When news of a contract to purchase Shadow Lawn appeared in the Asbury Park Evening Press, Monmouth Junior College students were elated. Dean Schlaefer was serenaded with, “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow,” as he emerged from the administration building at 422 Westwood Avenue.

“I remember that rainy night on February 5th,” wrote Dean Schlaefer’s son Robert ‘60. “We were ‘scattered about’ the house on Liberty Street as usual. I am guessing that Mom called us to the living room. Pop was sitting on the couch kind of slouched down and looking worn out, but happy…Monmouth Junior College had obtained an option to buy Shadow Lawn! I remember feeling awed and proud of Pop. All of us knew something big had happened to Monmouth but also to us as a family.”

Schlaefer’s daughter, Nancy Schlaefer Bruch ’58, also remembers that “certain February day that year was the happiest day of Dad’s life. That was the day he could announce to the world that his beloved college had acquired a campus of its own, a campus with an imposing main building and enough auxiliary buildings to meet the college’s needs for the present.”

MJC students were cheering in Long Branch, but at the nearby Highland Manor campus in West Long Branch, Dr. Eugene Lehman was furious.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

In a letter written to the Monmouth Junior College Board of Trustees shortly after the announcement, Lehman fumed that in going public with details of the Shadow Lawn contract, Schlaefer had betrayed years of secret planning between the two men. Both life-long educators were strong-willed and passionate about preserving the dignity of his respective school.

Lehman was 77 years old when the controversy erupted. Without a substantial endowment, Lehman had earlier come to realize his Highland Manor School and Junior College would prob-
ably not long survive him. His best hope for a lasting legacy, he believed, was to affect a spiritual – if not legal – union between the Highland Manor Junior College and Monmouth Junior College.

Lehman, who had run the school since 1928, knew there were near-term issues to resolve so his current crop of students could graduate properly.

Once news of the Shadow Lawn sale was public, the faculty, staff and students quickly evaporated in search of stability. The rapid deterioration of conditions for Highland Manor bumped the originally scheduled purchase date of Shadow Lawn from July 1, 1957 to July 1, 1956.

"Just prior to this date [July 2, 1956], the Highland Manor Junior College had only one student and enrollment in the lower grades had been greatly reduced," reads the History of the Acquisition of Shadow Lawn and Beechwood Manor penned by Bill Smith, Milton Cranmer and Walt Withey.

In his letter to the Board, Lehman argued that the announcement of the sale had caused the dire circumstances at Highland Manor, rather than the opposite position taken by Smith, Cranmer and Withey, that the sale of Shadow Lawn was predicated by steadily declining enrollment at Highland Manor Junior College. Lehman’s letter also sets forth his unique position in the transaction.

On the one hand, as the President of Highland Manor School, he had an obligation to seek maximum profit for Shadow Lawn. On the other hand, as the incoming President of Monmouth College, he was charged with purchasing the property for as little money as possible. Lehman described himself as both an ethically motivated seller and principled purchaser in the transaction.

Lehman negotiated a sales price of $350,000, and payments of $2,500 per year for ten years, for a total of $375,000.

"Newcomers felt especially grateful to the Lehmans, who had sold the prop-
erty for substantially less than other offers," wrote former faculty member Margaret G. Juckett '75, in the 1984 Shadows Yearbook.

Another condition of the Shadow Lawn purchase was to name Eugene Lehman as the first president of Monmouth College. Edward Schlaefer, founding dean of Monmouth Junior College, served as executive vice president. The unusual arrangement did little to ease tensions between the two men.

Lehman was no stranger to conflict. Although by all accounts a brilliant scholar and gifted orator, distinct patterns of interpersonal behavior emerge over his long and varied career. In 1912 Henry Morgenthau, Sr., who was later U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during World War I, accused Lehman of disloyalty to Rabbi Stephen Wise of the Free Synagogue.

As the mayor of Tarrytown, NY in the early 1930s, Lehman ran on a platform of reform, but was ousted two years later. Even in 1958, writing to the New York Times as president emeritus of Monmouth College, he generated controversy suggesting northern schools didn’t possess the moral authority to criticize segregation in the South.

