

The
PALIMPSEST

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Loren N. Horton, Acting Director

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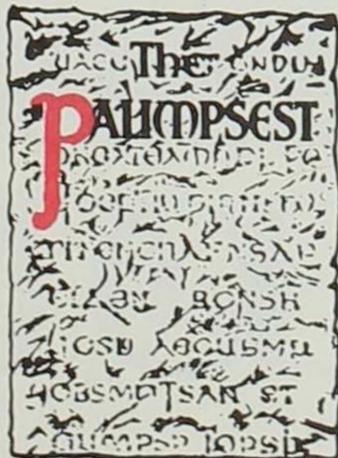
William Silag, Editor

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Cover: (clockwise from top) Henry A. Wallace, John L. Lewis, Herbert Hoover, and Harry Hopkins, four men from Iowa who helped shape American history in the twentieth century. They are the subject of our special feature in this issue of The Palimpsest, "The Providers," by John N. Schacht. (Peter Nelson drawing for the State Historical Society)



The Meaning of the Palimpsest

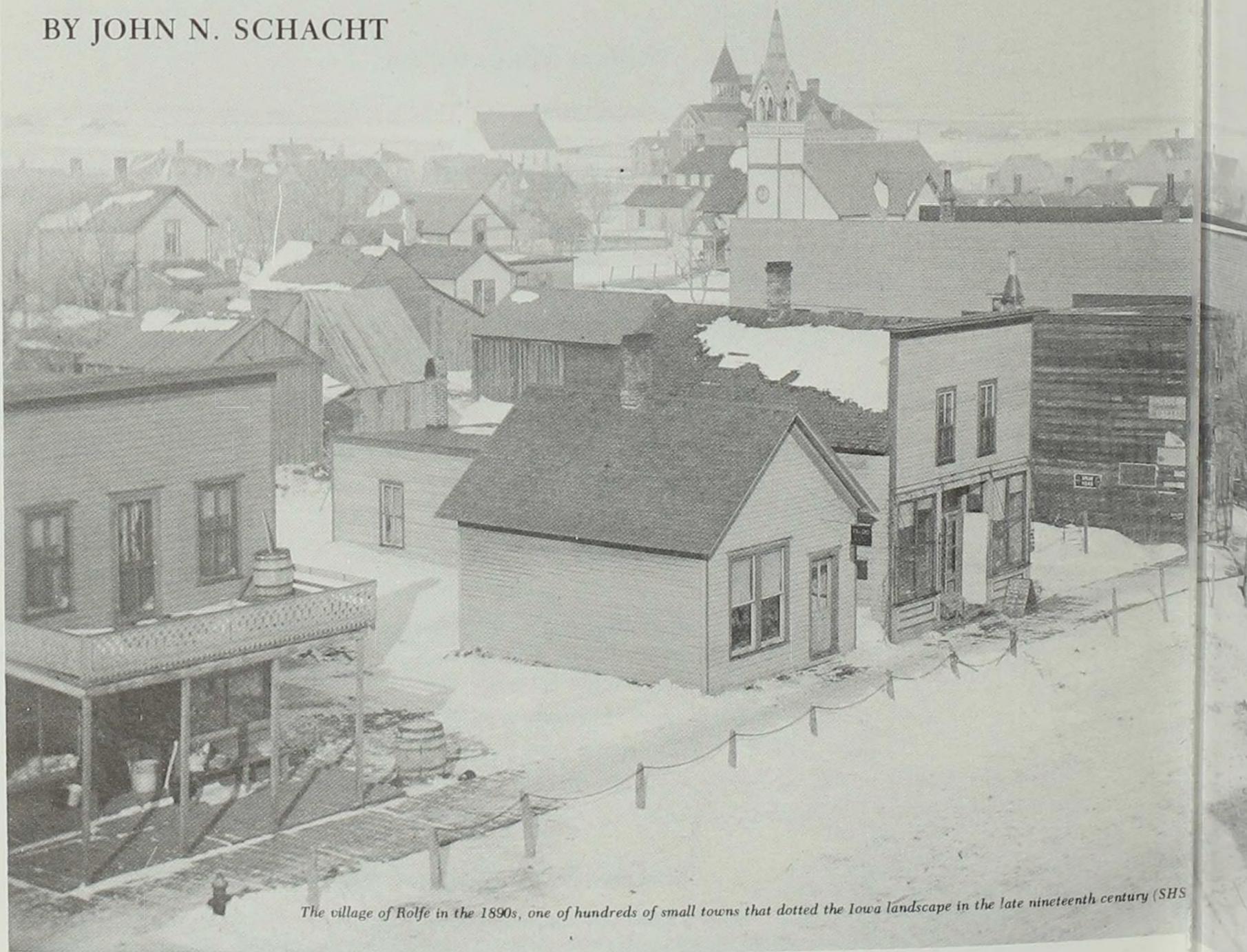
In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the 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 record 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.

How and why men from Iowa—Herbert Hoover, John L. Lewis, Henry A. Wallace, Harry Hopkins—were the leaders who shaped American history during the Great Depression a half-century ago

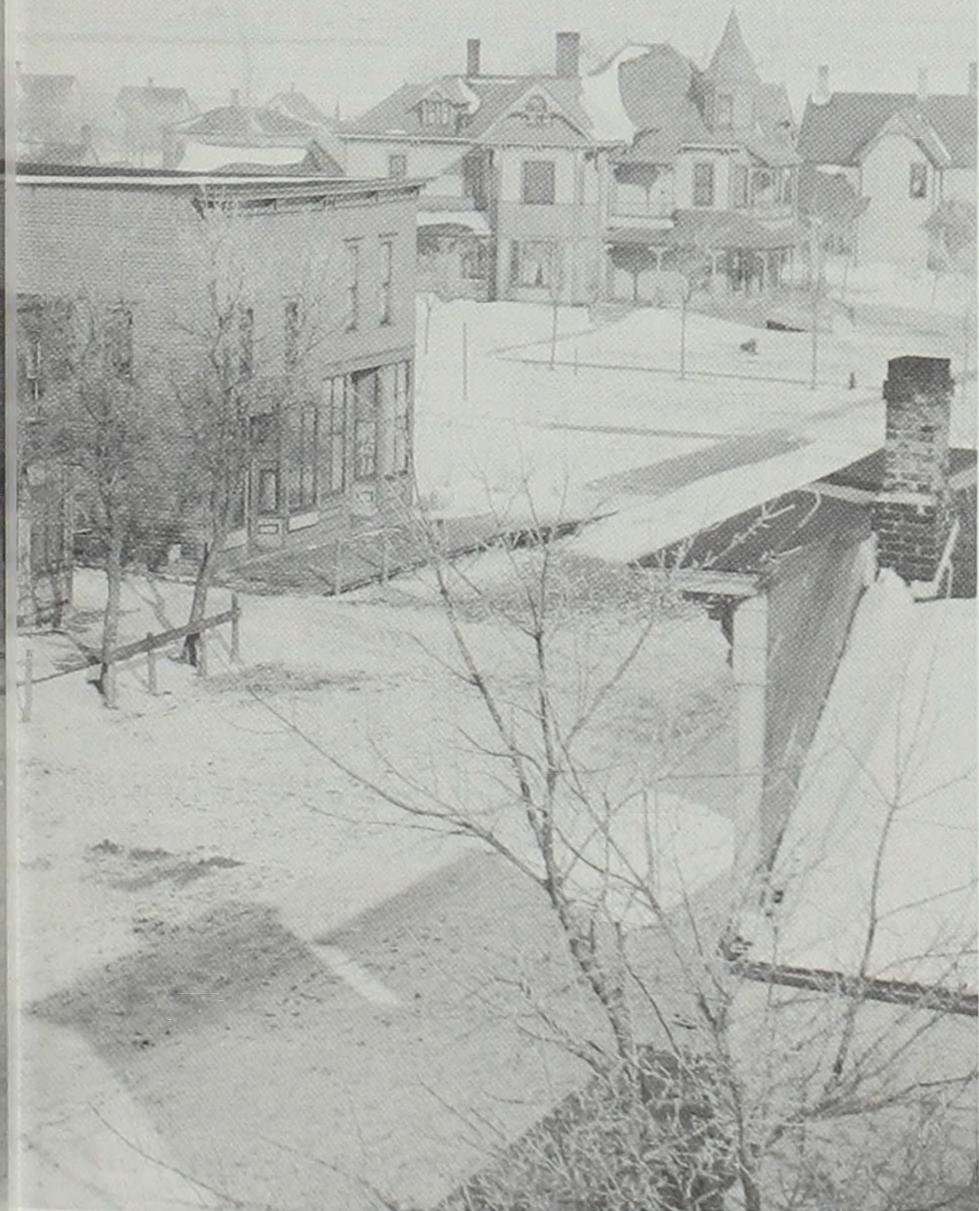


BY JOHN N. SCHACHT



The village of Rolfe in the 1890s, one of hundreds of small towns that dotted the Iowa landscape in the late nineteenth century (SHS)

THE PROV



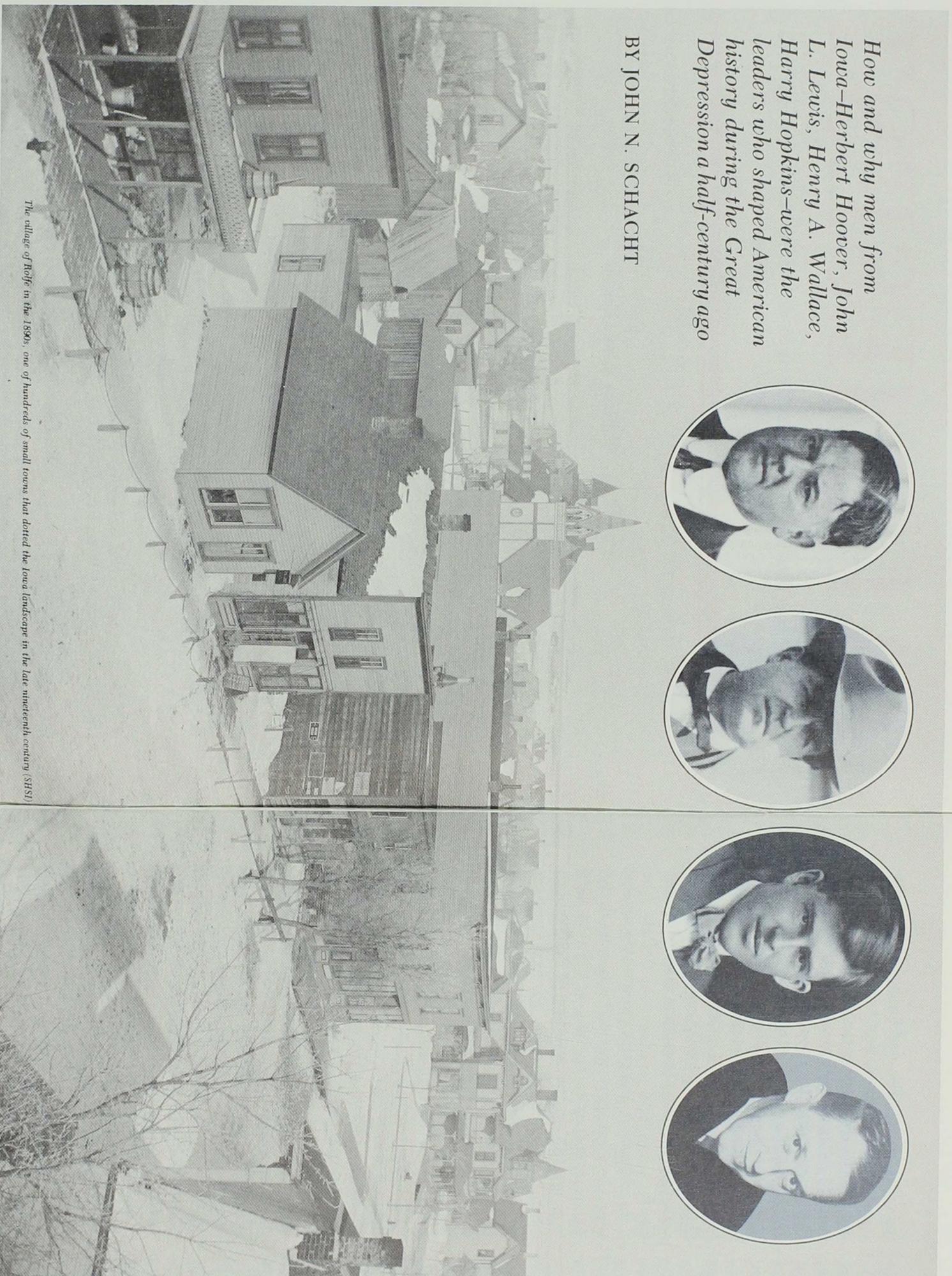
The 1930s, as Charles Dickens once wrote of an epoch 150 years earlier, might have been called the best of times, the worst of times, the age of wisdom, the age of foolishness, the spring of hope and the winter of despair. From the ashes of the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression rose the phoenix of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, which shaped the direction of American government and society for two generations. Playing major roles in the drama of the decade—in the depths of the Depression and in recovery from it, in the building of the New Deal and in opposition to it—were four natives of Iowa. Aside from the towering figure of FDR himself, it would be difficult to name four people as important in national affairs between 1930 and 1940 as Herbert Hoover, John L. Lewis, Henry A. Wallace, and Harry Hopkins.

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LDERS

How and why men from Iowa—Herbert Hoover, John L. Lewis, Henry A. Wallace, Harry Hopkins—were the leaders who shaped American history during the Great Depression a half-century ago

BY JOHN N. SCHACHT



The village of Rolfe in the 1890s, one of hundreds of small towns that dotted the Iowa landscape in the late nineteenth century. (SISS)

THE PROVIDERS

The 1930s, as Charles Dickens once wrote of an epoch 150 years earlier, might have been called the best of times, the worst of times, the age of wisdom, the age of foolishness, the spring of hope and the winter of despair. From the ashes of the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression rose the phoenix of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, which shaped the direction of American government and society for two generations. Playing major roles in the drama of the decade—in the depths of the Depression and in recovery from it, in the building of the New Deal and in opposition to it—were four natives of Iowa. Aside from the towering figure of FDR himself, it would be difficult to name four people as important in national affairs between 1930 and 1940 as Herbert Hoover, John L. Lewis, Henry A. Wallace, and Harry Hopkins.

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Each of these men had been nurtured in the Iowa environment. President Herbert Hoover was born into a Quaker community in West Branch and went on to gain world fame as a mining engineer before turning his talents to public life. United Mine Workers President John L. Lewis grew up in the coal towns of southern Iowa. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace's family had been leaders in Iowa agriculture and agricultural journalism for decades. And New Deal administrator and presidential advisor Harry Hopkins developed a social conscience in his years as an undergraduate at an Iowa liberal arts college.

