

## LONG ISLAND

# New Homeowner Finds Body of Pregnant Woman in a Barrel

By The New York Times

JERICHO, N.Y., Sept. 4 — When Hamid Tafaghodi and his family moved into their new \$455,000 split-level home here, they found a rusted 55-gallon drum. The drum was later discovered to contain the mummified remains of a pregnant woman.

Mr. Tafaghodi asked the seller of the house, at 67 Forest Drive, to remove the drum from a crawl space. The seller, Ronald Cohen, asked his movers to take the drum, which weighed 345 pounds, to the curb. But the garbage men would not touch it.

"The garbage men told the owners: 'We can't take it because it might be toxic or noxious. You are responsible for opening it,'" said Sgt. Robert Edwards, a detective in the Nassau County homicide squad. "If they had just taken it and put it in the truck, that would be it."

On Thursday, Mr. Cohen and his real estate agent pried the lid of the drum open with a screwdriver.

Inside they found another contain-

er with a rusted bottom. Then they saw a hand and a shoe and decided to call the police.

The police arrived at 1:35 P.M. Thursday and removed the body from the drum. The body was that of a woman who was nearly full-term pregnant. The body was 4 feet 9 inches tall and weighed 59 pounds, the police said. The body was in a skirt, button-down sweater, high socks and a shoe with a mid-high heel. Around the neck was a locket with the words "Patrice, Love Uncle Phil." On the left hand was a wedding band with the inscription "M.H.R. XII-59" and another ring with a green stone. An imitation leopardskin coat and a pocketbook filled mostly with makeup were also found in the drum.

The container was tightly sealed, largely preventing oxygen from entering and the body from decomposing.

The police used dogs in a search of the rest of the house and yard, but no other bodies were found.

Though the police estimated that the woman had been dead for nearly 25 years, they said they had leads.

"It's tough, but we do have some parameters," Sergeant Edwards said, adding that the barrel had been made in 1963 and originally contained pigments used to tint plastic and paints, which were no longer made after 1972 or 1973.

Real estate records show that the owners before the Cohens were Frank and Bernadette Salmaggi, who had bought the house from Arthur and Judith Ebbin. The Ebbins lived there from 1972 to 1984.

Howard B. Elkins sold the house to the Ebbins. Reached by phone in Boca Raton, Fla., Mr. Elkins said today that he knew nothing about a drum or a body.

Before moving out in 1972, Mr. Elkins said, he and his wife, Ruth, lived there for at least 15 years.

"We built a room off the kitchen to the back of the house," Mr. Elkins said. "A big den with a fireplace. It was built up to the level of the living

room and the kitchen, so there was a crawl space."

Asked if he had ever gone into the crawl space, Mr. Elkins replied, "What for?"

Mr. Elkins said he could not recall the name of the contractor who did the work on the house, but remembered that the job went smoothly. "It wasn't bad. It probably only took a few months."

"Outside of the gardeners and landscapers, and the contractor who built the addition, I can't think of anyone else who had access to the house," Mr. Elkins continued. "We did have maids on and off over the years" who often had keys to the house, he said.

One neighbor, who would not give her name, said: "I just can't understand how this can be undetected for so long. Wasn't someone declared missing? Wouldn't it smell?"

As the new owners carried out rusty wire hangers and old carpets today, cars and children on bicycles slowed to a crawl as they passed.