

Lewiston History Mysteries

It's called the "The Morgan Affair" and it caused political and social shock waves throughout the nation. It remains one of the most bizarre unsolved cases in American history.

William Morgan was considered a traitor by members of the Freemasons -- one of the largest fraternal organizations in the world -- because he wanted to divulge their secrets. He was kidnapped by several Masons in Batavia on Sept. 11, 1826. One of his abductors was Niagara County Sheriff Eli Bruce.

Morgan arrived in Lewiston by stage coach at midnight and was put in another carriage behind the Frontier House on Center St. on his way to Ft. Niagara to meet an unknown fate. He was never seen again and controversy swirled.

The Rev. David Smith of the Presbyterian Church was harshly criticized for defending the actions of his fellow Masons and was forced to resign. He later established the Episcopal Church which is now the home of the Lewiston Museum on Plain and Niagara Streets.

The original coach Morgan arrived in remained for years behind the Frontier House because people feared to move it, lest they be implicated in the abduction plot. The coach decayed where it came to rest and no trace of it remains today.

Welcome to Lewiston, NY

The Historical Association of Lewiston hopes you enjoy your visit to our historic and charming village. The Lewiston Museum is at 469 Plain Street.

Mark your calendar for this year's spectacular Historic Home Tour on Dec. 2 & 3, 2006.

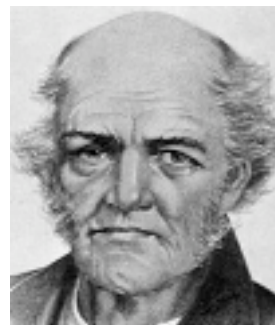
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William Morgan Last Seen in Lewiston

Strange disappearance in 1826 led to national uproar.

It's called the "The Morgan Affair" and it caused political and social shock waves



William Morgan

After antagonizing Masons for threatening to publish secrets about their organization, William Morgan disappeared in 1826. What happened after that has been hotly debated for 180 years.

Three theories on Morgan's fate:

1) Morgan was taken to Ft. Niagara and then shackled and thrown off a boat and drowned in the middle of the Niagara River.

2) He was escorted to Canada by Masons and given \$500 and a horse, with the agreement that he never return.

3) Other reports say he ended up in the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean, where he married and had 6 children. Some say he fled to Alabama, or even the country of Turkey.

Political and Social Fallout of The Morgan Affair

Morgan's disappearance caused a national firestorm. Sentiment took a sharp turn against the Freemasons between 1826 and 1845.

• Niagara County Sheriff, Eli Bruce spent two years in jail for his part in the Morgan kidnapping.

• 54 Masons were indicted by 20 grand juries and 15 trials were held. 10 Masons were found guilty and served from 30 days to 28 months.

• Masonic Lodges were entered and desecrated. In 1826, there were 480 Masonic Lodges in New York. By 1835, there were 49.

• The Anti-Masonic Party was established in Western NY and had an impact on national politics. One leader was William Seward, who later served as Governor and was Lincoln's Secretary of State. He is remembered for his role in purchasing Alaska from Russia.

Was Morgan Drive named after William Morgan?

No. Morgan Drive was named after J. Warren Morgan who owned a large fruit orchard where the "Morgan Farms" housing development was started around 1960. He lived to be over 100 years old.

Freemasons Endowed Academy

It was located at what is now known as "Academy Park"

Where did the brightest students in Western NY and Southern Ontario attend high school in the early 1800's? Right here in Lewiston at the private Lewiston Academy -- a large four story building constructed in 1824 (about the same time as the Frontier House).

It was endowed by the Lewiston Masonic Lodge and the majority of the teachers were from Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. Also teaching there were the poet Saxe, and the scientist Odonathus Hill. The 150 students enjoyed a large library, renowned chemistry labs, and an observatory. In 1826, the State directed the proceeds from the Lewiston-Queenston ferry be paid to the school. The Academy prospered until the Canadian students withdrew during the 1837-38 MacKenzie Rebellion. In 1851, when the bridge between Lewiston and Queenston opened, the ferry service was discontinued, and financial support ceased. It was forced to close.

Reopened briefly in 1855, and again in 1867, the building remained vacant until it was demolished in the 1930s.

Academy Park is now used for many activities throughout the year, including the Kiwanis Peach Festival.



The Lewiston Academy was demolished in the 1930s

No longer standing, the Lewiston Academy was located where Academy Park is today. The cornerstone, which was originally laid with full Masonic honors, stands today on a pedestal in the northeast corner of the park, near Center and South 9th Street.

You'll see the Freemason's Compass and Square symbol on the stone.

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(right across the street from historic Academy Park)

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