

COLT: LEGEND & LEGACY
Produced, Written & Directed by Kenneth A. Simon
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NARRATOR: It was called the Peacemaker ... the Equalizer ... the Gun that Won the West --Colt! ... The name is legendary ... the gun an historic American icon. The Colt revolver helped tame frontiers, win wars and spark a revolution in American manufacturing. In the mid-19th century the Colt had no equal either as status symbol or weapon ... and everyone in the mid 1800s knew of the man behind the gun -- The revolver king, Samuel Colt, America's first industrial tycoon.

TITLE: COLT: LEGEND & LEGACY

NARRATOR: The Colt empire was built on a foundation of guns, art, religion, and personal mythology. Sam Colt was complex and flamboyant -- a self-proclaimed genius whose real accomplishments were matched by relentless self-promotion and repeated self-invention. His faithful wife Elizabeth proved herself to be no less extraordinary, and in the end made Sam Colt's legend bigger than ever, and his empire her own.

KAREN BLANCHFIELD (Curator, Wadsworth Atheneum): He was forging ahead on paths that had never been walked before and all of the robber barons to follow would walk in Colt's footsteps.

"If I can't be first, I won't be second in anything." --Sam Colt, 1844

DR. COULT

NARRATOR: Sam Colt was born in Hartford in 1814.

BILL HOSLEY (Author, "Colt"): I think Colt's dominant trait was just this intense craving for success. And I am certain it all does trace back to, you know, his father's failure, the family being knocked off the social register, their downward mobility (intense downward mobility), a- his mother's death, his sister's suicide. Just wave after wave of personal human tragedy to a young boy who had grown up in privilege in Hartford and then at the age of 7, between the age of 7 and 14, watched it all collapse.

BLANCHFIELD: Colt was raised very modestly. His mother died when he was young. His father was an agent for a woolen textile mill. We get the feeling from family correspondence that he was not the best student but he was very ambitious and he and his father decided that the best thing for him would be to see some of the world and he was outfitted to be a sailor on a ship, that sailed around the world. While he was on this journey he conceived the idea for the repeating revolving mechanism.

DEAN NELSON (Administrator, Museum of CT History): And when he returned from a one year apprenticeship aboard ship He had worked up very crude carved wooden elements of a revolving firearm. He was able to talk his father into funding some prototypes by the gunSMITH: Anson Chase in Hartford in 1832.

NARRATOR: Colt was a complex man who learned self-promotion at an early age. From 1832 to 1836, Colt traveled throughout America as Doctor Coult, c-o-u-l-t, giving demonstrations of the newly discovered nitrous oxide – laughing gas.

NELSON: He was setting up in local lyceums and museums and lecture halls and town halls of the period and was attempting to earn a livelihood from that. You can imagine that as master of ceremonies and the choreographer of that, a tremendous amount of showmanship came into play.

And in 1834 he ends up in Baltimore where he executes a contract with John Pearson who's a local gunsmith: and Pearson works exclusively for him under contract for about a two-year period working up the various models that lead to his formal application to the U. S. Patent Office.

BLANCHFIELD: The laughing gas money allowed him to pay the gunsmith: to produce the first prototype Colt revolvers. It was a passable way to make a living; he wasn't very successful. In fact, his gunsmith, John Pearson, was constantly reminding him that he needed to be paid.

"I worked night and day almost, so I would not disappoint you and what have I got for it---why vexation and trouble...The manner you are using us is too bad...Come up with some money. ... In a devil of all ill humor and not without cause." --John Pearson, 1836

BAD TIMING, BIG EGO

NARRATOR: With his patent in hand, and with the help of wealthy New Jersey relatives, Sam Colt opened the Patent Arms Manufacturing Company in 1836 in Paterson, New Jersey. He was 23 years old.

NELSON: His principal role was as a salesman for his patent firearms and the sales were terrible. Sam was working every angle in connection that he could to try to secure government contracts, influencing Congressmen. His cousin and - and sort of economic overseer, Dudley Seldon, was very angry with Colt for trying to sell guns through Old Madeira, basically wining and dining influential folks that had influence either with the War Department or Congress,

"You use money as if it were drawn from an inexhaustible mine."--Dudley Seldon, 1836

NARRATOR: In 1842, after six years and a production run of 5,000 pistols and rifles, the company declared bankruptcy, and liquidated its assets.

HOSLEY: Colt had failed New Jersey for two reasons: first is that he was a chaotic presence in the midst of this small, struggling start-up business. He had ego the size of Texas, but he didn't understand the nature of the challenge he was embarking on. But also - the timing was wrong. They launched the company within months of a collapse, you know, the great bank riots and panic of 1837 -- it was like a huge recession – and just a bad time in the economic cycle of the country. It was also during the period when there were no wars that the country was involved with.

