

# A Day at Alasa Farms



On the South Shore of Sodus Bay

*Postoffice Address:*

ALASA FARMS, Inc., ALTON, N. Y.



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ALASA FARMS, Inc.  
Alton, New York

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*View of Sodus Bay from Alasa Farms*

WHEN I was a boy of nine or ten, my grandfather used to entertain me by telling of a curious sect called "Shakers." Grandfather was a fat, jolly sort of man and enjoyed telling the stories fully as much as I enjoyed hearing them. As he recalled boyhood visits to Shaker meetings, like the proverbial Santa Claus, he, too, shook "like a bowlful of jelly."

As fresh incidents and escapades of his youth came to his mind, these abdominal tremors of his increased in violence and usually I became so interested in his volcanic laughter and so fascinated by his convulsions of humor that I scarcely heard his description of the religious ague which affected the Shakers when their fervor in their faith reached its height.

And so I grew up, somehow always associating granddad's quivering stomach with the Shaker religion, little realizing that some day I should see tangible evidence of Shaker virtues which my sire overlooked entirely.

The Shakers, today, are scattered. One by one their colonies have disbanded; their properties have been sold and the proceeds divided pro rata among their remaining adherents according to the Shaker communistic belief. Only one active Shaker colony remains and that is a small one in Ohio.

But, if you, like so many, believe that the chief Shaker characteristic was their habit of shaking during their religious meetings, you should visit, as I did, the old Shaker Tract on beautiful Sodus Bay near Rochester, New York.

My visit was most enjoyable for two reasons; first it enabled me to see a side of the Shaker religion which my boisterous grandfather had either overlooked or ignored; and second, because I had the pleasure of seeing how the Old Shaker Tract had been converted into a magnificent country estate with 1600 acres of rolling pasture lands, immaculate orchards, wooded



*Men's Dormitory on Alasa Farms.  
Built on site of the old Shaker  
Meeting House. Garages and  
Tenant Houses in background*



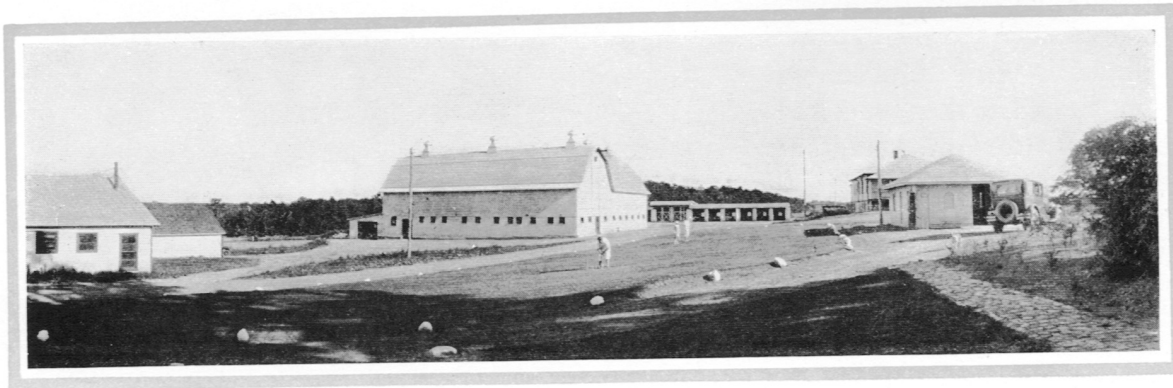
*Office of Alasa Farms, Inc.*

groves, virgin forests, and bubbling streams and mile after mile of shady lanes and country roads. As in the days of the Shakers, blooded shorthorn cattle grazed on the hillsides, pure-bred hogs grunted in the stys; aristocrats of the equine world neighed in the paddocks; shetland ponies scampered in the meadows; various breeds of dogs barked a welcome from the kennels; everywhere there was

bustling farm life which would have gladdened the hearts of the industrious Shakers.

