



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

Western Petroleum Refiners' Association

Complimentary Dinner Given By The Kansas City Real Estate Board
March 6, 1928

It is an honor to entertain the leaders of an industry which has sent so many excellent citizens to make their homes in Kansas City. These men have immediately taken prominent positions in the business, social and cultural life of our city and become as active as our citizens who have spent their entire lives here.

The realtor and the oil man have a common bond of interest in the mutually creative type of their businesses and we wish to pay tribute to the oil merchant as a pioneer, a main of vision and courage.

In the early days in the settlement of America, the pioneer on the East Coast went down to the sea in sailing boats and risked his fortune on the uncharted waters. Later, the West was conquered by the pioneer with his axe and gun, daring the dangers of his time, and then the oil man, a new pioneer with the same courage as a frontiersman, risked his fortune and finally gave to the Middle West one of its greatest and soundest industries – an industry unknown in the world seventy-five years ago – an industry that in the last ten years alone has produced three fourths of the 15 billion barrels of all the total production to date; a business that has brought to industry commerce, and to humanity a new wealth of incalculable value, romantically and miraculously giving us the energies and power of the sun's rays of millions of years ago. Truly, as Stephenson with his first steamboat with coal, so the oil man has harnessed the rays of the sun of prehistoric ages and given to the world far more wealth and power than he has gained for himself.

It has been said that the highest form of intelligence is the ability to adapt one's self to new problems and changing conditions. Certainly, in no industry are the leaders met with a greater call for intelligent application and experience and quicker application to constantly and ceaselessly changing conditions than in the oil business.

The shooting of a new well in a distant state may change the potential prospective production area overnight, or the discovery of a new use for oil or its products, may almost revolutionize the possibilities of the marketing or consumption of its products.

We admire the efforts of the farm boy to constantly grow better corn and to produce more wheat of better food content. We honor the scientist who frequently gives up his life in medical research. As realtors, we claim the distinction of devoting ourselves to building better, more efficient cities, but we wish to pay tribute tonight to the petroleum industry which calls to its aid the most advanced thought in geology and chemistry; which commands the services of great mechanical engineering skill in finding and lifting its products from the ground, in transportation and refining at the least

possible cost and minimum waste, and ever and constantly keeping abreast with the scientific study of the advanced uses of thousands of products coming from this great natural resource.

Those here tonight who are not in the oil business, in fact, the layman in general, perhaps have little conception of our daily contact with your industry and its great basic value to humanity. We luxuriously enjoy the conveniences and pleasant service of the filling station attendant who pours power in the gasoline tank of our automobile and little do we think of the long series of steps through which the product has passed to serve us. We forget the courage back of the original first well that opened the field from which the raw product came. We forget the years of costly experiment in the development of equipment to find and harness the oil. We little dream of the thousands of miles of pipe lines and long trains of tank cars used in the transportation of this liquid wealth, and we have only a hazy idea of the great investment and intricate equipment of the enormous refineries bringing this product to its thousands of uses. We forget the work of the chemist over his test tube and microscope in his constant endeavor to squeeze out of this raw product a new and greater use for humanity. We forget the thousands of channels of trade into which these by-products spread themselves in a miraculous network of ceaseless relation to almost every industry of our land.

During the last few days in talking with the representatives of our three splendid refineries in Kansas City, a new and almost romantic world of opportunity and achievement was spread before my eyes. It was difficult to realize and comprehend the possibility of such a great industry having been evolved in the life time of one man. And the story told, almost equals the fable of the Magic Carpet and seems to acclaim the fact that nothing is impossible to the American people in this scientific age.

We are all familiar with the greatly increasing use of oils and asphalt in the paving of our streets and roads throughout the country. But perhaps none of us not engaged in the oil industry realize that last year in the ten states surrounding Kansas City more than 100 million pounds of asphalt coming from the oils of the Mid-continent field were consumed. Perhaps you do not realize that Kansas City ranks third in the roofing industry in the United States, and that more than 10,000 tons of asphalt for this purpose was used in our city alone last year.

