

Austin Families Association of America

Winter
2025

NEWSLETTER

Fostering Austin Genealogy & Heritage



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John Austen's Civil War Diary: The Siege of Port Hudson

Inspired by an article from the AFAOA Genealogists' Files

"May 21, 1863: U.S. forces advanced from Baton Rouge. Heavy skirmishing all day..."

With this terse entry, Confederate Chief Telegrapher **John D. Austen** began a remarkable firsthand account of the 1863 **Siege of Port Hudson**—a grueling struggle that became one of the longest continuous sieges of the Civil War.

Stationed along the Mississippi River, Austen chronicled the mounting hardships inside the Confederate lines as Union forces tightened their grip through the summer months. His diary notes dwindling provisions, men surviving on meager daily rations, and the relentless strain of artillery and sharpshooter fire that left little opportunity for rest. He wrote, too, of Port Hudson's harsh terrain—its bluffs, ravines, and thick undergrowth—features that offered the defenders natural shelter even as their endurance waned.

Despite these advantages, successive Union assaults slowly eroded Confederate

strength. As ammunition ran low and supplies disappeared, Austen's entries reflect the grim recognition that surrender was only a matter of time. When Port Hudson finally capitulated—just days after Vicksburg—it gave the Union full control of the Mississippi River and marked a decisive turning point in the war's western theater.

Preserved by the Austen family for more than a century, the diary was ultimately recognized by three great-grandchildren as a document that truly belonged to history. It now resides at the Port Hudson State Historic Site, where it remains as an invaluable record of life behind the besieged Confederate defenses.



Diary Image courtesy of Daniel Goyer,
Port Hudson State Historic Park

John Austen enlisted in the Confederate infantry in May 1861 and was commissioned as a telegrapher in the Confederate Signal Corps the following year. He survived the siege and managed to escape, only to be captured in October 1864. He spent nine months in confinement in New Orleans until the end of the war. After his release, Austen settled in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, where he married and raised a family. He died in 1892 at the age of 53. His widow, Jeanne Elise Austen (née Leuret), moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, where she lived to the age of 92. In tribute to the family, the street on which she resided was re-named Austen Place.

John Dawson Austen is in the Unplaced Southern Austin database.

Austin Families Association of America Newsletter

Winter
2025

What's New in the Austin Databases?

By Bonnie Austin Bigolin and Susan Joy Lewis

If there's one thing we can count on, it is change. Our Austin Project is no exception. With more than 70 databases currently in use, the ongoing discovery of new information often requires us to merge, unlink, or even create entirely new databases. Advances in both traditional genealogical research and Y-DNA testing continue to drive these updates, and we will aim to highlight major changes in our quarterly newsletters.

Levi Austin of Oneida Co. New York

(no longer in the AFAOA databases)

Recently, the Levi Austin of Oneida Co, New York database has undergone some significant changes. The Levi Austin database has been removed from the AFAOA databases and placed into three different databases due to new research. The changes involved are: 1) Levi Austin line; 2) Frederick Austin line; 3) Jacob Austin line. They were previously included in the Levi Austin of Oneida Co., NY database.

John Austin of New Haven, Connecticut

Levi Austin d. 1802 in Oneida Co., NY, wife Hannah, and Reuben, the administrator of Levi's estate (relationship unknown), were originally listed as the progenitors of this lineage.

At some point, probably due to their presence in the same county, it had been assumed that Levi and Hannah were the parents of sons Jacob Austin (b. 1798) and Job Austin (1802 - 1849 Herkimer Co., NY). Although the database no longer has an assigned compiler, descendants of this lineage had recently been tested for Y-DNA, leading to a review of the genealogical records.

Genealogy for Jacob downward was solid; but the links between Levi and supposed sons Jacob and Job (brother of Frederick Austin; no issue) were not. The 1800 Census for Paris, Oneida Co., NY listed a Levi Austin (age 45+), a Levi Jr. (age 16 - 25) and a Reuben Austin (26 - 44). The estate records did not indicate an age for Levi who died in 1802; it had been incorrectly assumed that it was the younger Levi, born about 1775. Newly discovered Hanover Church records (Paris, NY) were helpful in sorting out the relationships. These records showed a Levi Austin and wife received from Goshen, CT in 1799; the same day a Hannah Austin was admitted. Reuben Austin (and wife Tryphena) joined the church, had six children baptized, and were transferred to another NY church in 1812. Who was this

Reuben, and why had his relationship to Levi and Hannah never been established? A search of our Master Index yielded answers. There were eight Reuben Austins born between 1756 and 1774; only one had a wife Tryphena. And who were his parents? Reuben was the eldest son of Hannah and Levi. All were born in CT; Reuben and mother Hannah had died in Oswego Co., NY. Levi's death date was known to be 1802, but no place was recorded. And there was a son Levi Jr (1775 - 1847). Neither of these men was known to have had a son Jacob or Job, and Reuben and Levi Jr. Moved to Oswego Co., NY between 1812 and 1824.

