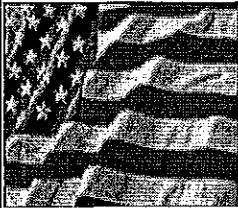
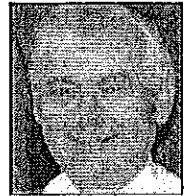


# The Windline



A Quarterly Issue— Volume 23—No. 4  
Austin Organs official newsletter to our representatives and friends!

December 2004



## DONALD B. AUSTIN TRIBUTE ISSUE 3/27/33—9/17/04



DBA AND FBA IN 1973, ON FBA'S RETIREMENT AND DBA'S ASCENSION TO THE PRESIDENCY

From Edward J. DuBrule, retired console foreman and longtime Austin man:

**“ When the Austin Co. moved to the four story building (with the fire escape on the front), the console room was on the third floor (on fire escape end). I was removing sets of manual keys (on keyframes) from a shipping box. A young boy came into the room and picked up one set of manual keys and started to walk out of the room toward the fire escape. I grabbed him, took the keyframe back and ‘ushered’ him out of the room. Later, a person named Jim who was the finisher at the other end of the room said this kid had tried to take something he was finishing. When Harold Dubrue (Ed’s uncle, Plant Sup’t at that time) came into the console room I told him about the kid and the incidents. He replied, “In case you’re interested, that KID is the PRESIDENT’S SON !! “**

When I sold Opus 2712 to Saint John Lutheran Church, Council Bluffs, Iowa, budgetary conservatism made it necessary to make several stops as windchest and console preparations. Some time after contract signing, a bequest was received that allowed those stops to be “fleshed out;” and I duly notified the Hartford office. In due course, Don Austin was on the phone to me, saying that production of the organ had reached the point wherein assurance of the additional funds would allow the complete instrument to be completed in the factory. In short order I was able to send that assurance, and the complete organ was fabricated, shipped, and installed in good time. It was - and is - an outstanding installation, and I will always appreciate Don’s stewardship of it. Interestingly, it arrived with a 32’ Resultant, something that was not in the contract. If that was a “present” from Don, I send him my eternal thanks!  
Cordially, John Hansen

DEAN ZENOR REMEMBERS...

While working for Austin one summer, a theft in the parking lot cost him a new battery for his car. Don whipped out his checkbook and paid for it. Dean always remembered that kindness. He also remembers splitting pizzas with Don. If there was half cent split Don would go downstairs to the metal shears and cut a penny in half.



ONCE AGAIN OUR FRIEND BOB DINALLO COMES TO THE RESCUE !! IN THE LAST ISSUE OF “THE WINDLINE”, WE REPORTED THAT THE ST. JOSEPH’S CATHEDRAL, HARTFORD WEBSITE’S ADDRESS INCORRECTLY. IT IS :WWW.CATHEDRALOFSAINTEJOSEPH.COM. THANKS !!



I have vivid and fond memories of FBA and DBA working together back in the early 1970's. Then, DBA was the "Boss" of all installation personnel, and we all worked with him when there were problems or supplies needed on the road. His excellent memory knew the construction details of each organ and he provided immediate assistance when occasional calls were placed for help.

Don was a very fair, astute and highly respected President and business leader of AOI. Also, he was caring and kind to employees and their families. His wisdom and foresight, carefully led Austin through the economic problems of the early 1970's, and he and the late Richard Piper worked together to assemble the finest organbuilding staff in the world! Later, after Mr. Piper retired, DBA, Fred Mitchell, Al Isaacson and David A.J. Broome collaborated on many important organ installations during the 1980's and 1990's.

