

Discoveries Relating to the Virginia Manufactory of Arms That Have Been Made Since 1975

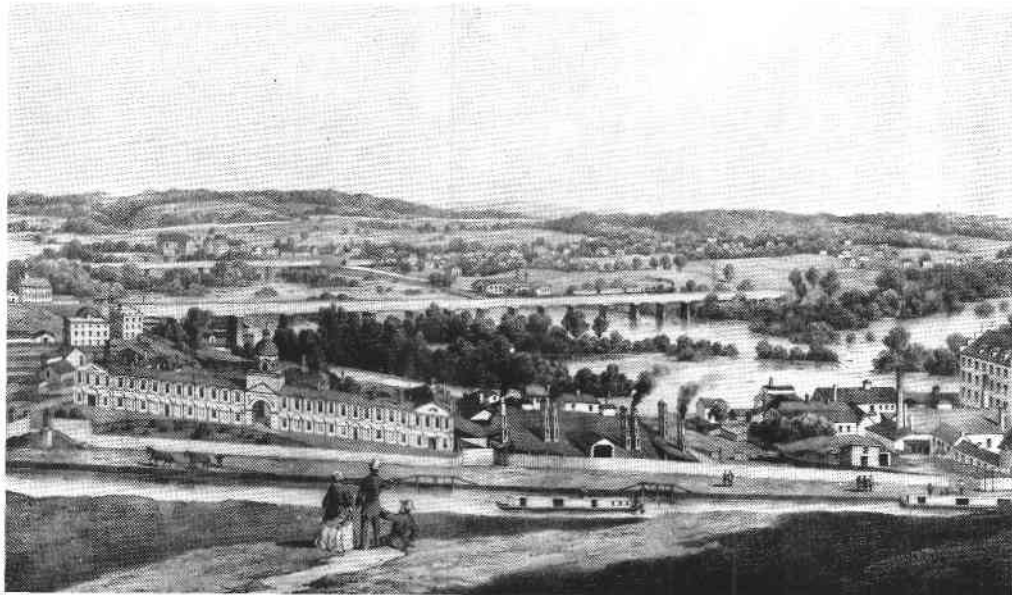
by Giles Cromwell

Since the 1975 publication of *The Virginia Manufactory of Arms*, several objects which I consider to be important both to the field of arms collecting and to the related and inseparable area of Virginia history have been discovered which I would like to share with you at this time. In other words, this presentation will be something in the way of an up-dating on this subject. First of all, let me say that this brief talk will not pertain to just additional examples of Virginia Manufactory weapons which have circulated within the collecting field since 1975, but, rather, those new pieces which have, I believe, something special and unique about them which elevates them somewhat above the usual items occasionally seen. Thus, most of the objects we will be sharing have in their own peculiar way, something interesting and important about themselves as they relate to the study and history of the Virginia Manufactory of Arms. Had the schedule of human events allowed their appearance and recognition earlier, they certainly would have been included in the publication, but the capriciousness of collecting and fate prevented this objective. Consequently, these pieces will be seen and commented upon in their proper perspective for the first time.

As a brief background to what the Virginia Manufactory of Arms was all about, let me begin by saying that after the American Revolution, Virginia was the first and perhaps only state in America to manufacture all of the weapons for its own militia. Established by the General Assembly on January 23, 1798, the armory in Richmond was completed in 1802 and pro-



duced muskets, rifles, pistols, swords, and cannon from 1802 through 1821. Later, during the Civil War, practically all of these weapons were re-issued to the Confederate troops. Virginia's arms manufacturing was eminently successful, and while the publication adequately summarized the twenty years of weapons production, I have found to my greatest enjoyment that new facets of this subject are continuing to surface, and as a student of this armory and as a collector of its weapons, it is my obligation, and in fact, a sense of duty compels me, to at least record these fragments of history for you. As a background I would like to show you a few views of the armory.