I am sure that you do not know that more than 75,000 tons of asphalt were used in these ten states last year in the waxing of paper for the air-tight containers of the bread, crackers and other food products that you eat. I was astounded to learn of the hundreds of uses that are being made by the farmer and the dweller in the city alike, in the use of asphalt in repairing his roof, his pipe, his water trough, preserving his iron from rust, and scores of other uses.

It is interesting to us to learn that your light distillate leads not alone to gasoline, but into paints, lacquers, varnishes, enamels, soaps, dry cleaning products, putty, naphtha, linoleum, heating, lighting and refrigeration, and into cattle and hog dips, insecticide and other uses.

And think for a moment of the great ramifications of the paraffin products of oil. Here come polishes of all kinds and also more than five hundred varieties of candles, hydro-carbon, chewing gum, matches, canning industry, wax paper, medicinal purposes,

harness oils – only suggestions of the many uses and daily contacts with our lives. Just take one of the by-products with the unromantic name of “Grease” and think for a moment of the cup axle and cable greases, elevator, railway and track grease, oil, anti-rust grease, transmission gear and rail greases, and all lubricating oils, lead one into almost a maze of uses common, but generally unknown except to you men of the oil industry.

Soap, meter and floor oils, rubbing and cutting oils, clock, sewing machine, spindle oils, knitting, auto and tractor and transmission oils, all help tell the story.

The oils used in the great dynamos of industry, the turbines that drive our mighty ocean steamers, the harvester oils that help garner the grain of our fields, and the oils that make it possible to keep the great ice making machines of every small town and large city, are typical examples. A mere glance at the uses coming from the asphalt and coke family leads you into so broad a field as to almost challenge your comprehensions. Floor and pipe covering, roofing paper, asphalt, shingles, leather upholstering, insulators, batteries, metal protection, water proofing, fuel purposes, artistic crayons, calcium carbide and electric light and battery carbons, graphite and electrodes, will give you a meager scope of this one branch upon the enormous tree of the uses that you have brought to humanity by synthetic petroleum chemistry.

All this evidences the great scientific attack made upon the industrial and economic problems of today by the leaders in thought and action in the petroleum industry.

Even much of the inlaid work upon the chair in which you sit pays its share of tribute to the scientific advancement of the oil industry. The Chief, the Santa Fe train coming to Kansas City from Chicago, today is made par excellent by the burning of heavy fuel oil. The Diesel engine on the Great lakes steamers and the rapidly increasing number of barges on our inland waterways, take on added usefulness to commerce and industry by the burning of oils.

How many of you have ever thought of the wide-spread uses of renovating oils? The feather industry in Kansas City makes great use of this oil. Fur and textile industries in our industrial cities are beginning to grasp this new boon to their business. The orchardist and the farmer were quick to apply the insect fighting advantages of the oil spray. The medical profession alone is using thousands of tons of oils in the various medicinal preparations to combat disease and preserve good health. The factories of artificial rubber throughout the country are large consumers of oil products.

In clothing, in rubber boots, in artificial silks, the rubber heels on your shoes, we come in contact with your industry. As a mere suggestion of the rapidly advancing uses of oil products and the probable further application to industry and good living coming from the increasing use of oil products, is the making of chloroform acetic acids, saccharine, flavorings, colorings, perfume, dye stuffs and explosives.

And way up on the tip of the genealogy of the oil tree, you will find a romantic and mysterious branch tip beginning to lift its subtle form from this, and which perhaps augurs much in future prosperity for our country and reduced cost of living. I refer to lard substitutes, edible fats, butter substitutes, and perhaps other edible uses as yet beyond

imagination. And here we find the same fine spirit of courage, vision and scientific research – a far cry from the fine daring of the first Wildcat well in an unknown field.

As captains of the petroleum industry, as true adventurers, as intelligent scientists, as leaders in the industrial progress throughout every stage of your industry, is it any wonder that the Real Estate Board and Kansas City are glad to have the opportunity to welcome you; not in a mere perfunctory sense of compliment and flattery, but in a forceful statement of appreciation of the great value to it, and our trade territory, and the nation at large, of the wonderful achievements that you have wrought within the past ten years.

The question that we of Kansas City should ask ourselves is, what can our city do to help so important and so basic a branch of our nation's commercial life?

