

Center for Research on Vermont
At the University of Vermont

The Legacy of Joseph Battell
By Lauren Mair

My research examines the life and legacy of Joseph Battell, a Vermont native and passionate horseman, and his everlasting impact on the Vermont Morgan Horse. In this research I examine the central role of Joseph Battell in preserving the Morgan Horse. Due to the Morgan Horse Farm's close proximity to Burlington, Vermont, I have examined first hand documentation of Battell's actions, accounts, and aspirations. Battell's legacy thrives at Middlebury College (his alma mater) and his student and trustee files have been well preserved and are open to the public. In 1887, construction was completed on Battell's beautiful farm in Weybridge. In 1907 the same farm was accepted for use by the US government in hopes of growing and expanding the delicate Morgan breed. Not only did Battell donate his farm to the US government, but he also contributed approximately four hundred acres of the surrounding land. This facility was used by and for the government's remount program up until 1951. The Morgan Horse had been used and cross-bred to the near point of extinction during the Civil War. In this research I show how Battell's farm in Weybridge offered a sanctuary at which the breed could be nursed back to it's size in numbers as well as an opportunity to trace the bloodlines of the horses back to their quality roots. Through his efforts in the preservation, conservation, and purification of Vermont, Battell ultimately saved the Morgan Horse from total decimation.