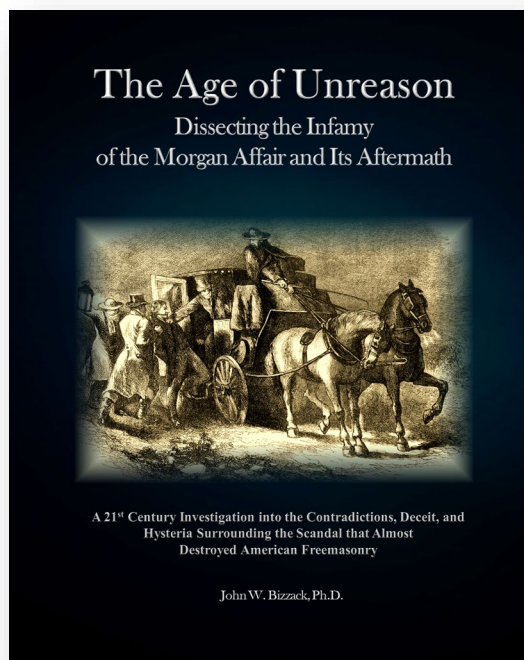


Book Interview with John W. Bizzack

Masonic Author and Past Master of Lexington Lodge No. 1

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

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William O. Ware Lodge of Research
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In Batavia, a remote area in upstate New York, the few people who knew for sure where William Morgan was on the morning of September 12, 1826, were all Freemasons. The 1880 image on the cover of John Bizzack's *Age of Unreason*, depicts what happened the previous evening as Morgan was forced into a carriage by Freemasons and never seen again. We find a description of the distinct framework through which this important research is presented below that image: *A 21st Century Investigation into the Contradictions, Deceit, and Hysteria Surrounding the Scandal that Almost Destroyed American Freemasonry*.

Recognized as a prolific writer, researcher, commentator, and advocate of the historical aim and purpose of Freemasonry, Bizzack applies both accepted standards of academic research and experienced investigation techniques to previously written accounts and thereby exposes whether such accounts are reliable. He uses his own experience and background as an investigator to analyze the evidence and the testimony of the participants, considers the political, social and cultural conditions that existed at the time, and provides the reader with an unbiased and factual account of the events that became known as *The Morgan Affair* and its long-reaching effect on American Freemasonry. As he unpacks decades of flawed compilations of supposed facts, the reasons become clear about why William Morgan has been portrayed the way he has by Masons and non-Masons. He assembles and underscores the evidence surrounding Morgan's disappearance that has too often been disregarded or left unexamined, shatters myths, and disassemble the surplus of evidence-troubled theories and distortion of circumstances that plagues this episode in American history for nearly two centuries.

The Age of Unreason will be published in 2020 and is expected to join the few publications written about this event that provides reliable information and in-depth perspective about how and why the Morgan Affair not only changed the course of American Freemasonry but continues to do so.

Providing context to the facts about what is really known about Morgan and the events that shaped the direction of the fraternity in the United States also sheds additional light on the importance of consistently ensuring members are adequately provided the effective structure through which to deliver the promise of Freemasonry.

This interview was conducted in anticipation of selected excerpts from *The Age of Unreason* being posted on the William O. Ware Lodge of Research website (<https://williamowarelodgeofresearch.com>), and *The Craftsman* (<https://thecraftsman.org>).

KEMBLE: There have been dozens of books, pamphlets and articles written about the Morgan Affair. How is *The Age of Unreason* different from all the others?

BIZZACK: Many writings offer accounts of the Morgan Affair. *The Age of Unreason* delivers the story of not only the flaws in those accounts, but the story of *why* they were accepted at various times in history, then passed on – many being widely believed as fact and truth when in reality they were based on biases of the time, the writings of Masonic apologists, sensationalism-based reporting, politics of the era and the infant stage of the evolution of American society alongside a young fraternity.

The first researched publication about the disappearance of William Morgan at the hands of Masons appeared in 1827, only months after he vanished. The first reliable historical analysis of the rise of the Anti-Masonic Party is found ten years after Morgan's disappearance. On these subjects, explanations between historians, Masonic writers, journalists, and anti-Masons range widely. *The Age of Unreason* ties these accounts together, placing them in their proper historical context, rather than telling the story in piecemeal fashion thus providing an unbiased account seeking only to discover the reality of what occurred, and why.

KEMBLE: What does the book disclose in terms of what is factual and what is not accurate in many of the previous writings?

BIZZACK: William Morgan was many things, but foremost he was a victim of his own making. His posthumous notoriety, however, is not just that he was abducted by Masons. Those who believe that only his abduction and disappearance make him notable in American Masonic History actually miss the point; they are overlooking the root of the reasons for which he was abducted in the first place.

