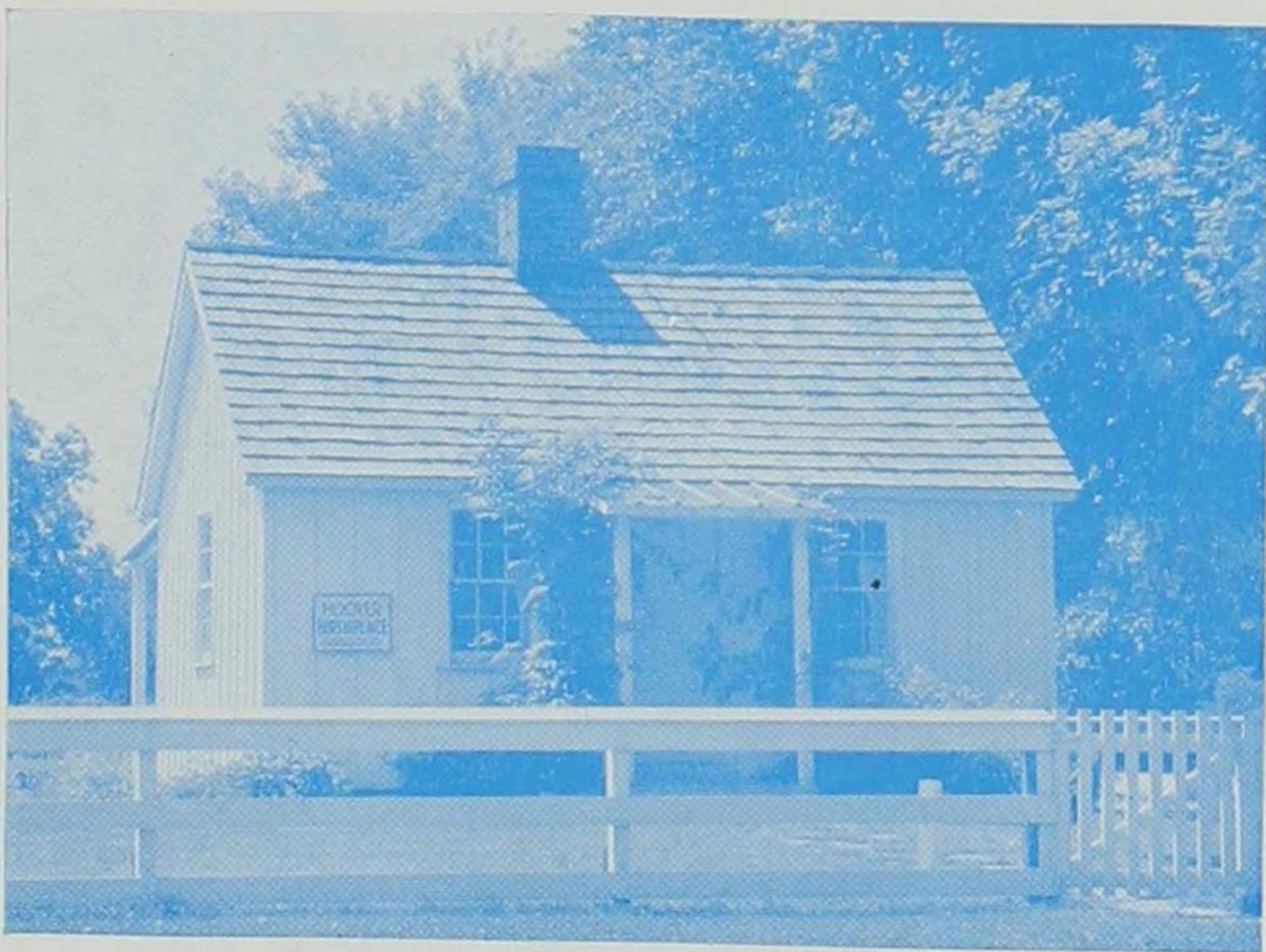


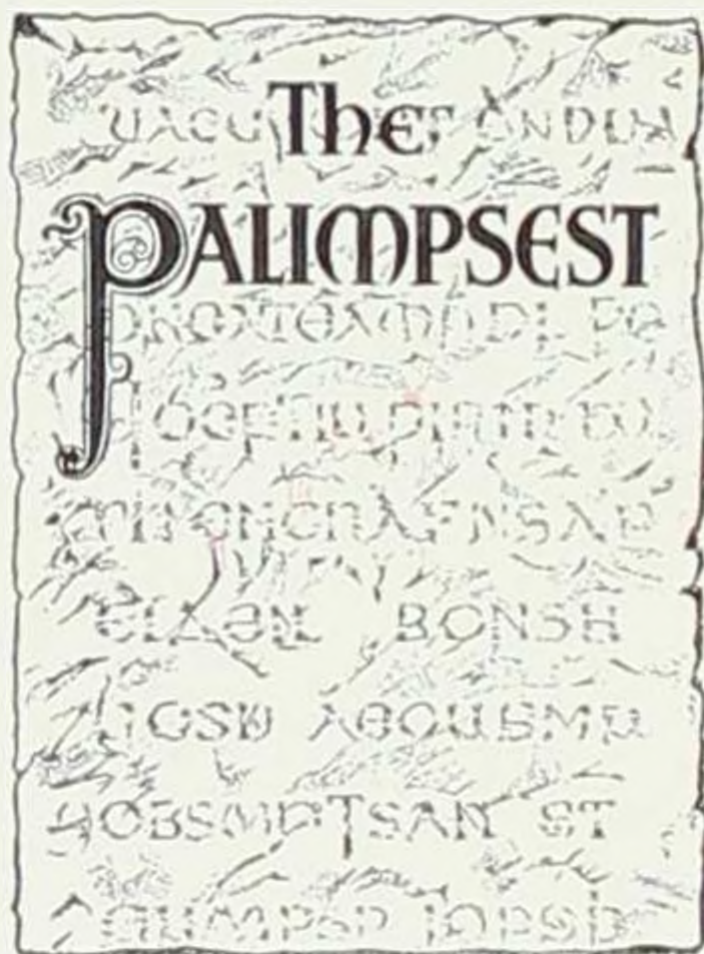
The PALIMPSEST



HERBERT HOOVER BIRTHPLACE

Published Monthly by
The State Historical Society of Iowa
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The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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WILLIAM J. PETERSEN	

Cover

Front — Close-up of Hoover Birthplace.

Back — Scenes at 74th Birthday at West Branch — August 10, 1948:

Inside top: Herbert Hoover Cutting Birthday Cake.

Inside bottom: Supt. William J. Petersen, Gov. Robert D. Blue, and Herbert Hoover on Speakers' Platform.

Outside: View of Hoover Birthplace from the South.

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THE PALIMPSEST

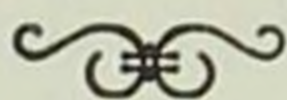
EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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Boyhood in Iowa

[These personal recollections of boyhood experiences at West Branch, Iowa, were related by Herbert Hoover in an informal address before the Iowa Society of Washington on November 10, 1927. They were published in *THE PALIMPSEST* for July, 1928, from which they are reprinted. — THE EDITOR.]

I prefer to think of Iowa as I saw it through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy — and the eyes of all ten-year-old Iowa boys are or should be filled with the wonders of Iowa's streams and woods, of the mystery of growing crops. His days should be filled with adventure and great undertakings, with participation in good and comforting things. I was taken farther West from Iowa when I was ten, to Oregon and thence to that final haven of Iowans — California — where I have clung ever since. Some one may say that these recollections of Iowa are only the illusions of forty years after, but I know better, for I have been back and checked it up. I was told that when I went back everything would have shrunk up and become small and ordinary. For instance, there was Cook's Hill — that great long hill where, on winter nights, we slid down at terrific speeds with our tummies tight to

homemade sleds. I've seen it several times since; it's a good hill and except for the older method of thawing out frozen toes with ice water the sport needs no modern improvement. The swimming hole under the willows down by the railroad bridge is still operating efficiently, albeit modern mothers probably compel their youngsters to take a bath to get rid of clean and healthy mud when they come home. The hole still needs to be deepened, however. It is hard to keep from pounding the mud with your hands and feet when you shove off for the thirty feet of a cross-channel swim. And there were the woods down by the Burlington track. The denudation of our forest hasn't reached them even yet, and I know there are rabbits still being trapped in cracker boxes held open by a figure-four at the behest of small boys at this very time. I suspect, however, that the conservationists have invented some kind of a closed season before now.

