

California State College, Bakersfield

San Joaquin Valley Oral History Project

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Charles H. Dodge
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Brentwood, California
INTERVIEWER:	Juliet DeRuchie
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INTERVIEWER: Julia DeRuchie

DATED: October 23, 1977

J.D.: This is an interview with Charles Dodge for the oral history of Southern San Joaquin BLM by Julia DeRuchie at Kern County Museum 10-23-1977 at 1:48 pm.

J.D.: Where was the birthplace of you and where were you born.

C.D.: I was born in Brentwood, California in Contra Costa County May 10, 1910.

J.D.: How long did you live there?

Dodge: Well, I lived there approximately two years in that area. My father was employed on a large ranch there in the Sacramento River Basin and we were in that area at that time.

J.D.: What were you mother and father's name?

Dodge: My father's name was Charles H. Dodge, Senior and my mother's name Mary Woolesy Dodge.

J.D.: Had they lived long in Brentwood?

Dodge: No, my mother was born at the foot of Mount Diablo in Contra Costa County which is about thirty miles from Brentwood. My dad was a ranch worker at that time. His usual occupation was a either a foreman or a superintendent on large ranches and he had been transferred to that area and was running cattle up in the Mount Diablo area.

J.D.: What was your former source of income?

Dodge: Well my father was a ranch foreman and a superintendent and that was his source of income. My mother was very young and she was a teenager, about sixteen years old.

J.D.: Did she work?

- Dodge: No, just a housewife.
- J.D.: How many kids did she have?
- Dodge: Just two, my brother and I.
- J.D.: Is your brother older?
- Dodge: My brother was older. He is deceased now.
- J.D.: Where did you family live in Kern County?
- Dodge: My father first came down to Kern County in 1922, which is about 55 years ago. He was employed by the Miller and Lux Ranching Company as the assistant superintendent on the Buttonwillow Ranch which was a large ranch located about twenty-five miles west of Bakersfield.
- J.D.: When you lived here in Kern County, how long did you live here?
- Dodge: I came here in 1924. I came down here two years after my dad came down here. He and my mother had separated temporarily and I stayed in Oregon. I left Brentwood, California and we went from there down to Central California and then moved up into Oregon where my father was a superintendent on a large cattle ranch in Eastern Oregon. Then he came down to the Buttonwillow Ranch and I came down a couple of years later.
- J.D.: What was the most interesting thing you did while you were here with your parents that you really liked?
- Dodge: Well, probably the most interesting thing I did when I came here in 1924, I might add that the Miller and Lux properties had been sold. The Miller and Lux Company got into financial trouble and my father was temporarily out of a job when they started laying-off all their employees on the large ranches, they were being sold off.
- In 1924, the first year I was in Kern County, I spent that winter in a camp out here in Edison. My dad being unemployed and in those days there was no unemployment insurance or any welfare. You had to either work or starve and he went out and picked oranges for \$1.25 a day and we lived in a tent out here and it was a rather bleak cold winter. At that time I went to the Edison Grammar School out at Edison. It was a very small school at that time, in fact, it was probably less than thirty children in school and I was the only eighth grader.
- J.D.: It says here that your dad really liked prospecting. Did you ever help him?
- Dodge: Yes, well my dad always had the gold gold fever and in addition to being a rancher he prospected up on the Kern River up at Democrat Hot Springs. There

is some gold there and there is still gold now but maybe nothing [?][5:35]. But he always thought there was a lot of gold up there. When he would have a few days off he would go up there and he'd build sluice boxes and dig in his diggings and using water from the Kern River he would wash the pour down in these sluice boxes and he was getting some small nuggets out of there but I really think there was more rattlesnakes up there than there was gold because one summer he killed about a hundred rattlesnakes right in that area there on the north side of the river.

J.D: When did you become interested in becoming Sheriff?

