

Capt. Kendrick Brown, Rev. Samuel Mitchell, and the Beginnings of First Baptist

Predating the town of Ames, the Squaw Creek Church was in existence by 1860 but after much struggle, the church had closed by 1866. The population of the new community of Ames Station was 40 people. The railroad had just come to town, however, and settlers were coming. In 1868, Rev. J.F. Childs of Oskaloosa, Secretary of the Iowa Baptist Convention, came to Ames with the goal of reestablishing a church here. One of the new residents in Ames was Capt. Kendrick Brown, son of a Baptist minister in New York. Brown had served in the Civil War, being wounded several times. He was in the first Battle of Bull Run and was present at the end of the war at Appomattox. After the war he married Lydia Gates and they moved to Ames, where they ran the first grocery store in town.



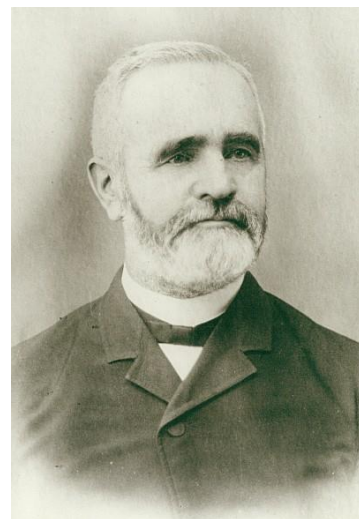
Capt. K.W. Brown

Childs and Brown traveled the countryside around Ames, looking for Baptist families. They found five. An announcement was made soon after that the Baptists would hold a prayer meeting at 3 pm on a Sunday afternoon in the back of Frank Hays' harness shop. The prayer meetings continued and on July 11, 1868, eight individuals signed the roll as charter members of the First Baptist Church. Later that month, a recognition service was held for the newly organized church at the Congregational Church, with Baptist pastors and leaders from the area taking part. By the end of the year, the church reported 23 members.

Not having a building, First Baptist met in the old Regulator building near the southwest corner of Fifth and Kellogg. The church did not have a pastor and was led by lay leaders, with interim and supply preachers. Kendrick Brown was the church clerk.

Brown was a key figure both in the church and in the city of Ames. He was a leading businessman and one of the organizers of the Union National Bank of Ames. He was also a strong proponent of prohibition and ran for governor twice on the Prohibition ticket.

Rev. Samuel H. Mitchell, a native of Indiana, served as a general missionary with the Iowa Baptist Convention, working to begin and support new churches. In 1870 he agreed to come and serve as pastor of the new church at Ames, turning down an appointment as a Railroad Missionary. (The Northern Baptists had a number of "chapel cars," railroad cars that served as mission churches in frontier areas.) When he told Rev. Childs of his decision, Childs replied, "Well enough, an important field, but how are you going to live?"



Rev. S. H. Mitchell

The little church grew along with Ames. By the time the town was incorporated in 1870, it had a population of 656. In 1872, Kendrick Brown purchased two lots at the northeast corner of Fifth and Kellogg and donated them to First Baptist. The new church was built at a total cost of \$1540.30, paid in cash.

Rev. Mitchell served First Baptist for five years as pastor and was a key leader of Iowa Baptists. He left our church to serve as Financial Agent for Des Moines College, a new Baptist school. Mitchell wrote [*Historical Sketches of Iowa Baptists*](#) in 1886, from which we know a lot about early Baptist activity in Iowa. He went on to pastor several churches in Iowa as well as work with the Alluwe Baptist Church in Indian Territory (Oklahoma), and wrote [a biography of Chief Journeycake](#) of the Delaware Indians, a Baptist pastor and missionary. In retirement Rev. Mitchell moved back to Ames and often served here as supply pastor.

Brown's wife died in 1885. The following year he married Margaret Mitchell, the daughter of Rev. Mitchell and his wife Mary, so Capt. Brown became Rev. Mitchell's son-in-law. Together, the Brown and Mitchell families made a huge impact on Ames, Iowa Baptists, and the world.

Captain Brown's children included Gates Brown, a physician and surgeon; Harry Farwell Brown, a leading insurance underwriter in Ames and father of Farwell Brown, longtime Ames resident and local historian known to many of us; Daisy Brown, who became a missionary to China and later librarian at the University of Chicago Divinity School; and Lydia Belle Brown, daughter of Brown and Margaret Mitchell Brown. She became a missionary to China, where she met Rev. J. B. Hipps. They were married here at First Baptist and returned to Shanghai where she taught music and was dean of women at the Baptist College. They had one son, Robert. Lydia Brown Hipps died in 1924, three years after she was married. She was buried in China; there is a memorial stone in the Ames Municipal Cemetery.

The desk that is currently at the back of the sanctuary belonged to Rev. Mitchell. It was given to the church last year by Donna Westlic Hipps. She tells the story:

I came into possession of Rev. Mitchell's desk through my marriage to his great grandson. When I married Robert, in 1946, it was by coincidence that Margaret Brown Mitchell died that year, and the Mitchell desk was passed on to my husband, Robert Hipps... I am pleased to have the First Baptist Church of Ames receive this gift as a tribute to the Mitchell and Brown families in establishing this church. Bob and I were married in August 9, 1946 in the Baptist Church that was located at 5th and Kellogg in Ames. Rev. J. Harold Gamble officiated. I have fond memories of my time at Roger Williams House, singing in the Baptist Church choir and being part of life in Ames.