

Antique incubator restored to former luster

At least one collector's item was rendered obsolete when the Mycoplasma Laboratory moved from Temporary 2 to Bigelow 4 and bought new equipment. But rather than grace some sad junkpile with the brass and glass gas-operated, water-jacketed, bacteriological incubator which had been in constant use at the MGH for 80 years, Sarabella Annenburg, of the Mycoplasma Laboratory, and Stephen Hall, Bacteriology Department Laboratory Coordinator, decided to refurbish it. The result is a gleaming example of turn-of-the-century craftsmanship and science.

The incubator was first employed in 1896 by Dr. James Homer Wright, the MGH pathologist who championed the notion of a pathological laboratory separated from patient care areas in hospitals. Dr. Wright had that year toured Europe, where he observed researchers and pathologists making use of incubators to culture specimens of the recently discovered organisms--bacteria--which were proving to be the cause of so many diseases. Upon his return he commissioned Peter Grey of Boston to manufacture such a device for the hospital. After Dr. Wright, the late Dr. Louis Dienes, director of the Mycoplasma Laboratory, used the mechanism for many years. Mrs. Annenburg reports that while in use the temperature within the incubator was remarkably steady; she has never seen it change by more than half a degree.



Stephen Hall (left), Bacteriology Laboratory Coordinator, and Sarabella Annenburg, of the Mycoplasma Laboratory, with the antique incubator they saved from discard.
