

**HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY
BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES**

HIST-6 R. IV. 6/83

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION

59 SOUTH PROSPECT STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT, 06106
(860) 568-3005

Final

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Town No.:	Site No.:
UTM:	18 691280 4627420
QUAD:	Hartford North
DISTRICT <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> NR	IF NR SPECIFY <input type="checkbox"/> Actual <input type="checkbox"/> Potential

IDENTIFICATION

1. BUILDING NAME (Common)	(Historic) AUSTIN ORGAN COMPANY FACTORY
2. TOWN/CITY Hartford	VILLAGE Hartford
3. STREET AND NUMBER (and/or location) 158 Woodland Street	COUNTY Hartford
4. OWNER Woodland Lofts, Inc., 145 S. Center Street, Windsor Locks, CT 06096	
5. USE (Present) vacant	(Historic) Industrial - production of pipe organs
6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	EXTERIOR VISIBLE FROM PUBLIC ROAD <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	INTERIOR ACCESSIBLE IF YES, EXPLAIN By appointment
7. STYLE OF BUILDING utilitarian	DATE OF CONSTRUCTION 1899 +

DRAFT

DESCRIPTION

8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Clapboard	<input type="checkbox"/> Asbestos Siding
<input type="checkbox"/> Wood Shingle	<input type="checkbox"/> Asphalt Siding
<input type="checkbox"/> Board & Batten	<input type="checkbox"/> Stucco
<input type="checkbox"/> Aluminum Siding	<input type="checkbox"/> Concrete
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brick	<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldstone
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Cobblestone
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cut Stone
Type: _____	Type: <u>Brownstone window sills</u>
9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wood frame	<input type="checkbox"/> Post and beam
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Load bearing masonry	<input type="checkbox"/> Structural iron or steel
	<input type="checkbox"/> Balloon
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____
10. ROOF (Type)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Flat
<input type="checkbox"/> Gambrel	<input type="checkbox"/> Shed
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mansard
	<input type="checkbox"/> Hip
	<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor
	<input type="checkbox"/> Round
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sawtooth
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____
(Material)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wood shingle	<input type="checkbox"/> Roll asphalt
<input type="checkbox"/> Asphalt shingle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Built up
	<input type="checkbox"/> Tin
	<input type="checkbox"/> Slate
	<input type="checkbox"/> Tile
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____
11. NUMBER OF STORIES 3	APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS see continuation sheets
12. CONDITION (Structural)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good
<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated
	(Exterior)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good
	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair
	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated
13. INTEGRITY (Location)	WHEN?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On original site	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved
	(Alterations)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	IF YES, EXPLAIN
	Windows filled in for use as warehouse - see #17.
14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES	
<input type="checkbox"/> Barn	<input type="checkbox"/> Shed
<input type="checkbox"/> Carriage house	<input type="checkbox"/> Shop
	<input type="checkbox"/> Garage
	<input type="checkbox"/> Garden
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other landscape features or buildings (Specify) _____
15. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT	
<input type="checkbox"/> Open land	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodland
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Residential
	<input type="checkbox"/> Rural
	<input type="checkbox"/> Scattered buildings visible from site
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High building density
16. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS	
The surrounding area includes multi-family residential buildings, a medical center, and industrial buildings, among the latter of which is the current plant of Austin Organs, Inc.	

17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior)

The factory built by the Austin Organ Company on Woodland Street in Hartford is a complex of mostly 3-story, flat-roofed buildings that are joined together to form a hollow square (see Site Plan). The buildings are built of brick, with pilastered walls. The first part to be built, in 1899, includes 50 feet (six bays) in the center part of the west elevation, facing Woodland Street (Photograph 1), and extends eastward about 120 feet. The following year, the building was extended to the north another four bays; the resulting 40' by 65' addition was known as the "Erecting Room" (Photograph 2). In 1901, a 50' by 75' addition, known as the "Pipe Shop" (Photograph 3) was added along the south property line, with six bays on the Woodland Street elevation. The Pipe Shop is joined to the original factory by two four-bay connectors that are open on the first story so as to allow access to the interior yard (Photograph 4). The rear part of the Erecting Room, which originally had been a one-story wooden building, was rebuilt in brick a full three stories sometime before 1909. All these early portions have segmental-arched window openings, with brick heads and stone sills, set between the pilasters. The flat roofs are concealed by low parapets finished with simple corbelling and a dentil course. The foundation material for these portions could not be observed.

(continued)

18. ARCHITECT

Not known

BUILDER

Not known

19. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE

The Austin Organ Company Factory is significant because of the important role the company played in Hartford's economic history. For over a century now, Austin organs have been one of products that have made the city's name well-known throughout the country and even abroad. This factory was the place where Austin organs were manufactured from 1899 to 1937, when the company was reorganized as Austin Organs, Inc. and moved to the adjacent property just east of its original factory.

The Austin Organ Company's chief business was manufacturing large high-quality church, theater, and auditorium organs, though it also had a line of residential instruments marketed to the very wealthy. About 2,000 units were produced in the period 1899-1937. In 1911, the factory is said to have turned out ten major four-manual instruments, more than any other American manufacturer (*Hartford in 1912*, p. 211). Austin Organs were noted for their technical innovations, including a console that was especially compact and reliable, and, most importantly, the distinctive Universal Air Chest, which provided an exceptionally steady volume of air. The Universal Air Chest, which was adopted with variations by other major organ builders of the period, also allowed access to the organ's mechanisms while the air was on, a major advantage in adjusting and repairing the instrument.

