

# Herbert Hoover

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

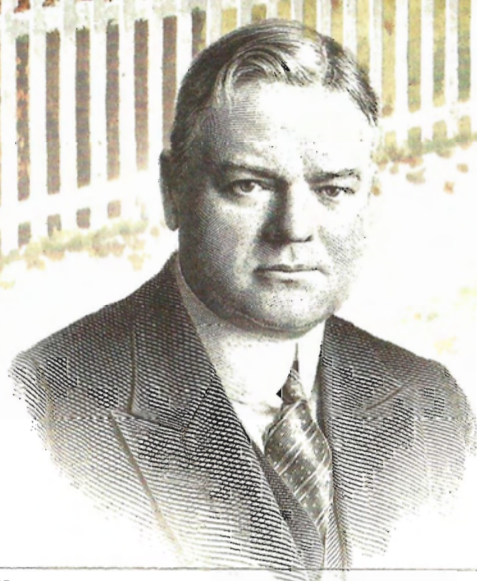


National Historic Site  
Iowa



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

*Herbert Hoover*



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 life of service to the nation and the world.

Herbert was the second of three children born to Jesse and Hulda Hoover. Jesse, a blacksmith, sold his blacksmith shop and opened a farm implement business in 1878. The Hoovers soon moved to a larger house on Downey Street, but they did not enjoy their new prosperity for long. Jesse died of a heart attack in December 1880. By taking in sewing and economizing, Hulda was able to save the money from Jesse's insurance policy for her children's education. A noted speaker in the Quaker community, Hulda was often called to nearby Meetings. On a trip in 1884 she caught a cold that developed into pneumonia and then typhoid fever, which caused her death. The children were sent to live with various relatives. Herbert went to his Aunt Millie and Uncle Allan Hoover on a farm near West Branch.

When he was 11, Herbert was sent to Newberg, Oregon, to live with Hulda's brother, Dr. Henry John Minthorn and his family. Herbert

attended the Friends Pacific Academy, where Dr. Minthorn was superintendent. In 1888 the family moved to Salem, and Herbert worked in the office of his uncle's Oregon Land Company. In 1891 Herbert entered the first class of Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif. He graduated in 1895 with a degree in geology and went to work in the California gold mines. In 1897 he joined a British firm and worked as a mining engineer in Australia.

On February 10, 1899, Hoover married Lou Henry, whom he had met at Stanford. They had much in common: roots in Iowa, love of the outdoors, a sense of adventure, and college degrees in geology. They left immediately for China, where Hoover continued his career. There, in 1900, the Hoovers survived the Boxer Rebellion, an uprising of Chinese nationalists.

Hoover became a partner in Bewick, Moreing and Co., in 1901. Known as the "doctor of sick mines," he circled the globe several times accompanied by his wife and two young sons. Hoover retired from the company in 1908 and established his own international firm of engineering consultants based in London. In 1912 the Hoovers' English translation of the 1500s Latin treatise on mining, *De Re Metallica*, was published; it remains a standard reference work to this day.



Hulda Hoover

Jesse Hoover



Mary, Herbert, and Theodore Hoover, 1881

BIRTHPLACE COTTAGE WATERCOLOR (ABOVE) / STAN HARRIS, USED BY PERMISSION OF BARBARA HARRIS. OTHER PHOTOS AND IMAGES / UPS ORIGINATING ARCHIVES.

## A Life of Public Service

*"The great human advances have not been brought about by distinctly mediocre men and women. They were brought about by distinctly uncommon people with vital sparks of leadership."*

—Herbert Hoover



Flour sacks carried needed food to Europe. Hundreds of beautifully embroidered sacks were returned to Hoover in gratitude.

Hoover exemplified the ideal of individualism and the self-made man. His expertise as a mining engineer made him a millionaire by age 40. Having been raised in the Quaker traditions of being humane and generous to others, Hoover embarked on a course of public service for the rest of his life.

**1914**  
Helps Americans stranded in Europe return home at the outbreak of World War I; Chairman of Commission for Relief in Belgium.



**1917**  
United States Food Administrator for President Wilson.

**1918–19**  
Director General of American Relief Administration; feeds 350 million people in 21 countries.

**1919**  
Founder of the Hoover Institution of War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University.

**1921–28**  
Secretary of Commerce for Presidents Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge.

**1929–1933**  
Elected 31st president of the United States; practices Good Neighbor Policy towards Latin America; signs London Naval Treaty; reforms federal courts; creates Federal Farm Board and Veterans Administration; regulates stocks and securities; convenes conference on child health; increases acreage of national forests; expands National Park System.

