

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

Book Review - January 2021

The Age of Unreason *Dissecting the Infamy of the Morgan Affair and Its Aftermath*

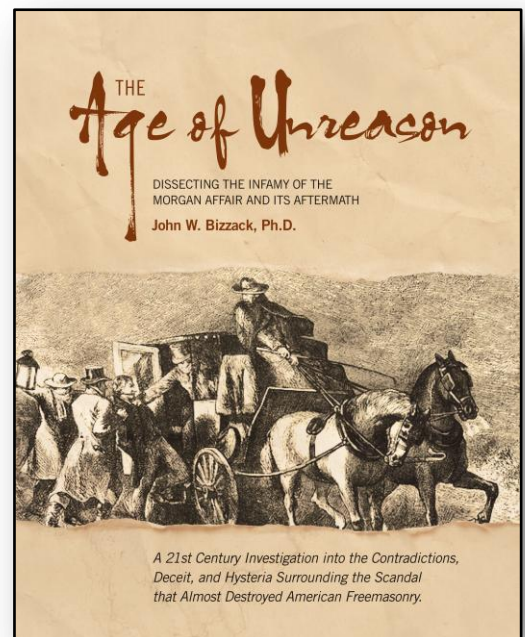
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I thought I knew the story of William Morgan and his disappearance in 1826 from a town in upstate New York. But like any good story, the truth can be muddled with deception, personal gain, and the unwillingness to face the underlying cause of an issue. Brother John Bizzack was challenged with finding the truth behind the William Morgan Affair, but, in typical fashion by this author, he found so much more than the superficial facts of the story. The reader will be taken beyond the basic history of the incident. A historical dissection of the events that led up to the Morgan Affair, and its aftermath, which still haunts American Freemasonry, is examined.

The story began in early 1826, with William Morgan preparing to write an expose of the rituals of Freemasonry. It should be noted that exposes of Freemasonry had already been written, but, nevertheless, this was just going to be one more book that would “reveal all the secrets.” The Brothers of Batavia Lodge in New York, however, thought differently, and prior to Morgan’s abduction tried in multiple ways to sabotage the book so these “secrets” would not be revealed. On September 11, 1826, Morgan was arrested on nonpayment of a loan and theft and incarcerated at the Canandaigua Jail. By 9:00 p.m. that night, Morgan had been abducted from the jail by Freemasons and was never to be heard from again. In the end, no person was ever charged with the murder of Morgan, and the charges that were brought against persons involved carried little punitive weight.

It is almost impossible to relay all the literary components of this book for the reader to digest in a timely manner. I will attempt to break it down to three major areas that include anti-Freemasonry hysteria and the defense of Freemasonry, the fact that Freemasonry had nobody at its helm, and the consequences of the events.



Brother Bizzack details the stories of those who came to the defense of Freemasonry and those who very much would like to have seen its ultimate demise. In the midst of this back and forth, two men spent a lifetime proclaiming their version of the “true story” and end of William Morgan: Thurlow Weed and Rob Morris. Weed was the editor of the *Rochester Daily Telegraph* and a leader of the Anti-Masonic Party. Rob Morris was a nationally known Freemason and Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky. Both men wrote extensively on the subject and authored many publications and books, each defined by their personal stance on Freemasonry. Each used uncorroborated information or testimony from a myriad of personalities that either proved the fact that the Freemasons killed Morgan shortly after his abduction, or that Morgan lived on in faraway places. It becomes very apparent that both men were not interested in the truth, but, rather, creating a narrative that best suited their intended target audience. Unless blindly taking their written word as fact, which most did, a simple verification of the facts would have easily shown that most of the claims could not be authenticated or could not have physically occurred due to time and place. In the end, Morris and Tweed created a false sense of truth that galvanized their respective audiences and created myths and legends that can still be seen today.

Even though the focus of this book is on the Morgan Affair, an underlying truth comes out as you read each page. The truth is that American Freemasonry lost its way shortly after being introduced into the colonies (and subsequently the newly created United States of America). Across the country, countless lodges were being created and were taking in new members at an alarming rate. New York, by 1825, counted over 400 lodges and 20,000 members. Any historian can tell you that America in that time was still isolated; and communication was rudimentary in its ability to inform the general public, let alone lodge members. As a result, Grand Lodges were unable, even in their best efforts, to ensure that lodges were conducting Freemasonry as it was intended to be practiced. This inability led to lodges acting on their own and creating what they thought Freemasonry was supposed to be, but unfortunately, they only created traditions that lacked the fundamentals of true Freemasonry. Adding to this calamity, the anti-Masonic era depleted what was left of the members that held much of the genuine Masonic knowledge. Both issues led to a lack of leadership and understanding of the true aim and purpose of Freemasonry. As stated before, no one was at the helm to guide the fraternity, and, as a result, it wandered in darkness trying to find its true self.

Finally, we are faced with the consequences of it all. After decades and centuries of both sides arguing, for and against Freemasonry, squabbling over the value and relevance of the fraternity to society, we can only conclude that everyone has their own opinion. As for American Freemasonry, we have a habit of shooting ourselves in the foot as Brother Bizzack is known to say in his speaking engagements and writings. Examples of this are found in the Baltimore Convention of 1843, where we put restrictions on the fraternity that haunt us to this day; and in our failure to realize that we have a lot of members, as Brother Bizzack states, who are more interested in the *idea* of Freemasonry, rather than becoming the kind of man that Freemasonry was designed to influence and produce.

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American Freemasonry needs to, and should, take a hard look at itself. In my humble opinion, I really don't think we would recognize ourselves. Through factually understanding where we came from and learning the lessons that history has given us, there is hope, however, that we will again know who we are and act appropriately to the betterment of society and to ourselves.

I highly encourage all that read this review to pick up a copy of Brother Bizzack's book, ***The Age of Unreason: Dissecting the Infamy of the Morgan Affair and Its Aftermath***. You will not be disappointed, and you will be very impressed with the amount of documentation he accumulated in it. This book will leave you looking for more, and, perhaps, taking a hard look at American Freemasonry and what we need to do to be relevant not only to society, but, more importantly, enhancing your personal journey of self-improvement.

The Age of Unreason: Dissecting the Infamy of the Morgan Affair and Its Aftermath is available from the author at www.thecraftsman.org, at Amazon, or from other online booksellers.