

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



Jesse C. Ziegler (1856-1918)

Reverend Jesse C. Ziegler was born in 1856. "He began preaching at the Mingo Church of the Brethren in May of 1889 and was ordained Elder in 1900, and continued as Elder until his death in 1918." His parents were Daniel Peiffer Ziegler (1823-1908) and Mary Ann (Conner) Ziegler (1832-1911). Jesse Ziegler was married to Hannah (Horning) Ziegler, (1856-1947).¹

Jessie Ziegler served as the first chair of the Elizabethtown College Board of Trustees from 1900 until 1918. Early in the creation of the College, Ziegler was on the locating committee which was authorized to "select the site, and directed to draft a constitution and by-laws for the new college."² This time J.G. Francis was a member. The others were H.E. Light, S.H. Hertzler, George Bucher, Jesse C. Ziegler, Samuel R. Zug, Abram H. Royer, Benjamin Hottel, and William H. Oberholtzer.³ At the May 24th 1899, meeting, "the committee then appointed a subcommittee of Falkenstein, Ziegler, and Francis to write the constitution and by-laws of the new college.

In selecting a name for the College, there was much debate. Below is an excerpt from Chet Williamson's account of the College's history in *Uniting Work and Spirit*:

¹ "Rev Jesse Ziegler," Find a Grave, accessed June 27, 2024.
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/27473919/jesse-ziegler>.

² The Committee, *History of the Church of the Brethren of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania*. (Lancaster, PA: Press of the New Era Printing Company, 1915) 626.

³ Chet Williamson, *Uniting Work and Spirit: A Centennial History of Elizabethtown College* (Elizabethtown, PA, Elizabethtown College Press, 2001), 14-19.

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"The next area of contention was the school's name. Falkenstein, Ziegler, and Francis had come up with one, but no one else liked it, not even Francis, who suggested naming the school Mack College after Alexander Mack, the pioneer of the Anabaptist movement. George Bucher objected to naming the college after a single man, no matter how important to their faith, and suggested Conestoga College. But H.E. Light felt that Conestoga gave the school too local an appellation. This was, after all, a school for the entire Eastern Pennsylvania district. Jesse Ziegler, in logical reaction, offered East Penn College⁴, and the reaction was positive enough that it was brought to a vote, but it didn't pass, and it was finally decided to go with "Conestoga College" after all. That name, however, remained for only one night....After much discussion, a large majority of the assembled Brethren decided that "Elizabethtown College" was the right choice, and the college now had a name."⁵

The first board meeting was held on June 16, 1899. They held elections for president of the college board and it resulted in a tie. "The matter was settled by casting lots, Ziegler was elected president."⁶

A commonly mentioned memory in the founding of the college was one with Falkenstein and Ziegler. George Falkenstein had spent the night at Jessie Ziegler's house. The two had slept in the same room and talked until after midnight. Suddenly, a herd of cows broke out of Ziegler's pasture field and they had to herd them back. Falkenstein was quoted as saying, "College trustees, should make good on any emergency." In his diary, Falkenstein writes the following entry:

"During that night we herded cows in the night. They broke out of the pasture field and we returned them. College trustees should make good in any emergency. Talking until after midnight and herding cattle afterward should make good trustees, or at least show what they are made of."⁷

In a similarly strange event, G.N. Falkenstein also recorded his experience of walking six miles from Parkerford to Royerford, to the home of Jesse Ziegler for the night. Through this walk he went through slush, mud, and snow drifts.⁸

In the early days of the creation of the college Falkenstein receives a letter from J.G Francis which reads as follows:

"Dear Bro., -- An invitation is herewith extended to you to attend the school meeting in Mentzer's Hall, Ephrata Pa., 10 A.M., Tuesday, Sept. 12. Before leaving home inflate yourself well, so as to impress the meeting with a due sense of your great importance. Also,

⁴ Ralph Schlosser, *History of Elizabethtown College 1899 - 1970*. (Lebanon, PA: Sowers Printing Company, 1971), 17.

⁵ Williamson, 14-19.

⁶ Williamson, 21.

⁷ Schlosser, 28.

⁸ Ibid., 6.

for a pretense be ready to make a long prayer to the effect that we may not be self-seeking.
It might also be well to oil your lying machinery. Fraternally, Jay G. Francis
P.S. It might be well to extend an invitation to your congregation."

"Three days later, Falkenstein visited Jesse Ziegler, who had also been invited to the same meeting, in Ephrata to discuss the proposed "Mack College." Although Ziegler wanted Falkenstein to join him, possibly as another dissenting voice, he declined, possibly telling Ziegler what he states in his diary: "It is a bold, audacious, shameful, malicious move to crush Elizabethtown College."⁹

On January 2, 1919, a campaign called the Jesse C. Ziegler Endowment Campaign was launched to raise \$500,000 for the accreditation of the college by the Pennsylvania State Department of Public Instruction.¹⁰

Jessie C. Ziegler died on September 28, 1918, at age 62. He died in Limerick, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania and was buried at Providence Church of the Brethren Cemetery.¹¹



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⁹ Williamson, 23.

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Benowitz, and Peter J DePuydt, *Elizabethtown College*. (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 58.

¹¹ "Rev Jesse Ziegler," Find a Grave, accessed June 27, 2024.
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