

# “The threat of being Morganized will not deter us”: William Lyon Mackenzie, Freemasonry and the Morgan Affair

Chris Raible

Volume 100, Number 1, Spring 2008

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065725ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065725ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Raible, C. (2008). “The threat of being Morganized will not deter us”: William Lyon Mackenzie, Freemasonry and the Morgan Affair. *Ontario History*, 100(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065725ar>

Article abstract

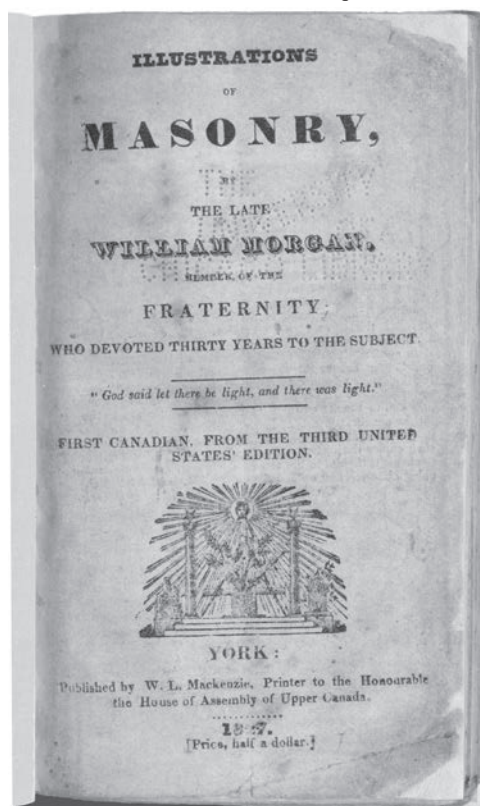
In January 1827 William Lyon Mackenzie applied for membership to in York's lodge of Freemasons, an episode in his life totally ignored by his biographers. His action seems incompatible with the character and personality of the radical journalist. As he was re-establishing his printing business in the wake of its blatant destruction, why would Mackenzie, an outsider, want to join the Masons, the insiders? And why would the Masons consider welcoming him into their secret circle? Freemasonry was embroiled in scandal over the abduction and supposed murder of William Morgan, author of a book exposing Masonic secrets. Mackenzie began publishing lurid stories of the Morgan affair. The Masons rejected his membership application. Mackenzie proceeded to put out his own edition of Morgan's book. A mutually beneficial bargain, exchanging editorial silence for social status had failed – and Mackenzie published his version of the drama in the columns of the *Colonial Advocate*.

# “The threat of being Morganized will not deter us”: William Lyon Mackenzie, Freemasonry and the Morgan Affair

By Chris Raible

William Lyon Mackenzie is famous (or infamous) in Canadian history as an outspoken journalist, a radical politician, and the instigator of the ill-fated 1837 Rebellion in Upper Canada. Although much has been written about him, one incident in his life has been totally ignored: in 1827 he tried to join a York lodge of Freemasons. The idea of Mackenzie as a Freemason does not fit the usual portrayals of the man. Admirers and detractors are agreed that he was vigorously independent, critical of the establishment, distrustful of authority – in short, not one likely to accept or adhere to the disciplines of a secret fraternal order.<sup>1</sup>

Freemasonry, the international secret fraternal movement with a mythological heritage tracing back to King Solomon’s temple and a known history rooted in the guilds of British stone masons of the Middle Ages, originated in its modern form in



the late 17th Century. It offered its male members intellectual stimulation, mutual aid and fraternal fellowship, with meetings marked by solemn oaths, secret signs and elaborate rituals. Spreading worldwide, its network of local lodges attracted the allegiance of affluent merchants, military officers, members of the professions, and even members of the royal family.<sup>2</sup>

The fraternity grew rapidly in the

<sup>1</sup>The author would like to express appreciation to Guy St. Denis and to an anonymous reader for their many helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. For clarity, all references to Masons, including those in quoted material, are capitalized.

<sup>2</sup>See Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), ch. 1: “The

## Abstract

In January 1827 William Lyon Mackenzie applied for membership to in York's lodge of Freemasons, an episode in his life totally ignored by his biographers. His action seems incompatible with the character and personality of the radical journalist. As he was re-establishing his printing business in the wake of its blatant destruction, why would Mackenzie, an outsider, want to join the Masons, the insiders? And why would the Masons consider welcoming him into their secret circle? Freemasonry was embroiled in scandal over the abduction and supposed murder of William Morgan, author of a book exposing Masonic secrets. Mackenzie began publishing lurid stories of the Morgan affair. The Masons rejected his membership application. Mackenzie proceeded to put out his own edition of Morgan's book. A mutually beneficial bargain, exchanging editorial silence for social status had failed – and Mackenzie published his version of the drama in the columns of the *Colonial Advocate*.

**Résumé:** Un épisode de la vie de William Lyon Mackenzie est totalement ignoré par ses différents biographes : sa demande d'adhésion en janvier 1827 à la loge des Francs-maçons de York, une démarche qui semble incompatible avec le caractère et la personnalité de ce journaliste aux opinions radicales. Au moment où il s'occupait de rétablir les affaires de son entreprise d'imprimerie, pourquoi Mackenzie, un homme en marge, a-t-il voulu rejoindre les Francs-maçons, les gens en place? Et pourquoi les Francs-maçons semblaient-ils prêts à l'accueillir au sein de leur société secrète? À l'époque les Francs-maçons se trouvaient mêlés au scandale suscité par l'enlèvement et le meurtre présumé de William Morgan, l'auteur d'un livre qui révélait les secrets maçonniques. Mackenzie avait commencé à publier des informations sur l'affaire Morgan, et sur certains de ses aspects les plus scandaleux. Les Maçons ayant refusé de l'admettre parmi eux, Mackenzie décida donc de publier sa propre édition du livre de Morgan. Un arrangement qui aurait pu être bénéfique aux deux partis – le silence en échange de la reconnaissance sociale – échoua; et Mackenzie publia sa version du drame dans les colonnes de *The Colonial Advocate*.

United States, especially after the Revolution when the new country was abandoning its old allegiances. Freemasonry was untainted by notions of an hereditary aristocracy – admission was open to men

were nearly five hundred lodges in New York state alone.<sup>3</sup>

Though less affected by American republican fervour, Freemasonry also spread in Upper Canada. By the mid-

regardless of their wealth, religion, or political opinions. But, brothers claimed, they accepted only those of high moral virtue, those committed to the ideals of the new republic. As historian Alan Taylor noted in his book on Cooperstown, New York, Freemasonry served

to create a new translocal network of leading men distinguished by merit and public service rather than by inherited privilege.... [It] enabled aspiring men to translate their new property and influence into a certification of superior merit and prestige.

However, a modern study suggests, this “public standing was ambiguous.... [It] could be convivial, benevolent, mystical, patriotic, charitable, pietist, and even reformist,” but was also marked by “secrecy, secularism, cosmopolitanism, elitism, and [an] implicitly anti-egalitarian urge to provide a model of social order.” By 1825, there

Creation of the Masonic Fraternity.” Also Wallace McLeod, ed., *Whence Come We? Freemasonry in Ontario 1764-1980* (Hamilton: Masonic Holdings, 1980), ch. 1.

<sup>3</sup> See Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, ch. 5: “A New Order of the Ages,” and his “A Pure and Sublime System: the Appeal of Post-Revolutionary Freemasonry,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 9 (Fall 1989); Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York, Random House, 1995), 211; Ronald P. Formisano and Kathleen Smith Kutolowski, “Antimasonry and Masonry: The Genesis of Protest, 1826-1827,” *American Quarterly*, 29:2 (Summer, 1977); Bul-

1820s it was well-established with more than two dozen lodges belonging to the Second Provincial Grand Lodge, including two in York. Masons represented a variety of occupations: farmers, merchants, doctors, lawyers and government officials. A number were men like Samuel Peters Jarvis, Levius Peters Sherwood, Christopher Hagerman and William Dummer Powell – members of the ruling elite that Mackenzie would later dub the “Family Compact.” Even Lieutenant Governor Sir Peregrine Maitland was a Mason – arriving in Upper Canada in 1818, he was nearly named Provincial Grand Master.<sup>4</sup>

Why would Mackenzie attempt to align himself with Masons? His biographers are singularly silent on the whole affair. Not one – and there are several in the 150 plus years since his death in 1861 – makes mention of this episode in his

life. This silence is surprising, since Mackenzie publicly detailed his version of the story in his *Colonial Advocate* newspaper. His nearly joining the secret society was hardly a secret.<sup>5</sup>

There is one brief mention: John Ross Robertson’s *History of Freemasonry in Canada*, written over a century ago, quoted minutes of “Lodge No. 762 E.R. (English Registry)” for January 10, 1827, noting a petition received from W. L. Mackenzie “praying to become a candidate for the mysteries of Masons, enclosing £0 10s. 0d.” At a meeting two months later, “the ballot for Mr. W. L. Mackenzie was found unfavorable.” Robertson added his own wry comment: “the candidate’s political prominence and predilections no doubt contributed to his non-reception by the lodge.”<sup>6</sup>

To understand why Mackenzie, an out-

---

lock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 188.

