

# THE PAST IS ALWAYS PRESENT

## CONNECTING THE DOTS OF A BANQUET OF FOOLISHNESS

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An Excerpt from *Bending Granite: Taking Stock of American Freemasonry*

Ridiculing and defamatory pamphlets, manuscripts, folios, newspaper articles, or advertisements purported to reveal Masonic lectures, test questions, or symbolic materials about Freemasonry began to appear almost as soon the Fraternity was formally organized.<sup>1</sup> Some of these works were products of betrayal and, by that fact, suspicious. Others were clearly intended to antagonize the Fraternity. Some may have been published to help Masons learn rituals and processes and even as a publication to attract the attention of men who became interested enough to join the Craft.<sup>2</sup>

As Freemasonry spread to other parts of the world, a genre was created. Regardless of the purpose behind the writing and publication, the writings in the new genre became fodder for those with social, religious, and political agendas and used to create and fan public concern that hosted paranoia about Freemasonry. This coincided with a period when social orders and governments were changing and the religious landscape that influenced them. And, of course, writings, as then and now, that create public excitement and promise to “reveal,” “expose,” and give away the “secrets” of Freemasonry also have a financial profit/angle to them.<sup>3</sup>

The genre developed what might be considered common working tools, as it were, for the writers and printers. Merely publishing Masonic rituals for public consumption that noted the ceremonies, passwords, and grips would later incorporate longer narratives and commentary, and ultimately lengthy books, and provide an array of conjecture, innuendo, surmise based on surmise, and fallacious tales. These tools provided the opportunity to shoehorn assumptions and calamitous reasoning into later exposures that played on fantasy, fraud, catered to bogus documents, and deceit, which established a standard formula that worked especially well for the genre as the nineteenth century ended.<sup>4</sup>

As the twentieth century ended, the Internet, where anyone with a half-baked opinion can, with anonymity in most cases and with almost complete impunity, copy and paste nonsense and shoehorn fallacy of their own interpretation, thus helping to further pave an even more convenient path for a banquet of foolishness about Freemasonry. An easily accessible and seemingly endless list of links on the Internet about Freemasonry has

<sup>1</sup> S. Brent Morris, *Why 33? Searching for Masonic Origins*, Chapter, collection of papers, *New Light on Gormogons*, p. 297. Westphalia Press, Washington, D.C., 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Arturo De Hoyos, *Light on Masonry: the History and Rituals of America's Most Important Masonic Exposé*, Scottish Rite Research Society, 2008. Harry Carr, *The Early French Exposures*. London: Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, 1971, Leo Zaneli, *A Pragmatic Masonic History*, *The Square Magazine*, Published in three parts in Vol. 25, September-December 1998, and Vol. 26, March 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Henry W. Coil, in Coil's *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (Macoy, 1961) note that there were thirty-nine writings between 1723 and 1852 classified as Masonic exposures.

<sup>4</sup> Arturo De Hoyos, S. Brent Morris, *It True What They Say About Freemasonry?* 2nd edition, pp. 27–36 & 195–228, Chap. 3, Leo Taxil: The Hoax of Luciferian Masonry, and Appendix 1, The Confession of Leo Taxil, 1988. Alain Bernheim, A. William Samii, and Eric Serejski, “The Confession Of Leo Taxil,” *Heredom*, *The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society*, vol. 5, 1996, pp. 137-168.

spread more quickly than ever in history, no matter the veracity of its content.

Packaging conjecture and the cobbling together of many compendiums of poor research and reasoning has not only become the signature of the genre. It has subsidized and inspired sensationalism that appeals to our lowest instincts and feeds the alarming increase of our appetite for superficial details. Facts are often supplanted, so common sense and reason are suffocated. Instead of striving for a balance of reason and emotion, appealing to emotions makes emotion the foundation of what is believed by too many to be the truth.

This *feeling more and thinking less* approach to inquiry has mushroomed in our culture today. The dispiriting evidence saturates our media and entertainment outlets and chokes the Internet, especially social media platforms, with endless unfurling incapacity for reasonable and intelligent discourse. This headlong, artless rush dims what was formerly considered reasonable and intelligent discourse.

In this time of accelerated, emotion-driven contentions, the argument that too many in just the past few generations seem to have sleepwalked their way through the education available and offered to them is even more conspicuous. The position that too many of our educational institutions napped, which produced so many sleepwalkers, is no longer an occasional theory.

Regardless, the prevalence of naive and gullible mindsets is present daily to remind us that our current culture does not always bother itself with connecting dots or even looking for them in our technology-driven world. Many even seem to connect dots where none exist.

Suppose our institutions have a general incapacity to transmit knowledge from which sound thinking and wisdom are supposed to derive. How do we get ahead (or out) of the problem when those who sleepwalk become part of the system and the educational institutions designed to transmit knowledge? How do we begin to bring them from their siestas and keep them from sliding backward into sleepwalking again? This conundrum in our greater society mirrors the American Masonic Fraternity of Freemasons.

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## **THE IDEA OF FREEMASONRY**

This writing is not an exhaustive defense of Freemasonry against defamatory works. As renowned author and Oklahoma Freemason James T. Tresner once noted, dealing with the attacks of anti-Masonic sentiment can be likened to other distasteful tasks, like unstopping a clogged toilet.<sup>5</sup>

The *idea* of Freemasonry needs no defense. The Fraternity surrounding Freemasonry that is responsible for the life and care of Freemasonry, however, is another matter. The Fraternity is a human institution. Thus it has flaws like all such organizations and for many of the same reasons (i.e., over-reliance on past performance based on a mistaken definition of how its success is measured). Understanding that, and then remembering that the factual history of American Freemasonry *and* the Fraternity requires its study to be viewed in context

with the development of the larger society and culture in which it evolved. The Fraternity and the state of Freemasonry today did not come about in a vacuum. Our past is always present and inescapably married to the larger society in which it exists.

Members have always been invited to improve Freemasonry if they can and to especially improve the organization of the Fraternity that administers it. Each generation of Masons tinkers with that, but it cannot be said that each generation has improved or constructively advanced the idea of Freemasonry. It can, however, be shown that every generation has, based on what they believe the idea of Freemasonry to be, had their busy hands involved in establishing the way the Fraternity is led and its purpose understood by its votaries and public.

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There is no finish line when determining how best to lead and administer the *idea* of Freemasonry through the ever-changing shifts and societal developments of the larger culture from which its members must be drawn. Successfully and effectively getting across the *idea* of Freemasonry, its historical intent and design, to all admitted into its ranks will always need work. Nevertheless, as pointed out earlier, should a system be erratic in transmitting the knowledge it is expected and supposed to consistently deliver, what happens when those exposed to that system become responsible for transmitting the knowledge to which they were exposed? We must remember, too, that generations of members and the public alike have believed what

they were told the idea of Freemasonry is. What the majority believe becomes the core of what is passed on to the next generation.

