

Forensics professor wins access to records on Hoover's death

WASHINGTON (AP) — A university professor of forensic science, suspecting foul play in J. Edgar Hoover's death, has been granted access to the District of Columbia medical examiner's records to reinvestigate how the former FBI director died.

George Washington University professor James Starrs believes the records may clarify the circumstances around Hoover's 1972 death at age 77, which was attributed officially to a heart attack. No autopsy was performed.

Starrs says nothing in Hoover's medical history would suggest he was a candidate for a heart attack. Without an autopsy, other causes of death are still open, he said.

"Everything thus far indicates there was nothing of sufficient medical history to write this off as a heart attack," Starrs said yesterday. "Hoover had numerous enemies from all walks of life; the man's life was marked for death by all kinds of people."

Hoover's death will be the subject of a panel at the upcoming American Academy of Forensic Science meeting on Feb. 13 in San

Francisco.

Starrs says his long interest in the Hoover case has been compounded by various suspicious details people have reported through the years.

One theory suggests that burglars on the Hoover premises might have poisoned his toiletries, which could have triggered a heart attack, Starrs said. According to another report, a neighbor saw someone moving a body back to the house the day of the death, Starrs said.

Starrs already has obtained some FBI records on Hoover, which he will use to compare notes with the medical examiner papers. He is particularly interested in details such as when the funeral home embalmed the body and who the doctor was that Hoover had an appointment with the day of his death.

"This is not a cold fishing expedition," he said. "I know what I am looking for."

Starrs says he and other skeptics will not call for the exhumation of the body until they have amassed enough proof to warrant it.

"I'm conscious of the fact that the public thinks there are a group of people who are graverobbers," Starrs said. "We have to do significant investigation to prove the merit for an exhumation."

Several years ago, Starrs dug up infamous outlaw Jesse James. He also has asked to exhume the remains of famed explorer Meriwether Lewis to determine whether his death in 1809 was a murder or suicide. The National Park Service has rebuffed his request.