

her mother (and possibly her father as well) had earlier sat for Earl, Acklen sought portraits of them for her own household. For her parents' portraits Acklen ordered a pendant pair from Washington Cooper. The fine portraits depict the distinguished couple well dressed and in the typical mode of Tennessee portraiture. Both mature individuals appear seated in three-quarter length poses. Sarah Hayes's portrait resembles Cooper's last portrait of Adelia from the 1850s and perhaps they were commissioned together to complement one another. According to Lessing, "Southern domestic ideology placed a greater emphasis on extended family and social relations."⁴⁷ The presence of these works would have placed Acklen, in the eyes of her visitors, within her excellent family lineage. The works also bespeak her strong family connections. The Hayes portraits are still hanging in Belmont mansion in their original gilded and decorative frames. Other works present in the home functioned similarly. Joseph's mother Elizabeth Hunt Acklen appears in a portrait attributed to Huntsville artist William Fry. Adelia's grandparents, Joel Hayes, Jr., and Mary Bliss Hayes were also featured, as well as her brother Richard Hightower Hayes, who was killed in a duel as a young man.⁴⁸

Through a life that seemed dominated by the loss of loved ones and in which women were not encouraged to think or act independently, Adelia Acklen maintained her strength and forged a unique

path. She flourished as an independent force in a patriarchal society in which women typically held very little power, legal or otherwise, while shrewdly managing seemingly limitless assets, maintaining control over her life, and making her own decisions. In the series of portraits she commissioned of herself and her loved ones, she presented a family heritage that likened her to genteel Tennessee society. That these portraits were significant to her is underscored by the multiple insurance policies that Acklen took out to protect her personal property in 1881. She signed up for thousands of dollars of coverages from multiple agencies, some of which was specifically purchased to cover "paintings and engravings and frames thereof."⁴⁹

Although this brief study only offers a small sampling of the portraits of Belmont, ultimately these works are significant on many levels. Primarily, they provide a tangible visual record of a remarkable woman and her much-beloved family. Placed throughout the house, they depict Acklen and her family in the modest portrait styles that were fashionable. They stand in opposition to her less than modest reputation in some circles and reveal the elements of her identity that she probably cherished most—her role as a mother, her loss of loved ones, her faith, and the significance of family in her complicated life. Acklen's strength in the face of frequent death still rings today in her collection, which is steadily making its way back to Belmont Mansion. Acklen's cherished Thomas Sully

portrait of Queen Victoria is perched over the central stair, while Rhinehart's *Sleeping Children*, the memorial to her twin daughter sits in the Front Hall. The centrality of these themes of strength and loss, and indeed Acklen's significance in nineteenth-century culture, was not lost on curators at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who today have arranged Sully's portrait in the same space as a similar sculpted memorial to children, Thomas Crawford's *The Babes in the Wood*.

1. Lauren Lessing, "Angels in the Home: Adelia Acklen's Sculpture Collection at Belmont Mansion, Nashville, Tennessee," *Winterthur Portfolio* 45:1 (2011): 30.

2. Cited in Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 12, from Mary Telfair to Mary Few, 1 December no date. Few Collection, Georgia State Archives, Atlanta.

3. See Anita Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780–1860: From Frontier to City* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1989).

4. Don Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860–1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) cited in Christine Kreyling, "Nashville Past and Present," produced by Nashville Civic Design Center, 8.

5. Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 15.

6. Both stories are recounted in Albert W. Wardin, Jr., *Belmont Mansion: The Home of Joseph and Adelia Acklen* (Nashville: Belmont Mansion Association, 2005), 3–4.

7. Vited in Wardin, *Belmont Mansion*, 1.

8. Joseph Acklen to Adelia Acklen, August 20, 1863. Acklen family papers, Manuscripts Collection 86, box 2. Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane Library, New Orleans, Louisiana.

9. Sister Aloysius Mackin, "Wartime Scenes from Convent Windows: St. Cecelia, 1860 through 1865" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39:4 (Winter 1980): 413, from Mother Frances Walsh's *Annals of St. Cecelia Convent, 1860–1881*.

10. Cited in Lessing, "Angels in the Home," 39 from Wardin, *Belmont Mansion*, 27.

11. Eleanor Graham, "Belmont: Nashville Home of Adelia Acklen," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 30:4 (Winter 1971): 355. *Teresina in America*

12. Ibid, 354

13. Therese Yelverton, *Teresina in America* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1875): 250; 252.

14. Mackin, "Wartime Scenes from Convent Windows," 413.

15. Cited in Wardin, *Belmont Mansion*, 11 from Mother Walsh's *Annals of St. Cecelia Convent*.

16. Cited in Wardin, *Belmont Mansion*, 14.

17. Yelverton, *Teresina in America*, 250–252.

18. "A Lovely Spot: A Correspondent's Visit to the most Beautiful and Delightful Home in the Sunny South," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 18, 1881, 6.

19. Acklen does refer to a portrait of herself in Paris in her will, for example. That work is unlocated. She did also commission artists that regularly worked in New Orleans, such as Robert Gschwindt. Mark Brown, email correspondence, July 8, 2016.

20. Budd H. Bishop, "Three Tennessee painters: Samuel M. Shaver, Washington B. Cooper, and James Cameron." *The Magazine Antiques* (September 1971), 432–434.

21. Graham, "Belmont," 347.

22. Cited in Wardin, *Belmont Mansion*, 3 from *George Hayes of Windsor and His Descendants* (Buffalo, 1884), 102–106.

23. Cited in Graham, "Belmont," 347. This work is known through a photographic reproduction at the Tennessee State Library and Archives and pictured at www.tnportraits.org.

24. As shown by letter of recommendation by Hayes for Earl, September 15, 1820 (two let-