

Reading #1

Herbert Hoover's Family

Herbert Hoover, the first President born west of the Mississippi, was born in a small two room cottage on August 10, 1874. Herbert's father Jesse and his grandfather Eli Hoover built the cottage in 1871.

Jesse and Hulda Hoover had three children. Theodore was born in 1871, Herbert in 1874, and Mary in 1876. As young children they were known as "Tad," "Bert," and "May." This family of five made a cozy home out of the two-room cottage at the corner of Penn and Downey streets. The main room of the cottage served as living room, dining room, and kitchen. To reduce the heat in the house in the summer, the stove was moved to the back porch, which became a "summer kitchen." The whole family shared the single bedroom, with the boys sleeping together in a trundle bed pulled out from under their parents' bed.



As Jesse Hoover prospered as a businessman, he sold the cottage and his blacksmith shop in 1878. In May of the next year, the Hoover family moved to a larger two-story house about one block south of the cottage, and—as reported in the *West Branch Local Record*—the family was "as snug as a bug in a rug." After selling the shop, Jesse Hoover purchased a building on the corner of Main and First streets where he opened a farm implement store. Hoover proved to be a good businessman and quickly expanded his inventory to include pumps and wagons. He also bought a machine to make barbed wire.

Then disaster struck: Jesse Hoover died of rheumatism of the heart on December 13, 1880, at the age of 34. Hulda Hoover supported her three children by taking in sewing and by accepting assistance from some of her relatives. Nearby communities often called upon her to speak at Quaker meetings. After returning from one such speaking trip to the nearby town of Springdale Hulda fell ill. She died of typhoid complicated by pneumonia in February of 1884.

After Hulda died, relatives gathered to decide who should care for the children. May Hoover stayed with grandmother Minthorn (Hulda's mother.) Tad went to live with uncle Henry Davis Hoover, where he was expected to earn his keep by helping with

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farm work. Young Bert was taken in the family of his uncle Allan and aunt Millie Hoover near West Branch.

The Allan Hoover farm was a busy place, as was typical of the time. The family made their own soap, wove their own rugs, sewed their own clothes, canned their own fruits and vegetables, and butchered hogs and cattle for meat. Sometimes Bert and his cousin they earned extra money for special jobs: five cents a hundred to cut thistles, and two cents apiece for cleaning the barns. They even picked potato bugs at one cent a hundred. Herbert used some of his money to buy fish hooks. He used a butcher string for a line and a willow branch for a pole.

When he was 11, Bert's relatives sent him to Newberg, Oregon to live with Hulda's brother, Dr. Henry John Minthorn, and his family. A local family from West Branch also was headed west, and accompanied Bert as a new chapter of the life of the future president began. Hoover would go on from Oregon to attend Stanford University and eventually would become a successful mining engineer, a humanitarian providing food aid to Belgium during World War I, US Secretary of Commerce, and, of course, President of the United States. Quite a life's journey for a boy born in a two room cottage in West Branch, Iowa!

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Reflect

1. What types of businesses did Hoover's father operate?
2. Why would those businesses have been important in the economy of a town like West Branch?
3. What caused the deaths of Jesse and Hulda Hoover?
4. How did their deaths affect the lives of their children?
5. How did young Hoover earn spending money and how much did he earn?

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Connect

1. How does the amount Hoover made compare with what you might earn today doing odd jobs?

2. How does daily farm life in 19th century Iowa differ from your daily life today?

Predict

1. What are some ways you can imagine Hoover's childhood experiences might have affected his later life and achievements?

2. What do you think you might see at the Historic Site that will reflect the experiences written about above?

3. List some questions you have for the park ranger during your visit.