

Woodbury (1816-1838)

The First Morgan Horse in Alabama

by Leslie R. Tate

The story of Woodbury and his last owner is like a Shakespearean play, both interesting and surprising, but with a bit of tragedy. It begins with Woodbury's sire Justin Morgan, the foundation of the Morgan Horse breed. Born in 1789 in Massachusetts, he was an extraordinarily impressive horse in all respects. His qualities and accomplishments made him famous and provided ample basis for establishing the Morgan Horse as the first American breed of horse. His foals, likewise, continually impressed their owners with their quality, spirit, and sensibility. Of the many offspring Justin Morgan sired during his 32 year lifespan, three stallion sons — Sherman, Bulrush, and Woodbury — are of primary importance to the breed.

Woodbury, born in 1816, was the youngest of the three, but according to all accounts was the most impressive. Larger than both Sherman and Bulrush, he exhibited a commanding manner and action in harness or under saddle. He was an excellent driving horse, though higher headed and not given to the quiet perfection of his two half-brothers. He was also the first horse ever foaled to sire three sons who each sired a "2:30 (minutes per mile) trotter."

Even though he did exceedingly well in harness, Woodbury appeared to best advantage under saddle, much to the pleasure of those who had the opportunity to ride him at muster and in parades. The parading of horses occurred at training days and musters of the local militia. It was a way for owners of stallions to show off their horses and it could also provide a additional source of income to an owner of a renowned horse of "endless activity" to rent out his horse for the day. These horses were often trained in military movements, known as dressage today, and could provide an officer with a prized mount on which he could show off the horse, himself, and his uniform's bouncing pompons and waving plumes.

Woodbury was one the most highly desired mounts for such events. Unable to stand still, he constantly strutted and pranced as if he were the center of attention, yet his disposition was pleasant and playful. Linsley reported that militia colonels and generals were always eager to ride him and no musters or reviews could pass without him being seen. His heart-stirring qualities were so impressive that one of the men attending his last public appearance on Muster Day 1836 in Newbury, Vermont, clearly remembered Woodbury's bold and exciting performance even 60 years later. Unfortunately that was the last time they would see him under such circumstances. He was sold later that year as part of his owner's estate sale and transported to Gainesville in Sumter County, Alabama.

Gainesville had been established on the Tombigbee River in 1832, only a few years after Alabama became a state. The town grew rapidly because of its convenient location for shipping cotton from the surrounding areas in both Alabama and Mississippi to the port city of Mobile. In 1838 Gainesville had over 4,000 permanent residents and by 1840 it was the third largest city in Alabama, behind only Mobile and Huntsville. Between 1835 and 1850 Gainesville was also the largest inland port in the nation with annual shipments of cotton ranging from 6000 to 8000 bales.

People from the Northeast were attracted to this rapidly developing and prosperous area. Many of the local elite were from the New England states and established various businesses providing goods and services to the population of the area. Doctors, lawyers, bankers, clothiers, jewelers, druggists, gunsmiths, and more, they helped establish Gainesville as a small but thriving city. They also helped establish some fine wood-framed churches, including one which has a bell the same size as the Liberty Bell.

Yet the people needed some excitement in their lives as well. The grand American Hotel was a favorite gathering spot for visitors and townspeople with its gaming rooms and a dance floor supported on wooden springs to add bounce to the dancers' steps during the Virginia Reel and other popular dances of the period. Planters and their families from the surrounding area often spent several days here during various events and celebrations, especially during the two weeks in late October that was the cotton shipping season.

Because horses were a vital part of life at that time, wealthy landowners often owned several fine animals and were eager to show them off whenever possible. Racing easily became a favored activity and drew strong support from town leaders, who served as trustees for the racing track built northeast of town near the river. The North Sumter Course quickly became known as the best track in the entire Southeast.

Many of the people moving into the area were acquainted with fine stock from the farms, racetracks, and muster grounds of their former homes. Among these were Jonathan Bliss of Randolph, Vermont, who had lived only a few miles from where Justin Morgan gained fame. Another was Norman Bugbee, who had lived in Bradford, Vermont, where Woodbury was stabled from 1830 to 1836.