He may have been a very unlikeable man as portrayed by both those who knew him and many Masonic apologists—a debtor, drunkard, liar, and thief, among other things, but his character was not the fundamental reason Morgan was abducted and subsequently disappeared. The exposé he was writing was at the core of the motive to kidnap him, but it was the Masonic ignorance of the men involved and those who supported the scheme that tell the real story.

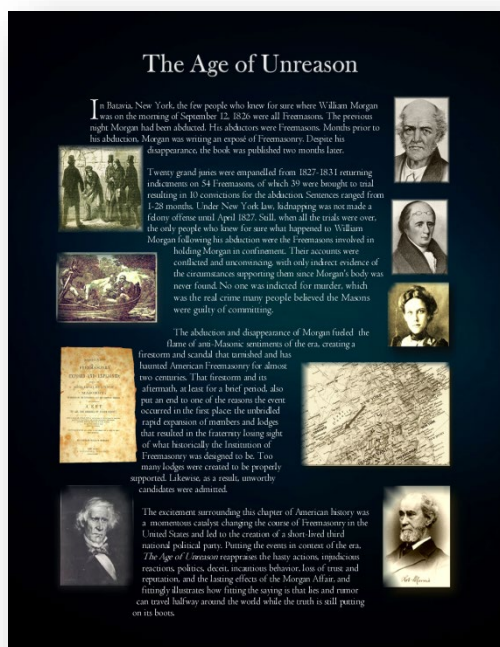
In a certain sense, William Morgan is the least important character in the story. On a personal level, there is little to indicate that anyone cared very much about Morgan and a case can be made that a good many were happy to be rid of him. The real story is about what Morgan came to represent to those who were philosophically opposed to Freemasonry and those who were frightened by it, and the feeble way in which institutional Freemasonry responded.

Many early and later writings from Masonic sources focused on the Morgan Affair as if it were merely a brief, regrettable episode in the unfolding of American Freemasonry with no significant, lingering effects. The 1843 Baltimore Convention and its results were, in part, Masonry's bid to avert another Morgan Affair and rebuild the fraternity. The convention was certainly a good idea in 1843, and had grand lodges continued to meet periodically, governed by balanced introspection, the course of American Freemasonry may have taken more constructive paths in its evolution.

The need to rebuild at all was the disastrous consequence of Freemasonry's rapid expansion, without an adequate infrastructure to support such a swift proliferation. The unbridled expansion turned into a perfect storm, illustrating the damaging effects when consistent, uniform admission practices, appropriate instruction, and capable visionary leadership are more scarce than plentiful at all levels.

While the Morgan Affair may have been a brief episode in the long history of American Freemasonry, it since contributed to shape the course of the Institution through today and much of the fraternity has not yet successfully realized or addressed its lasting lessons.

KEMBLE: Is there one writing that has muddied the waters about the Morgan Affair more than others?



BIZZACK: Yes. Rob Morris's, 1883 book, *William Morgan: Or Political Anti-Masonry, Its Rise, Growth, and Decadence* was ultimately adopted by many Masons at the time (and still today) as the final word on Morgan's disappearance, making Morris the arch-apologist for 19th-century American Freemasonry. His work was largely a defense of Freemasonry and he advanced theories that are clearly made with an agenda and a well-seasoned personal bias. This was first pointed out by Stephen Dafoe in 2009 in his research of the Morgan Affair.

Morris's work, however, is far from the only writing that clouded and warped the facts. We find that even the long-discredited works continue to be consistently cited as sources, although fact-free.

Some are based strictly on opinion, or worse, the opinions put forth in early writings that are interpreted as fact by later writers and commentators. Hearsay, substituted for facts, early in the writings and were, unfortunately, believed by later writers to be indisputable. The habit of copying and pasting such flimsy-based information litters the Internet on Masonic and non-Masonic sites alike. Very few writings have provided a comprehensive, factual, and fair overview of the numerous details involved.

KEMBLE: What resources have you found to be valuable for those who seek to best understand the Morgan Affair?

Stephen Dafoe's 2009 book, *Morgan: The Scandal That Shook Freemasonry*, and William L. Cummings's *Bibliography of Anti-Masonry with a Sketch of the Morgan Affair and Appendix Containing Several Important Documents, Etc.*, published in 1934, are essential reading. Steven Bullock's 1998, *Revolutionary Brotherhood* offers the kind of cultural and organizational histories few historians previously provided regarding anti-Masonry and the Morgan Affair. William L. Stone's 579-page volume of 49 letters published in 1833 and Peter Ross's *A Standard History of Freemasonry in the State of New York*, made available in 1899, is important foundational reading, and Michael A. Davis's *Jacksonian Volcano: Anti-Secretism and Secretism in 19th-Century American Culture* and his *Life, Death and Masonry: The Body of William Morgan*, published in 2013, offers perhaps the latest solid core of useful and balanced information.

