Belmont University pledges to provide students with the opportunities, the tools and the encouragement to go from here to anywhere… and the university offers itself as a living example of progress through its rich history as a member of the Nashville community. This history reflects an increasing presence and improvement through time. From its foundation as a private estate in 1853 to its current status as a respected institution of higher education, Belmont has seized every opportunity to create an ideal learning and living space in the heart of this urban community.

Here is a look at how Belmont’s face and function have transformed time and again throughout the past 150 years.

Adelicia Acklen Era
Newlyweds Joseph and Adelicia Acklen constructed Belmont as a private residence in 1853 and surrounded their Italian villa-style mansion – called Belle Monte – with gardens, fountains, gazebos, a greenhouse, art gallery and zoo. Since there was no public park in the area, Mrs. Acklen invited her Nashville neighbors to enjoy the Belmont estate. However, following Joseph Acklen’s death, Mrs. Acklen remarried and sold the estate to a land development company.

Ward-Belmont Era
In 1890, the company sold the property to two Philadelphia women who transformed the estate into Belmont College, which offered elementary school through junior college education to young women. In 1913, the school merged with Ward Seminary to become the prestigious Ward-Belmont School for Women. The college design was based on Jeffersonian model of the University of Virginia with a green mall situated in the center of campus surrounded by academic and residential buildings facing inward towards the mall.

Belmont College Era
The Tennessee Baptist Convention purchased Ward-Belmont in 1951 and created a coeducational liberal arts school – Belmont College. Most of the academic and student residential facilities were constructed during this era.
Belmont University Era
Belmont College received accredited university status in 1991. By the year 2004, Belmont’s enrollment included 4,000 students from across the United States and the world as the University celebrated its 114th year of higher education on this site.

Throughout all of these transformations, one quality has remained constant: Belmont’s interest in and commitment to the community and its neighbors. Just as Mrs. Acklen opened her home to Nashville residents, the administration, faculty and students at Belmont University continue to reach out to their neighbors in the surrounding Waverly-Belmont, Belmont-Hillsboro and Sunnyside residential neighborhoods, as well as those north of Wedgewood Avenue in the Music Row district. The University also strives to enhance relationships with the residents, businesses and organizations that populate the busy Belmont Boulevard corridor. In 2004, Belmont created a statuary memorial to Ed and Bernice Johnson, who operated a service station at the intersection with Portland Avenue, in recognition of their 30-plus years of caring and giving to students.

As enrollment increases and physical space needs grow, the university will seek to sustain these relationships with the community. Plans for the future involve smart and responsible growth, integrated community-campus functions and, as always, open doors to the university’s neighbors. The ever-changing face and function of Belmont University will no doubt include state-of-the-art educational facilities, but will remain rooted in history as an urban campus growing up and around a still-standing 19th century estate.