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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service

JAN 17 1990

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in **Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms** (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "NA" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name West Branch Commercial Historic District (Boundary Increase)
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number West Main, East Main, and North Downey Streets | | not for publication
city, town West Branch | | vicinity _____
state Iowa code IA county Cedar code 031 zip code 52358

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>13</u>	<u>2</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>13</u>	<u>2</u> Total

Name of Related multiple property listing: N/A Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet, section _____ page _____.

David L. ...
Signature of certifying official Date 1/4/89

Bureau of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet National Register criteria. See continuation sheet, section _____ page _____.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

Entered in the
National Register:

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- See continuation sheet, section ___ page ___
- determined eligible for the National Register.
- See continuation sheet, section ___ page ___
- determined not eligible for the National Register.

Alvina Byrum 2/23/90

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)
Commercial

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)
Commercial

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)
Commercial Style
Prairie School

Materials
(enter categories from instructions)
foundation _____
walls wood
brick
roof _____
other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheet, section 7 page 2

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance
(enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance Significant Dates

COMMERCE 1895-1916

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Various

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. See continuation sheet, section 8 page 2

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet, section 9 page 2

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

- Primary location of additional data:
- State historic preservation office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property one acre

UTM References

A 115 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
Zone Easting Northing

C 115 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

B 115 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
Zone Easting Northing

D 115 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

See continuation sheet, section 10 page 2

Verbal Boundary Description See continuation sheet, section 10 page 2

Boundary Justification See continuation sheet, section 10 page 2

11. Form Prepared By

author/title Tom Walsh
preparer Jim Jacobsen
organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date September 28, 1989
street & number 600 East Locust telephone (515)281-4137
city or town Des Moines, state Iowa zip code 50319

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Between 1850, when Quaker farmers and others first settled this area of eastern Iowa, and 1916, the closing date for this nomination, the site of West Branch evolved from a vast expanse of virgin prairie into a thriving commercial center. Most of the early commercial buildings (including 6, 7, and 13) were erected along what later became Main Street, on a topographic rise that offered protection from the occasional spring and summer flooding of branches of the Wapsinonoc Creek to the south and east. The commercial district has always been anchored by the intersection of what are Main and Downey Streets. When the town was originally platted in 1869 in conjunction with the construction of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Great Northern Railroad, Main Street was designated as "Commerce Street." It became Main Street with the 1875 incorporation of West Branch and the arrival in that same year of the railroad. Main Street then extended east-west for three quarters of a mile and was on the stage route between Iowa's first territorial and state capital, Iowa City, and the Mississippi River port of Davenport. What became Downey Street in 1875 was originally platted as "Mechanics Street," running north-south. This intersection was the beginning point of public improvements such as the first sidewalk (1875), the first telephone line (1879), the first street light (1883), the first town pump (1883), and the first community bandstand (1895). The intersection remains the cornerstone of the 13 key and contributing structures within the district.

Architecturally, the 7 key and 6 contributing structures that now exist within the West Branch Commercial District collectively trace the evolution of small-town commercial building styles prompted by the turn-of-the-century boom in the Corn Belt's farm economy. In terms of social history, these 13 buildings illustrate the surge in development that occurred within the West Branch business district between 1895 and 1916, the opening and closing dates of the nomination. This growth was directly linked to the "Golden Era of American Agriculture" -- a period of unparalleled prosperity for Cedar County, Iowa, farmers and farmers throughout the Midwestern Corn Belt. As West Branch area farmers prospered, so did the merchants in town. A scattering of wood-frame, one-story storefronts gave way to more substantial, two-story brick business blocks constructed both in response to calamities, such as major fire in 1895, and to the economic momentum generated by a surge in farm prices and land values. This wave of commercial development continued during the next generation, until World War I disrupted the parity in supply and demand for grain and livestock that had made farming profitable.

The present-day West Branch Commercial District contains four early buildings (6, 7, 10, 11) that are representative of the wood-frame storefronts that lined Commerce/Main Street during the early commercial development of West Branch. Two others (9, 12) are brick commercial buildings constructed as replacements for wood-frame Main Street buildings lost to the 1895 fire that transformed the south side of Main Street. The six other business blocks within the district (4, 14, 1, 3, 2, 5) -- including the opulent, three-storefront, two-story Opera Block Building (4) -- are representative of the final phase of prosperity. Four of these six structures replaced older buildings (14, 1, 2, 5), two filled vacant lots (4, 3) and four extended the commercial district north along North Downey Street (4, 1, 3, 2). The post-World War I-Era slump in the farm economy brought an end to the surge in commercial growth in

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West Branch in 1916 -- the closing date of this nomination. Two of the 15 buildings within the district are intrusive structures (13, 8). One of the two (13) has been classified as intrusive due to extensive exterior alterations, but is included within the district boundaries due to their locations within the 100 blocks of West Main and North Downey streets. This building has not been so altered as to preclude eventual restoration. The second (8) is considered intrusive due to its last construction date (1948) and because its scale and style are inconsistent with other buildings within the district. This building separates a key (5) and a contributing (10) structure.

Extension of the central business to the south and the routing of north-south vehicular traffic through downtown West Branch were affected by the establishment of the 187-acre Herbert Hoover National Historic Site in the 1960's. Preservation of the Herbert Hoover birthplace cottage, which is located on South Downey Street approximately 100 yards from the south boundary of the West Branch Commercial District, has affected land use and development south of the downtown area since restoration was begun in the 1930's. In conjunction with the later construction of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library-Museum and formal designation of the National Historic Site, South Downey Street was closed at its intersection with Wetherell Street, with north-south traffic being rerouted onto a new roadway, Parkside Drive. This federally funded road project routed traffic that otherwise would have passed within a few feet of the Hoover birthplace cottage along South Downey Street onto a new roadway a block east that now serves as a link between the West Branch business district and Interstate 80 to the south.

DESCRIPTION OF ARCHITECTURAL TYPES

Fifteen buildings are included within the boundaries of the West Branch Commercial District. Although the interiors and, to a more limited degree, the front facades of these buildings have undergone occasional renovations, the foundations, structural side walls and now-concealed remnants of original facades are known to date back to 1869. There are two preserved first-floor storefronts (1, 2) in the district and one restored storefront (4). The oldest, substantially intact facades within the district date from 1895, the beginning date of this district. These key structures (4, 9) are the largest brick blocks within the district and were constructed with bricks baked in kilns at a West Branch brickworks. The elaborate brick and iron front of the Opera Block (4) has been returned to its original splendor through a 1986 restoration.

Although two of the structures (14, 8) were constructed to house post offices, all 15 buildings within the physical boundary of the district are now commercial buildings. Architectural types are generally determined by the front facades of these buildings. Street-level storefronts have been remodeled far more frequently than upper level facades, and have consequently been given less consideration in differentiating among architectural types. Building dates have been determined from documented histories, newspaper accounts on construction activities, historical photographs and abstracts of title. In some cases, Sanborn maps provided approximate dates.

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Architectural styles within the West Branch Commercial District are grouped with three distinctive periods. The earliest period (1869-1895) includes five very simple structures (13, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15) that are typical of Western town, false-fronted buildings of wood construction. The two oldest commercial buildings (13, 6) within the district have gables spanning their narrowest dimensions, which are almost the full width of the building lots. The similarities of their constructions indicate these two buildings were possibly built by the same carpenter, but not at the same time. The roof pitch and pediments over the windows appear to be identical. Of these five early buildings, the Gruwell and Crew General Store building (11) has undergone the least renovation over the years. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in October 1982 as a "well preserved example of a small-town commercial structure." Although this building's front steps have been replaced, other elements of the facade are virtually unchanged. For the purposes of the nomination, one of these five early 1940's era renovation that included construction of a brick facade that hides the building's original architectural character. This building is thought to be the oldest surviving commercial building within the district, with a construction date of 1869.

Three of the buildings within the district (4, 9, 12) are representative of the second distinctive architectural grouping within the district -- brick business blocks constructed in the 1890's including two (9, 12) built as an aftermath of the great fire of August 30, 1985, that destroyed or heavily damaged a row of wood-frame commercial buildings along the south side of West Main Street. These three fine brick buildings are key structures that were constructed in a Late Victorian style. They were built to be as fireproof as possible at that time, blending iron and brick for their first-floor exterior facades and stamped sheet steel for their cornices. Of these three structures, a 1986 restoration made the Opera Block building (4) the best example of this second group of architectural styles within the district.

Five buildings (14, 1, 3, 2, 5) are representative of the third architectural grouping within the district -- buildings constructed between 1907 and 1916. At least three of the buildings within this period (14, 1, 5) are top-quality structures that are not significantly altered. These three show some very fine brick and stone work. The West Branch State Bank building (5), designed by the Josselyn & Taylor architectural firm of Cedar Rapids, shows a touch of Prairie School style and Art Deco. The Citizens' Savings Bank building (1) on the opposite corner is a classical design in good proportion. It was during this period that office buildings were often designed like a classical column, with a base, a shaft and a cap. The Citizens' Savings Bank building (1) would have been more in scale to the style had there been one or more floors between the street-level and the cornice, or cap. The old post office building (14) is a "little jewel." It, too, has a touch of Art Deco. North of the 1908 Citizens' Savings Bank building (1) are two brick buildings (3, 2) constructed in 1911 and 1912, respectively. The 1912 structure (2) has undergone only minor alteration. The 1911 structure (33) has been somewhat altered by the addition of a wooden "cowboy" awning and the use of clapboards to cover what was a shallow brick cornice.

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Summary

The West Branch Commercial District includes a range of architectural styles that have endured for more than a century. They range from very simple to quite original and include several examples of good architecture. Perhaps due to the Quakers' traditional concern for taking care of one's property, the buildings within the West Branch Commercial District have been well-maintained. None of the buildings within the district that fall within the 1895-1916 parameters of this nomination, has been altered beyond hope of restoration. Perhaps the greatest feature of this district is that no gaudy or "strip" architecture has appeared within the district to spoil the small-town feeling of downtown West Branch.

