

# Thomas Mitchell

Innkeeper, Farmer, Sheriff,  
Member of the County Board of Supervisors,  
State Representative, State Senator,  
Founder of Mitchellville



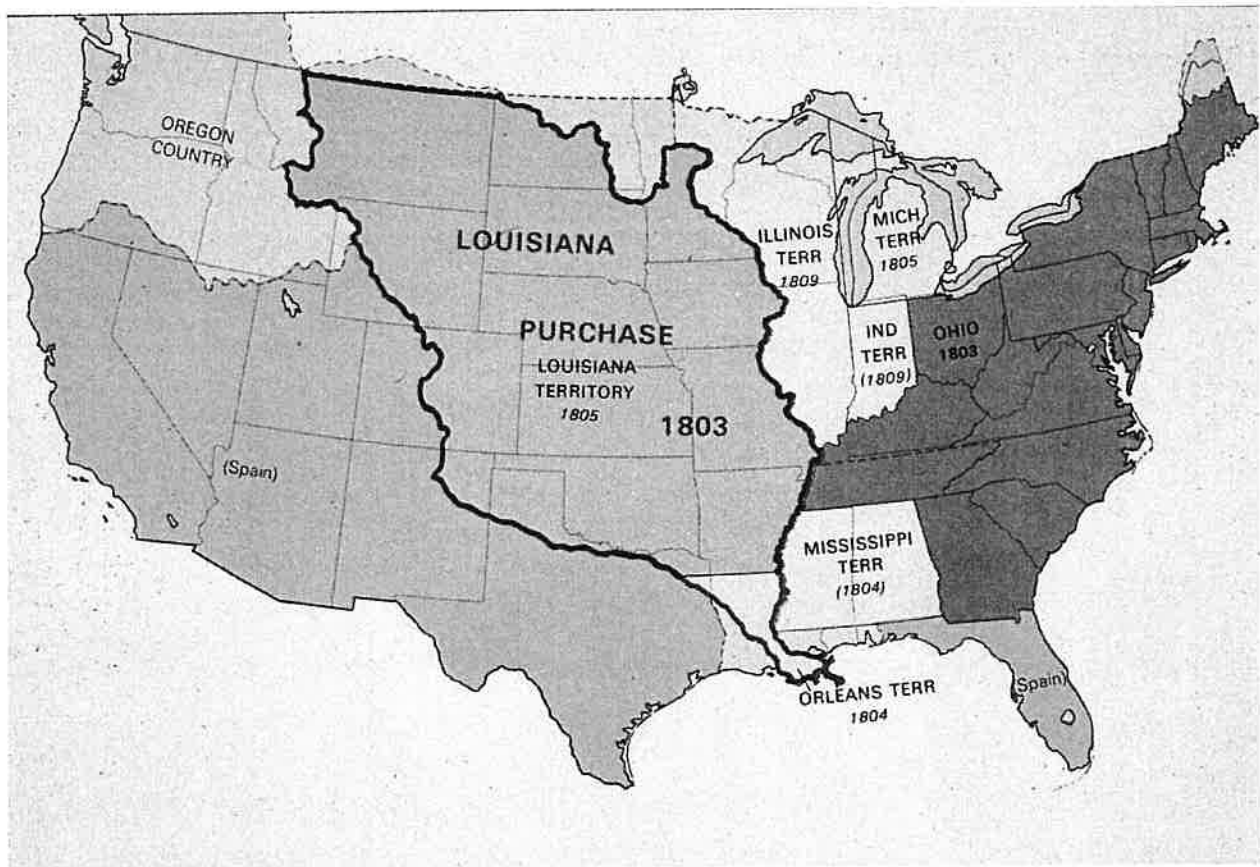
Compiled by Karen Spitler, September 2017

1803 – Area now known as Iowa was included in Louisiana Purchase.

1816 – Thomas Mitchell born in New Hampshire.

1832 – he left home at age 16 when his father died, worked as a hired hand for a farmer.

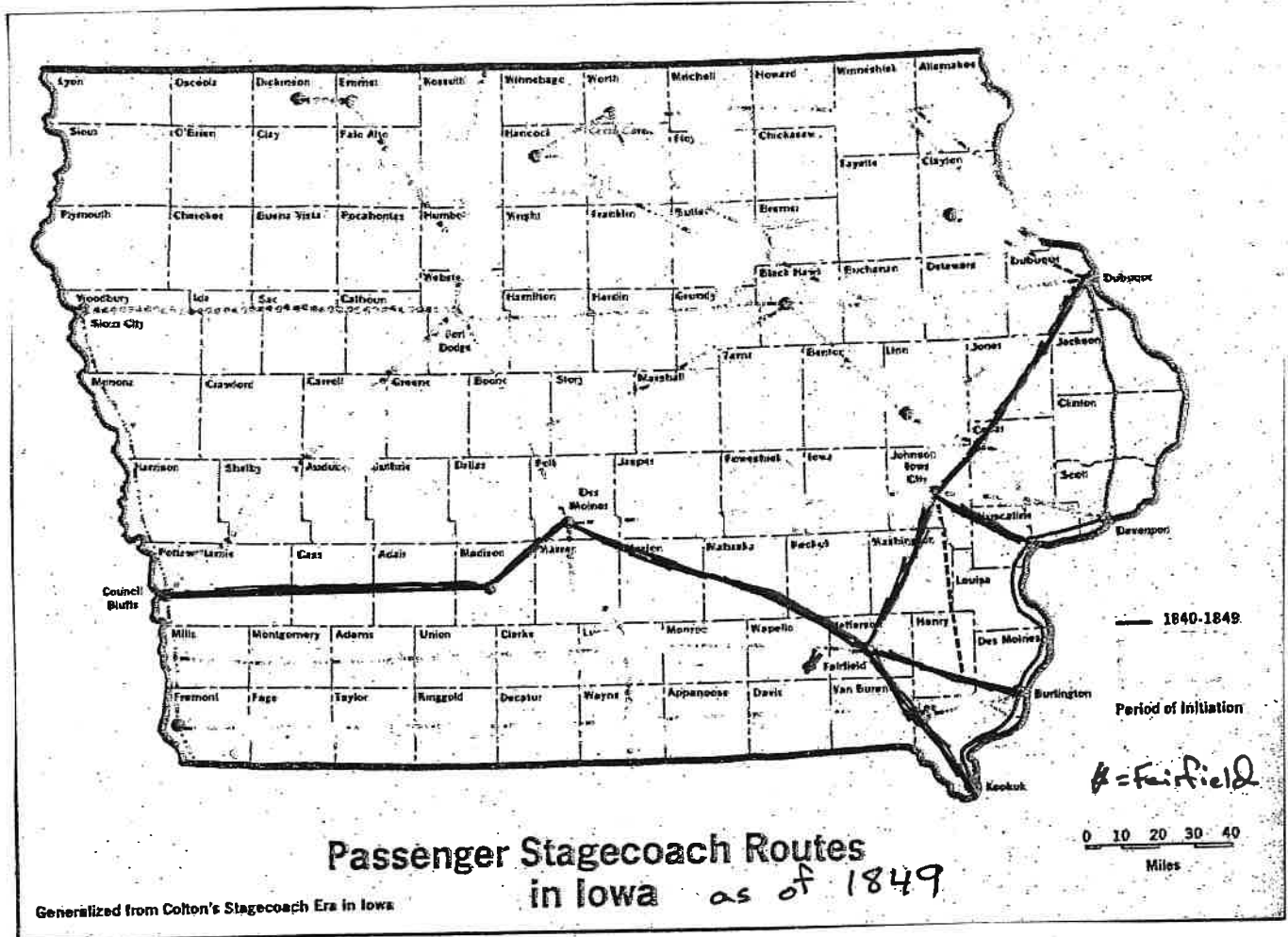
1839 – started the journey west.



1840 – Mitchell moved to Keosauqua, Jefferson County, Iowa, and worked as a hired hand. He entered a claim near what is today Fairfield. His younger brother and sister came west to live with him.

1841 - Mitchell married Elvira Swift from Vermont and she joined the family in Iowa.

1842 - Mitchell was elected County Commissioner of Jefferson County. Brothers Daniel and Eli Trullinger came to Fairfield from Ohio.



1842 – Treaty signed with Sac & Fox Indians in western Iowa.

1843 – U.S. Army troops arrive at the forks of the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers and establish Fort Des Moines. The troops were assigned to keep peace in the area and protect the Sauk and Mesquakie Indians from their longtime rivals, the Sioux. The troops were also charged to keep white traders from taking advantage of the Indians. A Federal law prohibited white settlers in the Iowa territory until the land had been surveyed and was ready to be sold. Polk County was not officially opened to settlers until 1845.

Daniel Trullinger who had met Thomas Mitchell in Fairfield, Iowa came west to make bricks for the buildings at Fort Des Moines.



