

Bloomington: The Lost Town Without Tornadoes,
Violent Storms, and Eventually, People



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When Dr. Daniel Tilden was strolling through the plains of north central Kansas in what is now Osborne County, he was looking for a safe place to homestead with his family. He reached Osborne County on April 1, 1870. Once there, he consulted with local Native Americans, asking about the area and where he should settle with his family. According to Indian legend, the place he chose had always been avoided by tornadoes and violent storms. A year later, Dr. Tilden laid out the town site of Tilden on his homestead.¹ The spot he chose lays about six miles northwest of present-day Osborne. To the north are a series of hills, and to the south is the Solomon River and another series of hills beyond that.

On May 30, 1872, the Tilden Post Office was opened and Cyrus C. Tilton became the first postmaster there. Shortly afterwards, School District 10 was organized. Figure 1 shows the first schoolhouse that was built.



Figure 1. Photo of the first stone schoolhouse built in Bloomington. Picture from the “Bloomington Scrapbook,” courtesy of the Carnegie Research Library in Osborne, Kansas.

¹ “Bloomington Scrapbook,” (Scrapbook, Carnegie Research Library, Osborne, Kansas, n.d.).

The town once had hopes of being the county seat, but is now only noted for being situated in the center of a rich agricultural district². The residents of Tilden hoped that their town could continue to grow, and believed that changing the name would help its prosperity. On May 10, 1873, the town site was officially changed to Bloomington, and on January 1, 1874, the post office changed its name to Bloomington as well.

At its peak, around 1930, Bloomington had seventy-five residents and boasted a bank, grocery store, telephone company, restaurant, lumberyard, stockyards, and two churches.³

Figure 2 shows the old depot that was located in Bloomington.



Figure 2. Photo of the old depot that was located in Bloomington. Picture from the "Bloomington Scrapbook," courtesy of the Carnegie Research Library in Osborne, Kansas.

Residents could drop things off at the depot to be shipped out. Elmore Nelson, a resident of Bloomington in the 1930s, can remember selling narrow white-striped skunks for \$5.50 a piece at the depot.⁴

² William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/>.

³ "Bloomington Scrapbook"

⁴ Elmore Nelson, phone interview by Nathan Mick, December 10, 2012.

Like most towns started in Kansas, agriculture was not only a large part of the community, but was also the reason many families moved to Kansas. The Blead family, shown in Figure 3, moved from Canada to Bloomington to start farming.

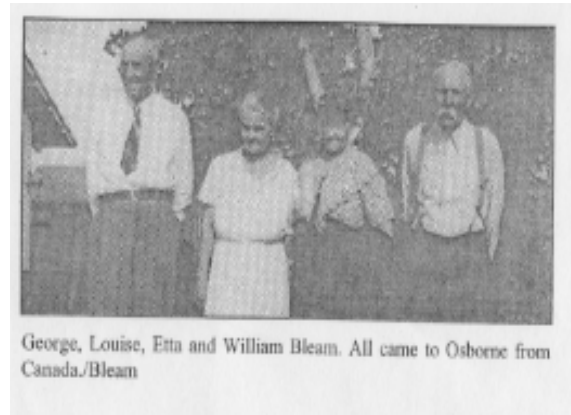


Figure 3. Photo of George, Louise, Etta, and William Blead, who immigrated to Bloomington from Canada. Picture from the “Bloomington Scrapbook,” courtesy of the Carnegie Research Library in Osborne, Kansas.

Figures 4 and 5 show what the grain elevators, where the local farmers hauled their grain, looked like at two different time periods in Bloomington.



Figures 4 & 5. Pictures of the grain elevators in Bloomington. Photos from the “Bloomington Scrapbook,” courtesy of Carnegie Research Library in Osborne, Kansas.

Part of the old elevator remains beside today's current elevator and is shown in Figure 6 below.

The elevator is the only business that currently operates in Bloomington today, which shows how important agriculture was and is to the town.



Figure 6. Photo of elevator in Bloomington that stands today. Picture taken by Alan Mick on December 12, 2012.

Bloomington also boasted a phone station, shown in Figure 7, which was run by Mrs. Shaw. Residents of Bloomington would call into Mrs. Shaw who would then use a switchboard to connect people to whomever they wanted to contact.