NARRATOR: Colt spent 1841 to 1846 in New York City, where he maintained a studio at New York University. He continued to unsuccessfully hustle for a government firearms contract as he pursued, with little success, other inventions and enterprises.

In 1844, Colt demonstrated for Congress his invention of an underwater mine that used a telegraphed signal for harbor defense. Colt's showmanship prevailed as he blew up a 500-ton schooner on the

Potomac River to the delight of the thousands who attended. But to his great disappointment, Colt was once again unsuccessful in securing a U.S. government contract.

During his six years in New York, Colt would regularly receive discouraging field reports on his Paterson guns. Users complained that the guns were too complicated, too easily fouled up ~~in use~~, too heavy and potentially lethal to the shooter.

Undaunted, Colt regularly solicited testimonials from Colt gun users, as he kept up a steady stream of correspondence with military officers and others who he thought might help him..

But fame and success were still elusive. Then, after 30-years of peace, the Mexican War broke out in 1846.

HOSLEY: Sam Colt was in 1846 poor as a church mouse and he knew the Mexican War had started and he's flailing around. He knows surf's up and that there's an opportunity for him but he's not sure what.

SUCCESS

HOSLEY: In November 30th, 1846, Captain Samuel Walker of the Texas Rangers writes Sam Colt in Hartford a letter that will change the course of history. That letter is basically reporting from the frontier that in fact, the guns you made in New Jersey do work and they have, in fact, changed the way we fight.

"The pistols which you made...have been in use by the 'Texas Rangers' for three years...[and are]the only good improvement I have ever seen...[In the] summer of 1844, Col. J.C.Hayes, with fifteen men, fought about 80 Comanche...Without your pistols we should not have had the confidence to undertake such daring adventures"--Samuel Walker, 1846

HOWARD LAMAR (Professor of History, Yale University): An Indian can fire 20 arrows in a minute but a gun could only shoot about once or twice in a minute because of the having to reload, say, a rifle. Something had to be developed as a counter to the Indian's great firepower, as it were, and the Colt revolver was the answer to that.

RICHARD SLOTKIN (Professor of American Studies, Wesleyan University): A Texas Ranger with a repeating pistol has a weapon that can be fired as rapidly, more accurately with more hitting power than an Indian's bow and arrow, so it's very much a tool of advantage, a weapon of advantage on the Great Plains.

NARRATOR: With a \$25,000 contract for 1,000 guns that Walker arranged and with the design modifications that Walker suggested, Sam Colt re-entered the gun manufacturing business in 1847. Without a factory or machinery, Colt contracted with Eli Whitney's Armory in New Haven for the manufacturing of the guns.

NELSON: The key ingredient in that contract was when Whitney finished the contract, all the machinery and the tooling and the unfinished parts and the gauges became the property of Colt, so he basically moved these up to Hartford and first set them up in the Pearl Street factory.

NARRATOR: It was in Colt's native Hartford that he would finally see the success he craved. In the 1840's, Hartford was an old merchant and banking city suffering from declining agriculture and population loss.

"A Crisis has arrived...[Hartford is] on the downward course...Manufacturers and mechanics...are the soul of prosperity...We must bring prosperity to our doors by producing."--Rev. Horace Bushnell, 1847

NARRATOR: Colt returned to Hartford primarily because a rich uncle had extended a line of credit. This fortunate turn of events wedded the story of the gun in the 19th Century to the story of 19th Century Hartford, as firearms manufacturing became its central industry.

SILICON VALLEY OF THE 19TH CENTURY

NARRATOR: The Connecticut River Valley had long been a center of gun production. Connecticut itself was known as the "arsenal of the revolution."

In the decade prior to Colt's return to Hartford, machine tools and precision measurement had reached the point where firearms could be produced with machine-made interchangeable parts.

MERRIT ROE SMITH (Professor of Technology History, MIT): New England in general was the center of great mechanical skill. The Connecticut Valley, I would say, was one of the pockets within that region that had all sorts of people who exhibited a lot of talent when it came to design the machinery.

NARRATOR: The center of New England industrialization was the Springfield, Massachusetts, Armory, which had been founded in 1794.

During the early 19th century, the Springfield Armory became an incubator of technology through firearms production. A leading goal of the Armory was to achieve interchangeability of gun parts, a concept it actively promoted to the many private contractors in the area who hoped to do business with it.

SMITH: It was a clearinghouse of technical information. And what happened, basically, is that because these private contractors held government contracts, the Ordinance Department in effect insisted that if they wanted to continue to contract with the national government, they had to share their inventions with anyone who walked through that Armory gate, and that's exactly what happened.

NARRATOR: When Sam Colt was first studying the system of manufacturing that he understood to be necessary to mass-produce guns, the Springfield Armory was the first place he visited on a tour of Connecticut River Valley arms factories.

