

Louis Froelich: Immigrant, Sword Maker . . .

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If you drive through Kenansville, North Carolina, today you might notice a lone highway marker located at the western edge of town on the road leading “from the Court House to Magnolia.” The marker reads “Confederate Arms Factory stood here. Made bowie knives, saber-bayonets, and other small arms. Destroyed by Federal cavalry, July 4, 1863” (next page). No mention is made of Louis Froelich, a German immigrant, who used his expertise and resourcefulness to produce for the State of North Carolina and the Confederate States of America more than 26,000 edged weapons.

Froelich’s valuable contribution to the Confederacy was recorded in *The Wilmington Journal* on April 28, 1864:

HOME INDUSTRY — We learn from the Confederate that at the manufactory of Messrs. L. Froelich & Co., Kenansville, N. C., from April 1, 1861, to March 1st, 1864, this establishment has furnished 18 sets of surgical instruments, 800 gross military buttons, 3,700 lance spears, 6,500 sabre bayonets, 11,700 cavalry sabres, 2,700 officer’s sabres, 600 navy cutlasses, 800 artillery cutlasses, 1,700 sets of infantry accoutrements, 300 sabre belts, and 300 knap-sacks.¹

In the early months of the Civil War, the State of North Carolina successfully placed contracts for rifles with firms in the Jamestown and Greensboro areas. However, they were concerned with the need for sabre bayonets for these rifles and sabres to arm the large number of cavalry regiments being raised. This concern was indicated in a letter Governor Henry T. Clark wrote on March 11, 1862, to Confederate Secretary of War, Judah P. Benjamin, about his difficulty in obtaining carbines and swords for Colonel Spruill’s 19th N. C. Reg’t. Clark stated “We searched from New Orleans to Richmond. We did engage from the Estvan & Froelich sword factory at Wilmington, and paid high prices, but three-fourths of the swords proved worthless.”²

Froelich left his home in Bavaria in the late 1850s and by way of London and New York ultimately arrived in Wilmington in the spring of 1861. He spent several years in London building steam engines for ships. In Wilmington, Froelich almost immediately became associated with the firm of Loeb & Swartzman, dealers in groceries, coal and wood. This firm advertised in *The Daily Journal* during June and July of 1861 as the Wilmington, N. C. Button Manufactory. One ad stated that “under the direction of Mr. L. Froelich, a thoroughly educated mechanic, we are



enabled to turn out at the quickest notice, all sizes of uniform buttons.”³ Very little is known of the success or failure of the button operation.

In the fall of 1861, Froelich met B. Estvan, a man who would prove to be of questionable background and character. Estvan, situated in Wilmington in early 1861, contacted Governor Clark and offered his services to instruct a company of cavalry in the use of the lance. Estvan was in North Carolina traveling under the guise of a “Colonel” of Confederate Cavalry. Apparently the North Carolina officials, anxious to arm their cavalry, were somewhat taken-in by the “Colonel.” This situation probably led to the first North Carolina sword contract and Estvan sought Froelich to produce the swords. Collectors have been unable to positively identify any of the swords from this contract.

By November of 1861, Froelich and Estvan were well established in arms manufacturing with contracts from both the State of North Carolina Ordnance Office in Raleigh and the Confederate States of America in Richmond, Virginia. In January, 1862, they advertised in *The Daily Journal* for “mechanics who can execute round wood work,” probably referring to the making of sword handles.

They also were paying highest cash prices for old iron, copper, brass, and pewter.⁴ In the same paper in February, 1862, they were paying one cent per pound for anthracite coal for their forge and steam engine use.

The firm used various names in Wilmington: “Estvan and Froelich Sword Factory,” “Confederate Arms Factory,” “Confederate States Sword Factory,” etc. Research has not revealed the location of the Wilmington manufactory.



Highway marker at Kenansville, N. C., armory site.

