



*Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols*  
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**Missouri River:  
Its Relation to Unified Inland Waterways**  
Kansas City, Missouri [ca. 1929?]

The trip of President-elect, Herbert Hoover, to South and Central America, has an important relation to the waterways of the Mississippi Valley.

After some four months careful investigation and study of the economic possibilities of the development of our inland waterways, Mr. Hoover some three years ago, in his epoch making address at Kansas City stated, "If we were to make a survey of all the opportunities that lie before us, of possible physical progress in our nation, the development of our internal waterways would stand in the forefront. We must realize the economic dislocations that have come from the war," he said; "and the economic disadvantage of our Middle Western areas compared with our seaboard region. The industries of this area have suffered a loss of distribution territory. This has a reflex action on the agricultural situation, because the ideal must be, to build up industry in the midst of agriculture, thereby gaining diversification of employment, the immediate consumption of agricultural products without long transportation, and better distribution of the population of the nation."

Mr. Hoover further stated that we could have no real national prosperity with large sections of our country placed at a grave disadvantage compared with other sections, and in this same notable address visualized to the nation a great system of inland waterways approximately nine thousand miles in length from Pittsburgh to Kansas City and beyond, and from the Great Lakes and the Twin Cities to the Gulf with many contributing tributaries.

This address gave new hope to agriculture and inland industries. These same convictions frequently have been expressed by President Calvin Coolidge, Honorable Dwight Davis, Secretary of War and Honorable William Jardine, Secretary of Agriculture, and many leaders in Congress.

The great waterways of the Mississippi system affords a direct route from some twenty-six states to the Gulf, Central and South America with which our trade is increasing so rapidly, and with which our interests are so mutual – certainly Mr. Hoover with his keen and constructive mind will be quick to grasp the great importance to this trade, of the earliest possible completion of the greatest waterway system available to any nation in the world, and by nature placed providentially in the direct line of this rapidly growing South and Central American trade movement.

Our agricultural regions are still suffering from the unfair price levels of the things they sell compared with the things they buy. Industry in a large part of the

territory we represent lags woefully behind industrial growth of our seaboard cities. The greatly increased transportation costs since the War continues adversely to affect this 'long-haul' country in everything we ship in and everything we ship out.

Not enough has been done for the development of manufacturing the raw products of this territory within its own region. Hides for tanning, grain for cereals, clays for pottery and china, wood for furniture, wool, cotton, lead, zinc, metals, chemicals, and other heavy bulky raw products are hauled far east for manufacture and hauled back again for consumption, levying a costly double toll on our part of the country and building population centers at our expense far beyond our region. This is not real national economy.

We are confronted with a constantly declining population upon our farms largely the result of improved farming implements, with the consequence that there is a less consuming rural population in the trade territory of our Midwestern cities. In competition with a seaboard belt on the east, west, and south, we are suffering from the adverse effect of low Panama Canal freight rates. Greatly increased business of mail order houses, and the wide extension of chain stores throughout this region, present a serious situation for many of the local merchants of our towns and cities and do not properly build our territory.

Many of the industries we have are being confronted with a constantly decreasing trade area within which they can profitably ship their products in competition with those sections enjoying the benefits of low water transportation cost. We are not enjoying the increase of intensive agriculture which would follow the building of larger industrial cities as a nearby consuming market for our farm products.

The increasing volume of tonnage successfully handled upon the Mississippi River itself and the imminent completion of the improvement of the Ohio River, the upper Mississippi, the Missouri, Illinois, and other projects give great hope to our region. In fact, the past year has been a notable one in many achievements fundamental to a sound and extensive development of our inter-dependent waterways to give us the cheapest known type of transportation.

The passage of the Dennison bill authorizing ten million dollars additional capital for the Inland Waterways Corporation and its constructive plan of unifying and consolidating the operation of government barge lines; provision for the prompt inauguration of barge lines service on channels as they are completed, and reasonable continuance of such service during demonstration periods; its safeguards as to the protection of public interest in the event of the eventual sale of such barge lines, as well as its careful provision for the establishment of joint river and rail rates, all constitute the most constructive and aggressive legislation heretofore passed for the development of our inland waterway transportation.

This with the announced policy of the Government to complete approved projects within five years, creates an assurance of long needed relief for the agricultural and industrial interests of the Middle West.

