

‘Breast the Storm!’: Vermont Freemasonry during the Antimasonic Period 1826–46

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ON 19 JULY 1831 THE DANVILLE, VERMONT *NORTH STAR* EDITORIAL demanded:

The organization and government of the Grand Lodges, Chapters and Grand Encampments, must be totally annihilated and forever; subordinate branches must fully participate in the general dissolution of the Sorceress and Cheat; and an evidence must be given to the American freemen that Masons, *one and all*, have *simultaneously*, and *with united voice*, absolved themselves, *not only from Masonic government*, but from the aristocratic and treasonable obligations of their illegal and murderous oaths.¹

Three months later, at the Grand Lodge of Vermont’s annual communication, a reso-

¹ *North Star*, Danville VT, 19 July 1831, as quoted in Lee S. Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry in Vermont* (Montpelier: Capital City Press, 1920), 99.

Presented to the lodge on 28 June 2012

lution was introduced: ‘That a committee be appointed by this Grand lodge whose duty it shall be to report a resolution recommending an unqualified surrender of this Grand Lodge of the charters of the several secular Lodges under its jurisdiction, and that this Grand Lodge henceforth abandon all convocation as a Masonic body.’²

How the people of Vermont came to make such demands and the Freemasons of Vermont were forced to consider fraternal suicide is this paper’s subject. This paper will also explain how Vermont Freemasons sustained themselves through nearly twenty years of abuse, yet found the means to reconstitute and reform the Craft.

Since the formation of the 1717 London Grand Lodge, Freemasons have fought similar wars of survival, but the Grand Lodge of Vermont’s story may be unique. Its legal, moral, and common sense rhetoric successfully withstood the Antimasonic Party’s assaults beginning in 1827.³ Its wise choice of leadership preserved the Craft as membership dwindled and lodges went dark. Its reliance on Masonic precedence and constitutional adherence enabled the Grand Lodge’s regeneration and, after 1845, initiated deep reform that nurtured Freemasonry’s rapid and sustained growth. This paper is a testament of Masonic virtues and Vermont Freemasons’ response to the mass masonophobia of the period and should be an example to all Freemasons.⁴

Early Vermont History

There is a common misconception that the United States was settled and developed in a systematic manner from the first state of Delaware (1787) in the east to the fiftieth state of Hawaii (1959) in the west. America, so the storybooks say, with the exception of a few noble tribes of Indians and a few colorful outlaws, was won by ‘Manifest Destiny.’ But history reveals in every territory, state, county, and town, a far more complex and chaotic story. The small and unassuming state of Vermont is no exception.⁵

Vermont, redundantly nicknamed ‘The Green Mountain State,’ has a total area of 9,260 square miles (24,923 square km) and is on average 80 miles (130 km) wide and 160 miles (260 km) in length. It is the forty-fifth smallest state in size and with a current population 649,000 is the forty-ninth lowest, just ahead of Wyoming.⁶

² *Records of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Vermont from 1794 to 1846 Inclusive*, (Burlington, VT: The Free Press Association, 1879) 375.

³ For this paper’s purpose ‘Antimasonry,’ ‘Antimasonic’ and ‘Antimason’ refer specifically to members or supporters of the American Antimasonic Party that existed c.1828 to c.1843.

⁴ Robert L. D. Cooper, *The Red Triangle: A History of Anti-Masonry* (Hersham: Lewis Masonic, 2011) 274, note 14: ‘Masonophobia is more than a simple and irrational fear of Freemasonry but also indicates a malign and malicious attitude toward the order and its members.’

⁵ ‘Manifest Destiny’ is a term coined in the 1840s to promote westward expansion and settlement. More especially used to justify the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), it implies that God has called Americans to civilize the West and bring order and freedom to the world.

⁶ As its name describes, three-quarters of Vermont is forest with hills, rivers, valleys and many small towns. Its

The French first claimed Vermont and built Fort Lamotte on Lake Champlain in 1666. The Dutch coming up the Hudson River from New Amsterdam (New York City) established trading posts in the area in 1690. The first British settlement came with the 1724 construction of Fort Drummer in the south to protect western Massachusetts. Vermont was contested ground during the French and Indian War. Sir Jeffery Amherst commanding 12,000 men, traveling from New York via Lake George destroyed Fort Carillion and replaced it with Fort Crown Point.⁷ The 1763 Treaty of Paris gave the Vermont territory to the British Crown.

With peace, New York, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts colonists all made claims to parts of Vermont. King George III determined the boundary for the new Vermont colony in 1764, but New Yorkers remained unsatisfied and encouraged colonists to move into Vermont. In response, Vermont's most famous son, Ethan Allen, organized the militia/vigilante 'Green Mountain Boys' in 1770 to fend off the so-called squatters.

New York's land claims prevented Vermont from officially participating in the American War for Independence. Vermonters relied on the New Hampshire delegation as its proxy to the Continental Congress. With a population of nearly 50,000, Vermont did contribute men and materials to the cause. Most famously they captured Fort Ticonderoga and sent its cannons to break the Siege of Boston, forcing the British evacuation in March 1776. A second major victory for Vermont came at the Battle of Bennington on 16 August 1777. That victory proved the American Continental Army was capable of defeating a British army in the field.

Denied a place among the rebellious thirteen colonies, Vermonters nonetheless declared their independence and organized a republic. The Republic of Vermont's constitution was the first to abolish slavery, allow full male suffrage, and support public schools. The Vermont Republic ended when it joined the Union in 1791 as the fourteenth state. The delay was due to negotiating a resolution to New York's land claims.⁸

Upon achieving statehood Vermont became the 'frontier' and enjoyed a land rush and an economic boom. Renewed trade with Great Britain and a greater demand for wool and wood caused the population to nearly double from 85,000 in 1790 to over

eastern border with New Hampshire is the Connecticut River. It flows south through Massachusetts and Connecticut into Long Island Sound. It shares its western border with New York State and is dominated by Lake Champlain that flows north up the Richelieu River to converge with the St. Lawrence River in Canada. Vermont's northern border is the Province of Quebec and its southern border is Massachusetts.