For while Alasa Farms, as the Shaker Tract is now known, is a magnificent country estate, it is more than that. It is a big business enterprise, departmentalized like a factory, with each division in charge of an expert and conducted strictly on a business basis. In fact, Alasa Farms is a corporation, but like all corporations, behind its activities is the foresight, the vision, the dreams, if you will, of one man, Alvah Griffin Strong, the principal owner, a young man scarcely out of his twenties, who shared the enthusiasm which must have been the Shakers when they first saw this wonderful tract and who is converting what might have been merely a show place into a highly productive agricultural project.

Seldom have I seen a more beautiful location. From the rippling waters of Sodus Bay, Alasa Farms stretches back acre after acre, up hill and down dale, two bubbling streams sparkling in the sun, winding in and out, now here, now there, as their fancy seems to lead; now and again vast orchards with trees so planted that they seem like West Pointers on parade, break up the terrain and a virgin forest of some eight hundred acres carries one back to the estates of Merrie England. And every so often, the glistening white of one of the fifty odd buildings brings one back to the practical side.



*View from Veranda of Manor House*



Standing on the topmost hill and scanning this beautiful tract, one cannot help but admire the judgment of the Shaker leader who came to Sodus in 1823 and selected this site as the future home of his people. At that time, the tract consisted of 1400 acres and was owned by Judge Nicholas of Geneva, New York. The Judge had built a grist mill there previous to the American Revolution, but most of the land was still virgin forest. In fact, from this very tract both the farmer patriots and the British were supposed to have felled trees in the war of 1812, when the British sailed into Sodus Bay.

From Lebanon, New York, the parent colony of the Shakers, came some thirty members of the sect. True to their principles, they first built the old Meeting House, which unfortunately burned during the first year of Mr. Strong's ownership, but which was so well built that but for the fire, it would have served a useful purpose for years to come. After their Meeting House was erected, the Shakers built other necessary farm buildings and set to work

*Waterfalls in one of the two streams.  
The Old Shaker Manor House, now the  
Summer Home of Alvah Griffin Strong.*





*Alvah Griffin Strong and His Youngest Daughter*

clearing the land. Whatever strange ideas they may have had, the Shakers were workers. They were Shakers, not Shirkers, and for a fitting monument to their painstaking labor, good taste, and careful selection of woods, one should see and carefully inspect the Manor House of Alasa Farms, now Mr. Strong's summer home.

But dreams are dreams; some come true, and others vanish like a wisp of smoke from the camp fire. The dreams of the Shakers were never to materialize. Their hope of Utopia was not to be. After fifteen years, they were obliged to sell their tract, strangely enough, to other men who had dreamed a dream—a dream of a canal which was to connect the Erie

Canal, then in its heyday, with the Great Lakes. But the Adams Canal, sponsored by Adams, Duncan & Company, the new owners, was not to be. The bubble burst and the Shaker Tract became the property of still another queer sect, the Fourierites, both French and Communistic. As with the Shakers, their plans were unsuccessful and after reverting back to the canal men, the property, in 1885, was sold to D. W. Parshall, founder of the Town of Lyons, New York. Mr. Parshall added two hundred acres to the original tract, which remained in the possession of his family for many years until it became Alasa Farms, Inc., with Alvah Griffin Strong, grandson of the late Henry A. Strong, President of the Eastman Kodak Co., as principal stockholder.

And so, after one hundred years, the old Shaker Tract has come into the possession of a man who shares the vision which inspired the Shaker Leader who first saw the tract so many years ago, a man who has, in a comparatively brief period of ownership, carried the Shaker dream of a vast agricultural enterprise into the realm of reality.

Alasa Farms is a short hour's motor ride from Rochester through fine farm country and thriving orchards. Almost before we knew it, we had reached Alton, just a few miles beyond the village of Sodus and had turned off the main highway onto the road, which wound in and out until we came to the outskirts of Alasa Farms. Here a sign greeted us, with the information that we were entering the Farms proper.

