

# The **P**ALIMPSEST

AUGUST 1948

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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

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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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# THE PALIMPSEST

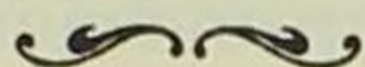
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## Boyhood in Iowa

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

[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.]



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 black-



smith 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' camp fire. 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 wonderful 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 to-day? 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 eighty 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 twenty per cent of the product of the farm. I know, and you know, that to-day as the result of the revolution brought about by machinery and improved methods of planting and breeding animals, and what-not, eighty 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 recreation does to-day. 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 to-day 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

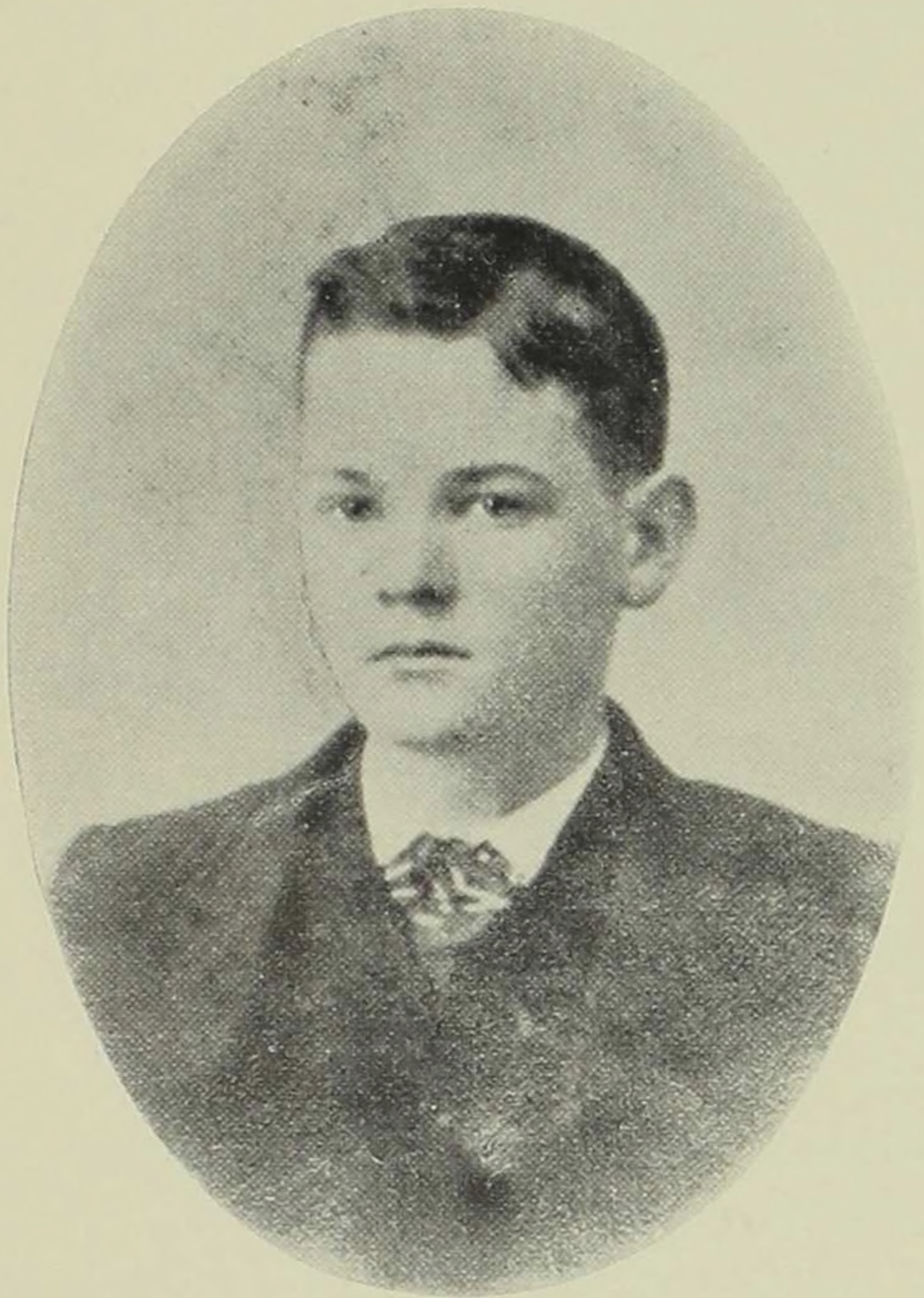


## Bert Hoover

On a summer afternoon in the early eighties a chubby-faced, bare-foot lad might have been seen looking for pretty stones and fossils along the gravelled embankment of the railroad track at West Branch. Picking up pebbles, rubbing them vigorously to make them shine, and moistening them with his tongue to see if they would sparkle would doubtless be considered dull pastime for the average boy. But for Herbert Hoover — "Bertie" he was called at home — it was a matter of pure delight. Collecting choice specimens of stones was his hobby. Dr. William H. Walker, the dentist, could point out the beauty and fine qualities of an agate, and the peculiar characteristics of a fossil coral. And these were things that interested Bert.

