

Vicious campaigns precluded the presidential election of 1828. Both sides hurled sultry accusations of adultery, murder, solicitation of prostitution, bigamy, and general incompetence. Two major factions, the Democrats and the National Republicans, were at the heart of the mudslinging that dominated the era. The leader of the National Republicans, referred to by most at the time as the “Republicans,” was the incumbent John Quincy Adams. Adam’s challenger and the Democratic nominee was “Old Hickory,” Andrew Jackson. In the end, after the polls closed and the votes were counted, it was apparent that Jackson had successfully waded through the mudslinging to emerge as the victor. While the political attacks among and between the two major parties are well documented, a sidebar that is often overlooked in the accounts of the 1828 presidential election are the actions of a minor third party that came into existence two years before.

In 1826, a movement originated in central New York and proliferated throughout the northeast evolving into a political party as it spread. Both the movement and the political party were known by a self-descriptive name: “Anti-masonry.” Anti-masonry was a crusade to utterly destroy the secret fraternal organization of Freemasons. The birth and rise of Anti-masonry was the direct result of the mysterious disappearance of a Central New York resident, where it was widely believed that Freemasons were responsible for the abduction. It was also believed that the Freemasons used their considerable influence to thwart investigations into the disappearance and subverted prosecution of those involved. Anti-masonry as stated is the pursuit of the end of Freemasonry, but, what is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry

Freemasonry is a secret fraternal organization predominantly found in the United States

and Western Europe. Many conspiracy theories claim Freemasons are the puppet masters who rule the world behind the curtain. Similar to most conspiracy theories, there is no evidence to back such assertions. Freemasonry is primarily a social club where the well-to-do and influential members of the community make connections. There are also elements of scholarship and philanthropy within Freemasonry. One of the tenets of Freemasonry is the betterment of one's self through the pursuit of knowledge. Freemasons are also widely known for their contributions to their communities and other worthy causes. Among the secret societies, Freemasonry is perhaps the only one with a strong connection to Central New York and the Mohawk Valley. There are many Masonic lodges throughout New York, including several in Central New York.

Anti-Masonry

In September 1826, newspapers printed reports about the disappearance of a man from Batavia, New York, Captain William Morgan, a soldier who fought in the War of 1812 and a Freemason.¹ According to the local newspapers, William Morgan had planned to publish the secrets of the Freemasons in a tell-all account of their rites, pledges, and rituals. Displeased by the potential disclosure of their secrets, the Freemasons took action to prevent Morgan's manuscript from being published. Allegedly, these actions were the direct cause of Morgan's disappearance. The months that followed the infamous "Morgan Affair," were consumed by speculation and investigation into the circumstances of Morgan's disappearance. A perceived cover up by the powerful Freemasons incited the public into a wave of Anti-masonry that would sweep across New York and most of the nation. As to be expected, the press focused on the Morgan Affair and Anti-masonry. As the election of 1828 came and went, all sides manipulated

¹ Harriet A. Weed, *The Life of Thurlow Weed Including His Autobiography and Memoirs* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1883), p. 214.

the press and, in some cases, even created new newspapers to achieve their political goals. The purpose of this paper is to show that Anti-masonry manipulated the press to ignite a crusade against secret societies and the prominent Freemason, and presidential candidate Andrew Jackson. At the same time Freemasons used the press to squelch the Anti-masonic movement and promote the Democratic candidate and later his presidency.

Anti-masonry rose out of the “Morgan Affair.” William Morgan was a native of Virginia who moved to the Genesee County town of Le Roy in 1825, where he joined the local Masonic lodge. Disputes between the Le Roy Freemasons and Morgan led him to relocate to the Batavia lodge where the rift continued to grow.² According to the Masons, Morgan was often intemperate and was therefore rejected by the new Batavia lodge and blackballed for having unworthy habits.³ Some speculated that Morgan sought to publish the secrets of Freemasonry in an attempt to seek revenge against the Freemasons. Michael Holt describes Morgan as a disgruntled Mason dissatisfied with his lodge in Batavia.⁴ Many Freemasons speculated that Morgan was a swindler looking to make a fast dollar through the exploitation of the Freemason’s secrets. Ronald Formisano agrees with this assertion and paints Morgan as a pure profiteer, looking to profit from disclosing Masonic secrets.⁵ The more zealous Anti-masons believed that Morgan sought to bring the evils of Freemasonry to light in his publication. Whatever the reason, Morgan was determined to publish the secrets of the first three degrees of Freemasonry and found a willing publisher in David C. Miller.⁶

² Weed, 216.

