

PA035203

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAR 29 1976
DATE ENTERED JUN 23 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
** Collinsville Historic District
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

See continuation sheet

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Canton

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

6th-Anthony Moffett

VICINITY OF

STATE

Connecticut

CODE

09

COUNTY

Hartford

CODE

003

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Multiple ownership, public and private

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

VICINITY OF

STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Canton Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

4 Market Street

CITY, TOWN

Collinsville

STATE

Connecticut

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Connecticut Statewide Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

1974

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect St., Hartford

CITY, TOWN

STATE
Connecticut

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> _UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> _RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> _MOVED DATE_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> _UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Collinsville Historic District is a compact nineteenth century mill town in the southern end of Canton, Connecticut. The district, which is largely intact, contains approximately 300 structures exhibiting diversity in age, function and style. Mill buildings, workers' housing and public places dating from the 1830's to the present were built predominately by the Collins Company, an axe and tool manufactory established in 1826.

Collinsville's core, the mill complex, is on the east bank of the Farmington River amid a highly articulated system of reservoirs and waterways. From the factory complex, two distinct building clusters climb from the river banks up the steep sides of Huckleberry Hill on the east and Sweetheart Mountain on the west. The streets follow the contour and fall lines of these hills. The wooded hills and the surrounding undeveloped countryside provide the district with natural visual boundaries.

There are five distinct modes of development in Collinsville which are defined by the types and functions of buildings within them. The modes are: the mill complex; the village center immediately east of the mill; and three residential clusters--first, a group of workers' houses and tenements on the west side of the river; second, a strip of private and company houses for middle class residents farthest from the factory on Maple Avenue; third, a mixture of company and private housing for both workers and middle class on the east side of the Farmington River uphill from the village center.

Collinsville's well-preserved center occupies the blocks facing Main Street and the Green (also known as Church Street). The center's visual cohesion is attained through a lively, raw-edged diversity, rather than a homogenized blend of buildings. Within this small area are commercial, public and residential buildings constructed in a wide variety of nineteenth century architectural styles. The Collinsville Savings Society (c. 1890) is built in the Romanesque Revival style; the Valley House Hotel (1868) and house #5 on the Green are Second Empire style; the Italiannate style is represented in house #111 on Main Street and in a clubhouse (originally a law office) on 7 Market Street. The Greek and Renaissance Revival styles are also represented in Collinsville, as are various eclectic and vernacular building interpretations.

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51-72 Bridge St.
4-10 Cemetery Rd.
10-44 Center St.
4-7 Church St.-The Green
4-24 Collins Rd.
56-116 Dunne Ave.
2-6 Dyer Ave.
5-18 East St.
14-15 Front St.
5-6 Harrington Court
1-73 High St.
1-10 Huckleberry Hill Rd.
17-24 Johnston Place
105-152 Main St.
4-54 Maple Ave.
4-12 Market St.
26-36 New Road
2-28 North St.
11-16 River St.
9-31 South St.
10-17 Spring St.
45-58 Sunset Terrace
52-85 Torrington Ave.
3-No
Number Thayer Ave.
53-70 West Church St.

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Numerous structures within Collinsville Center are of special significance because of their historical associations, quality and style of building or prominent position. These buildings are essential for providing visual and historical continuity. Two such structures are the Collins Company office building and the Valley House Hotel. Both buildings were erected in 1868 by the Collins Company during a period of economic prosperity and expansion.

Built in the Renaissance Revival style, the Collins Company office occupies the corner of Front and Main Streets. Its pivotal position marks the transition from the mill complex to the village center. The bold three-story building structure is highly visible from the outskirts of town. Its blunt silhouette provides a vertical focal point identifying the center of town. Above its rusticated gneiss base, the building is constructed in pressed concrete bricks. This unusual building material is also used in the Hough Block (1867), a commercial and residential building at 124-128 Main Street. In both buildings, ornamentation is severely controlled, reflecting a rugged machine aesthetic consistent with the provincial character of this industrial town.

The growth of the Collins Company necessitated the building of a hotel suitable for visiting businessmen. In its scale, quality and style, the Valley House Hotel reflects the company's interest in projecting a cosmopolitan image. The prominent four-story brick building has a slate mansard roof with dormers typical of the Second Empire style. The Hotel is directly across "The Green" from the Congregational Church. Together, these buildings define "The Green" by visually enclosing it.

In Collinsville, the interrelationship between buildings is of particular importance for, often, the cumulative effect surpasses the significance of individual structures. This is particularly true of the three residential nodes.

