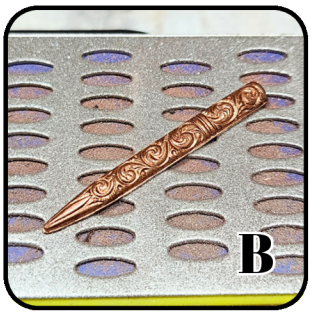
Make a Needle Holder

Use an antique impression die to re-create a sewing needle holder.

by Annie Pennington

Tools & Supplies

- 20g sterling silver sheet
- 28-26g sterling silver sheet or thin-walled tubing (size varies)
- 1-2 sterling silver jump rings
- Impression die WD-M941 Victorian Vial
- Hydraulic press
- Jeweler's saw with 2/0 or 3/0 blade
- Hand file, needle files
- Diamond hone (opt.)
- Abrasive paper, sanding discs, etc.
- Burs: Krause, cylinder, tapered cylinder, etc.
- Stainless steel binding wire or titanium clamps (opt.)
- Soldering setup
- Awl (opt.)



Make the stampings.

Make two stampings of WD-M941 and trim them so there's barely a lip around the design **[A]**. I used 20g copper, but I strongly suggest using 20g sterling silver instead. The finished piece will be much more durable.

Use a diamond hone or abrasive paper on a flat surface to sand the bottom edges of each stamping perfectly flat **[B]**. You want an even, flat edge on all sides, approx. 1mm wide **[C]**. The two halves must meet flush with no gaps **[D]**.

To allow air to escape the form while being soldered, use a jeweler's saw to make a partial cut between the two raised lines on one of the stamping **[E]**. The cut should be approx. one-quarter the width of the stamping **[F]**.

Solder the two halves.

Use stainless steel binding wire **[G]**, titanium clamps, or a third hand to secure the two halves together in preparation for soldering. I like stainless steel binding wire because it can be placed into pickle.

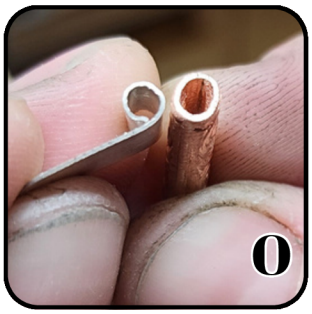
Hold the hollow form in a pair of cross-locking tweezers in a third hand, apply a generous amount of flux, and heat the assembly evenly until the flux becomes glassy **[H]**.

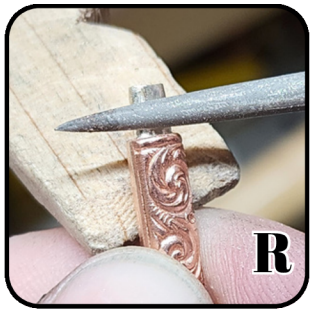
Use a soldering pick or tweezers to place small pallions of hard solder along the join **[I]**, and heat evenly until the solder flows **[J]**. Check the opposite side of the assembly to ensure the entire piece is soldered. Quench, pickle, rinse, and dry the hollow form.

Separate the top and bottom.

Use a file and abrasive paper to refine the edges of the form. Use the jeweler's saw to separate the top and bottom of the form, using the air-vent line as a guide **[K,L]**.

NOTE: There is likely going to be water and/or pickle trapped inside the hollow form that will leak out when sawing. This is okay, but I recommend placing both pieces in a bath of boiling water and baking soda to neutralize any remaining pickle before continuing.





Enlarge the openings.
File the cut ends flat [**M]**, and remove burrs from the outside of the cut ends.

Use a Krause bur **[N]**, tapered cylinder bur, cylinder bur, or needle file to enlarge the openings of both halves. Focus more on the bottom/longer half of the needle holder at this point. Carve the opening into a smooth, even oval with walls approx. 0.5mm thick. This allows room for the inner sleeve to be inserted next.

Make the inner sleeve.
This step is trial and error, so there aren't specific measurements; make tests to see what works best for you. The goal is to make an oval tube that fits into the opening of the bottom of the needle holder.

Use roundnose pliers to form a strip of 28-26g sterling silver into a cylinder approx. ½" tall **[O]**, and solder it closed.

Here's where the trial and error comes in: When slightly flattened into an oval, the end of the silver sleeve should fit tightly into the bottom of the needle holder. Use files and burs to adjust the sleeve and the opening in the needle holder until the two pieces fit snugly **[P]**. Solder the sleeve into the needle holder with hard solder **[Q]**.

Fit the top and bottom parts together.
File the top edge of the sleeve flat, then use files and burs to adjust the sleeve **[R]** and the opening in the top piece of the needle holder until the two halves fit together with no space between them **[S]**. It should be a very tight fit. Insert an awl into the top of the sleeve to expand the opening and create a tighter fit **[T]**.

Alternative sleeve: If you have a variety of thin-walled tubing available, find a size that, when flattened into an oval, fits within the opening of the needle holder. You'll need to experiment to see what size will work best for you.

Finish the needle holder.
Refine the surfaces and finish the needle holder as desired.

If the top of your needle holder is tight and quite difficult to remove, you can solder a jump ring on the top and use that to attach the holder to a necklace or chatelaine.

If the top is tight but easy to remove, solder two jump rings onto the bottom of the needle holder, one on each side just below the cut edge.

Alternatively, you can look at antique containers, lockets, and boxes to get ideas for catch mechanisms.

PotterUSA.com