

Justin Morgan the Man

Justin Morgan is most famous in history for the horse which founded the Morgan breed of horses. He is also less widely known, but equally respected, as a musical composer of notable talent. He composed 18th century musical rendition of poetry and psalms known as fuguing tunes or psalmody.

Justin Morgan was a descendant of Miles Morgan and born in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1747. Miles Morgan was the head of one of the earliest families in Springfield, Massachusetts, originally settling in the area in the 1640's. The Morgans are described as being "substantial yeoman farmers". Family members became active participants in their communities frequently holding town and church offices.

Justin Morgan was the son of Isaac Morgan and his first wife Thankful. He was the eighth of eleven children, mostly boys. Little documentation has been found of Justin's childhood so his early life consists of much speculation. It is assumed that his life followed the same pattern as that of many other boys of the mid-18th century. He apparently received a quality education at some point in time, but where and when is not known.

In 1771 Justin was deeded a portion of his father's barn and a small amount of land. He married his first cousin Martha Day in December 1774 at 27 years of age. His first child Martha was born in May of 1776. She was followed by six other children, two of whom did not survive young childhood.

Morgan's occupations, as with others of that time period, appear to have been many and varied. He obtained a license to sell liquor at retail from his home and is said to have maintained a boatmen's tavern. He described himself as a husbandman, or farmer, in the town records. He also was a stallioner, that is: he maintained stallions at stud with the stud fees generating a portion of his income. During the Revolution Springfield was a cavalry depot for the Patriots which would create a beehive of horse activity in the area. And Hartford, Connecticut, the acknowledged horse center of the times, was located relatively close, being just down the river.

In 1782 Morgan became involved in a lawsuit concerning a runaway slave named Price Freeman. Morgan, along with his brothers, were among those in the Springfield community who helped Freeman obtain his freedom so that he might join the Continental Army.

Morgan became a substitute tax collector for West Springfield in 1784. He apparently performed his duties as he was paid by the town in 1785. He again became tax collector in 1787. Taxes were very difficult to collect during this period. This was partially due to the poor economic conditions of the times, but

equally difficult was meeting the requirement that tax debts be paid in specie (or coins).

Massachusetts law allowed attachment of a tax collector's property and for the auction of that property if the collectible tax funds were not forthcoming. In post-Revolutionary War times, the citizens of Massachusetts were suffering financially from an economic recession and high taxes to pay war debts. Morgan apparently did not fulfill his position satisfactorily as he was summoned into court in January 1788 regarding the lack of tax receipts.

He was directed to pay the balance owed by order of the court. Whether he paid the balance due is unclear. Morgan sold his remaining property in March 1788, and moved to Randolph, Vermont. The tax collection situation has been speculated as being one of the reasons why he left Massachusetts for the then independent republic of Vermont as many others were doing at the time.

An attempt to correct the situation developed as people became more desperate and were unable to meet their financial obligations. Now known as Shay's Rebellion, action was undertaken to prevent the Court of Common Pleas from sitting. This court was where creditors sued debtors for payment of goods and services. By preventing the court from holding session, debt collection was disrupted and civil war threatened.

The rebellion was forcefully put down. Eventually the law was changed to allow the use of neat stock and produce to pay private debts. Still later public taxes were allowed to be paid in like manner and paper currency was issued to assist people with paying their debts. Another mitigating factor for Morgan may have been that his wife was a sister to Luke Day, who was the #2 man (behind Daniel Shays) of Shays' Rebellion.

In an 1880's interview, Morgan and his family are said to have gone to Randolph by ox sled. Once in Randolph Morgan soon became active in local affairs. In 1789 he was elected a lister and grandjurymen of the town. In 1790 he became town clerk and treasurer holding those positions for three years.

He owned and operated a tavern in Randolph Center. The relic of this tavern was burned by college students about 25 years ago. It was located virtually on the campus of Vermont Technical College. Two daughters were born to the Morgans in Randolph, but, unfortunately, his wife died ten days after the birth of the second in March 1791.

