

Acklen remained in Nashville at the outbreak of the Civil War, although in early 1864 she went to Louisiana to rescue her cotton. During her absence, U.S. General Thomas J. Wood appropriated Belmont and quartered his troops on the lawn. (Belmont, ca. 1864, Belmont Mansion Association)



went for fear the Inspector might object to them and then might take the other things I wanted to send I mean your Sugar & buckwheat.”¹¹¹ She reveals much about Nashville under Union control here, for while occupation shut down the city’s Confederate press, newspapers printed elsewhere in support of the southern cause made their way into the city, and were shared amongst the citizenry, as Acklen did here. The exchange of particular products is also telling of conditions in occupied Nashville; as Acklen pro-

vided products—the aforementioned sugar and buckwheat—to her brother in exchange for chickens, apples, and other products, in short supply in the city.¹¹²

By October 1862, Acklen reported “the screws tighten every day,” as Union officials heightened their efforts to wrest loyalty oaths from the Nashville citizenry and “reconstruct” and restore Nashville—and Tennessee—to the Union. The crackdown on Confederate sympathizers became personal when Acklen informed Oliver Hayes

that Hal “has tried every way to get off without [illeg.] the ‘parole,’” and “they are obstinate at ‘headquarters.’” There is no known record of Hal Hayes’s arrest in 1862, but he may have been detained, and his movements restricted, at the whim of the occupying government, as was common.¹¹³ “We go in every day to see Hal,” her letter continued, “he & George keep ‘batchelors’ hall.” George Shields was Acklen’s brother-in-law, the husband of her sister, Laura, and according to her letter, his movements in and out of Nashville were restricted at this time as well. “Hal says don’t come down now,” Acklen advised Oliver, “be careful,” fearful of the acts of violence committed against Nashvillians by Union soldiers as the tension of occupation increased

In July of 1863, Acklen wrote Oliver, “We are all *loyal*.”¹¹⁴ Her statement, and the length of time between this letter and those from the fall of 1862, raises many questions; key among them, “loyal” to whom? Acklen had suffered no significant damage or loss to her personal property to this point in the war, but male family members were harassed and detained at times by the occupying government, and her dedication to the Confederacy did not appear to run particularly strong. In carrying out her plan to survive occupation—and survive it well—taking the oath of loyalty to the Union makes perfect sense. The mystery lies in the “if” and the true meaning behind her statement to Hayes, as no record of Acklen taking the oath at this time survives.

This is the last of Adelia Acklen’s surviving letters from the period of Union occupation, though her personal experiences continued in dramatic form until war’s end. In a letter received from the Louisiana plantations dated August 20, 1863, dictated to another and signed in a very unsteady hand, Joseph Acklen revealed to Adelia the family’s precarious economic situation: “I have nothing left now but my cotton and it is uncertain if I shall be permitted to dispose of it,” he wrote. “I am in constant dread of its being burned my mules and horses have all been taken and stole by the Confederates and my neighbours the places are all in ruins the crops and all waisted and waisting my only chance of support is to sell my cotton.”¹¹⁵ Adelia’s response to Joseph’s letter is lost to history, and even if she posted one, he never received or read it. By September, Joseph Acklen was dead, malaria the most likely cause, and full responsibility for the Louisiana and Tennessee properties, and the well-being of the over eight hundred individuals living on them, fell to Adelia. With her husband’s dying words ringing in her ears, Acklen, a forty-six year old, twice-widowed, mother of four surviving children, made the decision to travel to Louisiana in wartime, negotiate with the military authorities, regardless of allegiance or color of uniform, and find a way to deliver her cotton to market.¹¹⁶

Acklen left no personal account of the cotton rescue, save a few letters housed in a thin Metro Nashville Archives file of related documents written several months after