

BOOK REVIEW

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

WILLIAM MORGAN, OR POLITICAL ANTI-MASONRY, ITS RISE, GROWTH AND DECADENCE

By: Rob Morris, 1884

REVIEWED BY: JOHN W. BIZZACK, PM, MASTER OF WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH, April 2025

TSeptember 11, 1826, abduction of William Morgan by Freemasons from the Canandaigua Jail in upstate western New York led to more than a decade of overwhelming repercussions that shook the foundations of Masonry in America. The only people who knew for sure where Morgan was for at least the next seven days following the abduction were Freemasons. There is no verifiable evidence that Morgan was ever seen alive again.

By the end of that year, the abduction of Morgan and his plan to publish an exposé on Freemasonry became widely known as "The Morgan Affair." From that point through the mid-1830s, the topic dominated public discourse in New York and other states. Hundreds of publications, speeches, Anti-Masonic newsletters, newspapers, pamphlets, and almanacs reported extensively on those implicated, the community hearings, and the trials of the Masons charged in connection with the criminal case. These reports were frequently reprinted in established newspapers of the time, ensuring their wide distribution. By the late 1820s and continuing through the remainder of the century, the controversy inspired the publication of numerous books, all exploring Anti-Masonry and the mystery surrounding Morgan's disappearance.¹ These also include books by defenders of Masonry. The calamitous effect practically suppressed Masonry in New York, if not most of New England, Pennsylvania, Ohio Indiana, and Kentucky.



"The Abduction of William Morgan, New York, USA, 1826"
(c1880). Artist: Hooper. A print from *Cassell's History of the United States*, by Edmund Ollier, Volume III, Cassell Petter and Galpin, London, c1880.

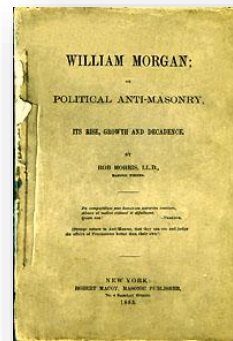
¹ William Leon Cummings, *Bibliography of Anti-masonry. With a Sketch of the "Morgan Affair and an Appendix Containing Several Important Documents Etc.*, North Carolina Lodge of Research, No. 666. Syracuse, N.Y., September 24, 1933.

All writings about The Morgan Affair regardless of the source are important, if, for no other reason than to serve as an example of weak research and inept investigative efforts that is driven by agendas of both those opposed to Masonry and those who defend it.

By the darkest years of the Anti-Masonic craze, accurate accounts of the affair, and information and details about William Morgan did not matter. It was not important to the Anti-Masonic movement if Morgan was dead or alive. What mattered shifted to whether Masons, who held a significant number of political jobs and had friendly local and state authorities in their corner, perpetrated a cover-up to conceal crimes that reasonable people would believe were a result of Masons systematically violating the law.² By late 1827, Anti-Masonry evolved from a moral crusade to a political movement.

What the movement ultimately produced was an extraordinary number of flawed narratives, an exceedingly high number of imperfections printed, spoken, testified to, and widely circulated from 1826 through the end of that century, through the next, and still today.

While sober writings about the Morgan affair do exist,³ they are often smothered by the vast accumulation of other works riddled with the deep bias, shockingly poor investigative skills, and alarmingly weak scholarship from proponents on both sides of the issue. Rob Morris's 1884 work, ***William Morgan Or Political Anti-Masonry, Its Rise, Growth And Decadence***, stands out as a superior example of published works in the latter category.



Relying on Rob Morris's Masonic reputation, both contemporaneous defenders and modern supporters often cite his work as a definitive and tidy conclusion to The Morgan Affair. Morris attempts to convince readers that what he presents is the way that history should remember all those involved in The Morgan Affair, especially when it comes to his account of William Morgan. However, verifiable evidence gets in his way. He supposedly traveled to Batavia, New York for the September 1883 unveiling of a thirty-five-foot monument in a cemetery in Batavia dedicated in memory of Morgan. The monument was commissioned, and public ceremony orchestrated by the National Christian Association.⁴ He reports that while there, he conducted what he calls one-hundred interviews. The validity of those interviews as well as Morris's conclusions continues to be

² Kathleen Smith Kutolowski, "Freemasonry and Community in the Early Republic: The Case for Anti-Masonic Anxieties," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 5, Winter, 1982.