³ “The Morgan Affair,” last modified on April 1, 2008, http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/freemasonry_morgan_affair.html

⁴ Michael F. Holt, *History of U.S. Political Parties Volume I: 1789-1860 From Factions to Parties*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1973), 577.

⁵ Ronald P. Formisano, *For The People: American Populist Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 91.

⁶ Weed, 216.

It did not take long for Morgan's intentions to reach the Freemasons who were understandably perturbed at Morgan's attempted to publish their secrets. At first they tried to buy Morgan's silence. Morgan supposedly agreed, but his publisher, Miller, did not. Freemasons reacted by publishing articles denouncing Morgan in local newspapers.

If a man calling himself William Morgan should intrude himself upon the community, they should be on their guard, particularly the Masonic fraternity. Any information in relation to Morgan can be obtained by calling at the Masonic Hall in this village. Brethren and companions are particularly requested to observe, mark, and govern themselves accordingly. Morgan is considered a swindler and a dangerous man. There are people in this lodge who would be glad to see this Captain Morgan. Canandaigua, August 9, 1826.⁷

The Freemasons attempts to subdue Morgan were not limited to publications in the local newspapers.

They tried to intimidate him and his publisher through judicial action. Johnson Goodwell, Kelsey Stone, and John Wilson, all Batavia residents and Freemasons, seized Morgan and arrested him for petty debts. Friends tried to bail Morgan out of jail but were denied because the jailor and sheriff "were not to be found." After some searching, Morgan's friends finally secured his release. While Morgan was incarcerated, a constable illegally searched Mrs. Morgan's apartment for the manuscript. Miller too, was not immune to harassment as he was also prosecuted for summary debts.⁸

Efforts to subdue Miller and Morgan were soon taken to the next level. Two attacks were

⁷ Weed, 216.

⁸ Weed, 217.

made on Miller's printing office. The second attack succeeded in setting the building on fire, but due to the quick response from the town and a passing group of teamsters, the fire was extinguished before causing significant damage. Cotton balls saturated in turpentine were found at the scene and Miller insisted that the fire was caused by Freemasons bent on vengeance. For their part, Freemasons circulated the rumor that Miller started the fire to generate sympathy for his cause.⁹

On 10 September 1826, Nicholas G. Chesebro, master of the Canandigua mason's lodge, obtained a warrant from the village magistrate to arrest William Morgan on the charge of petty larceny.¹⁰ During the preceding May, Morgan had borrowed a shirt from a tavern keeper, Mr. Kingsley, that he never returned. Morgan was apprehended by Chesebro and brought before Justice Chipman who dismissed the charges after a brief inquiry. Immediately after the charges were dropped, Morgan was rearrested and imprisoned by Chesebro for a debt of \$2.00¹¹ to Aaron Ackley, another tavern keeper.¹² While Morgan was held in jail, the Freemasons moved against Miller.

Town of Le Roy constable, Mr. French, arrested Miller on charges of theft. Miller was taken to Stafford where he was held in a lodge and denied counsel for some time. He was charged with stealing \$30 to \$40 from his partner. While detained, Miller was told by his captors that he was "going where Morgan had gone."¹³ His request to go before a magistrate was eventually granted, and the issue surrounding his arrest was found to be of a civil nature not criminal. The plaintiff never materialized and the charges were dropped. Upon leaving the building, the same man that initially arrested Miller, French, tried to arrest him again on the same

⁹ Weed, 219.

¹⁰ Weed, 219.

¹¹ Some accounts place the debt at \$2.60, while others place it at \$2.69.

¹² Weed, 220.

