



## The Illustrator's Pencil: John Falter from Nebraska to the *Saturday Evening Post*

(Article begins on page 3 below.)

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Article Summary: Born in Plattsmouth and raised in Falls City, John Falter became one of the nation's most successful illustrators because he knew how to capture the spirit of the times. His illustrations for ads, articles, and magazine covers provide a window into mid-century American culture.

### Cataloging Information:

Names: John Falter, Alice Cleaver, J M "Ding" Darling, Monte Crews, Margaret "Maggie" Huggins, Elizabeth "Boo" Wiley

Place Names: Plattsmouth and Falls City, Nebraska; Kansas City, Missouri; New York City, New York

Keywords: Falter's Clothing Store, Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI), Art Students League of New York, Grand Central Art School, *Saturday Evening Post*, "pulp," "slicks," Society of Illustrators, American Artists Company, Young & Rubicam

Photographs / Images: Falter family portrait; scrapbook page showing Falter as a student at the Kansas City Art Institute and the telegram announcing his scholarship to the Art Students League of New York; Falter posing as a cowboy; Falter posing for "Hearts and Swords"; Falter in his studio, working on the illustration for "Have a Good Time, Dear"; Falter working while his daughter tries to distract him

Falter Images Reproduced in the Article: "Nebraska at Christmas," *Saturday Evening Post* cover, December 12, 1946; scrapbook drawings, 1925-1926; "Down Thru the Ages," *Falls City Journal* cartoon, June 1, 1926; "Caleb Snort—Rushville's Leading Hardware Merchant"; drawing on George H Falter business letterhead; painting completed at the Art Students League of New York; "Girl with the Dreaded 'O-mouth'; sketch that may have been intended for a pulp cover; pulp magazine cover, *Western Story*, March 26, 1932; cover for *The Master Detective*, October 1933; *Liberty Magazine* cover, 1933; "Celebrity" illustration, *McCall's*, 1939; "Hearts and Swords," *Liberty Magazine*, 1933; "Have a Good Time, Dear," *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1939; "Four Star hit with a Lone-Star man," ad for Four Roses whiskey; "Wife Beater!" ad for Cambell's soups, 1936; painting of a parachute rigger for a Navy WAVES poster; poster from the 1940 Pall Mall ad campaign; "If you tell where he's going . . . He may never get there!" poster; "Prisoners," 1943; "Stay on the job!" poster; "By His Deeds Measure Yours,"

1942; Clark Gable cover for *Look*, March 23, 1943; painting of Grammercy Park; “Millinery Shop,” sketch and *Saturday Evening Post* cover, March 10, 1945; “Lover’s Lane, Falls City, Nebraska,” preliminary sketch and cover, *Saturday Evening Post*, May 24, 1947; sketch and self-portrait cover for *Newsweek*, December 22, 1952; “Storm Blowing In,” sketch and *Saturday Evening Post* cover, April 26, 1952; “Choosing a New Suit,” *Saturday Evening Post* cover, November 20, 1948; photo, sketch and *Saturday Evening Post* cover, January 8, 1955; 2 photos and *Saturday Evening Post* cover, November 9, 1957; Falter’s stepchildren and the 1959 Johnson & Johnson ad for which they modeled; “Anyway, you didn’t burn the Schlitz” ad, 1952; General Motors Annual Report illustration, 1952; “Air Travel, Like Football, Belongs to Everybody,” American Airlines ad, 1946; bird’s-eye-view of Park Street, Boston, *Saturday Evening Post* cover, January 7, 1961







# THE ILLUSTRATOR'S PENCIL: John Falter from Nebraska to the *Saturday Evening Post*

BY DEB ARENZ

John Falter was a Nebraska boy who made good. His artistic ability, drive, and genial nature helped him become one of the most successful American illustrators from the 1930s through the 1960s. His clients included such advertising giants as General Motors, Packard, Pall Mall, and Campbell's Soup. His art graced the pages of pulp classics, mainstream magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *McCall's*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*, for which he completed 129 published covers. While he lived most of his adult life in New York City and Pennsylvania, the influence of his Nebraskan and Midwestern roots can be seen in his artwork. People and places he knew and remembered were common models or subject matter, and many pieces have Midwestern themes.

This article is adapted from an exhibit of the same title that opens at the Nebraska History Museum in Lincoln on April 6, 2011, and runs through August 9, 2013. The exhibit features items from Falter's own studio, the contents of which were donated to the Nebraska State Historical Society by his widow, Mary Elizabeth Falter Jones, and select pieces from other collections. The following pages contain selected images from the exhibit, revealing the creative spirit behind the illustrator's pencil.

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*"I never really left Falls City. Every chance I could get, I would bring my family back here so they could see where my roots were planted. I love this state...I'm so much a Nebraskan that I'm thrilled when my airplane crosses Nebraska on a transcontinental flight and I can look down on those tall bluffs around Plattsmouth where I was born."*

*—John Falter<sup>1</sup>*

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Falter painted *Falls City, Nebraska at Christmas* for the cover of the December 21, 1946, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Unless otherwise noted, all items in this exhibit were donated by Mary Elizabeth Falter Jones, and are part of the Nebraska State Historical Society's John P. Falter Collection.

NSHS 10645-4562



### Falls City to Kansas City

John Philip Falter was born in Plattsmouth, Nebraska, in 1910 to a close-knit, artistic family. In 1916 parents George and Margaret moved John and his younger sister Suzanne to Falls City, where his father opened Falter's Clothing Store. Falter's family recognized and encouraged his artistic talent early on.<sup>2</sup> During World War I, his grandmother sold stamps for the war effort by offering people who bought them Falter's drawing of the Kaiser riding a motorcycle. At seven Falter was enrolled in an art class taught by noted regional painter Alice Cleaver. He disliked the discipline of the class and soon was forging Cleaver's signature onto his own drawings so he could skip class without his mother knowing.<sup>3</sup>

As a teenager Falter was interested in cartoons, movies, and jazz.<sup>4</sup> His passion for jazz was lifelong—he became an accomplished self-taught musician—and surfaced occasionally as a theme

in his paintings.<sup>5</sup> As a young artist he was influenced by many of the popular cartoonists of the day: John Held, Jr., James Montgomery Flagg, Russell Patterson, Dorman Smith, and J. M. "Ding" Darling.<sup>6</sup>

Falter's father took him to visit Darling, a syndicated cartoonist with the *Des Moines Register*, to investigate a career in cartooning after John graduated from high school in 1928. In later years Falter recalled: "Ding took one look at what I had done and said, 'This boy should be an illustrator not a cartoonist, because he doesn't caricature his work enough. He draws too well.'"<sup>7</sup> At Darling's suggestion, John enrolled in the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI). His family followed him and eventually relocated in Atchison, Kansas.