**1936–64**  
Chairman of the Boys Clubs of America.

**1946–47**  
Plays key role in founding children's welfare organizations CARE and UNICEF.

**1947–49**  
Chairman of the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, first Hoover



Commission, for President Harry S. Truman.

**1953–55**  
Chairman of the second Hoover Commission, for President Dwight Eisenhower.

**1955–64**  
Enjoys final years as a revered elder statesman; dies from massive hemorrhaging of the stomach, October 20, 1964.

## The Hoovers—A Special Partnership



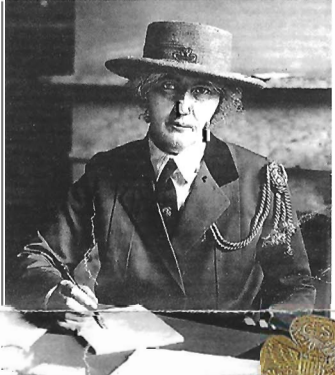
Herbert Hoover, 1921



Herbert Jr., Lou, and Allan, 1912



At Camp Rapidan, 1932



Lou Hoover, 1925

Hoover's humanitarian efforts during and after World War I and service as Secretary of Commerce made him a highly respected figure. He easily won the presidency in 1928, but the bright prospect of his administration was soon overshadowed by economic disaster. On October 29, 1929, the stock market collapsed, triggering a depression that forced Hoover's ideals into conflict. Individualism demanded that private institutions provide relief, but humanitarianism called for federal aid.

As a result Hoover did more than any previous president to relieve the widespread distress, paving the way for the anti-depression New Deal measures. He introduced banking reform legislation, created the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, developed an agricultural credit system, and convened an economic conference to promote trade and stabilize currencies. It was not enough.

Hoover's popularity evaporated, and he lost to Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1932 election. Hoover retired to his California home and devoted much time to the Hoover Institution. He maintained his interest in the welfare of young people and once again worked on food relief for European countries during and after World War II. His final acts of public service were to head two commissions to make the federal government more efficient.

Hoover's journey along what he called the "slippery road of public life" was not traveled alone. At his side was his wife, Lou. On March 28, 1874, Lou Henry was born in Waterloo, Iowa, to banker Charles Henry and his wife, Florence. The family moved to California 10 years later. Lou was skilled in athletics and possessed an analytical mind and an independent spirit. She was the first woman to graduate from Stanford with a geology degree.

