



## **Randolph J. Harris** **Independent Consulting in Heritage Conservation & Community Development** **Partner, National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom—Spring 2017**

A native of Western Pennsylvania's Monongahela Valley, Randolph J. Harris has worked for more than a quarter century on projects and initiatives that focus on community revitalization through the preservation and reuse of historic buildings, creation of heritage tourism sites and programs, and other sustainable land use practices.

Trained as a journalist and communications specialist, Harris was a reporter, editor and photographer for The Daily Messenger, Homestead, PA and Pittsburgh Suburban Community Newspapers. In the late 1970s he began working for the Pittsburgh Area Office of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in a variety of positions. Over the subsequent 12 years he was the chief public information program officer, real estate appraiser, environmental review specialist and he promoted the use of rehabilitation mortgages by lenders and consumers. He left HUD in 1991 to start a consulting practice in community development and historic preservation.

While working as a consultant, Harris was engaged in concept planning, community organizing and news media relations with the Steel Industry Heritage Task Force, which is now the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, an eight-county heritage region in Western Pennsylvania. He served as Chair of the Planning Commission of the Borough of Homestead, Allegheny County, PA and was a board member of the Steel Valley Enterprise Zone. He helped to establish a Habitat for Humanity Chapter in Homestead, serving as its first president, and also served on the Board of Directors of the Community Loan Fund of Western Pennsylvania.

Harris and his family moved to Lancaster in 1995 when he was named Executive Director of the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County, a private, countywide non-profit organization founded in 1966 to preserve the architectural heritage of Lancaster County. With the Trust and in collaboration with other organ-

izations, public agencies and private interests, he was responsible for initiating and managing preservation efforts involving both direct acquisition, re-sale and the reuse of historic buildings. He also advanced public policy initiatives to help combat suburban sprawl and regenerate urban areas. He helped obtain national and international designations for Lancaster County, citing threats to the larger community and region due to loss of farmland and related urban decline due to sprawl and unmanaged growth.

In 2000 Harris developed the concept plan for the preservation of the Congressman Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton Smith Historic Site in the City of Lancaster, now part of the \$170 million Convention Center and Marriott Hotel development. With that project, he renewed his practice as an independent consultant beginning in 2002. Since 2003 he has worked individually or with teams of historians to secure the designations throughout Pennsylvania for 20 heritage sites into the National Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program, the nation's official listing of authentic resources associated with the Underground Railroad.

Recent independent consulting projects have been completed for architects, historical societies, travel and tourism agencies, citizens groups, real estate developers and engineering companies involving research and documentation of historic and cultural resources. Recent projects focus on African American heritage sites in the communities in the South Central PA region and heritage tour development. He is the archivist of the African American Historical Society of South Central Pennsylvania.

Harris recently served as Chair of the Shreiner-Concord Cemetery Foundation Board of Directors and Design Committee Chair of Main Street Mount Joy. He holds an Associate Degree in Liberal and Commercial Arts from the Community College of Allegheny County (PA) and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism and Communications from Point Park College in Pittsburgh.