The boy's father and mother were Quakers, as were their parents and grandparents for several generations. His father, Jesse Hoover, the village blacksmith, was known for his stalwart character, his high ideals, and his strict adherence to the Quaker faith. Huldah Minthorn Hoover, his mother, was a gracious, womanly woman, a recorded minister of the Society of Friends, always ready to serve, and proud to associate with the

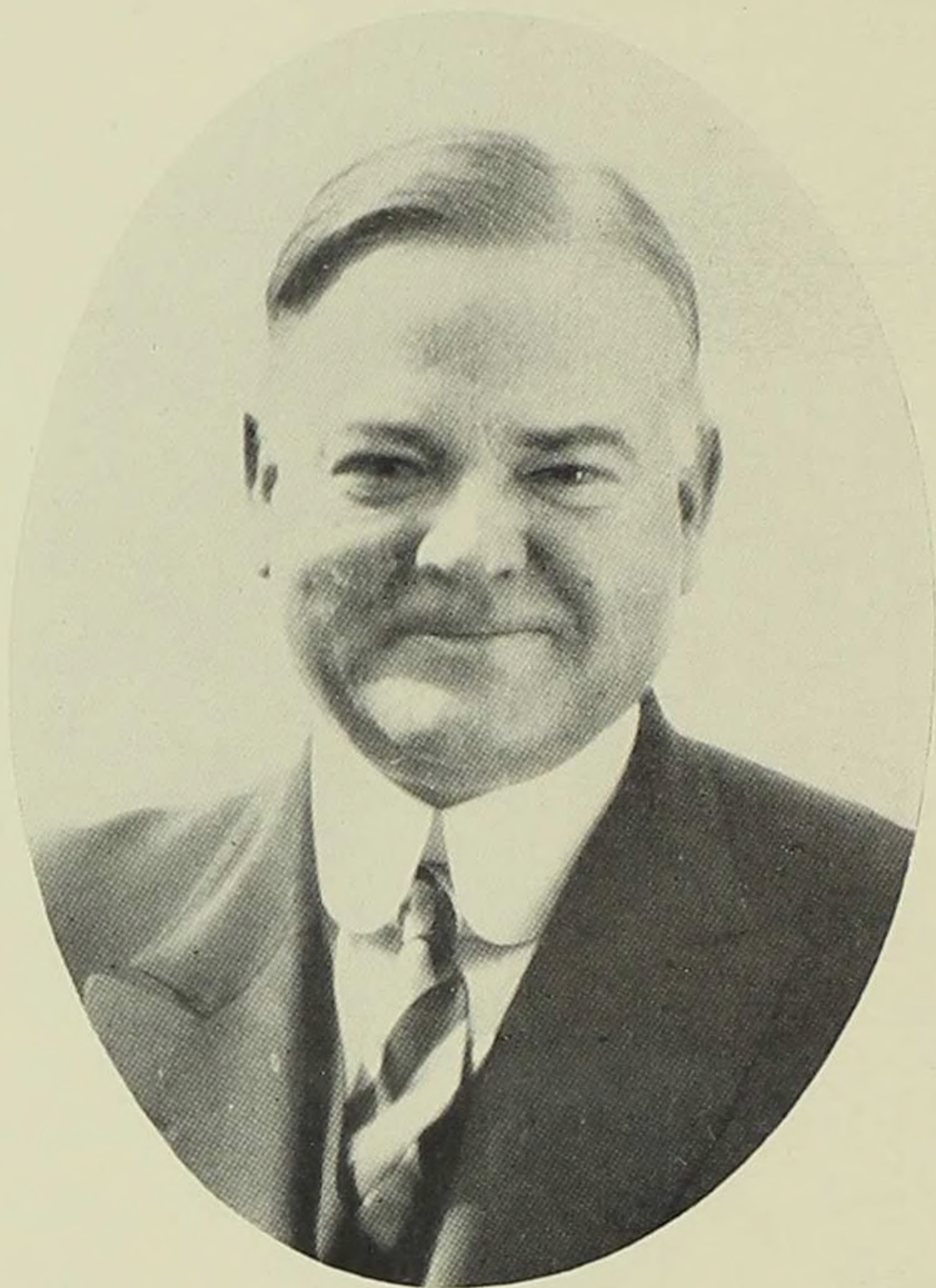




COURTESY OF MRS. CHARLES STRATTON

BERT HOOVER





HERBERT HOOVER — PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE



most humble of the community. One might well say of her as Hamlin Garland has written of his own pioneer mother: "She was neither witty, nor learned in books, nor wise in the ways of the world, but I contend that her life was noble. There was something in her unconscious heroism which transcends wisdom and the deeds of those who dwell in the rose-golden light of romance. Now that her life is rounded in the silence whence it came, its significance appears."

The humble little two-room cottage in which Hoover was born and spent his early boyhood still stands on the bank of the west branch of Wapsinonoc Creek. In a little room seven feet wide and thirteen and a half feet long he first saw the light of day. With the passing of the years the little cottage was remodeled. The little bedroom became a tiny kitchen. Significant events of the decade of the seventies — the interests and activities of the Hoovers — for a time were forgotten. Meanwhile, important events in national and international affairs now and again harked back to this little cottage on the banks of Wapsinonoc Creek. Quietly and unannounced it was in the process of becoming a historic shrine. As such, in 1928, it was opened to the public, and its owner, Mrs. Jennie Scellars, was proud of the fact that her home was the birthplace of Herbert Hoover.



In more recent years, the little cottage has been restored to its original form, and its true significance has come to be a matter of national interest. It is the birthplace of the first President of the United States born west of the Mississippi River.

The boyhood of Bert Hoover was not particularly romantic. He was a boy among boys — “a reg’lar feller”. He went swimming and fishing like other boys, caught rabbits in a figure-four trap, shot pigeons and prairie chickens with a bow and arrow, watched a torch-light parade at a Republican rally, and sold old iron to earn money for fireworks on the Fourth of July. A record of his school attendance during the spring of 1882 when he was seven years old is still preserved in the beautiful penmanship of one of his teachers, Mrs. R. Anna Painter. And he left his name with kind sentiments in the autograph albums of his friends.

A. W. Jackson, an early resident of West Branch, remembered him as “round faced, chubby, serious, and pretty much in the way”. By his teacher, Mrs. J. K. Carran, he was characterized as “industrious and determined”. Whatever he did “he put his whole heart into, whether it was coasting down Cook’s hill on his homemade sled, or diving into the old swimming hole down by the railroad track, or getting a hard lesson in school. He worked with all his might.”