<sup>4</sup> For an extended discussion of Freemasonry in an Upper Canadian context, see Jeffrey L. McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 69-83; McLeod, *Whence...*, 51-52, 254; Mackenzie’s notorious listing of the Family Compact was first published in his *Sketches of Canada and the United States*. (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833) and reprinted in the *Colonial Advocate*, 26 September 1833; J. Ross Robertson, *History of Freemasonry in Canada*. (Toronto: George N. Morang & Co. 1900), vol. 1, 1000-02; Maitland was not, if Robertson’s (vol. 2) chapters on lodge memberships are correct, active in either York lodge.

<sup>5</sup> Chronologically, the biographies are: Charles Lindsey, *The life and Times of William Lyon Mackenzie* (Toronto: P.R. Randall, 1862); Charles Lindsey, retitled *William Lyon Mackenzie* and “Edited with Numerous Additions” by [son] G.G.S. Lindsey, (Toronto: Morang, 1908); William Dawson LeSueur, *William Lyon Mackenzie: A Reinterpretation* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971). (originally written ca. 1908); William Kilbourn, *The Firebrand* (Toronto: Clark Irwin, 1956); David Flint, *William Lyon Mackenzie: Rebel Against Authority* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); Greg Keilty, *1837: Revolution in the Canadas as told by William Lyon Mackenzie* (Toronto: N.C. Press, 1974); Lillian F. Gates, *After the Rebellion: The Later Years of William Lyon Mackenzie* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988); and John Sewell, *Mackenzie: A Political Biography of William Lyon Mackenzie* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2002). See also the lengthy entry, “Mackenzie, William Lyon” by Frederick Armstrong and Ronald Stagg, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. IX*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 496-510. Anthologies of his writings, with substantive biographical information are: Margaret Fairley, *The Selected Writings of William Lyon Mackenzie: 1824-1837* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1960) and Anthony W. Rasporich, *William Lyon Mackenzie* (Toronto & Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Robertson, *History of Freemasonry*, vol. 2, 373.

sider, would consider joining the Masons, the insiders, requires temporarily forgetting the later dramas of his life. It may also require setting aside assumptions about his personality and about his place in Canadian history. Mackenzie's (or anyone's) inner motives are unknowable, but the columns of his newspaper publicly expressed his opinions, feelings and attitudes.

Much of what is known about Mackenzie is known because he wrote so much. He left behind a paper trail yards wide and miles long. What he wrote was often self-serving; he put his own spin on his controversial activities. (Who does not?) His versions of events could be incomplete or even inaccurate. They should not automatically be taken at face value. But neither should they be blithely discounted or discredited.<sup>7</sup>

Commenting some years ago on writing about Mackenzie, Paul Romney noted:

It is hard to get close to a man of such emphatic personality and decided political views as William Lyon Mackenzie and still be indifferent to him – attraction or repulsion (perhaps both) must ensue. Mackenzie's life and works, therefore, form a subject loaded with emotional obstacles to its objective treat-

ment, and a definitive estimate of his character and achievements is still lacking.<sup>8</sup>

For this Masonic episode in Mackenzie's life, there is surprisingly little evidence beyond his own published account. The files of York's other newspapers offer little information.<sup>9</sup> Few of his private papers for this period exist – most were lost in the Rebellion. In the papers of his contemporaries – the Baldwins, the Jarvises, Robinson, Ryerson, Strachan, et al. – no references have been found.

Mackenzie, by his Scottish training and experience, was a merchant. For four years in Upper Canada he operated successful businesses – in York, in Dundas, in Queenston – prior to launching a newspaper. When he became a journalist, he did not close his Queenston general store, nor did he sever his Dundas commercial connections. Indeed, he made use of his already established network of friendships and associations to promote his new venture. In communities across the province, his contacts acted as agents for the paper and sources of news.<sup>10</sup>

While it is clear from the first issue of the *Colonial Advocate* – May 18, 1824

<sup>7</sup> Great quantities of his papers are among the Mackenzie-Lindsey Papers at the Archives of Ontario – and the William Lyon Mackenzie Papers at the National Library and Archives. There are, however, major gaps, especially for the earlier years. For much of his life Mackenzie kept extensive, even exhaustive files, but most of the early papers were lost in the turmoil of the Rebellion. For his life in Canada in the 1820s and early 1830s, there are no extant financial records, few items of correspondence, almost no personal memoranda. There is, however, a virtually complete run of the *Advocate* from its start 1824 to his selling it late in 1834. Its columns offer a window of understanding not only into the political issues of the times, but also into the personality of the editor.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Romney, "William Lyon Mackenzie as Mayor of Toronto." *Canadian Historical Review*, 56:4 (December 1975). More than three decades later, the comment is still apt.

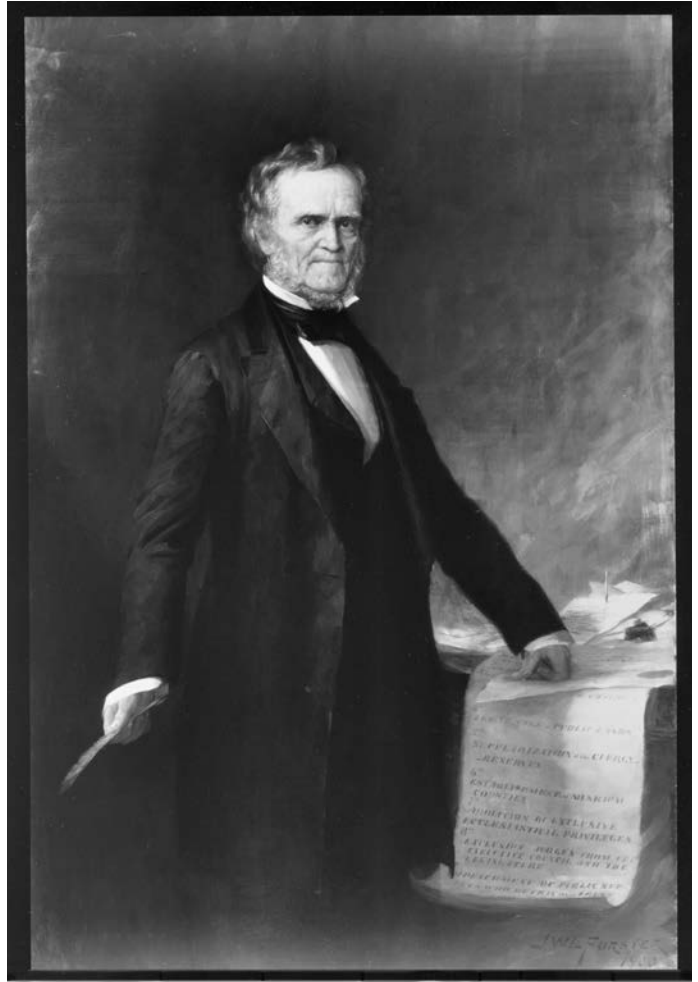
<sup>9</sup> The government-operated *Upper Canada Gazette*, by then edited by Robert Stanton, avoided all reference to the affair. What John Carey, editor of the *Observer*, wrote is unknown – there are almost no extant issues. Francis Collins, editor of *Canadian Freeman*, made a few brief references, as will be noted.

<sup>10</sup> Lindsey, 36-39; John Kaler, "William Lyon Mackenzie: the Dundas Connection" *York Pioneer*, vol.

*Portrait of William Lyon Mackenzie, Mayor of Toronto (1834), painted 1900 by John Wycliffe Lowes Forster. Oil on canvas (114.3 x 167.6 cm). Courtesy of the City of Toronto Art Collection, Culture.*

– that politics energized its publisher, Mackenzie wanted to offer much more than political commentary. To succeed economically, he hoped his paper would also be pragmatically useful – note its extended title: *Journal of Agriculture, Manufactures & Commerce*. As editor he expected to play many roles: teacher, social philosopher, financial advisor, cultural commentator, even preacher of sorts. To be viable commercially, the paper needed to attract a wide readership. Mackenzie soon discovered he had underestimated the expenses, and the time involved, in putting out a paper every week. He also underestimated the hostility his frank expressions of opinion would excite.<sup>11</sup>

He soon became notorious for his direct attacks on the provincial government. He decried the administration of Lieutenant Governor Peregrine Maitland as inefficient, incompetent and expensive. The Canadian myth is that



Mackenzie filled his columns with personal invective amounting to abuse. Yet a careful reading of the early paper reveals his censures of Maitland – and of John Beverley Robinson, Henry John Boulton and the Rev. Dr. John Strachan – to be harsh and pointed, but they were neither vicious nor scurrilous.

