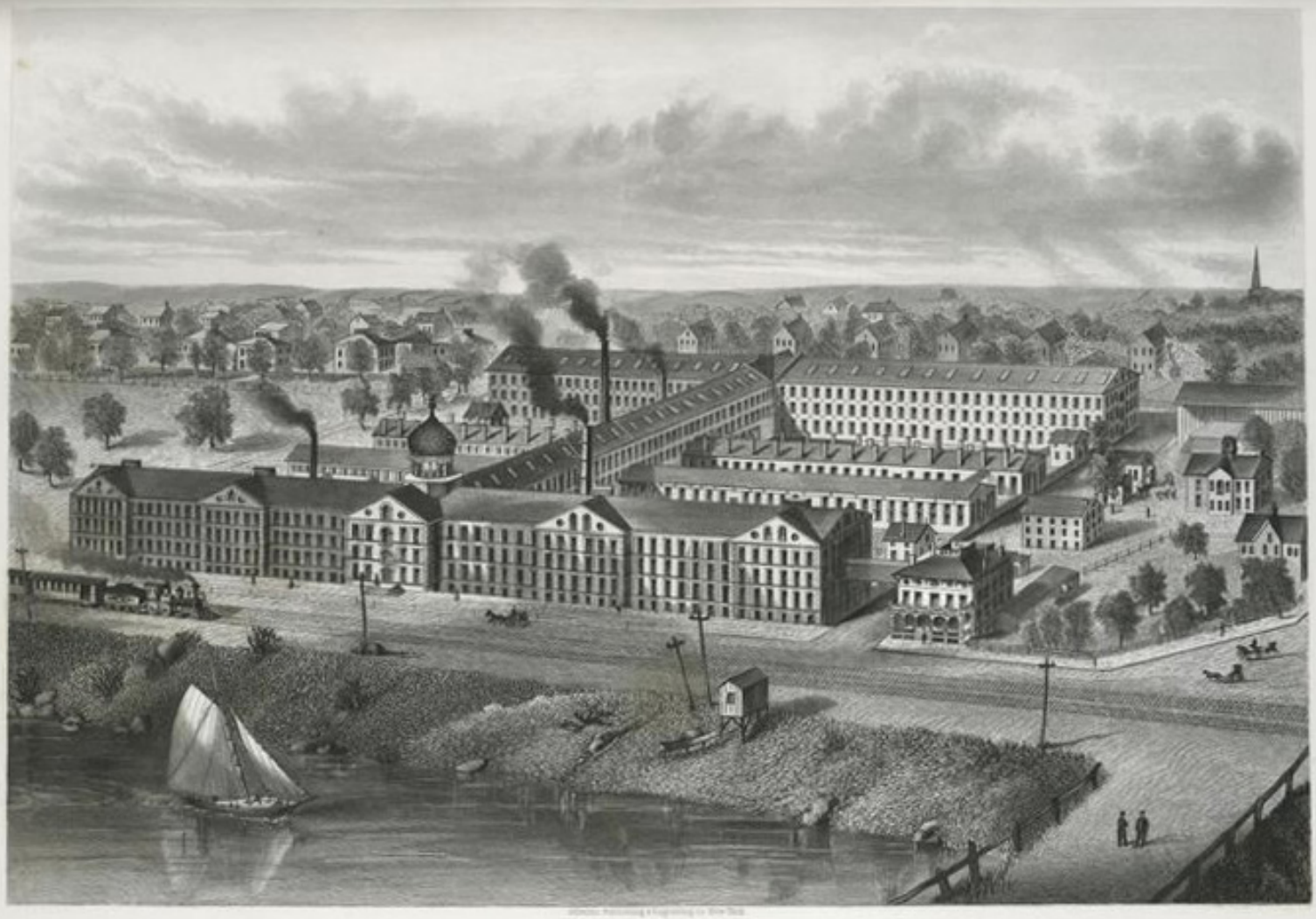
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Coltsville National Historical Park
Historic Resource Study

Revolution in Industry:
An American Manufacturing Empire on Hartford's South Meadow, 1855-1945



Leah S. Glaser
Katherine Hermes
Matthew Warshauer
Lauryn West

In Partnership with the National Council on Public History

Cover: “Colt’s Armory and Machine Shops. Hartford, Conn,” New York: Atlantic Publishing and Engraving Company, 1876. General Research Division, The New York Public Library, New York City, New York. In New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed April 2, 2026. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/ee42e090-c6e5-012f-c5bb-3c075448cc4b

REVOLUTION IN INDUSTRY: AN AMERICAN MANUFACTURING EMPIRE ON HARTFORD'S SOUTH MEADOW, 1855-1945 HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY

Coltsville National Historical Park

U.S. Department of the Interior

Interior Region 1, North Atlantic – Appalachian

National Park Service/In Partnership with the National Council on Public History

August 2026

Recommended by:

JACI WELLS Digitally signed by JACI WELLS
Date: 2026.08.21 12:54:57
-04'00'

Jaci Wells
Manager, Cultural Resources (Acting) Date
Interior Region 1

Approved by:

Kelly Fellner August 20, 2026

Kelly Fellner
Superintendent Date
Coltsville National Historical Park
Springfield Armory National Historic Site
New England National Scenic Trail

Dedicated to the memory of William N. Hosley, Jr.,
a long-time champion of Coltsville's
preservation and interpretation

Table of Contents

List of Figures i

List of Acronyms iii

Acknowledgments iv

Executive Summary v

Preface vi

Introduction 1

I: The Place 5

- A Native Village, Colonial Trading Post, and Region for Manufacture (to 1855) 5
- Indigenous Homeland 6
- Suckiog/ Huyshope 8
- English Colonization 9
- Colonial Settlement in the South Meadow 13
- A Landscape for Trade and Manufacture 16
- Conclusion 23

II. The Founder 25

- Samuel Colt in Context (1814-1835) 25
- Childhood 27
- Adventure 31
- Conclusion 35

III. The Product 36

- Western Expansion and the Development of the Colt Revolver (1835-1860) 36
- The First Factory at Paterson 39
- The Challenge of Frontier Warfare 42
- Success in Texas 50
- More Success: Back to Hartford 53
- Colt in the West 56
- Expanding Markets Abroad 61
- Conclusion 64

IV. The Market 66

- Buying and Selling Colt (1835-1845) 66
- American Advertising and Consumerism 68
- The Colt in the American West 70
- Self-Branding 74
- Storytelling and Imagery 75
- International Exhibits 78
- Free Samples, Gifts, Collectibles, and Fine Art 79
- Product Placement in Art 81

Table of Contents

Discounts . . . 83
Celebrity Endorsements . . . 84
Selling History and Nostalgia . . . 87
Selling Safety and Protection . . . 87
Backlash . . . 93
Colt Quality . . . 97
Conclusion . . . 99

V. The Factory, Part 1. . . . 100
Establishing Coltsville, an Urban Factory Estate on the River (1855-1864) . . . 100
Establishing Mechanized and Uniform Production . . . 102
The Colt Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company in Hartford . . . 103
The South Meadow . . . 105
Planning a Factory Complex . . . 107
The Hartford Common Council vs. Samuel Colt . . . 112
The Original Armory . . . 115
The Precision Manufacturing Corridor and Firearms Industry . . . 121
The Machinists . . . 123
Armory Administration. . . . 130
Conclusion . . . 131

VI. The Test . . . 132
The Civil War (1860-1865). . . . 132
Arms for the Union. . . . 133
Pushing his Product . . . 137
Rumors of a Traitor. . . . 139
Colt's Southern Arms Sales . . . 142
Watershed . . . 151
The Armory Fire: Confederate Sabotage? . . . 153
Conclusion . . . 160

VII. The Factory, Part II. . . . 161
The New East Armory in a New Era (1865-1945) . . . 161
Management in the Post-Civil War Era . . . 162
A Modern Industrial Factory . . . 164
The Business of the Dike . . . 167
Addressing Competition. . . . 171
Colt's and Hall and Browning . . . 177
World War I. . . . 179
The Corporatization of Colt's. . . . 184
Colt's Manufacturing Company . . . 186
Depression and Disaster . . . 188
Conclusion . . . 193

Table of Contents

VIII. Labor 195
Worker Housing and Potsdam Cottages (1855-1945) 195
Artisan to Wage Worker 196
Attracting Workers 198
Working Under the Contract System 200
The “Community of Practice” on the Factory Floor 203
Retention 206
Tenement Housing 210
German Immigrant Workers 213
The Working Irish 219
Women’s Work at Colt’s 220
European Immigrants 225
African Americans at Colt 227
Clubs and Organizations 228
Worker Discontent and Political Action 229
Contract System to Taylorism 231
Labor Unrest in the Great Depression 234
Returning to Corporate Paternalism (2.0) 238
Conclusion 241

IX. The Home: 242
Armsmear; James B. Colt House; Church of the Good Shepherd;
Caldwell Hart Colt Memorial Parish House 242
Elizabeth Hart Jarvis 245
Armsmear 251
The Colts of Armsmear 255
The Death of a Husband and Father 257
James B. Colt 259
Mrs. Samuel Colt 260
A Model of Postbellum Mourning and Memorial 261
Hartford Society of Decorative Art 264
The Church of the Good Shepherd 266
The Caldwell Colt Memorial Parish 269
Cedar Hill Cemetery 274
The Lifestyle of Elizabeth Colt 275
The Other Armsmear Residents 277
Elizabeth’s Politics 280
Preserving Hartford 285
Elizabeth’s Legacy 286
Conclusion 290

Table of Contents

X. The Estate (1855-1945). 291
Colt Park, Gardener's Cottage, Carriage House 291
A Private, Palatial Estate. 292
Private Estate to Public Park. 301
Play Education 305
Festivals and Menageries 307
Conclusion 309

Conclusion 311

Appendix 313
A. Colt Family Tree. 313
B. Past Presidents to 1945 314
C. Worker Residence, 1905-1926 315
D. Topics to Consider for further investigation: 316

Bibliography 317

List of Figures

Cover	Lithograph, Colt Armory and Machine Shops, 1876	cover
I.1	Map, Detail of The City of Hartford, Connecticut, 1877.	1
1.1	Map of Connecticut Showing Native Trails, Villages and Sachemdoms, 1625	5
1.2	Map, Hartford with property owners, 1640	14
1.3	Painting, Charles De Wolf Brownell, The Charter Oak, 1857	16
2.1	Samuel Colt Monument in Colt Park, 2009.	25
2.2	Sculpture, young Colt as a boy, Colt experimental models, 1830-1835	34
3.1	Wooden and metal prototypes of Colt revolver	36
3.2	Photograph, View of "The Factory at Paterson, NJ, 1911	40
3.3	Ring Lever Percussion Revolving Rifle, 1837-1838	43
3.4	Colt Belt Paterson Revolver, 1836-1842	45
3.5	Samuel Caldwell Colt, 1860	49
3.6	Enlargement of Map of Hartford, 1850 showing Colt's at Porter's factory	53
3.7	Colt Walker 1847 Revolver	55
3.8	Colt Model Navy Revolver, 1851	57
3.9	Lithograph, London Factory, c. 1853	63
4.1	Painting, Catlin the Artist Shooting Buffalos with Colt's Revolving Pistol	66
4.2	Advertisement, Col. Colt's Military and Sporting Rifles, 1860	71
4.3	Advertisement, "Pioneers of Civilization," 1860	72
4.4	Illustration, "Colt's pistols, on exhibition at the Crystal Palace," c.1851	77
4.5	Colt Navy Revolver, 1861	81
4.6	"Romance of a Colt" Cover, c. 1911-1930	86
4.7	Advertisement, .25 caliber Colt, 1912	88
4.8	Advertisement, "Colt Protection" pocket revolver, 1920	88
4.9	Advertisement, "Once in Every Man's Life," 1916	90
4.10	Advertisement, "The Pony Express" (Law and Order series), 1926	92
4.11	Advertisement, "Colt's New Police Positive," 1905	93
4.12	Lithograph print, Colt Peacemaker .45 Caliber 1873, c. 1945	96
4.13	Advertisement, "Colt Reliability," Electrical Division publication, 1943	97
4.14	Advertisement "Keep Wash and Rinse Tubes Clean!" Autosan, 1943	97
5.1	Lithograph, Colt Armory, 1860	100
5.2	Portrait, Samuel Colt, 1860	104
5.3	Map detail, South Meadow, 1855	111
5.4	Map, South Meadow (Colt's improvement area), 1866	112
5.5	Daguerreotype, Construction of the Colt Armory	116
5.6	Sketch, original factory layout, 1857	118
5.7	Painting, View of Colt factory from Connecticut River, 1857	123
5.8	Prints, forging shop and armory proper, first division, 1857	129
6.1	Portraits of unidentified Civil War soldiers, 1861-1865	132
6.2	Lithograph, Colt's armory fire- wide view, c. 1864-5	155
6.3	After the Armory fire - and equipment, February 4, 1864.	157
7.1	Photograph, east armory, early 1900s	161

7.2	Portraits, Richard Jarvis and W.B Franklin	163
7.3	Sketches, Porter-Allan steam engines in the Colt Factory	166
7.4	Image, Porter-Allen Engines in the Colt Armory	166
7.5	Photograph, Richard Gatling with the Gatling Gun, model 1893	174
7.6	Photograph, Colt factory shop area, 1890s	177
7.7	Map (Sanborn), Colts Factory, 1880	178
7.8	Photograph, Construction on the North Armory, 1916	180
7.9	Lithograph, Colt factory complex, 1919	181
7.10	Photograph, John Browning and the M1895/1914 Colt-Browning Machine Gun	182
7.11	Photograph, east armory complex workers, early 20th century	183
7.12	Portraits, William C Skinner and Charles L. F Robinson	185
7.13	Portrait, Samuel M. Stone	186
7.14	Photograph, View of factory from flood of 1936	189
7.15	Photographs, Army-Navy “Excellence” Award	192
7.16	Photograph, Highway construction near the Colt Factory, 1945	193
7.17	Aerial photograph, view of Factory 1950s	194
8.1	Photograph, east armory workers, 1909	195
8.2	Photograph, workers in Front of the Factory, 1876	196
8.3	Photographs, various Machines of the Armory	205
8.4	Engraving, Potsdam Village and Willow Ware Factory	214
8.5	Photograph, Germania/ Armory House	217
8.6	Illustration, cartridge house and workers, 1857	221
8.7	Photograph, women workers grinding barrels of automatic 45s, World War I	223
8.8	Photograph, Colt Electrical Division, 1935	226
8.9	Chart, Colt factory worker population graph, 1905-1926	233
8.10	Photograph, Picketing Colt workers, 1935	237
8.11	Photograph, Construction of Storehouse and Recreation Center, 1936	239
9.1	Photograph, Armsmear, 1899	242
9.2	Photograph and Painting of Elizabeth and Caldwell Colt	243
9.3	Photographs, Armorer’s Porch, Church of the Good Shepherd, 2025	268
9.4	Illustration, Caldwell’s Coming of Age Party	270
9.5	Postcard, Caldwell Hart Colt Memorial Parish House	273
9.6	Interior of Armsmear Library after conversion to women’s home, 1933	288
10.1	Photograph, statues, bridge and pond, Colt Park c.1907	291
10.2	The Charter Oak before collapse, 1850s	292
10.3	Henry Fenn, painting of Colt estate, 1865	296
10.4	Maps of Colt Park layout	299
10.5	Postcard, statues, bridge and pond, Colt Park	303
10.6	Remaining greenhouses with Gardener’s Cottage, Colt Park, 1921	304
10.7	School gardens, Colt Park, 1918	306
10.8	Colt Park play area, 1921	307
10.9	Children Dancing, Band Shell, Colt Park, 1921	308
C.1	Engraving of Colt’s Armory, 1896	311

List of Acronyms

AAS	American Antiquarian Historical Society
AFL- CIO	American Federation of Labor- Congress of Industrial Organizations
CCSU	Central Connecticut State University
CHS	Connecticut Historical Society (see CMCH)
CLSA	State Archives, Connecticut State Library
CMCH	Connecticut Museum of Culture and History
Colt's	Colt's Patent Fire Arms and Manufacturing Company
CTDA	Connecticut Digital Archive
FLSA	Fair Labor Standards Act
GE	General Electric
H.E.L.C.O	Hartford Electric Light Company
HABS	Historic American Buildings Survey
HAER	Historic American Engineering Record
HRS	Historic Resource Study
HR	Hudson River School (of painters)
J-P	Johns-Pratt
JRP	Jarvis-Robinson Papers (Beinecke Library, Yale University)
LDS	Latter-Day Saints
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NPS	National Park Service
NRPA	National Recreation and Park Association
NYS	New York State
PAMC	Patent Arms Manufacturing Company (in Paterson, NJ)
UHW	Union for Home Work
V-J Day	Victory over Japan Day
WPA	Workers Progress Administration

Acknowledgments

This narrative rests on decades of research on Samuel and Elizabeth Colt and Coltsville by both popular and professional historians. The work is indebted to a long line of students from Central Connecticut State University, whose research and transcriptions as interns with Coltsville was invaluable: David Abrams Hochman (WWI), Danielle Morrison (Elizabeth Colt and her domestic staff), Joseph Mumley (marketing), Eric Ott (German immigrants), Aaron Singh (Colt's patents), Brayton Price (Colt estate and park), and Grace Stacy (labor). Other Central graduate students who provided research on Coltsville resources through course-related projects include Zachary Bartolome, Morgan Bengel, Gabriel Benjamin, Mallory Bordonaro, Garrett Coady, Stefon Danczuk, Paul Dickson, Amanda Drummond Justin Edwards Chelsea Farrell, Sally Givens, Cristin Generoso, Joseph Guerrera, Ira Hessmer, Allen Kozloski, Shannon LaPoint, Jared Leitzel, Chelsea Marti, Regan Miner, Bethany Niebanck, Kristina Oschmann, Ryan Paolino, Robert Pawlowski, Joshua Pfohl, Barbara Sternal, and Shaun Winton. Juila Baldini and Samantha Ozzone, and Joshua Thiede whose research also helped us quickly identify source material regarding Elizabeth Colt. Emma Steckline of Wesleyan University provided invaluable help in the state archives. Peter Moran helped begin the project and produced an amazing audio tour based on this report.

Leah would like to express profound gratitude to many supportive colleagues. Drs. Jennifer Tucker, Joseph Slaughter, Brennan Rivas, Brian Delay, John Sheehan, and many other scholars she met through the Wesleyan Center for the Study of Guns and Society. The conversations and insights helped shape this narrative so very much. Special thanks to Tucker and Slaughter for reading through select chapters and for your continued support and encouragement. Our former colleague, Dr. David Naumec, provided support, insight, knowledge, and expertise regarding firearms history and the colonial period that helped ensure accuracy, and to current colleague Dr. Aimee Loiselle for identifying important sources and issues in Coltsville's labor history. Dr. Lindsay Schakenbach Regele helped refine ideas and shared her work specific to Colt. Dr. David Granston and Kathy "Woodsy" Woods at Armsmear, generously gave their time and opened their files. Granston's work on Elizabeth Colt is a treasure trove of information. At the Wadsworth, Curator Philippe Halbert provided Leah a useful "behind-the-scenes" tour of Elizabeth Colt's collections. William Keegan and Dr. Kristen Keegan shared maps and other incredibly helpful research as well.

Finally, thank you to park staff for your attention on this project and your patience in producing this document: Taylor Brookins (National Park Service), Stephanie Rowe (National Council on Public History), Coltsville staff Kelly Fellner, Amy Glowacki, and Andrew Long for your long-time collaboration with Central Connecticut State University students and projects and to Alan Amelinckx for continuing it. We also acknowledge the careful attention of Alex Mackenzie, Curator at the Springfield Armory National Historic Site.

Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a Historic Resource Study (HRS) conducted for Coltsville National Historical Park, the former factory complex and estate of Samuel and Elizabeth Colt. Coltsville is located in Hartford, Connecticut within the Connecticut River Valley, holding a prominent physical and historical place along the precision manufacturing corridor. This 260-acre site reflects the transition of the American economy and society from an agrarian to an internationally dominant urban industrial one, specifically through the production, sale, and marketing of firearms from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. In meeting requirements established under federal law, including the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, this HRS will assist park staff by providing a foundational document for preparing a variety of documents, including Historic Structure Reports (HSRs), cultural landscape inventories (CLIs) and reports (CLRs), resource management plans (RMPs), and long-range interpretative plans (LRIPs).

This HRS enlisted Coltsville's resources to discuss various historical contexts relevant to the manufacture and sale of firearms and the emergence of the United States as a major economic power in the industrial era. The report has synthesized voluminous primary and secondary material on Samuel Colt, his widow, his business, Colt workers, and the site itself. This HRS primarily addresses themes and major extant resources during the period of significance, as identified by the National Park Service, including: the East Armory; the Church of the Good Shepherd; the Caldwell Hart Colt Memorial Parish House; Colt Park; the Potsdam Cottages of worker housing; Armsmear, the Colt residence; and the James Colt House.

These contexts include the role of the environment (specifically the Connecticut River Valley) and its manipulation for commerce and manufacture, product innovation in response to American expansion, warfare, and capitalism, the development of American manufacturing technology, big business, and marketing, and the impact of such enterprises on the landscape. Additionally, it describes the evolution of this industrial community from one of corporate paternalism to one reflecting a widening gap in income and lifestyle between the upper class and a diverse labor force characterized by immigrants.

Preface

The Historic Resource Survey for Coltsville National Historical Park incorporates broad and specific topics identified by a Scholar's Roundtable on March 25-27, 2019 in Hartford, Connecticut. Themes are broad and complex, reflective of the diversity of resources and their relevance to local, regional, and national history. These include the indigenous cultural and economic pre-contact history of the region, the geographic context and the early industrial environment, Hartford's relationship to the rise of industry in New England, Samuel Colt's choice of Hartford for his business, Colt's innovations and place in American industrial history, and the people of Coltsville (workers, managers, and community life and the relationship between those entities). The period of significance also requires discussion of the role and influence of Elizabeth Colt in company management and decision-making (particularly after Samuel's death in 1862 to her death in 1905). The Colt manufacturing model influenced outside industries, notably Colt's role in business and the development of the marketing industry. In addition to the company's influence on America's manufacturing economy, Colt and Colt firearms impacted political and military events, in particular its use in pre- and post-Civil War southern states and in westward expansion, Indian removal, and western settlement. Samuel Colt and his company had a strong role in firearms history, helping to create and articulate "gun culture" in America.

The research team began this study by compiling dozens of volumes of existing books, articles, theses, and papers relevant to the Coltsville site. We checked most of the identified repositories of primary source material, including several with important primary and secondary sources including the Connecticut Historical Society (now the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, or CMCH), Preservation Connecticut, the Hartford Preservation Alliance, Colt Manufacturing LLC, the Connecticut State Library and Museum (CSLA), and the Colt Bequest (Armsmear). We also identified additional archives, including the Autry Museum of the American West, the Cody Firearms Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the American West, the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware, the Hartford History Center, the Beinecke Library and Archives at Yale University, and the National Archives. We found that most of these collections focused specifically on Colt's firearms technology and collections. Because of the volume of resources available locally and online, as well as the HRS focus on the site's resources, we pulled most of our materials from the CSLA, the CMCH, the Beinecke, the Hartford History Center, and the Colt Bequest. Even by limiting our scope in this way, we doubled the expected length of this report so that we could adequately address all the identified themes, but there is so much more research that can be conducted to tell so many more stories of this rich and complex site with a century-long history.

The team began by focusing on each member's expertise and drafting different chapters. We enlisted research assistants to search for and summarize relevant documents in accordance with their interests. Project historians evaluated materials and developed an initial outline. While writing our first draft, we had to alter the outline somewhat, expanding and contracting certain areas. Chronology proved challenging due to condensed timelines and the wide variety of themes and resources, so the report tries to balance both in its organization. With each draft, we honed our interpretation and focus with each chapter and across the document. We had to make many difficult choices about what to include, basing our decisions on what we felt would be the most useful to park staff and of interest to visitors.

Introduction



Figure I.1 O.H. Bailey & Co., Cartographer. The City of Hartfod, Connecticut, Boston, Massachusetts: O.H. Bailey & Co. 1877, Map. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/2018593481/. Original map is cropped to encompass resources discussed.

Many people are familiar with the Colt Model 1873, popularly known as the Colt .45, the "Peacemaker" or "the gun that won the West."[1] While tied to ideas about western expansion and the so-called "frontier," the "Colt .45" and most of the other firearms manufactured in the United States originated in the Northeast. One hundred and forty years after this particular gun was first made, on March 19, 2013, Congressman John Larson introduced legislation to create Coltsville National Historical Park in the State of Connecticut following years of advocacy by local champions like historian William Hosley. Congress authorized the park in December 2014 as part of a National Defense Authorization Act.[2] The 150-year-old site of "Coltsville," a nineteenth-century factory complex, is located along the Connecticut River Valley within

---

1 Both popular culture and scholarship perpetuated the idea of the Colt as "the gun that won the West," including historians like Walter Prescott Webb, author of *The Great Plains* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1931), who helped found the field of Western history and the study of the American West as a distinctive region with a distinctive history.

2 Coltsville National Historical Park Act (H.R. 1259/S. 615), December 2014; At this time the Connecticut state legislature was, ironically, passing sweeping gun control legislation in the wake of a mass shooting tragedy in Newtown the previous December 14, 2012, at which a gunman killed twenty children and six adults in Sandy Hook Elementary School. *Connecticut; Statutes at Large* 128 Stat. 3292 - Public Law No. 113-291 (December 19, 2014).

Hartford, Connecticut, a city at the center of American precision manufacturing and innovation during the so-called Gilded Age of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Through its production, sale, and marketing of firearms, the urban industrial estate and factory complex reflects the transition of the American economy from an agrarian to an urban industrial one, providing insight into the impact of those changes on society and the local environment. Today, what was formerly known as the East Armory of the Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company houses apartments, a school, and offices.

Coltsville is therefore more than just the factory. It includes a set of unique historic resources through which this study examines the symbiotic relationship of technological and manufacturing innovation with American expansion, capitalism, consumerism, and labor from 1855 to 1945. The East Armory, the homes of former company owners, managers, and workers (Armsmear, the James Colt House, Potsdam cottages, worker tenements), the memorial buildings of the Church of the Good Shepherd and Caldwell Colt Memorial Parish House, and the resources associated with the estate, including the Colt Memorial statue, the gardener's cottage and carriage house, and what is now known as Colt Park all remain.[3] Together these resources contribute to a broad and nuanced understanding of the technological, economic, and cultural history of firearms and firearms manufacturing from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Coltsville resembled more the great estates of Europe than the rural industrial villages of the early 1800s. The site provides a window into the social history of the northeastern United States during the rise of the industrial economy through precision manufacturing and mass production from the Victorian era and Gilded Age through World War II.

These remaining physical resources stress historical themes of economic, environmental, and social change in the United States and Northeast. Those changes included the emergence of precision manufacturing and modern capitalism, innovation and technology, labor and class, the evolution of memory, the role of philanthropy, and American conquest and expansion. Samuel Colt's manipulation of Hartford's South Meadow (a site along the Connecticut River he chose for shipping access) to control flooding proved critical to the stability of the factory complex and estate. Colt's East Armory conveys the economic influence of firearms history encompassing mid- to late-nineteenth- century industrial and urban growth through the rise of big business, particularly the rise of mechanization. The factory system that it housed epitomized a system of manufacturing that helped position the young country as a major global economic power. American military campaigns like the Mexican American War, the Civil War, military action against Native people in the American Southeast and West, and two world wars demanded the expansion of gun technology and the beginnings of what we know today as the "military industrial complex," which necessitated partnerships between private and public entities to meet production goals. Furthermore, Colt's factory helped position Hartford as a major manufacturing center for the next century, the fourth largest in the nation for producing the machine tools that made possible the mass manufacture of not only guns, but dozens of other products.[4] Political

[3] Coltsville National Historical Park Act (H.R. 1259/S. 615), December 2014. U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal also promoted the park and U.S. Senator Chris Murphy established his Hartford office in the former factory building.

[4] In the twentieth century President Dwight Eisenhower would popularize the label for these partnerships as the

revolution, upheaval, and nationalism made the firearm the first product with such demand and complexity as to warrant production on a scale well beyond the traditional workshop, enlisting machines to repetitively, consistently, and swiftly make uniform parts. Supported by new transportation networks that encouraged markets and consumers, production manufacturing changed the relationship and attitudes of Americans toward firearms and other manufactured goods.

This report will demonstrate that in response to the demands warfare, advances in transportation, and market revolution, firearms production through companies like Colt's helped initiate the transformation of American society from an agrarian economy to an urban, industrial one of precision manufacturing, mass production and even consumerism during the nation's geographic and economic expansion from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The company carefully marketed and embellished its products. The site, established in 1855, played a key role in the evolution of an industrial economy where advances in machine and automated technology drove highly efficient manufacturing of products and transformed the nature of labor from artisan to wage work. While this "American System of Manufactures" eventually culminated in Henry Ford's assembly lines of the 1920s, the Colt armory improved production methods through a specific product: the gun.[5]

The origins of machine tools and interchangeable parts, cornerstones of America's acclaimed manufacturing system, can be traced back to small arms production. The machine-driven techniques of mass production also changed gunsmithing by skilled artisans (who were paid by the product) to wage laborers. Beyond Samuel Colt's story and that of the firearms are those of the workers. The East Armory and worker housing provide venues to discuss not only the nature of factory labor but the people who operated new machinery and ensured quality production. The inventions and infrastructure underlying the mechanization of the Colt company's products is a much larger tale of technological innovation, industrialization, manufacturing, wage work, corporate paternalism, and brilliant marketing, all in the context of immigration, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Gilded Age, and the first half of the twentieth century. The manufacturing techniques that the workers at the factory adopted and conceived applied to innumerable other industrial products, including sewing machines, bicycles, clocks, tools, appliances, and other mechanicals and hardware. Coltsville's resources serve as venues to further explore the lives of workers outside of the factory.[6]

"military-industrial complex." Dwight Eisenhower, "The Military-Industrial Complex: The Farewell Address of President Dwight Eisenhower," delivered January 17, 1961. National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-dwight-d-eisenhowers-farewell-address; Robert Asher, "Connecticut Workers and Technological Change, 1930-1980," (Storrs, CT: Center for Oral History, University of Connecticut, 1983), 19.

5 For an in-depth discussion of the idea of the "American System of Manufactures," see David Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1832: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 15-65.Also see Barbara Tucker and Kenneth Tucker, Jr., Industrializing Antebellum America: The Rise of Manufacturing and Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

6 For more discussion on separate spheres, see (among dozens of sources) Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75:1, 1988), 9–39. https://doi.org/10.2307/1889653.

After Samuel Colt's untimely 1862 death early in the Civil War, firearms production continued and even expanded under his widow Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt's ownership. Within the following year, Colt's armory produced thousands of weapons (one estimate puts the number at more than 300,000), making it one of the largest private firearm manufacturers in the world.[7] The company expanded into the domestic market, particularly after the war ended. After Elizabeth's death, the company diversified its product line further to meet consumer demand for other industrial products while accelerating firearms production during the two world wars. Coltsville provides the opportunity to examine the control of public memory through physical memorials and storytelling through popular culture that captures the core values and imagination of a rapidly changing industrial nation. Furthermore, a "consumer's republic" emerged as a rising population and urbanization replaced rural frontier life.[8] Structures like the Church of the Good Shepherd, the Caldwell Hart Colt Memorial Parish House, the reconstructed East Armory, and the Colt memorial statue reflect the memory-making work of Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt and her intention to create a physical and sustaining legacy for her family in the city of Hartford. Elizabeth Colt inherited the majority shares in the company, but she left management to those she appointed. Turning to her own interests, she became Hartford's best-known Victorian-era female leader, Gilded Age philanthropist, and public memory-maker, especially after her husband's and children's deaths. The Colts' home, Armsmear, and the James B. Colt House exemplify the growth of American class stratification, personal and concentrated wealth, and upper-class culture, created by industry and big business. During the late Victorian era, capitalism and urbanization provided a public arena for middle- and upper-class women in the areas of the arts, philanthropy, and social reform, relying on hired immigrant and Black servants to attend to private, domestic matters.

The historical significance of Coltsville therefore extends beyond the enigmatic founder Samuel Colt and the iconic firearm that bears his name, one closely identified with the nation's values of independence and self-reliance. The Coltsville site is unique for a historical industrial site, as it was neither fully rural, nor part of the urban fabric. It was a designed, self-sufficient community within a city and today provides the space to examine the economic, social, cultural, and demographic impact of industrial production on that city, Hartford. Finally, the site can contextualize today's conversations around gun use and violence to help the public better understand the long and complex history of firearms well beyond the early contexts of the eighteenth century and the Second Amendment. Coltsville enables the National Park Service (NPS) to explore broadly the political, social, and economic themes surrounding the evolution of gun culture and its close relationship to technological development and production and providing insight into the firearms industry's influence on the growth of the United States as an industrial economic power.

---

[7] Some have claimed the armory, particularly during the Civil War, was the largest private firearms manufacturer in the world. See Bruce Clouette and Carole Anstress Paine, "Colt Industrial District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Hartford County, Connecticut: Hartford, CT (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1976).

[8] See Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2004) for a fuller explanation of this term.

I: The Place

A Native Village, Colonial Trading Post, and Region for Manufacture (to 1855)



Figure 1.1 Detail of Mathias Spiess and Hayden L. Griswold (drawn), Map of the of Connecticut showing Indian trails, villages, and sachemdoms, c. 1625. Maps like these frequently misidentified the tribal name of the Wangunk with the village name. In this case, "Sicaogs" refers to the Wangunk village of Suckiog. Connecticut Society of the Colonial Dames of America. Publisher place unknown, 1930. University of Connecticut Library Map and Geographic Information Center - MAGIC. Accessed April 2, 2026, http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/magic_2/raster/37800/hdimg_37800_0000_1625_s350_Griswold_1_s(rescan).zip.

Coltsville National Historical Park is situated south of Connecticut's centrally located capital city. It is cut off from the Connecticut River to its east by Interstate-91, a major transportation corridor built almost a century after Sam Colt established his industrial complex. Historically, the Connecticut River's flow facilitated transportation, and therefore trade, especially at the intersection with the "Little River." Occasional flooding south of the confluence left the area with mineral-rich soils for agriculture. Colt chose this site for multiple geographical, economic, and personal reasons. For centuries, these attributes of water transportation and fertile soil had attracted Indigenous people and, eventually, European colonists to the area later known as the South Meadow. Coltsville's spatial and built environment permanently changed the land use of the site from agrarian to industrial. In the 1850s, when Samuel Colt established his factory and 106-acre estate in Hartford, he was crafting a legacy for himself within the timeline of the city's and the region's long history.

Several geological factors contributed to the regional conditions that opened Hartford to human commerce and settlement. Central Connecticut is only about thirty feet above sea level, situated within what scientists refer to as the Hartford Basin, which formed during the Triassic and Jurassic periods about 220 million years ago. East of the major fault system that bounds the basin, one of the thickest lava flows in the world formed three volcanic units of black and gray

shale, reddish brown siltstone and sandstone, conglomerate, and basalt that would serve as the building material for monuments and factories in the nineteenth century. The Hartford Basin's youngest geological unit emerged to the south during the Early Jurassic period, leaving reddish brown arkose sandstone. Centuries later, this location became a quarry for "brownstone" used extensively in the nineteenth century as a building material for urban row houses, memorials, and mansions across the Northeast, including the city of Hartford and the Colt armory itself.[1]

When a glacier that covered all of what is today New England retreated at the end of the Ice Age (about 11,000 years ago), it created a large prehistoric lake within the basin. Glacial lakes formed huge debris dams that trapped sediment, so the valley floors that remained when the river streams breached those dams included the porous soils and clays ideal for crops and pasturing. The last glacial retreat left a sediment dam near what is now the town of Rocky Hill. This dam formed what geologists refer to as Lake Hitchcock, which extended at times as far north as Vermont. Subsequent glacial movements created valleys, while "more resistant crystalline strata constricted the waterways into gorge-like valleys with fast-flowing currents" that became the region's rivers. When that dam burst several thousand years ago, Lake Hitchcock created the Connecticut River and its valley. The lake's clay and silt remained, making the soil extremely rich at the confluence of what later became the two rivers near the city today known as Hartford.[2] Originating near New Hampshire's Canadian border and extending south to Long Island Sound, the larger 440-mile-long Connecticut River today forms the border between Vermont and New Hampshire. It runs south through the Central Valley basin and just to the east of Hartford. However, before the seventeenth century it served as the homeland of Indigenous peoples, like the Wangunk.

Indigenous Homeland

While popular culture has often affiliated the "Colt" name with the conquest of the nineteenth-century American West and the subjugation of its Indigenous people, such conflicts with Native tribes over land began much earlier. For centuries, Connecticut was home to various Indigenous peoples, including the Pequot, Mohegan, Nipmuc, the Quinnipiac, the Tunxis, and the Wangunk, among others. (See 1.1).[3] European colonialism proved devastating to the Indigenous population in North America, but many of the Wangunk, along with other Indigenous peoples, enlisted ways to survive as they had for thousands of years and continued to live in the area where Sam Colt eventually built his factory. They frequently migrated between the shoreline and inland territories

---

1 See Thomas R. Lewis, "The Landscape and Environment of the Connecticut River Valley," in Gerald W. R. Ward and William N. Hosley, Jr. *The Great River: Art and Society in the Connecticut River Valley,* 1635-1820 (Hartford, CT: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1985), 3-15. The quarry is now listed as a National Historic Landmark in the town of Portland, Connecticut.

2 Lewis, 3-15; Richard W. Judd, *Second Nature: An Environmental History of New England* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 71-2; see David E. Hill, Edward H. Sautter, Walter N. Gonicj, "Solis of Connecticut," Bulletin 787 (December 1980), (New Haven: The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/CAES/DOCUMENTS/Publications/Bulletins/B787 for analysis of different soil types.

3 Gary O'Neil, "Growing Up Wangunk," *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut* 79 (2017): 63-70.

of traditional settlement, including the future site of Coltsville.[4] The Wangunk presence in the South Meadow had lasted well into the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, Wangunk people lived primarily outside Hartford, in the area surrounding Colchester and East Hampton, where several remain today.[5]

While Indigenous peoples were no longer living in the South Meadow when Colt erected his 1855 factory, memory of them remained in deeds that recorded the land as "the Indian lot." By memorializing six streets named for seventeenth century Wangunk leaders, Samuel Colt incorporated Indigenous people into a compelling narrative of American progress on the landscape of which he was now a part, one that preserved and distorted local Indigenous history. Coltsville's streets of Curcombe (Curricomb), Nepaquash, Masseek (Massecup), Sequassen, Weehassat, and Wawarme specifically recall Wangunk signatories to the July 1670 confirmatory deed for England's 1636 presumed purchase of Hartford from Sequassen, the sachem of Suckiog.[6] Wawarme and Masseek roads reflect the all-important alliance with the Narragansett (Rhode Island) community.[7]

Beginning in the late Woodland period (from ca. 1000 BCE to ca. 1500 AD), the territory of the Wangunk people, powerful rivals to the Pequot and often allies with the Narragansett, stretched from the borders of the early central Connecticut colonial town of Windsor to the shores of Saybrook and along the shoreline of Long Island Sound. Wangunk families settled in a trail of villages from Suckiog (Hartford), Pyquag (Wethersfield and the southern section of Rocky Hill), Nayaug (South Glastonbury), Mattabeseck (Middletown), Haddam, and Pattaconk (Thirty Mile Island/Haddam Island). Individual Wangunk appear in local eighteenth-century records in places to the southeast, from Killingly to Lyme. The South Meadow, situated to the southeast of where the Little River emptied into the Connecticut River, was a site of an annual Atlantic salmon run. The Wangunk lived along the Connecticut River for centuries before the sixteen-ton Dutch ship the Onrust anchored at Suckiog in 1614. (See 1.1)[8]

---

4 See William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

5 Katherine Hermes and Alexandra Maravel, "Finding the Onepennys Among the Wongunk," *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut*, (2017): 103; Katherine Hermes, Genealogy of the Cushoy Family, https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/108067325/family?cfpid=350063745051&fpid=350063745052; Andrew Curricomb (Tunxis) served in Capt. Aaron Hitchcock's company of the Connecticut militia during the French and Indian War. Hitchcock's descendants eventually settled in Farmington as Christians under the tutelage of Joseph Johnson, a Mohegan teacher who ran a school in the 1770s that attracted new converts from the Mohegan, Wangunk, Tunxis, and Quinnipiac peoples. Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society (Hartford: CHS, 1903), 9: 104; Joseph Johnson, *"To Do Good to My Indian Brethren": The Writings of Joseph Johnson*, 1751-1776 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press,1998), 162; Katherine Hermes, Genealogy of the Curricomb Family, https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/162038718/family/pedigree?cfpid=322113066977.

6 "History of Hartford Streets," *Bulletin* No. 9, (Hartford: Municipal Art Society of Hartford, 1911); James Hammond Trumbull, ed., The Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut, 1633-1884 (Hartford: E. L. Osgood, 1886), 225.

7 If Colt knew anything about the Wangunk beyond their participation in the critical land conveyance that gave the English their town of Hartford, he would have called them "Sequins," a tribal name that appeared on an early map and in the local history books.

8 For more about the Wangunk, see Timothy H. Ives, "Wangunk Ethnohistory: A Case Study of a Connecticut

Suckiog/ Huyshope

Adrian Block, the Dutch ship's captain, was a fur trader and explorer who, with Hendrick Christiansen and Cornelius Hendricksen, became among of the first Europeans to navigate the Connecticut River. The Dutch entered the American Northeast through Block Island in 1615, followed by the English Pilgrims in 1620. Indigenous peoples occupied all these areas, including the Connecticut River Valley. The Dutch established a fort in 1633, the House of Hope (or *Huys de Hoop*), beside Suckiog at the confluence of the Connecticut and Little rivers, where the Colt factory stands today. At Suckiog, the Wangunk grew corn, beans, and squash in the regularly flood-enriched black soil as they had since time immemorial. After the Dutch arrived, the Wangunk, Quinnipiac, Pequot, and Narragansett Bay tribes also traded beaver, otter, and mink furs, probably up to 10,000 pelts a year, with the House of Hope, who themselves grew grain and grazed animals to support the trading post. The Dutch post likely also traded firearms to Indigenous people in exchange for furs. Colt further acknowledged this early European contact by designating several streets for this early regional economic activity. Those thoroughfares running perpendicular to the Connecticut River include Van Block Avenue for Adrian Block and Hendricxsen Avenue for Cornelius Hendricksen. The name Huyshope recalled the Dutch fort. Vrendendale was a plantation belonging to Frederick DeVries, director of the West India Company.

With a goal of trade, rather than settlement, Dutch presence in the area remained small, however, the arrival of Europeans challenged relationships among the local Indigenous people. Jacob van Curler (also spelled van Corlaer), Commissary for the Dutch West India Company, signed an agreement with Tatobem, the sachem (the highest political leader) of the Pequot, whose homeland encompassed much of the shoreline, in June 1633. Notably, this agreement ensured that his people would dwell alongside the Dutch.[9] When the Dutch later asserted that they had similarly purchased the Hartford meadow that they occupied from Wangunk sachem Altarbaenhoot, his grandson, Sequassen, denied it.[10] Regardless, the seventeenth-century Wangunk found themselves ensnared in a fragile Pequot-Dutch alliance and distrustful of the

River Indian Community," MA thesis, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia (2001); Timothy H. Ives, "Reconstructing the Wangunk Reservation Land System: A Case Study of Native and Colonial Likeness in Central Connecticut," *Ethnohistory* 58, no.1 (2011): 65-89.

9 "Letter of Edward Winslow to John Winthrop, 1644," Winthrop Papers (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929), 4: 452-454. There are various spellings for Altarbaenhoot. Winslow spelled it Attawanyut. See also William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Charles Deane. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), 40. Bradford spells the name Natawanute, whom some historians have identified as a Podunk sachem.

10 Sequassen's name does not appear in the Dutch record of the purchase of the Hartford meadow, and in 1640 he testified "that he never sold any ground to the Dutch." Jacob Van Curler, "Condition and Agreement entered into between Commissary Jacob van Curler and the Chiefs of the Sickanames, on the 3rd of June, 1633," *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York Procured in Holland, England and France*, Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan, ed. (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1858), 1: 643; 2: 139-140; Richard Manack, "The Fresh River and the New Netherland Settlement, 'Hope of Good Hope,'" in *Dutch and Indigenous Communities in Seventeenth-Century Northeastern North America*, Lucianne Lavin, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 244-245.

Dutch as allies. The English took advantage of that fragility and claimed the land in the region as part of the British colonies.

English Colonization

The Wangunk's approach to negotiating with the European settlers further north, namely the English of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, contrasted with that of other tribes in the region. In 1631, the Wangunk sent an emissary, Wahginnacut, to entice the English to move to the Suckiog village.[11] The governor concluded that Wahginnacut was interested only in procuring protection from the Pequot and referred to him as "a very treacherous man."[12] Yet Wahginnacut also wanted the English "to come plant in his country" and offered incentives of land and beaver skins.[13] The Wangunk were looking to build an integrated community with an alliance not unlike what they had with the Quinnipiac to the south and the Narragansett to the east. They had a vast territory to offer English settlers, and while the Pequot were militarily stronger and controlled the wampum trade, the Wangunk were more numerous and well settled on their homelands. They produced food, furs, and trade goods that provided a comfortable lifestyle. After Massachusetts declined interest, Edward Winslow and other leaders from the nearby Plymouth Colony decided to visit in 1633 to personally confirm rumors that the area around the Dutch fort was indeed a fertile place full of highly desirable furs.[14] Settlers began trickling into Wangunk territory in 1634, but an advance party of about sixty English colonists arrived in 1635. Within four years the Massachusetts Bay Colony also established farming communities in Windsor (in Podunk territory), Wethersfield, and Hartford (in Wangunk territory), which included the most tillable soils along the Connecticut River Valley. The sachem with whom they contracted, though, was Sowheag (also known as Sequin). Sowheag inherited the grand sachemship after Altarbaenhoot died, probably from smallpox.[15]

Sowheag claimed several wives as part of Wangunk tradition, and, in keeping with his leadership status and to ensure long-term power, he saw to it that his children married into the Narragansett of Rhode Island, the Tunxis of Farmington, and the Quinnipiac of New Haven, Connecticut. His first wife gave birth to the eldest son, the aforementioned Sequassen, and the eventual sachem of Suckiog. Sequassen married a Pequot woman, with whom he had at least one daughter.[16]

---

[11] George Sheldon, *A History of Deerfield, Massachusetts: The Times When and the People by Whom it was Settled, Unsettled and Resettled: with a Special Study of the Indian Wars in the Connecticut Valley. With Genealogies* (Greenfield, MA: Press of EA Hall & Company, 1895), 53, 56.

[12] John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649* in James Savage, ed., Vol. 1 (Boston: Phelps and Farnham, 1825), 1: 52; hereinafter cited as WJ.

[13] WJ, 1: 61; Michael Burgan, *Voices from Colonial America: Connecticut 1614-1776* (New York: National Geographic Society, 2007).

[14] William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation*, Charles Deane, ed. (Boston: 1856), 312-314.

[15] Daniel Howard, *A New History of Old Windsor, Connecticut* (Windsor Locks: Journal Press, 1935), 10. An epidemic broke out in Plymouth in 1633, killing settlers and local Indians. Alfred Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 82. It is possible the visit by Plymouth colonists brought the epidemic into Connecticut.

[16] "Richard Morris To John Coggeshall, *ca*. May 22, 1647" and "William Baulston to John Winthrop, Jr.," Winthrop Papers (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1947), 5, 164, 165.

Sowheag's daughter Wawarme married the Narragansett sachem Miantonomi and bore a son, Massecup, who then resided with the Wangunk all his life. Sowheag likewise tried to develop alliances with the Europeans.[17]

Sequassen, Sowheag's son, ratified the first Hartford deed to Samuel Stone and William Goodwin. Wigwams and fields of maize populated both the North Meadow and South Meadow around Hartford at that time, along with the Little Meadow between the river and the Great Path, southern New England's primary Indigenous transportation route. Histories of colonization often imply that "Indians" did not understand European concepts of property ownership. However, the cultural misunderstandings were more complicated. Accounts in the journals of Governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts Bay and Governor William Bradford of the Plymouth Colony show that they knew exactly what the Wangunk expected. Sowheag was not transferring land. Subsequent events confirm Sequassen and Sowheag's reliance on that original understanding of the agreement. Sowheag and the Wangunk intended for the English to live alongside the Native people as an integrated community, not displace them. The English would help the Wangunk access technologies, shoring up their defenses against the Pequot.[18]

The violation of this understanding ultimately provided the spark for the Pequot War. Believing that they were living in shared Wangunk space, Sowheag had decided to move his wigwam and some of his tribal members to Wethersfield in April 1637, but the Wethersfield settlers, without consulting colony leaders, forcibly drove out the sachem and his people. Sequassen approached the Pequot to exact revenge. On April 23, the Pequot attacked the English village and killed three women, six men, twenty cattle, and a horse. One week later, the Connecticut Colony declared war on the Pequot.[19] The violent conflict that ensued, which initially enlisted the European style of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century warfare, shattered Pequot power, particularly after the English turned to even more unconventional and ruthless tactics of warfare.[20] The Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut colonies won the war, eventually with the help of the Narragansett and the Mohegan, but at great cost to Indigenous life.[21]

---

17 "Letter of Edward Winslow to John Winthrop, 1644," Winthrop Papers (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929), 4: 452-454. See also William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation,* ed. Charles Deane. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), 40.

18 A confirmatory deed signed in 1670 by Wawarme, Curricomb, and others, "the heirs of Sowheag," recited the terms of the original agreement. *Original Distribution of the Lands in Hartford Among the Settlers,* 1639 (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1912), vii; Sherman W. Adams, "Settlement of the Town," in James Hammond Trumbull, *The Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut, 1633-1884* (Boston: Edward L. Osgood, Pub., 1886), 1: 221-222; Trumbull, *Memorial History,* 34; William DeLoss Love, *The Colonial History of Hartford: Gathered from the Original Records* (Hartford: 1914), 82.

19 John William De Forest, *History of the Indians of Connecticut from the Earliest Known Period to 1850* (Hartford: W.J. Hamersley, 1851), 113; Alden T. Vaughan, "A Test of Puritan Justice," *The New England Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1965): 331–39.

20 As quoted in Carr, 878-879.

21 Cave, 18-22; Also see Ronald Dale Karr; "'Why Should You Be So Furious?': The Violence of the Pequot War," *Journal of American History* 85, no. 3 (December 1998): 876-878; Nicholas Canny, "The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America," *The William and Mary Quarterly: A Magazine of Early American History* 3rd ser. 34, no. 4 (1973): 575.

During the Pequot War the English and their Indigenous allies combined snaphaunce or wheellock arms weaponry (a friction wheel that created a spark) with more unconventional tactics like arson.[22] The colonists' firearms had been imported from abroad or built from the combinations of parts of various firearms from those different origins.[23] The largely English-born blacksmiths in the colonies tended to cluster near populated settlements like Boston. They extended toolmaking to gunsmithing and primarily repaired firearms throughout periods of conflict, including the Pequot War. Many sought the guns of Eltweed Pomeroy, who brought his craft over from England. That family business survived until the mid-1800s, most notably through to Revolutionary War General Seth Pomeroy. The Puritans encouraged settlers to purchase their own equipment, and many owned both long- and short-barrel weapons for hunting and defense, usually due to fear of Indigenous people. Native warriors managed to capture several flintlock guns during battle, but after experiencing European firepower in a skirmish with the Dutch in 1634, they often formed smaller groups and used bows and arrows to shoot from outside of musket firing range (about 125-175 yards).[24]

Meanwhile, between 1637 and 1640, Thomas Hooker led the first English settlers to the site near Suckiog (which they designated Hartford), at that point an active regional economic center, where they divided the land and claimed numerous lots. (See 1.2). The 1650 Treaty of Hartford settled boundary claims between New Netherlands and the Connecticut colony. Until the Anglo-Dutch War of 1664, Dutch attempts to buy out Native land claims required notarization and often formal negotiations between colonial authorities and the Indigenous nation. Civil legal proceedings legitimated New Netherlands and New England territorial claims, eliminating the formal treaty negotiation process for acquiring land. According to historian Katherine Hermes, Native signatures on deeds for land transactions following the Pequot War indicated attempts to maintain peace with the colonists in a hostile colonial environment.[25]

---

[22] David Naumec, "Arms and Armour of the Pequot War (1636-1637): A Historical and Archeological Perspective," in *The Bulletin of the American Society of Arms Collectors*, Ephrata, PA (Spring 2024). Also see Karr, "'Why Should You Be So Furious?'" for the nature of unconventional warfare by the English during the Pequot War.

[23] Erik Goldstein, "To Arms! Weapons of the Revolutionary War," University of Wyoming Firearms Research Center, Springfield Armory National Historic Site, November 21, 2025; Kevin Sweeney, "An Eighteenth Century Gun Culture Shaped by Constraints," Duke Center for Firearms Law, September 6, 2023, accessed November 21, 2025; Kevin M. Sweeney, "Firearms Ownership and Militias in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England and America" in Jennifer Tucker, Barton C. Hacker, and Margaret Vining, eds., *A Right to Bear Arms? The Contested History in Contemporary Debates on the Second Amendment* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 2019), 62-63.

[24] David J. Naumec, "From Muskets to M4s: Connecticut's Gunmaking Tradition, 1637-2010," *Connecticut History Review* 49, no. 2 (2010): 187; Sweeney, "Firearms Ownership and Militias in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England and America," 60.

[25] Katherine A. Hermes, "21. Peace Treaties Between Colonial Powers and Indigenous Peoples in North America," in *Handbook of Peace in Early Modern Europe* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2020), 420-421. From the European point of view, these transactions constituted sale, but for Native people, these agreements were more nuanced negotiations in a colonized world.

The Wangunk, however, physically remained in the South Meadow during the late seventeenth-century colonial period. In the *History of Colonial Hartford,* Reverend William DeLoss Love conducted extensive research on the land in the South Meadow. A 1666 Dutch map showed the existence of a Native fort there. Sequassen and another man, Manorolos, claimed the land in the meadow, and Sequassen's sister Wawarme kept her wigwams there.[26] In 1643 Uncas (Mohegan) attacked Sequassen on the northern and eastern sections of South Meadow. Uncas killed Miantonomi, and Sequassen decamped, staying away from the colony until Sowheag's death in 1650. Still, Rev. Love relayed an oral tradition that Sequassen's wigwams remained on the land lot subsequently held by Richard Brown.[27]

Between August 1 and November 10, 1675, Native warriors attacked each of the Massachusetts border towns on the Connecticut River. The resulting conflict, known as King Philip's War, is remembered as a significant example of Native resistance, but historians have only recently begun to uncover the myriad experiences of Native people.[28] Afterwards, colonists enslaved adult male warriors, exporting them out of the mainland to the Caribbean.[29] The Connecticut colony tried enemy Natives as murderers in court and frequently executed them, sometimes summarily, but Connecticut granted amnesty to those who gave up their arms and willingly submitted, even as colony forcibly detained others on reservations.[30] Survivors Sarah Onepenny the Elder and her children Cushoy, Nanamaroos, Siana and Sarah Onepenny the Younger, with her son Mamoosen, were eventually able to return to the traditional Wangunk lands in Hartford and Middletown.[31]

After 1715, while the leadership of the Wangunk all resided outside of Hartford, ordinary Wangunk remained in the city. Native men found employment in Hartford, sometimes working in the warehouses near the Connecticut River or as farm laborers.[32] Other Wangunk who had lived in Hartford resettled in Middletown, but returned often for market days.[33] They may have

---

[26] Love, 86-90.

[27] William DeLoss Love, *The Colonial History of Hartford: Gathered from the Original Records* (Hartford, 1914), 86-90.

[28] Samuel Gardner Drake, *Drake's Book of Indians* (Scituate, MA: Digital Scanning, 2001), 86.; Jason W. Warren, *Connecticut Unscathed: Victory in the Great Narragansett War, 1675–1676* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 90.

[29] Linford Fisher, "'Why Shall We Have Peace to Bee Made Slaves': Indian Surrenderers during and after King Philip's War," *Ethnohistory* 64:1 (2017): 92.

[30] Newell, 164.

[31] Hermes and Maravel, "Finding the Onepennys among the Wangunk," 98-99.

[32] On February 13, 1658/59, Japhet, an Indigenous man, was listed among the ratepayers (property taxpayers) in the South End. He was among the poorest of the ratepayers, including Pater Hogan, a Dutchman, and the Widow Watts. He may have been a Wangunk who moved from the wigwams of Suckiog into a house in town, a freed Pequot captive who received freedom dues, or a member of a nearby tribe like the Podunk or Tunxis. See *Original Distribution of the Lands in Hartford Among the Settlers*, 1639, 498.

[33] Sowheag probably died about 1650, and Sequassen about 1665. But Nesehegen, Turramuggus, Curricomb, the Onepennys, and Massacup continued to sign deeds with the English as both grantors and witnesses in the 1670s. It was the customary practice of the Connecticut General Assembly to give prior approval for any purchase of Native land. Connecticut rigorously controlled settlers' purchases of Indigenous land, but the colony itself made purchases and authorized towns to do so. Charles J. Hoadly, trans. and ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut,* Oct. 1706-Oct. 1716 (Case, Lockwood and Brainard: Hartford, 1870), 1: 214, 420; hereinafter cited as CCR.

stayed near the remaining South Meadow wigwams established by Sequassen, Wawarme, and Sarah Onepenny the Elder. Wawarme Avenue today runs along an area of meadow on which those wigwams stood until at least the 1730s.[34]

On her deathbed in May 1713, Sarah Onepenny the Elder was surrounded by her family, including Mary Whiting, the twenty-five-year-old daughter of Colonel William Whiting whom Sarah had helped to raise. She provided instructions for the disposal of her estate, leaving all her land in Hartford's South Meadow, including the small parcel of three to four acres by the wigwams, to her grandson, Scipio Twoshoes, a servant of Colonel William Whiting in Hartford, with whom she likely also lived.[35] While some of the meadow had already been purchased by settlers, the first Native land surveyed for Native use appears to have been Scipio's land in 1714. On January 12, 1726, Whiting sold three acres of land in the South Meadow to his son William Whiting, Jr.[36] On October 20, 1728, Whiting also transferred additional land he purchased from Scipio to William, Jr.[37] On April 2, 1744, William, Jr. sold Scipio's former land to a man named John Knowles. The land Knowles bought was "bounded west with the land of George Wyllys, south by John Knowles late belonging to Benjamin Calling, easterly and northerly on the Great River." An April 2, 1744, warranty deed noted, "It being that Land whereon the Wigwams were formerly standing."[38]

Colonial Settlement in the South Meadow

George Wyllys was one of the English colonists who acquired seven acres of the South Meadow in 1636, at the founding of the Connecticut Colony.[39] The son and heir of an English Lord, Wyllys was one of the wealthiest and most important men in the colony and his estate was one of the largest in Hartford. By 1639 his landholdings included the nutrient-rich soils of the South Meadow. While gentry who maintained their status from England, like the Wyllys family, held

---

[34] Katherine Hermes, *et al*., "Old Robin," Uncovering Their History African, African-American and Native-American Burials in Hartford's Ancient Burying Ground, 1640-1815, https://www.africannativeburialsct.org/person/old-robin-aka-doctor-robin/.

[35] We have kept the spelling of names as they appeared in the original documents, and if several documents vary, have chosen one spelling. The scene set here is a composite drawn from several documents: Wyllys Papers, Document No. 88, Connecticut State Library; CCR, 5: 366; Nuncupative Will of Sarah Onepenny, in Katherine A. Hermes, "'By Their Desire Recorded': Native American Wills and Estate Papers in Colonial Connecticut," *Connecticut History* 38, no. 2 (1999): 165; Hermes and Maravel, "Finding the Onepennys among the Wongunk," 98-99; William DeLoss Love, *The Colonial History of Hartford: Gathered from the Original Records* (Hartford, 1914), 86-90.

[36] Nuncupative Will of Sarah Onepenny, in Katherine A. Hermes, "'By Their Desire Recorded': Native American Wills and Estate Papers in Colonial Connecticut," *Connecticut History* 38, no. 2 (1999): 165.

[37] *Hartford Proprietors' Records* (also known as *Hartford Land Records*) (HLR), 4: 303.

[38] HLR 7:76; CSL #1563, LDS#0004513.

[39] Love, 86-90. The first African person recorded to have been laid to rest in Hartford was Louis Berbice, an enslaved man whose Dutch master, Gisbert Opdyke, murdered him in 1639 on the shores of the Great River (the Connecticut River), which ran past the Wangunk town of Suckiog, the Dutch Fort called the House of Hope, and the English village known as Hartford. Berbice was probably buried in or near the fort. Glenn A. Knoblock, *African American Historic Burial Grounds and Gravesites of New England* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2016), 9.

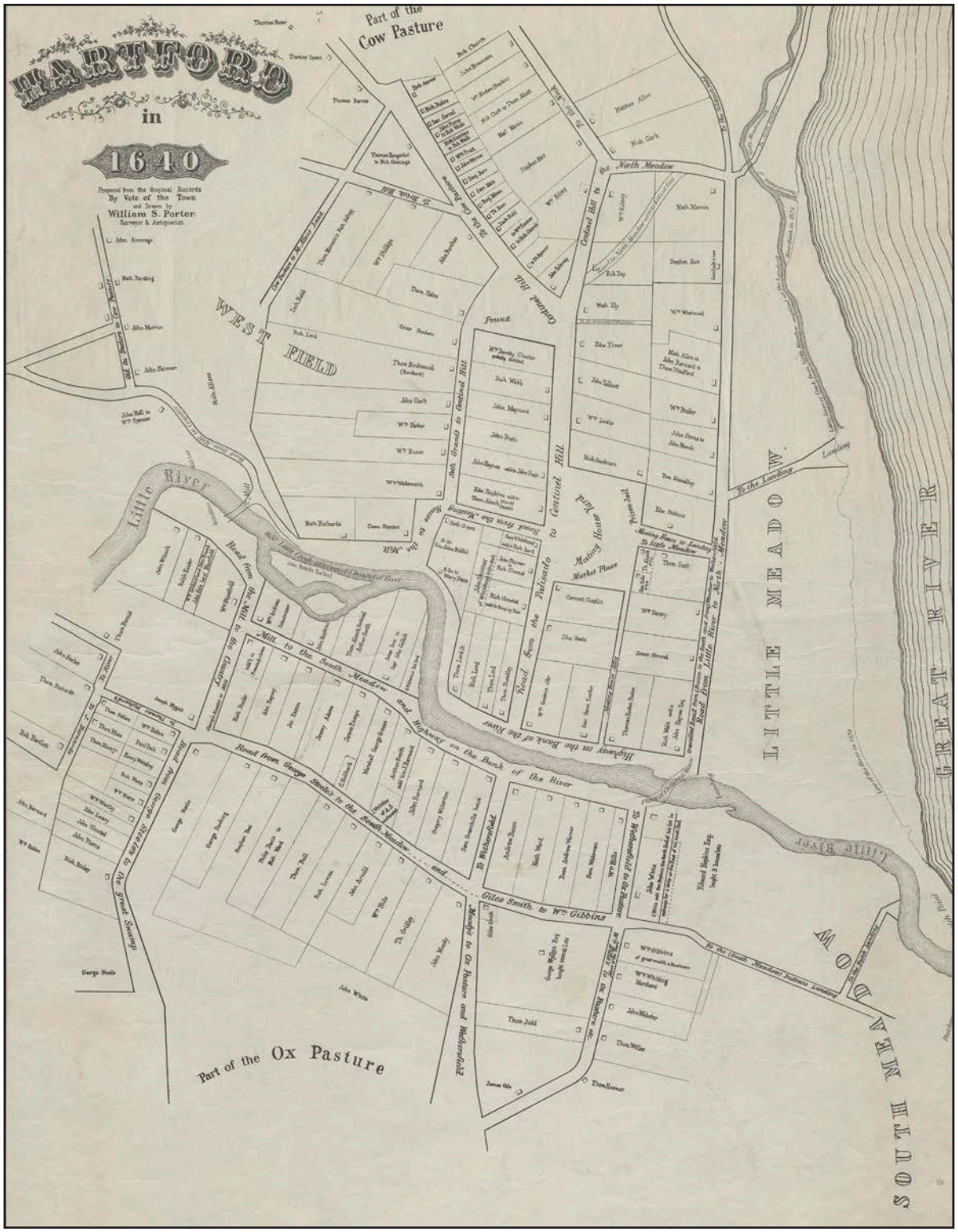


Figure 1.2 William S. Porter, Map, "Hartford in 1640," showing names of property owners. Originally published in 1838. Watermark: Agawam Bond from the American Paper Company (Holyoke, Massachusetts). Connecticut State Library and Archives (CSLA), Hartford, Connecticut. http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:o743070538.

large tracts of land, most settlers secured land for subsistence. Farmers enjoyed especially good conditions, free of the rocky soil in other areas of the colony. They often produced a surplus of grain, rye, oats, flax, onions, beef, hogs, and horses that supported the growth of mercantile trade through innovative farming practices.[40]

Wyllys's son Samuel acquired the property in 1662, soon after England's King Charles II granted the Connecticut Colony a Royal Charter that stipulated self-rule. Colonial accounts describe a delegation of Indigenous people, likely the Wangunk, who pleaded to Wyllys not to remove an old, enormous oak tree as he cleared the parcel for farming. Not only did the tree possess spiritual significance, but its springtime leaf development helped indicate when to plant maize. Years later, the English and their descendants appropriated this Native "peace tree," both literally and culturally, into their own origin story, that of the famous "Charter Oak." A popular story explains that in 1686, King James II threatened to revoke the colonial charters under his new "Dominion of New England." While he was able to seize the Massachusetts charter, the people of the Connecticut Colony refused to give up its autonomy. When newly appointed governor Edmund Andros arrived in person to confiscate the charter, settlers hid the document in the centuries-old hollow oak on the South Meadow. England's Glorious Revolution deposed James soon afterwards, but unlike Plymouth and Massachusetts, Connecticut retained its charter. "The Charter Oak" became a symbol of colonial resistance, self-rule, and independence. For residents like Samuel Colt, the tree's mythical status only grew over the next two centuries, and he would repeatedly pay it homage as he built Coltsville (see 1.3 and chapter 10).[41]

The Charter Oak therefore maintained a cherished status before and after Samuel Colt established his factory in the nineteenth century, but colonists generally did not see much value in trees. In 1638, the Dutch businessman David Devries reported more than fifty cherry trees on the South Meadow, likely planted upland, but he recorded in his diary that English colonists had generally cleared the forests to expand farming. The extensive beaver trade with the Dutch had meant that, with the animals hunted to near extinction for their fur by the nineteenth century, their dams eventually deteriorated. Hence, wetlands soon disappeared, replaced by treeless meadows that New England's farmers could till, enrich, and fertilize with "leaves, bark, rotten wood and other manure."[42] Historian Jerry Belknap observed that "The whole tract, which before was the bottom of a pond, is covered with wild grass, which grows as high as a man's shoulders…. Without these natural meadows, many settlements could not possibly have been made."[43] On the other hand, the lack of trees and the decimated beaver population exacerbated flooding, making farming increasingly more difficult but creating better shipping conditions. In

---

[40] Judd, 90; Sweeney, 23; also see Janice P. Cunningham, "Connecticut's Agricultural Heritage: Historic Barns of Connecticut," Historic Context Study, Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation (April 2012), https://connecticutbarns.org/images/uploads/Connecticuts%20Agricultural%20Heritage%20Report_final2012-0512.pdf.

[41] Viola Barnes, *Dominion of New England* (New York: Kennikat, 1960), 229.

[42] Richard W. Judd, *Second Nature: An Environmental History of New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 71-72; Jeremy Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* (Bradford and Read, 1813) as quoted in Ben Goldfarb, "Why We Need Beavers," *Connecticut Explored* 17, no. 2 (Spring 2019), https://www.ctexplored.org/why-we-need-beavers/.

[43] Belknap in Goldfarb.

1692 a flood washed out the oxbow and created Wethersfield Cove, making the area even more accessible for ships to port.[44]

A Landscape for Trade and Manufacture

The early Dutch fur trade and rich, agricultural lands led to the development of the Hartford area as a commercial hub that eventually evolved into manufacturing and industry. The early commerce along the rivers that emptied into Long Island Sound expanded. Identified by the English as "the Great River," the Connecticut River in particular, with its powerful flow, proved ideal as a main transportation artery. Just over a decade after the Pequot War, the Puritan settlers looked to warmer climates and larger profits. The merchants of Wethersfield and Hartford invested in a small vessel, fittingly named the *Tryall*, or "trial," to trade with Barbados in 1649. Loaded with fresh produce, lumber, and barrel staves (the wooden slats that form a barrel), the boat departed the confluence of the Connecticut River and the Sound. It returned packed with valuable sugar and molasses.[45]



Figure 1.3 Charles DeWolf Brownell, *The Charter Oak*, 1857. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. The Colt Factory stands in the distant background. Because Samuel Colt ordered several works of art around this time, he also likely commissioned this painting as well.

[44] Steve Grant, "Dutch Point: The Environmental History of a Small Place," *The Hartford Courant*, April 15, 1990, A1, A18.

[45] Portions of this section were previously published. See Matthew Warshauer, "Connecticut's Sweet Tooth: The Sugar Trade & Slavery in the West Indies," *Connecticut Explored* 21, no. 3 (Summer 2023), 22-27; Brenda Milkofsky, "Connecticut and the West Indies: Sugar Spurs Trans-Atlantic Trade," *Connecticut History.org*, January 7, 2021, https://connecticuthistory.org/connecticut-and-the-west-indies-trade/.

While rocky soils limited arable lands, Connecticut's abundant rivers and streams provided waterpower that positioned the state as a leader in industry, trade, and manufacturing throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the gentry looked toward grist mills to facilitate trade with the southern colonies and the West Indies. English colonists selected many of the old beaver dam locations for mill sites because they offered a predictable flow to turn grist mill wheels and later to operate industrial machinery. As technological advances in infrastructure facilitated easier and faster travel, production, and sales, Connecticut residents used other elements of the environment "to generate energy, process food, and make material goods."[46]

Connecticut's eighteenth-century economy revolved around the West Indies trade, particularly sugar, molasses, and rum. While most colonial farmers lived through subsistence and bartering, they still managed to grow extra crops and breed enough livestock to trade with the islands. In 1731 Governor Joseph Talcott, reported that 44 vessels plied the West Indies trade, carrying some 456 tons of goods. Within just thirty years, by 1762, the number of vessels increased to 76, carrying a total of 6,790 tons. By the 1770s the number of ships had quadrupled, and the tonnage multiplied twenty-fold.[47] Just three years later, in 1774, Governor Jonathan Trumbull declared, "The Principle Trade of this Colony is to the West India Islands." Connecticut ships traded with British, French, and Dutch islands, carrying every manner of product in exchange for molasses, cocoa, sugar, and salt. The colony boasted 180 vessels carrying 10,317 tons, all operated, as the governor noted, by "seafaring men."[48] The opportunity for profit shifted the colony's production toward a more market-oriented economy, one in which farmers and other businessmen specialized in specific items. In *New England Nation: The Country the Puritans Built,* the historian Bruce Daniels noted that "commercial farming grew because of the vast markets in the West Indies for Connecticut's products."[49]

The Connecticut colony's trading activities with the West Indies held a central place in the triangular trade, which connected the western hemisphere to the continents of Europe and Africa and exchanged raw materials in the Americas for finished goods from Europe. The infamous Middle Passage transported enslaved people stolen from Africa to provide forced labor in the fields and mills of the Caribbean and, farther north, in Britain's American colonies. The colony's investment in the sugar trade over the next 150 years tied its fortunes to slavery. Connecticut-built and Connecticut-owned ships ferried the enslaved, with Middletown (the site of one of the earliest small-arms factories) serving as the primary slave port in the Connecticut River Valley. Upon achieving statehood in 1784, Connecticut passed a gradual emancipation law, not fully exculpating the state from slavery until 1848.[50]

---

[46] Gordon and Raber, ix; Grant, *Yankee Dreamers and Doers*, 7.

[47] Eric Kimball, "An Essential Link in a Vast Chain: New England and the West Indies Trade, 1700-1775," PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2009.

[48] Kimball, "An Essential Link in a Vast Chain."

[49] Bruce Daniels, *New England Nation: The Country the Puritans Built* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 94.

[50] See Anne Farrow, Joel Manfred Lang, Jenifer Frank, Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005); Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, and Survival* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

Meanwhile, sugar became an incredibly valuable resource. It was one far more profitable to sell the granulated gold and simply pay for all sorts of items like foodstuffs, furnishings, building material, and horses than to lose even a small parcel for personal food production. With New Haven and New London as the two principal ports of the colony, 444 vessels departed New Haven for the islands between 1768 and 1772. They represented 43 percent of the total number, carrying 18,090 tons of goods, which accounted for 56 percent of the tonnage of all trading vessels departing New Haven. During the same period, 792 ships carrying 30,175 tons sailed south from New London for the West Indies.[51] Long known as "the Provision State" for its role in feeding George Washington's army, Connecticut achieved that status because of the vast network of producers and merchants that had developed to feed and supply the West Indies trade.

During and after the successful American Revolution from 1776 to 1783, New Englanders continued to engage in the mercantilism of the well-developed West Indies trade. By the mid-eighteenth century, almost 25 percent of adult males in Hartford County identified as craftsmen, many working in small shops to produce tinware, wagons, furniture, shoes, guns, and much more. Their goods whet the landed gentry's appetite for refined commercial products, which could communicate their elevated status distinct from that of the yeoman subsistence farmer. As communities increased in number and size and subsequent generations inherited smaller land parcels, sons of farmers looked to college to prepare for livelihoods as physicians, attorneys, and ministers, but also to apprenticeships with merchants and craftsmen.[52] As poor soil cultivation and other factors began to deflate agricultural production, some emigrated west, while other farmers expanded into animal husbandry or took over abandoned fields, where they embraced agricultural practices to "improve" the soil. In his book *Second Nature*, Richard Judd described how some began to consolidate estates, renting out some of the acreage and marketing the surplus goods. "The well-honed culture of consumption among this social elite gave rise to a strong craft tradition that blended influences from four states along the river, and these artisans in turn laid the foundation for industrialization…." As industry brought urbanization, Hartford incorporated as a city in 1784.[53]

The profit from the West Indies Trade thus fueled Connecticut's industrial development with grist and textile mills, but also mines, quarries, and iron furnaces. Iron was essential to industries like toolmaking and gunsmithing. Large-scale iron production in America began in the 1730s

---

[51] Joseph Avitable, "The Atlantic World Economy and Colonial Connecticut," PhD Thesis, University of Rochester, 2009. All agricultural and livestock counts are found in Kimball, "An Essential Link in a Vast Chain."

[52] Karyl Lee Kibler Hall and Carolyn Cooper, "Windows on the Works: Industry on the Eli Whitney Site 1798-1979" (Eli Whitney Museum: Hamden, CT), 11; Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); Robert Gordon and Michael Raber, *Industrial Heritage in Northwest Connecticut: A Guide to History and Archaeology* (Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2000), 13-16; Kevin M. Sweeney, "From Wilderness to Arcadian Vale: Material Life in the Connecticut River Valley, 1635-1760," and Robert Blair St. George, "Artifacts of Regional Consciousness in the Connecticut River Valley, 1700-1780," in *The Great River: Art & Society of the Connecticut Valley, 1635-1820* (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1985), 17-23, 29; Mary Babson Fuhrer, *A Crisis in Community: The Trials and Transformation of a New England Town*, 1815-1848 (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Press, 2014), 74-125.

[53] As quoted in Judd, 91; Ellsworth Grant, Yankee Dreamers and Doers: *The Story of Connecticut Manufacturing* (Connecticut Historical Society, 1996).

with the development of the blast furnace. When siting these enterprises, ironmasters looked to the region's rural areas for iron ore, water, limestone, and forests. The Connecticut River Valley boasted a valuable concentration of hematite iron ore in Canaan and other districts located northwest of Hartford. Wood itself had limits as a construction material, due to its flammability and lack of durability, but it was essential for making charcoal, a key resource for heating up a furnace enough to create, as Europeans had done for centuries in "bloomeries," malleable iron. Iron furnace operators accessed unproductive woodlands. Skilled colliers turned trees into charcoal by heating wood in an enclosed pit or kiln over several days, essentially baking the wood with limited oxygen to smolder and "carbonize" it.[54]

Ironmasters and their workers formed villages with homes, farms, barns, and stores. Connecticut's iron industry, concentrated in the northwestern Salisbury region, ran until the 1920s, providing artisans with pig (unrefined) or sometimes wrought (refined) iron when steel became the preferred metallurgic product. Most furnaces produced pig iron, which a blacksmith could process further into cast or wrought iron to make containers for building and cooking. Those working in the foundries designed the molds for cast stoves or plows, ordnance, and even firearm parts, laying the foundational knowledge for the machine shops and machinists who defined the industrial workplace. Thus, between the river, the woodlands, and iron production, the Connecticut River Valley possessed invaluable resources and a labor pool of craftsmen and artisans, including blacksmiths and gunsmiths.[55]

From the early colonial era on, many households in America possessed at least some firearms, primarily for hunting, but local militias also stocked them collectively, at the insistence of British colonial governments, to combat racial, social, and foreign conflict.[56] These threats included Indian attacks, such as in the 1636 Pequot War, King Philip's War, and Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, slave revolts such as the 1739 Stono Rebellion, and military campaigns such as the French and Indian War (1754-1763).[57] In the eighteenth century, individual gun ownership skewed male, southern, and rural.[58] Some scholars have argued that even after the American Revolution, many in the Southern states enlisted their militia forces (or patrols) as a way to quell slave resistance and rebellion. However, historian Kevin Sweeney found that probate records reveal that at least

---

[54] Robert Gordon, *A Landscape Transformed: The Ironmaking District of Salisbury, Connecticut* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Robert Gordon, *American Iron*, 1607-1900 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 22, 34.

[55] Much of this summary has been compiled from Joseph E. Walker, *Hopewell Village: The Dynamics of a Nineteenth Century Iron-Making Community* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967), which provides a social framework for rural industrial village communities. See also Roy Appleman, "Historical Report: French Creek Area" (Bronxville, NY: Second Regional Office, National Park Service, August 19, 1935), 2; *Hopewell Furnace Handbook*; Hugins, 28; Felicia Johnson Deyrup, "Arms Makers of the Connecticut Valley: A Regional Study of the Economic Development of the Small Arms Industry, 1798- 1870," *Smith College Studies in History* 33 (Northampton, MA, 1948), 15.

[56] Kevin Sweeney, Table 1, "Ownership of Firearms in Massachusetts Probate Inventories." Paper, Center for the Study of Guns and Society conference, Wesleyan University, October 18, 2025.

[57] Brian Delay, "The Myth of Continuity in American Gun Culture," *California Law Review* 113 (February 2025), https://www.californialawreview.org/print/gun-continuity, accessed February 2025.

[58] James Lindgren and Justin Heather, "Counting Guns in Early America," *William & Mary Law Review* 43, no. 5 (2002), 1777-1842.

half of the males in Massachusetts owned firearms, many secured through the French trade or via other imports. The work of the gunsmith largely entailed repairs.[59] The French and Indian War prompted the development of local gun making using local materials. The Connecticut General Assembly sent agents to Boston and Albany to supplement what local craftsmen could not produce. By 1755 the Connecticut colony provided a bounty for "men in newly formed regiments to provide himself provincial fire-lock."[60] While the colonists established factories in Pennsylvania and Virginia and Connecticut farmers produced food provisions, independent artisans and craftsmen in New England's small workshops and armories supported George Washington's Continental Army with ordnance and other implements. They also helped meet the Connecticut General Assembly's demand for "three thousand stands of arms" to fight the British during the American Revolution.[61]

However, after the war, a new, independent, and vulnerable nation built two arsenals, one at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia and the other in Springfield, Massachusetts. George Washington himself sited the locations because of river access for power and transportation. The former allowed service to the Southern states. Springfield provided access to the mighty Connecticut River and its tributaries, and proximity to Salisbury, Connecticut, a region with significant iron production. The Springfield Armory enjoyed some advantages over that at Harper's Ferry, which, while closer to Virginia coal and Pennsylvania stock supplies, had higher raw-material and labor costs. In addition to water access for transportation and power, both arsenals were located inland for purposes of defense and protection.[62]

The Militia Acts of 1792, which established an organized system of state militias and required each militia member to provide his own musket or rifle, raised the demand for firearms. The Springfield Armory worked toward interchangeability and uniformity in the manufacture of gun parts to make repairs quick and simple. The federal armories produced firearms for the military, such as the model 1795 musket, and became sites for innovative machinery, such as Thomas Blanchard's lathe in the 1820s that helped standardized irregular-shaped gunstocks.[63]

The government also issued contracts to arms makers in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and throughout New England to supplement supplies. Because financing private armories continued to be a challenge and often took years to see a return on the investment, the ordnance department maintained relationships with a few select small-arms manufacturers, serving as the primary

---

[59] Carl Bogus, "The Hidden History of the Second Amendment," *U.C. Davis Law Review*, 31 (1998): 309-408. See also John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Kevin Sweeney, Table 1 "Ownership of Firearms in Massachusetts Probate Inventories."

[60] From Hammond Trumbull, ed. *Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* X, 317, as quoted in Naumec, "From Muskets to M4s: Connecticut's Gunmaking Tradition, 1637-2010," 198.

[61] For more on early gunmaking in Connecticut, see Naumec, "From Muskets to M4s: Connecticut's Gunmaking Tradition, 1637-2010," 187-189; for details on the equipment of the Revolution, see Deyrup, 33-35.

[62] Deyrup, 36-37, 43-44.

[63] U.S. Laws, Statutes, etc. An act to provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions and to repeal the act now in force for those purposes (Philadelphia, 1795). pdf. https://www.loc.gov/item/2020769638/.

source of their capital through advance payment or bonded contracts that required gunsmiths to comply with inspections and uniform design. Ten of the government's eighteen contractors hailed from New England, and three from the Connecticut River Valley. This resulted in the development of a domestic industry of particular importance because the federal ordnance department forbade importing parts from Europe as foreign affairs grew tense.[64] Skilled workers (stockers, forgers, filers, finishers) moved among contracted worksites and the Springfield Armory, maintaining comparable wages and recruiting each other's workers. This arguably allowed the development of a more robust industry than in the South, where Harper's Ferry did not have the same concentration of artisans and manufacturers. As the nation's transportation continued to improve, so did access to resources, such as with the Erie Canal's completion in 1825. Arms makers in Connecticut could now access walnut trees in western New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio for gunstock material and anthracite coal from the Lehigh Valley in eastern Pennsylvania.[65]

These small producers, however, depended heavily on a wider credit system. Several succumbed to high labor costs. Many failed, yet despite these economic problems and quality control outside of the federal armories, Felicia Deyrup maintains that the federal contact system encouraged "a spirit of cooperation and mutual helpfulness" rather than competition among one another and with the Springfield Armory. Producers shared materials such as unused or unfinished stocks, tools, patterns for machinery, forging and graining services, and the pre-sizing of pig-iron bars from the Salisbury region that supplied the iron for the gun barrels. Area farms supplied wood to make charcoal to fire the furnaces. By the 1820s, some experimented with bituminous and anthracite coal.[66]

Contractors Daniel Gilbert in Massachusetts and Eli Whitney of New Haven attested to willingness to conform with government standards, but the latter did not have much experience upon which to base that promise.[67] After inventing the successful cotton gin in 1793, which allowed the rapid expansion of the slave plantation system, Connecticut's entrepreneurial Eli Whitney lost the patent through continuous infringement. Financially desperate, Whitney sought a lucrative government contract to produce firearms as the French Revolution threatened to draw the new American nation into conflict. Although he had never produced guns before, and scholars dispute whether he was even aware of Frenchman Honore Blanc's interchangeable gunlocks, Whitney nevertheless won a government contract for 10,000 pieces. He managed such a feat largely through his Yale University connections with the secretary of the U.S. treasury, Connecticut resident Oliver Wolcott.[68] Whitney was also likely aware of Englishman Richard Arkwright's 1769 patent, which used waterwheels for mechanical power. He identified a location in New Haven to take advantage of the waterpower from the Mill River (which emptied into

[64] Deyrup, 36, 43, 42-44, 67, 88.
[65] Deyrup, 43-48, 66-67, 82-84; Gordon, 136.
[66] Deyrup, 43-48, 55, 66-67.
[67] Deyrup, 35, 41-43; Lindsey Schackenbach Regele, "A Different Constitutionality for Gun Regulations," *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (Spring 2019): 523-530.
[68] See Robert S. Woodbury, "The Legend of Eli Whitney and Interchangeable Parts," *Technology and Culture* 1, no. 3 (1960): 235–53. https://doi.org/10.2307/3101392.

Long Island Sound at New Haven harbor) at the site of a colonial-era gristmill. On May 13, 1798, Whitney wrote Wolcott: "…I am persuaded that machinery moved by water ought to do the business which greatly diminishes labor and facilitates the manufacture of these articles…. Machines for forging, rolling, floating, boring, grinding, polishing, etc., may be made use of to {sic}advantage….There is a good fall of water in the vicinity of this town which I can procure and have works executed in short time."[69] He took so much time figuring out a manufacturing system, however, that he delivered only the initial batch in 1801. It took him more than a decade to meet the contract for the Model 1798 muskets.[70]

Whitney used this time to develop unique machinery that harnessed waterpower to forge, roll, bore, grind, polish, and turn parts, but by most accounts he never quite perfected his system. He delivered on his contract almost a decade late. The innovation of machine-produced parts proved a significant industrial development toward uniformity for metalwork, at least until the availability of steam power in the mid-nineteenth century. Whitney's stunted efforts did, however, contribute to the development of the regional small arms industry from one of artisan craftsmanship to the more specialized "New England system," foreshadowing the manufacturing techniques Samuel Colt later embraced.[71]

Although historians have discredited Whitney's role in developing the technology behind the "American System of Manufactures," he remains an important figure who shared his machine-run factory system with and in the federal armories. The system promoted, if it did not achieve, the concept of a system focused on the interchangeability of parts. Whitney's armory (like the Springfield Armory) supported division of labor and the growth of "occupational specialization" in terms of operations. This system not only planted the early seeds for the mass production of goods in the twentieth century, but it challenged the gunsmith's craftsmanship and allowed for the hiring of semiskilled and unskilled workers. One of Whitney's former employees, Roswell Lee, eventually became the superintendent at the Springfield Armory.[72]

---

[69] As quoted in Davis, Cochran, Miller, Noyes Architects, Guilford, CT, "Preservation of the Eli Whitney Gun Factory Site and its Potential Development as a Historical Site Museum," prepared for the New Haven Colony Historical Society, November 1974, 1, Hamden Historical Society, Miller Library, Hamden, CT.

[70] David Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1832: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1984), 29-30; Deyrup, 87. Hounshell subscribes to Robert S. Woodbury's skeptical view of Whitney's contributions to devising a system to make interchangeable parts and argues that Whitney emphasized his goal of uniformity only after failing to deliver his orders on time.Hounshell surmises that Whitney was looking for a good excuse to ask for more time. Thomas Jefferson, however, assumed interchangeability was the goal after Whitney performed a demonstration to the then president-elect and other officials of assembling a musket from parts with only a screwdriver. Robert S. Woodbury. "The Legend of Eli Whitney and Interchangeable Parts," *Technology and Culture* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1960), 235-253.

[71] Deyrup, 34, 48, 87-93.

[72] Karyl Lee Kibler Hall and Carolyn Cooper, "Windows on the Works: Industry on the Eli Whitney Site, 1787-1979," (Hamden, CT: Eli Whitney Museum, 1984); Hounshell, 3-4; see also Merritt Roe Smith, "Eli Whitney and the American System of Manufacturing," in Carroll W. Pursell, ed. *Technology in America: A History of Individuals and Ideas* (Washington, DC: Voice of America, 1929), 49-65.

More contractors converted previous skills to gun manufacture, especially around the time of the War of 1812. The government pushed interchangeability to its contractors, investing heavily in the private gun-making industry to meet an 1808 congressional annual appropriation of $200,000 (to manufacture 82,000 muskets) for arming and equipping the militias.[73] Berlin, Connecticut's Simeon North, who made agricultural implements, eventually built an 8,500-square-foot factory in Middletown on the Coginchaug River, stepped in to compensate for Whitney's shortfalls. North's factory would go on to produce 10,000 pistols a year, and while he still struggled to stay ahead financially, North's production methods furthered the goal of interchangeable parts manufacturing. Scholar Merritt Roe credited him with developing the first milling machines as early as 1816, which North developed to meet an 1813 government contract for 20,000 pistols that dictated interchangeability for the locks. His neighbor, sword manufacturer Colonel Nathan Starr, Jr., located another pistol factory across the river and received one of the first government contracts in 1798, while John R. Johnson and J. D. Johnson also developed a factory in the Middletown region, on the Pameacha River. All these small-arms producers depended upon the Connecticut River for access to coal, stocks, grindstones, and imported tools and to easily and efficiently ship completed weapons.[74]

Conclusion

The siting of Samuel Colt's famous arms factory just south of Hartford on the Connecticut River was no accident. Indigenous people had settled on the South Meadow for centuries. Due to both the natural geology of the Connecticut River Valley and a developing economy related to the Little and Great rivers, Hartford became a city of renowned trade and manufacturing. The vast region of New England enjoyed opportunities for manufacturing. Industry thrived across the waterpower-rich region. In her book *Manufacturing Advantage*, historian Lindsay Schakenbach Regele argues that the firearms and American textile industries in New England combined to bolster American political, economic, and military power in the early nineteenth century.[75] Lowell, Massachusetts's textile mills used the Merrimack River to power its enterprise, which helped inaugurate the first industrial age in the American Northeast in the 1820s. While Lowell asserted New England's dominance in textiles, the Connecticut River Valley attracted industries around precision manufacturing items like tools and firearms.[76]

The Lowell Mills industrial textile complex on the Merrimack River, Eli Whitney's factory on the Mill River in New Haven, the production of milling machines from Simeon North and Nathan Starr in Middletown, and Samuel and David Collins's Axe Company in Canton off the Farmington River steadily moved the bucolic agricultural Connecticut River Valley from an

---

[73] Carlton O. Wittlinger, "The Small Arms Industry of Lancaster County, 1710-1840," Pennsylvania History: A *Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 24, no. 2 (1957): 121–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27769725; Deyrup, 43-46.

[74] Deyrup, 43-44; Merritt Roe Smith, "John H. Hall, Simeon North, and the Milling Machine: The Nature of Innovation among Antebellum Arms Makers," *Technology and Culture* 14, no. 4 (1973): 574–77. https://doi.org/10.2307/3102444.

[75] See Lindsay Schakenbach Regele, *Manufacturing Advantage: War, the State, and the Origins of American Industry, 1776–1848* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019) for more on this topic.

[76] Deyrup, 43-44.

agricultural mecca of rich, fertile meadows to an industrialized and urban force. The geographic and communal setting for manufacturing in the early nineteenth century provided opportunity for many smaller arms makers to work in concert with the federal armories to meet the needs of a young nation. In the process, they played an important role in shaping Samuel Colt's vision for Coltsville.

II. The Founder
Samuel Colt in Context (1814-1835)



Figure 2.1 The statues of a younger and older Samuel Colt (Samuel Colt Monument) in Colt Park, August 18, 2009. The younger Colt is seated wearing a sailor's outfit whittling his first revolver. Above him, standing, is a middle-aged Colt, wearing a long coat. Image from Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Box 4, Folder 2, Item 9, PG 460, State Archives, Connecticut State Library (CSLA), Hartford, CT.

Facing west toward Wethersfield Avenue in Hartford, Connecticut, a memorial to Samuel Colt is situated at the top of a hill that once had a clear view of the Connecticut River. Set between the Armsmear mansion and the James B. Colt House, a bronze statue on a pink Westerly granite pedestal portrays an adult Sam at the height of his success, a titan of industry standing proudly atop his factory estate. He is cloaked in his signature fur coat, reportedly a gift from Russian Czar Nicholas I.[1] Granite *exedrae* with bronze plates (bas-relief) featuring pivotal moments in his career flank the statue. One portrays Colt speaking in front of the British House of Commons, and the other depicts Czar Nicholas presenting two gold rings to Colt.[2] Centered at the top of the

---

1 As chapter 9 will discuss further, the memorial was designed under Elizabeth Colt's direction by J. Massey Rhind, who also designed the General Sherman statue in New York City's Central Park. The fur coat depicted here, along with other military outfits, are stored in the collections of the Museum of Connecticut History, Hartford, Connecticut, a donation from Samuel Caldwell Colt.

2 "Memorial to Col. Colt," *New York Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1905, 4, accessed via *Chronicling America*, Library

memorial steps sits another figure of Colt as a young sailor whittling a prototype for a repeating revolver, an idea the adult Colt eventually refined and mass produced at Coltsville. (See 2.1 and 3.1).

The memorial statues conjure the biographical narrative of Samuel Colt's short life, culminating in the two events depicted in relief, both of which occurred in 1854, just a year before he built his armory. Its narrative reflects one that Colt and his widow Elizabeth carefully crafted and curated, but also one that's in keeping with the popularized lexicon of American legends.[3] The compelling story of how an extraordinary young man conceived his famous repeating firearm echoes tales that Americans have recounted for decades about our inventors in historical accounts, literature, and film. These stories describe extraordinary heroes destined for greatness from childhood, and they include Colt's elder contemporaries like innovators Eli Whitney and Thomas Blanchard.[4] In her article "Myth, Rumor, and History: The Yankee Whittling Boy as Hero and Villain," historian of technology Carolyn Cooper challenges the veracity of these often remarkably similar origin stories about inventors that focus on individual pluck and genius, especially those without direct evidence of such qualities. Even renowned labor historian Herbert Gutman challenged the "rags to riches" belief promoted through popular literature. Rather, he argued, manufacturers hailed from a "business elite."[5]

However, Colt's early biographers repeated the tale Samuel and Elizabeth promoted of a young man's inventive spirit, thus advancing the appeal, popularity, and persistence of Colt's company products. Colt's ambition, energy, and savvy unquestionably contributed to his success, but a more nuanced examination of his life reveals that he took great advantage of the dramatic changes that took place during the era in which he lived, and of his wealthy familial relations, in building his empire. Samuel Colt came of age at a time when America was rapidly changing, credit flowed freely, and money could be made quickly. He eschewed a traditional education to

---

of Congress, Washington, D.C. https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/; "Colonel Colt's Statue in Place," *The Hartford Courant*, October 26, 1905.

3 Both Sam and Elizabeth left volumes of papers and material items to define their legacy. They endorsed and promoted several well-known and oft-repeated stories about Sam's childhood and origins, sharing his legend in newspapers and popular magazines and through memorials. But there are also gaps in the records. A letter written by Charles Gross, Elizabeth's attorney, describes purging the papers of Christopher, Samuel, and Elizabeth Colt, especially those considered too personal. Charles E. Gross to Mrs. Charles L.F. Robinson, December 11, 1911, Box 4, Jarvis-Robinson Family Papers, Beinecke Library, New Haven, CT.

4 Blanchard developed a lathe for cutting the exterior surface of gun barrels and ultimately one that made and standardized gunstocks. The original lathe is located at Springfield Armory National Historical Park's museum in Springfield, Massachusetts. https://www.nps.gov/spar/learn/historyculture/thomas-blanchard-and-his-lathe.htm, accessed July 5, 2025.

5 Carolyn C. Cooper, "Myth, Rumor, and History: The Yankee Whittling Boy as Hero and Villain," *Technology and Culture* 44 (1), January 2003 82-96. Since the mid-twentieth century, historians have debunked the "rags to riches" myth of the nineteenth-century American industrialist. Colt was actually typical of most industrialists who rose after his death, being "American by birth, of a New England father, a Protestant in his religions, and distinctly upper class in origin....Urban in early environment, he was…born and bred in an atmosphere in which business and a relatively high social standing were intimately associated with his family life." See, Herbert Gutman, "The Reality of the Rags-to-Riches 'Myth,'" in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 211.

seek adventure and wealth; his lack of formal education is evidenced in his writings, which, well into his adulthood, were riddled with grammatical and spelling errors. The historical era, the environment, and the experiences as a child surely formed and informed how he would create and manage his future financial empire based upon the idea of a revolving pistol.

Childhood

While much of Samuel Colt's early life cannot be fully documented, it is nevertheless important to the establishment of Coltsville.[6] Born in Hartford on July 19, 1814, Samuel Colt grew up in a city transformed by the forces of a market revolution that catapulted America into a new economic era. As a boy growing up in a wealthy urban neighborhood, he likely did not have use for firearms for activities such as hunting. Rather, he would have been surrounded by and inundated with a rapidly expanding urban infrastructure, and it makes sense that a young man such as he would absorb the frenetic pace of change. Colt witnessed the development of a national transportation network that shifted New England and the nation toward a market-oriented economy in which the production of goods for sale introduced profound socioeconomic change. The War of 1812 was one catalyst for this massive change, as it disrupted the agriculturally based mercantile economy, made dependence on imports problematic, and in turn nurtured a demand for local manufacturing. As historian Jane Cunningham summarizes, "With foreign commerce at a standstill, Connecticut's agrarian-based mercantile economy, of necessity, turned to manufacturing to replace imported goods. Often supported by accumulated merchant capital, in the 1820s it set the stage for the rapid industrial development of the pre-Civil War period with almost half of the male population of the state engaged in industry by 1850."[7]

By the time Samuel Colt was a teenager, therefore, Connecticut was moving swiftly away from subsistence farming and toward maritime commerce, industry, and capitalism, accelerated by technology that offered increasingly efficient and pervasive movement of people, commodities, and information. Away from the Connecticut River, almost 75 percent of Connecticut's land base remained stony and infertile, and farmers struggled to survive through sustainable farming. Poor soil and weather events (hurricane and frost in 1815 and 1816 respectively) compelled many subsistence farmers to move west or to supplement their household through factory work. It made good economic and cultural sense, then, for factory-building in New England to grow during this period, tapping as it did into the energy provided by water sources used at Whitney's armory and Lowell's textile mills, at least until the popularization of the commercial steam engine in the United States. Under President James Madison's administration in 1815, the federal government invested heavily in a national transportation system, supplementing time-consuming coastal maritime travel and horse-drawn carriages with steam-engine-driven ships and trains on a network of new roads, canals, and rail lines. The new infrastructure provided more direct

---

[6] For a fully detailed, comprehensive, and broadly contextualized biography, see Jim Rasenberger, *Revolver: Sam Colt and the Six-Shooter that Changed America* (New York: Scribner, 2020). While there are no citations in the text, notes and references are available online at jimrasenberger.com, accessed December 1, 2025.

[7] See Janice P. Cunningham, "Connecticut's Agricultural Heritage: Historic Barns of Connecticut," Historic Context Study, Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, April 2012, 9. https://connecticutbarns.org/images/uploads/Connecticuts%20Agricultural%20Heritage%20Report_final2012-0512.pdf.

connections for importing raw materials from the South and allowed manufactured items to expand markets across the young nation, including the western territories.[8]

Thus, in the post-War of 1812 period into which Colt was born, the American economy flourished, with access to foreign markets and the American West, fundamentally reshaping the ways the nation did business. The combination of a new federal bank in 1816, with new credit lines, and new modes of travel–steamships, canals, and new national roads– fostered robust prospects for ambitious individuals. This was the economy that Alexander Hamilton, the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, had set in motion many years earlier. Economic contraction and tightening of credit followed rapid economic expansion and speculation. While the "Panic of 1819" depressed the economy for a short while, it could not halt the movement toward a business-oriented society and away from primarily subsistence agriculture. The Jacksonian Era saw the rise of ambitious men devoted to building new businesses, private corporate structures, and making money. Due to its ideal location for trade and commerce, Hartford benefited greatly, and young Sam Colt witnessed all this economic opportunity.[9]

The new infrastructure also accelerated settlement into the Louisiana Territory and Ohio River Valley, leading in 1820 to the creation of the first state west of the Mississippi. Missouri statehood came with a political compromise that maintained the Southern-style slave plantation system below the state's 36°30' line of latitude. This contested "compromise" signaled the continued expansion of America into the West. At the same time, the 1821 Mexican War of Independence from Spain opened that new nation as an important trading partner for the United States to the south.

As the Northeast moved toward industry, the American South expanded its tobacco and cotton-based economy through single-crop plantations, exacerbating sectional economic, political, social, and cultural differences between the regions. The economic system of plantation slavery grew rapidly in the South, while in the Northeast the market-dominated economy of manufacturing moved away from highly skilled artisan labor. Connecticut produced textiles like Massachusetts did, but by the mid-nineteenth century, the "Provisions State" became renowned worldwide for tin and brass products, especially clocks, hardware, tools, and firearms.[10] While his popularly known life history implies humble beginnings, Sam Colt hailed from a

---

[8] See Cunningham, 9-10. Also see Francois Weil, "Capitalism and Industrialization in New England, 1815-1845," *The Journal of American History* 84: 4 (1998), 1334–54.

[9] Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political and Religious Expression, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press); see in particular chapter 1, Christopher Clark, "The Consequences of the Market Revolution in the American North," 23-42.

[10] Even a place like New Britain, "the hardware capital of the world," eventually became an international manufacturing center, despite its distance from any river. The North and Judd Company established its latches, clasps, and buckles factory in 1812 and attracted similar businesses, buoyed by an overland transportation network that connected the community. See Herbert Fowler, *A History of New Britain* (New Britain, CT: New Britain Historical Society, 1960), 8; David N. Camp, *History of New Britain with Sketches of Farmington and Berlin, Connecticut: 1640-1889* (New Britain, CT: William B. Thompson & Company, 1889), 52, 55, 69; and New Britain Centennial Committee, *New Britain Centennial: 1871-1971* (New Britain: 1971).

prominent and well-connected New England family with strong ties to Hartford and its history. The Colt family's presence in the region dated back to the Connecticut colony, with his branch eventually settling in Hartford, where they experienced mixed economic success in this center of early American industry. Through his father Christopher, Colt descended from one the region's earliest colonists, John Colt, born in Colchester, England and arriving in New England via Scotland. John Colt followed Thomas Hooker to central Connecticut to form the Connecticut Colony between 1636 and 1638. Sam's grandfather, Lieutenant Benjamin Colt, Jr., served in the Continental Army, eventually achieving the rank of colonel. Benjamin, Jr. became a prominent farmer in Hadley, Massachusetts and married Lucretia Ely of Lyme, Connecticut. Benjamin, Jr.'s brother Peter manufactured textiles in New Jersey and Connecticut. Due to his success and interest in developing manufacturing in the United States, Peter Colt befriended Alexander Hamilton.[11]

At the turn of the nineteenth century Benjamin Jr.'s son Christopher moved back to Hartford, where his ancestors had originally colonized. Christopher possessed little capital but opened a modest shop on Main Street selling housewares.[12] In 1805 he met Sarah "Sally" Caldwell, the daughter of Major John Caldwell, a Revolutionary War veteran turned wealthy merchant. As president of the Hartford Bank, John Caldwell became a publicly prominent citizen in the city. Perhaps because he could not allow his daughter to marry a man of so little means, Caldwell helped connect his future son-in-law Christopher Colt to the West Indies trade. Christopher moved his business to another location in the city, south of the Connecticut State House, to concentrate on textiles. The Colt/Caldwell family remained financially successful through farming and international commerce and was well connected in society and politics. With a large family of two daughters and five sons (of which Sam was the middle), Christopher and Sally Colt became involved in the city's high-profile philanthropic organizations such as the Connecticut Asylum for Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, located in their elite, still largely pastoral estate of Lord's Hill neighborhood, located west of downtown and the home of Hartford's earliest and wealthiest landed gentry. There, the Colt family's estate not only featured an elegant house but also a meadow and orchard.[13]

---

[11] Peter Colt was Samuel Colt's great uncle and a successful industrialist in his own right. He was a paymaster during the Revolutionary War, co-founded a Hartford textile mill, and corresponded, along with relative Elisha Colt, with Alexander Hamilton about developing manufacturing and about the Society for Establishing Useful Manufactures. This idea contrasted with Thomas Jefferson's dream of an agrarian nation. See John R. Nelson, "Alexander Hamilton and American Manufacturing: A Reexamination," *The Journal of American History* 65, no. 4 (1979), 971–95. https://doi.org/10.2307/1894556; John Ferling, *Jefferson and Hamilton: The Rivalry That Forged a Nation* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury USA, 2014). Peter Colt is also documented to have enslaved one person in 1790. See Barbara Beeching, "African Americans and Native Americans in Hartford 1636-1800: Antecedents of Hartford's Nineteenth Century Black Community," Trinity College, 1993. For more on the Colt extended family, see Richard Vangermeerch, "The Life and Writings of John C. Colt (1810-1842): A More Evenhanded Approach and a Request for Your Participation," Special Collections (Miscellaneous), Paper 18, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI, https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/sc_pubs/18, accessed April 2025.

[12] Connecticut Courant, July 18, 1804.

[13] "The Colt Family-The Jarvis Family," *Americana Illustrated* (United States: National Americana Society, 1914); William B. Edwards, *The Story of Colt's Revolver: The Biography of Col. Samuel Colt* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Company, 1953), 15-17.

Yet while the family was privileged, several tragic circumstances of the early nineteenth century denied the Colt family physical health and financial stability. The Panic of 1819 proved incredibly detrimental to those merchants who largely conducted business through credit, like Christopher Colt. The financial challenge, however, became the lesser of the family's concerns, as early urban areas lacked sanitation and a regular waste-disposal system. Deadly diseases such as dysentery, smallpox, typhoid fever, malaria, yellow fever, cholera, and tuberculosis bred and spread through the dense urban population and were especially dangerous for children. Sam's mother died of tuberculosis in June 1821, when was just six years old. His baby brother Norman died soon after. Now a destitute widower with six children, Christopher enlisted his sister Lucretia to help care for the children until he married Olivia Sargent in March 1823. With his second wife, he bore three more children: Mary, Olivia, and William.[14]

Despite Christopher's best efforts to retain his socioeconomic status in various enterprises and remain living in Hartford's elite Lord's (now Asylum) Hill neighborhood, he reluctantly sold the home and moved to Church Street, near the city center, to temporarily surrender his children to the welfare system of the day. He sent his eldest son John to an uncle's farm in Burlington, Vermont, and Samuel to indenture with a family farm in Glastonbury, located southwest of the city and across the river. After almost a decade of uncertainty and struggle, a seven-year-old silk textile company in Ware, Massachusetts offered Christopher a permanent job as a mill operator in 1829. The factory village was not quite rural, but it was certainly more provincial than Hartford. It was located off a tributary of the Connecticut River at a spot where a steep grade produced a natural waterfall to power a massive waterwheel for the mill. The company dammed the site to control the falling water to create Ware Pond. The village boasted its own iron foundry, machine shop, stores, homes, and church. Both the mill and the town likely provided Sam Colt, just shy of fifteen years old, with inspiration for the manufacturing community that he ultimately created in Hartford more than a quarter century later. The Colts again lived comfortably in a house on a hill.[15]

Still, as surmised by business historian Barbara Tucker and sociologist Kenneth Tucker, the tumultuous previous decade of separation and loss created conditions that ostensibly affected lasting physical and emotional stress on Christopher's family. As a teenager in 1825, his daughter Margaret succumbed to tuberculosis a few years after her mother. Mary then died at age seven, less than a year later, and the youngest daughter, Sarah, who worked as a teacher at Catherine Beecher's Hartford Female Seminary with Harriet Beecher (later author Harriet Beecher Stowe), died of suicide by arsenic at age 21.[16] While the remaining four boys survived into adulthood,

---

[14] William Richard Cutter, ed. New England Families, *Genealogical and Memorial: A Record of the Achievements of her People in the Making of the Commonwealths and the Founding of a Nation*, Series 3, vol. 4 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company,1915), 2262; Also see "Sarah Caldwell Colt," Find a Grave, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/130684709/sarah-colt; Olivia Sargeant Colt, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/60719669/oliva-colt (Find a Grave is one of several genealogical sites to verify this family information) and Richard Vangermeersch, "The Life and Writings of John C. Colt (1810-1842): A More Even-handed Approach and a Request for Your Participation," (2010), 58, Special Collections (Miscellaneous). Paper 18, University of Rhode Island, Digital Commons at URI. https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/sc_pubs/18.

[15] Jim Rasenberger, 17; Perry Walton, *The Story of Textiles* (Boston, MA: John S. Lawrence, 1912), 56-57.

[16] Annie Fields, ed. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,

the unstable aftermath of their mother's, sisters', and baby brother's deaths affected their adult lives in different ways. The eldest, John, ran away from home twice, joined and quit the U.S. Marines, and led a turbulent lifestyle. While he eventually became a successful accountant, he remained troubled and emotionally volatile. He died by suicide thirteen years after his sister's suicide, but only after he was convicted of murdering a client, Samuel Adams, and sentenced to execution. Christopher, Jr. became a silk merchant, but he, by several accounts, suffered from depression and eventually withdrew from the family. The youngest brother, James, became a relatively successful lawyer and judge in Missouri. He even worked as Sam's factory manager for a time but never seemed mentally or physically settled.[17] Sam Colt, ultimately the most professionally successful and seemingly the most mentally stable, arrived there through ambition and restlessness. He behaved as if he had little time to accomplish all he wanted to do, often pursuing several projects simultaneously. After his death, even his widow Elizabeth described him as a "quick, high tempered, impulsive man."[18]

One of the many stories of teenage Sam's impetuous nature involved his manipulating electrical currents to create an underwater explosion of a raft on Ware Pond. Clearly understanding the value of spectacle, he advertised his plans and drew a formidable and curious crowd in the early hours of the morning, among them Elisha Root, one of Ware's 21-year-old machine shop workers. Sam successfully detonated an explosion that projected water high into the air and back down on annoyed spectators, while the raft remained intact. Looking to channel this reckless energy, his parents Christopher and Olivia sent the presumably bored child to study at Amherst Academy, a preparatory school attended by notables like poet Emily Dickinson. They hoped Amherst would challenge him and distract him from further trouble, but to no avail. Soon after arriving, Sam snuck out after curfew, with other classmates in tow, to shoot a cannon from a hill above town in the early morning. The event made such an impression that Emily Dickinson's father Edward later recounted the incident in a letter to Colt's biographer Henry Barnard, noting that Colt caused an altercation.[19]

Adventure

Clearly restless and ill-suited to prep school, where he was at the very least dismissive of what formal education offered, the teenager embarked on what became a pivotal life experience, one steeped in the romance and mythology of maritime adventure that many boys of the early nineteenth century might have dreamed about. In 1830, through a family friend, Christopher Colt arranged for Samuel to join the crew of the ship *Corvo*. The friend, Samuel Lawrence, outfitted

1897), 382.

17 Barbara M. Tucker and Kenneth M. Tucker, "Samuel Colt," in *Industrializing Antebellum America* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York: 2008), 25-86. Jim Rasenberger speculates that James may have suffered from a bipolar condition. Rasenberger, 323.

18 Elizabeth Jarvis Colt, in Henry Barnard, *Armsmear*, 306.

19 Colt would resurrect this failure as another side-business venture as progress on his gun business stalled, developing a viable submarine battery. Edward Dickinson to Henry Barnard, July 22, 1864, as quoted in Herbert Houze, Carolyn Cooper, and Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, *Samuel Colt: Arms, Art, and Invention* (United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 2006), 37.

and escorted the boy to the departure port in Boston to set sail for Calcutta, India (now Kolkata), a port of the East Indian Trading Company. There is scarcely a record of this experience outside Sam's own reminiscences, but Colt biographer Jim Rasenberger discovered the diaries of four young couples who were traveling to India for mission placement in Burma at about the same time. According to one missionary's diaries, the work was hard and the journey nauseating. Regarding a young man on board, the missionary expressed that "if he ever reaches America, he shall never be caught at sea again…." After being accused of stealing raisins and sugar, that boy, identified as Colt, received a "flogging" in front of the crew.[20] Having been raised in an environment requiring little physical labor, young Sam Colt was clearly having a hard time on this adventure.

One can only speculate about what Sam saw upon his arrival in Calcutta, a diverse, international, urban center, one stricken with cholera. Popular stories cite this experience as inspiration for Colt's most infamous invention, the rotating revolver. Some argue that Calcutta was where he first saw the flintlock pistol conceived by Captain Artemus Wheeler and developed by Bostonian Elisha Collier around 1814, the year Sam Colt was born. The Collier model featured a rotating six-cylinder chamber, meaning one pistol could fire six shots without reloading, but the cylinder needed to be turned by hand between each shot. With no luck selling to the American government, Collier found a manufacturer and a customer base in England, where sporting activity prized shooting with accuracy, handling, and speed. Collier sold his designs to the British army, which had several units in India. However, it is unlikely that Colt ever saw the weapon, as Collier made only two or three dozen of them.[21]

Whether Sam Colt saw the Collier pistol in India or not, the *Corvo*'s return journey generated Colt's most notable origin story, but without the missionaries' diaries to verify it. This popular Colt legend recounts the young Sam's trip on board the *Corvo* was instrumental to the development of, at the very least, some version of his famous multi-shot, repeating pistol. Colt often claimed that the ship's wheel (or windlass) inspired him as he watched its spokes, which always returned to position with a clutch-and-lock assembly. This observation reportedly motivated him to carve a wooden prototype for the multi-cylinder revolver. Given Elizabeth Colt's devotion to developing and preserving her husband's legacy, she chose to depict this image on the Colt Memorial off Wethersfield Avenue, and to donate the prototype to the Wadsworth Atheneum, thus reinforcing the "true" story of the young Sam's inspiration.

There are other tales regarding the motivation and design for Colt's initial multi-shot pistol. Rasenberger notes that the *Corvo* returned to Boston Harbor in late August 1831, at the very same time that Nat Turner engaged in the nation's most deadly slave rebellion. At some point, Colt apparently mentioned that it was Turner's slave revolt that inspired his invention, contradicting the account that he had carved the revolver prototype on the boat. However, Rasenberger and historian Richard Slotkin both allege that Colt could have reframed the origin

[20] Perry Walton, *The Story of Textiles* (Boston, MA: John S. Lawrence, 1912), 56-57; Samuel Lawrence to Christopher Colt, August 2, 1830, in Edwards, 20; As quoted in Jim Rasenberger, *Revolver: Sam Colt and Six-Shooter that Changed America* (New York: Scribner, 2020), 41.

[21] Rasenberger, 47-48.

story of his invention to appeal to a Southern market that lived in fear of mass uprisings by enslaved peoples.[22] Moreover, there are questions about the original design that challenge the *Corvo* story. Was it a single barrel with a rotating cylinder, or, as Colt suggested later, a "pepperbox" design, a multiple-barrel firearm with several barrels that rotated around a central arbor?[23]

Arriving back in his boyhood hometown of Hartford in the autumn of 1831, Christopher and Olivia encouraged Sam to continue gaining experience in whaling and shipping. Instead, he headed back to Ware, where he worked from October to December 1831in the dyeing and bleaching department at the nearby Hampshire Manufacturing Company with chemist William T. Smith, whom he had known as a schoolboy. Smith likely introduced Sam to laughing gas and its entertaining effects. Chemistry was, however, not Sam's true passion. As he had long exhibited mechanical skills, with a clear interest in mechanical and technological challenges, Colt returned to Hartford to develop the prototype that he had presumably conceived on the *Corvo*. With the financial support of his father, he began working with local gunsmith Anson Chase in Hartford to refine an innovative new firearm. Unlike Collier's design, which required one to turn by hand, or the original pepperbox-design carving, Chase worked from a drawing to realize Colt's idea with the use of a ratchet to turn the multi-chamber cylinder, activated by cocking the gun, with a pin to hold it in place. This feature supports the notion that Colt was inspired by the ship's locking system and that a rotating cylinder was part of his original concept. But that concept did not easily translate to something practical. The first models of the new revolver, completed and tested in 1833, burst on the first shot. This was possibly due to an inherent design flaw in which the plates that held the extra bullets "trapped the lateral flash at the breech of the barrel, and directing the hot particles of gunpowder into the adjoining chambers," thus setting off the others, shearing off the screws, and sending the barrel flying into the air. (See 2.2).[24]

[22] Rasenberger, 51-54; Martin Rywell, *Samuel Colt: A Man and an Epoch* (Pioneer Press, 1952), 44; *Journal of the American Institute* 3:1 (October 1837), 99-101; Richard Slotkin, "Equalizers: The Cult of the Colt in American Culture," in Bernard E. Harcourt, *Guns, Crime, and Punishment in America* (United Kingdom: NYU Press, 2003), 60.

[23] Rasenberger, 53, 54; *Journal of the American Institute: A Monthly Publication, Devoted to the Interests of Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures, and the Arts: Accompanied with Public Documents, Sketches of Natural History, And, Occasionally, Philosophical and Literary Essays 3* (New York, 1838), 99–101; Tracey L. Barnett, "Men and Their Guns: The Culture of Self-Deputized Manhood in the South, 1850-1877," *The Panorama: The Journal of Early America*, https://thepanorama.shear.org/2023/10/24/men-and-their-guns-the-culture-of-self-deputized-manhood-in-the-south-1850-1877, accessed August 29, 2025; "The Colt Pistol: How its Manufacture Originated," *The Hartford Courant*, June 1, 1869, 2.

[24] Edwards, 29-30; Rasenberger, 54.

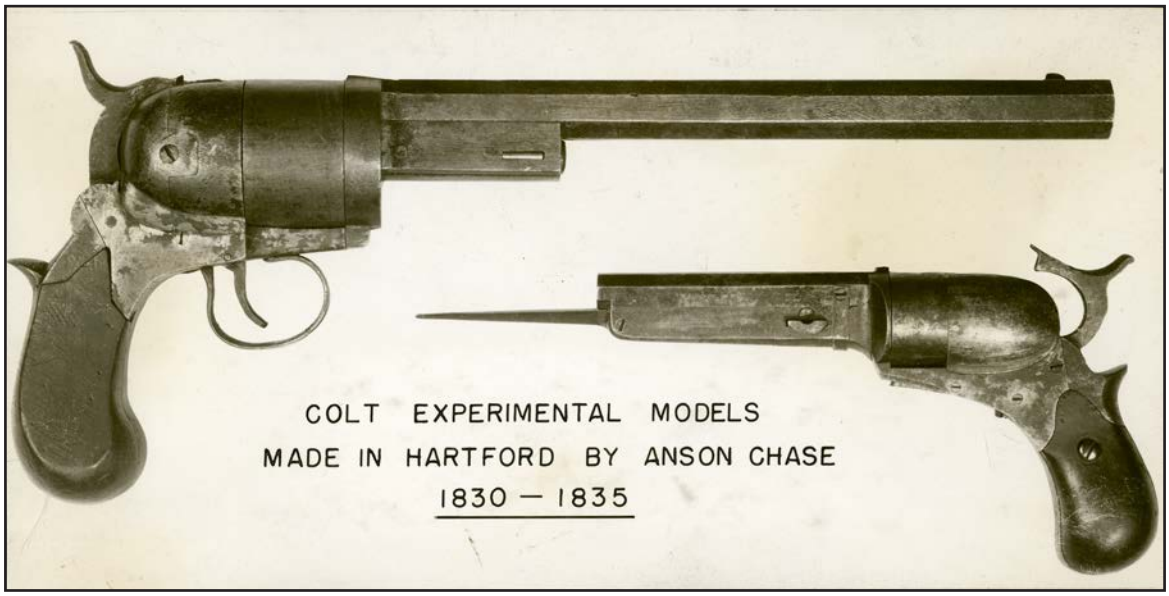


Figure 2.2 Anson Chase made these experimental Colt percussion revolvers to Samuel Colt's specifications when Colt was about 20 years old. Gunsmith John Pearson of Baltimore, Maryland worked on the patented designs in 1835. Box 9, Folder 3, Item 9, PG 460 Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library.

Committed to making his idea for a revolver viable, Sam headed in February 1832 to Washington, D.C., where his father Christopher's friend, future U.S. Patent Commissioner Henry L. Ellsworth, acted as a *de facto* chaperone for the young man. Ellsworth reported to Christopher that while many were impressed with Sam's invention, it was not ready for a patent. Sam needed more time, and more money, so Sam turned to Plan B.[25] Perhaps driven in part by impulsive and adventurous inclinations, but certainly by the need to raise funds for his pistol idea, Sam Colt eventually took advantage of the new national transportation infrastructure of roads, canals, and rails to embark across the country on a showman tour until 1835. He likely saw an opportunity to make money in an era when live traveling shows, including minstrel and circus acts, were becoming popular. Colt sported a beard grown on the sea that likely made him look older, than his 23 years and he tapped into the affinity for spectacle that had inspired his pyrotechnics in Ware and his experience with the chemist in Ware. Sam earned money and invaluable experience in marketing by demonstrating the effects of nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, at a time when people used it primarily as a recreational drug. Newspaper announcements indicate his route, which seems to have begun in the Northeast, where he traveled to Boston to perform in the summer of 1832 before going to New York City by July, Providence, Rhode Island and then Portland, Maine by October. After practicing performances at various places up and down the east coast, Sam sailed from Alexandria in northern Virginia on a ship carrying slaves for sale to the deep South, around the Florida peninsula and into New Orleans, then traveled by steamboat up the Mississippi and across the Erie Canal, where in Albany, New York he paid

[25] Edwards, 18, 25, 26; Rasenberger, 53-57; Also see R.M. Lewis, *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

gunsmiths to make more models. He returned to New England and eventually back to Virginia. "The Celebrated Dr. Coult of New York, London, and Calcutta" gave demonstrations that drew spectators in all these towns and cities.[26] The public lectures gave Colt invaluable advertising opportunities and promotional experience. Equally importantly, these gigs helped fund gunsmiths to refine his revolver design throughout his months of nitrous oxide touring.

Conclusion

Samuel Colt's turbulent childhood, including several tragic deaths in his family, the dramatic shifts in his family's financial fortunes, and his connection to a rapidly changing Hartford, most likely affected his personality, his global outlook, and his life plans. Furthermore, the Connecticut River Valley's development from the transportation and market revolutions of the 1820s and 1830s shaped Sam's views about what was possible when it came to manufacturing. His father's attempts to find a suitable outlet for his son's impetuosity and penchant for hijinks during his youth gave Sam the chance to travel widely before he turned twenty-five.

His voyage onboard the *Corvo* likely inspired Sam to develop his revolver, at least in some way, as did his curiosity about the world beyond the Connecticut River Valley. If one defers to the legend that Elizabeth Colt delivered via the Colt Memorial in Hartford, Sam whittled the now-famous prototype for his turning cylinder while on board the vessel, inspired by the mechanism that controlled the ship's wheel. The next many years upon his return to America involved a constant reworking of the pistol design, even as he made ends meet on the road as "Dr. Coult." All these experiences shaped Sameul Colt, an often brazen, restless, and petulant young man, into an ambitious, charismatic, cocky, persuasive, impatient, persistent, and resilient entrepreneur.

[26] "Nitrous Oxide Gas," *Charleston Courier*, April 3, 1834, 3; James Wynbrandt, *The Excruciating History of Dentistry: Toothsome Tales and Oral Oddities from Babylon to Braces* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 106; Rasenberger, 51-67 details Colt's nitrous oxide tour experiences.

III. The Product

Western Expansion and the Development of the Colt Revolver (1835-1860)



Figure 3. 1 John Massey Rhind, American, 1858-1936; Samuel Colt as a boy, 1902; Bronze, 9.5 x 5.5 x 6 in (24.13 x 13.97 x 15.24 cm) 1905.1554a; Samuel Colt, American, 1814-1862, *Wooden Revolver Model Parts*, 1830-31. 1 7/8 (length) in. 1905.1072.1-.3; Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, American, Hartford, Connecticut, established 1855, Elisha K. Root, American, 1808-1865. *Sidehammer Pocket Pistol (cutaway)*, Model 1855, *Experimental Prototype, s.n. 5*, 19th century, Steel and brass, 3 in. (7.7 cm), barrel length; 265 calibre, 5 shot, 1905.1001. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection, 1905.

The Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford displays not only Samuel Colt's wooden prototype, which he reportedly whittled on his youthful voyage to India, but also a cutaway of a sidehammer pocket pistol, a Colt prototype from the 1850s. (see 3.1).[1] Sam Colt had exhibited many interests as a young man, but he eventually focused on the repeating firearm. This choice likely stemmed from his exposure to the textile industry as a young man, his affinity for mechanics and pyrotechnics, and his recognition that such a product had a substantial market. Before we can understand the factory complex that represented the pinnacle of Sam Colt's success and serendipitous fortune, it is important to understand how he got to the point at which he could build it. From the mid-1830s to the mid-1850s, Colt worked with gunsmiths to continuously refine his products as he strove to become the major supplier for large and lucrative government contracts, working with confidence, hustle, and persistence. Colt was relentless in his pursuit of success, and he took advantage of every opportunity, often simultaneously working on several ventures—and at a stunning pace. After much trial and error, he eventually popularized his own name through the sale of repeating revolvers and rifles to both military and civilian markets.

---

[1] "No. 1 Pocket Pistol, c. 1840s; Text panel for Elisha K. Root, "Sidehammer Pocket Pistol (cutaway), Model 1855; Experimental Prototype, s. sn. 5, 1849-1850. From the Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. Wadsworth text panel, January 4, 2024. Root experimented with a sidehammer design that included an impractical slide-and-groove system and a rack-and-pinion loading lever that the company later successfully manufactured.

When he finally found success, it was largely due to a confluence of historical events that met the needs of his invention more than a decade after he first conceived it. Between the time Colt sailed on the *Corvo* when he built his own armory, the United States of America had acquired more than a million acres of new territory. These western lands became most closely associated with Samuel Colt's products, which by then could be found around the world.

It took many years to achieve a workable design, resulting in a revolving cylinder, which could hold 5 to 6 bullets, depending on the model and turned with each cock of the hammer to align with a single, stationary barrel. With such a gun, the shooter could fire repeatedly without taking the time and energy to reload. This feature became especially useful in non-traditional warfare with Native tribes in Florida and the West, during the Mexican-American War and Civil War, and conflicts throughout the world in the industrial era. While the design intrigued many civilians and politicians, the U.S. War Department resisted adopting his product for years, insisting that it, like other multi-shot firearms, was impractical and unsafe in battle.[2]

Americans began to settle in the territories beyond the original colonies in the early nineteenth century, about the same time that the fledgling federal government infused money into the Springfield and Harper's Ferry armories and the eclectic small-arms manufacturing of the Connecticut River Valley through contracts. Such timing certainly supported Colt's ambitions. By the 1820s and 1830s, the same expanding transportation infrastructure and markets that had allowed Colt to travel the country as a showman drove industrial production and western settlement. As missionaries, fur traders, and landless would-be farmers pushed Americans into the homelands of Indigenous peoples, conflict naturally followed. The government continually stepped in to defend its citizens. Most notably, Americans joined Tejanos in fighting the relatively new Mexican government, formed in 1821, to preserve the long-standing independence of the border province of Tejas at the same time Sam Colt and his investors incorporated and began building a gun mill in New Jersey.

The Texans and Tejanos looked for support, recruiting fighters like the famous Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie, but they also needed weapons. Well into the nineteenth century, the design of traditional American military long arms and handguns did not significantly differ from those the patriot colonists used in the American Revolution. The federal armories produced a single-shot, flintlock smoothbore musket that still loaded from the muzzle with a ramrod. The needs of what the military labeled "frontier warfare" in places like Florida, Texas, and eventually the lands of northwestern Mexico (later New Mexico, Arizona, and California) drove Colt's initial business success, at least in his home country. Military exigencies and western expansion demanded different types of weapons, particularly against Native tribes, who challenged traditional modes of warfare. Historian Lindsay Schakenbach Regele explains that "the realities of military conflict in the territorial expansion in North America had particular effects on its manufacturing. Americans' ability to acquire land depended on an implicit commitment among

[2] See Rasenberger, Parts 1 and 2 for a detailed account of Colt's quest to design a repeating pistol based on a revolving cylinder that aligns 5 to 6 bullets up with a single barrel, one at a time.

settlers, manufacturers, and federal officials to improve firearms."[3] As long as two decades earlier, General William H. Ashley observed that certain types of weapons were more appropriate for certain types of climates and foes. For example, the patent rifle allowed one to charge on horseback. Artillery seemed more effective against the tribes in the Rocky Mountains. Ashley also called for weapons that one could easily repair that would perform in the high winds and rain of the prairie without malfunctioning.[4] Traditionally, Regele noted, "The War Department valued military applicability over novelty, and in general erred on the side of safety and reliability. Officials were wary of inventors like Sam Colt, who were motivated by profit rather than battlefield realities."[5]

But in early 1834, even Colt knew his revolver design needed work. He wound down his cross-country travel in Baltimore, perhaps because his father's well-to-do cousin Roswell Colt, who had married into an even wealthier Baltimore family, was living there. Baltimore also was conveniently located near Washington, D.C., where Colt hoped to secure his patent. Whatever his reason for being there, once in Baltimore he located a gunsmith, Arthur T. Baxter, and hired his assistant, John Pearson, full-time for a year to help improve his revolver design and solve the problem of repeated misfiring. Originally trained as a watchmaker, Pearson proved adept at working with intricate mechanisms. He refined Colt's pistol to include a reliable cap lock for igniting the gunpowder in the rotating cylinder.[6] Colt eventually hired Fred Brash to assist Pearson. To pay the gunsmiths, Colt returned to the road as "Dr. Coult," but he kept abreast of the modifications to his prototype through Joseph E. Walker, a curator with the Baltimore branch of the Peale Museum at which Colt may have given lectures. Walker, himself burdened with financial difficulty, proved unreliable as an intermediary. Colt himself rarely made timely payments to the gunsmiths, perhaps a sign of his youth and inexperience in business, or perhaps just indicative of his stubborn resolve.[7]

Finally, two designs seemed strong enough to apply for a patent, and Colt borrowed money to build the prototypes. With a caplock ignition incorporated into Pearson's final designs, the models allowed the cylinder to rotate, to unlock, turn, and relock merely by cocking the hammer, allowing for rapid firing. Colt took the models to Washington, D.C., where J. W. Post, a patent draughtsman, sketched illustrations. The patent made three claims: the locking and turning mechanism for the cylinder engaged as the user cocked the hammer; the caps and cones at the end of the cylinder prevented the hammer from interfering with sight lines; and a partition between the caps prevented the ignition of one cap from igniting the next. To do anything with this product, though, Colt needed considerable support, financial and otherwise. He found that

---

3 Lindsay Schakenbach Regele, "Industrial Manifest Destiny: American Firearms Manufacturing and Antebellum Expansion," *Business History Review* 92:1 (Spring 2018): 58.

4 Lindsay Schakenbach Regele, "U.S. Expansion and the Development of a National Firearms Industry," in Joseph Blocher, Jacob D. Charles, and Darrell A.H. Miller, eds., *New Histories of Gun Rights and Regulation: Essays on the Place of Guns in American Law and Society* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2023), 16-18.

5 Regele, "Industrial Manifest Destiny," 71.

6 William B. Edwards. *The Story of Colt's Revolver: The Biography of Col. Sam Colt* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Company, 1957), 32-33; Boorman, 8.

7 Rasenberger, 78-82; William Hosley, *Colt: The Making of an American Legend* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 16.

support through family connections. Under the advice of friends and supporters like Patent Commissioner Henry Ellsworth (son of founding father and later Chief Justice Oliver Ellsworth), during whose tenure notables like Samuel Morse and Charles Goodyear submitted inventions, Sam traveled to Europe in 1835 to secure patents there before the United States, as European countries were less likely to issue a patent if Colt already held one in the United States. Relatives funded the trip, and Sam would continue to wield the patent as a business strategy for years.[8]

The First Factory at Paterson

Land speculation and free-flowing credit encouraged investment in new enterprises in the 1830s economy, spurred by the Market Revolution's rapid and unstable growth. Sam's father and primary business advisor Christopher Colt encouraged his son to incorporate the Patent Arms Manufacturing Company (PAMC) in March of 1836, just when Hartford's economy seemed to be struggling, due in part to the impending economic contraction known as the Panic of 1837. "The business of our city is nearly a dead letter," he wrote to Sam in June that year. The Colts may have also feared that conditions in the Connecticut River Valley might allow too much sharing of technology before Colt could patent his designs.[9] Father and son therefore reached out to family in Paterson, New Jersey to begin manufacture and sale of his invention. Paterson allowed a still-young Colt to access the creative energy of New York inventors and the financial support (amounting to $300,000), business acumen, and network of his extended Colt relations such as Christopher's cousin, Roswell L. Colt (now divorced and returned from Baltimore to his hometown), and Sam's older cousin on his mother's side, Dudley Selden, a well-connected and respected former politician and businessman. Recall that Roswell's father Peter, Christopher's brother, had been a close friend of Alexander Hamilton.[10] Hamilton, who started an ill-fated Society for Establishing Useful Manufactures, founded the city of Paterson as an industrial center in 1791, naming it for his ardent supporter Governor William Paterson. The robust textile manufacture there attracted hundreds of machinists, and the city began developing industries

---

[8] Over the next two decades, Colt secured several more patents with designs that allowed him to meet the needs of western expansion and non-traditional military campaigns. Between 1849 and 1858 alone, the company sought to dominate the market with thirteen patents that ensured a monopoly on designs for a commercial repeating firearm that featured a revolving cylinder with multiple (5 to 6) chambers. His patent applications stressed improvements to the rotating breech firearms. These would include percussion caps at the end of the cylinder, partitions between the caps, a mechanism for locking and turning the cylinder, connecting the barrel to the cylinder around an axle, a loading lever attached under the barrel, and a device "charger" for inserting powder into the chambers. Colt's revolvers used a percussion ignition system for unlocking/latching, turning, and re-latching/locking of the cylinder by cocking the hammer. This streamlining eliminated multiple steps that one previously had to do by hand, such as turning the cylinder, allowing the weapon to be safely and easily fired quickly and repeatedly without reloading. These patents also covered new machinery for boring the cylinders and barrels. Patent for Certain Improvements Applicable to Fire Arms, No. 6909, granted to Samuel Colt by His Majesty's Patent Office in United Kingdom, October 22, 1835; Boorman, 37-38; "List of Colt Patents," Box 1, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Also see Hosley, 15-16.

[9] As quoted in Bruce Clouette, *Getting their Share: Irish and Italian Immigrants in Hartford, Connecticut, 1850-1940* (Storrs: University of Connecticut, 1992), 36.

[10] See Roswell L. Colt Papers, Collection 1883, 1808-1854, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, available at https://www2.hsp.org/collections/manuscripts/c/Colt1883.html#N1008C. Also see Barbara Tucker, *Roswell Colt: Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic* (New York: MacMillan, 2008).

around the railroad locomotive, iron goods, machinery, and machine tools after 1830. A handful of machinists eventually opened their own enterprises. That kind of opportunity made Paterson an ideal place for Sam Colt to start his patent firearms company, one that relied heavily on machines and skilled machinists.[11]

At Paterson, Colt and the PAMC investors took advantage of the power created by the Passaic River's flow, purchasing a factory on a site originally identified for textile manufacture. Dudley Selden served as treasurer and general manager of the new company, and through his father Christopher's connection, Sam recruited Pliny Lawton, a machinist from Ware (who worked with Christopher but may have also been related to Olivia) to establish manufacturing operations. Lawton knew that machines like those in the textile factories could replace human labor by performing consistent and repetitive tasks that increased output exponentially. However, both Colt and Lawton had to familiarize themselves with how machines could make metal tools and parts. They embarked on a tour of the Connecticut River Valley's industrial landscape, visiting places like Simeon North's factory and the Springfield Armory in the Spring of 1836. Yet the mechanically inclined 23-year-old Colt still seemed to underestimate what it would take to translate the manufacture of John Pearson's patented models from single objects crafted by individual gunsmiths to items produced in quantity by machine.[12] (See 3.2).

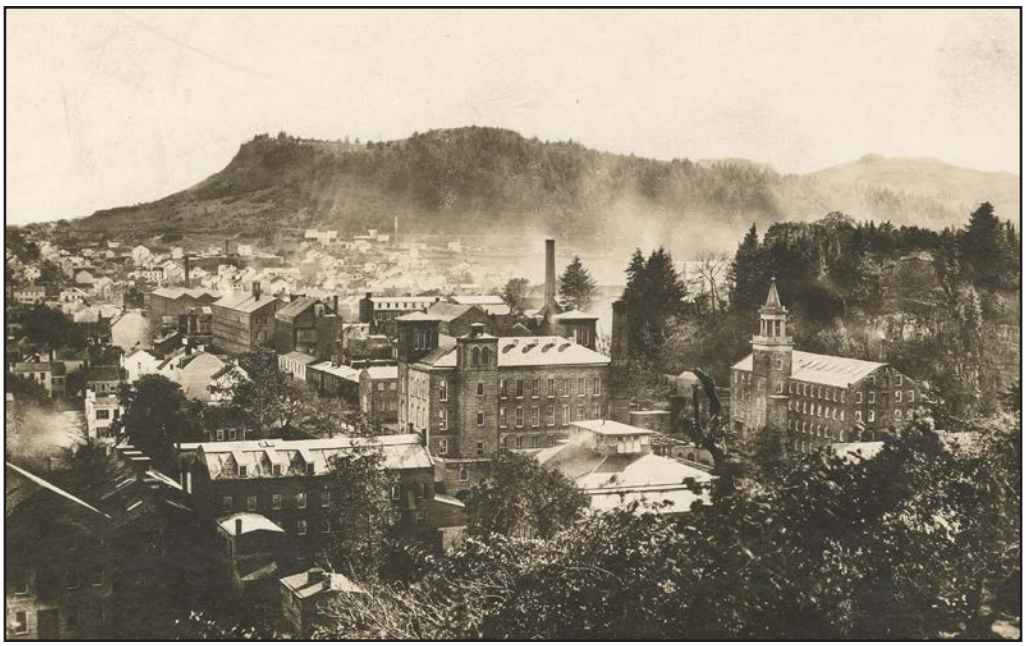


Figure 3.2 PAMC Factory at Paterson, NJ, 1836-1842, 1911, Box 4, PG 460, State Archives, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT. Photograph by J.E. Combes. Connecticut Digital Archives (CTDA), http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720214853.

11 For more on Paterson, New Jersey, see Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 209-259.

12 Edwards, 49; Rasenberger, 116-118.

In early 1837 Colt revised the patent to address misfire concerns and prepared to have his newest model tested by the U.S. Ordnance Department, which the government had reestablished as an independent body to evaluate small arms five years earlier. Colt caught a break when trials in Washington in 1836 and West Point, New York in June of 1837 selected four models, including two single-shot breechloaders, a multi-firing rifle and pistol by John Webster Cochran, and Colt's pistol. Colt's model proved safer than Cochran's, since all the chambers "faced forward and away from the shooter," but hardly by much. Like most multi-chamber guns, it had proved vulnerable to misfiring. While the Colt model impressed many at the trial, the ordnance board concluded that Colt's first machine-made models were too unreliable, delicate, potentially dangerous, and complicated to load and repair "for the general purpose of the service." They expressed even more concern over Cochran's arms. The military was clearly not prepared to risk ordering any multi-chamber firearms at this time.[13]

Amid these challenges, the U.S. Army again tested Colt's new repeating arms, the Colt Ring Level Rifle and the Paterson model pistol, during a September 1837 test, also at West Point. The Ring Rifle was so named because of the metal ring lever placed in front of the trigger that, when pulled, rotated the eight-shot cylinder and cocked an internal hammer. Users of the Ring Rifle therefore cocked the weapon with the ring to fire eight shots in approximately twelve seconds and reloaded in about two minutes. It also included a second "receiver," or cylinder, that could be pre-loaded and swapped out quickly.[14]

The late 1830s and 1840s, then, were a trying time for Sam Colt and his Paterson factory. Colt continued to address the misfire issues with his models. At the Paterson armory, he and Lawton experimented with various models and features, producing long arms and handguns in three sizes: rifles, carbines, and shotguns. The patented design became known as the Colt Paterson, but even as it was refined, it was too delicate for the battlefield and not accurate or affordable enough as a sporting rifle, especially given the economic troubles of the late 1830s. Nonetheless, Colt printed 5,250 circulars and placed his first newspaper advertisement in the New York Courier and Esquire in December 1837. One merchant expressed interest and hosted a public exhibition on February 19, 1838. While the event attracted viewers, it did not generate buyers, and Sam concluded that his only option for volume sales remained a military contract.[15]

Frustratingly for Samuel Colt and his financiers, the U.S. Department of War remained resistant to products like Colt's, which they considered underdeveloped at the time and untested on the

---

[13] Edwards, 50-53; Rasenberger, 127-130, 134-137; M. L. Brown, "Notes on U.S. Arsenals, Depots, and Martial Firearms of the Second Seminole War." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (1983), 445. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30140683.

[14] Colt had not yet developed an external hammer or a mechanism that automatically turned the cylinder with each shot. The first model featured a 32-inch octagonal barrel and came in multiple calibers, from .34 to .44. Total production of the first model Ring Rifle was 200, making it the rarest firearm produced by the Paterson factory. The second model appeared in 1838, with a total run of 500. James Tarr, *Standard Catalog of Colt Firearms* (Appleton, WI: Gun Digest Books, 2013), 196–197; John Walter, Rifles of the World (Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 2006), 92–93; Norm Flayderman, *Flayderman's Guide to Antique American Firearms and Their Values* (Iola, Wisconsin: Gun Digest Books, 2007), 81-82.

[15] Edwards, 62.

battlefield, opting instead to supply American troops with single-shot, muzzle-loading pistols. Without a government contract or another similarly large customer, Colt's patents were not enough to sustain the Paterson factory, which had proved costly to both develop and run, leading in turn to a product too expensive for most buyers. He tweaked his designs and sought other ways to make money. Colt traveled to New York to collaborate with scientists and inventors where he refined his manufacturing knowledge and mechanical skillset.[16] At the same time, he began to explore other markets. It is at this time that Colt first began to suggest that his product might be the best weapon against a less traditional foe, promoting its use in the uprisings and resistance of enslaved Blacks and Native Americans.

The Challenge of Frontier Warfare[17]

America's rising conflicts in the South and West helped Colt access the military market. The Seminole War (1835-1842) in Florida offered his first break. President Andrew Jackson, who had gained national fame in the War of 1812 fighting Indigenous tribes like the Creek, became the first president from the newly formed Democratic party. He oversaw the growth of markets and development of regionalism from the "transportation revolution" Colt experienced in his youth. The lands in the West served to provide farmland and natural resources, the South grew raw materials through large-scale production, and the North increasingly industrialized through manufacturing. During his presidency, beginning in 1829, Jackson advocated for states' rights, western expansion, and the preservation and extension of the slave system. The market growth of the 1830s placed additional pressure on his administration to develop land for profit. Indigenous peoples on those lands became obstacles, and traditional military efforts struggled to subdue the resistance of small bands who pushed back against expansion.

Jackson viewed the Indigenous population as a threat to border security, believing foreign powers could influence them. In 1818 he had entered Spanish Florida after the Seminoles, who had crossed the Georgia border and attacked American farms, reportedly in retaliation for Georgian attacks on Seminole villages, where they believed runaway slaves had found refuge. While Jackson's actions were controversial at the time, he had popular support, which helped expedite the acquisition of Florida from Spain through the 1819 Transcontinental Treaty. As land-hungry Americans poured into coveted lands of the Southeast, Jackson advocated for moving eastern tribes to territory west of the Mississippi River to open lands for the "common man." The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized the president to exchange the homelands of the southeastern tribes for land west of the Mississippi. The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole had assimilated in several respects to American culture and economy, vehemently resisting

---

[16] Rasenberger, 178-180, 181-183; 194-196.

[17] Since the 1980s, historians of the American West have resisted the term "frontier" (as made popular by Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1890) as an artificial and culturally biased line between what is civilized and what is not, arguing in favor of a more regional, perspective. Other scholars have turned back to the word to describe areas of meeting and exchange between cultures. See Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner III, and Charles E. Rankin, ed. *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 1991) and Kerwin Lee Klein, "Reclaiming the "F" Word, or Being and Becoming Post-Western," *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 2 (May 1996), 175-215.

displacement by laying legal claims to their tribal homelands in both history and federal law. Jackson's forced removals began in 1831 and continued after the 1832 U.S. Supreme Court decision acknowledging tribal sovereignty (Worcester vs. Georgia). The defiance of the court ultimately led in 1837 to the Cherokee "Trail of Tears," which forced the "five civilized tribes" on to land set aside as Indian Territory in the West.[18] Florida land was not particularly desirable, but Jackson and Southerners were determined to end the use of Seminole territory as a refuge for runaway slaves. More than the other Southern tribes, Seminoles resisted the military with their own tradition of guerilla-type warfare, which flummoxed American troops. Seminoles attacked American soldiers after the latter had fired their first volleys and were busy reloading cumbersome single-shot, muzzle-loaded muskets. The mounted cavalry needed a more effective weapon against this new kind of foe.[19]

The testers at the 1837 West Point trial worried that Colt's rifle was too complicated and might fail in combat.[20] However, others who had experience fighting on the Florida frontier and who needed a new type of weapon, including Lieutenant Colonel William Selby Harney of the Second Dragoons (troops generally mounted on horses), witnessed those tests and thought the repeater might be effective against the Seminoles. Harney invited Colt to Florida for a field test of the weapons. Thus, in March 1838, Colt again convinced his investors to let him try a new market that could test his arms in the field. He made his way south with 100 of his Ring Rifles to meet two of Harney's men who were, according to the lieutenant colonel, "well acquainted with firearms" and "first-rate marksman" to test the efficacy of Colt's repeating rifles. The men were duly impressed, as was Harney, who wrote of the speed with which the "many chambered rifle" could fire and reload. Harney also added a personal note to the report:



Figure 3.3 Rare Colt Paterson No. 1 Ring Lever Percussion Revolving Rifle with Case and Accessories, 1837-38. Courtesy of the Rock Island Auction Company, https://www.rockislandauction.com/detail/73/1068/rare-colt-paterson-no-1-ring-lever-percussion-revolving-rifle.

[18] Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (New York: Viking, 2001); David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Old Hickory's War: Andrew Jackson and the Quest for Empire* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1996).

[19] Historian David Silverman points out that several hundred Seminoles continued to resist in Florida well into the 1850s, until American settlers overwhelmed the diminishing Indian population. See David Silverman, *Thundersticks: Firearms and the Violent Transformation of Native Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 190-220.

[20] There was also sometimes a problem in which an adjoining chamber in the cylinder could be set off by the flash of the chamber being fired. John Walter, *Rifles of the World* (Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 2006), 92–93.

> I must beg leave here to state that I (a native Tennessean) have been all my life accustomed to the use of a rifle, and, after a full examination of Mr. Colt's gun, I feel pleasure in stating that I concur fully in opinion with the board; and I do assure you that, sooner than I would use any other rifle myself, I would use none. The invention does the greatest honor to the inventor, and to the country. And I am confident that, in a few years' time, no other rifle will be used in our country.[21]

Harney's commanding officer, General Thomas Jesup, approved the purchase of fifty Colt Ring Lever Rifles for $125 each, a total of $6,250.[22] (See 3.3).

Colt finally had impressed the U.S. Army and hoped to capitalize on his success, but misfortune struck quickly. On his return voyage to New Jersey, he lost the money, the fifty unsold rifles, and almost his life to the sea during a harrowing storm. The government eventually replaced the check, but Sam remained in trouble with his relatives. Furthermore, investors, including Sam, were in financial trouble themselves as the economy contracted. However, while the New Jersey company itself struggled, its product gradually gained enough of a favorable reputation in Florida to assure Colt's future.[23] Emboldened by his product's positive reviews, Colt enlisted all his charms and energy to interest the United States military in his firearms throughout the 1838-1839 winter. He freely spent his relatives' and shareholders' money (to the profound dismay of Selden), wining and dining most of the capital elite, including President Andrew Jackson and members of his cabinet, to secure the kind of contract held by people like Simeon North. While he remained unable to persuade the military on a federal level, the 1808 Militia Act provided $200,000 annually to equip state militias.[24] Such a contract would ensure a successful business venture, so Colt continued to pursue a more refined weapon. He also continually wrote to Harney, requesting a testimonial, which finally arrived in February 1839. "In answer to the many inquiries which you make of me respecting the rifles of your invention, which I have had in my possession some twelve or fifteen months, I have the pleasure to state that they have surpassed my expectations (which were great) in every particular. They have had much hard service in Florida," wrote Harney, who closed by offering, "It is my honest opinion that no other guns than those of your invention will be used in a few years."[25]

---

[21] *Army and Navy Chronicle*, B. Homans, ed. (Washington: Homans), Vol. 10, No. 26, June 25, 1840, 8-11. Accessed via Google Books. This source contains reports such as *Report from The Secretary of the Navy, in Compliance with a resolution of the Senate, in relation to the adoption of the improved boarding-pistols and rifles invented by Samuel Colt, United States Senate*, Document 503, 26th Cong. 1st Sess, (May 18, 1840).

[22] Pat Griffin, "Colt's Wonder Weapon," *Ocala Star Banner* (Ocala, Florida), June 17, 1956; George Rollie Adams, *General William S. Harney: Prince of the Dragoons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 67.

[23] Another reported mishap involved an ill-timed firearms demonstration in Washington, D.C. just as the carriage of President Martin Van Buren (or John Quincy Adams, according to another account) arrived, reportedly spooking the horses and throwing the driver onto the iron fence. Jack Rohan, *Yankee Arms Dealer* (New York: Harper and Brothers), 94-96; Rasenberger, 156. For details about the "Florida adventure," see Samuel Colt and Christopher Colt Correspondence, Group 78: Colt Family Papers, Series 2: Christopher Colt, Sr. Business Correspondence, Box 11, Folder 5 (1838), University Archives and Special Collections, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI. Also see Tucker and Tucker, 60-61.

[24] "An Act making provision for arming and equipping the whole body of the Militia of the United States," April 23, 1808, 10th Congress, Sess. I, *Annals of Congress*, 490.

[25] Colonel William S. Harney, letter, February 6, 1839, in *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 11.

Colt also sought and received a statement from a non-commissioned officer, one P. W. Henry, who drilled those members of the Second Dragoons who had received one of the Ring Lever Rifles. Henry wrote,

> there was not a man in the whole detachment that did not feel themselves of five times the force with one of your repeaters, then [sic] the common carbine or musket. And so eager were the soldiers to get each one of your rifles, and so great was the desire to be attached to this select corps, but to receive one of your patent arms was the reward of every good and brave soldier.[26]

Henry added, "in passing through the Indian country, I always felt myself safer with one of your rifles in my hands, but if I was attended by a body of ten or fifteen men armed with the common musket or carbine," and concluded that "nothing is more requisite, in Indian warfare."[27]

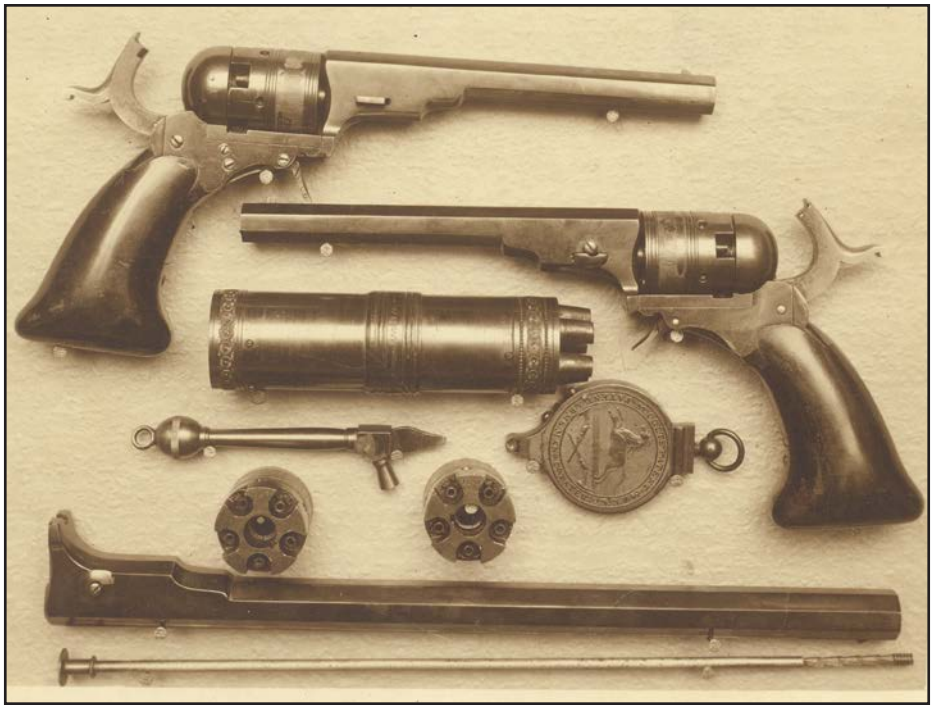


Figure 3.4 Colt Belt Model Paterson Revolver No. 3, pair, with accessories that include extra cylinders, the combination tool, a cleaning rod (which is missing its wooden cap), a capper, and a 14-inch barrel, 1837-42. Box 9, Folder 2, Item 6, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720243376.

Colt never wasted time enlisting such declarations in prominent journals, such as *New York Military Magazine* and *The American Institute of New York*, which boasted that Colt's revolver allowed "for several charges of powder and ball, whereby a cylinder revolved on an axis to position each chamber." The journals featured articles about the trials conducted with Colt's

[26] Letter from the non-commissioned officer P. W. Henry, February 22, 1840, in *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 11-12.
[27] Letter from P. W. Henry, February 22, 1840, in *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 11-12.

rifles and pistols, highlighting the Colt firearm's attributes, including its simple construction, large capacity, accurate, high fire rate, safety, ease of use, and great penetrative power. A single advertisement in the New York Courier & Enquirer compared the craftsmanship to "rifles imported from England." In an 1838 issue of the *Journal of the American Institute: A Monthly Publication, Devoted to the Interests of Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures & the Arts,* an author stressed that Colt arms retained bullet velocity, accuracy, power, and durability in wet and cold weather, safely. At the bottom of the page, an advertisement included testimonials from three U.S. dragoon captains, W. M. Tompkins, W. M. Fulton, and John Graham, the men who made up the 1837 Florida trial board and who had attested that Colt's firearms could serve average infantry men and lowly soldiers but were of even greater value to cavalrymen. These "incalculable advantages" made the arm simple to use and demonstrated its "superiorities over every other become known." *The New York Courier & Enquirer*, emphasized how the "craftsmanship are fully equal to… rifles imported from England."[28]

The journal cited only the cost as a negative feature: at $125, Colt's Ring Lever Rifle cost more than an average soldier's yearly salary. Colonel Charles Downing, serving as the delegate from Florida to the U.S. House of Representatives, wrote directly to General Waddy Thompson, the chairman of the Military Committee for the House in February 1840 with an impassioned plea, part of which was titled "Urging the importance of supplying the frontier settlers of Florida with one of Samuel Colt's Improved Repeating Rifles." In dramatic style, Downing recounted that "the numberless murders of women and children in Florida prove, without the need of argument, the total inefficiency of present military protection" and that "the rifle, and the musket, and the walls of his buildings, form the only obstacle to the butchery of his family." He continued, arguing that he knew of several instances in which families had been spared only because they had "several loaded firearms in the house, when the husband had a quick eye, and a steady hand, and a loaded gun; when the wife had the nerve of a man, and loaded one gun, while the husband fired another." Yet, he opined, most settlers had only a single firearm and that once it had been discharged, "the enemy has drawn the fire, and well knows that he may now rush on in safety, and the house is stormed, and the females scalped with all the horrors of savage cruelty." Downing insisted that "It is to prevent this that we would have a repeating rifle. One cylinder holds 10 shots; another is attached to the piece with as many more, which may be shifted in a twinkling, even in the face of death; thus giving the man besieged in his house twenty shots; superior to twenty ordinary rifles." He closed with yet another exultation on behalf of Colt's Ring Lever Rifle: "I unhesitatingly declare my opinion, that any man of nerve, of coolness, of determined resolution, on the inside of his house, depending on his skill and courage, would find Colt's rifle a safer reliance in an Indian midnight attack than ten men, in the same position, with the ordinary gun."[29]

---

[28] Edwards, 62; "Improvement in Fire Arms," Army & Navy Chronicle 2, no. 9 (1836), 133; "Samuel Colt's Many-Chambered Repeating Rifles," (1838); William B. Edwards, The Story of Colt's Revolver: The Biography of Col. Samuel Colt (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1953), 62; "Samuel Colt's Many-Chambered Repeating Rifles," Journal of the American Institute: A Monthly Publication, Devoted to the Interests of Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures & the Arts 3: 9 (1838), 502-503, from Joseph Mumley, "How to Get People to Kill in Your Name: Samuel Colt," History 501, Central Connecticut State University, December 13, 2021.

[29] Letter from Colonel Charles Downing to General Waddy Thompson, chairman of the Military Committee of the

This was everything Colt had hoped for, and such testimonials undoubtedly led the U.S. military to further consider the product. They planned for two new sets of trials, both of which included the well-known single shot, breech-loading rifle created by John H. Hall in 1819, the first breech-loading weapon adopted by the government. Colt prepared for the first trial carefully, sending a detailed letter on May 1, 1840 to the board, which at the behest of Secretary of the Navy James K. Paulding included two navy captains and a captain from the U.S. Marine Corps. He outlined the superiority of his arms within the specific guidelines of military testing: simplicity, safety, resistance to water damage, force, accuracy, celerity of fire, and celerity of loading and firing after first discharge.[30]

Yet the navy board's report, while noting the effectiveness of Colt's weapons, especially regarding its ability to function after submersion in water, still inexplicably concluded that neither Hall's nor Colt's pistols were sufficient.[31] Dismayed by the board's inconsistent decisions, Colt quickly penned letters to Secretary Paulding. Colt tried to remain gracious, but he asserted that he had "not the slightest doubt but that their report was written with the firm belief they were giving my invention its *full* deserts." Yet he noted, "in some particulars, I think their report would lead persons not familiar with the subject to reach the wrong conclusion concerning the real liability of my *improved arms* to get out of order." Betraying his concerns that the officers for the 1840 trial may have been somehow influenced by the earlier 1837 test, when some of Colt's arms had misfired and discharges had ignited adjoining chambers in the cylinders, Colt insisted he had made great improvements in the more than three years that had elapsed since that first test. Here he expressed his greatest concern: "the pride of making improvements worthy of Government patronage," adding, "I am more and more satisfied that the time will come when my arms will triumph to the full extent of my wishes." He delved into a minute account of the adjustments that had been made since 1837, included the testimonial letter from Harney, and noted, "I sincerely hope that no time may be lost in ordering a sufficient number of my rifles and pistols." Colt desperately closed with a quote from the U.S. Navy board report, which stated that his arms in "boat expeditions possess *incalculable* advantages over the arms now in use in the service."[32]

Colt clearly saw the trials as critical to saving his Paterson business. The Paterson plant and changes to the arms had cost far more than he had originally anticipated, and the only thing that might save his company was an immediate government contract. The second trial took place in November 1840 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and was reported as "an exhibition of the repeating fire-arms and water-proof ammunition invented by Samuel Colt." The trial, however, tested

U.S. House of Representatives, urging the importance of supplying the frontier settlers of Florida with one of Samuel Colt's Improved Repeating Rifles, in *Army and Navy Chronicle* (February 1840), 13-14.

30 Letter from Samuel Colt to the Board of the Navy and Marine officers, appointed by order of Congress to test the merits of his Improved Repeating Firearms, May 1, 1840, in *Army and Navy Chronicle,* 1-3.

31 "Report of the Board of Navy and Marine Officers, appointed by the Secretary of the Navy to report on the advantages to be derived from the use of Samuel Colt's Improved Repeating Firearms, in the Navy Service," May 6, 1840, in *Army and Navy Chronicle,* 4-5.

32 Letter from Samuel Colt to the Secretary of the Navy, on the subject of the report made by the Navy and Marine officers on his Improved Repeating Firearms, May 12, 1840, in *Army and Navy Chronicle,* 6-7.

Hall's breech loader against Colt's Ring Lever Rifle and Paterson pistol for speed, number of shots, accuracy, safety, and ease of use. The report concluded, "we would remark, that the foregoing experiments were very successfully made, and have impressed us with the belief of the utility of these repeating fire-arms for military purposes." Yet the officers still stopped short of recommending that Colt's weapons deserved a big government contract. Rather, the board requested that one or two companies test them out for six months to ensure their safety and effectiveness. Such a conclusion also betrayed the board's blindness to the new battle tactics that rapid fire, repeating weapons could enable on a changing battlefield. Given the rate of fire with Colt's repeaters, for instance, there would be no need to line up in traditional Napoleonic formations. Such conservative thinking hampered the acceptance of repeating arms well into the Civil War.[33]

It certainly did nothing to save the financially strapped Paterson factory. The complexity of manufacturing the model, the need to constantly address design flaws, and the lack of consistent government contracts, proved too much for Sam Colt's first business venture in arms production, which lasted only six years, closing less than two years after the 1842 trial.[34] After the closure of the PAMC, Colt looked to other financial pursuits, sojourning into starting a company for his remotely triggered submarine battery in New York. Through that venture, he entered the burgeoning telegraph business, where the system, like the submarine battery, used copper wire to send electricity long distances. Unfortunately, those products failed to realize profits on as well.[35]

---

[33] Report from the Secretary of War, transmitting the report of a board of dragoon officers appointed to witness an exhibition of the repeating fire-arms and water-proof ammunition invented by Samuel Colt, December 16, 1840, Senate, 26th Cong., 2nd Sess., Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/llserialsetce.00376_00_00-010-0014-0000/?st=gallery.

[34] Hosley, 22; Grant, 20.

[35] Colt also continued to dabble in explosives, developing a submarine battery for naval defense and even courting investors, perhaps as a continuation of the experiment he conducted years earlier as a youth at Ware Pond. His design "for harbor defense" combined Robert Fulton's steam engine technology with Samuel Morse's telemagnetic cable that could detonate underwater explosives remotely. Morse and Colt collaborated on underwater electric cabling for the telegraph and submarine defense, respectively. The federal government was, however, not persuaded to adopt Colt's coastal defense technology, despite a $6,000 U.S. Navy-funded test. One source blames this rejection on Colt's insistence on too closely guarding his technology. See Phillip K. Lundeberg, *Samuel Colt's Submarine Battery: The Secret and the Enigma* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1974). For more on Colt's involvement in the telegraph, see Kenneth B. Lifshitz, *Makers of the Telegraph: Samuel Morse, Ezra Cornell and Joseph Henry* (United States: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2017), 101, 244-245.

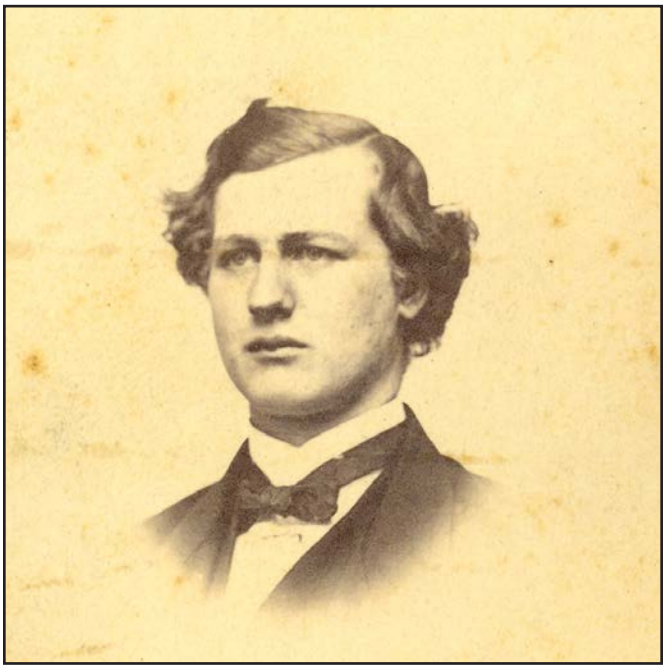


Figure 3.5 Samuel Caldwell Colt, c. 1860. Box 1, Folder 10, Item 1, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168274.

In the meantime, personal and family drama competed for Colt's attention during these professional tribulations. It is rumored among Colt scholars and aficionados that at some point, Samuel Colt eloped with a young woman named Caroline Henshaw, whom he possibly met in Europe. Most biographers have been unable to find a marriage certificate or pinpoint a date, but biographer William B. Edwards asserted that they met around 1835, possibly while a twenty-one-year-old Colt was securing his patents in Europe, but there are no conclusive records available. The strongest indication of a relationship is the fact that Henshaw became pregnant with a child most historians conclude was likely Sam's. Early in her pregnancy, she moved in with Sam's older brother, John, a successful accountant, who cared for and educated Caroline until he was accused and convicted of the ghastly murder of his client.[36] Edwards surmised that Sam likely facilitated a jailhouse marriage between Caroline and John, before he died by suicide shortly before his execution for murder in 1842. Caroline had given birth in December 1841, but neither she nor Sam behaved as though the baby were John's. With financial assistance from Sam, Caroline raised her son in Europe, named him Samuel Colt, Jr., and later changed his name to Samuel Caldwell Colt. Sam referred to the child as his "nephew," supporting him financially, paying him frequent visits, sending letters with fatherly advice, and including the boy as an heir.[37] (See 3.5).

---

[36] Edwards, 37-47, 181-182. In a rage, John had killed a client and then attempted to hide the body by shipping it from the crime scene in a crate. For more on the scandal involving not only John Colt's murder trial but that of Samuel's ongoing affair with Caroline Henshaw, which resulted in the birth of an illegitimate son, see Harold Schecter, *Killer Colt: Murder, Disgrace, and the Making of an American Legend* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2010).

[37] Vangermeersch, 11-12; Edwards, 182-183, 342; For details about rumors and suspicions around Samuel's

Factory struggles must have weighed heavily on Sam Colt, and his family surely distracted his focus from his business. Still, Colt's attorney simplistically attributed the closure of the Paterson enterprise to the lack of demand, surmising that "the moment the Indians [in Florida] were extirpated, there was no market for their guns."[38] This assessment did not consider the costs of delays in building machines, but it seems that Paterson's operations had simply arrived too early. Colt could not interest the military in his product, and the Paterson models were too expensive for most civilians. However, America's continued expansion westward, which promised almost constant conflict with those already living there, increased the need for arms for both the military and the civilian migrants and settlers by the end of the 1840s. The positive feedback from Florida positioned Colt's ambitions especially well, when, in 1844, Texans fighting the mounted Comanche sought Colt's Ring Level revolving-cylinder rifles and pistols for frontier fighting. As the soldiers in the Seminole War had learned, the rapid-fire, rapid-reloading arms were particularly well suited to combat Indigenous fighting tactics.

Success in Texas

Since its 1821 independence from Spain, the young country of Mexico had struggled to unite its peripheral territories. Its northernmost province of Tejas grew especially resistant to the reforms and controls of President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Meanwhile, American settler expansion increased sectional tensions due to questions about the legality of slavery, and consequently the political power of slaveholding states, in America's territories and new states. With the help of patriotic and largely pro-slavery American settlers and fueled by the rhetoric and bravery of Davy Crockett, William Travis, and Jim Bowie at the Alamo as they resisted Mexican rule alongside Tejanos, the province of Tejas declared independence as the Republic of Texas in 1836. Under Sam Houston, the new nation created a navy and formalized the Texas Rangers, originally established in 1823 to secure its border against local tribes, especially the Comanche. The Comanche effectively defended their southern plains homeland on horseback with the ability to fire multiple arrows before an opponent could reload an average single-shot firearm. While the Colt weapons were accurate primarily at close range, Texas Ranger Captain Jack Hays praised them as early as 1833 and 1834 as most effective for combatting Comanche-style warfare. By the 1840s, Colt had redesigned his 1839 Paterson model for the Texas Navy, making it one that its user could load without taking it apart, but that model continued to be a favorite of the Rangers (largely unbeknownst to Colt).[39]

That preferred status worked to Colt's advantage when the United States annexed and accepted the Republic of Texas as its 28th state in December 1845, precipitating the Mexican-American War in 1846. The U.S. War Department suddenly needed far more arms, and more quickly than the federal armories could produce them. With the Texas Rangers already familiar with Colt

possible first marriage, see Edwards, 339-342.

[38] U.S. Circuit Court, *The Trial of Samuel Colt*, 8.

[39] For example, D.E. Twiggs, Florida war veteran and commander under both General Zachary Taylor and General Winfield Scott, endorsed them to the U.S. Congress. David E. Twiggs to Thomas Jefferson Rusk, April 21, 1848, in John E. Parsons, ed. *Sam Colt's Own Record of Transactions with Captain Walker and Eli Whitney, Jr. in 1847* (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Society, 1947), 84-85.

repeating arms, then Texas Ranger commander Captain Samuel Hamilton Walker, who had also fought in the Second Seminole War, swore by his Colt "repeating pistol," which could be "fired rapidly from the saddle."[40] On November 30, 1846, Sam Walker wrote to Sam Colt, informing him that "The pistols you have made for the Texas Navy have been in use by the Rangers for three years, and I can say with confidence that it is the only good improvement that I have seen. The Texans who have learned their value by practical experience, their confidence in them is unbounded, so much so that they are willing to engage four times their number." He readily agreed to collaborate with Colt in refining the Paterson Revolver into something specifically designed for use on a horse to meet the needs of the Rangers fighting the Comanche, who conducted warfare primarily on horseback. (See 3.4). Walker's suggestions included a fixed trigger and trigger guard (rather than a receding one), and increasing the cylinder to hold six bullets at a higher caliber. He wanted the design to be easier to reload in battle, thus improving lethality at a close distance. What became the "Colt-Walker," a single-action revolver, was far sturdier than the Paterson Colt. This new model was particularly large, weighing more than four pounds, having been designed for Walker's cavalry, and it came with a pommel holster to accommodate its size and weight.[41]

In just a few months, Colt finally won his first large government contract: $25,000 for 1,000 guns, to be delivered in three months, followed by another duplicate contract, this one for an improved model. The irony, of course, was that as soon as the military showed an interest in his revolver, Sam no longer had a factory. To fulfill his new contract, he found Eli Whitney, Jr., the son of the original inventor, whose armory in New Haven still manufactured rifles for the federal government. The younger Whitney had improved the productivity of his father's gun manufactory with an impulse hydraulic turbine wheel, rather than the steam-power turbines of his competitors.[42]

Per the government contract, Colt insisted on using the finest steel and recruited the Springfield Armory's master armorer Thomas Warner, who moved south to New Haven to help refine the tool machinery at the Whitney Armory to meet the Walker-Colt contract.[43] Colt repeatedly sought Walker's help in soliciting testimonials from generals to secure additional contracts

---

[40] Engelbrecht and Hanighen, 40. Born near Baltimore, Maryland, Walker may have even been, as one biographer conjectured, a relative of Colt's old friend Joseph E. Walker, who had brokered the payments to Colt's principal gunsmith John Pearson during the nitrous oxide tours in the 1830s. Bern Keating, *The Flamboyant Mr. Colt and His Deadly Six-Shooter* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978), 91.

[41] Correspondence, Samuel Walker to Samuel Colt, November 30, 1846, December 1, 1846, December 3, 1846, 9-13, December 7, 1946, in Parsons, ed. Sam Colt's Own Record, 9-13; *A Collection of Annual Reports and Other Important Papers: Relating to the Ordnance Department, Taken from the Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, from Public Documents, and from Other Sources* (United States: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880), 359.

[42] William Brown and Sally Hill, "The Eli Whitney Museum: A Case Study," The Eli Whitney Museum and Workshop, c. 2002. Interpretative signage at the Eli Whitney Museum, Hamden, CT (written fifteen years later, also by William Brown) features a more extensive explanation of the hydraulic wheel, which is on display, although the steam engine replaced it in later years. The site features a discussion of a stone forge with six hearths.

[43] David Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1832: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 47.

for the revised pistol. Colt himself wrote to Sam Houston on February 14, 1847, after hearing that the general had proclaimed that "Colts Repeating Arms was the most effective weapon in the world and peculiarly suited for fighting the Mexicans."[44] He followed with an even bolder solicitation of a comment from President James K. Polk, who had stated that while testing the Colt-Walker at West Point in the summer of 1847, U.S. officers concluded that "they may be successfully imployed [sic] in special cases; as in fixed positions; in defence [sic] of a breach; to cover borders; in tops of ships; or for personal attach or defece [sic]; in a word, under any circumstances where the operation is of a special and breif [sic] character, and it be desirable to throw a mass of fire upon a particular point for a limited time. In such or similar situations the entire strength of this arm might be so controlled and managed as to render it fully available and highly efficient." Colt assured Polk that recent improvements made these claims even more true. Furthermore, with the machinery he had made at the Whitney Armory, Colt's new revolver had more precise parts and was easier to repair.[45]

On September 28, 1847, *The Hartford Courant* boasted that "The Regiment of the U.S. Mounted Rifles, for whom 1000 of these arms have been made by Mr. Colt, can, at the commencement of an engagement, fire a volley of 6000 balls into an enemy's ranks, without stopping to reload, and afterwards load and fire at the rate of 6000 charges per minute! No force in the world five times as large, can withstand such a terrific fire." The article noted that General Zachary Taylor, commander of U.S. forces in Mexico, had written to Colt on August 17, stating that Colt arms "may be relied upon under all circumstances" and that well-known soldiers such as Captain Walker "have performed feats of almost romantic daring and gallantry with them, during the war with Mexico. *The Courant* closed by adding, "we are gratified to learn that Mr. Colt has returned to this, his place of nativity, for the purpose of establishing an armory for the construction of his arms for the government and for private sale."[46] (See 3.7).

More Success: Back to Hartford

Colt's success in fulfilling his first government contracts brought him great confidence, enough to start his own company, not a corporation beholden to older relatives and impatient stockholders like those of the PAMC. He also now understood the intricacies of mechanization well enough to produce his weapons quickly and efficiently. Soon after fulfilling his first major government contract with the help of the Whitney Armory, and after Sam Houston's support led to another contract, Colt looked for money. He considered New York for his factory, but relatives like Dudley Selden were tired of gambling and losing money by working with Sam. Sam looked to another relative, this time his cousin Elisha Colt. Sam Colt moved from Whitneyville in New Haven, taking with him the machinery built specifically for the Walker-Colt back to a factory in his hometown Hartford, on Pearl Street, in 1847. There he established the Colt Patent Fire-Arms

---

[44] Samuel Colt to Samuel Houston, February 24, 1847; reprinted in Parsons, ed. Sam Colt's Own Record, 49-51.

[45] Walker continued to offer encouragement about the demand for the weapon, ordering more of the product before the first left the factory. Sadly, Walker received the new models just days before he was killed in battle on October 9, 1947. Colt to Polk, March 1, 1847; Colt to Whitney, December 20, 1846, in Parsons, ed. *Sam Colt's Own Record*, 51-53.

[46] "General Taylor and Colt's Firearms," *The Hartford Courant*, September 28, 1847.

Manufacturing Company (sometimes subsequently referenced as "Colt's"). By 1839, Hartford was connected to the railroad from New Haven to Springfield, and over the course of the 1840s the city's population had grown well past 10,000, including many German and Irish immigrants fleeing economic turmoil, political unrest, and crop failure. They arrived looking for wage work. Now that the stationary steam engine allowed for a power source that did not depend on falling water, the up-and-coming city hosted more industries that took advantage of the labor force and that consciously added civic amenities. The factory on Pearl Street was located north of the old city printing office. It employed about 350 men and boys with average wages between $.75 and $5.00 per day, depending on their skills. As business increased, Sam eventually moved to Colonel Solomon Porter's larger manufactory, located between Grove and Potter streets, which housed Woodruff and Beach, makers of steam engines.[47] (See 3.6).



Figure 3.6 Enlargement showing location of the Colt Armory's Grove Street location of Solomon Porter's factory. Copy of a map of Hartford surveyed and drawn by Marcus Smith, 1850, prepared for the municipal register of 1902 by Henry F. Smith, City Clerk, City of Hartford, Hartford City Parks Collection, Connecticut Digital Archive. http://hdl.handle.net/11134/50002:2773.

With the support of on-the-ground military officers who applied pressure on the government, including a Texas delegation with Sam Houston, the Hartford venture quickly went better than the one in Paterson, even as some military officers continued to dismiss the Colt firearms. Colt complained that Colonel George Tolcott, the chief of the U.S. Ordnance Department, "viewed my arms as complicated & unsuited to the regular servace [sic] in speaking of them…."[48] Correspondence between President Polk, Secretary of War William L. Marcy, and Brigadier

[47] Samuel Colt to Eli Whitney, September 22, 1847, Box 6, folder 11, Sam Colt Papers, CMCH; "Colonel Colt's Pistols, *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 3, 1856.

[48] Colt to Houston, February 24, 1847, Parsons, ed. *Sam Colt's Own Record*, 49.

General David E. Twiggs reveals debates over the merit of the new Colt weapons for official adoption by the U.S. military. The discussion of the arms criticized Tolcott's opinion on several points, noting the guns were "as firm and solid as any other small service arm at this day," and no more likely to "get out of order as any other arm." Besides, the improved pistol now had only seven parts, reducing failure rates. Also, breech-loading was faster and more efficient in the field. Several distinguished officers of the Mexican-American War expressed "favor of these arms," including General Zachary Taylor, who stated that "one hundred cavalry armed with the repeating rifle would be, at least as efficient as three hundred armed in the ordinary way." The recommendation was that they be supplied for "all mounted men." Secretary of War William L. Marcy ordered 2,000 pistols, but when the U.S. War Department sought to purchase the patent outright and produce the arms in the federal armory, Colt held his ground, refusing to discount his arms to the government or allow the federal armories to manufacture from his patent, "believing that he is the most capable person to direct in the manufacture of an arm of his own invention."[49] By April 1848 the government had purchased only 260 carbines at between $32.50 and $45 and 1,050 pistols at about $28 each.[50] Colt continued to play hardball as demand for his product grew in the field.

By the end of the year, Walker-Colts had gained sufficient acclaim for Colt to petition the U.S. Congress for a continuance of his contract. Not nearly so desperate as in the Paterson days, Colt pressed his advantage. Even President Polk acknowledged that Colt had the machinery, and that he had the patent, essentially forcing the government, which clearly preferred to have military weapons manufactured in its own armories, to contract with private manufacturers like him, and/or pay what the government considered an unreasonable price for weapons clearly desired on the battlefield to take advantage of the newest innovations. In the December 12, 1848 petition to Congress to extend his patent, Colt leveraged the PAMC failure as evidence that he needed to ward off competition. When he got the patent extension, he argued that unless he received another government contract for his valuable weapons, he would again be forced to abandon manufacturing.[51] He reminded the government that rising conditions on the frontier necessitated uses of his firearms, specifically. His younger brother James B. Colt made inquiries into

---

[49] "Petition of Samuel Colt, Praying a Contract for Supplying the Government with an Additional Number of his Repeating Fire-arms," December 12, 1848 in Committee on Military Affairs, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 1848. https://li.proquest.com/elhpdf/histcontext/533-S.misdoc.3.pdf.

[50] *A Collection of Annual Reports and Other Important Papers: Relating to the Ordnance Department, Taken from the Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, from Public Documents, and from Other Sources* (United States: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880), 232; hereafter referred to as Collection of Annual Reports.

[51] James K. Polk to the U.S. Senate, April 13, 1848, Rusk, et. al to Polk, March 3, 1848 in "Rusk Report," U.S. Senate, 30th Congress, 1st Sess., April 25, 1848; "Extract from the Report of the Committee of Military Affairs," in *Report, as to the Relative Efficiency of the Repeating Pistols* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1851), 3-5; "Petition of Samuel Colt, Praying a Contract for Supplying the Government with an Additional Number of his Repeating Fire-arms," December 12, 1848 in Committee on Military Affairs, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), 1848. https://li.proquest.com/elhpdf/histcontext/533-S.misdoc.3.pdf.

establishing another armory in his own home city of St. Louis, claiming a market for Walker-Colt pistols, belt pistols, pocket pistols, and rifles and carbines in the government and "the whole Valley of the Mississippi."[52]

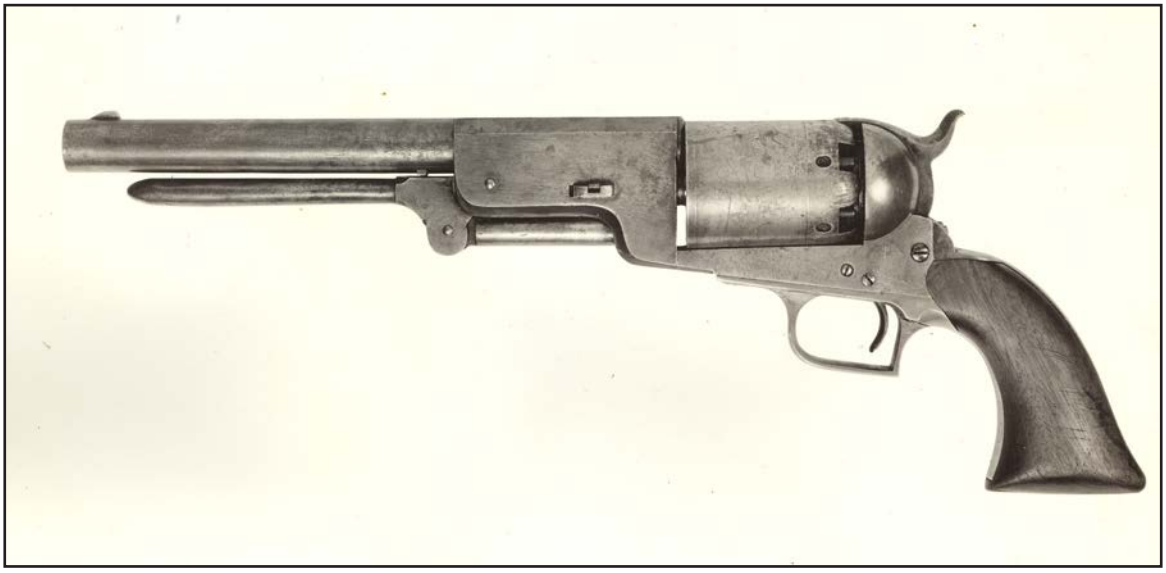


Figure 3.7 Colt Walker 1847 Civilian Revolver. The label on the photograph incorrectly identifies this as a 1st Model Dragoon. The frame, barrel lug, trigger guard, and grip are all marked 1009. Box 9, Folder 5, Item 13 PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720217374.

The government was not Colt's only challenge. When the Massachusetts Arms Company in Chicopee, Massachusetts claimed to match Colt's product, Colt brought suit on September 1850, using the opportunity to explain that he had extended his patent in 1848 because "my invention relates to that class of fire-arms in which a series of parallel chambers for containing the charges, are made in a rotating breech, so placed in connection with the barrel, that, by the rotation of said breech, the charges are in succession brought in a line with the barrel for a discharge." He claimed that having each cock rotate the cylinder was a protected part of the patent, as was the safety feature that prevented one exploding cap from igniting the next cap.[53]

Colt in the West

Winning the lawsuit was an important part of protecting Colt's designs at a time when sales were rising and competition became more intense. Firearms became a ubiquitous feature of the American West after the Mexican-American War, when Mexico ceded 55 percent of its territory,

[52] After seeking military service, James returned to the Northeast, presumably to help Sam with Paterson, in 1836, then joined a law firm in Hartford (having been admitted to the bar in 1840). James then moved west to St. Louis with a friend (Albert Dodd) and became one of the youngest judges in the St. Louis Criminal Court. James B. Colt to Samuel Hawken, May 31, 1847. "James B. Colt," in John Livingston, *Portrait of Eminent Americans Now Living*, (1853), 148-159.

[53] Rydell, 13, 15.

including the present-day states of Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, most of Arizona and Colorado, and parts of Oklahoma, Kansas, Wyoming, and California. While there was no formal war, the annexation of former Mexican and Indian lands by both the military and civilians ignited political tensions, creating ripe conditions for violence.

To quell the rising conflicts in the West, the military sent the dragoons to points of conflict in Texas, New Mexico, and Kansas, often to protect overland emigrants from Indian attacks. Colt wasted no time in taking advantage of a rapidly changing military landscape. With his eyes on the American migrant settlers, Colt continued to focus on manufacturing the dragoon revolvers best suited for battles on horseback. He also began producing "Baby Dragoons" specifically for civilian use. Meanwhile, he developed the larger 1851 Colt Navy Revolver for the military. According to historian William Hosley, Colt also sent agents for sales to Mexico as soon as the war with America ended. (See 3. 8). Pro-Confederate allies in the West such as William Quantrill continued to use the model throughout the Civil War, and John Chivington and his men used the .44 Army Revolver (1860) at the 1864 Sand Creek massacre of mostly women and children at a Cheyenne and Arapaho village in Colorado.[54]

Western conquest and settlement proved key to Colt's rising fortunes. Reverend William Jarvis of Portland, Connecticut commented on the impact of the California Gold Rush in Hartford. "A great many in this quarter are crazy about going to California and are sacrificing their property and abandoning a prosperous business to get there, leaving their families without means, helpless and dependent. And what will such a multitude do when they get there? It is hardly possible to conceive the extent of the deprivations and suffering which they must undergo."[55] Then, in 1850, as if in response to the hardships of "the forty-niners," Colt's agent J. Knox Walker reported that Congress had passed a law to furnish Oregon- and California-bound migrants with firearms at a government rate. Soon after, Congress approved a $50,000 purchase of Colt's repeating pistols to capitalize on western settlement and make his product relevant on the west coast.[56]

---

[54] William Hosley, "Guns, Gun Culture, and the Peddling of Dreams," in Jan E. Dizard, Robert M. Muth, Stephen P. Andrews, eds. *Guns in America: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 47-85; Rasenberger, 390-392.

[55] William Jarvis to William Jarvis, January 17, 1849, William Jarvis Letters, Library and Research Center, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History (CMCH), Hartford, Connecticut.

[56] Knox also cited an 1808 law that additionally offered to provide a quota of arms to state militias. J. Knox Walker, Agent for S. Colt, July 25 1850, Correspondence, B6F6, Samuel Colt Papers, CMCH; James Servan, *Colt Firearms, 1836-1854* (Santa Ana, CA: Foundation Press, 1954), 38; "A Resolution Authorizing the Secretary of War to Furnish Arms and Ammunition to Persons Emigrating to the Territories of California, Oregon, and New Mexico," March 2, 1849, *The Statutes at Large and Treaties of the United States of America: From Dec. 1,1845, to March 3,1851*, (United States: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1851).

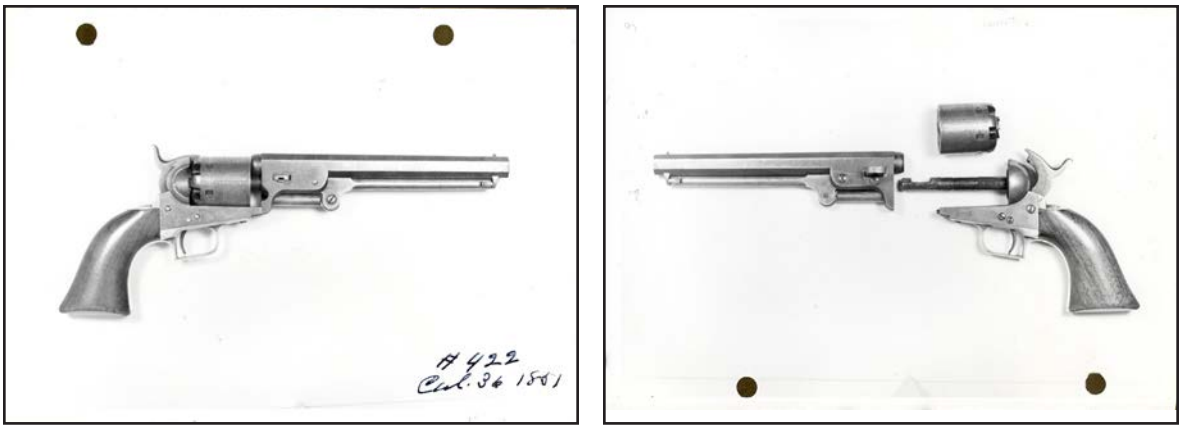


Figure 3.8 Cold Model 1851 Revolver, assembled and disassembled. PG 460, Box 9, Folder 1, Item 7, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Museum of Connecticut History, Connecticut State Library.

Several of the forty-niners' diaries and memoirs from the 1850s mention a Colt firearm.[57] At least one of these California-bound migrants, one who later worked at the Colt factory in Hartford from 1854 to 1861, brought 200 Colts in January 1849 to sell to stampeders, including an 1848 model with .44-caliber percussion and a .31-caliber Paterson revolver, along with powder caps, likely 1849 .31-caliber pocket pistols, bullet molds, and bowie knives. The .44-caliber dragoon army revolvers arrived in January 1850, followed by .36-caliber 1851 navy pistols.[58] One California agent claimed that Colt's pistols were so desired, he refused an offer for half a city block for one of them. Excerpts from books and memoirs note that many travelers carried Colt revolvers. In the 1855 self-published work *Land of Gold: Fact vs Fiction*, Hinton R. Helper stated that "among the fiery spirits of this western metropolis [San Francisco] the slightest affront, even tho it be purely accidental, is considered a wound of dignity- curable only by application of a Colt Revolver."[59]

Samuel Colt's name, product, and process carried a reputation. A former Colt worker advertised his skills and pedigree in *The Empire County*, a newspaper based in El Dorado County, California with the headline, "Hunters and Sportsmen, Attention!" "Forty-niner" Frank Bekeart boasted about his time at Colt's factory to boost his credibility as a gun repairman: "Frank B. is still on hand to do all kinds of Gun and Pistol repairing as it should be done- in a workmanlike manner- it being his legitimate trade, and having once been a journeyman in Colt's factory, he is fully competent to repair this celebrated fire-arm in a proper manner."[60]

---

[57] Phil B. Bekeart Company, San Francisco to Samuel Stone, September 3, 1931, Incoming Correspondence, Box 19, RG 103, State Archives, Connecticut State Library (CSLA).

[58] Servan, 51-52; "A Sabbath in the Mines of California," Semi-weekly Eagle (Brattleboro, Vermont) III, no. 77, May 6, 1850, available via *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*, https://www.readex.com/products/americas-historical-newspapers-periodicals.

[59] Hinton R. Helper, *The Land of Gold* (Baltimore, Pub. for the author by H. Taylor, 1855).

[60] "Hunters and Sportsmen, Attention!" *The Empire County*, November 24, 1855; accessed via Chronicling America Database, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/about-this-collection/.

Many others, including the military and government officials at home and abroad, took note of Colt's advanced weaponry during this period. At a U.S. Senate hearing in January 1851, Brigadier General Harney again celebrated the revolving pistol, stating that it

> is the only weapon with which we can ever hope to subdue those wild and daring tribes, unless we have at least three regiments of dragoons on the Texas frontier alone; and those officers who have recently returned from the frontier corroborate this statement by declaring that a dragoon armed with Colt's repeating pistol and a musquetoon [sic], or perhaps a Sharp's [sic] rifle, would be the most formidable for the frontier service; and in particular when encounters with savages occur, as they generally do, in the prairies, defiles and mountain gorges. The advantages of repeating arms in such encounters are incalculable. A few bold men, well skilled in the use of these weapons, can, under such circumstances, encounter and scatter any number of savages.[61]

Colt fully recognized that his greatest market advantage lay in what officers like General Harney characterized as fighting "savages." At a speech in London in 1851, he argued that

> living in a country of most extensive frontier, still inhabited by hordes of aborigines, and knowing the insulated position of the enterprising pioneer, and his dependence, sometimes alone, on his personal liability to protect himself and his family, had often meditated upon the inefficiency of the ordinary double-barreled gun and pistol, both involving a loss of time in reloading, which was all too frequently fatal, the peculiar character of Indian border warfare.
>
> By the United States Government, also, it was considered an object of great importance to obtain an effective repeating firearm, as the peculiar characteristic of the mode of attack by the mounted Indians, was to overwhelm small bodies of American soldiers by rushing down on them in greatly superior numbers, after having drawn their fire, and then to dispatch them, whilst in a defenceless [sic] state, from the necessity of reloading their arms.[62]

Colt further asserted that "on the Texan frontier, and on the several routes to California, the Indian Tribes are renewing their murderous warfare, and a general Indian war is likely to ensue, unless bodies of mounted men, efficiently equipped for such service, are employed against them."[63]

---

[61] Report of Mr. Shields to the Committee on Military Affairs, United States Senate, 31st Congress, 2nd session, January 30, 1851, 257.

[62] Samuel Colt, "On the Application of Machinery to the Manufacture of Rotating Chambered-breech Fire-arms and Their Peculiarities," (United Kingdom: W. Clowes, January 1855) 3, excerpt minutes of proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers 11. Members of the British Institution of Civil Engineers invited Colt's testimony on the manufacture of small arms by machines were so impressed that the group bestowed on Colt the prestigious Telford Award that year for his paper "On the Application of Machinery to the Manufacture of Rotating Chambered-breech Fire-arms and Their Peculiarities." Also see Hounshell, 17-18.

[63] Tucker and Tucker, "Samuel Colt," in *Industrializing Antebellum America*.

Other contested territories of the West likewise offered the opportunity for sales. Brigham Young, leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS, also known as Mormons) fought the Utah War for his community's sovereignty. The need to protect the Mormon community followed the 1844 murder of its leader Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois. In 1845 LDS followers looked westward, beyond what was then the boundary of the United States, to Mexican territory, seeking refuge near the Great Salt Lake that they called Deseret. The establishment of their independent community in the western region necessitated arms for survival. While the Mormons sought repeating pistols primarily for hunting, they soon found they needed them to use against local tribes, who themselves were armed via the Spanish trade. Those available were mainly of a "pepperbox" design, which involved multiple barrels, making the weapon front heavy and thus "clumsy, heavy, and inaccurate." Some of Young's followers had even joined the U.S. Army to enlist in a Mormon battalion during the Mexican-American War to procure more weapons, including at least 500 Model 1816 (M1816) flintlock muskets but also newer Model 1841 (M1841) rifles accurate to several hundred yards.[64]

The LDS community's efforts to escape the U.S. and become an independent community proved folly when the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo included the western region they had moved to and the Mormons were thus reabsorbed into the United States. President Franklin Pierce appointed LDS leader Brigham Young governor of the Utah Territory, now a U.S. property. In November 1851, LDS Legion Major General Daniel H. Wells wrote to Colt asking about the range of arms that he was manufacturing and pricing for up to 1,000 "scope-equipped weapons" and "any kind of instruments you may be manufacturing, suited to mountain warfare." The legion then reportedly placed an order for "several hundred." By the late 1850s, their muster rolls included Colt products.[65]

In 1857, when tensions between the federal government and the LDS Church peaked over the church's insistence on maintaining independence and its communal and polygamous practices that undermined United States law and cultural practices. By then, LDS was manufacturing Colt imitations. Still, Utah stores continued to carry Colt's complete line of revolvers.[66] Throughout the Utah War of 1858, Colt revolvers, and their imitations, were among the territory's most popular weapons for both the military and civilians. Even non-Mormon merchants, many of whom had refused Colt's products due to their price, felt pressured to carry his revolvers to compete with the Mormon cooperative store.[67]

---

[64] Harry W. Gibson, "Frontier Arms of the Mormons," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1974), https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/uhq_volume42_1974_number1/s/113480.

[65] Gibson; Jack Rohan, *Yankee Arms Maker: The Story of Sam Colt and his Six-Shot Revolver* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), 232-234; William P. MacKinnon, "At Sword's Point, Part 1: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858." (United States: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 45-46; Daniel H. Wells to Mr. Colt, Letter Book Vol. 1, Brigham Young Papers, The Brigham Young Center, www.brighamyoungcenter.org, accessed December 21, 2023.

[66] Rohan, 234.

[67] Rohan, 234; also see "Later from Utah: The Destroying Angels Ready for the War," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 18, 1857, 3.

The westward migration of American settlers also ignited another smoldering feud: the extension of slavery in the West. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 had seemingly resolved the issue by demarcating a line of latitude, 36°30', above which slavery could not exist. However, that applied to the Louisiana Purchase Territory only, and when the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo expanded U.S. territory, the question of slavery in the West again became a polarizing issue. Then the newly created state of Kansas became the flash point.

The 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act stipulated that popular sovereignty, or settler democracy, would determine the future of the territory. Pro- and anti-slavery settlers poured into the region for both political and economic reasons. Autobiographies of those who fought in Kansas in the 1850s, such as August Bondi, frequently mention buying and carrying Colts.[68] In 1856 John H. Stringfellow, a leader of territorial Kansas's pro-slavery legislature and editor of the Squatter Sovereign newspaper, began raising funds to outfit pro-slavery forces and "give the Abolitionists at least one good thrashing before political matters are settled in this territory."[69] Anti-slavery "free-soilers" soon realized that while they might have the numbers, pro-slavery forces had an advantage because they were better armed. The Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society and other abolitionist aid societies purchased 900 to 1000 Sharps carbines (a shorter rifle better suited to a civilian guerilla-style fighter) for Kansas. Abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher espoused the morality of the rifle, even over the Bible, for supporting such a cause. According to Jack Rohan, in his biography *Yankee Arms Dealer,* Colt took note and had his agents circulate a letter from an anti-slavery settler to well-funded Abolitionist societies that complained about the ability of pro-slavery forces "to supply themselves with Colt revolvers," prompting both sides in Kansas to order the revolvers.[70]

News reports implied that Hartford gun manufacturers Sharps and Colts were fueling an arms race in Kansas. With heavily armed settlers on both sides of what was arguably the most momentous issue facing the nation, violence was assured, and between 1854 and 1859 the territory became known as "Bleeding Kansas," characterized not just by skirmishes but by targeted killings and other atrocities.[71] Buoyed by such violent opportunity in the western territories, Colt pursued the economic promise of western conquest on multiple fronts. He shipped thousands of dollars' worth of guns to sell in the West, but also gifted weapons to politicians, army officers, and other individuals with influence on the U.S. War Department.[72]

---

[68] August Mendel Bondi, *Autobiography of August Bondi, 1833-1907* (Galesburg, Ill: Wagoner Printing Company, 1910), 33-34.

[69] "Another War in Prospect," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1856, 2.

[70] While Jack Rohan does not document the actual letter that he describes, newspaper articles from 1855-1856 reveal pro-slavery calls to raise funds for Colt revolvers. Rohan served as editor of the National Rifle Association's American Rifleman magazine from 1926 to 1927. See Jack Rohan, *Yankee Arms Dealer: The Incredible Career of Samuel Colt* (Harper and Brothers, 1935), 228, 234-5, 271; "Border Ruffianism," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 19, 1856; "Another War in Prospect," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1856.

[71] Jonathon Earle, "Beecher's Bibles and Broadswords: Paving the Way for the Civil War in the West, 1854–1859," in Virginia Scharff, ed., *Empire and Liberty: The Civil War and the West* (University of California Press, 2015), 52-53; Pantle, Alberta, ed., "The Connecticut Kansas Colony: Letters of Charles B. Lines to the New Haven (Conn.) Daily Palladium," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1956), 35.

[72] North, xiii; Herbert G. Houze, *Colt Presentations from the Factory Ledgers, 1856-1869* (Mowbray, 2003).

Colts (mainly the M1849 and M1951) found their place with the civilian population, too. Those fighting for Kansas yearned for Colts, as abolitionist John Brown, Jr. expressed in a letter to his father in May 1855, but the people of Lawrence intercepted at least one shipment of the desired weapons.[73]

Yet another section of the lands won in the Mexican-American War, the Arizona Territory, presented a literal and figurative golden (and silver) opportunity. By the late 1850s Colt had made contacts with several figures in the West who had issued positive reports about the mining opportunities around Tubac and Tucson.[74] Colt actively supported efforts to establish a stronger military and political presence in 1850s Arizona Territory, a region that Spain and Mexico had for decades struggled to control in the face of harsh climates and a hostile native population. Colt soon invested in the Sonora Mining and Exploring Company, which served not only to help build his fortune but also to promote settlement in the new territories, necessitating efforts to ensure safety and stability amid the region's resistant Indigenous population of the Apache, creating yet another new market for his firearms. Colt lobbied in Washington for the creation of the Arizona Territory, and then he pushed his agent to arrange more mention of Colt revolvers in Arizona newspapers (see chapter 4).[75]

These efforts effectively ended, however, with the onset of the Civil War. The Apache greatly hampered Colt's western mining investment with repeated attacks and thefts. Rohan asserted that while Colt was experiencing this resistance to non-Indian settlement, he took advantage of similar conflicts across the West, directing his agents to work with Indian traders to sell unsold weapons manufactured for European wars to tribes in the Plains, including the Snake, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe. Accurate or not, use of Colts by these tribes in the Indian wars of the 1850s compelled the U.S. government to order Colts to defend against these enemies.[76]

Expanding Markets Abroad

As Colt tapped the growing military and civilian markets in the American West, he also looked abroad for contracts. He found an ideal venue to make himself and his product globally known at an international exposition known as the "Works of Industry of All Nations," located in a massive glass and iron structure resembling a greenhouse and dubbed the Crystal Palace. This effort to promote industry and world trade would be part of the first World's Fair in London from the late Spring to the late Fall of 1851. Over the next century, other cities across Europe and the United States would host similar events, attracting millions. The multi-month economic and

---

[73] Alberta Pantle, ed., "The Connecticut Kansas Colony: Letters of Charles B. Lines to the New Haven (Conn.) Daily Palladium," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1956), 36.

[74] Colt to Wrightsman, December 14, 1858, in James L. Mitchell, *Colt: The Man, the Arms, the Company* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1959), 264.

[75] Colt to Hartley, February 28, 1860, in Mitchell, 264; Samuel Colt to Heintzelman, May 19, 1858, Box 29, SubGroup 5, Sonora Mining and Exploring Company, 1858-1861, RG 103, CSLA.

[76] According to one account by biographer Jack Rohan, who unfortunately does not cite his sources (as was typical of the time in which he published), Czar Nicholas Romanov of Russia died in February of 1855 before purchasing unfinished muskets. Rohan claims that, to unload the items, Colt sent agents to work out deals with Indian traders. Rohan, 229-235.

cultural events became a hallmark of the industrial era and helped introduce the general public to new technologies.[77]

This first fair focused on British industrial might, with America only offered a total of 50,000 square feet of the Crystal Palace's one million square feet. Still, the venue offered Colt an irresistible opportunity to increase the visibility of his product, its inclusion assured due to Sam's membership on the state's governor-appointed committee to determine which Connecticut products would be featured. A national committee-at-large determined America's exhibits. They included several agricultural products including Cyrus McCormick's grain reaper, Mathew Brady's daguerreotypes, Charles Goodyear's rubber products, and an array of clocks, locks, agricultural equipment, carriages, a sewing machine, and a grand piano large enough for four, among 600 exhibits. The European press regarded most of the American products as unimpressive in size, scope, and quality, with a notable exception. Colt's firearms became one of the few standouts at the exposition, and even the often-snarky Punch magazine acknowledged them as the first real American invention. (See chapter 4 for more about the display).[78]

The positive reception after London's 1851 Centennial Exposition (see chapter 4) persuaded Colt to open a factory in the city in 1853, the Colt's Patent Repeating Arms Manufactory, at Bessborough Place on the Thames at Pimlico. He persuaded his brother James to resign his judgeship in Missouri and manage the London factory. With steel from Thomas Firth and Sons in Sheffield, the factory produced what would become some of Colt's best-selling products: 37,000 to 40,000 percussion-cap Navy Revolvers Model 1851 and roughly 10,000 Model 1849 Pocket Revolvers. The company marked each product manufactured in London as "Col. Sam'l Colt, London." (See 3.9).[79]

---

[77] See Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago, ILL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[78] "A Circular: To the Manufacturers, Mechanics, and Artizans, and Citizens Generally of the State of Connecticut," *The Hartford Courant*, December 2, 1850, 2; Marcus Cunliffe, "America at the Great Exhibition of 1851," *American Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1951): 115-156.

[79] Rasenberger, 295; Joseph G. Rosa, *The Gunfighter: Man or Myth?* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 169.

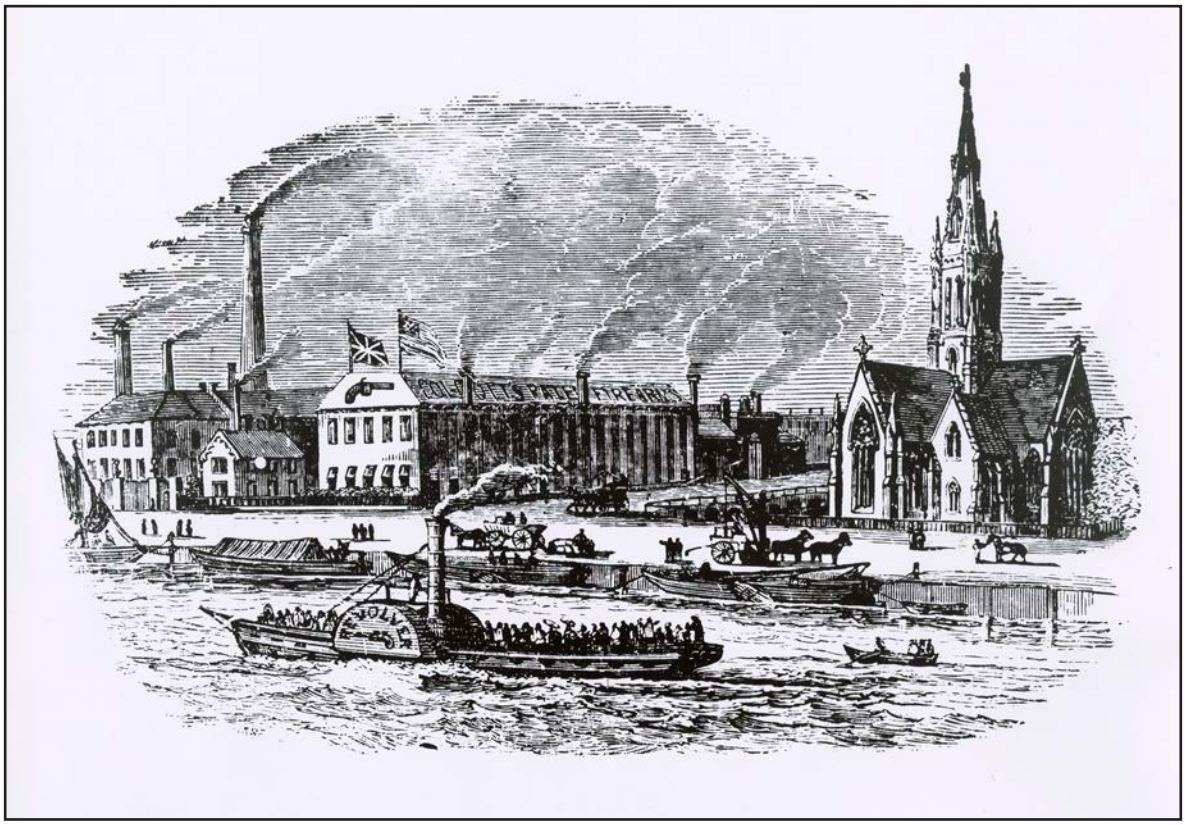


Figure 3.9 London Factory, Box 4, Folder 5, Item 1, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720214854.

Not everyone supported Colt's expansion abroad. Upon hearing about plans for the London armory in November 1852, the *Hartford Times* criticized Sam for ignoring the needs of his hometown, opining that "Samuel Colt, whose name is given to the most destructive shooting iron in use in the civilized world, sailed for Europe last summer to employ 400 men in manufacturing his weapons for the foreign market."[80] Such criticism did not deter the now successful entrepreneur, who was quickly becoming internationally known. While abroad, Colt courted the leaders of Europe with gifts of highly customized and decorative revolvers. From 1852 to 1858 he secured British and Russian contracts. In 1853 he took advantage of his relationship with Thomas Seymour, who was serving as the minister of Russia when the Crimean War began. At the time, Russia could not compete with the diversity of weapons in the Prussian arsenal. Colt made multiple trips to sell his arms in St. Petersburg, winning a contract to refit 50,000 smooth-bore flintlocks to percussion rifles. He also sold about three dozen armory machines. Colt cultivated this relationship, exchanging various gifts with the royal family, the Romanovs.[81] He provided personalized and elegant custom revolvers and in return received jewels and other extravagant items. Some of the less extravagant pistols went to members of the U.S. Congress.

[80] "Colt's Pistol Factory," *The Hartford Courant*, November 1, 1852.

[81] Geoffrey Stewart, *Arming the World: American Gun Makers in the Gilded Age* (Essex, CT: Lyons Press, 2024), 149.

Some even attribute to him the early instances of lobbying, recognizing his efforts to persuade Congressional representatives to vote for legislation extending government contracts or Colt's patents. The latter would allow him to secure the market beyond the patent extension date of 1857 and continue to corner the market on his version of the revolving cylinder. The measure ultimately failed, but not for lack of effort. Although nothing seems to have come of it, Congress even pursued an investigation into Colt's tactics and that of his agents, which included gifts and lavish entertainments involving young women and the use of "contingent fees" if the patent-extension legislation passed, all of which bordered on bribery.[82]

Colt seized every opportunity to expand his market through dizzying amounts of energy and travel, especially during the last fifteen years of his life. He played the Russian Czar and the Ottoman Sultan against one another to secure orders from both sides of the Crimean War. He additionally got foreign contracts in Egypt, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, and later Japan, Peru, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. All firearms sent to London were identified with an L (London) or an E (Europe) after the serial number. Eventually, Colt replaced his brother James as manager with Charles Manby, the Secretary of the Institution of Civil Engineers.[83] At the same time, he began building his own empire, and his own family, in the South Meadow of Hartford.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1850s, conflict throughout the globe and the United States, combined with Sam Colt's ability to market his wares, reaped him huge rewards and reputation. Just a few years earlier, his Paterson factory had failed. Even amid rave reviews from the military who were fighting the Seminoles in Florida, the big government contracts that he sought were not forthcoming. A military not adept at rapid change viewed his inventions with skepticism but nonetheless ordered continued trials, most of which pointed to the future of repeating arms. Such realities encouraged him, and soon after the New Jersey factory closed, Sam Colt regrouped and moved back home to Hartford, where he knew that the Connecticut River Valley promised the right geographic locale, the ingenuity, and the machinery to bring his long-sought dream to life. By this time, he no longer had to persuade the U.S. War Department about the efficacy of his products. Colt's ability to position his pistol and its effectiveness at fighting the Indigenous population in the West became keys to his larger success. Many officers, most notably Willam Harney in Florida and Samuel Walker in Texas, preferred Colt's repeating pistols for the cavalry and had convinced the federal Ordnance Department to purchase them, especially for frontier warfare and during the Mexican-American War.[84]

---

[82] Rasenberger, 312-315. In the 1980s, Senator Robert Byrd asserted this claim. Robert C. Byrd, "Lobbyists," September 28, 1987, in "Addresses on the History of the U.S. Senate," The Senate, 1789-1989, vol. 2, pp. 493, in Bicentennial ed. (Washington: U.S.: Government Printing Office), 1988-1994, accessed December 19, 2025 (quoted from U.S. Congress, U.S. House of Representatives, No. 353, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, (August 3, 1854), 4, 9, 15.

[83] For more about Colt's international activity and sales, see Stewart, Serven, 103, and Joseph G. Rosa, *Colonel Colt, London: The History of Colt's London Firearms, 1851-1857* (Essex, CT: Lyons Press, January 1, 1976).

[84] George Talcott to C. M. Conrad, December 30, 1850, William Maynadier, August 13, 1851, 391-92, in *Collection of Annual Reports*.

Colt recognized that both domestic and global political instability created opportunities, and he used these conditions to realize the success he sought. After perfecting the design of a revolving, multi-shot weapon, he shifted his attention. To developing a range of models. His company began producing pocket pistols, crafted specifically for self-defense, for civilian use. Thus, having spent years pursuing government contracts, Colt demonstrated the same determination and skill in marketing to civilian customers as well.

IV. The Market
Buying and Selling Colt (1835-1845)

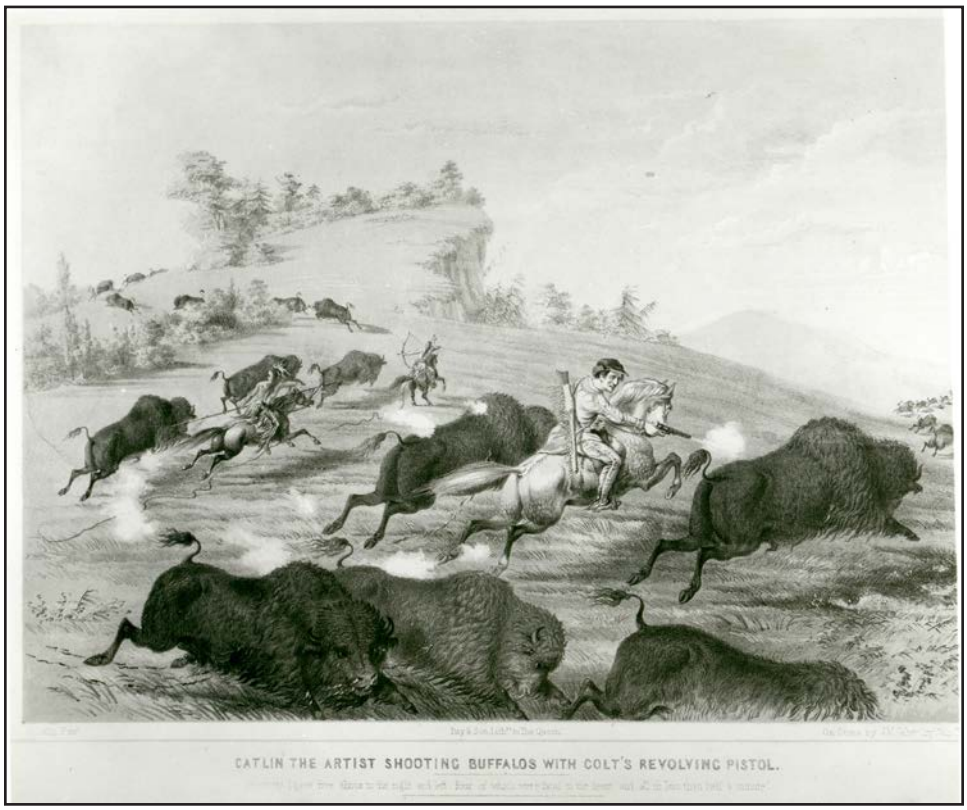


Figure 4.1 Print of George Catlin, "Catlin the Artist Shooting Buffalos with Colt's Revolving Pistol," 1855-1860. Box 6, Folder 7, Item 7, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library.
CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720216512.

Advertisements in American newspapers during the Spring of 1834 promoted "Dr. Coult of New York, London, and Calcutta," a practical chemist who lectured about and demonstrated the effects of nitrous oxide. Throughout the 1830s, Samuel Colt, acting under the pseudonym "Dr. Coult," entertained large crowds, inhaling the laughing gas himself and offering hits to audience members, in whom the gas prompted fits of laughter and involuntary muscle movements.[1] Samuel Colt's showmanship preceded that of even P.T. Barnum."[2]

Comparison to Barnum, who many cite as America's greatest pioneer in the art of self-promotion and publicity, is apt. In the 1840s and 1850s, like the twenty-year-old Colt had done nearly a decade earlier, P.T. Barnum filled newspapers and posters with images and testimonials about his museum, aiming to "produce conversation as well as attention" through continuous innovation.

---

1 "Exhilarating Gas," *Boston Post*, June 22, 1832, 3.

2 Thanks to Zachary Bartolome for writing more about this comparison in "Samuel Colt: The Pioneer of Nineteenth Century Showmen," HIST 301, CCSU, Spring 2024.

He frequently changed his exhibits and acts and took "advantage of every opportunity to bring about editorial comment or news," to "provide more value than competitors."[3] Just before the Civil War, Antebellum businessmen like Colt and Barnum helped to cultivate what historian William R. Leach described as a "Land of Desire." By the turn of the century, in part because of those efforts, even those who lived outside of America's upper classes embraced conspicuous consumption.

Biographer Henry Barnard notes that Colt "practiced a kind of 'artful deception,' peddling the laughing gas and posing as a medical authority. Such spectacles, however, were somewhat popular at a time when it was not unusual for "quacks" to claim medical expertise and when newspapers often reported on duped or disgruntled customers. Colt distinguished his performances by combining so-called medical expertise with showmanship. In doing so, he captivated audiences, providing a preview of his instinct for attracting and sustaining public attention through spectacle, novelty, advertising, and promotion.[4] Colt continued to combine salesmanship with showmanship when marketing his firearms to both the government and the public. He converted his affinity for rebellious, often reckless behavior into unbridled energy in pursuit of experiences, travel, developing his dream of earning his fortune through a multi-shot firearm, networking, and securing the investments to make it all happen. While he set out to create a weapon primarily for the military but also cultivated the civilian market.

Many historians have explored Colt's marketing acumen, even attributing to him the popular phrase "new and improved," a phrase Colt often used in promotions. Yet popular and patent publications in the late 1840s and 1850s also employed the phrase to describe agricultural tools and technologies.[5] Marketing firearms differed from other technologies in some ways, but Colt often described his products as tools, using promotional language enlisted to market more common tools. For example, he used the phrase "new and improved" in a letter to Maryland Governor Thomas H. Hicks on May 12, 1860, to describe samples of combustible armament cartridges packed in patented waterproof cases.[6]

Colt's stylized language was just one of multiple techniques and strategies he employed to build demand for something beyond a tool designed for use by the military, a coveted consumer product. Many of Colt's pieces from as early as Paterson featured fine engravings, distinguishing

---

3 Applegate, 49-57.

4 "Cure by Confidence;" Vermont Chronicle. October 18, 1833; "Dr. Howe's Discourse on Quackery," *The Hillsborough Recorder*, October 1, 1834; "Patent Medicines," *The Washington Union*, January 14, 1836, 3; James Gordon Bennett, "Medical Quackery," *New York Daily Herald*, March 27, 1837, 2; Also see Zachary Bartolome, "Samuel Colt: The Pioneer of Nineteenth Century Showmen," HIST 301, CCSU, Spring 2024; Henry Barnard, *Armsmear: The Home, the Arm, and the Armory of Samuel Colt* (North Hollywood: Beinfeld Publishing, 1976), 129-152; Barbara Tucker and Kenneth H. Tucker, *Industrializing Antebellum America: The Rise of Manufacturing Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic* (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 45-46.

5 "Jessup's New and Improved Thrashing and Seating Machine," *New Genesee Farmer and Gardener's Journal*, 1848, 150; *London Journal of Arts, Sciences and Manufacturers, and Repertory of Patent Inventions* (United Kingdom: W. Newton, 1854).

6 "Journal of Proceedings," Maryland General Assembly, House of Delegates (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1861), 6-7.

them as both collector's pieces and utilitarian ones. As his firearms developed further, so too did Colt's advertising, which increasingly contextualized the object, depicting it within landscapes, with its users, and with the workers who manufactured it. The Colt revolver was more than just a gun–it was safe, efficient, and reliable, and most importantly, it offered intangible independence and adventure associated with western settlement and conquest. As the United States expanded westward, Colt caught and held the civilian imagination through imagery, storytelling, and "branding." By the 1850s, America knew well of Colt and his "Colt."[7] After Colt found traction for his products through the Crimean and Mexican-American Wars, his machines and factory could produce more than the peacetime market could bear.

American Advertising and Consumerism

In *The Gunning of America*, historian Pamela Haag argues that the "firearms business was an early, enthusiastic pioneer into advertisement to find and develop civilian markets."[8] Posters, shop signs, and billboards proved common as early as the seventeenth century and predated Winchester and Colt by almost two centuries. Antebellum Americans mostly used advertising for land sales, services, and even runaway slaves more than to promote specific products for consumers. Few people had the money or the need to buy materials that they typically produced themselves at home. Advertising and competition over goods and products came with the transportation revolution discussed in chapter 3, opening markets for competition among producers and facilitating commerce among the states. By creating demand, producers and manufacturers, not buyers and consumers, could set the price. As Charles Goodrum and Helen Dalrymple explain, "advertising permits higher profits, not just more sales."[9]

Unfortunately, the early republic lacked many resources, including paper, leaving limited space in print media like newspapers for any sort of "extras." Ads placed in even the most sophisticated media such as *The Hartford Courant* included only a handful of lines, with no visual components. Between the 1830s and the 1850s, early advertisements stressed the variety of goods available at an establishment rather than the attributes of the products themselves.[10] Publishers only began experimenting with different type sizes and fonts after the outbreak of the Civil War forced the invention of wood pulp, thus making paper affordable and available for newspapers. Salesmen sold advertising space to offset costs as well. In the mid-nineteenth century, members of the public had access to only a handful of magazines, including *Harper's Weekly*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner's*, and *Godey's Lady Book*. Many more periodicals became available by the 1880s and 1890s as the Industrial Revolution created an economy that revolved

---

7 See Pamela Haag, *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture* (New York: BasicBooks, 2016) for more on the marketing of firearms by Colt, Winchester, and other gun manufacturers. Haag primarily focused her study on Oliver Winchester and the years following the Civil War.

8 Robert Henning, as quoted in Pamela Haag, *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of the American Gun Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 167.

9 Charles Goodrum and Helen Dalrymple, *Advertising in America: The First Two Hundred Years* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), 13-17.

10 Edd Applegate, *The Rise of Advertising in the United States: A History of Innovation to 1960* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2012), 29.

around consumer spending on products and experiences that were less essential to daily life and more about raising social status.[11]

As already discussed in chapter 3, Colt was particularly aggressive when promoting his products to the military. His promotions capitalized on how his rifles and pistols performed in military trials. Military and technical journals such as the *Army & Navy Chronicle* and the *Journal of the American Institute,* as well as the publications with broader audiences like the *New York Courier & Enquirer* featured military testimonials and described the Colt's repeating rifles in design and performance terms: simple construction, ease of use, high accuracy and fire rate, safety features, penetrative power, and craftsmanship.[12]

Colt continued to lobby the military, wining and dining military officers and politicians for contracts and testimonials, but he now took advantage of advances in printing larger formats. An 1855 broadside offered a detailed illustration of a Colt revolver. The company used instructions and diagrams to convey how safe and easy the revolvers were to load and clean. It also sought to distinguish Colt's product from forgeries and copycat products, as one advertisement cautioned buyers to "Beware of Counterfeits and Patent Infringements" and used labels to identify the barrel, cylinder, hammer, trigger, lever, and ramrod.[13]

Captain Randolph B. Marcy, who was known for writing a guidebook for western migrants, endorsed "Col. Colt's Military and Sporting Rifles" even for those not expertly trained.[14] (See 4.2). "My own experience has forced me to the conclusion that the breechloading arms possess great advantages over the muzzle-loading for the reason that it can be charged and fired with much greater rapidity," and for those migrating west he testified that "if I were alone upon the prairies, and expected an attack from a body of Indians, I am not acquainted with any arm I would as soon have in my hands as this."[15] Lieutenant Hans M. Busk referenced the illustration

---

[11] Goodrum and Dalrymple,13-48; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011).

[12] "Samuel Colt's Many-Chambered Repeating Rifles," *Journal of the American Institute: A Monthly Publication, Devoted to the Interests of Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures & the Arts* 3, no. 9 (1838). The officers were W.M. Tompkins, W.M. Fulton, and John Graham. Quote from Col. D.E. Twiggs and Lt. Col. W.S. Harney, to General T.J. Rusk, April 24, 1848, United States Senate Committee on Military Affairs and Thomas J. Rusk. *In Senate of the United States: April 25, 1848: Submitted and Ordered to Be Printed: Mr. Rusk Made the Following Report: To Accompany Joint Resolution S. no. 20* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 1848. (Rusk Report).

[13] "Patent Repeating Pistols Army Navy and Pocket Sizes," (London Edition), Photostat print of advertisement that appeared in an 1854 magazine; see Box 66, RG103, CSLA.

[14] "Col. Colt's Military and Sporting Rifles," *New-York Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, Politics & Society* 55, no. 4 (April 1860): 466. The authors thank Joseph Mumley, a graduate student at Central CT State University, for his work identifying and analyzing sources related to *Colt* advertising. See Joseph Mumley, "Colt Related Book Reviews, Book Summaries," "Description of Ads from Chronicling America Database," "Description of Ads from Connecticut State Library," "Description of Colt's Advertisements in American Antiquarian Historical Society (AAS) Historical Collection," Coltsville HRS Files. See also John Ogle, *The Book of Colt Paper, 1834-2011* (Bloomington: Blue Book Publications, 2011) for republished copies of many Colt advertisements and promotions.

[15] "Col. Colt's Military and Sporting Rifles."

of a shooting target in the center of the advertisement, one he claimed as his from April 28, 1859, when he fired 28 shots into the center from approximately four hundred yards away. Busk promised satisfaction with a Colt firearm: "let any one [sic] who wants to know what a Colt can do take my word that for efficeny [sic] and strength, of *shooting nothing can beat it.*"[16]

When Colt manufactured his revolvers in peacetime in Paterson, New Jersey, he struggled to find customers. Still, in the Fall of 1837, while his relatives and investors grew frustrated with the pace of production and sales, Colt won first prize at the American Institute of New York's fair. He used the feature story in the Institute's journal to woo slave-owning customers who were terrified of uprisings like Nat Turner's in August 1831. Here Colt allowed an explanation of his revolver's inspiration to challenge the popular story of the *Corvo* as his original inspiration. The article asserted "If the genius of [Eli] Whitney [and his cotton gin] has allowed the South to realize incalculable gains, the delightful region will not fail to honour the genius of Colt for rendering them secure."[17] Likely emboldened, Colt spent more than $25 on 5,250 circulars and printed his first newspaper advertisement in the *New York Courier* and *Esquire* in December 1837, but such periodicals and testimonials still failed to reach a particularly receptive public. He tried to attract wealthy civilian buyers who might be impressed by quality and workmanship, but he could not garner an adequate civilian market.[18]

The Colt in the American West

Fortunately for Colt, the volatile expansion period between the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and the beginning of the American Civil War (1848-1861) saw continued demand for firearms. But just as Colt was enjoying enormous success, his patent expired. Through a combination of strategic placement and rising demand, the Colt firearm arguably became more closely associated with the American West than any other gun. Cultivating ideas of trust and protection, advertisements often personified the Colt firearm as a "friend," with "six hearts in its body" (the six chambers in the cylinder) that one could always rely upon. An ad asserted that these "pioneers of civilization" would participate in western settlement and "afford surest protection for your family, your life, and your property."[19] (see 4.3). One widely circulated broadside emphasized the role Colt's firearms played in American conquest, addressing existing western migrants as well as those thinking of heading west. The same ad appeared in newspapers as far south as Mississippi on the eve of the Civil War.[20]

---

16 "Col. Colt's Military and Sporting Rifles."

17 Colt returned from his *Corvo* voyage in July 1831 and Nat Turner's Rebellion occurred a month later. Rasenberger, 52, 138-39; *Journal of the American Institute* (November 1837), 99-101.

18 Edwards, 60-63; see also Haag, 35-36.

19 "Simple Reasons for Preferring Colt's Arm to all others," *Sunny South*, February 21, 1861), in Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company Records, Box 66, RG103. Connecticut State Library; "Simple reasons for Preferring Colt's Arm to all others," *Spirit of Jefferson*, (Charles Town, VA), September 22, 1860; "The Pioneers of Civilization: Simple Reasons for Preferring Colt's Arm to all Others," *Knickerbocker Magazine*, April 1860.

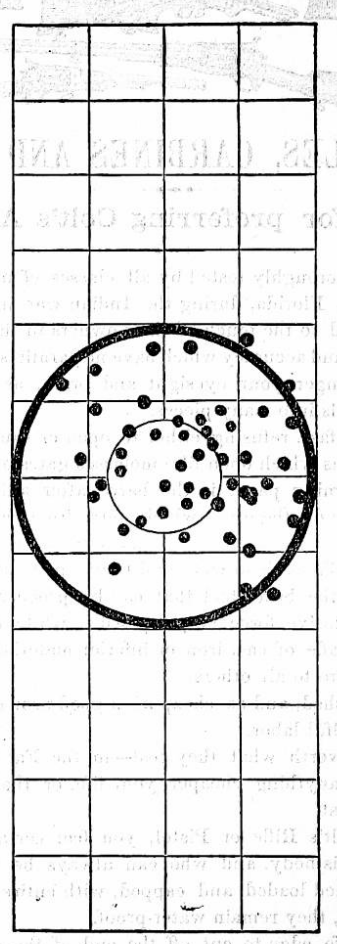
20 "Colt's Revolving Breech Firearms," *Daily Richmond Examiner*, May 1, 1860; Sunny South November 1, 1860; accessed via *Chronicling America Database*.

COL. COLT'S
Military and Sporting Rifles.

Captain Randolph B. Marcy, U. S. A. in his recent work the 'Prairie Traveller,' thus speaks of Colt's Breech Loading Fire Arms, page 42.

Colt's revolving pistol is very generally admitted, both in Europe and America, to be the most efficient arm of its kind known at the present day. As the same principles are involved in the fabrication of his breech-loading rifle as are found in the pistol, the conviction to me is irresistible that, if one arm is worthy of consideration, the other is equally so. For my own part, I look upon Colt's new patent rifle as a most excellent arm for border service. It gives six shots in more rapid succession than any other rifle I know of, and these, if properly expended, are oftentimes sufficient to decide a contest; moreover, it is the most reliable and certain weapon to fire that I have ever used, and I cannot resist the force of my conviction that, if I were alone upon the prairies, and expected an attack from a body of Indians, I am not acquainted with any arm I would as soon have in my hands as this.

My own experience has forced me to the conclusion that the breech-loading arm, possesses great advantages over the muzzle-loading, for the reason that it can be charged and fired with much greater rapidity.



Lieut. Hans Busk, M. A. of the Victoria Rifles, England, in his recent work "The Rifle and how to use it," *thus speaks of Colt's Arms, pages* 45 and 46.

"His cavalry pistols are, in fact, pocket rifles. With one of them I once fired from a rest, at the Erith rifle ground, thirty-six rounds at the enormous range of FOUR HUNDRED AND TEN YARDS! Six bullets struck the butt at a distances varying from thirty to thirty-six inches from the centre of the target, eighteen bullets struck within the circumference of a circle seven feet in diameter, and the other six shots at heights varying from ten to twelve feet above the target—satisfactorily proving the capacity of the weapon for a still greater range. As regards the purposes for which they are intended, they may be pronounced in every respect perfect."

In a letter to the inventor, dated 28th April 1859, sending target (attached) he says: "Your rifle is by far the most complete specimen of a soldiers firelock that has yet been produced and considering that I have fired more than 68.000 rounds from my own shoulder, my opinion in such matters is perhaps, worth more than the mere empty praise of a green hand; let any one who wants to know what a Colt can do take my word that for efficieny and strength of shooting *nothing can beat it.*

Target, 6 ft. by 2 ft.; 8 in. Bull's-eye.

Shot 28th day of April 1859, by Lieut. Busk; Distance 400 yards; No. Rounds, 48; No. Hits, 48; Colt's Regulation Rifle, also Colt's Ammunition.

Figure 4.2 "Col. Colt's Military and Sporting Rifles," New-York Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, Politics & Society 55: 4 (April 1860): 466.



THE PIONEERS OF CIVILIZATION.

COLT'S REVOLVING BREECH FIRE ARMS.

PISTOLS, RIFLES, CARBINES AND SHOT GUNS.

Simple Reasons for preferring Colt's Arm to all others.

1. They have been thoroughly tested by all classes of men in every country, and from the first rifle fired in Florida, during the Indian war in 1837, to the present hour they have always responded to the touch of their owners in the time of danger.
2. They have a force and accuracy which have no parallels in the history of fire-arms.
3. They do not endanger your eyesight and brain, as do the arms with patent primers, which fly like shells into many pieces.
4. They do not stick fast, refusing either to open or shut without the aid of an axe when heated, as do the guns which open like molasses gates or nut crackers.
5. They leave no burning paper in the barrel after a discharge, to blow the next cartridge into your face, as do the guns which open from behind.
6. They are simple in construction, and easily taken care of, as any ranger or cavalry soldier will tell you. Treat them well, and they will treat your enemies badly.
7. They are made of the best steel that can be procured for money, and have the strength to resist the explosive force of gunpowder, while the mongrel imitations and cheap arms are clumsily made of cast iron or inferior materials, and are more dangerous to their owners than they are to all others.
8. They are well finished, and as cheap as a good arm can be made by the aid of modern machinery and skillful labor.
9. They are always worth what they cost—in the Far West much more, almost a legal tender! If you buy anything cheaper, your life, or that of your companion, may balance the difference in cost.
10. If you buy a Colt's Rifle or Pistol, you feel certain that you have one true friend, with six hearts in his body, and who can always be relied on.
11. They can be carried loaded and capped, with entire safety. In rain, or when wading or swimming rivers, they remain water-proof.
12. They have no knife edge to cut off the end of the cartridge and the powder, cutting off more and more at every discharge, as the barrel gets heated, and finally getting so dull that they will not cut at all. What old lady will lend her scissors to cut paper with? Ask any ranger who has tried the cutting slide guns, what he thinks of them.
13. Colt's arms have been adopted for the service of the United States by the army board at West Point, in 1858, and for many years previously, as superior to all others. See the printed reports, which fill volumes.
14. Colt's weapons are old friends to many thousands who will read this sheet. See Colt's new rifles before you buy any other, and then decide which will afford surest protection to your family, your life and your property

Sold by all respectable dealers throughout the world.

Figure 4.3 "The Pioneers of Civilization: Simple Reasons for Preferring Colt's Arm to all Others," New-York Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, Politics & Society 55, no. 4 (April 1860).

However, for many American civilians, and especially migrants, Colt firearms were a luxury. If they possessed them, they likely used older models.[21] As early as 1855, an ad for the pocket pistol in the *London Times* noted its benefit for travelers and for "household protection."[22] By 1860, the company expanded beyond military and trade publications into more markets across the nation and the world, hoping that Samuel Colt's product, proven in the field, could find favor in the civilian market. On April 1, 1860, the company released a series of advertisements in national and regional publications, including the *New York Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, Politics, & Society*, also known as the Knickerbocker, a cultural magazine considered "proto-environmentalist."[23]

---

[21] *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), April 12, 1858. https://www.loc.gov/item/sn83045462/1858-04-12/ed-1/; accessed via Chronicling America Database.

[22] "For Travelers and Household Protection-Colts Pocket Revolvers, *London Times*, January 20, 1855, 1.

[23] "Opinions in the United States of Colt's Revolving Firearms"; see also, *Daily Intelligencer*. (Wheeling, WV), October 1, 1860. https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84026845/1860-10-01/ed-1/; accessed via *Chronicling America*

As competition increased, marketing became more sophisticated. In *The Gunning of America*, Pamela Haag explains how Colt's competitors (Sharps, Winchester, Smith & Wesson, and Remington) aggressively marketed their product by highlighting detailed designs.[24] Like Colt, Remington & Sons had an international market and began to regularly advertise its firearms in the mid 1850s.[25] However, Remington did not always enlist the range of innovative marketing tactics that Colt utilized, including the heavy use of testimonials, endorsements, and product placements.[26]

While Colt provided dozens of names, trials, personal thoughts, and anecdotes from the U.S. and European militaries, competitors provided small, single-sentence endorsements from military men, famous shooters, and government officials. The Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Company had its own fans in the west during the contentious 1850s. An article titled "New Species of Firearms" in the *Evansville Weekly Journal* cited Texas Senator T. J. Rusk, a hero of Texas independence, as a proponent for the Sharps rifle.[27] Sharps seemed to have a knack for inviting what was seemingly free publicity, when Michigan's first regiment included a play on the Sharps name in its recruitment poster for "sharpshooters."[28] When minister Henry Ward Beecher preached that violence might be the only thing pro-slavery forces might understand, abolitionists sent Sharps carbines to 1850s "Bleeding Kansas" in crates marked "Books and Bibles." (see chapter 3). The press and public often promoted Sharps rifles as "Beecher's Bibles."[29]

Colt urged widespread adoption in the territories and used the violence to promote his brand. He frequently argued that wide ownership of his weapons in the American West could balance power and thus create peace. When he assumed the presidency of the Sonora Mining and Exploring Company in 1859, he pushed his products through advertisement. One Arizona newspaper promoted Colt himself as the epitome of American independence and the self-made man, describing him in his early years as "so poor that he mortgaged a lathe and other machinery to the Ames Manufacturing Company, to secure a debt of $750. Colt is now generally believed to be the richest man in Connecticut, and he has the most complete armory for the manufacture of firearms in the world. He is a successful inventor."[30] The article exemplifies the mythic common

Database, https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/about-this-collection/.

[24] Haag, 330-335.

[25] "Remington's Fire Arms," *Gold Hill Daily News*, September 12, 1870.

[26] "Fire Arms: Celebrated Breech loading Sporting and Hunting Rifles," *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, June 10, 1873; Similar advertisements: "Diagrams of Targets Made with a Remington Rifle," *American Agriculturalist*, January, 1873; "Remington's," *American Agriculturalist* (August 1872); "Col. Colt's Military and Sporting Rifles," 466.

[27] "Sharp's Patent Rifle," National Intelligencer, January 4, 1851; "New Species of Firearms," *Evansville Weekly Journal*, July 27, 1848; Joseph Slaughter, "Church of the Holy Rifles: Henry Ward Beecher and the Sharps Rifle Controversy," paper delivered at Current Perspectives on the History of Guns and Society - CSGS 2025 Fall Conference, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, October 11, 2025.

[28] From image of article published at Gettysburg National Military Park, "Memories of the Men in Green, Part 2 of 3," Blog, June 28, 2016; https://npsgnmp.wordpress.com/2016/06/28/memories-from-the-men-in-green-part-2-of-3/. The same image is also available at several auction sites: "Sharp Shooters Wanted," Berdan's Sharpshooters Sharps Rifle Civil War Recruitment Poster, eBay, accessed December 9, 2021.

[29] W. H. Isley, "The Sharp's Rifle Episode in Kansas History," *The American Historical Review* 12, no. 3 (1907), 546-566.

[30] Herbert G. Houze, *Colt Presentations from the Factory Ledgers, 1856-1869* (Mowbray, 2003), 49; Mario

man and rags-to-riches story perpetuated by Colt, his widow, and his company, and reveals how the man directly associated his personal story with the qualities of the gun itself.

Self-Branding

From the beginning of his entrepreneurship, Sam Colt developed his brand, which intertwined his personal story, his guns, and his factory, through storytelling. As noted in chapter 2, Samuel Colt and others spun so many versions of his life, it is difficult to discern which were true and which were fabricated. He often deliberately fused his persona with his product, ultimately creating a seamless brand. Colt's pistols and revolvers carried a reputation, one that closely aligned the man and the product with the image of the cavalry, the American West, and historical men of power. In 1857, Colt even commissioned his own portrait bust from sculptor Edward Sheffield Bartholomew, mimicking a classical Roman portrayal in robes, a not-so-subtle effort to depict himself as a prominent leader of thought within historical and intellectual traditions.[31]

Colt never earned a degree, nor did he engage in military service, but he sought to place himself and his arms within the purview of the U.S. Army, with the obvious goal of marketing his wares and the Colt name. When the Mexican-American War broke out in 1845, Colt contacted officers in New York and New Jersey, offering his patriotic services. Writing to New York General Jonathan B. Stevenson, Colt requested a commission as an officer and insisted, "In tendering you my service I beg permission to state that I am actuated by that sense of duty which every American owes his country in time of war, and a desire to distinguish myself in my country's service. My whole life has been devoted to military matters…." In reply, Colt received a brief note that all positions had been filled. Undaunted, Colt quickly turned to New Jersey General Samuel R. Hamilton, explaining that in 1837 the New Jersey legislature had passed a law directing the governor to purchase 240 of his repeating rifles, but the order had never been made. Colt was attempting to renew the requisition and promised that soldiers armed with his patent rifle would be extraordinary. "Such a battalion of men would do as much execution in a fight as a full regiment armed in the ordinary way, and their employment would prove a lasting honor to the state," insisted Colt. He then offered, "I would gladly take command of such a battalion, and lead them through any task, to the City of Mexico."[32]

Hamilton saw Colt's intention clearly: sales. "I ought not to be taxed with communications of gentlemen appertaining to their own business and personal interests," replied the general curtly. Colt shot back his own insult. "Be kind enough to inform me if I taxed you beyond the sheet of letter paper and five minutes time..." Frustrated, Colt penned a letter to New Jersey

DeBlasio, "Sonora Exploring and Mining Company, 1856-1861," M.A. thesis, University of San Diego, 1971, 66, 68. Advertisement, "Colts Revolving guns and pistols, manufactured and for sale by Col Samuel Colt Harford, CT," *The Weekly Arizonian* (Tubac, AZ), November 10, 1859; William H. Lyon, *Those Old Yellow Dog Days: Frontier Journalism in Arizona, 1859-1912* (Tucson: Arizona Historical Society, 1994), 66.

[31] "Colonel Colt's Pistols," *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 3, 1856; Edward Sheffield Bartholomew, "Bust of Col. Samuel Colt," c. 1857, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

[32] Samuel Colt to Colonel Jonathan B. Stevenson, July 1, 1846, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 2; Samuel Colt to General Samuel R. Hamilton, July 16, 1846, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 3.

Governor Charles C. Stratton, but he received a short reply from an adjutant general who merely acknowledged receipt of the letter. Still not satisfied, Colt then wrote to a friend from Trenton, A. Godwin, and asked him to advocate on Colt's behalf, only to be informed that the quartermaster general with whom Godwin had spoken related that "he agrees with me that you may give up all hopes of getting a command in New Jersey for the Mexican War."[33]

Colt historian James L. Mitchell surmises that "Colt felt a military commission would help him with government sales. A commission would permit him to circulate among army officers as an equal, as from this class came recommendations which many times led to the adoption of new model arms." Colt never received his much-desired commission during the Mexican-American War, but he never gave up on the goal. When Sam moved back to Hartford, he also sought out old and new friendships to further establish credibility as an industrial titan and firearms manufacturer. While his pistol was gaining a strong reputation among western miners and settlers, Colt's personal connections and transactional relationships with military and foreign leaders provided him with the type of credentials that allowed him access to global markets. His friend Thomas Seymour became Connecticut's governor in 1850 and appointed Sam "Aide de Camp to the Governor," with the rank of lieutenant colonel, in accordance with the 1847 Militia Act, which stipulated two classes of militia: active members and inactive. The position held no real military standing but provided Colt with the optics of being an officer. In short order, Colt contacted his friend J. D. Vinson of New York and arranged for a uniform to be sent. Vinson wrote, "You will receive the chapeau you dispatched for with the rest of your 'armament.' The 'army cap' will become you more than the old-fashioned chapeau. Should you wear it on parade it will *effectively smother* your fine head way down to your shoulders." Colt clearly reveled in his new role and at some point dropped the "lieutenant" in lieutenant colonel. Colt now claimed military rank and a particularly helpful title for selling military arms both at home and when representing his products to leaders abroad throughout the 1850s.[34] While in Washington in 1850, he sent a memorandum to the factory in Hartford requesting "a pack of visiting cards, Colonel Colt on them."[35]

Storytelling and Imagery

Legitimized in title and thus military credibility, Colt additionally enlisted local Connecticut symbols to establish his gravitas, such as the Charter Oak's story of ingenuity, defiance, and independence when the young colony defied the power of the crown by refusing to give up its charter. Such attributes readily applied to Colt, his workers, and the arms they produced. He located his factory adjacent to the site of the great tree and simultaneously constructed Charter Oak Hall, where he hosted local and state dignitaries and hoped to educate his workers. He commissioned artist Charles DeWolf Brownell (who may have been related to Colt's sister-

---

[33] General Samuel R. Hamilton to Samuel Colt, July 16, 1846, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 3; Samuel Colt to General Samuel R. Hamilton, July 16, 1846, in Mitchell, Colt, 4; Adjutant General A. Cadawalader to Samuel Colt, August 1, 1846, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 4-5.

[34] Edwards, 270.

[35] Mitchell, *Colt*, 5-6; Edwards, 270. Chapter 6 will discuss Colt's success in finally establishing a regiment during the Civil War.

in-law Theodora DeWolf) to paint a portrait of the tree with Colt's armory in the background, literally in the shadow of the great Charter Oak, as a symbol of Hartford and Connecticut. When the tree died soon afterward, Colt purchased and commissioned furnishings from its wood, including the Hartford mayor's chair and a cradle for Colt's own first born, carved by piano maker John H. Most, who inscribed it with a poem written by close Colt friend Lydia Sigourney. Sam's wife Elizabeth later had one of the covers of the Armsmear memorial book to Sam and his legacy carved out of the tree's wood.[36]

Just as he inserted the Colt factory and estate into the history of Hartford, Colt inserted his life story into the values, myths, and tropes of American independence and self-reliance, ingenuity and hard work. Newspaper and magazine articles told and retold the popular origin story of a young boy imagining a different kind of revolver on the *Corvo,* a tale also enshrined in the memorial book, *Armsmear,* in brochures, in catalogs and the later "Coltalogs," and in children's books. He took full advantage of his surname to affiliate with the attributes of a young horse and the association of the horse with military actions and western expansion. The Colt family coat of arms, which hailed originally from England dating back to the sixteenth century, depicted a horse running at full speed, which not only served as a play on the Colt name but traditionally symbolized loyalty in heraldry. For his purpose, to convey the youthful power and independence of a young horse, Sam Colt modified the image of a running horse by rearing the horse on its hind legs—in heraldry terms, rampant—sometimes with a center belt connotating the military and a spear firmly held in its mouth. The rearing animal is posed, presumably as in battle, having grabbed the spear (symbolizing valor) of an enemy, now broken, to protect its rider. Whereas a running horse expresses freedom, a rearing one conveys power. The image coalesced with images many had of the wild American West. When Colt built his factory in the South Meadow, he commissioned two nearly identical statues of a rampant colt, one to place atop the factory and one for the Armsmear garden, later enlisted to replace the other after fire destroyed the original factory. The "Rampant Colt" conveyed strength, power, and protection.[37]

The company experimented with the rampant colt as a visual trademark, what is now considered a logo, over several years. It appeared on stationery, in advertisements, and in the architecture and furnishings of the Coltsville estate. Yet during his lifetime, Colt only depicted the rampant colt on one production item, a box of tin-foil cartridges. Later the company featured the rampant colt directly on more of its products, and in 1872 it created a logo featuring a tiny image of the colt with the letter "C." In 1876, a company display of 350 guns featured a carved rampant colt in relief at the top of the case (now in the Museum of Connecticut History). The rampant colt appeared on such items as Paterson calling cards and bullet pouches, and variations on its original design appeared in catalogs and ads from the 1870s through the 1960s. In 1883, the company stamped it on the Burgess-Colt rifle. It appeared in ads for rifles and carbines, city directories, brochures, and catalogs. Despite the power of this symbol, the company did not

[36] Charles De Wolf Brownell, "The Charter Oak," 1857, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

[37] A motto often accompanying Colt's trademark translated from Latin to mean "He who suffers is victorious." The company later described the rampant colt in its publications as "raring to go." See R.L. Wilson, *The Rampant Colt: The Story of a Trademark* (Spencer, Indiana: Thomas Haas), 1969.

register the rampant colt as a trademark until February 19, 1890.[38] By the 1930s, the company used it in most of its print advertising. The monthly employee newsletter The Coltsman used it on its masthead in 1942.[39]

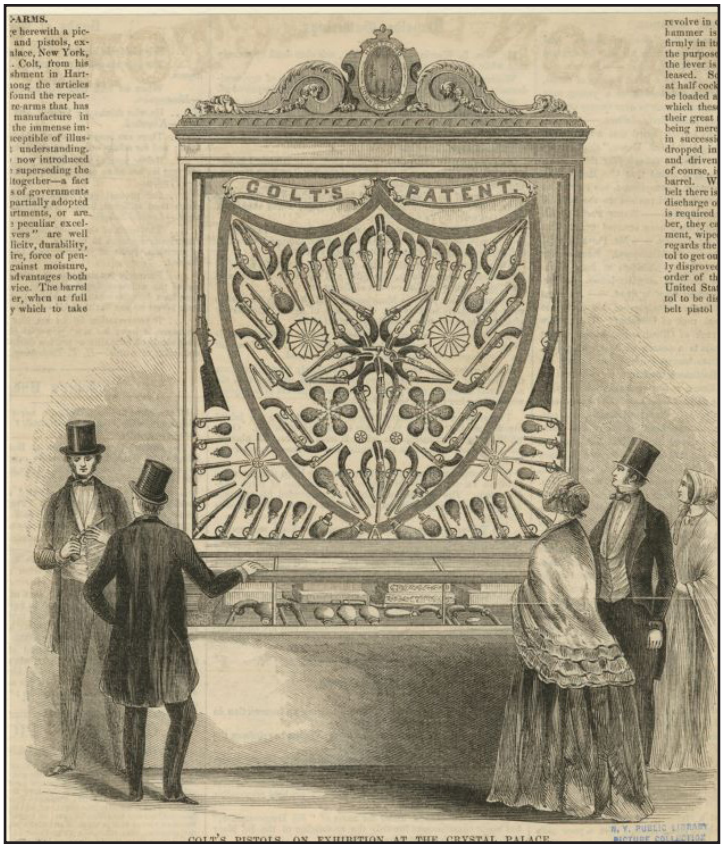


Figure 4.4 "Colt's pistols, on exhibition at the Crystal Palace," 1851. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed October 25, 2024. http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-ccb3-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.