A clear majority (64%) of Lodges report the current practice of their Lodge reflects the best way to practice Freemasonry.<sup>6</sup>

Included in that majority, we find Lodges that cannot open their meetings due to the lack of required officers present and struggle to sustain the life of their Lodge because of the loss of revenue from inadequate dues, suspensions, demits, and the death of members that go unreplaced. Additionally, many are unable to perform their own ritual, rank a functional library at the bottom of a list of ideal characteristics of a Masonic Lodge, offer no instruction beyond ritual, rank low the need for a long-term plan under which to manage and lead their Lodge, and over half believe that ancillary “Fun degrees” are important to the Masonic experience.<sup>7</sup> “We were never told about that at my Lodge” is a common remark by too many members in response to hearing or learning about rudimentary topics about Freemasonry.<sup>8</sup> Surprising as it may be, 71 percent of those participating in the survey that provided this data were, at the time, current or Past Masters.

*We must remember is that generations of members and public alike have believed what they were told the idea of Freemasonry is, with little exception, and in the main, what the majority believe becomes the core of what is passed on to the next.*

Writings that paint Freemasonry with the broad brush of

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<sup>6</sup> *Characteristics of An Ideal Lodge Survey Results and Analysis*, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky, October 2019.

<sup>7</sup> *IBID.*

<sup>8</sup> *IBID.*

juvenile illusion and folly are either unaware of or overlook these realities that have and continue to exist in too many Lodges. The claims often made by the ignorant that only Masons, at the top of a brilliantly designed imaginary organizational pyramid, are privy to the real purpose of the institution. All other members are dupes and are as silly as they sound.

A human institution, even one with laudable and well-grounded life philosophies, has flaws. A lack of careful reasoning on the part of zealous theorists who paint the image of Freemasonry with their broad brush, as well as those who buy into such sloppy thinking, rarely seem to have stepped outside their own appetite for sensationalism or are willing to do just a little honest homework before spewing this evidence-troubled view.

Understanding why people create, seek, embrace, and spew outlandish, mistaken notions, misinterpreted events, and cling to such evidence-troubled theories, can help to understand humanity and, thus, of Freemasonry as an institution.

Under the aegis of that viewpoint, becoming aware of the series of events that contributed to the dawning of anti-Masonic sentiment in the United States is useful to the Fraternity in the same way that a better understanding of our factual history better serves members and their leaders to make decisions that directly affect public perception and the course of American Freemasonry.

It seems reasonable to believe that with such an awareness and understanding, leadership could also help curb unnecessary tinkering with Freemasonry by those in the Fraternity who have not bothered to seek that awareness or knowledge themselves.

Many Masons express surprise to learn there was ever a real anti-Masonic period in America, much less the extent of what took place in an era in which the public was stirred to extinguish Freemasonry. While many Masons may have heard of The Morgan Affair, few can say when that affair occurred, much less what led to and caused it.

What actually happened in America (and to Freemasonry) in the decades preceding The Morgan Affair (and twelve to fourteen years following the event) is far from the genesis of anti-Masonic sentiments or the genre of writings that continues to fuel misinformation and conspiratorial theories about the Craft. However, knowing little about this period in American history and the Fraternity during those years creates gaps in the factual history that impede a clearer understanding of how Masonry in America arrived where we find it today.

*Seeing and understanding how  
events in history connect provide  
insight into origins of things and by  
looking in context with the times  
that circumstances give birth to  
later historical events, help us to  
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many things.*

## **CONNECTIONS AND THEIR RIPPLING EFFECT**

The course of history is often changed because of the extraordinary way change happens. It reminds us that while there may be certain patterns we can detect in factual history, there is no grand design to how history goes. One thing here may lead to another there, and another there can have a rippling effect on things elsewhere. Rippling depends on the circumstances of the times, the necessity for discoveries that contribute to the life and care of our civilization, and public perception of new concepts that emerge from study, experiments, mistakes, misconceptions, politics, and good and bad information. Importantly, the intelligence of those, at any given time, who are affected by change and their ability to reason their way through the

ripples plays, perhaps, the lion's share of the effect.

Seeing and understanding how events in history connect provide insight into the actual origin of the event. When looking at the times in which circumstances give birth to later historical events, context helps us appreciate why we do or do not do many things. The absence of context has lasting implications as much as cherry-picking through history to find those things that only support one's bias.

Anti-Masonic sentiment in the United States is commonly but incorrectly attributed to what occurred on a chilly fall evening in September 1826, when William Morgan was kidnapped by Freemasons in upstate New York and subsequently disappeared.

This writing will not delve deeply into the details of what is factually known as The Morgan Affair. Much has already been written about the crime, the circumstances that led to it, and its aftermath.<sup>9</sup> Forty-seven indictments of Masons over a five-year investigation that resulted in nine convictions was more than enough for the anti-Masonic sentiment pump, already primed twenty-seven years earlier, to explode and be exploited.

Although careful not to appear as defending the behavior of those found guilty, many Masonic writers have taken bits and pieces of information about the event and often, with some imaginative rhetoric, tried to fill in the blanks to push back the tide and consequences of anti-Masonic sentiment to defend and restore the reputation of the Fraternity. The circumstances of Morgan's disappearance alone provided perfect ammunition at a particular time in American history to advance the anti-Masonic agenda, and it did.

The groundswell of anti-Masonic sentiments, already implanted in much of a full generation before 1826, proved too robust to curtail or effectively address once news of The Morgan Affair spread through the nation.

As late as 1883, Rob Morris, a well-known nineteenth-century Mason and stanch apologist, wrote a clumsily assembled book that he and many in the Fraternity hoped would set the record straight on The Morgan Affair and anti-Masonry. It did neither.<sup>10</sup>

What does exist that allows us to trace the early seed of the later widespread anti-Masonic sentiment in America?

How did that seed grow and spread to a groundswell, then a full-fledged movement to destroy Freemasonry three decades after it was planted?

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## CONNECTING DOTS

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<sup>9</sup> John W. Bizzack, *Age of Unreason: Dissecting the Infamy Of The Morgan Affair And Its Aftermath*, BSF Foundation, 2021. Stephen Dafoe, *Morgan: The Scandal That Shook Freemasonry*, Cornerstone, 2009. (See citations in both works for hundreds of other writings about The Morgan Affair)

<sup>10</sup> Rob Morris, *William Morgan: Or Political Anti-Masonry, Its Rise, Growth, and Decadence*, Morris, 1883. Although Morris admits that what he offers in his alleged 37 years of investigation of The Morgan Affair was drawn primarily on his memory as the evidence the notion that Morgan was not murdered by Masons, his book crumbles under the microscope and consistently omits solid proof of his version of what happened to Morgan. Like so many other ineloquent attempts by Masons to answer all questions related to The Morgan Affair and explain anti-Masonry, then and now, satisfies only those who look no further for facts.

Eight men, six intentionally and two inadvertently, represent dots in our factual history that shed light on when and how anti-Masonic sentiment roots began to emerge as a matter of public concern.

The following questions help frame the context necessary to examine factual roots.

