

# 'Vampire Killer'

## Richard Chase

### Dies In Prison

By Jaime Diaz  
Bee Staff Writer

Richard Trenton Chase, the so-called "vampire killer" condemned to the gas chamber for the bloody slaughter of six Sacramentans, Friday was found dead in his cell on San Quentin Prison's death row.

A preliminary examination indicated Chase, 30, swallowed a fatal amount of anti-depressant pills prescribed by a prison doctor, according to prison spokesman Michael Madding.

"There is no foul play suspected," Madding said. "It was either suicide or natural causes."

A prison guard making lunch rounds at 11 a.m. discovered Chase slumped on his bed with his feet and legs sprawled on the floor of the 6-by-8-foot cell, Madding said. No suicide note was found.

Chase was pronounced dead by a prison doctor at 11:23 a.m. Marin County coroner's deputies estimated Chase had been dead an hour when he was found.

Madding said the official cause of Chase's death would be determined after an autopsy next week.

Chase was sentenced to death June 8, 1979, for killing two men, two women and two boys. The murders took place during a bloody spree in December 1977 and January 1978 in Sacramento's North Area.

Chase, a former mental patient diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, apparently picked his victims at random. His two women victims were eviscerated so he could drink their blood. The youngest victim, aged 22 months, had been decapitated.

In February, Chase was transferred from San Quentin to the California Medical Facility at Vacaville because of his "deteriorating psychological condition." Madding said Chase was returned to death row after a month at Vacaville when he was found "suitable for rehousing."

Madding said Chase had spoken of suicide "on and off" in the past, but wasn't considered a serious suicide threat. He was visited weekly by staff psychiatrists who had prescribed the anti-psychotic drugs.

Chase's eating habits were "sporadic" and he almost never exercised during his time on death row, Madding said. He talked to a few people, Madding said, but was considered an outcast by other inmates.

"His crimes were pretty heavy — he wasn't popular," Madding said. "Whether you could say he had enemies, I don't



Bee file photo

RICHARD T. CHASE  
... foul play not suspected

know. Other inmates didn't have an awful lot to do with him."

Madding said there had been no indications that Chase had been abnormally depressed recently.

"He just kind of maintained his own status quo. There was nothing spectacular about it."

Chase had pleaded innocent by reason of insanity to six counts of murder. During the trial, which was transferred to Santa Clara County because of publicity, there was extensive testimony by psychiatrists on a mental condition that had been deteriorating for a decade.

The prosecutor who dismantled Chase's psychiatric defense, Ronald W. Tochterman, told the jury the death penalty would be "an inadequate punishment for the crimes (Chase) committed."

He argued, "These murders were not ordinary or common — they betrayed a depravity that is so great that the level of reprehensibility manifested is difficult to imagine — almost beyond human conception or imagination."

Chase's life was not salvageable, Tochterman said.

Tochterman, now a Sacramento Municipal Court judge, said Friday it would be inappropriate for him to