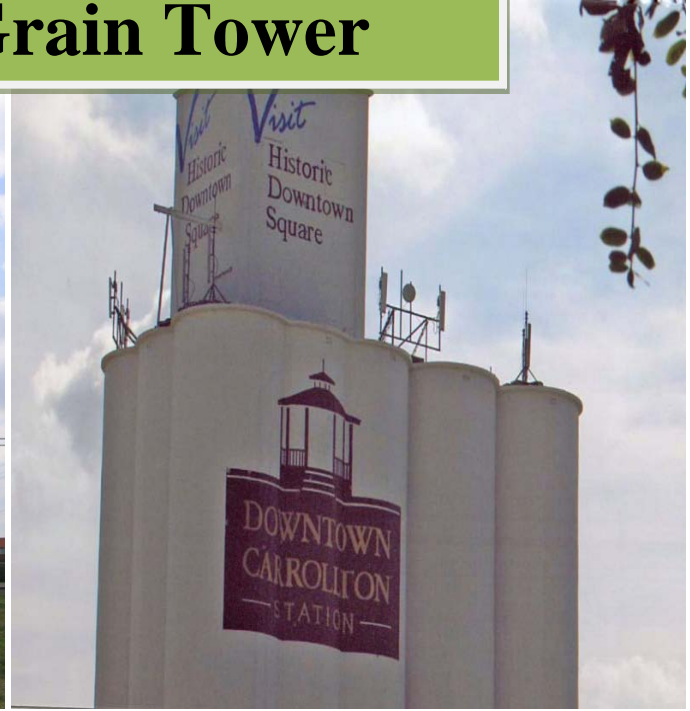
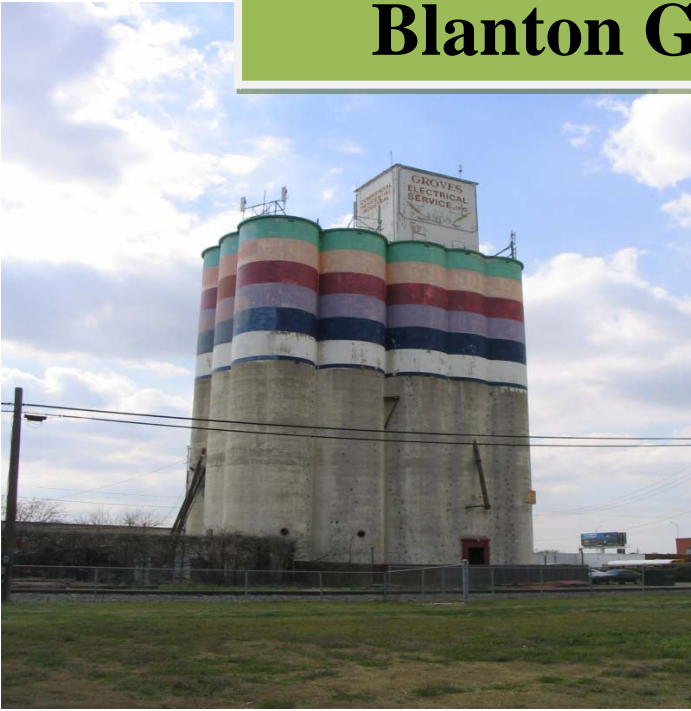


Blanton Grain Tower



Historic Preservation Advisory Committee

November 10, 2010

Miachelle Marzullo

Lark Tribble

Carolyn Sumner (Granddaughter of L.F. Blanton)

THE BLANTON GRAIN COMPANY TOWER

The Old Downtown Square of Carrollton, Texas, houses behind its east side an historic treasure of the Dallas-Fort Worth region of North Texas. The 3 extant buildings of a large grain and feed operation sit snugly close to the railroad line a few yards from the old town square as a relic of the days when the towns around DFW formed a matrix of large and small family farms which fed into the great grain-growing plains of Middle America and thus into the heart of America itself. Such agricultural operations still exist in this country, but most are absorbed in the distant insides of large corporate farms, where their existence and certainly their intimacy with local efforts and enterprise is largely invisible. The city of Carrollton is fortunate to have an intact and well-preserved example of a family agricultural operation from the last century, one which was integrated into the community by its presence near the center of town and by the family that lived in the town and helped to build both. This remarkable remnant of the past includes a giant concrete storage tower of the Blanton Grain Company.

