

and \$100 each.³⁴ Because miniature portraits were an extravagance, Dodge painted the most prominent people (who had the most means) in Tennessee. According to collector Raymond White, he “painted the *haute monde* of Middle Tennessee.”³⁵ He had limited competition and there were no other resident miniature painters of his abilities in Nashville.³⁶ A handful of miniature painters had traveled through Nashville by the 1830s and the region’s first resident artist, Ralph E. W. Earl, who resided in Nashville full time between 1817 and 1830, was known to have painted more than one, but Dodge dominated the market.³⁷

Another modest portrait of Adelia Acklen, in which she wears a lacey black dress, was produced by Washington Cooper, probably in the early 1850s. The sensitive portrait bespoke the loss of loved ones that was too common in Acklen’s life. By the time this work was created, Acklen had probably already buried her first husband and at least two children. The work is similar in many ways to Cooper’s earlier portrait, on the occasion of her marriage to Franklin. Here she appears again, this time as a mature woman in three-quarter length view with her hands folded in her lap and swags of red drapery behind her. Unlike the mansion itself, the work is subdued. Acklen’s hair is neatly parted and combed back, as usual, and she wears no jewelry.

Like Acklen, her three husbands also sat for portraitists throughout their lives, as most Tennessee men of prominence did,

and Acklen displayed these in her home as well. Perhaps the continued presence of these works in Acklen’s home was intended to remind viewers that she was twice widowed (in addition to losing her fiancé before they were married). Acklen had married Isaac Franklin in 1839, and by the time of their marriage, he had already sat for Earl. Later Washington Cooper produced several additional portraits of Franklin. The one owned today by Belmont Mansion was created in three versions by Cooper. The work depicts Franklin in the typical manner of a Tennessee gentleman, seated in half-length in a black jacket against a dark backdrop. Perhaps it was commissioned upon the occasion of their marriage as a pendant to the wedding portrait of young Adelia Hayes Franklin. Seen with Franklin’s portrait, Adelia sits in a complementary pose, seeming to look lovingly across the canvas toward Franklin who stares outward with a bright expression. Her youth in comparison to Franklin is evident and her white dress denotes the occasion of their marriage.

Adelia’s second husband Joseph Acklen, who lived six to eight months a year in Louisiana managing the family plantations, was known as a man of “great energy and industry,” and his portraits portray him as such. One now lost portrait of him always hung at Belmont and an 1881 visitor recalled seeing this life-sized portrait of Acklen in the front hall.³⁸ A surviving image by Cooper also corresponds with the standard taste of the time but



Isaac Franklin, portrait, on the occasion of his marriage, Washington Bogart Cooper, 1839. (Belmont Mansion Association)

Joseph A. S. Acklen, portrait, with family tartan. (Belmont Mansion Association)

interestingly portrays Acklen with a swag of his family tartan. Acklen was a lawyer by training from one of the oldest families in Huntsville, Alabama. Perhaps alluding to his heritage was another way to align the family with the Scotch-Irish descendants that dominated the region and for Adelia to emphasize extended family relations.

By all accounts the Acklens had a happy marriage, and Joseph Acklen was devoted to his family. During the Civil War, he wrote home to Nashville from Louisiana to

his beloved “Addie” that “to be separated [sic] from you and the children for so long a time is a very great hardship but one I could not avoid.”³⁹ With his business skills expanding the Acklen estate by the outbreak of the Civil War, the Acklens were among the richest southern plantation owners. The source of the Acklens’ wealth, and thus the Acklens’ ability to travel regularly, collect artwork, commission Tennessee portraitists, and live in complete leisure at a grand Nashville estate, must be