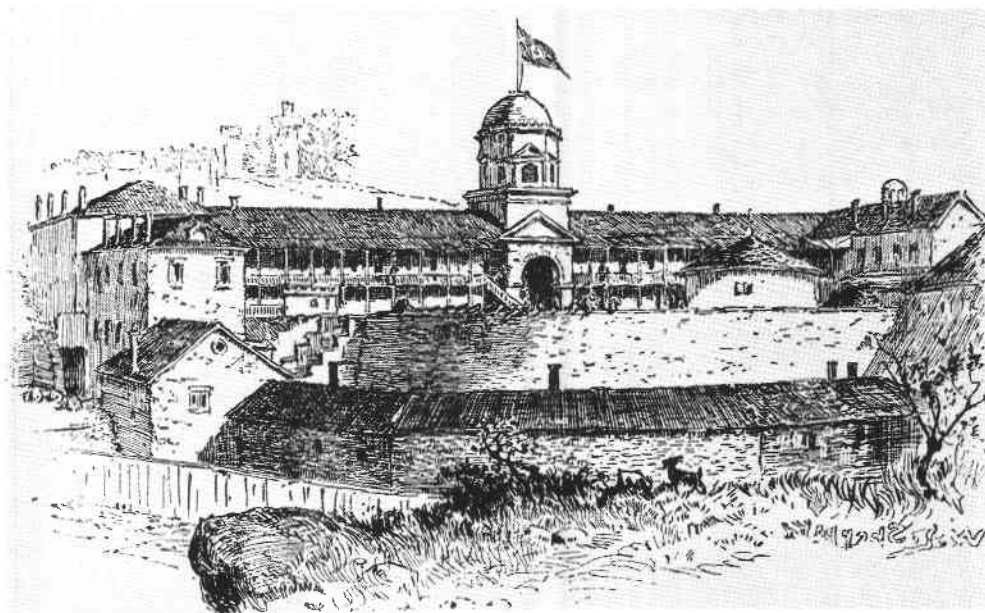


This first picture is a print of the armory ca. 1840 by Edward Beyer, a German landscape artist, who spent a considerable amount of time in Virginia recording many varied scenes. This print, which is widely known, is perhaps the single best view of the Virginia Manufactory of Arms in the context of its setting near the canal and river, and, hence, must be considered of the utmost importance in our understanding of the institution. The building was approximately one hundred yards long and was located at the end of 5th Street between the James River Canal and the James River.

Courtesy Virginia State Library



This is a close-up view of the armory sketched by William L. Sheppard ca. 1861, and gives us a better understanding of the detail of the building.
Courtesy Virginia State Library

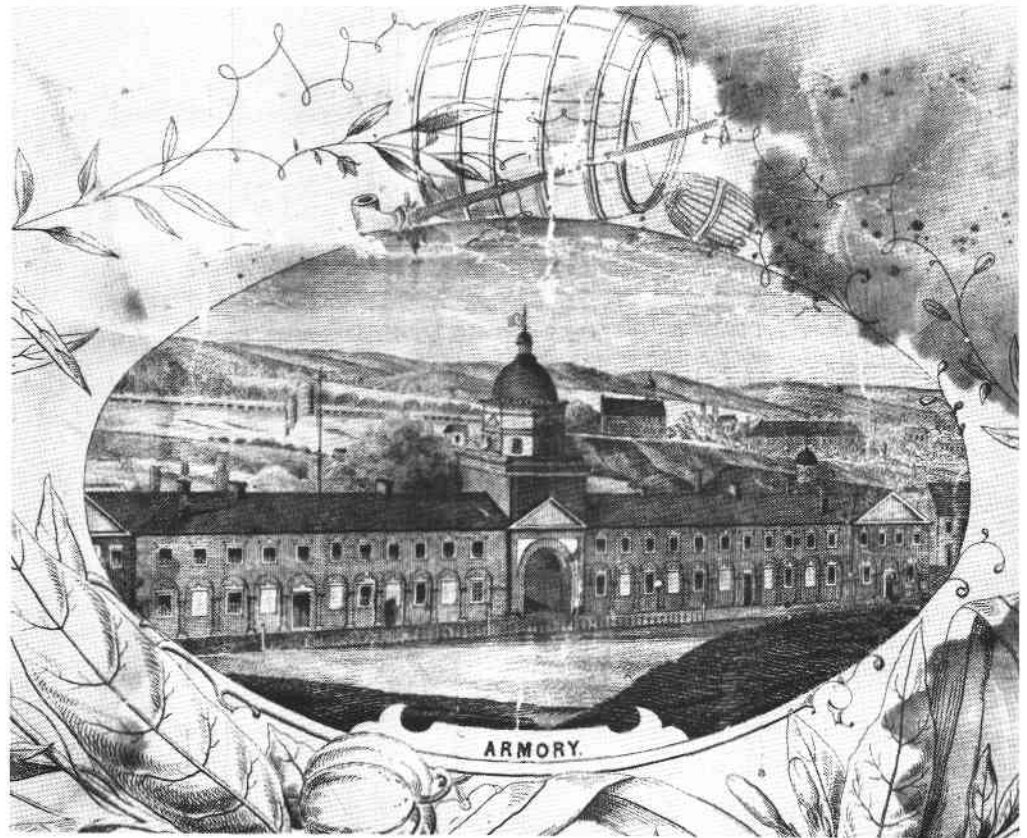


This is a view from the rear of the armory also sketched by Sheppard ca. 1861, and clearly shows how the armory expanded since the early 1800s by adding on to the buildings toward the lower James River so that eventually an enclosed courtyard was formed.
Courtesy Virginia State Library

