

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



## Abner Augustus Ritcher (1872-1928)

Abner Augustus Ritcher was born May 5, 1872, in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania in the North Annville township.<sup>1</sup> His parents' names were James Madison Ritcher and Lydia A (Ruff) Ritcher. Abner Augustus Ritcher died on November 17, 1928, at age 56 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is buried in a mausoleum plot at Mount Lebanon Cemetery. Pictured below is his certificate of death which indicates that he was buried at West Laurel Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His obituary indicates that he was temporarily interred at a vault at West Laurel Hill until his mausoleum -- which he was the architect for -- at Mt. Lebanon was completed.<sup>2</sup>

His paternal grandfather was Charles Ritcher who was born in North Lebanon township in Lebanon County and was a painter by trade. His maternal grandfather was John Ruff who came to America and settled in North Annville Township after leaving Wurtemberg, Germany at twenty years old. Ruff was a farmer and lived until the age of ninety-one. Abner Ritcher's father, James M. Ritcher was a carpenter.<sup>3</sup> Abner Ritcher attended Lebanon high school and graduated in 1888. Soon after he entered the office of architect H.T. Haur where he stayed for two years until beginning work with H.A. Roby, another architect of Lebanon. Ritcher spent nine years with Roby, the later four being his partner. In 1899, Roby retired and Ritcher continued his business.<sup>4</sup> In 1893, Abner Ritcher married Philadelphia Native



<sup>1</sup> H Beers, *Biographical Annals of Lebanon County, Pennsylvania: Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Representative Citizens and of the Early Se* (Franklin Classics Trade Press, 2018), 782–83.

<sup>2</sup> "Photos of Abner Augustus Ritcher." Find a Grave, accessed May 21, 2024.

[https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/205249429/abner\\_augustus-ritcher/photo](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/205249429/abner_augustus-ritcher/photo).

<sup>3</sup> Beers, 782–83.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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Irene Bentz, daughter of Harry Bentz. They had two sons, Henry Bentz and Walter James.<sup>5</sup>

Abner Augustus Ritcher was an architect from Lebanon PA and was responsible for drafting the plans for Alpha Hall -- Elizabethtown College's first building.<sup>6</sup> During the sixth board meeting for Elizabethtown College, held at the home of Joseph H. Rider on April 12, 1900, conditions for an architect for Alpha Hall were discussed. T. F. Imler and S. H. Hertzler made up the committee on securing an architect. W.W. Bretherick was the architect the committee was looking to initially hire, but Bretherick was relieved of his responsibility after he failed to meet his contract.<sup>7</sup> In search of a new architect, the committee had

arranged for an architect from Lebanon PA by the name of A. A. Ritcher to be present at the board meeting.<sup>8</sup> After a two-hour interview with Ritcher, the board decided they would employ him as the architect of Alpha Hall on the following conditions:

- If the committee finds his contract price too high, Ritcher will revise his plans to lower the price within the budget of the Board.

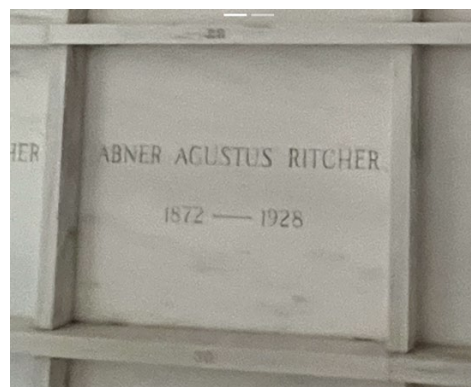
- If revisions are necessary to the plans, Ritcher is to receive \$150 for said revisions.

- If the contract price is too high to erect the building at this time, Ritcher is to be paid \$75.00 and the balance when the building has been erected.

- Plans are to be in the hands of contractors no later than May 3, 1899.<sup>9</sup>

During the seventh board meeting, which took place at the Middle Creek House of the West Conestoga Church, on May 2, 1900, the members discussed plans and specifications for architect, A. A. Ritcher.<sup>10</sup>

This photograph depicts the groundbreaking at Groff farm for the building of Alpha Hall in 1899.<sup>11</sup> Alpha Hall was designed by President Faulkenstein and dedicated on March 4, 1901. A.A. Richter, the architect, drafted the plans which were then executed by the builder Benjamin Groff.<sup>12</sup> "The



<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph Schlosser, *History of Elizabethtown College 1899 - 1970*. (Lebanon, PA: Sowers Printing Company, 1971), 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz. *Images of America: Elizabethtown* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2015), 80.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz, and Peter J DePuydt, *Elizabethtown College*. (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 13.

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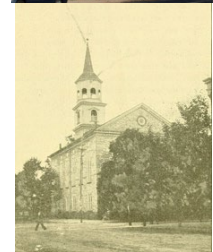


basement included a heating plan, kitchen, dining room, and science laboratory, while the first floor housed the chapel, library, bookstore, and three classrooms. Dormitories were on the second floor.<sup>13</sup>”

