

The Strange Disappearance of William Morgan

The so called Morgan Affair is regarded as an incident in a larger anti Masonic movement. There had been opposition to Freemasonry in the U.S. before the disappearance of William Morgan in 1826. The anti-masonic movement reached its high point around 1830 and lasted for about ten years.

The following facts are from a book of the same name by Thomas A. Knight and were compiled and edited by Bro. Barry D. Thom P.M. Lodge Mackay #1129 S.C. (20 min)

Around 1826 this man disappeared from his place of residence in New York State. It was stated that he was kidnapped and murdered by the Masons. Prior to this he threatened and caused the publication of the first three degrees of Masonry. Today if you travel to Batavia, in New York state, you will find in a cemetery, a monument with the following inscription on it, "William Morgan Murdered by the Masons"..

It took seven years of investigation to determine what events actually took place. Some of you might ask, Who was William Morgan?"

He was born in 1774 near Richmond, Virginia. Morgan was a stone mason by trade and had been a soldier in his younger days, having fought with General Andrew Jackson in the Battle of New Orleans. When he was 44 years of age he took a fancy to a young girl named Lucinda Pendleton. She was the 16 year old daughter of Rev. Pendleton who, as the name implies, was a minister. Lucinda was most impressed when she first met Morgan in his military uniform, which he made sure that it was cleaned, pressed and all the buttons polished for the occasion. He had the reputation of being a hard drinker and a gambler. Morgan wooed Lucinda and eventually married her, an event which Reverent Pendleton and his wife strongly opposed. This marriage caused the estrangement of Lucinda from her family forever. The Morgan's then left Richmond never to return. Morgan continued to drink, however, in those days this was very common. They ventured north to Upper Canada and settled in the town of York, which today we know as Toronto. Here Morgan worked for awhile at the Doel Brewery. Morgan and Lucinda then moved to Rochester where he returned to his trade, that of a stone mason. While there he petitioned to join the Royal Arch Masons, Western Star Chapter # 35. They examined him and believed that he had

received the three degrees of the Masonic Lodge and he was admitted to that Order. Now you must remember that in those days there was no dues card and in many cases no certificate given out. How then, you ask, did he gain his knowledge of Masonry? It is believed that he had in his possession a printed exposé of Masonry from England. Morgan's drinking habits worsened and he began talking about Masonic ritual in the taverns. As you can well imagine the Masons were most upset about this and they tried in vain to get him to stop. During one of his drinking bouts he met a David Miller. Morgan untruthfully declared to Miller that he was a Master Mason. Miller had received the Entered Apprentice degree in Albany, New York, however the Masons of Batavia discovered his worthlessness and refused to advance him. Meanwhile Lucinda was now 20 years old and had just given birth to a baby. Time moved on and Morgan continued his escapades, which now included lewd women as well as drinking. Lucinda then gave birth to a second child. Morgan wasn't even present as he was on a drunken spree in a town 50 miles away. Today fifty miles is nothing, but in those days travelling by stage coach over bad roads was quite a trip. The Morgans were boarding with a family in Batavia by the name of Stewart. Since Morgan was no longer supporting his family, Mr. Stewart looked after them and he refused to let Morgan inside his house. So Morgan had to find shelter elsewhere. At his time there was a new Royal Arch Chapter starting up in the area and Morgan wanted his name added to the petition. He raised such a fuss that they finally let him sign the petition. The Masons then immediately destroyed it and issued a second petition without his signature. Somehow, Morgan found out what they had done and this infuriated him so much that he entered into a conspiracy with David Miller to expose Masonry. Morgan would write out everything in the three degrees and Miller, who was a printer, would publish them. From the sale of the books the two of them figured they could strike it rich. When the Masons got wind of what was about to happen they were panic stricken and a flurry of meetings quickly took place. The Masons then issued a notice of warning concerning Morgan's poor behaviour and sent it to the people in nearby towns, especially Masons and Companions. This notice appeared in the Canadaigua Newspaper as well as two of the three Batavia newspapers. Meanwhile Miller figured the profits from the sale of books would amount to two million dollars. It would have been very difficult to compose from memory all three degrees. It is believed that Morgan copied from an exposure of Masonry published in England some years prior to this. Morgan later confessed to John Whitney, who was the master of a lodge in Rochester, that he had never been initiated into masonry. John Whitney was selected by a

