

## Cordell Hull and the 65th Anniversary of the United Nations

*By Robin Peeler Wooten*

The glorious turning and falling of leaves, the cool nip in the air, and the harvest of gourds and pumpkins are but a few of the seasonal highlights of autumn in Tennessee. Some interesting historical dates including a famous birthday and an international anniversary also exist to make this time of the year unique.

Cordell Hull, the gentleman who served as U.S. Secretary of State from 1933-1944 and became a Nobel Laureate in 1945, was born in a log cabin in rural Pickett (then Overton) County on October 2, 1871, on the heels of the American Civil War. As the nation reunited and recovered, Cordell Hull grew up during the Reconstruction playing with his brothers on the farm, following his father William "Billy" Hull down to the moonshine still in mouth of nearby Bunkum Cave, and later running logs down the Cumberland River to Nashville.



Young Cordell grew to have a strong affinity for reading and yearned to learn about the world and its affairs. Receiving encouragement from his parents to pursue his education, Hull's father built the local Willow Grove schoolhouse and later sent Cordell to receive schooling at Montvale Academy in adjacent Celina, National Normal School in Kentucky, and National Normal School in Ohio. His father Billy once said of him, "Cord was always just like a grown man, from the time he could walk." At 16 years old, Cordell once secretly put up his mule team and went over to a neighborhood schoolhouse and made his first political speech. This was the first of many public speaking engagements that would become an integral part of his career.

After successfully completing the law program at Cumberland University in Lebanon, at the age of 18, Hull established a law practice in nearby Celina. At the young age of 21, he was elected as a member of the Tennessee House of Representatives. He heeded his nation's call to serve in the Spanish–American War where he served a Captain of the Fourth Tennessee Regiment in Cuba from 1898-1899. Upon his return he resumed his law practice and was appointed circuit judge of the Fifth Judicial District in 1903. In 1907, he began his federal career at the age of 35 with a successful campaign and election as U.S. Representative for the Tennessee Fourth Congressional District. This was a position he would retain for a total of 23 years with a short break 1921-1923 due to the Harding Landslide of 1920.

Hull's years in Congress focused on taxation and tariff programs, and he called for a reduction in trade barriers. In his early years, while running around with his hero Congressman Benjamin McMillan, Hull became a firm believer that the world would never be a prosperous and peaceful place until nations brought down tariff barriers that blocked interchange of goods. During his early tenure in Congress he served on the Ways and Means Committee, authored the first Federal Income Tax Bill, the Revised Act, and the Federal and State Inheritance Tax Law. The patriotic Hull was quoted as saying, "Every good citizen should be willing to devote a brief time during some one day in the year, when necessary, to the making up of a listing of his income for taxes to contribute to his government, not the scriptural tithing but a small percentage of his net profits." Until his death, Hull was very deliberate about doing just that.

In 1917, he quietly married Rose Frances Witz in a weekend ceremony and the couple returned to work the following Monday. Frances was from Virginia and the daughter of a banking and textile heir who served in the Civil War under Stonewall Jackson. A graduate of Mary Baldwin Seminary (now College), Frances later served as the first president of the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace Foundation. The devoted couple worked tirelessly their entire lives on pursuits in the interest of the nation.

At the tail end of WWI, in 1918, Hull had the opportunity to meet and become friends with Sgt. Alvin C. York who was returning with honors from his famous battle in the Argonne Forest of France. Representative Hull met the popular Sgt. York in New York City upon York's return from the war. The two mountain men had much in common, not only were they both from the great state of Tennessee, but were born and raised just 20 miles apart in the rural north central region of the state. Tennessee State Legislature established the Cordell Hull Birthplace & Memorial Association (now Cordell Hull Birthplace State Historic Park) under Alvin York's original chairmanship in 1953.

In 1930, Hull made the transition from House of Representatives to the United States Senate. By this time he

had gained quite a reputation as a supporter of low tariffs and free trade. He had gained the attention of newly elected President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933, and was offered the prestigious position of Secretary of State in Roosevelt's cabinet. On March 4, 1933, Hull resigned his seat as senator and began his new position working directly for the president. In this role, Hull emphasized international economic policy and was responsible for reciprocal trade agreements with other countries.

During Hull's early years as Secretary of State he led the American delegation to a variety of international affair conferences in London, Montevideo, Uruguay, Buenos Aires, Lima, and Havana. During this time he implemented President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy that was intended to promote good relations with neighboring Latin American countries. A staunch supporter of the policy, Hull stated, "No country has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another."

