



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

**Our Trip to Mexico**  
August and September 1936

RAILROADS

We left Kansas City on the 'Katy' which afforded excellent connections at San Antonio, and we found the employees on the train very courteous and helpful. We arrived in Mexico City on the evening of the second day.

MONEY

At Laredo we found it expedient to change a small part of our American money into Mexican money. The train stopped there for about an hour, and we changed our money right in the station. I would advise not changing more than you think you will need to take you down into Mexico because at Mexico City you will find a more favorable rate of exchange. Also, the banks give you a better rate than the hotels, though the hotels will direct you to the banks. The difference in exchange is not great, however. At present a peso is worth 28¢ and for \$100 you get 360 pesos.

Returning I got off the train at Monterey, where it stopped for 15 to 20 minutes, and exchanged what little Mexican money I had, and the rate was very reasonable.

It is well to have American Express checks because they will accept them anywhere.

HOTELS

We stayed at the Ritz having made reservation in advance. We had two inside rooms with connecting bath at the rate of \$6.00 per day for all three of us. I would recommend this hotel, and if you wish I think they have even cheaper accommodations. Other hotels are the Imperial, which is operated by the Branif family, relatives of Tom Branif in Oklahoma City. There is also the Regis and the Geneva both of which are further out.

TRAFFIC

Traffic regulations in Mexico are rather complicated, and I would advise extreme care. I would advise garaging your car (in the event you drive down there) and hiring a driver and car, which is very inexpensive. In the long run, I believe one would find it cheaper and more satisfactory.

At the Ritz they put me in touch with Henry Jaimes, a very fine young Argentina boy who speaks English fluently, having studied in the states; and he is married to an

American girl. This man has his own car and is a splendid driver and guide. If he is not available, the clerk at the hotel will help you get a dependable driver. The rate is 2 pesos per hour in the city, and outside there is a union scale. These rates are published on the wall of the hotel. There is no need for paying more than a peso for most any place you might wish to go in Mexico City. They will try to stick you for a peso, but I got by with paying only 1/2 peso. This is approximately 14¢.

### EATING PLACES

Sanborn's on Madero is probably the best-known eating-place in Mexico City. It is a very old building with beautiful tile walls inside and out, and is extremely interesting. It is run by dependable Americans who have been there many years. You will find the meals very economical.

Also, I recommend that you go to Preddes' Restaurant; and to Paola (Paoli) Restaurant.

Pete's Log Cabin is a very interesting and rather inexpensive place. The interior is built from logs with rattlesnake skins all over them. I recommend you be sure to see this place.

San Angel Inn is a very interesting old Spanish building converted into a cafe, and while the price is a little higher there, it is a perfectly delightful place to eat. Be sure to walk out in the garden in the back of the building. The company owning this place is mostly Kansas City people. A man by the name of Al Dickinson is president. There is a good restaurant called the Grillon, which is a fair nightclub. Also, there is another good restaurant called Papillion (Butterfly). Then there is the Cucaracha (Cockroach), which is a good drinking place.

There are several good nightclubs in Mexico City and you will probably want to attend one or two of them. I recommend you ask the hotel clerk which ones to go to. Most of these nightclubs, however, do not get started with any excitement until around 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock at night.

### INTERESTING THINGS TO SEE IN MEXICO CITY

Of course, you will wish to see the Cathedral which is on the Zozola, the big square. It is extremely interesting and beautiful inside.

I doubt the art gallery is worth your going to see unless you want to see the Mt. Albans collection, which was discovered four years ago and is one of the finest in the world.

You will want to walk through the Alameda, which is a beautiful downtown park.

Go up to Chapultepee, which is a very beautiful palace. There is no admission charge, but I think it is customary to pay the guide a half peso for taking you through. Many of the rooms in this palace are almost equal in beauty of ornamentation to Versailles. The beautiful view from the hill upon which this palace is erected, is one of the finest you will see anywhere. You can go up there on a clear day and get a wonderful view of the snow-capped mountains. You will want to spend at least half an hour going through it.

If you can you should go to the Symphony Orchestra concert in the great National Theater Building, one of the finest buildings on this continent, and having a glass curtain supposed to be the finest in the world. The Mexicans are great musicians.

By all means drive out to see Teotihuacan. This is about thirty or thirty-five miles from Mexico City. There are two pyramids there, one of which is larger than anything in Egypt, and there is a great excavated court in front of it. Be sure to go down into this court and clear over to the other side from where you go down, and see the great Aztec heads. This court is supposed to have held a million people. No one knows when this city was built, but it probably covered an area of eight square miles. There is no remnant of the town standing today. Much of it is being farmed. If it is not too windy you might climb to the top of the pyramid, although it is much harder coming down than it is going up. The steps are very long, and it looks fairly easy, but you will find it's not. To us these pyramids were one of the most interesting and thrilling sights in Mexico.

