

Austin Powder Company

Black Blasting and Sporting Powders

by Douglas K. Miller

August 7, 2023

This year, Austin Powder Company is celebrating having been in business for 190 years.¹ The company was started in 1833 by five brothers from Vermont: Daniel (29), Alvin (27), Lorenzo (18), Henry (18), and Linus (16). Someone in their hometown of Wilmington, Vermont gave them a small amount of money and urged them to move west and start a powder business. They set out in 1832 with a wagon and team.² They got as far as Kansas City, Missouri, where they found supplies of saltpeter (potassium nitrate) and sulfur, two of the three essential ingredients of black powder. The third is charcoal which is easily produced. However, the area was sparsely populated, and their potential market was limited to small amounts of black gunpowder for hunting and defense against hostile Indians.³ So, after replenishing their cash by working in local lead mines for a while, they started back east until they reached Akron, Ohio, which they found to their liking.⁴ Akron, though only eight years old at the time and having a population of 200, had good business opportunities and potentially a strong demand for powder.

The five brothers established a small, water-powered gunpowder mill at Old Forge and crewed it themselves. Later known as the Newburg Mill, this site was specifically chosen by the brothers because it had fine water power and it had access to the local transportation network of roads and canals. From Akron, the Austin Powder Company gained access to [a] number of markets which included coal, iron, and clay mining, quarries, municipal construction, railroad construction, and canal projects.⁵

Coal had been discovered in Ohio east of Old Forge as early as 1808. Additional discoveries were made in that same year northeast of Old Forge. In 1833 and for many years thereafter coal mines provided a steady market for Austin's blasting powder. Both Akron and Austin continued to grow. By 1850, the city's population reached 3,266. The Cleveland, Akron and Columbus railroad was completed two years later, connecting Akron to the east by means of the Cleveland and Pittsburgh railroad. In 1864, the Atlantic and Great Western Railway was built, giving Austin access to the eastern Ohio coal mines and Pittsburgh. Akron's population had grown to 5,000 by this time. Austin's fortunes steadily improved. "It found an increasingly profitable market in

¹ Austin Powder, History, <https://www.austinpowder.com/unitedstates/company/history/>, accessed July 28, 2023.

² Arthur Pine Van Gelder and Hugo Schlatter, *History of the Explosives Industry in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), 265.

³ Austin Powder Company, *130 Years of Explosives, The Story of Austin Powder Company*, 1963, 4.

⁴ Eric Twitty, "Austin Powder Co., 1833-Post 1960," *Collectors' Mining Review*, Winter 1997, 21.

⁵ Eric Twitty, 21.

mining, quarrying, and heavy construction industries for black blasting powder as well as a constantly growing demand for gunpowder.”⁶

In 1867, Austin purchased Cleveland Powder Company which had built a powder mill on the outskirts of Cleveland in Newburgh Township. Austin’s new location was adjacent to the Ohio Canal, two important railways, and the main highway to Pittsburgh, giving Austin access to markets both east and west of its newly acquired Cleveland mill. Austin operated both its Akron and Cleveland powder mills until 1871, when all powder production was combined in Cleveland.⁷



Austin Powder Company, Newburgh Mill, on the Ohio & Erie Canal, Cleveland, (1890)⁸

When 1880 arrived, the population of Cleveland had grown to over 160,000. Industry was moving toward Austin’s Newburgh mill and business was booming. Coal production was increasing and with it the need for blasting powder. The quarrying and construction businesses were robust, and sporting powder had become a growing item. In 1884, Austin invested in the Chamberlin Cartridge Co., a Cleveland manufacturing concern specializing in making shotgun shells. As a result of this and related transactions, Austin became Chamberlin’s sole supplier of rifle powder.⁹



Wagon Hauling Kegs of Austin Powder from Newburgh Mill (1890)¹⁰

⁶ Austin Powder Company, *130 Years of Explosives, The Story of Austin Powder Company*, 5.

⁷ Austin Powder Company, *130 Years of Explosives, The Story of Austin Powder Company*, 6.

⁸ Austin Powder Company (OEC_79.tif), Louis Baus Canal Photograph Collection, Archival Services, University Libraries, The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio.

⁹ Austin Powder Company, *130 Years of Explosives, The Story of Austin Powder Company*, 7.

¹⁰ Austin Powder Company on the Ohio & Erie Canal (OEC_77.tif), Louis Baus Canal Photograph Collection, Archival Services, University Libraries, The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio.