Exactly when Norman Bugbee arrived in Gainesville is not known, however in February 1836 he purchased a 40' x 180' business lot located at an excellent spot at Market Square and State Street, which was the main business route into Gainesville. His cousin Orrin Bugbee became a partner one month later and they established a store listed in court records as "O. & N. Bugbee."

Norman, his wife Sarah Ann Hayes, and their daughter Sarah Jane are known to have lived above the store for a few months before building a house next to it. Orrin and his wife Mary Ann Robbins may have lived with them or in another apartment above the store since no record was found that they purchased any property on which to build a home. Norman's 14-year old sister, Caroline Bugbee of Hartford, Vermont, came to live with him at some point, likely arriving in early 1836.

Bugbee was undoubtedly aware that Woodbury would be sold and was likely waiting for word from Vermont about the date. Woodbury's owner, Peter Burbank, a well-known but unmarried lawyer in Newbury, Vermont, had died on January 17, 1835. It took some time for his estate to work its way through the probate court system, however the executors of his estate finally advertised that Woodbury would be sold at auction in May 1836. Norman Bugbee now saw his chance to acquire a proven stallion, well-known for his appearance and performance, and for his ability to sire champion trotters. Seeing an opportunity to bring a horse of Woodbury's quality and value to the area, he traveled to Vermont and purchased Woodbury using a six-month promissary note. He left Woodbury stabled in Bradford until he could arrange payment and transportation. In late September 1836, Woodbury was taken to Boston to meet Bugbee, who in

early October arranged two loans totalling \$3328. The store was apparently used as collateral and the debt was to be paid in full a year later.

Woodbury and Bugbee then boarded a sailing ship bound for Mobile, Alabama. Upon arrival, they changed to a smaller boat and traveled up the Tombigbee River, arriving in Gainesville in mid-October on what should have been a grand occasion. However the trip had been rough and very unpleasant. Woodbury had fared poorly and arrived in extremely poor condition. He unloaded with difficulty and reportedly was injured when he slipped.

Bugbee undoubtedly did his best to help Woodbury recover, likely stabling him at or near his home and caring for him as best he could using local resources and expertise. His concern was obvious for several reasons: he admired Woodbury and saw his potential value, plus he had made a significant investment of time and money in Woodbury and, perhaps more worrisome, he also had the loans to pay off. Very likely his payment plan was based on the expectation of significant stud fees, however Woodbury was ill or injured and unable to perform. At the same time, Bugbee was likely angry with the ship's owners and captain about the quality of Woodbury's transport and the quality of feed and water available for Woodbury during the trip.

Misfortune struck again in May 1837 when Norman's sister Caroline died at the age of 15. Orrin and Mary Ann evidently took her body home to Vermont since her name does not appear in either of the two local cemeteries. The couple may have already made plans to move back to New Hampshire since they signed a deed there in August 1837 for their half of the Gainesville store. Part of their decision to remain in New Hampshire may also have been based on the Panic of 1837, which began in May of that year and was followed by a five year nationwide economic depression.

Norman Bugbee was now caught in a downward spiral of events. Although Woodbury may have improved slightly during the months following his arrival in Gainesville, it was never to his former health and never sufficiently to be used at stud. In early 1838 Woodbury's health took a tragic downturn and he died without having sired any Alabama-born foals.

Bugbee's hopes were now crushed. His sister was dead, his cousin and partner had returned to New Hampshire, his valuable horse was gone, and he still had not paid the loans which were now overdue. On June 6, 1838, he mortgaged his half of the store and his home. The mortgage holder was to pay off the two overdue promissary notes signed by Bugbee in Boston in Oct 1836. Bugbee, in return, was to repay the mortgage in two annual installments,. The second payment was never made and the mortgage holder, David Russell, filed the deed for the properties in 1840.

