



*Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols*  
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**Kansas And Missouri River Improvement**  
Kansas State Chamber of Commerce, Kansas City, Kansas,  
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The Honorable Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce of the United States – one of the most eminent engineers in the world after a very comprehensive study of the Missouri River, has stated that all the engineering problems of its improvement are behind us, and it is thoroughly practical and feasible to provide an ample depth of water for the successful navigation of this river.

The Missouri River is the longest river in the United States, stretching more than 2500 miles through the greatest agricultural area in the world. It has the most uniform slope and even flow of any large river in the Mississippi Valley. Through the summer months a good minimum flow is maintained by the melting snows in the mountains at its head-waters. The Mississippi River at Rock Island has a minimum flow of 21,000 cubic feet per second; the Ohio River, above the mouth of the Tennessee has a minimum flow of 17,500 cubic feet, while the Missouri River at Kansas City has a minimum flow of 23,000 cubic feet.

Four groups of Army Engineers throughout the past fifteen years after careful investigation have reported favorably upon the feasibility of its improvement. And today the 400 miles from Kansas City to the mouth of the river has been adopted as an improved inland waterways project by the United States Government, and Thirteen Million dollars has been expended on improvement and maintenance of this stretch of the river. It has been estimated by Major General Harry Taylor, Chief of Engineers of the United States Army, that it will require approximately 21 Million Dollars to complete its improvement and afford a permanent 6 foot depth of water from Kansas City to the Mississippi.

At a hearing recently held by Major C.C. Gee, the capable army engineer, who for the past four years has been in direct charge of Missouri River improvements, it was clearly demonstrated by the mass of evidence submitted that there will also be ample tonnage to justify the operation of barge lines from Kansas City northward to at least Yankton, South Dakota. It is anticipated that Major Gee will report favorably to the present Congress upon the adoption of this upper stretch of the river as an approved project for development by the Federal Government, affording a continuous navigable channel for more than 800 miles on the Missouri River.

With the Missouri River improved, barge lines could be operated from the entire Missouri River territory, via the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico, via the Ohio River to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; via the Upper Mississippi to Minneapolis and St.

Paul; and via the Mississippi River, Illinois River and Illinois and Michigan Canal to Chicago. This will afford some 3100 miles of trunk inland navigable waterways, with some 6000 additional miles of tributary streams navigable by smaller craft. The Missouri River has an average fall of 10 inches per mile; it flows four to six miles per hour, about the same as the flow of the Rhine River, which in Europe carries so great a volume of tonnage.

The improvement of the Missouri River does not call for the continuous walling of the banks of the stream. Modern engineering science has developed an economical method of direction and control of currents by the placing of controls, rotards and revetments at certain points along the banks of the stream. Over seventy five percent of the Missouri River below Kansas City today has a depth of 6 feet at low water. Much of it has a depth as great as 35 to 40 feet. A 40 mile stretch of the river below Jefferson City was improved some thirty years ago, to a depth of 6 feet. Since that time the river itself has deepened this channel to a depth of 9 feet to 11 feet. Practically no money has been expended until the past two years in maintenance and yet the work put in thirty years ago is fully 90 per cent intact. It is believed that with the creation of a 6 foot channel Nature would largely deepen the river to a depth of some 9 to 10 feet. Engineers state that none of the work expended in making a 6 foot channel will be lost in the later provision of a 9 foot channel. A 9 foot channel is highly desirable, because this is the depth provided in the Lower Mississippi project, and a depth of 9 feet would enable barges to pass from the Mississippi River, up the Missouri River without reloading at St. Louis. Thirty percent of the river today is improved from Kansas City down stream.

Major general Taylor states that with the expenditure of 2 to 3 million dollars a year for the next three years a 6 foot channel can be provided and a barge line successfully operated. Further developments will be necessary to make permanent this channel and that thereby none of the work during the next three years would be wasted. It is also stated that it will be possible to extend the 6 foot channel northward from Kansas City to Yankton, South Dakota.

The Kansas City Barge Line, under the splendid leadership of W.S. Dickey and A.W. Mackie, demonstrated over a period of several years of operation of barges on the river while still unimproved that there not only is sufficient tonnage available but that it is feasible and profitable to operate such freight barge lines over a period of approximately 8 months in the year – except at times when the channel was of insufficient depth, due to its unimproved condition, or during the winter months when navigation was closed by ice. When water was ample barges made the run downstream from Kansas City in two days and upstream in five days. With the channel properly improved, marked and lighted at night this time could be shortened. This boat line ran at freight rates 20 percent less than railroad rates for the same distance, it moved immense quantities of raw products, particularly of the farm, down stream, and almost every known class of freight upstream – wholesale groceries, hardware, pianos, toys, dry goods, farming implements, steel, chemicals, sugar, in fact almost everything that is consumed in our Middlewestern Country.