Despite nationwide recessions in the late 1890s, Austin continued to expand. The coal mining industry remained its biggest customer, and the company enjoyed an increase in demand for its blasting powder from its quarrying and construction customers. To handle this increased demand, Austin built a blasting powder mill at Glenwillow to supplement Newburgh's output. The demand for its sporting powder remained steady. Crack Shot, Club Sporting, and Champion Ducking were among Austin's leading sporting brands.¹¹

By the beginning of the 20th Century, sales of Austin's sporting powder were starting to decline. Serious production and other problems made 1906 a disappointing business year. Use of black sporting powder continued to decline. Prices eventually dropped so low that its manufacture ceased to be profitable.¹²

Twitty writes that, despite the upsurge in demand for high explosives in the 1880s and 1890s, for decades Austin continued to limit itself to making blasting powder. Then, in about 1910, Austin got involved in high explosives when it began selling Gold Medal Dynamite manufactured by Illinois Powder Mfg. Company. The product sold well. The success of Gold Medal Dynamite sales coupled with increased demand from Austin's customers for an Austin-brand of dynamite impelled Austin to give serious consideration to its manufacture. This began to bear fruit in the late 1920s, when Austin sought an appropriate plant site and began planning marketing and manufacturing strategies. In 1929, Austin found a fine site "strategically located on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in MacAther, Ohio and construction began at once." By 1930, Austin had built a modern dynamite manufacturing plant with a production capacity of eight tons per day. Its products included straight dynamite, gelatin dynamite, and permissibles. All products were sold

AUSTIN POWDER CO.

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CLEVELAND,
OHIO.

Makers of the following
Celebrated Brands of
Gunpowder:

✕

✕

Austin's Rifle,
Austin's Club Sporting,
Austin's Champion Ducking,
Austin's Crack Shot.

Especial Attention is Called to

. **Austin's New Brand,**

"Crack Shot."

It is Clean and Strong; Far-killing for Duck and other Game, and is the
Most Popular of all Powders.

Write for Pamphlet.

Powders can not be sent by Express.

The AUSTIN POWDER COMPANY'S Powder can be obtained through
the following-named Distributing Agents:

E. S. RICE, Manager, 62 Wabash Avenue	Chicago, Ill.
W. L. GARBER, Manager, 99 W. Second Street	Cincinnati, Ohio.
A. AUSTIN, Manager, 93 Jefferson Avenue	Detroit, Mich.
M. O'CONNOR & COMPANY	Indianapolis, Ind.
RECTOR & WILHELMY COMPANY	Omaha, Neb.
L. C. THORNHILL	New Orleans, La.
W. L. PIERCE & COMPANY	Peoria, Ill.
TENK HARDWARE COMPANY	Quincy, Ill.
GEORGE HAW & COMPANY	Ottumwa, Iowa.
ADAM DECKER & COMPANY	St. Paul, Minn.
FRIESE BOAT & CYCLE COMPANY	Milwaukee, Wis.
PEEPLER & TROTTER	Chattanooga, Tenn.
R. KUPFERSCHMIDT	Memphis, Tenn.
CRUZE, BUFFAT & BUCKWELL	Knoxville, Tenn.
BIRMINGHAM ARMS COMPANY	Birmingham, Ala.
CHRISTIAN CRAFT GROCERY COMPANY	Mobile, Ala.
J. S. WARREN & COMPANY	Montgomery, Ala.
J. J. & J. E. MADDOX	Atlanta, Ga.
BUHLER & COMPANY	Detroit, Mich.
HASTINGS & REMINGTON	Grand Rapids, Mich.

Ask your Dealer for the Austin Shot-Gun Cartridges.

¹¹ Austin Powder Company, *130 Years of Explosives, The Story of Austin Powder Company*, 9. The advertisement is from William Bruce Lefflingwell, *The Art of Wing Shooting* (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Company, 1895).

¹² Austin Powder Company, *130 Years of Explosives, The Story of Austin Powder Company*, 11.

under the Red Diamond brand name and logo. Nonetheless, as late as 1950, Austin remained one of a handful of companies still making blasting powder.¹³

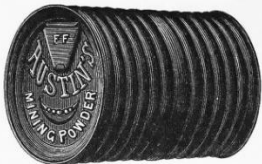
AUSTIN POWDER CO.
EXPLOSIVES. 807

AUSTIN POWDER COMPANY

CLEVELAND, OHIO

1229 Rockefeller Building

Established in
1833.



