

*Tasting Freedom: Octavius Catto and the Battle for Equality in Civil War America.* By DANIEL R. BIDDLE and MURRAY DUBIN. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010. 632 pp. Notes, bibliography, index, illustrations. \$35.)

In March 2011, Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter announced that the city would contribute five hundred thousand dollars toward a statue commemorating Octavius Catto, an African American activist who was murdered in the midst of election violence in 1871, at the age of thirty-two. It is no coincidence that the mayor's announcement came not long after the publication of this fine book written by two Philadelphia journalists, Daniel R. Biddle and Murray Dubin. The book is the culmination of the authors' efforts to bring public attention to this forgotten figure in the city's nineteenth-century history. In *Tasting Freedom*, Biddle and Murray seek not only to recover the life of the martyred Catto but also to tell the story of "the first civil rights movement" in the city of Philadelphia (1). Readers of this journal will no doubt already know that despite the gradual end of slavery in the state of Pennsylvania, this southernmost northern city was hardly friendly to either abolitionists or free African Americans. The first half of the book details the struggles of a fairly small group of white and black Philadelphians against slavery and in support of racial equality. At the same time, Biddle and Dubin follow the story of the Catto family, who moved to Philadelphia from Charleston, South Carolina. Even as this section focuses on local events and introduces a host of Philadelphia-based activists, including Octavius's father, William Catto, we also see the complicated interplay between national, state, and local politics during this era, as antislavery activists organized and struggled at all levels of government.

It is in the second half of the work, which focuses on the Civil War and the postbellum period, that Octavius Catto emerges as the central figure. Biddle and Dubin have done yeoman's work in recovering his story from a scattered evidentiary base and bringing it to life in vivid, and often moving, prose. The meat of the book covers Catto's political activism, especially his role in the fight against segregation in the city's streetcars and his efforts to secure for African Americans the right to vote in Pennsylvania. Most powerful of all is the authors' reconstruction of the 1871 Election Day riots during which a white political thug gunned down Catto in broad daylight.

For all *Tasting Freedom's* strengths, there exists a certain tension in its treatment of its central figure—a tension of which the authors are, I think, quite aware. The book opens and closes with a quote from a descendent of Catto, who insists that "there were a hundred O. V. Cattos" (1, 490). At times it appears that Biddle and Dubin want to use Catto as a lens through which to view the complex world of the "first civil rights movement"; at other times they seem to push Catto into a place of prominence that occasionally overstates his importance. Ultimately, though, it is clear why the authors find Catto so compelling; one of

the great achievements of their work is that it communicates to the modern reader what was obvious to Catto's contemporaries: the man's brilliance and charisma. This is a book that will reward both general and scholarly readers.

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*Remembering Chester County: Stories from Valley Forge to Coatesville.* By SUSANNAH BRODY. (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2010. 128 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$19.99.)

In *Remembering Chester County*, amateur historian and self-described "storyteller" Susannah Brody provides a unique blend of family anecdotes, folklore, legend, and both oral and recorded history. Spanning more than two hundred years, this slender volume contains nearly three dozen tales detailing the heroism, patriotism, and sacrifice of Chester County's residents; their involvement in our nation's long struggles with inequality, racism, and war; and their brushes with well-known historical figures. But Brody does not confine herself to narratives that showcase wisdom, bravery, and altruism; she also includes several that illustrate ignorance, cruelty, and selfishness. The result is a quaint and curious collection of yarns—with just a soupçon of boosterism—presented in breezy, vivid prose.

Brody groups her vignettes of Chester County's past into three sections, roughly covering the American Revolutionary period, the nineteenth century, and the twentieth century. Each era offers tales that run the gamut from the truly noteworthy to the utterly obscure. Brody tells us, for example, of Squire Cheyney's warning to George Washington; the Paoli Massacre; the activities of abolitionists and fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad; the kidnapping of Rachel and Mary Elizabeth Parker, sisters who were suspected of being runaway slaves; and the lynching of Zachariah Walker. Readers also learn about the filming of the science fiction classic *The Blob* at Yellow Springs; Bayard Rustin's role in the civil rights movement; and the deaths of Irish immigrant laborers at Duffy's Cut—a topic explored through written history, ghost stories, and archeological evidence.

While the anecdotes that Brody offers are entertaining and in many cases enlightening, the author mixes some good history with some poor. She presents fictional conversations as direct quotations despite that fact that we don't know what words Squire Cheyney used when alerting George Washington or who said what when an angry mob of neighbors interrogated suspected witch Molly Otley. Brody asserts that some civil rights leaders had "concerns" about Bayard Rustin's "private life" (108), which is true, but today it should simply be stated that the man was gay. Brody also leaves some of her references unidentified, referring to