

# VERMONT HISTORY

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# About the Covers

## D. C. Linsley's Horses

In 1851, Daniel Chipman Linsley journeyed west from Middlebury to engage in the family business: surveying and investing in railroads. He began in Kentucky, which he found cold and miserable, and traveled on to Ohio. As he traveled, he wrote to his father for advice, commiseration, and occasional funds. His accounts of contracts give a picture of the complicated and tumultuous nature of railroad building at the time.

Daniel's father, Charles Linsley, was a lawyer based in Middlebury who served as director and solicitor of the Rutland and Burlington Railroad Company and later as railroad commissioner under the Act of 1855. His mother's father, Daniel Chipman, served in a number of distinguished roles, including professor of law at Middlebury College and US Representative to Congress from Vermont.

Daniel—or D.C. as he would become known professionally—stayed west until 1857, but he names 1852 as an especially important year for him. As he describes it, “[I] was acquainted with [Morgan horses] in Vermont, and familiar with their peculiar form and action. But it was not until [I] engaged in the prosecution of a great public work, at the West in 1852, that [I] became fully aware of their extraordinary hardiness, speed, and endurance, from severe use and daily comparison of them with horses of a different style.”

On Linsley's return to Vermont, he turned away from the engineering work that had so far been the focus of his adult life and sat down for a research project that no one had attempted before: the story of the Morgan horse. In 1857, after what must have been several years of work, he published its result: *Morgan Horses: A Premium Essay on the Origin, History, and Characteristics of this Remarkable American Breed of Horses*.

Linsley's publication wasn't just an essay. It was a 340-page book that began with a careful consideration of all other breeds of horses and types of work that modern conditions demanded of horses. Following that, he set out what was then known or believed about the first Morgan horse, named Figure, and its owner Justin Morgan. Taking a wholesale approach to history, he printed as many accounts as he could find without a great deal of discernment as to which was historically accurate.



The most important work, however, was to be the latter part of the book, in which Linsley accounted for as many descendants of the first Morgan horse as he could find. It is in his work that we find the recognition of the pre-eminent three sons of Figure: Sherman, Woodbury, and Bulrush. The goal of Linsley's work was not simply a short monograph on the origins of the storied first horse Figure, but something else arguably much more important: the first-ever argument for the Morgan horse as a distinct breed worthy of study and perpetuating.

The idea of "breed" was evolving at the time that Linsley wrote, changing from a regionally-based collection of common characteristics to something provable and repeatable through careful records and selective breeding. Certainly, there had been some breeds always subject to this careful scrutiny. In the context of Linsley's English-speaking world, the Thoroughbred horse would have been the archetypal example.

Linsley was, therefore, elevating a Vermont-based type to the status of carefully documented breed. He was interested not only in tracing bloodlines but in later chapters in the "present condition of this stock in Vermont" and "performances of the Morgan horse; the demand for them, and their present value as indicated by sales"; and offered the reader "hints as to the best methods for improving and perpetuating the breed." He was collecting a body of knowledge that until that moment had been at the level of folklore: well-known among Vermonters and inside a small community of equine enthusiasts, but without definition and documentation.

It's difficult to overstate the importance of his work and the publication of this book not just in the history of Vermont but also the history of American agriculture. The Morgan horse was not America's first horse breed: That honor goes to the Narragansett Pacer, a Rhode Island-based breed of riding horse that was well known but had completely vanished by the time Linsley published. Had this book not appeared at the time it did, the Morgan horse could easily have gone the same way.

Forty years later, Joseph Battell—coincidentally, also of Middlebury—would build upon Linsley's work to publish his landmark *The Morgan Horse and Register* (1894), which revisited much of Linsley's previous work and transformed it into the final form needed: a true registry of Morgan horses, and a closed studbook that would set the standards for the modern existence of the breed. Today, all registered Morgan horses can trace all of their ancestors to Battell's work.

After publishing his book, D. C. Linsley made a brief foray into further publishing with the *Vermont Stock Journal*, a short-lived periodical that ended in 1859. That same year, he returned to his earlier work and took a contract with the Central Vermont Railroad to construct a branch between Burlington and Winooski. Over the years, he was responsible for many other railroad projects in Vermont and beyond and served as mayor of Burlington for one term beginning in 1870. When he died in 1889, he was eulogized as “a man of broad ideas and brilliant conceptions.”

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# MORGAN HORSES:

## A Premium Essay

ON

THE ORIGIN, HISTORY, AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS REMARKABLE  
AMERICAN BREED OF HORSES;

TRACING THE PEDIGREE  
FROM THE ORIGINAL JUSTIN MORGAN, THROUGH THE MOST NOTED OF HIS  
PROGENY, DOWN TO THE PRESENT TIME.

WITH NUMEROUS PORTRAITS.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

HINTS FOR BREEDING, BREAKING, AND GENERAL USE AND  
MANAGEMENT OF HORSES,

WITH

PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS FOR TRAINING THEM FOR EXHIBITION AT  
AGRICULTURAL FAIRS.

BY

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