# THE P.T. SMITH HOUSE

## HERBERT HOOVER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
## HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT
## HISTORICAL DATA

SEPTEMBER 30, 1969

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## HERBERT HOOVER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
## WEST BRANCH, IOWA

by

EDWIN C. BEARSS

DIVISION OF HISTORY

Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

**SEPTEMBER 30, 1969**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

Historical Data

P. T. SMITH HOUSE

Herbert Hoover National Historic Site

West Branch, Iowa

A P P R O V A L  S H E E T

RECOMMENDED

_____ Date_____
Superintendent

_____ Date_____
Chief, Office of Archeology
& Historic Preservation

APPROVED

_____ Date_____
Regional Director, Midwest Region

## FOREWORD

This report has been prepared to satisfy the research needs as enumerated in Historical Resource Study Proposal HEHO-H-5, Historic Structures Report, P. T. Smith (Harley Anderson) House. All available documentary material and historic photographs of the structure have been collected, studied, and synthetized in an effort to provide the architectural historians with a document to assist them in preparing the measured drawings to be used to restore the exterior of the structure to its appearance as of 1879-1884. The building's restoration will help re-create the historic scene in the core-area of Herbert Hoover's youth.

A number of persons have assisted in the preparation of this report. Particular thanks are due Historian Glennie Murray and Administrative Assistant Judy Moske of Herbert Hoover National Historic Site for their assistance at the site; Mrs. Trudy Peterson and the staff of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library for their cooperation in making valuable source materials entrusted to their safe keeping available; Mrs. Golda Gruwell, Mrs. Faunetta Oakley, Sig Larson, and L. C. Rummells for copying and permitting me to use priceless photographs of the P. T. Smith House in their private collections; to Mrs. Mildred Speight, Mrs. Golda Gruwell, Mrs. Faunetta Oakley, Mrs. Bertie Moore, Mrs. Laura Butler, Harley Anderson, and L. C. Rummells for sharing their memories of the structure; and to Don

Wehman of the Springdale Mutual Fire Insurance Company for permitting me to examine the files of his company for the nineteenth century. Architectural Historians Henry Judd of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation and William Wagner of Wetherell, Harrison, Wagner and McKlveen, Architects, were helpful in making suggestions as to what might interest the Historical Architects, and information found in the structure's fabric. My colleague Frank Sarles proof-read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions, while Miss Frances Gastellum skillfully typed the subject report.

ECB

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# I. ADMINISTRATIVE DATA--PETER SMITH HOUSE

## A. Name and Number of Structure

The Peter Smith (Harley Anderson) House, Structure No. 2, West Branch, Iowa. The Peter Smith House is classified as a BBB Structure.

## B. Proposed Use of Structure

The exterior of the Peter Smith House will be restored to its appearance, circa 1880s. It will help restore the historic scene in the core-area of the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site. The interior of the house will be used as classrooms for an Environmental Study Center.

## C. Justification for Such Use as Shown in the Master Plan

The approved Master Plan proposes to restore the core-area of the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site to the appearance of a typical midwestern village of the 1880s. An exterior restoration of the Smith House will lend a high degree of authenticity to the historic scene.

## D. Provision for Operating the Structure

The house will be used as classrooms for an Environmental Study Center.

## E. Cooperative Agreement, if any Executed or Proposed for Operating the Structure

Cooperative agreements will not be needed to operate this structure.

F. Brief Description of Proposed Construction Activity

The construction activity proposed for the Peter Smith House will consist of removing portions of the fabric not associated with the exterior appearance of the dwelling in the years 1885-1910, and restoring the structure to its appearance, circa 1880s. To carry out this program it will be necessary to: (a) replace a number of 8 x 8 sills on the east-west-north sides of the house and under the kitchen. (b) The three columns supporting the front porch will be replaced with columns identical to those shown in photographs, circa 1907. (c) The pilasters and front door will be replaced with period pieces. (d) On the north elevation the bay entrance will be reconstructed, along with the walkway leading out onto Cedar Street. (e) The period entrance to the cellar will be reopened and restored. (f) At the rear of the house, the back porch will be removed and reconstructed in accordance with the 1909 photograph. (g) The brick chimney on the south elevation of the house will be demolished. (h) Two chimneys, the kitchen and the one within the house, will be reconstructed. (i) Shutters will be placed at the windows having them in the historic period. (j) The roofing will be removed and replaced with period metal roofing. (k) The house will be painted the same colors as it was in the historic period. (l) A white picket fence will front Downey and Cedar streets. (m) Through the use of selected plantings the yard will be returned

to its appearance, circa 1885. (n) The shed and privy will not be reconstructed. (o) The interior of the house will not be restored, but it will be rehabilitated to facilitate its use as classrooms for an Environmental Study Center.

G. Estimate of Cost of Proposed Construction

$35,000.

II. HISTORICAL DATA

A. Significance

In the years 1879-1884 that Herbert Hoover lived in the two-story house on the northeast corner of Downey and Cedar, Peter Smith and his family were next door neighbors. Among Herbert's playmates were Etta, Eddie, and Willie Smith.[1] In his twilight years, Herbert Hoover, when discussing his boyhood in West Branch, recalled that the only houses he could remember in the immediate neighborhood were the Smith House, the Coombs House, and the dwelling in which he lived. Of these three structures, only the Peter Smith House survives.[2] The house thus possesses significance as the only building, extant, in the immediate neighborhood that

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1. Rose Wilder Lane, The Making of Herbert Hoover (New York, 1920), p. 19; Maud Stratton, Herbert Hoover's Home Town: The Story of West Branch (Iowa City, 1948), p. 55. In 1880 Etta Smith was 10; Eddie Smith, 8; and Willie Smith, 5. "Tenth Decennial Census, Springdale Township, Cedar County, Iowa," National Archives and Records Center.

2. Wagner to Fagergren, May 21, 1969, files, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Washington, D. C. William Wagner is a

Mr. Hoover could recall with any detail. His recollections of the birthplace cottage were vague, as he was only five when his parents moved to the dwelling across the street from the Smith House.

The Peter Smith House likewise possesses considerable local architectural merit. It was built by Peter Smith, one of West Branch's first carpenters. Smith was in West Branch by June 1871, when he advertised in The Index that he could be found at "Jepson Bros. New Building." He would build coffins of black walnut or pine and trim them to suit the customers.[3]

Historical Architect William Wagner, who is familiar with local architecture, was impressed with "some of the very fine wood detail scattered throughout the structure." Writing to Regional Director Fred Fagergren on May 21, 1969, Wagner observed,

> personally speaking, on the architectural style, I rate this [the Peter Smith House] second in quality of all the homes you have under your control. The Little Gothic [the Siler House] being first and the

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distinguished American Architect and a member of Wetherell, Harrison, Wagner and McKlveen, Architects, 500 Hubbell Building, Des Moines, Iowa. Fred Fagergren is Regional Director, Midwest Region.

3. The Index (West Branch), 1, No. 2, June 1871. Peter Smith had been born in Massachusetts in 1836. In 1880 he and his wife, Mary, were living with their five children in the house on Downey and Cedar. The children were: Clara, age 18; Ella, 15; Etta, 10; Eddie, 8; and William, 5. "Tenth Decennial Census, Springdale Township, Cedar County, Iowa."

third being the other house [the Phelps] . . .
standing at the top of Downey.[4]

The Peter Smith House, besides possessing local architectural merit and a niche in Herbert Hoover's boyhood memories, helps restore the historic scene. As visitors to the birthplace cottage look southward and up Cook's Hill, they will see a peaceful tree-lined country road. The boardwalks and unpaved road, along with the Meeting House and Smith House, will provide a mood of small town mid-America in the 1880s.