committee of Masons to speak to Morgan and try to work out some sort of agreement. Morgan explained that he was penniless and afraid that Miller would murder him if he did not provide the expose on the Masonic degrees. In short, Morgan asked Whitney if he could point out some way of escape. The following plan was put forth by Whitney. Morgan was to be paid \$50.00 as a show of good faith. He was to be arrested on the technical charge of the theft of clothing which he borrowed from a Mason named David Kingsley. Apparel that he had not yet returned. This would get him out of Genesee Country and away from Miller and his gang. Kingsley would drop the charge and from there the Masons would escort him out of the U.S. and place him on a farm in Canada where he could start his life over again. He was to be provided with funds and the Masons would arrange transport for his wife and children at the earliest convenience. In due time, the plan was executed and Morgan was hustled out of the jail in Canadaiqua and placed in a stagecoach which headed east. They made a distance of 50 miles the first day. This was no ordinary stagecoach journey, there were accompanying carriages and outriders who cleared their way to Lewiston. In Lewiston they were met by Edward Giddens, who was an innkeeper there and also the keeper of the Powder Magazine at Fort Niagara. Among other duties he was in charge of the ferry that traversed the Niagara River at this point. It was discovered later that while Giddens was a Master Mason, he was one of the conspirators working with Miller. They departed on the ferry, however, the Canadian Masons were not ready to receive Morgan at that time, so they returned to the U.S. and there decided what to do. To place him in the jail was too risky, as they had no warrant, so it was decided to place Morgan temporarily in the Fort's empty and unused Powder Magazine until the Canadian Masons could receive him. Up to this point, everything was agreed to and accepted by Morgan but now, against his will, he was locked up in the Powder Magazine, and while he had ample food, water and blankets, he was deprived of alcohol and to a point, light. Being an ammunition room, there were only two small windows, 10 feet up, in a room that measured 30 by 50 feet. His light came from a tin candle lantern. The alcohol withdrawal symptoms started and he hammered on the walls of his prison, tore his clothing, smashed his lantern against the door, threw his food at the wall, smashed boxes and generally suffered delirium tremors. Finally a doctor was called in and Morgan was given a sedative. After being locked up for four days, Morgan had gotten over the D.T.'s and settled down somewhat. The Mason's came to him with two offers, one being a farm in Canada, and when he settled, his family would be sent to him. The second offer was a horse and \$500.00 With either of these two offers he was to agree never to set foot in

the U.S. again. Morgan, true to his style, chose the money. They then accompanied him across the river onto Canadian soil. In the mean time, Giddens reported all the happenings to Miller. Miller then printed an article concerning Morgan's disappearance and the rumors started. One stated that Morgan had been pushed over Niagara Falls. Another was that "Morgan's throat had been cut and his body buried under the sands of Lake Ontario". In each case, it was declared, that the deed was carried out by the Masons. The Masons who were responsible for Morgan's disappearance became quite concerned over the public outcry and decided that they had better try to bring Morgan back. They hired an Indian tracker and the search began. After Morgan left the Masons on the Canadian side of the Niagara River, he proceeded to Hamilton and then on to York and Richmond Hill, where he visited his old haunts for a few days. He then proceeded to Port Hope where he sold his horse and embarked on a steamer bound for Boston, Massachusetts. Meanwhile, the governments of both countries offered rewards amounting to \$1,500.00 for information leading to incriminating evidence relating to what was now popularly believed to be "a murder". The Niagara River was dragged and the shores of Lake Ontario patrolled. Miller missed no opportunity to circulate all rumors no matter how outrageous they appeared to be. One such story was about a sturgeon that washed ashore from Lake Ontario and when it was cut open, a pair of boots were taken out. The rumour was that the boots were all that remained of Morgan after the Masons had rowed him out into the lake and dumped him overboard, and the sturgeon had swallowed him. Careful investigation disclosed that there was no fish or boots at all. Then there was a story published by an anti-Masonic newspaper that the murderers took Morgan, tied and blindfolded, to a field where a team of oxen pulled and partially uprooted a maple tree. Morgan was then placed in the cavity and the tree released and pulled back into its original position. An investigation into this story revealed that it was fiction made up by the paper's editor. Miller had printed Morgan's expose of Masonry and sold it for \$1.00 per copy. It contained 125 pages, which were poorly printed and bound. Miller's actual cost was about 10 cents per copy. Miller was no longer alone in the anti-Masonic journalistic field. There were no less than 130 papers at the height of the anti-Masonic movement. Meanwhile the Masons assured Lucinda Morgan that her husband was alive and she should see him within a year. They offered to board her and her children at an inn owned by a Mason and pay all expenses for clothing, food, etc. Lucinda refused this offer. No less than 5 incidents were reported by men confessing to having eye witnessed the murder of William Morgan. In all these cases the evidence was unsupported, uncorroborated and ultimately

