Kansas City is inspiring. Nature gave it wooded hills and winding water courses. Through the years men who have had a part in the development of the visible city have sought to preserve the beauty of the landscape and to enhance it. From the time our great park and boulevard system began to emerge from the dreams of those who conceived it, the imagination of Kansas City people was aroused to the possibilities of a city orderly, clean and inviting. Admirable homes, set in gardens, commercial structures with a touch of grandeur in them and industrial plants that are not only serviceable but habitable for the workers have been the result.

The calculating city planner breaks down a city into its constituent parts and begins by a consideration of the uses to which property is put. He thinks of private property and public property. The former embraces homes, business houses and industrial plants. The latter includes the seats of government, parks and playgrounds, schools and churches, libraries and hospitals, and the like. Decisions affecting the street network and the other arteries of transportation and communication hinge upon demands arising from property’s use. Likewise the underground utilities and supplementary agencies that concern public health and welfare.

It is the conviction of city planners that every city should possess a civic center, visualizing for a free people the greatness of democracy at work, which is another term for self-government. Kansas City’s court house and city hall will answer that need. But the city which aspires to be called great and deserves it, must have yet another center. I refer to its cultural center.

The art spirit dwells in the hearts of a city’s people. It is a part of the city invisible, but as real as its structures of lumber, brick and stone. As I view it, the cultural center is a shrine at which those who dwell within the city’s borders, and those who come to be its guests, catch inspiration to learn more of the “durable satisfactions of life.”

No city has or can have a finer opportunity than Kansas City’s to create the outstanding cultural center of America. The Nelson Gallery of Art alone would make Kansas City a formidable contender for honors. This great cultural asset of Kansas City, born of the generosity of William R. Nelson, will surpass in its ultimate fineness the hopes of our most farsighted and understanding people.

The Kansas City Art Institute alone would give Kansas City a claim to distinction in the same field. Here workers in the arts are being taught to give to the things we make for use in every day life the art forms which will make them more cherished as well as more useful. From among these will come objects of serious art, one day to adorn the gallery itself.
Howard Vanderslice, the institute’s great benefactor, and others who already have given and will give to enlarge its sphere of usefulness and of influence, have assured its future.

But what of a university? We have grown accustomed to hearing the names of great cities associated with institutions of higher learning – the Universities of Chicago, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, New York, Boston and the rest. Kansas City should have its own university. And, through the generosity of William Volker, it already has a site. It is a site that seems detached from the busy life of the city, yet in common with its two congenial neighbors, the Nelson Gallery and the Art Institute, it is closely linked to every part by our great boulevard system. John Henry Newman’s “Idea of a University” pictured an institution which could be appropriately located here.

Years from now, Kansas Citians of the future will thrill at the contribution to the life of that day by the three institutions adorning the hills that run down to Brush Creek. Youth will come to the University of Kansas City to learn what men have thought and said, and done and felt. Some of Kansas City’s youth will come to the Art Institute to learn, by study and practice, how to appreciate and to create art. Young and old will come to the Nelson Gallery to be uplifted. Melded into one great cultural center. Kansas City and its vast territory will be a better, finer place in which to live and work. It is our high privilege to have a part in making real the vision of the Kansas City of tomorrow as a city with a cultural center second to none.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN010

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.