SMITH: Some of the most important machine tools in the United States were never patented in the 19th Century because they came out of these shops of gun makers who wanted to keep their government contracts and decided that they would forego patenting their machinery because that was part of the deal.

And then from there that technology spreads out.

NARRATOR: 1849 marked a turning point in Sam Colt's life. That year, Colt was granted a controversial renewal of his patent, and moved to a larger rented factory in Hartford.

That year also, the California Gold Rush had begun and Colt developed the legendary 1840 Pocket Revolver, the single most successful pistol produced in his lifetime, with 325,000 sold by the time of his death.

It was also the year that he first made a profit from gunmaking. But most importantly, in 1849, Colt hired Elisha King Root.

SMITH: [Root] came to Colt at mid career after having worked at the Collinsville Ax Factory in nearby Collinsville, Connecticut. And by the time he came to Colt, there's no question that he was ~~one~~ recognized as one of the really top, top master machinists in the Connecticut Valley which made him one of the top master machinists in the United States if not the best in the world. The thing that Elisha Root did for Sam Colt was that he helped Colt synthesize manufacturing. He helped Colt introduce machinery that had been developed elsewhere and bring it into a sophisticated production facility

"What a scene can be more captivating to the eye of a live mechanic, than those long lines of shafting and machinery, and the vista of busy workmen, in rows...It is a museum of curious machinery."--Hartford Daily Courant, 1849

HOSLEY: Once Sam Colt and Elisha Root perfected the system for mass producing complex metal instruments like firearms, that system was readily adapted to make typewriters, sewing machines, and eventually bicycles, automobiles, cameras, you name it. And it really is in Hartford, CT and in the CT Valley that this choreography of machining - of complex machine operations is developed.

NELSON: And a lot of inventors and manufacturers that went on to greater independent fame, really cut their teeth-in this incubator that was Colt's armory. A famous example, Francis Pratt and Amos Whitney leave Colt's in the mid 60's and form their own machine tool company,

HOSLEY: So, the alumni of Colt's Armory became the vanguard of this high tech industrial revolution that made Hartford, the silicone valley of the 19th century. The center of a revolution in the world of work that really changed the way things are manufactured and essentially gave birth to the modern age of mass production.

EAST MEETS WEST

NARRATOR: In mid-19th century America, the youthful nation dreamed of glory and expansion. Colt's revolver was perceived to be a necessary tool, and a progressive symbol of the age.

LAMAR: In the early Colonial period, everybody felt they had to have a Kentucky rifle so this is the later generation version of the Kentucky rifle. The difference is that the revolver was seen as self-defense, the Kentucky rifle was seen as a way to get your food that you would hunt.

SLOTKIN: What was remarkable about the Colt pistol when it came out was the, the amount of firepower it could put out, the fact that it was a workable repeater. I think people were also taken with the way in which this product of industrialization was itself like a small factory. It was a bullet firing machine as opposed to a single shot weapon. In that sense it was a kind of model product of technology the way that the computer is today.

"I for one feel thankful, that if pistols must be made, they are to be made in Hartford since they bring so many pleasant accessories"

--Isabella Beecher Hooker, 1856

NARRATOR: Walker's 1847 contract was a harbinger of the tremendous sales that Colt would reap with the settlement of the American West. But more than a huge market for his guns, the Western frontier became the source of his biggest fame.

LAMAR: I think Colt tapped into the Texas Revolution which was a - a huge area rebelling against a foreign power and capturing the imagination of the Americans. Out of Texas came scores of heroes. So the eyes of the world were on Texas. And along with the settlement of Oregon in the 1840's and 50's and with the California Gold Rush in 1849, suddenly the entire West had captured the imagination of the - of the public. The West was unknown and, therefore, considered dangerous. The West was associated with warring Indians or hostile Indians. The West was associated with literally grizzly bears and snakes and everything, so a gun was seen as absolutely necessary. When California Gold Rush people went West, every single one of them wanted a revolver. Most people had a rifle but they also, if they could get one, wanted a revolver and I imagine that made Mr. Colt a millionaire.

SLOTKIN: And because of Colt's success in marketing his pistols to the Texas Rangers in the 1830's and because of Colt's priority in the field in inventing a repeating pistol, it's the Colt weapon that has the name recognition and, therefore, the market share.

"The name Samuel Colt is now more widely known throughout the world than that of any other living American inventor."--William Hamersley, 1856

"Compliments of Col. Colt"

HOSLEY: Sam Colt was a- pretty determined to be a famous person and to use his personal celebrity as a way of marketing his product and he cultivated, created this cult of personality, this cult of genius around himself again, as a way of lifting the reputation of his product. You know, one sees people like Lee Iacocca or Madonna using persona and personality as a marketing tactic. This is 130, 140 years later. Very few people had done that prior to Sam Colt.

