



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

Important Industrial Aspects

Given to the Kansas City Real Estate Board
Kansas City, Missouri September 25, 1936

Land Frontiers in Kansas City's trade territory have passed. We are confronted today with a declining population on our farms; farm machinery constantly reducing the number of farm hands. This means fewer consumers for our manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers. During the last two or three years there has been further curtailment of our agriculture by governmental direction. Our loss of foreign markets is well known.

Kansas City has always proudly boasted of itself as the agricultural capital of a great Middle Western empire stretching in all directions with no forbidding mountains, arid deserts, or expanses of unproductive lakes or seas. We have established here the largest distributing center of farm implements. We became the second largest center in livestock, packinghouse, and grain markets, ranking second in flour milling and high in stock food products. From many states have we drawn an immense trade based largely on the products of our farms.

If we are approaching even a static condition in the growth of our agriculture; if we have reached the maximum consumer population of our farms; if we are ambitious for the future growth of our town, should we not be contemplating the forces which can create a basis for our future progress?

Few large cities in America are more dependent upon one great industry – agriculture.

Realtors' livelihood depends largely upon the growth of our city. We cannot prosper in a static community. We must be interested in dynamic progress and forward movement if we are to succeed. We must look for new frontiers; for new opportunity for the creative genius of our business leaders, and our great body of intelligent American laborers. Survey the situation as you will, you cannot but lead to one conclusion; we must build Kansas City industrially.

Fortunately, situated as we are in the center of a great supply of raw products, of which as yet the surface has been barely scratched; located in the heart of our nation; with river, rail, highway and air transportation covering our territory like the web of a spider; with financial and commercial and business institutions outstanding in our nation; with ideal educational, religious, recreational, cultural and residential facilities; with an alert constructive group of citizens ready to move forward to new frontiers; I say again, we must become more industrially minded if Kansas City is to continue in the race for commercial supremacy.

Next Sunday an “Art in Industry Exhibition” opens at the Kansas City Art Institute, continuing for one week, from 2 till 9 p.m. with admission free. Some 90 manufacturers in Kansas City are joining in this exhibition. Through the newspapers we have invited every manufacturer who feels that good design is an important factor in his product, to enter this show. This exhibition will demonstrate that art, or good design is not a fancy or fad; it is a vital force in the lives of us all; never sterile; always rugged; surging through every activity in commerce. Perhaps the extent to which manufacturers of our town employ good design largely controls the future growth of Kansas City.

The driving energy that built this city still lives in our creative activity. The venturesome spirit of our forefathers will carry us on to new fields of achievement. The generations just behind us conquered a wilderness of prairie and plain. Now good design comes.

Artistic pattern or form generally spells economy and solidarity, which, plus efficiency and art, creates a product the world loves to see and touch.

The news of a new artistically created product travels with lightening speed.

The 20th Century standard of beauty and attractiveness is evident in nearly every package you see on the shelves of every merchant in Kansas City.

The world today, more than ever before, is striving to sell through the eye. The human eye is a great salesman.

This is the epic struggle at our doors. Our trained artists give a new form – a new pattern – recast the whole design, making the article, not only a symbol of utility, but a symbol of beauty.

I predict that during the next decade, the mainspring of industry will be “good design.” This is the industrial revolution of our time.

Herein lies a field in which human imagination and daring know no bounds or barriers; herein lies a new frontier; herein lies the great destiny of that fabulous storehouse of raw materials in our trade territory.

Let us survey these resources. Along the banks of the Missouri River we have clay equal to any in America; worth perhaps a few cents per ton in the banks of the river, it becomes worth thousands of dollars when molded into lovely pottery and china or terra cotta.

Today from the clay in the slopes of Mt. Oread in Lawrence, Kansas, the University is molding some of the most exquisite pottery to be found in America.

To the south of us, throughout southern Missouri, we have great areas of hard wood timber remarkably adapted to the making of fine furniture, sash and door panels and other wood products. Consider the comparative value of the wood in a standing tree, and the value of the same wood transformed under the direction of a good designer into a charming piece of furniture, reflecting comfort and joy of life.

We boast that we are the largest collecting point of raw walnut, one of the rare woods of America. Yet, how little of this splendid wood is transformed into greater

value within the boundaries of our city? It is shipped throughout the country where its value increases many fold by the magic touch of artistry.