Another characteristic which he seems to have possessed as a boy was "keeping still when he has nothing to say." Even as a youngster he could express himself upon any subject that interested him; but he was never adept at "just making a talk for the sake of talking." He preferred to listen to the others if they had anything worthwhile to say; if not, he had something of his own to think about.

But Bert's boyhood days were not all filled with the boundless joys of youth. There were likewise days of hardship, of sadness and bereavement. When he was only six years old his father fell a victim of typhoid fever and died at the age of thirty-four. The family had just moved from the one-story cottage by the blacksmith shop into a two-story house behind the maples a little to the south. The estate was meager and the demands upon it were great. Mrs. Hoover turned to sewing: she was an excellent seamstress. Moreover, she was frequently called upon to minister at the Quaker meetings, for which she received no regular compensation, but accepted occasional gifts from friends. By industry and economy she would have succeeded in holding the little family together but for her own untimely death, which occurred when Herbert was nine years old.

Completely orphaned, the lad found a home temporarily with his Uncle Allan and Aunt Millie



Hoover on a farm near West Branch. The freedom of country life and the adventurous experience of the farm appealed to his youthful and exuberant nature. And his Aunt Millie's culinary ability appealed with equal strength to his ever increasing appetite. But there were also new duties and new responsibilities confronting him. Laurie Tatum, wise and friendly counselor who had often given him pennies and fatherly advice, was appointed guardian. He spoke to Bert about his conduct; he must be kind and brave and prudent, and help as much as he could on Uncle Allan's farm.

Uncle Allan and Aunt Millie made no distinction between Bert and their own son, Walter, of the same age. They awarded praise and blame with impartial justice and affection. Bert helped to bring in the wood, pumped water, learned to feed and harness the horses, and taught the young calves to drink from a pail. When haying time came, he conceived the idea of training one of the calves to draw a mowing machine. Uncle Allan heard of the plan but made no objection, so a harness was made for the calf. Next a mowing machine was improvised with some boards and a cross-cut saw. Bert was the mechanic. When completed the machine "was a triumph. The wheels were borrowed from an old buggy, the



framework was neatly sawed and nailed, and the steel cutting-edge, sharpened by patient toil with a file, actually moved back and forth like that of a big machine." Aunt Millie was called to admire it; Uncle Allan praised it highly. Then the calf was brought forth, fully equipped, and the traces were fastened to the whiffletree. Suddenly there was a commotion. The bawling calf, tail high in the air, tore through the barnyard. The mower crashed into a tree, the traces broke, and the calf escaped. The pride of boyish invention lay in a wreck against the trunk of an apple tree.

But the days spent on the farm were not all days of hilarity. There were busy days — days of training in industry and economy. The summer passed with its orderly cycle of work: the corn was plowed, the hay cut, the wheat and oats threshed, and the grain carried to the nearest mill for grinding on toll. Bert was too small to do a man's work, but he helped as much as he could. He observed that there was always plenty of work, and that the reward for service lay largely in the satisfaction of tasks well done.

If the influences of the first decade of a person's life determine the principal traits of his character, then Herbert Hoover owes much to his experiences and early training at West Branch. And there seems to be considerable evidence that the



boy was indeed father to the man. His boyhood days, with their joys and hardships, their lessons of industry and thrift, and their fine dreams of future success have borne abundant fruit.