One of the bitterest days of my life was in connection with a rabbit. Rabbits fresh from a figure-four trap early on a cold morning are wiggly rabbits, and in the lore of boys of my time it is better to bring them home alive. My brother, being older, had surreptitiously behind the blacksmith shop read in the *Youth's Companion* full directions for rendering live rabbits secure. I say "surreptitiously," for mine was a Quaker family unwilling in those days to have youth corrupted

with stronger reading than the Bible, the encyclopedia, or those great novels where the hero overcomes the demon rum. Soon after he had acquired this higher learning on rabbits, he proceeded to instruct me to stand still in the cold snow and to hold up the rabbit by its hind feet while with his not over-sharp knife he proposed to puncture two holes between the sinews and back knee joints of the rabbit, through which holes he proposed to tie a string and thus arrive at complete security. Upon the introduction of the operation the resistance of this rabbit was too much for me. I was not only blamed for its escape all the way home and for weeks afterwards, but continuously over the last forty years. I have thought sometimes that I would write the *Youth's Companion* and suggest they make sure that this method is altered. For I never see rabbit tracks across the snowy fields that I do not have a painful recollection of it all.

There were also at times pigeons in the timber and prairie chickens in the hedges. With the efficient instruction of a real live American Indian boy from a neighboring Indian school on the subject of bows and arrows, we sometimes by firing volleys in battalions were able to bring down a pigeon or a chicken. The Ritz Hotel has never yet provided game of such wondrous flavor as this bird plucked and half cooked over the small boys' campfire. And in those days there were sun and cat fish to be had. Nor did we possess the modern

equipment in artificial lures, tackle assembled from the steel of Damascus, the bamboos of Siam, tin of Bangkok, the lacquer of China, or silver of Colorado. We were still in that rude but highly social condition of using a willow pole with a butcher string line and hooks ten for a dime. Our compelling lure was a segment of an angle worm and our incantation was to spit on the bait. We lived in the time when fish used to bite instead of strike and we knew it bit when the cork bobbed. And moreover, we ate the fish.

And in the matter of eating, my recollections of Iowa food are of the most distinguished order. You may say that is the appetite of youth, but I have also checked this up. At later stages in my life, I had opportunity to eat both of the presumably very best food in the world, as well as of the very worst. When I ate the worst, my thoughts went back to Iowa, and when I ate of the best I was still sure that Aunt Millie was a better cook. Some thirty years after this time, in visiting Aunt Millie, I challenged that dear old lady, then far along in years, to cook another dinner of the kind she provided on Sabbath Days when we were both youthful. She produced that dinner, and I am able to say now that if all the cooks of Iowa are up to Aunt Millie's standard, then the gourmets of the world should leave Paris for Iowa, at least for Cedar County.

I mentioned the Burlington track. It was a won-

derful place. The track was ballasted with glacial gravels where on industrious search you discovered gems of agate and fossil coral which could with infinite backaches be polished on the grindstone. Their fine points came out wonderfully when wet, and you had to lick them with your tongue before each exhibit. I suppose that engineering has long since destroyed this inspiration to young geologists by using mass production crushed rock.

My earliest realization of the stir of national life was the torch parade in the Garfield campaign. On that occasion, I was not only allowed out that night, but I saw the lamps being filled and lighted. There was no great need for urging voters in our village — there was a Democrat in the village. He occasionally fell to the influence of liquor, therefore in the esteem of our group he represented all the forces of evil. At times he relapsed to goodness in the form of rations of a single gum drop to the small boys who did errands at his store. He also bought the old iron from which the financial resources were provided for firecrackers on the Fourth of July. He was, therefore, tolerated and he served well and efficiently as a moral and political lesson.

But Iowa through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy is not all adventure or high living. Iowa in those years, as in these years, was filled with days of school — and who does not remember with a glow

that sweet-faced lady who with infinite patience and kindness drilled into us those foundations of all we know today? And they were days of chores and labor. I am no supporter of factory labor for children but I have never joined with those who clamored against proper work of children on farms outside their school hours. And I speak from the common experience of most Iowa children of my day in planting corn, hoeing gardens, learning to milk, sawing wood, and the other proper and normal occupations for boys. We had no need of Montessori schools to teach us application. But of more purpose I can bespeak for the strong and healthy bodies which come from it all. Nor was Iowa of those days without its tragedies. Medical science of those times was powerless against the diseases which swept the countryside. My own parents were among the victims.

There was an entirely different economic setting of farm life in Iowa in those days. I am not stating to you that I had at that time any pretense of economics or the farm problem. Upon Uncle Allan's farm where I lived, we did know of the mortgage as some dreadful damper on youthful hopes of things that could not be bought. I do have a vivid recollection that the major purpose of a farm was to produce a living right on the spot for the family. I know by experience that a family then produced all of its own vegetables, carried its grain to the nearest mill for grinding on toll, cut

and hauled its own fuel from the wonderful woods ten miles away, and incidentally gathered walnuts. The family wove its own carpets and some of its clothes, made its own soap, preserved its own meat and fruit and vegetables, got its sweetness from sorghum and honey. These families consumed perhaps 80 per cent of the product of their land. Twenty per cent of it was exchanged for the few outside essentials and to pay interest on the mortgage. When prices rose and fell on the Chicago market, they only affected 20 per cent of the product of the farm. I know, and you know, that today as the result of the revolution brought about by machinery and improved methods of planting and breeding animals, and what not, 80 per cent of the product of the farm must go to the market. When the price of these things wobbles in Chicago, it has four times the effect on that family on the farm than it did in those days. If prices are high, they mean comfort and automobiles; if prices are low, they mean increasing debt and privation. I am not recommending the good old days, for while the standards of living in food and clothing and shelter were high enough for anybody's health and comfort, there was but little left for the other purposes of living.

That is probably one reason why the people of Iowa of that time put more of their time in religious devotion than most of them do now. It certainly did not require as much expenditure as their recre-

ation does today. However, those of you who are acquainted with the Quaker faith, and who know the primitive furnishing of the Quaker meeting-house of those days, the solemnity of the long hours of meeting awaiting the spirit to move some one, will know the intense restraint required in a ten-year-old boy not even to count his toes. All this may not have been recreation, but it was strong training in patience. And that reminds me that I have a brand of Iowa still upon me, for one of my earliest recollections of that great and glorious state was stepping barefooted on a red hot iron chip at my father's blacksmith shop, the scar of which I still carry.

But there are few scars that people carry from the state of Iowa. The good Lord originally made it the richest stretch of agricultural land that ever blessed any one sovereign government. It was populated by the more adventurous and the more courageous, who fought their way along the ever-extending frontier. They builded there in so short a period as seventy-five years a people who today enjoy the highest standard of living, the highest average of intelligence, the highest average degree of education that has ever blessed a single commonwealth. There is no man or woman born of Iowa who is not proud of his native state.

HERBERT HOOVER

Herbert Hoover

Just off Main Street, in the little Iowa town of West Branch, there is a large well-kept park enclosed by a white board fence. The center of interest in this park is a small two-room white cottage. Here, on August 10, 1874, Herbert Clark Hoover, thirtieth President of the United States, was born. His birthplace has become a national shrine as have so many other houses, both large and small, which saw the birth of men of great affairs.

In 1928, when Herbert Hoover returned to West Branch to inaugurate his presidential campaign, the little house did not look as it does today. For years it had served as a kitchen annex of a larger house owned, at that time, by Mrs. Jennie Scellars. After Hoover's term of office, which began so auspiciously and ended so disastrously, the Hoover family took steps to restore and preserve his birthplace. A son, Allan Hoover, bought Mrs. Scellars' house and a dozen lots surrounding it in 1935. Subsequently, in 1938 the addition was removed, leaving the original two-room cottage on the site. Repairs were made and as much of the old Hoover furniture as possible collected and returned to the house.

