

The Blanche Falter Story

Just when you thought Eagle was a sleepy farming community, comes the story of a young farm hand looking for love, and a lonely girl looking for romance. It was the early 1900's, when newspapers set aside space for personal ads where lonely people could find others looking for a friend.

Blanche Young was 13 years old in 1900, working as a servant for a middle-aged couple in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She was one of several children from a broken home, so poor that she had to work to help support the family. Looking for friendship, her sister Bertha took out an ad in the Chicago Tribune, asking to correspond "with some nice young man".

Frank Falter was born in Eagle Wisconsin in 1875 and grew up living on his grandfather's 200-acre farm along with his grandparents and three of his siblings. His died when he was young, and his father was killed in a fall on the farm. He was a hard worker and by his mid-twenties, was looking for a wife. On reading the Chicago paper, he spotted the ad placed by Bertha Young and quickly responded, however, Blanche intercepted and answered Frank's letter. Frank quickly responded back and the two fell in love. By his fourth letter to Blanche, Frank popped the question "Will you marry me?" to which Blanche answered "Yes!" Frank made arrangements to meet her at the train station in Chicago. His fifth letter included money for the railroad fare and their meeting was a go.

Frank was the first to arrive at the train station in the morning and looked frantically for his bride-to-be, but without luck, so he went searching for her. There had been a mix-up between them, so Blanche didn't arrive at the station until 6PM. The station was unlike anything she had ever seen before, with the busy crowds of people running to and fro as though they were chasing a pot of gold. She waited patiently for Frank to arrive, looking for the man with a kind face wearing the suit he said he would be wearing.

Soon, a Police officer walked by and thought it odd that a young girl would be standing alone, waiting in the train station, so he approached her and asked what she was doing. She explained that she was waiting to meet her fiancé so they could get married. When the officer learned that she was 16 and meeting a man 25 years of age who she had never seen, he took her into custody believing it to be some sort of sex criminal preying on a child and began a search for Frank.

Police found him three hours later, dressed in the suit as described by Blanche and with a flower in his lapel. Upon his arrest, he told the same story as Blanche, saying he intended to marry her. This was all too much for the Police to believe and needed further investigation. When Blanche learned that Frank had been arrested, she asked when it became a crime for a man and woman to get married. She also told Police that if they stopped her and Frank from getting married, she would never return to Michigan.

After confirming the information they received, the Police let Blanche and Frank meet the next day at the station where they reconfirmed their love and commitment to one another. The only thing standing in the way was approval by Blanche's mother. Five days later, after receiving parental approval, Frank and Blanche were married at Justice Hall in Chicago.

So you think that's the end of the story?

Nooo...waaay...

The Blanche Falter Story – Part 2

The last time we left, 16-year-old Blanche Young and her 27-year-old husband-to-be, Frank Falter, were waiting at a Chicago Police station for parental consent so they could marry. The letter finally arrived with her mother's signature, so they were allowed to continue with their marriage plans.

The wedding was held on March 1st, 1902, at the Harrison Street Police precinct station with the precinct captain smiling and relieved that this drama was finally over. The story was reported in the Chicago Tribune newspaper and was picked up by newspapers nationwide, making Blanche and Frank small time celebrities.

The next day they boarded the train and headed back home to Eagle. The ride was exciting for both because their dreams were finally coming true and oh, how they were in love. They arrived at the Eagle train station shortly after noon where a large crowd of people gathered to greet them and stopped at the nearby Diamond Hotel to share their tale with the crowd who came to listen. Afterwards, they headed home to his grandfather's old farm.

The month of March soon gave way to April, a time when farmers begin their heavy season of work. Fields must be prepared for plowing, equipment checked and repaired if needed, the animals must be fed daily, and a dozen cows milked twice a day.

Frank worked long hours, often from sunup until sundown, leaving Blanche at home alone with grandpa Falter. Just when things seemed to settle, Frank's grandfather passed away and his life was in limbo. With both of his parents dead, life seemed hopeless.

But a year later, love gave way and a new baby girl named Virginia was born. Everyone said she looked like Blanche. The life of a farm family can be grueling and monotonous as days turn into weeks. Still, love blooms and the following fall, a new child was born to them. Ruth was her name, and they were now a family of four.

The property was in probate court and about to be sold when Frank decided to rent a house in the Village of Eagle, located a couple of miles north. He took a job on another farm and stayed there most days leaving Blanche and the kids alone. Another tragedy struck when baby Ruth got a serious intestinal disease and died in 1905. Blanche was devastated and tired of the whole thing.

About that time, a troupe of performers from Chicago arrived at the train station in Eagle to perform at the local Opera House and other venues in the area. The town was buzzing with excitement, and many went to see the theater performance. The show leader was a handsome young man named Stephen Smith, who spotted the pretty Blanche Falter in the crowd and later struck up a conversation and Blanche opened up to him about her plight.

Being about the same age, soon a romantic flame was ignited as Stephen returned to Eagle often after other theater engagements in the area. Blanche had enough of life here, so when the performances were done and the train left Eagle heading back to Chicago, Blanche and her daughter Virginia were onboard, having eloped with Stephen Smith.

They and their theater group stayed at a rooming house in Chicago run by Stephen and Blanche, who joined them as a performer. With the late hours of performing and partying, this was no life for a young child, so Blanche sent her young daughter to live in an

orphanage in Ohio, run by a relative of Steven Smith while they were on the road.

As you can imagine, Frank Falter was furious, blaming others for the loss of his wife. He soon filed for divorce so he could get on with his life, and moved to the city of Waukesha, thirty miles away where he worked as a machinist.

With the divorce finalized, Stephen Smith and Blanche were married in 1916. They picked Virginia up from the orphanage and were united as a family again. Business slowed and by 1920, the troupe of performers each went their own way.

Stephen took a job as a cook, and later, he and Blanche moved the family to Toledo, Ohio where he worked as a taxicab driver. He had the gift of gab so with fees and tips, he made good money all through the depression years. Virginia grew up, got married, and had three children. Stephen and Blanche remained married until her passing in 1956. Stephen Smith lived another 21 years and died in 1978. They are buried next to one another near Toledo, Ohio.

What about Frank Falter, you ask? He later remarried a young woman 18 years his junior and lived happily thereafter until his death in 1937. He and his new wife Marion never had children.

And that's the rest of the story.