

their scarcity makes writing a biographical study of her life nearly impossible. Her story, though, pasted together with the documents that do exist, causes the task to be worthy of the challenge, for through it the life of an elite white woman in Nashville's early days of growth and expansion is better understood. In particular, her actions during the Civil War in Nashville and in Louisiana reveal the tenacity and determination of a Southern woman to take whatever steps necessary to preserve hearth, home, and the wellbeing of those who depended on her—in Acklen's case, that number topped eight hundred individuals.

The narrative that follows, then, is not the consummate biographical study on Adelia Acklen; rather, it is a glimpse into the life of one of Nashville's most interesting female characters. Utilizing those Acklen primary sources that do exist, and relying on Nashville legend and lore to fill in the gaps, the goal is to give a face to the name, and an appreciation for the woman who built the big pink house on the hill.

Adelia Acklen was born Adelia Hayes, on March 15, 1817—the Ides of March—in Nashville, Tennessee. Her father, Oliver Bliss Hayes, a New Englander by birth, left his Massachusetts home in the first years of the nineteenth century to pursue a career in the law—first in Baltimore, and later in Nashville—and established himself in the profession Anita Shafer Goodstein suggests “carried the greatest weight and opened the most doors.”<sup>1</sup> Her mother's family migrated from North

Carolina to Williamson County, Tennessee, probably in the late 1780s, where Adelia's grandfather, Richard Hightower, is remembered as a founding member of the county.<sup>2</sup> Her mother, Sarah Hightower, was noted for her beauty, and artist Ralph E. W. Earl remarked he had “never painted a portrait from a lovelier model,”<sup>3</sup> when she sat for him in the early 1810s. On February 2, 1812, Oliver Hayes and Sarah Hightower married,<sup>4</sup> and over the next five years welcomed the first three of their eventual ten children into the family: two sons, Richard Hightower Hayes and Joel Addison Hayes, and in 1817, a daughter, Adelia, whose dark-haired loveliness certainly favored her mother.

By the time of Adelia's birth in the late 1810s, Middle Tennessee had experienced tremendous economic and population growth, and was no longer the isolated frontier community founded by James Robertson and John Donelson in 1780.<sup>5</sup> A concerted focus on land speculation and tobacco and cotton production increased trade and brought new groups of settlers to Middle Tennessee, eager to capitalize on the promise of lucrative opportunities available there. When Adelia turned three, in 1820, the region's population topped 290,000,<sup>6</sup> signaling not only a significant increase in numbers, but a change in the population make-up as well. As Kristofer Ray has pointed out, in addition to the yeoman farmers and speculators who first settled in and around Nashville, “now there was a diverse economic population that included

merchants, planters, and intraregional commercial interests.”<sup>7</sup> Consider “intraregional commercial interests” as code for “cotton,” for as Ray further suggests, “when cotton emerged as a viable commodity,” particularly in Nashville, the principle port on the Cumberland River, “progressive planters, lawyers, and merchants became boosters to that crop and of the small town.”<sup>8</sup>

Oliver Hayes belonged to this booster group and practiced law in early Nashville with some of the era's giants; Thomas H. Benton, Felix Grundy, and “Old Hickory” himself, Andrew Jackson, among them. He argued numerous land dispute cases, and participated in several of Nashville's most important federal cases, including the request, in the spring of 1819, that a branch of the Bank of the United States be opened in Nashville, ultimately denied by the bank's president, Langdon Cheves.<sup>9</sup> In addition to his legal endeavors, Hayes engaged in a variety of business pursuits in and around Nashville and Middle Tennessee ranging from real estate promotion, to partnership in a local paper mill, and serving on numerous Boards of Directors.<sup>10</sup> Hayes also participated in Nashville's philanthropic and community organizations, held membership in Hiram Lodge No. 7, F&AM, and served in 1819 as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee.<sup>11</sup>

His varied and lucrative business pursuits allowed Oliver Hayes to establish a comfortable home and lifestyle for his growing family, and Adelia spent her first few years in the Nashville home her grandfa-

ther Hightower presented to her parents as a wedding gift. Located on High Street, in close proximity to what is now the corner of Union and Sixth Avenue North, the red brick, two-story home was comprised “of a number of old-fashioned large rooms with high ceilings and big fireplaces,”<sup>12</sup> surrounded by “ornamental grounds”<sup>13</sup> and was “full of life and gaiety”<sup>14</sup> while Oliver and Sarah Hayes, and their four eldest children resided there.<sup>15</sup>

Hayes family lore suggests a close and loving relationship existed between Adelia and her father, and his actions in furthering women's education in young Nashville make clear his desire and determination she receive a classical education, as rigorous as that provided her brothers. On August 4, 1817, the Nashville Female Academy opened its doors,<sup>16</sup> with Oliver B. Hayes<sup>17</sup> among the original “subscribers,” and a member of the Board of Trustees from 1819 until at least 1826.<sup>18</sup> Adelia's name appears on surviving documents from as early as 1825, indicating she began her formal education at eight years of age, or younger. She was an above-average student, and according to the “Bill of Recitations” for the academic year ending in June of 1827, when she was ten years old, earned 565 “perfect” points out of a possible 600.<sup>19</sup> Adelia attended school with the daughters of Nashville's elite and well-connected, and the names Grundy, Robertson, McGavock, and McNairy are common on the academy's roll. While all indicators suggest Oliver Hayes stepped away from his position as