99 (2004); for an extended discussion of the early months of the newspaper, see Chris Raible, *A Colonial Advocate: The Launching of his newspaper and the Queenston Career of Lyon Mackenzie* (Creemore, ON: Curiosity House, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Attorney General John Beverley Robinson, on reading the first issue of the *Advocate*, described Mackenzie to a friend: “Another reptile of the Gourlay species has sprung up... I dare say I could name some one or two of his assistants - what vermin!” J. B. Robinson to Major Hillier, *Upper Canada Sundries*, 19 May 1824.

He did not, of course, avoid controversy – he courted it – but not necessarily for its own sake. In his early years as an editor, Mackenzie was not a scandal monger but a grievance monger. His experience as a storekeeper and his extended travels made him aware of the many deep discontents harboured by farmer settlers. Land granting policies, vacant crown and clergy reserves, poor roads and bridges, political patronage, lack of schools, injudicious legal decisions, religious inequities, shortages of money, discrimination against Yankee-born settlers, high tariffs and customs duties, unresponsive bureaucrats – these and more were the issues that Mackenzie wrote about. His paper publicized, even magnified distress; it did not create it. His opponents, however, typically preferred to “shoot the messenger,” to attack his character, doubt his motives, or question his loyalty.<sup>12</sup>

Mackenzie was a proud man. He wanted his paper to be respected as well as read. He knew that his opinions would arouse opposition, but he hoped they would also stir admiration. Notwithstanding his independent ideas, he saw

himself as a responsible member of his community. Despite his harsh attacks on the colonial administration, he saw himself as a loyal British subject, committed to the betterment of his country.<sup>13</sup>

Consider, for example, the oft-told tale of Mackenzie and the Brock monument, the stone tower on the heights behind Mackenzie’s Queenston home and office. As monument construction was about to begin, the editor learned no public observance was planned, so he quickly arranged one, complete with vocal music and Masonic ceremony. He composed a formal citation to be placed in a sealed capsule – along with coins and newspapers (both the official *Gazette* and his own *Advocate*) – in the monument’s base.<sup>14</sup>

By organizing the event, despite his outspoken criticism of colonial officialdom, Mackenzie demonstrated both his patriotism and his admiration of Brock. The *Advocate* report of the ceremonies hinted neither political motivation by Mackenzie nor criticism of Maitland. The affair was not intended to upset the administration, yet it did just that.<sup>15</sup>

The episode became notorious,

<sup>12</sup> Charles Fothergill, editor of the official government organ, *Upper Canada Gazette*, devoted five columns to pouring scorn on the *Advocate* editor – 26 May, 4 June 1824.

<sup>13</sup> For example, he vigorously defended himself against rival editor Charles Fothergill’s accusations of disloyalty: *Colonial Advocate*, 10 June 1824.

<sup>14</sup> Another instance of our knowledge of a controversial episode in Mackenzie’s life being dependent upon Mackenzie himself. Apart from the *Advocate* reports at the time, Mackenzie re-printed many details in his *Sketches of Canada and the United States*. (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833) 314–318. See also Charles Lindsey, *Life and Times*, vol. 1, 65, a brief reference (in error in its chronology); repeated by G.G.S. Lindsey, 107; LeSueur, *William Lyon Mackenzie*, 46–47; and Kilbourn, *The Firebrand*, 24. John Charles Dent allocates a long paragraph to the incident in his *The Story of the Upper Canadian Rebellion* (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1885), 123–24. For full details of the affair, see Chris Raible, “‘Sacred to the Memory’: William Lyon Mackenzie and the Brock Monument,” *York Pioneer*, vol. 103 (2008); the citation is quoted in full in the *Colonial Advocate*, 10 June 1824.

<sup>15</sup> The ceremonies are described in the *Colonial Advocate*, 3 and 10 June 1824. A modern historian

thanks to the over-reaction of the Lieutenant Governor, who ordered construction halted and the capsule extracted. Mackenzie's published report of this removal attracted much attention and, no doubt, caused much amusement. Mackenzie took delight in the controversy, but there is no reason to assume he planned it that way. Perhaps he hoped to embarrass the government. Perhaps he was naive in not anticipating Maitland's response. Nevertheless, Mackenzie's clear and original purpose for the observance was as a public testimony of true patriot love.<sup>16</sup>

Four months later Brock's body was entombed in the monument. Mackenzie played no role in the elaborate ceremonies, yet he devoted several columns to reporting them. His account was devoid of anti-administration political commentary. Indeed, it closed with a sincere

expression of loyal sentiment:

...when I returned to my home, I felt a pleasure in calling to mind that Britain ... cherishes the memory of her departed Chieftains. To know assuredly, that such honours and trophies await his bones, is cheering and consoling to the mind of the defender of his country, as he bleeds into eternity, having ... given his life for the benefit of his race, their liberties and rights.<sup>17</sup>

After six months' experience in Queenston, Mackenzie moved to York. The paper's renown rested on its politics – to play a central role, it must move to the centre of provincial political activity. In York Mackenzie quickly became a model citizen, attending church regularly, urging the creation of a library, even helping to establish a non-sectarian burial ground.<sup>18</sup>

As a publisher, Mackenzie knew that to pay for his paper, he needed advertising income as well as subscriptions. As impor-

---

contents that Mackenzie usurped Maitland's role – Mark Francis, *Governors and Settlers: Images of Authority in the British Colonies, 1820-1860* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., 1992), 38-40 – but nothing in Mackenzie's writings suggests that his organizing of the Brock ceremony was a conscious or deliberate confrontation. To assume other motives for the occasion is pure speculation.

<sup>16</sup> Two modern scholars, in sharp disapproval of Mackenzie, have rejected some of these details (even though they were fully publicized at the time). F. M. Quealey – “The Administration of Sir Peregrine Maitland, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada 1818-1829,” Ph.D Thesis, University of Toronto, 1968, 211-12 – insists, with no cited evidence, that Lieutenant Governor Maitland himself publicly laid the Queenston monument's foundation. Only after Maitland left town, Quealey charges, could Mackenzie “surreptitiously” insert his newspaper in the foundation. Following suit, Robert Shipley – *To Mark Our Place: a History of Canadian War Memorials* (Toronto: NC Press, 1987), 28 – repeats the charge, adding an amplifying comment, “Not everyone in the colony was ... enthusiastic about the British connection.... For MacKenzie and his partisans, the continued veneration of Brock as the defender of Canada against Americanism was simply a cover for depriving Canadians of greater democracy.”

<sup>17</sup> His press was, however, commissioned to print the program of arrangements – see Patricia Lockhart Fleming, *Upper Canada Imprints, 1801-1841* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), note on listing #233, 66; *Colonial Advocate*, 13 October 1824.

<sup>18</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 8 December 1825 – Mackenzie acted as secretary for a meeting and a committee formed thereafter. Several Mackenzie infant children, however, were buried in the Presbyterian Burial Ground (handwritten inscriptions in the Mackenzie family Bible in the possession of the City of Toronto).



tant, his shop also must do job printing – the handbills, blank forms, cards, and myriad other printed documents needed by paying customers. Despite his opposition to the administration, he hoped to profit from the government’s almost inexhaustible demand for printing. *Observer* editor John Carey accused Mackenzie of moving to York in the hope of becoming the King’s printer – a charge Mackenzie denied, but he did not deny his desire to share in government printing. To serve his readers, he continued to be controversial. To serve his customers, he determined to be dependable. The balance cannot have been easy. Publishing a paper continued to drain much of his time and more of his purse. He suffered so severely that he contemplated moving back to the quieter life of a merchant in Dundas.<sup>19</sup>

In June, 1825, he stopped his paper but continued his printing business. Half a year later, with a new cast-iron press and new types, he re-entered journalism. After another six months, he again almost gave up. In his desperation he devoted most of two *Advocate* issues to supposedly satirical, but personally offensive, commentaries on several key public persons. These “Patrick Swift” commentaries

were unlike anything the editor had previously published. Ironically, the reckless response of his adversaries saved his business.<sup>20</sup>

In early June 1826, while Mackenzie was out of town exploring ways pay his creditors while avoiding legal action, a group of men – led by one of York’s most prominent citizens, Samuel Peters Jarvis – deliberately destroyed the *Advocate* print shop. Two magistrates watched with glee. This so-called “Types Riot,” was no youthful Indian-disguised escapade, no charivari – it was a heavy-handed attempt to silence Mackenzie. Instead, it amplified his political influence. A subsequent civil trial awarded him enough in damages for him to settle up with his creditors, set up his repaired press and start up his paper again. Moreover, the incident made him a popular hero – persons in power had tried to gag him, as they had effectively gagged Gourlay before him, and failed.<sup>21</sup>

Despite his new-found popularity, Mackenzie suffered monetarily, physically and psychologically. For six months he had no income, a family to feed, and apprentices he was pledged to board and lodge. Although buoyed by proofs of the rightness of his cause, he was also dis-

<sup>19</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 13 January 1825 – as noted, few copies of the *Observer* are extant; *Colonial Advocate*, 7 April 1825 – he had lived in Dundas in 1822-23 and still owned property in the village.

