CBB Historical Marker Dedication, July 19, 2023

Good morning,

Thank you for joining us today as we dedicate this historical marker.

I would like to begin by thanking Jennifer and the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia for their support in dedicating this historical marker. Her words this morning mark an important occasion in the history of Philadelphia.

I would also like to thank Alli Davis at the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for this opportunity and the generous support they have provided during the course of our marker application. Alli was instrumental in guiding us each step of the way concerning our application, marker wording, property permissions, installation, and dedication ceremony programming. Without their help, and that of review panel members, this historical marker would not have been possible.

Many others also helped along the way, beginning with Stephen Shapiro who initially proposed the idea of an historical marker and Marion Rust and Max Cavitch who generously wrote letters of support and advised about the marker’s placement. A debt of gratitude is also owed to Candis Johnson and others at the U.S. Custom House who helped us identify this current location for the marker, and to Kasim Ali, Chief Traffic Engineer, Thomas Buck, Assistant Chief Traffic Engineer, and the workers at the City of Philadelphia Department of Streets who installed the marker earlier this week. Here again, without their help, our dedication today would not be taking place.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank my colleague, Philip Barnard, for his steadfast help with the marker application, and our wives, Karol and Cheryl, for their decades of support regarding Brown and why he is America’s first significant novelist and an important editor, political pamphlet writer, and historian. The Charles Brockden Brown Society, now 23 years old, and all of the scholars who have ever presented a conference paper on Brown, published on some aspect of his writing, or who have helped financially have also been instrumental in establishing this marker. Likewise, I want to acknowledge earlier generations of scholars, like Sydney Krause, S.W. Reid, Alfred Weber, Wolfgang Schafer, John Holmes, Fritz Fleischmann, and others who helped unearth Brown’s numerous writings and understand their cultural, literary, political, and philosophical significance.

For those of you are not familiar with Brown’s career, he accomplished much in his brief life (he died at age 39). After attending the Friend’s Latin School and apprenticing for a Philadelphia law firm, Brown authored a feminist dialogue in 1798 and then eight novels, four of which were gothic, by 1801. In addition, he edited the New York *Monthly Magazine and American Review* at this time, *The Literary Magazine* *and American Register* (from 1803-1807), and the *American Register; or, General Repository of History, Politics, and Science* (from 1807-1809). If that were not enough, he also published political pamphlets on the Louisiana Purchase and Jefferson’s Embargo and authored numerous essays, short stories, and poems before he died in 1810.

In closing, I would like to thank Brown himself, whose candor as a young Quaker in post-Revolutionary Philadelphia and writings first opened my eyes in regard to the injustice of displacing the Lenni Lenape, the limits of American exceptionalism, and the often fraught relationship between history and fiction. His writing also provided me with insight into how democratic processes could be compromised by a few individuals and the importance, at any time in history, of questioning the hierarchies and binaries of the status quo.

As Brown stated in his address “To the Public” in his novel *Edgar Huntly* in 1799, “One merit the writer may at least claim” is “that of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the reader, by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors.” In this respect, throughout his career Brown sought to engage his readers or “the public” by urging moral reflection on issues of social, economic, or political importance and on how to build a more “virtuous,” equal, and fulfilling society. Today, more than ever perhaps, that is still worth thinking about and pursuing.

Again, thank you everyone for taking the time to attend this dedication ceremony this morning.