Dodge: Well, I really didn't think of having any idea of being Sheriff when I went into law enforcement. After I finished local schools here we had the Depression at that time and jobs were very hard to find. I got a job driving a truck over the old Ridge Route, that's the old original Ridge Route which had about 800 curves between here and Los Angeles. I drove truck over there and I got acquainted with numerous Highway Patrolmen between Oakland and Los Angeles, which was my run that I drove. I got interested in being a Highway Patrolman and that was really my goal at the time.

I did see an ad in the paper back in 1937 which told of the Bakersfield City Police Department having an examination for the position of police patrolman. I thought, well, I'll take that examination to see how well I can do and maybe it will help me prepare for the Highway Patrol examination. So I took the examination and I placed high enough on the exam to qualify for an appointment and in early 1937 Chief Robert Powers, who was then the Chief of Police of Bakersfield, and a man who I had known because at an intervening time when I was going to school here I had a shoe shining parlor over on F Street and Chief Powers at the time I was shining shoes was a Rail Road Special Officer and I used to shine his shoes. He had joined the police department and had risen to the position of police chief. So I knew him and I liked him real well and he offered me the job and I took it. So I spent 29 years on the Bakersfield City Police Department before I ever became Sheriff.

J.D: How did you meet your wife?

Dodge: Well, I had a first wife. I married my first wife when she was 17 years old and I was 21. We had a tragedy in the family. My first wife contracted cancer and she passed away. My present wife was Mary Holman who was a police officer for the City of Bakersfield who I've known ever since she went to work in 1940. I worked with her professionally and that's how I got to know my present wife. After my first wife passed away Mary and I got more romantically inclined and we got married about 14 years ago.

J.D: Let's get back to your earlier life. How was life on the ranch?

Dodge: How was life on the ranch? It was a good life on the ranch. I remember when I was a young boy when my dad was the ranch superintendent we lived in a large two-story house. The ranch superintendent for Miller and Lux Company was treated rather royally. He was furnished with a Chinese cook, so my mother didn't have to do any cooking at all. All she had to do is just straighten up the house and keep it well. We always had a lot of horses on the ranch. We were on cattle ranches all the time and had lots of cowboys and we had bunk houses and we had blacksmith shops on these large ranches. It was real enjoyable to go out to a blacksmith shop and smell the burning coke and watch blacksmiths trim horses' hooves and put shoes on them and watch them tighten wagon wheels and repair old wagons.

I remember when I first went to school in the first grade we weren't bussed like kids are now. We had a single horse cart. When I started the first grade I was six years old and my brother was seven years old. We drove this single horse cart by ourselves four miles to school and even forded a river. There wasn't a bridge there where we crossed. During the winter time, this is up in Oregon, we would cross the river on the ice when the ice froze in Eastern Oregon. Life on a ranch was really an enjoyable experience for a child. It's too bad many children now do not have that same experience. We had a lot of fun, we used to get calves in these corrals and we'd ride and put what we called a [?] around them which is a rope around their chest and tummy and get on and push the tail a little bit and wind them up and boy they'd get to bucking like a bucking bronco, a Brahman bull. I got a broken collar bone as a result of riding calves. It's just too bad we didn't stay on the ranch and the Miller and Lux Company hadn't got into financial difficulty because it was a really an enjoyable life.

J.D: How was Miller and Lux to work for?

Dodge: They were like any other large company. My dad liked to work for them real well. He worked for them for nearly twenty years. They were a good company. They fed well, they paid well. At that time a ranch superintendent got about \$100 a month, a house furnished and everything, but that was a lot of money in those days. They got the choice horses to drive and nice Surrey to drive. A nice Surrey was like a Cadillac car now. They were a very fine company.

J.D: Can you remember any of your teachers?

Dodge: I don't remember my teachers' name. The teachers that I had though were quite competent in those days especially in grammar school and even high school teachers were quite competent. Because in those days you had to learn your lessons or you didn't pass. You just stayed in the same grade until you finally learned them. And if a person was found to be un-learnable then they would finally would give you, at sixteen years old, they would give you a work permit

and you could go out and get you a ditch digging job. They would just figure you were unable to learn or if you didn't want to learn.