The Austin Organ Company was not large in comparison with other Hartford manufacturers -- it had about 150 employees in 1906 -- but like Colt, Royal Typewriter, Arrow-Hart, and others, it held a substantial if not dominant place in its market, in large part because of its reputation for quality and reliability, its ongoing search for innovation, and the inventiveness of its founder, John T. Austin (1869-1948).

(continued)

SOURCES

Atlas of the City of Hartford and the Town of West Hartford. Springfield, MA: L. J. Richards, 1909.

Barnes, William H. *The Contemporary American Organ: Its Evolution, Design and Construction*. New York, NY: J. Fischer & Bro., 1952.

(continued)

PHOTO

PHOTOGRAPHER

Bruce Clouette

DATE

7/2007

VIEW

See continuation sheets

NEGATIVE ON FILE

COMPILED BY

NAME

Bruce Clouette

DATE

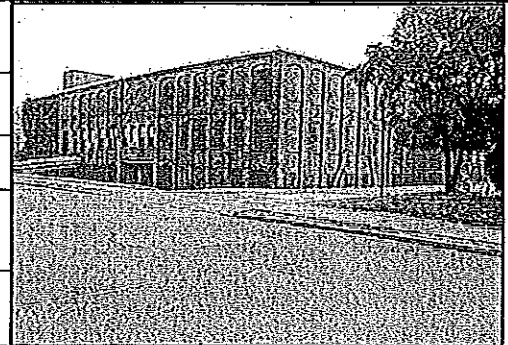
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ORGANIZATION

Archaeological and Historical Services, Inc.

ADDRESS

P.O. Box 543, Storrs, CT 06268



20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE

- None known
 Highways
 Vandalism
 Developers
 Other _____
 Renewal
 Private
 Deterioration
 Zoning
 Explanation _____

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HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM

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AUSTIN ORGAN COMPANY FACTORY

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17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (*continued*):

Appended to the rear of the complex, presumably built at the same time as the 1899 portion, is a one and two-story brick boiler house with an attached tall, square smokestack (Photograph 5). Figure 1 is an artist's view of the complex as it existed ca. 1906.

In 1914 the company expanded the factory by adding a 48' by 139' extension (Photograph 3, right). This 1914 portion also has brick pilastered walls and segmental-arched window openings, but instead of a continuous cornice, there is step-corbelling at the top of each recess between the pilasters. This part of the complex has a shallow-pitched gable roof, now covered with asphalt shingles, and a poured-concrete foundation. Also built that year was a one-story brick ell (Photograph 6) that originally served as a drying room.

Extending across the rear or east line of the property is a one-story brick garage and storage building (Photograph 7). The date of its construction is not known, but it appears to be a ca. 1950 replacement for the wood-frame lumber storage building shown on the 1922 Sanborn insurance map (see Figure 2).

In 1937, the organ factory was sold to the Windsor Shade Tobacco Company, which converted it for use as a tobacco warehouse. The small amount of equipment still present in the factory – a press, a set of scales, and a large drying machine – date from the tobacco company's occupancy. The chief change was the filling in of the window openings; a number of double-door openings with their original wood-panel doors were left unchanged (Photograph 8). A few second-floor windows on the west or Woodland Street elevation have modern metal sash; this was an office area for the Austin Organ Company that was re-used as offices by the tobacco company. A few examples of early or original eight-over-eight wooden sash remain in interior partitions that once were outside walls.

The interior features brick walls, wood floors, and timber post-and-beam interior structural members (Photograph 9). The posts have iron collars at the top where the beams meet, with the beams also fastened together by iron plates on each side (Photograph 10). Reflecting load-bearing requirements, the size of the framing members decreases from the first story to the third. Throughout the factory, brick interior partitions are closed off by sliding metal-clad fire doors (Photograph 11). The upper floors of the Erecting Room and Pipe Shop are completely open, with the roof decking carried on large wooden trusses (Photograph 12). The top floor of the 1914 part is also open, but there the roof trusses are constructed of steel angles (Photograph 13). Stairways are plainly detailed with wooden steps, railings, and newels. (Photograph 14).

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19. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE (*continued*):

John Turnell Austin was born in Poddington, England, and received his early training working for his father, a farmer and mechanic who hand-built six organs for local churches. Around 1889, at the age of 20, John T. Austin came to America and worked for the organ-building firm of Farrand & Votey in Detroit, Michigan. Three years later, he was joined by his younger brother Basil (1874-1958). In 1893, John T. Austin patented his Universal Air Chest, a room-sized structure built of heavy framing and thick planks that acted as an air reservoir. His employer, however, showed little interest in the innovation, so the Austins left for another Detroit firm, Clough & Warren, that was eager to adopt it. The first organ using the Austin patent was completed for the Central Christian Church in Detroit in 1893. In 1898, while the Austins were in Hartford installing a Clough & Warren organ in the Fourth Congregational Church, they received news that the firm's factory had burned to the ground, at which point the brothers decided to start their own company. In 1899, the Austins began building their factory on a lot on Woodland Street that they leased with an option to buy. Starting with just three employees, the brothers added to the factory over the next two years, tripling it in size; in 1904, they bought the property outright. John T. Austin served as president of the company and Basil Austin was the factory superintendent. The Board of Directors also included John Spencer Camp (1858-1946), a noted organist and composer of that period.

