Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols
Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City

Brief Review of Work on the Missouri River
[ca. 1928-1929?]

It is expected that the channel work will be sufficiently advanced that navigation can be opened sometime in 1930. During the present year work has been done or is under way on the Missouri River at fifty different points. During this year, or by the end of this working season, there will have been completed the following works:

- 151,000 feet of dikes
- 57,760 feet of revetment
- 5,700 feet of abatis
- 12,327 feet of retards

More than twenty-five working units have been engaged in the improvement of the Missouri River this season. While the work has been somewhat retarded by the long period of high water during the early part of the working season good progress has been made on the river and due to the fact that the work is being pushed by our able District Engineer, Major Gordon R. Young, and that a greater number of units are engaged in the work than ever before, the result will be that a greater amount of work will be completed this year than ever before and we confidently expect the Missouri River, as far as Kansas City, will be added to the trunk line system of the Mississippi Valley waterway within the next two years.

Work has been started this year on the Missouri River between Kansas City and Sioux City and several jobs will be completed during this working season. Surveys are being made on this division of the river and plans made for a great amount of work during the next year. When the channel is opened to Kansas City efforts will then be concentrated on the work from Kansas City to Sioux City.

RIVER TERMINALS

What Kansas City is doing on her river terminal.

Besides providing a barge line terminal for the handling of freight at Kansas City plans are being made for the construction of a river-rail grain elevator which, it is expected, will be ready for operation when navigation starts.

In this connection we might call your attention to the great elevator capacity of Kansas City, at the present time being over forty million bushels. The Kansas City flourmills now have a daily capacity of 37,500 barrels and in 1927 these mills shipped out 8,718,775 barrels of flour.
TONNAGE SURVEY

A tonnage survey made on the Missouri River as far up as Sioux City, by the Department of Commerce last January, under the supervision of Norman F. Titus, showed a total available tonnage of 8,445,353 tons; and that 54% of this tonnage would be down-stream and 46% off it up-stream. This is said to be an ideal proportion of up and down stream tonnage. A survey of the potential tonnage on the Missouri River, made under the supervision of the Chambers of Commerce of the river cities, showed a total potential tonnage of 19,406,000 tons. The great difference between this and the Titus survey lies in the fact that the survey made by the Chambers of Commerce took into consideration tonnage moving to and from points removed from the river which might move by water over the Missouri River while the Titus survey only took into consideration tonnage handled through the river cities. You will get the significance of this vast amount of available tonnage on the Missouri River by comparing the available tonnage reported under the survey of the Mississippi River, made by the Department of Commerce under the supervision of Norman F. Titus, which showed 6,937,918 tons available on it, with the 8,445,353 tons for the Missouri.

These figures are presented for the purpose of emphasizing the importance of the Missouri River, with its vast amount of tonnage, to the Mississippi System of waterways.

If anyone thinks that the figures for the Missouri River are exaggerated let them contemplate for a moment the wheat crop of the Missouri River states for this year which has been estimated by the Department of Agriculture at 522,739,000 bushels, being 58.36% of the entire wheat crop of the United States for this year. Under the Titus survey it was estimated that about 115 million bushels of grain and grain products would move over the Missouri River when dependable navigation was established.

Based upon the rates made by the Inland Waterways Corporation on grain from the Twin Cities to the Gulf, it has been estimated that when the Missouri River is completed there will be an average saving of about 7 1/2 cents a bushel on grain and grain products moving over the Missouri River. Economists all agree, that with this reduction in the cost of marketing the crop, the savings will be added to the price paid the producer for all wheat raised in the Missouri Valley. Seven and one-half cents a bushel on this year’s crop in the Missouri River states would amount to nearly forty million dollars and the saving on the wheat crop for the one year would more than pay for the entire cost of the improvement of the Missouri River from the mouth to Kansas City. Bear in mind that this is figured on the wheat crop alone and does not take into account the saving on other grains, grain products, agricultural implements, and various kinds of tonnage which might move over the Missouri River.

In the discussions of the saving on grain shipments, most of which is based upon export grain and grain products, very little has been said about the saving that will be effected on domestic shipments. A vast amount of our agricultural products move into the territory east of the Mississippi and south of the Ohio. The rate on grain from the Twin Cities to the Gulf made by the Inland Waterways Corporation is approximately 2 mills per ton-mile. If we were to take 3 mills per ton-mile as a basis of water rate from Kansas City to Pittsburgh it would reduce the cost of moving this grain from 35 cents per cwt. to 22 1/2 cents, amounting to a saving of 7 1/2 cents per bushel. A corresponding
savings would be made on shipments of grain and grain products to Lower Mississippi points and this saving would extend into all of the southeast territory.

Let us consider, for a moment, the savings on class rates between some of these points on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and Kansas City. Take 80% of the present rail rate between Pittsburgh and Kansas City or freight classes 1 to 5 and the savings would amount to from $125 to $350 a car and on this class freight moving between Memphis and Kansas City there would be a saving of from $190 to $250 a car. If grain and grain products could be moved by barge at 3 mills per ton mile between Kansas City and Memphis it would effect a savings of 4 1/2 cents to 7 cents a bushel over the present rail rate.

These figures on savings are presented for the purpose of establishing the fact that, with this tremendous saving in freight rate, there will be no question but that this tonnage will move over the waterways when we have dependable channels and adequate equipment for handling the shipments.

I have given above the figures on the enormous production of wheat in the Missouri River States taking wheat only, as I did not want to burden you with figures on other crops. I might mention here that those river states produce about 55% of the rye of the United States and 37% of all the oats in the United States.

