

# Chapter 1: Study Purpose And Background

## Introduction

Public Law 108-94, the Coltsville Study Act of 2003, authorized the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study regarding the national significance and suitability and feasibility of the Coltsville Industrial District, in Hartford, Connecticut, for potential designation as a unit of the national park system. The legislation also requires evaluation of the importance of the site as it relates to the history of precision manufacturing. This report constitutes the results of the study undertaken by an interdisciplinary team of professionals within the Northeast Regional Office of the National Park Service (NPS).

Areas comprising the present 391 unit national park system are cumulative expressions of a single national heritage. Potential additions to the system should, therefore, contribute in their own special way to a system that fully represents the broad spectrum of natural and cultural resources that characterize our nation. The NPS is responsible for conducting professional studies of potential additions to the national park system when specifically authorized by an Act of Congress, and for making findings regarding new areas to the Secretary of the Interior, the President, and Congress. Several laws outline criteria for potential units of the national park system. To receive a favorable finding from the NPS, a proposed addition to the national park system must

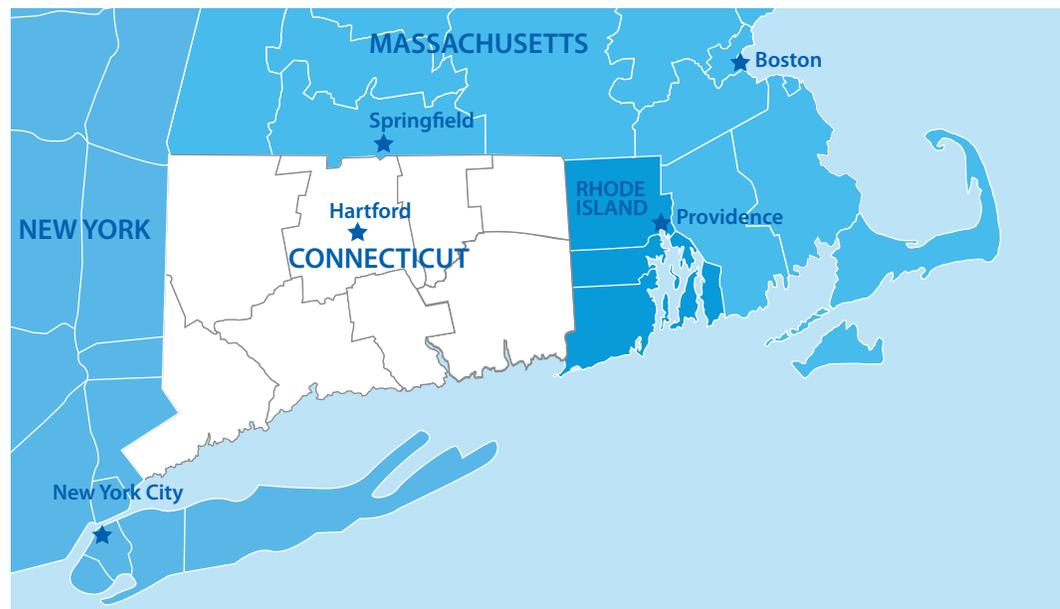
- (1) possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources;
- (2) be a suitable addition to the system;
- (3) be a feasible addition to the system; and
- (4) require direct NPS management, instead of alternative protection by other public agencies, tribes or the private sector.

These criteria are designed to ensure that the national park system includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation's natural and cultural resources. They also recognize that there are other alternatives, short of designation as a unit of the national park system, for preserving the nation's outstanding resources.

An area or resource may be considered nationally significant if it is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource; possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our nation's heritage; offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment or for scientific study; and retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource. National significance for cultural resources, such as those comprising the Coltsville Historic District, is evaluated by applying the National Historic Landmarks criteria contained in 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 65.

An area may be considered suitable for potential addition to the national park system if it represents a natural or cultural resource type that is not already adequately represented in the system, or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by other federal agencies; tribal, state, or local governments; or the private sector. The suitability evaluation, therefore, is not limited solely to units of the national park system, but includes evaluation of all comparable resource types protected by others.

Locus map for Hartford, Connecticut, in the Northeast



Suitability is determined on a case-by-case basis by comparing the resources being studied to other comparably managed areas representing the same resource type, while considering differences or similarities in the character, quality, quantity, or combination of resource values. The suitability analysis also addresses the rarity of the resources, interpretive and educational potential, and similar resources already protected in the national park system or in other public or private ownership. The comparison results in a determination of whether the potential new area would expand, enhance, or duplicate resource protection or visitor use opportunities found in other comparably managed areas.

