

## Helen Delich Bentley

### At A Glance:

**Born:** November 28, 1923, Ruth, White Pine County, Nevada

**Died:** August 6, 2016, Timonium, Baltimore County, Maryland

**Maiden Name:** Helen Delich

**Race/Nationality/Ethnic Background:** Serbian

**Married:** William Roy Bentley, 1959

**Children:** None

**Primary City and County of Residence and Work:** Tonopah Canyon, Nevada; Baltimore, Maryland; and Washington, D.C.

**Major Fields of Work:** Journalist, U.S. Congresswoman, chair of the Federal Maritime Commission

**Other Role Identities:** Radio and TV personality, international consultant, president/CEO for HDB International



**Helen Delich Bentley**  
Photo from  
Maryland Women's  
Hall of Fame

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### Nationally renowned journalist, politician rose from Nevada mining origins

Helen Delich Bentley could be considered the most nationally recognized and most powerful Nevada woman the state produced during the Twentieth Century. As a young woman from a town with a 1950 population of just over 3,500, she left Ely, Nevada, after high school, worked in politics and in the newspaper business while going to college in Nevada and Missouri. She became staff advisor to Richard Nixon in his 1968 presidential campaign. When president, he appointed her chairman of the National Maritime Commission in 1969. She was elected to Congress from Maryland in 1984 -1994. The Baltimore, Maryland port was renamed the Helen Delich Bentley Port in 2006.

Helen Delich was born on November 28, 1923, in the small Serbian mining community of Tonopah Canyon just outside the town of Ruth located near Ely, White Pine County, Nevada. According to Wikipedia, Ruth had a population of almost 2,300 inhabitants in 1923. Her parents, Michael Ivanesevich Delich and Mary Kovich Delich, both immigrated to the United States in 1906. From Ellis Island, N.Y. the Delichs made their way west, ending up in Ruth, Nev. The family had six children, Malie, George, Mary, Sam and Helen. A sixth child died in infancy.

Life in a Nevada mining town was rough. Helen later wrote of her family's experiences which were printed in the "American Serb Life." She wrote,

"Miners worked 12-hour shifts, 7 days a week. Women often took in boarders as her mother did, all the while raising small children of their own. There was no running water in the miners' homes during the early years. The women carried their buckets a good half mile uphill several times a day to get enough water for all the family needs plus those of the boarders who changed work clothes in the house. The boarders slept in shifts, like they worked. When one group left for work, Mom would quickly straighten out the beds and another group would tumble right back in. Maids were unheard of. These hardy women also reared big families and usually were attended only by a neighbor at childbirth. In two days, the mother was up and slaving away again."

As the Great Depression wore on, the population of Ruth diminished. Helen's father had been stricken with miner's consumption. In March 1932, he died at his home. He was 48 years old and left a widow with three young children to raise. Helen, the youngest, was 8 years old. The family struggled, but as in many immigrant families, education was seen as the key to obtaining a better life. Helen attended schools in White Pine County. She wrote in her "American Serb Life" article,

"In those days the Serbs kept pretty much to themselves. They talked the company into building the Serbian Hall and there they'd gather for their drustva meetings and socials. Their kids also isolated themselves, as much in defense of barbs, as in the preference of their own company. But when they began walking with school honors, the jeers and taunts turned to covetous respect. Bit by bit they began taking a more active part in the general life of the community."

Helen was active in school activities and took her education seriously. In 1940 she placed second and won \$2.50 in the White Pine County, Nevada Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary, White Pine County, Nevada essay contest. In 2024, that would be \$56.00. In 1940 she received the Rotary Club citizenship scholarship award. As a White Pine senior, she was named a four-year honor student and designated valedictorian of her class of

1941. She was also the recipient of the National Elks Foundation scholarship for girls and made a trip to Philadelphia sponsored by the Elks. While in high school, she did part-time writing for the *Ely Record* and continued writing for the newspaper after she enrolled in the University of Nevada in fall 1941.

She was interested in politics and in 1942 she managed former Governor James G. Scrugham's successful Senate campaign in two of Nevada's counties. He was elected to the U.S. Senate, and Helen went to Washington D.C. with him to work as his secretary. She was never to return to Nevada to live. However, this young woman went on to achieve national recognition in United States politics.



