

Acklens. They were both rich, well educated, and collectors of artworks, but one building most assuredly did not inspire the other. Villa Borghese was in effect a "villa suburban," a building in which to primarily gather for social events, while Belmont served first as a family home and second as a showplace.

Villa Borghese was built to impress, awe, and inspire, all of which could be said for Belmont as planned by the Acklens. In essence the two structures have little in common, with the exception of the builders' intent, and the lifestyle they shared, separated by two and a half centuries. There is no common cornice line defining the mass of Villa Borghese, as can be found at Belmont. The Acklens built for light and air, while the cardinal, judging from the size of wall openings in his villa, built for privacy and the security of his collection.

The builders of Belmont were tied to antecedents of American architecture much more than they knew or would ever have admitted. The form in which they chose to build, of central block, balanced by receding wings, is strictly redolent of a classic five-part house most commonly found in eighteenth century America. Look beyond the architectural details and fenestration of Belmont to the physical massing of the structure. Do not let the abundance of blank wall space seemingly unbroken by windows and doors mislead you. What is left would have easily been recognized by Thomas

Jefferson as he stood in front of Carter's Grove in 1775.

Building when they did, the Acklens expressed a desire to move toward a more popular modern style. They were handicapped however, by previous architectural experiences. In an era when classical details and symmetry were slow to give way to more romantic styles, the Acklens bowed to each era in which they lived, both the classical and the romantic. They harkened to the past, never quite being able to adopt a completely modern attitude toward the design of Belmont. Classical details abound on both the interior and exterior of the structure, in combination with a building footprint utilized multiple times by previous generations.

As they looked to the future, the Acklens continued an American tradition of requiring the latest technological advances within Belmont. America, then immersed in the Industrial Revolution, discovered it was possible to light, heat, and bring running water to the interior of a home on a more permanent basis than anyone a generation earlier would have believed possible.

The Acklens first exposure to such advancements would have come through travel. American hotels, by the third decade of the nineteenth century, offered improvements such as running water to lure people like the Acklens into their establishments. Gas lighting became available in the east as early as 1818. By 1850 Nashville was just beginning to

consider forming a municipal gas company. Belmont's owners, living two miles from downtown, had no hope of being connected to a gas line for years to come. A more immediate solution exercised by the Acklens was to install a private gas plant on the property, lighting all four levels of the house, plus numerous out-buildings.

Most important was the introduction of a water tower and piping system designed by Adolphus Heiman, supplying water to the interior of the house by no later than 1859, perhaps as early as 1857. The fountain installed in the Grand Salon in 1860 is evidence of water being available within the walls of Belmont. Considering water was used for domestic as well as ornamental purposes, introduction of a recognizable bathroom within the walls of Belmont would have been paramount. Prior to that time, a well-planned system of cisterns supplied domestic water. There is no doubt the Acklens enjoyed a bathroom within the walls of Belmont by at least the end of the decade, but most likely earlier. This "convenience" would have been viewed as a "necessity" to people of the Acklens status. American homes of comparable size were rapidly transformed by the very type of advancements employed by the Acklens at Belmont.

While looking to the old world for architectural inspiration, as evidenced by the choice of the newly popular Italian Villa style, the Acklens remained firmly

a part of the American school of design and innovation. Neither of the Acklens had yet crossed the Atlantic to view originals of the form they were building. Their inspiration relied primarily, as it did for others of their generation, upon published works of established eastern architects.

This not to say the Acklens made a conscious decision to build an American house, but that is precisely what they did. Utilizing a floor plan tested by the ages made for a commodious functional structure. No matter how they chose to use Belmont, as a home, a country retreat, a party palace (there is plenty of evidence to support this theory), or as a space to hold their growing collections, the Acklens' enjoyment in the process is evident by their results.

These conclusions in no way denigrate the accomplishments of the Acklens or Heiman. They built to prove it could be done. They built also, it must be said, for personal aggrandizement to a certain extent, presenting what they perceived to be a European model as the centerpiece of their country estate. They built for the ages, with much consideration given to the creation of a world different from any they had previously known. Credit must be allotted for developing an estate resembling no other in the American south in their day and time. In the twilight of an era, the Acklens produced a lasting statement of American architecture. They did what Americans have done so well since