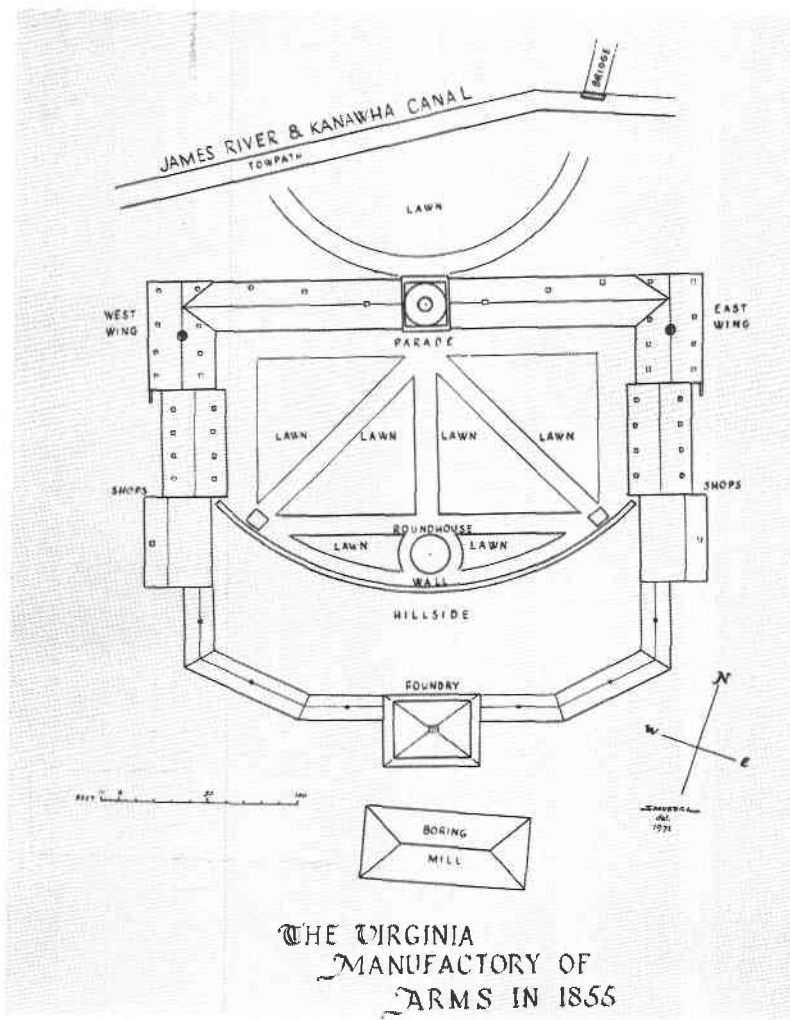


Another view of the armory by an unknown artist ca. 1861. The cupola is actually out of perspective and a little too large for the building.
Courtesy Virginia State Library

A view of the armory ca. 1852.
Courtesy Virginia State Library



An artist's concept of the armory, ca. 1855.
Courtesy University Press of Virginia



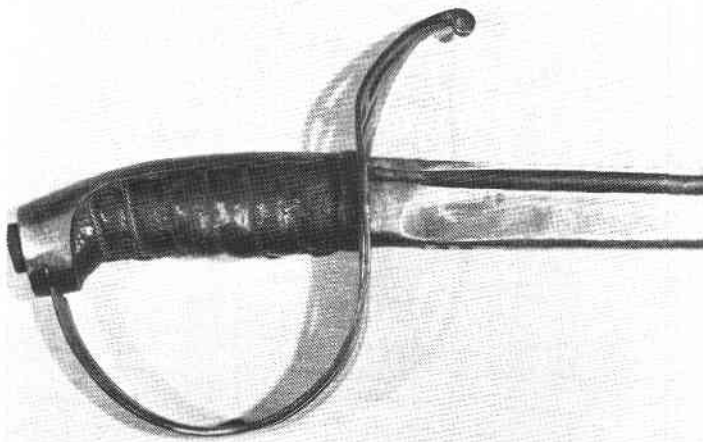
Let us now proceed from this brief look at one aspect of the armory's furnishings and look at some of the weapons which

have appeared since 1975. We will begin by mentioning a few edged weapons.

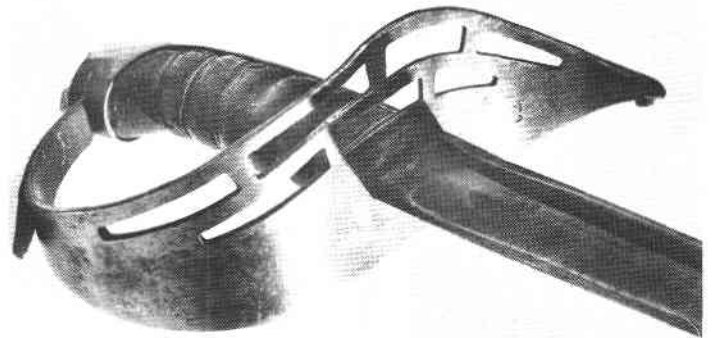


This first weapon photographed illustrates one of the earliest known Virginia Manufactory swords. It is one of only 56 made by James Winner at the armory in 1804 using a single fluted, rather than a double fluted, blade. Up until the discovery of this particular sword in 1975, collectors of these weapons had only seen the double fluted blades. I would mention at this time, however, that this blade has been slimmed to fit a later Confederate style thinner scabbard, but you can still see the deeply pronounced fuller. The Executive Council decided to change this blade style from a single to a double fuller in January 1805, and thereafter, all Virginia Manufactory swords were made with the double fuller or fluted blades. Of particular interest to collectors is the fact that these first 56 swords were completely and entirely made by James Winner. Unlike other Virginia Manufactory weapons including the swords which were assembled by using the parts often made by different artificers, this example is the product of one, identifiable