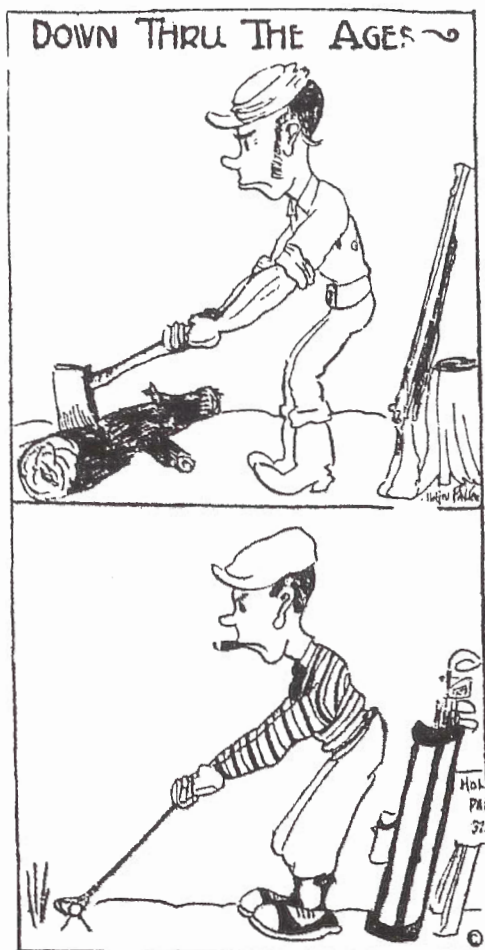
At KCAI Falter studied under illustrator Monte Crews and learned the two fundamentals of illustration: depicting dramatic moments from text and conveying the meaning instantly to the viewer. Crews discouraged the use of photographs in setting the stage for a painting, thinking the resulting work would lack motion and life. He instead taught his students to use live models and props. Falter later said: "Monte led me into Howard Pyle, N. C. Wyeth, all the great illustrators. He gave me a sense of what could be done with illustration and I got really interested."<sup>8</sup>

Falter family portrait;  
John is on the left.  
NSHS RG4121-1-1



Scrapbook compiled in 1925 and 1926 that  
showcases John's natural, yet still developing, talent.  
NSHS RG4121.AM





Falter's talent was appreciated beyond his family. The *Falls City Journal* began running John's cartoon, *Down Thru the Ages*, in May 1926. It ran regularly for more than a month, and ended only when the artist had to leave for Boy Scout camp.<sup>9</sup> *Falls City Journal*, June 1, 1926

Painting, *Caleb Snort*—Rushville's  
Leading Hardware  
Merchant. NSHS  
10645-4810



FALTER

CALEB SNORT

Rushville's leading  
Hardware Merchant—



"Dad had me come to the store. I was to sell clothes, but every time I could get away I would sneak to the basement and draw."—John Falter, 1972<sup>10</sup>

**GEORGE H. FALTER**  
**VALUE GIVING CLOTHIER**  
FALLS CITY, NEBR.

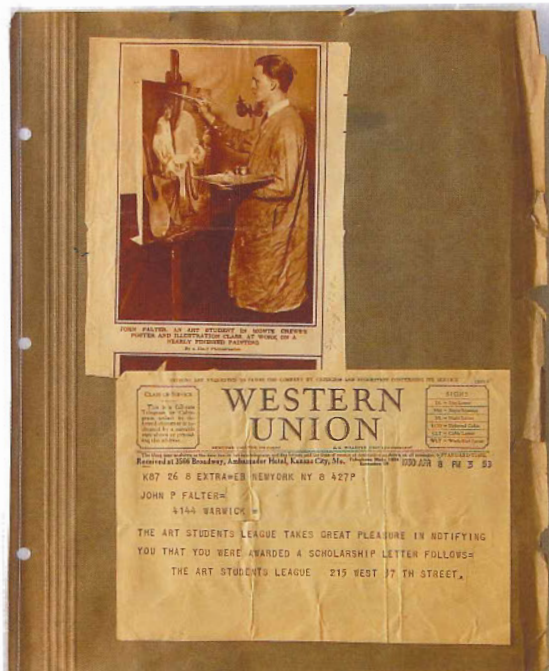


Drawing (on Falter  
letterhead). NSHS  
10645-4791

## New York City: Pulp and Slicks

Falter was the first KCAI student to receive a scholarship to the prestigious Art Students League of New York in 1929. Although famous illustrators such as James Montgomery Flagg and Norman Rockwell had studied there, Falter's tenure was short. He was uncomfortable with many of the students' political views and transferred to the Grand Central Art School.<sup>11</sup> After one term he felt ready to start working for magazines.

Falter's first attempt to sell a cover to the *Saturday Evening Post* was quickly rejected. It didn't set him back; he posted the rejection letter on his wall. He tried again and brought a painting to the art director of *Collier's*, which was rejected on the spot. John later recalled that he couldn't blame him: "It was a painting of a girl fishing . . . She was making what they call in the business an 'O-mouth.' Any artist who paints an 'O-mouth' is scraping low. If anybody showed me that painting now I'd advise them to quit art school."<sup>12</sup>



This scrapbook page shows Falter as a student at the Kansas City Art Institute and also the telegram he received announcing his scholarship to the Art Students League of New York. NSHS 10645-2026



Painting completed as part of the illustration class at the Art Students League of New York. NSHS 10645-4558

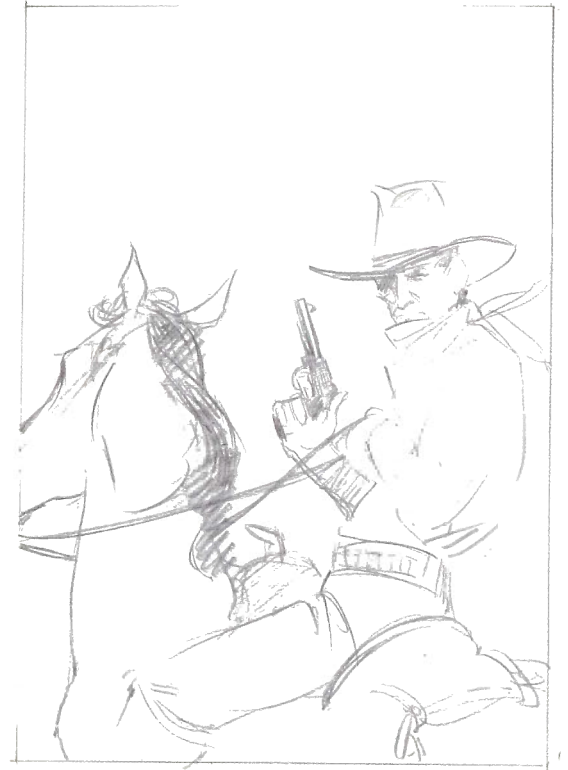


**Girl with the dreaded  
"O-mouth."** NSHS  
10645-4550

The magazine market in the 1930s consisted primarily of "pulp" and "slicks." Pulps featured action-packed, often lusty stories printed on cheap pulp paper. Slicks, such as the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies' Home Journal*, were higher profile, more expensive magazines, printed on finer, glossier paper. Most burgeoning illustrators aspired to work for the slicks, but many art directors and

artists themselves believed that the "pulp" were a good training ground.<sup>13</sup>

A friend encouraged Falter to try the pulps. After several attempts his first cover sold to publisher Street & Smith for \$100 in 1932.<sup>14</sup> He wired his parents, "Sold cover to Street & Smith. I have arrived in art!"<sup>15</sup> Falter produced about one cover per month for them over the next year.



