



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

Robert A. Long

April 30, 1925

Mr. and Mrs. Nelson, Mr. and Mrs. Long, Members of the Long Bell Family – Kansas Citians, and our friends joining us by radio in this celebration.

We Kansas Citians know full well – we speak tonight, not for our city alone, but also for the wonderful country beyond us!

We are justly proud of Long-Bell achievement's – a record of opportunities in our territory!

The winning of the Great West – the home of the Pioneer – populated by the covered wagon and claimed by the sturdy hand on the plow. Hardship – toil – breeders of the fathers and mothers of most of us here, and our radio audience. Men of dreams and plans! Men tireless and fearless in action! Men loving its prairies, forests and hills – the same as the New Englander his rockbound shore and the Southerner his happy plantations!

The Romance of the West – not alone the story of the trail, the homestead and the village – but the story of the beginnings of great cities – of which Kansas City so well typifies the Spirit of the West!

Men of thought, of leadership – as so well exemplified in the courageous life of William R. Nelson! Men of heart and soul, embodied in the beloved William Volker of our city!

And men – Pioneers in constructive industry when facilities were limited and the very foundations themselves were being laid.

A young man from a Kentucky farm – without money, experience or influence, cast his lot in the heroic making of the West – Robert A. Long, to whose life and achievement we pay honor tonight – of whose citizenship Kansas City is justly proud, and whose varied activities perhaps affect it more than any other citizen of today.

There is a sky line in the lives of men, as there is a sky line in a city. From humble beginnings and lower structures gradually arise outstanding peaks of achievement – leaders of their time – dominating their respective fields – each the inspiration of greater things yet to be.

The greater the life, the greater the city, the more pinnacles of creation – the more beacon lights for us all!

First, in the sky line of Mr. Long – outside of commercial achievement, was a great gift to the erection of a house of worship, so significant of a man who has never surrendered his ideals, or compromised his faith, in his busy career.

Next, – a magnificent office building, the city’s sky-scraper of its time, an asset of civic beauty – early visualizing the future of a metropolis, and a worthy home for the splendid Long-Bell organization, largely responsible for this city’s becoming the worlds largest yellow pine market.

It is well to recall the words of Mr. Long at the opening of this building in 1907:

Work – don’t wait!

Laugh – don’t weep!

Boost – Don’t knock!

And he proceeded to add another high point in his sky line: A magnificent home – a token of his devotion to his wife and children – glorifying the traditional family love in our city – setting a high mark in residential building of a city famous for its beauty – a well deserved home for Mrs. Long, who had shared all the early struggles of her husband and to whom we pay equal honor tonight!

Soon, a hospital – again evidencing the heart and soul of a man never forgetting service to society or failing in responsibility to his fellow men.

Later on – Longview Farms – beautiful, yet practical, and affording encouragement to most modern agriculture, promotion of better livestock, and order and harmony in farm life – an asset to any community – a place we are proud to show our visitors and share with surrounding territory.

And recently – perhaps the most important undertaking of his career in Kansas City – The leadership in the building of our great Liberty Memorial, the nucleus of a future Art Center, destined, – with the magnificent gifts already available – to make Kansas City the center of Art and culture in the Middle West. At the close of the World War, Mr. Long advocated that our city show its gratitude to its sons who gave their lives for us, in a great inspirational monument free from the slightest utilitarian purpose, consecrating it to future generations “Lest the ages forget.” Few of our citizens will ever realize the courage, zeal and sacrifice given by this leader through out the past six years, in this cause.

A design chosen by a jury composed of five of the most eminent architects in America, which, when finally completed, with its broad terraces, steps, approaches and adorning touches will take its place among America’s great memorials.

Considering the age of Mr. Long at the initiation of this movement, the great mass of demands upon his time and strength, I know of no greater single civic service in the history of our city!

The sky line of his life has extended beyond the hills of our city and county. Schools and churches have risen under his leadership and financial assistance – not only in numerous communities throughout America – but even in foreign countries.

Measured in scope of national importance, in gigantic financing, in human vision, human courage, human daring and adventure into an almost entirely new field of American endeavor – the Highest Peak, towering above all the structures we have surveyed, Is the building of the wonder-city, Longview, Washington – where the Columbia River turns westward to the sea.

