ARCHIE JAGGE

MEMOIR

Alsatian Customs and Traditions

B24

PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a tape-recorded interview conducted by the Castroville Public Library Oral History Program Project B in March 1981. Deanna Hoffman transcribed the tape and Connie Rihn was the interviewer and editor of this transcript. The interview took place in the Archie Jagge home located 3 miles north of Castroville.

Archie Jagge was born in 1899 of Alsatian parents and has lived all his life on the ranch north of Castroville. At 81 he still retains his love of life and mischievous humor. He has a distinct memory of life in this area when he was growing up in the early 1900's. The Jagge family was engaged in farming and ranching and Archie followed that profession. He has written his memoirs, which were printed in the News Bulletin in 1975. Archie talks about his life as a boy, going to school, his life as a young man, and the social customs of that era.

Tape # B24
2 hrs.
transcribed

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Today is March the 13th, 1981. This is Connie Rihn interviewing Archie Jagge at his home about three miles north of Castroville. I'm interviewing for the Castroville Public Library Oral History Project B.

Q Mr. Jagge, We're going to start out with, I'd like to know a little bit about your family background, like where were you born and who were your parents and your family.

A That's a good question.

Q What, you don't know?

A Oh, yes. I was born three and a half miles from Castroville on my ranch.

Q Which direction?

A Northeast. And I was born September the 12th, 1800 and 99. In those days it was just different than what it is today.

Q Who were your parents?

A My parents were Amand Jagge and Caroline Tschirhart. I've got the wedding dates but not just now. (MAY 24, 1879)

Q Well, how many children did they have? How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A There were eight children.

Q And are you the youngest?

A I was the youngest. I was the caboose. And --

Q Now, was their home place in the vicinity where your home is here? Where was it from here?

A The old original ranch headquarters was about a mile from

my residence today. And when I was born there was no doctor in town at that time, so my aunt --

Q Who is that? Ed's wife?

A Yes.

Q Anna? Anna Stepenack?

A Anna Stepenack, yes.

Q She was Ed Tschirhart's wife.

A Was Ed Tschirhart's wife, the old Indian. He was --

Q She was a midwife, then?

A She was a professional midwife, educated in Poland, came here as a midwife and during her entire life she delivered most every child in Castroville.

Q Well, what years did she operate about, did she do this midwifing, 'cause I've never heard anybody talk about what years that was.

A Well, that was --

Q You were in '99.

A In 1800 and about 80, according to her age at that time, so --

Q Do you know when she died? Early 1900's, wasn't it?

A Yes, she died in the early 1900's. But she was my aunt, and she was an individual. She made housecalls from the little city, town of Castroville to every ranch.

Q How did she come here?

A She come here, she come --

Q buggy?

A With horse and buggy, and she'd come alone. Often she'd travel as much as ten miles or more. But many times she'd, the child was delivered before she ever got there. There was always a neighbor to help out in case the midwife didn't come.

Q Well, Dr. Fitzsimon wasn't here at that time?

A No. No, he first came here in 1900.

Q Oh. I thought he was here in the 1890's.

A The only doctor that I remember, the first one, was Dr. Boehme. I think his name was Ferdinand Boehme. He was the first doctor that ever give me any medicine at the age of about six, six or seven years. My dad took me to this old doctor, he was a real old man at that time, and the reason I went to the doctor, I was like a dog at that time. I had what you'd call running fits, you know, I'd be sleeping, walking in my sleep.

Q Oh, uh-huh.

A And so my dad took me over to the doctor and he said, "Oh," in German he says, "This kid's got thick blood. I'll give him something for that thick blood." And so he said to me, he said, "Do you have any small medicine bottles?" He says, "I'd like to get some. I'll give you 25 cents a dozen if you collect 'em at different houses." So I said, "Well, that's a deal, because that was my first business, you know, in life. I was gonna collect bottles. They were patent medicine bottles,

didn't make any difference, just so it was a clean little bottle. And when mother and dad and I was a little kid, the first thing I'd ask when I'd get to a neighbor, "Do you have any bottles?" So I collected bottles until I had a dollar and 75 cents --

Q Now this was for Dr. Boehme?

A That was for Dr. Boehme. And that was about 1906.

Q Well, where did he have his practice? In Castroville?

A He had his practice right near the bridge. There was an old Ihnken house. I think they called it -- It was between the Bourquin Station, just next to the Bourquin Station. There was an old house.

Q Well, okay, what about the Haass house? The Valentine Haass house?

A It was between the Haass house and the Johnson house, I think.

Q Somewhere where Ms. Alma Etter lives now?

A Yes. It was this side of Alma Etter's. I twas a big two-story building. I'm surprised that you don't have pictures of it.

Q Well, there's a picture of the Haass house that they tore down when they built the highway.

A Well, that's a different -- a two-story. It was built, it looked similar to the house from the Parish hall.

Q Oh, really? Like the Carle house.

A Carle house. It wasn't as long --

Q Well, I remember a two-story house where the Medina Savings is now. It was in that area. There was a two-story house.

A No, there weren't no two-story house. That was Carle store. That was a one-story. And then the next building was the Haasses.

Q Well, Dr. Boehme, you're the first person I've ever heard talk about him. Is he the father of, like, Gus Boehme and --

A No relation.

Q Oh, no relation?

A No. He was from Germany.

Q But he is not from this Boehme family?

A Oh, no. In fact, there was a story in those days that he really wasn't a real doctor. He probably was like the first ones were --

Q Self-educated --

A -- a veterinary doctor and from there they --

Q Well, I didn't know. I thought he was the ancestor of the

A Oh, no, he was no relation.

Q Well, did he live in Castroville? Was he --

A Yeah, he was an old bachelor. It's kind of long ago when that all happened.

Q But you remember Anna Stepenack though, don't you?

A Oh, yes. Aunt Anna I called her.

Q Yeah, my dad has told me some interesting stories about her, about how she was.

A And, like Uncle Ed, he was the one that had that uniform.

Q The one that killed the Indian.

A Killed the Indian and sold the whole doggone thing for about $15 which -- he killed a Indian chief. It wasn't just a regular Indian. And every Fourth of July old Uncle Ed, they said, would put that Indian uniform on or whatever you call it, and --

Q Whoopeed up, huh?

A Yeah. He was celebrating the Declaration of Independence because he helped.

Q Okay, Mr. Jagge. Tell me who your, let's get back to your family and you tell me who your brothers and sisters -- start with the oldest and tell me who your brothers and sisters --

A Well, there were eight brothers and sisters. The oldest one of the girls was Molly Jagge Schmitt. Second oldest, boy, or the first oldest boy was Philip Jagge, Phil Jagge. The second oldest one was Fred Jagge. The next one was Jul Jagge. The next one was May Jagge Poerner. Then there was Lenora Jagge.

Q Who did she -- oh, is that the girl that died?

A No. There was another boy, Patrick. He was older than Nora was. So after Patrick and then Nora there was

Archie Jagge.

Q That's you.

A That's me.

Q Were all these brothers and sisters still living at home when you grew up? Or were they already married?

A Well, I knew all of 'em except my brother Patrick. When he died I was probably about three years old. I just have a faint memory of --

Q What did he die of? Was he killed or --

A Well he was an epileptic, but before he died we had no screens on our house, so in summer the doors were all open when the weather was warm and he was laying on the floor and a skunk bit him. He could have had rabies. Of course, they didn't know. We didn't know, but he was an epileptic.

Q Well, did he die very soon after that bite?

A I wouldn't remember.

Q What was your dad's occupation? What did he do to raise you kids?

A Well, we go back to -- he was a son of Philip Jagge and Grandma Wernette.

Q And her name was Elizabeth?

A I'd have to --

Q Elizabeth Meuret?

A Meuret, yes. And we never knew the date they married, but what my dad said, he, according to my records, he

was four months old when his dad got killed. He was in the Army in the service at that time. U.S. Army, and he was stationed somewhere at a post which they called forts, but I've forgotten the name of the fort where he was. I was told that his, he was a baker by trade in the Army, and every morning around 4:00 o'clock he'd go to the post and start the fire in the kitchen and bake bread.

Q Did he ever live in Castroville?

A We have no record of it.

Q Was he a landowner here?

A Yes.