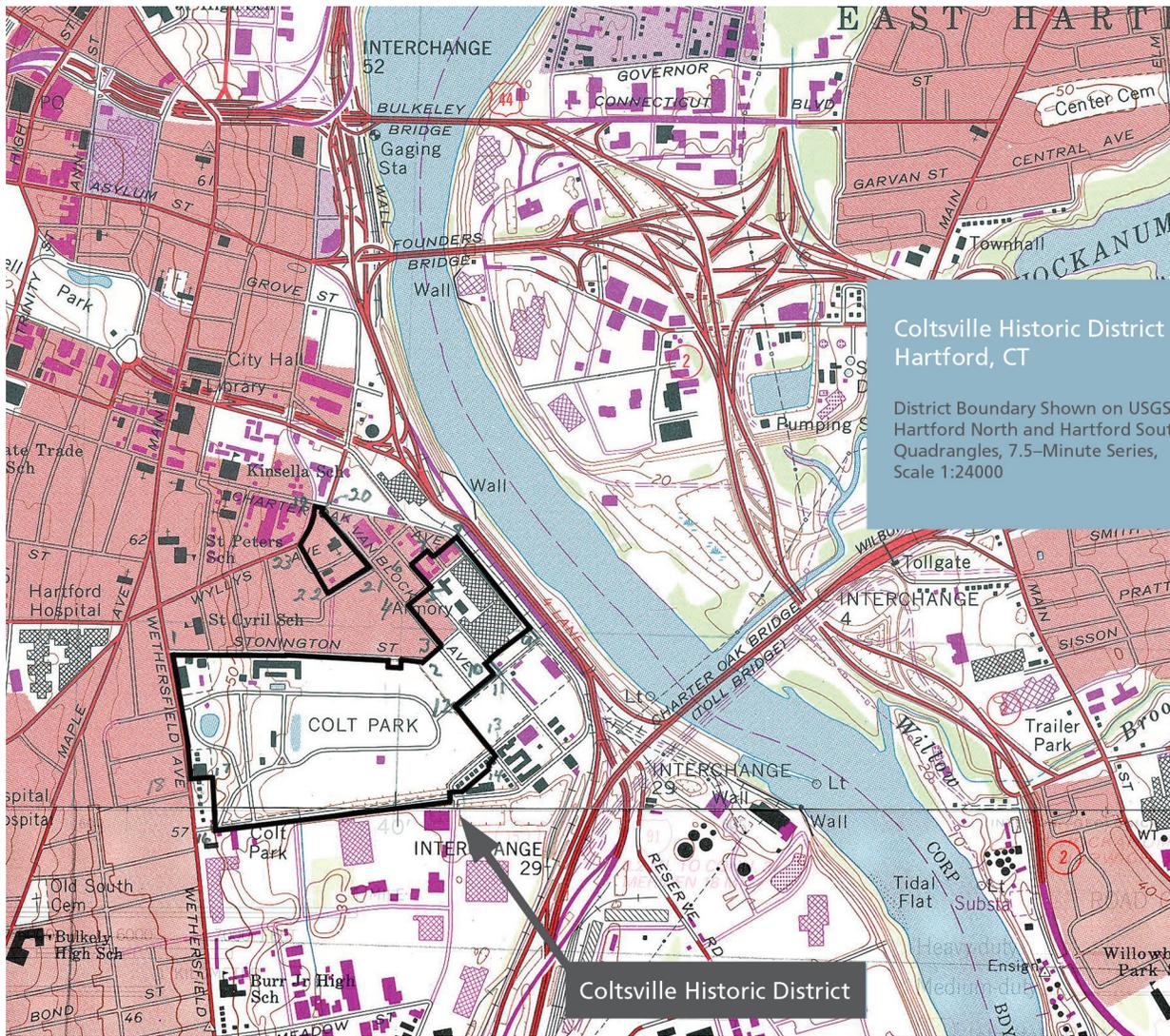
To be feasible as a new unit of the national park system, an area must be of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment (taking into account current and potential impacts from sources beyond its boundaries), and be capable of efficient administration by the NPS at a reasonable cost. In evaluating feasibility, the Service considers a variety of factors, such as: size; boundary configurations; current and potential uses of the study area and surrounding lands; land ownership patterns; public enjoyment potential; costs associated with acquisition, development, restoration, and operation; access; current and potential threats to the resources; existing degradation of resources; staffing requirements; local planning and zoning for the study area; the level of local and general public support; and, the economic/ socioeconomic impacts of designation as a unit of the national park system. The evaluation also considers the ability of the NPS to undertake new management responsibilities in light of current and projected constraints on funding and personnel.

