

“I Know No Master”  
by Scott Aiken

[Introduction]

We’re going back in time. More than 200 years.

In 1787 – the Continental Congress creates the Northwest Territory from lands west of the Alleghenies and north of the Ohio River.

It encompasses what will become five new states of the infant United States of America – Ohio, of course, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

One day, millions upon millions of people will live in this region, farming its rich land, making steel, building cars and trucks, producing a multitude of other goods and services.

But right now ... imagine all the European-American pioneers gathered here in the Great American Ballpark, just a few hundred paces from our historic home. They do not fill the stadium.

Even if we should add to our gathering U.S. Army soldiers in their small frontier garrisons, we still have room for several thousand Delaware, Shawnee, Wyandot, Seneca, Potawatomi and other native Americans.

But set aside for the moment thoughts ... and concerns ... about the tribes upon whose fields and hunting grounds we are encroaching.

Forget, too, about the British, who may well not be living up to the provisions of the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War.

Both will come back into our story.

In this gathering of settlers there are a few men to whom we should give special attention.

One is our governor ... General Arthur St. Clair, a distinguished Revolutionary War veteran, former president of the Continental Congress, and colleague of our recently retired President, George Washington.

Others include Thomas Worthington, Dr. Edward Tiffin and Return Jonathan Meigs Jr. Each will eventually become governor of the new state of Ohio.

Finally, we come upon a slight, wiry man with brown hair and blue eyes. Anyone hearing his heavy brogue will attest he is Scotch-Irish.

He is a devout Presbyterian ... a founder of the Mill Creek Congregation. Every Sunday he and his wife, Mary, ride 12 miles from their farm on the Little Miami to their church near what is now Glendale.

This is Jeremiah Morrow. His story is the story of the development of Ohio. It is a story of building the United States, its unique and precious democracy, and its thriving economy.

What Morrow – and a few other men of vision and action – then do in the early 1800s still touches us today.

For example:

Is there anyone here who has not driven Central Parkway and taken I-75 to Middletown, Dayton, Piqua, and on north?

How about I-70 from Wheeling, West Virginia, west to Indiana and beyond?

How many have ridden or jogged on the Little Miami bike trail?

A number of our members are on the faculty of Miami University. But is anyone present who has not at least visited that great college in Oxford Township?

And, finally, if you own land in southwestern Ohio between the Great Miami and Little Miami Rivers, you are probably, in some small, but real way, a beneficiary of Morrow's ideas and actions.

As his story unfolds, you shall see, a piece at a time, the relevance of these questions.

This is also a story of character. Today we talk more about values than character. But Jeremiah Morrow lives his values – honesty, morality, and selfless dedication to the welfare of the community. He doesn't talk about them. He demonstrates them.

Born in 1771 near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Morrow comes to the Ohio country in 1794, floating on a flatboat downriver to Cincinnati.

He spends the next few years working as a surveyor, growing corn in the fertile bottom lands of the Little Miami, and ... for a short time ... teaching school.

Around 1797, he pays Judge John Cleves Symmes a dollar and a half an acre for a tract of land on the Little Miami in what will become Deerfield Township in Warren County. After clearing the land, he builds a log cabin.

Then in 1799, Morrow returns to Gettysburg to marry his cousin, Mary Parkhill, and bring her to the Ohio country.

(By the way, his Presbyterian congregation thrives along with Ohio. Today it is called Sycamore Presbyterian Church. It opens its doors for worship at its current home on Mason Road in Symmes Township in 1848.)

[The Northwest Territory]

When, through the Treaty of Paris, the new American nation acquires a large region west of the Ohio River, King George's prohibition against settlement in the region ended.

At first a trickle of adventuresome young men – later a steady stream with Ohio fever – cross the Alleghenies and move down the Ohio River. Others come up through Kentucky. They find riches in game, in land, and even in salt, much prized for preserving meat.

The 1787 Northwest Ordinance is probably the Continental Congress' single most important act.

To bring in money the government desperately needs, Congress decides to sell the territory's land in vast tracts.

Judge Symmes from New Jersey receives a grant of a million acres east of the Great Miami River.

Unfortunately, for many who purchase land from him, Judge Symmes is incapable of managing surveying and titling.

Beside that, he fails to pay for much of the grant. Congress reclaims the land, but Symmes also continues to sell it. This only adds to the confusion.

And ... Symmes neglects an important requirement of his grant. He is supposed to set aside 640 acres ... one square mile ... in each township. The revenues from that parcel are to be used to fund public education.

His failure to do that has a place later in our story.

