
Daniel Morgan: A Revolutionary Life

A Reader's Companion



Why *Daniel Morgan: A Revolutionary Life*

I've been asked several times why I wrote about Daniel Morgan. The short answer is, a publisher's request; a boyish outrage; and a persistent fascination.

In 2016, my agent texted me from a conference; I was rather new having an agent, so any contact with him was a big moment. Imagine my delight when I saw his simple question: "Would you like to write a biography of Daniel Morgan?" Sitting on a colleague's porch in Davenport, Iowa, overlooking the Mississippi River, I responded with a quick "Yes."

What he didn't know was that Daniel Morgan and I had a history that began when reading Burke Davis's *Heroes of the American Revolution*, which I bought as a young boy at Wanamaker's in Philadelphia.

Morgan was not the primary subject in any chapter of Davis' book, but he was a key figure in many of them. He so captured my imagination that, on a trip to Valley Forge National Historic Park, my dear aunt bought me a paperback copy of Don Higginbotham's *Daniel Morgan: Revolutionary Rifleman*. It must've been the first academic book I ever read, or owned; I was about ten years old at the time. (As I slogged my way through the scholarly prose, I did not imagine that decades later I would write the next comprehensive biography of this complex and intriguing character.)

Such was my enthusiasm for Morgan that my mother stitched me a hunting shirt for Halloween, and with a toy rifle in one hand and a tricornered hat on my head I explained to anyone who would listen that I was Daniel Morgan. That so few knew him provoked a boyish outrage on my part—How could I be mistaken for Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett?

When I returned to Daniel Morgan in 2016, after several decades of not thinking about him, I realized that his story was deeply complex. First, he was quite literally homeless when, as a teenager, he walked into Virginia. While there were many transitory colonials, very few left the historical traces that Morgan did. Second, I had studied social mobility in colonial Virginia; Morgan strived his entire life to rise from his transitory, impoverished status and integrate into the established elite. Finally, Morgan had both participated in the American Revolution, and had been changed by the Revolution. These complexities, which I overlooked as a child, compelled me to re-examine Morgan. The result was this book.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Zambone not talk about or speculate about Daniel Morgan's childhood? Why do you think Daniel Morgan might not have talked about his childhood?
2. Why does Zambone believe that geology and geography are important in Morgan's life story? Do you agree? If so, could you think of some ways in which they have shaped your own life?
3. What was Daniel Morgan like in 1755? In 1765? In 1775?
4. How do you think that Morgan went from being a rowdy wagoner to a man with property and elected office?
5. What did the march through the Maine woods and the attack on Quebec reveal about Morgan, particularly to superiors like Benedict Arnold and George Washington?
6. What was partisan warfare in the 18th century, and how did Morgan practice it?
7. How did Morgan and his riflemen assist in defeating the British Army at the battles of Saratoga in autumn 1777? Do you think it could have been won without him? Why or why not?
8. What do you think Morgan saw in George Washington that made him loyal to Washington?
9. How did Morgan do in the campaigns around Philadelphia during late 1777? In the Monmouth campaign of June 1778?
10. By late 1778, Washington had broken up Morgan's corps of riflemen. Why? Do you think that he didn't understand the capabilities of the rifle?
11. Why did Morgan feel that his honor required him to leave the Continental Army? What was important for him at home? How did Washington feel about this?
12. Under what conditions did Morgan agree to join the Southern Army with Horatio Gates as his commander? Ultimately, why did Morgan travel south to join Gates?
13. What was the condition of the war in the South in the autumn of 1780? What qualities and experience did Morgan bring to the fight?
14. Zambone argues that Daniel Morgan and Nathanael Greene complemented one another. How? And how did Greene use Morgan?

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15. What qualities do you think Morgan showed at the Battle of Cowpens? What did he in the days following his victory to make sure it remained a victory?
 16. How did Morgan serve in the remaining years of the Revolution? What rumors made him controversial among his contemporaries?
 17. What was Morgan's family connection to the Whiskey Rebellion? How did he serve the United States during and after the rebellion?
 18. Why do you think Morgan developed the political views that he held in the 1790s?
 19. Towards the end of his life, what did Morgan regard as important? How had he changed since he had first walked into Winchester? How had he remained consistent?
 20. What is Daniel Morgan's legacy?