Sauk Family “Yellow – earth” photo to left

Meskwaki (Fox) “Red Earth People” bottom photo

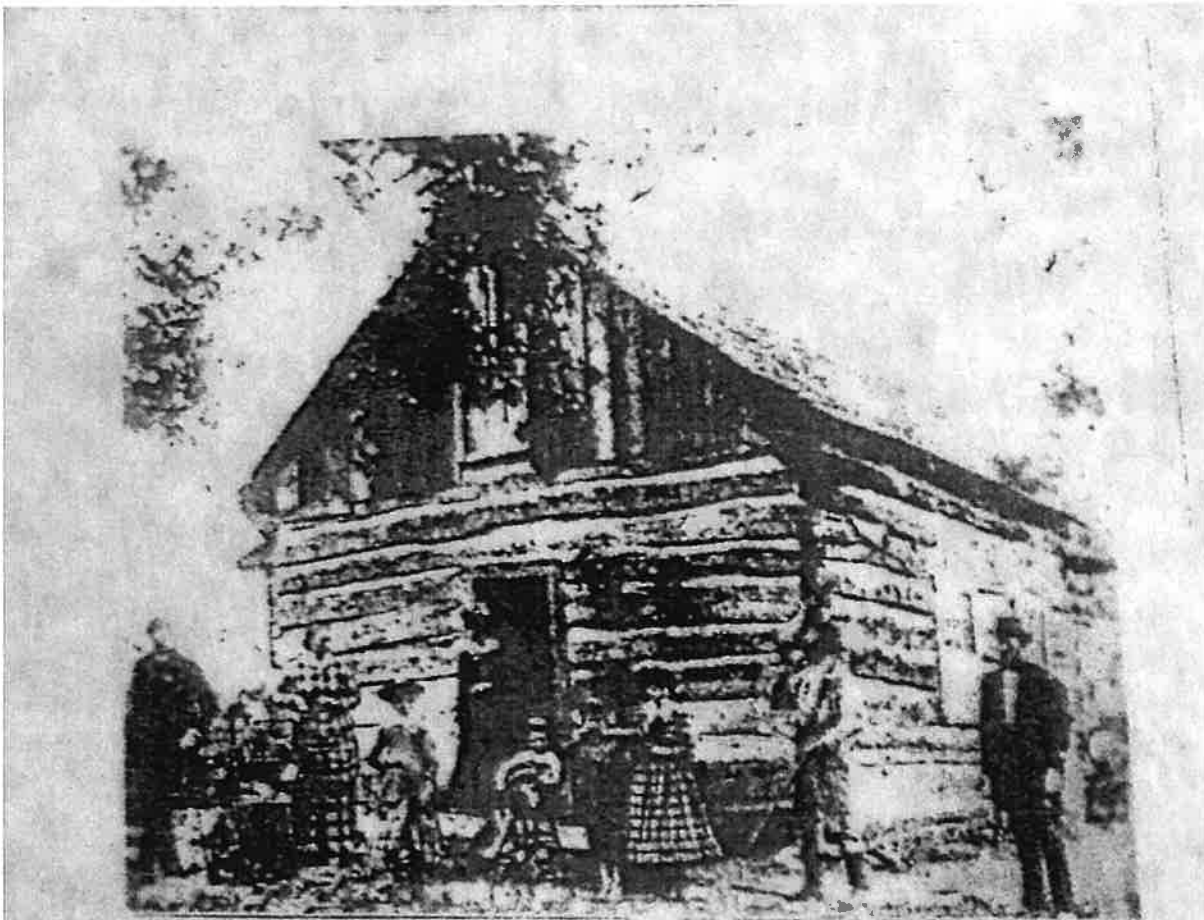
The tribes allied together to become the Sac & Fox nation.

Important Sauk Leaders were Keokuk and Black Hawk.



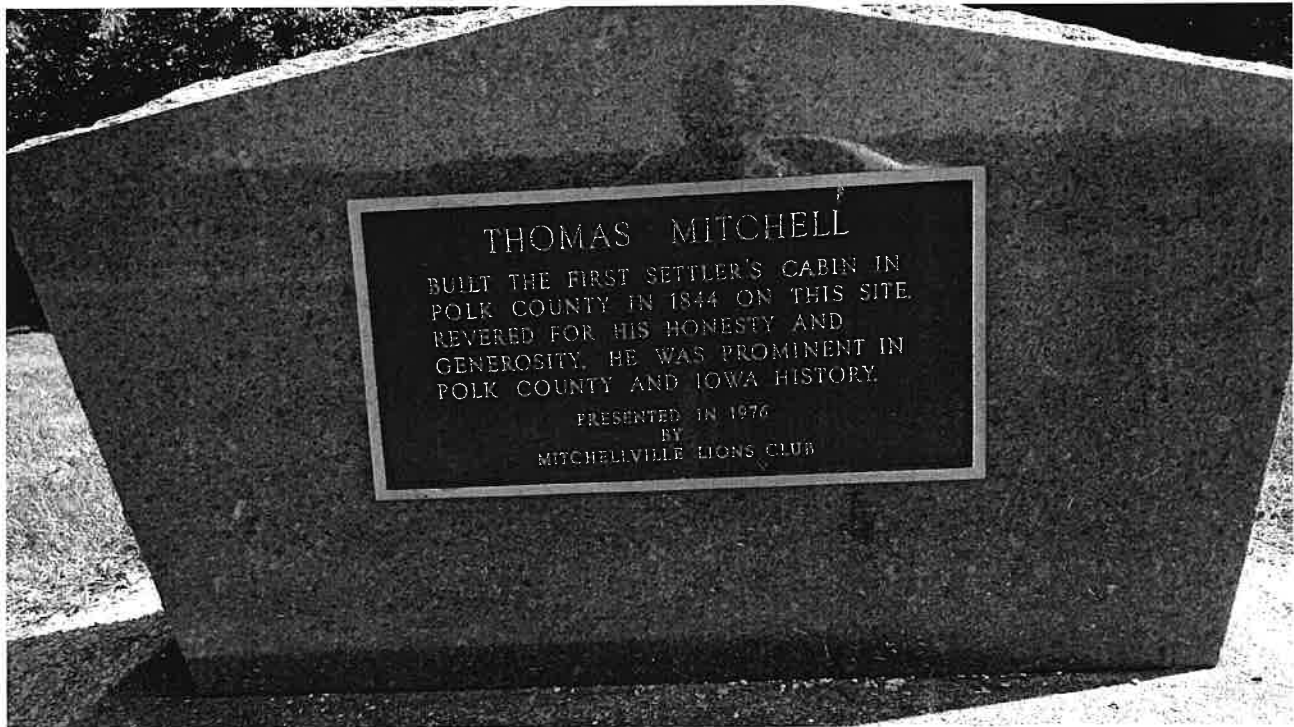
1844 – Thomas Mitchell got permission to build a stage station and inn for travelers at the crossing of Camp Creek in the eastern part of what is now Beaver Township. In return Mitchell built a bridge across Camp Creek. His inn was used as a stopping place for supply wagons traveling between Keokuk and Fort Des Moines, and Iowa City and Fort Des Moines.

Henry Mitchell, Thomas's younger brother came to the area and built a double log cabin for Thomas and his family. To the west was only Fort Des Moines and wilderness. Eli Trullinger came with Henry to break prairie for Mitchell's farm.



First Home in Polk County, built by  
Thomas Mitchell in 1844.

1845 – Thomas Mitchell arrived with his wife, 22 month old son, Orrin, 2 month old daughter, Ann, a hired girl and a hired man. They called the area Apple Grove for all the wild apples growing there, now Thomas Mitchell Park. The family became the first permanent white settlers in Polk County. Henry Mitchell was a partner with Thomas and regularly brought supplies from the east to his brother's inn.



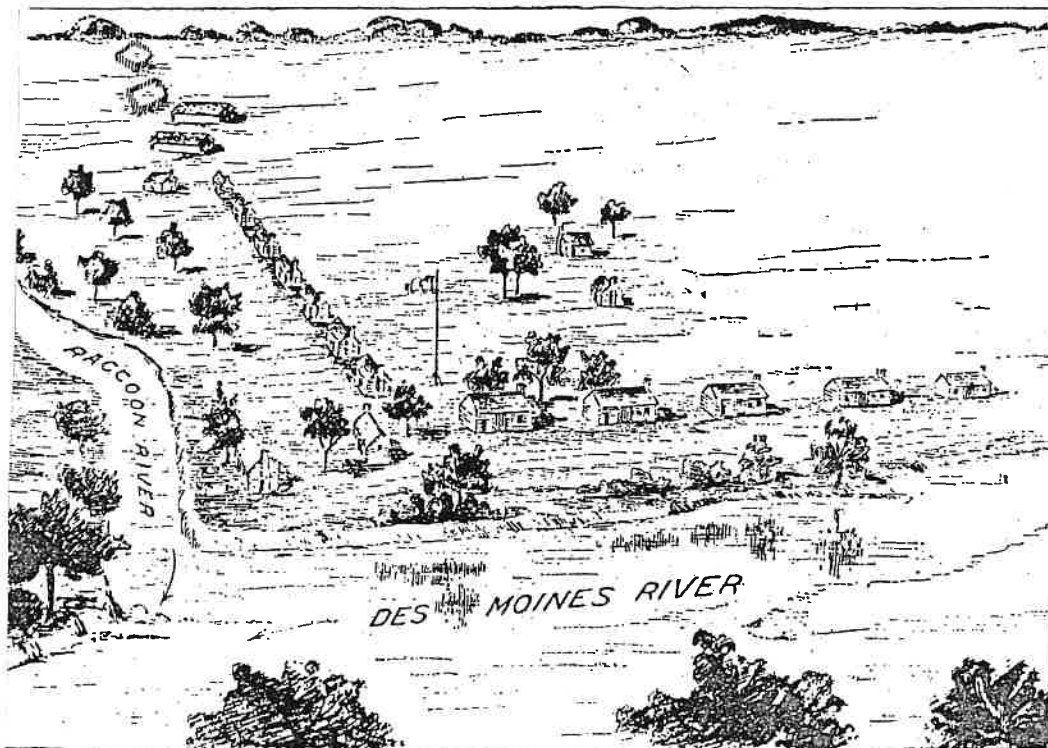
1845 – General A.C. Dodge, delegate to Congress from Iowa territory visited the area and talked about making Iowa a state with eastern boundary the Mississippi River and the western boundary a few miles west of Fort Des Moines. Mitchell insisted the western boundary should be the Missouri River, the suggestion was used.

October 1845 - The Indian tribes were removed from western Iowa.

