

# Determination nets a major legacy for communal needs

Where there's a will there's a way!

Determination, skill, team work and a little bit of luck have saved a major legacy for the community — more specifically for "the poor and needy of the Jewish faith".

Because of the persistent efforts of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS), which went to extraordinary efforts, including the use of a "private eye", a will was discovered in a secret hiding place, ensuring that the Society would have the use of a five-bedroom house in Paddington for the next 20 years.

The will also specified that the residue of the estate be applied to scholarships in Jewish education, for needy students.

Syd Field, AJWS president said this week that a meeting had just been held at the Society's Darlinghurst office, when the elusive will was read to those who had played a major role in the search.

The will was found in a hidden panel in one of the walls of the Paddington house, where Chaim Copp (born Kopilovicus, in Lithuania) lived alone for many years, in almost complete blindness, helped by the AJWS.

Attending the reading of the will were Mr Field, Brian Lenny (AJWS executive director), Roland Gridiger (solicitor), Bernie Rosen (president of the Hebrew Benevolent Society), Dr Leonard Yedeiken (a distant relative) and Peter Kay (private investigator).

Mr Gridiger (who drafted the will) and Mr Rosen are executors of the Chaim Copp estate.

## RECLUSE

Mr Copp came to Australia via China in 1936.

A bachelor, he was in latter years very much a recluse, lonely and distrustful.

An AJWS officer, Stephanie Pojer, was introduced to him in 1975.

Mrs Pojer "got to know him" over a period and he seemed to trust her.

She visited him often, did shopping for him and took him for walks.

It was a question of looking after his "human needs" — "he didn't seem to be short of money", Mrs Pojer said, "but he was sick, 80 per cent blind and very much alone".

Following a stroke, which semi-paralysed him, Mr Copp was hospitalised.

He died on December 15, 1982.

Dr Yedeiken and Mr Copp's cleaner, who came once a fortnight, were the only mourners at the funeral.

Mr Copp had been such a recluse that many weeks later police visited the Paddington house to investigate.

Apparently the neighbors were unaware that Mr Copp had died.

Dr Yedeiken, who had kept in touch with Mr Copp and visited him in hospital, had earlier spoken to him about making a will, and had



• Solicitor Roland Gridiger (left) reads the last will of Chaim Copp to (l-r) Bernie Rosen, Syd Field, Brian Lenny and Dr Leonard Yedeiken.

## By PETER MORRISON

been told: "Don't worry, it is taken care of."

The secretive Mr Copp would give no further information.

After Mr Copp's death, the doctor checked the house and cleaned up.

There was no will among the few papers he found.

He inquired with a bank manager, solicitors and others, without success.

Meantime, the Public Trustee had taken over.

They, too, had been unable to find a will.

The furniture and all other belongings except Mr Copp's braille watch were dumped ("they couldn't even give them away") and the house was about to be put up for auction.

Now a dramatic turn.

Dr Yedeiken, in the course of his professional work, happened to be talking to Mr Copp's doctor, and the situation was mentioned.

Mr Copp's doctor said there must be a will.

In fact his secretary had witnessed it.

He put Dr Yedeiken in touch with Roland Gridiger and the AJWS was alerted, since Mr Gridiger was able to reveal that the Society was a major beneficiary.

He said that after drafting the will, he had offered to hold it in safe-keeping for Mr Copp, who thanked him.

## DOCUMENT

But, Mr Gridiger heard no more about the matter and had no idea what Mr Copp may have done with the document.

The AJWS now contacted the Public Trustee and urged it to "hold everything" while a thorough search was conducted for the will.

Brian Lenny was determined that the estate was not going to slip through the AJWS's fingers and was convinced the will would be found.

It was explained that the unsigned copy of the will in Mr Gridiger's office was not a legal basis for any enjoyment of the estate and it took some persuasion to stop the auction of the property going ahead.

After all other inquiries proved fruitless, it was decided to engage private investigator, Peter Kay, to find the missing will.

His brief was literally to leave no stone unturned in the search.

The will, together with bank documents, was finally located in the secret hiding place in a wall of the Paddington house — discovered by the classic method, so familiar from "private eye" movies of bygone days, of tapping the wall.

When the tapping revealed a hollow sound, Mr Kay knew he was onto something.

## MISSING

In another parallel drama, Mr Rosen had received a call from the police, informing him that Mr Copp was "missing".

They had found Mr Rosen's name in the empty house.

By an extraordinary coincidence, Mr Rosen was later standing by a graveside at a consecration and noticed the name on the next grave.

It was Chaim Copp's.

The following week, Mr Rosen was further involved in the mystery through a call from the Public Trustee, regarding a final tax return for Mr Copp's estate.

Mr Rosen had handled Mr Copp's tax matters for many years, and he was able to give the Trustee a great deal of information of which he was completely unaware.

At the reading of the will in the Welfare Society's offices, investigator Peter Kay shed more light on the

secretive life of Chaim Copp.

He was born on May 18, 1892, and that date now assumes strange significance.

His last Australian passport was issued on May 18, 1973 and Mr Kay found the will on (would you believe?) May 18, 1983.

At one time Mr Copp had been a handbag manufacturer and some materials were still lying in a shed at the back of the house.

Inquiring at the Public Trustee's office for anything that would help him in his investigation, Mr Kay found very few clues.

There was, however, a photograph of a soldier in a garden.

## WISHES

On the back was written in Yiddish, "Best wishes, Shlomo Klein", and an Israeli address.

But all inquiries in Israel and in South Africa (where Dr Yedeiken came from) proved dead ends.

Chaim Kopilovicus died "a poor old rich man", as Mrs Pojer put it.

But he had a good Jewish heart and though he did not make it easy for his executors, "the poor and needy of the Jewish faith" will finally benefit from his labors.

The Australian Jewish Welfare Society together with the executors, is now looking into ways of fulfilling the wish expressed in Mr Copp's "last testament".