There are undoubtedly other writings that offer some reliable background, valid references, and facts. Still, the bulk of those writings and particularly many website postings are little more than a rehash of early materials. Those materials impart long-embedded factual flaws, some exaggerating and embellishing the reliability of certain sources, and overstate the authors' familiarity with the topic.

KEMBLE: Why, after the passage of nearly 200 years, are we still interested in Morgan?

BIZZACK: The Morgan Affair, although not the cause of the anti-Masonic movement in America, but certainly fueled it, is part of not only Masonic history but our nation's history.

Even if we follow the logical conclusion from the available evidence that Freemasons murdered Morgan, we cannot know for sure with what facts were and have been established since, know how, where, or the exact identity of the Mason or Masons involved in Morgan's last minutes - and we do not have enough corroborate information that his death was intentional or unintentional. That creates the part that remains an intriguing mystery, however, the fact remains that the logical conclusion is that Freemasons were solely responsible for Morgan's disappearance, held him captive, and although they eventually offered an account of what happened to Morgan it was, and remains unconvincing in light of the facts and evidence that does exist.

Freemasonry requires a combination of maturity and intellect. Had either been present in Batavia and surrounding communities in 1826, the Morgan Affair may not have occurred at all or unfolded as it did once after Morgan's kidnapping. Freemasonry has never taught the infliction of violence upon another. Any other conclusion is inconsistent with the true teachings and philosophy of Freemasonry; thus, it would be a crime against logic to believe the Masons involved were acting as responsible, learned Masons or that Masonry required the acts they committed.

KEMBLE: What happened to William Morgan?

BIZZACK: Precisely what the evidence and circumstances indicate.

There are two clear casualties of this period that stand today: Morgan himself and the Institution of American Freemasonry.

KEMBLE: Your books, essays, commentaries, and presentations are well received by Masons around the country. Do you attribute that to the range of the topics you research and write about or the positions you take on those subject areas and the manner in which you present them?

BIZZACK: I have found there is a particular interest from younger members who seek reliable answers to the questions about how our fraternity evolved in our country. In addition, there is a surprising interest from some members who may be considered veteran Masons who find it fascinating to learn of events, circumstances, and factual accounts of how and why Freemasonry unfolded in the way it has in America and its direction bringing us to the practices and condition in which we find the Institution today.

I believe many Masons take to heart the encouragement we find in our ritual and lectures to seek truth and to expand on what they may have been offered in their lodges, and embrace information that offers new perspectives and factual information to ponder about our Craft and its rich history.

I also firmly believe in the importance of what American historian David McCullough tells us about the need for us to know our history. He said, *history is who we are and why we are the way we are*. I sense using that concept makes many of the writings and presentations more interesting.

John W. Bizzack is a forty-five-year veteran in the field of policing and criminal justice. He served over half of his criminal justice career with the Lexington Police Department rising through the ranks and serving most of his career in the Criminal Investigation Bureau, as Commander of Special Investigations, Robbery-Homicide, and later the Bureau. He retired in 1996 from assignment in the Office of the Chief of Police. He was appointed by the governor in three consecutive administrations to the position of Commissioner of the Department of Criminal Justice Training with the Kentucky Justice Cabinet. He retired with twenty years of service in that position directing the responsibilities of the department for the hiring and selection practices of Kentucky police officers as well as overseeing certified basic and advanced annual training for over 10,000 law enforcement and criminal justice officials.

Dr. Bizzack is the author of eighteen books, numerous essays, commentaries, and papers on leadership, criminal investigation, police standards, the behavior organizations, and their management. His books and writings include the topic of Freemasonry. He speaks nationwide on a variety of issues about Freemasonry, the criminal justice system, and critical thinking.

Elected to two, consecutive terms as Master of Lexington Lodge No. 1 – the oldest Masonic lodge in Kentucky - he is co-founder and coordinator of the Masonic History & Study Group and has served as chair of the Education Committee since 2011. He is currently a member of the Education Committee, Grand Lodge of Kentucky and Fellow and member of the Board of The Masonic Society.

He is a Founding Member of the Rubicon Masonic Society. Also, he is a member of the Scottish Rite, and member of the Philaethes Society, Southern California, and Texas Lodge of Research, a Fellow and member of William O. Ware Lodge of Research in Covington, Kentucky, and Honorary Member of Sophia Lodge No. 767, North Carolina's first Observant Lodge. He sat as Regent on the board of Eastern Kentucky University and co-founder and first President of the Kentucky Law Enforcement Memorial Foundation. Having served as Commissioner on the Commission on the Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies and Kentucky Crime Council, and various other boards and task forces, he is a current member of the board of the Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Bluegrass.