



STORIES SERIES Over two hundred years of history are tucked into the corners of this house and hidden among its fascinating families. Here is Story #7.

From time to time this series will share stories of the Linden Place 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.

THE MEMORIAL AMBULANCE



The *Bristol Phoenix* of June 15, 1917 announced the arrival of the town's first ambulance. "The ambulance is of a special design and was built by the White Motor Car Company. It is painted a dark blue with gold striping and lettering....and has a 45 horsepower motor with electrical starting and lighting systems. It is of a large size having a 140 ½ inch wheel base and is equipped with United States tires."ⁱ The article goes on to map out the area of service, and to explain how the "chauffeurs and attendants" would be selected, how detailed records were to be kept on index cards, and to remind the public that at no time shall any citizen be charged for the use of its service.

The outside of the ambulance reflected *one* part of the story; but it was the solid silver plate inside, inscribed "In Memory of Lebaron Colt" that tells the *rest* of the story.

The concept of ambulance service in America was "forged one link at a time" according to the Emergency Medicine Residents Association.ⁱⁱ The Civil War (1861-1865) precipitated an organized method of field care and transport of the injured on the battlefield. In 1869 a Civil Ambulance Service was formed in New York. Each ambulance arrived with a quart of emergency brandy for each patient. In the wake of World War I, volunteer rescue squads were formed in places like Virginia and New Jersey. "Funeral home hearses were slowly joined by fire departments, rescue squads and private ambulances" to transport the ill, the injured, and the dead.ⁱⁱⁱ

Just prior to the Civil War, the White Sewing Machine Company was started in Templeton, Massachusetts in 1858. The business moved to Cleveland in 1866. At the turn of the century a new division was added, The White Motor Company, which made steam powered motor cars. President William Howard Taft owned one of their White Steamers, and stored it in the new garage at the White House. However, by 1910 the White family, father and three sons, turned to gasoline powered vehicles. Eventually the business concentrated on manufacturing trucks.^{iv}

With the growth of the manufacturing of vehicles of all kinds came the demand for better roads. Safety became a concern as well. In 1913 33.38 people died for every 10,000 vehicles on the road. In 2020, the death rate was 1.53 per 10,000 vehicles – a 93% improvement.^v In 1916 about 10,000 people in America died in automobile

accidents. Two of them were Bristolians: Lebaron C. Colt and Albert S. Chesebrough. Mr. Chesebrough died on scene at 10 pm on May 18, 1916. Mr. Colt survived the initial crash, but succumbed to his injuries days later on May 26th. A third man in the car, Luke H. Callan, barely escaped with his life.



Lebaron C. Colt, born in 1877, was the son of Senator Lebaron Colt and the nephew of industrialist Samuel Pomeroy Colt - Gilded Age industrialist, head of the United States Rubber Company, CEO of the Industrial Trust Bank, and resident of Linden Place and the Colt Farm (now Colt State Park.) Lebaron was a graduate of Brown University, class of 1899, and that year became an apprentice at the United States Rubber Company on Wood Street. He did well. By 1904 he was appointed the Resident Manager of the National India Rubber Company, part of US Rubber. His division's workforce grew from 1700 to 3300, and the production of "lawn shoes," which we now know as Keds, grew from 18,000 to 44,000 pairs a day. He married JouJou Edith Converse, the daughter of Rear Admiral George Albert Converse, an expert on torpedoes and torpedo boats, who over his career served as the chief of three bureaus of the Navy: Equipment, Ordinance and Navigation. On his passing in 1909 he was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

The June 14, 1904 Bristol Phoenix somewhat breathlessly reported the "surprise" wedding of Lebaron and JouJou. Apparently, they had "plighted their troth" but never announced any engagement. Suddenly, after an absence of three years, they re-connected on a Monday and married that Friday. "The smouldering flames of the old love kindled so rapidly that the wedding...was the result....The actual time of the marriage was not determined until a few hours before it took place (as) the marriage license was not procured until Friday afternoon." Dr. W. Fred Williams gave the bride away, William Hodgkinson acted as best man, and Rev. Dr. Locke presided. The ceremony was at St. Michael's Church.^{vi}

Lebaron and JouJou had three children, George Albert, JouJou Edith, and Lebaron Carleton III. Lebaron C (the father), among his many corporate and civic duties, was a member of the Bristol Children's Playground Association, the Sewer Commission, and the Hydraulion Engine Company. The newspaper reports indicate that Lebaron was driving the automobile involved in the deadly crash.