Q He was? This was Philip Jagge, your grandfather, you're talking about. He was --

A In fact, he owned about one acre of land in the Wernette Garden. That was on my grandfather's name. Plus two lots where Elmer Groff lived, and that was all that was on his name. The reason there wasn't -- he owned quite a bit of property before he was killed, in Castroville, or he had the money. Anyway, after his wife, my grandma, passed away, or he passed away, why, she married John B. Wernette, and then the land that was purchased or transferred over to the Wernettes which was --

Q Well, did he own the ranch, your grandfather? Philip, did he own the ranch that you lived on, or was that just Amand?

A They both owned, each one owned the same amount of the property. Half of it was purchased by John B. Wernette and my dad after they were married bought this same ranch we're on today. And there was a deal between my grandfather, or step-grandfather, between him and my dad; that he would give him 40 acres of land which was known as the Felix place. An old Frenchman by the name of Felix owned that property, and Grandpa Wernette bought it and then give it to my dad for taking care of his livestock. They fenced the property; it was not fenced. And the agreement was just a verbal agreement. Several years later after Phil, Molly and Fred were born why, my dad got orders to move the house. The homestead where I was born in was at one time located on the old Felix place. Today it's part of Robert Burell's property.

Q So they moved the homestead to where Cecile lives now?

A Yes. Of course there was part of it added on to it then.

Q Oh, Cecile, Fred's wife, lives in the old home place.

A She lives in that old house and I was thinking about that old house today, that there is an old antique house that was built almost at the same time when those houses in Castroville were built.

Q Oh, really? That long ago?

A I'm 81 years old, and that was an old house when I was born, and it was --

Q A log house or what?

A No, it was a lumber house, one by twelve. No ceiling, just a one by twelve with a little piece of lumber over the cracks. And it's still there today. The original house is still there. And it's as old as some of your rock houses that are in Castroville.

Q Really?

A Absolutely.

Q That's pretty unusual, that a frame house would last that long.

A And the first coat of paint that house had was in 1916, and I helped apply it --

Q What kind of paint did you use?

A It was --

Q Was it white?

A It was gray. The color was, but it was a lead paint, you know, it wasn't the kind of paint --

Q They have today.

A -- and since that, my brother Fred and his wife had it painted one time, the outside. And there's still some paint on it.

Q But your dad, then, basically was a rancher, huh?

A Yes.

Q Did he farm also?

A Well, we'll go back to the beginning. At the age of ten years old, he was going to school, he attended school for one year and his step-brothers and sisters outnumbered

him at home, so they must have been a feud between 'em because he took off. He was what I'd call a runaway. He left home and went to work for John Ihnken on the ranch and he was paid $15 a month plus board and room and clothes. And he stayed and learned the ranching business from John Ihnken and he remained with him until he was full-grown. Then he became, he went in business with his step-father as a freighter; they followed the freight line, and later he purchased a wagon and mules and joined the freight line and hauled freight. And after that he married and bought this property, built a house on somebody else's property, was forced to move it onto his property with the help of some good neighbor, Mr. Joseph Burell, another man that came from Germany. He wasn't no Alsatian. His wife was Alsatian. She was a Haby.

Q The Burells came from Altdorf though, that same place the Rihns came from, and that's in Alsace.

A But this, he spoke --

Q German.

A Absolutely German. Wherever he --

Q Well, possibly his ancestors had come from Germany.

A Yes. Well, he came from Germany. His ancestors were over in Europe, but what part of Europe I would not know. But anyway, that solved that problem. And of course my dad was left alone then. I mean, as far as his father's inheritance that was all gone, because at

the age of 21 he demanded his half interest in the Jagge property but his mother said, he received a letter from a lawyer, and my dad couldn't read.

Q Oh, he couldn't?

A No, he just went to school one year. So he took the letter and gave it to his mother and she took it and went upstairs with it. The same building across from the City Hall. So she told him then that he don't have to worry, he'll get his part like all the other children. But in the meantime she passed away and so did his property, you know. It never did materialize. So that still didn't break him because he had enough energy to --

Q Well, how did he make his living then, raising cattle?

A Raising cattle and farming.

Q And all of you children farmed too then?

A Oh, yes. I started out in the ranching business when I was about 16 years old. I was still working for the estate. See, in those days, as long as a boy was single he had to work for the estate because we had debts, our parents, on land that they bought.

Q Uh-huh. And all the children had part of that.

A Yes. We were working for a big company but we weren't getting paid right at that time. But anyway, I was then about the age of 15 or 16 years old and we had this ranch out where 1604 --

Q That's about 15 miles east of here?

A Yes, it was about 16 miles west of San Antonio, and we were on the west side of 1604. We had 1010 acres, and that's where I got in the ranching business.

Q Oh, you went over there and worked --

A Well, my dad -- see, my mother passed away in 1915 but before that in summer I spent all the time I had, my vacation was on the ranch with my daddy. I was pumping water, going around with two mules or horses under horsepower from morning 'til night in place of having a gasoline engine to run the pump you had to go around in circles all the time, and I done that until I got about 16 years old.

Q You pumped the water with those two mules.

A Yes.

Q For the cattle.

A For the cattle and for the water we used. We just had a camphouse there, we'd spend the weekdays there and Saturdays we'd come to the old ranch here.

Q Well, now, did you have a windmill?

A Yes, but in summer there wasn't no wind.

Q This is when there wasn't any wind, I see.

A Yeah. And so I finally decided one day I lost my temper and I tried everything. I'd ride on the darn horsepower or whatever you called it, I'd get dizzy, I'd walk and the minute I didn't follow the horse or the mules, they'd stop. And I got to where I learned how to cuss and I

cussed a little too much and lost my temper and hit one of the horses too hard and they took off and they broke everything. The whole thing was all in pieces. And I still think my dad saw from the little camphouse --

Q Saw what was going on.

A -- saw what was going on. Anyway I thought well, I'm gonna get it. I'm gonna go tell him what happened. Then when I got to him he said, "What happened?" I says, "Everything. I lost my temper and I just hit that horse too hard and they tore up everything." And he kind of smiled then, and I thought, "That is the first time in my life I seen him smile when I done something wrong," because he believed in teaching discipline because, what I mean, you either done it or you didn't. And anyway he kind of smiled and he says, "Well," like Ronald Reagan says, "Well, I think we'll go to San Antonio, hitch up the horses and drive to San Antonio. I know an old man, a man his age, that has a hardware store, and he told me he had a gasoline engine." And he says, "Well, we're going to get it." And I says, "Well, that's the best news I ever heard."

Q So you got modern there, huh?

A So we go real modern.

Q Well, did you ever live anywhere but the ranch house?

A Oh, yes. I lived in San Antonio when --

Q How long did you live at the ranch after you were born?

How long did you all live there?

A We lived there until I guess Fred and Cecile got married.

Q And that was --

A And my mother was a diabetic and she was ill. So we moved. I lived in, let's see, one, two, three, four different houses.

Q In Castroville?

A My mother lived there. My dad and I were gone all week, you know --

Q To the other ranch.

A To the ranch, yes.

Q Or this ranch?

A This one. Well, we had the other one at the same, had two ranches.

Q Yeah, two ranches.

A First ranch --

Q Fred was living on the home ranch and then you all would just come there to work.

A Yes. And also before we bought this ranch over on 1604 we owned 640 acres. Part of it is under the water --

Q At Medina Lake?

A Medina Lake. And there was a log cabin and I spent my first few years with my dad and mother during the week they'd take me up there when I was a kid. In fact, I was there in 1900 when that flood was, although I was only born in 1899, but I was there with my parents.

Q Well, what were they doing there? Living or --

A They lived during the week, you know, working on that. Had a little field, too. And so in 19 --

Q But you remember that.

A I don't remember that when the flood was --

Q But I mean you remember that log cabin.

A Oh, yes. I could draw --

Q But now it's under the water.

A Yeah. It's been under there since 1912.

Q Was that a log cabin that they built or was it there before?

A It was there before. So --

Q Was that a treat to you to go up there to that place?

A Oh, my, I was --

Q Because of the prettiness of the country?

A Yes, as much a thrill I got out of going there, but I was more like a wild person. I was scared of certain things. The thing that scared me the most was at the age of about six years or maybe only five we had a baler and my dad was raising cotton.

- End of Side 1 -

He took me along to the cotton gin in Castroville to get the cotton ginned. And he had me on the wagon when someone said, hollered "fire," and when -- there was fire in the building --

Q At the cotton gin?