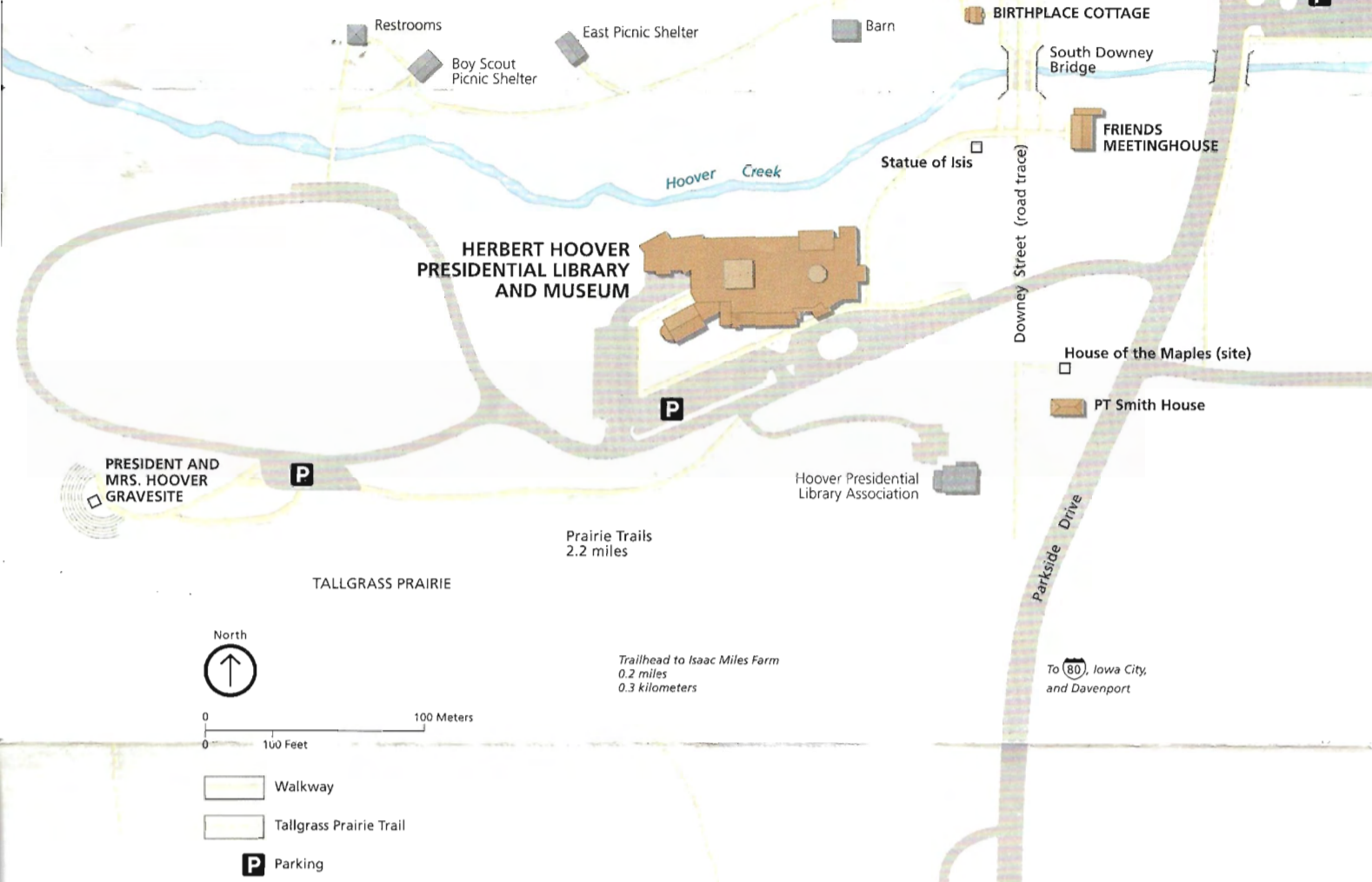
Her marriage to Herbert Hoover in 1899 began an adventure that took them around the world and to the White House. Their sons, Herbert Jr., born in 1903, and Allan, born in 1907, traveled with them.

Lou shared with her husband the belief in the equality of all people and the desire to help those in need, especially children. She was active in humanitarian causes from food relief to the Girl Scouts. She designed the Hoovers' home in California on the Stanford campus, as well as Camp Rapidan, the presidential retreat in what is now Shenandoah National Park. In the 1930s she directed the restoration of Herbert's birthplace cottage. After 1940 the Hoovers lived at the Waldorf Towers in New York City. Their special partnership of nearly 45 years ended when Lou died in January 1944 of a heart attack.

# Visiting West Branch

*"My grandparents and my parents came here in a covered wagon. In this community they toiled and worshipped God . . . The most formative years of my boyhood were spent here. My roots are in this soil."*

—Herbert Hoover



At the time of Hoover's birth, West Branch was a growing community of about 350 people. By 1880 over 500 people lived here. It was a town dependent on farming, and even those who did not farm, like Jesse Hoover, supported farming. The town had schools, churches, hotels, general stores, livery stables, dressmaking and shoe shops, and other businesses reflective of the economic prosperity of the era. Today the town's buildings and site help recall that historic setting. The birthplace cottage, blacksmith shop, Friends Meetinghouse, and schoolhouse, all open to the public, are typical of a mid-western farm community of that time.



Blacksmith shop

## Enjoying Your Walking Tour

Please be alert for posted safety messages. Boardwalks may be slippery when wet. Stay on established walks and trails. Do not climb trees and fences. Avoid creek banks, which are steep and unstable. Be watchful for poison ivy and ticks. Do not disturb animals or plants. Keep pets leashed at all times. Use designated crosswalks.

Herbert Hoover's long public career was preceded by an upbringing in this small town. Both periods of his life are represented on the walking tour through Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, which was authorized in 1965 to preserve historical properties associated with his life.

