the globe. By 1878, Frank had joined the family business, venturing into the ring for the first time at twelve years old when the usual trainer was out with an injury. The twelve-year-old Bostock was a natural, and he soon grew into a master of the field, traveling Britain with the family menagerie.

Eventually, Bostock decided to strike out on his own, and soon after marrying in 1893 moved to the United States. Joining him in his new life were three lions and a kangaroo, the latter of which would quickly become a New York sensation as a combatant in several well-publicized boxing matches arranged between the kangaroo and human competitors. His kangaroo antics proved profitable enough for Bostock to open an animal show at Balmer's Bathing Pavilion on Coney Island. His show, appropriately dubbed Bostock's "Jungle," was a smash hit, drawing crowds of thousands. A true pioneer in the field, Bostock was the first to figure out that a lion could be controlled by strategic use of a chair, and penned 1903's *The Training of Wild Animals*, which would go on to inspire a generation of lion tamers.

Bostock's fame led none other than Dreamland's Samuel Gumpertz to extend an offer for the animal trainer to move his menagerie to a purpose-built stage at the park. Now dazzling Dreamland visitors with his collection of fantastic beasts, Bostock's trademark intrepidity and showman's swagger will be well suited to reinvigorating the struggling park's economy.

CHARLES FELTMAN, RESTAURANT OWNER AND HOT DOG PIONEER

Born in Germany in 1841, a fifteen-year old Charles Feltman immigrated to the United States in 1856. By 1867, he was peddling the famous sausages of his native Germany out of a converted pie wagon, strolling the seaside boardwalks of Coney Island with his wares in hand. It was around this time that Feltman is credited with the invention of the dish we know today as the classic hot dog, though many different origin stories have been offered. One legend states that the hot dog came about when Feltman decided to place his pork sausages on a bun so that busy customers could eat their meals and walk at the same time. Another version of the story claims that a thrifty Feltman, unwilling to shell out for plates and cutlery, came up with hot dogs as a way to save on business costs.

When they were first invented, the sausage-bun combo wasn't originally known as the hot dog- that name wouldn't become mainstream until the early 1900s. Instead, the sausages were known as "red hots," a nod to the scalding grills where they were often cooked up for hungry lunch goers. Regardless of where the idea came from or what they were called, Feltman's sausages were a massive hit. In 1871, he swapped his wagon for a more permanent stand on Surf Avenue. In his first year of operation alone, he sold 3,684 Coney Island red hots to eager passers-by, and Feltman's empire would only grow from there, to include several restaurants, pavilions, and even an outdoor theater.

As a large business owner on Coney Island, Feltman is feeling the squeeze of competition like everyone else. Feltman will need to stay on top of his game if he wants to remain king of Coney Island's meats, as he navigates the war between the island's major amusement parks. Still, Feltman has considerable power in Coney's entertainment scene. As an independent enterprise, he's able to maintain a measure of detachment from the three big parks, and Feltman's dogs have been enjoyed by the likes of President William Howard Taft. If anyone can come out of this as top dog, it's Charles Feltman.

DR. MARTIN COUNEY, MEDIC AND SHOWMAN

Michael Cohn was born in 1869 in Krotoszyn, a small town in what was then the German Empire. A natural-born showman, he left his native Prussia to pursue carnival work and toured England. In 1888, at the age of 19, he crossed the Atlantic and moved to the United States, where he would eventually become a naturalized citizen under the name Martin Couney. He boasted an impressive series of credentials, including studying medicine in Berlin and training under famed pediatrician Pierre Budin, regarded as the father of modern neonatal medicine. In 1896, as the story goes, Couney took the lessons of his mentor Dr. Budin to develop a pioneering infant incubator exhibit at the Berlin Great Industrial Exposition. Most of Couney's claims, however, were fictitious. He almost certainly never studied medicine at all, and the incubator he claimed as his own invention was merely licensed. However, while his early resume may not have been genuine, his later documented successes certainly were.

He would go on to open exhibits of his incubators at events ranging from Paris's 1900 Exposition Universelle to 1905's Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland, Oregon. Eventually, however, Dr. Couney would settle down, moving to Coney Island where he would open permanent displays at both Luna Park and Dreamland in 1903. Though the cost to house a single baby in a Couney incubator ran the modern day equivalent of four hundred dollars per day, all expenses were covered by the twenty-five cent fees the public paid to gawk at the babies in their "ovens."

The medical community has largely rejected Couney's incubators as serious life saving tools, and a majority of hospitals don't take him seriously. However, he's not without friends in high places, counting prominent neonatologist Julius Hess and several local doctors among his supporters. Additionally, Couney has earned the gratitude and respect of thousands of parents around New York thanks to his efforts, many of whom credit him with saving their children's lives. With all the attention pouring into Coney Island given the imminent meeting of the Amusements Association, now is the perfect time for Couney to bring his cherished cause into the

limelight and gain mainstream traction. Running displays at two of the three main amusement parks positions him well as a mediator across Coney Island, as a man whose good intentions are unimpeachable and whose positive impact for the youngest and most vulnerable cannot be denied.