J. A. SWISHER



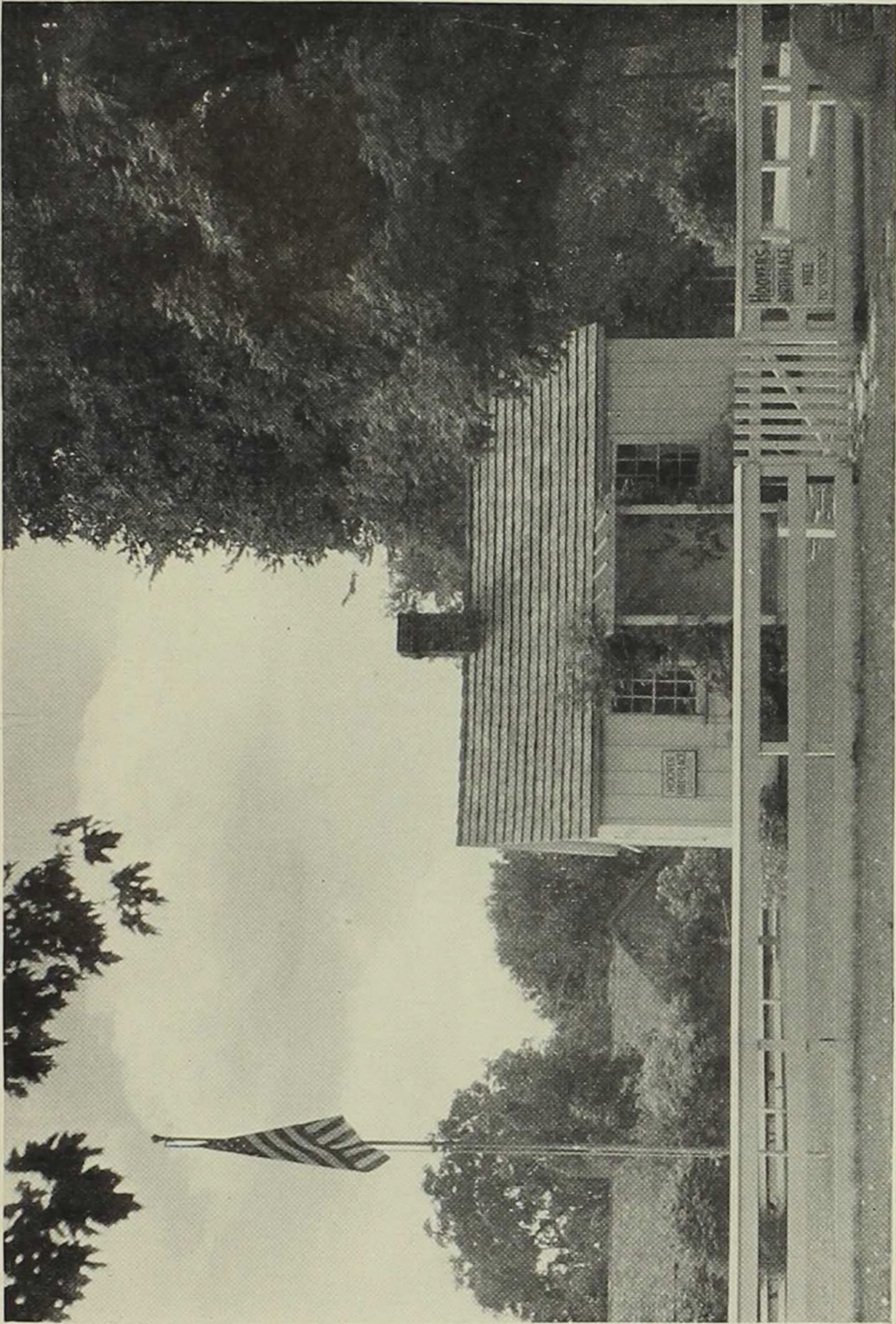


PHOTO BY C. F. KENT

FRONT VIEW OF HOOVER BIRTHPLACE



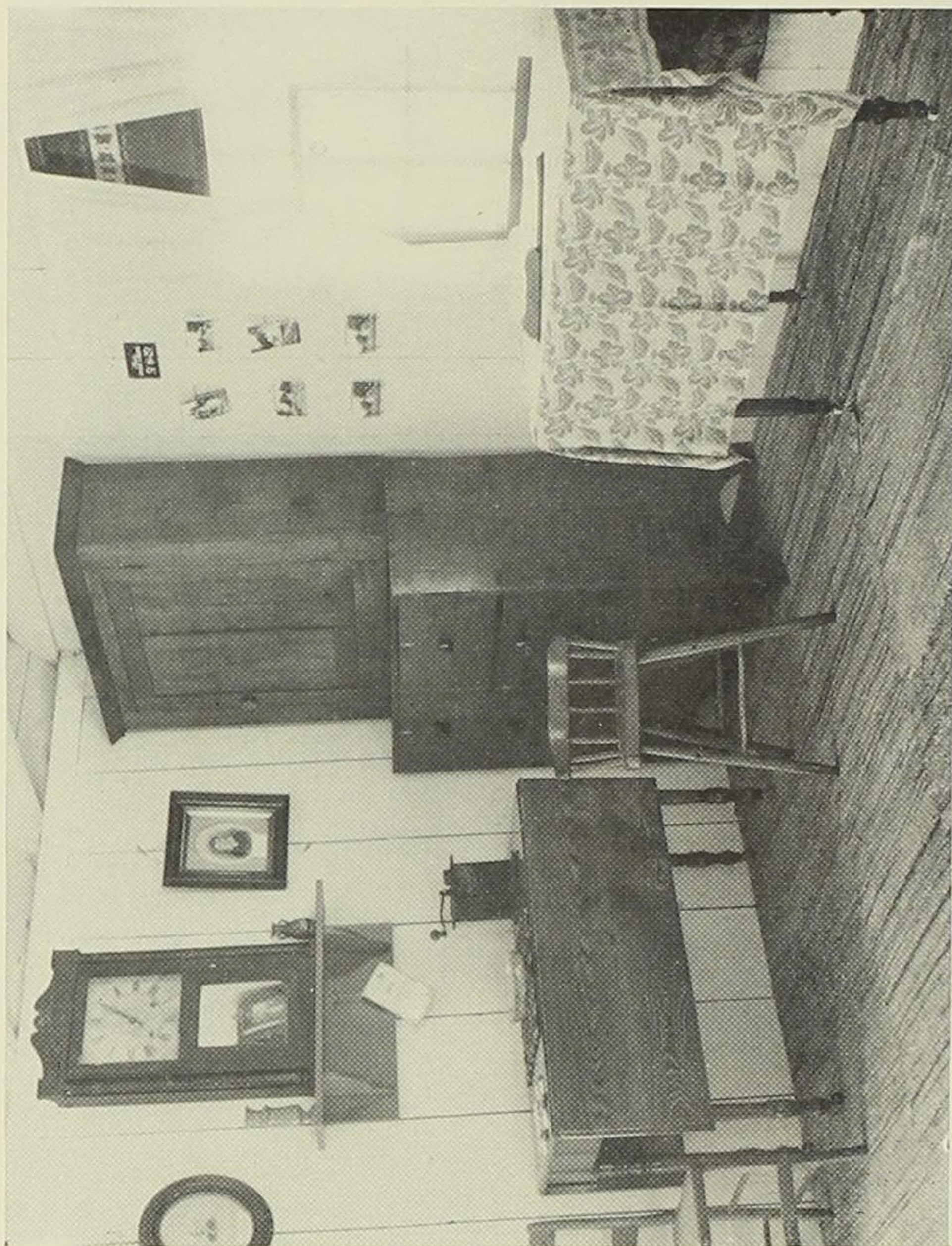


PHOTO BY C. F. KENT

KITCHEN-LIVING ROOM OF HOOVER BIRTHPLACE



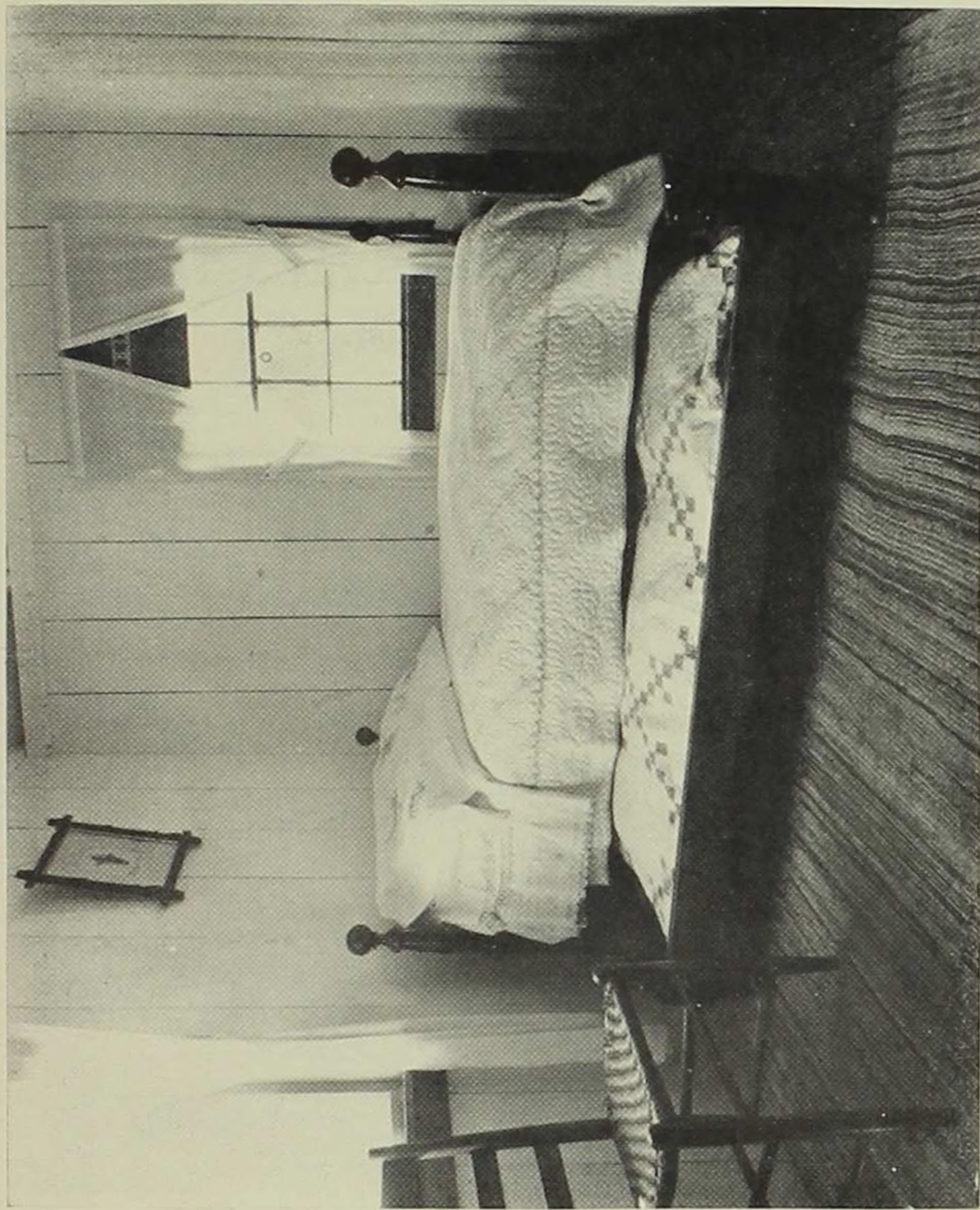


PHOTO BY C. F. KENT

BEDROOM OF HOOVER HOME



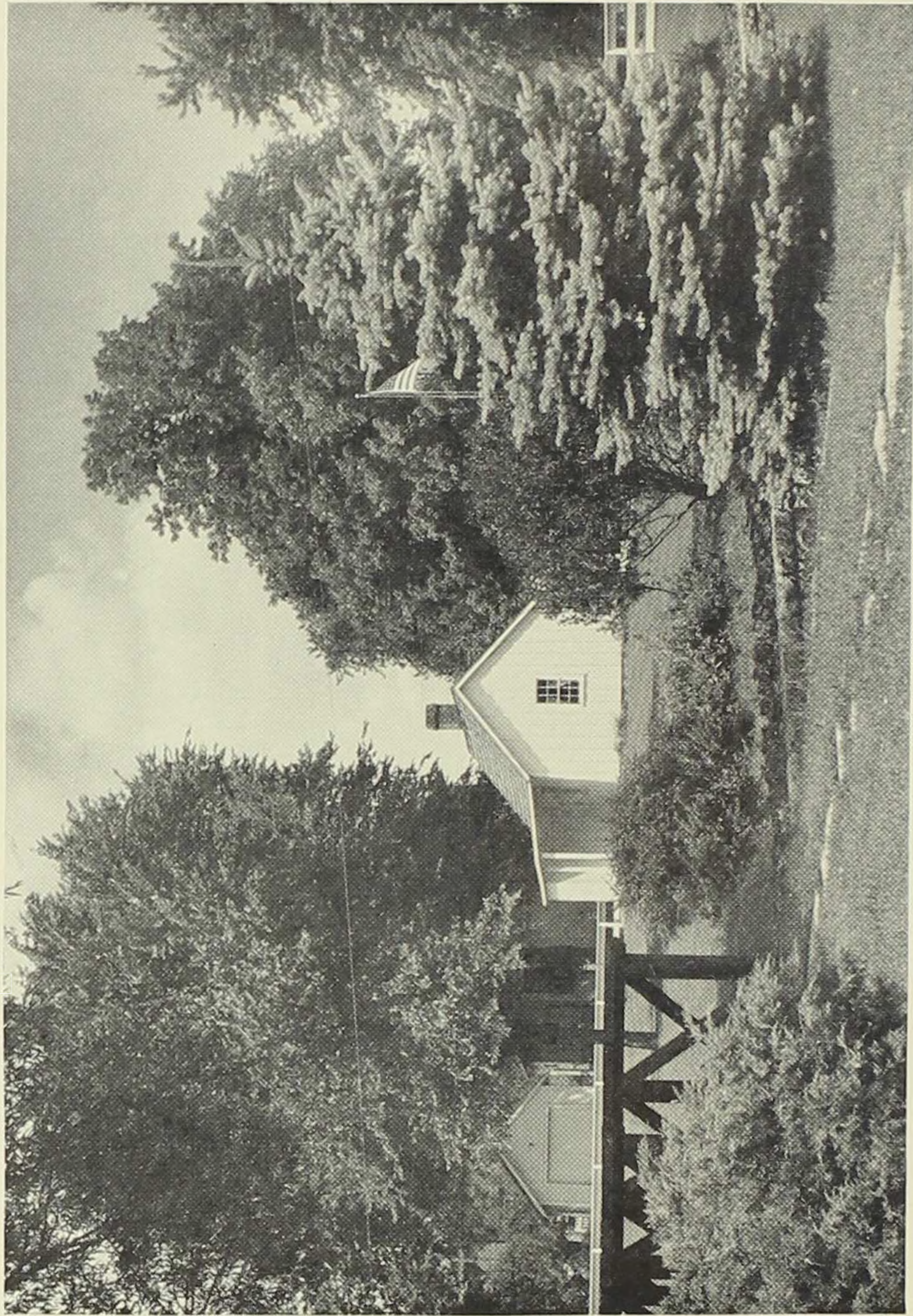


PHOTO BY C. F. KENT

VIEW OF HOOVER HOME FROM THE SOUTH



## The Hoover Birthplace

On the west side of Downey Street and a block south of Main Street in the town of West Branch stands a tiny cottage, which has become historic and which commends itself to widespread attention. Well may one ponder the influences that may come from a little home, or indeed from a little town. For in this diminutive two-room cottage in West Branch was born Herbert Clark Hoover — the first President of the United States born west of the Mississippi River.

West Branch had its beginnings in the decade of the fifties, the townsite being located on the west branch of the Wapsinonoc Creek. David Tatum was one of the first pioneers to settle in the vicinity of West Branch, arriving in 1850. Such well-known settlers as Samuel King, James Townsend, Thomas Barrington, Joseph Steer, Michael King, and Eli Hoover — a sturdy Quaker farmer with a penchant for carpentry and masonry — were present by 1853.

A post office was established at West Branch in 1854 with Samuel King as first postmaster. King kept the post office and a grocery store in his residence, which was located on the south side of



Main Street. A little later the post office was removed to the house of James Townsend who kept a typical pioneer inn, known as "Traveler's Rest", where many a weary wanderer found repast and refreshment, and where John Brown was received as a free and welcomed guest in the fall of 1856.