We are glad to call your attention to the fact that in the early days of the oil industry it was Kansas City banks that first worked out an acceptance plan of crude oil to comply with the requirements of the Federal Reserve Banks. We are naturally proud of the fact that the form evolved by our Kansas City banks became the model later on for the Chicago, St. Louis, Cleveland and New York banks to use in their later handling of oil acceptances, after it had been demonstrated by the Kansas City banks. We also wish to give the credit due our Kansas City banks for having done so much in developing the car trust loans on oil tank cars in the early days and the very wide interest and appreciation by our banks today of the stability of the oil industry, and their extension of large lines of credit to your business. Few banks of our city today would regard their directory complete unless it had the counsel and advice of one or more of the leaders of your industry on its Board of Directors.

As we look over the situation and comprehend the distributing advantages of our twelve railroads leading North, and East and West from Kansas City as a gateway and realize that 71% of all the gasoline consumed in the United States last year was North of the South line of Kansas and East of the West line of that state, it seems to us that we should realize the responsibility we have in co-operating with you in speeding and facilitating the distribution of your product into this great consuming territory.

We appreciate the three immense pipelines, one the longest electrically equipped pipeline in the world, leading from Wyoming and the Mid-continent fields to Kansas City, and we are glad the use of these pipelines has greatly reduced the price of delivering crude oil to our city. We are interested that in this section where 71% of the gasoline of the United States was consumed last year, and to which territory Kansas City stands as a gateway, that the increase in the gasoline consumption last year amounted to some 13 1/2%, whereas the increase in gasoline consumption in the balance of the United States was approximately 6%. We are glad to know that the Mid-continent field and Texas produced more than 60% of the oil in the United States last year.

In the study of our freight rate situation and our opportunities of industrial advancement, our Chamber of Commerce raised 24 millions of dollars last year to be expended in the next five years in advancing not alone the interests of Kansas City, but of this whole Middle West section, including our agricultural areas.

In the last three years the whole Missouri Valley has become aroused to the great importance of improving the Missouri River for freight transportation of heavy bulk products, and we believe in this field there lies an opportunity of progress for the oil industry which we know, in your pioneer spirit, you will be quick to grasp.

The United States government is committed and appropriating this year, if the President signs the Bill now passed by the Senate and the House, 55 million, 800 thousand dollars for the improvement of our inland waterways and our harbors. The Ohio River has already received some ninety million dollars of federal money and is to be opened with some 50 locks throughout its length for barge line transportation within a year. The lower Mississippi barge line from St. Louis to Louisiana hauled more than a million tons of freight last year and was offered seven times as much freight as it could handle. Barge line service opened on the upper Mississippi to Minneapolis and St. Paul just last summer and is now quadrupling its equipment. The Government has promised the improvement of the Illinois River and Chicago Canal from the Mississippi to the Great Lakes within three or four years. The building of the Intercoastal canal from New Orleans to Corpus Christi is now going forward.

Here on the Missouri River, by the expenditure of 4 1/2 million dollars this year and 5 millions next year, from Kansas City to St. Louis, this whole inland waterway transportation route of 9,000 miles of our great rivers will be connected to Kansas City and not only make us a seaport town but give us either direct or indirect inland waterway transportation to some twenty-six states, extending from here to Cincinnati and Pittsburgh, Minneapolis and St. Paul, Chicago and by the Great Lakes to Lake City, to St. Louis, New Orleans, Houston, Galveston and to the ocean steamers serving our entire coast, South America and the world.

A tonnage survey is being carried on along the Missouri River at this very hour by the United States government, to determine the type and number of barges to be used to Kansas City. This tonnage survey also extends to the upper regions of the Missouri River, as far north as Yankton, South Dakota, working toward carrying the improvements on the Missouri River and barges as far north as the Dakotas.

Have you, as producers and merchants of oil, in your busy lives, paused to comprehend this new strategic distributing opportunity and the great savings in freight rates that will come with the establishment of a barge line which can carry the equivalent of 400 freight cars in one movement?

Have you realized that cities like Memphis are voting bonds and spending millions of dollars in providing docks with great modern loading and unloading equipment, reducing the cost of handling terminal tonnage from \$2.40 per ton to 43 cents per ton, on the lower Mississippi?