This sketch may have been a preliminary drawing or study for a pulp cover. Original cover artwork for pulp magazines is hard to find today. Once they fulfilled their short-term purpose, paintings were often thrown away. Artists sometimes reused their canvasses and painted over the earlier images.<sup>16</sup> NSHS 10645-2929

(Right) Falter's first pulp magazine cover was for *Western Story*, March 26, 1932. His early pulp work features a softer look and looser brush strokes than found in his later work. In cover illustration, some blank space is necessary for text and title. Over the years he learned to use this space to add drama to the scene.<sup>17</sup> NSHS 10645-5711



Mar. 26

★

STREET &  
SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

15¢

STREET & SMITH'S

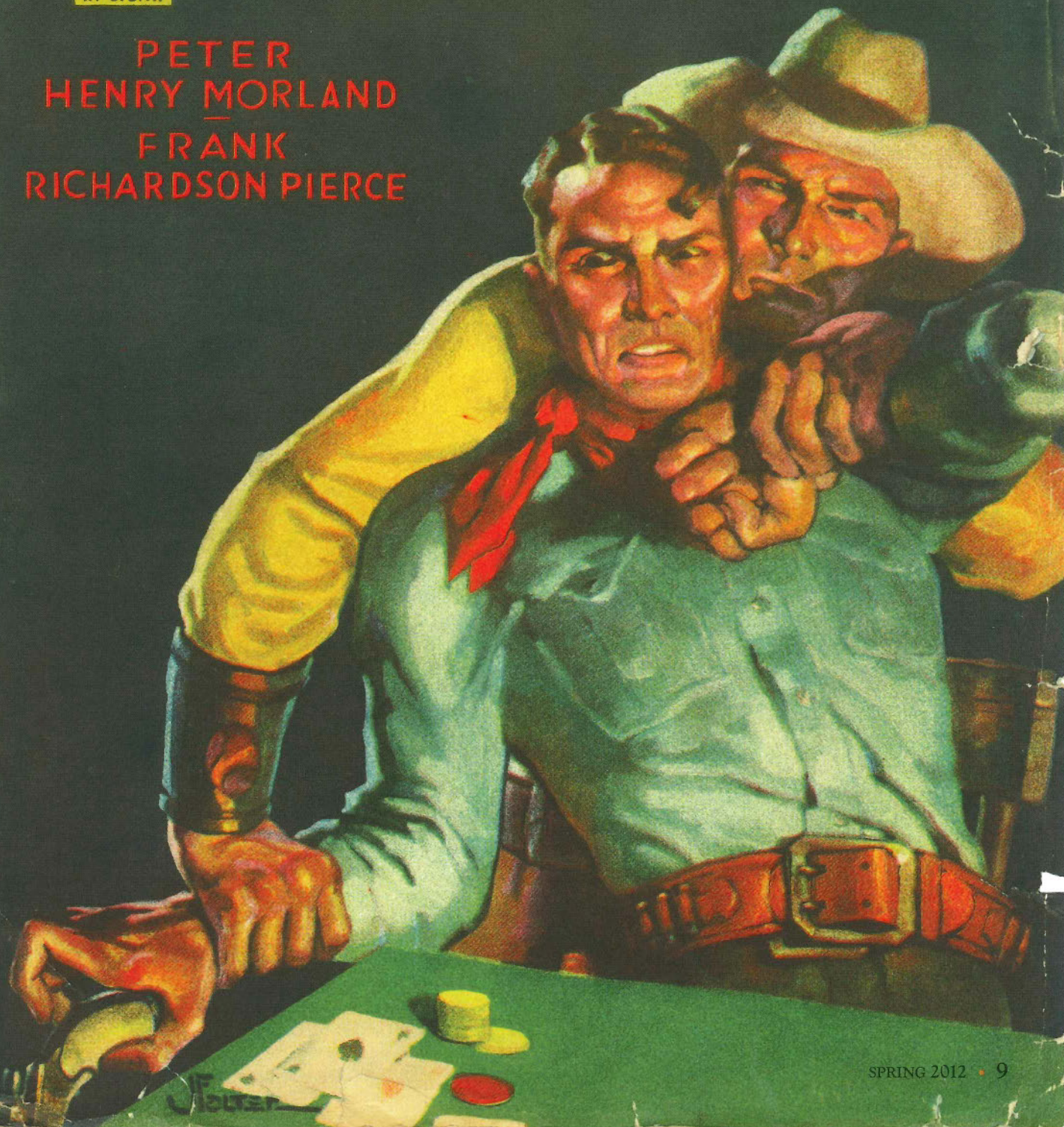
# Western Story

Magazine

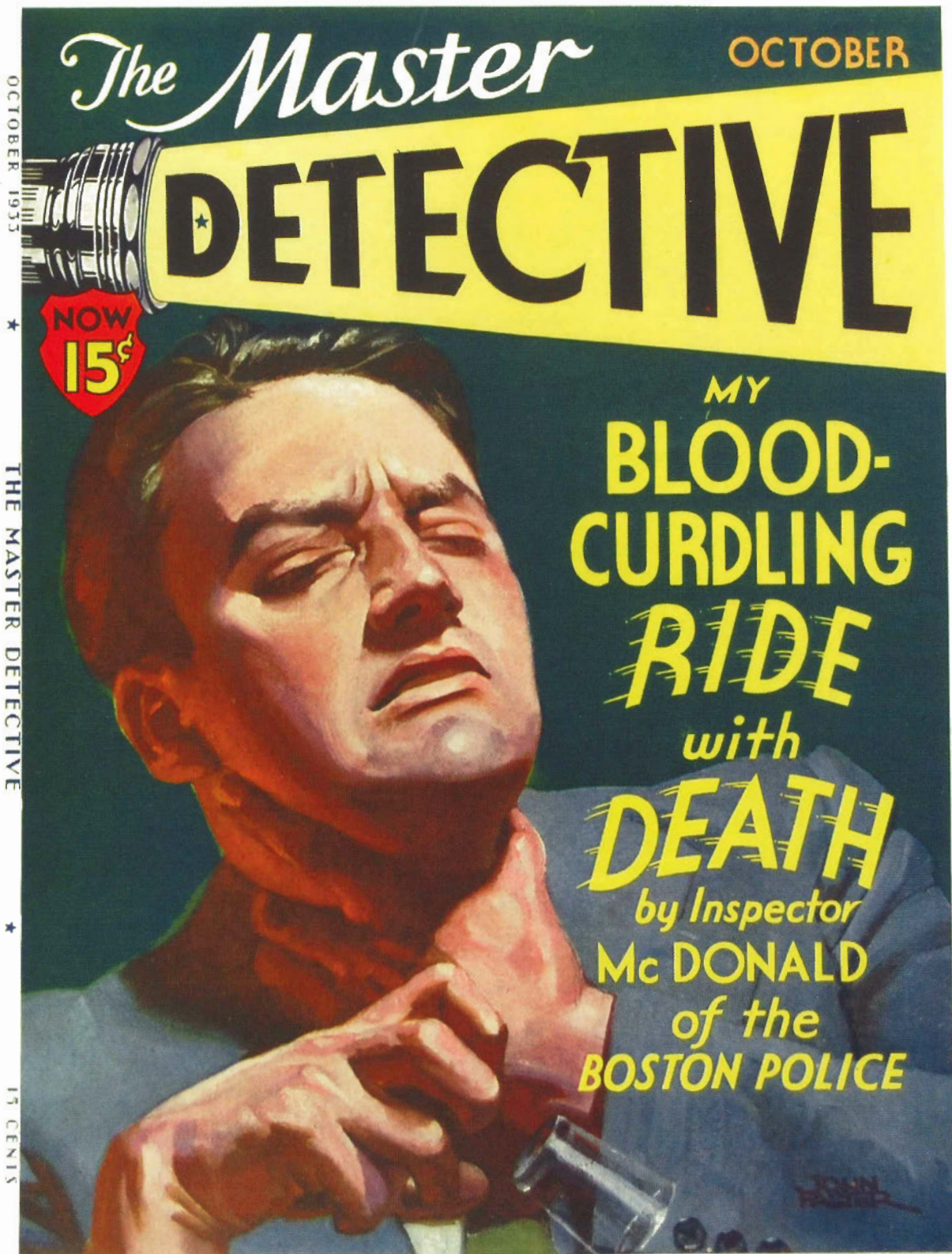
EVERY WEEK

MAR. 26,  
1932  
**15¢**  
IN U.S.A.

PETER  
HENRY MORLAND  
FRANK  
RICHARDSON PIERCE





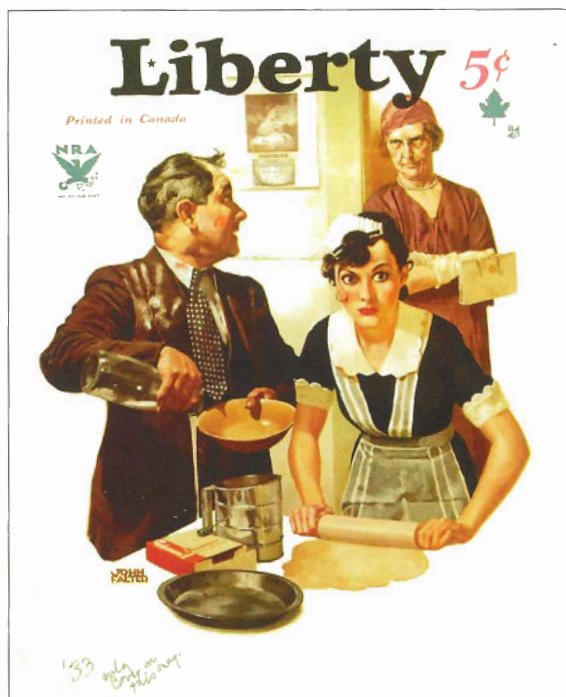


OCTOBER 1933

THE MASTER DETECTIVE

15 CENTS





*Liberty Magazine*, 1933. NSHS 10645-190

Falter's romantic life blossomed along with his artistic career. He married Margaret "Maggie" Huggins, his sister's sorority sister, in 1932. They set up housekeeping in a building full of artists with a shared studio in New Rochelle, New York. Maggie would be a frequent model for John throughout their marriage.<sup>18</sup>

Good pulp art is "storytelling in motion, like a still photograph taken from the middle of a movie, a stop-action at the crisis point." —Robert Lesser, *Pulp Art: Original Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines*<sup>19</sup>

The lean times of the Great Depression prompted Falter to push for more exposure and a move to the slicks. He eventually sold three oil paintings to McFadden Publications (publishers of *Liberty*, *Physical Culture*, and other family-oriented magazines) for \$75.<sup>20</sup>



