

Walter E. Brown

Walter E. Brown worked at Elizabethtown College for thirty-two years from 1948 to 1979 as the superintendent of buildings and grounds.¹ Brown was born in Higgins, Schuylkill County, but went to Reading in the 1930s to work on a farm.² He then worked on highway construction in the state for four to five years, after which he worked in the steel industry for nine years.³ Eventually he and his wife moved to Elizabethtown, where K. Ezra Bucher hired him to work at the college.⁴ He remained there until 1979, when he retired.⁵ However, even in retirement Brown continued to work hard, as a part-time/full-time worker for Mount Joy Township.⁶

When he came to the college much of it was still a farm, but by the time of his retirement Brown had helped transform the grounds into a modern university. Sweet corn, cabbage, and beans were all grown at the college, and Brown helped with the farming as well as grounds maintenance.⁷ A vegetable patch sat next to the Thompson Gymnasium, and the land on which Meyer Hall now resides was covered by an apple orchard.⁸ Apples from the orchard were taken to the Masonic Homes and turned into vinegar.⁹ During his first years at the college there were only 260 students and eight buildings, mostly sheds that were torn down during various expansions throughout the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁰ Among the buildings Brown helped remove were the first science building (a wooden shed next to the vegetable patch outside of Thompson), a shed used to stable visitor's horses, a pig stable, and a chicken house.¹¹ He also inspected three of the buildings constructed during his time as director of building and grounds.¹² Brown started out with just one other maintenance employee, which required him to be a jack of all trades.¹³ However, as time went by and more buildings were erected his staff increased to twenty by the time of his retirement.¹⁴

His innovation was endless, using wheelbarrows before the college had a truck and turning a Model A Ford into a lawn mower for the bigger areas of grass, such as the Dell.¹⁵ In fact, Brown's lawn mowing capabilities were legendary, mowing the entire campus in just two and a half days.¹⁶ Brown eventually purchased a truck for the college, which was returned to him when he retired.¹⁷ He remained extremely dedicated to the college, working a 30 hour shift when the furnace of the brand new Meyer Hall would not stay lit.¹⁸ He also drove to Baltimore to get wire to fix an electrical line break in the pouring rain during his time at Elizabethtown.¹⁹

The students loved Brown and would frequently run into him. When Brown shoveled the sidewalks after a snowstorm he would get into snowball fights with the kids, and when a group of young men attempted to raid the women's dorm Brown stopped them by locking the doors and placing a trip wire.²⁰ He also placed a tub of roofing pitch inside of a window which students typically used to sneak into the gymnasium on Sundays, which

¹ Linda Whipple, "Brownie," *Elizabethtown*, Summer 1989, 33, accessed 17 November 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/elizabethtown1989eliz#page/n105/mode/2up/search/%22Brownie%22>

² Ibid, 33.

³ Ibid, 33.

⁴ Ibid, 33.

⁵ Ibid, 33.

⁶ Ibid, 33.

⁷ Ibid, 33.

⁸ Ibid, 33.

⁹ Ibid, 33.

¹⁰ Ibid, 33.

¹¹ Ibid, 33.

¹² Ibid, 34.

¹³ Ibid, 33.

¹⁴ Ibid, 33.

¹⁵ Ibid, 33-34.

¹⁶ Ibid, 34.

¹⁷ Ibid, 33.

¹⁸ Ibid, 34.

¹⁹ Ibid, 34.

²⁰ Ibid, 34.

let the administration track the culprit right to his room.²¹ Brown was also a fair but humorous boss, as demonstrated by the time he locked a sleeping painter on a window ledge.²²

Brown was also involved in several projects to improve some of the buildings on campus. Among these projects were the installation of organ speakers on the roof of Rider Hall and the creation of the picnic area between College Avenue and Campus Road, now erased by the expansion of Lake Placida.²³ He also tore the wooden floor out of Rider Hall, replacing it with a much more modern concrete floor which surely pleased the students, who frequently played basketball there.²⁴

Upon his retirement, the college renamed the Kiwanis Building, then used as a maintenance facility, the Brown Building in his honor.²⁵ His retirement dinner was held at Willow Valley and gathered a crowd of around three hundred people.²⁶ A poem was comprised in his honor by Gerald Risser and his wife.²⁷

²¹ Ibid, 34.

²² Ibid, 34.

²³ Ibid, 34.

²⁴ Ibid, 34.

²⁵ Ibid, 34.

²⁶ Ibid, 34.

²⁷ Ibid, 34.