



PHOTO BY KEVIN BOATRIGHT

A Simple Little Building

by Kevin Boatright

THE ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD BOY who left town an orphan in 1885, shunted off to an uncertain future in Oregon, came home to West Branch, Iowa, on August 21, 1928, a national hero. "Bert" Hoover was the Republican nominee for president of the United States.

This homecoming, steeped in the glitter and schmaltz of a political campaign, proved to be much more than a whistle stop for Herbert Hoover. It was the beginning of a lifelong relationship with West Branch that would renew his love for Iowa and would, in 1964, bring him back forever to the land where he was born.

While Hoover's one-day visit was an occasion for nostalgia on his part, it was motivated by politics. Midwestern support for Hoover and the Republicans was uncertain, a reflection of the candidate's opposition to the McNary-Haugen Bill and similar solutions to the 1920s

farm crisis. At the convention in Kansas City, for example, Hoover received the votes of only seven of Iowa's twenty-nine delegates. The speech he was to give in West Branch, before an enthusiastic crowd of fifteen thousand, was devoted to farm policy, and was one of only six major addresses he would make during the campaign.

The wealthy, Stanford-educated Hoover was also eager to remind voters of his humble midwestern origins. He was the son of a West Branch blacksmith and a Canadian-born Quaker minister, but before serving as secretary of commerce under Harding and Coolidge, Hoover had been a prominent international mining engineer. During and after World War I, his leadership of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the U.S. Food Administration, and the American Relief Administration had earned him the praise of

Left: The east facade and public entrance of the Hoover Presidential Library-Museum in West Branch.

such diverse figures as John Maynard Keynes and Franklin Roosevelt. Although he was comfortable in the company of kings and presidents, Hoover wanted the American public to think of and accept him as one of their own.

There was no better place to do this than West Branch. On "Hoover Day," the candidate ate breakfast in the cottage where he was born (which had since been turned ninety degrees and attached to the back of a larger house). He posed for photographers while holding ears of Iowa corn, and reminisced in his speech about a boyhood spent "in the swimming hole, fishing in creeks [and] hunting for prairie chickens and rabbits in the hedges and woods. It is the entry to life which I could wish for every American boy and girl."

While the occasion was political, the sentiments were genuine. Hoover retained a fondness for West Branch and for Iowa throughout his life, even though his homecomings were few. Lou Henry Hoover, herself an Iowa native, knew this about her husband. For his fifty-fourth birthday in 1928, she looked into the possibility of purchasing the house where he was born. The owner, Jennie Scellars, wanted to consult her children, but since she could not do so until after Hoover's birthday, nothing came of the inquiry.

THE WARM RECEPTION given Hoover in West Branch was reflected at the polls in November. In the largest local turnout up to that time, Hoover received 528 votes in West Branch, to just 46 for Democrat Al Smith. Hoover was elected president in a landslide.

Local supporters quickly formed a Hoover Birthplace Committee, an outgrowth of the partisan Cedar County Hoover Farm Club that had been formed that April. The Birthplace Committee organized an excursion train, the "Hoover Birthplace Special," to transport a contingent of Iowans to the March 4, 1929,

inaugural in Washington. It purchased buttons and banners for the occasion and sought funding to send the Coe College ROTC Band to Washington. Committee president T. A. Moore, speaking to a WOC radio audience about the trip, reflected West Branch's pride in its native son when he said: "We of West Branch . . . have no fears that the blast of the furnace, the roar of industrial machinery, the whir of the spindle or the pandemonium of the Stock Exchange, will ever drive from [Hoover's] life's dearest memories the lowing of the cattle on the prairie, the squeal of the mortgage lifter, or the Thump, Thump, Thump of the corn against the barn board."

Throughout Hoover's four years as president, West Branch followed the ups and downs of his administration with special interest. Although Iowa and the nation voted for Roosevelt in 1932, West Branch remained loyal to Hoover by a margin of 450 to 156.

During Hoover's presidency, interest in his birthplace naturally increased. Jennie Scellars opened her home to visitors, who signed her guest register in ever-growing numbers. By the summer of 1931, more than 34,000 people had been escorted through the cottage wing, representing every state and several foreign countries. Two marriages were even performed there in 1929, and a replica, built for the Iowa State Fair by the Des Moines Better Homes Committee, proved to be one of the most popular attractions of the 1930 fair.