Morgan has long been acclaimed for his elegant penmanship and as a singing master. He conducted both writing and singing schools, apparently traveling widely to do the latter. He has been detected as far afield as the Susquehanna River area (Wyoming Valley) of Pennsylvania and Jericho (now Bainbridge), NY. It has been speculated that he may have gone as far south as Baltimore, MD.

Morgan's music was psalmody or fuguing tunes. This music is considered to be America's first distinctive style of music. It has been called "America's first original art music". fuguing tunes are a complex musical composition that involved the theme being elaborately repeated by voices or musical instruments. They require much practice and skill to execute successfully.

By European Standards, however, the New Englanders' attempts to compose music would have been considered rustic as it lacked the musical pattern of English anthems. In psalmody the text of the music governs its musical structure. The native New England composers were not formally educated in musicianship. Psalmody closely reflected the Calvinist Protestant religious practices of the day. The Calvinists practiced "sacred harmony" as singers of psalms. They were popular with the congregations of the Congregational and Baptist churches which dominated New England culture.

Morgan's musical compositions are now highly regarded as exceptional, original pieces of music. The rest of his musical compositions are described as having "vivid pictorial quality" which appealed to its audience. The musicianship which created it was highly imaginative if untutored. The "Judgment Anthem" was particularly popular and contained many difficult parts which required singers of exceptional ability.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Morgan did not publish a tune books, many of which were quite thick. However, nine pieces of Morgan's music survive today in tune books published by others. The first eight were published in *Federal Harmony* in 1790. The ninth piece was published later. The tune books were widely distributed and used in rural areas until circa 1810 when fuguing tunes went out of style. Many later publications often did not credit Justin Morgan as the original composer.

Fuguing tunes went out of style about 1810 and were replaced by European music which was in vogue. The native New Englander's fuguing tunes were considered to be rustic and were frequently made fun of by the socially conscious. Although fuguing tunes were relegated to dusty shelves by the trend setters of the early 19th century, they were used in rural areas much longer. This was particularly true of rural Pennsylvania and the Southern mountain areas.

Morgan's music continued to be used. However, it was changed over time through simplification and the musical scores roughened. They began to sound like folk tunes and, when published, were attributed to others. Not until the mid-20th century did the fuguing tunes again regain the attention of the musical world. Morgan's music was highly acclaimed and appears to have earned a place in history that is as respected as that of his famous horse.

In addition to his ongoing musical activities, Morgan continued his horse activities. While in Massachusetts, he had owned a few mares and raised foals

by the stallions he stood at stud. One of the last mares he owned was bred to the stallion True Briton the year he left Springfield, in 1788. The resulting bay stud colt foaled in 1789 was to have a profound and far-reaching effect in his role in American history.

Named Figure, the colt was advertised at stud in West Hartford, Connecticut in 1792. He was apparently taken to Randolph by Justin Morgan late that spring as he was no longer advertised at stud after May 21st. Morgan advertised him at stud in 1793, 1794, and 1795. Just when Figure passed out of Morgan's hands is not certain.

He was no longer advertised by Morgan at stud after 1795. In 1796 he was advertised at stud by Jonathan Shepard of Montpelier, VT. However he was raced against two New York running horses in Brookfield, VT in 1796 (defeating both easily). That stretch of road is known as "Morgan Mile" to this day and is located close to the place Morgan is said to have lived near the Randolph-Brookfield town line.

Figure went on to become known as the Justin Morgan horse. To dedicated fanciers he was often simply called "the Justin". He spent the balance of his life in and around the state of Vermont. Legends of his skills as a racing and pulling horse abound, some fanciful, some based on fact.

His most respected quality among horsemen, however, was his ability to reproduce himself and his qualities. His descendants were instantly recognizable for their distinctive look (or type). They were revered for their stamina, beauty, willingness to please, and easy keeping qualities on Vermont's marginal hillside farms.

