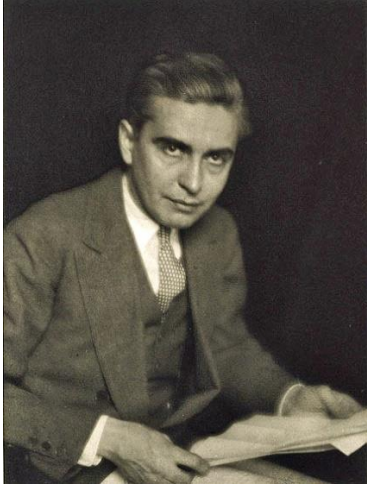


# Henry Blackman Sell

<p>Henry Blackman Sell (November 14, 1889 – October 24, 1974), trim and dapper, was a near legendary figure in the publishing, society, and food worlds.</p> <p>Henry B. Sell was a fascinating person. Among other things, he was the first to publish literary reviews as part of a newspaper; the first to write a popular book of interior decoration; the first to make a vitamin-mineral product available to the general public; was the editor of two world-class fashion magazines; developed nutritious food products that were sent in every WW II POW package and every CARE package; was a good friend of the Romani community; and was famous for hosting fabulous parties!</p>		<h2>Henry Blackman Sell</h2>  <p>Henry B. Sell, 1925</p>	
<h3><u>Contents</u></h3>		<h3>Personal Information</h3>	
Background and early life		Born	November 14, 1889 Whitewater, Wisconsin
Career		Died	October 24, 1974 (age 84 years) New York City, NY
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References		Spouse	Maud Ann O'Harrow
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## Background and early life

Henry Blackman Sell, was born Nov. 14, 1889 in Whitewater, Wisconsin to Henry Thorne Sell and Mary B. Blackman.<sup>[1].<sup>1</sup></sup> He had one brother, Charles J. Sell, who died young. Henry B. Sell was a kinsman of William F. Cody, the frontiersman and showman known as Buffalo Bill.<sup>2</sup>

Henry B. Sell came from a long line of ministers. For example, his first American ancestor was Reverend Adam Blakeman (Blackman) who, in 1639, led his flock from Derbyshire, England to Stratford in the Connecticut Colony, where he served as the first minister of the church until his death in 1665.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Henry's father, Henry Thorne Sell, was a minister. Henry T. Sell wrote many religious works, the most famous of which is *Bible Studies in the Life of Paul; Historical and Constructive* (1904),<sup>4</sup> which is still available in print.

For high school, Henry B. Sell attended Culver Military Academy, in Culver, Indiana. At Culver, Henry was the editor of the school newspaper and the leader of the debating society, among other things. However, he never graduated! After five years in attendance, at age 19 years, (in 1909) Henry went on to other pursuits. Upon Henry's departure from the academy, the

commanding general said “No one here has any worry about Henry’s future. Henry [just] doesn’t seem to have interest in organized information.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Career**

Henry Blackman Sell had a long and successful career in a wide variety of fields.

1910: Cub newspaper reporter in Fort Wayne, Indiana<sup>6</sup>

1910: Stringer for *Billboard* magazine, also in Fort Wayne, where interviewed people in vaudeville and in the theater. In this capacity he met future stars such as Will Rogers, W.C. Fields, Eddie Cantor, and Eve Tanguay.<sup>7</sup>

1912: Reporter at the Indianapolis *Star*, where he met and became a friend of “Queen Zenora” the self-proclaimed leader of the Indianapolis Gypsies (Romani).<sup>8</sup>

1914: Wrote the book *What Is It All About “An explanation of the New Theatre Movement that explains”*.<sup>9</sup>

1915: Became the literary editor at the *Chicago Daily News*, and even at that time (at age 25), he was regarded by many as a pivotal figure in American criticism. “When the *Daily News* page was at its height, H.L. Mencken called it ‘the only civilized book section in this Presbyterian satrapy’”.<sup>10</sup>

1915: Became an influential figure in interior decoration with his publication, with his wife, of *Good Taste in Home Furnishing*,<sup>111213</sup> the first book on home decorating to become a popular success, with sales of over 100,000 copies.

1920: Hired by William Randolph Hearst to be the editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar*,<sup>14</sup> which he converted from a “scrawny undernourished spinster, gasping for breath”<sup>15</sup> into a world-class fashion magazine. In 1948, it was said of Sell that he was “the inventor of the fashion magazine as we know it”.<sup>16</sup>

1927: Became assistant to the chairman of the board of the Butterick Publishing Company, in which capacity he became the editor-at-large of the company’s magazines—*The Delineator*, *Adventure Magazine*, and *Everybody's Magazine*.<sup>17</sup>

1928: While still working for Butterick Publishing, bought and further developed the Blaker Advertising Agency, with clients such as the Waldorf-Astoria, Elizabeth Arden, and American Radiator, among many others.<sup>18</sup>

1931 to 1935: With the Blaker Advertising Agency, did the advertising and promotion for the just-built Castle Harbor Hotel in Bermuda. In doing so he transformed the empty (due to the Great Depression) hotel into a very popular and fashionable destination hotel.<sup>1920</sup>

1936: Developed *Vitamins Plus*, which was the first vitamin-mineral product to be sold directly to the public.<sup>21222324</sup> Through his unique sales approach—through fashionable department stores rather than pharmacies—and through his massive advertising campaign, for the first time, made the public vitamin conscious. This company was sold in 1940 to the Vick Chemical Company, makers of Vicks VapoRub.

