

COMMENTARY

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Immeasurable Importance

By JOHN B. LARSON

The history of Coltsville is not only a history of industry in central Connecticut, it is a piece of our national heritage from the Industrial Revolution that still stands in downtown Hartford, alive but partly disused and underutilized. This unique regional and international landmark must not be allowed to remain that way. Making Coltsville a national park is a most appropriate way to preserve the area's immeasurable historical value and to further cultivate its history and importance to Connecticut and the nation.

It is important to emphasize that the Colt legacy is not just about firearms, but also about industrial innovation and the development of technology that would change the way of life in the United States. Founder Samuel Colt worked with Samuel Morse in the development of the telegraph, and Colt manufacturing contributed to the develop-

ment of technology in many ways, inspiring the jet engine pioneers Francis Pratt and Amos Whitney, who served as apprentices at Colt manufacturing. Colt brought other early industrial leaders to Hartford to learn about the innovative manufacturing techniques and equipment being invented and developed in the area. This string of industrial innovations and successes began with Colt Firearms, but went on to include Pope manufacturing's production of bicycles and automobiles.

Recent news of an interested buyer for the property is exciting, as any redevelopment and investment in Coltsville can and should be incorporated into making parts of the area a national park. The combination of private investment in a historical industri-

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al area, combined with local, state and federal efforts to preserve and enhance its historical value, is the formula that led to a successful similar effort in Lowell, Mass. During the recent delegation visit to the national park area in Lowell — a city that shares similar characteristics with Hartford — local leaders, responding to questions regarding the key to their success, said it resulted from building a strong partnership among area businesses, the community and government. The same components for success exist in Hartford, including critical support on a local level in the Sheldon/Charter Oak and nearby Dutch Point neighborhoods.

A reinvigorated Coltsville with a national park designation would fit perfectly with other Hartford landmarks and redevelopment projects, including Adriaen's Landing, the Mark

Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe houses, the Old State House, a soon-to-be repaired Butler-McCook home, the Bushnell, the Wadsworth Atheneum and the entire riverfront area, among others. Just as Colt manufacturing led the way in Hartford's industrial revolution, a national park at a redeveloped Coltsville will be a leader in restoring and improving our capital city, returning it to the status of a vibrant and economically healthy New England urban area.

The blue onion dome sitting atop the armory is an internationally recognized symbol of Samuel and Elizabeth Colt's manufacturing company. Once Coltsville becomes a proud addition to our national park system and its redevelopment into residential, office or commercial space is complete, the dome will also be a symbol of dedication to our rich history, our industrial heritage and Hartford's growing economic prosperity.