

## Belmont Mansion In Restoration And Research

In its first years the priorities of the new Belmont College were directed towards developing an educational institution which meant that only limited funds were available for the maintenance of Belmont Mansion and the tower. Belmont College continued to use the mansion for numerous social functions, but with the passage of time the mansion and tower were increasingly in need of renovation. Except for a room for the college librarian on the upstairs level during the first school year, the entire second floor of the mansion was left in a serious state of disrepair. But fortunately the beginning of the 1970's witnessed a surge of interest in the historic Belmont properties.

Through the efforts of Dr. Albert W. Wardin, Jr., professor of history at Belmont College, Belmont Mansion was placed in 1971 on the National Register of Historic Places. When Wardin became chairman of a newly formed faculty committee, the Heritage Committee, he recommended to its members the formation of a historic organization for renovating and furnishing the mansion. Mr. John W. Kiser, professor of art and a member of the committee, suggested the name, "Historic Belmont Association," for the proposed organization. On October 23, 1972, over seventy people gathered at Belmont College and formed the association with Wardin as president *pro tem*. Succeeding presidents have been Dr. Benjamin H. Caldwell, Jr., (1973-75), Mr. John W. Kiser (1975-77), Mrs. Edward C. Kennedy (1977-80), and Mrs. William L. Jones (1980- ).

The association has sought to raise funds through its memberships, tours of the mansion, donations, and various fund-raising efforts. Activities to gain funds have included an annual tour of homes (started in 1974), "Christmas at Belmont," an open house when the mansion is decorated for a Victorian Christmas (begun in 1974), an annual fashion show, and sales from its Victorian shop. By 1980 the association had invested \$142,969.29, which included \$44,000.00 in government grants, in the restoration of the mansion and \$12,377.53 in furnishings. The most notable project was renovating the entire roof. The association has received as gifts a number of pieces of furniture and other items for the home. In 1976 the mansion was opened on a regular basis for conducted tours. Students of the college formed in 1973 a Student Auxiliary, which has provided outstanding support for "Christmas at Belmont," guide service, and restoration work. The first three presidents of the auxiliary, serving from 1973 to 1977, were Kathy Rutherford, David Agee, and Mark E. Brown. The Historic Belmont Association has at present over 1,000 members. With its engagement in 1981 of its first full-time director, the organization has come to full professional status.

The restoration of the historic Belmont properties was greatly furthered by two gifts of \$25,000 each to Belmont College. Mr. and Mrs. Charles G. Hitner in 1971 gave their funds for renovation of the tower, which included the incorporation in its base of a prayer chapel which was dedicated in November, 1974. Mr. and Mrs. Edward C. Kennedy contributed their gift in 1972 for the restoration of an upstairs master bedroom, completed in 1975. Two brothers, Bernard and Vernard Barkley, gave to the college in 1972 the smaller iron gates of the Belmont estate, which had stood for a number of years at the entrance of the Stephen Foster Apartments. The gates were placed at the entrance of the college at the end of Acklen Avenue. The larger gates, which were given by the president of the Belmont Land Company to Walter Stokes, Sr., remain at the home of Walter Stokes, Jr.

Before the formation of the Historic Belmont Association, the mansion possessed a number of original Acklen items. They included three pieces of statuary, *Ruth Gleaning*, the *Sleeping Children*, and *Rebecca at the Well* (the last two statues returned by Mrs. Pauline Lockett Kaiser), a Victorian library table, chandeliers, and two mirrors—one in the front hall and the other in the central parlor. Through the generosity of Mrs. Jeanette Noel, the mansion received additional Acklen pieces including a Victorian library table which matched the other table, a Victorian Renaissance sofa, a large gold-leaf picture frame (now a mirror in the grand salon), and after the association's formation a French mantel clock and a wardrobe for the master bedroom. The association bought and restored a large mirror with a marble base, belonging to the Acklens, now in the grand salon. On the property itself are still the marble fountain, gazebos, various pieces of statuary, and hitching posts.

Historical studies on Belmont Mansion started also in the early 1970's with the appearance in the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Winter, 1971, of three outstanding articles on Belmont. One was on the mansion and *Adelicia* by Eleanor Graham; a second was on the statuary by Jacqueline Simone Innes; and a third was on Ward-Belmont College by three alumnae of that school. In the same publication in 1979, "Scion of Belmont," the memoirs of William Acklen (or Ackland), edited by John W. Kiser, appeared as well as an interpretive article on Adolphus Heiman, with an analysis of Belmont Mansion, by James Patrick. On the initiative of the association, Henry Judd of the National Park Service undertook an independent survey of the home, making remarkable discoveries which resulted in an outstanding article by Clara Hieronymus, "Belmont's Hidden Assets," which appeared in the *Tennessean*, January 28, 1973. Patrick made another survey in 1980.

## Belmont Mansion In Art, Literature, And Music

The classic beauty of Belmont Mansion, together with its tower and grounds, has often appeared in paintings or sketches. About 1860 an unknown artist painted in oil a rather romanticized landscape of the mansion and its grounds. For many years the painting remained in the home of Pauline Acklen Lockett of Washington but later was acquired by an art collector, Max Tendler. After his death, his wife donated the picture in his memory to the Tennessee Fine Arts Center at Cheekwood where on May 7, 1978, it was publicly shown. The most notable artist of Belmont has been John W. Kiser who has frequently painted the mansion and its grounds in watercolor. Don Fields produced a pen and ink sketch which has been distributed by the Belmont College Alumni Association. Max Hochstetler painted Belmont Mansion in his murals at the entrance of the Tennessee Ballroom of the Opryland Hotel in Nashville. Sketches of the mansion have appeared not surprisingly on Christmas cards and note stationery.

The popular Nashville writer and historian, Alfred Leland Crabb, portrayed Belmont in one of his historical novels, *Dinner at Belmont*, which appeared in 1942. The story was closely interwoven with Nashville in the period around the Civil War and featured, among others, the Acklens and William Walker who had dinner at Belmont. In the celebration of its fiftieth anniversary in 1981, the Nashville Academy Theater commissioned a play by Kenneth Robbins, *Dinner at Belmont*, based on the novel. Literary interest in Belmont and the Acklens continues with the efforts of Joyce Blaylock in writing a historical romance, *Adelicia*, scheduled to appear in the 1980's.

Belmont Mansion has also inspired music. Tupper Saussy composed in 1968 a piano concerto, *Hausgeists*, whose first movement made some attempt to gain an impression of "The Acklen House." The Nashville Symphony gave the premier performance in January, 1969.

