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The Genesee River During The War of 1812

by Lillian Roemer

The Disappearance of William Morgan

by Margaret Stoler



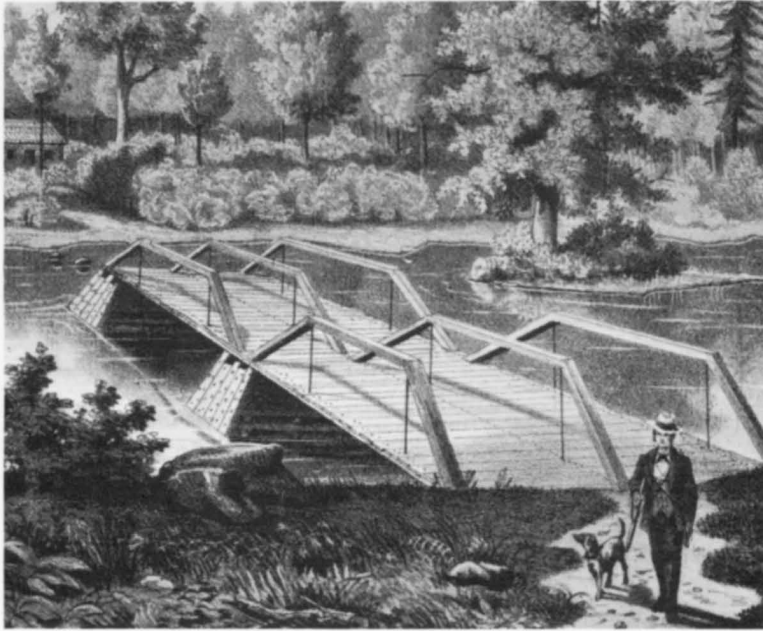


Above: On the site of the Charlotte Lighthouse, the British fleet fired a 24-pound cannon ball at William Hinchey, Dr., Abel Rowe, and Donald McKenzie in late 1812. The Lighthouse was built in 1822. The Keepers house was built in 1862.

Cover: The British sailed to the mouth of the Genesee River many times during the War of 1812, several times firing on the Americans there. In September of 1813, the British and Americans exchanged cannon fire for two or three hours before the British sailing ships escaped.

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The militia protected the Main Street bridge during the War of 1812. It was the only Genesee River crossing north of Avon 20 miles away. If the British took control of the Genesee River it would give them control south to the Pennsylvania border and of the lake shore near the river's mouth.

Genesee River During The War of 1812

The British vessels on Lake Ontario appeared off the mouth of the Genesee River four times during the War of 1812. Three times the British put men ashore, twice raided the community of Charlotte, and once they fought with the fleet of the United States. The letters and dispatches of the officers in charge of the British vessels on Lake Ontario tell why they came and who gave the orders. The reminiscences of the United States citizens who lived through these encounters rounds out the picture.

The First Visit October 18, 1812

Three British vessels appeared off the Genesee River on October 18, 1812; from Lt. H. M. Earle, who was in charge of the British fleet before Capt. Sir James Lucas Yeo was assigned, this letter to Sir George Prevost, Bart. Governor General and Commander in Chief of His Britannic Majesty's Forces in the Provinces of North America tells of this:

Kingston, 2nd, Nov. 1812

Sir:

I have the honor to inform you that we sailed from this place on October 10 to look into the streams on the south shore of Lake Ontario. . . . a survey of the Enemy's harbors may prove useful. No Enemy vessels were sighted. The Americans have one Brig and one Schooner gun-boat.

I am, Sir, Your Excellency's
most obedient, humble
servant,

(signed) H. M. Earle, Lt.¹

And these eye-witness accounts tell of the events on shore: Lyman Spaulding, son of Erastus Spaulding, who owned the Commercial Hotel in Charlotte, wrote this in 1859 in his "Recollections of the War of 1812."