1. What did a monk in the late eighteenth century, a British spy, have to do with contributing to the anti-Masonic hysteria that took root and blossomed in America?
2. What did that monk have to do with a heavily medicated, well-known, twenty-year professor of Natural Philosophy at Edinburg University whose work caused shockwaves about Freemasonry over three-thousand miles away and would continue to reverberate for centuries?<sup>11</sup>
3. What does a French publicist living in exile in London, who happened to be a Jesuit priest, have to do with the monk, the professor, and American anti-Masonic sentiment?<sup>12</sup>
4. And how did the author of the first textbook on American geography published in the United States, and a penchant for conspiracy theory, trigger early anti-Masonic attitudes in the United States because of the monk and the professor?<sup>13</sup>
5. How and why was the president of Yale University influenced by the monk, the professor, and the geographer and referred to as “The Pope of New England?”
6. What did a preacher in New England do to make the actions of these four men turn into a thorny issue that may have somewhat swayed the presidential election of 1800 that led Thomas Jefferson to the presidency?
7. What did the fifth president of the United States, who was also the last president from the Founding Fathers and the last surviving Revolutionary War general and hero, do that inadvertently contributed to the ease with which the decades-old embers of Anti-Masonry were later stirred into a flame?

The monk, professor, university president, and preacher had three things in common. *First*, they passed on through their writings and presentations notions that were long on theory but desperately shy on facts and evidence to support them. *Second*, they relied on information from others who, for political and religious reasons, believed there were evil forces at work that were intent on overthrowing religion, government, and human society—civil and domestic. *Third*, with the help of other factors that were clearly at play at the time, these men planted and nourished the seeds of a movement that shook the foundation of a young version of American Freemasonry and attempted to destroy it.

The fifth president and last surviving Revolutionary War general are dots that can be connected but play unexpected roles in the story without intentions of their actions leading in any way to the events that took place after the Morgan Affair.

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<sup>11</sup> Mike Jay, “Darkness Over All: John Robison and the Birth of the Illuminati Conspiracy,” *The Public Domain Review*, April 2014.

<https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/darkness-over-all-john-robison-and-the-birth-of-the-illuminati-conspiracy#2-1>, accessed June 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Richard J. Moss, *The Life of Jedidiah Morse: A Station of Peculiar Exposure*, University of Tennessee Press, 1995.

These dots illustrate how “one thing here may lead to another there, and another there can have a rippling effect on things elsewhere.”

## DOTS

Maurus Alexander Horn, or, to use his cover name, Mister Bergströma, was a priest, librarian, manuscript trader, and British diplomat spy in the mid-1790s. He anonymously authored many papers that condemned France for activities he believed undermined the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup> Horn, a believer in the power of the Illuminati, was the main supplier of materials that supported his contentions to John Robison, who cited him in his 1798 book that further spread the idea that fraternal groups were the cause of the French Revolution.<sup>15</sup>



John Robison was a professor of Natural Philosophy who, in 1798, published, *Proofs of a Conspiracy: Against All The Religions and Governments Of Europe, Carried On In The Secret Meetings of Freemasons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies*.

Alexander Horn's arguments and writings led Robison to become disillusioned by the horrors of the French Revolution and its aftermath, as well as a belief that the participation of French Freemasons and the Bavarian Illuminati (as well as other similarly themed fraternal, philosophical, and esoteric groups) were at the root of the Revolution. His book, which became what we would consider today to be a best seller, was written while under heavy medication for an ongoing ailment and attempted to point out the culpability of these groups, as well as his perception of untrustworthy Continental Masons.

Like all convulsive world events before and since, the French Revolution had been full of conspiracies, bred by the speed of events, the panic of those caught up in them, and the limited information available to them as they unfolded. Unable to believe that the French Revolution had been a genuine mass movement reacting to the oppression of a tyrannical regime, Robison, like so many of the era, clung to their belief that it must have been orchestrated by a small cell of fanatics and that the lack of evidence for any such conspiracy was itself evidence for the conspirators' cunning in concealing their operations from public view.<sup>16</sup> In his *Proofs of a Conspiracy*, Robison proposed that all the agents of revolution had been pawns in a much bigger game, with ambitions that were only just beginning to make themselves visible.<sup>17</sup> Unbeknownst to Robison, he advanced a formula that later advanced a new genre style that would use his approach and shoehorn conjecture masquerading as evidence in many writings about Freemasonry. To the surprise of some, Robison was initiated in March 1770 into Freemasonry at La Parfaite Intelligence Lodge Liege, Belgium, but could hardly be considered more than a casual Mason.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Claus Oberhauser, "Diplomacy From The Underground. The Remarkable Career Of Alexander Horn (1762-1820)," FWF Project: ISBN: 978-3706553070, 2014, Mark Dilworth, 'Horn, Alexander 1762–1820,' Oxford *Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> *IBID*, and Livia Gershon, The French Revolution as Illuminati Conspiracy JSTOR Daily, September 28, 2020, <https://daily.jstor.org/the-french-revolution-as-illuminati-conspiracy>, accessed, March 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Jay.

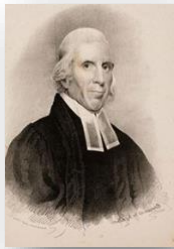
<sup>17</sup> *IBID*.

<sup>18</sup> W.K. Firminger, Barruel," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. I. W. J. Parrett, Ltd. Margate, 1940.



Augustin Barruel, a French publicist and Jesuit priest, wrote a book titled, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (published in French in 1797–98 and translated into English in 1799). He also alleged that secret societies planned and executed the French Revolution. Moreover, their motive was cloaked in a conspiracy to overthrow any and all forms of political and social organizations based on conformity to the moral teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>19</sup>

Although written independently, Robison's book fell into Barruel's hands, and Barruel's fell into Robison's by some questionable means, as they each were being written.<sup>20</sup> Barruel was educated by the Jesuits and conveniently claimed to have unwillingly been initiated into Masonry *without* making any obligation of secrecy.<sup>21</sup>



Jedidiah Morse, a prominent Congregational minister in Charlestown, Massachusetts, with a penchant for conspiracy theory, was pushed into the national spotlight by a series of spurious sermons he delivered in 1798 and 1799, detailing the accusations made in John Robison's book. His sermons centered around the assertion that the government and religion of the United States were the targets of a vast conspiracy directed, generally, by France, but more specifically by a shadowy group called the Bavarian Illuminati whose ideas had infiltrated American Freemasonry.

In the first sermon, he warned of a sinister Illuminati conspiracy in the United States. His second sermon attempted to answer charges that he had provided no proof in his sermon. In this third sermon, Morse claimed to have found proof of an Illuminati presence in Virginia in a regular Lodge of Freemasons. Morse accepted Robison's book as accurate and advanced the idea that the Illuminati, which he identified Freemasonry as an offshoot, had kindled the French Revolution and currently stood behind the successes of the French army in Europe.