<sup>20</sup> In the *Colonial Advocate*, 12 July 1828, in response to critics, Mackenzie confessed how dire his financial condition had been two years earlier. The commentaries of Patrick Swift – a Mackenzie pseudonym identified as the grand nephew of Irish satirist Jonathan Swift – are reprinted in full as an appendix to Chris Raible, *Muddy York Mud: Scandal and Scurrility in Upper Canada* (Creemore, ON: Curiosity House, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> The magistrates were William Allan and Stephen Heward. For the full story of the “types riot” see Chris Raible, *Muddy York Mud*. For reference to supposed Indian costumes, see Armstrong and Stagg, *DCB*. For an interpretation of the riot as a “semi-ritualistic derision” or “charivari” see G. Blaine Baker, “So Elegant a Web’: Providential Order and the Rule of Secular Law in Early Nineteenth Century Upper Canada,” *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 38 (1988).

mayed by the hostility his journalism had aroused. He was also critically ill – his chronic “dumb ague” (a malarial fever) recurred in times of stress.<sup>22</sup>

This involuntary interim offered Mackenzie an opportunity to ponder his predicament. He had barely avoided bankruptcy – but for the irresponsibility of the rioters and the sympathy of his jurors, he might well have gone under. As he moved back into journalism and printing, his problem was clear enough: how to both continue his role as a public critic *and* carry on a financially successful printing operation? Without sacrificing his principles, how could he earn enough to afford continuing his journal? The answer was apparent: for the newspaper to produce more advertising revenue and the printing office to attract more job work, Mackenzie must enhance his reputation and improve his social standing. However controversial he might be, he must also be seen as trustworthy and loyal, responsible and reliable.<sup>23</sup>

The largest purchaser of job printing was the government. Although the administration employed a King’s Printer, its needs were always greater than he could

print, especially when Parliament was in session. The other York printers actively competed with Mackenzie for the extra work. These jobs were rarely tendered – government printing contracts largely depended on personal contacts. Also, the House of Assembly had complete control its own printing. (It helped to have friends in high places.)<sup>24</sup>

Further, Mackenzie planned to play a future public political role. To influence the course of human events in any significant way, he could not comment from the sidelines – he would have to join the fray on the field. (It would be another year before he sought election to parliament, but he already had the idea in mind.) To be elected, he knew, the voters would have to see him as he saw himself: a reformer, not an agitator; a patriot, not a rebel.<sup>25</sup>

For some years Mackenzie had been intrigued by the Masonic fraternity. Its democratic ideals and moral order may well have impressed him. He admired the personal qualities of many Masons he knew. The Brock monument ceremonies of 1824 involved Masons, bringing Mackenzie into closer contact with the rituals of the brotherhood. But he had never

<sup>22</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 7 December 1825 – see also Lindsey, *Life and Times*, vol. 1, 123-26.

<sup>23</sup> This is, of course, speculative – as noted, there are no extant financial records and only minimal correspondence for this time.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Stanton became King’s printer after Fothergill was dismissed early in 1826. Mackenzie’s eagerness to obtain government printing contracts was evident immediately after the re-start of the *Colonial Advocate* – issues for 7 December 1826, 4, 25 January 1827, etc. By May he was “Printer to the Honourable the House of Assembly of Upper Canada.” *Colonial Advocate*, 17 May 1827.

<sup>25</sup> He mused about being a Member of Parliament in the *Colonial Advocate*, 22 February 1827: “if ever it should be our lot to sit ..., we shall, if we see such abusive bullying and insolent conduct indulged in by any member ... instantly move for his being taken into confinement, or expelled.” Formal announcement of his candidacy came almost a year later: “Address to Electors of the County of York” dated 17 December 1827 (Broadside, Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library – also printed in the *Colonial Advocate*, 27 December 1827).

considered joining. Nor, it seems, had anyone ever encouraged him to join.<sup>26</sup>

However, in December, 1826, just as the *Advocate* was starting up again after the Types Riot, the editor was approached by one or more Masons, including Thomas Carfrae, the Master of the York St. George's lodge. These men urged Mackenzie to learn more about Masonry. They lent him a book on the Masonic constitution.<sup>27</sup>

Masonic brothers, Mackenzie learned, looked after each other. Masons formally pledged to aid and support fellow Masons, agreeing to employ, do business, and, according to one account, even vote for their brothers "before any other person in the same circumstances."<sup>28</sup> Becoming a Mason, Mackenzie came to understand, would assist him wherever he travelled. Becoming a Mason would benefit his printing business. Becoming a Mason would aid his political aspirations. Becoming a Mason would help provide Mackenzie with what he most needed in business and in politics: social status and economic security.

Quite apart from the economic and political benefits, Masonic membership had an emotional appeal – not simply its camaraderie, but its offers of friendship, harmony, and cooperation, its professions of virtue, honour, and fidelity. Bruised by his confrontations with hostility, Mackenzie may have sought solace in a sanctuary of harmony and brotherly love. Freemasons – secret, exclusive and traditional, yet liberal, convivial and moral – formed a friendly compact he wanted to join.<sup>29</sup>

The central religious aspects of Freemasonry may also have attracted his allegiance. The brotherhood was non-denominational, essentially Protestant, although there were a few Roman Catholic members. Both its creeds and practices expressed faith in a divine creator and ruler. The Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge, the Rev. William Smart of Brockville, was, like Mackenzie himself, a secessionist Presbyterian. (Mackenzie may have known that Smart's joining the Freemasons in 1820 had aroused

<sup>26</sup> See *Colonial Advocate*, 3, 10 June and 14 October 1824. See also *Sketches of Canada and the United States*. (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833), 314–18. Mackenzie even teased (*Colonial Advocate*, 8 July 1824) that Maitland had ordered the capsule removal from the foundation of the Brock Monument because he feared it contained Masonic secrets – in fact, Maitland was upset because it contained a Mackenzie newspaper critical of his administration.

<sup>27</sup> Robertson, *History of Freemasonry*, vol. 2, 377 – Mackenzie had worked closely with Carfrae in creating the non-sectarian "Potter's Field" burial ground a few months earlier (*Colonial Advocate* 9 December and 4 May 1825; Mackenzie published details in the *Colonial Advocate*, 26 April 1827. Indeed, virtually all the contemporary evidence for Mackenzie's nearly joining the Masons comes from Mackenzie's own statements published shortly after the fact. Whether these writings, or anything Mackenzie wrote, are to be believed must be left to the reader. The book: *Constitution of the Ancient Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons ... First Canadian Edition* (Kingston: H.C. Thomson, 1823). See Fleming, *Upper Canada Imprints*, listing #194, 55

<sup>28</sup> Quoted by Bullock, "A Pure," 367.

<sup>29</sup> See Kathleen Smith Kutolowski, "Freemasonry and Community in the Early Republic: The Case for Antimasonic Anxieties," *American Quarterly*, 34 (Winter 1982). See also McNairn, *Capacity to Judge*, especially pages 81–83.

some opposition among his parishioners though the controversy did not last.) The Masonic religious order was totally congruent with Mackenzie's own faith, a faith firmly rooted in his Scottish Secession Presbyterian origins.<sup>30</sup>

Mackenzie was also aware that the Masons embraced political diversity. The *Constitutions* of Masonry explicitly prohibited Masons from "doing or saying any thing offensive, or that may forbid an easy and free conversation; for that would blast our harmony, and defeat our laudable purposes." "Private piques or quarrels" were not admitted, "far less any quarrels about religion, or state policy, we being only, as masons, of the universal religion ... we are also of all nations, tongues, kindred, and languages, and are resolved against all politics."<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Mackenzie was drawn by the prospect of Masonic meetings as a retreat from political wrangles.