The descendants of Justin Morgan's horse played a prominent role in Vermont history by serving as the general purpose horse of the farm. They served as stage horses when the Concord coach was introduced and stage lines flourished in Vermont. They also fulfilled the role of race horse on America's early harness racing tracks.

Outside markets developed for Morgan horses in the 1830's and 1840's enabling many Vermont farmers to pay off their mortgages or provide school tuition for their children. The First Vermont Cavalry was mounted entirely on Morgans during the Civil War. After the Civil War the Morgan began to lose favor as it was not fast enough for short distance racing on the tracks. It lacked the height desired by many in the city markets.

In the mid to late 19th century Morgan breeding stock helped lay the foundation for other native American horse breeds. These breeds included the Standardbred, American Saddlebred, Tennessee Walking Horse, and in the 20th

century, the American Quarter Horse. These specialized breeds often outstripped the Morgan breed's ability to perform the more specialized tasks.

The Morgan horse was developed as a general purpose horse with an ability to do many tasks well. That versatility continues to stand him in good stead today for those who like a horse that can do a little of everything. The fame of Justin Morgan's horse quickly outstripped that of his master's musical abilities.

Justin Morgan died in March 1798 at 51 years of age. He lies buried in the Randolph Center, VT cemetery beside his wife. He had contracted consumption or lung fever (which is now known as tuberculosis). Signs of his debilitation are evident in the deterioration of his fine penmanship in the town's records. His contributions to the musical world and equine development of the nation have been immeasurable.

The Life and Times of Figure

Figure was the founding stallion of the Morgan breed of horses and is the horse to which all Morgans are related. He was foaled in 1789 and a few years later became the property of Justin Morgan. Justin Morgan was a teacher, composer, businessman, and horseman who lived in Randolph, Vermont.

As Figure grew, his compact, muscular body and stylish way of moving impressed many of the pioneer farmers and settlers. Soon tales of his strength, speed, endurance, and ability to produce sons and daughters bearing his likeness spread amidst the small New England towns. His stud services were offered throughout the Connecticut River Valley, and in the course of his 32 years, he became known as "the Justin Morgan Horse."

- * 1789 - Figure was born in southern New England; said to be sired by True Briton (a.k.a. Beautiful Bay) out of a mare of Wildair breeding that was bred by Justin Morgan.
- * 1792 - advertised at stud in West Hartford, CT by Samuel Whitman until late May, then was taken to Randolph, VT by Justin Morgan.
- * 1793 - advertised at stud in Lebanon, NH and Randolph, VT by Justin Morgan.
- * 1794 - advertised at stud in Randolph and Royalton, VT by Justin Morgan.
- * 1795 - advertised at stud in Williston and Hinesburgh, VT by Justin Morgan; he is believed to have been leased to Robert Evans, Randolph, VT in Fall 1795 to clear land for Mr. Fisk for \$15.00 per year; the horse was traded by Justin Morgan for land in Moretown, VT to Samuel Allen, Williston, VT.

- * 1795 (?) - traded or sold to William Rice, Woodstock, VT.
- * 1796 (?) - raced against New York horses Sweepstakes and Silvertail in Brookfield, VT (the road is still known as 'Morgan Mile') defeating both for a \$50 stake.
- * 1796 - advertised at stud by Jonathan Shepard, Montpelier, VT; Figure became known as the Justin Morgan horse; Shepard often used him in match races with great success.
- * 1797 - February - traded with blacksmith shop by Jonathan Shepard to James Hawkins, Montpelier, VT for a farm.
- * 1797 - 1801 - whereabouts not known.
- * 1801 - 1804 - owned by Robert Evans, Randolph, VT.
- * 1804 - Evans sued for debt; Colonel John Goss secured his debt with the Justin Morgan horse; Evans was unable to pay; John Goss sent the horse to his brother David Goss in St. Johnsbury, VT; John Goss traded the horse for a mare to David Goss in 1805.
- * 1804 - Justin Morgan won a pulling bee at General Butler's Tavern, St. Johnsbury, VT.
- * 1805 - 1811 - owned by David Goss, St Johnsbury, VT he was worked on the Goss farm except 2 months in spring when he was on a stallion service circuit; he was known as the Goss horse.
- * 1807 - advertised at stud by John Goss in Randolph, VT and Claremont, NH.
- * 1811 - sold by David Goss to son Philip Goss, Randolph, VT.
- * 1811 - Fall - after the breeding season the horse was sold to Jacob Sanderson, then to Jacob Langmade who used the horse to haul freight between Windsor and Chelsea, VT; then to Joel Goss and Joseph Rogers, Claremont, NH.
- * 1814, 1815, 1817 - at stud with Joel Goss and Joseph Rogers, Claremont, NH (whereabouts in 1816 not known).
- * 1817 - sold to Samuel Stone, Randolph, VT; exhibited at Randolph, VT fair.
- * 1817 July 22 - parade mount for President James Monroe in Montpelier, VT.
- * 1819 - sold to Levi Bean, Chelsea, VT

