



Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols
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European Trip
[1922?]

I want to say to you fellows that after endeavoring to count foreign money for several months, and battling with Customs officials for several months, one really appreciates getting back home.

The Americans who travel in Europe for a few months cannot come back with any adequate appreciation of European affairs. Their view point over there is so different from that of America that one finds it rather hard to measure in any way.

It is my desire to speak of the conditions or things in Europe which relate or can be compared to the fifty-six square miles of territory in our own city.

I went through England stopping at the little towns, talking to the farmers and the common people. The thing that impressed me most was the number of idle men on the street corners. In York one morning I heard a man whistling below my window and it occurred to me that it was the first time I had heard anyone whistle during my stay there.

It was sickening to see the paralyzed condition of commerce in the seacoast towns of Europe, with the possible exception of certain German cities. In Glasgow and Amsterdam, factories were running at half capacity and the harbors were glutted with idle shipping.

I crossed Germany three times and endeavored to get an impression of German public opinion. In Bavaria and southern Germany, the country is in a more prosperous condition apparently than any agricultural country I have ever seen. I have never seen a country where there are so many fine houses and barns being built, practically on every farm. I have never seen better dressed farmers or a more general appearance of prosperity. This same prosperous condition also was manifest throughout the Rhine provinces.

When you passed into the large cities of Germany unemployment was somewhat prevalent, but on every hand nearly all the factories were running night and day. In all the large German ports there was much evidence of shipping and there seemed to be more commerce on the Rhine than I had seen when there before.

One could not help feeling that throughout Germany they really have not felt the War – in fact, they will not allow one to speak of the armistice as surrender, but refer to it as an agreement. I believe that nine out of ten people in Germany feel that in ten, twenty or fifty years there will probably be another war between Germany and France. I am glad to say that was the only country I visited where such an expression was heard.

One did not feel the results of the effects of the war on the Germanic side until one got into Austria-Hungary. In those countries horses are almost alone the means of vehicular conveyance, but I did not see one well-fed horse while there. In Budapest one encounters more beggars on the streets within two blocks than in an entire American city.

I got 260,000 kronen for \$50.00 whereas only a few years ago the rate of exchange was 250 kronen for \$50.00. One can hardly imagine the destructive influence and hardships that such fluctuating values have brought about.

A few days later I passed along the southern battle front in France. Coming from prosperous Germany into devastated France one was made to feel that France, indeed, had just claim to some of the resources of Germany in reprisal. When you saw where villages of 25,000 people had been entirely destroyed and when you went into Rheims, a city of 120,000 people and found that there had been only six houses left untouched and only thirty in good enough condition to attempt repair, one could hardly help but appreciate France's determination to see that there should be no future war.

In all the large towns of Germany the houses were newly painted, the gardens well kept and the lawns mowed. In one particular section of Dresden much labor was being employed in the laying of sod between the streetcar tracks. The people of Germany are not suffering from taxation as are the people of England and France.

The people in all the countries on the continent are very busy agriculturally. You would see whole families working in the fields from sunrise to long after sundown. You would pass them traveling back from their labor on their little farms to their villages as late as ten o'clock at night.

In Italy the people are clearing off and preparing new ground that has for years gone without cultivation. To my mind the most hopeful sight in all Europe today is the zeal with which the laboring people have set about the reconstruction and further development of their countries. I do not believe that revolution could come from peoples so hopefully working to rebuild their countries.

We received universal courtesy everywhere, regardless of reports to the contrary that have been brought home by Americans traveling abroad.

I want you to know of the moral influence of our 1,200 American soldiers stationed in Coblenz. They are having a more stabilizing influence on the situation there than perhaps all the rest of the army of occupation. All of the disputes arising in the armies of occupation are gladly referred by all to the general office of the American Army in Coblenz.

We not only have moral and humanitarian obligations but there is also a commercial obligation to help stabilize and study the affairs of Europe.

The United States is in a position to lay down requirements, and entirely independent of political influences, to see that boundary lines, financial relations and other settlements are made with equal justice to all.

I don't want you to feel because I may mention a number of things I have noted abroad which are perhaps superior to ours at home, that I am overlooking the many things in which we excel the cities of Europe. I feel that men of good blood and vigor with a

knowledge of their best developments, can build them into our own surroundings and make ours a greater and more beautiful city.

