

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person

**Entry ID:** AWE0622

## Clarke, Patricia

(1926 - 2026)

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**Born** 19260730, Alphington Victoria Australia

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**Died** 20260309, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia

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**Occupation** Editor, Historian, Journalist, Writer

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### Summary

Writer, historian, editor and former journalist, Dr Patricia Clarke has written extensively on women in Australian history and media history. Several of her publications are biographies of women writers and others explore the role of letters and diaries in the lives of women. Since the 1980s she played an active part in national cultural institutions and community organisations in Canberra and her work has been recognised by a number of awards and grants.

## Details

Patricia Clarke was born in Melbourne in 1926, the daughter of John Laurence Ryan, teacher, and Annie Teresa neé McSweeney, bookbinder. Educated at St Anthony's School, Alphington, and Notre Dame de Sion, Sale, Victoria, she matriculated with honours in 1942. Her studies at the University of Melbourne included economics, pure maths, English and political science but were interrupted by tuberculosis, which led to a reappraisal of her goals. In 1951 she joined the Commonwealth News and Information Bureau and became the only woman journalist in its Melbourne office, transferring to its Canberra branch in 1957. In 1961 she married Hugh Vincent Clarke (1919-1996), writer, public servant and former prisoner of war in Thailand and Japan. While raising five children, Patricia worked as a casual but full-time journalist with the Australian Broadcasting Commission in the Parliamentary Press Gallery (1963-68); as the editor of Maxwell Newton's weekly business newsletters (1968-74); Canberra representative for Daily Commercial News (1968-74) and publications editor with the National Capital Development Commission (1974-79).

Since the 1980s, Patricia has written and edited 15 books, innumerable articles and at least 15 book chapters on women in Australian history and media history. Several of her publications are biographies of women writers and others explore the role of letters and diaries in the lives of women. In 2004 she was awarded a PhD by Griffith University for her thesis, based on six of her books, entitled 'Life Lines to Life Stories. Some Publications about Women in Nineteenth Century Australia'. Her most recent book is 'Bold types : how Australia's first women journalists blazed a trail', published in 2022.

She has also played an active part in Australian cultural institutions and community organisations in Canberra. She has written articles for the Australian Dictionary of Biography and been a member of its Commonwealth Working Party since 1987. At various times she served as President, Vice President, and Councillor of the Canberra & District Historical Society (1987-2004 and 2013-2024) and edited the Canberra Historical Journal from 1987-2000. She was a Committee member of the Centre for Australian Cultural Studies from 1993-2003; was on the Manning Clark House committee in its early years and from 1995-2001 was founding Honorary Secretary of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia (ISAA). Elected an Honorary Member in 2001, she was a member of ISAA's ACT Council until 2018. A Committee Member of the Friends of the National Library of Australia from 1997-99 and its Deputy Chair in 1998, she represented the Australian Society of Authors as a member of the Library's Fellowship Advisory Committee from 1997-2017 and chaired its National Folk Fellowship selection Committee 2003-17. She has been an active member of the Canberra committee of the Australian Women's Archives Program and wrote many entries for the Australian Women's Register, the most recent in 2024. She served on the ACT Historic Houses Advisory Committee between 2010-16 and was a Consultant to the Media Hall of Fame from 2011.

Her work has been recognised by many awards and grants. She was awarded a NSW Premier's Department Cultural Grant in 1983; Literature Board grants in 1986 and 1988; a Harold White Fellowship from the National Library in 1993 and Fellowships from the Australia Council in 1995 and 2000. In 1995 she was joint winner of the Society of Women Writers non-fiction award. She was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in June 2001 'for services to the promotion of Australian history through research and writing, to the study of Australian writers of the nineteenth century and to the Canberra and District Historical Society'. She was made a Fellow of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies in 2002 and an Honorary Fellow, Australian Academy of Humanities in 2005. In 2016 she received the Friends Medal of the National Library of Australia for her significant contribution over many years. In June 2025 she was awarded the Australian Dictionary of Biography Medal in recognition of her many and varied contributions to the ADB since the 1980s.

