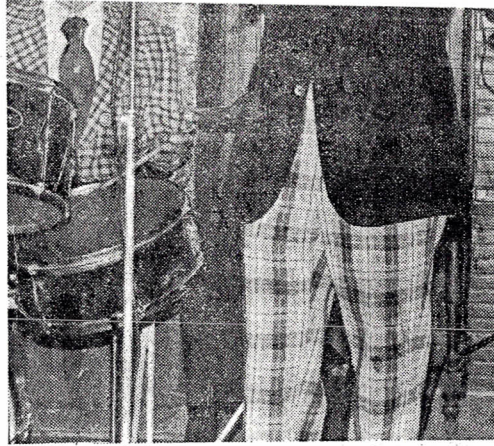




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## *Old Musicians Still in Tune*

*STANWOOD* By Nancy Doyle

~~STANTON~~ — The weather-beaten Mecosta Grange Hall near here has seen many a dance and anniversary party.

And musicians Frank and Irma Mattison of Smyrna have played the grange as well as a hundred other similar halls around West Michigan.

But last week, their appearance at the old Mecosta hall turned out to be a lot more than just their regular, twice-monthly "gig."

As they entered the hall, they found themselves the object of a surprise party, celebrating their 64th wedding anniversary.

The party for the Mattisons was a tribute from local residents who want to make sure the couple knows they are appreciated.

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"We don't put on these dances just to make money," said Don Spedoski, sponsor of the dances. "We just want to have a good time and let people know about these wonderful old-time musicians."

Mattison's Music Makers, a four-piece orchestra, are well-known throughout the state. The group played 154 years at Turk Lake, north of Greenville, and at 51 of the last 122 annual St. Patrick's Day celebration in Smyrna, located just southwest of Belding.

Frank plays the fiddle, which he began playing at age 7; Irma plays saxophone; their daughter, Frances Geiger, provides piano accompaniment and Albert Bozung handles the drums.

Frank Mattison's life has been music. He played professionally when he was 8. His uncle taught him to play and "conned" him into playing at a house party. In those days, Frank noted, he could earn up to 90 cents for playing parties.

When he was 13, he traveled with his uncle's medicine show in the Cadillac area. Besides music, he also entertained crowds with acrobatics and walking a tight rope. At the tender age of 83, he still amazes people with hand stands. Apparently all the exercise paid off. Neither he nor his wife seem to tire after playing four-hour stints at dances and parties.

In the early years of their marriage, the couple played background for silent movies in Belding.

"We played scores for "Phantom of the Opera," Thief of Baghdad," "Ten Commandments," and "Covered Wagon," he recalled.

Besides twice a month at Stanwood, the Mattisons play Tuesdays at nursing homes in Belding, Thursdays for senior citizens and on Wednesdays, Frank performs in the Grand Rapids Symphonette.

"You'd think they would get tired after playing for so long," said Spedoski. "But they don't even appear tired."

When the first dances were held at the Grange, Spedoski noted, attendance was sometimes low. Frank, he said, would give back a portion of his fee, saying he knew the dance organizers were not making enough to meet expenses.

Although the Mattisons don't attribute their longevity and energy to anything in particular, Spedoski is sure it's their love of music they share with others; "It makes us so happy to see people like the Mattisons come clear up here just to play for dances."