World War II officially broke out in September 1939 with the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany. In November 1941, Hull entered into talks with the Japanese Ambassador Nomura in hopes of averting or postponing what appeared to be an imminent outbreak of war in the Pacific. On December 7, 1941, Japan made a devastating surprise attack on the U.S. Navy base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, killing over 2,400 U.S. personnel, wounding nearly 1,300, and destroying a vast amount of military equipment and buildings. At this time the United States officially entered into WWII. President Roosevelt proclaimed December 7 as "a day that will live in infamy."

Immediately following the U.S. entry into WWII, President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull envisioned a world where there would be no Third World War and set forth to create a functioning agency to facilitate such a vision. Beginning in 1942, Secretary Hull and the State Department spent a majority of their time laying the groundwork for the United Nations Organization. The proposed UNO was to be given authority to continue and strengthen peace and cooperation among nations, as well as establish legal, economic, and military power to achieve those goals. Once in place, the UNO would replace the beleaguered and failing League of Nations that was created in the aftermath of WWI. By August 1943, the State Department under Cordell Hull's leadership drafted a document titled "Charter of the United Nations" that later became the basis of proposals submitted by the United States.

The road that led to the signing of the Charter of the United Nations (UN) was long and winding. The formal idea of the UN was agreed upon at the two wartime Allied conferences in 1943. The 3rd Moscow Conference was attended by Sec. Hull and involved an elaborate trip around the globe and resulted in the Moscow Declaration. The Tehran Conference was attended by the "Big Three" Allied leaders themselves, Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom.

The Dumbarton Oaks Conference in Washington, D.C., took place from August to October 1944 and included representatives from France, the Republic of China, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the USSR. Discussions at the conference included what nations would be invited to become members, the formation of the United Nations Security Council, and the right of veto afforded to permanent members of the Security Council. Following the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, Secretary Hull resigned effective December 1, 1944, due to his ill health and doctor's recommendation.

During the Yalta Conference in February 1945 and the San Francisco Conference in April through June 1945, the text of the United Nations Charter was finalized. Although retired, the dedicated Hull served as both a member of and senior advisor to the American delegation at the San Francisco Conference.

WWII ended on September 2, 1945, when Japan signed surrender documents aboard the USS Missouri. Shortly after that, the United Nations came into existence formally on October 24, 1945, with ratification of the five members of the Security Council – Republic of China, France, USSR, United States, and the United Kingdom and the majority of the other 46 signatories.

President Roosevelt nominated Hull for the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in creating the United Nations and coined the phrase "Father of the United Nations" to describe Hull. On December 10, 1954, Secretary Hull was awarded the coveted Nobel Prize for Peace. In his acceptance speech Hull wrote: "Under the ominous shadow which the Second World War and its attendant circumstances have cast on the world, peace has become as essential to civilized existence as the air we breathe is to life itself."

While United Nations Day is celebrated every year on October 24, this year marks the 65th anniversary of the UN. Today the organization has 192 member states and fulfills its mission by providing a variety of services to

the world in such areas as sustainable development, disaster relief, counter terrorism, international health, clearing landmines, expanding food production, peace and security, and human rights. To learn more about the UN go to [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

On a local level, the United Nations Association of the United States of America provides outreach and understanding about UN work around the world. To learn more go to [www.unausa.org](http://www.unausa.org). The local chapter in Tennessee is the Nashville Cordell Hull Chapter that was the first local chapter in the nation, organized in 1945. The group hosts a seminar series, spring and fall luncheons, performs education about the UN, and much more. You may learn more about the Nashville Cordell Hull Chapter at [www.una-nashville.org](http://www.una-nashville.org).

Former Secretary of State Cordell Hull's birthplace cabin has been restored and is part of the Tennessee State Park system. You may visit the cabin and see many personal effects from Hull's life on display in the park museum. In June 2010, a new state-of-the-art Artifact Storage Facility was completed as an addition to the Cordell Hull Museum and houses Hull's complete collection. To learn more about Cordell Hull Birthplace State Historic Park in Byrdstown visit [www.tnstateparks.com/CordellHull](http://www.tnstateparks.com/CordellHull) or contact the park by calling 931-864-3247.

Learn more about Friends of Cordell Hull at [www.friendsofcordellhull.org](http://www.friendsofcordellhull.org).

**(Park Manager of Cordell Hull Birthplace and Sgt. Alvin C. York State Historic Parks, Robin Peeler Wooten also serves on the board of directors for the Nashville Cordell Hull Chapter of the United Nations Association of the United States of America.)**