

The Search for John Henry Wackerman

John Henry Wackerman was a Game Protector for the State of New York's Conservation Department during the early 1900's. His grandson, Paul Mansfield of Long Island, recently began a search for information on John Henry on behalf of his mother, John Henry's daughter. Paul sent the following request to the Department of Environmental Conservation Central Office in Albany:

I have been fruitlessly searching online data bases for ages hoping to find information on my grandfather John Wackerman, who was a Game Protector for the old Conservation Dept. I'm hoping there was an office photo taken of him to go along with any information on his career - all the family photos were tragically lost in the 1950's. Our mom is quite elderly now, so I'm hoping the DEC can help.

His pertinent info;

John Henry Wackerman

Born: June 21, 1875

Died: November 20, 1940

Home Address: 338 Maujer Street, Brooklyn NY (born & died, same address)

Years Employed: 1911 - 1940

Original Title: Game Protector

Our mother was only 10 when her father died, so what follows is everything we know:

He joined the Dept approx 1911 as a Game Protector. In his early years, he was often on duty upstate NY. For many years he travelled Long Island, both Nassau & Suffolk Co.'s, hunting poachers. By the time our mother was born in 1930, he was a 'plain clothes' Officer (title & rank unknown). By at least this time also, he was driving autos supplied by the Dept. It's known also that in his last years he was in a position to "deputize" his son Richard Wackerman (born Aug 4, 1914, same address), & put him on the payroll to be his driver. Sadly, this is all we know & we have only one photo of him.

Lt. Tom Caifa, the Division of Law Enforcement's historian was tasked with the responsibility of looking into Mr. Mansfield's request, and sent him an initial response indicating that he would begin researching the Department's records and would get back to him as soon as he could.

Mr. Mansfield sent Lt. Caifa the following:

Dear Lt. Caifa

Thank you so much. Believe it or not, I just happen to be sitting with our mother and she asked if I had heard from the Dept ! Your message made her very happy. Thank you.

I have one new piece of information to add regarding her father John. I found a small news article from the 1930's in 'Suffolk Life' which described him as a Warden, Shell Fish Inspector. He was having 2 poachers arraigned before a Suffolk Co. Judge. I do hope this helps you.

We are praying the Dept has our grandfather's photos, as our mother has had none since the 1950's.

Thank you from all of us

Knowing how important this was to Paul Mansfield, his mother and their family, Lt. Caifa began an exhaustive search of old records for anything that might provide information on Game Protector John Henry Wackerman. Within a few days, he was able to provide some valuable history and photos to the family. Lt. Caifa's letter to Mr. Mansfield and the photos he found follow.

Dear Mr. Mansfield,

I did a thorough search of our historical files and came up with the following information on your grandfather, Game Protector John Henry Wackerman.

John Henry Wackerman's name first appeared in our 1912 Conservation Commission Annual Report to the Legislature. He is listed among the other Game Protectors in the Metropolitan & Long Island Division. His number of arrests that year was 7, which is low but not the lowest. This indicates that he was indeed new and since he does not appear in the 1911 report, I would guess that he was appointed sometime between December of 1911 and March of 1912.

This is corroborated by the fact that he is listed on the roster found in The Conservation Law in Relation to Fish and Game and to Lands and Forests 1913. This roster would be a year old at the time of printing. Your grandfather does not appear in the 1912 edition, telling me that he did not work for the department for most of 1911. You are very fortunate in that the roster was only included in this publication from 1912 until 1916. His residence is listed as Brooklyn, Kings County.

In 1917, a letter was generated by then Chief Game Protector Llewellyn Legge listing every Game Protector in the state as they ranked in a rating system designed to differentiate different "levels" of Game Protector. This was a short lived system, but it illustrates the fact that your grandfather, being ranked #12 out of 125 officers was a quick learner and very good at his job. He was given the rating (not rank) of First Grade Game Protector.

As to the question of rank: In the early 20th Century, you came on the job as a Game Protector and that was the base rank. If you were lucky enough to be well respected and well connected (all these jobs were highly political at the time) you could achieve the rank of Division Chief (later changed to District Game Protector). There were only a handful of these jobs available. Next up the chain would be the Chief Game Protector of the Fish & Game Division. If you wanted that job, you had better be on a first name basis with the governor.

