

## CUMBERLAND TALES: THE STORY OF CORDELL HULL

By Dr. Jeanette Keith:

Cordell Hull, the Upper Cumberland's only Nobel Peace Prize winner, was born in a log cabin in what is now Pickett County.

He served as judge, congressman and senator before Franklin Roosevelt made him Secretary of State in 1933. He held that office through the Great Depression and most of World War II.



Born in 1871, Hull heard many stories about the brutalities of the Civil War in the Upper Cumberland. As secretary of state, Hull focused on trade treaties designed to create economic links that might prevent future wars. His part in creating the United Nations, which grew from the same concerns, earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1945.

Hull was born in poverty, but did not grow up poor. His father got into the timber business. Hull and his brothers rode their father's huge log rafts down the Cumberland to Nashville. His father became wealthy, and assured that Cordell received a good education. As a congressman, the rich man's son was instrumental in creating taxes on income and inheritance.

Hull's private life, although well-organized and proper, did not always follow the conventions of his time. For example, in 1917 Hull, then 45, surprised his friends by marrying Frances Witz Whitney, a divorcee of Jewish ancestry he met in a Washington hotel. While in the capitol the Hulls lived in hotel suites.

As secretary of state, Hull refused to attend embassy dinner parties. When he had to, he sat at the table and conversed, but refused to eat. This may have been related to his health. Although he did not make it public, insiders knew that Hull had tuberculosis.

Although respected, Hull never became part of Roosevelt's White House team, and was often left out of major foreign policy decisions. However, he did participate in negotiations with Japan, and in November 1941 delivered the "Hull Note" demanding that the Japanese pull their troops out of China-- a note that the Japanese considered an ultimatum.

On Dec. 7, 1941, Secretary of State Hull had a meeting scheduled with Japanese diplomats. By the time they arrived Hull had heard about Pearl Harbor. Seething, he dismissed the diplomatic note they presented as "infamous falsehood" and showed them the door.

People said that Hull had cursed the envoys out, Tennessee mountain style. He insisted that he had done no such thing. However, a staffer in the department reported that as the doors closed behind the Japanese, Hull muttered, "Scoundrels! Piss ants!"

Over the course of his career, Washington became Hull's home. When he died in 1955, he was buried in the Episcopal National Cathedral, a very long way, in time and geography, from the banks of the Upper Cumberland.

"Cumberland Tales," created by Calvin Dickinson and Michael Birdwell and sponsored by the Cookeville History Museum, welcomes any tale of this region's history. For more information, contact Calvin Dickinson at [cdickinson@tntech.edu](mailto:cdickinson@tntech.edu) or Michael Birdwell at [birdie@tntech.edu](mailto:birdie@tntech.edu).

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