



Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols
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Mid-West Foreign Trade Conference

Kansas City, Missouri September 19, 1939

The war in Europe will undoubtedly result in new channels for foreign trade and a redistribution of exports and imports of not only Latin American countries, but other nations throughout the world and even including belligerent countries. New conditions perhaps will exist in every part of the world. During this period the United States will undoubtedly have the opportunity of establishing new or greater foreign trade volumes.

We are already enjoying some 36% of the products purchased abroad by the 20 Latin American republics to the south of us, amounting to a total volume of \$238,000,000 per year. During the previous world war, and since that time our country has secured an increasing percentage of the total volume of trade from these more than a hundred million people to the south of us.

New contacts made – and new business obtained during the war will acquaint our foreign neighbors with our goods – they will learn to depend upon us for their supplies, and this certainly is business which should continue and grow after the cessation of hostilities in Europe.

Extreme caution, however, must be employed by American exporters due to the import quotas; price control; currency exchange; and trade restrictions which various countries may be forced to set up during these uncertain periods. We must not unwisely try to sell more goods abroad than foreign countries can pay for.

No greatly increased volume of export trade can be maintained over the years without a corresponding increase of imported articles purchased from those countries.

It is supremely important that the foreign trade situation be very carefully studied in order that no unwise credit should be extended. On the other hand our country has already evidenced a desire to cooperate in building foreign trade by its recent increase of the capital of the Federal Export-Import Bank by some \$75,000,000 and by other loans which it has been extending, particularly to South American countries.

This possibility of increased opportunity comes at a time that new, faster, and larger ships are being developed to sail from New Orleans to South America. Airplane service to both the east and the west coasts of Latin America is being rapidly improved. The time may not be far distant when we will have airplane service not to exceed three days from Kansas City to Rio de Janeiro; Buenos Aires; Valparaiso; Santiago; Lima, Peru, and many other large distributing points in South America. Don't forget that in many of these cities a high degree of civilization was flourishing a hundred years before the Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock.

We in the Middle West face the fact that we cannot anticipate much greater growth from agriculture and livestock. We must build more industry to make a larger consuming market for the products of our farms, and create larger towns and cities to give increasing employment to men and women, if we are going to grow. The Chamber of Commerce in Kansas City is not thinking of this city alone – we are vitally concerned with the growth of every single community in our entire Middle Western area. It is our desire to be of aid and assistance to every factory – large or small – now in existence or yet to come in this whole section. We are taking a broad, comprehensive view of this matter – we are thinking Missouri River Valley.

The recent amazing progress and discoveries of Farm chemurgy is creating new frontiers for the Middle West. Rapidly growing Latin America and other foreign countries have frontiers which should be linked with ours.

The setting up recently of an industrial commission in the state of Kansas to survey the raw products of that state and encourage their manufacture at home, and the revival of the Missouri State Chamber of Commerce looking to the same end, are steps that fit into the program of the Midwest Foreign Trade Association.

The very great interest the entire Missouri River Valley has exhibited, as reflected by the attendance at the foreign trade conference here last fall, indicated that the people of our valley are aroused to the necessity and opportunity of the time.

The European war, regrettable as it is, may offer an opportunity for more vigorously pushing the program of our organization in order to obtain a reasonable and fair share of the trade dislocated from its former channels, and knocking at the door of the United States to supply their needs.

It must, however, always be the purpose of our organization to build more import trade to buy more things from our customers abroad if we expect to increase the volume of products to be sold to them.

It is my thought that the potentialities and possibilities at this time are so great that we must be alert in getting all the information we can from our Department of Commerce at Washington, and from every other available source, at the same time being careful not to encourage manufacturers to sell abroad articles for which they might not ultimately be paid. In contact with the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce in the last few days I learned that additional technical and expert men have been employed and assigned the job of securing accurate data if possible, essential to anyone desiring to enter or expand their foreign trade.

This whole Middle Western section of the country has suffered as a result of the adverse affect of the building of the Panama Canal, thereby giving impetus to industry all around the coastal belt of the United States. It should be our duty to take advantage of every opportunity to overcome this handicap. Next year it is hoped the Ft. Peck dam will have reached a point to insure us a dependable, deep channel on the Missouri River throughout the year. This new waterway connection to the New Orleans port, serving practically all of those rapidly growing South American countries should help overcome some of the disadvantage in freight costs from which we have suffered.

The exchange of information as to dependable and reliable foreign agencies and importers throughout the world should be made of great value to our other exporters and importers in this section, and perhaps this is the most effective manner in which our association can be of real service. A great many manufacturers have already offered to make all their information pertaining to the handling of their products abroad, available to other noncompetitive manufacturers. These manufacturers also, pretty generally, realize that effort must be made to increase imports from our customers abroad. So, our whole picture is one of approaching these problems cautiously and carefully, but determinedly, to give a boost to industry throughout the Middle West that through the years should grow into a powerful factor in the growth and prosperity of this entire area.

Mr. David I. White, representative of the Department of Commerce in the Kansas City office, has already furnished us with a very complete list of exports and imports from Germany, England, and France and will from time to time be able to place at our disposal such lists affecting other countries. It would seem well for us to select from this list items of interest to our part of the United States. I suggest we then furnish this information to all chambers of commerce and industries located throughout our region.

After we have made an exhaustive survey of the number of interested organizations, manufacturers, exporters and importers, it is my thought we should hold another foreign trade conference in Kansas City during this fall, prepared carefully; have representatives from Washington here, and endeavor to carry on the good work we started one year ago.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN062

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.