dismissed. Thirteen months after Morgan's disappearance, the body of a man floated ashore in Lake Ontario. He was examined by a coroner and then buried. Anti-masonic people were desperate for Morgan's corpse and after hearing this story they took Lucinda with them to identify the body. When she said that the clothes were not those of her husband, they replied that the Masons changed his clothes before they murdered him. The corpse was bloated beyond recognition and she was bamboozled into identifying the man as her husband, Lucinda was seeing another man at that time and perhaps she wished for a corpse as well. Miller and six others also positively identified the corpse as that of Morgan. They had the putrid corpse returned to Batavia where it was laid out in state on the lawn in the cemetery for all to view. Then the corpse was buried for the second time. The anti-Masons were ecstatic over the whole episode until Sarah Munro of New Castle, Ontario came to claim her husband's body. She told how her husband Timothy Munro had set out in a boat on Lake Ontario and never returned. She stated that he always travelled with a collection of religious tracts in his pocket and he was wearing a suit made by her hands. She gave explicit details of how the suit was stitched and later mended, and even of a sock that she had darned a hole in. So the corpse was dug up again and sure enough the suit was made exactly as she had said. The religious papers were found in the pockets. There was also a tuft of hair on the top of the man's head whereas Morgan was completely bald on the top of his head. The corpse was measured at 5'10", while Morgan was 5'6". Timothy Munro was then buried for the third and final time. While Morgan was in full agreement with his plan of escape, aided by the masons, he did not want to be locked in the powder magazine for four days and charges of his kidnapping were laid against the Masons responsible. A trial resulted with the following sentences given out. Sheriff Eli Bruce was stripped of his rank and given 28 months in jail, Colonel William King died shortly before he came to trial, Loton Lawson, 2 years, Nicholas Cheseboro, 1 year, John Sheldon, 3 months, and Edward Sawyer, 1 month. An anti-Masonic rally took place in 1928, in Le Roy, a town outside of Rochester. Here, the first seven degrees of Masonry were read out in public, and afterwards published. Another rally took place on July 4th, 1928 where before a crowd of 10,000 people 1,103 Masons renounced Masonry. All this caused Masonic membership in New York State to drop from 30,000 to 3,000. Lodge charters were surrendered or the lodges merely ceased to meet. In 1930, four years after Morgan's disappearance, Lucinda married George Harris, a border who lived in the same residence. During those 4 years, Harris had provided for her and the two children, After the wedding, the family moved away. After twenty years

