
Urban Study of Blanchard, Oklahoma

BILL COX, University of Oklahoma, Norman

Blanchard, Oklahoma with its 1,311 inhabitants is located in the south central part of the state of Oklahoma on United States Highway No. 62. It is approximately 23 miles southwest of Oklahoma City, sixteen miles southwest of Norman and twenty miles northeast of Chickasha. Within a radius of twelve to fifteen miles from the town of Blanchard are several small towns and villages dependent on Blanchard for mail, trade, and school service.

The particular region in which Blanchard is located is the Permian Redbed physiographic province. The topography of the area is quite hilly and is underlaid by Redbed containing a large proportion of sandstone.

A large amount of space in the more hilly parts around Blanchard is devoted to pasture. The valleys and flat-topped hills have fertile soils which produce large quantities of corn and grain and lesser quantities of cotton. Though cotton has been one of the major crops it is on the decline at the present time. Reduced cotton production has caused the abandonment of three cotton gins. The remaining cotton gin has not been used for the last two years. The farmers have been growing more wheat and alfalfa. Only a few farmers continue to grow cotton as their major crop.

The trade area of Blanchard has a radius of approximately twelve to fifteen miles. Many types of crops and livestock are raised within this area. Farmers bring chickens, eggs, milk, cream, soy beans, and shelled corn to Daniel's Produce House, located at the south end of Blanchard's main avenue. The produce house then sells the eggs, milk, cream, and chickens to an individual from Oklahoma City who, in turn, sells the chickens and eggs at the public market and delivers the milk and cream to a major dairy that maintains daily milk routes throughout Oklahoma City. Wholesale feed stores in Oklahoma City provide Daniel's Produce House in Blanchard with various seeds, feeds, and necessary equipment for livestock raising.

Blanchard, like many other towns of its size, is dependent on wholesale stores in a larger city for most of its retail merchandise. In like manner, large cities rely on towns like Blanchard for some of the farm products that are sold in their retail stores.

Blanchard's commercial functions consist of selling various kinds of articles. There are three grocery stores that handle everything from feeds to linoleum, two hardware stores, two dry goods stores, two feed and seed stores, two lumber yards, two automobile agencies (Ford and Chevrolet), two electric appliance shops, one variety store, one store specializing in radios, and two cafes, one of which is connected with the bus station.

Functions primarily concerned with service in Blanchard include filling stations and garages, a building contractor, two banks, a real estate loan and insurance company, and others. Other special services in

Blanchard are communications and school bus service. These two functions cover approximately the same area.

The postal service extends 10 miles north, nine miles west, thirteen miles south, and eight miles east. Mail is delivered to Blanchard twice every 24 hours via the Highway Post Office. Four mail routes cover the postal area once every day.

This postal distribution closely resembles Blanchard's extensive telephone service area which covers the territory to Washington, Criner, Cole, Bridge Creek, Middleburg, and Newcastle. These lines also extend to within a few miles of Purcell, Tuttle, and the Lindsay ridge. The entire telephone system, with its one room office, has 21 rural lines with approximately 800 subscribers. More than one half of these subscribers live in town.

Another form of communication in Blanchard is its weekly paper, *The Blanchard News*. This paper comes off the press every Friday and is distributed to the residents in Blanchard's postal radius. *The Daily Oklahoman* and *The Oklahoma City Times*, brought to Blanchard by the Mistletoe Express twice a day, is also available to the Blanchard residents.

Although the area covered by the school bus service is much smaller it is not insignificant. Seven large busses are needed to transport Blanchard's 509 students to school each morning. The school district covers 36 square miles, which is somewhat smaller than the postal or telephone area.

Utility services for the people of Blanchard include water supply, sewage disposal, electricity, and natural gas.

Water is supplied by four wells. Two of the wells are 57 feet in depth while the other two are but 28 feet deep. Lack of water is a current problem in Blanchard and has caused the urgent proposal for four new wells to be drilled. Bonds in the amount of \$45,000 have been voted in order to begin construction of these new wells. Also in the same bond issue was a proposal for a new 110,000 gallon storage tank to replace the old 55,000 gallon tower. At the present time 87 per cent of the homes are served by city water. With the adoption of these new proposals, not only will the shortage of water be corrected, but the addition of more lines to remote homes will give every resident a chance to use city water.

