

Elizabethtown College 125th Anniversary  
National Historic Preservation Trust This Place Matters Campaign & Campus Historic Building Survey  
Based on the National Parks Service Historic American Building Survey  
2024 Summer Creative Arts and Research Program SCARP  
Ava Barton Class of 2027  
Jean-Paul Benowitz, Director of Prestigious Scholarships and Fellowships and Public Heritage Studies



## Richard Randolph Crocker

Richard Crocker attended Brown University for his undergraduate degree and studied English and American literature in the college's honors program. He went on to become a Rhodes Scholar and studied theology at Vanderbilt and the University of Oxford.<sup>1</sup> Crocker attended Brown at a pivotal point in the school's history – one where he saw the birth of Brown's "New Curriculum." It was during an era that many students were protesting the Vietnam War. The student body craved greater authenticity in their education and wanted something that came from their own direction. Crocker enjoyed having a more personal relationship with professors and found that he gained more insights in his seminar-structured classes over his large lecture-based courses.<sup>2</sup>

In September 1989, a new dean of Elizabethtown College named Dr. Ronald R. Brown was hired. After eight months he resigned due to an illness in the family and he was replaced by Richard R. Crocker.<sup>3</sup> Dean Richard R. Crocker created the Task Force on Community Service which

compiled a final report which evaluated the proper place of community service. This committee recommended that the college encourage community service rather than require it.<sup>4</sup> In 1994, the "Into the Streets" program was started by Dean Richard Crocker along with Shirley

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz, and Peter J DePuydt, *Elizabethtown College*. (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 46.

<sup>2</sup> "Open Curriculum: 'We Craved Greater Authenticity,'" Brown University, May 21, 2024. <https://alumni-friends.brown.edu/news/2019-11-21/open-curriculum-crocker>.

<sup>3</sup> Chet Williamson, *Uniting Work and Spirit: A Centennial History of Elizabethtown College* (Elizabethtown, PA, Elizabethtown College Press, 2001), 299.

<sup>4</sup> Williamson, 306.

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Deichert, Director of the Learning Center. It was part of a national campaign to promote service learning. "When the program was announced, *The Etownian* stated that twenty students and seven faculty members would be participating, but a month later, on October 29, 1994, the number had increased to nearly 400 students helping to meet the community's needs." The program would go on to become an annual tradition for the college. By the second year over "600 students participated in 19 separate projects, including painting buildings, working with children, and offering workshops in communications and computers."<sup>5</sup>

During Crocker's time as Elizabethtown Dean, he had to deal with a tumultuous period between the Elizabethtown residents and Elizabethtown College student relations. Through disputes in parking as well as noise complaints as documented in the *Etownian*. In the 1992 issues of the *Etownian*, Crocker comments on hazing and how the college will not accept it. He writes in the September 11, 1992, issue, "Hazing to be fully enforced." "Any sort of initiation that makes them (college freshman) feel uncomfortable should be brought to our attention." On the second page of that very same issue he expresses the sentiment that freshman initiations can be beneficial by making freshman feel more included by upperclassman, that being said, there are limitations that are needed. "When conducting your freshman initiation, ask yourself: "Do I feel comfortable leaving out a welcome mat for Dean Crocker?" If the answer is "yes," then go ahead and have your fun."<sup>6</sup>



Another problem at the forefront of the September 11, 1992, issue was the College's relationship with the Elizabethtown Borough residents. Dean Richard R. Crocker himself writes about it in his *Etownian* column, "From the desk of...Dean Richard R. Crocker" "Is the College a Bad Neighbor? Take a Walk!"