J.D: Were you ever involved in any lodges or was your father?

Dodge: Yes, my father was a member of the Moose and a member of an organization known as the Knights of Pithias. These are both still existent now. I've been involved in quite a number of lodges, predominately the Masonic Lodge and the [?] Club.

J.D: What was the effect of the World War on the Police Department?

Dodge: World War II on the Police Department? Well, we had rather a mass exodus of officers leaving the department. Some of the younger officers that were unmarried were drafted into the army and many of them volunteered for service in the army and naval forces of the United States during World War Two and I was among those who left and served during World War Two. About half of the members of the police department joined the armed forces. Older men who were beyond the draft age took our places on a temporary basis during the war or those who were classified as 4F and not considered physically able to serve in the armed forces took over the police jobs on a temporary basis until the war was over and then most of us came back and were restored to our positions in the department.

J.D: What year did you run for....?

Dodge: For the Office of Sheriff? I ran in 1966 which was about eleven years ago. I had finished 29 years of service with the Police Department. At that time I was assistant Police Chief. I took a leave of absence from the Police Department and for three months I campaigned throughout the county for the Office of Sheriff. In the primary election in June 1966 I was elected. However, I didn't take Office because my predecessor's term had not expired until January of '67 and I took Office in January of '67. I served a four year term and then I ran again for Sheriff four years later and was re-elected. At that time I nearly reached my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday and I figured that I had been in law enforcement for a little better than 37 years and I figured that that was enough and it was time to retire.

J.D: Looking back over the years that you were in the Sheriff's Department and Police Department and looking at what it is now, do you feel that it was better back then or better now?

Dodge: Well, I would say there are two schools of thought on that. When I first went into the Police Department in 1937 people were a lot safer on the streets and in their homes than they are now. The police had a lot more authority then, than they have now. There have been numerous high court decisions; the Supreme Court of the United States has rendered several decisions and so has the California

State Supreme Court rendered some decisions on prisoner's rights and on suspect's rights which did tamper the work of law enforcement officers.

I would say at the same time that some law enforcement officers had overstepped their bounds of authority. These were in the minority but some had done it. I think this is the reason we were given these adverse decisions and the power of the police officer had been limited. Of course, there's a lot of other socio-economic conditions that had developed over the last 25 to 40 years which has changed the make-up of the community and their morality and their standards and we have kind of entered into the permissive age where anything goes and some people have taken advantage of it, primarily the criminal element.

As far as in the early days, when I was a young police officer, the police officer had a lot more authority. We had a vagrancy law that practically covered anything which you could put a suspect away. At least get him off the streets at night if he was under suspicious circumstances. You didn't have to watch him to see if he was going to break into a building or into somebody's home. All these vagrancy laws, which were rather vague, had been ruled unconstitutional. The police no longer have this wide latitude that we had prior to 1950.

J.D: Well, what I want to know is if you had to do it over again would you?

Dodge: Yes, I'll do it. I found police work very enjoyable and would recommend it for anyone who likes that kind of work or thinks that they would like it because there was never a day in the 37 years that I was in police work that I didn't look forward to going to work whether it was a graveyard shift or on the night shift. I might add that it's rather hard on family life because all the new policemen all draw the night shifts. That's been just a custom in the police force that the older, the more seniority you get the better shifts, you get the daylight shifts. This is hard on family life where you are working from four at night to midnight for years on end or working from midnight to eight. Your whole life is turned topsy-turvy if you have a wife who is either staying home or working daylight and you're working nights, you just kind of pass at the door. Your family life is disrupted a great deal.

Of course now, the officers do have a lot more time off because they work a 40 hour week. When I went to work we worked a 48 hour week and there was no paper or compensatory time for overtime and we usually worked about a 60 hour week. But I found it very interesting and sometimes very exciting. Of course we had new a lot of advents of new communications systems. When I went to work we had no two-way radios. The one-way radio had just been introduced into the police service. We didn't get the two-way radio until 1950.

