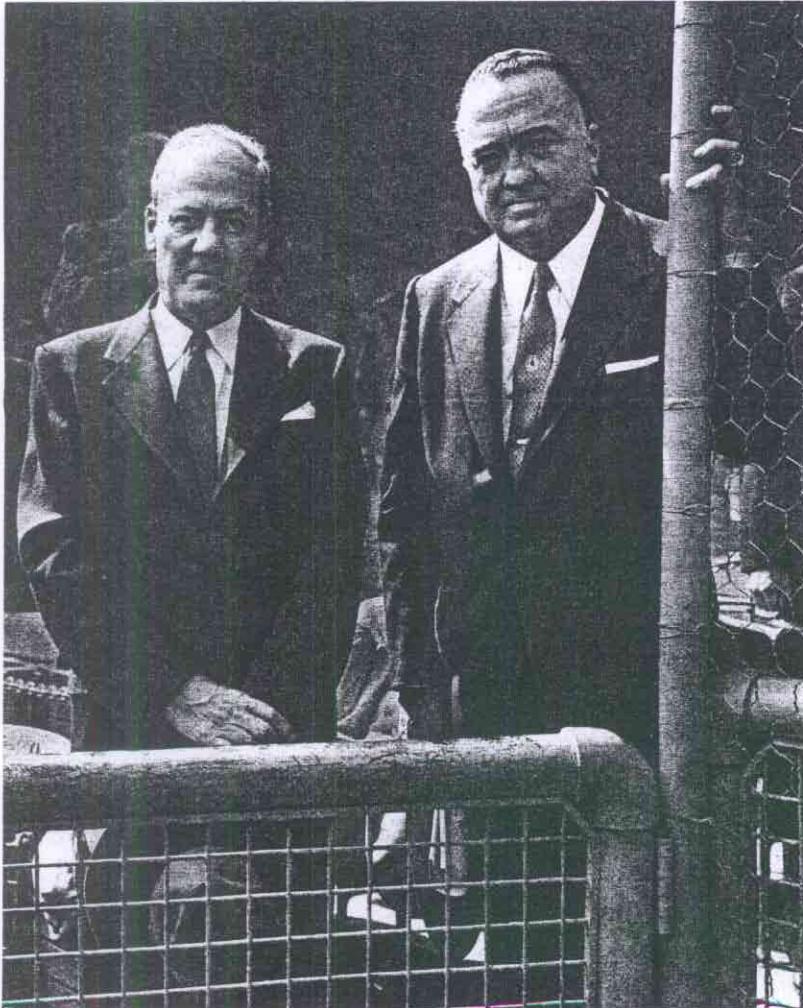


What's Happened To J. Edgar Hoover's Fortune?

by Robert Walters



FBI Associate Director Clyde A. Tolson (l) and Director J. Edgar Hoover at New York's Polo Grounds for '54 World

Series. Hoover willed nearly all he owned to his longtime companion, whose own estate is now hotly contested.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

In death as in life, J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI for 52 years, remains a subject of controversy.

For more than four years—he died on May 2, 1972—a bizarre struggle has been going on over Hoover's estate.

Almost all of the estate was willed to FBI Associate Director Clyde A. Tolson, Hoover's longtime confidant and close companion. When they were working together at the FBI, Hoover's bullet-proof Cadillac limousine would pick up Tolson every morning at his apartment at precisely the same time. And they invariably lunched at the same restaurant in Washington's Mayflower Hotel.

Every summer, the pair would travel to the Del Mar Racetrack outside San Diego. On the first day of every year, they went to New York to celebrate Hoover's birthday. And every winter, they fled to Miami Beach.

Hoover and Tolson also made numerous trips around the country, always shepherded by FBI agents who temporarily abandoned their crime-fighting tasks to act as tour guides.

Former agent Joseph L. Schott, in a book called *No Left Turns*, describes the often hilarious aspects of preparing for a Hoover and Tolson visit to a Texas hotel. Four down pillows had to be placed on each man's bed, typed operating instructions had to be put next to all appliances, and a doctor had to be on call in case of medical emergencies.