Rounding a curve and mounting a slight grade, we came upon a most delightful group of buildings, chief of which was the old Manor House, previously referred to. This is a low rambling structure, built with infinite care from trees felled on the tract. Successive owners have made many alterations in the structure but in spite of that it is possible to definitely trace Shaker workmanship; the whole effect is that of olden times

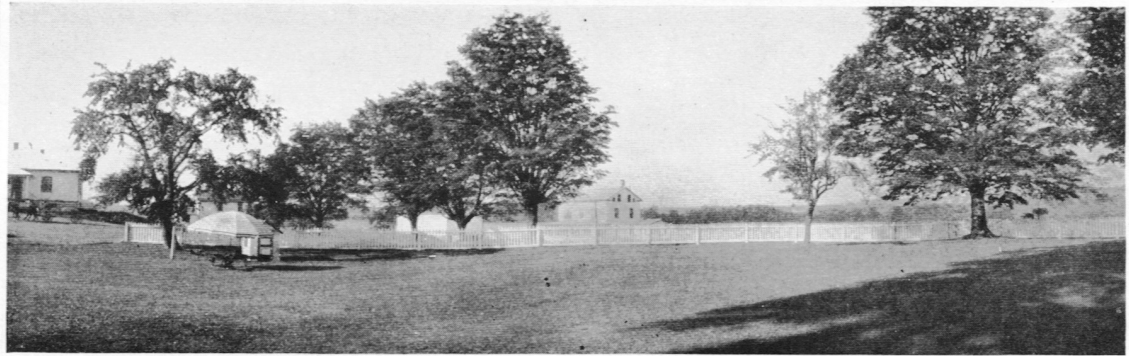
when men built homes with infinite care and when hospitality was universal. Large open fireplaces in the main rooms and a Colonial kitchen are salient features, while small markers above the doorways to each bedroom tell of the days when the Manor House may have served as a Wayside Inn. Mr. Strong has modernized the House, of course, but so gracefully has this been done that the original lines are unaltered.

A towering Locust which shades the house has an interesting history. It seems that, in the days of the occupancy of Mr. and Mrs. John David, heirs of Mr. Parshall, this tree protected the house on several occasions from lightning, and one of the stipulations when the tract changed hands, was that this friendly protector was to remain untouched.

Clustered around the Manor House, were the main barns, the garages and the home of the Manager, William J. Hardy. Mr. Hardy's presence lent an additional tie-up with the past for, as many a cattleman will tell you, it was the Shakers who were among the first to see the possibilities in the Milking Shorthorn and it was Mr. Hardy who brought the first large herd of milking Shorthorns to America from England, for James J. Hill, the railroad magnate who died some years ago.

Mr. Strong told us of the incident as we left the manor house and walked over to inspect the model cattle barns. Desirous of building up the agricultural industry along his railroad, Mr. Hill purchased a herd of blooded Shorthorns in England. These he entrusted to the care of Mr. Hardy, a recognized English expert. Mr. Hardy came to America with the herd and remained in charge of

*The Spacious Lawn of the Manor House and the Children's Play Corner*



them until Mr. Hill's death. He was then engaged by Charles A. Otis of Willoughby, Ohio, and was manager of the well known Otis Herd until its dispersal. When Mr. Strong became interested in farming and cattle and purchased this beautiful farm at Alton, he selected Mr. Hardy to manage it. And so it is that on the tract where the Shakers planned to raise the breed of cattle they had known in England, that same breed is being raised by the man who was responsible, in a large measure, for their successful introduction on a large scale in America.

With a number of excellent cattle of Otis breeding together with many other prize winning and heavy producing cows that have been purchased, the foundation has been laid from which Mr. Hardy is building an extensive cattle breeding plant.