NARRATOR: Colt's inventive marketing and his personal mythology helped him gain market share. But his greatest success came as worldwide conflicts opened up new markets for his weapons.

HOSLEY: Little could he have dreamed even in 1846 and '7 that the Mexican War would be just a drop in the bucket compared to the impact of the Gold Rush, western migration and the outbreak of wars of independence and liberation around Europe in Italy, Austria, France, Russia. The Crimean War follows in the 1850's and then our Civil War, cataclysmic Civil War in 1861. So that from 1848 until 1865 was one of the biggest growth periods in terms of the need for armaments in the history of the world.

"The good people of this world are very far from being satisfied with each other and my arms are the best peacemakers."--Sam Colt, 1852

NARRATOR: It was a momentous time in American history as the young nation climbed onto the stage of world affairs. Sam Colt made sure he was where the action was, wherever it might be..

In 1851, Colt reached his greatest fame yet with a triumphant performance at London's international Crystal Palace exhibition of technology.

BLANCHFIELD: He's inducted into the Institute of Civil Engineers in London. He's the first American to be drawn into their circle and it was a very elite group of men devoted to promoting technology. And he's really hailed as the epitome of American ingenuity. And he receives all this attention from the world press and he then launches his great mission to go around the world and meet all these world leaders

SMITH: Colt's marketing of his product took him to a lot of different places around the world. I don't know if there was anyone prior to Samuel Colt who had the sort of international contacts that he developed.

HOSLEY: He worked both sides of the street in a number of international conflicts and in the American west he actually sold firearms to both the Native Americans and the American forces that were fighting against them. So, you know, it was part of the whole ethos at the time.

NARRATOR: Sam Colt saw the big picture of his time – new opportunities from industrialization and mass marketing, the new style of warfare, and new markets for firearms.

BLANCHFIELD: One of the first things that he did was to develop the rampant colt trademark that we think is really the first corporate trademark, at least in this country, and it's still used. The most famous outgrowth of that was the rampant Colt sculpture that was on top of the armory dome until very recently.

HOSLEY: The Colt is bold, erect, standing up, launching, lunging forward. I mean, this is a surrogate for the man himself. The posture and the persona are synonymous. And both of them snap, crackle, and pop - the idea that this is tomorrow's technology, tomorrow's frontier, you can have it today. You know, it's romance. And it really worked.

SLOTKIN: I think Colt's - Colt was a genius in two ways. He was clearly a genius as an inventor; He is also a genius at marketing and - and popularizing this product which is - is a peculiar product, a tool for - for producing death. To be able to sell that the way one sells toothpaste and sewing machines is - is a kind of demonic brilliance.

HOSLEY: He began giving gifts to important decision makers - people in the military, people in political life who he thought could help him land government contracts. But in the Hartford years, he expanded this activity to include pay backs to friends, bribes to individuals that could help him either land contacts or make connections. The presentation gun was an instrument of marketing

NARRATOR: For a product that ranged upwards of the equivalent of \$1,500 today, It was no small token to receive a pistol "compliments of Col. Colt." Colt gave away 2,500 presentation sets during his lifetime.

HOSLEY: He was legendary for the relationships he formed with journalists and artists and people who, again, were decision makers and people who could influence opinion. And whether it was through just schmoozing or bribery or whatever, Sam Colt worked the mechanism of public relations brilliantly.

"When...there can be made a good story of the use of a Colts Revolving rifle, carbine, shotgun or postol...upon Grisley Bears, Indians, Mexicans, & c (sic)...for publication...the opportunity should not be lost...Send me 100 copies...[and] give the editor a pistol."--Sam Colt, 1860

BLANCHFIELD: He also commissioned artists to document his achievements. He had George Catlin paint a series depicting Colt revolvers in action and those were then turned into lithographs so they could be mass marketed.

COLTSVILLE

NARRATOR: Sam Colt shared with his generation a faith in progress and a belief that the American experiment would lead to a more perfect way of life. Colt used his multiplying profits to create a new model industrial community -- a utopian vision he called Coltsville.

Colt planned to buy 200 mostly unused acres in Hartford's South Meadows flood plain for the site of Coltsville. The size of his plan, the way he acquired land, his demand for unheard-of public subsidies, and the very idea of massive urban development on a flood plain were all highly controversial. Colt threatened to leave the city if his demands were not met.

HOSLEY: It took him several years to get through all the bureaucratic red tape and to amass, as quietly as possible, the land he needed to carry out the whole vision. The old guard, Hartford's standing order as it was once called, typically were Republicans and they were the bankers, the insurance people, the old money and they were clashing with Colt all over the place. He also really pushed their buttons by building the entire armory and Coltsville complex out of cash flow. He never took loans from the bank and never insured his property in a city where banking and insurance were the other major modern industries. From the moment Colt's plans became known, people were just slapping their heads in wonderment, thinking he's nuts, he's crazy, this guy is crazy. He hasn't been around Hartford long enough to realize - maybe not this year, maybe not next year, but inevitably the Connecticut River will seek its revenge and it will rise up.