Albert S. Chesebrough, a passenger in the auto, was part of a storied family of Bristol as well. His mother, Constance L. Herreshoff Chesebrough, was one of nine children and the sister of Nathanael Greene and John Brown Herreshoff, who created the famous boat building dynasty. Mr. Chesebrough was taken under their wings and became a well known boat designer. A widower about 50 years old when he died, he left two young children who were then raised by their grandmother Constance. Mr. Chesebrough's wife, Emma Russell Bullock, died tragically of suicide in 1908. Emma was the half sister of Mrs. Samuel Pomeroy Colt - also known as "Dot" Bullock. Emma and her family lived on Burton Street, close to the Colts and Linden Place. One newspaper reported that when her maid found Emma's body, she rushed to Linden Place to find Mrs. Colt for help.^{vii} On November 7th of that year Mr.

Chesebrough had sailed for Greenock, Scotland to oversee the construction of a steam yacht for the Rainey Brothers of New York. When notified of his wife's death by cablegram, he sailed home immediately on the

steamship *Baltic*. In the newspaper reports of his death he is described as a large and robust man, over six feet tall.



The third occupant of the auto, Luke H. Callan, survived. During World War I he had served in France with the 107th Engineers, whose specialty was road and bridge work. At the time of the accident, Mr. Callan was the Superintendent of Highways in Bristol. A few years after the accident he was appointed Chief of Police in the town after some disagreement over the way the former police chief handled labor unrest at the rubber company. Colonel Callan rose high in the ranks of the Reserves and the American Legion. In 1934 he ran for governor of the state of Rhode Island. He was defeated by Theodore Francis Green (for whom the airport is named.) The photo is from a newspaper article in 1922.

According to numerous articles in the Bristol Phoenix, Providence Evening Bulletin and the Pawtucket Times, Colt, Chesebrough and Callan were returning from a meeting whose purpose was to “consult an expert about some proposed road building.” Also in attendance at that meeting were Mr. and Mrs. Howard Clark of Warren, RI. The meeting was hosted by Daniel Rogers Case at his home at PapooseSquaw Point, known as South Point Farm.^{viii} Reviews of back issues of the Phoenix indicate that Mr. Case was very active in town politics and at one town meeting in 1917 “expressed much pleasure at the repair of PapooseSquaw Road.” Articles paint a picture of a man who traveled frequently to Europe, hosted a popular annual clambake, and was one of the founders of the Bristol Reading Room in the LeClair Cottage. Esteemed members were committed to promoting the town and its history and encouraging folks to move to Bristol.

Mr. Colt was driving the car when the three men departed from the Case residence. It was reported that the men decided to take a turn around “The Boulevard” before returning home. They approached North Point, about ½ mile west of Millgut Bridge. Mr. Callan later recounted that they struck a sandy stretch. The car went into a skid, he heard the steering gear break, and then the car went over a stone embankment and plunged into Narragansett Bay. Callan was seated at the “right hand doorway” of the car and was able to jump as the car tipped into the water. He reached the end of the car, and using the buoyancy of the water raised it enough to slide Mr. Colt free. Sadly, he was not as successful with Mr. Chesebrough, a much larger man. He ran to the



Colt farm house to get rescue help and several of the employees went back with him to the car to try and free Mr. Chesebrough. Mr. and Mrs. Clark had also left the dinner meeting at the same time as the Colt party; they came upon the accident, and were able to get Mr. Colt into their car and bring him to the Colt farm house. He was in semi-conscious condition and had a deep gash on his left knee which ultimately required 16 stitches to close. The Medical Examiner’s report indicated that Mr. Chesebrough had suffered a fractured skull and the cause of death was reported as “accident.” Mr. Colt’s outcome was quite different, however.

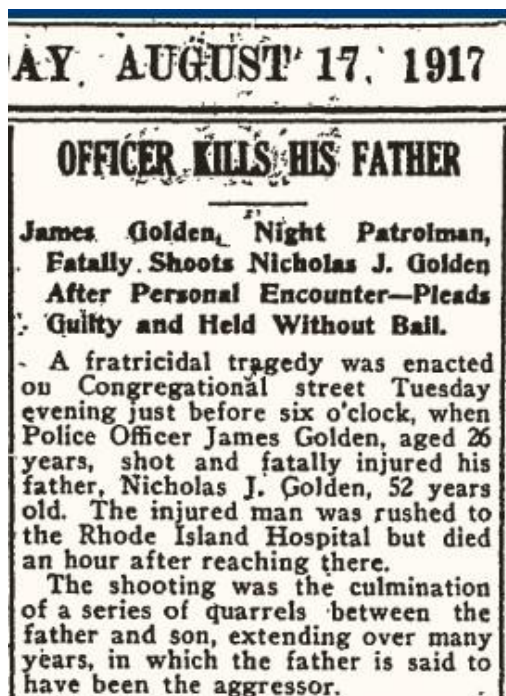
In the following days, an investigation by police re-created what most likely happened at the scene. A team of oxen from the Colt farm pulled the car out of the water.

