MSM Bellringer

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Safety Sal — A Little-Known Exhibit

A little-known, but important historical exhibit at the museum is Safety Sal, a sign that stands in the front entry vestibule. This sign is part of the Wichita Public School historical traffic safety collection located on the third floor. Through the years, USD259 and the City of Wichita have utilized several strategies to promote the safety of school children on their way to school. The following article briefly tells this story.

As long as there has been a school in Wichita, children have walked to school and many had to cross dangerously busy streets. When horses pulled wagons and cars were new, it was easy for a child to hear the vehicle coming and jump out of the way in time. However, by the 1930s, cars were larger with more horsepower, and traffic injuries and deaths involving children walking to school increased dramatically. In 1937, a patrol officer with the Fullerton (California) Orange County safety force known as V.G. (Vivian Garner or "Skip") Wolfe, along with the young men of the Orange County 20 – 30 Club, originated Safety Sally, a life-size wooden figure of a schoolgirl. She was dressed in a blouse and skirt and placed in the middle of roads adjacent to schools.

The Safety Sal sign that was used in front of McCormick Elementary School. Photographer: Cynthia Rhodes

The Club's stationary school zone warning signs quickly caught on in Orange County. These signs were effective at alerting speeding and inattentive drivers, and the campaign soon became national. By 1948, Safety Sallys were protecting youngsters in 250 communities around the country, and the Club continued to promote safety and awareness in areas surrounding educational institutions for decades. The original signs were handmade out of plywood with the features painted on. Some school districts held contests to select a local schoolgirl to serve as a model for the signs; warning signs featuring boys were added later. Unfortunately, distracted motorists still plowed into them, and in 1940, the plywood signs were replaced with steel ones. To slow the war time traffic by schools close to the busy aircraft factories, Wichita Public Schools utilized the steel Safety Sal's with great success. Rich Sign, Inc. fashioned the Wichita Safety Sal signs which continued to be used into the 1960s, when schools began using other strategies to promote safety around educational facilities. The Safety Sal sign in the vestibule was placed in the middle of Martinson Street before students began to arrive. The sign was there all day until the custodian placed it on the grass at school's end.

As another early safety strategy, the City of Wichita and the Wichita Public Schools adopted a traffic safety plan in 1922 modeled after one from Chicago entitled "Boys' Safety-First Patrol." By the late 1940s, working with USD259, the City of Wichita Police Department appointed Sgt. L. (Louis) Elmer Million to oversee the district's Safety Patrol Program. He was instrumental in developing policy and instructed the selected school boys in how to perform the duties of the Junior Traffic Patrol (JTP). The students wore royal blue berets and a sash with the JTP logo emblazoned on both. In inclement weather, students wore yellow rain slickers and hats. Each student carried a wooden long-handled stop sign, and one student blew a signal whistle. By 1960, the Wichita City Commissioners adopted "School Traffic Safety Guidelines" to provide uniformity of safety procedures throughout the city.

As a 5th and 6th grader at Kensler Elementary School in 1968-1969, Brian L. Martin remembers being a JTP officer. He recalls being one of five boys selected by his principal and teachers to perform the duties of the Junior Traffic Patrol. When they were on-duty (before school, at noon, and after school), four of the boys held the long-handled stop signs (one at each street corner immediately in front of Kensler) and the fifth boy blew the signal whistle (one blast for signs out, and two blasts for signs in). There were no flashing school zone lights in place at that time. He remembers wearing the blue beret and, if needed, the yellow raincoat and hat; the team of five worked one week on with several weeks off until their next weekly shift. He recalls that it was an honor and privilege to do a responsible job around the school and keep kids safe.

The two safety strategies were in use into the late 1960s to early 1970s, when the city began placing school zone traffic warning lights and signs at designated crosswalk areas around educational facilities. The flashing yellow lights and distinguished

— Continued on page 2

The Newsletter of the McCormick School Museum, Inc. is published six times per year to inform constituents of the Wichita Public Schools and other interested patrons of activities and events taking place at the museum. Contributions help us to produce this publication.

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— Continued from page 1

crosswalks, along with other safety measures, are in use today to keep school children safe. We invite you to stop by to learn more about Safety Sal and other traffic safety strategies. The museum is located at 855 S. Martinson in Wichita. Museum hours of operation and contact information can be found in this Bellringer Newsletter.

Sgt. L. Elmer Million presented the Longfellow Elementary School JTP officers with a safety award in 1950.
Photographer: Parent of David G. Stuart

Museum Happenings

Thank you to our dedicated supporters who donated to the "Keep Our Bell Ringing" fundraising campaign which ran from July 1 through December 31, 2025. With a goal of $28,000, a total of $26,296.89 was raised! The money will be used to pay for 2026 museum operation expenses. We truly appreciate each of our donors and supporters! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Even though the recent Kansas Day chili supper was delayed one week due to the cold, snowy weather, our supporters came out strong, and around 100 people enjoyed a bowl of chili and toppings, corn bread, and peach cobbler. Paul Oberg sang and played Kansas tunes on his banjo while guests enjoyed their chili, visited, and competed in the USA 250/Kansas/Wichita trivia contest. A total of $1298.70 was raised at the chili supper. Thank you for braving the cold weather for a fun evening!

A recent museum acquisition of interest is the "Wichita Public Schools Outline of Lessons in Cooking for the District Schools" lesson booklet brought in by Lyndon and Tammy Drew. Published sometime around 1910, the pamphlet contains fascinating photos, recipes, and lessons designed to help students learn proper nutritional guidelines. The booklet may be found in the museum library.

We are always on the lookout for enthusiastic volunteers who want to help us with our McCormick School Museum mission. If interested, contact a staff member for more information, meet new friends, and get involved. Better yet, come by and see what we are working on! The museum is located at 855 S. Martinson in Wichita. Museum hours of operation and contact information can be found in this Bellringer Newsletter.

EVENTS & MUSEUM HOURS

The McCormick School Museum is open Wednesday from 9:00 am to noon and Sunday from 2:00 to 5:00 pm. Park to the north of the building; enter through door #4 (closest entrance to the parking lot). Ring the doorbell if needed. You may call 316-708-0676 to confirm museum hours before your visit or to schedule tours outside regular hours.

Currently, the stairway to the multipurpose room is handicap-accessible for events. Admission is by donation; your support is always appreciated.

SAVE THE DATES

MARCH 21

Boiler-Cooked Potato Bake: 5:00 to 7:00 pm
Celebrate St. Patrick's Day and enjoy a large, delicious baked potato (freshly baked in the museum boiler) with all the toppings, a green salad, and dessert. Hog Wild will once again donate the potatoes for baking! Paul Oberg will sing and play the banjo, and Patrick O'Connor will recite Irish musings and stories for the entertainment. Suggested donation: $10; kids under 12 are $5. Wear green!

JUNE 6 (Tentative)

16mm Film Fest: 5:00 to 7:00 pm
Come and watch entertaining and educational 16mm films from the McCormick School Museum film archives. Fun for all ages; families are invited. Refreshments served. Watch social media sites for more information as the date approaches.

To reserve a room for your meeting or event, contact the museum office for reservation information and availability.

For more information and to contact the museum:

Bldg. Address: 855 S. Martinson, Wichita

Postal Mail:	**P.O. Box 12881, Wichita, KS 67277**
Website:	**www.mccormickschoolmuseuminc.com**
Donations:	**www.savemccormick.com**
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