B. Legal Description of Property and Chain of Title

The Peter Smith House is located on a lot in the west one-half of the northwest quarter of Section 8, Township 79 North, Range 4 West. On June 10, 1851, Samuel Mather was issued a patent by the General Land Office for the west one-half of the southwest quarter of Section 5 and the west one-half of the northwest quarter of Section 8 in Township 79 North, Range 4 West. To pay for the 160 acres, he surrendered the land warrant issued by the United States to William L. Eleman for service in the Mexican War.[5]

Mather retained possession of the property for twenty months. On March 17, 1853, Samuel and Lydia Mather sold to Joseph Straughn

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4. Wagner to Fagergren, May 21, 1969, files, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation.

5. Cedar County Deed Book 41, p. 595. The Cedar County Deed Books are found in the County Clerk's Office in the courthouse at

of Columbiana County, Ohio, for $140 the two eighty-acre tracts.[6] Nine years later, on May 3, 1862, Joseph and Jane Straughn sold the west one-half of the northwest quarter of Section 8 to James Hirst. Several factors, the outbreak of the Civil War and an influx of settlers, had caused land values to zoom, and the Straughns received $500 for the eighty acres.[7]

The Straughns, being absentee landowners, had lost money by selling when they did. Seven months later, on January 28, 1863, James and Anna Hirst of Cedar County, Iowa, sold the west one-half of the northwest quarter of Section 8, less the two acres in the southwest corner, to Joseph Cook of Belmont County, Ohio. Cook paid $1,600 for the 78 acres.[8]

With the end of the Civil War there was a decline in land values in Iowa. On May 19, 1866, Joseph and Elizabeth Cook sold to James Cook for $1,300 the 78 acres they owned in the west one-half of the northwest quarter of Section 8.[9]

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Tipton, Iowa. Eleman, who had enlisted in the 1st Pennsylvania Volunteers, had assigned his warrant, No. 29657, to Mather.

6. Cedar County Deed Book G, p. 447.

7. Cedar County Deed Book R, p. 622.

8. Cedar County Deed Book S, pp. 192-93. The lot in the southwest corner was twenty rods east and west by sisteen rods north and south.

9. Cedar County Deed Book W, p. 406.

Three years later, on May 29, 1869, the village of West Branch was platted by Joseph Steer, as attorney for John M. Wetherell.[10] In November of that year, William W. Lamborn platted a village east and north of Main Street to be called Cameron.[11] With the platting of the two villages, James and Mary Ann Cook began to subdivide and sell lots in the west one-half of the northwest quarter of Section 8, Township 79 North, Range 4 West. This property became known as Cook's Addition.

On March 31, 1873, the Cooks sold to Hannah Smith for $275 Block No. 31 in Cook's Addition. This block was bounded on the west by Downey Street and on the north by Cedar Street.[12] The consideration paid by Hannah Smith for the lot, when compared to similar transactions of this period, leads to the conclusion that there were no improvements on the property in 1873. Peter T. Smith acquired the property by inheritance from Hannah Smith, and on June 10, 1885, he and his wife, Mary, sold Block 31 in Cook's Addition to Elisha Haines for $1,200. The increase in the lot's value represented improvements made by Smith.[13]

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10. Stratton, Herbert Hoover's Town, p. 12.

11. Ibid.; Edwin C. Bearss, Historical Base Map and Ground Study: Herbert Hoover National Historic Site (Washington, 1968), p. 4.

12. Cedar County Town Lot Book M, p. 235.

13. Ibid., p. 375.

Elisha and Sarah Haines retained possession of the property for six months. On December 12, 1885, they sold the block and improvements to Isaac Gruwell for $1,200.[14] Isaac Gruwell lived on the property until his death on January 12, 1889. Following his death, his children by his first marriage, Fred W. Gruwell and Etta Emrick, sold on March 22, 1890, to the widow, Mary, their interest in Block 31, Cook's Addition.[15]

By the fall of 1891, the Widow Gruwell had remarried. Her second husband was Samuel R. Wood. The Woods on November 18, 1891, sold to Aaron Eaton for $600 "the undivided one-half of Block 31 in Cook's Addition of the Town of Cameron, now part of the Town of West Branch, as shown by plat recorded in Book E, of Town Lot Records of Cedar County."[16] An examination of the subject plat shows that the lot conveyed by the Woods to Eaton is the one on which the Smith House is located.

Aaron Eaton lived on the property until his death in February 1911. Following his death, his sons and their wives--Henry C. and Sarah and James and Mary of Neosho County, Kansas

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14. Cedar County Town Lot Book N, p. 155.

15. Cedar County Deed Book 26, pp. 88, 109. Besides Block 31, Gruwell's real estate included: The northeast quarter of Section 28, Township 80 North, Range 4 West. Fred Gruwell received $800 for his interest, while Mrs. Emrick was paid $750 for her share.

16. Cedar County Town Lot Book Q, p. 56.

--sold to his daughter, Louise Branson, for one dollar their interest in

> Block 31, beginning 21 rods north of the southwest corner, then north five and 16 5/25 rods to northwest corner, then east 18 rods to northeast corner of block, then south five and 16 5/25 rods to northeast corner of a tract sold to Charles E. Smith by Aaron Eaton, and then west 18 rods to the beginning.[17]

Louise Branson on September 23, 1919, sold the property she had inherited from her father to Floyd O. Randall for $1,200.[18] Seven years later, on March 8, 1926, F. O. and Frances Randall sold to Joseph Randall for one dollar their interest in the lot and improvements purchased from Louise Branson.[19] Joe Randall in 1950 sold the property to Woodrow Millett. In 1957 Harley Anderson purchased the house and lot from the Milletts, and in 1966 the United States acquired the property from Anderson.[20]

C. Peter T. Smith Builds a House

A comparison of real estate values in West Branch demonstrates that there were no major improvements on Block 31, Cook's Addition, at the time it was purchased on March 31, 1873, by Hannah

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17. Cedar County Deed Book 39, p. 560.

18. Cedar County Mortgage Record Book 39, p. 456.

19. Cedar County Town Lot Book 8, p. 21.

20. Personal interviews, Harley Anderson and Laura Butler with Bearss, July 14 and 19, 1969. Laura Butler is the daughter of Joe Randall.

Smith from James and Mary Ann Cook for $275.[21] Some time between March 1873 and April 1875, several structures were erected on Block 31 by Peter T. Smith. On April 24, 1875, he insured three buildings and his personal possessions against damage by fire and wind with the Springdale Mutual Fire Insurance Company. His house was insured for $800, his stable for $100, his tenant house for $600, and his possessions for $300. The policy was to be in force for five years.[22]

Between 1873 and April 1875 there would have been two building seasons in Cedar County. As Peter Smith waited until April 1875 to insure his property, we may assume that he erected his house in the late summer or early autumn of 1874.

According to L. C. Rummells of the First State Bank of West Branch, his grandmother, Elizabeth Endslee, on moving to Cedar County in 1874 or 1875, spent her first night in town at the house at the southeast corner of Downey and Cedar.[23] As Mr. Rummells did not know about the information contained in Town Lot Book M and the files of the Springfield Mutual Fire Insurance

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21. Cedar County Town Lot Book M, p. 235.

22. Records, Springdale Mutual Fire Insurance Co., West Branch, Iowa.

23. Personal interview, Rummells with Bearss, July 14, 1969. Mr. Rummells referred to the house in question as the Aaron Eaton House. Aaron Eaton owned the house in Rummells' youth.

Company, his information reinforces the evidence that the Peter Smith house was built in the late summer or early autumn of 1874, the year Herbert Hoover was born.