What had been the background, the training,

and the experience of Herbert Hoover, to lead him to become President of the United States? How did the boy from this simple home reach a position held by only thirty-two men in all of the nation's 175 years of history?

His father, Jesse Hoover, was a blacksmith and a descendant of Cedar County pioneers. In 1853 Jesse's father, Eli, a Quaker farmer, had been one of the first settlers of West Branch. In 1870 Jesse Hoover married Huldah Minthorn, whose Quaker parents had moved to Iowa from Canada. Jesse then left his father's farm and moved into West Branch, built his little house and an adjoining blacksmith shop, and set himself up in business. Herbert was their second son; he had an older brother, Theodore, and, later, a younger sister, May. As the years passed, Jesse followed his trade, and Huldah, in addition to raising and caring for the small family, acted from time to time as minister of the West Branch Society of Friends.

This small average family circle was broken in 1880 when the father died of a fever. Four years later Huldah Hoover died, leaving her three orphaned children to the care of relatives. Herbert lived for a year with his Uncle Allan and Aunt Millie Hoover on their farm near West Branch. Then another uncle, Dr. H. John Minthorn, offered to take the young eleven-year-old to Oregon with him. Dr. Minthorn had recently founded a

Quaker academy at Newberg in Oregon; here his nephew was educated in the Quaker tradition.

As he boarded the train for Oregon in 1885, young Hoover scarcely dreamed that it was to be only the first of many long journeys — journeys which would carry him all over the world, to wealth, to fame, and to the White House in Washington. After a few years at Newberg, Dr. Minthorn moved to Salem, Oregon, and opened a land office where his nephew helped as office boy. Among the business handled by the Minthorn land agency was some mining property. Here young Herbert Hoover met a mining engineer, and his future was decided.

Meanwhile, a new college was opening in California — Leland Stanford. Young Herbert journeyed there in 1891, when he was but seventeen years old, to study mining. His savings were small, but by working at various jobs he completed the four years of study and received his degree in 1895. One of his most profitable college jobs, viewed in retrospect, was as secretary to John C. Branner, professor of geology. During summer vacations Hoover traveled with Dr. Branner and with the United States Geological Survey on surveying trips in Arkansas and in the Sierras. It was Dr. Branner, also, who introduced Hoover to a young lady from Iowa who was to play an even more important part in his life — Lou Henry.

Upon graduation Hoover found that no one was

clamoring for his services. Nothing daunted, he took a job as a laborer in the Mayflower mine at Silver City, Nevada. The following year, with this practical experience behind him, he traveled to San Francisco and asked Louis Janin, famous mining engineer, for a job. Janin did not need another engineer, but he let the young man stay on as a sort of general office assistant. Fortune was kind — when Janin needed a hurried report on a certain mining property, he asked Hoover to prepare it. Pleased with his young clerk's report, Janin asked how he could know so much about the problem. "I ought to know every foot and every vein of that mine because I once worked in it as a mucker," was the reply.

With this auspicious start, Hoover served for two years on Janin's staff, gaining much valuable experience. Then a British mining firm asked Janin to recommend an engineer to open up some new mines in Australia. Herbert Hoover, only twenty-three at the time, was given the recommendation and the job.

In Australia, Hoover introduced American mining methods, organized a staff, and brought equipment from the United States for the ten large mines owned by his employers. Then, while on an inspection trip, he discovered another mine which proved to be one of the richest in Australia. His name soon became well and favorably known in mining circles. When the Chinese government

wanted an engineer to head their new department of mines and railways, they sought out Herbert Hoover.

Before taking up his work in China, however, the young engineer returned to California where he married Lou Henry at Monterey in 1899. They left at once for the Far East. Hoover was twenty-five years old, he had graduated from Leland Stanford only four years before, but he already had an established reputation in his field and a pioneering job to do.

The years in China were busy ones. From his base at Peking, Hoover traveled all over that vast country — by boat, by camel, or on shaggy ponies. These were the years of great European exploitation of the resources of China, and the Chinese people were restless. In 1900, while the Hoovers were at Tientsin, this unrest flared into the Boxer Rebellion which overthrew the Chinese government. Tientsin, under siege by the rebels, was transformed into a fortress, partly by the help of Hoover and his corps of engineers. They built barricades, fought fires, manned the pumping station which supplied water, and stood sentinel until the storm had passed.

Hoover's activities in China ended with the downfall of the Chinese government. His work now took him to wider fields; in 1902 his former employers in Australia offered him a partnership in their London office. There now followed years of

work and travel. Hoover supervised mining operations in Europe, Russia, India, and Burma. Great success and great wealth came, as the years passed. But the Hoovers never cut their American ties; they maintained a home at Palo Alto to which they returned at least once a year. By the time he was forty, in 1914, Herbert Hoover had an international reputation in mining circles; world events would now thrust him onto a wider stage.

San Francisco was planning a huge Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1914. The officials asked Hoover, who was well known in European capitals, to solicit aid and exhibits for their fair. Thus, in the fateful days of July and August of 1914, when European armies began to march, Hoover found himself in London, his original mission forgotten, helping stranded Americans find a way home. Perhaps for the first time the name of Hoover appeared in Iowa newspapers. On August 7, 1914, the *Des Moines Register and Leader*, in a short paragraph on the first page, printed a story with a London date line:

Many Americans here today asked for help to obtain food and lodging. There were many instances of persons with gold certificates in their pockets walking the streets all night hungry. Some of these were relieved by small unsecured loans from H. C. Hoover of California, who spent most of the day working to obtain a reasonable rate of exchange for American bills.

People in Waterloo, Mrs. Hoover's old home,

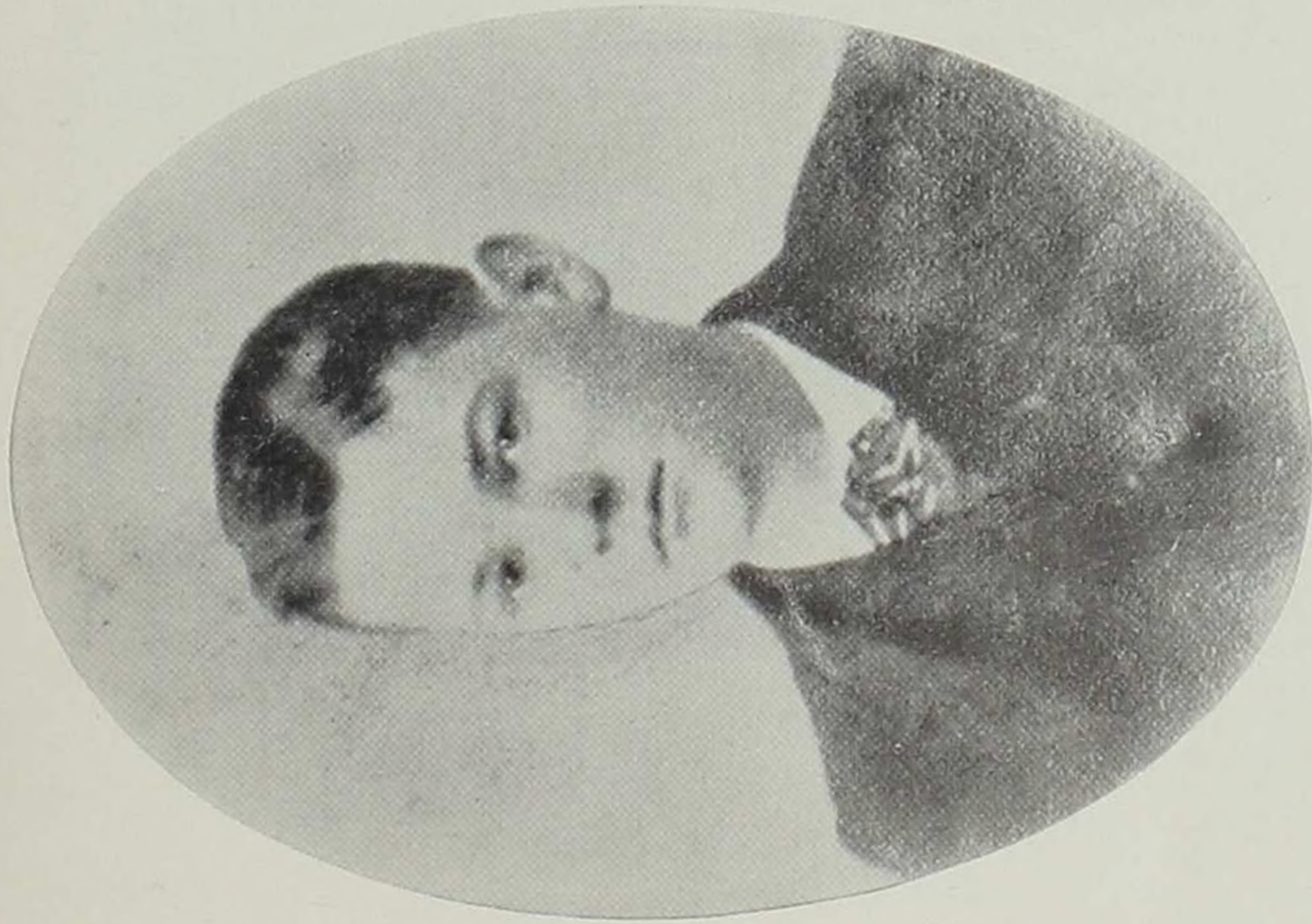
evidently recognized the name; the following day the *Register* found room, on page seven, for a two-paragraph story headed "H. C. Hoover is an Iowan." The story, however, mistakenly credited Le Grand, Iowa, as Hoover's birthplace, possibly because many Hoover relatives lived there. During the following years the Hoover name moved from the back pages of the newspapers to headlines on the front page. His national career had begun.