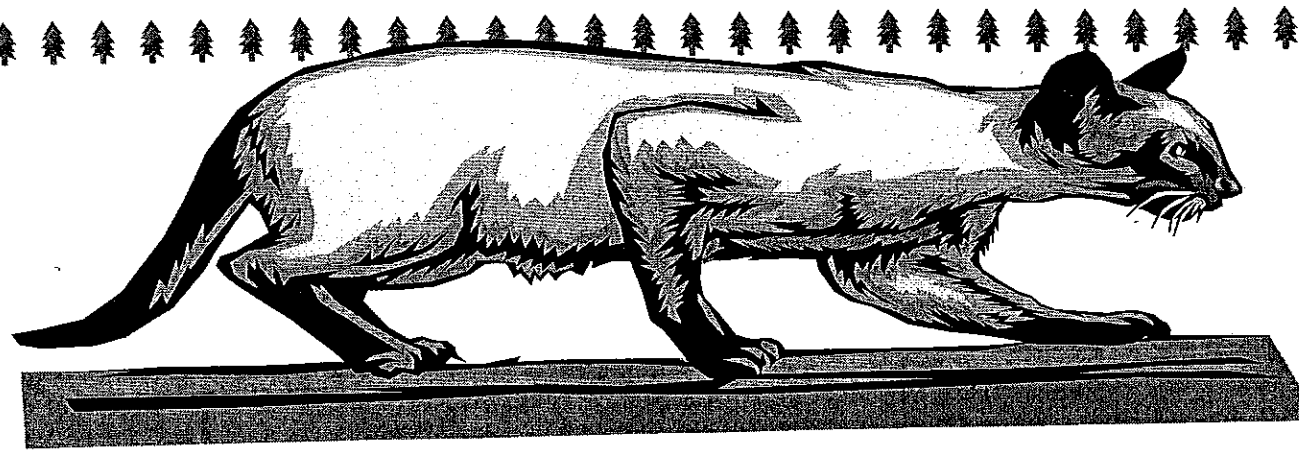
Don was always friendly and had many interests such as The Bloomfield Fire Department, serving as an officer for many years, and he was a life-long railfan and enthusiast.

His funeral was held at Old St. Andrew's Church in Bloomfield, where Don had installed the Austin organ (and donated a fine Trumpet stop), and served as Warden and Vestryman for many years. During his last years, he remained active at the office, coming in occasionally and was always available for consultation by telephone as his health permitted.

Condolences have been received from colleagues from all over the world.

I had the pleasure of knowing him for 32 years, and will sadly miss his good humor and encouragement.

Alan D. McNeely



Don Austin was my first real boss out of college. I had worked at the shop for several summers, but in 1988 I came on full-time and worked in the office for the next seven years. This was the late autumn of Don's career, and though ill health was beginning to set in, Don was fully in command.

He was often intimidating to work for, mostly because he knew so much about organ building, about history, about seemingly everything. But he never let you know how much he knew unless you were trying his rather small amount of patience, then you were usually put in your place. I have many vivid memories of working with him at the office. He had a chair in his office that reclined almost horizontally. When a question was posed, he would lean way back, take several drags on his cigarette, and pat his abdomen reflectively for a while. When he answered, it was generally a response you hadn't considered at all.

Don was very enthusiastic about the fax machine when they first came into use. "Get it in writing!" was his golden rule, and the fax gave him the chance to send out quick love-letters to colleagues. Typical messages were "Send \$\$\$", or "My favorite color is green". In later years, he embraced e-mail and I got a message from him from time to time. His responses were never long, but always prompt.

His humor was always on the bawdy, sarcastic side. One New Year's Eve day, we all left work at noon, as we always did on that day. As we came out of the shop, Don was sitting in his car with the motor running. "Take the rest of the year off!" he cackled as he drove off. I gave him a one finger salute.

Day to day, Don ran things by consensus. Every week or so, a group of six or seven of us would gather and talk about what was going on. Meetings covered many topics, mostly business-related. They could be uncomfortable if you weren't prepared or if you rambled. But it was a good way of running things and I have seldom seen it done as effectively in later jobs I have had.

Collaboration and collegiality with other organ builders was one of Don's strengths. I recall the local meetings of the AIO and APOBA, which he was very proud to host, even though he was not big on the social chit-chat aspect. He never suffered fools and despised pretense and foppiness. He was very fond of Austin historiographer Orpha Ochse, herself an unpretentious person, and he gave her open access to the Austin records. Her book paints a transparent and colorful picture of the company.

I must be a dog person - I never understood Don's softness for cats. But the compassion he and Marilyn showed to the poor homeless ones was a clue that under that gruff exterior was a compassionate heart.

There will be none like him again. Don Austin was a whetstone who rubbed some the wrong way but who honed many who worked for him into sharper, better people. We will miss him.

Floyd Higgins  
West Hartford, CT

Some memories of DBA: ..

