

Commonwealth Monument is First at PA Capitol to Honor African-American Heritage

The new monument on the PA State Capitol Grounds, “A Gathering at the Crossroads: For Such a Time as This,” was officially dedicated Wednesday, August 26, a date that marks two anniversaries of two major milestones in the quest for equal rights in America, the 150th anniversary of the 15th Amendment to the US Constitution granting Black men the right to vote, and the 100th anniversary of 19th Amendment which granted voting rights to women.

The site of the monument is significant, located where Harrisburg’s “Old Eighth Ward” was, until the early 20th Century, a thriving multicultural neighborhood. “All people of all backgrounds lived in this neighborhood,” said Governor Tom Wolf at the ceremony. “Immigrants seeking the American dream for a better life. Religious groups in search of protection under William Penn’s promise. And, of course, hundreds of African-Americans rebuilding their lives in the wake of slavery and the Civil War.”

When fully completed later this year, the monument will feature four bronze statues: African-American Abolitionist William Howard Day (for whom the William Howard Day Homes in Harrisburg in named); suffragist Frances E.W. Harper; Jacob T. Compton, a sergeant of the 24th United States Colored Infantry (USCT) and local musician; and T. Morris Chester, Civil War correspondent, educator, lawyer and diplomat.

The Commonwealth Monument Project is overseen by a steering committee under the aegis of the Foundation for Enhancing Communities. Historic Harrisburg’s Preservation Advisor, Jeb Stuart, played a key role in the project as a volunteer administrator, as did former Historic Harrisburg board member Lenwood Sloan, the project’s executive director. Kelly Summerford and Yvette Davis, also past board members of HHA, served on the project steering committee. Historic Harrisburg friend and benefactor Peggy Grove played a key role in providing and raising funds for the project.

Contributions to the project may be made on line at <https://www.tfec.org/funds/harrisburg-peace-promenade/>