¹³ Weed, 222.

charges, but Miller's friends skirted him away.¹⁴

Morgan remained in his cell throughout the night of his arrest. The next day, however, a Freemason named Loten Lawson attempted to pay Morgan's debts and fines in order to secure his release. Morgan, perhaps sensing the danger, asked to wait until morning stating that he was already undressed.¹⁵ Lawson insisted on securing Morgan's release but Mr. Hall, the jailor, was not to be found and the jailor's wife would not comply. Lawson then went looking for the jailor, but found Colonel Sawyer and Chesebro, both Freemasons, instead. The trio worked together to convince Mrs. Hall to release Morgan. Mrs. Hall finally consented to the release, after which Lawson and an unknown individual took Morgan by the arm and escorted him away.¹⁶

As Mrs. Hall went to the door, she heard Morgan crying out "Murder!" and saw him struggling with Lawson and the unknown man. Chesebro and Sawyer stood by and took no part. Soon after, a carriage followed in the direction the men had taken Morgan. Chesebro and Sawyer later followed, gathering Morgan's hat that had been lost in the struggle. Corroborating Mrs. Hall's account of the abduction was a woman who recognized Chesebro, Sawyer, and the stage proprietor. The woman saw a carriage pass by empty, then again occupied.¹⁷

The carriage driver, Mr. Hubbard, claimed that he did not know the men who hired his carriage but drove them to Rochester. The carriage stopped twice on the way and reached Rochester by daylight.¹⁸ Morgan was then taken at night through Rochester, to Fort Niagara to his ultimate fate.¹⁹

Inside Fort Niagara, Colonel William King of Lockport, a Knight Templar, told Morgan

¹⁴ Weed, 223.

¹⁵ Weed, 223.

¹⁶ Weed, 224.

¹⁷ Weed, 224.

¹⁸ Weed, 225.

¹⁹ Thulow Weed, "Good Enough Morgan," *The Daily Observer Utica*, August 14, 1875, 6.

that he was to be taken to a farm in Canada. Along with King and four other men, Morgan boarded a boat on a wharf attended by Elisha Adams. Adams claimed that the boat returned at two in the morning with five people instead of the six that departed. It has long been suspected that Morgan was murdered during the boat ride and his body was dumped at the mouth of the Niagara River.²⁰

The Freemasons claim nothing untoward happened to William Morgan. According to them, Morgan agreed to be relocated to Canada and was voluntarily “abducted” in exchange for the sum of \$500. The Freemasons point out that there is no concrete proof of wrong doing. In fact, they were quick to mention that William Morgan was allegedly sighted in Smyrna, Asia Minor, and other places around the world following the so called abduction.²¹

The Morgan Affair was a sensational story with which the press quickly ran. The coverage of the abduction heightened awareness about the incident and caused public curiosity that soon cried out for an investigation. On 26 September 1826, the Honorable David E. Evans presided over a meeting called in Batavia to discuss the possible abduction of William Morgan and the attempted arson at Miller's printing office.²² At the meeting, a ten person committee was appointed to investigate the matter including David F. Evans, Trumbull Cary, George F. Talbot, Harmon Holden, and Timothy Fitch. The committee wrote a letter to Governor Dewitt Clinton that explained the situation and asked for state assistance.²³

On 7 October 1826, Governor Clinton responded that the state would not join the investigation. The letter stated that the investigation must proceed through the local county's magistrate.

²⁰ Thrulow Weed, “Good Enough Morgan,” *The Daily Observer Utica*, August 14, 1875, 6.

²¹ “The Morgan Affair,” last modified on April 1, 2008, http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/freemasonry_morgan_affair.html

²² Weed, 213.

²³ Weed, 225.

GENTLEMEN... Indeed, I do not see how I can interfere to a greater extent at present. Any forcible opposition to the execution of the laws which cannot be put down by the civil authority, must be met in another shape; but, as it does not appear that any such has been exhibited, and I trust that none will be, the magistrates of the county must proceed, in the ordinary channels of justice, to arrest the offenders, to vindicate the rights and to protect the property, liberty, and persons of individuals, and to maintain the ascendancy of the laws...²⁴

The Governor's refusal to aid the investigation was the first hint that a conspiracy may have existed to cover up the alleged crimes, as Governor Dewitt Clinton was a high ranking Freemason.

There were probably dozens of Masons throughout New York who worked to thwart investigations into the "Morgan Affair" or curb any meaningful punishment.²⁵ The trials that followed in the courts across New York State were spectacles. Investigations were held in five counties and dozens of Masons were indicted. Even though so many were indicted, only six came to trial. Of them, only four were convicted, pleading guilty in order to suppress testimony.²⁶ To many across the state, it was apparent that the whole ordeal was covered up by a conspiracy within the legal system. Some accounts of the trials claim that Eli Bruce, a Freemason and public official, ordered the Niagara County juries to be packed with Masons. The packed juries resulted in very few convictions and those who were convicted served light sentences.²⁷

²⁴ Weed, 226.