By now, Norman Bugbee had likely soured on the area and realized his fortune would never be made in Gainesville. Taking what money remained from his investments, Norman and his family moved to Mobile. He was not found in Mobile or anywhere else in the 1840 census, so he may have traveled to Vermont for the summer. By 1844 he had returned and was listed as a "daguerrean artist" — a photographer producing daguerrotypes or "tintypes" — with a studio at 64 Dauphin Street in Mobile. Two years later he and Sarah made another trip to the northeast and are listed as having arrived back in Mobile on October 28, 1846, aboard the Brig Selma from New York. Norman's occupation is listed in the ship's passenger log as "fine arts," so his trip may have been to visit and study the layout and operation of New York's daguerrean galleries

where the owners displayed their photographic portraits and landscapes in elegant surroundings as a means to attract new customers.

In 1850 Norman may have been suffering from depression or an illness since Sarah, then 36, is listed first in the household, a position which normally indicates the head of household. Norman, 41, mistakenly listed as “Marian,” is listed second and with no occupation, although they do have some lodgers. Their daughter Sarah Jane was then 16 and attending Barton Academy, a three story Greek Revival building and the first public school in Alabama.

By 1860 Norman and Sarah Ann had returned to New England and were living near the Connecticut River in Orford, New Hampshire, which was only a few miles south of Bradford, Vermont, where he had lived before coming to Alabama. Norman was then 51 and a merchant. Living with them are daughter Sarah Jane’s two young children from her first marriage to Andrew Johnston, along Norman’s 85-year old father Olvard Bugbee (misspelled as Alvord) and his second wife Sophia.

In 1870 Norman’s daughter Sarah Jane was in Memphis, Tennessee with her second husband, Dr. Charles Williams, their daughter Anna, and Sarah Jane’s older children Norman Bugbee Johnson and Mary Clementine Johnson. A 50-year old Sarah Johnson also lives with them, however she appears to be Norman’s wife Sarah who was mistakenly identified as a Johnston because of her position in the listing below the Johnson children. For some unknown reason, Norman was then in Nez Perce County, Idaho, where he is listed as a 61-year old Vermont-born teamster, however it was likely related to his business in New Hampshire. He apparently had been there for several months since the 1868 U.S. Federal Tax Assessment List for Lewiston, Idaho, shows “N. Bugbee” being taxed for both his income and for operating as a produce broker for 13 months. The 1870 census indicates he did not have his wife with him.

By 1880 Norman, then 71 and a farmer, and Sarah, 65, were back near the Connecticut River in Charlestown, New Hampshire. It is presumed that they died there within the next few years, although no record of their death or burial has been found. It is quite likely that they died in or around 1885 since their daughter Sarah Jane moved to Lancaster, New Hampshire that year with her youngest daughter Anna Burns Williams and lived near daughter Mary, who was married to Isaac W. Hopkinson. Sarah Jane served as librarian at the public library in Lancaster for 17 years before retiring and died in 1926.

The story of Woodbury and Norman Bugbee doesn’t conclude at this point. Woodbury’s death in Gainesville, Alabama in 1838 had not ended his influence on the people of that area. Twenty years later in 1858, shortly before the Civil War began, a grandson of Woodbury — Norman Morgan Horse 3077 of Hartland, Vermont — was taken to Alabama and sold “near where old Woodbury had died.” During the Civil War he became a mount for a Confederate colonel. While nothing more is known of Norman Morgan, it is expected that his superb qualities were not lost on his owners.

As a final tribute to Woodbury and to the man who brought him to Alabama, a historical marker was purchased in 1990 by the Morgan Horse Club of Alabama with donations from members and additional financial support from the Morgan Horse History Club. The marker was erected in Gainesville at a small park near the site of Bugbee’s store and near the Tombigbee River which had brought Woodbury to his final home in Alabama. The marker reads:

Woodbury

Earliest known Morgan Horse in Alabama and one of the three major stallion sons sired by Justin Morgan, foundation sire of the breed. Woodbury was foaled in 1816 in Vermont, where he remained until sold to Norman Bugbee of Gainesville, Alabama, in 1836. Bugbee, a native of Vermont, had opened a store a few months earlier in this thriving port city, home of the North Sumter Race Course. In late 1836, Woodbury was shipped by sailing vessel from Boston, but became ill en route and was injured during unloading. He never fully recovered and died in 1838. The U.S. Post Office at Gainesville is built on the site of Bugbee's store.