⁷ Between 1756 and 1762 'St. Johns' (Modern) Provincial Grand Lodge of Massachusetts chartered three regimetal lodges in New York: Lake George Lodge (13 May 1756) at Crown Point; Crown Point Lodge (13 April 1759) at Crown Point; and Crown Point Lodge (20 March 1762) at Crown Point. Grand Lodge of Masons in Massachusetts, *Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Massachusetts Masonry* (Boston: Rapid Press, 1983) 16.

⁸ Because Vermont was a sovereign nation, New York's threats to reassert its land claims could have resulted in war. Instead a settlement was found that included Vermont paying \$30,000 to New York to compensate for the loss of land and in return New York renounced all claims within Vermont.

200,000 by 1810. But what goes up must come down. Too many people arriving too fast overused the limited farmland and destabilized a simple economy. With the 1820s opening of the Erie Canal, large numbers of Vermonters migrated to western New York and larger numbers of immigrants bypassed the Green Mountain State altogether to settle in the vast North American interior. Vermont's boom lasted for only fifteen years reaching a population of 280,000 in 1830 that would not rise above 300,000 until 1850 and not reach 400,000 until 1970.⁹

Early Vermont Freemasonry

Like Vermont's settlement, Vermont Freemasonry was a confluence of different sources. The first lodge in Vermont began in New Hampshire but was chartered as 'Vermont Lodge'. In 1781 Freemasons in Cornish, NH, received a charter from the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts to meet in Vermont.¹⁰ The brethren, however, chose to meet in Charlestown, NH, until 1788. When Vermont Lodge crossed the Connecticut River and settled in Springfield, they requested and were granted a new charter and the new name of Faithful Lodge. The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts also chartered Vermont's second lodge, North Star, at Manchester in 1785.

Becoming a state in 1791, Vermont remained open Masonic territory. This allowed other grand lodges to charter lodges in the north and south. The Provincial Grand Lodge of Canada (Ontario) warranted Vermont's third lodge, Dorchester, at Vergennes on 3 September 1791.¹¹ The Grand Lodge of Connecticut warranted the fourth and fifth Vermont lodges: Temple Lodge at Bennington on 18 May 1793 and Union Lodge at Middlebury on 15 May 1794.

Three months after Union Lodge received its charter, Freemasons from North Star, Dorchester, and Temple Lodges met at Manchester. On 7 August 1794 the delegates drafted a grand constitution and a resolution to form an independent Grand Lodge. Between 10 October and 14 October 1794, fourteen officers representing the five Vermont lodges met in convention at Rutland. The convention approved a Grand Constitution, elected Grand Lodge officers and granted its first charter to the local Freemasons

⁹ John Gay, *The World Book Encyclopedia*, s.v. 'Vermont' (Chicago: World Book Inc., 2013), 321, 334–336.

¹⁰ John Spargo, *The Rise and Progress of Freemasonry in Vermont, the Green Mountain State, 1765-1944* (Burlington, VT: Lane Press, 1944) 16–19, 42–44. This 'Ancient' Grand Lodge of Massachusetts originated from the Grand Lodge of Scotland through the Lodge of St. Andrew, Boston, chartered 1756. The original Vermont Lodge charter is in the possession of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association, Alexandria, VA. The charter is signed by Joseph Webb as Grand Master and Paul Revere as Grand Senior Warden.

¹¹ Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry in Vermont*, 34–35. The charter was granted by the Provincial Grand Master, Sir John Johnson (1731–41), who had led a Loyalist regiment during the American War for Independence. Dorchester Lodge's Charter Master was Thomas Chittenden (1730–97) who served as the Governor of both the Independent Republic of Vermont and the State of Vermont. The lodge is named after the Governor General of North America Canada, Sir Guy Carleton, KB (1724–1808), later Lord Dorchester.

as Center Lodge No. 6. Bro. Noah Smith of Temple Lodge was installed Grand Master and Bro. Nathaniel Brush of Temple Lodge installed Grand Secretary.¹²

At its second communication the Grand Lodge chartered the founding lodges: Faithful as Vermont No. 1, North Star No. 2, Dorchester No. 3, Temple No. 4 and Union No. 5. By the onset of the Antimasonic Period some 33 years after founding, the Grand Lodge had issued 73 charters. Such rapid growth mirrored Vermont's economic boom, but also its volatility. For example, Temple Lodge No. 4 went dark in 1808 and North Star No. 2 followed suit in 1813. Franklin Lodge No. 10 forfeited its charter in 1810 and was restored in 1812. Mount Moriah No. 16 forfeited its charter in 1825 and had it restored in 1826. Washington Lodge No. 21 was suspended in 1821 and restored in 1822. Lively Stone No. 22 forfeited its charter for the year 1810. Many other lodges skirted closure for failing to pay annual dues, attend annual Grand Lodge sessions or file annual reports. In 1827 the Grand Lodge had issued 73 charters with 68 working lodges on its rolls.¹³

Vermont's geography and scarcity of farmland isolated its citizens into numerous small towns connected by rough roads and rivers. For Freemasonry this meant one lodge per town whose membership comprised of 'town fathers,' the better-educated, or the more prosperous. While similar in dispersal and composition of many American lodges of the era, Vermont's isolated population and unstable economy provided a perfect incubator for masonophobia.

