

# Rooker Report

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A portrait of Judge Muriel Robinson, a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing a black judicial robe with a red sash. She is smiling and looking slightly to the right. The background is dark with a blurred American flag.

**END OF  
AN ERA**

**Judge Muriel Robinson:  
Venerable Jurist Leaving Bench**

**Judge Muriel Robinson Writes Final Chapter of 26-Year Career**

# Preparing for Final Bang of Gavel

A major chapter in Davidson County's rich judicial history will close with the impending retirement of Fourth Circuit Court Judge Muriel Robinson.

The veteran domestic relations jurist announced last month that she would step down on February 15 after an impressive bench career that began more than 26 years ago.

Robinson, whose family bloodline includes a number of politically active public servants, made history in 1982 when she became the first woman ever elected to a court of public record in Davidson County. That eight-year stint would lead to three more such terms as voters expressed their approval of her performance in dealing with the broad range of domestic issues that found their way into her court.

Along the way, her efforts in bringing about fair resolution to broken marriages, child custody matters and domestic upheaval in general didn't go unnoticed by the community at-large.

In 1993, she was voted Nashville's "Most Favorite Judge" in a Reader's Choice Awards poll conducted by The Tennessean in honoring Middle Tennessee's favorite people. In the next two consecutive years the Business Nashville Magazine named her as one of Nashville's most powerful people. During that same period, readers of the Nashville Scene Magazine chose her as their favorite judge. And in 2002, she was named as one of Nashville's "25 Most Beautiful People" by readers and subscribers of Nashville Lifestyles Magazine.

She is the daughter of the late Garner Robinson, a prominent political leader who served the county as sheriff and trustee during a long and colorful career. His public service would serve as inspiration to his daughter Muriel, his son Gale and eventually his grandson Gale B. Robinson, who currently is presiding judge over the General Sessions Court, a position once held by his late father.

Muriel's twin sister, Maude Robinson-Hopkins, is an active partner in the family's funeral home business.

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Robinson earned her law degree from the Nashville School of Law in 1968 and landed a job with the prestigious Jack Norman Sr. law firm where she would spend the next 14 years handling cases of all genre. She developed a special interest in domestic cases and made a point of expanding her knowledge of that area of law. As her expertise grew, so did her client base.

When she learned that longtime domestics judge Benson Trimble would not be seeking re-election in 1982, she decided to put her experience and name recognition to the test. Trimble had been the only judge of the court since its creation by the State Legislature 25 years earlier. His experience would be hard to replace. Besides, county voters had never before elected a woman to a court of record.

But her perseverance paid off. It would be the first of four times that voters would reward her efforts. In return, she was placed in charge of a tribunal with concurrent jurisdiction over all matters involving divorce, annulments, separate support and maintenance, custody support and care of children, adoptions, actions under the Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement and Support Act, appeals from Juvenile Court and all other proceedings involving domestic matters and the relationship of husband and wife, parent and child.

The heavy caseload would eventually require assistance from another Circuit Court with concurrent jurisdiction, but Robinson retained 75 percent of the case burden, plus 100 percent of adoptions. In 2004, Judge Carol Soloman's Eighth Circuit Court was made a fulltime domestics court and now evenly shares all new filings other than adoptions. Cases are assigned to each court on a rotating basis as they are filed.

During the 2008 calendar year, resolution was brought to 2,377 divorce cases and 2,943 assorted domestic issues.

Robinson calls it "one of the most efficient courts in the state."

Indeed, she has reigned over the court with a firm hand, applying the law with a mixture of common sense judgment she believes to be in the best interest of the parties. Her chief goal, she says, is putting families together while always keeping the best interest of children at heart. She scoffs at notions that she doesn't always give male litigants a fair shake. Statutes that guide her decisions, she points out, were "written by a male dominated legislature."

"I remember my very first custody case," she smiles. "I granted custody to the father because he was the better parent."

She holds fond memories of adoption cases that turned out well. "They remember me," she said, "and they keep in touch. They send graduation and wedding invitations."

The one element she will miss the most, she says, is her relationship with the lawyers who have practiced in her court. "We watched each other grow old."