There are many excellent examples of the successful management of important natural and cultural resources by other public agencies, private conservation organizations, and individuals. Most notably, state park systems provide for protection of natural and cultural resources throughout the nation and offer outstanding recreational experiences. The NPS applauds these accomplishments, and actively encourages the expansion of conservation activities by state, local, and private entities, and by other federal agencies. Unless direct NPS management of a studied area is identified as the clearly superior alternative, the Service will recommend that one or more of these other entities assume a lead management role, and that the area not be recommended as a potential unit of the national park system.

Studies evaluate an appropriate range of management alternatives and identify which alternative or combination of alternatives would be most effective and efficient in protecting significant resources and providing opportunities for appropriate public enjoyment. Alternatives to NPS management are not normally developed for study areas that fail to meet any one of the four criteria for inclusion listed above, particularly the “national significance” criterion.

In cases where a study area’s resources meet the criteria for national significance, but do not meet other criteria for inclusion in the national park system, the Service may instead recommend an alternative status, such as “affiliated” area. To be eligible for “affiliated area” status, the area’s resources must:

- (1) meet the same standards for national significance that apply to units of the national park system;
- (2) require some special recognition or technical assistance beyond what is available through existing NPS programs;
- (3) be managed in accordance with the policies and standards that apply to units of the national park system; and
- (4) be assured of sustained resource protection, as documented in a formal agreement between the NPS and the non-federal management entity.



Designation as a National Heritage Area is another option that could be recommended. Heritage areas are distinctive landscapes that are designated by Congress, but which do not necessarily meet the same standards of national significance. Either of these two alternatives would recognize an area's importance to the nation without requiring or implying management by the NPS.

Location of the study area of the Coltsville Special Resource Study, Hartford, Connecticut. Bruce Clouette, based on United States Geological Survey base map.

A Notice of Intent to undertake a Special Resource Study/Environmental Impact Statement (SRS/EIS) was published in the Federal Register on September 2, 2004. In cases where resources do not meet the required criteria for potential designation as units of the national park system, the EIS portion of the study is not undertaken and a notice indicating that action is published in the Federal Register upon the conclusion of the study. Therefore, a notice will be placed in the Federal Register that an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

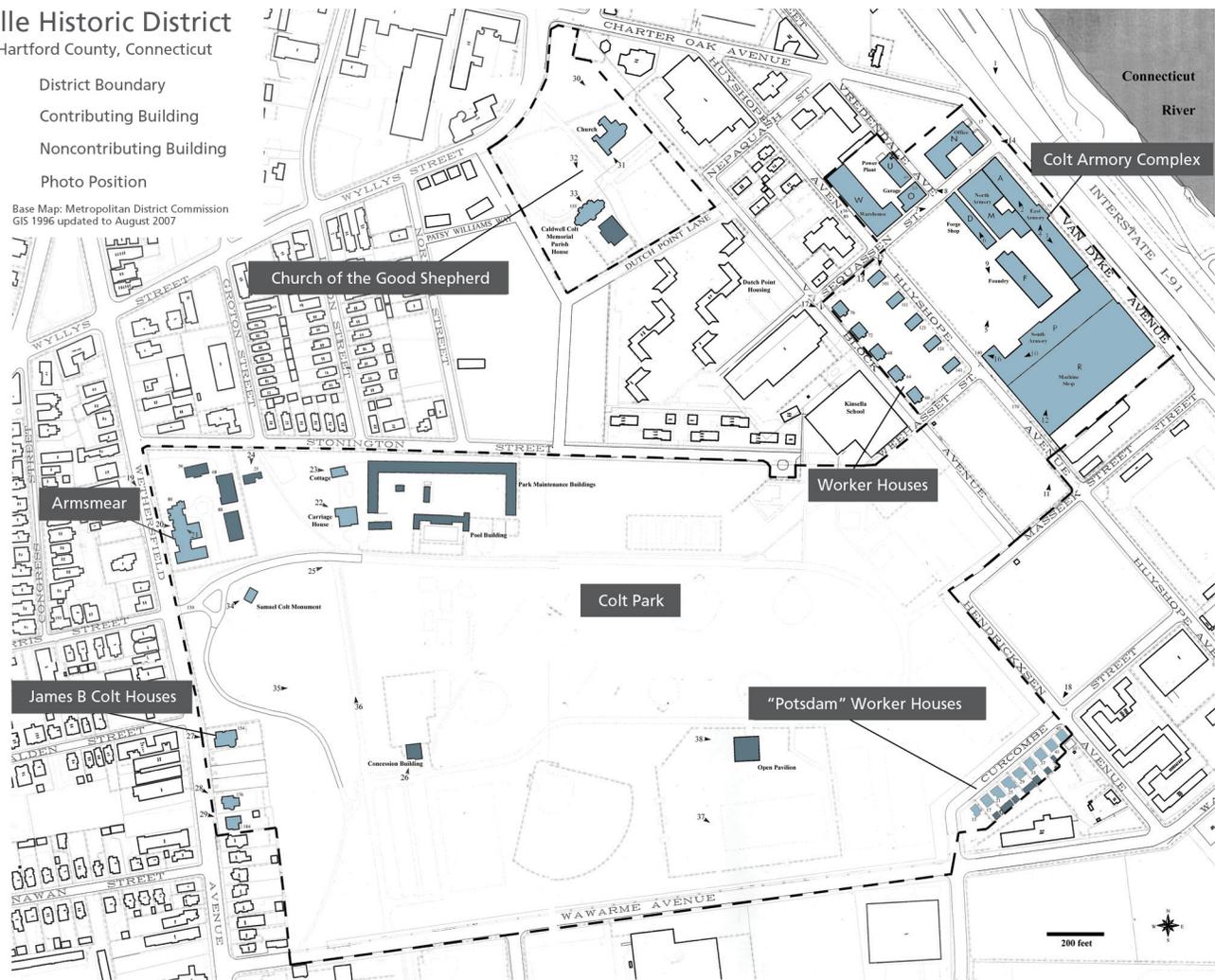
This study has been conducted by the NPS Northeast Region's Park Planning and Special Studies Branch. The project team included planners, historians, curators, and architects based in the Northeast Region's Boston and Philadelphia offices. Advisers have included specialists in industrial

