

County's Personnel Files Seized

By Alice Bonner and
Deborah Sue Yaeger

Washington Post Staff Writers

Montgomery County State's Attorney Andrew L. Sonner has taken possession of certain county personnel documents in connection with allegations that files containing derogatory information were kept on county employees.

The allegations surfaced last September when County Council members said they had been receiving complaints from county employees about the existence of such files. The county's personnel board investigated and reported in December that it found no material in the personnel files "which could be considered even remotely detrimental or defamatory."

The board's report also said, however, that spot checks of about 6,000 personnel files by the board disclosed 33 sealed brown envelopes, which former personnel director John P. Gaquin had used to "maintain confidentiality" of information on such things as employees' performance and medical history. The report said no sealed envelopes had been compiled since early 1973, when Ronald G. Lloyd replaced Gaquin as personnel director.

Sonner obtained a court or-

der Friday to seize the documents after receiving an anonymous telephone tip that county officials were destroying the files.

At the time the personnel department was involved in a review of about 28,000 personnel files dating back at least 20 years.

Acting chief administrative officer Robert T. Carty, acknowledged yesterday that he ordered a file-by-file search last week to discover "once and for all" whether the brown envelopes in question still existed and whether they contained any derogatory information that did not belong in an employee's file.

Personnel Director Lloyd said the search of the files, now overseen by sheriff's deputies, has turned up at least 60 more of the sealed brown envelopes and added that "We've never had a file-by-file search before."

Lloyd said that a meeting last Wednesday between himself, Carty and County Attorney Richard S. McKernon, Carty ordered the file review "to dispel all doubts and clear up all fears. I thought it was a good idea."

Asked whether anyone had suggested informing the state's attorney, who is the county's prosecutor, of their intended search in order to avert charges of tampering, Lloyd answered no, "but we're learning fast."

Shirley Bailey, a county personnel analyst, said the envelopes she had opened in the course of conducting routine personnel duties, contained bad reference checks, poor performance reports and similar documents of an unflattering nature.