

THE LYONS SHARE:

PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE LYONS FAMILY FROM THE ROBINSON COLLECTION





Joe, Enid and children, Home Hill, (1932 or 1933), R 2841.2



Dame Enid Lyons attending Presentation event, 1951, R 9398.7



Joe and Enid Lyons casting their votes, 1936, R 1839.0

FAMILY, POLITICS AND THE PHOTOGRAPH

The images that feature in this exhibition, the *Lyons Share*, have been digitally printed from original negatives held in the Robinson Collection, which spans a period of almost fifty years from 1927 to 1975. Each year, the Devonport Regional Gallery curates an exhibition derived from this vast repository of black and white negatives. Bert Robinson, and later his son Albert, photographed a variety of subject matter ranging from family portraits to local activities and important events.

While highlighting certain aspects of the Lyons' political life, the *Lyons Share* also provides a charming glimpse into Joe and Enid's private life. Unlike press photographs made around the country while Joe and Enid were involved in politics, many of the photographs taken by Bert Robinson are more personal, representing a growing family and devoted parents. Joe, Enid and their eleven children were often photographed at their residence in Devonport - 'Home Hill' - providing a window into the busy lives the couple led domestically. At the same time these images offer a glimpse into the couple's hectic political lifestyle.

The history of the Lyons family, who made Devonport their home, is a fascinating political and family-focused narrative. Joe and Enid were well known both as a Tasmanian couple, and as politicians in their own right. Joe Lyons was a 35-year-old member of the state ALP branch when he married Enid Burnell, a 17-year-old trainee teacher, on 28 April 1915. The following year Joe became leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and was Premier of Tasmania for the next three years. After almost seven years as opposition leader, Lyons was again Premier of Tasmania from 1923, at which time he also took on the Treasury portfolio, which he retained for the five and a half years he led the party. After quitting state politics Lyons contested the Federal seat of Wilmot, which he won comfortably in 1929 and held through the next three general elections.

Lyons experienced many difficulties with the ALP caucus and after a series of disagreements he resigned in 1931. At the end of that same year he successfully led the newly formed UAP (United Australia Party) to victory at the general election and assumed the Prime Ministership on 6 January 1932. The Lyons family was the

first to use the Prime Minister's Lodge in Canberra as a family home. While in office, Lyons successfully made significant economic and social reforms and was a popular Prime Minister. However, the pressures of his role at a time when a second world war was imminent probably contributed to Lyons' ill health, which eventually caused a fatal heart attack in April 1939. Lyons was the first Prime Minister to die in office. An Australian Navy ship transported his coffin to Devonport, Tasmania, where a state funeral was held in his honour. Bert Robinson's photographs of the funeral procession in Rooke Street are displayed in this exhibition.

Enid Lyons was often by Joe's side, campaigning and speaking at public events. It was only three years after Joe's death and with eleven children to provide for, that Enid won the North-West Tasmanian seat of Darwin (since named Braddon) and was the first woman to be elected to the House of Representatives. She was also the first female member of federal Cabinet. Enid managed to provide for her children by bringing in two wages – one as a politician, the other as a newspaper and magazine columnist, which she continued to do throughout her life. At the same time, she continued to lobby for women's rights and equality. Enid Lyons died in 1981 and is buried beside her husband Joe in Devondale, Tasmania.

The photographs in this exhibition highlight domestic and political discourses underpinned by values of integrity, equality and fairness. *The Lyons Share* sensitively juxtaposes the extraordinary within the ordinary – a couple who achieved great things, yet remained united as a family weathering the undulating experiences of a combined public and private lifestyle. Yet it would be wrong to assume that these photographs reveal everything about this extraordinary family. While the history of the Lyons family is well documented, little written information accompanied the photographs taken by the Robinson family business. By its very nature, photography provides selective views of reality – we cannot assume that what we are looking at is always an accurate reflection of the 'reality'. The viewing of photographs combines recognition and knowledge with imagination and speculation. The photographs in *The Lyons Share* present the viewer with an opportunity to reflect on the links and differences in the past, and our present lives and a famous family who made Devonport their home.



Prime Minister Joe Lyons Funeral Procession, Devonport, 1939, R 1646.1

LIST OF WORKS

Photographs printed from scans made from original negatives produced by ROBINSON & SON STUDIO acquired by the Devonport City Council, 1993.
The Robinson Collection, Devonport City Council Permanent Collection.

Joe Lyons studio portrait, 1931, R 2841.0
Scanned from original nitrate negative

Joe Lyons beside car, 1931, R 2841.5
Scanned from original nitrate negative

Joe Lyons on the steps of Home Hill with five of his children, 1936, R 4924.0
Scanned from original ¼ plate glass negative

Joe, Enid and children, Home Hill, 1931, R 2841.2
Scanned from original ¼ plate glass negative

Prime Minister Joe Lyons, Dinner Lucas Hotel, 1932, R 0766
Scanned from original ¼ plate glass negative

Home Hill, 1936, R 4924.1
Scanned from original ¼ plate glass negative

Joe, Enid and children, Home Hill, 1933, R 4924.2
Scanned from original ¼ plate glass negative

Joe, Enid and child, Home Hill, 1936, R 4924.6
Scanned from original ¼ plate glass negative

Joe, Enid and children, Home Hill front steps, 1936, R 4924.8
Scanned from original nitrate negative

Sheila Lyons (Joe and Enid's eldest daughter) in car, 1936, R 4924.3
Scanned from original nitrate negative

Joe and Enid Lyons casting their votes, 1936, R 1839.0
Scanned from original ¼ plate glass negative

Joe Lyons, then Prime Minister presenting trophy to Jim Foster, Latrobe, 1937, 4578.1
Scanned from original ¼ plate glass negative

Prime Minister Joe Lyons Funeral Procession, Devonport, 1939, R 1646.1
Scanned from original nitrate negative

Prime Minister Joe Lyons Funeral Procession, Devonport, 1939, R 1646.2
Scanned from original nitrate negative

Dame Enid Lyons attending Presentation event, 1951, R 9398.3
Scanned from original ¼ plate safety film

Dame Enid Lyons attending Presentation event, 1951, R 9398.5
Scanned from original ¼ plate safety film

Dame Enid Lyons attending Presentation event, 1951, R 9398.6
Scanned from original ¼ plate safety film

Dame Enid Lyons attending Presentation event, 1951, R 9398.7
Scanned from original ¼ plate safety film

Dame Enid Lyons attending Evening event, 1951, R 9399.1
Scanned from original ¼ plate safety film

Dame Enid Lyons attending Evening event, 1951, R 9399.2
Scanned from original ¼ plate safety film

Dame Enid Lyons, skeining wool, 1953, R 10367.1
Scanned from original nitrate negative

Joe Lyons presenting cup, Ulverstone, date unknown, R 3664.2
Scanned from original nitrate negative

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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A special acknowledgment must be given to the staff and volunteers involved in the initial negotiations to purchase the Robinson negatives, remove, re-house and clean them. It is their hard work and dedication that has provided viewers with countless exhibitions of cultural and heritage significance and allowed curators to research myriad subject matter—not least, the significance of photography both then, and now.

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Cover image: *Joe, Enid and children, Home Hill front steps, 1936, R 4924.8*

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