International Exhibits

To bolster credentials in Europe, Colt took advantage of three-dimensional exhibit displays to impress potential buyers. Marketing historian Terence Witowski recounts Colt's "visual merchandising" at the world expositions held in London (1851), New York City (1853–1854), and Paris (1855).[40] Colt sent a trusted employee whom he had known since his time in Whitneyville, Thomas Peard, to the first 1851 Centennial Exposition in London's Crystal Palace, with strict instructions about tabling at the end of the hall. Peard brought several models of all

[38] Wilson, "The Rampant Colt,"15-17, 21-27, 34-37.
[39] "The Coltsman," Box 65, RG 103, Connecticut State Archives; Wilson, "The Rampant Colt," 53-55.
[40] Terrence H. Witowski, "A History of Visual Merchandising and American Firearms," *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 16 No. 4 (2024): 416-444.

different sizes (500 in all). Colt instructed him to "arrange the arms in as showy and tasteful manner as possible" and to allow people to handle the weapons' parts, but not to draw or fire the weapons.[41] (See 4.4).

The Robbins and Lawrence Company of Vermont also displayed rifles. Their boast about interchangeable parts attracted British military attention, since the British Board of Ordnance sought to manufacture a rifled musket far more quickly and cheaply than the traditional Birmingham system of gun-makers. However, Samuel Colt's elaborate and spectacular firearms display of his various models of six-shooters took the shape of a shield (see image), attracting even more attention.[42] Newspapers reported the Colt exhibit as one of the highlights of the exposition's American contingent. The popular *Scientific American* magazine reported about the event in a feature story.[43] The product intrigued Europeans not only for the benefits and quality of the product, but for Colt's manufacturing process, which used machines to make parts and relied on the division of labor rather than individual craftsmen who single-handedly created each product. This reception motivated Colt to open his London factory, which supplied revolvers to the British War Department and trained workers to operate the machines that could produce them at large scale. The British Institution of Civil Engineers invited Colt to speak about the machine-made system, awarding him the distinguished Telford Prize, and with it technological legitimacy that attracted still further attention.[44] Biographer Jack Rohan commented that the 1854, "hearing turned out to be excellent advertising, in and out of England, and revolver sales soared…."[45]

Such recognition spurred Colt to exhibit at America's first World's Fair, the New-York Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, which opened in July 1853. It was a much smaller venue than the one in London and focused on art, rather than industry. Undeterred, Colt sent a collection back to Europe in the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris, but this time, his marketing failed to impress at least one French skeptic. While Sam Colt often argued that his guns were "peace-makers," an official French commission commented that "they have been abused by all; filibusters, travelers, and friends of violence carry revolvers with them, the same in peaceful towns; under the slightest pretext they kill each other with an incredible fury. The new states, Texas, Louisiana, and above all, California, are signaled out by the frequency and ferocity of these assaults."[46]

---

41 Colt was fighting a patent infringement lawsuit at the time. Samuel Colt to Thomas Beard, Samuel Colt Correspondence 1848-1861, Box 1, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT (JRP-Yale).

42 Stewart, 5, 13.

43 "Colt's Pistols," *Scientific American* vii, December 27, 1851, 116.

44 Samuel Colt, "On the Application of Machinery to the Manufacture of Rotating Chambered-breech Fire-arms and Their Peculiarities." (United Kingdom: W. Clowes, January 1855), 3; excerpt minutes of proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers 11. Members of the British Institution of Civil Engineers extended an invitation to Sam Colt, the first American to receive such an invitation, to provide testimony on machine manufacturing. They were so impressed that the group bestowed upon Colt the prestigious Telford Award that year for his paper, "On the Application of Machinery to the Manufacture of Rotating Chambered-breech Fire-arms and Their Peculiarities."

45 Rohan, 219.

46 Quoted from Houze, in Witowski, "A History of Visual Merchandising and American Firearms," 422-423.

Free Samples, Gifts, Collectibles, and Fine Art

The displays at fairs offered spectators a chance to see objects and their features first-hand, rather than just read about them in articles and advertisements. Colt continually tried new methods for getting his products into customers' hands to encourage interest.[47] On May 1, 1860, he solicited several state governments through a form letter imploring them to order his "new arms of my invention and manufacture" for their militia. The letter provided "documentary evidence of these facts," the name of the local agent to demonstrate the products' functions, and a price sheet for muskets, pistols, rifles, and accessories such as artillery equipment, holsters, belts, and appendages.[48] Colt extended invitations to the public to experience his repeating rifles and revolvers in person at area hotels and thereby experience the "safety, simplicity, durability, accuracy of aim, force of penetration, and beauty of workmanship."[49]

Part of this solicitation strategy included the equivalent of free samples, often unique items with engravings on or around the cylinder. Samuel Colt gifted customized weapons in luxurious mahogany presentation cases to friends and to national and world leaders. These pieces were so intricate and artistic that Colt's weapons became and remain collector's and auction items. Scenes inspired by German scrollwork and designed by German engravers like Cuno A. Helfricht, Herman Bodenstein, John Marr, and Gustave Young and American Daniel Stevens depicted wagon trains, stagecoach hold-ups, fights against Native people, maritime battles, and even George Washington. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, such scenes served to suggest the many uses for and the users of Colt firearms, including self-defense and patriotism.[50] These "presentation firearms" essentially served as a thank you for favors performed or anticipated, such as testimonials or positive reviews in newspapers, or cultivating contracts. The products differed from standard issue, often highly decorated with patriotic American imagery and sometimes personalized. They came in quality cases of oak or mahogany lined with felt or another luxurious product.[51] (See 4.5). Colt distributed at least sixty revolvers (double-cased sets) for Union military officers, with the full understanding that the men could be charged with a conflict of interest in accepting them as gifts. In those cases, an enclosed note stated that it was the officer's private property until Colt asked for it back. In all, Colt made an estimated 2,500 custom pistols between 1851 and 1862. In May 1854 alone the company produced twenty-four finely engraved Navy revolvers and fifty-three small pistols.[52]

Colt sent letters of solicitation to those he viewed as embattled leaders, such as Brigham Young in Utah Territory in 1851, to whom he also sent a customized presentation case and revolving pistol. By several accounts, Colt admired Young, and that is likely why Colt gifted him a pistol

---

47 Outgoing Correspondence C-H, 1856, RG 103, CSLA.

48 Samuel Colt, May 1860, "State Militias," Box 6, RG 103, CSLA.

49 See "Correspondence/ Outgoing: General" 1839 (from S. Colt), RG 103, CSLA

50 James E. Serven, *Colt Firearms*, 1836-1954 (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1954), 153; Three examples are on exhibit in the "Arms and Armor" room of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY.

51 Wilson, 125; Rohan, 23-234; "Engraved Pistols," bill and receipts, Box 1, RG 103, CSLA; R.L. Wilson, *Colt: An American Legend*, 125.

52 "Engraved Pistols," Bills and Receipts, 1854, Box 6, RG 103, CSLA.

kit through his agent, H.E. Dimick. The custom inscriptions around the cylinder included depictions of hardships of the overland trail.[53] The strategy worked. Young accepted the gift and purchased "several hundred revolvers, paying cash." He wrote to Colt, "I received per the hand of his Hon. Perry E. Brocchus, Associate Judge of the United States Court for Utah, one of your justly celebrated revolving pistols medium size—I take pleasure in saying that I consider it not only one of the best of the kind, but the best kind of arms, known as pistols, that I have any knowledge of.… Be pleased to accept my thanks for the present, which I shall always esteem a favor to have the privilege of honorably using, when duty shall require in the defence of the innocent, or the punishment of the guilty."[54] In response to the purchase, the competing gentile (non-Mormon) stores nearby reportedly began stocking Colt revolvers.[55]

Colt presented an intricately decorated, gold-inlaid, engraved Dragoon model revolver set to Czar Nicholas I in 1854 to persuade him to use Colts in the waging of the Crimean War (1853-1856). He saw opportunity in Europe's mid-nineteenth-century conflicts and took advantage of the new appointment of his friend, former Connecticut Governor Thomas Seymour, as the United States minister to Russia to cultivate contacts with Russian diplomats and eventually the czar. Courting orders from Russia's enemies as well, Colt gifted the sultan of Turkey and British officer James Brudenell, also known as Lord Cardigan, a London Colt Navy revolver. And around the same time, he presented similar gifts to French General Aimable-Jean-Jacques Pélissier Napoleon III of France and Prince Albert. Vice Ambassador Muragaki Norimasa and the samurai delegation in 1860 received a custom engraved Model 1855 military revolving rifle, while dignitaries like the King of Siam (1858) and the King of Denmark (1861) received full sets. Colt reserved some of these treasures for friends, including his manager Elisha Root, newspaper editor Horace Greeley, and prominent figures like artist George Catlin.[56] The personalized gifts encouraged sales and testimonials, but also raised Colt firearms from a product to a collectible, a status symbol, and even fine art.

Product Placement in Art

In addition to exhibits and gifts, Colt leaned on the visual arts to elevate his business and products. The company continued featuring Colt's factory and firearms in paintings, literature, and film long after his death, thus adding context for the products' many uses. Many scholars attribute the well-known advertising strategy of product placement, in part to Samuel Colt.

---

[53] Presentation case, "Brigham Young Colt Model 1849," https://www.rockislandauction.com/detail/67/1222/brigham-young-colt-model-1849-pocket-percussion-revolver.

[54] Letter to Samuel Colt, November 29, 1851, Brigham Young Center, Salt Lake City, UT, https://brighamyoungcenter.org/.

[55] Haag, 34. Also see Edwards and Rohan.

[56] Wilson, 125; Historic and Magnificent Cased and Engraved Colt Model 1851 Navy Revolvers Presented to the Commander of the Light Brigade, Rock Island, Ill, May 16, 2021, https://www.rockislandauction.com/detail/82/3136/model-1851-navy-revolvers-presented-by-colt-to-lord-cardigan; Colt Third Model Dragoon Percussion Revolver, serial no. 12406, 1853, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/24960; Joe Engasser, "Samurai Gun: Colt's Gift to Muragaki Norimasa," April 21, 2022, https://www.rockislandauction.com/riac-blog/samurai-gun-colt-revolving-rifle.

Between the Mexican-American War and the Civil War, Sam Colt commissioned twelve paintings from George Catlin.[57] (See 4.1).



Figure 4.5 A finely engraved Colt 1861 Navy revolver, right view. An inset shows the backstrap, which is engraved with "To Hon Horace Greeley from Colts Pt F.A. Mfg Co Feby 5th 1863." Greeley was publisher of the *New York Tribune*. PG 460, Box 9, Folder 5, Item 2, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720217363.

The two men met at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exposition in London and maintained a friendship back in Connecticut. Like Colt, Catlin was adventurous and somewhat of a showman. Catlin originally trained as a lawyer in Litchfield, Connecticut, but instead moved toward his passion for art and documenting the American West. He accompanied the famous explorer William Clark, who by then served as the superintendent of Indian affairs in the West, gaining through him introductions to Indigenous people in the western territories. In the 1830s Catlin made five trips to the region, traveling thousands of miles over the course of seven years, to paint images of Plains Indians and record their way of life. Considering himself a witness to a vanishing people, he used his gallery to "rescue from oblivion so much of their primitive looks and customs." Many wealthy Americans at the time enlisted portraiture to memorialize loved ones, including Elizabeth Colt, and Catlin aimed to do the same for Indian people. His highly popular Indian Gallery helped coin the ideas of the "Noble Savage" and the "Vanishing Indian."[58] Widely

[57] "Arming the Hunters," in Philip Dray, *The Fair Chase: The Epic Story of Hunting in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

[58] As quoted in "The John Bull," in George Catlin, "Catlin's Notes of Eight Years' Travels and Residence in Europe." (United Kingdom: George Catlin, 1848), 217.

distributed in the United States and abroad, Catlin's paintings and subsequent prints established some of the most iconic images of a region and helped develop what historians have referred to as the "West of the Imagination." In 1832 alone, Catlin produced 150 paintings, and by 1837 he achieved fame with his Indian gallery, followed by a traveling wild west show, a precursor to the Buffalo Bill version. Historian William Goetzmann observes that Catlin depicted western landscapes as "enameled brightly colored Eden peopled with noble warriors."[59] It was into this lush landscape that Sam Colt wanted to insert his products.

While Catlin memorialized Native cultures in his most notable works, Sam Colt advocated his firearms as the surest way to tame those very same peoples. Rather than continue to use a disembodied sketch of a revolver, he asked Catlin to contextualize a Colt product in use. He chose six of Catlin's twelve pieces to make into lithographs for mass reproduction and distribution. The paintings mostly depicted Catlin's South American adventures, featuring himself using and manipulating the Colt pistol "in the field," perhaps to promote the weapons to a South American market, with the lone artist-explorer-hunter shooting flamingos. Others focused on the American West, with Catlin featuring himself on horseback, on an escapade shooting the bison of America's Great Plains, protecting companions from wild animals, and demonstrating his firepower to Native peoples. In other images, Native people are shown cowering in fear.[60] Catlin biographer Benita Eisler wonders "whether Catlin, the early environmentalist, ever reflected upon the irony that his only subsidy came from promoting the principal weapon of mass destruction of native peoples and wildlife."[61]

Regardless, Catlin took the job. He often squandered his earnings, as indicated by a March 1861 letter to Colt in which he asked for a loan in exchange for unpublished works depicting the Rocky Mountains. The artist took much delight from the rifle that Colt gifted him, naming it "Sam." In his writings, *Life Among the Indians: A Book for Youth and Last Rambles Amongst the Indians of the Rocky Mountains and the Andes*, both published in the 1860s, Catlin boasted, "a six-shot carbine made expressly for me by my old friend Colonel Colt and which answers to the nickname of Sam, always lying before me during the day and in my arms during the night, by which a tiger's or alligator's eye, at a hundred yards, was sure to drop a red tear.…" During his South American travels, Catlin disdained the use of blowguns and poisoned arrows: "I don't wish to poison anybody! and game enough 'Sam' in my formal travels." Catlin was so confident that, before an ostrich hunt in Argentina, he claimed: "I …with 'Sam' in hand and a six-shot revolver in my belt, was considered equal to a war party."[62]

---

[59] William H. Goetzmann and William N. Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination* (New York: Norton, 1986), 44-68.

[60] Benita Eisler, *The Red Man's Bones: George Catlin, Artist and Showman* (New York: Norton and Company, 2013), 382-383; George Catlin to Samuel Colt, March 1, 1861, Box 1, JRP-Yale.

[61] Eisler, 383.

[62] Eisler, 382; *American Heritage* 19:4 (June, 1968) https://www.americanheritage.com/catlin-colt; George Catlin, *Life Among the Indians* (United Kingdom: Gall & Inglis, 1870), 228; George Catlin, *Last Rambles Amongst the Indians of the Rocky Mountains and the Andes* (United Kingdom: Sampson Low, Son and Marston, 1868), 219, 282.

Colt enlisted other Connecticut artists to create powerful imagery around the armory and in the Harford landscape. In 1857 he commissioned at least two pieces to depict the working factory.[63] An unknown artist painted a view of the Colt factory from Dutch Point at the Little River confluence and a second view from the opposite shore, this one featuring a steamship. The paintings depict a peaceful early industrial scene with a clear view of the rear of the factory, the Connecticut River dotted with sailboats, and a thin trail of smoke flowing out of the factory and echoing wispy clouds across the sky. They are a classic depiction of what historian Leo Marx refers to as "the machine in the garden," the rural-industrial aesthetic that maintained American agrarian ideals while embracing technological progress and economic prosperity, most often seen in artistic renderings of the steam train barreling through spectacular natural landscapes (See 5.7).[64] The company would continue to commission artists to make engravings of Colt factories, including the one in London on the Thames. One 1874 engraving depicted the Coltsville industrial village, including smoke, trees, and the train. Another engraving showed "Col. Colt dispatching a shipload of arms from the dock on Connecticut River," alongside an image of the young Colt carving on the *Corvo*.[65]

Discounts

With the vast expansion of his customer base, Sam Colt, and later his company, offered discount prices to officers of the regular army, navy, and marine corps to maintain military loyalty. The Colt company remained firm on the final sale value of each of its products, but it also offered discounts to agents and sellers to allow them a higher profit margin. For years the company negotiated discounts to state organizations like the Texas Rangers, with individuals allowed to purchase products from the adjutant general at a military discount. Sometimes buyers requested a custom item, often featuring adjustments to existing models, or for older models.[66]

An 1873-1880 letter book from "The Allies," a conglomeration of gun dealers that was tasked with cultivating customers, negotiated discounts, and enjoyed exclusivity, makes note of Colt's offering a not-so-successful deal of an extra 10 percent of profits for every number sold over that specified by contract. Agents could prove useful as partners in the face of competition. In 1889 a Colt agent in the South noticed a demand for Winchesters in anticipation of a "race war," so the C. G. Meacham Arms Company papered Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida with circulars and ran ads in daily papers for Colt rifles.[67]

---

[63] These were part of Elizabeth Colt's bequest to the Wadsworth Atheneum.

[64] "View of the Colt Factory from Dutch Point," 1857, and "View of the Colt Works with Steamboat from the South, Colt Meadows," 1857, Wadsworth Atheneum.

[65] "Publications," RG 103, Box 70, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.

[66] Memorandum, 1909, RG 103, Box 61, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.

[67] Allies Rebate Account, Box 1, Allies Letter Book, Allies Price List, Box 11A, Pricing, Box 61; C. G. Meacham Arms Company to Colt's, RG 103, September 30, 1889, General Correspondence, 1889, Box 18, CSLA.

Celebrity Endorsements

In her book *The Drama of Celebrity*, Sharon Marcus argues that modern celebrity arose along with technology as a product of the industrial age, urbanization, and the separation of work from leisure time.[68] For at least eight decades, Colt's products enjoyed the endorsement of some of the most prominent celebrities of the day, combining the marketing strategies of testimonial and product placement. Colt even furnished P.T. Barnum's celebrities with his pieces: Jenny Lind received a mini-pistol and Tom Thumb a custom-engraved, small-sized, shoulder-stocked Navy revolver.[69]

One particular entertainment venue further cemented the Colt as a central image in western expansion and settlement. The association of Colt's products with highly popular wild west shows from the 1870s into the twentieth century allowed the Colt company to promote, highlight, and exaggerate the singular role of Colt's pistols and revolvers in western conquest. Some entrepreneurs, like former Indian scout and self-described "Indian fighter" William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, took advantage of public nostalgia for the western frontier and the Indian Wars of the 1830s-1870s. By the 1880s, most Native tribes had submitted militarily to treaties with the federal government, confining communities that once migrated and hunted over vast acres to settlement on government reservations. As with Barnum's shows, wage workers, many of them immigrants whose monotonous and tedious industrial jobs made them hungry for popular entertainment, spent their money at Wild West shows. Most performances for audiences outside of the upper class featured minstrel shows and novelty acts, much like Sam's 1830s alter ego "Dr. Coult." In Cody's show, which traveled nationally and worldwide into the early twentieth century, Cody himself assumed the character of "Buffalo Bill," whose performance recreated the greatest battles in the West. He even enlisted members of the Lakota Sioux tribe, which augmented the act's credibility and realism. And he featured firearms, not only in these reenactments, but also in acts featuring such popular performers as Phoebe Anne Mosey, known as Annie Oakley. As a fifteen-year-old in 1875, Oakley proved her skills as a sharpshooter. The two joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in 1885, where she became a major star performing all kinds of trick-shooting, including with her back to the target with a mirror. The Colt company took out a full-page ad that noted that "Little Miss Sure Shot" used a Colt revolver in daily exhibition work with the "Young Buffalo Wild West" at Vernon C. Seaver's Hippodrome.[70] In January 1888 Oakley asked the Colt company to make a custom .22 Colt rifle with a shortened grip. According to a correspondence file in the Connecticut State Archives, the company obliged. An accompanying newspaper article from May 1888 boasted that Oakley used a Colt repeating rifle to shoot balls tossed in the air. Not surprisingly, it was a good investment. Oakley enjoyed international fame, performing for royalty abroad and throughout the United States. These events

---

[68] Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[69] R. L. Wilson, Samuel Colt Presents: A Loan Exhibition of Presentation Percussion Colt Firearms, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, November 3, 1961 to January 14, 1962 (Hartford: 1961), 125, 131; Wilson, R. L. *The Book of Colt Engraving* (Los Angeles: W. Beinfeld Publications, 1974).

[70] Johnny Baker to Colt's, July 17, 1888; Ed B. White to Colt's, 1889; George L. Behueu to Colt's, December 23, 1889, Correspondence, 1889, 1890, George Sickels, Healy and Bigelow, Correspondence, May-October, 1890, Box 18, Vernon Seaver Advertisement featuring Annie Oakley (Box 77), RG 103, CSLA.

broadened the acceptance of sport-shooting and opened the door for modified products designed especially for women.[71]

Other celebrities using Colt's guns in their shows included expert marksman Johnny "The Cowboy Kid" Baker, actor Ed B. White (a.k.a Sunflower Ed), and George "Buckeye George" Behueus, trick shooter C.A. Damon, who juggled two Colt six-shooters and performed trick-shooting, and George Sickels, who used a carbine for shooting glass balls and marbles. Will Ament, who was part of a "Sensational Comedy Shooting Sketch" with his wife Winnie Nicholson also solicited Colt's for special models, as did Wild Burt, the "Rifle Shot and Pistol Twirler."[72] Tom Mix began his career in Seaver's "Young Buffalo Wild West" show in the 1920s and went on to become a silent film star. He regularly endorsed Colts and even provided photographs for use in marketing to South America.[73] Silent film actors like Joseph J. Dowling and Mix requested arms from Colt's. Such performers who boasted their superior abilities, like Mix and "Texas Jack" Sullivan, handled a .44 Colt's pistol. "Texas Jack" claimed to be the world's fastest revolver shot, comparing himself to other accomplished gunmen such as "Wild Bill" Hickok, and "Bat" Masterson. A poster titled "Gun-Play" depicted Mix pointing the end of the gun barrel, presumably a Colt, at the viewer.[74]

The association of the Colt product with the attributes of danger and adventure proved very successful. Eventually this visibility transferred to motion pictures. Some of the earliest Hollywood feature films were westerns in which actors used Colts or Winchesters, creating an intimate introduction for those not familiar with the weapons. A Colt pistol first appeared in the classic silent film *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). Directed by Edwin S. Porter, the short film ends with the leader of the bandits who robbed the train looking directly into the camera. As in "Gun-Play," he points his six-shooter, a Colt 1878 Double Action revolver, directly at the camera and begins shooting all six shots. He pulls the trigger an additional three times before finally lowering the gun, while the audience, the seeming targets, sits vulnerable.[75]

Possibly the most famous actor to bring Colt firearms to the silver screen during the silent era was William S. Hart, who grew up in Dakota Territory alongside the Sioux. He began acting in 1914, at age 49, starring in his first feature-length film as a stagecoach robber in *The Bargain* (1914).[76] As the face of western-genre cinema before John Wayne, Hart used a Colt in almost every movie in which he was an actor, director, producer, or writer.[77] The collection of the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American History includes his Colt 1851 Navy revolver prop gun, seen in films like *Wagon Tracks* (1919), *The Testing Block* (1920), and

---

71 Incoming correspondence, 1888, Box 18, RG103, CSLA.

72 September 16, September 18, RG103, Internal Correspondence, 1888, Box 18, RG 103, CSLA.

73 Tom Mix endorsement, March 1, 1922, RG103, Correspondence/Incoming, Box 18, RG 103, CSLA.

74 JJ Dowling to LC Groves, August 21, 1889, General Correspondence, 1889, RG 103, CSLA; Box 18, Publications, Box 77, RG 103, CSLA.

75 "The Great Train Robbery (1903)," Internet Movie Firearms Database, https://www.imfdb.org/wiki/The_Great_Train_Robbery_(1903); "The Local Field," *Perry Daily Chief* (Perry, Iowa), July 30, 1904.

76 *The Bargain*, directed by Reginald Barker (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1914).

77 Michael K. Schoenecke, "William S. Hart: Authenticity and the West," in *Shooting Stars: Heroes and Heroines of Western Film*, Archie P. McDonald. Ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1-19.

White Oak (1921).[78] The public so closely associated Hart with the 1851 Navy revolver that a journalist, reporting on a couple on the lam for moonshining, reported that "…They found in a drawer a regular 'William S. Hart' gun. It was a .45 Colt, ten inches long; big enough to hold the fort against a police squad…."[79] In 1950 the Colt brand earned its own feature film, about a Colt gun salesman, entitled simply *Colt .45*.

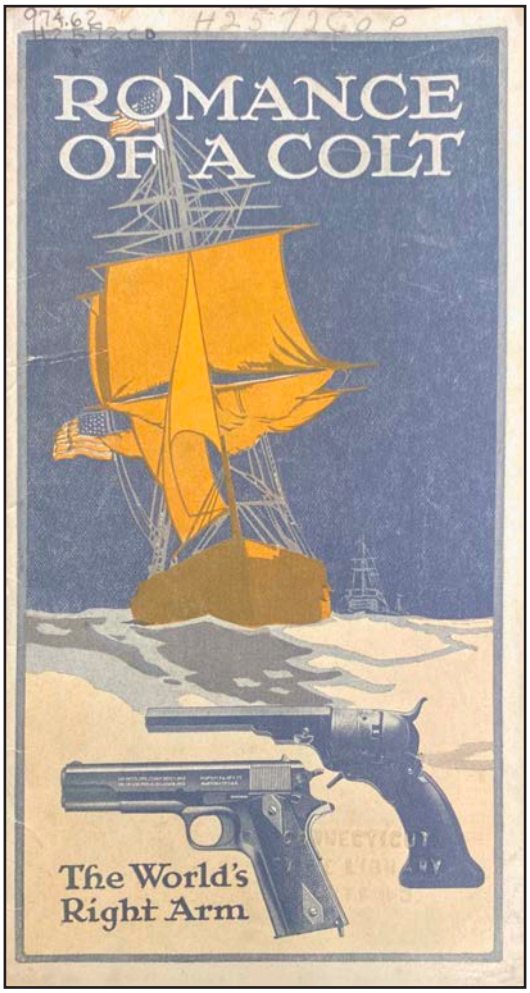


Figure 4.6 "Romance of a Colt," RG 103, Box 68, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.

Selling History and Nostalgia

Increasingly, print advertisements situated revolvers within the lives of ordinary people.[80] The strategy following the Civil War courted a broad civilian consumer base beyond those involved in western settlement or domestic warfare. The company advertised to farmers and others

[78] Anjuli M. Singh, "Treasures from Hollywood's Silent Era [Part 1]," National Museum of American History, May 30, 2017, https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/treasures-hollywoods-silent-era-part-1.
[79] "Draws Prison Sentence," *Kenosha Evening News*, February 28, 1924.
[80] Haag, 330-31.

interested in novelty and technology, placing ads in popular magazines like *Scientific American*, *American Agriculturist*, and the *Rural New Yorker*. A March 2, 1872 story in *Scientific American* featured the Colt Camel Gatling Gun, designed for use from the back of a camel, for a feature story on Gatling's designs.[81]

As manufacturing, industry, and urbanization challenged America's agrarian identity and tradition in the early twentieth century, Colt's capitalized on the myth and characterizations of the American West, reflecting nostalgia for the long-gone "frontier" and anxiety about modern urban life. The company's catalog, Romance of a Colt: The World's Right Arm, combined a definitive illustrated narrative of the company, including the lore of its founder, alongside its products. The catalog, published through the 1930s, enlisted narratives that continued a long-effective strategy integrating Colt's product into the popular imagination.[82] (See 4.6).

With the United States's entry into World War I, one campaign emphasized a history of government contracts. The company adopted a new logo, a prominent "C," at the start of its campaigns "The Colt—the Protected Progress of America," "The World's Right Arm," and "Colt: The Standard of the Firearms World."[83] Colt produced war posters during World War I. Some asked the consumer to "put your trust in the Colt name—your country does."[84] World War I posters featured elaborate illustrations and artwork asking Americans to support the war through bonds, using patriotic language to cultivate a civilian market during and after the war with slogans like "The Guns that Stopped the Huns Over There" meant to encourage civilians to continue to purchase them.[85]

Selling Safety and Protection

While Sam Colt himself repeatedly characterized his product as a tool for deterring war and promoting Jacksonian values of self-reliance, it was reportedly one of Colt's Cincinnati-based distributors (B. Kittredge and Company) that coined the name "Peacemaker" as a marketing moniker in 1874.[86] With the turn of the century, company leaned on name recognition and stressed tradition. Ads began to argue that gunmaker John Browning's automatic and

---

[81] "The Gatling Battery Gun (fig. 1)" *Scientific American* 26:10, (March 2, 1872), 143.

[82] "Romance of the Colt," Advertisements, Box 68, RG 103, CSLA. See Elliott West. "Selling the Myth: Western Images in Advertising." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 46:2 (1996), 36–49.

[83] Collier's *The National Weekly* 66 (October 2, 1920), 28.

[84] "Colt: The Standard of the Firearms World," New York Public Library Digital Collections, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-cdb2-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99; Colt Firearms Advertising Poster, https://www.liveauctioneers.com/price-result/colt-firearms-advertising-poster/, February 14, 2025.

[85] American advertisement for Colt Firearms, 1919, Fine Art America, https://fineartamerica.com/featured/ad-colt-firearms-1919-granger.html, accessed December 22, 2025; John Ogle, *The Book of Colt Paper* (Minneapolis: Blue Book Publications, 2011), 290.

[86] "The Entire History of the Colt Single Action Army Revolver," *Popular Mechanics*, November 23, 2020; "B. Kittredge and Company," *Turf, Field and Farm*, October 30, 1874, in Terrence H. Witkowski, "Early Brand Development in the U.S. Firearms Industry," Conference on Historical Analysis and research in Marketing (CHARM), Proceedings 15, 2011, 201. https://ojs.library.carleton.ca/index.php/pcharm/article/view/1462

semiautomatic pistols (produced by the Colt Company) and pocket hammerless Colt pistols played to notions of personal safety among the millions of Americans (now thirty percent) who lived in cities. Engravings and illustrations in Colt's magazine print ads did not distinguish between military and personal self-defense. The ads explained the safety mechanism, the ease of carry design, and even questioned whether the family dog offered the same level of protection in the home.[87] (See 4.7 and 4.8).

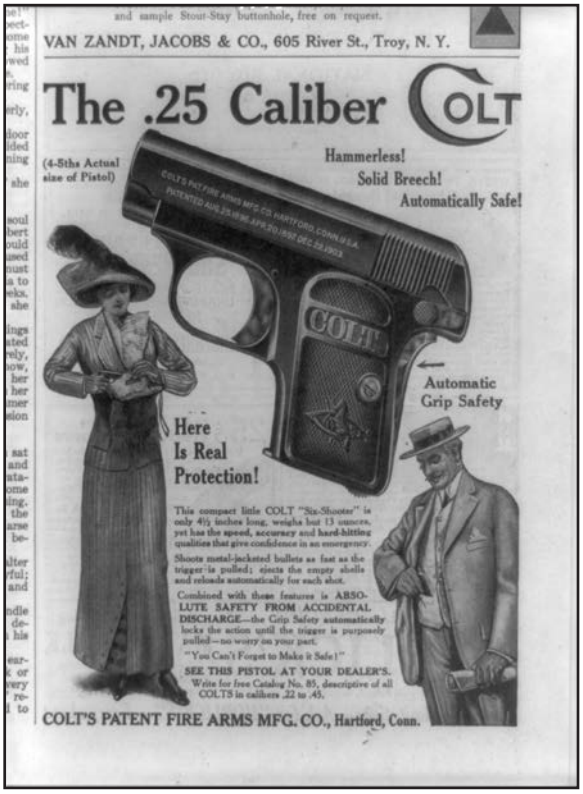




Figure 4.7 (left) *The .25 Caliber Colt*, 1912, Photograph, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. https://www.loc.gov/item/90709417/.
Figure 4.8 (right) *The Literary Digest* 71 (November 12, 1921): 78.

By the early twentieth century Colt's became more sophisticated with print advertisements, creating templates "that told the Colt story," that helped maintain control of the narrative through a consistent brand. The company wrote to its dealers that "WE advertise to create a demand on YOU for our arms…."[88] It was through these narratives that Colt's argued that their product was critical not only to national defense but to personal defense as well. During the inter-war period of the 1920s, one ad featured just a .32 caliber automatic pistol lying on a desk in a home, with the headline "Protection- Where most needed." Another series depicted a Colt being used in different conflicts, through illustrations in four corners—with center text emphasizing these

[87] "Historical Firearms," https://www.historicalfirearms.info/post/72598963382/colt-automatic-pistol-adverts-pt2-in-1900-colt#google_vignette.
[88] Haag, 328-332.

models: 1848, 1861, 1898, and 1918. The "Protection" series imagery ranged from a castle door and moat to a lighthouse to scenes featuring families and police officers. Stories published as advertisements appeared in the most popular magazines of the day: *Collier's The National Weekly*, *American Illustrated Magazine*, *Outing Magazine*, *Time Magazine*, and *LIFE*. They described various forms of modern "piracy," articulating the need for a gun in the automobile to provide backup to the police, or in the home, where the advertisement claimed the gun would prevent 90 percent of home burglaries.[89]

The company advertised in popular literary magazines, placing Colt firearms visually and contextually in the urban space of the office and family home and appealing to personal safety and security. Most narratives implied a risk of burglary in banks, businesses, or homes. Written as a two-column story in the fiction magazine *Adventure*, the advertisement series "Once in Every Man's Life" featured woodcut illustrations and recorded a series of close calls, saved only because of the Colt revolver. The 1916 and 1917 print ads featured different heroes who rescued themselves because they carried a Colt weapon. These included "The Paymaster's Story" and stories featuring the night watchman, the automobilist, the doctor, the camper, policeman, and female schoolteacher. Another warned of the risk of not carrying a Colt, pointing out that "A Colt revolver might save your money and your life." A 1913 advertisement depicted a burglar, hands in the air, as the homeowner stops him cold, with the headline "The Colt Way."[90] (See 4.9).

While Annie Oakley provided an ideal symbol to reach a new gendered market in sport-shooting in the late nineteenth century, by the early 1900s, with America not involved in military conflict, gun manufacturers aimed for new customers in urban women. They designed guns smaller and streamlined, usually hammerless and with a solid breech. Small pistols could fit nicely into a purse, or, for a man concerned about danger in the city, a coat pocket.[91] At Colt, the names of five pocket pistol designs included words like "little," "pony," "ladies," and "pet." The 1908 Hammerless Automatic pistol (.25 caliber) was "small enough for a vest pocket or lady's handbag," and advertisements featured a woman in full Victorian fashion, feathered hat and all, placing one pistol into her purse; she could be assured of "Speed, accuracy, and penetration that give confidence in an emergency, along with assurances of safety." The text expanded on the safety issue, so we can assume that this was of concern for potential female consumers.[92]

---

[89] *Collier's The National Weekly* 66, October 2, 1920, 28; *Outing Magazine: The Outdoor Magazine of Human Interest*, 1922, 80-82: *American Illustrated Magazine*, 90, 117; *Outing Magazine: The Outdoor Magazine of Human Interest*, 77, 1921; Everybody's Magazine 42, 1920; *American Magazine*, 93, 1922; *Saturday Evening Post*, 195, Issues 1-9; *The Sunset* 48, 1922; *Argosy All Story Weekly*, April 29, 1922.

[90] "Once in Every Man's Life: The Night Watchman's Story," *Literary Digest* (July 1, 1916), 42; "Once in Every Man's Life: The School Teacher's Story," *Literary Digest* (September 2, 1916) 587l.
"Hello, central emergency call police, please!" The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, New York Public Library Digital Collections, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-3635-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99; "Once in Every Man's Life: The Jeweler's Story," *Adventure*, 35 (1922).

[91] Goodrum and Dalrymple, 31.

[92] Haag, 167; Advertisement, Display Case, Colt Collection, Connecticut State Library; see also, Laura Browder, *Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006).



Figure 4.9 "Once in Every Man's Life: The Jeweler's Story," *Literary Digest* (November 11, 1916), 1282.

The company still capitalized on the nostalgia of the western frontier when promoting protection, with advertisements featuring people who used the guns and the places where they used them rather than on the product itself. Colt's hired artist-illustrator Frank Schoonover, whose paintings appeared in the country's most popular magazines from 1906 through the 1930s, to provide the illustrations for a series of posters and for its catalog cover. In 1925 Schoonover sketched depictions of frontiersmen with a Colt revolver in their holster, or in one case, beside them at a campfire, clearly leaning into the mythic West that had emerged from Wild West shows, dime novels, and films. The cover of the catalog featured *Tex and Patches* (also known as "The Frontier Sheriff") and captioned "*The* Arm of Law *and* Order." With a western landscape as a backdrop, a frontier sheriff sits atop his trusty horse, with a Colt's revolver tucked into his holster. Schoonover was not a surprising choice, since the American West inspired his best-known illustrations; those posters are now worth thousands of dollars at auction. *Tex and Patches* appeared on the cover of Charles Seltzer's novel The Range Boss, but the Colt company produced three versions of the poster: one in Spanish, one in English, and one without any text at all. The English version included the "Colt's" trademark, with the large "C," and the tagline "The Arm of Law and Order." Emblazoned across the bottom was the company name.[93] The wide

[93] Nicholas Lowry appraisal, Antiques Road Show, Episode 28, Season 21, PBS, April 4, 2016; https://pbswisconsin.org/watch/antiques-roadshow/antiques-roadshow-appraisal-frank-schoonover-colt-poster-ca-1925/,

distribution of this image, and its association with Colt's, continued to offer visibility a century later.

In 1926 the company published *Makers of History: A Story of the Development of the History of Our Country and the Part Played in It by the Colt*. The book recalled western conquest and literally wrote the use of Colt's revolver into the history of the American West through all the characters of the frontier since the 1840s: the explorer, the scout, the settler, the cowboy, the lawman, the hunter, etc.[94] In addition to the association with the nineteenth-century western "frontier," films associated Colts with twentieth-century crime, too. Josef von Sternberg's *Underworld* (1927) launched the American gangster film into the spotlight, and with it the Colt firearm. A shootout in the film features the Thompson, or Tommy, gun, an iconic submachine gun, with several clear shots of a Colt-made Tommy gun, again cementing the image of a Colt product within an era and genre. Both Browning's revolver design and the Tommy gun made it into the toy market.[95]

The 1920s campaign "Colt's: *The* Arm of Law *and* Order," also took advantage of the proliferation of magazines and the highly visual print advertising of the 1920s to market Colt's firearms to a civilian audience. (See 4.10). It also returned to previous campaigns that emphasized technological progress and the nation's history of western expansion by conflating them. Publications like *Elks Magazine* and the National Rifle Association's *American Rifleman* featured a series of detailed engraving illustrations associating Colt's with major, events in American history, particularly western expansion: the Pony Express, the Gold Rush, the Panama Canal, and probably most effectively, the life of the cowboy on the ranch, who according to the ad protected himself from "savage tribes" and "bands of cattle thieves," playing on the cowboy image promoted in wild west shows and popular dime novels. The copy read, "A Colt Revolver inspires confidence in the hand that holds it, whether soldier, sailor, or marine, officer, or private citizen." They also emphasized safety by including a cut-out view of the locking mechanism. These campaigns placed Colt's product within a realistic visual rendering of history, framing firearms as devices of protection rather than tools for military conquest and implying that America's pioneers trusted Colt weapons to keep them safe and.[96]

a poster was appraised from between $4000-6000; "Tex and Patches," 1926, Box 11, Series 3, 1926, PG 460, CSLA; Tex and Patches Images, Frank Schoonover Catalogue, Norman Rockwell Museum, https://www.frankschoonover.org/tag/colt/; Ogle *The Book of Colt Paper*, 292-3.

94 F. Romer, *Makers of History: A Story of the Development of the History of Our Country and the Part Played in It by the Colt*. Hartford, Conn.: Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing, 1926.

95 *Underworld*, directed by Josef von Sternberg (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1927); Terrence H. Witkowski, "Toy Guns in America: Marketing, Children's Play, and Social Unease," *Journal of Macromarketing* 44, no. 4 (2024), 813-842.

96 "Colt Advertisements," Elks Magazine (January 1926), *Picryl: The World's Largest Public Domain Media Search Engine*, https://renopenrose.getarchive.net/media/colt-revolver-ad-1926-01-3ba569; "The Panama Canal," *American Rifleman* 74: 11 (December 12, 1926).

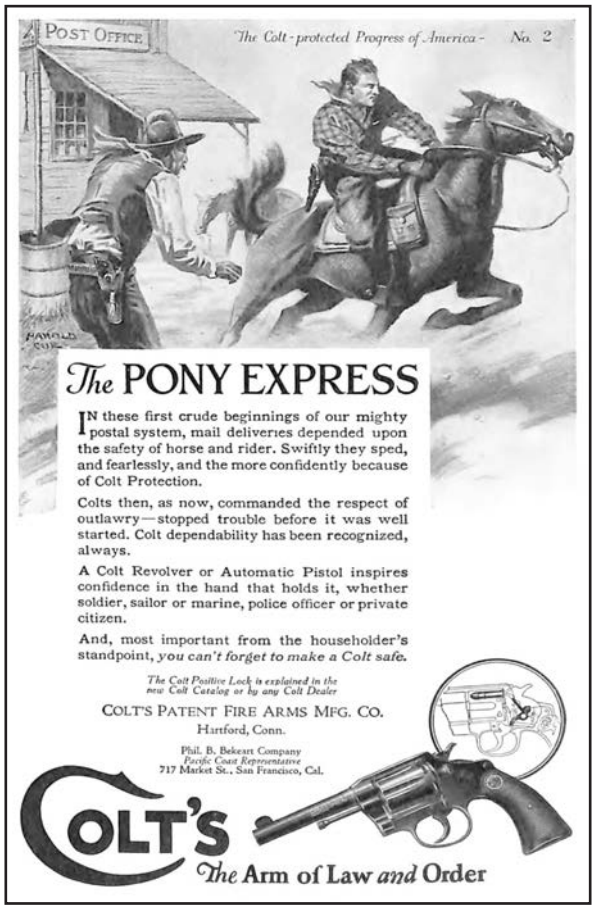


Figure 4.10 Print Ad, "Protection," *Elks Magazine* (March 1926), 895. Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Colt_revolver_ad_1926-03.png.

Colt's began marketing to the police just after the new century, promoting the Colt gun as "the official firearm approved for use by leading Police Departments of the two Americas," as well as those law enforcement officers with the major railroads.[97] The *Colt's Police Revolver Handbook* included photographic illustrations of the "quick draw" and instructions for disarming an assailant. It claimed that of 68 cities with populations over 100,000, 70 percent were equipped with Colt Revolvers and that 100 percent of state police used Colt's revolvers. In addition, all the agents, guards, and messengers with American Railway and Wells Fargo bank used them, including police forces in foreign cities in Canada and South America.[98] (See 4.11). Although ads in popular magazines simply depicted the product as if in a catalog, police endorsements came in the form of stories.[99] The ad "What Officer X Thinks about a Colt" claimed that "It's me and the Colt they fear, not the law." The advertisement warned hesitant buyers: "But to guard your home and family from dangers which such places breed. You should have and can have the same

[97] "A Quick Draw," Colt's Police Department Handbook, *Colt's Police Revolver Handbook*, RG 103, Box 68, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.
[98] *The Colt's Police Revolver Handbook*, RG 103, Box 68, Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.
[99] James E. Servan, Colt Firearms, 1836-1954 (self-published, 1954), 253.

splendid protection which takes Officer X, unafraid, through his dark alleys every night- a Colt Revolver or Automatic pistol."[100]

Backlash

Amplifying the fears about urban life in the 1920s to promote sales was not always advantageous. Because of the perception of rising crime in the cities, the proliferation of organized crime syndicates during the Prohibition era, and international calls for disarmament, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed an anti-gun backlash. The Colt company collected several press releases about the proliferation of gun control laws, including those requiring owners to register their weapons. Company correspondence stressed that law-abiding gun owners should not suffer such restrictions, arguing instead that existing laws should be enforced and violators punished.[101]



Figure 4.11 "Colt's New Police Positive," 1905, New York Public Library Digital Collections. http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-cbda-a3d9-c040-c00a18064a99.

Congress passed a law regulating machine guns in 1933, and in 1934 the National Firearms Act limited "the availability of machine guns, short-barreled shotguns, short-barreled rifles, sound suppressors (silencers), and other similar weapons that were often used by criminals during the Prohibition Era." The Federal Firearms Act (FFA) of 1938 required gun manufacturers, importers, and dealers to obtain a federal firearms license. In 1939 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled

[100] *The Literary Digest* 71 (October 8, 1921), 60.
[101] "Industrial News Bureau - The Manufacturer, March 12, 1928-April 20, 1931," RG 103, Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.

in *United States v. Miller* that the National Firearms Act of 1934 allowed Congress to regulate the interstate sale of a short-barrel shotgun. The 1936 publication of H. C. Engelbracht and F. C. Hanighen's *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* clearly reflected the antiwar and disarmament movement amidst concern for Adolf Hitler's rise in power and his calls for German militarism. Engelbracht and Hanighen accused American arms makers of resisting regulation through control of the newspapers and of warmongering prior to World War I to maintain a market. The authors devoted four pages to the building of Samuel Colt's company in a chapter called "American Musketeers."[102] In response to such accusations, Republican Senator Gerald Nye formed a Senate Munitions Committee to evaluate whether arms manufacturers had unduly influenced the American decision to enter World War I. The Nye Committee held ninety-three hearings with 200 witnesses over the course of eighteen months, but the politicians found little hard evidence of conspiracy. However, the public remained suspicious, and this fueled the America First isolationist movement throughout the decade, until the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.[103] This legislation and criticism proved concerning at Colt's. Company President Samuel Stone remarked, "I can appreciate that the manufacturers of arms and ammunition are not standing very high in the estimation of the public generally."[104]

It is therefore not surprising that in 1941 the National Rifle Association (NRA) corresponded with the public relations division of the Colt Club, an employee organization. Back in 1871, National Guard officers in New York City, formerly Union commanders who fretted over the poor marksmanship of recruits during the Civil War, had organized the NRA. Inspired by the British National Rifle Association and its Wimbledon firing range, the NRA in the U.S. initially sought to promote rifle-shooting, focusing on civilian tournaments and activities to practice and improve marksmanship. By the 1920s the group was using its newsletter, *American Rifleman*, which combined high-quality illustrations and newspaper-style articles that often featured and reviewed various firearms to collectively urge its members to push back against anti-gun legislation. The NRA invoked the Second Amendment to protest registration requirements, stressing personal rights over national defense.[105] Colt's embraced the *American Rifleman* and its tribute to the draftees "who only a short time ago were firing at targets on the club range"

---

[102] H. C. Engelbracht and F. C. Hanighen, *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1934); "An Act Relating to Machine Guns, Regulating the Manufacture, Possession, Sale of Machine Guns and Parts, and Providing Penalty for the Violation Thereof, and Declaring an Emergency," ch. 64, §§ 1-5, Sess. Laws 335-36, 1933, available via Duke Center for Firearms Law, https://firearmslaw.duke.edu/laws/an-act-relating-to-machine-guns-1-5-1933-wash-sess-laws-335-335-336-o-h-olson; Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, "Background," The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' National Firearms Registration and Transfer Record, Evaluation and Inspections Report IN-2007-006 (June 2007), https://oig.justice.gov/archives/reports/ATF/e0706/back.htm.

[103] Senate Munitions Committee (Nye Committee), "Merchants of Death," United States Senate, September 4, 1934. https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/merchants-of-death.htm.

[104] As quoted in Engelbracht and Hanighen, 1.

[105] *Army and Navy Journal*, August 12, 1871, 836-837; "The Legion Knows," American Rifleman 74: 9 (November 11, 1926), 8; Also see Patrick Charles, *Vote Gun: How Gun Rights became Politicized in the United States*, New York City, Columbia University Press, 2023; "I am an American," newspaper clipping, May 1941, RG 103, National Rifle Association, Public Relations Division, Correspondence 1941, Box 19, Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.

and who "are no longer boys, but men." The company stated that "We, at Colt's, are proud of tradition, too." The ads targeted the post-World War II market: "One day the final shot of this war will be fired, and men and women will once more return to their accustomed places in civilian life. Colt's is looking forward to the day, when again you can load your Colt Woodman or Colt Officers' Model and join the next relay on the line."[106]

Plans called for each ad to "be one of the more popular Colt target arms with a brief description of its features." An ad in the *American Rifleman* touted the craftsmanship angle, arguing that despite the scores of machines used in production, "Colt quality is born of skilled hands." An illustration depicted a blacksmith's gloved hands gripping tongs. The text continued, "For the duration our resources are being devoted to supplying our armed forces with Colt revolvers and automatic pistols, machine guns, and automatic cannon. We are looking forward to the day of victory when once again we will serve our target-shooting friends."[107]
During the second half of World War II, the company already began preparing catalogs, price lists, folders, dealer displays, salesman aids, instruction manuals, and show material to support a concentrated sales program that maintained markets in newspapers, magazines, and yearbooks. These included the *Army and Navy Journal*, police organizations, and military academies. The company committed to rebuilding local goodwill by raising positive publicity through activity sponsorships and by advertising activities and events to Hartford.[108]

As for small arms, the company decided to expand into more consumer publications "to keep our name associated with the manufacture of target revolvers and automatic pistols" and "to create a desire to purchase and use Colt firearms when the war is over," devoting ads to a series of outdoor sketches showing the part Colt products can play in adding pleasure to camping, hunting, and other outdoor activities. One ad illustrated a father and son camping trip, with the son shooting at clay pigeons with the Sport Model Woodsman. The copy read, "This is outdoor America, the domain of the brotherhood of sportsmanship...Colt Revolvers and Automatic Pistols, back from war, will keep a peacetime date with you on camping trip and target range." In 1943, to appeal to different users, ads included diagrammed illustrations highlighting features like a solid breech and ammunition choices in the Colt Sports Model Woodsman and the long rifle. One ad suggested forming a "cellar club," illustrated by a couple in their empty basement shooting at a target.[109]

As for trade publications, 1944 began "a series of messages aimed primarily at familiarizing dealers with Colt arms."[110] Throughout that year, the Colt grounded the company in historical prestige, again focusing on portraying Colt guns as art pieces and now producing "historical prints" featuring six of the early models, including the Paterson and the Walker-Colt. (See 4.12).

---

[106] AD Rev, 1943, Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, RG 103, Box 65, CSLA.
[107] "Small Arms Division Publication Advertising," RG 103, Box 65, Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.
[108] "Colt's New Police Positive," 1905, Wallach Division Picture Collection, New York Public Library Digital Collections, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-cdba-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.
[109] Assorted ads, 1943, AD Rev Box 65, RG 103, CSLA.
[110] "Small Arms Division Publication Advertising," Box 65, RG 103, CSLA.

The company sold more than 20,000 sets of the lithograph prints, which measured 14 inches by 11 inches and were designed for framing, for $.25 per set.[111]

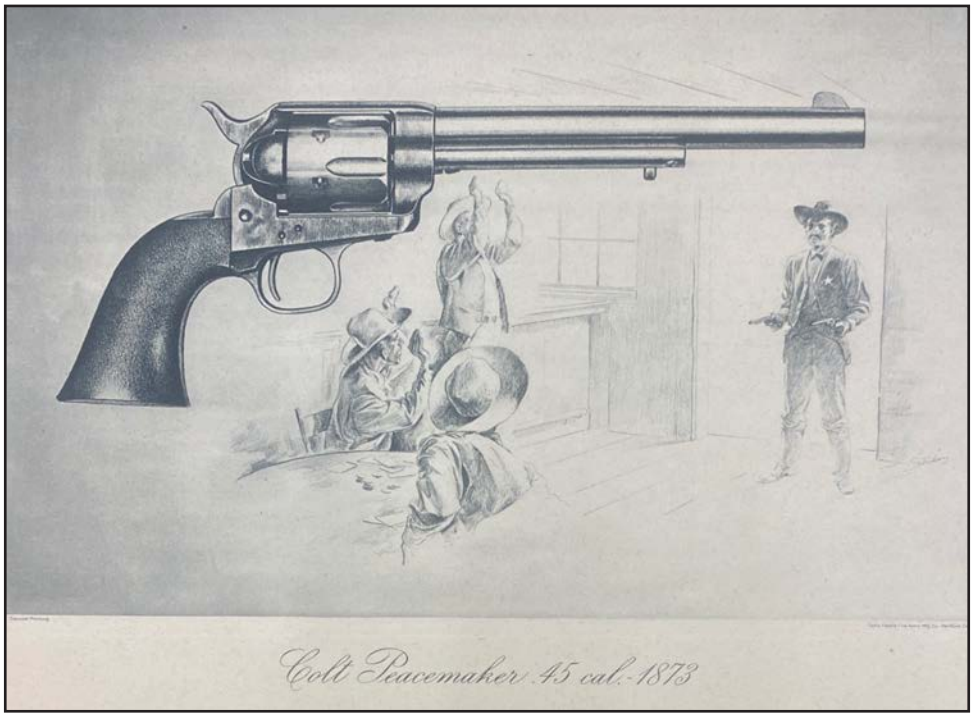


Figure 4.12 "A Collection of Historical Prints," c. 1945, Box 6, Folder 7, Item 9, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library.

Colt Quality

At the same time, the company's advertising strategy for the Electrical Division entailed associating closely with the notoriety and quality of the Colt brand, thus "capitalizing on the known, to sell the less known." The catalogs emphasized quality and featured photographs, different fonts, the big C Colt logo, and a "Coltalog" (for the Electrical Division). One even featured an electrical worker in overalls calibrating a switch—with a small illustration of a target shooter and the claim that "The smooth, dependable functioning Colt revolvers and automatic pistols is an accepted feature equally assured in precision-built Colt electrical products." The ad included "Colt Precision," "Colt Reputation," "Colt Action," and "Colt Reliability." The Electrical Division planned a series of straight product ads with copy featuring safety switches and industrial controls and using phrases like "Colt engineered controls" to emphasize the same technological quality. A paragraph of copy recalled the 1850s and highlighted the products' reputation and craftsmanship, comparing the dependability of machine guns and automatic cannons to that of electrical products.[112] (See 4.13).

[111] 1943 AD Rev Box 65, RG 103, CSLA.
[112] "Electrical Division Publication Advertising," 1943, Box 65, RG 103, CSLA.

By World War II the Colt factory had expanded its manufactures beyond firearms, and the company promoted the products by capitalizing on the Colt reputation and name recognition. A 1943 ad for the Colt Autosan (a dishwasher) used the typical aesthetic of the day—different fonts, illustrations, photographs, and lists of features. Like the ads for firearms, the ads printed in *Industrial Equipment News* included use, cleaning, and maintenance instructions. Ads used their "war model" to market to restaurants and hospitals that could demonstrate their place as essential and demonstrate a need for the equipment. They depicted dishwashers as part of the war effort, helping with "KP," or kitchen patrol duty, featuring an illustration of dishwashers marching into the factory plant, which the government classified as "1A" and vital to the war effort.[113] They hoped to "produce inquiries from manufacturing companies requiring metal cleaning equipment and to establish the name of "Colt Autosan."[114] The "picture your post-war kitchen" campaign emphasized planning and efficiency. Colt's sought to place Autosan into post-war buildings like restaurants, hotels, hospitals, and schools. They offered staff to help in planning kitchen equipment and meeting all dishwashing needs with precision metal parts for these efficient cleaning machines.[115] (See 4.14).





Figure 4.13 (left) "Electrical Division Publication Advertising," 1943, Box 65, RG 103 Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library.
Figure 4.14 (right) "Keep Wash and Rinse Tubes Clean!" Colts' Autosan Division Publication Advertising," 1943, Box 65, RG 103, State Archives, Connecticut State Library.

[113] "Keep Wash and Rinse Tubes Clean!" Autosan Division Publication Advertising, 1943, Box 65, RG 103, CSLA.
[114] Autosan Division Publication Advertising, 1943, Box 65, RG 103, CSLA.
[115] "Electrical Division Publication Advertising," 1943, Box 65, RG 103, CSLA.

Conclusion

A young Samuel Colt undoubtedly learned a lot about salesmanship from his experiences as "Dr. Coult" in the early 1830s. Promoting products to both the military and the civilian, however, was another matter. At the beginning of nineteenth-century America people purchased or bartered home goods for muskets and rifles from a local gun maker. Samuel Colt happened to come of age when technology was producing unique and specific tools that could be transported through an emerging and increasingly reliable transportation network that expanded merchants' access to markets. Colt, and later the Colt Company, adeptly enlisted a variety of marketing and advertising techniques that are still highly relevant even today.

Colt seemed to innately understand that promotion could create demand. The Colts and the company learned early how to control their own narrative, first to sell products and secondly to define their legacy, including through marketing. Promotion could entail a variety of strategies, including commitment to quality, but also self-branding, face-to-face salesmanship, direct solicitations, and working with licensed agents and dealers to distribute the product and control prices. Sam Colt collaborated with users and customers to improve his products. He infiltrated the Colt name and brand into American values and culture. He did this by planting feature stories in newspapers and popular periodicals, enlisting storytelling to control a compelling and irresistible narrative about himself and his product and using visual media with prominent illustrations and "high art" paintings.[116]

Along with other manufacturers, notably Winchester, the Colt's company continued soliciting testimonials and celebrity endorsements, providing free samples and customization to elevate caché and increase demand, engaging in product placement, enlisting imagery and history to tap consumer nostalgia and therefore cultivating national brand recognition, consistent messaging, markets, and customer loyalty. Those strategies sustained a market for Colt's products, especially after the company invested heavily in manufacturing machine tools and training a workforce to produce them. This mechanical process for making firearms laid the foundation for the American system of manufacturing.

Almost as much as he stressed the quality of his product, Sam Colt was deliberate about promoting and championing the machine-manufacturing process in his factory armories as evidence of what he extolled as a superior product in national publications. By the end of 1856 the newly built South Meadows factory received immediate praise. *The New York Journal of Commerce* reported it "ranks second to none in the extent and success of his operations."[117] The following March, the Jacksonian-influenced *United States Magazine* published the article "Repeating Fire-Arms: A Day at the Armory of Colt's Fire-Arms Manufacturing Company,"

[116] One example of the type of press to solicit public goodwill: "Col. Sam Colt," *Hartford Daily Courant,* April 20, 1855.

[117] *Colonel Colt*, 1856. Photograph from London News, November 29, 1856. https://www.loc.gov/item/2004669227/; https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3g12112/.

which several scholars believe Sam Colt likely commissioned himself. Such coverage provided extensive and detailed descriptions of his factory and its operations.[118]

[118] "Repeating Fire-Arms: A Day at the Armory of Colt's Patent Fire-Arms Manufacturing Company," *United States Magazine*, 4, no. 3 (March 1857): 240-421 (referred to as US Magazine).

V. The Factory, Part 1

Establishing Coltsville, an Urban Factory Estate on the River (1855-1864)

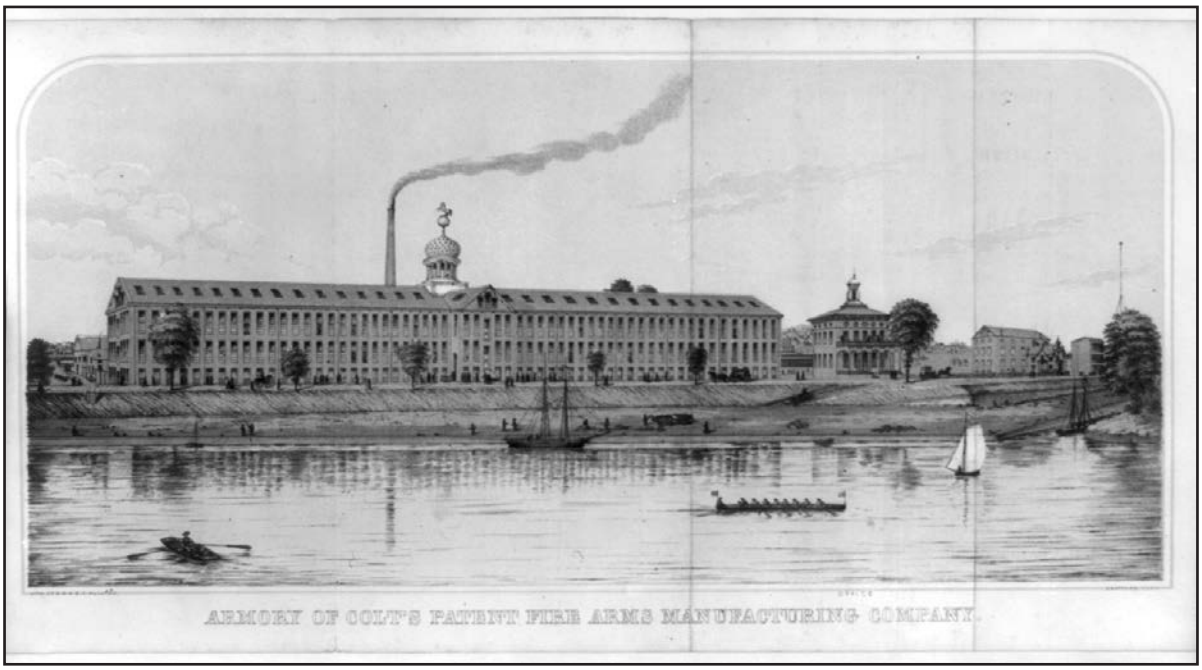


Figure 5.1 *Armory of Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Co.*, c. 1860. Lithograph by E. B. & E. C. Kellogg, in Proceedings at the Dedication of Charter Oak Hall, J. Deane Alden, 1866, Hartford, Connecticut, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. https://www.loc.gov/item/2002725242/.

In August 1855 *The Hartford Courant* reported that the emperor and empress of Russia had presented rings to Colonel Samuel Colt. One contained minute diamonds worth more than $3000. The newspaper, however, bestowed on him an even greater honor: "We hold our emperor of the South Meadow fully the equal of the Emperor of all the Russias - difference in the extent of their demesnes excepted."[1] At the time, Sam Colt was building his own palatial armory at the southern end of Hartford. The symmetrical, 500-foot-long, four-story industrial factory featured a gable roof and brownstone walls. (See 5.1). Most notably, it supported a blue onion dome over its central bay that still stands today as a symbol of the city Colt helped create. For the past 170 years, the exotic architectural feature has greeted anyone approaching Hartford from the south or from across the Connecticut River. The dome communicated Sam Colt's cosmopolitan image and the worldwide renown of his firearms. In place of the customary Eastern Orthodox cross, Colt had his company's signature "rampant colt," reared on its hindlegs, placed atop the dome, a play on the factory owner's name that fit perfectly into the ongoing conquest and settlement of the American West. Less than a decade later, on February 4, 1864, though, the elevated equine and "the elegant Oriental architecture of the dome itself was seen wreathed with flames and looking like a balloon on fire in mid-air."[2]

---

1 "Col. Samuel Colt," *Hartford Daily Courant*, August 11, 1855.

2 *Hartford Weekly Times*, February 13, 1864.

The company's emphasis on the design and improvement of the arms-making machinery, as much as on the products themselves, demanded a managerial efficiency and financial sustainability that earned global renown for the Colt name. The title of "Emperor" also nodded to Sam Colt's rising influence on the city. *The Hartford Courant* referred to the development of Hartford's frequently flooded South Meadow as the "Coltville" site, a product of "the most gigantic plans ever formed in the breast of an individual" and characterizing those plans as "quite Napoleonic."[3] The Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company (Colt's) armory and factory held a central place in not only Hartford's development but in the urbanization of the Northeast. The armory building, known as the East Armory after its post- Civil War expansion, produced many different types and models of firearms: military rifles, sporting rifles, army or holster pistols, navy or belt pistols, and pocket pistols with barrels measuring four, five, and six inches.[4] The two single-story brownstones that stand parallel to the main armory block served as a forge and foundry. They survive as the only original parts of the factory that Sam Colt himself had built. These structures, together with the reconstructed factory and the World War I era additions to the complex, represent one of the nation's strongest examples of an early urban, industrial factory. With the complexity of the revolving chamber integral to his patent revolver design, Colt's Connecticut factories embraced the mechanized manufacturing techniques and production processes developed in the armories of the Connecticut River Valley that transformed the nineteenth-century economy.

The main elements of Sam Colt's product designs required precision because of the revolving chamber and complexity of the patent revolver. By hiring a few key managers with dozens of skilled machinists, Colt efficiently achieved that precision through an inside contract system that employed dozens more. Based on Adam Smith's original idea of a division of labor, different contractors supervised semi-skilled workers in the operation and maintenance of precision machine tools for each piece of the process required for making the various gun parts. After his 1868 visit to Hartford, writer Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) described what he saw at the Colt armory.

> Every floor is a dense wilderness of strange iron machines that stretches away into remote distances and confusing perspectives- a tangled forest of rods, bars, pulleys, wheels and all imaginable and unimaginable forms of mechanism. There are various machines to cut all parts of the pistol roughly from the original steel; machines to trim them down and polish them, machines to brand and number them; machines to bore the barrels out, machines to rifle them; machines that shave them down neatly to a proper size, as deftly as one would shave a candle in a lathe; machines that do everything but shape the wooden stocks and trace the ornamental work upon the barrels.[5]

---

[3] "Coltville," *Hartford Daily Courant* (April 20, 1855), 2; "Wethersfield Avenue," *Hartford Courant,* July 16, 1855.

[4] "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 233-235.

[5] Billy S. Garvie, "Twain Liked City on Visit in '68," *Hartford Times*, 1932.

Establishing Mechanized and Uniform Production

Less than five years after the exposition at the 1851 Crystal Palace, America's armories became internationally renowned models of America's machine-driven manufacturing processes that applied also to multiple other industrial products. The Colt Company employed the most advanced machinists, manufacturing machinery, and manufacturing processes in both Hartford and London. Colt's factory was one of those toured by Great Britain's Machinery Committee in the summer of 1854 to learn the American manufacturing system. With the indispensable aid of his chief engineer, Elisha Root, Colt refined the designs of his firearms through several models, developing the machines to produce them en masse for both a military and civilian market. About two decades of experience, invention, innovation, and mechanization in forming intricate metal parts all came together on the East Armory's factory floor.[6]

Emboldened by his experience at Eli Whitney's New Haven armory in the 1840s, Colt and his staff relocated machinery to Hartford armories and began improving the standardization process that both Whitney and Simeon North of Middletown had at least initiated. Decades earlier (in 1801), Whitney offered a convincing demonstration of interchangeability to President John Adams, Vice President Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of War James McHenry, and several members of the U.S. Congress, showcasing the possibility of uniformity and interchangeability as he assembled ten different gunlocks into the same musket. He explained that he could achieve this through "drilling and filing by jigs" and "milling by irregular shaped cutters." Since the 1960s, however, most historians of technology have disputed that Whitney had indeed managed this feat. Rather, scholars surmise that he had selected these parts in advance and the seamless interchangeability resulted from careful filing. While scholars concede that Whitney popularized the idea, in terms of practicality and reliability, interchangeability required precision gauges and refined machinery.[7]

Such refined machinery was still evolving in the early nineteenth century, largely through the federal armories. Thomas Blanchard, who worked at the federal armories, pushed the goal forward when he invented a lathe for reproducing irregular shapes in 1818.[8] This machine proved ideal for shaping gunstocks, saving the time for tasks such as hand whittling, boring, and chiseling, incidentally the same tasks required to make a variety of other products like wheel spokes, shoe lasts, and oars. By 1842 the federal armories had also adopted a system of weights and measures to ensure uniformity and even interchangeability. At Harper's Ferry armory, John H. Hall developed and refined the turret lathe, revolutionizing firearm production with a mechanized system that could produce interchangeable metal parts. The development of the horizontal turret lathe in 1845 allowed for interchanging cutting tools. The milling machine, in

---

6 Stewart, 18-19.

7 Karyl Lee Kibler Hall and Carolyn Cooper, Windows on the Works: Industry on the Eli Whitney Site 1787-1979 (Hamden, CT: Eli Whitney Museum, 1984); Felicia Johnson Deyrup, *Arms Making in the Connecticut Valley: A Regional Study of the Economic Development of the Small Arms Industry, 1798-1870* (G. Shumway, 1970), 88; Stewart, 14.

8 Stewart, 14-15. The original Blanchard lathe is on display at the Springfield National Historical Park's museum.

which the tool—-usually a cutter—rotated against a fixed part, reversed the process. (See chapter 9 for images of various machines).[9]

The Springfield Armory's master armorer Thomas Warner (who later worked for Colt at the Whitney armory) further developed milling machines and used inspections to achieve uniformity. At the same time, machine manufacturers Kendall and Lawrence in Windsor, Vermont (known as Robbins and Lawrence by 1850) could make uniform gun parts with a new level of precision. In 1851, the Providence firm of Brown and Sharpe developed a vernier caliper to measure to a thousandth of an inch. These precision manufacturing centers ran along the Connecticut River Valley from Vermont to the Long Island Sound and through an industrial region that also included the burgeoning brass industry in Waterbury to the west and the textiles centers from Cheney Silk in Manchester and Willimantic as well as New York City and the various factories of Rhode Island to the east and Pennsylvania to the west.[10]

Historian Nathan Rosenberg describes the historical and economic context for the rise of the Colt company and its role in this American System of Manufactures process, arguing that multiple industries benefited from the constant refinement and adaptation of similar technical processes and machinery along the Connecticut River Valley. Between about 1840 and the 1880s, with the expansion of the railroad, steamships, and opportunities for transport, certain firms along the Connecticut River Valley disseminated their knowledge, collaborating and refining the technologies associated with the production of machines.[11]

By the early 1850s Sam Colt embarked on building a Hartford a factory complex of his own. By the time the American Civil War began, Colt was doubling the size of that complex with a second main building to accommodate the demand for arms. Yet, Colt died before the war was over, never witnessing the full embrace of his product by the military, something that had been an elusive goal throughout his adult life. Nor did he see the full impact of his factory in the city of his birth.

The Colt Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company in Hartford

While Sam Colt had operated the Patent Arms Manufacturing Company's (PAMC) factory in Paterson, New Jersey in the 1830s, in Hartford in the 1840s, and in London by 1853, Colt's armory in the South Meadow reflected an advanced version of all those places, representing the refinement of machine-driven industrial production that characterized and contributed to the rise of American industrialism and capitalism, fueled by invention and technological innovation.

---

[9] Deyrup, 88-99; David R. Meyer, *Networked Machinists: High Technology Industries in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 429; Merritt Roe Smith, "John H. Hall, Simeon North, and the Milling Machine: The Nature of Innovation among Antebellum Arms Makers," *Technology and Culture* 14, no. 4 (October 1973), 573-591; Stewart, 15-16.

[10] See also Barbara Tucker and Kenneth H. Tucker, *Industrializing Antebellum America: The Rise of Manufacturing Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic* (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 74-76.

[11] Nathan Rosenberg, "Technological Change in the Machine Tool Industry, 1840-1910," *The Journal of Economic History* 23, no. 4 (December 1963), 414-443.

Colt's multiple patents for firearms and machinery constituted legal protections that warded off competitors, and he built upon these systems to produce and refine products in both design and function.[12] While the United States Ordnance Department prized interchangeability at the federal armories because it made weapon repairs easier, most private arms makers did not fully subscribe to interchangeable production methods because they were not yet cost-effective.[13] Colt aimed to prove that philosophy wrong. He and his managers looked to balance technological accuracy with economic efficiency. Instead of perfect interchangeability, Colt worked to make the machine-made parts as uniform as possible, refining them "in a final fitting process."[14] The timing of these advances met the moment. By the mid-nineteenth century, industrialization, rising nationalism, and decolonization ignited wars across the globe. These conflicts pushed for technological innovation and sustained firearms production. Finding opportunity in growing conflicts like the Crimean War, Colt secured many international contracts, but the Mexican-American and American Civil War and American migrants' push to settle the rugged terrain of the West escalated sectional tensions in the United States, increasing opportunities to sell at home. (See chapter 4).[15]

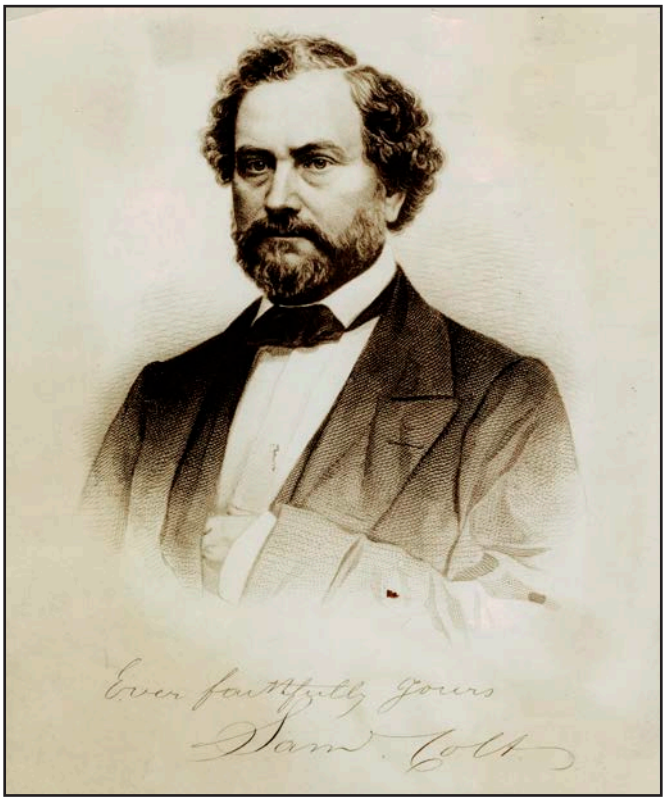


Figure 5.2 Samuel Colt around 1855. PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Box 1, Folder 1, Item 3, Connecticut State Library and Archives, Hartford, CT. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168249.

[12] Lindsay Schakenbach Regele, "Industrial Manifest Destiny: American Fire-arms Manufacturing and Antebellum Expansion," *The Business History Review* 92, no.1 (Spring 2008), 57-83.
[13] Regele, 71.
[14] Regele, 71; See also Tucker and Tucker, 74-76.
[15] Philip Dray, *The Fair Chase: The Epic Story of Hunting in America* (Basic Books: New York), 2018), 113-115.

Before the Mexican-American War ended in 1848, thirty-four-year-old Sam Colt had his machine shop up and running on Pearl Street, manufacturing several rifles, carbines, and pistols with the revolving cylinder design. (See 5.2). About a year later, he rented space for about five years in Colonel Solomon Porter's modern factory building on Grove Lane (later known as Mechanic Street), about a block north of the confluence of the Connecticut and Little rivers. Yet, whereas the PAMC ran on hydraulic power, the steam-powered Porter Manufacturing Building (the first and largest in the city at that time) meant that the Colt armory operated adjacent to Woodruff and Beach. Originally an iron foundry, Woodruff and Beech eventually became a primary manufacturer of stationary steam engines that revolutionized the possibilities of scale for manufacturing.[16] According to his cousin, creditor, and financial agent Elisha Colt, the Colt company could barely keep up with orders from both the government and private sales by 1851. Colt's enterprise produced about 25,000-30,000 pistols that year and was making a healthy profit, in addition to the London factory output. With Porter's space inadequate to fill the demand and his ambitions, Colt set his eyes across the Little River to the South Meadow.[17]

The South Meadow

By the mid-nineteenth century, Hartford's landscape was rapidly transitioning from a rural settlement to a fully urban, industrial city. Colt's estate and factory complex would reflect a careful balance between the agrarian and the industrial. Beyond the geographic and historic conditions of the South Meadow, Colt's choice of location for the factory (also see chapter 1) provides important context for his creation of a privately owned, heavily landscaped estate and manufacturing complex within the growing, hardscaped, industrial city of Hartford.

Throughout the industrial period the Connecticut River remained integral for transportation and keeping soils rich, but its tributary, which the Dutch first dubbed the Little River, attracted early economic development. These enterprises included many mills, and enough pig farms that locals began referring to the Little River as the Hog River. The first grist mill on the Little River in 1637 drew many other industries amid the existing agricultural enterprises of the Puritans. Several fulling mills, which cleaned woolen cloth, were located on what became known as the Mill River by the end of the seventeenth century.[18] In the 1780s Jeremiah Wadsworth built a rum distillery, and in 1788 several prominent Hartford men, including Sam's great uncle Peter Colt, founded the first broadcloth mill in the country, which "at its peak produced 5,000 yards of

---

[16] "Mr. Samuel Colt," in "Notes by a Man About Town," *The Hartford Courant*, January 5, 1848; Hosley, 55-56.

[17] Elisha Colt, August 15, 1851, MS9441, Hart Family Papers, CMCH; *A History of American Manufactures from 1608 to 1860* (Edward Young & Co. 1864), 747; William B. Edwards, *The Story of Colt's Revolver: The Biography of Col. Samuel Colt, 1953* (Reprint, Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 1957), 315.

[18] By the 19th century, John Knowles' combined 18th century landholdings subdivided. "Hartford's Early Mill Industry: Upper Mill Once Owned by B. Graham and J. Mygatt Town Clear H.F. Smith Has Their Picture as in 1710 the Park River Was Called Mill River," *The Hartford Courant*, August 13, 1910; Norris Galpin Osborn, ed. History of Connecticut in Monographic Form (United States: States History Company, 1925), 4; W.A. Ayers, "Manufactures and Inventions," in *The Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut, 1633-1884* (United States: E. L. Osgood, 1886), 563-565; "Industrial History of Connecticut," Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, of the State of Connecticut, 265.

broadcloth a year."[19] By 1800 other industrial enterprises set up along the river including Sam's father, Christopher Colt, who opened a market near the confluence of the Little/Mill River and the Connecticut River, in about 1804.[20] Alpheus and Truman Hanks established the Woodruff and Beach Iron Works in 1821, which, alongside tanneries, slaughterhouses, pigsties, dye houses, brickyards and tenement homes, as well as farms, lined the banks of the Little River during the early nineteenth century. Cheneyville, home of the Cheney silk mill, known for high-quality products and a skilled workforce, on the eastern bank of the Connecticut River in Manchester.[21] Precision manufacturing joined all these other enterprises by the 1830s, eventually dominating Hartford industry. At the end of 1839 the Hartford and New Haven Railroad ran along the banks of the Little River, now also known as the Mill River, providing more access to goods and trade, and by 1844 connected to the home of the federal armory, Springfield, Massachusetts. The following year the Jewel Belting Company, which made factory machine belts, raised the demand for machine-driven production. Five years later, in 1850, one of Colt's chief rivals in firearms production, Sharp's Rifle Manufacturing Company, opened a factory on the north side of the river.[22]

Just south of the confluence with the Connecticut River, however, waterlogged property lay up against the south bank of the Little/Mill River. It frequently flooded from heavy rains upriver, adjacent to, but separated from, the city's other manufactories, and it was not an obvious place upon which to build a factory complex.[23] Those living up and down the Connecticut River, accustomed to the regular spring flooding caused by warm rains and melting snow, referred to the annual events as "freshets."[24] The area featured marshy grasses and wildflowers such as hepaticas, skunk cabbages, and liverworts. Even many of the manufacturers located north of the Little River viewed what was once just an annual nuisance as increasingly economically inconvenient, with an impact on production and employment. So, when Sam Colt signaled his intentions to purchase and develop the South Meadow for his new armory, *The Hartford Courant* initially reported it as a foolish choice.[25]

---

[19] Sandra Wheeler, "A River Runs Under It: A Hog River History," *Connecticut Explored* (Fall, 2002); Ellsworth S. Grant, *The Colt Armory: A History of Colt's Manufacturing Company, Inc.* (Lincoln, RI: Mowbray Publishing, 1995), 7; Jim Rasenberger, *Revolver: Sam Colt and the Six-Shooter That Changed America* (New York: Scribner, 2020), 17, 83; Ayers, 563-565.

[20] Steve Grant, "Dutch Point: The Environmental History of a Small Place," *The Hartford Courant*, April 15, 1990, A1, A18. Much of the research for this article can be found at the Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT.

[21] "Manufacturing in Hartford Noted for Skilled Labor Employed: A Group of Pioneer Manufactures of Hartford," The Hartford Courant, October 6, 1908. *See Michael Forino, "Cheney Brothers Silk Company Machine Shop, Historic Structure Report," w/ Manchester Historical Society, MA Thesis (Capstone), Central Connecticut State University, May 2013.

[22] Wheeler, "A River Runs Under It."

[23] See chapter 1 for land convenyence history.

[24] For more on the phenomenon of annual and semi-annual freshets and flooding of the Connecticut River, see "The Gathering of Floods in the Connecticut River System," *Geographical Review* 18, no. 3 (July 1928), 428-445.

[25] Helen Post Chapman, *My Hartford of the Nineteenth Century* (Hartford, CT: E.V. Mitchell, 1928), 36; Jared Taber, "Thinking Like a Flood Plain: Water, Work, and Time in the Connecticut River Valley, 1790-1870" (PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 2016), 291.

However, the soil was unusually fertile for the Connecticut River Valley, and the meadow served as primarily pasture and orchards. After the flooding in Spring 1852, *The Hartford Courant* suggested that, considering the impact of the freshets on Hartford's "large manufacturing establishments," the city should build levees to protect against flooding. Having the city embark on such a project limited such a water control project to public land. Hartford's Common Council instead poured its efforts into managing drainage through road grading, sewers, and regulating sidewalk heights. City-built roads along both banks could still become quite muddy.[26]

Sam Colt nevertheless embarked on his redevelopment project from 1852 to 1856, notifying the Hartford Common Council on July 25, 1853. He eventually acquired 250 acres at a cost of $60,000 and focused on plotting out a factory and estate to create a finely tuned community of production and prosperity. His purchases covered almost all the land in the South Meadow, from the riverbank well past Hendrixson Avenue.[27] The new armory would serve as the centerpiece of the industrial village complex that included worker housing, entertainment halls, a reservoir, and train stations. Since work of the factory was often rigorous, tedious, and monotonous, he would provide housing and other cultural institutions to create a loyal working community at a time when laborers, especially talented and skilled machinists, were a highly mobile workforce. The concept represented one entrepreneur's effort to integrate labor, leisure, and opportunities through industrial paternalism.

Planning a Factory Complex

Colt's ambitious proposal reflected his intent to "reclaim from inundations of the Connecticut, and open to the occupation of our citizens, and to the uses of industry, a tract of several hundred acres, lying almost within the heart of the city and which, without improvement in question, must remain forever uninhabitable."[28] Due to the grandiosity of his plans, which began in earnest in 1855, Colt was forced to negotiate with the city's often cautious Common Council. This process was likely made more tense because Colt, a Democrat, held political differences with many of them at a time of rising sectionalism and abolition movements, accelerated by none other than the darling of the Republican Party, Hartford's Harriet Beecher Stowe, soon after she published *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. In response to Colt's requests, the council argued that one individual's ambition could not supersede the city's interests. The South Meadow already featured a couple of roads that allowed travel, but Colt planned far more, and he approached those plans boldly and brashly.[29]

---

[26] Tucker and Tucker, 83; Peter Baldwin, *Domesticating the Streets: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford: 1850-1930* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1999), 19-22; "Hartford's Early Mill Industry," *The Hartford Courant*, August 13, 1910.

[27] Minutes of the Hartford Common Council, July 25, 1853, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library; Kristen Noble Keegan, "Coltsville Historical Supplement," 2013.

[28] "Common Council Friday Evening," *The Hartford Courant*, August 15, 1853, 2; "Common Council, Last Evening," Hartford Daily Courant, July 26, 1853; "South Meadow Improvements," Hartford Daily Courant, June 14, 1854, 2.

[29] Colt believed slavery was inefficient. According to Ellsworth Grant, he resented abolitionists. Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 23-24; Keegan, "Coltsville Historical Supplement."

On July 25, 1853, Colt petitioned the Common Council to build infrastructure in October, and he asked for a speedy decision. With increasing demand for his arms, he wanted to move the main manufacturing center from London to his hometown of Hartford.[30] In true Colt fashion, he tried to negotiate a deal.[31] Before the factory construction began, Colt ensured that his factory complex would contain numerous roads to transport both goods and people throughout the area. He requested permission to lay out and grade streets beyond the limited existing pathways. As part of his flood mitigation plans, Colt applied to raise the grades of his South Meadow streets, supplying all materials and conforming with grading and durability standards at less than the projected budget of $125,000-$150,000, with the intent of crediting the city the amount he saved. The council approved the streets on August 3, 1853, however streets (then often called highways) had to meet certain standards in terms of width and grading, and the council hired consultants to ensure those standards were met.[32] South Meadow highway #2 (Wyllys Avenue, named for Governor George Wyllys) was never opened due to opposition from a local landowner, who happened to be Colt's landlord, Solomon Porter. Porter would continue to be a thorn in Colt's plans. Final approval for Highway No. 8 (Huyshope Avenue) was delayed until 1861.[33]

While early records refer to these thoroughfares as numbered highways, the names Colt assigned to those near his proposed factory invoked the heritage of colonial northern European descendants. (see chapter 1). Recall that the river confluence was the site of the colonial Dutch fort, House of Hope, or Huyshope, the seed of Hartford's growth. Nineteenth century residents still referred to the location as Dutch Point. The legendary Charter Oak stood just northwest. Colt aimed to make his factory just as significant to the city.[34] Naming his streets after Indigenous names, as well as colonial ones, invoked the long history of interactions among the peoples of the region. Paradoxically, the street names emphasized the colonial process of land dispossession from Indigenous tribes, which at the time that Colt was building his factory was an ongoing reality with expansion into the Native homelands throughout the western territories. In Fall 1855, as his development of his complex was well under way, *The Hartford Courant* reported that he told his workers to preserve Indigenous and colonial artifacts and "relics" for the Connecticut Historical Society.[35]

Creating an industrial infrastructure required the manipulation of the South Meadow environment. Those who pastured their cows there preferred the South Meadow land to remain as it was, a site of enriched soil. However, the regular deluges made water control essential to Colt's vision for his factory site. He planned a dike to encircle it, forever altering the meadowed landscape that attracted the region's first settlers. Colt's architect (and distant relative), civil

---

30 "Common Council Friday Evening," *The Hartford Courant*, August 15, 1853, 2; "Common Council, Last Evening," Hartford Daily Courant, July 26, 1853; "South Meadow Improvements," *Hartford Daily Courant*.

31 "Article 6," Hartford Daily Courant, December 15, 1857.

32 Minutes of the Hartford Common Council, August 3, 8, 18 in Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 23.

33 *The Hartford Courant*, February 1, 1859, 2; Albert L. Washburn and Henry R. Buck. *History of Hartford Streets: Their Names with Origin and Dates of Use* (Hartford, CT: The Society, 1911), https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hxt8jd.

34 "Proceedings at the Dedication of Charter Oak Hall," 18.

35 "Some More Relics!" *The Hartford Courant*, November 24, 1855.

engineer Henry Augustus Graham (H. A. G.) Pomeroy may have borrowed the idea from similar embankments built in the Netherlands centuries before. The Dutch technique involved building packed mounds of mud, or dikes, around low land areas to help hold back regular floodwaters.[36] Colt spent $180,000 to build a dike nearly two miles long, 15 feet high, 120 feet wide at the base, and 60 feet wide at the top, along the western riverfront. *The Hartford Courant* recognized the magnitude of these efforts in the summer of 1853, asserting that

> he has, in fact, more than realized the dream of public-spirited ambition, and without any draft upon our capital, but by a prodigal outlay of his own, given to manufactures, what laws of Nature had devoted to Agriculture. He has dared to execute what no man but himself, dared conceive. An enterprise of this magnitude, carried through by the skill, boldness, and resources of one man, is without a parallel in this country, and its destined influence, in augmenting all the sources and elements of our material prosperity, can hardly be exaggerated.[37]

Such praise added to Colt's renown, not only as a successful businessman, but as an industrial visionary who was quickly catapulting Hartford's reputation as a place of innovation. Colt promised to employ almost an eighth of the city's population of almost 14,000 in his factory. Additional structures would include storehouses, offices, boarding houses, and tenements. He came close to that goal, employing on average 800-1500 workers, while also making a major environmental and economic impact on the city.[38]

Even these mighty efforts, though, could not entirely stem nature's power. In Spring 1854, a multi-day rainfall overflowed the Connecticut River. On Thursday, April 17, torrential rains totaling six inches in two days and continued for days after, with water rising two inches a day. The city saw its worst flooding in at least fifty years, particularly along the Connecticut and Mill rivers, with water standing in cellars and bottom floors and washing away entire homes, bridges, gas lines, communication lines, and railroad tracks. The river rose 29 feet 10 inches over the entire eastern part of Hartford, where homes were carried off by the river water. The flood covered much of the land Colt had bought in the South Meadows, including the building site for the new factory. Several feet of water suspended production at multiple factories, including Colt's in the Porter building; workers laboring on the massive dike and living in temporary

---

[36] Edwards, 315. Pomeroy was likely related to Samuel Colt through the Roswell Colt line. Roswell's mother, Sarah Lyman, was descended from the Pomeroy family. Pomeroy, Albert Alonzo, "History and Genealogy of the Pomeroy Family: Collateral Lines in Family Groups, Normandy, Great Britain and America; Comprising the Ancestors and Descendants of Eltweed Pomeroy from Beaminster, County Dorset, England, 1630" (United States: Franklin Printing and Engraving Company, 1912), 153; Ellsworth Grant, "Looking Back at Sam Colt's Gun Factory," *The Hartford Courant*, August 24, 1980.

[37] "Common Council, Last Evening," *Hartford Daily Courant*; August 23, 1853.

[38] Rasenberger, 296; "Common Council, last evening: Sewers Fire Department Highways Improvements In The South Meadow New Streets Debts Receipts And Expenditures Public...Water Works Sinking Fund," *Hartford Daily Courant*, April 17, 1855, 2; Bureau of Census, The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850-Connecticut, (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration), Table II, "Population of Subdivisions and Counties, 78. https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850a/1850a-21.pdf.

shanties on the South Meadow had to escape in boats. Colt put them up in nearby lofts. Hartford Mayor Henry C. Deming opened city hall to people displaced by the rising waters. According to *The Hartford Courant*, the city gas works department refused to work during the flood, so only a few oil lamps lit the city.[39]

The flood further emphasized why Colt's dike was indispensable to building in the South Meadow. Colt pushed forward, eventually creating a levee to the east and south to contain more than 300 acres and raising the height to 9 feet after the 1854 flood. It held firm during the seasonal floods of 1855.[40] Just a year later, in 1856, the river rose 21.5 feet, about 7.5 feet lower than the year before, and the dike, 420,077 square yards of earth costing close to $50,000, held. Over the next few years, workers continually improved, maintained, and adapted the dike to guard against any interruption that could easily cost the company as much as $25,000 per day.[41]

In addition to the challenges posed by nature, those who valued the South Meadow's rich agricultural lands objected to the dike. The plans for the factory complex required cutting through multiple property lines. Agricultural production had been waning, and most landowners in the South Meadow sold their land cheaply to Colt. Hartford resident George Clark III sold his land to Colt in April 1855, which transaction created Colt's westernmost border. Clark had initially purchased the land only fifteen years earlier, but like many speculators had never developed it. Colt friend and future biographer Henry Barnard sold him the southernmost land. Maps indicate the names of the other former owners of the land Colt bought for enterprise.[42]

Unfortunately for Colt, Colonel Solomon Porter, his landlord and now rival, grew apples on elevated ground and still desired the fertilization benefits of the regular freshets. He adamantly refused to sell. Porter, a veteran of the American Revolution, a West Indies trader, wholesale grocer, and president of the State Bank, had purchased land and built a stately Italianate mansion on the corner of Wyllys and Wethersfield avenues He resisted Colt's plans, money, charms, bullying, and even threats, which included abandoning the project altogether.[43]

Colt launched a multi-year campaign against Porter, but being a wealthy businessman himself, Porter stood firm, proclaiming, "it is true that I declined to sell the property upon the appraisement of individuals…and so far as my observation has extended, it is not customary for one man to call upon another to dispose of his property in this way; nor have I ever before heard any man blamed for declining to sell his house for a price named by a third person."[44] The matter

---

[39] "Great Freshet: The Water Higher than the Flood of 1801!" *Hartford Daily Courant*, May 1, 1854, 2.

[40] William Jarvis, November 14, 1859, Correspondence, William Jarvis letters, 1838-1889, CMCH.

[41] See Taber, "Thinking Like a Flood Plain," for a thorough account of the 1854 flood, especially the coverage from the *Hartford Times* and *The Hartford Courant*, 294-303; "Great Freshet: The Water Higher than the Flood of 1801," *The Hartford Courant*, May 1, 1854; Col. Colt's Dike, *Hartford Daily Courant*, April 23, 1855.

[42] See letter of support, *The Hartford Courant*, July 4, 1854; Henry Barnard, *Armsmear: The Home, the Arm, and the Armory of Samuel Colt: A Memorial* (New York, NY: Alvord Printer, 1866), 19, 64.

[43] "South Green Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1977), Section 8; "South Meadow Improvements," *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 14, 1854, 2.

[44] "Letter to the Editor 1 -- no Title," *Hartford Daily Courant*, September 19, 1853. Also see "Samuel Colt,

dragged out for a decade, until Porter capitulated a bit more (but not all) of his land to complete the Armsmear estate.[45] (See 5.3 and 5.4).



Figure 5.3 Enlarged area of 1855 map indicating Solomon Porter's house at the edge of Colt's improvement area. E. M. H. Woodford, C. T. Smith, and Wagner & Clark. *Smith's Map of Hartford County, Connecticut*. [S.l, 1855] Map. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. https://www.loc.gov/item/2001620484/. A 1869 map illustrates that Solomon's property still intruded on the Colt estate. It appears that Colt simply built his empire around it. He would locate his home, Armsmear, next door to Porter. Armsmear rivaled the Solomon state in size and opulence. See map in Hosley, *Colt: The Making of an American Legend*, 101-104.

The Hartford Common Council vs. Samuel Colt

Porter was not alone in pushing back on Colt's aggressive plans. The initial approval of the streets and dike had been just the first of many heated negotiations between Colt and the City of Hartford. Throughout the growth of the armory and estate, the city continued to hold Colt accountable for contractual obligations to maintain the dike and roads. Colt had raised the roads in the meadow along the dike and to ingratiate the project to the public, created a scenic and "charming afternoon" drive for citizens between the dike and river.[46] Unfortunately for him, at the end of 1856, the city council determined that some of the streets were 8-12 feet narrower

Manufacturing and Firearms dispute with Col. Porter of Hartford, CT 1852-1857," Box 1, Samuel Colt Papers, Jarvis-Robinson Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

[45] Hartford County Land Records, Connecticut, Volume 94:49; "Colonel Colt's Prowess," *Hartford Times* (10/26/1931); Hosley, 101-104.

[46] "Coltville," *Hartford Daily Courant*, April 20, 1855, 2; Also see "The Colt's Embankment Contract," *Hartford Daily Courant*, May 3, 1856.

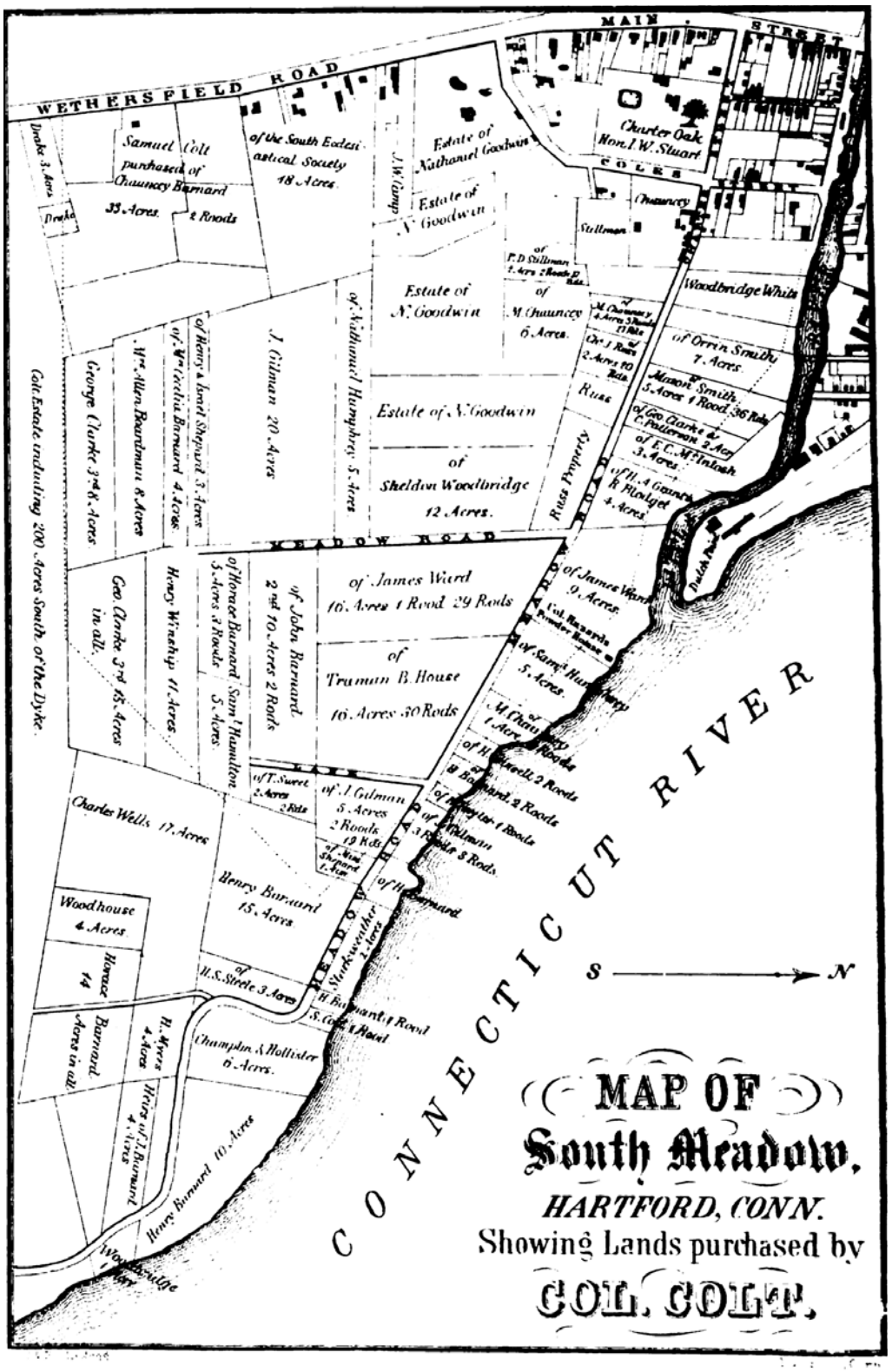


Figure 5.4 From Henry Barnard, *Armsmear: The Home, the Arm, and the Armory of Samuel Colt. A Memorial* (New York: Alvord, printer, 1866), 59.

than required and that portions of the embankment were not adequately protected as stipulated by Colt's contract.[47] In 1857, the council determined the dike was insufficient, and in lieu of widening it to sixty feet, insisted that Colt build a fence along the road to protect the dike and additional waterways. To stabilize the dike, Colt had workers plant willow trees, whose roots grounded the embankment, throughout 1855, but the council also approved stones, trees, and shrubbery to further control drainage. The Hartford Common Council also complained that Colt did not have the proper receipts to account for the dike's $140,000 cost, disputing the price of the earth, the builders, the sewers, and willow trees.[48] The parties disputed who should pay assessments and maintenance on the South Meadow streets and dike, with Colt demanding what was then uncommon: a tax abatement for all his improvements.[49]

The urban improvements continued even after the completion of the factory, totaling a capital investment of $1,250,000. The railroad first arrived in Hartford in 1839, a halfway point between New Haven and Springfield, but in 1857 Colt convinced the railroad to go by the armory along the dike, effectively threatening the safety of the road and presenting, in the opinion of at least one taxpayer, the city with liability.[50] Possibly due to the opposition of the Common Council and citizens, the railroad expansion did not occur until 1871.

Colt also made decisions irrespective of the council. He erected a windmill on the dike at Wawarme Avenue and in Fall 1858, he cut a tunnel through the dike to install a gate, which increased access to the factory complex from the train depot. City Alderman Charles Benton believed the tunnel was unsafe and disagreed as to how much Colt deserved in tax abatement for this "improvement."[51] Unfortunately for Colt, another flood breached the dike gate the following year.[52] In September the Common Council asked for repairs, noting the tunnel and windmill, but more worrisome was the southern portion of the embankment, which had been washed away. The city attorney determined that Colt was responsible for the damage to the land due to his gate "arch," and "that he, owning the land on both sides, has a right to tunnel the dike, but is responsible for the interruption of travel or injury at the highway." Three years later, in April 1862, a freshet again threatened the dike, and a leak was found near the base of Colt's windmill. Rats had burrowed a small opening.[53]

Other improvements concerned the city's water commissioners and the Committee on the Fire Department. For several months, Colt battled with the water commissioner over his water bill for what was estimated as at least 30,000 gallons a day for the factory, the boiler, and the animals

---

47 Minutes of the Hartford Common Council, August 3, 8, 18, December 8, 1856, in Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library.

48 Colt was accustomed to receiving tax favors. In 1850 he had managed to get an exemption of $500 on a gift from the Turkish Sultan through congressional favor. See Aaron Winchell blog posts, April 11, 2025 and *The Washington Union*, June 5, 1850, 2; "Article 6," *Hartford Daily Courant*, December 15, 1857; "The Dike Case," The Hartford Courant, December 2, 1868; "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 1857.

49 "The City Taxes," *Hartford Daily Courant*, May 6, 1856, 2.

50 "Colt's Meadow Dike- Our Common Council," *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 6, 1857, 2.

51 *Hartford Courant*, September 6, 1859.

52 *Hartford Courant*, March 18, 1859.

53 *Hartford Daily Courant*, September 24, 1859; "The Great Freshet," *Hartford Daily Courant*, April 21, 1862.

and consumers on the estate. This dispute included Colt's decision in November 1857 to create and fill a three- to four-million-gallon reservoir on his estate and pump it with Connecticut River water. This supplied his estate, factory and tenements through underground pipes, separate from the city's water system. The newspaper explained that "On Wethersfield Avenue, Col. Colt's pipes are connected with the city pipes, forming a communication from that point throughout Colt's works, into his reservoir. This communication can be open or closed by means of a gate, placed at this point on Wethersfield Avenue, and this gate is controlled by the city alone." Colt asked the city to open the gate only in case of a fire because his own reservoir did not provide sufficient water pressure. The city agreed by placing a water meter on the city pipe and charging for the excess, at one cent for each hundred gallons. Colt then protested that the meter obstructed the natural free flow of water and was "uncalled for," but the city insisted that Colt should not receive special treatment. This dispute is especially noteworthy due to the fire a decade later and the inability of workers to extinguish the flames due to empty hoses.[54]

Throughout these fraught negotiations, Colt strengthened his bargaining position as Coltsville became an important financial asset to the city through employment taxes and considerable property taxes. When Colt planned to expand his armory in 1861, he was tired of fighting the Common Council and threatened to build on the other side of the river in East Hartford, denying the city his tax money. The Common Council stood its ground, refusing to reimburse him for the streets and the dike, and Colt never acted on his threat. He also continued to maintain the improvements by building additional streets, sluiceways, and drains, while the city continued to tax his property.[55] Regardless of all the delays posed by the Common Council, Colt moved with his usual speed and aggressive energy to build the factory complex.

Colt's final request to the city was for permission to build a bridge across the Little/Mill River at Commerce Street. He took into consideration the plans for City Park, where the intent was to clean up the Little/ Mill River, which residents dubbed the "Hog" River, now packed with waste from the mills, tanneries, tenements, garbage dumps, and pig pastures. A decade or so later, City (later Bushnell) Park, together with the Colt estate, would help transform the city's environment from industrial blight to pastoral beauty in harmony with industry.[56] By 1855 the dike had stabilized the meadow enough for keeping pigs and cows and maintaining a tobacco barn.[57] In June 1856, an impressed *Hartford Daily Courant* captured an image of how Colt was "Making the green grass of the old meadow spring up as it were by magic into a manufacturing village and adding prosperity and renown to the beautiful city of the Puritans."[58] Colt's improvements

---

[54] Article 6, *The Hartford Courant*, July 29, 1858; "The Dike Claim Against the City" *Hartford Daily Courant*, November 30, 1858; *The Hartford Courant*, September 28, 1859. This is an interesting detail, because one could speculate that this issue contributed to the dearth of water during the 1864 fire. To this day there is little understanding as to the cause and spread of the fire that destroyed the east armory.

[55] Editorial, *The Hartford Courant*, November 19, 1857; "Schedules of Highways, *The Hartford Courant*, May 3, 1861.

[56] The city eventually buried the again-renamed Park River after the 1936 flood, hiding any evidence of the environmental origins of the industrial city.

[57] Article 4 *The Hartford Courant*, October 12, 1855; Article 5, *The Hartford Courant*, August 25, 1855; Classified Ad 3, *The Hartford Courant*, August 23, 1856, 3.

[58] "Colonel Colt's Pistols," *The Hartford Courant*, June 3, 1856.

to the South Meadow accelerated Hartford's transition from agricultural to industrial, from an indigenous, local natural landscape to one that manipulated natural resources to create a hybrid landscape that would become an industrial center of international acclaim.

The Original Armory

Sam Colt's use of historical street names to inscribe the local past into the South Meadow landscape was followed by a more worldly choice of architectural elements for his home and factory. Places like the Middle East and Far East represented the exotic, and many in the nineteenth-century upper classes embraced "orientalism." Colt armory's central onion dome likewise echoed Eastern Orthodox churches in Russia and Moorish influence.[59] Historic preservation documentation identifies the 500-foot-by-60-foot building style as Palladian. While the symmetrical, multi-bayed, neoclassical structure maintained a European palatial or civic feeling, it featured fewer embellishments characteristic of that style, and features Romanesque Revival elements with the gabled, originally slate, roof and central tower bay. Some credit architect Octavius Jordan or Colt himself, while others identify Colt's supposed nephew Henry A. G. Pomeroy (a trained civil engineer). Pomeroy earned the current equivalent of $100,000 to oversee the building and infrastructure-related construction.[60] The factory design was most likely a collaborative one, as the style does not resemble Jordan's other work, which leaned toward Gothic Revival, Second Empire, and Italianate architectural styles.

In many ways the armory facade mimicked European civic architecture as much as it echoed a textile factory or traditional federal armory design. A central tower creates a canopy for an interior rotunda, not unlike the neoclassical United States Capitol. But in this case, Colt chose to crown his armory with a gold "star-studded royal blue onion dome" lifted above the center gabled roofline by slender white columns.[61] The blue onion dome described earlier remains Coltsville's most prominent decorative feature, which billing records indicate that Jordan designed, debunking a theory that claimed that a Turkish Sultan, grateful for the efficiency of the Colt revolvers, gifted the dome to Sam Colt.[62] More likely, Colt, inspired by his many trips, including his honeymoon, to Russia and the Eastern Orthodox churches in and around Moscow, asked Jordan to design it that way. Originally seen in Syria during the Umayyad caliphate, the onion dome remained a staple feature on Russian Eastern Orthodox churches since at least the sixteenth century and the reign of Ivan IV Vasilyevich. The blue dome with gold stars most resembles those on the Nativity of the Virgin cathedrals, such as the seventeenth-century Our

---

[59] Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

[60] We have not been able to verify exactly how or if H. A. G. Pomeroy is actually related to Sam Colt, but every source refers to him as a nephew. See Hosley, 107, footnotes 42 and 45; "Bill and Receipts," Box 1, RG 103, Connecticut State Library and Archives, Hartford, CT.

[61] According to Ellsworth Grant, Elizabeth Colt wrote that Colt had ordered the thirty-six stars to match the American flag. Anstress Paine, "The Gun and the Dome: Samuel Colt's Fantastical Monument to his Industry," in "Papers Delivered in the Thematic Session of the 37th Annual Meeting of the Society of Society of Architectural Historians," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 43, no. 3 (October 1984): 279-281.

[62] Octavius Jordan Bill for Architectural Plans, Box 1, RG 103, CSLA; *A Guide to Greater Hartford, CT* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Coordinating Council for the Arts, 1966).

Lady of Kazan Church at Kolomenskoye just outside Moscow. That church was dedicated by the Romanovs, ancestors of Alexander and Nicholas, with whom Colt had cultivated a personal and profitable relationship. Even after Sam's death, Elizabeth Colt maintained a relationship with Russian royalty, as evidenced in her hosting the grand duke in 1871.[63] The dome's shape alleviated snow buildup, and presented a cosmopolitan symbol that his enterprise was an international one. In place of a cross rising from the dome, Colt crowned his version with a golden rampant colt, a symbol inspired by the Colt family's coat of arms that became the logo and trademark for the company. It was, as Colt historian William Hosley observed, "one of the most distinctive interpretations of the industrial building tower and certainly established a public stature. In fact, the presence of the tower can best be accounted for by the pragmatism and profit motive that drove the design of industrial buildings."[64]



Figure 5.5 Construction of Colt Armory, c. 1854, Daguerreotype, Museum of Connecticut History, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT.

Early factory buildings like this reflected engineering based on rational, strategic planning, often vernacular, over a strict architectural style, enabling flexibility in floor plans to accommodate varying mechanical needs. Machinery manufacturers provided plans and often played a role in building design. One critic explained that "the Armory is an impressive building, not beautiful. Giants seldom are, and this is a hard-working, smoky Vulcan of a giant, but it is still picturesque and interesting."[65] Details such as door handles and hinges shaped like pistols customized the design.[66] (See 5.5).

[63] "Americans in Russia," *Hartford Daily Courant*, November 16, 1871.
[64] Hosley, *Colt: The Making of a Legend*, 107.
[65] M.E.W.S. "The Homes of America VII Armsmear," *The Art Journal* 2 (1876), 323.
[66] Barnard, 210.

Brownstone taken from the quarries located on the east bank of the Connecticut River at the western edge of the town of Portland (where Elizabeth's father served as a pastor) and across the river from Middletown, Connecticut served as the primary building material for the armory. The brownstone there, known for its superior quality, consisted of a "distinctive reddish-brown sandstone that builders enlisted across the northeast, including that of urban residences." Connecticut's Old State House, the Sailors and Soldiers Memorial Arch, Wesleyan University, and the Vanderbilt mansions in Newport, Rhode Island also used the Portland quarry. Geologist R. J. Altamura noted that the "Portland quarries were the king of the brownstone quarries in Connecticut and...the country."[67] Most of the contractors hailed from the masonry industry and included brick mason Hiram Bissell, stoneworker James Batterson, woodworkers Henry Burgess and Son, and painters Henry J. Huxham and William Wright, also a window supplier. The stone and masonry remained untreated inside and out, perhaps to reduce the threat of fire, and Sam Colt decided not to take out insurance for the armory.[68]

The factory's sturdy framing resisted the vibration and oscillation of the hundreds of pieces of heavy machinery that it housed. In most factories of the era, the positioning of machinery depended on the location of the millwork power system, and the size and shape of the factory determined distribution. Linear plans provided more floor space than a large empty square. Colt's factory spaces would run about a mile and a half long if laid end-to-end. A belt-and-pulley system, whereby the belts descended from shafts in the ceiling, were threaded into pulleys, attached to cast iron columns, and moved by millwork, drove the machines.[69] Occupying the second stories of the east wings of both main buildings, two open rooms constituted the main working areas. Within each room, four to six rows of machines lined the walls. The repetition of bays of uniform size resulted in regular rectangular forms that create similarity of the interior space, allowing even light distribution. Architectural historian Matthew Roth observes that the Colt factory design resembled Amos D. Lockwood's Wauregan Mills, also built in 1854, which had an "H" shape and gable roof, where two long, parallel factories connected by a central, perpendicular ell.[70]

Colt's original H-shape factory consisted of the main armory along the bank of the Connecticut River, with an open floor to allow for the gears running from the engine to the machines. A perpendicular 500-by-60-foot ell extended west from its center to matching 500-by-40-foot single-story brownstone structures used as the forge and foundry. Framed gabled watchmen cottages stood in yards between the wings. The administrative office with an ornamental clock

---

67 Robert J. Altamura, "Historic Geologic Sites in Connecticut," *Connecticut Environment* 17 (1994), 10-11. "Portland Puts its Stamp on an Architectural Era," connecticuthistory.org (May 23, 2013), http://connecticuthistory.org/portland-puts-its-stamp-on-an-architectural-era/; National Historic Landmarks Survey, Portland Brownstone Quarries, United States Department of the Interior and National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, Form no. 10-900 (Portland, May 16, 2000), 6-7. Also see Cristin Generoso, Garrett Coady, and Kristina Oschmann, Coltsville Historic Structure Report, Brownstone #2, Central Connecticut State University, 2017, Coltsville HSR files.

68 Geer City Directories, Hartford (1858), 220, 144.

69 Barnard, 226-240.

70 Matthew Roth, Bruce Clouette, and Victor Darnell, *Connecticut: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites* (Washington, D.C: Society for Industrial Archaeology, 1981).

tower faced the river, and a second story bridge across Sequassen Street connected to the armory. Additionally on that north side of Sequassen, the factory complex included the powerhouse, the testing departments, an office boiler house and chimney stack, an armory boiler, office, carriage shed, drying house, paint shop, and barn. When Colt looked to expand the factory at the start of the Civil War, his plan added a nearly identical brick armory west of the brownstone that solidified the symmetry of the H shape even more literally. With speed characteristic of Sam Colt himself, workers completed construction of the second forging and blacksmith shops by October 1861 and planned to build the west armory in six weeks.[71]

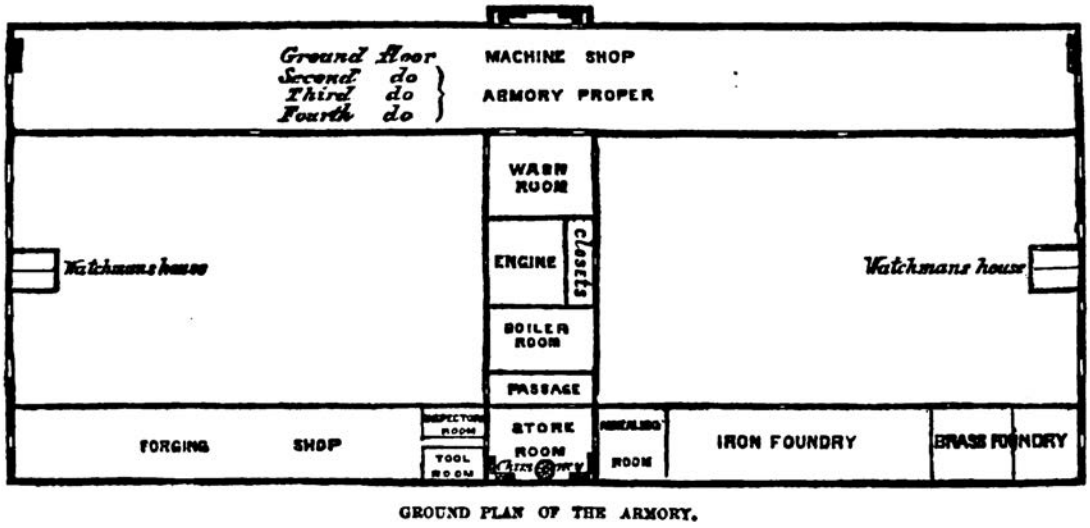


Figure 5.6 Original factory layout from "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine* 3, no. 4 (March 1857), 227.

Two single-story brownstone buildings running parallel with and between the main east and west armories served as a blacksmith's shop, brass furnace, forge and foundry with a welding shop, and annealing and joiner's shops. The 1861 expansion added another similar brick version built parallel to the west armory. In her review of several historical maps, geographer Kristen Keegan describes the expansion of the complex:

> Each main yard had a watchman's house (four in all), and multiple gates (large and small), while the spaces between the old and new armories each had one gate. Spaces called "Driveways" permitted communication between the six yards formed by the buildings. On the north side of Sequassen Street, the brick buildings were identified as Office Building, Planing Mill, Smithy, and Steam Dry House; there were also a number of wooden sheds, barns, and other buildings… As of the end of 1863, the construction of "New Boiler House and chimney in Old Armory yard" was noted.[72]

[71] See Bradley and Barnard, 212; Jarvis to Jarvis, October 1, 1861, Jarvis Family Papers, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, Hartford, CT. Hereafter referred to as CMCH.

[72] Anonymous, "Plan of Colt's Armory," c. 1862. Museum of Connecticut History, Hartford, CT, in Keegan, "Coltsville Historical Supplement."

The three-story, 500-by-60-foot west armory, the single-story forge (214 by 40), and the blacksmithing department, foundry, and polishing shop (also 214 by 40) completed the complex. During the Civil War, according to Henry Barnard, the west armory primarily produced muskets similar to those made in the federal armory at Springfield. As with the first building, the machine shop occupied the first floor, as well as the machines and tools for boring muskets and rifle barrels, a barrel drill design that arranged spindles vertically, which proved more accurate than drilling by hand or with horizontal drills.[73] The second and third floors served as the main areas of machine operation, filled with lathes and jigging and milling machines for metal cutting.[74]

A modern central steam engine, rather than traditional waterpower, powered the entire factory. Unlike the Eli Whitney armory on New Haven's Mill River and the enterprises that used the Hartford's Little River to run machines with waterpower, new factories no longer needed to be located near water-power sources, which typically were rural. Colt had a very different reason for wanting proximity to the Connecticut River, which was far too large to serve as an energy source. Colt relied on the Connecticut River for transporting materials, products, goods, and people to and from his factory. Access to water streams, and hence waterpower, had provided New England the energy to develop robust manufacturing for more than a century, but by the 1850s, in place of the textile mill's waterpower wheel pits, the steam engine had become the preferred source of power for urban manufacturing. Despite its dangers and volatility, the steam engine allowed industries to operate in cities with access to an urban, rather than a rural, workforce and transportation network.

For his South Meadow armory, Colt would not share power as he had at the Pearl Street location and at Porter's factory. Steam power still required a system of line shafts and belts to transfer power from a centrally located engine to the machines over several feet, which in turn required large open, narrow spaces with plenty of light and multiple stories. This usually meant locating the steam engine in the central section to minimize the distance for delivering power.[75]

For the original 1855 factory, Woodruff and Beech built what the industry then considered a state-of-the-art, 250-horsepower, double-cylinder steam engine for Colt's armory factory that "supplied power to the whole building through a system of noiseless belts and shafts." Its eighteen-foot flywheel allowed rotational energy to deliver steady power with consistent speed.[76] The "Sickels cut-off" valve could turn off steam at any point. Two 22-foot boilers, each 7 feet in diameter, provided the steam. A "beam engine" was a type of steam engine with a pivoted overhead beam that applied the force from a vertical piston to a vertical connecting rod and was often used for pumping water. These beam engines powered the line-shafting in a mill. In the

---

[73] Charles H. Fitch, "Report on the Manufacture of Fire-arms and Ammunition," U.S. Department of the Interior, (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1882), 8. The barrel design was created by Elisha Root.

[74] "The New Colt Armory," *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 10, 1868; Barnard, 213.

[75] Rosenberg and Hounshell, 4-5; Bradley, 89.

[76] Bruce Clouette, "Colt Industrial District" National Register Nomination. Henry B. Beach served as treasurer of *Woodruff and Beach*, and he eventually became the brother-in-law of Elizabeth's sister, Hetty Jarvis. Cyprian Nichols Beach and Henry Beach were half-brothers, sharing a father, George Beach Sr. of the Phoenix Bank in Hartford.

original east armory, a 118-foot-long belt, 22 inches wide, stretched from the flywheel into the attic, rotating 2,500 feet per minute. A wire rope drive attached to roof trusses distributed the power over long distances.[77]

As in the original armory, the west armory featured a double-cylinder, high-pressure steam engine from Woodruff and Beach, with an 18-inch diameter flywheel and 22-inch double-sole leather belt. It boasted an improved cut-off by the company's superintendent William Wright, making it even more efficient than the original. Another double-cylinder engine built in Providence supplemented the main engine. This coal-fueled steam-power system prevailed until the Colt factory switched to electrical generators and motors in the 1880s. These motors replaced the older rope drives.[78]

The factory's motive power was critical to its operations, and the engines were therefore centrally located. Coal heated water to create steam, which turned a turbine wheel, providing the rotating power for the belt system that operated machinery. An engineer had to light the fire for the steam one to two hours before the 8am start of the workday to produce enough power to run all the machines (about 50 to 60 pounds of steam pressure). Visitors reported that the space was surprisingly quiet for such a high-volume production manufacturing center with a "labyrinth of belts and bars" prevailing over a gear system.[79] The steam pipes from the ground floor engine boilers delivered hot air for heating and extended through the walls, underground, and "under the benches…completely around the sides and ends." Along with the heat from running the machines, this made for hot working conditions.[80]

While most of the windows maintained a simple rectangular double-hung design, the rounded center bay and gables were perhaps a nod to the German gunmaking tradition. A version of German Romanesque revival known as "Rundbogenstil" adapted the rounded arch style from German architects of the 1830s and 1840s, who applied pilasters and horizontal bands. The style relied on brick and locally available stone. Windows with rusticated brownstone sills and quoins set off segmentally arched windows. Architectural historian Bruce Clouette notes that the factory was "exceptional for its time for the amount of ventilation provided by the large

---

[77] At the time, the stationary steam engine was fairly new. While it freed manufacturing from waterpower, it was somewhat unstable. Several machinists affiliated with Colt's spent time with one another as members of a Polytechnic Club that discussed questions of science: Elisha Root. Francis Pratt, Amos Whitney, and others were concerned about exploding steam engines and their causes. Inspired by similar efforts in England, they established a body in Hartford to promote safety, inspecting steam engines and insuring owners against loss and explosions. In 1866 they created Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company. See "Hartford Conn as a Manufacturing, Business and Commercial Center," Hartford Board of Trade, 1889, 67.

[78] Stewart, 20; Grant, 49; "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 238; Barnard; "Armsmear," 213; The Hartford Courant, February 12, 1867; newspaper clipping, Samuel Colt Papers, Box 17, Jarvis-Robinson Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

[79] Charles B. Richards to Charles T. Porter, October 9, 1903, as quoted in Charles T. Porter, *Engineering Reminiscences Contributed to "Power" and "American Machinist"* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1908), 177-181.

