

## American As Apple Pie

In America, artists' works are not only shown in museums, they are often displayed on magazine covers. Norman Rockwell produced cover paintings for the Saturday Evening Post, a major magazine of the 1910's and for many decades later. In the process he became a nationally renowned artist. His precise detail brought him great popularity. "He created a moral myth in which people were reassured of their own essential goodness," art critic Arthur C Danto told Allison Adato of Life magazine. "And that is a very powerful thing." Film director Steven Spielberg remarked to Adato, "Growing up, we always subscribed to the Post. He saw an America of such pride and self-worth. My vision is very similar to his, for the most part because of him." When people use the expression "as American as apple pie" they could just as well say as American as a Norman Rockwell painting.

Rockwell was born on February 3, 1894, in New York City. His father worked for the textile firm, starting as office boy and eventually moving up to manager of the New York Office. His parents were very religious and the young Rockwell was a choir boy. Until he was about ten years old the family spent its summers in the country, staying at farms. Rockwell recalled in his autobiography *My Adventures as an Illustrator*. "I have no bad memories of my summers in the country," and noted that his recollections "all together formed an image of sheer blissfulness." He believed that these summers "had a lot to do with what I painted later on."

Rockwell enjoyed drawing at an early age and soon decided he wanted to be an artist. During his freshman year in high school, he also attended the Chase School on Saturdays to study art. Later that year he attended Chase twice a week. Halfway through his sophomore year, he quit high school and went full time to art school.

Rockwell enrolled first in the National Academy School and then attended the Art Students League. Because he was so dedicated and solemn when working at his art, he related in his autobiography, he was nicknamed "The Deacon" by the other students. In his first class with a live model, the location of his easel was not the best. The nude young woman was lying on her side and all Rockwell could see was her feet and her rear end. So that is what he drew. Rockwell noted that, as Donald Walton wrote in his book *A Rockwell Portrait*, "He started his career in figure drawing from the bottom up."

At the Art Students League, Rockwell had two teachers who had a significant influence on him: George Bridgeman, a teacher of draftsmanship, and Thomas Fogarty, a teacher of illustration. Besides their expert instruction, Walton wrote, they conveyed their "enthusiasm about illustration." While still at school, Fogarty sent Rockwell to a publisher, where he got a job illustrating a children's book. He next received an assignment from *Boy's Life* magazine. The editor liked his work and continued to give him illustration assignments. Eventually Rockwell was made art director of the magazine. He regularly illustrated various other children's magazines after that. "I really didn't have much trouble getting started," he remarked in his autobiography. "The kind of work I did seemed to be what magazines wanted."

In March of 1916, Rockwell traveled to Philadelphia to attempt to see George Horace Lorimer, editor of the Saturday Evening Post, to show him some proposed cover paintings and sketches. It was his dream to do a Post cover. So he set out to sell Lorimer on his work. Since he did not have an appointment, the art editor came out and looked at his work, then showed it to Lorimer. The editor accepted Rockwell's two finished paintings for covers and also liked his three sketches for future covers. Rockwell had sold everything; his dream was not realized but exceeded.