JAMES LAFFERTY, INVENTOR, ARCHITECT, AND EMBITTERED BUSINESSMAN

James V. Lafferty has always yearned to innovate, especially when it comes to animal-shaped architecture. From the moment he created his first cow-shaped hot dog stand in 1875 (see history of the problem), he knew he'd stumbled upon perhaps the best idea known to man. He went on to create Lucy the Elephant in New Jersey, as well as his magnum opus, the Elephant Hotel of Coney Island, which he opened in 1885 and went on to operate profitably for a few years. Over time, however, crowds to the elephant waned and profits fell. Later efforts to bring back crowds, such as the partnership with Lorenzo Shaw to bring a rollercoaster to the elephant in 1889, were partially successful, and brought Lafferty some financial stability, but didn't last long enough to make him rich. The elephant hotel burned down in 1896, thrusting Lafferty into a deep sadness.

But not all hope is lost. While Lafferty may have lost his greatest work, he still holds Patent Number 268503, which gives him exclusive rights to animal-shaped architecture in the US. He also maintains his connections with the various Coney Island investors. Perhaps, with a few right steps, he could one day relive his glory days.

MICHAEL J. KENNEDY, PARKS COMMISSIONER, BROOKLYN AND QUEENS

Michael Kennedy was the parks commissioner for Brooklyn and Queens beginning in 1906. He was born in Ireland and moved to NYC at three years old. He joined the management of the Kennedy and O'Connell dock building firm, before pivoting to a political career and assisting in the campaign and election for the-mayor of

Brooklyn Seth Low. Following Low's election, Kennedy was appointed as the commissioner of parks for the borough. As parks commissioner, he has the power to oversee the process of building and maintaining parks in the borough, and as such has large influence in the use of park and beach space on Coney Island.

MACDONOUGH CRAVEN, SANITATION COMMISSIONER

As industrialization has grown New York into a metropolitan behemoth, the city has been besieged by garbage. New Yorkers fight a seemingly endless battle with shoddy plumbing and a waste collection system that can be generously described as unreliable, and Coney Island is no exception. Luckily, MacDonough Craven knows exactly how to fight and win his battles.

Born to a longtime Navy family, Craven attended the Naval Academy and served in the Spanish-American war. He soon proved a capable commander, methodical and ruthless in his determination to eradicate the foe. After the war ended, Craven joined up with the New York sanitation department, where his military precision led him to rise the ranks at breakneck speed. Appointed commissioner in 1906, Craven now finds his attention turned to Coney Island. Years of less-than-stellar management by local government and a loose adherence to construction standards have made the island a waste collection nightmare. With a major disaster or disease outbreak only one accident away, it's time for Craven to direct his military mind to cleaning Coney up—both literally and figuratively.

NATHAN HANDWERKER, NATHAN'S FAMOUS HOT DOGS

Nathan Handwerker is a Polish Jewish shoemaker and one of 13 children, who migrated to New York City in 1912²⁵. He began to work at a restaurant called Feltman's German Gardens on Coney Island, where the

²⁵ Millie Zeller, "History Of Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs At Coney Island."

hot dog has recently been invented and capitalized on as a new snack for hungry amusement park-goers. However, due to Nathan's low salary and pressure by two struggling singing waiters, he is thinking about opening a competing hot dog stand nearby and undercutting Feltman's prices. At such low prices, people may be suspicious of a competing hot dog vendor, and getting loyal Feltman customers to switch over will be an uphill battle.²⁶ What can Nathan do to advertise his hot dog stand and make it "stand" out from fellow competitors? With a healthy amount of luck and a lot of business tactics, Nathan may one day be able to compete successfully against Feltman and rise as the underdog in the hot dog business - his success or failure on Coney Island will make or break his career.

PAUL BAUER, REAL ESTATE PROPRIETOR

Paul Bauer was an enterprising German who emigrated from Austria to the United States and rose to the rank of captain in the Union Army during the Civil War.²⁷ An entrepreneur and music lover who had gained his finer tastes from the music scene in Vienna, Bauer set his sights on West Brighton on a visit in 1876, where he had pledged to make the beachfront the best place his wife had ever seen²⁸. Bauer obtained a lease to the land between West 6th and West 8th streets from John McKane at a low price (potentially due to his daughter's connection to McKane's younger brother), and began construction on a grandiose hotel with the help of McKane's construction company. Bauer's Atlantic Garden Hotel, later renamed the West Brighton Beach Hotel, subsequently opened in May of 1876, filled to the brim with gaudy decorations, live bandstands, and a restaurant that could serve eight-thousand diners at once. Bauer often profited off of the island's reputation for vice: his hotel dispensed prodigious amounts of alcohol, and he created a casino to serve the needs of the island-goers. However, he did recognize the unsavory nature of West Brighton and pledged to take it into his own hands,

²⁶ NYC EATS, "Nathan Handwerker."