worker. To date, this is the only example extant of the 56 single fluted swords reported on vouchers as having been made prior to the change to the double fluted blade style. As an aside, this particular sword, of course unidentified at the time, came from an estate sale in Roanoke, Virginia, and was taken to the Hillsville Gun Show on Labor Day in 1975. The original Confederate scabbard with brass carrying rings had been taken off of the sword and, instead, had been placed by the dealer on a French cavalry sword dating ca. 1840. I subsequently had to purchase this French sword in order to obtain the original Confederate scabbard so that a correct and proper re-marriage could occur. Out of curiosity I inquired of the dealer why he had taken the scabbard away from the old iron hilted sword in the first place, and his reply was because with the brass rings on the scabbard it looked so much better on the brass hilted French sword!

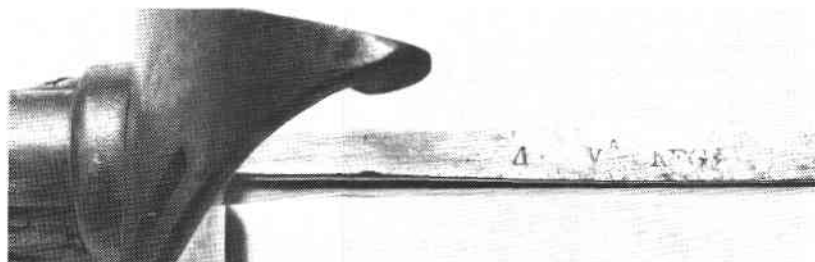


This next photograph shows a close-up of the hilt area. Twisted brass wire encircles the horsehide covered walnut handle.

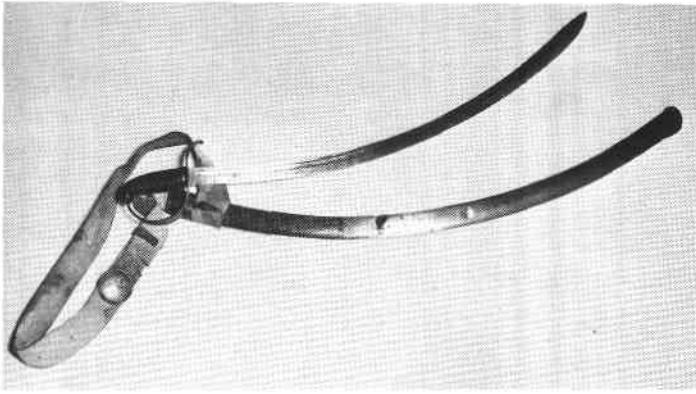


Photos Courtesy The Gun Report

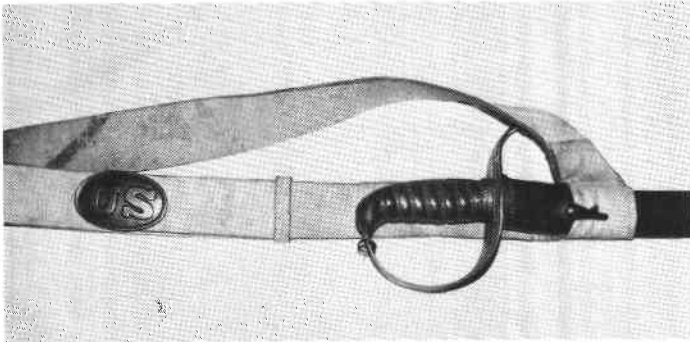
This is another angle of the hilt. Notice the number "62" stamped into the face of the guard. I know of other Confederate-altered First Model swords with numbers stamped into their guards, but I am unable to explain these markings other than that they somehow pertain to the altering of the swords for Confederate use.



A close-up of the blade marking indicating that this sword was distributed to a cavalryman in the Fourth Virginia Regiment.



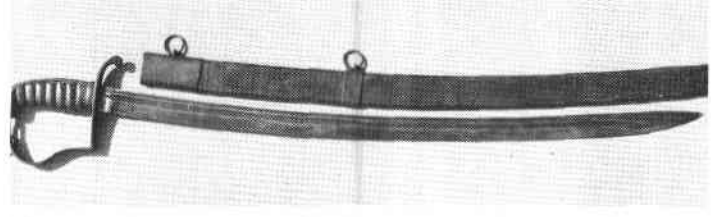
This sword, scabbard, and original buff leather belt have been photographed before, but I offer the set here as a preface to another sword and belt we will view after this example. This sword with its white buff leather shoulder belt and plain circular brass plate, which is lead filled and stamped "H. Dingee," were all found together in an attic of a house in Warrenton, Virginia, when central air conditioning ductwork was being installed several years ago. The sword is a Second Model dating 1806-8, and the belt is basically of the ca. 1830 period, probably manufactured in New York and purchased by Virginia. Although there is a loop sewn adjacent to that portion which encircles the scabbard, it has never been cut to hold a bayonet scabbard stud, and it should not have been so cut as we are viewing a cavalry accessory here. This photograph serves to introduce the next sword and belt and plate which was just recently located in California.



