

The Vermont Morgan History Trail

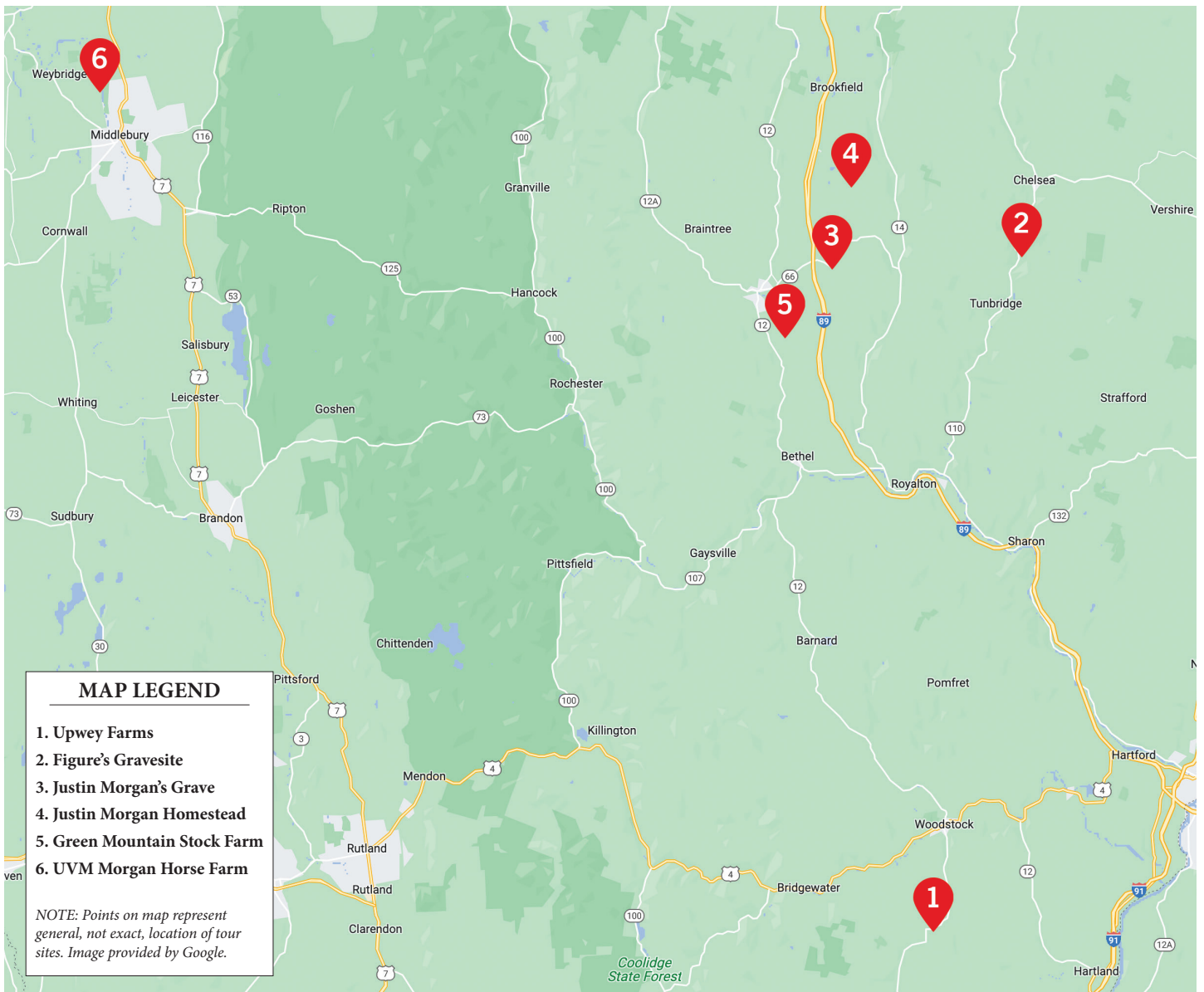
By Denny Emerson

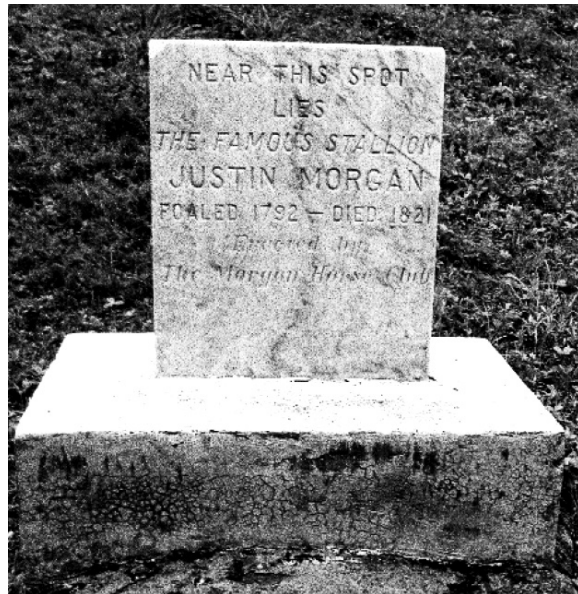
In Boston, there is a walk called The History Trail where you can see American colonial highlights. In Vermont, for Morgan horse lovers who are either visitors from afar or natives, we should have a similar Vermont Morgan History Trail.

There might be any number of these hypothetical tours, but one that might make sense, which I describe here, highlights both

the history of the original Justin Morgan, as well as the history of three of the primary breeding lines that we find in the pedigrees of most modern Morgans.

Since probably more visitors will come from the south than from the north, I will start this tour at its southernmost point, ending at the northernmost destination.





LEFT TO RIGHT: The oval at Upwey Farms, onetime home to the “National” Morgan show; Justin Morgan (horse) grave marker, on the property of the late Harold and Marilyn Childs

UPWEY FARMS

Our tour begins in South Woodstock, Vermont, where, in the early 1900s, Owen Moon started buying up properties which collectively became Upwey Farms. Owen Moon and his wife, Margaret Scott (of the Scott Paper Company family), enjoyed visiting a part of England called Upwey (named so because it was on the river Wey). Since South Woodstock reminded the Moons of their favorite place, they gave the name Upwey to the place that can be considered the primary originating source of the modern Morgan show horses. Moon bought the American Saddlebred stallion Bass’s King Peavine sometime in the 1920s, brought him to South Woodstock, and had his name changed to Upwey King Peavine. In those days it was possible to double register American Saddlebreds with some Morgan ancestry as Morgans. Later, Moon also bought a young son of Upwey King Peavine, named Jefferson, and renamed the colt Upwey King Benn. Upwey King Benn might well be called the foundation sire of modern Morgan show lines because he sired two full