

AN ADDRESS  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE

50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE STATE FUNERAL OF  
PRESIDENT HERBERT HOOVER

BY

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AT THE

HERBERT HOOVER GRAVE  
HOOVER PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY  
WEST BRANCH, IOWA

OCTOBER 25, 2014  
3 P.M.

(REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY)

## **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the State Funeral of President Herbert Hoover October 25, Herbert Hoover Grave, Hoover Presidential Library**

- Andrew Hoover, President Hoover's grandson, and Jeanie Hoover
- Alexander Hoover and Leslie Hoover Lauble, the great-grandchildren of President Hoover
- State Senator David Johnson
- Dr. Thomas Schwartz, Director of the Hoover Presidential Library Museum
- Peter Swisher, Hoover Historic Site Park Superintendent
- Charlie Becker, Hoover Presidential Foundation Board President
- Jerry Fleagle, Executive Director of the Hoover Presidential Foundation
- Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

That heart, which had been filled with such energy and empathy for 90 years, finally succumbed to the toxins assaulting his body, and so death came for the Great Humanitarian on a Tuesday morning in suite 31-A of the Waldorf Towers in New York City.

There, his personal physician, Dr. Michael Lapore, handed a sheet of Waldorf Astoria letterhead to two wire service reporters upon which in handwritten script was simply stated:

“President Hoover

October 20, 1964

11:35 a.m.”

His two sons, Herbert, Jr. and Allan Henry, had been present when their father, the 31st President of the United States, Herbert Clark Hoover, had expired.

Later that day Neil MacNeil, an old friend of Hoover's, called a press conference on the 4th floor of the hotel at which he announced what would be the headline of Hoover's life.

"A great American has ended a brilliant career of service to his fellow men. Above all, he was a humanitarian. He fed more people and saved more lives than any other man in history."

Thus ended a great personal odyssey that had begun in this small Iowa town of West Branch on August 10, 1874 and which had taken Herbert Hoover to Stanford, Australia, the Boxer Rebellion in China, London, two world wars in Europe, the Cabinet, the White House and travel around the globe assessing hunger and delivering succor to the starving.

And, at the same time, it began the historic state funeral of President Hoover, which would traverse the two cities that had inflicted upon him the greatest political pain of his life--New York, the location of the stock market crash of 1929, and Washington where his embattled presidency had ended in his defeat for re-election.

That state funeral would culminate here in the Iowa countryside, at this same exact hour of 3p.m., 50 years ago, on Sunday, October 25, 1964.

If in life, his legacy had been used as a divisive cudgel in partisan electoral battles, in death, Herbert Hoover provided a unifying moment for the country, which, it need be recalled, was just two weeks away from the bitterly contested 1964 presidential election.

President Lyndon Johnson and Vice President Hubert Humphrey attended the service at St. Bartholomew's Church, as did Senator Barry Goldwater, the Republican candidate for president and his running mate, William Miller.

They were joined by former Vice President Richard Nixon and Senator Robert F. Kennedy. At the U.S. Capitol, the President's remains were placed on the same catafalque that had held Abraham Lincoln's body almost 100 years earlier and John F. Kennedy's just 11 months before.

Placed in the center of the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, surrounded by the great scenes of American history, Herbert Hoover laid in state on Saturday, October 24 as more than 30,000 people passed his coffin to pay tribute.

On Sunday morning, October 25, his casket was flown to Iowa. On a magnificent autumn day, with the temperature in the mid-70s and the countryside a blend of gold, brown and orange foliage, Iowans lined the streets, parked along the shoulders of the Interstate and filled the overpasses, just to have a glimpse of the motorcade from the Cedar Rapids airport to West Branch.

From 75 to 80,000 were estimated to have gathered on these grounds and in nearby corn fields that had been hurriedly harvested and mowed down just the day before.

All totaled, as many as 100,000 people either stood along the procession route or were present here to honor the first president born west of the Mississippi.

Hoover friend and Quaker elder, Dr. Elton Trueblood, spoke and pronounced the benediction, a presidential wreath was laid and a bugler sounded taps. The flag covering the casket was folded and handed to Herbert Hoover, Jr. At 3:35 p.m. the burial service was concluded and family members withdrew.

The public was then allowed to file past the grave. Their numbers were so great that even as the glowing Iowa autumnal sun was setting to the west and a glorious red reflection illuminated the sky, the long winding line of mourners was still moving past the burial site, paying a final tribute to a son of Iowa who at long last had returned home.

Herbert Hoover's burial in West Branch marked the end of a family odyssey that had begun on his mother Hulda Minthorn's side with Quakers who arrived in New England in 1630 and had made a home in Canada, before migrating south to Iowa; and by his father's ancestor Andrew Hoover who arrived in America in 1738 and eventually settled in North Carolina along the Uwharrie River where Herbert Hoover's great grandfather, Jesse, was born in 1799.

