

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Colt Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

Colt Historic/Armsmear, Samuel Colt Estate

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Between Wethersfield, Wawarme, Van Dyke and Wyllys Streets NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

VICINITY OF

first

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Connecticut

CODE

09

COUNTY

Hartford

CODE

003

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Multiply, public and private owners, (see continuation sheet)

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

VICINITY OF

STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Record Room, City of Hartford

STREET & NUMBER

550 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

Connecticut

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Connecticut Statewide Inventory of Historic Resources

DATE

January 1975

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

Connecticut

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PAGE 1

Owners of Property

Armsmear, Samuel Colt Mansion

The Trustees of the Colt Bequest
and the Episcopal Diocese of Hartford
1335 Asylum Avenue, Hartford

James B. Colt House

City Redevelopment Agency
City of Hartford

Potsdam Cottages

nine cottages, all privately owned

Church of the Good Shepherd and Parish House

Trustees of Colt Bequest and Episcopal
Diocese of Hartford
1335 Asylum Avenue, Hartford

Colt Park (and associated buildings)

Department of Parks and Recreation
City of Hartford

Colt Factory

Water & Way Property (Esper L. Dix, Managing Partner)
140 Huyshope (P.O. Box 62)
Hartford, Conn. 06101

Armorers' Housing (10 buildings)

City Redevelopment Agency
City of Hartford

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Historic American Buildings Survey
1967, 3 photographs
Division of Prints and Photographs
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Colt Armory factory buildings were originally built by Samuel Colt in 1854-55 near the riverbank. They were designed with the help of Elisha K. Root (inventor, Colt company officer and later president), and H. A. G. Pomeroy. The first armory, an H-shaped structure, was doubled in size in 1861. In 1864 the East Armory burned but was immediately rebuilt on the same site. The building was based on the same approximate design and it was completed in 1867.

Henry Barnard wrote "The arms factory is a pile of building surpassed in magnitude by few industrial establishments."⁸ The long sections of the building were 500 feet long, 60 feet wide, and the cross bars were 150 by 60 feet. The 1861 addition had the same approximate dimensions. Within the courtyards were small buildings, storehouses, and stables. The company offices were housed in a three-story domestic-style building with an arcaded veranda, balconied second story porch, and an unusual cupola.

The original building was of roughly finished sandstone and brick, three stories plus attic with skylights. The dome above the central pavilion was supported by a white drum, "...its bowl bulging in the Moorish manner, blue, star-spangled and sustaining a gilded globe on which a Colt is rampant."⁹

The armory was exceptional for its time in the amount of light and ventilation provided by the many large windows, supplemented by gas lights and pipe-in air. The work areas had 16 foot high ceilings. They were heated by hot-air pipes and had hydrants for workers' use and fire prevention. A 250 horsepower engine with two 30 inch boilers and a flywheel 30 inches in diameter supplied power for the entire building through a system of noiseless belts and shafts. The 1867 armory was built "even more incombustibly."¹⁰

Of this early factory complex, only the river front section of the east armory of 1867 survives, and behind it a long, single story shed, built of resticated brownstone, quite likely a surviving section of the 1855 building. The extant old armory building, a substantial, utilitarian structure, much like the first in design and built on the foundations of the burned building, is a long, three and a half story, brick structure with brownstone lintels, quoins, and stringcourses between stories. The gable roof is crossed by five gable bays. All but the center one are only slightly projecting and outlined by quoins. Under the gables are arched windows, flanked by round windows. The gables and cornices are outlined by brick corbelling. There are many large windows, with double-hung sash, of 16 over 12 lights.

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The projecting central pavilion has a large arched doorway trimmed in brownstone in the center of each of its four levels, obviously used as central entrance and for hosting materials to and from various levels of the building. Above the point where the gable roof and the central bay's roof cross is the very large blue onion-shaped dome, originally studded with gold stars, set into a white stone ring, supported by a circle of white columns with bulbous capitals. At its top is a golden ball, surmounted by a rampant colt--the company insignia. Cast in the company foundry, the colt is approximately 6 feet long.

