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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Covehead Man Has Rare Skill

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PEOPLE have seen a new potato harvester this year on the farm of Emmett Power, Greenfield which is in the heart of the tobacco country. But the most interesting part of the story is that the big machine was built by Donnie Allen, 24, of Covehead.

I visited Donnie a few weeks ago when he was still working on the harvester, and was deeply impressed with the highly skilled work this young farm boy is able to turn out in his Quonset-hut type workshop, with very little to work with except his own unusual ability, and imaginative mechanical genius.

Donnie was sitting on a couch in the Allen kitchen, putting a new set of points in his "Go Kart" engine when I dropped in on him. The young inventor and builder is also a Kart enthusiast and he does that well, like everything else.

Last time I looked, he was at the top of the pack with the highest individual point total.

IVAN KERRY, representative of a nationally known feed company here, gave me the tip on Mr. Allen's work. He built a harvester for their own use last year, and this year he has improved on it as he built the machine for the Greenfield man.

Donnie has never had any technical vocational training, but he talks like an experienced expert and does his own work - he even hammers out by hand the flanges of iron used for the framework. One of the most modest young men I have ever had the privilege of meeting, he casually noted as he showed me various parts of the machine "I changed the elevation here" or he "altered the level or angle" somewhere else, and he had the most logical explanation why the changes would result in better service in the potato field, and that's the reason for building this type of machine in the first place.

IT SOUNDED so simple listening to the likeable young Covehead man, that I almost had to force myself to realize that he was improving on the type of equipment built originally by companies that have highly trained technicians along with other personnel, working in the best equipped factories.

I'm purposely staying away from technical details, but this type of machine does cut labor costs of potato harvesting. It cost the Allens between one dollar and two dollars per acre for labor costs last year, for example. It takes from two to four men on the machine, depending on whether the potato field is clean or dirty.

Harvesters Are Becoming Popular

IT'S ONLY A year or two since the first factory built harvester was brought here, but there are many of them now, I'm told. Asked regarding the often heard claim that harvesters damage potatoes, Mr. Allen told me it's definitely not true, not, he added,

unless the equipment is driven too fast. They should be held to three or four miles per hour, he believes.

They use a 25-horsepower engine mounted on the machine he built for their own farm, but Donnie built a power-take-off into this one and it runs off the tractor. A 40-horsepower tractor will handle it, he told me.

Donnie also showed me a four-row potato planter they've built but "Dad", James Allen, "is responsible for it" the son told me. It requires four men, one for each row, as they drop the spuds, one at a time, into tunnel shaped receptacles because they plant the tuber-unit method. Each spud is cut into four sets as it drops through the mechanism and planted in a row. Value of the tuber-unit method is that an inspector, or the grower, who spots one diseased plant can easily find the other plants from the same tuber right alongside, and pull them, too. There's nothing new about the tuber-unit method but this is the first machine I've seen that permits its use in this way.

V-8 Engine In Motorcycle

I ASKED Donnie to show me the motorcycle into which he built the V-8 car motor, and again I had to thank Mr. Kerry for the tip. The motor is there alright but there are still bugs that have to be ironed out, said the young man who was just too busy with building harvesters, and other responsibilities to work on the motor bike at the time. Mr. Kerry told a group of Ontario men about it in Toronto earlier this year, but none of them would believe such a thing could be done. But that's understandable. They've never met and talked to Donnie Allen as we have.

Non-Poisonous Top Killers

SPEAKING OF potatoes reminds me of potato top killers, and the large number of cattle poisoned last year by the arsenic mixtures. Some people charged that at least some of the cattle deaths were due to carelessness, that the cattle were not fenced securely, or that gates were left open, etc.

But Charles Wright, Searletown, lost a registered Holstein cow, a full sister to Wrightaway King Lisa that won the senior and grand championships at the Provincial Exhibition the last two years. Mr. Wright also had another valuable cow so badly damaged by the poisoning that she has not yet recovered completely, he told me recently, and several others were also affected. In his case the poison came down into the stream where the Wright cows drank, from a spot on the roadside where a sprayer had been filled. The development was completely beyond his control.

THERE'S A non-poisonous top-killer, Reglone, on the market here this year that can be used safely. It has been tested on the Experimental Farm and found effective. Only trouble is that it's more expensive than the other killer, though the extra expenses would be justified if it results in saving valuable cattle.

Another top killer has been put out by Shell Oil company which has been working on the idea for some time. Several samples have been sent to this province recently for testing, but I haven't got conclusive reports from test results as yet; though I have been

told that it has been used in New Brunswick. This product, I am told, is priced reasonably. It's also non-poisonous.

Bob Simmons Aims At Tokyo

LAST SATURDAY I watched Bob Simmons throw a Discus 147 feet 10 inches, and that's farther than a Maritime man had ever thrown before in competition. I'm interested in the Discus because it was my favorite event in track and field competition. But I'm even more interested in Bob, because this husky and determined young man has accomplished what he has done to date without ever having any expert coaching advice, and that's amazing. This is his third year in the event and he's aiming at 1964 and the Olympic Trials for Tokyo. I hope he makes it.

Right now he has plans to have some film made of himself throwing and send it to World Champion Al Oerter in New York for comment by an expert. He's hoping it will help and so am I.

There's a great amount of form in the Discus event but there's also physical strength and the ability to get into that heave all the power that is possible. And Bob is going to work on that too. He will concentrate through the winter on weight lifting, and body development to improve, so far as is possible, the splendid physique he has already.

Bob has thrown up to 155 feet in practice and he hopes to improve steadily over the next two years. If hard work, concentration and devoted effort can do it, this young Charlottetown man will be going to Tokyo in two years time. I'm sure he will have a lot of support from well wishers here.

Alfred Groom On Empire Team

IT WAS a tremendous thrill to learn that Summerside's Alfred Groom made the British Empire Games team when he cracked the Canadian record in the Pole Vault which is his favorite event. I recall that I did a column on him just after he had failed to make the 1960 Olympic team, though he topped all other Canadians in the trials. Alfred stuck to the demanding conditioning and training grind, and his effort has paid off for him. Both of these fine young athletes are a credit to their province. Their future progress will be watched with interest.

Angus Cattlemen Are Active

I RECALL writing a story last fall, or early in the winter, that the Angus were the fastest growing beef breed on the Island. I wrote that after President Leo McIsaac told me they had 38 members, compared to the seven they had had previously. Leo and Irving MacDonald told me Wednesday at Crapaud the Angus breeders are meeting tonight to plan further expansion. "We're going to promote our breed" said the men who indicated new blood will be brought in, and a sale held to distribute the new animals, and any breeding stock that Island breeders may have for sale.