Along the Missouri River bottomlands are tens of thousands of acres of willows, going to waste. And yet, these willows are amazingly adapted to being woven into baskets, which touched with the color effect of the paints from our paint factories would bring a great new industry to our city.

Out in Kansas, at our very doors, we grow great quantities of broomcorn. This is a product which could be turned into great value in the form of brushes, greatly enhanced by the touch of the skilled artisan.

Down around Carthage, we have an abundance of excellent quality of stone which lends itself well to the sculptor's hand, perhaps increasing the value of a chunk of stone a hundred times.

We boast that we are one of the largest junk iron centers of America, supporting one of the great basic industries of our territory. Here lies an opportunity for the development of an ornamental iron industry invaluable in the beautifying of our commercial and residential structures. The thousands of carloads of junk iron that roll into Kansas City every year can leave untold wealth within the confines of our city simply by the trained touch of the designer's hand.

To the south of us we have great lead and zinc mines, centering around Joplin. Both white lead and zinc oxide are basis pigments for the making of paints of vivifying and harmonizing colors, adding immense values in beauty as well as in preservation and protection to the articles to which they are applied. Just recently Dr. Royce H. LeRoy of the University of Kansas City told me of a new paint pigment which has been developed from finely divided metallic zinc and which adds luster and durability to an ordinary begrimed smokestack, making of it a thing of beauty against the sky. Of course, zinc is fundamental to our galvanizing industry.

We are proud to say Kansas City is located in the greatest live stock producing area in the United States, resulting, as I have said, in its being the second largest meat packing city. Our great American Royal Live Stock Show brings the beauty and perfection of well-bred stock to the public eye, in a rapidly moving panorama of natural art.

We produce an almost unlimited amount of hides, and yet the value of these raw skins represents a very small part of the boots, shoes, harness, drumheads, and many beautiful hand-tooled leather wares which they may eventually become in the manufacturing centers of the east. I have just returned from Mexico where thousands of Mexicans are employed daily in hand tooling leather into lovely pocketbooks; desk pads; picture frames; bookbindings, and other ornamental objects. With modern methods of tanning by chemicals, it is no longer necessary to ship our hides to distant states to be tanned.

Go down to these packing houses and see the almost unbelievable volume of horns and bones being shipped out of Kansas City only to be returned here in the form of fine combs, buttons, handles, brushes and other articles of daily necessity.

Hair from the animals slaughtered in Kansas City is shipped eastward to be used in the manufacture of felts and other upholstery used all the way from automobiles to Pullman cars.

Strings for tennis rackets and musical instruments and surgical supplies are even made from intestines.

Numerous pharmaceutical products and extracts are made from animal glands and secretions.

Even the gall stones are taken from the animals and transformed into dyes to add beauty to objects of commerce, and according to George Catts, Executive Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, I am mentioning only a few of such products.

Let me again remind you in this survey of raw products which abound in our territory, I am endeavoring to point out the importance of good composition in the multiplying of the value of the products, and let me say that the Kansas City Art Institute is devoted to the purpose of turning out from its school every year, skilled designers to serve the manufacturers of our community who appreciate the sales value of good artistic form.

We are one of the great raw wool markets of the west, and yet almost none of this wool is woven in our own city. Reflect upon the value of this raw wool as compared with the handsome woven fabrics to be found in the marts of the east. Then, too, wool grease is widely used in cosmetics.

St. Louis from force of habit has been considered an established fur market. Many of these furs are transported through Kansas City. Certainly artistic lines play a most important part in the manufacture of raw furs into beautiful and expensive coats.

Let us not overlook fine great use of feathers in manufacturing. We are a large poultry market.

Hugh Curran, President of the North Kansas City Development Company, told me yesterday that Kansas City ranks high as a waste paper market. This is a product that is available for the manufacturer of fancy boxes and good-looking containers which exert untold influence in selling the articles enclosed. Certainly there is opportunity here for the establishment of more factories to consume this great volume of waste paper, particularly when you realize that this is an era when the artistic wrapping of a package is one of the strongest factors in its sale.

There is a composition being made for the manufacture of common card tables, in which the principal ingredient is peanut hulls!

