

# Samuel Robinson: Man of Passion and Principle

Samuel Robinson was a man of action and deep principle, a leader by example. He came from Russia to the United States during a wave of Eastern European immigration, arriving in Galveston, Texas in 1901. At the University of Texas, he earned a degree in engineering, then worked in Texas fisheries, Louisiana oil fields, and as a surveyor for Houston harbor. His 1913 college yearbook described him as having an “inborn desire to eradicate aristocratic tendencies.” It continued, “Sam will have an idea on any subject, no matter how insignificant.”

As engineering was not his life’s calling, he proceeded to obtain a degree in optometry. His father, Daniel operated a jewelry store in downtown Asheville between 1915 and 1942. He told his son he believed there would be opportunity for him here in western North Carolina. The young Dr. Robinson then moved to Asheville to begin a practice in optometry. Thriving in this new mountain environment, Dr. Robinson immersed himself in numerous civic duties, including serving on the [Asheville] Metropolitan Planning Board. His many accomplishments resulted in the naming of Robinson Hall on the campus of the University of North Carolina Asheville in his memory.

## Samuel Robinson



Dr. Samuel Robinson in front of his optometry office at 78 Patton Avenue, in downtown Asheville (1936). During the over 55 years he practiced optometry, he performed his own lab work, wrote and presented several papers that addressed difficult optometric problems, and created his own method of glaucoma therapy. A strong proponent of equal rights, Dr. Robinson never turned any patients away because of their race or inability to pay, and he instituted a first-come first-serve policy despite the segregation protocols of his day. He believed in treating his patients equally, regardless of social status or ethnicity.



Dr. Samuel Robinson hiking in the mountains he loved (1937). The environment was one of his passions. An avid hiker, he kept a detailed record of every hike he made. An active member of the Carolina Mountain Club until he deemed their hikes too easy, Dr. Robinson founded his own hiking group (he called) the Wilderness Hikers. He volunteered with the American Forestry Association and campaigned at length, with others, to name a 6,000-foot peak in the Great Smoky Mountains “Masa Knob” in honor of George Masa, a Japanese immigrant and founding member of the Carolina Mountain Club who devoted much of his life to photographing and mapping the Smokey Mountain National Park and the Appalachian Trail.



Whiteside Mountain hike June 2, 1940, Leah Robinson Karpen and Michael Robinson.



Dr. Samuel Robinson 1891-1973

*Whiteside Mountain*  
 Sunday June 2, 1940. It is a warm, partly cloudy day. We leave Asheville at 8:45. We cross through Cashiers then re-ascend the Blue Ridge. On foot we follow the old road and then worn trail towards top. The views are spectacular to the southeast is the famous precipice said to be the highest in Eastern America. There are patches of vegetation at upper rim of mountain hundreds of feet of bare...rock below this rim.  
 We walk along crest of mountain to its northern extremity, then return to lunch at the top. After a long rest we retrace our steps down from the mountain...Arrive Asheville at 6:45.

Excerpt from Mountain Memories, Volume III A Record of My Mountaineering, Hiking Trips Outings, & Travels, Dr. S. Robinson, Asheville, N.C. pages 51-52. (Unpublished.)



Samuel and Esther Robinson 1972. They met in Asheville where her mother Jennie Kroman, owned a women’s hat shop, Paris Millinery, sharing a partition wall with Robinson’s optometry practice at 78 Patton Avenue. Esther later managed his office and was a great supporter of Samuel’s causes. She jokingly referred to herself as a hiking widow on weekends.



As a proponent of civil rights, Samuel strove to integrate the Boy Scouts of America, an organization in which he was active for more than 25 years on the local, as well as the national level. The photograph at left shows him receiving the Silver Beaver award for his work in scouting.