The attorneys for each side in Mackenzie's "Types Trial," Marshall Spring Bidwell and Christopher Hagerman, were also sharp political opponents, yet both belonged to the Kingston Lodge. Nonetheless, for Mackenzie to be encouraged to join York's St. George's Lodge – if indeed the idea came as a Masonic initiative – is surprising. The immediate past Masonic

Provincial Deputy, Col. James Fitzgibbon, was a man with whom Mackenzie had often been at total odds. Neither Fitzgibbon nor either of the two Types Rioters known to be Masons seemed likely to embrace as a brother the outspoken *Advocate* editor. But none of these men was a member of St. George's Lodge.<sup>32</sup>

In York there were not one but two Masonic Lodges. The older lodge, St. John's, was reorganized as St. George's after the re-organization of Freemasonry in the province in 1822. That year marked the formation of the St. Andrew's lodge, begun informally in the home of judge William Campbell (the presiding judge at Mackenzie's Types Trial). It was the lodge of the upper elite. Among its nine founding members were the Receiver-General, another Legislative Councillor, and the aide-de-camp to the Lieutenant Governor. The St. George's lodge, on the other hand, was perhaps more egalitarian. In the quarter century of its earlier life as St. John's, it included among its numbers "three farmers, two tailors, two innkeepers, two carpenters, and a blacksmith, clergyman, barrack master, saddler, surveyor, tinsmith, merchant, mason, mariner, goldsmith, and cabinet maker." Perhaps there was room for a printer.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary*, ch. 6: "An Appearance of Sanctity: Religion;" Robertson, *History of Freemasonry*, vol. 2, 298-99 and W. McLeod, "Freemasonry as a Matter of Fact," *Canadian Historical Review*, 99:1 (March 1988); Ruth McKenzie article, "Smart, William" *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. X (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972). See also McNairn, *Capacity to Judge*, 71.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted by McNairn, *Capacity to Judge*, 73-74.

<sup>32</sup> Robertson, *History of Freemasonry*, vol. 2, 327-30 – Hagerman affiliated 1 December 1825; Bidwell 7 September 1826 and withdrew 5 June 1828; the Types Rioters were Samuel Peters Jarvis and Henry Sherwood, see McLeod, *Whence*, 254 – there may have been others; Robertson, *History of Freemasonry*, vol. 2, 304, 377 lists the members of the two York lodges during this period.

<sup>33</sup> Summary by McNairn, *Capacity to Judge*, 77-79, see also Robertson, *History of Freemasonry*, vol. 2,

When Mackenzie expressed strong interest, he was not specifically invited – Masonic rules forbid such direct invitation – but he was urged to apply. No doubt Mackenzie was flattered to be courted. If it would accept him, he would join. In January 1827, he paid his ten-shilling (\$2) application fee and formally petitioned the lodge for membership. His application, supported by lodge leaders, was, according to longstanding Masonic practice, laid on the table for a month prior to being acted upon. (It is probably coincidental that Dr. John Rolph, Mackenzie friend and reform Member of Parliament for Middlesex, was present as a guest at this January 10th meeting.)<sup>34</sup>

For Mackenzie to apply may be understandable, but why would the fraternity consider embracing the fiery journalist? To understand why the Masons, mostly insiders, would want Mackenzie, an outspoken outsider, to join them requires going back in time a few months.

In the fall of 1826, New York State was ripe with rumours of bold abduction and bloody murder. The alleged victim: one William Morgan. The alleged motive: preventing Morgan from publishing a book exposing the secrets of Freemasonry. The alleged perpetrators: a cadre of members of the Masonic brotherhood.<sup>35</sup>

In mid-September, Batavia resident Morgan had mysteriously disappeared.

Wild stories soon spread. Morgan had been falsely accused of crimes. Morgan had been kidnapped. Morgan had been executed. Though the tales were widely discounted – especially by editors and politicians who were themselves Masons – they were also widely believed. Public passions were so aroused that New York Governor DeWitt Clinton (a Mason himself) felt prompted to issue a proclamation calling attention to violations of law and urging all citizens to cooperate with authorities in maintaining law and order. As emotional interest escalated, by the end of October Clinton was offering monetary rewards for information about Morgan's disappearance.<sup>36</sup>

New York's many Masonic lodges numbered among their members the most prominent and respected men in their communities. But as a secret society dominated by an affluent elite, it was also deeply distrusted by others. Office holders, judges, and jury members who were Masons were especially suspect. They were seen as the weavers of a covert network, not simply for mutual support, but for social and political control.

Late in 1826 Morgan's book appeared: *Illustrations of Masonry by One of the Fraternity Who has devoted Thirty Years to the Subject*. Its publisher, Batavia journalist and printer, David C. Miller, prefaced the work asserting that “the au-

---

255-305, 263-77.

<sup>34</sup> Robertson, *History of Freemasonry*, vol. 2, 373. To repeat, the only detailed account of these events is by Mackenzie in the *Colonial Advocate*, 26 April 1827.

<sup>35</sup> As far as can be ascertained, the only extended Canadian examination of the Morgan affair is by Robertson, an avid Freemason: *History of Freemasonry*, vol. 2, ch. VII, 121-40.

<sup>36</sup> The rewards ranged \$100 to \$300 – by the following March the amount was raised to \$1,000.

thor ... was kidnapped and carried away ... on the 11th day of September, 1826, by a number of Freemasons.”<sup>37</sup> Miller closed his seven-page introduction:

When our book goes out to the world, it will meet with attacks of a violent nature from one source, and men of mock titles and orders will endeavor to heap upon it every calumny. Men more tenacious of absolute forms and practices than they are attentive to truth and honor, will deny our expositions, and call us liars and imposters.... We now aver ... that this book is what it pretends to be; that it is a master key to the secrets of Masonry.<sup>38</sup>

Morgan’s modest volume (fewer than 100 pages) is well described by its own title page summary:

A Description of the Ceremonies used in opening a Lodge of Entered Apprentice Masons; which is the same in all upper degrees, with the exception of the difference in the signs, due-guards, grips, pass-grips, words and their several names; all of which will be given and explained in their proper places as the work progresses.

Step by step the reader is taken through the secrets and mysteries: room arrangement, voting process, dress, paraphernalia, rituals, signals, gestures, solemn oaths, and the like.<sup>39</sup>

The publication of Morgan’s exposé

fueled the growing controversy. As the storm blew through western New York, it quickly crossed the border, catching Upper Canadians in its blasts. In late October the *Niagara Gleaner* quoted a New York report and a general appeal for information issued by a Batavia committee. The following week it published Governor De Witt Clinton’s proclamation and two issues later it was advertising an American book about the Morgan affair.<sup>40</sup>

One who heard the tales – and thought them hoaxes – was the editor of the *Advocate*. When Mackenzie first learned of Morgan’s book, he later asserted, he assumed that it, like other anti-Masonic books he had run across, was worthless. When in December, the York lodge “Grand Master” – having already declared it untrue – offered to lend Morgan’s book to Mackenzie, he uncharacteristically declined for he “had no curiosity.” Nevertheless, his interest had been aroused.<sup>41</sup>

The *Advocate* was resurrected on December 7th – later than the editor hoped, but just in time for the opening of the new Parliament. As an editor, every week Mackenzie perused dozens of other

<sup>37</sup> David C. Miller, “Introduction” to William Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry...*, enlarged edition, (Batavia, NY: David C. Miller, 1827 - first edition, 1826; reprint, Palmdale, CA, no date), ii.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, “Introduction,” ix.

<sup>39</sup> Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 11 and pages following.

<sup>40</sup> *Niagara Gleaner* 28 October, 5 and 19 November 1826. This last reference was not located but it is cited by Fleming, *Upper Canada Imprints*, note on listing #328, 94. The full title of the book: *A Narrative of the Facts and Circumstances Relating to the Kidnapping and Presumed Murder of William Morgan, and of the Attempt to Carry Off David C. Miller, and to Burn or Destroy the Printing Office of the Latter, for the Purpose of Preventing the Printing and Publishing of a Book, Entitled “Illustrations of Masonry, by one of the Fraternity, Who Has Devoted Thirty Years to the Subject...with an Appendix, Containing Most of the Depositions.* Batavia, [N.Y.]: Printed by D.C. Miller, 1827. Although the first edition of the work is dated 1827, it was apparently published – or at least noticed – in 1826.