The research was further confused by the presence of no less than three widowed Hannah Austins in the neighborhood from 1800 - 1850.

Thomas Austin of Albany Co., New York

Jacob Austin Sr. was born about 1798 Bethlehem, Albany, NY and married Theresa Allen about 1820 New York. Jacob Austin is the son of Thomas and Abigail Austin per the Will of Thomas Austin of Bethlehem, NY, recorded in Albany Co., NY 14 Dec 1820, mentioning his wife Abigail and children: Sally, Peter, Darkus, wife of Daniel Hugs [Hughs], Matthew, John, Jacob, Jane and Abraham.

Two of Thomas and Abigail's children Jacob Austin and Darkus, wife of Daniel Hugs [Hughs] were found in the 1830 Census Schuyler, Herkimer, NY adding continuing evidence to this relationship.

Jacob and Theresa Austin had eleven known children born between 1821 and 1843 in Oneida and Herkimer Counties, New York: Olive, Lydia, Lucy, Jacob Jr, Oliver, David, Horace, Sarah, Louisa, William and Edward. After Jacob Austin Sr. died in 1866 Antwerp, Jefferson, New York, his wife and several of their children moved on to Caldwell County, Missouri, where Theresa remained until her death in 1881 Caldwell County, Missouri.

Frederick & Sarah Austin of Rhode Island & Oneida Co., New York

Frederick Austin was born about 1787 in Rhode Island to a currently unknown Austin father and Hannah Austin (unknown maiden name). We know this from Census records of the mother Hannah and those of their children consistently giving both of their parents born Rhode Island. From census records we can estimate that this family moved from Rhode Island to New York between 1813 and 1818. Frederick married Sarah about 1810 Rhode Island. Their first born was Gardner Austin was born about 1811 Rhode Island. According to census records their other children were all born in New York: Jacob, Teresa, Sarah,

continued on page 3

Austin Families Association of America Newsletter

Winter
2025



It's hard to believe an exceptionally busy 2025 is already drawing to a close. The AFAOA Board devoted considerable time this year to evaluating FamilySearch as a potential partner for hosting our databases—ultimately deciding not to change hosts at this time—while also assessing and initiating development of the next TNG website upgrade, designed to function smoothly across all devices. In addition, the Board addressed a denial-of-service (DOS) attack that briefly took our systems offline. Instead of focusing on these, I would like to share some broader information on our organization, drawn from my presentation at this year's conference in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Currently, we have 13 board members, 7 elected and 6 appointed, who work tirelessly to guide and support the organization. We also have 20 editors who research and update our Austin databases, including 4 super-editors who manage multiple lines. AFAOA currently has 218 members representing 41 states, with the highest numbers from California (25), Texas (17), and Florida (13).

Our organization remains financially strong, allowing us to host and maintain our three websites—Members, Database, and Test Admin. This support extends to ongoing research across our 70 Austin family lines, the production of monthly virtual webinars, and continued funding for both our Y-DNA surname project and our autosomal DNA project.

We also maintain three active committees. The Database Committee oversees website and database maintenance and manages our partnership with the Allen County Public Library. The NPE Committee reviews non-paternal events identified through DNA testing and determines how best to document them in our databases while balancing privacy considerations. The Webinar Committee identifies and organizes our monthly presentation schedule.

This year's webinar series covered a broad range of topics, including Autosomal and X-DNA, DNA triangulation, the Big Y-700 test and its relevance to our database

lines, identifying NPEs, and using DNA evidence to prove DAR lines. We also explored effective uses of AI in genealogy, the F.A.N. Club methodology, and the application of General Land Office (GLO) records in genealogical research.

In addition, we hosted two interactive Meet & Greet sessions: the first inviting members to share which ancestor they would most like to invite to dinner, and the second featuring an "Ask the Genealogist" Q&A with our distinguished experts. Planning for next year's programming is already well underway, so please let us know if there are topics you would like to see presented.