It was not until the construction of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern Railroad, that the town of West Branch was platted. In those early days the railroad was one of the chief points of interest in the little village. In the summer of 1871 one train passed each way through West Branch daily on the route between Burlington and Cedar Rapids, both carrying freight and passengers. The northbound train was of special interest to the populace, and a goodly number of citizens could be counted upon to be at the station upon its arrival. This train was scheduled to arrive about 4 P. M. Frequently it came an hour or two later. The engines of the two trains were unique. Instead of bearing numbers, they were named after distinguished men. One was called *Fitz Henry Warren* and the other *W. W. Walker* — honoring two early Iowa railroad builders. Each engine was equipped with "a single pair of drive wheels and carried a big smokestack, shaped like a balloon." The engines used wood for fuel, and West Branch, like other stations along the way, main-



tained a supply of fuel where the engines wooded up.

In 1873 a two-story frame, steam gristmill was built near the railroad and north of Main Street at a cost of \$7000. The first regular hotel was erected near the depot by Frank Savage during the same year. In January 1875 the West Branch Bank was established by a stock company, with a cash capital of \$25,000, which was soon increased to \$50,000. In February of that year a petition was signed by thirty-two legal voters within the limits of West Branch, stating that it contained 353 inhabitants and praying that an election be held "to vote upon the propriety of incorporating the village."