*Celebrity*. Maggie Falter modeled for a painting to illustrate the story "Celebrity" for *McCall's* magazine in 1939. NSHS 10645-4400

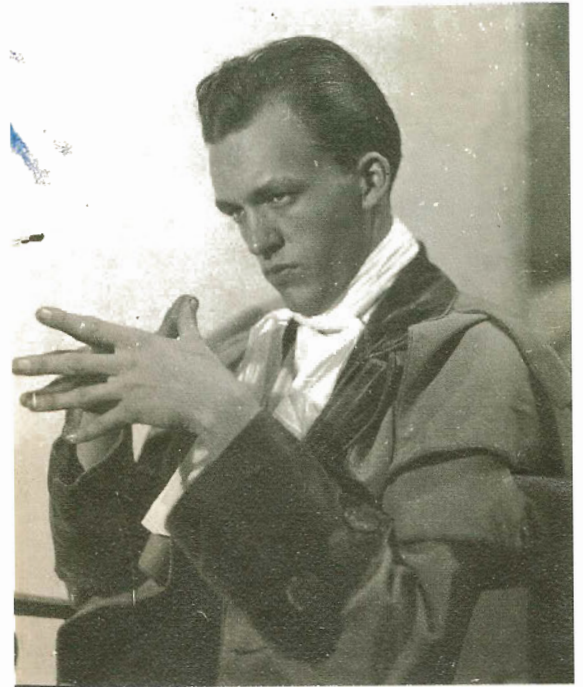


Falter posing as a cowboy. He used models and photographs regularly throughout his career (and sometimes modeled for his own or other artists' work). In a 1947 newspaper article, he said the photographs were mainly to refresh his memory as the painting went on, and that the finished paintings were usually quite different from the photographs.<sup>21</sup> NSHS RG4121-16-2



In 1934, the same year he was inducted into the Society of Illustrators, Falter became a client of the American Artists Company, a New York agency representing artists. He was hesitant because the agency would receive 25 percent of the payment for each painting he sold, but he knew this connection would get him regular work in more prestigious magazines. He was ambitious—in addition to wanting to work for the slicks, he was eager to move into advertising art, which offered more money and was thought to be a field with more sophisticated art directors. Falter remained with them for four years. Before long his work was regularly seen in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *McCall's*, *The Delineator*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*.<sup>22</sup>

In 1933 Falter was his own model for his illustration for the story "Hearts and Swords" in *Liberty Magazine*.  
NSHS 10645-4410; NSHS RG4121-16-4 (bottom)











In the early 1940s Falter also worked on an ad campaign for Four Roses whiskey. This painting appeared in an ad headlined "Four Star hit with a Lone-Star man" in which the Texan waxes eloquent about the merits of Four Roses whiskey. NSHS 11744-136. In memory of Mary Hannah Hansen Lux and Clarence Burton Lux by the Gladys Marie Lux Memorial Acquisition Endowment established at the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation.