America's ambassador in London, Walter Hines Page, was grateful to Hoover for his aid in financing Americans caught in the financial chaos which followed the outbreak of the war. He wrote to President Wilson of Hoover: "He's a simple, modest, energetic man who began his career in California and will end it in Heaven." Meanwhile, the German armies rolled over Belgium, leaving destruction and starvation in their wake. Pleas for aid came from Americans in Belgium, and from Brand Whitlock, American ambassador at Brussels. It was inevitable that Page, in London, should turn to Hoover for aid.

With his usual energy and organizing ability, Hoover established the Commission for Relief in Belgium, and began gathering funds, ships, clothing, medicine, and food. Belgium, which imported about 80 per cent of its food, was completely cut off by the Allied blockade of Europe. Thus it was Hoover's job to convince both sides in the conflict

that the Belgians must be fed. Such was his success that Page wrote in 1916: "But for Hoover Belgium would now be starved." Today, in the park surrounding the birthplace in West Branch, there is a statue of Isis — the Goddess of Life — the work of a Belgian sculptor. It was the gift of grateful Belgian children, refugees, and soldiers in recognition of Hoover's distinguished service to their country.

With such a record of success in Belgium, it was natural that Hoover should be called home when America entered the war in 1917. President Wilson promptly gave him the task of controlling American food supplies, under the title "United States Food Administrator." His duties were twofold — he must make food denial popular, and he must stimulate food production. "Food Will Win the War" was the telling slogan of the publicity campaign instituted to bring home to Americans the importance of self-denial. "Serve Just Enough" was another popular phrase. Wheatless Mondays and Wednesdays, meatless Tuesdays, porkless Thursdays and Saturdays, "Victory" bread all week long — such were some of the suggestions of the Food Administrator. American housewives accepted these restrictions; they cut down on sugar, wheat, and fats — the crucial food items. To increase food supplies, Hoover appointed state and county food administrators to help the farmers increase their production — espe-