I wish I could have met Donald B. Austin earlier than I did. That didn't happen until 1995, the year I got on board the Austin sales wagon. It amused me when I learned that his initials, DBA, were the same as mine. After this similarity was pointed out to me, I tried to be sure I never signed off any memos I sent to the home office by using "DBA" lest someone think it was a missile from the great man himself, instead of from me. I became very careful and always use DByA, or DByronA, for my communications. It's interesting that, in legal and business parlance, "DBA" stands for "doing business as....." How nicely this fitted Don Austin, too, as DBA did indeed *do business* ..... representing the third generation in a great line of Austins, doing the business of building fine pipe organs in America! To be sure, DBA will be sorely missed.

DByronArneson

#### REMEMBERING DBA

**In 1993, when I first corresponded with Donald Austin about writing a history of the company, he offered his cooperation and said I could have access TO INFORMATION IN THE COMPANY FILES. Nevertheless, when I arrived in 1994 I was hardly prepared for the red-carpet treatment that greeted me. Not only did I have the entire board room as an office, but Don even gave me his own parking space!**

**During the next four years, as I worked my way through Austin history, I relied on Don for clarification on countless matters. He never seemed to mind my interrupting his work, and frequently he guided me to information I couldn't otherwise have found. Sometimes, when he came across a particularly interesting old letter or document, he would hide it under some papers on my desk when I wasn't around, and I'd have the fun of discovering it later. By the time the Austin book was finished, Don and I had become good friends as well as colleagues, and I treasure the memory of those Octobers I spent in the Austin factory. As for the book—well, it just couldn't have been written without Don's help. — Orpha Ochse**

FROM MIKE HERZOG IN OHIO:

*When the Lancaster, Ohio organ arrived at the church (first organ I sold), the reservoirs were laying atop the 16' Principal of the facade - and the pipes were crushed. That was the first time I'd met Bernie Higgins, and he blew about every gasket he had. He phoned Don and ranted away, and finally Don asked to talk to me. Now, I'd never met Bernie, and didn't know Don very well, and Don's words were simple. "Fix it and send me the bill." I did and he paid it. As I say, I didn't know him well, but his straightforward fairness impressed me, and he must have been very good at what he did because he attracted superb people to the company, and they stayed there working for him for a long time. There is an old military saying - the unit reflects the attitude of the commander. Don was a fine commander.*

Donald B. Austin

During my 15 years with Austin, I worked closely with Don, for much of the time, almost at the next desk. I got to know him not only as a great businessman, but as a gentleman with a true sense of humor and compassion for his fellow man, which he fostered through the Bloomfield Volunteer Fire Department.

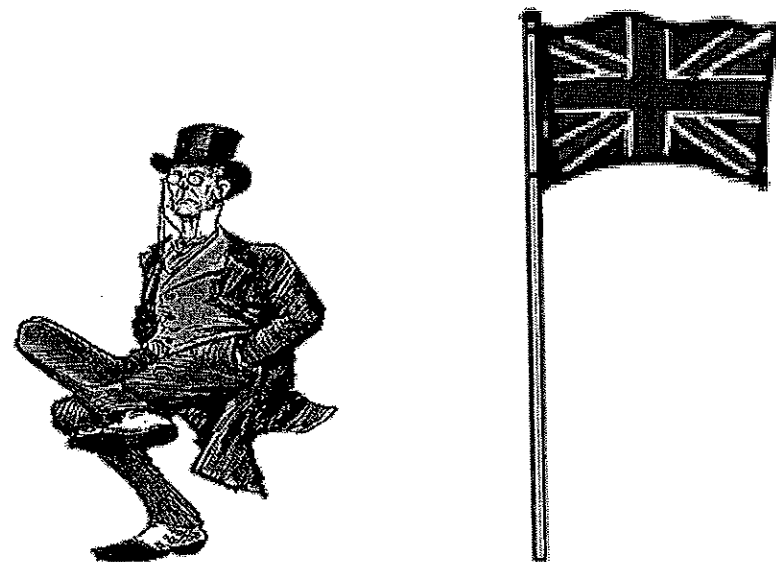
Don had a mind like a steel trap, especially when it came to numbers. If you mentioned a town that had an Austin, he not only would tell you the opus number, he would tell you how much profit or loss the company made on that job. I was constantly amused by pet twists he came up with for the names of certain towns and cities.

The first time I flew to a job with Don, he told me that one big advantage to sitting in First Class (which we didn't) was that you got there a few milliseconds sooner than the blokes in Coach.