The old armory is now surrounded by later buildings, still all part of the Colt armory, many of them apparently built quickly around the period of World War I. The entire two block area has been included because it contains older buildings from several periods, all built by the Colt Company, and still used in their arms production.

Armorer's Tenements, multiple family housing for workers, was constructed immediately behind the armory in c. 1855. Of the estimated 50 original structures, only ten survive. They occupy one whole block in two rows of five identical buildings. Considered model housing in 1855, the houses were inhabited until 1974, but are now unoccupied, boarded-up, and under the jurisdiction of the city redevelopment agency. They are all substantial brick buildings, painted white with brown trim, with simple 19th century details. There is no landscaping on the block, but considerable space between the structures, all of which are entered from the side rather than the street facade. From the exterior, the housing is remarkably uniform and little-altered.

The five houses, 60-78 Van Block Avenue, are very square, four bays to a side, with flat roofs and three and a half stories. The windows on the first three stories are double-hung, six-over-six sash with thick sills; the smaller windows under the rather wide eaves, are square with six lights. The apartments are entered from the south side exterior wooden stairway which has railed porches and board and batten siding. Originally six families probably occupied each house.

The five houses, 101-143 Huyshope Avenue, which probably housed four families each, are more detailed. Each has a three-story, gable-roofed main block plus a two story west section with shed roof, and a two story entrance porch on the far west side. The gable ends of the houses and the little central gable on the side are trimmed with simple cut-out woodwork. The first story entrance under the gable is approached by a few wooden steps and tiny railed

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porch, protected by simple pedimented hood with drop-pendant decorations. The windows of the main block are double-hung, six-over-six sash, outlined in brick molding of a simple stepped design, with an arched window under the side gable. All windows have thick sills, and windows in the west section are segmentally arched, without trim.

Potsdam Cottages, 13-45 Curcombe Avenue, as the triangular area at the southern edge of the Colt industrial complex is called, contained the Colt Willow Ware Works factory and two rows of workers cottages. The complex was built in the late 1850s. One row of nine cottages, is extant. The cottages--are built in a half-timbered, or modified chalet style, supposedly reminiscent of the vernacular style of the German hamlet from which Colt imported nearly 40 craftsmen. Some of these nine have been somewhat disguised by modern siding, yet all retain their original shape and profile. The best have exposed first story red brick walls set into half-timbered framing joined by wooden pegs. The buildings are one and half stories with gable roof. They all originally had exterior stairways with porches on both levels and a small balcony outside the second story window in the gable end. The second story was covered with vertical board and batten clapboarding which was painted white. The wide, overhanging eaves, as well as the windows were trimmed in typical 19th century woodwork patterns.

"Armsmear," The Colt Mansion, 80 Wethersfield Avenue, was constructed in 1855-57. From the top of Wyllys Hill the mansion overlooked the long slope of the extensive landscaped grounds which reached nearly a mile east to the industrial complex on the riverfront. H. A. G. Pomeroy, Colt's nephew and company engineer/architect, probably designed the original house, a large two and a half story mansion in the popular Italianate mode. In circa 1861 the exterior was embellished with some extravagant detailing, including glass-domed conservatories with Moorish domes and gold finials (akin to the star-spangled Moorish dome of the Colt Armory). In addition an elaborate five-story tower over the main entrance at the southwest corner, plus an assemblage of porches, towers, and ornaments created a fanciful facade at the south end. The mansion was surrounded by gardens complete with sculpture and live peacocks.

At the north end of the L-shaped structure, a driveway ran under an arched porte-cochere, between twin three-story towers, to the courtyard and then passed through the landscaped grounds. Two marble copies of the Uffizzi

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dogs guard the entrance to the porte-cochere. A cast-zinc copy of "Mounted Amazon Attacked by a Tiger" by August Kiss is now in the center of the courtyard. These pieces are apparently all that remain of the reproductions of famous European sculpture that once were found throughout the Colt's 100 acres of parkland.