* 1821 - died of injury from kick of another horse on the Levi Bean Farm.

FIGURE'S PEDIGREE

Figure is said to be sired by True Briton, a horse widely respected for his excellence and known as a sire of quality horses. He was said to have been "of the best English blood." John Morgan (in 1846) stated that he was sired by the imported horse Traveller. whether it was Thoroughbred blood or another breed (such as the Welsh Cob) or a combination of types remains open to debate.

Figure's dam was bred by Justin Morgan. She was, as described by John Morgan in 1846, "...of the Wildair breed, of middling size, with a heavy chest, of very light bay color, with a bushy mane and tail - the hair on the legs rather long, and a smooth, handsome traveller.." Her sire was Diamond, a son of Church's Wild-air by Wild-air (Delancey's) out of a mare owned by Samuel Burt named Wild-air.

Others theorize that Figure has the Friesian horse as a possible ancestor. The Friesian horse was bred and developed in Holland. This type of horse was taken to North American by the Dutch. Figure and some of his sons were often referred to as 'Dutch' horses. That label, however, could have referred to his being of Dutch breeding or the fact that True Briton was from New York.

Morgan Horses in the West

As emigrants trekked westward in the 19th century, the frontier advanced with them. Vermonters initially emigrated to northern New York, thence to Ohio. by the 1850's, they could be found in Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin in large numbers. In the U.S. Census of 1850 Vermont had the highest number of its native- born population living outside their native state (41%)

To provide transport for their wagons and goods, Vermonters took their Morgan horses with them. Ohio agricultural journals mention Morgan horses frequently in the 1850's. Two Morgan stallions, Black Hawk and Hale's Green Mountain 42, were shown at Midwestern state fairs in the early 1850's. Both attracted much attention and were widely admired.

In what was then the west (but is now the Midwest), Morgans were used to pull stagecoaches, for light farm work, and as buggy horses. The high demand for them created high prices. Some Vermonters became concerned about the possible depletion of their breeding stock. One writer warned Vermont farmers not to be tempted to sell all their best stock as they needed to retain some to be able to continue to supply the market. The high prices were difficult for many Vermonters to resist as their children needed tuition for school or mortgages needed to be paid.

In the 1850's Morgans could be found throughout Ohio and Michigan and as far west as Wisconsin. They were so popular that many less-than-honest folks were claiming Morgan ancestors for horses that had no Morgan blood in their ancestry. Complaints appeared in the press about the problem to no avail.

At the start of the Civil War the Second and Third Michigan Cavalry were mounted on Morgan horses. Union General Philip Sheridan's famous mount Winchester (a.k.a. Rienzi) was presented to him by Captain Archie Campbell of the Second Michigan Cavalry.

As the Western Frontier continued to expand, the Morgan horse influence continued to spread also. As ranches were established, they proved to be reliable and enduring mounts. Richard Sellman of Texas established his ranch at this time. by the early 20th century he had the largest herd of Morgans in America. He registered over 300 mares and a few stallions, but most of the colts were simply gelded and used as ranch horses.