**Birthplace Cottage** Jesse Hoover and his father, Eli, built the 14-by-20-foot cottage in 1871. The Hoovers sold the cottage in 1878; it had several owners until it was purchased in 1935 by President and Mrs. Hoover and restored. To President Hoover the cottage was "physical proof of the unbounded opportunity of American life." A private organization operated the site as a memorial and public park until it became part of the national historic site.

**Blacksmith Shop** This shop, northwest of the birthplace cottage, is similar to the one Jesse Hoover operated from 1871 to 1878. Here young Herbert Hoover learned the work ethic that prevailed in this community.

**Schoolhouse** Quakers believed strongly in educating both boys and girls. This one-room frame school, built in 1853, was first used as a meetinghouse. The building originally stood two blocks from here at the corner of Downey and Main streets and was moved several times. It served as the primary school for the West Branch community when Hoover was a boy. The building was moved here in 1971.

**Hoover Creek** This small creek flows past the birthplace cottage and into the larger west branch of Wapsinonoc Creek. The Wapsinonoc was central to young Herbert Hoover's environment. There he swam, fished, and learned the pleasures of the outdoors, which stayed with him throughout his life.

**Friends Meetinghouse** Wooden benches and an iron stove provided simple furnishings for the meetinghouse, completed in 1857. The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, held services of silent meditation here. Anyone who had an insight or a spiritual message could stand and speak before the congregation. Young Herbert worshipped here with his family. His mother, a recorded minister, spoke often at Meeting, working for temperance and other causes. The building has been moved two blocks from its original site.

**Statue of Isis** The children and citizens of Belgium gave Herbert Hoover this bronze statue of Isis, the Egyptian goddess of life, in gratitude for his work on their behalf during and after World War I. Sculpted by Auguste Puttmans, the statue was on the Stanford University campus from 1921 until 1939 when the Hoovers moved it here to overlook the birthplace cottage.

**House of the Maples** Nothing remains of the house where the Hoover family lived from 1879 to 1884. Today a sign and maple tree mark the site. The P.T. Smith House, next door, is the only house that Hoover remembered when he visited West Branch years later. The Hoover children and their neighbors enjoyed sledding on nearby Cook's Hill in winter.

**Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum** Here you can find papers and collections relating to both President and Mrs. Hoover. It was built by the Herbert Hoover

Birthplace Foundation and dedicated by former Presidents Hoover and Truman in 1962.

**Gravesite** Herbert Hoover died October 20, 1964, and was laid to rest five days later in this hillside grave overlooking the cottage where he was born. Lou, his wife, is buried beside him. The simple stones of Vermont marble are in keeping with the Quaker ideal of simplicity.

**Tallgrass Prairie** The National Park Service restored the 81-acre tallgrass prairie in 1971 to represent the landscape that covered most of Iowa until the land was settled in the second half of the 1800s. This fertile land was plowed and farmed by the time Herbert Hoover was born. The Isaac Miles Farm at the top of Cook's Hill is a typical farm of the 1870s and 1880s when Hoover was a child. Isaac Miles was a relative of the Hoovers.



Hoover family Bible and a Quaker woman's bonnet (above).

## Planning Your Visit

**Visitor Center** Start here for information, exhibits, publications, a video, and bookstore. Park staff can answer questions and help you plan your visit. The park is open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

**Getting Here** The visitor center is at Parkside Drive and Main Street, one-half mile north of exit 254 on I-80 in West Branch, Iowa.

**Self-guiding Audio Tour** The map above can help you find your way around the park. Enjoy the tour at your own pace and in any order. An audio

guide is available. Borrow a listening wand from the visitor center (free) or use your cell phone by calling 888-244-4178. Ask for a map and menu of stops at the visitor center.

**Safety** Please be careful and don't allow your visit to be spoiled by an accident. The park takes great care to provide for your safety, but hazards that require your attention may still exist. For firearms and other regulations, check the park website.

**Accessibility** The visitor center, restrooms, and most historic structures are

wheelchair-accessible. The video is captioned. Service animals are welcome.

Herbert Hoover National Historic Site is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

**More Information** Herbert Hoover National Historic Site P.O. Box 607 West Branch, IA 52358 319-643-2541 [www.nps.gov/heho](http://www.nps.gov/heho)

**Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum** The National Archives and Records Administration runs the library and museum. It is open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. It has permanent galleries, temporary exhibits, a film, and museum store.

**More Information** Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum P.O. Box 488 West Branch, IA 52358 319-643-5301 [www.hoover.archives.gov](http://www.hoover.archives.gov)