With its attention-seeking "Wife Beaters" headline, a 1936 ad boasted that Campbell's Soup was better than what a wife would make. The notation in pen, "They look capable of just that," is Falter's. NSHS 10645-246

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

*They look capable of just that*

## WIFE BEATERS!

When everybody is steadily enjoying the Campbell's best soup in soup making. The better the work, the more ready they are to select it.

To begin with, they realize that Campbell's is the best of everything for their soup.

Wives proud of their own cooking naturally compare Campbell's soups with those made at home. Just to be sure.

They have found, and so will you, that Campbell's soups have the same delicious flavor as soup made in the home kitchen. The apparent difference is partly caused by long use of the salt, stimulating goodness—the way you would do it yourself.

Campbell's soups include many that cannot be duplicated at home. For instance, take Campbell's Tomato Soup. Its deliciously smooth taste would indeed be difficult to make at the home kitchen. Then, also other soups hard to make at home, such as Ch. Tail, or Mac & Cheese. Each is a soup of distinction, because of Campbell's exclusive recipe and special methods.

Then, of course, with Campbell's soups there's no long preparation. No bother. No wasted waiting. Just add water—heat a few minutes—and the soup is ready.

Leave the goodness of soup all by serving Campbell's Vegetable Soup, Campbell's Beef, Campbell's Chicken, and Campbell's Noodle with Chicken. Ask your grocer for all four, and enjoy the same delightful changes that come every morning, evening, and after day.

24 kinds to choose from—...Chicken, Beef, Tomato, Ch. Tail, Chicken, Macaroni, Cream, Corn, Consommé, Green, Ham, Beef, Macaroni, Noodle, Potato, Tomato, Vegetable, and others.

24 kinds to choose from—...Chicken, Beef, Tomato, Ch. Tail, Chicken, Macaroni, Cream, Corn, Consommé, Green, Ham, Beef, Macaroni, Noodle, Potato, Tomato, Vegetable, and others.

Visit us at "BROADWOOD HOTEL" during DICK WHITELY Friday, 9-10 P. M. G. S. T. J. California, Nebraska, Cleveland, Ohio

**Campbell's SOUPS**

**Campbell's**  
 Chicken Soup  
 A delicious, hearty soup. Flavorful and good for you. Ideal for company and for home.

**Campbell's**  
 Beef Soup  
 A genuine picture of flavor and heart. A rich, hearty soup with beef, carrots, and vegetables.

**Campbell's**  
 Chicken Soup  
 A delicious, hearty soup. Flavorful and good for you. Ideal for company and for home.

**Campbell's**  
 Macaroni Soup  
 A delicious, hearty soup. Flavorful and good for you. Ideal for company and for home.



## The War Years

Like many Americans during World War II, Falter wanted to help the war effort. When a Young & Rubicam executive was called to active duty and was asked to pull together an agency to handle publicity for the U.S. Navy, he enlisted Falter. He went to work as a Chief Specialist in an old Mack Truck factory in White Plains, New York, in 1943. In addition to pamphlets and portraits, the artist produced more than three hundred posters for the Navy before returning to civilian life in 1946.<sup>25</sup>

Commercial work during the war included a series of hero portraits for *Look* magazine and recreations of famous wartime events for *Esquire*. Of this series Falter said, "each one appear[ed] on the other side of the Pretty Girl posters. Someone told me I would become one of the most famous back-to-the-wall painters."<sup>26</sup>



Painting of a parachute rigger for a Navy WAVES poster. Courtesy of the Navy Art Collection.

Poster from the 1940  
Pall Mall ad campaign.  
NSHS 10645-29



"WHEREVER PARTICULAR PEOPLE CONGREGATE"



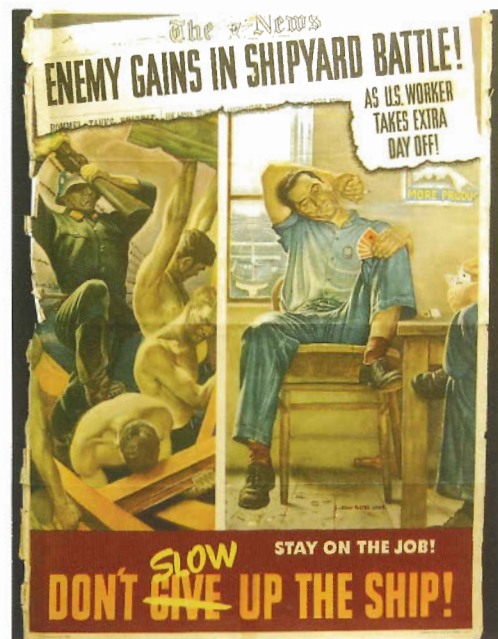


**If you tell where  
he's going . . .  
He may never  
get there !**





(Left) Nebraska State Historical Society,  
A. E. Sheldon Collection. NSHS 4541-358



*Prisoners*, 1943. NSHS 10645-53; poster  
NSHS 10645-4377





*By His Deeds Measure Yours*, 1942. NSHS 10645-4423



*Look*, March 23, 1943. NSHS 10645-2103



Falter's career thrived after the war and he and Maggie enjoyed the fruits of his success. They rented an apartment in New York City near John's studio overlooking Gramercy Park. He played in jazz bands whenever possible. They also frequented all the New York hot spots. Maggie noted, "John was much sought after by hostesses, since he could absolutely make a party—he played hot jazz piano, would whip out sketches of all the pretty ladies after dinner upon request, keeping up a patter of bright new humor that no one could resist."<sup>27</sup>

### The *Post* Years

*Saturday Evening Post* art director Kenneth Stuart purchased his first Falter painting for a cover during a visit to the Gramercy Park studio. The painting was a view of the neighborhood from Falter's window and was intended as a present for Maggie. Stuart purchased it on site; it was published on the *Post*'s March 25, 1944, issue. It was the first cover painting Falter sold to the *Post*, but not the first published. That claim goes to his January 16, 1943, cover of Benjamin Franklin.<sup>28</sup>