List of Intrusive Buildings

There are two intrusive structures within the boundaries of the West Branch Commercial District. One (13) is an older building (1869) that has been designated as intrusive structures due to extensive exterior alterations. The Faye's Bakery building (13) is believed to be the oldest existing commercial building within the district, but a 1940's era remodeling included construction of a brick facade that now hides the original facade. It was originally constructed as a drug store and was subsequently used over the years as a jewelry store, meat market, variety store, antique store and bakery. The second intrusive building is the 1948 War Memorial building (8), which was designated as a non-contributing structure due to its late construction date.

DESCRIPTION OF BOUNDARY

The district's boundary was determined based on commercial growth pattern, construction dates, architectural integrity and uses of adjacent properties. The district includes the east side of the 100 block of North Downey Street, 138.6 feet of the north side of the 100 block of East Main Street, the south side of the 100 block of West Main Street and the four buildings along the north side of the 100 block of West Main Street that are west of the intersection of Main and Downey streets. The West Branch Commercial District is bounded on the north by residential properties. It is bounded on the west by a mixed-use area (commercial/public/residential) and on the east both by commercial buildings of later construction dates and commercial buildings of compromised architectural integrity.

The district is bounded on the south by the north edge of the 187-acre Herbert Hoover National Historic Site maintained by the National Park Service and, along the 100 block of East Main Street, by modern commercial buildings. While the West Branch Commercial District largely is buffered from the Historic Site through natural barriers, such as plantings, and physical barriers that restrict vehicular traffic, two pedestrian walkways link the Commercial District with an adjacent historic core area. This Downey Street "trace" includes six homes constructed between 1869 and 1874, two built between 1899 and 1903 and another constructed in 1920. Two of these nine homes were relocated onto the Downey Street trace.

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Three have been restored since 1983 and the others preserved for incorporation into the Historic Site. These nine trace homes are among 34 historic structures in the National Historic Site. These homes separate the West Branch Commercial District from the restored birthplace cottage of Herbert Hoover, 31st President of the United States. There are 34 structures located within the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, which is a National Historic Landmark.

As the West Branch business district evolved, commercial growth was focused along Main Street, both before and after a major fire in 1895 destroyed or heavily damage wood-frame commercial buildings along the south side of the 100 block of West Main Street. As the town prospered between 1895 and World War I, commercial activity spread to North Downey Street to a row of four adjacent structures (1, 2, 3, 4). Of the 15 buildings within the district boundaries, 14 were constructed before or during 1916 -- the closing date for this nomination. The one building within the district constructed after 1916 (8) is an intrusive structure that is included due to its location within the 100 block of West Main Street. Commercial buildings east and southeast of the district boundaries post-date 1916 and/or do not contribute to the district due to limited or irretrievable loss of structural or architectural integrity.

Verbal Boundary Description

Starting at the center point of the intersection of Main and Downey streets, thence east along the center line of East Main Street to a point that intersects with an extension of the lot line at the east 48.6 feet of the east 1/2 of lot 1, Block 34 Cameron Addition, thence north to a point that intersects with the north lot line of Lot 1, Block 34, Cameron Addition, thence west to a point that intersects with the east lot lines of lots 2-4 of Block 34, Cameron Addition, thence north to a point that intersects with the north lot line of Lot 4, Block 34, Cameron Addition, thence west to the center line of North Downey Street, thence south to a point that intersects with the extension of the center line of the alley that runs along the north lot lines of lots 1 through 4 of Block 38 of the Subdivision of Lot 64, thence west to a point that intersects with the west lot line of Lot 4, Block 38 of the Subdivision of Lot 64, thence south to a point that intersects with the center line of West Main Street, thence west to a point that intersects with the extension of the west lot line of Lot 3, Block 44 of Steer's First Addition, thence south to the center line of Wetherell Street, thence east to the center line of South Downey Street, thence north to the center point of the intersection of Main and Downey Streets (the point of beginning).

METHODOLOGY: History of the Project

This application is an outgrowth of the continuing interest demonstrated by the people of West Branch and the West Branch Chamber of Commerce in preserving the turn-of-the-century atmosphere of the town's central business district. West Branch has a rich historical tradition by virtue of its Quaker ancestry and the attention it has received as the

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birthplace of Herbert Clark Hoover, the 31st president of the United States. Ever since the formal dedication of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library-Museum in 1962 and the subsequent creation in 1965 of the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, commercial activity within downtown West Branch has been closely linked to tourism activity at these adjacent federal sites. As early as 1980, the West Branch Chamber of Commerce began exploring the possibility of nominating a portion of downtown West Branch for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

After a few false starts, the project was turned over in 1986 to the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association. This private, non-profit organization raised the funds needed to construct the Hoover Presidential Library and to acquire the land and many of the other buildings now within the 187-acre Herbert Hoover National Historic Site. The Association agreed to handle the West Branch Commercial District project without cost and assigned Tom Walsh, assistant director, to undertake the required research. In consultation with staff members at the Iowa State Historical Society's Bureau of Historic Preservation, Mr. Walsh spent nine months researching the individual properties within the district's boundaries, relying heavily on archival materials on file at the Hoover Presidential Library. Those materials included microfilmed copies of early West Branch newspapers, previously published West Branch histories, summaries of research undertaken by the National Park Service in conjunction with establishment of the Historic Site and historical photographs. Concurrent research into the history of American agriculture before, during and after the construction dates of the buildings within the West Branch Commercial District resulted in a significant theme: the dynamic growth in commercial activity in West Branch as a result of the "Golden Era of American Agriculture" that occurred between the 1890's and World War I. The viability of the proposed theme was then assessed by Professor Walter Nugent, an agricultural historian at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. "I hope you succeed in your National Register application for downtown West Branch, Professor Nugent said in a letter to Mr. Walsh. "I looked at it (the commercial district) a few months ago and was struck by how closely in time most of those buildings must have been built, and what that says about the farm economy of the day."

With this assurance that the proposed theme has a strong historical base, this social history approach to a historic district nomination was reviewed and approved in April, 1986, by Jim Jacobsen, Iowa's National Register coordinator. This approval was contained in a letter written by Mr. Jacobsen after he had received verbal support for the thematic nomination from Beth Grosvenor of the U.S. Department of the Interior, who reviews National Register nominations that originate within the department's Rocky Mountain region. With a theme now determined, research continued and was expanded to include materials on file at the State Historical Society of Iowa research library in Iowa City, the University of Iowa Main Library in Iowa City and the Cedar County Court House. Mr. Walsh also conducted interviews with long-time West Branch residents and made use of historical photographs included in the collection of the West Branch Heritage Museum. A day-long seminar sponsored by the State Historical Preservation Office in Des Moines, frequent contacts with SHPO staff members,

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access to "how-to" handouts published by the U.S. Department of the Interior and copies of successful district nominations (Oskaloosa City Square Commercial Historic District and Bishop Hill Colony) were used in finalizing the form and content of the application.

As a first step locally, Mr. Walsh compiled a list of the owners of downtown properties likely to be included within the boundaries of the West Branch Commercial District. A letter was then sent to each property owner to inform them that research required to submit a historic district nomination was underway. Included was a copy of the Iowa Site Inventory forms, as an indicator of the types of information being gathered. The letter also discussed the implications of having their buildings included within a historic district. As a spinoff to this letter, a newspaper release was written to announce that the historic district effort had been revived. This story also outlined the implications of having downtown properties included in a historic district. The subsequent research conducted by Mr. Walsh was used during the process of finalizing the nomination application as source material for a series of 12 newspaper articles about various downtown buildings. These stories, illustrated with historical photographs and other illustrations, appeared between January and July 1986 in the West Branch Times newspaper. As a last step, Mr. Walsh made an appeal in The West Branch Times to anyone who might have noticed errors of fact or emphasis in the 12 newspaper articles. One written response was received and an error corrected as a result.

This application's "Description of Architectural Types" is the result of an analysis of building styles and alterations that was conducted by William J. Wagner, AIA, of Dallas Center, Iowa, a restoration architect and a member of the AIA's state and national committees on historic landmarks. His architectural research focused on the evolution of the commercial district as indicated by Sanborn maps, current and historical photographs, on-site inspections and personal familiarity with downtown buildings (6, 14) that have been renovated under Mr. Wagner's supervision. The reference map incorporated into the site inventory forms was prepared by graphic artist Chris Wolf of Solon, Iowa. The photographs of individual buildings and streetscapes were provided by Vid Johnson of West Branch, editor of The West Branch Times newspaper and a member of the West Branch Chamber of Commerce board of directors.

In 1989, and 1895 commercial building located at 109 East Main Street -- The Rich & Bailey Business Block (15) -- was threatened with demolition due to its deteriorated condition. This building was not included in the 1986 commercial district nomination because of its condition. During the summer of 1989, a local ad-hoc citizen's group (The Save Old Buildings Committee) worked with the buildings owner (Kristin Sagert of Iowa City, Iowa) and the West Branch City Council to devise a plan that would preserve the building and enhance its potential for restoration and re-use. This Committee raised more than \$6,000 to pay for stabilization work described within the site inventory form. In September of 1989, the building was nominated for National Register listing by amending the 1986 nomination to reflect the inclusion of an additional key structure. Like the entire 1986 nomination, the 1989 nomination was researched and prepared by Tom Walsh of the Hoover Library Association,