Scellars, who lived in the house with her son Earl, charged ten cents admission to visitors. This steady income was one reason why she resisted renewed overtures in 1930 to sell the building to the Hoover family.

That inquiry was made discreetly and indirectly. Working through *Des Moines Register* cartoonist J. N. "Ding" Darling and a West Branch friend of Hoover's, Fred Albin, the president's secretary, Lawrence Richey, tried to ascertain whether Scellars was more willing to sell the property than she had been in 1928. In a letter to Richey on the condition of the

By the summer of 1931, more than 34,000 people had been escorted through the cottage wing.

house, Darling reported that it "is kept in apple-pie order; the yard is well sodded, and flowers around the house make it very attractive to the eye." A purchase price of \$2,500 was discussed but after consulting with her children, Scellars again declined to sell the house.

Those who wanted to purchase the house seem to have been motivated by fears that it would be exploited commercially. The 1930 inquiry quieted that concern. Darling reported that "there are no refreshment stands either on the premises or near it, and Mrs. Scellars, herself, conducts the job of showing the visiting tourists through the house with fine dignity and sympathetic affection."

Others were also interested in acquiring the building. Edgar Harlan, curator of the State Historical Building in Des Moines, looked into obtaining the property by purchase or through condemnation. The state lacked the funds to buy the house, and condemnation would have been an embarrassment to the president. Satis-

fied that the house was in good hands, neither the state nor the Hoovers took any further action while Hoover was in office.

ON OCTOBER 22, 1933, the former president rekindled the question with a note to Fred Albin: "I am sorry that Mrs. Scellars is not in humor to sell her house. Mrs. Hoover would have liked to have had it. The day may come, however, when [Scellars] will be anxious to have a patron, in which case, you are authorized to go ahead."

Scellar's death, in June 1934, brought matters to a head. The heirs contacted the Hoovers in California, offering to sell the house in West Branch. Hoover responded to Albin on February 27, 1935, that "they wanted a good deal too much and I don't want to be known in this transaction. Mrs. Hoover wants you to buy the house. Would you open negotiations in your



The smaller house in which Hoover had been born had been pivoted and added onto a two-story house. This rear view was taken August 21, 1928, when Hoover campaigned in West Branch.

Restoration "isn't my idea," said Hoover. But it "would please Mrs. Hoover."

own name and get a week's option at the lowest price possible?"

That price proved to be \$4,500 for the house and its twelve lots of land. The purchase took place on July 29, 1935, in Albin's name. On October 1, he transferred the title to Allan Hoover, the president's younger son, who had been handling arrangements for his parents.

With the house finally acquired, the problem remained of what to do with it. A memo of October 7, 1935, believed to have been drafted by Lou Henry Hoover, spelled out two possible alternatives:

Project 1. To restore the house and lots to about 1880 condition with [the statue of] Isis as a feature.

Project 2. To remove the house entirely and create a small park or children's playground.

The statue of Isis, given to Hoover by the children of Belgium in gratitude for his World War I relief work, was in temporary storage in California. The author of the memo described the house as "probably not in condition to last much longer." It needed a new roof and foundation and would have "to be rebuilt to a considerable extent, to turn it into a passable monument."

If the house was to be restored, as the memo suggested, it would have to be maintained and kept open for visitors. If the house was torn down, and a small park given to West Branch, the community might possibly "use the site for a town hall or a fire house in a few generations." Regardless of which option was chosen, the author of the memo noted that a historical association "is probably the best custodian."

The question of the house's fate had been settled by June 11, 1937, when Hoover visited the site accompanied by an attorney, Harrison Spangler, and an architect, Bruce McKay, both of Cedar Rapids. Hoover acknowledged that the house was to be restored, based on his recollections and any other available evidence.

Restoration "isn't my idea," said Hoover,

since "the old place looks all right to me just the way it is." But, he added, it "would please Mrs. Hoover."

To accomplish this, the Scellars house would be torn down except for the cottage wing, which would be turned ninety degrees and moved back to its original location on a new foundation. Once the work was completed, according to the *West Branch Times*, the Hoovers hoped to turn the site over to "the Iowa Historical Society or a similar organization for preservation."