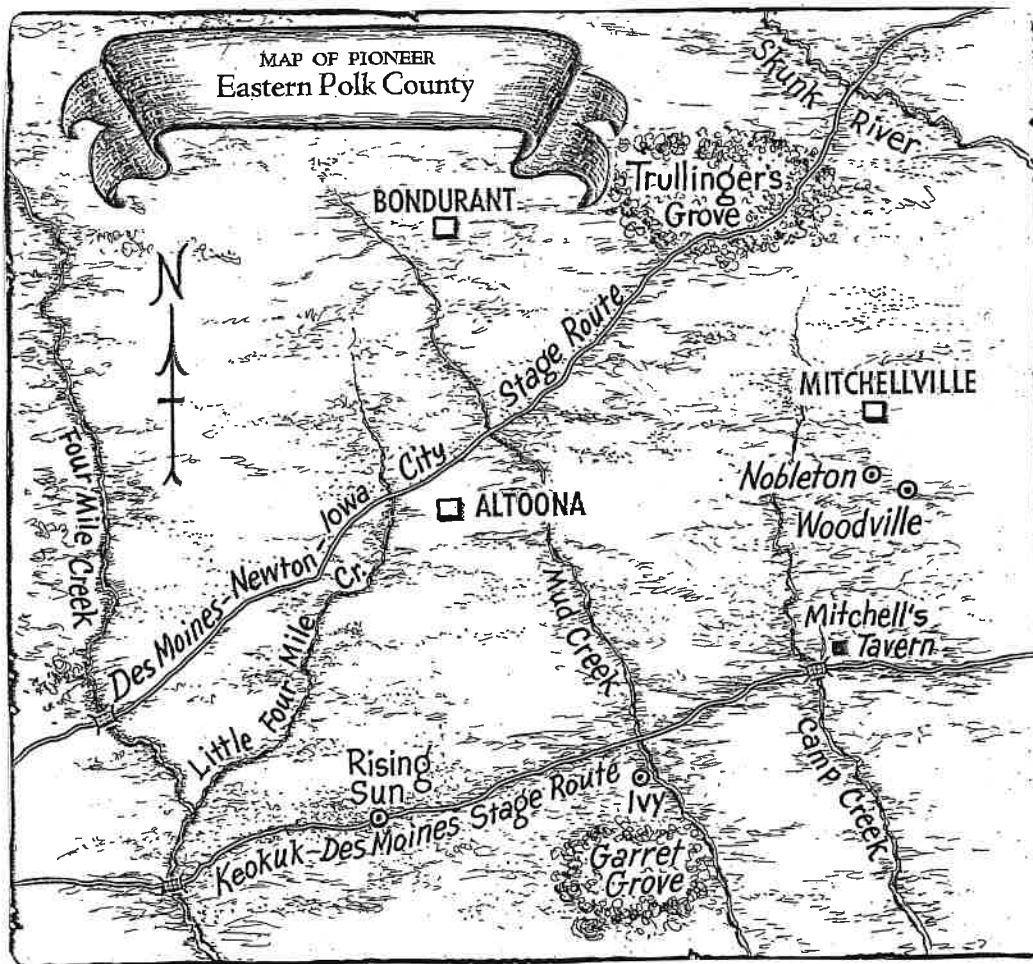
January 1846 – Iowa Legislature recognized Polk County and named it for the U.S. President James Knox Polk. Thomas Mitchell and several other settlers helped organize the county, Mitchell was a part of the group that lobbied to make Fort Des Moines the county seat, it was a controversial decision.

February 1846 – Fort Des Moines abandoned, troops moved to Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis. The buildings of the fort became the core of the town of Des Moines.

The confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers and the location of Fort Des Moines in 1844.



1846 -Daniel and Eli Trullinger settled in a grove in Franklin Township, northwest of Apple Grove. A community named Trullinger's Grove was created. Lee's Burying Ground, now Franklin Cemetery) was near the grove.





April 1846 – Thomas Mitchell’s Apple Grove Inn was one of 3 polling places for the county to elect the first county officers. Voters rode in to cast their ballots in “Uncle Tommy’s hat”. Mitchell was elected as the first sheriff of Polk County.

Mitchell and his family were known for “pioneer neighborliness”, it was said the latch string was always out on the door and his heart “was as open as his cabin door.”

June 1846 – the first couple to be married in Polk County were married at Mitchell Tavern.

*Se quicentennial History of Iowa  
Donald G. Kimball v. 2*



The above map depicts the 44 counties that had been created when Iowa became a State on an equal footing with even the original 13 States. The created counties were mostly in the southeastern part of the State. While the counties shown above had been "created" by the Territorial Legislature many had not necessarily been "organized" and were attached to a "mother county" for judicial, taxation and election purposes. The counties of Boone, Clarke, Dallas, Decatur, Jasper, Lucas, Madison, Marshall, Polk, Story, Warren and Wayne had been created in 1845, the same year as Iowa's admission to Statehood making the total of 44 counties on the map at that time.

September 1846 – Mitchell sold his cabin and part of his farm, then built a larger Stage Station and Hotel in a wooded area about a mile and a half south of his first cabin. He also called this stage station Apple Grove Inn. It was built large enough and with wide double doors on each end so the coaches could drive in and let passengers out while protected from the weather. Mitchell's hotel became the official and only Post Office for Beaver Township and the surrounding area. Mitchell was appointed Post Master. He established a school room in one of the upstairs rooms of the hotel and paid the teacher a salary. The teacher also worked at the hotel to make extra money. The hotel room was used as a school room during the day, and rented to guests at night.



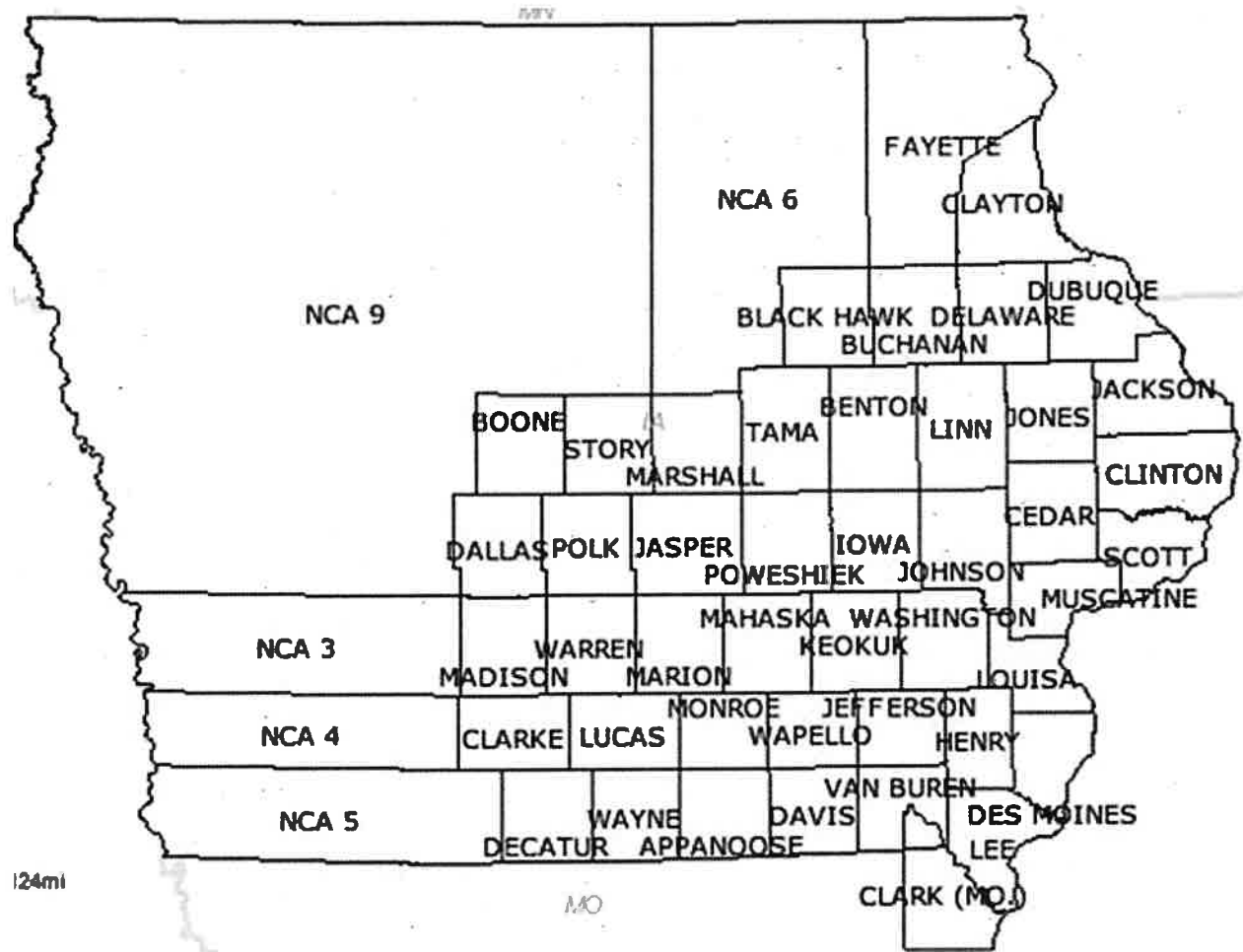
Unpainted building, made out of walnut wood, inside of which stage coach passengers alighted.



Large red horse barn used by Thomas Mitchell, 1846-1854.

Both buildings stand on a farm three and one-quarter miles south of Mitchellville.

December 1846 – Iowa becomes a state.



Mitchell was considered to be a friend to the Indians. Mitchell knew Black Hawk, Appanoose, and Powesheik personally, and conversed in their languages.

He was also active in county politics and possessed strong convictions, he was first a Whig, then became a Republican and a strong advocate for the freedom for negroes.



Top left – Black Hawk  
Top right – Appanoose  
Bottom - Powesheik

1848 – Mitchell and a friend persuaded 16 Democrats to go with them to drive some hogs to market at Ottumwa the day before an election so they would be unable to vote. After arriving at Ottumwa, Mitchell and his friend rode fast horses home so they could be there to vote.

