**What's It All Mean?**

*A commentary on the Historical Evolution of the Morgan Horse*

By Jeff Morse

Past surveys of the Morgan Community indicate that Morgan owners have a strong interest in Morgan history. The Morgan Timeline is a handy reference that keeps significant events in historical perspective. What strikes me about this Timeline is what is not recorded here.

So what’s missing from the 1st 100 years? For starters, a sense of perspective with the rest of the World. What else was happening in America? The same year Figure was born George Washington became our first President.

And let’s add the birth and death of the man for whom our breed is named, Justin Morgan, 1747 – 1799. Perhaps without him, our breed would have never evolved. And shouldn’t we include the death of Figure in 1821 at age 32, his longevity an indication of the hardiness of the breed that was to descend from him? Shouldn’t we include what may have been the Sire and Get Class of all time, the 1851 overtaking by Black Hawk 20 and 75 of his get of the 1st Vermont State Fair? Certainly this was a most powerful testament to the importance of this family of Morgans. What a sight that must have been!

In 1860, the Morgan, *Shepherd F. Knapp*, was exported from USA and became fastest trotter in England. Exported? No small undertaking back then. One has to wonder how many other horses were exported from America in the mid 1800’s. That same year, the Civil War began. Many Morgans were among the survivors and the casualties. What a story could be told by those valiant Morgans! There are certainly many other significant events in that 1st century. How many have just been forgotten or seemed too unimportant at the time to record?

Just over 100 years after the dawn of our remarkable breed, came the beginning of the end of the horse drawn era. In 1896, in Springfield, Massachusetts, the town next to Figure’s birthplace, America's first automobile manufacturer began production. In 1909, coinciding with the formation of the Morgan Horse Club, was the sale of the 1st Model T car. The age of the automobile was here to stay and the horse had to find another place for itself in history.

The Morgan breed put up a valiant fight. 100 Morgans entered the Vermont State Fair in 1909. In 1910, entries almost doubled to 170. With the Morgan holding a special place in the hearts of New Englanders, the statue at Weybridge was erected in 1921, paying permanent homage to the noble breed. But by 1925, only 5 people attended the annual meeting of the Morgan Horse Club.

In 1926, antifreeze was invented, allowing motorists the ability to use their cars year round and the need for horses continued to wither. By 1933, the Morgan Club had only 52 paid members. Only 78 Morgans are registered that year. Was the end at hand? Almost.

What saved the breed from fading into obscurity? Horse shows. The comeback began for the Morgan breed thanks to Owen Moon, President of the Morgan horse Club and founder of the Eastern Morgan Horse Show and to all the New Englanders who maintained a large place in their heart for the Morgan Horse. In 1939, 65 Morgans entered the Eastern Morgan horse Show in Woodstock, VT., the largest gathering of Morgan Horses since World War I.

By 1941 the Morgan Horse Club had tripled its membership and registrations grew by fivefold. Owen Moon, Jr. started *Morgan Horse Bulletin*, later to become the *Morgan Horse Magazine.* Six years later*,* the Club’s memberships reaches 300 and 700 registrations are filed.

In 1950 mechanization gained the upper hand for the US Government. Their Morgan breeding stock was offered to the land grant colleges of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Dr. Clarence Parks published “The History Standard of Perfection & Judging Outline for the Morgan Horse” in 1952, coming to aid of the Morgan Horse which found itself becoming increasingly removed from the form and function of horses selected solely for the utilitarian demands of speed, transportation and farm work. Horse showing for the Morgan Horse was officially here to stay when the American Horse Show Association recognized the Morgan Horse Division that same year. It would be 200 years after the birth of Figure that the official “Morgan Standard of Perfection and Judging Standards” are adopted by the Morgan Community.

In 1961, Yuri Gagarin, followed 3 weeks later by John Glenn, became the first men in space. How far removed from horses the Modern World had become! Yet the Morgan endured and recording its history and progress was Jeanne Mellin, publishing her classic book: “The Morgan Horse” that same year.

The year was 1970 that Lawrence Appley took the reins of the Morgan Horse Club which had grown to 2000 members and big events soon followed: the registry Trust Fund reached $175,000; the American Morgan Horse Association was incorporated; the American Morgan Horse Institute was formed; the first Grand National was held in Detroit; the first Morgans in over 100 years were exported to Australia; the Morgan Magazine’s readership expanded to 10,000 and AMHA reached the 4000 member milestone; Disney released “Justin Morgan Had a Horse”, planting the seeds of Morgan romance in the fertile minds of many children who later would say they chose to own the Morgan Horse thanks to their memories of that movie.

Little did we know when the first VHS cassette was released in 1976 what a significant role video would play in marketing and popularizing the Morgan Horse. Combined with the allowance of shipped semen, video has all but eliminated the obstacles of geography in buying, selling and breeding Morgan Horses.

1985 saw the election of the first female President of the AMHA, Georgie Green. She remains today one of our breed’s staunchest supporters. One of her first challenges was ushering in the allowance of shipped semen, perhaps the most significant event in the history of the breed. It’s been in effect for 28 years and only time will tell how wisely we will have used this tool. Georgie ended her tenure the year that AMHA moved to its permanent home in Shelburne, VT, 1988.

At the two century mark, the breed registered more than 3500 Morgans per year and its third century began in turmoil with the legal wrangling around the Snow registry case, the controversial Bell Report, the Bright Line Rule adoption, and the rescinding of the High White and Blue Eyes Rule. The race for color in the Morgan breed began and the Rainbow Morgan Association was founded.

In 1997, the Morgan trotted into Cyberspace when AMHA launched its first web site. Like the video tape before it, few imagined the important role the Internet would come to play for the breed. Could Justin Morgan, the man, ever have imagined such a thing as he led the colt up to northern Vermont?

The 21st Century has been clouded by the tumultuous Ekstrom debacle, legal issues and the confines of financial austerity. But what a journey the Morgan Horse has travelled from the founding of our country and the Horse and Buggy era to the days of robots sending to Earth live pictures as they roam the surface Mars! What strikes me most about this Morgan Timeline is the incredible passion for the Morgan Horse that is the common thread hidden under the raw recorded data. There is little doubt that passion will endure. I wonder where it will take the Morgan Horse in the remainder of its 3rd century.