

JAMES EDDIE: GRAZIER, KEILOR COUNCILOR, SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCILOR, 1957-1967

Background



James Eddie was born in Bullingarook, Gisborne, in 1904 and his future wife Marjorie Robinson was born in Melton in 1910, so they both were, relatively speaking, almost near neighbours of the Keilor Plains. They married in 1931 and came to St Albans in 1941 via a circuitous route and that was from the broader Shepparton Irrigation District. James's parents were horticulturalists Robert and Margaret Eddie who were in Mildura during the twenties and thirties. Robert Eddie was born in Lanarkshie, Scotland, in 1862, so he was an immigrant. Margaret Eddie nee Keam was born in Elmhurst, Victoria, in 1875, so she was a home-grown Australian.

James Eddie started his farming life was working on his parents' property in Mildura. He was actively associated with the Mildura District Development League, a body which represented city and shire councils, progress associations, school committees, etc. This committee was responsible for considerable development in the Mildura area, so the family's community and business connections must have been strong. Eddie would later refer to his considerable experience of irrigation farming as originating from his time in this district. He said he had 18 years' irrigation experience on the Murray River operating a private water pump, having practical engineering experience, plus laying of miles of underground drainage and irrigation channeling.

James's father, Robert Eddie, died in 1939 and it seems likely that the family horticultural property was broken up. James had had an older sister, Elsie, but she is said to have died in 1921 so may not have had any involvement in the Mildura farm.

James Eddie married Marjorie Robinson in 1932 and their first child, a son, died at birth that year. They presumably did not take over the running of the family's Mildura property after the father's death in 1939 as they relocated not long afterwards to St Albans. They arrived in 1941 and settled on land along Taylors Road opposite the Coleman farm further west of Kings Road; they named their farm "Alban Park". Eventually they had three properties in that area: two to the north of Taylors Road stretching towards Sydenham and another one to the south of these. By the mid forties they were already making their mark on the land through planting lots of trees. The home paddock was on the Sydenham side of Taylors Road and the Eddies built their home a fair distance back from the road and planted an avenue of trees along the long driveway from the road to the house. So they really did try to establish their own park amongst the landscape of empty paddocks. They were keen horticulturalists, promoted Arbor Day events, and even won some awards for their tree planting. In the early fifties the Natural Resources Conservation League was holding a statewide "Save the Forests" campaign and the Eddies won a couple of awards for their conservation and wise use of trees on Alban Park, coming runners-up in the "Best Use of Trees in Farm Improvement" and "Best New Plantation under Five Years."

The family became long-term settlers and farmers specialising in sheep grazing. They also raised a family of daughters. Anne was born in 1935 and after attending St Albans Primary she attended Williamstown High School. Helen Margaret was born in 1938, attended the primary school and then the Sunshine Junior Tech. She became a nurse, married Douglas Twaits and had two sons and two daughters. Robyn Fay was born in 1943, went to the St Albans Primary and then the Sunshine Tech. She married Alan Collins and had a son and a daughter. Janice was born in 1947 and also attended St Albans Primary before transferring to the Presbyterian Girls School. She married Daryl Finger and had a daughter. The girls' histories have not been recorded locally although it's known that Anne was working at Kerr the Chemist in Main Road West.

Eddie became very well known in his new district. He combined his farming interests and improving property with an interest in community groups including churches, schools, progress associations and political involvement. He became a member of the Sydenham Fire Brigade, the Sydenham Progress Association, was a member of the committee of management

of the St. Albans Presbyterian Church, and had connections with the St Albans Progress Association.



Cr. James Eddie (front row, right) with Keilor councillors and senior officers, 1963.

Eddie was encouraged to stand for Keilor Council in 1946 in opposition to Cr Jolly who was the retiring Shire President with already eight years' experience as a local councillor. An election campaign committee was formed with Mr. John Stevens as secretary, and the backing of local notables such as Claude Cox and Norm Self. The contest was expected to be fairly even as neither candidate officially represented any political party, but ultimately Francis Edgar Jolly defeated the newcomer by 269 votes to 224.