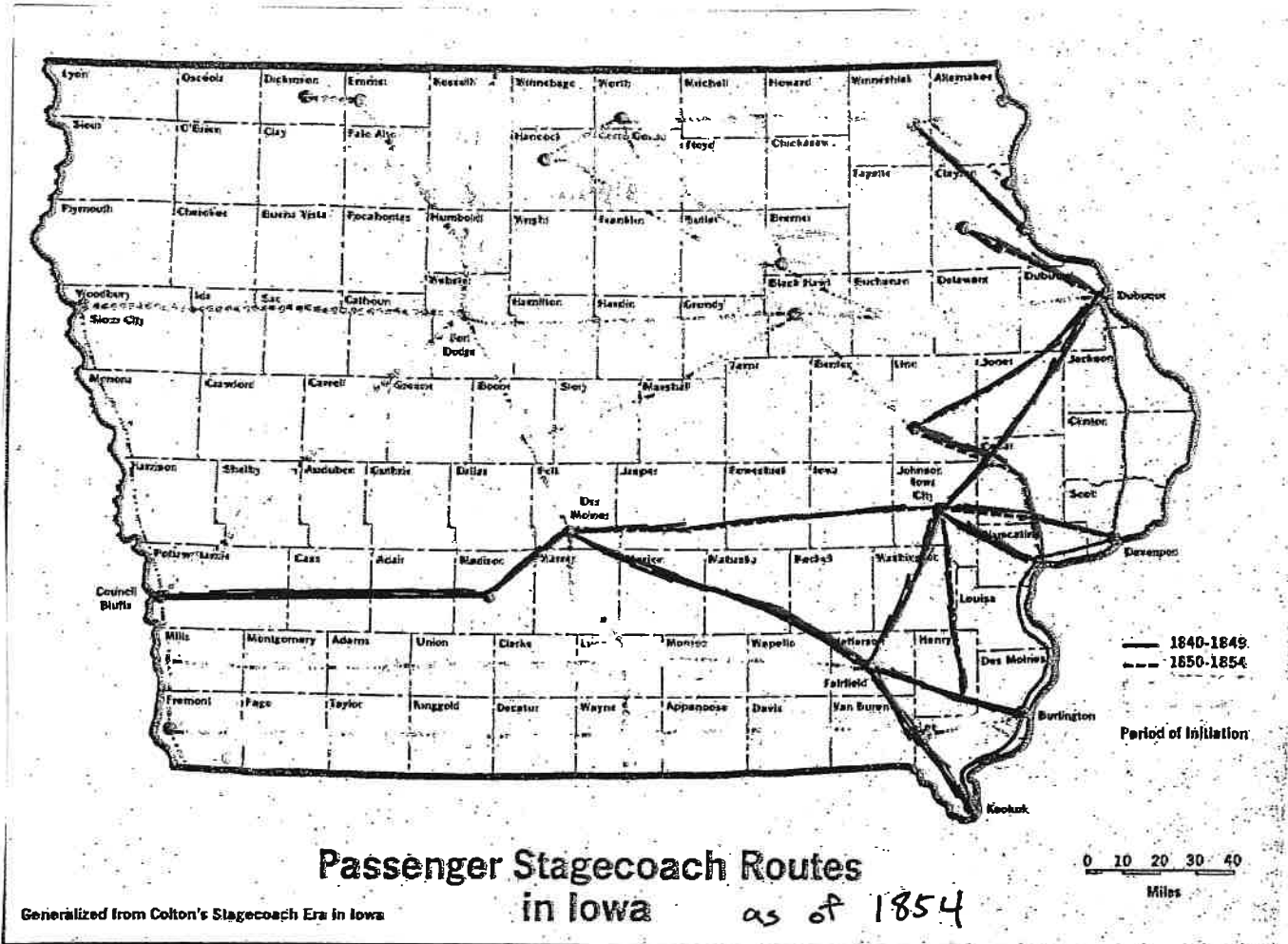
1849 – Garrett Grove community formed near Mud Creek, south of what is now Ivy. It had a schoolhouse and later a Methodist Church. The grove was named for the Garrett family who came from Ohio.

1849 – Gold seekers traveling to California (the 49'ers) stopped at Mitchell's Tavern. Mitchell is to have said to have 7,000 teams stop at his tavern. (Iowa State Register, July 17, 1894). When he ran out of food, Daniel Trullinger hauled a load of provisions to Apple Grove.



Government men, army officers, immigrants and travelers of all sorts stopped at Mitchell's Inn. The "Forty-Niners" on their way to California and westward pioneers were advised by an eastern newspaper to take the "Best Route to the Pacific" by way of Fort Des Moines

January 1852 - "Harris Over Land Guide" advertisement, "Tom Mitchell (!!!) Dispenses comfort to the weary (!) feeds the hungry (!) and cheers the gloomy (!!!) at his old, well-known stand, 13 miles east of Ft. Des Moines. Don't pass me by."



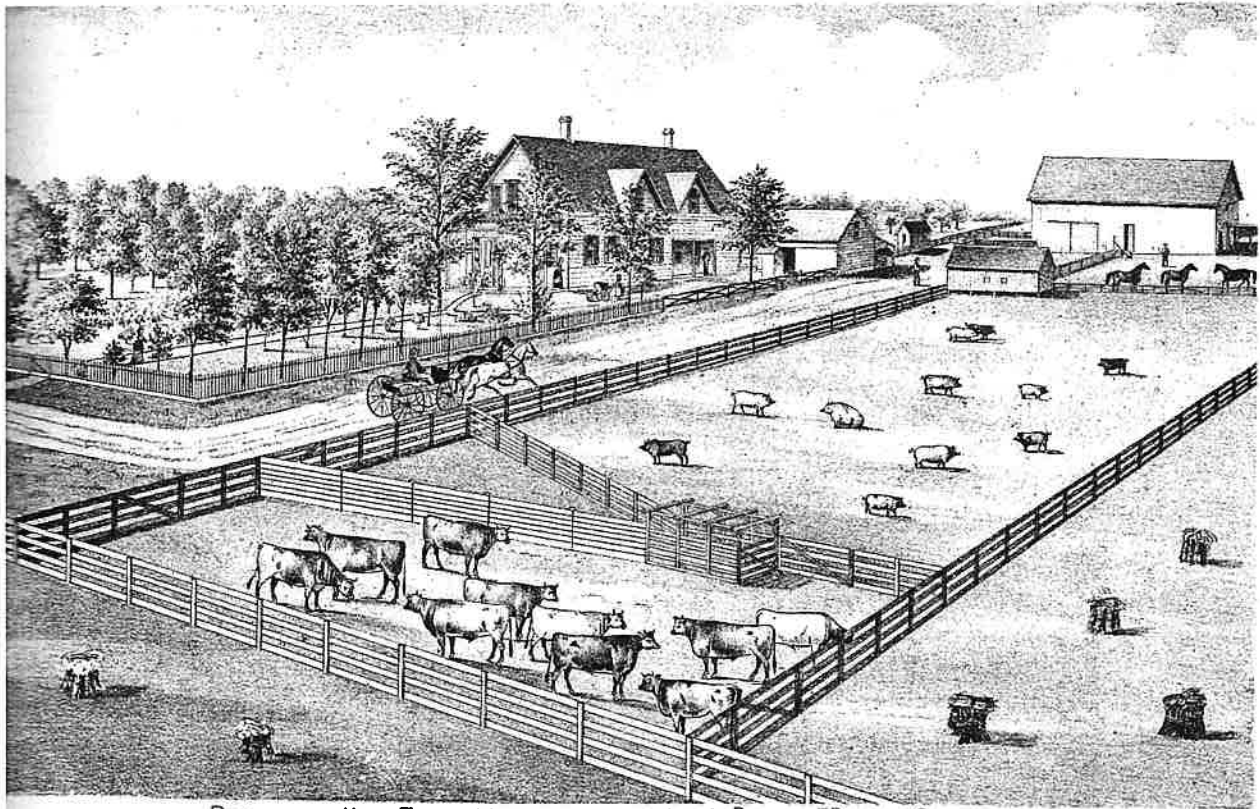
1852 – Mitchell helped organize 1<sup>st</sup> Polk County Fair that was held in the Court House Yard in Des Moines and served as one of three directors of the Fair, he also showed stock. The next year the Fair was moved to Horseshoe Lake in the Valley of Raccoon, near present day southwest 9<sup>th</sup> and Tuttle Streets.



1853 – the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad surveyed to establish a route for their railroad and a site for a depot.

December 1853 – Mitchell was a representative that helped organize the first State Agricultural Society.

1854 – Mitchell sold the 2<sup>nd</sup> Apple Grove Inn and built a 22 room house  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile north of current day Mitchellville. Even though he no longer was an innkeeper, many travelers stayed in his home.

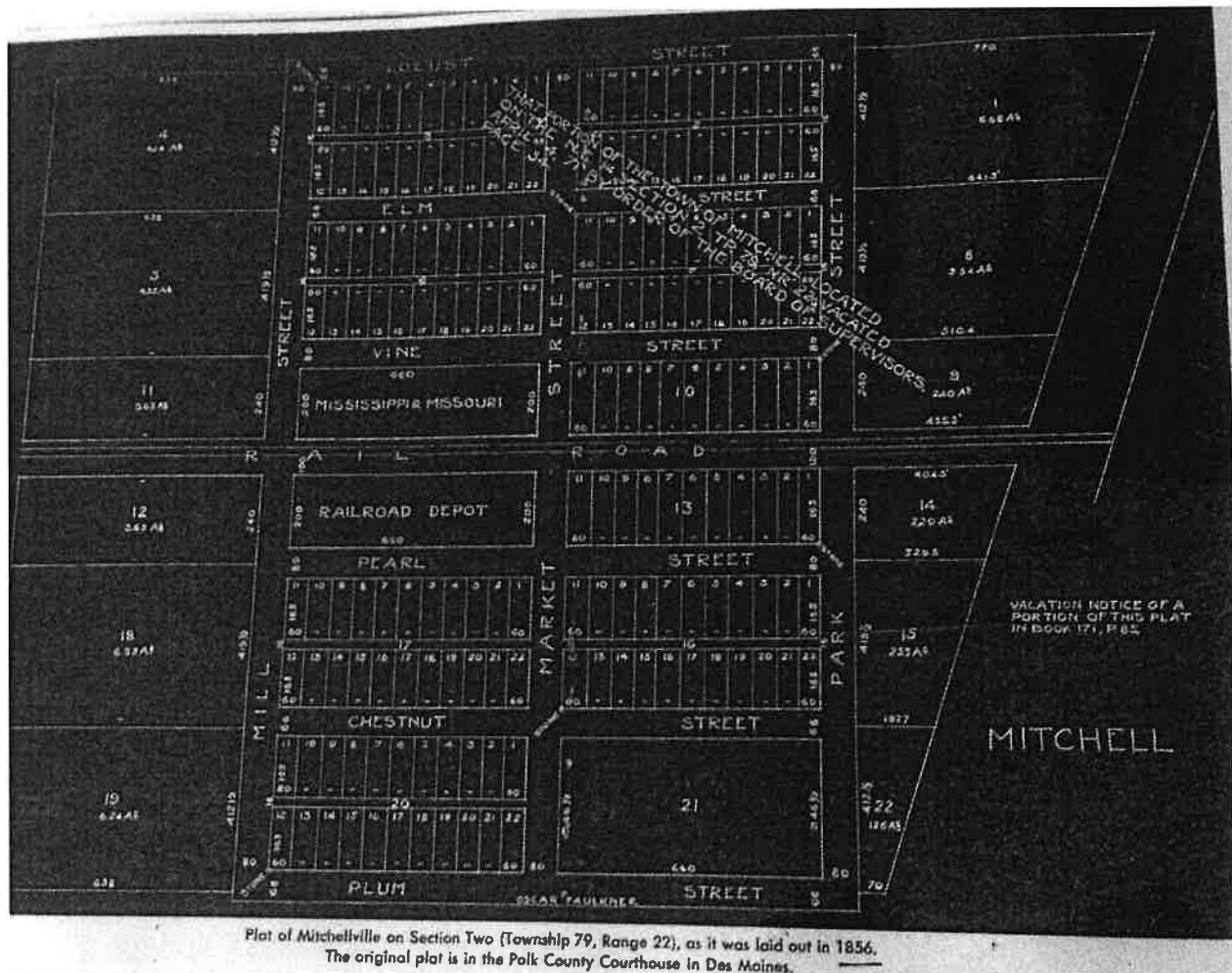


RESIDENCE OF HON. THOS. MITCHELL,  SEC. 1, BEAVER T<sup>r</sup>, POLK CO., IOWA.



