



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

**Value of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art  
and Atkins Museum of Fine Arts to  
Kansas City and the Middle West**

Chamber of Commerce, Kansas City, Missouri

January 9, 1935

My co-trustees, Mr. Herbert V. Jones and Mr. Arthur M. Hyde; and the building trustees greatly appreciate the significance attached by the Chamber of Commerce to the first anniversary of the opening of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and the Atkins Museum of Fine Arts; perhaps Kansas City's most important civic asset.

This collection has brought more people to our city during the past year than all other civic and public activities combined; with any attendance of more than 1,000 persons per day, including approximately 100,000 out of town visitors during the year. People have come from every state in the Union; from every country in Europe, and many places in Africa and Asia.

Hundreds of columns of favorable publicity have appeared in newspapers, magazines and other publications throughout the U. S. and foreign countries.

Twelve to fifteen hundred children a week are now being given special instruction in art appreciation in the gallery. As children pass through the public schools, when they reach the sixth grade, all are taken to the gallery five times during that school year. There they remain two hours and are given careful and intensive instruction and demonstration by the skilled members of our educational department.

It would give you a great thrill to see the vivid interest and intense enthusiasm of these children. This is a powerful and ennobling influence for appreciation of better design in every physical object and higher impulses for better living, being placed before these children at the most formative period of their lives.

Moreover, it is impossible to calculate the great value to them in their geographical and historical studies, giving them a visualization of the customs of days gone by. Here they receive invaluable lessons in the manner of dress of our forefathers, and those of other nations; their methods of farming; their style of architecture; the indigenous types of trees and other horticultural growth; as well as matters pertaining to the lives of peoples in other civilizations in every part of the globe. All these lessons are taught from the more than 10,000 objects of art which are housed in the gallery structure.

During this past year members of our staff have given illustrated lectures in some fifty towns in Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma.

More than 10,000 (130-page) illustrated handbooks, and tens of thousands of pictorial cards and photographs have been purchased at the gallery by interested visitors, while many more have been sent to clubs and various organizations throughout the surrounding states for group study in their communities.

Plans are now being developed looking toward the furnishing of a weekly column of art with appropriate illustrations for each week, to be distributed free to every newspaper within a radius of 200 to 400 miles of Kansas City.

Small informative leaflets have been distributed by the hotel association to all the leading hotels, and properly displayed in each room, giving the hours that the gallery is open, with an invitation to all guests.

Some 100,000 or more leaflets telling about the gallery were distributed by the Retail Merchants Association.

Another 100,000 were distributed by the Convention and Visitors Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce. It certainly is one of the strongest arguments in presenting the cause of our town as a desirable convention city. During every important convention to Kansas City, our attendance immediately mounts.

Our director, Mr. Paul Gardner, has endeavored to time our loan exhibitions in our three large loan galleries, so as to fit in and be appropriate to the activity of the city on particular occasions. For instance, during the American Royal we had a fine exhibition of paintings of the world's most famous horses; and exquisite sculptured examples of horses, cattle, hogs and sheep in bronze and stone. This one exhibition enjoyed the attendance of some 40,000 people.

Not long ago we acquired one group of thirty costumes from Japan, exquisite and graceful in line and composition; beautiful in harmony of color. We have been seeking and considering good examples of American costume design beginning with Colonial days.

Within the last week Mr. H.G. Moore of Peoria, Ill., formerly a resident of this city and president of this Chamber, has written us relative to making a gift in memory of his late wife, of ninety dolls, displaying native costume and dress of many different countries. These will not only immediately catch the eye of all the children who come to the gallery, but will teach a valuable lesson in the designing of costumes.

At an appropriate time of the year during the best buying season of furniture and other objects of interior decoration, we hope to plan special exhibits of famous examples of such craftsmanship.

Within our city and nearby Leavenworth, we have many furniture and wood manufacturing concerns. Their designers are welcome to come into our gallery and study and copy in detail some of the best-known designs of furniture and woodcarving which have come down to us through the ages.

