

Ancient Type For To-day
By Bruce Orser
Curator of Ancient Morgan Word and Image
**** Disposition ****

The ancient Morgans were disposed to carry ladies to the dance, drive families to Church in a wagon, pull a log or harrow, a freight wagon or stage; they were obliged to do many things, rarely if ever done any more. They did those things and more, if not badly treated, willingly and cheerfully.

In the course of searching for material for this article, 5 or 6 referred to horses with bad dispositions, all but one were developed by the horse from bad management. A son of Sherman, Wicked Will, was the apparent exception.

Woodbury Morgan made a victim of Ira Coolidge. Wassle of Mr. Fenton, the Hawkins horse, and Bullrush were inclined to be cross.

Justin himself was not enamored of children and hated dogs. So what happened to the disposition of the Morgan horse?

The genuine Morgan was very intelligent, and very often exceptionally so. On page 85 of Linsley's is written "He is a very sprightly animal, and is said to be more sagacious than the generality of horses." The stories of some of the old ones would leave you wondering. There is probably a certain amount of rudimentary reasoning in many species, the horse not the least of them. Some dogs can be scolded only so much before they indicate more should not be done. It is accepted that dogs are generally more intelligent than horses.

According to D.S. Putnam writing of Putnam Morgan: "Style, action and appearance much like Woodbury, and he was regarded one of the best of his sons. He was inclined to be cross, the same as his

sire, from having different managers. Woodbury and Putnam Morgan were very much alike in all particulars; they would bear any amount of kindness but no abuse." This was true of many in that day.

A Gifford son was abused by his owner and the horse turned viscous. His owner was no longer able to get near the horse and turned to a well-known trainer of the day to break the animals' habits. It worked the first time and again the owner was able to handle the horse. Soon he fell back into his abusive ways and again the horse turned on him. The trainer was again called and he was barely able to get him under control but did so. The horse found a new owner but thereafter would become very agitated whenever he saw a bald man which his former owner was. From "*Vermont Tradition*" page 214: The saying was that 'you can teach a Morgan anything, s'long as you don't take a whip to him.'

When nervous energy and intelligence were combined in some of the old Morgans, it seemed to instill a sensitivity or reaction to stimuli, more than that of a lethargic animal. This was not necessarily the rule. Indeed most were of pleasant disposition in all situations.

Silas Hale writes in his circular of Green Mountain stock, "...their high spirit combined with docility and tractableness of temper which makes them perfectly reliable in all situation..". ..."Green Mountain Morgan strikingly illustrates the peculiar qualities of the

original stock". The account of his appearance in Saratoga in 1844 includes this statement "...such promptness and fire, with such perfect docility, I never saw united in any other species." Of Vermont Morgan Champion Harvey Judevine, of West Concord, writes: "His colts were remarkable for kindness of disposition", and his poster states: "The knowledge of the horse and his stock is sufficient; and we are grateful that we have a horse which is perfectly adapted to the wants of the community,..." A son, the Town horse -- "powerful horse with great ambition, good disposition, and smooth action;--"

So many of the early ones were disposed to do whatever was asked. "The disposition equal to the versatility of them. Eyes flashing, muscles gathered, at the starting line. A happy spring in the trot as they drove mom to town; fire and smoke on the parade ground, a soft nicker in response to grooming. Avery Horse: "...fine appearance, good action and disposition." Morgan Eagle: "...Disposition mild..."

Linsley says: "They are spirited and docile,..."

It is often found that these characteristics of the ancient Morgan are mentioned in the same breath of space as if in wonderment at how a thing like that could be or to make the point. The following illustration is one of the best regarding the adaptability of their disposition to a situation, it has been printed in recent Lippitt publications but bears repeating again and again.

Mr. Jonathan Brewer

Farnsworth, one of the judges at the 1909 White River Show of Morgans, relates a story told him by John McKenzie regarding the great show of Morgans at Rutland in 1852.

