

Herbert Hoover

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE • IOWA

Herbert Hoover, world-renowned engineer, humanitarian, and 31st President of the United States, was born in a simple, two-room cottage on this site in the village of West Branch, Iowa, on August 10, 1874. Although he spent only the first 10 years of his life here, these years on the banks of the Wapsinonoc (an Indian term meaning "sweet water") left an indelible impression upon this man whose life of public service took him to all parts of the world and won for him distinction everywhere. His life at West Branch, Hoover recalled, was "filled with adventure and great undertakings, with participation in good and comforting things."

"Bertie," as he was then affectionately called, was the second of three children born to Jesse and Hulda Hoover. The family were Quakers, and the source of the principles that guided Hoover's life—honesty, loyalty, hard work, cooperation, and generosity. Jesse Hoover, a blacksmith, died from pneumonia in 1880, at the age of 34. His wife died from typhoid fever 3 years later and the orphaned Hoover children went to live with relatives, Herbert going with an uncle, Allan Hoover, on the uncle's farm just northeast of West Branch.

At age 11, Herbert journeyed to Newberg, Ore., to live with another uncle, Dr. H. John Minthorn. At 17 he entered the engineering school of the newly opened Stanford University, where he showed a marked aptitude for mathematics. He graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in geology in May 1895. After working several months in the California gold mines, he became a mining engineer in Colorado and then served on the staff of a leading mining engineer in San Francisco.

In 1897 Hoover joined the international British firm of Bewick, Moreing and Company as chief of mining operations in western Australia. A year later, he accepted a position with the Chinese Engineering and Mining Company, which sent him to Peking in March 1899. (Before going to China, he married Lou Henry, whom he had met at Stanford.) The Boxer Rebellion broke out shortly after the Hoovers' arrival in China, and it was during this conflict that Hoover received his first taste of war and relief experience, doing humanitarian work among the refugees. Late in 1901—after the rebellion ended—he returned to the United States as a junior partner with Bewick, Moreing and Company, whose world-wide interests kept him constantly on the move. "I circled the globe five times" while working for them, he later wrote. He was with the firm 7 years.

With the outbreak of World War I, Hoover (who was then living in England) headed the American Relief Committee in London, which aided Americans stranded in Europe. Later he headed the Commission for the Relief of Belgium. In 1917 he was appointed food administrator of the United States to provide food for the allies in the war and to control domestic production and distribution. This mission later merged into another when, after the Armistice in 1918, he was appointed Director-General of the Relief and Reconstruction of Europe, which he held until August 1919. Subsequently, Hoover organized the volunteer American Relief Administration, which continued relief until July 1923. His work during World War I brought food to millions of hungry people in more than 33 nations.

In 1921 President Warren G. Harding appointed Hoover Secretary of Commerce, a post he held for more than 7 years under two Presidents. Under Hoover the activities of the Commerce Department were expanded, particularly in the field of foreign trade and communications. When President Calvin Coolidge refused to seek renomination in 1927, Hoover became the Republican Party's leading candidate. He was nominated overwhelmingly and subsequently defeated his Democratic rival, New York Gov. Alfred E. Smith, by the largest popular and electoral vote that any President had received up to that time.

Hoover's administration had many notable accomplishments, including the signing of the London Naval Treaty, the inauguration of the nonintervention policy in Latin America, reforms of the criminal procedure for Federal courts, bankruptcy legislation, creation of the Federal Power Commission, new banking laws, regulation of stock speculation and securities promotion, expansion of the improvement of waterways, and the conservation of oil and other natural resources. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation was created, as were home loan banks and a new agricultural credit system to help farmers. Hoover was influential in the convening of a world economic conference to reduce trade barriers and stabilize world currency.

On October 29, 1929, the stock market crashed, triggering an economic depression that did not fully end until World War II. Hoover hoped to relieve the distress by a policy of indirect Government assistance to the masses of unemployed. But despite these efforts, his popularity evaporated. Though renominated on the first

ballot at the 1932 Republican convention, Hoover lost the election to the Democratic nominee, Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York. After Roosevelt's inauguration, Hoover retired to his home in California. He devoted much of his time to the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, once describing it succinctly:

Here are the documents which record the suffering, the self-denial, the devotion, the heroic deeds of men. Surely from these records there can be help to mankind in its confusions and perplexities, and its yearnings for peace.