The central portion of Blanchard's residential district has two eight-inch sewer lines. They run parallel to Main Street and carry the main loads of sewage. The sewage disposal tank located in the extreme southeast section of town serves all but 57 homes. The extreme northwest, northeast, and southwest sections are not served by the sewer lines because of the slope.

Electricity for Blanchard is furnished by the Public Service Company of Oklahoma which has its district office in Chickasha. Ninety-nine per cent of the homes utilize electrical service.

Natural gas is also utilized by 99 per cent of the homes. The other one per cent use butane or propane which is generally trucked into Blanchard by companies operating from Purcell and Chickasha.

The residential district of Blanchard has over 450 homes. Usually the houses are average frame construction and have fairly neat lawns and gardens. Most of the homes have three to five rooms and are built on 50 by 150 foot lots. The nicer homes, constructed primarily of brick or rock, are built north along Main Street. These houses generally have from five to seven rooms and double garages. Apartments have been built over many of the garages.

The lowest type of houses are primarily situated on the fringes of town, having a greater concentration in the northeast section. These houses

vary in size from one to four rooms. Generally they are of frame construction and appear to be in extreme need of a new coat of paint or other covering. Gardens which make up the front, side, and back lawns are usually better kept than the living quarters. A cow and a few chickens are not uncommon in the front or back yards.

Blanchard has many cultural facilities. Primarily, however, they are made up of the school and the eight local churches. There are three Baptist churches, a Nazarine, Methodist, Assembly of God, Holiness, and Church of Christ. The First Baptist church has the largest membership with 273 members. The Methodist church is a close second with 200 in its congregation. A majority of the business people of Blanchard are members of the Methodist Church. Both the Baptist and the Methodist churches are constructed of brick while the other six churches are of frame construction. In the southwest part of town the Apostolic Trinity Church has a thatched arbor for summer revival meetings.

Of the 509 students enrolled in Blanchard's consolidated school system, sixty per cent live in Blanchard. There are 125 enrolled in high school, and 384 enrolled in the grades. The system has nineteen faculty members sharing a \$67,000 annual pay roll. The school playgrounds offer excellent facilities for baseball, basketball, soccer, and tennis.

Other types of recreation can be found at the large park in the southwestern part of town. It has two picnic sites and a large field for baseball. A softball team, sponsored by the Blanchard Lions Club, starts its practice in early spring. A variety of recreational establishments, such as a domino parlor and poolroom, the theatre, Boy Scout headquarters, and meeting places for the Order of Odd Fellows and the Masons can be found in Blanchard's downtown district.

On a spring afternoon, during the months of March and April, Blanchard shows signs of solitude and quietness. Only a few pick-up trucks are parked in the middle or angled into the curb on both sides of Main Street. The town seems to be desolate and struggling to survive. Later in the evening many automobiles with Tinker Field stickers on their wind shields indicate large numbers of the people make their living outside of Blanchard.

Blanchard has changed considerably since its origin. The town was not deeded land until 1906. Before that time Blanchard was located three miles east of the little village of Womack. The Canadian Valley Construction Company received its right-of-way on January 2, 1906, and constructed the Oklahoma Central Railroad through the present location of the town. This railroad later became a branch of the Santa Fe, starting at the coal mining town of Lehigh, 130 miles southeast, and terminating at the market town of Chickasha in the Washita River Valley.

This railroad hauled most of the products that were shipped in and out of town. Blanchard received grain, hogs, cattle, hardware, groceries, clothing, and drugs. Poultry, grain, feed, and dairy products were Blanchard's contribution for shipping on the railroad.

Work was started on the hard surfacing of United States Highway No. 62 during 1920 and was finished twelve years later in 1932. The paved highway was a major cause for failure of the railroad as trucks were soon hauling nearly all the products and merchandise that had previously been transported by rail. Cheaper service and faster delivery was offered by the truck lines to the larger commercial centers of the state. As a result trains were discontinued and the tracks pulled out during World War II after serving the area for about 35 years.