

The Dodge Brothers

John Francis Dodge

(October 25, 1864 -January 14, 1920)

John Francis Dodge was the second of three children born to Maria Casto Dodge and Daniel Rugg Dodge, who owned a foundry and machine shop in Niles, Michigan, in partnership with two of his brothers. John's sister, Delphine, was a year older than he, and his brother, Horace Elgin, was four years younger. From their earliest days, John and Horace were inseparable. They played together, went to school together and, as they grew into manhood, always took jobs together.

In 1882, the year John graduated from high school, Daniel Dodge moved his family to Port Huron, Michigan, following the deaths of his two brotherscum-business-partners. In Port Huron, Daniel Dodge established a machine shop specializing in internal combustion engines, but the business failed. John and Horace ended up working as machinists for the Upton Manufacturing Company in Port Huron. When the family moved to Detroit in 1886, the two brothers found work at the Murphy Boiler Works, a manufacturer of marine boilers. They continued to live in Detroit but, in 1894, went to work as machinists at the Dominion Typograph Company across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario.

The Dodge brothers formed a partnership in 1897 with Fred Evans to manufacture the Evans & Dodge bicycle, based on an improved ball bearing Horace had patented. They leased the Dominion Typograph plant and successfully produced the "E & D" bicycle there.

The Dodges dissolved the partnership in 1900 and used their share of the proceeds, some \$10,000, to establish their own machine shop in Detroit in late 1900. Within six months, they were making parts for the automobile industry, thus beginning their lifelong careers.

The Dodge brothers had different temperaments. John was quicker to anger than brother Horace and more prone to violence. There are numerous anecdotes illustrating his volatility. He once, for example, was reported to have threatened a Detroit saloon owner with a pistol, forced him to dance on the top of his bar and then applauded his dancing skills by smashing dozens of glasses against the walls of the saloon. A sober John Dodge returned the next day to apologize and pay for the damages. In another incident, after the *Detroit Times* printed an editorial criticizing John Dodge

and his friends, Dodge went to the home of the newspaper's owner in a rage and threatened his life. Prestigious social clubs like the Detroit Club rejected his applications for membership because of his boorish behavior.

In the last decade of his life, John Dodge became active in Republican politics in Michigan. He and two close friends, Robert Oakman and Oscar Marx (mayor of Detroit from 1913 to 1918), controlled the Republican Party in southeast Michigan. Dodge was active in party politics at the state level, and his friends pushed him to run for the U.S. Senate, but he decided against it. He did, however, serve on Detroit's Board of Water Commissioners from 1905 to 1910 and on the Detroit Street Railway Commission from 1913 to 1920. Following a strike against the private Detroit United Railway in 1914, which he helped settle, John Dodge led a campaign for municipal ownership of the streetcar system, which finally occurred in 1922, two years after his death.

Horace Elgin Dodge

(May 17, 1868 - December 10, 1920)

Horace Elgin Dodge was the youngest of three Dodge children, born in the village of Niles, Michigan, in the southwest corner of the state. Because Horace's playmates incessantly made fun of his first name, he called himself "Elgin," "H. E.," and other variants until adulthood, when he finally felt comfortable using "Horace" again. Horace showed signs of his mechanical genius early in life. At age 13, with the help of brother John, he built a working high-wheel bicycle from scrap materials. Horace also developed a passion for music early in life. A prosperous neighbor owned a piano, which he encouraged Horace to play. Later, when he could well afford to support his interest in music, Horace Dodge became one of the principal patrons of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

When Horace and John worked together as machinists at the Murphy Boiler Works (1886-1894) and at the Canadian Typograph Company (1894-1897), Horace proved the more mechanically inclined and talented of the two. In 1898, while John lay ill with tuberculosis, Horace Dodge worked part-time for Henry M. Leland at the Leland and Faulconer Manufacturing Company in Detroit. Leland had come to Detroit from Brown & Sharpe in Providence, Rhode Island, and brought with him high standards for accuracy in machining metal parts. Leland went on to establish the Cadillac Motor Car Company in 1903 and the Lincoln Motor Company in 1919.

Horace Dodge was quieter, more taciturn and generally shyer than his brother

John. He did not have his brother's quick temper but could become quite as belligerent once aroused. One evening, after spending time in a local saloon, Horace struggled to crank his Model A Ford. When a passerby snickered at Horace's increasing frustration with his uncooperative car, he briefly stopped his cranking, knocked his critic senseless and then returned to his efforts to fire up the Ford. Horace's tantrums were typically brief, and they were followed by long periods of intense brooding.

Like John, Horace Dodge was at first discriminated against by Detroit society. After the prestigious Grosse Pointe (Michigan) Country Club denied him admission in 1906, Horace bought a large tract of land next to the club and built an extravagant home, one which — in his words — made the Country Club “look like a shanty.” His mansion, finished in 1910, featured an enormous pipe organ, a large boathouse, docks on the Detroit River and elaborate rose gardens. He named it Rose Terrace. Boating, one of his lifelong interests, eventually won him acceptance into Detroit's elite social circles. He built two 40-foot speedboats, the *Lotus* and the *Hornet* in 1903, and a 96-foot steam yacht, also called the *Hornet*, in 1905. He commissioned the 100-foot *Hornet II* (1910), the 180-foot *Nakomis* (1914), the 243-foot *Nakomis II* (1917), later renamed the *Delphine* and finally, the *Delphine II*, under construction at the time of his death in 1920.

Horace Dodge became the most important patron of the fledgling Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) in the late 1910s. He helped pay for a permanent conductor hired in 1918 to give the symphony world-class status. More importantly, he contributed \$150,000 toward the cost of a new concert hall and led the successful fund-raising campaign for the building. Detroit's Orchestra Hall, which opened in October 1919, served as the home for the DSO until 1939 and from 1989 to the present. The DSO played at Horace Dodge's funeral in recognition of his contributions. Following Horace Dodge's death, Victor Herbert composed the “Dodge Brothers March” to honor Horace Dodge for “his generous efforts toward the advancement of American music.”