

Reading #2

Hoover Remembers His Childhood: 1874-1884

In spite of his relatively short time in Iowa, Hoover remembered those years with great fondness. "I prefer," he later wrote, "to think of Iowa as I saw it through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy. Those were eyes filled with the wonders of Iowa's streams and wood, of the mystery of growing crops."

There also was Cook's Hill, and Hoover described it as a place "where on winters' nights, to satisfy our human craving for speed, we slid down at terrific pace with our tummies tight to homemade sleds." The Wapsinonoc Creek was dammed to form a swimming hole under the willow trees. In the woods along the Burlington track Hoover trapped rabbits and occasionally felled a pigeon or chicken with bows and arrows. Using willow poles as rods and worms for bait, Hoover fished for sunfish and catfish in the streams.



The Burlington railroad tracks were filled with gravel where boys searched for agate and fossil coral, polishing them on the grind stone. Hoover remembered that "Their fine points came out wonderfully when wet, and you had to lick them with your tongue before each exhibit."

Hoover went on to recall that "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?"

The values of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) played an important role in shaping Herbert Hoover's life. "Before I left Iowa," Hoover noted, "I had read the Bible in daily stints from cover to cover." The desire for education, a solid work ethic, the recognition of the duty to help those in need, and a belief in the equality of all people were fundamental to his character.

Although Hoover left Iowa at the age of 11, his adult character owed much to those years. He maintained an interest in the outdoors, and he never forgot the lessons of his early religious training.

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Reflect

1. What was Hoover's attitude toward school and school teachers when he wrote his memoirs?

2. What values did Hoover learn from his religious group?

Connect and Predict

1. How did Hoover's childhood activities and attitudes differ from your own?

2. What do you think you will see at the historic site that will reflect Hoover's memories?