



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

**Foreign Trade Possibilities for
Kansas City and This Trade Territory**

Before the Chamber of Commerce of Kansas City
in celebration of National Foreign Trade Week May 24, 1939

As long as there exists on God's green earth a spot where we can sell more farm products of the middle west-manufactured articles to make the wheels of our industry hum – or a place where we can buy more necessities to bring comfort and happiness to our people – Kansas City and its wonderful trade territory are vitally concerned in foreign trade.

To the man with imagination, foreign trade conjures up thoughts of far-flung places – of ships that go down to sea – of picturesque, glamorous spots of the world; of romance and color in hundreds of products from the Fiji Islands, darkest Africa, to the Malay Islands, supplying needs of the two billion people of our globe.

Complexities and intricacies of foreign trade – strange languages –different customs – quotas – restrictions – exchanges – freight rates – all discourage one's first entry into foreign commerce. However, these are being beaten down by the man of vision –the man of zeal and progress.

Since the day our Pilgrim Fathers landed, our country has looked to world trade. America could not have been great had we not shipped our goods, and purchased our needs from all climes.

You are all interested in world commerce. When you eat – sleep – dress – ride – walk – or even look, you are in contact with hundreds of articles from the mines; forests; lakes, and soil of far-off countries.

Cocoa, sisal and coffee from Brazil – tungsten from China – wine from France – tea from Japan – rubber from East Indies – spices from the Orient – tin from Bolivia – and so on.

Our high standard of living in America could never have been attained had we not enjoyed the fruit of the sweat, labor, and brains throughout the world.

For example, our great automobile industry, with 45% of its production entering foreign markets could not otherwise have reached its gigantic proportions with an army of employees; nor our machine tools (in which we lead the world) without 50% of sales in distant lands!

American ingenuity – American prowess – have placed our products in every world port. Where would our grain farmers be if they hadn't sold even \$68,000,000

worth of grain abroad in the 1st quarter of '38? Where would our cotton growers be if 87,000,000 yards of cotton hadn't gone to foreign countries during the quarter?

In the year ending June 1938, our exports amounted to three and a half billion dollars! a 22% increase over the previous. Double these exports – a reasonable goal – and give total employment to 8,000,000 men or women in this United States! The old Chinese proverb says – “He who aims at nothing, hits nothing.”

American farm exports in 1938 were valued by the agricultural department at 828 million dollars, the largest amount since 1929. Imports of competitive farm commodities were valued at 477 million dollars, or 39% less than in 1937, and the lowest since 1934.

Some 11% of trade volume of the U. S. flows through channels of international marts.

This may spell the difference between a profit and a loss for both agriculture and industry. It may mean elimination of a deadening surplus – it may be the lifeblood of our factories – large and small.

Every new artery we can create leading into a foreign country may become a mighty stream of international trade which will build prosperity for farms – cities – and towns in our western progress.

Ours is a magnificent city with a great trade territory in the great interior of North America. As yet we are not foreign-trade-conscious. EVERY COASTAL CITY in the U. S. is definitely foreign – trade conscious. They've learned that export and import trade brings growth to their communities – work for their people – idleness of men and women means poverty.

Today we stand in dire need of freight rate adjustment. Compared to the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coast belts we suffer from staggering disadvantages as compared with manufacturing areas east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio rivers, which enjoy some 25% better rate on basic materials entering manufacturing processes.

Let's just take our relative freight rates on iron and steel alone, as compared with Pittsburgh. That city in CFA territory can ship 600 miles at 43¢ per hundred; while the rate for Kansas City, in southwest territory, in zone 3, is 69¢ for 600 miles – 65% more than Pittsburgh competitors... for 1,200 miles Pittsburgh has a rate of 62¢ per hundred – Kansas City in this zone 3, \$1.00, approximately 60% more.

Don't you see how the distribution area for our plants is restricted and also how it handicaps our foreign trade?

Have we not the right – and are not our railroads who are so interested in this region, vitally concerned in obtaining freight rates to make the Missouri River Valley come into its own agriculturally and industrially? How can we expect to get fabricators of iron and steel and other raw products to build more business for Kansas City unless this unjust and unfair freight structure is corrected?

Certainly there can be no lasting national prosperity with the Missouri River Valley 'hamstrung' in the battle for foreign and domestic commerce!

Our sturdy river barges – with a 9 ft. channel, after Ft. Peck dam is finished – will take their rightful place in revolutionary service for this vast inland empire spelling greater prosperity for our region with a new outlet to the Sea.