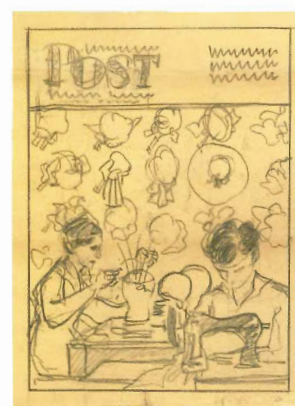
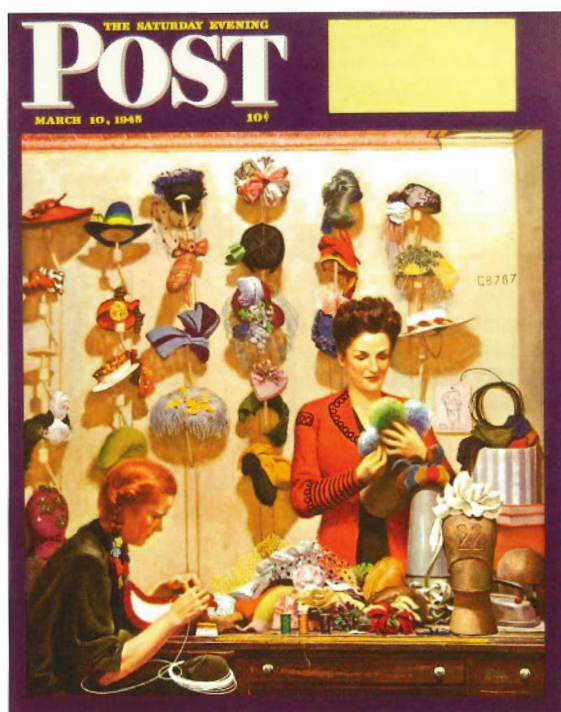
Falter's relationship with the *Post* lasted for almost three decades. The *Post* published 129 Falter covers that mostly featured rural scenes, small-town/middle-class themes, and cityscapes, reflecting Falter's boyhood in Falls City and adult life in New York and rural Pennsylvania. Falter painted what he knew, albeit in a typically idealized fashion, as preferred by the *Saturday Evening Post* editors and expected by their readers.<sup>29</sup>

*American Artist* magazine described the *Post* covers of the 1940s as "pictorial Americana, a sort of contemporary Currier & Ives created by such top illustrators as Falter, Dohanos, Ather-ton and, of course, Rockwell." As author Jan Cohn noted, the *Post* covers principally served to reflect America's ideas about itself rather than realistic portrayals.<sup>30</sup>

**Millinery Shop, sketch and cover of *Saturday Evening Post*, March 10, 1945.** Falter was forever drawing: rough sketches of things he saw that might make a good cover, preliminary sketches of more concrete ideas, and sample sketches sent to the art director for approval. *Saturday Evening Post* cover illustration © SEPS licensed by Curtis Licensing, Indianapolis, IN. All rights reserved.



Print of the Gramercy Park painting. NSHS 10645-459



NSHS 10645-4872





NSHS 10645-4916

**Lovers' Lane, Falls City, Nebraska, preliminary sketch and cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*, May 24, 1947.**

*Saturday Evening Post* cover illustration  
© SEPS licensed  
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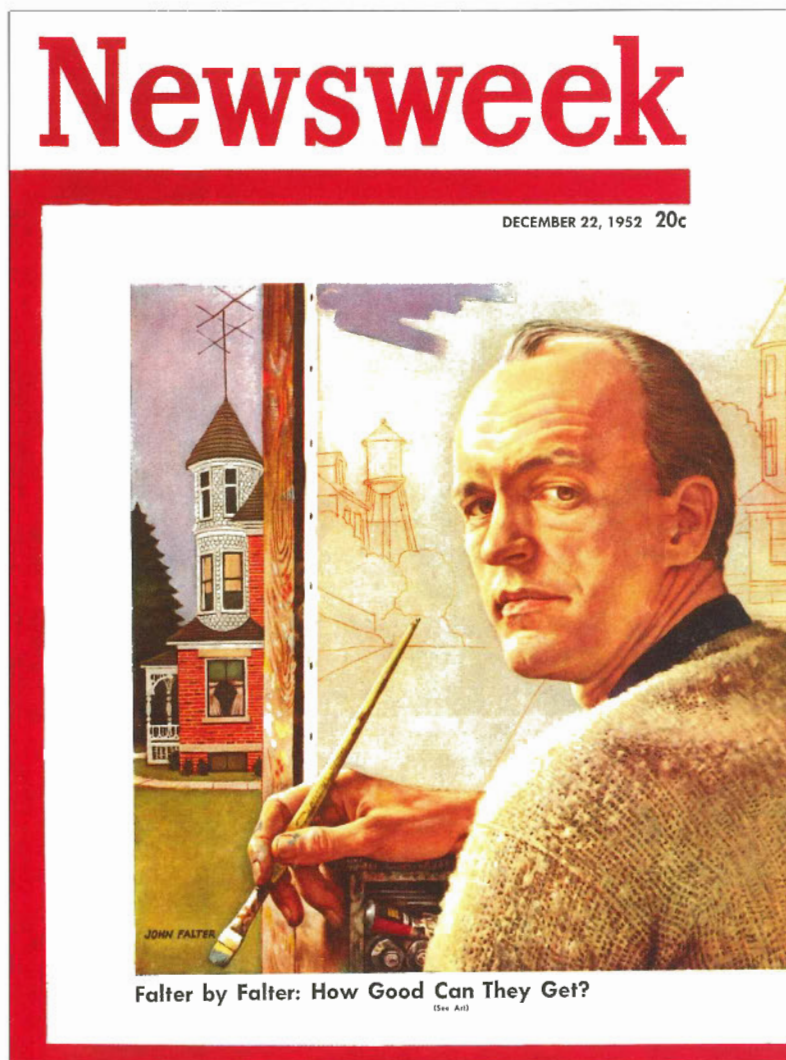
10645-5811

The house is from Plattsmouth and the water tower from Falls City in this self-portrait for *Newsweek*. The article inside indicates that Falter had a fan in Norman Rockwell: "In some of his cover paintings of recent years he (Rockwell) has adjusted the scope from his famous vignetted close-up to a longer view. This change was initiated by Ken Stuart, art editor of the *Post*, and by John Falter. Rockwell sometimes refers to his few relatively panoramic covers as having come in his 'Falter Period.'"<sup>34</sup>

From *Newsweek*, December 22, 1952. ©1952 The Newsweek/Daily Beast Company LLC. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the copyright laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of this content without express written permission is prohibited.