# Coltsville Historic District

Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

- District Boundary
- Contributing Building
- Noncontributing Building
- Photo Position

Base Map: Metropolitan District Commission  
GIS 1996 updated to August 2007



Study area of the Coltsville Special Resource Study, in Hartford, Connecticut. The study area's boundary is coterminous with the boundary of the Coltsville Historic District National Historic Landmark. Bruce Clouette, based on Metropolitan District Commission base map.

archeology and history; business, urban, and labor history; historic districts and structures; and historic collections. The study team has had primary responsibility for conducting the study process, producing this report, and has been responsible for coordinating the involvement of other public agencies and the public in the study.

## Study Area

The city of Hartford, Connecticut is located in the north central portion of the state, along the Connecticut River. Hartford is the state capital of Connecticut and has an estimated 2007 population of 124,563 (U.S. Census Bureau); it is the state's second largest city.

Hartford is served by air transportation through Bradley International Airport, located in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, 20 minutes north of the downtown. Rail transportation is provided by Amtrak with connections through New Haven to New York City and Boston. Hartford sits at the intersection of two interstate highways (I-84 and I-91).

Hartford is implementing a downtown revitalization strategy that seeks to develop a critical mass of downtown market-rate housing, which would support downtown shopping, restaurants, and cultural life. The downtown plan seeks to knit together the fragmented sections of the downtown into a cohesive whole that becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Much attention is being focused on redeveloping the Riverfront area known as Adriaen's Landing. This is the site of the Connecticut Convention Center, the Connecticut Center for Science & Exploration, the Hartford Marriott Downtown Hotel, and new shops and housing. Located just south of the redevelopment activity in downtown Hartford, Coltsville serves as a southern extension of the redevelopment activity. City of Hartford officials regard the redevelopment of Coltsville and establishing a national park there an important part of its overall redevelopment strategy.

Coltsville, itself, is located in the Sheldon/Charter Oak neighborhood of Hartford. The neighborhood is bounded on the east by Interstate-91 and the Connecticut River. The Coalition to Strengthen the Sheldon/Charter Oak Neighborhood, Inc. is the neighborhood's primary community development organization, seeking to promote development of the 335-acre neighborhood. The Coalition to Strengthen the Sheldon/Charter Oak Neighborhood has been active in promoting the historic preservation and interpretation of Coltsville.