Don had an interest in mechanical things and we shared an interest in mechanical musical instruments. He thought a player organ was too simple, since everything boiled down to contacts closing and opening. But a reproducing piano was something to behold. When I bought an Ampico, Don took great interest in how vacuum could be made to instantly not only play the notes, but impart true expression. Soon Don had an Ampico of his own, and restored the pneumatic system. We attended a couple Musical Box Society meeting together, and Don took interest or fascination in the restoration of the Austin roll perforator and went to Virginia to see it in operation. After all, his father, Frederick Basil Austin, had personally assembled every Austin player, and was pictured operating the perforator.

My last memories of Don were discussions over the possible restoration and installation of opus 500, the great San Francisco Austin, in an open outdoor pavilion. I will miss Donald B. Austin. The organ world has lost a great man.

Allen R. Miller



I've had the pleasure of knowing and working for Don Austin since 1979. Through the years I've appreciated and respected his intelligence, leadership and quirky sense of humor. Don was known for his problem solving abilities on the factory floor and certainly in our office! He was the reason many of us are still here today. We salute you Don! —Mike Petronio

"An Extraordinary Life"

On page 8 of this issue, you will find a reprint of an article by Ann Hamilton published in the local newspaper "The Hartford Courant". At the beginning of the article, she states: "Each Sunday, "Extraordinary Life" looks back on someone who died recently, whose life made a difference."

"...whose life made a difference"...what an incredible statement for me personally. Just reading those words makes me very emotional. There is no person on the face of this earth who made more of a difference in my adult life than Donald B. Austin, with the single exception of my wife, Becky.

Don was the consummate organbuilder. He knew everything there was to know sprinkled in with absolutely amazing recall about almost any instrument the Company had built. He would make his very early, daily walk throughout the factory. From that exposure, he instantly knew what was right...and he also recognized what wasn't so right!

On a rare occasion (...hummm...), if I had been involved in something that was not up to his expectations, I clearly remember his loud, plodding footsteps moving in my direction down the long hallway connecting the main office with the Drafting room...coughing and clearing his throat all the way. This was his classic method to let anyone know they were in for a little "heat", which he could deliver so well...but ALWAYS an amazing learning experience...!

He always enjoyed a challenge to try something new...of course, after an initial coughing spell. He would think and think and think about a different approach to a problem...and always resolve it in the most amazing but simple way.

Don and I also shared a great interest in trains. I think he subscribed to every train and plane magazine that exists...and he gladly shared them with many of us. He even subscribed to Bus World...!

Other than an endless amount of organ building information, Don taught me two extremely important lessons...it doesn't exist if it isn't in writing, and every document MUST be dated. The FAX machine quickly became his best friend...!

Also in the headline of Ann Hamilton's article is the word "passion"...Don was absolutely passionate about this wonderful Company and was deeply compassionate about all those who worked for him. I doubt there wasn't one employee that worked here during his 50+ years that he didn't personally help them in some way.

He certainly helped me simply because of the incredible respect I developed for this extraordinary man.

I miss him very much.

Al (Ike) Isaacson



# An Organ Builder With A Passion For Cars And Trains

Each Sunday, "Extraordinary Life" looks back on someone who died recently, whose life made a difference.

By ANNE HAMILTON  
SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

Donald B. Austin, 71, of Bloomfield, died Sept. 17

Donald Austin was fascinated by how things worked, and in another family, perhaps he might have become an engineer. But his great uncle had founded Austin Organs Co. of Hartford, so Austin went into the family business.

## EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

He expressed his interest in mechanics through his love of cars and railroads. His main interest was the Central New England Railway, which used to travel from Hartford through the Farmington Valley and on to New York state.

Austin grew up in Bloomfield and had the kind of childhood that is often idealized today. With his boyhood friends, he fished, hunted, biked to Lake Congamond, skied on the Bloomfield hills and played cards. Later he learned how to fix cars. When he was a teen, he bought a Model T, but the janitor at his school — who was also a police officer — turned him in because he didn't have a license and the car wasn't registered. "He had to sell it because he was only 15," says Frank Burnham, a boyhood friend.

As a senior, Austin, Burnham and Homer Guilmartin drove to Florida in Burnham's 1936 Chevy. It was the boys' first big adventure away from home.

"I think we invented spring break," says Guilmartin, who still lives in Bloomfield. They stayed with relatives, went deep-sea fishing for king mackerel and returned home without incident. It was an innocent trip by today's standards.