Architect McKay recommended that the "Birthplace Cottage," as it came to be called, be enclosed within a larger protective structure. Lou Henry Hoover rejected this idea. Instead, she suggested that a caretaker's house be built to the west and attached by a covered walkway. This would provide security for the cottage against vandalism without compromising its rustic appearance.

Meanwhile, Lou Henry Hoover sought recollections from family members concerning the original appearance of the house. This information guided McKay in the restoration work that began in June 1938.

Funding for the project came directly from the Hoovers, who were kept informed of progress by McKay and Fred Albin. "We are getting along fine with the work on the cottage," wrote McKay in August. "Mr. Albin is sending you some pictures and from them you will get a good idea as to how it's going to look. The hand-split shakes on the roof, with the board and batten sides, really do look just right for such a place."

As the restoration proceeded, attention again turned to management of the finished site. Lou Henry Hoover asked Harrison Spangler to look into the legality of forming an organization to be responsible for the cottage and grounds. "We should like very much to have an association set up," she wrote. "I am wondering if it would be possible to have trustees and members of the association, the members to be anyone who wanted to join, and the trustees to be comprised of some representatives of the

“We should like to have an association set up,” Lou Henry Hoover wrote. “I am wondering if it would be possible to have trustees and members.”

members. . . . If this could be worked out, Allan and I will transfer to the Association the property when its reconstruction is complete.”

Spangler responded by drawing up articles of incorporation for an organization whose object “shall be to acquire, take care of and preserve the cottage, and its surrounding grounds.” At a March 22, 1939, meeting at the cottage, thirty local citizens discussed and signed the articles of incorporation of the Herbert Hoover Birthplace Society. Fred Albin was elected president, with William Anderson as vice-president and Frank Pearson as secretary-treasurer.

THE NEW SOCIETY set to work preparing a budget that would cover insurance, upkeep of the house, lawn mowing, a pedestal for the statue of Isis, furnishings, and the caretaker’s \$60-a-month salary. The Hoovers transferred the deed to the “Birthplace Cottage” to the Birthplace Society on December 1, 1939. Allan Hoover, acting for the family, made it clear that the society would be in charge of the site, with funding whenever needed from the Hoovers. All he asked for was an annual budget, which should be as simple as possible. He wrote to Albin that “I do not believe the Society should develop the house and yard into a ‘show place,’ but should maintain it in appearance and to keep it running as one would logically have expected it to look at the time of my Grandfather — in good repair and with neatness, to be in general keeping with the surroundings of West Branch.”

The society had instructions to ask Allan Hoover for any money it needed, but it was reluctant to do so, often waiting until a check had bounced before requesting funds. Early on, the society hoped to relieve the Hoovers of the burden of supporting the West Branch group, and the Hoovers did not object. Should an admission fee be reinstated, asked Allan?

Could “outsiders” contribute money to the society, asked Pearson? Could the society accept tax-deductible gifts of cash and real estate? All of these questions in their correspondence pointed to a mutual desire for the society to be self-supporting.

Herbert Hoover himself made the first substantial gifts to the society: two farms, one in Missouri and the other near LeGrand, Iowa. The farms, eighty acres each, were eventually sold for \$25,000.

Other interested persons were also free to make contributions. The family’s willingness to let others help support the site did not mean the Hoovers wanted out. “Our own interest is in no way diminished,” wrote Allan in a letter to Frank Pearson. Reflecting the growing awareness of the site beyond West Branch, he added: “I am quite surprised that the restoration has attracted so much attention. Now that the work has been practically completed, I think that the acceptance of a voluntary offer, without solicitation, would ensure a permanent and wider interest, outside of that of our small group and the town of West Branch.”

The Iowa legislature also began, in 1941, the first of a series of appropriations in support of the site. This appropriation, coupled with other funding sources, effectively relieved the Hoovers of responsibility for the day-to-day expenses of the society.

The rather limited scope of the society in its early years changed drastically in 1945. In January, Hoover’s elder son, Herbert Jr., outlined to Spangler an ambitious proposal: “Some friends of my father’s, with whom I would join, wish to secure forty to fifty acres adjoining the little house in West Branch; they would like to improve it into a park and present it to the West Branch people.” Up to \$20,000 could be spent to buy the land, with another \$20,000 to develop the park.

