Valiant woman who stands tall in our history

When Margaret Lyons died aged 92 in 1998, she failed to reach the new millenium, but she and the other members of her Morrison family were an integral part of the history of Canberra, whose centenary we are about to celebrate.

Margaret’s husband, Les Lyons, writing in the Canberra Historical Journal in September 1974 details the Morrison family’s place in Canberra’s history. Margaret’s parents, John and Elizabeth, built up the well-known station property of “Tralee”.

Margaret was the third of 10 children, the eldest of whom, Isabel, was to become Sr Mary Stanislaus in the Sisters of Mercy. The oldest and the youngest sons, John and Vivian, were to become notable priests in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

Three of Margaret’s brothers, Edmund, Francis and Patrick died in accidents on the land while twin brothers, Bernard and Leo, were prominent local identities. If Margaret’s younger sister Clare were still alive, her claim to fame would be in being the grandmother of Michael Maguire, the successful coach of Canberra and Goulburn. Michael’s forebears, his parents, John and Elizabeth, built up the family’s place in Canberra’s history. Margaret’s eldest of whom, Isabel, was to become Sr Mary Stanislaus in the Sisters of Mercy, later to be in the Catholic Women’s League, serving as president of the Catholic Women’s League. She was also the first president of the Catholic Women’s League.

Both Frank Boyle and Mgr Alexander Mcgilvray (writing in “The Hallowed High Adventure”) recount the active part which Les and Margaret Lyons played under the leadership of Mgr Patrick Hayden, in the burgeoning St Christopher’s Parish. Frank writes of Margaret riding her horse to the building site of the Prime Minister’s Lodge, selling raffle tickets to the workmen to raise funds to build St Christopher’s Church, which was opened in 1939 and would be extended to become St Christopher’s Cathedral in 1973.

In the eulogy at Margaret’s funeral Mass in 1998, Frank Boyle noted that Les had died in 1979 after 50 years of marriage to Margaret. He pointed out how the Morrison-Lyons story was very important to share that knowledge and her memorabilia with one and all. Recent historians were constantly on her doorstep to ask questions and Margaret Lyons was always always always open to sharing her knowledge of early Canberra and a willingness to share that knowledge and her memorabilia with one and all. Recent historians were constantly on her doorstep to ask questions.

Margaret Lyons, is surely now standing tall among the valiant women described in the scriptures. Canberra’s history is the richer for her being a significant part of it.

In the 20th in a series of portraits of significant Catholics of the national capital, Bishop Pat Power pays tribute to Margaret Elizabeth Lyons and other members of the Morrison family.

ABOVE: Margaret (far right) with her sisters Isabel and Clare at the Cotter in 1920s. BELOW: Family group on Tralee verandah. Margaret with her husband Les holding first born baby John.

In 1902 to 1927 was Frank McGee whose daughter and brother at Tuggeranong were the late Michael Maguire, the successful coach of Canberra and Goulburn. Michael’s forebears, his parents, John and Elizabeth, built up the family’s place in Canberra’s history. Margaret’s eldest of whom, Isabel, was to become Sr Mary Stanislaus in the Sisters of Mercy. Later to be in the Catholic Women’s League, serving as president of the Catholic Women’s League. She was also the first president of the Catholic Women’s League.

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