

and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America"—were dispensing how-to advice to individuals who had "an attachment to a certain spot, and a desire to render that place attractive."<sup>2</sup> The beauty of the spot as elegantly cultivated in the taste of Adelia and Joseph Acklen offered captivating "prospects" for family, friends, and the pleasure-seeking public given access to the grounds every day of the week with the exception of the Sabbath. Visitors could amble along pathways covered with gleaming white clam shells transported from the coast of Louisiana, meander through colorful floral beds, repose in blossom-covered gazebos, or contemplate the classical and animal statuary that ornamented the grounds. Formal landscaping covered approximately sixty of the 177 acres of the estate, while kitchen gardens—essential for meeting the needs of family, guests, workers, and nearly three dozen enslaved people—lay outside the cultivated frame of the baronial-like garden.

Involvement in the design and development of the garden appears to have been a collaborative effort on the part of both Joseph and Adelia Acklen. Nonetheless, both labor and expertise were required. No fewer than nine gardeners attended to the grounds of the estate over the course of two decades.<sup>3</sup> It was a common practice to advertise for gardeners with French, German, or Irish backgrounds since various European countries were thought to produce professionals with the skills and expertise essential for successful gar-

dening.<sup>4</sup> Leon Geny, who arrived from the Alsace region of France in 1858, was perhaps the best known gardener locally since he gained American citizenship, and his descendants established themselves in the community as professional gardeners and florists. German-born Robert Kunze was listed in the 1860s census as living with Geny in the gardener's cottage on the grounds. Post-Civil War gardeners include William C. Rock (ca. 1864–1865), William Blair (ca. 1865–1867), English-born Henry Gray (ca. 1867–1869), the Scottish-trained Owen Sharkey (ca. 1869), Elias Winkler (ca. 1870), German-born Valentine [Fischer] Fisher (ca. 1880), and Mike Mullins, who transitioned from "laborer" to "gardener" around 1870.

Belmont's gardeners participated in professional organizations and sponsored exhibitions. The June 17, 1868, edition of the *Nashville Union and Dispatch* lists Belmont gardener Henry Gray as a contributor to the first floral exhibition of the Tennessee Horticultural Society held in the Masonic Hall on May 19 and 20, which featured 672 exhibited plants. Gray received a first premium for a variety of fuchsia over Owen Sharkey who, at the time, was the gardener at the Tennessee Insane Asylum. The premiums were reversed, however, in the *euphorbia splendens* category demonstrating the competitive nature of horticultural exhibitions. Gray also won first premium for twenty-one other plant varieties he submitted to the exhibition, as well as first premium for

his cut flower arrangements, "a pyramidal bouquet and a Latin cross, composed of the finest and rarest of flowers..." His won numerous second premiums and certificates as well. (Owen Sharkey still did well, however, winning twenty-three first premiums. And he became Gray's successor at Belmont.)<sup>5</sup>

Booksellers, like Hagan and Bro. located on Market Street in Nashville, carried an extensive inventory of publications on agriculture, including fruit and floral companions, landscape gardening for dwellings, vine-dresser's manuals, and treatises directed to men and women. William N. White's *Gardening For the South* was among the noteworthy new arrivals listed in a local newspaper on April 1, 1857, illustrating the type of printed resources available to the Acklens and their gardeners.<sup>6</sup>

While publications and periodicals, including A. J. Downing's complete 1855 volume titled *The Horticulturist*, graced the shelves of the Belmont's library, only select aspects of the advice disseminated within their pages were put into practice. The formal terraced-style of eighteenth-century villas that inspired earlier plantation gardens along the banks of the James River in Virginia continued to hold sway throughout the antebellum South. However, the naturalistic mode favored in modern English landscape design was gradually embraced and adapted. Yet, it would be erroneous to imagine gardens were designed solely in an older formal style or

newer naturalistic mode. Period gardens were combinations of both. Landscape authors Rudy and Joy Favretti point to one such example near Nashville. "Some estates had a very straight and majestic approach, such as Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. His wife's garden had many features of the ancient style. Yet other parts of the Hermitage landscape incorporated informal groupings of trees."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, visitors made their way to the Acklens' villa along a road lined with cedar and magnolia trees, which ran through an open deer park before reaching the arbor-studded lawn of the more formal gardens. A reporter visiting the estate in 1863 described the scene:

In the company of an officer, I rode through a beautiful country, rich in splendid groves, breezy hills and luxurious laps of valleys, until in the distance rose a stately tower—a lookout over the country round. Presently we entered the grounds and through the grandest evergreens you ever saw, magnolias, cedars and forest trees, there was a glinting of white statues. Here Hercules, there Apollo, yonder Diana.<sup>8</sup>

Adelia Acklen was well acquainted with the grounds surrounding the home of President Andrew Jackson and his late wife Rachel Donelson although they predated those at Belmont by three decades. Rachel Jackson was known to have taken particular pride in the Hermitage garden which, tradition holds, was designed by the art-