<sup>41</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 26 April 1827.

newspapers, including many from New York state. That fall these papers were packed with reports of the Morgan affair: meetings of citizens, committees of investigation, sworn depositions, arrests and trials. Mackenzie considered copying some of these articles into the columns of his own paper, much to the consternation of York Masons, who warned him that republishing these reports “might give offence to the fraternity.”<sup>42</sup>

Mackenzie was too much a journalist to ignore such a startling story. But it was mid-January, 1827, a full five weeks after the *Advocate* resumed publication, before a paragraph reported the New York conviction of four Morgan kidnapers. Almost as an aside, it quoted an unidentified Queenston correspondent: “By many it is said that he had become a victim to Masonry ... others as firmly deny these allegations.” This, Mackenzie’s first reference to Morgan, was published more than a week after his Masonic application. He would not refer to the affair again for another three weeks.<sup>43</sup>

In the meantime, amidst rumours of Upper Canadian connections to Morgan’s disappearance, Lieutenant Governor Maitland, at the urging of New York’s Governor De Witt Clinton, publicly offered a reward of £50 for information. Mackenzie considered withdrawing his Masonic application. The Masonic

publications he had read made the brotherhood seem benign, but the Morgan stories were exposing a darker side. Mackenzie read Morgan’s infamous volume and confronted the Master of the Lodge, asking “if the oaths and obligations ... were genuine?” Assured that they were not, Mackenzie nevertheless declared he “could not and would not consent to become a Mason under [his] present feeling.” His petition could be laid aside as long as he chose, he was told, but he would lose his two dollars.<sup>44</sup>

On February 8th, having learned that Morgan was “formerly a brewer in New York,” Mackenzie printed more, reporting Morgan was “carried off from his home in Batavia in September last,” and noting Maitland’s offered reward. Mackenzie feared that Morgan had come “to a dreadful and unnatural end.” If not, why cannot those “who carried him off show what became of him and why they took him away? There is an awful mystery hanging about this man’s fate.” Based on “information brought ... by two of our townsmen” Mackenzie noted, “the general belief, over at the frontier, is that [Morgan] was murdered in the fortress of Niagara.” Only near the end of this report did Mackenzie acknowledge he had now read Morgan’s book, but would “for the present suspend giving any opinion upon it, or upon the fate of its author.”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 26 April 1827.

<sup>43</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 18 January 1827.

<sup>44</sup> The Proclamation was dated 31 January 1827, published *Upper Canada Gazette*, 10 February 1827 – referred to in *Colonial Advocate* 08 February 1827 – was republished in the *U.C. Gazette* weekly through April; *Colonial Advocate*, 26 April. 1827.

<sup>45</sup> In 1900, Robertson, *History of Freemasonry*, 362-63, reported that Morgan had visited the York

The February 15th *Advocate* made no mention of Morgan or Freemasonry. The editor's application for lodge membership had yet to be voted on.

On February 22nd the dike broke and Mackenzie went to press: "We are well assured that [Morgan's] book and his abduction have materially injured the Masonic fraternity in the eyes of the people.... Our desire is to come at the truth, if it may be attained...." He confessed he had "shuddered ... at the terrific recital of his awful end, as detailed in the newspaper and gossip of the day."

[I]n the absence even of circumstantial evidence" he still did not fully credit them. He assured his readers he was "willing, very willing indeed, to lay before the public every argument which can possibly be used to show the probability of this individual's being yet alive and unhurt."<sup>46</sup>

Manifesting no admiration for Morgan, Mackenzie quoted "a very respectable inhabitant of this town ... who is not a Mason.... [that] in some degree relieves the dark shade thrown over Morgan's fate." Morgan, according to this informant, after living in Upper Canada for nearly two years, had

absconded ... very much in debt.... I take it for granted he would hardly return to Canada openly again.... I have no kind of doubt, but that Morgan is now secreting himself in this province for the double purpose of avoiding his debts and getting sale of his

book. ...I cannot bring myself to believe for a moment that he has been murdered in cold blood, altho' certainly nothing can justify the outrage committed on him.

Morgan may have been a victim, but Mackenzie was not about to make him a hero. A month later, an *Advocate* detailed hundreds of dollars of unpaid debts left behind in Upper Canada when Morgan absconded in 1822 – and noted that "the female" Morgan lived with was "considered not to be his wife."<sup>47</sup>

Mackenzie himself was not yet directly critical of Freemasonry. Instead he quoted Andrew Heron of the *Niagara Gleaner*, who had broken his own silence the week before:

[N]ever having been initiated into those hidden mysteries, we profess ourselves entirely ignorant of the superior light said to be promulgated in those secret assemblies. We have however, watched for many years, the outward conduct of free Masons ... without any exceptions, that they are not more sober, honest, and are not better husbands, or better members of society, than the uninitiated; nor could we ever observe any improvement in the outward conduct of any person after being initiated into those mysteries but sometimes, *vice versa*.... Whatever benefit may be received in the lodge is not for us to say, but we are decidedly of opinion that it has no effect in improving society.<sup>48</sup>

In this same issue, Mackenzie went a step further by quoting, without comment, an extract from a Masonic oath

---

St. John's (later St. George's) lodge in 1822 and that he had been employed at Doel's brewery and later on Yonge Street north of York; *Colonial Advocate*, 8 February 1827.

<sup>46</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 22 February 1827.

<sup>47</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 22 February 1827; 29 March 1827.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in *Colonial Advocate*, 22 February 1827. The *Gleaner* was a source for much of Mackenzie's information about the Upper Canadian aspects of the Morgan affair, e.g., *Colonial Advocate*, 22 February, 8 March, 15 June, 28 June, 20 September 1827.



taken to preserve secrecy:

Binding myself under no less penalty than to have my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by the roots, and my body buried in the rough sands of the sea at low water mark, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in every four hours; so help me God and keep me steadfast in the due performance of the same.<sup>49</sup>

For the next several weeks *Advocate* readers were flooded with reprints of news stories about Morgan. Canadian connections made the story one that could not be ignored. According to some reports, Niagara Masons – even Joseph Brant, son of the famed Mohawk leader – were implicated in the affair. In composite, with little or no attempt to judge their veracity, published accounts told a grizzly tale of a murderous Masonic plot: In 1826 William Morgan – Virginia-born and sometime resident of Upper Canada – was living in Batavia, New York. He had clandestinely arranged with a local printer to publish his exposé of the secret oaths, signs and signals of Masonry. A group of area Masons got wind of the coming book and conspired to suppress it. On September 11th, they abruptly – and falsely – charged Morgan with theft, arrested him, and spirited him to Canandaigua, the county seat, where he was jailed. Released the next day, Morgan was quickly kidnapped, blindfolded, and

transported by overnight carriage rides to Fort Niagara on the shore of Lake Ontario, some 120 miles away. There he was imprisoned in the unused fort’s magazine. Next he was ferried across the river to Upper Canada, to be transferred to the local Niagara Masonic lodge.

Sworn testimony described the plan: Upper Canadian Masons were to put Morgan aboard a British man-of-war to be got rid of. Or, better yet, Morgan was to be turned over to Mohawk chief – and Mason – Joseph Brant, “to be executed with savage cruelty.” Brant was summoned to the home of Edward McBride, the area’s Member of Parliament, also a Mason. According to one account:

Brant proved himself of too much a noble nature to have any thing to do with so cowardly, inhuman, and wicked a transaction. The savage hero disdained to do that which cowardly white monsters urged him to do.<sup>50</sup>

Without Brant, the other Niagara Masons had no stomach for disposing of Morgan as proposed by their New York brethren. Thus refused,

the diabolical wretches who had him in custody, brought him back as far as Fort Niagara – and there murdered him in cold blood – cutting his throat from ear to ear! Cutting out his tongue, and burying it in the sand! – and concluding the hellish rites by sinking his body deep in the lake!<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 22 February 1827 – the wording is confirmed in Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 21-22.

<sup>50</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 March 1827, quoting the *New York Spectator* quoting the *Albany National Observer*; the reports did not identify McBride by name, only by “McB”; the area Member of the Assembly is identified in Frederick Armstrong, *Handbook of Upper Canadian Chronology, Revised edition* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1985), 66; *Colonial Advocate*, 1 March 1827, quoting Solomon Southwick, the editor of the *Albany National Observer*.

<sup>51</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 March 1827, quoting Solomon Southwick, the editor of the *Albany National Observer*.

Thanks to the hesitancy of Niagara Masons – and the decisiveness of Brant – Upper Canada was spared as the scene of such butchery. Brant later totally contradicted the whole report. “Neither in that instance, nor in any other, has such a barbarous proposal been made to me nor do I believe that a man exists who would have dared to wound my feelings in such a heinous manner.”<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, Mackenzie was rapidly losing interest in aligning himself with the Masons – and they with him. Despite assuring him that his application would be laid over, on March 7th a “ballot for Mr. W.L. Mackenzie [to become a member] was found unfavorable.” Perhaps they never intended to welcome him, but simply wanted to keep him quiet for a while.<sup>53</sup>

Interest in the Morgan affair continued to escalate. The editor of New York’s *Commercial Advertiser*, a Mason and a vigorous critic of Grand Lodge leadership, the *Advocate* reported, was “threatened with a terrible death ... on account of his honest and open” journalism. Mackenzie lauded all editors who, “laying aside the fear *even of death*, faithfully fulfill their high and important duties as watchmen and sentinels for their country’s laws.” He totally identified himself with them,

[F]ar rather would we be victim of Masonic or any other fanatics than one of those miserable men who ... were accessory to Wm. Morgan’s murder. All men must die once, but ...

after death cometh judgment. ... [T]he threat of being *Morganized* will not deter us.<sup>54</sup>

In claiming the high ground, he was perhaps going over the top – neither his life nor his press was in any peril. Nevertheless it was essential for him to distance himself from the association he had so recently sought. But he did not denounce the brotherhood wholesale, far from it:

For a long time we believed there was more of fiction than reality in this [Morgan] business, and we said little about it. When convinced of our error, we spoke out, as every man and every Mason should speak. We vindicated the fraternity from the sweeping and unmerited denunciations of excited popular assemblies, while we spoke in the strongest terms of reprobation and horror, of the perpetrators of the supposed crime.<sup>55</sup>

To recount the stages in Mackenzie’s reporting on Morgan – first he ignored the affair, then he doubted the reliability of the accounts, next he confessed his abhorrence of the apparent murder and abduction, and later still he praised Masons who dared openly criticize the excesses of the fraternity. He thus moved further and further away from any personal association.

