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The man of the signs

DEBORAH ERWIN

THE vast real estate empire known as LJ Hooker has become a household name but until recently little was known about the late founder and his humble beginnings.

A few months ago, Mr Hooker's granddaughter Natalia Hooker published his biography called *LJ Hooker The Man*, revealing details of his heritage, personality, pursuits and philanthropy.

"I'm proud of his vision, the fact that he knew what he wanted and he went for it. He seemed patient and persistent. He really didn't reach his goal until he was in his 50s."

After six years of research and an intense 10-month writing period, Ms Hooker released the family tome with over 400 images.

The story begins in Canterbury, with the entrepreneur's birth in 1903 and follows his lifelong adventures.

The author said one surprising revelation was her grandfather's Chinese heritage. He was born as



Leslie Joseph Hooker

Leslie Joseph Tingyou and was cared for by relatives after being orphaned at age eight.

At 25, he changed his name by deed poll to Hooker with the goal of setting up a successful Australian company during the time of the White Australia policy.

He met his business partner Heck Adams while working as a ship's purser in his late teens.

The two became lifelong friends.

"My grandfather became bank-

rupt before he started up LJ Hooker and Heck was with him all the way," the author said. "And he stayed with the company for his whole career."

To amass capital for his first real estate office, Mr Hooker sold a joint business with his uncle of converting grocery stores into licensed hotels.

"They sold the business and my grandfather had quite a bit of money, almost 3000 pounds."

The eponymous founder got his break in 1928 with an office in Maroubra.

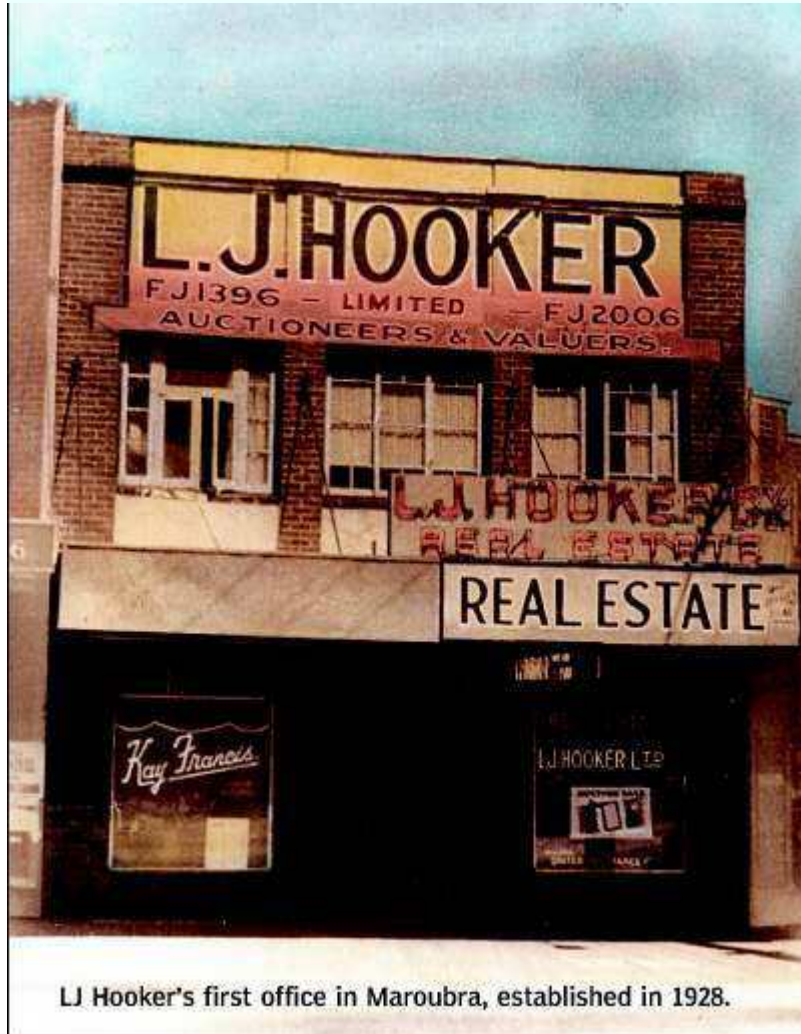
The property empire now boasts 658 franchise offices across Australasia, employs 6000 staff and sells \$15 billion worth of property a year.

In 2009, the author's brother Leslie Janusz Hooker bought the company for \$67 million after more than two decades of separation from the Hooker family.

"Because of the economic crisis, the then-current owner of the company was looking to sell and my brother managed to get an exclusive agreement."



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LJ Hooker's first office in Maroubra, established in 1928.