Early Vermont politics reflected its New England culture and rapid economic development. Its 1791 state constitution created a unicameral legislature, with a governor and a council of twelve delegates. Balance of power was maintained by the legislature's right to approve all office appointments, and the governor's and council's right to veto legislative bills. That all members of the three branches were elected annually ensured political instability and limited concentrated power.¹⁴

In national temperament Vermonters generally supported a strong federal government as advocated by President George Washington and his successor John Adams. After 1810, and the onset of the War of 1812, Vermonters favoured high tariffs to defend local industries, and to fund infrastructure improvements and national defence. But in the hard-scrabble, land-locked state settled largely by old Puritan families, economic and national politics came second to religion and morality. Numerous local and state

¹² Henry Coil, *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia* (Richmond, VA: Macoy Publishing, rev. ed. 1996) 665. The Vermont Royal Arch Grand Chapter was formed 9 January, 1806, the first Royal & Select Master's Council was chartered by Jeremy Cross in 1817 and said to be the oldest council anywhere. The Knights Templar Grand Encampment was founded 17 June 1824.

¹³ Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry in Vermont*, 70–77; *Records of the Grand Lodge of... Vermont*, 317–320.

¹⁴ William Preston Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party in the United States, 1826-1843* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 70.

newspapers printed stories and editorials on moral issues to increase circulation and to satisfy Protestant congregations.¹⁵

Historian Paul Goodman in *Towards a Christian Republic* argues that 1820s Vermont was equally divided between the Democratic and National Republican parties. Both parties' support came from the upper classes, while the vast majority of middle and lower class people had no party affiliation. Equally important, the same men who supported different political parties joined the same Masonic lodges. Economic instability, scarce farmland, and a large underclass fixated with religious and moral issues connected by small town newspapers, made a highly volatile electorate.¹⁶

Despite Freemasonry's rapid growth and honor in the early American Republic and Vermont, the Craft was not universally admired. Antimasonry existed in Europe since the early years of the Premier Grand Lodge in London. In America Benjamin Franklin parodied the Freemasons in his Philadelphia paper before he joined the local lodge.¹⁷ Besides the Roman Catholic Church, numerous Protestant denominations, particularly Baptists, argued against Freemasonry on a variety of theological points, but centered on being a means to threaten congregational harmony and divide men's loyalty between church and lodge. The French Revolution, the 'Illuminati scare' and the 1798 American edition of John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe* bred deeper political suspicions.¹⁸

Freemasonry itself contributed to the public's suspicion of the Craft. That many of its members were among the nation's political, commercial and intellectual leaders earned it a reputation of elitism. That it received a privileged place at public events, cornerstone ceremonies, within Independence Day parades, and when welcoming dignitaries, such as Marquis de Lafayette during his 1824–5 tour, increased the Craft's public honour, but also public resentment. Furthermore, the advent and growth of the Royal Arch and Knights Templar, ruled by High Priests and Eminent Commanders, suggested something more sinister was happening behind tyled doors. Vermont's Grand Royal Arch Chapter was established in 1805, while the Vermont Knights Templar Grand Encampment was created in 1824. Lastly, the York Rite's elaborate and esoteric rituals reflected the new romanticism that reacted against the older 18th-century rational enlighten-

¹⁵ Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party*, 70.

¹⁶ Paul Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition in New England, 1826–1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 122.

¹⁷ Wayne Huss, *The Master Builders: A History of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Grand Lodge of Masons in Pennsylvania) Vol. I, 17.

¹⁸ Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 165–169, 173–176.

ment and Protestant piety. These any many other factors only needed a major scandal to release a cataclysmic political storm.¹⁹

The ‘Morgan Affair’

The scandal began in 1826 when William Morgan (1774–1826?) an itinerant stonemason, brewer, and bricklayer, had attempted to visit the Masonic lodge in Batavia, NY. The lodge refused to recognize him as a brother. This rejection led Morgan, in part, to partner with local printer David Miller. Together they agreed to publish a book exposing all of Freemasonry’s ‘secret’ rituals, signs, grips and words.

Western New York Freemasons hearing of the book took matters into their own hands and made both reasonable and threatening attempts to dissuade him. When he refused to stop writing, they arrested Morgan on a petty charge. On 11 September 1826, Freemasons then kidnapped Morgan from jail and he was never seen again. His book, *Illustrations of Masonry*, was nonetheless published by Miller and became a best seller.²⁰ Morgan’s disappearance caused a series of moral, political and religious crusades, and hysterical attacks on Freemasonry that questioned the very honour and actions of generations of Freemasons.

‘The Morgan Affair’ as it became known, gathered public notoriety throughout 1827–28, as numerous investigations and trials of Morgan’s kidnappers could neither solve the mystery of his disappearance nor satisfy the public’s demand for justice. Kidnapping was not a federal crime in 1827. The first three men tried received sentences of two years, three months and one month, respectively. Anti-Masonic leaders and a growing number of citizens were convinced that such perceived light jail sentences proved a Masonic conspiracy.²¹

The Morgan affair, combined with a grieving widow and the publication of the missing man’s scandalous book, brought national scrutiny to bear on Freemasonry. To many citizens, the once affluent, morally upright association now appeared sinister.

The Anti-Masonic Party

Protestant preachers in western New York were the first to see evil in Freemasonry and gave a cradle for the Antimasonic Party to grow. Throughout western New York, Presbyterians, Methodists, Calvinists and more especially Baptist preachers organized the first Antimasonic protests and conventions. But, as William Preston Vaughn argues, ‘Reli-

¹⁹ Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 260–61.

²⁰ William Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry by One of the Fraternity Who has devoted Thirty Years to the Subject* (Batavia, N.Y.: David C. Miller, 1827).