"Recently there has been much discussion in the Borough of Elizabethtown about the relationship between the College and Borough residents. Many residents in the immediate area of the College have complained about the behavior of students. The Borough Council has heard these complaints and has proposed an ordinance to reduce the number of unrelated people who can live in a single dwelling. After having attended two open hearings on this subject, I am struck by the frustration of borough residents concerning one issue – PARKING. Residents on Plum, Ceder, Arch, College and South MountJoy streets say that they can not park in front of their houses during term because Etown students are parking there. Resident have asked the College to MAKE students and employees park on

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Crocker, "Hazing to be fully enforced," *Etownian*, September 11, 1992.  
<https://archive.org/details/etownian19921993/page/n33/mode/2up?q=crocker>

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campus. Our reply is that, while we have adequate parking on campus, some students and employees find it more convenient to park on the street, and as long as they are not breaking laws (like parking in restricted zones), we can not keep them from parking there. However as your Dean as a resident of the Borough, I ask your cooperation. PLEASE PARK IN ON-CAMPUS LOTS. Your parking near your residence hall or office may save you a few steps some times, but the accumulated affect is to irritate and annoy area residents who feel that they are paying taxes but can not park in front of their houses. Please, whether you are a student or an employee, be considerate in where you park. If we are not, there will certainly be restricted parking, with attendant parking fines, imposed by the Borough all around the College. The relationship between Elizabethtown College and the Borough of Elizabethtown is mutually important. Please remember that even such a simple thing as where you park your car makes a difference."

On page eight of the same issue, Crocker says in an article on housing ordinances "We can encourage students to park on campus, but we have no means of enforcing it."<sup>7</sup> In the September 18 issue of the Etownian in 1992, the headline reads "Relations Tense Between Borough, Students." The borough is proposing an ordinance that limits the number of off-campus students to three. They believe this ordinance will reduce the town's noise and parking complaints. Dean Crocker responds to this ordinance calling the proposal "ill-conceived to address the problems that it (the proposal) is supposed to address." In addition, Crocker questions the legality of the proposed ordinance.<sup>8</sup> In the September 25, issue of the 1992 Etownian, Dean Crocker writes in his column "From the desk of... Dean Richard R. Crocker" about College Life and Alcohol:

"Many students (and some of their parents) assume that alcohol and college life go together. While that may have been the case in some parts of the past, it is no longer the case. Not only has the law changed, but also societal attitudes have changed. Getting drunk is no longer tolerated as acceptable recreational behavior. Elizabethtown College expects its students to obey the law. This means that no persons under 20 years of age should possess or consume alcoholic beverages. Is this an unrealistic expectation? Perhaps. There always will be those who, exercising their freedom, choose to disobey the law. When the College becomes aware of those decisions, however, there will be consequences for such behavior. In addition, students should realize that the civil authorities will levy substantial penalties for underage possession, consumption or for serving alcohol to underage persons. The decision about whether or not to use alcohol is a personal one, for people over 21. Even those of legal drinking age, however, must exercise responsibility, care, and caution if they choose to drink. No obnoxious or dangerous behavior is excused by intoxication. For people under 21, the use of alcohol is not acceptable. Recently some Etown students have become aware that the local police will not turn a blind eye to underage drinking. Neither will the College. On this Parents Weekend, I invite students and parents to enjoy

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Crocker, "Housing Ordinance," Etownian, September 11, 1992.  
<https://archive.org/details/etownian19921993/page/n33/mode/2up?q=crocker>

<sup>8</sup> Richard Crocker, "Relations Tense Between Borough, Students," Etownian, September 18, 1992.  
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the richness of college life – the athletic contest, the movies, the lectures, the play, and to realize that it doesn't take alcohol to have a good time at college.”<sup>9</sup>

On October 23, 1992, Dean Crocker writes in his "From the desk of..." column once again about parking:

"Although I would like to devote this column to lofty educational ideals, I return to the mundane issue of parking. My reason for bringing up the subject again is that I continue to receive many questions on this issue. Indeed, to judge by the number of inquiries, one would conclude that parking is among the most important issues of life for Elizabethtown students. Here are the facts: a special committee, headed by Associate Dean of College Life Jim Hilton and consisting of administration and students, is working to develop and implement rules as soon as possible for the use of the 54 overnight weekday parking spaces that the Church of the Brethren has graciously agreed to make available. Chances are that these spaces will be open to juniors and seniors, and we hope that residents of Myer, Royer, and Schlosser especially will benefit from them. We realize, of course, that this will not solve all the problems brought to our attention by Borough residents who object to students parking on the streets near the College or by freshman and sophomores who object to the walk from the Brown lot. To alleviate the complaints of Borough residents, the Borough Council is considering a ban on overnight parking, except by permit, on all streets near the College. This would mean that students and staff could park on the streets during the day, but not overnight. Freshman and sophomores will have to park their cars in the Brown lot each night. As of this date, the Borough has not banned overnight parking on *all* streets near the College, but it has done so on several. I expect to see the ban broadened. While I have some sympathy for those who must park in the Brown lot and walk to their residences, my sympathy is limited. I don't think the walk to and from the Brown lot will hurt anyone. I walk from my house to my office each day – a distance of two blocks. I suggest that other faculty and students do likewise.”<sup>10</sup>

