The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE1187

Baylor, Hilda Gracia

(1929 - 2025)

Born	19291008, Brisbane Queensland Australia
Died	20250523, Wantirna Victoria Australia
Occupation	Feminist, Parliamentarian, Teacher, Women's rights activist, Women's rights organiser

Summary

In 1979, Gracia Baylor became the first woman member of the Liberal Party to be elected to the Victorian Legislative Council when she was elected as the member for Boronia. That year she was one of the first two women to be elected to the Upper House, the other being Joan Coxsedge of the Australian Labor Party. Baylor held her seat until 1985 when she resigned to contest (unsucessfully) the Legislative Assembly seat of Warrandyte.

Details

Gracia Baylor, daughter of Herbert David Parry-Okeden, a grazier and businessman and Hilary May Webster, was born in Brisbane, and educated in Victoria and Tasmania as well as Brisbane as a result of her father serving in the Royal Australian Air Force during World War Two.

At the National Gallery Art School in Melbourne she completed a Diploma of Fine Arts and subsequently trained as a secondary school teacher. In 1950 she married John du Frocq Freeman. She worked at Mercer House, a training college for teachers in independent schools, from 1951-57 and at Hamilton College from 1957-59. She married again in 1959, to Richard Patrick Baylor, a solicitor, with whom she had four children, three boys and a girl. She became a law clerk in her husband’s firm in Healesville

Her interest in politics was sparked when she recognised the need for a kindergarten in the town of Healesville. She served as a Healesville Shire Councillor from 1966-78 and ultimately became the first woman president of the Shire of Healesville from 1977-78. This also made her the first female Shire president in the state of Victoria. During her time in parliament she assisted in the establishment of the Queen Victoria Women’s Centre.

Over the course of her career, Gracia Baylor initiated the council-approved baby capsule program which all new parents use to safely carry their infants in cars for the first few months. ‘Before this program, babies were just placed in the back of the car in a bassinet and if there was an accident, they didn’t have a hope,’ she said. Baylor was also instrumental in getting mammograms approved for the Medicare register and she saved the only remaining tower of the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital for Women which is now a centre for women’s health.

Baylor was an active member of the National Council of Women at the national and state level, serving as president of the National Council of Women of Victoria from 1990-93 and of the National Council of Women Australia from 1997-2000.

Events

2000 - 2001
'Women Shaping the Nation' Centenary of Federation Committee

1999 - 2002
Commnwealth Advisory Board for Equal Employment Opportunity for Women

1990 - 2008
Dr Vera Scantlebury Brown Memorial trust

1999 - 1999
In recognition for her work in Parliament and women's affairs.

2003 - 2003
Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

1999 - 2002
Ministerial Advisory Committee to Minister for Women's Affairs (Victoria)

1991 - 1999
Victoria Women's Council

Published resources

Book
Biographical register of the Victorian Parliament, Browne, Geoff, 1985

Resource Section
Gracia Baylor, AM, 2003,
http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/Graphic+Files/2003_Honour_Roll/$file/2003_Honour_Roll.pdf

The Liberal Party of Australia Federal Women's Committee: History and Achievements 1945-2003, 2003,
http://www.liberal.org.au/documents/fwc_history.pdf

Site Exhibition
Carrying on the Fight: Women Candidates in Victorian Parliamentary Elections, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cws/home.html

Stirrers with Style! Presidents of the National Council of Women of Australia and its predecessors, National Council of Women of Australia, 2013,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ncwa

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

A young mother from Healesville breaks political barriers,
https://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Explore-Yarra-Ranges/Arts-and-our-creative-community/Cultural-venues/Yarra-Ranges-Reg

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Records of the National Council of Women of Australia, 1924-1990 [manuscript]

NCWA Papers 1984 - 2006

Private hands (These records may not be readily available)
Interview with Gracia Baylor AM

State Library of Victoria
National Council of Women of Victoria

Yarra Ranges Regional Museum
A young mother from Healesville breaks political barriers

Author Details
Rosemary Francis

Created 20 May 2005
Last modified 28 July 2025

Digital resources



Title: Gracia Baylor
Type: Image
Date: 3 May, 2023