In Europe the average cost of river transportation is approximately one-fifth that of railroad transportation. Regardless of the great efficiency of our American railroads it is estimated that upon many classes of bulky freight fleets of river barges of the latest

improved design, with Diesel engines, on a thoroughly improved stream with ample depth of water and with modern loading and unloading equipment, will be able to move freight upon the Missouri River at not to exceed fifty percent of the average cost of railroad transportation in the United States. One fleet of Government barges handled by powerful tow boats on the Lower Mississippi is today moving on one trip, according to Brig. General T.B. Ashburn, the equivalent of 8 freight trains of fifty cars each, operating at a rate 20 percent less than competing railroad rates and affording the Government a profit of nearly \$300,000 during the year 1925 – and this on a partially improved basis.

As Mr. Hoover pointed out in his splendid Kansas City address, real efficiency and economy in inland water transportation can only be attained when we have a completed system of waterways, with freight well balanced for both local and through freight needs. Boat lines operating in segments and unrelated to one another suffer from the same handicap that a railroad would suffer if its operations were cut into many segments divided by gaps of unbuilt sections of the railroad.

The Missouri River Navigation Association represents ten states – Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma – a great area, largely agricultural in resources, suffering today perhaps more than any other section of the country, in competition with the lower freight rates enjoyed by the coast belt of our country as a result of the low water rate transportation afforded through the completion of the Panama Canal.

Factories located in these ten states are finding that they can no longer compete in eastern, southern or western coast markets because of the great economic disadvantage of higher transportation costs. For example, many manufacturers at Omaha, Sioux City, Atchison, Leavenworth and Kansas City are finding freight costs from these points to the Pacific Coast as much as three times as great as the freight on the same articles shipped by all water haul from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast.

We are largely a region of high power costs with little water power available. We have as yet not developed industry to the proper extent in this region. We mainly produce raw materials sent to other parts of the country for manufacture. We are the longest haul territory in the United States – 800 miles from the southern Sea Coast. We pay for the longest haul on everything we buy and everything we sell. The farmer gets the price of his produce in the consuming market, less the cost of getting it there. On a large portion of the things he buys he pays the price in the manufacturing market plus the cost of transporting it to his farm.

The agricultural population in a large part of these ten states is actually declining. A greater population can only be sustained on our farms by more intensive farming. Intensive farming can only be made possible by greater nearby consuming markets or a widening of far removed markets as a result of lower transportation costs. The price the farmer receives for wheat, for example, is the price made in Liverpool, less freight costs all the way from the farm where it is produced.

It is estimated by F.G. Crowell, Vice President of the Hall-Baker Grain Company of Kansas City, and Vice President during the War of the United States Grain Corporation charged with complete responsibility of furnishing grain to our boys and the Allies, that with the final completion and improvement of the Mississippi and Missouri

Rivers, and with the establishment of modern and highly improved service there would be an approximate average saving to the farmers of this region of 5 to 6 cents per bushel on all the exportable wheat and corn shipped from this territory. This estimated saving is probably a very conservative statement.

Herbert Hoover, in his Kansas City address – after months of study of the problem – made the following statement:

*Modern forms of development have made water carriage the cheapest of all transportation for many types of goods. Broadly, 1,000 bushels of wheat can be transported 1,000 miles on the sea for \$20 to \$30; by large lake steamers for \$20 to \$30; by our modern equipped Mississippi barge service for \$60 to \$70 and by the railroads for \$150 to \$200. These estimates are based not on hypothetical calculation but on the actual going freight rates.*

Everyone agrees that the agricultural problem today is of national concern. Agriculture is the basis of American wealth. Nature has provided the greatest highways of commerce for the transportation of the products of the farm and yet, up to this time, no inland river has been completely improved by the Government to afford this possible relief. These ten states have cheerfully and willingly joined in paying their share of the building of the Panama Canal, a thoroughly worthwhile project of national importance, strengthening the position of the United States throughout the commercial world. And yet, today, practically all economists agree that the Canal has worked adversely to the interests of the interior states of our country.

There is now under consideration the building of a Great Lakes – St. Lawrence Navigation project, providing a channel of ample depth to bring sea-going craft into the Great Lakes, serving all the middle-northern section of this country. This undoubtedly is a meritorious project and should be built as a part of the great transportation system of our country. However, were it to be completed, we would then find our ten states marooned in the middle section of this country, with lower freight rates to the north, to the south, to the west and to the east of us. Is it not the American right of our section to be entitled to the same national aid and assistance in affording the lowest possible transportation costs to this section as well as the other parts of the United States? And will it not, in the long run, be of national good to have every part of our country enjoy the greatest economic saving? Lower transportation costs to this section would not only afford greater prices to the farmer for his product, make possible more intensive farming and a larger agricultural population, but it would also bring about the building of larger cities and towns, by an increase in the manufacture of our raw products at home. Our cities would grow and supply a greater consuming market nearer to the farm. Our farming population would grow and expand and afford a greater market for the manufacturers in our territory.

