

French doors in the south exterior wall were originally balanced by another pair in the north wall, also opening to the exterior, prior to the construction of the salon in 1859. Directly opposite the entry door stands a projecting chimney breast on the north wall. Each perfectly spaced element complements another on an opposite wall, whether that be east, west, north, or south, a symbol of classical rigidity as yet unbroken by the asymmetry of more romantic styles just coming into vogue.

The Acklens never intended to occupy their Belle Monte, as they referred to the estate early on, as a year-round residence. Winters were spent on the plantation in Louisiana, with numerous sojourns to New Orleans. Viewed primarily as a summer home, stairs would have been of secondary importance to other more impressive architectural elements, including marble mantels and elaborate classical ceiling medallions depicting bulging acanthus leaves.

The placement of stairs on an exterior gallery would seem typical to people who frequented New Orleans several times a year. Gallery stairs were long a common feature of French Creole architecture, especially on close knit city lots. Belmont's early stairs would likely have risen from the rear gallery, but still under protection of the roof. Centered on a broad rear gallery, a large niche was created in the 1850–1853 construction period. The early Belmont stair likely stood within this space as does its grander

1859 replacement. Above stairs, a shorter open gallery provided excellent views of Nashville while functioning as a connector to multiple family bedrooms.

Belmont as configured in 1853 in actuality had a much more of a deep south flavor than the completed house of 1859–1860. The aforementioned gallery adjacent to the principle floor was long and broad, running the length of the northern elevation. In this early form the gallery was open-ended both to the east and west. Later additions completely enclosed this space. Positioned as it was, the gallery took full advantage of any available breeze originating from multiple directions.

Galleries such as the one created by the Acklens were frequently treated as outdoor living spaces, furnished much the same as modern Americans would treat a screened porch in 2017. From this gallery major first floor rooms were easily accessed. Doors leading to the rear gallery were generally aligned with similar openings on the principle façade, allowing for the passage of air through each living space. On certain days a table may well have been brought to the gallery for dining. This comfortable, always shaded, open aired gallery would have been one of most relaxing, friendly and heavily utilized spaces in the early years of Belle Monte.



For centuries country house life represented a unique lifestyle for limited quan-

ties of people. The building of a country house was not merely an instance of a family seeking shelter. Such endeavors served as an announcement to contemporaries that the occupant had arrived, both financially and socially. Belmont, as it rose from newly laid foundations became a statement easily read by all. The Acklens designed, lived in, entertained in, and enjoyed one of the most uniquely planned houses yet built in Nashville. Those fortunate enough to cross the threshold also participated in the enjoyment of their lifestyle.

A completely different house, with little indication of what had come before rose upon the hilltop. This more modern residence was emblematic of the times in which the Acklens lived. Breaking out of an earlier more classical shell brought an outmoded derelict house to useful life once again. At some point in the process it was decided that merely raising the wings to a full second story would not provide enough chamber space above stairs. Small, low ceilinged rooms were far from what the Acklens sought from the project. What had formerly been a colloquial form of Palladio, the much simpler Browning house evolved into a more studied Renaissance plan with the Acklen additions.

On either side of the original, centrally located projecting pavilion, in front of what were originally shed-roofed wings, two full height, two-story additions were joined to the existing structure.²³ Within

each addition were two new rooms, one up and one down, for a total of four rooms. The Italians referred to such private spaces as "Cabinet Rooms," a term Americans seldom made use of either on house plans or in conversation. The inclusion of such spaces in Belmont's revised floor plan, created unique, individual specialized rooms, then becoming fashionable in America. These smaller more intimate spaces often featured the display of artwork and personal collections.

Palladio developed his cabinet rooms in a very specific way. In his second of four books of architecture, twelve designs are featured offering the type of plan developed by the Acklens.²⁴ Many of Palladio's Italian villas featured recessed double height porches allowing for the inclusion of cabinet rooms into the design. Falling to the right and left of the principle entry, each room offered access to the exterior, hence Belmont's three doors opening onto the recessed entry porch. Interior plans as designed by Palladio offered long broad rooms often attached to the rear of such spaces. In America these rooms were utilized as parlors, or libraries, identical to spaces located within the completed Belmont. These cabinet room additions, placed to the right and left of the former projecting pavilion squared up the main block of the house totally eliminating the earlier lines of Browning's villa. This "squaring up" of the new Belmont allowed for the construction of a continuous classical cornice wrapping the struc-