A At the cotton gin in our bale that they were baling they separating the lint from the seed, and it was blowing into the press at the time. But my dad -- Joe Burell's was on the scale. They were exchanging corn for cornmeal or something like we all did and so my dad tooke me over and handed me to Mr. Burell and Mrs. Burell and that old man took off with that wagon -- a buckboard, and he never stopped until he crossed the river. And I still remember that --

Q Now this all happened down where Landmark Inn is now, and there was the cotton gin below that.

A Yes, that was the cotton gin was at Landmark Inn.

Q But he went across the river to the east, huh?

A East, and when we crossed the river he said, "Godt-dammer Deres, his wife was named Theresa, so he said in German, "Godt-dammer, Deres et bronst." It was burning, you know.

Q Well, did the gin burn?

A yes.

Q Burned down?

A No. But he meant there was fire there, "It's burning," Bront, I guess in German was --

Q I wonder what started that, you think somebody was smoking?

A Wire. A piece of wire. He had some Mexicans picking cotton, and when they weighed the cotton chances are there

was a piece of wire and it got in there.

Q Wheel or whatever.

A Or into the cotton bale or the gin, and caused the fire. Anyway when we crossed and when he said, "It bront", I was so excited that I don't remember exactly what happened, but when I got home there were still flies around me, so you can imagine --

Q Okay, all right. We'll imagine. Now, who was running that cotton gin? Who owned that cotton gin?

A Joseph Courand owned that cotton gin, and the miller, or whatever you call him, I remember him well, was an old man, slim build, tall man, named Conover.

Q He worked for Courand?

A He worked for Courand at the mill. The first one I remember. The second one was Emil Halbardier. He operated the mill and gin then. And every time the farmers wanted cornmeal they'd shell a bunch of corn, say 10 pounds or so and exchanged it for ground corn.

Q Oh, you'd take in your whole corn and then they would give you an equivalent amount of ground corn. Yeah, someone told me they remembered they used to take in the corn and they'd grind it for you. But after awhile they would just exchange it rather than do -- you wouldn't get your own corn back, in other words.

A See, when, I think the mill was operated by the water wheel that they could -- you know, was running constantly,

if they were grinding something, so they just had that corn ground. But after they operated the mill by steam and later by diesel engine. Diesel engine was the first power that they brought to make electricity. That was done by J. T. Lawler when he --

Q Yeah, well, that was only in the 20's.

A Yes, that was later on. But after they quit raising cotton around here -- the boll weevils took over in this part of the country, and it was impossible to raise cotton, so --

Q That happened all over the country.

A Yes, and the gins just disappeared. There were gins at La Coste; gins at Dunlay, gins at Rio Medina, there were gins all over.

Q Did people make a good living off of the cotton before that?

A Well, yes and no. The price of cotton in those days varied from about nine cents up to the highest we, I remember, was 14 cents.

Q But was it a profitable crop to grow then or not?

A Well, in a way it was because growing anything in the country --

Q Dry farming.

A -- was a problem because there was only certain people that could live in the country and they were the conservative people. They raised chickens --

Q Now, what do you mean by that? You mean because they were self-sustaining and they raised all their own stuff.

A Sure. They went to the store. They sold the chickens, they sold the eggs, they --

Q In exchange for flour and sugar and coffee.

A -- in place of using cash. They didn't have no cash. And the value of things coming off of the farm and ranch, it was almost impossible to realize a profit.

Q Yeah. And then, in other words, the things you took into the stores then they would sell to the people who lived in town that didn't have chickens.

A And that same thing they're trying to do today, they say --

Q They're going back to it.

A -- if the people would exchange things amongst each other, you know, or if people would work, you know, at home and sell something. The ladies that are not employed could make quilts or different things.

Q Of course, all it is is changing a lifestyle because in those days you spent your entire life doing that, so you never got to do too much else. Nowadays people are involved in so --

A Well, we have different people. They come from a conservative country where everybody was brought up that way. That was the only way that people ever could exist in other countries.

Q You think that's why the Alsatians survived this area, then?

A Why, sure. They and the Germans.

Q They knew how to live on the land and do with nothing.

A Live on the land and off the land.

Q Yeah, and do with nothing if they had to.

A Like someday you're going to find people going out of the city in place of trying to retire in the city because it's going to be impossible for anyone to live on social security or other as inflation continues. It's just eating the old people up.

Q Well, when you think back about your growing up, did you feel like you were well-off or did you feel like you were poor or how did you feel about your family. Were they well-off?

A We felt we were just independent, that we were surviving on something that was growing slow. But during all my lifetime I worked as a farm and ranch man and as this inflation continued up to a certain point, the amount of property that I owned was worth a million dollars. Not actually a million dollars. That's a million dollars with a 36 cent dollar. See, that's the difference. In those days a dollar had purchasing power. Today it has the purchasing power equal to about 36 cents. So if you've got a million dollars today why you're actually only worth $100,000. The other is no value. You can't

buy --

Q Well, when did you get married, Mr. Jagge?

A I got married September the 12th, no, May the 12th.

Q May the -- September was your birthday.

A May the 12th.

Q In what year?

A 1924.

Q And then how many children did you have?

A I had two children.

Q Who was your wife, first of all?

A My wife is Celine Schott, daughter of Joseph Schott and, I don't remember her name.

Q Her mother's name? Well then we'll ask her. Okay and your children then were, who were your children?

A The oldest child was born in 1925. He was Calvin Jagge, and, he, at the age of 19, he fell out of a pecan tree and died. In '27 my second son was born, or our second son, and he lived.

Q And his name is --

A Melvin Jagge. He's still living, but he became ill in 1971 and since that he has been an invalid. He has multiple sclerosis, or whatever you call it. I've got a different name for it but I can't tell it. It's, it shouldn't be.

Q Well, that's really too bad, that he was so young yet, but I still remember when Calvin died --

A But that's all in life, you know, there's good things happen in life and bad things.

Q You have to learn to take it.

A You have to learn to live with it.

Q Well, just talking to you it just seems to me like even though whatever has happened to you you seem to be to have accepted life and enjoyed it to the fullest.

A Of course, I could have enjoyed it a whole lot more if things would be better, but that's life for most people.

Q Okay. When you got married then, did you move to a different piece of land or was this land part of your dad's ranch?

A Yes.

Q It was part? Did he give you this part or --

A Yes. This part where I built my house in 1924 still belonged to my daddy but was willed to me. In the will it was specified where it was, which I think most people do to avoid a lot of --

Q A fight between the kids after they're --

A Yeah, and losing the property. But anyway, I must say that my dad really done the right thing.

Q Well, did he give each child some land then?

A Each child, yeah, each one got their part. There was never a word said after he passed away. Everybody was happy that they knew what they were getting and that was that.

Q Well, something my dad has always said, and he's said it to me at least four times, that two of the nicest people that he ever knew in this world were Amand and Caroline Jagge. He said they were absolutely the finest people he ever knew. Everybody loved to go to your dad's ranch. There was always boys there, weren't there?

A There was always boys.

Q And then with Fred the same way. Everybody went to Fred's, then.

A Everybody loved Fred because at one time a certain party's name was mentioned that he mustn't have a friend, that certain party. And Fred kind of smiled, "Sure, he's got a friend." Then one of the guys, Wilfred Wernette and some others said, "Oh, well, you're everybody's friend." And that's the way Fred always said, "If you can't say anything good about somebody don't say anything at all."

Q He was a happy guy.

A He was, in a way, more a comedian than anything else. He was like old Jack Benny and different ----, because there's a little story that Fred told one day when he went to a funeral at Castroville. And Fred was driving an old truck. It would break down and he would have to walk three miles sometimes. And he was griping about that and your daddy was there and Gabe Hans and a bunch of others and he was telling, he said, "That darned old truck quit on me out at the back end of the well and I

had to walk all the way to the house." And I don't know if Gabe or if it was Blackie who says, "Fred. How come you drive a truck like you're driving when you could afford any kind of truck?" And Fred, he said, "Well," like Ronald Reagan, "Well, I tell you one thing. "You whole bunch," there was a bunch around. "I could buy a new truck and I could buy a new truck for each one of you. But I damned sure ain't gonna do it." And that was Fred, you know.

Q He just did with what he had, huh? Well, was he tight?