"The Black's were stately as they were led up the track. The Morgans, on the other hand, did not keep such perfect alignment; and when, the two lines approached the grandstand and when the band began to play, every Morgan began to dance and their line became anything but straight. The Black's on the contrary kept to their line with great dignity." "John McKenzie was highly amused at the way the Morgans showed their traits." "On account of their vastly greater activity and more restless spirit, he preferred them to the Blacks." Disposition befitting the occasion!

Mr Linsley says on page 139 referring to Justin's fetes of strength and speed; "...We mention these facts to show the great muscular development of the horse, and his kind and tractable temper,..." "A lady of St. Johnsbury once told us she remembered his appearance perfectly, and had repeatedly ridden him when a girl, to balls and other parties, and spoke with much enthusiasm of his noble appearance, his high spirit and perfect docility.

Albany Cultivator, March 1848, Mr. J.B. Burnett, an obvious opponent of the Morgans, writes: "It cannot be denied that they possess great energy and courage, great strength and endurance, great ambition and docility;..." Docility---easily handled.

Today, perhaps the greatest misconception of the True Type Morgan lies in this characteristic. We have nothing to fear from this ambitious, highly active animal for he is easily handled.

An account of Gifford Morgan, also recently published in part illustrates the disposition of the Ancient Morgan perhaps better than any other. Mr. Alan Thomson quotes the *Albany Cultivator* in speaking of the fair, said: "The Old Gifford pranced in the van of the cavalcade with all the fire, spirit and gaiety of a horse of six, instead of 23,..." Mr. Ladd states that Gifford followed Mr. Wier into the show ring without bit or strap and would walk or trot cheerfully at the word." Another account in the *New England Farmer* titled The Finest Sight of His Life. W.S. Porter of Belvedere, Ohio writes: "I was 16 years old when I saw Mr. Wier ride Gifford Morgan around the track at the New York State Fair at Saratoga in 1847, followed by 20 young Morgans---the finest sight I ever saw in my life. I stood near Mr. Wier when he got off the old horse and looked at the blisters on his fingers and said "I never will get on his back again!" Mr. Thomson also says in his interview with Mr. Wier, "Mr. Wier said his little daughter would lead Gifford to drink and when she fell down he would wait for her to get up and seemed to want to help her by taking hold of her."

An article in the *Middlebury Register* for June 16, 1893 calls Justin "always willing, kind and spirited."

Middlebury Register April 7, 1893: A man writes "Take the Morgan horses; Where will you find anything superior? They have never been appreciated as they deserved. Strongly constituted, they are unequalled for endurance. Gentle in disposition, even a child may handle them without fear or danger. Intelligent and obedient, they appear to understand not only our commands, but our wishes." etc.

Linsley quotes several sources on the merits of the horse and one on page 85 that reiterates the extreme characteristics of disposition. "They...are full of noble and generous spirit, with such docility of temper that the most timid can drive them; but if put to their mettle, they are a full hand for the best driver."

A more recent example of the good Morgan disposition was a horse who attracted such notice at a Morgan show at Harrisburg PA, that people called him "the black parade horse from New York", such was the fire and animate nature he presented. Yet at home sets of very small children in twos and threes would sit on his back and take the reins while the Allen's Major would walk them around the yard and up the dirt road fully aware of his precious cargo. He always knew the level of competence of the hand on the rein. Linsley says: "His proud, bold and fearless style of movement, and his vigorous, untiring action have perhaps never been surpassed. When a rider was on him, he was obedient to the slightest motion of the rein, would walk backwards rapidly under a gently pressure of the bit, and moved side-ways almost as willingly as he moved forward; in short, was perfectly trained at all the paces and evolutions of a parade horse; and when ridden at military reviews (as was frequently the case), his bold, imposing style and spirited, nervous action, attracted universal attention and admiration. He was perfectly gentle and kind to handle, and loved to be groomed and caressed..."

Is your horse kind and gentle? You say, **absolutely!!!** Does your horse attract universal attention and admiration for its bold imposing style and spirited nervous action?Hello???

Back to the breeding shed.