On March 12, 1862, Froelich posted a notice in *The Daily Journal* that the partnership between him and Estvan as “Confederate States Arms Factory” was dissolved and that he would continue the business alone.⁵ Estvan’s true identity surfaced in an editorial that appeared in the *Daily Richmond Examiner* on August 10, 1863, under the heading “Southern Imposters North.” The editor stated that Estvan was Hungarian, served with distinction in several European wars and came to Richmond to establish a military school. He was described in the most uncomplimentary terms possible and was hated by Richmonders for leaving his wife and family there at the “mercy of its welfare.” Estvan went North and published a book in which he made himself a hero. He even fooled the Yankees, as the book got into “*The [New York] Herald*” and Estvan became an instant celebrity in New York.⁶

Listed in the National Archives is a group of approximately fifty pay vouchers to Froelich and Estvan. These vouchers are from the Confederate States of America and the State of North Carolina Ordnance Office. The two earliest vouchers, both from the Confederate States of America and dated November 16, 1861, include payments for 128 lances at \$7.00 each and 220 lance “boots” at 72 cents each. Lance “boots” were leather scabbards to cover the blades. Another group of vouchers from the State of North Carolina Ordnance Office, dated between December 18, 1861, and March 26, 1862, include payments for:

226 Sword bayonets	\$ 10.50 each
102 Cavalry sabres and belts	\$ 24.00 each
151 Artillery swords (probably cutlasses)	\$ 12.00 each
4 Artillery swords	\$ 35.00 each
300 Sabre bayonets	\$ 10.50 each
50 Attachments (rings)	.90 each
192 Lances	\$ 5.00 each
1 Artillery Cutlass	\$ 12.00 each
232 Sabre bayonets including sheaths and rings ⁷	\$ 10.50 each

It appears that most of the edged weapons left the factory with the accoutrements necessary for field use attached. Initially the State of North Carolina may have supplied the leather goods to the armory, but later Froelich established his own leather working operation at Kenansville.

These two groups of vouchers, though by no means a complete record, indicate the production at Wilmington from the Froelich and Estvan partnership. The Confederate States of America deliveries were received at Richmond, Virginia or at Wilmington, and the State of North Carolina deliveries were consistently made to Raleigh.

By a deed dated September 30, 1862, Froelich purchased a 2.5 acre lot in Kenansville, N. C., from Alsa Southerland for the sum of \$900.00. The lot was located at the western edge of town on the south side of the road leading “from the Court House to Magnolia.”⁸ Magnolia was the closest station on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. Kenansville is approximately sixty miles north of Wilmington, which was and still is the county seat of Duplin County. The town was named for an early patriot, General James Kenan, whose family established a plantation there in the middle 1700s. The price Froelich paid for the armory site would indicate that there were probably considerable buildings existing there. One interesting point of reference in the deed is “beginning at the Kenan line.” I believe the site was once part of the Kenan plantation and probably contained storage sheds, barns, and possibly even a blacksmith shop or forge. We know that Froelich used a steam engine for power.

Just prior to purchasing the Kenansville property Froelich continued to operate at Wilmington, making deliveries to both the Confederacy and the State of North Carolina. Some work may have continued at Wilmington even after the Kenansville armory was in operation.

During the next several months, Froelich established a major arms manufacturing operation in Kenansville using the business name “Confederate States Armory, L. Froelich, Prop.” If Froelich brought any supplies or equipment from Wilmington, they would have gone on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad to Magnolia Station and by wagon over to Kenansville. This same railroad would have been used for arms deliveries as well as incoming raw materials.

Another group of vouchers lists six deliveries to the Confederacy and one final delivery to the State of North Carolina between September 30, 1862, and July 1, 1863. Included in these vouchers were:

2 Brass kettles	\$ 70.00 each
153 Sabre bayonets (Last N.C. delivery)	\$ 13.00 each
99 Sabre belts	\$ 3.00 each
34 Sabre belts	\$ 4.00 each
200 sets infantry accoutrements, consisting of cartridge box, cap pouch, cartridge box belt, waist belt & bayonet scabbard	\$ 13.00 each
102 Sabre bayonets and scabbards ⁹	\$ 10.50 each

These deliveries, some of the first from the Kenansville Armory, indicate Froelich's increased production of accoutrements.