With the champion "Bessboro Musician" at the head of the herd, a close relative of the noted English Champion "Bessboro Polonius", Alasa Farms have already contributed to and found a place in Shorthorn history with their remarkable winnings at shows and wonderful records of production made on the farms. If you are interested in blooded cattle, it will pay you to write for the descriptive folder, "The Alasa Herd" in which full particulars of the cattle are given.

From the model cattle barns, fit homes for blue blooded bovines, we visited the stables, where friendly Shetland Ponies searched our pockets for sugar and Horse Show favorites thrust their noses out to be rubbed. Mr. Strong stated that he intended to build up a fine stable of hunters and might possibly breed horses of the blooded type.

Leaving the horses and the carriage shed with its usual collection of equipages, welcoming barks told us that the Kennels were near and we spent over half an hour playing with as fine a collection of dogs as I have seen in many a day. There were Whippets, that lightning like breed—the fastest in the world—there were St. Bernards and Newfoundlands, Hunting Dogs, and Terriers. Perhaps the most interesting were the Alaskan Huskies, which, Mr. Hardy told us, were very affectionate, despite wolf ancestry. The huskies, by the way, were purchased in the Northlands and are the only ones of their kind in this section.

Stopping in, for a minute, at the small but complete Dairy, we continued on to pay our respects to the chickens, which, like all the other live stock, are the best that money can buy. A poultry man of long experience has charge and has already made a name for "Alasa Poultry Products." Prize hens and roosters are being exhibited at leading Poultry



*Some of the Ponies*



Shows and will soon be something to be reckoned with when the blue ribbons are distributed.

The great orchards on Alasa Farms are one of its most interesting features. There is one solid block of over one hundred acres, the largest in the State, besides numerous smaller orchards dotted here and there throughout the Farms. These trees are being cultivated in the most approved, scientific way, and their fruit is marketed as too few New York State Apples are marketed. The full capacity of the orchards in a peak year is estimated at 100,000 bushels. Mr. Strong has had extensive experience in the apple packing business and will devote much of his time to his orchards. "We intend," he said, "to use every part of the apple in one way or another. Not a bit will be wasted and all the processes required in the sale of our orchard harvest will be accomplished on the farm — packing, drying, cider making, etc. We are even considering making the crates and barrels for our apples from timber grown, cut, and planed on the farm."

This last statement seemed almost an exaggeration to us, until we learned that there are nearly 850 acres of timberland on the farm, including a virgin forest of about 600 acres. As with all his other operations, Mr. Strong has placed an experienced lumberman in charge and is cutting and shipping thousands of feet of oak, chestnut, basswood, and poplar. All of the equipment for handling this vast lumber tract is of the most modern kind and is being added to rapidly.

We could go on and on describing the many things we saw. To city men like us, it was most interesting and instructive and a farmer, cattleman or lumberman could spend days at Alasa Farm and keep interested every minute.

*Aquaplaning on the Bay.  
View from a Cottage on Alasa Farms.*







*Store at Alton Owned by Alasa Farms, Inc.*

Coming back, down a country road, we passed the two streams which circle here and there about the farm. These have been stocked with brook trout and some day, will be a Fisherman's Paradise. Part-ridge, Pheasants, Woodcock, and Snipe inhabit the woods in great numbers and Deer, Fox and other wild animals have been placed there.

Passing the century old Grist Mill, now the hab-  
itat of the farm blacksmith, we came to the glistening waters of Sodus Bay and the boathouses. Here in his own front yard, so to speak, Mr. Strong has a water frontage of four miles and in the summer, sleek yachts, fast motor boats and other water craft dot the farm harbor. And as if this were not enough, Mr. Strong has built a large outdoor swimming pool adjoining the Manor House.