She also will miss the daily presence of Brenda Parks, who has served as her clerk/court officer for 24 years. "Whoever gets this job would be smart to keep her," said the judge.

Age has been kind to the veteran jurist, whose striking appearance belies the fact that she will turn 65 on February 7 and that she is a grandmother of two grandsons and 13 step-grandchildren from an early marriage. Her only biological child is a daughter, Kathleen Gale Uhlhorn, a Memphis attorney.

Her flowing blonde tresses are worn long at the request of her husband of eight years, former Nashville Banner Publisher Irby Simpkins. Always elegantly attired, she equally enjoys the comfort of jeans while spending





Judge Robinson enjoys a light moment inside her chambers.

## Robinson: End of an Era

(From Page 2)

time on the couple's 125-acre farm in Bedford County where she enjoys riding her two Tennessee Walking Horses.

The farm will become her permanent residence following retirement and completion of a new home currently under construction on the property.

While retirement will offer "some" time to relax, Robinson plans on staying active. She will continue to work in the family funeral home business where she is one of three principal owners. She also plans to continue her monthly segment on Channel 5's "Talk of the Town" where she offers legal advice to call-in viewers. She also has applied for senior judge status, but will make herself available for special case assignments until the state's quota permits.

Seven attorneys have applied for Robinson's domestic court job, which will be temporarily filled by Gov. Phil Bredesen. His selection will serve until the next general election in 2010 when voters will choose a judge to complete the balance of Robinson's term, which expires in 2014.

What advice does she have for her successor?

"I would encourage my replacement to continue to be diligent in collecting child support and enforcing visitation orders for both parents."



## RETIREMENT

Photo by Nick Lane

JOANIE YOUNG happily receives a parting gift from Traffic Violations Bureau Chief Clerk Bill Cartwright during her retirement party on January 23. Young was a permanent member of the Traffic Warrant Office staff for the full ten years of her employment. She says she will devote most of her time to gardening and canning while selling the flowers she grows. She and her husband, a retired Metro police officer, also plan on attending a lot of their grandchildren's ball games.

PHOTO CREDITS: All photos by Nick Lane

## December Trial Verdicts

### Jury

Week of December 8

CASE	TYPE	COURT	PRAYER	VERDICT	PCT. FAULT
04C-3227	AUTO ACCIDENT	5		\$4,500	P-50%/D-50%

### Non-Jury

Week of December 15

CASE	TYPE	COURT	PRAYER	VERDICT	PCT. FAULT	JUDGMENT	APPELLANT
08C-2229	GSA/AUTO ACCIDENT	1		\$30,000		DISMISSED	PLAINTIFF
08C-756	PERSONAL PROPERTY	5		\$27,238			
06C-3239	AUTO ACCIDENT	5		\$2,527			
08C-1428	GSA/DEBT	1		\$7,227		DISMISSED	PLAINTIFF
08C-2117	TRAFFIC	1		PLAINTIFF			
08C-1878	DETAINER	5		\$3,348/POSSESSION		P-\$3,392/POSS.	DEFENDANT
05C-981	AUTO ACCIDENT	1		\$499,960			
08C-2926	GSA/NEGLIGENCE	5		\$12,410		P-\$12,410	DEFENDANT

### CIRCUIT COURT

### Appeals

#### GENERAL SESSIONS



## Cheers...

Congratulations to **Ricky and Gay Rooker** on the birth of their first grandchild, **Braxton O'Neil Luckey**. Braxton was born on December 30, and weighed 7 pounds, 14 ounces. Mom, dad and baby are all doing well.

Circuit Court Judge **Hamilton (Kip) Gayden** says his popular book *"Miscarriage of Justice"* is headed for a second printing. The fact/fiction novel, based on turn-of-the-century events surrounding a shocking public murder in Gallatin and the surprising outcome of the trial, has been well received in hard cover format. The new version will be offered in paperback, Gayden said. A release date is forthcoming.