This project was undertaken in some secrecy to avoid driving up land prices, and was not

completed until March 1946. Included in the transactions were two houses, five lots, three half-acre tracts, a fifteen-acre farm, and a storage building.

AS THE SIZE of the site began to grow, so did the society's thinking regarding future possibilities. One of these took shape in 1948, when William Anderson, the society's new president, invited Herbert Hoover to celebrate his seventy-fourth birthday in West Branch. After considering the invitation for nearly two months, Hoover accepted. His appearance on August 10 was reminiscent of the reception he received in 1928. An audience of more than twenty thousand was present to hear the former president, who had returned to public prominence after 1945 as coordinator of President Truman's Famine Emergency Committee and as chairman of the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, the first "Hoover Commission."

In his remarks, Hoover reminisced about his West Branch childhood and about his life. "Within the soul of America is freedom of mind and spirit in man," said Hoover. "Here alone are the open windows through which pours the sunlight of the human spirit. Here alone is human dignity not a dream, but an accomplishment."

The response to Hoover's first visit to West Branch in eleven years energized the Birthplace Society under its new leader, Anderson. The 1948 celebration brought the society national recognition for the first time. It also gave its leaders an opportunity to discuss with Hoover their ideas for the expanded park, including a small museum, extensive landscaping, and other improvements.

Subsequently, the society constructed a driveway through the park, with a stone gate at its entrance. Two picnic shelters were erected near the Birthplace Cottage, and on June 30, 1952, the entire area was dedicated as "Herbert Hoover Park."

The success of the 1948 birthday party, and the park development that followed, led the society to consider another invitation: Would Hoover return to West Branch for his eightieth birthday, on August 10, 1954? The Iowa legislature endorsed the idea in March 1953, when both houses unanimously passed a resolution to that effect. Hoover accepted, setting in motion six months of frantic preparation.

This time, the celebration lasted two days instead of only a few hours. The National Guard provided an honor escort, and Hoover's speech was televised. As he looked out over his hometown, a crowd of fifteen thousand well-wishers, and a national audience, Hoover closed his remarks by saying: "Eighty years is a long time for a man to live. As the shadows lengthen over my years, my confidence, my hopes, and dreams for my countrymen are undimmed. This confidence is that with advancing knowledge, toil will grow less exacting; that fear, hatred, pain, and tears may subside; that the regenerating sun of creative ability and religious devotion will refresh each morning the strength and progress of my country."

Clearly, the two birthday celebrations had done much to cement Hoover's feelings toward his birthplace. Writing to Anderson on August 12, in one of his few handwritten letters, Hoover said that "the affection which the people of West Branch and the people of Iowa showed to me is more than a precious memory."

IN RESPONSE TO Hoover's speech, the number of requests for information about the Birthplace Society grew. Spurred by this interest in what was still a largely local club, a group of trustees met twice to review the birthday celebration and to plan for the future. These meetings led to a decision to expand the scope of the society.

What they envisioned was a state or national organization that could promote and pay for the development of the West Branch site. With the approval of the Hoover family, a new organiza-

"I am quite surprised that the restoration has attracted so much attention," remarked Allan Hoover.

“It looks like we’re off to a good start,” wrote one trustee. “With the time and work you have put into it, it just can’t miss.”

tion, the Herbert Hoover Birthplace Foundation, was created on December 1, 1954. Its primary objective was to “aid in the preservation of the birthplace of Herbert Hoover at West Branch, Iowa, and the advancement of the principles for which he has stood.”

Admiral Lewis Strauss, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and a longtime friend of Hoover’s, became the first chairman of this foundation, which coexisted with the Birthplace Society. The three vice-chairmen were Allan Hoover, Herbert Hoover, Jr., and William Anderson. They were joined by more than fifty other trustees selected from across the country, many of them prominent figures in government or business.

“It looks like we’re off to a good start,” wrote Anderson to John Henry, a trustee and director of public affairs for the *Des Moines Register*. “With the time and work you have put into it, it just can’t miss.”

Under the new arrangement, the society managed and maintained the park in West Branch, while the foundation generated outside funds to develop the site. It took time for the foundation to find its proper role. An early suggestion that it fund scholarships raised the possibility that such a drive might compete with Hoover’s efforts to raise money for the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

Arguing against scholarships, John Henry wrote that the foundation ought not to try “to get more students into the State University of Iowa. (Our problem is how to handle the ones already there.)” Even though Henry had originally proposed the scholarship idea, he suggested a resolution “to the effect that we are *not* in the scholarship business. . . . Maintaining the Birthplace park on through the future certainly can be a job enough for one foundation.”