²¹ See Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, Chapter Ten and Stephen Dafoe and Arturo de Hoyos, *Morgan: The Scandal that Shook Freemasonry* (New Orleans, LA; Cornerstone, 2009).

gious Antimasonry met with limited success in churches because it had to compete with other crusades such as evangelism, temperance and Sabbath observance.²²

The man most responsible for transferring the Antimasonry anger from the church to the public square was Thurlow Weed (1797–1882). A New York journalist, politician, and shrewd operator, he was quick to realize the Morgan Affair could be used to challenge the power of Governor DeWitt Clinton and US Senator Martin Van Buren. In 1827 he arrived in Batavia to raise funds supporting the ongoing investigations, and in 1828 he was publishing *The Antimasonic Inquirer* in Rochester, NY.

During Weed's activities, important Antimasonic conventions occurred in LeRoy, NY, in 1828. The first occurred in February when area Freemasons renounced their membership, affirmed Morgan's book to be authentic, and passed a resolution urging the federal government to investigate Freemasonry.²³ The second convention at LeRoy occurred on Independence Day, 4 July. Comprised of religious and political and former Freemasons, they did as would be expected on the holiday and issued a 'Declaration of Independence from the Masonic Institution'. Similar to the 1776 Declaration, the numerous charges against the Craft included: 'a requirement to protect brothers from punishment,' 'that its members assume titles and dignities incompatible with the republican form of government,' 'that it destroys the veneration of religion' and that it 'promotes idleness and intemperance by members neglecting their business to attend its meetings and drink its libations.'²⁴

The third convention at Leroy was held in August to form the Antimasonic Party. The delegates organized a basic platform, stated the purposes of the party and nominated Solomon Southwick (1773–1839) as their candidate for Governor of New York. Southwick was a poor candidate in the November election, gaining only 33,335 votes and carrying only six western counties of New York's 62 total counties, but such success was still sufficient to launch the Antimasonic Party onto the national level.²⁵

Antimasonry entered Vermont as the Morgan Affair developed. In September 1827 The *North Star* of Danville published an account of the Affair and was soon the leading Antimasonic paper in the state. The sensational journalism and the lurid details of a Masonic conspiracy and presumed murder agitated the public. Three men in particular directed people's curiosity into anger, and from anger into political power.²⁶ Martin

²² Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party*, 22–3.

²³ Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party*, 29. The resolution was sent to the US House of Representatives. Congress eventually voted to refer the petitions to the executive branch for further investigations. President John Quincy Adams never acted upon the request and no action was ever taken.

²⁴ David Bernard, *A Collection of the Most Important Documents on the Subject of Speculative Freemasonry...* (Utica, NY: William Williams, 1829) 544–6.

²⁵ Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party*, 31–2.

²⁶ Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party*, 72–73; Tillotson, *Ancient Masonry in Vermont*, 134.

Flint claimed to be the first Freemason in Vermont to renounce his membership. He attended the September 1828 Leroy Convention and brought the Antimasonic cause to Vermont. The second Antimason, William Cahoon, of Lyndon, VT, won election to the US House of Representatives in 1828. As the first non-New York Antimason to enter the Congress, his victory proved the party could challenge and defeat Vermont's two established parties. Lastly, William A. Palmer (1781–1860) was the Antimasonic Party's choice for governor in 1830. A lawyer by profession, Palmer served as a US Senator for Vermont from 1818 to 1825.

Vermont Antimasonic success can be attributed to several reasons. Its support came from the large middle and lower class, but its leaders were not. Antimasonic Party candidates were usually from the same upper class as the Democratic Party and National Republican Party. The party thereby split the upper class while capturing the lower class vote.²⁷ The party organized the population by holding local and county conventions before its state convention. Furthermore, the party created grassroots 'Committees of Vigilance' in each county with the power to organize Antimasonic 'clubs' in towns and school districts and 'to ascertain, as far as practicable, the number of Masons and Masonic lodges in their respective counties; also the number of Masons holding offices civil and military ...'²⁸

Equally important to its organization, Antimasonry was a moral crusade. These issues, more than political or economic, sold the most newspapers and excited Vermonters to vote. That most of 'wicked Freemasons' were from the well-to-do and better educated only helped to foster class resentment and boost Antimasonic votes.

At Vermont's first Antimasonic convention in August 1829, a lengthy resolution was adopted that outlined its objections to the Craft. It included that Freemasonry: 'meddles with politics, that it enters the pale of the Church, that it creeps into courts of law; that its history begins in 1717 and with infamous men. That the horrors of the French Revolution sprung ... from principles secretly propagated in the lodge of Freemasonry; and that the same lodges in this republic afford the same facilities for disseminating doctrines of impiety and anarchy; and destroying our free government and our Holy Religion.'²⁹

The Vermont Antimasonic Period may be understood in three phases. The first phase spans from the initial raw outrage of the Morgan Affair to the Antimasonic Party's zenith. This phase includes Palmer's tenure as Vermont governor, numerous government investigations and bills that culminated with the 1833 statute outlawing extrajudicial oaths.³⁰

²⁷ Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic*, 124.

²⁸ Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party*, 72.

²⁹ Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry in Vermont*, 134.

³⁰ Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party*, 80. Effective 7 November 1833, the law forbade anyone to administer an oath or obligation, unless authorized by the law, such as oaths and affirmations in a court of law. Convictions

Within five years of achieving political power, the Antimasonic Party was nearly extinct. It was summarily defeated in the 1836 national presidential elections and it quickly dissolved into oblivion. During this stage grand lodges wrestled with how to respond officially, protect their rights and counsel their members in proper behaviour.³¹ During the first phase, Vermont Freemasonry continued, albeit with ever decreasing strength.

