

LINDEN PLACE

MANSION SCULPTURE GARDENS BALLROOM

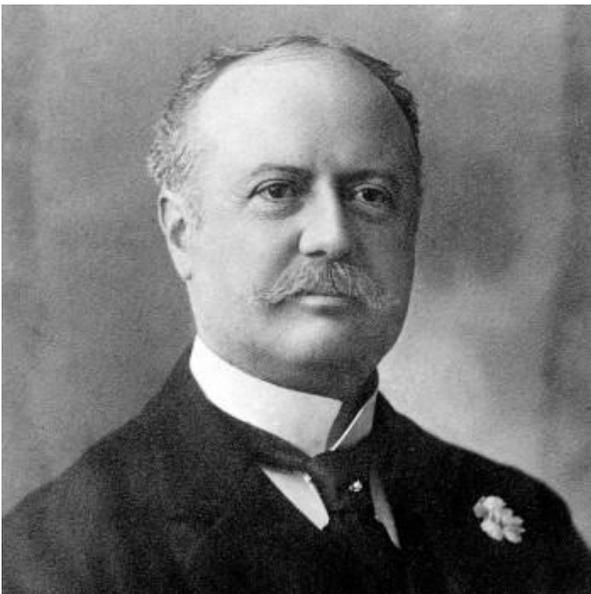


Chapter Two of our "Stories" Series..... *From time to time this series will share stories of the mansion and the people and events connected to its history. We hope that you will enjoy the diversion and learn a little history about the families, the house, and its neighborhood.*

Observations on the One Hundredth Year Anniversary of his Passing

Samuel Pomeroy Colt: 1852-1921

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 100 years ago this month, opened the obituary this way: "What the elder Havemeyer did for the sugar business, and the elder Rockefeller for the oil business, and Andrew Carnegie for the steel business, Samuel Pomeroy Colt did for the rubber business."¹



The Associated Press wire was picked up by hundreds of newspapers across the globe that day as well, reporting the death of Bristol, RI's Samuel Pomeroy Colt, who passed on August 13, 1921. Their piece included this quote from Colt:

"The first rubber seen in America was brought by Yankee sea captains plying between Salem, Mass and South American ports. They had no idea that those lumps of black gum were of any particular value; indeed, they often used them as ballast. But about 1820 some forgotten sailor took to Salem and Boston as speculation a number of rubber shoes made by natives along the Amazon. People quickly discovered that they kept out the wet and, crude as the shoes were, there was soon a lively demand for them at \$4 and \$5 a pair.

The trouble with them, however, was that they melted in summer and froze in winter and it remained for someone to discover a means to overcome this defect. Charles Goodyear of Connecticut in 1842 invented the process of vulcanizing and this was soon followed by the formation of several companies for the manufacture of rubber shoes. A spirited and famous lawsuit grew out of the Goodyear patents in which Daniel Webster took one side and Rufus Choate the other, but Webster won for Goodyear."

¹ Brooklyn Daily Eagle, August 15, 1921

Colt (1852-1921) was described as a captain of industry and the organizer of the United States Rubber Company, with combined capital of \$75 million and about 20,000 employees in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.² Adjusted for inflation, that's about \$1.7 billion in today's dollars. By 1917 the annual report of the company listed net sales of \$176 million – about \$4 billion today.

JUNE 14, 1922.



A leader with men and boys

IDEAL for all-round sport wear. Uppers of fine white or colored canvas—smooth, corrugated, or suction soles. The famous **Keds line** has a type for every summer need—street, home, sport—for men, women, and children. Keds are made *only* by the United States Rubber Company. If the name Keds isn't on the shoes, they aren't real Keds.