The Colt house is brick, stuccoed, and painted cream color. The trim is painted dark brown. The house is about 210 feet by 105 feet, with an irregular roofline composed of a series of small, nearly flat arches, with many towers and levels, accentuated by a wide cornice, with many brackets of several styles, all painted dark brown. The windows are of many sizes and a variety of treatment. All have very prominent moldings or hoods, and the lintels--curved, flat, or pediments, and sills are also painted dark brown. The outside west and south facades of the L-shaped house were much more elaborate than the east and north walls of the courtyard. The west and south had very irregular facades, with many strong projecting sections, and a very asymmetric arrangement of openings and features. In contrast, the courtyard facades are much simpler, with little detail, matching rows of windows with flat lintels and sills. In approximately 1871 Edward Tuckerman Potter designed the library at Armsmear, which is still intact, with finely detailed, carved black walnut bookcases, woodwork trim, and a particularly fine molded paneled ceiling.

The Colt Mansion has been considerably altered during the twentieth century. In 1912 according to the terms of Mrs. Colt's will the mansion became a home for Episcopal women. A two-story addition of dark brick was added to the south end, covering what was the most ornate facade and main entrance. The interior was completely rearranged to provide a number of individual apartments, and three additional buildings were constructed to the rear (east) of the house. Three major first-story rooms are relatively unchanged and open to the public. Although most of the interesting, most unusual Moorish-style detail is gone, Armsmear is well-maintained, and though altered, is a good example of a rather large complicated version of the Italian villa style in America.

James Colt House, 154 Wethersfield Avenue, was built 1855-57 on land of the Colt Estate, either by or for Samuel's brother, Treasurer of Colt Firearms and a U.S. Senator. He occupied the house until 1859. From 1865 to 1888 it was the home of William Buel Franklin, retired Union Army General, and

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Vice President and General Manager of the Colt Company. In 1895 it was sold to George H. Day, prominent Hartford civic leader and industrialist. The house was constructed in the Italian Villa style, particularly popular in that very fashionable neighborhood. Though much smaller and simpler, this house is very similar to Samuel Colt's "Armsmear" in style, massing, exterior finish, and exterior and interior detailing. The house has three full stories, with two projecting corner bays on the front (west) facade, which suggest towers. The northwest bay has a steeper roof which increases this effect.

The brick walls are stuccoed and painted cream, with dark brown trim, like Armsmear (rear brick walls were left exposed). The window treatment is not uniform some windows are surmounted with hood moldings, others with modified pediments. They are identical in detail and variety to the window trim of Armsmear. The wide overhanging eaves supported by fancy brackets and the decorative band which runs parallel to the cornice, and outlines the windows, again like "Armsmear" are painted dark brown.

The north corner of the front first story is covered by a porch, composed of a series of alternating wide and narrow arched openings with wide eaves supported by decorative brackets. On the rear a set of ornamental cast-iron stairs rises to the second story. On the south there is a protruding three-story bay and a small verandah near the front corner.

The building was converted to apartments during the 20th century, but some of the original interior detail in plaster ceiling molding and wooden carved mantels remained. A 1973 fire severely damaged the rear of the building and ended its occupancy. Since that time the house has been undergoing renovation for conversion to apartments (partially funded by a National Park Service grant).

Colt Park, bounded by Stonington, Wethersfield, Warwarme, Curcombe, Masseek, Huyshope and Van Block Streets, was once Samuel Colt's private park. It was also enjoyed by his employees and neighbors. Developed in the vogue of the 19th century landscaping tradition, the park contained formal gardens, artificial lakes, curvilinear carriage paths, statuary, a deer park, live peacocks, and nooks and dells. The park also included a number of buildings associated with the estate as well as an estimated

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2600 feet of hot and green-houses.