Not that these four were the only Iowans in the public eye in those years. There were writers like James Norman Hall and Ruth Suckow; painter Grant Wood and cartoonist J.N. "Ding" Darling; journalist Marquis Childs; opinion analyst George Gallup; movie actor John Wayne; football's first Heisman Trophy winner, Jay Berwanger; baseball player Bob Feller; and band leader Glenn Miller—all Iowans by birth or upbringing. But Hoover, Wallace, Hopkins, and Lewis were movers and shakers of the first rank, men at the fountains of power who, as much as individuals can, made the 1930s what they were.

Why in this period should Iowans have been so predominant? Partly, no doubt, by coincidence. And yet it seems not entirely coincidental that a disproportionate share of the influential people in the 1930s came from Iowa. To see why, one must go back another half-century to the Iowa of the mid-1870s to mid-1890s, when these men were being born or growing up. Anyone from Iowa in those days had the *arithmetic*, so to speak, on his side.

In the first place, the Iowa of a century ago was not the statistically "average" state that it is

today (at or near the middle among the fifty states in area, population, and income per capita). The 1880 census ranked Iowa's population of 1,624,615 tenth among the then thirty-eight states; in 1900 its population of 2,231,853 ranked tenth among the then forty-four states. For twenty years or perhaps slightly longer, Iowa was the tenth most populous state—the highest proportionately it has ever been—and thus sheer numbers would predict more successes (and failures) from Iowa than from most states.

In addition, Iowa's population was in several ways special in its prospects for success in the American society of the time. In 1880 the state was seventh in the number of native-born whites (conversely, Iowa ranked twenty-seventh in "colored" population) and seventh in the number of native-born white males. Some 16 percent of Iowa's population was foreign-born, but fully one-third of the immigrants, like John L. Lewis's Welsh-born father and mother, came from countries where English was widely spoken. Also, most of Iowa's churchgoers were in the conventional Protestant sects (though there were important exceptions, such as the large Catholic enclaves around Dubuque and Carroll, and various utopian groups including the Amana Society). Therefore, most ambitious Iowans were in no danger of being frustrated by barriers of racial or religious discrimination or of language in whatever drive they were able to mount toward wealth and fame.

Furthermore, Iowans had the chance to become well educated—relatively. Originally, Iowa may have been, as Herbert Hoover once wrote, "populated by the more adventuresome and the more courageous, who fought their way along the ever extending frontier." But in the

The Iowa Environment

1880s that frontier had extended farther west. Swords had been beaten into plowshares. Corn was regarded as an unfailing crop; the stable economy which it provided enabled Iowans to turn some attention to things other than wresting a living from the soil. Keach Johnson has drawn a convincing picture of the shortcomings of early Iowa education, pointing out that the state's numerous schools (fifth most numerous nationally) were mostly one-room, ungraded establishments housed in unsuitable buildings and staffed by teachers who were mostly inexperienced and ill-prepared. Yet census figures and other evidence show that Iowans of a century ago valued education and put more into it than most states. Tenth in population, Iowa in 1880 was seventh in the number of pupils attending school and seventh in expenditures for school purposes. It was fifth in the number of teachers. In 1900 it was second in the percentage of children attending school (nor was this statistic unduly affected by racial makeup; it was third considering only its white population). The most convincing evidence of educational advantage is that Iowa led the United States in literacy in the 1880 census and again in 1900 and 1910.

Further, it seems likely that child labor did not deprive many Iowa boys and girls of schooling, as it did in the more industrialized states. Of course, many children—like the young Hoover, Lewis, and Wallace—were involved in farm work, but most of this was seasonal or before and after school hours. Altogether, the attitude of Anna Pickett Hopkins, who in 1901 engineered a family move to Grinnell so that her son Harry and her other children could have the advantages of higher learning, was not uncharacteristic of Iowans.

Iowa a century ago was also a comparatively healthy place to live. An orphaned Hoover had grim personal reason to know the threat posed by communicable diseases of that era. Yet Iowa children could expect to flourish and grow to maturity. "The healthfulness of the state ap-

pears to good advantage," wrote Iowa Secretary of State John A. T. Hull in 1883. "Only four states reported a smaller number of deaths [for 1880] in proportion to the entire population . . . and only three had a smaller proportionate number of deaths among the male population." And the moral environment was such that robust young men need not have feared being led astray by bad companions, at least to the extent that staying out of prison signified virtue. Iowa in 1880 was thirty-seventh among the thirty-eight states in number of prisoners per capita—and thirty-eighth of thirty-eight in female prisoners.

"Morality" might have been asserted in a subtler and more significant way. The social makeup of the state was such that children were likely to grow up possessing qualities that pointed toward success. Iowa was basically a state of freeholding farmers and those who served them—small businessmen, tradespeople, and professional people. Consider these 1880 census data: Iowa was, as always, highest of all the states in agricultural output per capita, and it was fifth in the country in the number of "planters and farmers." But it ranked eighteenth in the number of agricultural laborers—people working for wages. Thus, one sees a state in which a sense of ownership was strong, a state of small family farms. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century this was the kind of life designed to inculcate the Puritan staples of hard work, thrift, and self-reliance, salted with shrewdness and ambition.

This, then, was the atmosphere in which was raised a generation that would reach its prime of middle age in the 1930s. The athletes of the Thirties were younger, of course, and so were some of the others—Gallup, Childs, Wayne, and Miller were born after 1900—but most were boys and young men before 1900. They never lost traces of their nineteenth-century Iowa origins, and they owed many of their successes, and some of their failures, to it.

A Time of Preparation

Of the four men considered here, Herbert Clark Hoover was the oldest and, as thirty-first President of the United States, certainly preeminent. He was born of Quaker parents, Jesse and Huldah Minthorn Hoover, on August 11, 1874, in West Branch. His father died when Herbert was six, his mother—a victim of pneumonia complicated by typhoid fever—when he was nine. After the death of his mother, the child was sent to live with his uncle, Allen Hoover, and his aunt Millie on a Cedar County farm. The Allen Hoovers had little money, but as Quakers neither they, nor indeed their community, could have failed to provide for the orphaned boy. Later, Hoover wrote in almost idyllic terms how his eyes were “filled with the wonders of Iowa’s streams and woods, of the mystery of growing crops.” And his heart and mind were filled with the faith and sturdy independence of the Society of Friends. At the age of eleven he was sent to another of his uncles, Dr. Henry John Minthorn, in Oregon, where there was a greater likelihood of his obtaining a college education.

In 1891 he entered the newly established Stanford University in California, and there he met a young woman of his own age, Miss Lou Henry, who had moved with her family from Waterloo, Iowa to the West Coast at about the same time as Hoover. By the time of his graduation in 1895, “an understanding” existed between the two, and they went on to correspond over the next four years while Hoover launched a career in international mining engineering in Australia’s “outback.” Hoover returned to the United States in 1899 to marry Miss Henry, and the two departed for China, where Hoover was to spend the next three years. (His wife had unusual interest and ability in languages, and it is said that in later years the two frequently conversed domestically in Chinese.) Thereafter, his work, first for a London-based firm

and later as a freelance engineer, was to take him to a score of nations on four continents and earn him a worldwide reputation as technician, manager, and businessman. He also stirred admiration for his honesty by paying a group of creditors a great sum of money that had been embezzled by a business associate of Hoover’s and that he and his firm were not legally liable for.

It was during World War I that Hoover leaped to fame as a public servant. August 1914 found him in London, in charge of a far-flung mining and engineering empire that had brought him much more than the million dollars that he had once said any capable man should be able to make by the age of forty. At the outbreak of war, the United States embassy in London found itself besieged by thousands of Americans stranded in Europe. It asked the Great Engineer for help. Hoover organized an effective volunteer effort—the American Relief Committee—which sent 120,000 of his fellow citizens home in good shape, though in the meantime his own business went to pieces. Next, he set up and directed the Commission for Relief in Belgium, which fed ten million civilians in German-occupied Belgium and northern France, and he headed several organizations aimed at averting famine in postwar Europe. Alexander Solzhenitsyn has remarked that the Hoover-directed American Relief Administration saved millions of lives in Russia during the early Twenties.

Now committed to public service, Hoover became secretary of commerce in President Warren G. Harding’s cabinet and continued in that position under President Calvin Coolidge. In accepting the position, Hoover had exacted from Harding the promise that his influence would not be restricted to Commerce, and certainly he played a far more influential role than his position in the Commerce Department would suggest. His experience with food relief

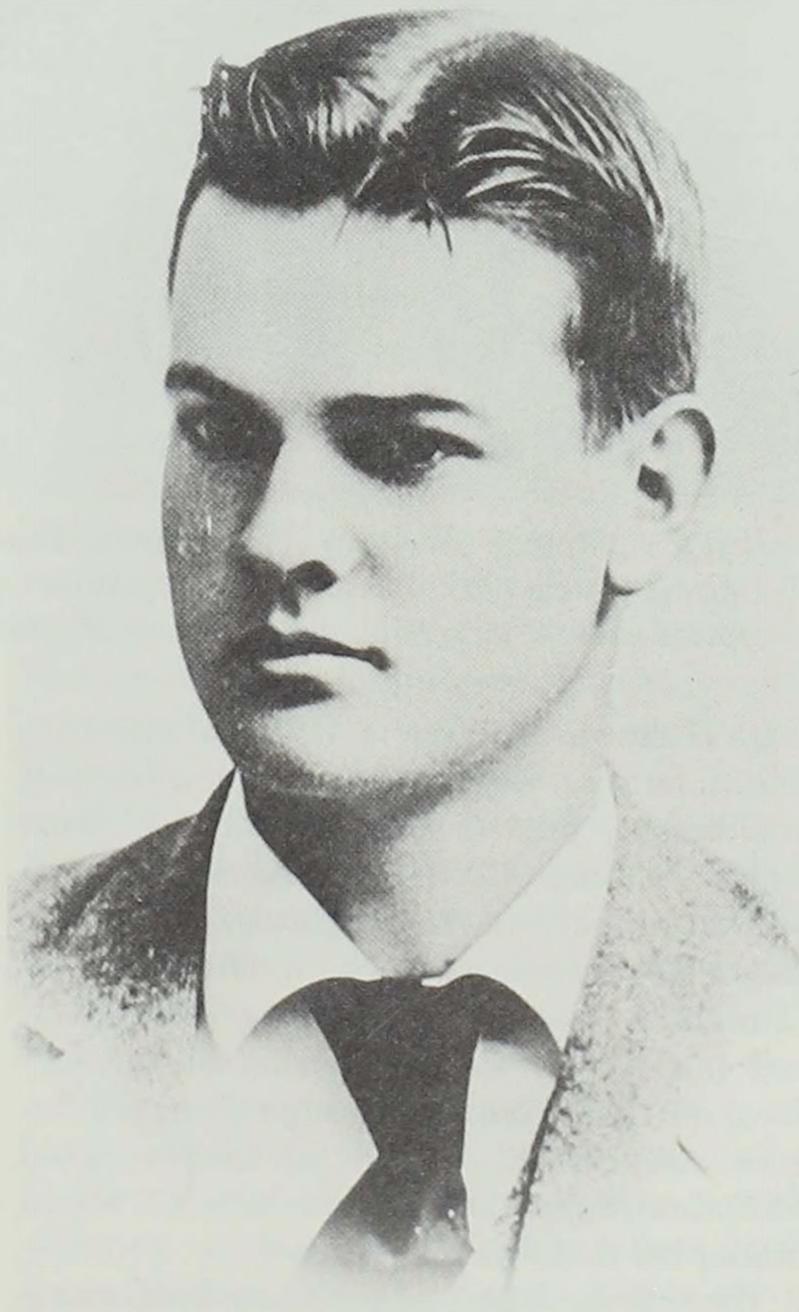
gave him a strong interest in the marketing of farm products, and this brought him into jurisdictional and philosophical conflict with another Iowan, Henry C. Wallace, the secretary of agriculture. Friction increased after Calvin Coolidge became president. Though he thought Hoover a busybody, the President disliked Wallace and distrusted his programs, and thus he supported Hoover in what became a continuing conflict. Though Hoover regarded Wallace as a "dour Scotsman" who "made trouble for the Department of Commerce," he had recommended the Ames professor for his cabinet position and does not seem to have felt any personal animosity toward him. Since Hoover was winning the arguments, he was probably insensitive to the resentment he was raising in Wallace. Resentment in Henry C. Wallace the father became enmity in Henry A. Wallace the son, who at one point blamed the frustrations of the cabinet struggle for his father's death in 1924.

Hoover had eyed the Republican presidential nomination as early as 1920. When Coolidge did not choose to run in 1928 there was little doubt that Hoover, widely regarded as the ablest man in public life, would receive the Republican nomination. He did, and he easily defeated Al Smith in November. But eight months after Hoover took office in 1929 the stock market crashed.

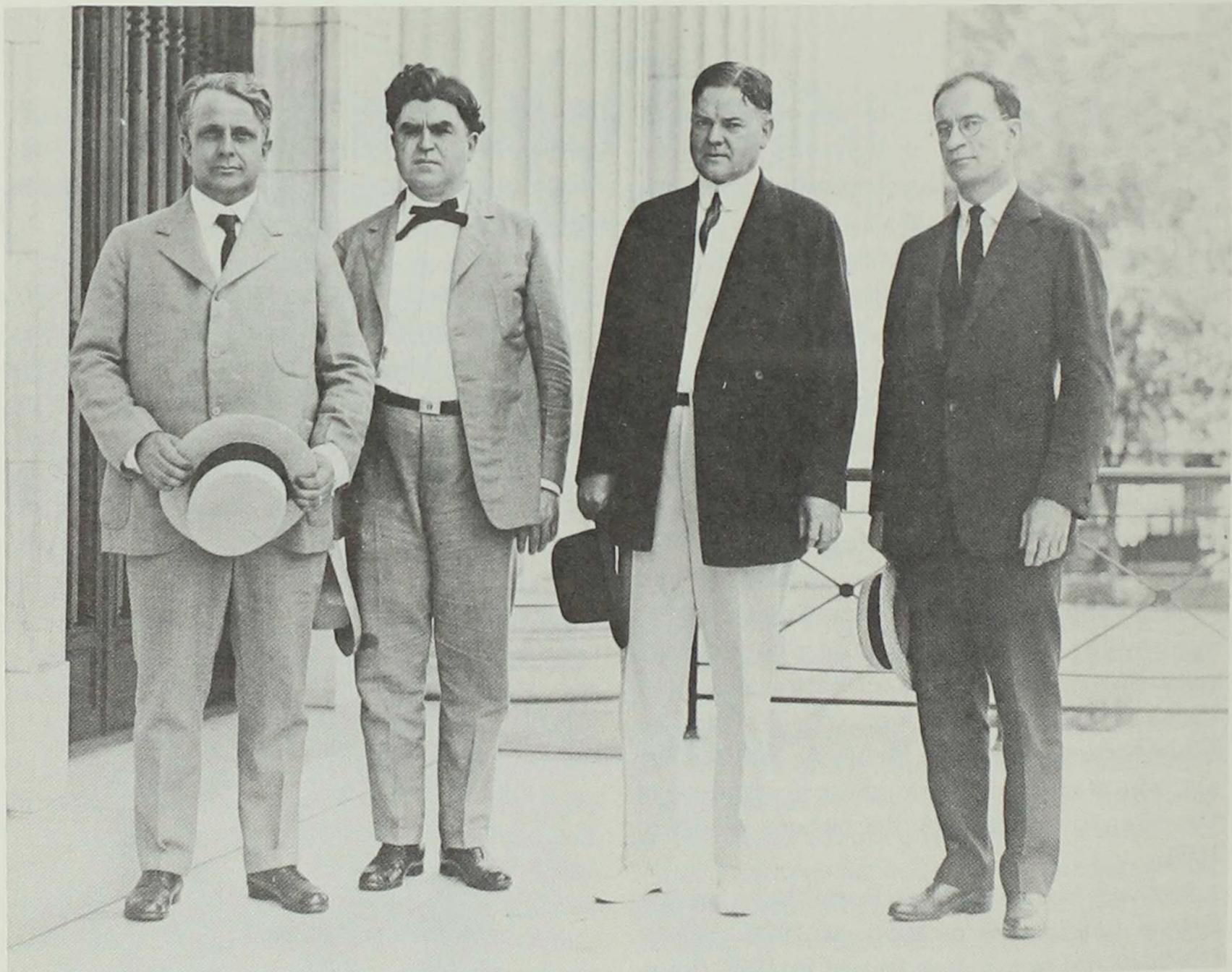
Now, a half-century later, the popular impression is that stocks plunged off the Big Board, investors leaped from skyscrapers, millions of workers got dismissal slips in lieu of pay, and the Depression settled over everything like a pall. Older people recall that misery was not ushered in so flamboyantly. The market, in fact, rebounded after a day or so and seemed to stabilize. In November it fell again, sharply, but the outlook was still "hopeful." Most economic activity continued, perhaps on sheer momentum, for some months. If Herbert Hoover surveyed the country's prospects as the bells rang in the new year 1930, he may have

felt some uneasiness. Yet he also must have felt that the crisis would prove manageable. Confidence must have seemed justified by his own and his country's past performance.

But past performance may have led another Iowa native of Hoover's generation to regard the start of the decade with something less than optimism. John Llewellyn Lewis was six years younger than Hoover; he was born on February 12, 1880, in the hamlet of Cleveland, near the town of Lucas, in Lucas County. The discovery of a rich



Herbert Hoover, age fifteen or sixteen, in Palo Alto, California (courtesy Herbert Hoover Presidential Library)



(left to right) U.S. Secretary of Labor James Davis, John L. Lewis, Herbert Hoover, and Alfred M. Ogle, president of the National Coal Operators Association, at the Conference of Coal Miners and Operators held in Washington, D.C., 1921 (Culver Pictures)

seam of coal in the area in 1876 had attracted John's father, Thomas Lewis; his maternal grandfather, John Watkins; and the Watkins family. Thomas Lewis married Ann Louisa Watkins, John Watkins' daughter, in 1878. She was a devout member of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and thus Lewis was the second of our four Iowans to come under a strong religious influence early in life, though he later rejected Mormonism, possibly because he felt it would hinder his trade union career.

There is no dearth of anecdotes concerning Lewis's childhood and youth, but Lewis—as image-conscious as any modern adman—later became notorious for fitting his personal his-

tory to whatever the occasion demanded, and hard facts are few. As his family moved here and there in Iowa, he apparently attended schools in Oskaloosa, Colfax, and Des Moines, concluding his formal education after seventh grade, although he himself later claimed to have gone to high school in Des Moines. (Hoover and countless others, however, have attested to the high quality of Lewis's continuing self-education.) He lived with his family until he was twenty-one, by which time he had worked as newspaper boy, farmer, miner, and—not surprisingly—as an amateur actor and theater manager. He seems to have served as secretary of the United Mine Workers Union Local 1933 of Chariton, Iowa in 1901.

Then Lewis left Iowa for the Rocky Mountain mining region. Stories of that period abound. One tells how Lewis the humanitarian happened upon the Hanna, Wyoming mine disaster of 1903, where more than two hundred men died, and rendered incalculable aid; another tells how Lewis the warrior, attacked by a crazed mule in a mine shaft, stunned the beast with one blow of his fist and dispatched it by clubbing it with a two-by-four.

In 1906 he was back in Lucas County, and the next year he married Myrta Edith Bell, daughter of a doctor who was one of Lucas's leading citizens. Shortly afterwards, Lewis ran for mayor of Lucas and lost; he and a partner then opened a grain and feed business and failed. In the spring of 1908 he and his wife made a fateful decision. Along with Lewis's parents, five brothers, and a sister, they moved to the town of Panama, Illinois, in a relatively prosperous coal region. There the Lewises found jobs and the chance to become English-speaking leaders in an immigrant community. They entered town and union politics. John was quickly elected president of UMW Local 1475, one of the largest in Illinois. In 1909 he became a lobbyist for the UMW at the state capital in Springfield, and in 1911 Samuel Gompers appointed him an organizer for the American Federation of Labor. His activities and influence burgeoned. He became known as an artful and forceful negotiator. In 1917 he was elected vice-president of the United Mine Workers, and after rising to national prominence in the coal strike of 1919, he was elected union president in 1920.

The 1920s were hard times for the coal industry and its workers, with the UMW membership falling from 400,000 to 80,000. Still, Lewis prospered personally. He consolidated his position in the union and strengthened his reputation as labor autocrat, political powerhouse, and public personality. His name was mentioned as a Republican vice-presidential nominee in 1924 and, following Coolidge's

election, as a possible secretary of labor. Nothing came of either idea, though the administration flattered him as "a statesman of labor," and he and Commerce Secretary Hoover formed what historians Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine have called "a mutual admiration society." Thereafter, the two Iowans occasionally supported each other under surprising and none-too-convenient circumstances. With his union in disarray, Lewis made a bid for influence by solidly backing Hoover for the presidency in 1928, but Hoover won so easily that Lewis could not pretend his aid had been crucial. He hoped to be appointed secretary of labor in the new administration, but apparently Hoover never seriously considered him. The President explained in his memoirs that such an appointment would have been impossible because of "a disgraceful incident at Herndon, Illinois." (Hoover meant the 1922 massacre of nineteen strikebreakers at Herrin, in which Lewis as UMW president played no direct role.)

Lewis could scarcely have been complacent as the 1920s ended. The first chill of the Depression had been felt in the mines, and his union was virtually in tatters. True, Lewis had used coal's troubles with rare skill. Economies he had instituted, for instance, left the national organization relatively stronger than the unruly districts and locals, and hence strengthened the union president's position. But, though he was able to suppress revolt to remain indisputably master in his own house, as the Thirties dawned that house was hardly more than a shell.

In the early 1920s, while Hoover and Henry C. Wallace, two strong-minded cabinet officers, struggled to provide differing solutions to the nation's farm problems, Wallace's son was demonstrating one of his several outstanding skills as editor of the family's great farm magazine, *Wallaces' Farmer*. The Des Moines-based magazine had

been founded by Henry A. Wallace's grandfather, "Uncle Henry" Wallace, an ordained minister who ever after sermonized with passion and knowledge in the editorial columns of his magazine. His grandson is said to have taken after Uncle Henry. "Young Henry" (Russell Lord says Iowans still called him that at mid-century and no doubt a few today remember him that way) was born Henry Agard Wallace on October 7, 1888, on a farm near Orient in Adair County. In 1892 his father, Henry C. Wallace, accepted a position as a professor at Iowa State College, and the younger Henry grew up in Ames. He was befriended by research scientist George Washington Carver, then a student at Iowa State. It was Carver who, Wallace later wrote, "first introduced me to the mysteries of plant fertilization," and as a teenager Wallace went on to conduct row-yield tests of corn that were to play a significant part in the revolution in plant genetics and the development of high-yield hybrid seed corn. Upon graduating from Iowa State in 1910, he joined the staff of *Wallaces' Farmer*, and in 1914 he married Ilo Browne, daughter of an Indianola merchant and land dealer. He became the magazine's editor when his father moved to Washington in 1921, and he took full charge upon Henry C. Wallace's death in 1924. All the while, he continued the corn-breeding experiments he had begun as a youth, and he now headed his own seed company. He became involved in politics—naturally enough, for *Wallaces' Farmer* had always fought for the interests of midwestern agriculture on all fronts, and in the late 1920s farmers needed help. Wallace had been raised a Republican, but after vainly backing Illinois Governor Frank O. Lowden against Hoover for the 1928 GOP presidential nomination, he supported Al Smith in the election. Sensing greater sympathy for his farm-aid approach among Democrats than Republicans, he became a Democrat henceforth, though he did not formally make the switch until well into the New Deal years.

By 1930 Wallace was engaged in three successful careers: he was the respected editor of a distinguished farm magazine; he was therefore also a powerful voice in agricultural politics; and at forty-one he was beginning to enjoy the financial rewards of being the president of the Pioneer Hi-Bred Corn Company. His star was high and rising.

Harry Lloyd Hopkins, youngest of the group, was born on August 17, 1890, in Sioux City. His father, David Aldona Hopkins—known as Al—was a sociable, somewhat footloose man who at various times was a gold prospector, traveling salesman, and harness shop proprietor, but he was at his best as a bowler. His wife had been a schoolteacher in South Dakota when he met and married her. She was a serious woman, a devout Methodist, and it was she who steered the family to Grinnell in anticipation of her children's college education. Harry Hopkins appears to have been more interested in athletics than scholarship when he was in high school, but he evinced an interest in politics—significantly, working for someone else's politi-



Henry A. Wallace in Europe (courtesy University of Iowa Library)



Presidential assistant Harry Hopkins meets reporters, January 1941 (Culver Pictures)

cal success. Confronted with a tradition of faculty-dominated class elections in which top students were chosen, Hopkins managed the election of an engaging fellow who made no pretense of scholastic interest. The annoyed faculty scheduled another vote. Hopkins' candidate won again, and this time the victory was final.

As a college student in Grinnell, Hopkins played baseball and entered class politics on his own, being elected class president in his senior year. No more serious a student than in high school, he was nonetheless influenced by several faculty members, among them Professor Edward A. Steiner. Steiner called his course "Applied Christianity," and in it Hopkins, who up to this point had shown himself to be his father's son, now showed that he was also his mother's. The course was, in fact, sociology,

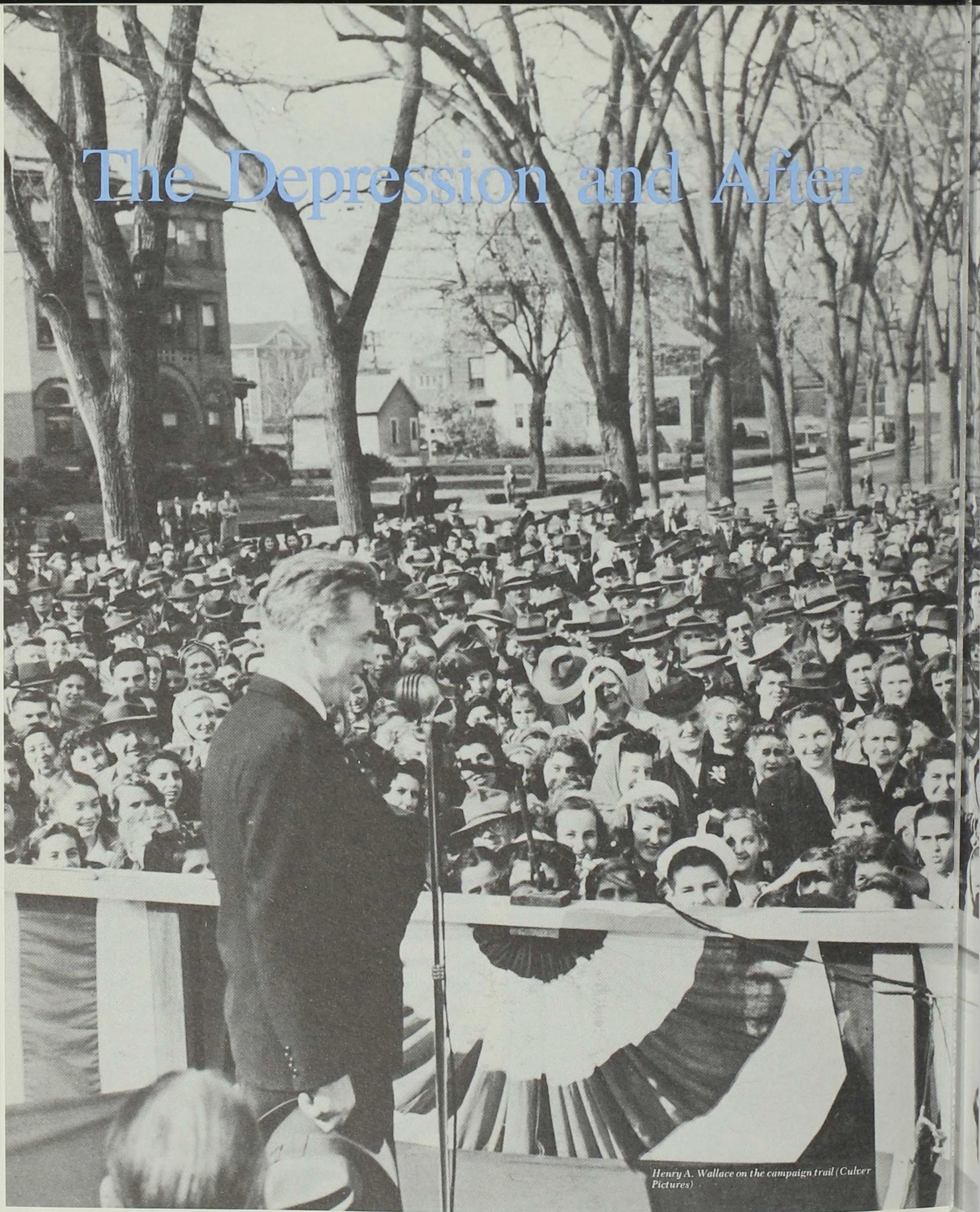
and in it Hopkins received one of his few A's.

When Hopkins was graduated from Grinnell in 1912, he had planned to take over the operation of a newspaper in Montana. Instead, after a talk with Steiner, he headed in the opposite direction, to serve as a summer-camp counselor for the Christadora settlement house, headquartered in New York City. On the way east he stopped to watch William Howard Taft frustrate Theodore Roosevelt's effort to capture the Republican presidential nomination at Chicago and to see the Democrats nominate Woodrow Wilson at Baltimore. Politics and welfare work—those were to be his interests for the next thirty years.

In 1913 Hopkins worked days at Christadora and evenings for the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP), a major city charity. He also found time to marry Ethel Gross, a settlement-house colleague, and to campaign for John Mitchel for mayor. Mitchel won, and Hopkins was rewarded with a city job in child welfare. In 1917 he was rejected for military service because of his poor eyesight, though he had also recently suffered one of the succession of serious illnesses that plagued his adult life. He worked for the Red Cross mostly in the South, until returning to New York in 1922. Two years later he became the director of the New York Tuberculosis Association. In the autumn of 1928 he met Franklin Roosevelt for the first time. Roosevelt was then campaigning for the governorship of New York. It was a fateful meeting, presaging perhaps the closest and the most important personal-political relationship of this or any other century.

For the next couple of years the pace of Hopkins' life was as hectic as ever, and the year 1930 found him working days at the Tuberculosis Association and nights at the AICP. His marriage had failed, his wife winning custody of their three children and half his salary. His hours, responsibilities, and money worries would have left most men frazzled. But Hopkins was probably too busy to notice.

The Depression and After



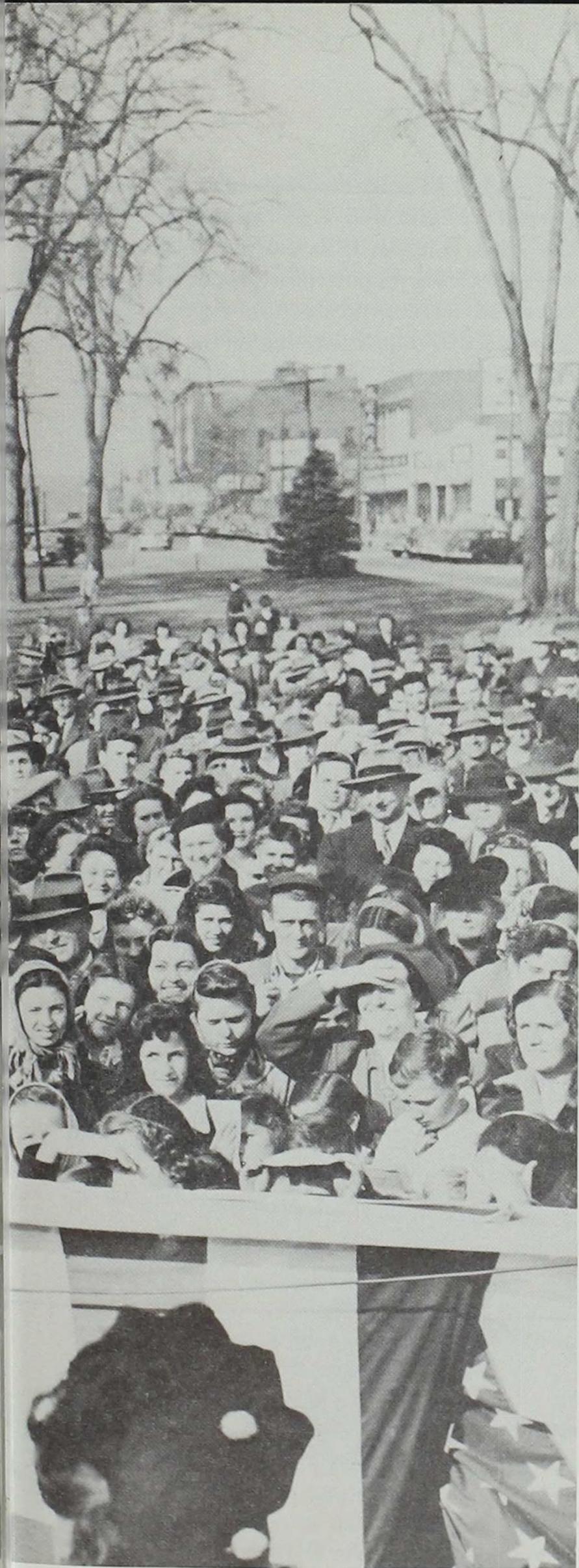
Henry A. Wallace on the campaign trail (Culver Pictures)

These, then, were the situations of our four men at the start of a decade when an Iowa background could serve as a preparatory course for success. Why was it of value?

The 1930s were a mixed bag of experiences; the decade left memories of extremely diverse people, institutions, and events. There were Will Rogers and Father Coughlin; Joe DiMaggio and Joe Louis; Huey Long and Norman Thomas; John Dillinger and William Randolph Hearst; Albert Einstein's flight from Germany and Jesse Owens' triumphs there; the Maginot Line, the Munich Pact, and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade; Wrong Way Corrigan and Sally Rand; the Lindbergh kidnapping and the Scottsboro case; Prohibition's repeal, flagpole sitters, and dance marathons. But mainly it was the decade of the NRA and WPA; the Townsend Plan and the Supreme Court fight; the Bonus March and apples for sale on street-corners; "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" and *The Grapes of Wrath*. The Depression—that was the story.

And that meant Iowans had some advantages. To start with, they had advantages because of what they were not: Iowans were not likely to be prominent in fields where success was improbable in the Thirties. For example, big-business types were rare in Iowa. Historian William Miller and others have shown that such men tended to emerge from big, industrialized cities; small chance of that in Iowa! But big business was not in good repute in the Thirties, with formerly prestigious figures like Henry Ford and Samuel Insull now associated with labor goons and stolen money. (Obviously Hoover had ties to big business; let us ascribe that to the California influence.) All in all, the unlikelihood of an Iowan's dominance in the business world did not much diminish his chances for fame in the 1930s.

For another example, military and naval leaders rarely hailed from Iowa. Of the sixty-four Americans listed in Roger Parkinson's *En-*



The Depression and After



Henry A. Wallace on the campaign trail (Culter Pictures)

THE PALIMPSEST 13

These, then, were the situations of our four men at the start of a decade when an Iowa background could serve as a preparatory course for success. Why was it of value?

The 1930s were a mixed bag of experiences; the decade left memories of extremely diverse people, institutions, and events. There were Will Rogers and Father Coughlin; Joe DiMaggio and Joe Louis; Huey Long and Norman Thomas; John Dillinger and William Randolph Hearst; Albert Einstein's flight from Germany and Jesse Owens' triumphs there; the Maginot Line, the Munich Pact, and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade; Wrong Way Corrigan and Sally Rand; the Lindbergh kidnapping and the Scottsboro case; Prohibition's repeal, flagpole sitters, and dance marathons. But mainly it was the decade of the NRA and WPA; the Townsend Plan and the Supreme Court fight; the Bonus March and apples for sale on street corners; "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" and *The Grapes of Wrath*. The Depression—that was the story.

And that meant Iowans had some advantages. To start with, they had advantages because of what they were not: Iowans were not likely to be prominent in fields where success was improbable in the Thirties. For example, big-business types were rare in Iowa. Historian William Miller and others have shown that such men tended to emerge from big, industrialized cities; small chance of that in Iowa! But big business was not in good repute in the Thirties, with formerly prestigious figures like Henry Ford and Samuel Insull now associated with labor goons and stolen money. (Obviously Hoover had ties to big business; let us ascribe that to the California influence.) All in all, the unlikelihood of an Iowan's dominance in the business world did not much diminish his chances for fame in the 1930s.

For another example, military and naval leaders rarely hailed from Iowa. Of the sixty-four Americans listed in Roger Parkinson's *En-*

cyclopedia of Modern War, only one—Admiral William D. Leahy, who had been born in Hampton—was an Iowan, and Leahy was a naval diplomat rather than a “fighting admiral.” (None of the sixty-four, incidently, was born in the other upper midwestern states: Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, or Nebraska.) But, again, military and naval figures were not much admired in the 1930s. Many Americans had become so disenchanted with the results of World War I that they now recoiled at the thought of any past or future military intervention overseas. In consequence, the prestige of military men sank to perhaps its lowest point in American history during the 1930s, and they exerted no influence on basic national policy until very late in the decade.

What the Thirties called for, rather, were men who could cope with hard times. And in hard times, food becomes a vital concern in a way that it is not during prosperity. Iowans, having grown up with what historian Frank Freidel aptly called “the ample demonstration of abundance and the promise of even greater abundance from the Iowa soil,” were shocked—not just startled, but morally offended—by what the Depression meant: a scarcity of the elemental necessities of life. Being expert in the production and distribution of food, Iowans felt qualified to do something about this monstrous condition. In the disastrous Thirties, Hoover, Lewis, Wallace, and Hopkins all assumed the role of providers.

Of course, the four men brought differing expertise and differing points of view to that role. With their complementary skills, one could imagine them forming a well-integrated corporate team: Wallace providing research; Hoover, management; Lewis, labor; and Hopkins, distribution. True, one cannot readily imagine their agreeing on methods. The four would have agreed that all men and women were entitled to some equitable share of life's needs. But the relatively conservative Hoover and Lewis emphasized the part that individual

toil played in achieving rewards. Hoover expected enlightened and rational people to cooperate voluntarily for mutual benefit. Lewis might not have disputed this, though he clearly expected workers to exercise their collective muscle if a fair share was denied them. Wallace and Hopkins, on the other hand, had spent much of their professional lives during the 1920s watching the diligent efforts of men and women come to naught on farms and in slums, and they felt government was obliged to help people who were in real need. Still, the four had more in common than their obvious political differences suggest: their Iowa upbringing, rural or small town; their marriages, three out of four to Iowa women; their exposure to serious religious guidance, whether expressed in a work ethic, charitable duty, or both; their interest in education, and exclusively Iowa schooling for three out of four; and their political acumen and ambitions—for all four, at one time or another, aspired to the presidency. And of course there were personal connections, with the two older men and the two younger sometimes operating in close or loose alliance.

The Depression decade began with one of our Iowans, Herbert Hoover, in the White House. The year 1930 dawned dark and grew darker, but Hoover still moved confidently. Calling Congress into special session in April 1929, he had pushed through the Agricultural Marketing Act, designed to aid farmers in a period which still looked generally prosperous. Now in 1930 he persuaded dozens of trade associations to pledge to maintain wage levels and engage in new investment. He signed the Hawley-Smoot Tariff into law, increasing agricultural and other duties; and the Federal Farm Board swung into action, forming government corporations to purchase surplus wheat and cotton. Before the stock market crash, he had inveighed against the prevailing easy credit that had fueled specu-

lation, and he had instituted a tight-money policy to dampen it. Now he took measures to get credit flowing again. But none of this kept unemployment from sticking at between three and four million. Businessmen were clearly becoming convinced, despite Hoover's public optimism, that new investment outlays were unwise. And as drought intensified the stress on farmers and the banks that served them, a huge wave of bank failures began to roll, closing more than six hundred banks by the end of the year.

By the autumn of 1930, Americans were sufficiently shaken to vote Republican con-

gressmen out of office by the score, and Hoover's problems were not lightened by the generally unfriendly Congress that convened in December. But in response to disastrous bank failures abroad, Hoover was at least able in July 1931 to declare a moratorium on the payment of debts foreign governments owed the United States. That December, he succeeded in establishing a system of home-loan banks to provide easy financing for home building. Meanwhile, he had worked out the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. Approved in January 1932, the RFC was intended to stimulate economic activity and put some of the



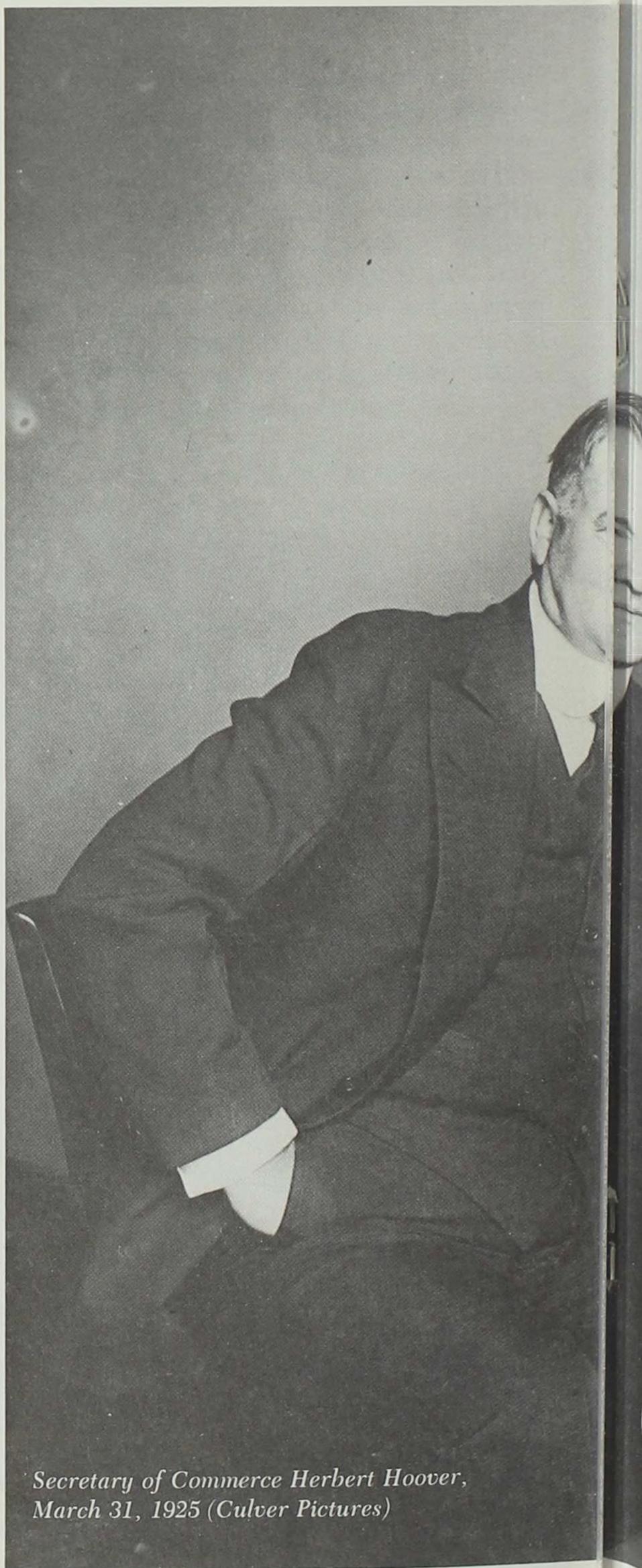
Herbert Hoover—with Kitty Dalton of the Knights of Columbus—inspects relief supplies bound for Europe's starving children, January 24, 1921 (Underwood and Underwood photo; courtesy Herbert Hoover Presidential Library)

jobless back to work by making money available through loans to insurance companies, banks, farm organizations, state and local governments, and other institutions. In the winter of 1931-1932, Hoover drew millions of bushels of wheat and tens of thousands of bales of cotton from Farm Board surpluses to be converted into flour and cloth and distributed by the Red Cross to those in need. Billions of dollars were spent on public works and billions more advanced on credit. By then, unemployment had risen to more than eleven million.

Hoover's relief and assistance program was based on voluntary cooperation; when government intervened directly, emphasis was on the temporary nature of this emergency assistance. Hoover was opposed in principle to the dole. He was convinced that voluntarism would work, that Americans would voluntarily provide what other Americans, for the time being, were without. After all, why should he abandon an approach that he believed was right and that he knew worked? As an orphaned child, he and his parents' families had exemplified it, and in Belgium and elsewhere after World War I he had made it work. So this man, "enormously capable and efficient" in the words of a not especially sympathetic historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., jawboned worried bankers, suspicious business leaders, angry labor groups, and a recalcitrant Congress and got them to agree to many measures that he thought would get the country back on an even keel.

Did he achieve success? A few historians and journalists have thought so. Walter Lippman was one: "Hoover [and his aides] had hold of the essence of the matter in the Spring of 1932 when they forced a reflation policy on the federal reserve system. Believe it or not, they arrested the depression."

Believe it or not. The American electorate in November 1932 did not believe it, and they voted out the Hoover administration resoundingly. The President carried only six states, not



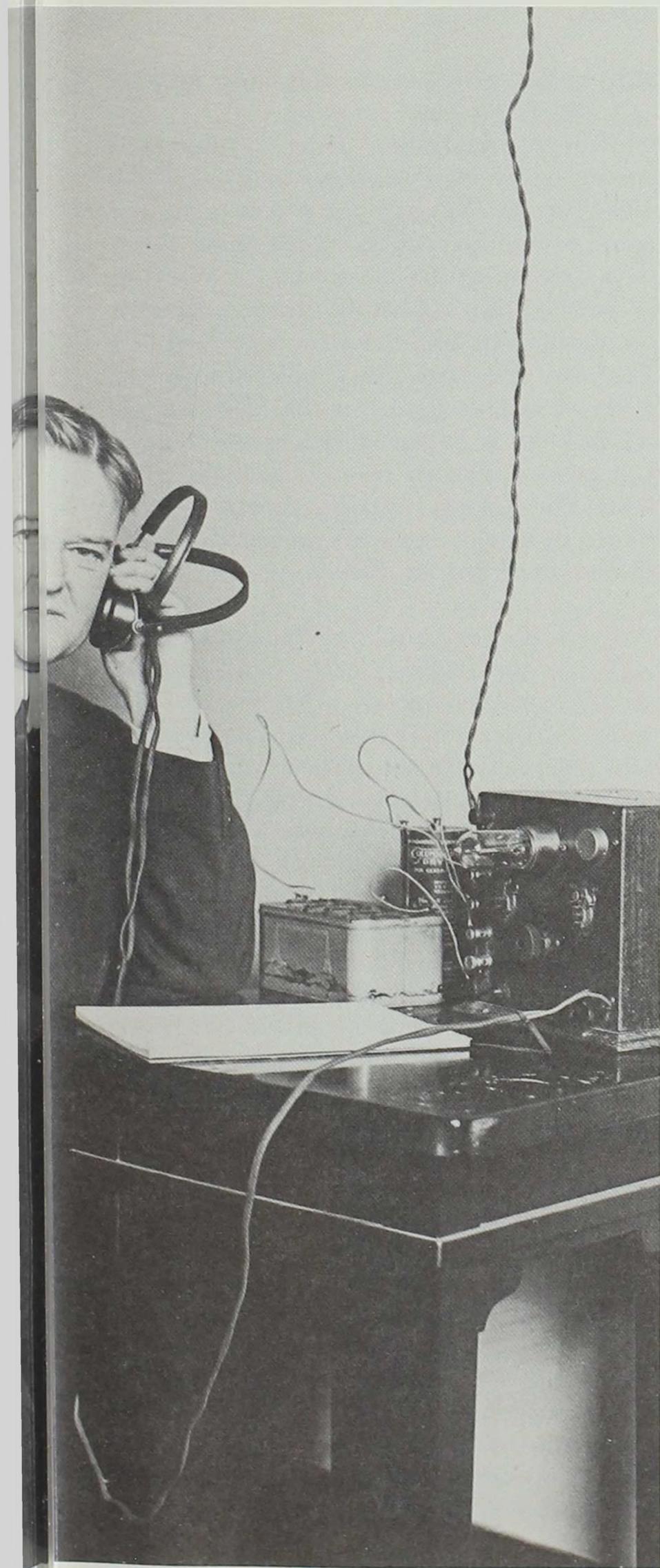
*Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover,
March 31, 1925 (Culver Pictures)*

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Where had Hoover failed as a provider? Lippman's comment is revealing, for it implies what Hoover seems to have believed: that the Depression was merely a technical monetary problem. Hoover was loath to put the full force of the federal government into a fight, relying instead on voluntarism. In short, many say, he failed to recognize the scope of the disaster confronting him. On the other hand, Rexford Tugwell, a leading member of the Roosevelt brain trust, has said that "practically the whole New Deal was extrapolated from programs Hoover started." This is an exaggeration, yet it is true that Hoover was often blamed for ideas and measures similar to those for which Roosevelt was praised. For example, critics jeered when Hoover contended that a good deal of the trouble was psychological, but when FDR declared that "We have nothing to fear but fear itself!" the same critics praised both his perceptiveness and his eloquence.

Hoover, exhausted and bitter, stayed out of public life for a year or so after his defeat, but by 1935 New Deal measures had sufficiently outraged him that he returned to the political wars. In 1936 he was interested in the GOP nomination, which may have seemed a prize worth having, since anti-Roosevelt outcries in the news media suggested that the New Deal was vulnerable. But Alfred Landon was nominated and then beaten even more decisively than Hoover had been four years earlier.

During FDR's second term, Hoover stayed active politically. He blasted the attempt to "pack" the Supreme Court, of course, and fought against various New Deal moves that struck him as not only immoral and wrong-headed but unsuccessful—and, indeed,



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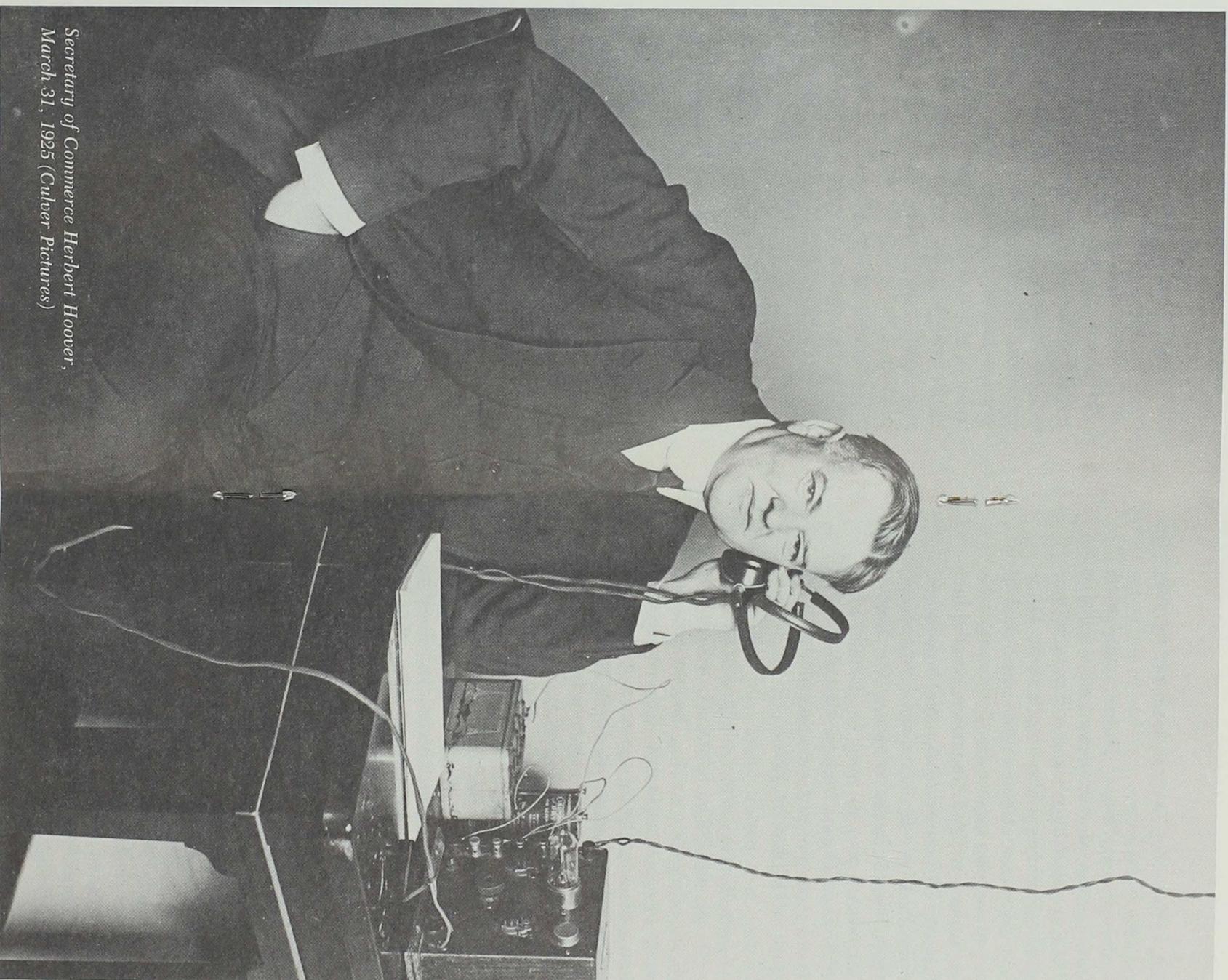
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Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover,
March 31, 1935 (Culver Pictures)



Herbert Hoover, June 1936, as seen by a cartoonist from the New York Herald-Tribune (courtesy Herbert Hoover Presidential Library)

unemployment did remain distressingly high throughout the decade. In 1938 Hoover went abroad, returning to blast Nazism but also to speak against American intervention in the approaching war. Apparently unmindful of his continuing unpopularity among much of the public, he hoped to be nominated by his party in 1940, though he could scarcely have failed to notice that for years Democratic campaigners had been attacking Hoover and "his" Depression more than the actual Republican candidates. But when Wendell Willkie was nominated and then defeated in Roosevelt's third-term victory, Hoover must have known

that, at the age of sixty-six, his hopes for elective office were over.

After Pearl Harbor, Hoover supported America's war effort wholeheartedly. Early in 1946, now in old age and a widower, he was asked to perform public service again. President Truman sent him around the world to survey and plan against the threatening post-war famine. In 1947, Truman appointed him chairman of the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, which became better known as the Hoover Commission after its work was completed in 1955. Then Hoover retired, though he continued to lecture and write virtually until his death on October 20, 1964.

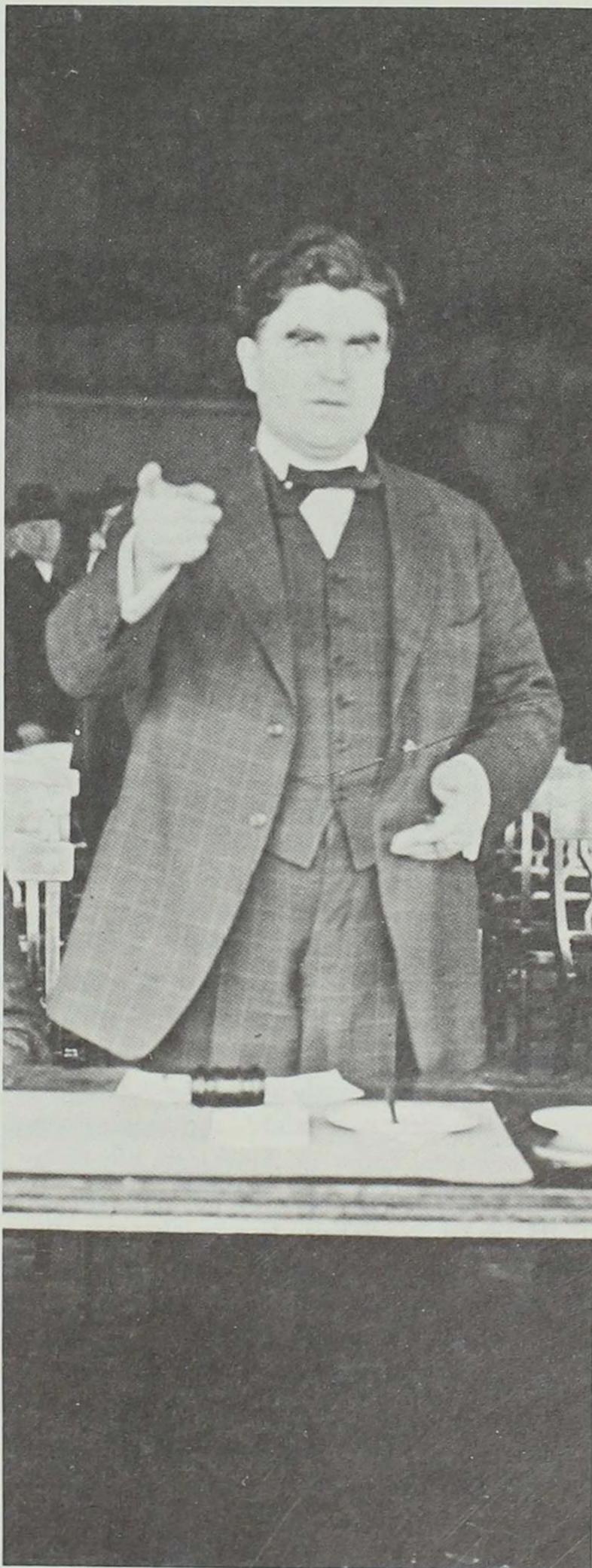
As Hoover's career plunged to its nadir in the 1930s, John L. Lewis's career reached its zenith. The two men had much in common. Hoover the manager and Lewis the labor leader did not hold basically different economic views. Lewis never questioned the principle of free enterprise, though he wanted a larger slice of the pie for the workingman. Lewis supported Hoover in 1928 and, as we have seen, was rebuffed when he made himself available for political appointment. But, astonishingly, he then backed Hoover in 1932, though historians believe he hedged his bets a bit. In personality, the men were reverse images of each other. Hoover, reserved in public, is said to have blossomed among small groups. Lewis, by contrast, seems to have been shy in intimate circumstances, but in public he became a burly, beetle-browed Glendower calling metaphors from the vasty deep to sway the American public as no other labor leader has before or since.

But in 1930 Lewis and his miners were in serious trouble. UMW membership was sinking below the 80,000 mark, and union-set daily minimums of \$6.10 to \$7.50 were fast becoming unenforceable. In 1931 Lewis urged Hoover in vain to use the federal government

to revive the moribund coal industry. By 1933 union power had been erased in all but a few dozen mines, and those few miners who were working earned only \$1.50 to \$4.00 a day. Poverty and outright hunger stalked the coal fields.

His biographers call the rest of the 1930s Lewis's "years of glory." After Roosevelt's election, Lewis demanded legalized union organization and collective bargaining, stabilized prices, and national planning. The National Industrial Recovery Act as passed by Congress in June 1933 embodied much of this, though there had been a great furor over the clause concerning union rights. Lewis then staked the whole UMW treasury on an organizing campaign. Coal miners, heartened by the NIRA and a federal administration that seemed friendly to union organizing, responded by joining the UMW in huge numbers. That summer, strikes and other militant actions achieved widespread union recognition from coal operators. Wages stabilized at between \$3.40 and \$5.63 per day, and the wage scales in northern and southern mines were somewhat equalized. West Virginia miners who had earned as little as \$1.50 a day now received \$4.50 for an eight-hour day. In 1934 miners won a seven-hour day, a five-day week, and a \$5.00 daily minimum in the North and a \$4.60 minimum in the South, with fairer treatment of black workers. And they gained virtually a closed shop in the mines.

But now Lewis turned to a new objective: the broadening and reshaping of the whole American labor movement. Against the wishes of most of his fellow AFL union leaders, he resolved to build a numerically overwhelming labor movement around a core of mass-production workers. Hopes for rapid union growth appeared dashed by the Supreme Court's May 1935 decision that the NIRA was unconstitutional, only to be lifted high the next month by congressional passage of the Wagner Act, which has been described as "labor's Magna Charta." With unrest swelling among workers



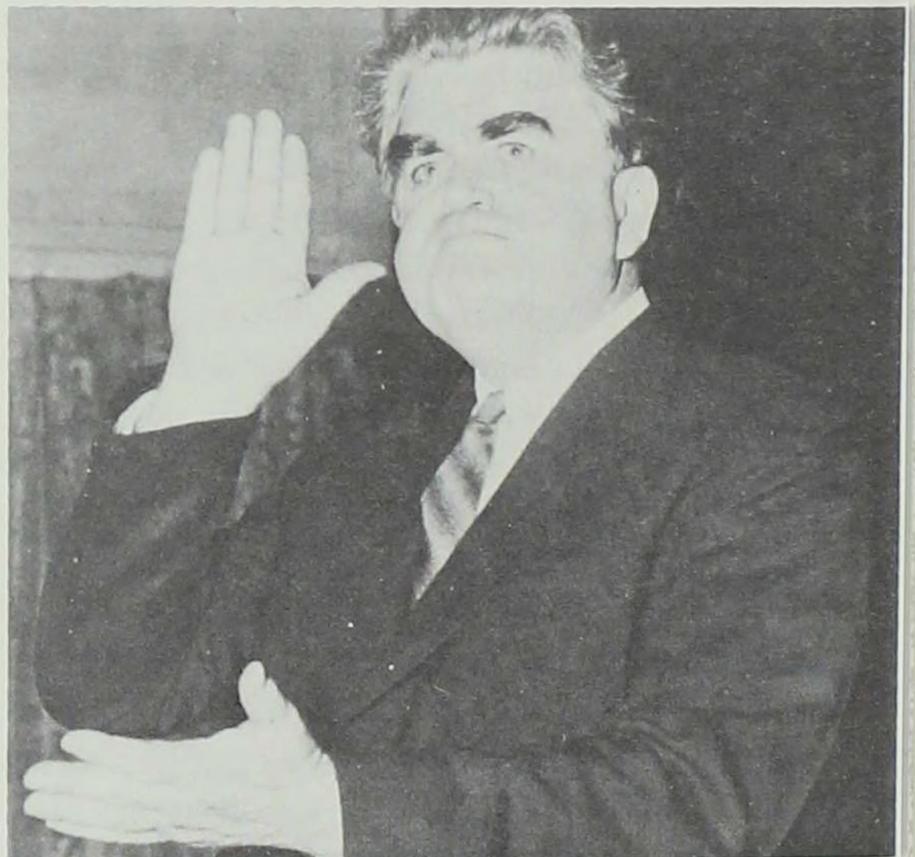
John L. Lewis in the 1920s (Bettmann Archive)

in the mass production industries, the American labor movement now faced its greatest organizing opportunity in history.

At the AFL convention in Atlantic City in October, a raging debate developed over whether to give AFL charters to emergent unions in the mass industries, with Lewis arguing in favor. The debate culminated in a fist-fight between Lewis and the president of the AFL carpenters. Lewis won the fight, lost the convention vote, and went on two weeks later to form and become president of the Committee for Industrial Organization. While AFL conservatives busied themselves drawing up ultimatums demanding the CIO's dissolution, Lewis helped new CIO-affiliated unions win contracts in such mass industries as automobile and rubber manufacturing. Then he launched a giant organizing drive in steel. The demands for CIO dissolution were ignored.

The 1936 presidential campaign saw Lewis working vigorously for Roosevelt, and many feel that FDR's landslide win over Landon was in part a triumph for Lewis as well. The year 1937 started off brilliantly for Lewis and the CIO; they achieved contracts with General Motors and U.S. Steel, the giants of the auto and steel industries. Union membership doubled in 1937, with most of the new members belonging to CIO affiliates. CIO unions now had a larger membership than the AFL. In *The Nation* the CIO was called "the most progressive and vital force in American life today." Later in 1937, however, the CIO was repulsed in its efforts to organize the smaller steel companies, known as "Little Steel." An angry Roosevelt called down a plague on both parties, and his criticism of labor and Lewis contributed to the split that later developed between the two men. The next year the CIO broke entirely with the AFL and held a constitutional convention in which Lewis was again chosen president.

In the next couple of years Lewis, nursing his grievance against the President following the



John L. Lewis tells a Senate committee that labor must have the right to organize, 1933 (Harris and Ewing photo; courtesy U.S. Department of Labor)

Little Steel episode, also found other reasons to turn cool toward FDR. The "Roosevelt Depression" of the late 1930s was a nagging worry for labor. And Lewis, sure that American involvement in a war would be costly for labor's hard-won gains, threw all his influence on the side of peace for the United States, crying out against Roosevelt's moves toward intervention.

All this seems sufficient to have caused Lewis's bitter opposition to FDR's third-term candidacy, though a more interesting explanation is the dubious story told by Frances Perkins, FDR's secretary of labor, who has asserted that Lewis baldly pushed his own name at Roosevelt as a vice-presidential candidate and, when turned down, sought revenge. Historians Dubofsky and Van Tine point out that Lewis's vanity was not likely to permit his laying himself open to such a rejection. For whatever reason, Lewis urged labor to vote for Willkie in 1940, vowing to resign as CIO president if Roosevelt won. FDR did win, handily, and Lewis did resign.

The decade of the Forties was not the triumphal march for Lewis that most of the Thirties had been. Of course, he remained as president of the miners, leading them to significant gains in the decade that saw America's involvement in World War II and its aftermath. Frequent walkouts before, during, and after the war made Lewis a formidable problem for Roosevelt and his successor, Truman, and may have made him, as some said, "the most hated man in America." No matter; obloquy rolled off Lewis's broad back—off the back of the public Lewis, at least—and did not deflect him from his goals. In 1941 the miners won a union-shop ruling in the steel industry's company-owned coal mines. In 1943 they gained the equivalent of portal-to-portal pay. And in 1946 they won welfare and retirement funds and a variety of improvements in working conditions. On the other hand, they and Lewis were troubled by mechanization in the coal mines and competition from other fuels, both of which reduced mine employment and thus led to declining UMW membership.

In the 1950s Lewis, now in his seventies, found the world passing him by, though honors came his way. In 1956 he was paid homage at the Beckley, West Virginia dedication of a group of hospitals that the miners' money had built, and he was honored, too, by Georgetown University and Iowa's Buena Vista College. When he resigned as UMW president in 1960, he received messages of affection from both rank-and-file miners and establishment greats, including Herbert Hoover. Despite failing health, he survived, outliving most of his associates and family—his wife, his daughter Kathryn, his brothers and sisters. His son and grandchildren were virtually estranged from him.

In the years before his death on June 11, 1969, he was a lonely man. But in his lifetime he had seen the American workingman make gains unprecedented in the country's history. Lewis had provided the leadership that



John L. Lewis, age seventy-one, inspects damage caused by a mine explosion in West Frankfort, Illinois, 1951. One hundred nineteen miners died in the blast. (courtesy United Mine Workers Journal)

brought his coal miners a living wage, reasonable hours, and some protection against the vicissitudes of desperately hard and often deadly jobs. Sometimes berated as a revolutionary, he was actually the foe of revolutionaries. He simply wanted a society in which prosperity was widely shared, in which laboring people—by organized power—could obtain high wages to spend on the products of capitalism.

As the decade of the Thirties opened, Henry A. Wallace was engrossed in editing *Wallaces' Farmer* and in conducting his seed business, and he was scoring successes in both. It was in August 1932 that he



Vice-presidential candidate Henry A. Wallace during the campaign of 1940 (Bettmann Archive)

met Franklin Roosevelt for the first time, and he was impressed by the candidate's vigor, humor, and knowledge of agriculture. And the Iowa editor impressed the candidate as well. FDR appointed Wallace secretary of agriculture—an appointment that surprised those who forecast such matters. Wallace told the readers of *Wallaces' Farmer* that he was going to Washington under “a chief who is definitely progressive, entirely sympathetic toward agriculture” and “a courageous man with a kindly heart.”

By all accounts, Wallace, green as June corn to the ways of Washington at the beginning, grew in the job. His path was predictably bumpy. When the controversial Agricultural Adjustment Act was implemented, Iowa's Milo Reno, the Farm Holiday radical, called it diabolical and demanded Wallace's resignation. But Wallace soon became adept at defending unpopular measures—“the slaughter of the little pigs,” for example. His speeches varied from lectures in economics to sermons to frank and friendly conversations. In various crises of the period, Wallace and other New Dealers found themselves in conflict with more conventional farm theorists, like the deans and faculty of land-grant agricultural colleges, over planned production—particularly planned restrictions on production. In the dust storms of 1934, the AAA proved useful in soil conservation, though that had not been its original purpose. And Wallace, of course, interested himself in distribution, as his father had wanted to but had been prevented from doing by Hoover. Meanwhile, he competently administered a department somewhat polarized between young urban liberals—mostly in the legal division—who clustered around Undersecretary Rexford Tugwell, and other men with more traditional and knowledgeable agrarian viewpoints. The split finally ended with the resignation of most of the urban group. In January 1936 the Supreme Court declared the AAA unconstitutional. That was a blow, but

Congress passed new legislation to enable Wallace to keep his programs going. One of Secretary Wallace's last projects, in 1939, was to establish the food-stamp program, using agricultural surpluses to improve the well-being of American society as a whole.

Wallace left his mark on the Department of Agriculture; after his tenure it would never be the same. Under him, as Frank Freidel has remarked, “national planning in the area of agriculture became accepted federal policy.” He was able to implement the idea that he and his father had proposed as early as 1912: that government warehouses should be built to store grain withheld from the market in years of plenty and to release it when lean years ar-



Henry A. Wallace, plant breeder. Wallace's experiments with hybridization led to the formation of the Pioneer Hi-Bred Corn Company of Des Moines, a leader in the twentieth-century revolution in corn production techniques. (courtesy University of Iowa Library)

rived. Wallace termed this "the Joseph Plan" and later "the ever-normal granary," characteristically drawing his first title from the Book of Genesis and his second from the writings of Confucius, which he had studied in the Des Moines Public Library. School lunches were a brainchild of Agriculture under Wallace. He seemed often to have the needy in mind—the marginal farmer, the sharecropper. Later, during World War II, he is reported to have explained half-seriously to the wife of the Soviet ambassador: "The object of this war is to make sure that everybody in the world has the privilege of drinking a quart of milk a day." Though not always in tune with the politics of Iowa, Henry Wallace was perhaps the most basically Iowan of our four leaders in his approach to providing life's necessities to his fellow man.

When Wallace left the Department of Agriculture in 1940, it was because wider horizons beckoned. During the 1930s he had demonstrated not only administrative talent but political promise. In 1939 he was one of a number of cabinet people with legitimate presidential ambitions who were, however, quite willing to defer to the plans of FDR as commander-in-chief. Who among this group first publicly called for a third term for Roosevelt is a matter of debate, but Wallace was at least one of the first, in January 1940. He had demonstrated loyalty, as in the Supreme Court-packing fight in 1937. But he had also demonstrated independence, as in his support of some conservative Democratic senators, including Guy Gillette of Iowa, whom Roosevelt wanted to defeat in the 1938 primaries. Gillette's victory enhanced Wallace's prestige. For these and other reasons, he became a leading candidate for the vice-presidential nomination. The clincher, no doubt, was that Roosevelt then thought of him as a man capable of taking over as president.

So Roosevelt forced through Wallace's nomination, and when that ticket was elected over Willkie and Charles McNary in 1940, Wal-



Henry Wallace greets reporters as he leaves meeting with President Harry Truman, September 18, 1946. Truman had hoped to silence his secretary of commerce on matters related to foreign affairs. When Wallace proved reluctant, Truman demanded his resignation. (courtesy University of Iowa Library)

lace himself and others must have regarded the Iowan as heir apparent. But things turned sour for him. His far-sighted views on how the post-war world should be molded were no doubt an irritant to Roosevelt's wartime pragmatism. A worse irritant was a bitter public clash between Wallace, as chairman of the Board of Economic

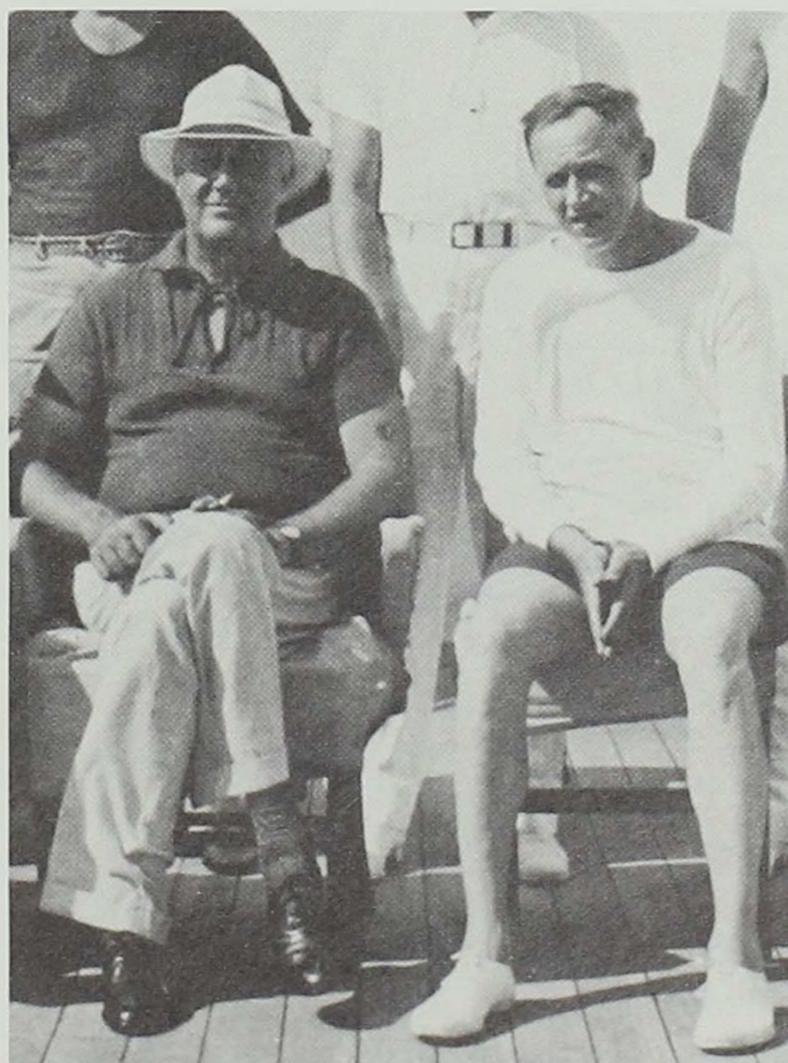
Warfare, and Commerce Secretary Jesse Jones, as chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, over the failure to meet priorities in raw materials. Roosevelt resorted to his plague-on-both-your-houses approach: Wallace and Jones lost their chairmanships, and the Board of Economic Warfare was reorganized under a man sympathetic to Jones. From that time on, Robert Sherwood has written, White House insiders knew that Wallace was no longer the anointed. When Roosevelt ran for a fourth term, he ran with Senator Harry Truman, who became president upon FDR's death.

In 1945 Wallace may have derived some satisfaction from replacing Jones as secretary of commerce, but even there his days were numbered. He was fired by Truman in September 1946 for public utterances too friendly to Russia. After a stint as editor of the *New Republic*, Wallace became the presidential candidate of the Progressive party, which opposed the Marshall Plan and called for disarmament and accommodation with the U.S.S.R. The ticket failed to carry any state, though its popularity in New York permitted Thomas E. Dewey to defeat Truman there, and thus to make the GOP look like the victor nationally for a few hours after the polls had closed on the East Coast.

Becoming disenchanted with his Progressive associates, Wallace quit the party in 1950 and later repudiated his sympathy with Russian aims. In his last years, withdrawing from politics, he returned to his Pioneer Hi-Bred Corn business. He died on November 18, 1965 in Danbury, Connecticut, and is buried in Glendale Cemetery in Des Moines.

In 1930 the youngest of our four leaders, Harry Hopkins, was doing two men's jobs in New York City. In the early months of the Depression, his boss at the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, William Mathews, secured \$70,000 from

the Red Cross to pay for emergency jobs, and Hopkins was assigned to do what his enemies always maintained he did best: spending other people's money. The original \$70,000 didn't last long, but Mathews managed to continue Hopkins' funding until August 1931, when then Governor Franklin Roosevelt established the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration. The supposedly temporary nature of this agency discouraged some people who might have worked for it, but when Hopkins had a chance to become deputy in charge, he accepted quickly. Soon he became TERA's top administrator. He got to know the governor, as well as people who would later become important in Washington, people like Frances Perkins and Henry Morgenthau, Jr. Always more comfortable in two full-time jobs than one,



President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins enjoy a holiday cruise aboard the USS Houston, October 1935. (courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library)

Hopkins became involved in supporting Roosevelt's try for the 1932 presidential nomination, which was being astutely and, it turned out, successfully directed by James Farley.

Hopkins was called from Albany to Washington in May 1933 to head the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, a project he had done as much as any individual to design. It is said that he spent more than \$5 million in his first two hours in office, dispatching relief funds to governors of six states, including Iowa. Hopkins kept on top of the program nationwide by consulting with field representatives and by close personal attention to the states' priority proposals. He saw to it that states paid their share of relief costs, using the threat of withholding federal funds, for example, to bludgeon the Illinois legislature into passing a state sales tax to generate needed state revenues.

During the grim winter of 1933-1934 Hopkins showed his skills as an improviser and expediter. When the Federal Emergency Relief Administration proved unequal to some relief problems, he and Roosevelt worked out plans for the Civil Works Administration. To provide the \$400 million necessary to start paying the workers, Harold Ickes was persuaded to make funds available from the unpaid balance of his Public Works Administration. The CWA was established in early November. Hopkins had nearly two million men and women at work by December and more than four million by January. Roosevelt, hearing cries about abuses in the program, sent his longtime friend Frank Walker to check it out. Walker reported that Hopkins was doing "a magnificent job." He was handling both the FERA and the CWA, but he was approaching physical exhaustion.

Roosevelt sent Hopkins to Europe, ostensibly to rest, but while there he observed how much further Europe had gone than the United States in matters of government social assistance, and he returned determined to institute a permanent work-relief program. After New Deal Democrats smote most of their enemies

in the congressional elections of 1934 (during which Hopkins made his debut as a political speech writer), the time seemed ripe: in 1935 the Work Relief bill was passed, and FDR installed himself as titular head of the complicated relief structure, with Ickes in charge of a huge and high-sounding advisory committee as well as the PWA, and Hopkins heading the Works Progress Administration, which got most of the work done. Washington found the infighting between Ickes and Hopkins fascinating. When Ickes won the point that the WPA should be limited to projects costing less than \$25,000, Hopkins' answer was to divide large projects into enough smaller ones to bring the cost of each below the critical sum.

So Hopkins enjoyed both intramural and extramural victories. But in 1935 he was afflicted with an ulcer. From then on, his enormous quantity of work was accomplished by a frail man whose cumulative illnesses were to kill him in a little more than ten years. Recovering from the ulcer, Hopkins was desolated by the ultimately fatal illness of his second wife, Barbara, who died in 1937. Hopkins himself underwent cancer surgery within three months after her death.

But his WPA work went well, gaining him the ever firmer regard of the President and the ever greater antagonism of his political foes. In the floods and droughts of the mid-1930s, the WPA was invaluable, but it also became the target of strong criticism for waste and graft. Hopkins was able to defend the organization pretty well against the graft charge; as to waste, that was so strongly colored by political views that no explanations could change any minds on the subject. In 1937, wars in Spain and China presaged a shift in emphasis in America from national to international events, but that year's recession kept Hopkins' attention at home. He and others convinced Roosevelt early in 1938 that recovery demanded renewed government spending, and a relief package of nearly \$5 billion was drawn up. Roosevelt thought that



Harry Hopkins meets the press to announce his appointment as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's personal representative to England, January 1941 (Culver Pictures)

(right) Representatives of the Allied nations meet at Tehran, November 28-December 1, 1943 to discuss strategy for the defeat of the Axis powers. (left to right) General George Marshall, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, Harry Hopkins, interpreter M. Parlov, Josef Stalin, and Foreign Minister V. Molotov (courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library)

he needed a Congress more sympathetic to his aims and tried to purge his party of conservatives, so Hopkins worked in Iowa for the nomination of Otha Wearin for senator but, as we have seen, Guy Gillette was the winner and subsequently retained his senatorial seat. Now Hopkins began attending cabinet meetings as a kind of minister without portfolio. Clearly, he was the most powerful man in the administration next to Roosevelt.

Late in 1938 he was relieved as WPA administrator and appointed secretary of commerce, as FDR moved to groom Hopkins as his successor in the White House. Biographer Henry H. Adams says that Hopkins considered buying a farm in Iowa to meet residency requirements there, though his official residence was then in New York. He did lease a farm, near Grinnell, and about that time became a trustee of Grinnell College. But illness struck again in 1939—so severely that he was unable to function as commerce secretary and saw his presidential ambitions fade away. He was virtually bedridden all summer and fall. As the Thirties ended, Hopkins was so sick and depressed that he sometimes talked about places where he might go to “end his days.”

Had Hopkins in fact ended his days—or at least his working days—in 1939, he would still have been one of the most influential men of his generation. As much as any one man, he implemented the welfare state in America. What Hopkins provided in the 1930s was jobs. His creed was simple: if people need work, it should be made available to them, and in his



view government, particularly the federal government, could do that better than any other institution. Hopkins saw to it that government did, at a total cost of some \$9 billion. Afterwards, his friends and foes agreed on at least one point: not a penny ever stuck to Hopkins' fingers.

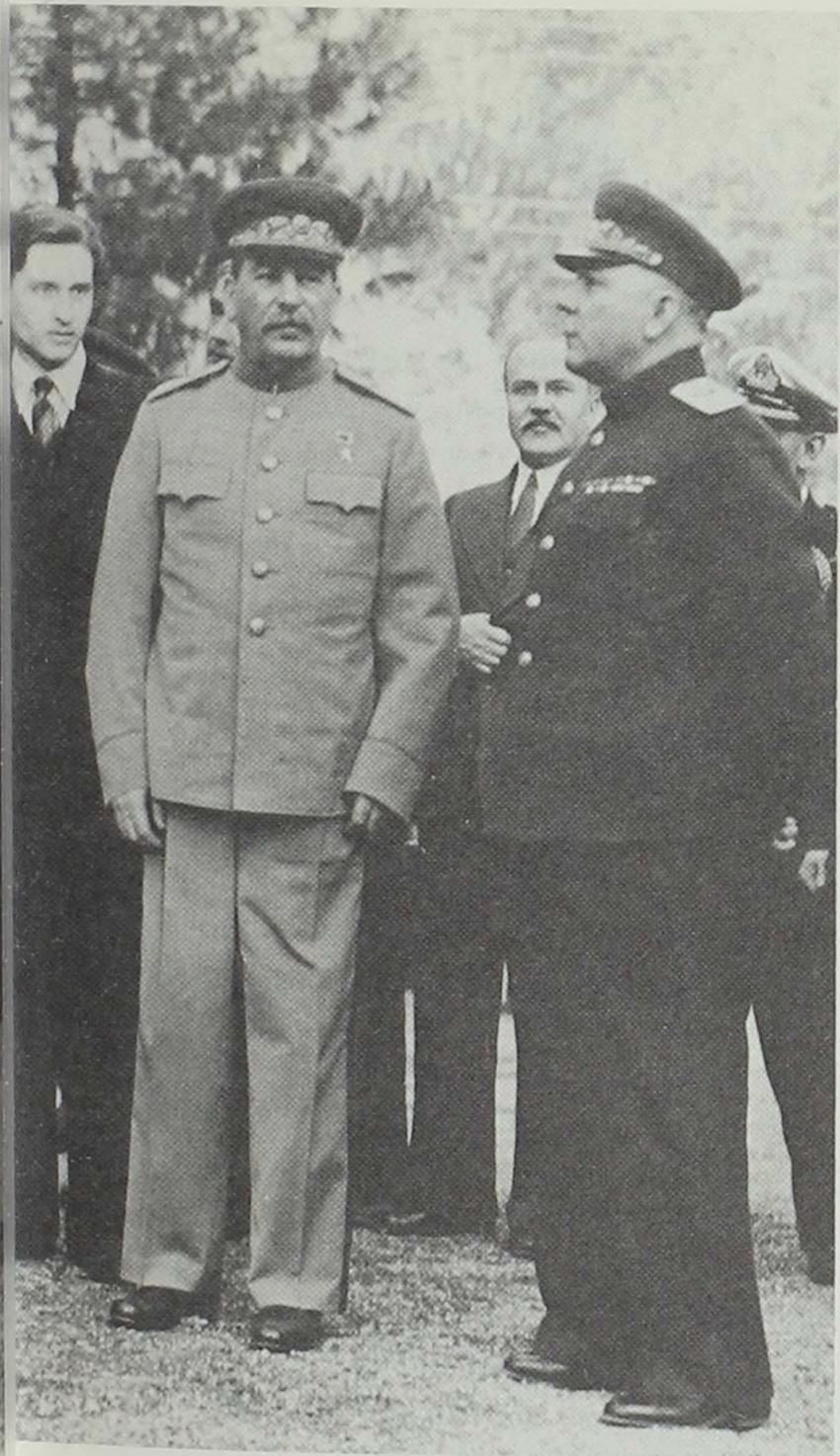
In the spring of 1940 Hopkins, still very sick, came to dinner at the White House and, like the main character in a popular play of the period, stayed on and on as a houseguest—three and a half years in Hopkins' case. He resigned as secretary of commerce and became something unofficial and infinitely more important—perhaps executive officer, or assistant president, or *eminence grise*, or FDR's alter

his presidential ambitions dashed and his health shattered, he began the 1940s with dim personal prospects. Yet he was the only one of our four Iowans for whom the decade was to bring genuine triumph. In 1940 he worked tirelessly to get Wallace nominated vice-president, then to get the Roosevelt-Wallace ticket elected. This accomplished, America's effort to help the beleaguered Allies in Europe began in earnest. To start with, Hopkins handled Lend Lease. He had a marvelous ability to perceive Roosevelt's thinking, so that when he was running a project it was the same as if the President himself were in charge. Then Hopkins served as a liaison with Great Britain, and after the United States entered the war, he not only interpreted America's positions to Churchill, Stalin, and Chiang Kai-shek but also helped determine those positions. Churchill in those years is said to have considered him one of the six most influential people on the face of the earth.

He was an indispensable aide to the President in the planning of the Great Powers' victory strategy at Tehran. Then, early in 1945, came the Yalta Conference. Hopkins, though ill—as Roosevelt was also—again served as aide to the President in efforts to work out a blueprint for lasting peace. Roosevelt died on April 12, not long after his return home, with victory over Germany imminent. Hopkins left government service on May 12, but he was called back and dispatched to Moscow to try to bring the Russians back to participation in the San Francisco Conference to establish the United Nations. In this, his last government mission, Hopkins established some American aims and no doubt did better than anyone else could have. On July 2, 1945, he resigned for good. That autumn, illness prevented his going abroad to receive an honorary degree at Oxford. In November he went to the hospital, and he died there on January 29, 1946.

ego. Whatever he was, he was in a position for which he was uniquely qualified. Unawed by Roosevelt or by anyone else, he could intelligently and toughly argue matters of the greatest moment, then subside and throw all his energies into carrying out presidential orders when policy had been decided. For instance, economic recovery came as the country tooled up to become "the arsenal of democracy," and Hopkins—no more an economic theorist than was Roosevelt—did not worry about the source of jobs if jobs were there. So he was quite ready, in Roosevelt's terminology, to abandon Dr. New Deal in favor of Dr. Win-the-War.

