

Death Report Delay Stirs Investigation

Wife of Missing Man Not Notified for Four Days After His Death

Why the body of Fred A. Voorhees, 62-year-old engineer employed by the County Flood Control District, was allowed to remain at the Coroner's office for nearly four days without his wife being notified was under investigation yesterday by police officials and the Coroner's office.

Voorhees died of a heart attack on a bus at Fifth and Olive Sts. at 7:45 a.m. Saturday while en route to work. His body was removed from the bus and taken to the Coroner's office, where papers on his person readily identified him.

Absence Caused Search

Despite this fact, his widow was not notified and the next day began a frantic search of the city for her missing husband. All local newspapers carried news stories and police were contacted, but it was not until yesterday that his whereabouts was learned.

Police Inspector Edgar Bittle, who took charge of the police investigation, said he learned the following:

Radio Officers J. O. Summers and E. C. Russell answered the call and upon learning no detectives had been assigned, went to the Coroner's office. There they received the dead man's name, address and other vital statistics. The Deputy Coroner asked them to notify the wife and, according to Bittle, they agreed to do this.

Debate Responsibility

Later, Bittle said, the two officers talked the situation over with a Central Station lieutenant, who called the homicide bureau and was informed that the notification was a duty of the Coroner. Bittle said, as far as he could learn, no further action was taken.

Sunday, Bittle said he learned, a relative of Voorhees called Sgt. Robert Swan at the Wilshire detective bureau. Swan said no reports of Voorhees' whereabouts had reached the station and agreed to check further. Swan said he called the jail, hospital and the Coroner's office and was informed at each source that there was no Voorhees on the records.

Coroner Frank A. Nance said Deputy Chester Thompson, who was on duty Sunday, denied he received any requests about Voorhees.

Regular Procedure

Nance said the regular procedure in notifying relatives of a death is through the Police Department. He said the officers who had promised to notify Mrs. Voorhees had taken over that responsibility for the Coroner's office.

"We are trying to get at the bottom of this buck passing," Bittle said. "Death notifications are definitely the Coroner's duty. However, since he has no facilities for this, the Police Department, in the past, has co-operated in making notifications."

Funeral services for Voorhees will be conducted today at 2 p.m. at the Cunningham & O'Connor Mortuary.