NARRATOR: In 1854, with construction underway, Hartford was hit by the century's worst flood. Although what became known as Colt's Folly appeared doomed, he hired an artist to document a world he was about to change.

BLANCHFIELD: He's undaunted; he insists on starting again and this time they'll build an earthen embankment around the South Meadows so that he won't be as vulnerable to flood water.

NARRATOR: Colt continued work on a two-mile long, forty-foot-wide embankment that successfully reclaimed the flood plane for development. Colt's embankment was a triumph of civil engineering and a symbol of his outsized ambition.

HOSLEY: And it was an intensely politicized age. Sam Colt and the industrialists of the North typically voted Democratic. The Democratic Party was, you know, pro business, pro industry, pro immigration. Sam Colt became one of the champions of the Democratic Party and probably one of its largest financial backers. In fact helped Thomas Seymour land the governorship of Connecticut in 1850 for which he was awarded a commission as a Lieutenant Colonel; hence, Colonel Samuel Colt.

NARRATOR: In 1855, as his catalog of products continued to expand, Colt incorporated the Colt's Patent Fire-Arms Company and opened the Colt Armory, the world's largest private gun factory.

"Hartford is destined to be the largest manufacturer of firearms, of any place in the Union."--Hartford Daily Times, 1856

NARRATOR: With success came tremendous employment growth. Colt employed about 50 people in 1847, his first year in Hartford. At the height of the Civil War, Colt's Armory employed about 1,400 workmen in eight, 500-foot-long, 60-foot-wide rooms filled with men and machines.

It's massive scale and Russian-style onion dome symbolized the power and international aspirations of the manufacturing revolution that unfolded within. Colt's Armory was a clanking, clamorous spectacle that earned Hartford an international reputation for machine-based manufacturing.

"On every floor is a dense wilderness of strange iron machines...a tangled forest of rods, bars, pulleys, wheels, and all the imaginable and unimaginable forms of mechanism. It must have required more brains to invent all these things than would serve to stock fifty Senates like ours."--Mark Twain, 1868

HOSLEY: Sam Colt, like the Democratic Party, was pro immigrant and he recruited Irish, German and British immigrant workmen that came to Colts - to Hartford and for many of them this was their first job in the New World. About a third of Colt's work force were Germans. He built amenities for them - the band, the beer hall, the Potsdam Village - sort of German workers' housing - gave Coltsville a distinctly European flavor which was very interesting and, I suppose, also controversial to the congregational old guard of old Hartford.

NARRATOR: Coltsville was conceived as a self-contained industrial compound, complete with a store, boat dock, railroad depot, a school, recreational facilities, and Charter Oak Hall, a community center. Because Hartford lacked sufficient working-class tenements, Colt built 40 units of worker's housing.

While the armory workforce was entirely male, Colt setup Colt's Cartridge Works far away from the armory where young single women did the dangerous work of loading gunpowder into foil cylinders.

BLANCHFIELD: He built the whole thing. He put in his own sewer system. He had his own roads, his own amenities. He had his own gas works. He was really seeking to build an industrial utopia. He had his own brass band made up of armory workers. And Coltsville had its own schedule, really, it all revolved around the factory.

Narrator: Coltsville also included the palatial estate of Armsmead with its deer park and swan ponds and greenhouses.

BLANCHFIELD: And he ultimately was successful although his earlier plans for Coltsville are a lot more elaborate than what was actually executed. Some of the streets were never built. He had a dream of having a compound, essentially an officer's compound for the upper level staff in the factory. He also had an idea for a huge school to promote the teaching of technology and mechanical skills and he was going to leave money to the city to have this built when he died. And he became so disenchanted with Hartford politics and government that he took that out of his will. He also wanted the new State Capitol Building to be built on the site of the Old Charter Oak tree and that would have made Coltsville really the center of the city, and that didn't happen either.

NARRATOR: Although the place known as Coltsville never lived up to its founder's dream, hundreds of thousands found work there. For many, it was the beginning of a new life in America.

MERCHANT OF DEATH

NARRATOR: With the onset of the Civil War, Sam Colt's company was about to meet its greatest success. Colt himself, like many industrialists of his day who did business with the South, was anti-abolitionist. He vigorously marketed guns to both North and South before the outbreak of war. He was once again hugely controversial.

SLOTKIN: He was shipping weapons South because he was being paid for weapons South and there was an opportunity to make a sale. That kind of almost amoral willingness to deal the instruments of death to both sides as long as there's a demand for weapons is something that really becomes marked later in the century where Colt is selling weapons to both sides in European wars, continental wars, Asian wars.