Lester Franklin (L.F.) Blanton was born in Shawnee, Kansas, a small town on the outskirts of Kansas City on November 11, 1892. As a young man, Blanton worked at several jobs. For a time he studied law, but found the sheltered life of the study too confining for his activist spirit. He farmed and owned two small businesses, but these also lacked the potential for growth that would satisfy an entrepreneurial spirit that made him restless. In the words of his son, Jack Blanton, "He began life as did most of the forebears on both sides of the family - as a farmer. According to family tradition, he went through life driven by ambitions foreign to most of his immediate family and their ancestors, although his grandfather, George Washington Blanton, displayed many of the same traits in his incessant moving in search of the opportunities to do, to become, and to have more than seemed apparent to the average citizen."¹ In 1930 he did what many people were doing during the height of the Great Depression. He packed his wife and four children (and several in-laws) into his car and moved to another part of the country. He came south to Texas and settled for a year in the Rio Grande Valley. But again he became unsatisfied and started back north, intending to return to Kansas. He stopped for a time in

Dallas Morning News Classified Ad page April 17, 1931, showing the ad L. F. Blanton saw announcing sale of half interest in a grain and feed mill. Note that Carrollton was so small and isolated that the advertisement warns the owner must be willing to go "where products and demand is located".

AUTO ACCESSORIES, SALES, REPAIRS 18 PIERCE wheel, new tires, for \$20. Phone 54. 4307 Vandelia.	PROPERLY VALUED AT \$12,000, TO TRADE FOR GOOD land priced right. All clear of debt and doing good business. Address J. F. McWILLIAMS, Eastland, Texas.	FOR SALE—In beat oil to rooming houses, cafes, bus stations. For full particu McFATRIDGE, 713 West Texas.
Automobiles Wanted 18 CHANGE furniture for car or good light very truck. O. L. JONES, 4310 Elm. 61.	OAK CLIFF DRUG STORE. MONEY-MAKER. All location. Sell you fixtures or rent with building. Splendid curb service. Owner must give attention to other business. 2-7747. E. A. MARTY. 109 Martin.	FOR SALE—Combined ne ber shop, good business. Write WEBBER NEWS ville, Ark.
WE clear lot in best improved section of Grand Memorial Park, list price \$700, will mighty good trade for late model car. pe preferred. 3-3059. 3-9691.	A GOOD proposition. Investment required and competent man to handle grain, feed and mill business where products and demand is located. Must see it to appreciate. Come. Don't write. DENTON COUNTY NATIONAL BANK, Denton, Texas.	FOR SALE—Certified fi well equipped garage, wi and car sales contract: mands my attention. Bes
INDIVIDUAL will pay cash for light auto- bile. Must be big bargain, sacrifice price, ellent condition, considerably under \$100. Holmes.	ASSISTANT manager wanted to take charge office routine for local corporation; returns beyond reasonable expectations; \$500 investment fully secured and returnable 90 days. Call 303 Burt Bldg.	FOR SALE—Barber shop well established; prefer would sell all to right p voted to studio. WA. BEAUTY PARLOR. SHINE PARLOR, Box Texas.
ANTED—Light coupe or sedan; will give 0 cash. \$285 radio set for good car. MR. VIS. 617 S. Akard. 7-4512.	CAPABLE office executive, now employed, would invest a substantial amount in a permanent and profitable business connection. Answer in detail. Box 61-J. News.	FOR SALE—I have som and machinery for sale, lo in Quanah, Texas, erc laundry purposes; will e building with sale of fix ery. A rood location f
ANTED—Best light sedan less than \$200 h will buy. Must be a bargain. No deal. Box 83-J. News.	ESTABLISHED growing business wants partner, possessing executive ability, with \$2,500 to be used for further expansion.	
ANTED—Late Chevrolet or Ford coach. ve good 1926 Ford coupe and cash. Must bargain. Phone BATES. 8-6524.		
¼-CARAT diamond scarf pin. ½ carat F's solitaire diamond ring and new Maric radio to exchange for good auto; only \$2,500 to be used for further expansion.		

Greenville, and while there, he saw a classified ad in *The Dallas Morning News* which described a sale of half interest in a feed and grain business.² He made a quick trip to Carrollton and fell in love with the place. He bought a half interest in the **Carrollton Feed Mills** from its owner, a man named Omart³, for \$250.

He returned to Greenville and moved his family to Carrollton. He never

¹ Written memories of Jack Blanton, son of L.F. Blanton

² *The Dallas Morning News* classified ads, April 12, 1931

³ Interview of Bill Blanton (son of L.F. Blanton) and Betty Blanton Sumner (daughter of L.F. Blanton) by Georgia Ogle

looked back. He had found his place.⁴

Within a year, Blanton had paid Mr. Omart another \$250 and became sole owner of the business. The feed mill was a long, low iron-clad building which stood where the concrete towers now stand. The mill had two employees, Blue Cross and Lucius Price, whom Blanton retained. Later they were joined by Jesse Radford, a local man who remained with the Blanton Grain Company until its closing. Another high profile employee of the early years was Beck Yeargain (James). Beck Yeargain had been a classmate of the Blanton children in the Carrollton schools. When she graduated from Carrollton High School in 1937, she joined the Blanton Grain Company as the office manager, working for \$7.00 a week. She worked throughout the extensive Blanton operations for many years until she retired to open her own business, a highly successful and visible real estate business on the town square.⁵

Walter Blanton, L.F. Blanton's oldest son, became a partner in the business in the 1930's. A handsome and charismatic man, W.H. Blanton quickly rose to leadership positions in the industry. He was both President and board member of the Dallas Grain Exchange, and he served as President of the Texas Grain Dealers' Association and as a Director of the National Grain Dealers Association.⁶ Under his and his father's combined leadership the Carrollton grain works became one of the hubs of an American national enterprise, the post-war farming boom.