D. Elisha Haines Buys and Remodels the Smith House

In the spring of 1885, Peter Smith and his family moved to Muscatine, Iowa. On June 10 Smith returned to West Branch and sold Block 31 in Cook's Addition to Elisha Haines for $1,200.[24] After securing the property, Haines began making improvements. According to the Local Record for June 25, 1885, he was "engaged in remodeling the whole structure and when completed this will be one of the most desirable residences in town."[25]

By August the house had been renovated and Haines sold the property to Isaac Gruwell. In reporting the sale, the Local Record observed:

> I. N. Gruwell has purchased the Elisha Haines residence in the southern part of town, formerly owned by P. T. Smith, consideration $1,200. Since he has almost

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24. Cedar County Town Lot Book M, p. 375; West Branch Local Record, June 11, 1885. Haines, like many residents of Springdale Township, had been born in Belmont County, Ohio. He had moved to Iowa in 1866. West Branch Times, April 2, 1891. P. T. Smith and his family returned to West Branch in January 1887, moving into a house on Main Street. In February 1887 daughter, Ella, left home to accept a position in St. Paul, Minnesota, as a short-hand reporter. Eighteen months later, in July 1888, the Smith family again removed to Muscatine. West Branch Local Record, Jan. 27 and Feb. 3, 1887, and July 26, 1888.

25. West Branch Local Record, June 25, 1885.

entirely rebuilt the house and done much other substantial repairing it now stands as one of the best residences in town.[26]

## E. The Gruwells and the House

### 1. Isaac Gruwell's Background

The new owner of the Peter Smith house was 46-year-old Isaac N. Gruwell. A native of Starke County, Ohio, he had been born on the "old Gruwell place, near the village of Marlboro." The oldest child of Aaron and Basheba Gruwell, he had moved with his parents, while still a child, to Logan County in western Ohio. Several years later, Gruwell emigrated to Cedar County, Iowa, settling near Honey Grove.

In 1863 he was united in marriage with Eliza Wren. She died, leaving Isaac a widower with two children, Fred and Etta. Isaac remarried in 1873, taking Mary Frisbie as his second wife. By August 1885, when they moved off his farm and into the house on South Downey, Mary Gruwell had given birth to five daughters--Leota, Esther, Cora, Jennie, and Alice.[27]

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26. Ibid., Aug. 27, 1885. The final papers for the purchase of Block 31 were not signed and filed with the Cedar County Clerk until December 12, 1885. Cedar County Town Lot Book N, p. 155.

27. West Branch Local Record, Jan. 17, 1889; Records of the Cedar County Probate Court, Isaac Gruwell, File No. 2082, County Clerk's Office, Tipton, Iowa.

2. Improvements Made by Gruwell

After moving his large family into the house, Gruwell proceeded to make several improvements on the grounds. In November 1885 he built an icehouse and in May 1886 a new fence was erected which set "off South Downey Street in good style."[28]

3. Isaac Gruwell Insures His Property

On December 19, 1885, Gruwell, learning that there was no fire insurance on the house, took out a policy with the Springdale Mutual Fire Insurance Company. This policy, which was to run until August 8, 1887, was to provide a coverage of $600 for the house and $500 for its contents.[29]

F. Isaac Gruwell's Twilight Years

Life for the Gruwells, during the period 1886 to 1889, was similar to that experienced by most middle class citizens living in a small midwestern town. Although they lived in West Branch, Isaac and his son, Fred, continued to farm their quarter section in Township 80, Range 4 West. Another daughter, Maude, was born to the family.[30] On May 18, 1887, there was a surprise birthday

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28. West Branch Local Record, Nov. 26, 1885, and May 13, 1886.

29. Records, Springdale Mutual Fire Insurance Co., West Branch, Iowa, Policy No. 1285.

30. Records of the Cedar County Probate Court, Isaac Gruwell, File No. 2082.

party at the house on South Downey for Mrs. Gruwell, attended by a number of her friends.[31] A successful farmer, Isaac Gruwell, like many Midwesterners of his age group and economic status, determined to visit the west coast. Accompanied by his father-in-law, D. F. Frisbie, he boarded a train for California in the second week of October 1887. After a short visit, they returned to West Branch on October 30.[32] On Isaac's fiftieth birthday, April 6, 1888, his wife honored him with a bountiful dinner in their home on the corner of Downey and Cedar to which she invited a number of his friends.[33]

G. The Death of Isaac Gruwell

Isaac Gruwell was destined not to see another birthday. On Saturday, January 12, 1889, he died in his house on Downey Street. The funeral was held on the fourteenth at the Honey Grove Church, "where a very large congregation of assembled friends and relations paid their last respects, and he was laid to rest in the cemetery at that place."[34]

Fred Gruwell, as administrator of his father's estate, announced on January 28 that all persons having claims against

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31. West Branch Local Record, May 25, 1887.

32. Ibid., Oct. 13 and Nov. 1887.

33. Ibid., April 12, 1888.

34. Ibid., Jan. 17, 1889.

the estate should file them with the clerk of the Cedar County District Court.[35] An inventory of the real estate showed that the deceased had owned, in addition to Block 31, 160 acres in Section 28, Township 80 North, Range 4 West, and two acres in Section 28, Township 80 North, Range 3 West.[36]

Following the death of her husband, Mary Gruwell continued to live in the house with her six daughters until the first week of August 1889. At that time she moved with her family to the farm in Gower Township.[37]

H. The Bransons and the House

Within the week, Joseph C. Branson and his family moved into the house vacated by Mary Gruwell.[38] Branson was a carpenter as well as City Recorder. He had been elected Recorder on Monday, March 5, 1888.[39]

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35. Ibid., Jan. 31, 1889.

36. Records of the Cedar County Probate Court, Isaac Gruwell, File No. 2082.

37. West Branch Times, Aug. 15, 1889. The Local Record was renamed the West Branch Times on April 11, 1889.

38. Ibid.

39. West Branch Local Record, March 8, 1888. Branson is remembered in West Branch for the maples he planted on South Downey for Elisha Haines. The last of these maples was cut down in 1953. Maud Stratton Scrapbooks, Scrapbook No. 8, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

Branson, who had suffered from diabetes insipidus for over a year, became seriously ill in late November. A pulmonary abscess complicated the situation, and he died at 5 p.m., Monday, December 9 at his residence. The deceased had been born in Belmont County, Ohio, on January 7, 1852, the son of L. M. and Mary Ann Branson, nee Lewis. He had moved to Cedar County with his parents in 1865, and he had married Louise L. Eaton, the daughter of Aaron and Lydia Eaton, on March 3, 1874. Besides his widow, he was survived by six children. The funeral was held at the home on Downey Street on December 12 with the Reverend W. S. Cratt conducting the service.[40]

In the first week of January 1890 I. T. Enlow was elected to fill the Recorder's Office left vacant by Branson's death. On the sixth the Town Council passed a resolution:

> Whereas it hath pleased our Creator to remove from our midst our late recorder J. C. Branson, who has so faithfully served the town of West Branch for near three years past, therefore, be it resolved that we the town council of West Branch assembled, express our satisfaction with and appreciation of his work done in such capacity, and that we extend our sympathy to his surviving family in the great loss they have thus sustained.[41]

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40. West Branch Times, Dec. 12 and 26, 1889.

41. Ibid., Jan. 9, 1890.

Joseph Cook was named administrator of the estate on February 27, 1890.[42] The widow and her children continued to live in the Peter Smith House, renting it from Mrs. Gruwell until 1891.

Meanwhile, the Widow Gruwell had remarried. On the evening of November 12, 1890, she was united in marriage with Samuel R. Wood.[43] Before the marriage on March 22, 1890, the widow had acquired the interest of Fred W. Gruwell and Etta Emrick in the estate of her late husband and their father.[44]

Sometime in 1891, Louise Branson and her children moved out of the Peter Smith House and into a dwelling on the corner of Poplar and Wetherell. Henry Gregg then rented the house on the southeast corner of Downey and Cedar from the Woods. Gregg lived in the house for several months before the property was rented to Aaron and Lydia Eaton. The Eatons, previous to moving into West Branch, had lived on their farm on the Downey Road, several miles south of West Branch. In September 1891 Eaton

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42. Ibid., March 13, 1890.