Courtesy of Mrs. Charles Stratton

Bert Hoover



Herbert Hoover — Presidential Nominee

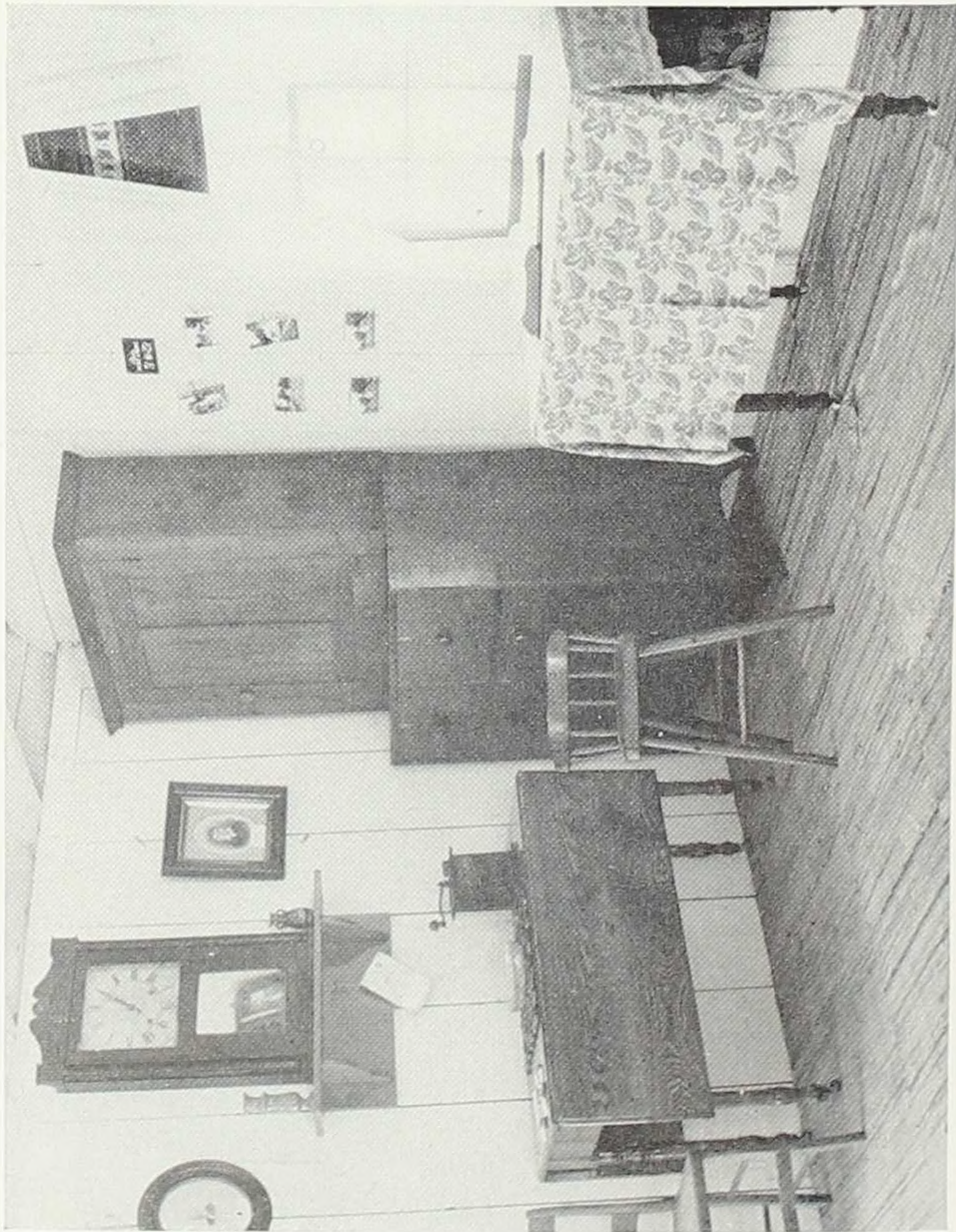


Photo by C. F. Kent

Kitchen-Living Room of Hoover Birthplace

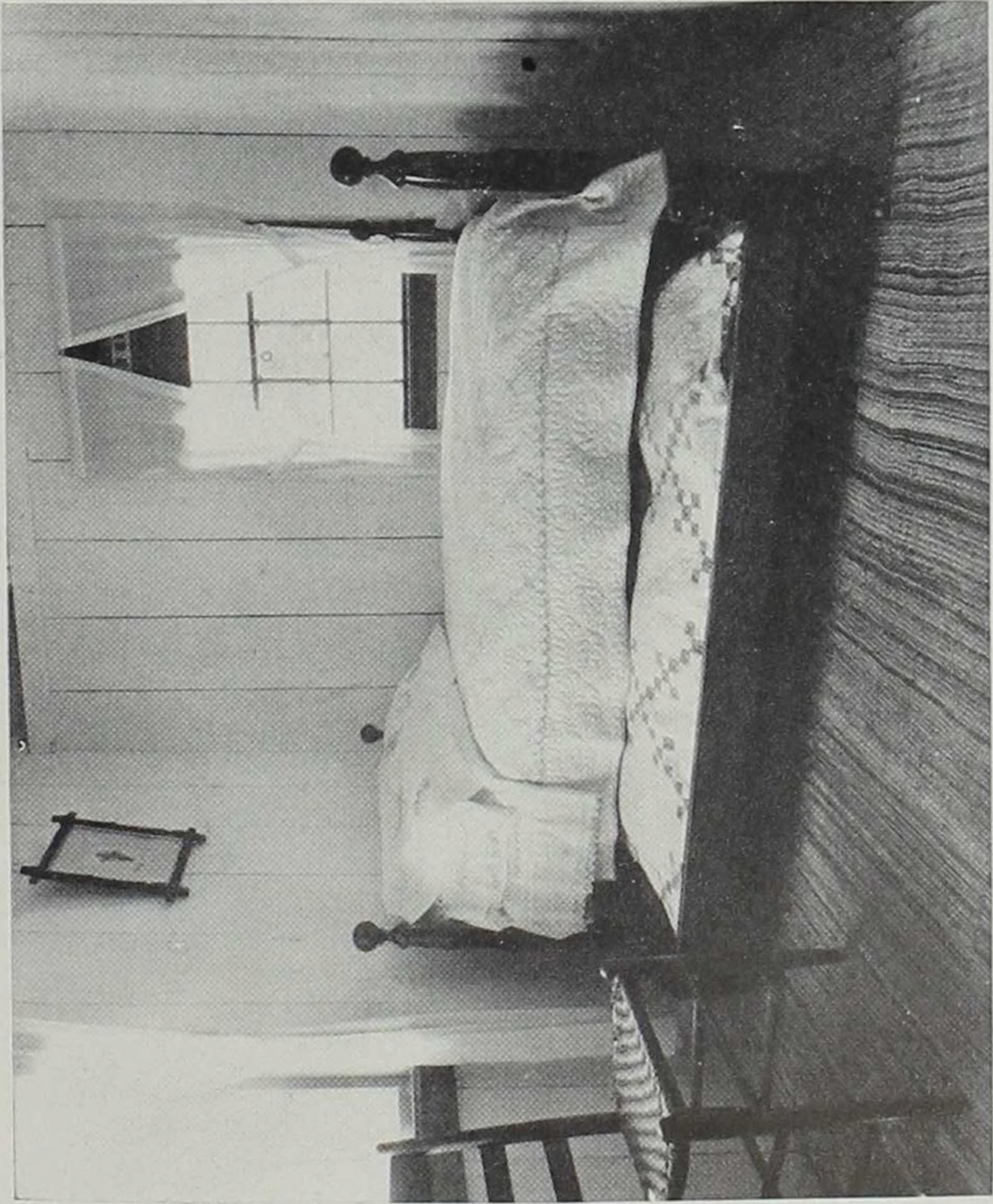
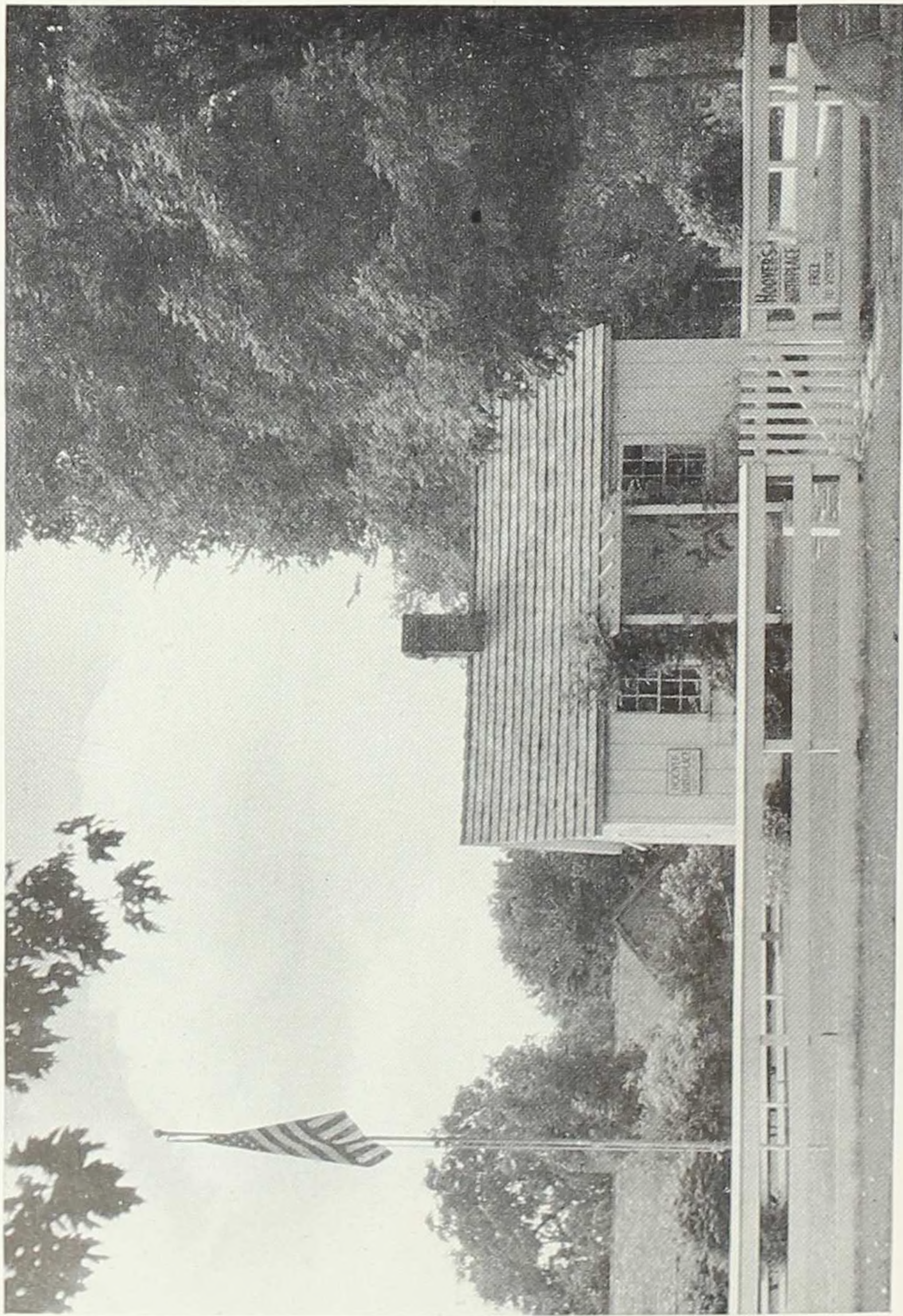