Meanwhile, in 1870, Jesse C. Hoover, the third son of pioneer Eli Hoover, was united in marriage to Huldah Minthorn, the daughter of a Quaker family recently arrived from Canada. Upon their marriage, young Jesse Hoover, following the mechanical bent of his father, left the farm to become a blacksmith and mechanic at West Branch. In 1874 an event occurred in that vicinity which was not widely heralded at the time, perhaps because it happened in the two-room cottage of the village blacksmith. On August 10th of that year Herbert Clark Hoover was born. It is reported that the elated father commented: "Well, another U. S.



Grant is born." But it is doubtful if anyone at that early date could have had the wisdom to prophesy that Herbert Clark Hoover would become President of the United States. Beside Herbert, there were in the Hoover home two other children — Theodore, an older brother, and May, a younger sister.

The humble birthplace of Herbert Hoover had been built on a part of the quarter section of government land entered by Aaron Baker, January 23, 1852, as the N. E.  $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec. 7, twp. 79, range 4. This land extends northward and eastward to the intersection of Main and Downey streets in West Branch. Mr. Baker soon transferred the land to Samuel King, who during the same year, 1852, sold it to Timothy Kirk. In 1856 Mr. Kirk sold seven acres of the northeast corner of this quarter section to Steer & Co. In 1870 J. M. Wetherell purchased five acres of this area, and in April of the following year, platted it into town lots, selling lot 41 to Eli Hoover and lots 42 and 43 to his son, Jesse C. Hoover.