Present building of larger – faster freight ships, plying between gulf ports and Latin America can mean the dawn of a new opportunity. The time may be imminent when much of the east and west axis of foreign trade will shift to a north and south axis of such extreme importance to the Middle West.

The miraculous improvement of air service, as well as development of the Pan American Highway are linking us with the 20 Republics straight south of us – offering opportunity to compete with the quicker and lesser cost communication Europe has enjoyed with the lower half of the western Continent. Latin America, today, is as close to Kansas City as St. Louis was a hundred years ago.

The very upset world conditions today, create new opportunity for our vast inland empire. In these 20, largely undeveloped Republics to the south of us, live more than a hundred million people – our logical friends and customers – here in this virgin field exists an almost limitless opening for business and cultural relations.

Upon these relations may depend the very salvation of the independence of our western hemisphere in world conflict. Our two continents should become closely welded and present to the world a unity of thought and trade interest impregnable against foreign competition ... with PEACE AS TO WAR and PEACE AS TO TRADE!

It is absurd for anyone in the Middle West not to be interested in international trade. Every retailer – wholesaler – banker – farmer – manufacturer, every man, woman and child is interested in increased sales abroad of the products of our region. It means turning the wheels of industry – selling our farm products and bringing employment to the Middle West, spelling growth for this vast domain.

The sound of the hammer and saw – building new factories – homes and farm buildings in our region should become our industrial anthem.

Kansas City is the center of a teeming agricultural area. We have no nearby, forbidding mountains; no barren deserts; no wide expanses of unproductive lakes or seas ... for 500 miles or more in all directions, we are the center of the greatest agricultural lands in the world.

Our farms produce immense supplies that need foreign markets – either in their natural state or manufactured articles. Our economic development has reached the stage that we need to supplement agriculture with industry and so the laboratory and the farmer have joined hands – and the industrialist may soon become the farmers' biggest customer.

We must build a greater consuming population in our towns and cities to use our farm commodities – we must stop the declining population on our farms by more intensive farming – an endless chain of progress – working both ways! We must not forget the hand on the plow leads to the loom in the town – the furrow on the farm goes straight to the smokestack in the city.

We must demand our rightful place in the industrial sun of the world. This is our epic struggle. We have competent financial institutions; strong retail and wholesale

institutions; an abundant supply of splendid American born labor; we are a concentration point for 12 mighty railroad systems. We are coming into our own God-given rights of river transportation. We are at the crossroads of airplane routes. We are a concentration point for oil and gas and gasoline products.

WE ARE TRULY THE HEART OF AMERICA.

We abound in raw materials. The miracle of synthetic chemistry is today outdoing nature in breaking down the molecules in matter and re-arranging the atoms to make articles of daily use and necessity. This juggling of atoms spells forward growth for Kansas City.

Nature works with catalysts, called “enzymes,” which bring about reactions in living organisms. Our chemists delving into the mysteries of the 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 thousands of materials, creating our new frontier.

Our oil and gas can produce 3,500 articles of commerce. Coal some 300 objects. Some hundred items are made from the soybean. Many come from salt in Kansas. A vast array of objects are being made from wheat and oats straw, cornstalks and corncobs.

From casein in milk alone more than 200 products are available. From sand, gravel, and natural gas, a multitude of things can be manufactured. From our broomcorn, our gypsum deposits; our lead and zinc – our Kansas bentonite – even the despised goldenrod may lend itself to the production of items that come into daily use in our busy lives.

A new era of industrial progress is ahead of us. We are becoming a greater market for raw wool, important in world trade, Then there is our furs; our feathers; our waste paper; used automobile tires; our clay; our hardwoods; Carthage stone; our junk iron; hides; bones, hair, intestines and gall stones of our packing industry; and consider the great areas of tobacco in Clay and Platte counties – our immense livestock, our various and abundant grains, right at our very door. All these point the way to industrial success.

Factory whistles should become the theme song of our time. Our supply of raw materials has been barely scratched. The multitude of uses should spread like a spider web into every corner of the world, bringing prosperity to this great valley. Here really is a new frontier; a vital force – never sterile – ever rugged – surging through every activity of commerce.

Will our territory remain stationary? Or will it grow into gigantic proportions as its rightful heritage? We have the creative genius; the driving energy; the red blood; the venturesome spirit of our courageous forefathers to rise to the challenge of the hour and carry us on to newer heights of achievement.

The generation just before us conquered a wilderness of prairie and plain. Now it becomes our job to build industrially and enter the markets of the world. Let’s follow wings of progress to greater heights! Let’s make the hum of factory wheels; the drone of airplane wings; the wail of the barge siren; the shriek of the factory and train whistle; the shirr of the combine; the clatter of tractors and farm machinery, our Western theme song.