We are a city of considerable importance in the manufacture of jewelry. While our collection in this department is as yet small, through the years we plan to make it a very important one. Here will be found examples which may be studied by our manufacturers, not only of comparatively modern designs but dating back to the early

ages of Egyptian civilization; of the Hittites, Canaanites and Scythians, as well as of the golden age of Greece and Rome.

The various excavation expeditions in which we have joined in Persia, Palestine, and Asia Minor are yielding interesting and splendid examples of jewelry made one to four thousand years before the Christian era. In Central America we found examples of that strange, mysterious race of Mayans who antedate all known history on our Western continent.

The very presence of such a great collection of art as there is in Paris, for instance, perhaps had much to do with the size of that city, and in making their designers and manufacturers dominant over the world in the matter of styles. Style and design alone may add value a hundredfold to mere raw material.

A casual visit to the Metropolitan Museum in New York today will disclose dozens – yes, hundreds – of designers being sent there by various factories, not only in New York City, but from many other Eastern Cities. These manufacturers recognize the value of the inspiration that comes from the study of these wonderful creations of our ancestors, in bringing forth new ideas. I doubt if we have even begun as yet to realize and take advantage of the great opportunity afforded to our city in industrial growth made possible by this collection.

Architects may find there splendid examples of interior designs, doorways, windows, fireplaces and mantels, all being the actual rooms which were dismantled in their original places and re-assembled in our gallery exactly as they were two-to-five-hundred years ago. Our thousands of prints and paintings in the gallery becomes a veritable school of design, where architects, interior decorators, and landscape artists may find inspiration among the best examples of the products of their profession.

We are already accumulating some fine examples of wallpaper, dating back one-hundred to two-hundred years, as well as lighting fixtures, not only of this country, but of foreign lands. Certainly such exhibitions are of value to the manufacturers of such products in Kansas City and the surrounding region.

Our rare, beautiful objects of glass may some day inspire and cause glass factories to take advantage of our natural gas fuel and build a new great industry here.

I have always felt that one of our greatest and least used natural resources was the splendid deposit of clay along the Missouri River bluffs, so adaptable for the manufacture of terra-cotta, porcelain, china, pottery and other allied lines. We already have terra-cotta plants of importance here and we have the making of some pottery.

We are collecting and intending to develop a collection of the best examples of art in terra-cotta. Our pottery collection already ranks high in the country. Our Chinese porcelains are drawing technical students from everywhere. In fact, our whole Chinese collection already ranks third in the entire United States and many of its objects surpass anything to be found in the entire world, yet we are competing with galleries which have been collecting fifty to seventy-five years.

In our pottery collection we have more than twelve nations represented; every object carefully chosen as being the best example of the artist's handiwork of that particular time. Duplications are being carefully avoided. At this time we have probably

ten times as much pottery in storage as we have on exhibition. In fact, it is our ultimate aim in many of our departments to have sufficient material in storage to make a complete change of that particular exhibition every thirty days throughout the year.

We wish to create new interest in the gallery every month. We do not want anyone to feel that because they have visited the gallery once they have seen all there is to see and there is no reason to go again. Such is not the case. We want people to develop the habit of making monthly trips to the gallery to see, not only the new acquisitions, but the objects brought from our immense storage vaults and displayed from time to time.

Special exhibitions can be displayed at any time to serve any industry in our community. Mr. Gardner will gladly arrange that the designers or representatives of any industry may have special displays prepared for their own particular study, set up if necessary in one of our small study rooms on our lower floor with permission to copy and design anything of interest and value to them.

While our ornamental-iron collection is yet small, through the years we hope to make it of value to such factories in our community.

We have already assembled a very wide and splendid collection of tapestries and rugs, including some of the best examples of color and weaving design that the world has ever known. Perhaps some day our wool of this region will be woven here in the Middle West.