The little two-room cottage which was erected on lot 42, and which became the birthplace of Herbert Clark Hoover, was a modest dwelling, constructed chiefly by the sturdy hands of Jesse Hoover, assisted by his father. The foundation stones were boulders hauled from the open prai-



ries. Auger holes, still visible in the rafters, give silent testimony that the timbers from which the substantial framework of the cottage were hewn had been lashed together and floated raft-like down the Mississippi River, perhaps from the forests of Wisconsin to the lumber mills at Muscatine, whence they may have been transported overland by oxen or horse teams to the site of the little cottage on the west branch of the Wapsinonoc. The two-room house in which Herbert Hoover spent his early childhood was simple in every detail. The little room,  $13\frac{1}{2}$  feet long and 7 feet wide, in which he was born, looked out upon a yard and playground. The living room, used as a parlor, kitchen, and dining room combined, lent itself to the development of a social atmosphere.

The side walls of the Hoover cottage were not lathed and plastered as they might have been in later years. Instead, the walls were of wide "barn boards", placed in a perpendicular position and closely fitted together by skillful hands. "Inside, to keep out the cold, the cracks were carefully taped with strips of cloth, and the walls inside and out, were whitewashed, immaculate and clean."

"Twelve-pane windows were kept shining, and the doors of vertical boards, homemade, were hospitably opened, with their latches of oldfashioned type, to lift at the pressure of the thumb."



The cottage had, for an additional sleeping room, "a shed annex" which provided a bedroom for the journeyman who sometimes assisted Jesse Hoover during his busy days as the village blacksmith. It is reported that E. D. King was occupying this sleeping room on the night of August 10, 1874, when he was called to summon the doctor on the occasion of the arrival of Herbert Clark Hoover. Adjoining the "shed room" was the back porch. Nearby was the old wooden pump, and dangling from it an old-fashioned gourd dipper gave visible evidence of economy, utility, and thrift. Beneath the pump spout was a tub, in which, on a summer evening, the barefoot children would wash their feet before retirement.

Enclosing the house yard, when Herbert Hoover was a small boy, "was a three board fence, topped by a flat board on which daring youngsters walked, and a white picket gate swung its welcome to visitors." Perennial shrubs and old fashioned flowers grew profusely within the yard that surrounded the Hoover cottage. It was a typical Quaker home where peace and quiet prevailed, and where industry, thrift, and culture were ever present.

As early as 1871, perhaps, Jesse Hoover erected a blacksmith shop on Lot 41, just north of the cottage, which at that time belonged to Eli Hoover.





PHOTO BY C. F. KENT

CORNER OF BEDROOM





PHOTO BY C. F. KENT

STATUE OF ISIS

*Gift of Belgian Children to Herbert Hoover*



Not long afterwards Huldah Hoover wrote: "Jesse gets plenty of work to do for himself and a hand; still the trouble is he don't get the cash for near all his work, which makes it pull kind of hard."

But Jesse and Huldah Hoover were young, ambitious, and industrious. They would make their own way in the world and be successful. They would purchase the lot on which the little shop stood. They would live in the little cottage a few years and then purchase a larger dwelling. These were dreams which were destined to come true.

In the decade of the seventies West Branch was a typical frontier village. The stage road from Davenport to Iowa City constituted the principal street extending from east to west through the village. A block south of the stage road and Main Street was the little Hoover cottage, and beside it was the village blacksmith shop, operated and managed by the sturdy Jesse Hoover.

In 1879 the little cottage and the shop nearby were sold and the Hoover family had moved into a larger dwelling a block farther south and on the opposite side of the street. In that portion of the village which lay north of the main thoroughfare and along Downey Street was the Quaker Meeting House, and on the summit of the hill farther north was the village schoolhouse, where knowl-



edge and culture were dispensed freely. "A combination of organizations and institutions could not be more perfectly arranged as a setting for the development of a broad and civic outlook. American civilization as a whole was epitomized in this village." It was a modest youth who came up through this environment who was destined to become the only man born west of the Mississippi River to be elected President of the United States.

A little more than a year after the Hoover family moved into their new home on South Downey Street, Jesse Hoover contracted a fever and died at the age of thirty-four, on December 13, 1880. Huldah Hoover bravely sought to carry on, and to nurture her children in their own home. But her own untimely death on February 24, 1884, at the age of thirty-five, brought an end to this carefully planned program. Thus at an early age the interests and welfare of Herbert Hoover came to be guided by the hands of foster parents.

At the country home of Uncle Allan and Aunt Millie Hoover, young Herbert enjoyed the privileges of home life. Cousin Walter, a lad Bert's own age, was his constant companion. Together they worked and played, farmed and fished, as boys of ten will do. But in the winter of 1885, at the age of eleven years, it was "Westward Ho" for Herbert. He went to live with his uncle, Dr. H.



John Minthorn, at Newburg, Oregon. Soon he was studying engineering at Stanford University.

Eleven years passed before Herbert Hoover returned to West Branch. He was on his way to London. As a mining engineer, in the employment of the Rothschilds, he would supervise gold mining in Australia — a position of great responsibility for a youth of twenty-two years. Four years later friends at West Branch learned that Herbert Hoover and his young wife, Lou Henry Hoover, were in the midst of a Boxer uprising in China. Subsequently, there were years of engineering and of mining — difficult, exacting years. Then came World War I, Food Conservation, and Belgian Relief work. When there were millions of orphans and needy children in Europe, Mr. Hoover was first among their friends and sponsors. In a sense he was foster father to them all. His humanitarian interests brought him to the fore and made him an international figure. In 1923 he was Secretary of Commerce in the cabinet of President Warren G. Harding. On April 13th of that year he was in Des Moines, stopped at Le Grand to see Aunt Millie, and came quietly into West Branch.

