

than the new home of a former president. The homes and lifestyles of American presidents have been closely followed since Washington first took the oath of office in 1789. Certainly every master carpenter in the state was capable of producing these elements, and did so on many houses. Simply put, there are too many similarities existing between both houses for there not to be a connection. A surviving photo of Polk Place validates this theory.

James Patrick in his notable work, *Architecture in Tennessee*, published in 1981, cites a native Tennessean, James M. Hughes born in 1818, as the master builder of Polk Place.¹¹ Hughes, according to Patrick, enjoyed a successful career into the late 1850s and beyond into the post-war period.

In tracking Hughes's career, Patrick speaks of projects prior to Polk Place, for which he drew a floor plan in 1848, and after 1853, leaving a substantial gap.¹² Polk Place was substantially complete by 1849. As work at Polk Place came to a halt, the next major residential construction project in Nashville became Belmont in 1850. It would have been natural for a talented master builder to migrate from one site to another, particularly with the connection between the two families. The career of James M. Hughes may well have included Belmont in the three-year period from 1850 to 1853. Both houses were large dwellings requiring a large talented labor force. Hughes would have had such

a force at his fingertips having just completed Polk Place. His skilled crew could have easily made the transition from one site to another, especially since the buildings were similar in form.



The Acklens were also influenced in their choice of an architectural style by Romantic designs just making their way to Nashville. Most influential in this period were the forms of Italy, giving rise to the Italian Villa style with which Belmont is identified. The completed Belmont of 1860 most resembles this emerging architectural idiom and its transition from Palladian Villa to Italian Villa was a multi-step process beginning in 1850. In the ensuing ten years, multiple minds and hands contributed to this evolution.

Master builders, aided by many American treatises of architectural styles and plans, were capable of designing and fulfilling the needs of all clients. Nashville profited substantially from the talents of these semi-professionals in an age before America began professionally training architects. This was a time when gentlemen participated enthusiastically in the design process of their domestic quarters. Educated men prided themselves on an ability to speak and act intelligently on questions of architecture.

Joseph Acklen was just that, an educated client, determined to build his vision upon Adelia Acklen's hilltop.

Acklen profited from both an academy and university education in the second quarter of the nineteenth century when the classics were a featured course of study.¹³ No letters or plans survive from this first phase of construction to document his involvement. Our only understanding of Joseph Acklen's influence and participation in the project was written four years after his death. Elizabeth Fries Ellet, author of *Queens of American Society* published in 1867, when writing about Adelia Acklen, relates that Joseph, "possessing refined taste and cultivation, made improvements in their large estate near Nashville, building a magnificent house..."¹⁴

Young men, such as Joseph Acklen, often studied the Greek language.¹⁵ Ancient democracy was heavily promoted, the age of Pericles being touted as an ideal. The revolution in Greece during the 1820s brought these thoughts to the forefront, inspiring young men and women alike. Such events, coupled with a metamorphosis in architectural styles brought about the construction of Greek "Temples" in various domestic forms worldwide. New York author James Fenimore Cooper is known to have written in 1838, "The public sentiment just now runs almost exclusively and popularly into the Grecian school. We build little besides temples for our churches and banks, our taverns, our courthouses, and our dwellings."¹⁶

By 1850, the popularity of those staid Greek Revival temple forms, now a gen-

eration old, with classical details pasted upon them, was beginning to wane. The introduction of more romantic styles began to dot the nation's horizon, aided by the publications of Andrew Jackson Downing, who offered both architectural and landscape designs.

In Nashville, a city far from the east coast, fashionable architectural styles were at times slower to develop. Architects traveling from the east, even from across the Atlantic, became the first to design and develop more fashionable up to date structures.¹⁷ Few American neoclassical houses were designed without the direct influence of European trained architects such as Benjamin Latrobe, who did not stop in Nashville, (although he is known to have supplied drawings for a dwelling there) on his way to New Orleans before dying there of yellow fever in 1820.¹⁸ This constant movement of talented well-trained men benefited Nashville. Many lingered long enough to leave a lasting impression upon the built environment, using the city as a waystation before heading further south.

William Strickland was called to Nashville in 1845 for the construction of the State Capitol on a hill then known as Cedar Knob, thereby creating a permanent example of his genius.¹⁹ What he did not accomplish was the design and building of Belmont Mansion as stated by historians of earlier eras. Not a shred of stylistic or written evidence exists to lend credence to this outdated theory. The