



The Common Cup – An Exhibit No Longer In Use!

Today, school children are encouraged to carry their own fashionable water bottles and insulated tumblers during the day. And all schools have drinking fountains and water dispensers available in hallways and other public spaces for water refreshes and refills. But before the availability of these personal and safe water dispensers, how did our ancestors quench their thirst during their day at school?

The answer to this question is found at McCormick School Museum in the form of the “common cup” exhibit located in the entry foyer of the east doors of the school. The following describes the evolution of the common cup into the water dispensers of today.

The 19th and early 20th century common cup consisted of a single cup or dipper that was attached to a water faucet or fountain or made available with a bucket of water. The cup was made from such materials as enamel, glass, or metal, and was placed in a public area where anyone could use it. The cup was used by many people over time and was not necessarily washed or sanitized regularly (certainly not after every use). This was the acceptable practice of the time and was considered more sanitary than drinking out of a nearby creek or pond.

Before the 19th century, the public mostly believed the miasma theory which claimed that diseases came from foul smells or “bad air”. In 1861, French microbiologist Louis Pasteur, through experimentation, disproved spontaneous generation (the false idea that life can pop up from nonliving things) and that individual germs in the air cause food spoilage and illness. Later, a German physician, Robert Koch, proved that individual germs cause specific diseases, and an English surgeon, Joseph Lister, used the new microbial discoveries to introduce antiseptic practices in hospitals and clinics, which drastically lowered infection rates. This shift to germ theory revolutionized modern medicine and public health.

By the early 20th century, American physicians and public health officials became increasingly concerned about the threat that the germs and filth of a common cup posed to those who drank from it. In 1907, a Kansas public health physician, Dr. Samuel B. Crumbine, began a

crusade to eliminate the common drinking cup after an experience on a train. Dr. Crumbine was traveling with one of his tuberculosis patients and while in the railroad car watched his patient take a drink of water out of the common drinking cup. He then watched as a young girl drank out of the same cup! Appalled, Crumbine began campaigning across the state to ban the use of common cups and other public utensils.



Photographer: Cynthia Rhodes

Kansas abolished the common cup in 1909 and advocated for the provision of disposable paper cups and the telescoping personal tin cup, among other practices. People were even taught how to fold a cup out of a piece of paper. Eventually, drinking fountains were provided in public spaces. With the advance of electricity, water fountains became water chillers, and refrigerators included freezers with ice makers for the “cold water” quenching experience. Since the advent of plastics in the 1950s, we now have the option of individual water bottles and drink containers.

Today, we do not give a second thought to carrying a reusable tumbler, drinking from disposable cups, and buying bottled water. But, when you stop to think about it, the idea behind the personal drink container started with the era of the “common cup”. You can see one at McCormick School Museum in

the east door entry foyer. The museum is located at 855 S. Martinson in Wichita. Museum hours of operation and contact information can be found in this *Bellringer Newsletter*.

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.

Editor: Cynthia Rhodes

Art Director: Brian L. Martin

Museum Happenings

The 2026 "Keep Our Bell Ringing" fundraising campaign runs through December 31, 2026, and so far, \$7,654.39 has been donated. A goal of \$30,000 has been set, and money raised will be used to pay for 2027 museum operational and building expenses. Note KOBR on your gift to designate this funding account. We truly appreciate each of our donors and supporters! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Former McCormick Elementary School classmates Michael Sipult of Arizona, Ernest Megli of Alabama, and Gary Stein of Wichita held an impromptu class reunion on-site during the afternoon of June 28. They spent several hours visiting and walking through the halls and rooms recalling common memories, lessons, and school events. If you are coming from out of town, let us know ahead of time, so we can coordinate your visit, if possible.

Recently, we welcomed WARSP members Jane Dooley and Marilyn Sharp who heeded recent requests for volunteers. After training, they are working on accessioning the many intake artifacts, documents, and photographs from recent district school closures. Thank you, Jane and Marilyn, for stepping up and joining the MSM volunteer crew which meets every Wednesday morning from 9 to noon. Every other month, volunteers eat lunch at a local restaurant for a social time together.

We are always on the lookout for enthusiastic volunteers who want to help us with our mission. If interested, contact a staff member for



Recently McCormick classmates (left to right) Ernest Megli, Gary Stein, and Michael Sipult shared stories and memories from their elementary school days. Photographer: Cynthia Davie

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

SAVE THE DATE

DECEMBER 4 - FRIDAY

Annual Holiday Open House: 9 am to 5 pm
Include a seasonal stop at McCormick School Museum for our Annual Holiday Open House Friday and enjoy musical performances by USD259 students around the large, live Christmas tree from 9:30 am to 3 pm.

DECEMBER 5 & 6 - SATURDAY & SUNDAY

Holiday Open House Weekend: 12 pm to 5 pm both days
With decorations throughout the museum and a beautiful Christmas tree, experience an old-fashioned festive season in an 1890s school setting. Ring the bell to celebrate!

DECEMBER 10 - THURSDAY

Carol Sing Around the Tree: 6:30 pm to 8 pm
Bring your friends to sing and be merry at this seasonal holiday evening event around our Christmas tree as we enjoy hot apple cider and Christmas cookies. The spirit is festive!

JANUARY 30

Kansas Day Chili Feed: 4:30 to 6:30 pm
Celebrate Kansas Day with folk songs, homemade chili and toppings, cornbread, and cobbler. Suggested donation: \$10; kids under 12 are \$5.

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:

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Postal Mail: P.O. Box 12881, Wichita, KS 67277
Website: www.mccormickschoolmuseuminc.com
Donations: www.savemccormick.com
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MSM Office: 316-558-5804 (leave a message)