²⁵ Formisano, 91.

²⁶ Formisano, 99.

²⁷ Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730 – 1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 278.

The conventional wisdom about the origins of Anti-masonry is that it was created as a result of the “Morgan Affair.” However, Formisano, Holt, and Steven Bullock have a different theory. They believe that the cause of the negative public reaction towards Freemasonry was not because of Morgan’s murder, but because of Masonic efforts to thwart the investigation.²⁸ Formisano and Bolt argue that the real reason for the backlash against Freemasonry was the subversion of the judicial system. Holt took a slightly different approach. He theorized that the political ramifications against Freemasonry were caused by the state legislature’s lack of action.²⁹

Anti-masonry was a crusade to destroy secret organizations, and a mission to promote liberty and Christianity. Freemasonry's secrecy and exclusivity made it incompatible with the Constitution and republican ideas.³⁰ If the Freemasons were powerful enough to manipulate the judicial, legislative, and executive branches of government, American democracy was a farce. Anti-masons sought to purge Freemasons from all offices of government in order to promote equal justice under the law.³¹ The Anti-masonic party was comprised of people who feared a system of aristocratic nobility that claimed unequal advantages and privileges for its members.³²

The “Christian” aspect of the movement was motivated by the desire to purge Freemasons from the churches.³³ There was tension between the non-Masons who were largely Presbyterians or Baptists and the Freemasons who observed Deism and Universalism.³⁴ Any group that opposed the religion of most “God fearing folk” was unfit to belong in their

²⁸ Formisano, 91.

²⁹ Holt, 577.

³⁰ Bullock, 281.

³¹ Formisano, 94.

³² Holt, 581. Freemasons were prevalent within the New York State government. From 1804 to 1820, all but one of New York's governors was a Freemason.

³³ Formisano, 94.

³⁴ Formisano, 95.

communities.³⁵ According to Anti-masons, Anti-masonry was a movement against an anti-Christ, a “monster,” and tyranny within the republic; it was a movement centered on the fears of American society.³⁶

The momentum that turned a local movement into a national party came when the Anti-masonic party met for its first statewide convention in Utica, in August 1828.³⁷ Speeches made during the convention conveyed the party’s goals and ambitions such as expelling the “Masonic legislature” by appealing to the “sovereign people.” Anti-masonry would “take measures for the destruction of the Masonic Institution, sustaining the liberty of the press, and asserting the supremacy of the laws, for protecting the rights and privileges of the citizens against the vindictive persecutions of members of the Masonic society.” Thurlow Weed, one of the Anti-masonic party leaders, stated at the convention that defeating Jackson was a “main priority in 1828.”³⁸ As a result of the Utica convention, Solomon Southwick was nominated as the Anti-masonry candidate for New York State governor. Southwick only received twelve percent of the vote and was defeated by Martin Van Buren. From Utica, the Anti-masonic party sent assemblymen to Albany and a political shock wave to the rest of the nation.³⁹

The Anti-masonic Press

Newspapers were the primary weapons Anti-masons used in their crusade to destroy secret organizations. Many of the articles in the favorable Anti-masonic papers included a self idealized image of Anti-masonry. For example, an article in *The Oswego Free Press* describes Anti-masonry not as a political party, but as a movement that opposes Freemasonry and its

³⁵ Bullock, 281.

³⁶ Holt, 580.

³⁷ Bullock, 280. The convention was held in the Utica Baptist Church: Formisano, 103.

³⁸ Holt, 578.