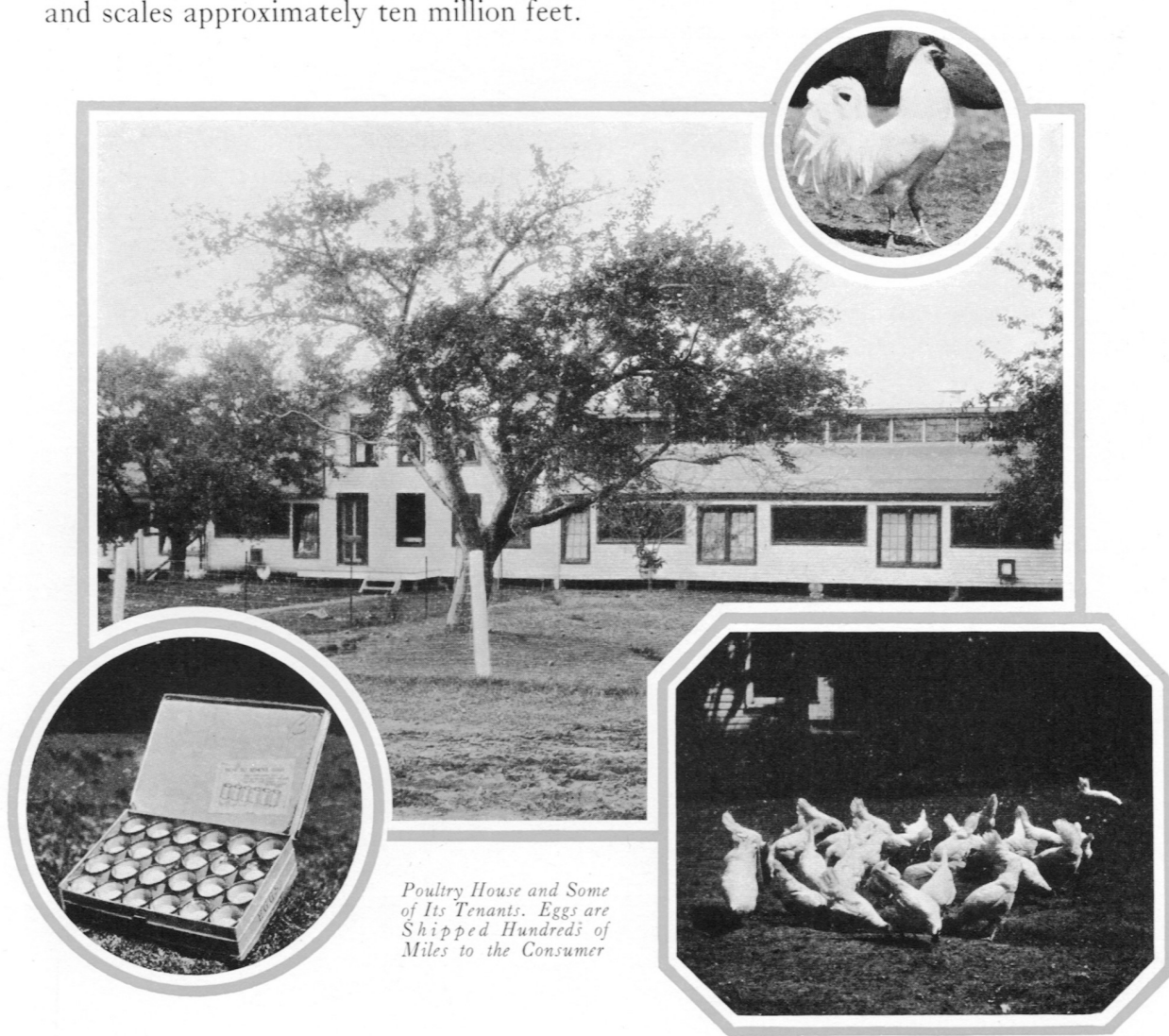
To carry on farm operations on such a scale, much help is needed. Ten families are now living in the various tenant houses and more are to be built. There are, in all, over fifty buildings on the farm — all or most of them with all modern conveniences. Some of the farm laborers have been on the farm forty years and all of them are imbued with the enthusiasm which is characteristic of everything Mr. Strong does.