We of the Missouri River territory rejoice with the Ohio River section in their prospective early completion of the improvement of their great river. We believe an

immense amount of freight will move east and west to and from our territory into the Ohio River region. We are vitally interested in the continued and increasing success of the operation of the upper Mississippi barge line.

We believe the quickest possible establishment of a barge line through the Illinois River and to the Great Lakes is almost as vital to us as it is to the Illinois River and the Great Lakes area. We regard the upper Missouri River, the Cumberland, the Tennessee, the Arkansas, the Monongahela, the Allegheny, the Warrior, and the inter-coastal canal, all as a part of a great consolidated system of inland waterways, each a vital and essential part, and all multiplying manifold the advantages of each project. Possibly the time may come when a waterway and canal project may connect the Mississippi system with the Atlantic Ocean via the Potomac River, carrying out the vision of George Washington in the early building of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal.

And, may I urge right here, a greater support of each river group for all other projects in the Mississippi System. Too frequently the addresses of the leaders and the printed material of the respective organizations in each section refer only to the merits of their own project. This does not build unified inland waterway support. In the long run it would not be advantageous to any one section for their own pet projects to be developed at the delay and handicap of other projects. Little benefit will accrue from isolated segments of improved rivers. Little reduction in transportation costs will come from a disjointed system of waterways. We are not interested in the mere improvement of our rivers; we are interested in an extensive use of these rivers for wide transportation of freight at less cost and certainly no particular river territory should expect any great benefit to its region unless it gains a 'continuous through line' distribution – east, north, south and west, through a unified system of interchanging barge line operations, reducing to a minimum reloading costs and loss of time in the movement of freight, and unbalanced upstream and downstream loads.

None of us should go before Congress or any Federal Department in the advocacy of our project alone. We still have a big task before us and we should stand united, and work together not only for the completion of every project now approved, within five years, but for the adoption of every other river project which is meritorious and which the army engineers find to be feasible.

In Kansas City, we feel that the earliest complete improvement of the upper Missouri and for which General Jadwin assures us increased allotments this coming year, and upon which work has been begun to serve Kansas, northern Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming, is essential to the full benefit of the improvement of the lower Missouri River, the Ohio, Mississippi and other projects.

This year alone 151,000 feet of dikes; 57,760 feet of revetment; 5,700 feet of land building obstructions and 12,327 feet of retards, will have been constructed on the lower Missouri. 25 units have been working, under Major Gordon Young, our able district engineer. More than 90% of the distance from Kansas City to the mouth of the river now has a minimum six-foot channel and the improvements thus far fully demonstrate the feasibility of a nine-foot channel. All the work now being done on the Missouri for a six-foot channel can be utilized for a later nine-foot channel, to which the natural action of

our particular river contributes in a large way. Careful sounding this past summer shows long stretches of channel with depths of 10 to 35 feet.

All our regions need earliest possible relief. A nine-foot channel on one arm of the system is of little value until other rivers also have 9-foot channels.

A tonnage survey made this last year on the Missouri River from St. Louis to Yankton, South Dakota under Norman E. Titus of the Department of Commerce at the request of Secretary Davis, showed a total available tonnage of 8,445,535 tons, and that 54% of this tonnage would be down stream and 46% of it up-stream – a remarkably good balance in freight movement.

This survey did not include tonnage moving to and from points removed from the river which our own survey shows would more than double this tonnage and while this is nearly a million and a half more tons than Mr. Titus found originating on the whole lower and upper Mississippi River, we do not believe that it should give any precedence to our project over that of the Mississippi River. We have on the Missouri River 2,285 miles from its mouth to Ft. Benton, Montana, the most even flow of water of any large river in the world. We have a fall of approximately 10 inches to the mile and an average flow of 4 miles per hour, about the same as the Rhine, one of the largest cargo carrying rivers in the world. We have much greater volume of water at low stage than either the upper Mississippi at Rock Island or the Ohio River at the mouth of the Cumberland, yet we do not believe that this gives us any claim for a nine foot channel earlier than a nine foot channel on other similar projects, but that they should all be developed concurrently.

