

HISTORY OF  
K A N S A S  
STATE AND PEOPLE

KANSAS AT THE FIRST QUARTER POST  
OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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KANSAS BIOGRAPHY

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*J. Arch Lewis*

**J. ARCH LEWIS.** The president of the Steel Hardware Company, Incorporated, of Wichita, J. Arch Lewis, has gained his position by no happy accident, but by years of assiduous attention to the details of the business, by a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of its principles, and after the most searching test of his firmness and integrity. The facts of his outward life are few and simple. The qualities of his intellect and character are more subtle. The qualities that make a successful merchant are neither rare nor wonderful, although he must possess intelligence, good judgment, prudence, sagacity, industry and integrity. To constitute a leader in his field of endeavor are needed in addition to these a comprehensive knowledge of business conditions, an understanding of political economy as it affects the operations of production and distribution, and skill in determining the dominant influences that control human action, and a quick and accurate perception of character. These are not taught in the schools; they are not the product of study and discipline, however careful and rigid. They are developed in some men, like Mr. Lewis, possessing the inborn faculty, by experience and trial in the school of practical business.

Mr. Lewis was born at Palmyra, Otoe County, Nebraska, February 9, 1880, and is a son of James and Mary (McAleer) Lewis. James Lewis was for a number of years engaged in agricultural pursuits in Nebraska, where he was the owner of a well-cultivated property, and in 1894 moved with his family to Paola, Kansas, where he continued his operations as a farmer until 1918. At that time he retired from active labor and took up his residence at Wichita, and since then has made his home with his eight children, all of whom are living. Mrs. Lewis having passed away in 1922. Although an ardent democrat and very active in the ranks of his party, Mr. Lewis has never been an aspirant for public office. He is a devout member, as was Mrs. Lewis, of the Catholic Church.

J. Arch Lewis attended the public schools of Nebraska and Kansas, being fourteen years of age when brought by his parents to the latter state, but because of the failure of crops in Kansas, left the home farm to seek other avenues of activity and secured a position with the Deering Harvester Company, by which concern he was employed for six months. Next he took a position with George T. Steel, a hardware merchant who had been engaged in business at 117 Main Street, Wichita, for some years, and for two years worked at a salary of six dollars per week, out of which he paid all of his expenses and also saved a little money. Mr. Lewis remained with Mr. Steel for thirteen years, and at the

latter's death became the manager of the concern, which he managed for Mrs. Steel for four years. In 1917 he bought the business, which at that time was selling about \$25,000 worth of hardware annually. Two years later the business was incorporated as the Steel Hardware Company, Inc., with J. Arch Lewis, president; Paul C. Lewis, vice president; L. J. Wynn, secretary and treasurer; Mark E. Lewis and Will W. Hays, directors. Under Mr. Lewis' able management this has been developed into one of the leading and most up-to-date hardware stores in Kansas, and maintains a branch office at 3201 East Douglas Street, the main store being at 122, 124, 126 South Market Street. The business done by this enterprise at this time approximates a quarter of a million dollars annually, which means that it has been increased ten-fold in about ten years. Mr. Lewis, who never had a dollar given to him that he did not earn fairly, remembers his own poor boyhood and is philanthropically inclined, being a generous contributor to all worthy charities, as well as to public movements which his good judgment tells him are for the public welfare. He is a past grand knight and a past district deputy of the Knights of Columbus, and a member of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the Wichita Club and the Wichita Country Club.

On January 10, 1905, Mr. Lewis was united in marriage with Miss Mary Josephine Sittler, of Hooppole, Henry County, Illinois, and to this union there have been born the following children: James Anthony, born April 4, 1906, a graduate of St. Mary's Cathedral High School, class of 1923, who is now a senior student at St. Mary's College; Bernard Archibald, born February 14, 1909, a graduate of St. Mary's Cathedral High School, class of 1926, who is now a freshman at St. Mary's College; Archibald James, born April 6, 1913, who died November 15, 1913; Mary Josephine, born May 2, 1915, and died May 15, 1915; and John Joseph, born February 4, 1924.