siblings, the stallion Upwey Ben Don and the mare Upwey Benn Quietude. Upwey Ben Don became one of the leading show sires back in the 1950s, and Upwey Benn Quietude’s son, Waseeka’s Nocturne, became the most predominant show sire in Morgan history. At one time, the “Upwey Oval” was home to the old “National” Morgan Horse Show. Visitors will see the big, white Upwey barn, can visit the grounds of the Green Mountain Horse Association which now owns Upwey barn, and can browse in The Vermont Horse Country tack store owned by Morgan breeder Laura Spittle. More about the Green Mountain Horse Association, still home to the classic 100-mile endurance ride, can be found at <https://gmhainc.org/>.

FIGURE’S GRAVESITE

The next stop on the Vermont Morgan History Tour will be just off Vermont Route 110, across a covered bridge near the Chelsea-Tunbridge town line. There is a historical site marker stating that Figure, also known as Justin Morgan, died on this farm in 1821, and is buried somewhere on the surrounding property. There isn’t much more to see there now than there was 200 years ago. Woods, old back roads, the occasional hayfield, still rural and remote. It is important to get this sense of history, that in Figure’s day horses were used for work and transportation, just as today we use cars and tractors. The hard reality of utility more than recreation in those colonial times. Figure is buried on the farm that belonged to longtime Morgan breeders and trainers Marilyn and Harold Childs, formerly known as “The Bean Farm,” after the last owner of the horse. There is a private marker on the farm, but there are two public gravestones near the road, one for Figure and one for Marilyn’s heart horse, Lippitt Mandate.

JUSTIN MORGAN’S GRAVE

Our next stop will be the little hill town of Randolph Center where we will have three separate places to see. The singing master Justin Morgan is buried in a small graveyard in the village of Randolph Center, and if you tour the cemetery, you can find his gravestone.