On July 3, 1863, a force of 650 men of the Third New York Cavalry, commanded by Lt. Col. George W. Lewis, left New Bern, N.C., headed for Warsaw, N.C. Correspondence in the Official Records states that their mission was to destroy communications on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. Their route of travel would take them west from New Bern through Trenton, Comfort, Hallsville, Kenansville, and onto the railroad at Warsaw. Their advance was hampered all along the route by extreme heat, Confederate pickets, and by their own Horse Artillery and Howitzer Battery. When the column approached Hallsville they had to take extreme care in crossing a river ford to prevent their ammunition from getting wet. It was also necessary to rest the horses. Seeing a delay, Colonel Lewis sent Major Jacobs and a battalion of men on to Kenansville with orders to capture a company of cavalry thought to be there. At Kenansville, Major Jacobs surprised the cavalry, capturing all of their horses and equipment and taking a number of prisoners. Correspondence further states that an armory and knapsack manufactory were destroyed, including some 2,500 sabres, saber bayonets, Bowie knives and "other small arms." A large quantity of tools, saddles, and equipment as well as food stores were also destroyed. It was dark when Major Jacobs arrived at Kenansville and this may have prevented him from destroying all of the buildings at the armory. Colonel Lewis and the balance of the column arrived early the next morning, bivouacked, and prepared to move out before daylight on July 5. Magnolia was the closest railroad point to Kenansville; however, a large Confederate force was encamped there at the bridge. Being informed of this, Colonel Lewis headed the column towards Warsaw, arriving about 8 a.m. Just as Lewis' men arrived at Warsaw an empty train was going south towards Wilmington for troops to reinforce the Confederates at Magnolia Bridge. Lewis' men immediately began cutting the telegraph lines, destroying the depot, warehouses, stores, and the railroad

track for three or four miles in both directions. At about 1:00 p.m., the column headed back towards Kenansville, where they were fired upon by Confederate troops from Magnolia. Lewis then pushed his troops rapidly towards Hallsville and Comfort to be under the protection of his own troops coming out from New Bern. Additional correspondence in the official records was critical of Colonel Lewis for not destroying more railroad track and for not having his "cavalry work gangs" more organized.

Colonel Lewis' column contained one unusual group of men on this expedition: Company L, North Carolina Union Volunteers.¹⁰

Existing vouchers indicate only two deliveries to the Confederacy for the remainder of 1863 after the raid on the armory, one dated November 12, for 80 pounds of candles, and one dated November 24, for one sergeant's sword and belt at \$35.00

The armory raid interrupted an agreement Froelich made on April 29, 1863, with W.S. Downes, Superintendent of Armories, Confederate States of America, for 500 sets of infantry accoutrements. One hundred fifty sets were to be delivered on July 1, 1863, and 50 sets each two weeks thereafter.¹¹

There is recorded in the registrar of deeds office in Kenansville an Articles of Agreement between Louis Froelich and Jacob W. N. Cornehlson dated January 1, 1864. In this agreement Froelich sold a co-partnership to Cornehlson for the sum of \$29,930.62. The business would operate under the name Louis Froelich & Co. in the manufacturing of arms, accoutrements, and horse shoes. On February 25, Froelich acknowledged payment of the funds in full and the agreement was recorded on March 1. The 1860-61 City Directory of Wilmington lists a J. (H.) N. Cornehlson as being associated with the firm of Sharpsteen & Co. as a "bar keeper."¹²

The last known deliveries from Kenansville to the Confederacy are as follows:

January 4, 1864	
200 knapsacks	\$ 6.00 each
January 25, 1864	
23 (?) swords	\$ 10.50 each
436 sabres	\$ 28.00 each
133 sabre bayonets	\$ 10.00 each
May 2, 1864	
645 sabres	\$ 28.00 each
293 knapsacks	\$ 6.00 each
May 6, 1864	
97 sabres	\$ 28.00 each
December 31, 1864	
30 axes ¹³	\$ 12.00 each

It appeared that Froelich and Cornehlson managed to get some production back on schedule, especially during the first half of 1864.

