

George Ness Falkenstein

George Ness Falkenstein was born in York County, Pennsylvania, on 16 July 1859 to father David Falkenstein and mother Mary Ness.¹ Falkenstein worked in a grain mill from an early age following his father's death. The strenuous work at the grain mill resulted in a permanent back injury and left him with limited abilities. His work at the mill also left him with limited time for a formal education. Falkenstein decided to work long enough to earn the money necessary to attend school.²

Once Falkenstein was able to leave the grain mill to pursue his education, he attended many different schools, including York County Academy, the Brethren Normal School (which is now Juniata College), and Oberlin College.³ Upon graduation, he moved west to teach in Kansas and Illinois, where he also worked as a wheat farmer and harvester in between teaching jobs. He moved back east after his short period of time teaching and married a woman named Eva Shellenberger. Together they opened a business, but it failed unsuccessfully.⁴

Falkenstein and his wife moved back to Kansas to give their business one last shot, only to have it die quickly in the new community. After officially giving up on the business, Falkenstein accepted a job teaching at a local school. This job came to an end when a blizzard shut the school down in 1888 and left his family temporarily stranded. His streak of misfortune persisted when his house was hit by a tornado two months after the blizzard, and his first child died within the following few days.⁵

Attempting to move past his time of bad luck, Falkenstein accepted a position at Mount Morris College, where he taught science for a brief period. After this, he was called back to Pennsylvania to be a minister at the Germantown Church of the Brethren; he was the minister from 1893 to 1900. In 1904, Falkenstein bought his house on 39 South Market Street from Jacob M. Galebach.⁶ He moved from Germantown, Pennsylvania, to Elizabethtown to assist with the founding of Elizabethtown College and eventually join the college as a staff member.⁷ From his house, he operated a printing press, a lending library, and a store, from which he sold items such as college textbooks, school supplies, and stationary.⁸ Additionally, Falkenstein sold postcards of Elizabethtown. Falkenstein was known to have photographed everything in town, and used his photographs to both preserve history and create attractive postcards to sell to visitors.⁹

It was during this same time period in which Falkenstein became involved with the founding of Elizabethtown College, as he was invited by Reverend Jay G. Francis to attend a meeting in Reading, Pennsylvania, which would discuss the possibility of placing a Brethren school in the eastern district of Pennsylvania.¹⁰ Falkenstein was involved in the entire process of founding the college, from searching for a plausible location to designing the first building, Alpha Hall, alongside architect A.A. Richter.¹¹ On 13 November 1900, Falkenstein – Elizabethtown College's acting president at the time – delivered the opening exercises for Elizabethtown College at the Heisey Building, since the construction of Alpha Hall had not yet been complete.¹²

¹ Pennsylvania State Government, Pennsylvania Department of Health, certificate of death number 70112, 17 August 1849.

² *George Falkenstein Obituary*, 1950.

³ Ralph W. Schlosser, *History of Elizabethtown College, 1899-1970* (1971), 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Olivia LoGiurato, "Clinton and Falkenstein Shop and Residence: 39 South Market Street; Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania," Elizabethtown College, last modified May 05, 2017,

<https://www.etown.edu/programs/honors/Clinton%20Falkenstein%20Residence%20and%20Shop.pdf>.

⁷ Richard K. MacMaster, *Elizabethtown: The First Three Centuries* (1999), 164.

⁸ Jean-Paul Benowitz, *Images of America: Elizabethtown*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015), 82.

⁹ Benowitz, *Historic Elizabethtown*, 65.

¹⁰ Chet Williamson, *Uniting Work and Spirit: A Centennial History of Elizabethtown College* (2001), 2.

¹¹ Jean-Paul Benowitz, *Historic Elizabethtown Pennsylvania: A Walking Tour*. 2015, 38.

¹² *Ibid.*

After seeing the school successfully open in 1901 after the construction of Alpha Hall, Falkenstein served as the college's president from 1901-1902, and remained secretary of the board of trustees until 1903.¹³ After serving as president, he returned to his ministry work until announcing his formal retirement. He was responsible for publishing many works in his lifetime, with some of his most notable being the history of the Brethren Church, the first history of Elizabethtown College, the college's constitution, and the first issues of the Elizabethtown College Catalog.¹⁴ He died on 17 August 1949 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., 65.

¹⁴, Benowitz, Historic Elizabethtown, 65; MacMaster, 169.

¹⁵ Certificate of death number 70112.