Inside Hoover's house

On the night of Hoover's death, Tolson moved into the Hoover home on 30th Place, a quiet residential street in Northwest Washington, where he went into seclusion for several days.

Following Tolson into the Hoover home was an assessor assigned to inventory the household possessions. He found a grab bag of statues, figurines, rugs, mementos, photographs, cartoons and artifacts from every corner of the world.

Among the items that occupied almost every nook and cranny of the Hoover house were a celluloid figure of Buddha, a gold-plated Colt .22 revolver with a mother-of-pearl handle, a mounted golden railroad spike, an airplane propeller, a marble fragment of Hitler's bookcase, a pottery dish with the Justice Department seal and a pair of Chinese opium pipes.

Also in the home were 26 miniature elephants made of ivory, crystal, teak and bronze, 23 Indian rugs, a dozen miniature ivory horses, eight miniature wooden horses, numerous female nude figures made of a variety of materials, and countless trinkets from Haiti, Japan, Mexico, Germany, China, Switzerland, Hungary, India and Morocco.

Shortly after Hoover's death, The Washington Star interviewed his neighbors and reported on his fetish about orderliness in the house:

"Hoover rarely switched a picture or art object after he had assigned it a

place in his house. In fact, when everything had to come down one year so that the wallpaper could be cleaned, he had photographs of the walls taken first, to make certain that everything would be put back in the same place.

The complete list of Hoover's household possessions took 49 legal-size pages, included more than 1200 items and carried an estimated value of just under \$70,000. Additional assets—in the form of cash, insurance policies, stocks and bonds—brought the total value of the Hoover estate to slightly more than \$425,000.

Bachelor Hoover's will called for small bequests totaling about \$11,500 to a handful of distant relatives and personal aides. His funeral cost slightly more than \$5000, and the federal estate tax took \$135,000.

\$280,000 to Tolson

Everything remaining, valued at approximately \$280,000, was willed to Tolson, although Hoover specified that if Tolson should die before or at the same time he did, the money should be divided equally between two charities.

One early, ominous sign of what was to befall Hoover's estate involved a pair of cairn terriers which were his pets when he died. A dog fancier, Hoover had at least seven dogs as pets during his time in Washington, and he thought enough of the animals to purchase grave sites and perpetual care for them at a suburban Washington pet cemetery.

His will, although relatively short, contained a clause which specifically said: "I would like Clyde Tolson to keep or arrange for a good home for my two dogs." But according to one source familiar with the estate, the two dogs were killed shortly after Hoover's death because "they were pretty old."

Unexpected claims

Hoover's will was processed in the District of Columbia courts with few complications, although there were some unexpected claims. Among those shrugged off by court officials were:

- A Richmond, Va., man who claimed to be a "first cousin nine times removed" and offered a genealogical chart to identify others in the family.

- Three Michigan men who claimed the FBI had violated their civil rights through illegal electronic surveillance, thus entitling them to a compensatory payment from the estate.

- A Gainesville, Ga., woman who wrote: "I am his wife. We were married in Hall County, Georgia, in 1945. We have a son . . ."

The bulk of the Hoover estate was transferred to Tolson, apparently without a hitch—until Tolson died on April 14, 1975, almost three years after Hoover. Touching off the controversy was a clause in Tolson's will which specified that "I leave nothing . . . to my brother, Hillory A. Tolson, or to any of his brother's children or grandchildren.

The brother promptly filed a lawsuit charging that at the time of Hoover's death Tolson "suffered from many ailments which resulted in his permanent disability" and made Tolson "an easy prey for undue influence and coercion, which was exhibited upon him" by John P. Mohr, the FBI's third highest ranking executive under Hoover's administration.

Hillory Tolson contended that his brother was improperly influenced not only by Mohr, who received \$26,000 under Clyde Tolson's will, but also by Dorothy S. Skillman, Clyde Tolson's secretary at the FBI and the intended recipient of a \$27,000 bequest.

Before that lawsuit was settled in an out-of-court agreement, it produced a series of startling admissions by present and former FBI employees, all required to testify under oath, in their depositions.