The society’s next project was one that Herbert Hoover originally opposed: reconstruction of his father’s blacksmith shop. No one knew what the actual building looked like, and some thought it might detract from the Birth-

place Cottage. Eventually the Hoovers changed their minds. The blacksmith shop was completed in May 1957, but was located west of its original site in deference to the Birthplace Cottage. Trustee Fred Maytag presided over the June dedication ceremony, using an anvil for his lectern and a hammer for his gavel. That ceremony, marking the completion of a ten-year spurt of activity in West Branch, was in fact only a prelude to the even more ambitious work that followed: the creation of a Hoover museum.

A letter from Neil MacNeil, a friend of Hoover’s, to William Anderson in May of 1958 launched the project. In it, MacNeil quoted Hoover as saying: “I will give you [MacNeil] an idea to pass on to the boys in West Branch if you wish to do so. It is a simple little building in some part of the park remote from the cottage itself in which we can display a lot of so-called Hoover memorabilia.”

Less than a week later, Hoover wrote Anderson directly to propose a museum, adding that “such a collection would come under the provisions of the law providing for support from the Federal Government, such as is now being done for the Truman and Roosevelt collections.”

Hoover had attended the 1957 dedication of the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. This event no doubt stirred Hoover to think about a similar museum of his own, to complement his archives at the Hoover Institution. The final spur to action, however, may have been two films, “Birthday Goddess” and “This is Worth Remembering,” that were sponsored by the Birthplace Foundation and shown to Hoover in March 1958.

“Birthday Goddess” documented the development of the park in West Branch. “This is Worth Remembering” was a film about the eightieth birthday party. MacNeil wrote to Anderson that “Mr. Hoover was deeply touched” when he viewed the films. “When I say he was touched,” he wrote, “I mean exactly



Foundation president William B. Anderson breaks ground for the library-museum on May 4, 1959. The birthplace cottage is the small white building in the distance. Behind Anderson (from left): William Smith, construction firm superintendent; L. D. Vickers, administrative assistant to Fred Maytag; Fred Maytag, trustee; William Weber, of Weber Stone in Stone City; John M. Henry, trustee; Paul M. Jensen, vice-president of Viggo M. Jensen construction company; Floyd Fawcett, R. B. Figge, Ralph Evans, L. C. Rummells, and John Thompson, all trustees; and Rev. L. E. Bauman, who gave the invocation.

that — in fact, he was moved to tears and had to wipe his eyes with a handkerchief. I don't, of course, want this advertised."

Anderson and a small group of trustees considered Hoover's museum proposal in confidence and announced their willingness to undertake the project. They arranged for temporary storage of the memorabilia in Cedar Rapids, and the first shipments began to arrive.

To prepare for the enormous undertaking, the Birthplace Society and the Birthplace Foundation finally merged in November 1958. One of the first acts of the united organization was the formation of a land acquisition committee. To build the museum and to ensure its

protection from commercial exploitation, the park needed to expand to the south, toward the future route of Interstate 80. Between the park and the highway stood the John and Pauline Kofron farm, and negotiations began toward purchase of this property.

Confident that the adjacent land would be acquired soon, the foundation broke ground for the museum building on May 4, 1959. The New York firm of Eggers and Higgins was chosen as architect, with local oversight by William Wagner of Des Moines and construction by the Coralville firm of Viggo M. Jensen Company.

The groundbreaking took place under a

"I will give you an idea to pass on," Hoover said. "It is a simple little building in which we can display a lot of so-called Hoover memorabilia."

cloud of uncertainty, caused by speculation that Hoover was considering moving his papers to West Branch, as well as his memorabilia. It had been assumed that the Hoover Institution would be the repository for Hoover's personal and official documents, but his dissatisfaction with the leadership and direction of the institution during the mid-1950s had led to strained relations with his alma mater. The appointment of W. Glenn Campbell as director of the institution in 1959 brought a reconciliation, but the question of the papers remained unresolved.