Two years later Jesse Hoover's family began a trek through the wilderness of Kentucky to eventually settle near Stillwater, Ohio. Then, in 1853, burning with "Iowa fever" that had been instigated by John Deere's steel plow which suddenly made the prairie "farmable," Jesse Hoover loaded his family onto a schooner wagon, crossed the Mississippi, and followed the rutted wagon tracks that are now Interstate 80.

His son Eli, Herbert Hoover's grandfather, was recorded as filing a claim for a plot of land here in Cedar County, just seven years after Iowa had achieved statehood.

As pioneers crossed the Appalachian Mountains and streamed into the expansive central plain of the Western Reserve and the Louisiana Purchase, they were suddenly free of all bonds and shackles of governments which had bound all previous generations in Europe and on the east coast of America.

Now they would rely only upon themselves and the groups of which they were a part, such as a religious denomination like the Quakers. It was these experiences and this tradition of self-reliance that became part of the Hoover family DNA, and from which Herbert Hoover's philosophy of Individualism was derived and which he outlined in his 1922 publication, *American Individualism*.

It was a concept that he would embrace until his death, and which is being carried forward with great passion and enthusiasm by his great-granddaughter Margaret Hoover.

Herbert Hoover's last public appearance came on May 22, 1963, at a luncheon at the Waldorf to honor astronaut L. Gordon Cooper, whom the former president likened to other trailblazers like Lewis and Clark, Lindbergh and Admiral Byrd, whose individualism, he contended, had produced such incredible achievements.

Hearing about this story made me consider the amazing technological transformation that occurred during Hoover's lifetime. When he was born in West Branch no one could have imagined such things as electricity, telephones or motorized farm machinery, and yet he lived to watch football and baseball on color TV and to honor astronauts who circled the earth in space capsules.

Hoover's passing began a process of reconsidering his role as President during the Great Depression, and giving emphasis instead to his array of humanitarian accomplishments for which he was five times nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

He was praised not only for addressing hunger following both world wars, but also in so effectively coordinating relief efforts for more than 600,000 people following the historic flooding of New Orleans in 1927 and for leading two commissions on the re-organization of the executive branch of the federal government.

He was recognized for his well-known love of fishing. "Even the trout will miss him," one admirer wrote.

Despite these encomiums of praise, the memory of Hoover's humanitarian achievements began to fade soon after his death. The State of Iowa, which had turned away from him in the 1932 election, now enacted a day of recognition in his honor, the only one ever so established up to that point.

And, of course, the diligent efforts here at the Hoover Library and Museum and by historian George Nash kept the embers of Hoover's incredible story glowing, but that heat could only radiate so far. New generations grew up without learning his story.

My own encounter with Hoover's legacy came on a on a Sunday morning in 2001 as I drove along Massachusetts Highway 2 en route from Williamstown to Logan Airport in Boston. A beckoning "open" sign in the window of an antique store caused my wife to urge me to stop.

As she browsed through the displays, I wandered about the store and soon found myself in a room filled with hundreds and hundreds of old National Geographic magazines.

Overwhelmed by this daunting aggregation of yellow colored journals, I was about to turn around and leave, when by chance, I glanced down at a small stack of magazines next to my foot. On the top of this pile was the September 1917 issue with a barely perceptible headline: "The Food Armies of Liberty: The Winning Weapon--Food." The author's name, in even smaller type, was: Herbert Hoover.

To this day, I cannot tell you what caused me to look down at this magazine. Curious, I bent down to pick it up and soon found myself engrossed in a story with which I was totally unfamiliar.

The article itself was his call to the American people about how to save food which could then be shared with the people of Europe who were engaged in the Titanic struggle of World War I.

Appointed, as U.S. Food Administrator by a Democrat, President Woodrow Wilson, Hoover was in charge of guiding and encouraging Americans to "Hooverize" their own diets so that foodstuffs that could travel well could be shipped to starving populations across the Atlantic that could no longer feed themselves due to the destruction of agricultural production by the war.

I bought all of the copies of that issue that the antique store had for sale and soon found myself learning all I could about Hoover's amazing role between 1914 and 1923, which had begun with his volunteer position in London facilitating the travel back to the U.S. of more than 100,000 Americans, stranded by the outbreak of war in August 1914.



Three months later, on November 5, 1914, Hoover organized what, for many, would become his signature historic achievement, the Commission for the Relief of Belgium. In an unprecedented masterpiece of international negotiation, Hoover obtained an agreement from the German military authorities to take food to millions of Belgians trapped by the unexpected occupation of their country.

It is estimated that more than 9 million people were kept sustained and alive by the food which Hoover delivered to that beleaguered nation. Hoover saved Belgium!

As World War I drew to a close, Hoover, now back in America, was given leadership of the American Relief Administration which distributed food in 20 nations including the Soviet Union, where in 1921 the worst famine in Europe since the Middle Ages broke out in the Volga River region. Millions reportedly died.

Hoover called it "the greatest famine of all time, "and although himself an ardent anti-Communist, Hoover shipped food to feed more than 20 million people, including many, many Russian children who were kept alive with a "Hoover lunch."