In 1812, soon after the declaration of war by the United States against Great Britain, one morning early, I awakened from sleep and told the British had come, I took my pantaloons in my hand, ran out of the house (which was situated on the high bank of the Genesee River at Charlotte), towards the river and saw a British gun-boat with a large cannon, 32 lbs., I believe, mounted on her bow and pointing towards the warehouse and dock on the west side of the river; the boat laying on the east side. A man was standing by the cannon with a slow match lighted, ready to fire. At the dock a schooner was fastened, which was partly owned by my father. A barge with ten men attached a rope to the bow of the schooner and then cut her loose with axes and towed her out of the river into the lake. The gun-boat no doubt lay in position ready to fire on any party that might resist taking the vessel.²

This seizure was not referred to in any British account.

Donald MacKensie, a pioneer who settled near Caledonia gave this in an address before the Mumford Lyceum in 1843:

In the latter part of the year of 1812, being on a visit with my wife at her father's at the mouth of the river, he accompanied us on horse-back to the residence of my brother-in-law, Abel Rowe, on the Ridge Rd.

The next morning, as we were mounting our horses to return, a messenger arrived with an express, stating that a British fleet was approaching the mouth of the river, and requesting Capt. Rowe to call out the militia immediately. Returning on our way towards the landing, we could hear distinctly the report of every cannon fired by the enemy.

After leaving my wife with the family of my worthy friend, Benjamin Fowler at the landing, we hurried on as fast as possible to the mouth of the river. But nothing was to be seen of the fleet nor of the few families there.

We rode immediately to my father-in-law's old log house, standing then on the very spot where now stands the United States Light House, fastened our horses, and from there, with my brother-in-law, William Hincer, Jr. went on foot to the beach of the lake.

We soon discovered the fleet sailing toward us, from the direction of Braddock's Bay, but not anticipating any danger, we remained on the spot until it approached quite near us.

We were shortly saluted with a 24 pounder which whistled through the bushes near where we stood and entered the bank of the lake in our rear. This shot was in rather too close proximity to us to be agreeable.

I, afterwards, dug the ball out of the bank and used it for a number of years to grind indigo with in my woolen factory.³

The Second Raid June 16, 1813

A letter to Sir George Prevost, Governor General of the British Forces from Lord Bathurst, Lord of the Admiralty, gives information concerning the supply situation the British forces faced at this time.

14th, March 1813

Sir:

I cannot avoid regretting that the Commissary General should on the eve of a deficient supply of flour in Canada have thought it prudent to export so considerable a quantity of that article to the Peninsula at the close of last year.

I must impress on you the importance of deriving, as far as possible, from other quarters than Great Britain such further supplies as may be required for the subsistence of the troops or the inhabitants.⁴

The letter continues on subjects relative to other theaters of the War.

Governor General Prevost responded to this in the last paragraph of his letter to Lord Bathurst of the 26th, April 1813.

Commodore Sir James Lucas Yeo will henceforth report direct to the Commissary General on the subject of supplies but in all other areas to be under my command.⁵

Part of the communication that Sir George Prevost sent to each of the Generals under his command, marked "Secret" and dated 18th June, 1813 informed them:

I have made the following arrangements with Sir James Yeo, who sailed yesterday for the purpose of interrupting the supplies for the American army moving by water and for carrying away or destroying his Depots of Stores and provisions collected at Oswego, Great Sodus and the Genesee River together with all vessels and boats he could get at. In the event that the wind doesn't favor this design, then the Commodore is to proceed to Niagara.⁶

The rest of this dispatch concerns the War at other points on the Lake.

One of a series of dispatches to Sir George Prevost over the signature of Noah Freer, Adj., and dated Kingston, 18th June, 1813, marked "Secret" states:

There is a severe shortage of materials, cannon, general supplies in this place. It is, however, rumored that wheat is available in Ogdensburgh for \$12. per barrel. We shall be under the necessity of getting most of our flour and pork from their side.⁷

The rest of the dispatch deals with the movement of troops.

The direct reason for the raid on the Genesee River on June 16, 1813 is given in a letter to Sir John Croker, Secretary of the Admiralty, from Commodore Sir James Lucas Yeo, written aboard *H.M.S. Wolfe* on 29th June, 1813 in the last paragraph states:

On the 13th inst. we captured two schooners and some boats going to the Enemy near Oswego. By them we learned of a depot of supplies at the Genesee River. I accordingly proceeded off that River, landed some seamen and the marines of the Squadron. I had brought off all the provisions found in the government stores and also a sloop laden with grain for the army. Col. Mulcaster was in charge of this landing.