Bibliography and Resources

- Oral history, John A. Rogers, Gainesville, Alabama, to Elizabeth Stegall, Emelle, Alabama, about 1925; cited in a letter from Mrs. Stegall to Les Tate, January 29, 1986, with additional material provided by Mrs. Stegall on March 5, 1986. Mrs. Stegall recorded the following information about 1925 as related by Mr. Rogers: “Woodbury, a purebred from Europe or New England and owned by Norman Bugbee of Gainesville, had been shipped from Boston and died in 1838 at age 22.”
- Sumter County, Alabama, Deed Book A, pages 517-518.
- Sumter County, Alabama, Deed Book B, pages 41-43, 339-341, 344-346.
- Sumter County, Alabama, Deed Book C, pages 252-253, 255-256.
- Sumter County, Alabama, Deed Book D, pages 779-780.
- Alabama Sun Magazine, article by Ed Watkins, Tuscaloosa (Alabama) News, Dec. 6, 1964.
- History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography, Vol. 1, Thomas McAdory Owen, The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago, 1921, page 643.
- “All’s Well in Gainesville, Alabama,” Walter Musgrove, Ford Times, pages 32-36, Ford Motor Co., undated.
- “Letter Reveals Gainesville’s Beginnings,” reprint of 1949 letter from John A. Rogers, Jr., to Mr. Smith, Sumter County Journal, January 30, 1985.
- Oral history, Katherine (Kitty) Harris, Gainesville, Alabama, to Alabama Historical Society Tour Group, 1986; also private conversations with Mrs. Harris in 1990.
- Private message, Betsy Curler, New Haven, VT, Sept 15, 2008, to Les Tate, regarding use of horses at militia training days and musters and the national depression beginning in 1837.
- Panic of 1837: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic_of_1837.
- “Gainesville, A Piece of the Past”, brochure, Gainesville Historical Commission, undated (around 1986); states that in 1840 the city had a bank that issued its own currency, livery stables, blacksmith shop, grist mill, ice house, gun shops, jewelry shops, drug stores, bakery, candy makers, barber shops, saloons, a cotton gin and warehouse, doctors’ and lawyers’ offices, coffin shop, and two newspapers.

- Old plat map of Gainesville, Alabama, belonging to Barnes Rogers, copied 1947 by J.T. McLemore, redrawn in 1972 by J.A. Martz, printed by Sumter County Historical Society.
- Morgan Horse Registry, Vol. 1; states Woodbury was sold to a man from Gainesville, Alabama, in September 1836 and died there in 1838.
- Morgan Horses, D.C. Linsley, 1856, pages 156-160; states Woodbury had a bad trip aboard the vessel and was injured during unloading. Book is available online at books.google.com/books?id=I6UCAAAAYAAJ
- “Woodbury - Another of the Three,” Mabel Owen, The Morgan Horse Magazine, April 1951, repeats Linsley’s information, but also notes that some records state Woodbury slipped and broke his leg during unloading.
- Voice of Sumter (newspaper), May 30, 1837; announced death of Caroline Bugbee, 15, daughter of Olvard Bugbee of Vermont.
- History of Hartford, Vermont, July 4, 1761-April 4, 1889 , William Howard Tucker, The Free Press Association, Burlington, VT, 1889, pages 190-194 and 411-412; now available online at books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=_D02Xj-Im6IC [Tucker shows Olvard Bugbee was the uncle of Orrin and the 1860 New Hampshire census shows 85-year old “Alvord Bugbee” living with Norman and Sarah Bugbee.]
- List of Ships Passengers, Mobile, Alabama, 1841-1860, Vol. II, Lucille Mallon Connick, compiler, Mobile, AL, undated, pages 70-71 and 115.
- Obituary of Sarah J. Bugbee Williams, copies provided by Leah Smith, Sep 13, 2008:
 - (1) unidentified newspaper, Lancaster, New Hampshire, Wednesday, Nov 10, 1926;
 - (2) Coos County Democrat, Nov 3, 1926, page 8.
- U.S. Censuses, 1820-1880, Ancestry.com.
- Bugbee Family Genealogy Forum, Aug 31, 2003 & June 25, 2004, “Norman Bugbee, daguerreotypist”: (1) genforum.genealogy.com/bugbee/messages/186.html;
- (2) genforum.genealogy.com/bugbee/messages/193.html
- Craig’s Daguerreian Registry; www.daguerreotype.com/bu_table.htm, see entries for Bugbee (no first name) and Bugby, Norman.
- Bugbee burials in Vermont, Find-A-Grave.com, www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gsr&GSln=Bugbee&GSst=49&