The purpose of this institution is to preserve the American way of life and to promote peace. Its records stand as a challenge to those who would destroy the freedom in America and who would promote war.

But Hoover's public service was not finished. In 1946, President Harry S. Truman asked him to study food supplies and make recommendations for averting a post-World War II famine—a task that took him to 39 countries. In 1947, Hoover was appointed head of a commission to investigate and make recommendations for improving the organization of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. Congress enacted into law many of the commission's recommendations.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower created a second commission in 1953, and Hoover again served as chairman. After 8 years, and the work of the commission ended, Hoover finally retired from public life on June 30, 1955. He died on October 20, 1964, and was buried on a hillside overlooking his birthplace in West Branch. A few days after his burial on October 25, the body of Mrs. Hoover (who had died in California in 1944) was reinterred here.

ADMINISTRATION

Herbert Hoover National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box B, West Branch, IA 52358, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

THE SITE

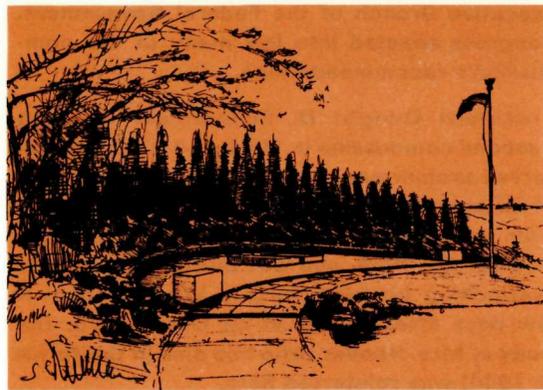
Herbert Hoover's birthplace was designated a National Historic Site on August 12, 1965. It is located on Downey Street in West Branch, less than 1 mile north of Int. 80.

At the site are the restored birthplace cabin, a replica of Jesse Hoover's blacksmith shop, the graves of President and Mrs. Hoover, the Quaker meetinghouse, the Presidential Library, and the statue of Isis, the Egyptian goddess of plenty, given to Hoover in the 1920's by school children in appreciation for his World War I relief work.

Several buildings in West Branch, near the site, have been restored to their original appearance.

The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library is administered by the General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service. An admission fee is charged.

Graves of President and Mrs. Hoover. On a hillside about ¼ mile southwest of the birthplace cabin are the graves of President and Mrs. Hoover. Landscaping provides a circular setting for the flat, white marble gravestones, with a view down the valley to the birthplace.



Blacksmith Shop. Near the birthplace cottage is a well-executed replica of Jesse Hoover's blacksmith shop. It houses an extensive collection of contemporary tools and other objects.



Birthplace Cottage. Built by Jesse Clark Hoover about 1870, the little two-room birthplace cottage, now restored and refurbished, stands on its original site not far from Wapsinonoc Creek's west branch, from which the town drew its name. The Hoovers lived in the house until 1879, when Jesse Hoover sold both it and the blacksmith shop and moved his family into a larger dwelling farther south on Downey Street. When the birthplace cottage was restored to its 1870 appearance in 1939, as much of the original furniture belonging to Jesse and Hulda Hoover as it was possible to secure was acquired for the house.



Quaker Meetinghouse. During his years in West Branch, Herbert Hoover attended meetings here with his parents. In fact, his mother often spoke before the congregation that worshipped in the building. Neglected for many years, the meetinghouse was purchased by the people of West Branch in 1964 and presented to the Herbert Hoover Birthplace Foundation. In 1964-65, after being moved to its present location on the east side of Downey Street opposite the Presidential Library and southeast of the birthplace cottage, the meetinghouse was restored to its near original appearance.



Herbert Hoover Presidential Library. The library faces Downey Street and houses the large collection of papers accumulated by Hoover during his many years of public service. It also holds his collection of books and objects associated with his long, distinguished career. Many items are on display in exhibit areas. A 180-seat auditorium occupies one wing of the building. The library was built by the Herbert Hoover Birthplace Foundation. The buildings and grounds, offered to the Federal Government as a gift by the Foundation, were accepted on August 10, 1964.