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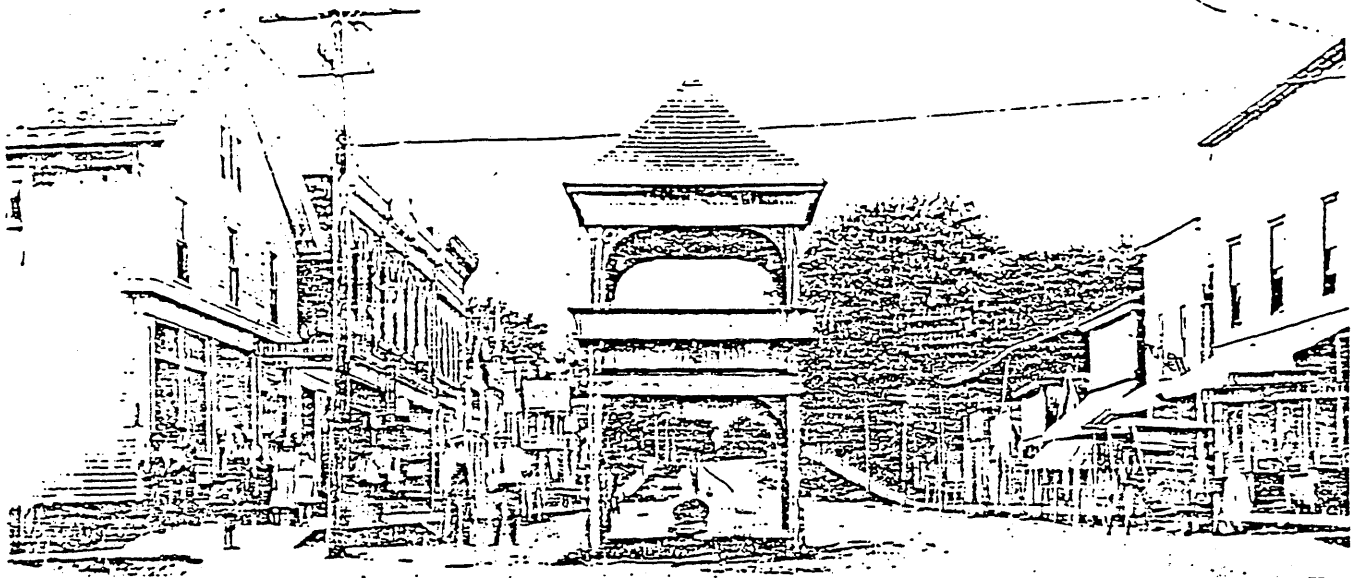
Inc. of West Branch. As part of that process, the 1986 nomination was updated to reflect the extension of the district to include the Rich & Bailey Business Block (15).

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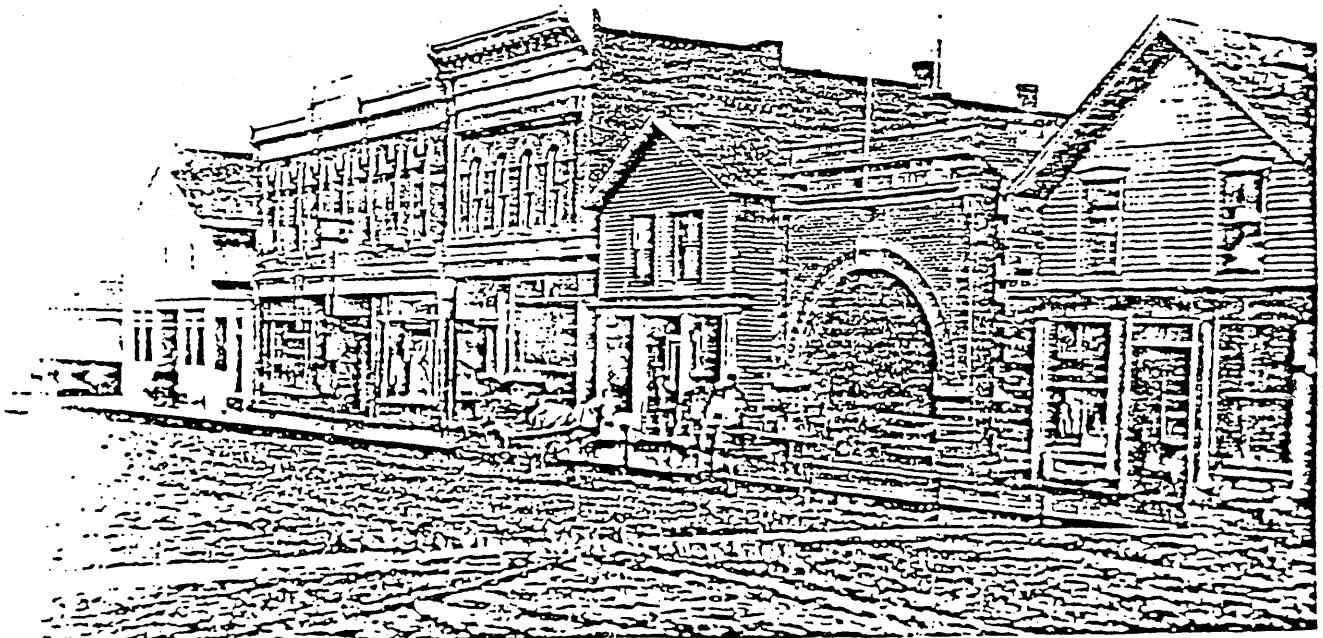
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CFN-259-1116



Streetscape of West Main Street, looking west, circa 1914
(Source: West Branch Heritage Museum)



undate photograph taken after 1907. Shows south side of
West Main Street, including sites number 6,7,9,12,13,14 (left to right)

Photographer unknown

Source: West Branch Heritage Museum

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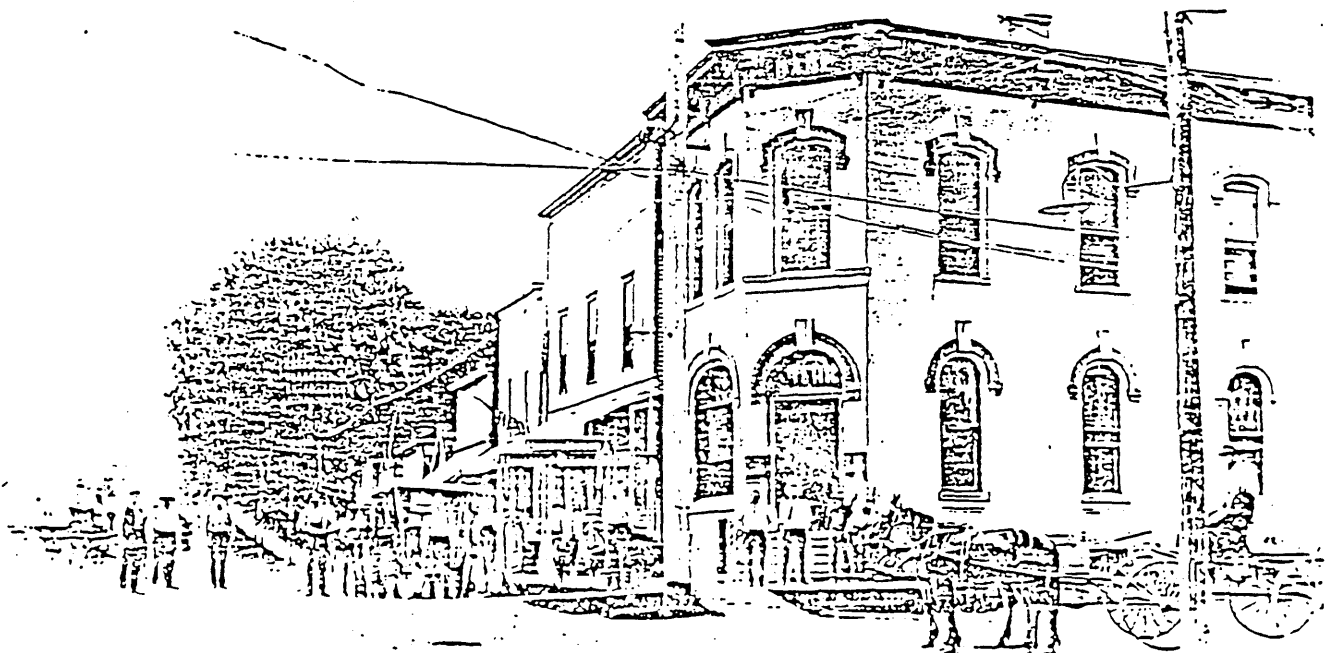
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CFN-259-1116



Streetscape of North Downey Street, looking south, circa 1908
(Source: West Branch Heritage Museum)



Streetscape of the north side of West Main Street, circa 1910
(Source: West Branch Heritage Foundation)

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The West Branch Commercial District is a historical and very tangible economic indicator of the greatest period of prosperity in American agricultural history. Fourteen of the 15 commercial buildings within the West Branch Commercial District are illustrative of the commercial growth prompted by what has been termed the "Golden Era of American Agriculture." They illustrate the economic momentum that allowed a small Midwestern farm town to experience a period of unparalleled prosperity as grain and livestock farming quickly evolved from a primitive, pioneering exercise in self-sufficiency to a highly complex business organized on a scientific, capitalist, commercial basis. In West Branch that momentum peaked between 1895 and 1916 -- the opening and closing dates of the District nomination.

The mix of 7 key structures (15, 4, 9, 12, 1, 2, 5) and 6 contributing structures (3, 6, 10, 11, 14) within the proposed district is illustrative of the commercial evolution of downtown West Branch. Two of the 6 contributing structures within the district (6, 7) were constructed between 1869 and 1875, including the building that housed Cedar County's first bank (7). One of these contributing structures -- The Gruwell and Crew General Store (11) -- was added to the National Register of Historic Places on September 9, 1982, as a well-preserved example of a small-town commercial structure. Also included in this group is a building (3) that was the first downtown automobile garage in an era when, as this item from The West Branch Times of July 22, 1909, illustrates, cars were symbols of successful farming: "The prospect for good prices for grain of all kinds, and with hogs at 8 cents per pound in Chicago, everything seems bright for the down-trodden farmer, most of whom will probably have automobiles next year, if they have not already purchased." The 7 key structures, all of which were constructed between 1895 and 1916, include the first home of the town's second bank (12) and three commercial block (15, 4, 9), including two (4, 9) built with locally produced brick. The remaining 4 key structures were built between 1907 and 1916. One of two intrusive structures within the district have some historical significance to the theme, but have been designated as intrusive due to extensive exterior alterations. The prime example of such extensive alteration is the Faye's Bakery building (13), which dates from 1869 and is the oldest existing commercial building in West Branch. The second intrusive structure is the War Memorial building (8) built in 1948 to house the West Branch Post Office and, on the second floor, an American Legion post.

The Early Days

Over two generations the farm families that began taming the rolling prairies near West Branch in the 1850's refined their farming techniques and improved their crop yields and animal husbandry techniques through the use of farm implements and scientific methods. As these farmers prospered, so did the merchants upon whom they relied for tools, seed, wagons, harnesses, dry goods, building supplies and other store-bought necessities. A commercial area that once was little more than a scattering of ramshackle wooden buildings underwent a major transformation between 1895 and World War I with the construction of eight new brick commercial buildings along West Main and North Downey Streets. This period of unparalleled growth of the local farm economy carried downtown West Branch in the 20th Century on a wave

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of progress. "And still they come," said an item in the April 7, 1898, edition of The West Branch Times. "It has been our pleasant lot since the beginning of the new year to announce nearly every week some new industry, institution or local enterprise come, opened up or about to come to our lively little city.

