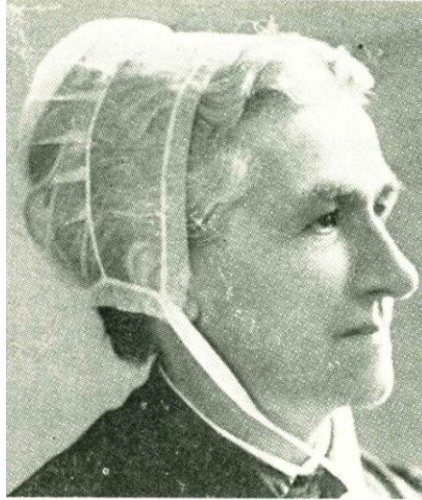


Elizabethtown College 125th Anniversary
National Historic Preservation Trust This Place Matters Campaign & Campus Historic Building Survey
Based on the National Parks Service Historic American Building Survey
2024 Summer Creative Arts and Research Program SCARP
Ava Barton Class of 2027
Jean-Paul Benowitz,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



Elizabeth Myer (1863-1924)

Below is a section of a biography written about Elizabeth Myer in the book, *History of the Church of the Brethren: Eastern Pennsylvania, 1915-1965*:

“Elizabeth Myer, daughter of Samuel Rohrer and Amanda Evans Myer, was one of the first women to become active in the Church of the Brethren of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. She belonged to the well-known Myer family of whom the Biographical Annals of Lancaster County (1903) says, ‘For many years the Myer family has been a prominent one in the state of Pennsylvania.’ Her father, Samuel R. Myer, was born in Upper Leacock Township, a son of Joseph Myer, long-time elder of the historic Conestoga congregation of the German Baptist Brethren Church in Lancaster County. Elder Joseph Myer was the son of Jacob Myer and the grandson of Johan Myer, pioneer settler of the Myer family who came from Switzerland. Like his immediate forebears Samuel was a man of considerable ability and attainments, a keen businessman, and a zealous churchman. He became a member of the German Baptist Brethren Church (Conestoga congregation) in 1864, was elected to the ministry in 1865, becoming one of the most esteemed and able ministers of the congregation; in fact, he was the only English-speaking minister in his congregation and for miles around. Though he had been reared on a farm in Upper Leacock, his tastes and inclinations led him off his ancestral acres at the age of 19, and into the mercantile business in Bareville, where he became owner of a large dry goods and grocery store. To this place he brought his bride, the former Amanda Evans, of Fiddler’s Green, and of Moravian background, to establish a home whose influence in the community came almost immediately to be felt. Into this home Elizabeth was born on the seventh day of June, 1863, the fourth daughter but the fifth child of a family of 12 children. In her early childhood those physical, intellectual, and moral peculiarities which later distinguished her

were easily discernible; she was slight, delicate in manner, and sensitive, spending much time apart from the other children, alone and pensive. A certain quickness of parts led her parents early to think that maybe here was a child who should be educated (a conclusion reached by few parents in Bareville as early as 1876). Probably the most striking image of the Elizabeth-to-be arose in her parents' minds when as an eight-year old she assumed the role of mother, teacher, mediator, and nurse to two of her younger sisters. According to her mother she was a disciplinarian in embryo.

There was, too, in this unusual child a foreshadow of her many later eccentricities: she did odd things; she walked peculiarly; she carried her head strangely; she spoke differently, a bit too precisely for her Bareville schoolmates perhaps, who sometimes mimicked her; she frequently chastised her brother, Caleb, and her older sisters for their improprieties; and in a childlike though none the less real manner she early preached and practiced health rules learned at her ailing father's bedside.

From birth Lizzie had no sight in her one eye; however the force of her mind overcame this impediment which except for a peculiar turn of her head interfered in no way with her personality or her progress in school. Limited as her sight was, she read and learned with such ease and rapidity that at the Bareville two-room school, which gave her all of her early formal training, she soon became known as the best scholar.

Of the years that intervened between her last year at the district school and her first session at the State Normal School at Millersville (September, 1885) little is worth recording. She resided at home; she clerked and kept books in the family store; and when left to her own devices she ransacked her family's library shelves, and dipped into scores of books. Because of her father's illness and death in 1876, her widowed mother with nine living children and a child still to be born needed her help. Her ambition to go to school laid aside, she bridled her talents and her rather limited physical strength to the service of her family; but as her older brothers and sisters came to share more and more the household responsibilities as well as her plan to continue her education, her hopes revived. She would soon be able to go to the State Normal School at Millersville. The question arose in her mind, "Would Millersville take her with no more formal training than the eight grades of the district school had afforded her? Millersville's catalogues were not heartening. Every catalogue from 1880-1885 read the same: "Students with a fair knowledge of the branches of study named in the Preparatory Course (Orthography, Reading and Elocution, Writing and Drawing, Mental and Written Arithmetic, Political and Physical Geography, Grammar and Composition, and Vocal Music) can enter this course (Elementary) and graduate in two years." The requirement seemed prohibitive to Elizabeth. Besides none of her family felt at all sure that a state normal school was the school for her, for was she not of such religious background as might not fit easily into the irreligious(?) pattern of a state school.