The second phase of Masonophobia from 1836 to 1845 witnessed the Party's collapse while the public's animosity towards the Craft remained. For ten years the Vermont Grand Lodge successfully fought off political attacks, but as a voluntary association it could not prevent brothers from renouncing their membership and lodges going dark. This second phase is beyond the scope of this paper to document, yet its duration demonstrates that while political rage may be fleeting, individual fear and hatred often persists.

Beginning in 1845, phase three recounts Freemasonry's recovery as the Grand Lodge reformed the Craft and reclaimed a respected place in Vermont society. Surprisingly, Freemasonry's return was quite rapid, but it never again earned the public respect it held prior to 1827.

Masonophobia: First Phase (1827–34)

After 1827, as each US Grand Lodge wrestled with a proper response to the Morgan Affair, the rapid growth of antimasonry shocked Vermont Freemasons. By its constitutions, traditions and history Freemasonry is a deliberative and conservative institution. The first symptom of Vermont Masonophobia was a decrease in attendances at Grand Lodge meetings. Between 1825 and 1827 Grand Lodge attendance was fifty-one, forty-two, and fifty-two, but dropped to thirty-nine in 1828.

Three years after Morgan's disappearance, the Grand Lodge of Vermont took its first action in response to the Antimasonic Party. Most fortunately the brethren's choices reflected the wisdom of King Solomon.

With forty lodges represented at the 1829 Communication the brethren elected Nathan B. Haswell (1786–1855) Grand Master. A customs inspector in Bennington, 'Haswell was a man of austere virtue.' ... 'His irreproachable character was itself a crushing answer to many unjust accusations. His moral courage was unbounded, ... [and] a man of almost infinite patience.'³²

Elected Deputy Grand Master was Philip C. Tucker (1800–61) of Vergennes. He was a lawyer and a Justice of the Peace for thirty years. A recognized Masonic authority, noted author and lecturer, he later assisted the Grand Lodge of Canada in its creation in

incurred a fine up to \$100. There is no evidence that the law was ever enforced

³¹ Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party*, 184–6.

³² Spargo, *The Rise and Progress of Freemasonry in Vermont*, 57.



Fig. 1 Nathan B. Haswell (1786-1855), Grand Master of Vermont, 1829-47



Fig. 2 Grand Master Haswell with his daughters

the 1850s.³³ Together, Haswell and Tucker became the luminaries that guided the Craft through the dark years ahead.

One of Haswell's first actions was to approve Tucker's 'Appeal to the Inhabitants of Vermont.' It concludes several paragraphs with a repeated assertion that Freemasonry was 'guiltless' against a wide range of charges. These charges included 'shedding human blood,' 'conspiring against the liberties and privileges of the people,' 'diverting the course of Justice' and 'performing any rite, or doing any act, immoral or irreligious.' One-hundred and fifty-seven brothers joined Haswell and Tucker in signing the Appeal, including Vermont Governor Samuel C. Craft and former governor Martin Chittenden. Two thousand copies were printed and distributed throughout the State.³⁴

The Appeal did not slow the Antimasonic Party or Freemasonry's decline. At the 1830 Grand Lodge communication 42 out of 68 Lodges were represented and only 12 lodges paid their annual dues. Antimason William Palmer's 1831 election as governor along with numerous Antimasons to the legislature brought more pressure on the Craft. In spring 1831 the fledgling Knights Templar Grand Commandery and its four subordinate commanderies returned their charters and were dissolved. The Grand Royal Arch Chapter also considered disbanding but waited until the Grand Lodge's October annual meeting.

At the 1831 Grand Lodge Communication, with 39 lodges represented, the resolution 'that this Grand Lodge henceforth abandon all convocations as a Masonic Body' was placed in consideration. With the fate of the Craft in the balance Grand Master Haswell addressed the brethren:

...; and what have Masons in Vermont done, that this widespread ruin should visit us? We have made repeated and solemn appeals to our fellow-citizens, our neighbors and those endeared to us by solemn ties of kindred and friendship. In return we have been met with reproaches and persecutions, our honest intentions misrepresented, our rights as Masons, our rights as freemen, abridged, and our character traduced. What shall now be done? Will you permit me to answer the question? Breast the Storm!

And when a calm succeeds and the moral ruins shall be made bare, an injured and insulted public will reinstate us in our rights, and visit the despoilers with infamy and disgrace.³⁵

The assembled brethren voted to dismiss the motion for disbandment by a vote of 99 to 19, and the Grand Lodge continued to labour.³⁶

The next day the brethren did pass a compromise resolution. It allowed lodges to hold only two meetings per year, one for 'for good order and discipline and instruction

³³ Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry in Vermont*, 70–77; *Records of the Grand Lodge of... Vermont*, 161–6.

³⁴ *Records of the Grand Lodge... of Vermont*, 352–4.

³⁵ *Records of the Grand Lodge... of Vermont*, 374–5.

³⁶ *Records of the Grand Lodge... of Vermont*, 374–5.

in Masonry the other for yearly choice of officers.³⁷ As the Grand Lodge affirmed its will to survive, the Vermont brothers wisely allowed each lodge to chart its own course.

The 1832 national presidential election season was particularly fierce. It was a struggle between the incumbent President and Past Grand Master of Tennessee, Andrew Jackson (Democratic Party) and Senator Henry Clay, Past Grand Master of Kentucky, (National Republican Party). The Antimasonic Party also offered a candidate for the presidency. At its 1832 national convention, the first of its kind in American history, delegates nominated former US Attorney General (and former Freemason) William Wirt (1772–1834). Jackson won handily with 54% of the vote (701,780). Clay, losing for the second of what would become three failed attempts, gained 37% of the vote (484,205). Wirt received only 100,700 votes, but he did carry Vermont.³⁸

Attendance at the 1832 Grand Lodge session was reduced to only ten lodges. Acknowledging the decrease, Grand Master Haswell passed a resolution that all District Deputy Grand Masters visit each and every lodge to ensure lodges were meeting twice a year and their records and papers were kept safe.