*A Scene During the  
Apple Harvest*

Walking down one of the many shady lanes which dot the Farms I met one old fellow who reminded me of the type one sees so often in England. His age seemed indeterminate and his memory phenomenal. He traced the history of Alasa Farms from the time he was a lad and rejoiced that the vast tract he loves so well is being developed in such a modern way. Mr. Strong told me afterward that the old fellow was the champion sawer on the Farms and could out-saw (if that is the word) any of the husky young fellows who assist in the lumber operations.

This again brought up the subject of timber and in the most casual way Mr. Strong mentioned that in addition to the eight hundred and fifty acres of lumber on Alasa Farms he had recently acquired a tract of nineteen hundred acres near Johnstown, Fulton County, New York. This is mostly virgin and first growth and scales approximately ten million feet.



*Poultry House and Some of Its Tenants. Eggs are Shipped Hundreds of Miles to the Consumer*



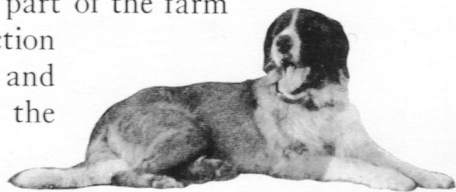
*Husky Dog Team*

Lumber operations on this tract will be carried on under the name Caroga Lakes Lumber Company, Inc. Maple, Ash, Chestnut, Birch, Beech, Hemlock, Poplar, Basswood, Spruce and pulp wood will be cut from both the Farms and the new tract.

Passing the pastures again where the magnificent Shorthorns were grazing, Mr. Strong told of the Alasa Farms Thousand Dollar Cup which he has offered for the best cow of any breed to produce the most butter fat at any State Fair. The Trophy is to be perpetual, the winner at each State Fair to decide at what Fair it shall be offered the following season. Mr. Strong is greatly interested in the improvement and increase of butter fat production and believes that such a competition between owners and breeders of all breeds of cattle will encourage and stimulate interest in this important phase of dairying.

The Trophy is the only one ever offered to cover all breeds. Most cups are offered for one type only.

Approximately four hundred acres of rich, rolling land constitute that part of the farm used for the production of corn, grain, hay, and pasture which with the



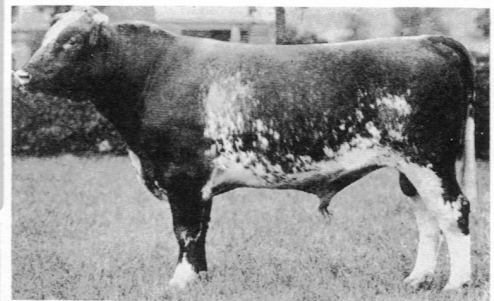
*Alasa Farms Kennels.  
Husky, Whippets and St. Bernard.*

exception of a small amount of commercial feed provides the feed stuffs with which to care for Alasa Farms livestock. Wheat is usually sown as a seed crop for hay and this in turn is marketed and takes care of the expense of the commercial feed purchased.