Having lived his younger life in Kansas, L.F. Blanton brought with him to Texas a faith in the potential of wheat and grain farming, and it was partially under his influence that the difficult and labor-intensive work of cotton farming began to be replaced by grain growing in this region.⁷ "As L.F. Blanton of Carrollton explained," reported *The Dallas Morning News* in 1953, 'The best wheat crop in the Southwest is right around Dallas. [This year's] is the most wonderful crop in history.' Blanton said the bumper crop area 'extends from Crowell in West Texas to Paris in Northeast Texas, from Waxahachie south of Dallas northward to Sherman. In the area, yields of thirty-five to forty-five [bushels per acre] are common.'" Reporters from *The Dallas Morning News* and *The Dallas Times Herald* were often on the scene reporting on weather, progress of crops, estimates of harvest, and other interests to the farming community throughout the region. Part of the daily work of the grain company involved interviewing farmers and keeping an eye on their fields and barnyards. One of the Blantons was on the road almost all the time looking over local farms and ranches. Agriculture was such an important part of the local economy that the names and photographs of these local producers were a prominent part of local news reporting. It soon became common knowledge that "as goes farming around Carrollton, so goes agriculture in a three-state region."⁸



The operation of the original feed mill involved buying several kinds of grain from the local farmers and mixing them in various proportions for resale as feed. The business was badly in debt when Blanton first bought it, and for a time he had to struggle not only with the Depression, but with recovering from the debt he had inherited from his predecessor. He began with a crew of three employees (including Vernie Brake, the father of one of his future daughters-in-law) and an asset base of

⁴ Written memories of Bill Blanton

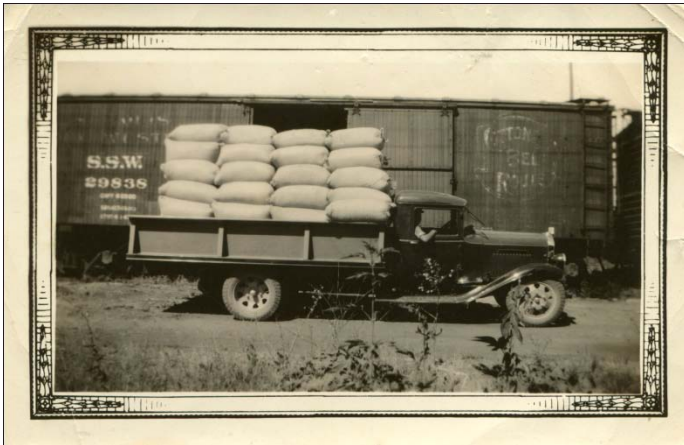
⁵ Written memories of Bill Blanton

⁶ *The Dallas Morning News*, October 2, 1959

⁷ Interview with Joan Blanton Keck, granddaughter of L.F. Blanton

⁸ *The Dallas Morning News*, June 7, 1953

almost zero. “The total equipment consisted of a farm-type hammer mill and a borrowed 1,000-pound batch mixer and one used truck.”⁹ As soon as he felt the business was on sound footing, he began to make changes. He installed the best of modern machinery. He bought a machine that allowed the mixing of blackstrap molasses into the feed. This made the feed easier to process and also more palatable to the livestock. He also added machinery to process ear corn. He bought the corn from area farmers, stored it in cribs and then either ground it for feed, or shelled it to sell as grain. He sold the shocks for fodder, and he left the cobs in piles for local people to use as firewood. It was a common sight to see wagons pulled up near the feed mill to allow people to collect the corn cob fuel. He also bought two company delivery trucks. With the trucks in service, he could sell, buy and deliver to feed stores all over the area rather than depend solely on the walk-in traffic from local farmers.¹⁰



In 1935, while restoring the feed mill after a fire, Blanton added several small wooden towers to the end of the building in order to store more grain for bulk processing. In 1939, he also added a separate scale house and office across 4th Street from the feed store. The previous owner had left a concrete foundation for the scale house, but never built on it. The foundation was elevated from the street, probably because the town square had suffered a very serious flood in 1908, so Blanton built an elevated, covered sidewalk on both sides of the building for easier access. Eventually he added to the west side of the building a great scale for

weighing grain trucks. The scale itself was covered by wooden planks and hidden in a deep concrete pit. It was an awesome thing to see.¹¹ The scale house is still standing across the street from the concrete elevators, much as it looked in 1939, and the rectangular shape and end supports of the great scale (which extended most of the length of the office building) are still clearly visible underneath the wooden porch that was built by later owners to cover it. By the late 1930's, as the country emerged from the Great Depression, the Carrollton Feed Mills had become a profit-making operation.