The finest surviving Froelich document is a letter in the National Archives dated June 7, 1864, from Froelich to Capt. Dinwiddie, Ordnance Department, Richmond, Va. In this letter, Froelich acknowledged previous instructions from Colonel Brown to discontinue the production of knapsacks. The letterhead shows "Confederate States Armory, Kenansville, N.C., L. Froelich, Proprietor." To "L.

Froelich" has been added by hand "& Co."¹⁴

Among the arms made by Froelich is a group of short swords that have been highly sought after by collectors. Included in this category is a distinctive Bowie knife, artillery cutlass, and naval cutlass.

The first to attribute these short sword arms to Froelich were the late Messrs. William A. Albaugh III, and Richard, D. Steuart; the latter's collection now resides in the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond.



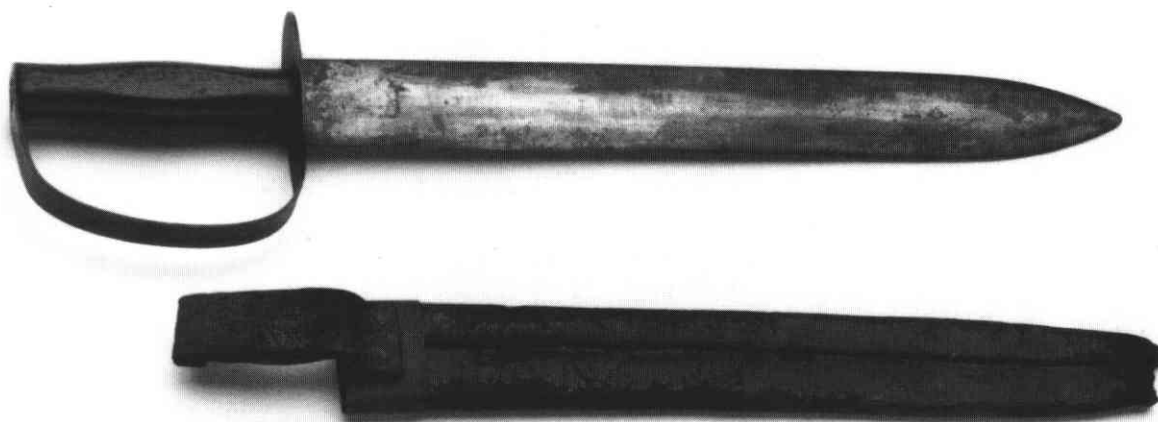
BOWIE KNIFE

Overall length 20 inches. Bowie blade has clip, is 14¾ inches long, 1⅙ inches wide and ¼ inch thick. Three and one-half inches from guard, the blade has slight edge taper down and following along the clip to the point.

The clip is not sharpened. Guard is cut from stock material ⅜ inches thick. Guard is ⅞ inches wide at the pommel and forms a "D" to the blade where it flares into an oval. Grip is one-piece walnut through which the tang passes and is peened flat at the pommel. Grip is basically round except

for a flattened area on either side running 3¾ inches up from the guard.

The scabbard for the Bowie knife is leather, folded over and sewn from the bottom of the throat to the point and to the beginning of the clip. A two-piece copper rivet reinforces the scabbard at the bottom of the throat. The belt loop is 1⅜ inches wide, 4¾ inches in length and sewn to the reverse side of the scabbard.