During the Gold Rush days of 1848 a herd of 125 Morgans was taken west to California. Most survived the trip and were sold for high prices upon arrival. Other Morgans arrived in California as well with the stallions often commanding high stud fees. St. Clair sired over 600 offspring while standing at stud in Sacramento in the mid-19th century.

In the 1880's Morgan horses were used as part of a government program to educate Native Americans about modern agricultural practices. The program was short lived. Morgans were again used about 1920 to 1940 to upgrade Native American horse herds and provide their schools with experienced breeding purebred horses.

Morgan stallions were used in the Remount program of the army to produce quality cavalry horses. Remount stallion services were available to farmers and ranchers for a nominal fee. The \$25.00 fee was waived if the breeders contracted with the government to have the offspring available for consideration as a cavalry mount. A colt resulting from the breeding was inspected at three years old for soundness and conformation. If the young horse was accepted by the army, the breeder received \$150.00 for the purchase price. If the breeder chose to retain the fillies, the fee was again waived. Other conditions under which the fee was waived included foals that were injured or born with deformities.

Morgan were used in the U.S. Part Service by park rangers as mounts and for packing. One horse, Red Cloud, was said to have averaged 800 miles a year according to former ranger T.W.Daniels. One year he went 1,200 miles and on some fire calls he went 55 miles without a stop, often after dark. Daniels stated that "The horse never missed putting his feet in the trail and a bad windfalls he knew the detour without a misstep, although it was pitch dark to me....At the end of these trips he never showed any leg weariness."

MORGANS AS STATE HORSES

"[I have lived in Chicago since 1839] during which time I have been largely engaged in the business of staging -- which business affords constant employment for about fifteen hundred horses -- and have thus had opportunity for observing and testing the capacity and endurance of horses. I have no hesitation in saying, I consider Morgan horses far superior to any other breed or blood I have ever known for the road or farm."

"In fact, I would prefer them over all others for any kind of service ... They are invariably good feeders, are easily kept, and will not only perform and endure more service in a year, but more years of service, than any other breed of horses I have ever known ... a Morgan horse, from New England, will outlast two horses raised in the West."

-M.O. Walker, Chicago, letter dated April 14, 1856

Morgan Horses in American History

As the new nation of the United States of America began its 200-year-old history, a new breed of horse also began. The now legendary bay stallion Figure was born in 1789 in southern New England. He was taken to Randolph, Vermont, in 1791 by Justin Morgan, who had recently emigrated there with his family from Springfield, Massachusetts. Little did Justin Morgan know that the young stallion Figure and his descendants would play a major role in American history.

Figure was a stylish bay horse of many talents. He became widely known for his ability to pull stumps and logs while clearing the land of newly arrived settlers. In addition, he won races and pulling contests, was a favored parade mount at militia trainings, and was used as a saddle and driving horse. His strength, endurance, and easy-keeping qualities served him well on the Vermont frontier. Among horsemen he became widely respected for his prepotency (the ability to pass his own looks and qualities on to succeeding generations).

Figure was said to be sired by True Briton, a horse widely respected for his excellence and known for siring quality horses. He was said to have been "of the best English blood." Whether it was Thoroughbred blood, blood of another breed (such as the Welsh Cob), or a combination of types remains open to debate. Figure's dam was a mare bred and owned by Justin Morgan (having been sired by a stallion he stood at stud in 1793) and is described as being of the "Wildair breed."

As was the custom of the day, Figure became known as the Justin Morgan horse. After the death of Justin Morgan, Figure passed into other hands and spent the balance of his life in Vermont and the Connecticut River Valley of

western New Hampshire. He died in 1821 at 32 years of age after sustaining a kick injury from another horse. He left a legacy of sons and daughters who were used by farmers to develop a type of horse well suited to the hilly topography of northern New England.

