

ADELICIA ACKLEN: *Beyond the "Belmont" Legend and Lore*

BY BRENDA JACKSON-ABERNATHY

Adelicia Acklen. To many Tennesseans, the name is a familiar one, though they may not know why. Some may recall traveling the Nashville city streets that bear her name, or be familiar with the large Italian Villa-style mansion at the center of the Belmont University campus that was once her home. Others may know the stories casting Acklen as Nashville's own Scarlett O'Hara during the Civil War, but beyond the landmarks and legends, most know very little of this woman and the role she played in Nashville and Civil War history.

Adelicia Acklen's relative anonymity is curious until a concerted search for documents, records, and other "verifiable evidence" of her life and activities is launched. Common sense would suggest the existence of plentiful records left by the woman who built the Belmont Mansion and owned its surrounding acreage, as well as nearly ten thousand acres of agricultural land in Louisiana, and other assorted parcels in vari-

ous southern states. Certainly deeds, bills of sale, receipts, and the accompanying correspondence necessary to conduct business and maintain properties and estates as extensive as these were carefully preserved during Acklen's lifetime, and neatly tucked away in well-organized and accessible archival collections after her death. That scenario is reasonable, and makes sense, but the fact is, this cache of personal papers and documents of which historians and researchers dream no longer exists, or if it does, has not come to light. The possibilities of just what happened to Adelicia Acklen's personal papers are numerous—perhaps, Acklen purged her personal files over the years; perhaps, following her death her children disposed of paperwork for which they saw no practical need; perhaps, as Belmont passed into the hands of others, documents and papers in which they had no interest were simply destroyed. Whatever the case, Acklen's surviving personal papers are few, housed in collections scattered across the country, and

One of the wealthiest women in the United States from the 1840s until her death in 1887, Adelicia Acklen created Belmont as a summer pleasure estate. By 1860, Belmont became the showplace of Nashville. (Portrait by Washington Bogart Cooper, early 1850s, Belmont Mansion Association)