Photo by C. F. Kent

Bedroom of Hoover Home



Front View of Hoover Birthplace

Photo by C. F. Kent

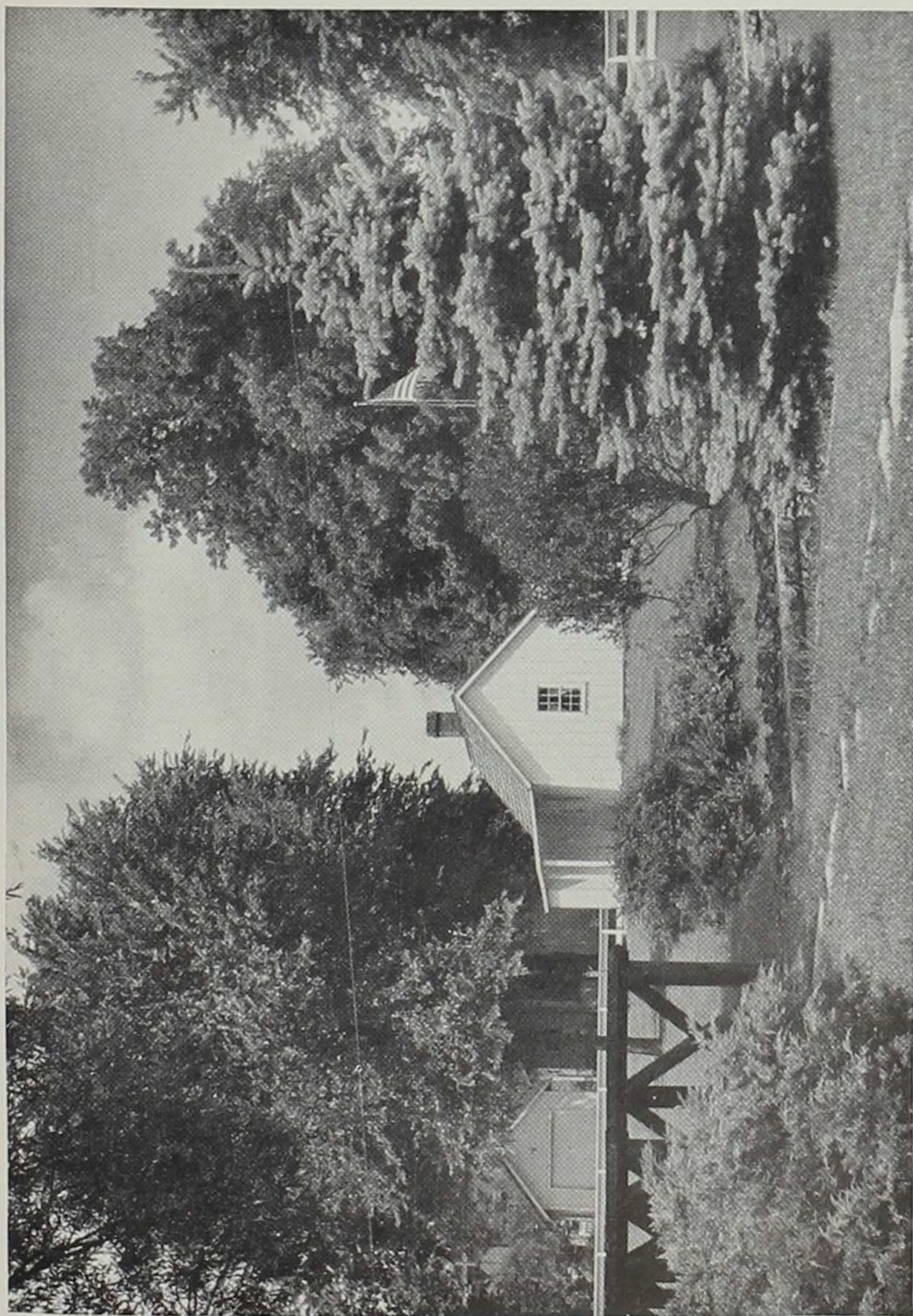


Photo by C. F. Kent

View of Hoover Home from the South



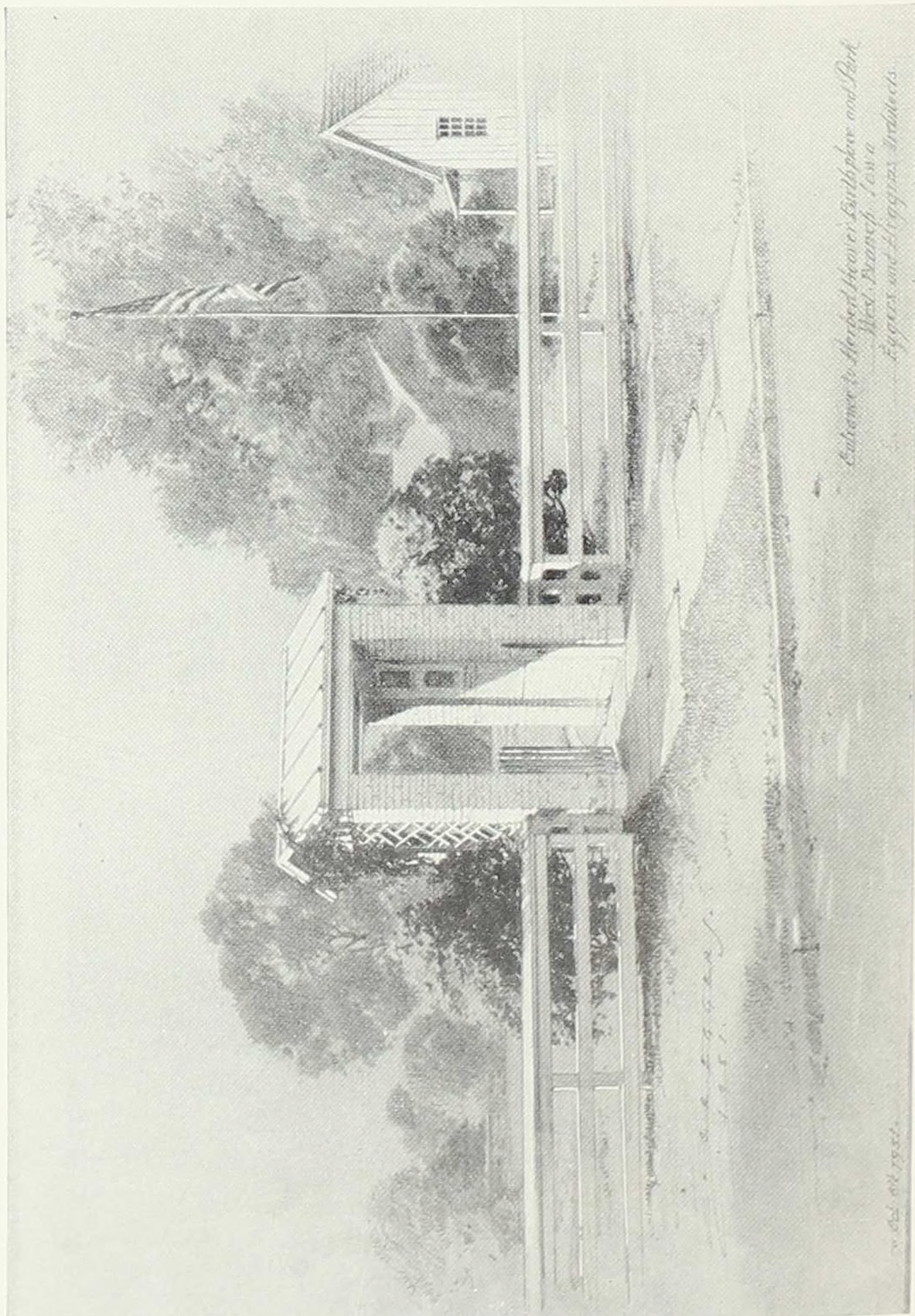
Corner of Bedroom

Photo by C. F. Kent



Photo by C. F. Kent

Statue of Isis
Gift of Belgian Children to Herbert Hoover



Entrance to Herbert Hoover Birthplace

cially of wheat and hogs. All this was done on an entirely voluntary basis. The results enabled America to feed herself, her troops, and her Allies in Europe.