The round and compact bodies of Morgan horses enabled them to "get the best of their feed" and made them suitable to perform a wide variety of tasks. Their large eyes, small ears, and short, broad heads set on gracefully curved necks carried high provided them with a proud countenance. Also blessed with ground-covering gaits, the Morgans were able to cover many miles day after day at steady rate of speed. This ability, combined with a businesslike attitude to get the job done, made them a favorite horse of all work. (In later years, when a taller horse became the vogue, the Morgans would be criticized for their relatively short stature.)

Sherman Morgan, Bulrush Morgan, and Woodbury Morgan were Figure's most famous and influential sons. These stallions, along with other unrecorded offspring, came to dominate the horse industry of New England and northern New York. In the 1820's they were favorite teams for the stage lines and for field work on farms and transport to town. Their reputation as "horses of all work" was becoming widespread.

Black Hawk, a son of Sherman Morgan; and Hale's Green Mountain Morgan, a grandson of Woodbury Morgan, were the dominate Morgan sires of the mid-19th century. Green Mountain Morgan had a host of admirers gained, in part, from his appearance as a parade horse at militia trainings. He was also renowned for his resemblance to Figure. Black Hawk was famed for his speed and elegant style and he, in turn, sired the world champion trotter Ethan Allen. In the 1850's these two rival stallions were shown at Midwestern state fairs with great success and heightened the continuing demand for Morgan horses.

New England supplied big city markets such as New York with Morgan horses for public transportation and freighting as well as private driving. Morgan horses comprised the preferred teams of stage line owner M.O. Walker of Chicago. They were taken to California to be employed as ranch and harness racing horses. In other areas of the West they were also used as ranch horses.

During the Civil War Morgans were dependable cavalry mounts and artillery horses. Again, their easy-keeping qualities and ability to endure grueling condition allowed them to outlast other types of horses. Several units of cavalry in the Union army and one (known) of the Confederate army were mounted on Morgan horses. United States General Philip Sheridan's famed charger Winchester (a.k.a. Rienzi), who was immortalized after the war, was a descendant of Black Hawk.

Due to a trend in which taller horses were becoming more desirable with great speed at short distances, the popularity of Morgan horses began a decline which would not reverse itself for several years. Morgan mares continued to be widely used by horse breeders, but were bred to taller stallions of non-Morgan breeding. The purpose was to capture the enduring qualities of the Morgan but with increased size in the offspring. The result was a more marketable product for farmers selling to the city markets. As a result of this practice the Morgan, as it had been known earlier in the 19th century, almost disappeared.

From this type of foundation other American horse breeds were developed. Harness racing had become an exceedingly popular sport for which the Standardbred was developed. Other major American breeds that contain the Morgan horse in their initial development include the American Saddle Horse, Tennessee Walking Horse, American Quarter Horse, and American Albino.

Continuing modernization and development of new technologies, however, were affecting the horse market nationwide. Electrification of trolleys and continuing expansion of trains reduced the demand for harness horses significantly. Larger farms and a corresponding increase in the size of agricultural machinery to do the work was creating a demand for larger, heavier draft horses.

The 1890's witnessed efforts on the part of many to locate and "regenerate" the Morgan horse. A business horse or roadster was desired with not only speed but with the classiness which would reflect upon one's social standing as well. Writers berated the disappearance of the "ancient" type Morgan and called for its regeneration, if it could be found. Pockets of these Morgans had survived, particularly in northeastern Vermont, though much reduced in number.

Many new breeding programs were established. Edwin Hoffman of Lyndon, Vermont, became a Morgan horse dealer and assisted many nationwide with locating and purchasing Morgans for their farms. It was at this time the foundation was laid for the highly influential Brunk bloodlines. The National Morgan Horse Breeders Association was formed during the 1893 Columbian Exposition (although it was not destined to last). Joseph Battell published his 1,000 page *Morgan Horse Register* in 1894.

The Vermont State Fair of the 1850's and 1860's had been a popular venue for the showing of Morgan horses. This fair was discontinued in the 1890's when an economic downturn forced it to cease operating. It was revived in 1907 and, within a very few short years, became the national showcase of the Morgan horses. In 1909 the Morgan Horse Club was formed during the fair. Morgan horses from as far as Illinois and Pennsylvania came to participate in a highly competitive atmosphere.

