

# Herbert Hoover

National Historic Site  
Iowa

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

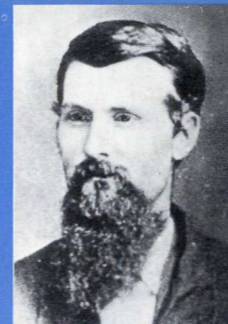
"But I prefer to think of Iowa as I saw it through the eyes of a ten-year old boy—and the eyes of all ten-year old Iowa boys are or should be filled with the wonders of Iowa's streams and woods, of the mystery of growing crops. His days should be filled with adventure and great undertakings, with participation in good and comforting things."

Herbert Hoover, Nov. 10, 1927  
*Hoover After Dinner*, © 1933, 1961

Hulda Minthorn Hoover, the mother of the future President, was born May 4, 1848, in Norwich Township, Canada. In 1859 she moved with her parents to West Branch. She taught school before her marriage to Jesse Hoover on March 12, 1870.

Jesse Hoover was born September 2, 1846, in Stillwater, Ohio. Eight years later his family migrated to West Branch. He became a successful blacksmith with his own shop, then opened a farm machinery business. Jesse and Hulda Hoover had three children, of whom

Herbert was the second. This photograph, taken in 1881, shows Mary—the youngest—Herbert, and Theodore.



The white building with the steeple in this 1880 photograph is the Methodist-Episcopal Church. To this side of the church, in the circle, is the roof of Jesse's blacksmith shop and the gable end of the birthplace cottage.

Herbert Hoover—mining engineer, humanitarian, statesman, and 31st President of the United States—was born August 10, 1874, in a simple two-room cottage in West Branch, Iowa. His Quaker family had helped settle the town, and their principles of honesty, hard work, simplicity, and generosity guided Hoover throughout his long life of service to the Nation.

"Bertie," as the young Herbert was called, was the second of three children born to Jesse and Hulda Hoover. Jesse was a successful blacksmith with his own shop near the cottage. By 1879 he had sold the shop and opened a farm machinery business. The Hoovers soon moved to a larger house on Downey Street, but did not long enjoy their new prosperity.

At the age of 34 Jesse died, leaving Hulda to raise the children. By taking in sewing she was able to save the \$1,000 from Jesse's insurance policy and use it for the children's education. Hulda, who had been a school teacher before she married Jesse, was well educated for a woman of the time. A noted speaker in the Quaker community, she was often called to minister to neighboring Meetings. In 1884, three years after her husband's death, Hulda died of pneumonia. Herbert went to live with an uncle, Allen Hoover, on a farm near West Branch.

When he was 11 Herbert moved to Newburg, Oregon, to live with another uncle, Dr. H. John Minthorn. Six years later he became a member of the first class to enter

the engineering school of Stanford University. In 1895 he graduated with a degree in geology and went to work in the California gold mines and then as a mining engineer in Colorado. He soon joined the international firm of Bewick, Moreing and Company as chief of mining operations in western Australia. In February 1899, on a trip back to the United States, he married Lou Henry, whom he had met at Stanford. Then for two years he worked with the Chinese Engineering and Mining Company in Peking, but returned to Bewick, Moreing in 1901 as a junior partner. In seven years with the company he circled the globe five times.

When World War I broke out, Hoover was working in London. He was asked by the

U.S. Consul General to help stranded Americans reach home. He later headed a variety of relief efforts that helped feed millions of hungry people in more than 33 nations. In 1919 President Woodrow Wilson appointed him Director General of Post War Relief and Rehabilitation.

In 1921 President Warren G. Harding appointed Hoover Secretary of Commerce, a post in which he served Harding and his successor Calvin Coolidge for more than seven years. When President Coolidge refused to seek re-election in 1927, Hoover was nominated by the Republican Party as its candidate. He defeated his Democratic rival Alfred E. Smith by the largest popular and electoral vote received by a candidate up to that time.

Hoover's administration is noted for the signing of the London Naval Treaty, the inauguration of a nonintervention policy in Latin America, reforms in criminal procedure in Federal courts, the creation of the Federal Power Commission, new banking laws, regulation of stock speculation and securities promotion, improvement of waterways, and the conservation of oil and other natural resources.