When 28-year-old Jeremiah Morrow and his wife take up residence on his farm, he has already established a reputation for honesty and dedication to the general welfare of the frontier community.

His neighbors petition Governor St. Clair to appoint Morrow a justice of the peace. This is the one and only office of government the settlers can fill with one of their own.

St. Clair basically has full power to rule the territory, a power he willingly uses ... and which makes him increasingly unpopular.

In the matter of the petition on behalf of Morrow, St. Clair never responds.

And St. Clair routinely vetoes the acts of the new Territorial Assembly. Passions flare.

At one point, during an assembly meeting in Chillicothe, a group of Democratic-Republicans, their tempers heated more by drink than democratic principle raise their torches and march on the governor's residence.

St. Clair is waiting, pistols loaded. But the leader of the Democratic-Republican faction ... Thomas Worthington ... intervenes, persuading the mob to disband.

On another occasion, St. Clair comes to Morrow's room to complain that the settlers are unfit to govern themselves.

Supporting St. Clair are the Federalists, many of them Cincinnatians.

These political heirs of Alexander Hamilton, John Adams and others who believe the right people should rule ... and do it through a strong central government.

On the other side, are the new Democratic Republicans ... supporters of Thomas Jefferson ... the republican Thomas Jefferson who believes in the rights of the individual and finds the French Revolution a very positive development in the history of mankind.

Morrow, Worthington, Dr. Tiffin, Meigs ... these are the Jeffersonian leaders.

St. Clair decries the Jeffersonians as QUOTE a multitude of indigent and ignorant people ... ill-qualified to form a constitution and government for themselves.

They want to create a new state, and to do it now ... because statehood brings the right of self-government.

The Jeffersonians focus on the territory's eastern part, a region bounded by the Great Miami River on the west, the Ohio River to the south and east, and Lake Erie to the north.

But ... St. Clair fears that forming a state would give Jefferson three more electoral votes in 1804. Remember the election of 1800 was very close.

Accordingly the governor proposes a new division of the territory, one that would eventually ... but some time off ... result in two states, one with its capital at Marietta ... and another with Cincinnati as its capital.

An appealing proposition, you must admit to Marietta ... and to Cincinnati.

St. Clair and the Federalists send a delegate to Congress to propose this new division.

Morrow and his colleagues dispatch Worthington as a rival voice. Worthington outmaneuvers the Federalists.

After hot debate Congress creates the new state desired by the Jeffersonians.

Filling in the blank left for the state's name, Congress tells Ohio to hold a constitutional convention for the 17<sup>th</sup> state of the Union.

Morrow is elected as one of 35 delegates to the convention. He writes the article on the qualification of voters.

When the first state legislature is elected in 1803, Morrow is one of four senators from Hamilton County. He barely has time to find his seat.

[Miami University]

First, the general assembly asks him to join a commission to rectify Judge Symmes' failure to reserve a township to support public education. There is not, in truth, any suitable land left within the Symmes Purchase.

Morrow and the other two commissioners consider Lebanon, but ultimately settle on a township in the newly formed Butler County for a college to be named after the Miami tribe.

Morrow's service on the commission starts a lifelong commitment to Miami University. He becomes chairman of its board of trustees, and continues to serve even as he approaches age 80.

[Morrow in Congress]

Next ... the Democratic Republicans ask Morrow to run for election as Ohio representative in the U.S. House of Representative.

Elected handily Morrow takes his seat in the Eighth Congress in October 1803 for the first of five consecutive terms during which he will be Ohio's sole representative.

A century later, Morrow's grandson Josiah publishes a memoir. Somewhat tongue in cheek, Josiah notes that when his grandfather leaves the House, it takes six men to replace him.

That is the result of Ohio's rapid growth in population, as recorded in the Census of 1810, but it is, as well, an evaluation of the high esteem in which Morrow is held.

The Kentucky statesman Henry Clay says:

No man in the sphere within which he acted ever commanded or deserved the implicit confidence of Congress more than Jeremiah Morrow.

During the long period in the House and in the Senate that Ohio's upright and unambitious citizen ... presided over the Committee on Public Lands ... there were no chimerical schemes. All went on smoothly, quietly and safely.

There existed a perfect persuasion of his entire impartiality and justice between old states and the new. A few artless but sensible words pronounced in his plain Scotch-Irish dialect were always sufficient to insure the passage of any bill or resolution which he reported. [End Quote]

But let's go back to the first day of the first session of the Eighth Congress. It's October 17, 1803, 109 representatives present their credentials.

The House first records Silas Benton, one of five representatives from New Hampshire. Last to be seated that day is Jeremiah Morrow of Ohio.