The following partial list of major organs produced at the Austin factory was compiled from various historical accounts:

- All Saints Cathedral, Albany, New York
- Atlanta Auditorium, Atlanta, Georgia
- City Hall, Portland, Maine
- Eastman Theater, Rochester, New York
- John Wanamaker Concert Hall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Los Angeles Auditorium, Los Angeles, California
- Medinah Temple, Chicago, Illinois
- Mormon Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah
- Public Ledger Auditorium, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

In addition, the Austin Organ Company produced more than 100 large theater organs, including sixteen in New York City alone (Landon, pp. 51-52), and at least three organs for major international expositions. It was claimed that, as of 1922, the Austin Organ Company was the single largest organ builder in America and had to its credit the three largest organs in the country (Burpee, Vol. I, p. 588).

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Although best known for the Universal Air Chest and the Austin console, John T. Austin developed many other technical innovations that influenced the entire industry; indeed, he is credited with more patents on pipe-organ mechanisms than any other builder (Barnes and Gammons, p. 80). Despite his patents, other manufacturers copied the details of Austin organs and adapted them to their own products. Regarding one such borrowing, John T. Austin is said to have commented, "Oh well, by the time they get to using that, I will have something better." (Barnes, p. 148). Austin received the Edward Longstreth Medal of Merit for mechanical excellence from the Franklin Institute in 1917. In 1918, when the Organ Builders' Association of America was organized, Austin was selected as its president.

In addition to its main line, the Austin Organ Company produced instruments intended for large country homes. Some of these had a provision for automatic operation, and the Hartford factory recorded music on rolls for sale to these customers. The Austin self-player mechanism could operate a residential organ's three 61-note manuals, the pedal keyboard, 32 stops, two expression shades, and the crescendo; when equipped with a magazine for the rolls, the organ could play for two hours uninterrupted, after which it shut itself off (Ochse, p. 331).

In 1935, the Austin brothers decided to retire. The assets of the company were sold to a new entity, Austin Organ, Inc., headed by a nephew of John Austin and Basil Austin's son. The new company moved production to a plant using both newly constructed and renovated buildings on the lot just to the east, and in 1937 the old factory was sold to the Windsor Shade Tobacco Company. Windsor Shade Tobacco was one of the region's largest growers; in addition to the former Austin factory, the company warehoused its tobacco in several other former manufacturing buildings along the river front and elsewhere in Hartford.

Architecturally, the Austin Organ Company Factory represents the typical "mill construction" of the turn of the 20th century: multi-story brick construction, flat or near-flat roofs, stout timber interior framing, and layered floors carried directly on the beams. These features created the most fire-resistant construction then available, especially when supplemented by automatic sprinklers. The use of roof trusses on the top story was a common way of providing uninterrupted interior space, something not possible on the lower floors because of the necessity of rows of columns. The utilitarian appearance of the factory, with ornament limited to some simple corbelling, was also characteristic of the period.

Integrity

The only major change to the historic appearance of the building is the blocking up of the window openings when it was used as a tobacco warehouse. This appears to be a reversible alteration.

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ADDITIONAL SOURCES:

Barnes, William H., and Edward B. Gammons. *Two Centuries of American Organ Building*. Glen Rock, N.J.: Fischer and Bro., 1970.

Burpee, Charles W. *History of Hartford County, Connecticut*. Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1928.

Hartford in 1912, Story of the Capitol City, Present and Prospective. Hartford: Hartford Post, 1912.

Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Annual Reports, 1900-1914* [title varies]. Each year (or biennium, in the case of later reports), described new factory construction since the previous report.

Hartford Land Records. Vol. 266, p. 651 (1899); Vol. 300, p. 622 (1904). Hartford City and Town Clerk.

Henney, William F. *Hartford, Commonwealth of Connecticut*. Hartford: Connecticut Magazine Company, 1906.

Landon, John W. *Beyond the Mighty Wurlitzer: The History of the Theatre Pipe Organ*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983.

Ochse, Orpha. *The History of the Organ in the United States*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1975.

Sanborn Map and Publishing Co. Insurance maps of Hartford, 1900-1947. Microfilm, Connecticut State Library, Hartford.