After Morse's attention-getting sermons, several other Congregational ministers (although a few questioned the accuracy of the claims) took up the same issues from the pulpit, first in New England, which rippled into congregations in other states, spreading the alarm of conspiracy that Morse created by his sermons.<sup>22</sup>



The Reverend Timothy Dwight, the president of Yale University, was one of the most powerful men in New England. He delivered a sermon at Yale on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1798, titled, *The Duty of Americans at the Present Crisis*. He told his audience that there was a new and terrifying threat to the young nation: the Illuminati. Dwight declared that those who were part of the Illuminati believed that murder, and butchery, however extended and dreadful, were completely justified by what the group believed was their great purpose, which was to overthrow religion, government, and human society.<sup>23</sup>

Morse and Dwight sought to undermine public respect for Freemasonry because the

<sup>19</sup> *IBID.*

<sup>20</sup> *IBID.*

<sup>21</sup> "The French Revolution and the Bavarian Illuminati," *The Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon*, <https://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/texts/robison-barruel.html>, accessed June 3, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, Columbia University Press, 1918, Chapter 3, The European Illuminati, Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, website accessed November 24, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> *The Duty Of Americans, At The Present Crisis, Illustrated In A Discourse*, preached on the fourth of July 1798 by Timothy Dwight, Evan's Early American Imprint Collection, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N25378.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>, accessed, March 2022.

Institution of Freemasonry was a friend of religious liberty and presented a major obstacle to these advocates of the religious establishment.<sup>24</sup> As such, the assertions from the pulpit that alleged that the European-based Illuminati had infiltrated American Freemasonry began to spread.



John Cosens Ogden, a little-known preacher compared to Morse and Dwight, turned the paranoia created by those men against them through a series of pamphlets he wrote in 1798 and 1799. These pamphlets appeared in the *Philadelphia Aurora* and illustrated how a popular English proverb (even when twisted) rings true. What is good for the goose is good for the slanderer.<sup>25</sup>

Ogden believed there was clerical tyranny in New England. He understood the power of "Illuminati" and "Jacobin."<sup>26</sup> That they were more than simple invective and that the words conveyed a definite image to the public: the image of an insidious, antichristian, antigovernment, foreign conspiracy threatening the United States.<sup>27</sup>

He claimed to have uncovered the *real* conspiracy posited by Horn, Robison, Barruel, Morse, and Dwight. He argued that the foreign and domestic threat of the Illuminati was all a front and accused them and others in the pulpit elsewhere, specifically Timothy Dwight, of being part of the Illuminati bent on destroying America's young democracy. Ogden held that Dwight was trying to establish Congregationalism as New England's 'official' religion and achieved this reversal, in part, by repeatedly referring to Dwight as the "Pope of New England" and Dwight's home as the "Papal Palace at Yale."<sup>28</sup> He successfully insinuated that Dwight was using his position as the head of Yale to infiltrate America's higher education system and indoctrinate the youth. He wrote that Dwight was "perverting a public literary institution to the purposes of the political party of the time by slyly suggesting that colleges were subversive breeding grounds where impressionable young people were being led astray."<sup>29</sup>

Ogden's conspiratorial accusations were carried by the *Aurora* and spread in sympathetic newspapers from New York to Baltimore. Even some who did not repeat his specific Illuminati insinuations adopted his overall contempt of New England's political class and many clerics—the *Richmond Virginia Examiner* called the state of Connecticut "Priest Ridden" and "muzzled by its prejudices."<sup>30</sup>

Ogden's claim helped crumble some of the manufactured paranoia about Freemasonry in the early republic.

<sup>24</sup> Alan V. Briceland, "The Philadelphia Aurora, the New England Illuminati, and the Election of 1800." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 100, no. 1, 1976. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20091027>. Accessed 20 May 2022

<sup>25</sup> The proverb, "What is good for the goose is good for the gander" is used to say that one person or situation should be treated the same way that another person or situation is treated - what is appropriate in one case is also appropriate in the other case in question. John Ray, *A Collection of English Proverbs: Digested Into a Convenient Method for the Speedy Finding Anyone Upon Occasion; with Short Annotations. Whereunto are Added Local Proverbs with Their Explications, Old Proverbial Rhythmes, Less Known Or Exotic Proverbial Sentences, and Scottish Proverbs*, Printed by John Hays, Printer to the University, for W. Morden, 1670.

<sup>26</sup> The Jacobins were the most famous and powerful of the political clubs or societies of the French Revolution. Their official name was the Society of the Friends of the Constitution. They championed republican government, the rule of the people, the abolition of the hereditary aristocracy, popular education, and separation of church and state.

<sup>27</sup> Briceland.

<sup>28</sup> *IBID.*

<sup>29</sup> *IBID.* The *Philadelphia Aurora* publication contended that, "In order that young people might be properly indoctrinated, the clergy had paid special attention to the colleges. They had subverted. One set of religious opinions was being forced upon students at Yale, at Williams, and at Dartmouth. The colleges from New York to the south, as yet uncorrupted by "controverted theology," continued to embrace "universal science, candor and moderation." But in New England states, where the clergy had gained superiority, "a want of conformity to the constitution of the Christian church, and and convolute government." "From this system," the *Aurora* warned, "confusion, expense, and trouble multiply"

<sup>30</sup> Charges made by Ogden achieved wide circulation and were taken seriously in many quarters. Newspapers in Staunton and Richmond, in Easton and Baltimore, in New York, and in New London, carried accounts of Illuminati activities.

Some interpreted his writings in opposition to Congregationalism, which helped lower the reelection chances of John Adams, although a prominent opponent to Freemasonry, to a second presidential term in 1801.<sup>31</sup> On February 17, 1801, presidential candidate Thomas Jefferson won the support of a majority of congressional representatives displacing Adams, even though many paranoia-spreaders and Federalists often characterized Jefferson and his Democratic-Republican party as Jacobins.<sup>32</sup>

## UNPREDICTABLE RIPPLING EFFECT OF THE DOTS

We see from these dots how *one thing here leads to one thing there*, often with unpredictable rippling effects. However, while anti-Masonic sentiments in the nation may have been sidetracked for a while from around 1801 through much of 1826, they smoldered. The foundation was laid for a light wind to blow an ember into flame. The Morgan Affair served more as a gale than a wind and created a raging tempest.

**CONTEXT:** The Second Great Awakening, beginning in the earliest years of the 1800s, helped ready that foundation and primed the fiercer anti-Masonic point of view that followed the 1826 kidnapping and disappearance of William Morgan in New York.<sup>33</sup> While this second awakening may be considered a dot, it might, since it covers more than two decades, be thought of as what kept some of the public simmering and primed for outrage.

**CONTEXT:** Many things took place in American history between the early seeding of anti-Masonic sentiment and the 1801 presidential election.

There was a controversial land deal purchase that expanded the territory of the United States in 1803. Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase added another 828,000 square miles to the nation and, ultimately, a steady migration of the population moving into and settling in the new western territories. There were many reasons for the country going to war in 1812. Although neither Britain nor the United States could secure major concessions through the Treaty of Ghent that ended the war, it nevertheless had important consequences for the future of North America. It opened the door for unbounded expansionism by the United States.

