

houses rising upon the horizon. None however were quite like Belmont, of this the Acklens were sure, and soon, so would everyone else in Nashville.

Human nature has changed little since ancient times. Patricians in Rome, the rising merchant class in Renaissance Europe, as well as newly enriched Nashvillians in the antebellum period, all had the capacity to show jealousy. Each citizen of 1850s Nashville speedily became aware of a new house rising before their eyes two miles in the distance. With a population of just under 17,000 people, neighbors and strangers alike were keenly aware of the Acklens progress as the house grew taller, brick by brick, upon the Acklens' hill.⁷ People who had no conception of building costs naturally assumed the new Mrs. Acklen was well on her way to spending Isaac Franklin's entire fortune for the creation of Belmont. Locals began to refer to the house, then the entire estate as, "The Acklen Folly," no doubt blaming the new husband for the expense, for he was most definitely not a native Tennessean.⁸

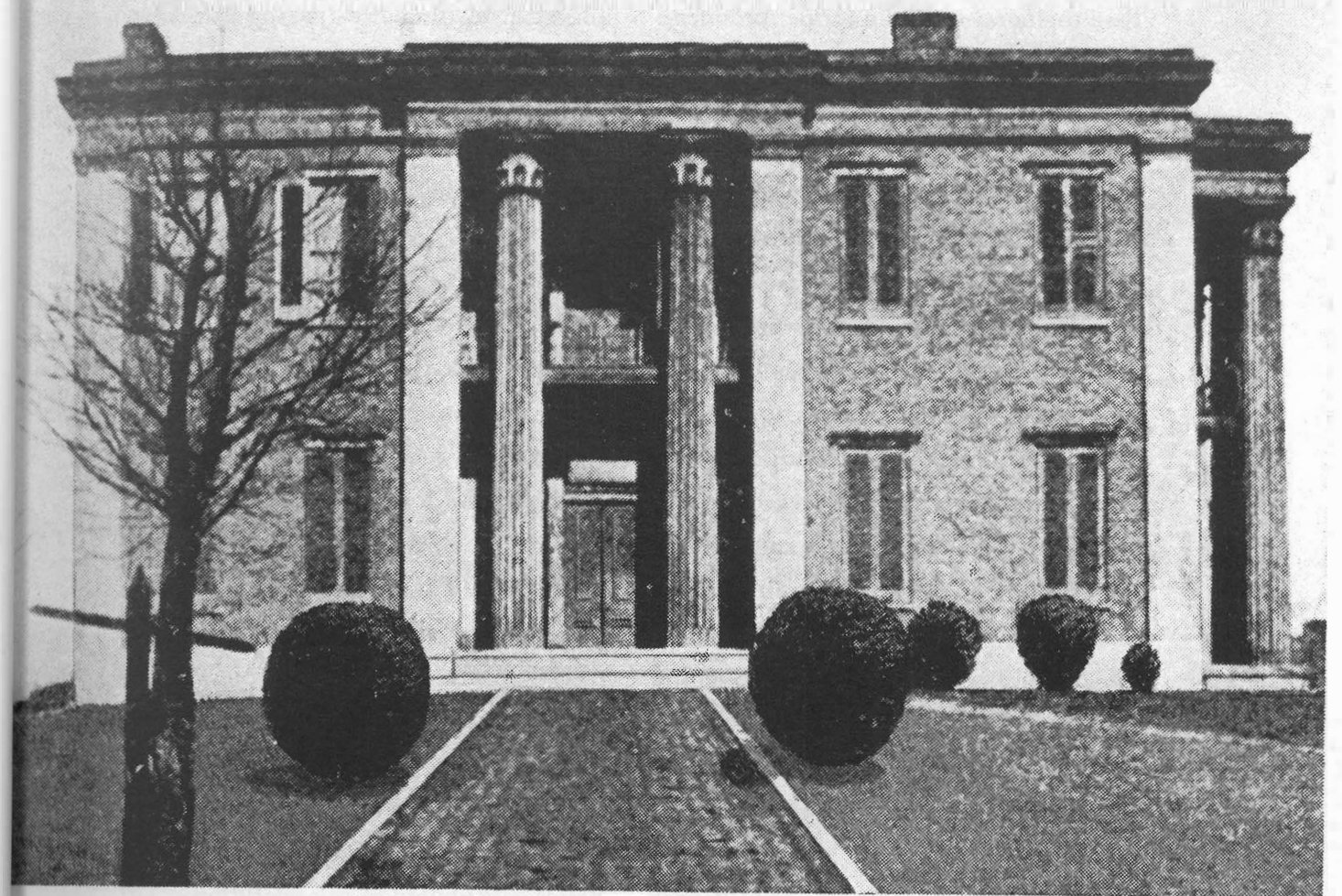
Gossip aside, the Acklens pushed forward through three successive building seasons from 1850 to 1853, first occupying Belmont by the summer of 1853. This is verified by the date of a letter addressed to Joseph Acklen at Belmont from a business associate in an attempt to reach him at that location or any other.⁹



No house springs from the earth totally free from influences that have gone before. Multiple architectural fashions were swirling around the Acklens in the spring of 1850. Just south of Strickland's capitol sat one of the most prominent and discussed building projects in Nashville's history, Polk Place, home of former president James K. Polk and his wife Sarah Childress.

Before leaving Washington the Polks purchased a large city lot containing a house built by the late Felix Grundy, which by the 1840s had become terribly out of fashion for so conspicuous a location. The Polks instigated a building campaign enlarging the house, making it over in the Greek Revival style, with the addition of a monumental portico on one elevation, and a porch *an' antis* on the south side. It is this elevation that ties Polk Place to the Belmont additions of 1850–53.

There is more than a fleeting similarity between the southern elevation of Polk Place as completed in 1849 with the southern façade of Belmont as completed in 1853. Both feature a recessed porch with monumental fluted columns exhibiting Corinthian capitals. To the rear of the columns stretching across the width of both recessed porches are balconies. Cast iron railing, practically identical to that on Belmont's balcony is evident in an historic photograph of Polk Place.¹⁰ Identical full height pilasters rise to the height of this porch giving visual strength to this element. Framing the exterior corners



This façade of Polk Place, completed in 1849, may have inspired the very similar façade at Belmont, completed in 1853. The cast iron railing at the two mansions is almost identical. (Wiles photo, from *History of Homes and Gardens of Tennessee*, 1936)

of both buildings are two more identical pilasters. Resting upon capitals of both columns and pilasters, a broad cornice consisting of a deep fascia and projecting soffit complete the design of Polk Place.

An almost identical arrangement of elements can be found at Belmont. Notable exceptions are the addition of classical trims, dentils, and modillions on Belmont's façade, all an indication of the Acklens' wealth. Such happenstance rare-

ly occurs in architecture. One structure usually influences the design of another. The Polks were closely associated with the Acklens. Joseph and Adelia Acklen would have had more than a passing interest in the transformation of the Polks' home. Adelia Acklen and Sarah Polk remained friends until Acklen's death in 1887.

No better architectural inspiration existed in all of Nashville during this era