Keds
Trademark Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

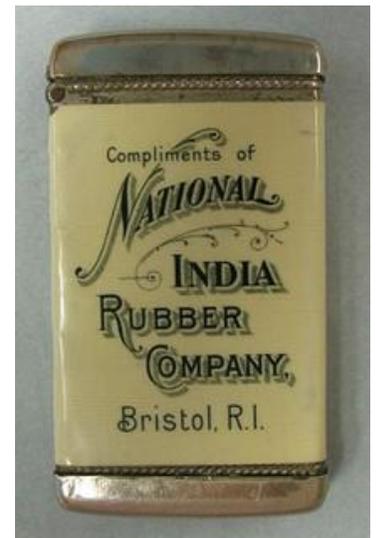
The February 12, 1918 Bristol Phoenix described a special company luncheon hosted by Colt for the foremen – and forewomen. Vice President George Schlosser described the production growth of the company: one year ago producing 44,000 pairs of Keds and one million feet of insulated wire a day by 3,500 employees, and now the force has grown to 4,300 people with a payroll of \$62,000 and a production of 53,000 pairs of Keds and well over one million feet of wire a day – so a new Employment Department was established.³ A cafeteria was available for employee meals; a day nurse to care for workers' children was established. By March of that year a clinic was connected to the factory and ambulance service in memory of his nephew who died in a tragic car accident was provided to the town. Chemical fire trucks were on site; ice cooling sanitary drinking water bubblers were installed throughout the plant, "Monitor" roofs provided fresh air ventilation, and a new pension plan was put into place: "No longer does the co-worker who gives us his services from early youth to middle or old age find himself on the street or at the mercy of the world."

All of those positive corporate actions, however, did not prevent strikes in November of 1916, March of 1918, and one in May of 1920 in which three strikers were shot and multiple National Guard members called to quell the disturbance were injured.

Colt's actions in 1887-1888 were described as a 'consolidation' of the National Rubber Company. *Consolidation* might be a word that is a little too polite. The profile in the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame describes it this way: "In 1887, he was appointed receiver for Governor Augustus O. Bourn's bankrupt National Rubber Company of Bristol. To the detriment of Bourn, he **seized** and reorganized the company and reopened it in 1888 as the National India Rubber Company."⁴

There is no doubt that Colt worked hard, and played hard. Perhaps he inherited some of the 'flamboyance' genes passed down by his grandfather George DeWolf, who built Linden Place in 1810. Perhaps he inherited the 'tenacity' genes of his mother Theodora. She was 5 years old when her father George fled Bristol with his family in 1825, bankrupt. She came back 40 years later to reclaim, refurbish, and rebrand the "Homestead Estate" as Linden Place.

The flamboyance genes were evidence in his multiple homes, and his travel – up to Maine for three weeks to his camp outside of Norcross, Maine by the Penobscot River in the shadow of Mount Kathadin.....vacations in Palm Beach.....a month in Havana...Hot Springs, Virginia.....a home in Providence, and in New York City, and on Long Island.....automobile trips to the White Mountains, and the Adirondacks and Montreal, extended visits to Europe – each week the Bristol Phoenix breathlessly reported his whereabouts.



Matchsafe, c. 1905; collection of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum

² Associated Press, August 13, 1921

³ Bristol Phoenix February 12, 1918

⁴ http://www.riheritagehalloffame.org/inductees_detail.cfm?iid=601



1911 Mercedes, body by Vanvooren



in Fall River.⁵

The entertainment was first class – but often with a business purpose. 400 salesmen at a clambake at “The Farm”dinner with the Governor of Sumatra.....dinner in New York with Mrs. Vincent Astor. The designs of his personal florist, the music of The Crown Orchestra, detailed descriptions of the elegant dinners - all were reported on a regular basis by the local paper. Mrs. Colt’s activities were faithfully reported as well. She always managed to be in a different place. But the gossip was that Mr. Colt never seemed to want for female companionship.

He appreciated beauty – the elegant horse-drawn carriage, the gorgeous car collection, the statues from August Rodin, sculptures from Gutzon Borglum of Mount Rushmore fame and treasures from the estate sale of Stanford White, American architect, designer of the triumphal arch of Washington Square in New York, Madison Square Garden, and the Boston Public Library.