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<sup>31</sup> The 1800 and 1801 United States House of Representatives elections were held at the same time as the 1800 presidential election, in which Vice President Thomas Jefferson, a Democratic Republican, defeated incumbent President John Adams, a Federalist. These elections resulted in the Democratic-Republicans picking up twenty-two seats from the Federalists. This brought the Democratic-Republicans a solid majority of sixty-eight seats, whereas the Federalists were only able to secure thirty-eight. In their constitutionally prescribed role, the presidential election was decided by congress, and elected Jefferson to his first term. Jefferson's triumph brought an end to one of the most acrimonious presidential campaigns in U.S. history and resolved a serious Constitutional crisis. (Jeffrey A. Jenkins, Charles H. Stewart, *Fighting for the Speakership: The House and the Rise of Party Government*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Jacobins were an influential political club during the French Revolution of 1789. The Jacobins were a radical and ruthless political group formed in the wake of the French Revolution for the purpose of abolishing the Monarchy and declare France as Republic. They sought to ensure equality in all forms of speech and address, and established a Revolutionary Tribunal, which tried ex-nobles, clergy, and members of other political parties in an attempt to leave no trace of the Monarch or those associated to it. (Crane Brinton, *The Jacobins: An Essay in the New History*, Transaction Publishers, 2019, I. Woloch, *Jacobin Legacy: The Democratic Movement under the Directory*, 1970, M. L. Kennedy, *The Jacobin Club of Marseilles*, 1973, David P. "The Jacobins And Their Victims." *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1983, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41467302>. Accessed 2 June 2022).

<sup>33</sup> Marianne Perciaccante, "Calling Down Fire: Charles Grandison Finney and Revivalism in Jefferson County, New York, 1800–1840. Albany, New York, State University of New York Press, 2003 (In part because religion was separated from the control of political leaders, a series of religious revivals swept the United States from the late 1790s and into the 1830s that transformed the religious landscape of the country. The Second Great Awakening is best known for its large camp meetings that led extraordinary numbers of people to convert through an enthusiastic style of preaching and audience participation. Known today as the Second Great Awakening, this spiritual resurgence fundamentally altered the character of American religion. At the start of the Revolution the largest denominations were Congregationalists (the 18th-century descendants of Puritan churches), Anglicans (known after the Revolution as Episcopalians), and Quakers. But by 1800, Evangelical Methodism and Baptists, were becoming the fastest-growing religions in the nation. The repeated and varied revivals of these several decades helped make the United States a much more deeply Protestant nation than it had been before).

International respect for the country was also gained, which installed a greater sense of nationalism among its citizens. Technological advances in transportation created by the Erie Canal and the Santa Fe Trail opened as a two-way international commercial highway connecting Franklin, Missouri, to Santa Fe, New Mexico. The landmark Supreme Court decision *Gibbons v. Ogden* (no known relation to John Ogden) ended a steamboat monopoly in New York City waters and opened up the steamboat business to competition. The Missouri Compromise became law in the United States. The Monroe Doctrine became the United States' foreign policy position that opposed European colonialism in the Western Hemisphere, holding that any intervention in the political affairs of the Americas by foreign powers was a potentially hostile act against the United States.

The final dot, at least for the purpose of this writing, took place with no intention of adding to, much less stirring, the glowing embers of anti-Masonry, but it did.

**CONTEXT:** In 1824, President James Monroe, the last of the founding-father presidents, invited Marquis de Lafayette, the last surviving general of the Revolutionary War, to visit the United States as an official "Guest of the Nation" and to participate in the anniversary celebration of the 1781 surrender of the British at Yorktown. Lafayette arrived in New York Harbor in mid-August 1824.<sup>34</sup>



He returned to France in August 1825 after visiting and being well-received in all twenty-four states as an honored guest. Monroe could not have known how the visit, which was hoped to reconnect and instill the "spirit of 1776" in the next generation of Americans celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of independence, would inadvertently contribute to fanning the embers of anti-Masonry that was about to be ignited into a fire in September of 1824 by The Morgan Affair. Many of the banquets, dedications, processions, and events were hosted by Masons and their Lodges, which gave citizens an unanticipated glimpse of just how many of their leaders were Freemasons who also attended these and other events, some in full Masonic regalia.



Months later, following the spreading news of Morgan's kidnapping by Masons, this glimpse would add to the easily provoked public notion that Masons were running the country and many from local, state, and federal government seats—especially the justice system. The display of mysterious aprons and jewels, along with the whispered reference to the brotherhood in speeches and public events on Lafayette's tour, heightened suspicion of the Craft as an international order with secrets and a radical revolutionary past.<sup>35</sup>

If there was a cap on the events of the first twenty-five years of the 1800s, before it moved into the next, it was July 4, 1825—fifteen months before The Morgan Affair occurred. John Adams died in Massachusetts, and Thomas Jefferson died in Virginia on the same day—the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Their deaths left Charles Carroll of Carrollton as the last surviving signer of the nation's founding document.

Now, almost three generations past the years of the American Revolution, their deaths symbolize the period when the popular memory of the events and struggle which gave birth to the republic a half-century before

<sup>34</sup> "From James Madison to Lafayette, 21 August 1824," Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-03-02-0356>. [Original source: The Papers of James Madison, Retirement Series, vol. 3, 1 March 1823–24 February 1826, ed. David B. Mattern, J. C. A. Stagg, Mary Parke Johnson, and Katherine E. Harbury. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016.]

<sup>35</sup> Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasonry: Three Centuries of Building Communities*, New York University Press, New York and London, 2005.

began to fade. Political parties became more organized, and the character of American democracy became more partisan and raucous in ways that bred uncertainty and discontent with politics and the dominant parties.

No matter the progress and all that took place in the first twenty-five years of the century in the United States, nothing prepared the still young country for what was to take place for at least the next decade and a half that would again draw negative attention to the Fraternity and the Freemasonry.

## THE PUBLIC STORM

**CONTEXT:** On the morning of September 12, 1826, the few people who knew for sure where William Morgan was, were all Freemasons. The news of his abduction and subsequent disappearance was widespread in most of the country by early 1827.

Depending on the source, there are reports that there were over 100,000 Masons in the United States in 1826.<sup>36</sup> Ten years later, as hysteria grew in some places resulting from The Morgan Affair, there were reportedly 40,000 members.

By 1834, there were 141 anti-Masonic newspapers published in the United States.<sup>37</sup> Anti-Masonic committees were established in many states soon after the Morgan kidnapping occurred and were sustained by the ongoing news of the work of twenty-grand juries empaneled from 1827-1831. These returned indictments on forty-seven Freemasons in connection to the abduction of William Morgan.<sup>38</sup>

Thousands of members of the Fraternity “renounced” Freemasonry and joined in the attacks upon it. Anti-Masonic pamphlets, almanacs, and addresses were printed and distributed in large quantities. In an age focused on fairness, the mere fact that someone was barred from a Masonic meeting because he was not a brother infuriated many Americans, especially as the early exposures written about the Fraternity became even more prevalent as the story about Morgan’s disappearance was spread.<sup>39</sup>

Itinerant lecturers toured the country, each striving to outdo the other in a denunciation of an institution again declared “repugnant to the Christian religion and hostile to America’s republican form of government.” Masonic clergies were dismissed from their churches. Churches were disrupted; clergymen and laymen alike were driven from worship. Lodges were burned, and public Masonic participation at funerals, cornerstone layings, and parades declined and, in some places, disappeared.

The Craft was characterized as a discredited intellectual society at best and dangerously subversive at worst. Men were no longer eager to join. Masonry was accused of serving many members in place of a church, to the exclusion of true religion. Rumors that the oaths took the Lord’s name in vain and those alcoholic beverages were used in its various ceremonies irritated a growing sensitivity on the subject of temperance.