The 1833 Grand Lodge Communication again witnessed a resolution to dissolve Freemasonry. Unlike 1831, this resolution was several paragraphs in length and concluded by stating that if the:

... Grand Lodge shall cease to exist as an organized body and constituted body, each and every member thereby shall be and hereby is fully absolved and discharged from all allegiance or duty to this Grand Lodge or any subordinate Lodge, constituted as aforesaid, in its constituted capacity, and shall be free to act in relation thereto according to the dictates of his own conscience and sense of moral right.

Again a long debate followed and again Bro. Haight offered a resolution dismissing the resolution. But this time Grand Master Haswell gave no speech, and the vote to dismissal was Ayes 79 and Noes 42.³⁹ Once again Vermont Freemasonry had looked into the abyss, yet had the courage to step back.

Following the resolution's defeat Grand Master Haswell offered a second resolution: 'The Grand Lodge would be prepared to accept all charters and property from any lodge wishing to surrender and go dark. All property will be given to the Grand Lodge to be turned over as charity to the Common School Fund of Vermont.' This resolution was passed, thereby allowing lodges to close in a charitable fashion without endangering Grand Lodge viability.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Records of the Grand Lodge ... of Vermont*, 392.

³⁸ Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party*, 68.

³⁹ *Records of the Grand Lodge ... of Vermont*, 391.

⁴⁰ *Records of the Grand Lodge ... of Vermont*, 392.

To affirm its continued existence and to reject publicly any demands to quit, the Grand Lodge on 21 October 1833 circulated *Address of the Officers of the Grand Lodge to the People of Vermont*. Nearly three thousand words in length it contains several key statements on the Grand Lodge's actions, its limitations, and its rebuke of Antimasonic and Masonophobe attacks.

The first paragraphs reviewed the plan by a 'so-called Royal Arch Mason' to reform Freemasonry. This plan, the *Address* replied, was little more than a sophisticated ruse for Grand Lodge dissolution. The *Address* then examines Grand Lodge authority over local lodge charters and through several paragraphs Vermont Masonic history and governance is recounted. The most significant statements are:

Neither by the constitution of 1794, nor by the by-laws and general regulations which have been framed under it, has the Grand Lodge reserved the power of recalling charters at its will, and by Masonic usage no charter is ever taken away, but for mal-conduct of a lodge. . . . The majority of the Grand Lodge voted against surrendering, and undoubtedly voted upon that principle that they had no right to assume any control over the subject. They left the responsibility of acting in the only hands where it could be justly placed, the individual lodges themselves.

and

willing at all times to keep ourselves strictly within the acknowledged principles of the Government under which we live, we cannot be brought to feel the justice of being considered as proper objects for attack and punishment, because we belong to a different society and entertain different opinions from our oppressors.

The *Address* concluded with:

to honest men of all sentiments, and of whatever party, we beg leave to say, that the present excitement has more of interest that is generally acceded to it. It is the first general excitement against a particular society which has occurred in this republic, and should it prove eventually successful, will furnish a precedent of the most dangerous character to the institutions of our beloved Country.

Only Grand Master Haswell, Deputy Grand Master Tucker, Grand Senior Warden Lavius Fillemore, Grand Junior Warden Barnabus Ellis, and Grand Secretary John B. Hollenbeck signed the address.⁴¹

Just seven lodges attended the 1834 Grand Lodge communication. The only significant business it conducted was to affirm 1: the Grand Lodge as the sole authority over Freemasonry in Vermont; 2: that lodges were free to determine the best policy for their welfare, but as Freemasons they could not assemble outside of the lodge or without Grand Lodge dispensation; and 3: No Masonic body could be connected with, or

⁴¹ *Records of the Grand Lodge . . . of Vermont*, 396–400.

endorse any political or sectarian party's views. Lastly, the Grand Lodge 'encouraged its brethren to cultivate good will towards those who may differ from them,' and 'if Freemasonry falls, her monuments will not crumble, nor her epitaph fade. It is erected upon the everlasting hills, it is firmly planted in the deepest valleys. The widow's prayer of joy, the orphan's tear of gratitude as they ascend like the dew before solar influence, bear with them its eulogy and praise.'⁴²

With just seven lodges attending the October 1834 Grand Lodge communication, the assembled brethren voted to move the meeting date to January each year. Perhaps by skipping 1835, the brethren had hoped the hysterical attacks might abate. This would not be the case.

Masonophobia: Second Phase (1836–45)

At the 13 January 1836 meeting, with only nine Grand Lodge officers present, resolutions were passed that gave local lodges the freedom to surrender their charters and then took the unprecedented action of suspending its annual communications with its subordinate lodges. It then issue the following emergency edict:

That the Grand Master, Grand Treasurer and Grand Secretary, with such of the Grand Lodge as may make it convenient, be and they are hereby authorized to attend at the hall of such Lodge on the 2nd Wednesday of January, A. L. 5837 and adjourn said Lodge to the 2nd Wednesday of January, A. L. 5838, and thereafter biennially.⁴³

Through this resolution the Grand Lodge accepted its dire situation but resolved to keep the Masonic light faintly burning. What politics could not do Masonophobia made possible.