43. Ibid., Nov. 13, 1890. The marriage took place at the residence of the Reverend J. Y. Hoover.

44. Cedar County Deed Book 26, pp. 88, 109.

sold his farm to Henry Gregg.[45] Eaton on November 18 purchased the house and lot where he resided from Samuel and Mary Wood for $600.[46]

I. The Eatons and the House

The spring after he purchased the property, Eaton was reported to be "trigging up, ie his residence."[47] Aaron Eaton and his wife continued to live in the house on the corner of Downey and Cedar until their deaths in 1911. During these years there were annual visits to the homes of their married sons, Clinton and J. W., who resided at Chanute, Kansas. The Eatons, on occasions, were accompanied to Kansas by their daughter, Louise Branson, and her children.[48]

On January 10, 1911, death claimed Mrs. Eaton. She passed away in her home at 5 a.m., "after a lingering illness incident to old age." She was 87 years old, and had moved to Cedar County with her husband and family in 1866, and had resided in the area since then. With her at the time of her death, besides her husband, were one of her sons and her daughter Mrs. Branson. The

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45. West Branch Times, Sept. 10 and Dec. 3, 1891.

46. Cedar County Town Lot Book Q, p. 56; West Branch Times, Dec. 3, 1891.

47. West Branch Times, April 7, 1892.

48. Ibid., Nov. 1, 1894, and Sept. 26, 1895.

funeral services were held in the home at 2 p.m., January 12, with the Reverend E. A. Lang of the Methodist Church officiating. Following the services, the remains were laid to rest in the West Branch Cemetery.[49]

Aaron Eaton did not long survive his wife. During the first week of February he became seriously ill. Upon being notified by the family physician, Dr. Leach, that his father was not expected to recover, Clinton Eaton returned to West Branch from Chanute, Kansas, to assist his sister in caring for their father.

On February 9 death came. The funeral was held in the house on Saturday, the eleventh, at 2 p.m., with the services again being conducted by the Reverend Mr. Lang. Eaton's remains were laid to rest in the local cemetery next to the grave of his wife.[50]

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49. Ibid., Jan. 12 and 19, 1911. Lydia Elliott Eaton was the daughter of John and Rachael Elliott, and she had been born on July 21, 1823, near St. Clairsville, Ohio. Her parents had been pioneers, moving into Ohio from Maryland, at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Lydia Elliott had grown to womanhood on her parents' farm, where she was raised as a Friend. On June 3, 1845, she had married Aaron Eaton of St. Clairsville. The Eatons lived in that area until 1866, the year after the Civil War, when they removed to Iowa. Their first year in Iowa was spent on a farm near West Liberty, and then they moved onto the farm south of West Branch, where they lived until the fall of 1891, when they moved into the house on the corner of Downey and Cedar.

Of the six children born to Aaron and Lydia Eaton, three had died in infancy. The husband, one daughter, Louise Branson, and two sons, J. W. and H. Clinton, survived. Ibid., Jan. 19, 1911.

50. Ibid., Feb. 9 and 16, 1911. Aaron Eaton, the son of James and Hannah Eaton, had been born September 22, 1824, near St. Clairs-

J. The Randalls Move In

The house on the southeast corner of Downey and Cedar stood vacant for two months following the death of Aaron Eaton. Mrs. Branson's brothers, Henry Clinton and James W., promptly transferred to her for one dollar, each, their interest in the house and lot.[51] In the first week of April 1911, Mrs. Branson rented the property to John Randall. The Randall family had moved into the house by April 13.[52] The Randalls rented the house from Mrs. Branson until 1919, when Floyd Randall purchased the property for $1,200. One of the Randall daughters, Faunetta, vividly recalls carrying the rent to Mrs. Branson.

## III. RECOLLECTIONS OF THE HOUSE

### A. Mrs. Faunetta Oakley Describes the House

John Randall had two daughters, Faunetta and Loydelia, living with him in 1911, when his family moved into the house on the southeast corner of Downey and Cedar streets. On July 14, 1969, I visited with Faunetta, who is now Mrs. Faunetta Oakley. Mrs. Oakley currently resides at 319 North First Street, West

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ville, Belmont County, Ohio. He was one of nine children, seven sons and two daughters. Of this large family, Aaron was the youngest and also the last to die.

51. Cedar County Deed Book 39, p. 560.

52. West Branch Times, April 13, 1911.

Branch, Iowa. I found Mrs. Oakley a treasure trove of information regarding the house and lot. Besides possessing a vivid memory, she had in her possession a number of family photographs, showing various views of the house and lot, which she permitted me to have copied. These photographs accompany this report.

Faunetta Randall was a teenager at the time her family moved into the house. She recalled the following details regarding the property in the period 1911-1915:

1. Exterior of the House

   a. Roof

      The roof was shingled.

   b. Color of House

      The structure needed repainting.

   c. Shutters

      The shutters were painted dark green.

   d. Front Porch Columns

      There were three columns with different detail than those there today. She provided me with a photograph showing the detail of the columns, circa 1913.

   e. Bay Doorway in North Elevation

      In 1911 there was a bay doorway, with two windows on each side, on the north elevation of the house. This bay was opposite the bay in the south elevation.

f. Rear Porch

The rear porch was smaller and not glassed in. There were posts supporting the roof, and below the openings in the rear, north, and south elevations, there was wainscotting.

2. Yard

a. Walkway from Front Door to Gate

This walkway was a boardwalk.

b. Fence in Front of the House

The fence in front of the house was a picket fence. The pickets were two-inch square, with square posts. There were two of these square posts at the gate.

c. Shed and Privy

A building used as a shed and privy was located in the backyard behind the house. The privy was in the west end of the shed.

d. Pine Trees

There were five pine trees in the front yard.

3. Interior of the House--First Floor

a. False Fireplace and Partition

In 1911 there was a false partition and fireplace separating the parlor and living room. The false fireplace faced east and was located in the middle of the partition.

b. Rooms at East End of the House

There were two rooms in the east end of the house. Today there are three. The north room was the kitchen and the south room a bedroom. There was a trap door leading from the kitchen into the basement.

c. Pump

There was a pump on the back porch.

4. Upstairs

Mrs. Oakley is of the opinion that in the period 1911-1969 there have been no major structural changes in the upstairs fabric of the house.

5. Changes in the Structure's Fabric Recalled by Mrs. Oakley

a. Electric Lights

When the Randalls moved in, the house was lighted with kerosene lamps. Some time before 1919, possibly in 1916, she recalled, the house was wired for electricity and electric light fixtures were installed.

b. Bay Containing Door and Four Windows on North Elevation

After the death of her father, John Randall, and after she had married and left home, Joe Randall had the bay removed.

c. Center Chimney

The center chimney was removed and replaced with one attached to the house's south elevation.[53]

B. Mrs. Laura Butler Reports on the Structural Changes Made to the House

Laura Butler, a daughter of Joe Randall, lives in West Branch. On the morning of July 19, 1969, she discussed the house with me. She told me that her father had sold the house to the Milletts in 1950.[54] While her father owned the house he had made several alterations. Among those recalled by Mrs. Butler were: (a) the removal of the bay on the house's north elevation; (b) the removal of a false fireplace and chimney between the front and middle rooms; and (c) the construction of a brick chimney attached to the house's south elevation.[55]

Mrs. Butler recalled certain characteristics of the house and yard in the 1920s. She reported:

a. Roof

The roof was shingled.

b. Color of House

The structure was painted white.

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53. Personal interview, Mrs. Oakley with Bearss, July 14, 1969. John Randall operated a threshing machine.

54. Personal interview, Mrs. Butler with Bearss, July 19, 1969. Mrs. Butler told me that her father died on July 18, 1957.

