

Addendum: The New Flameless Hot Water Heat Source for drying and varnishing plates works great!

Yes, yet another break through innovation from Camp Tintype that is sure to sweep the wet-plate world. Well, it deserves to, anyway. It is simply a flat hot water tank. Mine is 14"x16"x2 ½" and is made out of thin steel plate welded together. It could just as easily be made out of aluminum plates welded together or tin sheets soldered together and any size you want to make it. The tin soldered together version certainly could have been around in the 19th century and for that, is as good as "authentic". To use it, you simply fill it with very hot to boiling hot water. My hot water comes from my old tin coffee pot hung over a campfire or from off my old wood fired cook stove. However, I have been told some people have steaming hot water on tap in their labs and at home. My plate heater unit stays hot and useful for up to two hours. That's plenty of time to dry and varnish a lot of plates. It also happens to be a much faster procedure than any other method aside from the equally safe and simple one of just laying your plates out in the hot summer sun on a hot deck or black gum blanket to heat up and dry varnished plates. By this method, you don't have to dally around waving your plates over a heat source and especially over the little pencil size flame of the ultra fire hazardous alcohol "Spirit Lamp" that has a nasty habit of setting plates and sometimes people on fire.

I will take the opportunity to say here, it is simply mind boggling that some still teach the "Spirit Lamp" as the "correct" heat source when varnishing or even as one of several options. They seem to always get a big laugh when they describe how, while waving a freshly varnished plate a little too close to the hard-to-see blue flame, the plate can suddenly go Woof! into flames. I find a flaming plate in my face with open bottles of highly flammable varnish only inches away to be not cute and humorous at all! Some minds and manuals will never be changed, this we know.

So, onward to how I use my sweet little hot water heater unit. I lay one or more plates on its surface, image side up, to dry if they have not already dried in a plate rack. It only takes a minute or so for a dry plate to heat up to varnishing temperature. You then pick the plate up and varnish it in the usual way. Draining the excess varnish off, blot the drip edge carefully and then lay the plate back down on the top of the hot water tank to dry. I then go onto the next plate and do the same thing and on and on you go, as you have room on the tank. You can leave the varnished plates on it as long as you want. This is a very handy way to get the varnished surface of the plate bone dry. The old way of waving a plate over a Spirit Lamp or any heat source for a minute or so just isn't long enough to thoroughly dry the varnish. That's why, in that case, it is recommended to then leave the plates in a drying rack overnight, at the very least, to finish drying and curing out. That's not really necessary with the new hot water tank method. Like I said before, the hot water heater tank makes things go a lot faster and safer too.

Ah, but some might say getting such a contraption together is way over my head and perhaps budget, if you had a shop make one for you. Well, not so fast! You might have a unit lying around already. I first started out with an empty gallon size rectangular tin can that once had Denatured Alcohol in it. Then I doubled up with a can the same size that once had Mineral Spirits in it. Then I tripled up with a third in the array that once had Coleman Camp Stove Fuel in it. So, look around, you probably have cans kicking about like these or similar metal vessels. Here is my home built unit with a 5x7 plate on it. Also, note the cans I used to use for hot water heaters in the background:

