

The Herbert Hoover Library and the Presidential Library System

The Herbert Hoover Library at West Branch, Iowa, is a Presidential Library operated by the National Archives and Records Service of the General Services Administration as a part of the National Archives system. At present there are three other Presidential Libraries in operation under the direction of the Archivist of the United States: the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library at Abilene, Kansas; the Harry S. Truman Library at Independence, Missouri; and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, New York.

Presidential libraries are a relatively new addition to the Nation's archival institutions. For 166 years there was no systematic provision made for the preservation of the papers of the Presidents. Consequently many were lost, dispersed, or destroyed. Others were preserved, often by mere chance, and some, although preserved virtually intact, were long not available for research use. Yet almost from the birth of the Republic it was recognized that Presidential papers formed an important part of our national heritage. Why, then, were they not systematically preserved from the outset as a part of the Nation's archives?

In the United States, the Office of the President is a constitutional office having a separate and independent status in the governmental system. Every President since George Washington has considered that this status extended to the papers of his office — that they were his personal property during and after his administration. So from Washington on Presidents have taken their papers with them when they left office — or, if they died in office, their heirs took over the papers.

Fortunately Congress, recognizing that the Government and the people had a vital interest in Presidential papers, appropriated considerable sums of money during the 19th Century to purchase the papers of our earliest Presidents. These were eventually deposited in the Library of Congress, which by gift or purchase, also managed to acquire substantial quantities of the papers of 19 later Presidents from Van Buren to Coolidge.

In recent times, the volume of papers accumulated by a President while in office has increased so greatly that the space required for their safe-keeping has multiplied many times over. The combined papers of Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe now in the Library of Congress, for example, comprise only about 75,000 manuscript "items." The papers of the Adams family in the Massachusetts Historical Society, including those of two Presidents and spanning a period of two and one-half centuries, num-

ber some 275,000 manuscript pages — the equivalent of about 75 modern file cabinet drawers. In contrast, the papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt would fill some 2500 drawers; Harry S. Truman, 1600 drawers; and Dwight D. Eisenhower, 2000 or more. In addition to papers, modern Presidents accumulate thousands of printed items — personal libraries, in effect — and countless gifts and mementoes, many of which have great cultural or commemorative value. It is no accident, therefore, that the concept of the Presidential Library has appealed to our recent Presidents.

Presidential Libraries within the National Archives system were made possible when Congress, with bipartisan support and without dissenting vote, passed the Presidential Libraries Act of 1955. This legislation authorizes the Government to accept as gifts to the Nation the papers of any President or former President of the United States and buildings, privately financed and constructed, to house them. It also designates the National Archives and Records Service of the General Services Administration to operate such libraries as "Presidential Archival Depositories."

President Hoover offered his public papers and related historical materials to the United States as a gift in December, 1960. On the same date, the Herbert Hoover Birthplace Foundation, Inc., which had raised funds for and supervised the construction of a Hoover Library-Museum at

West Branch, offered the building, equipment, and grounds to the Federal Government as a gift. The Hoover birthplace cottage and other structures in the 28 acre Hoover Park were included in the gift. Congress authorized the acceptance of the gifts in March, 1962.

The nucleus of the Hoover Library's holdings is, of course, the large collection of papers accumulated by Mr. Hoover during his long years of public service — especially while he was Secretary of Commerce, President of the United States, and later, as Chairman of the First and Second Commissions on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government (the Hoover Commissions). They do not include, however, the President's notable collection of "war and peace" documents which he earlier gave to Leland Stanford University at Palo Alto, California.

It is anticipated that the Hoover papers will be supplemented to the extent possible by gifts of personal papers deposited by leading associates and contemporaries or by the acquisition of microfilm copies of such papers when not available to the Library in original manuscript form. The Hoover and related papers will be further supplemented by the President's collection of books and memorabilia.

The President's memorabilia include a wide variety of items associated with his long and distinguished career. Among them are the desk,

chair, flags, and associated items he used in the White House; unique, interesting, and significant mementoes pertaining to historic events in which he participated; countless tokens of esteem and thanks presented to him on behalf of the millions of grateful men, women and especially children, whom he saved from starvation by his relief work in years of war and peace; objets d'art presented to or acquired by him during his travels; and evidences of all kinds reflecting his life-long devotion to the public service. Many of these are on display in the Library's exhibit galleries.

The Library building is a compact, one-story stone structure designed by the architectural firm of Eggers and Higgins of New York in consultation with President Hoover and the Foundation. Appropriately situated adjacent to the Birthplace Cottage in beautifully landscaped, well-kept Hoover Park, it includes exhibit galleries, a handsomely paneled but simply furnished "library room," staff offices, and stacks for the storage of papers, books, and mementoes. Completion of high-speed Interstate Highway 80 east and west from Iowa City, with its exit at West Branch, will make the Library easily accessible to tourists as well as to scholars.

In accordance with current plans, the present building will shortly be expanded to include two additional tiers of stacks, a commodious research room, a small auditorium, a photographic labora-

tory, and several more staff and work areas. The Foundation, in consultation with President Hoover and Eggers and Higgins, will supervise construction of the addition which, upon completion, will operate with the help of the National Archives and Records Service as an integral part of the properties given to the Government by the Foundation in 1960. The original structure will then be devoted almost exclusively to museum displays.

Because of its meaningful location in West Branch, its historically significant holdings of papers and books, and its unique museum displays, the Herbert Hoover Library will contribute notably to a better understanding of our history and heritage not only by scholars but also by the many thousands of Americans, young and old, who will visit it in the years to come.

Truly President Hoover, the Foundation, and all who have cooperated with them to make the Herbert Hoover Library at West Branch a reality have performed a service of lasting benefit to the world of scholarship, the State of Iowa, and the Nation.

WAYNE C. GROVER