³⁹ The first national nomination convention in American history was held by the Anti-masonic party. The convention selected the New York State attorney general William Wirt as their candidate for the presidency. Wirt won eight percent of the vote, carrying Vermont as his only electoral votes.

crimes. The article goes on to say that Anti-masons are not the least bit interested in holding public office. "They care not a copper."⁴⁰ Anti-masons were only concerned with the extermination of Freemasonry. The article then explains the political side of Anti-masonry. It consists of: "Farmers and members of industrious mechanics, some manufacturers and merchants, and now and then a professional gentleman." Anti-masons had views similar to the National Republicans. For example they were in favor of protective tariffs, roads, canals, and all manner of internal improvements. Even though they had similar platforms, Anti-masons did not like to be called Republicans because they did not want to be associated with Henry Clay.⁴¹

The best way to attack the political influence of Freemasonry was through the election of Anti-masons to political office, especially the legislatures. According to the Anti-masons, they went to the ballot-box because it was the best way to reach the feeling of the masses.⁴²

Political Anti-masonry is the forcing of politicks [sic] into the existing opposition to masonry with a view to expedite its extermination. Political anti-masons use politics as a fit machinery to accomplish their laudable purpose knowing the power of the ballot-box over the selfishness of the human heart; hence they make politicians and political men fight the battles of justice and humanity so they rely to regain supremacy of law.⁴³

In reality, Anti-masons wanted to dislodge Freemasons who currently held office. Once in power, they intended to pass legislation to prohibit Freemasonry. The actual purpose of sending

⁴⁰ A. M. Intelligencer, "A Short and Easy Catechism," *The Oswego Free Press*, January, 1833, n. p.

⁴¹ A. M. Intelligencer, "A Short and Easy Catechism," *The Oswego Free Press*, January, 1833, n. p.

⁴² A. M. Intelligencer, "A Short and Easy Catechism," *The Oswego Free Press*, January, 1833, n. p.

⁴³ A. M. Intelligencer, "A Short and Easy Catechism," *The Oswego Free Press*, January, 1833, n. p.

men to the legislature was to make the oaths of Freemasonry illegal.⁴⁴

Anti-masonic newspapers often stated and restated the reason for the party's existence: to exterminate Freemasonry. Articles also explained why Freemasonry should be destroyed and focused on the wrong doings of Freemasonry. For example, *The Oswego Free Press* presented an itemized list of the crimes of Freemasonry, in a question and answer format. The list included the murder of William Morgan; burglarizing an elderly man's house; forging a magistrate's name; and, the theft of Mrs. Morgan's papers which were probably her husband's manuscript. The article states: "The crimes are recorded and proven."⁴⁵

Other articles that justified the crusade against Freemasonry focused on the idealized reasons why the secret fraternal organization should be extinguished. These articles highlighted the dangers that Freemasonry and other secret organizations presented to republican forms of government. As previously presented, the Anti-masons feared that Freemasons were undermining the great Lockean experiment. Not only did they fear that Freemasons would create a new aristocracy that was not subjected equally to the rules outlined in the social contract, they also feared that Freemasonry had an impact on First Amendment freedoms, more specifically the freedom of speech. "So powerful was the masonic institution – so extensive its influence that we newspapers not dare publish circumstantial accounts of Mogan's murder for eighteen months after it happened – nor was it done until the Anti-masons established a press for that purpose."⁴⁶

The Anti-masonic newspaper coverage of 1828 and 1832 obsessed over the prominent Freemason Andrew Jackson. It was the primary goal of the Anti-masonic party to defeat this Democratic presidential nominee and this was reflected in their newspapers. An important newspaper in the struggle between Anti-masonry and Freemasonry, was *The Albany Evening*

⁴⁴ A. M. Intelligencer, "A Short and Easy Catechism," *The Oswego Free Press*, January, 1833, n. p.

⁴⁵ A. M. Intelligencer, "A Short and Easy Catechism," *The Oswego Free Press*, January, 1833, n. p.

⁴⁶ A. M. Intelligencer, "A Short and Easy Catechism," *The Oswego Free Press*, January, 1833, n. p.

Journal which was created by Thurlow Weed for the sole purpose of denouncing and eliminating Freemasonry.⁴⁷

The Albany Evening Journal included an excerpt from Samuel D. Ingham, a military officer and Jackson's Secretary of the Treasury. Following Ingham's removal from Jackson's administration, he made claims that the Executive branch was both "wicked and evil." The president was a threat to the Constitution and the liberties of the nation's citizens. The article continued and stated that the Anti-masonic party would not sanction the actions of Andrew Jackson and would seek his removal through the electoral process. In the opinion of the Anti-masons, the best way to defeat Jackson would be to create an Anti-Jackson party and ticket.⁴⁸