[80] H. C. Darbee, Colt Armory, HABS, 1969 and Bruce Clouette, "Colt Industrial District" National Register Nomination.

many-paned windows" and sixteen-foot ceilings.[81] Each of the machines needed to be lubricated with tallow (animal fat) or whale oil, which when heated with friction gave off a powerful odor, so ventilation was helpful. Henry Barnard reported 180 window and door openings, as well as 32 skylights that further offered views of the river from the east side and met the need for daylight to provide the illumination needed to safely, efficiently, and accurately conduct the work of the factory. Those workers whose tasks required precision were located near the natural light of the windows, which were supplemented by gas lights during the early morning and late afternoon winter hours. The gas lighting, which was available throughout the complex and estate, also brightened the space for adequate visibility at the machines.[82]

At about the same time of the completion of the west armory in 1862, Pratt and Whitney designed a rotary lifting and forcing pump that piped the Connecticut River water to two 30-foot boilers in the original factory through 8-inch-diameter pipes at 300 gallons per minute. The pump also filled two ornamental reservoirs on the Colt estate.[83] Plumbing ran throughout the factory, allowing each area, or "apartment," to offer water for drinking, washing, and extinguishing fires, when necessary.[84]

The Precision Manufacturing Corridor and Firearms Industry

Colt biographer Henry Barnard relayed that Secretary of War John B. Floyd described the initial 1855 armory "as having risen to the dignity of a great national work, as well as superior in machinery and extent to either of the national armories in the United States."[85] Historian David Hounshell agrees that the American System of Manufacturing changed in scale and nature from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century as federal armories and private gunmakers worked to develop an efficient system for producing uniform firearms with interchangeable parts, "culminating perhaps with the completion of Samuel Colt's armory in Hartford in 1855."[86] Historian Robert Gordon challenges the assertion that machines wholly replaced artisan skill. Even at Colt there was need, even preference, for skilled finishers to properly fit and assemble products well into the late twentieth century.[87]

---

[81] Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7, 15-17, 66, 119, 229-235.

[82] Stewart, 20; "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 238; Barnard; "Armsmear," 213; *The Hartford Courant*, February 12, 1867.

[83] Newspaper clipping, Box, 17, Hart-Jarvis Papers, Beinecke Library. "Colt's New Armory," *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 10, 1868; Hosley 1996, 199.

[84] A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 238; Barnard; "Armsmear," 210, 213; *The Hartford Courant*, February 12, 1867.

[85] Barnard, 237.

[86] Rosenberg, 427; David Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1832: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 15-166.

[87] Robert Gordon, "Who Turned the Mechanical Ideal into Mechanical Reality?" *Technology and Culture* 29, no. 4 (October 1988), 744-778; Robert Howard, "Interchangeable Parts Revisited," *Technology and Culture* 21, no. 3 (July 1980), 549-550.

Rather than introducing new ways of manufacturing, Colt's factory, as a private enterprise, developed and solved problems through "technological convergence" as the technical knowledge that workers and contractors acquired and shared diffused to other industries such as sewing machines, typewriters, bicycles, and eventually automobiles.[88] The new and specialized machinery and processes that Colt enlisted grew out of the efforts of many others throughout the Connecticut River Valley, including the government armory at Springfield (and that at Harper's Ferry in Virginia) to produce interchangeable parts. When the British government sent a commission to the United States to examine its manufacturing system in 1855, the group toured the Springfield Armory, Robbins and Lawrence armory in Vermont, and Colt's armory factory in Hartford.[89] By the 1880s the firearms industry influenced the precision manufacturing of bicycles, sewing machines, clocks, watches, and other products in America. The U.S. Congress commissioned a report to examine the role of firearm production in creating an American System of Manufacturing. In the report, prominent mechanical engineer W. P. Trowbridge remarked that

> The practice of making single objects of general utility, such as steel pens, pins, and needles, by machinery or by successive processes, in which different workmen have special operations to perform in succession of the same object before it is completed, is an old one. The art of making complete machines or implements, each part which may be introduced into any machine of the same kind, and especially the adaptation of special tools, by which hand-work in fitting the parts is often entirely avoided, is, I believe, of American origin.[90]

Beyond its size, mechanized hyper-specialization made Colt's armory different from other factories of the era. Each machine was specifically designed to make a single part in a dedicated area of the factory. Machines and workers, micromanaged by and through in-house contractors, focused on different parts, machines and/or processes: chambering cylinders, turning and shaping cylinders, boring rifle barrels, and even making many different screws for assembly.

---

[88] Rosenberg, 423.
[89] Fitch, "Report on the Manufacture of Fire-arms and Ammunition."
[90] W.P. Trowbridge to Hon. Francis A. Walker, October 1, 1881 in Fitch, V.



Figure 5.7 Artist unknown, "View of the Colt Factory with Steamboat from the South, Colt Meadows [Hartford]," 1857. Painting commissioned by Samuel Colt. The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Collection, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT.

The Machinists

Because of the reliance on and necessity for machine-driven production, Colt initially sought semi-skilled labor, focusing on recruiting experienced machinists rather than experienced armorers. However, he did convince Springfield's master armorer Thomas Warner to supervise operations. Warner contracted with Colt to refine the tool machinery at the Whitney Armory to meet the Walker-Colt contract, machinery Colt then took to Hartford.[91]

In Hartford, Colt attempted to recruit Albert Eames, a machinist at Springfield, but Eames turned the job down. Colt then persuaded Horace Lord, who served as a longtime manager. Lord had worked at Springfield before going to the Whitney armory. In 1849 Colt lured machinist Elisha K. Root, who was married to Colt's cousin, Mathilda. (Recall that the two men first met in Ware, Massachusetts, when Root came to watch Colt's explosion in the lake.) Root had apprenticed in Ware, moving among many textile machine shops in New England. He arrived in Collinsville via Chicopee Falls and Cabotsville in 1832 to serve as a 24-year-old journeyman with a community of machinists, who worked to mechanize axe-making at the Collins Company Axe Factory. At age 28, Root began patenting some of his innovations, and he eventually worked as the Collins

[91] Contract between Colt and Thomas Warner, January 18, 1847, in John E. Parsons, ed. *Sam Colt's Own Record* (Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT, 1949), 30, 34, 105. Hereafter referred to as CHS. Correspondence indicates that the movement of tools and machinery was hardly a smooth process and that Colt took equipment from Whitney's armory that he should not have, interfering with the pace of work at the New Haven armory.

factory's superintendent. Root had helped develop machine tools, including forging and finishing with manufactured machinery aided by steam power. While lacking experience in firearms manufacturing, Root had transformed the production of edge tools for the Collins Company. He introduced die-forging and developed drop hammers, adapted from versions at Harper's Ferry (which had in turn likely been adapted from Simeon North) and applied those tools to axe-making. He specialized in single-operation machinery that could cut metal with precision and developed a die-forging machine and other similar ones that could perform multiple steps, thus reducing set-up time. Root had declined many offers, including one from Springfield Armory, but Colt's financial package proved too tempting. To create a similar integrated manufacturing system for his modern factory, Colt offered Root $3,000, plus stock.[92]

At Colt's, Root patented his own crank-driven drop hammer for making firearms, and his enlistment of power-driven milling and metal cutting machines propelled the Hartford armory toward uniformity. He developed a drop-forge machine for axe production and adapted it for the firearm. One of the most important machines was the drop hammer. Building on the designs of Robbins and Lawrence, who had designed drop hammers to forge gun parts in the early 1850s, Root developed the vertical drop-forge hammer, which he patented on August 16, 1863. Root's version was multiple-drop and screw-operated, making it faster and more accurate. The hammer shaped annulled iron and steel into barrels, cylinders, and other gun parts. The creation of the drop hammer assisted in developing drop forging. Beneath the vertical drop hammer would be an anvil or a steady surface against which the hammer acted as a pile to forge the dies. Dies were precut to make the desired part. Dies of different shapes created the barrels, cylinders, or other parts needed for manufacturing. The power impacting the top die would come from a hammer or a machine like the vertical drop hammer. Multitask machines integrated production, and Root patented several of these. They included the crank drop for die-forging in 1850 (1858 patent); a multiple-operation machine, essentially a double turret, in 1852; a compound screw drop hammer (1853 patent); an improved machine for boring revolver cylinders (1854 patent); an improved slide lathe, and a compound rifling machine (1855 patent).[93] In a government report decades later, Charles Fitch explained that the barrel drilling techniques used in 1882, as well as drop forges and jigging machines, stemmed from Elisha Root's designs developed for Colt's.[94] Jigs performed the precise work of drilling and hand-filing gauges for measuring, and Root's die-forging machine did the same for the work of the blacksmith. In tandem with a milling machine, a turret lathe could hold several tools on the vertical axis, which "made it possible to perform a sequence of operations on the work piece without the need for re-setting or removing the piece from the lathe."[95]

Root also brought with him professional connections to a network of machinists who served as a hub for innovation in precision manufacturing throughout New England.[96] Between the

---

92 Meyer, 254-55; Stewart, 39.

93 Meyer, 254-58; Stewart, 19, 39.

94 Table 1, "The Manufacture of Fire-Arms in the United States," in Fitch, "Report on the Manufacture of Fire-arms and Ammunition," 14.

95 Rosenberg, 429.

96 Rosenburg, 246. Through the marriage of science and technology, Leonard Reich argues that rather than the

1830s and 1840s, the nature of networking changed with the larger capital invested by private firms like Colt's. Machinists moved among these firms as part of a "community of practice" that brought that collaborative energy to the state-of-the-art facility at South Meadow. Federal armory machinists, too, saw the advantage in a profit-driven company and embraced Colt's latest designs and practices.[97]

While Colt had his vision for a full-service factory, Root, who attracted the best machinists in the region, executed it. Historian David Meyer calls Root a "node" and the Colt factory a "hub," arguing that what happened across the Connecticut River Valley in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, from Windsor, Vermont, through Springfield and Hartford, to New Haven, in many ways paralleled the Silicon Valley boom of the late twentieth century. Different industries adapted machinery to their specific purposes, which in turn improved technology for other firms engaged in products requiring precise metalworking.[98]

The urban iron foundries served as the earliest of such hubs for machinist networks that then extended to the cotton textile industry, and on to armories. Diffusion of technical knowledge and skills to individuals, firms, and machinist networks happened through social connections and interactions, workplace collaboration and mobility, and demands for similar skills and redundant tasks. These innovators carried with them knowledge of certain components or clusters of skills shared through apprenticeships or within a factory as part of a contract system, which led to the development of a small number of machines and processes for countless products involving milling, cutting, grinding, and lubrication. Machinists enlisted the turret lathe and automatic screwing machines across industries, and they even adapted the flat-link bike chain to other types of machinery to diffuse power. As Meyer observes, "Clusters of machinists' firms also manifested continuums of knowledge," and Colt's was central to all this synergy. Largely mobile men in their mid-upper twenties visited other shops across regions, sometimes making temporary moves and bringing knowledge back, and sometimes permanent ones to begin new businesses based on the production methods they learned at Colt's. The Colt factory supplemented the role of the federal armories in terms of training. While there was some concern about trade secrets, a fairly elite group of machinists continued to participate in "communities of practice" to stay competitive, addressing difficult problems. "This competitive environment," explains Meyer, "coupled with a dynamic exchange of collaborative know-how, constituted a potent mechanism for enhancing innovation because incremental improvements passed among the practitioners."[99]

lone inventor, industrial research fueled corporate competitiveness, contributed to commercial success, and helped construct the workings of American industry today. His argument is based on the collaborative research in the laboratories of General Electric and Bell to create new markets with new innovations and continually spur their competitors to improve products with technological advances of their own. The kind of collaboration in the precision manufacturing valley pre-dated this by twenty years. Leonard S. Reich, *The Making of American Industrial Research: Science and Business at GE and Bell, 1876-1926* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

97 Rosenburg, 256.

98 Meyer, 8, 255; Rosenberg, 436; Also see Howard.

99 Meyer, 6-7, 17-21; Also see Rosenburg, 428-429.

Colt's therefore became an essential stop for machinists working up and down the Connecticut River Valley's "precision corridor." The firearms industry, and its need for more specialized, precise machines, directly influenced manufacturing in other industries. A publication on Hartford's manufacturers not only discussed Colt's in the company profile, but also a who's who of the company's former employees. Several of the machinists who came to work under Root eventually founded their own companies. These included Pratt and Whitney, the Hartford Machine Screw Company, and the Spencer Rifle Company. Francis Pratt and Amos Whitney met one another at the Colt factory. Charles Billings helped design the Lincoln Miller for Colt when working for the Phoenix Iron Works. He later worked at Remington and then returned to Hartford at the Weed's Sewing Machine Company before founding Billings and Spencer to manufacture drop-forging equipment and other tools. His partner, Christopher Spencer, who invented the Spencer repeating rifle, had worked at Colt and invented a machine for turning sewing machine spools, explored making metal screws, and even developed the automatic turning lathe, which "was instrumental in a major acceleration in the pace of machine tool operations."[100] A. S. Cook brought his experience and knowledge gained at Colt's to the National Screw Company in Hartford. Machinists across the industry conferred outside of the factories, as seen when Root formed the Polytechnic Club, which included Francis Pratt, Amos Whitney, and others, to discuss questions of science and brainstorm innovative ideas.[101]

Historian Bruce Tull explains the importance of this type of communication and interaction among the armory and other precision manufacturing interests. Innovation is a social activity, and diffusion of knowledge accelerates technological change. At Springfield, the suspension of patents in the armories augmented the sharing of knowledge and skills. Labor policies also encouraged armory employees to innovate, and cooperative labor relations helped encourage craft-trained workers to move around within a tight network of other armories to maintain employment in periods of slower demand.[102]

Samuel Robbins and Richard Lawrence of Windsor, Vermont received a government contract for muskets in the 1840s and used their their water-powered armory to develop machinery, versions of which later supported watch, typewriter, bicycle, and the automobiles industries.[103] Collaborators like Frederick Howe worked with Lawrence and applied machines like lathes, drills, planers, and milling machines to making sewing machines. The same universal milling machine used for sewing machines could also mill for the Springfield muskets. Rosenberg explains that "as machinery and technological practices diffused outward and were applied to the production of a broad range of products, continued problem-solving led to the modification and incremental improvement of the technologies in question."[104]

---

[100] Rosenberg, 429; Meyer, 255-257.
[101] "Hartford, Connecticut as a Manufacturing, Business, and Commercial Center," 119.
[102] Bruce Tull, "Springfield Armory as Industrial Policy: Interchangeable Parts and the Precision Corridor," (PhD dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2001), 13-14.
[103] Rosenberg, 418, 426-27.
[104] Rosenberg, 439; Stewart, 21-24.

Robbins and Lawrence expanded, building 250 machines for its Hartford factory but never selling them. The company manufactured Christian Sharps's breech-loading, single-shot rifle (the "Beecher's Bibles") between Laurel and Broad streets in 1851. The street became known as "Rifle Avenue" until it was changed to Capitol Avenue upon the erection of the new state capitol building in 1878.[105] By 1855 Phoenix Iron Works built Robbins and Lawrence's milling machines and sold them to Colt. The superintendent at Phoenix, Frederick Pratt, had apprenticed in Lawrence, Massachusetts and worked for two years with Colt at the Amos Whitney armory. When those two founded Pratt and Whitney in 1860 to build and sell machinery, they based designs on Robbins and Lawrence but refined the metalworking features. By the 1860s Colt's was buying machinery and tools from Pratt and Whitney. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, Hartford manufacturers thrived by applying machine-building traditions and innovations from textile factories, armories, and consumer hardware across industries.[106]

Colt's armory housed every part of the process under one roof. In addition to the forge and foundry, Colt's pulled in production tasks formerly completed outside most armories, such as the plating of guards, engraving cylinders, and manufacture of flashes, percussion caps, and mahogany cases. The in-house forge and foundry particularly helped consolidate operations. In the space of two first-floor brownstones, workers performed thirty-two separate and distinct operations "required in the forging for a single pistol, with each person or multiple people assigned to one operation." According to an 1856 article in Hartford's *Evening Post*, the factory imported coal from Pennsylvania. A local iron house imported the best steel expressly for Colt's from Sheffield and Stewart in England (whose steel the London factory had also used), both cities benefiting from the new process (Bessemer) that accelerated the purification of iron, greatly reducing the cost of making steel. One reference claimed that the armory also eventually pulled steel from iron made at Mark A. Cooper's furnace from the American South in Bartow County, Georgia.[107] Colt's own forge prepared the brass (for mounting and bullet molds) and iron (for machinery) for casting. It also had impressive technology that made it a relatively healthy place to work. The forging began in the 40-by-200-foot northern, single-story brownstone with the raw material. At the Colt factory's forge, "along each side range stacks of double-covered forges, the blasts for which, entering and discharging through flues in the walls, carry off the smoke and gases. Here, for the first time in our life, we were in a blacksmith shop in full operation, yet free from smoke and cinders, and with a pure atmosphere."[108]

An inspector examined each forged piece before sending it to the annealing ovens in the 40-by-200-foot foundry across the way for annealing, chemical processes, and some casting. The

---

[105] Ellsworth Grant, "The Miracle on Capitol Avenue," *Hog River Journal* 2:3 (May/June/July 2004), 25-29.

[106] Roth, 1981; "Machinery and Tools," Ledger Book, 1862, RG 103, Connecticut State Library; "Hartford Connecticut as a Manufacturing, Business and Commercial Center," (Hartford Board of Trade, 1888, 1889). Google Books.

[107] "Colonel Colt's Pistols," *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 3, 1856 in Scrapbooks, Box 56, RG 103, CSLA; Letter HW Listone to Mr. Ulrich, November 31, 1931 and Clipping, Incoming Correspondence, May 25, 1931, Box 19, RG 103, CSLA; "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 221-249. The Springfield Armory had used imported steel for decades (see Deyrup) and "Sam Colt Opted for British Steel," The Gun Report 14, no. 2 (July 1968), 8-14.

[108] "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 233-234.

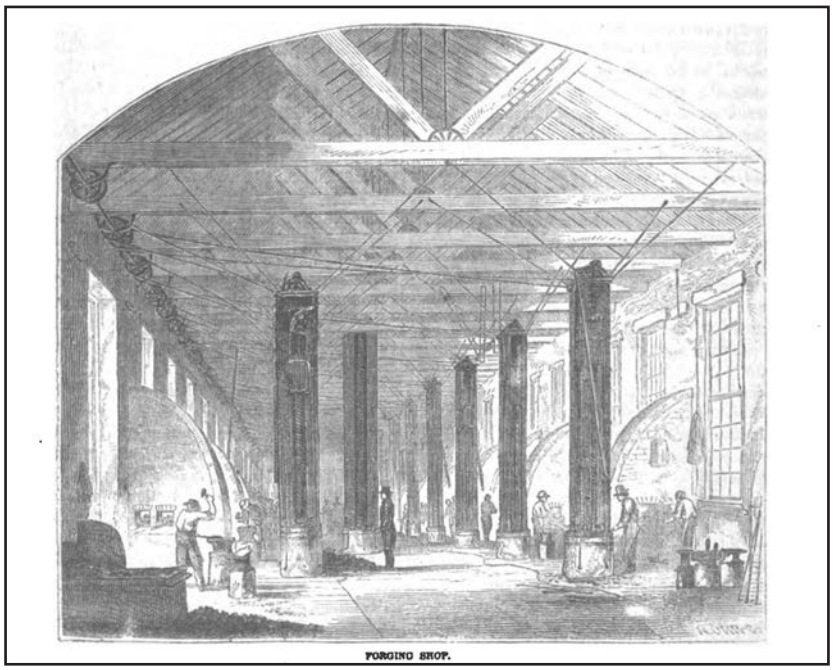
magazine reported that, “the arrangements here for both brass and iron castings are on a liberal scale; the former is mostly for mountings, bullet-molds, etc.- the latter for machinery.” This all happened before sending the parts to the second floor of the main east armory for milling, shaping, turning, boring, and cutting of the more than fourteen different gun parts, not to mention even more particular screws of all kinds to secure the parts together. In the storekeeper’s department, where someone tracked all tools and parts, sometimes stamping them depending on where in the process they were, each part was again inspected, enlisting at least fifteen different tools and gauges, and the inspector stamped his initials on the piece for accountability. For the gunstock, workers operated the machines for mountings and woodwork.[109]

Based on a tour of the factory in 1857, the writers of a magazine article called “A Day at the Armory” noted that ten percent of the work involved passing pieces through machinery, another ten percent involved assembly, and machines conducted 80 percent of the work required to produce a firearm. Sixty men worked with “power and hand tools of every desired kind” on the entire lower floor of the 60-by-500-foot main building to manufacture the machines used to make the armory’s own products, but also for sale to other companies. The factory workers did not just make firearms; many also refined the type of machinery used to make them. It is partly through the eventual sale of some of those machines that machine-based manufacturing spread across America and the globe.[110]

On the second floor of the armory, sixty cast iron columns ran down the middle of the 500-by-60-foot space with its sixteen-foot-high ceiling, with shafting attached by continuous pulley for driving the more than 400 machine tools arranged in sections in accordance with the specific part of the firearm that each produced. The arrangement provided just enough room for the machine operator to move around the workbenches that lined exterior walls, facing the 112 floor-to-ceiling windows for precision work and color matching. The middle areas were reserved for storage and additional power stations. Managers maximized space by fitting as many massive machines onto the floor as possible. Colt factory etchings, drawings, lithographs, and photographs from several years illustrate machines lined in rows across the wings of the second floor of the east armory. The machine tools that made up the armory included chambering cylinders, turning and shaping tools, boring barrels, milling and drilling lock frames, and screw-making devices.[111] (See 5.8). Those tasks divided among the various contractors included fourteen parts: 1) cylinder barrel; 2) lock-frame; 3) hammer; 4) trigger; 5) bolt; 6) key; 7) main-spring; 8) hand; 9) sear-spring; 10) lever; 11) rammer; 12) guard; 13) back-strap; and 14) stock. Ammunition manufacturing steps included creating cartridges, cones, cap tubes, and bullet molds. The machine floor was lined with rows of identical machines in each area, all attached to a belt-and-pulley system, all powered by the centralized steam engine described earlier. Machine operators completed the tasks of boring barrels, milling lock frames, drilling, screw cutting, rifling, and using jigging machines that mortised out lock-frames. Assemblers then collected all the parts, each receiving a number and manufacturing stamp, to create the finished product. They then took it all apart

[109] “A Day at the Armory,” *United States Magazine*, 236.
[110] “A Day at the Armory,” *United States Magazine*, 221-249.
[111] Bruce Clouette, “Colt Industrial District” National Register Nomination; “A Day at the Armory,” *United States Magazine*, 235.

again and sent parts to another area of the factory "for their final finishing." The dry-polishing shop, with its polishing wheels, was located on the third floor of the center building in a 60-foot-square room. This step was followed by another inspection before the product moved on to the 25-by-40-foot basement of the office building, where the mountings were plated with silver and burnished. At the center of the building, the 60-by-80-foot stock makers' shop included power saws, planes, and mortising and shaping machines. Here workers varnished and finished the black walnut woodwork.[112]



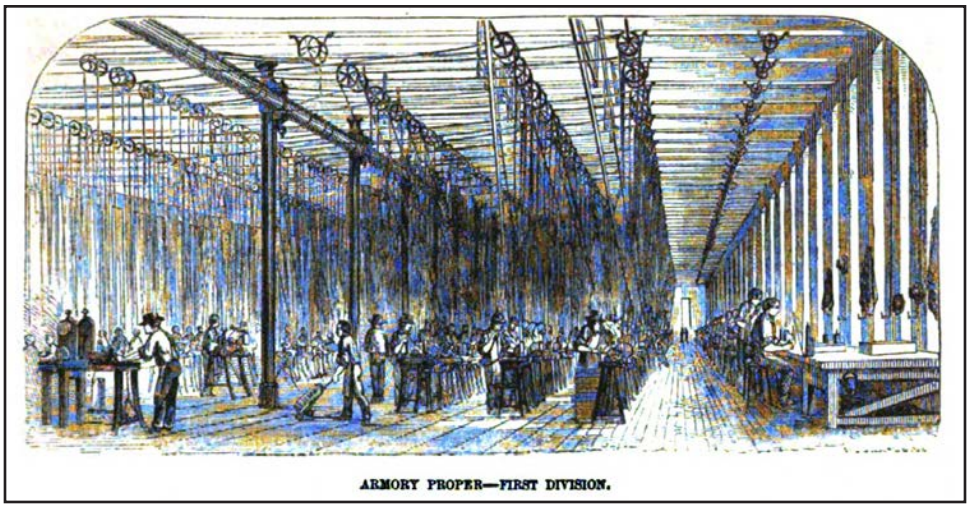


Figure 5.8 Forging Shop (top), and armory proper (bottom), First Division, in "Repeating Fire-Arms: A Day at the Armory of Colt's Patent Fire-Arms Manufacturing Company," *United States Magazine*, 4, no. 3 (March 1857), 233-235.

[112] "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 234, 236, 237.

All parts were eventually delivered back down to the second-story general store to track tools, parts, and materials. Upon receiving a full set, clerks sent them back up to the assembly room, where artisans, who, "guided by the numbers, … once more assembled and stored [them] in a rack" for testing (or "proving'). On the third story of the rear building," provers tested each firearm on the third story of a rear building, shooting into the butt of a tree. The prover loaded each weapon twice "with largest charge possible" and filled the tree with heavy charges, sometimes splitting it so that it looked like it had been hit by lightning. An inspector stamped those that passed. The provers then wiped the guns down. The area on the third floor that specialized in the making and polishing of the gun stocks also served as the department of inspection. After this step, the products were marked and after assemblers again fit the parts together, finishers refined and reassembled them. Each piece moved on to final inspection, which involved disassembling for polishing and finishing, re-assembling, and another inspection.[113]

The inspection department disassembled the pieces to clean and oil, assembled them yet again, and inspected each one for a final time. Inspectors like William Tuller maintained high standards and rejected a product for even the smallest scratch in the varnish. Back in the storeroom, a clerk recorded the assembled products and finally sent them to the office building for shipment "to nearly every portion of the habitable globe."[114] The *United States Magazine* article concluded that the process involved a total of about 460 separate processes of manufacture conducted over three to four weeks, and that "scarcely less than one hundred thousand weapons were at that moment in the various stages of progress, yet the whole number of employees was a little less than six hundred, who, by the aid of mechanical contrivances, turn out an average of two hundred and fifty finished arms per diem."[115] In 1857 the Colt company's monthly expenses reached nearly $50,000, but enough orders produced a profit.[116] By the end of 1860, even as Colt's health faltered, orders steadily rose. His father-in-law wrote that "the Col. continues to improve slowly, but I hope surely. It is unfortunate for him at this time to be confined; but he has got good managers in his armory, and I trust they will keep things right. His orders are immense, and his works are driven to their full extent. From three to four hundred arms are turned out daily."[117]

Armory Administration

Management at the Colt armory consisted of experienced engineers and skilled machinists, a relatively new profession. Familial relations seemed to be another desired qualification. When Sam Colt himself was president, Root served as superintendent, and Luther P. Sargeant, who had served as one of Colt's agents in Europe (and may have been a relative of stepmother Olivia), assumed the positions of treasurer and secretary. Horace Lord served as master workman in

[113] "Col. Colt's Pistols; "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 234.

[114] "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 237-238. Colt's innovations also included non-mechanical processes like a patent lubricator to protect the barrel and control the release of oils, and a metallic foil cartridge with an inverted cone charged with gun powder. This ensured dry powder even if the gun got wet. See Samuel Colt, "Improvement in the Mode of Lubricating Firearms," Patent No. 16716, March 3, 1857, in Edwards.

[115] "A Day at the Armory," *United States Magazine*, 224.

[116] William Jarvis to William Jarvis, December 7, 1857, Correspondence, William Jarvis letters, CMCH.

[117] William Jarvis to William Jarvis, December 30, 1860, Correspondence, William Jarvis letters, CMCH.

the armory. Colt's stockholders tended to be family members, company department managers, and sometimes contractors. Sam's brother James B. Colt served as treasurer for two years, and Milton Jocelyn became treasurer by 1856. J. Deane Alden served as his private secretary and was often sent on errands as far as Washington, D.C. and the western frontier to serve as Colt's eyes and ears. Other managers included Frederick Kunkel, a German immigrant whom Colt had met at Eli Whitney Jr.'s armory and who became a key figure in Colt's primary side business making wicker furniture. Colt's management worked closely with one another in developing products and in securing contracts.

Conclusion

Colt and his managers created a workforce of skilled and semi-skilled employees to build and run machinery to make parts, even if they were not always interchangeable, as we would define today. The PAMC had failed, even while Colt's guns were right on the cusp of popularity with the military, partly, David Meyer asserts, because of poor production methods. Despite the development of machine tools, the Paterson factory still relied too heavily on hand labor to address the complexity of the designs and ensure safety and performance.[118] When Colt refocused his venture and returned to his hometown, he took advantage of Hartford's high-society political and social connections. He also had the critical support of his cousin, Elisha Colt for company finances and Elisha Root to organize production. He capitalized on the Connecticut River Valley's unique corridor, where inventors and mechanics tinkered with machinery and in doing so changed the way society produced manufactured items. The modern, mechanized factory, which re-envisioned industrial production, transformed the Hartford waterfront and its reputation.

When Sam Colt built his iconic factory in the South Meadow, with its blue onion dome and rampant colt rearing toward the sky, it was testament to his vision and tenacity in the face of so many challenges. From one of the great epicenters of American manufacturing, mechanization, and especially machinists, Colt and his factory armory were poised to become major players in the country's impending political crisis.

[118] Meyer, *Networked Machinists*, 254; Hounshell, 37.

VI. The Test
The Civil War (1860-1865)



Figure 6.1 (left) Unidentified soldier from North Carolina with Model Colt revolving rifle. Liljenquist Family Collection, Library of Congress, Washington DC, 1861 - 1865. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2015650765/. (right) *Unidentified soldier in Union corporal's uniform holding Colt revolver to chest*. Library of Congress, Washington DC, 1861 - 1865. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2010648932/.

The Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company of Hartford was well positioned to supply Union forces during the American Civil War. The Union's Chief Ordnance Officer General James W. Ripley noted at the outset of the conflict that Colt's was "probably further advanced in their preparations than any of the other companies…we are more likely to get good home manufactured arms from them…. in less time than elsewhere…." According to biographer Henry Barnard, Colt procured more machinery from London just days after the war began. The consummate marketer and representative for his company, Samuel Colt pursued every opportunity to supply his now popular pistol, along with rifled muskets and breech-loading repeating rifles, to the Union Army. "Without an active network of private firms with interchangeable parts experience, the government's procurement goals would have been virtually impossible to realize," historian Dean Nelson concluded that Colt's, along with other Connecticut manufacturers, "produced 47 percent of all domestically made percussion military revolvers used by Union forces." These were the Model 1860 Army .44-caliber revolvers, which Colt's sent in regular deliveries of 1,000 or more per week through November 1864, when the Colt's factory caught fire and burned to the ground. Colt's, of course, sold more revolvers than any other maker; sales of Colt's revolvers and the company's Special Model 1861 rifled musket, along with cartridges, percussion caps, and spare parts, accounted for an astounding $4,687,031

in total orders.[1] The wartime records are filled with extensive listings of plates, screws, springs, and every other part needed to service Colt arms. While obviously a watershed event for the nation, the Civil War proved the ultimate test for Sam Colt's company, his products, and his political skills.

In the conflict, Sam Colt saw economic opportunity. He was, after all, first and foremost a gun manufacturer and promoter, with the goal of selling his product to any buyer. At the outset of the war, newspapers charged Colt with continuing to market his firearms to the South, even after Fort Sumter had fallen. Colt disputed the claim, but it is clear in researching his extensive correspondence that he had pushed hard not only to develop Southern arms sales as the likelihood of war increased but also to establish a factory south of the Mason/Dixon line. Such a goal was not a fleeting notion. Colt sent an agent south and corresponded with him regularly, as he also did with Southern governors and prominent military and political men. Nor was Colt alone in advertising his wares to the South. Letters show that many Northern arms dealers were attempting to provide weapons to secession-minded Southerners. Arms companies, including Colt, engaged in a brisk business with Southerners, some of whom traveled north to visit the Colt factory. Once the war began in earnest, however, Colt quickly recognized that with his commitment to the Union came massive military contracts. There was no longer any need to dally with Confederates.

Colt's legacy, as it relates to the Civil War, is therefore complicated. The Union desperately needed Colt's weapons, and Sam Colt worked closely with the military and the Springfield armory to produce a serviceable rifle for Union troops. Yet he was also a brazen capitalist willing to do business with the South when he knew the clouds of war were gathering. Perhaps this is because he largely blamed the war on abolitionists and other so-called "Black Republicans" who, he believed, pushed the South toward secession. When Sam Colt died in 1862, his wife Elizabeth not only carried on the factory's work but dedicated herself to ensuring Colt's legacy as a patriot and entrepreneurial genius.

Arms for the Union

Colt made his name and fame with the production of pistols. He had also developed a revolving shotgun and the Model 1855 Revolving Rifle, but in the 1850s, as hostilities between the North and South grew more tense and conflict more likely, more infantry soldiers carried muzzle-loading single-shot rifles. On April 21, 1861, Colt wrote Connecticut's Gideon Welles, who served as the nation's Secretary of the Navy, offering to manufacture 100,000 arms before the end of the year. Colt worked closely with the Springfield armory on updating the Model 1855 rifle musket, resulting in the Colt Special Model 1861 rifle musket, but not without some degree

[1] Dean Nelson, "Connecticut Arms the Union," Connecticut Explored 9:2 (Spring 2011), 31-35. Ripley quoted; Barnard, 213; Ross Thompson, "The Continuity of Innovation: The Civil War Experience," *Enterprise & Society* 11:1 (2010), 135. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23701222; Melvin M. Johnson and Charles T. Haven. *For Permanent Victory: The Case for an American Arsenal of Peace* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1942), 53-54.

of difficulty. As arms historian David Naumec explains, the musket Colt produced resembled the 1853 British Enfield more than the Model 1855 Springfield.[2]

One of the issues was the primer system; the spark that ignited the black powder rammed into the muzzle and down the barrel of the weapon. Edward Maynard, a dentist fascinated with firearms, developed a spooled paper cap system that allowed for much faster firing. (The rolls of caps were essentially the same caps that children later used for toy guns.) But the paper performed poorly in damp weather, and the Army's Ordnance Department opted to revert to the tried-and-true copper percussion cap, which, while considered more reliable, was also expensive to produce. Furthermore, a percussion cap had to be manually placed and removed with each shot, thus adding a step in loading and firing the musket.[3] As these design questions challenged the Ordnance Department's production plans, Colt maintained constant contact with Chief Ordnance Officer General James W. Ripley. In a June 15, 1861, letter to George Dwight, the superintendent of the Springfield armory, Ripley commented on proposed design changes and requested that a musket be speedily sent, "as Mr. Colt is about to commence the manufacture of muskets of the Springfield pattern, and it is essential that they shall interchange in all their parts with the National Armory arms." Colt moved quickly to complete a sample of the rifle and sent it by express to Washington for Ripley's approval. On July 5, 1861, Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company received a contract for 25,000 Colt Special Model 1861 rifles, although the arms were not entirely interchangeable with the National Armory's weapons. Additional modifications resulted in a Model 1863 rifle musket.[4]

Arms historian Dean Nelson noted that "the Model 1861 rifle musket and its close cousin the Colt 1861 Special Model were the finest infantry shoulder arms issued to rank and file and the most common Union infantry arm of the war." The muskets fired a one-ounce, .58-caliber lead conical shaped bullet, powered by 65 grains of black powder, that could travel 1,000 feet per second. The interior of the barrel had three grooved spirals that ran its length, known as rifling, which provided the bullet with spin, much like a spiral-thrown football, creating more in-flight stability, speed, and accuracy. A well-trained infantryman could fire his weapon every thirty seconds with a high degree of precision at 100 yards.[5]

Colt's armory records show it supplied 113,980 muskets to the Ordnance Department, along with 7,000 breech-loading revolving rifles, of which Colt was particularly proud. The big seller for Colt, however, and the one that had brought him fame, was the five-chamber repeating revolver. Colt's Hartford armory manufactured 387,017 revolvers during the war, and although there was

---

2 Samuel Colt to Gideon Welles, April 21, 1861, War of the Rebellion: Serial 122, 135; Union Authorities, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/122/0135. Welles forwarded Colt's letter to Secretary of War Simon Cameron. See also, David Naumec, "The Connecticut Contracted '61 Springfield: The Special Model to the 'Good and Serviceable' Arm," *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin* 90:1-16, accessed via https://americansocietyofarmscollectors.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2004-B90-The-Connecticut-Contracted-61-Springfiel.pdf.

3 Roger Pauly, *Firearms: The Life Story of a Technology* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004); Jack Coggins, *Arms and Equipment of the Civil War* (Mineola, NY: Courier Dover Publications, 2004).

4 J. W. Ripley to George Dwight, June 15, 1861, cited in Naumec, "The Connecticut Contracted '61 Springfield."

5 Nelson, "Connecticut Arms the Union."

a great deal of competition from other Connecticut firms and those elsewhere, the Ordnance Department requested as many as could be produced on a weekly basis. Colt dominated the revolver market.[6]

Colt's wartime production, and that of other manufacturers, was so important to Union efforts that the government exempted arms workers from the Union draft. Writing specifically about Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, Brigadier General and Assistant Adjutant General C. P. Buckingham wrote to Colt treasurer Hugh Harbison advising him to "please notify this Department immediately after the draft of the names of your men drawn, and state reasons, if any, why they should be excused." A similar letter was sent to John Palmer, president of the Sharps Rifle Company, also in Hartford, stating, "if any of your skilled workmen are drafted, they will be discharged. This will relieve you."[7] The demand for arms was simply too great for skilled machinists and others to be taken from the factories.

Correspondence in *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies* is replete with requests for Colt Navy and Army pistols and Colt rifles. Records also reveal that the demand for weapons caused a surge in pricing. On September 25, 1861, General Ripley wrote to Assistant Secretary of War Colonel Thomas A. Scott, noting that Colt pistols contracted at $25 were now selling at $35 and "Colt carbines at $60, and Colt rifles at $65 each—much more than these arms are worth." The repeating rifles should normally have been in the $40-to-$45 range. Ripley stated "that in view of unauthorized purchases of arms and other ordnance supplies at prices involved expenditures of great magnitude, I deem in [sic] my duty to call the attention of the Secretary of War to this subject, and to state that unless measures are adopted to regulate such purchases and restrict expenditures, even the very liberal appropriation for the purpose will not be sufficient to meet the liabilities which may, and probably will, be thus incurred."[8] Records show that Colt's arms were generally more expensive than those of his competitors. In addition to finished arms, Colt also sold cartridges and percussion caps and an extensive array of parts. Arms used on a regular basis required constant care.

As the war dragged on, so did concerns over price gouging. It was not always the manufacturer who bumped up costs, but rather what Union Brigadier General C. P. Buckingham referred to as "middlemen," who, he reported to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, "are generally rapacious and

---

6 Nelson, "Connecticut Arms the Union."

7 C. P. Buckingham to Hugh Harbison, August 11, 1862; P. H. Watson to John C. Palmer, August 11, 1862, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 123, 348, Correspondence, etc., https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/123/0348. James B. Fry, Provost Marshal General for the War Department, later disputed the argument to exempt arms workers, noting that they could not be considered in "military service." They "were excused therefrom because of their being engaged in the manufacture of arms for the government in Colt's establishment. It is in reference to this latter employment that they are spoken of by the Secretary of War as 'in the service of the government,' and such service most clearly cannot exempt them." It is unknown what became of this issue. See, James B. Fry, Circular, War Department, August 6, 1863, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 124, 631, Union Authorities, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/124/0631.

8 James W. Ripley to Colonel Thomas A. Scott, September 25, 1861, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 122, 539, Union Authorities, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/122/0539.

unscrupulous, and thrust themselves between those whose interest it is to deal, and who ought in every case to deal directly with each other–the government in need of arms and the manufacturer producing them."[9] Buckingham noted that the military could procure Remington revolvers at a lower rate, $15, than Colt's, but also in much lower numbers. No other company could compete with Colt's manufacturing capacity. He possessed the most modern, high-production arms company for the creation of pistols. The price list included:

> Colt's Revolver
> Parts Parts
> Barrel $7.00 Ket screw $0.02
> Sight .01 Lever 1.00
> Cylinder 4.00 Rammer .30
> Cone .06 Lever screw .02
> Base pin .35 Catch on barrel .04
> Lock screw .02 Catch on lever .06
> Hammer and Tumbler .88 Stock Strap .50
> Bolt .33 Stock-Strap screw .02
> Bolt spring and sear .10 Guard plat .75
> Bolt-spring screw .02 Guard-plate screw .02
> Hand .31 Trigger .30
> Handspring .02 Stock .50
> Mainspring .50 Screwdriver and cone .42
> Wrench
> Key .31 Ring or spring vise .01
> Mainspring screw .02 Bullet mold 1.00
> Key spring and rivet .10 Pistol and appendages 24.00[10]

Mentions of the quality of Colt's pistols and repeating rifles appeared in dozens upon dozens of both Union and Confederate reports, sometimes in the most flamboyant way. Captain James Chamberlain of the 3rd New York Cavalry reported that two rebel cavalrymen had mistakenly approached his men and called out, "What's the matter below?" Chamberlain stated, in reference to the speed of repeating arms, "these words had hardly left their lips when several of Colt's 'Love me quicks' were presented to their heads and they were 'gobbled.'"[11]

In 1863 Confederate Brigadier General Humphrey Marshall wrote to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper that in an engagement at Jonesville, Virginia, his troops came upon Union forces: "They were 2,000 strong and splendidly armed with Colt's five-shooting rifles and army revolving

---

[9] C. P. Buckingham to E. M. Stanton, July 1, 1862, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 123, 192, Correspondence, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/123/0192.

[10] Colt revolver parts and price list, 1861, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 123, 620, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/123/0620.

[11] Captain James R. Chamberlain to Lieutenant Colonel George W. Lewis, "No. 4. Report of Captain James R. Chamberlain, Third New York Cavalry," March 10, 1863, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 026, 164, North Carolina and S.E. Virginia, Chapter XXX, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/026/0164.

pistols. I do not doubt they had twenty shots to my one."[12] Major Arnold McMahan of the Twenty-First Ohio Volunteer Infantry extolled Colt's guns in an 1864 report, explaining that a strong force of the enemy had moved against his men and "a severe engagement" ensued. Union reinforcements soon arrived, and though Confederates were "superior in numbers he was unable to endure the repeated volleys of our superior arms (Colt's revolving rifles)."[13] Even the capture of Confederate leader Jefferson Davis at the end of the war included a story about Colt revolvers. On May 13, 1865, Brevet Major General J. H. Wilson reported to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that Union forces in pursuit of Davis quickly surmised that he had attempted disguise in one of his wife's dresses and run toward the woods. "The race was a short one, and the rebel President was soon brought to bay," reported Wilson, who explained that Davis "brandished a bowie-knife of elegant pattern, and showed signs of battle, but yielded promptly to the persuasion of the Colt revolvers without compelling our men to fire."[14] While these are some of the most interesting mentions of Colt's arms, the pages of the historical documents are filled with additional reports revealing that Confederate forces were frequently captured with Colt revolvers, and even the relatively scarce Colt repeating rifles, prompting concerns of illicit domestic sales or through third-party buyers in Europe.[15]

Pushing his Product

As he had shown in California, Kansas, Utah, and Arizona in the mid-1850s, Samuel Colt understood that getting his arms in the hands of combatants was the single best way to show their worth. To gain military credibility, Colt offered his services to Connecticut Governor William Alfred Buckingham by organizing a special unit called the 1st Connecticut Regiment Colt's Revolving Rifles. The regiment would include army officers and as many West Point cadets from Connecticut as possible. Each member was to stand a minimum five feet, seven inches tall and be armed with Colt's imposing repeating rifle, essentially his pistol in rifle form. Ever the marketer, Colt envisioned the regiment as a vehicle to feature his arms. Within two weeks of Fort Sumter, Colt penned a letter to Connecticut Adjutant General Joseph D. Williams, who promptly wrote Governor William A. Buckingham on April 25, 1861. Colt's offer was intriguing and clever. As Williams explained his offer "to give the use of sufficient number of rifles to arm an entire Regiment to be called, the 1st Connecticut Regiment Colt's Revolving Rifles." Williams gushed that Colt's "offer is truly a noble one, the outlay will be between forty and fifty thousand dollars. Colonel Colt has tendered the entire use of the armory to the government." The next day, April 26, the governor wrote Colt: "Accept my high appreciation of your proposition to arm a regiment

---

[12] General Humphrey Marshall to General S. Cooper, "No. 6. Reports of Brig. General Humphrey Marshall, C. S. Army, of operations December 30-January 7," January 7, 1863, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 029 , 95, Chapter XXXII, Carter's Raid into E. Tenn. And SW VA, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/029/0095.

[13] Original placed in parenthesis. A. McMahan to Brigadier General William D. Whipple, April 6, 1864, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 050 Page 0389 Chapter XLII, Chickamauga Campaign, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/050/0389.

[14] Brevet Major General J. H. Wilson to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, May 13, 1865, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 104, 743, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/104/0743.

[15] See, for example, Colonel Robert Bullock to Captain James Benagh, September 25, 1863, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 051 Page 0438 KY.,SW.VA.,TENN.,MISS.,N.ALA. and N.GA, Chapter XLII, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/051/0438.

of men from this State with your rifles and to enlist their services for the war," and closed by noting he was "grateful for your patriotic offer."[16]

There is nothing in Colt's initial correspondence that indicated an expectation to be named as a colonel in the proposed regiment, but Colt historian James L. Mitchell surmises that was Colt's intention, insisting, "it would appear that Colt was motivated more by mercenary reasons than by patriotism. All in all, under these conditions there could be little loss but much to gain." Colt's calculation paid off. On May 1, Buckingham notified the Connecticut General Assembly of Colt's "noble proposition," the governor's acceptance, and the fact that Colt was already "actively engaged in enlisting a full regiment for the war and also furnishes officers to drill and perfect the men in the use of the weapons at his own expense." Buckingham also noted that the value of the repeating rifles and bayonets was over "fifty thousand dollars in cash." Finally, the governor included a copy of "Special Order No. 83. Sam Colt, Esquire, of Hartford is appointed Colonel of the 1st Regiment Colts Revolving Rifles of Connecticut."[17] While the troops were supplied with food by the state, they resided at the Colt Factory and trained in the South Meadows of Hartford, adjacent to the gunwork.

It was no surprise that Colt again tendered his services to the government at the outset of the Civil War as he had attempted a decade earlier (see Chapter 4). He knew the value of a commission, and in the fifteen years since the Mexican-American War, when leaders rebuked his offers, his factory and fame had grown, especially in Connecticut. Nor was it surprising, then, that this time Governor Buckingham, who was scrambling to recruit troops and raise money to equip them, quickly accepted Colt's offer to arm an entire regiment. Yet like Colt's back-door entrée to secure a military title in 1850 with the gubernatorial "aide de camp" appointment, his attempt to create a special regiment hardly resembled effective military recruitment. Colt was more interested in what a regiment could do for him and sales than in fielding soldiers. His insistence that the men stand at a minimum of five feet seven inches created problems, especially when he added an inch here and there. He also played something of a bait and switch, encouraging Connecticut men to join but at the same time pushing to have the regiment placed in federal service, which would position Colt and his arms directly before regular army rather than merely Connecticut officers.

While many joined, *The Hartford Courant* reported on problems with the height requirement, stating, "some companies have been formed in various portions of the State, by men who knew the standard required when enlisting their men, but who took in volunteers much below that standard under the belief that if enrolled and brought here, they would be accepted. As these were not accepted, whole companies have taken offense and returned to their homes, leaving anything but blessings with those who have the corps in charge." Hartford's *Daily Post* reported similarly, announcing that "a company of about twenty-five as noble and good looking fellows as ever enlisted in the State presented themselves at his rendezvous yesterday when, as two or three

[16] J. D. Williams to William Alfred Buckingham, April 25, 1861, in James L. Mitchell, *Colt: A Collection of Letters and Photographs About the Man, the Arms, the Company* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1959), 8; William Alfred Buckingham to Samuel Colt, April 26, 1861, Mitchell, Colt, 9.

[17] Message to the Connecticut General Assembly and "Special Order No. 83," in Mitchell, *Colt*, 10.

were half an inch too short, they were rejected and the rest of the crowd becoming indignant because some of the best men were turned off for so whimsical a cause, left in a body, not one would enter his regiment." The paper added that "possibly a misunderstanding may have arisen from the fact that the Colonel has raised the standard of admission an inch within a few days."[18] Other newspapers around the nation also picked up on Colt's plans, and in doing so relayed suspicion at his motives. The *Louisville Democrat* reported that "Colt is furnishing and arming a regiment as if it were impossible to 'break such a Colt.' That's so! It would be pretty hard to break such a heavy capitalist, as hard as it would be to induce a really patriotic man to be neutral while his country is in peril and needs his assistance."[19]

Colt's maneuverings to federalize the regiment also created problems. By mid-May Governor Buckingham wrote to Secretary of War Simon Cameron suggesting the idea. The governor explained that the men would be provided and drilled with "Colt's breech-revolving rifle" and that the regiment will be "the best and most complete of any offered from any State, adding "the further idea that the same would be incorporated into the Regular Army." Colt even traveled to Washington to make the case. Historian James L. Mitchell concludes that "the advantages of the regiment being enlisted as regulars lay in the use of his revolving rifles by a regular army unit, which in itself would be tacit approval of this weapon by the Government." When the men who had enlisted in the regiment learned of Colt's plans, they insisted on remaining a Connecticut unit and nominating their own company officers, as was often the norm. Colt refused, and the entire plan collapsed. General Orders No. 307 from Connecticut Adjutant General Joseph D. Williams, issued on June 20, 1861, announced, "the 1st Regiment Colts Revolving Rifles of Connecticut is hereby disbanded and all commissions issued to officers in said regiment are revoked." On the same day, Governor Buckingham wrote to Secretary of War Cameron notifying him that "the battalion which Colonel Colt proposed to arm with rifles the soldiers have become disaffected and now decline going into the Regular Army of the United States." He stated that many of the men had joined a different regiment, the 5th Connecticut. Buckingham closed, "I much regret this, but under the circumstances this course was unavoidable."[20]

Rumors of a Traitor

The disappointment of Colt's elite regiment was exacerbated by rumors that he had continued to sell arms to the South even after the fall of Fort Sumter, that many sales were discounted, and that others were run through England to avoid suspicion. Newspapers around the country picked up such reports, and Colt was placed on the defensive. It appears that the first such charges came on April 15, 1861, from a group calling itself the "Vigilance Committee" of

---

[18] *The Hartford Courant*, May 21, 1861, notes that each man must be 5' 7"; *The Hartford Courant*, June 10, 1861, Rasenberger, 382.

[19] Even his then 19-year-old "nephew" Sammy joined the regiment. Rasenberger, 382; Mitchell, *Colt*, 11.

[20] William A. Buckingham to Simon Cameron, May 18, 1861, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 122, 213, Union Authorities, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/122/0213; General Orders No. 307 from J.D. Williams, Adjutant General's office, June 20, 1861, Mitchell, Colt, 12; William A. Buckingham to Simon Cameron, June 20, 1861, *War of the Rebellion*: Serial 122, 281, Union Authorities, https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/122/0281.

Springfield, Massachusetts. "It is gathered from reliable sources that you are manufacturing and shipping arms south in response to orders from the traitors," announced the author. "Now sir, I am able to inform you that if you fulfill any more orders or ship further supplies South from this date, your establishment will be most thoroughly cleaned out. Yours with respect due a traitor." Just two days later, on April 17, *The Hartford Courant* released a story charging that both Colt and the Sharps factory were selling to Southerners. "Both establishments have been regarded with suspicion that they were furnishing arms to the Southern States now in rebellion against the government," reported the *Courant*, "and that they would continue to do so until legal proceedings were adopted against them and their business declared contraband." On April 23 Horace Staples, president of Saugatuck Bank in Westport, Connecticut, wrote to Governor Buckingham, notifying him that "it has been said in N[ew] York City…that Mr. Colt's arms are still being forwarded to our enemies within the last week."[21]

The next day, on April 24, the *Chicago Tribune* ran a headline "Better Late Than Never" for an article explaining that Colt had stated his arms were available to the State of Connecticut, the government of the United States, "and none at all to the South." The newspaper opined that "this is patriotism at the eleventh hour, but we supposed these gentlemen are entitled to their penny." Just a few days later, on April 29, one Daniel Gardner wrote to Colt from New York City, expressing that he was a friend of the Colt family and "I heard rumors that you are manufacturing large quantities of arms for the Southern Rebels. I have since seen a statement that you charged them less for arms than you are now selling to our true men and patriots." Gardner continued, "you will pardon me as an American proud of your genius and fame and as a friend of a branch of your family, for suggesting that these dark fogs and scandalous mists ought to be swept away by some splendid and patriotic act on your part." He suggested that Colt create "a Regiment and arm it with your guns and revolvers and name it Colt's Railroad Legion. I will take the trouble finding the officers and men of the highest efficiency to the number of 1000 men" to tear up bridges, railways, and telegraph. This is most certainly not where Colt came up with the idea of creating his own regiment.[22] He had already written to Governor Buckingham and had pursued the idea during the Mexican-American War, but Gardner's concerns revealed the extent to which the negative press about Colt's selling arms to the Confederacy swirled throughout the nation.[23] And they kept coming.

By May, other papers in the country picked up the story, some in the least likely places, like Amherst, New Hampshire. On May 2, 1861, the *Farmer's Cabinet* published "Favoring Treason." "Mr. Samuel Colt, the famous manufacturer of revolvers, has illustrated one peculiar

---

[21] Member of V.C. (Vigilance Committee) to Colonel Samuel Colt, April 15, 1861, Mitchell, *Colt*, 78; *The Hartford Courant*, April 17, 1861; Horace Staples to William A. Buckingham, April 23, 1861, Record Group 005, Governor William A. Buckingham, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut.

[22] "Better Late Than Never," *Chicago Tribune*, April 24, 1861; Daniel Gardner to Samuel Colt, April 29, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 81.

[23] James L. Mitchell states, "It is entirely possible that Colt, through this apparent grand gesture [offering arms to create a regiment], hoped to eliminate and put at rest all of the unfavorable publicity which had arisen against him." See Mitchell, *Colt*, 80.

mode of aiding and abetting treason," announced the paper. It then explained the patents given by the government that enriched Colt and noted that "he repaid the favor by sending hundreds of thousands of weapons to the Southern traitors, with *a large discount*!" For proof, the *Farmer's Cabinet* included a memo from April 25 in which Colt announced to various arms dealers that "hereafter all arms and cartridges will be invoiced to your house at the list prices, *without discount of commission*; you to sell for what price you please. Telegraph and write us at once how many arms you want on these terms." Colt's change in policy was in direct relation to the increasing demand for his guns. Perhaps he no longer saw a need to provide discounts, and the decision may have directly affected the inflated prices for his guns that Union Brigadier General C.P. Buckingham had complained about to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. The author at the *Farmer's Cabinet* concluded that Colt had already made a fortune and "ought they not to be satisfied with this, without running up their prices in proportion to the dire necessity of the country?"[24]

Other news outlets were even harsher in their conclusions. "A Colting," published on May 18, 1861 in Vanity Fair, began with a quote from the May 4 edition of the *Boston Transcript*: "PLEASE EXPLAIN." Noting that Colt had furnished "A handsome sum" for Connecticut troops, the author concluded that this was merely "to divert public indignation a little," and, like the *Farmer's Cabinet*, complained that Colt had recently raised the price "of his patent fire-arms twenty five per cent, when he did not think of doing so while the demand was confined to his Southern friends." After quoting the *Transcript*, *Vanity Fair* offered, "Just so. Let's have a little explanation, and a few words over this same pistol-mill-ion-air which the Colonel is singing just now to such a high note. All winter long, COLT—the lobbying COLT—made arms for the South. Made scores of thousands—knowing they were meant to murder Northern patriots. Made them cheap too—for COLT was a great friend of Southern customers." The author then embraced full sarcasm: "And now who so patriotic and busy as COLT. Who so fighty and fussy? Who the bold soldier boy like COLT. Who raises a company? Who—Who! Bah!"[25]

Other news sources came to Colt's defense. "Colt's Armory—The Colonel on the Side of the Government," an article published in *Scientific American* on May 25, 1861, explained that Colt had donated rifles worth some fifty thousand dollars to Connecticut, most likely for the special Colt regiment that at the very moment of the article's publication was quickly disintegrating. The author acknowledged "some suspicion having been cast upon the loyalty of Colonel Colt, growing out of the fact that he has heretofore made many arms for the South, it is due to him to state that, although decidedly opposed to the election of Mr. Lincoln, yet as soon as he heard of the insult to the flag at Fort Sumter, and saw the proclamation of the President calling for troops to put down treason, he at once tendered the use of his armory to the government at Washington."[26]

---

[24] "Favoring Treason," *Farmer's Cabinet*, May 3, 1861.
[25] "A Colting," *Vanity Fair*, May 18, 1861.
[26] "Colt's Armory—The Colonel on the Side of the Government," *Scientific American*, May 25, 1861.

Colt attempted damage control in early May, publishing in the *Boston Evening Transcript* "Colonel Colt and the Rebellion" and providing a statement "from a high source" that "absolves Colonel Colt from the censures he has recently received from the press of Boston and New York. The article so fully explains the business relations between a manufacturer and wholesale dealer that it would mean only to call public attention thereto." The statement proceeded with a ham-fisted explanation that essentially translated into the reality that Colt could sell all the guns he had "at his list prices without discounts or commissions," that that was exactly what the directors of the Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company had done, and that they had "simply notified his agents and from that date (April 24) he should not pay them a commission in the form of a 10% discount on their orders." The statement ended by reminding readers that Colt had donated "1000 of his revolving rifles with Sabre bayonets worth $50,000 in cash" and asking "where is there another man, who from his profits on firearms or otherwise, has done or will do as much? Let those who censured him show themselves equally generous."[27]

By the end of 1861 the rumors of Colt's malfeasance continued, and on December 19 Colt himself wrote to the *New York Tribune* in response to a recent article the paper had run claiming that Colt agents in England were actively engaged in "the manufacture of revolvers for the Southern rebels." Colt insisted that "if any persons have assumed to act as my agents, in giving aid to the rebels in Southern States, they are acting under false pretenses." He assured readers that "at the first outbreak of the rebellion, I tendered to the government, in writing, the whole energy of my large arms establishment…. The record of the [War] Department, and my correspondence on file at Washington, are sufficient defense against all such slanders." Only two days later, on December 21, Colt's acting secretary, Lewis Sheldon, issued a statement to *The Hartford Courant* titled "Col. Colt's Defense," in which he included the New York Tribune statement. Sheldon insisted that once the war began, "from that time to the present every nerve has been strained, both here and in Europe, and our whole works have been driven day and night, for the sole supply of arms to our own government, to the entire sacrifice of the regular trade."[28]

Colt's Southern Arms Sales

The difficulty of Colt's defense lay in the fact that he had enjoyed a brisk business with the South right up to and after the firing on Fort Sumter. He sent an agent into the Southern states to meet with military men and politicians, kept in close personal touch with that agent, and learned directly that a secession movement was sweeping the South. Colt discussed sales strategy, who the agent should speak with, and the possibility of setting up a gun manufacturing facility in the South. Colt sought multiple markets for his product, but he focused on the direct sale of arms to the states, to military companies, and to individuals. No sale was too small or too large. As historian James Mitchell concludes, by early 1859, "Colt, due to the political unrest, believed the time propitious to send an agent into the South to drum up business." Mitchell implies that the South's "determination to arm" was in line with Colt's political views about the danger posed by

---

[27] "Colonel Colt and the Rebellion," *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 7, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 79-80.

[28] "To the Editors of the New York Tribune," *New York Tribune*, December 19, 1861; see also, Chicago Daily Tribune, December 23, 1861, which reprints the *New York Tribune* story; "Col. Colt's Defense," *The Hartford Courant*, December 21, 1861.

"Black Republicans" and that "many prominent Southerners knew this." But in 1861 Sam Colt's abolitionist father-in-law proudly reported that Colt distributed 1,000 copies of Ohio Senator Benjamin F. Wade's fiery speech of December 1860 *condemning* the South and the institution of slavery.[29]

Family documents reveal that Colt's stance on slavery was, like much of the man's personality, complicated. Colt seemed to embrace Jacksonian Democracy, which emerged during his adolescence, and ally with anti-abolitionist Democrats in opposition to the "Black Republicans" associated with the abolitionist movement. Perhaps this political affiliation harkened back to President Andrew Jackson's warfare against Native tribes, which provided the spark for the need and success of Colt's particular style of pistols. Perhaps it had to do with the stories of invention and self-sufficiency that Jackson promoted. Perhaps he just wanted to avoid secession. Colt's wealth and wielding of patents represented everything that Jacksonian Democrats resented, so his political views may well have been based less on values than on business, local machine politics, and what was best for his company, especially as he battled the city over improvements and tax abatements. Regardless, Colt's own Charter Oak Hall hosted elaborate "Mechanics Balls" that often aligned with celebrating political victories of local Democrats. Workers made and sent a cane made of the Charter Oak wood to the Democratic mayor, Fernando Wood, congratulating him for his victory over the "Black Republicans." Colt and many members of the Jarvis family (who themselves identified as abolitionists) feared that abolitionist agitation would start a civil war, and they asserted that the economic impact of such an event would be devastating. Yet in 1858, even as Colt celebrated Democratic politicians with the Armory Guard and Band, more than half of the workers identified as Republicans.[30]

Documents imply that Colt used his workers as political pawns to benefit the factory, especially in terms of swaying the affiliation of Hartford's Common Council to approve his projects, and reportedly fired employees who did not vote Democratic. An 1860 payroll notates a "D" or "R" alongside the names, indicating that he tracked political affiliation.[31] The *Hartford Times* accused Colt of replacing experienced Republican workers with Democrats, which Colt denied.[32] Such action echoed those of the political "bosses" in places like New York City, who provided housing and other services to immigrants in exchange for their vote. In 1859, when Colt wanted the city to approve a bridge across the Little River, he asked workers to attend the city meeting and vote for the bridge. Soon afterward, he seemed to pressure employees to elect candidate William Eaton, the alderman of the ward- securing Democratic majority for the city. Colt's secretary J. Deane Alden made note of who voted for which candidate. Laborers pushed back. A springtime broadside in 1860 announced "Mechanics, Workingmen of CT, Read! Read! Read!" and enlisted secession rhetoric by urging "Show them that you are freemen, and not the slaves and any master! Let your voice be heard in tones whose import cannot be mistaken, on the

---

[29] Mitchell, *Colt*, 35; Jarvis to Jarvis, Jarvis Family Letters, December 12, 1859, January 7, 1860, CMCH.

[30] Jarvis to Jarvis, Jarvis Family Letters, December 12, 1859, January 7, 1860, CMCH; Isaac Toucy, Speech, August 12, 1858, in Hart Family Papers, CMCH.

[31] "List of Men (and their occupations) Employed at Colts Armory, Feb 15, 1860," Records of The Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company 1826-1979. Administrative File, Payroll Records. Box 64, RG 103, CSLA.

[32] Tucker and Tucker, 82-86; *Hartford Times*, April 2, 1860.

Monday of April next!" The broadside accused Colt of compelling Democratic contractors to discharge Republicans, but Colt claimed that the subsequent dismissal of twenty workers had nothing to do with politics. Eight Democrats returned to work shortly afterward.[33]

Furthermore, Colt attended the Democratic Party Convention in Hartford on August 29, 1860, and a number of national newspapers stated that "Samuel Colt of Hartford was an [Democratic] elector," but such a political affiliation does not prove Sam Colt advocated secession.[34] There is likewise no evidence that he publicly supported the robust Democratic peace movement that was led by his close friend Thomas Seymour.[35] Without such evidence, it seems fair to at least minimally conclude that Colt was a capitalist, like so many other Northern arms manufacturers. However, evidence does show Colt arguably going above and beyond to compete and sell to the Southern states.[36]

The year before Lincoln's election, 1859, was momentous. Indeed, most of the previous decade had revealed the growing cracks in the Union's foundation: the violence in Kansas, the controversial Dred Scott U.S. Supreme Court decision, the John Brown raid on the Harper's Ferry Arsenal, and the growing influence of the Northern-based Republican Party and the fact that if that party should win the presidency, many Southern states promised secession. It was against this turbulent backdrop that Sam Colt, while in Washington, D.C., penned a letter on February 13, 1859 to his secretary J. Deane Alden informing him that "circulars corresponding with the enclosed list of arms and their relative values in muskets" had been sent by the U.S. Ordnance Department and that Colt was republishing that circular "with a circular of my own and intend sending off Mr. Hartley to visit all the Southern, Middle and Northern states and exhibit to the several military authorities, samples of the several arms of my approved construction therein referred to."[37]

What is clear, however, is that Colt did not send William M. B. Hartley, the secretary of Colt's Patent Firearms. Instead, Hartley arranged an "agreement" with Amos H. Colt of New York (a distant relation of Sam) to "without delay proceed to the western and southern states and elsewhere as directed for the purpose of introducing and making sale of Colt's revolving

---

[33] Colt's Pistol Factory, *The Hartford Courant*, May 16, 1860; Editorial, *The Hartford Courant*, March 20, 1860; "Mechanics, Workingmen of CT, Read! Read! Read!" Colt M486W, Archives, CMCH.

[34] William Hosley, *Colt: The Making of an American Legend* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 124-125, 243; "Payroll Notebook, February 15, 1860," Colt PFMAC, Box 64, Administrative File, np., Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut; for Colt as a Democratic elector, see *Evansville Daily Journal* (IL), August 31, 1860; *Daily National Democrat* (CA), September 21, 1860; *Weekly Standard* (NC), September 12, 1860. These newspapers are available in the Chronicling America's Newspapers digital database.

[35] For more on Connecticut's Democratic peace movement, see Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, and Survival* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011); Matthew Warshauer, "Copperheads in Connecticut: A Peace Movement that Imperiled the Union," in Andrew L. Slap and Michael Thomas Smith, eds., *This Distracted and Anarchical People* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 60-79.

[36] The collection of letters edited by James L. Mitchell is a veritable treasure trove of Colt's correspondence, much of it revealing that he had no qualms about selling weapons to the future Confederacy right up to the firing on Fort Sumter, and a little beyond.

[37] Samuel Colt to Major Alden, February 13, 1859, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 35.

shotguns and rifles at the prices specified in the announced price list, allowing a discount of not more than 10%." Note this was before Colt changed his policy and eliminated the 10% commission. Initially, Colt questioned the appointment of Amos Colt, worrying that he was not sufficiently suited, perhaps not aristocrat enough, writing Hartley of "the great importance of having a competent rich man in the field" and wondering "if Mr. Colt is not quite the man for this kind of business with the governors and political officials of the Southern states." Sam Colt suggested several other, military, men, and concluded that perhaps Hartley should "go yourself alone with Mr. Colt to the governors of the important southern states." He impressed upon Hartley that "no time should be lost in getting information to the officials of Carolina and Georgia of the peculiar excellencies of our arms….I write in haste for the mails, be sure to keep a sharp eye to the Southern business."[38]

On January 13, 1860 Hartley wrote to Colt from Washington, notifying him of Amos Colt's arrival there and reporting that he "leaves this evening for Richmond, thence to North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, etc." Hartley attempted to assuage Colt's concerns about Amos Colt, adding, "I think Colt is fully competent to do all that is required of him…He gets along remarkably well here…he appears to know where he is and is very shrewd." Amos Colt wrote to Hartley the moment he arrived in Richmond to see Governor Henry A. Wise, who was absent, but noted there "were several persons present representing other manufacturers and they are trying to impress that our arms are too complicated." Amos Colt particularly made mention of the competing Hartford Sharps Company and relayed to Hartley, "in a quiet way I told some of the members [of the Virginia legislature] that Sharp's weapons were brought to market by making a present to Beecher and other fanatical preachers," a reference to abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher and his use of Sharps rifles, known as Beecher's Bibles, in Kansas. (See chapter 4.)[39]

On January 19 Amos Colt arrived in North Carolina and quickly forwarded a letter to Hartley with a glowing endorsement from Governor John W. Ellis in which he lauded the quality of Colt's rifle, especially the revolving rifles, stating, "I have seen no arms to surpass them," and adding that "the guns have been placed in the hands of our best volunteer companies and cadet students at the State Military Academy and I received good [reports] from them." The guns, concluded the governor, "are found to be all that their manufacturers represent them to be."[40]

Just a few days later, on January 24, Amos Colt proceeded to South Carolina, where he met with General Jeffrey Jones, the president of the South Carolina Military Academy, and General States Rights Gist, brother of Governor William Henry Gist. The general was born in 1831 at the height of the Nullification controversy between South Carolina and the federal government and thus his parents bestowed upon him the name "States Rights," befitting that moment in history. The meeting with both men went well, and the general promised "to use his utmost influence to have

---

[38] "Agreement," in Mitchell, *Colt,* 35; Samuel Colt to William M. B. Hartley, October 11, 1859, in Mitchell, *Colt,* 36-37.

[39] Amos H. Colt to William M. B. Hartley, January 16, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt,* 38. Colts and Sharps shipped weapons to western territories, such as Kansas, during the Civil War as well. Bondi, 104.

[40] Amos H. Colt to Samuel Colt, January 19, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt,* 39.

the governor order" Colt arms. Amos Colt also included a list of prominent men in his letter to Sam Colt, noting that these were the key men with whom the governor would consult and that each should be sent Colt pamphlets. The general and governor were particularly enamored of the Colt revolving shotgun; they bought the ones that Amos Colt had with him and ordered others, writing, "I wish the company would take the utmost pains in making up the guns for General Gist as he is a person of influence and will pay for the articles on delivery. He has also written articles for the local papers a copy of which will be sent to the company." The Colt agent closed by noting that other gun dealers were very active in the region and though Colt's "pistols are much preferred in the South," circulars advertising other arms "are laying upon hotel tables, on the seat of cars, etc. I have selected the circulars of those that are most prominent and will send them in my next." Amos Colt followed with another letter noting that Governor Gist had determined to send "an efficient person" to the Colt factory in Hartford to select arms.[41]

Amos Colt's trip to Georgia two days later, on January 26, proved to be quite successful. He met with several military men and politicians, all of whom inspected Colt arms. "There is a crack regiment at Savannah whose Colonel is W. S. Rockwell," relayed Amos Colt, noting that he was also the chief of ordnance and that a notice of arms should be sent to him, as well as to Georgia Adjutant General A. R. Lawton of Savannah. From there, Amos Colt traveled to Milledgeville, where he met with Governor Joseph Emerson Brown, who promised to send a Mr. Mark Cooper to "to visit the factory in relation to a selection of arms." Upon his arrival at Montgomery, Amos Colt visited the capital, where the legislature was in session. He reported that "[I] have had this day a number of the members to look at the arms. Think they will be recommended. I find this a very proper time to be here." He also wrote that a member of a Georgia cavalry unit had just traveled north to purchase arms and that "this person was instructed to purchase the Colt pistol but some other breech loader for the carbine. After I had an interview with the Captain and some of the committee, they telegraphed to the agent to purchase the Colt carbines." Again, Amos Colt reported that many arms agents were traveling throughout the South and suggested "sending as much materials on Colt arms as possible and to advertise in local newspapers." He followed with an additional letter to William Hartley, listing meticulously the names and addresses of competing arms sellers and their addresses.[42]

Amos Colt's business in Montgomery proved remarkably successful. On February 3 he met with the governor, who said "he would visit the factory himself and purchase such arms as were needed," as well as several members of the legislature, who escorted Colt "to the Capitol where nearly the whole of the members had inspection of them." He also enclosed an order "from one of the prominent members of the assembly," adding "it is good policy to comply with their requests." A "P.S." to the letter stated, "please make two pairs of navy pistols with 12" barrels, cases and accompaniment and holsters to suit if they can be made to send with them."[43]

---

[41] Amos H. Colt to Samuel Colt, January 24, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 40-41; Amos H. Colt to Samuel Colt, January 26, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 42; Amos H. Colt to Samuel Colt, January 29, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 42.

[42] Amos H. Colt to Samuel Colt, February 1, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 43-44; Amos H. Colt to William Hartley, February 3, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 45.

[43] Amos H. Colt to Samuel Colt, February 3, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 46.

Amos Colt moved along to Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. His travels attracted the attention of the press, with the Daily Express of Louisiana publishing a March 15 notice: "Bye the bye, we might add that Mr. Amos H. Colt an agent of the famous Colonel Sam of the revolver notoriety, has been here for the past week exhibiting the Colt revolving musket, the artillery sword bayonet rifle, and other arms for inspection of the Governor and members of the Legislature." The article added that proposals had been made to adopt the revolving rifle for both the state military academy and state companies. There were also opportunities for competitions to demonstrate both shooting prowess and the effectiveness of Colt arms, particularly the revolving shotgun. One such challenge pitted Amos Colt against a Mr. H. Bernard of West Baton Rouge, who was purported to be one of the finest shots in Louisiana. The two men fired their respective shotguns at bottles thrown in the air, then at billiard balls thrown in opposite directions and at a five-cent piece. The paper reported, "it is needless to say that Mr. Colt beat his adversary and was eminently successful." Successful to be sure. The next day Colt wrote that after visiting the legislature and Governor Thomas Overton Moore, they "were fully satisfied with the arms" and the factory should expect "an order for some 70 to 80,000 worth of arms."[44]

By the time Amos Colt reached Mississippi at the end of March, his personal relationship with Sam Colt had progressed, as evidenced in letters addressed to "My Dear Friend Colt." The letters also reveal that Amos was sick of the South. While he noted "this is a great country, the military spirit is abroad," and that "they are all horsemen here," he added they had "damn poor horses" and that Southerners "are too damn lazy to walk." Of the food, "HOG AND HOMINY is the fare – the hog predominates" and that "these southern gentleman live upon fare that the humblest mechanic would turn up his nose at in the North then sell their cotton in the fall, or a nigger, and then splurge around the St. Charles with a beautiful pair of boots and red gloves. The rest of the suit looks as if they had been bivouacked in them for 12 months period. Let her rip!" He concluded that he could no longer blame Englishmen for their love of country, ending with, "I am disgusted with mine – particularly this end of it."[45]

As Amos Colt continued his travels throughout the South, he dutifully sent newspaper clippings and reports north to Sam Colt and William Hartley. These included accounts of legislative acts to form volunteer companies, military defense bills, and monies allocated for such purposes. One such clipping from the Savannah Republican announced a bill to appropriate one million dollars for the purchase of arms and ammunition, stating, "we would call the attention of our legislature to the necessity for immediate action on the matter, for the events of the day are pressing us forward to a period when it will be necessary to stand by our muskets, if not use them." The article urged the legislature to act, to "put our state in a position that will command respect from those who are now disposed to sneer at us for our defenseless condition."[46]

As arms orders poured into the Colt factory in Hartford, the success of Amos Colt's travels in the South was apparent. Mississippi Adjutant General W. L. Sikes wrote the company on July 3,

---

[44] Amos H. Colt to Samuel Colt, March 15, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 47. Daily Express included in letter.
[45] Amos H. Colt to Samuel Colt, March 31, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 48-49.
[46] For *Savannah Republican* clipping, see Mitchell, *Colt*, 51-52.

1860 that he had visited the factory earlier in the year, was forwarding $4,110 in silver and gold for the purchase of pistols (what he referred to as "New York funds," as opposed to Mississippi paper notes), and that he wanted to order another 200 revolvers. Felix Tait, writing from the adjutant general's office in Alabama, confirmed his order of revolvers for testing, which would be followed by an order for an additional twenty-five. Not long after, on June 8, Sam Colt received a letter from an arms agent working on behalf of Alabama notifying him that "the Governor from the State of Alabama is here [in Hartford] on the subject of rifles. He will be here one week." The following month the Colt factory received an order from Alabama for 300 pistols. One W. H. Ward wrote on behalf of Georgia to order shotguns and side arms. He specifically noted that "our [military] company is to be armed with double barrel shotguns, with side arms, and I would like one of your shotguns to show them its superiority over the ordinary double gun."[47] Clearly Amos Colt's endeavors during his whirlwind trip through the South had borne fruit. But sales from the Hartford-based factory were not Sam Colt's only goal. He also pushed to locate an arms production facility in the South or partner with a Southern state to reopen a shuttered factory.

In December 1859 William Hartley wrote Colt asking that they travel together to Virginia to engage in discussion about reopening the old Richmond armory. Colt responded that due to a flair up of rheumatism he could not make the trip but advised Hartley "to act in your capacity as Secretary of the Company and convince the Governor that we will do everything in our power to carry out his designs whether it be by creating a manufactory of arms for them at Richmond or employ my armory here on this service." Colt followed with a proposal to Virginia Governor Wise outlining a number of options that included accepting an exchange of old arms from the state for new breech-loading rifles; a special contract "of my own special arms," presumably the Colt Special, "for a limited time at the present fixed United States prices"; furnishing Virginia with machinery and tools capable of "making annually, 10,000 rifled muskets, the United States pattern, for $250,000"; and providing machinery and tools for alterations and repairs of flintlock muskets to percussion caps, for 10,000 arms per year at the price of $50,000.[48]

Upon his return from Richmond, Hartley wrote a telling, surreptitious letter to Colt in which he reported to the gun maker that a proposal had been submitted to the Virginia legislature. He advised Colt concerning the inner politics of the state and counseled that they wait in as much silence as possible for things to play out. Hartley noted that once the proposal was known it would "strengthen your hands at the South" and that until then "nothing whatever can be done, and it wouldn't be policy to have even the appearance of doing anything." He added, "the press must be kept simply silent if it can be done" and that once arrangements were made "I honestly believe that should you come here personally to superintend the affair you would be scarcely visible." As troubling as Hartley's clandestine advising was, perhaps more alarming was that the same letter implies that he knew that secession was imminent. He discussed the "present state of feelings [that] exists in the South" and an attempt via a "secret convention this past

[47] Mississippi Adjutant General's Office, W. L. Sikes to Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, July 3, 1860, see Mitchell, *Colt*, 52; Adjutant General Felix Trait to Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, February 18, 1860, see Mitchell, *Colt*, 53; M.W. McClusky to Samuel Colt, June 8, 1860, see Mitchell, *Colt*, 54; M.W. McClusky to Samuel Colt, June 8, 1860, see Mitchell, Colt, 56-57.

[48] William Hartley to Samuel Colt, December 1859, and Samuel Colt to Virginia Governor, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 86-87.

summer by Southern men" to bring "the merchants of New York and the North to their senses." Hartley insisted that he and Colt must be careful, as "any identification with a single man of the black Republican stripe would be fatal," and that he had been viewed "suspiciously" while in Richmond. Finally, Hartley closed: "I look upon the state of affairs as most threatening and unless the black section of the Republicans can be rooted out, you may look for a dissolution of the Union as certain."[49]

While Colt steadily received such alarming political reports, evidence that what he saw were dollar signs came directly from Colt himself. While in Cuba on a business trip, he sent a letter on February 18, 1860 pressing a manager to "Run the armory night and day with double sets of hands until we get 5,000 or 10,000 ahead of each kind. I had rather have an accumulation of our arms than to have money lying idle, and we cannot have too many on hand to meet the exigencies of the time." Commenting on the ongoing talks with the U.S. War Department and the contract he was pursuing for the Colt Special Rifle, he added, "it is not unlikely we will soon be changing to machinery of the plain rifles with the sword bayonet, as well as larger supplies of arms which are much wanted now, judging from the news I have received from New Orleans since I arrived." Colt summarized, "Make hay while the sun shines."[50]

Colt clearly saw the looming war as a business opportunity. Hartley sent too many letters about the situation in the South for there to be any doubt that the nation was about to be torn asunder. Amos Colt, while traveling through the region selling arms, informed Hartley on November 14, 1860 that "there is much excitement here, a continual talk of secession." Yet he still "moved as rapidly today in the business as possible sending letters to the different officers of Minute Men and companies forming, put an advertisement in the local papers, etc." Hartley quickly advised Colonel Colt of the situation, writing just two days later that, "I have entire faith that six or eight of the Southern States will secede unless the Northern States abolish the personal liberty bill," adding that he had just sold 500 revolvers to Georgia. The mention of a personal liberty bill referred to Northern states that had passed laws in violation of the nation's Fugitive Slave Act and refused to return runaways. November 18 brought yet another letter from Hartley to Colt, again warning, "… a number of southern states will secede." This prompted important considerations for the business. Hartley relayed that "men in the South are casting quantities of lead into bullets ... The rise of pig lead may be expected."[51]

Even more ominously, Hartley's question suggested subterfuge in shipping arms. He wondered if they should continue to send them from Hartford, stating plainly that there is "a matter of great consideration for you to decide as to the policy of having *Colt arms hail from the City of New York*, rather from the State of Connecticut and from the very town where Wide Awakes originate." The Wide Awakes referenced Abraham Lincoln's Spring 1860 Connecticut visit to campaign on behalf of Governor William Buckingham's reelection bid and the young men of Hartford who poured into the streets clad in makeshift uniforms and carrying oil torches to escort

[49] William M. B. Hartley to Samuel Colt, December 18, 1859, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 90-91.
[50] Samuel Colt to Unknown, possibly William M. B. Hartley, February 18, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 75.
[51] William M.B. Hartley to Samuel Colt, November 18, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 59.

Lincoln. Their movement was popularized and replicated throughout Northern cities. Hartley opined, "it is not pleasant to contemplate a state of such affairs, but it is one in which it is better to look the facts in the face early."[52]

As secession loomed darkly on the horizon, Colt pursued the Richmond armory contract and continued Amos Colt's Southern tour to sell arms. In January Colt wrote to Hartley, "I think we should endeavor to secure the contract for the Armory at Richmond, keep your eye on it," and in a later letter suggested that they convince a Virginia "Military or special Committee appointed by the legislature, to visit my Armory in Hartford."[53] During the same time period in January 1860, Colt also corresponded with men in Georgia who were keen on establishing an armory. Bedney F. McDonald wrote Colt on January 4 that the Georgia governor had appointed Major Mark A. Cooper to visit the Colt factory in Hartford, explaining that Cooper was "the iron master of Georgia and is authorized by the Governor to examine the cost also of establishing a manufactory for making arms in the state. You can speak to him in relation to it. He is one of the *substantial men of the South.*" Cooper and Colt met and maintained correspondence about the potential of such an armory.[54]

Even as late as April 1861, after seven Southern states had seceded from the Union, Colt continued to discuss the possibility of an armory in Georgia. In one letter, dated April 5, 1861, just five days before the attack on Fort Sumter, Cooper responded to a telegram Colt had sent inviting the Georgian north to discuss business. Cooper responded that building arms in the South "might be greatly to mutual interest" and that "there may be millions in it. I have at command all the gun work for Ordnance and Army – I have been waiting to hear from you." He closed the brief letter with what can only be considered the most disingenuous of statements: "We will have no war between the North and South, but plenty to do nevertheless."[55]

Colt and Hartley understood the nation's precarious situation, and their own. South Carolina had seceded in December 1860, followed by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana in January. Seizures of arms running through New York City began immediately. Shipments headed to Georgia appear to have been the first, and Governor Robert Toombs fired off a heated telegram to the secession-minded mayor of New York, Fernando Wood, who whined that he had no authority over the police, or he would "summarily punish the authors of this illegal and unjustifiable seizure of private property." These seizures were ultimately reversed, but they revealed the tension and what to come.[56]

---

[52] Amos Colt to William M.B. Hartley, November 14, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 49; William M.B. Hartley to Samuel Colt, November 16, 1860, in Mitchell, Colt, 59; William M.B. Hartley to Samuel Colt, November 18, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 59. For more on the Wide Awakes, see, Jon Grinspan, Wide Awake (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024).

[53] Samuel Colt to William M. B. Hartley, January 12, 1859; Samuel Colt to William M. B. Hartley, January 14, 1859, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 91-92.

[54] Bedney F. McDonald to Samuel Colt, January 4, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 99; see also, Mark A. Cooper to Samuel Colt, January 26, 1860, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 102.

[55] Mark A. Cooper to Samuel Colt, April 5, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 103.

[56] Robert Toombs to Fernando Wood, January 24, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 62; Fernando Wood to Robert Toombs, January 24, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 62.

In Virginia, which had not yet seceded, Ben McCulloch in February and March sent letters ordering thousands of revolvers, asking that they be "packed securely in plain dry goods boxes, without your name or any designation of their contents except 'hardware' if you think that necessary." He was clearly concerned about identifying the contents, adding in the same letter, "owing to the danger of seizure we request you to see that special care is taken not to allow the character of the shipment to be known; and in this, we must rely entirely on your judgment and tact." And yet again after his signature: "P.S. Let me suggest that the shipment and bills of lading should not be made by you directly – as it might lead to seizure." Those guns arrived by April 16, as evidenced in a letter of acknowledgment to Colt. On the same day, after the attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, William Hartley wrote to a letter addressed to "Gentlemen," (it is unclear who the recipient was), stating that the 100 engraved pistols they had ordered were being shipped in "casks marked 'T' care of the express agent at their destination." Just two days later, on April 18, Colt himself telegraphed the armory to "get ready at once the arms with belts, flasks, etc. to pay for land purchase of Mr. Hale."[57] Hale was from Texas, which had seceded on February 1. He acknowledged receipt of the guns. Colt accepted the land mentioned in lieu of cash payment. Many Southerners noted the lack of gold and silver available to pay debts and requested alternative means of payment.

Orders continued to pour in.[58] Some came from interesting sources. On April 18 Stephen Russell Mallory wrote to Colt requesting 200 Navy revolvers. At the top of the letter, spelled out clearly, was, "Secretary of the Navy, Confederate States of America." A few weeks later, on May 3, none other than Confederate cavalry commander Jeb Stuart wrote Colt requesting only a single pistol, adding, "you will do me a favor by packing this in such a box as to elude the scrutiny of mob search on the road. I take pleasure in adding my testimonial to the superiority of your arms over all others." Clearly, prominent Southerners knew that in Colt they had a ready supplier, even up to the last moment and beyond. Historian James Mitchell sums up the situation: "Colt was exerting great effort to dispose of every arm he could make, regardless of from which quarter the order came."[59] Mitchell wonders further what was "passing through Colt's mind as he saw the stream of orders pour in from the South, and the guns flood out, guns which he knew would later be turned against his own people."[60]

Watershed

In 1860, despite some delegation of responsibilities, Samuel Colt aggressively oversaw all his business interests in Hartford and beyond. Letters indicate that he micromanaged the product

---

[57] Ben McCulloch to Samuel Colt, February 24, 1861; Ben McCulloch to Samuel Colt, March 24, 1861; William G. Hale to Samuel Colt, April 8, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 64-65; William M. B. Hartley to Gentlemen, April 16, 1861, in Mitchell, Colt, 67; Samuel Colt to Col. Colt's Armory, April 18, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 67.

[58] George W. Hughes to Samuel Colt, January 9, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 69-70; J. R. Anderson & Company to Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, April 8, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 72-73; Thomas Dyer to Samuel Colt, April 17, 1861, 73; F. B. Dedricks to Samuel Colt, April 13, 1861, in Mitchell, Colt, 73-74; John W. Ellis to William M. B. Hartley, February 18, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 74.

[59] Stephen R. Mallory to Samuel Colt, April 18, 1861; Jeb Stuart to Samuel Colt, May 3, 1861, in Mitchell, *Colt*, 77.

[60] Mitchell, *Colt*, 75.

and operations of both his armory and mining interests in the West. His father-in-law Reverend William Jarvis predicted that Sam would earn nearly $100,000 over the first half of 1860, but to the detriment of his health. Indeed, Colt was at times so sick that newspapers once predicted his death prematurely. Still, Colt consistently recovered sufficiently to continue his frenetic pace.[61]

By the end of that year Colt refused to stop working, cultivating sales, and personally overseeing the factory, despite his poor health. According to his father-in-law, a typical day for Colt, by the end of 1860, involved waking up at 5 or 6 a.m., when he took his ferry, named Armsmear like his home, across the river to his garden, farm, and brickmaking factory on the river's east bank. (This was possibly a ten-acre property he named the "Henery" he had purchased from a man named Sam Cooley in February 1860 for a small business raising swine and chickens, but the historical record has limited information on these operations.) Colt then returned for breakfast and spent the day at the armory until 7 or 8 p.m. Jarvis observed that "the Colonel does not improve in health very fast; and I think it is in consequence of overtasking his brain while he is so feeble. He will know all the details of his immense business from day to day and give minute directions regarding it. The orders for arms are so numerous, that his men work until midnight; and the more letters and orders there are, the more time and thought he will expend in attending to them."[62] At the same time, Colt completed factory expansion with a west armory in a matter of weeks, while never seeing the construction on his own house (Armsmear; see chapter 9) completed. When Colt fell sick again in January 1862, Reverend Jarvis speculated that his son-in-law's inflammatory rheumatism was due to drafts in the unfinished house, where workers continued extensions to the south and the east. He reported that Colt recited poetry from the afternoon of January 9 to the following morning of January 10, when he died, with the disease having "gone to his brain."[63] Jarvis lamented that "his brain has been overworked till its functions have given out. It is in fact too active for his physical powers of endurance."[64]

The irrepressible Sam Colt, the genius gun maker, marketer, and businessman, had suffered years from gout and/or rheumatoid arthritis. He succumbed to what was likely a related infection on January 10, 1862. His passing sent shock waves through the city of Hartford. The newspaper described the profound impact of Colt's death on Hartford:

> he died, a middle-aged man, but he had lived far longer than those who vegetate to more protracted periods. Colt's life was intense; his mind ever on the strain; his brain teeming with plans, and hopes and enterprises, he drank life's cup brimming full, though he died in the midst of his enterprises. Our city was very sad when his death was announced. It

---

[61] Jarvis to Jarvis, Box 1, January 7,1860, William Jarvis Papers, CMCH.

[62] Jarvis to Jarvis, December 4, 1860, December 12, 1860, Box 1, William Jarvis Papers, CMCH; Samuel Colt, contract between Colt and Sam Cooley for East Hartford property known as "The Henry," 1860, Box 3, Samuel Colt Acquisition, Jarvis-Robinson Family Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT; "Colonel Colt's Prowess," *Hartford Times* (October 26, 1931).

[63] Jarvis to Jarvis, January 9, 1862, Jarvis to Jarvis, June 1862; Jarvis to Jarvis, October 1, 1861, Jarvis to Jarvis, December 9, 1861, Box 1, William Jarvis Papers, CMCH.

[64] At the time, the public seemed to use the term "rheumatism," interchangeably with "gout." Rev. William Jarvis to William Jarvis Jr., January 9, 1862, January 10, 1862, January 12, 1862, Box 2, William Jarvis Papers.

> seemed, as a lady said, as if the "main spring was broken." For to a very large fraction of our people, Colt's name was the name of all names, which came most nearly "home to their business and their bosoms." He was stern and tenacious of his rights as a businessman, but he had a large heart, and at the proper time and place, he never failed to show it. His death, although it will not close his pistol factory, because he had made provisions for such an event, will leave an irreparable gap in our city. Hartford would not be what it is, by thousands of inhabitants, had not Colonel Colt loved the place in which he was born, and chosen here to make his dwelling. Multitudes will wish to pay their tribute of respect to their deceased benefactor.[65]

The Hartford Courant reported that at Colt's funeral on January 14, "upon no occasion have the people of the town come out in such force as they came out yesterday to testify their respect to the man who had added so greatly to the prosperity of his native city."[66] Historian Ellsworth Grant describes Samuel Colt's funeral on January 14, 1862 as "The Day Hartford Stopped." Work at the armory and the Willow Ware factory was suspended. The armory band, primarily German willow workers, accompanied the procession. All 100 workmen filed past his coffin with black armbands, as well as his guard—Company A, 12th Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers—and the Putnam Phalanx, a ceremonial, quasi-military honor guard formed in 1858.[67] Forgotten was the Northern criticism for his robust sale of arms in the South. Equally true, however, was the importance of his production for the Union Army once the war began in earnest. Both Northerners and Southerners understood this reality. It was no great surprise, therefore, that whispers of conspiracy filled the air when the original Colt armory caught fire at about 8 a.m. on February 4, 1864.

The Armory Fire: Confederate Sabotage?

After the unexpected death of the Colt factory's iconic, innovative creator, Elisha Root managed to continue production until fire consumed the South Meadow during the Civil War years. Flames quickly engulfed the east wing of the factory as the steam whistle echoed throughout the valley, shrilly heralding an emergency. River-borne fire steamers shuttled along the river to the 1500-foot-long structure. If they could even reach, water hoses continually burst, making it a fruitless task to stem the flames. Spectators, including Sam's widow and the company's major stockholder Elizabeth Colt, rushed to the scene. Within two hours, the damage was so complete that the grand blue onion dome, atop which rested the iconic carved rampant colt, collapsed.[68] (See 6.2)

---

[65] "Death of Colonel Colt," *The Hartford Courant*, January 11, 1862, 2.

[66] Obituary, *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 15, 1862; Ellsworth S. Grant, "Sam Colt's Funeral: The Day Hartford Stopped," Connecticut History.org, January 14, 2021, https://connecticuthistory.org/sam-colts-funeral-the-day-hartford-stopped-2/.

[67] Ellsworth S. Grant, "Sam Colt's Funeral: The Day Hartford Stopped," ConnecticutHistory.org, January 14, 2021.

[68] "A Terrible Fire in Hartford," *The Hartford Times*, February 5, 1864. For the most thorough account of the fire and the question of a conspiracy, see Luke G. Boyd, "The Colt Armory Fire: Connecticut and the Great Confederate Conspiracy," in Matthew Warshauer, ed., *Inside Connecticut and the Civil War: Essays on One State's Struggles* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 140-158.

Elizabeth Colt watched with the crowds from the dike as the blue dome collapsed inward and crumbled into the flames. She must have felt, historian William Hosley explained, as if she were laying her husband to rest all over again. She recounted her trauma in a letter to her sister.

> I was up and dressed when I heard the gong and knew at once that something was wrong – summoning to the window …cloud of smoke that almost enveloped almost the main Armory in it's dark folds. I ran to Dick's [her brother Richard] room in the short time I was in there long enough for the great tongues of flames to shoot up through the roof. I waited a few minutes and then put on my things and went down to the nearest point it was safe to go and watch the roof and floor after floor, wall after wall, fall into the fiery pit covering thousands upon thousands of dollars worth of the superb machinery--- the living representations of my dear husband's great mind and genius and to be so powerless to help save one thing from the general ruin was so hard to bear. The Great dome fell with the thundering crash --the great gong rang only by the hand of the fateful fire, moaned on until almost the last like a sad dying angel for the dear old Armory the Colonel loved and was so proud of --a dirge for its departing glory --it seems as if another link between him and us was broken. - nothing of the original Armory being left but the forging and blacksmith shops.[69]

The *Willimantic Journal* agreed that the fire was "a grand sight and no pen can describe the sublimity of the scene. Nothing like it has ever occurred in this city before." The *Hartford Daily Courant* wrote of the destroyed edifice in grand, elegiac style: "The student of history will see the standing walls, much to remind him of classic story and song. Historical allusions are frequent among the spectators. Fifteen hundred feet of crumbling masonry forms a scene of confusion which few communities have witnessed. It is a sad sight."[70]

[69] Elizabeth H. Colt to Hetty Hart Jarvis Beach, February 6, 1864 in Elizabeth H. Colt Correspondence 1858-1879, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, Box 10, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

[70] *Willimantic Journal*, February 6, 1864; Hartford Daily Courant, February 8, 1864.

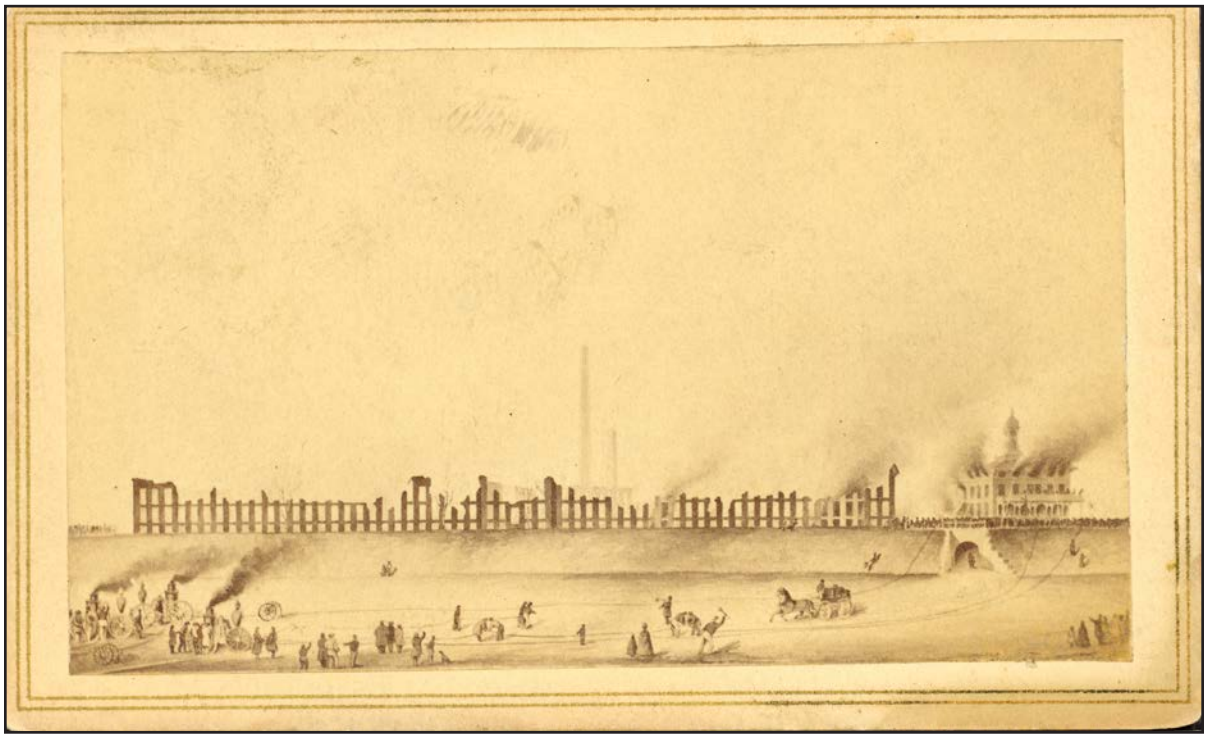


Figure 6.2, A lithograph *carte de visite* of the Colt's armory fire of 1864. Box 3, Folder 5, Item 1, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Connecticut State Library and Archives, Hartford, CT. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168317.

The East armory, which had become a landmark for almost a decade within the Connecticut River Valley, was in partial ruins. Flames reportedly began in the third-floor polishing room, near the main driving pulley and drying room, heated by steam pipes, with multiple gun stocks and possibly cotton waste, as well as paper patterns for the valuable machinery. With a cause never definitively determined, or at least reported with certainty, workers explained that when they tried to use the hoses, there was no water, and the fire spread rapidly across the yellow pine floors, soaked with the fats and oils that lubricated the hundreds of machines. The fire quickly burned through the roof braces, and the dome collapsed within an hour. The newspaper credited the workers with exhibiting bravery and calm as they rushed to save whatever arms, tools, machinery, books, and papers they could. If not for the bridge that connected the factory to the office building, the fire would likely have destroyed operating and financial records on the second floor worth about $400,000, including valuable drawings. With the firehouse reservoirs dry, the firemen had to bring steamers to the river for water, necessitating over 700 feet of hoses, which repeatedly burst. Workers like 50-year-old E. K. Fox grabbed tools, machines, papers, and whatever else they could. With many ladders too short to reach upper floors, several had to jump to safety. Tragically, Fox, who lived with his wife and children in the South Meadow, sacrificed his life for his efforts.[71]

[71] "The Fire at Colt's Armory," *The New York Times*, February 7, 1864.

While she praised the workers for saving what they could and expressed appreciation for the pain of the public at large, a devastated Elizabeth Colt expressed disgust at not only the heavy losses, but what she saw as ineptitude of the fire department, then a volunteer force, as well as the ungrateful behavior of some members of the public.[72] She complained to her sister that

> the fireman caused more loss than it is easy to forgive them for-had they not been there our men would have saved the office, none of us doubt-the firemen broke into the wine cellar and many of them were drunk-well dressed people among the crowd stole pistols right and left and some people behaved in a way to make one more disgusted with humanity thou it is good to be. But the mass of the immense crowd was kind and good and did all they could and their sad faces showed that they knew Hartford had met such loss as they could not well bear… all express such sympathy and sorrow and none speak of it without tears. Hartford feels now, if never before, what the Colonel did for it.[73]

The *Hartford Evening Press* and the *Hartford Weekly Times* likewise reported that several of the firefighters seemed to lack discipline and that several of them broke into the cellar and helped themselves to the Colt's considerable liquor reserves. At least one clearly intoxicated individual reportedly stood on the office balcony pointing pistols and rifles at the crown. Other firemen believed rumors that the office basement held gunpowder and decided to abandon efforts to cut the bridge. The newspaper reported that the police caught several men who took advantage of the chaos and stole firearms.[74]

A couple of days later Mrs. Colt reflected on the trauma that the event inflicted on herself, her family, and the community. Her brother John Jarvis was so devastated, she explained, that he "cries like a woman and he says he feels as if his home was gone," and President Elisha Root "though much grieved, keeps up good courage." Her only comfort seemed to come from the fact that the stories in the Hartford press reflected "as never before how much they all owe to him who was not there having been some very touching tributes to his genius and energy." Friends told her that the mourning reached across all classes, with laborers looking "like men who have lost their wives and families and homes." Roughly 800 to 900 people no longer had a place to go to work.[75]

---

[72] Elizabeth H. Colt to Hetty Hart Jarvis Beach, February 6, 1864, in Elizabeth H. Colt Correspondence 1858-1879, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, Box 10, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT; "Hartford's Great Fire," February 14, 1894, 6; "The Fire at Colt's," *The Hartford Courant* February 12, 1894, 5.

[73] E. H. Colt to H. H. Beach, February 6, 1864; "Hartford's Great Fire," *The Hartford Courant*, February 14, 1894, 6.n. According to Sam Colt's estate inventory, the Colt armory kept 215 gallons of gin and dozens of bottles of champagne, Scotch whiskey, Jamaica rum, and brandy. Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 29.

[74] The incident demanded, and inspired, the professionalization of the Hartford Fire Department by the end of that year. A paid fire department began the following October. "Hartford's Great Fire," February 14, 1894, 6; "The Fire at Colt's," February 12, 1894, 5, Connecticut Fire Museum, *Greater Hartford Firefighting* (Chicago, Ill: Arcadia Publishing Incorporated, 2006), 10.

[75] Elizabeth H. Colt to Hetty Hart Jarvis Beach, February 6, 1864; "City intelligence: Great Fire at Colt's Armory! Original Building Destroyed! Loss Nearly $2,000,000! 900 Men Thrown Out of Work! One Man Killed! The Discovery Excitement Among the Workmen Progress of The Flames Occupation of The Building the Adjoining Building the Cause of the Fire the Appearance of the Ruins Loss of Life the Loss of Property Insurance Hartford



Figure 6.3 "After the Armory fire - and equipment." The Colt's armory after the fire of February 4, 1864. The remains of machinery can be seen in the building. PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Box 3, Folder 5, Item 4. Colt Collection, Connecticut State Library and Archives, Hartford, CT.
CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168320.

By February 9 work had already begun on demolishing the remaining walls so that workers could safely salvage "something of that glorious machinery pipes." The fire destroyed about 1,000 lathes and milling machines, including those that made the screws and did the polishing for the products in the newer, surviving wing. The engines and boilers were destroyed (300 and 400 horsepower), including the small initial engine with which Colt began his business. Along with at least 20,000 Hartford citizens, Elizabeth visited the ruins and described "the charred and broken staircase and such a scene of ruin you can hardly imagine." The office building survived, but barely. Much of the second floor was destroyed. The former office of Samuel Colt, located on the southeast side, partially survived on the east side, but the other managers' offices were destroyed. In place of the south side lay a pile of ashes two feet high. The office safe survived.[76] (See 6.3).

The resulting damage was extensive, one paper estimating about $660,000 worth.[77] The day after the fire, the Phoenix Bank gathered its directors together for an emergency meeting and unanimously voted to dedicate all the bank's resources for use at the Colt's Company's disposal.

New York Providence Springfield New Haven Incidents," *Hartford Daily Courant*, February 6, 1864.

[76] "The Fire at Colt's Armory."

[77] "City Intelligence," *Hartford Daily Courant*, February 6, 1864.

Samuel Colt, ever the risk taker, never took out insurance, but after his death the company secured numerous policies. Still, Elizabeth surmised that insurance would only cover $300,000 of the $800,000 building, with $400,000 of firearms in stock. This did not include the irreplaceable patterns for machines and firearms, but she admitted that "this is better than nothing."[78]

Committed to memorializing Colt's genius and fame, and with the support of the press and presumably the public, many of whom tied their livelihoods to the factory, Mrs. Colt and the other stockowners announced before the week had ended that the factory would be rebuilt "just as her husband left it." While numerous factors including supply chains and the demands of war delayed actual reconstruction, the production at Colt's armory had returned to 1861 levels within eight months.[79] Company President Elisha Root and the other company directors enabled the remaining west wing of the factory to persevere and meet the production demands of the Civil War. Elizabeth insisted that the company pay its contractors their compensation in its entirety.[80]

Murmured amid the still-smoking ruins was the charge of Confederate conspiracy. So great and important was the Colt factory's arms production, what else could its destruction be than a deliberate attempt to harm the war effort as the South's chances on the battlefield continued to dwindle? Elizabeth, too, blamed the Confederacy, telling her sister Hettie that "there's scarcely a doubt in my mind but that it made the work of an incendiary-- the place, the time and some other suspicious circumstances make it almost a certainty to my mind-- you know it was threatened 3 years ago by the rebels and I believe they have accomplished it at last."[81] Historian R. L. Wilson, in *Colt Heritage*, presents the conspiracy as fact, determining that Confederate President Jefferson Davis ordered the armory burned, though Wilson offers no evidence to support the conclusion.[82]

Rumors in Connecticut ran amuck. As historian Luke Boyd explains, "in their hearts, the people of Hartford knew the flames soaring into the February night was a message sent by this multitude [of Confederate conspirators]…Rebel advances were perceived everywhere in the Nutmeg state" as the public sought a reason for the disaster. As rebel plots were part of the Civil War experience it provided the perfect milieu.[83] Such beliefs were spurred by the *Hartford Evening Press* with such strident declarations as "an emissary of Jeff. Davis did this deed," adding it was "rebel sympathizers and disloyal men" in the employ of the Colt Patent Firearms Company. The Press even insisted that the steamer hoses brought in to quell the flames continually burst because someone had sabotaged the system.[84] The *Press* report was quickly picked up by the *Norwich*

---

[78] The newspaper estimated that the company held $396,000 of insurance held across nine companies in Hartford alone and twenty-five others in New York, Providence, Springfield, and New Haven. "Hartford's Great Fire;" "The Fire at Colt's Armory."

[79] Niven, 327; *Hartford Daily Courant*, February 6, 1864.

[80] *Hartford Daily Courant*, February 15, 1864.

[81] Elizabeth H. Colt to Hetty Hart Jarvis Beach, February 6, 1864 in Elizabeth H. Colt Correspondence 1858-1879, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, Box 10, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

[82] R. L. Wilson, *The Colt Heritage: The Official Story of Colt Firearms from 1836 to the present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 123; Hosley, *Colt: The Making of an American Legend*; Grant, 20.

[83] Boyd, "The Colt Armory Fire," 148-149.

[84] The Hartford Press, February 5, 1864.

Morning Bulletin, the *Bridgeport Standard*, *New Haven Palladium*, and others.[85] The nationally published *Scientific American* also bought into the conspiracy, declaring that a "deserter from the rebels" employed at the factory was to blame, for "no one but a rebel sympathizer could have ordered its destruction."[86]

Interestingly, the *Hartford Times*, without question the most outspoken Democratic newspaper in the state, called the conspiracy rumors "absurd" and explained the virtual impossibility of a fire's being set in morning day-time hours with hundreds of witnesses available to spot a saboteur.[87] Moreover, it was well known that Sam Colt had employed watchmen to thwart such possibilities, and that vigilance was still followed even after his death in 1862. Fires were also common in this era, when so many open flames existed in largely wooden structures. Just a few days after the Colt fire, on February 6, the *Willimantic Journal* reported that a rubber mill in Colchester had burned due to a watchman's broken lamp. And five months after the Colt factory burned, the federal armory in Springfield caught fire in a blaze remarkably like the Colt fire. The Springfield fire began in the attic, sparked by a hot chimney near dry wood. In that instance, no one claimed a Confederate conspiracy.[88]

Of further significance was the portion of the Colt factory that burned, the East Armory wing. That section of the factory had focused on civilian arms production, while the west wing manufactured for the active military. Any saboteur clandestinely employed by Colt would surely have known this. Both *The Hartford Courant* and the *Hartford Times* explained that the newer, West Armory was built solely for production for government contracts.[89] On February 15 Richard Jarvis reported the disaster to the U.S. Secretary of War, explaining that screws and polishing still occurred in the East Armory and the loss of those tasks and machines would interrupt the production rate for 50,000 Springfield muskets (at a rate of 5000 a month) to arm the Union, and requesting only a four-month grace period without penalty. Elizabeth Colt and the shareholders set about to rebuild the armory.[90]

It is far more likely that the Colt factory burned not because of a secret Jefferson Davis plot but because of an unfortunate accident. A fire that began in the attic where wooden rifle stocks and cotton would have provided perfect kindling to ignite factory floors that were literally soaked with the very oil that kept the vast arms machinery humming, a somewhat common occurrence in early industrial factories.[91] After almost four years of a bloodier war than anyone, North or South, could have imagined, the frayed nerves of an exhausted and understandably paranoid

---

[85] Norwich Morning Bulletin, February 6, 1864; Bridgeport Standard, February 6, 1864; New Haven Palladium, February 6, 1864.

[86] "Colt's Armory," Scientific American, March 12, 1864, American Periodical Series Database (accessed October 30, 2010).

[87] "Origin of the Fire" *The Hartford Times*, February 6, 1864.

[88] *Willimantic Journal*, February 6, 1864; "Fire in Springfield," *Hartford Daily Courant*, July 4, 1864.

[89] *The Hartford Times*, February 6, 1864; *Hartford Daily Courant*, February 6, 1864.

[90] Richard Jarvis to E. W. Stanton, Secretary of War, February 15, 1864, "Colt Patent Firearms Correspondence," 1864, Box 3, Jarvis Robinson Papers, Beinecke Library.

[91] R. L. Wilson, *The Colt Heritage: The Official Story of Colt Firearms from 1836 to the present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 123; Hosley, *Colt: The Making of an American Legend*; Grant, 20.

populace saw more than an accidental tragedy. The deep political division within Connecticut lasted throughout the war, and no doubt fueled the speculation.

Conclusion

In many ways, the Civil War was the perfect storm for Sam Colt, who had worked for almost three decades to sustain a profitable business. His steadfast commitment to produce the finest firearms in the world fueled his uncanny ability to market those weapons, and there was no better advertising than during a military conflict. He quickly attempted to obtain an officer's position at the outset of the Civil War so he could showcase his guns with the 1st Connecticut Regiment Colt's Revolving Rifles, something he had failed to achieve years earlier in the Mexican-American War. As with his earlier attempt, it did not come to be, but the conflict between the North and South quickly became so gargantuan that Colt's ability to produce high quality arms in great quantities ensured his company's success and long-lasting legacy, as well as a true fortune.

It is also clear that Colt recognized the coming of the war well before the Confederate firing on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. War requires guns, and Colt quickly dispatched his company's representative Amos Colt to travel throughout the South to drive sales, secure contracts, and determine the potential for establishing an arms factory in Virginia or Georgia. He kept his Hartford factory running at top speed, insisting on the pecuniary philosophy, "Make hay while the sun shines." Even after the war began, Colt maintained correspondence with Southerners and discussed with his secretary William Hartley the need to send shipments clandestinely. These actions call into question Colt's ethics and devotion to the Union. He was opposed to Lincoln's election and the "Black Republicans," but once charges appeared in newspapers and via correspondence that Colt was continuing sales with the South, he quickly backed away from the practice and insisted he had done no wrong. His rapid and outspoken support for the North's war effort was most certainly driven by the realization that his greatest business lay with the Union, not the Confederacy. Given the extent of Colt's correspondence regarding Southern gun sales when he knew the Civil War was imminent makes the story of his life, and his character, that much more nuanced and complicated.

Sam Colt's role in the great war between the states ended in January 1862 with his untimely death, but the Colt factory continued to supply arms to the Union. Samuel's widow, Elizabeth Jarvis Colt, ensured both the company's continued operations and the memorialization of her departed husband. The Colt armory continued to serve an essential role as arms supplier for the Union even after a portion of the factory burned on February 4, 1864. So important was the company's production that some suspected a Confederate conspiracy of destroying the Hartford gunwork. While the man would not live through the conflict, his reputation survived, and his company emerged with a well-tested product and a factory rebuilt anew for mass production at the height of the industrial age. By January 1868, the blue dome once again stood high above the South Meadow.[92]

---

[92] Hosley, Colt, 198-199; *The Hartford Times*, February 8, 1864; "Horrible Fire in Hartford: Armory Destroyed," Hartford Weekly Times, February 13, 1864; "The New Colt Armory," *The Hartford Courant*, January 10, 1868, 2.

VII. The Factory, Part II
The New East Armory in a New Era (1865-1945)



Figure 7.1 *Colt's Armory*, Hartford, CT, c. 1900-1906. Detroit Publishing Company. Photograph, Library of Congress (Prints and Photographs Division), Washington, D.C. https://www.loc.gov/item/2016804525.

The Civil War proved a tragic and watershed event for the nation, but also for Sam Colt and for his original factory armory, neither of which survived the conflict. After Confederate General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Colt's company had to not only recover from the drop in demand for its product and the destruction of the original armory, but also reckon with the death of its founder, visionary, and president. Throughout the era of Reconstruction, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company mirrored the nation's recovery by evolving and experimenting. The company continued to address firearm production based on market demand, but it also diversified its products to maintain solvency during eras of peace. As the factory returned to the high-demand production of wartime and government contracts in the twentieth century, its physical and product expansion meant that, far more than any other resource, the factory and its operations overwhelmed the use of the South Meadow's acreage, diluting Sam's original factory village ideal. Despite two catastrophes that threatened the whole company's survival Colt's emerged from the Civil War primed to grow.

After Sam's death, Elizabeth and the couple's only surviving son, Caldwell Colt, assumed most of the company's stock. However, neither Elizabeth nor Caldwell expressed much interest in Colt's business or factory operations, beyond their significance to Sam's legacy and their role in maintaining their lifestyles and funding her philanthropic activities. Elizabeth ensured that

the position of the company's presidency remained with people she knew and trusted and who shared her Episcopalian faith.

Management in the Post-Civil War Era

In the fifty years after Sam Colt died, only two presidents, Elisha Root and Elizabeth's brother Richard William Hart Jarvis, ran the Colt's Patent Firearms Company, indicating the well-placed trust Colt had in his initial management team, their loyalty to his vision, and the wealth of business talent Colt had amassed. Both Root and Horace Lord, who served as two of Sam Colt's pallbearers, already held prominent positions within the company, Root being Colt's star mechanic and former superintendent, and Lord serving as superintendent. Elizabeth Colt described Elisha Root as a "valued and esteemed friend," and she must have been eminently grateful that he managed to keep production going, not only after Sam's death but also after the tragic fire. The company managed to fulfill its December 1863 government contract for the Springfield musket, since most of that activity occurred in the west armory.[1] While Root's ascension from superintendent to president ensured consistency in leadership through the remainder of the Civil War, Root himself fell sick only months after General Lee's surrender in April 1865 and passed away the following September. His death could have very well been, as Elizabeth's father William Jarvis predicted, a "calamity" for the factory.[2]

While Sam had tried to hire his brother James Colt to oversee factory operations in London and later in Hartford, the two had grown estranged, taking each other to court over business affairs. James's children later sued Elizabeth over the assets that James had insisted Sam owed him from London. But both Sam and Elizabeth deeply trusted Elizabeth's brother, Richard Jarvis, who served as Colt's liaison for managing the Arizona mine venture. Jarvis remained a bachelor, living with his widowed sister at Armsmear, until his own death. In Fall 1865, stockholders, with Elizabeth holding the most shares, elected Jarvis as the company's president, with a salary of $6,000 per year. Jarvis depended upon managers to run the factory operations, but requested daily updates about production. Focusing on ensuring the company's solvency and dividends, he managed the company for the next several decades.[3] (See 7.2).

Before assuming the presidency, therefore, Richard Jarvis ensured he had a strong support staff to handle the manufacturing side of the company. To run the actual armory, he persuaded a trained civil engineer, West Point graduate, and celebrated Mexican and Civil War veteran, General William Buel Franklin, to join the armory in November 1864 as vice president, enticed by the forty-eight stock shares Jarvis encouraged Elizabeth to sell him in addition to an offer of

---

1 Barnard, 237; Richard Jarvis to E. W. Stanton, Secretary of War, February 15, 1864, "Colt Patent Firearms Correspondence," 1864, Box 3, Jarvis Robinson Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Screw-making and polishing still occurred in the east armory, and the loss of those tasks and machines interrupted production. "Conflagration at Colt's Armory," *Scientific American* X, February 20, 1864, 117.

2 Barnard, 376; and Alyce Englund, interview with Samantha Ozzone, Hartford, CT, December 7, 2011, in Samantha Ozzone, Central Connecticut State University, Coltsville HRS files.

3 Ellsworth Strong and Marion Hepburn Grant, *The City of Hartford 1754-1984: An Illustrated History*. (Connecticut Historical Society: Hartford, 1986), 53; Jarvis to Jarvis, February 10, 1862, CMCH.

a salary that matched his own at $6,000 per year. Franklin lived in the James B. Colt House next door to Armsmear after he took over operations.[4]

General Franklin faced an enormous task: a factory rebuild, a way to keep the company in business without its founder and visionary and without Elisha Root, who had served as the glue to the operations, and after the Civil War, which put many other gun manufacturers out of business by the 1880s. Companies like Colt and Winchester survived this post-war period primarily on their ability to cultivate a domestic market, something Sam had nurtured for years through his broad and innovative marketing. Franklin invested himself fully into the production process and eventually became general manager.[5] While Elizabeth Colt and the stockholders had hoped for an immediate reconstruction of the factory, the *Hartford Weekly Times* reported that construction costs were high, with a brick shortage causing building material prices to rise to $12 per 1,000. Similarly, the price of lumber, tin, and plumbing had doubled during the war.[6]

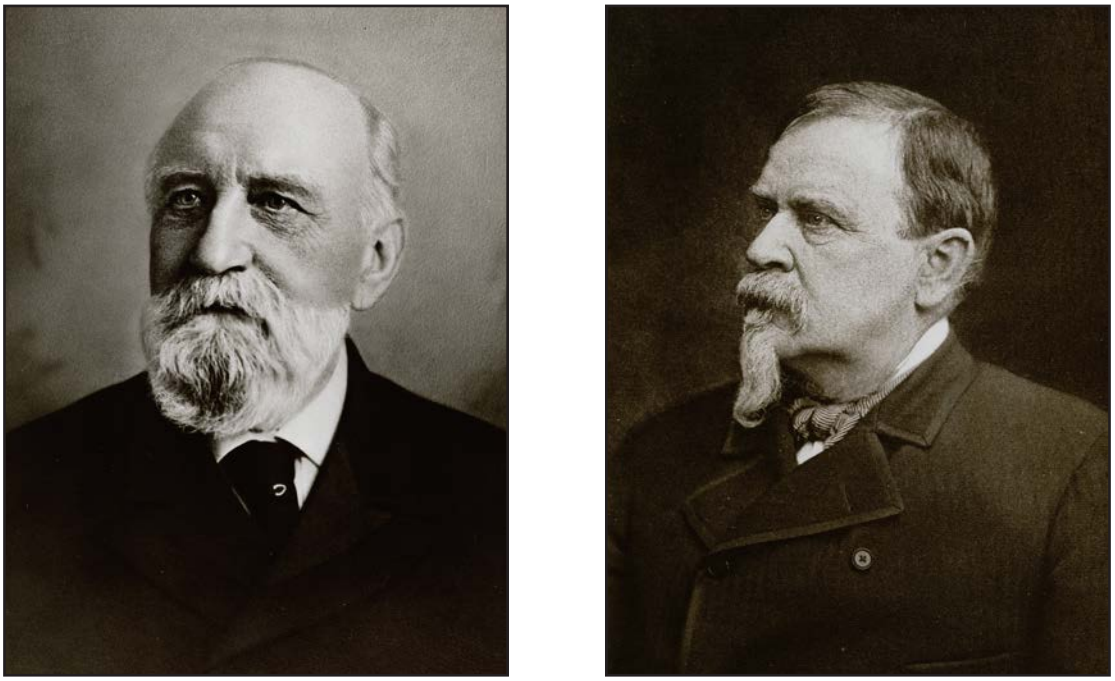


Figure 7.2 Richard Jarvis (left) and William B. Franklin (right), 1866-1888, PG 460, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Box 1, Folder 3, Item 4, Museum, Connecticut State Library and Archives, Hartford, CT. http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168253.

4 Diary, William Buel Franklin, November 15-16, 1865, William Buel Franklin Biography, Box 54, RG 103, CSLA; For more on Franklin, see Mark A. Snell, *From First to Last: The Life of Major General William B. Franklin* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

5 The financial collapse of the Ottoman Empire also contributed to the collapse of American small arms manufacturing. Furthermore, several European countries now had their own factories thanks to shipment of American machinery. Jonathan Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money: The Global Arms Trade in the Age of Imperialism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 36; Snell, 338; Diary, William Buel Franklin, April 2, May 4, 1866;

6 "City News," *Hartford Weekly Times*, February 12, 1864.

Franklin oversaw the complete reconstruction of the main armory after it burned down. He reported few details about it in his diary. In his November 21-22, 1865, entry, Franklin only shared that he "examined roof of New Armory [sic] building with reference to rebuilding the brick part of the Armory. Gave directions to stop sale of brick and to commence hauling when the weather will suit," although according to Elizabeth's father, the arrival of iron for the roof structure so delayed construction that the building still had no roof when bad weather arrived.[7] Relying on his engineering background, Franklin "consulted with carpenter about bill of timber for the new building, details of roof truss, flooring and resolved to pile the foundations for the columns." He ordered men "to look of [sic] data for cost of fireproof building."[8] By February, Franklin reported an estimated cost of $130,000 to replicate the original, but the cost came closer to $300,000. Superintendent Lord required each floor to store a fire brigade and hoses.[9]

A Modern Industrial Factory

In January 1868, the reconstructed east armory was finally operational. (See 7.1) Seventy-five feet above the roofline, the copy of the rampant colt statue that formerly served as a fountain in the estate garden (and is thought to have been created at the same time as the original) topped the new thirty-foot-diameter blue dome. Because Elizabeth meant the reconstruction as a monument to the memory of the late Colonel Colt, the new east armory closely resembled the original structure (excepting its four stories, rather than three), with a 12.5-foot-high ceiling on the first floor and 16-foot ceiling on the upper floor.[10] Unlike the original single pedimented bay, the new building featured five additional pedimented bays with oxeye and arched windows beneath corbelled cornices. The main entrance and fire-resistant iron staircase remained at the center. The plan called for adding a fourth floor, using the more fireproof pressed brick instead of the original brownstone (except for accents in the sills and quoining), as well as additional doors and staircases on each end. Details like the door hinges and latches molded in the shape of pistols carried the firearms theme. In addition to the three-foot-thick pressed brick walls, the new design also provided more ornamentation and decorative elements befitting a memorial. Carved brownstone trimmed the belt courses, rustic corners, and window caps and sills against the brick. Fenestration included more than 550 windows spaced eight feet by three inches across the building.[11]

Between every other window, a ventilation flue ran air to louvres on the roof through thirty-seven miles of heating, gas, and water pipes. The open attic space was intended to be an experimental shooting gallery. Wrought iron columns, spaced over eight feet apart, served as fireproof structural supports topped with brick arches. They stood on more than a thousand piles sunk twenty-five feet into the ground to hold the foundation and walls, the shaft lines to hold the

---

7 Jarvis to Jarvis, December 24, 1866, CSLA; "Colt's Armory," *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 2, 1866; "The New Colt Armory," *The Hartford Courant*, January 10, 1868, 2.

8 A few years later from early 1866 to late 1867, he would supervise the construction of the new Connecticut State Capitol. Franklin diary, November 21-22, 1865; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 37-38.