Not until March 29 was he moved to directly attack Freemasonry – in practice, but not in theory: He began by admitting that “Masonry is productive of good in some respects ... otherwise [men] so upright and honest and fearless” would have no part in it. He went on to name several Masons “respectable in private

<sup>52</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 March 1827, quoting the *York Observer*.

<sup>53</sup> Robertson, *History of Freemasonry*, vol. 2, 373. According to Morgan’s book, Masonic rules called for voting on prospective members not by ballot but by secretly depositing white or black balls in a box – one black ball was enough to reject an applicant.

<sup>54</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 22 March 1827, based on reports in the New York *Commercial Advertiser*.

<sup>55</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 22 March 1827.

life ... the chief justice of this colony, the secretary to the last governor, Mr. [John] Rolph, Mr. [Marshall Spring] Bidwell, Mr. [James] Fitzgibbon, the Receiver General [John Henry Dunn], and many others,” as well as “the royal dukes of England, General [George] Washington and Mr. [De Witt] Clinton of America, and Marquis La Fayette of France.... Their having continued in connection with the institution, is to us conclusive that it is useful and honourable.”

Nevertheless, he insisted, “the conduct of many Masons ... is very hurtful to it in the eyes of the world.” It is “a secret society” with

one essential difference between [it] and other societies.... [O]thers leave to the Divine Being the punishment of those who violate their oaths and take HIS name in vain; while Masons claim to themselves ... the power of punishing the perjurer with terrible death. [The worst feature] is the penalty attached to their oaths – which is a direct violation of the law of the land.... Many other injunctions laid upon members are excellent, and would, if well attended to, make them more useful members of society.

But, these “ceremonies are like the gilded pill, or bottle conjurer, attractive only to such weak and vain minds as are more delighted with sound and show than with sense and substance.”<sup>56</sup>

The *Advocate* editor was no longer

content to comment on columns clipped from other papers; he joined the war. He would print “the first Canadian” edition of the volume at the centre of the controversy. “Mr. Morgan’s book contains a faithful account of Masonry as far as it goes, we do verily believe. – otherwise it should never be republished by us.” Mackenzie’s motives were, no doubt, mixed – to avenge his having been misled by Masons, to assuage his guilt for nearly falling into temptation, to massage his moral indignation, to expose an evil in society. He probably also wanted to enlarge his income.<sup>57</sup>

Masonic reaction was immediate. One, “respectable in private life, and of high standing in the fraternity,” who, according to Mackenzie, “had been on terms of intimate friendship for many years,” declared he was henceforth an “open and avowed enemy ... [who] would do him (Mackenzie) all the injury he could both in public and in private.”<sup>58</sup>

Not deterred, Mackenzie moved ahead with the publication. By mid-April the book was off the press. Introducing the volume, Mackenzie noted:

The Masonic oaths as enumerated are dark and terrible in their imprecations; & are rendered still more so from the knowledge we have arrived at, that the victim of Masonry must in this life pay the penalty of his folly by an inhuman, unlawful, and cruel death.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 29 March 1827.

<sup>57</sup> First advertised, *Colonial Advocate*, 22 March 1827. Kingston’s *Upper Canadian Herald*, 10 April 1827, disputed the claim, saying an edition printed there by the *Kingston Chronicle* was already off the press – see Fleming, *Upper Canada Imprints*, note on listing #328, 94. The *Niagara Gleaner*, 28 April 1827, also refers to a Kingston edition. It is more likely that this was an American edition selling in that town, for Fleming lists no Kingston edition. *Colonial Advocate*, 29 March 1827.

<sup>58</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 29 March 1827.

<sup>59</sup> *Illustrations of Masonry... First Canadian Edition* (York: W. L. Mackenzie, 1927), xvi.

Predictably, local Masons moved into attack mode. In the *Canadian Freeman*, “Boaz,” an anonymous Masonic author, publicly revealed Mackenzie’s attempt to become a Mason:

As Mr. McKenzie’s Edition of *Morgan’s* catchpenny is now before the public ... many attribute his late exertions ... in endeavouring to throw odium on the Masonic system, to his zeal in the cause of humanity. I beg leave ... to expose [his] hypocrisy, and ... point out [his] *real* motives.... A very short time back, Mr. McKenzie petitioned the Masonic Lodge in York to be admitted into that order... [H]is petition was submitted to the Lodge ... but on a retrospective view of his general character, it was deemed inexpedient to admit him as a brother. His petition was therefore *blackballed*.

The author sought “to expose hypocrisy,” suggesting Mackenzie’s publishing of anti-Masonic material was more than a retaliation for his being rejected. He was attempting to repeat his recent experience of “provocation to outrage” – the damage to his printing office – and its subsequent court judgment. The motives of the “*the six hundred and twenty-five pounds little man*” were thus “something very different from those of humanity.... [I]t is a bad thing, to use the vulgar adage, to *show the cat the way to the churn* – but I trust, Sir, it will not be again resorted to with equal success.”<sup>60</sup>

Mackenzie was quick to respond with his own account of the whole affair. He readily admitted applying for membership, but insisted he soon after had withdrawn his petition. He was now con-

vinced that York Masons had tried to seduce him. into a mutually beneficial bargain: exchanging status for silence, silence for status. What else, the editor asked, could have prompted “some Masons to display the advantages of the craft in such glowing colours before me at the particular time in which they did and at no other time during my residence in Canada?” Clearly, they were motivated by “a desire ... that at least one of the presses in York *should be under Masonic direction*, lest the ‘Morgan mania’ might spread.” Had Mackenzie joined, his Masonic oaths would have prevented his publishing his exposés. The Masons had wanted not to embrace him but to envelop him.<sup>61</sup>

It is, of course, possible to see this whole episode in different lights. Perhaps Mackenzie wanted to join the Order to penetrate its wall of secrecy, to infiltrate the fraternity, and then expose its evils. If so, he would have had to do so in bad faith, solemnly swearing and then quickly renouncing his oaths. He would have had to pretend to be something he knew he was not. Had this truly been his motive, he would have restricted his Morgan news coverage – and certainly his editorial opinions – until *after* his application had been acted upon.

Or perhaps he applied for membership knowing full well that he would be rejected, setting himself up for the glories of martyrdom with little of its sufferings. If so, he surely would have paraded his rejection immediately after the vote

<sup>60</sup> *Canadian Freeman*, 19 April 1827 – this, and the issues of 18 January and 8 February are the only extant copies of the paper for this period.

<sup>61</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 26 April 1827.

took place, gloating in his cleverness and mocking the Masons for their professions of brotherhood. It is unlikely that he would wait from early March to late April before publishing his side of the story – and only then in response to a published anonymous letter.

There is no real evidence to support either of these conjectures. One can either accept his publicly confessed and detailed version, essentially as he presented it – or one must assume that his story is false, deliberate lies put out for his own purposes. To deny the veracity of Mackenzie's version of the events requires assuming both a deviousness and a patience not congruent with his character. Whatever else he was, Mackenzie was typically open, direct and precipitous in his actions – sometimes to his own detriment.

Is it not easier to believe that he was, perhaps naively, foolishly over-eager for the fraternal acceptance Freemasonry offered? Is it not more likely that the Masons – or at least some Masons – tried to take advantage of him for their own purposes, than *vice versa*. Certainly he came to believe that the Masons tried to muffle, even muzzle him, keeping him quiet until the Morgan cloud passed. But the cloud did not pass and Freemasonry suffered severely, not only in the United States but

also in Upper Canada – of the twenty-six lodges in 1826, eighteen closed or became dormant within a decade.<sup>62</sup>

Mackenzie printed a thousand copies of Morgan's book. Nearly 300 copies sold the first day. Rival editor Francis Collins gave it immediate notice in the *Canadian Freeman*. For three months, the *Advocate* carried ads for it – 50¢ each, \$4 a dozen – the last one ran July 19th. Presumably the book sold out; there was no second edition. A year later Collins accused Mackenzie of publishing it purely for profit, a charge with some truth, perhaps. Printing was his business – he was hardly the first printer to discover that sensation sells.<sup>63</sup>

In the conflict between Mackenzie and the Masons, neither side won. Mackenzie came out somewhat ahead, but he took no pride in it. Apart from profiting from the sale of Morgan's book – he closed the matter.<sup>64</sup> Had he seen the episode as a great victory, it would likely have been added to his litany of personal grievances against the establishment. He would almost certainly have become an Anti-mason, lauding the political eruption taking place in the New York and other American states.

