

Statement of National Park Service in support of Coltsville Study Act before Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks

STATEMENT

OF BRENDA BARRETT, NATIONAL COORDINATOR FOR HERITAGE AREAS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 2519, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A STUDY OF COLTSVILLE IN THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT FOR POTENTIAL INCLUSION IN THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.

June
20, 2002

Mr.

Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 2519. This bill would direct the Secretary of the Interior to undertake a study of Coltsville, a site in Hartford, Connecticut, for potential inclusion in the National Park System.

The

Department supports this study. However, we did not request additional funding for this study in fiscal year 2003. We believe that any funding requested should be directed towards completing previously authorized studies. There are 37 studies pending currently, of which we hope to transmit at least seven to Congress by the end of 2002. To meet the President's Initiative to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog, we must continue to focus our resources on caring for existing areas in the National Park System. We caution that our support of this legislation authorizing a study does not necessarily mean that the Department will support designations of this area as a unit of the National Park System. The study would be undertaken with the full involvement of representatives of the State of Connecticut, the City of Hartford, property owners in the study area, and other interested organizations and individuals in the region.

The

bill directs the National Park Service to study the site commonly known as "Coltsville," and its surrounding area within the City of Hartford, to evaluate its national significance, suitability, and feasibility for designation as a unit of the National Park System. The bill also directs NPS to evaluate the importance of the site to the history of precision manufacturing.

At

the core of the Coltsville area, which is estimated at some 260-acres, is the 17-acre Coltsville Heritage Park.

Owned by a non-profit subsidiary of the Goodrich Corporation, this site contains ten historic buildings, some of which are occupied by commercial, residential, and office tenants; a number of artists also live and work in the complex. Also within the study area, but in separate ownership, are examples of former Colt worker housing and other buildings associated with Colt history. The potential study area borders Interstate 91, which parallels the Connecticut River, and is close to the central business district where the State Capitol and Museum of Connecticut State History are located. The State Museum is a major repository of Colt-related artifacts and archives, as is the Wadsworth Atheneum, a renowned museum also in the city center.

Samuel

Colt was born in Hartford in 1814 and died there in 1862. He obtained his first patent in 1836 and went on to found a company that is still in operation today, although it moved from the historic armory to West Hartford, Connecticut and is no longer owned by the Colt family. The Colt name is known throughout the world. Colt firearms and other products have been used in every major conflict from the U.S.-Mexican War to the present.

The

Colt revolver was a revolutionary weapon that changed military tactics and eventually made the sword obsolete in combat. First produced in 1847, it maintained its reputation through the Civil War despite competition from other manufacturers. Colt's salesmanship was legendary, and the company grew due to his marketing, advertising, and public relations skills. He began construction of his first factory in Hartford in 1847. At the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London, Colt revolvers were displayed and their interchangeability demonstrated as a highlight of the "American System of Manufacturing." Colt was so impressed with his reception in England that he would build a factory there, becoming the first American to set up a manufacturing plant overseas.

The

Hartford facility expanded in the mid-19th century. The armory's distinctive blue onion dome, a Hartford landmark visible from I-91, was built in 1855. In order to attract laborers, Colt built a self-contained community surrounding the factory at Coltsville that included housing, gardens, beer halls, and a band. A library and school were established for the children of the workers, as well as a church and social hall. Many of these structures are still extant and are part of the Colt Industrial National Register District that was listed in 1976. The Colt family home, Armsmear, a National Historic Landmark, and its surrounding grounds are situated in Colt Park, abutting the armory site. The original factory burned in 1864, but was rebuilt soon after.

Colt

would continue to supply sidearms to the United States military until 1985. Colt weapons were carried not only by the American soldier on the frontier, but were the personal weapon of choice of cowboys, both famous and infamous.

Colt

history complements that of Springfield Armory National Historic Site, which is managed by the National Park Service in Springfield, Massachusetts, 25-miles north of Hartford along the Connecticut River. Originally Springfield Armory produced shoulder arms while Colt made handguns. Later they worked together to bring the rapid-fire gun and later the machine-gun into the inventories of the U.S. military. But in 1961 Colt challenged Springfield Armory's M14 rifle while promoting its competing AR-15, now known as the M16 rifle. This ultimately resulted in the demise of Springfield Armory in 1968.

The

Colt story is also the story of Elizabeth Colt, who took over the factory after her husband's death in 1862, and ran it successfully for another 39 years. The history of this remarkable woman is not well-known and should be included as part of the study.

In

our 1998 Connecticut River Valley Special Resource Reconnaissance Study, we said, "innovations stimulated by firearms manufacture, notably mass production and the concept of interchangeable parts, had far-reaching consequences throughout American industry." As the skills developed in firearms manufacture were given broader application, the corridor between New Haven, Connecticut and Windsor, Vermont became known as the "Precision Valley." Developments in arms making translated to other metal-working industries, such as sewing machines, typewriters, bicycles, railway equipment, and clocks.

It

is appropriate for the National Park Service to explore further this theme of American history. Only through further investigation will it be possible to determine if it is feasible and suitable for inclusion in the National Park System.

Thank

you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks.

I would be glad to answer any questions that you or the members of the committee may have.