9 Franklin diary, August 3, 1866; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 37-38.

10 Franklin diary, November 21-22, 1865, 8-9; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 37-38.

11 "The New Colt Armory," *The Hartford Courant*, January 10, 1868, 2; Hosley, 199.

belting system that operated the machinery, and the roof structure, covered by painted sheet iron. The 3.5-inch floors of thick pine allowed machinery to be bolted into them. Work benches ran through the whole building. A main iron staircase and entrance graced the center, with staircases likewise on each end. The first floor served as the machine shop and held the musket and rifle barrel boring and rifling machines. The second and third floors housed machines for stocking, milling, and jigging, and the fourth floor held the assembly and storage rooms.[12] Together, according to Henry Barnard, the east and west armories held an estimated 1,460 machines, valued at about $200 each, plus costly tools. While many machines were similar in design, they featured different tool attachments depending on the task: cutting, filing, drilling, or polishing.[13]

Because of new construction, the factory emerged into the post-war era with the most updated, modern necessities of the industrial era for the construction of firearms. Updates included not only the new machines but an improved system to power them. Four 50-horsepower vertical high-speed Porter-Allen steam engines placed at the center of the second floor, with 12-inch diameters and 24-inch cylinders, operated at 140 revolutions per minute. They featured a "Porter's cut-off," an improvement over the earlier Sickels, invented in 1841. The engines stood in line with one another, allowing flexibility for operating one or more secondary shafts. Reformed lawyer turned mechanic Charles T. Porter had developed the prototype of a high-speed steam engine in collaboration with engineers John Allen and Charles B. Richards, a friend of Porter who helped carry out the design. As an engineer in the Colt armory, Richards built the first Allen engines in the United States by adapting prototype drawings that Allen and Porter sent him and manufacturing them in house. The $40,000 engines located on the second floor of the central cell powered Colt's machines, with a line shaft stretching about 250 feet each way. In between, pulleys drove the line shafts for the first and third stories. The *Hartford Daily Courant* reported that they went into operation in June 1868.[14] Architectural historian Matthew Roth describes the engines as architecturally integrated "in a literal merger of structure and power, the steam-engine cylinders doubl[ing] as load-bearing columns."[15]

In 1866, official Colt biographer Henry Barnard reported on the introduction of an even more powerful backup 450-horsepower engine, presumably added because the cost of stopping production for just one day was so steep. (See 7.3 and 7.4) The pistol shop alone operated with a 240- horsepower, 100-foot circumference wheel. Altogether, the steam engines generated more than 1,000 horsepower to keep the machines running, with the smoke exiting through a 138-foot-

[12] "The New Colt Armory," *The Hartford Courant*, January 10, 1868, 2.

[13] Barnard, 213.

[14] For more details about the Porter-Allen engines, see Porter, 177-181, and Otto Mayr, "Yankee Practice and Engineering Theory: Charles T. Porter and the Dynamics of the High-Speed Steam Engine," *Technology and Culture* 16, no. 4 (1975): 570–602. https://doi.org/10.2307/3103435; "New Engines at Colt's," *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 20, 1868; See also Clouette, "Colt Industrial District" National Register Nomination; Barnard, 237.

[15] This is confirmed by engineer Charles Richards. See Porter. Eight posts formed the secondary columns of the building framing. The framing of the engines was also connected with the beams of the fireproof flooring on all three lower floors. Matthew Roth, *Connecticut: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites* (Washington D.C: Society for Industrial Archeology, 1981).

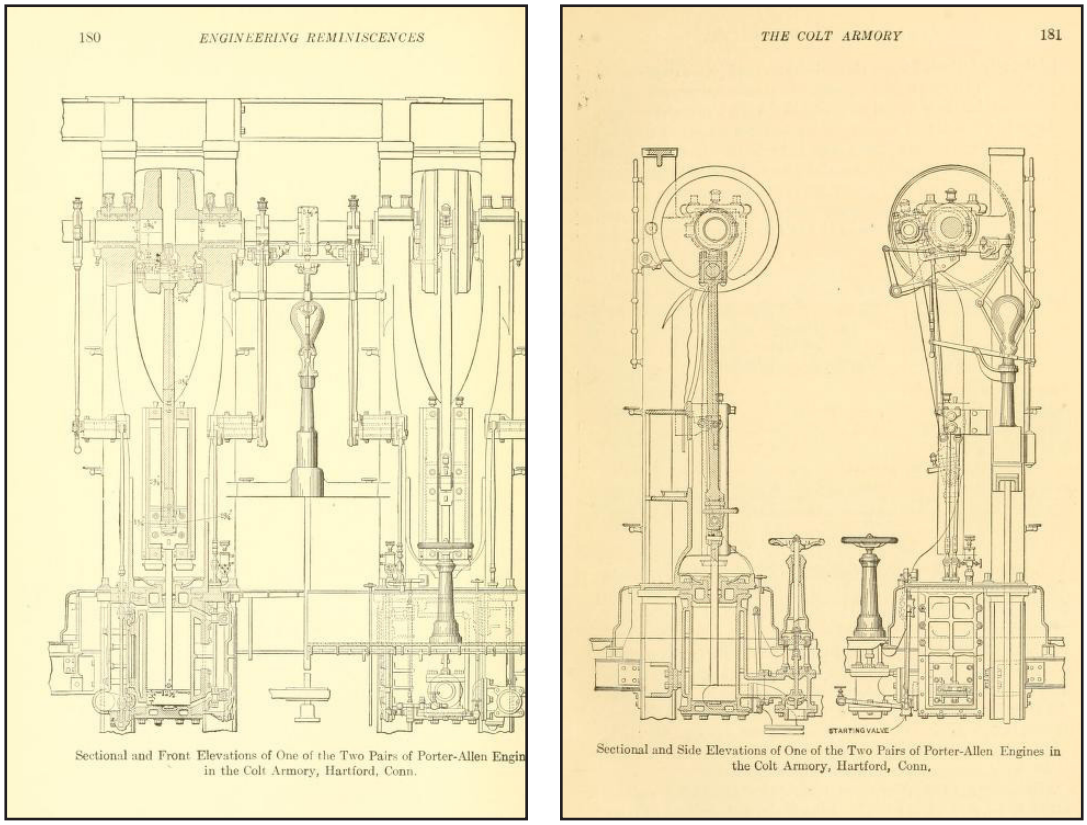


Figure 7.3 Charles T. Porter, *Engineering Reminiscences contributed to "Power" and "American Machinist"* (New York: John Wiley and Sons 1908), 180-181.

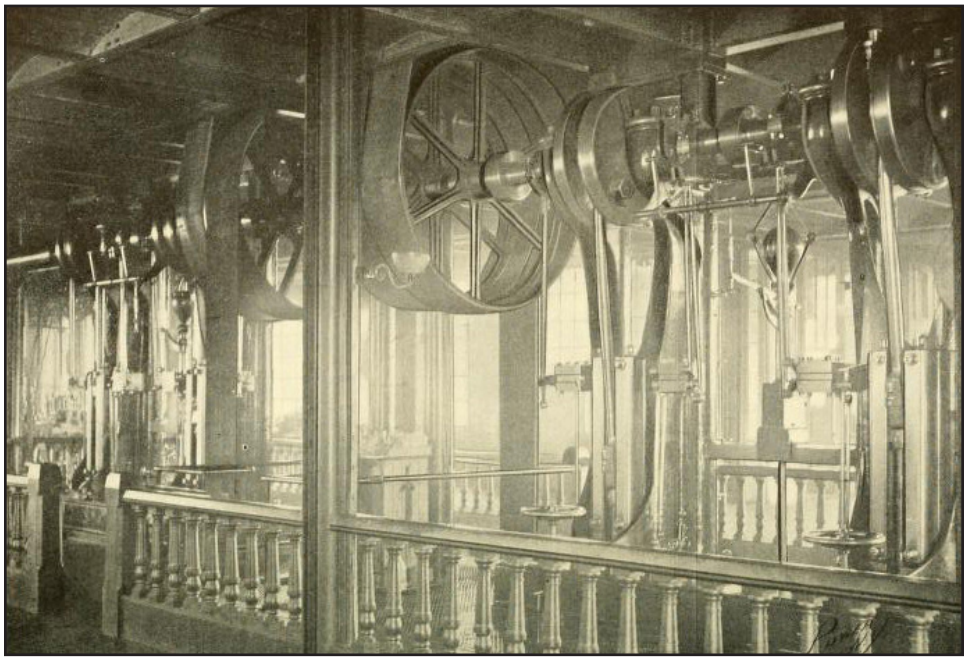


Figure 7.4 Porter-Allan Engines in the Colt Armory, Harford, CT. Charles T. Porter, *Engineering Reminiscences contributed to "Power" and "American Machinist"* (New York: John Wiley and Sons 1908), 181.

high chimney.[16] The company continued to update its power source, purchasing its first electric generators from a local vendor two years after the City of Hartford converted its streetlights from gas and just seven years after Thomas Edison developed the incandescent lightbulb in 1886.[17]

The Business of the Dike

With a brand-new factory finally completed in 1868, the Colt's factory achieved a reputation as the largest private armory in the world, rivaling European palaces in size.[18] A side business in wicker baskets and furniture that Sam Colt had cultivated himself also survived Civil War and flourished beyond his death. One of the strategies for strengthening the earthen wall around his industrial village had revolved around planting trees along the dike. Colt may have accepted wise advice from one of his factory employees, Frederick Kunkel, a German immigrant who was connected to the willow trade abroad. Around 1855 Kunkel imported a stock of French osier willows that could hold the soil and prevent erosion because of their strong and entangled root system.[19]

These willow trees would not only prove to be an effective tool for flood control but an economically sound one as well. In a short time, the fast-growing willows covered the dike, necessitating frequent trimming. Because it was the roots that were important to keep the dike stable, the branches were a waste product. The cut branches apparently captured the attention of local and traveling basket makers, to whom Colt sold the first crop of green wood. At the time the United States imported most of its willow ware, with only a handful of German craftsmen creating willow baskets, furniture, and carriages located in New York City.[20] Colt began selling the trimmings to a wicker house there, but in 1858 he decided to manufacture willow wicker ware himself alongside his armory in Hartford. As more seedlings sprouted, these scions became the rejuvenating stock base for Colt's expansion beyond firearms, the Colt Willow Ware Manufacturing Company. They covered seventeen acres in the meadow from 1858 to 1859.[21]

At first Colt's basketmakers worked in their homes, until Colt decided to locate Willow Ware's relatively small operations into a more complete factory complex of its own. As with most of his projects, he worked fast. One researcher surmises that "the speed of construction can perhaps be explained by Colt's reuse of building materials." *The Hartford Courant* reported in 1860 that he enlisted an old chicken house that had originally been donated for the use of his willow workers. This building "...forms the upper portion of the main building of the willow works," later lifted

---

16 "The New Colt Armory," *The Hartford Courant*, January 10, 1868, 2.

17 Ellsworth Grant, *The Colt Factory*, 55.

18 *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 10, 1868; Hosley, 199; Box 17, Hart-Jarvis Papers, Beinecke Library. Henry B. Beach served as treasurer of Woodruff and Beach, and he eventually became the brother-in-law of Elizabeth's sister Hetty Jarvis. Cyprian Nichols Beach and Henry Beach were half-brothers, sharing a father, George Beach Sr. of the Phoenix Bank in Hartford.

19 Jarvis, November 14, 1859, CHS; Hosley, 111.

20 Jack Rohan, *Yankee Arms Dealer* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), 190-195.

21 Article 7, *The Hartford Courant* (November 10, 1859); "The Old Colt's Willow Ware Industry," *The Hartford Courant*, October 10, 1915.

upon two stories of brick, with an addition built that Fall.[22] With no evidence of an architect, the project was completed in only a few months. (see chapter 8 for image of factory and homes).[23]

Willow ware made Coltsville much more than just an armory. The brick building that housed the willow works and storehouse fronted the eastern side of the main dike, near the junction with the south dike, which ran west to Wethersfield Avenue. The opportunity of a side manufactory provided a safety net for the company as it faced uneven market demands of firearms, especially during peacetime, a cushion Colt did not have in Paterson.[24] A joint company formed with $25,000 capital in 1859. By this time Colt's health was in decline, so he then looked to none other than his brother-in-law Richard Jarvis. Jarvis, who had previously overseen Colt's mining operations in Arizona, assumed the roles of president and treasurer of Colt's Willow Ware Manufacturing Company.[25] Jarvis was served as one of five directors for the company, with Sam Colt, Elisha K. Root, Horace Lord, and Kunkel assuming the other positions. Kunkel managed the operations until 1861, when Leopold Simon took over as supervisor. When Sam Colt passed away in January 1862, the remaining directors decided not to fill his seat. The board remained relatively unchanged for the rest of the existence of the willow works, save for the death of Root in 1865. In that instance again, the remaining directors did not replace him.[26]

Colt had taken advantage of the growing popularity of wicker products. By the mid-nineteenth century, willow wicker furniture was becoming highly fashionable and therefore lucrative. The material proved durable and moisture tolerant. Migrants and immigrants especially appreciated that it was inexpensive and lightweight. The willows provided the material to manufacture not just baskets but eventually children's cradles and wagons, chandeliers, sleigh bodies, stretchers, chairs, and go-carts. Markets included Cuba and South America. Predictions forecasted that Colt could bring in $10,000 a year from his willow business alone.[27]

Colt's Willow Ware Manufacturing Company depended on skilled workers. Costs remained fairly low at first, as workers weaved baskets by hand and at home, in the "windmill house" south of the dyke, and in one tenement in the Charter Oak Hall building, located at the intersection of Charter Oak Avenue and Huyshope Avenue.[28] Directors soon found out, however,

---

22 "The Manufacturers of Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, May 21, 1867.

23 Ott, 73; "The Manufacturers of Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, May 21, 1867.

24 Jarvis to Jarvis, November 14, 1859, Box 1 Hartford, CMCH; "The Old Colt's Willow Ware Factory." See Gabriel Benjamin, Stefon Danczuk, Paul Dickson, Justin Edwards, Shannon LaPoint, Robert Pawlowski, and Barbara Sternal for more on the Potsdam houses, recorded in "The Potsdam Worker Houses at Coltsville National Park: Historic Structures Report," prepared for Coltsville National Historical Park, Fall 2017.

25 The Civil War, as well as an inability to secure the mine from attacks by Apache, put an end to the Sonora Company. Jarvis to Jarvis, December 12, 1860, Box 1, CMCH.

26 "The Manufacturers of Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, May 21, 1867, 4.

27 Much of this information is taken from "The Potsdam Worker Houses at Coltsville National Park: Historic Structures Report." See also Eric Ott, "Invisible Legacies: The Past and Present of Hartford's Potsdam Worker House Community in Coltsville: A Potsdam Worker Houses Historic Resources Survey," Historic Resource Survey with Coltsville National Historical Park, Hartford, CT. (MA capstone, Central Connecticut State University, 2019).

28 "The Manufacturers of Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, May 21, 1867.

that the small number of artisans could not compete with cheaper imported baskets from Europe. Colt made plans to double the size of the 100-person workforce.[29] In 1859, Colt committed to a larger furniture enterprise with plans for a dedicated factory at the corner of Curcombe Street and Wawarme Avenue. In addition to baskets, the factory-made furniture like cradles, chairs, and even wagons. In 1860 Colt's father-in-law William Jarvis commented that the "willow factory is a great curiosity and is turning out a great variety of beautiful articles, which sell rapidly. The osium are colored or dyed for many of the articles made. They are now selling at the rate of $1,000 a month, which is all they can make with their present force; but will soon double that amount."[30]

The Willow Ware manufactory building reflected the machine manufacturing techniques and wage labor of Colt's firearms. Traditionally, the process to produce such furniture in Europe required cutting and peeling the wood by hand. Colt's factory steamed the cuttings in cylinders before workers fed them into a peeling machine, which George H. Colby of Waterbury, Vermont reportedly designed specifically for the willow works. The peeling machine cleaned 100 tons of the cuttings in one winter. Beyond machinery, the lower floor of the factory building provided ample storage space for the furniture produced. *The Hartford Courant* reported in February 1861 that 60 employees worked in the factory while it was still under construction, with expectations of more than 300 workers when the premises were complete.[31]

A year after Sam Colt's death in 1863, the enterprise saw its height of production. It employed 100 people, including a dozen German craftsmen who trained both male and female workers, also primarily German. Eventually workers followed a routine of cutting the willows when the dirt on the dike froze, packing them in 50- to 100-pound bundles to be stored at the south end of the factory. They also sometimes harvested the larger willow-like trees that grew along the shore of the Connecticut River to use for making furniture. While willow ware workers performed much of the work by hand, machines peeled the bark from the branches with four revolving cylinders, each 8-10 inches in diameter and three feet long.[32] With its office on Wawarme Avenue, Colt's Willow Ware Manufacturing Company officially started trading publicly valued at $25,000.[33]

By 1867, *The Hartford Courant* reported that not only had the willow plants completely covered the dike embankments, but the company had expanded its willow farms to an additional twenty-two acres around the South Meadow. At that time the business switched to exclusively producing furniture. The Courant believed the manufactory to "...be the only one in the country where willow ware is made to any great extent, and probably the best systematized one in the world." The company apparently had exclusive control over its peeling machine. Additionally, its

---

[29] Jarvis, December 4, 1860, CMCH.

[30] Jarvis to Jarvis, Box 1, October 8, 1860, William Jarvis Letters, 1838-1889, Library and Research Center, CMCH.

[31] "The Willow Works," *The Hartford Courant*, February 12, 1861.

[32] *The Hartford Courant*, October 10, 1915.

[33] Information compiled from Erastus C. Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (Hartford: 1861), 444. Accessed via ancestry.com.

business was purported to have extended to as far north as Montreal and as far south as Havana and New Orleans.[34]

On December 31, 1872, eight years after Colt's original armory went up in flames, a fire broke out in the willow works factory. According to the Courant, the night watchman, Mr. Moran, noticed flames inside the factory a few minutes after eleven o'clock. The fire had likely started on the second floor near a steam roller machine or near the associated steam pipes. Moran attempted to pour water on the fire to keep it from spreading, but his efforts were to no avail due to the flammability of the space. The second floor of the building was entirely wooden, and the first floor was likely stacked full of wooden furniture and wood, as the main harvesting season (between April and November) had just ended. The first-floor bricks likely acted like an oven, containing the flames on the first floor, where they consumed most of the furniture. The Hartford Courant sent three reporters to the scene. They provided a detailed account of the fire. "The factory burned like tinder and soon the flames burst out from the roof, lighting up the scene and making the meadows as light as day..."[35] In a harrowing start to a new year, the tragedy was surely reminiscent of just a few years earlier when the armory burned.

The fire department had been celebrating at a New Year's Eve party when the alarm sounded, and some firefighters rushed to the scene still wearing their formal attire. Additionally, a heavy snowstorm had blanketed the city a few days earlier, making the streets along the South Meadows difficult to traverse and freezing fire hydrants in the area. The fire department brought four fire engines to the scene, but only two hydrants were available, and thus only two engines could work to extinguish the fire. The Hartford Courant reported, "The one nearest the factory was frozen. But for this, Chief Engineer Eaton thinks he could have extinguished the fire…." The fire burned so fast and hot, that the roof caved in within an hour. Thirty minutes later, the east and middle walls collapsed. By 1:30 a.m. "the brilliant illumination had declined to a dull red reflection."[36]
Wawarme Avenue resident William Burns perished, likely from severe burns suffered while trying to remove stock from the building. Even more tragic, although much of the green willow survived, Burns died for naught. The loss of the factory was a financial disaster for the Colt's company. Having not learned the lessons of the armory fire eight years earlier, managers had allowed some of the insurance on the building to expire and could only recoup about $8,000. The building itself was estimated to be worth $15,000 and the stock about $50,000. This time, Richard Jarvis and his sister Elizabeth Colt decided not to rebuild the Willow Ware factory because it couldn't operate as cost-effectively as their competitors in Europe.[37] This did not,

---

[34] "The Manufacturers of Hartford," *The Hartford Courant,* May 21, 1867.

[35] "Disastrous Fire: The Colt Willow Works Burned," *The Hartford Courant,* January 1, 1873.

[36] "The Willow Works Fire--Man Badly Burned: Probably Fatal Accident," *The Hartford Daily Courant,* January 2, 1873.

[37] Hosley, 109-110. The cause of the fire was unclear, but it is interesting to note that in 1865, an unnamed engineer at the Colt Willow Works factory caught 15-year-old Mary Ann Kearney attempting to set fire to the entire factory. He observed her going into the basement to light kindling. He stamped out the fire before it got too big and found Kearney peering through a window on the other side of the building. When she was arrested and brought to court, the young woman said she was "hired….by another girl." She was sentenced to jail with a $100 bond. "Attempts to ... Colt's Willow Works," *The Hartford Daily Courant,* July 6, 1865, 2.

however, mean the company would abandon opportunities for diversifying its production of non-firearm products to stay profitable.

Addressing Competition

With its supplemental business no longer viable, and Sam Colt's patent now expired, Colt's needed to find a way to maintain profitability and remain resilient. After the Civil War, the arms industry had to readjust, ramping down its amplified production to accommodate lower demand. Machinery allowed for more efficient production, lowering the sale cost of individual arms, but the maintenance of machinery kept investment and production costs high, thus requiring companies to promote demand for their products.[38] The company began offering products for sportsmen as early as the 1860s.[39] By the 1870s Colt's expanded beyond its role as an armory into the realm of factory work. After the Willow Ware fire, the company manufactured sewing machines alongside Baxter steam engines. These safe, durable, affordable, and portable systems heated all the water in the boiler, economically efficient. The company's production of a machine gun also helped the company survive the post-war depression.[40]

Throughout the nineteenth century competitors challenged Colt's for precious firearm contracts and markets domestically and abroad as the government's military needs shifted toward western expansion. Colt had kept some at bay with patents (see chapters 3 and 4). When several firms went bankrupt after the Civil War, Remington (founded in New York in 1816), Sharps (in Hartford in 1852), Smith and Wesson (in Massachusetts in 1856), Winchester (in New Haven 1866), and Marlin, which took over Whitney's armory in 1887, survived as Colt's primary competition. Relationships between these players could be both contentious, as when defending patents, and cooperative. Threats of patent infringement encouraged creativity, and in times of high production these companies sometimes actually helped cover each other's contracts or made parts when another company did not have the right machinery to manufacture them. This type of competition encouraged and fueled more innovation, especially during and after the Civil War, when tariffs protected nascent domestic industries from foreign materials and products. The growth of American industries like the railroad, steel, oil, timber, meatpacking, textiles, and firearms transformed the American economy. Without foreign competition, many of those industries began monopolizing production through horizontal and vertical integration to the point where the U.S. Congress passed anti-trust legislation by the end of the century.

Colt's had to negotiate patents to develop its next firearm model, one that could rise above those of its rivals. Rather than providing substantive commentary on the rebuild, General Manager Franklin's 1865 diary indicated that he was fairly consumed with developing a new design for a metallic-cartridge breech-loading revolver to manufacture that did not violate existing patents,

---

[38] Herbert House, *Arming the West: A Fresh New Look at the Guns that were Actually Carried on the Frontier* (Woonsocket, RI: Mowbray, 2008), ix; Haag, 110; Deyrup, 202-216.

[39] Jarvis to Jarvis, July 3, 1865, CMCH.

[40] Michael Thompson, "Baxter Steam Engine Co," New England Wireless & Steam Museum, https://newsm.org/manufacturers/baxter-steam-engine-co/; Operations, Correspondence, Box 33, RG 103, CSLAA; "Connecticut Business Prospects," *Hartford Daily Courant*, October 22, 1877, 4.

particularly one filed by former Colt employee Rollin White for a design Sam Colt himself had rejected. Smith and Wesson offered White royalties if they could use the patent and eventually came to dominate the market for the highly desired breech-loading revolver. Franklin sought to manufacture a model that avoided the White patent, such as one designed by Silas Crispin, who had attempted a design that skirted the White patent. Franklin turned to adapting older Colt models. The company found some success by enlisting a five-shot pocket pistol model that Colt and Root had designed before their deaths and replaced it with one that could use metallic ammunition. They did this in cooperation with the Union Metallic Cartridge Company of Bridgeport.[41]

As a veteran of two major wars, Franklin leaned toward military use, partnering with inventors like Hiram Berdan, Richard Gatling, and John Browning to develop firearms that had a significant impact on modern warfare. Franklin worked with Russian officers, at least one of whom seems to have negotiated for kickbacks to gain contracts for Colt's. The company unfortunately lacked the patents for the Russians' preferred weapons, so Colt's developed a new rifle via gun designer Berdan by buying up various licenses to avoid patent infringement. Colt's used Berdan's metallic cartridge designs to fill an order of 30,000 for Russia in 1868, making the new gun the imperial army's main service rifle until Berdan's next design, which he developed without Colt's. Unable to secure another contract from Russia, the company later sold its Berdan stock around the world, as far as Ethiopia, Bulgaria, and Korea, after the Russo-Turkish War. Russia began manufacturing firearms on its own and ended the historic relationship between Colt's and the tsar by the 1880s.[42]

Throughout Franklin's management tenure, which lasted until 1888, Colt's attempted many versions of repeating arms, but the handguns (revolvers and pistols) were the most successful. Colt's and rivals like Winchester responded to the demand for firearms during the American Indian wars of the 1860s and 1870s. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1877 opened large swaths of western lands to non-Native settlement on what had been Indian land. The 1862 Homestead Act, passed during the Civil War (like the Transcontinental Railroad Act), facilitated rapid settlement as an extension of Thomas Jefferson's dream of an agrarian nation. Revolvers provided many civilians with the ability to defend themselves against increasing Native discontent. While the idea of such a nation depended upon the ability of yeoman farmers to achieve self-sufficiency, the industrial revolution that Colt helped ignite undermined that very dream. The railroad had allowed for the rapid transit of not only people but goods. Colt and his contemporaries had created an "American System of Manufacturing," one that led to national prosperity but also to national dependency on products from far away. Self-reliance no longer meant the yeoman farmer ideal; instead, the average American supported the household as an industrial worker and a consumer. With increasing urbanization and dependence on consumerism over self-sufficient farming practices, Americans grew nostalgic for the past. As Colt's revolvers

[41] H. C. Ryands to Union Metallic Cartridge Co. re: Order of 500 cartridges, September 13, 1889, Correspondence, May-October, 1890, Box 18, RG 103, CSLA; Grant, 43-44; Rosa, 172; Snell, 337-338.

[42] See Geoffrey S. Stewart, *Arming the World: American Gun-Makers in the Gilded Age* (Essex, CT: Lion Press, 2024), 150-157; "Correspondence between R. W. Jarvis and Franklin regarding sale of arms to Russia," Box 3, Robinson-Jarvis, Beinecke Library, Yale University Library and Special Collections, New Haven, CT.

and other firearms successfully killed or subdued Native people, federal treaties denied traditional indigenous lifeways by confining them to reservations, sometimes, but not always, within Native homelands. In such wars, it proved harder to sell to and arm both sides. After General Custer's cavalry fell to armed Lakota in 1876, Congress passed resolutions limiting sales to Indians, although many managed to steal and trade for firearms.[43]

Under Franklin, the company produced the firearm most associated with the American West. Colt's single-action army revolver of 1873, that model popularly known as the Colt .45, became the company's most renowned product for both cavalry and hunters, as it allowed for maintaining control of a horse with one hand while firing with the other.[44] Once the White patent expired, the company's engineers developed the Model 1873 single-action army revolver for the 1872 military trials. When it proved simpler and more streamlined than the Smith and Wesson, the U.S. Army ordered a supply of the gun on June 26, 1873, and continued to enlist it for standard issue until 1892.[45]

Colt's manufactured the M1873 in several models in different calibers and barrel lengths, including those best suited for cavalry and artillery. The version for popular sale became known as the "Frontier" revolver. The 1877 double-action version removed the need to cock the hammer. The gun was small, simple to operate, and good for shooting on horseback, since one could easily shoot with one hand without reloading the cartridge. The Colt version had slightly better accuracy and penetration over competitors' revolvers; more importantly, it was simpler in design, with fewer and more durable parts. Inspired by Sam Colt's own stated sentiments about his product, company agents marketed it to western settlers as "the peacemaker," and fans later credited the model with "winning the West." Soldiers and settlers used "the peacemaker" in famous conflicts across the West, including the battle at Little Big Horn and the Spanish-American War. Not everyone was in favor of the model. Some argued that the gun had failed General Armstrong Custer's Seventh Cavalry.[46] However, the Colt .45 maintained great popularity for the next several decades, with books and movies helping to sustain its legacy through the twentieth century.

Throughout the 1880s Colt's explored all types of firearms, from pistols and revolvers to long arms, automatic guns, and machine guns. As mentioned earlier, innovation sprung from efforts to secure patents or avoid patent infringement. Most significantly, the company moved beyond single- and double-action arms toward the weapons of industrial-era warfare. Several other countries adopted machine guns and semi-automatic weapons. As early as the 1860s Franklin secured the company's rights to one such gun, and its government contract, by buying a smaller company. Colt's produced this weapon exclusively, with moderate success and acceptance by the U.S. military. The multi-fire gun operated with a crank that fired bullets through up to ten

---

[43] Report of Secretary of the Interior Sales of Arms to Indian (Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1877), 748-749.

[44] Jeff Kinard, *Pistols: An Illustrated History of Their Impact* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 118; Dray, 117.

[45] Dean K. Boorman, *The History of Colt Firearms* (Kensington, MD: Lions Press, 2001), 21.

[46] Boorman, 21.

rotating barrels, with a cartridge feed; the new product played a critical part in the company's sustainability after the death of its founder.[47]



Figure 7.5 Gatling Gun, Model 1893, with Richard Gatling, PG 460, Colt Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Box 7, Folder 2, Item 5, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720216711.

Richard Gatling was not an armorer by trade but rather an inventor of efficient equipment to plant crops more quickly, create faster steamboats and bicycles, more efficient toilets, and a steam-powered vacuum cleaner. In recalling his inspiration for the Gatling gun, he wrote that a more efficient gun would allow one man to do the work of many and thereby reduce congestion in the field and disease and death. He received the patent in 1862, sure that it would obviate the need for large numbers of armed forces in repelling offensive troops. Initially the conservative American military resisted, although Gatling was able to produce and sell thirteen of the guns in 1863. Troops threatened rioters with them during the Draft Riot in New York City that same year. Union General Benjamin Butler used the Gatling with some success in the siege of Petersburg, Virginia near the end of the Civil War, but the American military did not see much use in adopting the weapon across the board for several years.[48] (See 7.5).

[47] Snell, 338.
[48] Boorman, 21.

The Army eventually ordered 100 machine guns for use in its campaign against Western Native tribes, and Gatling contracted with Colt's in 1866. At Colt's, workers adapted it for a .50-caliber centerfire rifle cartridge version.[49] Military historian David Armstong argues that the government contract brought Colt's a much-needed boost after the Civil War. In order to produce the weapon, Franklin oversaw machine retooling and increased testing and new lines of production while at the same time rebuilding the East Armory. Colt's continued to improve Gatling's design, encasing the barrels in a brass housing. In 1893 Colt's patented an electric drive, giving the gun the ability to shoot 3,000 rounds per minute. American troops also used Gatling guns against the Sioux in 1877 and in Cuba and the Philippines during the Spanish-American War in 1898.[50]

The company collaborated with other manufacturers, offering surplus sales of stock. Winchester even manufactured some of the Colt's rifles.[51] But that practice often caused conflict. In at least one example, Colt's charged Pratt and Whitney with poaching employees.[52] Remington and Winchester dominated long-arms sales, but Colt's line of hammerless shotguns and rifles remained competitive. By the late nineteenth century Smith and Wesson's handguns served as Colt's primary competition. The company developed the Colt-Burgess Lever Action and the Lightning Magazine Rifles in the late 1880s. Indian agents also bought these models before Colt's phased out long arms to focus on pistols and revolvers. At the time, agents like Hartley and Graham sold these at prices dictated by the company but shaped some production decisions, as when Hartley and Graham requested that new police pistols be altered to revert to the older-style Newhouse pistol.[53]

Still, late nineteenth century correspondence also indicates that inventors also offered other products beyond firearms to Colt's to manufacture. In Fall 1890 Samuel Insull ordered a machine produced that made graphophone paper tubes for the Edison Phonograph Works.[54] Waterhouse Electric Light was just one of many companies and manufactories that rented out space in the factory during periods of low production in the 1890s. Gas lighting had faced competition after Thomas Edison's patent of the incandescent lightbulb in 1879. The City of Hartford changed from gas to electrical streetlights in 1886, when the Waterhouse Electric Light Company, housed in the West Armory, incorporated. Directors included many mechanics with historic ties to Colt's, including Asa Cook, Charles Billings, and Francis Pratt. To rival Hartford Electric, Waterhouse Electric Light instituted a more efficient system that used less energy to generate the same light. The company grew from one room to half a floor, where it manufactured dynamos, arc lights,

[49] Gatling labor and material, November 29, 1873, Box 37, RG 103, CSLA.

[50] Snell, 338-339; James E. Serven, *Colt Firearms*, 1836-1954 (United States: Foundation Press Publications, 1954).

[51] Bennett to John Hall, July 18, 1889, General Correspondence, 1889, Box 18, RG 103, CSLA.

[52] H.A. Pratt, Pratt and Whitney to John Hall, Colt's October 13, 1888, General Internal Correspondence, 1889, Box 18, RG103, CSLA.

[53] Hartley and Graham to Colt's, still ordering "lightening carbines," June 14, 1889; Hartley and Graham to Colt's, February 11, 1890, April 22, 1890, Incoming Correspondence, January-April, 1890, Julian B. Ayer to Colt's, the Original Crow Indian Medicine Company, August 18, 1890, Incoming Correspondence, May-December, 1890, Box 18, RG 103, CSLA.

[54] Samuel Insull, Edison Phonograph Works, to John Hall, October 3, 1890, Incoming Correspondence, May-December 1890, Box 18, RG 103, CSLA.

and incandescent lights.[55] It is unclear if the Colt's factory ever adopted this system.[56] A screw-making company and the Thorne Machine Company, which specialized in typesetting and distributing, also shared factory space.[57]

But the Colt's company itself did not stray far from its primary product. John Browning of Utah wrote to Colt's in 1890, offering his machine gun for production. "I have just completed our new automatic machine gun and thought we would write to you to see if you were interested in that kind of gun." He claimed that the gun, which shot six times per second, "can be made as cheaply as a common sporting rifle."[58] Initially, management resisted, having been disappointed with sales of the Gatling, but General Manager John Hall quickly reversed that decision after John and Matt Browning visited in 1891 to demonstrate the still unperfected weapon, embarking on one of the company's most profitable relationships. While it would not pay off until World War I, the manufacture of Browning's automatic and semiautomatic weapon designs ensured the company's important role in producing firearms for twentieth-century industrial warfare and ensured Colt's viability into the twentieth century.[59]

[55] "A Hartford Concern: The Waterhouse Electric Light Company its Steady Progress—A Novel Regulator—Some Tests of its Efficiency," *The Hartford Courant*, March 26, 1888.

[56] "Success of the Waterhouse Electric Light," *Hartford Daily Courant*, July 23, 1886.

[57] "Hartford Conn as a Manufacturing, Business, and Commercial Center (Board of Trade, Hartford, CT, 1889), 92. University of Connecticut Archives, Storrs, CT. Accessed via Internet Archive.

[58] J. R. Dermir, Quarter Master General's Office, Rhode Island to Colt's Arms, October 10, 1888, General Internal Correspondence, 1889, Box 18. Request for customized order. Hartley and Graham to Colt Patent Arms Factory, Box 18, January-April 1890; John Browning, Browning Brothers to Colt's, November 22, 1890, Incoming Correspondence, May-December, 1890, H.D. Darling to Colt's offering a repeating rifle that preserves the exploding shells. Box 18, Incoming Correspondence, May-October, 1890, Box 18, RG 103, CSLA.

[59] John Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 38.

Colt's and Hall and Browning

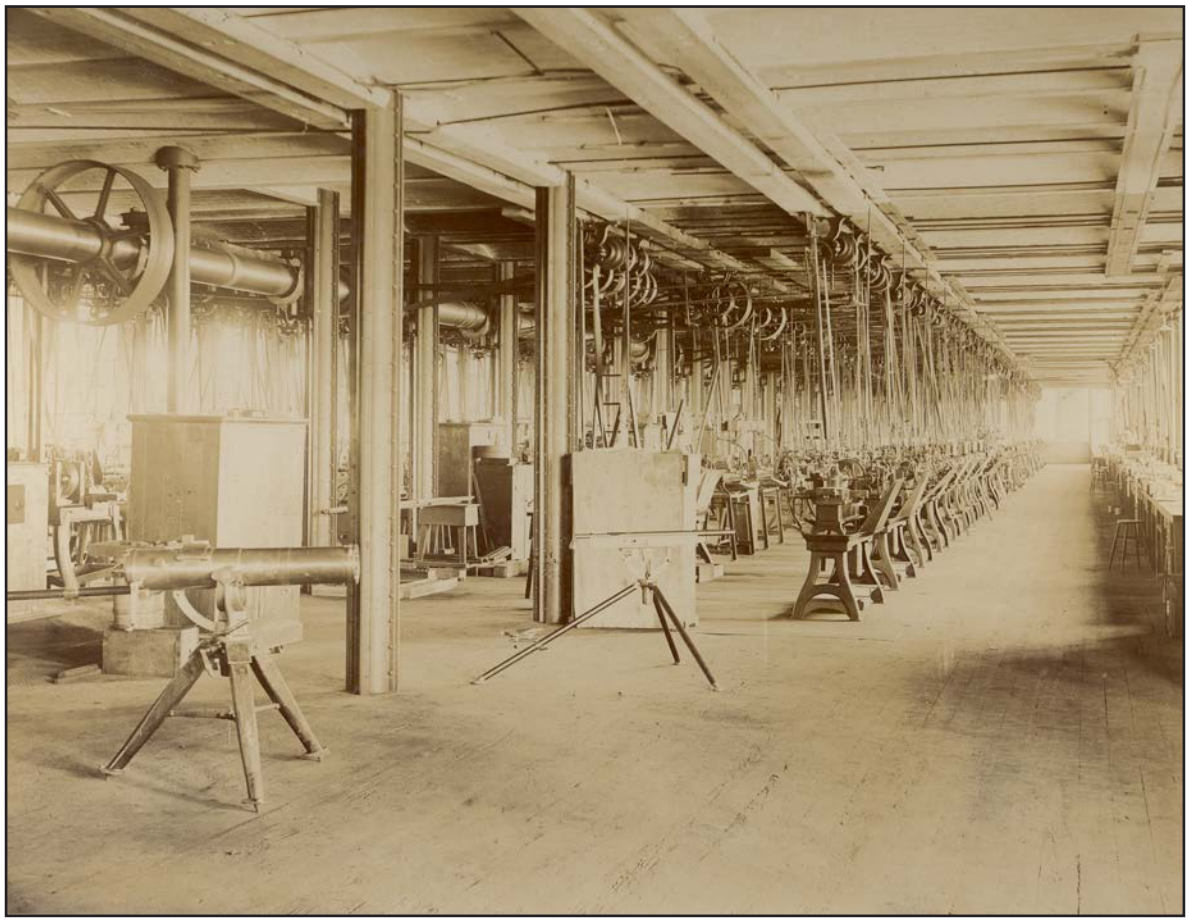


Figure 7.6 Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company armory complex—Shop area, showing Gatling gun. Box 3, Folder 2, Item 6, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Connecticut State Library and Archives, Hartford, CT. http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168304.

Colt's remained under steady leadership until 1890, when General Franklin retired and Richard Jarvis fell ill. The only legitimate surviving son of Sam and Elizabeth, Caldwell Colt, did not have the interest or the aptitude to assume daily responsibility for the company, and although Elizabeth was loath to allow company leadership outside the family, even she did not trust her son to manage the business. She made him vice president but selected John Henry Hall (no relation to the John H. Hall of Harper's Ferry) as manager. Hall was a family friend and the manufacture of Browning's automatic and semiautomatic weapon designs ensured the company's important role in producing firearms for twentieth-century industrial warfare and Colt's viability into the twentieth century.[60]

[60] John Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 38.

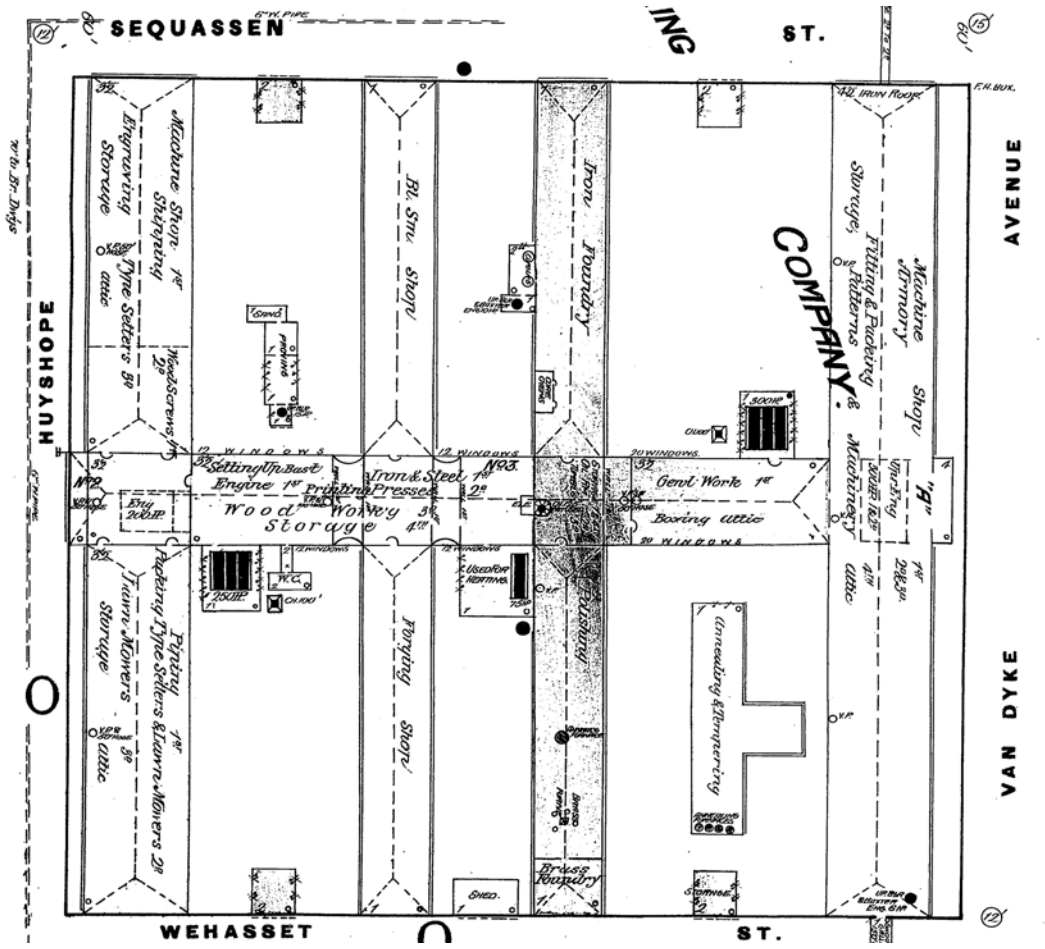


Figure 7.7 Detail of Sanborn Fire Insurance map showing the main factory complex. Sanborn Map Company, Hartford, Connecticut, 1880.

John Browning's pistol was not the first automatic produced under Hall's watch. U.S. Navy officers patented the Driggs-Schroader revolver, which fired thirty-six shots a minute, in 1888. Pratt and Whitney made a similar class of firearm and contracted with Colt's to produce them. Colt developed its first automatic gun for the Navy in 1896.[61] Even more than Gatling, and in many ways more than Samuel Colt himself, it was John Browning and his design skills who solidified the company's legacy. Born in 1855 in Utah territory, Browning was the son of a follower of Joseph Smith and the Latter-Day Saints Church. His father, Jonathan Browning, was a gun store owner, married multiple times, and bore seventeen children. When Jonathan died, his son John Moses Browning and four of his brothers took over the business. The Browning Brothers filed dozens of patents and shared them with Colt's competitors like Winchester and Remington. They realized that the 1890 automatic machine gun they offered to Colt could only be used for military purposes. The Brownings' innovations and skills focused primarily on the mechanical. They needed Colt's for manufacturing, promotion, and sales, and they regularly requested single firearms and parts, even as small as screws and bolts, for their work out of

[61] The Driggs-Schroeder Gun: Another New Industry Started at Colt's," *The Hartford Courant*, November 28, 1889, 5.

Ogden, continually testing and improving existing models. John Browning eventually became the creative force behind most of Colt's later firearm designs. He began by refining existing designs, like improving the Winchester rifle in 1894.[62]

Hall offered Browning a royalty contract, and from 1895 on, Colt's based all of its automatic pistols (those that automatically reloaded after each firing) on the designs of Browning, who often collaborated with Colt's own Carl J. Ehbets, a German immigrant, on designs specifically for the company. Browning's thirty-year association with Colt's sustained the company through the world wars. The gas-operated, air-cooled, Browning machine gun, consisting of only 100 parts and gas-operated, could shoot six times per second and, at forty pounds, was half the weight of the Gatling. Furthermore, Browning's design eliminated the Gatling crank. Its simplicity attracted the U.S. Ordnance Department's interest. The government ordered fifty, choosing it over the Gatling, the Maxim, and a French offering. The government also asked Browning for full rights to his .30-caliber automatic rifle and his .45 pistol design, which captured the recoil of a rifle to eject exploded cartridges and bring the next one into line.[63] The army adopted the automatic pistols gradually, starting with 200 for testing and eventually ordering three million units for the U.S. military, the largest order for any handgun type. U.S. Marines enlisted Colt's Brownings in the Spanish-American War, during the Boxer Rebellion, and in France during World War I. Historians consider World War I to be the first "industrial" war because it was fought with the use of new technologies like poison gas and automatic weapons. These designs evolved into models used beyond the battlefield and onto the urbanizing American streets. The mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania armed his police force with Colt's pistols by 1880, and in 1902 civilians used them for target shooting and personal defense.[64]

World War I

As tensions in Europe greatly increased company fortunes, the Great War brought back business, thanks to the success of Browning's designs. In the book *Hartford in World War I*, David Drury recounts that even before America entered World War I in April 1917, Connecticut Governor Marcus H. Holcomb directed the manufacturing companies in Bristol, New Britain, Manchester, and Hartford to produce arms for the European conflict. Americans entered the war with an army understocked with old machine guns. At that time, Colt's manufactured Maxim-Vickers Machine guns for the allies at an average of fifty a day, and roughly 425,000 of Browning's Colt M1911 .45-caliber model pistols for Romania, Great Britain, and the United States. The model proved

---

[62] John Browning to Colt's, 1890, Browning Brothers to Colt's, General Correspondence, 1889; September 19, 1888, Internal Correspondence, 1888, December 26, 1889, May – October Correspondence, 1889 Box 18, RG 103, CSLA.

[63] T. T. PIERCE, "The Gun with the Boys 'Over There': The Colt Army .45 Automatic Pistol, Considered by Uncle Sam to be the Best Man's Size Gun Made, Meets All Demands of Hard Service," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting, Fishing, Yachting* 12 (December 1917), 611.

[64] R. L. Wilson, *Colt: An American Legend* (Memphis: Artabras, 1985), 229; Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor, State of Connecticut (1902), 340. It was reportedly the Browning pistol (M1910 *Fabrique Nationale*), likely manufactured under a European contract, that assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, sparking World War I. See Nathan Gorenstein, *The Guns of John Moses Browning: The Remarkable Story of the Inventor Whose Firearms Changed the World* (United States: Scribner, 2022), 1.

reliable and popular for decades.[65] Colt's contracted with the Romanian government to supply 20,000 M1911 .45-caliber semiautomatic pistols, 40,000 magazines, and 2.4 million cartridges in May 1915. Great Britain's Ministry of Munitions bought about 400 Colt .45s a month, which, according to Ellsworth Grant, the armory routed through Canada.[66] That year the Colt-Vickers Model featured a .30-caliber machine gun to replace Colt's automatic. In Fall 1915 the British government helped Colt's secure a contract for 10,000 Vickers guns for the Russians. The United States Army followed its initial order for 125 Vickers in 1915 with another for 4,000 in 1916. The twelve-month period from June 1915 to June 1916 "increased Colt's stock increase in value by 86 percent, from $443 to $825 a share. The company had ended the period with $34 million worth of orders on hand and, flush with cash, ramped up dividends to shareholders."[67]



Figure 7.8 Construction at Colt's Patent Fire Arms Company's North Armory, Hartford, 1916, Box 3, Picture Group 400, Fires & Explosives-Monuments & Statues, Hartford Collection, 1885-1936, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. CTDA, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720096105.

By the summer of 1915 it became clear that Colt's needed to evict its tenants (then Maxim Silencer, Sterling Blower Company, Hartford Auto Parts Company, and Asa S. Cook Company) to scale up production and re-open the West Armory to make firearms again before winter.[68]

---

65 Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 113.

66 Drury, 33; Grant, 105.

67 Drury, 33-34; During the war, in 1915, authorities found stolen plans for Colt's machine guns in the Hartford headquarters of the Union of All Russian Workers and Peasants, "Machine Gun Plans, Stolen from Colt's Factory. Found in Headquarters of Reds," The Hartford Courant, November 20, 1919; "Union of all Russian Workers and peasants- for US Vickers 30 caliber machine guns- raid on Hartford headquarters," *The Hartford Courant*, November 20, 1919, 1.

68 Colt's had only used the building for machine-gun assembly. "Old West Armory of Colt Factory to be Re-

Production demand increased to the point that the company now used all its space again for production. As European contracts piled up, Colt's even looked to erect new buildings. As it had done for the Civil War, the factory complex expanded to a second armory in 1916. In a lot located south of the original factory complex, the company demolished the watchman's cottage and boiler smokestack to build a new four-story factory building labeled the "Saw Tooth Building," four stories high, and 225 by 60 feet, as a testing building, and it also doubled the number of employees to 1,200. It would pull the shipping, drafting, and storage departments from the East Armory to make room for more production in the latter.[69] The new building included modern equipment, created an employee clubhouse, and offered its first group insurance plan, with $300-$800 in benefits for recruiting workers. Engineering plans from 1914 also show free-standing buildings in the yards between the main armory wings.[70] The company also added two warehouses by the Aberthaw Construction Company from 1916-1918 (34 Sequassen Street, 50 Vredendale Avenue) and a Classical Revival-style boiler house at 49 Vredendale Avenue.[71]



Figure 7.9 Colt's Patent Fire Arms Company Complex, 1919. Box 3, Folder 4, Item 1, PG 460, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company Collection, State Archives, Connecticut State Library.
CTDA, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720214095.

Then company President William Skinner released a statement reassuring the public that the Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company had been preparing for this moment since the end of the Civil War and was be focusing on its government contracts for Colts, Brownings, Vickers machine guns, and automatic pistols; it would not be able to honor civilian requests.[72] Throughout the war the company cultivated good will from the local community, which even seemed to forgive errant bullets from testing at Colt's shooting range (also known as "proofing").[73] (See 7.8 and 7.9).

opened," *The Hartford Courant*, June 30, 1915; "Must Leave West Armory by October 1," *The Hartford Courant*, July 4, 1915.

69 "Work Begins Today on New Building for Colt Company," *The Hartford Courant*, January 28, 1916; "Colt May Build Large Factory Soon," *The Hartford Courant*, August 19, 1916.

70 Keegan, "Coltsville Historical Supplement."

71 Bruce Clouette, "Colt Industrial District, "Boundary Increase," National Register Nomination (National Park Service: United States Department of the Interior), Hartford, CT.

72 W. C. Skinner, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, "Statement," 1917, Museum of Connecticut History, Hartford, CT.

73 "Never Touched Us," *The Hartford Courant*, 1917, Box 56, RG 103, CSLA.

When the government adopted the Browning designs, it requested that John Browning himself oversee production of the machine gun, machine rifle, and automatic pistol, paying him around $750,000. Browning moved to Hartford in 1917 with his wife and two youngest children to have access to five of the six factories manufacturing his weapons across the region. At the Colt armory, Browning enjoyed his own desk and walking from his hotel (Heublein Hotel at 98 Wells Street) less than a mile to the factory throughout the 1920s. Sometimes Browning had to adjust and disrupt the government contract system at Colt's at the point of inspection when he sometimes tweaked his designs. Normally the amount of time for the government to approve even the smallest changes was an enormous hindrance to timely production, so the army allowed Browning the final word. He also had to adjust to the schedules of factories like Colt's, which had to gear up for production, and maintain patience as workers were completing British machine- gun orders.[74] His presence and demeanor were appreciated on the factory floor, where Browning interacted with workers focused on their individual pieces and tasks, often explaining to them where their particular contribution contributed to the whole.[75]



Figure 7.10 M1895/1914 Colt-Browning machine gun, John Moses Browning, gunner, Box 7, Folder 7, Item 3, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720216742.

[74] John Browning and Curt Gentry, *John M. Browning: American Gunmaker* (The Browning Company,1964), 120, 158, 166-168, 218-219.

[75] Browning and Gentry, 120, 158, 166-168, 180-181, 218-219.

In 1908, the factory consisted of the East and West armories and connective buildings, in which more than 2,000 machines operated.[76] From 1912 to the end of 1918 the factory's daily output quadrupled to around 2,000 a day. By the time of the armistice, the Great War had earned the company $21.5 million and $66 million worth of munitions; at one point Colt's employed 6,000 workers. The company celebrated the war's end with the Colt Band and State Guard and took credit for much of the victory, designing posters with patriotic eagles alongside the M1911 pistol and guns on display to advertise Colt's contributions to the Allies like Great Britain and Romania with 425,000 .45 automatic pistols, 151,700 revolvers, 13,000 Maxim-Vickers machine guns, and 10,000 new Browning 1917 rifles.[77]



Figure 7.11 Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company armory complex - East Armory workers-, n.d., but likely early twentieth century. Box 3, Folder 2, Item 3, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168302.

[76] "Colt Patent Fire Arms Co: Short Sketch of its Phenomenal Growth," *The Hartford Courant*, October 6, 1908.

[77] William H. D. Goddard, *The Government Models: The Development of the Colt Model 1911* (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray, Incorporated), 34. From research of David Abrams-Hochman, April 2025; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 117, 121; "Colt Co Will Get Government Order: Vickers Guns Will be Made Here," *The Hartford Courant*, November 11, 1916, 13; David Drury, *Hartford in World War I* (Charleston: The History Press, 2015); John Franklin Crowell, *Government War Contracts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920). Acknowledgments to Dr. Heather Prescott and students for identifying and digitizing these sources as exhibited in "Industry in Connecticut during World War I, https://library.ccsu.edu/dighistFall16/collections/show/11, Partnership Digital Projects and Collections, Special Collections, Burritt Library, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT, accessed November 22, 2025.

The Corporatization of Colt's

In 1901, when Richard Jarvis's health continued to decline, Elizabeth lamented the company's future outside her close circle of trusted family and friends. She reluctantly decided to sell the company privately, rather than to sell stock or take the company public. President Hall and Vice President William Skinner approached the Boston and New York financial house of Armstrong and Schirmer, interested in establishing a trust for munitions. When both Hall and Jarvis died in the following months, Elizabeth sold the company to Armstrong and Schirmer before she herself passed away, in 1905.[78] This was a personally painful decision, as she wrote to a family member:

> But we cannot help ourselves without making matters worse perhaps the RI family had not decided to sell but Pomeroy wrote me that he would do what I did though feeling badly to have the Armory go out of the family no one can feel as sorry as I do but it is too much for me to carry with all the uncertainties if business continues as now I shall not have near as much income probably but then if I have fewer worries it ought to be worth as much as money to me I appreciate all Mr. Hall has done in bringing the old business back and restoring the prestige but on the other hand it has given him a position and influence financially that would over besides a generous support during the years he has been at the Armory so it is not all on one side and if there had only been someone to take the business belonging to the family who could have looked after my interests I should not have had it to part with what I have been so proud of I was at the office yesterday morning and it was very hard to think that in a few days I should have no right there and it was like bidding a last farewell to my dear friend memory bought back so vividly scenes and loved ones all gone now.[79]

Elizabeth's and her brother Richard's deaths at the dawn of the twentieth century marked a new phase for Colt's leadership. Elizabeth had always kept family and trusted friends at the helm of the company, and for a while the company continued to promote from within. Lewis Grover, originally from Springfield, Massachusetts, assumed the presidency from 1902 to 1909. Grover worked at Norwalk Iron after the death of John Hall, who recruited him from the Whitney armory to be assistant superintendent in 1886.[80]

In April 1909 stockholders elected then vice president and director William Skinner as president, awarding him a salary of $7,500 per year. It was during his tenure that the holding company dissolved and the value of company capital stock more than doubled. Just the government order of the .45 automatic resulted in a 34 percent profit. In 1913 politician Morgan Bulkeley, who had served Connecticut as governor and U.S. senator, and as the first president of the National Baseball League, became the largest stockholder.[81] It was a time when economic recession

---

[78] Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 70-71.

[79] Correspondence, Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt to Elizabeth "Lizzie" Jarvis Beach Robinson, c. 1902, Jarvis-Robinson, Box 10, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

[80] Grover served as head of the Park Board of Commissioners after Elizabeth Colt died and oversaw Colt Park.

[81] With Lewis C. Grover (chairman of the board), Frank C. Nichols and Charles L. F. Robinson (vice presidents), Frank A. Schirmer (treasurer), and Louis R. Cheney, "William C. Skinner Elected President: New Head of Colt's

burdened production activity across Hartford's industries. Employment fell to just 21,066 in the city. Charles Robinson of Newport took over the presidency from Skinner during this time. Robinson's tenure returned leadership back to the family, as he married Elizabeth Colt's niece, Elizabeth Jarvis Beach and named his son after Caldwell Colt, but Skinner returned to guide the company through World War I.



Figure 7.12 William C. Skinner (left) Charles Robinson (right), led Colt's through World War I. PG 460, Box 1, Folder 3, Item 5 and 1, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA, Hartford, CT. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168264, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168260

Colt's emerged from WWI fiscally strong, with demand for Colt revolvers 150 percent above the pre-war level. *Financial World* magazine reviewed the company, asserting its dominance in the field of "high grade firearms," notably the Colt revolver, Browning machine gun, and the Colt-manufactured Thompson, known as the "Tommy gun" by gangsters, with whom it became closely associated.[82] From 1903 to 1957, Colt's produced no rifles, carbines, shotguns, or muskets except the Browning automatic rifle, which the company marketed as "The Monitor" for law enforcement, and the Thompson submachine gun, developed by Army General John Thompson and able to fire a thousand .45-caliber bullets per minute. While historian Barry Latzer disputes the perception that crime rose in the established industrial cities of the 1920s, Colt's seemed to have taken advantage of that perception, especially with civilian access to the WWI-era machine guns by organized crime in high-profile Prohibition events like the Valentine's Day massacre in Chicago. Many law enforcement officers found themselves ill equipped, but smaller semiautomatic revolvers offered increasing convenience.[83]

Patent Firearms Manufacturing Co," Box 54, RG 103, CSLA, Hartford, CT.

[82] *The Financial World Magazine*, RG 103, CSLA.

[83] Barry Latzer, *The Roots of Violent Crime in America: From the Gilded Age Through the Great Depression* (Baton

The company also worked to combat international anti-war efforts during the inter-war period as related to the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928. That included arms embargo policies to keep American products from revolutionaries in Latin American and China, placing Colt's and other American munitions companies at a great disadvantage in the global markets and, President Stone argued, diminishing the readiness of the U.S. military.[84] At the same time, Colt's sold weapons abroad, winning a $2,000,000 contract for several thousand machine rifles to Poland. Over 12-18 months, the contract included production at a factory near Warsaw, but Poland also bought 10,000 Browning machine guns to be made in Hartford in 1929.[85]

During this time company leadership finally stabilized under President Samuel Stone (1921-1944), who served as Skinner's vice president in 1916, having been recruited as a salesman by Stanley Works and Colt's in 1905. Stone, who was not an engineer, military man, or relative of the Colt-Jarvis family, became the longest-serving president after Jarvis, remaining in the position for twenty-three years. His tenure was noteworthy because Stone was a Presbyterian and belonged to a Congregationalist church. Episcopalians had always run the company.

Colt's Manufacturing Company



Figure 7.13 Samuel M. Stone, president, 1921-1944. PG 460, Box 1, Folder 3, Item 9, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA, Hartford, CT.
CDTA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720214044.

Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021), 263, 281.

84 "Arms Embargo Doomed to Fail," *The Hartford Courant*, 1933; "A Century Turns at Colt's featuring the Plastics Division," Business File, Box 29, RG 103, 3, CSLA.

85 "Colt's to Make Guns for Poland," *The Hartford Courant*, March 28, 1925; "Colt's in Line for Big Army Gun Contract, The Hartford Courant, April 2, 1929.

Throughout the inter-war period, Colt's sold products at three times the pre-war prices and had high return on dividends by diversifying its production. Perhaps because the general tenor of the public and world leaders was a belief and hope that the horrors of industrial warfare would forever prevent such a conflict again, Colt's produced guns marketed to police and to the civilian market of campers, tourists, and gun enthusiasts in the 1920s. The company also manufactured adding machines for the federal government, and another successful enterprise capitalized on the rising popularity of appliances, producing a patented industrial dishwasher called the Autosan (the marketing of which is discussed in chapter 4) in the 1930s. This expansion brought a change to the company's name, dropping "patent firearms" and continuing as just the Colt's Manufacturing Company.[86]

In 1923 Colt's acquired the Johns-Pratt (J-P) Company (which had produced electrical and molded plastic products since 1886) for $1.2 million in a move away from dependence on firearm sales. J-P occupied 200,000 square feet and had 500 workers who worked across the electric, appliance, and plastics divisions. The introduction of the Coltrocks followed Colt's absorption of the Noark Electrical Company. This product resembled a previously developed plastic known as Bakelite used for gun handles, clock cases, and plugs.[87] A notable Coltrock item was the "foursome," a plug designed to accommodate four appliances sharing an outlet.[88] The eventual success of the Colt's electrical division prompted its relocation to an off-site factory on Park Street in the 1940s.[89]

The plastics division produced caps for bottles, toothpaste tubes, thermos bottles, drinking cups, pill boxes, and clock cases. Keeping up with demand required two shifts of workers.[90] But the plastics division also made the Colt product that was most different from firearms: costume jewelry. Costume jewelry existed for centuries, replications of precious stones with glass and metal, but it did not enter the consumer market until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the advent of plastics. Most costume jewelry hailed from Czechoslovakia, but newspapers boasted the economic promise of costume jewelry produced in New England as the war limited the European supply to domestic jewelry.[91] The trend began to prominently appear

---

86 1920 Diary-January 23, 1920 acquisition of J-P (Johns-Pratt), "Administrative File, Diaries," Box 54, RG 103, CSLA.

87 "Connecticut Industrial Activities: Production Developments and Business Conditions," *The Hartford Courant*, November 3, 1927, 22.

88 "The Foursome Speeds and Enlivens your Table Service by Providing Four Electrical Outlets." *Vogue* 72:6, 160b; "Enlarged Industrial Scope of Colt," *The Hartford Courant*, June 17, 1928.

89 "Electrical Division Publication Advertising," 1943, Box 65, RG 103, CSLA.

90 During World War II, some costume jewelry sales benefitted Great Britain, although there is no evidence that Colt participated in this activity. Cedric Foster, "Colt's Plastics Division Working in Two Shifts," *The Hartford Courant*, July 12, 1933; Joan Gardner, "Costume Jewelry Aids War Victims," *The Hartford Courant*, October 5, 1941, D9.

91 "Colt's Earns $7 Per Share in Good Year: Prospects for Plant Expansion Uncertain; Coltstones receive Widespread Demand," *The Hartford Courant*, March 22, 1940, 22; AE Magnell, "Jewelry Will Be Produced by Colt's Company," and "Colt's 'Synthetic Jewel' Plastics Find Wide New Market Range, *The Hartford Courant*, May 23, 1940; Deanna Farnetti Cera, *Adorning Fashion: The History of Costume Jewelry to Modern Times* (New York: Woodbridge, 2019), 8-16; "Eleanor Gunn Says: Costume Jewelry is more Artistic than Formerly Antique in Suggestion," *The Hartford Courant* (September 2, 1925), 8; "Jewelry will be Produced by Colt's Co.: Concern,

in American fashion in the 1920s, when movie stars popularized bold jewelry designs, which trickled down to the fashion of the middle class.[92] Several factors encouraged the product's short-term popularity. An article from 1924 observed that "there is no sign that the popularity of costume jewelry will lessen. Every indication points to a continued vogue."[93]

From October 1939 to 1947, Coltstones generated much excitement for their various shapes, brilliant colors, and sheen. Colt's vice-president Benjamin F. Connor dedicated months to experimenting with plastics and other materials to create these stones, from smaller gems to cameo brooches, but eventually Colt's solely focused on the stone. Only a month after the release of the Coltstone product, jewelers Henry Kohn & Sons displayed the jewels in the first week of December, beckoning people to purchase them for the holidays.[94] For those watching their budgets more closely, Coltstones substituted for actual luxuries. The product allowed women to embrace high styles and social clout without straining finances in what Nicole De Silva termed "consumer diplomacy."[95] The Colt's plastics division constituted most of the company's business during the Great Depression, even amid the economic crisis. By diversifying production and expanding its product offerings to appeal to both men and women, Colt's remained financially and commercially robust during a global economic crisis.

Depression and Disaster

During the Great Depression production of firearms, like many industries, slowed. Colt's reduced production to four days a week, primarily to make replacement parts for the standard army rifle and to develop a new semiautomatic rifle. However, the company still had more machines than the Springfield armory, and it received a couple of large government contracts, including one for $300,000 worth of machine guns in June 1933.[96] This period emerged against a backdrop of new government regulations in the wake of the financial crisis.

The passage of the first part of the New Deal, a set of federal programs designed by the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, forced changes in business practices. Most notably, the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), at least until the U.S. Supreme

Long Noted for Plastics to make Simulated Gems for Costume Mode, European Supply Shut off by War, Local Products have many Advantages of Brilliancy, Shape, and Color," *The Hartford Courant*, (September 16,1939), 1-2.

92 Janet Zapata, "The Democratization of Glamour: Fashion and Jewelry from the Silver Screen," *Antiques: The Magazine* (September/October 2014).

93 "Costume Jewelry adds a Distinctive Note," *The Hartford Courant*, March 30, 1924.

94 "Jewelry will be Produced by Colt's Co.," *The Hartford Courant*, September 16,1939, 1-2; "Colt's Manufacturing Company Products," *The Hartford Courant*, September 15,1947, 15; "Announce an Exhibition of Colt Costume Jewelry," *The Hartford Courant*, November 30, 1939, 21.

95 Kathleen Caesar, "Coming Fashions: Costume Jewelry rich in Historic Background," *The Hartford Courant*, (November 2, 1939), 10; see Nicole De Silva, "Homemakers as Peacemakers: U.S. Women's International Organizing and the Practice of Consumer Diplomacy, 1919-1946" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Santa Barbara) for a deeper exploration of consumer diplomacy in the interwar period.

96 "Order for $300,000 Machine Guns Given Colt's by War Department," *The Hartford Courant*, June 30, 1933.

Court struck it down in 1935, aimed to support businesses and the workforce in production and maintaining price stability. The legislation set fair competition codes and encouraged industry cooperation. Colt's tried to provide some relief to its employees, including sharing dividends resulting from overhead and material reduction to 1,500 employees at two percent of their salary, followed in March 1934 with five percent. Still, a labor strike and two natural disasters threatened production and profits.[97] (See chapter 8).

On the heels of a months-long workers' strike, the company faced the first major challenge to flood control since Samuel Colt had built the original dike, which was joined in 1927 by the Clark dike extension stretching all the way to Wethersfield. On Wednesday, March 11, 1936, the warm spring rains melted the snow in the mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire, swelling the tributaries of the Connecticut River. At Windsor, Connecticut, a three-mile-long, twenty-foot-high ice dam broke. Water rose to twenty-four feet, and rains and warm weather exacerbated conditions. For decades, Colt's dike had held back regular flood waters, even during flooding in 1859 and 1869, when Colt's had to repair leaks, which were easily addressed by its engineer executives Lord and Franklin, respectively.[98]



Figure 7.14 Flood of 1936 - Aerial view of factory. The Memorial Church of the Good Shepherd and its accompanying parish house can be seen in the center foreground. PG 460, Box 3, Folder 6, Item 23, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT.
CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168325.

[97] A. E. Magnell, "1500 at Colt's Are to Share in Earnings," *Hartford Daily Courant*, November 17, 1933; "1600 at Colt's to Get 5 PC on Earnings," *Hartford Daily Courant*, March 16, 1934.

[98] "The Flood," Hartford Daily Courant, March 21, 1859; "The Highest Point of the Flood," *Hartford Daily Courant*, April 24, 1869; J. W. Goldthwait, "The Gathering of Floods in the Connecticut River System," Geographical Review 18:3 (July 1928): 428-445; "Colt's Dike All Right," *Hartford Daily Courant*, February 27, 1883.

City engineers and hundreds of men worked to raise the dike with sandbags, but at 11am on Thursday, the muddy waters breached the dike, bringing a massive flow of muddy water over the top at 300,000 cubic feet per second. Within minutes the factory flooded up to two feet on the second floor, upending quarter-ton molds and sheets of steel. The flood waters destroyed a squatter's village south of the armory, the utilities, and telephone lines. On Saturday the water crested at 37.56 feet, surpassing the record by six feet and demolishing the dike. With twenty feet of water surrounding the plant, no one could get inside until Sunday, March 22. To fill a pistol order of 200, workers carried boxes to motorboats out of second floor windows. Half the worker housing was permanently destroyed, necessitating demolition. The former Colt estate, now Colt Park, turned into a lake, and glass shattered in the Church of the Good Shepherd that Elizabeth had built for the workers to memorialize Samuel and her children. In the factory, every machine had to be dismantled and cleaned of silt and debris from three-foot-deep sand dunes.[99]

President Stone informed stockholders that the water eventually rose to a depth of at least three feet on the second floor and confirmed the great damage to the machinery, other equipment, and the buildings. He reported $825,000 in damages. The flood forced the razing of several recently built structures in the complex that were mostly used for storing and receiving. These included homes on the north side of Sequassen Street, the auto sheds, the scale house (built in 1916), and the receiving and storage building farther north, and the new dock that had been built in 1904. Among the Armory buildings proper, the one known first as the Nickel Building and then from 1909 the Colt Reading Room."[100]

Operations shut down, but as soon as two days after the water crested over the dike, the factory resumed operations in the upper floors. Essential workers required a pass to get through the military and police lines.[101] By Wednesday, May 25, the factory resumed operations with 2,097 employees, 538 more than in 1929. Stone reported $88,500 in lost wages, although some employees found work in the reconditioning and machine plants. The company still earned $31.25 dividends that year and paid employees ten-percent bonuses.[102] In the months that followed, Hartford invested in the first comprehensive new flood control plan since Samuel Colt's original dike, but this time it was funded by the state and federal governments to protect a major American industrial city.[103]

During the post-flood recovery planning, another natural disaster hit Hartford and all of New England. On September 21, 1938, the 186 miles-per-hour winds of the Great New England Hurricane arrived without warning, crippling Connecticut's transportation and utility infrastructure. Trees fell, blocking trolley lines and roads and flattening homes. As the first state hit by the hurricane winds, Connecticut, including Hartford, experienced several devastating

---

[99] Ellsworth Grant, "The Flood of 1936-A City Battles Its River," *The Hartford Courant*, March 9, 1986.
[100] Keegan, "Coltsville Historical Supplement," 2013.
[101] "Flood Pass," 1936, Box 7, CSLA.
[102] S. M. Stone to Stockholders, March 24, 1936, March 25, 1936, Box 24, RG 103, CSLA.
[103] "Ebbing Flood Waters Bare Damage Conditions Worst in Colt Dike Area," *The Hartford Daily Courant*, March 26, 1936; "City Flood Control Plan is Outlined," *The Hartford Daily Courant*, August 28, 1936; "Colt Dike Raining Considered before North Meadows Job," *The Hartford Daily Courant*, October 22, 1938.

floods.[104] Part of the armory's roof came off, in the oldest section. This time the water met the doors of the factory office on Sequassen Avenue. The local public works administration and the city engineer warned Stone about the dangers if the dike did not hold. After the hurricane, New England's worst since 1815, Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers, college students, national guardsmen, and veterans worked around the clock to secure the dike with loam, a type of topsoil, and sandbags. Colt's had to sell the armory dock to the city for the construction of the new dike.[105] In 1940, Colt's also sold the dock warehouses and property to the City of Hartford and took over the old U.S. Rubber Plant on Park Street instead. The sale included the railroad siding on the dock property (built by Windsor Cement Co. and transferred to Colt's when the lease was up in 1932). Sadly, the 1865 office, damaged and reconstructed during the flood, was finally razed in 1941, but not before another Modern-style one was built.[106]

The flood, the hurricane, and World War II altered the industrial complex. Likely between 1941 and 1947, the company demolished the West armory, leaving only the East armory (rebuilt after the 1864 fire), along with a shortened center wing, the original 1855 brownstone forge and foundry buildings, the World War I addition to the south, and new office buildings to replace the original flood-damaged one, constructed between 1940 and 1943. The firm Moore and Salisbury designed a -shaped Modern-style Colt Company headquarters at 17 Van Dyke Avenue (facing Sequassen), followed by a two-story steel employment office at 1-3 Van Dyke Avenue and a garage in 1946.[107]

Even before Pearl Harbor drew the United States into World War II on December 7, 1941, the Colt's factory became one of the first to earn the Army-Navy "E" (Excellence) award for outstanding production, along with only 5 percent of the more than 85,000 war industry efforts.[108] As the war continued, however, earnings faltered, and the company sold the electric division in 1944. The diversification that had sustained the company in peacetime hindered efficient arms production.

---

[104] Stephen Long, *Thirty-Eight: The Hurricane that Transformed New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 118-119.

[105] "50 Dead, 20 Missing Storm Toll in State Gallant Thousand Fight River in South End," *The Hartford Courant*, 1938; See Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 155-156.

[106] Keegan, "Colt Historical Supplement."

[107] The pedestrian bridge, which once connected to the original building, continued to connect to the new one. Bruce Clouette, "Colt Industrial District, "Boundary Increase," National Register Nomination (National Park Service: United States Department of the Interior), Hartford, CT; Keegan, "Colts Historical Supplement," author's files.

[108] Employee Handbook, "This is YOUR Company" 1943, Box 71, RG 103, CSLA.

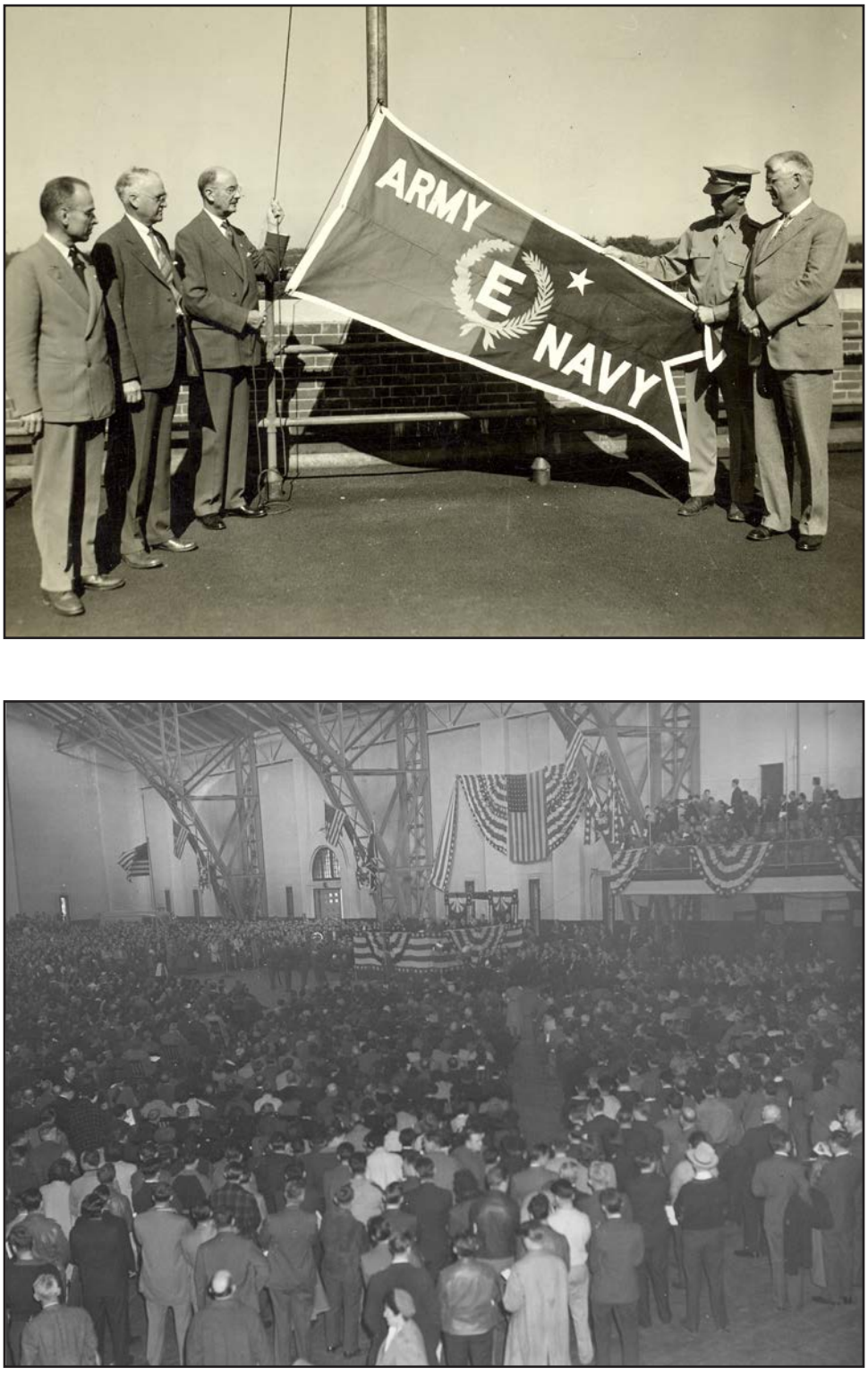


Figure 7.15 Army Navy "E" Award. November 18, 1942. Box 4, Folder 11, Item 1. PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.
CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720214867, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720214877.

Unfortunately, Colt's management had failed to update machinery for years, and the overall production process had not changed significantly in almost a century. When machines did improve production rates, pay scales did not match. After V-J Day government contracts ceased, and the company laid off thousands, shutting down its arms department and eventually turning to sporting guns. It continued its plastics and appliance (mainly commercial dishwashers) divisions. The factory no longer produced machine guns and thus sold and auctioned off some machinery. At 75 years old, Sam Stone stepped down as president.[109] The flood commission appropriated $10 million to build a new 45-foot-high dike, bury the Park River, and construct a highway. By 1945 the new interstate highway definitively cut the factory off from the Connecticut River, whose waters for so long had defined Hartford's economy and the armory's grandeur and connected Colt's to the world. (See 7.16, 7.17)

Conclusion



Figure 7.16 Highway construction near the area formerly known as Dutch Poing with H.E.L.C.O. and Colt factory, Hartford, c. 1945. The Graphics Collection, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, Hartford, CT. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/1072265.

[109] Janet Nolan, Interview with Mary Maiorani, Connecticut Workers and Technology Project, February 24, 1982 (transcript), Connecticut Workers and a Half Century of Technological Change, 1930-1980, Center of Oral History Interviews Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Connecticut, Connecticut Digital Archive, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/20002:860310243; "Interim Report," January 21, 1947, "Stockholder's Memorandum," Statements, RG 103, CSLA; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 159-162.



Figure 7.17 Colt's Armory complex - Aerial view of company property, 1950s, Box 3, Folder 4, Item 14, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720214096.

While active firearm and production operations no longer take place at Coltsville today, the big blue onion dome still stands tall in the South Meadow, overlooking the Connecticut River, albeit across the interstate. So significant was the fulfillment of his vision that even after Sam Colt passed away at the beginning of the Civil War, those he had empowered around him were able sustain the company well into the twentieth century. After the fire consumed the East armory, Samuel Colt's legacy, at the height of its production during the Civil War, Elizabeth Colt and the rest of the company stockholders doubled down on the enterprise. Struggling to stay innovative and profitable, the company managers looked to build a domestic market and frequently corresponded with domestic gun dealers. They turned not only to their own inside engineers, but to outside ones as well, fortunate enough to produce the designs of John Browning to stay on the forefront of the firearms industry. The company also took a page from Samuel Colt's wicker furniture manufacturing enterprise and expanded production to all kinds of different products and even renting out the West armory factory space to keep the company and machines operating. Once the company transitioned from the ownership and management of the Colt family, however, the tenor of Colt's business culture evolved away from the strong paternalism of the nineteenth century. As the company resembled more of a twentieth- century manufacturing corporation, it adopted the ideas and management style of a Progressive era that valued efficiency. The twentieth century brought global warfare, and once again the factory secured multiple, lucrative government contracts from both the U.S. and international governments, necessitating expansion. They would not have been able to do so, however, without the thousands of workers who operated and maintained the machines beneath the blue onion dome.

VIII. Labor
Worker Housing and Potsdam Cottages (1855-1945)



Figure 8.1 Colt's armory complex - East armory workers, 1909, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Box 3, Folder 2, Item 2, State Archives, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168301.

Colt's armory helped inaugurate an era of wage labor for America's industrial worker, enlisting the model of a rural industrial village to construct a factory and estate adjacent to an industrial city. As previous chapters have noted, thousands of people with many different skills, ethnic backgrounds, and goals were essential to Coltsville's significance and success over its long history. Not surprisingly, employment ebbed with military conflicts, peaking at 10,000 during World War I and 16,000 during World War II.[1] As described in chapter 5, the factory served as a site for a "community of practice" because so many in the Colt's labor force transferred the production techniques they learned to their own enterprises and products, cultivating the innovation that helped build the American manufacturing economy. Many laborers migrated to Coltsville from around New England, while others traveled across the Atlantic Ocean. Samuel Colt initially separated his workforce from the greater city, establishing his own insular, self-sufficient village that the newspapers dubbed "*Colt*ville."[2] In designing the factory complex, Sam Colt integrated workers into a community that included the armory itself, his own home and estate, multi-family housing tenements, a beer garden, social hall, community activities, a library, a farm, and eventually a church. His company town of corporate paternalism mimicked the palatial estates of Europe.

---

1 Ellsworth Grant, *The Colt Armory: A History of Colt's Manufacturing*, 219.
2 "Coltville," *Hartford Daily Courant*, April 20, 1855, 2.

This idyllic place, however, eroded during the Reconstruction and industrial era. That very reality illustrates the historical significance of Colt's industrial complex and estate as a transitional space for industrial workers, one that bridged the rural, early nineteenth-century industrial village to the urban industrial yards of the twentieth century. In a short time, Coltsville's working community expanded well beyond the factory floor itself and into Hartford, influencing the socioeconomic history of Connecticut's capital city. Workers and their families lived and worked in the heart of Hartford, contributing to the city's industrious reputation. Of note, Colt recruited immigrants into this community during a time of rising national nativism.



Figure 8.2 East armory and the main office, 1876 All Colt Employees Baxter Engine + Gatling Gun – foreground, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Box 2, Folder 4, Item 2, CSLA. http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720253288.

Artisan to Wage Worker

In many ways, activity at the Colt factory reflected national labor trends as the company hired a new type of workforce that grew in step with the new industrial model of the North, transforming how people worked and lived. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the manufacture of firearms move from artisan to machinist. Thus, while those developing and maintaining the machinery needed to be skilled or semi-skilled, so did those workers who operated them. Sometimes, this required knowledge of metal and mathematical precision to alter metal shapes, selecting the right cutting tools, and guiding the process. Few, however, needed comprehensive knowledge of metal fabrication. Division of labor increasingly required highly specialized work, with focus on a specific action or part, requiring tedious repetition. As working conditions deteriorated, laborers looked to one another rather than to management. Previous chapters

reviewed the general organization and operations of the factory, but this chapter explores the workers themselves, the nature and evolution of their working and living conditions, and how their shared experience eventually redistributed loyalty from the company to the labor union.[3]

The mid-nineteenth century was a time of profound transition for the American worker in general, marked by political, demographic, and technological upheaval and resulting in an economic transformation that characterized the Jacksonian era in which Colt built his business. The changes shifted focus from communities to the individual and from family farms and trades to corporations and wage labor.[4] As historians Herbert G. Gutman and David Zonderman have argued, laborers adjusted their lifestyles from an artisan tradition to the mechanized workplace of textile mills, paper mills, armories, clock factories, metal working machine shops that encouraged both a social and an economic shift. Labor and management often worked together in close quarters engaging in monotonous, tedious, and rigorous tasks. This shared labor experience fostered loyalty to the company.[5] Colt's company paternalism walked a line between maintaining the community of practice that fostered innovation and the loyalty that kept the company stable and successful.[6]

After the Civil War, the northeastern United States remained a dominant manufacturing employer in the nation, if not the world. Twelve of the thirty-eight factories located in Connecticut eventually employed nearly 2,700 workers, roughly double the number in Massachusetts and constituting half of all the firearms workers in the country.[7] Census data from 1859 through the 1920s shows the number of occupations of those residents who lived on Huyshope or Van Block avenues that can be linked to Colt's armory, including such listings as "gun or pistol maker," "gun polisher," "factory machinist," "gun shop worker," and "willow ware maker" as key jobs that linked the people in the census to Coltsville. The Colt's factory payroll from 1860 provides more specificity about the array and variety of jobs in the Colt's factory during Samuel Colt's lifetime: machinists, pistol makers and gunsmiths, joiners, provers, assemblers, inspectors, blacksmiths, die and drop forging, and silverplating.[8]

---

3 Robert Asher, "Connecticut Workers and Technological Change, 1930-1980," (Storrs, CT: Center for Oral History, University of Connecticut, 1983), 19.

4 For how this transition happened on a local level see Mary Fuhrer, *A Crisis in Community: The Trials and Transformation of a New England Town, 1815-1848* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). See also Richard M. Candee, "New Towns of the Early New England Textile Industry," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 1 (1982), 31.

5 David Zonderman, *Aspirations and Anxieties: New England Workers and the Mechanized Factory System, 1815-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4; Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

6 Coltsville Special Resource Study (Philadelphia, PA: National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, November 2009), 39.

7 Table 1, "The Manufacture of Fire-arms in the United States," in Charles H. Fitch, U.S. Department of the Interior, "Report on the Manufacture of Fire-arms and Ammunition," (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1882).

8 Bruce Alan Clouette "Getting their Share: Irish and Italian Immigrants in Hartford, Connecticut, 1850-1940" (Storrs, University of Connecticut, 1992), 74. Accessed via *Doctoral Dissertations*, AAI9300925. https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/dissertations/AAI9300925,70-72.

Sam Colt also took advantage of a growing foreign workforce. Between the 1840s and 1850s four million to five million immigrants arrived in the United States as nascent industrial industries looked to hire immigrants as low-wage workers. Due to political and economic push factors, many hailed from Germany and Ireland, with the Irish potato famine of 1845-1852 driving large numbers of the rural poor into the urbanizing cities of the American Northeast for work. German immigrants first arrived looking for land but found that many early industries sought their skills. By the Civil War close to 13 percent of Americans were foreign born.[9] Many industrial bosses subscribed to the nativist tenor of pre-Civil War America, as exhibited in the Know-Nothing Party, which resented the influence of Catholics on Protestant America. Sam Colt did not seem to be bothered by this, even though the Know-Nothing political party was making political gains in Connecticut, with Governor William Minor serving from 1855 to 1857.[10]

Attracting Workers

Colt initially looked to recruit highly experienced gunsmiths or mechanics to set up his first Hartford operations. Springfield armory's superintendent Roswell Lee arranged it so that any armory owners under government contract could not hire another worker without a letter of recommendation, limiting Colt's ability to recruit. He successfully lured S. P. Bryant away from the Eli Whitney armory in September 1847, but not easily.[11] Bryant, who worked at the Whitney armory, wanted to know the pay schedule, how much per hour, and whether he was paid by the hour or by piece. Bryant informed Colt that he did not want his supervisors to know about his search for a new position, but he felt the Colt Company was the right direction for his career. He negotiated with Colt, clearly seeking a promise of future security.[12]

> As you intinated [sic] a wish to Employ me, when I should be through here. I- take this method of asking you a few—questions first Should you employ me, how long must I wait for my pay, how much – will you give me per hour. (and as it—would not be worth while [sic] for me to move for three or four months work,) how long will you probably have work for me either by the piece or the hour. Not that I wish to engage for any particular length of time. But because I wish to be certain of bettering myself before I make any move, I have—and can work at all kinds of machinery or gun-work—that is well known to all who work—here. But it is all humbug for a person to tell what they have or can do the proof of a

---

9 Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990 (February 1999), United States Bureau of the Census, at www.census.gov, accessed July 24, 2025. https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/1999/demo/POP-twps0029.html#:~:text=of%20this%20period.-,1,and%2014.7%20percent%20in%201910. Also see Luke Ritter, "Inventing America's First Immigration Crisis: Political Nativism in the Antebellum West" *History* (2020), 19, at Fordham Research Commons, https://research.library.fordham.edu/history/19. Also see Gutman, 74-78.

10 Robert David Parmet, "The Know-Nothings in Connecticut" (Thesis, Columbia University, 1966). Accessed via *Proquest*, Order No. 6606950.

11 Zonderman, 59-60, 99.

12 Zonderman, 99, 199. Citation identified through Kyler Wesner in "Coltsville: The Lives of the Workers Tour," Capstone Project, MA Thesis, Central Connecticut State University, August 2020.

> Pudding is in eating of it. I have written this because I do not wish any one here to – know that I think of leaving until I am ready to be off.[13]

Chester Bradley also felt reluctant to make the career move to Colt's. The Springfield armory provided him with adequate compensation and a positive work environment, indicating that generous management policies limited restlessness and helped ensure loyalty.[14]

By the time Sam Colt decided to build the South Meadow armory, many potential armory workers would have known about Colt's factories in Hartford and London. Urban locations offered large labor pools. Because moving waterways like streams and rivers provided early industrialists in the United States and Britain with power and access to transportation, factories often located in rural areas, which necessitated providing housing to recruit and retain workers. The mill or factory set laborers' living patterns. In his 1964 article "The Factory Village in the Industrial Revolution," historian Sidney Pollard observes that at their most ideal, the industrial villages that became popular in the nineteenth century should be "models of social progress… vehicles for transferring at least some of the benefits of industrial invention and work to the mass of the working population."[15] In eighteenth-century England, workers boarded near the mill. When Robert Owens purchased cotton mill factories in New Lanark, England in 1800, he provided workers housing to cultivate loyalty and ensure productivity. Worker housing characterized factory villages and reflected the attitude of employers toward their labor force. Samuel Slater set the standard in America at his cotton mill in Slatersville, Rhode Island in 1805.[16]

New England adopted this village model at textile mills, cultivating a first generation of mechanics to design and operate loom machinery that performed repetitive and mundane tasks. Recall that Samuel Colt himself had spent time in the textile factory village of Ware,

---

[13] Zonderman, 165-66; S. P. Bryant, Whitneyville to Samuel Colt, Esq, September 5, 1847, Colt Company Records, Connecticut State Library and Archives, Hartford, CT; hereafter referred to as CSLA.

[14] Zonderman, 59-60.

[15] Sidney Pollard, "The Factory Village in the Industrial Revolution," *The English Historical Review* 79: 312 (July 1964), 513.

[16] Pollard, 513-518; To keep the upper hand over the competition, England in 1774 banned textile workers from leaving the country and emigrating to the colonies. Designs for the water-powered spinning frame, carding machines, and other innovations that made British processing superior to others, were their best kept secret. Twenty-one-year-old Samuel Slater disguised himself as a farmer when he set sail from his village of Belper, one of the first mill towns in England, for Pawtuxet, Rhode Island in 1786. In early 1807, now joined by his brother John, Slater launched operations at Slatersville, Rhode Island, the country's first industrial mill town. The Slaters' efforts ignited a drive for more water-powered factory villages, which started to crop up along New England rivers and falling streams. Sharing England's secret knowledge of certain technological innovations spurred locals to dub Samuel "Slater the Traitor." His economically self-sufficient industrial communities attracted the attention of several industrialists including Samuel Colt. These factory towns featured brick factories, owned by a single manufacturing corporation, commercial blocks, and hotels with boarding houses and mechanic shops. See Barbara M. Tucker and Kenneth H. Tucker, Jr., *Industrializing Antebellum America: The Rise of Manufacturing Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 95-118; William R. Bagnall, *Samuel Slater and the Early Development of the Cotton Manufacture in the United States* (Middletown, CT: J. S. Stewart, Printer and Bookbinder, 1890), 31-50.

Massachusetts. In Connecticut, similar towns included Rockville and Talcottville in Vernon, the American Thread Mills of Willimantic in Windham, Taftville cotton factories in Norwich, and tool manufacturing mills in Collinsville in Canton. These manufacturing villages not only produced goods but provided jobs, housing, and services to many American-born and immigrant workers, both skilled and unskilled. New England craft traditions fused with the mechanized assemblage of factory work to create unique American systems. Colt presumably modeled his village setting on Eli Whitney's Whitneyville in New Haven, which manufactured his Colt-Walker revolver, and the Cheney Silk Mills in Manchester, recognized as a highly successful factory community and located just across the Connecticut River from Hartford. Prominent nineteenth-century abolitionists John Fox Slater and Amos Adams Lawrence idealized these clusters of industry as a "free labor" economic path in contrast to slavery. These businesses, they asserted, offered owners the opportunity to be self-sufficient and philanthropic, while also ensuring a loyal labor force.[17] Samuel Colt had rented buildings at a couple of different sites in Hartford since 1847, but he now envisioned a community not just based on the traditional idea of a controlled factory village or company town – one that could also be integral to a major industrial city.

In general, armories boasted better management-labor relationships than did textile mills. An armorer managed to control production both individually and cooperatively, possibly because armories were often smaller than textile mills. Families could work together, and these relationships could be advantageous on the factory floor in terms of power dynamics.[18] One factory notice read, "Every man employed in or about my armory whether by piece wirk [sic] or by days is expected to wirk [sic]ten hours during the running of the engine, & no one whose not cheerfully content to du [sic]this need expect to be employed by me."[19] While Simeon North greeted employees by name, and Eli Whitney was rumored to lend his workers money, Zonderman points out that "paternalism promised harmony, but demanded deference."[20] In many ways, Coltsville embodies the factory town that worked to maintain this fine line through the planning of a communal enterprise of industry with a central factory, and with worker housing and amenities within a small, tight-knit area on the outskirts of the city.

Working Under the Contract System

Samuel Colt boasted that machines did eighty percent of the work at the Colt factory, while the worker contributed the other twenty percent. Mechanization combined with the New England system's ideas about the division of labor resulted in an efficiently run factory floor, with all the workers tending machines focused on a single task in the multistep and complex gunmaking process. Each area of the factory hosted machinery. Workers designed and produced a specific piece of the firearm. Inspectors used gauges to ensure precise measurement. After 1850 machines increased the rate of productivity per person by five times, creating a demand for more

[17] Candee, 31-38.
[18] Zonderman, 109, 122.
[19] As quoted in Ellsworth Grant, "Looking Back at Sam Colt's Gun Factory," *The Hartford Courant*, August 24, 1980.
[20] Zonderman, 109.

machinists. While these machines cut, bored, and drilled metal, non-machine workers hand filed, assembled, finished, inspected, assembled again, and tested. Electroplaters burnished in the basement of the office building.[21]

By 1856 the factory employed 500 people and carried a total payroll of $15,000 to $20,000 per month, with an output of 100 to 150 pistols a day. One magazine described the factory space "completely filled by machinery, and not less than 200 men engaged in operating it, all in rapid motion."[22] In the early years, as described in chapter 5, Colt embraced Adam Smith's theories about increased productivity through a division of labor system. Most workers labored under the contract system until the late nineteenth century.[23] Colt and Root expected precision, discipline, and top performance micromanaged through the contract system and trusted managers. This meant that anywhere from twenty to forty contractors eventually supervised 800 to 1,500 workers specializing in a specific part of the process, leaving Colt and his management team to focus on financing and selling. Contractors sublet an apartment or other space in the factory and specialized in making a certain part. The company furnished each contractor with a room, power, tools, material, heat, and light. A contractor could consist of one worker or a supervisor and up to forty assistants. Colt's company paid those assistants, who had to follow the company's rules and regulations.[24]

According to biographer Henry Barnard, Colt hired and paid his contractors by either the day or the piece on the fifteenth of every month. Each piece had to pass a "gauntlet of inspections." Poor products constituted a financial loss. Contractors assumed responsibility for meeting production goals, quality, and losses, including broken tools. Colt's company would only pay contractors if they met production goals in both number and quality. Because the men worked so intensely, Barnard reported that few spoke while they worked.[25] Failure to perform could mean dismissal.[26]

Specialization meant that manufacturing a single pistol to completion required dozens of workers. For example, "the inside of a gunstock is oiled by one man, and the outside by another." Because of constant repetition, specialization of minute tasks bred increased dexterity, accuracy, and speed. Staying at one machine rather than changing tasks and/or locations also saved precious minutes. In theory, focused workers and machinists could conceive of better ways to conduct their work, stimulating new ideas and more efficient inventions. For example, when boring a hole, typically achieved by turning a screw into a block, workers at Colt's found that it was more accurate to turn the block, an innovation that applied to numerous other tasks.

---

[21] See Ellsworth S. Grant, *The Colt Legacy: The Colt Armory in Hartford, 1855-1980* (Sheffield, UK: Mowbray, 1982), 16-17; Henry Barnard, *Armsmear: The Home, the Arm, and the Armory of Samuel Colt. A Memorial* (New York: Alvord, 1866); "A Day at the Armory," 233.

[22] *Colonel Colt*, 1856. Photograph. From London News, November 29, 1856, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. https://www.loc.gov/item/2004669227/; https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3g12112/.

[23] See Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776.

[24] Barnard, 214-15.

[25] Barnard, 211-214, 238; "Armsmear," *The Hartford Courant*, February 12, 1867.

[26] Howard, "Interchangeable Parts Reexamined."

Specialization also saved money. Instead of paying a trained craftsman for his experience and knowledge, less-skilled workers could learn to operate machines, saving on wages. Barnard even attested that "one man sometimes tends six machines."[27]

Pay varied according to skill. Newspapers in the 1850s reported that Colt's 500 hundred employees turned out 200 revolvers every 24 hours. Colt paid several employees an average of $2.50 a day, competitive with other manufacturers in Connecticut. Skilled workers like a blacksmith or inspector earned about $2.00 a day, and machinists likewise pulled in $1.50 - $2.00 a day, which would have covered a monthly rent in most tenement apartments in the 1860s. The most skilled experts would "earn five dollars a day."[28] Other metalworkers received around $27.06 to $31.59 a month in 1854, or approximately 90 cents a day in a 30-day month.[29] After he received the barrel from the jigging machine, the first filer could earn seven cents each, with the second filer, who could move through 150 barrels a day, earning 2.5 cents each, thus earning a handsome $3.75 a day. One polisher explained that "the pistols go through our hands twice in the rough and after they are polished and blued."[30]

Finally, Barnard stressed a system so expansive and varied that the factory seemed to offer a wide array of jobs. Most of the workers at Colt's in the 1850s and 1860s, who collectively earned from $1,000- $1,200 per day, were young, inexperienced men in their first job. Some unskilled workers started at 50 cents a day for the first year.[31] Contractors were even willing to hire and train unskilled workers, so men came in from the countryside. A laborer could secure a position through networking. After George Elliot arrived from out of town to find work, he attested that that a mechanic would "have an opening for him any day and there will be no trouble in his learning…he is used to having green hands come, and the work is all so simply arranged that anyone can easily learn the part assigned them. The work is mostly light and clean…"[32] Elliot claimed that a contractor who made jigs (Mr. Glazier) recruited him from elsewhere in the factory. Even "a man too ignorant to manage a machine for stocking" can sweep up scraps or oil the machines for $1 a day.[33] When the factory offered one worker a temporary job at the straw shop, he excitedly told his wife that earning $2 a day would alleviate the pressure on her to accept more sewing–a task that he asserted was not worth a "few cents" when he was getting paid so well.[34]

---

27 Barnard, 238.

28 Barnard, 218.

29 "Col. Colt's Pistol Factory," *Evansville Daily Journal*, August 15, 1853; J. D. B. DeBow, *Statistical View of The United States, Embracing its Territory, Population* (Washington: B. Tucker, 1854), 181.

30 Edmund to Lizzie, undated, and October 12, 1862, Museum of Connecticut History, CSLA.

31 William Jarvis to William Jarvis, Jarvis Family Papers, February 9, 1858, CMHC.

32 George Elliot to wife, June 6, 1861, Museum of Connecticut History, CSLA.

33 The 1860 census and city directory later listed Elliot as a "joiner." George Elliot to wife, June 6, 1861, CSLA; Barnard, 214-217; H. G. Bulkley, to Gentlemen of the Providence Tool Company, June 8, 1861, CMHC; Jarvis to Jarvis, February 9, 1858, CMHC.

34 Edmund to Lizzie, October 12, 1862, Museum of Connecticut History, CSLA.

The "Community of Practice" on the Factory Floor

Manager and head machinist Elisha Root designed the factory floor for optimal production, with hundreds of workers operating machinery in a shared open space. With work concentrated under one roof, mid-nineteenth-century factories served as hubs of learning, commerce, and community. Colt's factory was arguably one of the most successful of these training grounds. The contract system allowed workers to stay engaged with the latest advancements in manufacturing, since workers could move to other factories between contracts. As mentioned in chapter 5, historians of technology attribute the development of American manufacturing to the diffusion of knowledge through this system, because it spread techniques to variety of industries, including firearms, sewing machines, clocks, and bicycles. In many ways, by cultivating specific skills, the contract system gave machinists a certain amount of power. Armorers had to cultivate loyalty to ensure that they would return and bring to Colt's skills and knowledge that they may have learned elsewhere.[35]

Machine-tending lacked the skill and pride of craft labor for most men, especially metalworkers. Historian David Zonderman notes that "mechanization did narrow the skills of armory workers but did not eliminate them all together." For example, those operating the millers, grinders, and lathes had to hold material in place and guide the drills and milling wheels. The constant demand to learn with each innovation, or when each new model of firearm required re-tooling, demanded knowledge and attention. Still, unlike machine tenders and production workers, only patternmakers and machinists could rely upon steady work.[36] Robert Howard, in the 1978 article "Parts Reexamined: The Private Sector of the American Arms Industry on the Eve of the Civil War," concludes that the Colt Company had yet to achieve interchangeability as late as the 1860s. Workers often had to grind the parts for certain guns to fit.[37]

Barnard's description of the factory reports on the "journey" of a piece of metal, either iron or copper alloyed with tin. The process began with the forgers. Barnard calls the forge the pride of the shops because the forging system eliminated a foreman, allowing a worker to produce at three times the former pace. Blacksmiths melted metals into pieces, from pistol guards to back-straps. Molds could turn out a dozen guards at a time, and once cooled one annulled, milled, filed, polished, electroplated, and then burnished the piece, taking it "from dull white to silver luster with steel dipped in soap and water." At the foundry a worker cut a heated piece with an anvil or shears into smaller sizes. The forger or operator of the hammer rotated and adjusted the dies to make specific cuts and produce certain shapes. Root's vertical-drop hammer held a patent because a worker could elevate and disengage the hammer's drop, allowing more control. The machine operator determined the height by placing a "dog" in the appropriate notch of the hammer.[38] The worker pulled a lever that disengaged the dog, and the hammer dropped. It was

---

[35] Bruce Tull, "Springfield Armory as Industrial Policy: Interchangeable Parts and the Precision Corridor," (PhD thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2001).

[36] Zonderman, 54-55.

[37] Robert Howard, "Interchangeable Parts Reexamined: The Private Sector of the American Arms Industry on the Eve of the Civil War," *Technology and Culture* 19:4 (October 1978), 611-649.

[38] *United States Census Reports Tenth Census*, 20-22, and John Light, "A Dictionary of Blacksmithing Terms,"

so efficient that workers could forge two parts a minute. Many forgers wore gloves to protect them from the sparks created by the impact of the hammer. Operators of the drop hammers could adjust continuously rotating screws to create a main spring, cone nipple, lock plate, lever, bullet mold, or pistol barrel by stamping each piece of moldable metal in one blow. All these machines included an oil-tank, drip pan, oil pump, and driving gear. A barrel required the operator to initiate several drops to stamp, compress, and shape.[39]

Forging, boring, milling, drilling, screw cutting, and dozens of other machines required an operator. Different types of milling machines, central to the production process, included a universal milling machine and a double face-milling machine for shaping and cutting metal.[40] The act of milling created the frame of the revolver and ground metal blanks into finished components. A double-head, face-milling machine allowed cuts to two opposite faces of a piece of metal. Experienced operators often used only one cut to prepare certain components for grinding or buffing, but other parts required multiple cuts. They adjusted the angle of the cut as a sliding fixture held the frame while spindles moved the cutters back and forth.[41] (See 8.3)

Slotting machines provided the opening in the revolver frame by drilling a series of holes and slotted them using a horizontal movement. Colt and his workers developed the revolver frame jigging machine in 1857 to cut both interior and exterior surfaces of a revolver frame. It included a revolving mechanism, not unlike Colt's revolving cylinder, and the wheel featured different cutting tools for shaping the gunlock frame. The operator moved handles to lower the cutter spindles. With the machine, an operator could make four successive cuts on a single piece or make a single cut on four different parts.[42]

Some jobs required skills that went a bit beyond simple machine operation. After the Civil War welding became an important part of the process. One hundred barrels a day of iron flat bars passed through the rolling machine to create a thin foil that allowed for the small boring hole in gun barrels. Failure in the welding process sometimes resulted in the barrel's bursting upon firing. One out of thirty failed such testing. In the proving area, two men, aided by an inspector, tested more than 250 pieces a day, earning one cent per test. After testing, the products still had to be counter-bored on the breech end, further reamed, and polished. Polishers could use one machine to polish 200 barrels a day about 5/6 of the length. Stocks required breeching up, deadening/browning, and rifling. The government had different requirements, and most of those pieces completed to federal armory specifications were made in the west armory. Colt's used

Historical Archaeology 41, no. 2 (2007): 84-157, as described in Wesner, 102.

39 Barnard, 227.

40 Simeon North of Middletown and Eli Whitney of New Haven developed some of the earliest milling machines. The first milling machine in Hartford, Connecticut is believed to have arrived by a Mr. R. S. Lawrence, after which they became in high demand from gun and sewing-machine manufacturers, and George S. Lincoln & Co. in Hartford eventually supplied them. The Lincoln became the standard for the milling machine, which was designed by F. A. Pratt. Usher, Abbott Payson. Robert S. Woodbury, *History of the Milling Machine: A Study in Technical Development* (Technology Monographs, Historical Series, No. 3) Cambridge, MA: The Technology Press, 1960.

41 *Census Report Tenth Census*, 24, as described in Wesner, 105-106.

42 United States, Census Reports Tenth Census, 29, as cited in Wesner, 109.

the same black walnut for stocks as the Springfield Armory, where the wood was seasoned for four years. According to Barnard, Colt's workers established a method of kiln-drying the wood, shortening that production time to four weeks.[43]

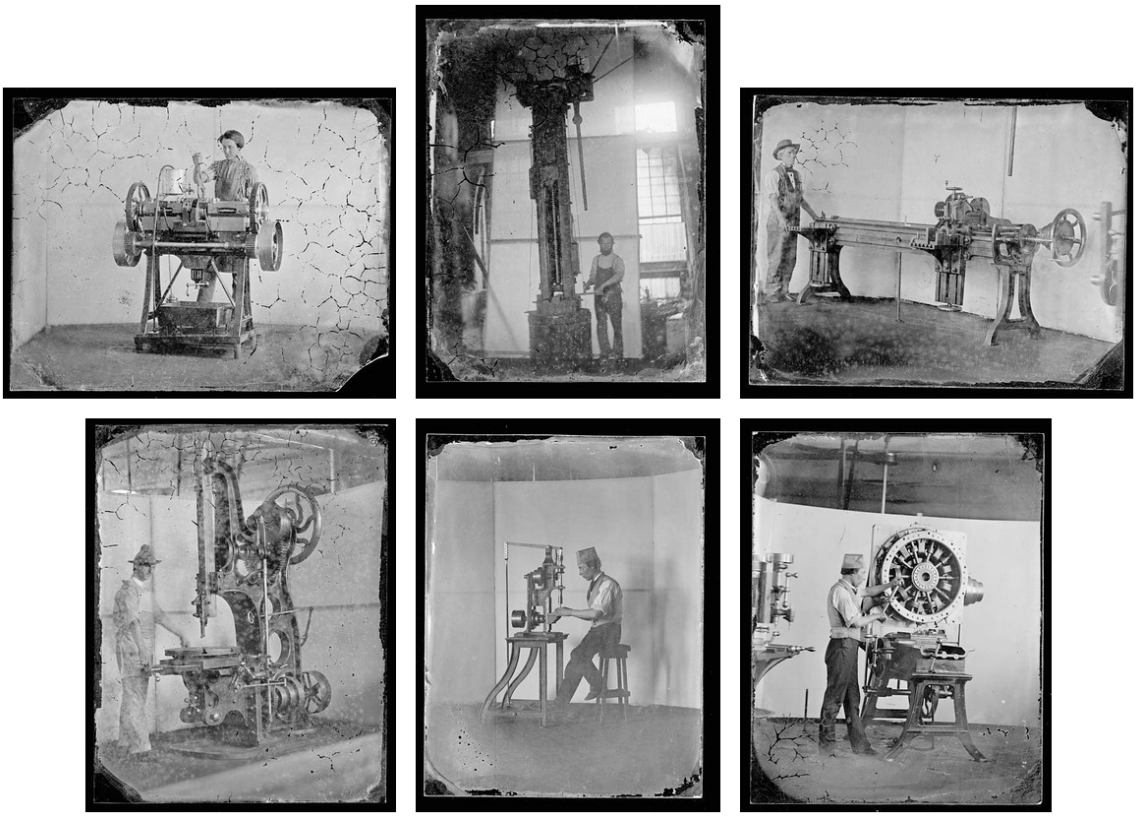


Figure 8.3 Machines of the armory. First row: milling machine; vertical drop hammer (may be Elisha Root); slide lathe; Second row: slotting machine, revolver frame jigging machine, spindle drill, c. 1855-1860. Machines album, Museum of Connecticut History, Hartford, CT.

Each machinist, both the machine-maker and the user, possessed the general knowledge and a skillset that allowed him to not just operate the machine but also to maintain it. This was essential because broken machines held up production. Some machines required constant interaction—placement, speed, depth, power—to address production for different parts and models.[44] One female worker from 1915 described the experience to a researcher:

> Every day the foreman gave the lead man his orders for daily production. The set-up man adjusted the machines for the barrels or cartridges that would be milled, ground, inspected or polished. It took the set-up man about ten minutes to teach new workers how to use a drill press or a milling machine. However, it took the new workers time to get their work up to speed. This type of work was paid by the piece.

[43] Barnard, 238-239.
[44] Zonderman, 54-57.

The system expected that "workers kept up a proper rate of speed and did not produce too many pieces of 'scrap.'"[45]

Thus, whereas a single armorer once crafted the entire musket or rifle, in the factory, hundreds of workers crafted a single product, with each part created by a different department and in a different room. As George Talcott of the U.S. Army's Ordnance Department explained, armorers used to construct firearms by "eye and hand." Now "machines perform nearly all the work," "leaving workman with nothing to do but to fix the article in proper position, apply the necessary oil, and set the machine in motion…the difficulty of finding good armorers no longer exists; they abound in every machine shop and manufactory in the country." He also implied that workers were now replaceable, particularly those who read the newspaper while at work or rushed their work to create more breaktime.[46]

By 1857 about 1,500 people worked on 460 machines, laboring around ten hours a day. They arrived promptly at 7 a.m., and gatekeepers checked contractor names against a list provided by the company. Workers could go home for lunch and return promptly at 1pm. If one were even a minute late, he was locked out the rest of the workday. Most ended their workday at 6pm, but there was some flexibility to leave a little early if the worker recorded his name with the bookkeeper. Barnard claimed that "no one is allowed to enter, if tardy even so little as an instant," unless "those detained by real sickness," who were admitted at any time.[47]

With product notoriety, security became an issue in the factory. Gun collectors and buyers persuaded some workers to smuggle products out of the factory. During the Civil War the company hired night workers. Local boys who brought night workers their dinner would often try to pocket different gun parts and assemble them outside the factory on their own.[48] In his 1866 work *Armsmear,* Barnard explained that in addition to facilitating assembly, the Colt company stamped all its parts to help identify stolen goods. One could assess the veracity of a fully inspected Colt product by checking for that stamp, applied near the end of the assembly. One employee named Fredrick Kleam worked at Colt's as a tester for the revolvers around the turn of the 20th century. He regularly stole revolvers from the armory and sold them to neighborhood shops, which in turn sold them to other potential dealers. Police eventually traced the revolvers back to the factory and to Kleam.[49]

Retention

Machines simplified manufacturing and inevitably threatened to eliminate, or at least reduce, skilled jobs. Most workers performed "relatively simple tasks innumerable times each day at

---

[45] Morgan Wilson, 61.

[46] Zonderman, 54.

[47] George Elliot to wife, June 6, 1861, Museum of Connecticut History, Hartford, CT; Barnard, 214.

[48] Barnard claimed that night workers reportedly broke their tools more often "so that they cannot on the whole complete more than half as much as they would by daylight"). Barnard, 211, 244.

[49] "Kerry's Bargain Leads to Machinist's Arrest: Colt Employee Held, Charged with Stealing Revolvers," *The Hartford Courant*, July 29, 1910.

increasing speeds, and there were few skilled workers with any power to regulate the pace of production."[50] Samuel Colt seemed to know that he was asking a lot of his employees, who had been accustomed to considerably more variety and autonomy in their lives: long days of redundant tasks that required strict discipline to meet high and precise standards. In his book *Aspirations and Anxieties: New England Workers and the Mechanized Factory System, 1815-1850*, David Zonderman verifies that the dehumanizing effects of factory work could be balanced with other sorts of activities that might give life meaning. Early industrial craftsmen and machinists had power and freedom of movement. As gun polishers, pistol makers, and blacksmiths reached ten-hour workdays, they felt the cultural traditions of craftsmen and machinists of those earlier generations increasingly becoming obsolete with industrial mechanization. Artisans had generally worked irregularly, sometimes in bursts of productivity followed by several days off. The mix of work and leisure that characterized those days held "almost ritualistic meanings." Owners fought labor unrest and mobility by cultivating loyalty, often with personable overtures and benevolence. Labor historian Herbert Gutman argues that in the early years, many industrialists struggled to maintain unchallenged authority.[51] The Colts, the company, and even the press worked hard to cultivate a certain idealism regarding the company's product, its process, and its corporate paternalism through sophisticated memory-making and marketing to the public.

Coltsville featured plenty of social and leisure activities and encouraged employees to take part. Colt's laborers, contractors, machinists, and support staff enjoyed several benefits that alleviated the tedium of factory work.[52] Colt workers felt that they had some financial security. After the Panic of 1857 and the subsequent economic crisis, Colt's father-in-law William Jarvis observed

> Col. Colt is about the only person that I know, whose business is not either suspended or greatly lessened. And I suppose he would be glad to diminish the number of his operatives, somewhat; but he is unwilling to discharge any of them at this season. His expenses are nearly $50,000 a month, and his sales ought to be large to meet them. He gave away 80 barrels of Flour at Thanksgiving; and he is constantly giving on this same seale [zeale].[53]

At the same time, Sam and Elizabeth cultivated community institutions and traditions. Colt organized an armory band soon after the factory opened in 1856. They hosted Independence Day celebrations with fireworks, parties, free beer, balls and dances, and baseball games.[54] On at least one occasion Sam and Elizabeth invited workers to the house.[55] Elizabeth's father William Jarvis recounted that just after New Year's in 1860, "he ha[d] a sleigh built 30 feet long by 10 feet wide, in which about 160 children took their seats and to which were harnessed 15 mules….After their ride, they went to his house and partook of oysters, cakes, oranges, ice cream, lemonade,

---

50 Zonderman, 25.
51 Zonderman, 16; Gutman, 38, 236-237.
52 "A Day at the Armory," *U.S. Magazine*, 235, 241.
53 Jarvis to Jarvis, February 9, 1858, CHS.
54 Tucker, 86; Hosley,11-114; *Hartford Daily Times* October 7, 1860 and January 8, 1961. His first fireworks display on the South Meadow was in 1854, before much construction had even begun. Rasenberger, 312.
55 *Hartford Daily Times*, July 7, Sept 22, 1858.

and other good things - and when they departed, Elizabeth gave each of them a cornucopia filled with a variety of sugar plums, a happier set of little folks I never saw."[56]

Sam Colt encouraged his employees to form their own clubs and organizations, some of which lasted well into the twentieth century. Beyond the famous Colt's Armory Band, where members wore Prussian blue uniforms during performances in parades and balls, others participated in an Armory Glee Club. One group of workers, influenced by the antebellum reform era that began in the 1840s, founded the South Meadows Division of Sons of Temperance.[57] The members of the short-lived Colt's Guards became drill officers instrumental in the formation of the 5th Regiment of Connecticut Volunteer Infantry. (See chapter 6)[58]

In traditional paternalistic industrial villages, employers maintained an uneducated workforce because it was easier to control. The Colts took a different approach, believing that workers should have as much leisure time as the management. Coltsville's amenities reinforced community, with the likely goal of limiting transience, especially in a city with so many options. The Colt estate created an idealized agrarian/pastoral community, balancing change with tradition. As at Slatersville in Rhode Island, open fields lined linear, gridded streets.[59] On May 7, 1856, Colt dedicated Charter Oak Hall, intending for it to serve the civic, social, and cultural life of his industrial community. Entertained by Colt's Armory Band, attendees of the opening ball included "gentlemen and ladies, comprising invited guests and the workmen employed by Col. Colt." The event concluded with a firing salute off the embankment.[60] The triangular building situated west of the armory housed a vast library and hosted lectures and other intellectual and cultural activities for the workers in a space that could accommodate as many as 1,000 people in a "well-ventilated" space lit by gas. The hall also held parties, balls, and other celebrations for employees. A Christmastime Armory Band ball facilitated "cheap and easy" transportation to it via discounted carriage rides, encouraging would-be guests "to pile in as many as you please…Once there the Band and the girls will see that the time hangs heavy on no one's hands."[61] Workers could also play games, read the newspaper, or hold debates and discussions. A room of the building even offered Sunday school for the children of armory workers (until the construction of the Church of the Good Shepherd; see chapter 9).

Colt even hoped to open a technical school at Charter Oak Hall to rival places like Yale and Harvard universities "for advancing the intellectual and aesthetic culture of mechanics."[62] Perhaps Sam Colt's experiences during his nitrous oxide tour convinced him that science could be popularly enjoyed and understood. Colt left one quarter ($500,000) of all his wealth to start a school of mechanics and engineering in Hartford, located on his estate. The bequest was

---

[56] *Hartford Daily Times*, January 6, 1860; Jarvis to Jarvis, Jan. 7,1860, William Jarvis Letters, Box 1, CMCH.
[57] John Ogle, *The Book of Colt Paper: 1834-2011* (Bloomington, MN: Blue Book Publications, 2011), 123.
[58] Marvin, *The Fifth Connecticut Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers: A History Completed from Diaries and Official Reports*. (Hartford, CT: Press of Wiley, Waterman & Eaton), 1889.
[59] Zonderman, 86, 99.
[60] "Inauguration of Charter Oak Hall," *Hartford Daily Courant*, May 7, 1856.
[61] Article 1, *The Hartford Courant*, December 23, 1856.
[62] As quoted in Rasenberger, 332.

in the will for almost three years before he revoked it in a standoff with Hartford's Common Council in 1859 as retribution to the city over the costs and assessment associated with building and maintaining the dike (See chapter 5).[63] The school was supposed to encourage intellectual pursuits and interest in science, because "the more the mechanics know of science, the more they apply it to their arts." The idea never materialized, but after the dispute with the city of Hartford over the dike, Colt discussed opening the school on his East Hartford property at length with Henry Barnard, designating thirty percent of his bequest to build the school, dwellings, and workshops, ten percent to teachers' pay, thirty percent for scholarships, and thirty percent to purchase books. Admission would prioritize sons of Colt employees (male), then Hartford inhabitants, Connecticut inhabitants, and others as trustees saw fit. He intended to appoint the governor, state secretary, state engineer, Hartford engineer, and notable Hartford intellectuals Isaac Stuart, Henry Barnard, Henry Deming, and Richard Hubbard as those trustees.[64]

At the same time, Sam Colt revealed a condescending and paternalist attitude toward his workers in correspondence with his so-called nephew, Samuel Caldwell Colt (most likely his biological son with Caroline Henshaw). Colt stressed the importance of education and social station yet conveyed that his workers were in a different situation. Colt had a duty to employ and feed his workers, an industrial class of worthy people, as "they not having the faculty to do so for themselves so well as I do, would necessarily become in a little while unemployed, indolent, and destitute of the ordinary comforts of life and in view of being the center of pride and envy of the -- favored of their profession, they would be like a vessel at sea without rudder, or compass to guide it." He continued expressing what one can interpret as classist views:

> You should see what you should remember in this picture that the superiors must control the inferior intellect and the obligations of each to the other is mutual and must natural hold its relative position. To be the chief, or the captain to employ the lesser mind, and not the jaded man of labor, throughout life, requires a cultivated intellect and what to the young like yourself, is laboring now, to learn to know everything there is in useful books will when acquired be the ultimate service, and proportionate to the amount of natural abilities you possess and the acquirements you obtain, so will be your position in the -- of your life, on the scale of grade in the human family and what you look upon now to admire will be easy for you in turn to acquire…[65]

Historian Tracey Morgan Wilson noted that in comparison to other industries, the "production of guns was a more volatile business, defined by frequent layoffs and rehires and various struggles over workplace control." It is perhaps for this reason that Colt's celebrated its loyal and long-time workers.[66] By the early twentieth century the company recognized groups of workers

---

[63] Candee, 38; Ticket to "Free Lecture Course, Church of the Good Shepherd" Winter of 1893-1894, Box 71; Last Will and Testament of Samuel Colt, Samuel Colt Papers, 1808-1904, box 10, folder 2, CMCH, Hartford, CT.

[64] "The City Lost a Technical School," *The Hartford Courant*, August 31, 1905, 12.

[65] Sam Colt to Samuel Caldwell Colt, Letters, 1854-1859, Museum of Connecticut History, Connecticut State Library.

[66] Tracey Morgan Wilson, "From Assembly Line to Steno Pool: Women Workers at Colt's Firearms and the Travelers Insurance Company 1910-1955," (PhD Thesis, Brown University, 1993), 51, 82.

exclusively for employees who reached certain milestones at the factory. The Twenty-Five Years Club and Fifty Years Club for employees honored those who had worked with the Colt Arms Patent Company for those numbers of years. The company held a "supper and get-together" throughout the 1930s at the Caldwell Colt Memorial Hall. William R. Thompson began as a Colt contractor from Providence in 1857 and worked as a mechanic until days before his death of the flu at 75.[67] Edwin Stevens worked at the factory for more than fifty years.[68]

Tenement Housing

Colt tried to cultivate a cultural and civic life for his employees through the Charter Oak Hall, and, more critically, by forming a residential worker community. Many industrialists erected cheap tenements to accommodate the massive influx of workers who they hired for their factories. Such housing rarely resembled homes. In describing Colt's plan, his father-in-law Reverend William Jarvis wrote, "he is all the while putting up dwelling houses for his workmen, and at the rate he is going on, in a few years his land within the Dyke will be a densely populated city."[69] Forty to fifty duplex and triplex houses accommodated the growing numbers of resident employees. Constructed in rows, these tenements housed both unmarried employees and families. Twenty-three families lived in Coltsville by 1856.[70] The tenements eventually accommodated about 145 families, including native-born and foreign workers, primarily German and Irish. In 1860 most of those residents were affiliated with gun manufacturing. Some of the first families in these houses were the McNarys, Thompsons, Campions, Ballous, Campbells, and Mastersons.[71]

After the initial buildings were constructed and the streets finally laid out, Colt added more housing to his model factory village. These homes featured gas and plumbing. The housing stretched for two blocks between Sequasson and Weeshasset avenues. Along Huyshope Avenue, which ran north-south between Charter Oak Avenue and Wawarme Avenue, two blocks of five, three-story houses stood, each featuring a central entry with a projected pedimented awning, topped by gothic-style gabled bargeboard roof, with "jigsaw cut cornice moldings." Running parallel to Huyshope, Van Block Avenue featured four-story, eight-family, shallow-hipped, Italianate-style buildings (40 feet by 160 feet) with high double-hung windows. An 1870 photograph by Prescott and White shows established fenced roads and pathways lined by planted trees, also the fenced backyard of the workers' houses for a family space and sense of private

---

67 "Death Of William R. Hopkins: Forty Years A Contractor at Colt's and a Well-Known Mason," *The Hartford Courant*, March 30, 1897.