Probate Records

Date	Document Type	From	To	\$	Deed Book & Page
bef Mar 1836	Indenture	Norman Bugbee	Richard H. Morris (Buffalo NY, late of Windsor County VT)	2500	Noted in partnership of Oren & Norman
Feb 5, 1836	Indenture (2 year mortgage)	Norman Bugbee	Ansel G. Hearsey (Hershey?)	600	A-517
Feb 8, 1836	Indenture (Deed)	Moses Lewis	Noman Bugbee (Gainesville AL, late of Bradford VT)	300	B-41
Oct 11, 1836	Indenture (1 year)	O & N Bugbee	John H (or A) Rogers, Boston	748	Noted in 1838 indenture to David Russell
Oct 14, 1836	Indenture (1 year)	O & N Bugbee	John A Blanchard & John H Blodgett, partners, Boston	2580	Noted in 1838 indenture to David Russell
Mar 1, 1837	Indenture (partnership deed signed 1 yr earlier)	Norman Bugbee	Oren Bugbee (Gainesville AL, late of Plymouth NH)	3000	B-339
Mar 2, 1837	Deed of Quit Claim	Jonathan Bliss	Oren and Norman Bugbee	1	B-344
Mar 2, 1837	Deed of Quit Claim	Norman & Sarah Bugbee	Jonathan Bliss	18083	B-345
Aug 21, 1837	Indenture (Deed)	Orrin Bugbee (21 Aug 1837 Norman Bugbee (6 Jan 1838)	William H. Dandridge	9000	D-779 (filed much later than others?)
Jun 5, 1838	Indenture (Deed)	Wm M Sumpter & Rufus G Lewis	Norman Bugbee	200	C-252
Jun 6, 1838	Indenture (2 year mortgage)	Norman Bugbee	David M. Russell & others (to pay 2 Boston debts dated 11 & 14 Oct 1836)	3328	C-255 (filed by Russell in July 1840)

Note from the author:

My initial paper about Woodbury and his last owner, Norman Bugbee, was prepared in mid-1988 based on research conducted during the previous two years. It was published in an abbreviated form in the Morgan Horse Magazine shortly afterward. Prior articles and books had all identified Woodbury's last owner as "Norman Baglee" and it was not until I began talking with people in Sumter County, Alabama, and checking probate court records and censuses for that his correct name "Norman Bugbee" was found and information about his life unfolded.

Twenty years later in response to a inquiry from the Lippitt Club and the Alabama Morgan Horse Club about reprinting the article, I located my notes, but only about half of the published information I had collected since much of it was given to the AMHA in mid-1988. Fortunately I had a rather detailed narrative I had prepared for the Alabama Morgan Horse Club in early 1989 and a handout prepared in 1990 for distribution at the Woodbury historic marker dedication. These documents were re-examined and combined with new information obtained from internet-based databases and other online information resources, along with information provided by online contacts. This data was then used to prepare a revised and updated narrative which provides additional detail about the historical background of the time and traces Norman Bugbee from just prior to his arrival in Alabama through his death in New Hampshire sometime after 1880.

This work has been a labor of love done in appreciation of the Morgan Horse as a breed and the individual horses I have known personally and for the Morgan Horse owners I have known as friends. Because of my age, I doubt I will be able to do another revision 20 years from now, therefore this document is being placed in the public domain for the use of current and future admirers of the Morgan Horse so that you won't have to contact me in the future for permission to reprint it.

If you enjoyed reading this, thank the Morgan in your backyard for their friendship and give him or her a loving pat in remembrance of Woodbury and the other Morgan Horses in the past, present, and future.

— Les Tate, Florence, Alabama, September 19, 2008