A No. Oh, he was tight like all the Jagges were because if he hadn't have been tight he wouldn't --

Q Held onto the land.

A Because he died a millionaire, his property actually worth a million dollars, after inflation. But anyway, Fred was an individual. There's no question about that. He was an individual when he was at home, when he was a kid.

Q He was -- in the family, you mean?

A He was, my dad was strict with all the boys, but he never could tell Fred to do anything.

Q Fred got away with it, huh?

A Oh, yes, Fred would take off and leave for several days and come back. Well, all Fred done when he was a boy there was ride wild horses. That was his business. He made a living that way. Of course, another thing that happened as we go on, I want to tell a little story about

Fred, because when Fred was seeing the girls why he was dating a girl in Castroville. She was a Kreisler, Viola Kreisler. And he had been dating her and all the other girls around here. So finally he, his sister married Poerner from D'Hanis.

Q Mae?

A Mae Jagge married a Poerner and so he visited out there and Ed Poerner had a sister. Her name was Cecile, which he later married this girl at the same time he was dating all the others. So one day he was saddling, putting the saddle on a wild horse in a big corral or pen and his older brother Phil was helping him. And so Phil was in the mercantile business; he was married then. No, before he was married, he was in the mercantile business. So he, Fred, out of noplace, says, "You know, Phil, he says, and I was sitting on the fence; I was just a young boy, he says, "I'm gonna get married." So Phil says, "You get married?" He says, "You don't have a dollar." He says, "I know it." He says, "How are you going to support a wife?" He says, "Well," like Reagan says, "Well, she's got $1800 cash she inherited." And this is just what happened. "She inherited $1800 and I love that woman."

Q You mean to say that Fred married Cecile for her money?

A No, yes, Fred married Cecile for the money she had regardless of where it come from, you know. No, he really, they were the most devoted, most lovable couple I ever seen.

Q Well, and I must say he married a hard worker, too.

A Oh, there's not another one like her.

Q No, I believe Cecile worked --

A And another thing, this story is getting too darned long, but I just can't leave this part out. So after they got married, moved to the ranch and my dad and I would, spent the weekend there, well we'd be up at the ranch, and they were two lovebirds --

Q Cecile and Fred?

A Cecile and Fred. So they were farming there and they were supposed to drag, walk behind a drag, you know, to level the land. So they was pretty smart. Fred had a beautiful buggy, you know, and a fancy horse. And he'd wash that buggy before he went out, you know. That was something special. So it had an umbrella on it and Fred and Cecile had just married, and he said, "Sweetness," that's what he called her. "Sweetness, " he says, "I've got an idea," he says. "I'm gonna hitch the horses on that buggy, and it's got an umbrella on it, and you go with me. We'll work the field together." And my dad seen that. He told Fred's wife, he says, "Cecile, if you and Fred keep doing what you're doing now for one year," he says, "I'll buy you a silk dress. And you can pick it out, regardless what it costs, if you keep doing what you're doing now." And they did, you know. I never seen a couple that were more in love than they were.

Q Oh, really?

- End of Side 2 -

Today is Friday, March the 13th, 1981. This is Connie Rihn interviewing Archie Jagge about three miles north of Castroville at his home. I'm interviewing for the Castroville Public Library Oral History Project B.

Okay, Mrs. Jagge, we've been talking for about an hour about your family and so forth. Now I'm going to ask you some questions about, go into some areas about what you did when you were young.

Q When you were growing up, this is while, say, before your mother died, what kind of things did your family do in your home for leisure like after the work was done. What did you enjoy doing in the family.

A Well, from the time I remember, in those days everyone that lived within a short distance was like one family.

Q Your neighbors, you mean?

A Yeah. The neighbors would visit each other on Sunday. So all the kids -- they were all large families. There wasn't hardly a family where there wasn't six to eight kids -- and we would get together and we had a wonderful time.

Q Playing with each other?

A Oh, yes, and the thing that worried us kids the most was in those days when lunchtime, which we called dinner, we kids were all hungry. But the table was set for parents first because they wouldn't have a table large enough to accommodate all at the same time, so we kids

would worry. "See all that good food on that table, and I wonder if there'll be any left."

Q Well, was there any left? (laughter)

A Oh, there was always plenty. But I mean we was worried about that we wouldn't get that food. So those people -- that was the only communication they had was with their neighbors. There was no telephone.

Q Well, when you were getting together with your neighbors like this on Sunday evenings or Sunday afternoons, and the kids were playing, what did the parents do? Just talk?

A They talked and the kids were supposed to be seen but not heard. You know, kids never knew what the parents were talking about. They thought they were really educating their kids by not telling 'em anything. There was sex information like the kids have today. There was that kind of talk between the parents --

Q But you never listened to your parents talking then? You wouldn't sneak up there and listen a little?

A No, because if we did we were in trouble. Because there was normally a strap. The husband of the family usually shaved and he had a shaving strap.

Q And that was used on the boys' legs, huh?

A That was not only to sharpen the razor, but it sure hurt sometimes when it got in the wrong place.

Q Did your daddy ever use it on you?

A Oh, yeah. But not twice for the same thing.

Q You learned that. When you were home you learned a little better than at school.

A Oh, yeah. I was a mischievous person. I rode through the school on a donkey.

Q Through the building?

A Through the building, when I was going to the public school. I was not a kid anymore. But I'd do the darndest things. And the dumbest thing I ever done was Bill Burell and Robert Burell, which was Beetz, we were three buddies. We'd buy lunch sometime, special, like limburger cheese or anything like that we'd have a special lunch, so we decided, one of 'em went over to the store and bought a pound of lumburger cheese and that was the kind that had a scent that many people stepped in it but they never ate any. Anyway what was left we decided to attract flies with it. At that time Ed Hans had a meat market, it was screened, but all the flies were on the outside. So I put some of that cheese under the lid of the teacher's desk and I also put some in a little girl that did not like me too much -- her name was Annie Haby. So when they come in there all the flies were supposed to be around the meat market were in the school. There was flies all over and then the teacher, they were around the lid of his desk and when he opened that lid the flies went in. When Annie opened her geography --

A And she got mad at us. She really -- she figured it was me because I was the meanest one, the onriest one in school, so she didn't like me a bit after that.

Q Well, was school there where City Hall is now?

A Yeah.

Q That was the school?

A We had a little teacher, Morris was his name. And he was just about our size, just a little runt. So one day the school board bought us a basketball. They also bought us some boxing gloves. Bill Burell was a tall, strong man, and this teacher was gonna teach him how to box, and old Bill knocked him down, so that was the end of the boxing gloves. He wouldn't let us box because he thought we'd beat hell out of him.

Q What ages did you go to the public school? Was this after you went to the Catholic school?

A Yes. The reason I finally decided, I wasn't making any progress at the Catholic School. When Herbert Tondre and Bernard Fitzsimon and I started school together they handed us two books. One was the American English book. The other one was the German. The Catechism was German. The prayers were German. Everything was German, and I was one of the only kids that could speak English because my father learned English from Mr. Ihnken when he worked for him. And when my father and mother go married why she was the teacher, she went to school. She went

to school. She went through the fourth grade and that was a pretty good education in those days. Anyway, she learned him how to read and write, and they all spoke English at home. We never spoke Alsatian.

Q Oh, you didn't?

A No. But when we, when company would come they couldn't speak English.

Q The company couldn't speak English?

A No, because, we were three families, the Ihnken family, De Montels, and the Jagges --

Q That could speak English.

A -- that could speak English. Outside of that it was Alsatian, then we had the Germans.

Q But your mother and daddy could speak Alsatian, couldn't they?

A Oh, yeah. See, he learned French first. His mother was French, and I guess his daddy too, I don't know. But anyway, she spoke better French when I was a kid. I knew Grandma Wernette, Jagge, And she'd speak French. And we had to learn French. So we had German, we had Alsatian, we had English, thrown at us right at one time, and if you want to talk about a confused kid I was, because --

Q You never knew what language to think in, huh?

A No, I was learning 'em all at the same time, and then I stayed there at school and later I, then I went to the

public school.

Q Because there they used English, right?

A There they learned in English, because we wasn't like the Mexicans were in those days. We wanted to learn English. Today it's different.