Out of our community every month is shipped an immense tonnage of old automobile tires, and yet these despised and abandoned tires may later be worn by some of our women as a silk substitute, or maybe used in the manufacture of artificial flowers, or worn on the heels of our shoes. Is this not cause for the establishment of a factory in our city for the use of this valuable material? Some day we may make rubber from our common weeds – goldenrod; food from the Kansas sunflower, and even smokeless powder from vegetables; in fact, we may become weed farmers!

We boast that we are the gateway to the great mid-continent oil and gas fields. More than 3,500 articles of daily use can be fabricated from petroleum products. The value of a barrel of oil may increase a hundred times by the time it reaches the ultimate consumer, and yet up to the present time Kansas City has not fully grasped its opportunity in this field.

Paraffin, a petroleum product, is being used to make decorative candles; leather upholstery; fancy crayons; and beautiful inlaid work on the chairs of our homes.

Asphalt made from petroleum residues is being used, often with fine design, in shingles made in Kansas City. It is basic to many waterproofing products.

The more volatile constituents of both petroleum and coal tar oils are being used as an ingredient in the manufacture of fine paint and lacquer.

Paraffin and wax are used in the creation of beautiful wrappings for bread, translucent lampshades and a multitude of other products.

A by-product of oil is being used to add beauty and gloss to our woods, thereby avoiding termites.

Furriers have found that certain oils give flexibility and brilliance to their furs. Shoe manufacturers have discovered that they not only waterproof their products, but add luster to the leather employed.

Jay Wilson, District Manager of the Standard Oil Company of Indiana, told me that there is a new retrax oil tissue which is one of the most recent developments in the oil industry, and which is used for beautiful wrappings for apples and similar products.

And don't forget the oil and gas fields being rapidly developed across mid-western Kansas are getting mighty close to Kansas City and our great system of pipelines and refineries. New uses are being constantly discovered in the breakdown of the constituents of our wide fields of natural gas. Helium gas is one of our rare resources.

Many of the ingredients being used in the plastic industry today come from natural gas and water.

We cannot think of the future industrial horizon of Kansas City without considering its relation to synthetic chemistry.

Consider the "mysterious alchemy by which the gases of the air and the minerals of the soil are transmitted into waving grasses and tossing foliage by the radiation from the sun."

As miraculous as this seems, synthetic chemistry today is even outdoing nature in breaking down the molecules in matter and re-arranging the atoms to make articles of daily usage and necessity. This juggling of atoms spells future growth for Kansas City.

Nature works with catalysts, called "enzymes," which bring about reactions in living organisms. Our chemists delving into the mysteries of Earth's contents and products, set up new compounds, re-arrange matter, and outdo the soil and rays of the sun. They bring into existence hundreds, yes, thousands, of materials, creating a new world and a new frontier for the industries of the land.

Let us take the soybean, a product of our soil – little known a few years ago. Dr. H. P. Cady, of the University of Kansas, tells me that the articles that could be made from the common soybean are almost limitless.

Do you realize that fabrics of the softest and most silken character have been successfully developed from the common soybean?

Thousands of acres of our land, taking in the free nitrogen of the air, can grow a bean which developed by the wand of the chemical engineer, may bring the basis here in Kansas City or many new industries.

All kinds of plastic materials, paper, picture films, a large variety of automobile parts, radio cabinets, tile, spools, lacquers – yes, the very interior materials of the home – its mantels, draperies, table covers, may all be made possible from the cellulose of the soy bean and yet it was the Chinese who beat us to this wonderful product of the farm.

They use the milk from it – they get cream and make butter out of it – they make flour – they get food for their livestock – oil for their lamps, and then they use the cellulose for their fabrics and other materials. Certainly in tilling the soybean, the hand on the plow grasps the hand on the loom!

This same cellulose can also be produced from trees, cornstalks, and straw. Dope for airplane wings is made from this cellulose.

Cellophane, as we see it daily, is another product of wood pulp.

Out in Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado are grown immense quantities of sugar beets, basic to our candy, cake, and biscuit plants.

Vegetable oils, particularly of the linseed and soy type, add beauty and luster to the exquisitely patterned linoleum used in our modern kitchens.

