

Death Announcement: Robert Graves, Local 1-NY (Jerry Graves, Esq. 917 204-0094)

Robert Burnett Graves was born Wednesday August 8, 1928 to Leola (Tucker) and Otis Graves on a farm in Alberta, Virginia. Interestingly he was born the same year Alberta was incorporated. Robert began his life on a rural tobacco farm on the eve of the great depression. His father Otis was a sharecropper until he bought the farm in 1937.

Robert attended St. Paul's Normal and Industrial School in Lawrenceville, Virginia where he learned the trade of masonry. In 1948, after graduating from St. Paul's, and eager to leave farming behind, Robert landed his first masonry job in Richmond, Virginia. As the times dictated, African-American's were discriminated against and jobs were grossly scarce. Robert's vocational school familiarized him with the importance of trade unions as a way to secure masonry jobs and employment benefits for his family. At the time, there were either no African-Americans in the Bricklayers and Allied Craft Workers Local 15 in Virginia or very few but he managed to convince 6 of his friends to seek entrance. In January 1949 Robert became one of the first African-Americans to join BAC local 15. This opened up opportunities for Robert and he travelled to Iowa, New York and Saint Louis working as a brick mason. Towards the end of 1950, Uncle Sam called his number and he was drafted into the Korean War. On furlough, Robert was married on September 26, 1951. Robert's discharged papers show that he worked as a brick mason during the time he served in the Korean War helping to build apartment houses and a dam.

After being honorably discharged on January 17, 1953 from the Army, at age 25, Robert came back to his wife Velma in New York. Robert continued to work and save his money because he hatched an idea to use his masonry skills to build his own home on Long Island. But first, on December 8, 1955, Robert and Velma welcomed the birth of their first-born. This put Robert's planning in full gear as he did not want to raise a family in the city. He and friends, one being John Bartlett, who joined the union with him, were scouting Roosevelt Long Island as a possibility. Robert chose Roosevelt and in 1956 he began to build a red brick house on a sizable lot at 72 Jefferson Avenue where he and Velma would raise each of their 5 children. Robert worked long hours in the masonry trade during the week and built the house with the help of his friends and family primarily on weekends. In Fall of 1956, when the house became habitable, Robert and his wife moved into the house while Robert continued to finish the construction. In 1957, Robert, to his surprise, welcomed the birth of triplets, in fact, Stephen, Shirley and Sheila were the first triplets born in what is known today as Nassau University Medical Center.

In January 1999, Robert was bestowed a business card sized bronze card announcing his "Life Membership" in the BAC. Robert was proud of this achievement and acknowledged that the union played a major and critical role in his life and the lives of his 5 children. Soon after, Robert retired and he began to live a simpler life eventually relocating to Durham NC.

On July 31, 2015, after a 5 year struggle with Alzheimer's disease, he passed away in West Orange, New Jersey surrounded by his children and siblings. Robert would have reached the age of 87 on August 8, 2015.

Funeral Arrangements

Philemon Baptist Church

246 Shephard Ave

Newark, NJ

(973) 926-8605

Friday, August 7, 2015

Wake: 9 a.m.

Service: 10:a.m.

Repast: 11: a.m.

Burial: 3 p.m: Pinelawn Cemetary