Uncertainty concerning the ultimate size and function of the building, coupled with difficulty finding solid footings in the soft soil next to Wapsinonoc Creek, held construction in limbo during 1959 and 1960. Convinced that more space would be needed for memorabilia than the original 5,000 square feet would accommodate, the foundation decided to expand the museum by 2,050 square feet while construction was underway.

THE EXTENT OF THE MUSEUM was not determined until June 1960, when Franklin Floete, director of the General Services Administration, notified the Birthplace Foundation that the National Archives (then a part of General Services) was ready to operate the facility whenever it was completed. Hoover had finally agreed to this arrangement. At a foundation meeting in Des Moines on December 13, Chairman Strauss was authorized to offer all of the foundation's West Branch facilities to the federal government "for the purpose of creating, maintaining, and operating a Presidential archival depository."

Two days later, Hoover wrote Floete to confirm the foundation's action and to offer "all of my collected presidential papers, wherever they may now be housed, as well as papers accumulated by me prior to my presidency and those accumulated since leaving the White House." Access to these papers, which were still Hoover's personal property, would be subject to certain conditions. Excluded from the gift would be "the 'war and peace' documents gathered since World War I" which had

already been given to the Hoover Institution.

Thus, Hoover resolved the Stanford/West Branch dilemma. About half of his personal and public papers would be deposited in Iowa in the care of the National Archives. The Hoover Institution would retain those Hoover papers related to the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the United States Food Administration, and the American Relief Administration, all of which related closely to the institution's core mission as a center for the scholarly study of war, revolution, and peace.

With the ultimate purpose now clarified, the foundation turned its full attention to completing the expanded building and purchasing the Kofron farm. The State of Iowa had already purchased 27.1 acres of the farm for interstate right-of-way for only \$27,200, but the Kofrons wanted between \$1,500 and \$2,000 an acre for the remaining 108 acres, plus \$20,000 for their house. The Birthplace Foundation was willing to pay \$60,000 for the 87.5 acres west of Downey Street between the park and the interstate. An agreement was never reached. The 87.5 acres were eventually sold in 1962 to Greater Iowa Development Corporation for \$106,000.

The object of purchasing this land had always been, in Allan Hoover's words, "to prevent a Knott's Berry Farm or Disneyland being hatched next door." This did not happen. Greater Iowa Development ultimately resold the tract to the federal government in 1969 for \$250,000. This tract was later reconstructed as a prairie preserve, reminiscent of Iowa in the 1870s.

As construction of the "Library-Museum" progressed, Hoover decided that one building should hold everything, memorabilia *and* papers. This meant that yet another addition would be necessary even as the original expanded structure was nearing completion.

With the end in sight, plans were formulated for an elaborate library-museum dedication ceremony. William Anderson, who had resigned as foundation president in 1961 to become curator of the museum, was given a leave of absence to organize the event, scheduled for Hoover's eighty-eighth birthday on August 10, 1962.

For many, the most memorable part of Her-



COURTESY HERBERT HOOVER PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

bert Hoover's final visit to West Branch was the presence at the dedication of his longtime friend, Harry Truman, who had announced that he would attend "if not dead."

On August 10, a caravan of cars brought Hoover and Truman from Cedar Rapids to West Branch. More than 25,000 people were present, including Governor Norman Erbe, Senator Bourke Hickenlooper, and Archivist of the United States Wayne Grover, representing President Kennedy. All made remarks in Hoover's honor, but none moved the crowd

Crowds surround Hoover and Truman at the library-museum dedication, August 10, 1962. Lewis Strauss, chairperson of the Birthplace Foundation, is on Hoover's left.

like Harry Truman, who said: "The presidency . . . is the most important office in the history of the world. And you don't get it by inheritance, you don't get it by any other way except by the people wanting you to be President . . . and then you have the greatest responsibility in the history of the world. Nobody knows that better than I do and I've had one hell of a time

"I'm here," Truman said, "because I think he's doing the right thing in turning his documents over to the public here in this library."



The Walnut Library exhibit in the library-museum honors Lou Henry Hoover (shown in a painting above the fireplace).

with it, I don't mind telling you."

Referring to Hoover, Truman said: "I've always been fond of him, and of course after he saved all of those people from starving [after World War II] I feel that I am one of his closest friends and he is one of my closest friends and that's the reason I'm here. I am here because I like him. I'm here because I think he's doing the right thing in turning his documents over to the public here in this Library."