JUSTIN MORGAN HOMESTEAD

A few miles north of Randolph Center where Snow Road and Neighborly Road intersect, right on the Randolph-Brookfield town line, is a Vermont historical marker showing where Justin Morgan first brought young Figure to Vermont from West Springfield,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Justin Morgan (the man) grave marker; The historic marker at the homestead of Justin Morgan, the man, with Laura and Dennis Tatro, who located it; A 1958 photo of “Field Day and Judging School” at Robert Lippitt Knight’s Green Mountain Stock Farm; The historic barn at the University of Vermont Morgan Horse Farm (photos by Bill DeFlorio via findagrave.com, David Eaton, *The Morgan Horse*).



Massachusetts, around 1790. Justin Morgan's small cabin is long gone, and apart from the memorial marker, there is nothing to see except a meadow where the young stallion may have grazed 200 years ago. The homestead's location was only recently verified. For years, Morgan breed stalwarts Dennis and Laura Tatro made a valiant effort to find the property using maps and property deeds available at the time. It was the invention of GPS technology that let them find the site with certainty. The historic marker was unveiled in a ceremony on August 30th, 2020.

THE GREEN MOUNTAIN STOCK FARM

The third place to visit will be down Route 66 toward the larger town of Randolph from tiny Randolph Center. There will be a left turn onto Stock Farm Road where many of the buildings and barns which once constituted the Green Mountain Stock Farm still exist, although the property has become a satellite campus of a school in Connecticut. Until 1962, when Robert Lippitt Knight died and his herd was dispersed by auction, this was the home of the Lippitt family of Morgan horses, with their high concentration of the blood of the original Justin Morgan horse. What I remember hearing was that when Robert Knight began his breeding program back in the 1920s, he "criss-crossed" offspring from two of his first stallion purchases, Ashbrook mares onto Moro, Moro mares onto Ashbrook. Most current Lippitt pedigrees will have both stallions back in their pedigrees. This farm is as much the fountainhead of the older lines of Morgan as Upwey Farms is to modern show lines.

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT MORGAN HORSE FARM

Now we will travel about 43 miles northwest to the town of Weybridge, Vermont, home of the University of Vermont Morgan horse breeding program on the farm where the government line of Morgans evolved. At one point, "Government" meant owned by the United States of America. Later, it referred to breeding programs of state universities in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Government lines were primarily based upon the stallion General Gates, his son, Bennington, and the stallions Mansfield, Canfield, Querido, Redfern, and Ulysses, who were sons of Bennington when he was bred to the broodmare Artemisia. The farm and its iconic Victorian barn were originally the property of philanthropist Colonel Joseph Battell, who also collected the detailed bloodline information known as *The Morgan*

Horse Register, which, in 1894, inaugurated the Morgan Registry as we know it today. Battell donated the barn, land, and herd of horses to the U. S. Government, and it is now home to the University of Vermont Morgan Horse Farm. Because it is still an active Morgan breeding farm there's lots to see at this last stop including a gift shop, and in front of the magnificent old barn the regal statue of Figure overlooks broad meadows and far vistas to the west. The farm offers tours to the public. More information can be found at <https://www.uvm.edu/cals/morganhorsefarm>.

In these six destinations, we have seen four fountainheads of four distinct breeding dynasties. The most important, of course, being the man Justin Morgan, and his horse, Figure, who founded the entire Morgan breed more than 220 years ago, when George Washington was President of the United States. At Upwey Farms, we saw where most of the modern show lines originated. Then we saw what is left of the Green Mountain Stock Farm, home of the Lippitt lines. Finally, we saw where the Government lines of Morgans originated in Weybridge. If you look at the pedigrees of your own Morgan horse, you will almost invariably find either some Lippitt lines, some Government lines, or some show lines. Sometimes you will find all three lines in one horse, two of the lines, or just one. In every case, however, your Morgan will trace back several times to old Figure, the one horse from whom every Morgan is descended.

The southernmost point of this trip is the beautiful town of Woodstock, Vermont, where Figure lived for a time, while the picturesque village of Middlebury, Vermont (next to Weybridge), is at the northernmost point. You can do this entire tour in a few hours, you can do any part of it, you can do it in several different trips, and you can add other Morgan farms or attractions while you make up your own tour. More information on tourist sites, dining, and accommodations can be found at www.vermontvacation.com.

I have talked to Morgan owners who have lived in Vermont their entire lives without seeing all six of these places, just as I am sure there are native New Yorkers who have never visited the Empire State Building or the Statue of Liberty. But once you have done this trip, I think you will have a much greater sense of Morgan history than those who have not. Reading about these places does not replace the feeling you derive walking on hallowed ground. ■

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