



Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols
[Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City](#)

City Planning
[ca. 1922?]

Mr. Hoover at meeting engineers, architects, artists, and other citizens interested in City Planning, at Engineering Societies Auditorium, 29 West 39th Street, New York, on May 10, 1922 said:

The action of the Trustees of the Russell Sage Foundation in providing for the survey by engineers and other experts of the economic and social situation, and the preparation of a comprehensive plan for the development of New York City said its environs deserves the highest commendation.

The enormous losses in human happiness and in money which have resulted from lack of city plans which take into account the conditions of modern life, need little proof. The lack of adequate open spaces, of playgrounds and parks, the congestion of streets, the misery of tenement life and its repercussions upon each new generation, are an untold charge against our American life. Our cities do not produce their full contribution to the sinews of American life and national character. The moral and social issues can only be solved by a new conception of city building.

The great growth of industry since New York was originally planned, presents a host of new problems. The cost of distribution of necessities within the foundries of the city increases each year until today the congestion, and inadequate system of terminals of transportation and commodity distribution generally taxes New York with ten or fifteen percent upon the cost of living above more adequately served centers.

Many of our industries are seasonal. If we are to secure high living standards and to gain in national productively, these industries must be so interlocked as to give more continuous employment. The fact that New York has at all times the largest proportion of unemployment of any of our cities is due partially to this ill adjustment.

New York is the gateway of Europe into the United States and the dumping of great hordes of people into our slums is a poor introduction to Americanization.

One part of such a plan must be a realization of each economic group in the community as to its function to the whole great community of which it is a part. With this in mind, residential districts whose interests center largely around low cost of living and educational and recreational facilities would see their interests in better means of distribution, and the development of public utilities. The manufacturing districts must find not only better aligned transportation but coordination to residential areas which can be developed upon human lines.

The survey can help arouse a consciousness of its needs on the part of each community and group within the whole territory. The cooperation of all groups must be enlisted if a workable plan is to be evolved. This is vital in surrounding the legal difficulties in the way of executing such a plan.

The vision of the region around New York as a well planned location of millions of happy homes and a bettered working center of millions of men and women grasps the imagination. A definite plan for its accomplishment may be only an ideal. But a people without ideals degenerates – one with practical ideals is already upon the road to attain them.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN013

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.