Further Investigations in the Life and Times of Daniel Morgan

Visiting

It's very helpful for me to visit the places where historical figures once walked. Fortunately many of the places associated with Dan Morgan still exist. While the battlefields of Saratoga and Cowpens are great, the most important places to me are those where Morgan lived and worked, in and around the city of Winchester, Virginia.

Burwell-Morgan Mill

Located in the little village of Millwood, between Morgan's home of Saratoga and the Shenandoah River. Morgan supervised construction of the mill, in partnership with his neighbor Carter Burwell. The mill has been restored to working condition, and on Saturdays you can stop in to watch it at work, and buy some of the flour and grains that are ground there.

Village of White Post

A few miles away from Millwood, built around a crossroad in the center of which is a white signpost. The original signpost directed visitors to the plantation of Lord Fairfax. Morgan surveyed the road from White Post north to a church halfway between White Post and Berryville.

Town of Berryville

Courthouse for Clarke County (a county created decades after Morgan's death), the town was named after Benjamin Berry, who remembered when Morgan first arrived in the area. Legendarily Berryville was first known as "Battletown" for the brawls and fights at the local tavern. Morgan's first home, which he named "Soldier's Rest", is privately owned and located on the edge of this charming little town. The Clarke County Historical Association can be found on Berryville's Main Street; they have a very nice small museum that explains the area's history.

City of Winchester

Filled with places and things Morgan knew, including (in the courthouse) the door of the jail behind which Morgan was once held for arson. His last home is privately owned, but you can visit the old stone Presbyterian church where he worshipped in his final years. A statue of Morgan stands in front of it. His grave is in the town cemetery, and nearby are those of some of the men who marched to Quebec with him, and survived the experience.

Colonial Williamsburg

It's not clear from the written record whether Morgan ever visited the old colonial capital. But as one of the preeminent historic museums in the world, dedicated to interpreting the era of the American Revolution in Virginia, it is an ideal place to learn about Daniel Morgan's world. (E.g., visit the tailor's shop to learn more about Morgan's clothes: how extravagantly expensive they were for someone of the time, how elaborate they were, and what a hunting shirt was.)

Seeing

For many people of the difficulties of imagining the era of the American Revolution is that there are no photographs of its people and places. The best we can do is to see the few portraits that were painted of some of the most prominent people of the time. Fortunately there are several of Morgan that still remain on public view. Here is where you can see some of them.

Rotunda of the United States Capitol

One of the eight enormous paintings located under the dome of the Capitol is John Trumbull's rendering of "The Surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga", in which Morgan takes a prominent position. (It's the cover of the book!)

Independence National Historic Park Portrait Gallery

There in the old Second Bank of the United States hangs Charles Willson Peale's portrait of Morgan, as well as those of many of Morgan's friends and contemporaries.

Virginia Museum of History and Culture

Displayed in this magnificent museum and research library are both a second Peale portrait of Daniel Morgan, and Morgan's sword

Reading

Finally, if you want to find out more about Morgan's life and times, you should read some of the books that I read when writing his biography.

Rod Andrew,

The Life and Times of Andrew Pickens: Revolutionary War Hero, American Founder

The definitive biography of the man who brilliantly led the South Carolina and Georgia militia at the Battle of Cowpens.

Lorri Glover

Founders as Fathers: The Private Lives and Politics of the American Revolutionaries

We often forget that the "founding fathers" were first of all fathers, with families for which they were responsible. Lorri shows how many of the founders had to abandon the revolutionary struggle to see to the financial and even physical security of their families.

Warren Hofstra

Planting the New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley

Warren Hofstra is one of the leaders in the study of the American colonial frontier. This masterful book combines geography, sociology, and history to explain how the first settlers of the Shenandoah lived.

David L. Preston

Braddock's Defeat: The Battle of the Monongahela and the Road to Revolution

This book makes the persuasive case that "Braddock's Defeat," which David calls "The Battle of the Monongahela" is one of the most formative battles in American history. Copious research supports the book's gripping narrative.

Glenn Williams

Dunmore's War: The Last Conflict of America's Colonial Era

In 1774, Virginia went to war with the Indians of the Ohio Valley. This was the “last colonial war” that Glenn Williams describes in this fantastic book.