Another opportunity came up within the year. Cr. Frederick Stenson had represented the St. Albans riding of Keilor Council for 40 years and decided to retire from the council so would not be seeking re-election in 1947. James Eddie nominated for the vacant position against well-known locals Dan Gavaghan and Harold Easton. Agnes Stevens had been promised a lot of backing if she stood for Keilor Council, but she declined the offer and spoke in favour of James Eddie as a progressive civic representative. This time round Eddie was elected with a majority of 95 votes. He could have become the Shire President in 1948 but declined nomination due to ill health. He took on the role of Keilor Shire President in 1954/55.

In September 1949 Eddie helped form the St. Albans-Sydenham Branch of the Liberal-Country Party when the inaugural meeting was held in the Mechanic's Hall St. Albans. Eddie was elected as President and he was well supported with John Snaith and Agnes Stevens as Vice Presidents, John Stevens as Secretary, and William Morton as Treasurer. Perhaps such show of force scared away prospective challengers for council because when he stood for re-election in the following year Eddie was returned unopposed in the Maribyrnong Riding.

It was the fifties and as a district representative Cr Eddie was well aware of changing population trends and was soon telling his Keilor council compatriots that by the mid fifties Maribyrnong Riding would be represented predominantly by New Australians. They were arriving almost daily and showing keen interest in district affairs and were anxious to join school committees. One night at Council he was explaining a spot of trouble the removal of a tree at St Albans was giving a new resident. "What's his name?" asked Shire Secretary. "Can't pronounce it," said Cr. Eddie. "I call him George. He calls me Uncle."

In 1953 a deputation of Keilor councillors including Milburn, Eddie, Moffatt and Easton met with the Chief Commissioner of Police to argue for better police facilities for St. Albans. They were promised that a pre-fab office would be erected in East Esplanade near the St. Albans fire station and a policeman from Sunshine will be in attendance at regular hours. The office would be in direct communication with Sunshine Police Station and at times when the constable was not in attendance anyone desiring the police would be able to make a call from the office. Thus started a more permanent police presence in St Albans. The police station was later located on the corner of Mitchell Street and Main Road West.

Cr. Eddie was also one of local men who helped re-establish the St. Albans Boys' Club. This happened in May 1954 when a meeting was held in Errington Reserve pavilion supported in particular by the police in Constable Shaw, who had been involved earlier with the boy's club, and he was assisted by Sergeant McLeod and Constables Miller and McRae. James Eddie was one of the councillors in attendance, the others being Harold Easton and Bert Moffatt. Easton

and Moffatt were elected Vice Presidents and Eddie was also a Committee member. Doing the extra good deed for the cause was Cr. Moffatt, who not only was one of the conveners of the meeting but he also offered to foot the bill for the use of the pavilion for the ensuing year.

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James Eddie (second from left) at St Albans High School Speech Day, 1963.

Cr. Eddie was a supporter of education and became involved with the St Albans Primary School, the Sunshine Technical School, and the St Albans High School. He was appointed to the Advisory Council at Sunshine Tech in 1951 and became the first President of the St Albans High School Advisory Council when it was formed in 1956 and continued in this role until May 1965, when his service with the school was interrupted by holidays, when he and Mrs Eddie sailed on the "Canberra" for their overseas sojourn. Cr Eddie continued his representation in the Advisory Council until at least 1967, but his name is not listed in the 1969 Council membership so he must have retired. The family were still living in Taylors Road in the late sixties but had relocated to the Frankston area in the early seventies. At this stage James would have reached seventy years and Marjorie was in her sixties. So, after thirty years of life and work on the windy Keilor Plains the Eddies retired to the other side of the bay.

James Eddie died at Frankston on 26 October 1978 and his remains were interred at Melton cemetery. Marjorie Eddie nee Robinson died at Dandenong on 7 July 1985 and her remains were interred at the Melton cemetery.



James and Marjorie Eddie (right) with daughter Janice at dinner function, 1960s.

Family images courtesy of Karen Bugeja.
 High school photograph courtesy of Nick Szwed.