On October 29, 1929, the stock market collapse triggered a depression that did not fully end until World War II. Despite Hoover's efforts to relieve the economic distress—banking legislation, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, home loan banks, an agricultural credit system, and the convening of a world economic confer-

ence to reduce trade barriers and stabilize world currency—his popularity evaporated. He was renominated by the Republicans in 1932, but lost the election to Franklin D. Roosevelt. Hoover retired to his California home and devoted much of his time to the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford.

In 1946 President Truman asked Hoover to study food supplies and make recommendations for averting a post-war famine. In 1947 and 1953 he headed commissions to recommend improvements in the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. Hoover finally retired from public service on June 30, 1955.

## Service And Ideals

No man has been more honored upon assuming the Presidency, and few have been more reviled upon leaving office than Herbert Hoover. Now, almost 50 years later, historians are re-examining this complex and misunderstood man.

Hoover grew up in an age that believed in the ideal of rugged individualism and the self-made man. His career exemplified that ideal: raised in the Quaker tradition of humanity and generosity, and orphaned while young, his expertise as a mining

engineer made him a millionaire by the age of 40. As President, the Great Depression forced his ideals into conflict: individualism demanded that local institutions provide relief for the needy, yet humanitarianism forced the Federal government to help. Consequently, Hoover did more than any previous President to relieve the distress caused by economic collapse and paved the way for the anti-depression measures of the New Deal.



Engineer, 1899; Chairman, European Relief Council, 1920; President, 1929

## Information for the visitor and researcher

Herbert Hoover National Historic Site is located in West Branch, Iowa. The visitor center is on Parkside Drive and Main Street 0.8 km (1/2 mi) from Exit 254 of Interstate 80. The park's historic buildings are open daily 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, and New Year's Day. There is no admission fee for the historic buildings. The site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 607, West Branch, IA 52358, is in immediate charge.

The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library-Museum is administered by the General Services Administration, National Archives and Record Service. The Library-Museum is open daily except Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Museum hours vary with the season. An admission fee is charged persons 16 years of age and older.

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## Walking Tour

Herbert Hoover's birthplace was designated a national historic site on August 12, 1965. The park contains six sites in three areas that together memorialize his life and contributions. The portion of West Branch adjacent to and including the birth-

place cottage is undergoing restoration. When complete, it will recall the late 19th-century Midwestern neighborhood from which Hoover came. The Library-Museum represents his years as a public servant. The Gravesite is the third area.

**Safety Reminders** Always use caution and good sense during your visit to the historic site. Don't let an accident spoil your stay. Take care on the historic walkways. Note that the boardwalks are especially slippery in frost or wet weather.

The small, 14-by-20 foot **Birthplace Cottage** was built by Jesse Hoover and his father Eli in 1871. Herbert was born here in 1874, but by 1879 Jesse had sold both it and the blacksmith shop and moved his family into a larger dwelling farther south on Downey Street. When the cottage was restored to its 1874 appearance in 1939, as much as possible of the original furniture belonging to Jesse and Hulda Hoover was acquired for the house. It still stands on its original site at the corner of Downey and Penn Streets.