He doted on his cattle and spent over \$100,000 for their new barn at The Farm – which is now Colt State Park, his gift to the town. The Rhode Island Division of Parks and Recreation website recalls: “There was one employee for each cow. The cows’ horns were polished and their tails washed daily. When in their stanchions, the cows always had a thick bed of fresh straw. Cork and rubber covered the concrete floor where the cows stood. The spotless, comfortable barn was even heated in the winter. Tractors were not used on the farm, he preferred Percheron draft horses.”

On October 23, 1917 the newspaper reported that a 5 year old black bear, raised at The Farm from the time it was a small cub, was sent to a public park

Colt was generous – in June of 1916 it was reported that any employee of U.S. Rubber who was drafted to serve in WWI would be paid full salary and a job would be held for each until his return.⁶ In May of 1919 the Women’s Committee in town was raising money for the brave veterans of the war. Their goal was \$300,000, they had reached only \$200,000 – and then the check for \$50,000 arrived from Colonel Colt. His will reflected the same generosity, including bequests such as \$100,000 to maintain the school he had built in memory of his mother; \$50,000 to support the poor in Bristol, \$25,000 for the poor in Warren, \$25,000 for those in Barrington – plus sizeable donations to the Home for Destitute Children, for Aged Women, for Aged Men, for Juniper Hill Cemetery, and \$1,000 for each of the 200 or so employees of the Industrial Trust Bank, which he founded in 1887. Forerunner of Fleet Bank, it became the largest financial institution in the state of Rhode Island.

Before I moved to Bristol in February of 2020, I had never heard of Linden Place or Samuel Pomeroy Colt. Oh, I had heard of the Colt revolver (Samuel Colt, the uncle) but I knew nothing of the rubber business or of Industrial Trust. I visited Colt State Park and enjoyed my picnic there, but did not recognize the significance of the bull statuary that greeted me as I turned onto Asylum Drive. But now, as a volunteer in the gift shop at 500 Hope Street, I am slowly peeling back the layers of the story, like a delicious millefeuille cake – one thousand layers to be uncovered and savored. There is much more to this story, much more complexity, many more twists and turns, the drama of politics, but on this 100th year anniversary of the passing of Samuel Pomeroy Colt, I wanted to write down some of what I have learned. And maybe, just maybe, by the 150th anniversary I will get to the bottom of more of the nuances of this flamboyant, tenacious, remarkable man.

⁵ Bristol Phoenix October 23, 1917

⁶ Bristol Phoenix June 30, 1916

FUNERAL OF SAMUEL P. COLT

Held Tuesday -Afternoon From His Late Home on Hope Street—As a Mark of Respect Thousands Paid Tribute to Their Late Townsman.

"Linden Place," the beautiful colonial residence of the late Colonel Samuel Pomeroy Colt, was thronged with relatives, statesmen, town officials, industrial officials, merchants and friends on Tuesday afternoon to attend the funeral which was held at 3 o'clock.

Long before the hour set for the services thousands of the residents of this town began to gather on Hope street, between State and Bradford streets and remained to pay their last tribute of respect until after the cortege had passed.

Rev Anson B Howard, rector of St. Michael's Church, assisted by Rev. James DeWolf Perry of Germantown, Pa, father of Bishop James DeWolf Perry of Rhode Island, conducted the services at the house and at the grave, using the ritual of the Episcopal Church.

Many eyes were dimmed as the guard of honor, George Schlosser, James W Franklin, Edward J Cooper, Maurice C Smith, Jr., W E Barker, Ralph W. Holt, John B Pollock, George Pollock, James Brown, Isaac H Gorham, Capt Patrick McGovern, Owen Hughes, John F. Duffy, John McNamara, Fred L. Dunbar, M. J. Doyle, William Connelly, James Allyn, Wendell R. Davis and Edward E. Bunn, officials and old employees at the National India Rubber Company, and members of the Colt Band, were drawn up on either side of the broad marble walk leading to the street, forming a lane through which the re-

man; and Nathan M. Wright, secretary, of the Republican State Central Committee; Isaac Gill of Pawtucket and Col. Robert F. Rodman of North Kingstown.