In his own remarks, Hoover reviewed his life as an example of what was possible in America. He also spoke on the theme of world peace, and how it might best be achieved in a divided world. He closed by saying "to the boys and girls of America that the doors of opportunity are still open to you. Today the durability of freedom is more secure in America than in any

place in the world. May God bring you even more blessings."

It was Hoover's final public address. He did not return again to West Branch until October 25, 1964, when he was buried on a knoll overlooking the Birthplace Cottage after a private funeral in New York City and a lying-in-state at the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Along the route of the funeral cortege from Cedar Rapids to West Branch, an estimated 100,000 people gathered to pay their respects. One week later, the body of Lou Henry Hoover, who had died in 1944, was reinterred at West Branch, next to that of her husband. Hoover's decision to be buried in West Branch had been made several years earlier but never publicized. In 1963, fearing that a hog lot might be established in the general area of the grave-

site, the foundation purchased the adjacent 4.8 acres from Greater Iowa Development for \$5,000, and secured an easement on 16.5 acres to the west and north so that it would be "forever free and open."

THE DEDICATION in 1962 and the burials in 1964 did not end the development of the historic sites in West Branch. Over the course of the next twelve years, three separate additions were constructed onto the library-museum to provide archival space, offices and exhibit areas, a reading and conference room, and an auditorium. The total cost when completed was approximately two million, with most of the money provided by the foundation and other private sources.

The entire site was formally deeded to the federal government on August 10, 1964, and the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site was created by Congress one year later. Today, the library-museum is staffed and operated by the National Archives and Records Administration, while the surrounding 186-acre park and its buildings are managed by the National Park Service.

Once the job of constructing buildings and buying land was accomplished, the Birthplace Foundation did not cease to exist. A lawsuit led to a new name and a new mission. In 1962, the president and trustees of the Belgian-American Educational Foundation (BAEF), which had been created with funds left over from the Commission for the Relief of Belgium in 1919, voted to distribute \$900,000 of its assets to the Birthplace Foundation to pay for the archives addition to the library-museum. Two years later, two BAEF trustees filed suit against the BAEF and the foundation, charging that the BAEF officers and board had exceeded their authority in making the gift.

After seven years of litigation, the courts finally dismissed the suit. To continue work in the meantime, a new organization, the Hoover Presidential Library Association, was established. In 1972, the foundation was merged into the association, which continues to function in West Branch as a private, nonprofit agency in support of the purposes and mission of the library-museum, while furthering schol-

arly and public interest in Herbert Hoover. The association provides research grants and promotes visitation, and is funding George Nash's multivolume, definitive biography, *The Life of Herbert Hoover*.

The library has helped generate a scholarly reassessment of Herbert Hoover. Since the opening of his papers in 1966, that reassessment has often been more favorable and less partisan than was earlier the case. Through 1986, more than 1,600 researchers have used the library. The results of their work have included more than 1,000 books and articles, 400 theses and dissertations, and 300 course papers. In addition, more than 1.8 million visitors, from the United States and many foreign countries, have toured the museum. An even larger number have toured the Hoover National Historic Site.

None of this would have happened had "Bert" Hoover been a blacksmith, like his father. Instead, he grew up to become the thirty-first U.S. president. Today, twenty-five years after its dedication, the Hoover Presidential Library-Museum is more than a memorial. It is a reminder of a privately funded effort to increase public knowledge, appreciation, and critical understanding of Hoover and the times in which he lived.

Along with the national historic site, the library-museum is also the final chapter in the story of a man's birth, education, work, worship, and death. It is the legacy Hoover may have envisioned in 1951 when he donated his Iowa Award plaque to the Birthplace Society. "In that way," he said, "the people can see that the fellow who was born there came to a good end. . . . There is no point in having a memorial telling how a fellow started out without knowing how he finished." □

NOTE ON SOURCES

The principal source for this article is a 42-chapter manuscript history of the Hoover Presidential Library Association, completed in 1983 by the late Frank Nye, a former assistant editor and political writer for the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*. The manuscript will be published in its entirety by the association during 1987. Nye's sources included personal interviews, transcripts of oral histories, public records, correspondence, newspaper accounts, minutes of meetings, published works, government documents, and other publications at the Hoover Presidential Library.