## ...Tears

**SAD NEWS** this month out of Memphis where two local judges passed away on the same day.

General Sessions Criminal Court Judge C. Anthony Johnson, 61, succumbed to heart failure at his home on January 2, the same day that cancer claimed the life of Circuit Court Judge Rita Stotts, 55. Both judges had Nashville connections. Judge Johnson was a graduate of Fisk University and Judge Stotts received her law degree from Vanderbilt University Law School.

**EUNICE MARIE JONES**, 57, aunt of Traffic Violations Bureau Deputy Marie Roberts, passed away on January 8 in Nashville after a long illness.

**GLENN SNELSON**, grandfather of Jacquelyn Jones of the Traffic Violations Bureau, passed away on January 27.

## Report 16 Years Old

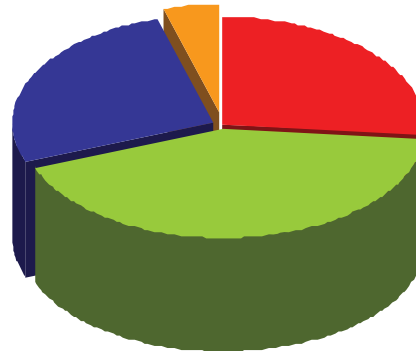
*The Rooker Report will kick off its 17th year next month.*

*This issue marks the completion of 16 years in publication since its debut in February 1992.*

*The report has been distributed without interruption as an informational service to those doing business with the civil courts under the management of Circuit Court Clerk Richard Rooker. It is the longest running newsletter of its type in Metro Government.*

*We appreciate the patronage of our readers.*

## Civil Trial Recap By Class



Miscellaneous	58%
Auto	23%
Contracts	17%
Medical Malpractice	2%



### Case Information

#### Circuit Court

New Civil Cases Filed	198
Jury	79
Non-Jury	119
Civil Cases Concluded	149
Jury	96
Non-Jury	53
New Divorce Cases Filed	146
Divorce Cases Concluded	210
Domestic Petitions Filed	276
Domestic Petitions Concluded	146

#### General Sessions Civil

New Cases Filed	4,208
Executions Issued	3,512
Garnishment Payments	5,057
Judgments Collected	\$990,423
Orders of Protection Petitions	190

#### Probate Court

New Cases Filed	137
Cases Closed	157

#### Traffic Violations

Moving Citations	11,131
Total Violations	16,474
Parking Violations	5,654
Total Fines Collected	\$551,793
Nullifications	2,086
Nullification Fees Collected	\$25,034
Environmental Citations	529
*Credit Card Payments	4,515

\*--Online and phone payments combined

## Case Analyses

GENRE	DECEMBER	YTD
<b>AUTO ACCIDENTS</b>	4	35
PLAINTIFF VERDICTS	4	24
DEFENDANT VERDICTS	0	8
NONE	0	3
<b>CONTRACTS</b>	0	25
PLAINTIFF VERDICTS	0	18
DEFENDANT VERDICTS	0	7
NONE	0	0
TOTAL AWARDS	N/A	*\$430,838
*REPRESENTS ONLY AMOUNTS DISCLOSED BY COURT.		
<b>MEDICAL MALPRACTICE</b>	0	3
PLAINTIFF VERDICTS	0	0
DEFENDANT VERDICTS	0	2
PENDING	0	1
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	5	87
PLAINTIFF VERDICTS	5	64
DEFENDANT VERDICTS	0	18
NONE	0	5

## Auto Accident Cases

	DECEMBER	YTD
JURY TRIALS	1	22
NON-JURY TRIALS	3	13
PLAINTIFF VERDICTS	4	24
DEFENDANT VERDICTS	0	8
NONE	0	3
HIGHEST JUDGMENT	\$499,960	\$499,960
AVERAGE JUDGMENT	\$17,250	N/A

## Soft Tissue Auto Cases

	DECEMBER	YTD
JURY TRIALS	0	8
NON-JURY TRIALS	0	0
PLAINTIFF VERDICTS	0	6
DEFENDANT VERDICTS	0	2

## General Sessions Auto Appeals

	DECEMBER	YTD
PLAINTIFF VERDICTS	1	6
DEFENDANT VERDICTS	0	2
NONE	0	0

## Rooker Report

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If you have a disability and require assistance, please contact 862-5204