



HERBERT HOOVER



# THE MEMOIRS OF HERBERT HOOVER

Years Of Adventure, 1874-1920

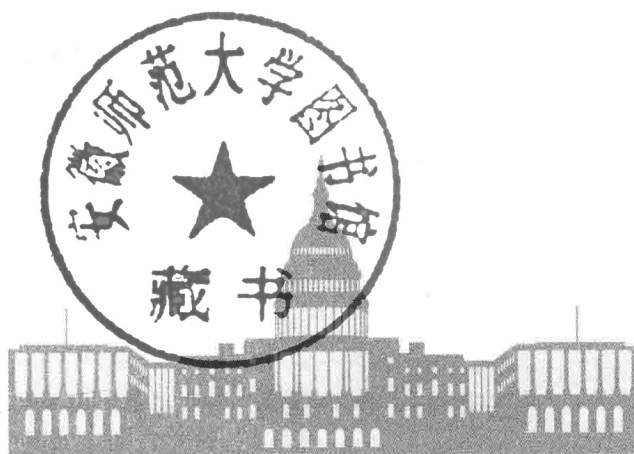


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## PREFACE

These memoirs are not a diary but a topical relation of some events and incidents in a roughly chronological order. It has been my habit to keep notes and documents rather than daily entries—for which indeed I have found little time in life.

This volume comprises three parts: the first covers the period from my birth in 1874 to the end of my professional career in 1914; the second covers the First World War and the Armistice from mid-1914 to October, 1919; the third, my relations to the making of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

The first part was written at odd times during 1915-1916 when I was occupied with Belgian Relief. At that time I constantly had to journey backwards and forwards from London, crossing the English Channel two score times en route to Holland, Belgium, Germany, and often thence to Switzerland, Paris, and London again. These journeys were filled with hours of waiting. Wartime boats and trains were always late in starting or in arriving. There was also the eternal waiting in hotels for appointments with officials. Consequently, in the waits, I compiled this sort of record of my varied life for my two sons who I hoped would follow my profession as an engineer (as they did). It also served to relieve the boredom and monotony of the waits.

This portion was not originally intended for publication. Mrs. Hoover and I always believed the incidents of our family life were our sole possession. But myths sometimes good and sometimes not appear as to all persons who enter public life. Whether the myths are good or bad, they do not contribute to the store of truth.

The second and third parts, relating to my activities during World War I, were written at various times from 1920 to 1924.

The text has not been changed except to include some minor quotations from subsequent disclosures in proof of what happened in the

negotiation of the peace and to condense the text by eliminating a large amount of documentation. This documentation has become generally available, and footnotes to the text indicate where it can be found. Among the available sources is the Stanford War Library, which contains probably ten million items on World War I and its aftermath.

Part of the text on peace making was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in November, 1941.

I could have revised this volume in the light of twenty-five years after, but it has seemed to me that the value of such memoirs is to reflect views one held at the time and to clothe the documents of formal history with their background of events and personalities. I saw that war in the raw, together with some of its political and international phases, probably more intimately than any other American.

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## CHAPTER 1

### IOWA 1874—1884

#### FROM ZERO TO TEN YEARS OF AGE

I prefer to think of Iowa as I saw it through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy.<sup>①</sup> Those were eyes filled with the wonders of Iowa's streams and woods, of the mystery of growing crops. They saw days filled with adventure and great undertakings, with participation in good and comforting things. They saw days of stern but kindly discipline.

In later years I was told that if I went back to these scenes everything would have shrunk up and become small and ordinary. For instance, there was Cook's Hill. That was a great long hill where on winters' nights, to satisfy our human craving for speed, we slid down at terrific pace with our tummies

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① Herbert Hoover was born at West Branch, Iowa, on August 10, 1874. His elder brother Theodore was born on January 28, 1871. His youngest sister May was born September 1, 1876.

His father, Jesse dark Hoover, was born at West Milton, Ohio, September 2, 1846, and died from typhoid fever at the age of 34 in West Branch, December 10, 1880, Herbert being then six years old. His mother, Huldah Minthorn Hoover, was born at Burgersville, Norwich Township, Ontario, Canada, on May 4, 1848, and died of pneumonia at the age of 34 on February 24, 1883, Herbert being then eight years old. His mother's forebears were Quakers who landed in New England from England at various times from 1630 on.