Other Anti-masons attacked the Democrats and the National Republicans in an attempt to champion their own party. Colonel Stone wrote in the *Albany Evening Journal* that the two parties have always been divided on the ideas in the Constitution and governance, but lately the parties have "united in such a way that they are no longer distinguishable." "The ancient party land marks have all been erased." What was needed, according to Stone, was a new political party that was "vigorous" and "active" that sprung up "...as if summoned into existence by the wand of another Prespero."⁴⁹

Anti-masons were critical of the Masonic press. William Seward,⁵⁰ an Anti-masonry party leader, attacked the Freemasons in his speech at the Anti-masonry national convention: "Pretended victories over the daring intruder were reported to have been gained where no battles had been fought, and fabricated renunciations of Anti-masonry were everywhere published, and

⁴⁷ The Albany Evening Journal still exists today as part of the Times Union.

⁴⁸ Alexander Cook, "Interesting Correspondence," *The Albany Evening Journal*, October 20, 1832, n. p.

⁴⁹ Colonel Stone, "Masonry and Anti-masonry" introduction letter from Colonel Stone's history of the masonry and Anti-masonry," *Albany Evening Journal*, November 20, 1831, n. p.

⁵⁰ William Seward's career in politics started with Anti-masonry.

its dying agonies were re-echoed in all the Masonic papers throughout the state.”⁵¹ Seward also attacked the Freemason’s influence over the press.

That in the events which called the party into existence we have proof that the society of freemasons has broken the public peace, and with a high hand deprived the state of a citizen; that in the guarded and studious silence of the press throughout this Union on the subject of that outrage, we have proof that freemasonry has subsidized the public press.⁵²

In the opinion of William Seward, the Freemasons had “guardianship” over the press.⁵³

Seward was not alone in his attacks on the Masonic press. An article in the *Batavia Republican* attacked the *Rochester Examiner* outing them as a pro-Masonic paper. The article also claimed that the editor of the *Craftsman*, E.J. Roberts, featured columns that include “Masonic rants.”⁵⁴ Richard Rush, one of the candidates contending for the Anti-masonry presidential nomination at the party’s national convention, was praised by the *Geneseo New York Livingston Register* for: “daring to speak the truth against the Masonic Newspapers.”⁵⁵ The attacks against the Masonic press escalated as the 1820s came to an end. The Masonic press refused to lie down and absorb the barrage; they fired back with attacks of their own.

The Masonic Press

Freemasons fought back with attacks upon the virtues of the Anti-masonry party leaders. *The Wayne Sentinel* included an article that claimed that the leaders lacked moral principles and

⁵¹ Myron Holley, *The Proceedings of the United States Anti-masonic Convention, Held at Philadelphia, September 11, 1830* (Boston: The Free Press, 1830), p. 69.

⁵² Frederic Bancroft, *The Life of William H. Seward: Volume I* (Harper & Brothers, 1900), p. 33.

⁵³ Myron Holley, 70.

⁵⁴ *Batavia Republican*, June 1, 1830, n. p.

⁵⁵ *Geneseo New York Livingston Register*, August 21, 1831, n. p.

integrity.⁵⁶ An article in the *Geneva Gazette* claimed that Anti-masons “were equally loud in their professions of zeal for the public good and all were equally hypocritical in those professions.”⁵⁷ *The Peoples Friend and Gazette of Little Falls, New York* also featured an article that attacked Anti-masonry leaders. “The leaders of the Anti-masonic party neither possess virtue nor principle – it becomes the duty, therefore, of everyman who values the institutions of his country and the harmony of society, to come out and resolutely contend against the hydra of Anti-masonry.”⁵⁸

Perhaps the most persuasive argument the Anti-masons employed was that secret societies posed threats to the liberties of citizens and to the democratic form of government. To refute this claim, Freemasons crafted a clever counter argument. Newspapers featured several articles that reminded the public that many of the founding fathers and national heroes were in fact Freemasons. For example, La Fayette was a Freemason. As Anti-masonry started to gain momentum, La Fayette was touring the United States. The general public was excited about the return of one of its heroes. An article in the *Geneva Gazette* sought to capitalize on La Fayette’s tour by claiming that Anti-masons would attack the hero’s status as a Freemason as if he were a common criminal. “All the vials of Anti-masonry vengeance would be poured upon him. He would be proscribed and denounced untrustworthy.”⁵⁹ The *Geneva Gazette* also used George Washington to attack Anti-masons.