Early West Branch grew slowly but steadily in the decade between 1860 and 1870. Its growth was accelerated in the 1870's by the completion on December 20, 1870, of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern Railroad tracks. A list of local businessmen that appeared in the June 15, 1871, issue of The West Branch Local Record included a dentist, a stone mason, a wagonmaker/painter, photographer, a jeweler, two cobblers, a cabinet/coffin maker, a dry goods store operator and an insurance agent. The locations of early commercial buildings in the West Branch Business district is perhaps best illustrated by a map entitle "The Hoovers and Their West Branch Neighborhood 1871 - 1884" that is included with this application as Appendix I. It was prepared by Edwin C. Bearss of National Park Service during the late 1960's. The town's growth continued into the 1890's. "By actual count within the last five years there has been 100 houses and barns (sic) built or remodeled so as to be good as new in and adjacent to the town of West Branch, cost of the different improvements ranging for \$100 to \$10,000," The West Branch Times reported in January of 1894. A Year later, on January 3, 1895, the paper carried a listing of new construction and remodeling projects in and around West Branch during 1894. That list contained 60 projects estimated to have cost collectively \$28,465. Most were new houses and barns, including a \$4,000 "first class dwelling house" for blacksmith J. E. Michener, complete with indoor plumbing and steam heat. During the same year, the list shows, Michener spent \$500 improving his forge, while J. E. Steer, a West Branch pioneer who owned a lumberyard, spent \$300 adding a brick yard that would produce the bricks used in two major downtown building projects (4, 9) as this wave of improvements continued into 1895. "The carpenter's racket is heard all over town," The West Branch Times reported on March 14, 1895. "There are four or five new buildings now under construction." The paper even had its own "wish list" for the town: "West Branch wants an artesian well -- wants a water tower --wants electric lights -- wants a factory or two -- wants 20 car loads of rock to begin paving the streets -- wants a grand hotel building -- wants a ready made clothing store -- wants an auction sale every Saturday afternoon --wants an electric street car line to Springdale, Cedar Valley and Cedar Bluffs," said an item that appeared in the paper on May 2, 1895. "And West Branch wants to extend her corporate limits and take in \$100,000 more wealth and taxable property and it wants an ordinance requiring the issuing of building permits and prohibiting the erection of wood buildings on Main or Downey streets within one block from the center crossing." Before long, some of those dreams would come true.

A Wave of Public Improvements

As West Branch began evolving into a thriving commercial center there was also an expansion of public improvements, beginning with the installation of sidewalks. In the mid-1870's, Nathan Crook, the proprietor of Crook's Hotel (6) at Main and Downey streets, solicited

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National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Continuation Sheet

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contributions from other merchants to install a sidewalk. Only two planks wide, it extended along the south side of Main Street from Crook's hotel corner to the railroad depot a quarter mile to the east. An 1879 city ordinance called for the installation of a sidewalk along the west side of Downey Street from Main Street to the Quaker cemetery just north of the business district. The sidewalk ordinance also called for sidewalks fronting Main Street businesses to be "built of 2-inch plank to be laid crossways 6 feet wide with four stinger 2x6 inches wide" and required that work be completed by May 15, 1880. Another wave of sidewalk improvement emerged after this comment appeared in the August 9, 1883, issue of The West Branch Local Record: "The most notable feature of our town is the dilapidated condition of our sidewalks." By 1885 there were 3.2 miles of wooden sidewalks in West Branch. A summary of improvements that appeared in The West Branch Times of January, 1896, notes that a mile of new sidewalk had been constructed during 1895. In 1898, the city fathers experimented with a new type of sidewalk made of broken brick and cinders (WBT 9-15-98), a composition that failed to replace the wooden walkways. Ten years later the town council decided that wooden sidewalks in a bustling business district were unsafe (WBT 8-6-08) and ordered them to be replaced by cement walks. "Four persons were looking for property last week and all claim that West Branch has the best walks of any town in eastern Iowa," The West Branch Times reported on June 18, 1908. "Four gangs of cement workers were in town last week and three are still at it this week and the end is not yet in sight."

Nathan Crook was also responsible for installing the town's first street light, not surprisingly in front of his hotel (6). It served as a beacon to weary travelers arriving after dark by train (Source: West Branch Local Record, December 13, 1883). Within a few weeks of installing his own street light, Crook raised \$62 by subscription that paid for nine additional kerosene street lamps. With the prosperity that brought a wave of commercial construction between 1895 and 1916 came electric lights, including street lights. The city's first "electric light plant" was built in the spring of 1898 (WBT 4-14-98). By September, electricity was available not only in the evenings but from 4:30 a.m. until daylight (WBT 9-22-98). In June of 1909, power was made available on Monday and Tuesday mornings to accommodate housewives using electric washing machines and irons. Twenty-four hour electric service wasn't available until 1916 (WBT 7-13-16). In March of 1909, city street lights were moved from the center of city streets to the sides of the roads.

Early roads in West Branch were either dusty thoroughfares or muddy bogs, depending on the weather. As the commercial district grew, the town man used a team of horses to grade and drag the streets to eliminate ruts and bumps. The summary of improvements during 1895 that appeared in The West Branch Times mentions "several hundred dollars worth of grading on the streets and public highway (Main Street) has been done." Later, when West Branch had its own street commissioner, roads were oiled. In 1916, 10,000 gallons of road oil were ordered by the city (WBT 8-31-16). By then, the city streets were busy enough to be the scene of three accidents during a single week, one involving two cars, another involving a car and a motorcycle and a third involving a car and a train (WBT 8-24-16). All this despite speed limit signs having been posted on downtown streets since May of 1911 (WBT 5-18-11).

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Continuation Sheet

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The telephone arrived in West Branch in February 1879, when a line was installed between the Townsend, Edmundson & Co. general store on the southeast corner of Main and Downey streets and the railroad depot a quarter-mile to the east. In June of 1898, West Branch had a "talking booth" -- an early phone booth (WBT 6-2-98). That same year, phone wires were strung between new cedar poles, instead of from tree to tree. In July, 1900, the first rural telephone toll service in Iowa was available in West Branch, with the switchboard located at Ball's Hardware (4). Meanwhile, the telephone was being touted not only as a convenience, but as a necessity, especially for farmers. "Because some farmers are not getting rich after having (sic) had telephones installed for some years, is no argument against the phone," The West Branch Times noted on April 30, 1908. "The telephone has simply put him in a position to meet competition of other businessmen who have taken advantage of the service which may be gained over the wires." By the end of 1915, the West Branch Independent Telephone Company boasted the "largest percentage of subscribers compared with the residents of its district of any like county in the state." (WBT 12-8-15)

City water made its appearance in 1907, with a water tower constructed on a hillside northwest of the central business district. It was a welcome improvement but, as the West Branch Times noted on January 10, 1908, not without cost. "If you find your taxes a little high this year just remember that we are paying for our waterworks as well as the high school building, both of which are good improvements and worth all they cost." The paper also reported that a public drinking fountain installed in 1911 on the northwest corner of Main and Downey streets was "proving very popular and is being well patronized these hot days." (WBT 7-13-11).

The city began planning its sanitary sewer system in 1916, with the West Branch Times noting on August 10, 1916, that: "Sewer facilities are an absolute necessity for the continued health of the town." Prosperity even brought a public restroom to West Branch. "Did you notice when Iowa City was building a rest room, they said it was the first men's rest room in the state," the West Branch Times asked its readers on March 16, 1916. "We'd like to challenge that statement, for we have had one over a year."

New Markets Mean New Income

During this "Golden Era of Agriculture" West Branch area farmers were among the Midwestern farmers who prospered from the expansion of domestic and foreign farm markets brought on by railroad extensions. The railroad had arrived in West Branch in 1870, allowing local farmers to take advantage of the tremendous growth on non-agricultural populations in urban centers such as Chicago and St. Louis that created tremendous markets for their farm products. What those growing cities couldn't consume they sent elsewhere, with Chicago becoming the nation's largest meat packing and rail shipping center. "Iowa holds the fort as the leading stock producing state in the Union," The West Branch Times reported on February 4, 1897. "The receipts in Chicago for the month of December give Iowa the credit of 2,495 cars of live stock, Missouri 2,332 and Illinois 2,007."

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Continuation Sheet

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Those carloads of cattle, hogs and sheep gave West Branch area farmers both money to spend and money to bank. These good times fueled the growth of downtown West Branch and even prompted the opening of a second bank (12) in 1898. "This is what brings good times and prosperity," said an item in the January 21, 1897, issue of The West Branch Times. "Within the past 20 days there has been 23 car loads of fat hogs and 6 car loads of fat cattle shipped from the yards at this place, making in all, 29 car loads. The shippers inform us that an average of \$600 to the car is not an overestimation of the returns to the farmer. The amounts to the sum of \$17,400 clear cash that has been distributed within the past twenty days among the farmers in this immediate vicinity; and it doesn't stop with the farmer, but plants confidence, inspires enterprise and brings prosperity to every business concern and every working man in the country. How much depends on the farmer."

With the birth of a new century came continued growth in demand for farm products, both within the United States and by foreign countries. Total U.S. grain exports climbed to 155 million bushels by 1902. Meat exports in 1901 and 1902 totaled \$121 million. The West Branch rail yards were busier than ever. "During the last 24 hours from midnight Sunday night to midnight Monday night there were 43 passenger and freight trains passed through West Branch." The West Branch Times reported on November 14, 1912.