1856 – Mitchell, Milton Ferguson, and Wilson Jones laid out the plot of a town laid out on 80 acres in Section 2 of Beaver Township, now just south of I-80. Originally called Mitchellville, after the second Mitchellville was built the first town was called Mitchell Town. *(Note to prevent confusion, the first Mitchellville will be called Mitchell Town in this record even though the name was not changed until after the second Mitchellville had been established.)*

The eighty acres was cut in half by “the big slough” in a north and south side. Camp Creek ran from north to south through the town. The stage coach route went from Iowa City to Newton to Des Moines. Instead of log cabins, small frame houses were built. With an ordinary farm team of horses it took four hours to travel from Mitchell Town to Des Moines.



Plat of Mitchellville on Section Two (Township 79, Range 22), as it was laid out in 1856. The original plat is in the Polk County Courthouse in Des Moines.

Fall 1856 – the David Mattern family became the first residents of Mitchell Town, they came by covered wagon from Pennsylvania. The nine children of the Mattern family took turns walking and riding on the long journey. Mitchell had invited Mattern to move to Iowa to be the town's first blacksmith. The winter was a severe one with the family living in a temporary house.

Town grew quickly, and became a stop on the Stage Coach run from Iowa City to Des Moines. The first general store was started in 1857 by William Sweeney. Mitchell was one of four men to build a hotel called the Mitchell House, although Mitchell never acted as the proprietor. A barn for stage coach horses was attached to the hotel. A steam saw mill, owned by R.B. Ellis and Thomas Mitchell was built in Trullinger's Grove

Residents of the town quickly learned their Indian neighbors were friendly and were curious about the white people.



(Typical blacksmith shop from 1800's)

1857 – a young man named A.C. Bondurant came to Polk County and like many of the settlers had very little money. Mitchell loaned him \$250, which took Bondurant five years to pay back. Mitchell tried to help all those who needed help, with advice, loans, or providing supplies.

Fall 1857 – Mitchell was elected as a Republican to represent Polk and Jasper Counties as a State Representative, where he also served on a variety of committees.

1858 – Des Moines became the capital of Iowa.

1858 – Jonathan Blyler, from Allentown, Pennsylvania, opened a tannery and shoe store.

Mitchell tried hard to get the stage coaches to come through Mitchell Town, it was not until 1861 the stage coach came through Mitchell Town on a daily basis.

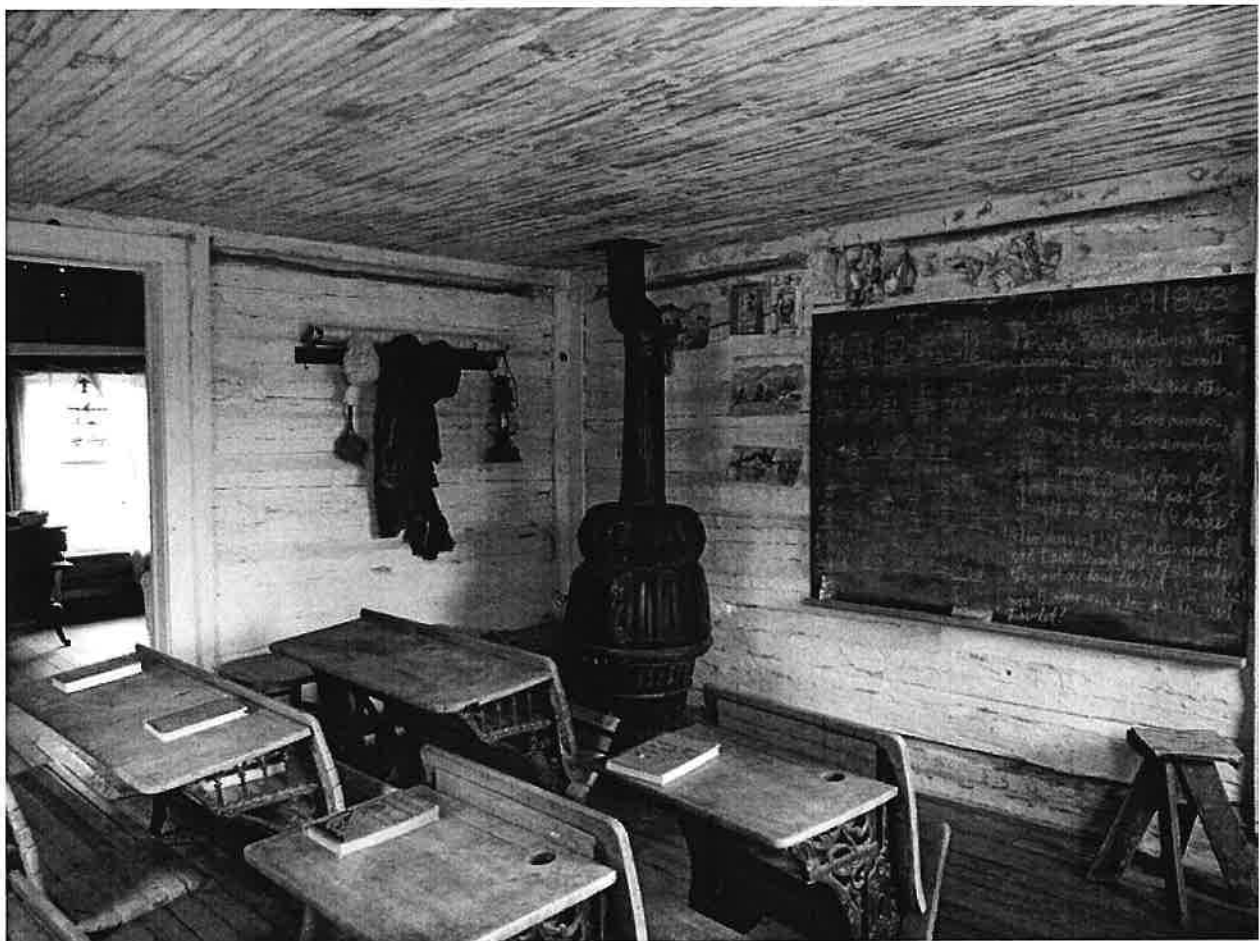


A. C. Bondurant

1859 – Mitchell Town had its first doctor, Dr. J.R. Wharton. He enlisted in the second Iowa Cavalry during the Civil War. After he was mustered out in 1862, he returned to Mitchell Town to practice medicine.

1859 – saw another gold rush as up to 50 wagons a day came through Polk County on their way to mine gold in Colorado.

The schoolhouse was the center of the community, it was used for school, Church and Sunday School, and many heated political meetings as the citizens debated the question of slavery.



Typical frontier schoolhouse

March 1860 – James Craig and Fianna Blyler Craig, his bride of two months arrived in Iowa at the Humphrey’s Stage Coach stop. They then walked the four and a half miles north to Mitchell Town. The Craig family have been a part of Mitchellville since then. James set up shop as a mason and plasterer.

1860 – a mail route from Des Moines to Marietta (seat of Marshall County) was established. Joseph Williams was appointed the first postmaster.

1860 – Mitchell helped organize the Universalist Church. Preachers held services in the school house about every 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday. Universalists were described as religious liberals. They supported prison reform, public health, abolition of slavery, public school education, and better care for the elderly. They believed that God, being infinitely good, could only have planned for all men to be served. They would stage public debates between Universalist ministers and ministers of other denominations. They were also one of the first denominations to ordain women in 1863.

1860 – Mitchell’s wife Elvira passed away. They had four children, Orrin, Ann (Mary Ann), Charles, and Walter.

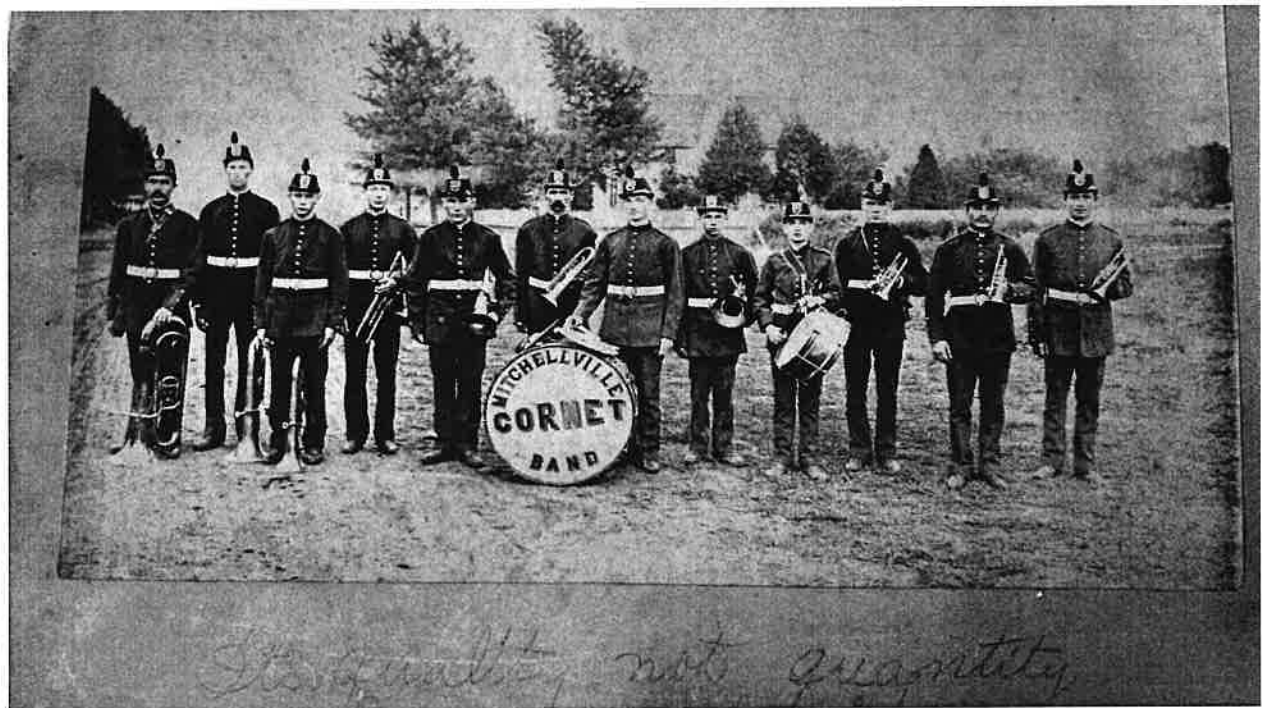
James Craig, photo from early 1880’s.