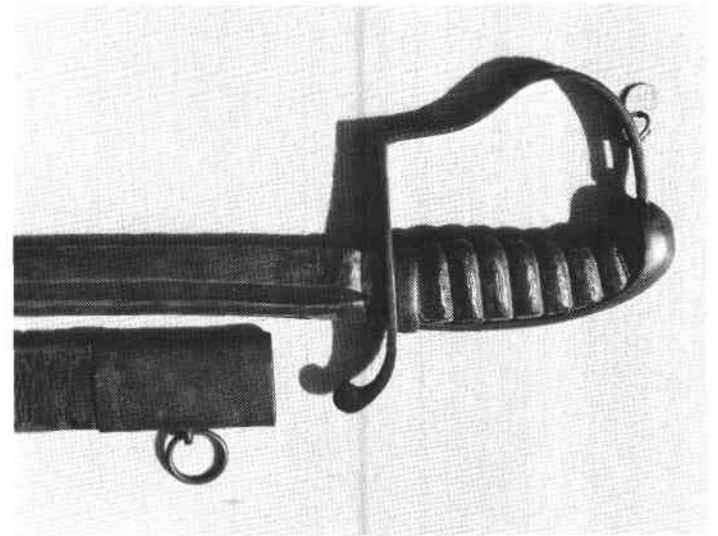
I have little history on this piece except that it is also a Second Model sword, and the belt and plate, dating from approximately 1846, are all original to the piece. The thin brass lead-filled oval U.S. plate is unique and completely original to the belt. The plate has three wire hooks on its back and has always been with the belt. This accessory probably dates around the Mexican War period of 1846-8 and probably was a federal issue to some Virginia organization going into the southwest. The belt, incidentally, is identical to the one in the preceding photograph.

This next photograph is unique in that it illustrates to date the only known example of a leather scabbard for the scarce Virginia Manufactory artillery sword. This sword and scabbard in Robert McCauley's collection truly fills a missing link in the history of these weapons. Only approximately 2,000 of these artillery swords were made, and their survival rate appears to have been extremely low. They were frequently used during the Civil War as cavalry weapons, and this may partially explain

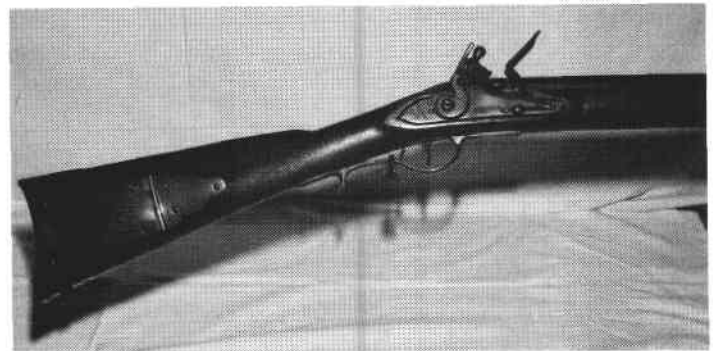
the reason for their low survival rate as collectors' items today. In 1806, an artillery sword cost the state \$4.31, and the scabbard cost approximately \$1.00 to manufacture. The scabbard is leather with an iron or tin throat and has small iron carrying rings. The tin scabbard tip is missing.



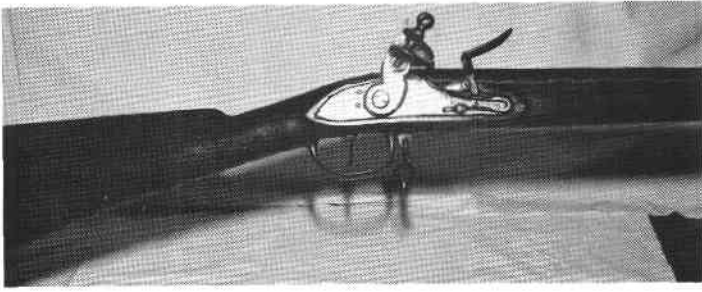
This is a close-up view of the hilt of the artillery sword and includes the throat mounting of the scabbard:



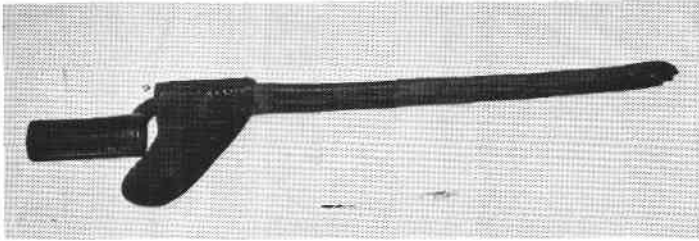
Within the past several years another Virginia Manufactory rifle has become available to collectors, and I have included a photograph of it here because the piece is original flint and, hence, a scarce specimen, as so many of these rifles were converted to percussion and often have their barrels shortened. As of this time, I know of only five original flint Second Model Virginia rifles in either museums or private collections. The original goosenecked cock has been replaced with a reinforced one many years ago; this second cock is so contemporary with the flint era of the rifle and has been with the piece so long I feel that it should not be replaced with a more correctly styled cock.