Q Okay. Well now when you got a little older and say after you got out of school and you -- what was going on around Castroville? What did people do besides getting together and visiting? What else? Was there any cardplaying or anything? like that, or --

A There was cardplaying and there were parties.

Q What kind of parties?

A All the families would get together on a Saturday night. One would play the violin and the other one the guitar or whatever they had and they moved all the furniture out of the house that had large enough rooms and have a party. And that went from one house to another. And another thing they had --

Q How often did they do this?

A Well, that was once a month or so. And then when people started building new homes it was customary that you had to have a dance in your house.

Q New house?

A New house. So in '24 when we got married we had four little rooms here and none of 'em was big enough -- they were 10 by 12, and 12 by 14, so there wasn't any room,

and we had covered everything with linoleum and there wasn't any room, so they couldn't have a party here, but every time a house was built that had 14 by 16 rooms or something, out went the furniture.

Q Well, did the people surprise the --

A Oh, yeah.

Q It was a surprise party?

A There were surprises and there was also when a boy became 21 years old if he wasn't married, sometimes at the age of 18 or so they'd give him a surprise party because they thought he was a man then. And I remember I was visiting my wife at that time, or my girl, when I became 21 years old. See, I was an old boy when I got married. I had to wait five years until my wife was old enough to get married, so I had to wait a long time, but I managed to get by.

Q Well, did they give you a party?

A Cecile give me a party.

Q At 21?

A Yeah, 21, and I happened to be staying that day with Celine's folks because I had a deal going in those days, we had that ranch up at the lake, Medina Lake, so I would ride a horse and leave here in the morning at daylight and I'd ride that horse up to the ranch and spend the whole day up there working cattle, doctoring cattle and things, and so I would --

Q Stop at Celine's on the way, huh?

A Stop -- they had the best water you ever -- I never tasted that kind of water. The well was right at the road and I had to -- she says not only the water. But she griped me, I shouldn't say this.

Q She griped.

A Yeah, I tell you. Her mother made the best cheese, cooked cheese, and before I'd leave there I was like a hungry dog, I had to be fed. But anyway that was the kind of entertainment we had.

Q Well how did you get home for the party then if you didn't know it?

A They had a Hudson automobile that a seven passenger. It was --

Q Who was this, the Schotts?

A The Schotts, yeah. And it had room for, seven seats. It was as big, almost, as a eighteen-wheeler, in those days. Anyway, they thought they were surprising me. But I done had knew it that there was something in the making. I come to the ranch there and everybody was there. "Surprise." I says, "No, you didn't surprise me. I just didn't tell you. I knew all the time what was happening."

Q So what did you do then at your party? What kind of entertainment did you all have?

A Dancing.

Q Dancing. Now who played the music there? Do you still

remember who played that music?

A I know Celine had a piano, that was one thing. I just don't remember because I was too much interested in the girls. I wasn't worried about the music because I was more or less a playboy.

Q Well, what kind of food did they serve at a party like in those days before you got married?

A Well, the most, in place of -- when they had a what they called a surprise party usually they served beer. Beer was scarce you know in those days, so everybody enjoyed the beer when you had a party. The only difference when people went to a dance at Castroville -- my Aunt Mary Wernette, she served food at the dance, 50 cents a plate. But the trouble was when I was a little kid, I'd get about 10 cents, you know, and I'd buy ice cream, a dish of ice cream that was made by Mr. --

Q Grice

A No, by --

Q Mueller?

A Halbardier.

Q Halbardier? What, did he have an ice cream shop?

A No, he had two five-gallon freezers. He turned it up there -- that was the only thing you could buy was home-made ice cream.

Q I never heard this before.

A Oh, yeah.

Q Out of his house? Just at his house you'd --

A No, at the dance hall where the Tondre's store was, in the lower building where the store was --

Q He would make the ice cream and sell it at the dance?

A Yes. And before it was divided off, the east part of the building at the Tondre's store, there was a division in there. That was the lunch room; they had long tables. And everybody that had a dollar would take his partner to that dinner. And what they served! Tripe. Any thing you -- special --

Q Well, how did Mary Wernette cook all that food for that many people?

A Well, she was some --

Q Everybody lived at her house that came in to go to Solemn Communion, too. She boarded them.

A Celine's one of 'em. She --

Q She must have been some worker, too.

A Well, and there was Molly Schott, that was Molly Hans, that would clean tripe and things, helped Aunt Mary. They prepared that already at the market there.

Q What other foods did they serve at this --

A And there was Lizzie Tondre, Victor's mother. She lived in the courthouse at the same time I did when my mother lived there.

Q In the courthouse? Where the City Hall is?

A Where the City Hall --

Q Well, I thought that was the school.

A It was first the courthouse.

Q Yeah, I know it was first the courthouse.

A Then it was the school. Then it was -- I mean it became living quarters.

Q Well, where did the school go to?

A The school was up at the Mueller Rest Home.

Q After it was in the City Hall.

A No, before it was at the City Hall.

Q Yeah.

A So after they moved into -- they didn't have room no more at the Mueller building, so it was moved over to the City Hall and that's where I rode through the darned school on my burro.

Q But when did you live in it?

A I lived in there --

Q Before that or after that?

A -- before that when I --

Q Oh, you lived in it before it was made into the school.

A Yeah.

Q Oh, I see. I didn't know that.

A See, those divisions were changed, you know, where the officies are now that whole west, northwest part of it was just one room, and the other one where the office was, the city office was before, I guess, and the library -- well, the library was in another building -- but anyway

that's where Lizzie Tondre, or Lizzie Halbardier, she and her dad lived there.

Q But getting back to the food, what kind of food did they make for those suppers?

A Well, there was every kind that there was. Meat was prepared, like roast, you know, different things. They served some vegetables with it, It was --

Q Potatoes --

A Everything that they served in a hotel, because we had two hotels at one time in Castroville. The hotel was there, Beetz Hotel where Gene Shuehs' place is now, and then there was Mrs. Schmidt's Hotel, that was where Dan Burell between -- there was the hotel, I think it was --

Q Dr. Eckert's house that he moved?

A Yes. Anyway, that's where my brother used to eat his food before he married. He was, he had a furniture store in the top of the building, now the City Hall. That whole floor on top was furniture.

Q Who was this? Phil Jagge?

A Yes. And I was working for Phil when I was just a little kid, I was a delivery boy. And that's the time I broke all the eggs when I drove too fast over a ditch, and all those things happened in those days.

Q Well, what did Phil have? A grocery store too?

A Oh, general merchandise. That meant everything. Like the old saying is, "From a rat skin to a ranch", you know.

Q But then when did they make that building into the school?

A Well, that was --

Q About 1915 or something like that?

A Yes, it was sometime around --

Q Or maybe earlier than that.

A No, it was later than that because when I was sick in bed Aunt Clotilda as everybody called, she was a nurse, a registered nurse, she came back from Hot Spring, Arkansas, and I was the first patient she took care of. For six weeks she stayed with me.

Q Okay. Now, you were saying you had the surprise parties. Everybody'd get together about once a month. At that time were there also dance halls in Castroville?

A Oh, yes.

Q Okay. So, and how often would they have dances?

A Well, there was Christmas, New Years, Easter and --

Q St. Louis Day is one.

A -- St. Louis Day.

Q How about Fourth of July?

A Well, they had -- the dances were, when I was small were not too often. People didn't have the money, you know, to spend, because most kids when they began to go to a dance, they had a dollar.

Q Yeah. Well, these dances, because they weren't very often, do you think that the Alsatian people around here loved to dance? Do you think --

A Oh, yes.

Q -- always. Do you think this is why they had the surprise parties then, because they had to have some fun.

A Why sure. We liked -- that was our entertainment, was the dancing and --

Q And that didn't cost you anything because everybody would bring a little something, huh?

A Yeah, it was free, you know, with the exception of the beer; they'd pass around the hat if anybody had any money. There wasn't no money here. There wasn't no banks. I tell you, that was a different world. When you needed money the only way you could find money if you knew some older person that had money, like when I, in place of me going to a bank, when I started in business there was Louie Fuos and my uncles like Uncle Louis, or not Uncle Louis, Auncle August and Uncle Leo. They were like a family to me, 'cause they would --

Q Loan you money.

A Loan me money and my daddy would sign the note and then I'd tell 'em that when the interest is due I said, "You come over here and I'll have it here waiting for you." I says, "That way I'll not forget because I don't want to forget because that's the poorest policy in the world." But anyway there was quite a bit of entertainment. But there's another thing. We had rules. Our church set the rules.