²⁷ The Daily Whig, "A Dramatic Scene Unfolds at a Trial In a Court Room."

²⁸ Sullivan, "The Comprehensive History of Coney Island."

stating that “[t]he condition of my surroundings is so bad that I am going to stay down here this winter and rip and tear right and left among the shanties and dens.... I have invested an immense amount of money here and I cannot afford to let my place be hurt by the low dens established in the neighborhood.” Despite his apparent change of heart, he was arrested on charges of allowing gambling in his West Brighton Hotel, caught in the middle of a political scandal involving John McKane’s rigging of Gravesend voting in the 1884 Presidential Election. However, Bauer is now back from jail with a renewed purpose to reinstate his influence on Coney Island in its new era. He is more than ready to use whatever means necessary to make sure Coney Island remembers his name.

HARRY HOUDINI, MAGICIAN AND ENTERTAINER

Harry Houdini was known to the world as one of the most popular and dazzling entertainers: a magician who thrilled audiences with seemingly impossible escapes and tricks²⁹. Born in Hungary as Ehrich Weiss, he immigrated to Wisconsin when his father got a job as a rabbi in America. With four brothers, Weiss’s family struggled to make ends meet, which was when young Ehrich made his debut as a trapeze artist in the neighborhood circus. He soon moved to New York with his father, teaming up with his friend Jacob in 1891 for a magic act they called the “Brothers Houdini.” Houdini and Jacob left his home after his father’s death, traveling the road with Jacob in an attempt to make it as magicians who dealt in an unremarkable collection of card and magic tricks. One of his stops was to West Brighton Beach on Coney Island, where he performed a show stopping trick where he seemingly passed through a solid brick wall³⁰. Coney Island was also where he met his future wife Bess, or Wilhelmina Beatrice Rahner, who he later performed with. Houdini’s big break came while he was performing a handcuff trick in Minnesota with Bess where Martin Beck, a rising tycoon in vaudeville theater, spotted the performer and invited Houdini to perform from the Midwest to California. Houdini later expanded

²⁹ PBS, “Harry Houdini(1874-1926)

³⁰ Sullivan, “The Comprehensive History of Coney Island.”

his range, traveling across Europe as an ever-growing magician who stunned audiences. He returned to America to put down his roots, and has traveled as a performer since. With the rise of business from Coney Island's amusement parks, Harry has begun to find more appeal in the spot where he met his wife, and has returned to the parks in an attempt to gather larger crowds and return to the place where he performed in his early days. Harry now has a chance to reform Coney in the interest of bringing attention to entertainers such as himself while maintaining his status as one of the world's most famous magicians. Despite being widely known, Harry has a reputation to uphold, and tricks that must not be exposed throughout his attempts to capitalize on Coney Island's fame: as they say, a magician never reveals their secrets.

SOPHIE TUCKER, VAUDEVILLE PERFORMER

Born in Ukraine as Sophie Abuza, Sophie Tucker was an international music and stage performer who soon made headlines across America.³¹ She came to Hartford in 1886, where she sang at her family's restaurant for tips despite her family's disapproval of her wishes to become a star. After a short-lived marriage with Louis Tuck, Sophie changed her name to Sophie Tucker and left her family to pursue show business in New York City, initially performing at vaudeville shows, and then touring with her band around Europe. She performed multiple times at the Henderson Music Hall on Coney Island, even going so far as to write a song to promote Nathan's Famous hot dogs, a staple on Coney Island in 1921.³² Now, though, her career on Coney Island is still kicking off, and she is hoping to increase her reach and prove herself as a Jewish actress and singer. Her success is still to be decided, and her role on Coney Island's stages will be an instrumental part in writing her future legacy.

CHARLES V. FORNES, NEW YORK CITY ALDERMAN

³¹ CT Women's Hall of Fame, "Sophie Tucker"

³² Millie Zeller, "History Of Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs At Coney Island."

Charles Vincent Fornes was an American politician who served three terms as a Democratic United States Representative from New York, and was a two-time president of the New York City Board of Alderman, holding office from 1907 to 1913.³³ A former teacher and president of the Buffalo Catholic Institute and organizer of the Catholic Club, Fornes was deeply religious. He was elected president of the New York Board of Alderman on the Fusion ticket in 1901, and then re-elected on the Tammany ticket in 1903.³⁴ He then received a Democratic nomination and was elected to the Sixtieth U.S. Congress. As a previous businessman, trustee and director of several banks and corporations, he was known for his generous activity in religious and charitable enterprises of the Catholic Church. Fornes, as a representative of Coney Island, is passionate about ensuring the sanctity of the amusement parks and the success of business ventures on the Island. As a member of this council, Fornes' role as a New York bureaucrat will be essential in bringing a more administrative aspect to the committee, and shedding light on Coney Island from the perspective of the wider New York government.

