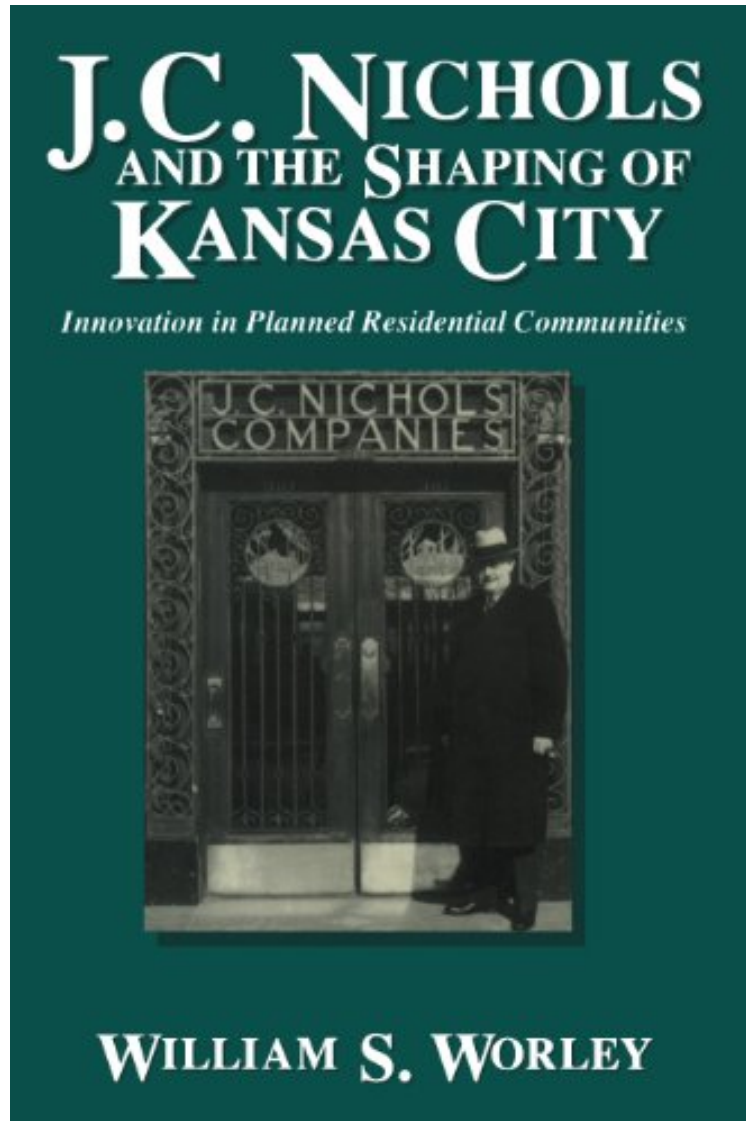


J. C. Nichols and the Shaping of Kansas City: Innovation in Planned Residential Communities

William S. Worley

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William S. Worley : J. C. Nichols and the Shaping of Kansas City: Innovation in Planned Residential Communities before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised J. C. Nichols and the Shaping of Kansas City: Innovation in Planned Residential Communities:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. OK but soooo much detailBy Michael LewynOn the positive side, this book is certainly informative: a blow-by-blow guide to the career of J.C. Nichols, a developer who built not only Country Club Plaza (a shopping center built in 1922 and still going strong) but also most of Kansas City's affluent

southwestern neighborhoods. Why is Nichols important? What can we learn from him? This book gives a few pointers: 1. By using deed restrictions to freeze his neighborhoods in place, Nichols ensured that his neighborhoods continued to be wealthy over time. By contrast, before him, Kansas City's proto-sprawl ensured that the center of the city's upper-class population moved a little further south every decade. In 1900, that "social center" was in an area that is now very much part of the central business district. By 1915, it had moved 20 blocks south to the Hyde Park neighborhood. By 1930, it had moved to areas developed by Nichols- and it remained there in 1975. Today, the areas developed by Nichols are still the wealthiest in the metro area, though much of the middle and upper middle class has leapfrogged into suburbia. On the other hand, Nichols was lucky as well as good: even before he began building in the first decade of the 20th century, wealthy Kansas Citians were moving south towards land he owned. 2. Nichols was innovative in a lot of smaller ways: he used parks and shopping centers as boundaries to buffer different types of neighborhoods from each other, rather than allowing long strips of commercial development- thus preventing the kind of jumbled, strip mall sprawl that makes Levittown look less attractive than his developments. Nichols also made neighborhoods more attractive by giving sweetheart deals to private schools and churches catering to the upper classes. 3. Nichols is of course most famous for Country Club Plaza, a shopping center that has become Kansas City's satellite intown downtown. What went right here? First, Nichols managed to accommodate both the automobile and pedestrians, installing parking garages but not putting yards of parking in front of every store. Also, Nichols favored surrounding the Plaza with apartments, thus creating a built-in customer base for his shops. Having praised this book, I would add somewhat negative note: because it piles detail upon detail, it can be a pretty slow read for a 300-page book. So reading it cover to cover may not be for everyone.

Born and reared on the outskirts of Kansas City in Olathe, Kansas, Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was a creative genius in land development. He grew up witnessing the cycles of development and decline characteristics of Kansas City and other American cities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These early memories contributed to his interest in real estate and led him to pursue his goal of neighborhoods in Kansas City, an idea unfamiliar to that city and a rarity across the United States. J.C. Nichols was one of the first developers in the country to lure buyers with a combination of such attractions as paved streets, sidewalks, landscaped areas, and access to water and sewers. He also initiated restrictive covenants and to control the use of structures built in and around his neighborhoods. In addition, Nichols was involved in the placement of services such as schools, churches, and recreation and shopping areas, all of which were essential to the success of his developments. In 1923, Nichols and his company developed the Country Club Plaza, the first of many regional shopping centers built in anticipation of the increased use of automobiles. Known throughout the United States, the Plaza is a lasting tribute to the creativity of J.C. Nichols and his legacy to the United States. With single-mindedness of purpose and unwavering devotion to achievement, J.C. Nichols left an indelible imprint on the Kansas City metropolitan area, and thereby influenced the design and development of major residential and commercial areas throughout the United States as well. Based on extensive research, *J.C. Nichols and the Shaping of Kansas City* is a valuable study of one of the most influential entrepreneurs in American land development.

"A thorough, tough-minded look at the man and his accomplishments."--Kansas City Star