Don't feel that I do not recognize the great and fine plans that our city commissions have for the development of Kansas City, but there is a beauty and permanency in the foreign cities which I think we can follow or parallel which will bring to our cities a greater growth and more permanent development,

The great commercial cities of Europe are the interior cities. We should not feel because we are not a seacoast town, or on the Great Lakes as is Chicago, that Kansas City is at any disadvantage as to rates and as to trade territory.

Neither are the great commercial cities of Europe most favorably located as to climate. The history of their cities shows that climate is no very large factor in the growth and rapid development of a large commercial and manufacturing city surrounded, as we are here, by a large and prosperous trade territory.

Mr. Dalton has told me here today that it is one of his doctrines that Kansas City shall not only be the market for the few adjoining states, but rather that it shall be the market for the whole Mississippi Valley.

All large cities on the continent and in England, even though as small as 50,000 population, have got together vast exhibits and have museums which bring home to their people the wonderful development of the arts and crafts of their home cities, and to make the people realize how unnecessary it is that they should seek elsewhere for unlimited opportunities. The cities of those countries teach their citizenry to appreciate the possibilities of their own city.

The European cities have looked well to the future and provided ample facilities not only to afford the commercial opportunities of a New York, but also the cultural opportunities of a Paris.

NOTES

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In Germany they are not taxing their people in the proportion that France and England are making their people pay.

Unless our city planning commission, with our support, is able to provide an opportunity for industrial expansion through an adequate physical layout of our city, like London, we will see our industries diverted from the city proper to new factory suburbs many miles removed.

Taking a lesson from the stress European cities are laying on broad straight highways of easy grade, we should be very sure that we, as quickly as possible, become the hub of one of the best road systems in all the United States.

The European authorities all agree that high buildings will greatly accentuate the traffic problem through piling up too much business in a limited area. New York

merchants recently entered into an agreement to endeavor to hold down the height of buildings in the New York retail district.

Just so surely as Kansas City fails to recognize the necessity of controlling our building heights, inevitably will the property owners in the congested districts sooner or later suffer a great depreciation in value. The very congestion occasioned by the piling up of business in limited areas will drive away business from the place where real estate values are the highest of any in the city.

Within ten miles of this building are possible locations for an artificial lake four or five miles long, that I think would go a long way toward making Kansas City a better place in which to live.

Do you think any city in Europe the size of ours would not already have, or at least have planned to establish a great university? We have here in Kansas City men who are willing with large gifts to lay the foundation for a university that will enable many boys and girls to get an education while living at home.

Europeans are agreed that it is a waste of money to place any important building in an inadequate setting or away from a conspicuous approach. As an example, how many of you have ever driven a visitor past our own Public Library? Yet if approached over good boulevards, the Library would be one of the first things pointed out to visitors. It is a beautiful building up there at 9th and Locust.

The cafe life of the capitals of Europe certainly is a factor in the holding of tourists who come there for an occasional day. In full deference to this hotel and to the one across the street, I believe that we will all agree that one of the greatest needs of Kansas City today is an immense popular priced hotel.

Let's endow Kansas City with those elements of beauty and permanency that will endear her not only to our own residents, but to every citizen in our entire territory.

Let's so plan and build that no man in this region will voluntarily choose another city in which to live, but that from all this vast territory men will see in Kansas City commercial opportunities of a city like New York and cultural opportunities of a city like Paris.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN011

Arguably Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was the single most influential individual to the development of metropolitan Kansas City. Moreover his work, ideas, and philosophy of city planning and development had far-reaching impact nationally – so much so that the Urban Land Institute has established the J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development to recognize a person or a person representing an institution whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

Nichols' objective was to “develop whole residential neighborhoods that would attract an element of people who desired a better way of life, a nicer place to live and would be willing to work in order to keep it better.” The Company under Nichols and his son, Miller Nichols (1911-), undertook such ventures as rental housing, industrial parks, hotels, and shopping centers. Perhaps the most widely recognized Nichols Company developments are the Country Club District and the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center, reportedly the first shopping area in the United States planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) contains both personal and business files concerning J.C. Nichols' private and business life. Included are personal correspondence, family related material, and speeches and articles written by him. Business and financial files pertain to actions of the Company, including information about different developments and the securing of art objects; and printed materials produced by and about the Company.