[END OF TAPE ]

Dodge: Probably an interesting thing in my teenage days was when my father started a movie picture show in Arvin in 1925. This was the first theater in that small

town. My dad and another gentleman bought an old lease house from the Standard Oil Company here off of one of the leases in the Kern River front, cut it up, and took it out in sections to Arvin, put it back together. We bought some second hand theater seats, bought a couple of second hand movie projectors and we were in business. And we ran the old silent movies, the old westerns, black and white no sound. The price of a theater ticket then was .25 cents for adults and ten and fifteen cents for children. We were quite successful out there and my dad started a theater up in Tehachapi. There was an old building out in Shafter which had been abandoned. He used to show silent movies out there. He did this for a number of years.

It was kind of fun. I used to sit down by the big stove that we had in the winter time there and I had some friends that liked to come and see the movies. I would occasionally slip a few of them in the side door. I remember my dad caught me once and I got a good lickin' for that because it was cutting down on the profits. The theater was rather successful and because it was a novelty at that time in these rural areas.

J.D: What did your friends think about the theater? Did they think it was great?

Dodge: It was rather harmless larceny. They were teenagers and they'd have to pay .25 cents to get in. It saved them .25 cents. In those days .25 cents was a lot of money because that was about the beginning of hard times here in this area. Kids didn't have dollar bills in their pockets then. If they had a few coins then they were lucky.

J.D: When you were first getting into the Police Department, when you first started, can you remember what your pay was?

Dodge: Yes, it was \$150 a month.

J.D: Was that very much?

Dodge: It was considered a good salary for a high school graduate at that time. A \$150 a month would buy quite a bit. You didn't live luxuriously, you couldn't buy a television because we didn't have any, but you could pay rent and you could buy your groceries and you could support your family on a \$150 a month if you were frugal.

J.D: Do you remember about the oil boom?

Dodge: No, the oil boom was prior to my time here. Of course, Bakersfield has always been a rather bright spot, even during the Depression because it's always had oil under its ground; it's always been a good farming area. During the Depression which started full blast in 1929, Bakersfield was one of the brighter spots here, of the nation because there always was a demand for oil; there was always a

demand for agricultural products. A person, if you sought diligently enough, you could get a job. I know I was able to keep a job all during the Depression. I never had to go on relief, as they called it then. I never had to beg a meal. I always had a job even though I was only a high school graduate of average intelligence.

J.D.: What do you think of Bakersfield?

Dodge: I think Bakersfield is a great place. I've been to a lot of places in the United States and while Bakersfield has a little warm weather in the summer time and it has a little foggy weather for a month or six weeks in the winter time, you take it as a whole. It has a wonderful climate. It's just a nice place to live because people here are very friendly as a whole. There are really no strangers; people will speak to you here. When you get into larger cities and some places they are quite aloof. Here regardless of your financial circumstances in life, as long as you lead a good life, other people will associate with you whether they are millionaires and you happen to be just happen to be an ordinary working man, I know that, because I have many friends that are moneyed people. Even before I was in public office I could associate with people as long as you have a good reputation.

J.D.: Now that Bakersfield is all grown up, do you think this is the high-point of it or do you think it'll grow more?

Dodge: Oh it's going to grow more. It's kind of too bad that it is going to grow more because I thought Bakersfield was a much nicer town when the metropolitan Bakersfield population was about 75,000 people. That was just about right. Now I guess we've reached nearly a quarter of a million in the metropolitan area. It's getting now that you don't know as many people as you did then. The growth seems to be unlimited here. I think Bakersfield will eventually be a city of probably a half million or more people.

J.D.: Considering that Bakersfield now isn't quite that big of a town yet, but, when it gets bigger do you think that the crime, the crime is already bad, do you think it will get higher and higher as it goes?