"It is generally understood that Colt's establishment...[is] incessantly occupied...in making arms for the Southern States...to be used in waging war against the United States...Treason...consists either of levying war upon the United States...or 'giving aid and comfort to the enemies,' as is done daily, constantly and by contract, by individuals in Connecticut..."--The New York Times, 1861

HOSLEY: After the war began, he stopped selling guns to the south, but that was his mode. Which is to work both sides of the fence in international conflict. Sam Colt was intense and outrageous, audacious certainly, and it was part of the whole character of the man

SAM & ELIZABETH

HOSLEY: Colt was by 1852 a international celebrity. He'd made it. And he began summering, spending the height of the summer season in Newport, Rhode Island, partly for leisure - mostly for business. Newport became the meeting ground of the international "glitterati" of the 1850's and especially large concentrations of military, southern and political figures.

NARRATOR: In the summer of 1852, Sam Colt met 25-year-old Elizabeth Hart. the daughter of a very prominent and affluent socially connected Newport family.

HOSLEY: They were utterly devoted to each other. There was a real sense of partnership there. And she didn't need the money. The Jarvis family had plenty of money in their own right, but I think to a daughter of an Episcopal Minister Sam Colt was exciting. And she brought instant social credibility and respectability to a guy who'd been controversial. Sam Colt was married at the age of 41, which is certainly late in life by the standards of the period.

BLANCHFIELD: They were married in 1856. On their honeymoon they travel all over Russia, they travel all over Germany, they go to England and they've been more places than most people of their time. And at that time, in the 1850's, travel was a pretty exotic thing to do and, of course, when the Colts traveled, they traveled well. They traveled on the nicest steamer that existed at the time. And so they're traveling around, they're bringing back reminders and souvenirs but, also, examples of the arts and the culture of these places that they're visiting and they're bringing all this back to Hartford.

HOSLEY: The period between 1856 and 1862 is the most settled period and the most domestic period in his life. I mean, he really is already successful. And he loves his children. He absolutely loved family life. He loved Armsmear, this mansion. He loved his gardens. And he wanted to smell the roses.

NARRATOR: For all their prosperity and contentment, the Colts suffered more than their share of human tragedy. During their five years of marriage they lost two children to illness. A third was to be stillborn and the two remaining children would predecease Elizabeth .

For Sam Colt, the success he had craved and had achieved would ironically contribute to his death at an early age just after the outbreak of the Civil War.

BLANCHFIELD: He was under a tremendous amount of stress because he was very successful and he was trying to build on that success. He was doubling the size of the armory, and the factory was running 24 hours a day. He had been ill with gout for a couple of years before that.

HOSLEY: The rumor was always that Sam Colt had died of syphilis, which is almost certainly not true. I think the big picture is that Sam Colt died almost of exhaustion clearly there were natural causes - the gout, rheumatism, that did him in. This was a guy that was falling apart. His wife - Elizabeth herself

described Sam as never having fully recovered from the death of his first daughter. I mean, what a fascinating contrast to the image of the rampant Colt - this macho persona.

NARRATOR: Sam Colt died in January 1862 at the age of 47. Elizabeth buried him on the grounds of his beloved Armsmear, next to his two infants.

HOSLEY: Elizabeth, as was the custom of the day, remained home and watched the funeral from the boudoir at Armsmear.

"I...see the workmen at the tomb, preparing a last resting place for him...It seems as if 'the main spring is broken' and the works must run down."

--Elizabeth Colt, 1862

HOSLEY: There was a sense of just shock at the factory that this guy was so inseparably connected to the company. He was the company. His persona was mounted on its roof, his name was over the door. He had built this thing from nothing. He was lionized as one of the American originals, one of the great, you know, inventor industrialists of his age. Who would pick up the reigns and carry on?

NARRATOR: By the time of his death, Samuel Colt had made and sold almost one million guns, more than anyone before. How would Colt's empire, fame and reputation endure after his death?

Elizabeth, his 35-year-old widow, had been married to Sam for just five and a half years.

HOSLEY: In the end she is alone and of course one of many reasons why Elizabeth becomes Hartford's greatest philanthropist is because she has no direct heirs to leave the fortune to. But it was also out of sense of civic love that she does these great things.

FAITHFUL AFFECTION & MEMORY

HOSLEY: In 1863 she begins to emerge in public life as the first President of the Soldiers Aid Society, which is a charitable relief organization. And at the end of 1863, she conceives the first of her memorial campaigns which is the memorial biography of Sam Colt called *Armsmear*

BLANCHFIELD: She co-wrote sections of that book with Henry Barnard who was a very noted educator that book documented Sam Colt's achievements, their life together. And *Armsmear* was published privately and to give you an idea of dedicated she was, she had all kinds of bindings produced for this book and some of them went on to win prizes. She didn't just publish a book, she published one of the most beautiful books of the time.