"Nobody had much money to throw away. You were just very conservative," says Guilmartin. "We all had \$25 when we went on the trip and had a little when we returned."

Austin and Burnham joined the fire department as young volunteers; Austin rose over the years to the rank of captain and was later a commissioner of the Bloomfield Center Fire District.

"It was like his second family," says his older daughter, Sheryl Morales, "or even his first." Besides fighting fires, Austin used his business skills to keep the volunteer group well organized.

"He was a very, very good firefighter," says Bloomfield Fire Chief Daniel Canfield. "I can't describe enough what he did for the fire department."

and eventually took over the presidency of the company from his father. The organs, most of which are used by churches, can be found from Beijing to San Diego.

One pipe organ is in the Mormon Tabernacle, another in city hall in Portland, Maine, and two others at Trinity College and St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hartford. Each one is numbered, and a request for repairs or refurbishing triggers a search for the original drawings and specifications.

The company prospered originally because of inventions by John Turnell Austin, Donald

father, learned the business from the ground up, first holding down a key while the organ was being tuned.

"He wasn't the best teacher," Kim Austin says of her father, because he had little patience. "He let me make my own way."

He also liked to pepper a conversation with sarcastic comments.

"It would come at you in a nano-second," says Sheryl Morales. "The words would scarcely be out of your mouth."

"He didn't suffer fools gladly and was curmudgeonly when he was younger," says Kim Austin. But both sisters agree that their dad's bark was worse than his bite.

When Austin's emphysema made it impossible for him to continue working, he asked daughter Kim to work for him, then surprised her by naming her company vice president and, later, president.

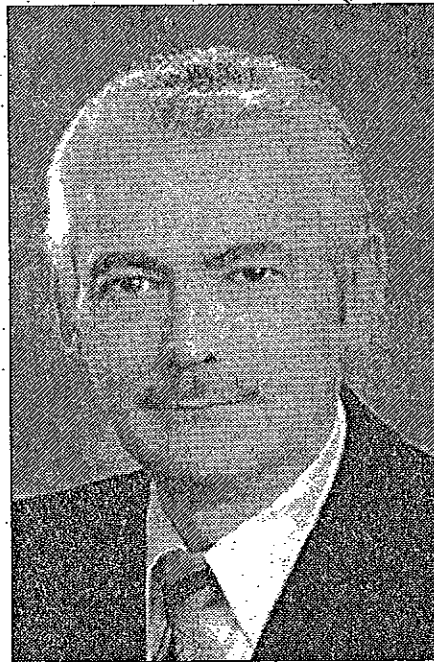
"He was a consummate organ builder," says Ike Isaacson, a vice president of the company. "He knew everything there was to know about this business. Pipe organs are the king of instruments. One person can duplicate an orchestra."

Nearly 3,000 instruments have been made since the company was founded in 1893.

Besides organs, Austin loved trains. Since he was a teenager, he had a special fondness for the Hartford train and researched the history of the CNE Railway, which was in its heyday in 1900 and ran until about 1927. It went from Hartford to Simsbury, Canton, New Hartford and Norfolk before ending in New York State.

Austin and fellow "train nuts" gathered monthly to discuss train lore and memorabilia in Simsbury at a restaurant near the old tracks.

"He was a person who did a lot of things for a lot of people without recognition," says Guilmartin. "He didn't make a big deal about it. He didn't want people to know he had a soft spot in his heart for animals and for people."



DONALD B. AUSTIN

The Korean War was underway when the three friends graduated from high school and joined the armed services. Austin was stationed at Fort Belvoir, Va. By then he had married his high school sweetheart, Marilyn Heeber. She commuted back and forth to his Army post until he was discharged and returned to Bloomfield in 1956.

During high school, Austin had helped out at the organ factory, where the cabinets are made of poplar and the pipes formed out of a special zinc. He gradually assumed greater responsi-

bles. Austin's great uncle, who patented several devices that improved the organ's quality. During Austin's tenure, as many as 50 employees custom-built the organs, and there was a two- to three-year wait for new organs.

Austin oversaw every aspect of the operation, drew many of the models himself and had a near-photographic memory.

"He had an enormous ability to do what he put his mind to," says Kim Austin, his younger daughter, who has been president of the company since 1999.

She, like her father and grand-