

# Louis S. Rothschild

Merchant and Civic Leader  
1900-1984

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by Barbara Magerl

A self-described “smart alec” at Westport High School, and a young, would-be playboy, Louis S. Rothschild distinguished himself in his hometown and in Washington, D.C. The oldest of three children, Louis started work in the family clothing store at 10th and Main at age 12—wielding a feather duster. During summer vacations he learned about every department, including bill collecting. One day he called on a grain broker just after the man had lost a sale. When Louis asked for payment of a past due account, the broker picked him up and threw him out the door.

At Yale University he majored in science which he found more appealing than merchandising. When World War 1 disrupted his studies, his father offered to “make connections” for him with top Army friends at Ft. Leavenworth. Adamant about his own decisions, Louis enlisted in the Navy!

Back again at Yale, he won two football bets and spent the money on a pre-owned Buick. His irate father telegraphed him to come home. “If you can own and operate a car on the allowance I give you, you need no more education.” But he stayed, received his science degree and resigned himself to being the third generation in the family business in Kansas City, which eventually had five stores with him as president.

A civic and mercantile leader, he either chaired or was on the board of many groups, including the City Planning Commission, Menorah Hospital, and the Kansas City Association of Trusts and Foundations. An original trustee of Midwest Research Institute, he served alongside a Yale pal he had lured to Kansas City, Arthur Mag.

In 1953 Rothschild moved to Washington when President Eisenhower chose him to chair the Inland Waterways Corporation, a federal barge line agency. Rothschild’s long federal career climaxed as Undersecretary of Commerce for Transportation.

When Washington colleagues asked if he and his wife would return



to Kansas City, Rothschild's well known sense of humor surfaced. "We have to," he's say. "We have two cemetery lots there." He died in Washington in 1984 and rests in one of those lots in Rose Hill Cemetery.

### **Sources**

Fowler, Dick. *Leaders in Our Town*. Kansas City: Burd & Fletcher Co., 1952.

"Louis Rothschild Dies at Age 84." *The Kansas City Star*, 3 Sept. 1984.

"Maritime Board Member Appointed by Eisenhower." *New York Times*, 11 June 1953.

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