On the 19th, I anchored off Great Sodus and took 600 barrels of flour and pork which had arrived there for the army.

I have the honor to be
your most humble, obedient

Servant,

(signed) James Lucas Yeo, Commo.

(The schooners captured were the *Enterprize*, re-named the *Drummond* and *Lady Washington*, re-named *Consort*.)⁸

And what happened on this day from the point of view of the inhabitants of Charlotte? Again Lyman Spaulding's first-hand experiences:

In the spring of 1813, my father loaded a vessel belonging to him with about 2000 bushels of corn to take to the American Army at Fort Niagara. The vessel had, besides her crew, a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army and my Uncle Ephraim and father, and was coasting along the shore of Lake Ontario in expectation of getting to the fort unobserved by the British fleet which was then in command of the Lake. When about ten miles west of Genesee River the British fleet was discovered, and the vessel was immediately put about in hopes of getting into the Genesee River and running up it far enough to be out of the reach of the enemy. The British discovered the vessel, and dispatched the Commodore's Barge with ten armed oarsmen, and a midshipman to steer, just as the vessel with corn had fairly entered

the mouth of the river. The commodore's Barge got within gunshot distance and commenced firing on the vessel. The bullets flew thick and whistled fearfully.

My mother, sister Jane and myself stood on the high bank of the river and with great alarm expected father and those with him would be shot. The vessel was run into the marsh on the east side of the river and all on board except father, the Lieutenant and Dr. Bingham jumped off and escaped while father, the Lieutenant and Dr. Bingham jumped into the yawl belonging to the vessel and pulled for the west shore of the river. The Lieutenant pulled off his coat as it had an epaulette on, and placed it in his trunk.

The fire from the Barge was then directed to the yawl and the three persons in it. Father was standing in the stern steering and the Lieutenant and Dr. Bingham rowing, but the bullets came so thick and fast that they became alarmed and stopped rowing and laid down in the yawl and thus leaving father the only mark to be shot at, and the only one to get the yawl ashore. He stood upright and paddled, the bullets whipping and water flying as they struck the water. We stood on the river bank in agony expecting every moment to see father shot.

He finally reached near the shore, when his two companions jumped from the boat for land, actually kicking it back into the stream, but father paddled and got the boat to land and drew out the Lieutenant's trunk and hid it in the marsh while the officer and doctor ran as fast as their legs would carry them to the village. Father walked deliberately up the hill to his house.

By this time, a large gunboat from the British fleet with 32 oars on a side, and full of soldiers, sailors and marines, had hitched to our vessel with corn and was towing her out of the river. Not knowing the channel, the British got stuck on the bar and while laying there, Constant Bacon, a young man of about 20, loaded a Queen Ann, (a gun carrying a two-ounce ball and about a six foot length of barrel) with five rifle balls and crept through the brush and bushes to a large tree which had fallen down near the mouth of the river and securing himself behind that, aimed at the men in the gunboat who sat as thick as they could be, and fired. The smoke of the gun showed his position and immediately the 32-pounder on the bow of the gunboat was discharged and

the grapeshot mowed down the bushes around Bacon, but the big tree protected him. (Constant was bound to father, I think, in 1804. He was then 6 or 8 years old, and had to stay until he was 21. I have the old indentures.)

Getting additional boats from the British fleet, which by this time had arrived in front of the river, the vessel with the corn was towed out, throwing overboard a part of the corn to lighten her and she was joined to the British fleet, the last I saw of her, making the second schooner the British captured that partly belonged to my father.

The gunboat full of armed men returned to the river and came up to the dock and warehouse. Many of the inhabitants, seeing her coming in went to the dock, myself among them. The gunboat made fast to the dock and the marines stepped ashore, armed to the teeth and looking very fierce at me, as they passed and made for the Main Street. As they gained the street they commenced firing at those who were leaving the village and I thought my time had come and feared I would be shot. To protect myself, I ran up the hill and went into my father's barn, the basement of which was built of stone.

Very soon I saw a British officer running up the street toward Main Street, swinging his sword and hollering "Stop Firing." The firing stopped and in a short time I came out of the barn and went to the house and in front of it was paraded in line about 30 marines, a splendidly dressed British officer in his red uniform, sword by his side and finely polished pistol in each hand was walking in front of his men.

