

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 and Shawn Gipe Class of 2027
Jean-Paul Benowitz, Director of Prestigious Scholarships and Fellowships and Public Heritage Studies



Elmer L. Esbenshade (1881 – 1967)

Frances E. Esbenshade (1885 – 1959)

Born near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on August 27, 1881, Elmer L. Espenshade was a man who donated to various significant charities throughout his life.¹ He was said to possess “A friendly, personal warmth marked by candor, mental alertness and business acumen. His desire to help worthy social endeavors remained firm and deeply imbedded in his personality.”² Espenshade was a descendant of a German farmer who settled in Lancaster County and decided to invest his funds in rich farmlands. During his childhood, Elmer Espenshade attended the Mennonite Church and spent eight years in a one room rural school. Due to his father's farmland investing, Elmer Espenshade inherited 212 acres of farmland and was successful in implementing modern farming practices.³ Espenshade was proud of his heritage and ensured that his property's cleanliness was always kept. On the 212 acres of land, he erected various buildings, leased properties, and even operated an airport. With the money he gained, Espenshade engaged in several philanthropic ventures, some of which included making donations to institutions such as the Moody Bible Institute, Princeton Theological Seminary, Wheaton College, Juniata College, Messiah College,

¹ Ralph Schlosser, *History of Elizabethtown College 1899 - 1970*. (Lebanon, PA: Sowers Printing Company, 1971), 338.

² Ibid., 340.

³ Ibid., 339.

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Franklin & Marshall College, Eastern Mennonite College, and Elizabethtown College.⁴ Espenshade was also said to be a generous supporter of the American Bible Society and the Board of Missions of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States.⁵

During a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees on January 15, 1962, President McAuley asserted that a classroom building should be erected. The Board of Trustees quickly hired an architect to start preparing drawings of the building, containing classrooms, seminar rooms, office suites, and a large lecture room.⁶ After a grant of \$387,750 was secured from the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency on June 22, 1965, and Elmer L. Espenshade from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, made a large donation, the erection of the new classroom building started to progress. On September 9th of the same year, groundbreaking ceremonies were held.⁷

On April 25, 1964, the Board of Trustees moved to name the new building Espenshade Hall in respect to the great donation Elmer L. Espenshade made and for his care of Christian Education.⁸ Additionally, the Board of Trustees further honored Espenshade by having him turn the first spade full of earth on September 9, 1965.⁹ The building was finished during the summer of 1966, and Espenshade Hall was officially dedicated on May 13, 1967.¹⁰



The hall itself is three stories with air conditioning, eighteen general-purpose classrooms, thirty-three faculty offices arranged in suites, seminar rooms, an auditorium for lectures with 234 seats, technical apparatus, and laboratories for modern languages, physics, earth science and technology. In total, the cost of the building amounted to \$818,161.¹¹ Unfortunately, just two months before the dedication of the building named after him, Elmer L. Espenshade passed away on March 9, 1967, at his desk. A plaque found in Espenshade Hall which reads:

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 256.

⁷ Ibid., 257.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 339.

¹⁰ Ibid., 257.; Jean-Paul Benowitz, Peter J. DePuydt, *Elizabethtown College* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 27.

¹¹ Ibid.

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Esbenshade Classroom Building
ELMER L. ESBENSHADE
has generously given for the
construction of this classroom
building in memory of his wife
FRANCES E. ESBENSHADE
and their interest in Youth
and Christian Higher Education

If not for Elmer L. Espenshade's untimely death, he would have assuredly been at the dedication for his building, as he had already prepared a statement for that day:

"My wife, Frances, and I believe that every normal youth, regardless of race, creed, or color, ought to prepare themselves for life by securing an education that will qualify them for some worthwhile vocation.

Our communities and the world community at large are in need of individuals who will apply their God-given abilities, and in so doing will influence not only their own destiny, but also serve the interests and welfare of human kind.

*We firmly believe in the American way of life, its goals and aspirations for excellence and reliability, and the development of enterprising individuals who through knowledge and experience will cherish freedom, morality, and Christian character such as Elizabethtown College fosters."*¹²

Elmer L. Espenshade was an Honorary member to the Board of Trustees of Elizabethtown College and served as Co-Chairman of the Pathway of Fulfillment program.¹³ In relation to Pathway of Fulfillment program, a three-year fundraising program to raise money for new buildings, a convocation was arranged on April 10, 1964, and 13, 1964, to launch the program. As the National Honorary Chairman, Elmer L. Espenshade was part of the organization for the financial drive.¹⁴ This financial drive was no doubt successful, since on May 16, 1966, James L.M. Yeingst said that Trustee David C. Stambaugh (the National Chairman) had told him:

"As of today, counting cash and pledges from all sources the Pathway to Fulfillment program has realized a total of \$1,465,276.64, an amount considerably above the initial goal of \$1,250,000. This total includes those monies we had available for Pathway projects at the start of our formal campaign more than two



¹² Ibid., 340.

¹³ Ibid., 339.

¹⁴ Ibid., 245.

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years ago, receipts from our Annual Giving Funds during the period of the campaign, and funds given or pledged in the various area campaign for capital gifts. We have taken that important first step; we have made a splendid start along our Pathway to Fulfillment. Our continuing challenge now is to maintain our momentum."¹⁵

The *Campus Call* of Elizabethtown College, in August 1967, describes Elmer L. Espenshade's donations specifically made to the College:

"Mr. Esbenshade's interest in Elizabethtown College includes gifts and annuities totalling approximately \$265,000. More specifically he provided \$185,000 in annuities, some at reduced rates of interest. On occasion he endorsed the interest checks and returned them to the College. He contributed more than \$25,000 in cash gifts.

He donated some \$50,000 worth of bonds to the College for the establishment of the Elmer L. and Frances E. Esbenshade Scholarship Aid Fund, which is providing assistance for deserving students from Lancaster County."¹⁶

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¹⁵ Ibid., 246.

¹⁶ Ibid., 339.

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