Almost forty years had passed since that winter day in 1885, when Herbert Hoover left the little town of West Branch for his new home in the West. Meanwhile the little cottage on Downey



Street had become significant. It had come to be widely known as the birthplace of Herbert Hoover, a member of the President's Cabinet. Meanwhile, too, the little cottage itself had been remodeled and enlarged. In 1879 the cottage had been sold to G. M. D. Hill. In 1885 it was sold to Z. T. McCaleb. In 1887 it was purchased by Victoria Hill, who sold it in 1890 to R. P. Scellars. Mr. Scellars was a builder, and had visions of a larger home. He purchased another dwelling which he moved on to the Hoover lot. He turned the little cottage one-fourth around, so that it faced the south instead of the east. Then he placed the larger building east of the cottage and joined the two buildings as one, affording a larger dwelling. Thus the little Hoover cottage became the kitchen in the home of Mrs. Jennie Scellars, and thus it was maintained for many years.

In 1928 when Herbert Hoover was nominated for the presidency, the Hoover-Scellars home suddenly became a place of national interest. Visitors came from far and near to see it. It was fast becoming a national shrine. "Hoover Day" at West Branch in August of that year "was preceded by an influx of notables, as well as newspaper, magazine and movie folk, artists, photographers and hosts of prominent people". On the morning of the arrival of the presidential candidate, Mr. and Mrs.



Hoover with their relatives and immediate friends breakfasted at the little cottage, and later visited many of the scenes of Mr. Hoover's childhood.

When Mr. Hoover was inaugurated President of the United States in March, 1929, a special train went from West Branch to Washington in order that hundreds of his immediate friends might witness the ceremony. It was a great day for West Branch. America is America because here it is possible for a youth to go from a tiny cottage to the White House. Mr. Hoover had done that. In doing so he had exemplified one of the very fine traditions of American life, and had made the little cottage at West Branch a focal point of American interest.

From the time that Mr. Hoover first became nationally prominent, citizens of West Branch were interested in his advancement, and were proud of the little cottage that had been his boyhood home. Whenever an occasion was afforded, West Branch rallied to the support of Herbert Hoover. Later when Mr. Hoover became President of the United States, there was an increased interest in the Hoover birthplace. In August, 1929, West Branch observed the president's birthday in an impressive ceremony in which it dedicated a native boulder and bronze tablet at the site of the president's birthplace.



As the years passed, Mrs. Herbert Hoover and her two sons, Herbert, Jr., and Allan, conceived the idea of restoring the Hoover cottage to its original appearance. To that end, Allan Hoover, in 1935, purchased the Scellars property and a dozen adjoining town lots. Subsequently, in 1938, the one and a half story front that had been added by Mr. Scellars was removed. That part of the building that constituted the original cottage was placed in its former position. The rooms of the cottage were restored to their former status, and a search began for some of the original furniture.

In 1939 prominent citizens of West Branch and other Iowa communities, who had long been interested in the Hoover home, formed an organization which they incorporated as the Hoover Birthplace Society. Since that time this organization, in cooperation with a large number of other interested citizens, has gone far in developing the Hoover home as a national historic shrine.

While simplicity marks the site, there is nothing surrounding the premises that suggests austerity. "Morning glory vines again climb over the back porch and an old-fashioned gourd dipper hangs on a post near the old wooden pump." Two hundred feet south of the cottage, on a substantial foundation, is a statue of Isis — The Goddess of Life — with the inscription: "I am that which was and is



and shall ever be, and no mortal has yet lifted the veil which covers me." The statue was designed by a Belgian artist especially for the Hoover birthplace, and was presented by a committee of Belgian school children, Belgian refugees, and soldiers of the Belgian Army in recognition of the distinguished services rendered by Herbert Hoover in administering Belgian relief during and after World War I.

Between the dooryard and the statue the west branch of Wapsinonoc Creek meanders slowly along its way just as it did when Herbert Hoover played along its banks as a barefoot boy. The yard surrounding the little cottage is again enclosed by "a three board fence, topped by a flat board", and the white picket gate again swings its welcome to visitors just as it did in days of yore. A little west of the Hoover cottage a new modern dwelling has been erected for the use of the custodian of the premises, and extending to the south and to the west for a distance of thirty rods or more is an open area which has been recently acquired by the Hoover Birthplace Society to enlarge and extend the park area surrounding the Hoover home.

But with all its surrounding improvements, the birthplace of Herbert Hoover remains the center of interest. As a visitor approaches the cottage from



the front, he comes first to a small porch. Entering the doorway he finds himself in a modest little room. The walls and ceiling as well as the doors and window sills are of rough-hewn boards. But they are immaculately clean and white as they were in the days of Huldah Hoover. Some of the furniture is from the original Hoover household. There is a sturdy drop-leaf dining table preserved from the early home, and beside it stands a highchair now weathered and worn, but highly prized as the one used by Herbert Hoover. In the adjoining bedroom where Mr. Hoover was born is an antique walnut bureau — a family heirloom — and beside it a trundle bed similar to one that was in the room when the Hoovers occupied it.

The preservation of the Hoover birthplace is significant, not for what it is, but for what it exemplifies. Steadfast and unremitting toil marked the progress of Bert Hoover from the little white house on Downey Street to the big White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. Herbert Hoover will long be remembered as the first Iowa-born man to achieve the Presidency of the United States. His birthplace is a shrine — for Iowans, for Americans, and for grateful citizens throughout the world. It is a challenge and an inspiration to youth everywhere.

J. A. SWISHER



## Comment by the Editor

### *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 Frankfort-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 nine and reared amidst adversity, demonstrated it was still possible for men to journey from log cabin to White House.

W. J. P.



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