Herbert Hoover's grandfather Eli Hoover was born at West Milton, Ohio, in 1820. His great-grandfather Jesse Hoover was born in 1800 at Uwharrie River, Randolph County, North Carolina. His great-great-grandfather John Hoover was born at Union Bridge, Maryland, 1760. His great-great-great-grandfather Andrew Hoover was born in Ellerstadt, the Palatinate, of Swiss parents, in 1723, and migrated to Pennsylvania in 1738. Andrew Hoover was of Quaker faith as were all his descendants.

tight to home-made sleds. I've seen it several times since; it's a good hill and except for the now obsolete method of thawing out frozen toes with ice-water the operation needs no modern improvement. The swimming hole under the willows down by the railroad bridge is still operating efficiently albeit modern mothers probably use cleaning fluid to get rid of clean and healthy mud when the boys come home from swimming. The hole still needs to be deepened, however. It is hard to keep from pounding the mud with your hands and feet when you shove off for the 30 feet of a cross-channel swim.

And there were the woods down by the Burlington track. The denudation of our forests hasn't reached them even yet. And there are rabbits still being trapped in cracker boxes held open by a figure four trap. Rabbits early on a cold morning are nervous rabbits, but in the lore of boys it was better to bring them home alive. My brother Theodore, being older, had surreptitiously behind the blacksmith shop read in the *Youth's Companion* full directions for rendering live rabbits secure. I say surreptitiously, for mine was a Quaker family unwilling in those days to have youth corrupted with stronger reading than the Bible, the encyclopedia, or those great novels where the hero overcomes the demon rum. Soon after Theodore had acquired this higher learning on rabbits he proceeded to instruct me to stand still in the cold snow and to hold up the rabbit while with his not over-sharp knife he proposed to puncture holes between its sinews and back knee-joints, through which holes he proposed to tie a string and thus arrive at complete security. Upon the beginning of this operation the resistance of the rabbit was too much for me. I was not only blamed for its escape all the way home and for weeks afterwards, but continuously for many years. I thought I would write to the *Youth's Companion* and suggest that they make sure this method is altered. For I never see rabbit tracks across the snowy fields that I do not have a painful recollection of it all.

There were also at times pigeons in this forest and prairie chickens in the hedges. With the efficient instruction on the use of bows and arrows from a real live American Indian boy of a neighboring Indian school and certain experiences of my own while living in Indian territory, sometimes by volleys in battalions we did bring down a pigeon or a chicken. The Ritz has never yet provided game of such wondrous flavor as this bird plucked and half-cooked over the small-boy's campfire.

There were sun-fish and cat-fish to be had. Nor did we possess the modern

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

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

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

My recollection of my father is of necessity dim indeed. I retain one vivid memento from his time. Playing barefoot around the blacksmith shop, I stepped on a chip of hot iron and carry the brand of Iowa on my foot to this day. Before his death he had parted with the blacksmith shop and had established a comfortable farm implement business. With larger resources and a growing family, he then bought a larger house across the street from the little cottage now preserved by the State of Iowa as my birthplace. The new house was later

destroyed but my memories are associated with it.<sup>①</sup>

At the implement shop he had a machine for putting barbs on wire. After the barbs were fixed, the bundles of wire were dipped in hot tar to prevent rust. While no one was looking I undertook an experiment in combustion by putting a lighted stick in the caldron. It produced a smoke that brought the town running and me speeding the other way in complete terror. Whenever I see a picture of a volcanic eruption I recall that terror. Another experiment in wood carving nearly cut a forefinger off. The scar is still there, but I had compensations among other small boys from my surgical importance.

My recollections of my mother are more vivid and are chiefly of a sweet-faced woman who for two years kept the little family of four together. She took in sewing to add to the family resources. It was only years later that I learned of her careful saving of the \$1000 insurance upon my father's life in order that it might help in our education. As a help to her, an uncle, Major Laban Miles, took me to the then Indian Territory for eight or nine months, where I lived with his family. He was United States Indian Agent to the Osage Nation, a position he held with the affection of the Indians for many years. It was my first train journey and my first long buggy-drive—from Arkansas City to Pawhuska, the agency. Here with cousins of my own age, I had constant association with the little Indians at the agency school. We learned much aboriginal lore of the woods and streams, and how to make bows and arrows. We attended the Indian Sunday-school which was conducted in English. One Sunday, a visiting missionary, reviewing the service, demanded to know the subject of the day's lesson. At once all the little Indians piped up "Ananias set fire to his wife," this being an etymological impression of "Ananias and Sapphira, his wife."