The grain works were a block removed from the old downtown square because of the necessity of being next to the railroad tracks. It was important for the boxcars to run close enough to the grain storage facilities to have the grain poured into them from giant funnels emerging from the storage buildings. In most small towns that had grain elevators, the railroad tracks were well away from town, so that the grain works were entirely separate from the town and its activities. Because of the unique relationship of Carrollton to its downtown railroad lines, the Blanton storage facilities were integrated into the everyday work and perceptions of the town. It was an unusual situation which gave the city the rare proximity it has today to this large and historically significant structure. The Cotton Belt and MKT ('Katy') railroad lines, which served Carrollton, were extremely important to the operation of the grain business. It was in these boxcars that the mill products were carried to market in timely fashion to towns throughout the region, state, and eventually to Houston and international trade. Most of the Blanton Grain Company storage products went to Universal Mills in Fort Worth or to Morrison Mills in Denton to be milled into flour or other products.¹² Today a section of old railroad line that served the Blanton Grain Company is



⁹ *Grain and Feed Journals Consolidated*, published in Chicago, April 25, 1951, page 15

¹⁰ Written memories of Bill Blanton

¹¹ Interview with Carolyn Sumner, granddaughter of L.F. Blanton

¹² Interview with Bill Blanton

being transformed into a branch of the D.A.R.T. light rail line, but the route of the old cargo-carrying railroad line is still the roadmap the builders follow.

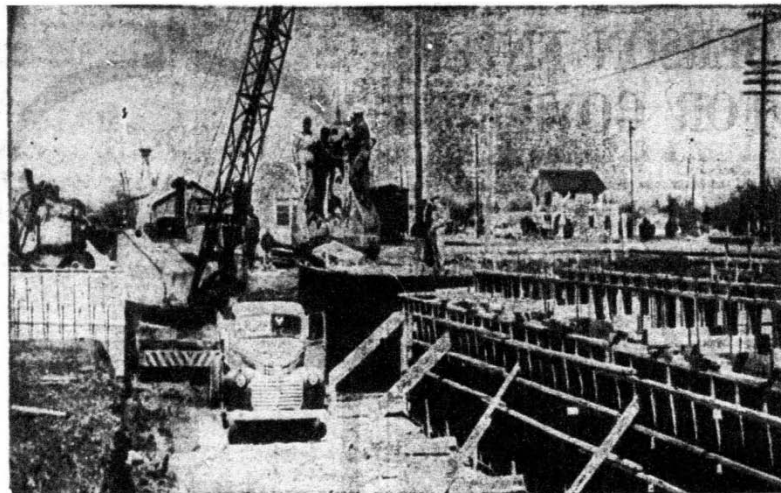
The end of the decade and the onset of World War II with its increased demands for production across the spectrum of American business brought great expansion to the Carrollton Feed Mills. Across the railroad tracks (on the east side) in 1939-40, Blanton built the first real, separate grain storage building. The new elevator was a steel-clad building with a large central tower and a drive-through in the base, which allowed the trucks to enter, release the grain into a pit, and then drive out the other side. Shortly after building this, Blanton added a second building nearby, a large concrete-tile feed mill. The buildings were connected by funnels and tunnels to facilitate moving the product back and forth between them. The grain storage and



feed mill were now separate operations in separate buildings. Eventually a large corrugated metal storage building was added to this new construction, which made a total of 3 buildings on the east side of the railroad track.¹³ Some time at war's end (1945-46), the company name was changed from **Carrollton Feed Mills** to **Blanton Grain Company**.¹⁴

After the war, the grain business increased with the postwar economic boom. Accommodating the storage of grain for the Federal Loan Program became a new imperative, driving growth throughout the whole industry. Almost overnight the need for increased storage space expanded exponentially. In 1949, the original Carrollton Feed Mill building in which the specialty feeds had been created and the first small wooden storage towers built, and which had survived both a fire in the 1930's and a flood in the 1940's, was torn down to make way for a new concrete elevator. For the new elevator, Blanton contracted with a company from Salina, Kansas to build a modern, 110-foot-high concrete storage tower directly across the railroad track from the steel elevator. The construction of the new elevator began in January 1950. The company, whose crews traveled across the country doing the highly specialized construction work, was called the Johnson-Sampson Coast Company.