Figure 7. Photo of the phone station where Mrs. Shaw would connect people via switchboard to other residents in the community. Picture from the “Bloomington Scrapbook,” courtesy of the Carnegie Research Library in Osborne, Kansas.

The school, as mentioned earlier, was built in 1878. In 1880 there were fifty-three students, and by 1882 there were sixty-five, prompting one of the first known uses of modern class scheduling by a rural one-room schoolhouse. The younger students attended school during the summer months while the older students attended school during the winter months. In 1882-1883 a new school building was built to handle this educational congestion.⁵ The new wooden schoolhouse was used until the school was closed down and the children of Bloomington started going to school in nearby Osborne. Nelson Manufacturing then began using the schoolhouse, where they built wheel weights and centrifugal pumps. However, the building burned down and is no longer there today.

When the new wooden schoolhouse was built, the old stone schoolhouse was taken over by the Bloomington 22 Club. The 22 Club was made up of a group of Bloomington men who

⁵ “Bloomington Scrapbook.”

would get together to socialize, talk about what was going on in the community, and play cards. Eventually the group disbanded, but before their closing they had a huge meal and invited the entire community to come and partake. The original stone schoolhouse still remains intact today and is shown in figures 9 and 10 below.



Figure 9. Photo of the old stone schoolhouse that still stands in Bloomington today. This building was used for the 22 Club meetings once the new school was built. Photo taken by Alan Mick on December 12, 2012.



Figure 10 Photo of brick that shows when the old stone schoolhouse was built. Photo taken by Alan Mick on December 12, 2012.

Bloomington had one restaurant, and it was connected to the post office, shown in Figure 11.



Figure 11. Photo of the post office and restaurant in Bloomington from the “Bloomington Scrapbook,” courtesy of the Carnegie Research Library in Osborne, Kansas.

The building that the post office and restaurant resided in is one of the few structures, along with the old stone schoolhouse and part of the elevator, that remains standing today. A picture of it is shown below in Figure 12.



Figure 12. Present-day photo of the building that once housed Bloomington’s restaurant and post office. Photo taken by Alan Mick on December 12, 2012.

Bloomington also had several churches. One of those is shown below in Figure 13. The church was simply called the Bloomington church and was non-denominational.



Figure 13. Photo of the Bloomington Church, which was non-denominational, from the “Bloomington Scrapbook,” courtesy of the Carnegie Research Library in Osborne, Kansas.

When Bloomington was a bustling community, it had a group of residents that always looked to help each other out. In an interview, Elmore Nelson talked about the friendliness and closeness of the community when he was growing up there. One example he gave was the preparation of the residents’ ice houses in the winter.⁶ Bloomington residents would go down to the river with a team of horses, a wagon, and an ice saw, and saw blocks of ice out of the frozen river. They would then pull them out with ice tongs and load them up and haul them to their ice houses. Nelson said that the community would come together and help each other out. Everyone would team up and help one family for several days, and then move on to the next family until everyone had been helped.

He also talks about community gatherings, such as the last day of school, when everyone got together. All the families would come together on the last day of school and bring food, and

⁶ Elmore Nelson, interview.

there would be a big softball game as well. It was in many ways a much simpler time, a time when people had time to stop and talk to each other and truly cared how others in the community were doing.

Nelson also spoke about some of the difficult times. Growing up in the 1930s meant that he got to experience some tough times in American agriculture. The Dust Bowl made conditions treacherous to work in and agricultural productivity was low during that time. Grasshoppers were also a major concern at the time. Nelson can remember bringing his pitchfork in at dinner time. He did this because if the pitchforks or other tools were left outside, the salt left by the sweat off of a person's hand caused the grasshoppers to chew on the handles and leave them torn up and rough. He also noted that the even the chickens got tired of eating grasshoppers all the time and eventually quit eating them.⁷

Bloomington may now be a lost town with only one grain elevator, but it was a community that still has a history worth noting. It's a good example of what agriculturally-based communities went through when settlers were becoming established in Kansas. Bloomington may never again be a town in Kansas, but many of the residents from Bloomington would argue that it was an important part of Kansas, and helped shape Osborne County into what it is today.

⁷ Ibid.

Bibliography

“Bloomington Scrapbook.” Scrapbook, Carnegie Research Library, Osborne, Kansas, n.d.

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Nelson, Elmore. Phone interview by Nathan Mick, December 10, 2012.