HOSLEY: And this is the point at which Elizabeth begins shaping, crafting and controlling the way her husband will be remembered. And for the next 43 years, she devotes a considerable amount of time to maintaining and shaping, managing his reputation, being sure that he will not be forgotten, building monuments, propagandizing, commissioning articles and books that contribute to his ongoing fame.

NARRATOR: In 1863 Elizabeth commissioned a monumental postmortem portrait of Sam Colt from Charles Loring Elliott, the leading portrait painter of the period.. She was so taken by the results that she commissioned Elliot to paint an equally imposing portrait of her and her beloved son Caldwell.

Then in 1866, Elizabeth commissioned a magnificent monument for the newly purchased Colt family burial plot in Hartford's new rural cemetery, Cedar Hill, where she, Sam, and their children are now buried.

HOSLEY: And that is a big project that cost the equivalent today of \$800,000. It is a tour de force of art and sculpture. I mean, it's big, big, big and it's loaded with visual iconography and power and it's just a really ambitious work of art.

NARRATOR: After losing four children and a husband within five years, Elizabeth had begun to emerge from a year of mourning. Then on February 5th, 1864, with the nation at war, Colt's armory bursts into flame and burns to the ground. It is suspected, but never proved, that Confederate sympathizers torched the building.

HOSLEY: And she stands in her boudoir window and watches his vision go up in flames. And as the flames engulf the onion dome with the rampant colt, the personal symbol of her husband, engulf that in flames and as the roof collapses and the onion dome collapses into the core of this towering inferno, wow. I mean that is just way over the top.

"To think that the magnificent, noble structure is in ruins...it seems so identified with the Col. It seems like burying him again...Elizabeth bears it...with calmness...When the beautiful dome fell she burst into tears"-Rev. William Jarvis, Elizabeth Colt's father, 1864

BLANCHFIELD: She had the choice of either rebuilding it or taking the insurance money which was about \$17 million at that time and which would be a lot more today, and she could have just incorporated that money into her already large inheritance from Sam. She inherited today's equivalent of \$200 million.

NARRATOR: Elizabeth would make sure that the Colt legend would survive. She and her board of directors resolved to rebuild the armory, while continuing wartime operations in an unburned wing of the building.

HOSLEY: She does it in the style of the original Colt's armory but she introduces fireproof construction. Instead of brownstone, it becomes brick. Instead of three stories, it becomes four. And it's more decorative, it's got more ornamentation on it. So it is more a work of art, it is a more practical building, it is a bigger building, but for all intents and purposes it is the same. The onion dome goes back on, the horse goes back on, another one remade, and Colt's empire lives again.

SMITH: She picked up the pieces after Sam died and arguably in a way the Colt company became even more successful after Sam's death than it did during his lifetime. Between 1862 and 1890 the Colt company was considered to be one of the most sophisticated manufacturers of firearms in the world and she was the one that was sitting at the helm.

NARRATOR: In 1865 Elizabeth decided to build a picture gallery, a private art gallery that is eventually installed at Armsmead. It becomes the premier art experience in the state of Connecticut and another memorialization of the values that the Colts and fellow Victorians held. Loring's larger-than-life portraits of Sam and Elizabeth bookend each end of the gallery, staring at each other across this encyclopedia of Victorian art. Elizabeth's picture gallery becomes not only one of the earliest intact fine art collections in the United States but the first believed to have been assembled by a woman patron.

HOSLEY: At the same time she is gearing up to build her masterpiece which is the Church of the Good Shepherd. The Colt Memorial Church built at the north end of Coltsville as a memorial to Sam and the

deceased children but also as a parish church, if you will, for the factory workers and as another embellishment of what has now become her empire, Coltsville.

NARRATOR: The church features an elaborate hierarchy of entrances: including the "Armorer's Door," decorated with Colt's Revolvers cut in stone. Gun parts are used as additional ornamentation. The interior of the church is decorated with a series of stained glass windows that memorialize the Colts, including a rendering of Samuel Colt as the Old Testament character of Joseph of Egypt.

HOSLEY: It really is far and away the grandest example of ecclesiastical church architecture in a city filled with churches and sort of eclipses everybody and everything and is big and outsized like the Colts and it's kind of her debut as a public figure. People know she's got the money but this is a pretty audacious thing in its own right.

NARRATOR: After 1869 Elizabeth turned her attention to charitable work and institution building. Good works mixed with good times, as Elizabeth and her only surviving family member, Caldwell spent time traveling together and mixing with American Victorian society.

