

Belmont College, 1890-1913

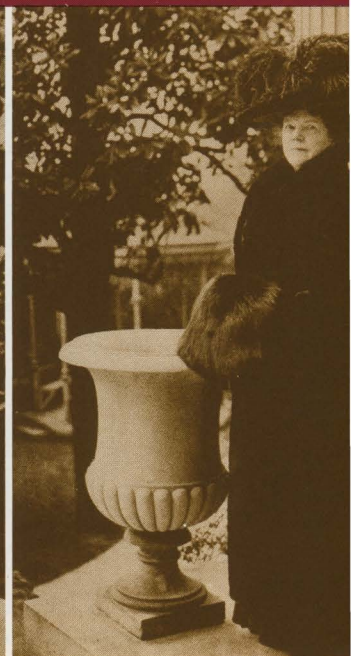
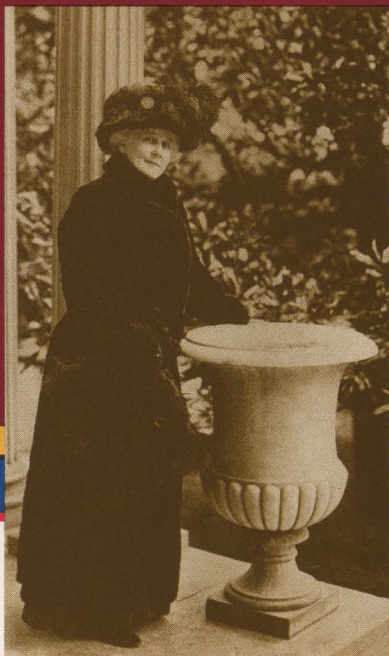
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nnouncing the opening of Belmont College on September 4, 1890, the *Nashville Daily American* called the new school for young ladies "the Vassar of the South." Its opening was hailed as "a red letter day in the educational annals of the city"

Ninety girls from prestigious families across the South and Southwest filled the available spaces and 40 others were turned away. History records that the school combined "the grandeur of an ante-bellum mansion with the cosy conveniences of modern inventions."

The school's founders were Misses Susan Heron and Ida Hood, reportedly from near Philadelphia. The two ladies were driving out Hillsboro Road when they saw the estate for the first time. Miss Hood later wrote that "Miss Heron was extravagantly pleased with the place and forthwith made arrangements for locating here." They are quoted as saying, "It was the tower" that attracted them.

At home in the Mansion. Belmont College student Annie Clements White, left, entertains a guest in her room in the historic building, circa 1898.



Miss Susan Heron, left, and Miss Ida E. Hood, founders of Belmont College.

A Rigorous Academy

The prestigious school was not just a finishing school, for these ladies believed in "girl brains." A rigorous academy was instituted. Included in the \$60 a year tuition were Latin and Greek, class elocution, calisthenics and chorus singing. Private lessons in piano and voice were available, each for \$80 per year. Art and private elocution lessons were also offered.

Soon, the college had grown enough for additional buildings. Fidelity (1905) and Founders (1909) halls were added to the west and east of "Friendship Hall" (later referred to as North Front), which became the north facade of the campus.

The three buildings looked down the hill toward the city of Nashville in the distance. In addition, dormitories were built to house the increasing number of students: Pembroke Hall (1913) and Heron Hall (1916).

Access to the city was gained via streetcar. Excursions were made into Nashville for shopping, sightseeing, and attending cultural events—with chaperones, of course. On Sundays, the girls attended church in a group, usually going to (Downtown) Presbyterian or McKendree Methodist.

By 1900, the college was conducting three-month tours to Europe. The group would meet in New York at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel before setting sail together. Louise Davis, reporting in the *Tennessean* in 1948, related an experience in Paris when they had been unable to get tickets to see Sarah Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon*. The actress heard of their disappointment and wrote each of the girls a special invitation to attend the performance. Those notes with her signature were saved to pass on to children and grandchildren.