At the end of the war, Hoover's field of operation was widened. His American Relief Commission took on the task of feeding hungry Europe, until those war-torn nations could return to what America then called "normalcy." In 1921 a new catastrophe added to the world's woes — a terrible famine struck Russia. The best efforts of the new Soviet regime to hide this fact from the world were fruitless; Maxim Gorki, the great Russian writer, appealed personally to Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, for aid. Again, Hoover came to the rescue of the hungry, but with certain conditions imposed. The Soviets were required to release American prisoners, and they must permit foreign relief workers to dispense aid to all the needy, regardless of class. Congress voted a fund of \$20,000,000 for the Russians, while the Kremlin put up \$11,000,000. In all, \$78,000,000 was eventually raised for Russian relief, and the worst of the famine was defeated.

Meanwhile, the American people turned their attention from foreign to domestic affairs; they wanted no more of Europe or its wars. In the election of 1920 the Democrats went down to defeat, and Republican Warren G. Harding was swept into the White House. It was inevitable that one

of the best-known of Americans, Herbert Hoover, should be a part of the new administration. Offered his choice of cabinet posts, he chose that of Commerce because of his life-long interest in business and management. His seven years in that office, under Presidents Harding and Coolidge, were fruitful. He raised the post to new importance, and he aided business in organizing, standardizing, and economizing. Hoover's task, as he saw it, was the raising of the standard of living, the promotion of business stability, and "the economic welfare of the American people." The voluntary trade associations of manufacturers, encouraged by the energetic Secretary of Commerce, "sought to eliminate abuse and unfair competition" in industry and also "to eliminate government from business."

When Calvin Coolidge did not "choose to run" for president in 1928, Herbert Hoover's name naturally led the list of possible candidates. As the time for the Republican National Convention at Kansas City approached, two names were at the top — Herbert Hoover and Ex-Governor Frank O. Lowden of Illinois. The Iowa delegation of twenty-nine Republicans was committed, not to the "native son," but to the neighbor from Illinois. The crucial test would be the stand of the Convention on agriculture. The farmers, not sharing in the general business prosperity of the "golden twenties," were clamoring for some form of gov-

ernment aid. The agricultural plank of the Republican platform did not please Lowden — on the eve of balloting for a candidate he withdrew his name. Herbert Hoover was nominated on the first ballot, on June 15, 1928.

In West Branch "bedtime never did roll around" that night. Bands, fireworks, and "fifty-seven varieties of noise" celebrated the achievement of Bert Hoover. Mrs. Jennie Scellars must then have begun to realize the importance of her home as the birthplace of a President of the United States. When, after his acceptance speech at Palo Alto in early August, Hoover laid plans to open his campaign at West Branch, the little village sprang into national importance. Even though, through the new medium of radio, it was not necessary to attend political rallies to hear the candidate, some 10,000 people descended on little West Branch on August 21 to hear Herbert Hoover's opening campaign address.

Iowans — and especially those in West Branch — were busy before that date, however. For the first time in American history a man born west of the Mississippi had been nominated for the highest office in the land. Ten days before, some 30,000,000 people had listened to the Hoover acceptance speech over the radio, and the *Des Moines Register* had pointed out the significance of that event: "The size of the audience alone will make this the most notable occasion of its kind in the human rec-

ord thus far." But the *Register* had no qualms about the performance of the candidate: he was "fully equal to the occasion." Now, a much smaller number would see him at West Branch, where a "subdued carnival spirit" prevailed.

The Hoover campaign train reached West Branch Tuesday morning, August 21, and the candidate was at once whisked "home" to Mrs. Scellars' house, where a typical Iowa August breakfast awaited him: peaches and cream, ham and eggs, hot biscuits, honey, strawberry jam, and coffee. Friends, old and new, milled around the streets waiting for a glimpse of "the next President of the United States." There followed a day filled with visits to the scenes of his childhood, talks with the old friends, and political conferences with the new ones. His speech in the evening was all that they had expected. He was "proud to have been born in Iowa," he told them. "I have oftentimes said that the good Lord made it the richest stretch of agricultural land that ever blessed any one sovereign government." Then he talked about agriculture, the leading problem of the campaign, and he closed with words which reveal the natural bent of his mind:

And I must say again that the solution of these problems has but one purpose — that is, the comfort and welfare of the American family and the American home. The family is the unit of American life and the home is the sanctuary of moral inspiration and of American spirit. The true con-

ception of America is not a country of 110,000,000 people, but a nation of 23,000,000 families living in 23,000,000 homes. I pledge my services to these homes.

The campaign which followed, between Republican Herbert Hoover and Democrat Al Smith, swung back and forth between the problems of agriculture, the tariff, and prohibition. As usual, there were breaks in the party ranks. A few prominent Republicans went over to the Democrats, while some Democrats announced a preference for Hoover. Smith W. Brookhart, Iowa's fiery Senator, surprised everybody by endorsing Hoover enthusiastically. No one saw the black cloud on the financial horizon. Both candidates worked hard; both offered their programs to the American people. On election day the people chose; the victory of Herbert Hoover was an overwhelming landslide, reaching even into the traditionally Democratic South. Smith carried only eight states. West Branch and Iowa and the nation rejoiced. Four years passed. Herbert Hoover was again the Republican candidate; his opponent was Franklin D. Roosevelt, Governor of New York. Again there was a landslide; but this time a Democratic one. Hoover, who had carried forty states in 1928, won only six in 1932. What had happened?

This overwhelming defeat dates back to October 23, 1929. On that day the American stock market, which had been climbing each day to dizzy heights, slipped and fell. Two billion dollars

in paper profits disappeared. The following day three billion dollars more vanished from the ticker tapes. Wall Street bankers rose to the occasion and threw fortunes into the market to stay the tide, and there was a pause. Then came Black Thursday — October 29, 1929 — and even blacker Friday. Five billion, ten billion — so it went. In all, some thirty billion dollars were lost by investors. As winter set in, the inevitable aftermath came — business and bank failures, unemployment, and breadlines.

The first seven months of the Hoover administration had been normal. Prosperity continued, and an extra session of Congress took up farm relief and began the struggle over tariff. The whole aspect of American life changed with the October stock market collapse. Fear gripped the nation, and men looked for a scapegoat. Reassuring words came from Washington and Wall Street, but as the months passed the depression deepened.

In the past, American presidents had been content to "ride out" a financial panic, trusting to the soundness of American economy to right itself. Hoover broke this tradition. The government stepped in with efforts to stem the tide. Taxes were cut; funds were voted for some types of public works; a moratorium was placed on war debts to relieve Europe, also suffering from the worldwide financial collapse; the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was established to aid business;

the Farm Loan and Home Loan Acts — measures presaging the more far-reaching legislation of the New Deal period — were passed. Unhappily, none of these served to alleviate conditions for very long.

By 1932 the nation had found its scapegoat — the administration, and especially the President. It was inevitable that the Republican party would lose the 1932 presidential election. Herbert Hoover “reaped the whirlwind” of an overexpanded economy which had resulted in the most severe depression in American history. From a peak of popularity in March of 1929, Hoover went out of office in March, 1933, bearing the blame for an economic collapse which had been far beyond the power of any one man to prevent.

With the passage of the years, opinions have changed. Herbert Hoover has attained the honored position of an “elder statesman” whose advice is sought on many problems, both national and international. Men now know that he was the victim, and not the creator, of the Great Depression. The wisdom of hindsight has reapportioned the economic causes of the tragic years of the thirties and has shown that the Hoover measures, if perhaps too little and too late, at least paved the way for the more drastic legislation needed to cope with almost complete economic collapse.

Probably the most significant work of Hoover's later years is the commission which, under his

leadership, has made a study of reorganization of the executive branch of the federal government. In 1946, at the request of President Truman, Hoover also undertook the coordination of the food supplies of thirty-eight European countries; again, in 1947, he made a study of the economic situation in Germany and Austria for the President. He is an honorary citizen of many European cities; fifty-eight universities and colleges have given him honorary degrees; and societies of many kinds have made awards of medals. The latest of these honors is the "Iowa Award," presented to Iowa's famous native son before a tremendous throng at the State Fair in 1951. When Iowa laid plans for the giving of such an Award, it was natural and inevitable that the first recipient should be Herbert Hoover. The "Iowa Award" has been appropriately placed in the gateway to his home at West Branch.