Q Like what?

A We couldn't have a dance on a Saturday, absolutely.

Q So when were they held? On Sunday?

A On Sunday, because the priest said, "if you go to a dance on Saturday," he says, "you're gonna be too sleepy to come to church." And those were rules that people lived by. And there was Lent and all that --

Q Well someone else told me that they didn't have any dances like on Christmas night. They would always be on the following night like the 26th.

A Yeah. Because Christmas Eve, you know, was midnight mass in those days --

Q Family Christmas.

A -- yes.

Q Okay, well, what was New Year's customs around here? What did you do, what did your families get together or anything on New Year's?

A Not just too much because they --

Q Well as a young boy what did you do on New Year's?

A They were waiting for that dance, 'cause that -- New Year's dance. And another thing with New Year's. The Alsatians would always say, they called the day after New Year's Day I think Stefa's Dawg (Alsatian).

Q That's St. Stephen's, that's the day after Christmas, the 26th the --

A Stefa's Dawg. It sounds like a dog, but it's day.

Q Yes, right, dawg, yeah.

A And those days were -- there's another thing that was so different from life today was we had a number of saloons in Castroville. But in all the days that I see, I worked across the street from one. My uncle had a saloon, but never did I see a lady walk along the sidewalk --

Q By a saloon.

A -- by a saloon or go in a saloon. That would have been a -- there was only one occasion where some girls, I wouldn't mention their name, they got out of line a little and they probably took a few drinks, but they would go in the saloon, but just once that I remember. And this day after Christmas, you know, they celebrated and one time they had one of the girls in a wheelbarrow. She was pretty well lit up, and they were pushing this girl up and down the street in a wheelbarrow, and she didn't hesitate to go along with it. But that was the only -- but ever seeing a girl or woman walk in front of that saloon --

Q But the men went to the saloon, this was just common practice. Do you think that in the old days the men going to the saloon, did they carry on the business the same way they do at Sammy's coffee clatch now?

A Yes.

Q (Laughter) Talked over the town business.

A Yes.

Q A lot of politicking?

A Well, I'd like to add, the first business I established.

Q What was that?

A My dad, when I was old enough, where he'd take me along, which was about three or four years, I had to go with him. And the first thing he ever told me was, he'd say, "I want you to respect old people," he says, "because there isn't anything in the world that an old person don't enjoy more than if a young boy comes and shakes his hand." He says, "someday you'll be that old man," he says, and that's just exactly what I did. When I started going to these old people, called 'em by their name, my dad mentioned Mr. -- and shook their hands, they'd give me a nickel. And it grew to be a business with me.

Q Oh, that was your business?

A I mean, that's where I found out that if you used personality, you know.

Q Well, what was your first business? you said you --

A Well, that nickel they'd --

Q Oh, I thought collecting the medicine bottle, --

A That was one, but this was before the medicine --

Q This was even before. You knew how to make money pretty early, I think.

A Yeah, I don't know if the Tschirhart part or the Jagge, I don't know. Both of 'em was conservative anyway. So that was one of my enjoyments, but there was not too much enjoyment because there was no news.

Q Well say, for instance, like when you were a little boy, in the evening and chores were done and supper was done, what would your mother sit down and do? Would she sew or what would she do?

A Oh, yes, there was always something. And if you were living on the ranch, you had chores to do. That was one thing that kept the kids out of trouble. And another thing I'd like to mention about the old days. The first time I went to San Antonio and stayed overnight with my sister, in the morning there were so many roosters crowing. There were cows bawling. It was just like out on the ranch. Every house had their own chickens. They had their own garden, and when the kids come home they had something to do, you know. Today they watch T.V.--

Q Okay. But then say it almost got dark and you didn't have any radios yet then and there was no television. So what did you do for fun? Did you sing?

A Played cards. Neighbors, sometimes. I had a deaf and dumb neighbor that lived within about 500 yards for at least fifteen years. This Burell, deaf and dumb, would come here and sit at this table until 10:00 o'clock every night he'd be here, and we'd play cards and I'd talk to him like I'd talk to you, sign language, I could talk sign language, and he could understand everything I wanted to tell him.

Q Well, was card playing, did it ever go on at big parties

or anything? Did they --

A No.

Q No? That was just at home.

A D'Hanis played more cards than any place I ever seen. Because when I was a kid at D'Hanis the Lutzes learned me how to play 66, 42, I learned all the -- High Five, and all those card games.

Q Well then, do you really think that around Castroville the dancing was probably the most entertainment that we had?

A That and later were your horseraces. That was something. Rio Medina and Castroville and LaCoste were feuding against each other all the time.

Q Even with their horses, huh?

A Oh, yes. That was the worst -- I tell you, it was about like election.

Q Well, where were the main places that they held these horseraces?

A Well, there were different places. The big races was over where --

- End of Side 3 -

Q What day of the week were they usually held?

A They were usually held on a Sunday. And all week they'd feud with each other. There'd be people coming from Rio Medina and they had the best horses. There'd be people from Hondo and Quihi and they had the -- the Blesses,

the Schucharts, the Schotts, the rainy-day people.

Q Who's the rainy-day people?

A They were E. J. Schott. He had one of the best horses. And there was Cornelius Haby. They were great people. They raised some real good horses.

Q Well, would they be match races?

A Oh, yes.

Q In other words, one man would challenge another man?

A Yeah. You'd come to a race, horseraces, and they'd match. Say, chances are one from Rio Medina would match a horse from Castroville, and they'd argue for an hour or two before they got in position to run, and after they were in position to run you could figure it'd be 30 minutes until they could get started, because one was trying to take advantage of the other and there was no gate, starting gates or anything. They both had to be ready, and --

Q Okay. Some of the big people involved you said were Gene Schott and --

A Henry Vonflie.

Q Henry Vonflie?

A Henry Vonflie had one of them good horses.

Q And then Cornelius Haby was --

A Cornelius Haby --

Q How about Burells?

A The Burells had some.

Q Anybody else from around Castroville?

A And the main horse was Moody Haller. He had a horse that was a stud horse and he, for years he never got to race him. But he believed in his mind that he could beat any horse, and so finally I think the Habys, Otto Habys, had a horse named Bugger Ed or something, and they challenged, then they finally beat him, but those people were ready to kill each other because they were so disappointed, you know.

Q Who?

A The whole community. Castroville was one side and Rio Medina was --

Q Oh, and so they put all of their hopes into this horse, huh?

A Oh, yes. It was just like a candidate in a race, you know, everyone --

Q That's just like the high school football is now. (laughter)

A Same thing. And there also was baseball. In summer, you know, that was a good sport, and everybody went to a baseball game. Nobody paid anything. Everybody was standing along the first base line. Everyone was an individual umpire.

Q Did these baseball teams practice before their games or did they just get together and play the game?

A Very seldom did that. They had no time.

Q So it was just fun for them.

A Oh, yes.

Q Well, who were some of the big, the guys you knew that grew up with you that loved the baseball -- that were good at it?

A Well, there was, in my days, there were Fred, Jul, and Phil, they were playing. I never was a --

Q Athlete?

A No, because --

Q Yeah, Fred's picture is on several of those pictures that we have.

A Because when my daddy bought the first Model T -- it was one of the first ones around -- and I was a boy at that age where the girls would be sitting over there on that rock at the bridge there, and I'd come by and load the Model T up and they'd all gather 'round.

Q Oh, you gave the girls a ride.

A Oh, yeah, I wasn't worried about the damn ball game in the first place.

Q You were catching all the girls while they were catching the flies.

A (Laughter) I sure was.

Q Well, I have to interview some of these girls that grew up with you and see what they thought about you.

A That'd be mighty fine.

Q Who were some of the girls that you sort of courted before you got serious with Celine?

A Well, you want me to tell you about your kinfolk?

Q Yeah, I don't care. I'm not responsible for anybody else.

A You know, your aunt, when I was --

Q Which one? Cecilia? Netla? Frank Keller's wife?

A No. I mean --

Q My great-aunt probably.

A Yeah. I called her white child because she was so --

Q Who? What's her name?

A Your mother's --

Q Oh, oh Alice?

A Alice. Oh, my, we spent many hours. She'd play the piano and sing.