"Gentlemen," asserted a orator at an 1899 Corn Carnival in Iowa, "from the beginning of Indiana to the end of Nebraska there is nothing but corn, cattle and contentment" (Source: Ross, Earls D., Iowa Agriculture, State Historical Society, Iowa City, Ia, 1951). These good times for farmers saw net farm income increase from \$1.2 billion in 1860 to \$5.6 billion in 1910. Just as the local rail yard was bustling with activity, so were local banks. "That there is no financial crisis on hand just now is shown by the volume of business done by the two banks located in our town," The West Branch Times reported on March 4, 1909. "On Monday, March 1, \$280,000 worth of business was transacted by the two banks during the usual banking hours. This breaks the record for one days business in West Branch, yet, we expect to see this record broken in the near future." The farm prosperity saw the number of farms increase from 2 million in 1869 to 6.4 million in 1910 (Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789 - 1945, Washington, 1949, pp. 95 - 100.) Between 1900 - 1910 the value of Iowa farmland increases 104.2 percent and the average property value per farm increased from \$8,023 to \$17,259 (Source: Iowa Yearbook of Agriculture, 1910). In West Branch, the local paper followed land transactions with keen interest. "The Harmon Myers eight acre farm one mile south of Centerdale was sold last week to Fred Hartley for the record price of \$190 per acre," the paper reported on December 20, 1909. "All guesses as to the limit that farm lands will reach are now off." A West Branch Times news story on the official government crop report for August 1909 ended with this paragraph under the subheading "Era of Prosperity Sure"; "These figures show that the farmer will have an enormous amount of money to spend this winter. His prosperity will be reelected in manufacturing lines, because the pianos, automobiles and other luxuries the farmer will now find himself able to buy will have to be made in factories. The railroads will receive a double profit, because they will not only have to move the crops to market, but the said pianos and automobiles from the cities to the farmers. Consequently the great crop outlook makes it appear that the country is in for an era of prosperity such as it never saw before" (Source" WBT 8-26-09).

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

The Bubble Begins To Burst

The good times would continue, but not for long. By 1914, the gross income of Iowa farmers had grown to well over \$500 million, and, by 1916, it was estimated that 53 percent of the livestock receipts at the Chicago stockyards were from Iowa. The prosperity for U.S. agriculture that began just prior to the turn of the century and continued throughout 1919, termed the "Golden Age of Agriculture, was to define "parity", the balance of farm costs and profit and farm income, for future farm generations up to the present day. Between 1909 and 1914 the prices farmers received for their grain and livestock were in balance with their costs of doing business (Source: Guither, Harold D. Heritage of Plenty, A Guide to the economic history and development of U.S. Agriculture, Danville, Ill 1972, jp.1 102). The outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914 accelerated farm profit and inflated farm land values. Response to abnormal demand required to support the Allied war effort resulted in postwar inflation, as farmers faced huge surpluses, low prices confronted a heavy burden of fixed costs. For example, the total cost of food for an average farm family increased from \$264.81 in 1887 to \$535.46 in 1918 (Source: Wallace's Farmer, XLIII, March 22, 1918, p. 551). Lynn Naines, Writing in Successful Farming magazine in July 1916 noted that farmers were getting more for the grain and livestock they had to sell, but that the cost of production was increasing far more rapidly than the prices they received. (Source: Lynn Haines, "The High Cost of Living," Successful Farming, XV, July 1916, p. 8). U.S. farm population began slipping from a 1916 figure of 32.5 million to 30.1 million by 1930 (Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census). Although the post-war farm economy didn't bottom out until 1920, the impact of the post-war farm economy put the brakes on commercial development in West Branch after the construction of the new West Branch State Bank building (5) at Main and Downey streets in 1916.

Summary

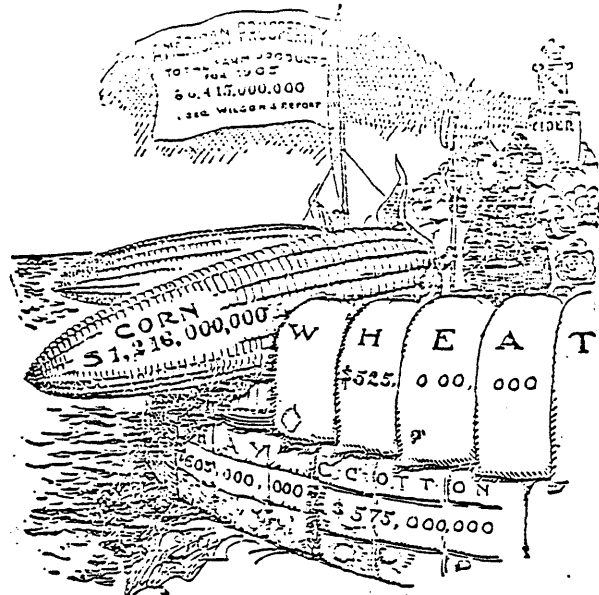
The impact of the wave of prosperity associated with the "Golden Era of Agriculture" in Iowa is best illustrated by the downtown structures within the West Branch Commercial District that remain today as monuments to better times for Midwestern farmers of the past. The period of downtown commercial development between 1895 and 1916 was directly linked to the bullish farm economy. In 1895, two hundred bushels of corn bought 1,000 feet of lumber; by 1908, when corn prices hit 50 cents per bushel, 100 bushels would buy 2,000 feet of lumber. It was a period of prosperity that transformed the West Branch Business district from a dusty little intersection into a thriving commercial center. It was this generation of growth that allowed the establishment of such nonessential enterprises as an Opera House (4), a music store (13, 11), a jewelry shop (13) and even a movie theater (8, 4) as well as expansion of essential commercial enterprises such as banks (12, 1, 5), hardware stores (1, 4), clothing stores (15, 4, 2), grocery stores (4,9?), harness shops (11, 16), drug stores (9), and meat markets (9, 5, 13). All of the buildings that housed these businesses are within the boundaries of the proposed West Branch Commercial District. All are intact today as examples of the good times that greeted the farming community of West Branch at the dawn of the 20th century.

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CPN-259-1116



—Chicago Chronicle.

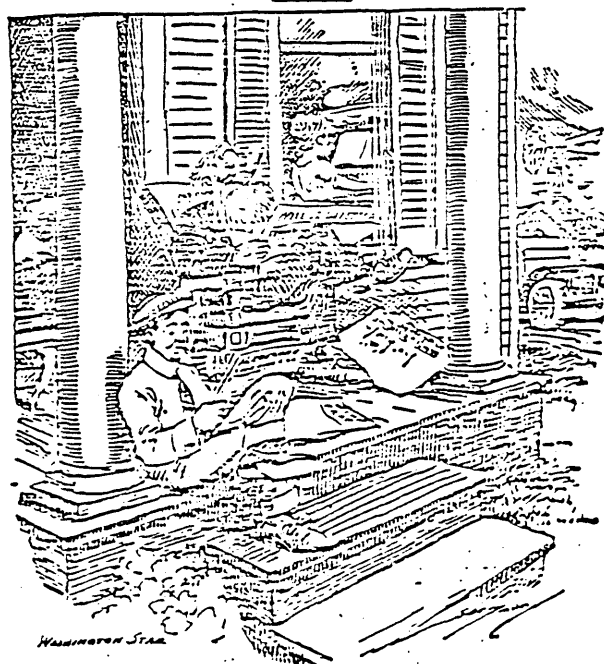
December 7, 1905

-- The West Branch Times

September 15, 1910

-- The West Branch Times

THE UNHAPPY FARMER.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

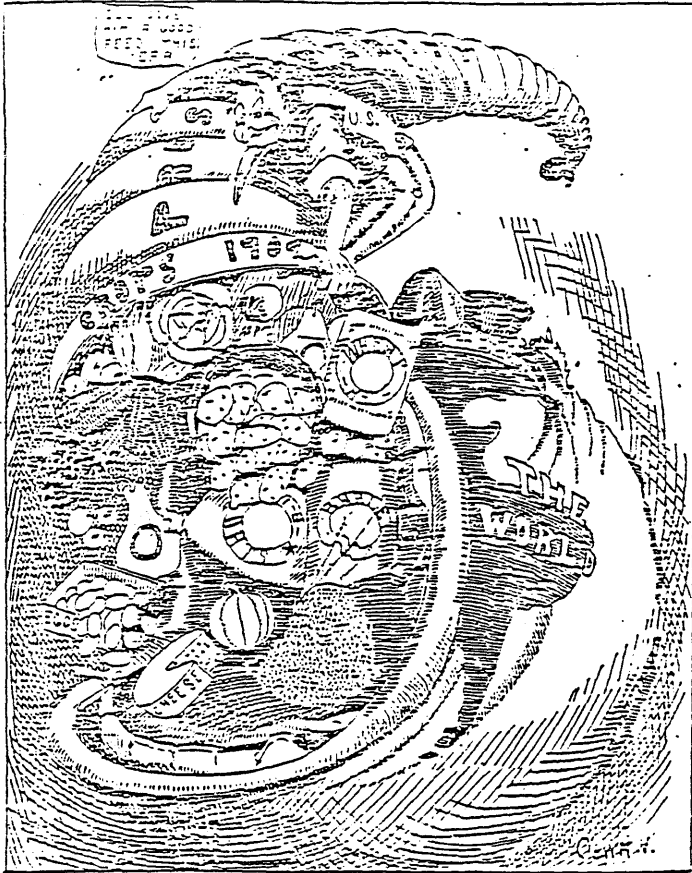
Section number 8 Page 9

CPN 359-1114

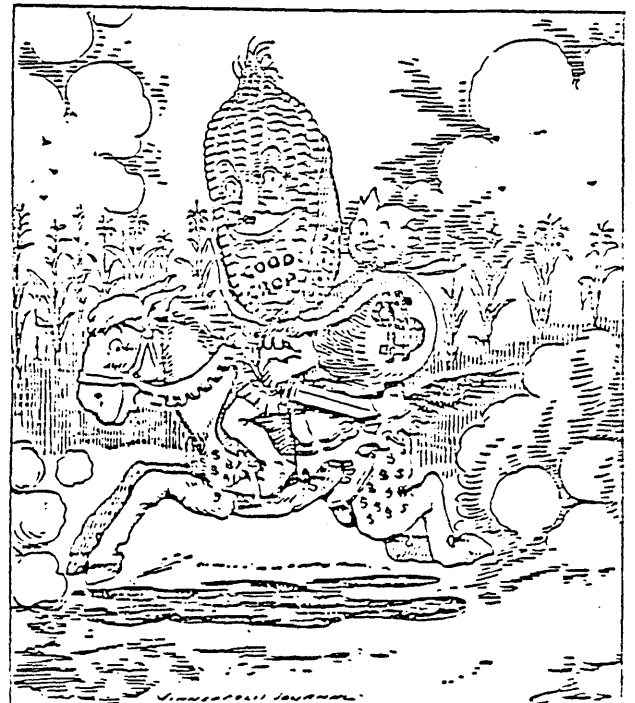
WHOLE SAU CAN FEED THE WORLD.

