

Zodiac theory doubted

By JAMES E. BEED

Yesterday's news stories about a possible connection between the Zodiac killer and slayings of some 49 young women, including six in Sonoma County, and lawmen in Western states rechecking homicides in their areas.

However, police in various other areas expressed skepticism about Sheriff Don Striepeke's theory the slayings are the work of a "loose" who might be the Zodiac.

"The last messages we got from the Zodiac indicated he was going to continue his killings, but vary them. And he bragged about collecting slaves for his use in the next world," Striepeke said.

The slayer of six young women in Sonoma County in 1972 and 1973 "could definitely be the Zodiac," Striepeke said.

Deluged with phone queries from news media in the Western states since yesterday, Striepeke refused further comment on the investigation this morning.

A previously scheduled news conference it will set to begin at 10 a.m. tomorrow at the Board of Supervisors meeting room at the county administration center.

Although some officials in other areas doubt a possible connection between the homicides, Salt Lake City Sheriff's Sgt. Riley S. Cannon said he

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accepted at least part of Striepeke's theory.

"It's very possible our cases could have been committed by the same person or persons as Sonoma's," he said.

Authorities near Seattle were more skeptical, however. They said they found no direct connection between involved homicides of women in their area with Zodiac.

In Colorado, where Sheriff's Detective Sgt. Ruth Carlstedt has been this week meeting with homicide investigators, Pitkin County Sheriff Carol D. Whitacre said he had no reason to believe the murder of a 23-year-old Michigan woman near Aspen was tied to the Zodiac.

"This is the first I've heard of the Zodiac killer," Whitacre said yesterday.

"If this fellow Carlstedt says there may be a connection, he must know something I don't."

The body of Caryn Campbell was found Feb. 17 along a road leading to Aspen. She disappeared from a ski lodge lobby a month earlier.

In Eagle County, a sheriff's department spokesman said they are still not sure a missing 19-year-old woman was not kidnaped.

Julie Coningham disappeared March 13 when she left her home to visit a friend's apartment.

"She left to go to another apartment and nobody's seen or heard from her since. She just disappeared," the spokesman said.

Six girls whose bodies were found off rural Sonoma County roads disappeared in similar circumstances.

Yvonne Weber, 15, and Maureen Sterling, 12, went to the Redwood Empire Ice Arena the evening of Feb. 4, 1973, and dropped from sight. Kim Wendy Allen, 19, disappeared while hitchhiking north from San Rafael on the freeway; Caroline Madeline Davis, 15, was last seen hitchhiking south on Highway 101 from Carlsville, and Theresa Diane Walsh, 15, was hitchhiking north from Malibu when she dropped from sight.

Striepeke is expected to go into the background of the Sonoma County victims at tomorrow's press meeting, to explain his conclusion that the young girls were all slain by the same person or persons.

It is also expected that a combined \$10,000 reward will be offered through the Secret Witness program for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for the Sonoma County slayings.