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## AREAREGION



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COURTESY PHOTOS

Much of the information used in this story was supplied by Mrs. B. Sengelaub and Mrs. Shirley Graham — Jep Bisbee's great-grandniece. My thanks for their kindness and the fascinating insights they offered into this interesting figure in our local history. walked along to visit his sister on the northern edge of the village of Paris.

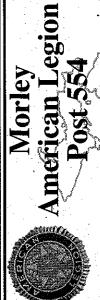
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The richest and most influential men in America made 'pilgrimage' to his door and shaded porch to listen to a few tunes.

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# AREAREGION



#### to visit Paris, admire work among those Henry Ford

**By Jim Crees** Pioneer News Network

PARIS — Jasper Bisbee was playing the fiddle long before Henry Ford became interested in

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He determined he would never be laughed at again out on the dance floor and searched the country for the best dance instructor there was to be had.

He contracted with a dance teacher named Benjamin Lovett from New Hampshire bringing him and his wife to live in Michigan.

Lovett taught the Fords all the 'steps' and how to perform

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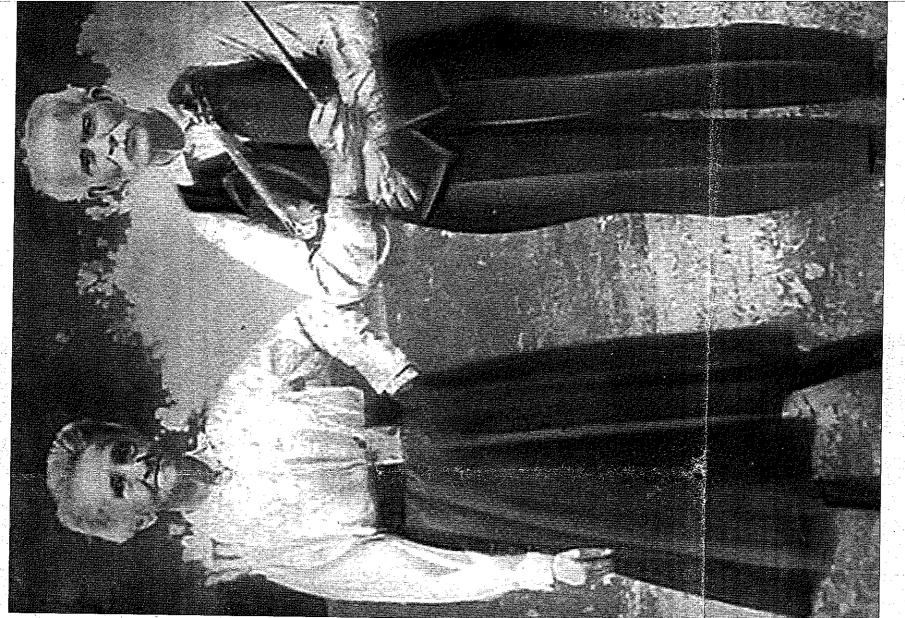
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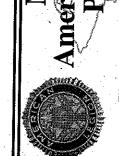
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Morle Post 5 Américan

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But as Ford became more and more involved in his new business the social side of life less-

Years later, when the Fords had become one of the richest families in America, Henry and Clara stepped out for an evening of dance — like in the good old

Unfortunately, their skill on the dance floor had suffered over

the years.

While trying to keep up in a dance they'd been fond of earlier in their married life they stumbled through a number of the

steps.

Someone laughed.
Henry Ford was a proud man who didn't appreciate being made an object of ridicule — no matter how congenial.
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Dance lessons became mandatory for all Ford Motor Car Co. executives.

The dance master and the Ford Orchestra were on call every hour of every day.

The musical accompaniment included two dulcimer players and a fiddler.

Ford became enthralled with classic folk music and his agents searched the country for the best musicians around.

He traveled around the state listening to dulcimer players and

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listening to dulcimer players and collecting examples of handmade dulcimers.

He collected fiddles from around the county and was a huge fan of a Maine fiddler by the name of Mellie Dunham—called by many in the 1920s the best fiddler in the nation.

Then ... Henry Ford met Jep

Ford heard about the Paris fiddler from his brother-in-law who operated a Ford dealership in Traverse City.

The brother-in-law, W.D.

