

State-Level Historical Documentation Auto-Ordnance Buildings (Tuck-it-Away)

In 1904 the Royal Equipment Company built an industrial complex in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Later named Raybestos, the company was a nationally prominent producer of brake linings for the rapidly developing auto industry. The company expanded, especially during World War I, until it erected a large new plant and removed to Stratford. In 1940 the buildings,



Russell Maguire, the "Tommy Gun Tycoon," and owner of the Auto-Ordnance Company in 1944.

then vacant, were leased to the Auto-Ordnance Company, which renovated the complex and added new buildings. Auto-Ordnance was part of the industrial empire of Russell McGuire, an entrepreneur from Meriden, Connecticut, who specialized in acquiring and turning around faltering industrial enterprises. McGuire had purchased the company in 1939 from the estate of venture capitalist Thomas Fortune Ryan, best known for creating the Royal Typewriter Company. Auto-Ordnance's submachine gun was the invention of Brig. Gen. John T. Thompson, from whom it derived its moniker, the "Tommy Gun." In 1916 Thompson, Ryan and others had formed the Auto-Ordnance Company. With its pistol grip and 100-round magazine, the Tommy Gun was developed for trench warfare during World War I; however, the company never reached production stage before the war ended. Postwar sales were slow, though the Tommy Gun was favored by big-city police departments and organized crime, becoming a virtual symbol of the Prohibition era. With the outbreak

of World War II, gun sales soared, with large contracts with Great Britain, the United States and France. Bridgeport proved to be an ideal location for large-scale production, because it had a large pool of skilled toolmakers, machinists and operatives that could quickly mobilize. The company purchased the entire complex outright in 1941. Hundreds of thousands of guns were produced during the war, giving Maguire the nickname the "Tommy Gun Tycoon." The Tommy Gun played a critical role in World War II and saw action in North Africa, Europe and Asia. Following the War, the company retooled for radio and phonograph production, but did poorly and sold the complex in 1947. For the remainder of the 20th century the buildings passed through a number of companies, large and small, until the 1980s when they were converted into storage units by the Tuck-it-Away Self-Storage Company. The buildings were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 as part of the Railroad Avenue Industrial District. In 2000 AHS prepared state-level Historical and Photographic Documentation of the remaining buildings prior to the complex's destruction by Interstate 95 improvements.