June 1861 – Mitchell married Ann C. Mattern. They eventually had four children, Allie who died at the age of 8 months, Harry, Maud, and John.

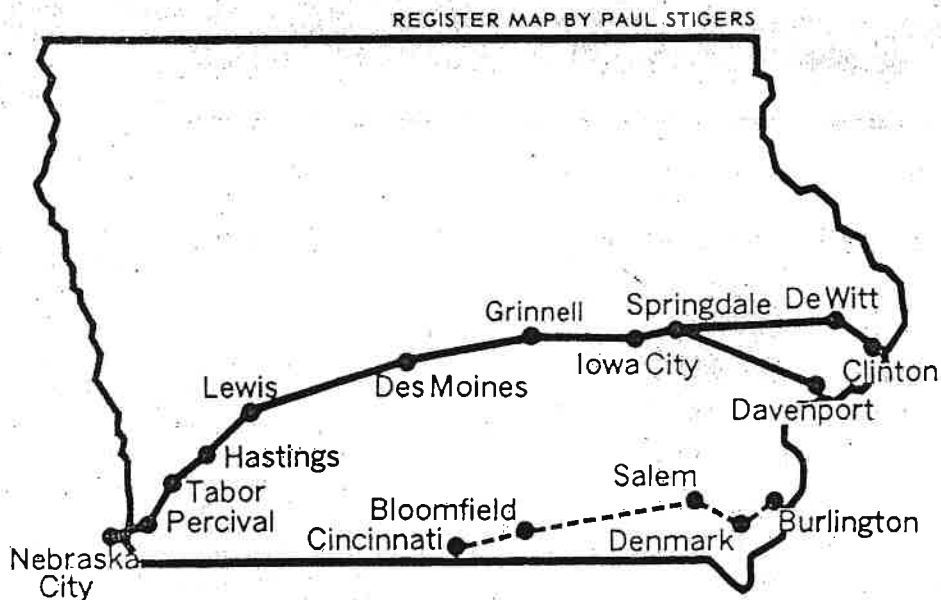
1861 – Mitchell Town had a population of 200 when the Civil War began. The Mitchellville Brass Band was organized and played at political rallies in the area, James Craig was the leader. The brass drum that was used had been in a battle and had a bullet hole on the shell, the hole was covered by a patch.

1861 – 1864 – Mitchell was elected County Supervisor and served on various political committees.



The Civil War lasted from 1861-1865. The majority of the populations of Mitchell Town supported the North, although there were some differences of opinions that spilled out in public. Mitchell Town and Polk County sent approximately 50 men to join the Union Army, most served in the Tenth Iowa Regiment. Included in the recruits was Mitchell's oldest son, Orrin, who died of typhoid fever in 1864 in Tennessee. Families back home including the "loyal and liberal citizens of Mitchellville" raised money and sent supplies to their boys in service. Many of the soldiers had not gotten uniforms or supplies from the government.

Mitchell was a strong abolitionist and is said to have been an agent on the Underground Railroad. "Uncle Tom's" station would hide the fugitives in the cistern.



The map shows the main underground railroad routes which hundreds of fleeing slaves traveled to gain freedom in Canada. The solid line shows the Tabor-Springdale route and the dotted line, the Cincinnati-Burlington route.

1863 – Home guards were formed consisting of young boys and old men unable to go to war.

The Civil War also disrupted the plans of the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad's plan to lay tracks across Iowa.





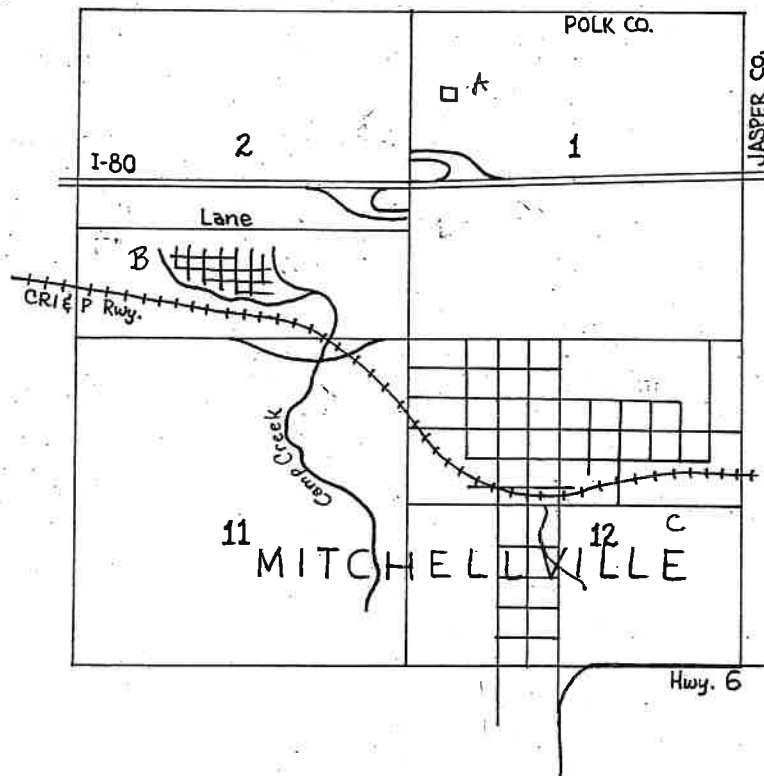
1867 – Rock Island Railroad bought the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad and changed the planned route of the railroad to south of Mitchell Town. Thomas Mitchell and his second wife then bought 160 acres, and sold the lots for \$20 with the stipulation that no liquor be sold on the premises. Some new buildings were erected. Several houses, the hotel, school, and store were moved to from Mitchell Town to Mitchellville over the next four years. Thomas Mitchell’s house was cut in half, one half stayed on the farm north of town, the other half was brought to Mitchellville and located on Fourth Street near the Universalist Church.

Sections 1, 2, 11, and 12 of Beaver Township,  
Polk County, Iowa

A – Home of Thomas Mitchell, 1857 – 1867

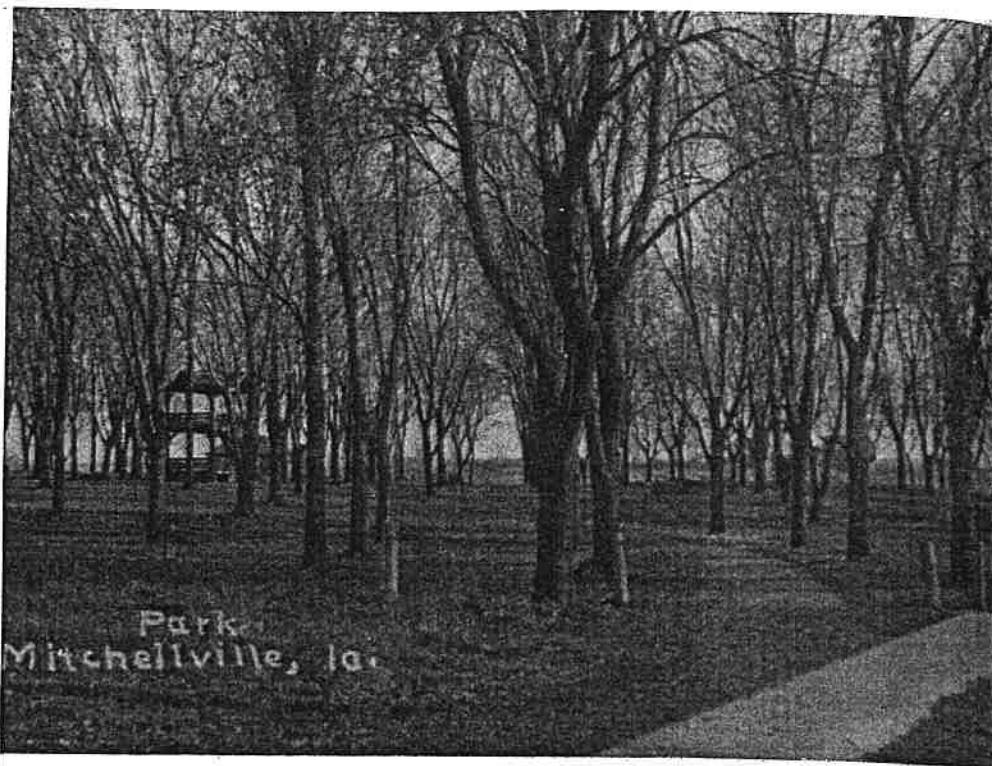
B – Mitchell Town

C - Mitchellville



The new town of Mitchellville quickly took root. Thomas Mitchell donated the land for the cemetery and a city park that included a two story band stand. He also donated the land for the Universalist Church.