Hartford has plans to reconnect Coltsville with the Connecticut River, now separated by I-91. In the 19th century, the Colt Fire Arms factory had a dock on the Connecticut River where it sent and received shipments, but the construction of Interstate-91 during the 1960s effectively walled off the Colt factory from the river. The nonprofit organization Riverfront Recapture, Inc., has been developing a continuous public park for the length of the banks of the Connecticut River in Hartford since its original plan was published in 1982. Much of this has been achieved, but the largest uncompleted section is on the riverfront opposite Coltsville. The 3,700-foot stretch, between the existing Riverfront Plaza, near downtown, and Charter Oak Landing, near the Charter Oak Bridge, is called Riverwalk South. Access to the riverfront from Coltsville currently is blocked by railroad tracks, Interstate-91, and a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dike built in 1942. Riverfront Recapture, Inc., plans to create an opening in the dike, which would have a working gate to protect against flooding. The City is seeking federal funds to partly fund the connection between Coltsville and the riverfront.

The Coltsville Industrial District, the subject for this study, comprises 260 acres at the southern edge of Hartford's downtown section. The study area is bounded by Van Dyke Avenue, Vredendale Avenue, Huyshope Avenue, Sequassen Street, Van Block Avenue, and Maseek Street.

## Previous Designations

On November 11, 1966, Armsmear, the home of Samuel and Elizabeth Colt, was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) by the Secretary of the Interior. Colt planned and built the Italianate style house at 80 Wethersfield Avenue in 1857 as a family residence when he married Elizabeth Colt on June 5, 1856. Today, the dwelling serves as a 51 unit complex for retired single women operated by the Episcopal Church.

The Colt Industrial District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on June 8, 1976. The district includes Armsmear, the Colt Fire Arms factory complex, Colt Park, three manager houses, and worker housing. A boundary increase to the district occurred in 2001 and included seven buildings and one structure situated on the north side of Sequassen Street between Van Dyke Avenue and Huyshope Avenue. These buildings were erected between 1916 and 1947. During the course of this study, the entire historic district was designated the Coltsville Historic District National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior on July 22, 2008. The period of significance for the Landmark is 1855 to 1945.

## The National Park Service in Connecticut

The NPS has enjoyed lengthy and collaborative relationships with the governments, organizations and citizens of Connecticut in furthering the protection of natural and cultural resources. A unit of the national park system, Weir Farm, located in Ridgefield and Wilton, preserves, and interprets the landscapes, buildings and objects which together form a place of central importance to the art of Julian Alden Weir and the American Impressionist movement.

In 1994, the U.S. Congress designated an area comprising 26 communities in northeast Connecticut as the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor. The corridor was extended in 1999 to include nine communities of the state of Massachusetts. The NPS provides financial and technical assistance to national heritage areas. In 2006, Congress designated the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, with eight communities in northwest Connecticut, and 18 communities in western Massachusetts.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service, has provided grants to state and local governments of Connecticut in excess of \$63.4 million for land acquisition, development and redevelopment of open space and recreational resources affecting close to 28,000 acres. The NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) has provided technical assistance to numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations in Connecticut for 18 conservation and trails development projects since 2000. RTCA projects currently underway include the French River Greenway and the Naugatuck River Greenway.

Connecticut contains 61 National Historic Landmarks including the Coltsville Historic District. In addition to Coltsville, NHLs in Hartford include the A. Everett Austin House, Henry Barnard House, the Connecticut State Capitol, the old state Capitol, and the Mark Twain House. The NPS administers the NHL program and provides technical preservation assistance to designated properties. NHLs are also eligible to apply for Save America's Treasures grants.

## Local Activities in Support of a Coltsville National Park Unit

Interest in recognizing the historic significance of Coltsville has been strong in Hartford. In 1996, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art hosted an exhibit entitled "Colt: The Making of an American Legend." The exhibit and companion book of the same title, written by William Hosley, stoked local support for celebrating the story of Samuel Colt and his company. The 2006 Wadsworth Atheneum exhibit "Samuel Colt: Arms, Art, and Invention" strengthened awareness of Colt's technological and marketing genius. Samuel Colt was featured on the PBS program "They Made America" (2004). The companion book by Harold Evans, *They Made America* (2004) maintained:

*"Whether Colt's revolver defended or retarded civilization is endlessly arguable, but there can be no doubt his advances in precision manufacturing and his iconic marketing methods advanced American industrialization and marked a coming of age of the ideal of American individualism."*

The Coltsville study legislation was sponsored by Senators Christopher Dodd and Joseph Lieberman, and Congressman John B. Larson who formed the local Coltsville Ad Hoc Committee to work on preserving and interpreting Coltsville as a unit of the National Park System. The committee has included congressional staff, state and local officials, the Colt Gateway developer, and representatives of local cultural and historical institutions and interested community organizations.

