

the impression Belmont made upon visitors. Not one bill survives from the construction period. No personal letters from Joseph or Adelia Acklen describing the building process to family or friends have yet come to light.



By the mid-1850s Adelia Acklen had given birth to three children with Joseph Acklen and was expecting again. Emma, the last surviving Franklin child, along with her younger Acklen twin sisters would die by the end of 1855.²⁸ Prior to these events, the Acklens embraced a period of peace and contentment, enhanced by a booming economy leading to sizable profits from the Louisiana plantations. Considering the building history of Belmont, dust had barely settled from one season before another project was begun. Initially intended only as a summer house, Belmont offered a lifestyle unattainable at the other Acklen homes as their entertainments continued to grow in number. The house would have begun to seem a little cramped, with an expanding family coupled with continuing rounds of guests and social obligations.

For the entire decade of the 1850s, the estate was under development in one form or another. Multiple outbuildings including an art gallery specifically designed by Joseph Acklen dotted the grounds.²⁹ Massive conservatories comparable to those found at either the White House or

the U. S. Capitol, a bath house, a water tower, ponds and other ancillary garden structures, farm buildings, and numerous slave houses were all constructed during this period. How small could Belmont possibly have seemed in the midst of such splendor, apparently small enough to contemplate enlarging yet again.

The latest solution to perceived spatial limitations became the enlargement of existing wings with the addition of one room to the east and another to the west. Interestingly enough these new additions were stepped back from the face of the 1853 wings, just as those appendages had been stepped back from the face of the central block. This subtle but effective detail from a distance increased the width of the house visually more than it did in actuality. By increasing the horizontal footprint of the house the massive central block seemed to decrease visually in size. These additions effectively completed the five-part country house plan, so common in America for the previous 150 years.

Exact symmetry, as dictated by promoters of this classic five-part plan remained a goal of the Acklens for the final extension of Belmont. Brick was once again the primary building material and double-hung sashes were employed in the majority of window openings rather than French doors. Both new rooms were constructed with coal-burning fireplaces, identical in form to those in the central block as completed in 1853. As built the new east wing bedroom (26' x 31') could

easily accommodate an entire family in one space. The west wing, as wide as the east wing, was however more shallow (26'6" x 20') than its' counterpart.

A new cast iron balcony to the rear (north) of the west wing addition overlooked the city. Access to this balcony was gained through the use of two jib doors, one located in the recently built west wing bedroom, and the other in the billiard room. This balcony, offering fine views of the city below, became an appropriate location for gentlemen to indulge in a smoke, cue stick in one hand, cigar in the other.

These last additions to the principal façade brings into discussion multiple cast iron balconies which originally encircled Belmont's wings. By the late 1850s cast iron balconies, porches, window hoods, column capitals, figural animals, statues, grave markers, and even entire fronts of buildings were manufactured in America. The Acklens likely ordered from a catalog or a retailer in New Orleans during their winter sojourn, or perhaps they ordered in Nashville. Producers of ironwork such as the J.B. Wickersham ornamental ironworks company of New York City published a catalog in 1857 for distribution.³⁰ As found at Belmont, iron railings and posts offer a visual lightness to the exterior, much needed to counterbalance the physical massing of the structure that is in contrast to the intended use of a light and airy summerhouse.

Belmont's painted brick walls, representing several building campaigns,

no longer offered the cohesive appearance required by so large a building. The preferred material for such a substantial structure of this prominence would have been cut stone for all exposed wall surfaces. The primary hindrance to the introduction of cut stone was not the cost, but the sheer mechanics of applying a stone veneer to existing walls. Portions of Browning's original brick walls had been incorporated into the exterior of the 1853 house. The decision was made in 1850s to continue building with brick, precluding a changeover to stone without incurring even more undue expense. From addition to addition brick courses may not have been properly aligned offering a mismatched appearance.

In an effort to create a unified appearance, between 1857 and 1860 the Acklens decided to stucco Belmont's bricks walls. All exterior masonry surfaces were covered, then scored to appear as if large ashlar stone blocks composed the walls. Finally, Belmont became a cohesive whole with the application of cast iron balconies on multiple elevations, coupled with new stucco. As originally tinted, the stucco appeared to have a pinkish hue, as if the entire structure had been transplanted to the hills of Middle Tennessee from the shores of Lake Como in Italy.



The architectural history of Belmont Mansion is tied to one major American