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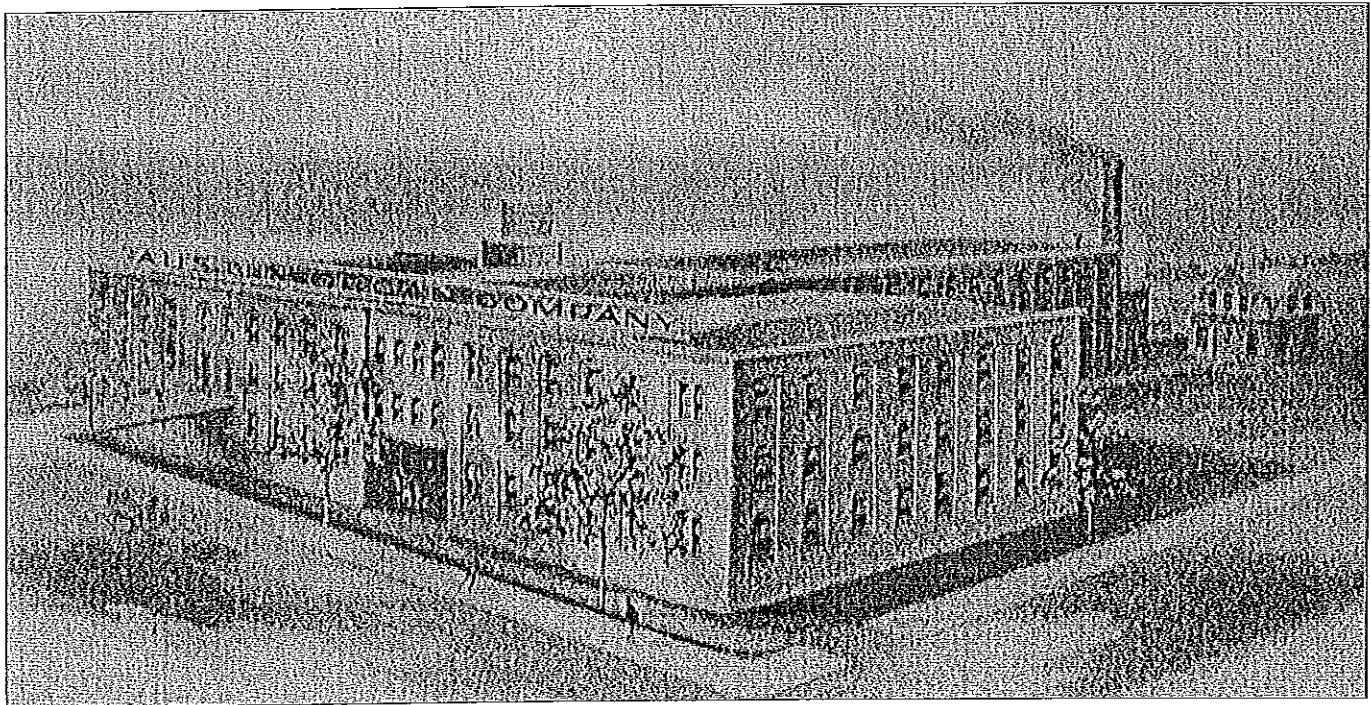
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Figure 1: View of the Austin Organ Company Factory, ca. 1906 (Henney, p. 119). The factory was enlarged again a few years later.

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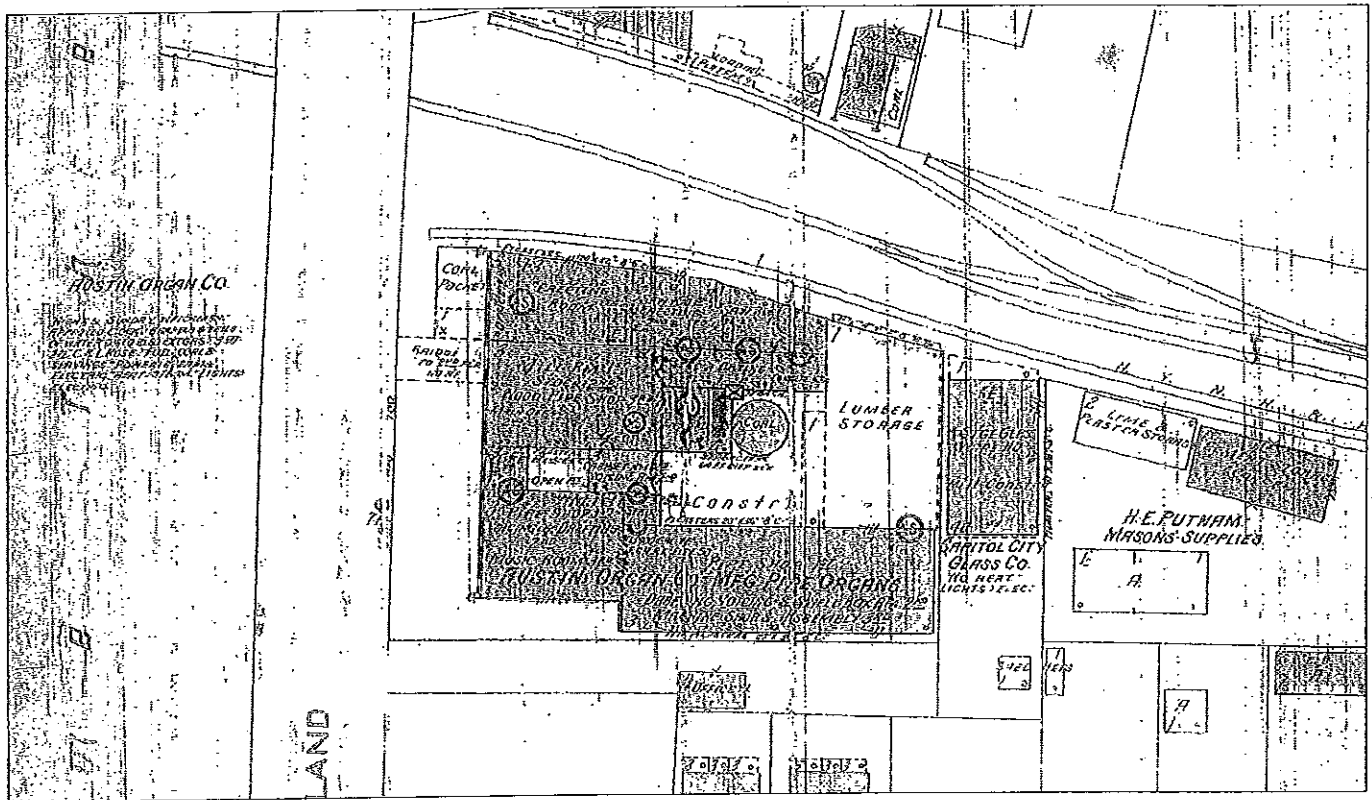
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Figure 2: Sample insurance map, from Sanborn Map and Publishing Company insurance maps of Hartford