Dodge: Well unless it is checked and a lot of circumstances are changed and maybe some of the court decisions are rescinded by the Appellate and the Supreme Court, I don't think the police can do a great deal to protect you because there just isn't enough of them. People have to protect themselves. At least, it's going to get worse, if people follow their present paths. However, there may be a change of morality and responsibility and especially parental responsibility of starting kids out on the right track and not letting them get derailed into a life of crime. Unless this is done and unless our morals improve, I don't see anything but more crime with more population because it's followed up to this point here. Bakersfield used to be a very, very quiet little town. I remember when I first went

on the police force practically all the crime was confined to one little area, the Tenderloin District down in what we called L Street. There were gambling parlors down there and they had little red light districts in there and if you went down there and hung around some of those streets there you could expect to get maybe rolled. But we didn't have the hoard of criminals driving around in cars now, snatching purses, breaking into people's homes and stealing televisions, radios, stereo players and anything else they can sell or trade for dope. This is one of the things that has caused a great deal of crimes against property and armed robbery is that young people suddenly deciding that they got to alter their minds with dope and especially the heroin addicts which find that they have to pay such a high price for a fix. And the only way they can get this money is the women can become prostitutes or they can become shoplifters or the males can become hold-up men or burglars or just common thieves. This is where a lot of our crime originates from is the addiction to hard drugs.

J.D.: When did you retire?

Dodge: I retired in 1965 in January, 1975 rather, when my second term of office expired.

J.D.: Have you been enjoying your life after retirement?

Dodge: Oh yes, very much. I'm awfully busy though. I serve on a lot of committees for various organizations. I help with fund drives and things like that for charitable groups. I have my horse that I have to ride to keep him in shape. I belong to three riding groups, so I find retirement very enjoyable. We have a trailer and we take trailer trips now and then. There is just so many things to do when you retire if you want to do them. If you just want to sit in a chair and watch television it would be quite boring I think.

J.D.: Do you ever go down and visit the old buddies that you had?

Dodge: Occasionally, I go. We have the Bakersfield Police Benefits Association that meets once a month and some of the old timers who have also retired usually go to the meetings and we meet there. And then we have a retirement group which I'm the president of this year, of Public Employees, which many of the old policemen belong to and have retired and we get together and talk about old times. The thing you have to avoid when you retire and as you get older is don't live in the past and look ahead to the future because there is always another happy day. The main thing is to keep your health.

J.D.: Seems like you've kept your health pretty good. How do you keep in shape?

Dodge: How do I keep in shape? I cut my lawn and I trim my trees and I ride my horse and I curry my horse and I clean my own stable. I do physical work to stay in shape because if you don't do physical work your body will deteriorate. That's really a necessity when a person gets older. We got to remember that we're all

going to get older. There's only one alternative to getting older and that's dying younger.

J.D.: What about when you were in the police force? Did you stay active then?

Dodge: Yeah we did. We had a gymnasium and we used to work out and stay in shape.

J.D.: What about when you were younger, when you and your brother were younger did you guys ever fight like normal brothers?

Dodge: Oh yeah, we used to have some good ones. We could pick a fight over almost anything like kids do because we were only eighteen months apart and we were nearly about the same size so it was a pretty even battle. We never got into real serious things; it was just little slug fests.

J.D.: Who always got in trouble the most, you or your brother?

Dodge: Well, we both managed to stay out of trouble pretty well. We avoided it because I was, you know, I had an opportunity when I was in about the fifth grade to go to a parochial school up in Baker City, Oregon which was run by the Catholic Faith. I was indoctrinated into Catholicism and thought about the Devil and he had horns and there was a hell fire and everything and it kind of scared me when I was a kid and I didn't want us to burn. So, I always managed to stay out of it and they told us not to steal and we would burn in hell fire and if we did things wrong we would get punished for it and the life hereafter and that kind of stayed with me even though I never joined the Catholic Church. That one year that I spent in this boarding school, my brother and I, I think it did a lot for us. It's too bad that all children aren't indoctrinated more by the Church regardless of what denomination it is so that they know that it is wrong to steal and they feel that they are going to get punished for it sometime.