The character of the parkland has been much-altered since 1906 when Mrs. Colt donated approximately 106 acres to the city for use as a municipal park. The land remains open, but it is nearly barren of its original features. The lakes and ponds have been filled-in, the gardens are gone, there are few trees, and little landscaping effort except for maintenance of the grass.

The Samuel Colt Memorial, a granite memorial with two bronze sculptures and two bas-reliefs of Colt, was erected in 1920 in a grove of trees near the entrance on Wethersfield Avenue.

Original outbuildings of the Colt Estate are located on Stonington Avenue, just east of the old mansion. They include a much remodeled rectangular brick house now used by the city for Colt Park offices, a red brick gardener's house with original bargeboard trim, the large brick carriage house, and a long, one story, brick stable, now converted to lockers for the swimming pool built beside it.

In 1926 a music shell was constructed in the park. WPA projects in the park included reconstructing the shell and building the swimming pool and the large stadium (outside the district to the east). In 1961 the 85 by 185 foot ice rink was constructed. Beside it is an outdoor track. Across from the Potsdam cottages, staging for large outdoor concerts was recently built.

The Church and Parish House of the Good Shepherd, 155 Wyllys Street, comprising a non-contiguous unit of the Colt historic district, are an integral part of the Colt "armory village." Built by Mrs. Colt as a memorial to her deceased husband and children, church and parish house were intended for the use of Colt employees and neighbors. They are an unusual pair of buildings. The work of Edward Tuckerman Potter, they incorporate symbols of the Colt family and industry into architectural details. Architecturally they are two of Hartford finest buildings.

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The Church of the Good Shepherd, built as a memorial to Samuel Colt and two deceased children, was the church for the Episcopal parish Mrs. Colt organized in the South Meadows in 1865. In 1866 after considering proposals from major church architects she chose Edward Tuckerman Potter, formerly associate of Richard Upjohn, to design the church. The church, is built of Portland brownstone and is dressed with light Ohio sandstone. It is typical of Potter's use of polychromy and his attention to fine detailing. The very unusual, asymmetrical plan features a semi-detached tower at the northwest corner; a single, large transept on the north; and a main entrance porch on the southwest corner. The steeply pitched roof, with patterned tiles, is broken by a clerestory that runs around the nave and apse. Two apsidal chapels are attached at the point where the nave and apse join. The tall, slender tower, which rises from the ground, has a small conical tower attached to it and contains an entrance to the nave.

The doors and windows are modified Gothic arches of alternating bands of light and dark stone. The windows include a number of lancet windows and a large double window at the nave end, which is surmounted by a small wheel (rose) window. A special feature of the church is the southwest "armorer's" porch. It was originally the main entrance. Revolver and machinery parts are mixed with Christian symbols and foliage in the capitals flanking the doorway.

On the interior, now restored and reopened after several years, beautiful molded chestnut ribs and bronze-colored cast-iron columns (now partially encased in wood) support the ceiling, which is painted dark blue, and is outlined in stenciling. In the apse, graceful chestnut ribs above alternating polished granite red and green columns divide the 13 lancet windows, with images of Christ and the Apostles, in stained glass. They are taken from paintings by German "Nazarene" Johann Frederich Overbeck (1789-1869). The large transept on the north is used as a chapel. It is separated from the nave by a floor-to-ceiling, finely carved, wooden screen set with plate glass.

The Parish House, (The Caldwell H. Colt Memorial Parish House) was commissioned in 1894-96 by Elizabeth Colt upon the sudden death of her remaining child. The house was built as a memorial and as a companion building to the church. She secured the services of the then retired Edward Tuckerman Potter. She also consulted with the Olmsted firm, although their landscaping plans were apparently never implemented.