Women and the church joined in against Freemasonry, and the call for it to be abolished turned into a full movement. The single issue of the movement was opposition to Freemasonry.

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<sup>36</sup> Rob Morris, *The Masonic Martyr: The Biography of Eli Bruce, Sheriff Of Niagara County, New York, Who For His Attachment To The Principles Of Masonry, And His Fidelity To His Trust, Was Imprisoned Twenty-Eight Months In The Canandaigua Jail*. Louisville, Morris & Monsarrat, 1861.

<sup>37</sup> Milton W. Hamilton, “Anti-Masonic Newspapers, 1826-1834.” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 32, 1938, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/24296490](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24296490). Accessed 19 Feb. 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Dafoe, *Morgan: The Scandal That Shook Freemasonry*, Cornerstone, 2009.

<sup>39</sup> William Preston Vaughn, *The Anti-Masonic Party in the United States: 1826-1843, 1983*, University of Kentucky Press, 1983.

One anti-Masonic publication reported a story that became widespread, declaring that the influence of Masonry was not "favorable to domestic happiness" and recounted a visit by a local sheriff to a poverty-stricken home, where he had reported seeing the starving wife and two tiny children huddled before a small fire while the husband was enjoying himself at a Lodge meeting.

*The spirit of the anti-Masonic  
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Many community leaders, including politicians, businessmen, and lawyers, were, of course, Masons. The public began to boycott those merchants who were members and broke off personal and business relationships with others. Not only were men who were Masons denounced, but also denounced were those who would not denounce them.

Stated meetings were disrupted. Mobs broke into Lodge rooms, destroying property and assaulting assembled members. Charters were stolen, and Lodge Halls and furnishings were defiled. Every source of fellowship in the community was poisoned. Excitement ran so high that boys were beaten and abused because they were the sons of Masons. The Craft,

discredited and shunned as a supposed intellectual society, caused men to stop looking to join the Order to be socially conscious.<sup>40</sup>

The spirit of the anti-Masonic years following Morgan's kidnapping and disappearance was vindictive toward Freemasons without distinction as to guilt or innocence.<sup>41</sup> After The Morgan Affair in 1826, American Freemasonry, not the Illuminati, was the sole target and at the core of the excitement. The memory of Morse's preaching about the Illuminati was fresh again, and Robison's book was widely used as a source of anti-Masonic literature. Timothy Dwight's words and stirrings found a new audience.

Although many exposures about Masonic rituals had been in print and distribution for almost one hundred years and available to Masons and non-Masons alike, The Morgan Affair gave them all new life and was of interest to the public. The ones incorporated into anti-Masonic literature to heighten the supposed threat of Masonry were regularly used since they contained detailed descriptions of the degree ritual and other ceremonies that took place in the privacy of Lodge rooms. The language used in every Mason's obligations when degrees are conferred is particularly troubling to the public. Without context, it exacerbated the mysteries that anti-Masonic proponents exploited.<sup>42</sup>

The use of high-sounding titles such as "master," "high priest," and terms like "worshipful," and others by Masonic bodies, and the wearing of elaborate regalia for public ceremonies, including processions, funerals, and the laying of cornerstones, also incensed many in the anti-Masonic crowd. Solomon Southwick, anti-Masonic candidate for governor of New York in 1828, declared that Masonry could never be a republican institution, for "its Knights, Kings, High Priests, and other dignitaries more extravagantly ridiculous, in this age and time, are at war with the simplicity of manners and equality of rights, which distinguish a republican government; and are not safely to be tolerated among a free people."<sup>43</sup> Southwick's view was echoed by other politicians who also emphasized that Masonic claims to ancient origins were fraudulent and not of the ancient world, and instead was a recent development and hence not an institution to be venerated.

The excitement ultimately led to the formation of a new political party in 1831: The Anti-Masonic Party. And although candidates running for president and vice president were unsuccessful on that scale; the party did

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<sup>40</sup> Dwight L. Smith, *Goodly Heritage*, Grand Lodge of Indiana, 1968.

<sup>41</sup> Albert Clark Stevens, *The Cyclopaedia of Fraternities*, Hamilton Printing, New York, 1990.

<sup>42</sup> Vaughn.

<sup>43</sup> *IBID.*

manage to replace some lower office candidates.<sup>44</sup>

The anti-Masonic frenzy was erratic. Some states were little affected. Masonry in other states was stifled until Freemasonry reached its lowest point around 1840. By the 1850s, as the country was anticipating a possible civil war, and then that war came about and consumed the nation for almost half the next decade, the hottest flames of anti-Masonic feelings cooled but never completely died out.

The avalanche that anti-Masonic sentiments stirred stands in stark contrast to the decade of the Civil War and the remainder of the nineteenth century.

**CONTEXT:** Following the War, America entered the Gilded Age, roughly from 1870 to 1900. The country outdistanced Britain's economic growth, rapidly expanding its economy into new areas: factories, coal mining, railroads, oil, and steel manufacturing. Demographics began to shift to where the work was found, usually larger cities and ports, and westward expansion continued. The telephone and light bulb were introduced, and larger buildings and steel bridges increased cities' sizes, drew more business, and provided better transportation for their populations. But on the surface of that posterity lurked the troubling issues of poverty that led to slums, the slow reconstruction of the South following the Civil War, and corruption.

Accompanying the Gilded Age came the Age of Fraternalism, which lasted roughly from 1870 to 1920, and many ritual-based fraternal organizations with memberships as high as 10,567,647.<sup>45</sup> Reportedly, as many as 40 percent of the adult male population held membership in a fraternal order during that age.<sup>46</sup>

Most organizations were established for social purposes and mutual aid, with an element of political or ethnic solidarity. A lot of that environment rubbed off on the Masonic Fraternity. While Freemasonry held a large percentage of the rankings regarding membership, the Odd Fellows had the largest membership of the era.<sup>47</sup> But many Masons belonged to more than one of the other fraternal organizations. They brought back to their Lodges the notion that Masonry, like many of their counterpart fraternal organizations, needed to be more fun—even in the Lodge room—a feature that has never completely vanished in the culture of some Masonic Lodges.

America had restyled itself once again. Anti-Masonic sentiments were relegated largely to Christian-based colleges. Masonic membership had exploded by multiple thousands beyond what it was at its height before The Morgan Affair in 1826. Deriding and scornful literature and fiery speeches that fed the mood of anti-Masons just decades before were gone. Documents during those years, or traces that showed grave concerns by the general public that Freemasonry was repugnant to the Christian religion and hostile to America's republican form of government, are not found.

An attempt in the 1870s that again failed to stir anti-Masonic sentiment might be considered a dot to connect since many American denominations today have historically had concerns about the Order; however, the attempt was out of step with the changing times in the United States.

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<sup>44</sup> *IBID.*

<sup>45</sup> "Harriet W. McBride, "The Golden Age of Fraternalism: 1870-1910," *Heredom*, Index 1: 23, 2015, Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender and Fraternalism*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1989.

