These and many other thoughts came to me while studying the cities of Europe. Many suggestions of things that Kansas City can and should do, and perhaps many illustrations of mistakes which we should avoid, giving us free for the asking, the experience, and test of time of the various phases of European cities, applicable to our own good town.

Thinking or planning for Kansas City, however, we certainly must have an idea of the physical size and population of the city which we propose to build. As a possible basis for this study, I have taken the census of greater Kansas City of 1920, 450,000, as a beginning point, representing a growth of Kansas City, Missouri of 30.6% from 1910 to 1920, a period of no abnormal expansion, a period without the impetus of war industries – in fact, one of the most difficult periods of recent years of Kansas City’s history – a period in which no additional population was obtained by the extension of the city limits – a period in which all agree that our rate of growth the last of the decade was greater than the first. Assuming that we may be able to maintain this rate of growth, 30.6%, during the present decade, and the two succeeding decades, I have, (Assuming for reason which I will give later), prepared the following figures.

(Figures)

As practical business men, we must consider:

First, is it possible to attain this growth?

Second, assuming this probable growth, what things should be done to bring it about, and prepare for a population of a million people in twenty seven years? I am not counting on that growth that naturally flows to a city, regardless of the community or the physical preparedness of the city itself.

I am counting the possibility, yes, the strong probability, of this growth, as a result of proper foresight displayed at this time in our city planning and civic activities, and in the arousing of the spirit and courage and vision of the people of Kansas City to plan and make our city one of a million inhabitants in 1950.

Compare the natural resources of the trade territory surrounding Kansas City with that of any large city in Europe, and you must agree that this territory can support and maintain, and vitally needs a city in our location, many times our present size.

Without exception, our natural resources are greater in proportion to our size than any large city in Europe today.
The average wealth of the citizens of our community is greater than the average growth, in my opinion, than any city of Europe. Many cities of Europe, and even cities in eastern United States, are located in territories which have largely reached their maximum growth. Kansas City is in the heart of a territory whose resources have scarcely been touched, when you compare them with the intensive agriculture of European countries. The state of Kansas, under the intensive agriculture of many sections of Europe, or with the development of co-operative marketing, so important to our trade territory, could produce ten times the foods and grains which it raises today.

We all realize the value to Kansas City of the development of the great oil fields through southern Kansas and Oklahoma, and that the building of large cities through this territory will not detract from Kansas City, but simply add that much greater wealth and distribution consumption territory to our opportunities.

The history of European cities, as well as American cities, has largely demonstrated that the growth beyond a certain size of a distribution center is comparatively slow. But once a given city becomes established as a factory city, its growth, in many instances, becomes almost miraculous. In my opinion, Kansas City’s present growth is largely as a distribution center. Yet, I firmly believe that the increased freight rate of recent years, fuel shortage, and railroad congestion in eastern manufacturing centers, is (perhaps slowly as yet, but surely) preparing the way to bring the factories for the raw products of our territory to our city. We can possibly never be a million people as a distribution city. But, as a city manufacturing the rear products immediately indigenous to our territory, the history of the trade territory of practically every large city in this country and Europe, would justify the confident expectation of a city of a million people.

But there is another reason why I believe Kansas City can be made to maintain this average growth, and in which I believe some of our greatest opportunities are offered. We must keep the man who has made his money in Kansas City. We must make our educational, cultural and recreational attractions so great that the man who has made his money in our trade territory and wishes to seek a city of larger opportunity for his family to live, will select Kansas City, not only bringing them here as residents, but bringing them here as patrons of all our enterprises, investors in our property and our securities, and adding greatly to the increase of our population. There is example after example in European cities of the very great growth accruing to certain cities, as a result of their being the enjoyment place and the playground of their entire trade territory.

But these things will not come about in their full degree unless we set our goal of growth at a high mark; unless we have the vision to see that growth will follow the population which makes business efficient and good living conditions for the people we attract, and the lesson of every European city is the wisdom of thinking in terms of generations, rather than in terms of months or years – in the planning of a city. Almost every civic undertaking of consequence takes many years in accomplishment. Years have already rolled by since we have realized the grave need of abundant and better water supply. Engineers tell us it will take six to eight years to build the plant once started.
For four years we have been trying to get started on the Liberty Memorial, and it will probably be two more years before the people will have the joy and inspiration of a completed memorial.

For years we have been talking of a general comprehensive traffic way plan for Kansas City, and as yet we have only a few disjointed inadequately width streets.

And, so I think there are many things which our generation has the privilege of doing and accomplishing that will make us a city of a million people in 1950 – but just so surely as we rest on our oars while neighboring cities forge ahead, we will suffer encroachments on our trade territory, and loss in our race for industrial supremacy.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN012

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.