September 2, 1909

-- The West Branch Times



OH, YOUNG LOCHINVAR CAME OUT OF THE WEST



August 9, 1910

-- The West Branch Times

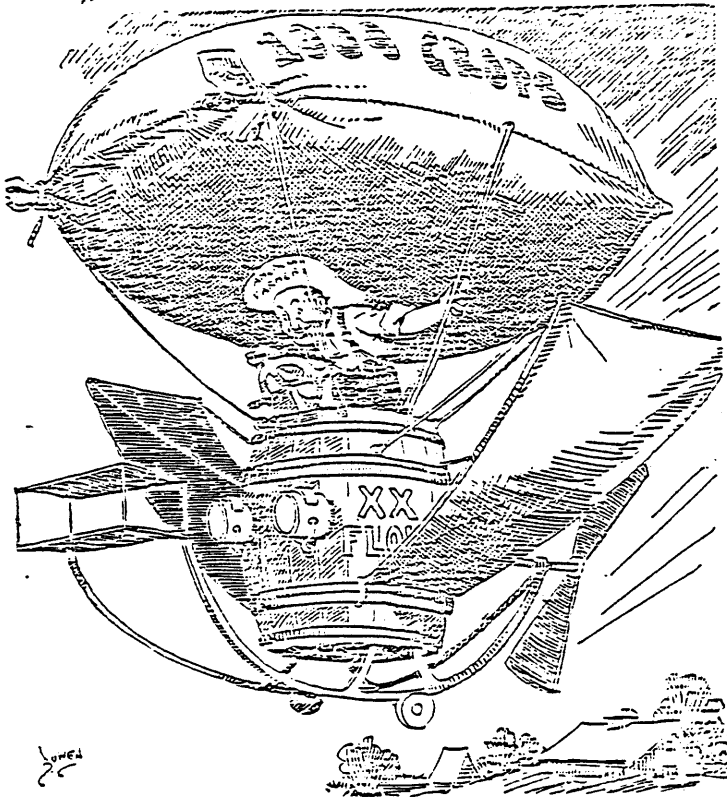
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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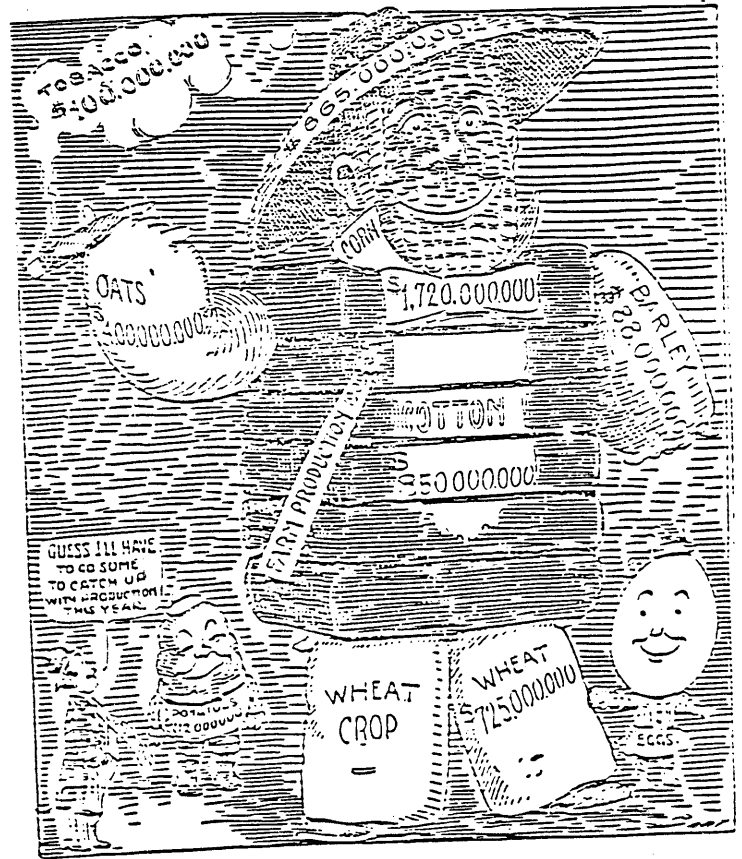
CFN-259-1116

A SECOND DEPARTURE



August 26, 1909 -- The West Branch Times

THERE ARE GIANTS IN THESE DAYS



December 16, 1909

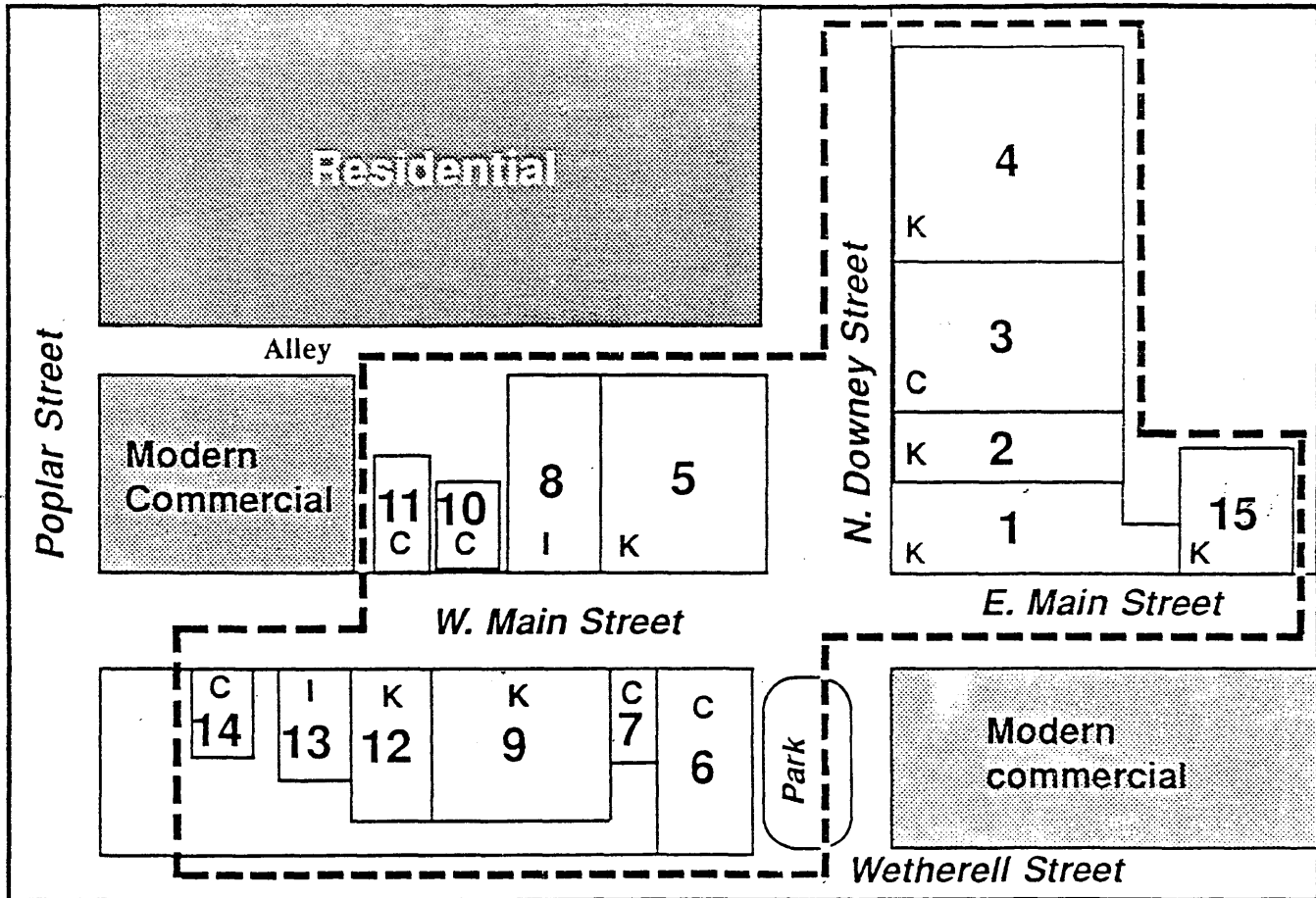
-- The West Branch Times

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

CEH-359-1116



Herbert Hoover National Historic Site



West Branch Commercial Historic District

----- District boundary -----

K=Key C=Contributing I=Intrusion

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2

Sources used in preparing this application included old newspaper articles, books, abstracts of title, historical photographs, Sanborn fire maps, a 1939 master's thesis, personal interviews with long-time West Branch residents, and items contained in the holdings of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, including a cemetery registry and the program for a 1897 band concert.

Newspapers:

The dates of specific copies of the newspapers used can be found in section 22 of 15 the Iowa Site Inventory Sheets. Newspaper stories quoted in the "Significance" section of this application are noted within the text. Generally, in completing the research required to submit this application, microfilmed copies of early West Branch newspapers -- The Indes, The West Branch Times and the West Branch Local Record -- Published between 1871 and 1916 were reviewed in the microfilm reading room of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library. In some cases (obituaries, bank closings, etc.) later issues of these papers were used as well. One issue of The Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette -- November 9, 1907 -- was also used.

Books:

The following books proved most helpful:

Bearss, Edwin C.: Historical base Map and Ground Study, Herbert Hoover National Historic Site (Washington, D.C., 1968)

Fite, Gilbert C.: The Farmer's Frontier 1865-1900 (Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1974)

Guither, Harold D.: Heritage of Plenty, a guide to the economic history and development of U.S. Agriculture (Danville, Illinois 1972)

Ross, Earle D.: Iowa Agriculture (Iowa City, Iowa, 1951)

Stratton, Maud: Herbert Hoover's Home Town: The History of West Branch (Iowa City, 1948)

Master's Thesis:

Woods, Elsworth P.: "The Effect of the World War on Iowa Agriculture, 1914-1920", a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Department of History, in the Graduate College of the State University of Iowa, August 1939.

