



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

**Defense and the Middle West**  
Kansas City Real Estate Board October 17, 1941

Present Status.

Mechanization of farming reducing manpower.

Reduction horses and mules limiting market for farm products.

Cash leaving farms.

Loss of export market until recent demand abroad.

10 years drought – (God knows we hope now in a wet cycle).

Low prices for our crops, now thru parity greatly helped.

Drainage of man power (2,000 per week from our area) 100,000 per year of the finest youth in our land.

Drainage of machines

Mass production in other areas

Power age-favoring TVA-Oregon, etc.

Adverse effect of Panama Canal – rates (as an example-our alfalfa hay market lost to California) R.R. men.

St. Lawrence seaway may only further maroon us.

Shall an Okie migration continue?

Shall we become an economic dustbowl?

For years our grain business, stockyards, packinghouses, and wholesale business has been declining until now.

Whole trade territory declining in population.

Only 14 counties of 105 in Kansas grew between 1930 and 1940 – Oklahoma, Nebraska, North and South Dakotas, Western Missouri and Iowa, Eastern Colorado, Northwest Texas and Wyoming.

Six states lost (show map)

Explains our vacancies.

Small ghost cities beginning to appear.

No balance of Industry with agriculture.

Mass production increasing elsewhere-squeezing little shops.  
Mail order houses pulling business from small towns.  
I arrived Washington June 20<sup>th</sup> – Business Adv. Council meeting.  
Found no plants allocated our area – Mississippi River to Rockies. None of Contractors getting jobs.  
Was told no skilled labor – no industrial “know how”.  
Fit to raise hogs and corn (Pittsburgh, PA editorial).  
Could not split management (particularly aircraft).  
Time-precious time – no blackout of America.  
Was materials needed quickly – speed  
Northeast Atlantic only point of attack (2 year plan).  
I answered  
    Why two ocean navy?  
    Why concern Latin America?  
    Why ignore central west who subject to draft and taxes?  
I screamed so loudly I was appointed to Division head.  
Knudsen meeting – JCN only man west of Chicago.  
Immediately prepared 5-page signed statement behalf decentralization and national safety; use of small plants, etc., and sent it to some 250 heads in army, navy, air corps, defense group, cabinet, and president.  
Habit of mind – E.F. Johnson (Remington Plant).  
Aviation story.  
I argued our

- Safety,
- Housing,
- Power,
- Cheap Fuel,
- Transportation,
- Unusual facilities, utilities etc.,
- Raw products,
- Skilled labor – 90% American born – Glenn Martin story,
- Equidistant all frontiers.

Our few strikes – 50 important right now.

Solidarity of nation.

Unity of purpose.

Multitude of small plants to build area production markets.

Concentration Baltimore to Boston as great as England.

56 prime contractors have 75% business. Whole procedure squeezing out little plants.

Necessarily navy bases went to coast.

Ship building yards to coast.

Air training base to south. New cantonments mostly in south.

Adverse effects on our area of amortization plan creating large plants written off elsewhere, making it impossible for us to build new competing plants in a generation to come.

Authorities all agreed situation serious for Middle West, but always had reasons why their project could not be placed away from large established industrial centers.

With lots of help from Richard Robbins, Roy Roberts, Lou Holland, Kenneth Spencer, our Chamber of Commerce, and others, finally we made headway, and now 24 defense plants are under way between Mississippi River and the Rockies (and 2 in Kansas City – perhaps most important to us).

I got 100 year FOB regulation changed on clothing and a few other items, and already as an example \$3,000,000 textile orders in Kansas City alone – 45 M-next year-Baker Lockwood 4 plants.

Many of our manufacturers got busy, came to Washington and got defense orders (Locomotive Engineering story, Atchison).

Initiative began to grow and some business came to our area, but then and now far below our capacity and fair share – and small shops still in dire situation. Priorities may cause many of them to shut down – unless they can convert to defense orders.

What can we do today? I believe many more defense plants will be built, Japan/Pick those we are fitted for

- St. Joe
- Atchison
- Topeka
- Emporia
- Salina
- Sedalia
- Springfield
- Lincoln, Nebraska, etc.

Question more in Kansas City, but encourage making more parts and supplies for defense plants.

Importance Zinc Roaster in Tri-state – where Spencer has performed so wonderfully.

Waste sulphuric acid to mix with phosphate rock to make cheap fertilizer – avoid long hauls from East Coast.

1,000,000 tons needed per year in our states.

