

This Day in History... October 20, 1964

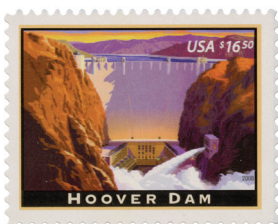
Death of Herbert Hoover

On October 20, 1964, Herbert Hoover, America's 31st president, died at age 90. Before the Great Depression defined his presidency, he had built a career as a mining engineer and organized relief efforts for people in several countries.

Born in West Branch, Iowa, on August 10, 1874, Hoover was the son of a blacksmith and a Quaker mother. His parents died before he was ten, and he went to Oregon to live with his uncle, Henry Minthorn. In 1891, Hoover enrolled at the newly opened Stanford University. He studied geology and graduated in 1895.

Hoover began his career in mining, then joined the British firm Bewick, Moreing & Co. Assignments took him to Australia and China. In Australia, he evaluated mines and became a manager. In 1899, he married Lou Henry, a fellow Stanford geology student. The couple moved to China, where Hoover worked as a mining engineer. When the Boxer Rebellion reached Tientsin in 1900, he helped organize the city's foreign residents and supplies during the siege. He later built an independent consulting business and became wealthy through international mining investments.

World War I brought Hoover into public service. In 1914, he helped stranded Americans in Europe arrange food and passage home. He then organized the Commission for Relief in Belgium, which brought food to civilians trapped by German occupation. The effort also aided people in northern France. After the United States entered the war, President Woodrow Wilson appointed Hoover to lead the US Food Administration. It urged Americans to conserve food through voluntary campaigns, including "Meatless Mondays" and "Wheatless Wednesdays." The program increased supplies for the armed forces without imposing nationwide rationing.



The Hoover Dam, dedicated in 1935, was named in his honor.

After the war, Hoover directed the American Relief Administration, which sent food and other aid to people in Europe. Admired for this work, he was urged to seek the presidency in 1920, but declined and backed Warren G. Harding. Harding appointed him secretary of commerce in 1921. Hoover served under Harding and Calvin Coolidge, promoting standards for manufactured products and supporting industries such as radio and aviation. In 1927, he coordinated federal relief after the Mississippi River flood. His public profile helped secure the Republican presidential nomination the next year.

Hoover won the 1928 election, defeating Democrat Al Smith. The stock market crash came in October 1929, early in his presidency, and the Depression deepened. Hoover called business leaders to the White House and urged them to maintain wages. He encouraged state and local governments to expand public works and supported federal construction. He favored voluntary cooperation and private charity, however, and resisted direct federal relief payments to individuals. In 1932, he created the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to lend money to banks, businesses, and some public agencies. These measures did not stop rising unemployment and hardship. Shantytowns built by displaced people became known as "Hoovervilles."

Hoover lost the 1932 election to Franklin D. Roosevelt, who promised a "New Deal." After leaving office, Hoover wrote, spoke, and worked with the Hoover Institution at Stanford. During World War II, he organized aid for Polish civilians. In 1946, President Harry Truman asked him to survey world food needs. Hoover traveled to 38 countries and recommended ways to address the risk of famine. The two men worked together again on a 1947 commission to reorganize the executive branch; many of its recommendations became law. Hoover later chaired a second reorganization commission under President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Hoover continued writing and public service, including work with the Boys Clubs of America. He died in New York City on October 20, 1964. He was buried in West Branch, overlooking the place where his life began.



Stamp issued on Hoover's 91st birthday.

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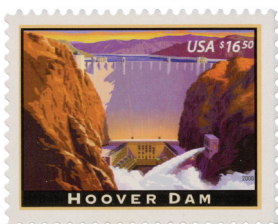
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