It was here that the first endurance rides were held. The Morgan Horse Club created a challenge to prove that the Morgan was the best horse for cavalry

purposes. These rides were eventually held at various locations around the United States and were extended to 300 miles in length. These rides were the forerunners of today's competitive trail and endurance rides.

By an act of Congress in 1905, a farm to perpetuate the Morgan horse was established. The United States Morgan Horse Farm was established in Weybridge, Vermont, on Joseph Battell's former Bread Loaf Stock Farm. The farm was operated under the auspices of the federal government until 1951, when it was transferred to the University of Vermont, which continues managing the farm today.

Again, modern technology interfered, with the advent of the automobile effectively reducing the need for horses. After this time, the primary focus of the horse market would become recreational. With exceptions, of course -- horses used for ranch work and, until the tractor became economically viable, for draft work on farms. In many rural areas horses continued to be a major source of transportation to market, church, and school. Although the need was diminishing, the Army sought remounts for its cavalry with demand peaking during World War I.

Throughout the balance of the 20th century the Morgan horse, like other types and breeds of horses, has been used primarily for recreational purposes. The majority of Morgan horse owners use their Morgans for pleasure. Many also compete with their Morgan horses in a wide variety of sporting events. Morgans are highly competitive in driving competition as well as in horse shows and on trail rides. They are competing in reining, cutting, and dressage with success.

The Morgan Horse Club was maintained for many years by philanthropic Morgan horse breeders and owners. From 1959 it operated in leased office space in various locations. In 1971 the name of the Morgan Horse Club was changed to American Morgan Horse Association. At various times efforts had been made to establish a permanent home for the organization.

In the 1980's this dream became a reality with the construction of the Morgan Horse Complex in Shelburne, Vermont, by the American Morgan Horse Institute. The complex houses the National Museum of the Morgan Horse (NMMH), the American Morgan Horse Association (AMHA), and the American Morgan Horse Institute (AMHI).

The National Museum of the Morgan Horse maintains exhibits on the role of the Morgan horse in history. In addition, the museum conducts on-site programming of Morgan horses and art, maintains a library, and houses a broad collection of artifacts. The AMHA is a service organization of Morgan horse breeders and owners. The American Morgan Horse Institute provides funding for educational projects, scholarships, and conducts the Grand National Morgan Horse Show annually.

Morgan Horses in the Civil War

Upon the start of the Civil War in 1861, volunteers promptly signed up on both sides to defend their chosen beliefs. Horses were an essential component in the transport of cavalry troops, supplies, and artillery weapons throughout the war.

Morgan horses are known to have been used in both the Union and Confederate armies. Due to the quality of the Morgan horses and their physical attributes, they were in high demand. They were hardy and their thick winter coats enabled them to survive without shelter during bad weather, they were able to survive on scant forage, their resilient skin reduced saddle sores, and the Morgans were highly trainable and willing to please.

Individual Morgan Horses

Rienzi (a.k.a. Winchester) - favored mount of Union General Philip Sheridan; a black gelding of Black Hawk lineage presented to Sheridan at Rienzi, MS in 1862 by an officer of the 2nd Michigan Cavalry; Rienzi was ridden in battle by Sheridan during the rest of the war

Charlemagne - mount of General Joshua Chamberlain when he won the fight for Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863

Mounts of the 5th NY Cavalry - Pink, Billy, Cockeye, Prince, Frank, Mink, Mollie, Jack (#1), Topsy, Nellie, Jack (#2), Dunlap's Mare, Sukey, Black Dick, Brydon's Nellie, Charley, Jane, Pomp, Wyman Horse, June, Lucy; a monument honoring Pink stands in Crown Point, NY as well as a grave marker for Billy

Betty Root - Lt. Trusselis' horse in the First Vermont Cavalry; wounded in 1863; owned by Asa Livingston, St. Johnsbury, VT in 1872