The warfare of Anti-masonry avowedly indiscriminate, and, according to its professed creed, it pursues, with the same destroying spirit, the peaceable and

⁵⁶ “The Election Result,” *The Wayne Sentinel*, November 15, 1831, n. p.

⁵⁷ *Geneva Gazette*, January 26, 1831, n. p.

⁵⁸ *The Peoples Friend and Gazette Little Falls New York*, July 1 1829, n. p.

⁵⁹ *Geneva Gazette*, January 26, 1831, n. p.

unoffending citizen and the convicted violator of the law: it would sacrifice, without distinction and without remorse, the guilty conspirator, and the beloved father of our country: for Washington, was too a Mason.⁶⁰

It was also well known that Benjamin Franklin was a prominent Freemason and some newspapers featured articles that reminded the public of this fact.

Many articles that were featured in the 1830s questioned why Anti-masonry still existed. The *Chittenango Herald* featured an article by Hiram Carpenter, a founder of the Anti-masonic Party of Lewis County. Carpenter questioned why Anti-masons would exist after all the Freemasons of Lewis County “have abandoned their lodge, given up their charter, and disposed of their tools.” Mr. Carpenter urged all readers, especially honest hearted Anti-masons, to hear his plea. Carpenter’s letter was a “most calm, rational convincing appeal,” to “the editor of the *Black River Gazette*.” The *Black River Gazette*, according to the article, would not publish the letter fearing it might not suit the views of his Anti-masonic readers.⁶¹

John Crary also questioned the existence of Anti-masonry in the *Chittenango Herald*. He wrote: “It must be obvious that if Anti-masonry was right in 1828, it must be wrong now; for it is very different both in principle and in practice, from what it was then.” Crary is alluding to the fact that as Anti-masonry existed only to eradicate Freemasonry and it became less and less relevant as the Masonic membership dwindled. In order to stave off irrelevancy, Anti-masonry had to take up other causes such as the ruination of Andrew Jackson’s political career. The Anti-masons allied with the Republicans in order to defeat Jackson. This meant that the Anti-masons allied with Freemasons in the Republican Party which caused Anti-masonry to lose its virtue and

⁶⁰ *Geneva Gazette*, January 26, 1831, n. p.

⁶¹ Hiram Carpenter, “Renunciation of Anti-masonry,” *Chittenango Herald*, September 22, 1831, n. p.

making it hypocritical.⁶² The *Oswego Palladium* echoed the *Chittenango Herald* by also featuring articles that discredited Anti-masonry and questioned its continued existence.⁶³

Anti-masonic attacks on Andrew Jackson could not go unanswered. The Masonic press published many articles defending its esteemed commander-in-chief. An article in the *Lyons New York Western Argus* stated that the Anti-masons were nefarious for their attempts to destroy Jackson's presidency, one that has done more for the country than any other.⁶⁴ Also featured in the *Lyons New York Western Argus*, was a letter to the editor. It was written by Oliver Bush.

My days are nearly drawn to a close by old age; but may I yet live to see the present opposition party to the present administration prostrated, and better men leading a party of opposition to the powers that be, to correct any evils that shall occur, who will, like faithful sentinels, watch on the high towers to guard the tree of liberty, which was planted by our forefathers.⁶⁵

According to the Masonic press, the Anti-masons were not suitable for such a role even if Jackson was unfit to govern.

Freemasonry was not only attacked in the press, but in the pulpit as well. To refute the claims that Freemasonry was synonymous with Satan worshipping, newspapers published articles describing Freemasonry's compatibility with Christianity. *The Peoples Friend and Gazette Little Falls New York*, published an article that named Freemasonry the "assistant of Christianity." The article refuted the argument that Freemasons were not Christians, and turned

⁶² John Crary, *Chittenango Herald*, August 1832, n. p.

⁶³ "Republican Nominations," *Oswego Palladium*, October 16, 1833, n. p.

⁶⁴ Oliver Bush, *Lyons New York Western Argus*, October 20, 1832, n. p.