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Excerpt from the USGS Hartford North Quadrangle, Scale 1:24000, showing the location of the Austin Organ Company Factory:

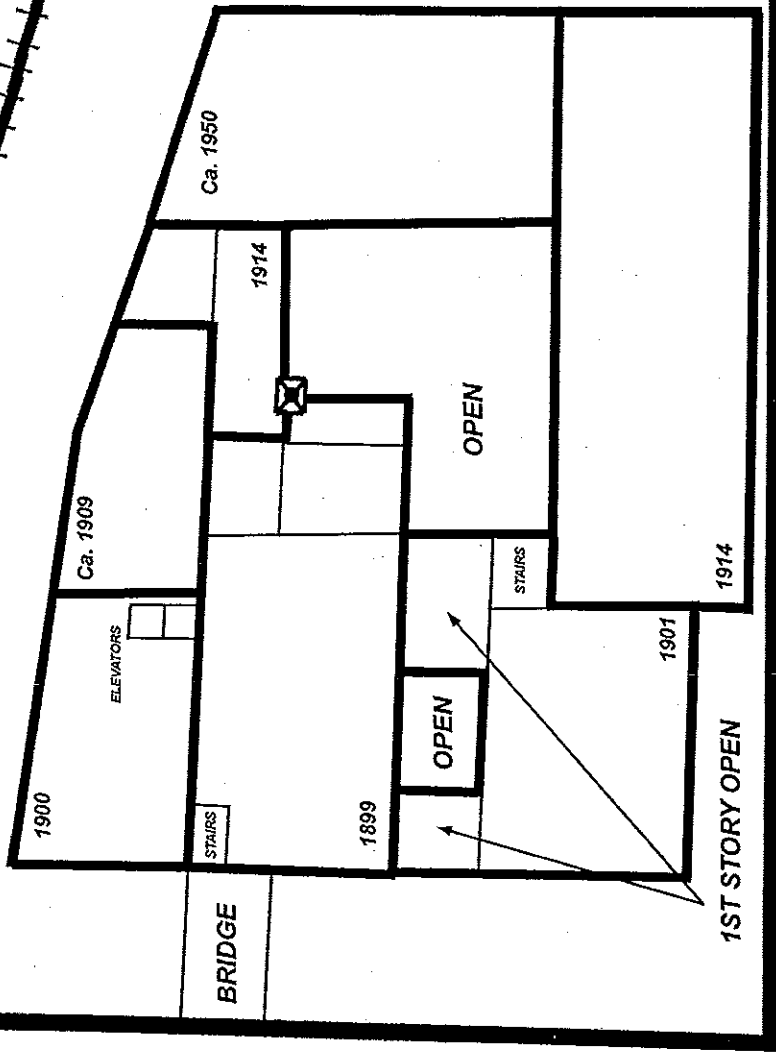


Austin Organ Company Factory
158 Woodland Street
Hartford, Connecticut

Site Plan

Former N.Y., N.H. & H. Railroad
"Griffin Line"

WOODLAND STREET



DRIVEWAY



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Photograph 1: West elevation, facing Woodland Street, camera facing northeast. The main entrance was via the bridge to the central portion's second story.



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Photograph 2: North elevation (covered with ivy) and part of west elevation, camera facing southeast. This portion was added in 1900.



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Photograph 3: South elevation, camera facing northeast. The front part was added in 1901, the rear part in 1914.



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Photograph 4: East elevation, detail of passageway between original factory on right and portion added in 1914 on left, camera facing west.



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Photograph 5: Boiler house at rear of original factory, camera facing northwest.