ARTILLERY CUTLASS

Overall length 21 inches. Spear-point blade is 15¾ inches in length, 1⅞ inches wide, ⅝ inch thick and has an oval cross-section. The "D-Guard" and grip are basically identical to that of the Bowie knife. The scabbards for the cutlasses are

leather, sewn in the middle of the reverse side with tin throat and tip mounts fastened with two iron brads. The identical belt loop is fastened on the reverse side through the tin throat mount with two two-piece copper rivets.



NAVAL CUTLASS

Overall length 21¼ inches. Spear-point blade is 16 inches in length, 1⅞ inches wide, ¼ inch thick and has a diamond cross-section slightly hollow-ground. Blade has a 1½ inch flat section in the middle next to the guard before the diamond begins. The “D-Guard” is identical to that of the

Bowie/Artillery cutlass except the obverse side of the oval has been flattened or drawn out to increase its size for more hand protection, as found on most navy cutlasses. The one-piece walnut grip is round, contoured to fit the hand.



CUTLASS VARIATION

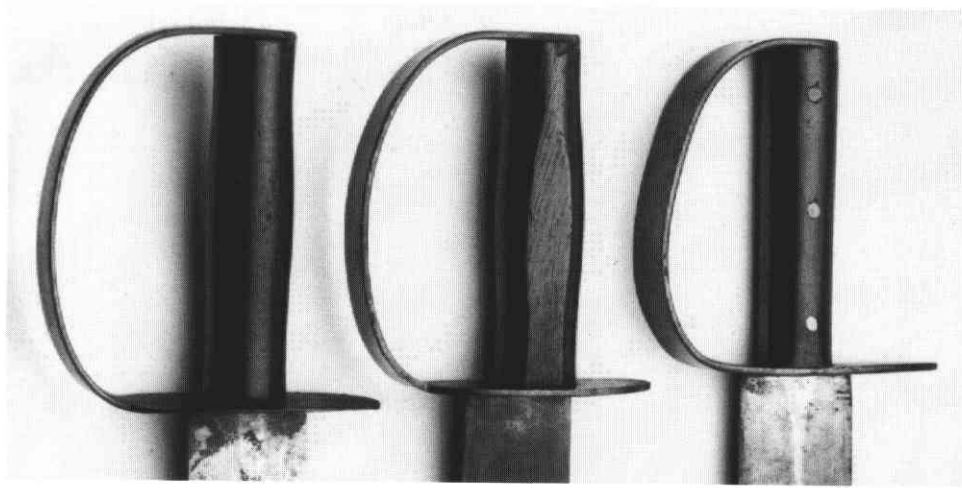
Overall length 21 inches. Spear-point blade is 16 inches in length, 1⅞ inches wide, ⅝ inches thick and has a diamond cross-section. The “D-Guard” is cut from ⅝ inch stock and is 1⅞ inches wide. The guard does not flare into an oval but is the same width as it passes the blade and then forms

a pointed quillon. The grips are two-piece walnut fastened to the 1⅞ inch wide tang with three iron rivets. The thicknesses of the blade, guard and tang add considerably to the weight of this cutlass.

MARKINGS

Some of the cutlass scabbards are decorated with a single line along the upper and lower edge of the obverse side. Some of the naval cutlass' scabbards are coated with a waterproofing material. The only markings on the short swords are a set of matching “punch marks” (dots) found

on the tang and face of the guard, both covered by the grip. Several short swords are known with the metal parts covered with a reddish-brown lacquer, identical to what Froelich used on the scabbards of the cavalry sabres and officer's swords.