Why should so much of our corn, wheat, oats, rye, barley and flax be shipped elsewhere for refining into cereals, liquors, linen and other uses?

Our Corn Products plant is a good example of a nearby use of farm products. Dry ice and ammonia, also lacquer, ingredients of safety glass and dozens of other articles are made from corn. In fact, more than 100 products can be made from corn alone!

Stop and reflect upon the immense waste of the raw products of the farms in our region – stacks of straw and cornstalks burned on the ground! These are becoming the bases of new industries just as in Atchison a few days ago, a new alcohol plant was started, making alcohol out of corn. Do you not see that the end of the furrow leads to the smokestack of the city?

In St. Joseph a building board factory has been operating successfully on cornstalks and oat straw.

With the touch of art, you can picture the number of beautiful paper and board containers that can be created from these raw products that have been a drug on the farms instead of an asset.

Up in Lawrence, there has been operating for many years a successful paper plant, making paper from farm waste mixed with wood pulp.

The Iowa State College, under the leadership of W.F. Coover, head of the Chemistry Department, has long conducted a successful experiment with our raw products and has already proved the value of the pulp from these products for insulation materials – they are even using the cobs in creating a substance called furfural, from which they make doorknobs, bottle caps, and many other items.

An important resin is the Bakelite which is likely used in the fountain pen that you have in your coat pocket today. This product is made from phenol and formaldehyde. The phenol is made from coal, and the formaldehyde from methyl alcohol, which is made from hydrogen and carbon monoxide; the hydrogen is taken from water and the monoxide coal, so it can truthfully be said that the ultimate sources from which Bakelite is developed are coal and water!

According to Messrs. J.C. Rice, James E. Wildish and E.S. Longfellow of the chemistry department of Kansas City Junior College, probably one of the most amazing triumphs of modern times is the discovery of the by-products coming from milk. We are a great dairy country. We should conserve more of our soil for the developing of dairy herds and save our soil from erosion. Our consumption of milk is principally for food purposes; but do you realize that today from the casein in milk comes the best white reflectors used in the floodlights employed in night football games?

Casein is also used in paints; it is used in pencils, waterproof glue, in penholders, and in pipe stems. Chemists have found that silk-like filaments, artificial wool, and draperies for the home can be made from milk! Yes, even dishes, toothbrushes, and carpets. The old family cow may some day feed and clothe us at the same time.

A new factory has just started at 211 East 14th Street in Kansas City, making dozens of ornamental and mechanical objects from buttermilk.

We have great cotton growing areas to the south of us. Industry is already making from cotton cellulose, toilet ware, lamp shades, shoe heels, fountain pens, rayons and motion picture film, and do you realize that there have been some 565 miles of cotton woven fabric reinforced bituminous highways built in this country?

Cottonseed is used in making soap, cooking oils and certain food substitutes.

Let us not overlook our great supply of sand, gravel beds, clay, and cheap natural gas available in southern Kansas for the manufacture of glass, brick, and tile. Today we have hand woven materials like silk made from glass, also sweaters, hats, purses, rugs and yarn, glass bricks, and even glass bathing suits are becoming common on the market.

The tung tree from China is now grown in the states south of us, and produces varnish, linoleum, oilcloth, printer's ink, and many other items.

Another raw product of the territory is gypsum, so important to beautifully decorated wall plaster.

Right at our door we have large cement plants, making a product not only available for heavy industries, but being more increasingly used in beautiful garden and house furniture, drinking fountains, balustrades, exterior architectural ornamentation and interior adornment of structures.

Out in Kansas, we have some of the greatest salt producing mines in America. Caustics, soda ash, alkali products, and chlorine from salt are increasing in importance in industry.

Right across the Missouri River at our very door we have a great area growing fine tobacco, most of which is shipped elsewhere for refining.

Also in Kansas and Missouri our gigantic supplies of coal give us ingredients for over 300 products.

Yes, we are battering down the atomic gates and with this great spread in the horizon of new industries rising out of every day products, the question of good design will play an important part.

Walk into any store in Kansas City and compare the presentation of merchandise of yesterday with the merchandise of today; in every package and container on the shelf; and realize the extent to which artistic appeal is employed in the sale of these articles.