Exactly how the problem was resolved is conjectural, but the Thirty-Fourth Annual Catalogue and Circular of the Pennsylvania State Normal School lists Lizzie Myer, Bareville, among the juniors in 1885-86, and the Thirty-Fifth Annual Catalogue lists Elizabeth Myer, Bareville, among the seniors in 1886-87. She was a candidate for the

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

degree of 'Bachelor of the Elements'. During her first year her scholastic achievements were superior.

It was November, 1886, during her senior year that circumstances played both against and for her. During a visit to her home, she attended a protracted meeting at the Conestoga church and there "came under conviction." Rather suddenly she decided to join the German Baptist Brethren Church.

There were those who urged that she delay her joining the church until after the school year, but as she told her family then, becoming a Christian was more important to her than becoming a teacher. She was baptized in November, 1886, she "turned plain", and in so doing faced the distressing possibility of not being allowed to continue her work on the normal school campus. For decades, there had been agitation throughout the state against a teacher's wearing a garb in the schoolroom; school boards generally opposed 'plain dress'; no person 'in plain dress' had ever sought to enroll at a state normal school, for no "plain" person could teach in the Pennsylvania public schools at that time. Elizabeth was convinced that she would have to leave college. Within a few days after her baptism, she notified the office of her intention to leave school; but it was within a few hours that the much respected Dr. B. F. Shaub, principal of the Normal School from 1883 to 1887, heard of her intention and called her to a conference with him. History was made in his decision during that conference. From Miss Myer's own account he said in effect: "Your scholarly attainments at this school have won the esteem of all of us. I shall, therefore, recommend to the faculty that you be allowed to continue your work at this place and I shall see to it that you have every opportunity to live out your convictions." He added, however, that, whereas he could assure her of unprejudiced treatment on the campus, there would still remain the problem of her getting a teaching job in the districts of Pennsylvania when she left the campus. She finished her senior year regularly and in so doing became the first 'plain' woman ever to be graduated from a state normal school.

Elizabeth Gibbel McCann attended the commencement on July 7, 1887, at which Miss Myer received her diploma. Said Mrs. McCann, "It was a moment I'll never forget. No one knew what the audience reaction might be. When Elizabeth, dressed in a pearl gray simple dress with a rose bud on her bosom and her prayer veil covering her soft hair, began her salutation's address, a holy quiet fell over the audience and prevailed throughout her speech". 'Her address was good', said Mrs. McCann, "but it was the simple, direct, sincere manner of this plain woman to be graduated that held the audience spellbound." Dr. Shaub was right. The innovation had met with success, even though the Garb Law (1895-June 27) (PL 395-S.L. Sec. 4801) still stands on our statute books.

Immediately after receiving her degree from the State Normal School, she was elected to the assistant principalship of Manheim High School, but because of a prolonged illness was unable to carry out her contract that fall. However, after her recovery, she taught for 14 years in the Lancaster County public schools in Upper Leacock, Leacock, Earl, East Hempfield, and Warwick townships. She enjoyed outstanding success as teacher and disciplinarian. It was almost the turn of the century, when her reputation as a disciplinarian

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

reached a high point. The Voganville school, three miles northeast of Bareville, was a notoriously difficult one; several teachers had been both figuratively and literally thrown out of their jobs there by the somewhat over-sized, under-disciplined boys. The directors of Earl Township heard of Miss Myer, whom they virtually conscripted to teach in that school. She accepted the challenge. When the first day of school arrived, as was their practice, a dozen older boys of the community lined the steps leading to the school door, waiting for the new little teacher to arrive. Her ‘Good morning, gentlemen’, her poise in a tense situation, her prayer to know just what to do at the moment, and her genuine interest in being of service, all these, she believed, helped her through that door on that opening morning and into the hearts of those rural children and parents during the following days. Her courtesy earned the gratitude of a people who like many others have said she was a teacher second to none.

It is on the school ground surrounding the Myer schoolhouse, still in use, that eight stalwart maple trees, which she as teacher planted there some 70 years ago still stand. Tourists pause to admire their beauty and children continue to play in the shade of their branching arms, a pleasure that has survived because of the generous spirit of her who knew how to teach over and above the call of duty.

