

BELMONT MANSION: An Icon of the American Country House Movement

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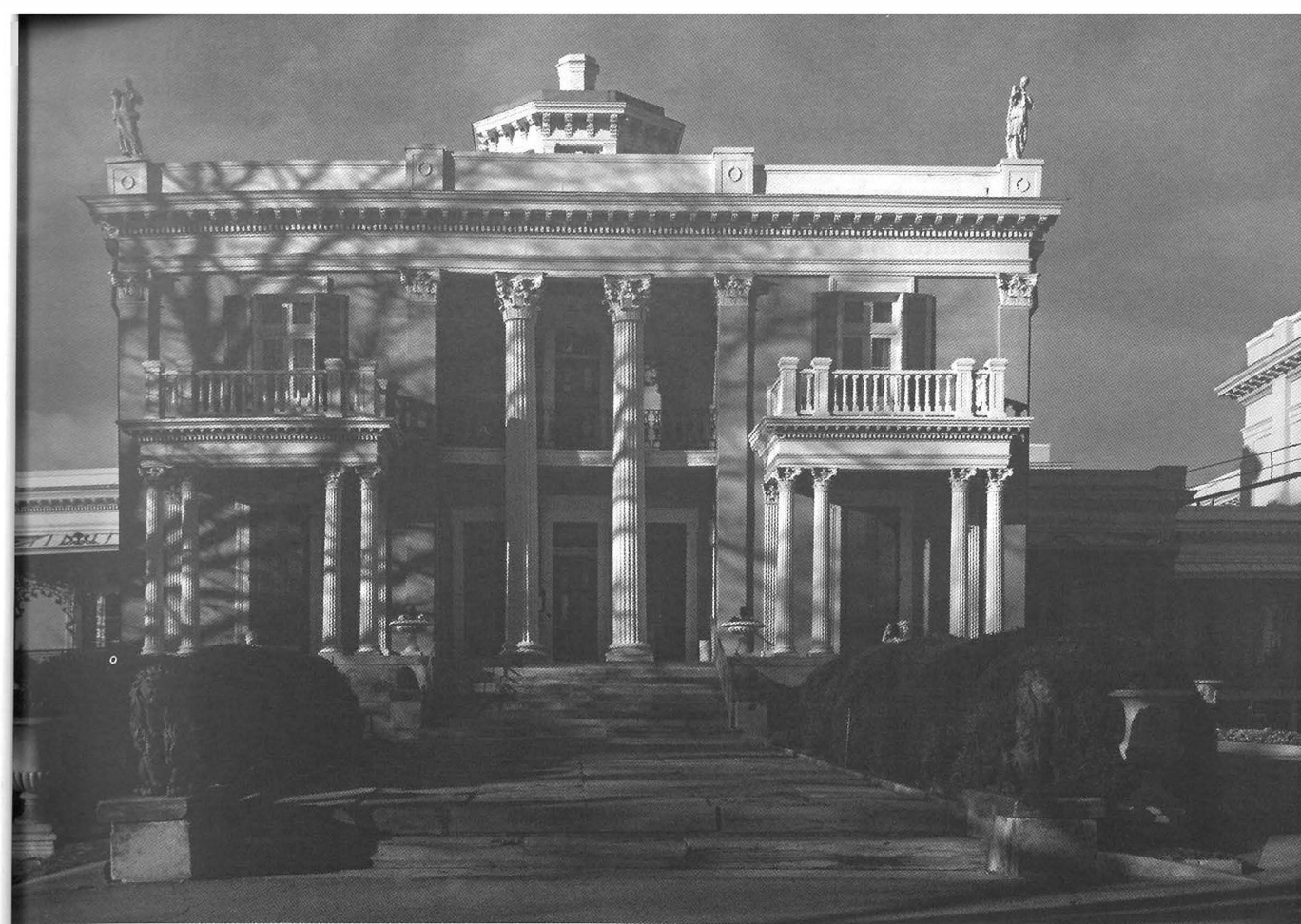
Stand today upon the edge of the limestone terrace in front of Belmont Mansion, enjoying the shade of mature trees on a summer's day, raise your head up and down, then move it side to side and back and forth. All the while be sure your eyes are wide open and your astute powers of observation are working overtime. You will need all of your faculties to take in what lies before you. Rest assured you are only one of thousands since 1853 who have stood in that exact spot, dazzled by the splendor before them. Along with antebellum international visitors, to Union soldiers on guard during the Civil War, to school girls dreaming of the future, to modern tourists, then yourself, you have now joined a long line of admirers of Belmont Mansion.

Understanding a structure this complex requires multiple disciplines. It is not enough to simply walk through room after room viewing assembled furnishings in restored settings. An architectural analysis of Belmont Mansion cannot be

attempted without attaining insight into who its builders, the Acklens, were and what they represented for their time and place in American history.

Joseph and Adelia Hayes Franklin Acklen played equal roles in the development of Belmont, one the dreamer, while the other processed organizational abilities to make their combined vision a reality. It goes without saying who initially funded the purchase of land upon which their estate was to rise. The young widow Adelia Franklin was left without a husband at the age of twenty-nine in 1846. Franklin applied an immense inherited fortune to amassing property on which she developed a most amazing antebellum country estate. Franklin's primary influence feeding her desire to establish a country estate was the home she left behind in Sumner County.

Fairvue, the home Franklin shared with her late husband Isaac Franklin, was for its time an immense neo-Palladian structure with a broad central hall from which opened numerous parlors on the



Thousands of people have been dazzled by the splendor of Belmont since 1853, Adelia Acklen's summer estate on a hill south of downtown Nashville. (Belmont Mansion Association)

first floor, with spacious chambers above. The Franklins saw the need immediately after marriage to enlarge Fairvue yet again, into what then would have been one of the largest houses in Sumner County. Fairvue's square footage nearly doubled, incorporating a new kitchen with accompanying service areas.

With Isaac Franklin's death in 1846, it would not have been unusual for Adelia to retreat entirely from the realities of widowhood into a more private world. In the short period of four and one half weeks Franklin lost not only her husband, but two of her three surviving children to

childhood diseases. Just a year after Isaac's death, Adelia left behind her grief-filled plantation in Sumner County for the presumed safety and companionship of her parents in Nashville.

Shortly after arriving in Nashville, Franklin purchased a brick Greek Revival townhouse on Cherry Street (now Fourth Avenue North). Similar in plan and form to the house in which she had been born in 1817, Franklin would own this property for the remainder of her life. Even after moving to Belmont, Franklin is known to have maintained the Nashville house as an investment property.