Short Sword Grips: A – Naval Cutlass, B – Bowie Knife and Artillery Cutlass, C – Cutlass (variation)

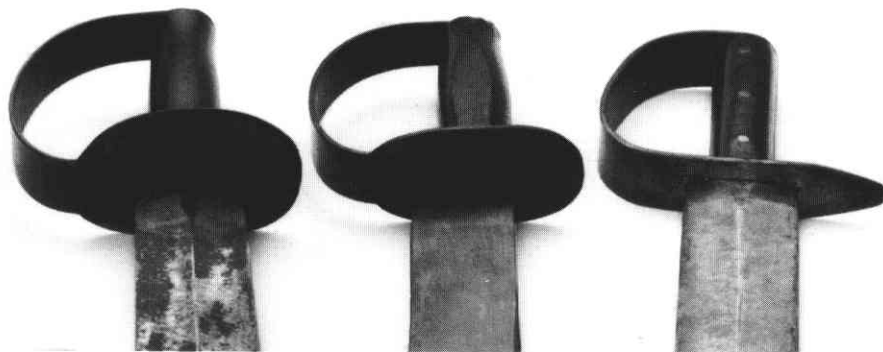
Kenansville today is a typical small southern town that has managed to survive the Twentieth Century better than most. Nothing remains at the armory site to remind one of sword making. The site has a dwelling built in the 1930s and a 40 by 60 foot cinder block office building built in 1979. The owner indicated that when the lot was cleared for the office building “a lot of metal” was carried away. The building faces north. When the footing was dug for the west wall, a row of “pine light wood” piers were unearthed. These probably supported a shed-type building that stood close to the road. Recently at the sight, a day of “relic hunting” did not disclose anything attributed to the armory. In addition to the armory site, Froelich is believed to have purchased lots east to the Presbyterian Church. In the last half of 1863, Froelich also rented a house in Kenansville to the Confederacy for use as a hospital for \$12.50 per month.

A short distance east of the armory site is the Cowan Museum located in the Kelly-Farrior House, c. 1848. Among the items in the museum is a piece of machinery (anvil?) found on the Vestal property years ago (opposite). It was saved for “cracking walnuts.” This piece is believed

to be from the armory. The Kelly-Farrior House was moved to its present site and renovated a number of years ago. During the renovation a lance spear was found in an interior wall. This lance spear is identical to one excavated at the armory site in 1973. Adjacent to the Kelly-Farrior house is “Liberty Hall,” the Kenan family plantation home, built by Thomas Kenan II in the early 1800s.

In the 1870 census, the Louis Froelich family was still living in Duplin County, Kenansville Post Office, in dwelling No. 34. This dwelling is believed to have been directly across the road from the armory. In this census Froelich was 51 years old and his occupation was listed as horticulturalist. The family included his wife and four sons, one each born in Germany, England, New York, and North Carolina. Also living in the household, born in Germany, was Katrina Bissinger.¹⁵ There was a Charles Bissinger associated with Froelich and authorized by him to receive payments for deliveries to the Confederacy at both Wilmington and Richmond.¹⁶

When additional information is found, I believe there is considerably more to the story of Louis Froelich, immigrant, sword maker.