With the move in 1956, Lehman remained on his home turf, and Schlaefer was the now interloper. Lehman had occupied Shadow Lawn since 1942 and been the head of a Junior College since 1928, after establishing a boarding school in 1920. At 78, Lehman was Monmouth College’s first president and remained a powerful personality.

Monmouth Junior College’s founding dean and head since 1933, but technically, Monmouth College’s second president.

**FIRST FOUR-YEAR DEGREES**

Monmouth’s first class of baccalaureates graduated June 7, 1958. According to the June 4, 1958 Outlook, the class included "65 candidates for the bachelor of arts and bachelor of science degrees, the first four-year graduates in Monmouth College’s history.”

Among the members of the historic class were Schlaefer’s daughter, Nancy Schlaefer Bruch, and Long Branch Commissioner of Public Safety Rocco N. “Rocky” Bonforte. Bonforte was the subject of local media interest, partly because he was a non-traditional student, and partly for his strong public advocacy of the importance of higher education.

Bonforte, a 47 year-old father of two, took on a full academic load while directing the Long Branch police and fire departments, and keeping active
Eugene H. Lehman

The first president of Monmouth College, Dr. Eugene Heittier Lehman, was a man of contradictions. He left a legacy of outstanding achievement, and very human failings. A graduate and later a faculty member of Yale, Lehman was a religious scholar and the author or co-author of several textbooks. Lehman was also an early environmentalist, and a pioneer in the 20th century American outdoor camping movement.

“He was a strong personality,” his son Godfrey said in a 1998 interview. “I developed my own personality to get away from his...I couldn’t live with his very dominating personality.”

Lehman attended the University of Colorado for one year before transferring to Yale as a sophomore in 1899. “He wasn’t the first Jew at Yale, but if you were Jewish and went there, your grades had to be very good,” said his oldest son, Eugene Lehman, in a 1998 interview. At Yale, Lehman distinguished himself as an intercollegiate debater, winning the Ten Eyck, De Forest and Townsend prizes. He was also a member of the freshman baseball team.

In 1903, Munsey’s Magazine hailed Lehman as America’s first Rhodes Scholar. But a New York Times article dated February 4, 1903 sheds more light on the situation, explaining that the scholarship announcement was “premature.” Despite a 1904 certificate from Oxford University exempting him from further examinations, Lehman never attended Oxford.

“A reference from Yale in 1906 noted that he was beyond the age limit,” wrote Chris Woodka in a 1998 article about Lehman published in The Pueblo Chieftain.

Lehman traveled to Europe, obtaining a scholarship to the University of Berlin. In 1910 he returned to the States and earned his master’s degree from Yale.

Already a prizewinning orator who exuded confidence and strong opinions, Lehman gave religious lectures around New York City, took postgraduate courses at both Columbia and Yale and worked for Rabbi Steven Wise at the Free Synagogue. The rabbi, for whom the Free Synagogue is now named, introduced Lehman to his first wife, Madeline Davidsburg. Lehman and Davidsburg married secretly in 1912.

At the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Lehman studied and taught English literature. He was expelled after openly criticizing fellow students and faculty members for their hypocrisy. This experience would establish a pattern of behavior he followed during much of his career.

With his first wife Madeline and her sister Estelle, Lehman ran a nature camp for girls in New York City’s Central Park and then the Highland Nature Camp for Girls on a 75-acre site at Lake Sebago in southern Maine. Lehman, who always had a love of the outdoors and camping, was its director.

But education was where he always seemed to return. In 1915 Lehman was named co-owner of the Lehman-Leete School for Girls in New York City, a country day school Lehman later moved to Tarrytown and renamed the Highland Manor Boarding School for Girls in 1920.

It became Highland Manor Junior College in 1928, the first school of its kind in New York State. Three years later he was elected mayor of Tarrytown at the age of 53, an honor that was soured by the death of his wife on December 1 the same year. Lehman was defeated in the next election two years later.

The 1930s proved to be a turning point for Lehman. In 1938 he married his second wife, Elizabeth Novitzky Meyer. The same year he was named president of the Westchester Branch of the Hudson River Conservation Society.

