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Police theorize heart attack

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POTOMAC — Lobellia Bishop had all three grandchildren bedded down for the night. Dinner was finished and the dishes were in the dishwasher. It was about 11 p.m., and the Golden Retriever was ready for his habitual nightly walk along Lilly Stone Drive.

She put on her coat, summoned the dog, and, unknown to her, walked quietly out into the night for the last time.

It was a balmy evening, much warmer

than usual for Montgomery County's typical blustery March. Leo was enjoying himself, sniffing all those invisible delights familiar to the animal kingdom. Perhaps, Mrs. Bishop continued that fateful sojourn a little longer than usual the night of March 1.

When she paced back up the driveway toward the brick and frame house in the woods, she was relaxed and ready to rest up for a busy Tuesday. Then she opened the door, stepping into a grizzly scene so horrible and shocking that she suffered an immediate fatal trauma.

Such is one theory surrounding the latest news of the mass murder of a Potomac family whose bodies were later unearthed in a shallow, Columbia, N. C., grave on March 2.

Mrs. Bishop, 68, was not bludgeoned to death as reported by police earlier. An autopsy may reveal today that she had been struck, but that she may have died of a heart attack, according to reports filtering from various sources.

Her body, those of her three grandsons and her son's wife, were discovered accidentally by a Forest Ranger in

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Good morning!

It is more important to do the right thing than to do things right.
R. Drucker

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killed Bishop's mother

Columbia, N. C., where all five had been buried and set ablaze. When Mrs. Bishop's body was removed by police, she was still clad in the coat she wore to walk Leo. The garment was purchased at Saks Fifth Avenue in Bethesda.

The children were still wearing their pajamas with their beaten heads wrapped in towels, which police surmised were used to soak up the blood while they were being transported to Columbia.

The children's mother, Annette, 37, was found with her shoes on, leading to

the theory that she was the first to encounter the killer and face death at the end of a blunt instrument. The children, two of whom shared a bedroom, were next. Their grandmother, upon reentering the house, was the last alive, some officials believe.

Still missing is the children's father, Bradford Bishop, a high ranking State Department official; Leo, and the family's maroon-colored 1974 Chevrolet station wagon. A resident of Columbia claims to have seen a man and a big dog near the dump on March 2.

Since the mass killings, which officials called the worst in Montgomery history, Lobellia Bishop has emerged as the head and owner of the house. She did the cooking, the cleaning and cared for the children, Bradford III, 14; Brenton, 10, and Geoffery, 5.

Her son was frequently out-of-town, and her daughter-in-law was wrapped up in her full-time art courses at the University of Maryland.

Last Monday, when the bodies were

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Police

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finally traced to Lilly Stone Drive, Officers Joseph Sergeant and Clarence Orbin were dispatched to investigate the murders in the Columbia area. The two-man team has visited the morgue in Chapel Hill, N. C., where they picked up pictures of the autopsy and the pathological reports; Raleigh, N.C., where they interviewed the Attorney General, and back to Columbia, where they met Thursday with 14 other investigators from the state to coordinate information gathered to date.

The slayings have received world-wide publicity, because of numerous foreign assignments of Bradford Bishop. An international police agency has been alerted to the facts in the case, because he is wanted for questioning.

Today, now that the snow has melted here, police plan an all-out search of the area surrounding the Bishop home. That investigation was scheduled for last Tuesday, but a heavy snowstorm prevented detectives from pursuing clues which may have been or still be hidden on the property.

In addition, police are expected to reveal today some of the evidence they gathered from the trip to Columbia. Officers returned by car late last night, reportedly bringing some of that evidence with them.

Although police have refused to comment on the fact, the fireplace poker in the Bishop home is missing from a set of tools on the hearth. No one knows if the poker was among the fireplace equipment, or if it was removed from its stand the night of the murders.