

# The Fayetteville Arsenal: A Place of Pride and Community Effort

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In 1836 the United States government built the Fayetteville Arsenal for the construction and storage of guns and ammunition. The arsenal was an important source of commerce and labor that helped Fayetteville grow. It provided jobs for people and brought more money into the local economy. Craftsmen and their families traveled from the North to work at the arsenal. Farmers from the surrounding area had a market for surplus crops. And citizens from other towns began to buy things from Fayetteville businessmen. The arsenal was as source of pride for the people of Fayetteville and all of North Carolina.

During the Civil War, the Fayetteville Arsenal became the second-largest domestic source of weapons for the Confederacy. After the attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, and President Abraham Lincoln's call for troops from North Carolina, the state seceded from the Union. As young male North Carolinians threw their support behind the cause, it became important to arm them.

The state's governor, John W. Ellis, knew what a valuable resource the Fayetteville Arsenal was. He ordered one thousand state militiamen to take control of the Federal arsenal. The arsenal surrendered peacefully.

In June 1861 Governor Ellis transferred control of the arsenal from the State of North Carolina to the Confederate government. This was an important gain for the South. With the surrender of the arsenal came 36,000 weapons that were stored there. In the fall of 1861, Confederate troops took over another Federal arsenal, at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Much of its gun-making machinery, rifle and pistol parts, and workers were sent to the Fayetteville Arsenal.

In addition to using the Harpers Ferry machinery to create weapons, the Confederate arsenal converted many older flintlock models to more modern percussion-cap weapons. The Fayetteville Arsenal also produced two guns unique to the arsenal—the Fayetteville Pistol-Carbine and the Fayetteville Rifle. These weapons were not produced anywhere else. The Fayetteville Pistol-Carbine was produced from the fall of 1861 until the fall of 1862. When pistol parts from Harpers Ferry ran out, production ended. Very few of these weapons exist today.

A far more important contribution to the wartime effort was the Fayetteville Rifle. This model was produced from the spring of 1862 until the end of the war. The rifle was forty-nine inches long and weighed about eight pounds. The lock plate, near the trigger, was stamped with the word *Fayetteville* and an eagle. In three years, the arsenal produced more than 10,000 Fayetteville Rifles.

As a result of the naval blockade, the arsenal received limited amounts of supplies. The Union wanted to prevent the South from receiving weapons and supplies from Europe and from areas of the Union that were sympathetic to the Southern cause. Warships blockaded all entrances to ports, rivers, and coastal towns.

The blockade made life in the South difficult because it caused shortages of food, clothing, and other necessities. Some supplies could be smuggled in, but there was not enough lead to make all the bullets needed. Newspaper advertisements in Fayetteville asked citizens to donate wood and metal from their homes to make weapons. The South also had a shortage of workers to manufacture guns for the soldiers.

Civilians in North Carolina assisted with the war effort in many ways. Since most men were fighting in the war, women did many jobs usually handled by men. Over the course of a few months in 1864, sixty women and young girls at the arsenal produced 900,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition and fuses for cannons and artillery shells. This output was one of the arsenal's most important war contributions. The Fayetteville Arsenal also produced gun carriages for cannons. Records indicate that civilian blacksmiths and foundry workers did this work.

Throughout Fayetteville, civilian women also cooked for soldiers. Women formed groups that knitted socks and gloves for soldiers to wear, acted as nurses, and farmed the land. In addition, civilian workers at the arsenal raised money for the relief of troops. The workers sent this money to the Confederate government in Richmond, Virginia.

The production of arms and ammunition continued off and on until General William T. Sherman and his Union army entered Fayetteville on March 11, 1865. Before Sherman's arrival, the commanding officer of the arsenal removed most of the weapons and machinery from the facility. He hid them in Chatham County coal mines so that they would not fall into Union hands.

Sherman made his headquarters at the arsenal and stayed in Fayetteville from March 11 until March 14. He was afraid the people of Fayetteville would begin using the arsenal to manufacture more weapons and ammunition after he left. So, on March 12, 1865, Sherman ordered the destruction of the arsenal. It took two days to complete the job.

Buildings throughout the city shook from the explosions, and many nearby homes caught fire from the intense heat as the arsenal burned. The Union army also destroyed shops, factories, food suppliers, fields, railroad property, gristmills, and newspapers. The arsenal site stood in ruins until 1873. The United States government then divided the land into lots and sold them to the public.

Today, Arsenal Park is part of the Museum of the Cape Fear Historical Complex. Visitors to the site can see remains of the arsenal's blacksmith shops, engine house, and gun carriage turning shop. The museum sponsors special events that show how people lived and worked during the Civil War.

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