Mrs. Bisbee playing along on the family organ.
Ford made a visit to Paris.
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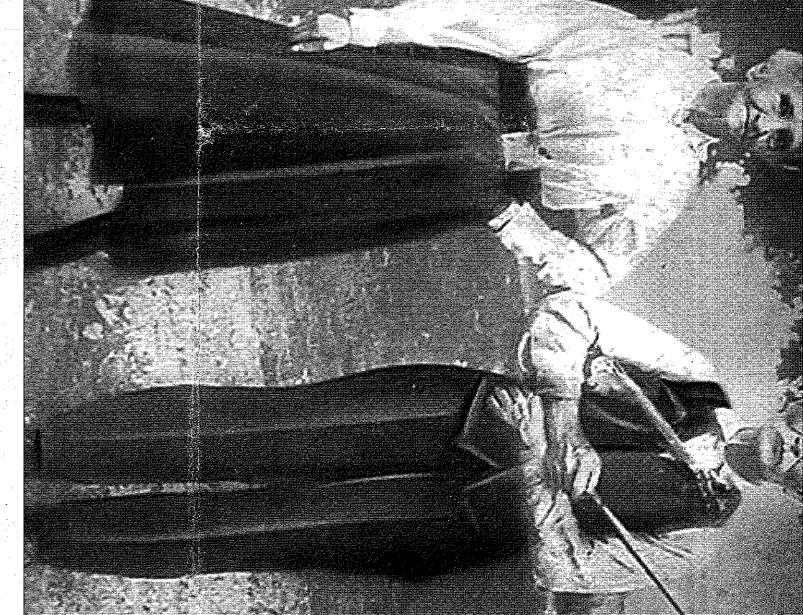
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New Jersey.
On their way home to Paris on the Ford train, the Bisbees stopped in Dearborn where they played at an "old fashioned ball."
Bisbee was one of Fords favorite musicians.
The wealthy industrialist often would make day trips north to sit in the Bisbee parlor and listen to Jep play And the men would sit on the Bisbees' front porch and watch the world pass by while talking about the business of the day.
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Bisbee's love of music and is dedication to the art wasn't imited to Henry Ford's

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Above, Paris fiddle maker and master player Jep Bisbee with his wife, Sarah. Top left, the Bisbee Paris.

At 84-years of age he was asked to play for a Knights of Columbus ball in Clare — at the Doherty Hotel.

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Have soup there by 12 Noon and pre look, smell & taste.
4 judges will announce the winner Soup judged on originality, Judging begins at 3 pm. ontes All money paid out Morley ent the prize to that person \$5 Entry Fee

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#### Henry Ford among those to visit Paris, admire work

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Jep and Mrs.. Bisbee played " ... one of the modern creations which dancers nowadays demand.'

The listeners were polite but not too excited.

Jep asked if they'd rather hear some old dance tunes and cranked out the Virginia Reel.

Soon tune after tune filled the parlor and Ford and Firestone asked to shift furniture out of the room in order to be better able to dance with their wives.





Above, Paris fiddle maker and master player Jep Bisbee with his wife, Sarah. Top left, the Bisbee home still stands in

He could have used the shifty lage of Paris: on the northern edge of the vil-The old couple appreciated walked along to visit his sister

But he never learned to drive fancy automobile Mr. Ford gave

and never rode in the car even him to make the trip,

interesting figure in our local hisinsights they offered into this kindness and the fascinating grandniece. My thanks for their Graham — Jep Bisbee's great-B. Sengelaub and Mrs. Shirley in this story was supplied by Mrs. Much of the information used

> "He's the nicest talking the gesture.

> age of 88. Mrs. Sarah Bisbee died at the man," said Mrs. Bisbee.

> while preparing to play a concert Bisbee died at the age of 93, A few years later, in 1936, Jep

Jep Bisbee of Paris was once uoignibuling ni

grimage, to his door and shaded tial men in America made 'pil-The richest and most influencalled the "nation's fiddler."

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stroll a couple miles north up the When they left Jep would porch to listen to a few tunes.

noon or evening. Nothing daunt-

no passenger trains in the after-

Marquette railroad was running

aded (by snow) and the Pere

state trunk line M-20 was block-

There was a problem.