Q Oh, yeah. Did she come to your house? See, that Droitcourt family had a lot of music in it.

A Oh, I lived at the Droitcourt house.

Q Over there where Oscar Karm lives now.

A Oh, yeah.

Q Yeah.

A Hettie and all the girls were there. That was our entertainment on Sundays.

Q Well, I'm going to interview Aunt Alice next week just on the music.

A I was dating Alice, you know, several times, and we'd dance, you know, and one day, on night, I think she decided that she wanted to go with her husband, Julius. And I asked for a set anyway. Anyway, I couldn't get that set I wanted. And I said, "Alice," I said, "I've got

money in my pocket and I got money in the bank, and I don't give a damn who you're going to dance with," that's the kind of guy I was, but we were best friends. But that was, dancing for me I loved -- it was the greatest sport.

Q Were you a good dancer?

A No.

Q Aw, you weren't? (laughter) How about it, Celine, was he a good dancer?

Mrs. Jagge: Not too good.

A Not too good. Not like your daddy.

Q Well, my daddy isn't that good of a dancer.

Mrs. Jagge: He was a good dancer.

Q He was a good dancer?

A Oh, yeah.

Q Yeah, he loved to dance, but he said he wasn't that good.

A There were worlds of boys that could dance. I never could.

Q Okay. We've been talking about dances. I wanted to ask you about one other activity. Do you remember box suppers?

A Oh, yes.

Q Now, when were they held? Or who held 'em?

A Well, the school district. There were schools every three miles. That was the normal distance. There was one between Castroville which was the Burell school. The next one was Rio Medina School, then we went to Yellow

Bank where my wife attended school, and we went to the Schucharts. There was a school.

Q Was that Geronimo?

A Yes. And that was the end at that distance. Then you started at Hondo. From Hondo you got to New Fountain and Quihi, and from there you got to Storm Hill. They were kind of spaced --

Q These were all little country one-room schools.

A And all the kids walked to school. Nobody rode anything. I rode a burro sometimes. I even rode through the school that time. I also had a gig that I hitched the burro. Sometimes I'd take a friend on weekends. Always I had a friend to stay for the weekends.

Q But anyway, getting back to the schools, what about them and box suppers?

A Box suppers was something that they had once a year and every girls would bring a box filled with food - chicken and everything else and then those boxes had names. And if you had a girl, you know, and she had that box --

Q You had to bid on it.

A -- you had to be sure, but times you didn't have enough money, so you had to loan some from somebody else in order to buy the box.

Q Well, listen, did only the single girls bring the boxes? What about the married people?

A Well, there were some, but mostly, you know, the single girls, but they were all so young, you know, the older ones didn't. But it was real nice.

Q Well, how much money would they raise at one of these auctions?

A Oh, sometimes a box would bring $5 which was equal to about $25 now.

Q That was a pretty expensive meal, then. Of course, it went for the school, so --

A And then it wasn't all. That party that bought that box for $5, his income if he was a laborer was $1 a day, so you know he had to do quite a bit --

Q A week's salary then.

A Yeah.

Q And then he would eat with the name that was inside.

A Yeah that was --

Q Well, were there ever any spirited bidding over boxes, like, they'd kind of --

A Oh, yes.

Q -- run 'em up, try to get as much money --

A If they knew a guy had money, why, he had to pay for that box. Of course, sometimes you'd get caught where he'd quit on you and then you had the box.

Q Well, I guess you could always resell it. (laughter)

A Oh, you could eat it. No, I remember box suppers and

parties where, when we were young folks we, on Sundays, you know, after we started going with the girls, the girls would decide that we'd go spend the day someplace and they'd fix lunches. And there was one time when I had a date and she was a strange girl that just had come in and whenever a strange girl, and she was a pretty little thing, and I enjoyed spending that day with her, but at noontime I found out all the other girls had chicken, everything you could eat, or think of, and my partner had hardboiled eggs. And I said, "Well, I don't know if it was worth that much." I says, "But I'm sure gonna try to find some way that I'll get equal with the others. It won't be in food but I'll get even with 'em some way." But she was a pretty little thing. And she was Cora Sittre's sister -- Tommie was her name. She was beautiful --

Q Well, like you were saying, like when you were like almost 21 or so and you were going around with girls, what did young people do when they got together? Did they go on a picnic, did you say, is that what --

A Oh, yes, there was a lot of picnics and then there was visiting and singing, you know. Wherever there was a piano like down there at Droitcourt, why we boys and girls congregated. I also remember the first time --

Q Did you go to LaCoste to Joe Droitcourt's, too?

A Oh, yes.

Q Where my mother and Aunt Alice lived?

A Sure.

Q That's where you came?

A Sure. Your mother was there.

Q Yeah, mother said after High Mass on Sunday everybody would come to the house and they'd sing and play the piano.

A The first time I ever went to Alice's house was, John Rihn asked me, he didn't have a car, and he had a girlfriend, a Biediger girl down there, and he said, "Say, are you going to LaCoste tonight? I don't have no way to see my girl." I says, "I don't have no date, no blind date or anything." I said, "But I'll take you down there. I'll find somebody. I'll just go to the first house." And that was the nearest place from where he went where the Biediger's lived, so I said, "I'm going to Joe Droitcourt's." I said, "There's Alice and your mother, and I'll just go there." And I did. Alice and I were sitting in the parlor they called it, the living room, 'til about 9:30, I guess, and then I said, "It's time for me to go home." And Alice was a cute little girl, nice little girl, and her parents never seen who she was with, so when we went out and sat in the car somehow or another I wasn't ready or she wasn't ready to separate, you know, and finally about 10:00 o'clock Mr. Joe Droitcourt come out there and boy, was I scared!

Q I didn't think you'd have the nerve to take a girl in your car in those days.

A See, in those days we were dumb- you know. We had a longer way to go, but after all, it didn't take too long. We finally found out that there were two kind of people, so anyway, Mr. Droitcourt comes out there and he said to Alice, "Who is this young man you're with?" And she says, "That's Archie Jagge." And he says, "Well, if it's Archie Jagge, that's okay." And I says, "You poor, dumb man. I think he's about the orneriest of all of 'em. He just had a good reputation."

Q He knew your mother and daddy. He was going on their reputation. (laughter).

A Yeah. Well, I wouldn't that kind of bad boy. "Cause I never took advantage of any young girls --

Q But did you ever go down to their house then and sing and play the piano?

A Oh, yes. Because there were other girls, like the Hoffman girls -- well, you could mention most of 'em.

Q You knew 'em, huh? (laughter)

A Oh yeah. I knew 'em.

Q Well, you said when you all went swimming, but you never went swimming with the girls as a sport; only with boys. And the girls had their certain place where they'd go. Did you boys ever sneak up and do things to the girls when they were swimming?

A Oh, no, we didn't do anything --

Q You behaved yourself.

A And they never picked up our clothes, which they could have. And that would have been a real trick to us. I guess that happened --

Q But I thought you only went after dark when you went in your birthday suit.

A No, in daytime.

Q In daytime.

A After vespers. We'd come out of church and we headed straight for water. We called it Mark's Hole. And there was the Biry hole. The Biry hole was closest to the mill, and the second hole was the Marks. There were people that were named Mark. I think that it was right straight down there from -- the first water place was that street by Mrs. Mangold's, that street, and the next one was what we called the Marks Hole that went by, who lives there? where? --

Q Gene Suehs?

A Yeah.

Q Okay. what about down where Hoogs'? We always swam where Hoogs lived. Down below Tommy Hoog there, Joe Hoog?

A Well, when I lived in the lower part of town I would go with Oscar Groff and Gussie Groff, his sisters, they'd swim there, and had their clothes, their dresses on. But we'd swim at a different time down there, but we'd

go in naked. They could see us above, you know, we didn't have no clothes on, but we always stayed under the water. We never swam down there and played tricks with 'em or nothing. That first come after we all wore bathing suits ----

Q You want to go ahead and light your pipe. I think you've been trying to light it for about --

A I do that all day.

Q You know, talking about all these different things you all did for fun, well, not so many things, but, did the church ever put on anything for social --

A No.

Q No? That was not in the church's place in those days. Only to go to church. Yeah, daddy said, like, if you were out of school for a Holy Day, you know, like it was a Feast, he said well, it didn't matter if you were out because they had you in church all day anyway, 'cause they'd have High Mass and then they'd have the Vespers again on the Holy Days, so you were in church all day.