68 "Colt's Fifty-Year Men to Be Honored: 9 Employees' Aggregate Years of Service is Nearly 400 Two Fought 1864 Fire that Burned Shops Oldest 79, Youngest 62, They are at Work Every Day Five Centuries of Service by Nine Employees of Colt's Firearms Company," *The Hartford Courant*, February 24, 1923.

69 Jarvis, June 1862; Jarvis, October 1, 1861, December 9, 1861, Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

70 Rasenberger, 27, 332. There are now only ten such dwellings left from what might have included dozens more.

71 United States Bureau of the Census (1860) RG 29, M653; Ward 3, Hartford, Connecticut, M653_78 via Ancestry.com; Also see Morgan Bengel, Mallory Bordonaro, Allen Kozloski, Chelsea Marti, Regan Miner, and Ryan Paolino, "Coltsville Historic Structure Report Armory Workers Housing. Coltsville National Historical Park, Hartford, CT," Central Connecticut State University, HIST 511, Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 for a list of residents in 1860 (Appendix, p. 16).

property.[72] These symmetrical six-family tenements contained three apartments and a chimney on either side. Built of brick with brownstone sills, they matched the armory in material, but they may have been painted white at some point. Machinists, toolmakers, and other craftsmen, many of Irish descent, moved in first, but by the 1880s the blocks were primarily occupied by the families of unskilled laborers.[73] Building permits from 1870 indicate that Elizabeth Colt ordered the construction of two wooden houses on Huyshope, but across the street opposite Sequasson Avenue; they are no longer there, nut they may have been for additional housing since they resembled the others according to maps.[74]

However, even during Colt's lifetime, it became clear that the factory's demands were growing beyond what Colt's on-site housing was able to accommodate. Colt biographer Jim Rasenberger observes that "only a small proportion of employees could be housed on company property. Samuel Colt's paternalistic vision of a self-contained industrial community gradually faded as Hartford became a complex industrial city with a wide array of employers…. The more affluent employees found better housing opportunities elsewhere in the city."[75] Others still lived close by. The 1880 census shows a cluster of firearms workers in the 1880s block of Charter Oak Avenue. One or more residents often lived in each household, but the census listed only one occupation, suggesting that the firearm worker's salary could sustain at least a three- or four-person household.[76]

Not all workers could be housed on the grounds of the South Meadow. Colt bought a steamboat on March 14, 1858, for employees living across the river; he also used the boat to visit his sixty-acre "hobby farm" in East Hartford (mentioned in chapter 6 note).[77] Colt contracted with the Union Ferry Company, despite protests from the Hartford Bridge Company, which also traversed the river. The ferry, which he named *Armsmear*, exclusively connected those in the South Meadow complex to East Hartford, Glastonbury, and other towns. It was one of several vessels at the Vredendale dock, which hosted shipping of iron, coal, and timber and had a harbor that could hold almost 100 vessels, according to William Hosley.[78] In 1869 a modern steamboat

---

[72] F. Perry Close, *History of Hartford Streets* (Connecticut Printers, Inc., 1969), 61; The photograph is in William Hosley, *Colt: The Making of an American Legend* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 110, but it does not identify a repository.

[73] Bruce Clouette and Carole Anstress Paine, "Colt Industrial District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Hartford County, Connecticut: Hartford, CT (Washington, D.C: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1976).

[74] O. H. Bailey & Co., Cartographer, O. H. Bailey, J. L. Galt, CSLA; *The City of Hartford, Connecticut* (Boston Massachusetts: O. H. Bailey & Co, 1877). Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/2018593481/; Court of the Common Council of the City of Hartford, 22 August 1870, Folder "Streets Van Block extension of, street building lines, sidewalks, curb, 1871-1931," Box hpl hhc ca1 B#147, Hartford Public Library Archives, Hartford, CT.

[75] Rasenberger, 27.

[76] *Geer's Hartford City Directory*, 1905-1929.

[77] William Jarvis letters to his nephew William Jarvis, September 20, 1858, William Jarvis letters, CHS.

[78] George Edward Wright, *Crossing the Connecticut: An Account of the Various Public Crossings of the Connecticut River at Hartford Since the Earliest Times, together with a Full Description of Hartford Bridge; Fully Illustrated with Excellent Half-tone Reproduction* (United States: Smith-Linsley Company, 1908), 49; Hosley, 109.

replaced the "dilapidated craft," and floating docks replaced the "levee style landings."[79] A stone pier located above Colt's ferry deepened the channel in 1882.[80]

For many years the streets of Coltsville, formerly a flood plain, remained muddy. Eventually, however, walking paths, backyards, fencing, and pathways lined by planted trees, offered families a sense of private property. In December 1886, then-President Richard Jarvis responded to vandalism and issued a statement of warning to tenants.[81] Building permits and city records in the Hartford Public Library Archives show sidewalks in 1903 from Van Block to Maseek that allowed children to walk to school in bad weather; lighting was added in 1904. In 1912 the community requested a crosswalk at Van Block Avenue and Weehasset Street. By then the trolley extended down Huyshope Avenue past the west armory, providing easier transportation for workers coming from across the city and diminishing the need for on-site housing.[82] The city even planned to develop the area south of Colt Park for additional working class housing.[83]

The trolley and electric street railways system in the 1890s made the option of commuting even more accessible, and most Colt's workers, roughly 700, took advantage as more lines spread across the city from 1905 to 1916. (738 miles of track connected Hartford to greater Connecticut by 1916). Colt's workers began to move farther away from Coltsville and into Hartford neighborhoods.[84] Less than a tenth of the company's workers remained in Coltsville's housing by the 1920s, falling from fourteen percent in 1905 to less than six percent between 1908 and 1925. Most concentrated west of the factory around Wethersfield and Franklin Avenues (Wards 1 and 7) in apartments and multifamily homes. About a fifth of Colt's workers lived outside the city of Hartford entirely, a number that rose steadily after 1905, spiking during World War I. These included places both west and east of the Connecticut River. Many workers commuted as much as thirty minutes to an hour each way by trolley or train.[85] Others moved long distances, uprooting families and communities, to work at Colt's and other industrial jobs in the northeastern United States. As they did, immigrant laborers diversified the demographics of Hartford and surrounding towns.

---

[79] In 1876 the president of the Yonkers Ferry Company, Colonel Matthew H. Ellis, purchased the Armsmear to run between Yonkers and the Palisades. "The Ferry Boat. "Mrs. Colt $30,000 expenses," *The Hartford Courant*, September 16, 1869. "Armsmear," The Hartford Courant, June 5, 1876.

[80] "The Pier at Colt's Ferry," *The Hartford Courant*, November 17, 1882.

[81] "Notice," Box 61, RG 103, CSLA.

[82] Kristen Keegan, "Coltsville Historical Supplement."

[83] Carrere & Hastings, Advisory Architects, to the Commission on the City Plan of the City of Hartford, Connecticut, "A Plan of the City of Hartford," Preliminary Report in Relation to the Rectification of the Present Plan and the Development and Extension of the City (Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1912), 50-51.

[84] See Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 103-113.

[85] *Geer's Hartford City Directory*, Hartford, Connecticut, 1905-1926. For more on these workers and their commute, see Lauryn West, "Taylorism, Tracks, and Tenements: The Introduction of the Efficiency System, the Electric Railways, and the Loss of the Factory Village," Capstone Project. MA Thesis (Central Connecticut State University, May 2025), 22-23, 27-30. West identifies where several Colt's workers lived outside of the factory village and highlights several individuals between the years 1905-1926.

German Immigrant Workers

The kinds of jobs that Coltsville introduced a diverse wage labor force of foreign-born workers.[86] German and Irish immigrants began arriving in American cities in the 1840s due to political unrest and the beginnings of the potato famine, respectively. Colt took advantage of the skills and numbers. Perhaps he recognized the cohesion and stability that came with a shared language and culture. Perhaps he knew that community cultivates stability and loyalty. The German community arguably became the most valuable to Colt's enterprises, especially during the times between large firearms contracts.

Colt seemed to base his hiring decisions on ethnic stereotypes and national reputations. He certainly knew that Germany had a long history of gun making, featuring several communities as well-known gun-making centers since the fifteenth century. He actively recruited Germans, including Augustus Fiege, Frederick Kunkel from Eli Whitney's armory, Samuel Knous and his sons, artist-engravers Carl Helfrecht, Alexander Birkholz, Herman Bodenstein, and Gustave Jung (or Young), and the ivory carver Christian Dehyle.[87] Perhaps because of language difficulties, Kunkel supervised German workers.[88]

Prussian-born German Kunkel proved extremely valuable to the South Meadow enterprise. His manufacturing experience stemmed from the willow furniture industry in Germany, one of the leading manufacturers of willow-ware baskets and furniture. After the dike was finished in 1855, Colt hired Kunkel to plant the stock of willows along the exterior of the dike that later literally became the seeds of the Willow Ware factory discussed in chapter 7.[89] Colt first met Kunkel at Eli Whitney Jr.'s Whitneyville Armory, but he became a valued and trusted worker for Colt and a leader in Hartford's German community. *Geer's Hartford City Directory* lists him as the president of the German Seymour Club, a Democratic Party-affiliated club in support of Democratic Governor Thomas H. Seymour, a friend of Sam Colt.[90]

To start the Willow Ware company, Colt sent his Berlin agent C. F. Wappenhaus, who fulfilled firearms contracts among the independent German states, to recruit workmen from basket-weaving districts of Prussia. Few workers outside of Germanic regions produced willow furniture in the nineteenth century. To lure these skilled workers, Colt promised to recreate village life by reproducing a willow weaver's village near Potsdam in Coltsville.[91] Recruiting

---

[86] Matthew Frye Johnson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[87] Hosley, 109-110.

[88] Clouette, "Getting their Share," 70-72; February 15, 1860 payroll, item 8A, Box 43, in Clouette.

[89] According to *The Hartford Courant*, Kunkel single-handedly imported an entire stock of 2,000 willow slips to North America when he immigrated in the 1840s. He was the first person to import the species salis purpurea mutabilis, or the purple osier willow. Kunkel initially settled in Buffalo, New York, selling his slips to plantations across the country and acting as the main supplier of willow slips to North America. According to *The Hartford Courant*, by 1867 most of the willow planted in the United States came from this initial import of willows. "The Manufacturers of Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, May 21, 1867.

[90] Information compiled from Erastus C. Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (Hartford: 1860), 440.

[91] Hosley, 109-110.

foreign laborers to work in a nativist-minded 1850s United States illustrates the lengths that Colt went to ensure product quality with these craftsmen, who all hailed from the same district.[92] Colt promised amenities to the German weavers when they came to America that would mimic what they had in Europe. By the end of 1860, a village of several tenements and Swiss chalet-style duplexes displayed what architectural historians might identify today as Carpenter Gothic, a popular vernacular style from the 1830s and 1890s.[93] *The Hartford Courant* quipped, "Col. Colt must be in possession of Aladdin's lamp. He has built a village on the south line of the dyke, so suddenly and quietly that nine-tenths of the town are not aware of its existence."[94] (See 8.4).

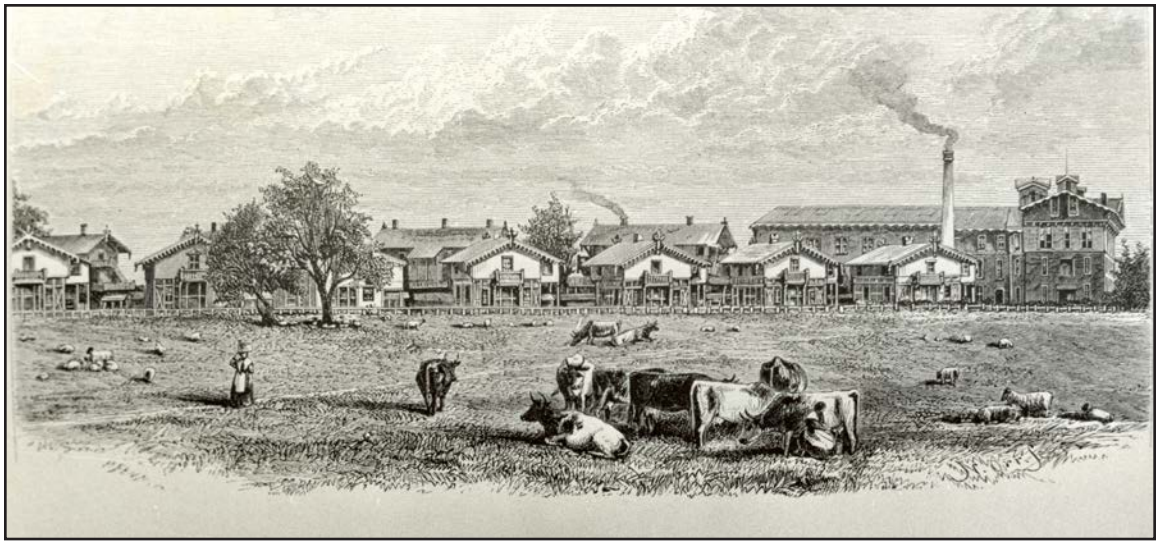


Figure 8.4 Nathaniel Orr, Potsdam Village and Willow Ware Factory, engraving, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Box 4, Folder 2, Item 7, CSLA. Connecticut Digital Archive. http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720214843.

The nine Swiss-style Potsdam Village cottages that remain offer a venue to explore the lives of the skill-specific workers at Coltsville who had little to do with gun manufacturing. They are an extraordinary example of an American industrialist targeting a particular ethnic group with a particular skill and recruiting them to travel from their home in Europe by promising to recreate culturally specific amenities of their homeland. Outsiders referred to the housing cluster architecture, dike, and willows as the "Potsdam Village" or "Dutchtown," erroneously implying that Dutch immigrants lived there.[95] Unlike the regular tenement housing, the Potsdam houses were located a distance from the factory and from downtown. Residency in the nine Swiss-style Potsdam Cottages was intended to be exclusive to workers of the willow ware factory or

[92] Tucker and Tucker, 90; Eric Ott, "Invisible Legacies: The Past and Present of Hartford's Potsdam Worker House Community in Coltsville, A Potsdam Worker Houses Historic Resources Survey," Historic Resource Survey with Coltsville National Historical Park, Hartford, CT, Capstone Project, MA Thesis, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT, 2022; Wilson, 27.

[93] Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 11.

[94] "A Willow Village," *The Hartford Courant*, January 7, 1861.

[95] "The Manufacturers of Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, May 21, 1867; "The Swiss Village: A Strange Landmark," The Hartford Courant.

the armory, including the supervisors.[96] Kunkel became one of the first residents in 1859 and eventually served as the supervisor of the Willow Ware factory between 1858 and 1861.[97]

The gable-roofed duplexes were originally built with brick set in a wooden frame. Some recall that they were painted pink with white trim and batten siding below, with overhanging cornices, exaggerated scallop ornamentation, and separate entrances, with an exterior staircase to access the top floor apartment. Each family in the surrounding cottages paid around $7 a month for a three-room apartment.[98] In addition to the duplexes, four additional irregular-shaped, three-story tenements lined the dike. Lower stories were brick with wood ornamentation. Each held ten tenements, four on the lower floors and two on the third. Another large rectangular building of eighteen tenements stood across from the Willow Ware factory.[99]

At least one of these boarding houses had a beer garden in the basement, along Hendricxsen Avenue, and housed some American-born workers, including those who worked at the armory with Colt's contractors. In an 1861 letter to his wife, George Elliot, the novice machinist discussed earlier in the chapter, described one of the boarding houses on the dike, run by a German, Mr. Alexandre Burkholz, which hosted thirty residents or more. He reported that while about twenty were German and French, the remaining ten claimed English and American heritage. Elliot even complained about the multiple languages at the house with "noise of so many boarders gabbling an unknown tongue about as unintelligible to me as the chattering of Monkeys, the clatter of an interminable flock of Blackbirds, or the discordant music of something less than 10,000 frogs." He felt better about the actual accommodations. His "large, airy" room stood level with the top of the dike. He shared the space with one roommate named Gould, a fellow American-born, from Collinsville. His room had wallpaper, carpet, a washstand, pitcher, basin, and towel, two chairs, a bedstand, and access to a water spigot. A balcony extended from the room to the dike, and in 1861, Elliot could see the Colt regiment camped out in the South Meadow from his window. While Elliot cited a five-minute walk to the factory, rainy days challenged him with the "most abominable walking…through the clay, slippery and sticky, why Russia Salve, Molasses Candy, and Spauldings Glue are nowhere compared with it..." At the same time, he praised the variety of food cooked for $3 a week.[100]

Colt successfully brought seven German families to the willow ware factory, and the 1860 census recorded one-third of the residents as German-speakers. who these families could have been. Charles Bauck is listed as a willow-ware maker from Prussia who came to Hartford with family. Adolf Leuty, another willow-ware maker from Prussia, came alone. Other willow-ware makers

---

96 "The Old Colt's Willow Ware Industry," *The Hartford Courant*, October 10, 1915.

97 Kunkel is the only resident recorded in city directory records in 1859 and 1860. "The Old Colt's Willow Ware Industry," *The Hartford Courant*, October 10, 1915; Erastus C. Geer, Geer's Hartford City Directory (Hartford: 1859), 140, 161; see also, Ott, "Invisible Legacies: The Past and Present of Hartford's Potsdam Worker House Community in Coltsville," 2022; Wilson, 27.

98 Benjamin, et. al., 6, from "The Swiss Village"; "A Strange Landmark," *The Hartford Courant*, August 3, 1908; Colt to Elizabeth Colt, June 6, 1861, Correspondence, CSLA; see also, Ott, "Potsdam Worker Houses," 20.

99 "The Manufacturers of Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, May 21, 1867, 4.

100 George Elliot to wife, June 6, 1861, CSLA.

listed in the census are John Rubner from Bavaria with a wife Elizabeth and their children, John, Rosaline, and Elizabeth, George Beck from Hesse-Darmstadt, and Vatine Gelneck from Saxe Weimer. Of the twenty-six names the census records as "Willow Workers," fifteen appear to be from Germanic subcultures (German States, Austria, the Netherlands), five from Ireland, four from New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island), and two from Western Europe (England and France). Basket makers include Louis Brasch, Charles Kirchner, and Casper Rubner. French, Russian, Germans, Irish, and others including American-born workers were also employed at the willow factory. Still, records imply that Germans recruited for the willow works came over at different times, and some were already established in America long before Colt had the idea of a Willow Works Manufacturing Company. They were not, as is sometimes suggested in books about Coltsville, all recent immigrants who came over specifically to work at the willow works plant. By 1863, 100 male and female employees included elite craftsmen as well as apprentices. The Hartford Courant estimated the total number of workers in 1867 at around sixty, and did the same in another report in 1873, believing most of them to be Germans.[101]

Several years of *Geer's Hartford City Directory* and census records, unfortunately, show almost exclusively male residents as the heads of the family, listing neither family members, children, nor boarders. Widows are the only women appearing in these records. But an 1867 article reported that forty women initially made up the Willow Ware workforce; about half of them lost their jobs with the mechanization of the process. The braiders worked entirely by the piece and earned from $50 to $100 a month (around $1,571.53 to $3,046.06 in 2021). Some young boys earned $40 a month ($1,257.22 in 2021).[102]

Even during a time when most Americans encouraged assimilation, Colt further cultivated the German community and culture by building livestock pens and allowing residents to use land to graze sheep and cows, creating a vineyard and gardens, establishing a German-language newspaper, a biergarten (beer, music, and coffee garden known as "Burcoltz," "Bierpalast") and a Dutch-style windmill along the dike at the Connecticut River. The biergarten was replaced by a drying lot by 1867. Furthermore, the Colt's Armory Band, which played at special events across Hartford for decades, dressed in Prussian-style military uniforms.[103]

Germania, also known as the Armory House, was located behind the armory office at Vrenendale and Sequassen. It served as both a social club, with a bar (possibly a Biergarten- style one), and a hostel of sorts since 1856, predating the Potsdam Village. When Colt's held a contract with Russia in the mid-nineteenth century, Russian inspectors boarded there to oversee production of

[101] Information also taken from New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957; United States Bureau of the Census (1860), Hartford, Connecticut, Ward 4, M653_78, (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration), via Ancestry.com; Ott, 140-141; "The Old Colt's Willow Ware Industry," *The Hartford Courant*, October 10, 1915; "Memories of Hartford's Most Romantic "Merchant Prince;" July 2, 1933, D2; "The Old Colt's Willow Ware Industry," October 10, 1915; "Disastrous Fire: The Colt Willow Works Burned," *The Hartford Courant*, January 1, 1873.

[102] "The Manufacturers of Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, May 21, 1867.

[103] Clouette and Paine, "National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Colt Industrial District," 1976.

their arms. When the company later converted the building into a boarding house, they renamed it the Armory House. In 1880 the Sanborn fire insurance map depicted the Germania House at Sequassen and Vrenendale Streets, and it likely served as a boarding house for workers from that time through the 1920s, when it was demolished.[104] (See 8.5)



Figure 8.5 Germania (or Armory House), 1856-1929, initially used as a hostelry for guests, and then a worker boarding house. Item 4, Folder 1, Box 4, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. CTDA, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720168337.

This idea of a contained German community at Coltsville did not last long after Mr. Colt's death. The historical record shows that over time the residents of the cottages hailed from a diverse set of occupations relevant to the armory, not the Willow Ware factory, and not all possessed German surnames. The census, property deeds, and city directories also reveal that some in the village did not work at Willow Ware. These included armory workers like gunsmiths, machinists, silver platers, and others who may have been employed elsewhere on the estate as laborers or gardeners. Ironically, Kunkel is listed as a "Pistol Maker" in the census, as was Leopold Bartholome. The same records reveal a considerable amount of resident turnover. Between 1863 and 1865, city directories show that the village lost six of its residents, with only two willow workers replacing them. The others worked in the armory and were not of German descent.[105]

[104] Hosley, 119-120; "Armory House, Landmark, Being Demolished Now, Famous Old Hostelry Adjoined Colt's Plant," *The Hartford Courant*, February 25, 1929, 4; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1880.

[105] The 1863 directory lists Seth Vinton, a volunteer in the Union Army, reportedly lived at 5 Curcombe Street; Henry Stegermann, a gunmaker, who lived at 7 Curcombe Street; F. W. Martenson, a laborer, who lived at 9 Curcombe Street; Frederick Gagel, a basketmaker, who lived at 11 Curcombe Street; and James Woolbridge, a gunmaker, who lived at 17 Curcombe Street. 13 Curcombe Street had two residents, James Kirby, a gunsmith, and Teatrich Matfield, a laborer. Similarly, 15 Curcombe Street had two residents, Conrad Mayfield, a gunmaker, and Matthews Boos, a willow ware worker. Within the publication of the 1864-1865 city directory, a little more than a year later, the village showed further transience, with only three of cottages had the same inhabitants. Mattews Boos and Conrad Mayforth of 15 Curcombe Street, F. W. Martenson of 9 Curcombe Street, and Frederick Gagle of 11 Curcombe Street remained in the same cottage since the previous city directory.

By 1868 most of the Potsdam residents had Irish surnames (Flanagan, McCann, Roche, Malloy), although three German-surnamed residents are listed as "basketmakers." Most of the others likely worked at the "pistol factory."[106]

> ...most of the furniture was removed from the half dozen nearest the fire. It was piled in the snow, thrown over the fence, placed in the gardens, or anywhere it happened. One man carried out a Morning Glory [coal fire stove] in full blast, and set it in the middle of the street, and it proved very convenient for frost-bitten bystanders to warm their hands. …. It was noticeable that a very large part of the furniture was of willow. One would be surprised at the numerous uses to which the willow can be put in the way of household furniture, could he take a look through the houses occupied by the ingenious artisans who are thus thrown out of employment...[107]

As the 1872 New Year's Eve fire consumed the Willow Ware factory (chapter 7), a remnant fire broke out in one of the Potsdam worker houses about 3 a.m.[108] With the factory unsavable, firefighters turned their attention to saving the Potsdam cottages.[109] *The Hartford Courant*'s reporting of this event indicates that coal-burning stoves heated the homes filled with willow-ware furniture. According to *The Courant*. After the willow-ware factory burned down, property deeds and city directory records confirm a high turnover rate for the cottages between 1874 and 1910. Most German residents left Potsdam Village, and not even all of the residents worked for Colt's.[110] The 1876 directories list two barbers and several farmers or gardeners at various addresses along Curcombe Street, while at least two pistol makers and a machinist who lived at the Potsdam Worker Houses likely worked at the Colt Armory.[111] By 1882 new residents with a range of occupations within or outside of the Colt estate lived at the Potsdam cottages.[112] By 1880 the company no longer enforced the requirement that those living in the houses be employed at Colt's, as one can find a "Brass Moulder," "a Gardener," and even a "Railroad Fireman" listed in records as occupations held by residents. With the properties no longer serving company purposes, Elizabeth Colt sold the rights to the houses to Thomas Curry, a local landlord, on May 9, 1896. Curry retained ownership until about the 1920s. In the 1900 census

---

Nonetheless, the remaining houses had acquired new residents. Dwight Lyman, a willow ware worker, now inhabited one of the Potsdam Worker Houses at 5 Curcombe Street, as did Philip O'Reilly, a silver platter, at 7 Curcombe Street; James Kirby, a gunsmith, and John Matfield, a basket maker, at 13 Curcombe Street; and Charles Standinger, a machinist, at 17 Curcombe Street. Information compiled from Erastus C. Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (Hartford: 1863), 59 - 272. Accessed via ancestry.com; Erastus C Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (Hartford: 1865), 61 - 260. Accessed via ancestry.com. The 1870 United States Census suggests that Philip O'Rielly was born in Ireland. See also, Ott for demographic data about the inhabitants).

[106] "Disastrous Fire: The Colt Willow Works Burned," *The Hartford Courant*, January 1, 1873, 2.

[107] "Disastrous Fire: The Colt Willow Works Burned," *The Hartford Courant*, January 1, 1873, 2.

[108] "The Willow Works Fire--Man Badly Burned: Probably Fatal Accident," *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 2, 1873.

[109] "Disastrous Fire: The Colt Willow Works Burned," *The Hartford Courant*, January 1, 1873, 2.

[110] CCSU, 8-10. See this source, as well as Ott, for demographic data about the inhabitants.

[111] See appendix for a complete list of names and occupations. Information compiled from Erastus C. Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (Hartford: 1876), 26 -150. Accessed via Ancestry.com.

[112] See appendix. Information compiled from Erastus C. Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (Hartford: 1882), 43-172. Accessed via ancestry.com.

workers employed at other companies heavily outnumbered remaining Colt workers. The census shows a "Teamster," "Brewer," "Iron Molder," "Laundress," "Nurse," "Gardener," and "Farmer," along with the more traditional "Machinist" occupation. Elizabeth Colt notably did not sell Curcombe Street itself, retaining ownership until her 1905 death as a private road, granting it to the City of Hartford in her will.[113] Although Hartford established an electrical plant in 1904, the Potsdam homes, then low-income housing, did not receive electrical power until the 1920s.[114]

The Working Irish

From the 1850s, skilled immigrant workers joined the German basket weavers, as most of the labor force at Colt's armory. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Irish immigrants began to replace textile workers across New England, bringing with them skills in blacksmithing and carpentry. Eventually the Colt factory benefitted from the flow of Irish immigration onto Front and Market streets, where Irish communities clustered around churches through the end of the nineteenth century. Unskilled laborers could fire steam engines and load and unload supplies, and Colt hired "at least two dozen Irish sweepers and helpers and several Irish "gate-keepers," who enforced arrival times in the morning and after lunch and supper. All of them earned between 75 cents to $1 per day."[115]

As indicated by their occupation of the tenement housing, by 1859-1860, at least nine Irish machinists worked at Colt, along with several blacksmiths. Historian Bruce Clouette identifies several. Patrick Drake and William Sullivan worked as blacksmiths earning $2 and $1.75 per day, respectively. Watchmen Charles Kelly and John Foley respectively earned $1.20 and $1.25 a day, and machinists Patrick Toole, John Brennan, and William Gaffy earned between $1.50 and $1.75 a day operating the lathes, drill presses, and milling machines that made precision parts for firearms, likely for contractors with whom they had trained at Colt or other Hartford-area factories. Philip O'Reilly and James Kennelly worked as inspectors measuring the precision of finished parts for around $1.92-$2.25 per day. According to Clouette, "some contractors hired no Irish, others only a laborer or helper or two." Clouette does, however, note that four out of the seven employees of James Smith, a contractor in the polishing department, were Irish, with two earning $1.50 or more per day. Likewise, Clouette counts three out of seven Irish-surnamed workers under the contractor for hammers, Dwight Mitchell, including two machinists. A contractor for triggers, tumblers, and caps, Valentine Cooper, hired as machinists Irishmen John Gaffey and John Brennan, who made up half his staff. Only one Irishman was among the ten employees working for contractors Nichols & Berry making sights and rods, and Seymour Bunnell hired only Robert Dwyer (at $.75 a day). However, "With enough skill and experience," Clouette notes that some workers, like the foundry's Thomas Curry, became an independent contractor himself.[116]

---

[113] United States Bureau of Census, Enumeration District: 009, Hartford, Connecticut, 1880, roll 97 (Washington, DC), p. 178C.; Hartford Country Land Records, Connecticut, Volume 246: 36; Perry F. Close, *History of Hartford Streets* (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Society, 1969), 33.

[114] Steve Grant, "At Dutch Point, the Fate of Two Rivers," *The Hartford Courant*, April 16, 1990.

[115] Clouette, "'Getting their Share,'" 60, 74, 119; Payroll, box 43, RG 103, CSLA.

[116] See Clouette, "Getting their Share," 70-72.

These positions helped sustain the Colt workforce, Colt housing community, as well as the Irish communities. Payrolls with many duplicate Irish surnames show that many workers likely found work, even unskilled, through family connections.[117] William H. Green employed John, Timothy, and Dennis Foley as watchmen and doorkeepers. John and Edward Egan worked together in the hammers department. Polishers Patrick, John, and Kearn Guinan respectively earned $1.75, $1.50, and $.75 a day and made up three out of seven workers in that department. Blacksmith Kennelly's sons, James A. and C. L. Kennelly, became druggists in Hartford. One of Colt's machine apprentices, Patrick Quinn, eventually left the factory "to start a wholesale and retail tea business with former store clerk Bernard Duggan."[118] William H. Green employed John, Timothy, and Dennis Foley as watchmen and doorkeepers. Twenty-four-year-old William Muller and his sixteen-year-old sister Margret worked as pistol makers in Hartford's Ward 4. This is noteworthy because while many of the women in Colt housing worked as homemakers, others found employment at the factory.[119]

Women's Work at Colt's

Many have written about female industrial workers, but few have examined their nineteenth- and early twentieth-century experience outside of the Lowell mills in Massachusetts.[120] Women began working at Colt's South Meadow facilities in specialized areas from the company's start in the mid-nineteenth century; by the turn of the century they had worked a greater variety of jobs across the factory.[121] During the interwar period, the number of female employees jumped from about one percent to fifteen percent when the Colt factory acquired a plastics and electrical division, which created gender-specific jobs. By 1926 women made up nearly eight percent of the Colt's workforce.[122]

---

[117] In one large textile city, more than three-quarters of the workers had family members who worked for the same employer. See Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship Between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (New York: University Press of America, 1982), 90.

[118] The 1870 census listed Samuel Cheethum, age eight, as the son of one William Cheetham from Ireland, a pistol maker. A decade later the 1870 census listed Cheethum as a firearms worker at seventeen years old. Even in the 1870 United States Federal Census, Luther Wilcox, a 45-year-old male, and his sons Henry, 24, and George, 17, are all listed as pistol makers. Clouette, "Getting their Share," 108. Pennsylvania became the first state to require a working age above twelve in 1848, and 48 states followed suit. In 1938, the federal government established nationwide restrictions on child labor. See John A. Fliter, *Child Labor in America: The Epic Legal Struggle to Protect Children* (United States: University Press of Kansas, 2018).

[119] 1870 Census, Hartford, Ward 4.

[120] See Wilson, 27 and Eric Ott, "Invisible Legacies" for brief historiographies.

[121] Wilson, 11.

[122] Wilson, 83, 185.

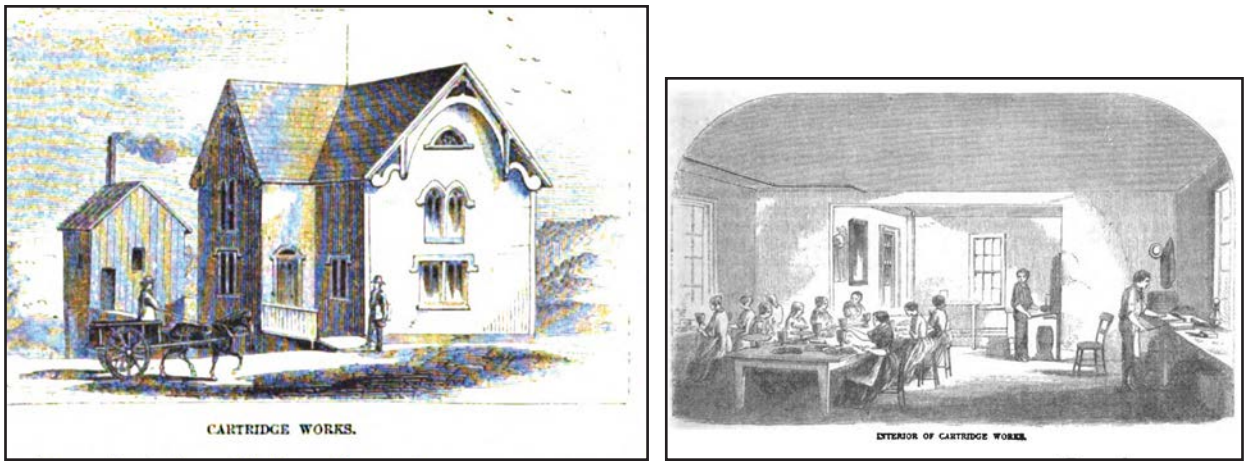


Figure 8.6 Cartridge works, 1857, Reprinted from "A Day at the Armory," *U.S. Magazine* 3, no. 4 (March 1857): 242-243.

Colt's factory offers a case study about what types of work were strictly gendered.[123] From the earliest days of the factory, Colt hired young, often single immigrant women, primarily as cartridge workers, meaning they produced ammunition with explosive substances as handlers, assemblers, inspectors, and packers; women's reputation for having "nimble fingers" made them seem particularly suited to this kind of work.[124] Other arsenals, including the Fayetteville, North Carolina arsenal and another in Watertown, Massachusetts, also primarily employed young women for cartridge work in the mid-nineteenth century.[125] (See 8.6). Colt's eventually contracted cartridge work out to the Union Metallic Cartridge Works in Bridgeport, which also mainly hired women.[126] William Chickering described some of a female worker's day in a letter to his sister Emily in early 1863.

> The women and girls do that work and I am told that some of the smart ones make good wages at it say from 8 to 12 dollars per week, but it takes comparatively but little powder to make cartridges for the rifles and muskets to what it used to in the mortars and cannon for the small arms it has to be finer and put up in smaller quantities than for the large ones a pound of powder will make the cartridges for small arms and it is ground as fine as

[123] Wilson. Pages three to six of the Wilson dissertation cite trials on women metal polishers taking place before and during World War I. The ability to pay women less was feared to push men out of work. Page 11 talks about how before the plastics division, women at Colt's did men's work for less pay. However, later in the dissertation Wilson notes that until World War I, Colt's hired women for "women's jobs."

[124] Charlotte Molyneux Holloway, *State of Connecticut Public Document – Special Report of the Bureau of Labor on The Conditions of Wage-Earning Women and Girls*. S. Z. Field Press, Hartford, CT. 1916. Report of the Bureau of Labor on the Conditions of Wage-earning Women and G... - Google Books.

[125] Filling Cartridges. Women working at the U.S. arsenal, Watertown, Massachusetts. From *Harper's Weekly*, July 1861.

[126] Cartridge work was likewise a common job for young women at other arms factories like Remington in Bridgeport through both world wars in the twentieth century. Holloway, *State of Connecticut Public Document – Special Report of the Bureau of Labor on The Conditions of Wage-Earning Women and Girls*.

> onion seed and in a large mortar they sometimes put in 21 pounds at one load and have the kernels about the size of walnuts.[127]

Company records list twenty-five women on the payroll as cartridge workers in 1855 and thirty by 1857.[128] While most were younger, at least two were above age forty. An exception was Anna Moore, sixty years old, listed as a gunmaker in the 1860 census.[129] Cartridge work, because of the volatility of the materials, was extremely dangerous. Colt built a separate house, about a half mile from the factory, for the work. Air could become heavy and stale and give a "dull and stupid feeling" to those inside, so ventilation was an important part of a structure. The women sat in a line at a table with a tray of caps, and later in front of a machine. They fit the caps to the pins and pressed the caps into brass cylinder tubes. Another worker would likely inspect each for defects before it was sent to be fitted with a bullet and percussion cap.[130]

Colt's employed a fair number of women workers outside the cartridge division as well. By the 1860s nine out of ten burnishers in the armory were women. They earned 3.5 cents per pistol (just over a dollar a day). Barnard reported that women completed thirty sets, half of what men could do, although he does not provide an explanation for the difference.[131] The Willow Works factory employed around one hundred and fifty basketmakers, with about thirty percent of these workers being women. This number dropped after the factory shifted focus to producing furniture.[132]

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, reformers debated about which jobs were safe and appropriate for women, as unions expressed concerns about women's health as the primary objection. Lower-paid women could push a male wage-earner out of a job, because the American Federation of Labor (AFL), a nationwide organization, excluded women.[133] In addition, reformers regarded women's factory work as exploitation. During a series of trials over the 1910s, the Connecticut legislature questioned the safety of women polishers in the Colt factory. While labor reformers painted women as victims, the polishers attested that they enjoyed better working conditions than in other factories.[134]

---

[127] Samuel G. Chickering to Emily Chickering, February 1, 1863, Hartford, and Yonkers, N.Y., Museum of Connecticut History, CSLA.

[128] Wilson, 31, footnote 28.

[129] Women at the Fayetteville Arsenal by Megan Maxwell, 1897 Poe House Education Coordinator Museum of the Cape Fear Historical Complex. Copyright 2012 Museum of the Cape Fear; *U.S. Magazine*; Bruce Tull, "Springfield Armory as Industrial Policy: Interchangeable Parts and the Precision Corridor," (PhD Diss. University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2001).

[130] Charlotte Molyneux Holloway, *State of Connecticut Public Document – Special Report of the Bureau of Labor on The Conditions of Wage-Earning Women and Girls*. S.Z. Field Press, Hartford, CT. 1916. Report of the Bureau of Labor on the Conditions of Wage-earning Women and G... - Google Books

[131] Barnard, 227.

[132] Ott; Uhan Hanarett was a twenty-nine-year-old Austrian-born willow-ware worker in 1860 who lived in district three of Hartford; United States Census Bureau (1860), Hartford, Connecticut, Ward 3, 124, accessed via Ancestry.com.

[133] Wilson, 1-4; Immanuel Ness, ed. *Encyclopedia of American Social Movement*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 513-514, as cited in Wesner.

[134] Wilson, 1-8.

Women stepped into many new roles in munitions work and machine maintenance to address labor shortages across the industry during World War I.[135] Colt's allowed them to perform traditionally male tasks like polishing, milling, and inspecting, only for less money. They did, however, produce just as much product, took fewer sick days, and stayed at the company longer on average. As Tracey Morgan Wilson observed, "they learned about the artisan tradition of the craftsmen while they were part of its destruction."[136] To accommodate the women, the factory had to add restrooms, cafeterias, dispensaries, and safety devices. President Stone even conceived the idea of recruiting immigrant Polish women to factory work by converting a local saloon to the "Colt Day Nursery," placing workers' young children under the charge of a registered nurse.[137]

The increase in female workers also followed the reorganization of the factory, which finally abandoned the inside contracting system in favor of the perceived efficiency of a more efficient management style articulated by Frederick Taylor in 1911. Morgan Wilson observed that "... women's entrance in large numbers into gunmaking coincided with a more centralized management, diversification of company products, and a further de-skilling of work with the introduction of new machines."[138] This change bled into World War I's armament build-up. By May 7, 1918, the total number of workers employed by Colt Manufacturing had increased from 750 to 6,300.[139]



Figure 8.7 Women grinding barrels of automatic 45s, in Colt's Patent Fire Arms Plant, Hartford, CT, c. 1914-1918. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3c11140/.

[135] Grant, The Colt Armory, 107; See Alexandria Severo, "The WWI and WWII Women's Ordnance Workers of the Springfield Armory," *NEPM*, March 9, 2023 for contextual material relevant to the women ordnance workers (WOWs) of Colt's Firearms. Women took a variety of jobs during World War I and received recognition from the U.S. military. https://connectingpoint.nepm.org/the-wwi-wwii-womens-ordinance-workers-of-the-springfield-armory/.

[136] Grant, 112; Cecelia Bucki, "Dilution of the Craft Tradition: Bridgeport, Connecticut Munitions Workers, 1915-1919," Social Science History 4 (February 1980): 105-24.

[137] Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 112.

[138] Morgan Wilson, 18.

[139] "The Colt Company," *The Hartford Courant* (May 7, 1918).

In 1918 a report on the state's conditions for wage earners praised the factory for putting a woman in charge of factory cleanliness and hygiene.

> The Colt Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co. deserves special mention because of the manner in which Mrs. Burgess, its woman superintendent, brought discipline, harmony and efficiency out of a chaotic condition. Confronted suddenly with enormous war orders this firm raked in help, from all sides, making a polyglot combination affording a peculiarly hard problem for solution. Mrs. Burgess' first step was to secure absolute cleanliness, both sanitary and personal, and also to have regard for moral conditions. A woman of over seven years experience in munition work in Canada, she had definite ideas of what to do and her first act was installation of women janitors, paying them $15 a week. The result was gratifying. Conditions which under the work of men would have been virtually impossible of change were made right and a general feeling of satisfaction resulted. Girls and women workers were given to understand they could come to her with complaints and be sure they would be protected and helped. In addition, she daily went over the works and saw that the safety conditions were good and cautioned the women and men workers not to attempt working on defective machines but to report to the proper authorities.[140]

But in the same year "the U.S. Department of the Secretary of War set women's salaries at 32 cents per hour, with men earning at least 42 cents per hour."[141] (See 8.7).

During the interwar period, women remained a prominent force at Colt's. The 1920 census of the Coltsville area revealed that women were employed at workplaces as diverse as stores, insurance companies, and at the "gun factory." In 1920 Eleanor Perry was a thirty-year-old bookkeeper who lived on Wethersfield Avenue as a room boarder. Hedwig Rudewicz, an eighteen-year-old gun polisher, helped support her unemployed parents with her two brothers, who worked as an assembler and mechanist. Thirty-five-year-old Christine O'Brien, who lived a block or two from the armory building on Van Block Avenue, worked as an inspector at Colt's. She had three children by the time she was working, including a teenage son who also worked as a clerk at the factory. O'Brien stopped working at Colt's in 1910, and by 1940 she was a widow and lived in Wethersfield. A few years later, the company hired women workers almost exclusively to work in the newly acquired plastics division, presumably to have women make products primarily for women such as costume jewelry (the Coltstones). There were at least three hundred women at the factory in 1928, but that number dropped after the stock market crash.[142]

---

[140] Charlotte Molyneux Holloway, State of Connecticut Report of the Department of Labor on The Conditions of Wage-Earners in the State, Published by the State: Hartford, CT. (1918), 54.

[141] Morgan Wilson, 85-86. Also see Alexandria Severo, "The WWI and WWII Women's Ordnance Workers of the Springfield Armory," *NEPM*, March 9, 2023, for more on female ordnance workers.

[142] Morgan Wilson, 11, 87; 1910 census, Hartford, Connecticut, Ward 7, United States Census Bureau, 4A; 1920 census, Hartford, Connecticut, 9A; 1920 census, Hartford, Connecticut, 1st ward, United States Census Bureau, 3B, 4B; 1940 census, Hartford, Connecticut, 4th ward, United States Census Bureau, 16B. Morgan Wilson, 7; "Plastics Division," Box 29, Business File, RG 103, CSLA.

European Immigrants

Italians arrived too late in the nineteenth century to secure early skilled contract work at a place like Colt's. However, by 1930 about a sixth of the 1,500 workers at Colt's were of Italian heritage. Among female employees at Colt's in the years 1929 to 1934, Italians made up about an eighth of the female work force, with the second generation outnumbering those born in Italy three to one.[143] By the twentieth century, historian Tracey Morgan Wilson reports, "Colt's management hired immigrants and married women to perform work that offered sporadic employment and little chance for advancement."[144] Nationwide, fewer than one in ten firearms workers were women, but Connecticut's female firearms workers made up seven percent of that workforce.[145]

The start of World War II in Europe brought many more new employees of Italian and Polish heritage, of Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant faiths, and women, many new to the industry, to fill labor shortages. In 1939 Colt secured a vital contract to produce guns for Great Britain, granting a monopoly on machine-gun production. To meet the demand for firearms, workers endured twelve-hour shifts for thirteen consecutive days as the factory produced around the clock, seven days a week. Although 1,100 workers joined the armed forces, the company doubled its payroll to 5,600 in April 1941 and to 6,800 in June, with three shifts of 7.5 hours, with every eighth day off. The plant reached a record-high workforce of 16,000 in 1942, the year that Colt's firearms earned the letter Army-Navy "E" for outstanding factory production from the federal government. The factory thus maintained production throughout the war.[146] Mary Maiorani and five other women worked production control for M-150 machine guns.[147]

Many of these new workers shared the experience of other "Rosie the Riveters." To aid women in the adjustment, the Colt's factory hired four policewomen and three directors.[148] Women integrated into factory work, as well as workplace culture. During World War II they participated in various clubs dedicated to helping the war effort, like the Colt Cadettes, a semi-militarized group made up of female Colt employees that were trained in signaling, jiu-jitsu, small arms, and rifles. The rifles were the same ones produced in the factory, and women spoke about how this enhanced their understanding of the guns produced. The club additionally organized war bonds sales and blood drives. Outside of the patriotic clubs, women fought for equality in the workplace. During World War II they successfully achieved equal pay for equal work and union recognition.[149]

---

[143] Morgan Wilson, 64; Clouette, "Getting their Share," 62.
[144] Morgan Wilson, 67.
[145] Table 1 "The Manufacture of Fire-Arms in the United States," in Charles H. Fitch, U.S. Department of the Interior, "Report on the Manufacture of Fire-arms and Ammunition," (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1882).
[146] Morgan Wilson, 16, 181, 194, 203, 246; Grant 159-162.
[147] Janet Nolan, Interview with Mary Maiorani, Connecticut Workers and Technology Project, February 24, 1982 (transcript), Connecticut Workers and a Half Century of Technological Change, 1930-1980, Center of Oral History Interviews Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Connecticut, Connecticut Digital Archive, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/20002:860310243.
[148] Morgan Wilson, 188-189.
[149] "These Cadettes aren't Kidding" *The Hartford Courant*, August 22, 1943, SM7; Wilson, 172-235, 191, 202-204.

While most women, like O'Brien, did not make a career out of working for the Colt factory, some, like Bessie S. Greenspon and Elizabeth M. Donofrio, took on clerical roles within the electrical division. A Jewish immigrant active in Congregation Agudas Achim, where her father served, Greenspon was born about 1900 in Russia and worked at Colt's through the 1950s.[150] She retired in 1966 after at least thirty-six years of work as a single woman.[151] Donofrio, in contrast, was born in 1909 in Connecticut to Italian immigrants, and lived on Bond Street, which was near the Colt Factory complex. She attended college and married but worked as a statistician for Colt's for twenty years.[152] By 1940, the plastics division employed young women for the institution now known as the American School for the Deaf. Anna Procannio worked as a clerk at the factory at age 17, and Eleanor Perry worked at Colt's manufacturing as a bookkeeper.[153] (See 8.8).



Figure 8.8 Pictured at the center of the Colt Electrical Division company photo are Bessie Greenspon on the left, Elizabeth Donofrio in the middle, and Lucy White on the right. Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Co. Electrical Division Employees, July 10, 1935. Picture Group 460 Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company Collection, Portraits, Box 2, Folder 1, Item 3, CSLA. http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720096163.

[150] United States Census Bureau, 1930, 4th Ward, Hartford, Connecticut, 47B; 1940 census, 4th Ward, Hartford, Connecticut, 9B; 1950 census, 4th Ward, Hartford, Connecticut, 21; "Synagogue Dean Dies at Age 92," The Hartford Courant, June 21, 1962, 17.

[151] Deaths (1)" *The Hartford Courant*, May 30, 1987, C10A.

[152] United State Bureau of the Census, 1930 census, Hartford, Connecticut, 7th ward, 6b; 1940 Census, Hartford, Connecticut, Ward 1, United States Census Bureau, 10A (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office); "Elizabeth (Donofrio) Chevalier," *The Hartford Courant*, January 25, 1995, B8.

[153] Edmund B. Boatner, "Placement-An Increasingly Important Function of the School," *The American Era* 26:6 (West Hartford, March 1940) 61-62; "The Coltsman," Box 65, RG 103, CSLA.

African Americans at Colt

Coltsville's embrace of diversity at the factory seemed to stop at the racial line. Granted, African Americans in Hartford had totaled less than 2,000 in the nineteenth century (around just two percent of the city's total population), many born in the Northeast. In 1860, the Irish outnumbered the Black population nine to one. While the Colt Band welcomed back the Black regiment into Hartford after the Civil War, most of Hartford's industry did not hire Black workers except as personal servants, notably Elizabeth Colt's butler George Carr (chapter 9). Between 1910 and 1930, Hartford's Black population doubled (to four percent of the population) when it became a primary destination for the Great Migration from the Jim Crow South. African Americans came to fill the job openings at industrial factories that immigration restrictions increasingly prevented foreign workers from occupying. Connecticut tobacco growers also recruited workers from Georgia, and they joined a small but established African American and Eastern European immigrant community in the North End of Hartford. A limited number of workers of color (and first-generation European and French-Canadian immigrants) served the Colt complex in lower-paid jobs that kept the factory operating. They worked non-factory jobs, such as in the dye shop, or as stone sawyers, cobblers, gas fitters, and painters.[154] The Urban League, a civil rights organization, conducted a study that documented the bias in hiring against new African American arrivals from the South. In 1921 a report by African American social scientist Charles S. Johnson, "The Negro Population in Connecticut," explained away the discrepancy as grounded in experience. He argued that the highly skilled men Colt's employed had apprenticeships or connections from family and a tradition of trade.

> It would have been difficult indeed with ordinary industrial training to fit into the highly specialized divisions of the principal industries. The Colt's Patent Firearms Company which employs in normal time about 3500 men is an institution in which two generations of constantly increasing skill and efficiency have contributed. Colonel Colt established his plant in 1852, surrounded himself in the beginning with men of a high degree of skill and by his insistence and absolute mechanical excellence and perfection early inspired his workers with the dignity and independence of this work and vocation.[155]

[154] Barbara Jean Beeching, "Hopes and Expectations: The Origins of the Black Middle Class in Hartford" (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2017), 66, 152, 165-166; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 105; Kurt Schlichting, Peter Tuckel, and Richard Maisel, "Great Migration of African Americans to Hartford, Connecticut, 1910-1930: A GIS Analysis at the Neighborhood and Street Level," Social Science History 39 (August 2015), 287-310; Peter Tuckel, Kurt Schlichting, and Richard Maisel. "Social, Economic, and Residential Diversity within Hartford's African American Community at the Beginning of the Great Migration," *Journal of Black Studies* 37: 5 (2007), 710–36.

[155] Charles Johnson, "The Negro Population of Hartford, Connecticut," Department of Research and Investigations of the National Urban League, New York, 1921, 106. Accessed via the Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford, Connecticut (http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu).

That left, according to Johnson, "little chance for a Negro to break in."[156] Johnson did report that Colt's plant employed four African Americans out of 925 total employees: one a clerk and the others unskilled laborers. One manager commented that, "As truckers, they have been very efficient." The vice president and general manager of Pratt and Whitney was similarly measured in his praise. He found black workers "all right," even while observing that "Human nature doesn't vary much with the color of the skin." He followed this comment with another about the general weaknesses of both Blacks and immigrants.[157]

Clubs and Organizations

Like those during his tenure at Coltsville, the types of clubs that formed after Samuel Colt's death reflected a national trend. Clubs and fraternal organizations proliferated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in northeastern American cities like Hartford. Such voluntary organizations built social capital by providing forums for support, a sense of loyalty and connectedness among workers, and democratic citizen participation. In his book City, Douglas Rae explains that club activity fell somewhere between the private and public spheres of life. This was especially true for members of the working class. Several of Colt's workers joined the fraternal organization Woodmen of the World, which helped provide them with insurance and assurance of the financial security that companies no longer provided.[158]

By the late nineteenth century, coinciding with the nationwide leisure and public park movements (chapter 10), Colt's employees, numbering at around 700, sought active recreation both involving firearms and not. In addition to the Colt Pistol and Revolver Club, the Colt Hammerless Gun Club, organized August 13, 1884, formed in response to the rise of sport-shooting after the Civil War. Active members hailed from Hartford, Middletown, Cromwell, Bloomfield, Windsor Locks, Wethersfield, Manchester, and outside the state as well. They held regular "shoots," which involved competitions for prizes, and even sponsored a Boy Scout troop in December 1938.[159] The Colt Bicycle Club, which operated from 1890 to -1897, provided alternatives to shooting.[160] Clubs with restricted membership included Colt's Gun Club, the Colt's Cable Club, the Colt's Boys Club, the Colt Foremen's Club, and the Colt Management Club. The Colt Club formed "to foster and promote a congenial and fraternal feeling between the various employees of the Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, and by means of social, recreational, and educational activities and all other means within this scope- good will

[156] Indeed, Colt's would hire inexperienced white men by 1939, like Jerry Driscoll. Robert Asher, Interview with Jerry Driscoll, Connecticut Workers and Technology Project, February 24, 1982 (transcript), "Connecticut Workers and a Half Century of Technological Change, 1930-1980," Center for Oral History Interviews Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Connecticut, Connecticut Digital Archive.

[157] Johnson, 7.

[158] Douglas Rae, *City: Urbanism and its End* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003), 155-161; West, "Arthur J. Hadden, Sr;" Raymond F. Canfield, StoryMap.

[159] Constitution and By-Laws of the Colt Hammerless Gun Club," Hartford, 1894; "Print Material," Box 77, RG 103, CSLA; *Forest and Stream* 42 (1894): 348; Clipping "In Older Hartford," *Hartford Times*, 1940 – from November 15, 1890; Invitation, Colt's Boy Scout Troop #131 First Birthday and Christmas Party, Box 71, CSLA.

[160] *The Wheeling and Cycling Trade Review* 16, 462; Ogle, 124.

pride and loyalty in our work, in our working environs, and in our company." Members met monthly and were charged $1 in annual dues.[161]

Hartford, now a fully industrial city and hub of laborers from various European countries, likewise hosted various types of entertainment. The armory held formal parties and celebrations for employees at the Charter Oak Hall, the same place where they could play games, read the newspaper, hold debates or discussions, and find a library. Furthermore, employees supported the city's institutions, especially as they moved into the city proper. An 1890 Hartford Courant article presents a list of contributors, including "Mrs. Samuel Colt" and employees from Colt's, who donated a total of three hundred and eighty-one dollars and fifty cents to support Hartford's first public library. Some like Jonathan Hall donated $100 to the funds for the library. Others donated what they could, like sixty-three-year-old pistol-shop worker Henry Tarbox, who had been with the company for more than two decades and gave 25 cents. John Cavanagh, a blacksmith for the armory, donated a dollar of his wages to the library fund.[162]

From its earliest years, Colt's estate featured beer gardens. Just two decades later, the Colt estate even hosted spectator sports, including the first professional games of the national league of what would become America's favorite pastime, baseball. Elizabeth Colt had leased land to Connecticut Senator and Governor Morgan Buckley, the first president of the National League. Hartford's first national baseball team, the Hartford Dark Blues, played from 1874 and disbanded in 1877. The baseball field on Coltsville grounds included one of the nation's first wooden grandstands. Colt factory workers were often among hundreds of spectators at these early major league baseball games.[163] By World War I, the factory sponsored ten interdepartmental baseball teams, including the Automatics, the Federal Adders, the Vickers, the Officers Model, the Derringers, the Brownings, and the Army Specials. All-female baseball teams began in 1919 and competed against one another, with the Factory Girls team playing against the women from the Main Office. By 1922, even insurance workers were playing ball on the Colt estate, although by then it had become a city park.[164]

Worker Discontent and Political Action

Despite efforts to cultivate loyalty through institutions, organizations, activities, sports, and clubs, as discussed in chapter 4, Colt's workers increasingly resisted compliance with certain working conditions, especially once Sam Colt died, and with him the corporate paternalism that undergirded the design of Coltsville. Colt workers had first formed a machinists and blacksmiths union at the end of the Civil War in 1865. Nationwide, worker unrest grew alongside industry, as wealth discrepancy increased and working conditions grew more tedious and dangerous in pursuit of efficient production and increased profit. The labor movement increasingly turned

[161] John Ogle, *The Book of Colt Paper: 1834-2011* (Minneapolis: Blue Book Publications, 2011), 123; Constitution of the Colt Club, Print Materials, Box 77, RG 103, CSLA.
[162] U.S. Census, 1870.
[163] Jim Rasenberger, *Revolver: Sam Colt and the Six-Shooter that Changed America* (New York: Scribner, 2020), 28; hundreds
[164] "Colts First Team to Start Baseball," *The Hartford Courant*, April 15, 1919.

to collective action to change conditions.[165] Although the Irish made early footholds into good factory jobs, Bruce Clouette noted that many who organized the union activity at Colt's from the 1880s to the 1930s were the children of those Irish (and Italian) immigrants. Machinist Dennis D. Donovan, laborer Patrick Guilfoil, and masons Edward Riley and James Spellacy joined others in forming a central trades council called the Workingmen's Union of Hartford to advocate for the eight-hour workday and limit child labor, with Donovan as the first president of both organizations.[166]

Labor unrest in industrial cities proliferated through the 1880s and 1890s, but Colt's did not see such activity until the turn of the century. In 1901 workers across several Hartford manufacturing companies started to demand that workdays remain limited to nine hours. These efforts ignited after the State of Oregon passed a law limiting the work hours for women to ten hours. In 1908 the case *Muller v. Oregon* went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the law. On May 20 *The Hartford Courant* estimated 3,500 Hartford employees, part of an alliance of national union activity, went on strike in pursuit of nine-hour days. Companies with unionized employees included the Lincoln Iron Foundry, Pratt and Cady, Dwight Slate Machine Company, Woodward & Rogers Company, Patternmakers Association, the National Machine Company, American Bicycle Company, Machine Screw Company, Electric Vehicle Company, Premier Manufacturing Company, National Machine Company, Acme Machine Screw Company, Cushman Chuck Company, and Whitney Machine Company. Others from Pratt and Whitney, Billings and Spencer, and American Bicycle Company threatened to also walk out.[167]

It may not be a coincidence that 1901 was also the year that Elizabeth Colt sold her controlling interest and Richard William Hart Jarvis Colt, the president of the company from 1865 to 1901, finally left the company. After Sam Colt's death in 1862, Elizabeth served as a cultural figurehead, with Richard at the company helm. They maintained the paternalistic tenor instituted by Sam Colt that cultivated a company culture. Years of cultivating loyalty appeared to have paid off. The union seemed unnecessary to most of Colt's workers. Colt employees already enjoyed shorter workdays, good pay, and decent working conditions. The factory would close at noon on

---

[165] See Elizabeth Faue, "Insurgent Labor, 1905-1922," *Rethinking the American Labor Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[166] Coulette, 98. An outline of the basic organizational history of labor in Hartford is contained in "History of Organized Labor in Connecticut," in Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Report. 1902 (Meriden, 1902), 333-416. See also Bernard Wolf, "Connecticut Labor from 1877 to 1914," MS, c. 1936, Works Progress Administration Records, Box 199, CSLA. In addition to the manuscript history, this collection contains the research files for the project, much of which were compiled from interviews with labor leaders and from city directories.

[167] Steve Thornton, *A Shoeleather History of the Wobblies: Stories of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Connecticut* (Hartford: Shoeleather History Project, 2013), 72-76, 88-90; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 70-71; "Strike on To-Day: Metal Workers for a 9-Hour Day Lockout At Screw Shop About 8,500 Hartford Workmen Will Go Out Strikers Say that All Shops but Colt's Will be Tied Up," *The Hartford Courant*, May 20, 1901. Throughout the 1910s the American Federation of Labor continued its push for limited hours and other provisions, but the movement faltered over whether this applied to only women, specific trades, or minority groups. The U.S. Congress passed an eight-hour law for railroad workers in 1917, just as the United States entered World War I. An article from November 1917 mentioned company workers finding employment at Colt's after being laid off. "H. & A. Company Facing Bankruptcy," *Norwich Bulletin*, June 27, 1917, in Sam Colt Papers, CSLA.

Saturdays. Colt workers largely remained loyal to the Colt factory, with the entire force of 750 men continuing to work during the strike, with only about two or three men out due to illness. The Courant reported that Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company was the largest company in Hartford to remain active during the strike. Addressing why the Colt workers did not strike, one manufacturer responded,

> This union did not order out the men at Colt's because they knew that but a very small percent of the men would go out. The unions have always found it a difficult matter to get any headway in this shop as many men have worked there nearly all their lives, as did their fathers before them, and they will have nothing to do with the union….The men have been making good wages there and they do not have any cause for complaint-unless it is being nagged to death by the labor agitators who would like to get some of their money to help their cause.[168]

Most strikers returned to work when the strike ended on June 3, having succeeded in their fight for nine-hour days. Colt's rewarded their workers for not going on strike with a weekly schedule of fifty-five hours but pay for sixty hours.[169]

Strikes across Hartford so concerned the ruling class that on June 27, 1905, the Connecticut State Senate passed legislation to build a national guard armory in the city for the protection of local businesses. They debated about whether it should be built by the state house of by the Colt's factory after former Hartford Mayor Alexander Harbison testified that he would have appreciated such an armory during the 1901 machinist strike.[170] Still, employee loyalty to Colt's seemed evident when, after Elizabeth Colt's death on August 23, 1905, several workers helped to transport her body from Rhode Island, where she died, back to Armsmear the next day for her funeral at the Church of the Good Shepherd. Veteran employees of the factory served as pallbearers for the funeral: they included A. L. Allen, F. W. Green, F. A. Stanton, B. A. Rooney, W. F. Wolff, and Fred Moore.[171]

Contract System to Taylorism

While Elizabeth Colt's widowhood philanthropy might have cultivated stability and loyalty, the company, like many of the early unregulated industries, offered few, if any, employee benefits like job security, unemployment compensation, and vacation days. While workers at the armory initially earned good wages, daily rates hardly increased for more than half a century.

---

[168] "Breaking in The Ranks: Some Strikers Returning to Their Work. Violence at Acme Machine Screw Company," *The Hartford Courant*, May 24, 1901.

[169] "Strikers to Go Back. To Resume Work at Six Shops To-day. About 2,000 Men Will Long Rest," *The Hartford Courant*, June 3, 1901.

[170] This was the same day of the first meeting the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Chicago. Steve Thornton, *The Shoeleather history of the Wobblies: Stories of the Industrial Workers of the World in Connecticut* (Hartford, CT: Shoeleather History Project, 2013), 1.

[171] These same men served as pallbearers for Elizabeth's brother Richard Jarvis Colt; *Geer's Hartford City Directory*, 1899, 395, 340.

Furthermore, many workers, including those engaged in making guns, valued their craftsman heritage. New technology produced spinning frames, power looms, and other machines that made jobs more affordable, quicker, and efficient but replaced some of the most skilled workers.[172] The start of the twentieth century brought several labor disputes at the Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, especially once Elizabeth Colt sold the company; such disputes took place in 1901, 1912, 1915, 1916, and 1918. Even before Elizabeth Colt stepped down, corporate paternalism was in decline.[173] The Colt's Patent Arms Manufacturing Company adopted norms of other factories, phasing out the celebrated contract system at the armory. Until the turn of the century, the payroll varied, and Colt's still charged rent to contractors. But while machinists could go to other workshops to pick up new skills and ideas in between contracts, this practice grew less frequent. Colt's employment cards reveal numerous layoffs in between contracts over which the workers had no control.[174]

By the 1910s, companies, including Colt's, no longer subcontracted work, placing the hierarchy in-house and reorganizing. Machinists, gunsmiths, and polishers argued that the company had instituted the scientific management policies of Progressive Frederick W. Taylor ("Taylorism"), whose treatise on organizational efficiency in 1911 challenged worker autonomy and reduced wages.[175] Colt's hired someone "to investigate how long it took workers to complete certain tasks." From the study's findings, the company changed its production goals, requiring all workers to accelerate their output from 125 to 200 pieces a day, effectively cutting wages from $2.90 to $1.60 a day in some cases. Union leaders claimed Colt's system was extreme Taylorism. The company continued to use inspectors to ensure quality. It often had to readjust each time a new machine further accelerated the process. This system required perfect timing, leaving no padding for setting drills, fixing or making needed adjustments to the machines. Workers also complained about cleanliness and that they had to purchase their own ice water, bring their own stools upon which to sit, and even provide their own drills.[176]

The shift in management-worker relations came within a decade of the end of the Colt's family business as the company began to integrate Coltsville into the economic landscape of Hartford. Management took advantage of a second-wave immigrant labor supply from eastern Europe, imposing longer hours and lower wages. As a result, Colt's workers joined union activity and participated in multiple strikes. In the past Colt's would sometimes enlist women as strikebreakers when labor unions excluded them, but management changes developed a common work culture across genders. By the early twentieth century, women joined the unions and strikes, becoming some of the most active participants. Morgan Wilson observes that "A united confrontation of a heterogeneous group of immigrants, Protestant and Roman Catholic, and

[172] Pollard, 518.
[173] Rasenberger, 30.
[174] Wilson, 86.
[175] Department of Education, "Laborer and Government Help Regulate the Workplace, 1900-1950," CT.gov, 2003.
[176] Wilson, 5, 61, 82, 85; "Small Strike at Colts—Men now forming union:120 Strike on Saturday," *The Hartford Courant*, September 16, 1912.

Jewish married and single women workers against management was not an unusual occurrence at Colt's.[177]

The new system mostly affected the "Government 45" workers who made the infamous Colt .45 for the army and navy. Pay remained flat, but workers had to make 200 pieces a day instead of 125 pieces. Workers demanded to be compensated for their time as much as their production. They tried to discuss terms with the company, with little response. With the guidance of the Central Labor Union (predecessor to the AFL-CIO), Colt's workers who had been with the company since it began in Hartford unionized and went on strike while the company's president, Colonel C. L. F. Robinson was away for the weekend, and their superintendent refused to engage. This was strategic timing for the workers because "the Colt Company is running night and day on government work."[178]

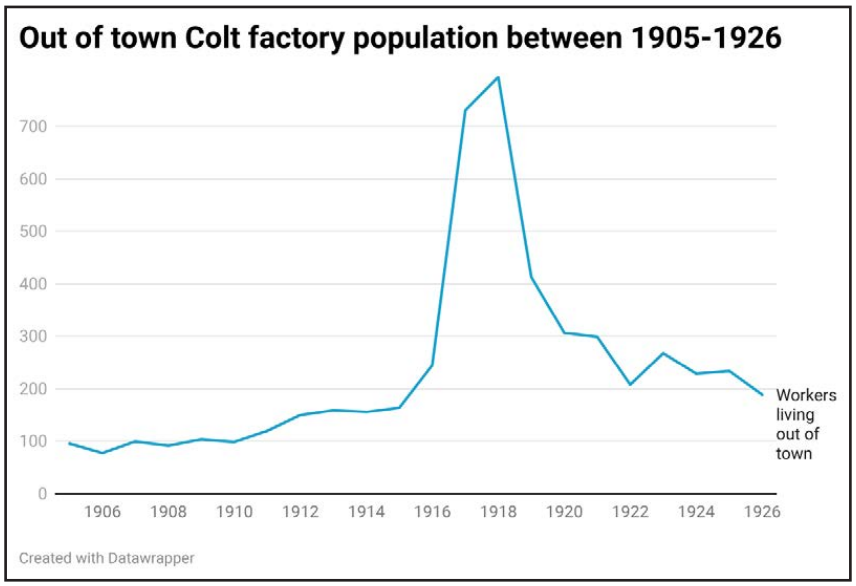


Figure 8.9 Data compiled by Lauryn West, 2024-2025, from *Geer's Hartford City Directory*, 1900-1927 (Elihu Geer, Hartford, CT). See appendix for location of households in Coltsville, Hartford, and elsewhere.

The strike made news across the country. *The Spokesman Review* in Spokane, Washington reported that on September 15, 1912, 120 to 130 skilled mechanics making the .45 calibers (the infamous Peacemaker) for the United States government walked out because of a new "efficiency system" where "the piece work prices paid have been so changed that they are equivalent to a reduction in wages." President Robinson quickly resolved the strike when he returned home, and workers returned to work on September 26 after Robinson agreed not to punish strike leaders and established a new policy for filing grievances. The men also indicated they would seek a unionization of machinists, although 500 Colt workers were already members

[177] Wilson, 82. See Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017) for more on how and why Eastern European women immigrants supported organizing.

[178] Small Strike at Colt's," *The Hartford Courant*, September 16, 1912.

of the Machinists Union. Either way, the strike resolved quickly, with the company promising to put an end to the new system that had caused such frustration. Colt employees held a carnival fundraiser and dances for the strikers.[179]

Small strikes over the next couple of years addressed hourly pay, with the Colt's company not as generous as it had been in the nineteenth century. Colt's records show that the company raised hourly rates between 1911 and 1912, with those increases varying from $.12 to almost $.45 an hour, with foremen compensated at $.53 an hour.[180] On September 8, 1915, perhaps inspired by labor unrest in Bridgeport at the time, *The Day*, a New London newspaper, wrote that on the day the vice president of the Polishers and Buffers Union came to Hartford, "Forty-five polishers and buffers…went on strike at 8 o'clock this morning" to raise wages five cents to 45 cents an hour, but that "the question of an eight-hour day has not yet entered into the issue."[181] The strike lasted about nineteen months. On a Tuesday afternoon on April 11, 1916, fifty assemblers in the east armory also walked out, but it is unclear if they were affiliated with any union. They also demanded a $.45 hourly wage.[182]

As World War I production demands rose, Colt employment reached between 6,000 and 7,000 from around 1,000 workers before the war. Tension continued for months between management and workers over the number of hours expected for production until the government stepped in. About 800 men and women walked out on October 12, 1918.[183] To ensure timely and quality war production, workers at Colt's and the Hartford Screw Factory received federal support, and the federal government reimbursed Colt's for additional labor costs. Serving as an arbiter between the workers and the company, Major Byers H. Gitchell ensured the workers an eight-hour day and a six-day week, established overtime at time and a half for every hour over 48 hours a week, and discontinued bonuses, placing the company more in line with the war labor board that was charged with employer-employee relations. He also moved that wages could rise ten percent with any cost of living. The same deal set women's rates at ten cents an hour less than men's. Night workers received an additional ten percent.[184]

Labor Unrest in the Great Depression

None of these deals prepared the company for the nationwide labor unrest of the 1930s. With revolver sales down in the early 1930s, most firearms workers' schedules fell to a four-day week. Executive salaries even saw a ten percent reduction, but workday and piece rates

---

[179] "Small Strike at Colt's--Men Now Forming Union: 120 Strike on Saturday" The Hartford Courant; "Colt Strikers Resume Work Today," The Hartford Courant, September 16, 1912, 5; "Colt Strikers Resume Work Today, No Discrimination to be Shown Against Leaders," *The Hartford Courant*, September 26, 1912.

[180] "Payroll Records, 1911-1912, Box 64, RG 103, CSLA.

[181] *The Day* (New London, CT), September 8, 1915.

[182] "Fifty Men on Strike at Colts: Ask 45 Cents an Hour--Are Not Organized," *The Hartford Courant*, April 13, 1916.

[183] "Employees at Colt Company Out of Strike," *Republican Farmer*, (Bridgeport, CT), October 18, 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress. https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015536/1918-10-18/ed-1/seq-3/.

[184] "8 Hour Day, 6 Day Week at Colt's Given by Gitchell," *Hartford Daily Courant*, October 25, 1918, 3.

remained the same. Stone kept an eye on rising fascism and tensions in Europe just the same, updating equipment with orders.[185] After the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932, the administration created numerous programs and passed legislation to support workers during the economic crisis of the Great Depression. Among other things, the NIRA encouraged industry-wide "codes of fair competition" to fix prices and wages, protect unionization and bargaining activity, and require companies to recognize and engage with unions, even those organized outside of the company.[186]

This was bad news for Colt's, since even those employees who had organized under the Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company's union expressed interest in joining the industry-wide and increasingly powerful craftsman unions. On February 3, 1934, union representatives submitted three demands relating to wage issues. Most workers no longer earned the generous wages of those in the 1850s and 1860s, and without the ten-hour limit to the workday that the previous generations of Colt workers had enjoyed. Some now worked 12 to 15 hours a day. A month later, in March, Colt's workers dissolved the company union. Seniority became a point of contention as well.[187] In April three separate craftsman departments at Colt's affiliated with their own specific unions, all part of the American Federation of Labor. Representatives with International Association of Machinists, Plastic Workers Union, and Federal Labor Union combined at Colt's to form a Joint Shop Council with the help of Frank Fenton of the New England AFL-CIO. The Joint Council provided workers with the advantages of an in-house industrial union with the strength of a craft union. Fenton was a charismatic leader, and Colt's management reportedly attempted to silence him in a variety of ways, including efforts to discredit him through tactics like sending a prostitute to his hotel room and offering him a one-year scholarship to the Ruskin School in England (which focused on working-class interests and skills) through a Hartford college. Management recognized that the Joint Council included its own employees but refused to recognize the union as the voice of the workers.[188]

On February 27, 1935, Colt's workers received federal support when the National Labor Relations Board announced that Colt's had violated section 7-a of the NIRA by refusing to bargain with its employees and issued a March 3 deadline to the company to recognize the Joint Council and its unions. Ten days later, with no response, about 1,000 Colt employees walked off the job for thirteen long and often cold, cold weeks.[189] For plumber Leo Laforge, who worked in the Plastics division, the strike was a family affair.

> Well, all I can tell you is that we went out on strike and on picket duty… I had my wife; I had my brother-in-law's; I had my sister-in-law's. We had them all out there, the kids. And

[185] Grant, The Colt Armory, 122, 128.
[186] "NRA Blamed for Strikes by Cornelius," *The Hartford Courant*, May 28, 1935.
[187] "Colt's Employees to Insist Upon Seniority Rights: Workers Disturbed ..." *The Hartford Courant*, May 17, 1934, 8.
[188] Their demands preceded the minimum wage (which the U.S. Congress set at 25 cents in 1938. Leo LaForge, April 26, 1981, Colt Strike of 1934, Center for Oral History Interviews Collection, University of Connecticut, Storrs CT, in Connecticut Digital Archive, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/20002:860314412.
[189] Leo LaForge, interview.

> we had everybody walking the picket line. This happened a few times because they wanted to show the company that we were strong. The union was strong. We weren't willing to back out...We did some marching.[190]

Other union workers outside the company sometimes would join the strikers in solidarity before their own workdays began.[191]

Meanwhile, strikers grew more assertive, enlisting confrontation tactics that included throwing bricks at strike breakers' homes, throwing eggs at them as they entered the factory, and calling management names. They sent letters to the governments of Turkey and Great Britain, asking them to place an embargo on Colt firearms. Police escorted strike-breakers to the factory "almost arm in arm." Strikers called the strike-breakers rats and threw pieces of cheese at them. Management soon offered to house non-striking workers to protect them from getting harassed in their homes and as they moved to and from work. A series of 1935 photographs show the quarters that housed them, including dining and recreation facilities and a line of cots covered with striped sheets and spaced out along the side wall below large factory windows.[192]

In response the federal government rescinded its Blue Eagle designation, which indicated a company had complied with the NIRA. This meant that the company could no longer receive government contracts. Despite this, the company still refused to bargain with the Joint Council union. Donald Richberg of the NIRA continued to sign government contracts with Colt's, in violation of the government's own policies, so the federal government stepped in as mediators. This action prompted investigations by North Dakota Senator Gerald P. Nye (mentioned in chapter 7) and triggered his 1934 investigation (known as the Nye Report) into the arms industry, which uncovered dubious practices by the arms industry during World War I.[193]

The behavior of the strikers grew more volatile by springtime. In May the *Hartford Times* reported on the arrest of three Colt's picketers after "egg throwing, name calling, Riot Inciting" behavior against Colt officials. Nine picketers were arrested for breaching the peace when a mediator came to Hartford to begin discussions with Colt company officials. At last, on May 4, Colt President Sam Stone, at least one vice president, and an attorney did meet with members of the joint shop committee and union representatives to negotiate for the first time since right before the walkout. Stone knew many employees by name. He even offered them other work with the company when they grew too elderly or unable to perform duties at a machine. However, the workforce had grown large and diverse, and such placation no longer worked.

---

[190] Leo LaForge, interview.

[191] Joe Rourke and Nelson Cruikshank, interview by Alice Hoffman, Pennsylvania State University, March 14, 1980, Colt Strike of 1984, Center for Oral Interviews Collection, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, in Connecticut Digital Archive, accessed July 23, 2025.

[192] Construction of storehouse and recreation center, June 1936. Men working on the construction of the second story of Colt's storehouse and restaurant/recreation center, which stands on the corner of Huyshope Avenue and Sequassen Street. Colt's worker houses on Huyshope Avenue can be seen in the background. PG 460, Box 4, Folder 6, Item 7, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.

[193] "Nine Colt's Cases Listed on Docket," *The Hartford Courant*, June 1, 1935; Joe Rourke and Nelson Cruikshank, interview.

Stone warned strikers they would lose their jobs permanently if they did not return to work by May 15. Signs around the factory read: “May 15 AM Deadline.” In the meantime, the U.S. Supreme Court was deciding the constitutionality of NIRA, and Colt strikers joined picketers in Washington, D.C. to support it.[194] (See 8.10).

By this time, strikers did grow frustrated and began returning to work. According to Leo LaForge “it was pretty hard during the strike to get the truth from anybody. You got your line to the hall and you get one story from one guy and you get another story from another guy. So, like I said, I belong to the union. I always was in favor of a union, but I never got treated good. I always had a problem with them.” Twenty more strikers returned to work at the factory to join sixty strikers who had already conceded. Conditions grew more enflamed, literally, when two men and one woman set off dynamite on Stone’s porch, smashing the front door and blowing out windows. Stone was home, but no one was hurt. Two were sentenced to a stint in state prison, while one Colt’s employee cooperated with the state and received no time.[195]

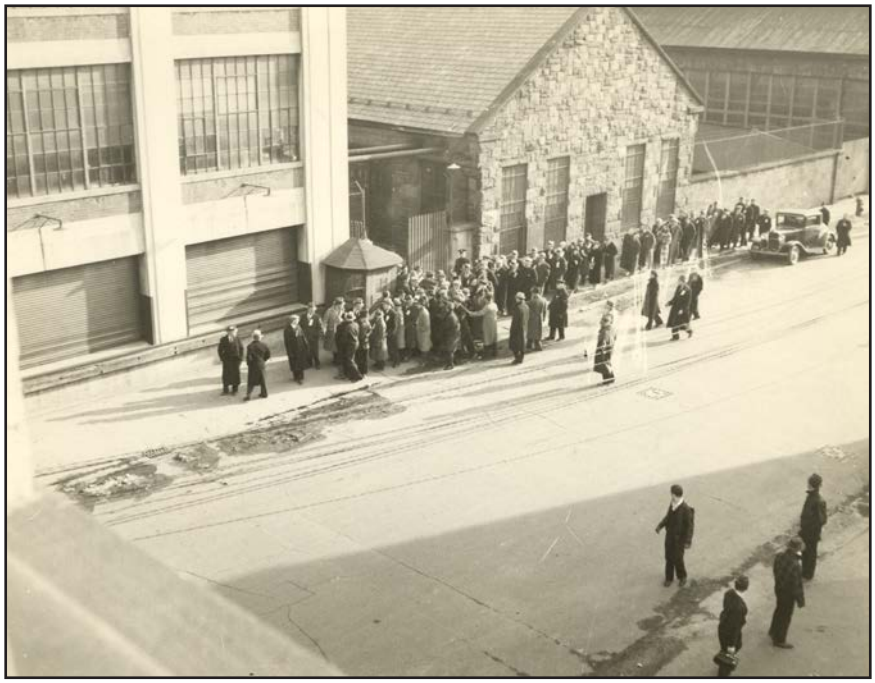


Figure 8.10 Strike of 1935, March 15, 1935, PG 460, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, Box 5, Folder 9, Item 6, CSLA. CTDA Archive, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720216293.

That same day, the U.S. Supreme Court delivered a death blow to the strikers by declaring the NIRA unconstitutional. The strike fell apart by June. Because army contracts drove Colt’s works and profits, federal support was critical to union success. Strikers returned to work after thirteen weeks. Despite Fenton’s attempted negotiations and the company’s recognition of the Joint

[194] Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 126, 131-138. See Chapter 8 for biographies of long-time workers.
[195] St. Pierre interview by Alice Hoffman; “Stone Home Bombed Three Held,” May 25, 1935, Clippings, RG 103, Box 57, Colt’s Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.

Council, Colt's refused to grant a requested 25 percent wage increase or to rehire any workers who had engaged in violent acts.[196]

All the union and strike activity eventually paid off with stronger New Deal legislation. The Roosevelt administration tried again to set work hours in 1936 with the Walsh-Healey Public Contracts Act, which applied to government contractors, limiting the number of hours one could work and requiring time-and-half pay for overtime. In May 1937 the company gave clerical workers every other Saturday off, alternating the staff, and beginning the workday at 8 a.m. Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) in 1938. Businesses involved with or affecting interstate commerce were required to have forty-hour work weeks. This act also included overtime pay for those working over forty hours. The FLSA ensured that no minors could be employed in oppressive child labor, a 40- hour workweek, minimum wage, vacation, and overtime pay. The legislation also required companies to record employee hours: Monday through Friday 8:30-11:45am, 1-5pm, and 3.5 hours on Saturday (8am-12pm). No employee was permitted to work beyond these hours. Rather than install a time clock as in the past, Colt's had employees report their own hours.[197]

Despite the upheaval, the company retained 1,581-1,200 employees during the Great Depression, and 120 even joined the 35-year club, with 10 having worked for Colt's for more than 50 years. By the end of 1936 almost 100 workers over the age of 65 worked at Colt's, the oldest still working at age 79. The company issued a publication explaining the new Social Security pension deductions from each paycheck.[198]

Returning to Corporate Paternalism (2.0)

Around this time the company had to address another crisis beyond its control. The 1936 flood in March forced the demolition of several buildings. The water had effectively destroyed worker housing for habitation, and the Red Cross, American Legion, and Coast Guard evacuated the tenants. Workers' housing deteriorated to the point that only 75 people were left living there. Colt's demolished the southernmost block for a parking lot. The building manager, Realtor Aubrey Maddock of Hartford rehabilitated the remaining buildings, ten in the main block and two more across Sequossen Street on Huyshope Avenue. Whereas the original buildings housed two families on each floor, the Van Block side now housed eight. Each unit featured a combination living and dining room with full kitchen and bathroom on the first floor and two bedrooms on the second floor. The third and fourth floors had the same layout. The real estate company rented 68 units, and the bank provided tools for yardwork to seed the grass and maintain the gardens and trees. The National Association of Real Estate Board recognized "Colt Village" in 1936.[199] In place of three damaged buildings and the several worker homes that

---

[196] *The Connecticut Craftsman*, June 1935, newspaper clippings, RG 103, Box 57, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, CSLA.

[197] A.L. Ulrich, "Notice," union contract, 1941, Box 61, RG 103, CSLA.

[198] "Employees over the age of 65," "Old Age Pensions," Elliot Service Company, November 1936, Box 64, RG 103, CSLA.

[199] Local Improvements in Colt Park Area Win National Fame," *The Hartford Courant*, August 21, 1938, B1. RG

they razed, Colt's aimed to build a two-story brick-and-concrete warehouse for a restaurant and recreation room valued at $125,000.[200] Construction was underway by the summer. (See 8.11).



Figure 8.11 W.J. Crockett, "Construction of storehouse and recreation center," June 1936. Men working on the construction of the second story of Colt's storehouse and restaurant/recreation center which stands on the corner of Huyshope Avenue and Sequassen Street. Colt's worker houses stand on Huyshope Avenue in the background. PG 460, Box 4, Folder 6, Item 7, Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, State Archives, Connecticut State Library. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720214856.

In the meantime, economic and political tensions mounted in Europe. After Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Europe entered World War II. America's swift shift to the war effort following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, helped charge the economy as every industry shifted its production. The war effort disrupted more than economic systems, as production needs also challenged social roles. With demands mounting for men to go to the front lines in Europe and the far east, Colt's and other industries, as they had in World War I, recruited more women. With hundreds of new workers, Colt's hit a company record of 16,000 employees. A 1943 employee handbook "This is YOUR Company" introduced newcomers. Not only did it include rules and policies, but it also provided a history of the company, which played on images and phrases popularized by the marketing and popular culture of the previous decades, such as the "winning of the West" and "hostile Indians." Illustrations and language clearly spoke to a new female workforce, with a "Rosie the Riveter" image, urging female workers to be conscientious about keeping the factory clean with phrases like "Good Housekeeping." Hostesses made "things pleasant for new woman employees!" The handbook described the expectations for work hours, which consisted of two shifts, six days a week. The first ran from 6:48 a.m. to 3:18 a.m. and the second from 3:30 to midnight, with one break for lunch or dinner. Not everyone lived close enough to go home for meals, and since about 1938, Colt's had opened new cafeterias on Van Dyke and at Park and Flower streets.[201]

103: BOX 19, 20, 58, 61, CSLA.

[200] "Ebbing Flood Waters Bare Damage Conditions Worst in Colt Dike Area," *Hartford Daily Courant*, March 26, 1936.

[201] "This is YOUR Company," Handbook, Box 71, CSLA.

Ignoring another available segment of the workforce, Colt's ran into problems with more FDR legislation by violating Executive Order 8802 (The Federal Employment Protection Act), passed on June 25, 1941, which prohibited government contractors from engaging in employment discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. The law seemed aimed directly at companies like Colt's and Pratt and Whitney, since the National Machinist Union ban on African American members. Some factories had hired African Americans during World War I, but only temporarily. The City of Hartford itself employed fewer than ten Black people. Already feeling pressure after an expose in *New Masses*, a left-leaning magazine, specifically targeted Hartford for racist labor discrimination practices, Colt's hired three Black workers in February. This was apparently too little, too late: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) listed the company as in violation, and President Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practice Committee held meetings with Colt's Vice President Dwight G. Phelps and with Connecticut's NAACP. This spurred months of negotiations, with the support of some White union workers, for Black workers' access to positions of skilled labor.[202] By April 1942, 340 Black men and women worked at Colt's, 150 as semi-skilled machine operators.[203]

The company facilitated worker unity. The state Public Utilities Commission granted the use of school buses to facilitate the workers' commute to Colt's plant from places as far as New Hartford, twenty miles away.[204] Industrial defense required intense security, with bag and vehicle checks, passes, and patrolling. Workers had to punch their card a total of four times a day, each time they left and re-entered the factory. The company issued cash wages every Tuesday. In the 1930s the company had established a credit union that included systematic savings deductions, credit extensions, and a mutual benefit association. It encouraged workers to participate in the war bonds program. Other benefits included a hospital insurance plan and medical and first-aid facilities made available for injury or illness.[205] Both the management and the workers had already begun addressing issues of health care since the turn of the century, when employees began a tuberculosis committee to support sick workers by tracking and raising funds. Timecards from the 1930s indicated if someone suffered from yellow fever, and the company may even have hosted vaccine clinics for typhoid.[206] Bulletin boards and monthly newspapers facilitated communication between management and workers. Workers started a Colt's Union Voice

---

[202] The Federal Non-Discrimination "City Discriminates Against Colored Labor is Charge, The Hartford Courant, February 25, 1941; "NAACP Names Plants which Discriminate," *The Chicago Defender*, August 2, 1941; "Hartford Example of How Defense Plants Bar Us," *Afro-American* (March 1, 1941), 1.

[203] "Connecticut and New York Plants Hire Skilled Help," *New York-Amsterdam Star News*, May 9, 1942, 1; "Fight for Skilled Jobs in Hartford Plant Won," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 18, 1942, 12; "Unity and Militancy of Race Outstanding in '41," *The Chicago Defender*, January 10, 1942, 1; "Eastern Firms Increase Employment of Skilled Negroes; Men and Women," Cleveland Call and Post, May 16, 1942, 20. For a history of Black workers' efforts to achieve equity with White workers in access, pay, and treatment, see Robert H. Zieger, For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America Since 1865 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

[204] "School Bus Will Run to Colt's Plant: Permit Granted for War Worker Transportation from New Hartford; Others may Follow," *The Hartford Courant*, April 1, 1942, 1.

[205] Cafeteria food and price list, 1938, data sheet, pamphlet, Credit Union for employees (November 1, 1934), data sheet, pamphlet, Box 71, RG 103, CSLA.

[206] Letter, December 22, 1907, "Printed Materials," Tuberculosis Committee, 1907-1911, Box 77, CSLA; J. H. Brian, MD, Vaccine Card, Typhoid, "Publication File," Box 71, RG 103, CSLA.

newsletter in 1942 to share information and resources. A newsletter curiously named The Coltsman at a time of record female employment included policy announcements, articles on production, scrap recycling and collection, absences, visitors, events, fundraisers, and war bond savings, along with poetry, letters, and news from in and outside the factory.[207]

Conclusion

Samuel Colt did not produce his revolvers by himself; hundreds of hands created each firearm, rifle, revolver, and pistol. He knew that to run a tightly regimented factory operated by focused and loyal labor, work needed to become integral to his employees' lives. With tedious, repetitive tasks, long hours, and short breaks, industrial work created a significant shift in a laborer's psyche, family, and spiritual life. Upon Colt's early death, the company continued to cultivate a community through various benefits and activities, but eventually such activities fell away, especially after Elizabeth Colt sold her company shares. By then workers had moved away from the South Meadow, many into Hartford neighborhoods and some beyond the city. As the company embraced a more corporate model with an eye on the social, economic, and martial demands of the twentieth century, the workers at Colt's found strength and independence in the growing power of their own industrial labor class.

[207] *The Coltsman*, Boxes 70, 71, RG 103, CSLA.

IX. The Home:

Armsmear; James B. Colt House; Church of the Good Shepherd; Caldwell Hart Colt Memorial Parish House



Figure 9.1 Armsmear, the Home of Mrs. Colt, Wethersfield Avenue, 1899, Samuel Taylor Collection.

Samuel and Elizabeth Colt lived in a place very distant from the conflicts in the western territories and the American Civil War, but from their home high on the hill, west of the lowland South Meadow, they could see their factory producing guns for military conflict. The Colts named their 20,000-square-foot house Armsmear, for a "Meadow of Arms." With their luxurious home and a manicured and designed estate located close to the armory and worker housing, Coltsville served as a transitional industrial space: a company town, but one adjacent to a city. Sam Colt had established Coltsville on the model of an industrial village, where owner, management, and workers, while living in very different and separate quarters, shared spaces and social activities. The Colts' home reflected the traditional model of the "Big House," where the company manager or plantation owner at iron furnaces, textile villages, and cotton plantations lived during the years of the early republic. Armsmear also reflected an early example of industrial-era wealth and privilege, during which those making the most money built extravagant mansions and manicured estates on the model of European palaces, far from the factories that provided their wealth. (See 9.1).



Figure 9. 2 Mrs. Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt and Caldwell Colt. Photograph with Elizabeth in mourning clothes, State Museum, Connecticut State Library, c. 1864-1865; Charles Loring Elliott, American 1812-1868 1865, Mrs. Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt and Son Caldwell, 1865, Oil on canvas, 84 x 66 in. (213.4 x 167.6 cm); Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection, 1905.9. The toy cannon in the bottom right corner may be in memory of the boy's father, Samuel Colt.

The 1850s held tremendous promise for Samuel and Elizabeth Colt until the early deaths of all but one of their children and, in 1862, of Sam himself. The tragedies prevented Elizabeth from serving as a traditional wife and mother. She instead poured her energies into mothering her only surviving child, Caldwell Hart Colt, and into securing Sam's and the Colt family's legacy in the memory of Connecticut's capitol city through public service and charitable activity. (See 9.2). To accomplish these goals, Elizabeth had to maintain her social and economic status and the Episcopalian values of her upper-class Victorian upbringing. Elizabeth and Caldwell were the main beneficiaries of Sam's estate. A woman with deep religious convictions who experienced great personal loss, Elizabeth held controlling interest in a highly successful company devoted to manufacturing tools used to kill people. She reconciled these sides of her life by investing in art, philanthropy, and her faith.

There is scant evidence that Elizabeth involved herself in the factory's daily operations, although a small mention in one regional newspaper article observed that in 1873, she inspected the factory twice a week "to make sure that matters go off right."[1] Elizabeth appointed only managers whom she trusted, either family members or at least those who shared her religious faith, to ensure enough dividends to maintain her lifestyle among an upper class that was growing more wealthy and powerful. She used that wealth and power to become one of the most prominent nineteenth-century patrons of the arts, working with notable painters Frederic Church

[1] "Mrs. Colt inspects her revolver foundry twice a week to make sure that matters go off right," in Miscellaneous Intelligence (Friday, December 26), *Troy Weekly Times* (Troy, New York), January 3, 1874, NYS Historic Newspapers, Empire State Library Network, https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/.

and Albert Bierstadt and architect Edward Tuckerman Potter. She carefully curated her city as an art collector and benefactor, and she similarly crafted Sam's memory, that of her children, and her own image as a widow and mother.

In 1904, just one year before Elizabeth Colt's death, the famous husband of her close friend Olivia Clemens cynically coined the phrase "The Gilded Age" to satirize the extreme changes in post-Civil War America, including the accumulation of wealth. Samuel Clemens's own chosen hometown of Hartford prospered during this period. And one can surmise that the furnishings and opulence of the Colt's mansion, Armsmear, at least partially inspired this "gilded" title.[2] The distinctive onion dome that crowned the palatial factory carried over to the elaborate Armsmear mansion and grounds, while not as grand in scale, rivaled the country estates in Newport, Rhode Island. Samuel Clemens, a renowned humorist who wrote under the pseudonym Mark Twain, never met Samuel Colt, having moved to the city after his death, but he befriended Elizabeth. They socialized together with other prominent Hartford families of wealth and reform, including his neighbors the Stowes and the Beechers, the Morgans, the Popes, and the Days.

Even before he moved to Hartford, however, Clemens expressed admiration for what the Colts had done for the city. In an 1868 letter to the *Alta California*, a San Francisco newspaper, he boasted about the beauty of Hartford and, after mentioning Sharps and the silk factory, referred to "…the greatest, the Colt's revolver manufactory…a Hartford institution."[3] Having seen many of Colt's six-shooters from his time in Nevada and California, he was excited to visit their "birthplace." However, he found the Gatling gun, which the company was developing at the time of his visit, most impressive. The weapon appeared in several of Twain's writings, but by 1874 the author expressed a more cynical view.[4] In a speech to the insurance industry in October, he slyly remarked,

> a city whose fame as an insurance center has extended to all lands and given us the name of being a quadruple band of brothers working sweetly hand in hand--the *Colt's Arms* Company making the destruction of our race easy and convenient, our life insurance citizens paying for the victims when they pass away, Mr. Batterson perpetuating their memory with his stately monuments, and our fire insurance companies taking care of their hereafter.[5]

---

[2] Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* (United Kingdom: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1904).

[3] Billy S. Garvie, "Twain Liked City on Visit in '68," *Hartford Times*, 1932.

[4] Mark Twain, "Mark Twain on His Travels," *Alta California*, March 3, 1868, 2-3, http://twainquotes.com/18680303.html. For more on Clemens's evolving relationship with firearms as seen through his writing, see Diana Curtis, "Two Samuels of Hartford: Clemens, Colt, and the Unification of a Disjointed Mysterious Ending," *Studies in American Fiction* 34 (1) (2006): 69–85. https://doi.org/10.1353/saf.2006.0013. Also see Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), where the main character was a superintendent at the Colt factory.

[5] Samuel Clemens, "Speech on Accident Insurance," October 12, 1874, in Mark Twain, *The Writings of Mark Twain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1917), 301.

What reads like a humorous, cynical statement to readers today was more of a dark joke in its day, especially if Elizabeth Colt was in the room. She had just rebuilt her deceased husband's firearms factory less than a decade earlier to sustain his memory and legacy, funding the work with an insurance policy that she had secured after his death. She had also designed and funded a memorial church in his memory and that of their children. Notably, she worked closely with her friend, builder James Batterson, who not only produced and populated the elegant pedestals for statues across her estate, but he was also the founder of Traveler's Insurance Company. Elizabeth Jarvis Colt epitomized the mourning Victorian woman and modeled what it meant to be a Victorian widow after a devastating civil war, fought largely on both sides with guns manufactured at the Colt armory. With Civil War casualties estimated at 750,000, thousands of women struggled to deal with the loss of their husbands and sons, but Elizabeth Colt's family losses did not result directly from the battlefield. Widows in Victorian America, especially those who inherited great wealth, possessed opportunity and great social influence. She would always identify as "Mrs. Colt" in public, never remarried, and reportedly wore black clothing for the rest of her life. Her income from the Colt company was recorded at almost $14,000 for 1867.[6] Over the years, she spent a lot of that money on building institutions of cultural influence and memory, primarily in the city of Hartford.

Elizabeth Hart Jarvis

On October 5, 1826, William Jarvis and his wife Elizabeth Miller Hart Jarvis welcomed their first-born child, Elizabeth Hart Jarvis. William served as the prominent Episcopal Reverend of Trinity Church in Portland, Connecticut, located across the Connecticut River from Hartford and the South Meadow. Elizabeth Miller Hart descended from the earliest settlers of Hartford and Rhode Island, including Stephen Hart, one of the first settlers of Hartford and Farmington, Sir John Leverett, governor of Massachusetts, and Henry Bull, governor of Rhode Island. Her well-connected family on her mother's side accumulated wealth from land speculation and the West Indies Trade. Later generations enlisted that wealth to gain social prestige as political and military leaders and clergymen. One Hart family chronicler wrote that the family name "has given dignity to the bench and bar; it has graced the professions of medicine and surgery; it has adorned the pulpit and the stage; it has entwined its garlands of poetry with music and painting, and it has thundered its deeds of daring over the ocean wave, and among the distant islands of the sea."[7]

---

[6] "Elizabeth H. Colt," Connecticut, U.S., Excise Tax Lists, 1865-1874, Ancestry.com. Elizabeth gave donations to her father's former church in Portland, Connecticut, presented a memorial window to the church at Saybrook, Connecticut, and was responsible for the erection and decoration of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Punta Gorda, Florida. Granston, 13.

[7] George A. Jarvis, George Murray Jarvis, and William Jarvis Wetmore, *The Jarvis Family or the Descendants of the First Settlers of the Name in Massachusetts and Long Island* (Hartford: Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1879), 6.

The Jarvis family eventually settled in Middletown, Connecticut.[8] While quite comfortable and stable financially, their eldest child suffered personal loss at a young age. Out of nine children, Elizabeth was one of only four who lived past the age of thirty. During a time of profound economic change following the War of 1812, which included the expansion of transportation systems and the market revolution of the 1820s, Elizabeth attended school in Hartford, where she lived with her sister Henrietta "Hettie" Hart Jarvis and their maternal aunt, Hetty B. Hart. Aunt Hetty escorted her nieces to Boston, New York, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., where they attended the inaugural balls of two presidents, James K. Polk and Franklin Pierce.[9]

Raised amid both privilege and mourning during what historians refer to as America's "second great awakening" of religious fervor and devotion, Elizabeth's parents instilled pious beliefs that served as guidance for dealing with loss and social responsibilities.[10] Since the country's beginning, the obligations of "Republican Motherhood" tasked women with raising future citizens within the ideals of civic virtue that would support a functioning republic. In the industrial city, this obligation translated into an entirely separate sphere for women by the late eighteenth century, placing men in the external, business sphere, and confining women in the internal, domestic sphere of the home, at least for the urban middle and upper class. A young woman was expected to remain chaste, guarding her virginity until marriage.[11] Hartford's own Catharine Beecher articulated a role for women of the era by writing *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at Schoo*l" in 1841.[12] Women like Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt stretched the boundaries of the domestic sphere, but still did her best to remain inside of it.

---

[8] Henry Barnard, *Armsmear: The Home, the Arm and the Armory of Samuel Colt: A Memorial* (New York: Alvord Printer), 1866); William Hosley, *Colt: The Making of an American Legend* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 28; Colonial Dames of America, *In memoriam, Mrs. Samuel Colt (Elizabeth Hart Jarvis): October 5, 1826-August 23, 1905, President of the Connecticut Society of Colonial Dames of America, 1893-1896, Vice-President of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America, 1900-1905* (Hartford, CT, 1905), Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, Hartford, CT; hereafter cited as Colonial Dames, In Memoriam.

[9] David W. Granston III, "A Story of Sunshine and Shadow: Elizabeth H. Colt and the Crafting of the Colt Legacy in Hartford," (MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 2016), 17. Granston's thesis is the most comprehensive source examining Elizabeth's memorializing, the Armsmear furnishings, and the artwork. Granston's research papers, held by the Trustees of the Colt Bequest in Armsmear, hold detailed documentation of Elizabeth through archives and newspapers along with original furnishings, from purchase to placement in the house and their current location.

[10] Colonial Dames, *In Memoriam*, 6; David Granston III, "A Story of Sunshine and Shadow: Elizabeth H. Colt and the Crafting of the Colt Legacy in Hartford," (MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 2016), 16.

[11] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18: 3 Part 1 (1966), 174; Marlene LeGates, "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10 :1 (1976): 39, from Joshua Thiede, "The Colt of True Womanhood: Escaping the Domestic Sphere of the Nineteenth Century," HIST 501, Central Connecticut State University, 2010. Copy in Coltsville HRS files.

[12] Historians have identified gender expectations for women as the "Cult of Domesticity." As early as 1848, however, some American women began formally advocating to participate in the public sphere of politics. In July of that year, a group organized a two-day convention in Seneca Falls, New York to clarify women's role and rights. The event launched the women's suffrage movement. But not all women, particularly those possessing significant social power, adhered to the principles of such direct political participation. Nancy Hewitt, "Religion, Reform, and Radicalism in the Antebellum Era," in *A Companion to American Women's History*, Nancy A. Hewitt, ed., (Malden, NJ: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 117-131.

The Jarvis sisters attracted much attention from the Hartford society pages. One magazine in Fall 1851 compared their considerable popularity to that of Samuel Colt's guns:

> The two Misses Jarvis of Middleton, Connecticut, are much admired. Their bright eyes and pleasant faces are accomplishing more mischief than they can possibly atone for by a long life of penitence. They even effect more terrible mischief upon palpitating hearts than Colt's famous revolvers. They also receive a great deal of attention and are remarkably good dancers.[13]

The Jarvises and the Colts shared social circles in both Hartford and Newport, Rhode Island. Elizabeth, her sister Hettie, and their brother Richard spent summers in Newport, with other wealthy nineteenth-century families. While the late-nineteenth century mansions that define Newport today, such as the Vanderbilts' "The Breakers," were built later in the Gilded Age of the 1880s to the early 1900s, Newport's shoreline attracted artists, writers, scientists, educators, architects, theologians, and landscape designers in the antebellum period. Wealthy families, including many from the American South, sought to escape the heat, marking the region as a summer resort town.

Samuel Colt also visited Newport for retreats and parties and to make connections that would help him with his business. His brother Christopher, Jr. married Theodora DeWolf in Newport in 1837; she hailed from a prominent family in Bristol, Rhode Island.[14] David W. Granston III and Jim Rasenberger speculate that Elizabeth may have met Sam at the social event of the summer season, a costume ball at Newport's prestigious and glamorous Ocean House hotel in 1850. According to a printed description of the event, the two wore costumes appropriate to their personas. Twenty-four-year-old Elizabeth Hart Jarvis wore an outfit styled after "Namouna, the Enchantress." Sam Colt, twelve years her senior, wore a "Turkish uniform, of the Engineer Department."[15]

---

[13] E. Littel, "Fashionable Society in the United States," from the *Morning Chronicle*, September 23 in *Littel's Living Age* 31 (October, November, December 1851), 274.

[14] "Obituary: Mrs. Christopher Colt," *The Hartford Courant*, September 18, 1901.

[15] Art historian David Granston points out that Colt knew, respected, and trusted Elizabeth's brother John, perhaps as a business acquaintance, as early as 1849. One can speculate that John Jarvis may have arranged the meeting, but, regardless, the men were close. In 1858, only two years after marrying Elizabeth, Colt chose his brother-in-law to represent the company in Russia. He then appointed him chief engineer at the armory in 1859. Granston notes that a Turkish costume once belonging to Sam Colt is now in the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum, having been donated by Elizabeth Colt upon her death. Whether this is the same Turkish outfit is unclear, but it does not seem unlikely. Colt and John Jarvis had a very close relationship based on intense trust and mutual respect. Granston, "A Story of Sunshine and Shadow," 18; also see note 33; William Jarvis to William Jarvis, September 19, 1849, September 23, 1859, William Jarvis Letters, 1838-1889, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, hereafter cited as CMCH. Jim Rasenberger, *Revolver: Sam Colt and the Six-Shooter That Changed America* (New York: Scribner, 2020), 298-300; "Grand Fancy and Dress Ball, at the Ocean House, Newport, on Wednesday Night, September 4, 1850," *The Boston Daily Bee*, September 5, 1850. A copy of this is found in Box 17, Jarvis-Robinson Family Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT; also see Colt Family Papers, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island.

Elizabeth, unbeknownst to most, and maybe even to herself, was likely not Sam's first wife. Recall that in 1838, when he was in Europe as a young man in his twenties, he met, and by some accounts may have even married, Caroline Henshaw. If true, he seemed to regret the union, since he did not publicly acknowledge his marriage. There is not a lot known about Henshaw, but some sources imply that Caroline could not speak English well, if at all, and she lacked social status. These characteristics hardly made her a proper partner in high society or someone he could introduce to dignitaries in Washington, D.C. She gave birth to a baby, Samuel Caldwell Colt widely believed to be Sam's child in 1841, but he had already begun distancing himself from the relationship. (See chapter 3 for more details.)[16]

Sam did support Caroline and her baby Samuel after his brother John's suicide, and he acknowledged and supported the child into adulthood, referring to him as his nephew. Colt maintained very close oversight of the child into young adulthood, sending him money and gifts, constantly writing to him and monitoring his progress in school, offering advice, and expressing deep disappointment and reprimands when he heard if the boy was doing poorly or exhibiting bad habits such as cigar smoking. Sam stressed the value of the boy's education and threatened to withhold spending money. It is clear "Uncle" Sam regarded Samuel "Sammy" Caldwell Colt as an heir and expected him to be a part of the educated upper classes. What is not clear is when or how much Sam relayed information about the baby to the single and eligible Elizabeth Jarvis, the future Mrs. Colt, but the boy would visit Armsmear for extended stays, and Elizabeth seemed to have embraced him as family.[17]

Sam's marriage to Elizabeth Jarvis was appropriately and serendipitously timed. By 1856, the armory in the South Meadow was up and running. Tensions in the western territories and abroad seemed to ensure a steady supply of military contracts, and business was booming. At the age of 36, Sam Colt was living in Hartford as a single man, with, according to the 1850 census, two Black men, likely servants, named John Parker and John Rodney. The young, educated, and well-connected Elizabeth Hart Jarvis would have presented as an ideal partner for the ambitious Sam Colt. When he began courting her, she was in her mid-twenties and almost beyond the marriageable age of the time.[18] However, he was an older bachelor, and her family was connected

---

[16] Henshaw married Samuel's brother John in 1842, while he was in prison and on trial for murder. However, she was reportedly already pregnant. Samuel Caldwell Colt was born in 1843. Most historians presume this child was Sam Colt's biological son. Sam left him shares of the company in his will, and he provided a stipend until age 21. They corresponded often, Sam saw to his education, and Ellsworth Grant reports that he worked at the armory for a time. Elizabeth maintained a relationship with him as well. He got married at Armsmear, and Elizabeth gave the couple a house across the street. Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 29, 54. For other details see Harold Schecter, *Killer Colt: Murder, Disgrace, and the Making of an American Legend* (New York: Ballantine Books 2010); William Edwards, The Story of Colt's Revolver (Mechanicsville: Stackpole, 1957), 42, 180-184.

[17] Sam Colt to Samuel Caldwell Colt, Letters, 1854-1859, Museum of Connecticut History, Hartford, CT. [CSL call number Main Vault 920 T46].

[18] See Barbara Jean Beeching, "Great Expectations: Family and Community in Nineteenth Century Black Hartford," Order No. 3464378, University of Connecticut, 2010, 293 for information on John Rodney, a porter, who planned a reception for the return of the all-black Connecticut-raised Twenty-Ninth and Thirty-First regiments after the Civil War and hoped to recruit the Colt Armory Band to play. https://ccsu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/great-expectations-family-community-nineteenth/docview/883918398/se-2 ; United States Bureau of the Census; Record Group 29; Series Number: M432:

to the wealthiest family dynasties in the region through business and marriage. Such an economic station provided Sam with social and political legitimacy. The marriage proposal was thus likely as much a business decision as a personal one. It helped further legitimize his social standing, a type of "self-branding" discussed in chapter 4.

At the same time, Colt clearly caught her attention for less formal reasons. For Elizabeth Jarvis, marrying a mature, ambitious, and increasingly renowned man like Samuel Colt would bring her opportunities of travel and public philanthropy– and to do all this while serving as a dutiful wife and mother. She may have felt both impressed and intimidated by his forceful personality, confidence, and obvious ambition. In the *Armsmear* memoir she commissioned, she described her husband as a "quick, high tempered, impulsive man who distrusted all men until they were proved true." She also noted his charisma, explaining, "there was a majesty in his forbearance that fairly awed me, and I often felt rebuked by it.…More truly than any other, he filled my ideal of a noble manhood, a princely nature, and honest, true, warm-hearted man." She recalled his "unflinching courage and resolution, his perseverance, his belief in himself, and in his own power to conquer obstacles that would have deterred and conquered a spirit less strong and firm were seen and felt by all."[19] While Samuel carried a distinct public persona, she explained that,

> few, comparatively, knew him as he was at home, where the active, untiring man of business was laid all aside, and he became only the kind, thoughtful friend, the wise adviser, the loving, devoted father and husband; or that, with his gigantic strength of will, was joined a heart most kind, gentle, and affectionate to those he loved and trusted; or how, with his impulsive, passionate temperament, he yet bore wrongs that would have made the meekest unforgiving, without one word of unkindness or reproach.[20]

Hartford's Lydia Sigourney, an accomplished poet of the period and close friend to the Colt family, reassured them both about the wisdom of their match. Sigourney told Sam that he had "... won to the green-house of your life, a most precious Heart Flower, whose spirit of love can never fade." To Elizabeth, she expressed her approval of Sam as a "noble life's companion."[21]

The extravagant wedding took place as Sam's business enterprises gained momentum amid the launch of his factory complex and the acceleration of the business from conflict abroad and in the American West, especially Kansas. The wedding date of June 5, 1856 also allowed him to welcome his new bride to the South Meadow to create their home and life together. Sam threw a grand ball on the eve of the wedding at the Charter Oak Hall, where about 1,000 people stayed

---

Hartford, Connecticut; Roll: 41, 223a (Washington, DC). Also accessed through Ancestry.com.

19 Elizabeth Colt, in Henry Barnard, *Armsmear: The Home, the Arm, and the Armory of Samuel Colt. A Memorial* (New York: Alvord, printer, 1866), 375.

20 Barnard, 320, 331.

21 Lydia H. Sigourney to Colonel [Samuel] Colt, February 23, 1856. Box 5, Jarvis-Robinson Family Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Surviving letters reveal a very close friendship between Colt and Sigourney, likely due to Sigourney's having had Colt's sisters as students. Lydia H. Sigourney to "My sweet friend" [Elizabeth H. Jarvis], May 29, 1856, Box 5, Jarvis-Robinson Family Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

up most of the night as Colt's Armory Band played. *The Hartford Courant* covered the event as an occasion more for the groom than the bride, with the headline "A Gala for his Friends." The wedding day included a chartered boat ride for guests on the flag-adorned steamer the Washington Irving, which began at Van Dyke Avenue in front of the armory, likewise decked with flags, past crowds along the dike. Workers fired rifles from the armory dome. Colt himself traveled to Middletown by carriage with Navy Lieutenant Silas Bent, his best man. He was married to Elizabeth Jarvis at two o'clock in the afternoon at the Episcopal church by the bride's family Bishop Thomas Church Brownell, who had officiated her parents' nuptials. The wedding was a high society affair, with the rich, famous, and politically connected among the guests. The Jarvis home on Washington Street in Middletown hosted the extravagant reception.[22]

The couple reportedly received $25,000 in wedding presents. Elizabeth's ensemble, including jewelry and her lace dress, with its veil of orange blossoms and diamonds, was valued at $8,000. With Colt's identity and purpose intimately tied to his business, the armory and its products infiltrated the wedding aesthetic. A Colt coat of arms topped three cakes, each 3 to 4 feet high and reportedly 5 feet in circumference. Lattice work surrounded the top of the cakes, surmounted by eagles holding bridal wreaths and, according to some accounts, revolvers made of sugar. At the center of each reared a large, sugar rampant colt as a cake topper, with a pistol to his front and rear. They threw another reception in Hartford with 100 mechanics and the Armory Band.[23]

Sam Colt's blending of his private life with his business extended beyond a wedding theme. The day after the wedding he whisked his bride off by train to New York City, where they spent the night at the St. Nicholas Hotel before embarking on a European honeymoon. At the time, wealthy couples sometimes had relatives accompany them on their honeymoon; in this case Elizabeth's sister and brother joined the newlyweds, as did a linguist to translate. The Colts' six-month honeymoon doubled as a business trip for Sam.[24] Colt, his friend, former Governor Thomas Seymour (who made Sam a colonel), and Elizabeth's brother Richard W. H. Jarvis, served as attaches of the United States Legation in Russia, where they met foreign ambassadors. The highlight of the trip was the coronation of Tsar Alexander II, emperor of Russia, for which Colt and Seymour, then the American minister at St. Petersburg, had an invitation. They also toured Belgium, Holland, Austria, Bavaria, and Paris.[25]

---

[22] "The Armory Ball," June 5, 1856. Guests included Commodore Matthew Perry, commander of the Japan expedition, and lieutenants Bent and Renshaw, Hugh Rose of Charleston, South Carolina, Colonel Hazard of Enfield, and L. D. Slamm, the former purser of the U.S. Navy; Hosley, 27-29; Rock Island Auction, https://www.rockislandauction.com/detail/84/1245/colt-presentation-triple-cased-revolver-set-to-lt-silas-bent.

[23] Mabel Collins Donnelly, *The American Victorian Woman: The Myth and the Reality*, 86, 107; "Marriage of Col. Sam Colt—A Gala Day among his Friends," *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 7, 1856, Description of cake in Hosley, 30 and "A Splendid Bridal Cake," *The Sun* (June 5, 1856).

[24] Harvey Green, *The Light of The Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 27-28; Barnard, 355.

[25] Colonial Dames of America, *In Memoriam*, 7; Barnard, 356.

Armsmear

Upon their return from the months-long honeymoon abroad, the couple could not move into their new house in Hartford until their one-year anniversary (June 1857). Sam began building his home the year before the wedding, in the summer of 1855. Residents of the tree-lined, "well-graded" Wethersfield Avenue included prominent citizens like developer Colonel Solomon Porter and builder Hiram Bissell. Armsmear ultimately complemented the other stately houses on Wethersfield Avenue, but it echoed the rural estates of European gentry with its irregular floor plan, towers, and bracketed cornices. As to its design, Armsmear was a "characteristic type rather of the unique than of the unities in architecture," with its tower, domes, large halls for occasions, and several rooms for potential children and guests.[26] It mostly suggested the Italianate style, which had grown in popularity in the 1840s, most likely due to the writing, ideas, and designs of Andrew Jackson Dowling, a noted landscape gardener who featured the Italianate cottage in his popular 1842 pattern book *Cottage Residences*, which was about romantic architecture complemented by pastoral gardens.[27]

Many of the same characters who designed the factory also helped decorate Armsmear. Octavius Jordan, local to Hartford, served as Armsmear's primary architect, but engineer Henry A. G. Pomeroy and both Colts were also involved. Anchored by a five-story tower, the foundation was brownstone, likely quarried from Portland like the brownstone for the armory.[28] With construction underway, a reporter for the *Hartford Daily Courant* visited Jordan's offices to view the plans and elevations for the main Colt residence and what would become Sam's brother James B. Colt's home next door to the south. Originally plans called for this second home to mirror the main one, including its own greenhouse. As construction began, the reporter shared, "we saw, on Saturday, drawings of these structures and were more than ever struck with the reach of the Colonel's schemes." The article noted that while the gardener's cottage was the first building erected on the estate, Colt planned to see through "these ideas with the same energy and success that has hitherto characterized" his business. The same newspaper article included a description of the most ambitious plans for a private home that he knew of in the area (although the original plans presented a more symmetrical design than the final layout).[29] One critic described a "long, grand, impressive, contradicting, beautiful, strange thing….An Italianate villa in stone, massive, noble, refined, yet not carrying out any decided principle of architecture, it is like its originator, bold and unusual in its combinations," and "long and somewhat obscure pathways piled high with velvet...rich in all appliances that wealth and taste bring to bear."[30]

---

[26] Barnard, 88-89, 92.

[27] See Andrew Jackson Dowling, *Cottage Residences or, A Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and their Gardens and Grounds: adapted to North America* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842).

[28] Katherine C. Grier, "The Blending and Confusion of Expensiveness and Beauty," in Julia B. Rosenbaum and Sven Beckert, *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), ebook.

[29] "Wethersfield Avenue," *Hartford Daily Courant*, July 16, 1855.

[30] Phillip M. Johnson, "Dialogues between Designer and Client: Furnishings Proposed by Leon Marcotte to Samuel Colt in the 1850s," *Winterthur Portfolio* 19: 4 (Winter 1984): 257.

The chosen Italianate style of cream stucco and painted woodwork offered elements typical of wealthy Victorian-era homes, yet it included unique symbols, elements, and details both inside and out, notably the glass onion domes that echoed the armory and the interior furnishings with details of firearm motifs. Over each door was the Colt coat of arms and a large "C" etched in a plaque at each corner. Newlyweds Sam and Elizabeth Colt incorporated an equine figure, a colt, or the "C" into some of the furnishings. Running and rampant colts personalized much of the silver and housewares.[31]

Armsmear reflected the international travels of Colonel Colt and his business deals. Even after the Colts moved in, workmen remained active at the mansion. The main house, with its signature towers, stretched fifty-two feet along the street side. Writer and Colt historian William Hosley points out that the final design boasted Sam's significant achievements. A conservatory on the south side extended across the back of the house and around the southeast corner. The structure resembled London's Crystal Palace, the site of the exhibit that initially gave Colt's firearms international recognition. The glass onion domes that crowned it echoed the blue onion dome atop the factory down the hill, reminding people of his business and personal relationships with the global royalty, including the Russian czar and the Ottoman Empire's sultan. The oriental onion domes and curves contrasted with the blocky Italianate tower, but this was likely part of the ongoing construction in the years after the Colts moved in. While still maintaining a feeling of comfort and repose found in the estates of Europe, the domes, pinnacles, and other ornamentation embraced orientalism. The only other house of more orientalist design in the region was P. T. Barnum's Iranistan in Bridgeport, built in 1848 (but destroyed by fire in 1857), of which Colt was most likely aware. Designers took notice of Armsmear, and in 1879, author and historian, Martha J. Lamb included it in her book, Homes of America. The international sensibility carried into tea sets, tableware, clothing, and furnishings.[32]

While on board ship during his honeymoon, Sam Colt ordered most of the 1850s furnishings from Paris-based *Ringuet-LePrince and Marcotte*. As French styles became popular in America, Colt became one of Marcotte's earliest patrons. He communicated with the designer through correspondence that included sketches and floor plans, writing from the American embassy in Moscow about washstands of marble and a purchase of embroidered chair coverings in Novgorod, Russia. Sam, not Elizabeth, appeared to make most of these decisions, and he wanted everything in by December 1856. Colt also chose an earlier, less elaborate style than the Louis XVI fashion that New York and Newport clients in the 1850s preferred. He decorated the library and dining room even more conservatively, but later Elizabeth would install architect Edward Tuckerman Potter's walnut bookcases. The initial cost came to $9,566.30. Sam was more budget conscious when it came to carpets and lighting, and the couple chose three lamps, carpets, and a chandelier from Marcotte's Paris showroom. After Elizabeth changed the upholstery, chose

[31] A colt also notably appeared above the mirror in the library, customized by Edward Tuckerman Potter, and on the display case in the reception room that Elizabeth ordered in 1862, after Sam's death. Elizabeth used a running colt for her letterhead in her personal correspondence. R. L. Wilson, *Colt: An American Legend* (Memphis: Artabras, 1985).

[32] M. E. W. S. "The Homes of America VII Armsmear," 321-325; Taylor, 130-133.

curtains, and created a "Boudoir for Madame Colt" on the second floor, the price reached $11,019.30.[33]

An inventory completed after Samuel's death in 1862 offers further insight into the Colts' opulent home. The rooms reflected layouts seen in many contemporary Newport mansions, including a first-floor reception room, office, music room with a piano, drawing room, ballroom, library, dining room, billiard room, and art gallery. The first-floor art gallery featured paintings against green walls and three octagonal skylights. Like the art gallery, the billiard room featured salmon-colored walls and hardwood floors laid in various colors. The more casual smoking room in the northeast corner had easy chairs and a large sofa. At one end, a carved coat of arms crowned a cherry-paneled fireplace, accented with an oriental design of gilt paper, red mantel cloth, and curtains. The reception room, library, and ballroom featured family portraits. As was the style in many wealthy homes, the red silk upholstered chairs matched hangings of heavy silk and lace in the reception room at the end of the main hall. The drawing room featured yellow silk furniture, also with a matching tapestry. Gilded mirrors were displayed on each corner. Red upholstered shelving lined the walls and held collectibles in a large alcove.[34]

Mementos permeated the décor. A walnut "Cabinet of Memorials" displayed gifts from abroad, given by distinguished customers who helped create his early financial success. These gifts included treasures like rings and a jeweled snuff box from foreign dignitaries like the Czar Alexander II and Czar Nicholas, a snuff box of gold and diamonds from the Turkish sultan, medals and awards from countries and organizations affiliated with art and industry, a "stone of fire" from the king of Sardinia, gold and silver from two kings of Siam, jeweled star buttons from a Texas Ranger, and carvings from the Charter Oak. After the armory fire, Elizabeth also displayed charred and twisted remnants of the original armory in remembrance of this space. Of two small libraries to the right of the main entrance, one featured a large case of birds. Large double doors opened to the veranda.[35] On the lower- floor windows, transparencies of thin porcelain, or lithophanes, made by the Royal Porcelain works in Berlin, Germany, provided both privacy and decoration. These appeared white from the outside, but seen from the inside when light shone through, they resembled famous paintings and scenery. The Colts additionally commissioned two lamp screens, customized lithophanes depicting the coat of arms, the Rampant Colt, and the Charter Oak.[36]

The second floor served as the private family areas, with a maze of bedroom suites of blue, green, and red hues. Each room featured large mirrors, with richly textured canopies over the beds and windows. Mr. Colt's located his suite on the south side, while Mrs. Colt's bedroom was located on the northeastern side, her furniture upholstered in red with matching canopy and curtains. Each bedroom included a large wardrobe with the front having three large mirrors surrounded by much carving the more elaborate was in Elizabeth's room. Her frescoed ceiling

---

[33] Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 62-63; Johnson, 260.