Let's not be content with the crusts of industry tossed to us by cities who have already recognized the boom of foreign trade – let's go out and demand a whole loaf for ourselves!

One tiny spark of industrial conquest of one little factory in world markets may burst into a mighty flame of industry through the years – an unquenchable flame of success for our region. Remember the feeble beginning of the automobile industry.

Airplanes over our oceans; ships of unbelievable speed; river transportation; streamlined trains; radio and cable; all tie us together with every part of the earth. Ours is an age of speed which unites the world as never before. It is our duty to become international in our thinking. We may be standing at the very cradle of opportunity.

No country can insulate itself from world trade.

We must be alert to new things. Let's not sleep as we did in the early days of our great mid-continent oil field. New oil fields may be rising today at our very door.

Some 151 of our manufacturers are already supplying products consumed abroad. 45 more manufacturers in Kansas City, 53 in Kansas, 22 in Nebraska, 5 in Colorado, 15 in Western Missouri, are now in or investigating foreign trade.

We have thousands of stores selling articles imported from across the ocean. There can be no healthy foreign trade if we do not buy from abroad an amount commensurate with the volume we sell. Equitable two-way trade is an axiom which cannot be disputed. We cannot achieve this if most of the gold in the world is hoarded in the U.S.

Civilization advances as human needs are supplied. Our higher wages, higher costs, and higher taxes are a serious handicap, nevertheless we must have confidence that national sanity will prevail and American ingenuity, American hardihood, our mass production, the skill of our labor, our superior transportation and our financial facilities can successfully combat foreign competitors.

It is what we buy that makes us happy, not alone what we sell. If we can sell the brains of America to buy bananas from Honduras, sardines from Norway, or olive oil from Spain, we are forging a bulwark to prosperity. If we get tanning extracts from the Amazon jungles to make our leather products dominate the world, we are maintaining commercial leadership.

If we can supply agricultural machinery, as Billy Brace has done in selling combines to estancias in Argentina, we are building a new regime. When Columbian steel tanks are used in every country in the world except twelve, in the oil fields across the Continents, we are keeping a toehold in world commerce.

When Black, Sivalls & Bryson and Union Wire Rope Co., supply materials over the globe, they are giving employment to people in Kansas City. When the Midland Flour Mills and our other great flour and feed mills, using the products of our farms, with hundreds of accounts in Latin America alone, continue to ship their products, they are adding to the value of every acre of our land. If Rearwin and Porterfield airplanes fly in foreign countries such as South Africa, China, and Latin America, we are building our town and our region. If Butler Manufacturing Company continues to ship their products

abroad; with Breadow Hilliard supplying the Orient and elsewhere with airplane parts; the Admiral Hay Press having their machines working in the haciendas of Chili; if the Penrod Walnut Company are shipping their veneers around the world; when Hall Bros. supply many countries with greeting cards; when Koch refrigerators are used in 20 nations; and Standard Steel Co. ships tar kettle wagons for road building, we are already in foreign trade.

Sonken-Galambe Company – shipping pipe and junk iron to wide areas.

Barker-McCroy Company – electric fences (a recent invention), shipping everywhere and leading the world.

Flav-Oak Company – shipping oak chips to age whiskey in all parts of the world.

Federal Cash Register Co. – sending equipment all the way from the Philippines to South Africa and Scandinavia. Largest exclusive manufacturers of cash registers in the United States.

Dyer Welder Co – sending electric spot welders to 14 foreign countries.

Burstein-Applebee Co. – radio and broadcasting parts by mail order from Manchuria to Bombay.

George Breon-pharmaceutical supplies to all continents. Also immense importer of chemicals and karaya.

Did you have any realization of the immense export and import business already passing in and out of Kansas City? And these are only a few representative firms, many doing an increasing volume each year.

Too many admit their foreign trade has been sadly neglected. Too many have as yet not even tried to explore this great field. Too many simply wait for orders to come.

Collection reports from our Kansas City exporters rank as high as their collections, in their domestic markets. Let's build foreign trade!