The towers were slip-form construction - the concrete was poured without stop as the forms moved slowly up the project and the previously poured concrete hardened behind it. In addition, Johnson-Sampson used a "homogenized concrete" technique whereby the concrete was heated as it was poured, which created a nearly indestructible tower¹⁵. For 17



Wheat Bin Started in Carrollton

New fangled combines harvest North Texas' grain crop in half the time it took ten years ago, yearly overflowing all storage bins in the Dallas area. This all-at-once harvest brings a golden flood of grain to market and the torrent is swelled by huge amounts going into government loan. Government-loan grain must be stored. So L. F. Blanton and sons, Walter, Jack and Bill, are raising the first major grain elevator to be built in Dallas County since World War II. It is a 220,000-bushel storage bin. It will more than quintuple Carrollton's present grain storage capacity of 40,000 bushels. Contractors Johnson-Sampson of Salina, Kan., must complete the huge bins by May 15 or pay a \$500-a-day penalty. Dallas area grain movement will get under way about May 20.

A dragline Saturday was digging the foundation pits for a 220,000-bushel elevator in suburban Carrollton. It will more than quintuple storage space in the Dallas County grain center.

¹³ Written memories and interview with Bill Blanton
¹⁴ Grain and Feed Journals Consolidated, published in Chicago, April 25, 1951, page 15
¹⁵ Ron Park research stated in HPAC minutes, February 4, 2004

days, 24 hours a day, warmed concrete was continuously poured until the entire building was erected. The facility was completed on May 25 at a cost of \$100,000¹⁶, and was ready for the mid-May beginning of wheat harvest in 1950 (a condition of the contract).¹⁷

The capacity of the new elevator was 210,000 bushels. Like the old elevator, the new one had a drive-through for trucks on the bottom floor. The drive-through was straight across the street from the scale. The loaded trucks would drive up onto the scale to be measured. They would be given a receipt for the weight of their truck in the office. They would then cross the street and drive into the base of the elevator. On the floor of



the drive-through was a lift, which tilted the trucks up so that the truck bed could be emptied. The grain drained from the trucks into a pit. From the pit it was moved by screw conveyor to an elevator. The elevator lifted the grain to the top of the massive storage bins and dropped the load inside. On the east side of the concrete bins was a chute which descended from the storage area. The trains would pull up under that chute and open the top of the boxcars to be filled with grain. The empty trucks would drive out the far side of the elevator drive-through and cross back to the scale to be weighed again. The difference in the weight with and without the load of grain determined how much the growers were paid.¹⁸

When it was complete, the new concrete grain tower became a focal point of the town of Carrollton and a landmark of the area. It was visible clearly from Highway 35E, and because Carrollton was located on a flat low plain, it could be seen for miles from any direction. During the Christmas season, Blanton always put a simple blue cross in lights on the small building on top of the tower. In the days before light pollution, the blue cross seemed to rise alone out of the black prairie and shine without support in the deep darkness of the Texas night sky. It could be seen halfway to Dallas.¹⁹

After World War II and the change of the company name, the Blanton Grain Company began manufacturing its specialty feeds under the name **Blanco Feeds** with the logo *Made from Texas Grains by Texas People*. In 1954, the concrete elevator was attached by walkway and chutes to a series of 4 steel-plated storage towers that extended to the south. Beyond that another 2 large corrugated metal buildings were added.

There were a total of 10 buildings in the Blanton Grain Company complex, 7 on the east side and 3 on the west side of the railroad track. The Blanton Grain Company also expanded its operation to six other towns and cities and built elevators in several of them. Dallas, Austin, Lancaster, Justin, Irving, Harrold in Texas; and Tipton in Oklahoma were other Blanton Grain Company locations. Their feed and grains were sold all over the region and the world.²⁰



¹⁶ *The Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 2003

¹⁷ *The Dallas Morning News*, March 12, 1950

¹⁸ Interview with Bill Blanton

¹⁹ Interview with Carolyn Sumner

²⁰ Interview with Bill Blanton

The Blanton Grain Company was unusual not just for its exceptional growth and success, but for its leadership. L.F. Blanton and his sons became the reference points for *The Dallas Morning News* and *The Dallas Times Herald* when reporting on agricultural issues. They were quoted extensively about the weather, the crops, new machines and techniques of farming. When the Dallas Zoo needed some special feeds, they

went to the Blanton Grain Company to mix them.²¹ The company office became a polling place for the frequent special elections on agricultural issues throughout the 1950's and 1960's.²² The cluster of buildings just off the old Carrollton square became a one-stop shop for area farmers, and the office became a hub, not just of business but of farmers gathering to socialize, exchange information, plan and even vote. The office in downtown Carrollton was frequented by names that are still familiar to this area: Trammell Crow and his wife Margaret Doggett; Hooker Vandergriff and his son Tommy, the future mayor of Arlington (Lena Blanton – L.F.'s wife – often took young Tommy Vandergriff, who later became famous for building a baseball stadium, along with her own children to attend Dallas baseball games); W.E. Schrieber (whose land supplied much of the space for Highway 635 where it passes through Farmers Branch); and the Morgan and Furneaux families who owned much of the land between Carrollton and Lewisville.²³

AFTER 10 YEARS

Carrollton Erupts After Long Sleep

By **WALTER ROBINSON**
News Staff Writer

CARROLLTON, Texas, July 20.—Suburban Carrollton slept serenely for seventy years, then exploded like a giant firecracker on the North-of-Dallas countryside.