[34] "Armsmear is Much Altered: Interior Being Cleaned to Permit of Changes," *The Hartford Courant*, May 12, 1909. See Granston and Granston files in Armsmear for more comprehensive documentation of furnishings.

[35] "Armsmear is Much Altered."

[36] Hosley, 142. Germany invented lithophanes in 1827.

also featured a rounded cornice. The blue and brown sitting room featured an alcove with seating for eight, along with a portrait of Sam Colt. The library held more than 500 books on a variety of subjects important to Sam: mythology, architecture, chemistry, military science, American and English literature, European travel, history, the firearms industry, and Colt himself. The third floor housed four rooms for servants and two double flights of stairs. In the southwest tower, which one could only reach from the third floor, hung four landscapes recording contemporary Hartford in 1855 on boards set in the walls, commissioned from Massachusetts landscape painter Joseph Ropes.[37]

While much of the interior resembled upper-class interiors of the time, more uncommon was the way the parlor and library opened into the conservatory of Venetian glass filled with hanging baskets of flowers, which one could also view from the third floor. The six-foot plate-glass panels were set in foliated iron arches painted red, yellow, and royal purple. During parties and celebrations held at the house, visitors enjoyed the sweet fragrances of the flowers and fruit trees planted throughout the home. The foliage reportedly changed seasonally, but the conservatory served as a transitional space to the vast outdoor garden estate, with eighteen acres of ponds, orchards, and pathways. Dog statues, like those at the Uffizi palace in Florence, Italy, guarded the front entry. (See chapter 10 for more detail.)[38]

Unsurprisingly, Armsmear was, by all accounts, a thoroughly modern home with all the latest comforts, including gas lighting. The conservatory was likewise "illuminated with crystal gas fixtures, the light of which is reflected in the sparkling fountain whose spray was scattered over the most luxuriant orchids and other rare plants."[39] By May 1869 Mrs. Colt had installed a $10,000 artesian well that discharged fifty gallons a minute. The traditionally minded Elizabeth, however, allegedly maintained the original gas lighting in Armsmear even after Thomas Edison popularized electrical lighting in the 1880s. She rejected indoor electricity, as well as transportation that utilized electrical technology, even though a friend, neighbor, and relation through marriage, George Day, was an early advocate for electric cars. She preferred to use her carriage.[40]

With the grand house built in stages, construction would unfortunately not be completed in Sam Colt's lifetime. Elizabeth's father blamed the chilly drafts from the ongoing construction as the cause of the illness that led to "the Colonel's" death in January of 1862. At the time, he must have meant the 60-foot glass domed enclosed conservatory of iron and glass.[41] Armsmear eventually became much more Mrs. Colt's domain than her husband's. Even before his death,

---

[37] "Armsmear is Much Altered," *The Hartford Courant*, May 12, 1909; Chicago Daily Tribune, December 20, 1879; Hosley, 143; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 29.

[38] "A Millionaire's Majority," *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, December 13, 1879; M. E. W. S. "The Homes of America VII Armsmear." *The Art Journal*, 2 (1876): 321-325.

[39] "A Millionaire's Majority" December 13, 1879; Pamela Haag, *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture* (Minneapolis: Basic Books, 2016), 35.

[40] Grant, 70-71.

[41] Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, January 9, 1862, Box 2, William Jarvis Collection, CMCH. Hereafter cited as the William Jarvis Letters.

Sam spent so much time away on business that Elizabeth likely made many of the final decisions about the décor and architecture that completed the mansion. She also redecorated several times over the years to keep up with trends of the Gilded Age. She spent her mornings in her octagonal boudoir, enjoying views of the English-inspired gardens and lawn from the veranda, with marble statuary, water features, and trees screening the factory and the industrial city. As many as thirty gardeners tended to the grounds. She could view the greenhouses to the left from her window as well. *The Art Journal* article commented "there is no winter at Armsmear: The pistol has brought down the calendar and shot frost and cold out of the year."[42]

The Colts of Armsmear

Throughout their brief marriage, Sam and Elizabeth welcomed children, friends, family, and prominent citizens of Hartford into Armsmear. While many of the upper class built stately homes, this mansion served as a hub for the paternalist industrial village community with the couple on the hill presiding over their workers on the meadow below. The proximity of their home to the workers allowed the Colts to conveniently host special events for workers' children such as the Festival of the Armory Sunday School and at least two Christmas parties. On one such occasion, the children of employees enjoyed a day of fine foods, gifts, and a thirty-foot sleigh ride such as only Samuel Colt could provide. The evening ended with "three cheers for the Colonel and his estimable lady."[43]

The newlyweds wasted little time starting their own family (seemingly conceiving on their honeymoon), but they were unable to sustain what Elizabeth likely regarded as her most important role, that of a mother. The couple was elated when Elizabeth gave birth to her first child, Samuel Jarvis Colt, on February 24, 1857. Their friend I.W. Stuart gave the child an extraordinary, one-of-a-kind, elaborately carved cradle from the original Charter Oak, with a letter explaining the tree's history and young Sammy's community obligations. The piece of art echoed the values of the early Connecticut colonists through more than its medium. The canoe shape embodied sentiments about independence and self-reliance that the baby's father Samuel promoted (not entirely fitting in his case) that men must "paddle their own canoe." The cradle also featured the family coat of arms and Rampant Colts. Inlaid in the cradle were precious stones that Colonel Colt had purchased at the Asiatic Fair in Novgorod, Russia. [44]

The summer and early fall of 1857 served an all too brief high point for the Colts, who also welcomed Sam's 15-year-old nephew, Samuel Caldwell Colt, to stay for a few months. Sam Colt seemed interested in having the "Sammys" develop a relationship with one another. Elizabeth seemed to accept the boy and maintained a relationship with him well into his adulthood. Tragically, the happy times for the family proved brief. At only ten months old, the Colts' baby died on Christmas eve. His distraught father blamed the illness on the chills of February contrasted with the overheated rooms in the house.[45] Elizabeth's father, Reverend William Jarvis,

---

[42] M. E. W. S. "The Homes of America VII Armsmear," 323.
[43] Hosley, 121; *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 5, 1860.
[44] Barnard, 32, 131.
[45] Rasenberger, 350; Barnard, 356-357; Samuel Colt to Wappenhans, May 22, 1857, as quoted in Edwards, 339, and

described the moments before the child's death in a letter to his nephew: "…he then looked at his mother and tried to tell her the visions of glory, which had been displayed to him. This was repeated three times; and then he clasped his mother's finger until he died." Reverend Jarvis's belief that it was "god's will" and "right and designed for our spiritual good" indicates that the family relied heavily on faith to cope with the child's death.[46] "Dear friend" Lydia Huntley Sigourney offered comfort in a poem. Her poems would record births and deaths for the Colt family over the next few years.[47]

While death was sadly commonplace in the nineteenth century, even outside of war, the passing of loved ones still devastated those left behind. Childbearing often threatened women's lives, and child mortality was not particularly unusual during this time, with the number of babies not surviving their first year of life hovering around thirty-five percent. Wealth and prestige did not seem to deter infant deaths or childhood disease or ensure long life. Sadly, most of the Colts' children contributed to the high infant and child mortality rates of the early industrial era. It was not until the 1850s that reformers even began to address these issues as a social problem, especially in cities where the population rose faster than sanitary infrastructure and public health awareness.[48]

Still hopeful, Elizabeth again became pregnant and gave birth to another baby boy less than a year later, on November 24, 1858. The couple named him after their mothers: Caldwell Hart Colt. Frustratingly, the new father, Sam Colt, began to suffer his own poor health at this time, sometimes experiencing bouts of either gout or rheumatoid arthritis, both likely aggravated by alcohol consumption. The press even reported rumors of his death after he suffered from a particularly serious episode while attending a state fair.[49] Observing that "Sam's health does not improve very fast," father-in-law William Jarvis blamed his son-in-law's relentless work ethic. He speculated that it was "in consequence of over-tasking his brain while he is so feeble. He will know all the details of his immense business from day to day and give minute directions in regard to it. The orders for arms are so numerous, that his men work til midnight; and the more letters and orders there are, the more time and thought he will expend in attending to them."[50]

Sam managed to recover, and he and Elizabeth continued to expand their family, welcoming a baby girl, Elizabeth 'Lizzie" Jarvis Colt, whom Sam reportedly adored. After Lizzie's birth on February 22, 1860, "a bright pleasant summer," followed, but Elizabeth lamented that it was "too full of happiness to last… followed by the saddest autumn." The little girl died of cholera after only a few months of life, in October 1860. Sam was too ill himself to attend his own daughter's

Samuel Colt to Wappenhans, May 22, 1857, October 24, 1857 as described in Rasenberger, 350.

46 Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, Jr., December 30, 1857, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

47 Barnard, 312, 332.

48 Green, 166; see Richard A. Meckel, *"Save the Babies:" American Public Health Reform and the Prevention of Infant Mortality*, 1850-1929 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

49 J. D. Alden, *The Hartford Courant*, November 15, 1858; "Elizabeth Jarvis Colt," File, Cedar Hill Cemetery, Granston files, Armsmear, Hartford, CT.

50 J. D. Alden, Letter, clipping, November 15, 1858 in Box 17, JRP; Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, December 4, 1860, Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

funeral. Elizabeth believed that the loss of Lizzie "struck a death-blow at the life springs of her father." Sam retreated to his room to grieve for weeks.[51]

The Death of a Husband and Father

Despite being plagued with pain, Sam worked tirelessly to increase production at the factory on the eve of the Civil War. His wife continued to bear witness to his deteriorating health as he dealt with their shared family tragedies, the drawn-out completion of their Armsmear mansion, heightened political tensions that threatened civil war as the nation acquired western territories, and the expansion of the factory to meet a growing demand for firearms to address the military conflicts. Happily, in May1861, the Colts welcomed another baby girl, Henrietta Selden. But, just as Elizabeth's new infant daughter brought joy into the family, the shock of Samuel Colt's own death at age 47 came within the year. The day before Sam died, Elizabeth's father reported that he was suffering from "inflammatory rheumatism," an acute inflammation of several joints simultaneously with rheumatic fever.[52]

When Samuel Colt died on January 10, 1862, the *Hartford Daily Courant* reported the cause as stemming from yet another attack of gout. As he was recovering, a slight cold triggered a relapse and likely an infection.[53] While neither gout nor rheumatism (arthritis) causes death, the conditions can both lead to complications, including heart and kidney issues, problems in the digestive tract, and infection. In her memoir of her husband, Elizabeth noted Sam's recurring battles with illness. [54]She described one of her last conversations with him "[He] told me many things that seem to have been said for my guidance in the dark soon coming.…" He instructed her to "carry out all his plans so far as [she] might."[55]

Elizabeth held Samuel Colt's funeral service at Armsmear. People began to gather along Wethersfield and Main streets and on the grounds two hours before the 3pm start time. Only a few could be admitted. For more than an hour, 1,500 workers marched as the Armory Band played dirges, filing two-by-two through the gates through the north wing and parlor to view the body, exiting out the southern end. Colt's Twelfth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers and the Putnam Phalanx, the Connecticut General Assembly's Honor Guard, followed and issued a resolution crediting Colt with the city's "prosperity and glory."[56] A few days later Mrs. Colt received another letter from friend and poet Lydia Sigourney, who once again must have brought her some solace with a tribute poem to Sam, as she had for his children, Sammy and Lizzie. Sigourney wrote, "I never saw so imposing a funeral, where there was such deep sorrow on

---

[51] Barnard, 315-317. Historians suspect that Sam Colt may have had at least two more children outside of his marriage with Elizabeth. One, Samuel Caldwell Colt, publicly identified as his nephew. Rasenberger, 303-304; 346-347, 349-350.

[52] At the time the public seemed to use the term "rheumatism" interchangeably with "gout." Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, Jr., January 9, 1862, January 10, 1862, January 12, 1862, Box 2, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

[53] "Death of Col. Colt," *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 11, 1862.

[54] Elizabeth Colt, "Memoir," in Barnard, 317-23.

[55] Colt, "Memoirs," 1866, 322-3.

[56] "Obituary 1—No Title," *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 13, 1862.

the face of every attendant…I am rejoiced that you are surrounded by so many kind friends to comfort you in the loss of one of the most affectionate hearts ever vouchsafed to man, and whose love for you was so confiding and perfect."[57]

Tragically, the Colts' sickly baby daughter Henrietta Selden died of diphtheria only six days after her father's funeral.[58] Elizabeth was pregnant again at the time of these dual tragedies, and the grief took a devastating toll on her mind and body. She fell ill on June 10, and in July the mourning mother and widow delivered a stillborn baby.[59] Elizabeth's father praised his daughter's resilience in the face of multiple tragedies. He wrote to his nephew, "Happy to say that she bears her love and appointment with wonderful patience and resignation."[60]

The Colts' marriage had lasted less than six years, but Elizabeth never remarried. Rather, she spent the rest of her life delivering on Sam's deathbed request to continue his work, fulfilling her role as Mrs. Samuel Colt and embracing the values and ideals of domesticity and Victorian womanhood. She identified her occupation as "keep house" on the 1870 census.[61] Elizabeth mourned through art, commissioning portraits of her deceased children from Matthew Wilson, and she poured her affections into her only surviving child, Caldwell. Her losses also meant she had to assume even more responsibilities than befit the role of wife and mother that she was raised to become. As Sam Colt's young widow, she inherited more than two thirds of Colt's entire estate, worth more than two million dollars, including 29 parcels of land with 24 houses and outhouses, the still unfinished mansion, estate grounds, outbuildings, and a controlling interest in the Colt's Patent Manufacturing Company, with 1500 shares of capital stock in the Colt Patent Fire Arms Company ($200 million by today's standards).[62] To the children, of whom only Caldwell remained, Sam left land upon which stood the workers' housing and 716 shares in company stock. He also left a good deal to his "nephew," Samuel C. Colt, who inherited the Charter Oak Block, $200 for support and education until he reached 21 years old, $5000, and 500 shares of the company after he turned 21. The will included codicils regarding relatives Luther P. Sargent and Elisha Colt, as well as Sam's brothers, Christopher and James, and their children. Lawsuits brought by those nieces and nephews adjusted their original inheritances, with Elizabeth successful in clawing back James's inheritance but not Christopher's.[63]

---

[57] Lydia Sigourney, letter to Elizabeth Colt, January 15, 1862, in Barnard, 325.

[58] "Henrietta Selden Colt," File, Cedar Hill Cemetery, Granston files, Armsmear, Hartford, CT.

[59] Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, June 9, 10, 17, 1862, William Jarvis letters, CMCH; Barnard, 320-325.

[60] Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, Jr., July 29, 1862, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

[61] United States Bureau of the Census (1870) "Elizabeth Colt," Hartford Ward 4, Hartford, Connecticut; Roll: M593_101, p. 665A, accessed through Ancestry.com.

[62] Hosley, 10; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 29, 224; "Will of Samuel Colt," clipping, Hart Family Papers.

[63] "Will of Samuel Colt," Box 17, Hart-Jarvis Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Also see Colt Family Papers at the University of Rhode Island; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, Appendix III, 225.

James B. Colt

Sam had originally generously provided for his brother James Colt and his family in his will, leaving him 500 shares and the same to his children to provide for their education and then "absolutely" once they turned 21. James, who Sam recruited him to help run the London factory, only lived in the Coltsville house his brother built for him for a few years when he worked in various roles in the company. Before that, James had enjoyed considerable professional success and lived in several places around the country, working in retail and accounting, and he tried unsuccessfully to join the navy. He then studied law and was appointed as a judge in St. Louis, where he married Mary Wilson, with whom he had six children. Prone to depression, James grew increasingly unstable and erratic. His brother Sam Colt frequently aided him financially and brought him into the firearm business. However, historian Barbara Tucker notes that James flipped between praising his brother when requesting loans to threatening litigation. Jim Rasenberger speculates on a rocky relationship between the brothers, perhaps exacerbated by James's mental instability and the dependent status that he felt his brother Sam had manipulated him into.[64]

James's family, especially his father Christopher, fretted over his "idleness," writing in a letter that "he has long been idle or reading books that has given him a desire to be a politician or a lawyer or something that is to make a great man of himself that I fear it will soon be too late for him to make himself useful in any way."[65] Working together placed heavy strains on the brothers. James believed Sam owed him a lot more of the profits from his work in London, noting, "it is true I thought you meant something when you talked a hundred times of you having done nothing for your own family yet…God forgive you for the past."[66] James sued his brother for $750,000, and after demanding certain conditions and with some initial resistance, returned to the armory business. By 1856 he moved into a house his brother built, where he lived until 1860 before moving down the road to 10 Buckingham Street with his wife and three of the children, and eventually to 4 Winthrop Street after 1872.[67]

Located at 154 Wethersfield Avenue (formerly 50 Wethersfield Avenue), south from Armsmear, James's house was essentially an abridged version of the mansion next door, as planned, but without a greenhouse. The three-story domicile boasted the same brownstone foundation, tower, stucco-covered brick, and cream-colored paint with brown trim. The interior featured similar fine woodwork.[68] The James B. Colt house is significant because, as a smaller version of Armsmear, it was clearly meant to house James for longer than it did. The house represents Sam's

---

[64] Barbara Tucker and Kenneth Tucker, *Industrializing Antebellum America: The Rise of Manufacturing Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 14, 16-17, 28-34; Rasenberger, 308, 322, 329-330, 335. Rasenberger comments that James's behavior, from depressed to erratic, seemed consistent with bipolar disorder.

[65] As quoted in Tucker and Tucker, 34.

[66] Tucker and Tucker, *Industrializing Antebellum America*, 35.

[67] Tucker and Tucker, *Industrializing Antebellum America*, 36; editorial, *Hartford Daily Courant*, November 1, 1856.

[68] Clark J. Strickland, "Colt, James B. House," National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Hartford, CT: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1975. 75001926_text (nps.gov); Rasenberger, 335, 338-339.

complicated relationships with his brothers. When Sam wrote James out of his final will after a fight, first James, and then his children, brought legal action against Elizabeth, accusing her of manipulating Sam on his deathbed and even of hastening his death.[69] Sam's nephews, James B. Colt and Norman B. Colt accused "Elizabeth of unduly influencing Sam to take them out of the will because she hated them and prevented reconciliation and that she hastened his death with overdose of medicine."[70] In the meantime, Sam had sold the house he built for James when the two had what must have been quite a falling out, but in the summer of 1865, Elizabeth bought it back for $32,500, well above the market price, as part of a bidding war with James. Her father William Jarvis described Sam's "ungrateful" relatives in his letters and stated that Elizabeth "would have soon have had a wild Indian for a neighbor."[71] Lucky for her, Elizabeth had her own family, and she kept them close. Recall the Jarvis family had lost four of nine children, and, not surprisingly, the remaining adult siblings, especially, John, Richard, Elizabeth, and Hettie remained quite close. The Jarvis family, more than the Colts, assumed Sam's legacy.

Mrs. Samuel Colt

When she became the wealthiest woman in the country and in control of a primary source of arms for a nation embroiled in the Civil War, Elizabeth had to navigate a life she never imagined for herself. In her grief, she needed the company of her first family. Her siblings Richard and Hattie Jarvis were already part of the Armsmear household, brought there to provide emotional support (possibly to keep loneliness at bay, with all of Sam's travel), as was niece Isabelle Jarvis. By Fall of 1862 Elizabeth's parents moved in and lived at Armsmear, where they stayed until at least 1870, with brother Richard and mother Elizabeth Jarvis still living there in 1880 after William passed away. Sister Hettie presumably lived in Armsmear until her marriage in 1867.[72]

---

[69] Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, Jr., Feb 4,1862, William Jarvis Letters.

[70] The legal dispute involved five hundred shares of Colt stock, which were endowed to James in the first draft of Samuel's will and then revoked when the will was revised to include Caldwell. James Colt had claimed that the provision in the first draft did not affect the part of the "undevised stock, which he took under the residuary clauses." He settled with the trustees for $100,000 and collected dividends until his death in 1878. "The Decision Affirmed: A Final Settlement of the Case of Le Baron B. Colt et al. v. Elizabeth H. Colt et al.," *Hartford Daily Courant*, May 7, 1884; "Contest Over Colt Will," *Ann Arbor Democrat*, May 28, 1897; from the New Haven Register, published as the New Haven Evening Register, July 29, 1881, 4.

[71] Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, July 3, 1865. Brother Christopher Colt's children also challenged the will. In LeBaron B. Colt, et al. vs. Elizabeth H. Colt, et al., the Bristol Colts (Theodora, LeBaron, and Samuel) sued Elizabeth, seeking to alter the terms of Samuel Colt's will to their benefit. After a protracted case, the courts ruled in favor of the Bristol Colts. The final settlement was signed in 1878, just seven days before the six years of the statute of limitations would have run. As a result of the decision, each of the Bristol Colts was awarded a substantial number of shares of stock in the Colt Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company. The case is documented in several printed court documents including petitions, briefs, and transcripts of trial testimony. For the breakdown of shares of Colt's Patent Manufacturing Company, per Samuel Colt's will, see "City Intelligence: The Colt Case Will Decision of the Supreme Court--Judge Colt Liberally Provided for," *Hartford Daily Courant*, May 8, 1866; "The Decision Affirmed: A Final Settlement Of The Case Of LeBaron B. Colt Et Al., V. Elizabeth H. Colt Et Al.," *Hartford Daily Courant*, May 7, 1884; "Mrs. Colt Sued," *The Hartford Courant*, May 25, 1897.

[72] United States Bureau of the Census, RG 29 (1870) "Elizabeth Colt," M593_101, Hartford Ward 4, Hartford, Connecticut, 665A, (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Management).; United States Bureau of the Census, RG 29 (1860) "Elizabeth Colt," M653, Hartford Ward 4, Hartford, Connecticut, p. 309, accessed through Ancestry.com; Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, October 1, 1862, William Jarvis Letters,

After she bought back the James Colt House, Mrs. Colt offered it to factory manager William Buell Franklin from 1865 to 1888 and in 1895 to Hettie's niece, activist and suffragist Katherine Beach Day, to live in with her husband, entrepreneur George Day.[73]

When the original armory burned down on February 5, 1864, Elizabeth viewed the fire from a distance. She endured "it with the same calmness as she does all of her trials," but "when the beautiful dome fell," her sister Hettie B. Hart wrote to William Jarvis, "it hung in the air for some time, and with its glittering stars…it was like a huge balloon…and finally it fell with a crash… [Elizabeth] burst into tears."[74] Sam had left his armory uninsured, but Elizabeth, as discussed in chapter 6, nonetheless committed immediately to rebuilding the Colt factory. Rebuilding the original factory maintained her inheritance and ensured financial security for the remainder of her life, but it also solidified Sam's legacy and the world he had built. The reconstructed armory served as a giant memorial to her husband's life's work.

As the heiress to an incredible fortune and growing enterprise, a woman in Elizabeth's position might typically maintain some economic activity, but historian Wendy Gamber notes that even businesswomen had to cultivate relationships that fit into culturally accepted gender roles.[75] Elizabeth's influence on the day-to-day operations of the factory and company business is unclear, but she clearly spent most of her time on activities related to her own interests, largely within the realm of art and social issues. As Joshua Thiede observes, "Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt embraced the Cult of Domesticity for the entirety of her life, and with the death of her husband and the advent of the Civil War, she utilized those virtues to reach well beyond the constraints imposed onto women by society."[76]

A Model of Postbellum Mourning and Memorial

Elizabeth's devout Episcopalian tradition would direct most of her business and philanthropic decisions, and her faith served as comfort in the face of personal loss. Of course, after the Civil War, Elizabeth Colt hardly grieved alone. The nation had lost nearly three quarters of a million lives in the Civil War, ironically one for which the Colt firearms had manufactured weapons. In *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, Drew Gilpin Faust writes about how a religious nation struggled to deal with the profound loss of life. Elizabeth's personal losses did not take place on the battlefield. Both of Elizabeth's brothers, although drafted, paid

CMCH.

[73] "Colt Historic District," National Register Nomination Form, Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut, 1975, https://hartfordpreservation.org/wp-content/uploads/Colt-Historic-District-Armsmear.pdf.

[74] H. B. Hart to William Jarvis, February 12, 1864, Jarvis Collection, CMCH.

[75] Claudia Goldin, "The Economic Status of Women in the Early Republic: Quantitative Evidence," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16, no. 3 (1986), 378; Wendy Gamber, "A Gendered Enterprise: Placing Nineteenth-Century Businesswomen in History," *The Business History Review* 72, no.2 (1998), 216. Goldin also goes into detail on the "widower" aspect of the economy and women as business owners, as well as the advancement of dressmaking technology and how this further altered the sphere of "womanhood" well into the twentieth century.

[76] Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt left very few papers and carefully curated what she did leave about herself. William Hosley, the foremost authority on the Colt legacy, notes that the "quantity of documentation on the life of Elizabeth Colt is razor thin." See Hosley, 254.

commutations to avoid service. While she did not personally lose her loved ones in the war, she helped found the Hartford chapter of the Soldiers Aid Society (originally founded in Bridgeport in 1861), and she certainly helped establish a standard of mourning after the Civil War through public and shared memorialization.[77]

As president of the Hartford Soldier's Aid Society she attended the Metropolitan Fair in New York City in 1864 to raise money for Civil War military camps.[78] At its table the Hartford Soldier's Aid Society displayed "a beautiful assortment of willow work from Mrs. Colt, including tables, book-racks, arm-chairs and a variety of children's chairs," and of course the company contributed three pairs of "beautifully mounted and valuable pistols."[79] The newspapers reported "Undiminished Attendance" and total receipts up to $605,822.13, of which the Hartford table contributed $6,500 from the sale of presentation firearms alone.[80] Significantly, the fine art exhibited elsewhere at the fair inspired the decorations in Armsmear. American landscape paintings by Frederic Church and Albert Bierstadt surrounded her booth, and Church had been her sister Hettie's neighbor in Hartford. Works by both Church and Bierstadt later became part of her collection. In 1866 she commissioned a landscape from Church, the founder of the Hudson River Valley School, likely the *Vale of St. Thomas, Jamaica*.[81]

Elizabeth's artistic sensibilities predated this event, however. She had contracted for a memorial soon after her husband's death in 1862. She canonized the legacy of her husband of only six years in an illustrated manuscript called *Armsmear: The Home, the Arm, and the Armory of Samuel Colt, a Memorial*. The book was a four-hundred-page "tribute to the inventive genius of Col. Samuel Colt, with a record of the wonderful change wrought in the Hartford South Meadow…" It included a history of Hartford, into which she could squarely place her husband's life. Elizabeth selected the illustrations and wrote some of Sam's biography for it, but asked close family friend Henry Barnard, renowned for his work in public education and as a director of the Connecticut Historical Society, to write the book. For her husband, she felt Barnard could show the "phases of his mind and heart of which the world knows little or nothing. His unflinching courage and resolution, his perseverance, his belief in himself, and in his own power to conquer obstacles that would have deterred and conquered a spirit less strong and firm, were seen and felt by all."[82] Published in 1866, just four years after Sam's death, the work provides tremendous

---

[77] See Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008). In this thesis, "A Story of Sunshine and Shadow," David W. Granston III cites a letter in which Elizabeth Colt urges her nephew to obtain a substitute in order to avoid going to war, writing, "Both my brothers have sent substitutes, + I hope you will do the same." Aunt Lizzie [Elizabeth Colt] to "My dear Sam" [Samuel C. Colt], August 9, 1863. Private collection. It is widely surmised that Samuel C. Colt was actually a child of Sam Colt's from before his marriage to Elizabeth.

[78] Hosley, *Colt*, 171.

[79] "Hartford and the Metropolitan Fair," *Hartford Daily Courant*, April 13,1864.

[80] The Hartford table also sold $1,300 worth of the Colt's items. "The Metropolitan Fair," *New York Tribune*, April l2, 1864, William Jarvis Collection, CHS; Hosley, 171.

[81] William Jarvis to William Jarvis, Jr., March 29, 1865, William Jarvis Letters. Frederic Church was also friends with Charles DeWolf Brownell, whom Samuel commissioned to paint the Charter Oak with the Colt factory in the background. (See chapter 1 for image and chapter 4.)

[82] Barnard, 375.

detail about Sam's life, both professional and personal, with rich and laudatory language. As a "tribute to his inventive genius," the book reads almost like a biblical tale of Samuel Colt, uncritically praising and embellishing his accomplishments through a compelling narrative of his life and influence.[83]

Armsmear the book set standards for American illustration and bookbinding, with bindings crafted by C. E. Matthews, the finest booksmith of his day. Mrs. Colt requested several different binding designs to be made: a velvet piece with golden colt medallion, a leather-bound edition with intricate Celtic knot designs, and others with a gold embossed Colt coat of arms. Perhaps most impressive were the two she had commissioned for her own private collection, bound with wood from the Charter Oak, one bearing the coat of arms and the other a Romanesque relief of the late Samuel Colt. With just 500 copies made, Elizabeth intended to give the books as Christmas presents for close family and friends. A copy of the book was included in the company's display at the World's Fair in Paris in 1867.[84]

In February of that year, both the *Hartford Daily Courant* and the New York Gazette reviewed the book, noting that it was intended for private circulation only and affirmed that no copies would be available for the public. However, Elizabeth's father believed she would need to eventually order more copies in response to multiple library requests.[85] Reverend Jarvis described the book to his nephew as "the most splendid book that you ever saw, or that ever was printed in this country, as is universally acknowledged." Elizabeth clearly favored this form of bibliographic memory. In 1881 she also honored her mother with a ninety-page memorial biography. The Reverend Samuel Hart, a relative, authored an illustrated memorial tribute to her son Caldwell after his 1894 death. In 1898 she similarly commissioned a book for her cousin.[86]

Elizabeth Colt seemed to perpetually live with and within her memories, cherishing mementos, creating images, and crafting memorials to maintain a physical connection to her family. While the reconstruction of the factory ensured Sam's economic and technological legacy, Elizabeth continuously turned to art to process her grief and build her own legacy. A year after her husband's death she reached out to Hartford artist friend, and founder of the Hudson River Valley school of painters, Frederic Church to contact Charles Loring Elliot, a famous American portrait painter from New York City. She commissioned Loring to create a portrait of Colt to hang in Armsmear. Elliot incorporated photos and mementos supplied by Elizabeth to create the portrait, which features Colt with his certificate of membership in the London Institute of Civil Engineers in his hand, a gilt brass vase from the King of Siam, a display case filled with revolvers, and

---

[83] Thank you to Julia Baldini for research and her description of the book in a Fall 2016 paper on Elizabeth Colt.

[84] Barnard, 193-194; Reverend William Jarvis Letters to William Jarvis, February 21, 1867, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

[85] Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, February 21, 1867, March 8, 1867, and March 12, 1867, in William Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

[86] A Memorial of Samuel Colt and Caldwell Hart Colt, D. B. Updike, Six Beacon Street, Boston A. D. MDCCCXCIIII; Hart, Samuel. A Memorial of Mrs. Elizabeth Miller Jarvis, Widow of the Rev. William Jarvis, at Rest, June 18, 1881: To which are Added Other Family Memorials (United States: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, Printers, 1881), Henry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

a view out the window of his armory. Perhaps not coincidentally, the full-length image was in the tradition of Gilbert Stuart's 1796 portrait of George Washington. Elizabeth was clearly happy with his work and commissioned another of her and their only surviving son, Caldwell. In that depiction, Elizabeth caresses a prayerbook as she sits on the sofa designed by the French designer Leon Marcotte. Caldwell leans against her, holding a string to a toy cannon. Both portraits likely cost her about $7,000 and served as the foundational pieces for the art gallery in Armsmear, displayed in the ballroom, forever preserving her family in the space. Both now hang in Wadsworth Atheneum.[87]

Hartford Society of Decorative Art

Armsmear itself became a testament to Elizabeth Colt's art patronage, when, from 1866 to 1868, Elizabeth established an elaborate private gallery. The collection was an assortment of family portraits alongside the emerging post-war genre of American landscapes, ala artist Bierstadt, expressing "manifest destiny," a concept so often associated with Colt firearms.[88] With the art gallery, Elizabeth Colt can in many ways be compared to her contemporary Isabella Stewart Gardner in Boston. As some of America's first female art collectors, both women used art within the context and juxtaposition of the furnishings and other decorative arts to make their homes a direct reflection of their personal artistic expression, independence, and sensibility. Elizabeth collected not only European and American painting, but hundreds of "ceramics, glass, and cloisonne, coins, icons, and other *objet d'art*."[89]

Elizabeth Colt viewed the art that she commissioned and the objects she collected as expressions of her personal identity. Eventually, other women with similar interests found her. In the spring of 1877, *The Hartford Courant* announced the formation of the Decorative Arts Society in New York. The article explained the society's goals "to establish a place for the exhibition and sale of…decorative work of any description done by women…to encourage profitable industries among women, by furnishing instruction in art…"[90] One of the founders was Candace Wheeler, known as the mother of American interior design, and she looked to establish auxiliary branches in major cities. The city of Hartford served as a natural satellite for fine furnishings decor.[91] Buyers wanted even functional pieces like pottery, porcelain, wallpaper, and fans to be beautifully decorated.[92]

---

87 As quoted in Baldini, 9; *Hartford Daily Courant*, February 24, 1862; renowned Hartford portraitist Charles Flagg produced numerous copies of Elizabeth's loved ones. For a more comprehensive account, see Granston. "Sunshine and Shadow."

88 Dianne Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture 1800-1940* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2008), 40-41; Houze, Arms, 242. Macleod identifies Eliza Jumel as the first woman collector.

89 Macleod, 17, 39.

90 "Decorative Art," *The Hartford Courant*, May 29, 1877.

91 Amelia Peck, "Candace Wheeler (1827-1923)," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cawh/hd_cawh.htm.

92 Nina Gray, "Leon Marcotte: Cabinetmaker and Interior Decorator," Chipstone Foundation, 1994, https://www.chipstone.org/article.php/28/American-Furniture-1994/Leon-Marcotte:-Cabinetmaker-and-Interior-Decorator; Samuel L. Clemens to William B. Franklin, Correspondence Card, May 12, 1877, Hartford, Connecticut, in *Mark*

In January 1878 the Hartford branch of the Decorative Arts Society opened a studio on the fourth floor of the Cheney Building downtown. The city's most elite women had joined Elizabeth Colt (who served on the advisory committee) in 1871 to found the Decorative Arts Society of Hartford, whose original members included Colt, Olivia L. Clemens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan L. Warner, Lucy Perkins, Harriet Ward Hawley, Mary A. Goodwin, Anna L. Franklin, Mary Cheney, and Ednah Dow Cheney.[93] Warner's husband, author Charles Dudley Warner, provided lectures on topics like Egyptian art.[94] The group generally promoted art education for women in the city, sponsoring numerous affordable classes and lectures featuring popular artists and holding public sales of students' art. They hired a female artist from Boston, Miss I. C. Taylor, to teach, and encouraged men, women, and children to enroll. Less than a month later, the more than seventy students soon necessitated a second instructor. Several more teachers focused on specific subjects like needlework, watercolor painting, and charcoal sketching.[95] Elizabeth had "taken advantage of the cultural space vacated by men during the Civil War" in becoming one of America's most renowned female art collectors. Postbellum art enthusiasts now focused on the home, specifically the decorative arts. Women were at the forefront of the decorative arts movement, with men often dismissing the pieces as overly ornamental, even though they maintained a functional purpose as well as an aesthetic one."[96] Elizabeth stayed on the society's advisory committee for several years. Many women found means of financial support through art production.[97]

In her will Elizabeth left the Wadsworth Atheneum fifty thousand dollars to build a wing for her collection, along with over one thousand pieces of art, collections from the Colts' travels around the world, and guns, including the first prototype revolver Samuel returned from sea with in 1831. The gift included paintings, sculpture, and "all of her bronzes, statuary, curios, medals, articles of *viru, bric-a-brac*; arms; armor and equipment, together with the cases in which they are or may be displayed." The Elizabeth Colt Memorial Wing at the Wadsworth Atheneum opened its doors in 1910, featuring "The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection" in the Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Gallery, the first art museum wing in America to bear the name of a female patron.[98]

Twain's Letters, 1876-80, Michael B. Frank and Harriet Elinor Smith, ed., Mark Twain Project Online (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL10581.xml;style=letter;brand=mtp.

93 "Hartford Decorative Art Society," *The Hartford Courant*, November 24, 1877.

94 "Literary Notices: Illustrated Holiday Books," *The Hartford Courant*, December 7, 1877.

95 "Decorative Art Society: A Studio to be Opened in the Cheney Building Next Week—Miss Taylor of Boston to Give Lessons," *Hartford Courant*, January 12, 1878; "Success of the Decorative Art Society," *The Hartford Courant*, February 6, 1878.

96 "Literary Notices: Illustrated Holiday Books," *The Hartford Courant*, December 7, 1877.

97 See "Report of the Society of Decorative Art of the City of Hartford, Conn. (1883), Connecticut State Library at collections.ctdigitalarchive.org. The Decorative Art Society eventually re-formed as the Hartford Art School. In 1886 Colt endorsed a merger with other organizations in the city to form the Arts Society of Hartford, which financier J.P. Morgan took over in 1891. Macleod, 39-44.

98 Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt, *Last Will and Testament of Elizabeth H. Colt* (Hartford, Conn.: s.n), found at CMCH,16-23; Macleod, 40.

The Church of the Good Shepherd

Elizabeth Colt was not just a patron of the arts, she also created art, and in doing so helped define memorial art and architecture in America. Sam had built Charter Oak Hall to encourage scientific and intellectual betterment. Creating a place where the employees of the Colt factory could gather and worship together for spiritual enrichment fell neatly in line with Elizabeth's own priorities: a sense of religious duty and "benevolent motherhood." Elizabeth also designed a sacred space to remember her loved ones: her children and her husband. She worked with the vestry of the church her family attended, St. John's Episcopal Church on Main Street.[99]

Perhaps due to her request, a satellite parish of St. John's Episcopal Church formed during the Civil War with an annual budget of $300. The congregation first met on the ground floor of Charter Oak Hall and set up an altar in one of the large rooms. The Sons of Temperance paid the rent. Reverend Henry Wells Nelson began services there on May 22, 1864. The Charter Oak chapel also hosted Sunday school "for a miscellaneous group of non-denominational children," and performed around thirty-eight baptisms and likely other religious services. Charter Oak Hall also hosted an annual Christmas party, with Mrs. Colt providing the tree and decorations, which included lighted candles. The children sang carols. Each child received a small gift, and Caldwell passed out oranges, likely from the greenhouse.[100]

Elizabeth began thinking about building a parish church as early as 1865, according to her father's letters. She first solicited Frederick C. Withers of Vaux, Withers, and Company as architects, and she visited churches in the region for ideas for what she would call the Church of the Holy Innocents.[101] Unsatisfied by their designs, perhaps because she wanted something more unusual, she changed the name to Church of the Good Shepherd to evoke her husband's paternal role as a leader of his flock. The parish formalized under that name on July 18, 1866. She hired Edward Tuckerman Potter, the architect of Armsmear's library, to design a church in his honor. Potter's and Elizabeth's fathers had been classmates at Union College in Schenectady, New York.[102] As a friend of her family who shared her religious and aesthetic sensibility, Potter was

---

[99] Granston, 89-90.

[100] "History of the Church of the Good Shepherd," Church of the Good Shepherd Correspondence, David W. Granston Files, Armsmear Archives, Hartford, CT; Harriet Evans Thurston, "Recollections of my Childhood and the Good Shepherd Church," Church of the Good Shepherd, Box 28, CSL; Jarvis-Robinson; Granston, 108, footnote, 208.

[101] William Jarvis to William Jarvis, June 27, 1865, July 13, 1865, William Jarvis Papers, CMCH; see Granston, 91-94 for full discussion of the initial plans, which Elizabeth ultimately rejected.

[102] There is a connection between Potters and the Jarvis/Colts, although little evidence survives. Both Bishop Alonzo Potter and Reverend William Jarvis, Elizabeth Colt's father, graduated from Union College in 1818, and due to the small class sizes, they likely knew each other. While there is no direct correspondence between Edward Tuckerman Potter and Elizabeth Colt, there are letters expressing his sympathy after the death of Colt's only surviving child, Caldwell. In a letter from Eliphalet Nott Potter to Elizabeth Colt, he writes "You may not remember me who...enjoyed your company & hospitality & who met your son," which suggests that the Colts and the Potters interacted in some capacity within the circles of high society. It helps that Henry Codman Potter was the Episcopal bishop of New York State. Granston, 95, footnote, 178; For more description of the Parish House, see Chelsea Farrell, Ira Hessmer, and Shawn Winton, "Parish House: Historic Structure Report," Central Connecticut State University, Prepared for Coltsville National Historical Park, May 8, 2016), 10, 13-15; Mary B.

also a renowned architect who designed nearly eighty structures, including sixty-six churches.[103] As a member of the prominent Potter-Nott family, some of his immediate family members include Eliphalet Nott, the longest-serving Union College president, and Henry Codman Potter, an Episcopalian Bishop. Upon graduating from Union in 1853, Potter apprenticed under the architect Richard Upjohn, the architect of Trinity Church in New York City, and remained with him until 1856. Among Potter's famous works are the Nott Memorial Hall at Union College in Schenectady, New York, Packer Hall at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and Mark Twain's house in Hartford.[104]

While Potter's style is best described as High Victorian Gothic, he incorporated newer technologies of the period than Upjohn, such as iron support beams. As a graduate of Union's civil engineering program, he embraced the new structural systems, the aesthetic, and the ideas of the Industrial Revolution. The mid-nineteenth century marked the introduction of iron as a structural material. Architects in Europe integrated this new material into their designs. At the Church of the Good Shepherd, polychromatic arches alternate between light and dark stone on the entryways and windows. Elaborately carved, composite capitals crown polished stone pillars. Red, brown, and white hexagonal tiles adorn the roof.[105] As Marion Grant notes in *In and About Hartford: Tours and Tales*, Potter was "one of the athletes of Gothic revival, and one of those who did most to make even the Victorian phase of that revival rational and acceptable."[106]

The cornerstone was laid on September 5, 1867, with ceremony. Prominent architectural and church magazines tracked the progress of Elizabeth's self-funded memorial and monument to her husband and children. There were even several critics who felt the endeavor far too extravagant.[107] General Franklin oversaw construction, as he had done with the east armory. Consecrated on January 28, 1868, the 114 -foot-by-47-foot Church of the Good Shepherd became one of Potter's most impressive examples of High Victorian Gothic Revival. While other churches memorialized through name, this church was infused with iconographic symbolism, and Elizabeth consulted closely with Potter on the design. The final cost of the Church of the Good Shepherd amounted to $175,000. Elizabeth expressed her gratitude to Franklin, writing, "Words I know cannot thank you for all the time & care & thought you have so cheerfully given to our beautiful and now finished church."[108]

Cheney, "The Union for Home Work: What it is doing, systemic Benevolence, a wide range of practical activities, a great work by earnest women, the story of the Annual Reports," *Hartford Daily Courant*, May 2, 1874.

[103] Hosley, 200; William Jarvis, Hartford, to William Jarvis, Jr., Elyria, Ohio, February 24, 1871, Jarvis Collection, CMCH.

[104] Frank Hunter Potter, *The Alonzo Potter Family* (Concord: Rumford Press, 1923), 5-9, 28-48; R. S. Chafae, "The Chronology of Work of E. T. Potter" (part of the alumni file at Union), 2; Carl George and Robert Uzzo, "Decoding the Nott Memorial," *Union College News Archive*, January 1, 1999. https://muse.union.edu/newsarchives/1999/01/01/decoding-the-nott-memorial/.

[105] Schaffer Library, "Library/Nott" *Union College Schaffer Library*.

[106] Grant, *In and About Hartford*, 118.

[107] "Mrs. Colt's Church was Called Waste: Erection of Memorial to Husband was Criticized --New York Rector Wrote its Defense." *The Hartford Courant*, September 29, 1926.

[108] William Jarvis to William Jarvis, June 27, 1865, CMCH; Granston, 98-100. For details on the iconography, see Henry W. Nelson, *Church of the Good Shepherd: Hartford, Conn: A Brief Description of the Edifice with a Short*

While Potter's signature stonework resembled that of Union College's Nott Memorial Hall, in this case with Portland freestone and Ohio sandstone, the church also echoes the orientalism seen in both the armory and Armsmear, with the ornamental arcades resembling the Moorish influence seen in the mosque in Cordoba, Spain. Most notably, Potter and Elizabeth Colt also unmistakably branded the building as an homage to Samuel Colt and the product that created his fortune. It was here that Mrs. Colt reconciled the firearm with her faith within the walls of the church and within the moral values of her deep faith, foreshadowing the close twentieth-century relationship between Christianity and gun culture.[109] On the exterior, over the workers' entrance known as the "armorer's porch," Potter incorporated much of the ornamentation to resemble parts of, or entire, Navy revolvers, with the trademarked revolving cylinder. Such whimsical embellishment was consistent with Samuel Colt's own sensibilities as seen throughout Charter Oak Hall. However, by weaving firearm parts that the workers produced every day into naturalistic motifs, Potter and Elizabeth Colt created "an astounding, yet ingenuous, architectural conjunction of the sacred and the profane."[110] Gun barrels, hammers, triggers, cylinders, and machine screws form intricate artistic representations of Christian imagery, ivy, and floral arrangements. As part of the Corinthian capital, a clear outline of a revolver points toward the ground. Perhaps even more meaningfully, an article in *The Churchman* noted that Potter and Mrs. Colt incorporated stones from the original armory into the church walls.[111] (See 9.3).



Figure 9.3 Armorer's Porch, Church of the Good Shepherd, Photographs by Leah S. Glaser, February 2025.

Explanation of its Emblems and Symbols (Hartford: Brown and Gross, 1869); Snell 339-340.

[109] See Joseph Slaughter, Wesleyan University, "God and Guns: Making Colt Christian," Business History Conference, 2023. https://thebhc.org/abstract/86643. Slaughter's forthcoming book, *Faith and Firearms*, will discuss the religious and spiritual lives of the Colt and Jarvis families, particularly Sam's father Christopher Colt and his widow Elizabeth.

[110] Haag, 107; Tucker and Tucker, 41-42.

[111] Granston also surmises that the darker stone was incorporated into the church. Granston, 102-103, from "Hartford- Church of the Good Shepherd," *The Churchman*, February 6, 1869, in Box 28, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, CMCH.

Several other key features make the church unique. The famed Colt Memorial windows strongly imply Colt's now spiritual role as shepherd to his flock. His face, or one strongly resembling his, adorns a figure representing Joseph of Egypt. The interior includes the stained-glass relief of an angel bringing a child, likely representing "Sammy," the couple's first child. One 1876 magazine described the Church of the Good Shepherd as toned down, and not "garish," despite the inclusion of revolver parts in the architecture and decor. The writer commented that it "reminds one of Nuremberg and Melrose, of that middle age when men were not afraid of their craft" and that "sermons in stone repeat the lesson that there are dignity and worship in labour."[112]

The church provided a space to extend Elizabeth's role as a spiritual mother. Upon its completion, the church served the community, including by offering Sunday School services. Children performed plays, joined picnics, and participated in other events with Hartford's other congregations. Reverend Henry W. Nelson, Jr. served as rector from August 27, 1866 to September 11, 1876, but Elizabeth was so involved in the message of the church that, according to Colt scholar Ellsworth Grant, she often insisted on previewing Sunday sermons.[113] The larger community joined regularly for Sunday services, including Mrs. Colt and the rest of the Jarvis family, the Beaches (Hettie's family), and General Franklin. She was so proud of the church that she gifted photos of it to clergymen while traveling abroad.[114] In 1881 the church's relief fund, which supported students preparing for the Episcopal ministry in Connecticut, the education of the daughters of clergymen, and missions out west appointed Elizabeth president of the Episcopal Women's Auxiliary.[115]

The Caldwell Colt Memorial Parish

As the only surviving legitimate heir to the richest fortune in Hartford, Caldwell "Collie" Colt inherited much of the company's shares on his twenty-first birthday. (See 9.4). To celebrate his adulthood, Elizabeth threw "one of the most brilliant parties which has ever been given in Hartford" in 1879. Several newspapers covered the extravagant event. One reported that Mr. Caldwell Colt is to receive a fortune independent of that left by his father's will, the story being that when the boy was a baby, Colonel Colt invested a half million dollars in his son's name. As guardian, Elizabeth brought that sum to a million dollars."[116] Hundreds of people, from more than 1,000 invitations issued, gathered at Armsmear to commemorate the occasion with

[112] M. E. W. S. "The Homes of America VII: Armsmear," 324.

[113] William Jarvis to William Jarvis, June 27, 1865, William Jarvis Letters, Box 2, CMCH; Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 62; See Granston, 98-100 for discussion of the unique nature of Elizabeth Colt's work financing this memorial church.

[114] "History of the Church of the Good Shepherd," Church of the Good Shepherd Correspondence, David W. Granston Files, Armsmear Archives, Hartford, CT; Harriet Evans Thurston, "Recollections of my Childhood and the Good Shepherd Church," Church of the Good Shepherd, Box 28, Jarvis-Robinson; Granston, 108, footnote, 208.

[115] Hosley, 206.

[116] "The Colt Reception. Over One Thousand Invitation: How the Twenty-first Birthday of Hartford's Young Millionaire Was Celebrated Last Evening," *New Haven Register*, November 25, 1879, 44.

them. Intertwined red roses created the giant number "21." At this and his mother's many lavish costume parties, Caldwell enjoyed socializing with politicians and celebrities.[117]

However, although he attended Yale University and designed a firearm in 1879 (a double-barreled rifle), Sam Colt's son was far more interested in adventures than academics, politics, or business. As a multi-millionaire, Caldwell showed little interest in the Colt's company, even after his mother insisted that he be named vice president, a role in which he served for only two years. Rather than an inventor, engineer, or businessman, he fancied himself a sportsman and enjoyed hunting, fishing, and especially sailing. Although his father, who sailed on the *Corvo* when he was young and claimed to have conceived his revolver design on the seas, had traveled extensively across the Atlantic, he reportedly did not care for the mariner's life. Caldwell likely grew up surrounded by ships. His mother's family, the Jarvises, hailed from Old Saybrook, a sailing community on Long Island Sound in Connecticut. Caldwell frequently visited Newport, Rhode Island, where his parents met and where he had relatives from both sides of the family. Caldwell spent his summers by the water. He began yachting at the age of ten and had his first yacht by the age of eighteen. He also loved the social life that surrounded the activity. [118]



Figure 9.4 "A Millionaire's Majority" *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (December 13, 1879), 265.

[117] "The Reception at Mrs. Colt's: Celebrating Mr. Caldwell H. Colt's Twenty-First Birthday Anniversary," *Hartford Daily Courant*, November 25, 1879, 2.

[118] See also R. F. Coffin, "The History of American Yachting from 1859 to 1870," Outing, An Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Recreation 8:4 (July 1886), 392; "Mr. Colt's Yachting Career" *The New York Times*, January 3, 1984; "*Dauntless* Remodeled," *The Hartford Courant*, October 17, 1902); M. Williams Phelps, *The Devil's Right Hand Man: The Tragic Story of the Colt Family Curse* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2013).

The schooner yacht *Dauntless*, built in Mystic, Connecticut in 1866, became his favorite yacht, and he sailed multiple transatlantic trips and races on it, including the Americas Cup. He purchased it from two commodores of the New York Yacht Club in the 1880s. According to one source, Caldwell often ran *Dauntless* aground and argued with his crewmates. Still, Caldwell loved to race it, most famously in an 1888 transatlantic race, and he took it on several other transatlantic trips to Europe and Egypt. Although he lost the race, he earned the title of "Commodore," serving as vice commodore for the New York Yacht Club and later as commodore for the Larchmont Yacht Club.[119] His ever-supportive mother accepted his lifestyle, commenting, "he is a real sailor, and loves the water better than land or business, but he knows a sailor's calling thoroughly."[120]

As an adult Caldwell spent most winters in Florida and little time in Hartford. On January 1, 1894, *The New York Times* reported Caldwell Colt's death from throat cancer due to excessive smoking. Rumors spread sensational accounts about the circumstances surrounding his death. Historian Ellsworth S. Grant described one in which his mistress's jealous husband shot him, and another in which Caldwell fell overboard hosting a raucous party aboard his boat and drowned in Charlotte Harbor, near Punta Gorda, Florida. With rumors of suicide swirling, William Cowper Prime, who was with Caldwell in his last hours, published a statement to disprove them. Other newspapers reported tonsillitis as a possible cause, but the burial record at Cedar Hill Cemetery lists "heart disease" as the cause of death.[121] Caldwell Colt left $800,000 in stocks, bonds, and real estate (property along Wethersfield Avenue and the dike, as well as Charter Oak and the ten worker homes on Van Block and Huyshope). Without an heir or a will, Elizabeth inherited everything.[122]

Caldwell Colt's death at age thirty-five devastated his mother, who had defined herself largely through her only surviving child. She again turned to the form of a physical memorial to accompany the Church of the Good Shepherd, inscribing the words "by his mother" across its cornice. She coaxed Tuckerman Potter, the same architect who designed the Church of the Good Shepherd, to come out of retirement to design a parish, or parsonage, for the Colt's community.[123] The memorial would be built on a lot adjacent to the Church of the Good Shepherd, but on higher ground to make it safer from flooding.

---

[119] "Mr. Colt's Yachting Career" *The New York Times*, January 3, 1984; "*Dauntless* Remodeled," *The Hartford Courant*, October 17, 1902); Further described in Farrell, Hessmer, and Winton, Parish House: Historic Structure Report," 13-15.

[120] Elizabeth Colt to P. H. Woodward, June 25, 1893, Woodward Family Papers, 1778-1948, CMCH, As quoted in Granston, 146.

[121] "Commodore Colt: Sudden Death in Florida Last Evening Known the World Over as a Yachtsman was Spending the Winter at his Favorite Florida Resort--A Thorough-Going Sportsman and Well Known Club Man," *The Hartford Courant*, January 22, 1894; "Victim of Malignant Tonsillitis: Commodore Colt's Death Due Primarily to Cigarette Smoking," *The New York Times*, January 1, 1894.

[122] Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 68; M. H. Outland to Elizabeth Colt, February 1, 1894, Jarvis Robinson Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University; Hosley, 206-207; Granston, 136, fn237. Also see Files, Cedar Hill Cemetery, David W. Granston Files, Armsmear. "Nearly $800,000: Inventory of The Estate of The Late Caldwell H. Colt," *The Hartford Courant*, May 23, 1894.

[123] Hosley, 207.

As a companion to the church alongside the abandoned northern stretch of the Hartford railroad along Hendricxsen Avenue, the parish's design proved in many ways even more extraordinary and complex in its symbolism than that of the church. To honor Caldwell's greatest joy, the massive Early English Gothic Revival brownstone parish house incorporated features of the *Dauntless*.[124] Ex-Senator John R. Hills, an experienced and prominent builder in Hartford, supervised the construction of the complex design and intricate ornamentation, breaking ground on May 28, 1894.[125] One architectural historian explained that

> Similar to the Church of the Good Shepherd, Potter brought modern structural materials together with classical Gothic features and elements. The 60 x 120 feet, $100,000 Parish House was Edward Tuckerman Potter's final work, and featured his characteristic styles, like stone polychromy, carved capitals, and modern adaptations to Gothic style. The richly decorated interior and monumental entrance stair, full of carved stone capitals, colorful polished columns, nautical form, opalescent glass panels and delicate ironwork reflects the ecclesiastical and moral values of the architect.[126]

Throughout the exterior and interior of the parish, intricate carvings in the masonry represent Caldwell's hobbies and interests, including sailing, the ocean, sports, and arts. While the load-bearing masonry walls match the Church of the Good Shepherd, Potter used exposed iron trusses supported by engaged iron columns encased with masonry on the second floor to span the ballroom instead of installing the timber hammer beam vaulting used in the adjacent church. Potter even designed a hanging iron catwalk that led to an outdoor, rooftop crow's nest and iron truss spire that resembled a ship's mast as another unique feature of the ballroom. By combining the stone with an iron frame truss system, Potter created a Gothic building that resembled a ship's hull with open floor plans that augmented ventilation. (Potter advocated for light and ventilation in modern urban planning and private homes, but especially in tenement apartments). He eliminated corridors, divided rooms with wide double-door openings, and arranged windows to allow for maximum light. The large leaded transoms on the first floor and the colored leaded glass clerestory running along the building contrast with many Victorian-era buildings, which tended to skew dark. The trusses span in two directions to the second-floor ballroom to allow for a vast column-less space for performances and seating for 300 persons. The second story also contains a memorial apse dedicated to Caldwell. Polychrome Gothic arches on the east and west ends contribute to the unique architecture. Originally, the first floor provided space for

---

[124] Potter similarly designed author Samuel Clemens', aka Mark Twain's, house to resemble a steamship, which inspired so many of Clemens' writings.

[125] Hills was the mason contractor for many important buildings in Hartford such as the Hartford Theological Seminary, the Hartford Courant building, the Hartford County Jail, the Connecticut State Prison and the Wadsworth Street School. "Hon. John R. Hills Dies at Hospital: Death of Veteran Builder and Man of Public Affairs," Hartford Courant, March 20, 1915; "Memorial to C.H. Colt," *Hartford Courant*, May 29, 1894, 4; see also, Keegan.

[126] Sarah Landau, "E.T. Potter and William Potter, American Victorian Architects," (PhD Diss., New York University, 1977); Schaffer Library, "Library/Nott" Union College Schaffer Library, union.edu/library/; "Memorial to C.H. Colt," *Hartford Courant*, May 29, 1894, 4.

the rector's mission work. Both the main floor and the second floor featured large stained-glass panels.[127] (See 9.5).

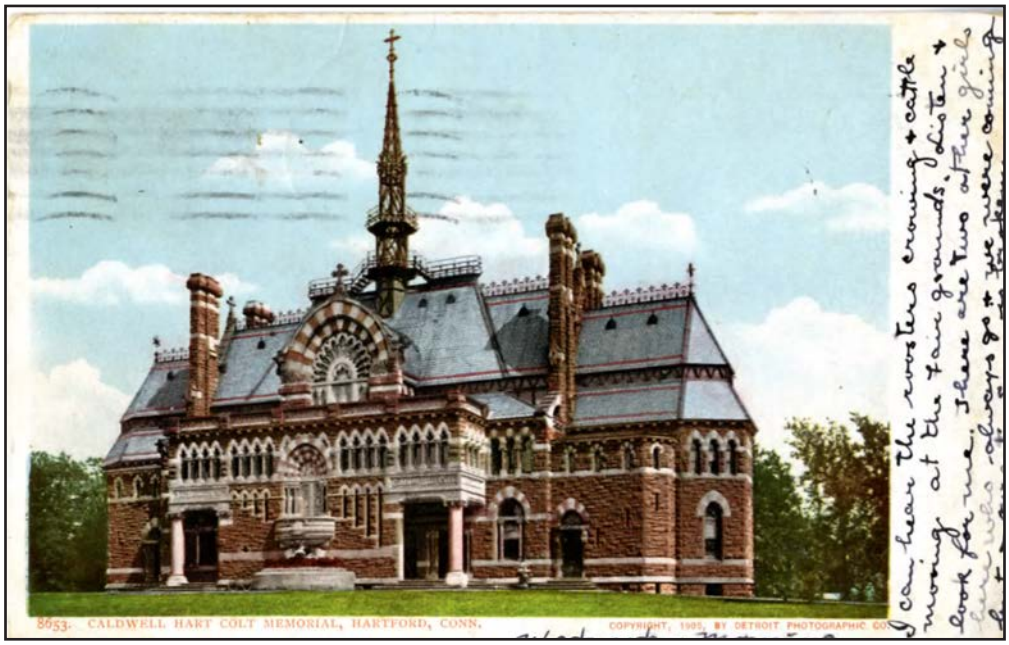


Figure 9.5 The Detroit Photographic Company, Postcard of Caldwell Hartt Colt Memorial Parish House. Richard L. Mahoney Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT. CTDA, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/50002:4289.

The Caldwell Colt Memorial Parish House was meant to serve, and continues to serve, as a modern community center for the Church of the Good Shepherd. Heated by steam, with gas and electric light, it included a library, office space, stage, and an auditorium. A basement for recreative activity held a bowling alley, fitness equipment, billiard tables, and club rooms available to both men and women.[128] Elizabeth Colt said that the Caldwell's memorial told a "... story of sunshine and shadow, of life and love and death, and of eternal hope..."[129] As David W. Granston explains in his thesis on Elizabeth Colt, one of the most comprehensive works on Elizabeth Colt and Armsmear, Elizabeth ensured harmony between the memorial buildings.

Elizabeth was conscious of the architectural dialogue between the church and the new memorial hall; both buildings were filled with symbolism and motifs that celebrated and memorialized members of her family. They were exceptional examples of l'architecture parlante, the phrase

[127] "Memorial to C. H. Colt," *The Hartford Courant*, May 29, 1894, 4; Sarah Landau and Carl W. Condit, *Rise of the New York Skyscraper, 1865-1913* (New Haven: New Haven Press, 1996), 32; Farrell, Hessmer, and Winton, 22.

[128] "The Pacific Commercial Advertiser. (Honolulu, Hawaiian Islands) 1885-1921, December 22, 1896: https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85047084/1896-12-22/ed-1/seq-5/.

[129] Having already funded the building material for an Episcopal church in Punta Gorda, Florida, after Caldwell's death in that city Elizabeth donated a Tiffany-designed chancel window and requested the name be changed to the Church of the Good Shepherd as a further memorial. "The Colt Memorial: Handsome Building Erected by Mrs. Samuel Colt," *The Hartford Courant*, September 11, 1896.

used by the French to describe buildings whose meaning was reflected in their design and detailing. To ensure that the two structures complemented one another, Elizabeth engaged the nation's foremost landscape architects. Having just completed its work for the Columbian World Exposition, the firm of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot was well suited for the job and worked with Potter to ensure that the placement of the new memorial house did not compete with or detract from the earlier church building.[130]

Early reports suggested that the completed structure would cost somewhere in the vicinity of $100,000, but estimates doubled as construction got underway, and in his analysis, William Hosley asserts that "All told, the building cost Elizabeth at least $300,000..." At three o'clock on September 10, 1896, the Caldwell Hart Colt Memorial was officially dedicated, an event for which Elizabeth mailed elegant invitations printed by Tiffany & Company. As she had done for her husband after his death, she commissioned for $5,000 a full-length portrait of Caldwell aboard The *Dauntless* by well-known portraitist artist Eastman Johnson, who had painted prominent businessmen and politicians including Grover Cleveland and John D. Rockefeller.[131]

Cedar Hill Cemetery

Before his death Samuel Colt had purchased a family burial plot in Hartford's Old North Cemetery, where many members of his family are interred, but Elizabeth initially buried him and their children near Armsmear. She began to work on establishing a formal cemetery plot in the new Cedar Hill Cemetery as early as 1864, becoming the first to erect a monument there in 1867.[132] Cedar Hill represented a new type of cemetery that focused on integrating nature. Lakes and rivers, a variety of trees and flowers, green lawns, shrubs, statuary, and memorials together created spaces of beauty for the immortality of the dead and served as sanctuaries for both mourners and the public, in contrast to the crowded church yards of the city.[133]

The Rural Cemetery Movement, inaugurated by Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, emerged from a confluence of factors: increasing urban density, overcrowding and health concerns in older burial grounds, the rise of romanticism at the start of the nineteenth century, and the growing "cult of the dead."[134] Elizabeth Colt's old friend James Batterson, who had provided most of the bases for the statues in the Colts' garden estates, co-founded Cedar Hill Cemetery with Jacob Weidenmann (who designed Hartford's Bushnell Park) in 1863. Along with helping found Traveler's Insurance Company, Batterson was an artist, sculptor, and the president of New England Granite Works. He invented a granite lathe that created smooth granite cylinders. Batterson and his company hired sculptors from Europe and supplied stone for major statues throughout the United States, including the Library of Congress, the Connecticut State

[130] Granston, 139.
[131] Granston, 145.
[132] Cedar Hill Cemetery Foundation, "Colt Monument, 1867," https://cedarhillfoundation.org/notable-monument/colt-monument, accessed April 3, 2024.
[133] James R. Cothran and Erica Danylchak, *Grave Landscapes: The Nineteenth Century Rural Cemetery Movement* (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 33.
[134] Cothran and Danylchak, 33-55.

Capitol, and several Civil War monuments. The cemetery emphasized individual burial plots, often grouped within larger family plots, as opposed to the earlier communal burials commonly used during pandemics or revolutions.[135] After burying Caldwell Colt in Cedar Hill upon his death in 1894, Elizabeth moved Sam and their four deceased children (Samuel J. Colt, Henrietta S. Colt, Elizabeth H. J. Colt, and the stillborn infant) from the "Grove of Graves" behind Armsmear to join Caldwell in the family plot at Cedar Hill Cemetery. The Colt memorial statue eventually took its place.[136]

The Lifestyle of Elizabeth Colt

While she spent considerable time memorializing her family, Elizabeth Colt, like her husband, was extraordinarily social. She kept most of her company with Hartford's upper class. She frequently visited the Nook Farm neighborhood about three miles away on what was then the very edge of the city. Nook Farm was home to many wealthy citizens, including Governor Marshall Jewell, but particularly those in the literary scene. These included Charles Dudley Warner, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Samuel Clemens (*aka* Mark Twain). His wife, Olivia "Livy" Clemens, was a sharp-minded intellectual from Elmira, New York's most prominent family. As two of Hartford's leading ladies, Elizabeth and Livy shared social circles. While twenty years apart in age, the two shared much in common, including a famous husband, and both lost infants in the early days of their marriages. Both focused their charity work on women's education, health and sanitation, and the arts.[137] In her diary, Annie Adams Fields, one of Boston's leading ladies and the wife of author-publisher James T. Fields, recalled her first introduction to Elizabeth Colt at the Clemens home: "Here we [the Clemens and Fields couples] were interrupted very pleasantly by the entrance of Mrs. Colt the richest woman I believe in Hartford. She has built a memorial church of great beauty here—she is a fine-looking woman cordial and appreciative. The social club allows five or six ladies every evening and Mrs. Colt is one of them usually."[138]

Elizabeth maintained membership in several social clubs about town, including the Hartford Lawn Club after it formed in October 1881.[139] Elite names associated with lawn tennis, including faculty from Yale and Trinity colleges. In December 1888 Elizabeth Colt, her sister Hettie Jarvis

---

[135] "Death List of the Day - James G. Batterson," *The Hartford Courant*, September 19, 1901.

[136] At the cost of $25,000, the thirty-two-foot gravesite marker featured "Egyptian-style red granite bronze-mounted plinth, column, and capital, the monument was topped by a seven-foot-high bronze figure of Gabriel, the angel of Resurrection," with a bronze Colt-Jarvis coat of arms in bronze at the base.. In 1878 the *Hartford Daily Courant* claimed the Colt Family Monument was the largest granite monument, or surely one of the largest, in the United States at the time of its installation. David Schuyler and Patricia M. O'Donnell, "The History and Preservation of Urban Parks and Cemeteries" in Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America, edited by Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 90. Cedar Hill Foundation, "Notable Residents," Cedar Hill Cemetery Foundation, 2016. cedarhillfoundation.org/notable- 5 residents/james-g-batterson/, accessed April 3, 2024.

[137] Olivia Langdon Clemens, *Gravity: Selected Letters of Olivia Langdon Clemens*, Barbara E. Snedecor, ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2023), 31.

[138] Annie Adams Fields, Excerpts from Annie Fields's Diary: 6 April and 27-29 April 1876, MTDP 00225, Mark Twain Project, 27-29, April 1876.

[139] "Tennis at the Rink," The Hartford Courant, October 5, 1881.

Beach, Olivia Clemens, and Fannie Bulkeley sponsored three assemblies there to discuss its activities and purposes.[140] But such an organization was hard to sustain. Elizabeth continued her financial support, but even that waned by the 1890s.[141]

One could find "Mrs. Samuel Colt" just about anywhere in elite society, and often that was in or near Armsmear. Mrs. Colt hosted many of her own social events. She even curated part of her neighborhood, building four more Queen Anne-style homes along Wethersfield Avenue in the orchard south of the James B. Colt House for her family and friends to live in the 1880s and 1890s. These residents included Samuel Caldwell Colt and his wife, May, as well as Lewis Grover when he served as vice president of the Colt's company. One housed the rectory of the Church of the Good Shepherd. Recall that General Manager Franklin, and later sister Hettie's niece Katherine Day, lived in James B. Colt's former home.[142] Elizabeth frequently hosted her own parties at Armsmear, including family weddings. Samuel Caldwell Colt married May M. Goodwin on December 16, 1863 at Armsmear.[143] Five years later, on December 5, 1867, Armsmear hosted sister Hettie's wedding, so infused with high society and elegance that newspapers covered it in full, to Cyprian Nichols Beach, a coal baron, with more than 1,000 guests, including fifty foreign dignitaries. They married in the picture gallery in front of Sam Colt's portrait, which served as an altar of sorts. It was as if, according to one observer, he was giving his beloved sister-in-law away. Once the ceremony ended, Elizabeth opened the entire house to guests and displayed all her wealth through her china sets, housewares, furnishings, floral arrangements, and expensive gifts. Colt's Armory Band performed on the main floor, with another band upstairs.[144] While this one was by far the most extravagant event, Elizabeth also offered Armsmear as a wedding venue for at least two of her servants.

---

[140] "Last Night's Assembly," The Hartford Courant, February 7, 1891; "The Lawn Club Assemblies," *The Hartford Courant*, December 7, 1888.

[141] "The Budget of Society: Physical Culture and the Lawn Club Assemblies," *The Hartford Courant*, October 22, 1892; "Among Society People," *The Hartford Courant*, January 7, 1893.

[142] "Samuel C. Colt Wed 50 Years: Married at Armsmear by Rev. Dr. E. P. Parker Florida Wine of Orange Blossoms Wedding Cake on Exhibition --Brooch of Diamonds for Bride," *The Hartford Courant*, December 17, 1913. Elizabeth sold the remaining eight lots she owned on Wethersfield Avenue. Today the homes make up part of the Parkside Historic District. Parkside Historic District, Nomination Form to the National Register of Historic Places, 1984, Sections 7 and 8.

[143] "Ibsen Reading at Mrs. Colt's: Mrs. Winslow's Rendition of 'A Doll's House,'" *The Hartford Courant*, February 13, 1891; "The Pillars of Society: Mrs. Winslow's Ibsen Readings at Mrs. Colt's." *The Hartford Courant*, February 10, 1891; "'An Enemy of The People': Mrs. Winslow's Third Ibsen Reading," *The Hartford Courant*, February 17, 1891; "Society Notes: Third Trinity German in Alumni Hall Last Evening Large Number Of Teas, Luncheons and Whists--Recitation Party At Mrs. Colt's--Personals And Notes Personals And Notes," The Hartford Courant, January 20, 1894; "Gay Pre-Lenten Week," *The Hartford Courant*, February 11, 1893; "Pendennis: Lawn Parties All The Go In This Bummer Weather For The Blind To-Day Numerous Teas And Parties--The Reception At The Colt Memorial Building -- Concert On the Retreat Grounds," The Hartford Courant, June 17, 1898, 2; "Samuel C. Colt Wed 50 Years: Married at Armsmear By Rev. Dr. E. P. Parker Florida Wine Of Orange Blossoms Wedding Cake On Exhibition --Brooch Of Diamonds For Bride," *The Hartford Courant*, December 17, 1913.

[144] Grant, *The Colt Armory*, 64; M. E. W. S., "The Homes of America: VII," 322; "Grand Wedding in Hartford," December 5, 1867, Mary P. Morris, Social Scrapbook, Vol. 2, CMCH, copy in "CHS," Granston files, Armsmear.

The Other Armsmear Residents

Armsmear's domestic staff kept the mansion busy with daily activity. Their maintenance of Armsmear allowed Elizabeth Colt to focus on her charity and memorial work. The staff lived in the basement or on the third floor, leaving the main and second floors to Elizabeth and her family. The 1860 census lists ten household servants; by 1867 (and confirmed in the 1870 census) Elizabeth's father, Reverend Jarvis, reported that at least six domestics served the household, including Marie Degerman, a housemaid, and her husband.[145]

Elizabeth's home, which barely had time to serve the Colts as newlyweds, became the setting of another love story for Degerman and one of the estate gardeners, Thomas Maltman. The American Minister to Russia, Thomas Seymour, had assigned 37-year-old Degerman, born in Russia, to attend to Elizabeth when the Colts visited St. Petersburg on their honeymoon. Elizabeth "was so pleased with her that she engaged her to come to this country" as Armsmear's first housemaid. Elizabeth's father described Marie as Slovenian and reported that she was fluent in German, Russian, French, and English.[146] Maltman was born in England in 1824. On June 6, 1855, when Thomas was 31 years old, he boarded the steamship *Washington* in Bremen, Southampton to New York City, with his final destination as Hartford, where Samuel Colt sought English gardeners for his new estate, Armsmear. Maltman boarded in a home near the rear of the Colt mansion, later referred to as the "Gardener's House," likely with James Stubbins, another English gardener (more in chapter 10).[147] Marie and Thomas began a relationship sometime between 1857, when she arrived, and 1862, when they married.

On October 19, 1862, Elizabeth Colt hosted the marriage ceremony of Marie Degerman and Thomas Maltman at Armsmear. Reverend Samuel Herman of St. Paul's Episcopal Church officiated. Even then-Governor Seymour attended the wedding.[148] After their marriage Thomas

---

[145] Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, July 4, 1867, CMCH; The National Archives ,Washington D.C.; Record Group: *Records of the Bureau of the Census*; Record Group Number: 29; Series Number: M653; Residence Date: 1860; Home in 1860: Hartford District 3, Hartford, Connecticut; Roll: M653_78; p, 309; Family History Library Film: 803078, 1870, Hartford Ward 4, Hartford, Connecticut; Roll M593_101, p. 665A.

[146] *Connecticut, U.S., Hale Collection of Cemetery Inscriptions and Newspaper Notices*, 1629-1934, Connecticut Headstone Inscriptions vol. 21, 114-4 Spring Grove Cemetery, Hartford, Sec. D, p. 89; digital image, Ancestry.com.

[147] Connecticut, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1609-1999, Connecticut State Library, digital image s.v. "Thomas Maltman," Ancestry.com; "Washington," *New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (Including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957*, National Archives and Records Administration, digital image s.v. "Thomas Maltman," accessed July 9, 2024, Ancestry.com; "Thomas Maltman," United States Bureau of the Census, 1870 United States Census, Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut, National Archives and Records Management, Ancestry.com;

[148] St. Paul's on Market Street was a place of worship so popular with immigrant communities that it changed denominations more than once to appeal to the changes in population. Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, October 21, 1862, Box 2, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH; U.S., Newspaper Extractions from the Northeast, 1704-1930; "Thomas Maltman," United States Bureau of the Census, 1870 United States Census, Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut, National Archives and Records Management, Ancestry.com; "Thomas Maltman," United States Bureau of the Census, 1870 United States Census, Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut, National Archives and Records Management, Ancestry.com; "Marriages," *The Hartford Courant*, October 23, 1862, 2.

and Marie Maltman lived at Armsmear, both as employees and residents, at least through 1880.[149] Thomas became an American citizen on March 19, 1870, as he continued to maintain the Colt gardens.[150] On November 11, 1889, after more than three decades of service to Elizabeth Colt, Marie Degerman Maltman died just eight days shy of her seventieth birthday. Marie's obituary, which reads as though Elizabeth had had a hand in writing it, explained that "since 1856 she has been in the employ of Mrs. Samuel Colt, and won, by her faithfulness to every duty, her gentleness and worth, the trust and affectionate regard of all." Elizabeth may have paid for all or part of the funeral services and for her tombstone. Her funeral was held at the Church of the Good Shepherd two days after her death.[151] At her burial site in Spring Grove Cemetery in Hartford, Marie's marble headstone identifies her as Maltman's wife, but uses her maiden name. Thomas Maltman returned to England almost immediately after his wife's death, having worked as Armsmear's gardener for more than thirty years. (More on Maltman's work in chapter 10).[152] When Maltman died on February 20, 1906 at age 82, in the borough of Wandsworth, *The Hartford Courant* published a brief obituary entitled "Died in England But Remembered in Hartford." In addition to his relatives, Maltman included three organizations in his will: Hartford Hospital, Church Home of Hartford, and the Church of the Good Shepherd, to which he left $500. Elizabeth Colt was not the only charitable resident of Armsmear.[153]

The other servants that supported Elizabeth's world in the 1860s were largely of Irish and African American descent, except Augustus Perry, a watchman armed with a revolver and accompanied by a dog, who guarded the house at night. The staff at one point included four Irish women: a seamstress, Elizabeth Kelly, a cook, Mary Brennan, and two nurses, Mary McGraff and Hannah Condon.[154] Irish immigrant Michael Bolan was also employed as a servant at Armsmear in 1860. Mrs. Colt employed two coachmen at that time, Irishmen Patrick Larkin and Mike Martin. Martin served as her personal carriage driver for more than thirty years.[155] Miranda

---

[149] "Thomas Maltman," United States Bureau of the Census, 1870 United States Census, Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut, National Archives and Records Management, Ancestry.com. An 1880 city directory lists Marie as "Mrs. Mary Mortman, housekeeper, 30 Wethersfield, in Elihu C. Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory and Hartford Illustrated; for the Year Commencing July 1880* (Hartford, Connecticut: Hartford Steam Printing Company, 1880), 116, accessed via Ancestry.com.

[150] U.S. Naturalization Record Indexes, 1791-1992 (Indexed in World Archives Project), digital image s.v. "Thomas Maltman," Ancestry.com.

[151] "Deaths," *The Hartford Courant*, November 12, 1889.

[152] Connecticut, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1609-1999, *Connecticut State Library*, digital image s.v. "Thomas Maltman," Ancestry.com.

[153] Free BMD, *Deaths Registered in January, February, and March 1906*, p. 216, Free UK Genealogy CIO database s.v. "Thomas Maltman," accessed July 24, 2024, https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?scan=1&r=11 5876156:8976&d=bmd_1724760026; "Died in England, But Remembered in Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, May 29, 1906. Research and writing for this section by Danielle Morrison.

[154] Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, July 4, 1867, CMCH; Hosley, 165, and The National Archives, Washington D.C.; Record Group: *Records of the Bureau of the Census*; Record Group Number: 29; Series Number: *M653*; Residence Date: 1860; Home in 1860: Hartford District 3, Hartford, Connecticut; Roll: *M653_78*; Page 309; Family History Library Film: 803078.

[155] Martin eventually started his own cab business that lasted another thirty years. "'Mike' Martin has left Union: Familiar Cab Driver Goes to Home--once Colt coachman," *The Hartford Courant*, December 3, 1914; "Mrs. Sam Colt's Pay-roll and Sundry Payments for May 1867," Box 10, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

Robinson Anderson, a Black servant who had worked for Elizabeth's Aunt Hetty, cared for the Colts' four children, and lived in Armsmear for a time with her brother, George, who the census lists simply as "servant." Henry Champion, also an African American, worked as a porter and waiter for the Colt family, likely in the 1870s-1880s.[156]

George Henry Carr, a prominent figure in Hartford's African American community, served as Elizabeth's butler for eleven years, from 1883 through 1894. Born in New Britain on July 17, 1849, Carr was one of the "best known and most respected Colored men in this city."[157] Carr attended the Pearl Street Colored School and worshiped at the Pearl Street African Methodist Episcopal Zion's Church next door with his family. Carr was too young, and his father too old, for the Civil War draft.[158] Still, the war affected Carr, as it did many Black residents. He held deep respect for veterans of the war, abolitionists, and those involved in the effort toward equality and civil rights. By the age of sixteen or seventeen, George began working for George Buck, at an apothecary on Main Street. In 1867, when he was seventeen, Carr became a laborer at the home of future Republican Connecticut Governor Marshall Jewell, who lived among Elizabeth's friends in the Nook Farm neighborhood.[159] Carr became heavily involved in politics and civil rights activism around the 15th Amendment, the last of the Reconstruction amendments passed by Congress.[160] Carr married Julia A. Johnson on October 12, 1869, and they bore four sons and three daughters, one of whom they named for Jewell, and two twin boys named after abolitionists.[161]

---

[156] The 1860s census curiously lists Miranda Robinson as "white" and her likely brother as "Colored." The National Archives, Washington D.C.; Record Group: *Records of the Bureau of the Census*; Record Group Number: *29*; Series Number: *M653*; Residence Date: *1860*; Home in 1860: Hartford District 3, Hartford, Connecticut; Roll: *M653_78*; Page: *309*; Family History Library Film: *803078*. Also see Barbara Jean Beeching, "Great Expectations: Family and Community in Nineteenth Century Black Hartford," (University of Connecticut, 2010), 92; Beeching, "Hopes and Expectations," 53; Hosley, 165, 248, footnote 119; "Henry A. Champion's Will," The Hartford Courant, July 31, 1894; *The Hartford Courant*, September 27, 1858. Henry Champion, married to Bathsheba Jacobs, owned real estate valued at $1,300 in 1850.

[157] "George H. Carr: Death of Mrs. Colt's Colored Butler Yesterday," *The Hartford Courant*, January 1, 1895.

[158] "The Draft," *The Hartford Courant*, July 14, 1863; "List of Drafted Men Exempted in the First District, State of Connecticut," *The Hartford Courant*, July 29, 1863.

[159] In 1867, Jewell unsuccessfully ran for the U.S. Senate, and the following year he ran for governor, also unsuccessfully. But in the 1870 election, Jewell was elected governor, seemingly ending Carr's employment. But Jewell rehired him as his butler when he lost re-election. Elihu C. Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory for 1866-67: Containing Every Kind of Desirable Information for Citizens and Strangers*, (Hartford, Connecticut: Hartford Steam Printing Company, 1866), 301; digital image, Ancestry.com; Elihu C. Geer, Geer's Hartford City Directory for 1867-68, (Hartford: Hartford Steam Printing Company, 1867), 302; digital image, Ancestry.com; "Gov. Marshall Jewell," National Governors Association, accessed July 20, 2024, https://www.nga.org/governor/marshall-jewell/; Baker & Tilden, Kellogg & Bulkeley, and Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., *Atlas of Hartford and Tolland Counties: With a Map of Connecticut, From Actual Surveys* (Hartford: Baker & Tilden, 1869), map, https://www.loc.gov/item/2005631863/; Elihu C. Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory for 1870-71: Containing Every Kind of Desirable Information for Citizens and Strangers; Together with a Classified Business Directory, and a Newly Engraved Map of the City*, (Hartford: Hartford Steam Printing Company, 1870), 78; digital image, Ancestry.com.

[160] The celebration for the 15th amendment's ratification celebration was held in Hartford on May 18, 1870, the year Jewell became governor. "The Fifteenth Amendment," *The Hartford Courant*, May 19, 1870; see also, Steve Thornton, "Serving Up Justice: Hartford's Black Workers Organize," Connecticut History, August 31, 2021.

[161] The Carrs welcomed their first child on October 30, 1870. Georgianna B. Carr, named for her father, died at

In February 1883 Marshall and Esther Jewell died within two weeks of each other. Within the year, Carr once again found employment as a butler—this time in the grand home of Mrs. Samuel Colt on Wethersfield Avenue, who certainly knew the Jewells, and therefore Carr, as part of her social circle.[162] By 1880 the census suggests that Elizabeth's servants no longer lived at Armsmear, with just Elizabeth, her mother, her brother Richard, and twenty-one-year-old Caldwell listed as residing there. In 1900, however, just she and Richard presided over the mansion, with seven servants, most of them Irish or English but including Danish immigrants, a cook, Maria E. Madsen, and laundress Christina Jacobson.[163] Now within the Colt orbit, George Carr sometimes served Elizabeth's sister Hettie (Mrs. Cyprian Nichols Beach) in Newport in the summer, and he accompanied Elizabeth to Bermuda with her over the winter of 1894, after Caldwell's death and that of Carr's mother.[164] Both sisters visited an ill Carr before he died in January 1895.[165]

Elizabeth's Politics

As evidenced by the fact that she included several of them in her will, Elizabeth cared for her servant. However, the closeness of her relationship with the politically progressive Carr is noteworthy considering the then conservative, sometimes anti-abolitionist, Democratic politics of her husband Samuel. Mrs. Colt's own early adulthood coincided with the early reform movement

just ten-and-a-half years old. They named their second child Marshall Lewis Carr, after George's boss. On September 9, 1874, the Carrs welcomed twin boys Sumner and Hawley, both named for outspoken abolitionists. While living in Newport in February 1876 they had another daughter, whom they named Mary "Mamie" L. Carr. Just under three years later, back home in Hartford, they had their sixth child, Lucy B. Carr, in January 1879. Finally, in September 1881, George and Julia had their seventh and final child, another son, named Arthur V. Carr. "George H. Carr: Death of Mrs. Colt's Colored Butler Yesterday," *The Hartford Courant*, January 1, 1895; "Births," *The Hartford Courant*, November 1, 1870; "Deaths," *The Hartford Courant*, April 28, 1881. She was buried at the Old North Cemetery; "Births," The Hartford Courant, June 26, 1872; "Births," *The Hartford Courant*, September 10, 1874; 1870 United States Census, Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut, digital image s.v. "Julia Carr," Ancestry.com; Charles Sumner's views led two anti-abolitionist politicians to beat him almost to death with a cane in the U.S. Senate Chamber in 1856. Sumner continued his work in the government for almost two decades following the attack. "The Caning of Senator Charles Sumner," United States Senate, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/The_Caning_of_Senator_Charles_Sumner.htm. Hawley was named after Joseph R. Hawley, the son of abolitionists who fled North Carolina when he was just a boy and who became a major general in the Civil War after his move to Hartford. He later became governor of Connecticut and served in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. "Gov. Joseph Roswell Hawley," National Governors Association, accessed July 31, 2024, https://www.nga.org/governor/joseph-roswell-hawley/; 1875 Rhode Island, U.S. State Census, Newport, Newport County, Rhode Island, digital image s.v. "George H. Carr," *Ancestry.com*; 1880 United States Census, Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut, digital image s.v. "George Carr," *Ancestry.com* "George H. Carr: Death of Mrs. Colt's Colored Butler Yesterday," *The Hartford Courant*, January 1, 1895, https://www.newspapers.com/image/369024428/.

[162] Elihu C. Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory and Hartford Illustrated: Comprising an Eight-Fold Directory of Hartford…for the Year Commencing: July 1, 1883*, (Hartford: Hartford Steam Printing Company, 1883), 60; digital image, Ancestry.com.

[163] "Elizabeth Colt," United States Bureau of the Census, *Hartford, Hartford, Connecticut*; Roll: 97; Page: 168d; Enumeration District: 009, 1880; Year: *1900*; Census Place: Hartford, Hartford, Connecticut; Roll: 137; Page: 18; Enumeration District: 0173, National Archives and Records Administration.

[164] Carr obituary, *The Hartford Courant*, January 1, 1895, 3; The Hartford Courant, January 24, 1894), 5.

[165] *The Hartford Courant*, November 21, 1894, 5.

prior to the Civil War. Hartford's Protestants dropped from 90 percent to 60 percent of the city's population between 1790 and 1860, but Protestant volunteerism and charitable agencies rose with the number of factories as those in the middle class sought to meet both the spiritual and the material needs of the communities of immigrants streaming in for factory work—and challenging Protestant values.[166] Many antebellum reformers also embraced other causes. In addition to temperance, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were involved with women's suffrage. That activity drew some into the abolitionist movement. Abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, for instance, also advocated for temperance and women's suffrage. After the Civil War, unresolved issues like temperance, suffrage, and health reform evolved into the Progressive reform movement.[167]

While Elizabeth must have felt some pressure to join her peers in engaging in such issues, she seemed to have chosen to avoid the kind of direct political activism of Carr, Douglass, Anthony, or Stanton, preferring to define herself through activities that centered around art, children, and the church. Elizabeth's sister Hettie's niece, Katherine Beach Day, who lived in the former James B. Colt house, was extremely active in social justice causes. Primarily known for her activism with the Connecticut Women's Suffrage Association, Day herself co-founded the Hartford National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Connecticut Birth Control League.[168] Elizabeth Colt counted Isabella Beecher Hooker, the presiding officer of the Connecticut Woman's Suffrage Association, as a friend. Hooker hoped that wealthy and prominent widows like Mrs. Samuel Colt would register to vote and inspire other Hartford women to support suffrage, but Elizabeth never did so, at least not publicly. Unfortunately, Hooker "did not consider that prominent women like Elizabeth Colt had already constructed a public identity for themselves centered around domesticity, benevolence, and informal political influence," notes historian Melissa Teed. Teed further notes that "so long as benevolent activists believed they could continue to influence public policy through the informal channels that had been created in antebellum Hartford, they would not support the enfranchisement of women."[169]

This certainly described Elizabeth Colt, who actively engaged in philanthropy and in the public sphere without sacrificing her status and while maintaining the extravagant life to which she was accustomed and that Samuel Colt had promised her. As indicated earlier in this chapter, she began with the Hartford Soldiers' Aid Society, founded in 1862, which helped support and bring relief to Connecticut troops.[170] In his book *Connecticut in the American Civil War*, Matthew

---

[166] See Andrew Walsh, "For Our City's Welfare: Building a Protestant Establishment in Late Nineteenth Century Hartford" (Hartford: Trinity University, 1995), 9.

[167] See Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Michael McGerr, *Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

[168] *Biographical Sketch of Katherine Beach Day*, written by Ernesta Diffley, undergraduate student, Central Connecticut State University. Included in *Part I: Militant Women Suffragists—National Woman's Party*, database assembled and co-edited by Thomas Dublin and Kathryn Sklar. Biographical sketches have been crowdsourced. (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2015).

[169] Teed, 330.

[170] Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, and Survival*. Middletown, (Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 90.

Warshauer notes that, "it was only through the work of soldiers' aid societies, of which some seventy existed throughout Connecticut, that the soldiers were able to survive." The Soldiers' Aid Society offered wealthier women a way of "extending domestic responsibilities out of the home and onto the battlefield."[171] In cooperation with the Federal Sanitation Commission, women raised funds, made clothes, collected supplies, and prepared gift boxes for the soldiers of their home state.[172] In 1863 Elizabeth and her friends supported the organization through theatrical fundraisers and lent it prestige and legitimacy, and she herself assumed leadership in January 1864.[173]

With the luxury of having servants perform the basic household tasks, Elizabeth Colt was free to be active in her communities. After the Civil War, many middle-class Protestant and Congregationalist women "recast benevolence" for the postbellum world. Scholars have referred to these kinds of activities as acts of "benevolent womanhood." Those adhering to the norms of the era's gender roles could access public spaces without challenging norms. For those without means, this meant providing domestic labor for others, serving through learned womanhood as teachers, temperance activists, or authors and through wartime motherhood as did many who advocated for abolition, war relief, and women's suffrage.[174] These women were closely affiliated with their local parish and believed that spreading Christian values would maintain society in a rapidly changing world through organized and charitable works.[175] Elizabeth supported organizations whose missions complemented her own sense of self, characterized by her motherhood, her widowhood, and her faith. Elizabeth supported mothers, orphans, widows, young children, and Sunday schools. These included the South Meadow Mission and Sabbath School, which had sponsored religious functions and education for young children, including Christmas celebrations for several Sunday schools in Hartford.[176]

In the late nineteenth century benevolent charities served as transitional organizations between the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era settlement houses. The most renowned settlement house was Jane Adams's Hull House in Chicago, Illinois. In Hartford, the Union of Home Work (UHW) fulfilled this purpose. As immigrants from around the world poured into cities for industrial work

---

[171] Thiede, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 13.

[172] John Niven, *Connecticut for the Union: The Role of the States in the Civil War* (Binghamton, New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1965): 95-96.

[173] United States Sanitary Commission, *To the Loyal Women of America*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Sanitary Commission), 973.777 U58t, Library, CMCH; William Jarvis, Hartford, to William Jarvis Jr., Elyria, Ohio, February 1, 1864, Colt-Jarvis Collection, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History. Hartford, CT; Hosley 1996, 211.

[174] Melissa Ladd Teed, "Work, Domesticity and Localism: Women's Public Identity in Nineteenth-Century Hartford, Connecticut" (PhD Dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1999), 1-2.

[175] In keeping with her faith, Elizabeth assumed the presidency of the Episcopal Women's Auxiliary. Elizabeth accepted a leadership role within the church of the Bureau of Relief's fund to support students preparing for the Episcopal Ministry in Connecticut and the education of the daughters of clergymen; Teed, 26-27; Colonial Dames of Colonial America, *In Memoriam*; Hosley, *Colt*, 210; "A Brilliant Wedding: Marriage of Miss Hettie F. Jarvis to Captain Montrose Barnard Breakfast And Reception Those Present The Bridal Dinner Party," The Hartford Courant (February 11, 1892).

[176] "Sunday School Festivals," *Hartford Daily Courant* (December 29, 1865); "Sabbath School Picnic," *Hartford Daily Courant* (August 11, 1866).

like that offered at Colt's, they brought with them poverty and a variety of cultural and religious practices. Middle- and upper-class white women stepped in to maintain social continuity through economic aid. Historian Martha Mabie Gardner explains how immigration law sought to categorize women based on whether they might become dependents of the state or work as productive residents. Naturalization law tied race and gender to shifting understandings of the significance of moral character, family, and work.[177] Settlement houses worked with immigrant women through Americanization practices, but they also emphasized their duties as women in the home. As the role of Hartford's Soldiers' Aid Society waned, prominent Hartford women saw a way to maintain their values and status in the rapidly changing city. Unlike the earlier benevolent women societies, these charities helped people of various backgrounds, not just the local-born population, and emphasized the betterment of society through morality, health, and cleanliness.[178]

Originally men conceived of the UHW as a temperance organization in the form of a coffee house that could replace taverns for veterans. Captain Steven Sluyter served 40,000 low-cost meals during the Long Depression of the 1870s. But then wives and daughters of Hartford's most influential political, economic, and religious leaders, who had gathered to make bandages during the Civil War. assumed leadership of the UHW. The women of high-society Hartford created a nonsectarian charity to benefit women and children in the city. The membership rolls in the annual reports include wives and daughters of important Hartford men. The UHW was located on Market Street in the sixth ward, which was largely inhabited by Irish and German immigrants; it also held other properties around the city. Unlike closely religious societies, the requirements for UHW membership included one dollar in annual dues and ascribing to the constitution. The UHW merged with the Hartford Social Settlement Association in 1939 after a sixty-seven-year tenure.[179]

The organization's goal was to "be the relief of all kinds of suffering, and the physical, intellectual, and spiritual elevation of women and children of our city, by personal and representative visitation." The UHW provided reading rooms for boys and girls, a "Home of the Friendless," a sewing school, and a nursery "Where working women may leave their young children for the day." The nursery was seen not just as a service but "as a way of reaching the

---

[177] Martha Mabie Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen: Women, Immigration, and Citizenship, 1870-1975*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

[178] *Fifth Annual Report of the Union for Home Work* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1877) 14-15. Annual reports available on Google Books and at the Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT.

[179] Mabel Johnson, "A Day Nursery," *The Hartford Courant*, February 26, 1935; *Special Acts Passed by the General Assembly of State of Connecticut at the January Session, 1939* (Hartford, Published by the State, 1939) lv. https://collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/30002%3A21975029#page/1387/mode/1up. The constitution upon which the charity was founded lists three main items that the charity set out to establish: a girls' reading room, a home for the friendless, and a day nursery. Over time the society provided multiple other services such as reopening the coffeehouse and establishing a boys' reading room. *Fifth Annual Report of the Union for Home Work*, (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1877) 3; 33d *Annual Report of the Union for Home Work*, (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1904) 15.

mothers" to improve the care of their children.[180] Teed explains that the nursery did not simply serve as a convenience for working mothers, including those at the Colt factory, but "it also reflected the organizers' preoccupation with domesticity and their identification with the role of public motherhood that had existed in antebellum Hartford. The committee, and not the parents, determined the instructional content for the children."[181] They were in effect acting as "public mothers," but they were not directly interacting with the clients or children. At some point the Colt company began to directly fund the UHW through its community chest. In 1927 several of those factory managers in charge of dispersing the money visited the house on Market Street. They witnessed collections for clothing and household goods, laundry services, and children taking daily cod liver oil. The facility served 400 children of working parents ranging in age from six months to eight years, including 100 infants in a nursery that was open from 6am to 6:30pm, and under the supervision of public health nurses. The cost was around fifteen cents a day. Children were provided two meals a day and had access to a Kindergarten, a playroom, and a playground.[182]

Elizabeth Colt served as a founding member and vice president, assuming the role of president after the death of the UHW's founder, Mrs. Sydney J. Cowen.[183] Elizabeth held important positions in the UHW throughout her life. One source claims she was president for twenty-two years, but the annual reports do not reflect that.[184] The UHW generated income through charity, donations, and events. The women on its board were hardly involved in the daily operations. While upper-class women like Elizabeth Colt and her friends ran these charities, they took on the roles of officers, managers, committee members, and executives, allowing for distance between the poor and high society. They organized bazaars and fundraisers to benefit the society. The UHW held an annual fair in November and other events throughout the year, including the Martha Washington tea, the Authors' Carnival, and an Oriental Tea Party.[185]

The Martha Washington Reception and Tea Party, a three-evening event, was held at Allyn Hall, now the site of the Hartford Civic Center. Along with food and dancing, the event included

---

[180] *Fifth Annual Report of the Union for Home Work*, (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1877) 7-9; *Eighth Annual Report of the Union for Home Work*, (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1880), 36-37; *30th Annual Report of the Union for Home Work* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1902) 39; *34th Annual Report of the Union for Home Work*, (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1906) 1-2.

[181] Melissa Ladd Teed, "Work, Domesticity and Localism: Women's Public Identity in Nineteenth-Century Hartford, Connecticut" (PhD Dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1999), 306.

[182] Janet T. Murphy, "Union for Home Work Activities," November 23, 1925; "Colt's Employees Visitors at Union for Home Work," *The Hartford Courant*, May 3, 1927.

[183] Colonial Dames, *In Memoriam*, 8.

[184] *34th Annual Report of the Union for Home Work* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1906)

[185] Teed, 300-303; *Fifth Annual Report of the Union for Home Work*, (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1877) 5, 7-9; Mary B. Cheney, "The Union for Home Work: What it is doing, systemic Benevolence, a wide range of practical activities, a great work by earnest women, the story of the Annual Reports." *The Hartford Daily Courant*, May 2, 1874; "The Union for Home Work: Fifth Annual Report" *The Hartford Daily Courant*, April 18, 1877; "Meeting for the Union of Home Work: Reports Show Good Work for the Year, Mrs. Sluyter urges for more cleanliness in tenements, inspection of new improvements." *The Hartford Courant*, May 2, 1910; "Carnival Week: Every Arrangement Completed for the Opening of the Author's Carnival this Evening" *Hartford Daily Courant*; December 3, 1883.

a series of tableaux vivant in which people dressed in costume to mimic historic characters in photographs or paintings celebrating New England's role in the American Revolution and a century of economic and cultural expansion. By the Victorian era, the medieval practice of tableaux vivant had become popular among high society; Queen Victoria and Prince Albert reenacted the coronation of Edward III and his consort at a costume ball in 1842.[186] The crowd paid one dollar each and filled the hall to the sounds of the Colt Armory Band playing "Washington's Grand March." Hettie Jarvis Beach played Martha Washington, Elizabeth Colt played Mrs. James Madison, Mark Twain portrayed Governor William Livingston, and seventeen-year-old Caldwell Colt appeared as Monsieur William Louis Otto. Other performers included Louisa Bushnell, Eliza Robinson, Esther Jewell, and the wife of Colt President William Franklin, Anna.[187]

Preserving Hartford

For women involved in settlement work like the UHW, aiding in the assimilation of immigrants extended to other efforts to define what it meant to be an American. In November 1893 Elizabeth, invited many of the women she knew from the UHW to Armsmear, primarily from New Haven and Hartford, to form the Connecticut branch of the Colonial Dames of America, making Connecticut the last of the thirteen former colonies to establish a branch. The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA) grew out of the first private historic preservation group in America, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association in Virginia, founded in 1853, but the Dames exclusively included direct lineal descendants of prominent colonial ancestors, both men and women, who were identified as having performed service to the colonies before July 5, 1776. As the organization's goal was to "perpetuate the memory" through historic preservation of records. documents, and buildings, the mission fell well within Mrs. Colt's wheelhouse. The Dames aimed to "create widespread interest in American history to inspire love of this Republic, to do justice and honor to heroic ancestors, and to commemorate the labors and achievements of the founders of our country."[188] The group saved the Henry Whitfield House in Guilford and pressured the state to assume responsibility for its preservation. Elizabeth would serve as president from then until 1896, hosting the president of the national organization, Mrs. Claiborne of Virginia, at Armsmear around 1902. She continued to serve as vice president until her death.[189] In its memorial to Elizabeth Colt, the Colonial Dames Society claimed, "wherever she appeared, her beautiful and dignified presence was at once the Centre of interest" and that "her leadership was desired and trusted, and others delighted to follow, and not because she, in her beautiful modesty and delicacy of feeling, arrogated any such position to herself."[190]

---

[186] An 1860 book prescribed different tableaux vivants and how to stage them. It was a way for people to look back into history and show off their wealth with lavish costumes without having to act or sing. Susan Owens, "Making a Scene," https://www.apollo-magazine.com/victorians-tableaux-vivants-historical-re-enactment/.

[187] "The Authors' Carnival," *The Hartford Courant* (December 5, 1883).

[188] National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Connecticut, *Register of the Connecticut Society of the Colonial Dames of America, 1883-1907* (Harvard University: National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Connecticut), 11.

[189] "Colonial Dames," *The Hartford Courant*, November 23, 1893.

[190] Colonial Dames, *In Memoriam*, 5-6.

Elizabeth's Legacy

On August 23, 1905, at 4:37pm, 79-year-old Elizabeth Jarvis Colt died in her family home in Newport, Rhode Island, her beloved niece Elizabeth Jarvis Beach Robinson by her side. The death was unexpected. She had traveled to Florida in the weeks before, visited friends in Boston, and spent time on the recently remodeled (into a houseboat) *Dauntless* with her niece in Old Saybrook before going on to Newport.[191] After five days of acute illness, likely from a hemorrhagic stroke (listed as "cerebral hemorrhage" in the burial record), she succumbed to what the newspapers termed "paralysis."[192] Her funeral at the Church of the Good Shepherd, attended by family, friends, and domestic staff, featured a vast floral display of asters and roses and the Colt Armory Band's rendition of Chopin's "Funeral March." A quartet and choir sang "Lead Kindly Light" and four other songs. Purple broadcloth with oxidized trimmings adorned her coffin, which bore a plate of sterling silver in the form of a cross with her name, date of birth, and date of death inscribed on it. The family held a public viewing of her body in the Parish House, in recognition of her public service. Several members of the clergy paid their respects, but her cousin Reverend Dr. Samuel Hart delivered the sermon that the newspaper printed in full. He asked the mourners to honor her by taking advantage of the resources that Mrs. Colt had left Hartford, both during her life and in her will.[193] In a full-page obituary of Elizabeth in *The Hartford Courant*, friend Mrs. E. W. Cheney spoke of Elizabeth's impact on Hartford's citizens, observing that "her presence has been like that of a wise mother in her household, uniting, shaping, controlling the social springs of life, quieting discord, evoking harmony out of contrary elements, bestowing a hallowed sympathy on aching hearts, dispensing a noble and gracious hospitality." Six long-time armory employees carried her casket: A. L. Allen, F.W. Green, F. A. Stanton, B. A. Rooney, W. F. Wolff, and Fred Moore, the same six who had carried the coffins of her son Caldwell in 1894 and brother Richard (who died two years before her at age 73). They laid her body to rest between Caldwell and Sam.[194]

Niece Elizabeth Jarvis Beach Robinson, whom Mrs. Colt regarded as a daughter, served as her primary executor. In her will Aunt Elizabeth left cash, furnishings, and silver to various family members and friends, notably to her beloved brother Richard, who did not survive her. She left money to her brother John's widow Elizabeth J. Jarvis, her sister Mary Louise Fitzgerald, and her two nieces, to whom she had written lengthy letters distributing various items such as

---

[191] "*Dauntless* Remodeled: Mrs. Colt Directs That Her Son's Yacht Be Reconstructed," *The Hartford Courant*, October 17, 1902. The *Dauntless* found a final home at Essex, and Elizabeth left it to Colonel Robinson. It sank in February 1915.

[192] "Elizabeth H. J. Colt," File, Cedar Hill Cemetery, Granston files, Armsmear.

[193] "Death of Mrs. Colt at Newport," *Hartford Times*, August 24, 1905, 1; "Mrs. Colt Dies of Paralysis," *The Hartford Courant*, August 24, 1905, 11; "Memorial to Mrs. Elizabeth H. Colt: Services at Church of Good Shepherd Dr. Hart Tells of her Benevolent Works Appeal To Members of The Parish to Cherish the Institutions Mrs. Colt Gave and to Take Advantage of their Opportunities Dr. Hart's Sermon," *The Hartford Courant*, October 2, 1905.

[194] "Mrs. Colt's Funeral: To be Buried Beside Husband and Children," *The Hartford Courant*, August 25, 1905; "Mrs. Colt Dies from Paralysis: She Lived for Five Days After being Stricken at Her Niece's Home in Newport," *The Hartford Courant*, August 24, 1905; "Buried from her Memorial Church: Simple Services for Mrs. Samuel Colt," *The Hartford Courant*, August 26, 1905.

jewelry. She also bequeathed gifts to nearly eighty friends.[195] Sam's "nephew" Samuel Caldwell Colt, now living in Farmington, inherited the Colt family artwork. Son Caldwell's beloved *Dauntless* was bequeathed to the Jarvis-Robinsons. Elizabeth also left a few hundred dollars each to loyal long-time servants.[196] These included butler William Shiloh, William Winship, the grounds superintendent, and domestic servants Susan Gallaghar (or Galligan), Kate Driscoll, and Sue B Rose.[197] Her trustees were those men she had relied upon for years, but two, her brother Richard and former Colt's manager and president John H. Hall, had predeceased her. The surviving trustees included Reverend Chauncy Brewster, Reverend Dr. Samuel Hart, Reverend Francis Goodwin (who pre- deceased Elizabeth), and George H. Day. A probate judge, upon recommendation of the bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, would appoint future trustees (preferably Episcopalians).[198]

With her entire estate valued at two and three quarter million dollars, Elizabeth Colt's gifts totaled $1.5 million, including the value of Colt grounds and gardens ($52,600), an $800,000 endowment to the Church of the Good Shepherd, the Parish House, Armsmear, $400,000 for the residuary estate, and a $108,445 art collection.[199] After her death, the endowment allowed the parish house and church to maintain their functions in perpetuity, including community events like small piano and violin recitals in the upstairs open ballroom.[200] Most of the money and property went to the Church of the Good Shepherd, Cedar Hill Cemetery, the City of Hartford, and the Wadsworth Atheneum. Having been a young widow herself, Mrs. Samuel Colt likely recognized the precarious state of wealth. In her death, she donated her home and 2.84 acres to the Fund for the Aged and Infirmed Clergymen and Widows and Orphans of Clergymen. Per her instructions, Armsmear converted from a single-family mansion to a rent-free, multi-family residence "for widows or orphans of clergymen of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and for other refined and educated gentlewomen" and, secondly, to "impoverished, but refined and educated women."[201]

Rather than preserve Armsmear, Elizabeth chose to move her collections from her home to a museum. She willed the Wadsworth Atheneum fifty thousand dollars to build an addition to house Armsmear's more than one thousand pieces of art, furnishings, collections from the Colts' travels around the world, and guns, including the first prototype revolver Samuel returned from sea with in 1831. The Colt Memorial Wing opened its doors in 1910 as the first art museum wing in America to bear the name of a female patron, "The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection." Surviving relatives and the Bartlett Brothers stored the rest at their site on Asylum Street. Save

---

[195] "Colt Memorial is Dedicated," *The Hartford Courant*, November 17, 1910.

[196] Last Will and Testament of Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt, Samuel Colt Papers, 1808-1904, box 10, folder 2, CSL.

[197] *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (1899), 395; 340.

[198] Last Will and Testament of Elizabeth H. Colt Box 3, Jarvis-Robinson Family Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT; *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (1899), 336, 340, 395.

[199] "Mrs. Colt's Gift," *The Hartford Courant*, November 3, 1905); "Mrs. Colt's Gifts," *The Hartford Courant*, December 26, 1905, 8; "Inventory of Colt Estate," *The Hartford Courant*, November 1, 1905, 11.

[200] "Mrs. Colt's Will," *The Hartford Courant*, August 31, 1905.

[201] Hosley, 192; "City Fathers at Armsmear Park: Mayor, Alderman and Councilmen make…" *The Hartford Courant*, October 20, 1905, 11; Last Will and Testament of Elizabeth H. Colt, Jarvis Robinson Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

Sam's desk and chair, the antebellum furniture left at the house was considered "neither modern nor antique."[202]



Figure 9.6 Interior of Armsmear (library) after its conversion to a women's home, 80 Wethersfield Avenue, Hartford, Hartford County, CT. Photograph from Survey HABS CT-357: Historic American Buildings Survey, Samuel Colt House, 80 Wethersfield Avenue, Hartford, Hartford County, CT. Hartford County Connecticut Hartford, 1933. https://www.loc.gov/item/ct0331/

The Trustees of the Colt Bequest met on October 27, 1905 to fill the positions of predeceased appointees Richard Jarvis and John H. Hall. Reverend Chauncey Brewster became president and Elizabeth's cousin Samuel Hart vice president, with Reverend Francis Goodwin, Robert Huntington, Edward Hatch, and Linsley George Day, as treasurer, granted authority to sign checks. They incorporated on April 18, 1907, with each of the officers earning a small salary for his work. They selected Benjamin W. Morris as the architect to remodel Armsmear into a group home.[203] The trustees spent $100,000 to completely transform the inside into sixteen apartments on the model of the Hampton Court Palace of Henry VIII (twelve in the original house, and four in the new wing). In 1909 Armsmear's renovations turned guest suites into two- to six-room apartments. Morris determined, to the relief of family and friends, to preserve the main building and the Wethersfield Avenue façade. Only paintings and photographs recall the view from the

[202] "Armsmear is Much Altered: Interior Being Cleaned to Permit of Changes," *The Hartford Courant,* May 12. 1909.

[203] "To Make Changes at Armsmear," *The Hartford Courant,* August 25, 1909; Digest of Rulings and Actions taken by the Trustees of the Colt Bequest, Compiled from the Minute Book, Granston Files, Armsmear Archives.

rear. He even removed the ornate glass dome once seen from the front of the house, reminiscent of the Colt Armory.[204] With corridors now of concrete, only the low-backed chairs in the trustees' room, formerly the library, remained. Modern furnishings replaced Elizabeth Colt's careful curating for more than fifty years. The original library was in turn reproduced in the Atheneum's Colt Memorial wing, with books transferred to the Parish. The thirty-five- by sixteen-foot room with large windows faced Wethersfield Avenue. It was one of two common rooms. Most apartments had 5-6 rooms (drawing room, dining room, kitchen, and 2-3 bedrooms, bathroom, pantries, and closets). The new wing included two apartments on each floor and eight single bedrooms. Apartments had all the modern conveniences, with their own entrances, telephone, dumb waiters, gas stoves, and housekeeping supplies. A central vacuum system in the cellar connected to each apartment. A fire escape and water line protected residents in emergencies. Elizabeth's will stipulated that residents would pay for only necessary living expenses and incidentals, but not rent, gas, water, and other services. They were encouraged to do their own housekeeping, and an infirmary was on the second floor until the 1940s. Women could submit applications through the warden, Dr. Linsley.[205]

Men and women crowded into the centrally located reception hall in 1911 when Reverend Chauncy B. Brewster dedicated the new Armsmear, now an altered version of the mansion with auxiliary buildings. The two-story dark-brick addition to the south end of the house contrasts with the original building of cream-painted stucco and brown trim. Supplementing the main house, trustees again enlisted Morris to design another building in 1927 but settled on architect Frank D. Glazier. They named it Jarvis Hall about a decade later. It was not until the 1960s, that an additional wing named after Episcopalian bishops, Brewster and Gray, completed the fifty-two-unit complex.[206] The newer buildings of tapestry brick boasted views of Colt Park, the pond, and Colt memorial statue that Elizabeth once enjoyed from her Armsmear bedroom.

In November 1919 the trustees hired someone to organize resident activities. Initially, widows lived in Armsmear with their children. As concerns arose about adult children of residents still living on site, new admission requirements restricted occupancy, requiring residents to pass a medical examination (a physical), and, although residents generally paid for their own clothing and food, to take into account an allowance based on need in the 1930s.[207] Some of the widows brought along their servants, until the 1940s, when the trustees decided to restrict residency to single women. For a time, single women lived as roommates, but eventually they were allowed to live by themselves in individual apartments. The requirements further evolved to restrict

[204] Granston, 175-177.

[205] "New Armsmear is Opened: Mrs. Colt's Gift of Home for Women Dedicated Bishop Brewster Tells of Giver's Purpose Many Inspect Transformed Building," *The Hartford Courant,* May 27, 1911; Mary Sullivan, Interview with Zachary Keith, Transcription by Gabriel Benjamin, May 24, 2016, Hartford, Connecticut; Minutes, March 13, 29, 1911, Digest of Buildings and Actions Taken by the Trustees of the Colt Bequest, David W. Granston, III files, Armsmear.

[206] "To Make Changes at Armsmear," *The Hartford Courant*, August 25, 1909; "New Armsmear is Opened," The Hartford Courant, May 27, 1911; Merle Kummer, *Hartford Architecture Volume Two: South Neighborhoods.* Hartford Architecture Conservatory Survey, Hartford CT, 1980.

[207] Minutes, November 3, 1919, Digest of Buildings and Actions Taken by the Trustees of the Colt Bequest, David W. Granston, III files, Armsmear.

residence to women over sixty years of age who were on a limited income; the requirement that they be Episcopalian was dropped. A male bishop, Dr. George Linsley, who had ministered the Church of the Good Shepherd since 1902, served as warden for twenty years until his death in 1937. The trustees assigned female executive secretaries to administer the boarding until an executive director position was created in the 1970s. While Sam and Elizabeth may still have recognized the stairwells and library, the Armsmear renovations included St. Elizabeth's chapel.[208] (See 9.6).

Conclusion

As a home for pious women in need, Armsmear remains a feminine space today. In post-Civil War Hartford, widow and chief shareholder of the Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company Elizabeth Jarvis Colt walked the fine line between traditional domesticity and active involvement in the public sphere, comfortably assuming her role as a wealthy Victorian-era woman in the North. Her personal losses pushed her toward the male-dominated realms of business and public life, but she carefully negotiated her place in these spaces. She framed her social activities within Victorian expectations of her gender and status and created a legacy of a remarkable life of wealth and service, primarily in the realms of the arts and memorializing, that she carried through to the very end of her own years. Elizabeth Colt spent much of her life ensuring a legacy for her family, managing a domestic staff and supporting the cultural life of Hartford, especially for women. She also came to represent the wealthiest of the upper classes during the Gilded Age, when the profits of the industrial economy flowed primarily upward, and workers shared little in the nation's rapidly growing wealth. After her death, Elizabeth's creative influence on Hartford's cultural future lived on through her wing at the Wadsworth Atheneum and with the donation of her distinguished South Meadow estate as a municipal park for those who kept the armory running and allowed her to do so, the city's working class.

[208] Sullivan, Interview with Keith, 2016; Minutes, February 2, 1912, Digest of Buildings and Actions Taken by the Trustees of the Colt Bequest, David W. Granston III files, Colt Bequest, Armsmear, Hartford, CT; William A. Beardsley, D.D., "Sermon Preached in the Church of the Good Shepherd November 2nd, 1941 at the Dedication of a Tablet in Memory of the Rev. George Thomas Linsley, D.D., Rector, 1902-1932, (Hartford, CT: Church Missions Publishing, 1941), https://anglicanhistory.org/usa/wabeardsley/linsley1941.html, accessed July 20, 2025.

X. The Estate (1855-1945)
Colt Park, Gardener's Cottage, Carriage House



Figure 10.1 Colt Memorial Park, Hartford, CT, ca. 1907. Photograph. Compare Fenn painting, 1867 (10.3). Publisher Detroit Publishing Co. Library of Congress, Washington, DC. https://www.loc.gov/item/2016795053/.

As a historic resource, the Colt's estate, now known as Colt Park, reflects changing ideas about natural resources, their industrial use and exploitation, but also their conservation from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. The Colts replaced the waterlogged meadow with an extravagant garden, an extension of the mansion. A year before they moved into Armsmear, Sam and Elizabeth Colt hired landscape architects Cleveland & Copeland to design their roughly eighteen-acre estate grounds, that included the long waterlogged agricultural fields of South Meadow, with the aesthetic appeal centered around country and rural living in the industrial city. Water now concentrated in ponds as features of a garden that rivaled those of European castles. For decades the public and media praised Colt's efforts that "made a swamp blossom as the rose."[1]

Through the construction of the dike, Sam Colt literally moved earth, if not heaven, to transform the environment of the South Meadow, representing in a dramatic fashion the transition of land use in New England from agriculture to industry. The seemingly natural beauty and harmony

[1] M. E. W. S., "The Homes of America VII. Armsmear," *The Art Journal* 2 (1876), 321.

of the Colt's factory complex and the Colt estate (left by Elizabeth to the city of Hartford as Colt Park) cloaked the profound human impact that the Colts, and the Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, had on the natural and urban environment of Hartford and greater Hartford. Colt's, along with other industries that made Hartford a dominant economic city, built dams on the Little River that backed up industrial sewage, created uncovered cesspools, emptied waste into the rivers, and eventually forced the city to enlist the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to bury the Park River tributary. Combined storm and sanitary sewers exacerbated the amount of waste that eventually went into the Connecticut River and its tributaries. The hundreds of steamers that delivered raw materials and Colt's products, not to mention the human sewage from worker housing, added pollutants to the river. Near the end of her life, the environmental conservation movement of the early twentieth century inspired Elizabeth to donate the land to the city upon her death and guided the transition of the Colts' private estate and company town to a public park.

A Private, Palatial Estate

When Samuel Colt first presented his development plans for the South Meadow to the Common Council in the 1850s, Colt shared his vision of his factory complex as a contribution to the city, promising that "if the City of Hartford should determine to locate a park for public recreation and health in the southern part of the city, I am willing to contribute any lands which I may own within its limits, without charge, or at its market value, provided all other lands so appropriated shall be furnished on the same terms.…"[2] His plans coincided with America's municipal nascent park movement, as Frederick Law Olmsted, born in Hartford six years after Sam Colt, planned New York City's Central Park between 1853 and 1858, and Horace Bushnell imagined a similar space for Hartford.



Figure 10.2 E. P. & WM. Kellogg, The Charter Oak, clearly suffering from age, before its fall, Hartford, c. 1855, The Graphics Collection, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, CTDA. https://hdl.handle.net/11134/2283056.

[2] "Common Council Friday Evening," *The Hartford Courant*, August 15, 1853, 2; "Common Council, Last Evening," Hartford Daily Courant, July 26, 1853; "South Meadow Improvements," *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 14, 1854, 2.

However, Colt hoped to preserve an ancient tree, the historic Charter Oak (see chapter 1 and 10.2), upon which he anchored his factory's place in Hartford's history, and after whom he named the venerable hall (see chapters 5 and 8).[3] However, less than a year after establishing the armory, a lightning storm felled the estimated 1,000-year-old tree in August of 1856. The community mourned, draping two national flags over the fallen tree and memorializing it with ceremony and speeches. Church bells rang. The Colt Armory band played dirges. The city hosted a parade. Connecticut residents made precious mementos from the oak's trunk to capture its mythical power, Colt commissioned several items, including a side hammer revolver, a carved chair that serves as a prominent seat in the Connecticut State Senate Chamber, and the infamous cradle for his first-born carved out of its wood. The city captured and grew scions from acorns and seedlings that still stand today.[4] The death of the venerable Charter Oak tree severed the last physical witness to the South Meadow's historic natural landscape.

When the Colts replaced the waterlogged meadow with an extravagant garden as an eighteen-acre extension of the mansion in 1856, architects Cleveland and Copeland imagined a highly landscaped garden reminiscent of those of European nobles and gentry, including statuary, fountains, ornamental ponds with live fowl, exotic trees and orchards, and docile wildlife. It is likely that in addition to mimicking European gardens, the Colts were influenced by their friend, Hartford artist Frederic Church, a founder of the Hudson River School and an early advocate for the preservation of sites like Niagara Falls. Several Hudson River School landscapes became part of Elizabeth Colt's art collection, which is now housed at the Wadsworth Atheneum. (See chapter 9.) Her collection included naturalistic scenes that celebrated pristine nature, depicting wilderness as uninhabited and uncontrolled. Influenced by Romantic art and literature, Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt created images of primarily uninhabited or unfarmed landscapes that inspired many easterners to emigrate west, promising rich, inviting, apparently empty lands.

Hudson River School landscapes represented a version of the Garden of Eden, an idea and ideal that influenced fine artists and the country's first landscape architects. As significant as the mansion itself, the grounds also carry great historical significance as a predecessor to America's urban park movement, serving as a transitional resource in landscape architecture, a field that began with the rural cemetery movement discussed earlier in association with Cedar Hill Cemetery where the Colts are buried.[5] The Hudson River School artists by and large rejected the urban aesthetic, reflecting a nostalgia for the pre-industrial landscape. These paintings defined the spiritual core of a new nation, the equivalent of the cathedrals of Europe, inspiring the government to establish its first preserve in Yellowstone National Park in 1872.

Municipal parks proliferated throughout the region beginning in the 1850s, shaping public perceptions of state parks and forests. The industrialization of eastern cities like Hartford led the movement. They convinced many Americans, and clearly the Colts, that nature was important

---

[3] Jack Rohan, *Yankee Arms Dealer* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), 183-84.

[4] "The Legend of the Charter Oak," August 21, 2019, Connecticut Humanities, https://connecticuthistory.org/the-legend-of-the-charter-oak/, accessed February 17, 2020.

