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Installing Wicks in Manhattan Student Lamps

Near Right: A Manhattan Student Lamp burning brightly with shade.

Far right: The lamp burning my wick with a Student Sans Rival Chimney.

Manhattan Brass & Manufacturing Company was organized in 1865 as a fabricator of brass products. The company was listed in the New York City Directory from 1866 to 1925. The company changed its name to Manhattan Brass Company in 1875.



Above, the disassembled burner on the left, the wick, and far right is the short wick sleeve. Note the stud in the middle of the wick sleeve.

At right, the wick partially inserted into the wick tube.

The wick is split on the bottom, pulled over the very short wick sleeve with the stud in the center, then the wick is tied on securely with thread.

There is literally no room in the wick tube for any type of clip to hold the wick - it must be tightly tied to the base of the wick sleeve so the wick is secured into the indentations visible on the bottom of the sleeve.



At right, the wick sleeve has been pushed up into the wick tube. There is excess wick exposed, but that extra wick will be trimmed in a subsequent operation. Note the stud is sticking up through the middle of the slot on the wick sleeve.





At left, you can see where the stud on the wick sleeve must be started in the spiral groove. Then the burner is turned to lower the wick into the wick sleeve as far as it will go. In many Manhattan Student Lamps there is only 3 or 4 inches of movement available.

At right shows the burner fully inserted into the outer spiral tube. The wick is raised 1/8" and the excess wick exposed has been cut away. Note that the wick is not level on top - it cannot be burned that way or the resulting flame spikes would severely limit the height of the flame to not produce soot in the chimney and on the ceiling while not producing enough light to be productive.



Before any fuel is added to the lamp, the wick must be burned level by placing fuel on the exposed wick, the wick lighted, and the chimney put on. This must usually be done twice to get the wick burned perfectly level. After the fuel burns off the cotton wick itself burns down even with the wick tubes. See the photo at left to see how smooth and flat the top of the wick has become after burning it level.

The font is filled by pressing down on the tab to open the valve. Carry the font with fuel to the lamp with the valve UP, and carefully turn the font over and lower into the font holder gently.



Fill the font (above, right) with only an inch or so of pure, water clear kerosene. The fuel will flow through the tube at the bottom of the font holder to the spiraled wick tube. Let the lamp sit like this for 15 minutes to check for any leaking fuel. These lamps are over a hundred years old and it is possible for a small stress crack to develop which could leak.

After you have determined there are no leaks, the wick can be lighted and the chimney placed on the burner. The height of the flame is adjusted by turning the burner, which moves the spike in the wick sleeve within the spiral in the tube. Raising the wick by turning the burner counterclockwise often simply raises the burner: the burner must be held down while turning to the left, with one hand supporting the burner by holding up on the drip cup. Turning the wick down is accomplished by turning the burner clockwise.

Start with a low flame to slowly heat up the chimney, the burner and the fuel. As the fuel heats it becomes thinner, has greater capillary action, and the flame will grow higher. Wait at least 15 minutes until the flame has stabilized before raising the wick higher, and let it stabilize for at least another 15 minutes before adding the shade.

