

located stair within its own niche directly to the rear of the entry. Positioning of the staircase in this location increases the social and architectural significance of the new salon. The stair empties directly into the center of the old gallery, now incorporated into the salon. As it reaches the floor, the new stair bows out invitingly at the bottom, either beckoning you to rise from below or climb down as if descending from on high, depending upon your position. Flanking the stair are identical columns to those in the newly installed column screen just across the width of the enclosed gallery. Heiman's stair of mahogany, cherry, and walnut first rises in a single flight, divides at a landing into two arched flights, then curves upward to the left and right before reaching the second floor.

Adolphus Heiman's 1859–1860 Belmont additions included the now necessary cupola, a cooling device designed to pull hot air up and out of the house in lieu of an open gallery below. Acklen is known to have referred to this element as her "astronomical observatory."³⁷ The cupola is by far the most obvious Italianate-influenced feature of Belmont, dating it to the period of Heiman's last additions. It is octagonal in shape, ringed by pairs of French doors opening to the roof for ventilation or an evening stroll for star gazing if one so chose. A central chimney rises through the structure piercing the cupola's roof. Visually supporting the cupola's roof overhang are a series of

brackets encircling the structure mounted just above the French doors.

One embellishment, likely designed by Heiman utilizing his classical background, is noteworthy as a finishing touch to the entire composition. The plain gently sloping roof supporting a wide overhang, dating from 1853, was simply too outmoded an element in combination with the now stuccoed, iron balcony encrusted façade. Heiman was known to incorporate parapet walls on other domestic projects of this period.³⁸ Belmont's new parapet wall was added to the existing roof structure, aligning it with the load bearing wall below. The run of the parapet wall was interrupted by a series of four plinths across the width of the central block imitating facades of ancient works. Upon the corner plinths Heiman placed classical statues. The same parapet design was also added to the wings with yet more statues reaching for the sky. This rooftop device was employed in ancient Rome, brought back into fashion by Palladio, who featured it on several designs in his *Four Books of Architecture*.

With these final additions, Belmont was complete. While one Acklen home was finished, another was being planned for which materials were then being gathered. A newspaper in Milledgeville, Georgia,—*The Federal Union*—announced on August 2, 1859, Colonel J. A. S. Acklen was anticipating the erection of a sixty-room "castellated Gothic" house on the banks of the Mississippi River in

Louisiana. This home was planned to be approximately double the size of Belmont.



Joseph and Adelia Acklen, with the completion of Belmont in 1860, possessed a most livable house, reflecting designs of centuries past and technological advances of their own time. Hampered as they were by the remains of the Browning house, a comfortable yet impressive plan was developed. Up to the time construction began in 1850, a majority of builders nationwide was mired in an ages old central hall plan. As asymmetrical designs developed with the introduction of Romantic styles, such as Gothic and Italianate at mid-century, some found it difficult, even then, to break away from more typical arrangements. The simple addition of a bay window here or there by local builders often became their only nod to current styles, perhaps with a centrally placed tower as an add-on to a plan long viewed as correct, functional, and unchangeable.

A first look at Belmont gives an impression the Acklens fell victim to these long accepted priorities. A balanced five-part plan suggests rigid adherence to the past. It is only when stepping into the entry that differences immediately become apparent. Visitors are first confronted with a small square entry, not the expected long broad passage running from front to rear containing a stair along one wall. Directly ahead a projecting chim-

ney breast becomes the most prominent feature of the space. This area is designed for more than funneling guests from one room to another, as is the conventional entry hall. It is a space where you are meant to linger, while admiring assembled collections of artwork and statuary placed about the room.

As built in 1853, light would have flooded the room from both north and south elevations, for in essence this space was no more than a narrow hyphen joining the exterior with larger, deeper rooms to both sides. Sunlight filtered through colored glass of red, yellow, and purple in four pairs of French doors with Venetian glass transoms above. The entry opened to the exterior on both the north and south.

Should any visitor fail to recall the Acklens built a house primarily for summer use, this space would swiftly remind them of that fact. This reality led to the completed plan of 1860, no matter how large the house grew to be. With the addition of numerous rooms, the principal of cooling air and its distribution throughout the structure became a factor in each construction phase. Hence the addition of Heiman's cupola, creating a chimney effect, pulling air into, up, and through the house, thereby crafting an equivalent of a modern day whole house fan.

As Belmont continued to grow in size throughout the 1850s, one unifying element became the first floor gallery, whether it be open ended or closed, as it became by 1859. To this gallery in time