City he was informed that the

"When he arrived at Reed

Columbus ball in Clare — at the from around the nation.

asked to play for a Knights of Ford, competing against fiddlers

At 84-years of age he was Fiddlers Contest" sponsored by

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all. And Pop, there's the chickens

conbje went to Edison's Iaborato-Things were sorted out. The and the cat, what would happen

"I just can't bear to leave it

night sleeping outside their

Every night for 56 years. Not one

their lives in the house in Paris.

spent every day and night of

maid to take care of all their

railroad car with a chef and

New Jersey in Ford's private

vincing the older lady the trip

Jaunched into a campaign con-

Clara Ford and Mrs. Edison

N. J. would depend on his wife's

noted the trip to the East Orange,

already in his 80s), agreed but The old fiddler, (Jep was

agreeing to the adventure.

Mrs. Bisbee hesitated and

The Bisbees would travel to

part of it," said Mrs. Bisbee

would be wonderful

She and her husband had

"I wasn't thinking of that

Jep loved to play.

his dedication to the art wasn't

and he appreciated Jep as a man.

by while talking about the busi-

borch and watch the world pass

world sit on the Bisbees' front

ten to Jep play And the men

to sit in the Bisbee parlor and lis-

often would make day trips north

". Ilad bənoidasi blo" na is bəyalq

stopped in Dearborn where they

on the Ford train, the Bisbees

80 recordings during his stay in

mated that Jep turned out almost

The wealthy industrialist

Bisbee was one of Fords

On their way home to Paris

Bisbee's love of music and

Ford enjoyed Bisbee's music

limited

ness of the day

favorite musicians.

New Jersey.

to Henry Ford's

time in one day in total it's esti-The musical accompaniment than any other person of his ry and recorded more records

Ford Orchestra were on call

every hour of every day.

The brother-in-law, W.D. approval.

who operated a Ford dealership

tiddler from his brother-in-law Ford heard about the Paris

best fiddler in the nation.

Then ... Henry Ford met Jep

called by many in the 1920s the

the name of Mellie Dunham huge fan of a Maine fiddler by

stround the county and was a

collecting examples of hand-

listening to dulcimer players and

searched the country for the best

classic folk music and his agents

included two dulcimer players

Ford became enthralled with

He traveled around the state

He collected fiddles from

in Traverse City

made dulcimers.

musicians around.

and a fiddler.

The dance master and the

Car Co. executives.

mandatory for all Ford Motor Dance lessons became

knew all the folk tunes.

American" instruments and those who played the "real

best musicians of the day — Ford also contracted with the

In order to practice daily,

them perfectly.

the 'steps' and how to perform

Lovett taught the Fords all

him and his wife to live in

from New Hampshire bringing teacher named Benjamin Lovett He contracted with a dance

instructor there was to be had. conutry for the best dance the dance floor and searched the

never be laughed at again out on

He determined he would matter how congenial. made an object of ridicule — no

who didn't appreciate being

Henry Ford was a proud man Someone laughed.

bled through a number of the record his music. in their married life they stum-

and asked if Jep would like to qsuce they'd been fond of earlier

While trying to keep up in a out to talk to each other. preak Ford and Edison stepped

the dance floor had suffered over

Unfortunately, their skill on

of dance — like in the good old Clara stepped out for an evening

had become one of the richest ened in importance.

ness the social side of life lessmore involved in his new busi-But as ford became more and

started out their life together. Halls or front pariors as they

trying to pick up the high points poor so he sat close to the fiddler Edison's hearing was already able to dance with their wives. the room in order to be better

The dancing went on all after-

asked to shift furniture out of parlor and Ford and Firestone 200n tune after tune filled the

of the music.

families in America, Henry and Years later, when the Fords

cranked out the Virginia Reel. hear some old dance tunes and

evenings with friends in Grange

You Don't Have To In 1926, Jep won an "Old from Henry Ford to Jep Bisbee. psr.u sug bsrked - s present Big Rapids it was driven into the as we did when I was a young ed and the car had returned from have as much snow in Michigan Myen the ramp was completwas heard to remark: 'We do not those planks." When Jep arrived in Clare he dusty road whistling as he torn Four millionaires are laying snow and they had to shovel. Mrs. Bisbee and said: trip the car buried itself in the One of the party turned to zero weather Twice during the Bisbee garage. the huge drifts over 45 miles in work building a ramp into the bile and they floundered through ets, ties and collars and went to of a man who owned a snowmo-The four men took off jacked Jep. He engaged the services

ed the Bisbee home.

spruced up after the long trip

Big Rapids with its driver to be

cars, one of which was sent to

man, possibly Burroughs, visit-

Edison, Firestone and a fourth

The visitors came in two

After the contest Ford,