Illustrating *Post* covers was more liberating than illustrating a story where a theme or element had to be quickly conveyed. Covers offered much more independence than advertising work. The *Post*'s art director, Kenneth Stuart, summed it up in 1945 by saying that cover artists could paint things that most interested them provided "they exploit the experiences and sympathies of a mass audience" and meet the approval of the art director whose job it was to ensure the consistency of the *Post*'s identity which was decidedly "middle-of-the-road, middlebrow, and middle-class . . ." <sup>31</sup>

Several of Falter's paintings feature Falls City scenes and/or its water tower, on which he claimed to have slept during many warm summer nights. <sup>32</sup> He said, "a lot of my works are done from above the scene and perhaps that old water tower influenced my view." It even appeared on the 1952 *Newsweek* cover featuring a self-portrait and the title, "Falter by Falter—How Good Can They Get?" <sup>33</sup>



10645-1508





Courtesy of the Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Nebraska Art Association Collection



The painting, *Spring Storm Blowing In*, appeared on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* on April 26, 1952. Many *Post* issues featured a small item called "This Week's Cover." As these items were written by editors and not by the artists themselves, they are sometimes pure fluff. The entry for this issue reads, "John Falter, whose little boyhood was spent in the Midwest, claims that that region has the most hair-curling lightning and thunder in the U.S.A. . . . details from his memories are the way trees turn up the undersides of their leaves and look like phantoms, and the way dogs turn up their chins and wail."

NSHS 10645-5659





The setting for this cover, *Choosing a New Suit*, was actually his father's store in Atchison, Kansas, and the sales-person was a rival clothing seller in town.

Both of Falter's parents' families were clothiers, so it isn't surprising that retail made its way into some of his paintings, or that he tried his hand at fashion design. In the early 1940s he launched a collection of ties called "Originals" (see inside back cover). They were designed to look like normal ties until the wearer opened his jacket and revealed the punch line, and Falter's sense of humor. The ties were sold primarily in the Midwest through his father's store but may not have been advertised enough to become successful.<sup>35</sup>

After a brief move to California in the 1950s, John and Maggie divorced. Falter eventually married Elizabeth "Boo" Wiley, who had three small children. The new family moved back east to a farm in Pennsylvania and added a daughter soon thereafter. *Post* covers in the 1950s increasingly reflected a fascination with suburbia and the nuclear family. Falter's work and life were in sync, since he enjoyed being a family man and his children were frequently featured in his work.<sup>36</sup>



NSHS 10645-29

The development of a *Saturday Evening Post* cover for the January 8, 1955, issue.



NSHS 10645-3021

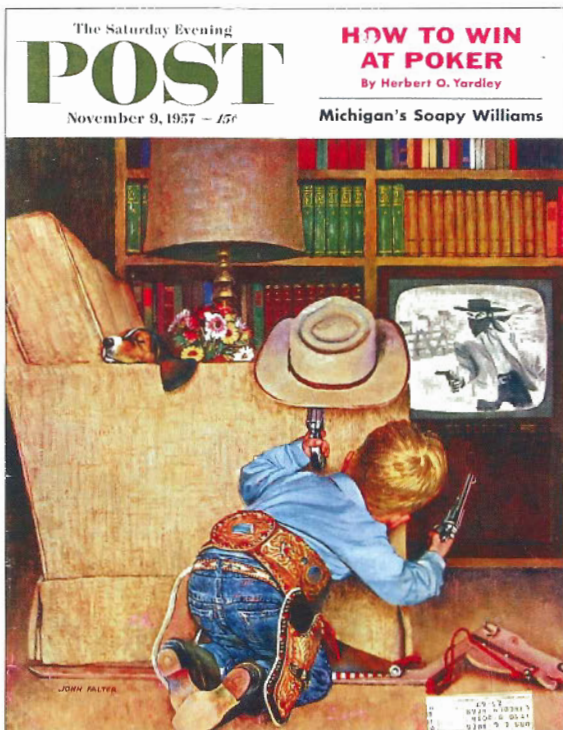
The Saturday Evening  
**POST**  
January 8, 1955 - 15¢

The Senate's Own Investigators  
Report Their Shocking Findings  
on Juvenile Delinquency  
in the U.S.A.



*Saturday Evening Post* cover illustrations © SEPS licensed by Curtis Licensing, Indianapolis, IN. All rights reserved.





This November 1957 cover features Falter's stepson, Jay, and part of the artist's large collection of studio props. *Saturday Evening Post* cover illustration © SEPS licensed by Curtis Licensing, Indianapolis, IN. All rights reserved.



NSHS RG4121-31-41



Nebraska State Historical Society, Ernest C. Ames Collection, NSHS 10645-2029



Falter working while his daughter Suzanne tries to distract him. RG4121-9-7





How many ways can  
he hurt himself today?

A boy's back yard can be wilder than the west ever was. You tell him to be careful, but even a stray twig can trip him up. Damage: one skinned knee.

So you're prepared to treat minor mishaps right away. For you know infection can turn even a tiny hurt into a dangerous one. Of course, if the injury is

serious, you immediately call your doctor. But like your doctor, you want to be prepared with the most modern First Aid needs for the minor cuts and scrapes.

Get set now—during Emergencies Don't Wait Week, October 9 to 17. Bring your medicine chest up to date with these sterile products by Johnson & Johnson.

A.J. No. 791  
Eds.—October 12, 1959

A year's First Aid...about \$2.



Johnson & Johnson

Falter's stepchildren,  
Sarah and Jay, modeled  
for this 1959 Johnson  
& Johnson ad. NSHS  
10645-4009



NSHS 10645-4009-15



NSHS 10645-4009-9





**"Anyway, you didn't burn the Schlitz!"**

There's longer for any young bride who knows that even so it's enough to say  
 "Schlitz Beer." For what more for a woman can want the taste of Schlitz  
 Beer... it's that million perfect taste that of any other beer, they're not  
 just saying that. There's the simple proof!

Schlitz tastes so good to so many people,  
 it's first in sales in the U.S.A.

© 1952 Schlitz Brewing Co., Milwaukee, Wis.

**Schlitz**

The Beer that made Milwaukee Famous

*Through Falter's Post years  
 he also stayed in advertising,  
 working on campaigns for  
 Pepsi, the U.S. Brewers  
 Foundation, Schlitz Beer,  
 Lucky Strike cigarettes, and  
 General Motors.*

"Anyway, you didn't burn the Schlitz!"  
 Magazine ad, 1952.



Print, General Motors Annual Report, 1952. NSHS 10645-1216



"I feel that I'm merely doing something I'm sincerely and thoroughly interested in and have a lot of respect for and that's life in America. I try to represent life in this country the way I see it. I don't care what the critics say as long as the people are satisfied. I'm not trying to make any pitch or propagandize anything. I'm just trying to put it down as I lived it."


