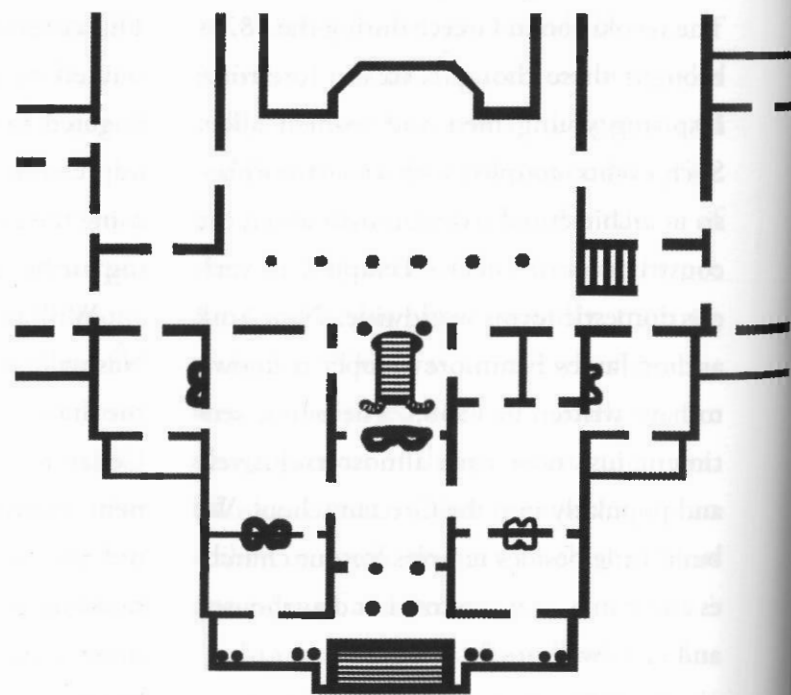




Belmont's square front hall was a design change from the earlier Browning house. The space provided perfect architectural balance, (Photo by Edward Houck and floor plan detail, Belmont Mansion Association)



completed 1853, phase one Belmont, was likely a large rather boxy house straddling the crest of the hill with a minimum of architectural ornament. As seen today, the last two extensions to the sides, both east and west, completing the principal façade, had not yet been built.

Plantation income allowed for the niceties of Joseph and Adelia Acklen's existence. In the short period from Isaac Franklin's death in 1846 to the spring of 1851, plantation income amounted to \$507,137.97 with which to finance Belmont's construction.²⁰ The house was repaired, enlarged, and rebuilt during 1850-1853. As a late Federal neo-Palladian villa the Browning house contained fewer rooms than required by the Acklens. When analyzing Belmont, keep in mind how architecture was adapted for the southern climate. What had previously been a tight small brick house with small window openings, the new Belmont was amazingly different, becoming a light and air-filled creation. Influenced by an Italian Renaissance interpretation of an ancient plan, filtered by way of the English Renaissance a hundred years later, to the final, less formal American arrangement of rooms and details generations later, grew the nucleus of the Belmont we know today.²¹

Entire walls were rebuilt rather than just punching through to enlarge window and door openings. Of note the south facing wall containing the principle entry was entirely rebuilt beginning in 1850.

As found today three 10' 3" tall openings stand side by side, accounting for approximately 80% of wall surface. With two operable transoms, two sets of French doors, plus the entry door, little solid wall surface remains. A majority of the wall opens to allow cooling breezes to enter the house. The addition of French doors and operable transoms indicates extensive restructuring occurred during the 1850-1853 building period giving new dimension to the structure.

Just as President Andrew Jackson raised his ceilings after the 1834 Hermitage fire in order to create a more formal, grander house than had previously existed, it is likely the Acklens chose to do the same. By the 1850s, Nashville had become a much larger, more sophisticated society than existed during the age of Jackson. Modern expectations for houses made the luxuries of the 1830s seem a necessity. Population had doubled from 1830 to 1850, bringing with it an East Coast awareness of new technology and culture unseen in the social order of the expanding frontier of years past.²² Higher ceilings meant cooler rooms, which was the aim of building on such a site in the first place.

Inspired by Palladian forms, Belmont's square entry is central to any discussion of the Browning house or the Acklen reconstruction. A perfect architectural balance exists in the placement of double leaf doors on the east and west walls leading into today's central parlor and library.