Fire Maps:

Sanborn Fire Maps on file at the University of Iowa Main Library's map room, including West Branch maps for 1895, 1900, 1906, 1912 and 1927.

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National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 3

Personal Interviews:

Occasional interviews with long-time West Branch residents, including L. C. Rummells, Glenn Brown, Minard Thomas, Harold "Bus" Thomas, Murray Gibson and Esther Jensen.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 2

UTM References

A	115	63715910	46144410	B	115	63716415	46144410
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	115	63716710	46144610	D	115	63716710	46144010
E	115	63716410	46143610	F	115	63715710	46143610

Boundary Justification

The district's boundary was determined based on commercial growth pattern, construction dates, architectural integrity and uses of adjacent properties. The district includes the east side of the 100 block of North Downey Street, 138.6 feet of the north side of the 100 block of East Main Street, the south side of the 100 block of West Main Street and the four buildings along the north side of the 100 block of West Main Street that are west of the intersection of Main and Downey streets. The West Branch Commercial District is bounded on the north by residential properties. It is bounded on the west by a mixed-use area (commercial/public/residential) and on the east both by commercial buildings of later construction dates and commercial buildings of compromised architectural integrity.

Verbal Boundary Description

Starting at the center point of the intersection of Main and Downey streets, thence east along the center line of East Main Street to a point that intersects with an extension of the lot line at the east 48.6 feet of the east 1/2 of lot 1, Block 34 Cameron Addition, thence north to a point that intersects with the north lot line of Lot 1, Block 34, Cameron Addition, thence west to a point that intersects with the east lot lines of lots 2-4 of Block 34, Cameron Addition, thence north to a point that intersects with the north lot line of Lot 4, Block 34, Cameron Addition, thence west to the center line of North Downey Street, thence south to a point that intersects with the extension of the center line of the alley that runs along the north lot lines of lots 1 through 4 of Block 38 of the Subdivision of Lot 64, thence west to a point that intersects with the west lot line of Lot 4, Block 38 of the Subdivision of Lot 64, thence south to a point that intersects with the center line of West Main Street, thence west to a point that intersects with the extension of the west lot line of Lot 3, Block 44 of Steer's First Addition, thence south to the center line of Wetherell Street, thence east to the center line of South Downey Street, thence north to the center point of the intersection of Main and Downey Streets (the point of beginning).

Iowa Site Inventory

Office of Historic Preservation
Iowa State Historical Department
East 12th & Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Site Number 15
District Name West Branch Commercial
Map Reference # 15

Identification

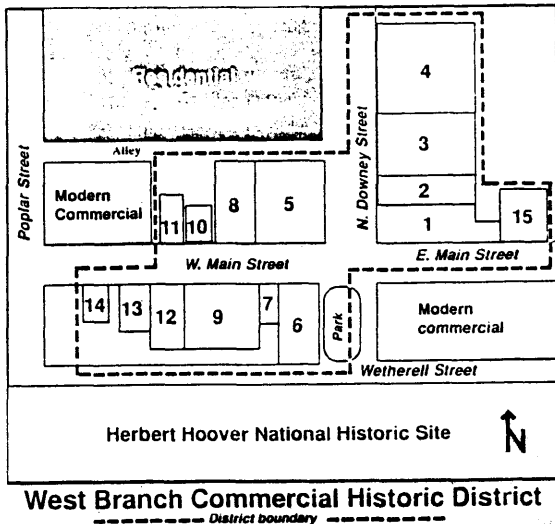
- Site Name Rich & Bailey Business Block
- Village/Town/City West Branch Township Springdale County Cedar
- Street Address 109 East Main Street
- Legal Location Urban Cameron 34 East 48.6 feet of east 1/2
Urban: Rural: subdivision township block range parcel section subparcel 1/4 section of 1/4 section of Lot
- UTM Location: zone _____ easting _____ northing _____; Acreage less than 1
- Owner(s) Name City of West Branch
- Owner(s) Address 304 East Main Street West Branch IA 52358
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)
- Use: Present vacant Original commercial/residential

Description

- Date of Construction 1895 Architect/Builder unknown
- Building Type:

<input type="checkbox"/> single-family dwelling	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> other institutional	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> multiple-family dwelling	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agricultural
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial			
- Exterior Walls: clapboard stone brick board and batten shingles stucco
 other _____
- Structural System: wood frame with interlocking joints wood frame with light members (balloon frame)
 masonry load-bearing walls iron frame steel frame with curtain walls reinforced concrete
 other _____
- Condition: excellent good fair deteriorated
- Integrity: original site moved—if so, when? _____
Notes on alterations, additions (with dates and architect, if known) and any other notable features of building and site:
See continuation sheet
- Related Outbuildings and Property: barn other farm structures carriage house garage privy
 other _____
- Is the building endangered? no yes—if so, why? Building was scheduled for demolition in May, 1989. City accepted title for 2 years in hopes of restoration/repair
- Surroundings of the building: open land woodland scattered outbuildings densely built-up commercial
 industrial residential other _____

18. Map



19. Photo

Roll _____ Frame _____ View _____

Significance

(Indicate sources of information for all statements)

20. Architectural significance

- a. Key structure/individually may qualify for the National Register
- b. Contributing structure
- c. Not eligible/intrusion

This two-story, wood-frame, false-fronted business block is typical in style to the early (1869-1894) commercial buildings constructed along Main Street in the West Branch business district. What's unique about this structure is that it represents the last -- and newest -- example of this building style, which was abandoned in 1895 in favor of brick, stone and iron facade construction adopted in the construction of sites 1,2,3,4,5,9,12 and 14 both as a reflection of local prosperity and in an attempt to fireproof downtown commercial buildings in the wake of a major fire along the south side of West Main Street on August 30, 1895. While earlier examples of this building style have been included in the District as contributing structures, this site is nominated as a key structure as its construction occurred during the peak

21 Historical Significance

Theme(s) Social History

- a. Key structure/individually may qualify for the National Register
- b. Contributing structure
- c. Not eligible/intrusion

The mix of buildings within the existing West Branch Commercial Historic District (1869-1916) collectively illustrates the economic prosperity that transformed downtown West Branch from a ramshackle assortment of wood-frame storefronts into a thriving commercial center anchored by business blocks, including this site. These 15 buildings are tangible, surviving economic indicators of the prosperity associated with what historians term "The Golden Era of American Agriculture." This period between 1850 and World War I saw grain and livestock farming in Cedar County, Iowa, and throughout the

22. Sources (for primary and secondary sources, give complete facts of publication: author, title, place of publication, date, etc.): (cont'd)

Sanborn fire maps: 1895, 1900, 1906, 1912, 1927
 Abstract of Title

The West Branch Times: 9/21/1876; 6/1/1882; 1-10-1895; 3/14/1895; 3/21/1895; 3/28/1895; 4/4/1895; 4/18/1895; 5/2/1895; 6/20/1895/ 7/4/1895; 10/24/1895; 1/9/1896; 1/16/1896; 7/21/1910; 7/21/1966 (cont'd)

Prepared by Tom Walsh Date 9/20/1989
 Address P.O. Box 696 West Branch IA 52358 Telephone (319) 643-5327
 Organization Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Assn., Inc.

For Office of Historic Preservation Use Only

1. Office Information Sources on this Property

- County Resource File
- Windshield Survey
- National Register
- Grants-In-Aid: _____
- Determination of Eligibility

Review and Compliance Project:

- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

2. Subject Traces

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

3. Photo Images

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Iowa Site Inventory

Office of Historic Preservation
Iowa State Historical Department
East 12th & Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

15

Site Number _____

Continuation Sheet - 1

Item Number(s) _____

14. Integrity

This building's exterior has undergone only minor alteration since its construction in 1895. During a stabilization project in 1989, a one-story shed-like attachment on the building's north facade -- an original feature according to the 1895 Sanborn fire map -- was razed due to its deteriorated condition from moisture damage. Once this shed attachment was removed, the building's north facade was covered with plywood and outfitted with gutters downspouts and ventilation louvers in an effort to protect the main structure from moisture damage. Because of moisture damage, the flooring in the first floor of the building's west room was removed, exposing the dirt floor just inches below. A wooden "cowboy awning" that extended over the sidewalk was added to the building's front facade in the 1960s. It was removed during the 1989 stabilization work. That work also included re-glazing windows, replacing broken panes, and scraping and painting the building's exterior with two coats of oil-based primer and one coat of latex paint. During this project, the building's color was changed from barn red with white trim to ivory (off-white) with forest green trim.

Sanborn fire maps indicate a variety of interior alterations between 1895 and 1927, including changes in separating walls and interior doorways. Between 1900 and 1906, a small, square shed-like structure was added to the northwest corner of the building. Sometime later, it was razed. Between 1912 and 1927, second-story windows on the south end of the east and west facades were converted to doorways, and exterior stairways were built to provide access to second-story living quarters. Sometime later, a first-story window on the south end of the east facade was converted to a doorway as well. During the 1989 stabilization work the two east facade "doorways" were restored to windows, using windows taken from the north facade before it was covered with plywood.

Historical photos clearly indicate that the clapboard cornice of the building's false front has been lowered by approximately four feet, a feature that could easily be restored. Two surviving architectural details of the building include an oak open staircase, featuring turned newel posts on both the first and second floors, and a built-in safe, ornamented with Dr. Bailey's name.

20. Architectural significance (cont'd)

of the wave of prosperity that arrived in West Branch in 1895, prompting construction of three major building blocks -- this project the first of the three. Its distinguishing architectural feature for a commercial building of this style is its corner entrances for each of the two first-floor commercial rooms. These were once elaborately ornamented with archway of scrolled and spindled wood trim. The window treatment on the building's front facade is also unusual -- the west commercial room built with two large (58-inch-square) display windows, each ornamented with 16-by-58-inch transom windows, while the east room's first floor utilizes three rectangular

-- over

20. Architectural significance (cont'd)

display windows (76-by-30-inches) that abut the square windows, but do not include transom windows. The second-story window treatment is unusual as well. While both the east and west living quarters utilize rectangular windows, the west side uses three, while the east side uses four that are more narrow than those to the west. The effect, between the corner entrances and the vastly different window shapes and styles, is that of a duplex -- one building designed to look like two.