Following World War II, working for another Democratic president, Harry Truman, Hoover embarked on a global tour that took him to 38 countries and an assessment of global hunger. He reported to the President that "hunger hangs over the homes of more than 800 million people – over one third of the earth," adding that the United States faced the alternative of sharing its food or watching its neighbors die.

And, once again, America shared its bounty with starving people everywhere, thanks to Herbert Hoover's leadership.

Perhaps the most compelling words that Hoover ever uttered came on a radio broadcast in which urging American generosity, he said: "Hunger is a silent visitor who comes like a shadow. He sits beside every anxious mother three times a day. He brings not alone suffering and sorrow, but fear and terror. All the values of right living melt before his invasion and every gain of civilization crumbles."

But, I would argue that Hoover's most enduring contribution, one especially relevant today, was in regard to what obligation people, communities and countries have to alleviate the suffering of others far beyond their borders. Hoover wrote that:

"For thousands of years, the question 'am I my brother's keeper?' has echoed in the conscience of mankind. The American people were the first in history to accept that obligation as a nation."

Those words resonate even more powerfully today, 50 years after his death, as we face "the greatest challenge in human history: whether we can sustainably feed the 9 billion people who will be on our planet by the year 2050."

I became so enamored of Hoover that in 2004, my World Food Prize Foundation created a bipartisan Hoover-Wallace Dinner to bring Republicans and Democrats together around Iowa's magnificent agricultural and humanitarian heritage.

In our World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in Des Moines there is a great mural I commissioned by Iowa artist Gary Kelly showing Hoover in his rightful place alongside other great Iowa hunger fighters like Norman Borlaug, George Washington Carver, Henry A. Wallace and Jessie Field Shambaugh. Together, they comprise Iowa's pantheon of heroes whose remarkable achievements have literally uplifted more than a billion suffering people.

In his book *American Epic*, Hoover notes under his direction that the United States fed hungry people in countries with populations of more than 1.4 billion people. On Borlaug's statue in the U.S. Capitol it is written that he is "the man who saved a billion lives."

It is remarkable to consider that Herbert Hoover and Norman Borlaug, the two individuals credited with saving the most human beings from hunger and starvation in all human history, both had their origins in small Iowa towns just 130 miles apart, making Iowa, in my view, the inspirational epicenter in the global struggle against hunger.

It is interesting to recall, as the World Series is being played today, that both men also had aspirations to be baseball players. Hoover tried out for shortstop at Stanford University, and Borlaug's dream was to play second base for the Chicago Cubs. I think they would like being remembered as the greatest hunger-fighting double play combination in history.

It is not a given the presidential gravesites and libraries and museums will be built near the birthplace of those chief executives. It is conceivable that Hoover might have chosen a California location near Stanford and where his wife Lou Henry Hoover was initially buried.

But there was something in his Iowa roots, something in those first 10 years of his life spent here along the West Branch of Wapsinonoc Creek, that was deeply planted within him and which stayed with him all of his life.

It was reflected in his 1931 book "A Boyhood in Iowa," where he recalled sledding down Cook's Hill, swimming under the willows by the Burlington railroad bridge and the delicious cooking of his Aunt Millie. And it also could be seen in the final passages of his speech given here in 1962 at the dedication of this library, when he said:

"As a boy of 10, I was taken from this village to the far west 78 years ago. My only material assets were two dimes in my pocket and the suit of clothes that I wore. But I carried from here something more precious. I had a certificate of the fourth or fifth grade of higher learning.

I had a stern grounding in religious faith. I carried with me recollections of a joyous childhood, of the winter snows and the growing crops of Iowa.... And I carried with me the family discipline of hard work..."

It is so fitting that Herbert Hoover is back home near that parcel of land that his grandfather Eli Hoover first settled and where the West Branch of the Red Cedar Quaker Meeting was established. For it is here in Iowa that Herbert Hoover, a man of common origins, will always be one of this state's greatest heroes.

And, ironically, it is here, so far from all of those places where Hoover spent his life and to which he delivered so much sustenance to hungry people, that his uncommon achievements can be seen most clearly.

As history fades, so do the memories of the exploits of most people who made significant contributions to their countries and culture. Only a very few still remain visible on the far horizon of time. And so it is remarkable that 140 years after his birth and 50 years following his State funeral, that Herbert Hoover's stature is growing taller and is more clearly seen than ever before.

A few months ago, I was in Iran, the first ever former U.S. Ambassador invited to address an Iranian government conference. The first image I showed that audience of 400 officials and scientists was of a painting of Hoover directing European relief, to make the point that confronting hunger can bring people together across even the widest political, religious, ethnic or diplomatic divides.

As "the greatest humanitarian in the history of the United States of America," 50 years from now or even at the beginning of the 22nd century, Herbert Hoover will still be a beacon of humanitarianism, beckoning future generations of Americans to follow his example and to continue his proud legacy of alleviating hunger wherever it exists in the world.