The Department of Agriculture estimated that 58.36 percent of the entire wheat crop of the United States was raised in the Missouri River section this last year, while 55% of the rye crop and 36% of all the oats were also raised in this section. But here is the sad part of the picture, and one that needs immediate relief. While wheat, according to the Department of Agriculture and subject to some variation of classes, was selling in Pennsylvania at \$1.30 per bushel; in Ohio \$1.27; Indiana \$1.22; West Virginia \$1.38; North Carolina \$1.46; Georgia \$1.61; Kentucky \$1.44; Tennessee \$1.51; Alabama \$1.55; it was actually selling in Iowa for 98¢, in the Dakotas for 89¢, Nebraska and Kansas 87¢. The Missouri Valley states produce a surplus over local demand which must be shipped to other parts of the U.S. or exported. You all know the sad story of the great freight differential confronting our wheat growers in competition with the other exporting wheat countries of the world.

The Missouri River with its connecting streams affords an ideal situation for bringing relief to the growers of wheat with bare lines running directly into the consuming states and to New Orleans for export. Even more startling figures could be given on the comparative prices of alfalfa hay raised in Kansas and Nebraska, needing and supplying a market in the cotton-growing bordering the lower reaches of the inland waterway system. The same condition exists in many other of our agricultural products.

A river rate of 80% of the present rail rate to and from the upper Ohio River Country, or upper and lower Mississippi regions to our Missouri River Valley would save \$125 to \$300 per 80,000-pound car on freight classes one to five.

On certain classes of freight, the rate from the Missouri River section to California is three times the rate on the same classification of freight from New York to California by way of Panama.

There are many factories located on the upper Mississippi and Missouri river which could formerly successfully compete with seaboard manufacturers. The years since the war have seen a gradual drawing in of their trade territory lines through a constantly diminishing area of profitable distribution. Many of these factories make the goods such as automobiles, farm machinery, stock foods, hardware, building steel, farm products, drugs, electrical supplies, etc., most required by South and Central America. South America and Central America in return furnish the nitrates, chemicals, sisal, copper, aluminum, ore, coffee, tropical fruits, and other raw materials needed to develop industry in our region. Today, Canada with her subsidized railways and ocean hauls can undersell us in much of the South and Central American markets. Yet even with this handicap, year before last, our trade with Central and South America was \$1,400,000,000 as compared with \$400,000,000 with France, Russia, Belgium, and Germany combined. May I repeat Mr. Hoover's trip is timely and vitally related to the early completion of our Mississippi Valley waterways.

The same situation prevails in most of the states represented at this meeting and with this crying industrial and agricultural need confronting all of us and with the government carrying enormous investment in uncompleted projects in our valley, the real benefits of which will not accrue until the entire system is completed, are we not justified in asking the army engineers to speed in every possible way a more rapid improvement of these rivers and should not the government stand ready to increase the appropriations to that amount, whatever it is, that can be expended efficiently in this work? Certainly with both national political parties having adopted a plank in their platform promising immediate development of our inland waterways, with Mr. Hoover deeply convinced of the dire necessity of speeding this relief to the middle west; with South and Central America trade opening a welcome door to our Mississippi Valley manufacturers, if we can only serve them; with our farmers still suffering terribly after ten years endurance, and bare survival, the insistent demand of this convention should be greatly increased appropriations this year and a still greater increased appropriation year by year until all waterways to serve inland America are completed to their greatest possible usefulness.

Certainly our army engineers, as able a group of men to be found anywhere, can speed up the plans to use efficiently at least a ten million dollar increase each year over the past year, and I mean on the Mississippi waterways alone for transportation purposes.

Almost a billion dollars have been expended on the Panama Canal, the Great Lakes, and our harbors, of which we of the inland region have borne our share of the cost, and which we heartily approved. But, should not the country at large as generously support a more rapid improvement of the waterways affecting such a large section of our nation? Fifty-five million dollars for a year, from which must be deducted some fifteen to twenty million dollars for maintenance of rivers and harbors, and some ten to twenty million dollars for improvements of projects other than those located in the Mississippi Valley, is not adequate to the size, urgency and importance of the task. The improvement of the whole Mississippi Valley system has taken on an enlarged aspect for the immediate welfare of the nation and we should not allow our habit of thinking in the past, to cause

us to fail to grasp the importance of investment of larger sums of money when they can be so profitably expended on our inland rivers to be sound, as soon as they are made usable.