As Mr. Hoover has well stated, “business begets business and traffic begets traffic.” Out of greater prosperity and activity, resulting from lower transportation costs, the railroads would enjoy a far greater increase of business than they would lose by the allocation of certain classes of freight to river haulage. By the recent rulings of the Interstate Commerce Commission, as evidenced by the freight rates now in effect in

combined river and rail rates between the Lower Mississippi Barge Line and the railroads of this section, the most inland town, the farthest removed farm, is entitled and receives its proportion of the saving resulting from the lower freight cost on the part of the haul carried upon the river.

Frankly, this situation has been greatly misunderstood throughout our states. Much of the territory removed from the rivers has been under the impression that the benefits resulting from lower transportation costs on the river would accrue only to the river cities. Nothing could be further from the facts. This has been investigated by the officials of farm organizations throughout these states, and without exception, so far as we have been able to learn, they have become convinced that every section of this interior empire would receive its proportionate saving in combined river and rail hauls.

Traffic has increased on our highways ten thousand fold as the result of the building of improved roads and the advent of the motor truck and the automobile; and yet railroad business in the last ten years has been greater than ever before in its history. Has anyone, for a moment, objected to the building of improved highways and the use of the motor truck, for fear it would hurt the business of the railroads? The motor trucks, over vast areas, carry freight to the railroad, increasing the movement and the volume of trade. The motor trucks, the improved highways, the railroads, and the modern fleet of barges will all seek and work out the proper inter-movement of freight, each supplementing the other, each serving its sphere of greatest usefulness. A great part of the volume of freight moved upon the rivers would also be moved by the railroads in hauling to and from river points, because the rivers are few and fixed in location.

The upbuilding of greater cities would produce wealth and consuming markets, greatly increasing railroad business. A larger farming population and a more prosperous population would, at the same time, greatly increase railroad business to and from the farms. Presidents of several of the large railroads of the country already have grasped this enlightened and broad policy and have completely reversed their former position, and welcome the greater development of this section by the improvement of our rivers for transportation. There is unity of interests in our valley, between the town, the city, the farm, the National Government and the railroad, in the placing of this inland empire on the best possible economic basis.

We cannot move our farms to the seaboard for lower rates. Our industries may leave inland towns and move to seaboard towns and enjoy the lowest possible transportation cost. However we can bring at least a part of the great saving – possible by river transportation to the farms, inland towns and cities by improving this 9,000 miles of our inland waterways system and the operation of great fleets of freight barges, not only throughout our ten states, but throughout the twenty-six states in the Mississippi Valley.

It cost our Government \$500,000,000 to build the Panama Canal. It is estimated that for \$100,000,000 – only one-fifth of that cost these 9,000 miles of rivers can be improved for transportation purposes. And let me say again that the impartial student of the problem can only reach the conclusion that it will not only be not injurious to the railroads, but in the long run, beneficial to the railroads.

In the last twenty-five years railroad tonnage has increased from 114 Billion ton miles to 338 Billion ton miles. At our present rate of growth the population of our

country will increase 40 million people within the next twenty-five years. On account of the high cost of securing land for terminals in our cities for increasing railroad capacity it has been estimated by Mr. Hoover that it will cost three times as much to take care of the increased traffic that will result from this continued growth in the next twenty-five years, by additional railroad building, as it will be provide for handling this increase of traffic by improving our waterways for inland water transportation.

And while it is true only a portion of this increased traffic can be handled by rivers, is it not a national opportunity, and is it not the birthright of these states – the very Heart of America – to enjoy the fullest degree their proportionate share of the saving that may be effected by the development of the natural opportunity afforded by the greatest system of inland waterways to be found in any country on the globe? And even though all the above, in relation to the railroads, were not true, is it not progress, is it not the duty, of any civilized country to ever be alert to take national advantage of every possible advancement in science or invention for the blessing of its people at large?

Would you – in protection of the manufacturers of cradles for harvesting grain before the advent of the self-binder – have endeavored to withhold the development of that wonderful machine for revolutionizing the gathering of grains upon our farms, simply because it might have injured the business man that made cradles? In the very building of our railroads that played so important a part in the upbuilding of our empire, would you, in protection to the ferry boat that was ruined by the building of the bridge by the railroad across the river at the point of the ferry – would you, I say, have refused to give the railroad the right to construct the bridge, stopping the progress of a great section of our country, simply because it might even spell the financial ruin of the owner of the ferry?

