



*Elizabeth Colt and her son Caldwell*

### Update on the status of the Park

The staff at Coltsville National Historical Park continue to move toward establishment. The initial environmental site assessments of the brownstone building sites has come back favorable and should not inhibit the transfer of the land. The complexities of the easements, right of ways, and other real estate agreements prove to make the transfer paperwork intensive and tedious for both the public and private legal teams. The park is developing a Preliminary Visitors Experience Plan as well as moving forward with a Scholars Round Table. The Scholars Round Table will bring together a team of leading academics to debate and construct the essentials of the park purpose and significance. This foundation will guide how the National Park Service will interpret the park for the next ten years. Many activities are happening behind the scenes in order to be properly prepared for the official establishment.

### Introducing Keenan Comer

The National Park Service is pleased to introduce Keenan Comer as the new Chief of Facilities and Resources for Coltsville and Springfield Armory. Keenan's interest in working in parks started when he was 15, when he helped build a park bridge. He brings 18 years of federal government experience to the role, including helping start the Pullman National Monument in Chicago.

Keenan is excited about the challenge of incorporating everyone's vision for the park into one overall plan and looking forward to building another park from the ground up.



*Keenan Comer*



*Elizabeth Colt as Colonial Dame, CN Flagg Portrait*

### **Meet Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt (1826-1905) by William Hosley**

So who was Elizabeth Colt and why does she matter to the Coltsville story?

Elizabeth Colt's unlikely emergence as a public figure and civic leader was the result of her husband's premature death, when she was just 35 years old. Although Hartford women like Catherine Beecher and Lydia Sigourney had already blazed trails in writing and education - Elizabeth Colt found herself in a unique situation for which she was prepared by family circumstances involving wealth, adversity, and unusual responsibilities at a young age.

By all appearances the Colts had a remarkable relationship. Shunned and abandoned by members of his own biological family, Sam Colt embraced his wife's family and made unusual provisions in his will that left Elizabeth in control of the estate

and Colt's Patent Manufacturing Company which she guided, through her brother Richard and trusted aids, for 40 years. She discovered a quality of leadership that involved an unusual capacity for fostering unity and cooperation among dissenting factions. Elizabeth Colt was a devout Christian who peppered her speech with scriptural citations. Had she been born male, she would probably have followed her father into the ministry. She was a champion of widows and the poor whose philanthropic gifts and acts have never been surpassed in the history of a city famous for philanthropists. Her obituary ran on page one of the Hartford Courant where it was noted that "What she has done for this community is incalculable . . . She was the First Woman of Connecticut whose every business undertaking was controlled by loyalty to the memory of her husband and children."

She was the founding president of the *Soldier's Aid Society* during the Civil War, the *Union for Home Work* - a pioneering social service agency, the *Hartford Arts Society* which played a major role in transforming Wadsworth Atheneum into the museum of art we know today, and the *Connecticut Society of Colonial Dames*. She also saved thousands of jobs when she chose to rebuild after the Colt's Armory fire in 1864. Her patronage of art and architecture reshaped the city creating some of its most enduring landmarks and an art collection that is one of the gems of the Wadsworth Atheneum. In the end she left Hartford a city park, a church, a community center, a retirement home, a social service agency, and an art museum - all still functioning 100 years after her death.

The Church of the Good Shepherd (1868) and Caldwell Colt Memorial Parish Hall (1894), at the north end of Coltsville, were built as family memorials and community amenities by Elizabeth Colt. When it opened in 1869, it was described as "the Finest Church in America." Its ornamentation, layout and stained glass reflect the most advanced capabilities of the age.

Following her death in 1905, Elizabeth Colt willed the gardens and grounds at Armsmead to the City of Hartford to be developed as Colt Park. She commissioned the Colt Memorial Statue (1902-





*Colt Memorial Statue*

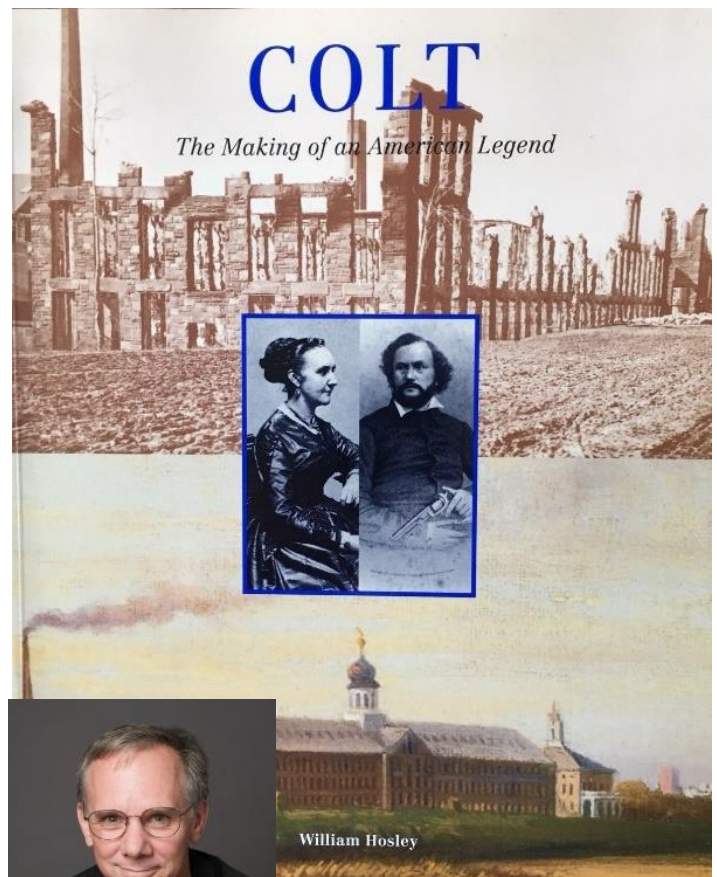
1904) by J. Massey Rhind, at the entrance to Colt Park, one of the city's most ambitious public sculptures. She also commissioned the Colt monument (1866 by James Batterson and Randolph Rogers) at Cedar Hill Cemetery - a towering masterpiece that set the tone for Connecticut's most opulent Gilded Age cemetery.