He ordered all the guns in the house to be brought out at once saying, "If you leave any in the building I will burn it down." This stern order brought out all the guns and among them the large Queen Ann that Constant Bacon had fired at the gunboat with 5 rifle balls in it. The officer made rigid inquiry to know who fired at the gunboat, but all were oblivious, no one knew anything about it. The little Indian Chief's gun my father gave me when I was seven years old, I took precaution to send into the woods by a boy, and afterwards recovered it, and it came to Lockport, and it was lent and lost as stated. I regretted losing it very much as it was a present from my father and a gun I had hunted with many a day.

The occurrence of the landing of the Marines and the firing so suddenly stopped. Sentinels were stationed around the village to give notice of any American military force, while all the property in the warehouses was being removed into British boats and taken away.

The first story of my father's tavern house was of stone and two stories of wood; the stone front facing the river and built in the bank so that the wood part was just above the level of the ground on the west and south side, the east facing the river and parallel with it. Into this stone basement many of the neighboring women came for protection during the night, expecting that a fight would occur when the militia at Hansford Landing, four miles up the river, came to drive off the British, and our villagers would be between two fires.

There was considerable alarm expressed by the women who imagined they might be shot in the fight, but about daylight our troops advanced and the advance guard fired on the British picket and he fired an alarm and all the sentinels immediately rushed to their boats and put off for the ships outside the harbor. They did not fire a shot until they got on their ships. They then shot a few cannon balls ashore cutting off the limbs of trees, but hit no buildings; neither was anyone injured.

When the gunboat came in with the marines, they discovered among the crowd on the dock an Irish sailor who before the war had command of a merchant vessel, and made him prisoner. He was very witty and a great friend of mine. We called him Captain James Flynn. They said he was a British subject, a British sailor and had deserted, and they would take him to the fleet and hang him as a deserter. We thought poor Flynn was gone, but he managed to get into the upper part of the warehouse while they were taking off the property, and in the morning when the alarm gun was fired, they ran off in such haste as to forget him and he captured a very fine gun belonging to the guard. He laughed a good deal at his lucky escape and fortunate capture. The name of my father's tavern, painted in large letters on the south end of the building in a semi-circle on the gable was, "Commercial Hotel." I think it was built in the fall of 1810 when the log house we had occupied was torn down.⁹

Orsamus Turner in the *History of the Pioneer Settlements of the Phelps and Gorham's Purchase* says that a body of armed men had collected at Hanford's Landing and marched down to Charlotte just as the invaders were embarking on board. This company were probably those collected by Lt. Col. Caleb Hopkins, who was the collector of customs and the Inspector of customs at the port of the Genesee.

This letter to Lt. Col. Hopkins from Major General Amos Hall of Ontario County refers to the militia assembled at Hanford's Landing mentioned in the Spaulding account:

Bloomfield, June 16th, 1813
4 o'clock P.M.

Lt. Col. Caleb Hopkins,
Sir;

I, this moment received your letter by Major Norton advising me of the landing of the enemy from their fleet off the mouth of the Genesee River. Your calling out your Regiment was perfectly correct. You will please collect as many men as appearances will justify until the enemy's vessels leave the mouth of the river. It cannot be expected they will make much stay. But you will be able to judge of their movements by tomorrow morning. I shall expect you will give me immediate notice if you think more force will be wanted.

Yours respectfully,
A. Hall¹⁰

The Third Visit of the British To the Genesee River September 11, 1813

Commo. Yeo's letter to the Right Honorable Admiral, Sir John Warren, Bart., Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Fleet, Halifax, N.S. tells of this occasion.

His Majesty's Ship Wolfe, off the
false Duck Islands, on Lake Ontario,
12th September, 1813

Sir:

I have the honor to acquaint you that His Majesty's Squadron under my command being be-calmed off Genesee

River on the 11th Instant, the enemy's fleet of eleven sail having a partial wind succeeded in getting within range of their twenty-four and thirty-two pounders, and from their having the wind of us and the dull sailing of some of our squadron, I found it impossible to bring them to close action. We remained in this mortifying situation five hours having only six guns in all the squadron that would reach the Enemy (not a carronade being fired). At sunset a breeze sprang up from the westward, when I steered for the false Duck Islands under which the Enemy could not keep the weather gage, but be obliged to meet us on equal terms, this, however, he carefully avoided.