The history of the world is marked with thousands of examples where improvement and progress have thrown into discard the tools of yesterday. And yet, could our country otherwise compete in the markets of the world unless we always stood ready to accept and adopt each forward step in commerce? Let me say again, even though we might have mistaken opposition by the railroads, opposition by the railroads is not sufficient reason for withholding the improvement of our inland waterways.

Fortunately for all, however, in the opinion of the greatest engineers of our country, the greatest students of traffic, men who have power to visualize the growth of our country, it is universally believed that the railroads will prosper from the greater business that will develop from the growth and development resulting from inland water transportation.

No other country in the world has been so slow to utilize this natural resource. We have been so rich in our opportunities, we have gone forward so rapidly, that we have not until recently recognized the great national inefficiency and national waste of our failure to properly utilize our inland streams. Recent years have seen a great awakening by the Government and the country at large, to this opportunity. Eighty seven million dollars has been expended by the Government on the Ohio. It is estimated that 17 million dollars expended over three years will complete the Ohio for transportation. More than 10 Million Dollars a year is being expended on the lower Mississippi.

Last week the Government made a contract to operate a barge line on the Mississippi as far north as the twin cities, this barge line costing \$600,000 to be built by private subscription of the citizens of that territory, realizing its economic salvation.

Kansas City has \$800,000 in Government Bonds in the treasury of its Barge Line Company, ready to design and build the most modern fleet of barges, to be placed upon the river the very day that a 6 foot channel is completed. Kansas City stands pledged to cooperate and work unceasingly to the end that the Missouri River be improved to Yankton, South Dakota, yes to Benton, Montana, as rapidly as it can economically be done.

You may say that the steer-boats, by which this very inland empire was developed, were driven from the Missouri River through their failure to compete with railroad transportation costs when the railroads were first built. You forget that the steamboats of that time were light craft, drawing some 3 feet of water, operated at a very high cost, far beyond the freight costs of this time. You forget that in those days the Diesel engine was unknown, that the Government was not improving the channel on the Missouri, that frequently it took weeks to transport cargo by steamboat from St. Louis to Kansas City, that modern loading and unloading equipment was unknown. The steamboat well served its day and passed into the discard in the march of American progress.

Today another cycle has turned. Engineers have given us a type of river barge and power boat, an economical method of loading and unloading great volumes of freight, a skill in controlling the current of our streams and the deepening of their channels, perhaps unsurpassed in engineering progress of the world. The great Missouri River that you have been accustomed to look upon with disdain, under the skilled direction of engineers, under the business-like improvement of a farseeing national Government and under the proper cooperation and support of the farmer, the merchant, the manufacturer, and yes, the railroads too, will become the greatest natural asset of millions of people, of agriculture, of industry, yes, of the greater enjoyment of prosperity and the best things in life.

Herbert Hoover has said: "If we were to make a survey of all the opportunities of possible physical progress of our nation, the development of our internal waterways would stand in the forefront."

Our Navigation Association, representing these ten states, is comprised of representatives of practically every farm organization within their boundaries and representatives of nearly all the leading commercial organizations in this territory. We are devoting ourselves to the presenting of our needs to Congress and urging immediate steps to quicken the hour that these advantages may be brought to our door. We are insisting that the 40 Million Dollars recommended by the Budget Department be increased to 54 billion Dollars, the amount recommended by the Army Engineers in charge of the rivers and harbors of our country.

We ask that the wasteful and extravagant plan of disconnected and periodical improvement of these inland rivers be cast aside and the intelligent, efficient, economical plan of the army engineers be adopted; that the equipment for river improvement be increased at once to the proper basis, and that just as rapidly as the money can be wisely

and economically used, this whole system of 9,000 miles of inland rivers be brought into the greatest usefulness.

We should not, be interested in our own river, alone. We should stand for the improvement of all the inland waterways which it is practical to improve, the same as we stood for the building of the Panama Canal.

Is it not the opportunity and duty of every interested citizen of these ten states to call upon their Congressmen to devote themselves to the earliest accomplishment of this task?

Three members of the Cabinet – William Jardine, Secretary of Agriculture; Dwight Davis, Secretary of war and Herbert Hoover Secretary of Commerce, and President Coolidge himself, have all unequivocally declared in favor of the earliest improvement of our inland waterways. They have all studied the problem intensively during recent months and are joining in the recommendation that the appropriation be increased to the greatest amount that can be efficiently expended. They regard it not as a Government expenditure, but as a capital investment, for the good of the nation. Our Government, after all, is representative of the sentiment of its people.

If you believe these principles are sound, let your wishes be known. Here lies a great opportunity, not only to serve your own interests, the interests of your neighborhood, your country and your state, but to assist in doing your part in the greater upbuilding of the Nation, that should know no limit in its growth, in the spread of its commerce, and in its service to the people of the world.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN016

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.