Do you realize that most of the cities on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, large and small, are voting bonds to provide modern and efficient docks and river terminals?

Have you stopped to think that the Missouri River is the longest river in the world, with the most even flow of water; that it has the least variation between high and low stage and the greatest volume of water in the low season, on account of being fed by

melting snow from the upper regions of the Missouri River in the Rocky Mountains, than either the upper Ohio River or the upper Mississippi River?

Last fall, one hundred and fifty of our leading business men took a seventy-five mile boat trip down the Missouri River, from Kansas City, studying the marvelous progress being made by the Government engineers engaged in stabilizing the banks and controlling the current of the stream, and returned, thoroughly convinced to a man, that this longest haul region in this entire nation, of everything we buy and everything we sell, was at last reaching the time when the great natural resources offered us in the Missouri River, is again to be utilized to serve this western Empire in industrial and agricultural progress as it once did by opening it to civilization.

We have been interested in the saving of about a cent and a half per gallon on gasoline being transported today in the two million capacity tanker on the Great Lakes. We have been interested in the great quantity of crude oil and gasoline being transported on the lower Mississippi barge lines.

Kansas City feels that it is its opportunity and duty to cooperate with the oil industry to provide ample and modern equipment for the transportation of your products from rail and pipelines to the barge lines on the Missouri River and the entire inland waterways system. The Interstate Commerce Commission has approved a rate on the lower Mississippi barge line of 20% less than the rail rate. The benefit from barge line transportation will not accrue alone to the river cities. A large majority of the freight moved on the lower Mississippi barge line today is combined rail and driver movement. The great benefits coming from the Missouri barge line will not adhere to river cities alone, but will spread their proportionate saving on a large majority of freight to the inland towns, cities and farms through this combined water and rail movement. This has already been evidenced by the fact that some thirty-four states are today using the lower Mississippi barge line.

Have you comprehended the adverse competitive effects upon your territory and the immediate Kansas City territory of the lower freight rates enjoyed by our coast sections now, by the all-water haul as a result of the Panama Canal? It seems to us that the competition of Mexican oil and California oil to a certain extent contracts your consuming market and your retail price in the coast belt territory of our nation, and we believe that proper inland water transportation at reduced cost will clearly mark the territory served by Kansas City as the greatest field of outlet for your increasing production. Herbert Hoover said, "Business begets business, and traffic breeds traffic," so we put much importance on this new opportunity of increasing the distribution of your products, and bring a better national balance of production, population and consumption.

In all our study of our freight situation, our relations to the economic structures of the country in our campaign for the improvement of the upper and lower Missouri River and the establishment of a government barge line on it, we have had the most splendid and valuable co-operation of the oil men living or having offices in Kansas City.

We want your suggestions and your ideas of how our city can co-operate with you. We welcome the oil companies who have made their headquarters and established their sales offices here. At the same time, we appreciate that the growth of such oil cities as Tulsa, Fort Worth and Wichita add to the consuming population in our territory and

create a new demand for Kansas City as the largest city in the Middle West to rise to its opportunity and co-operate in the upbuilding of our part of the nation.

We should not oppose the moving of some of our industries to your cities, or the establishing of branch houses in your cities, and taking away from us some of the trade we formerly enjoyed – if you can serve them better than we.

But we should realize that with the growth of your cities, we have a greater consuming population to serve and an opportunity as a super-city to establish larger and new industries here, adapted and enlarged to the change and growth in this whole section.

We also feel that Kansas City has an obligation to offer opportunities for the higher purposes of living sought by so many of the leaders in your business. We are impressed with the great appreciation by many of you of the advantages of music, art and literature, and other cultural and recreational facilities, and we admire the leadership which you have so ably taken in developing the opportunity for the greater enjoyment of these most worthwhile things in life.

We propose to establish an Art Center in Kansas City – made possible by the great bequest of the W.R. Nelson family, which eventually will be second to none in the United States and which is being so ably assisted by your splendid Mr. A.R. Jones and Mr. Howard Vanderslice.