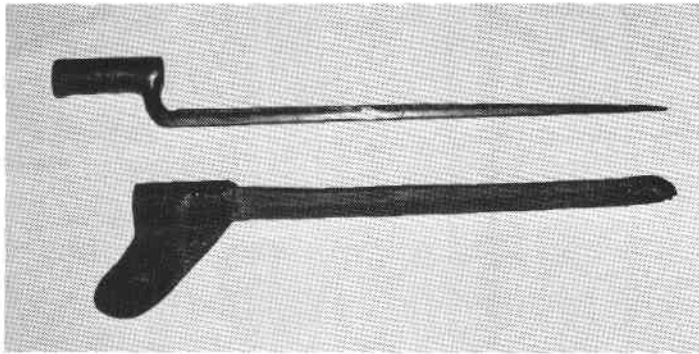
We will now make a transition from the swords and rifle to the Virginia Manufactory muskets.



This is a view of a Second Model musket dated 1817. That which enhances this piece from all other similar muskets is the fact that the original bayonet and scabbard were found together with the musket.

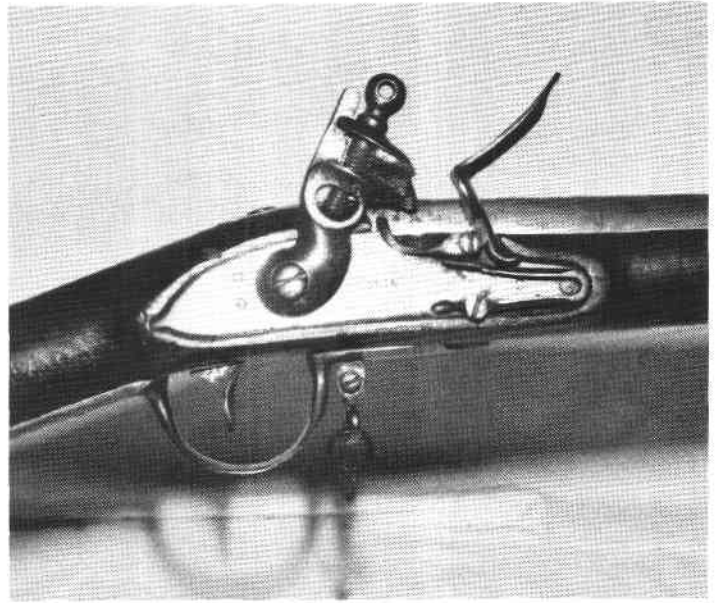


The bayonet has an overall length of 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ " and the blade measures 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". The piece generally conforms to the U.S. bayonet manufactured at the Federal armories during this period. The socket is stamped with the number "19" forward of the locking slot. The bayonet lug on the musket barrel is stamped "18" and the "1" digit on both numbers has been struck using the same die.



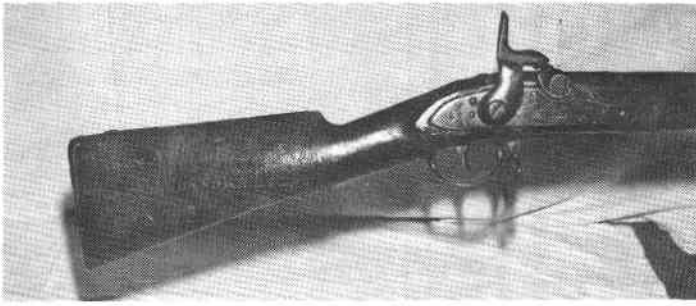
The bayonet scabbard is very interesting. The frog portion of the scabbard is sewn around the scabbard sheath and this frog has been treated with tar. Two thin brass studs fixed to this frog enable the scabbard to be attached to a cross shoulder belt. The short shanks, or length of the studs, indicate that the original belt probably would have been made of linen rather than of leather, as the short height of the studs' shanks would have prevented the thicker leather from attaching thereon. This scabbard generally conforms to the militia bayonet scabbard of the period ca. 1830-40, although these militia scabbards usually have small eagle buttons to secure the shoulder sling. I can find no indications that this Virginia-related scabbard ever had a metal tip, although such tips were traditionally applied to such scabbards. Although I consider the bayonet to be original to this musket and date the bayonet as 1817, I believe this scabbard was purchased by the state ca. 1830-40. Traditionally, Virginia only infrequently issued bayonet scab-

bards as the bayonets were to be carried fixed to the muskets at all times. There is a possibility, of course, that this scabbard also dates ca. 1817 along with its bayonet and may be a predecessor of the later-styled militia scabbards with the eagle buttons. As of this time, anyway, I know of no other bayonet and scabbard which has a direct relationship to its original Virginia Manufactory musket, although, of course, several muskets with (probably) original Virginia bayonets are known in collections.