As you go out to the pyramids there is an old monastery, Churubusco, which is very interesting.

You will wish to go to the Floating Gardens, Xochimilco, which are out just a few miles. You go out there and get in a little boat and you float around on the canals between the islands which used to float on the water. You can get your lunch out there if you like. You will find very beautiful flowers; a lot of Mexican life; little cooking boats will come up and serve you food, and there will be music everywhere. Don't miss this.

You want to go through 2 or 3 of the markets. Merced; San Juan; and perhaps the Thieves market. These are enormous and give a fine idea of merchandising in Mexico. The flower market is particularly beautiful. You could spend half a day at these markets.

In going to the pyramids you should stop off at Guadalupe and see the Virgin of Guadalupe in the old Cathedral.

In buying from any of these people in the markets do not pay the first price asked. You should get them down at least one third or a half, Don't be in a hurry; take your time to look around and see the different places and the Mexicans and Indians will push their wares on you in their anxiety to make the sale and will finally come down to your price.

You will find it interesting to go to some of the glass factories where you can see them blowing glass. These factories are glad to have visitors and you can get the addresses of them from the hotel.

You should have your guide drive you over some of the better residential sections in Mexico City to see the type of architecture and the new modernistic architecture of the new buildings being erected.

### SHOPS

We found Mrs. Berryman of Native Arts Shops one of the most reliable merchants in Mexico City. She is an American, has been there for 20 years or more, and is very dependable. Tell her I sent you to her and she will make you better prices. She is not the kind of person you have to 'jew' down. Simply ask her if you select a number of things would she make you a little better price. On anything you ship out she will be only too glad to arrange that you list the wholesale price of 25% less than retail to show

on your bills and you will have to pay duty only on that amount. We had shipments from eight different shops in Mexico, and hers was packed better than any of the rest. She has an interesting little shop where you can get nearly anything you want. Her address is Pasajo America 13.

We also bought a number of things from Leggerette's on Juarez Street. He will remember me and will give you fair discounts, probably 15 to 25% off. I think he is dependable and he speaks English.

### TRIPS OUTSIDE OF MEXICO CITY

In making out of town trips, of course, it will depend upon how much time you have. By all means I hope you will go to Curanavaca; get luncheon at the old Borda Gardens, and be sure to walk over the gardens. Also, go through the cathedral there. It is very beautiful in the interior. Also, see the little square which is quite interesting. Your guide will offer to take you to the Municipal Building, but outside of Rivera's painting on the wall it is not particularly interesting.

At Curanavaca we bought our furniture from La Gloria, a shop on the little Square.

In going to Curanavaca you go up over the mountains about 1000 feet high, but the road is excellent.

From Curanavaca you go on down to Taxco which is the most interesting town we saw in Mexico. You should have your guide arrange hotel reservations in advance. A man by the name of Harris runs the little hotel, Los Argan, there and you can get good meals. If they haven't rooms at the Los Argas hotel, Mr. Harris will put you into some other hotel. He is an American and was very nice to us. Also there is Taxqueno Hotel and another large one there.

At Taxco you will want to see the cathedral, and it might be interesting for you to go up to Spratling's place on the second floor of a building facing the square. We bought our tin electric fixtures for our farm building from him. You can see silver and tinwork articles being made; also weaving.

It is difficult to make these two towns in one day. It is better to go down one day; stay all night at Taxco and come back the next day. Taxco is an old Spanish mining town, built on the side of the mountain; extremely picturesque and the architecture is very interesting. If you have time to go through to the east when you get to Taxco, you are, as I recall one third the way to Acapulco is not so good from Taxco on. I would not advise taking your own car on this trip. You have some pretty sharp curves down the mountain and of course, in the summer you are confronted with a good many hard rains. Some people do drive their own cars. It is not dangerous or terrible difficult but if three or four of you can go together and pay for a car I think it will be better than driving your own car. If your driver is a good English speaking man he will tell you many interesting things as you go along, and he will help arrange lunch for you and take you to see some interesting places, etc.

Mrs. Nichols and Clyde made the trip to Acapulco after I left for home, all the way from Mexico City and I think they drove through in one day. The entire trip took

about four days, and I am not sure how long they stayed there. Perhaps if you are crowded for time you could make the whole trip in three days and have a reasonable amount of time at Cuernavaca, Taxco, and Acapulco.

It is only about 40 or 50 miles to Teluca, as I recall; a very beautiful mountain road with a number of interesting old Spanish towns and if possible you should get there on Friday which is market day. You should get an early start in the morning. There is a good place to eat there and the market is very interesting. It is a great center for baskets.

