Dog Catchers: A Descriptive Study*

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ABSTRACT
This ethnographic study examines the dog catcher in regard to work duties and role performances inherent in the occupation. Meanings associated with the occupation are considered in the light of the Sociology of Occupations. Dogcatchers were found to have devised mechanisms to subtly "get back at" an unappreciative public, behaviors which appear similar to those found in other low status or status inconsistent occupations.

INTRODUCTION
Agencies exist which are charged with the enforcement of statutes and ordinances concerning animals. Violations of such legal norms constitute an array of "zoological crimes," which have been previously articulated (Bryant and Palmer, 1976). Collective sentiments and political bodies have long regulated the ownership, control, treatment and usage of animals, and in so doing, have created select occupations to carry out these regulatory proscriptions and prescriptions. One such occupation, the topic of the present paper, is that of animal control officer, zoological garbage collector, or, for short, the dog catcher.

The history of the occupation of dog catcher is rather sketchy. Reportedly, however, even early Greece, Rome and

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the Middle East had authorities who were responsible for animal control; and the Code of Hammurabi in 2,250 B. C. required "...townsmen to restrict their animals from damaging persons or property" (Steele, 1976:4). Hodge (1976:1) contends that:

The identity of the first animal control program within the United States has been lost to posterity. Historical records do indicate that municipal animal control activities predate 1800. The first animal regulations were intended to protect the horse, which was the backbone of American commerce, against harassment by free-roaming dogs.

Some of the early official dog catchers appeared in New York City in the late 1800’s. Reid (1892) writing in Harper's Weekly magazine in June, 1892, provides a vivid description of "dog hunting" in New York which was done by anyone so inclined to receive the forty cents per dog bounty paid by the city. In 1894, another article in Harper's Weekly (Anonymous, 1894:367) mentions the "...official licensed ‘dog catcher’..." as being difficult to bribe (especially in front of witnesses) for fear of having his license revoked.

Animal control is currently undertaken by a variety of officials either at the state, county or municipal level. Some rural areas may entrust the county sheriff’s department with such power, or, in some cases, may charge state game wardens with the responsibility of controlling stray animals. In other instances, special game wardens may be appointed to keep a particular county free of strays. In addition, "several cities contract with their local humane society to provide for the administration of the animal control program" (Hodge, 1976:10). Many other cities operate their own animal control programs and appoint or hire dog catchers as full-time city employees.

Regardless of the political authority base from which current dog catchers operate, the occupation has evolved from a freelance endeavor into an administratively recognized and functionally important job performed in all parts of the United States today. As will be seen, the modern day dog catcher performs a variety of occupational duties centered around the