The Bristol Phoenix of May 23rd reported that Mr. Colt was resting comfortably at his uncle's farm house, and that danger from pneumonia "has apparently passed and his complete recovery seems certain." On the afternoon of May 24th he was moved from the Colt farm house to his own home on Smith Street. Around midnight on May 25th he took a sudden and unexpected turn for the worse. By 2:30 that afternoon he was dead.^{ix} Lebaron Colt was 39 years old. His friends, family, and co-workers were in shock.

"Mr. Colt was held in such high esteem by his employees that soon after his death there arose a desire to establish a memorial to him, and the one that seemed to meet with general approval was an Ambulance." ^x "The employees of the National India Rubber Company took the matter in charge, and soon a substantial nucleus towards this object was created."

A committee was formed, fundraising commenced, and the new memorial ambulance arrived in Bristol on June 15, 1917. ^{xi}

That first ambulance was put into service just five days after it was delivered – bringing Mrs. August Mendes to the Rhode Island Hospital where she underwent an operation for appendicitis. In July a baseball pitcher struck in the head by a line drive was transported to the hospital; Delwyn Crowley was the reported "chauffeur." Less than a week later a meat delivery truck driver was run over by his own wagon. He was taken to Rhode Island Hospital as well. The local newspaper reported each run, and often followed up with the outcome for each patient transported. Just like today, some trips were routine medical situations, some were more complicated, and some were sensational.



On August 17, 1917, James Golden, a night patrolman for the town, confronted his father after an ugly argument, and shot him repeatedly. 10 shots were fired – three went "wild" – one hitting St. Mary's School, one going through the skirt of a bystander, one lodging in the door of a house on Congregational Street. Three officers responded; they found the father, Nicholas J. Golden, on the ground – and the son standing over him with a pistol in his hand. The son surrendered without incident; the ambulance arrived on scene before the doctor; within an hour Mr. Golden was at the hospital and on the operating table. However, he succumbed to his injuries. When notified of the death of his father, Officer Golden, his voice tinged with years of abusive confrontations with his father, responded "I'm glad of it." At his arraignment, he pled guilty.

Reports of fundraisers for the ambulance are numerous throughout the years. Multiple committees and many dedicated volunteers worked endlessly to raise money. But the cost of replacement became steeper and steeper, from \$5,000 to \$24,500, to \$50,004. So, by the 1980s, the cost of the ambulance and its "chauffeurs" – the hardworking EMTs of today – became part of the town budget. Today, this life saving mission continues. Rooted in tragedy, created from the

respect of blue color workers for a supervisor who might have survived if immediate medical attention had been delivered by ambulance at the scene of a horrific car accident, the work endures.



The brand-new ambulance arrived in Bristol in July of 2022 – just in time to ‘debut’ for the 4th of July Parade. The 1917 \$5,000 cost is now over 140 times higher, the 45 horsepower engine is just a little bit stronger, the 140 ½ inch wheelbase is just a wee bit longer, and the silver memorial plate has been replaced by gold medal service.

The priceless dedication of the professionals who respond to emergencies today, who are committed to our community and devoted to saving lives, is a noble tradition that continues to strengthen over time and deserves every bit of our gratitude and respect. Lebaron Colt would be the first to agree.

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. As always, suggestions, comments, corrections and input are welcomed.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The Bristol Phoenix June 15, 1917

ⁱⁱ “A Brief History of Emergency Medical Services in the United States”; Emergency Medicine Residents' Association article www.emra.org

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} The White Motor Company, by Scott Mall, Managing Editor, Freight Waves ; <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/flashback-fridays/white-motor-company>

^v National Safety Council

^{vi} Bristol Phoenix June 14, 1904

^{vii} The Bristol Phoenix, December 8, 1908

^{viii} Providence Evening Bulletin, May 19, 1916

^{ix} The Bristol Phoenix May 19, May 23, May 25, May 26, 1916; The Providence Bulletin May 26, 1916

^x The Rubber Age of June 23, 1917

^{xi} Ibid