Although I have to regret the loss of Mr. William Ellery, Midshipman, and three seamen killed and several wounded, I cannot but conceive it fortunate that none of the squadron have received any material damage which must have been considerable had the Enemy acted with the least spirit, and taken advantage of the superiority of the position they possessed.

I found the Enemy this cruize (sic) reinforced by a new schooner of 18 guns, four of which are long 32 or 42 pounders; this vessel is about 85 feet keel, was intended for a large brig, and was actually laid down, built and ready for sea in six weeks.

Enclosed is a list of killed and wounded.

I have the Honor to be Sir;

Your most obedient, humble servant,

(signed) James Lucas Yeo, Commodore¹¹

It is interesting to compare Commo. Isaac Chauncey's account, extracted from his letter to Hon. W. Jones, Secy. Navy.

On board the USS Gen. Pike
off Duck Is. Sept. 13, 1813

Sir;

On the 7th at daylight, the enemy's fleet was discovered close in with the Niagara river, wind from the southward — made the signal, weighed with the fleet, (prepared for action) and stood out of the river, after him. He immediately made all sail to the northward, we made sail in chase, with our heavy schooners in tow, and have continued the chase all around the lake, night and day until yesterday morning,

when he succeeded in getting in Amherst Bay, which is so little known to our pilots, and said to be so full of shoals, that they are not willing to take me in there. I shall, however (unless driven from my station by a gale of wind) endeavor to watch him so close as to prevent his getting out on the lake again.

During our long chase, we frequently got within from one to two miles of the enemy, but our heavy sailing schooners prevented our closing in with him, until the 11th, off Genesee River. We carried a breeze with us, while he lay becalmed, to within about three-fourths of a mile of him, when he took the breeze, and we had a running fight of three and a half hours; but by his superior sailing, he escaped me, and run into Amherst Bay, yesterday morning.

In the course of our chase, on the 11th, I got several broadsides, from this ship, upon the enemy, which must have done him considerable injury, as many of the shot were seen to strike him, and people were observed, over the side, plugging shot-holes; a few shot struck our hull and a little rigging was cut, but nothing of importance — not a man was hurt.

I was much disappointed, that Sir James refused to fight me as he was so much superior in point of force, both in guns and men - having upwards of 20 guns more than we have, and throws a greater weight of shot.

This ship, the Madison and Sylph have each a schooner constantly in tow; yet the others can not sail as fast as the enemy's squadron, which gives him decidedly the advantage and puts it in his power to engage me when and how he chooses.

I have the Honor to be
Sir; etc.

(signed) Isaac Chauncey¹²

Turner is his *Phelps and Gorham's Purchase* tells how the people at Charlotte felt about this appearance of the British.

Toward the last of September, of the same year (1813) both the British and the American fleets were at the upper end of the lake, Commodore Chauncey making frequent demonstrations to Sir James Yeo, of his readiness to contend for the supremacy of the lake, but the latter declining, and gradually making his way down the lake. Arriving off the mouth of the Genesee River the fleet was becalmed and lay

almost motionless upon the water. The inhabitants at Charlotte supposed the fleet had anchored preparatory to another landing, expresses were sent into the country; men armed and unarmed, flocked from the backwoods settlements, and in a few hours a considerable number of men collected ready to fight or to run, as chances of invasion should make it expedient. While anxiously watching the British fleet, expecting every moment to see the boats coming toward the shore, a light breeze sprang up, and, soon after the fleet of Commo. Chauncey was seen rounding Bluff Point.

It was a welcomed advent and was hailed with joyous shouts from those on the shore; at a moment when a weak force had supposed themselves about to engage with a vastly superior one, succor had come - a champion had stepped, or rather sailed in, quite equal to the task of defense, in fact seeking the opportunity that seemed to have occurred.

Not much of the battle was seen from shore as Turner says;

Commo. Chauncey brought his fleet within a mile from the shore, and when it was directly opposite the becalmed fleet of the enemy, he opened a tremendous fire on it. At first a sheet of flame arose from the American fleet, and then a dense cloud of smoke that rolled slowly toward the British fleet, hiding it from view, as if the curtain of night had been drawn.