Ammonium plant at Baxter Springs will fit into fertilizer program.

Site committee at Washington has already ruled against more plants in certain large cities.

Lou Holland pool plan very fine.

30 in now – orders for 20 – \$268,000 order now.

Can serve 300 firms

Urge FOB for all defense supplies. Bob worked to make it general and looks probable.

Regional bidding like I got in paints. Bob working on this.

New order now made to require prime contractors to list proposed items to be subcontracted and given weight in awards of contract.

Five to six thousand prime contractors.

Chamber of Commerce, Kansas City clinic under Elmer Pierson, Wm. G. Ensinger, R. W. Webb and C. M. Woodward, a great opportunity for subcontractors and prime contractors to display needed parts.

JCN met 75 manufacturers of Kansas at Topeka urging to attend clinic.

I called Warren Blazier in Wichita – tells me they plan to subcontract 30 to 40%, and already have many shops in Kansas nearby states filled with orders – but have to go to Michigan, Houston, etc. for far too much.

Kansas already third in aircraft production.

How about sub-contracting in other Wichita aircraft plants and Omaha, Kansas City, Kansas, Tulsa, etc.,

Here is where the clinic can help. Lou Holland's pool can click, and most important of all, individual initiative of each industrialist.

Research important now.

- (1) Survey raw materials
- (2) Survey research under way elsewhere to avoid duplication.
- (3) Unite on research in several of our states.
- (4) Concentrate on our raw materials now overlooked in research.

- a. Sorghum for plastics
- b. Calcium
- c. Gypsum and clays
- d. Volcanic ash
- e. Bentonite
- f. Helium
- g. Salt
- h. Native woods, etc.

Salt, lime, chalk, waste farm products, starches from sweet potatoes, milk by-products, sugar products, brick, dehydrated products, synthetic rubber.

Cheese story, Gifford, Commerce, cereal plants, wooden products, machine.

Age of substitutes.

Story of Germany world war.

Dr. E.F. Reed mustard gas story.

Why not analyze 100 largest national industries.

Prepare our story on cheap fuel, raw products, labor supply, fine banking facilities, etc.,

Sent strong committee to call personally on them.

Story General Foods, etc. General Electric, etc.

After all Kansas City deeply interested in prosperity of our whole area.

Let's work to get plants in small towns – stop our decline in population we serve. We lost 20,000 customers in Kansas alone last year.

Not near so much danger in the “after emergency” period with defense business scattered in towns over a wide area – and many of these small plants learning new production may run on in peace times. Air Craft parts for example in such an expanding industry or factories fitting into the use of coal, lead, zinc, acids, phosphates, in our great tri-state area.

And also – in use of natural gas – petroleum right at our door and in which hundreds of new by-products are being developed.

Frank Phillips on synthetic Rubber possibilities.

Yes it is a great challenge to our initiative and leadership. It is a hard job but it can be done.

In all this let's have a strong cooperative spirit, a broad vision looking far beyond our own city limits.

Let's have unity of action. Omaha leaders came to me in Washington for the area – whether a plant went to Council Bluffs, Iowa or Omaha in Nebraska was all right with them.

Oklahoma City wired me to help Tulsa for an air-craft factory and so in many areas over the country. But I am sorry to say this was not always true here in Kansas City. Local interests came to me – ready to oppose a plant in Fairfax or North Kansas City – or in Kansas City, Kansas, or Kansas City, Missouri.

This spirit cannot build a great metropolitan area, a super-city to serve a great Hinterland.

Lets remember in Peace times – our beloved Middle West can go after a lot of foreign trade – particularly for Latin America.

Let's not lose out on the vitally needed additional airfield due to disagreement as to where it goes.

Let's be dead sure we build a new field and do it now. I'm sure it is essential if we are to take our proper place as a center of air passenger and freight transportation, and develop as a great aircraft-manufacturing center.

Let's all pull together – the older heads of big business in our whole community along with the rising generation of courageous new young leaders!

Let's build a great metropolitan Kansas City!

Let's build the resources of the finest trade in all America! Let's balance agriculture with industry!

Let's work for every small town.

Let's accept this challenge of our time!

Let's survey the cold facts confronting us!

Let's get together; devote more time to public service than ever before!

Let's take our proper place in this great nation which we propose to defend until this war torn world of today will again enjoy peace, prosperity, and progress, in which the Middle West and its grand capital Kansas City will do and play its important role in a growing domestic and foreign trade.

Let's roll on.

Let's go forward and forward.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN068

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.