Our collection of baskets represents many civilizations. Those of the southwest American Indian field alone, so carefully selected for us by the Fred Harvey Co., is one of the finest in the land. Kansas City, with the raw resources available at her very door, should take advantage of this great laboratory of designing in the art of basketry. Perhaps the thousands of acres of willows growing up and down the Missouri River flats could be turned into a great asset.

It is our aim to assemble some of the finest examples of printing that the world affords. We already have some of the rarest books in existence, with most delicate and exquisite illustrations and the finest of hand printing. Kansas City is already an important printing center, serving a vast territory. From the beginning we have regarded this as an important industry for us to cover.

In addition to books classified as objects of fine art, we are gradually building up a splendid art reference library. No gift would be more acceptable to the trustees at this time than funds that could be devoted to building more rapidly our number of reference books. We should have at least 5,000 volumes in order to begin to cover the many sources of information that should be available, not only for our director, his curators and staff, but for the interest of the public wishing to study more carefully any object or field of art.

Many of the commercial artists of Kansas City are already taking frequent advantage of the opportunity for study that is to be found in our exhibition.

Poster design and drawing; newspaper and magazine advertising illustrations; the very designing of letters; the use of color; all of these may be improved by studying the collection in this field.

The time is too short to cover the whole field of the relation of this collection of art to the commerce and industry in the Missouri River valley. I have endeavored only to point out a few of the intimate and practical relations.

I hope I have convinced you that 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. Perhaps the race for commercial supremacy in the Middle West depends upon the extent to which we apply art in manufacture of our great storehouse of raw materials.

While in our purchases we are restricted to objects of art whose makers have been dead at least thirty years, and while this gives us thousands of years of human achievement to draw upon. Nevertheless we are extremely desirous through gifts to acquire modern and contemporary examples in all fields.

We are glad to announce that we have already received a number of such gifts. There seems to be a mistaken idea that no object can be accepted unless it complies with the thirty-year clause of our will. This is not true. We can display gifts of any objects of fine art, though the artist may even be still living.

One of the interesting things about our gifts is that many of them are coming from people outside of Kansas City, and frequently from very unexpected sources. Just a month or two ago a man from Ponca City, Okla., who formerly lived in Kansas City, inquired as to the proper wording to be used in his will relating to a bequest he wished to make us. Gifts have come to us from China, as well as from London and Paris.

Certain people in New York, who formerly lived in Kansas City, or in Missouri or Kansas, have presented much-desired objects.

We know of a number of wills here in Kansas City which have been redrawn in order to bequeath either funds or objects of art. We are meeting in conference with a certain citizen within a few days who is considering a gift of perhaps \$100,000 for a certain activity which we sorely need.

A large majority of the objects to be found in the Metropolitan Art Museum in New York, or the Boston Museum, or the Chicago Art Institute, have come by gift rather than through purchase.

A reasonable value of our collection will soon be approximately \$10,000,000, but within a generation or two I would not be surprised to see it mount to \$100,000,000 largely through gifts. Certainly it will not be long until it will be necessary to finish the western half of the Gallery to house our rapidly growing collection.

A splendid example is the recent fine gift of Mrs. J. L. Loose, who gave us her collection of oriental jewelry and other rare objects gathered by her and Mr. Loose in their many trips around the world.

My appeal to you today is to enjoy and use this great collection. Let's not only make it a new elevating influence in the lives of our people, but make it a great and powerful factor in the building of our trade and commerce.

Too few of you remember to invite your out-of-town customers to visit the gallery. The late Louis Rothschild a few days before his death spoke to us about a plan

by which the benefits to be derived from this collection. I am afraid that some of you are so close to this great opportunity that you do not fully appreciate it, while the out-of-town people who come here are surprised and thrilled beyond our comprehension.

Young J. Pierpont Morgan, who was recently making a tour of the Middle West, was more impressed by the achievement in our gallery than anything he found on his whole trip, and went away with a newer and better appreciation of Kansas City and its people. Mr. H. I. Harriman, president of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, on his last trip here, was astonished and pleased beyond all his expectations by our gallery.