Miss Myer’s life during the succeeding years and almost until her death in 1924 is tied closely to the founding and early growth of Elizabethtown College, for she was with the school from its inception.¹

The Pennsylvanian Garb Law cast an uncertain future on Elizabeth Myer’s intended occupation as it prevented teachers from wearing religious garb in state public schools.² In 1899, a group of members of the Church of the Brethren asked her to become the first full-time faculty member at their new, private academy that would be called Elizabethtown College for a salary of forty-five dollars a month.³ In 1901, Elizabethtown College had a faculty of six with Elizabeth Myer being among them. She taught education and English courses.⁴ In the first published College catalog from 1900, Elizabeth Myer is listed as a “Teacher of Mathematics, Elocution, and English.”⁵

In 1900, Elizabeth Myer was placed on a committee on “catalog, textbooks, printing, and stationary.” This committee, made up of G.N. Falkenstein, Jesse C. Ziegler, I.N.H. Beahm, and Elizabeth Myer was also tasked to set the time of the first day of classes and prepare the opening

¹ Church of the Brethren, *History of the Church of the Brethren of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania* (Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 1915), 320–22. <https://archive.org/details/historybretheast00edis/page/322/mode/2up>.

² Steven Nolt and Jean-Paul Benowitz, “PLAIN DRESS in the DOCKET: LILLIAN RISSER, the PENNSYLVANIA GARB LAW, and the FREE EXERCISE of ANABAPTIST RELIGION, 1908–1910,” accessed June 12, 2024. <https://www.etown.edu/programs/honors/files/Garb%20Law%20Article.pdf>.

³ Ralph Schlosser, *History of Elizabethtown College 1899 - 1970*. (Lebanon, PA: Sowers Printing Company, 1971), 33.; 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) 629.

⁴⁴ Richard Kerwin MacMaster. *Elizabethtown: The First Three Centuries* (Morgantown, PA: Mastof Press, 1999), 169.

⁵ Schlosser, 41.

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

day program.⁶ Elizabeth Myer spoke at the dedication of Alpha Hall on March 4, 1901. She gave an address on “The Practical Side of Our Educational Life.”⁷ Elizabethtown College’s beginnings were largely centered around the preparation of teachers and the Board of Trustees felt the need to have a Model School on campus to provide prospective teachers with actual teaching experience. The Board of Trustees voted to open the Model School by September, 1901, and they selected Elizabeth Myer to be the Superintendent of the Model School on July 17, 1901. “She was relieved of this office on December 2, 1901, and M. Alverda Stayer was named Assistant Director of the Model School. Three children of G.N. Falkenstein, together with other children from the town, were enrolled. According to the Faculty roster for 1904-1905 the Model School was discontinued.”⁸

Our College Times ran issues from March 4, 1904 to July 1922. Elizabeth Myer served as an Associate Editor. The goal of the new paper was to serve as a “common medium through which friends of the College will keep in touch with the work and with each other.”⁹ In an event in celebration of the accreditation of the college, Elizabeth Myer gave an address during it on December 22, 1921.¹⁰ In the early days of the college there were two literary societies: The Keystone Literary Society and the Homeric Literary Society. With an increasing college enrollment, it was suggested that the Keystone Literary Society be split into two separate societies. On October 4, 1920, it was split into the Franklin-Keystone Literary Society and the Penn-Keystone Literary Society. Elizabeth Myer was appointed by the faculty as the advisor to the Franklin-Keystone society.¹¹

Below is an excerpt from Elizabeth Myer’s “History of Elizabethtown College” about the first few months of the founding of the College:

“It might be well to say right here that at the time of the opening, the Principal, Prof. I.N.H. Beahm, now President of our College was confined to his bed with nervous prostration, and Prof. G.N. Falkenstein was obliged to perform the duties of Principal and teach besides. Those of you who have been pioneers in any kind of work can imagine the arduous duties and discouraging conditions which Prof. Falkenstein and his corps of workers were obliged to meet perseveringly.”¹²

Elizabeth Myer was born Jun 7, 1863, and died on May 19, 1924 at age 60 in Lancaster County Pennsylvania. Her parents were Reverend Samuel Rohrer Myer (1833-1876) and Amanda Evans Myer (1837-1919).

Less than two months after Ober’s acceptance of the presidency, on May 19, 1924, Elizabeth Myer died. At this time, she was the only member of the original faculty still teaching.¹³

In the 1925 issue of the Etonian following Elizabeth Myer’s death, is a memoriam article which reads:

⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁹ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰ Ibid., 104.

¹¹ Ibid., 109.

¹² Ibid., 43.

¹³ Ibid., 97.