³ *IBID*, William Preston Vaughn, "The Anti-Masonic Party in the United States: 1826-1843," University of Kentucky Press, 1983. Ronald P. Formisano and Kathleen Smith Kutolowski; "Anti-Masonry and Masonry: The Genesis of Protest, 1826-1827." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2, The Johns Hopkins University Press 1977. Stephen C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840*, Omohundro Institute and UNC Press; 2nd ed. Edition, 1998, Stephen Dafoe, *Morgan: The Scandal That Shook Freemasonry*, Cornerstone, 2014 Peter Ross' "The Morgan Craze," in the *Miscellany of The Masonic Historical Society of The State Of New York*, Lewis Masonic, 1902, John C. Palmer, "The Morgan Affair and Anti-Masonry," *The Little Masonic Library*, Masonic Service Association of the United States, 1924.

⁴ Ludwig Fuerbringer, *The Concordia Cyclopaedia: A Handbook of Religious Information, with Special Reference to the History, Doctrine, Work, and Usages of the Lutheran Church*. St. Louis, Missouri, Concordia Publishing House, 1927. (The National Christian Association was founded in 1868 with the purpose of organizing Christian opposition to secret societies, i.e., oath-bound orders such as the Freemasons, Knights Templar, Oddfellows, and Knights of Pythias. American pastor, Jonathan Blanchard co-founded the National Christian Association (NCA) in 1868 and edited its newspaper, the *Christian Cynosure*, until his death.

a point of contention, as his interpretations and the evidence that he purportedly collected now face the long-overdue scrutiny from critics and skeptics alike in the Masonic world and by trained historians.

The lack of supportable sources, curiously invented witness who conveniently died years before their accounts were made public by Morris, decorate a deliberate lie in the book about a confession.⁵ That lie stabs the credibility of the rest of his book and Morris.

Regardless, his account continues to be cited and quoted by legitimate scholars and armchair detectives even though it was effectively disputed in 2014, by researcher Stephen Dafoe who exposed the lie that Rob Morris told and what motivated him to publish it.⁶ Then, in 2024, Morris's entire Masonic career was deciphered and untangled as it came under the scrutiny of a year-long inquiry into the lore surrounding his standing and reputation – much of which was found to have been orchestrated by Morris himself.⁷

Approaching Morris's 1884 book today with anything but skepticism or caution or accepting it on face value is a mistake if, that is, a researcher or casual reader seeks more than a tour of Morris's lopsided, agenda-driven account of The Morgan Affair.

Citing Morris and his 1884 book as a source without additional notation of the liberties he takes to masquerade his speculation as evidence and fact, merely advances and subsidize much of the found poor scholarship and understanding of abduction of William Morgan.

Morris's book continues to be reprinted. However, for those who seek to achieve a clearer understanding of Anti-Masonry and The Morgan Affair and search for a facts-first approach with no concession to the bias and myth surrounding the topics, Rob Morris and his 1884 book will be near the bottom of the list.

⁵ Stephen Dafoe, *Morgan: The Scandal That Shook Freemasonry*, Cornerstone, 2014, "The Lie Rob Morris Told," *The Square Magazine*, June 2021, <https://www.thesquaremagazine.com/mag/article/202106the-lie-rob-morris-told/>, accessed, August 2021,

⁶ IBID.

⁷ John W. Bizzack, "Deciphering Rob Morris," Presentation at The Rubicon Masonic Society, 2nd Annual Conference, *Shapers of our Ritual*, September 20, 2025, Lexington, Kentucky, "The Sword of Scrutiny, The Uneven And Meandering Course To Find And Explore Facts About The Morgan Affair," William O. Ware Lodge o Research, 2025 Transactions.