We have had out-of-town visitors who come here and remain for days, studying this collection, and yet we know that there is a large part of our own local people who have not yet even visited the gallery though it has been free to them every Saturday and Sunday for a whole year.

You employees will find it to your own distinct advantage to put up a bulletin for your employees, urging them to use this gallery. You, yourself, should develop the habit of visiting the gallery and seeing the things that can be of so much help to you in your business and in your life. Our whole staff is at your service.

Perhaps you can send a little enclosure in all of your out-of-town mail inviting your customers and friends to visit the gallery while they are here. They will appreciate it, and think better of our city.

As active as Mr. Gardner has been, and with the splendid help the newspapers have rendered in telling about the Wednesday evening lectures in the Auditorium of the Atkins wing of the building, in which from week to week all fields of art are carefully illustrated and explained through the research and study of our splendid technical staff, still the people as a whole are not beginning to take advantage of the opportunity afforded in these lectures.

I cannot end my remarks without paying our respect to the excellent work being done by the Kansas City Art Institute, across the street. We are fortunate that its director, Mr. Rossiter Howard, is perhaps a little more interested in industrial art than in any other field. Few men in this country have had greater experience or more knowledge than he, on this subject. The industrial art exhibition which he is planning this spring should be an immense boon to our city.

These two institutions are working hand in hand in a fine spirit of cooperation. There is a great field for both of them and their activities supplement each other.

Our intimate physical relation is being well cemented by the memorial gateway and driveway recently given to the Art Institute by Mrs. H. S. Epperson in honor of her good husband, and which is now being built, directly connecting these two institutions.

The art school in the Art Institute should grow into an enrollment of at least a thousand students, coming from all over the West, with the Gallery furnishing an almost limitless source of inspirational material for study.

The members of the building trust have provided a building worthy of the memory of Mr. and Mrs. Nelson; Mr. and Mrs. Irwin Kirkwood; Mr. Frank Rozelle, and

Mrs. Mary Atkins. Wight and Wight, the architects, accomplished a triumph in the designing of the building. John Long, the builder, erected a monument that will be here a thousand years from now. Herbert Hare, developed a landscape setting which, when completed with the proposed reflecting pool to the south, will surpass for gallery grounds, any place in the entire world.

Linked together, as we will be, with the University of Kansas City rising rapidly on the hill to the south and the Art Institute to the west, we have a setting second to none; and this all in a city which is surrounded by almost unlimited raw products as yet largely unused; with a citizenry that believes in the industrial growth of our section; with a labor of intelligence and talent not to be surpassed anywhere, there is no limit to the value that we may derive from this institution and its contents.

Kansas City has an obligation to all the cities, towns, and rural areas in this great valley. We have now answered this 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 driving energy that expresses itself in creative activity. The venturesome spirit that actuated our forefathers will carry us on to new fields of achievement, not only in industrial gain but in the sheer and glorious joy of better living.

The generations just behind us conquered a wilderness of prairie and plain. Now art comes! Yes, the crudities of the West are rapidly disappearing. Many feel the hope of American democracy lies in the west, where human imagination knows no bounds nor barriers, where its people are quick to try new ways, where we are not bound by traditions, where pioneer courage will carry on to create richer opportunities and new horizons for our people. New land frontiers are a thing of the past. But new frontiers surround us on every hand for more intensive use of our rich soils and the making of objects of daily necessities for a great nation, from the unlimited material at our door. Good design inspired by the great William Rockhill Nelson collection of art should play no small part in this great forward movement of our time.

My appeal to you is not simply to accept this collection and gallery as a rare and beautiful thing of luxury to be enjoyed only in leisure; but as a live, dominant force that should reflect itself in almost every business and industry in this community. And in so doing I am sure we will be carrying out the high purpose of all those splendid honors who made it possible, who believe in and so instinctively loved the west, that they left their all to its financial, industrial and cultural capital, Kansas City, the Heart of America.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN029

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.