J.D.: When you were younger growing up, what did you want to be?

Dodge: What did I want to be? I wasn't really sure. When I was young I would play everything. I'd play cops and robbers and we'd play cowboys and Indians and we rode stick horses over the hills. Of course, coming from a ranch I always loved horses. I even thought that maybe I'd like to have been a bronco buster or a rodeo rider at one time but it didn't work out that way.

J.D.: Did your dad have any influence on you ever? Did he ever say "I want you to go into farming?"

Dodge: No, my dad never suggested to me what I might want to do because I left home as soon as I left high school and I went on my own.

J.D.: When you were little did he ever help you with projects that you had to do?

Dodge: No, my dad was busy working. On the ranches you worked long hours and he didn't really have the time they have now to do those things. We helped out on the ranch. If we had cows we'd help with those. We lived for a short time up in Bend Oregon and my dad operated a slaughter house and a gary(?) and a small ranch up there. We had to help out. There was always work to do. We didn't have gas lines running heat into the houses. We had to saw the wood and we sawed that old juniper wood and it would take you all Saturday to saw up enough wood to keep you warm for the rest of the week. We didn't really have enough time to do the things they have now because life was a lot harder then, than it is now. You had to work or else you didn't eat or else you didn't stay warm. You had to cut your own wood; meat had to be prepared. You didn't have the big packing facilities that they have now, supermarkets.

J.D.: What kind of house did you live in when you were young?

Dodge: Well, we lived in several places. Like I said my dad was a rancher and we moved from ranch to ranch. They were usually wood frame houses. When we lived in Eastern Oregon after or a short time after Miller and Lux went broke, we lived in a brick house that was still there, but rather small houses and they had smaller rooms. Nothing as palatial and nice as the houses are now. Of course, in those early days we heated the houses either with heating stoves burning wood or coal. That was the source of heat. Of course my mother cooked over a wood or coal stove. We didn't have any gas or electricity then. When I was in grammar school we did all of our homework by coal oil lamps or kerosene lamps. We didn't have electricity out on there on the farms like we have now.

J.D.: Were you a good student when you were in school?

Dodge: Yes, I was a pretty good student. I liked to go to school.

J.D.: What were your favorite subjects?

Dodge: Oh, my favorite subjects were probably History and Geography.

J.D.: What were your worst?

Dodge: My worst was math.

J.D.: In your early years can you remember were the police tough and mean?

Dodge: I think there has always been tough and mean policemen and there is some even today that think they are tough and mean but there were a lot of nice ones too. Not all. There used to be what we used to call street court when I was a young officer. You would tell people what to do; you could question them. You didn't have to advise them to get an attorney before you questioned them. You could settle more things on the street. I don't mean by brutality or anything like that but policemen were respected because they knew they would put you in jail then and

the judges were tough then, too. When you told a person to go home that he's disorderly he usually went home. If he didn't go home then he ended up in jail. Jail at that time was more of a stigma on a person than it is now. Now it sometimes appears to be kind of a badge of honor that you've did a stretch in jail.

J.D.: Now kids have hardly any respect for police officers. In earlier years did they have more respect for them?

Dodge: Yes they did because there weren't nearly as many police and sheriff's as there is now, of course there weren't nearly as many kids either. But in those days justice was more swift and more sure. It was almost a disgrace then to go to Juvenile Hall which now it doesn't appear to be. No one ever wanted to be put in what they used to call the detention home then. If you've been in the detention home you were kind of an outcast in teenage society during my days. Kids weren't as well informed in the worldly ways of life as they are now. All they have to do now is watch television and you could see all kinds of life portrayed for you. In those days we had no T.V. and kids didn't see a lot of the sordid things they see now, the violence and so forth. It was just, in my opinion, it was a much more orderly society. We still had bad kids and we had criminals in those days but we certainly didn't have them in the number we have now or in the proportionate numbers we have now.

END OF INTERVIEW