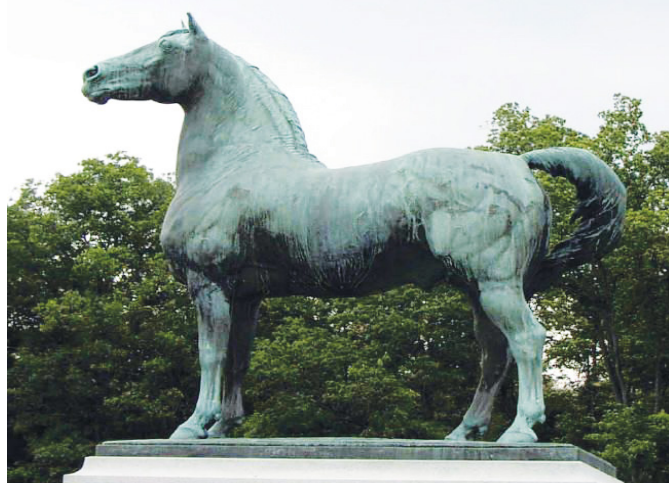




Figure

The Morgan Who Started Them All

Georgia Andrews



The Morgan breed is well known in the horse world as one of the earliest breeds of horse developed in the United States. But not many know about the beloved horse who started the lineage, Figure.

Figure was a bay stallion, born in West Springfield, Massachusetts in 1789. He is believed to have been sired by a thoroughbred stallion “True Britton”. Figure’s dam, was “...of the Wild-air breed, of middling size, with a heavy chest, of a light bay color, with a bushy mane and tail - the hair on the legs rather long, and a smooth, handsome traveler.”

Figure stood just 14 hands high. But despite his smallish size, he was strong, fast and had a stylish way of moving. At 3 years old, he was given to Justin Morgan, a music teacher and composer, as payment for a debt Morgan was owed. As was customary back then, he began to be known by his owner’s name, Justin Morgan’s horse.

While under Morgan’s care, Figure gained fame for his abilities as a workhorse and his speed as a racehorse. Figure famously beat two New York race horses in a 1796 sweepstakes race.

According to the American Morgan Horse Association, “[Figure’s] ability to out-walk, out-trot, outrun, and out-pull other horses were legendary. His stud services were offered throughout the Connecticut River Valley and various Vermont locations over his lifetime. However, his most valuable asset was the ability to pass on his distinguishing characteristics, not only to his offspring, but through several generations.”

The features and talents that made Figure stand out could still be readily spotted in his grandfoals.

He continued to sire foals even as he was traded from owner to owner in his later years, and he was used for everything from logging to racing to being a parade mount. In 1819, he was sold to his final owner, Levi Bean. He was put out to pasture and in 1821 and then died after being injured by a kick from another horse.

The legendary sire of a new breed of horse is at the center of author Marguerite Henry’s “Justin Morgan Had a Horse” as well as a 1972 film by Walt Disney Studios with the same name. Figure’s legacy lives on however in the beloved Morgan breed today and through his three most famous sons Sherman, Bulrush, and Woodbury.