I also want to express my gratitude to Alice Martin for her many years of selfless service to AFAOA. Alice served as President from 1999-2003 and, for many years, simultaneously held the roles of Conference Chair, Newsletter Editor, and Membership Chair. She passed the Conference Chair position to her daughter, Elizabeth Neithamer, in 2015. Earlier this year, she stepped down as Newsletter Editor, passing the responsibility to a small team led by Mike Wright, and this month, she is handing over the Membership Chair role to Debbi Brennan. Her dedication over more than 25 years is extraordinary, her experience and knowledge of the organization is priceless, and AFAOA is unquestionably stronger because of her efforts.

I hope to see you at our next monthly webinar, and I encourage you to contribute by placing your vote for the location of our 2026 conference. As winter settles in and you consider becoming more involved with the AFAOA organization, remember this bit of wisdom: "Noah's Ark was built by volunteers; the Titanic was built by professionals."

David Neithamer
president@afaoa.org

Austin Databases, *continued from page 2*

Charlotte, Frederick B, Emma Mary and Catherine from 1813 to about 1830. Frederick Austin died in 1829 and is buried in Prospect Cemetery, Prospect, Oneida Co., New York. After Frederick's death, his wife Sarah lived with her children for years. She did not remarry. Sarah passed away in Camden, NY at the home of her son Gardner Austin in 1878 at age 88 and was buried there in Camden, NY.

Austin Families Association of America Newsletter

Winter
2025



Back Row: Bill Austin, Dave Neithamer, Anne Alves, Mike Wright, Ann Wright, John Clinard, Rosa Austin, Thomas Austin, Craig Austin, Art Sikes
Seated: Beverly Sikes, Cherie Austin, Carol Hagglund, Debbi Brennan, Johnny Applesseed, Elizabeth Neithamer, Susan Lewis
Not Pictured: Lee Austin, Peter Austin, Barbara Bryce, Tim Hunter, Ann McCormick

Austin Families Association Conference

Fort Wayne, Indiana October 9 – 11, 2025

The 2025 Austin Families Association conference was held October 9 – 11, at the Courtyard in downtown Fort Wayne, Indiana. Austin cousins and friends gathered once again to hear outstanding speakers, take advantage of the exceptional research opportunities at the Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center, and enjoy time together.

Early arrivals visited the historic Old Fort—a faithful reconstruction of the 1815 original—and the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, a lush and distinctive



oasis in the heart of the city. On Thursday morning, AFAOA members received a tour and orientation of the Genealogy Center from Curt Witcher, Manager and Director of

Special Collections, providing a helpful foundation for research throughout the weekend. The Thursday evening Welcome Reception offered attendees the chance to enjoy drinks, hors d'oeuvres, and the opportunity to meet and reconnect with Austin family members and friends.

Friday morning, we officially opened the Conference in the Foster Room with coffee, tea, and time to get settled with our computers. Conference Chair Elizabeth Neithamer welcomed attendees before introducing President Dave Neithamer, who had a special “guest” for us. Imagine our surprise when our very own Edith Austin Moore, founder of AFAOA, appeared on-screen—brought to life through the magic of AI—to welcome us to this year’s gathering. It was a special moment to see her “come to life.”



Austin Families Association of America Newsletter

Winter
2025



Our first speaker was Bob Jones, a volunteer and Board member at Fort Wayne's historic Old Fort. Bob shared the rich history of "Historic Fort Wayne," built along the St. Mary's River in 1815 and serving as a cornerstone of the early settlement.

Next, with "Ask a Genealogist," we had the opportunity to bring any research questions and brick walls to a panel of three of our most knowledgeable researchers: VP Anne Alves, Past-President John Clinard, and Genealogist Susan Lewis. We can all use a little help from time to time, and more than one person walked away with some good information to pursue from this talk.

After breaking for lunch, we reconvened to hear from Bill Austin, our Webmaster and one of AFAOA's vice presidents, who spoke about his experience sharing his life story with his family through *Storyworth: The Story of Our Lives*. Storyworth is a program that helps create a personalized memoir for your family through simple questions which lead you to reflect on memorable moments, life lessons, and stories. The collected responses are then turned into a book to share with your family—an invaluable way to preserve the person behind the names and dates. It is truly a project worth the time invested.

We continued our afternoon sessions by welcoming Curt Witcher from the ACPL Genealogy Center. With decades of experience in the genealogical field, Curt presented *Beyond Hatched, Matched & Dispatched: Methods for Finding Our Families' Stories*. Our lives are much more than when and where we were born, married, and passed away, and Curt shared with us helpful tips and strategies useful in our own efforts to fill in the larger picture of our ancestors' lives.

Curt then followed with an *Update on Our Partnership with ACPL*, reviewing the ongoing collaboration that began after our 2019 conference in Fort Wayne. He highlighted the Center's progress in scanning and digitizing many boxes of AFAOA materials—from research notebooks to scrapbooks. These digitized collections are being uploaded to the ACPL website and made available to the general public. We appreciate the many hours the Genealogy Center has devoted to this important project!

We resumed Saturday morning with a fascinating presentation by AFAOA President Dave Neithamer, "Using AI as Your Personal Genealogy Assistant." AI has increasingly become part of our daily lives—often in ways we scarcely notice. Dave provided an insightful overview of the latest developments in how AI can support genealogical research, outline its strengths and limitations, and clarify what it can and cannot do.

Next, we heard from one of our own Austin cousins from the Robert Austin of Kingstown, RI line. Thomas MacEntee, who transitioned from a career in IT to become a genealogy educator and author, presented "After You're



Gone: Future Proofing Your Genealogy." He reminded us that each of us has a responsibility to safeguard our research and ensure it is preserved for future generations. Thomas offered valuable guidance and practical strategies for creating a realistic plan to organize and protect our genealogical work so that the next generation of researchers can build upon the years of hard work.

Our afternoon session began with the Annual Meeting. President Dave Neithamer provided a thorough update on the State of the Association; the complete report can be found on the AFAOA website under the Members Login

continued on page 6

Austin Families Association of America Newsletter

Winter
2025

Association Conference, continued from page 5

section, in the AFAOA files. New initiatives have been introduced this year, including a monthly webinar series on genealogical topics for the general membership. We also heard reports from various officers and committees before turning to nominations and a discussion of potential locations for our 2026 Conference.

AFAOA has met annually since 1942, with only a few exceptions—such as during World War II and the Covid pandemic. With members in 41 states, these conferences are held in different locations around the country. During the Annual Meeting, members in attendance may nominate locations for the following year's conference and vote as needed to narrow the list to two finalists. The two locations are then put to a vote by the membership at large to choose the location of the next conference

This year's nominations included Seattle (WA), Salt Lake City (UT), Biloxi (MS), Gatlinburg (TN), Portland (OR), and Gettysburg (PA). Those present voted to narrow the field to Biloxi, Mississippi, and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. In this newsletter, all members now have the opportunity to vote for the official location of our 2026



conference!

Following the conclusion of the meeting, attendees walked to the Genealogy Center for "Caring for Your Family Archives," a program geared toward the preservation of our personal family archives, led by Genealogist Librarian, Sara Allen.

Our 2025 conference concluded with socializing at Connor's Kitchen + Bar, followed by a delicious Italian buffet dinner at the Courtyard. We were joined by American folk hero Johnny Appleseed (portrayed by Steve McPhail), who spent the later years of his life in Fort Wayne. Through humorous stories and thoughtful answers to our questions, he offered a memorable glimpse into his life, pioneer customs, and the era in which he lived.

All too soon it was time to say goodbye, but we're already looking forward to seeing each other next year. We hope you will consider joining us next year and discover for yourself what makes this a special gathering of friends and cousins. Whether in Biloxi or Gettysburg, we hope to see you in 2026!

Elizabeth Neithamer
AFAOA Conference Chair

Good Chemistry

By Mike Wright

As we were leaving the Annual Conference in Fort Wayne, my wife Ann remarked that there seemed to be good chemistry among the attendees. Hmm... chemistry, I thought. What could explain that? Perhaps it's right there in our organization's name:

Au-S-Ti-N

Au (Gold) – *Valuable!* Gold represents the richness of the friendships and valuable knowledge we share through the association.

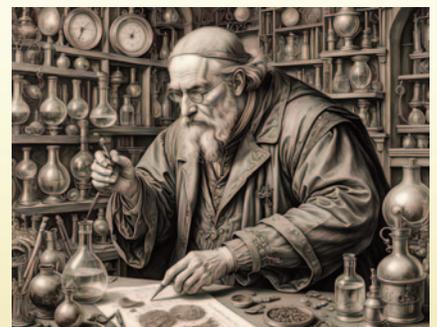
S (Sulfur) – *Supportive.* Sulfur is essential for life, found in proteins and biological molecules. (And not to worry—pure sulfur is odorless; it's only when hydrogen tags along that things get unpleasant!)

Ti (Titanium) – *Strong and helpful.*

Titanium strengthens other metals, much like our members strengthen one another through shared research and collaboration.

N (Nitrogen) – *Tolerant and vital.* Nitrogen is stable and abundant—found in the air we breathe and, fittingly, in our DNA.

Speaking of DNA—if you are a male Austin and haven't yet done so, please consider connecting with **Art Sikes** to take the **Big Y DNA test**. It's a great way to deepen our understanding of the Austin family's shared lineage.



Austin Families Association of America Newsletter

Winter
2025



VOTE FOR THE 2026 CONFERENCE SITE [One vote per membership]

Vote in one of the following ways:

1. **Vote by mail.** Use the ballot below.
2. **Vote by e-mail.** Send the information requested on the ballot to: conference@afaoa.org
3. **Vote on-line.** On the AFAOA web site, select "Annual Conference" on the sidebar and follow directions.

Include your comments on date preference, the reason you are interested in that location, etc.

Biloxi, Mississippi

The city of Biloxi occupies a low-lying sandy peninsula that is bordered by the bay of Biloxi on the north and east and on the south by the Mississippi Sound. Archaeological artifacts prove the existence of Native Americans on the Biloxi peninsula long before European settlement. The name Biloxi, which means First People, is the legacy of the historic tribe that greeted the first French expedition in February 1699. Biloxi operated as the capital of the Louisiana Territory from 1720 to 1722, when it moved to New Orleans. Biloxi remained a French outpost until 1727. French occupation ended in 1763. Britain (1763-1783), Spain (1783-1810), and the Republic of West Florida (1810-1811) hoisted their flags over Biloxi and the Mississippi Coast, which was attached to the Mississippi Territory in 1812. The Territory entered statehood in 1817. The early 19th century resort era began as steamboats brought yellow fever refugees from New Orleans and the surrounding areas. Many built hotels and summer homes along the beachfront, and some chose to stay. The 1888 establishment of the seafood industry made Biloxi the seafood capital of the world in 1904. By 1920 the seafood industry and tourism were the drivers of Biloxi's economy. Local highlights include Beauvoir, the Ohr O'Keefe Museum of Art, the Maritime & Seafood History Museum and the Biloxi Lighthouse. Beauvoir, the Jefferson Davis Home and Presidential Library, was the final home of the only president of the Confederate States of America. The Biloxi Lighthouse was one of three Mississippi Sound light-houses authorized in 1847.

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Beautiful and historic Gettysburg is located just 10 miles from Pennsylvania's Southern border. In fact, it is actually closer in distance to Baltimore (60 miles) and Washington D.C. (90 miles) than it is to Philadelphia (130 miles). It was founded in 1786 and named after early settler Samuel Gettys. Known for Gettysburg National Battlefield, site of a major turning point in the Civil War, and now part of the Gettysburg National Military Park. The park also includes the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center and Gettysburg National Cemetery, where a memorial marks the site of Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Gettysburg Address. The Visitor Center features a variety of exhibits for visitors to orient themselves, including a museum; "A New Birth of Freedom," a 30-minute movie narrated by Morgan Freeman; and the Cyclorama, the largest painting in North America, which brings to life Pickett's Charge on the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg. Other attractions include The Gettysburg Museum of History, a unique museum that spans several different historical periods, and the Eisenhower National Historic Site. There are many historic buildings and sites throughout Gettysburg. Check out the David Willis House and see where Abraham Lincoln put the final touches on his Gettysburg Address. Visit the Shriver House and the Jennie Wade House to learn about the civilian experience of the Battle of Gettysburg. Go to the Seminary Ridge Museum and experience the first day of the battle. Local genealogical resources include the Adams County Historical Society and the Pennsylvania State Archives.

----- Please cut here -----



2026 Conference Site Ballot:

_____ Biloxi, Mississippi
 _____ Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Comments: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Mail to: AFAOA
 c/o Elizabeth Neithamer
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 Midland, MI 48642

Austin Families Association of America

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Address Service Requested

Austin Families Association of America

Objectives

- To gather, preserve and disseminate Austin genealogies and Austin family histories.
- To establish a specialized database of Austin information that can assist genealogists and family members to learn as much as possible about their Austin heritage.
- To foster acquaintances and long-term friendships among the members of all branches of Austin families.

Please notice the membership renewal date on your address label.

If you receive your Newsletter only by email, find your dues expiration date on our website (AFAOA Members Login – Profile)

Annual dues are \$20.

Dues may be paid for 1, 2 or 3 years

It is now possible to renew your membership and pay dues by credit card on the website. (You do not need a PayPal account.)

If you prefer, you may pay by check.

Send to: Austin Families Association
P.O. Box 92
Blooming Glen, PA 18911-0092