—John Falter, 1953<sup>39</sup>

Falter painted a series of bird's-eye-view city scenes for the *Post* in the early 1960s. Several were featured on fold-out covers twice as large as usual. Falter stated he spent a week to ten days on an average cover—although some, like the city scene gatefolds, took longer.<sup>37</sup>

Falter's relationship with the *Post* effectively ended in 1962. Readership and advertising revenue had declined significantly due in part to the increased popularity of television as a leisure-time activity, the rise of niche magazines that competed with general interest publications such as the *Post*, and to the *Post*'s continuing promotion of an America that ignored social changes taking place at the time. In the early 1960s the *Post*

used more photographs (often of celebrities) for its covers, making the work of the illustrator obsolete. The original incarnation of the *Post* folded in 1969, but John Falter adapted and continued to work successfully in advertising, book illustration, and fine art until his death in 1982 at the age of 72.<sup>38</sup>

### The Artist's Journey

It's a long road from Falls City, Nebraska, to the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*. What made John Falter so successful on this path? He was an excellent commercial artist with a good design sense and fine painting techniques. He had the ability to create images of "real" people in "real" situations within the artificial worlds of advertising and story illustration. This may be because his art reflected his life. Using friends and family as models and the places he lived as settings, Falter created images that were descriptive, and sometimes humorous or poignant, but never disrespectful. Above all, the illustrator's work needs to immediately communicate the point of a story or the virtues of a product. But Falter's work went beyond simple communication. Because he painted what he knew and loved, his work has an emotional core that draws in the viewer. From places and faces that somehow seem familiar, he created a "real" world that resonates for us all. 

Deb Arenz is associate director for collections at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Painting for American Airlines ad, *Air Travel, Like Football, Belongs to Everybody*, 1946. NSHS 10645-4422





## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished/untitled biography by Suzanne Falter, n.d., n.p. (hereafter Falter Biography). RG4121.AM, John Falter Manuscript Collection (hereafter Falter papers).

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Simpson, "John Falter Rises to the Top," *Omaha World-Herald*, Oct. 3, 1943.

<sup>3</sup> Falter Biography.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Unpublished two-page autobiography by John Falter, July 21, 1971. Falter papers.

<sup>6</sup> Falter Biography.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> James Denney, "The View from the Water Tower," *Omaha World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands*, Feb. 6, 1972, 14-16.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Lesser, *Pulp Art: Original Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> "Cover Artist John Falter of Belvedere No Bohemian," *Independent Journal* [Marin, California], Mar. 14, 1953.

<sup>15</sup> Falter Biography.

<sup>16</sup> Lesser, *Pulp Art*.

<sup>17</sup> Falter Biography.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Lesser, *Pulp Art*.

<sup>20</sup> "Arizona Gets Post Publicity," Feb. 20, 1947, unattributed newspaper clipping, Falter papers.

<sup>21</sup> Falter Biography; "John Falter Rises to the Top."

<sup>22</sup> Falter Biography.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.; "John Falter Rises to the Top."

<sup>26</sup> John Falter as told to Gwilym G. Griffiths, "Reaching for the Moon—and Getting It." Unattributed Packard Motors publication, Falter papers.

<sup>27</sup> Falter Biography.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.; untitled newspaper clipping, *Atchison Globe*, Nov. 26, 1946; Jan Cohn, *Covers of the Saturday Evening Post* (New York: Viking Studio Books, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Ernest W. Watson, "What's Going on at the Post: An Interview with Kenneth Stuart," *American Artist Magazine*, September 1945, 30; Cohn, *Covers of the Saturday Evening Post*.

<sup>31</sup> Watson, "What's Going on at the Post," 14; Cohn, *Covers of the Saturday Evening Post*.

<sup>32</sup> "Home Town Boy Made Falls City Good to U.S.," *Lincoln State Journal*, May 15, 1966.

<sup>33</sup> "The View from the Water Tower."

<sup>34</sup> "Artists with Brush and Talent Paint Americana for Americans," *Newsweek*, Dec. 22, 1952.

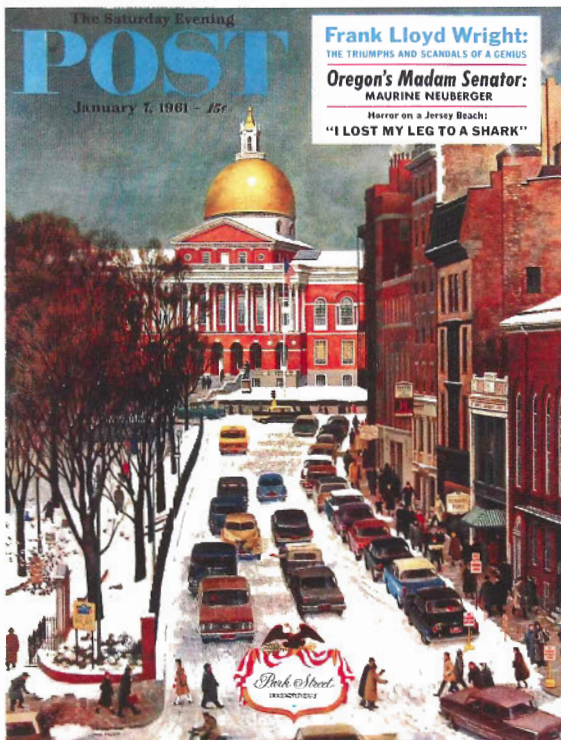
<sup>35</sup> Falter Biography.

<sup>36</sup> Cohn, *Covers of the Saturday Evening Post*.

<sup>37</sup> "Cover Artist John Falter of Belvedere No Bohemian," untitled newspaper clipping, *Boston Herald*, Jan. 12, 1961, Falter papers.

<sup>38</sup> Philip H. Dougherty, "Postmortem on Saturday Evening Post," *The New York Times*, Mar. 30, 1969; Theodore Peterson, "The Bright, Bleak Future of American Magazines" (Urbana-Champaign: Graduate School of Library Science, University of Illinois, 1969), [www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/1568/Peterson110.pdf?sequence=2](http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/1568/Peterson110.pdf?sequence=2); Pete Hamill, "More Irrelevant than Irreverent," *Village Voice*, Jan. 16, 1969, [http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runnscared/2010/06/pete\\_hamill\\_on.php?print=true](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runnscared/2010/06/pete_hamill_on.php?print=true).

<sup>39</sup> "Cover Artist John Falter of Belvedere No Bohemian."



Falter painted a series of bird's-eye-view city scenes for the *Post* in the early 1960s, including this one of Park Street, Boston. *Saturday Evening Post* cover illustration © SEPS licensed by Curtis Licensing, Indianapolis, IN. All rights reserved.