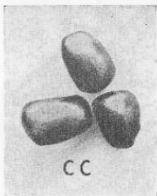
Factory at
FALLS JUNCTION, O.

Branch Offices at
DETROIT,
ST. LOUIS,
CHICAGO.

Blasting Powder, Dynamite, Blasting Supplies



CCC



CC



C



F



FF



FFF



FFFF

Austin Blasting Powder is manufactured of the best materials obtainable, and is of uniform quality and size. It is the standard powder for coal mining, and has been for many years. For other kinds of blasting it has no equal. It is made in seven sizes, and is calculated to meet every need in the blasting line, where Black Powder can be used at all.

Where High Explosives are required, we recommend "GOLD MEDAL" Dynamite, which is all that its name implies, and is manufactured in many

different strengths, both in Nitro Glycerine and Ammonia grades. You are bound to get results by using "GOLD MEDAL."

A complete stock of "Gold Medal" Dynamite and Blasting Supplies is carried at Cleveland, and at our branch offices.

Our shipping facilities are unequalled, ensuring our customers prompt service at all times. Write for prices.

Gold Medal Dynamite

MINING CATALOGUES

Mining Catalogue for the Year 1918¹⁴

¹³ Eric Twitty, "Austin Powder Co., 1833-Post 1960," 22.

¹⁴ *The Mining Catalogue for the Year 1918, Indexed by Firms Represented, Their Branch Offices and Agencies, and by Products* (Pittsburgh, PA: Keystone Consolidated Publishing Co., Inc, 1918), 807.

While its black powder days are now long gone, Austin Powder Company continues to be an important producer of industrial explosives and accessories, serving mining, construction, and seismic exploration customers in North America and throughout the world.¹⁵

Collectors are probably most familiar with the beautiful dynamite boxes used by Austin Powder Company and with its colorful blasting cap tins. These continue to be highly sought after and collectable. Not so well known, but equally desirable and rarer, are the labels, containers, and advertising ephemera associate with Austin's sporting powders. A few of these are pictured in the attached Appendix.

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Empire Publishing Company. *Resources of Onondaga County, A Complete Review of the Manufacturing and Jobbing Interests of Syracuse*. Syracuse, N. Y.: Masters & Stone Printers and Binders, 1883.

Eric Twitty. "Austin Powder Co., 1833-Post 1960." *Collectors' Mining Review*, Winter 1997.

