

1919: CHICAGO

Introduction by L. Brent Bohlke

Henry Blackman Sell (1889-1974) was literary editor of the Chicago Daily News from 1916 to 1920. He then went on to edit Harper's Bazaar (1920-26), served in the Roosevelt administration during World War II, was editor of Town and Country magazine (1949-72), and returned to Harper's until his death in 1974. While at Harper's he made the decision in 1925 to publish Anita Loos's Gentlemen Prefer Blondes in six installments, which began its crazy success story.

In Chicago he was a part of the literary scene that brought the Windy City to the forefront and included such people as Carl Sandburg, Floyd Dell, Ben Hecht, Burton Rascoe, Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, and others. The literary pages of the Chicago Tribune and Daily News rivaled their New York counterparts.

Sell visited New York and interviewed Cather at her apartment for his "A Page about Books and the People Who Write Them." He was certainly one of the first to call Cather the "Foremost American Woman Novelist." Although Sell says he learned about "her opinions on the Cather method of novel writing," his article focuses more upon her life and personality. It does show, however, that she had already formed the opinion about Alexander's Bridge which she expressed in the 1922 preface to the new edition of her first novel. Cather tore out the entire top half of the page containing the article and sent it to her parents (Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection).

A large portion of Sell's article was reprinted as a part of an article entitled "A Freedom in Her Book: Willa Cather's Life on a Nebraska Ranch May Be the Reason," which appeared in the Kansas City Times on 18 March 1919.