Helen Delich, 1941  
*Reno Evening Gazette*

Helen worked as a stringer for United Press International, then as a reporter and bureau manager in Fort Wayne, Indiana, during 1944-1945. She graduated from the University of Missouri School of Journalism in 1944, "graduating the same day as her mother became a citizen of the United States almost 1,000 miles away in Ely, Nevada." During 1945 she also worked as a telegraph editor for the Lewiston, Idaho, *Tribune*. In 1945 she was hired as a reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* where she primarily covered labor issues. In 1947, at age 24, Helen became the first female newspaper reporter to cover an American Federation of Labor Convention. That same year she was assigned to cover the shipping and waterfront activities at the Baltimore Maryland Port and by 1952, she had been promoted to maritime editor of the *Baltimore Sun*.



Helen and William Bentley

Photo at the  
Marjorie Russell Clothing and  
Textile Research Center

Her future began to skyrocket. She was writing and producing her own television show, "The Port that Built a City and a State" which ran on Baltimore WMAR-TV from 1950 to 1965 and on Washington D.C. WTTG-TV from 1955 to 1959. She served as staff advisor on shipping matters for Richard Nixon during his 1968 Presidential campaign and in 1969 he appointed her chairman of the Federal Maritime Commission where she served until 1975. In 1969, Helen was the only woman aboard the S.S. *Manhattan* when the tanker made its historic voyage through the Arctic waters of the Northwest Passage.

During all this upward mobility she married a local school teacher, William Roy Bentley, and together they opened an antique shop in Maryland. As one can surmise, Helen Delich Bentley was a self-described workaholic.

Helen served as Republican Congresswoman from Maryland from 1984 to 1994 when she resigned her position to run for Governor of Maryland. She ran as a moderate but was defeated in the primary by a long-time friend and a conservative. During her first term as congresswoman, she helped pass a bill allowing a channel to be dredged into the Baltimore port, making it the only East Coast port with that distinction.

After Helen left Congress, she started Helen Bentley & Associates and began working as a lobbyist for maritime and defense industries. In 2004 she was inducted into the International Maritime Hall of Fame in New York. In 2006 former Governor and current Congressman Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. announced during the 300th anniversary celebration of the Baltimore Port that it had been renamed and was now designated as the "Helen Delich Bentley Port of Baltimore." She was described by Michael Dresser in the *Baltimore Sun* as "the colorful and cantankerous former Maryland Congresswoman, whose fierce advocacy for the port of Baltimore led to its being named in her honor..."

During her lifetime Helen Bentley received numerous awards.

- 1941 National Outstanding high school graduate by the National Elks Club Foundation
  - 1944 B.A. in Journalism from the University of Missouri
  - 1956 Baltimore Women's Advertising Club "Woman of the Year"
  - 1958 Meritorious Service Awards from the Baltimore Traffic Club
  - 1965 North Atlantic Ports Association
  - 1965 AFL-CIO Maritime Port Council of the Maritime Trades Department of the Port of Greater New York
  - 1969 San Francisco Port Commission Order of Maritime Merit
  - 1969 University of Missouri outstanding female graduate
  - 1969 Baltimore Women's Advertising Club "Woman of the Year"
  - 1970 Honorary Membership (only woman member) in the Maritime Law Association of the United States
  - 1971 Valley Forge Freedoms Foundation George Washington Honor medal
  - 1971 University of Missouri Faculty Alumni Gold Medal
  - 1972 New York Foreign Freight Forwards and Brokers Association "Man of the Year"
  - 1972 Women's National Republican Club Distinguished Service Medal
  - 1973 Robert L. Hague Marchant Marine Industries Post No. 1242 American Legion Distinguished Service Medal
  - 1973 Navy League of the United States Robert M.J. Thompson Award for Outstanding Civilian Leadership
  - 1973 Nevada State Society Distinguished Woman of the Century award
  - 1974 Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers 22nd Annual Jerry Land Medal for outstanding accomplishments in the Maritime field
  - 1976 Valley Forge Freedoms Foundation George Washington Honor medal
- Who's Who in America and many more.

Mrs. Bentley also received several honorary degrees:

Doctor of Laws from the  
University of Michigan  
University of Maryland  
University of Alaska  
Long Island University  
Boucher College

Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from the  
University of Portland, Oregon  
Bryant College of Business Administration

Halls of Fame

2004 International Maritime Hall of Fame

2013 Maryland Women's Hall of Fame

Helen Delich Bentley passed away in Timonium, Baltimore County, Maryland on August 6, 2016. She was 93 years of age. Obituaries appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Pennsylvania Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Palm Springs Desert Sun*. This author was unable to locate an obituary in a Nevada newspaper. Helen had outlived her husband, William Bentley, by thirteen years. They are interred together in a columbarium at the Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens in Timonium, Maryland.



Image added to Find-A-Grave  
by James Austin Callahan.

**Researched and written by Marcia Cuccaro. Posted to website April 2017. Updated 2025**

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