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Setting the Record Straight: The History of  
Blood Banking—A Medical “Who Done it?”



Dr John S. Lundy

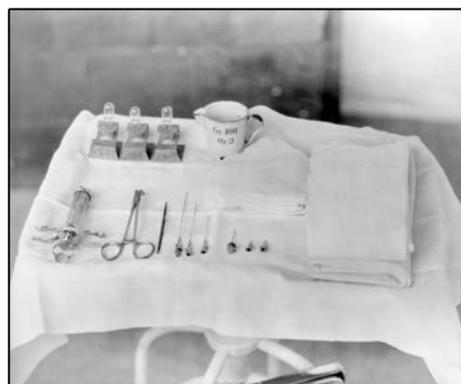
One of the most far-reaching life-saving procedures ever discovered is the ability to transfuse blood from a healthy person to an injured or otherwise ill person. Countless lives have been saved through this procedure. How did this begin, and who is credited for the discovery?

In the days of the ice box (non-electric refrigeration), surgery, anesthesiology, and many other common medical practices were in their infancy. At Mayo Clinic in 1933 and beyond, Dr John S. Lundy was assigned the task of improving pediatric blood transfusions. His expertise provided such great improvements that all blood transfusions were subsequently assigned to him and his staff in the anesthesia department. In the midst of their work, they discovered that blood could safely be stored (in the ice box) for 2 weeks without any safety concerns for the patient.<sup>1</sup>

Early transfusion practice actually began during World War I with the British army.<sup>2</sup> Very often, the credit for the first storage of blood for reuse at a later time is credited to Dr Fantus at the Cook County Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. The date for this record is 1937.<sup>2</sup> However,

Mayo Clinic historical records clearly document that Dr Lundy had described the creation of Mayo Clinic’s blood bank in his 1935 annual report. He also noted in his 1936 report that there was a significant decrease in any type of reaction to transfusions when stored blood was used.<sup>1</sup>

Another interesting historical fact with Dr Lundy and blood banking is his collaboration with Hormel & Co in Austin, Minnesota, for developing the process to quick-freeze blood—which provided a greater length of time for safe storage – another realization that was developed well in advance of this standardized practice.<sup>1</sup>



## References

1. Rabbits JA, Bacon DR, Nuttall GA, Moore SB. Mayo Clinic and the origins of blood banking. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2007;82(9):1117-1118.
2. Diamond LK. History of blood banking in the United States. *JAMA.* 1965;193(1):128-132.