The most significant of those disclosures involved a series of events which began on May 22, 1972—less than three weeks after Hoover's death.

Mrs. Skillman's sworn testimony was that on that date Mohr brought her a "power of attorney" document authorizing him to handle Tolson's financial affairs. Mohr asked Mrs. Skillman to sign the name of her boss—and she never bothered to check with Tolson to see if he approved.

No questions asked

"I knew Mr. Mohr was taking care of matters for Mr. Tolson," said Mrs. Skillman, "and I didn't question any order he gave me or any instructions he gave me from Mr. Tolson."

Three days later, on May 25, Mrs. Skillman again signed Tolson's name to a crucial legal document, a letter to a Washington bank containing detailed instructions for the handling of Hoover's estate. Again, she acted only on Mohr's instructions and never consulted Tolson. The next day, the process was re-



John P. Mohr, assistant to Hoover and now executor of the Tolson estate, was sued by Hillory Tolson for using "influence and coercion" on his brother.

peated again with another "power of attorney" document. As in the first case, Tolson's signature was supposedly witnessed by two high-ranking FBI officials, James B. Adams and Nicholas P. Callahan.

During the legal struggle over the Tolson will, Adams admitted that "Mr. Tolson did not sign it [the power of attorney] in my presence," and Callahan said he did not believe the signature was Tolson's, although it was "similar to signatures of his in the past."

Although Hoover named Tolson executor of his estate, the series of legal documents signed, witnessed and notarized by FBI employees using Tolson's name but without his knowledge had the effect of transferring control of the Hoover legacy to Mohr—and it is he who now also serves as executor of the Tolson estate.

Tolson's estate—including Hoover's house, knickknacks and cash—totaled more than \$725,000. His will called for distribution of almost \$200,000 among more than a dozen friends and colleagues. Another \$100,000 was ac-

cepted by his brother Hillory under terms of the agreement that settled the lawsuit.

The remainder of the estate is to go to the same two charities designated by Hoover, the Boys Clubs of America and the Damon Runyon-Walter Winchell Memorial Fund for Cancer Research. But neither group has yet received any money and by the time it is delivered the amount may be very small. "I'm not sure there will be much left after the lawyers get through," says one man who has followed the tribulations of the Hoover-Tolson estate.

Costly court battle

All of the bills for the legal fight within the Tolson family have not yet been submitted but will probably cost the Tolson estate close to \$100,000. And soon after that court case was settled there emerged another serious threat to the disposition of the Hoover-Tolson assets.

It is a civil suit filed in mid-1976 in federal court in Washington. A group of former officers and members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the civil rights group headed by the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., charge that they were the subject of illegal FBI wiretapping and eavesdropping during the 1960's.

The SCLC members who initiated the lawsuit are asking that the defendants—including Tolson—be required to pay \$6 million. The lawsuit may well entangle the estate in a new, costly and lengthy legal battle.

The story of Hoover's legacy is one of dismemberment. Even his collection of awards, honors and mementos now faces an uncertain future. Tolson's will instructs his executor "to install these memorabilia and personal property . . . in the J. Edgar Hoover Room in the new FBI Building."

The current FBI Director, Clarence M. Kelley, late last year discovered still another cache of Hoover treasures—packed in boxes at FBI headquarters—but he's not notably anxious to display them.

Mounds of memorabilia

In a letter to court officials, Kelley cited 18 separate boxes of scrolls, certificates, plaques, photos and trays from police chiefs' organizations, Boy Scout groups, American Legion posts and a host of other organizations.

In addition, said Kelley, another 60 "boxes, crates and packets" of newspaper articles, photographs, certificates, diplomas and honorary degrees have not even been inventoried by the FBI.

The FBI is retaining custody of the materials while the Justice Department considers whether their rightful owner is the federal government or the Hoover and Tolson estates. And the FBI has no current plans to establish a room for display of the memorabilia—a far cry from the days when whatever Hoover wanted, Hoover got.



Hoover's blanketed body in front of his Washington home on way to the funeral parlor. The house was crammed with knickknacks from around the world.