HOSLEY: Caldwell Hart Colt was the second son of Sam and Elizabeth and he was born in 1858 and he is the sole heir that lived really past the age of 2. So Caldwell is the crown prince of Coltsville. And there was a brief sort of flurry of optimism that young Caldwell was going to like take the reigns of the rampant colt and lead it to greater glories and it just never happened. He was more interested in hunting, fishing, sailing his yacht. He sounds like he was almost the antithesis in some ways of his father. He is eventually lionized in the American yachting community as one of the great yachtsmen of his era. And he, eventually at the age of 35, was sailing in Florida, gets tonsillitis and dies. Lots of things that don't kill us today killed the Victorians. And it's 1894, Elizabeth is now 72 years old. She resolves to build yet another memorial it's the Caldwell Colt Memorial House the parish house of the Church of the Good Shepherd. This building is way off the scales. It is a really big, in-your-face, dramatic statement about this yachtsman who Elizabeth doted on and loved.

NARRATOR: In 1901, after nearly 40 years at the helm of Colt's Armory, and facing a major wave of labor unrest, Elizabeth Colt, now 75 years old, sold the company, ending the Colt-family era.

BLANCHFIELD: She died in 1905 and she left the estate of Armsmear, the grounds, to the city as Colt Park, which it is today. And she left the house, Armsmear, to the Colt Trust, and it still functions today as a home for widows and other female dependents of Episcopal clergy and other qualified gentlewomen.

BLANCHFIELD: She also left \$50,000 to the Wadsworth Atheneum to build the Colt Memorial at the Wadsworth Atheneum to house the one-thousand-plus objects that she left to the museum.

EMPIRE LOST

NARRATOR: The story of the Colt company after Colt family ownership continued to be one of innovation in weaponry – the Gatling gun, the Colt .45, Browning rifles and machine guns, the M-16 – they and other models led to booming sales and huge profits during wartime.

But with increasing competition, employee strikes, and periods of peace, the Colt company in the 20th century was beset with declining sales and failed attempts at diversification.

In 1981, the company vacated its old armory and moved to the suburb of West Hartford, where it struggled to survive through various owners and economic bailouts.

Today, 160 years after Sam Colt's first patent, a diminished and renamed Colt's Manufacturing Company ties its future to the kind of technological innovation that propelled Sam Colt's company to the top of the American industrial pyramid..

NARRATOR: The Colt era transformed both Connecticut and Hartford. Once the region's leading manufacturing center, today, Hartford is one of America's poorest cities, trying to redefine itself in a post-industrial era. The Hartford of the late 20th Century has fewer factory jobs than in Sam Colt's time. Connecticut's long reliance on armaments has made for periods of boom and bust.

NARRATOR: Despite the survival of many prominent buildings, much of Colt's industrial empire is today lost or difficult to see. Sam and Elizabeth Colt's physical legacy has faded in some ways, and been redefined in others..

The once-abandoned armory building is today the centerpiece of an industrial park for small business, residential apartments, and studios for artists and craftsmen.

No longer owned by the company, the worker housing 278-21572 survives as "Colt Estates," in one of Hartford's' most historic residential districts.

Potsdam Village's beer garden and wicker furniture factory are gone, but the Swiss-style cottages remain, although greatly altered over the years..

In Colt Park, Armsmear's ponds, gardens, greenhouses, and statuary are long-gone, replaced by a city-owned recreation complex.

Among the surviving Colt family buildings in the park are a handsome brick Carriage Barn, the Gothic cottage residence of Colt's English gardener, and a long wooden building Elizabeth Colt used to store ice harvested from the estate's ponds.

At the entrance to the park is Elizabeth's last memorial, the Colt Memorial Statue, which she built in 1906 on the site where Sam Colt and their infant children were originally buried. The monument depicts Sam Colt, the "boy genius," and Colonel Colt, the master of Coltsville, together with scenes of Colt's international triumphs.

The Church and its Memorial House remain active in the community, still used for services, public programs, and parish activities..

The Wadsworth Atheneum opened the doors of its Colt Memorial Wing in 1910, eighty years after the revolver king conceived the invention that made him rich. In 1996, the museum mounted its most extensive exhibit yet based on the Colt collection.

Colt's empire has inevitably changed with the passage of time. Colt's lasting legacy, however, remains entwined with one of the critical issues of today – the proliferation of guns.

HOSLEY: Sam Colt, for better or for worse, did for pistols what Eli Terry did for clocks - he made it possible for middling folk to own one and suddenly these things become not exactly a household commodity but much more common today. There are, you know, there are almost as many guns as there are people in the United States.

SLOTKIN: I think that Colt is part of the 19th Century culture of the gun which for all kinds of reasons which were perhaps inescapable made gun ownership a critical and really a normal aspect of American life. Couple this with the spread of armaments after the Civil War and what you have as a kind of inheritance passed from the 19th Century to the 20th, is the notion that gun ownership -- widespread gun ownership -- is normal and not to be questioned as a normal aspect of American life.