

Albert Morch

Henry Sell, American Original

"THE JUNIOR LEAGUE to my mind is the beginning and the end of Society of the kind I like to talk about," said Henry Sell, arbiter emeritus and editor-at-large of the Social Set's National Geographic — Town & Country Magazine.

"The League serves a useful purpose and wields great influence because its members have husbands, fathers and brothers who are important people in their communities and, as a result, can really get things done," said Sell, a spry 82-year-old kinsman of Buffalo Bill Cody. Sell's alert blue eyes, partially concealed by bushy brows, indicate he likes to accomplish things himself.

Editor of Town & Country for 22 years, his romance with the League is no overnight affair. He once had a national in-depth study done on the JL and found such wide differences from chapter to chapter in its structure and objectives that he had Town & Country prepare a guidelines booklet embodying League concepts. It was printed and presented free to the League and, said Sell, in a chat at the Sheraton-Palace, is still in use today.

FAR FROM being stodgy, Sell wistfully misses some of the shenanigans of the late super-sophisticate Lucius Beebe, a regular contributor to the magazine and a good friend.

"I was involved in a book "Buffalo Bill and the Wild West" and it was to be launched in Cody, Wyo. I invited Lucius and he nearly missed the celebration, explaining he had to drive 2000 miles out of his way to avoid areas where Prohibition was in effect. Also he had brought his dog T-Bone Towser along and T-Bone had a liking for elk steak, which caused further detours."

Sell is an American Original himself. Born in White-water, Wis., the bulk of his education came from his grandmother who taught him useful things like sewing, reading the Bible, cooking and learning how to sleep.

"She taught me a valuable knock — how to get to sleep in two minutes. I sleep often, but short, about 20 minutes at a time, resulting in greater alertness when it is needed. However, I once did a study of the sleep habits of 400 prominent people and no pattern evolved. Adam Gimbel once told me the reason for his great success was his insomnia."

The Sell philosophy is "Get out when things are getting good," and reading over his recently-published biography, "A Talent for Living," written by a colleague of many years, Dr. Janet Leckie, one can understand his frequent occupational leaps.

Young Sell worked as a reporter, book editor, glove salesman and wrote a best-selling book on interior decorating after working a few months in the furniture department of Marshall Field in Chicago. He was named editor of Harper's Bazaar in 1919, but left in 1929 to pursue a number of ideas, using his own advertising agency as a base of operations.

FOR EXAMPLE, because his friend Dr. Leckie needed several vitamins and there was no multi-vitamin capsule, Sell created one.

A casual remark at a dinner party by a ranking British official at the start of World War II about the need for a nutritious concentrated meat product inspired Sell. He created Sell's Liver Pate, still on the market, but being produced by the William Underwood Co. (The pate was used in the International Red Cross POW packages and Sell's involvement resulted in him being one of the creators of the CARE package.)

Sell and Anne, his wife of 54 years, have lived comfortably since 1926 in a 100-unit apartment building they own in New York at 57th Street and Second Avenue.

"However, I have this passion for Italy. For a number of years I've been going four or five times a year. My ambition is to die in Venice and have a Venetian funeral procession, with splendidly uniformed gondoliers and flower-garlanded boats and have my ashes planted on the Isle of the Dead." For an American Original, the only way to go.



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