



James B. Austin

James Bliss Austin

1904–1988

By Harold W. Paxton

James Bliss Austin retired from the United States Steel Corporation as administrative vice-president, research and technology, in 1968 and then continued an active professional career. He died on May 25, 1988, at the age of eighty-four.

Dr. Austin was born in Washington, D.C., on July 16, 1904. He attended the Washington public schools and graduated from Central High School. He attended Lehigh University, graduating with a degree in chemical engineering in 1925, and subsequently received a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from Yale in 1928, studying with Professor John Johnston.

In 1926 the U.S. Steel Corporation (USS) of New Jersey decided to establish one of the first modern central research facilities in the United States at Kearney, New Jersey, and selected John Johnston to be the first director. He persuaded Jim Austin to join him in what was to be a lifelong career with USS. After several years as a physical chemist, he moved through positions of increasing responsibility and became the chief technical officer of USS before his retirement.

During the years at Kearney, which spanned the depression during the 1930s, he was part of a relatively small but influential group that changed the face of production and heat treatment of steel. Some of his distinguished colleagues, whose names are still part of the lexicon of modern metallurgy, were Edgar C. Bain, Lawrence S. Darken (both later elected to the National

Academy of Sciences), and Marcus Grossman. He himself was elected in 1967 to the National Academy of Engineering.

In 1956 the successes and financial impact of the Kearney laboratory and a desire to consolidate research work of many of the operating divisions of the company led to a decision to create a new central laboratory in Monroeville, Pennsylvania, just outside Pittsburgh. Jim was appointed vice-president of fundamental research in 1956, vice-president of research and technology in 1957, and to his final position in 1958.

From its early years in Monroeville, the laboratory was ranked among the finest in the world and was on the "visit list" for all overseas (and many domestic!) metallurgists, or, as they were beginning to think of themselves, materials scientists. Jim Austin could feel rightfully proud of the climate he was able to create. In addition to the outstanding staff, the facilities were superb, with the high point being perhaps the first million-volt electron microscope.

Throughout his career, he was very active in a wide range of professional societies including the American Chemical Society; the American Ceramic Society (ACS); the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical, and Petroleum Engineers (AIME); and the American Society for Metals (now ASM International). He was elected a fellow of ACS, ASM, AIME, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science and to several honorary fraternities, such as Phi Beta Kappa and Tau Beta Pi, and was an honorary member of AIME, ASM, the Iron and Steel Institute of Japan, and the Metals Society of London. He was the 1954 president of ASM and the 1973 president of AIME. He was invited to deliver several important memorial lectures to various societies and was awarded the Edward DeMille Campbell Memorial Lecture of the American Society for Metals. He also served on a number of civic committees at the local and state level.

He and his wife, Janet, were fond of traveling. They particularly enjoyed Japan, and over the years Jim accumulated a superb collection of Japanese wood block prints, which was eventually exhibited at the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh. He also had a major collection concerning Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his works, particularly Sherlock Holmes. Jim was a great lover of

music and a regular contributor to WQED, the listener-supported local classical radio station (both financially and as an occasional "disc jockey!").

To the end of his life, he was an active member of the Pittsburgh "Metallurgical Luncheon Club," and his recitation of limericks at the annual Christmas party was always a highlight of this event.

His wife died shortly before him; they had a son, Peter, a daughter, Winifred (Mrs. Donald C. Morton), and several grandchildren.