## Events

### 1987 - 1987

Australia Council, Literature Board Project Grant

### 1989 - 1989

Australia Council, Literature Broad Project Grant

### 2002 - 2002

Awarded a Fellow from the Federation of Australian Historical Societies

### 2001 - 2001

Awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) For service to the promotion of Australian history through research and writing, to the study of Australian women writers of the 19th Century, and to the Canberra and District Historical Society

### 1963 - 1968

Casual Journalist Grade B with ABC in Canberra

### 2000 - 2002

Committee Member at Manning Clark House

### 1993 -

Committee Member of the Centre for Australian Cultural Studies (ACT)

### 1987 -

Councillor with the Canberra & District Historical Society



**1974 - 1979**

Editor of publications (Journalist Grade A1) with the National Capital Development Commission

**1995 - 2001**

Founding Honorary Secretary of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia (ISAA)

**1993 - 1993**

Harold White Fellow at the National Library of Australia

**1995 - 1995**

Joint winner of the Society of Women Writers non-fiction award (for *Tasma*)

**1968 - 1974**

Journalist (Grade A) /Editor of weekly business newsletters with M Newton publications

**1989 -**

Member of the Commonwealth Working Party for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*

**1997 - 1999**

Member of the National Library of Australia's Friends Committee

**1998 - 1998**

Member of the National Scholarly Communications Forum (representing Australian Society of Authors)

**1985 - 1985**

New South Wales Premier's Department Social History grant

**1995 - 1995**

One-year Fellowship from the Literature Board at the Australia Council

**1997 - 1999**

President of the Canberra & District Historical Society

**2001 - 2002**

Two-year Fellowship from the Literature Board at the Australia Council

**1995 - 1997**

Vice-president of the Canberra & District Historical Society

**1999 - 1999**

Vice-president of the National Library of Australia's Friends Committee

**1951 - 1961**

With the News and Information Bureau, Melbourne, Journalist Grade D, Canberra, Journalist Grade C

## Published resources

### Edited Book

The Equal Heart and Mind: Letters between Judith Wright and Jack McKinney, Clarke, Patricia and McKinney, Meredith, 2004

With Love & Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright, Clarke, Patricia and McKinney, Meredith, 2007

### Newspaper Article

Rich addition to area history, Clarke, Patricia, 2002

The Federation decade, Bryant, John, 2001

Those perfect English ladies, Clarke, Patricia, 2001

Women who shaped an era, Clarke, Patricia, 2001

"Comfort women" of the colonies, Clarke, Patricia, 2001

Fascinating letters inspire novel, Clarke, Patricia, 2001

Fighter for women's rights, Clarke, Patricia, 2001

### Journal Article

Rosa! Rosa! : a life of Rosa Praed, novelist and spiritualist, Kingston, Beverly, 2000

Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist, Evans, Julie, 2001

Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist, Ferres, Kay, 2002

Nettie Palmer : search for an aesthetic, Clarke, Patricia, 2000

### Book

The governesses: letters from the colonies 1862-1882, Clarke, Patricia, 1985

### Site Exhibition

The Women's Pages: Australian Women and Journalism since 1850, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cal/cal-home.html>

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

### Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

### Press release

ADB Medal awarded to Dr Patricia Clarke, 26 July 2025,  
<https://history.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/ncb/news/adb-medal-awarded-dr-patricia-clarke>

## Archival resources

### National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Patricia Clarke, 1887-2010 \[manuscript\]](#)

### National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Patricia Clarke interviewed by Ann Moyal \[sound recording\]](#)

[Patricia Clarke interviewed by David Walker in the Australia-Asia studies oral history project \[sound recording\]](#)

### Author Details

Mary Sexton & Ann-Mari Jordens

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