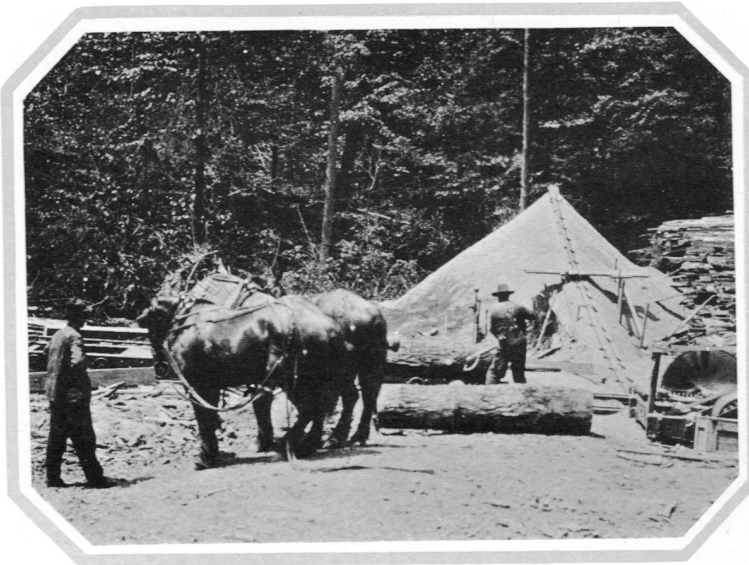
In other words all the products of the farm are sold on the hoof in the shape of cattle, hogs, chickens, horses, etc., though of course through the cattle the Farms sell milk, cream and butter, in addition to breeding stock and beef. The season being short the larger share of the land will eventually be seeded to alfalfa, thereby eliminating a good deal of hazard through bad seasons and cutting down considerable on labor as the harvesting of hay coming before the help are so busy on the fruit harvest, makes it possible to use the same labor for both. Tractors are used to some extent, but the fact that it is necessary to use a great many horses in the hauling of logs and lumber, Alasa Farms depends chiefly on horses.

In the work horses registered stock is not used but instead a heavy type draft horse that can pull enormous loads. They are either of Shire or Belgian crosses and sired by pure bred sires. These have been shipped in from the west and Mr. Hardy, the general manager, finds them the most profitable kind for the Farms as they must have the heavy boned type of drafter with the muscle and weight in hauling the heavy loads in the shape of logs and loads of lumber to the railroad for shipping. The shoeing of all horses is done on the farm and all repair work taken

*Alasa Farms Shorthorns and "Bessboro Musician," Prize Bull*







*Over 800 Acres of Timber, mostly virgin, are on Alasa Farms*

along to neighboring farms, besides, being of itself an important going concern, in that the surrounding farmers and townfolk find it easy of access, and patronize it to the extent of getting the major share of their supplies there. This gives the opportunity of a closer touch with everyone in the vicinity and the pleasant relationship existing between Alasa Farms and its friends and neighbors, is the kind that makes living worth while in any community.

Born and brought up in the East where one hundred acre farms are comparatively large, Alasa Farms was a continual source of amazement to me. Everywhere we turned we saw something new, something carried on in such a large scale that it did not seem possible that within such a short distance of Rochester there could be such a vast agricultural project.

*One of the  
Portable Sawmills  
on the Farms*



care of for all departments. From the repair shop all new tools are issued, broken tools being required brought back before new are given out, which eliminates a deal of expense on lost tools, and in unnecessary buying of new equipment.

The Alton Supply Corporation Store at Alton is owned by the Farms and in the matter of supplies of all kinds used on the place, this branch of the business gives a decided advantage in buying, which in turn is passed



Nor could one find a more ideal setting. With the blue waters of Lake Ontario fringing the Farms, with the gently rolling ground and the hills dotting the terrain at intervals, with the barns and tenant houses spotless in their coats of white—truly it is a most beautiful sight.

Anyone who comes to Rochester should surely visit Alasa Farms—to the agricultural minded it will be an inspiration and to the novice an education.

We saw so much and we did so much in our short visit to Alasa Farms that it is impossible to record it all here but fortunately Mr. Strong is publishing brief descriptions of his various Departments and soon these will be available to those interested in specific features.

The sun had set and the stars were beginning to twinkle in the sky as we bade farewell to Alasa Farms. All of us were busy with our own thoughts, when suddenly the philosopher of the group read each one's mind—"Boys," he said, "wouldn't you like to develop a place like that?" And with one accord, we said, "'Amen.' That, would be living."



*Winter Scene Showing a Few of the Farm Buildings, Sodus Bay in the Distance*