We also went down to Cholula and Puebla. It is a very mountainous drive a good part of the distance, and the cathedral on top of the pyramid at Cholula affords one of the most interesting sights we saw in Mexico. You can also see some of the excavations under way on this pyramid. Cholula is only a short distance from Puebla. We did not find Puebla very interesting, though there is an interesting old nunnery there. If you go there have your guide take you into the factories and see them making pottery and tile. Also, see the cathedral. We expected to buy pottery dishes there, but found their prices high and their product not as good as we later bought in Mexico City. You could easily make this round trip in a day.

A good many people go further on from Puebla to certain other interesting towns, but I do not believe this trip is as interesting as the others described.

### CUSTOMS

Each person is entitled to bring back \$100.00 worth of merchandise without paying duty. These things do not have to accompany you. On the train as you are coming out of Mexico, they hand you declaration blanks which you fill out and on one of these you put the things that are with you, and on the other the things that are being shipped. As long as you do not have more than \$100.00 worth of things with you, you are not assessed any duty on the train. If you have less than this amount with you and more being shipped so that the whole amount will total more than \$100.00, you can settle your duty after you arrive home.

On anything you have shipped you should instruct the merchant to mark it "Ship in bond to Kansas City" (or wherever point you wish it shipped), on each package, with your address, and instruct him to consign the goods to J. M. Gonzales, Iturbide St. 1205, or P.O. Pox 582 (for mail), Laredo, Texas. This man has taken over the business formerly operated by Well-Fargo at that point.

You must instruct each shipper to send him (Gonzales) the original bill with three copies; and you should also have another copy – or preferably two copies to bring with you. You attach one to your declaration agreement, and one you bring with you. If you have too many items to get them all on the declaration blank, you can simply write the name of the merchant from whom you purchased the goods and designate a number by which you can refer to the attached itemized bills.

Several of the better merchants are registered in the Customs house so you will not have to pay the 4% absentee tax, but some of the merchants are not registered. It is well to ask a merchant about this. Mrs. Berryman and Legorretto are both registered.

You go through Customs coming back in the early morning before you get to San Antonio. They get you up about six in the morning and the Customs House officials come through the train and examine your bags. If you have trunks they will go with you to the baggage car. They were very courteous and reasonable, and I am sure will be as long as they have no reason to suspect you of trying to smuggle anything into the country. They make a rather cursory examination of your hand luggage.

Just before you get into San Antonio you go through Immigration on the train. This takes place in the front part of the front Pullman. They simply ask you one or two questions and pass you.

If you have a trunk going down, you can check it to Laredo. You get into Laredo pretty late at night and you have to look after re-checking your trunk right on the train. I got hold of one of the trainmen and went forward to the baggage car and had the trunk re-checked. Coming back, the conductor arranged this for me on the train, but if you do have a trunk be sure it gets through Laredo both going and returning.

### SQIUBBS

Don't worry about taking a Kodak with you. There is no regulation against it.

As soon as you get to Mexico City I would advise that you make reservation for your return because the trains are pretty heavily loaded, and you can always change it later if you want to stay longer.

In going down by automobile you want to be sure to have plenty of gas on the long runs between towns, and so time your schedule that you will land in a town where you will get good accommodations. They are terrible in the small towns.

You will be interested in seeing some of the old haciendas. Your guide can drive you into some of them along the side of the road, which we did, and found the people very courteous, none of them speaking English.

You want to be careful not to leave things lying around where they can be stolen, though we had no trouble with this. In fact, we found the Mexican people very courteous and considerate, especially if they are approached with a smile.

The altitude is 7,300 feet at Mexico City and I would advise you to go slowly for the first few days. Many people get an intestinal upset at first, though they do not become seriously ill.

We found no trouble getting good drinking water at all the better places, and no difficulty getting clean food at all the places that I have listed above.

There are Fiestas in Mexico City and the surrounding towns on certain days. You will have no trouble finding out where they are, and it will be well for you to include 1 or 2 of them in your trip if it fits in with your plans.

There are many, many other interesting places to which you can take drives from Mexico City, but they are too numerous to mention. The Sanctuary of Remedias is about a half hours drive from Mexico City and quite interesting.

You can get airmail from Mexico City to Kansas City in one day.

You never need linen suits in the summer time. The weather is very pleasant, warming up somewhat during the day, but nice and cool in the evenings. It rains some time almost every day, but clears up quickly. The view of the mountains is not as good in the summer as in the winter because the peaks are usually covered with clouds, but in the winter you can see the snow caps all the time.

There is a good American bookstore on 17 Madero where you can always get books. Terry's "Mexico" is one of the best guidebooks. "Off to Mexico" by Moats is good. "Gringo" by Emma Lindsey Squire is very good. Also, there is a good little book called "Viva Mexico."

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN038

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.