



# MSM Bellringer

VOL. 3, NO. 4

NEWSLETTER OF THE MCCORMICK SCHOOL MUSEUM

JUL/AUG 2025

## The 1890s Classroom — A Living History Lesson

The students who went to school in the 1890s knew they were special because their families could afford to pay for their books, and they could be spared from farm and housework to attend. It was a different time, back then, when life was much slower and simpler and when in public, children acted like ladies and gentlemen and were taught at home to respect their elders. For many years, McCormick School offered an 1890s living history lesson to Wichita Public School students through a field trip experience. Let's reminisce.



School marm teaching her students in the 1890's classroom at McCormick School Museum. Photographer: Paul Oberg

The marm wore a long flowing skirt paired with a white, long sleeved, ruffle-collared blouse, functional black buckle-up shoes, and hair combed back into a bun. Her classroom was well-organized with rows of wooden desks and fold up chairs, her wooden teacher desk at the front of the room. The classroom featured eighteen-foot ceilings, creaky wooden floors, black chalkboards, and inkwells on top of the wooden desks. Students used small slate tablets and a slate pencil since there was little writing paper available. The few textbooks were kept in a bookcase at the back of the room. There were no bright colors anywhere except for the red, white, and blue flag with 44 stars hanging at the front of the classroom.

As part of the field trip experience and before the children and teachers experienced the 1890s classroom, Mrs. Lancaster (as school marm Sherry was called) would visit the students in their present-day classrooms to explain what a typical school day experience would be like in the 1890s. This preview helped the children and their teachers to understand the customs and strict discipline of days gone by. Sherry explains that she did not rap knuckles or make students stand

in a corner wearing a dunce cap, but her expectations for classroom behavior were stricter than today's standards. The students responded by becoming ladies and gentlemen while in her classroom and posed few disciplinary issues. She was able to provide students with a glimpse of the curricula of math, writing, reading, and even a spelling bee during their visit. Students and their teachers reported that the 1890s living history classroom was a special, magical place where history became interesting and real. Prior to their experience, students had been reading about what school was like 100 years ago. However, they discovered that the 1890s classroom was a lot different and came alive when they could experience it in person.

McCormick Elementary School opened in the fall of 1890 with four classrooms and four teachers: Hattie M. Edgar, May W. Pearce, Laura Laughlin, and Lucy Booth. Thirty-three students attended school that year. The school was finally closed as an attendance center in June 1992 and re-opened in August of the same year as McCormick School Museum and Science Center. The museum program was cut from the USD259 budget in June 1997. In December 1998, the Wichita Retired Teachers Association (now Wichita Area Retired School Personnel) opened the McCormick School Museum as a non-profit community service project. It is hoped that MSM will be able to revive the 1890s classroom field trip opportunity for area students at some future time. Museum supporters that share this vision are asked to contact the museum to express interest and for further information.

### OUR MISSION

The mission of the McCormick School Museum is to showcase and protect its historical and architectural importance while telling the story of Wichita Public Schools through artifacts and archives.

The mission of the Advisory Council is to guide and assist in long-range planning, marketing, and development of the McCormick School Museum, seeking opportunities for growth and recognition through increased educational opportunities and significant fundraising efforts.

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.

You may send your gift to  
McCormick School Museum, Inc. at:

McCormick School Museum, Inc.  
P.O. Box 12881  
Wichita, Kansas 67277  
savemccormick.com

Editor: Cynthia Rhodes

Art Director: Brian L. Martin



# Keep Our Bell Ringing! We Need Your Help!

McCormick School Museum is launching a fundraising campaign from July 1 through September 15 to raise funds for the operation of the museum. The goal is to raise \$28,000 to pay for 2025-2026 operational expenses which include monthly utilities such as gas, electric, and water; Internet fees, physical plant and boiler maintenance; special cleaning services; and security fees. A donation of \$50 is suggested and can be made one-time or monthly during the campaign. Donations of any amount and frequency are welcome and may be submitted online, through the mail, or in-person. A running total of donations received throughout the campaign will be posted at the museum and online through the McCormick Facebook page. Please support McCormick School Museum with your donations as we "Keep Our Bell Ringing!"

**Online donations:** [www.savemccormick.com](http://www.savemccormick.com)

**Postal mail and in-person donations:**

855 S. Martinson, Wichita, Kansas, 67213



Paul Oberg narrates a film at Film Night in June.  
Photographer: Cynthia Rhodes

## EVENTS & MUSEUM HOURS

The McCormick School Museum is open Wednesday from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm 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.

The Museum complex is located at 855 S. Martinson in Wichita. Currently, the stairway to the multipurpose room is handicap-accessible for events. Admission is by donation; your support is always appreciated.

## SAVE THE DATES

### SEPTEMBER 20

**End-of-Summer Ice Cream Social:** 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm

A late summer afternoon is the best time to relax and celebrate the beginning of school. Come and cool off in the shade of the sweet gum trees in front of the 1890s building with a scoop of delicious vanilla ice cream topped with an array of scrumptious toppings. Live entertainment by

community and school groups will be provided. Suggested donation: \$10; children under 12 are \$5. Watch social media sites for more information as the date approaches.

### DECEMBER 5

**Annual Holiday Open House:** 9 am to 5 pm

### DECEMBER 6 & 7

**Holiday Open House Weekend:** 12 pm to 5 pm both days

### DECEMBER 11 or 18 (TBA)

**Carol Sing Around the Tree:** 6:30 pm to 8 pm

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

**For more information and to contact the museum:**

**Website:** [www.mccormickschoolmuseuminc.com](http://www.mccormickschoolmuseuminc.com)

**Donations:** [www.savemccormick.com](http://www.savemccormick.com)

**Facebook:** McCormick School Museum

**Gmail:** [mccormickschoolmuseum@gmail.com](mailto:mccormickschoolmuseum@gmail.com)

**Telephone:** 316-708-0676 (call or text)

**MSM Office:** 316-558-5804 (leave a message)