

Cooper's anti-Nazi legacy honoured with anniversary walk

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BY BENJAMIN MILLAR



ABE SCHWARZ (MIDDLE) AND UNCLE BOYDIE (RIGHT) WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF WILLIAM COOPER'S FAMILY AHEAD OF THE WALK. PHOTO BY BENJAMIN MILLAR

A unique protest against the Nazi regime by indigenous activist William Cooper staged 80 years ago has been honoured with a walk retracing his footsteps from Footscray to the city.

Cooper, a Yorta Yorta elder who helped to establish the Footscray-based Australian Aborigines' League in 1934, led a march to the German Consulate in 1938 to deliver a letter in protest against the anti-Jewish events of Kristallnacht.

Members of Cooper's family and the Victorian Jewish community joined together last Thursday to retrace the steps Cooper and his delegation took from Footscray to the consulate exactly 80 years earlier.

The William Cooper Legacy Project and the Jewish Community Council of Victoria jointly organised the walk, which was led by Cooper's grandson, 90-year-old Uncle Alf Turner – better known as Uncle Boydie.

"I'd like to thank everyone for coming along here today and joining in," he said.

Abe Schwartz of the William Cooper Legacy Project said Uncle Boydie was living in the Southampton Street house at the time.

"He remembers very, very well when his grandfather walked from this house 80 years ago today, on what's been announced by many people as the only known public protest by a private organisation or individual to try to stand up to the Nazism that was demonstrated by the events four weeks early, Kristallnacht," he said.

Mr Schwartz said the walk demonstrated the importance of people sticking up for human rights irrespective of whether or not they are the people suffering.

"So if we can think, as we're about to take our first step, of any injustice that's going on in the world... to not look idly by when we see injustice."