On the west bank of the Farmington River, West Church and Bridge Streets are lined with identical two family houses which step directly up the side of Sweetheart Mountain. These worker's cottages were built in 1832 by the Collins Company and were rented to workers for \$25 a year. Although they are still occupied and well-maintained, the integrity of many cottages has been compromised by additions and alterations. Larger company houses, or "tenements," are on Dunne Avenue, which runs perpendicular to West Church and Bridge Streets.

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The building node along Maple Avenue encompasses numerous nineteenth and early twentieth century residences which reflect the lifestyle and tastes of the store owners, professionals, company executives and managers that constituted Collinsville's middle class.

Two family workers' cottages, identical to those on the west side of the river, were built in the mixed residential node just east of Collinsville Center in 1831. These houses are surrounded by larger company tenements and single family houses.

Although the Collins Company closed in 1966, the mill complex has retained its industrial character. Now owned by the Collinsville Company (not to be confused with the Collins Company), most of the mill complex is rented to various light industries.

Some original machine tools are still in use. Other equipment lies unused. This includes the massive machines designed by the company's first engineer, Elisha K. Root, to punch the eye out of an axehead. Grinding and polishing stones are still found in the mill complex and scattered throughout town in walls and fences.

The mill made use of various power sources. Although once powered entirely by water wheels, only a few remain. The buildings are still heated by the one coal and two oil fired boilers that were part of the original steam plant. The Collinsville Company is rebuilding the steam engine that once supplemented these three boilers. The company is also re-installing a turbine wheel (Holyoke, 1000 G.M.P., rotary pump, friction driven, six foot head, c. 1865) identical to the original. In the early twentieth century, the Collins Company installed two hydroelectric generating plants on the Farmington River. These have been dismantled by the Connecticut Light and Power Company, but are being studied for restoration.

Although numerous mill buildings closest to the river were destroyed by a flood in 1955, the high building density and functional relationship between buildings is retained in the surviving structures. Buildings were grouped in linear patterns to receive power from shafts and pipelines.

The Collins Company, a horizontal business organization, produced its iron and steel, forged and polished the tool heads, made the wooden handles and manufactured the packing boxes. The variety in building methods and techniques reflects the differing requirements, each activity demanded of its housing. The immediate juxtaposition of buildings with load-bearing stone walls, barn-like wood structures, brick buildings and corrugated steel sheds creates rich, though haphazard

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contrasts in color and texture. The mill buildings were designed and constructed by Collins Company engineers and managers. The direct simplicity of vernacular building is exemplified in these rough and rugged structures.

The mill complex is highly visible from major roadways. In particular, the prominent building cluster around the forebay (buildings #118, 29A, 27A-B, 24A, 131-A) and the stack rising from the boiler room are critical visual landmarks.

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The pervasiveness of the Collins Company's influence was made possible by its economic success. Before Samuel and David Collins started to manufacture axes in 1826, quality edge tools were difficult to obtain. The best edge tools, manufactured in England, were subject to prohibitively high tariffs. The axes available domestically were crudely fashioned by blacksmiths and had unfinished edges. The Collins brothers, who had worked in their uncle's Hartford iron company, were quick to recognize this market's potential. Production started in 1826 after the brothers and their cousin William Wells bought the Humphrey gristmill, fifteen acres of surrounding land in South Canton and obtained water privileges on the Farmington River.

The great demand for their product encouraged the brothers to utilize new materials, manufacturing techniques and power sources. In 1862, Samuel Collins went to England to study the Bessemer process for steel production. Elisha K. Root, hired in 1832 as a machinist was responsible for systematizing the production of edge tools and inventing various machine tools. Two notable inventions were a machine to punch the eye out of an axe and a machine that shaved the rough edges off newly forged axes. Root left the Collins Company in 1849 to become superintendent and later president of the Colt Firearms Company in Hartford.

Despite its economic progress, the Collins Company came close to failure in 1833 when immediate payment of its loans was demanded by the Hartford Bank. As a result, the company was reorganized as a corporation in 1834.

The Collins Company blossomed with the development of an overseas trade in machetes. In an effort to retain these markets and avoid tariffs, the company started manufacturing in Mexico and South America in the twentieth century. During the Civil War, the company benefited from the production of bayonets and knives. Plowshares and airplane propellers were also produced by the company.