1940 Became a Special Assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture for nutrition<sup>25</sup>

1941: Developed a highly nutritional liver pâté product. This pâté was shipped in every POW package during World War II and in every CARE package after the war. It was also sold to the general public as Sells Liver *Pâté*.<sup>262728</sup> (As of 2020, Sells Liver *Pâté* is still available under its original name 80 years later!<sup>29</sup>)

1949: Returned to the Hearst fold by becoming the editor of *Town & Country* magazine. Remained editor of *Town & Country* for 15 years, until 1964 (at age 75), at which time he became editor-at-large.<sup>30</sup>

1950: Worked with the U.S. Navy to develop nutritious, processed foods for submarines<sup>3132</sup>

1955: Wrote *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*,<sup>[6]</sup> a history of his kinsman, William F. Cody, "Buffalo Bill"<sup>33</sup>

1972: Returned to *Harper's Bazaar* as editor-at-large<sup>34</sup>

## **Awards**

In 1926, Sell was awarded the French *Chevalier* (Knight) Legion of Honor in recognition of his outstanding contribution to France through the many articles on France that he published in *Harper's Bazaar* magazine from 1920 to 1926.<sup>1</sup>

In 1957, Sell was awarded the French *Officier* (Officer) Legion of Honor in recognition of his outstanding contribution to France through the many articles on France that he published in *Town & Country* magazine from 1949 to 1957.<sup>2</sup>

In 1956, Sell was awarded the Italian E.N.I.T.<sup>3</sup> Gold Metal in recognition of "outstanding contributions this past year to this country's knowledge of Italy and its people" through the many articles on Italy that he published in *Town & Country* magazine from 1949 to the mid-1950s.

## **Some insights into his character**

In taking the position at *Harper's Bazaar* in 1920, Henry Sell moved to New York City, where he lived for the rest of his life. And in fact, from shortly after 1920 until the time of his death in 1974 (more than 50 years!), he lived in the same place: 320 East 57<sup>th</sup> Street.

"In World War II [Henry Sell] spearheaded a drive to improve the quality of children's lunches. Thousands of mothers were working in defense plants, and their children had cold lunches or none at all. A bill was introduced in the House of Representatives to provide inexpensive nourishing lunches, but was defeated, 136 to 54, in March of 1944. Outraged, Mr. Sell organized a national publicity and lobbying campaign in the districts of the 136 Congressional dissidents: Two months later the bill was reintroduced and passed, 113 to 54."<sup>3536</sup>

"A physical culture nut, he daily gulped an assortment of vitamin pills, yeast cakes, and wheat germ oil. Every day he upended himself for 15 minutes on an inclining board, every week he walked 20 miles (measured by a pedometer lashed to his ankle), and once a week he went to the gym and let Philadelphia Jack O'Brien teach him boxing and deep breathing. Then, when he had

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<sup>1</sup> Leckie, Janet T. (1970). *A Talent for Living: The Story of Henry Sell, An American Original*, Hawthorn Books, Inc. Publishers, New York, pp. 225-226.

<sup>2</sup> Leckie, Janet T. (1970). *A Talent for Living: The Story of Henry Sell, An American Original*, Hawthorn Books, Inc. Publishers, New York, pp. 225-226.

<sup>3</sup> Ente Nazionale Italiano per il Turismo (Italian National Agency for Tourism)

nothing to do, he worked out on trapezes and flying rings that he installed in his huge apartment.”<sup>[37]</sup><sup>37</sup>

Henry was a renowned party giver. “At them, he always had Gypsies, singing and dancing, and he always paid the Gypsies in gold coins—from a bag he carried. Once, when he was giving a huge party on the [luxury ocean liner] SS *Île de France* he didn't want his guests to walk the length of the pier, so he phoned Atlantic City and had 20 of the boardwalk wheelchairs—and their pushers—sent to the pier. "It was a great idea," he said, "because everybody was fresh and lots of fun when they got to the ship. They weren't all tuckered out from the walk." <sup>[37]</sup>

Henry Sell loved the circus, and he would go whenever it was in town. He held #1 Pass to the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, given to him by John Ringling North. There was a special entrance to Madison Square Garden for pass holders. And Henry would sit in John Ringling North's private box whenever he went, which was frequently. Sell especially enjoyed the trained dog act. Sometimes he would pop in for a short time just to see that act.

As Editor of *Town & Country* magazine, he had a tremendous power of the pen. When he spoke, people listened. For example, one time he wrote an article on Venice. He said, sure, Venice smells in the summer. However, it is so beautiful, you must go there. Tourism flourished greatly after that article appeared. And the next time he visited Venice, Henry was presented with the “Key to the City” by the mayor.

In 1948, it was written of Henry Sell: “For spiritual nourishment, he attends, in season, a concert and an opera a week. He reads for an hour or so every night before going to sleep. His schedule calls for one book of American history a month. He also takes a swim, a massage, and a dancing lesson every week. On Saturday he resets the pedometer he always wears and pledges himself to walk at least 20 miles in the coming week. He likewise allocates a certain amount of time to the trapezes and flying rings he has in his apartment.”<sup>38</sup>

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