Ritcher designed other buildings in Pennsylvania as well, most notably the Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, located at 119 North Eighth Street, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania.<sup>14</sup> The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2010.<sup>15</sup> On the

property of Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church there are two buildings from different time periods and built in different architectural styles. One is called Old Salem, which is a Colonial style 18<sup>th</sup> century building. The other is the Salem Memorial Chapel which is a ”19th century High Victorian Gothic style building with Richardsonian Romanesque influences.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Abner Ritcher also designed the building for the largest dry goods store in Lebanon called “Shen’s Dry Goods Store.” Designed in 1888, this building is a Victorian-Second Empire-style structure which housed one of the earliest elevators in Lebanon. From 1934 until the early 2000s it was Logan’s Dress Shop. The building was completely restored in 2005.<sup>18</sup> It is located on 816 Cumberland St, Lebanon, PA 1702. <sup>19</sup> Ritcher built the St. Marks Reformed Church which is now known as the St. Mark's United Church of Christ.<sup>20</sup> In May of 1903, Ritcher drew up the plans for the building. The plans were for a main church that was 60 by 105 feet and a Sunday school chapel alongside the church that was 50 by 105 feet. The church and building are in the Gothic style and the



<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> “National Parks Gallery,” National Register Digital Assets, accessed July 1, 2024, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/10000402>.

<sup>15</sup> “National Register of Historic Places - Pennsylvania (PA), Lebanon County,” National Register of Historic Places, accessed May 22, 2024, <https://nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/pa/lebanon/state.html>.

<sup>16</sup> “National Archives NextGen Catalog,” National Archives Catalogue, accessed May 22, 2024, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71996199>.

<sup>17</sup> “H J Shen Dept Store - 1926 between 8th & 9th on Cumberland, Lebanon (Became Logan’s Dress Shop),” Pinterest, accessed May 30, 2024, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/458874649530652389/>.

<sup>18</sup> MapLeb, *Heritage Trail: Downtown Lebanon* (Lebanon Valley, PA: Visit Lebanon Valley, 2021), P. 5. [https://visitlebanonvalley.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Lebanon\\_HeritageTrail\\_Map.pdf](https://visitlebanonvalley.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Lebanon_HeritageTrail_Map.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> MapLeb, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Beers, 782–83.

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finishing of the building is oak. The estimated cost of the church was \$50,000 and ground was broken on May 12.<sup>21</sup>



St. Mark's Reformed Church.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Miller, *History of the Reformed Church in Reading, Pa (Classic Reprint)* (Reading, PA: Forgotten Books, 2018), 421–22.

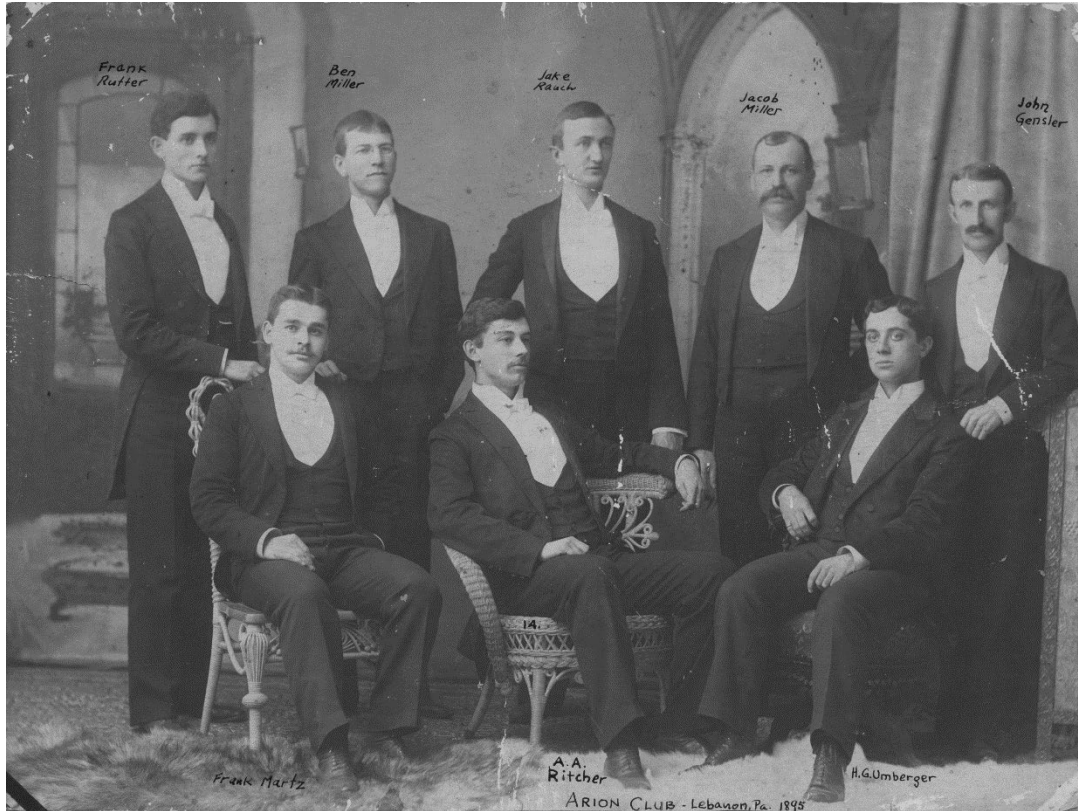
<sup>22</sup> “Lebanon, Pa - St Mark's Reformed Church and Parsonage,” eBay, accessed May 30, 2024, <https://www.ebay.com/itm/353687548339>.

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Abner A. Ritcher second from left (1896) Courtesy Michael Trump the Lebanon County Historical Society

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Abner A. Ritcher seated in the center (1895) Courtesy Michael Trump the Lebanon County Historical Society

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Abner A. Ritcher back row far right (1892) Courtesy Michael Trump the Lebanon County Historical Society

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