At the time of Elizabeth Colt's death in 1905, she bequeathed to the Wadsworth Atheneum the Colt Memorial Collection and funds earmarked for the *sole purpose* of erecting a building to house it. The collection is largely intact and was extensively documented and profiled in the 1996 *Colt's Empire* exhibition and companion publication, *Colt: The Making of an American Legend* (University of Massachusetts Press 1996). In addition to including the Colt Memorial Arms Collection - patent prototypes, production models from both from Colt's Paterson, New Jersey and Hartford factories, and Sam Colt's important collection of historic repeating firearms - the collection is especially rich in art and decorative arts that speak to the Gilded Age sensibility of Elizabeth Colt. The art collection is especially auto-biographical. They reflect her tastes, vision, and experiences and it helped put Hartford on the map as an art center.

Elizabeth Colt was a proto-preservationist. The Colt Trust, the primary beneficiary of Elizabeth Colt's largess and a major stakeholder in the Colt legacy,

was established to support and preserve the Colt Memorial Church, parish house, and Colt mansion *Armsmead*, repurposed as a retirement home. Although Elizabeth Colt could not have anticipated the booming economy and demand for "culture" in 20<sup>th</sup> century America, she prepared for it exquisitely by preserving most of what one would need to capture the sense and sensibility of her time.

More than anyone, Elizabeth Colt built and preserved the landmarks and collections needed to make Coltsville National Historical Park a reality.



*William Hosley and his book on Samuel and Elizabeth Colt*

## Upcoming Events

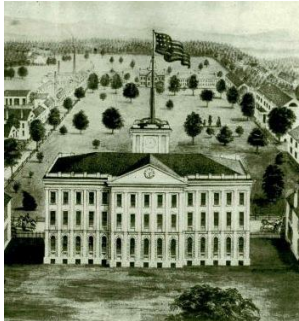


Colt Memorial. Hartford, Conn.

**Saturday, June 16:**  
Church of the Good Shepherd Tours at 11am and 1pm  
by Jack Hale

**Saturday, July 7:**  
8:30-10:00 AM:  
Friends of Colt Park  
Clean Up  
Location: Colt Park

**Saturday, July 14:**  
Armory Day at  
Springfield Armory  
Living History  
10am-4pm Big Band  
6:30pm



**Saturday, July 21:**  
Church of the Good Shepherd Tours at 11am  
and 1pm by Jack Hale

**Saturday, July 28:**  
2-3 PM “Sam & Elizabeth- Legend & Legacy  
of Colt’s Empire” - Bill Hosley  
Location: Springfield Armory

**Saturday, August 4:**  
Church of the Good Shepherd Tours at 11am  
and 1pm by Jack Hale



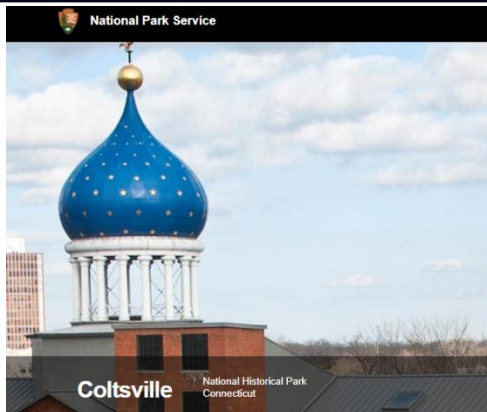
**Saturday, August 11:**  
8:30-10:00 AM:  
Friends of Colt Park  
Clean Up  
Location: Colt Park

**Saturday-Sunday August 18-19:**  
Big Bounce America Location: Colt Park



**Tuesday, August 28th:**  
10-11 AM: Sam & Elizabeth’s World - The Colts  
at Cedar Hill  
Location: Cedar Hill  
Cemetery  
Fee: \$5/person

## Contact Us



[www.nps.gov/colt](http://www.nps.gov/colt)

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