55. Ibid.

c. Fence

The yard was enclosed on two sides by a white picket fence.

d. False Fireplace

Across the front of the center chimney there was a mantel, designed to resemble a fireplace.

e. Back Porch

The back porch was not glassed in as it is today.

f. Pump and Sink

On the back porch, to the right of the door on entering, there was a pump and sink.[56]

C. Mrs. Golda Gruwell Recalls the House and Yard

Mrs. Golda Gruwell's mother was Louise Branson, while her maternal grandparents were Aaron and Lydia Eaton. Mrs. Gruwell now resides at 1811 St. John Road, Apt. 41 E, Seal Beach, California 90740. On August 14, 1969, I telephoned Mrs. Gruwell, and we discussed her recollections of the house. Besides having a keen memory, Mrs. Gruwell was able to provide me with two photographs taken of the house in the first decade of the twentieth century, and a plan of the yard. Among the structural details recalled by Mrs. Gruwell were:

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56. Ibid.

1. Exterior of House

a. Color of House

She reported that the house at the turn of the century was painted a stone gray. The structure was trimmed with white.[57]

b. Front Porch Columns

There were three columns supporting the porch roof. These columns differed greatly from those fronting the house today.

c. Bay Doorway in North Elevation

This bay, facing Cedar Street, contained a door and four windows. In winter the north wind found its way around the bay door and windows, causing the living-room to be referred to as the "arctic circle." To heat the room, Grandfather Eaton had a base burner. Mrs. Gruwell recalled that the part of one's anatomy facing the heater roasted, while the part toward the north bay froze.[58]

d. Front Parlor Window

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57. Telephone conversation, Mrs. Henry Gruwell with Bearss, Aug. 14, 1969. Historical Architect Henry Judd has examined paint samples from the house, and he feels that the color referred to by Mrs. Gruwell as stone gray was a light green or greenish gray.

58. Ibid.

The front window of the parlor was floor length with shutters.[59]

2. Yard

a. Walk in Front of House in 1907

The sidewalk in front of the house was concrete. It was one of the first concrete walks to be built in West Branch. It proved unsatisfactory, as it cracked and buckled with the first frost. The concrete walk only extended as far as the post at the south end of Eaton's picket fence.[60]

b. Pine Trees

There were five pine trees in the front yard.

c. Crabapples

There were two crabapple trees south of the house.

d. Apple Tree

There was an apple tree east of the back porch.

e. Plum Trees

One plum tree was located between the back porch and the north fence and a second between the apple tree and the south fence.

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59. Letter, Mrs. Gruwell to Bearss, Aug. 21, 1969.

60. Ibid.

f. Cherry Tree

A cherry tree grew north of the house, between the plum tree and the walk leading to the bay door.

g. Garden

Aaron Eaton's garden was located in the southeast corner of the lot.

h. Flower Plots

Lydia Eaton had five flower plots. On either side of the front porch were plots in which petunias were planted. In the triangle formed by the west face of the north bay and the northwest corner of the house, pansies were grown. There was a marigold bed between the two pines north of the house. Along the north fence, east of the walk leading to the bay door, was a plot in which were raised tiger and day lilies.[61]

Mrs. Gruwell has prepared a sketch of the yard, on which she has indicated the location of the trees, garden, and flower beds. A copy of this drawing is found in this report.

D. Harley Anderson Recalls the House

Harley Anderson was the owner of the house and lot when it was acquired by the National Park Service in 1966. On the

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61. Ibid.

afternoon of July 14, 1969, I discussed the house with Anderson, a long-time resident of Cedar County. Anderson informed me that he purchased the property in 1957 from Woodrow Millett. The Milletts continued to live in the house for about a year after it was purchased by Anderson. Originally, Anderson planned to demolish the house and build a duplex on the lot and the one to the east which he had also acquired. Learning that a national historic park might be established to include his lots, Anderson changed his mind about building his duplex on Downey and Cedar.

Before selling the house and lot to the National Park Service, Anderson made several improvements.

1. Improvements Made by Harley Anderson

In 1960 Anderson had a new roof put on the house. New spouting was added at the same time. Five years later, in 1965, he had a new hot water heater installed for his tenants.[62]

2. Anderson's First Recollections of the House

Anderson was able to recall when Aaron Eaton lived in the house. He told me that the building was one of the

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62. Personal interview, Anderson with Bearss, July 14, 1969. Anderson never lived in the house, instead he used it as rental property.

oldest in West Branch. Behind the house, Eaton had a well with bucket and endless chain.[63]

E. L. C. Rummells' Recollections

On Monday, July 14, 1969, I visited with L. C. Rummells of the First State Bank of West Branch. Mr. Rummells was expecting me, and he had secured the addresses of persons who had lived in the Peter Smith House--Mrs. Oakley, Mrs. Gruwell, Mrs. Butler, and Mrs. Charles Randall. Mr. Rummells, who had lived in the second Hoover House at the northeast corner of Downey and Cedar, recalled certain changes in the exterior appearance of the Peter Smith House.

Changes Recalled by L. C. Rummells

a. Bay and Door on North Elevation

Facing Cedar Street there was in 1910 a bay with a doorway.

b. Cellar Doorway

A few feet east of the north bay there was an outside trap door giving access to the house's cellar.

c. Back Porch

The back porch had been changed. In 1910 there were no glass windows. Mr. Rummells believed that John Randall

63. Ibid.

had added the windows, thus converting the back porch into a back room.[64]

F. Mrs. Bertie Moore Recalls the House

Mrs. Bertie Moore, who is 87 years old, discussed the Peter Smith House with me on Thursday, July 17, 1969. Like L. C. Rummells and Harley Anderson, she referred to the building as the Aaron Eaton House. Mrs. Moore recalled that Aaron Eaton, after deciding to retire, moved from his farm south of West Branch, on the Downey Road, into the house on the southeast corner of Downey and Cedar. In the 1890s this house was one of the best houses in West Branch.[65]

Details Recalled by Mrs. Moore

a. Windows

The house had beautiful windows. Undoubtedly, Mrs. Moore was recalling the bay windows and the large front window in the parlor.

b. Pump

There was a pump in the back yard.

c. Fencing

While most of the West Branch home owners used three-

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64. Personal interview, Rummells with Bearss, July 14, 1969.

65. Personal interview, Mrs. Moore with Bearss, July 17, 1969.

or four-board fences on the portions of their lots facing the streets, Aaron Eaton had a white picket fence.[66]

## IV. CHANGES SHOWN BY HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs taken during the period 1907-1915 show how the exterior of the Peter Smith House appeared in those years. Available documents indicate that few, if any, changes in the building's exterior were made in the period 1885-1915. These photographs, copies of which are found in this report, document changes that have occurred in the exterior fabric of the house since 1915. These changes are:

### A. West Elevation

The three columns supporting the porch roof have been changed, as have the pilasters. Although it is not apparent in the 1907 photograph of the northwest corner of the house, Mrs. Gruwell recalls that there was a French door leading into the parlor. This door had shutters.

### B. North Elevation

The bay with its windows and door has been removed, as has the doorway leading to the cellar. The shutters have been removed from the windows on both the first and second floors.

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66. Ibid.

C. East Elevation

The back porch has been rebuilt. In a photograph taken prior to October 1909, the back porch was a box-shaped structure attached to the east elevation of the kitchen. There were windows cut into the north and south elevations of the porch, and a doorway and two windows cut into its east elevation.

After the Randalls moved into the house, and before 1920, the rear porch was rebuilt. The north and south porch elevations were extended and aligned with the north and south elevations of the house. The roof was raised and the angle of the slope changed. The porch was glassed in, with nine windows positioned in the east elevation and four each in the north and south elevations.

D. South Elevation

In the period 1909-1915, the two upstairs windows, the downstairs parlor window, and the downstairs bedroom window had shutters. There was no chimney attached to the south elevation, west of the bay. Although it cannot be documented by photographs, the chimney from the stove used to heat the parlor and living room must have been in the middle of the house.