John C. Proudman, Hotel Owner

John C Proudman was a local businessman who acquired the Grand Central hotel from a George Bader, who died in 1903. Proudman went on to rename the hotel the Proudman Parkway Hotel. As of 1907, hotels on the island, including Proudman's, are generally doing well—the fierce competition between parks and the new attractions it has generated, while costly for the parks, has brought in more visitation than ever to the island. For hotels like Proudman's, this has meant sold out rooms and high profits. At this point, Proudman has been in talks with a local businessman looking to purchase his property to build a casino, but he has not yet decided whether to move forward with the deal.

³³ Find a Grave, "Charles Vincent Fornes"

³⁴ New York Times Editorial Board, "CHARLES V. FORNES DIES OF STROKE AT 82"

Alfred E. Smith, New York State Assemblyman

A Manhattan native, Al Smith grew up through the difficult financial straits of the Gilded Age in New York City. Forced to drop out of school during the eighth grade after the death of his father, Smith supported his family through a variety of roles, ranging from amateur actor to assistant fishmonger at a local market. Entering politics in 1904 with his election to the New York State Assembly, Smith would quickly make a name for himself as a crusader for the rights of New York's workers, who often toiled long hours under dangerous and unsanitary conditions. Smith has great sympathy for the many Coney Island residents who, like himself, are children of immigrants forced to become their family's breadwinners in an unforgiving and often exploitative market. His ties to the powerful Tammany Hall political machine have supplied him with valuable connections, which will surely come in handy as he battles the entrenched corruption and established political machine of the island in an effort to improve the lot of Coney's common citizens. While fully aware that his Tammany allies aren't entirely on the up and up, he's willing to work with whatever unsavory characters it takes to ensure a positive outcome for the people he represents.

Belle Moskowitz, Progressive Reformer

The daughter of Jewish immigrants from German East Prussia, Belle Moskowitz took an interest in social reform from early on. She cut her teeth working with organizations such as the Temple Israel Sisterhood and Educational Alliance, community groups dedicated to improving the lot of New York's burgeoning Jewish community. Spearheading projects that ranged from dance hall regulation and reform to opening temporary shelters for young women, Moskowitz became an impassioned advocate for New York City's working-class girls. Eventually, her experiences with workers across New York's industrial landscape were parlayed into a successful practice as an industrial mediator, providing factories and firms with solutions that worked to the benefit of both employers

and employees. This practice allowed her to forge connections with many of the city's leading business figures, with her reputation as a fair-minded problem solver endearing her across social classes. With Coney Island having become such a notorious symbol for all the places New York City is woefully lacking in comprehensive social services, it was only a matter of time before Moskowitz turned her practiced hand towards solving Coney's deep-seated social and labor ills.

Robert W. Hebberd, Established the Coney Island Hospital

Robert W Hebberd is a decent man. He dedicated his life in the service of health and well-being for Coney Island. Hebberd's unyielding dedication to the welfare of others, however, stemmed from his own tragic backstory. When neither of his parents were able to attend his birth or subsequent childhood, he was left to the mercy of a collection of underfunded and painfully inadequate social agencies, none of which filled the gap in his heart left by his lack of family. Upon maturing and reaching adulthood, he threw himself into charitable work, swearing that no one else would ever have to endure the childhood he suffered through. A passionate lobbyist, he was instrumental in state legislation to create child welfare boards, going on to serve as the executive secretary of one such board for several decades. He also held the position of New York Commissioner of Charities, supporting projects across the city's boroughs. The Coney Island Hospital is but the latest step in Hebberd's determined quest to give to others what he never had himself. He won't rest until every child, not just on Coney Island but in the entire city, gets the childhood he never had.

Joe E. Howard, Performer, Composer and Filmographer

As a kid, growing up in the Bowery (Neighborhood in Manhattan), Joe Howard quickly became known for his artistic talents. From the 1880s through the 1890s, he had a somewhat-successful career on Broadway as both a performer and composer, known for making catchy tunes and bringing joy to large audiences. In 1899, in a bid to better his financial condition, Howard decided to foray into the world of filmography, filming a number of boxing matches that took place at the Coney Island athletic club between 1892-1900. After the success of these recordings, which were rented to theaters, cabarets, and fight clubs, Howard grew sizable savings, but eventually stopped recording on Coney after the island's athletic club closed in 1900. Still, Howard has numerous connections on the island, and, recognizing the value of performance and film to Coney Island's success and advancement, Howard was invited to be a part of this meeting.

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