<sup>46</sup> William D. Moore, *Riding the Goat Secrecy, Masculinity, and Fraternal High Jinks in the United States, 1845–1930*, Winterthur Portfolio Volume 41, Number 2/3 Summer/Autumn 2007 Published for the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Inc

<sup>47</sup> *IBID.*

**CONTEXT:** A second circumstance involved American pastor, educator, social reformer, and abolitionist Jonathan Blanchard, who co-founded the National Christian Association (NCA) in 1868 and edited its newspaper, the *Christian Cynosure*. The newspaper was devoted to opposing secret societies and published emotional tirades and exposés explaining why no one should belong to any secret organizations.”<sup>48</sup> The newspaper enjoyed a weekly circulation of 5,000.<sup>49</sup>

Blanchard had been president of Wheaton College (Wheaton, Illinois) since 1860. The college was open to all students and taught a classic curriculum and radical social ideals. Blanchard’s anti-Masonry views prohibited the founding of fraternities or sororities on campus.<sup>50</sup>

In 1872, the NCA reorganized and attempted to resurrect the Anti-Masonic Party (active from 1872 until 1888). The platform of the Party promoted Christianity, temperance, the abolition of secret societies, and a direct vote for president and vice president of the United States instead of an Electoral College.<sup>51</sup> The revival of the anti-Masonic movement following the Civil War set in motion a miniature crusade (at least in comparison to the early-century anti-Masonic hysteria) that allowed Blanchard to organize and expand a platform that expressed his fears about social, cultural, and intellectual trends that seemed to run counter to his expectations of society.<sup>52</sup>

But the attempt at postwar, anti-Masonic excitement embarked on a quixotic crusade that was out of touch with public sentiment in the later quarter of the century.

Blanchard, who was seventy-one years old in 1882, allowed himself to be nominated in the second incarnation of the Anti-Masonic Party (later changed to the American Party) as its presidential candidate for the 1884 election.<sup>53</sup> It is unlikely that anyone except Blanchard ever expected to get a party nominee elected. Most viewed the tactics as a means to achieve publicity for the cause.<sup>54</sup>

Today, the Catholic Church has and continues to lead debates about whether Freemasonry is anti-clerical. Other denominations have joined that contention over the years. They continue to have a range of intensity

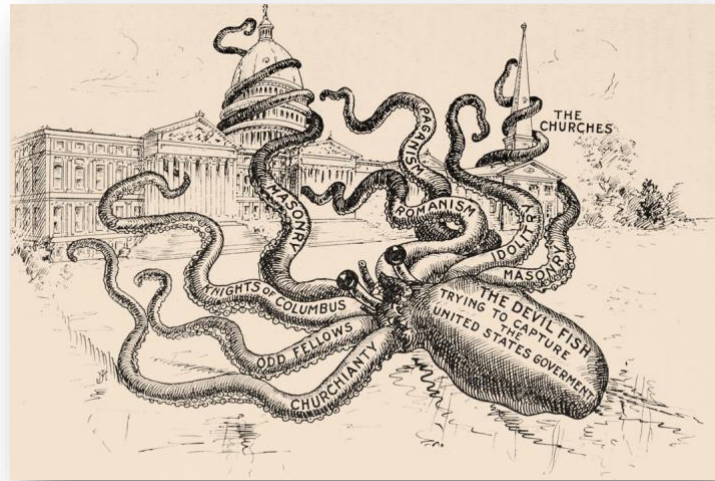


Image from an issue of the *Christian Cynosure* illustrating the tentacles of “The Devil Fish” reaching for and constricting government and churches. The center tentacle wrapped around the dome of the U.S. Capitol is labeled “Masonry.” From William Irving Phillips’s, *Secret societies - Religious aspects - Christianity*, Contributing Library: Buswell Memorial Library, Wheaton College.

<sup>48</sup> D. Sven Nordin, *Rich Harvest: A History of the Grange, 1867-1900*, University Press of Mississippi, 1974.

<sup>49</sup> Edwin Alden and Brothers, *American Newspaper Catalogue*, Edwin Alden and Brothers Advertising Agency, Cincinnati, 1884.

<sup>50</sup> Hughes, Richard T.; Adrian, William B., eds. *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Survival and Success*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1997.

<sup>51</sup> “The Anti-Masonic Convention,” *The Daily News*, September 14, 1882, reprinted in “New as History,” *The Buffalonian*, 1996-2001, [www.buffalonian.com](http://www.buffalonian.com), accessed November 24, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Richard S. Taylor, “Beyond Immediate Emancipation: Jonathan Blanchard, Abolitionism, and the Emergence of American Fundamentalism,” *Civil War History*, vol. 27 no. 3, 1981, p. 260-274. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/cwh.1981.0007.

<sup>53</sup> James M Volo, *The Boston Tea Party: The Foundations of Revolution*. 2012, ABC-CLIO, LLC. p. 21. Retrieved September 19, 2014

<sup>54</sup> William Preston Vaughn, *An Overview of Pre- and Post-Civil War Anti-Masonry*, Source: *The Historian*, Vol. 49, No. 4, August 1887, Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

that discourages men from joining the Fraternity.<sup>55</sup>

## ACCENTUATING SECRETS TO ENLIVEN DISCOURSE

Portrayed so often as some mysterious brotherhood of enormous world influence has made Freemasonry fertile ground for stories, rumors of plots and schemes, and suspicion, especially since portrayals cannot resist searching for ways to exploit the fact that Masons have “secrets.”

Few words excite the public's imagination more than *secret*. Few writers in the exposure genre bother to elaborate on the true nature of secrets in Masonry because doing so ruins their common narrative and diminishes the mysterious and shadowy angle they must maintain to hold their audience's interest.

Early operative stonemasons of medieval times were set apart from other trades and crafts because they had a secret. The secret that the medieval operative masons who physically worked with stone was geometry. These men formed guilds of architects, builders, craftsmen, designers, and engineers. They created a high demand for their expertise, and through these guilds, they passed on that expertise and knowledge of construction. In doing so, those admitted into the guilds took oaths to preserve the inviolable secret of geometry, thus cornering much of the massive construction undertakings and projects of that and later times. The guilds were rich in rules, symbols, myths, and lore handed down, ranging from general advice on good manners to regulating the working lives of masons to a mixture of wisdom about proper living from the Book of Kings and the ancients.<sup>56</sup>

As operative stonemasons used their tools and the science of geometry to build physical structures, the tools and work of these guilds were also seen by some as metaphors for building the character of men. The unfolding, and later organization of Freemasonry, as known today, reveres geometry as a metaphor for the fundamental order of the universe. And blended with religious and spiritual philosophy, it considers geometry sacred as an important education to the soul.

Masons today do promise not to reveal certain parts of what are considered mysteries of Freemasonry, no matter how trivial or already “exposed” those mysteries may be. The reason is that keeping a secret is an act

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<sup>55</sup> The Conference of Southern Baptists in 1993 representing over fifteen million Baptists, noted that while they believed many of the teachings of the Masonic Lodge are “not compatible” with Southern Baptist beliefs, it should be left up to individual Baptists about whether to join the secret society.<sup>55</sup> The Conference report also commended Masons for its many charitable endeavors and acknowledged that many outstanding Christians and Southern Baptists then and in the past were Masons. Freemasons declared a victory at the Conference and in the August 1993 Scottish Rite Journal, The Grand Commander, C. Fred Kleinknecht, called the vote historical, saying, “this [vote was the] significant turning point for modern Freemasonry.”