The wealth of our nation is such that it can afford to hasten in every possible way a better distribution of population, a relief to agriculture, and industry in the Middle West and a better economic balance to our nation as a whole. The markets of the Middle West must be widened. We have little natural waterpower for cheap fuel and we sorely need the lowest possible transportation costs for coal and oil for fuel purposes. We must save by manufacturing many products that now go to waste on farms.

Our splendid agricultural colleges are making great advances in chemical research looking to a greater utilization of the raw products in which our regions abound, but with our present comparative freight handicap – how can we sell to the nation until we obtain lower rates on our heavy bulk products?

On the other hand, we should not ask and urge the government to increase the expenditure upon our rivers unless we in turn do our part. In Kansas City we have already voted \$500,000 in bonds for the building of a river terminal although it will be nearly two years before a channel will be completed. St. Joseph is planning her terminal too. We have nearly a million dollars in cash, raised by public contribution, which we have tendered to the Inland Waterways Corporation on the same basis that the Twin Cities tendered some \$600,000 to help in the purchase of towboats and barges. Plans are under way for the building of a larger river-rail elevator. It has been estimated one year's saving on barge line movement of grain from the whole Missouri River region would more than pay the total cost of completing the channel from Kansas City to the Mississippi River. Delay is expensive, and deadly to our section.

We should encourage all our river cities to anticipate the need of river terminals and river-rail elevators, and have them ready at the time of the beginning of barge line operation. Our respective organizations in our various river sections should assume the responsibility of developing balanced in-going and out-going tonnage on the barge lines. Those of us located in river cities, also have the sacred responsibility of doing everything we can to see that inland rural areas, towns and cities get their just proportion of saving in transportation costs in all joint river and rail hauls.

Ours is a national project, and we cannot ask the support of the nation at large and at the same time endeavor selfishly to monopolize the benefit. As rapidly as any river is improved as far as your city, you certainly are obligated to continue to work for its improvement beyond you to serve the greatest possible area.

Methods of transportation have advanced more in the last hundred years than in all previous known history. The advent of railroads was perhaps the greatest factor in our nation's progress. We are indebted to the vision and courage of the builders of our great railway systems for many of the blessings to humanity and business today. We must be absolutely fair to the railroad interests of our country. We are sure that a more intensive development of the Middle West, greater prosperity coming from intensive farming, the establishment of greater financial centers, the re-invigoration and up-building of industry in our towns and cities, and the consequent growth of the population in our section of the country, will bring about an increase in business from which the railroads, operated

through enlightened policies, will receive their share. A more economic segregation of types of bulky freight adapted to barge transportation will free our railroads for the movement of higher classifications of freight. Increased volume in finished manufactured products will more than replace the movement of certain raw materials, and bring about increased business activity on every hand. Just as the Pennsylvania railroad has recently inaugurated a wide-spread system of co-ordination of rail and motor truck service through the use of larger interchangeable and cheaply transferable steel tank containers for less than carload lots, so will the railroads, trucks and barge lines, and airplanes, develop efficient co-ordination to the benefit of all classes of carriers, greatly increasing business for all of them in South and Central America and the Orient, the Middle West rightly claims a fair economic basis as compared with the seaboard belt areas of the U.S. Given this opportunity, we will do our part in the development of the resources of our nation, and the betterment of living conditions for mankind. This is a real national planning, and will challenge the thought and daring of the leaders of our country, and efface sectional jealousies. America gained her position in the world without inheritance of wealth or political combinations with other nations. We have never advanced our interests by conquest in war or aggressive military expeditions. We have achieved by hard work and fair dealing.

We have untold and undeveloped opportunities in the Mississippi Valley for further advancement that will enhance the world position and the solidarity of our nation. Every industry, every farmer, every man, woman and child of the Middle West has the inherent right to be placed upon the same economic basis as the rest of our land. This is sheer demand of reason, business, and human instinct.

Every red-blooded delegate in this convention should solemnly pledge himself to work unceasingly for the improvement of our inland rivers, the entire consolidated interdependent system, until the people of our twenty-six states secure the God-given benefits and blessings of the greatest waterway system to be found in the world; the trunk lines of which will forever stand as a great cross of salvation to the present and future generations of our glorious valley, stretching majestically in their influence from the Rockies to the Alleghenies, and from Canada to the Gulf.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN072

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.