Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00188

Hutchison, Ruby Florence

(1892 - 1974)

Born	18920215, Footscray Victoria Australia
Died	19741217, Shenton Park (Perth) Western Australia Australia
Occupation	Parliamentarian

Summary

Ruby Hutchison was the first woman elected to the Legislative Council in Western Australia, and the first to take her place in any Australian Council. She was the only female member of the Chamber during this period. Her work enabled the introduction of the first law to enable women to serve on juries, and she founded the West Australian Epilepsy Association to fight discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities.

Details

Ruby Florence Herbert was born in Melbourne in February 1892, and came to the Murchison goldfields in Western Australia with her parents in 1896. While still in her teens she married Daniel Buckley, a miner. When the marriage later broke up, she was left to rear seven children alone, and supported her family by taking in boarders and dressmaking. She married Alex Hutchison in 1941, and attended business college and summer schools at the University of Western Australia.

She contested her first election in 1950 at the age of 58, having joined the Australian Labor Party (ALP) decades earlier. In 1954 Hutchison became the first female member of Western Australia’s Legislative Council, and throughout her seventeen-year parliamentary career campaigned tirelessly for the Council to be substantially reformed, or abolished. She successfully fought for the right of women to sit on juries, and consistently attempted to secure compulsory voting and adult suffrage for Legislative Council elections. Hutchison received international recognition for her work on behalf of epilepsy sufferers, and was a founder of the West Australian Epilepsy Association. She also fought to ensure that those afflicted with intellectual disabilities did not suffer discrimination. Hutchison retired from politics in 1971 at the age of 79. She died at the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital in 1974, and is buried in the Karrakatta Cemetery.

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Edited Book
Biographical Register of Members of the Parliament of Western Australia, Vol. 2, 1930-1990, Black, David and Bolton, Geoffrey, 1990

Book
We Hold Up Half the Sky: The Voices of Western Australian ALP Women in Parliament, Watson, Judyth [ed.], 1994

Book Section
Making a Difference: Women in the West Australian Parliament 1921-1999, Black, David and Phillips, Harry, 2000

Resource Section
Hutchison, Ruby Florence (1892-1974), Black, David, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140600b.htm

Site Exhibition
The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

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