

Hot time in old hall tonight

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By NANCY DOYLE
Special to the Pioneer
STANWOOD—There'll be a hot time in the old (hall) tonight. As Don and Leona Spedoski, Old State Rd., Stanwood, prepare the old Mecosta Grange Hall for a wingding dance party this Saturday night, strains of that old familiar tune might well be running through their minds, for it will be quite a special event.

The Spedoskis have been hosting dances at the hall, located on Old State Road and 8 Mile, on the first and third Saturdays for about a year, with the musical services of one of the last of the "old time" fiddlers, 83-year-old Frank Mattison of Smyrna, and his 4-piece orchestra, "Mattison's Music Makers."

What make Saturday night's dance so special is that the public and friends of Frank and Irma Mattison will gather to help the couple celebrate their 64th wedding anniversary. The "old Grange Hall," as it is known, has seen many dances and anniversary celebrations, but probably not one marking so many years of happy life together. The Mattisons, of course, will provide the music for the dance, for that's what they were hired to do. What they don't know is that friends, such as Stewart and Lulu Carmichael of Evart, fellow Dulcimer Club members and Ken Stains, a banjo player from Greenville, who performed at the Mattison's Golden Wedding Anniversary celebration fourteen years ago, will be there, to "surprise" the couple.

As it happens, the Dulcimer Club convention is also

that they are going to have the evening party and expect many of the old musicians to leave the convention early and come to the grange. It could turn into a hoe-down such as the old hall has never seen.

Frank Mattison, earlier this week, recounted some of his life's accomplishments in a pre-party interview. "I never was an amateur," he said. His uncle, five years his senior, taught him how to play the violin and then "conned" him into playing at a house party. "Go get the kids to play" the older boys would say," Frank recounts, "so they could get out on the dance floor and hug the girls!"

A collection was taken up at the house part and Mattison was paid 90 cents, putting him in a "professional" league. He was 8 years old then, and he has made music ever since.

When he was 13 years old, he traveled with his uncle's medicine show, as an acrobat and tightrope artist. He continues to play the violin and other instruments, for parties and dances. "We made a circuit of towns west of Cadillac, and I lived for awhile in the Hoxeyville area," Mattison said.

About six years after he met and married Irma, Frank taught her to play and she usually plays in their orchestra. With both being equally at home on clarinet, saxophone, and flute, their repertoire includes many old favorites, but they keep up with current and popular tunes, too.

Although Frank played the violin by ear as early as seven, he studied under many tutors, all banding

Spedoski's mother, Mrs. Mark Spedoski, "There used to be five old time fiddlers who used to go through here, but they're all gone now."

When the Great Depression was just beginning to overwhelm the country, Frank Mattison was called in to his factory's office and told he would be laid off, indefinitely. He made the rounds of Greenville, Belding and Stanton, and asked the parents of well-to-do families if he could teach their children music. He organized a class at Stanton, and the day he was to begin teaching, the factory hailed him back.

Emphasizing the uncertainty of those times, Frank recalls, "I worked a couple of days and they again told me I was laid off and they didn't know when they'd have me back, or even if they ever could." Mattison went back to Stanton to again request a class to teach, and his students' families said "We expected you last week." That was the end of factory work and Mattison has made a living teaching and playing music since.

Since those days, the Mattisons have made quite a name for themselves. Frank and Irma have been the subjects of several newspaper features, as tribute is paid to the gathering years of their happy marriage and the music they provide. Their orchestra was a favorite for 15 years at Turk Lake. Frank belongs to the Grand Rapids Symphonette which meets every Wednesday at Olds Manor.

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Symphonette and Saturday nights twice a month at the old Mecosta Grange, they still have time to belong to the Old Time Fiddler's Club, and the Dulcimer Club.

In Smyrna, a jog in the road near Belding, the Mattisons are the mainstays for the annual St. Patrick's Day party, which attracts Irish and pseudo-Irish from miles around. "We had between 700 and 800 people here last March 17th," said Irma, with a happy smile. "We have a noon meal and supper, with home-made bread and other good dishes. We have skits and Irish jigs. Everybody is Irish in Smyrna on that day."

The day comes to a close with an Irish dance, and Mattison, who is Danish, puts on a good show. He dresses for the part and gives character monologues. "We have a good time," he says. He has played for 51 of the

122 annual St. Pats' parties of Smyrna.

Don Spedoski welcomes area families to come to the Mattisons' party and "Bring the kids and let them learn to dance." He emphasizes that dances at the old Grange Hall are family-style and no liquor is served. To help defray expenses, a number of luncheons are for sale, but this week there will be free homemade ice cream and anniversary cake.

Sometimes, Spedoski recalls, the dances weren't well-attended when they were just getting started. "Frank Mattison would tell me that he knew by the crowd that we didn't make enough to meet expenses, and he'd give me back part of his fee." When Spedoski protested, Frank insisted, in a generous and gentle way, "Not many people would do that," he says.



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As it happens, the Dulcimer Club convention is also Saturday, May 6, in Kalamazoo. The Spedoskis have planned to "noise it around!"

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