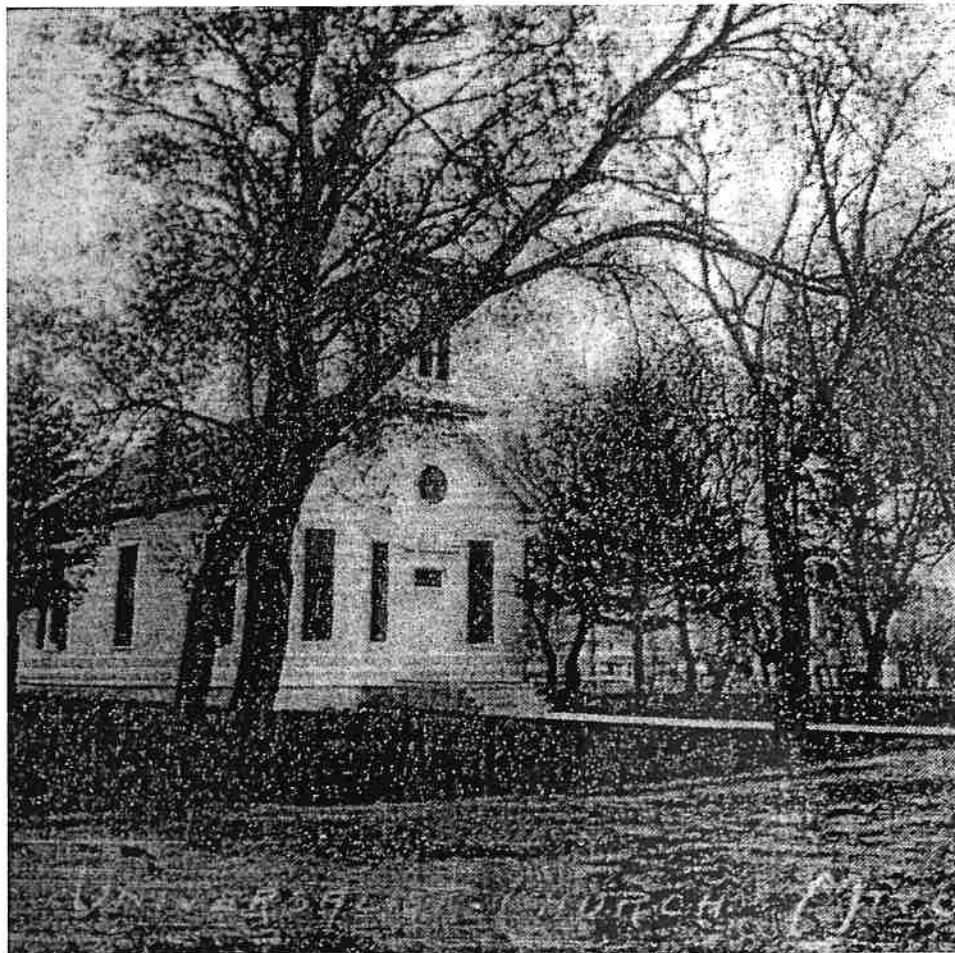
The Mitchell House Hotel was moved to the new town and called Humphrey's Hotel.



Reichard Park in the early 1900's. Note the two-story bandstand among the trees.

July 1867 – Mitchellville hosted the Annual Meeting of the Central Association of Universalists. Carriages brought people from the railroad depot. The Iowa State Register reported “A basket dinner will be provided for the multitude on Sunday.”

1868 – the frame building for the church was finished at a cost of \$2,800 and said to have been designed after churches from the East. It had a large yard enclosed by a board fence. The church bell was brought by train from the East to Iowa City, then brought by horses and wagon to Mitchellville. The original congregation had 35 members. Because it was the first church built in town, other denominations were allowed to use the building for their services. The Methodist had evening Sunday services twice a month.



February 1868 – the Early Settlers Association was organized and Thomas Mitchell was elected the first President. Members had to be living here from 1856 or earlier. 400 settlers were present for the first festival.



138

*Pictorial History of Southeast Polk County, Iowa 1981  
 compiled by Southeast Polk Historical Society*

1872 – Thomas Mitchell donated the land and the Church raised the funds to build a Universalist Seminary. The goal for the school was to fill a gap between the public high school and college. It was to be an Academy, not a college. Courses included Business training, English courses, an Academic course, Preparatory course for the State University, and a College preparatory course for getting ready for any college in the United States.

June 1872 – the Masonic Lodge was chartered in Mitchellville, Thomas Mitchell was the first petitioner.

In 1872 the Polk County Board of Supervisors declared the plats of Mitchell Town had to be vacated. The frontier town of Mitchell Town that had soldiers coming and going, Indians going through town to get to the river, and stage coaches rumbling through the streets gave way to the new settled, civilized, growing town of Mitchellville.

## Mitchell Seminary.

### LOCATION.

Mitchell Seminary is located in Mitchellville, a thriving town on the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad, exactly midway between Davenport and Council Bluffs, and 16 miles east of Des Moines. It is also a station on the Keokuk and Des Moines Railroad. It is centrally located and is easily accessible from all parts of the State.

The town is beautifully situated and contains a moral and intelligent population. There is not a saloon in the place. The inhabitants are peace-loving and law-abiding, and take an active interest in the welfare of the students, and in the prosperity of the Seminary.

### THE BOARDING DEPARTMENT

Is in the Seminary Building. Young ladies can be accommodated with handsomely furnished rooms and good table board at the low rate of \$4.00 per week, including lights, fuel and the washing and ironing of eight ordinary pieces. Each boarder is expected to provide one bed comfort, a full change of sheets and pillow cases; also towels, napkins, and toilet soap. Articles to be washed should be plainly marked.

Good board can also be had in private families at reasonable rates. Gentlemen can rent rooms in private houses, and table board will be furnished in the Seminary at \$2.50 per week. Arrangements can be made for self-boarding and for clubbing by addressing the Principal.

### COURSES OF STUDY:

#### FALL TERM

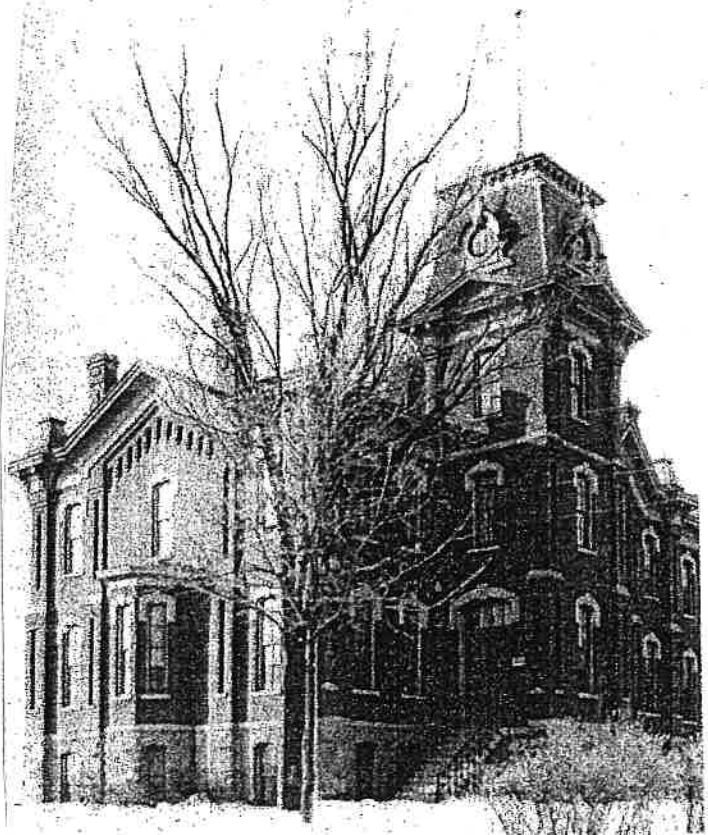
COM. ENG. BRANCHES,  
ALGEBRA,  
BOOK KEEPING,  
ENGLISH HISTORY,  
PHYSIOLOGY,  
NATURAL PHILOSOPHY,  
GEOMETRY,  
MENTAL PHILOSOPHY,  
ASTRONOMY, (Lectures)  
ANCIENT AND MODERN  
LANGUAGES,

#### WINTER TERM

COM. ENG. BRANCHES,  
PHYS. GEOGRAPHY,  
BOOK KEEPING,  
ALGEBRA,  
RHETORIC,  
ROMAN HISTORY,  
GEOMETRY,  
ENGLISH LITERATURE,  
MORAL PHILOSOPHY,  
ANCIENT AND MODERN  
LANGUAGES.