As to the question of title: Most of the time, Game Protectors were not differentiated on paper by their titles. Different titles were more of a downstate phenomenon at the time, mostly related to marine fisheries work. There were titles such as; Shellfish Inspectors, Marine Inspectors, Marine Protectors and Oyster Protectors, all of which had limited use at varying times between 1910 and 1964. Your grandfather was indeed a Shellfish Inspector, but I don't have written data on when he was appointed as such. If you could send me a scan of that newspaper article, I would greatly appreciate it and will add it to our archives.

The case you mentioned of the upstate Game Protector that was shot in the line of duty was Samuel S. Taylor of Madison County. He was the first Game Protector killed in the line of duty in 1914. Our highest award for valor is named after him. If your grandfather helped on this case, he must have been well thought of. In 1929, a Game Protector in Queens was also shot and killed. Due to your grandfather's proximity, he probably was involved on that one too.

There is no further written record of your grandfather until the 1940 Conservation Department Annual Report to the Legislature. In it, he is listed as having died during that year. His replacement was Shellfish Inspector J. O'Neill of Bellport. The fact that your grandfather was a part of the Game

Protector force for over 29 years is impressive, as the average for Game Protectors in that era was about 10 years.

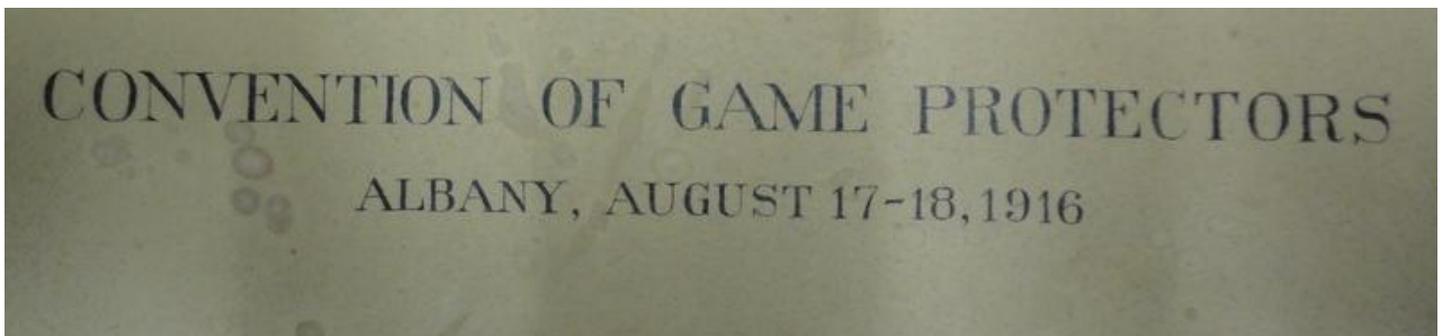
Last but not least, the pictures. I was lucky enough to find one picture of John Henry Wackerman in the archives. In 1916, there was a Convention of Game Protectors in Albany. These were held every so often, but this particular year a group photo was taken and someone had painstakingly listed out the names of all 139 officers and referenced them with a corresponding number. Your grandfather is listed as #85. I wish I had more pictures for you, but pre-WWII pictures of individual Game Protectors are quite uncommon in the records.

Enclosed you will find hard copies of the records and photos listed in this letter. I have also sent you this information via email. I hope you are pleased with the results of my search.

Best Regards,

Thomas J. Caifa

Lieutenant Thomas J. Caifa
NYS Environmental Conservation Police
Division Historian



39 Thomas, Frederick G.
 116 Towle, Henry F.
 83 Townsend, E. T.
 20 Travis, Geo.
 8 Underhill, C. Div. Ch.
 14 Van. Brooklin, Martin
 125 Van, John B.
 85 Wackerman, John
 84 Ward, Chas J. Imp. Agt.
 28 Ward, J. J.
 21 Waterhouse, Wm





Close up of Game Protector John Henry Wackerman #85 1916

Lt. Caifa's research provided Mr. Mansfield and his family with information and photos that they are very grateful for and will always treasure.