Dean Crocker wrote quite often in his "From the desk of..." Column on a variety of subjects but many of them read much like a conversation and through them one can see Crocker's dedication to the intellectual community that a college provides. During the 1992 presidential election Crocker sends out this message to the student body:

"Controversy literally means "opposing words" or "opposing sides." Part of the special nature of a college is that we learn through hearing and honoring the words of people who disagree with us. If you have come to Elizabethtown as a student, expecting that your previous ideas will be simply reinforced, you should be disappointed. There is no idea which a college should not test (including this one). A national election brings the controversy to the surface. At a good college, students and faculty will have passionate political convictions, because they care about public life. We will argue. We will change

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Crocker, "College Life and Alcohol," *Etownian*, September 25, 1992.

<https://archive.org/details/etownian19921993/page/n33/mode/2up?q=crocker>

<sup>10</sup> Richard Crocker, "Parking," *Etownian*, October 23, 1992.

<https://archive.org/details/etownian19921993/page/n33/mode/2up?q=crocker>

our minds as we argue. We will test positions to see how much intellectual weight they will bear. As students you should expect to have professors who support different candidates. You also should expect professors to know appropriate boundaries so that they can be models of civility in disagreement. What you should not expect, however, is silence, apathy or intolerance. This election is very important. Its outcome will have very significant implications for our common life. If you aren't engaged in an argument about it, you're missing something. Politics however, is only one of the things we argue about. We also argue about morals, movies, methods of teaching and the insights of one theorist versus those of another. We argue about Suzan Harjo and Arthur Schlesinger. We argue about parking tickets. This is what college is all about. It can be frightening to people who aren't used to it, but once you have developed a fondness for the education that comes through controversy, a community of complacency will be intolerable.”<sup>11</sup>

Dean Crocker's articles provide a guiding voice to students in their college years. They embody his role as Dean of Student Life. An excerpt from an article published in the November 13, 1992, issue of the Etownian reads:

"A concern brought to my attention every year concerns noise in the residence halls. Granted, this is a relatively insignificant issue in the scale of world affairs, but it can be important for those affected by it. Students often are reluctant to confront noisemakers because, after all, "they have the right to make noise." This is a mistaken idea of tolerance. No one has the right to monopolize the air waves. People do have the right to use headphones, but I have the right and the responsibility to confront you when your behavior infringes upon me. Tolerance is not the same thing as cowardice.”<sup>12</sup>

During Richard Crocker's time as Dean the core curriculum of Elizabethtown underwent significant changes. As in most of his pieces written in the Etownian, Crocker maintains full transparency with the student body and asks for their understanding:

December 11, 1992: THE CORE CURRICULUM

“It has been refreshing to hear many students talking, not about things like housing, but about the core curriculum. The New Core, which now affects a large majority of the student body, is an ambitious program. It is designed to insure that students gain acquaintance with important areas of understanding, that they approach learning in a logical sequential order and that they share certain common learning experiences like the Freshman Seminar and the Jr./Sr. Colloquium. As it is implemented, however, we are encountering some “transitional difficulties.” Students who are experiencing problems in understanding or in meeting core requirements should seek the advice, first of all, of their faculty-advisors. Often the problems can be resolved at this level. If, however, you are unable to find a solution to your concern with your advisor, you should consult Dr. Robert Wheelersburg, assistant dean of the faculty, whose office is in Alpha Hall. Dr.