#### SPRING TERM

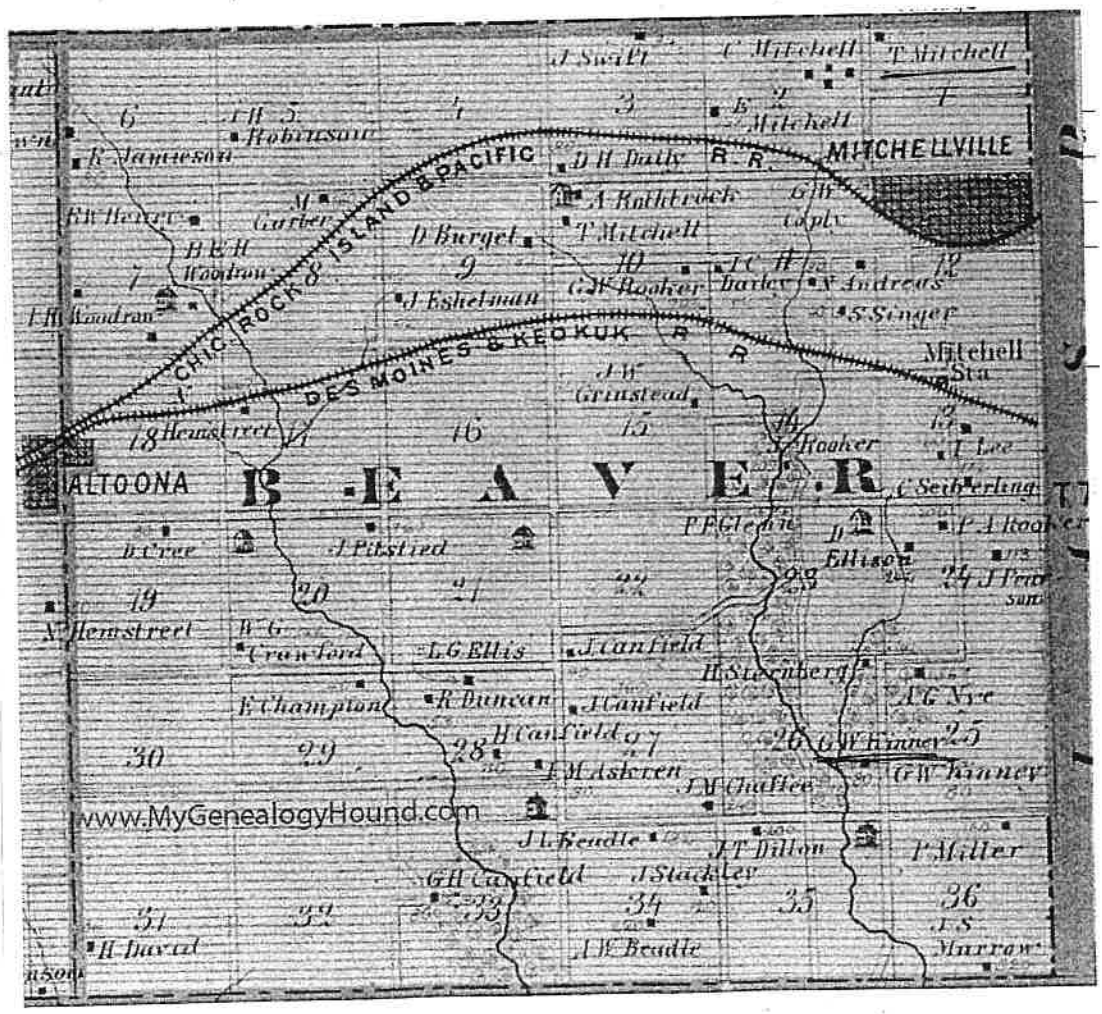
COMMON ENGLISH BRANCHES, U. S. HISTORY,  
CIVIL GOVERNMENT, POLITICAL ECONOMY,  
CHEMISTRY, GREEK HISTORY, ZOOLOGY,  
BOTANY, BOOK KEEPING, AN-  
CIENT AND MODERN  
LANGUAGES.



The Mitchell Seminary built in 1872. The building was later bought by the State of Iowa for use as a reform school for girls.

1874 and 1876 – Mitchell was elected to the Iowa State Senate and served on various committees. One bill amendment he worked on straightened the Skunk River to allow thousands of acres to be used as farmland.

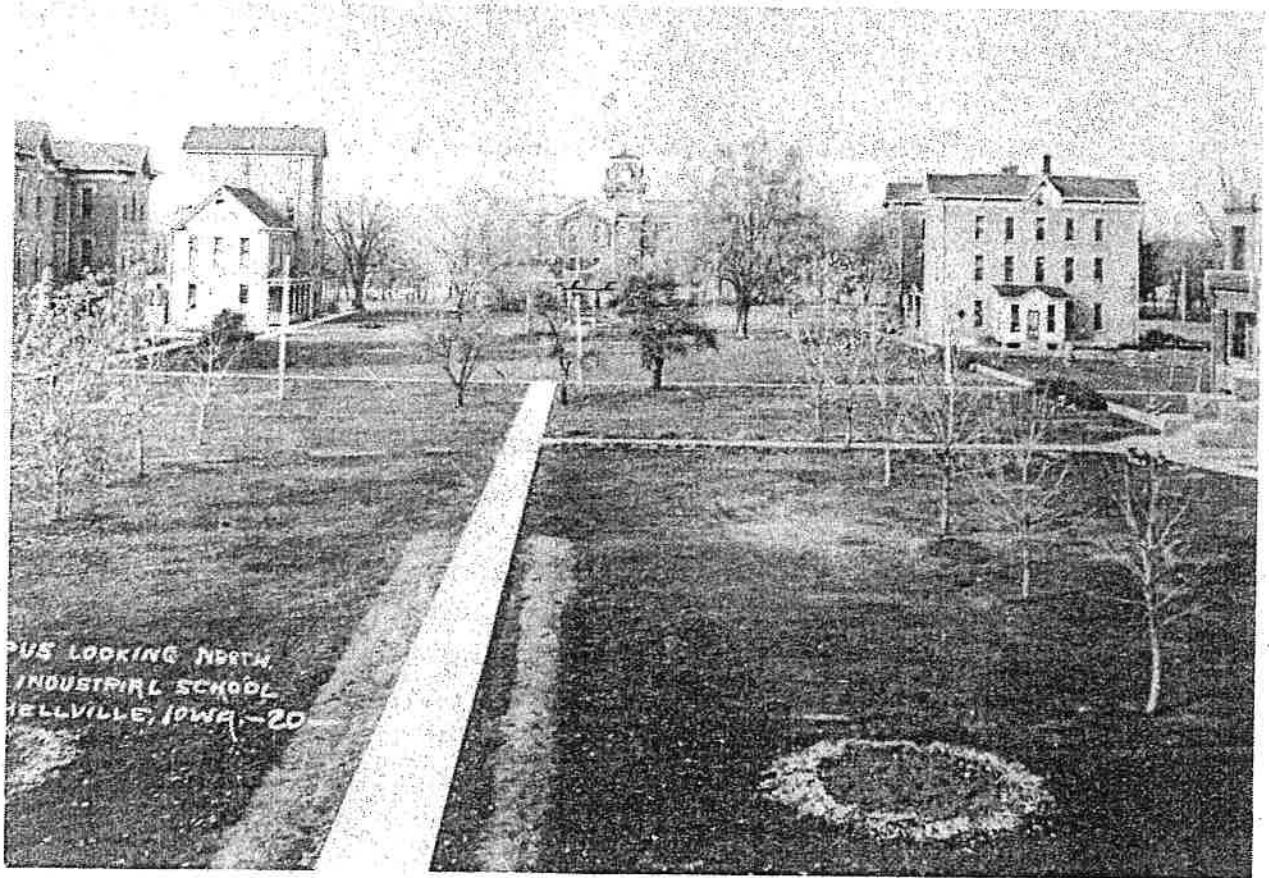
**Beaver Township, Polk County, Iowa 1875 Map**



T. Mitchell house, section 1

G. W. Kinney where Apple Grove Inn had been, section 25

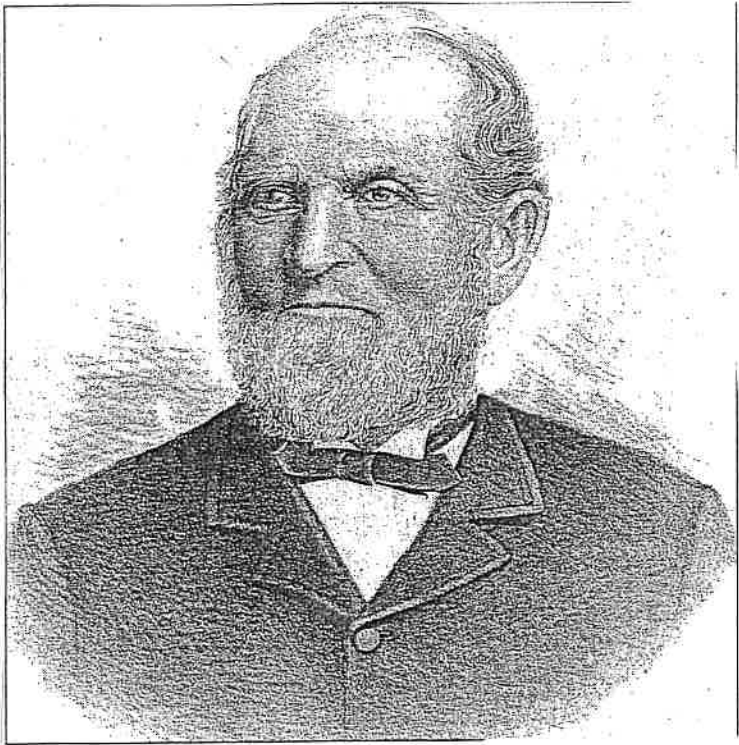
By 1880 the Universalist Seminary was far in debt and sold to the State of Iowa to be a reform school for girls, which eventually became the Women's Correctional Institute.



**The Girls Industrial School. Note the old Seminary at the north end, center, and the gazebo in front of it.**

July 15, 1894 – Thomas Mitchell passed away at age 78. A special train brought mourners from Des Moines to Mitchellville for the service. Over 1,000 people attended his funeral at the church, many people had to stay outside on the lawn, after the funeral, the casket was placed on the church lawn under the trees for viewing.

Mitchell said he didn't want to write about the development of Polk County because he didn't want anyone to think he was boasting.





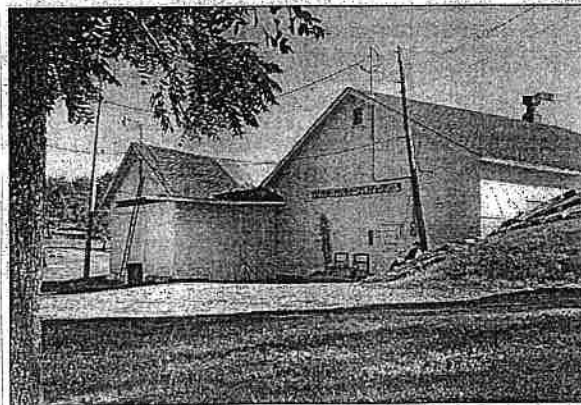
Thomas Mitchell was not only the founder of our city, but had a major influence in the development of Polk County and the State of Iowa. He had a total of eight children, four of whom preceded him in death, Orrin, Charles, Walter and Allie. The other four, Ann, Harry, Maud, and John moved to other states.

His name and his efforts are still evident, from the city he founded, to the park named after him where his first Stage station was, to his second Stage station at Apple Grove Orchard that is still in business as an orchard today.



2905 N.E. 112th St., Mitchellville

## Slice of Apple Grove lives on through longtime orchard



BOB NANDELL/THE REGISTER

**Apple Grove Orchard** **Apple house:** The only thing near Mitchellville today that bears the name Apple Grove is the orchard founded by Charles Noyes Kinney.

Mitchellville, Iowa

Email: [Contact Us \(https://ia.foodmarketmaker.com/contact/25191\)](https://ia.foodmarketmaker.com/contact/25191)

Phone: (515) 967-3017

Address: 2905 NE 112th Street, Mitchellville, Iowa 50169-0100