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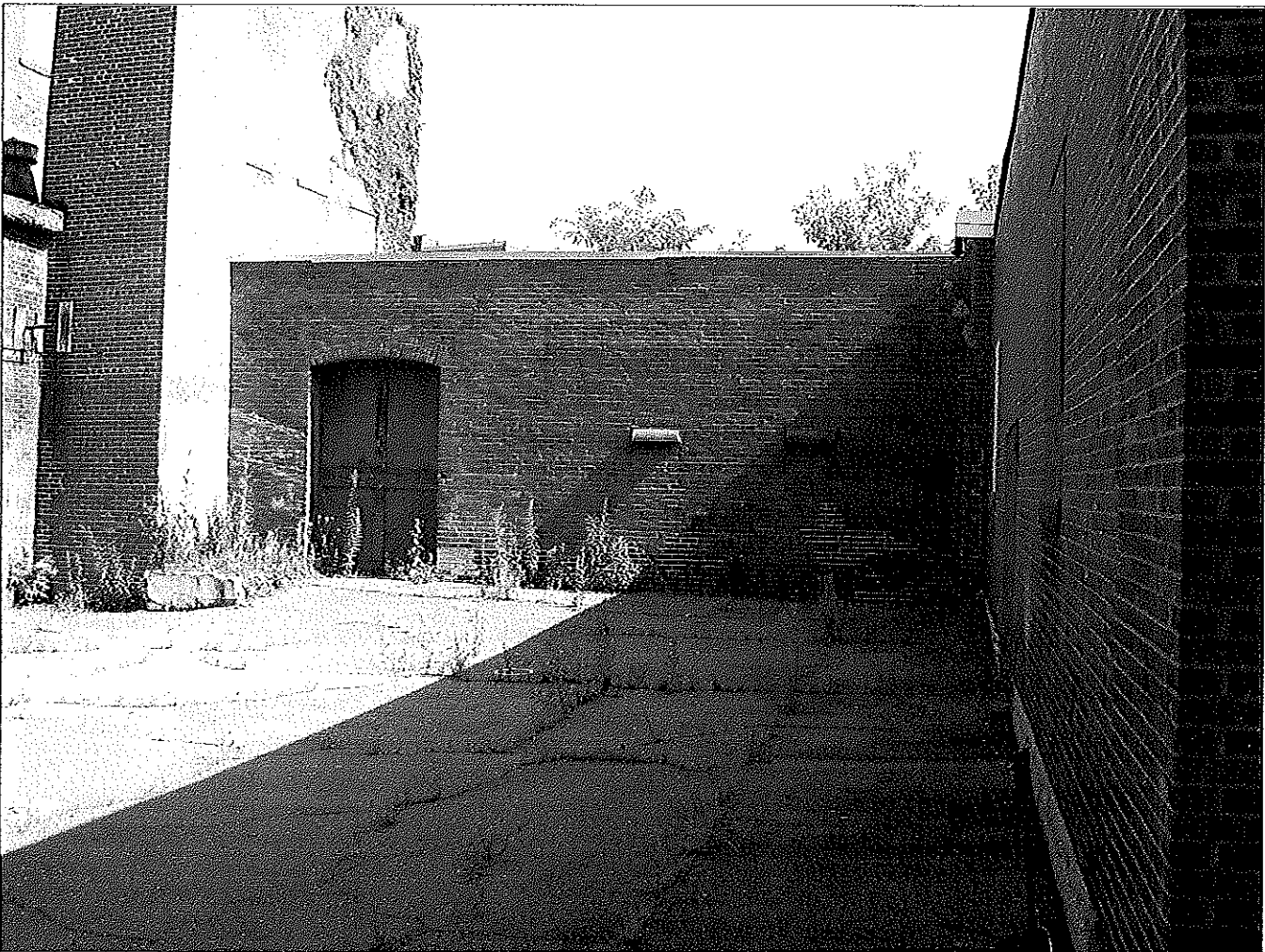
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Photograph 6: One-story brick ell appended to east elevation, camera facing north.



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Photograph 7: One-story brick garage/storage building added ca. 1950, camera facing east.



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Photograph 8: Detail of double doors, west elevation, first story, camera facing east.



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Photograph 9: Typical interior framing of timber columns and beams.