⁶⁵ Oliver Bush, *Lyons New York Western Argus*, October 20, 1832, n. p.

the tables on the Anti-masons as being less devout “David C. Miller, who unblushingly publicly vows that it is his “misfortune to be an atheist.””⁶⁶

In conclusion, both the Anti-masons and the Freemasons made convincing arguments in their battle within the press. Which side however, had the most convincing argument, in other words, which side won the battle? The best way to conduct such an analysis is to examine the ultimate fate of each faction and see which party achieved its goals. Did the Anti-masons exterminate Freemasonry? Did they purge the government of members of secret societies, like Andrew Jackson? Likewise, did Freemasonry discredit and ultimately defeat Anti-masonry? Did Freemasonry survive?

It is clear that the Anti-masons failed in their efforts to defeat Andrew Jackson, not once, but twice. The prominent Freemason won election and reelection by overwhelming majorities. Jackson even carried the birth place of Anti-masonry, New York, with relative ease. With such a failure on their resume it is hard to consider Anti-masonry as a success, and yet, it was successful on some fronts.

Masonic membership fell precipitously nationwide after the rise of Anti-masonry. Freemasons went from 100,000 to 40,000 in just ten years. In New York, the effect of Anti-masonry was devastating. The number of New York lodges declined from 480 to 82 and membership went from 20,000 to 3,000. Freemasonry was eradicated from entire counties; e. g., Lewis County. Even though Freemasonry was not completely eradicated, it would be hard not to call such a decline a success for Anti-masonry.⁶⁷

That said, Freemasonry did persist. The same cannot be said for Anti-masonry. The conflagration that was Anti-masonry lasted for less than a decade. As Masonic membership

⁶⁶ *The Peoples Friend and Gazette Little Falls New York*, July 1 1829, n. p.

⁶⁷ “The Morgan Affair,” last modified on April 1, 2008, http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/freemasonry_morgan_affair.html

began to diminish, so too did the fuel that fed Anti-masonry. Anti-masonry quickly transformed from a faction against Freemasons, into a faction against Andrew Jackson. Anti-masonry was ultimately consumed by the political party known as the Whigs. While Anti-masonry died a quick painless death, Freemasonry endured and still exists today. After Jackson's presidency, there were no less than eleven Masonic presidents. Such men may have included Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Gerald Ford.

The actions that the Freemasons took to prevent the revelation of their secrets created a backlash that shook the secret society to its foundation. In the end, all was for naught as Morgan's book was eventually published. *Illustrations of Masonry by One of the Fraternity*, sold for \$1 per copy.⁶⁸ The abduction known as the "Morgan Affair" was the direct cause of a struggle within the press between a secret society and a counter movement bent on its destruction. In such a battle, who would bet against Freemasonry? A wise man surely would not.

⁶⁸ "The Morgan Affair," last modified on April 1, 2008, http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/freemasonry_morgan_affair.html

Timeline of the “Morgan Affair”

Date	Event
05/31/25	Morgan receives Royal Arch Degree from Le Roy Masonic lodge
Summer 1826	Morgan denied into Batavia lodge
Summer 1826	Dyer approaches Weed about printing Morgan's book
08/09/26	Freemasons publish notice in local newspaper calling Morgan dangerous
08/09/26	Morgan and Miller harassed for debts
08/09/26	Morgan arrested on petty debts then bailed out
08/18/26	Morgan arrested again
08/18/26	Constable searches William Morgan's apartment.
08/19/26	Morgan was visited in jail by Freemasons who attempted to persuade Morgan to give up the manuscript
08/20/26	Morgan released on bail
09/08/26	Forces gathered to attack Miller's office but the attack was called off
09/10/26	Fire set to Miller's office
09/10/26	Warrant issued for the arrest of William Morgan on petty larceny charges
09/11/26	Morgan was brought before a judge who dropped the charges of petty larceny
09/11/26	Morgan was rearrested for petty debts
09/11/26	Miller was arrested for debts but released
09/12/26	Loten Lawson bailed William Morgan out of jail and took him away in a carriage
09/13/26	Carriage arrives in Rochester, passes through to Ft. Niagara
09/14/26	William Morgan's presence was recorded at Ft. Niagara

09/14/26	Colonel King takes William Morgan on a boat to the mouth of the Niagara River and Morgan disappears
09/26/26	Meeting held in Batavia to discuss William Morgan's disappearance, a committee is formed
10/02/26	A letter was written to the governor by the committee
10/04/26	A second meeting was held
10/06/26	Governor received committees letter
10/07/26	Governor writes back

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