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Deliberately retardataire in some stylistic effects so that it would match his church of thirty years earlier, Potter also designed a building which would capture the sporting and sailing interests of yachtsman Caldwell Colt. The result is a most interesting transitional building with unique elements. On both its exterior and interior are features which resemble a ship. Nautical elements were included the basic shape: an iron fleche, resembling a ship's mast, and an iron bridge at the roof ridge, (both gone) as well as a bas-relief of Colt's yacht, The Dauntless, and a place for the ship's bell.

Despite the dated feature of the parish house, such as the use of banded arches, the polychromy, and arcades, it was also constructed with many interesting transitional and modern elements. They were clearly based on the work of Violet le Duc and were also curiously related to the work of Frank Furness of Philadelphia. The house was constructed with exposed iron girders and exposed floor beams used both as structural and decorative members. Certain elements repeated from the 1868 church are the apse-like ends, apsidal chapels, use of varicolored stone, colored roof tiles, the clerestory breaking the roofline, as well as the use of the same brown ashlar material. The roof is blue slate, with running pattern in red. A narrow clerestory runs around its full circumference, and there are four large double stone chimneys with bulbous caps.

Bands of arcades stretch across the second story front (north) facade, with many modified Gothic arched windows outlined in alternating light and dark bands of stone. In the projecting central pavilion a double stair rises to the grand terrace on the second level. The lower end of the staircase is framed by two large polished stone columns with Romanesque capitals. There is a projecting balcony applied to the exterior stair, framed by a varicolored, elaborate stone door. An enormous dormer-like projection extends from the roof framing a hugh lunette containing stained glass.

One outstanding feature of the interior is the grand stairhall, with a double arcade dividing it from the large second story auditorium. There are columns of rare marbles (onyx, alabaster) in reds, blues, and blacks, with intricately carved foliage in Romanesque capitals, surmounted by an arcade of Saracenic-style arches, with ogee curves, again of alternating light and dark stone.

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The large, second story auditorium room is most unusual with its exposed metal beams, used both structurally and decoratively. Some of them criss-cross the room at right angles. Other beams are inlaid with stained glass and form the clerestory band that runs around the roof. A metal catwalk, with stairs and platforms, ascends from the ends of the room, along the central peak of the ceiling, and onto the roof at the center, at which point the fleche was originally located.

The building, which also has meeting rooms on the ground floor, is remarkably unaltered, and is well-maintained.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1854-1905 BUILDER/ARCHITECT H.A.G. Pomeroy and Edward Tuckerman Potter

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The history of Samuel Colt and the Colt Patent Fire Arms Company which he founded, is virtually synonymous with the development of the private arms industry in the United States. Colt and his company pioneered the development of the handgun with the famous Colt 45, used both in the Mexican and Civil Wars, and a graphic symbol of the American West. By 1860 Samuel Colt maintained the largest private armory in the world.

Later the Colt Company developed the Colt automatic, standard military sidearm since World War I. In their operation of a huge private armory, their involvement in international arms sales, the efficiency of their technical advances and mass production techniques, and success in promotion and sales, Colt Patent Fire Arms was a world leader in the arms business, and the Colt industrial complex in Hartford, was the prototype of a successful 19th century industrial operation.

The Colt "armorers' village" begun by Samuel Colt c. 1850, in Hartford, was an exceptionally elaborate version of the American company or mill town, of which there were many nearby New England examples. Model factories and workers' housing, plus community amenities such as meeting halls, church, and German beer garden, were stretched out along the riverfront. Overlooking the industrial complex, down a sloping hill covered with extensive gardens and parkland, was the large Colt mansion, "Armsmead," and Wethersfield Avenue, lined with fashionable houses, many of them homes of chief officers in the Colt factories.

The Colt complex, perhaps unequalled in its day, is considerably changed, but retains important industrial, residential and community features of the 19th century "village." During the past 125 years much of the grandeur of the district has faded and much of the fabric has been lost, but important portions remain intact, none of them beyond repair. During the past decade, the once-elegant neighborhood has been endangered by urban renewal plans, which have been delayed, but have removed many long-term residents, and seriously depressed the area. However, the recent restorations of the James Colt House and the Church of the Good Shepherd are evidence of positive preservation measures being undertaken, while the fate of some of the complex, particularly the armorers' tenements remains uncertain.