If the Great Western Mfg. Co. of Leavenworth ships flour milling machinery; McNally Co. of Pittsburg, Kansas, ships immense quantities of coal washing machinery; our Sterling Machine Corporation ships centrifugal pumps; Shipley Saddlery Co. ships saddles, and Hyers Bros. Boots of Olathe, cowboy boots; if Witte Engine Co. continues to ship their engines; Gustin-Bacon Mfg. Co., oil field equipment; A.P. Green Fire Brick Co. of Mexico, Missouri, their firebrick; the American Disinfecting Co. of Sedalia their chemicals; Anchor Serum Co. of St. Joseph, their cholera serums; Beech Aircraft Co. of Wichita their airplanes; W.B. Unge of Topeka, petroleum products; Chase Plow Co. of Lincoln, tractor plows; Miller Cereal Mills of Omaha, breakfast cereals; Baker Ice Machinery Co. of Omaha, ice making machinery – are we not already reaching out into foreign markets?

From H. C. Davis of Bonner Springs goes flour mill machinery; Dempster Mill & Mfg Co. of Beatrice Nebr. windmills; Hill Packing Co. of Topeka, canned horse meat; Peerless Machinery Co. of Joplin, gears of various kinds; Reece Wooden Sole Shoe Co., Columbus, Nebr., novelty shoes; Walnut Extort Sales Co. of Kansas City, Kansas, walnut lumber and veneer; and W-W Feed Grinder Co. of Wichita, feed grinders – we are really

bucking the line of foreign trade, and I say that Kansas City and this territory are fighting for international barter.

Did you know that National Bellas Hess exports \$500,000.00 worth of merchandise per year from Kansas City and sends 60,000 catalogs annually throughout the world? Do you know Cowden Mfg. Company, Donnelly Garment Company, Goodenow Textile Company, and H. D. Lee and Company are stepping into foreign trade?

Wolferman's, Robinson's, Jaccard Jewelry Co., Emery-Bird-Thayer, Kline's, Peck's, Taylor's, Harzfeld's, Goldman's, Woolf's, Mindlin's, Jones', Adler's, Berkson's, Keith's, Mehornay's, Jenkins', Duff-Repp Furniture Co., and others all build up exchange abroad to buy our products.

If Kimport Doll Company in Independence continues to import 1,000 varieties of dolls from 63 countries; if the Folger Coffee Co. is one of the greatest coffee importing companies in the world; if Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Co., if Cook Paint and Varnish Co.; Seidlitz Paint Co. and our other 16 paint factories; T. M. James; McKesson-Robbins; Paxton Lumber Co.; Peppard Seed Co.; Rudy Patrick Seed Co.; Sheffield Mills; Thompson-Hayward Chemical Co. and Abner Hood Chemical Co. and hundreds of other exporters and importers continue to hit the line, with a few dozen institutions joining the ranks every year, then we can carry the flag of American commerce into hundreds of distant countries.

We are a great concentration point for junk iron. Countries throughout the world are rapidly entering the machine age. They demand highly specialized machinery.

If Sheffield Mills becomes a basic source of iron and steel products used by our present 7 fabricating plants, with more to come, and our many lumber concerns and other producers of basic products do the same, we are building progress for our territory in entering foreign trade.

If any specialty manufacturing plant in Kansas City has the "guts" to study foreign markets, study foreign trade journals, consult export companies, and increase the volume of their business, we are building prosperity for central United States.

I realize the seeming mysteries of foreign trade; the obstacles confronting exporters, but we have a bureau of foreign and domestic commerce in the Department of Commerce at Washington with some 500 experts willing to aid every manufacturer. They maintain an office in Kansas City under Dave White and William Galloway to give full information as to credit of foreign importers, freight rates, exchange quotas, translation of foreign tongues and all the technical matters which exporters must consider.

As long as human needs throughout the world remain unsupplied, we, in the Middle West, are falling down unless we go out with daring to build more export and import trade.

We all know that in '31 our great depression was accented by loss of foreign markets. We all know the competition which confronts our country today with the unfair Aski marks used as payment in Germany for imports to which a government subsidy is

granted and which are good only for articles purchased in Germany. We all know the determined efforts being made by Japan and Italy to cut into our foreign market.

The United States has become a creditor nation. Recently we have been exporting nearly a hundred million per month more than we have been importing. Any student of economics knows that this condition cannot endure. The world balance of exchange must be equitable through the years.

Last night an enthusiastic group organized a Midwest foreign trade association where the whole potentiality of foreign trade will be studied and assistance rendered to every exporter and importer in our region.

Experience has shown that there is no greater insurance against recurring domestic difficulties than a constant flow of foreign trade. Great Britain has maintained its supremacy through the centuries because of its world commerce. The United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, Canada, and Belgium control 52 percent of the world foreign trade. The remaining 48 per cent is divided among some 100 other countries. While the per capita volume of exports in the United States is only \$19, the average of the above six countries is more than \$50. Does this not spell an opportunity for America?

