

describes the camellias fixed in William's memory as "very fine" with many being large, covered with flowers, and more than fifteen years old.

Belmont's gardens weathered the disruptions in horticultural activity brought on by the Civil War as cultivators were "called to the battleground from the garden and the spade [was] changed for the sword" while the Acklens' adjacent garden-farm Montvale did not.³³ Today only a portion of the original footprint of the formal garden and evidence of its stylish ornamentation remain within the boundaries of Belmont University's campus in the form of aforementioned cast iron gazeboes, water fountains, an aviary, and numerous iron and marble statues of animal, biblical, and classical motifs acquired by the Acklens. Gardens are an ephemeral art form susceptible to seasonal changes and the winds of modernization. Unfortunately, much of what captivated nineteenth-century visitors, including a substantial greenhouse large enough to accommodate a thirty-foot Norfolk Island pine tree, must be reconstructed through other means.

In 1961, a Washington, D.C., lawyer and art collector, Max Tandler, discovered a grime-encrusted and damaged oil portrait of an unknown estate in the attic of the home Adelia Acklen was building at the time of her death. Charmed by the painting and intrigued by the challenge of identifying the subject, Tandler had the canvas restored and then sent out inquiries

to museum curators across the country. Among them was Harry Lowe, then curator of the Cheekwood Botanical Gardens and Museum of Art in Nashville, who recognized the image as a portrait of the local antebellum estate of Belmont. Today the painting, which measures 39½" x 53 ½" in its original frame, is part of the collection at Belmont Mansion. This estate portrait by an anonymous artist painted around 1860 offers a singular and detailed period portrayal in color of Belmont amidst a well-groomed landscape garden.³⁴ The mansion is shown perched on a hill surrounded by formal gardens complete with gazebos, statuary, and a greenhouse. Additional structures in the estate complex include an art gallery, billiards salon, and bowling alley with rooms for guests and servants' quarters, and an ice-house. The octagonal structure on the right side of the composition, originally thought to be a bear house that was part of the estate's zoo of wild animals modeled after the menagerie at Versailles, is now considered to be a bath house. Brick slave quarters and stables are barely visible through the trees in the upper right. The cupola, added to the top of the mansion in 1860, was used as an observation deck for taking in the surrounding vistas. A water tower, which appears in the lower left portion of the composition surrounded by a moat and classical statues, was under construction in the fall of 1859.³⁵ This is verified in a letter written by Joseph Acklen in which he states he was giving the workers a day off in celebration of the birth of the



An unknown artist captured the Belmont estate about 1860. It offers a singular and detailed portrayal of the famed house and landscape on the eve of the Civil War. (Belmont Mansion Association)

Acklens' daughter Pauline. The greenhouse and art gallery, mentioned previously, also date to circa 1860, prior to the Federal occupation of Nashville in February of 1862, and the subsequent use of Belmont as one of the Union armies' general headquarters. It is reasonable to assume this large portrait of the mansion and its grounds was painted by an anonymous artist about 1860 or 1861 after the additions to the original estate and prior to the onset of the Civil War.

What we see in the portrait is consistent with what we know about the appearance of Belmont and its grounds from this time period. Other early images of Belmont were published in contemporary illustrated magazines, newspapers, and even map legends as engravings, alongside numerous interior and exterior photographic views that can be used for comparison. An engraving of the Belmont mansion appeared on an 1860 map of Nashville. This legend image provides the clearest contemporary