[5] California first designated Yosemite Valley as a state park in 1864, but the U.S. Congress designated it as the nation's second national park, after Yellowstone (1872), in 1890.

to physical, emotional, and mental health. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, parks served as an antidote to rapid urbanization and jarring societal changes, including natural resource depletion in service to manufacturing. These changes included a sharp separation of work from leisure, long work hours, low pay, unhealthy living conditions, poverty, and rising crime. Olmsted's pastoral and naturalistic Central Park aimed to provide urban residents with space to feel invigorated and escape the harsh realities of industrial work without losing the comforts of the city. Features echoed those of Europe's royal gardens, including ponds, orchards, open green space, ornamental trees and bushes, and pathways.[6] Horace Cleveland and Robert M. Copeland similarly designed the aesthetic appeal of the Colts' estate around rural living in the industrial city.[7]

Perhaps due to his own experience as a child growing up in the pre-industrial Central Connecticut River Valley, Olmsted, developed his philosophy about the influence of natural beauty on moral and social behavior from his close family friend and spiritual advisor, Reverend Horace Bushnell. Bushnell's sermons surely inspired young Olmsted's ideas about nature and "public parks as instruments of moral influence and reform and the value of passive recreation and unconscious mental and spiritual refreshment…," as well as communal well-being as a way of coping with and healing from the stresses of New England's industrial revolution.[8]

These ideas drew from nineteenth- century transcendentalist philosophies in arts and literature. Washington Irving, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Ralph Waldo Emerson philosophically and aesthetically responded to what many perceived as the dehumanizing effects of industrialism. Olmsted's philosophy about the influence of natural beauty on moral and social behavior stressed receptive (or passive) recreation (such as quiet contemplation, as through art and music)

---

[6] In his early days as a reporter Olmsted attested to the popularity and reliability of the Colt revolver. Olmsted wrote, "Of the Colts we cannot speak in too high terms. Though subjected for six or eight months to rough use, exposed to damp grass, and to all the ordinary neglects and accidents of camp travel, not once did a ball fail to answer the finger. Nothing got out of order, nothing required care; not once, though carried at random, in coat-pocket or belt, or tied thumping at the pummel, was there an accidental discharge. In short, they simply gave us perfect satisfaction, being all they claimed to be. Before taking them from home we gave them a trial alongside every rival we could hear of, and we had with us an unpatented imitation, but for practical purposes one Colt we found worth a dozen of all others. Such was the testimony of every old hunter and ranger we met. There are probably in Texas about as many revolvers as male adults, and I doubt if there are one hundred in the state of any other make. For ourselves, as I said, we found them perfect. After a little practice we could very surely chop off a snake's head from the saddle at any reasonable distance, and across a fixed rest could hit an object of the size of a man at ordinary rifle range. One of our pistols was one day submerged in a bog for some minutes, but on trial, though dripping wet, not a single barrel missed fire. A border weapon, so reliable in every sense, would give brute courage to even a dyspeptic tailor." Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas* (New York: Dix Edwards and Company, 1857), 75.

[7] Henry S. Graves, "A Policy for Forestry for the Nation," Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Circular 148, Office of the Secretary, December 1919, 5; Richard William Judd, *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 91; Ney C. Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America: A Critical Review* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 15-20.

[8] "Olmsted in Connecticut: Landscape Documentation Project, Statewide Context and Survey Report (September 2022), 20-25, 58-59; George Scheper, "The Reformist Vision of Frederick Law Olmsted and the Poetics of Park Design," *The New England Quarterly* 62: 3 (1989): 378.

to restore the soul. Reverend Bushnell conceived of and introduced the idea of a public park in Hartford as a form of social control that would encourage civility in an urban population. Bushnell believed in the rural idealism of his own youth, one that echoed the Jeffersonian ideals of agrarianism over industrialism, inspiring "refined behavior" and Protestant middle-class values that expressed feminine qualities of the Christian faith over the masculine faith of conquest. He saw the segregated space of the park as an antidote to the growth of manufacturing and a way to reestablish the values of the traditional rural religious community. Bushnell Park would be planned and established from 1851-1854 about a mile from the Coltsville estate, making it the oldest publicly funded park in the country. Colt would have been familiar with Bushnell, who advocated city planning for a public park about the same time that Colt was planning his factory complex and estate. Like Bushnell Park, the Colts' private and serene estate was meant to provided balance to the busy manufacturing center churning out military weapons.[9]

It was within this context that Copeland and Cleveland conceived the Colts' seemingly natural visual and physical buffer between Armsmear and the factory village. The architects the Colts hired were well known for designing rural cemeteries, forerunners to the public municipal parks that Olmsted pioneered.[10] The extensive formal gardens that echoed those of Europe with Greek statuary, nymph fountains, knolls, urns, fountains, a summer pavilion, an ornamental duck pond, special plantings, carriage paths, and even a deer park, alongside cornfields, and grazing pastures transformed the topography and ecology of the South Meadow.[11] (See 10.3).

North of the field of planted crops and meadows, west of the dwarf pear orchard, and set back from Wethersfield Avenue between the James B. Colt House and the mansion, the Colts created a large lake, shaped vaguely like a fish with its head pointed to Armsmear and the tail pointing south. A rustic bridge separated a small oval body of water from the rest of the main body. This lake acted like a reservoir for the gardens. With the water partially supplied by springs, pumps installed at the factory piped water to the ponds from the Connecticut River, which also supplied Armsmear, the factory, and worker housing (including Potsdam Village). Fish included black bass, goldfish, perch, and pickerel. Swans and peacocks roamed the garden around the 30-foot-deep lake. The lake was also large enough to accommodate a rowboat, two water nymph sculptures, and a bronze Colt statue.[12]

---

[9] Henry Barnard, Armsmear: The Home, The Arm, and The Armory of Samuel Colt. (New York: 1866), 19; Donald Poland, "Unconscious Influence: Olmsted's Hartford," Paper for the Amistad Committee, New Haven, CT, October 7, 2020), 99, 122; Public Park Association of Providence, "Interior Open Spaces in Cities: Their Advantages. Parks of Providence No. 8 (Providence: The Providence Press, 1889), 20-21; See Peter C. Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford, 1850- 1930* (Ohio State University Press, 1999), 12-33.

[10] The city of Providence would select Cleveland to design the state's flagship public park, Roger Williams Park, more than twenty years later. See Daniel Joseph Nadenicek, "Nature in the City: Horace Cleveland's Aesthetic," Landscape and Urban Planning 26:1 (1993): 5–15; Robert Copeland Morris, *Country Life: A Handbook of Agriculture, Horticulture, and Landscape Gardening* (Boston: J. P. Jewett, 1859).

[11] "A Millionaire's Majority" *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

[12] "Colt Ponds Over 23 Feet Deep: No Skating Will Be Allowed There; Fence May Be Built Soundings Made Through the Ice Big Bass Were Scooped Out by Men With Nets Soon After Mrs. Colt Died--Ponds Part Of Private Water System," The Hartford Courant, February 8, 1906; M.E.W.S, "The Homes of America VII; John



Figure 10.3 Henry Fenn, Painting of Colt Estate, 1865, commissioned by Elizabeth Jarvis Colt. Elizabeth Jarvis Colt Collection, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT.

Alongside the orientalist blue dome of the factory, the European-inspired garden estate reflected international cosmopolitanism, introducing hundreds of non-native plant species to Hartford and Connecticut. The nearly half-mile-long greenhouse, built between 1858 and 1860, was filled not with local produce, but with hundreds of foreign species of fruit trees, vegetables, and plants from around the world. Much like in his factory and the dike's construction, Colt enlisted technology to defy nature, in this case to distinguish his grounds and grow non-native plants of his choice, sometimes year-round. While he employed many Germans to work in his armory, he hired English gardeners to maintain his estate. As further evidence of Colt's global reach and perspective, a pinery (hothouse) even featured tropical plants like pineapples and bananas in the cold New England climate.[13] Four glass pavilions of glass and steel stretched between 2,364 and 2,700 feet in length. Of that space, 800 feet was not temperature controlled, but the remainder served as "hot houses" where the community pool stands today. These fantastical greenhouses began north of Armsmear at Wethersfield Avenue and extended east, following what appears to be the property line between the Colt and Porter estates, running almost a half mile adjacent to where Stonington Street is today. The others eventually formed a rectangle, with four octagonal glass rooms with pyramidal roofs at the corners. The rooms were furnished with willow ware, and round windows filled them with color. A grapery with "apartments" for thirteen varieties of grapes produced 2,000 pounds annually, including Hamburgs, Barbarossa, Black Prince, Muscat of Alexandria, Golden and Red Chasselas, Black Grizzly, White Frontenac, and Hamburg Muscat. The hot houses also grew nectarines, figs, peaches, plums, cucumbers, orchids, and ferns.[14]

Alexopoulos, The Nineteenth Century Parks of Hartford: A Legacy to the Nation (Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1983), 47.

[13] Henry Barnard, *Armsmear: The Home, the Arm, and Armory of Samuel Colt: A Memorial* (New York: Corydon Alexis Alvord, Printer, 1866), 86.

[14] Barnard, 86; "Armsmear-Glass Structured and Lawns," *The Hartford Courant*, April 9, 1869, 2.

At a horticulturalist exhibition in 1858, Colt's gardeners James Stubbins and Thomas Maltman (chapter 9) showed off the greenhouse's plate of Black Hamburg grapes and four pineapples, one still green, another in bloom, and the rest "had each a fully ripened apple to tempt the visitors gathered around this new production of Hartford soil." Grown in eighteen months from sucker to blossom, these pineapples became the first many people in Hartford had seen.[15] That fall the Colts built an extension that focused solely on fruits. By the following year, it produced more ripe peaches and nectarines than the family could eat.[16] As the snow fell in April another year later, in 1860, Elizabeth's father, William, reported the greenhouse grew not only strawberries, pineapples, bananas, cucumbers, string beans, cotton, and rice but that grapes, peaches, apricots, and nectarines were sure to ripen on the more than 2,000 fruit trees by May. Elizabeth's brother Richard Jarvis claimed that his eldest sister ate nothing but strawberries for a month. Reverend Jarvis would write on and on about the greenhouses in letters to his nephew in Ohio.

> They have had strawberries from the Colt's greenhouse for a month or more; and have pineapples the year round. Peaches and nectarines are more than half grown and will be ripe in May. The gardener said he would have cart loads of them through the season; and 1200 quarts of strawberries to last until they are ripe in the garden. A single pot of two or three vines yields a quart of berries. His green houses now extend about a thousand feet.[17]

The newspapers reported cucumbers between eighteen and thirty inches in length, strawberries the size of eggs, and a display of flowers and fruits "never seen in this country if in any other, and it was considered a great privilege by the citizens, as well as strangers to visit the green + hot houses." The New York Times also reported on the presence of hot and cold graperies and on the treat of seeing fruit rapidly ripen before season, even during a spring freeze. "Peaches are now as large as walnuts and grapes as large as rifle bullets," not to mention figs, plums, apricots, and beans. Seeing the potential for profit, Colt also sold strawberries to the Boston market at $3.50 a pound. It cost $20,000 a year to tend to the enormous project, and chief gardener Stubbins guessed he could easily bring in $30,000 from selling the produce. Reverend Jarvis claimed that Colt preferred to supply his friends and that Colt sometimes distributed oranges (and presumably other surplus fruit) to the workmen. "We are indebted to Colonel Colt," he claimed a winter-weary William Jarvis, "for some magnificent specimens of ripe cherries from his hot-house. If this cold weather continues, we fear that hothouse fruit will be the only kind that can be provided this season."[18]

While the greenhouse and gardens were extraordinary, early agrarian heritage had always encouraged the presence of nature among the factory landscape. Many mill owners landscaped their sites to emphasize the compatibility of industry and an agrarian landscape. Some mature

---

15 "The Horticulturalist Exhibition," *The Hartford Courant*, July 30, 1858.

16 Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, March 14, 1859, June 1859, Box 1, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

17 Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, March 18, 1860, Box 1, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

18 Article 6, *The New York Times*, February 15, 1858; Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis ,April 1, 1861, Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, March 19, 1861 William Jarvis Letters, CMCH; "Summer Luxuries in the Midst of Snow," *Hartford Times*, Saturday, March 30, 1861; "Monday, Morning, May 6, 1861," *The Hartford Courant*, May 6, 1861, in Box 56, Newspaper clippings, Connecticut State Archives, Hartford, CT.

trees still dotted the large meadow that included cornfields and pastures for the Colt family's cows and sheep. Sam Colt located a small working farm somewhere between the gardens and the Potsdam Cottages that lasted several years. Elizabeth Colt's 1867 payroll lists about eleven farm laborers, many with Irish surnames.[19] A tobacco warehouse, cattle, mules, oxen, corn, agricultural tools, a blacksmith shop, and orchards served the worker community, but William Hosley speculates that Colt may have also had plans to seek a profit with his model farm.[20] For several years the Colts intentionally flooded these wide meadows during the winter to create a skating pond. In February 1859, *The Hartford Courant* reported that 4,000 to 6,000 people, mostly women, took to the ice for what seemed like some sort of fair, accompanied by the Colt Armory Band. The Colt Armory Guard followed with a parade in the streets, stacking their muskets to the east of the rink. It must have been a chaotic scene, with carriages and sleighs joining individuals.[21]

The estate may have begun with Sam's vision, but his widow Elizabeth oversaw its completion. The height of the estate's opulence may have been in 1865. It was then that Elizabeth Colt commissioned Henry Fenn to paint pictures of the estate's magnificent landscape, perhaps to create a document of Sam's full vision, as this would have been soon after the factory fire.[22] By May 1867 Elizabeth employed 100 laborers. In addition to domestics, gardeners, and farm laborers, these employees included several individuals' work related to the Church of the Good Shepherd (see Appendix).[23] *The Hartford Courant* published an article in 1903 in which an elderly member of a florists' club, C. S. Mason, reflected on the early greenhouses of the city and praised the skills of the English gardeners at the Colt estate.[24]

Beside the greenhouse stood a gardener's cottage, a Carpenter Gothic- style building erected sometime in the 1860s. This was the residence of the chief gardener, initially the aforementioned Englishman James Stubbins, until at least 1867. Stubbins supervised around eighteen to nineteen other gardeners. For a time, the apparently single father lived there with his three young sons (Reuben, Caleb, and John Stubbins), another little boy named Michael Kelly, and Thomas Maltman, who succeeded Stubbins as master gardener.[25] Recall that Maltman had also been

---

[19] "Mrs. Sam Colt's Pay-roll and Sundry Payments for May 1867," Box 10, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Hereafter cited as William Jarvis Letters, CMCH; 1870; Hartford Ward 4, Hartford, Connecticut; Roll: M593_101; Page: 571B. Ancestry.com.

[20] David Zonderman, *Aspirations and Anxieties: New England Workers and the Mechanized Factory System, 1815-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 67. See also, Marx, The Machine in the Garden.

[21] At one point a carriage even broke through the ice. *Hartford Daily Courant*, February 3, 1859, 2; Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, December 30, 1860, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

[22] Board of the Hartford, "Master Plan;" Henry Fenn, Watercolors, 1867, Wadsworth Atheneum.

[23] "Mrs. Sam Colt's Pay-roll and Sundry Payments for May 1867," Box 10, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

[24] "Old-Time Gardens," *The Hartford Courant*, October 12, 1903.

[25] Michael Kelly may have been the child of a domestic servant, Elizabeth Kelly. National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group: *Records of the Bureau of the Census*; Record Group Number: *29*; Series Number: *M432*; Residence Date: 1850; Home in 1850: Hartford, Connecticut; Roll: 41; Page: 223a; Ancestry.com. *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Lehi, Utah, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011; Mrs. Samuel Colt Payroll and Sundry Payments, Box 10, Elizabeth Colt papers, JFP, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

recruited from England when he fell for and married the housemaid and presumably moved into Armsmear itself. An article about the 1862 Connecticut State Fair celebrated the quality of Maltman's work on the Colt estate garden. "Mrs. Samuel Colt's flower gardener, Thomas Maltman, sends a superb collection of varigated [sic] plants, each so very beautiful as to require a separate notice, but this we cannot give."[26] At an 1870 fair held by the Hartford County Agricultural Society, Maltman took home $11 (around $264 in 2024) in prizes on the final day for peaches, pineapples, and multiple varieties of wine grapes. [27]And in 1887 he represented Elizabeth Colt at a chrysanthemum show held at Allyn Hall in Hartford alongside the most popular gardeners of Hartford's elite, such as John O'Neil for Samuel and Olivia Clemens and F. A. Bolze for Pliny Jewell. As usual, Maltman brought home prizes.[28]

The carriage house, also built in the 1860s, housed stables for around seven horses and two ponies. Colt's inventory recorded 14 carriages and sleighs; Reverend Jarvis mentioned at least four carriages and three sleighs.[29] Reverend Jarvis later mentioned the relocation of the brick house that stood near the stables "to the south side of the Dike about a quarter of a mile without disturbing even a brick," for the willow-ware basket weavers to use for work. He also reported that the gardener's house moved "some distance" in early 1861.[30]

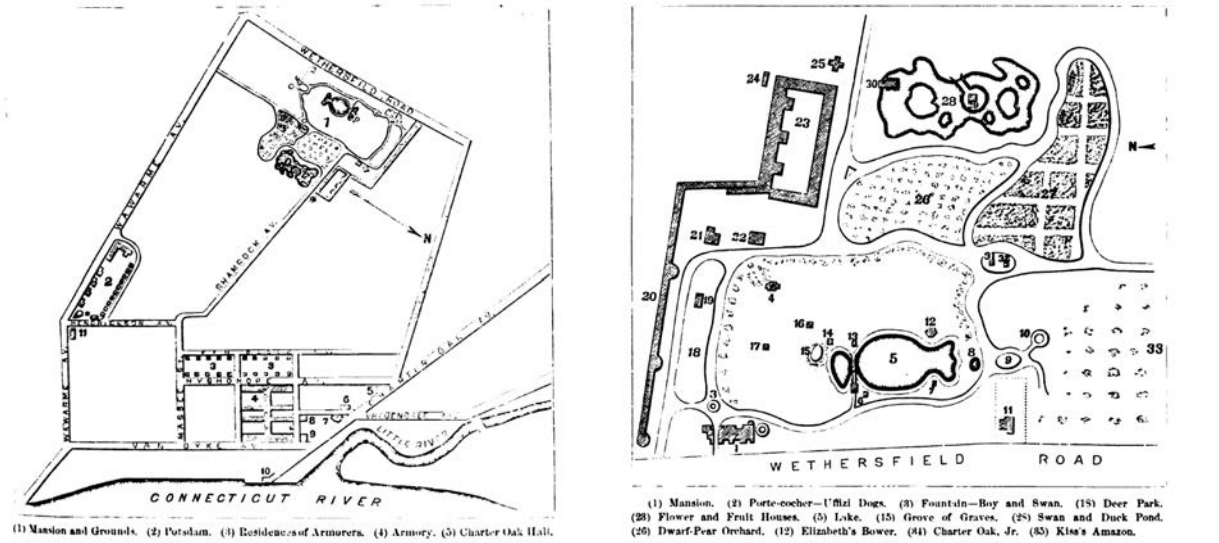


Figure 10.4 "Map of the Colt Estate and "Map of Armsmear," in Henry Barnard, Armsmear: The Home, the Arm, and the Armory of Samuel Colt: A Memorial. New York, 1866), 71, 72.

[26] "The State Fair at Hartford, October 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th," *The Hartford Courant*, October 9, 1862.

[27] "Hartford County Agricultural Society – 35th Exhibition," *The Hartford Courant*, October 6, 1870.

[28] "The Chrysanthemum Show," *The Hartford Courant*, November 10, 1887; "Mrs. Sam Colt's Pay-roll and Sundry Payments for May 1867," Box 10, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

[29] The carriage house would be renovated during the 1930s, but historian William Hosley still identifies a cockfighting space on the second floor, an activity attributed to Caldwell Colt. Tom Vanderbilt, "Can Coltsville Give Hartford Another Shot?" *Preservation: The Magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation* 50:1(1998); Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, February 6, 1859, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH; Grant, The Colt Armory, 29.

[30] Reverend William Jarvis to William Jarvis, March 19, 1861, William Jarvis Letters, CMCH.

As impressive as the greenhouse was, the majority of the estate consisted of a French seed mixture that lay the base for the lush, velvety lawns across the estate (likely frequently cut with reel mowers), with walkways created with compacted gravel and lined with different plants and shrubs such as Norway spruce that could tolerate the Connecticut climate.[31] The peach orchard lay south of the greenhouses, as did a swan and duck pond with an irregular shoreline, known as the lower lake, featuring a bridge to a center island called Amazon's Kiss. A carriage path cut north and south, separating this tranquil pond from the dwarf-pear orchard. Compacted gravel carriage roads, trails, and flagstone walkways wound throughout the estate. Instead of concrete walls, Norway spruce hedges separated the spaces.

Elizabeth constructed a rectangular, gable-roofed icehouse in the 1870s. One critic described fir-shaded quiet walks among "perfection of landscape gardening," including a rustic bridge, fountain, lake, and weeping willows. He added that "there is not one disagreeable object to be seen in the beautiful domain."[32]

At the very tip of the lake's north end stood a cluster of trees, dubbed the "Grove of Graves" to acknowledge the original burial site of Samuel Colt and his four deceased children. Marble slabs and a marble niche of a boy (sculpted by Edward Shepherd Bartholomew) marked the site before the bodies were moved to Cedar Hill Cemetery upon the death of Caldwell Colt in 1894. Elizabeth commissioned the Colt Memorial statue in its place in 1902, but it was not finished until after her death. On the east side of the lake sat two wood-framed "summer house" pavilions that added shelter to the Colt grounds, allowing visitors to overlook the park. The smaller of these was known as Elizabeth's Bower, which sat directly on the east side of the lake.[33]

Various species of vegetation complemented the statuary reminiscent of Greek and Roman depictions of dogs, Diana, and Hebe. The Romantic aesthetics mirror the statuary around the estate. A Grecian sculpture of Apollo stood beside Elizabeth's Bower. A goat and its suckling kid also stood beside the lake. Sprouting behind the house, the Boy and Swan Fountain acted like a central hub for visitors to take the path west to the Armsmear mansion, north to the greenhouse, south to the lake, or east to the deer paddock, an enclosure of more than a dozen white tail deer. These sculptures remained part of Colt Park's landscape as late as 1952.[34] The statuary featured such a variety of styles, however, that one landscape architect noted it was likely that "Colt assembled all of them himself and acted as his own planner and designer."[35] Well known sculptor James Batterson worked with Colt on fencing, posts, most of the statuary bases, the sculptures of Apollo and Diana, and a monument for the Colts' deceased daughter, "Little Lizzie."[36]

---

31 "Armsmear- Glass Structured and Lawns," *The Hartford Daily Courant*, April 9, 1869, 2.

32 "Armsmear- Glass Structured and Lawns," *The Hartford Courant*, April 9, 1869, 2; Board of the Hartford, "Master Plan;" Barnard, *Armsmear: The Home*, 80; M. E. W. S., "Homes of America VII: Armsmear," 323.

33 M. E. W. S., "The Homes of America VII: Alexopoulos, *"The Nineteenth Century Parks of Hartford,"* 47.

34 Barnard, 99-101; Board of the Hartford, "Master Plan."

35 Alexopoulos, 46.

36 "Bills to Samuel Colt from James Batterson," Armsmear Archives, Hartford, CT; For more on Batterson, see Anthony Roy, "James G. Batterson, Stone Contractor," https://connecticuthistory.org/james-g-batterson-stone-contractor/, accessed August 23, 2025.

The Colts frequently opened the estate to workers through various events and activities, and members of the public could likewise enjoy the grounds. Mrs. Colt threw fundraisers and lawn parties for 1,000 or more people.[37] At the same time, it was private property. Grown men and small boys frequently stole apples and other produce, although Elizabeth rarely pressed charges. Only one arrest for these crimes is on record.[38]

Private Estate to Public Park

Beginning in 1894, after consulting with several friends, including her attorney Charles Gross, Elizabeth Colt altered her will to donate the land of her estate as a park to the City of Hartford after her death. Probably her most influential advisor was Reverend Doctor Francis Goodwin, one of Hartford's earliest park promoters. Elizabeth took notice at a literary club meeting to which they both belonged at which Goodwin articulated his vision for Hartford, which like those for Boston and Providence involved a chain of parklands across the city to allow equal access from different neighborhoods. The Hartford Park Commission organized, with Goodwin on the board, and beginning in the 1880s orchestrated the creation of public parks in Hartford in a time called "The Rain of Parks" (1894-1895). Between 1890 and 1900, Hartford established five parks: Keney, Pope, Goodwin, Riverside, and Elizabeth (not named for Mrs. Colt).[39]

The location of South Meadow would mean that Hartford's park system could begin and end at the river's edge, with Riverside Park to the north. A South Meadow location added a needed playground for the roughly 5,000 children in the adjacent district and allowed a parkway to approach the dike from the south. After Elizabeth's death in 1905, the Hartford City Park system absorbed Colt Park's one hundred acres on the grounds of Armsmear. Along with the land, valued at $59,580, Mrs. Colt also left $60,000 with instructions to her attorney to construct two bronze statues to guard the entrance to Colt Park.[40]

The growth of Connecticut cities and industry had transformed the state's rural landscapes and homogenous population. In all, the state commissioned almost 300 jobs from Olmsted and his firm. Since the Civil War, Connecticut's cities of Hartford, New Haven, Stamford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Norwich, New Britain, Meriden, and New London began establishing parks throughout the rest of the century and into the twentieth, joined by Chicago in 1869, Boston in 1893, and Providence, Rhode Island in 1904. Worker volatility at that time contributed to broad support for urban parks. However, experts and the public disagreed as to whether parks served a therapeutic role or simply provided amusement and activity. When Mrs. Colt gifted the 106-acre estate, the grounds reflected the romantic passive recreation of the mid-nineteenth park movement. As Hartford's Director of Parks Theodore Wirth, the brother of future National Park Service Director Conrad Wirth (both Swiss immigrants), oversaw Hartford's parks upon Elizabeth's bequest. He gradually nudged Colt Park toward more active recreation.

37 "Clouds and the Lawn Party," *The Hartford Courant*, June 18, 1891.

38 "Boys Wholesale Stealing," *The Hartford Courant*, August 5, 1891; "For Stealing Apples: Three Men Arrested at Mrs. Samuel Colt's," *The Hartford Courant*, July 28, 1898.

39 "Hartford's Ring of Parks," *The Hartford Courant*, October 24, 2014.

40 "Mrs. Colt's Gift to Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, November 2, 1905.

After Elizabeth's death, the space provided active recreational space for Hartford residents, an alternative to (rather than an extension of) the more contemplative area known as City (Bushnell) Park. The park boundary extended from the fence of Armsmear at Wethersfield Avenue to the Colt Arms factory. Adding an additional 105 acres to the city, the park encompassed the vast meadow lands. Landscape architect Theodore Wirth and the park commission converted the area into tennis courts, baseball fields, playgrounds, running tracks, a skating pond, and a pavilion. During a tour of Colt Park with city leaders, Elizabeth Colt's attorney and Park Commissioner Charles Gross commented, "with little expense, it could be readily converted into a similar grove to that of Riverside [Park]," an area defined by its meadows.[41]

Wirth held high ambitions for the park's uses and worked with designs created by the Olmsted Brothers Company, which acted as consultants for Colt Park from 1895 to 1940, including overseeing the Samuel Colt memorial monument at the site of the former Grove of Graves.[42] Barnard Park architect Charles Elliot, not Elizabeth or the Olmsted firm, first conceived of a memorial statue of a "distinguished citizen." A figure of Samuel Colt rose to the top of the wish list, but because of his widow's plans to bequeath the city her own land, she requested a Samuel Colt statue be located near his factory and home, the future Colt Park. As she had for so many of her memorials, she participated in the monument's design shortly before her death, and it was completed after she died.[43]

Scottish American sculptor J. Massey Rhind worked with the Olmsted Brothers firm. Rhind had designed one of the doors of New York City's Trinity Church, statues in Washington, D.C., Nova Scotia, New York, New Jersey, and Michigan, and sculptures for the courthouses of New Haven, Connecticut and Memphis, Tennessee. The Olmsted firm provided "some careful work on the grounds surrounding," determining that "the ground in front of the building is low and wet and would be much improved if it were raised." The firm provided several alternative plans, with "Plan A" preferred, "especially the easy curves of approach, and the more gradual descent from front of the building."[44]

---

41 "City Fathers at Armsmear Park: Mayor, Alderman and Councilmen make…" *The Hartford Courant*, October 20, 1905, 11.

42 National Recreation and Park Association, "Theodore Wirth (1863-1949)" NRPA.org, (2007). https://aapra-goldmedal.secure-platform.com/a/page/HallofFame/Inductees/Theodore_Wirth, accessed August 14, 2026.

43 Mrs. Colt's Gift to Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, November 2, 1905.

44 David W. Granston III, "A Story of Sunshine and Shadow: Elizabeth H. Colt and the Crafting of the Colt Legacy in Hartford," (MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 2016); "Olmsted in Connecticut: Landscape Documentation Project, Statewide Context and Survey Report (September 2022), 102; 56 "Today is the Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of the Late Colonel Samuel Colt," *Hartford Daily Courant*, July 19, 1914.



Figure 10.5 Remaining Colt Park statuary, Rustic bridge and pond, Hartford, CT, c. 1910, Richard L. Mahoney Collection. Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library. CTDA, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/50002:4790.

The rest of the park converted to recreational purposes to meet the needs of all socioeconomic classes. The city converted carriage paths into bicycle paths to cut through the park. Officials determined the swan and duck pond hazardous due to the risk of public drowning and soon filled it. In July 1906 the city completed 640 feet of roadway from the entrance across the northside of the park but removed the dwarf-peach orchard and shrubbery to allow for more open play space. Six baseball diamonds enjoyed regular use. Benches and tables added a picnic option.[45] While some of the garden remained (see 10.5), in 1908 the landscape architect C. L. Flint constructed a bowling green for the game "Bowls," popular in the yacht clubs, with a flat, 120-foot-by-120-foot field of groomed lawn located west of the tennis courts and croquet grounds and north of the baseball diamonds. One Hartford player described the game as "exceedingly amusing and as very good exercise." The newspaper reported that "On summer afternoons," Colt Park gave "the appearance of one vast playground."[46]

Elizabeth Colt's attorneys Charles Gross and W. L. Winship suggested that the wide meadows where the Colt's cornfields, orchards, and pastures once stood be flooded during the winter for public skating.[47] In 1910 the city removed the shrubbery surrounding the lakes for a skating pond before eventually removing the pond, too. Such ponds were difficult to maintain because of unpredictable water levels, yet they were needed "to keep many children from the danger

[45] "Pope Park Roadway Temporarily Open," *The Hartford Courant*, July 7, 1906.

[46] "Bowling Green at Colt Park Begun: Game of Bowls a Simple One in Theory but Skill is Required to Play It Well Green Must Be Kept in Perfect Condition," *The Hartford Courant*, July 2, 1908.

[47] National Park Historical Park, "Colt Gardener's Cottage and Colt Carriage House," National Park Service, nps.gov, Colt Gardener's Cottage and Colt Carriage House - Coltsville National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)

connected with skating on the river."[48] The city transported water from the Connecticut River to allow for better control but eventually converted the skating pond back to fields for running and playing baseball in the 1920s.[49]



Figure 10.6 Remaining greenhouses, Colt Park, Hartford, 1921, Hartford City Parks Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT. CTDA, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/50002:3715.

Photographs from 1914 through the 1930s show a range of many activities, including field hockey, marbles, storytelling, a cellar door slide, dances, and races with sacks bicycles. Sometimes kids just fooled around, doing handstands and other activities.[50] (See 10.6-10.9). Colt Park became "a rendezvous for sportsman, sports enthusiast, and anyone who enjoys physical activity." By the 1920s the park featured ten baseball diamonds, a quarter mile of racetrack, quoit pits, soccer fields, bowling greens, three skating ponds with shelters, three shower bathhouses, two coasting places, and a football gridiron, along with basketball, tennis, and volleyball courts and three playgrounds. To add a unique feature, a dancing pavilion would serve as "a model for other cities."[51]

---

[48] "Building in Zion Hill Cemetery: Park Board Discovers a Two-Story Structure There Will Ask Council for Aid in Making Skating Pond in Colt Park Turns Down Extension of The Speedway," *The Hartford Courant*, December 6, 1910.

[49] Noel K. Atwood "Letter to the Editor 1 -- no Title," *The Hartford Courant*, February 22, 1922, 2; National Park Historical Park, "Colt Gardener's Cottage and Colt Carriage House," National Park Service, nps.gov. Colt Gardener's Cottage and Colt Carriage House - Coltsville National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov).

[50] "Colt Park," Multiple Photographs, Connecticut Digital Archive.

[51] George E. Farrell, "Where Hartford Finds Its Recreation," *The Hartford Courant*, June 19, 1927, D3.

Play Education

The aptly named George A. Parker, who took over as Hartford's superintendent of the parks after Theodore Wirth, maintained Wirth's advocacy for the playground movement, especially for playscapes constructed in public parks to keep children off the streets. To further combat the urban environment and connect children to the rural past, vacation schools emphasized agricultural knowledge in food cultivation through a public children's garden. The city gradually allowed the Colt greenhouse to fall into disrepair over the course of a year so that the school could teach the children agricultural skills lost to the industrial age by converting some of the space occupied by the greenhouses to community and school vegetable gardens.[52] A newspaper article reported that "at Colt Park, the gardens have been somewhat enlarged by the occupation of more land for plots. Miss Helen McClunie is in charge. There are still a few more garden plots to give out, a limited number of them having been reserved for children who could not spare time for them after the closing of schools."[53]

Many of the Colt Park's activities appealed to families and people of all ages, but as labor and social reform movements advocated for an end to child labor, concern grew that too much free time inflicted more harm than good on child development. As with many of Hartford's other parks, Colt Park began educating Hartford's children through playgrounds. Superintendent Parker noted that the "human scrap heap" of urban society endangered the natural growth of kids.[54] In 1921 a child psychologist wrote an influential work about the importance of controlled play for children. Playgrounds could balance the safety of children with exercise and control their "pre-savage, hunting instinct."[55] Parks featured play areas separated by age groups and reflecting different stages of development. The fields and courts for team sports like football, volleyball, and baseball met the needs of adults and older adolescents. Children between ages six and twelve enjoyed larger spaces to climb, play tag, or engage in track and field activities. For younger children, the sandboxes, hammocks, and see-saws created safe, smaller spaces for exploring early gross motor skills.[56]

---

[52] Board of the Hartford Botanical Garden, "Master Plan: Hartford Botanical Garden at Colt Park," CT Trust For Historic Preservation, December 3, 2007. https://www.hartfordct.gov/files/assets/public/mayors-office/sustainability/sustainability-documents/resources/landscape/colt-botanical-garden.pdf.

[53] "Vacation Work for Children: Summer Occupation Schools Open Monday Gardens for Children in Riverside and Colt Parks Pope Park Gymnasium Open for Classes this Afternoon and Evening School Gardens Pope Park 'Gym,'" *The Hartford Courant*, June 29, 1907.

[54] Granville Stanley Hall, *Aspects of Child Life and Education* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1921).

[55] Hall, 320. Hall notes there were no dangers to a child's morality in the country and found that "during the rowdy or adolescent age. the boy's tendency to revert to savagery can find harmless vent in hunting, trapping, and other ways less injurious to morals than the customs of city life."

[56] Weddell W. Pangburn, "Playgrounds, a Factor in Street Safety," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 13:1 (1927): 178-185.



Figure 10.7 School/Children's Gardens, 1918, Hartford City Parks Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT. CTDA http://hdl.handle.net/11134/50002:14565.

At the time, playground leaders and school instructors, consistent with women's domestic role, oversaw these spaces. In June 1912 the city hired Helen Curtin, Christine Antz, Martha Smith, and Margret White to run Colt Park Playground (summer) Vacation schools.[57] These single, young women worked as teachers during the school year, but they spent summers supervising the children at play in outdoor playscapes, leading games, resolving conflicts, and ensuring their safety. Playleaders lead games, making play instructive and enjoyable for the children by keeping them safe and resolving conflicts.[58] By the 1930s Florence Porter and Charles Gibson supervised occupational training with a staff of teachers to assist. Ellen C. Cunningham, age 22, served as playground and vacation school supervisor for all the Hartford parks, retiring as supervisor of recreation in 1947.[59]

[57] "Vacation School Teachers Named," *The Hartford Courant*, June 28, 1912; Hartford City Directory, 1912, Ancestry.com.

[58] The Playground and Recreation Association of America, "The Playground," *The Playground* 17: 1 (April 1923), 279.

[59] "Playground Classes to Open Soon: Handicraft and Woodcraft Instruction Will be Given to Girls and Boys during Summer," *The Hartford Courant*, June 19, 1935; "Supervisor Honored by Associates: Miss Ellen Cunningham Retires After 32 Years of Playground Service Playground Supervisor Honored," *The Hartford Courant*, November 30, 1947.



Figure 10.8 Colt Park play area, October 1921, Hartford City Parks Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, CTDA, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/50002:3670.

Vacation schools prevented summer idleness and helped prepare children to gradually enter the workforce with occupational skills, an essential part of becoming an adult in the industrial world, including firearm manufacturing. Colt friend Henry Barnard observed that,

> Work of every kind looks like play to children. They never witness an execution without considering it a sort of a joke, and so for weeks afterward they play Jack Ketch. To them the mystery of pistol-making is only a line in Mother Goose: 'Here we go round, round, roundy.' All outsiders, in their views of mechanical mysteries, are only children of a larger growth.[60]

Festivals and Menageries

For a time, the city maintained the remnants of the Colt estate, including the deer paddock, believing that it would attract visitors to the park, a type of readymade, early zoo exhibit. It added more mystique to the place where peacocks roamed freely on the property. According to the October 20, 1905, edition of *The Hartford Courant*, the white tail deer were to be protected by the city for seven more years.[61] In the early 1920s someone gifted a local business owner two

[60] Barnard, 221; Jack Ketch was an executioner during Charles II's reign in seventeenth-century Britannica, "Jack Ketch." Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jack-Ketch.

[61] "City Fathers at Armsmear Park: Mayor, Alderman and Councilmen Make..." *The Hartford Courant*, October 20,

bear cubs, named "Ma" Ferguson and "Cal" Coolidge. At first, he displayed them in the window of his business, Hartford Market, but Park Superintendent George Parker persuaded Colt Park to leash them for the enjoyment of park attendees. Not surprisingly, seeing bears alarmed visitors, so the city created a "bear house." In August 1925 Ma Ferguson escaped after dinner, only later wrangled back to her cage after biting two policemen. The city was not deterred. By 1926 Colt Park had a menagerie featuring foxes, a wolf, alligator, raccoons, owls, and thirty-five rabbits. It later added three monkeys, pheasants and parrots, squirrels, a raccoon, deer, a wolf, foxes, coyotes, two horned owls, and a forty-two-inch, thirteen-year-old alligator named Zepp. Such menageries were common in urban parks until they evolved into zoos as their mission shifted toward science and conservation.

Philadelphia was the first to open such a menagerie, in 1854, and Central Park's soon followed. The Golden Gate Park in San Francisco added a menagerie in the 1930s that regularly displayed exotic and farm animals throughout the 1880s into the twentieth century. The small outdoor exhibits and enclosure of animals became what George Farrell of *The Hartford Courant* described as a "mecca to curious children." A Spanish War veteran described as "efficient and kind to the animals" cared for the zoo animals through the 1930s.



Figure 10.9 Children dancing, Colt Park Band Shell, Hartford, 1921. Hartford City Parks Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT. CTDA, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/50002:3711.

1905, 11.

While the newspaper reported that the conditions at the zoo surpassed those of other city zoos, debates continued as to the wisdom of them due to issues of expense and safety. Tragically, the 1936 flood nearly drowned "Ma" Ferguson and "Cal" Coolidge, whom city officials eventually shot as a safety precaution.[62]

Near the zoo, visitors sometimes could visit a circus and exhibition featuring performers, reenactors, and a "human zoo," a phenomenon of the era. Visitors could view Congolese people, who traveled around the country with permission from the French government, "living" in their village.[63] The 1930s brought multiethnic music performances and the first Black tennis tournament. Photographs show bike races. At the same time, folk dances and songs were performed by members of various foreign national groups: Armenian, Chinese, Danish. Italian, Norwegian. Polish, Ukrainian, French, and German peoples performed in Hartford twice a week through a program of the Mayor's Tercentenary Committee, attracting crowds as large as 2,000 people.[64]

Conclusion

Within its industrial tale, Coltsville tells an urban environmental story. The Colts' factory and estate profoundly altered and changed Wyllys Hill and South Meadow in Hartford. As a case study for the twentieth-century park movement, Colt Park demonstrates how the industrial revolution transformed the environment by enlisting technology to manipulate landscapes and cultivate non-native vegetation. Samuel Colt's dike not only held back the mighty Connecticut River to allow for the establishment of a permanent factory for Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company. It had also allowed an elaborate garden to blossom with exotic foods

---

[62] "Bruin Unchained Causes Near Panic: "Ma Ferguson Bites Policemen Smith in Colt Park Skirmish Bear Pounded Up In Half Hour Chase "Cal" Coolidge, Playmate, Breaks Chain But Stays In Zoo," *The Hartford Courant*, August 15, 1925; "Zoo At Colt Park Being Considered," *The Hartford Courant*, November 3, 1924; "An Afternoon At The Hartford Zoo: Attractive Collection Of Animals and Birds at Colt Park Draws Numerous Spectators To The Cages Daily Varied Assortment Now Includes Bears, Foxes, Wolf, Alligator, Raccoons, Owls, Hawk, Pheasants And Thirty-Five Rabbits "Ma Ferguson," "Coolidge," The Two Bears, Are Disgruntled Members, Being Only Ones Not Provided With New Quarters," *The Hartford Courant*, July 18, 1926; George E. Farrell, "Where Hartford," D3; "Moving Day Looms at Colt Park Zoo," *The Hartford Courant*, September 13, 1932; Charles E. Wheeler, "The City Zoo: Humane Society Says The Birds And Animals Are Cared For," The Hartford Courant, December 20, 1928; Citizen, "The People's Forum: Keep the Zoo Sale of Animals at Colt Park is Objected to," *The Hartford Courant*, September 15, 1932; "Alligator Given to Colt Park Zoo: 'Zepp,' 13-Year-Old Specimen, Added to Municipal Collection Alligator is the latest acquisition at City's zoo at Colt Park," *The Hartford Courant*, August 5, 1925; Charles F. J. Morse, "Is Capital City Complete without Animals in Zoo," *The Hartford Courant*, July 14, 1957; "Two colt park bears, beyond saving, killed," *The Hartford Courant*, March 21, 1936; Alexander, Museums in Motion, 110-116; Young, 38; "Animals of Golden Gate Park," at "Historical Images of San Francisco," https://opensfhistory.org/Photoset/Animals_of_Golden_Gate_Park.

[63] "Circus here, Plays Today at Colt Park: Ubangi Savages, Sea Elephant and 'Human Projectile' Features--Doors Open at 1 and 7 P. M. Circus Schedule Today," *The Hartford Courant*, July 10, 1930.

[64] Colt Park hosted the first black tennis tournament in Hartford, hosting top Black players from Washington, D.C., New York, New Jersey, and Maryland; "Folk Dance Programs at Colt Park Soon," *The Hartford Courant*, July 20, 1935; "German Societies to Entertain at Colt Park Friday," *The Hartford Courant*, August 22, 1935; "Negro Net Play Opens tomorrow at Colt Courts," *The Hartford Courant*, July 2, 1942; "Tercentary Sing Given by Negroes," *The Hartford Courant*, September 12, 1935.

and plants in the formerly waterlogged South Meadow. The palatial estate helped establish the Colts as city royalty, but it also served the workers as a site for passive recreation. After Elizabeth Colt's death, the estate became a place of education for urban children and for active recreation and popular entertainment, meeting the demands of the industrial workers who manufactured goods through two world wars and the Great Depression.

On March 11, 1936, a deluged Connecticut River breached Colt's dike. The water flooded Elizabeth's Colt's memorial, destroying the floor. The wooden piles upon which the church stands became warped. The tower also twisted out of alignment by several degrees.[65] The parish house fared far better than the Church of the Good Shepherd, the latter being located on lower ground. Even so, the parish house's basement and first floor flooring needed replacing, as did the furnace and boiler. All the wooden doors, trim, and wainscoting required restoration. While the second-story ballroom remained unscathed, the rector, carpenter, and plumber took a boat and donned waders to remove the first-story windows and rescue paintings and other items. The waterline reached within just three inches of the chandelier in one of the rooms. The flood drowned the Colts' former garden and estate and submerged all the buildings, tearing wooden structures from their foundations, including the outdoor dance floor and pavilion. A week later the park commissioner toured the area by boat, estimating $50,000 of damage from the historic deluge. Excessive rain in the hills of Vermont and New Hampshire swelled the Connecticut River and its 148 tributaries, breaching the dike that had held the Connecticut River back from the South Meadow for eighty years. The resilient Connecticut River continued to defy technology and reclaim the land.[66]

The replacement of Colt's dike following the historic 1936 flood with more modern and effective infrastructure included burying the Park River (formerly the Hog, Mill, and Little River) underground, beneath Broad Street and Bushnell Park, and building a road, the Park River Express Highway, over the top of it. As chapter 7 explains, Interstate-91 further cut off the city from the Connecticut River, and it would not be until the 1970s that environmental groups began to advocate for the river's clean-up. The city began to make plans to reconnect the people of Hartford with the river, recognizing it as both an economic and environmental asset. The river is a major cultural as well as natural resource, one critical to understanding the history of Hartford, precision manufacturing in New England, firearms production, and Coltsville.[67]

---

[65] The church was closed for several years in the 1970s, undergoing major renovations when it was clear the foundation's problems threatened the entire structure. The entire building was lifted, and the piles were replaced with concrete and steel. Various cracks still compromise the structure. Jack Hale, interview with Joseph Guerrera, in Jared Leitzel and Bethany Niebanck, "Church of the Good Shepherd," Historic Structure Report, HIST 511 Historic Preservation, Central Connecticut State University, April 19, 2016. Copy in Coltsville HRS files.

[66] "The Flood of 1936," *The Hartford Courant*, March 9, 1986; Ada Bidwell to Mrs. Cushman, March 26, 1936, Ada Bidwell to Hetty Beach, April 1, 1936, Box 29, Jarvis-Robinson Papers, CMHC.

[67] Steve Grant, "Dutch Point: New Concern for Land as Highway Pushes In," *The Hartford Courant*, April 17, 1990.

Conclusion

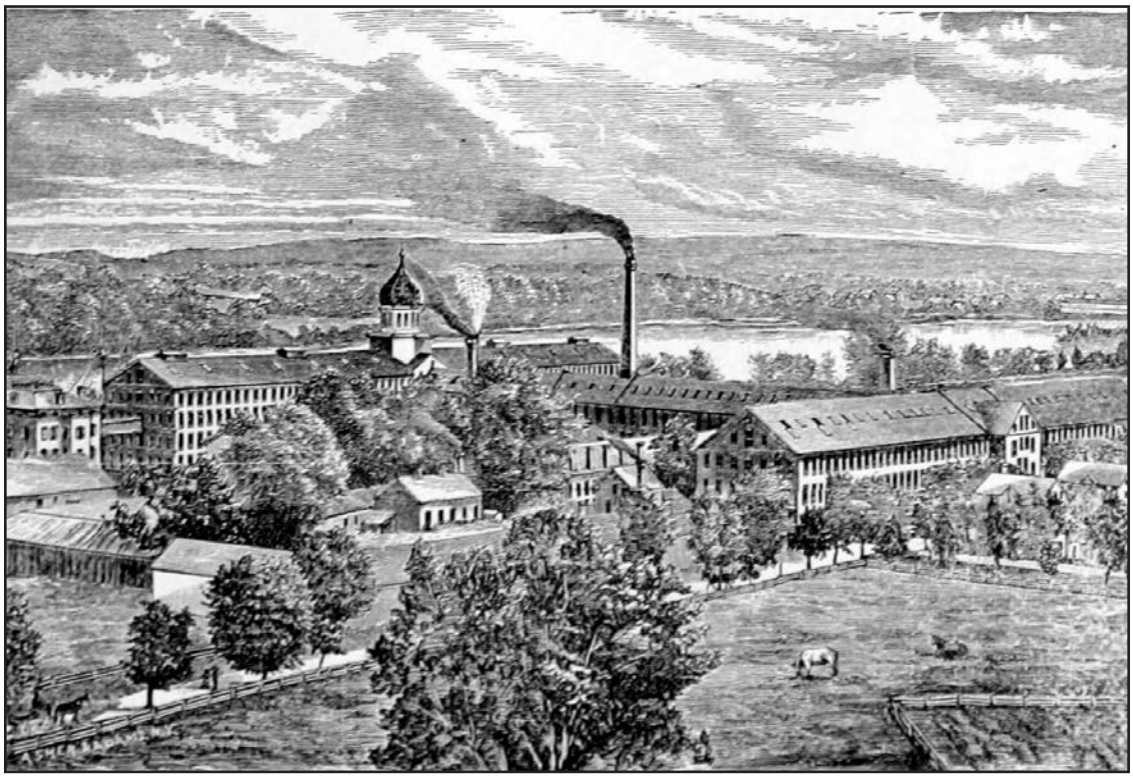


Figure C.1 View of Colt's armory from the northwest, 1896. Note the grazing lands and tree plantings. "Modern Machine-Shop Economics," in *Engineering Magazine* 11, 1896.

Coltsville's resources provide economic and cultural context for the emergence of the manufactured firearm, driving the United States of America's shift from an agrarian nation toward that of an urban, industrial power. The popularity, and popularization, of Colt's firearm contributed to American victories and prosperity. Furthermore, the story and legacy of founder Samuel Colt long encompassed popular American myths casting Colt as an inventive genius embodying the American values of self-reliance and independence. Colt himself leaned into such legends. Colt was indeed a forceful, ambitious, and significant nineteenth-century figure who developed a product, the revolving pistol, that was consequential to western expansion, warfare, and industrial manufacturing. He took advantage of his own charisma and his considerable personal and familial connections, technological advances in transportation and machinery, the conflicts of western expansion, talents of regional craftsmen and mechanics, an immigrant workforce, and growing consumerism during the Jacksonian and antebellum eras. The Civil War proved a watershed event for the nation and for the Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, which had just lost its founder and original armory. Marketing a reputation and investing in machine technology for mass production and precision manufacturing made the company resilient. The armory refined mechanical processes for what became known as the "American System of Manufacturing," one that depended largely on wage work and that launched the nation as a global power. Samuel Colt's activities at home in Hartford and abroad

in the 1850s show that American economic and industrial power, so often attributed to the later nineteenth century of the 1880s and 1890s, actually began in the antebellum period.[1]

The factory village itself began as a hybrid of traditional rural amenities set beside an urban center for owners, managers, and workers alike. The Colt company maintained its labor force, cultivating both loyalty and dependence by providing housing along with social and civic activities. The exponential growth of technology-based big businesses providing products and services to an equally swiftly growing class of consumers characterized the post-Civil War era. The emergence of wealth inequality and sharp class divisions is evident, as the Colts, living at their vast garden estate Armsmear, embraced the social and cultural life of the Gilded Age powerbrokers, which included investment in luxury goods as well as philanthropic works. As a widow and beneficiary to Sam Colt's fortune, Elizabeth made investments that were in keeping with her religious faith and consistent with the framework of Victorian womanhood and her role as wife, widow, and mother. These activities represented the early work of female reformers in the Progressive movement to moderate unrest by alleviating poor living and working conditions. Elizabeth ensured Coltsville's legacy with the establishment of Colt Park, an endowment to sustain the Church of the Good Shepherd, Memorial Hall, and Armsmear as a home for elderly women. By the time Elizabeth Colt passed away, Colt's had fully transitioned from paternalism to Taylorism. Mechanization increasingly devalued highly skilled craftsmanship, and wage work created larger wealth discrepancies between industrialists and workers. As two world wars and a turbulent interwar period maintained a high demand for Colt's products, workers became fully dependent on wage work and demanded stable and safe working conditions. As the working class became more diverse, Colt's workers moved from the East Meadow into growing neighborhoods throughout Hartford.

Samuel Colt's armory factory complex, the remaining worker housing, the Armsmear mansion, and its former estate embody the numerous and profound social, economic, and environmental changes from the mid-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century as the United States transitioned from a rural to an urban society. In 1964, after World War II when deindustrialization introduced another economic upheaval, historian Leo Marx offered a framework for understanding this earlier shift and its effect on American identity in his seminal work *The Machine in the Garden*.[2] The reform agencies and the memorials that Elizabeth Colt built served as a metaphor for the collective anxiety and sense of loss during that profound transition. Today, Coltsville survives as a place to contemplate these challenges, past and present, as well as our collective future.

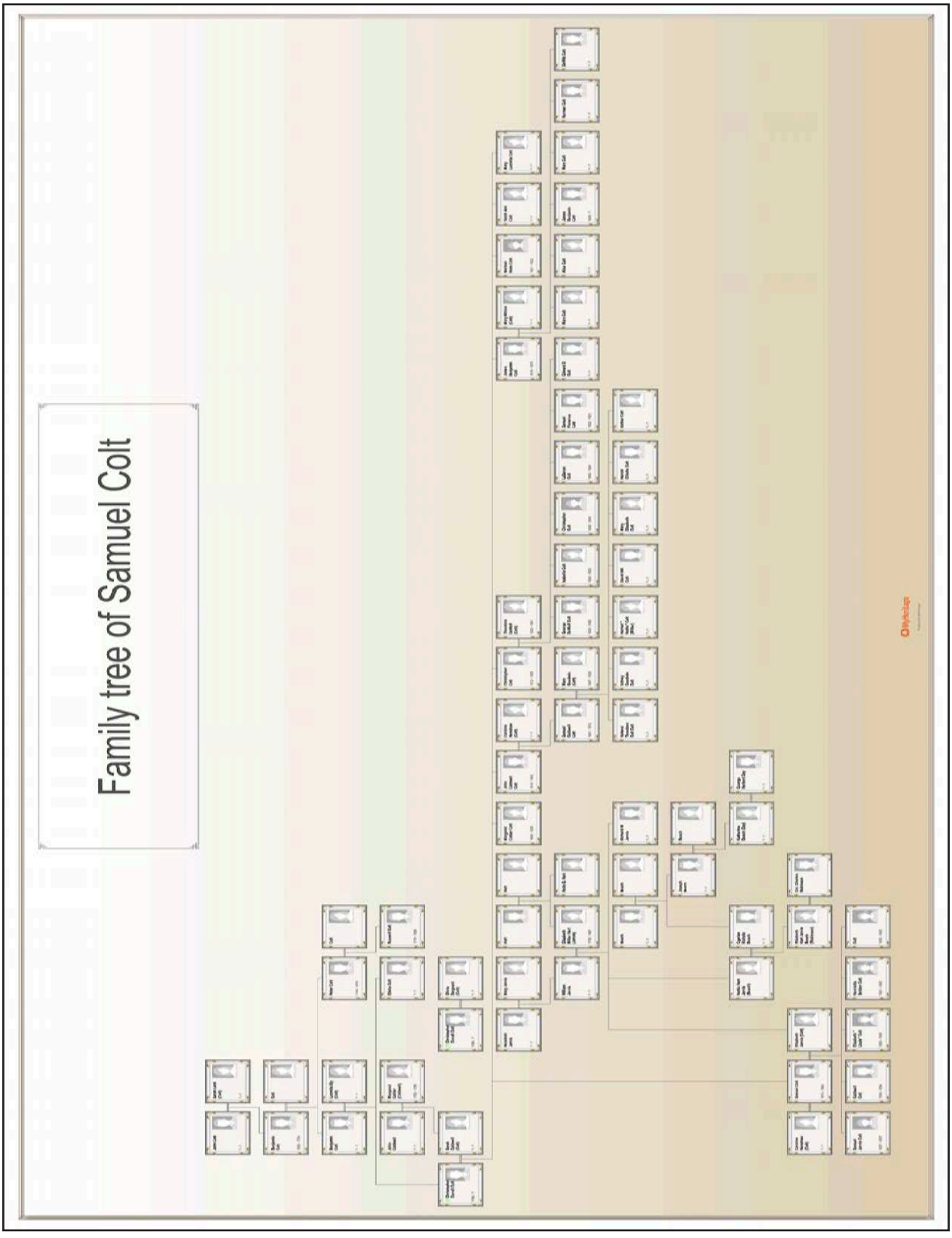
---

1 See Taylor, "I Think of the Future," 13, for his argument that Colt helped launch "the Americanization of the world" in the antebellum era rather than in the 1880s and 1890s.

2 Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

Appendix

A. Colt Family Tree.
Compiled by Leah S. Glaser, November 2025



B. Past Presidents to 1945

(as compiled by Ellsworth S. Grant in *The Colt Armory: A History of Colt's Manufacturing Company, Inc*, (Lincoln, RI: Mowbray Publishing, 1982, 1995), 218).

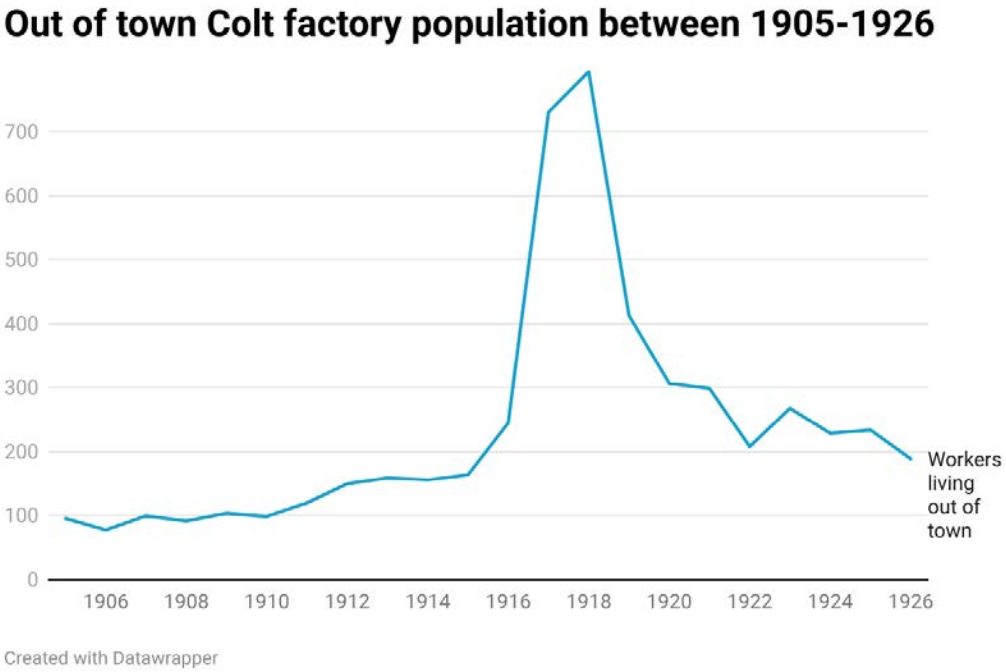
Samuel Colt	1855-1862
Elisha K. Root	1862-1865
Richard Jarvis	1865-1901
John Hall	1901-1902
Lewis C. Grover	1902-1909
William C. Skinner	1909-1911
Col. Charles L.F. Robinson	1911-1916
William C. Skinner	1916-1921
Samuel M. Stone	1921-1944

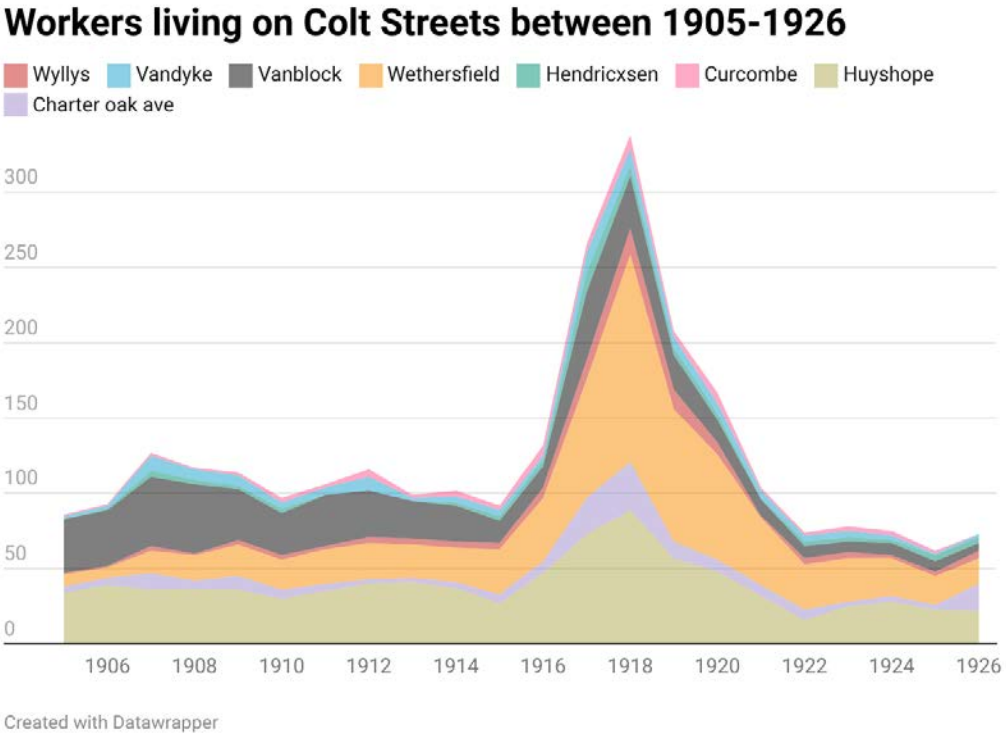
Colt's Board of Directors, 1915

Frank Schirmer, Armstrong and Schirmer
Lewis Sperry, Colt's legal counsel
Louis R. Cheney, Austin Organ Company (son of one of six Cheney Silk Company founders)
Charles M. Jarvis, American Bridge Company
D. Newton Barney, Hartford Electric Light Company
Morgan G. Bulkeley, former Senator and Governor of Connecticut, former Mayor of Hartford

C. Worker Residence, 1905-1926

Data compiled by Lauryn West, 2024-2025, from *Geer's Hartford City Directory*, 1900-1927 (Elihu Geer, Hartford, CT).





D. Topics to Consider for further investigation:

- More on Colt's firearms in comparison to the rest of the industry
- Exploration into Sam Colt's other pursuits, such as the submarine battery
- Colt's activities within the context of the political environment of the 1850s which was characterized by abolition and nativism
- The names and lives of the Colts' servants who lived in Armsmear and on ground
- Public health in the city which may have led to high infant mortality and early deaths that impacted the Colt and Jarvis families
- The life of the workers beyond Coltsville, including where they moved and their engagement with and impact of individuals and communities in Hartford
- Existence of child labor at Colt's
- John Browning's life in Hartford
- World War I product demand, and the increased production and factory expansion that followed.

Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES
Image Archives

Collins Photograph Albums of Hartford Collection, Album 3, PG440, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut https://ctstatelibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PG-440.pdf. A large collection of Hartford images. Album 3 contains 24 views of the 1938 flood at the Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company and vicinity.

Geer, Erastus C. *Geer's Hartford City Directory*, Connecticut Museum for Culture and History, Hartford, Connecticut, and ancestry.com. These books provide valuable information on a yearly basis as opposed to the Census being every ten years. These directories give the names, job titles, work location, and address of the people in Hartford. Sometimes the directories track people who pass away or move, but that is not as frequent when the population grows significantly.

Hartford City Park Collection, 1845-1967, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/50002:cityparks. Workers and (sewer) trench, Hartford, 1914-1920, photo – an excellent example of the workers that made urban factories possible by providing the public works and infrastructure support industry demanded; their stories are often erased as part of a local factories labor history even as they made it possible.

Hartford Collection, PG 400, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut https://cslarchives.ctstatelibrary.org/repositories/2/classification_terms/307. A collection of approximately 1000 photographs, prints, drawings, and negatives of the city of Hartford. Box 3 includes views of Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company. Similar to the Collins photograph album.

Photographs and Sketches of the Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company, c. 1864-1926. PG 460, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:PG460. This image collection displays various views of the factories, portraits of employees, inventors, firearms, gun manufacturing equipment, mechanical drawings, and advertisements.

Richard L. Mahoney Collection and Harford City Parks Collection, Connecticut Digital Archive, Similar to the previous photograph collections, but this one focuses on the city parks. This album gives various views of Colt Park, with many being from the 1920s. These images give views of the park being used by children and adults. https://ctdigitalarchive.org/node/16074.

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps 1855, 1885, 1900, 1924, 1927, 1947. Microfilm, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT. These are insurance maps which give a view of the factory as it develops over time. These maps include colors delineating new and old buildings, as well as additions to existing buildings. It also lists the street names, public works (water lines, etc), and who owns which properties. Sometimes they include trolley lines as well.

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections.

Additional Images

Anderson, Christopher, and Ben L. Pauley. "Colts, Knives and Cigars: An Exclusive Selection of Portraits Adapted from *Civil War Hard Images*." *Military Images* 34, no. 4 (2016): 16–21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24865767.

"Carbines, Colts & Confederates: Images from the Collection of Charles Darden." *Military Images* 36, no. 2 (2018): 34–43. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26348669.

Chindmark, Einar G., Colt Building Onion Dome being Refinished by a Workman, Hartford (Conn.), October 10, 1973, photo. https://collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/50002%3A5694.

Colt Firearm Pickets At FBI, 1935 (b/w photo), photograph, Underwood Archives, Bridgeman Images, 1935, https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en/noartistknown/colt-firearm-pickets-at-fbi-1935-b-w-photo/black-and-white-photograph/asset/3448160. Men and women at the front of the FBI office in Washington, D.C. to protest the lack of federal action in the strike at Colt Firearms where the machine guns used by the federal office are made.

Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company. "Classification of Real Estate and Buildings Account," typescript, 1944, Museum of Connecticut History, Hartford, Connecticut.

Colt's Patent Arms Company's Manufactory, Hartford, Conn. as appeared in Asher & Adams' *Pictorial Album of American Industry*, 1876. https://www.loc.gov/item/2004670958/.

Detroit Publishing Company, *Colt's Armory, Hartford, Ct.*, photograph, Library of Congress, 1900-1906 https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016804525/. A photograph of the Colt Factory near the end of Elizabeth Colt's life. It gives a view of the reconstructed factory complex (after the 1864 fire) as well as what the area in front of the factory looked like during this time.

Kellogg E. B. & E. C., *Armory of Colt's Patent fire arms manufacturing co.*, Lithograph, Library of Congress, 1866. https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002725242/. A gorgeous lithograph of the factory after its reconstruction following the devastating fire of 1864. The lithograph shows the front of the factory on the Connecticut river, along with the offices, the Germania/Armory House, and Charter Oak Hall.

Marcotte, Leon, Sketch of First Floor, Armsmear, showing proposed furniture placement. New York, May 1856, in Phillip M. Johnston, City of Hartford.

Moore, N. A. and R. A., *Colts Armory Interior after the fire*, print, Connecticut Digital Archive, 1864, https://collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/40002%3A12105.

"Samuel Colt: Phrenological Character and Biography." *American Phrenological Journal*, February 1862, reprinted American Periodicals.

Schierholz, L., *Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufactory, Hartford, Conn*, lithograph, Library of Congress, 1850 https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2018647819/. Another lithograph of the factory complex, similar to the Kellogg one. The date 1850 is not entirely accurate as the factory is built in 1855, however with the people in the lithograph it does look like roughly 1850s-1860s fashion, meaning this is likely from the earlier years of the factory. The angle of the image shows the extension of the property, with the inclusion of the factory, worker housing, Charter Oak Hall, Armory House, and the Willow Ware factory area.

Wright, George E., *Church of the Good Shepherd, Hartford, CT.*, still image, 1900-1910, Connecticut Digital Archive, Hartford Public Library, http://hdl.handle.net/11134/50002:4291. A view of the West elevation of the Church of the Good Shepherd, displaying the entryway and the spire. The armorer's entrance is hidden by trees.

Manuscript Collections and Repositories

Browning Arms Company Collection, Stewart Library Special Collections, Weber State University, Ogden, UT https://archivesspace.weber.edu/repositories/3/resources/2212. This manuscript collection focuses on the Browning Arms Company. The items pertaining to correspondence can be found in boxes 1, 6, 13. Financial items and royalties can be found in boxes 58, 61-63. Lastly, records pertaining to legal agreements can be found in boxes 77-81, 84.

City of Hartford, Office of Licenses and Inspections, Municipal Building. Building permits for 17 Van Dyke Avenue. Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT Contains all available permits for Colt's Armory from 1910 through 1950s.

Cody Firearms Museum, Buffalo Bill Center of the American West, Cody, WY. https://collections.centerofthewest.org/argus/bbhc/Portal/bbhc.aspx?lang=en-US. This is a museum and archives mainly focused on firearms, including a wide collection of parts and full firearms.

Colt Family Papers, University of Rhode Island Special Collections and University Archives, South Kingstown, RI https://webarchives.apps.uri.edu/xml/msg78.xml. This archive covers a wide breadth of the Colt family from the 1790s to the 1940s, with a vast majority of the archive focusin on the 19th century. There are papers from Samuel P. Colt, and Christopher Colt. The archive mainly focuses on correspondence and business records, but other items are included. This archive displays other important figures in Samuel Colt's story that are not found as much in the factory papers.

Colt Industries Museum Collection, 87.118, Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles, CA. https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8n87c5m.

Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company Records, Connecticut State Library and Archives, Hartford, CT. https://cslarchives.ctstatelibrary.org/repositories/2/resources/623. This archive is a vital archive for the history of Colt Patent Arms Manufacturing Company. There are many boxes that cover the business, legal, administration and publications of the factory. There is also a large photograph collection present. One of the items of note is "Colt's Patent Repeating Pistols Army Navy and Pocket Sizes."

Edward Tuckerman Potter Papers, Department of Drawings & Archives, Avery Drawings and Archives, Columbia University, New York City, NY https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/archives/cul-8408892. These are the personal papers of the architect of the Church of the Good Shepard and the Caldwell Hart Parish House. There is very little correspondence between Edward Tuckerman Potter and Elizabeth Colt.

Eli Whitney Papers, MS 554, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, New Haven, CT. These are the manuscripts of Eli Whitney spanning from 1716-1959, with a bulk being from 1785-1881. https://ead-pdfs.library.yale.edu/3841.pdf.

Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection and Bequest, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. A wide collection of items donated to the Wadsworth Atheneum from Elizabeth Colt after her passing in 1905. There are personal items, like the cradle made from the charter oak and personal copies of the Armsmear book. There are also factory items, like experimental models of revolvers and melted pieces from the 1864 fire.

Hartford Park Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT http://archives.hplct.org/repositories/2/resources/79.

Hartford Union for Home Work, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT

Jarvis-Robinson Family Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Yale University, New Haven, CT. https://ead-pdfs.library.yale.edu/1345.pdf.

Mary P. Morris Social Scrapbook, 1873-1924, MS 39449, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, Hartford, CT.

Records of the Secretary of the State, Connecticut State Library and Archives, Hartford , CT https://ctstatelibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/RG-006.pdf.

Roswell L. Colt Papers (Collection 1883), Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA https://www2.hsp.org/collections/manuscripts/c/Colt1883.html#N1008C.

Sam Colt Papers, 1808-1904, MS 28415, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, Hartford, CT.

United States Census Bureau, Census Record, *U.S. Census 1830-1930, Hartford County, Hartford Ward 1*, digital images, Ancestry.com, https://www.ancestry.com. This is a collection of the census records from Hartford in the span of 100 years. It gives valuable information on where workers live and how Hartford changes. It also shows who is living in the Colt factory housing and who is living outside of that.

William Jarvis Papers, 1838-1889, MS 70425, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, Hartford, CT.

Woodward Family Papers, 1778-1948, MS 75735, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, Hartford, CT

Notable Documents

Colt, Samuel. “Improvement in Firearms” United States, *US Patent 9430X*, issued February 25, 1836. https://patents.google.com/patent/USX9430I1/.

General Research Division, The New York Public Library. “Trial of John C. Colt for the Murder of Samuel Adams” New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed February 24, 2026. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/d9d7da40-c607-012f-1b8b-58d385a7bc34.

“Report from the Secretary of War, transmitting the report of a board of dragoon officers appointed to witness an exhibition of the repeating fire-arms and water-proof ammunition invented by Samuel Colt,” American State Papers, 16 Dec. 1840, 26th Congress, 2nd Session, no. 14, at 2. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/SERIALSET-00376_00_00-010-0014-0000/pdf/SERIALSET-00376_00_00-010-0014-0000.pdf.

U.S. Circuit Court, "The Trial of Samuel Colt: Complete Report of the Trial of Samuel Colt vs. The Mass. Arms Company," Tried June 30, 1851, in U.S. Circuit Court, Boston, Mass., before Hon. Levi Woodbury, Associate Justice, U.S. Supreme Court. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=zTEMAQAAMAAJ&pg=GBS.PA2&hl=en.

Newspapers and Media

America's Historical Newspapers, ReadEx database.

Army and Navy Chronicle

Connecticut Courant

CT Digital Newspaper Project, Chronicling America, Library of Congress, Washington, DC https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

The Chicago Daily Tribune

The Hartford Times

The Hartford Courant

The Hartford Daily Courant

The New York Times

The Washington Post

Contemporary Books & Articles

Alden, J. Deane, editor, *Proceedings at the Dedication of Charter Oak Hall Upon the South Meadow Grounds of Col. Samuel Colt With the Addresses on the Occasion by Messrs. Hamersley, Stuart, and Deming*, Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Company, 1856. A book written immediately after the dedication of the building Charter Oak Hall on the Colt Property. It contains transcriptions of the speeches given by various attendees as well as brief descriptions of the interior and exterior of the building. There is a sketch of the whole building included, but it is not accurate to other sketches from various time periods. It also speaks on the dedication of the streets with various historical names in the area.

A Memorial of Caldwell Hart Colt, 1858-1894. Hartford, 1894 https://hdl.handle.net/10079/bibid/390510.

Barnard, Henry, *Armsmear: The Home, the Arm, and the Armory of Samuel Colt: A Memorial*. New York, 1866. This book was commissioned by Elizabeth after the death of Samuel Colt in 1862. It describes the apotheosis of Colt. the book mainly surveys his works, including the revolver, the factory complex, and Armsmear. There are bits of a biography and the inventions process, giving credit to Root and Blanchard. There are also descriptions in the factory, including the division of labor and manufacturing process. Included is a collection of letters from famous people praising Colt.

Church of the Good Shepherd, *A Brief Description of the Edifice, with a Short Explanation of its Emblems and Symbols*. Hartford: Brown and Gross, 1869.

Colt, Elizabeth, Hart, Rev. Samuel, *In Memoriam: Samuel Colt and Caldwell Hart Colt*. Springfield, Mass.: Reverend Samuel Hart, 1898. Courtesy of the Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, Hartford, CT.

Colt, Samuel, *Saml. Colt's Own Record: Samuel Colt's own record of transactions with Captain Walker and Eli Whitney, Jr. in 1847*. Connecticut Historical Society, 1949.

Colt, Samuel. "On the Application of Machinery to the Manufacture of Rotating Chambered-breech Fire-arms and Their Peculiarities." Excerpt minutes of proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineer. Vol . XI, (January 1855.)

"Colt's Armory," *Scientific American*. 10, No. 11 (March 12, 1864). https://www.jstor.org/stable/24969953.

"Colt's Patent Case in England." *Scientific American* 10, no. 5 (1854): 5, 34. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2614040.

"Colt's Repeating Rifle." *Journal of the American Institute: A Monthly Publication, Devoted to the Interests of Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures & the Arts*. 3, Issue 4 (1838).

"Colt's Revolver." *Scientific American* 8, no. 19 (1853): 149. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26133047. Performance at Cape of Good Hope in South Africa in trials (via an agent). Very popular reception and credits it with winning the Caffre War.

"Colt's Revolving Pistols." *Scientific American* 3, no. 5 (1847): 34–34. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26128972.

"Government has decided to arm a regiment of mounted men with this most effective weapon, and Mr. Colt (whose factory is in Hartford) is now at work on a contract for 1000 for the government. The contract is nearly completed."

"Conflagration at Colt's Armory." *Scientific American* 10, no. 8 (1864): 117–18.

"Death of Samuel Colt, the Inventor." *Scientific American*, vol. 6, no. 4. (January 25, 1862): 57.

Engelbrecht, H. C., and Frank Cleary Hanighen. *Merchants of Death; a Study of the International Armament Industry*. New York: Dodd, Mead &, 1934.

Fitch, Charles H. "Report on the Manufacturers of Interchangeable Mechanism." In *Tenth Census of the United States (1880): Manufactures*. Vol. 2. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883. https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1880a_v2-13.pdf. A detailed explanation of the gun making process from raw metal to finished product. Includes historical and contemporary details, noting tech developments and differences between major manufacturers.

Haven, Charles T. and Belden, Frank A. *A History of the Colt Revolver and the Other Arms Made by Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company from 1836-1940*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1940.

"Improvement in Fire Arms." *Army & Navy Chronicle*. vol. 2, issue 9: (1836).

Marcy, Randolph B. *The Prairie Traveler: A Hand-book for Overland Expeditions*. New York: Harper & Brother's Publishers, 1861. https://archive.org/details/prairietravelerh01marc/mode/2up.

"New Species of Firearms." *Evansville Weekly Journal*. (July 27, 1848.).

Olmsted, Frederick Law. *A Journey through Texas, Dix Edwards and Company, 1857*.

"Opinions in the United States of Colt's Revolving Firearms." New-York Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, Politics & Society 55, no. 4. (April 1860).

Romer, F., and Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Co, *Makers of History : A Story of the Development of the History of Our Country and the Part Played in It by the Colt. Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing, 1926*. Google Books.

"Samuel Colt's Many-Chambered Repeating Rifles." *Journal of the American Institute: A Monthly Publication, Devoted to the Interests of Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures & the Arts* 3: 9 (1838), 99-101.

"Simple Reasons for Preferring Colt's Arm to all others." *Spirit of Jefferson*. Charles Town, Va. (September 22, 1860).

"Simple Reasons for Preferring Colt's Arm to all others." *Sunny South*. (February 21, 1861.)

Steuart, Richard D. "The Story of The Confederate Colt: —To the Memory of E. Berkley Bowie" *Army Ordnance* 15, no. 86 (1934): 83–92. http://www.jstor.org/stable/45374377.

"The Charter Oak City," *Scribner's Monthly* XII: 1, November 1876. 1-21. https://ontheline.trincoll.edu/images/1876-scribners.pdf. Extensive article on Hartford, with highlights describing Armsmear and the Colt reputation in Hartford.

"The Colt Patent Extension," *Scientific American* 13, 33, 261 (April 1858). doi:10.1038/scientificamerican04241858-261 .

"The Pioneers of Civilization: Simple Reasons for Preferring Colt's Arm to all others." *New-York Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, Politics & Society* 55, No. 4. (April 1860).

Indigenous Primary Sources
Archival

"A Return of the Number of Inhabitants in the State of Connecticut, February 1, 1782; and also of the Indians and Negroes." *Trumbull Papers* XXIV, document 178, Connecticut State Library. https://libapps.s3.amazonaws.com/accounts/41502/images/1782_Conn_census_return.jpg.

Connecticut Archives Miscellaneous Papers 1635-1789 Three Volumes and Index, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT. Accessed December 22, 2018. https://cslib.cdmhost.com/digital/collection/p128501coll3/id/3409.

Connecticut Church Records: Hartford First Baptist Church, 1789-1909, Connecticut State Library, Reel 222. Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT.

Connecticut Church Records: Hartford First Church of Christ, vol. 1, 1684-1910, Connecticut State Library, Reels 500-505, Main Vault, "Records and Papers." Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT.

Connecticut Probate Packets. Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT.

Connecticut, Wills and Probate Records, 1609-1999. Available through Ancestry.com.

"French-Indian War Rolls." *Connecticut Historical Society*, 1903, Hartford, CT.

Hartford Land Records. Vols. 1- 6. Connecticut State Library, Hartford, CT.

"New England Marriages before 1700." Available through Ancestry.com.

"Order for a Warrant for the Execution of Young Squamp and Waisoiusqua," Connecticut Court of Assistants, May 15, 1711. *Yale Indian Papers Project*, New Haven, CT. http://findit.library.yale.edu/yipp/catalog/digcoll:1018221.

"Original Distribution of the Lands in Hartford Among the Settlers." Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society.

Probate Estate Papers, Connecticut State Library, and Connecticut Wills and Probate, available through Ancestry.com.

"Rolls and Lists of Connecticut Men in the Revolution, 1775-1783." *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society*. Hartford: CHS, 1901.

Runaway Connecticut. Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. https://wesomeka.wesleyan.edu/runawayct/.

"Wagunk," Native Northeast Portal, https://nativenortheastportal.com/bio-tribes/wangunk.

Books (Colonial Era)

Bailey, Rev. Frederick W. "Early Connecticut Marriages: As found on Ancient Church Records Prior to 1800 (Wethersfield, Hartford Co., CT, Marriages 1739-1799)." vol. 3 (1898). http://dunhamwilcox.net/ct/wethersfield_bride.htm.

Connecticut, "Records of the Particular Court of Connecticut, 1639-1663." Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1928. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/ssd?id=mdp.35112104137601.

First Church of Christ (Hartford, Conn.). *Historical Catalogue of the First Church In Hartford. 1633-1885* Hartford: Pub. by the Church, 1885.

"Hartford Town Votes, 1635-1716, vol, 1." *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society* 6 Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1897.

Hermes, Katherine A. "'By Their Desire Recorded': Native American Wills and Estate Papers in Colonial Connecticut," *Connecticut History* 38, no. 2, 1999.

Parker, Edwin Pond. *History of the Second Church of Christ in Hartford*. Hartford: Belknap & Warfield, 1892. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100189580.

Sewall, Samuel. *The Selling of Joseph*. Boston: Printed by Bartholomew Green and John Allen, 1700. "Sexton's List of Burials Center Church Burying Ground Hartford, Connecticut," Annotated by Mary K. Talcott (as published in consecutive issues of *The Connecticut Magazine*, 1898-1899), http://hartford.omaxfield.com/PDF/SextonsList_ABG.pdf.

Talcott, John Col. "Memorandum Book of Col. John Talcott (-1688)," 1934, Connecticut State Library Archives, Hartford, CT.

Trumbull, J.H. and C.J. Hoadly. *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*. Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1850-1870. https://lib.uconn.edu/find/collections/unique-collections/public-records-of-the-colony-of-connecticut-1636-1776/.

Ullman, Helen Schavet, transcription. *Colony of Connecticut Minutes of the Court of Assistants 1669-1711*. Boston: New England Historical and Genealogical Society, 2009.

Ullman, Helen Schavet, transcription. *Hartford County, Connecticut, County Court Records, vols. 3-4*. Boston: New England Historical and Genealogical Society, 2005.

Wadsworth, Daniel. *Diary of Rev. Daniel Wadsworth, 1737-1747*. Hartford: The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1894.

Washburn, Albert L. *Historic Spots of Old Hartford* [map]. 1st edition. No scale given. Hartford: Polygon Press, 1930.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Reports

Historic American Engineering Record, Creator. *Colt Fire Arms Company, Huyshope Avenue Workers Housing, Sequassen Street and Huyshope Avenue, Hartford*, Hartford County, CT. Connecticut Hartford County Hartford, 1968. Documentation Compiled After 1968. https://www.loc.gov/item/ct0699/.

Library of Congress, "American Firearms and Their Makers: A Research Guide - Colt." Library of Congress Research Guides, Accessed June 28, 2023. https://guides.loc.gov/american-firearms/gunmakers/colt. A research guide compiled by the Library of Congress that focuses on the Colt factory. There are a variety of books in the list, with most concerning the firearms themselves and a little bit about the factory and the inventor.

Massachusetts Historical Commission State Survey Team. *Historic & Archaeological Resources of The Connecticut River Valley A Framework for Preservation Decisions*. The Massachusetts Historical Commission. February, 1984.

McDonald, Melissa, Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator. Samuel Colt House, 80 Wethersfield Avenue, Hartford, Hartford County, CT. Hartford, Hartford County Connecticut, 1933. Documentation Compiled After 1933. https://www.loc.gov/item/ct0331/.

MuseumInsights, *Coltsville National Park Visitor Experience Study*. Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, 2008. http://www.hartfordinfo.org/issues/wsd/history/coltsville_visitor_experience_study.pdf. This report outlines possible scenarios for the development of the National Park. There is the basic experience, which is just a small contact station and operation on the weekends. Then there is the more museum set up and then a full site scenario. This report presents the costs, benefits, issues and comparisons with each of the scenarios. It also outlines the possible visitors and partners with the site. This study is from before the park obtained official legislation, and from nearly twenty years ago, but still provides valuable information, especially within comparison of each scenario to an already functioning site.

National Historic Landmarks Survey, Portland Brownstone Quarries. [Digital Record], United States Department of the Interior and National Park Service, NRHP Form no. 10-900 (Portland, May 16, 2000). https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NHLS/00000703_text.

Ott, Eric. "Invisible Legacies: The Past and Present of Hartford's Potsdam Worker House Community in Coltsville, A Potsdam Worker Houses Historic Resources Survey," Historic Resource Survey w/ Coltsville National Historical Park, Hartford, CT, MA Thesis, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT, 2022. This is a historic resource survey focuses solely on the Potsdam houses within the Colt complex. There is a deep dive into the layout, use, and continued habitability of the houses. There are images included as well as

an examination of the census records to show the community of the houses as well as the perceived and actual makeup of the people who lived there.

Paine, C.A. and Bruce Clouette. *National Register of Historic Places Photography Form: Colt Historic District*. [Electronic Record] U.S. Department of Interior. 1976. https://www.hartfordpreservation.org/wp-content/uploads/Colt-Industrial-District-NR-photos-Clouette-1975.pdf.

Performing Parks. *Next Parks Coltsville: Engaging Communities to Imagine the Future of National Parks*. 2016. https://past.vanalen.org/projects/living-histories-workshops-imagining-the-future-of-national-parks/.

Roth, Matthew, Clouette, Bruce, and Darnell, Victor. *Connecticut: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites. Society for Industrial Archaeology*. 1981.

Schroer, Blanche Higgins. *National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form: Colt Historic District*. [Electronic Record] U.S. Department of Interior. 1977. https://www.hartfordpreservation.org/wp-content/uploads/Colt-Industrial-District-NR-1978.pdf. An early National Register nomination form for the Colt Factory. It describes the factory when it was still running in Hartford prior to the West Hartford move in the 1980s. It gives a brief history of the factory and a description of Colt Park.

Shrimpton, Jeffrey. *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Colt Industrial District* (Boundary Increase). [Digital Record] U.S. Department of Interior. 2001. https://www.hartfordpreservation.org/wp-content/uploads/Colt-Industrial-District-Boundary-Increase-NR-2003.pdf.

Strickland, Clark J. *National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form: Colt, James B. House*. [Digital Record] U.S. Department of Interior. 1975. James-Colt-House-NR-1975.pdf.

Strickland, Clark J. *National Register of Historic Places Photography Form: Colt, James B. House*. [Digital Record] U.S. Department of Interior. 1975. https://www.hartfordpreservation.org/wp-content/uploads/Colt-James-NR-photos-Strickland-1975.pdf.

Tarasov, Dmitriy Vladirmirovich. "With a National Park Next to Its Downtown: Forecasting the Distribution of the Economic Impacts of the Coltsville National Historical Park within Hartford, Connecticut" UCONN, 2016. https://collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/20002%3A860636899?search=%2522Colt%2520firearms%2522.

U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Natural Resources. "*Coltsville National Historical Park Act: Report (To Accompany H.R. 1259)* 113th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2014. H. Rep. 113-391. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-113hrpt391/pdf/CRPT-113hrpt391.pdf.

U.S. National Park Service. *Buildings 8 & 10: Historic Structure Report*. Coltsville National Historic Park, 2017. https://hartfordpreservation.org/wp-content/uploads/Coltsville-HSR-Forge-and-Foundry-Buildings-Oct-2017.pdf.

U.S. National Park Service. "Coltsville National Historical Park." April 26, 2021. https://www.nps.gov/colt/index.htm.

U.S. National Park Service. *Connecticut River Valley: Special Resource Reconnaissance Study*. Boston: U.S. Dept. of Interior. 1998. https://industrialhistory.org/files/NPS_Study.pdf.

U.S. National Park Service. “Early American Manufacturing.” Lowell National Historic Park. Accessed May 4, 2016. https://www.nps.gov/lowe/learn/photosmultimedia/early_american.htm.

U.S. National Park Service. *Coltsville: Special Resource Study*. November 2009. http://npshistory.com/publications/colt/srs.pdf.

U.S. National Park Service. *Summary: Scholars’ Round Table*. Coltsville National Historical Park. March 2019. https://www.nps.gov/colt/learn/historyculture/research.htm.

Graduate Student Studies

Historic Structure Reports. Coltsville National Historical Park, Hartford, CT, Central Connecticut State University, HIST 511, Fall 2016 and Spring 2017.

Armsmear/ James Colt House

Brownstones

Worker Housing

Potsdam Houses

Parish House

Church of the Good Shepherd

Dissertations and Theses

Barnett, Tracy. “Men and Their Guns: The Culture of Self-Deputized Manhood in the South, 1850–1877,” PhD diss, University of Georgia. In process.

Cesari, Gene Silvero. “American Arms-Making Machine Tool Development, 1798-1855.” Order No. 7025633, University of Pennsylvania, 1970. https://ccsu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/american-arms-making-machine-tool-development/docview/302460104/se-2.

Davis, Carl L. “Small Arms In The Union Army, 1861-1865.” Order No. 7221853, Oklahoma State University, 1971. https://ccsu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/small-arms-union-army-1861-1865/docview/288073157/se-2.

Fuller, Grace Pierpont. “An Introduction to the History of Connecticut as a Manufacturing State.” MA Thesis, Northampton, Mass.: Smith College Department of History, 1915. https://archive.org/details/introductiontohi00full/mode/2up.

Fries, Russell Inslee. “A Comparative Study of the British and American Arms Industries, 1790-1890.” PhD diss, The Johns Hopkins University, 1972.

Gehring, Tara Lynn. “Precision Manufacturing in the Connecticut River Valley and Westfield, Massachusetts.” MA Thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2014. https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1053&context=larp_ms_projects.

Granston, David, III. “The Story of Sunshine and Shadow” Elizabeth Colt and the Crafting of the Colt Legacy in Hartford,” MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 2016. https://udspace.udel.edu/bitstreams/20abdd44-4c8a-4e64-90c4-3339a1023fdc/download.

Material Culture

McMahon, Charles M. *The Three Cs of Industrial Social Control in Nineteenth Century Connecticut* (2021) MA Thesis, Department of History, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT.

Michaelsen, Scott. "Mark Twain's Capitalism. Gilded Age Capitalists and Aspirants, 1862-1909." PhD Diss, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1992.

Taber, Jared. "Thinking Like a Floodplain: Water, Work, and Time in the Connecticut River Valley, 1790-1870," PhD diss, University of Kansas, 2016.

Taylor, Joshua. "'I think of the Future:' The Long 1850s and the Origins of the Americanization of the World." PhD Thesis, University of South Florida, 2019. https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=9164&context=etd.

Teed, Melissa L. "Work, Domesticity, and Localism: Women's Public Identity in 19th Century Hartford, CT." Ph.D. diss. University of Connecticut, 1999. This dissertation gives wonderful context and information on the Union for Home Work, which was highly active in Hartford in the late nineteenth century.

Tull, Bruce K. "Springfield Armory as Industrial Policy: Interchangeable Parts and the Precision Corridor." Order No. 3000353, PhD diss, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2001.

Wilson, Tracy Morgan. "From Assembly Line to Steno Pool: Women Workers at Colt's Firearms and the Travelers Insurance Company, 1910-1955." PhD diss, Brown University, 1993. https://ccsu.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/pdf/218116.pdf. This dissertation compares white-collar and blue-collar working women in Hartford in the early-to-middle 20th century. Wilson's dissertation focuses considerably on the blue-collar women of the Colt factory and tracks their changing roles throughout the early-to-middle 1900s.

Books/ Articles
Context (American Manufacturing, Connecticut, Hartford/ the Factory, Sam Colt)

Bell-Kite, Diana. "Review: Justice & Faith: The Extraordinary Men and Women of Hartford's

First Black Church, 1819-2019, The Shoeleather History Project Walking Tour." The Public Historian 41, No. 3 (August 2019): 124-128. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26862148.

Bielakowski, Alexander M. "Colt, Samuel," In *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, ed. David Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler. ABC-CLIO, 2000. http://search.credoreference.com/content/title/abcacw.

Bingham, Harold. *History of Connecticut*. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company,

1962. 4 volume set. https://archive.org/details/historyofconnect02bing. Traditional top-down chronological history reviewing politicians, economic leaders, and institutions.

Blackford, Mansel. "American Manufacturing, 1850-1930: A Business History Approach." *OAH Magazine of History* 24, no. 1 (2010): 17–22. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40506022. Overview, provides broad themes and points of change.

Boorman, Dean K. *The History of Colt Firearms*. New York: Lyons Press, 2001. Broad pictorial history of the product.

Boyd, Luke. “The Colt Armory Fire: Connecticut and the Great Confederate Conspiracy,” in Matthew Warshauer, ed., *Inside Connecticut and the Civil War* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 140-158.

Brown, M. L. “Notes on U.S. Arsenals, Depots, and Martial Firearms of the Second Seminole War.” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (1983): 445–58. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30140683.

Cary, A. Merwyn. *American Firearms Makers: When, Where, and What They Made from the Colonial Period to the End of the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Thomas T. Crowell Company, 1953. Encyclopedia.

Cultural Landscape Foundation, “Colt Park,” *The Cultural Landscape Foundation*, accessed 3/12/2026 https://www.tclf.ornog/landscapes/colt-park.

Deyrup, Felicia Johnson. *Arms Making in the Connecticut Valley: A Regional Study of the Economic Development of the Small Arms Industry, 1798-1870*. York, PA: George Shumway, Publisher, 1848, 1970. Very detailed and useful work identifying key points and changes.

“Early American Manufacturing.” Lowell National Historic Park (U.S. National Park Service), Accessed May 4, 2016, https://www.nps.gov/lowe/learn/photosmultimedia/early_american.htm.

Edwards, William B. *The Story of Colt’s Revolver: The Biography of Col. Samuel Colt*. Harrisburg, PA: The Stackpole Company, 1953. Biography aimed toward gun collectors with useful sections on Walker and the Texas Rangers.

Grant, Ellsworth. *Yankee Dreamers and Doers*, Hartford: The Connecticut Historical Society & Fenwick 79 Productions, 1974. In this book, Grant explains how and why manufacturing gained such a foothold in early nineteenth century Connecticut. Aside from describing Coltsville, Grant explains how other communities like Collinsville evolved as well. See also: Ellsworth Grant, The Miracle of Connecticut (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1992).

Grant, Ellsworth S. *The Colt Legacy: The Story of the Colt Armory in Hartford 1855-1980*, Providence: Mowbray Company, 1984.

Grant, Ellsworth S. *The Colt Armory: A History of Colt’s Manufacturing Company, Inc*. Rhode Island: Mowbray Publishing, 1995.

Grant, Ellsworth Strong and Marion Hepburn Grant. *The City of Hartford 1784 – 1984*. Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1986.

Grant, Marion Hepburn. *In and About Hartford: It’s People & Places*. Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1989.

Hamilton, John D. “Arms Makers of the Pioneer Valley” American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin, 94: 17-34. https://americansocietyofarmscollectors.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2006-B94-Arms-Makers-in-the-Pioneer-Valley.pdf.

Hosley, William N., and Wadsworth Atheneum. The Great River: Art & Society of the Connecticut Valley, 1635-1820. Hartford, CT.: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1985.

Hosley, William. *Colt: The Making of an American Legend*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

Hosley, William. “Making a Success of Coltsville.” *Hog River Journal*. Retrieved 16 August 2014. https://www.ctexplored.org/making-a-success-of-coltsville/.

Houze, Herbert G. *Colt Rifles and Muskets from 1847 to 1870*. Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 1996.

Houze, Herbert G. *Samuel Colt: Arms, Art, and Invention*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.

Hulbert, Archer Butler. *Soil: Its Influence on the History of the United States, with Special Reference to Migration and the Scientific Study of Local History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930.

Jarvis, George A., George Murray Jarvis and William Jarvis Wetmore, *The Jarvis Family or the Descendants of the First Settlers of the Name in Massachusetts and Long Island*. Hartford: Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1879. This book traces the descendants of the Jarvis Family. It helps with seeing how people are related, with a few small biographies on notable people.

Johnson, Melvin M, and Charles T Haven. *For Permanent Victory: The Case for an American Arsenal of Peace*. New York: W. Morrow and Company, 1942.

Johnson, Charles. *The Negro Population of Hartford*, Department of Research and Investigations of the National Urban League, New York (1921).

Johnston, Phillip M. “Dialogues between Designer and Client: Furnishings Proposed by Leon Marcotte to Samuel Colt in the 1850s,” *Winterthur Portfolio,* 19 no. 4 (1984): 257-275.

Keating, Bern. *The Flamboyant Mr. Colt and His Deadly Six-Shooter*. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1978.

Kihn, Phyllis. “Colt in Hartford” 1 Bulletin, *Connecticut Historical Society*. Vol. 24, no. 3. July 1959.

King, Dr. Curtis S; Robertson, Dr. William G, and Clay, LTC Steven E. *Staff Ride Handbook for the Overland Campaign, Virginia, 4 May to 15 June 1864: A Study in Operational-Level Command Second Edition*, Kansas: Fort Leavenworth Press. 2009. StaffRideHB_ OverlandCampaign2dEdition.pdf.

Kolander, Joe. “Colt Family Tragedy: Caldwell Hart Colt,” *Rock Island Auction Company*, 2015. https://www.rockislandauction.com/riac-blog/colt-family-tragedy-caldwell-hart-colt/.

Lendler, Marc. *Crisis and Political Beliefs: The Case of the Colt Firearms Strike*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bspt.

Lundeberg, Philip K. *Samuel Colt’s Submarine Battery: The Secret and the Enigma*. Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press; [for sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. Govt. Print. Off.] 1974. https://orbis.library.yale.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?searchId=2752&recCount=50&recPointer=15&bibId=10260.

Martin, Frank and Lew Southard. “A Survey of the Model 1808 S. North Naval Pistols.” *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin*. 109 (2014): 57-79.

Marvin, Edwin E., and Connecticut. *Adjutant-General’s Office*. *The Fifth Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers : A History Compiled from Diaries and Official Reports*. Hartford: Press of Wiley, Waterman & Eaton, 1889 https://archive.org/details/fifthregimentcon1899marv/page/n1/mode/2up?q=colt.

Mitchell, James L. *Colt: A Collection of Letters and Photographs about the Man, the Arms, the Company*. Harrisburg: Stackpole Company, 1959. Very useful work filled with hard to access primary sources.

Modany, Angela, "Hartford, Connecticut: a 'Places of Innovation' Tour." *National Museum of American History*, Accessed March 10, 2026. https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/hartford-connecticut-places-invention-tour.

Murphy, Janet T. *Union for Home Work: A Study of Nineteenth Century Female Benevolent Societies*. United States: n.p., 1986.

Murphy, Kevin. *Water for Hartford: The Story of the Hartford Water Works and the Metropolitan District Commission*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004.

Myatt, Fredrick. *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Pistols and Revolvers: An Illustrated History of Hand Guns From the Sixteenth Century to the Present*. London: Tiger Books International, 1989.

National Park Service, "Pawtucket and Middlesex Canals." *Lowell National Historic Park*, February 26, 2015 https://www.nps.gov/lowe/learn/photosmultimedia/transportation_canals.htm.

Naumec, David J. "From Muskets to M4's: Connecticut Gunmaking Tradition, 1637-2010," *Connecticut History* 49:2 (2010), 187-200. Really useful chronological overview.

Niven, John. *Connecticut for the Union: The Role of the State in the Civil War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965. Also see Warshauer.

North, Simeon and Robert Jeska. *Early Simeon North Pistol correspondence with comments by Robert Jeska*. Plainwell MI: Jeska, 1993.

North, S.N.D. and Ralph H. North. *Simeon North, First Official Pistol Maker of the United States: A Memoir*. Concord: The Rumford Press, 1913.

Ogle, John. *The Book of Colt Paper 1834-2011*. Minneapolis: Blue Book Publications, 2011. Very useful for perusing the many images produced to promote Colt products.

O'Meara, Doc. *Colt's Single Action Army Revolver*. Iola: Krause Publication, 1999. Biography of an object.

Pantle, Alberta, ed., "The Connecticut Kansas Colony: Letters of Charles B. Lines to the New Haven (Conn.) Daily Palladium," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1956): 35-47.

Parson, John E. *The Peace Maker and Its Rivals. Toronto: Dominion of Canada, 1955*. Biography of an object that will be helpful in examining the technological distinctions between weapons at the time and why Colt's is still so famous/infamous.

Phelps, M. Williams. *The Devil's Right Hand Man: The Tragic Story of the Colt Family Curse*. Guilford, Conn.: Lyons Press, 2013. There was a lot of drama with the Colt family that doesn't necessarily have bearing on the park's significance.

Rasenberger, Jim. *Revolver: Sam Colt and the Six-Shooter that changed America*. New York, NY: Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2020. Rasenberger's biography of Colt takes readers from the iconic inventor's birth to his death in 1862. While the book does not focus entirely on Coltsville, it explains the factory town's evolution and fits it into Colt's career trajectory.

Reilly, Robert. *United States Military Small Arms, 1816-1865*. The Eagle Press Inc., 1970.

Remez, Michael. "Burden of History Weighs on Colt's as it tries to Write New Chapters." Hartford Courant (Hartford, CT), July 6, 1992.

Rohan, Jack. *Yankee Arms Maker: The Story of Sam Colt and his Six-shot Peacemaker*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948. Detailed bio- excellent stories and kernels of early life but not documented. Helpful for overview.

Rywell, Martin. *Samuel Colt: A Man and an Epoch*. United States: Pioneer Press, 1952.

Rywell, Martin. *The Trial of Samuel Colt*, Harriman, TN: Perriman Press, 1953. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31210006654451&seq=1.

Schecter, Harold. *Killer Colt: Murder, Disgrace, and the Making of an American Legend*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2010.

Simon, Kenneth A. *Colt: Legend & Legacy* (Connecticut Public Television, 1997) Online

Transcript, "Faithful Affection & Memory," SimonPure Productions, http://www.simonpure.com/colt06.htm.

"The Great New England Flood of 1936," *New England Historical Society*, Accessed May 2016. http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/great-new-england-flood-1936/.

"Tracing the Trends of Wicker Furniture through History." *Patio Productions*. December 29, 2014. https://www.patioproductions.com/blog/home-decor/history-of-wicker-furniture/.

Tucker, Barbara. *Roswell Colt: Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic*. New York: MacMillan, 2008.

Ulrich, Arthur. *A Century of Achievement 1836-1936*. Hartford, CT, 1937.

Wallach, Alan. "Col. Colt's Ambiguous Legacy; Or When I Hear the Word 'Revolver,' I Reach for My Culture," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 1998): 609-625. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30042153.

Warshauer, Matthew. *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice and Survival*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011.

Wilson, R.L. *Samuel Colt Presents: A Loan Exhibition of Presentation Percussion Colt Firearms, Wadsworth Atheneum*, Hartford, 3 November 1961 to 14 January 1962. Preface by C.C. Cunningham. Foreword by John S. DuMont. Hartford, 1961.

Wilson, Robert Lawrence. *The Rampant Colt: The Story of a Trademark* (Spencer, Indiana: Thomas Haas), 1969.

Wilson, Robert Lawrence. *The Colt Heritage: The Official History of Colt Firearms from 1836 to The Present*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

Wilson, Robert Lawrence. *Colt, an American Legend: The Official History of Colt Firearms from 1836 to the Present*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1985.

Winders, Gertrude Hecker. *Sam Colt and His Gun: The Life of the Inventor of the Revolver*. New York: The John Day Company, 1959.

Architecture

Bradley, Betsy Hunter. *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Discusses and contextualizes Colt's architectural choices.

Coles, William, and Reed, Henry Hope. *Architecture In America: A Battle of Styles*. New York: Appleton Century Crofts, Inc, 1961.

College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources. "Plant Database." 2016. University of Connecticut. Accessed April 25, 2016.

Faude, Wilson H. "Associated Artists and the American Renaissance in the Decorative Arts." *Winterthur Portfolio* 10 (1975): 101–30.

Fitch, James Marston. *American Building 1: The Historical Forces That Shaped It*. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966.

Grant, Ellsworth Strong and Marion Hepburn Grant. *The City of Hartford 1784 – 1984: An Illustrated History*. Hartford, CT: The Connecticut Historical Society, 1986.

Grant, Marion H. *In and About Hartford: Tours and Tales*. Hartford: The Connecticut Historical Society, 1978.

Kuckro, Anne Crofoot, dir., *Hartford Architecture Volume One: Downtown*. City of Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy Inc., 1978.

Kummer, Merle, ed., *Hartford Architecture Volume Two: South Neighborhoods*. City of Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy Inc., 1980.

Parker, John Henry. *A Manual of Gothic Stone Carving. Forming no. I of a Series of Manuals of Gothic Ornament*. Ed. 1 Oxford: Messrs. Parker, Corn Market, 1855. An illustrated handbook describing Gothic stone ornamentation in various European cathedrals https://archive.org/details/manualofgothicst00park/mode/2up.

"Portland Puts its Stamp on an Architectural Era," *Connecticut History*.Org, May 23, 2013, Accessed May 8, 2016. http://connecticuthistory.org/portland-puts-its-stamp-on-an-architectural-era/.

Taylor, Richard. *How to Read a Church*. London: Ebury Press, 2003.

The Episcopal Church "Executive Insight Report - Church of The Good Shepherd/El Buen Pastor -Hartford" The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, The Episcopal Church, 2/7/2015.

"The Fiftieth Anniversary of The Church Of The Good Shepherd: Few Churches in Hartford Have a More Interesting History Than That Which Was Built by Mrs. Samuel Colt as a Memorial to Her Husband and Son." *The Hartford Courant* (1887-1922). October 29, 1916. https://ccsu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ccsu.idm.oclc.org/historical-newspapers/fiftieth-anniversary-church-good-shepherd/docview/556398852/se-2?accountid=9970.

"The Pacific Commercial Advertiser. (Honolulu, Hawaiian Islands) 1885-1921, December 22, 1896:

Trumbull, J. Hammond. *The Memorial History of Hartford County Connecticut, 1633 – 1884*. Edward L. Osgood Publisher: Boston, 1886.

Cities/ Urban Landscapes/ Company Towns

Baldwin, Peter. *Domesticating the Streets: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999. *Domesticating the Street* explores how urban reformers, from the middle of the nineteenth century until the start of the Great Depression, changed spaces in Hartford to reflect middle class values. He follows Horace Bushnell and the park movement, then the benevolent women who worked to "clean" the streets. Lastly, he focuses on changing traffic patterns, especially with streetcars/ trolleys and cars and how that shaped Hartford.

Garner, John S. *The Company Town: Architecture and Society in the Early Industrial Age*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Garner, John S. *The Model Company Town: Urban Design through Private Enterprise in Nineteenth-century New England*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.

Poland, Donald, PhD "Unconscious Influence: Olmsted's Hartford," Paper for the Amistad Committee, New Haven, CT, October 7, 2020.

Pollard, Sidney. "The Factory Village in the Industrial Revolution." *The English Historical Review* 79, no. 312 (1964): 513–31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/560991.

Guns and Society

Bainbridge, John Jr., *Gun Barons: The Weapons that Transformed America and the Men Who Invented Them*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2022. Examination of the business and technological side of the gun industry. Leans toward the positive aspects of gun use and technology.

Bradley, Joseph. *Guns for the Tsar: American Technology and the Small Arms Industry in Nineteenth Century Russia*. Northern Illinois University Press, 1990.

DeLay, Brian "How Not to Arm a State: American Guns and the Crisis of Governance in Mexico, Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries," *Southern California Quarterly* 95:1 (2013): 5-23.

Ellis, John. *The Social History of the Machine Gun*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. Originally published in 1975, provides context for the weapon exploring the fatal impact of the machine gun, as well as its impact on popular culture.

Gibson, Harry W. "Frontier Arms of the Mormons," *Utah Quarterly* 42: 1 (1974), https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/uhq_volume42_1974_number1/s/113480.

Glaser, Leah and Nicholas Thomas, "Sam Colt's Arizona: Investing in the West," *Journal of Arizona History* 56:1 (Spring 2015), 29-52. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24459905.

Kinard, Jeff. *Weapons and Warfare: An Illustrated History of Their Impact: Pistols*. Santa Barbara California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2003.

Regele, Lindsay Schakenbach. "Guns for the Government: Ordnance, the Military 'Peacetime Establishment,' and Executive Governance in the Early Republic," *Studies in American Political Development*, Vol. 34, no. 1 (April 2020): 132-147. Focuses on the early period of firearms manufacture and the role of the federal government.

Russell, Carl P. *Guns on the Early Frontiers: A History of Firearms from Colonial Times through the Years of the Western Fur Trade*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.

Schindler, Harold. "More on Firearms in the West." In *In Another Time*, 94–96. University Press of Colorado, 1998. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt46nsdj.28.

Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-century America*. *Oklahoma Paperbacks*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. Classic, extensive overview of how popular culture has influenced our understanding of western expansion, violence, and the cultural power of the gun in America.

Silverman, David J. *Thundersticks: Firearms and the Violent Transformation of Native America*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016. Documents the active Indigenous acquisition of firearms and the cultural shift it caused.

Udall, Stewart L., Robert R. Dykstra, Michael A. Bellesiles, Paula Mitchell Marks, and Gregory H. Nobles. "How the West Got Wild: American Media and Frontier Violence A Roundtable." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2000): 277–95. https://doi.org/10.2307/969961.

Webb, Walter Prescott. *The Great Plains. Boston: Ginn and Company*, 1931. Attributes expansion to the Colt– a product of the needs of the Plains. Turnerian.

Webb, Walter Prescott, and James H. Sutton Jr., eds. Sylvia Leal Carvajal Collection. *The Texas Rangers; a Century of Frontier Defense*. 2nd Ed.]. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965. (originally 1935). Webb's classic work is limited in perspective, but does attribute a great deal of credit to the Colt product.

Watts, Dale. "Plows and Bibles, Rifles and Revolvers: Guns in Kansas Territory," *Kansas History* (Spring 1998), 30-45. Charles B. Lines of Wabaunsee, the "Bible and Rifle" colony of which so much has been made, when he wrote to his hometown newspaper in Connecticut on May 2, 1856 (Hamden). https://www.kshs.org/publicat/history/1998spring_watts.pdf.

Industrialization & Technology

Ferguson, Eugene S. "The American-Ness of American Technology." *Technology and Culture* 20, no. 1 (1979): 3–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/3103109. Contextualizes technology in American values, frequently referencing Colt.

Ford, Robert C. and Keenan D. Yoho. "The Government's Role in Creating an Innovation Ecosystem: The Springfield Armory as Hub in the Connecticut River Valley." *Journal of Management History* 26 (2020). 557-579.

Ford, Peter A. "'Father of the Whole Enterprise': Charles S. Storrow and the Making of Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1845-1860." *Massachusetts Historical Review* 2 (2000): 76–117. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25081153.

Fries, Russell Inslee. "British Response to the American System: The Case of the Small-Arms Industry after 1850." *Technology and Culture* 16: 3 (July 1975): 377-403.

Gordon, Robert B. "Who Turned the Mechanical Ideal into Mechanical Reality?," *Technology and Culture* 29, no. 4 (1988): 769–75; 778, https://doi.org/10.2307/3105044.

Gutman, Herbert G. “Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919.” *The American Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (1973): 531–88. https://doi.org/10.2307/1847655.

Gutman, Herbert G. *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*. New York: Vintage Books. 1977. Class labor history of the period.

Hounshell, David. *From American System to Mass Production: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984. Hounshell describes the technical evolution of the American system of production to mass production, made famous by Henry Ford’s assembly line. He stresses the role of innovation and shared production methodology through the industries of firearms, sewing machines, bicycles, reapers, woodworking, and automobiles to address the needs of the product and growing markets.

Howard, Robert. “Interchangeable Parts Reexamined: The Private Sector of the American Arms

Industry on the Eve of the Civil War.” *Technology and Culture* 19, No.4 (Oct. 1978): 633-649. https://doi.org/10.2307/3103762.

Hunter, Lewis C. *A History of Industrial Power in the United States, vol. 1, 2 & 3* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1979. Hunter compiled years of research in a series that serves as a standard overview of technology in the United States.

Hughes, Thomas Parke. *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm, 1870-1970*. New York: Viking University Press, 1989. Hughes characterizes his book as a history of the United States that takes quite a different approach than other historians by studying the evolution of a movement that defines America. New devices reflected the processes of inventors, scientists and engineers who expressed human values. These processes reflect the complex efforts “to organize the world for problem solving so that goods and services can be invented, developed, produced, and used.” The late nineteenth century’s celebrated independent inventors of popular history provided the foundations for industry and future “system-builders.”

“Innovation through Litigation: A Gunfight in Patent Court.” *Hagley*. January 24, 2022. https://www.hagley.org/librarynews/innovation-through-litigation-gunfight-patent-court.

Kasson, John F. *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900*. New York : Grossman, 1976. Using the period’s utopian literature of Mark Twain and Ralph Bellamy, Kasson discusses the reaction among intellectual circles to the rapid creation of mass markets, new machines, high production, reduced labor, and increased leisure time.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in Americ*a. New York, 1964. Classic intellectual discussion about technology and the struggle of American artists and intellectuals to reconcile industrialization with the agrarian dream, Good companion to Henry Nash Smith’s Virgin Land.

Meyer, David. *Networked Machinists: High-Technology Industries in Antebellum America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. Meyer explains how skilled 19th century machinists moved between foundries, textile mills, and firearms manufacturers, sharing expertise making the American manufacturing system possible.

Hintz, Eric, "Samuel Colt and… Sewing Machines?" *National Museum of American History Behring Center*, June 6, 2012. https://www.americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/samuel-coltand-sewing-machines-part-1. This is part one, the only one I could find of the article. This is at least one part of it.

Noble, David F. *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977. Noble asserts that the social process of modern technology came under human control, and not vice versa. His general thesis is that the conflation of science and corporate capitalism has formed the nature of American technology.

Pursell, Carroll. *The Machine in America: A Social History of Technology*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. Much of this study compares American technology with the English during the Industrial Revolution. However, Pursell's main argument is that, unlike in New England, the steam engine was vital in antebellum America for manufacturing in places where the water supply was unpredictable or undependable-- specifically in the Old Northwest/ Midwest.

Regele, Lindsay Schakenbach, "Industrial Manifest Destiny: American Firearms Manufacturing and Antebellum Expansion." *Business History Review* 92:1 (Spring 2018). 57-83. DOI:10.1017/S000768051800034X. See other books under context. This is a very useful article in that it makes direct connections between specific military needs of western expansion and the technological innovation required during the period of Colt's early business and product development.

Regele, Lindsay Schakenbach. *Manufacturing Advantage: War, the State, and the Origins of American Industry, 1776–1848*. Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.

Roe, Joseph Wickham. *English and American Tool Builders*. Nabu Press, 2011; Roe, Joseph Wickham (1916), English and American Tool Builders, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1916.

Rosenberg, Nathan. "Technological Change in the Machine Tool Industry, 1840-1910," in *Perspectives on Technology* (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 9–31.

Rosenberg, Nathan. "Economic Development and the Transfer of Technology: Some Historical Perspectives." *Technology and Culture* 11, no. 4 (1970): 550–75. https://doi.org/10.2307/3102691. Useful work in examining the borrowing nature of innovative technology.

Rosenberg, Nathan. *Technology and American Economic Growth*. New York, 1972. Classic and often cited work that links technology to American economic advancement. Concentrating on industry and agriculture, Rosenberg provides a good overview of technology's impact on the economy in America and vice versa. He describes the factors, such as a high resource-labor ratio, that enable America's advancement in science and technology. All of Rosenburg's work will help inform and contextualize the innovations at Colt's factory.

Rosenberg, Nathan, and Manuel Trajtenberg. "A General-Purpose Technology at Work: The Corliss Steam Engine in the Late-Nineteenth-Century United States." *The Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 1 (2004): 61–99. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3874942. Colt's steam technology was considered fairly cutting edge and this work will help evaluate that.

Roth, Matthew. *An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1981.

Smith, Merritt Roe. Army Ordnance and the 'American system' of Manufacturing. 1815-1861." MIT Press, 1985.

Smith, Merritt Roe. "John H. Hall, Simeon North, and the Milling Machine: The Nature of Innovation among Antebellum Arms Makers," *Technology and Culture* 14: 4 (1973): 574–77. Provides context for where and how Colt positioned his inventions and factory. https://doi.org/10.2307/3102444.

Stanton, Cathy. *Lowell Experiment: Public History in the Post-Industrial City*. Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 2006. Useful for thinking about how to interpret industrial work and workers.

Temin, Peter. *Engines of Enterprise: An Economic History of New England*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Thompson, Ross. "The Continuity of Innovation: The Civil War Experience." *Enterprise & Society* 11, no. 1 (2010): 128–65. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23701222.

"Technology and the Nineteenth-Century World." *American Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1958): 116–30. https://doi.org/10.2307/2710077.

Tucker, Barbara M. and Tucker, Kenneth H. *Industrializing Antebellum America: Rise of Manufacturing Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Classic and often cited work. A triple biography of antebellum industrialists, including the Colts. Super useful to compare and contextualize and evaluate the COlts' exceptionalism. "Types of Forging Processes" Forging Industry Association, Accessed April 14, 2016. https://www.forging.org/types-forging-processes.

Uselding, Paul. "Elisha K. Root, Forging, and the 'American System.'" *Technology and Culture*. 15, No. 4 (1974): 543-568. www.jstor.org/stable/3102242. Should be very useful focus on the manager who likely contributed to much innovation in the manufacturing system.

Weil, Francois. "Capitalism and Industrialization in New England, 1815-1845." *The Journal of American History* 84, no. 4 (1998): 1334–54.

Woodbury, Robert S. "The Legend of Eli Whitney and Interchangeable Parts," *Technology and Culture* 1:1 (1960), 235-253.

Indigenous

Adams, Sherman W. and Henry Reed Stiles. *The History of Ancient Wethersfield, Connecticut: Comprising the Present Towns of Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington*. New York: Grafton Press, 1904.

Barbour, Lucius Barnes. *Families of Early Connecticut*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1982.

Block, Sharon. *Colonial Complexions: Race and Bodies in Eighteenth-Century America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

Bowen, Clarence Winthrop. *Boundary Disputes of Connecticut*. Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1882.

Burpee, Charles W. Burpee's *The Story of Connecticut*. New York: American Historical Company Inc., 1939.

Clark, George L. *A History of Connecticut: Its People and Institutions*. New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1914.

Cooper, Karen Coody. "III Deeds of the Past: The Wangunk of Weathersfield,' *Artifacts XIV*, (1986): 3-8.

De Forest, John William. *History of the Indians of Connecticut from the Earliest known Period to 1850*. Hartford: W. J. Hamersley, 1851.

Fitts, Robert K. *Inventing New England's Slave Paradise: Master/Slave Relations in Eighteenth-Century Narragansett, Rhode Island*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Forgotten Patriots: African American and American Indian Patriots in the Revolutionary War. Washington, D.C.: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2008.

Hermes, Katherine and Alexandra Maravel. "Finding the Onepennys Among the Wongunk," Special Issue, *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut* 71 (2017).

Hill, Margaret. "Colonial Punishments," *Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute Project*. http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/score_lessons/colonial_court/html/colonial.html.

Ingersoll, Elinor Bukeley. *Connecticut circa 1625: Its Indian Trails, Villages, and Sachemdoms*. Hartford: The Connecticut Society of The Colonial Dames of America, Inc., 1935.

Ives, Timothy H. "Reconstructing the Wangunk Reservation Land System: A Case Study of Native and Colonial Likeness in Central Connecticut." *Ethnohistory* 1 January 2011; 58 (1): 65–89.

Lavin, Lucianne. *Connecticut's Indigenous Peoples: What Archaeology, History, and Oral Traditions Teach Us about Their Communities and Cultures*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Lavin, Lucianne, ed., "The Wangunk Tribal Communities of the Lower Connecticut River Valley," Special Issue, *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut* 79 (2017).

Love, William DeLoss. *The Colonial History of Hartford: Gathered from the Original Record*s. Hartford: 1914.

Main, Jackson Turner. *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Manwaring, Charles William ed. *A Digest of the Early Connecticut Probate Records*, 3 vols. Hartford District, 1636-1750. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc, 1995.

Newell, Margaret Ellen. *Brethren by Nature: New England Indians, Colonists, and the Origins of American Slavery*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015.

O'Brien, Jean M. *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Reumann-Moore, Maia Owens. ""To them and their heirs for ever": Creating Reserved Lands in Connecticut Colony, 1636-1680." MA Thesis: Wesleyan University Digital Commons, 2019.

Stein, Douglas L. “Seamen’s Protection Certificate: American Maritime Documents 1776-1860.” Mystic Seaport Museum. 1992. https://research.mysticseaport.org/item/l006405/l006405-c041/.

Stuart, Isaac William. *Hartford in the Olden Time: Its First Thirty Years*. W. M. B. Hartley, ed. Hartford: F. A. Brown, 1853.

Talcott, Mary K. *The Original Proprietors*. Hartford: Society of the Descendants of the Founders of Hartford, Inc., 1987.

Trumbull, James Hammond. *The Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut, 1633-1884*. Hartford: E.L. Osgood, 1886.

Vaughan, Alden T. “A Test of Puritan Justice.” *New England Quarterly* (1965): 331-339.

Welburn, Ron. *Hartford’s Ann Plato and the Native Borders of Identity*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2015. Williamson, Margaret. “Slave Names and Naming in the Anglophone Atlantic.” Oxford Bibliographies (April, 2018).

Wickman, Thomas. “Our Best Places: Gender, Food Sovereignty, and Miantonomi’s Kin on the Connecticut River.” *Early American Studies* 19, no. 2 (2021): 215-263.

Marketing/ Advertising/ Colt Advertising

Applegate, Wedd. *The Rise of Advertising in the United States: A History of Innovation to 1960* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2012), 29.

Barnett, Tracy L. “The Sandy Hook settlement could transform the centuries-old marketing of guns,” *Washington Post*, February 23, 2022 https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/02/23/sandy-hook-settlement-could-transform-centuries-old-marketing-guns/.

Canavan, Catherine, and Pamela Walker Laird. “Advertising and the Rise of Big Business.” *OAH Magazine of History* 24, no. 1 (2010): 41–45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40506028.

Goodrum, Charles and Helen Dalrymple. *Advertising in America: The First Two Hundred Years*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990.

Haag, Pamela. *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture*. NY: BasicBooks, 2016. Haag argues that civilian consumption of firearms was limited until arms makers employed strategic sales and marketing to create a market for guns in the second half of the nineteenth century; this was only possible because of frontier experience.

Henning, R. A. and T. H. Witkowski. “The Advertising of E. Remington & Sons: The Creation of an Iconic Brand, 1854-1888.” *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 5, no. 4 (2013): 418-448.

Holt, Douglas. “What Becomes an Icon Most?” *Harvard Business Review* 81:3 (2003): 43-49

West, Elliott. “Selling the Myth: Western Images in Advertising.” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 46, no. 2 (1996): 36–49. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4519878.

Workers

Blewett, Mary. *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Show Industry, 1780-1910*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Beeching, Barbara J. *Hopes and Expectations: The Origins of the Black Middle Class in Hartford*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2016.

Faue, Elizabeth. *Rethinking the American Labor Movement*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Schlichting, Kurt, Peter Tuckel and Richard Maisel. "Great Migration of African Americans to Hartford, Connecticut, 1910-1930: A GIS Analysis at the Neighborhood and Street Level." *Social Science History 39* (August 2015): 287-310.

Thornton, Steve. *A Shoeleather History of the Wobblies: Stories of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Connecticut*. Steven R Thornton Press, 2013. On page 50, the author compares the Winchester Arms factory in New Haven to the Colt Firearms of Hartford in his discussion of the machinists organizing in the early 1900s. Pages 72 to 74 refer to an IWW event in Hartford in 1919. Page 76 includes information on Black residents in Hartford.

Tuckel, Peter, Kurt Schlichting, and Richard Maisel. "Social, Economic, and Residential Diversity within Hartford's African American Community at the Beginning of the Great Migration." *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 5 (2007): 710–36.

Zieger, Robert H. *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America Since 1865*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014. A history of Black workers' efforts to achieve equity with white workers in access, pay, and treatment. The 1935 establishment of the CIO brought more Black and unskilled workers into the union movement.

Zonderman, David. *Aspirations and Anxieties: New England Workers and the Mechanized Factory System, 1815-1850*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Zonderman focuses on how laborers understood, accepted, or protested the new industrial order, with ambivalent views toward machines. He discusses gender differences and documents labor protests.

Womanhood

Donnelly, Mabel C. *The American Victorian Woman: The Myth and the Reality*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 1986.

Rose, Elizabeth R. *A Mother's Job: The History of Day Care, 1890-1960*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Rose traces day care's transformation from a charity for poor single mothers in the early 20th century to culturally accepted social need.