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History

Samuel Colt (1814-1862), a Hartford native, was the son of a textile manufacturer. While still a boy he briefly worked for a textile business in Massachusetts, attended Amherst Academy, and in 1830 sailed to India and back as a seaman. Then he returned to Hartford for a short stint in his father's factory before striking out on his own. He travelled about the U.S. and Canada, sometimes trying to finance his experiments by lecturing on the mysteries of chemistry and demonstrating the effects of laughing gas, billed as "Dr. Coult, late of New York, Loundon and Calcutta."

By 1831 Colt had designed at least two pistols, but not until 1833 did he complete a model of the efficient, lightweight, multi-shot firearm with a revolving barrel, that was to make him famous. He patented both a pistol and rifle of the revolving barrel type in England and France in 1835. February 25, 1836, Colt secured his first American patent, raised \$300,000 to begin manufacturing his weapon, and opened the Patent Arms Manufacturing Company in Paterson, New Jersey, in September 1836. However, the business failed for various reasons. Colt closed the factory in 1842. Although he lost his patent right, he had during those years improved his pistol and designed production machinery for it.

For about five years Colt turned to the successful development of an electrical submarine mine and an underwater telegraph. Then at the outbreak of the Mexican War, the Federal Government gave Colt a \$24,000 order for 1,000 pistols. He immediately set up a factory in Whitneyville, Connecticut. After one year, in 1848, Colt returned to Hartford and rented space for his factory. In 1852 the factory produced 55,000 pistols.

It was the war with Mexico that popularized Colt's pistol. Colt's major technical innovation was to make the revolving chamber on the pistol automatically advance to the next shot. Through variations and improvements on his design, Colt's 45 caliber revolver became the standard for Westerners, as well as a military weapon. Colt's revolvers were such an important part of western culture that there was common saying, "God didn't make men equal--Col. Colt did."¹

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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Colt Historic District

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Colt Patent Fire Arms was one of the first and largest of the 19th century industries in the northeast region to shift from small shop, craft economy to mechanized production, and by 1857 Colt employed 600 workers who finished 250 pistols per day.² In 1858 the Secretary of War described the armory (shortly afterward doubled in size), "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 of the United States."³ Although handguns were the major product, Colt also manufactured Gatling guns and Growning machine guns.

Colt Fire Arms methods of manufacture contributed importantly to industrial technology. "Eli Whitney, who produced Colt's gun before he was able to open his own factory, had brought the concept of interchangeability of parts to gunmaking. Colt's contribution was to manufacture the parts by machine. It is estimated that by 1857 80% of the process was done by machine alone. Moreover, Colt used steam power to drive numbers of large identical machines so that he achieved an unusual scale of operations. Colt broke the construction of pistols into a large number of small steps, in order to automate the process. Physically, the factory was laid out in an H-form with smaller ells off the center. Each component of the process, such as forgings, were located in its own section and fed its product into an assembly line. Each section also had a great deal of managerial independence, with quotas to meet. In this way authority and incentives were localized."⁴

Colt traveled to Europe and Asia to personally solicit orders for weapons from foreign rulers. He sold guns to both Turkey and Russia before the Crimean War. He exhibited at international expositions and built an armory in London in 1852. Colt has been accused of selling guns indiscriminately--to subversives as well as governments, to Irish Fenians, and to radical abolitionists. His weapons were probably used on both sides during the American Civil War.⁵

Colt Patent Fire Arms was a kind of school for Hartford industrial engineers. Many of the techniques perfected there were applied to other industries. Colt selected most able company engineers and officers, and after his death in 1862, the company continued under his superintendent, Elisha K. Root, an inventor in his own right.