Other congressmen, men whose journey is both easier and shorter than Morrow's, drift in over the next several weeks.

Yet at this session, and each succeeding one through the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress, Morrow is always present on the first day.

That's worth mentioning.

It's worth mentioning because it illustrates how conscientious Jeremiah Morrow is in this as in any other public service he undertakes.

It's worth mentioning because ... in order to be at the Capitol in Washington City on the first day the House convenes, Morrow has journeyed some 570 miles on horseback from his home on the Little Miami. And during that time ... 1803 to 1812 ... there is no single, paved road to take. Rather he travels a series of rutted, dusty, muddy, at best gravelly tracks.

It may, at first, have been because Morrow represents a state in which the federal government is selling millions of acres to new settlers, but he quickly becomes the authority on matters involving land, its sales, debts owed the government and so far unpaid, and a constant flow of petitions from settlers asking for more time to pay.

To this same Eighth Congress, Morrow's first, there comes ... as an example ... "two memorials of sundry inhabitants of the counties of Randolph and St. Clair, in the Indiana Territory ..., in behalf of themselves and other inhabitants of the Indiana Territory ...praying that they may be permitted to purchase public lands ... at a less price than that fixed by an acted passed at the last session of Congress for the disposal of the said public lands, and that the right of pre-emption may be granted to the memorialists and other actual settlers thereon."

In other words, a good number of settlers have already cleared the land and planted crops before seeking to buy it.

The House refers these petitions to Morrow's committee to "examine and report their opinion thereon...."

Morrow champions the petitioners. Time and again, on his recommendation, Congress accommodates the needs of men who are working the land and doing their best to pay their debt.

And simultaneously in the U.S. Senate, Thomas Worthington ... the leading Ohio Democratic-Republican ... is chairman of that body's Committee on Public Lands, and advocates the same policy:

Get the public lands into the hands of the small farmer, and support him, even when he goes into default on his payments.

Morrow and Worthington also oppose the policy of allowing settlers to buy land on credit. They want to sell smaller parcels and lower the price per acre.

[1812]

Let's jump ahead to 1812, and take note of several things that make this a particularly significant time.

First, there is a rising nationalistic clamor for war against Great Britain, which is impressing American seamen and disrupting American trade with Europe and in the Caribbean.

In addition, the Shawnee, the Delaware and other native American tribes are still attacking American settlers.

Many believe the British, who are still in the Northwest region ... contrary to their treaty pledge to relinquish it ... are encouraging native American grievances.

On the American side, there are also a goodly number who believe the United States can easily wrest Canada from the British. They expect Canadians will welcome an American army come to liberate them from the crown.

President Madison appoints Morrow and Worthington to persuade the tribes to ally themselves with the United States.

The Ohioans meet with the native Americans at Piqua in August 1812. There are some tense moments. Early one morning, Morrow and Worthington remove their munitions from the Piqua to a safer location.

And the aging American general, William Hull, first moves all too cautiously north toward Windsor, Ontario, and then at Detroit surrenders to a smaller British force. Still, Morrow and Worthington persuade most of the native Americans to ally themselves with the Americans.

Back in Congress, Worthington and Morrow sponsor two important bills on the public lands. Morrow wants to put an end to the problems that Judge Symmes and others have created.

One bill allows the original purchaser of a section of land to reclaim it ... even though he has defaulted on his original contract, causing his land to revert to the government.

The other bill creates a special bureau in the Treasury Department. Henceforth, Land Offices in Ohio, Indiana, and elsewhere along the frontier will handle all public lands, bringing better order as well as more equity to the process.

As long as the War of 1812 continues, there is little enthusiasm for settling in Ohio, or anywhere else from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes.

But with the war's end, Ohio becomes the center of an economic boom. In a few years, Ohio land offices sell more than 3,750,000 acres.

The Land Office becomes so important that the phrase “doing a land office business” even today signifies booming success.

Then in 1818-1819, a financial panic and an economic depression strike. As the currency system fails, there is also a dramatic slump in the price of agricultural produce.

Wheat falls from \$1.45 a bushel in 1818 to 91 cents in 1819 to 72 cents in 1820. Corn, tobacco, rice, cotton ... prices of all commodities are in free fall.

The crisis provokes a sharp debate over the terms under which public lands should be sold. There is particular concern that encouraging settlers to buy land on credit too often results in a crushing financial burden.

Morrow, Worthington and Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin have argued for years that public lands should be sold for cash only ... and that farmers should be allowed to purchase as few as 80 acres at a time.

Finally, in 1820, Congress acts. Public lands will be sold for cash only ... and in amounts as little as 80 acres. The price is set at one dollar per acre.