This next photograph is of a Transitional Model Virginia Manufactory Artillery musket with a lockplate dated 1812. The barrel length is 36". The important feature of this piece is that the barrel is stamped only with the extremely rare designation "1 VA REGT." A county name or designation has been omitted since all cavalry and artillery weapons were marked only with the regimental number (i.e., 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th) for which the weapon was issued. The 1st Virginia Regiment, for example, was made up from twenty-one counties, and thus these cavalry and artillery markings have more of a geographical association than an individual county or unit designation. Generally speaking, the state did not mark its artillery muskets. I know of only one other artillery musket, dated 1810, which is also stamped for the 1st Virginia Regiment. This example is in the West Point Museum collection. The date of 1812 on the artillery musket photographed here is interesting as it immediately recalls to us the War of 1812 and coincides somewhat with the state's philosophy of mobility of her cavalry and artillery troops during a war in which the coast and inland rivers necessitated both troop movement and flexibility not practiced since the Revolution as the British once again attempted the harassment and attack upon the state's waterways.

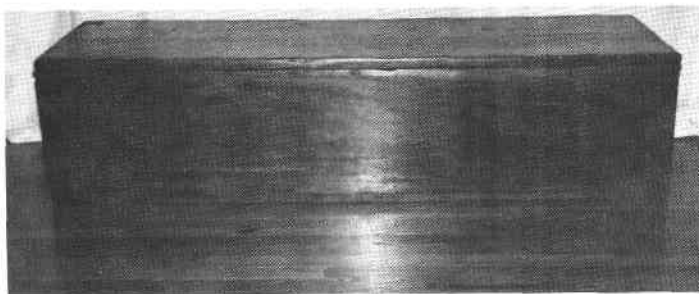
While on the subject of warfare, it is in order to now mention another war which took place in Virginia and also had a direct bearing on the use of these Virginia weapons. At the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, Virginia issued thousands of her old, obsolete Virginia Manufactory weapons directly to her forces. The firearms were issued immediately in their original flintlock form, and as the spoils of war augmented the Confederate weapons inventory, these old flintlocks were recalled and converted to the percussion system.



This is a photograph of one of those converted muskets which has an especially intriguing history. This piece may have been carried from Richmond by a member of the Richmond Light Infantry Blues, Co. A, 46th Va. Regiment under the command of Captain O. Jennings Wise, to Roanoke Island, as the Richmond Blues and the 59th Va. Regiment were the only two Virginia units to serve in that action in support of the North Carolina troops already there. While we will not cover the entire battle of Roanoke Island at this time, it will suffice to state that the Union forces, outnumbering the Confederate by at least three to one, managed a successful amphibious landing on the island and succeeded in taking complete control of the area and forced the unconditional surrender of 2,675 Confederates after the latter had retreated to the extreme northern end of the island. This victory enabled the Union forces to control the eastern coast of North Carolina as well as maintain jurisdiction over its many inland rivers.

This particular musket is inscribed on the right side of the stock "Taken at the Battle of Roanoke Island, Feb. 8, 1862," and on the obverse side of the stock is also inscribed "C.H. Foss" and "Mt." Research in the National Archives indicates that Charles H. Foss was a captain of the 25th Regiment of Massachusetts Infantry. This unit, along with other units from Massachusetts, New York and Connecticut, all took part in this battle. So here we have an interesting trophy. The musket is dated 1821, the last year of arms manufacture at the armory, and in the left side of the stock near the side plate are stamped the initials "TW." Records in the state archives indicate that Thomas Williamson stocked muskets at the armory only during the year 1821, so we are able to identify another fragment of history regarding this musket.

We now move from muskets to one other related subject.



At first glance, we have photographed what furniture minded people would assume is a "... six board blanket chest." However, this piece has a little more going for it than that. This is a Virginia pine musket box made ca. 1802-22, possibly by penitentiary labor, at a cost of \$1.50, or the same cost of a pine coffin of the period. The box was used to store and/or transport Virginia Manufactory muskets. The box measures

63½" long by 19" wide by 15½" high. It is constructed of southern yellow pine, nailed open-dovetail corners, with internal vertical corner supports, and has rope handles. Pine brackets inside held cross supports to secure the muskets; these cross supports are missing.



The cleats on the inside of the lid or top and the three hinges are later, non-period, additions. This box was found in the rough in Albemarle County, Virginia, ca. 1948 and the top of the box had been nailed shut using the original nails. As an aside, yellow pine when new or green is relatively soft, but as it dries and cures, it hardens considerably. The nails were so deeply embedded into the top that to pry open the top would have caused considerable damage to the wood. In order to remove the top, a hacksaw blade was inserted between the top and the sides of the box, and the nails were cut, thus allowing access to the interior.



Branded into each end of the box is "Va. Armory/20 Muskets/3 Feet 6." These markings indicate that the box was to contain muskets whose barrels measured 42" in length. To my knowledge, this is the only Virginia Manufactory musket box extant today. It certainly makes an exciting statement apropos of the collecting of these weapons.