of marriage to Harris, Lucinda just up and left him without a trace. No one seems to know why. Had she found out that Morgan was indeed still alive and well, and her strict Christian upbringing caused her to realize that she was not legally wed and in fact had been living in adultery all these years? Today, there still stands in a cemetery in Batavia a 47 foot monolith. The top part is a 7 foot statue of William Morgan himself. There are two redeeming qualities about Morgan as he appears at the top of the monument-- he is sober and silent--two qualities he did not possess in life. The inscriptions on the monument read as follows: "Sacred to the memory of William Morgan-- A Captain in the war of 1812-- A respectable citizen of Batavia and a martyr to the Freedom of Writing, Printing and Speaking the truth. He was abducted from near this spot in the year 1826 by Free Masons and murdered for revealing the secrets of their order". The Monument was the work of an organization known as The National Christian Association with headquarters in Chicago, Illinois, at a cost of \$20,000 which was raised through subscriptions from 26 U.S. States as well as Canada. Let us analyze some of the inscriptions found on the monument. First of all, in the army, he was not a captain, he was a private. Morgan was not a respectable citizen, for he was seen on more than one occasion dragging poor Lucinda Morgan by the hair and slamming her into furniture while intoxicated. More than once he was found passed out in the streets from excess alcohol. He was not a martyr, nor was he murdered by the Masons, in fact, there is no body buried beneath the monument and his corpse was never found, although many people searched for it. What then, become of William Morgan? He left Port Hope, Ontario by boat and went to Boston where he read in the local newspapers about all the excitement his disappearance had caused. He wasn't afraid of Miller and his gang anymore. In fact, he thought up another way to make a fast buck. He sent a letter to Miller, telling of his general whereabouts, in brief he would remain in hiding, the Masons would be charged with his death, a book would be printed about his disappearance and the profits split between himself and Miller. Miller agreed to the plan and for many months, a John Davis went back and forth from Boston to Batavia carrying money collected by Miller, the total sum being around \$4,000.00 The Masons were most anxious to locate Morgan and while they suspected he was in Boston, they failed to find him. When the sale of books dried up, Morgan sailed to Smyrna in Asia Minor, a boat trip that lasted one month. Morgan went under the assumed name of Mustapha, dressed as a Turk, and spent the remaining years of his life in that country. In 1875, a sailing captain made the statement that in 1830 he and his officers were in Smyrna and Morgan admitted to them at that time who he was. Morgan was also identified by other Americans over a

period of many years. So ends the story of the "Strange Disappearance of William Morgan".

Appendix

From: "Stuart MacDonald" <semacd@nbnet.nb.ca>

Date: Sun, 27 Jun 2004 10:43:21 -0300

To: "Barry Thom" <barry.thom@cablerocket.com>

Subject: The William Morgan Affair

Dear Bro. Barry;

It was with some consternation that I read your posting on the William Morgan affair. While I appreciate your efforts to post items of Masonic interest to the Canmas list I do have concerns when postings contain as many inaccuracies as contained within the Morgan posting. Unfortunately there are too few members of the craft that take the time to enter into Masonic research and as a result are all too ready to take as gospel postings such as the Morgan affair. To say that Knight was biased in his approach would be an understatement not to mention that he appears to have taken considerable license that borders on the fictional. His research was obviously poorly done resulting in false conclusions. in the future when posting this type of article I would suggest a disclaimer at the beginning pointing out to the reader that this is only one viewpoint.

Yours aye;

Stuart MacDonald, PM
Secretary/Historian
Albion Lodge No. 1
Saint John, N.B.

Editor

Mostly Masonry

Dear Bro. MacDonald,

The paper that I put forward was taken, without change, from Thomas A.

Knight's book. The book shows a copyright date of 1932. Knight is our Masonic Brother and I believe that he held a rank in the Grand Lodge of Ohio. The book was published by the author at Brecksville, Ohio. and distributed by The Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company. Our Brother spent seven years researching before the book was complete. You stated among other things that our Brother is bias. I would like to think that he tried to remain neutral, however, being a pro Mason he would tend, if anything to favour Masonry.

William Cummings of New York State spent twenty years researching the Morgan incident and did find many flaws in Knight's story but they were mostly minor and did not change the overall picture.

Some of the flaws are as follows:

1. Morgan did not own a brewery in Richmond Hill, Ont. He did, however, work at the Doel Brewery.
2. There is no proof to the story, that Morgan was offered a farm in Canada with his family to follow or be given \$500 dollars and a bridled horse to go where he liked.
3. There is no reliable account that Morgan went to Port Hope and boarded a ship to Boston.
4. Cummings felt that sveral people reporting that they saw Morgan in Turkey is only a romantic story.

Cummings did state, (not as a positive identification) "In 1827, a William Morgan was picked up at sea from the vessel CONSTANCE by the schooner STAR, the former having floundered on the coral reefs 200 miles east of Cape San Antonio, Cuba. He was landed in the Grand Caymans at Cayman Brac. Later he moved to Little Cayman where he married Catherine Ann Page, in 1829. They had nine children. Morgan moved his family to Utila, off the coast of Honduras about 1841. He died in 1864 at age 89.