The Grand Lodge concluded its business with one last message to their Vermont neighbours and fellow citizens:

That as all manner of evil is spoken against us, we will renew our endeavors to prove by our lives and conversations, the purity of our principles, and the rectitude of our intentions; when reviled, to revile not against, that by this doing we may overcome evil with good.⁴⁴

On 11 January 1837 Gr. Master Haswell, Gr. Treasurer Ebenezer T. Englesby and Gr. Secretary Hollenbeck met, declared the Grand Lodge open, declared it closed, and adjourned for the year. They met similarly in January 1838 and then in 1840, 1842, and 1844.⁴⁵

⁴² *Records of the Grand Lodge ... of Vermont*, 403.

⁴³ *Records of the Grand Lodge ... of Vermont*, 407.

⁴⁴ *Records of the Grand Lodge ... of Vermont*, 408.

⁴⁵ *Records of the Grand Lodge ... of Vermont*, 410–12.

Vermont Freemasonry continued nearly dark as the Antimasonic fear subsided, other grand lodges recovered, and national Masonic conventions were held in Washington, DC, and Baltimore, MD. During these years the United States moved forward. What was left of the Antimasonic Party migrated toward the abolition of slavery, anti-immigration, and anti-Catholicism. In 1846 war began between the US and Mexico, with the US acquiring what is today California, Arizona, and New Mexico. The republic of Texas was created while Florida, Iowa, and Michigan were admitted to the union. The Oregon Trail between Missouri and the Pacific Ocean opened and would later threaten a Canadian border war with Great Britain. In 1844 James K. Polk, a Past Grand Master of Tennessee, was elected US president to continue Andrew Jackson's strong foreign and domestic policies. In Vermont the economic depression that followed the boom abated, the population stabilized and the political factions would coalesce behind the abolition of slavery and the Republican Party in the 1850s.⁴⁶

Masonophobia: Third Phase (1845–48)

In 1845 Grand Master Haswell sent a letter to the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts with such proceedings of the Grand Lodge actions since 1836 and asking for 'recognition' and that 'the shield of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts to be cast over us and her sanction given to our acts and doings herein stated.'⁴⁷

A year later Haswell sent letters to a small number of Vermont Freemasons calling them to a meeting on 14 January 1846 to reorganize the Grand Lodge. His letter stated however: 'We think it not best to issue any public notice as we wish not to give alarm or see any but true and faithful Masons.'⁴⁸ Forty-three brothers, representing ten lodges, answered Haswell's call. The assembly first opened a Master Mason's Lodge with Haswell presiding in the East. The lodge appointed a committee to consider if the Grand Lodge of Vermont could open. The lodge went into recess while the committee deliberated. The lodge was called on again and the committee affirmed the question. Closing the lodge and dissolving the convention, individual brothers were reseated as lodge representatives; Grand Master Haswell reorganized his officers and declared the Grand Lodge of Vermont 'duly and truly open in ample form.'⁴⁹

Haswell's first words to his brethren were congratulate them and asked, 'Around our common altar let us invoke the Blessing of Deity, and ask for His Direction, that we may discharge with fidelity the important trust committed to our charge. Let us render to

⁴⁶ Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic*, 146.

⁴⁷ *Records of the Grand Lodge ... of Vermont*, 414–5.

⁴⁸ *Records of the Grand Lodge ... of Vermont*, 416.

⁴⁹ Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry*, 151–2, 153–4.

Him the humble and devout acknowledgments for His merciful protection of us during a long and painful separation ...⁵⁰

Following Haswell's address, Deputy Grand Master Tucker's resolution was adopted: that the annual January communications be restored, that all forfeited charters be restored, and that all lodges retain the right of representation in Grand Lodge. In short, amnesty was granted to all Vermont lodges with the right to reconstitute themselves and be seated in Grand Lodge. The communication closed with the election of a full slate of officers and District Deputy Grand Masters.

The communication's Minutes and a notification of the Grand Lodge's revival were sent to all other US Grand Lodges. Most Grand lodges responded by sending their annual proceedings. Through this exchange of official and private publications, and hearing no objection from any other Masonic group in Vermont, the new Grand Lodge resumed its legitimacy and authority.

Over the course of three years it allowed old lodges to reclaim their place in the Grand Lodge, but all lodges were renumbered according to their revival dates. For example Vermont Lodge No. 1 was renumbered 18 and Union Lodge No. 5 moved up to No. 2. Of the sixty-eight Vermont lodges in 1827 only twenty were revived. Missisquoi No. 38 of Berkshire is recognized as the only lodge to never cease meeting.⁵¹

That the Grand Lodge of Vermont took longer to recover, when compared with other US grand lodges after the Antimasonic Period, reflects on the voluntary nature of Freemasonry. Simply put, to survive the Antimasonic storm and Masonophobe insults, men had only to maintain a minimum membership. But rebuilding a fully functioning and prosperous fraternity requires greater energy and stamina. Indeed, it is particularly important to consider how such a reduced and slandered organization could marshal enough survivors not simply to conduct routine business but also to employ its jurisprudence to grant amnesty for the fallen and purge unworthy brothers.

After 1846 the Grand Lodge of Vermont enacted several major reforms to place it on a solid foundation. It also adopted several recommendations of the 1843 Washington, DC, National Masonic Convention. It appointed Grand Lecturers to teach uniform working and collect defunct lodges' charters and records. It began issuing Master Mason certificates, exchanging Grand Representatives with other Grand Lodges and requiring lodge business be conducted in the Master Mason degree. Yet it rejected the possibility of revising its rituals to be closer to those of most US Grand Lodges. Vermont chose to adhere to the ritual work it had used prior to 1836. Lastly, and perhaps most important

⁵⁰ Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry*, 152.

⁵¹ Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry*, 156–8.

