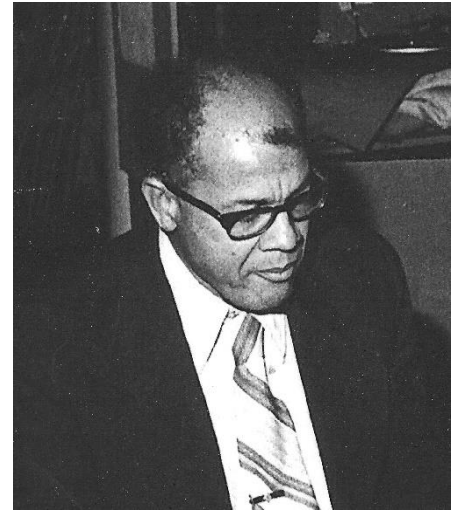


William H. Harris, Jr. (1926 – 1982)



William H. Harris, Jr. was born on October 4, 1926. He graduated from the Milwaukee School of Engineering and later, while working for Boeing in Seattle as an associate engineer, earned a MA from the University of Washington. Later in life, he left his job as a senior engineer at Boeing and moved to Lebanon, Pennsylvania where he took a job with the state of Pennsylvania.

A modest man and reticent to talk about himself, Harris nonetheless loved to talk at length about ideas, about Unitarian Universalism, and about his extended family.

Harris was a life marked by commitment and service. He served on the Democratic National Committee and yet in his modesty in rarely spoke of that or the wide array of organizations in which he was involved. Among these were the NAACP, National Organization of Women, the Astronomical Society and Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity). PUSH honored him with an award for his efforts to educate African-American children.

Harris joined the Harrisburg Unitarian Church in May 1974 and served in many capacities including as a Trustee on the Joseph Priestley District (JPD) Board.

William H. Harris, Jr died on March 20, 1982. At the JPD annual meeting held a month later William Harris was posthumously honored with the District Unsung Hero Award for his many contributions to Unitarian Universalism. Later that year, he was awarded the UUA Unsung Hero Award.

Sources:

The Memorial Service for William H. Harris, Jr. conducted by Rev. Lee C. Barker in Harrisburg, PA on March 24, 1982.

The nomination citation nominating William Harris for the Joseph Priestley District Unsung UU Award delivered on April 17, 1982 by Martha B. Holmes.

**The Nomination of William H. Harris Jr.
for the Joseph Priestley District
Unsung UU Award.**

The Joseph Priestley District is proud to nominate William Harris of the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg for the Unsung UU Award. Bill Harris was a positive power and force - a strong personification of basic ethical principles — a man of quiet determination, sincere concern and commitment. He was a man who made choices that involved the larger fellowship of the Unitarian Universalist community, and who carried out in detail all the obligations and functions that such programs imposed. Perhaps it was Bill's quiet, unassuming sensitivity to individual needs of his fellow Unitarian Universalist while urging them on to participate in the larger fellowship of the church that symbolized him as an unsung UU.

On the local level Bill's major contribution had been as Chairperson of Denominational Affairs for the past five years. During that time, the Harrisburg Church was struggling through the loss of a minister and the acquisition of a new one, followed by a building fund campaign and a growing congregation. All of these factors are concerns that are of a local interest and Bill participated in these important changes in a meaningful way. He was a member of the Ministerial Search Committee. He recorded many sermons and made the tapes available to members who had missed the service or who wanted to hear again something that was particularly meaningful to them. He tended to our individual needs but more importantly, he kept all of his fellow church members informed and interested in their linkage with the Joseph Priestley District and the Unitarian Universalist national interests. He conducted the annual Parish Polls for the General Assembly and followed this up by attending four General Assemblies. Despite involvement in District and National affairs, where expenses could add up quickly, Bill refused to apply for funding allocated to his mission. When asked about this Bill would reply, "Don't worry about me; just make sure we meet our financial obligations to the District and UUA."

Bill Harris represented the Joseph Priestly District, visiting eleven rural fellowships in the north-central area of Pennsylvania. This area of the state is not only sparsely populated but quite provincial and bigoted. Bill, representing a liberal religion and being Black, kept alive many sparks of tolerance and openness in an area needing such inspiration. Bill's quiet strength and dedication were the qualities enabled this to take place. Mr. Harris was also an active and dedicated member of the Joseph Priestley District Board for four years, as president of the Northern Area Societies. In this role, one of his major leadership thrusts was his involvement in organizing the Women and Religion Committee of the District.

At the District level, Bill put many of us to shame because of his thoroughness and dedication to his duties as liaison person between the District and his share of the JPD societies. I believe that

he personally visited each one, apologizing to his ministers when he must miss a service in Harrisburg.

Many of us remember Bill's special gift when Board business became heavy. Bill would insert a comment or anecdote related to the business at hand, that he told with his own inimitable sort of droll wit. This lightened the atmosphere and helped the business proceed more quickly as a result.

Although Bill's devotion to his family and his strong spiritual roots in this institution, and his commitments to broad activities in the church, limited his community activities, he did involve himself in the encouragement of Black youth to respect their heritage. Over a number of years he provided models of Black Achievement to young people so that they could build self-esteem. The most recent efforts saw Bill develop plaques and explanatory citations about Azie Taylor Morton, the first Black Treasurer of the United States. These materials were distributed to young Blacks in Wisconsin, Illinois, Virginia and Pennsylvania. For this and earlier efforts, PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) presented Bill with two awards, the latest in January 1982.

Oliver LaGrone of the Harrisburg church observed: During the last 10 years "Bill", as we call him, has become for me and, I believe, for our church a positive power" and force - a strong personification of basic ethical principles - of quiet determination, sincere concern and commitment. I see in him a man who made choices "and carried out in detail all the obligations and functions that such programs imposed. For the church and civic community he was a most valuable resource."

Joyce Hoskins, president of the Board of Bill's church said, "...our nomination of Bill for this award was decided upon by the Board of Trustees last year before his illness was discovered. The board did not feel then that there was enough time to prepare a proper nomination and voted to use the intervening year to gather supportive data and to nominate Bill in 1982."

Bill's spiritual strength has been tested during the past year as he has battled cancer. As one family noted when they visited him in the hospital, instead of their being saddened, he provided them with an uplifting experience. His approach to life - to live each day that he was alive without guilt or self-criticism, and his hope to recover to continue his good works (when presented with the Unsung Award for his own church, he said "He hoped to do more if the pain went away") - provides the healthy with inspiration and example. His quiet courage provides us all with insight into the power of belief, not in a personal god or immortality, but in the common ties with humanity and a life well lived. This life was lived in quiet dignity and a gentle sweetness toward his fellow human beings despite having to incur the usual racial bigotry too prevalent in our society.

As Lee Barker, his minister says, Unitarian Universalism was not some convenient religion for Bill. For a number of years it had enabled him to live his life with commitment. It offered him courage, strength, peace and a community of people who loved him. It enabled him to cope with the uncertainty and pain. He demonstrated to the rest of us that ours is a faith that can truly provide meaning.

Bill Harris quiet strength and dedicated responsibility to the larger fellowship of UU life makes him truly deserving of this award.

(These words of tribute were, for the most part, from the nomination papers presented by the Harrisburg church in support of Bill's nomination for the Unsung UU Award. I mourn Bill's death but I am sincerely glad to have known and worked with him.)

Martha B. Holmes

April 17, 1982