Winning the war is what occupied Hopkins for the remaining years of his active life. With

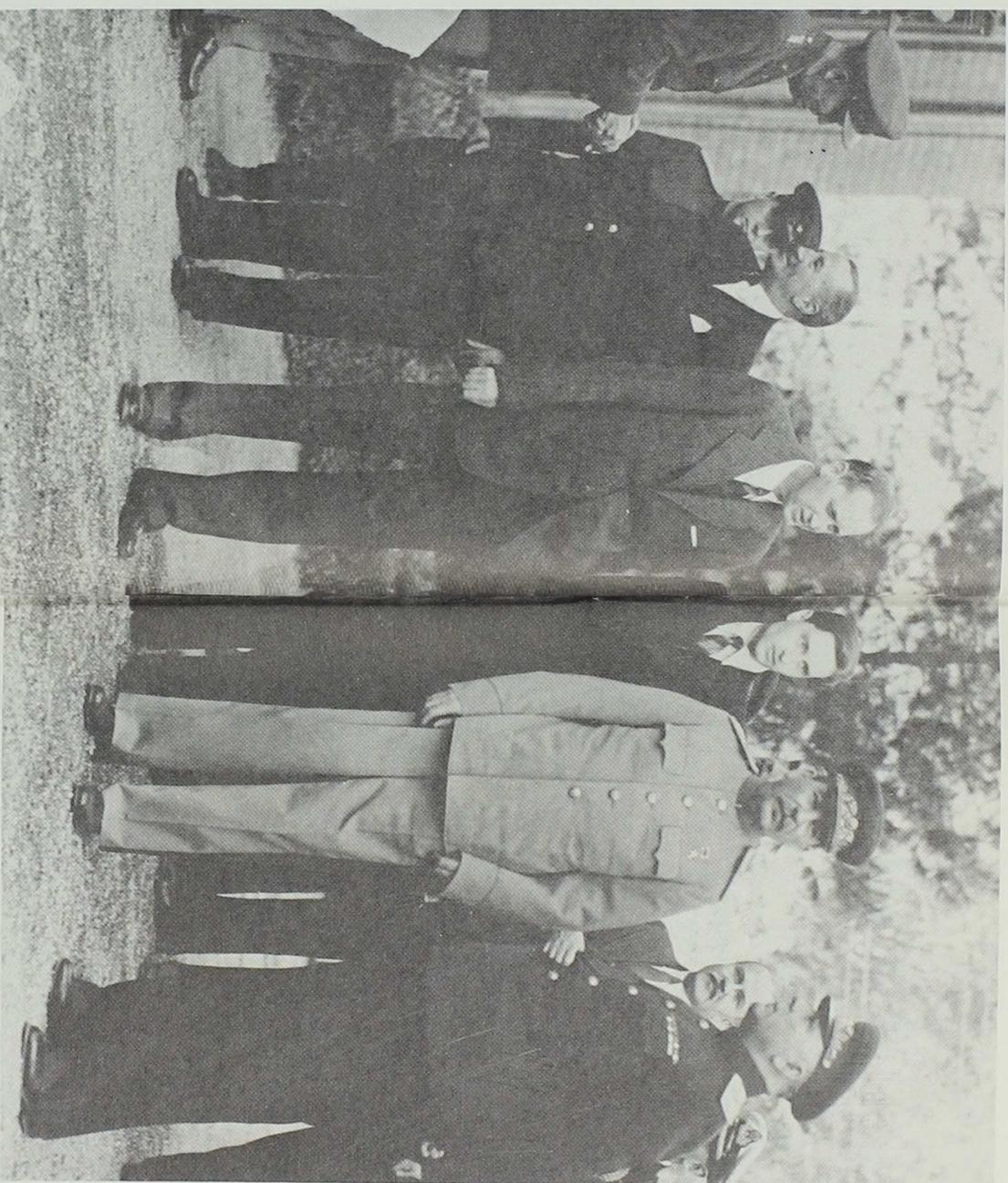


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Although the careers of our four Iowans were interlocked in significant ways, there were some curious connections, trivial or coincidental. For instance, Wallace's mystical propensities led him into some unusual associations, one of which was with Nicholas Roerich, a Russian guru of sorts who was also at one time an enthusiasm of Lewis's daughter Kathryn. When Wallace and Hopkins appeared to be in the running for the presidential nomination in 1940, the man most effective in promoting Wallace—Paul Appleby—was the Grinnell graduate who had taken the Montana newspaper job that Hopkins turned down. As agriculture secretaries the Wallaces, father and son, must have noted their extraordinarily bad experiences with the commerce secretariat: Henry C. was thoroughly frustrated by Hoover, and Henry A. attributed much of his rejection as FDR's vice-president to Hopkins' influence, although Hopkins denied this. Wallace himself had small reason to remember with pleasure his own term as secretary of commerce.

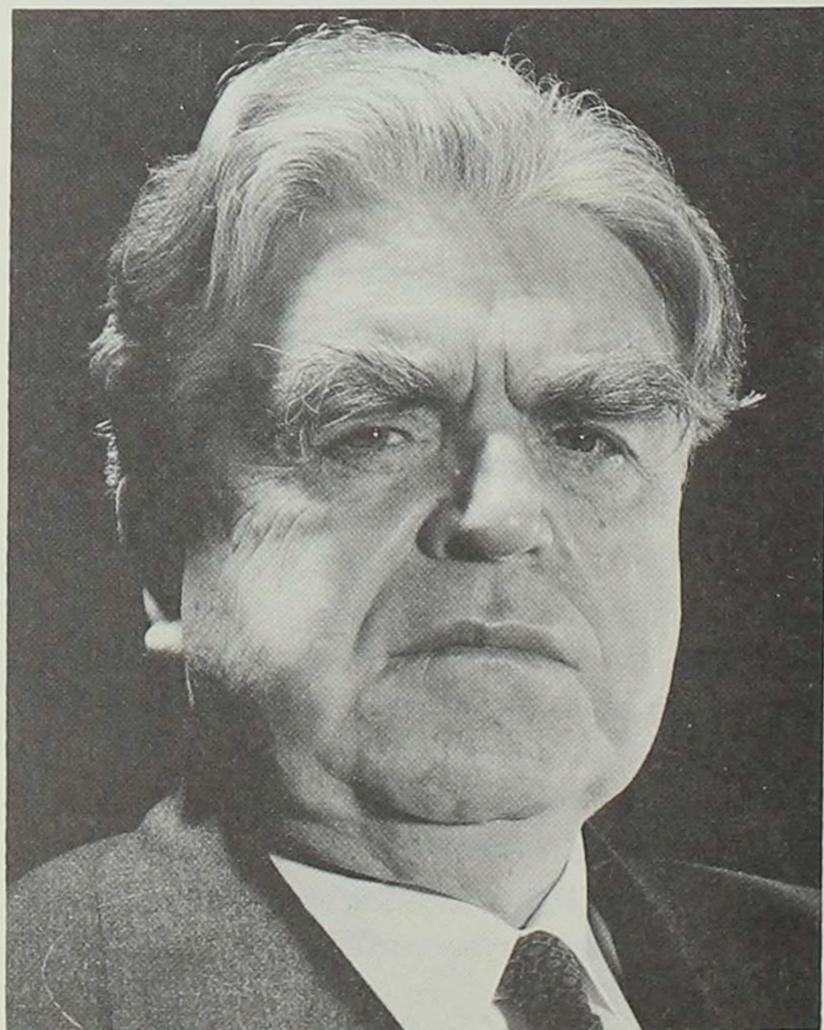


Herbert Hoover in 1961 (Joshua Wiener photo; courtesy Herbert Hoover Presidential Library)

Four Mer

Other episodes of collision or cooperation between the four were more important than these. There was the clash between Lewis and Hopkins over Lewis's demand for government help in organizing WPA workers; Hopkins' refusal was another reason for Lewis's swing from the New Deal back to Hoover. And there was Truman's combining the talents of Hoover and Wallace to avert world famine after World War II.

The four Iowans offer contrasts in personality and temperament, but also likenesses. Hoover and Lewis were people who had to be first in any enterprise. Hoover insisted on running all other departments while he was secretary of commerce, and Lewis never hesitated to speak for all of labor, whether he was in or out of the AFL or CIO at the time. And after reaching the top, neither could ever really comprehend any later rejection by his constituents. Personal ambition boiled in the breasts of Wallace and Hopkins, too, but they could let it simmer,

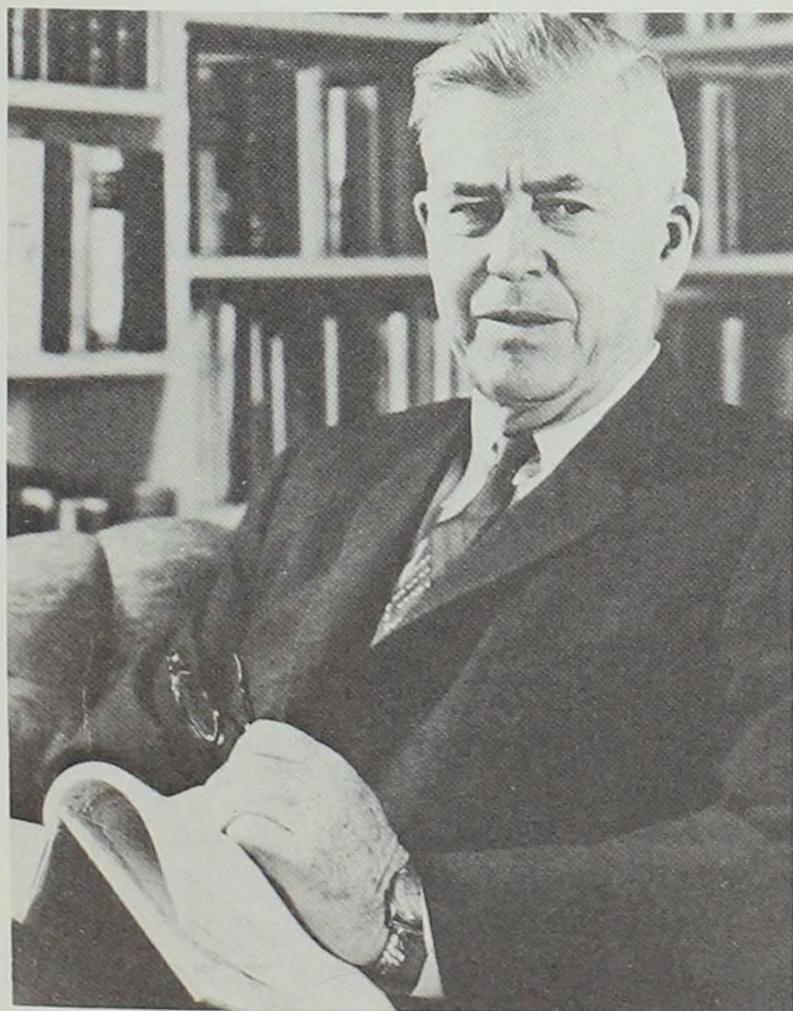


John L. Lewis in the 1950s (Bettmann Archive)

operating very well as members of a team. (Working under FDR, they doubtless had small choice.) Hoover, Wallace, and Hopkins were all workaholics; Lewis was not, though he worked hard and always gave his union members to understand that in their interests he toiled around the clock and then some. The unlikely pair of Hoover and Wallace were successful businessmen. Lewis was a failure as a businessman, and Hopkins never essayed the role. Had Hopkins tried or Lewis persisted, however, it is hard to imagine anything but success for both. All were educated men, three college-educated and one, Lewis, impressively self-educated, and all made intelligent use of their learning. All had come under strong religious influences which, however, were reflected variously. Three were helpfully influenced by wives from Iowa, Hopkins being the exception. Three—Hoover, Wallace, and Hopkins—made considerable use of fellow Iowans as lieutenants in Washington. Hopkins,

in fact, drew so many from his alma mater that Grinnell contributed more New Deal administrators than any other small liberal arts college in the country.

But at the last, as Freidel and others have come to point out in recent years, the four Iowans had more in common than their considerable political and philosophical differences would suggest—more, surely, than they themselves believed. Wallace and Hopkins scorned “Hooverism” but built upon foundations the Great Engineer had laid. Lewis ended up detesting the New Deal, but the gains he achieved for labor would have been impossible without Wallace, Hopkins, and the rest of the New Dealers. All, in an era when their countrymen badly needed succor, provided it abundantly. That they perceived the need so clearly and went so skillfully to the root of the matter would seem to owe much to their birth and upbringing in the state called by Paul de Kruif the land “laid down by God and the glacier for the particular purpose of growing maize.” □



Henry A. Wallace (courtesy University of Iowa Library)



Harry Hopkins (WPA photograph in the National Archives)

The Center for the Study of the Recent History of the United States

It is only natural that the letters and papers of many historical figures should ultimately be deposited in their native states. Thus, because a number of Iowans were in positions of national prominence in the 1920s and 1930s, Iowa holds a rich lode of sources for students of twentieth-century American history to mine. Of the men discussed in the accompanying article, the papers of Herbert Hoover are in the presidential library named for him in West Branch, and the papers of both Henry A. Wallace and his father are in the University of Iowa Libraries in Iowa City. The Division of the State Historical Society holds microfilm copies of the papers of John L. Lewis, with the originals on deposit at the Wisconsin State Historical Society in Madison. Harry Hopkins' papers and letters, some original and some microfilm copies, are in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, New York.

The original letters and papers of other prominent Americans—Iowans or people associated with them—are also to be found in the three Iowa institutions mentioned above. These include the papers of Senators William B. Allison, Jonathan P. Dolliver, Gerald P. Nye, and Albert B. Cummins; Congressman Gilbert N. Haugen; farm protest leader Milo Reno; and journalists Westbrook Pegler and J.N. "Ding" Darling. The papers of contemporary figures, like former Iowa governor and senator Harold Hughes and journalist Clark Mollenhoff, are also deposited at the three institutions.

The availability of such material was in part responsible for the establishment a few years ago of the Center for the Study of the Recent History of the United States. The Center is the outgrowth of discussions begun in 1975 among representatives of the State Historical Society, the Hoover Library, and the University of Iowa. The institutions recognized the outstanding quality of their holdings as a basis for the study of the twentieth century, and particularly of the 1920s and 1930s. The first venture in formal cooperation was a 1977 volume which called attention to the range of materials available: *A Guide to Resources for the Study of the Recent History of the United States in the Libraries of the University of Iowa, the State Historical Society of Iowa, and in the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library*. With the help of generous contributions from individuals and foundations, the Center has gone on to sponsor three conferences in Iowa City. The first, in 1979, dealt with "Three Progressives from

Iowa"—Herbert Hoover, Henry A. Wallace, and Gilbert Haugen. The 1980 conference on "Three Faces of Midwestern Isolationism" considered the isolationist positions of John L. Lewis, Gerald P. Nye, and Robert E. Wood. The papers presented at the first two conferences have been published and may be ordered at \$5.00 each from the State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. The *Guide to Resources* mentioned above is also available for \$10.00 from the same source. The third conference sponsored by the Center, "The Quest for Security," dealt with the history and future of social insurance in the United States and was held in Iowa City on October 7, 1981.

Note on Sources

Most of the material on the Iowa environment was drawn from "compendium" volumes summarizing U.S. Census returns for 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910; and from John A.T. Hull's *Census of Iowa for 1880 and the Same Compared with the Findings of Each of the Other States* (Des Moines: F.M. Mills, state printer, 1883). At several other points, I have drawn upon Joseph F. Wall's *Iowa: A Bicentennial History* (New York: Norton, 1978), Ellis W. Hawley's *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), and Frank Freidel's "The Iowa Progressive Tradition and National Achievements," in *Three Progressives from Iowa* (Iowa City: Center for the Study of the Recent History of the United States, 1980).

Biographies of the principals formed the prime source of material on the lives of Hoover, Lewis, Wallace and Hopkins. The portrait of Hoover presented here was drawn mostly from David Burner's well-balanced *Herbert Hoover, A Public Life* (New York: Knopf, 1979), but those with a strong interest in Hoover will also wish to pursue the major reinterpretations now being advanced by such scholars as Hawley and Joan Hoff Wilson. Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine's *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times, 1977) is the best work on its subject and likely will remain so for some time to come. The standard biography of Wallace is Edward L. and Frederick H. Schapsmeier's two-volume work: *Henry A. Wallace of Iowa: The Agrarian Years, 1910-1940 and Prophet in Politics: Henry A. Wallace and the War Years, 1940-1965* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1968, 1970), but many Iowans may find Russell Lord's *The Wallaces of Iowa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947) more interesting and, in some respects, more informative. Robert E. Sherwood's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York: Harper, 1948) remains unsurpassed among Hopkins biographies in both its sweep and its mastery of detail.

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