At the Art in Industry Exhibition at the Art Institute next week to which I urge you to come the opening day, you will find articles of many kinds, from streamlined trucks, hair dryers, coal stokers, electric refrigerators, tile products and cut stone to the finest and most delicate jewelry, weaving, wood carving, pottery, printing, lithographing, engraving, glassware, china and other similar products in which the deft hand of the skilled designer has added a greater value to the product, and greatly increased the volume of sales.

The Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum of Fine Arts is serving as a great laboratory for copying of good industrial designs by our manufacturers.

Stop for a minute and consider why it is that Paris dominates the world in style; reflect upon the extent to which European nations have had their industrial art exhibitions continue throughout the years.

Why did Henry Ford junk his old model car and spend millions to recast his dies and present an automobile more inviting to the eye?

Why did the General Electric pay \$10,000 to the designer who could produce the best trademark for their worldwide products?

Why did the president of the Standard Gas Equipment Corporation pay Frank Roberts \$50,000 for a better design for a stove? When the demand is sufficient to take only one of two products the maker of the more attractive and appealing stays in business. When products are equal in point of utility and price, the one that looks the most attractive to the eye is the one that the purchaser will buy first. After all, as I say, the human eye is a great salesman.

In the last 10 years the industrial designers have redesigned products in American industry so as to increase the annual volume several billion dollars, and some of these designers have earned as much as \$150,000 apiece each year.

The Toledo Scales Company asked Harold Van Doren to redesign their scales and their sales have multiplied ten times. (The beauty of this product comes from plastics which are made from coal, air, and water.)

Westinghouse Electric Range Company increased sales 600 percent as a result of more artistic design.

Parker's Vacuumatic fountain pen has increased its volume 100 percent through the use of more art in the shape of the pen.

The Colonial Radio increased its sales 700 percent by a new design.

Bengal Gas Ranges increased in sales 300 percent in six months as a result of using beauty in the shape of the stove.

Some manufacturers anticipate a trend in industry westward – but only slowly the center of population has moved westward, and certainly eastern concentration of factories up to now has made the movement very slight.

High transportation costs on long hauls on nearly everything we buy and sell in the Midwest, creates an economic cause to move more industry to the Middle West.

The recent installation of freight barges on the Missouri River, according to George J. Miller, Secretary of the Missouri River Navigation Association, should break down many of the economic handicaps which Kansas City and its trade territory have suffered in competition with all the country east of the Mississippi and the coasts on the east, south, and west, which territory has always enjoyed a much lower transportation cost. Missouri River transportation will bring additional foreign raw products to complement our vast supply of native material. River freight at less cost should widen our market hundreds of miles for every factory in our city.

So chemical science applied to the utilization of our farm products is making great strides at the very time that the door of opportunity opens to Kansas City industries.

The output per man in the industries of the country is 79 percent more than it was in 1913. A man alone is equal to about one-half horsepower but with the power of machinery, his talents may equal 1,000 horsepower. The electrical industry is a handmaiden to industrial progress. The coal, gas and petroleum groups are keeping up the pace in supplying us with more economical fuel.

Stevenson harnessed his locomotive to the rays of the sun when he used coal for power. Modern industrialists are harnessing industrial achievements to the use of synthetic chemistry, which, plus good design should make our Kansas City products demand a world market.

Our forefathers went down to the seas in ships; the pioneers of the west conquered with the axe and the gun.

The men of our time will achieve by science.

The blowing of factory whistles in our city should be our own "March of Time." The daily and happy employment of increasing thousands in our industries is the truest safeguard against Communism, and assurance of the permanence of American institutions. The beginning of the turning of a single factory wheel can aid hundreds of families.

The growth of our population made possible by the expansion of our industries will create a wider market for the products of our farms; our industries use of these

products of our farms will support a larger rural population and a greater nearby consuming market for our manufactured articles – an endless chain of progress.

Great as Kansas City's achievements are in education, culture, finance, retail and wholesale business, insurance and art, our further growth depends greatly upon the extent to which we take advantage of the industrial opportunities of our time; our quickness to appreciate the sales value of food design; our courage and daring in exploring new fields of industrial opportunity; and our willingness to devote our time to every civic cause and go forward in absolute faith and confidence in the Heart of America where industry faces the dawn of a new day.

Note: Printed and distributed by Grimes-Joyce.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN039

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.