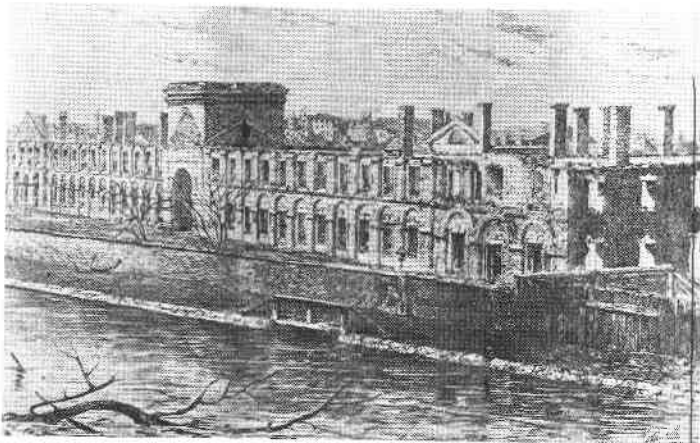
We will begin our termination of this discussion by once again referring to a few photographs of the armory itself.



On the morning of April 3, 1865, with the evacuation of the city of Richmond, the Virginia Armory was completely gutted by fire. Fortunately we are blessed with surviving photographs which have captured this traumatic period of our history, and through the existence of these photographs we are able to continue the investigation and research of this important southern arms-making establishment. This picture, I feel, adequately conveys the devastation of the armory area after the fire. These

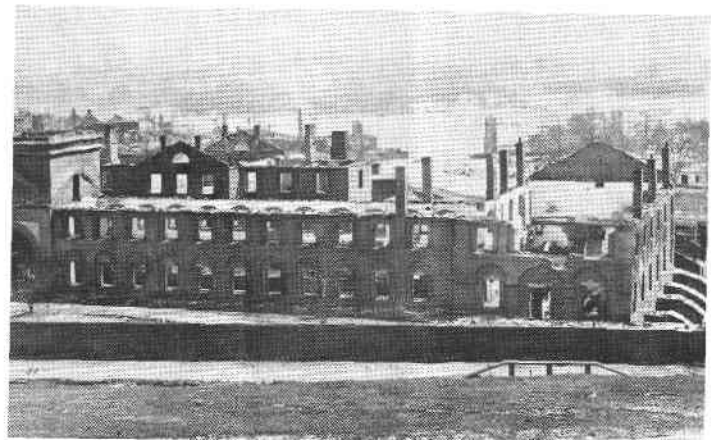
photographs are important for they have captured interesting features which otherwise would be lost to us. For instance, early work invoices ca. 1803 indicated that the interior walls of the armory were whitewashed during its early years of operation, and this particular photograph substantiates this fact and shows us that these same walls were still white as late as 1865 when the building burned.

Courtesy Virginia State Library



This is another view of the burned armory. Notice the lamp post in the foreground. This photograph and the next one both convey a profound sense of desolation emphasized by the cold, forsaken, leafless trees. These two pictures were probably taken about the winter of 1866.

Courtesy Virginia State Library



Still another view of the west wing of the armory. Notice the same lamp post captured by the artist in the preceding sketch.

Courtesy Virginia State Library



This next photograph has just been recently found in the Cook Collection in the Valentine Museum in Richmond. The photograph dates ca. 1905 and represents the last known reminder of any standing section of the armory building before it was razed. This view shows the west wing of the armory as it was rebuilt in 1866 as quarters for the Public Guard, who occupied the wing until 1869. As far as we know, this wing was unoccupied except as a possible storage facility from ca. 1870 until ca. 1905 when it was demolished. Notice again that the lamp post is still standing! If you remember, I mentioned at the beginning of this talk that I considered Edward Beyer's sketch of the armory

perhaps the single most important overall view of the building. I consider this last rebuilt view of the armory probably as number two in overall importance and interest. Because of this rare photograph, for example, we are able to determine for the first time that the brick in the building was laid in Flemish bond which consists of each course laid with headers and sketchers alternately. The juxtaposition of the twentieth century C. & O. railroad car in front of this nineteenth century building and the approaching Tredegar Foundry sheds built upon the side of the building, all serve to create, for me at least, a feeling of reality for this place which heretofore had somehow eluded me.



I am often asked, "What is on this armory site today?" This last photograph, taken from the twenty-third floor of the new Federal Reserve Bank, provides the answer. A public parking lot covers the entire area once occupied by the armory with the exception of a narrow portion where the western wing and culvert system was located. I believe, however, that the Ethyl Corporation, which owns this property, understands the significance of the area, and while the parking lot is not particularly

aesthetically pleasing, perhaps it may preserve this site for a closer, more detailed study and interpretation in the years to come, as one company official remarked to me, "The parking lot doesn't have to be there forever."

This concludes my presentation. In closing, I hope that we have been able to share a collecting spirit and recognize the feeling that our collecting, in order to be alive and positive, must be an ongoing quest. If we can allow this search to continue, we will refresh our experience while we simultaneously record both for ourselves and our beneficiaries the heritage of our country. Thank you.

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I am deeply grateful to the following persons and organizations who have granted permission for me to use photos copyrighted as indicated in the captions:

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