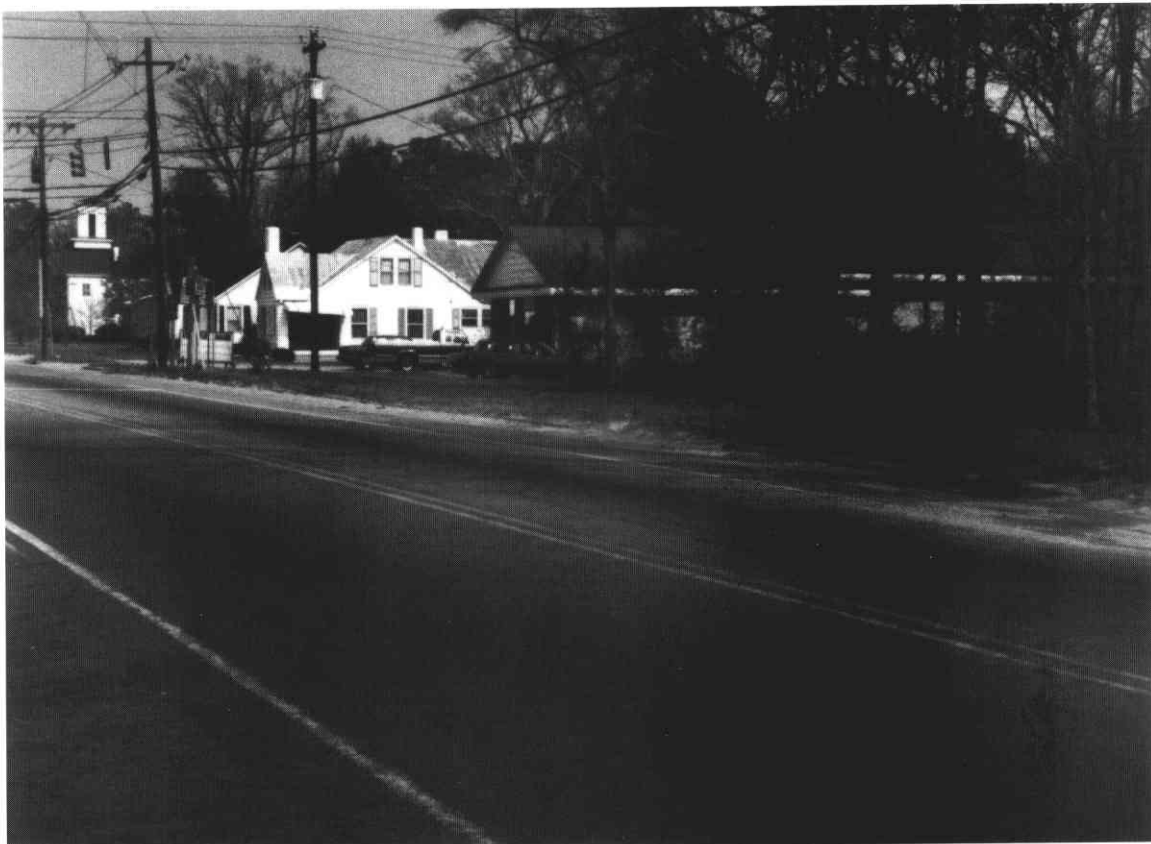
Short Sword Guards: A – Naval Cutlass, B – Bowie Knife and Artillery Cutlass, C – Cutlass variation

NOTES

1. *The Journal*, Wilmington N.C., April 28, 1864, Page 1.
2. *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series IV, Volume I, Page 987.
3. *City Directory*, Wilmington, N.C., 1860-61, Page 55.
The Daily Journal, Wilmington, N.C., June 4, 1861, Page 3.
4. *The Daily Journal*, Wilmington, N.C., January 14, 1862, Page 3.
The Daily Journal, Wilmington, N.C., February 7, 1862, Page 3.
5. *The Daily Journal*, Wilmington, N.C., March 12, 1862, Page 3.
6. *The Daily Richmond Examiner*, Richmond, Va., August 10, 1863, Page 1.
7. *War Department Collection of Confederate Records*, RG 109; M346 Confederate Citizens and Business Firms; Roll 327, Froelich and Estvan.
8. Registrar of Deeds Office, County of Duplin, N.C., Deed Book 24, Page 113.
9. Op. Cit., War Department Records, Roll 327.
10. *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol. XXVII, Part II – Reports, Pages 859-867.
11. Op. Cit., War Department Records, Roll 327.
12. Registrar of Deeds Office, County of Duplin N.C., Deed Book 24, Page 294. *City Directory*, Wilmington, N.C., 1860-61, Page 29.
13. Op. Cit., War Department Records, Roll 327.
14. *War Department Collection of Confederate Records*, RG 109, Chapter 4, Records of the Confederate Ordnance Department, Volume 94, Item No. 163.
15. Census, Duplin County, N.C., Kenansville Post Office, 1870, Page 456.
16. Op Cit., War Department Records, Roll 327.



This machinery block (anvil?) is in the Cowan Museum and is believed to be from the Kenansville Armory.



Kenansville, N. C., armory site today with office building, frame dwelling, and Presbyterian Church in the distance at left.