



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

**Opening of William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art
and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts**

Kansas City, Missouri December 11, 1933

It is with a high sense of privilege and pardonable pride that the Trustees present to Kansas City and the Middle West the William Rockhill Nelson Collection of Art.

This magnificent gallery was dedicated to the use of all people. We remember again today with deep feeling, Mrs. Nelson, Mr. and Mrs. Kirkwood, Mary Atkins and Frank Rozzelle. Their names will be enshrined forever in the memory of a grateful community.

We had had no small conception of the objective of the Will of that great citizen, William Rockhill Nelson, who gave his all to the creation of a perpetual fund, the income from which should be devoted forever to the purchase of objects of art.

Five years ago the Trustees adopted a broad policy, to create a collection reflecting the best handiwork of civilized man in all known ages. Our representatives have journeyed into many lands; into the regions that nourished "the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome," into Asia Minor, to excavate the graves of civilizations that flourished three thousand years before Christ; into the region of the Caspian Sea; into Ancient Egypt; into China and Japan, to find the sources of those artistic influences on later civilizations; to Honduras, Yucatan and Peru to secure worthy examples of the arts that flourished long before the American Indian. We have searched Europe of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the later centuries.

Yet there is no part of the collection which we present with greater satisfaction than that devoted to American work. Our outstanding American painters are admirably represented. Five American period rooms record significant stages in our growth.

The American Indian collection, while not large, is offered as unsurpassed for true quality.

This occasion is full of meaning. Every nation, after winning its struggle for existence, has turned its attention to the arts.

Kansas City, the heart of America, today gives evidence of its advancement to greater cultural appreciation.

The generations just behind us conquered a wilderness of prairie and of plain. Now art comes. May our people assert themselves from this day forward in higher aspirations, loftier ideals and nobler conceptions of the imperishable values of life.

Kansas City feels an obligation to all the cities, towns and rural areas of this great valley. We now answer the challenge by presenting an exhibition to instruct and inspire every man, woman and child in this broad area.

We believe our city to be the most truly American community. Its people are vibrant; with a driving energy that expresses itself in creative activity. The venturesome spirit that actuated our pioneers is recorded in this imperishable monument.

Yes, the crudities of the West are rapidly disappearing.

Many feel that the hope of American democracy lies in the West, where human imagination knows no bounds or barriers; where the prowess of our people is not retarded by tradition; where pioneer courage carries on to create richer opportunities and new joys for our people.

The Nelson collection could not have come at a more opportune time. Perhaps the struggle of the next decade will be in the human heart and soul, rather than in commercial conquest or the effort to extend land frontiers. The Trustees hope that these thrilling pictures and tapestries; the fascinating sculptures; the colorful pottery, porcelain and glass; the exquisite fabrics, laces, wood carvings and jewelry which the ages have given us, will sing with meaning, bringing new courage to the hearts of our people, new joy to their souls. These mute messengers from the past should sweep aside any doubt as to the permanency of our civilization.

All those who design the things made in our workshops in the great West may come here to make their products more pleasing to the eye, contributing to a better national taste, helping to make ugliness unknown in our part of the country.

Art is not a fancy or a fad. It is a vital force in the lives of us all. Art is never sterile. Always rugged, it surges through every activity from education to commerce, yet it is as tender as the smile on a baby's face.

No man need be ashamed because he feels a tug at his heartstring and a tear glistens in his eye as he stands before objects of art which grip his soul. Every object in these galleries is a product of human thought, surpassing the rank and file of its time. Every lovely curve, every exacting proportion is the product of a hand driven by a high desire to create a better standard.

The Trustees hope that you will here establish new contacts with the most worthwhile things in life; that you will be quickened to see the beauties in nature and in life that formerly have gone unnoted all around you.

Make this collection be a constant influence in your life. Tarry long when you come to the Gallery. Rest in the beautiful, open court. There is adventure here, adventure in finer living. Drink from a fount of inspiration that never runs dry. As you study some great masterpiece, may recollections of the past be vividly flashed again across your memory. May these halls help you to recall the harmony of friendships long since gone and carry you on wings of fancy into the divine realms of new happiness.

We invite every educational institution and organization within hundreds of miles to regard the Nelson Gallery of Art and the Atkins Museum as its personal heritage and asset.

There is a welcome here for all. Regardless of the clothes he wears, his wealth or position, everyone may feel that it belongs to him.

But the picture is not complete. The unfinished section of this building presents a wonderful opportunity to house gifts by men and women whose devotion to fine things will inspire them to bring the collection to its ultimate greatness.

We must think of our children and our children's children.

Nothing should inspire us more than the thought that our boys and girls may feel this ennobling influence in the formative period of their lives. No city in America claims a more imposing temple of art or a more magnificent setting. Let us now be content until the grounds are extended across the valley, with the reflecting pool linking them to the great university rising on the south. Surrounded by parks, beautiful homes and the Art Institute, supported by this vast people which instinctively loves the natural beauty of the west and unfailingly responds to those movements which seek to benefit mankind, there is no limit to the growth, influence and universal benefit of this exhibition.

Tonight is the beginning: tomorrow a new opportunity dawns. In perpetuity shall this Gallery live, shall its valued treasures grow in number.

And so the William Rockhill Nelson collection of art becomes a vital and enduring expression of a personality that valued beauty as sacred and desired to bring it into the lives of all of us. Poets tell us that all we can take with us when we die is that which we have given away. Mr. Nelson left us with full hands.

May these halls become a rallying place for high ideals and aspirations; may they crystallize a greater love for beauty, a fresh enthusiasm for living; may they be a happy, democratic meeting place for all groups, all races, all creeds, all men, who call the middle west their home.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN025

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.