So also I was taken for a summer to live with an Uncle Pennington Minthorn in Sioux County, Iowa, where he was breaking in a prairie farm. We

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① The Original one-story, three-room cottage where Mr. Hoover was born was for many years obscured by a two-story addition across the front. This is the shape of the house in Grant Wood's famous painting and is the one which appears in most illustrations. After Mr. Hoover was elected President, the place became a profitable hot-dog stand catering to inquiring visitors. In 1934 Herbert Jr. and Allan succeeded in purchasing it. On their behalf, Mrs. Hoover supervised the removal of the additions, restored the original cottage, built a caretaker's house, improved the grounds and presented the property to the village of West Branch. It is looked after by the village with an appropriation from the State.

lived in a sod house and I was privileged to ride the lead horse of the team which was opening the virgin soil.

Iowa, through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy, is not all adventure or high living. Nor was Iowa of those days without its tragedies. Medical science was still almost powerless against the contagious diseases which swept the countryside. My own parents were among their victims. I, however, successfully passed the requirements of mumps, measles, croup, diphtheria and chickenpox.

Iowa, in those years as in these, was filled with days of school—and who does not remember with a glow some gentle woman who with infinite patience and kindness drilled into us those foundations of all we know today? And there were days of chores and labor. I am no supporter of factory labor for children but I have never joined with those who clamor against proper chores for children outside of school hours. And I speak from the common experience of most Iowa children of my day in planting corn, hoeing gardens, learning to milk, sawing wood, and in the other proper and normal occupations for boys. It was a Montessori school in stark reality. And to more purpose I can speak for the strong and healthy bodies which came from it all.

Since my mother had been educated above most women in those days—as a school-teacher—she was in demand as a speaker at Quaker meetings. She also took a considerable part in the then vigorous prohibition campaigns. On one occasion I was parked for the day at the polls, where the women were massed in an effort to make the men vote themselves dry.

After her death our home was necessarily broken up. I have dim recollections of the councils of kindly relatives and others, not as to who should undertake the duty of raising the three orphans, but who should have the joy of adding them to their own broods. Among these contestants was my school-teacher, Mollie Brown—later Mrs. Carran—who strove to secure me for adoption. But Mollie was then unmarried, and the others insisted that family experience was a first necessity for my control. Anyway I was taken into the family of an uncle—Allan Hoover—who worked his own farm a mile from the town. My sister May was taken in by my grandmother Minthorn, and my brother Theodore by my uncle Davis Hoover.

My mother had carefully hoarded my father's life insurance. That sum plus the realizations from his agricultural implement business and the sale of

our home was by application of relatives to the courts put in charge of Laurie Tatum, a grand old gentleman living at Tipton, Iowa, as legal guardian for all the three children. The relatives wanted no taint of manipulating the "estate."

Farm life then had a different economic setting. I am not stating that I had at that time any pretension to economics or the farm problem. We did know of the mortgage upon Uncle Allan's farm which was a constant source of anxiety and a dreadful damper on youthful hopes for things that could not be bought. At that stage in agricultural history of Cedar County, a farm was not only a farm but all kinds of factories. Here the family performed all the functions of a Chicago packer, a Cincinnati soap company, a Duluth carpet factory and a California canner. They gave toll to a neighbor for the service of a Minneapolis flour mill and, by way of sorghum, they possessed a New York sugar refinery. Every fall, the cellar was filled with bins and jars and barrels. That was social security itself. The farm families were their own lawyers, labor leaders, engineers, doctors, tailors, dressmakers, and beauty parlor artists. They developed high art in feathers and wax. I know that my clothes, partly homespun and dyed with butternuts, showed no influence of Paris or London.

We cut and hauled our own fuel from the wonderful woods ten miles away on the river, and incidentally gathered walnuts and hickory nuts for the winter. These and popcorn balls cemented with sorghum molasses were our chief Christmas confections.

That economic system avoided strikes, lockouts, class conflicts, labor boards and arbitration. It absolutely denied collective bargaining to small boys. The prevailing rate for picking potato bugs was one cent a hundred and if you wanted firecrackers on the Fourth of July you took it or left it.<sup>①</sup>

These farm families consumed perhaps eighty percent of the product of their land. The remaining twenty percent was exchanged for the few outside essentials and to pay interest on the mortgage. When prices rose and fell on the Chicago market, they affected only twenty percent of the income of the family. Today as the result of the industrial revolution and improved methods

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① If that wage still prevails, it ought now to be adjusted to the commodity dollar and is entitled to a hearing by the Labor Board. It may be that the use of arsenic on bugs has created technological unemployment in the firecracker industry. If so, the recent remedy would be to dig up the potatoes while they are young.

of planting and of breeding animals and whatnot, eighty percent of the product of the farm must go to the market. When the prices of these things wobble in Chicago, it has four times the effect on the family income that it did in those days. If prices are high, they mean comfort and automobiles; if prices are low, they mean increasing debt and privation.