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Crocker, 1992 Presidential Election,” Etownian, October 30, 1992.  
<https://archive.org/details/etownian19921993/page/n33/mode/2up?q=crocker>

<sup>12</sup> Richard Crocker, “A Tolerant Community,” Etownian, November 13, 1992.  
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Wheelersburg has special responsibilities for the implementation of the New Core and he is the person to whom problems should be brought. The theme for this year's orientation was "Community Under Construction" The building of Schreiber Quad and the new student activities building have caused some inconvenience (I write this with a bull dozer directly outside my window.) But the benefits, I think we all agree, will be worth the inconvenience. Building a new curriculum also causes some disruption. We expect that it also will bring benefits. In the process, we ask your patience, and you have the right to expect our understanding of your problems."<sup>13</sup>

The BSC Annex was completed on Valentine's Day of 1993. In an article on this opening in the January 29, 1993 issue of the Etownian, they comment that "Dean of College Life Dr. Richard R. Crocker is anxiously looking forward to the opening of the center, noting "It will make a variety of facilities available that we have not had in the past. We will have a real student center for the first time," he said. Crocker continued, "Hopefully, campus life will become more centralized with the Annex acting as the hub." The Annex will contain the JaysNest, a student-managed pub, convenience store, meeting rooms, fitness center with locker rooms and showers and Hershey Hall, a multi-purpose room where dances and other events will be held.<sup>14</sup>"

In the February 12, 1993 issue of the Etownian, Dean Crocker speaks once again about the new annex along with the other new buildings the college has seen:  
"NEW BUILDINGS –NEW SPIRIT?"

"Within the last two-and-a-half years, the campus of Elizabethtown College has been transformed. Who can measure the impact on campus life of the opening of High Library, the renovation of Zug Hall and the building of the Schreiber Quadrangle, all of which have happened within the last 30 months. This weekend will see yet another tremendous change when The Annex to the Baugher Student Center is opened. There is no doubt that these changes have made Elizabethtown a more attractive, resourceful place. I am particularly hopeful that the Student Center addition will contribute to a renewal of the entire fabric of campus life. It will be interesting and exciting to see how all of these buildings work to contribute to the growth of our College community. While buildings are very important to the renewal of a college, they are secondary to the spirit and attitude that they support. This year is a time when Elizabethtown is trying to renew its spirit. The debates about the New Core, the formulation of clearer and fairer policies about housing, the demands by students to have greater access to information from the College, the formation of a long-range planning committee with its ambitious charge to produce a new five-year plan for the College – all of these testify to a renewal of spirit that is just as important as the new buildings. Elizabethtown College is a community dynamically engaged in learning. This is the vision statement that the long-range planning committee is exploring with a variety of campus groups. What would it mean for those words to become a living reality on this

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Crocker, "The Core Curriculum," Etownian, December 11, 1992.  
<https://archive.org/details/etownian19921993/page/n33/mode/2up?q=crocker>

<sup>14</sup> Richard Crocker, BSC Annex Slated for Completion on Valentine's Day," Etownian, January 29, 1993.  
<https://archive.org/details/etownian19921993/page/n33/mode/2up?q=crocker>

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campus? What changes will have to occur? The committee has asked all of us to think about this, and to make suggestions. How we answer that question is a matter of spirit.<sup>15</sup>

In 1997, the Dean of Student Life, Richard Crocker resigned after seven years of service to the college. He said that he had accomplished the tasks he had set out to do in his time in office. He had restored the College's trust in the dean, and helped "integrate college life into the academic part of the college by reaching out and cooperating with the faculty."<sup>16</sup>

"As a tongue-in-cheek parting gift, Dean Crocker left the College a new *alma mater*. Of the old one he said, "It is somewhat funny to wait for the inevitable snickers that arise as we sing about the endless lays in storied halls. In another age, the song perhaps was an asset. Now it is a liability." Crocker's *alma mater*, however, leaves something to be desired. He rhymes "change" and "remains," "together" and "forever," and "praise" and "say," while the second verse begins: "To build a place where learning thrives, where peace and honor dwell/Where all the tasks of daily life a better world compel." Needless to say, the original *alma mater* was not replaced by Crocker's offering.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Crocker, "New Buildings-New Spirit," *Etownian*, February 12, 1993.  
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<sup>16</sup> Williamson, 325.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

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