21. Historical significance (cont'd)

Midwest transformed from a primitive, pioneering exercise in self-sufficiency to an application of techniques and technologies that made farming a highly complex and increasingly profitable business. As local farmers prospered, so did the merchants and professionals upon whom they relied for seed, feed, tools, building materials, dry goods, legal advice, medical and dental care and other goods and services.

This site is nominated as an addition to the existing West Branch Commercial Historic District as a key structure that represents perhaps the best example of a building project undertaken at the pinnacle of local prosperity, providing commercial space for both a new business ("The Golden Rule" general store) and a well-established, well-respected local physician/surgeon (Dr. J.I. Bailey), whose thriving practice had been located on the same site since the mid-1870s. The "Rich & Bailey Block," as it was known ("Rich" for Frank B. Rich, owner of "The Golden Rule") was the first of three major business block projects undertaken in West Branch in 1895 -- a year that, by the estimate of West Branch Times Editor W.W. Gruwell, brought \$50,100 worth of improvements to the downtown area, including \$2,000 spent to construct the "Rich & Bailey Block."

From a social history perspective, this building is a fascinating study in how both a West Branch pioneer (Dr. Bailey) and an entrepreneur from Kansas (F. B. Rich) see their paths and careers cross as a direct result of local prosperity associated with good times on the farm. The building they construct in a style reminiscent of other early commercial buildings in West Branch (6,7,10,11) launches a wave of new construction and provides a replacement of a building constructed on the same site by Dr. Bailey in the 1870s and doubled in size with an addition in 1881. It provided new office space for F.G. Hersey, a one-time Cedar County deputy sheriff who opened a legal practice in Bailey's building in August of 1881.

At the time of the 1895 construction of the "Rich & Bailey Block," Dr. John I. Bailey was one of four physicians with practices in West Branch. According to the West Branch Times of 1-9-1896, three were MDs and the other a practitioner of "the homeopathic system of medicine." Bailey was among the most respected and well-established. This rave review appeared in the West Branch Local Record of 12/22/1881 -- 15 years before the 1895 building project: "Dr. J.I. Bailey located in West Branch 8 years ago in the midst of strong competition. But his energy and practical skill as a physician and surgeon has outlived the major part of it. His operating chair, large and expensive library and other professional paraphernalia (sic) is sufficient evidence of his enterprise, to say nothing of the large field of practice he has."

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21. Historical significance (cont'd)

Bailey came to West Branch as a six-year-old with his parents in 1851 from Columbiana County, Ohio -- an area from which many of West Branch's early settlers migrated. Despite his youth, Bailey served with the Union Army in the Civil War. He took his honorable discharge to medical school, where he studied for three years before opening a practice in Kinderhook, Illinois. He returned to West Branch in 1873, where he practiced until 1909, when he was debilitated by a stroke. He died a year later on July 12, 1910 at age 64 and is buried in the West Branch Cemetery.

Various issues of The West Branch Times and the West Branch Local Record reflect his prominence within the community. His first office building at 109 E. Main Street was a focal point for the community, serving as a meeting place for the West Branch Reading Association (West Branch Local Record, 11/28/1878) and the West Branch Veteran Association (Local Record, 8/18/1881). Bailey was active in local politics, serving as a trustee of the town and a city councilman. In fact, city elections were often held in his building. For many years he headed the local Board of Health and was a director of the local Driving Park Association, which oversaw the operation of a race track once located within a fairgrounds area situated west of the existing Herbert Hoover Presidential Library-Museum complex. In March of 1895 -- at the same time as the construction of the "Rich & Bailey Block" -- he was elected president of the school board. Bailey also helped to pioneer the telephone in West Branch from his (original) building at 109 E. Main Street. A notice in the West Branch Local Record of 7/14/1881 notified readers that "telephone tickets" were available from Dr. Bailey's office at the following rates: "100 tickets, each good for a five minute's talk, \$10.00. 50 tickets, \$6.25; 25 tickets, \$3.75. The charge for a single message will be \$25 cents. Two years earlier -- the same year the phone arrived in West Branch -- the good doctor had his own private phone line installed to link his office at 109 E. Main with his home on nearby North Downey Street. "Dr. Bailey has the 'boss' telephone," reported the West Branch Local Record of 3/13/1879. "He can sit in his office (several rods from his residence) and hear his little daughter sing and play on the piano almost as distinctly as if he were in the room with the player."

As an aside on Bailey, he was renowned throughout the Midwest for his skills as a horticulturist, developing a successful line of peach trees that became known as the "Bailey Peach." By 1895, when he built his new office, this interest had evolved into more than a hobby. "Dr. J.I. Bailey shipped nearly a carload of peach trees last Friday," the West Branch Times reported on 4/18/1895. "One man at Hampton took one thousand." His expertise in growing things apparently extended beyond peaches. "Dr. Bailey placed in our show window a beet 30 inches long that weighs 18 pounds," the West Branch Times reported on 10/24/1895. The same paper reported that Bailey had spent \$500 in 1894 constructing a cold storage fruit house to facilitate work at his orchards, located, ironically, on Orange Street.

Frank B. Rich -- the other principal in the 1895 building project -- returned

to West Branch in 1895 after an absence of unknown duration. "Frank Rich and family from Garden City, Kansas, arrived here last Thursday having sold their Kansas property," The West Branch Times reported on 3/21/1895. "They intend making West Branch their future home. Mr. Rich was in the grain and elevator business at this place a number of years ago when shipping grain was the leading agricultural interest."

Work on the "Rich & Bailey Block" began, according to The Times, within two weeks of Rich's arrival. The 1870s-1881 building that had served Bailey and others for more than 20 years was sold to J.A. Cochran, a local bookstore owner, who "moved it last Tuesday to rear of book store for a summer kitchen and woodhouse," according to The Times of 4/4/1895. Mrs. Rich, meanwhile, was dispatched to Chicago to order wares for the general store being planned for the new business block's west commercial room. The Times reported on 4/18/1895 that she had recently returned after purchasing "a large stock of fancy dry goods etc., which will arrive as the new store rooms are complete."

Within two weeks, the paper reported that "The Golden Rule" was "in the new business block, grand opening on next Saturday." Mr. Rich ran a page-one ad the next week (5/9/1895) touting the new store as offering ladies a "fine assortment of Shirt waists and Wrappers, infant underwear and white porcelain (sic) dishes -- all marked below Muscatine prices." Curiously, no further advertising followed, perhaps as a reaction to an editorial comment by the paper's editor, W.W. Gruwell, in the 5/2/1895 issue. In developing his "wishlist" for West Branch, Gruwell called for passage of an ordinance "prohibiting the erection of wooden buildings on Main or Downey Streets within one block from the center crossing." As the "Rich & Bailey Block" was the only such building project in that area (the other underway -- site 4 -- was to be of brick, stone and cast iron construction), Gruwell's comment was apparently a criticism of the project.

The paper reported that Dr. Bailey moved into his new office rooms in the building's east wing on June 18, 1895, and later reported that a local signpainter (later postmaster) Caleb H. Wickersham had ornamented the transom windows over "The Golden Rule" display windows with some fancy lettering "that is a credit to the artist and a flaming advertisement for the store." Apparently, Mr. Rich had his own thoughts about the best way to advertise. If there were any hard feelings between the editor and the town's newest shopkeeper, Gruwell buried the hatchet with two items in his paper of 1/9/1896. "F.B. Rich is entitled to the credit of instituting the golden rule as a basis for business transactions and people are rapidly learning the place to buy queensware, china and glassware, children's clothes, jewelry and notions is where they do as they would be done to." The other item contained the paper's first description of the new building, some seven months after it was phased into use: "With the early spring of 1895, the building rush began, even before the ground was clear of winters frost, dirt began to fly for the erection of Bailey and Rich's block on Main Street. The building is 36x46, two story divided in the center, Dr. J. I. Bailey occupying the east half, both stories as professional rooms, and F.B. Rich the west half as store rooms, the Golden Rule, and dwelling. The building is finished up in modern style with large front glass and corner enterances (sic), the doctors departments furnished with hot water heating.

Sanborn fire maps show The Golden Rule maintained its 109 E. Main Street location at least into 1900. A historical photo shows it was later relocated to 108 West Main Street (site 9). The 1906 Sanborn map shows a barber shop

(cont'd)

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21. Historical significance (cont'd)

located in the west wing of the building in 1906 and a grocery store in 1912, with the space occupied by Dr. Bailey through 1909 shown, still, as an office. Interviews with life-long West Branch residents Harold "Bus" Thomas and Esther Jensen indicate a variety of other uses over the years since. A baker named John Davis had a shop in the building's west wing and lived upstairs before moving his bakery to the building to the east at 111 East Main Street. For a period of years during the 1920s, Willard and Mary Blackburn used the west half of the building for a dry cleaning and men's clothing store, living upstairs. The building also once housed the Chapman Bros. furnace and tin shop.

Although not directly related to the theme of the district, the building is best remembered locally as the site of Martinus Jensen's grocery store, a fixture for many years prior to Mr. Jensen's death in 1966 at age 84 in the upstairs living area. Mr. Jensen was among the early Danish emigrants to West Branch and Cedar County and was well known and well respected for his generosity. "Often times he gave away as much as he sold," West Branch Times Editor Jack Maher said in a July 21, 1966, obituary. "During the Depression, he helped many. In more recent years he has been known to have burned books of credit slips because he refused to humiliate those who owed him money. It is possible he symbolizes the Danish migration to this part of the country. He was pious, generous, a hard worker and was constantly helping others."

Following Jensen's death, the building was used as a souvenir stand, ice cream parlor and potter's studio and gallery. For the last few years, it has stood vacant and, prior to a stabilization effort in 1989, deteriorating.

22. Sources (cont'd)

The West Branch Local Record: 11/28/1878; 3/13/1879; 12/22/1881; 8/18/1881; 8/11/1881; 8/4/1881; 7/28/1881; 7/14/1881; 6/16/1881; 6/2/1881
Interviews with long-time residents Harold "Bus" Thomas and Esther Jensen, June-July, 1989