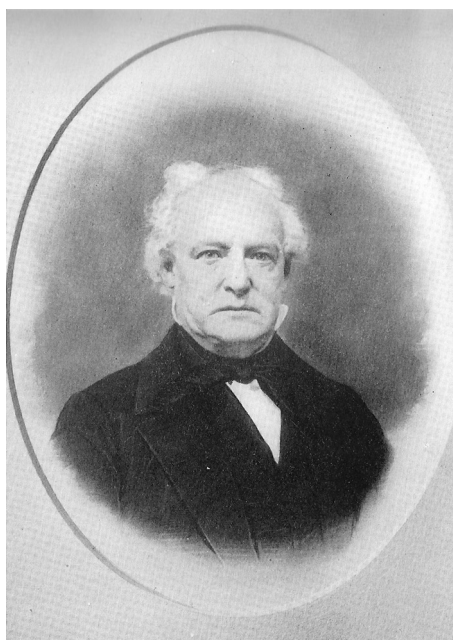


Fig. 3 Philip C. Tucker (1800–61), Grand Master of Vermont, 1847–61

to the long-term health of Vermont Freemasonry, it insisted that every lodge revise its by-laws and that every member must sign the by-laws to regain full membership.⁵²

In 1847 Grand Master Haswell retired after eighteen years of loyal service and was succeeded by Phillip Tucker. Haswell later served as Grand High Priest of the reorganized Grand Royal Arch Chapter and in 1854 served as the first Illustrious Grand Master of the Royal & Select Masters. In hopes of improving his health, he moved to Quincy, Illinois, along the Mississippi River, but there he died. He was buried in Burlington Vermont on St John the Baptist Day, June 24, 1855. About Haswell, Tucker wrote: ‘He knew as well as any man, that there was a soul and spirit in Masonry beyond forms, ceremonies or ritual; a soul that enjoined the practice *out* of the Lodge of the virtues enjoined *within* it.’⁵³ Among his many gifts to Vermont Freemasonry was a small silver trowel to be worn by his successors which continues in use to this day.⁵⁴

At the 1848 Grand Lodge communication Grand Master Tucker assumed the charge to reform the Craft. In his opening address he recognized there were men who were

⁵² Allen E. Roberts, ‘The Convention that Changed the Face of Freemasonry’ in *Short Talk Bulletin* (Silver Spring MD: The Masonic Service Association, January 1986).

⁵³ Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry*, 173.

⁵⁴ Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry*, 58.

always ‘ready enough in avowing themselves Masons and asserting their rights to all Masonic privileges, but are never seen in lodge rooms and paid no dues.’ Calling such men ‘drones in the Masonic hive’ he acknowledged Grand Lodge regulations had sufficient power to deal with, suspend or expel them. ‘But,’ he argued, ‘it is highly desirable that some uniform course be adopted by all the lodges in relationship to them and that all the lodges should adopt the same action.’⁵⁵

Two years later Grand Master Tucker was pleased to report his recommendations had purged bad members from many lodges, while using one lodge as an example:

In Dorchester Lodge it was strictly complied with and that lodge, though reduced in numbers, has purified itself by getting rid of the living-dead men whose former membership operated as an incubus to weigh down its energies and mar its beauty. The true brothers only are now members and as they cannot now be controlled by being voted down in every thing useful by those who only attend occasionally and care little for the prosperity of the order. They have found their strength increased, their unity of purpose perfected and their Masonic quiet and happiness redoubled.⁵⁶

The number of Vermont lodges increased rapidly in the years ahead with an addition of thirty-five in 1856, fifty-seven when the Civil War began in 1861 and one hundred lodges in 1873.

Conclusion

Closing this short review of a remarkable chapter in American Masonic history one final message needs relaying. Upon hearing of the revival of the Grand Lodge, Most Worshipful Brother Lemuel Whitney of Brattleboro, Grand Master of Vermont, 1819–22, sent a letter just prior to his death at the age of 82. Grand Master Tucker read his letter at the 1848 annual meeting:

I am happy in learning that some of the Fraternity yet possess the Nerve to revive an institution so deserving patronage, arising from her correct and philanthropic principles. None but an honorable man ought to be admitted to the privileges of the Order. ‘Tis Honor makes the Man.’ Caution your secular lodges on the admission of candidates ; - keep the institution pure and uncontaminated—better blot ten than admit one unworthy member.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons at their Annual Communication in Burlington on the Second Wednesday of January A.L. 5848* (Burlington, VT: C. Goodrich), 6–7. ‘Drones in the Hive’ is quoted from the Third Degree lecture Beehive emblem: ‘... and he that will so demean himself as not to be endeavoring to add to the common stock of knowledge and understanding, may be deemed a drone in the hive of nature, a useless member of society and unworthy of our protection as Masons.’

⁵⁶ *Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Vermont of Free and Accepted Masons . . . A.L. 5850* (Burlington, VT: C. Goodrich), 9.

⁵⁷ *Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Vermont, January A.L. 5848*, 9.

Vermont Freemasonry was ultimately victorious over the political forces that sought to destroy it, but the vast majority of its members succumbed to hatred. The rancor, accusations, threats and fears that divided family, friends, and small towns in the Green Mountain State are unknown. Those forces of history are difficult to record and harder to measure.

This chapter in American Masonic history is also a reminder that ambitious men will always find a cause and platform to gain the power they crave. But it is also a reminder that there will always be good men equally zealous for justice. Indeed, Freemasons like Haswell and Tucker, will always possess the wisdom to out-manoeuvre enemies and the patience to hold out against attacks, but, as Grand Master Whitney so rightly observed, good men must have the 'nerve' to sustain Freemasonry, for only 'honor' will keep it 'pure and uncontaminated.'

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