

Ralph W. Schlosser

Ralph Wiest Schlosser had a strong influence on the Elizabethtown community and campus. He was involved with the campus for over 65 years, and gave much of his time to local religious efforts. He also supported a liberal arts education, promoting “idea diverse professors as well as varied courses”, one of the defining factors of the college today.¹

Schlosser was born in Schoeneck, Lancaster County on July 21, 1886.² His parents, John W. and Emma Wiest Schlosser raised him on a farm in the Ephrata hills.³ He showed great interest in future educational pursuits and religious training.⁴ His mother read him Bible verses, and the family would gather together in the evenings to sing hymns. Schlosser graduated from high school in 1904.⁵

Schlosser taught at a rural school for two years, and entered Elizabethtown College as a student in the spring of 1905.⁶ He completed his English Scientific Course in 1906, and his Pedagogical Course in 1907.⁷ In 1907, Schlosser began his teaching career at the college.⁸ In 1911, he received a Bachelor of Arts from Elizabethtown College and Ursinus College.⁹ He attended Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York City.¹⁰

In 1909, he married Elizabeth Souders and had five children throughout their lives. Many of their children would go on to attend Elizabethtown College.¹¹

In 1906, Schlosser began teaching at Elizabethtown College as a student instructor in preparatory subjects.¹² In 1911, he became Professor of English and Languages, and held this position until 1922.¹³ For this position, he taught English, Latin, and French.¹⁴ In 1918, Schlosser was elected Vice President of the College.¹⁵ In January 1927, he was unanimously elected to be President of the College.¹⁶ However, in 1929, he took one year off to attend Columbia University.¹⁷ In 1930, he was voted to return to his position, because he believed “Brethren, we did not start this college as a view of quitting.”¹⁸ He resigned in 1941 and was replaced by A.C. Baugher.¹⁹ After 1941, he headed the English department and taught English, Spanish, French, and philosophy. From 1943 to 1949, he taught summer sessions at Juniata College.²⁰ After the Second World War, Schlosser taught classes at the GI Area College.²¹

¹ Jean-Paul Benowitz and Peter J. DePuydt, Elizabethtown College (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 57.

² Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Brethren Encyclopedia*. Philadelphia, PA: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983. 1153.

³ Church of the Brethren Eastern District of Pennsylvania, History of the Church of the Brethren (Lancaster: Forry & Hacker, 1965), 229.

⁴ Chet Williamson, Uniting Work and Spirit: A Centennial History of Elizabethtown College (Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania: Elizabethtown College Press, 2001), 105.

⁵ Church of the Brethren, 229.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Chet Williamson, 48.

⁹ Church of the Brethren, 229.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Donald F. Durnbaugh, 1153.

¹² Church of the Brethren, 229.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Chet Williamson, 72.

¹⁵ Ralph W. Schlosser, *History of Elizabethtown College 1899-1970* (Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania: Elizabethtown College, 1971), 87.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁷ Church of the Brethren, 229.

¹⁸ Ralph W. Schlosser, 124.

¹⁹ Ralph W. Schlosser, 175.

²⁰ Church of the Brethren, 229.

²¹ Chet Williamson, 163.

In 1919 and 1920, Schlosser led the Jesse C. Ziegler campaign²² to raise \$400,000 to help the college become accredited to grant baccalaureate degrees, in hopes that it might attain membership in the American Association of Colleges.²³

While teaching but mostly during his period as president of the college, Schlosser participated in sports and deciding what sports should or should not be practiced at Elizabethtown College.²⁴ He did not believe in sports teams, he thought that exercise is necessary but teams added unneeded pressures onto the students, particularly when it came to their social development and he also believed that sports negatively affected student's focus which was imperative to the college's success.²⁵

During his time with the college, President Schlosser was actively involved. In 1905, he was a pitcher for the Elizabethtown baseball team.²⁶ In 1911, he was a key member of the newly founded Homeric Literary Society.²⁷ In 1916, Professor Schlosser founded a temperance league, in line with his Christian ideals.²⁸ In 1917, he was first bass in the Faculty Male Quartet.²⁹ In 1924, Schlosser was a coach of the intercollegiate debate team while he was Dean of the College.³⁰ In 1930, he was president of the Faculty Club. In 1936, Schlosser was a charter member for Tau Kappa Alpha, a national honorary forensic fraternity.³¹ From 1936 to 1937, Schlosser did departmental field work to strengthen the programs at the college. During this time, he was not fulfilling the position of president.³²

In 1911, Schlosser was elected into ministry.³³ In 1952, the Brotherhood Board of the Church of the Brethren granted Schlosser the Certificate of Distinguished Service.³⁴ He served for the Brotherhood Board as annual Conference Moderator.³⁵ He served two terms on the General Brotherhood Board, as Trustee of Bethany Biblical Seminary, Member of Standing Committee, and Conference Reader.³⁶ He was also a member of the Board of Administration of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.³⁷ He was chairman of the Commission on Ministry and Evangelism, and a member of the Pennsylvania German Society.³⁸ In 1947, Schlosser was elected a District Governor of Rotary International.³⁹ He was a member of the Elizabethtown YMCA Board, and vice president of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society.⁴⁰ He conducted Bible institutes over the summers and weekends,⁴¹ and delivered addresses at many high school commencements.⁴² On 22 October 1966, Schlosser Residence, an all-female dorm at the time, was dedicated.⁴³ It was ready for occupancy by 200 students.⁴⁴ The hall remained an all-female dorm until 2012.⁴⁵

In 1971, Schlosser published a history of the college, entitled The History of Elizabethtown College 1899-1970. It constructs a narrative of the college's history, broken up by administration of each of the college's 10 principals or presidents.⁴⁶

²² Jean-Paul Benowitz and Peter J. DePuydt, 57.

²³ Church of the Brethren, 231.

²⁴ Chet Williamson, 72.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ralph W. Schlosser, 60.

²⁷ Ibid., 80-81.

²⁸ Jean-Paul Benowitz and Peter J. DePuydt, 35.

²⁹ Ralph W. Schlosser, 113.

³⁰ Ibid., 111.

³¹ Ibid., 141.

³² Ibid., 124.

³³ Donald F. Durnbaugh, 1153.

³⁴ Church of the Brethren., 230.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ralph W. Schlosser, 74.

⁴² Church of the Brethren, 230.

⁴³ Jean-Paul Benowitz and Peter J. DePuydt, 57.

⁴⁴ Chet Williamson, 216.

⁴⁵ Jean-Paul Benowitz, 57.

⁴⁶ "E-town College Auxiliary Plans Dr. R. W. Schlosser Reception", *Intelligencer Journal* (Lancaster), November 25, 1971.

In one of his letters to a senior class, Schlosser wrote, “Put your life on the side of those striving to consummate a constructive program for humanity. Dare to do the right at any cost. Never flinch when duty calls. To see you thus acquit yourself will be my highest joy.”⁴⁷ Schlosser retired from an active role in campus affairs in June of 1970,⁴⁸ and he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity by the college in 1976.⁴⁹ President Schlosser, or “Mr. Elizabethtown College”⁵⁰ had a monumental impact on the college and surrounding community. He died 13 December 1978 at the age of 92.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Church of the Brethren, 231.

⁴⁸ “E-town College Auxiliary Plans Dr. R. W. Schlosser Reception”, *Intelligencer Journal* (Lancaster), November 25, 1971.

⁴⁹ “Dr. R.W. Schlosser Dies, Was President at E-town”, *Intelligencer Journal* (Lancaster), December 14, 1978.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.