As gentle as are memories of those times, I am not recommending a return to the good old days. Sickness was greater and death came sooner. While the standards of living in food and clothing and shelter were high enough for anybody's health and comfort, there was but little resource left for the other purposes of living. That is probably one reason why the people of Iowa of that period put more of their time into religious devotion than most of us do now. It certainly was less expensive than modern recreation. Its recreational aspects were, however, somewhat limited.

Those who are acquainted with the Quaker faith, and who know the primitive furnishing of the Quaker meeting-house, the solemnity of the long hours of meeting awaiting the spirit to move someone, will know the intense repression upon a ten-year-old boy who might not even count his toes. All this may not have been recreation, but it was strong training in patience.

The Quakers—more properly the “Friends”—were given that sobriquet in the early 17th century, not because they quaked but because of their founder, George Fox's repetitive demand for the authorities of his time to quake and tremble before the Lord. They were one of the many Protestant sects which sprang into being because of the repressions on religious liberty and in protest against religious formalism. Their protest against religious rote up to the recent times expressed itself in their peculiar garb of “plain clothes” and adherence to the “plain language.” But as time went on, these very customs, the uniform architecture of meeting-houses, the method of conducting meetings, became a sort of formalism itself.

Moreover human nature cannot be fully repressed. The pride of my “aunts” in their Quaker bonnets and their flowing gray skirts contained grains of relieving worldliness. The religious characteristics of the faith were literal belief in the Bible, great tolerance, and a conviction that spiritual inspiration sprang from the “inward light” in each individual. Thus, being extreme religious individualists, they have no paid “ministers” and no elaborate ecclesiastical organization, “the meeting” being only roughly grouped under “quarterly” or

“yearly meetings” for spiritual guidance. The reflex of religious individualism is necessarily also economic individualism. The Friends have always held strongly to education, thrift, and individual enterprise. In consequence of plain living and hard work poverty has never been their lot. So far as I know, no member has ever been in jail or on public relief. This is largely because they take care of each other. Also it may be because if members evidence failings of loose living, their elders “visit” them in time to remedy their weaknesses or else expel them from the meeting.

Individual Bible-reading was a part of the Quaker concept of education—and before I left Iowa I had read the Bible in daily stints from cover to cover. Religious training among the Quakers in fact began almost from birth. Even the babies were present at the invariable family prayers and Bible readings every morning. They were taken to meeting every Sunday, since obviously there was no other place in which to park them. Their cries and bushings thereof were often the only relief from the long silences of Quaker worship. The men and women sat divided by a low partition. The elders of the women who sat upon the high “facing-bench” were the only ones of that sex that I could see. “Aunt” Hannah occupied the first place on this bench. At one time, “moved” in meeting, she rose to denounce a proposal of the youngsters that they should have singing in Sabbath-school and use the meeting-house for recreational purposes. She was bitter in her warnings of the wrath to come, and as a peroration made the prophecy that if these things came to pass “this edifice dedicated to God will some day be transformed into a place of abomination.” It might even become a “the-a-ter.” “Aunt” Hannah was correct. Many years afterward, when the more prosperous community built a brick “church” and introduced singing, the old meeting-house was transformed into a movie establishment.

My earliest realization of the stir of national life was the torch-light parade in the Garfield campaign of 1880. I was not only allowed out that night but I saw the torches being filled and lighted. I was not high enough to carry one but I was permitted to walk alongside the parade. There was no great need for urging voters in our town. There was only one Democrat in the village. He occasionally fell under the influence of liquor; therefore in the opinion of our village he represented all the forces of evil. At times he relapsed to goodness in the form of a ration of a single gumdrop to the small boys who did errands at his store. He also bought the old iron from which added financial resources



were provided for firecrackers on the Fourth of July. He was, therefore, tolerated and he served well and efficiently for a moral and political example.

Another touch of national life was the assassination of Garfield. The flag over the main store was placed at half-mast. All the people moved in hushed and anxious hours while his life lingered on. It was thus that I learned that some great man was at the helm of our country.