Since 1945, it's been a builders' race to keep homes going up fast enough in fourteen subdivisions tacked onto the old townsite platted by Dallas County pioneers in 1875.

Explains big Bill Hall: "We hardly know where all the money is coming from; it's coming from so many different sources."

Carrollton's hustling chamber of commerce president says his town has become a combination commuters' haven, industrial village, grain capital, livestock market and dairying center.

"Not too many years ago it was just a sleepy country town."

Bill Hall cites the 74 per cent population increase registered by Carrollton between 1940 and 1950—a climb from 921 residents to 1,601.

But neither Hall nor Mayor R. O. Connell thinks the census is a true barometer of Carrollton's growth.

Said Hall: "This thing has just started. Take my friend, Lloyd Wynn, for example. He's built and sold forty-nine houses this year, has twenty-two more going up and all were sold by the time the foundations were laid."

Hall and Mayor Connell agree that about 75 per cent of all Carrollton wage earners commute daily to jobs in either Dallas or Garland. Many are employed in the giant industrial district which has been growing up since the war along Hairy Hines Boulevard and off Maple Avenue.

And Carrollton folk take special pride in a big colony of Love Field workers, mostly employees of American Airlines and Braniff International Airways.

But not all of Carrollton's industrial workers are commuters. Some work in the town's first big industrial plant—the Inca Metal Products Company, makers of metal furniture and metal window frames.

This sprawling plant on U.S. Highway 77 originally was a promotion of Dallas' Curtis Sanford, sometimes called the founder of the Cotton Bowl classic. Before he got out, Sanford had such

assorted partners as the late Rogers Lacy, East Texas oilman; Pinky Aissbrook, the one-time Texas Aegle grid hero, and Dallas oilman Tom Potter.

In May of last year, however, brisk, smiling E. M. Quintana came to town from Birmingham, Ala., bought out the partners, and moved to Carrollton his 15-year-old Inca Metal Products Company. Now, Quintana, who has made himself one of Carrollton's favorites, plans to expand by adding 30,000 square feet of floor space to the 50,000 now used by 100 workers.

Before Quintana came to town, Kansas-bred L. F. Blanton moved in to set up what has become one of Texas' biggest grain businesses. He and his three sons, Walter, Jack and Bill, recently dominated the whole Carrollton area with a 220,000-bushel grain elevator—the first built in Dallas County in more than twenty-five years; the first ever built in the county outside the city.

Grain and livestock go together, so Homer Clayton, Carrollton's Ford dealer, and Dr. L. E. Casey, a Dallas veterinarian since 1922,

See GROWTH, Page 12, Col. 1

Blanton was himself a farmer and rancher. The area he farmed was bound by Trinity Mills on the south, Denton Drive on the east, the Crumley farm (where Creekview High School now stands) on the north, and the Trinity River on the west. He grew wheat, oats, and maize on these abundant fields. He raised livestock which he pastured in the Trinity River Bottoms (in the area that is now Indian Creek Golf Course), selling his beef cattle (mostly Hereford and Angus breeds) at the Fort Worth Stock Yard, and he had also a large flock of turkeys. At the corner of Denton Drive and

Trinity Mills Road where a large hill loomed (the hill was leveled to make way for the Furneaux Creek Shopping Center), a Blanton Dairy once stood, producing milk from approximately 100 head of Holstein and Jersey milk cows daily.²⁴

L.F. Blanton exercised leadership in other ways. He took an interest and active role in all the civic activities of the city of Carrollton. He was especially committed to the school system. He dedicated a large part of his life to the growing Carrollton schools. He oversaw the great expansion of the city and school populations in the

²¹ *The Dallas Morning News*, August 15, 1954

²² *The Dallas Morning News*, August 14, 1953

²³ Written memories of Beck (Yeargain) James and interview with Carolyn Sumner

²⁴ Interview with Bill Blanton

mid-century period and helped to build the first modern school buildings and school system in town. For 27 years he served on the school board, and 25 of those years he was its President.²⁵ His three sons followed in their father's footsteps. Walter served on the Carrollton City Council from 1944-1952 and was Mayor of Carrollton from 1952-1958. In the latter capacity he helped to secure the patronage of Inca Metal (a manufacturer of metal shelving and lawn furniture), the first actual industrial company to locate in Carrollton.²⁶ He was elected in 1959 to serve as president of the Texas Grain and Feed Dealers Association²⁷, which he helped to expand into a three-state organization, joining Oklahoma and New Mexico with Texas to cooperate on regional agricultural issues.²⁸ He eventually became a member of the Board of Directors of the National Grain and Feed Dealers Association, bringing national prominence to the Blanton name and business.²⁹