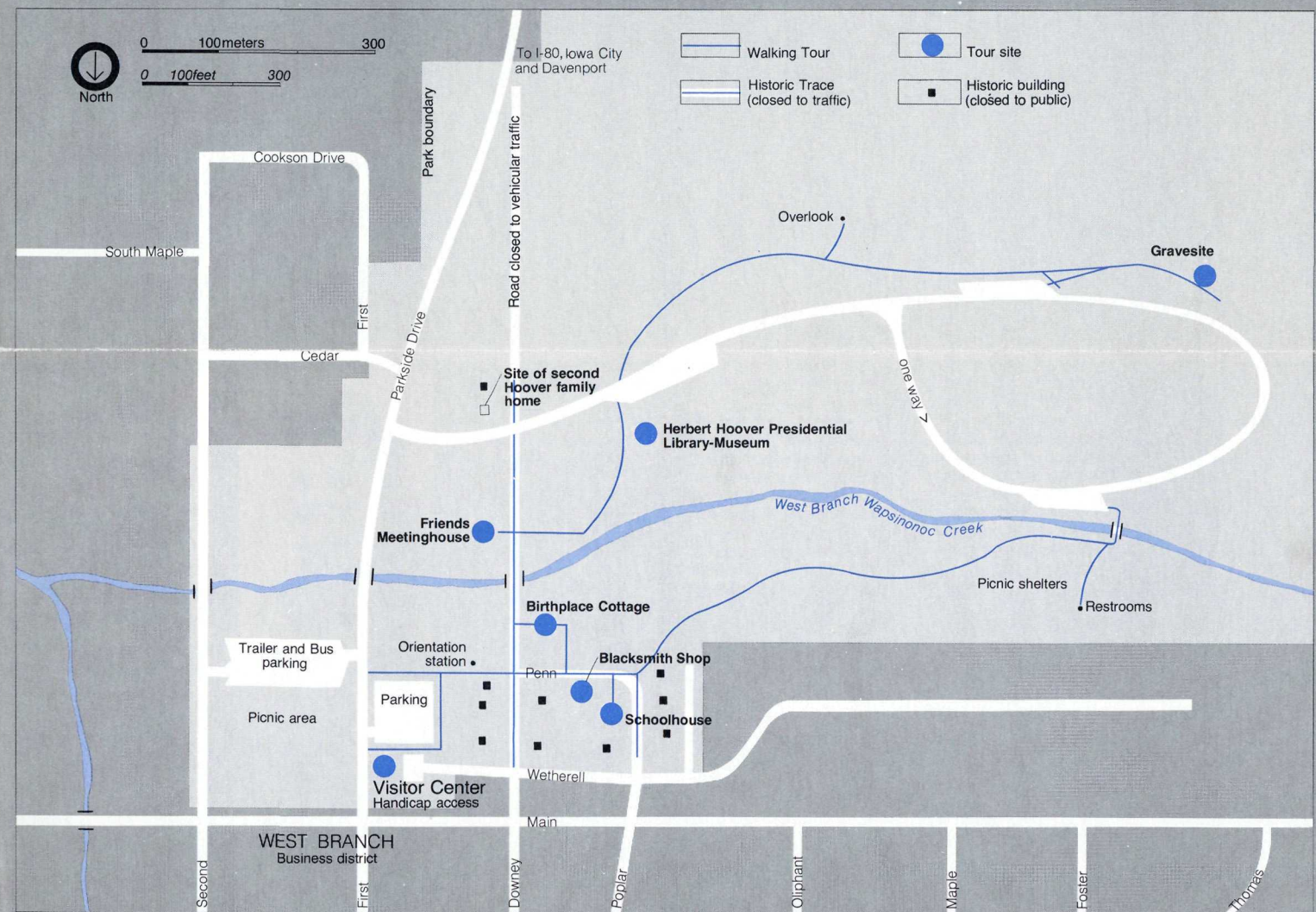
The **Friends Meetinghouse** was completed in 1857. The Friends, or Quakers, who met in this building held unprogrammed services of silent meditation. There was no special preparation or message for worship, and anyone who felt they had an insight or a spiritual message could share this with the rest of the congregation. During his years in West Branch, Herbert Hoover worshipped here with his family. Hulda Hoover often spoke before this meeting. The building has been moved about two blocks from its original site.

The **Presidential Library-Museum** houses the large collection of papers accumulated by Hoover during his many years of public service. It also holds a 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-Museum was built by the Herbert Hoover Birthplace Foundation and presented to the Nation on August 10, 1964.

The **Blacksmith Shop**, northwest of the birthplace cottage, is similar to the one operated by Jesse Hoover from 1871 to 1879. Jesse's abilities, and the needs of this farming community, guaranteed that he had a steadily increasing business. The shop is equipped with tools of the type used by Jesse. Demonstrations of blacksmithing are often held here during the summer months.