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In 1850 Samuel Colt began building his industrial village in the South Meadows, a tract south of the city very convenient to river and rail lines. The riverfront area on the west bank of the Connecticut was lowland and subject to flooding. Colt first secured the area with a massive dike, "by an encircling causeway" around "a princely domain of 300 acres, to be covered with massive structures for workshops, warehouses and dwellings, all to be erected at his own cost and risk."⁶ Colt's dike was about 100 feet thick at the base, 40 feet across the top, and nearly two miles long. It was planted with willows to hold the soil and it cost \$125,000 to build. Colt's holdings in the South Meadows were about one-third mile broad and two-thirds of a mile long. The property stretched from Wethersfield Avenue to the river and included gardens, farmland, and a brickyard on the opposite riverbank, which was reached by private ferry.⁷

The huge arms factory buildings were first built in 1854-55, near the riverbank. They were doubled in size in 1861. In 1864 the East Armory burned, but it was immediately replaced by a more fireproof structure of the same design, complete with its famous blue Moorish dome. It is still in use. Rows of substantial workers housing were constructed directly west of the armory and eventually as many as 50 structures of several sizes and designs were built.

In 1855, the year before he married Elizabeth Hart Jarvis, Samuel Colt began building his elaborate Italian villa on Wyllys Hill, with a magnificent view of his South Meadows. The Colts moved into "Armsmead" in 1857 and continued remodeling it for several decades. Mrs. Colt lived there until her death in 1905. Around the palatial showplace, large gardens and a private park were laid out. Surrounding the Colt area on the west and north were the most fashionable neighborhoods of the city, containing the homes of many Colt company officers. One of these was built for James Colt, Samuel's brother, company treasurer, and U.S. Senator.

In the late 1850s Colt built the Colt Willow Ware Works and workers' cottages (Potsdam), an enterprise which used cuttings from the willow trees on the Colt dikes to manufacture willow furniture. Colt supposedly imported a whole group of 40 master craftsmen from near Potsdam, Germany, and employed as many as 100 immigrants in the company. The factory burned in 1873 and never reopened.

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In the paternalist tradition of 19th century industry, the Colt Company provided employees with good housing, beautiful parkland, and community facilities. The company sponsored cultural activities such as the Colt Band, composed of workers. Charter Oak Hall, built in 1856 near the armory, was a lecture hall, library, and concert hall for the village, and also housed the Armory Sabbath School for many years. Mrs. Colt, active in the Episcopal Church and daughter of a minister, organized a parish in the South Meadows in 1865 to serve Colt employees and neighbors, and built two Colt memorial parish buildings, which were designed to emphasize their association with the Colt family and industry.

Elizabeth H. Colt, Samuel's wife, died in 1905 and bequeathed funds to insure maintenance of important parts of the Colt industrial village. She established trust funds to maintain the "Armsmear" mansion, and the Church and the Parish House of the Good Shepherd, all of which were given to the Episcopal diocese. She gave the 100 acres of landscaped gardens to the city for a municipal park.

Unfortunately during this century the once-elegant neighborhood and well-kept South Meadows has suffered from neglect and poorly planned modern developments, intensified by proposed urban renewal in the last two decades. Consequently many nearby structures were abandoned.

The Colt Patent Fire Arms Company continues operation, although at a somewhat reduced production level. The Colt Park recreation facilities are used to a limited extent, but there is no attempt to maintain any landscaping in the park. The Potsdam cottages are privately owned, and occupied. The armorers' tenements are city-owned, unoccupied and boarded-up. The James Colt House is undergoing rehabilitation and conversion to apartments.

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Footnotes

¹"National Register Inventory Form" on the Colt Industrial District, prepared by Bruce Colnette and Carole Anstress Paine, February 23, 1976.

²Ibid.

³Henry Barnard, Armsmear, The Home, the Arm and the Armory of Samuel Colt, (New York, 1866) p. 237.

⁴"National Register Inventory Form," Colt Industrial District.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Barnard, p. 59.