Jack Blanton was active all his life in public affairs. He was elected Mayor of Carrollton in 1946, and at the age of 25 was the youngest city mayor in the area. He served three terms in the Texas State Legislature, during which he helped to locate the University of Texas at Dallas in this area, and did many years of work as a legislative liaison to the Texas Department of Health and Human Services.³⁰ When L.F. Blanton volunteered the Blanton Grain Company as a host member of the hospitality committee for the Dallas Council on World Affairs, it was Jack Blanton who served as its representative and as a guide for many foreign visitors (including the governor of a province in Thailand, and the Mayor of Paris, France), giving them tours of the Blanton Grain Company and Blanton farm and hosting a dinner in L.F. Blanton's home.³¹ Because of his work in the cause of



diplomacy, he received a resolution in his honor from the Texas State Legislature and was invited to attend a State Department conference in Washington D.C. on the subject of citizen participation in foreign relations.³² He also made an appearance in "Outstanding Personalities of the South", which included governors, senators, congressmen and other political leaders of the Southern states.

Bill Blanton, who also worked for many years at the Blanton Grain Company, was active in Lion's Club, Rotary Club and the Carrollton Chamber of Commerce. Like his father, he was a member of the Carrollton School Board, serving for ten years in that capacity. He also was elected to five terms in the Texas Legislature, serving for a decade and working on many of the issues of education and the arts that had concerned him in his local offices. In 1986, the Metrocrest Chamber of Commerce voted him "Citizen of the Year".³³ Many friends of his children will remember him forever as the voice of the Carrollton High School football games on the old high school football field next to the gymnasium (now DeWitt Perry Junior High School field and gymnasium) throughout the 1950's and 1960's.³⁴

Lester Franklin Blanton died at his home on April 22, 1971. According to the *Suburban News*, he died at the same time that a committee was meeting to plan the naming of a school in his honor.³⁵ His oldest son,

²⁵ *The Dallas Morning News*, 1959.

²⁶ Interview with Marian (Good) Blanton, wife of Jack Blanton. Also see *The Dallas Morning News*, July 21, 1950

²⁷ *The Dallas Morning News*, October 2, 1959

²⁸ *The Dallas Morning News*, 1959

²⁹ *The Dallas Morning News*, October 2, 1959

³⁰ *The Dallas Morning News*, Jack Blanton obituary, October 14, 2002

³¹ Interview with Marian Good Blanton. Also see *The Dallas Morning News*, September 14, 1958

³² *The Carrollton Chronicle*, May 1969

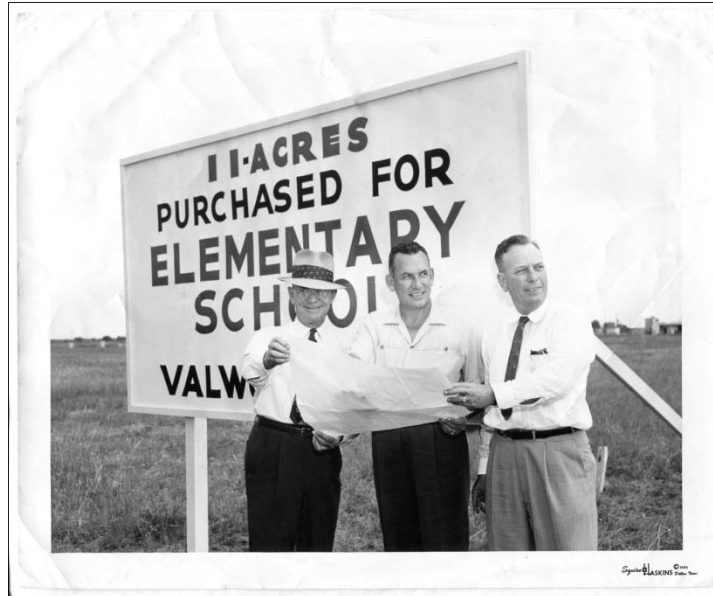
³³ Interview with Bill Blanton. Also see *Carrollton Chronicle* special supplement "Metrocrest Citizen of the Year", March 4, 1987

³⁴ Interview with Carolyn Sumner

³⁵ *Suburban News*, April 28, 1971

Walter Blanton, died only eighteen months later in October of 1972. The Blanton Grain Company closed shortly thereafter.