A conception unsurpassed, I can say, in city building in the entire United States – a comprehensive plan for a population of 100,000 people – involving scientific provision and efficient handling of every phase of our complex urban life. An example that marks the dawn of a new order of things in our future American cities. Achieved in the face of the greatest obstacles, despite the constant doubt expressed on every hand – the investment of an immense fortune upon an ideal and purpose in city building, led by Mr. Long and shared by his splendid, progressive organization. Longview will be studied and copied in America and throughout the nations of the earth – affecting not only the physical and material growth of cities, but influencing the moral, cultural and aesthetic life of the alarmingly rapid influx of our population into our congested centers.

As in the great mass and form we call a city, certain structures are seen from afar and stand out in bold relief, so, for Mr. Long, these achievements are merely high points that serve to accentuate the constant, unbroken train of creative building through the busy life of him and his organization.

There is, however, a silhouette in life, the same as the silhouette in the structures of a city – that great area of deepening shadow and softened line – the mellowed blending and coloring, of life's purposes into the real worthwhile objectives of existence. The mosaic pattern of life's ceaseless activities, thoughts and emotions that really determine the lasting value of a man.

From Kansas City, its territory and the hearts of our radio audience tonight there has sprung a code of business ethics, of civic idealism, and personal righteousness unsurpassed by those of any race or time.

Our city affords many striking examples of such lives. We have many commercial institutions firmly based on a true philosophy of life and social service.

And no institution in our city affords a better example of enlightened commercial procedure and creative service than the Long-Bell organization! In its leader there is embodied a constant battle for the greatest service to humanity – always giving liberally to every good cause – as a creed in life – even long before his accumulation of wealth – willing to mortgage and pledge his future energy and earnings at all times, in his zeal to promote human happiness.

“Many-sidedness” only inadequately expresses Mr. Long's contact with his fellow beings. No good cause fails to interest him. His only concern seems to be that he is doing his full part. Those close to him in the War campaigns frequently saw tears in his eyes, from deeply felt emotion. I have never known a man possessing more sentiment and feeling. The irresistible appeal of music or a fine painting – the thrill of the brass band marching down the street – the patriotic appeal of the waving of our glorious American flag, a beautiful landscape by the road, the hum of the mill saw carving out lumber for factory and home, never fail to grapple his soul.

His love of the beautiful is expressed by his office, home, farm, and orderly appearance of his mills – and even in the constant flower in the lapel of his coat, and his pride in the beauty of the horse he rides. Civic ugliness is abhorrent to him, and civic beauty is a delight.

A master of details, a genius in analyzing facts, a constant driving himself in his remarkable mastery of time, has never effaced from his heart the love of little children, or the companionship of friends.

His loyalty is known to us all. Idle gossip or criticism influence him not. Confidence perhaps to a fault, is one of his many qualities we love and admire. His ability to win and hold men and friends is well evidenced by the Long-Bell Family and his friends here tonight.

We have heard him lament the devastation of beautiful forests through the necessity of his business. We know he has led in reforestation and reclamation of cut-over lands for useful purposes.

We all know his love of good stories – the radiant, happy life that cheers – his rational, yet joyous manner of living. We know the deep cloisters of his feelings and creative thoughts for moral uplift and civic betterment; his innate sense of courtesy and fairness; his sympathy and toleration of every idea.

We know Kansas City's future is a dear theme to him; its proper growth; the navigation of the Missouri River; its Art Center; its schools and churches; its people; its service to the West.

As stated in the Kansas City Star, "Kansas City is just beginning to fully appreciate what an asset R.A. Long is!"

We would be startled with a conjecture of what one thousand R.A. Longs would do for our city and the west.

His useful fortune needs no apology.

His life has been one of quest for the things that are right!

A Pioneer in industry! A creator of wealth for the opportunity to serve! A crusader for the beautiful! A benefactor to his city and the West – a Beloved Fellow Citizen of us all.

His great energy and prophetic vision speak volumes for our future.

50 years active in business; 74 years old! For most men this is sundown!

Those of us who look into the face and grasp the hand of Mr. Long today, know that for him the sun is still high in the sky and his mind and heart are full of plans for the common future of Kansas City and the entire Great West!

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN015

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.