Old Clem - purchased in 1861 at 19 years of age by Colonel Lemuel Platt who organized the First Vermont Cavalry; lost hooves to foot rot in winter 1862-1863; wrenched a shoulder while being used by Phillip Ide in 1864 and sent to Giesboro Depot for recruit; seen in July 1864 by Ide when Old Clem was once again in the ranks

Clifton AMHR #457 - a son of Gifford Morgan that won walking races in New England in the 1850's; apparently sold after 1857 to Dr. William Capeheart of North Carolina; Clifton was used by Capeheart, a surgeon, in the Army of Northern Virginia (CSA) until killed in action in March 1864

Bemis Horse (Amasa Bemis) AMHR #685 - a black 15 hand son of Billy Root and foaled in the 1840's. Described as a ". . .very stylish and active horse", he won

third premium at the 1853 Vermont State Fair. He was sold to a Mr. Bryan of Georgia, VT, then to the army. He was killed in action.

Cavalry Units Mounted on Morgan Horses

The following regiments of cavalry were mounted on Morgan horses when they were first organized. As the horses used in the Union army became casualties of the war, they were replaced by government-owned mounts which often varied widely in quality. Some troopers owned their horses at the start of the war, but the U.S. government later purchased these horses.

Confederate troopers supplied their own mounts and, unless their horse was killed in action, could not expect any financial assistance for replacements. They had to purchase a replacement, capture a replacement from the enemy, or become a member of the infantry (which most cavalrymen refused to do).

First Maine Cavalry (USA)
Second Michigan Cavalry (USA)
Third Michigan Cavalry (USA)
Fourteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry (USA)
Fifth New York Cavalry, Company H (USA)

First Rhode Island Cavalry (USA) - the two New Hampshire battalions which were part of the original makeup of this unit were mounted on Morgans and French Canadian horses.

Fourth Virginia Cavalry, Company H (CSA) - also known as the Black Horse Cavalry or the Black Horse Troop; this unit created panic among the raw recruits of the Union army at the First Battle of Bull Run (or First Mannassas) which caused a humiliating rout.

First Vermont Cavalry (USA) - this regiment received shipments of more Vermont horses during the war; 200 of the original 1,200 Morgans used to mount this regiment survived the war.

"The mounts of the First Vermont Cavalry were decidedly the best I had ever seen. Everybody was attracted by them. I have heard both General Buford...and General Hatch...say that the mount of this regiment was the best in the army. Gen. Buford...also told me that he would as soon have this regiment of Vermont volunteer cavalry as a regiment of the regular army."

- Charles Tompkins, Captain, U.S. Army

'The other day, a very fine horse being offered at the Inspection Ground, I bought him. He is a chestnut horse about 15 1/2 hands high, five years old, weighs between 1000 and 1100 and is pretty as a picture. He is of the Morgan breed, proud and high spirited, yet fearless. He will stand within four feet of a puffing locomotive and never thinks of being frightened. He is deep-chested and has very powerful and muscular limbs. Built for strength, speed and endurance. He has a very fine head and ears and a neck that might serve as a model in painting. In fact, he is a prince among horses, and I doubt not that I shall be envied my treasure when I rejoin my regiment. I ride him a little every day and enjoy it hugely. It seems good to be once more in the saddle. On the street his proud bearing attracts much attention and the rascal gets more admiring glances than his rider.'

- Captain William C. Hazelton, 8th Illinois Cavalry, letter to his mother, June 3, 1864

Morgans Used for Artillery Purposes

"[Dad] fought in the Civil War and saw a lot of that company from Vermont that had all the Morgan horses. Dad was with the artillery. Six horses were needed to pull each big piece of equipment and Dad got two of those Vermont Morgans for his lead team. He sure thought a lot of them and according to him there wasn't anything they couldn't do. They were constantly in demand to move pieces of artillery that were mired and other teams had failed to move."

- A.G. Maier speaking of his father and his Morgan horses in 1950