

## An Independent Woman: the Life of Lou Henry Hoover

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1869 outnumbered the Pacific Northwest by 10 to 1—essentially, and ironically, the only mention of Iowa in the book. Still, the context that the book provides for students of midwestern history is tremendous.

Hine and Faragher have also managed to craft their work in prose that casual readers and undergraduate students will enjoy. It is chock full of unusual illustrations, written with a sharp sense of irony, and flavored with wonderful quotes. Fortunately, too, they put back some of the humor and bawdiness of the West that a hundred years of academic writing had largely removed, without trivializing the human tragedy and environmental destruction that accompanied growth. One can find much here that is bittersweet. *The American West: A New Interpretive History* is a welcome and exceptional text that should become a new standard on reading lists.

*An Independent Woman: The Life of Lou Henry Hoover*, by Anne Beiser Allen. Contributions in American History. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000. 232 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$65.00 cloth.

Reviewer Barbara McGowan is professor of history at Ripon College. She is interested in American politics, gender roles, and female biography and autobiography. Her next publication will be an essay on New England girlhood in the *Encyclopedia of New England Culture* (2002).

Lou Henry Hoover was born in Waterloo, Iowa, on March 29, 1874. In 1964, twenty years after her death, her body was reburied in West Branch, Iowa, next to that of her husband, former President Herbert Hoover. Lou spent most of her childhood and adolescence in California, graduating from Stanford University as the nation's first female geology major. Shortly after graduation, she married a fellow Iowa native, Herbert Hoover, and in doing so became part of a life that would include professional success, world travel, wealth, humanitarian service, and political triumph and failure. This biography of Lou Hoover characterizes her as an "independent woman" and links her experiences and achievements to the generation of women who came of age in the Progressive Era and through mainly female-based organizations improved the opportunities and status of American women.

Anne Beiser Allen, who frequently writes about Iowa people and places, is correct in describing Lou Henry Hoover as a "modern" woman with her own interests, activities, and causes. Lou Hoover was obviously extremely intelligent and energetic. She did not merely follow her husband to China when he took an engineering position there shortly after their marriage. Instead, she studied Chinese, collected

porcelain, and wrote scientific articles. She found the Boxer Rebellion "exciting." In 1901 the Hoovers moved to London when Herbert became senior partner in an international engineering firm. In the ensuing years, Lou gave birth to two sons, Herbert (1903) and Alan (1907), and managed to travel the world extensively. For example, she took Alan to Burma shortly after his birth and proudly reported that Herbert Junior had circled the globe three times before the age of four, not once missing a meal or a nap or suffering any childhood illness. By 1908, Herbert Hoover had founded his own international engineering firm and Lou often accompanied him on his overseas travels. When at home in England, Lou entertained frequently, researched Chinese history in the British Museum, translated scientific texts from German to English, and founded a service organization, the American Teachers and College Women in London.

However, as the author acknowledges, Lou Hoover was hardly a typical American woman. All of her activity was supported by a full complement of servants, including maids, butlers, cooks, and nannies. Her children were usually educated by private tutors or shuttled back and forth between various boarding schools. When the children did attend California public schools, they lived with Stanford graduate students while their parents divided their time between Washington, D.C., Palo Alto, and London. Lou was unable to attend her son Alan's graduation from high school because she was traveling for the Girl Scouts.

The Hoovers' public careers began in earnest during World War I, when Herbert served as wartime Food Commissioner and Lou became involved with various causes, including the Girl Scouts and the National Amateur Athletic Foundation. She was extremely effective and active in both organizations throughout the 1920s and '30s, spreading the Girl Scout concept throughout the nation and championing female participation in athletic events. After the war, Herbert served as Secretary of Commerce under Presidents Harding and Coolidge and was elected president in 1928. The Hoovers' years in the White House were unhappy ones as the country struggled through economic depression and blamed the president's policies for worsening the situation. Lou was personally upset by the attacks on her husband and blamed his defeat in 1932 on Democratic "smear tactics" (153). In addition to political adversity, the Hoovers suffered personal problems in those years as a son was diagnosed with tuberculosis (he eventually recovered) and his family came to live in the White House. Leaving the White House in 1933, a bitter Lou told White House servants to be sure to speak to her if they should run into her, but then added that she might not recognize them out of uniform (154).

After the White House experience, Herbert preferred New York City while Lou favored Palo Alto. The couple was frequently separated as Lou maintained homes in Washington, D.C., Palo Alto, and Monterey. She traveled widely with friends and on behalf of the Girl Scouts. In the mid-thirties, the Hoover family regained ownership of the Hoover family home in West Branch, Iowa, and Lou supervised its restoration. In 1940, following her husband's wishes, she moved to New York, where she died of a stroke in 1944.

Writing a life of Lou Hoover that goes beyond her surface accomplishments and activities is a difficult task because, as Allen points out, Lou "rarely shared her private thoughts, routinely burned personal letters, and maintained always an invisible barrier between her public image and her private self" (1). Within these considerable limitations, Allen has done an excellent job of portraying a woman who made the most of her opportunities, but always stayed within the framework of conventional society. Well educated and independent in that she worked for her own chosen causes, often managed her family's finances, and directed large domestic establishments, Lou did not support woman suffrage nor did she ever actually pursue her own career. Also, like most women of her time and class, Lou was unconsciously racist, heavily dependent on household help, and seemingly unaware of the economic and social inequities present in American society. Allen does not conceal these aspects of Lou Hoover, nor does she dwell on them. As a result, this book is a fair, balanced biography of a woman who came of age as the modern world was emerging and who participated in some, but not all, of the opportunities it presented to women.

*Making Connections: The Long-Distance Bus Industry in the USA*, by Margaret Walsh. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2000. xvii, 245 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$74.95 cloth.

Reviewer Bruce E. Seely is professor of history at Michigan Technological University. He is the author of *Building the American Highway System: Engineers as Policy Makers* (1987).

Margaret Walsh initially wanted to write a history of Greyhound, the leading American long-distance bus line. After finding that corporate records did not exist, she chose instead to examine other elements of the industry, and published a series of articles over the past 15 years in several scholarly journals (including this one) and books. Those articles formed the foundation for the book. Two new chapters, an introduction, and a bibliography round out the book, which provides a

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