Meanwhile, the birthplace site at West Branch, Iowa, grows in size and attraction. On Herbert Hoover's seventy-fourth birthday, August 10, 1948, he made another journey home and spoke to Iowa and the nation on his concept of "The Meaning of America."

MILDRED THRONE

The Meaning of America

[The following excerpts are from an address by Herbert Hoover at West Branch on his 74th birthday, Aug. 10, 1948. — THE EDITOR.]

I am glad to have your invitation to come again to this Iowa village where I was born. Here I spent the first ten years of my boyhood. My parents and grandparents came to this village in the covered wagon — pioneers in this community. They lie buried over the hill. They broke the prairie into homes of independent living. They worshipped God; they did their duty to their neighbors. They toiled to bring to their children greater comfort, better education and to open to them wider opportunity than had been theirs. . . .

Among these recollections was that of a great lady who first taught me in school and remained my friend during her whole long and useful life — Mrs. Mollie Carran. It was from her that I first heard something about the word *American*. Many great writers and statesmen have attempted to express what we mean by that word. But there is an imponderable feeling within it which reaches to the soul of our people and defies measure.

America means far more than a continent bounded by two oceans. It is more than pride of military power, glory in war, or in victory. It means more than vast expanse of farms, of great

factories or mines, magnificent cities, or millions of automobiles and radios. It is more even than the traditions of the great tide westward from Europe which pioneered the conquest of a continent. It is more than our literature, our music, our poetry.

Perhaps without immodesty I can claim to have had some experience in what *America* means. I have lived many kinds of American life. After my early boyhood in this Iowa village, I lived as the ward of a country doctor in Oregon. I lived among those to whom hard work was the price of existence. The open opportunities of America opened out to me the public schools. They carried me to the professional training of an American university. I began by working with my own hands for my daily bread. I have tasted the despair of fruitless search for a job. I know the kindly encouragement of a humble boarding-house keeper. I know now that at that time there was an economic depression either coming or going. But nobody told me of it. So I did not have the modern worry of what the Federal Government would do about it.

I have conducted the administration of great industries with their problems of production and the well-being of their employees. I have seen America in contrast with many nations and races. My profession took me into many foreign lands under many kinds of government. I have worked with their great spiritual leaders and their great states-

men. I have worked in governments of free men, of tyrannies, of Socialists, and of Communists. I have met with princes, kings, despots, and desperadoes.

I have seen the squalor of Asia, the frozen class barriers of Europe. I was not a tourist. I was associated in their working lives and problems. I had to deal with their social systems and their governments. And outstanding everywhere to these great masses of people there was a hallowed word — "America." To them, it was the hope of the world.

My every frequent homecoming was a reaffirmation of the glory of America. Each time my soul was washed by the relief from grinding poverty of other nations, by the greater kindness and frankness which comes from acceptance of equality and the wide-open opportunity to all who want a chance. It is more than that. It is a land of self-respect born alone of free men.

In later years I participated on behalf of America in a great war. I saw untold misery and revolution. I have seen liberty die and tyranny rise. I have seen human slavery again on the march. I have been repeatedly placed by my countrymen where I had need to deal with the hurricanes of social and economic destruction which have swept the world. I have seen bitter famine and the worst misery that the brutality of war can produce. I have had every honor to which any man could

aspire. There is no place on the whole earth except here in America where all the sons of man could have this chance in life. I recount all this in order that, in Quaker terms, I can give my own testimony.

The meaning of our word "America" flows from one pure spring. The soul of our America is its freedom of mind and spirit in man. Here alone are the open windows through which pours the sunshine of the human spirit. Here alone is human dignity not a dream, but an accomplishment.

Perhaps another etching of another meaning of America lies in this community. It was largely settled by Quakers over ninety years ago. This small religious sect in England had declared that certain freedoms of man came from the Creator and not from the state 150 years before the Declaration of Independence. They spent much time in British stocks and jails for this first outburst of faith in the dignity of the individual man.

They first came in refuge to New England. But the Puritans cut off their ears by way of disapproval of their religious individualism. Then came the great refuge which William Penn secured for them. From New England and Pennsylvania some of the ancestors of this community, before the Revolution, migrated first to Maryland, and, after a generation, to the Piedmont of North Carolina. Then early in the last century slavery began to encroach upon them. Most of that community

— 5,000 of them — organized a concerted trek to Ohio and Indiana. This time they were seeking freedom from that great stain on human liberty. Again after a generation they hitched their covered wagons and settled on these prairies.

Everywhere along these treks there sprang up homes and farms. But more vital was the Meeting House with its deep roots in religious faith, its tolerance and devotion to liberty of the individual. And in those people there was the will to serve their community and their country. Even this village was a station on the Underground through which Negroes were aided to the freedom of Canada. Sons of this community were in the then Red Cross of the Civil War. And despite their peace loving faith, many of their sons were enrolled in the Union Army to battle for free men.

That imbedded individualism, that self-reliance, that sense of service, and above all those moral and spiritual foundations were not confined to the Quakers. They were but one atom in the mighty tide of these qualities of many larger religious bodies which make up the intangible of the word *America*.

At the time our ancestors were proclaiming that the Creator had endowed all mankind with rights of freedom as the child of God, with a free will, there was being proclaimed by Hegel and later by Karl Marx a satanic philosophy of agnosticism — that the rights of man came from the state. The

greatness of America today comes from one philosophy, the despair of Europe from the other.

There are today fuzzy-minded people in our country who would compromise on these fundamental concepts. They scoff at these tested qualities of men. They never have understood and never will understand what *America* means. They explain that these qualities were good while there was a continent to conquer, and a nation to build. They say that time has passed. No doubt the land frontier has passed. But the frontiers of science are barely opening. This new land with all its high promise can not and will not be conquered except by men inspired from the concepts of free spirit. It is those moral and spiritual qualities in free men which fulfill the meaning of the word *America*. And with them will come centuries of further greatness to our country.

HERBERT HOOVER

Great Journeys from Little Homes

All mankind is given to hero worship. The birthplace of a great man, or a new idea, has been cherished by nations everywhere. Christians speak with reverence of Bethlehem; Moslems with equal fervor make their pilgrimage to Mecca. Shakespeare devotees stream to Stratford-on-Avon, while admirers of Goethe journey to his birthplace at Frankfurt-am-Main. Jamestown, Independence Hall, Fort Sumter, and Pearl Harbor are landmarks in American history. Mount Vernon, Monticello, The Hermitage, New Salem, and Hyde Park are significant names to this nation because of the men associated with them.

Homer's fame expanded so enormously after his death that seven cities have claimed him as their own. The Republican party became so powerful after the Civil War that Jackson, Michigan, and Ripon, Wisconsin, vie for the honor of being the birthplace of the G. O. P. Happily, West Branch in Iowa can lay undisputed claim to Herbert Hoover as its native-born son.

The utter simplicity of the Hoover birthplace has endeared it to all Iowans, for many of the commonwealth's greatest men were born amidst humble surroundings. Governor Henry Dodge

and Senator A. C. Dodge were both log cabin pioneers. Samuel J. Kirkwood was born in a two-story log cabin, and James Harlan has described his boyhood days in log cabins in Illinois and Indiana. Today, statues of Kirkwood and Harlan represent Iowa in the Nation's Hall of Fame.

Students of American history, lovers of the Iowa scene, followers of the Quaker faith, advocates of rugged individualism, engineers, politicians, statesmen, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, people of every race, creed, and color will draw from the Herbert Hoover birthplace at West Branch an inspiring lesson in democracy — that from the humblest home can spring the Nation's leaders, even the President of the United States. It was in 1828 that Andrew Jackson, born in a log cabin and reared in the west, became President of the United States. Jackson was the first American living west of the Alleghenies to be elected Chief Executive of the Nation. A century later, in 1928, Herbert Hoover, born in a simple two-room frame house in Iowa, orphaned at the age of ten and reared amidst adversity, demonstrated it was still possible for men to journey from log cabin to White House.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN