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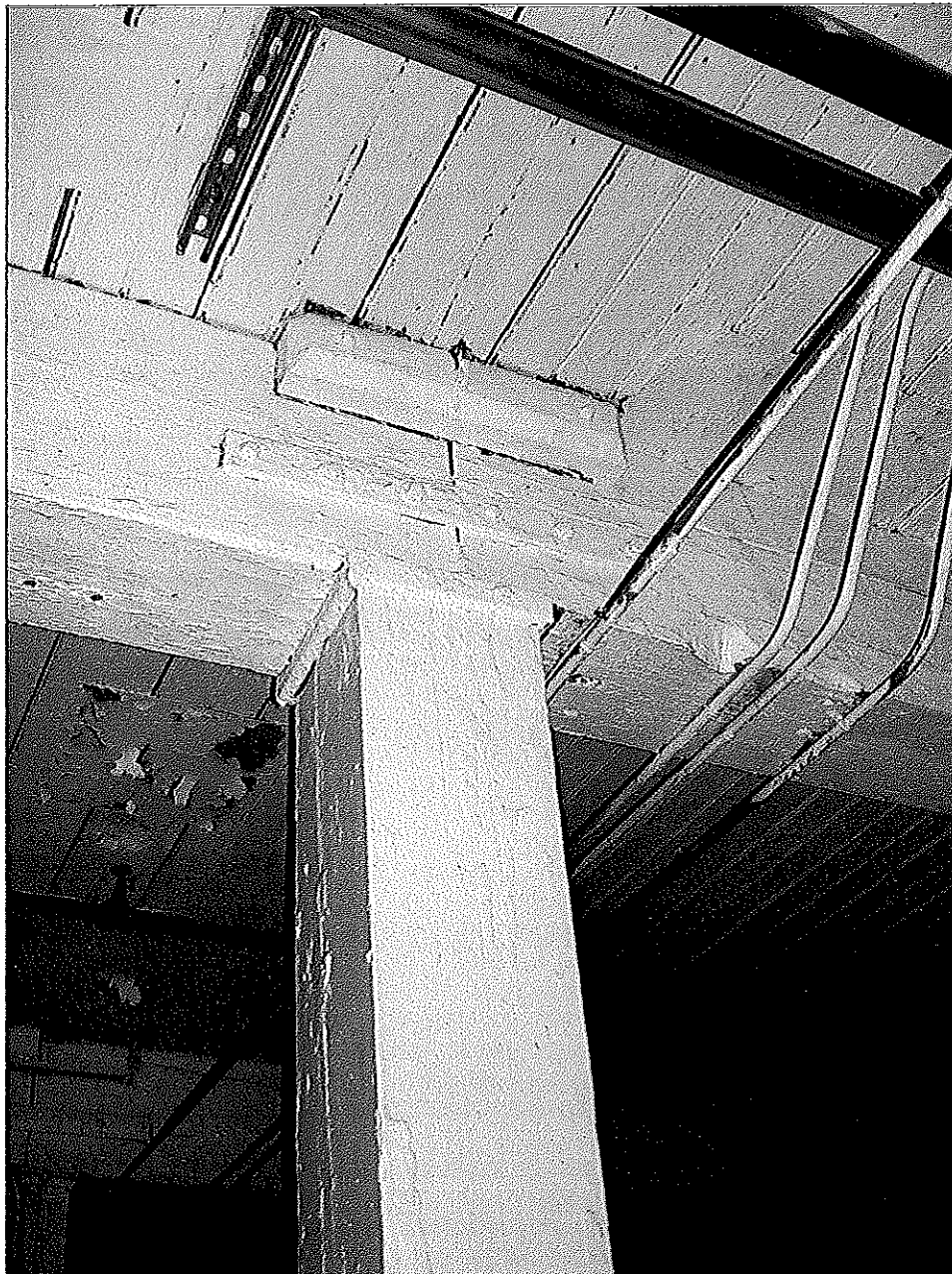
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Photograph 10: Detail of typical column-beam connection.

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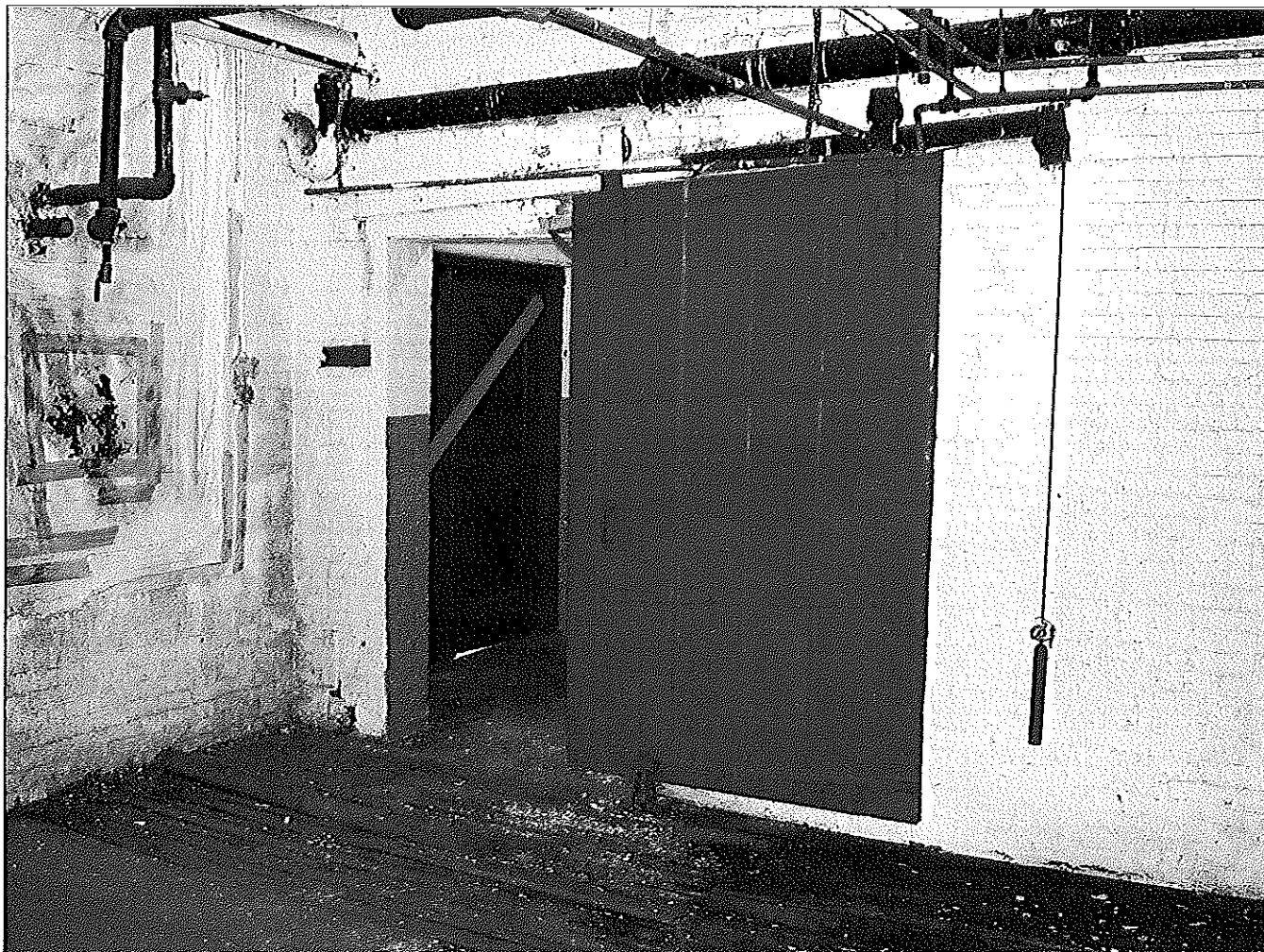
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Photograph 11: Typical metal-clad interior fire door.