⁷Barnard, p. 71.

⁸Barnard, p. 209.

⁹Barnard, p. 210.

¹⁰Barnard, p. 211.

¹¹Sarah Bradford Landau, "The Colt Industrial Empire in Hartford," in Antiques, Vol. CIX, No. 3, March 1976, p. 575.

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Barnard, Henry. Armsmear: The Home, the Arm and the Armory of Samuel Colt (A Memorial) New York, 1866.

Landau, Sarah Bradford. "The Colt Industrial Empire in Hartford," in Antiques, Vol CIX, No. 3, March 1976 pp. 568-579.

Original Historic Sites Survey by Sydney S. Bradford, 1967.

National Register report on the Church of the Good Shepherd and Parish House, prepared by Christine Brockmeyer, January 20, 1975.

National Register report on the James B. Colt House, prepared by Clark J. Strickland, March 1975.

National Register report on the Colt Industrial District, prepared by Bruce Clouette and Carole Austress Paine, February 23, 1976.

Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory forms prepared by Susan B. Bexby and Herb C. Darbee, Connecticut Historical Commission, 1973.

Field trip by Blanche Higgins Schroer, Boundary Review Project, with assistance of Steve Raiche, Connecticut Historical Commission August 14, 1974.

Architectural descriptions prepared with the assistance of Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian, Historic Sites Survey.

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Colt Historic District

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The National historic landmark boundary for the Colt District has been drawn rather restrictively to enclose the major extant features of Samuel Colt's 19th century "armory village." Most of the village is concentrated between Wethersfield Avenue and Van Dyke Streets and is connected by Colt Park. However, the area is surrounded by modern development and the boundary has been drawn to exclude certain areas, once part of the complex, but which have lost their historic character. For this reason, the Church and Parish House of the Good Shepherd, an integral part of the Colt industrial district, is defined as a non-contiguous unit of the district, to exclude non-historic features now located between them and the rest of the historic complex.

Beginning at the southeast corner of the intersection of Wethersfield Avenue and Stonington Street, the national historic landmark boundary runs southeasterly along the south curb of Stonington Street to its end; thence easterly to the northeast corner of the intersection of Van Block Avenue and Weehasset Street; thence northerly along the east curb of Van Block Avenue for one block; thence easterly along the south curb of Sequassen Street for two blocks; thence southerly along the west curb of Van Dyke Avenue for two blocks; thence southwesterly along the north curb of Masseek Street for two blocks; thence southeasterly along the west curb of Hendricxsen Avenue for one and a half blocks; thence southwesterly along the south (rear) property lines of the Potsdam cottages, parallel to the south curb of Curcombe Street, for one block; thence along the north curb of Warwarme Avenue for several blocks, following the boundary of Colt Park; thence northerly, parallel to Wethersfield Avenue, following the east (rear) property lines of the row of houses on the east side of Wethersfield, north of Warwarme, to the south property line of the James Colt House; thence westerly along this line to the east curb of Wethersfield Avenue; thence northerly along this curb to the beginning point.

The Church and Parish House of the Good Shepherd, on the east and south sides of a wide lawn, are the only features within the rectangular, non-contiguous unit of the district. Beginning at the southwest corner of the intersection of Wyllys and Van Block Streets, the national historic landmark boundary runs southerly, along the west curb of Van Block Avenue; thence west along the driveway which runs south of the church; thence west behind the parish house and between it and a modern parish building; thence north along the driveway to the parish house on the west side of the front lawn; thence east along the south curb of Wyllys to the beginning point.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 140 acres

UTM REFERENCES

I	A	18	694200	4625250	B	18	694790	4624601
		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
	C	18	693430	4624360	D	18	693770	4624920

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

II	A	18.693820.4625310	B	18.693870.4625240
	C	18.693730.4625170	D	18.693670.4625250

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Blanche Higgins Schroer, Landmark Review Project

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey Division - NPS

DATE

12/20/77

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)