E. Kitchen Chimney

In 1909 there was a chimney near the east elevation of the kitchen.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

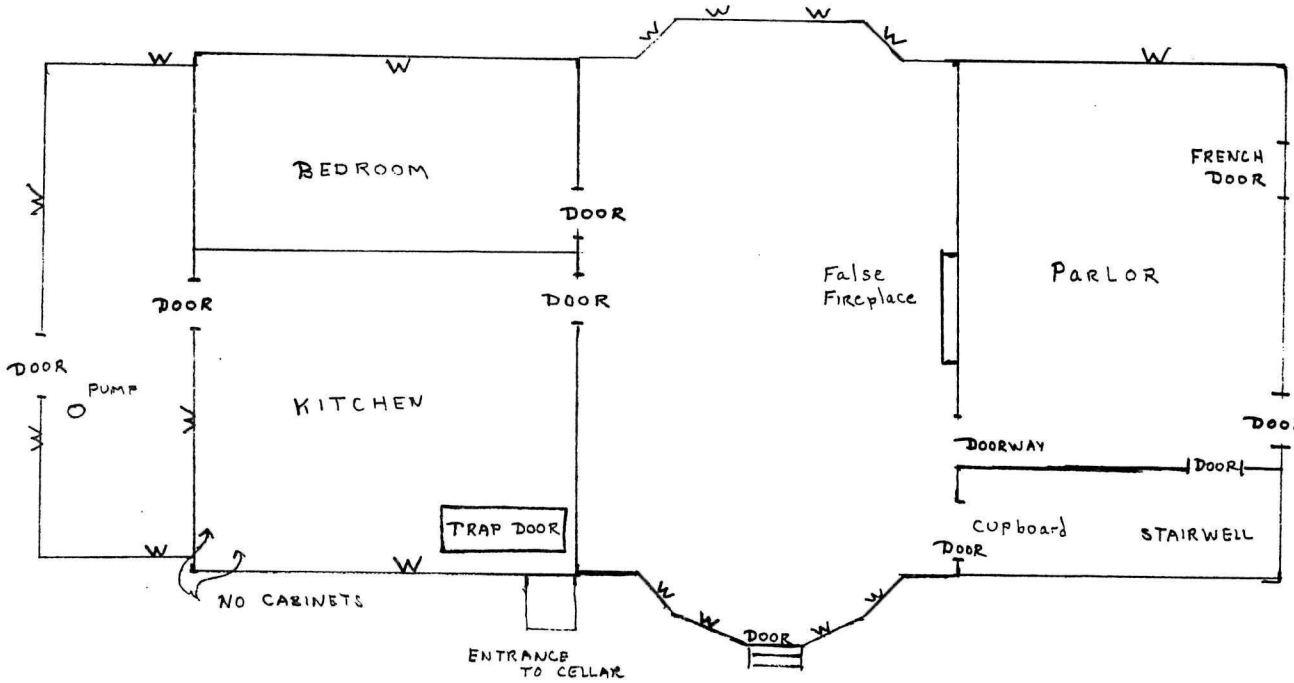
PLATE I

Floor Plan of the Peter Smith House, 1911-1915,
as recalled by Mrs. Faunetta Oakley.

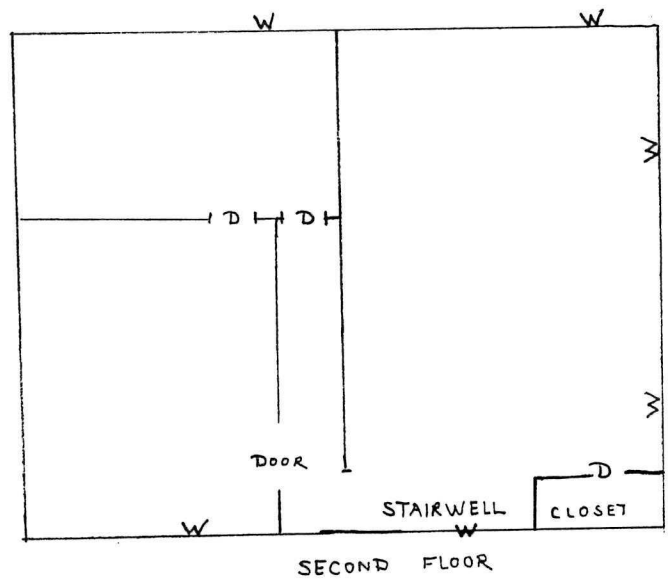
FLOOR PLAN OF SMITH HOUSE

1911 – 1915

as recalled by Mrs. Faunetta Oakley




FIRST FLOOR



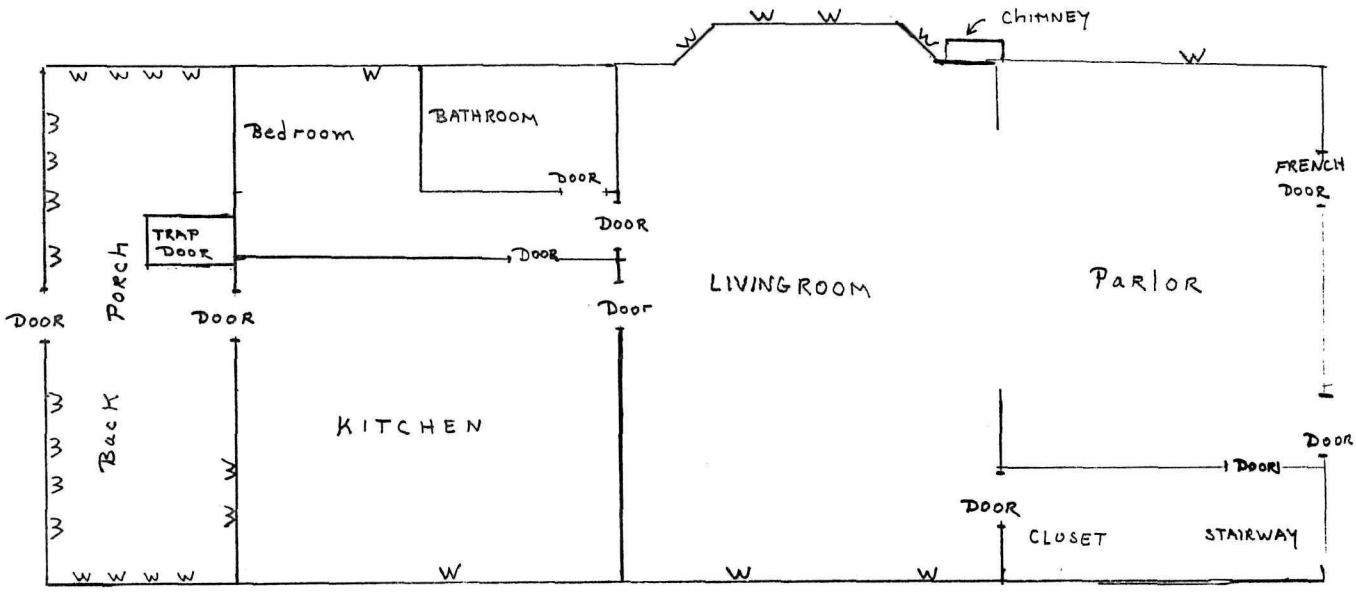

SECOND FLOOR

PLATE I

PLATE II

Floor Plan of the Peter Smith House, 1969.