Other public officials who were present were Congressmen Clark Burdick and Ambrose Kennedy, and Harry Sandager, secretary to Congressman Stiness; Secretary of State J. Fred Parker, General Treasurer R. W. Jennings, United States Attorney Norman S Case, Senator Max Saugy of Warren, B. Thomas Potter, Providence Alderman; Bank Commissioner George H Newhall, Representative John B. Mitchell, Collector of the Port of Providence Frank E. Fitzsimmons, Assistant Attorney General A A Capotosto, State Auditor Philip H. Wilbour, Collector of Internal Revenue Frank A. Page, Utilities Commissioner Samuel E. Hudson, Prohibition Director Edward J. Dunn

The United States Rubber Company was represented by Mr Leland, vice chairman of board of directors; Mr. Seger, president; Homer E. Sawyer, vice president; W. G. Parsons, vice president; Samuel Norris, secretary, Wilson H Blackwell, treasurer; John D. Carberry, assistant secretary and assistant treasurer; Ernest Hopkinson, vice president; James N. Gunn, president of the United States Tire Co.; A. P. Delahunt, Treasurer Revere Rubber Co., John W. Bicknell, treasurer of the United States Rubber Plantations, Inc., H. Stuart Hotchkiss, President of the General Rubber Co.; William F. Bass, vice president of the General Rubber Co., F. V. Glynn, secretary to the chairman, C. W. Whittelsey, president of the Hartford Rubber Company

Harvey S. Firestone, president of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company; B. J. Stowe, president of the Burek-

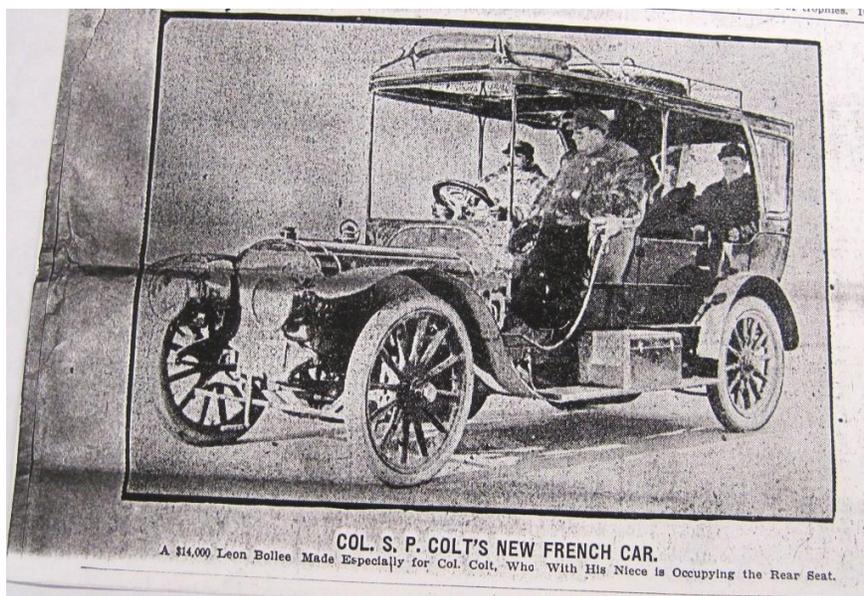
Brady, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick L. Dunbar, Senator and Mrs. Colt, Mrs. LeBaron C. Colt and children, Mr. and Mrs. George L. Gross, Mr. and Mrs. Bradford Colt DeWolf, Miss Gertrude B. DeWolf, the Misses Barns, Frank J. Saxe, E. Clarence Jones, John E. Rousmaniere, Mary Florence Harris LeBaron Bradford, Russell S. Church, M. D., Mr and Mrs. Clover Miller, Mrs. Waldron, George E. Leighton, Stephen W. Bourn, Mr. and Mrs. Earl Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Francisco DeWolf, William G. Nightingale, Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel G. Herreshoff, Jr., Francis Asay, Mr and Mrs Maus S. Wheelwright, Mr and Mrs James Cox Brady, Mr and Mrs. Grenville Montgomery, Mrs. Florence Beresford, Providence Tribune, Fred E. Suzman and family, Theodora, Mame, Primrose, Andrew and Harry; Mrs. Nicholas F. Brady, Mr. and Mrs. William A. Doran, Woonsocket Rubber Co., Governor A. O. Bourn; Mrs Frank L. Bowen, Frank T. Remieres, Household Employees and Gardner "Linden Place."