There are numerous explanations for the Collins Company's closure in 1966. Certainly its dependency on foreign markets and the destruction caused by the 1955 flood were contributing factors. It has also been advanced that the company's "tired directorate," whose primary concerns had shifted from manufactory to banking, chose to close when the Collins Company reached a plateau in its economic growth.²

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Since the Company's closing, the town has seen little development. The growth of a commercial strip along Route 44 in Canton and Avon has drawn development away from Collinsville, but it is probable that Collinsville, which is fifteen miles northwest of Hartford, will be subject to development pressures in the future.

¹Anne Biernacki, "The History of a Company Town," unpublished paper, History 734, University of Hartford, 1974, page 51.

²Guy Whitney, former manager, the Collins Company, interview on January 14, 1976.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Collinsville is significant as an almost totally intact nineteenth century mill town which has retained historic and architectural integrity of both individual structures and their setting. Of the over 200 manufacturing villages established in Connecticut during the nineteenth century, Collinsville is one of the few that survive. Collinsville displays great architectural diversity. In addition to more sophisticated interpretations of popular eighteenth to twentieth century styles, Collinsville contains significant provincial interpretations of these styles and vernacular buildings.

The singular character of Collinsville's built environment grew from the omnipresent influence of the Collins Company on the town's development. Collinsville was a one-company town which owed its roots and sustenance to the Collins Company.

The company was the town's foundation, offering employment for workers, who supported the town's retailers and professionals. In addition to the company built cottages and tenements, the Collins Company owned much of the remaining housing. Vital municipal services, such as fire protection and utilities were provided by the Collins Company. In 1836, the Collins Company built the town's first church-- Congregational-- which it held title to until 1925. Other churches also received support from the company.

The Collins Company influenced its employees' lifestyle through setting working hours, wage and housing standards and institutionalized its views in matters of religion and temperance. Samuel Collins, a devoted crusader against liquor, bought the tavern and distilleries that existed in Collinsville before his arrival and included in deeds to person's buying property from him a clause restricting the manufacture or sale of alcohol under penalty of forfeiture.

Indirectly, the Collins Company controlled political and governmental activities in Collinsville. The company carried the largest tax burden and also supplied members to the Boards of Education, Finance and other town commissions. The workers' identification of their own needs with those of the Collins Company was facilitated by business prosperity. The one-company town was also a one-party town, in this case, Republican. According to John C. Meconkey, registrar of voters, before the company closed in 1966, nearly 100 per cent of Collinsville's voters were registered Republicans.¹

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Anon., Canton Sesquicentennial, 1806-1956: A Short Illustrated History of Canton, ed. Canton Sesquicentennial Committee, Canton, Canton Sesquicentennial Committee, 1956.

Anon., One Hundred Years: A Brief Account of the Development of the Collins Company in the Manufacture of Axes, Machetes and Edge Tools and in Commemoration of its 100th Anniversary, Collinsville, The Collins Company, 1926.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 276

UTM REFERENCES

4631-420			4631-460		
A	18	67,188.0	4630	440	
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		
B	18	67,318.0	4630	440	
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		
C	18	67,320.0	4630	1,510	
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		
D	18	67,124.0	4630	1,210	
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The southern boundary is contiguous with the Collinsville-Avon/Burlington townline from Huckleberry Hill Road to West Church Street.

The western boundary follows the back lot lines of the west side of Dunne Avenue from the townline through house #36 Torrington Avenue.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carole Anstress Paine, Special Consultant

ORGANIZATION

Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE

February 20, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

59 South Prospect Street

TELEPHONE

203-566-3005

CITY OR TOWN

Hartford,

STATE

Connecticut

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

John W. Shanahan
John W. Shanahan

DATE February 26, 1976

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Attesting

DATE

6/23/76

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

8-23-76

SEAL OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Biernacki, Anne, "The History of a Company Town," unpublished paper, History 734, University of Hartford, 1974.

Interviews:

Canton Six Architects and Planners, Rodger S. Clarke, Richard E. Swibold, interviews, July 18, 1975, October 7, 1975, February 16, 1976.

Perry, Thomas, owner, the Collinsville Company, interviews, October 17, 1975, February 16, 1976.

Whitney, Guy, former manager, the Collins Company, interview, January 14, 1976.

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The north boundary crosses Torrington Avenue, above house #85 Torrington Avenue and continues along the back lot lines of the west side of Collins Road. The boundary then follows the west and north property lines of Calvary Cemetery and crosses the Farmington River to the back lot line of house #54 Maple Avenue.

The eastern boundary follows the northeast lines of lot #27 Thayer Avenue, houses 49-47 Maple Avenue, houses 73-25 High Street, houses 4-10 Cemetery Road to the intersection with the Avon town line.