



Government Morgans, a Timeline, a Bloodline, and a Lifeline

By Denny Emerson

As the late 19th century slid into the early years of the 20th, the internal combustion engine was about to create a sea change of gigantic proportions for horses in America. Thousands of years of horse transportation gave way to cars, trucks, and tractors in only three decades.

Many of us can remember seeing old horse-drawn equipment abandoned at the edges of meadows, or tucked into verges of the woods, left to become part of the landscape—hay rakes, harrows, and tedders, with cast iron seats for the drivers. Just as the farmers got rid of the horse-drawn implements, they would have sold the horses who pulled them.

There are still hay lofts on farms containing sleighs and buggies, mouse-eaten history, remembrances of times past.

Before 1900, Morgans were “farm utility vehicles,” used for transportation from home to school, church, general store, and business. U. S. Cavalry regiments depended in part on Morgans. Morgans worked cows on Western ranches. Usability was the key.

In post-World War II America, Morgans had made the shift from light work horses, ranch horses, and war horses to more recreational use as show horses and sport horses, avoiding conditions whereby the entire breed might have slipped into oblivion.

While there were many who helped save the Morgan, I think

ABOVE:At the turn of the 20th century, transportation and utility vehicles became mechanized and horses ceased being a necessity (photo of Fifth Avenue and 42 Street, New York, New York, circa 1900s from Wikimedia Commons, public domain).



The U. S. Government Morgan Horse Farm, which arguably kept the breed relevant and useful, relied on foundation sires General Gates (top left), his son Bennington (top right), and grandson Mansfield (shown at bottom left with full brothers Canfield and Ulysses).

that we can thank the U. S. Government and the state governments of Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut for casting lifelines just when Morgans needed them most.

When we hear the term “Government-bred,” what does that mean in terms of the horses we ride in 2023? If the Morgan breed had its own “Noah”—a guardian angel who rescued the breed

during a sea change—who would it be? Pedigree research suggests to me our Noah would be General Gates, who was foaled in 1896.

General Gates was the chief herd sire at the U. S. Government Morgan Horse Farm in Weybridge, Vermont, and he sired the next stallion in that line, Bennington. From there the bloodline spread like wildfire, in part because of the golden cross of Bennington



LEFT TO RIGHT: The author in 2015 mounted on SmithFields Forever Yours, a descendant of Bay State Tuppence, his family's mare purchased in 1957; Farm equipment once drawn by horses, seen in Bill Danforth's driveway museum in Tunbridge, Vermont.

and the rather plain little mare known as Artemisia. Together they produced ten foals over a 12-year span, from 1920 to 1932, including the stallions Mansfield, Ulysses, Canfield, and Querido. The universities of Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire began their own Morgan breeding programs based upon those same lines.

The stock went out West too (and to a New Englander, that is anywhere past New York). In Illinois, the important Brunk stallion Senator Graham was out of Fanita, a Mansfield granddaughter. Linsley, an actual son of General Gates, sired Linspar, a prolific sire for the L. U. Ranch. Move to Texas and California and the Bennington son Querido and the Mansfield son Sonfield sired dynasties of working ranch horses. The Jacksons brought Fleetfield (Mentor x Norma) from Vermont to their Montana ranch and his son, Senatefield, became their herd sire.

One hundred years ago it was no sure thing that the Morgan breed would be able to make the jump from a farm, transportation, and war horse to a modern show and sport horse. Those government and university programs bought vital time for the breed to take that leap. They gave money, they subsidized breeding and production programs, they provided marketing and moral support. They gave a less quantifiable stamp of approval, "the weight of the state."

Look in your Morgan's pedigree. It's hard to find one that does not trace back to Mansfield, Bennington, or to General Gates through other sons and daughters. There are some, but you'll have to hunt to find them. Would the Morgan breed still exist today without Government Morgans? Study the evidence of contemporary Morgan pedigrees and decide for yourself.

My personal involvement with those Government lines began in 1957 when we bought Bay State Tuppence, a University of

Massachusetts-bred mare. She was a granddaughter of both full brothers Mansfield and Canfield, with four crosses to General Gates. In 1962, I rode my father's driving horse, Miller Commander, in the GMHA 100-mile trail ride. He was a grandson of Mansfield. I have four Morgan mares sheltering under trees against the July heat as I write this, and all four of them go back to Government-bred horses.

For an example, out my window I can see HD Waverly's big white blaze. Waverly's dam is by Courage Of Equinox. The trail of sires now goes straight back. Courage Of Equinox is by Chasley Superman, by Orcland leader, by Ulendon, by Ulysses, by Bennington, arriving at General Gates.

Sixty-two years ago, while I was working during summer vacation at the Green Mountain Stock Farm in Randolph, Vermont, I asked the farm manager, Jack Esser, "so what is the deal with these Government Morgans?"

Jack replied, "Those breeders were stock men. They knew conformation, they knew about soundness, they knew about temperament, and they knew how to match up horses to create the results to get all of that."

Lineage, legacy, or lifeline, take your pick. And it's a gift that keeps on giving. In 2016, Anna Smith of Smith Fields Morgans in Walpole, New Hampshire, asked me if I'd like to ride one of her horses, SmithFields Forever Yours, in a couple of classes at the Vermont Morgan Heritage Show in Tunbridge, Vermont, the next town over from where we live in Strafford.

Later, when I looked up his pedigree, there, eight generations away and 60 years in the past, was my childhood mare, Bay State Tuppence.

It was like going back home. ■