

WEST MAIN STREET, SOUTH SIDE

- ***Crook's Hotel (1870) 102 W. Main***
Nate Crook owned and operated a barber shop and restaurant in this building in 1871. By 1877 he had expanded his operation to include a hotel and livery. Over the years the building has housed several hotels and restaurants.
- ***West Branch Bank (1875) 104 W. Main***
West Branch Bank was founded here in 1875 but moved across Main Street three years later. A variety of shops used this building over the years. In 1965 owners closed the original front door and cut an interior passage on the east into the building next door.
- ***The Union Block (1895) 106-108 W. Main***
T. Butler and Dr. L. J. Leech agreed to jointly finance this structure in 1895. The west half of the building housed a meat market on the first floor and the lodge of the Modern Woodmen of America on the second. The east side was rented to Bert Gill for the new Union Block Drug Store. Since then the building has housed several shops, cafes, and offices.
- ***Earliest Citizens' Savings Bank (1898) 110 W. Main***
In 1898 the Citizens' Savings Bank moved into this new brick building. The principle shareholders used local material dealers and contractors for construction. The front featured a dazzling 8 by 11 foot plate glass window. Since 1909 this building has been occupied by small businesses.
- ***Grimmell Building (1869) 112 W. Main***
Behind the brick facade stands the wood-frame building of Edwin Grimmell's drug store and H. T. Hollingsworth's watch repair. This building, the oldest surviving store, may date back to 1869. A series of jewelers and druggists occupied the building until 1924 when Fred Albin bought it for his meat market. He added the back room and brick facade.
- ***Old Post Office (1907) 116 W. Main***
Caleb H. Wickersham, postmaster of West Branch, contracted construction of this building in 1906. One year later, Wickersham signed the federal government to a 10 year lease to house the post office. The post office was relocated in 1928 and in the ensuing years the building housed a number of different businesses.

- ***Enlow Building (1904) 124 W. Main Street***
In 1904 Huldah Enlow donated the land and building for a public library. Later, an anonymous monetary gift financed construction of an expansion. In 1963, the front entrance was enclosed and in 1974, the basement was converted into a children's library. It remained a library until 1993.

WEST MAIN STREET, NORTH SIDE

- ***Grunwell-Crew Building (1894) 109 W. Main***
This is one of the older storefronts remaining along West Main Street, having been built shortly after the land was deeded in 1894. C. M. Paulsen had a music store here until a harness shop occupied the building in about 1910. It became a variety store in 1960. In recent years it has been the home of the West Branch Heritage Museum.
- ***Patterson-Leech Building (1890) 107 W. Main***
In March 1890 Lavina Patterson opened a millinery shop here and lived with her family upstairs. Dr. Leech moved his medical offices here after fire damaged the buildings across the street in 1895. It remained Dr. Leech's office until his death in 1937.
- ***Veterans Memorial Building (1947) 105 W. Main***
The War Memorial Building, built in 1948, honors veterans of World War II. The first floor served as the post office and the local American Legion used the basement and upstairs. An antique shop replaced the post office in 1970.
- ***Old West Branch State Bank (1916) 101 W. Main***
This large brick structure, built in 1916, housed the West Branch State Bank (previously named West Branch Bank). It replaced a bank building (circa 1877) which stood on the same site, but was razed to make room for the new, larger building. The bank took temporary quarters across the street during construction. It then occupied this building until 1974. Fred Albin rented the back for his meat market until 1924. The West Branch Telephone Company shared the second floor with Hubbard & Hubbard Chiropractors.

NORTH DOWNEY STREET, EAST SIDE

- ***Opera Block (1895) 109-107 N. Downey***
Charles A. Macomber constructed the most ambitious project of the era in 1895. The two-story Opera Block is still the largest commercial building downtown. Three stores shared the first floor. The top floor included the Masonic Lodge and a 500 seat theater with a 20 by 40 foot stage. "The Pastime" motion picture house took the upper space in 1912. A woodworking and antique store occupied the first floor prior to its restoration in 1986.
- ***Leech-Grunwell Garage (1911) 105 N. Downey***
Bert Leech and Harry Grunwell entered a partnership to build a garage and plumbing shop here in 1911. The members of the local Masonic Lodge helped construct this two-story brick building that would house the garage and plumbing shop on the street level and the lodge rooms on the second floor.
- ***Leech Building (1912) 103 N. Downey***
Charles F. Schroeder had this building constructed in 1912 for his men's clothing store. The modern store boasted large display windows and electric lights. Since that time, several shops have used the building and made alterations to its interior.
- ***Citizens' Saving Bank (1908) 101 N. Downey***
In 1909 Citizens' Savings Bank relocated here on the northeast corner of North Downey and Main Streets. Surviving the collapse of farm prices in 1921, but not the Great Depression, it was absorbed in 1934 by the West Branch State Bank creating the First State Bank.

EAST MAIN STREET, NORTH SIDE

- ***Rich and Bailey Block (1895) 109 E. Main***
This building's exterior has had only minor alterations since its construction in 1895. Originally Rich's Golden Rule general store occupied one side of the building and Dr. J. I. Bailey's medical offices occupied the other. Over the years a bakery, dry cleaning and men's clothing store, furnace and tin shop, antique shop, and grocery store were located here.

The West Branch National Historic District



“A Journey Back in Time”

Welcome to West Branch, Iowa,
the birthplace of Herbert Clark Hoover,
31st president of the United States

Some Background

On April 13, 1987, the U.S. Department of the Interior added 14 commercial buildings located in West Branch, Iowa, to the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic District under the designation: West Branch Commercial District. In 1995, two additional buildings were added, the Enlow Building and the Rich and Bailey Block. While the district includes fine examples of turn-of-the-century commercial architecture, these 14 buildings represent more than a lesson in building styles. Collectively, they trace the period of economic prosperity that saw downtown West Branch evolve from a ramshackle assortment of wooden storefronts into a thriving commercial center anchored by ornate brick business blocks.

The West Branch Commercial District was the 40th Historic District within Iowa to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

You are about to embark on a journey back in time. You'll explore an era when Corn was King and Midwestern farmers—and the rural communities like West Branch that relied upon their trade—were basking in the economic prosperity that accompanied what historians have termed the “Golden Era of American Agriculture.” Between the 1870s, when railroad expansion linked Corn Belt farmers with growing urban markets such as Chicago and St. Louis, and 1916, when World War I burst the bubble of farm prosperity, West Branch was among the Midwestern farming communities that grew and flourished. The 16 buildings along West Main and North Downey streets that are included in the West Branch Historic District are tangible economic indicators of the greatest period of prosperity in American agricultural history.



- A Crook's Hotel (1870)
- B West Branch Bank (1875)
- C Union Block (1895)
- D Earliest Citizen's Savings Bank (1898)
- E Grinnell Building (1869)
- F Old Post Office (1907)
- G Enlow Building (1904)
- H Grunwell-Crew Building (1894)
- I Patterson-Leech Building (1890)
- J Veterans Memorial Building (1947)
- K Old West Branch State Bank (1916)
- L Citizen's Savings Bank (1908)
- M Leech Building (1912)
- N Leech-Grunwell Garage (1911)
- O Opera Block (1895)
- P Rich and Bailey Block (1895)