All the while, Lehman’s Highland Manor school prospered, educating such notables as Lauren Bacall, née Betty Joan Perske. In her 2005 book, By Myself and Then Some, Bacall recounts dancing and performing during her last year at Highland Manor, when it was still located in Tarrytown, NY.

In 1942 Lehman moved the Highland Manor School and Junior College to the Shadow Lawn Estate in West Long Branch. In West Long Branch Revisited Helen Pike notes the greater Long Branch area had a growing German-Jewish population that was both religiously and culturally vibrant.

“One night, after they wined and dined my father,” remembered Lehman’s son Eugene, “they asked him, ‘Oh, would you like to make an offer?’”

“He had gone there to make a ridiculously low offer of $200,000. But in front of all those people, he said ‘$100,000.’ He was surprised when they shook his hand and accepted it,” Eugene recalled.

Highland Manor and Junior College operated on the Shadow Lawn Estate for the next 14 years, until 1956 when Monmouth Junior College, running out of room in the Long Branch High School, came calling. Lehman sold the property with the stipulation that he become the college’s first president.

Lehman died August 21, 1972, at Monmouth Medical Center in Long Branch. He was 94. His daughter, Carol, was quoted as saying at his funeral, “Sometimes we failed one another deeply, but he loved me...He was a unique force upon the earth. He lived to a fine old age with vitality, humor and devastating charm...He lived with his own brand of strength, courage and idealism.”
Welcome to Monmouth College

With the move to Shadow Lawn announced and accreditation to award bachelor’s degrees on the horizon, students and administrators were keenly aware that Monmouth Junior College was about to change dramatically. An editorial in the May 5, 1955 issue of The Outlook called for help in the transformation.

“The time has come to think of a new name for Monmouth Junior College. The editorial board of The Outlook wishes the cooperation of all students so that it may suggest to the college administration and board of trustees names that will be best suited to the new college!”

The editors suggested a number of new names, cheerfully observing, “There is a Monmouth College in Illinois.” The new name “should capture public imagination in our area and elsewhere; a new name should be easily remembered, and expressive of the kind of college we want Monmouth to be.” Alternative naming possibilities included:

- Monmouth Community College
- Monmouth College of New Jersey
- College of the Atlantic
- Garden College
- Monmouth Institute
- College of Monmouth
- Jersey Shore College
- College of the Garden State
- New Jersey College
- Atlantic College
- College of the Jersey Shore
- College of the Garden State

Several of the suggestions have since been adopted by other schools. The name Atlantic College was taken in 1962 by an organization based in Wales, UK, while a College of the Atlantic was founded in Bar Harbor, ME in 1969.

In retrospect, Monmouth College seems the least likely of all choices, especially because the Illinois-based Monmouth College had already been using the name for more than 100 years in 1956.

Founded in 1853 by Presbyterian pioneers, Monmouth College of Illinois is a nationally ranked liberal arts college affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). One of the first colleges to treat women and men equally, Monmouth today has an enrollment of about 1,350 undergraduate students, with neither graduate nor professional schools.

Even the name Monmouth University has a prior claimant. Western Oregon University was originally founded as Monmouth University on Jan. 18, 1856, seven years after the Territorial Government of Oregon was established in 1849.

The antebellum Monmouth University shared space with a congregation in a 20x30 foot building. In 1856, Monmouth University merged with nearby Bethel College, and changed its name to Christian College. The school, which has had several more name-changes since, celebrated its 150th birthday in 2006.

Older still is the UK-based Monmouth School, a public school for boys in southeast Wales. Founded by William Jones under King James I in 1614, the school is administered under trust of the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers, one of 108 Livery Companies, or trade associations, based in the City of London.

in the local Amerigo Vespucci Society, Knights of Columbus, first aid squad and Police Athletic League. Despite the hectic schedule Bonforte was named to Lambda Sigma Tau, the leadership society of Monmouth College.

With the acquisition of the Shadow Lawn campus and the ability to confer bachelor’s degrees, Monmouth had turned a major corner. Marking its first quarter century in 1958, the school had come a long way in a short time from the confines of the Long Branch High School.

But rapid growth meant change, and before the year was out, the campus would hear what The Outlook described on December 11, 1958 as “the roar of growing pains.” MU