# FLOOR PLAN OF SMITH HOUSE
1969

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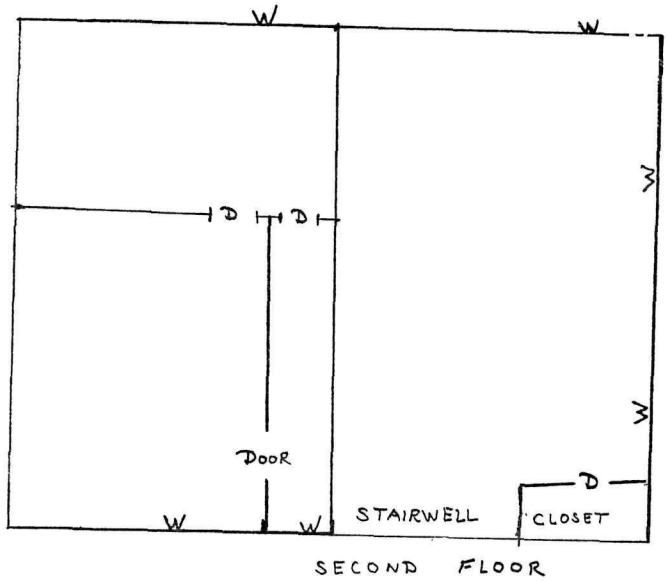


SECOND FLOOR

PLATE II

PLATE III

Landscaping Plan of Lot during the Aaron Eaton Years, 1891-1911, prepared by Mrs. Golda Gruwell.

The front windows of the parlor was floor length, and had shutters.
The house was painted stone colored, with a deeper shade for trimming with white accent.
9/13/9[illegible]

PLATE III

PLATE IV

View of West Branch from Cook's Hill, Looking Northwest, circa 1909, courtesy of Mrs. Golda Gruwell. In the left foreground can be seen the east elevation, kitchen, and back porch of the Peter Smith House. Aaron and Lydia Eaton owned and resided in the house at the time.

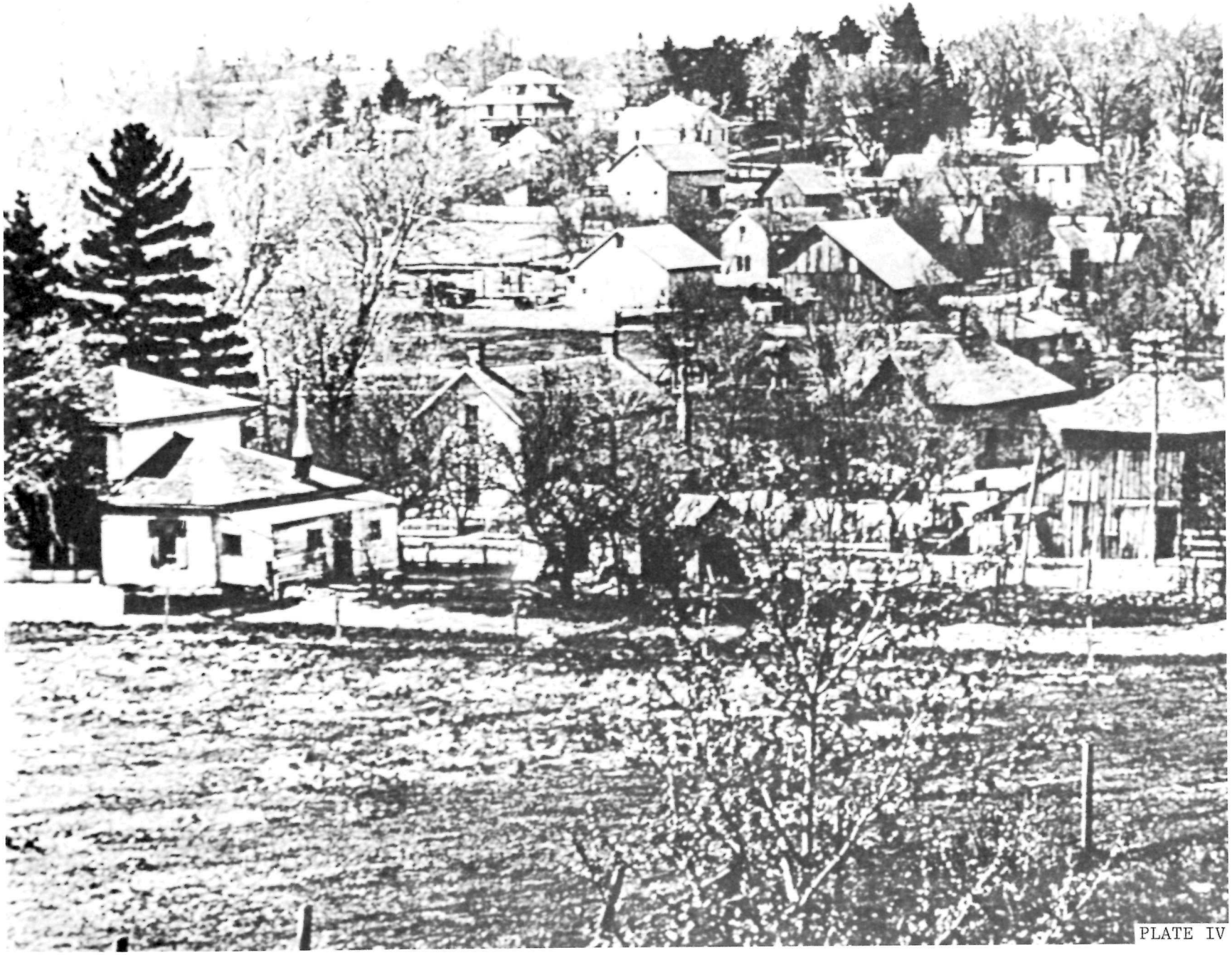

PLATE IV

PLATE V

View of North and West Elevations of the Peter Smith House, circa 1907, courtesy of Mrs. Golda Gruwell. This photograph was made while the house was the residence of Aaron and Lydia Eaton. Note: picket fence, pine trees, north bay, shutters, and back porch.

PLATE V

PLATE VI

Peter Smith House, South Elevation, circa 1915, courtesy of Mrs. Faunetta Oakley. Note: shutters, absence of chimney, and detail of porch columns.

PLATE VI

PLATE VII

Mrs. Faunetta Oakley on Front Porch of the Peter Smith House, circa 1915, courtesy of Mrs. Oakley. Note: details of column, pilaster, and door.

PLATE VII

PLATE VIII

View of North Elevation of the Peter Smith House, circa 1915, courtesy of Mrs. Faunetta Oakley. The young lady is Mrs. Oakley. Note: details of north bay, shutters, and entrance to the cellar.

PLATE VIII

PLATE IX

Detail of Steps Leading to North Bay Doorway, circa 1915, courtesy of Mrs. Faunetta Oakley.

PLATE IX

PLATE X

John Randall in Front of Combination Shed and Privy in Rear of the Peter Smith House, circa 1915, courtesy of Mrs. Faunetta Oakley.