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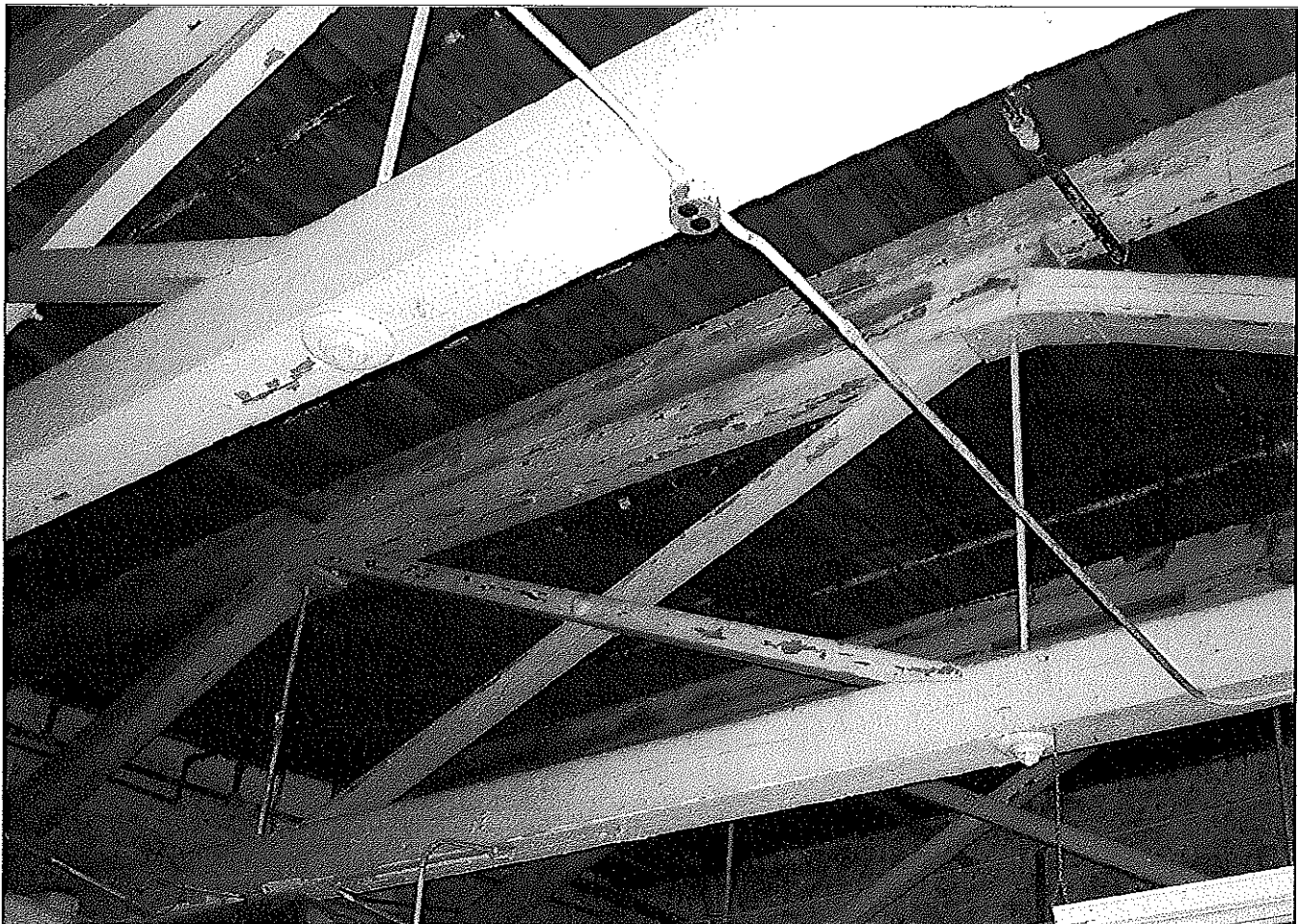
AUSTIN ORGAN COMPANY FACTORY

158 Woodland Street

Hartford, Connecticut

Photograph 12: Detail of timber roof trusses, south part of factory, west end, camera facing southwest.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY			
TOWN NO.:		SITE NO.:	
UTM:			
QUAD:			
DISTRICT:	S	NR:	ACTUAL POTENTIAL



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION

59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM

Buildings and Structures

CONTINUATION SHEET

Photographs

Date: 7/2007

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158 Woodland Street

Hartford, Connecticut

Photograph 13: Detail of steel roof trusses, east end of south part of factory, added in 1914, camera facing east.

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Photograph 14: Detail of main stairway in original part of factory, camera facing south.