Over the next few months Mackenzie occasionally copied references to Morgan from New York papers, but interest in the

<sup>62</sup> McLeod, *Whence...*, 53.

<sup>63</sup> The only known copy is in the library of the University of Chicago – see Fleming, *Upper Canada Imprints*, note listing #328, 94; *Canadian Freeman*, 29 March or 5 April 1827, as quoted in the *Colonial Advocate* 13 August 1829; *Colonial Advocate*, 12 April 1827; *Canadian Freeman*, 26 June 1828.

<sup>64</sup> The only exception was two years later, in an extended attack on several of his rival editors, Mackenzie devoted one section to quoting Francis Collins' references to Morgan and the Masons and parenthetically commenting "Collins at one time represents the abduction of Morgan as a hoax, and makes a mock of the story of his death – at another time he speaks of deeds dark as the calendar of hell – and so on – blowing hot and cold almost in the same breath."

affair waned. Morgan's body was never found. No murder trial was ever held. The mystery remained unsolved. In November, 1827, his last brief story reported the identification of a found corpse thought to be Morgan. The editor noted,

We have read the testimony, and are fully satisfied ... that ... the body of Morgan has not been found, but that the corpse supposed to be his was the mortal remains of Timothy Moore, lately drowned in the Niagara river.

He added, "We have not room to give a detail of the facts." Upper Canadians had lost interest in Morgan, and so had Mackenzie, although he occasionally ran Morgan-related items clipped from New York newspapers.<sup>65</sup>

But not the Americans. Thousands abandoned the fraternity. Four out of five New York lodges became dormant or were dissolved. The widespread distrust of Freemasonry became an early example of a recurring aspect in American culture: a propensity to political paranoia and suspicion of conspiracies. The early emotions aroused by his disappearance were soon politically channeled. The Anti-Masonic Party was organized, the

first important "third party" in American history. In a few years it merged with the Whig party and ultimately evolved into the Republican party. Nor was William Morgan himself forgotten. In Batavia a monument to his memory was erected. For 180 years, his book has remained in print. From time to time, over the next several decades – and, indeed, even in our own time – Morgan's name would be in the news. Several supposed death-bed confessions by conspirators were published. Reports and theories that Morgan had survived were advanced. One fantastic version alleged that, fearing for his life in Batavia, Morgan had appealed to fellow Masons for help, had been spirited off to Upper Canada and given \$500, and eventually had settled in Honduras where he died at age 89.<sup>66</sup>

Mackenzie never dabbled with Masonry again – nor did he expend further energies exposing it. True, a number of his political antagonists, including some of the Family Compact, were Masons, but so also were a number of his allies in reform and then in rebellion, men like John Rolph and Charles Duncombe.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 15 November 1827; in the next year there were two references: 1 May, 5 June, 28 August, 18 September.

<sup>66</sup> McLeod, *Whence...*, 48; see, for example, Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963); see especially Formisano and Kutolowski; The standard reference to Antimasonry is Charles McCarthy, "The Antimasonic Party: A Study in Political Antimasonry in the United States 1827-1840," American Historical Association, *Annual Report for 1902*, I, 365-574. See also, Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950) and Glyndon Van Deusen, *Thurlow Weed: Wizard of the Lobby* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1947). Perhaps the most exhaustive, and reasonably balanced, summary of the Morgan affair is Clarence O. Lewis, *The Morgan Affair* (Lockport, NY: Niagara County Court House, 1966). The author was the Niagara County Historian, but the work's value is seriously marred by its lack of specific citations and bibliography. See also Allison D. Bryant, "What Happened to Morgan, Investigating a Speculation." Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon A.F. & A.M., 2001. <freemasonry.bcy.ca/Writings/morgan\_theory.html>

<sup>67</sup> See McLeod, *Whence...*, ch. 18.

This Masonic episode taught Mackenzie an important lesson: privileged information, private arrangements, clandestine agreements, secret pledges, covert compacts are incompatible with democracy and public service. From that day on, Mackenzie refused to join any organization, even those with which he was in clear sympathy. With but one known exception, his membership days were over, as he testified late in his life. Responding to a complaint in 1858 that as a legislator he had “work[ed] ill in harness,” he admitted “some truth to that.” He had never become “a member of any sect or church;” nor was he ever a “Free Mason, Odd Fellow, Orangeman, nor member of a temperance society.” Why? Because, he confessed, he was “not able to walk up to the rules.” He rejected group discipline, always insisting on being his own man.<sup>68</sup>

But it would be an error to see him as a loner. When, from time to time, he earned public approval – as a member of parliament, as an agent to England, as mayor of Toronto – he basked in his popularity. He was not the demagogue he is often accused of being, but he was a genuine democrat. He passionately believed that his power – as a journalist and as a political leader – came from the people, from the yeomen farmers and others who supported him. His compact was with the people, not with the elite.

Nevertheless, Mackenzie had been tempted. Freemasonry, despite its semi-sacred ceremonies and peculiar paraphernalia, offered a close fellowship of social equals, undisturbed by political or theological differences. It claimed to be – and for its members no doubt was – a true fraternity, a loyal brotherhood. Mackenzie had hoped for, hungered for, the benefits of belonging to a body of associates mutually pledged to each other.

Mackenzie, despite his democratic ideas of the sovereignty of the people and his constant claims of popular support, was socially conscious almost to a fault. From the first issue of his newspaper, he affirmed his faith in Upper Canadian farmers, yeomen, freeholders – his mission was to be their instructor, their representative, their servant – their leader, their advocate. Perhaps, like a parish priest or minister, he worked with his people and for his people, but was not one of the people. He admired and associated with them, but his never-spoken assumption was that he was their superior. Neither ordained nor commissioned, he was nevertheless a “gentleman.” In time, he happily accepted adding “Esquire” to his name.<sup>69</sup>

Mackenzie had been tempted. He had applied for admission into a tight-knit secret circle. Freemasonry was a select society. Joining it required his swearing of solemn oaths, entering into agreements, accept-

---

<sup>68</sup> The exception: in its early years, Mackenzie was a member of York’s St. Andrews Church until the losing of a congregational dispute brought his resignation – see Raible, “‘Hold Fast to that which is best’: Religion in the York/Toronto life of William Lyon Mackenzie,” *York Pioneer*, vol 85 (1990), *Mackenzie’s Toronto Weekly Message* 26 November 1858.

<sup>69</sup> By the early nineteenth century there seems to have been no strict rule, but in British usage the term was used to distinguish a gentleman from an ordinary subject or citizen.

ing regulations. He had been willing to become a subscribing member of a closed group – albeit a fraternal not a political group, a friendly not a family compact.

And he had been rejected. He felt ill-used, even abused. The Masons had not even allowed him to withdraw his application (but, to his surprise, they had given him back his two dollars.)<sup>70</sup> He had applied in good faith, with eager encouragement, and he had been blackballed – the vote is not recorded.

Had Mackenzie become a Mason that spring, one can only guess at his public stance in the Morgan affair. Perhaps, like his Albany editorial colleague, with righteous indignation he would have defied his secret oaths and condemned Masonic evils. Perhaps he would have been quieter and more circumspect, defending Freemasonry while condemning the perverted excess of those who silenced Morgan. It seems unlikely that he would

have stayed silent – or that he would have remained within the brotherhood very long. His independent nature strained at the confines of organizational discipline.

Mackenzie never mixed with Freemasonry again, but his distrust of it probably remained unchanged.<sup>71</sup> His 1827 defence of his own brief involvement ended with the sermon, of sorts:

Courteous reader ... restrain thy curiosity and keep thy dollars, lest thou come to see the work of God bandied about in a Masonic lodge along with masons' squares and compasses – and then find it too late to refrain from taking the name of the Lord in vain, and breaking his commandments by unlawful oaths. The decalogue of Masonry says thou shalt kill thy fellow if he tattles, but the divine command saith, 'Thou shalt not kill.' Masonry requires horrid oaths – Christianity is content with yea, yea, and nay, nay. Masonry includes a few only of the human family – Christianity all mankind. Hold fast then to the faith of thy forefathers and keep clear of the entanglements of a Freemason's able.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 26 April 1827.

<sup>71</sup> No later substantive reference in his writings to Masons or Masonry has been located. From time to time he added clippings related to Masonry, most of them to Morgan, to his personal files, now held by the Archives of Ontario. See Mackenzie-Lindsey Papers, Clipping file # 1922.

<sup>72</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 26 April 1827.