To emphasize the need of lower transportation costs for farm products in the Missouri Valley states, it is interesting to note in reports of the Department of Agriculture, that on August 15, of this year when wheat was selling in Pennsylvania for $1.30, in Ohio for $1.27, in Indiana for $1.22, in West Virginia for $1.38, in North Carolina for $1.46, in Georgia for $1.61, in Kentucky for $1.44, in Tennessee for $1.51, and in Alabama for $1.55, it was selling in Iowa for 98 cents, in North and South Dakota for 89 cents, in Nebraska for 87 cents and in Kansas for 85 cents. This condition is due principally to two elements. First, the Missouri Valley States produce a surplus over and above local demands which must go for export, and their crop is therefore sold entirely on the basis of the export market. This export price is the Liverpool price less the cost of delivery plus incidental charges. Second, this wheat cannot, to any great extent, enter into competition with the small production of wheat in the states showing the higher price because of the cost of transportation to such states. Could a better illustration be given to show the handicap under which the wheat growers of the Missouri Valley are laboring?

While there will be a vast amount of tonnage moved between New Orleans and the interior, which in the main will have to do with exports and imports, yet the fact remains that the great flood of traffic in the United States is east and west and it will doubtless continue to be the major portion of the moving traffic. Let us consider for a moment the traffic relation between the Ohio River and the Missouri River. Based upon estimates of potential tonnage there is no doubt in my mind that eventually there will be a greater volume of tonnage moving between the Ohio and the Missouri than between the Ohio and the Lower Mississippi. It is easy to visualize barges from Pittsburgh loaded with steel products, merchandise, manufacturers’ products, imports, etc., moving to Missouri River points and in return the shipments of flour, grain, grain products, packing house products, stock feed, lead, zinc and many other commodities from the Missouri Valley territory.
Tonnage will move between Chicago and points on the Illinois Waterway and Missouri River points and between the Upper Mississippi and Missouri River points.

Let us not forget that there is a vast difference between the movement of tonnage on Inland Waterways and that of the railroads. Waterways are dependent upon tonnage moving between important river points and it is practically all a long haul movement, there being virtually no local freight to swell the volume of tonnage for our river carriers. It therefore becomes all the more important if we would make a success of water navigation to connect up those points on our trunk line system which not only will furnish large tonnage to the water carrier but will receive a great amount of tonnage. It must be borne in mind that the economy of water transportation, as of course in any other form of transportation, lies in the long haul. In an analysis of the operating expenses of the Inland Waterways Corporation on the Lower Mississippi Division it appears that the maintenance and operation of line vessels is only about 42% of the total expense of operation; that it costs more per ton mile to handle the tonnage at the terminals than it costs per ton mile for the line haul and undoubtedly the item of operation and maintenance of vessels would be reduced with the greater length of haul.

To show what water transportation can do I make reference to figures, made by the Director of the Bureau of Economics of the Canadian National Railways, on the cost of transportation on the Great Lakes, in which he figures the ton-mile cost for the line haul at .8 of one mill. The ton-mile cost for the line haul on the lower Mississippi is 1.67 mills.

CONCLUSION

All of what has been said is with the view of impressing upon you the interdependence of all parts of the trunk line system of inland waterways; that no one branch of this system will ever be entirely successful as a water carrier until it is connected up with the branches of this system and has joined in the system the great centers of tonnage that will furnish cargo for movement in both directions and that the people of the country will not get the full benefit of water transportation until the system is connected up. We of the Missouri River Valley feel that the importance of the vast amount of tonnage available for water transportation in our valley has not been fully considered by some of the other divisions of the Mississippi system and that when this trunk line system is in full operation it will be found that the Missouri River will furnish more than her share of tonnage to the barge line.

What is needed in a better vision of the system as a whole and what it will mean to river navigation.

When the trunk line system has been connected up and shows its real worth as an agency of economic transportation there will be no difficulty in getting the tributaries of this trunk line system improved and joined into the great system of waterways. It will come naturally and be comparatively easy.

Every division of the Mississippi Valley Association, having a vision of the importance of waterway improvement and visioning it as one great system, should work for the completion of this great trunk line system, forgetting any immediate advantage or
local interest, for in the end the working out of the great trunk line system will bring the greatest benefits to all concerned.

In the last appropriation bill for Rivers and Harbors work some of the friends of the Missouri River in Congress undertook to put into that bill a special appropriation for the Missouri River. This was done without the knowledge or consent of the officers or directors of the Missouri River Navigation Association and was repudiated by them as they refused to take the attitude of asking any special favor in the annual appropriation bill, taking the stand that we were not entitled to this special consideration and it was not the proper attitude to take toward the other rivers and harbor projects. We, therefore, asked our friends in Congress to not support this special provision but to go along with the friends of the other rivers and harbor projects, our friends, on the same basis as had been followed in the years past, leaving the general appropriation to be allotted in the usual way by the Board of Engineers. In doing so we seriously offended some of the best friends of the Missouri River in Congress but we preferred to stand with our river and harbor friends and take our chances with the rest of them. All of our efforts were thrown in with the other river and harbor interests to increase the appropriations bill to the estimate of the engineers without any special favor to the Missouri River.

We come to you in this spirit of co-operation with the plea that there will be a whole-hearted united action upon the part of all branches of the Mississippi System for that which will be most essential to the early realization of our dreams, the completion of our great trunk line system of the Mississippi Valley.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN074

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.