A But the country people that had to come like, we didn't have a buggy at first. All we had was a gig. And all those, well, the kids were all grown except Nora and I, we were the younger ones, the others were all grown. And imagine, a gig for that many kids. Then from the gig we went to the wagon. Then the kids all sat in the wagon, had just one seat for the parents and the kids went along

in the wagon. And there was two families --

Q Would you take your lunch along when you'd go to church on Sundays?

A No. We'd come back. But there were two families; the Fischer family, and the Fischer family never missed Mass. When they had just a buckboard and oh, they had eight kids, and they were all sitting in the back of that with Catherine's family, of course, she wasn't born then. But them seven kids were all in the back. Then the Scherrers, they had a hack, what we called a hack, you know, it had two seats and a top over it. It could rain or snow or anything, and they were always in church. Now people from up above Rio Medina before they had cars, there wasn't no way to come every -- that was just like people making their Easter duties. That's what they told us -- well, the catechism told us you must attend --

Q Mass.

A -- mass --

Q Communion and confession once a year.

A -- communion once a year.

Q Yeah, I know. We've been interviewing some of the people up there and they said well they couldn't always come 'cause they had a lot of little children, if the weather was bad or, you know, if things weren't going right at home they couldn't go.

A And they had too many chores to do, you know. There were

cows to milk, there were chickens, there was everything, hogs and everything. Well things like that have to be fed, and there was other work, and they were all poor people. They had to be so conservative that every nickel -- you know what offering was at church when I was a kid? Five cents.

Q Some still give it. (laughter)

A But I mean, people couldn't afford more, because people bought all their groceries, you know, on credit.

Q Well, and they all had big families, like you said.

A Imagine. Eight or ten people in a family and only earning a few dollars, and that would come once ayear, so they bought everything on credit until they could pay it. And then they were broke again. And how did they buy the land or anything.

Q There musn't have been very much taxes on the land in those days.

A There wasn't no taxes. There were no roads. Now people complain about taxes. If they could do without all the roads and all the schools, see, schools were cheap when the teacher got 20 or 30 dollars a month, you know, was teaching five, six grades, you know, that was a different way of life. Now if you've got five or ten kids you have to have --

Q Yeah, but you wouldn't want to go back to that.

A No. But I mean, I want to tell you one thing. I saw

progress begin. Up to 1900 there was nothing happen. And the first thing that I can remember was a telephone. And I remember the place they installed it, and I was just a kid, and my daddy said -- that was at Tondre and Keller's store next to the post office is where they installed that phone. And he says, "See that box," he says, "Mr. Tondre or Mr. Keller can talk all the way down to their other store at LaCoste. Six miles." There weren't no telephone lines. Telegraph lines was the only communication.

Q And then after that came the car and from there on came the progress, huh?

A I worked in the first filling station in Castroville.

Q Who was that? Mr. Suehs?

A No. My brother's.

Q Oh. Mr. Suehs told me he had the first filling station.

A Yeah, but he's a liar, because I pumped gas out of a 50-gallon drum of gas and transferred it into the car. There was no --

Q Where was this at? At Phil's store?

A It was, the place that he had the gas was right where the telephone office is today. See --

Q Was his store on the corner there across from Wernette's store?

A Yeah, yeah. And it belonged to the Haase's and he married a Haass. But anyway, this gas that was sold was

delivered in LaCoste by train. From there it was transported over to Castroville in a wagon and dumped there. And the first drum he had he didn't have a pump, you know, to pump it out. So he went to Billy Fuos, the sheetmetal man or the tinner, and he asked him if he could build him a pump. Sure.

Q He must have been able to make anything.

A Oh, yes. He was a smart little dutchman and a dumb little one, too, because he was onry, but anyway, I remember what he done. He, in place of having a metal ball to make the valve for the seat, he used what we called steelies, it was the same thing, you know, for a valve there, in place of a ballbearing --

Q But you filled gas from this for the cars?

A Yes, you'd pump it into a five-gallon can and you'd funnel in your car. That was the first filling station. But what Suehs says, he was the first because he had the first pump, but that was first years -- at that time, while we were selling gas he was hauling bones. He was collecting bones.

Q Bones?

A Yes. He used to -- when he started out he had two little mules and a wagon, and he collected.

Q Yeah, well he told us on tape that how he made his money during Prohibition being a bootlegger.

A Yeah, well, he wasn't the only one -- he was the bootlegger and I was the moonshiner. That was the difference.

Q Well, Billy Fuos didn't get rich making all those stills then, huh?

A No. He didn't even know what he was making when he was in court. They had him in court.

Q Oh, really? Oh, he didn't know what he was making? (laughter)

A Well, that was his --

Q That was his line.

A Why sure. See, they found him there while he was repairing the still.

Q Where? At whose place? Fritz Etter?

A Yeah, it was over on the river there. I remember the place. Little island, it was there. Anyway, when they brought Billy to court there, the district attorney asked him, "Mr. Fuos, you knew what you, that you were violating the law when you were repairing and building a still." He says, "I didn't know what it was." He says, "I repair, I close all holes." He says, "I repair evey - thing," he says. And they had nothing on him because they --

Q Was this the time that Fritz Etter got put in the pen that you're talking about?

A Yeah. It was before that. Later when Fritz, you know, he could pay his fine anytime and get out until this one

where the Judge West was the judge there. He says, "Well, Fritz, I fine you $500" or what it was. Fritz says, "That's okay. I got it in my pocket." And he reached in his pocket and he says, "and one year in the penitentiary in New Mexico at LaTuna" or whatever you call it.

Q So he did go to the pen?

A Oh, yes.

Q Well, was anybody else caught around here?

A Yes. Julius Jungman.

Q Oh, yes. I heard that. How long did he stay in?

A One year.

Q We hear, somebody said somewhere, that Castroville had the reputation for being the Prohibition capital of Texas.

A Oh, yes, because at one time somebody stopped at Castroville and asked where they could buy some liquor and whoever they asked says, "Oh, you can buy liquor at near any house with the exception of two churches." But that isn't the only joke about Castroville. There's the time when ole "Sport" Tschirhart and his brother, you know, Sport was the Bootlegger, and they were gambling there and had a bunch of liquor on the table and were celebrating and finally somebody came by and said -- in those days when the federal agents come they said "the dry agents are in town." Sport had all that bunch there, all drinking and everything, and August, his brother, he was, he took care of the hearse, you know, what we

called it at that time, so one of 'em said, "August, why don't you go hitch up that hearse and bring it over here." He says, "They won't stop you, because they'll just drive by when there's a funeral." Old August, it was only a block from there, went and hitched up his two little horses or whatever he had and drove over there and finally here comes -- he was standing beside the hearse, you know, and here comes the federal agents. And when they saw August standing there -- he had removed his hat and was holding it in his hand, you know, and they removed their hats. Thought there was a body there. And all there was was a poker game and a bunch of liquor. Now that story, I won't say it's a true story, and I won't say it isn't, but, anything could happen at Castroville, because I know more jokes about Castroville bootlegging days than I could -- wouldn't want to put on tape.

Q Well, I asked my dad why did he think so many people bootlegged, made moonshine, and he said, we he said it's because they didn't have any money. They had something to make a living on. Do you think that had anything to do with it?

A It had quite a bit to do with me because --

Q -- times were hard.

A --because when the vice president of the United States asked me to make some liquor for him to take to Washington, I told myself, I says, "Well, I don't know who

is more guilty, the one that makes it or the one that drinks it or buys it."

Q Well, what did the Castroville dances do when they couldn't sell beer at the dances during Prohibition days?

A That's a good question. But what happened, that was when the bootlegging started. See, when we got Prohibition.

(end of interview)

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Archie Jagge
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ORAL HISTORY OFFICE AGREEMENT

I, Archie Jaggo, volunteerly
interviewee's full name - last first

give Castroville Public Library the full use of the information recorded on tape on the 13 day of May 1980, in return for which I will receive a tape of the interview.

Archie Jaggo
Interviewee's signature

I, Connie Reiter, the interviewer of Castro Public Library hereby release all rights, title, literary or copyright interest in the interview conducted on 13 day(s) of May, 1980, to the Castroville Public Library Oral History Collection.

Connie Reiter
Interviewer's signature