Samuel Pomeroy Colt had a paralytic shock about a week before his death, and died at Linden Place the afternoon of August 13, 1921. He was 69 years old. Thousands lined the street to pay their respects and see the funeral cortege. Over twenty men from the National India Rubber Company and the Colt Band served as a guard of honor. On Tuesday August 16th his funeral, at St. Michael's Church, was presided over by Reverend Anson B. Howard, the Rector, and Reverend James DeWolf Perry of Germantown, PA, father of Bishop James DeWolf Perry of Rhode Island. Titans of business, including Harvey S.

Firestone, president of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, attended. Dozens of politicians paid their respects, including Governor Emery J. San J-1888.⁷

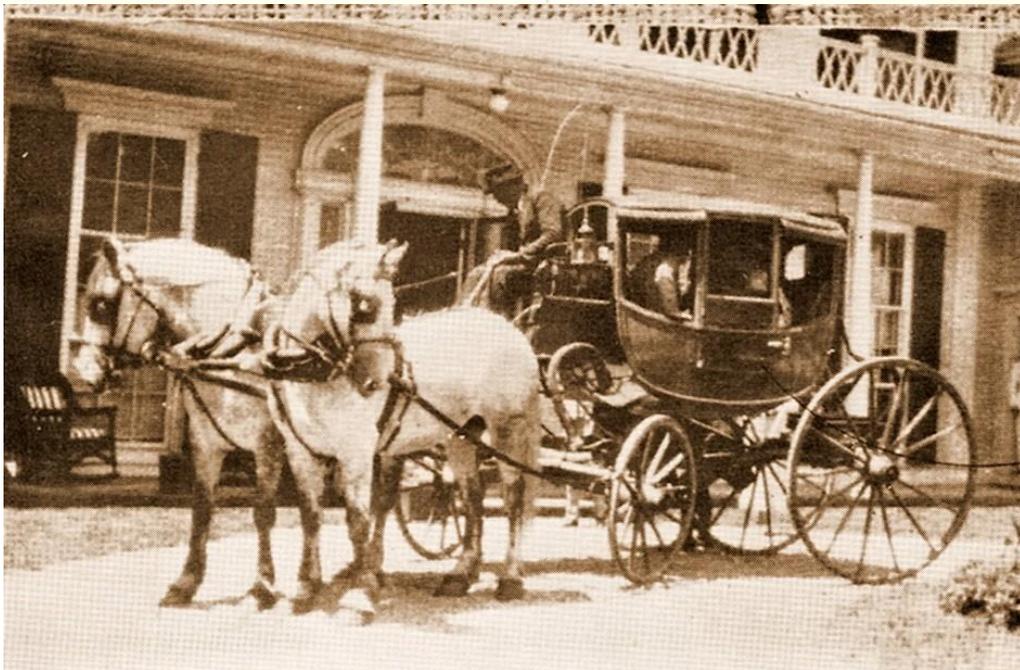
Henry Ford. Steve Jobs. Madam CJ Walker. Andrew Carnegie. Samuel Pomeroy Colt. All successful, innovative, business savvy leaders. None perfect. Messy lives. Complex personalities.

One hundred years ago, The Brooklyn Eagle ended their obituary this straightforward way: "Samuel Pomeroy Coltdeserves to hold a high place in American history."⁸



⁷ Bristol Phenix Friday August 19, 1921

⁸ Brooklyn Daily Eagle August 15, 1921



This article is written by Lynn Smith, volunteer and board member. Although not a trained historian, Lynn makes every effort to ensure that the information in the article is as accurate as possible. She is grateful to the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, The Rhode Island Historical Society, and Claire Benson for their research and writings. As always, suggestions, comments, corrections and input are welcomed.