In February of 1974, Lee C. Groves, the owner of a local electrical contracting company, bought the Blanton Grain Company land and buildings. He planned to use the spacious buildings as storage and work spaces for his contracting business, which he continues to do in the surviving corrugated metal building to this day. The concrete towers proved to be more difficult to deal with. He removed all the interior machinery, such as conveyors and elevators, so that the bottom floor could be completely open and utilized, but the building



itself posed a serious demolition problem. Initially he proposed several ideas to the city, including a Carrollton information center, but none of these ideas came to fruition.³⁶

Eventually he began renting the floor area of the elevators to various tenants, mostly industrial works. The building was occupied at various times through the next 16 years by a sheet-metal fabrication shop, an automated steel cutter, Golden Cab Company, a woodworking shop, and a furniture-staining business. After that, the building stood unused for five or six years.³⁷ At last a married couple, Russell and Karen Rand, approached Mr. Groves with the possibility of a climbing gym. The husband and wife team were champion climbers and they had been searching for some time to find an edifice which they could turn into a climbing gym. “When Russell and his wife Karen saw the silos they were awestruck,” reported *The Metrocrest News* in 1994; “It was like a dream. A rock climber’s heaven.”³⁸



After several months of work and a \$30,000 redesign, they opened the **Stone Works Climbing Gym** in 1993.³⁹ “Housed in 10 giant grain silos with 110 foot ceilings,” said *The Dallas Morning News*, “Stone Works is billed as the world’s tallest indoor climbing gym.”⁴⁰

³⁶ *The Dallas Morning News*, August 26, 1992

³⁷ *The Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 2003

³⁸ *The Metrocrest News*, January 20, 1994

³⁹ *Lewisville News*, July 22, 1994

⁴⁰ *The Dallas Morning News*, January 5, 1994

The gym, “nearly six times the height”⁴¹ of the average climbing gym, has attracted climbers from all over the country and even the world, and thrives on the 10,000 estimated climbers in the North Texas region.⁴² Adds Michael Cahil, a former employee and part owner of the gym, “It’s a really unique building. When climbers walk in and look up is usually when the jaw drops: ‘You want me to go up there?’” The same article



quotes Jon Eric Simmons, who was a member of the Dallas County Historical Commission, as saying, “For us old-timers, that is the icon of Carrollton. That’s how you knew you were in Carrollton back in the old days.”⁴³ Under the supervision of several different owners (as of early 2010, the owners are Tom and Dana Pierson), the climbing gym has continued to serve between 250 and 400 climbers each month. Atop the building are clearly visible several large electronic mechanisms. These devices power cell phone transmissions and include a 911 antenna. So the towers are now utilized from floor to roof.⁴⁴

The surface area of the building has also been put to use, being rented to display large painted advertising. In 1980, the infamous Robert Tilton and his Word of Faith message were painted on the silos. With rainbow background, one side read, *Jesus is Lord* and the church’s phone number. The front, facing the freeway, read, *Visit Word of Faith This Sunday*. In August of 1994, the Texas Department of Transportation determined that this advertising was illegal, violating the U.S. Highway Beautification Act. Lee Groves was ordered to paint over it.⁴⁵



In March 2007 the City of Carrollton leased the façade of the tower in order to remove the rainbow and to display a lovely and intriguing ad that invites visitors to visit the old historic downtown Carrollton Square. Using the façade as an advertisement for the historic identity of old downtown Carrollton would certainly have pleased L.F. Blanton, who once bought the local newspaper and put his son Jack to work editing it because he didn’t think the publication was doing enough to promote the town of Carrollton.⁴⁶

The climbing gym seems to bring the concrete towers to a full circle. Like the Blanton Grain Company, the climbing gym is a unique operation, seeing itself in typical Texas terms as “The World’s Tallest Indoor Climbing Gym”, and brings many newcomers and sight-seers to the area. It

integrates itself well into the festive and adventuresome activities of the Old Downtown Square. The spirit of L.F. Blanton, who loved children, education, dreams and ambitions, seems to be reflected in the challenges and commitments among the young climbers. One imagines that he would approve.



⁴¹ *Lewisville News*, July 22, 1994

⁴² *The Dallas Morning News*, January 5, 1994

⁴³ *The Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 2003

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ *The Dallas Morning News*, August 16, 1994

⁴⁶ Interview with Marian Good Blanton

The concrete elevator and the old scale-house of the Blanton Grain Company stand today on opposite sides of 4th Street, as a kind of gateway to the central and oldest part of Carrollton and as a memento of what built the city. The tower will soon be in close proximity of a new D.A.R.T. light rail line station that is

currently under construction on the opposite end of the square. That station stands very near the location of the original Carrollton railroad depot and brick works, another hub of old Carrollton. The grain tower on the south end of the square and the rail station on the north end are two poles of a never-ending evolution. The concrete grain elevator continues to tower over the town Blanton loved - like a watchman on guard, a symbol of the profound connection of all life to agriculture, and a monument to a world which, though it has vanished from among us, has made us what we are.

