Bellona Arsenal
Chesterfield County, Virginia
Lorraine Vic.

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey
Major Eugene Bradbury, District Officer, A.I.A.
210 East Franklin Street, Richmond, Virginia

VA#139

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BELLONA ARSENAL
On the James River, 12 miles above Richmond
Chesterfield County, Virginia

Owner: James M. Ball, Jr., Richmond, Virginia

Date of Erection: Arsenal, 1815-1816. The Virginia Foundry, 1801-1809.

Architect:

Builder: Arsenal was built by the United States Government. The Virginia Foundry was built by the Virginia Assembly.

ARSENAL:

Present Condition: The brick work of the existing brick buildings is in very good condition, but the roofing has been replaced with other materials. Interior work is practically gone. The stone walls of the Powder Magazine are in good condition but the roof is entirely gone. The stone wall several feet high which enclosed the grounds is gone in places and other places are in poor condition. On top of this stone wall surrounding the grounds was a brick wall about two stories high which has been entirely removed. A frame building on the grounds used as a dwelling is in fair condition.

Number of Stories: One of the existing buildings of brick, the largest, has two stories and basement. The other two brick buildings are two stories high.

Materials of Construction: The largest of the existing brick buildings has stone basement walls and two stories of brick above. The other two buildings have two story brick walls. The Powder Magazine with its surrounding stone walls is built of stone, with dressed and coursed stone work around the openings. The two small brick buildings at some distance away which, it is understood, were part of the original foundry were built of brick.

Existing Records: Colonel L. Spaulding, Chief of the Historical Section of the Army War College, stationed at Fort Humphreys, D. C., in a letter dated January 9, 1937, regarding the arsenal, writes:

"Our records yield very little information concerning Bellona Arsenal (also known as Richmond Arsenal). The land on which it was situated was acquired by deed from Wm. Trabue and his wife, September 21, 1815; an arsenal was established there the same year; the area was abandoned as a military reservation in 1833 and the property was sold in 1856."

The following extract was taken from the American State Papers, Military Affairs:

"A company of artillery was stationed at this (Richmond Arsenal) post from 1821 to 1831.

"Statement concerning arsenals and armories of the United States, under the resolution of the Senate of the 1st July, 1836.

"Arsenal, near Richmond, Virginia. The government have thought it advisable to abandon this arsenal in consequence of the unhealthiness of the situation and the difficulty of access."

The following extract was taken from the War of the Rebellion:

"Joint resolution in regard to the movement of troops and arms within the limits of this Commonwealth by the General Government. Adopted April 1, 1861.

"And whereas, it has come to the knowledge of this Legislature that a large number of heavy guns, manufactured at Belona Foundry, near the capital of Virginia, under an order of the Ordnance Department at Washington, D. C., have been ordered to Fortress Monroe, where they can only be neoded for the purpose of intimidation and menace to Virginia at present, and of actual hostilities in a certain contingency that may change her future relations to the Federal Government and the anti-slavery sentiment it represents:

"1. Be it resolved by the General Assembly, That the Governor of this Commonwealth be authorized, and he is hereby directed, in case of the actual attempt of the Federal authorities to transport said guns over the soil of Virginia, to seize and detain such guns for the use of this Commonwealth; and to that end to order out the public guard to arrest the contemplated removal of the guns beyond the reach and control of the government of this State.

"2. Resolved further, That the Governor be, and he is hereby, authorized and required, out of the money appropriated for the purchase of arms at the present session of the General Assembly, by an act passed on the 29th day of January, 1861, entitled an act appropriating $1,000,000 for the defense of the Commonwealth, to pay to Dr. Junius L. Archer the amount due him, viz, $7,872.47, on his contract for the manufacture of said guns, and to the Government at Washington the sum of $13,024, which said Government has paid to said Archer on account of his said contract; and the Governor shall require the superintendent of the armory at Richmond to take possession of said guns, and deposit them therein for safe-keeping."

THE VIRGINIA FOUNDRY:

The following information was gathered from Dr. Kathleen Bruce's book entitled, Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era:

In 1796 it was determined to build a State arms factory and a cannon factory at the Virginia capital and in 1800 the Assembly passed the Act necessary to put it into effect. John Clarke, a young Virginian, was delegated to execute the Project. In 1809, the Virginia Foundry was completed. It was engaged in producing muskets, rifles, swords, and pistols, and was, subsequently, engaged in the manufacture of cannon. Close to the Foundry the Federal authorities set up an arsenal, also known as Bellona, and there United States officers proved many a big gun before it was boated down river and canal to the deck of a sailing ship at Rockets whence it was transported to Fort Monroe at Old Point Comfort.

Bibliography:

American State Papers, Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States. Selected and edited under the authority of Congress, by Asbury Dickins, Secretary of the Senate, and John W. Forney, Clerk of the House of Representatives. Volumes V and VI. Published by Gales and Seaton, 1860.

Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era, by Kathleen Bruce, Ph.D. Printed by the Century Company, New York - London. Copyright 1931, by the American Historical Association.

The War of the Rebellion. A compilation of the Official records of the Union and Confederate armies. Published under the direction of the Hon. Elihu Root, Secretary of War, by Brig.-Gen. Fred C. Ainsworth, Chief of the Record and Pension Office, War Department, and Mr. Joseph W. Kinkley. Series IV, Volume I. Government Printing Office. Washington, D. C. 1900.

Letter from Colonel Oliver L. Spaulding, F. A., Chief, Historical Section, the Army War College, Fort Humphreys, D. C.

Virginia Thompson
Historian

Approved: January 15, 1937

Eugene Bradbury
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