The study team met with the committee, at its invitation, on a number of occasions during the course of the study. The committee provided extensive information relating to the resources and history of Coltsville and the successful Coltsville NHL nomination. It also assisted in organizing public meetings related to the study and the NHL nomination. In order to provide information on the feasibility of a unit of the National Park System at Coltsville, the committee obtained funding from the State of Connecticut's Commission on Culture and Tourism to hire a consultant team to examine various visitor experience scenarios at Coltsville. Working with the Coltsville Ad Hoc Committee, the consultant team developed a report "Coltsville National Park Visitor Experience Study" (December, 2008). The NPS study team reviewed the scenarios developed in the Visitor Experience Study to evaluate the feasibility of viable visitor experiences at Coltsville.

## Heritage Organizations and National Historic Landmarks Related to Coltsville

There are a number of places and organizations located within the city of Hartford but outside of the study area that have associations with Samuel and Elizabeth Colt. These include:

### Museum of Connecticut History

The museum operates under the Connecticut State Library. The purpose of the museum, which was established in 1910, is to interpret the political, constitutional, social, and economic history of Connecticut. It has a concentration in industrial history, collecting objects such as firearms, industrial machinery, clocks, household appliances, hand tools, and other manufactured products.

In 1957, the museum obtained the Colt Fire Arms Collection, assembled by the Colt Firearms Company over many years. The collection has 1,500 firearms, 350 of which are Colt firearms and the remainder manufactured by other companies. The collection includes firearms designed by Samuel Colt himself, as well as factory prototypes and “presentation” arms given to dignitaries. The museum also owns the original “rampant colt,” the emblem of the Colt Fire Arms Company that once stood atop the factory’s onion dome (currently a fiberglass replica is on the dome).

The museum owns a collection of approximately 50 pieces of industrial machinery, including one piece that was originally used at the Colt Fire Arms factory (starting in the 1930s, many historic Colt machines were lost when the company modernized and discarded them). Other pieces of machinery in the state museum collection are similar to machines once used by Colt. The museum currently keeps all of these machines in storage, but hopes ultimately to exhibit some of them. The museum’s collections also include bicycles, sewing machines, typewriters, and other local products made with technology developed at the Colt Fire Arms Company.

The museum has expressed a willingness to work with the NPS to provide short- or long-term loans of Colt-related artifacts.

### Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

This museum, established in 1842, is the oldest public art museum in the United States. The Atheneum has a significant comprehensive collection which features European and American art and decorative arts, contemporary art, costumes, and textiles. The Atheneum received a bequest from Elizabeth Colt upon her death in 1905. The bequest included a large collection of rare firearms, art, armor, curios, and documents. Elizabeth Colt gave the Atheneum \$50,000 (\$1.75 million in today’s dollars) to build the Colt Memorial Wing to display her collection. For much of the last century, the Wadsworth Atheneum displayed Elizabeth Colt’s collection. It mounted a major exhibition in 1996 based on her collection which interpreted the career of her husband Samuel, her philanthropic career, and the impact of the Colt Fire Arms Company on Hartford. The exhibit “Colt: The Making of a Legend” was curated by William Hosley, and a book by the same name was published by the University of Massachusetts Press. In 2006, the Atheneum mounted an exhibit, “Samuel Colt: Arms, Art, and Invention.” The focus of this exhibit was on firearms, particularly those objects dating to the career of Samuel Colt. A companion catalogue was written by Herbert Houze and published by the Yale University Press.

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art has expressed an interest in working with the NPS should a unit of the national park system be established at Coltsville.

### Connecticut Historical Society

This organization has one of the most important historical museum and library collections in the state. The Society has extensive collections of costumes, furniture, tavern signs, paintings, tools, and clocks. The museum collection does not include artifacts directly connected with the Colt Fire Arms Company, but it does interpret the history of industry in Connecticut and has expressed an interest in working with the NPS should a unit of the National Park System be established at Coltsville.

### Cedar Hill Cemetery

The cemetery is the burial site of Samuel and Elizabeth Colt and their children. Elizabeth Colt was the first subscriber of the romantic garden Cedar Hill Cemetery, which was opened in 1866. The Colt Family 32-foot-high funerary monument features a bronze Colt-Jarvis coat of arms and a statue of the angel Gabriel by sculptor Randolph Rogers.