

## ALVARO OLSON

Alvaro was born in 1894, the second child of John and Katie Olson. Alvaro was named after his mother's older brother, a sailor who had died at sea. As a young man Alvaro caught lobsters using the family's friendship sloop, the *Oriole*. Being quiet and reserved, he was well suited to the long hours at sea required of fishing and Al loved the fisherman's life. But in 1922 John Olson was severely disabled with arthritis and so Alvaro put the *Oriole* in dry-dock, put away his fishing gear, and settled in to help out on the Olson farm.

On the farm, Alvaro planted potatoes, peas and turnips. He also added blueberries to the field. When not tending the garden he cut hay for the animals and wood to keep the large house warm during the winter. When their father died in 1935, Alvaro and his older sister Christina were left alone in the large house. Their two younger brothers, Sam and Fred, had married and set up their own households in Cushing. They would visit Christina and Alvaro often with their growing families; the farm is where the entire family gathered on Christmas Eve. Alvaro collected the neighborhood mail and the Olson House became a place in the neighborhood to stop and visit, pick up the mail, and maybe buy eggs, milk or a few vegetables. As Christina's disability became more limiting with age, Alvaro spent more time helping her around the house. In the few moments that Alvaro could relax from the demanding work of running a farm, he could be found in the doorway of the Olson House smoking his pipe.

During the time that Andrew Wyeth was painting at the Olson House (1939-1968), he had a difficult time trying to capture an image of the elusive Alvaro. He was finally able to record a portrait of Alvaro in his 1945 tempera painting, *Oil Lamp*. He told Alvaro he was only drawing the oil lamp and managed to do a double portrait of the lamp and Al. Wyeth's 1968 watercolor *Alvaro and Christina* shows the two doors leading from the wood shed to the kitchen. Painted after the brother and sister had died, Alvaro is represented by the dark, muted door which reflects his quiet and gentle nature.

Alvaro Olson died on Christmas Eve in 1967 of cancer.