This act will govern public lands sales for the next 40 years.

The other issue Morrow supports during his 16 years in Congress is developing better means of transportation. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, that means putting federal funds into building roads and canals.

Early on Congress votes to build a national road. That macadmized road eventually starts in Cumberland, Maryland, proceeds west through Pennsylvania to Wheeling, on to Columbus, Ohio, and nearly all the way to St. Louis.

When you picture caravans of Conestoga wagons carrying families west to the prairies, it is along that road ... later designated as U.S. 40 ... that they are rolling. Today, Interstate 70 closely follows the same route.

Thus, as you drive I-70, give a quick nod of thanks to Jeremiah Morrow who saw national economic development as a proper use of federal power and monies.

When Morrow leaves the Senate, he doesn't leave public service. Ohio governor Ethan Brown appoints him to the state's canal commission.

New York's success in building the Erie Canal has encouraged the leaders of Ohio to link the Ohio River to Lake Erie.

Such canals will open new markets for Ohio produce.

The commission selects two routes. One follows a line roughly from Cleveland on Lake Erie to Portsmouth on the Ohio River.

The other starts at Cincinnati, goes up the Mill Creek Valley, to Middletown, and then to Dayton. Eventually the Miami Erie canal will reach the Maumee River and Toledo.

In 1822, Ohio elects Morrow governor.

Morrow has three priorities. One is to build the canals to improve access to eastern and foreign markets for the farmers and manufacturers of Ohio.

The second is to establish a statewide system of public education.

And the third is to provide a steady source of tax revenue for state government. He advocates an ad valorem tax and sees it enacted.

As Morrow's first two-year term is coming to an end, party leaders ask him to step aside.

Morrow patiently hears the delegation out. Then, he calmly replies:

QUOTE I consider public office as belonging to the people. A few of us have no right to make bargains on the subject, and I have no bargain to make.

I have concluded, he says, to serve another term if the people see fit to elect me, though without caring too much about it. [end quote]

He is re-elected. And on July Fourth, 1825, Governor Morrow joins former New York governor DeWitt Clinton, who led the construction of the Erie Canal, in breaking ground at Newark to start the seven-year construction of the nearly 400-mile-long Ohio & Erie Canal.

Two weeks later, the two governors turn the first spades of earth in Middletown to begin the Miami Erie Canal.

Thus, when you drive along Central Parkway, the Miami Erie Canal route through Cincinnati, and on up I-75, you are, at times, exactly following the Canal route ... and the rest of the time closely paralleling it.

Of Morrow's service as governor, an Ohio historian wrote in 1888 ... QUOTE If I were compelled to choose and name the one ablest and best of all the governors whom I knew it would be this Jeremiah Morrow of Warren County.

I believe I have known but one man who had so little of the spirit "to show off" – of false pretense, of selfish vanity or ambition – as he had.

Morrow never sought an office, nor did he ever refuse one. His opinion, always modestly expressed, was that a citizen of a republic should be ready to discharge any duty to which he was called by the voices of his fellow citizens. [end quote]

After Morrow retires as governor, he continues to serve as a state representative or senator.

In 1839, he is in Columbus to lay the capitol's cornerstone, which like much of what Morrow accomplished, is still in place today.

On that occasion, he says:

QUOTE It is true our [Ohio] system is not perfect. Imperfection attaches to the works of man.

But still we may rest satisfied in the conclusion that the system is not for wrong ... when a state so great has suddenly grown up in a wilderness...

... We may ... with certainty conclude that a political community has an indefinite period of duration – that while we continue to cherish and preserve our free institutions ... we may calculate on a continued course of improvement. [end quote]

For Morrow, despite a growing desire to leave public life, there is one last service required.

In 1841 representative Thomas Corwin from Warren County resigns his seat in the House to run for governor.

At age 70, Morrow agrees to stand for election to complete Corwin's term. He wins easily and sets out for Washington to take part in the last session of the 26<sup>th</sup> Congress in December 1840.

For the first time in the many, many journeys he has made to the nation's capital he takes a stage coach and travels macadmized roads – principally, the National Road that he helped bring into being.

Morrow is re-elected to the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress. By now, the Democratic-Republican Party, under the influence of President Andrew Jackson, has become more radically populist. Morrow and other moderates have formed the Whig Party.

Their new President, William Henry Harrison, calls an extraordinary session of Congress to deal with a national financial panic.

It is Harrison's final act. He dies in April, a few weeks after having been sworn in.

When Congress convenes on May 31<sup>st</sup>, Morrow is, as usual, in his seat. He joins a majority of the House in electing John White of Kentucky as speaker.

