



A start on Stanley's second violin.

By PHILIP NEESE

Stanley Berge, of rural Wahkon, is 92 years old and is working on making his second violin!

"I was helping my neighbor build a boathouse and we were sorting a load of freshly sawn lumber when I spotted this beautiful piece of maple. It was eight ft. long and just covered with the lines of optical illusion that are called flamed, fiddle back or tiger tail. When this wood is sanded and finished it produces some of the world's most beautiful grain. My friend gave me this piece of lumber and I put it away to age. I knew that I would build a violin but I did not think that it would take close to fifty years to complete. I was raising a family and farming, time just seemed to slip away."

Stanley's grandfather, Andrew Collin (he calls him his mor far, Swedish for his mother's father) built and played violins in Sweden. When Stanley was seven years old his

mother gave him one of his grandfather's violins.

"I never had any lessons. My mother, Edith, played the piano and encouraged me by giving me a self-help book on playing the violin. I was soon playing by ear but realized that if I were going to get to play any serious music I would need to read notes. I have played the violin all my life. I played for the Aitkin orchestra, which is called the Great River Strings. We would play several concerts a year. Now I play almost every week with a group of friends. Classical music is my favorite."

Stanley often had to make repairs on his violin and soon he was repairing violins for neighbors. This repair business grew until Stanley estimated that he had repaired over 200 violins. He had also collected over 50 violins. He has cut his collection down so he will have a few for his children; however, none of them play the instrument.

"I was working on this one violin and had it all torn apart. I got some paper and traced out the parts and then started to build. It took

20 years to finish the violin. It is not easy to build a violin as both the front and back must be arched and they need to be of just the right thickness so that the vibration will enhance the sound. My only tools were a block plane and a jack knife. I judged the arching and thickness by eyeball. One unusual aspect of the violin is that it expands and contracts with the temperature in such a way that the violin would be torn apart if the new plastic glues on the market were used. These glues have no give, however, hide glues, principally horse hide glue not only has the expanding capabilities but such glue joints can be taken apart without damage to the wood when repairs are needed. When the violin was sanded and finished in 1993, I played

it for the first time. It was unbelievable; the sound was fantastic! I have played some fine violins but this piece of Mille Lacs maple and pine was about as fine an instrument, as you could want. Of course I may be a little prejudiced."

"I had to take a break but now I have started the second instrument. The work is going slowly but I am not rushed. I have been blessed with a wonderful life. Music has given wonderful meaning to my life."

Duane Hawkinson has played his guitar in groups with Stanley Berge.

Duane put it this way, "Stanley is one of the finest musicians that I have ever played with. Age has not affected his ability to play. That instrument just comes alive when he puts a bow on it."



Some of the violins in Stanley's collection.

Senior violin maker — making up time



Stanley Berge displays the violin he crafted.



Shown here is the fiddle back design in the maple of the handmade violin..