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

“Miss Elizabeth Myer departed this life on May 19, 1924. In the occasion of her death Elizabethtown College lost the oldest teacher on the staff, the only one who had continuously served the school from the time of its founding. She died at the home of Mrs. John Heilman, 724 North Lime Street, Lancaster, Pa. Mrs. Heilman (nee Lydia Buckwalter) was one of the first lady students of the college with whom miss Myer formed an abiding friendship. The depth of this friendship can be most vividly seen in the fact that Miss Myer was so kindly invited to spend her closing days of illness in her comfortable home. The funeral service was held at her old home church at Bareville in charge of Elders S. H. Hertzler, H.K Ober and J.G Myer, who based their remarks on John 11:25. She was quietly laid to rest in the old Myer burial ground near Bareville. Miss Myer was born at Bareville in 1863. She grew up with seven other brothers and sisters. She attended the public schools of Lancaster County near her home. She later attended Millersville State Normal School and was the first Church of the Brethren lady graduate of that institution in 1889. Later she taught in the public schools. When Elizabethtown College was founded in 1900 the Board of Trustees selected her to become the first lady teacher and preceptress of the institution. She had a clear conception of the ideals which lived in the minds of the founders of the college and as a greater Elizabethtown College developed she was ever solicitous that these first principles should not be lost. Her life as a teacher was radiating life for she had friends in all parts of the country. Her life had gone out into the lives of others. She was an ideal teacher in the classroom. She demanded thorough work from her pupils. She was very earnest and sincere. As a hall teacher or preceptress she was concerned about the welfare of the girls and her heart followed them wherever they went. She was not a mother but possessed strong motherly instincts, Her general attitude demanded one’s confidence. She was just and conscientious. She was charitable for her hand was always ready to give. As a Christian woman she stood for the highest ideals. She had a remarkable zeal for truth and deep devotion. Her Christian womanhood was radiant in the classroom. Underlying her teachings was a deep conscientiousness and a firm conviction. She was a strong believer in prayer and the long-forgotten arts of meditation and fasting were not absent from her Christian experiences. She was wholehearted and self-sacrificing in her service to the church she so deeply loved. She had built her life into the warp and woof of many who had been her students. She has carried her life into the hearts of boys and girls who have now gone out into the world as her monuments. She bore her lingering illness with courage and contentment. She expressed a hope that her life may have counted for something in this world and that those who came within her personal influence may have had the path of life made clearer. Those who knew her best sincerely testify that her life was not in vain. Her last expression was that her friends were so kind to her and hoped that she might meet them all in heaven. True-hearted, whole-hearted, loyal, and faithful do we think of her now since she has gone to be with her Lord with whom she walked so closely in this life. “When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, What a glory He sheds

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

on our way! While we do His good will, He abides with us still, And with all who will trust and obey.¹⁴”

Ground was broken for Elizabeth Myer Hall in July 1955 with building being completed in 1956. The first students moved into the women’s dormitory in 1957.¹⁵ On May 11, 1957, Myer Hall was dedicated. “At the time the building had not been named, but on May 13, 1961, the Board of Trustees voted to name the dormitory with its modern kitchen and commodious dining room, The Elizabethtown Myer Residence Hall for Women.¹⁶ The person on whom this honor was conferred was a teacher from the very beginning of the College in 1900 to the time of her death in 1924. Her noble ideals and her magnetic influence in the classroom stamped themselves upon the spirit of the College, and thus she rightly deserved the recognition given her in the naming of this building.”¹⁷

Bibliography

Benowitz, Jean-Paul. *Elizabethtown College: The Campus History Series*. Charleston, S. C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2014.

_____. *Elizabethtown: Images of America*. Charleston, S. C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2015.

Bowman, Carl F. *Brethren Society: The Transformation of A Peculiar People*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Durnbaugh, Donald F. ed., *Brethren Encyclopedia* 4 vols. Philadelphia, PA: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc. 1983-2005.

_____. *Fruit of the Vine: A History of the Brethren, 1708-1995*. Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1997.

Falkenstein, George N. *The Organization and the Early History of Elizabethtown College*. Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown College, 1937.

History of the Church of the Brethren of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania: By The Committee Appointed by District Conference. Lancaster: PA: Press of the New Era Printing Company, 1915.

¹⁴ “Elizabeth Myer,” Find a Grave, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/99640075/elizabeth-myer#view-photo=191102651>.

¹⁵ MacMaster, 248.

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Benowitz, and Peter J DePuydt, *Elizabethtown College*. (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 56.

¹⁷ Schlosser, 199.

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

History of the Church of the Brethren of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 1915-1965.
Lancaster: PA: Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 1965.

MacMaster, Richard K. *Elizabethtown: The First Three Centuries*. Elizabethtown, PA:
Elizabethtown Historical Society, 1999.

Schlosser, Ralph W. *History of Elizabethtown College: 1899-1970*. Elizabethtown, PA:
Elizabethtown College, 1971.

Williamson, Chet. *Uniting Work and Spirit: A Centennial History of Elizabethtown College*.
Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown College, 2001.