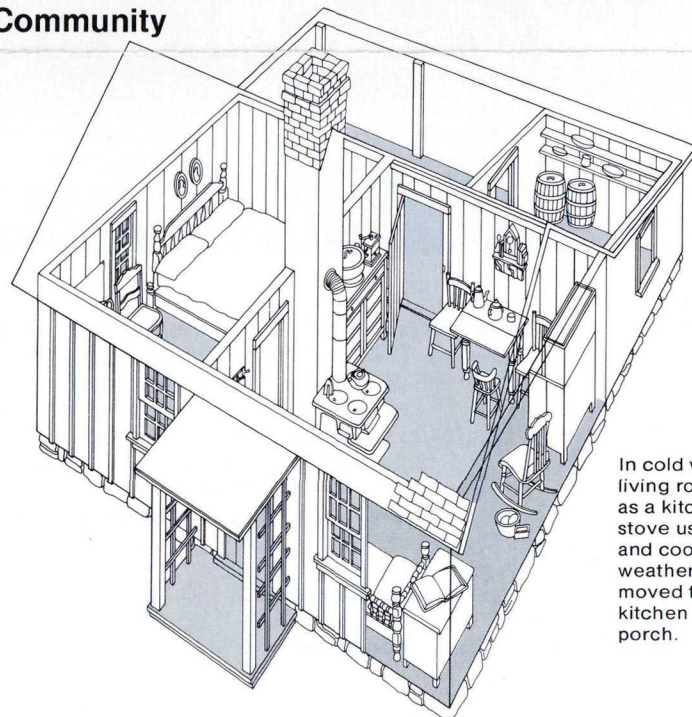
The Friends who settled West Branch built this one-story frame **Schoolhouse** in 1853 at a cost of \$800. For several years it was used by the Friends as a meetinghouse until the Friends completed their own place of worship. The school originally stood on a one-acre lot on the southwest corner of Downey and Main Streets. It has been moved several times and was finally placed here in 1971.

After more than 50 years of public service Herbert Hoover died on October 20, 1964. Five days later he was buried on this hillside **Gravesite** overlooking his birthplace in West Branch. A few days later the body of Mrs. Lou Hoover (who died in New York in 1944) was reinterred here. Landscaping provides a circular setting for the flat white marble gravestones.



## An Iowa Farm Community

This small 14-by-20 foot cottage was built by Jesse Hoover and his father Eli in 1871. It still stands on the original site.



The bedroom contains a rope bed with a feather tick. At night a trundle bed was pulled out for the children.

In cold weather the living room also served as a kitchen, with the stove used for heating and cooking. In warm weather the stove was moved to the summer kitchen on the back porch.

## Hoover's West Branch

As you approach Herbert Hoover National Historic Site you see the town of West Branch from the same viewpoint as the photographer who took the picture of Downey Street in 1880. Many changes have occurred in the intervening century, but when you

leave the visitor center you enter a setting that recreates the late 19th-century farm community into which Hoover was born in August 1874.

At the time of Hoover's birth, West Branch was a growing community of about 350 persons.

By 1880 over 500 people lived here. It was a town dependent on farming for its livelihood. Even those who did not farm supported farming, like Herbert's father who operated a blacksmith shop then a farm implement store. The town had schools, churches, hotels, gro-

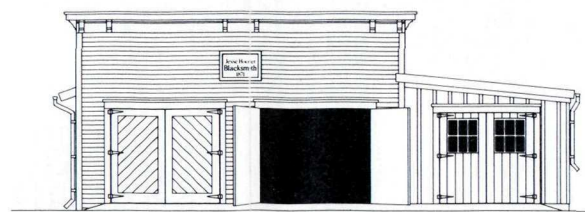
cery stores and meat markets, a harness shop, a funeral parlor, and even a book store.

Today the buildings of the site help recall that historic setting. The birthplace cottage, the blacksmith shop, the Friends Meetinghouse, and the school—all

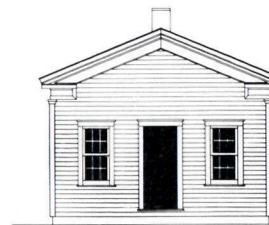
open to the public—and historical residences that are closed, are typical of those found in a midwestern farm community of the 1870s and 1880s.

From the overlook on the walkway to the Gravesite can be seen the Isaac Miles Farm

and a restored native prairie of the type encountered by the pioneers who settled here. In Hoover's youth this land was all farmed.



Blacksmith Shop



Schoolhouse



Friends Meetinghouse