Also, Mr. L.L. Marcell, one of your splendid leaders, is at this very time, leading a movement to make Kansas City the Musical Center of the West directing and supporting a musical school already serving 3,500 students, and establishing a curriculum and an excellence in musical education that already places our Horner Conservatory of Music at least on a par with any musical school in the United States.

Many of our citizens are leading a movement to build a great university here, known as the Lincoln and Lee University; our medical profession recognizes its responsibility to this great territory in attracting the best members of its profession to be found in the country, and build and equip hospitals second to none; our churches, our schools, our many excellent college preparatory private schools, our parks, our playgrounds, our twenty-one golf clubs, our city planning, our great insurance companies – are all being conceived and developed upon a plane to serve a city of many times our present size, and we hope to offer advantages for good living as fine, or superior, to anything to be found in cities on the West or East Coasts.

If any of the men of your industry, for any reason, move the place of their homes of business, we bid you welcome to Kansas City, rather than to California or New York.

And let me say right here that we admire the great bond of fraternity and co-operation that seems to obtain in the oil industry to a greater degree than in any other large sector of our commercial life. Let me also pay tribute to the very fine type of scientific and industrial training that many organizations in the oil industry are giving scores of young men in their training schools which they maintain for the developing of the skill and knowledge of their employees. Not all of these men remain in the oil industry, and many of them are carrying the benefits of this training into other lines of industry.

In frequently visiting Bartlesville, one of the typical modern oil towns of the Mid-continent field, one cannot but be impressed with the cosmopolitan air of the place and the high average intelligence and education of the people engaged in the oil trade. I believe that in no other industry will you find more of the college trained men gathered from all corners of our nation, the best talent of our youth, and being equipped for successful careers in this great industry.

And with all our opportunities to work and live together, let us comprehend that the average product output per man in all lines of business in the United States has increased 79% in the last twenty-five years, and let us realize that the business activity of the country has increased three-fold in that period and let us accept the responsibility that new billions of accumulated reserve wealth gives the generation of today over the last generation; let us comprehend the increased world power of the United States since the war. Let us realize that our interests in the Middle West are common and mutual; let us realize that we are in keen competition with the world and the older established industrial sections of our country.

Let us realize that our consuming populations on our farms have actually been decreasing in the last decade and that, it is our problem to work together and increase our consuming markets at home, manufacture the raw products at our door, improve the condition of our farms, increase the industry in our cities and improve the living conditions of our whole section of the United States to hold our population at home.

We are being linked together by splendid federal roads and the use of the automobile and the air-plane which almost make your cities and ours next door neighbors. In meeting our new industrial and economic problems, we need the benefit of the splendid intelligence which has so well guided your industry. It is the hope of our realtors, our newspapers, our banks, our Chamber of Commerce, and our various civic organizations, that this meeting tonight may bring about the greater appreciation on our part of your industry and we trust we may establish a closer bond of friendship and fellowship with you.

The very product which you create is going a long way to increase the natural one half horse power per man of our population to a force of one thousand or ten thousand horse power per certain leaders of our times and region.

If we were to dial upon the great clock reaching back 240,000 years to the dawn of historical man, the progress of the oil industry since its birth seventy-five years ago would represent but a few seconds in all the progress of this world and yet when we conceive the gigantic strides you have made within those few seconds of historical time, we begin to have some comprehension of the achievements of tomorrow and when we think of the various uses of your product which I have described, we begin to have some comprehension of the industrializing the humanizing and the civilizing influence of your industry. Let us again pay our respect to the initiative and intelligence displayed by you in your industry and in your vision and passion to overcome some of the greatest problems of our time.

The center of population in this country is moving westward and the United States should count on 40 million more people within twenty-five years. There is a shifting of industry going on since the war that opens a great opportunity to all of us. The men of

the Middle West are ready to challenge the daring and vision and leadership of the men of any other part of our country in directing forces of this western empire and it is our wish and our determination that the people of Kansas City volunteer and pledge themselves to co-operate with your industry in every possible way, forgetting sectional lines, forgetting any possible differences of the past and co-operating to the end that the real Athenian spirit of America, the real leadership in industry and commerce shall find its final location in the great Middle West which you are doing so much to help build and of which all of us are so proud.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN018

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.