



George Robinson

April 26, 2016

George L. Robinson, who played in the top division of national checkers tournaments for decades - often as the oldest player in the contest - with a resolve that included riding a Greyhound bus to a competition in Georgia when he was 98 or 99, died April 23 in Lutheran Village at Wolf Creek.

He was about 100. He was born in Arkansas on Feb. 2 in 1916, according to some records, or 1917 according to others, his daughter Carolyn Robinson Garrett said. He had suffered a fall at his longtime home in the Old West End area of Toledo in November, and his health declined from then on, although he had been driving up until that point.

He and his mother moved to Toledo in 1928 in search of a better life than their area of the South allowed blacks at that time, his son, Stephen, said.

Mr. Robinson graduated from Libbey High School in 1934 and worked at the former Martin Box plant in Toledo. He later was simultaneously employed full-time at the Toledo Steel Tube Co. and part-time at Sears, first in inventory and later as a salesman in the plumbing department. He often held two or even three jobs at once to support his family. He had been married three times and had two children.

But throughout his life he found time for games.

"I played chess and checkers and I found out that checkers is just as great a game as chess," he told The Blade in 2009. "It's more of a thinking game."

He won dozens of trophies and thousands of dollars over the years in tournaments organized by the American Pool Checkers Association.

Some 30 or 40 years ago, the association had a Toledo club of about 20 members who played in a barbershop, said Wayne Lockheart, the association's national tournament director. But many of the players were Mr. Robinson's age and the club never drew in younger members to replace them, to his great disappointment.

"Young kids, they're not interested in developing their minds in that area," Mr. Robinson said in the 2009 Blade interview. "I worry. I'm concerned that it's going to die out unless some young people get interested in it."

The national organization still has hundreds of members and often draws 80 to 100 to the week-long tournaments where Mr. Robinson enjoyed beating competitors a third his age.

"Any day of the week when I went to George's house, he was sitting in a La-Z-Boy chair with a TV tray with a checkers board at his side," Mr. Lockheart said.

Move by move, Mr. Robinson would go over well-known games, playing against himself.

"He was a strategist," his son said. "He liked the challenge and the competition."

In July, at a tournament in Albany, Ga., he told a reporter - after his 14-hour bus ride to get there - that his favorite of the many tournaments that he had attended was one held in the Bahamas.

Late in the 2015 tournament he became so ill that he spent one night in a hospital, but he had finished the competition in the money and he went from the hospital to the association's closing banquet to collect his prizes amid much applause, Mr. Lockheart said. A fellow club member even reimbursed his bus fare.

After a big win, he sometimes took his trophy to church the next Sunday. He had been a member of Warren AME Church since 1947, serving for years as a steward and usher.

"He was always by the door," Sheryl Riggs, managing director of Dale-Riggs Funeral Home, said of services her mortuary held at the church. "And I remember his quiet dignity."

As a younger man, he played and coached softball. As a retiree, he played bridge at the J. Frank Troy Senior Center.

His last wife, Carrie, a housekeeper in Old West End homes, died in 2006.

Surviving are his son, Stephen; daughter, Carolyn Robinson Garrett; two grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Visitation is 4 to 7 p.m. Tuesday in Dale-Riggs Funeral Home Chapel. The funeral is at 11 a.m. Wednesday in Warren AME Church.

Tribute Wall



“ *Dear Robinson Families,*

I knew your love one for many years as a member of Warren AMEC and mostly remembered him for ushering and being a gentle spirit. I see that you had many years with him being at the good age of 100, what a milestone to you all. But I know no matter what the age is, you will be missing him very much but remember that God will help each of you to remember him in your hearts always. Be of good courage and let others help you celebrate your dear love one.



Linda Reese - May 01, 2016 at 07:39 PM

DS

“ *Deepest Sympathy is extended to Carolyn, Steve and all the Robinson Family in the loss of their father, Mr. George Robinson. We are grateful to God for the long and blessed life George lived among us. He was always the consummate family man, devoted Christian, great checker player, great supporter of the Checker Association, the perfect gentleman, and a great asset to his church and community. We are all better for George having lived among us. He was duly rewarded for his faithfulness. He now rests with God.*

*Dr. Ervin Smith, Columbus, Ohio
President Emeritus of The American Pool Checker Association*

Dr. Ervin Smith - April 30, 2016 at 06:30 PM

EL

“ *My Deepest Condolences to Steve and the Entire Robinson Family. May you find Peace in God's Healing Love. Steve, you will remain in my Prayers. Love, Evette*



Evette Adams Lawson - April 30, 2016 at 01:00 PM

RB

“ *A sharp mind and a long life--a winning combination! What an honor it was to know George and see him at so many national and regional checkers championships. George was a champion, far above the level of most of us, a fine example of excellence and a gentleman who was a pleasure to have with us.*

Roger Blaine, Mishawaka, IN, formerly of Toledo

Roger Blaine - April 29, 2016 at 10:22 AM