The difference between a country which is dynamic and prosperous and one which is static and poor is that the first is aggressive in the development of new products and has the vision of a wider horizon, while the latter is self-satisfied and asleep. Where shall we stand?

Secretary Hull's reciprocal trade agreements are opening new opportunities and breaking down some of the high trade barriers, giving greater potentialities in foreign markets.

Subsidies, highly questionable, may serve a temporary emergency. In the long run, the sale of our agricultural products from the middle west; the building of new markets for our industries as a result of individual initiative, and a willingness to do or die for our part of the United States will bring about added opportunity for all of us.

This territory is largely an area of raw materials; a region of ambitious manpower and practically unlimited potentialities. Can we develop the skill and enterprise to utilize our enormous Middle Western wealth?

This is foreign trade week. Every man in this room knows that Kansas City is not growing as it should. Everyone knows that the farmers in our region are not prospering. Everyone knows that certain economic shifts in the channels of trade are creating new problems for our future. Everyone knows that this whole area was built by men of vision; men of invincible courage; men who were willing to put their all in the fight for the section in which they had elected to live.

May I appeal to this splendid Chamber of Commerce, that we combine our efforts to study the opportunity of greater foreign trade; that we declare that we will not sit idly by and see other sections of our country enjoy a foreign trade that is denied us? Let's work with every agency; let's pull together and build industry, agriculture and commerce; let's rally around the banner of progress for our great interior; let's demand equitable freight rates; let's so organize ourselves that we can know the channels through which we can sell and buy merchandise throughout the world; let's not admit that our great

agricultural area shall continue to be depressed; let's keep in tune with the great strides being made in synthetic chemistry in developing new uses for our farm products; let's survey every raw product in our area; let's knock at the door of every large industry in our country which could logically place a plant in our valley; let's band together to send representatives into foreign markets to study new outlets; let's work with every exporter and every importer in the country.

Let's remember that we have a Federal export-import bank, willing to help in financing exports; and let's not forget that, in the end, it all gets back to the individual heroic mettle of every man of our region.

Let's solidify our forces; let's marshal our army; let's cultivate our foreign markets.

Let's improve our cultural relations with foreign countries. More than 1,000 students today from Latin American countries alone are attending our schools.

China, when it comes out of its present conflict, may become one of our greatest customers, because of the education so many of their young people are today receiving in our schools.

If we are to build Kansas City and its trade territory our thoughts must encircle the globe. We cannot be insular in our thoughts. We cannot claim to be self-sufficient.

If we are to employ more men and women in our factories; if we are to open an outlet for the products of our farms, we must be globe-wide in our thinking. Regardless of our higher costs of production; regardless of governmental handicaps, I have an abiding, innate confidence in the genius and talents of our mid-western people that we can compete with the world; in the intensive use of the products of our soil, our mines, and our factories around the globe.

This fine Chamber of Commerce has no greater opportunity for service than the welding and solidifying of every interest in this noble valley for the promotion of foreign trade.

Gentlemen, it was not an easy road our forefathers traveled to conquer the Middle West – it is not an easy path we have to travel to build foreign trade, but we have the manpower, the resources, and the brains in the Middle West to battle the world, and God knows we can rally to the cause.

Thirty-three states have set up industrial boards – Kansas just now joining the list.

A new era is dawning – we are going forward – we will build one of the greatest civilizations of all time on the fertile lands in this valley. Our factories, like giant fingers, will reach into every nook of the world. There are a thousand articles we need to buy from world markets – a surging stream of abundance both ways.

The Forward Kansas City Committee, under J.W. Perry's guidance, stands ready at this crucial hour.

This Chamber of Commerce, under the leadership of one of our most devoted presidents, Ralph DeMotte, and under Jo Zach Miller III, chairman of its Foreign Trade Committee, will gird its loins for battle – will cooperate with every agency of the Middle

West and wing its way to a glorious victory for world commerce – for more of the good things of life for every man, woman and child living in the many states that look to Kansas City for their financial, commercial, cultural and educational leadership.

If necessary let's raise an industrial fund of \$5,000,000 to supply – under careful direction – venturesome capital for industries logical and sound for our territory.

Let's now pledge ourselves to the youth of today, and the youth of tomorrow, that Kansas City and the Missouri River Valley will be the happiest place in which to live, and a profitable place through coming years in which to do business and grow into one of the mightiest cities in the whole western hemisphere.

Let our Battle Cry be – KANSAS CITY FORWARD AND FORWARD AND FORWARD!

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN061

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.