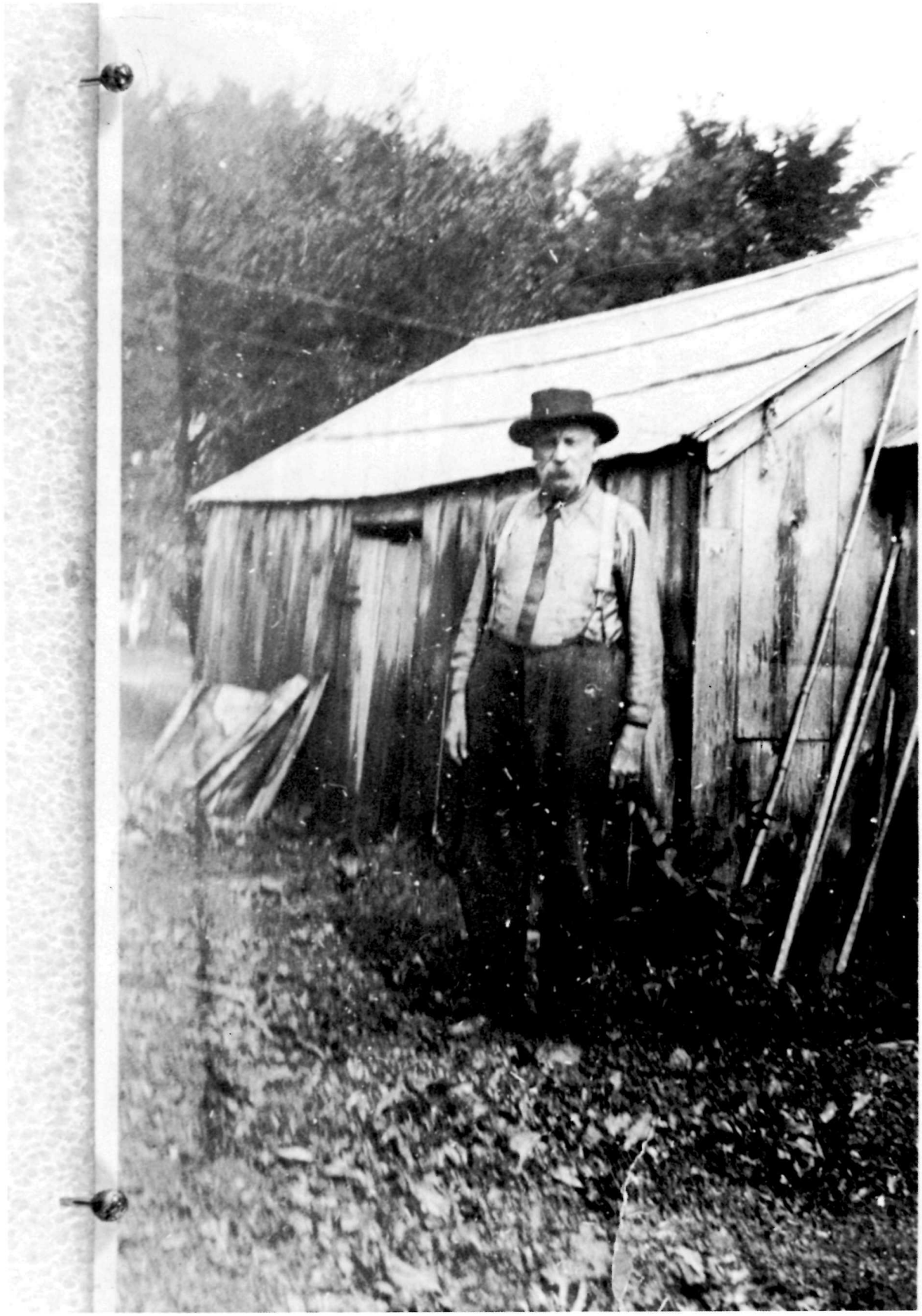

PLATE X

PLATE XI

View of East Elevation of the Peter Smith House, circa 1925, courtesy of Mrs. Faunetta Oakley. This photograph was made after the Randalls had rebuilt the back porch and had removed the north bay.

PLATE XI

PLATE XII

South Elevation of the Peter Smith House, July 1969. Note: chimney, the detail of porch column, and absence of shutters.

PLATE XII

PLATE XIII

North Elevation of the Peter Smith House, July 1969. Note: absence of bay, cellar entrance, and shutters.

PLATE XIII

PLATE XIV

View of Front Porch and West Elevation of the Peter Smith House, July 1969. Note: differences in detail of columns and pilasters from those depicted in historic photographs.

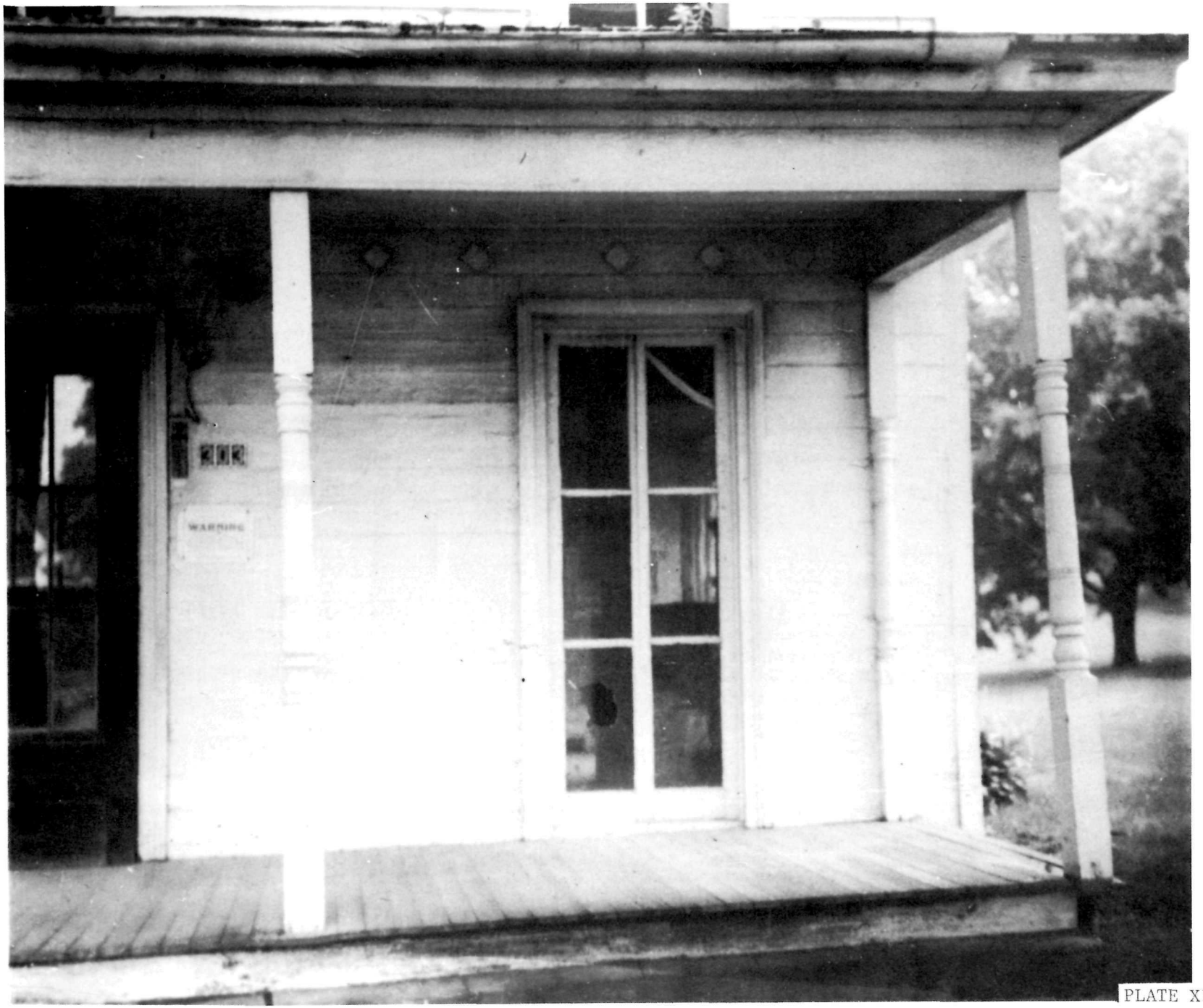

PLATE XIV

PLATE XV

The Second Hoover Home in West Branch, at the Northeast Corner of Downey and Cedar Streets, circa 1885, from Mitchell V. Charnley's, The Boys' [sic] Life of Herbert Hoover, New York, 1931.

THIS WAS HOME FOR HERBERT HOOVER IN WEST BRANCH

PLATE XVI

The Second Hoover Home in West Branch, at the Northeast Corner of Downey and Cedar Streets, circa 1910, courtesy of L. C. Rummells. (L. C. Rummells is the larger of the two boys). Mr. Rummells' parents had moved into the second Hoover House about 1904. The house was razed by John Kelch in 1923.

PLATE XVI

GPO 884-299