Presaging the bitter divisions to come, the House then requires four roll calls to elect its clerk.

Finally, the members of the standing committees are named. Although nearly 30 years have passed since Morrow last sat in the House, he is chosen chairman of the committee on public lands.

Morrow's Whigs want to create a new national bank (to which the new president, John Tyler, is opposed) and to enact a protective tariff for the north's young industries (which Tyler also opposes).

As the President and the Congress struggle, the Whigs meet to consider how to deal with Tyler.

They select Rhode Island Senator Nathan Dixon as one co-chairman of their meeting. And choose Jeremiah Morrow – described as QUOTE both venerable on account of age and of character [end quote] – as the other co-chairman.

The Whigs adopt sharply worded resolutions expressing, as one historian has put it, QUOTE the indignation of the Whigs throughout the country, and then formally expel Tyler from their party.

Among the new members of the House that summer is Robert Winthrop of Massachusetts.

(Later he will become speaker, and still later governor of Massachusetts.)

But right now, he shares lodgings with Morrow and five other members of Congress.

Years later, Winthrop recalled that time:

QUOTE In those days members of Congress had no salaries – a pitiful per diem of eight dollars during the session was their allowance....

They lived in what were called “messes” – small parties clubbing together in boarding houses. It was in such a mess that I formed the acquaintance of Jeremiah Morrow.

We were seven: Two senators (from Maryland and Indiana) and five representatives ... [from Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts and Ohio].

I recall them all ... said Winthrop ... with warm regard ... (but) Jeremiah Morrow almost with veneration.

He was older even than his years, but he bore the burden of the heat of that trying session with more patience than any of us. He was an example to us all and had wisdom and experience in public affairs to instruct a whole Congress.

Amid all the excitements and provocations of that memorable session he remained calm and collected, discharging his duties as chairman of the committee on Public Lands with untiring diligence, while in the private associations of our little mess, he was a genial and most instructive companion. [End Quote]

When the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress adjourns in 1843, Morrow is asked to run again. He declines, saying that when he returned to the House, he knew only one other member, that being John Quincy Adams. Moreover, he says, the spoils system has changed the character of Congress.

He concludes:

QUOTE My reasons for declining nomination are mainly personal. It is now nearly 43 years since I was by the favor of the people first called into public life as a member of the Territorial Legislature.

... To make further claims on the public confidence would, he says, manifest unwonted ambition and be an effort to go out of my proper place. [end quote]

In private life, Morrow serves, without pay, as president of the Macadized Turnpike Company. It builds the first paved road connecting Cincinnati, Montgomery, Hopkinsville, Rochester and Clarksville.

At the same time, he is president of the region's first railroad, the Little Miami Railroad Company. Again, he serves without pay.

A contemporary account goes as follows:

QUOTE In July 1844, the first cars were seen at Deerfield, now South Lebanon, and before the close of the same year they were at the mouth of Todd's Fork. No sooner had they reached Todd's Fork than a town sprang up there, which was named Morrow. [end quote]

Each day as the train steams south toward its terminus in Fulton, the neighborhood just east of the Cincinnati city line, the engineer stops by Morrow's riverside farm.

And each morning an elderly man "rather below medium height, compactly built and active with animated blue eyes" climbs aboard.

The Little Miami Railroad – now the Little Miami bike trail – stops in Fulton, where the steam boats that ply the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers are built. The Cincinnati city fathers have balked at allowing steam boats or railroads ... a new fangled, noisy and dirty, mode of transport to sully their town, fondly known throughout the west either as the Queen City ... or Porkopolis.

Throughout his life, Morrow never asks anyone to do something he is not willing to do himself. He builds a grist mill, powered by the Little Miami, and it is not uncommon, his friends and neighbors remark, to find him knee-deep in the river repairing a part on the water wheel.

While he is governor, Germany's Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar ... a veteran of the Battle of Waterloo ... arrives in Cincinnati on a tour of the young American republic.

Being told by a friend that Governor Morrow is at home, the duke hires a carriage to take himself thence.

Arriving at the Morrow farm, the grand duke encounters a small group rolling logs in a new field. Among them is ... he later recalls ... a homely little man in a red flannel shirt.

I asked him, the Duke recounts, where is your master?

"Master," exclaims the man, "I own no master – no master but Him above."

Thus is the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar introduced to Ohio's governor, Jeremiah Morrow.

And I know no better way to end this story of a remarkable man of character and principle who did far more to build Ohio and our nation than anyone today remembers.

For he truly knew no master; neither did he seek favor, or give it. His goal was the public good.

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