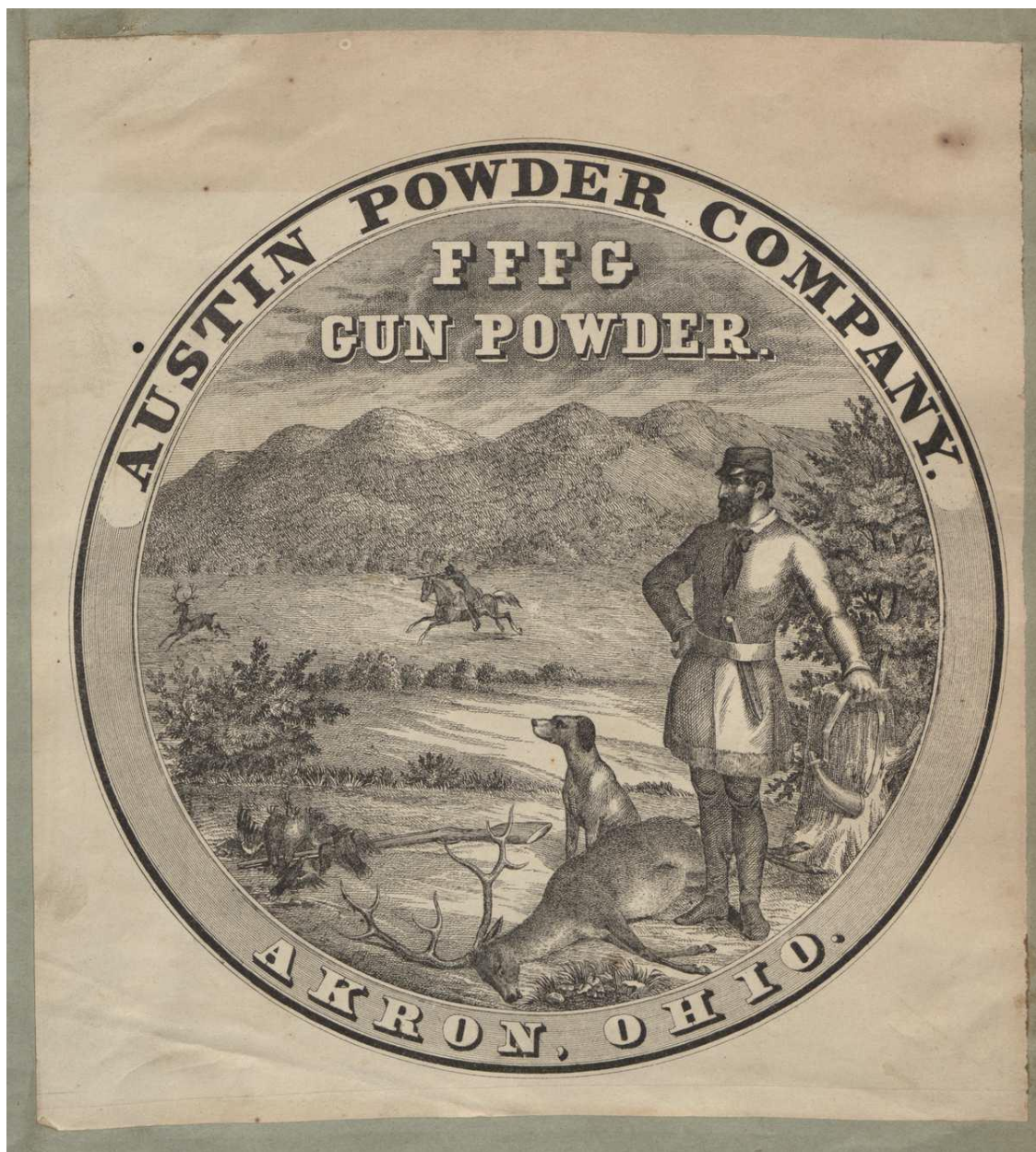
L. C. Smith. *The Smith Top-Action Double Cross-Bolted Double Barrel Shot Gun*. Syracuse, N. Y.: Columbia Press Print, Herald Building, 1884.

The Mining Catalogue for the Year 1918, Indexed by Firms Represented, Their Branch Offices and Agencies, and by Products. Pittsburgh, PA: Keystone Consolidated Publishing Co., Inc, 1918.

William Bruce Lefflingwell. *The Art of Wing Shooting*. Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Company, 1895.

¹⁵ ReferenceforBusiness.com, Austin Powder Company, <https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/history2/10/Austin-Powder-Company.html>, accessed July 28, 2023.

APPENDIX
Austin Sporting Powder



Volume 3, American Gunpowder Labels, 1830-1865
Hagley Museum and Library, https://digital.hagley.org/20091123_2,
Accessed July 8, 2023.



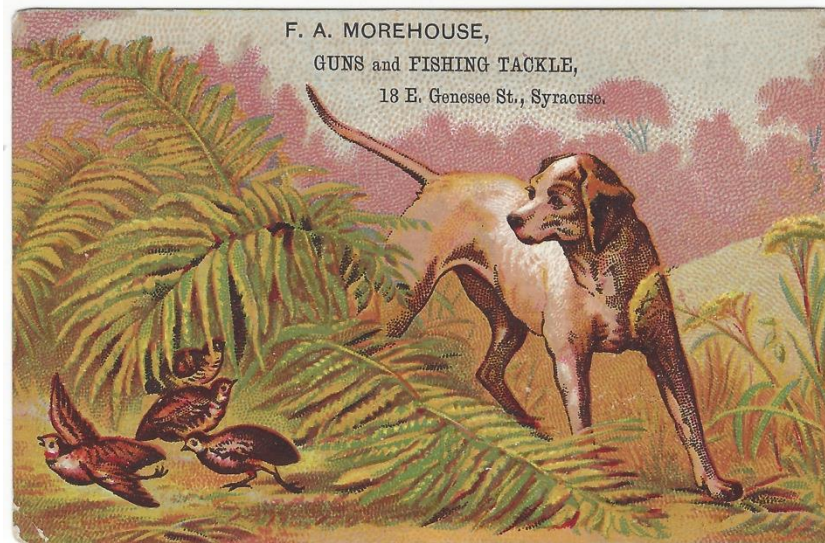
Austin Powder Company, Austin Rifle Powder Keg,
Sold by William Morford Antiques,
Antique Advertising.com

<https://antiqueadvertising.com/free-antique-price-guide/sporting-huntingfishingammo/austin-rifle-powder-keg/>

Accessed July 8, 2023.

Dimensions: 9.5 inches by 7.75 inches in diameter

This powder keg sold at auction on May 15, 2015 for \$1,207.50.



A635

F. A. MOREHOUSE,
(Successor to BARNUM & MOREHOUSE.)
—WHOLESALE DEALER IN—

AGENT FOR AUSTIN POWDER, BAKER, PARKER, PIEFER AND LEFEVER HAMMERLESS SHOT GUNS.	GUNS REVOLVERS, RIFLES	AGENT FOR BALLARD, WESSON, REMINGTON, WINCHESTER AND KENNEDY
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AMMUNITION & FISHING TACKLE.
 SOLE AGENT FOR CENTRAL N. Y. OF
THE NEW SMITH TOP ACTION, DOUBLE CROSS BOLTED SHOT GUN
 GUARANTEED TO BE THE HARDEST AND CLOSEST SHOOTING GUN MADE.
 18 EAST GENESEE STREET, SYRACUSE, N. Y.

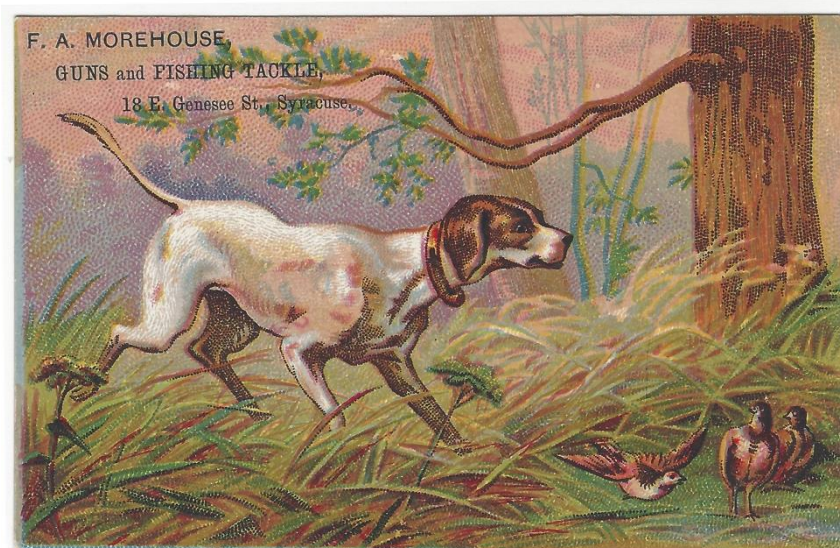
Advertising Trade Card, ca. 1884

Dimensions: 4.25 inches by 2.75 inches

Collection of Douglas K. Miller

Of F. A. Morehouse Sporting Goods, an 1883 guide to the businesses of Syracuse writes, "This important business ... is now under the sole management of Mr. F. A. Morehouse, who in December 1882, succeeded to the business formerly conducted by Barnum & Morehouse. ... Mr. Morehouse is ... sole agent here for the Austin Sporting Powder, and handles other brands, particularly DuPont's, extensively."¹⁶

¹⁶ Empire Publishing Company, *Resources of Onondaga County, A Complete Review of the Manufacturing and Jobbing Interests of Syracuse* (Syracuse, N. Y.: Masters & Stone Printers and Binders, 1883), 206.



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18 EAST GENESEE STREET, SYRACUSE, N. Y.

Advertising Trade Card, ca. 1884

Dimensions: 4.25 inches by 2.75 inches

Collection of Douglas K. Miller

This advertising trade card and the advertising trade card on the previous page can be dated by their reference to "The New Smith Top Action, Double Cross Bolted Shot Gun." This double-barreled, side-by-side shotgun was introduced to the sporting community by L. C. Smith of Syracuse, N. Y., on July 1, 1884.¹⁷

¹⁷ L. C. Smith, *The Smith Top-Action Double Cross-Bolted Double Barrel Shot Gun* (Syracuse, N. Y.: Columbia Press Print, Herald Building, 1884), 2.