<sup>56</sup> Jasper Ridley, *The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society*, Arcade, 1999. David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century 1590-1710*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, John Dickey, *The Craft: How Freemasons Made the Modern World*, Public Affairs, Hachette Book Group, New York, 2020. Robert L. D. Cooper, *Cracking the Freemasons Code: The Truth About Solomon's Key and the Brotherhood*, Atria, 2007.

of moral fidelity and a valuable tool for training character.<sup>57</sup> The promise also extends to keeping other Masons' confidences to themselves—a somewhat formal version of the assumption between good friends in daily life.<sup>58</sup>

Recognizing that is anticlimactic to many who find entertainment from anti-Masonic genre writings and wild-eyed speculation about “secrets” in Freemasonry, who find stories about secrecy far more interesting than the facts about what is and is not secret in the Order. Writers in the genre, starting in the nineteenth century and continuing today, have gone to great lengths to keep their audiences from being disappointed that there is not more to this secrecy business because the actual secrets, at least the passwords, tokens, and signs are so underwhelming to the sensationalism-seeker.

In classic crime-against-logic-thinking, they attempt to convince their audiences that all that has been “exposed” about Freemasonry and the doings of the Fraternity only scratch the surface. And through a new round of shoehorning their innuendo and evidence-troubled concepts, they claim that only *certain* Masons get to know all the “secrets.” Once a writer establishes that nonsense, anything goes in the way of “revealing” and furthering the claim that there are supposedly secrets within the secrets that hold more secrets but are known only to a few in the Fraternity. When a premise is fallacious, the conclusion drawn from it is also false, of course, and this premise does not hold up to scrutiny. But the definition of scrutiny, especially rational scrutiny, is not the goal of those who write for the genre.

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## THE ERA OF INTELLECTUAL STUBBORNNESS

No one has yet found a way to reason people out of positions they did not reason themselves into about much of anything, particularly Freemasonry. Lamentably, those who have studied, learned critical and contextual thinking skills (and applied them) continue to be outnumbered and outgunned, as it were, by vast armies of individuals who *feel* entitled to pass judgment on matters of evidence to support their views. While that may be an admirable aspiration to some, doing so without troubling themselves to obtain a basic understanding of an issue carries calamitous consequences, as can be verified today in headlines, not only in America but around the world—and clearly not only about Freemasonry.

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anything, especially Freemasonry.*

Our culture, becoming even more content to merely skim for information like never before, does not help those who do not reason their way into their positions and beliefs. Truth demands the same standard of reason. Consistent signs that such standards continue to slip and, in some cases, become redefined are not encouraging. This significantly escalates the long-standing and vital necessity to guard the West Gate, an even more pivotal issue than in the previous three centuries of organized Freemasonry.

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<sup>57</sup> Jay Kenny, "Shhhh! It's a Secret! Grappling with the Puzzle of Freemasonry" *Quest 101*, Volume 3, Summer, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> *IBID.*

The Enlightenment, the intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated Europe and spread to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, carried global influence and presented an era of great hope that superstition, and the misconceptions arising from it, along with the assumption that a connection exists between co-occurring, non-related events, could be curbed and eliminated by reason and the knowledge and wisdom that stems from it. The thinking that surrounded the range of ideas from the Enlightenment centered on the value of human happiness, the pursuit of knowledge obtained using reason and the evidence of the senses, and ideals such as liberty, progress, toleration, fraternity, constitutional government, and separation of church and state, seem slowly to be degenerating. In its place, we see another range of ideas masquerading as reason.<sup>59</sup>

*History might, however, be inclined to give the past seventy years a name like: The Era of Intellectual Stubbornness.*

We can certainly see it today in the repackaging and continuation of the ridiculing and defamatory works about Freemasonry. The regularity throughout the larger society where we see matters taken to extremes, and the forms of expression or action that marginalize or insult those who are not impressed with unreasoned opinion, is far from a flash-bang minority that history will remember as only a footnote. History might, however, be inclined to give the past seventy years a name like: *The Era of Intellectual Stubbornness*.

The main problem with the ridiculing and spurious works about Freemasonry is not that some people write and distribute nonsense; it is that the nonsense about so many things in our society exploded and can now reach and influence in ways that were not possible before the advent the technology we used today to communicate.

## **ARTISANS OF REASON AND UNDERSTANDING**

We are told that Mark Twain said, "Lies travel around the world while truth is still putting on its boots." If he did say that, he would be shocked at how accurate the assessment is today.

Considering the truth in the statement, it is ironic how repeated attribution of this quote to Twain is an example of how lies, rumors, and misinformation do travel around the world and are so often merely accepted as truth because there is no evidence despite books and mountains of Internet memes and posts, that Twain ever said or coined it. However, the phrase has been so often attributed to him that it is believed by so many that he did.<sup>60</sup>

English satirist Jonathan Swift said, "Falsehood flies and truth comes limping after it."<sup>61</sup> This is perhaps the statement on which the alleged Twain quote is based.

We know Swift wrote something related to this paper in the same 1710 publication: "...truth (however sometimes late) will at last prevail."

We can point fingers and listen to pundits offer their endless debates in the regular media, and we can now, thanks to the media's stepchildren (the Internet and social media), also read, listen, *and* watch all the streaming videos that are dispersed by anyone with an unqualified opinion) about how we arrived where we find society

<sup>59</sup> Milan Zafirovski, *The Enlightenment and Its Effects on Modern Society*, Rheinberg-Buch, Bergisch Gladbach, Germany, 2010, Anthony Gottlieb, *The Dream of Enlightenment*, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Jennifer Speake, *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, 6th Edition, OUP Oxford, 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Swift, The Examiner No. XIV, Thursday, November 9th, 1710.

and ourselves today. No matter how we might try, we still cannot get away from the past always being present, which should tell us that there is a benefit from spending more time at least attempting to examine the factual past, throw away the shoehorns, connect the actual dots, and enter into our discussions armed with reason before we become the past and recognized in history as the creators of the present.

Doing that is a formidable task, of course. Putting genies back in a bottle is daunting work. But learning how to gain more information from various certifiable and reliable sources is certainly a step in that direction, not to mention the most rational approach. Those who think those things can be ignored only add to the growing chorus of those who cause the need in the first place.

We are free to believe, act, stand aside, and let others believe nonsense. What we cannot do is walk away from the consequences of believing nonsense.<sup>62</sup>

Until we actually perform the labor associated with becoming artisans of reason and understanding, we will remain incapable of successfully passing that laudable ability and widespread practice to the next generation.

However, should that labor ever be accomplished, as Swift said, "...truth (however sometimes late) will at last prevail."

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This essay was inspired by Brian T. Evans, Past Master.



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<sup>62</sup> Charles P. Pierce, *Idiot America*, Anchor Books/Random House, 2009, 2010.