The fire was returned but as the breeze increased both fleets moved down the lake, continuing to exchange shots until after dark.¹³

After the Sept. 11, 1813 battle off the mouth of the Genesee, Chauncey controlled the Lake until navigation closed for the year. The inhabitants felt fairly secure until they heard about the recapture of the Fort at Niagara.

Part of a letter from Hamlet Scrantom to his father Abraham Scrantom gives an idea of the state of affairs among the settlers in Rochester and Charlotte.

Rochester, Sunday Evening
26th of December 1813

Dear Sir;

You will doubtless have news of the serious affair on our frontiers before you receive this. On Sunday morning, the

19th, the British troops and Indians crossed the (Niagara) River at Five Mile Meadows; they proceeded to Fort Niagara, entered, and commenced a horrid massacre of the sick and wounded. . . . Our first accounts stated that all that came in their way were butchered without regard to age or sex, but it is not correct. But the distress of the inhabitants whose lot it was to fall into their hands is indescribable. Daily are passing here in sleighs and wagons, families deprived of their all. Not a cent of money, no provisions, no bedding; children barefoot, etc. All depending on the charity of the people. The enemy continued their ravages from Sunday morning to Monday afternoon.

Early on Tuesday morning an express arrived in our village relative to the above affair, orders were issued by the captains of the companies, the men were warned out forthwith and the next morning whole companies were on their march. . . . On Thursday morning an express arrived at break of day, that the enemy were landing from their boats at Oak Orchard Creek about forty miles from this and were proceeding this way desolating the country and it was expected another party would be in at the mouth of the river. All were alarmed. Some thought it best to be on the move; others did not apprehend danger. The militia were all called upon to repair to the bridge and the mouth of the river; the whole country in confusion.

Capt. Stone (who keeps the tavern on the other side of the river) sent in all directions to assemble his company of dragoons (a very fine company) sent his children to Bloomfield, and made preparation to move his valuable effects at short notice. The merchants went to packing goods (of which there are four very full stores here), some running balls, others making cartridges.

I yoked my oxen, packed up all our bedding and clothing and moved my family up to my log house on a back road about a mile from the bridge on the east side of the river, together with all my provisions and cooking utensils that were of immediate use. Before night our village was crowded with militia coming in all night and the next, but the whole of this proved a false alarm; the enemy were never but ten miles this side of Lewiston. The next week I moved back again to the village, and now rest secure, I think,

for the winter. Israel and his family and one other family remained in the village all night, the rest crossed the river.

Although they felt safe for the winter, the spring would bring more naval activity. Elisha Ely gave this account some thirty years later, of the preparation that the citizens made for the 1814 sailing season and the possibility of being raided.

I think it was in April 1814, an eighteen pound cannon and a four pounder, the latter of brass, were sent by Gen. P. B. Porter to the care of Captain (afterwards Colonel) Isaac W. Stone. It required seventeen yoke of oxen to draw the eighteen pounder through from Culver's to this place such as was the state of the roads. With the cannon came powder and ball. We soon collected some powder in the village and had a few rounds, very much to the amusement of all of us.

It was suggested that we should see what effect a ball would have. The cannon was placed on Main St. at the corner near Blossom's hotel. On the rise of ground very near the residence of the lamented Gen. Matthews, a large limb about forty feet from the ground was cut from the tree, which left a white spot for a target.

I went rather clandestinely to Capt. Stone's barn, and got a ball and intended getting it into the cannon without his noticing it. He observed it, however, and said I ought not to waste the public property in that way. I replied, "Never mind, Capt., we will find it again." "Find the devil," said he. Enos Stone and Frederick Hanford acted as chief engineers, and myself as assistant. All things being ready, the cannon was fired. The ball struck the tree about four feet below the mark. The top quivered a moment and fell. This was our experience in gunnery. The boys soon brought us the ball, so that the United States lost nothing by the operation.¹⁵

Although the Genesee River is not mentioned in the following letter, it gives some interesting insights into the provisioning problems the British were having and indirectly into the reasons for the landing at Oswego, Great Sodus and the Genesee.

To: Sir Geo. Prevost, Governor General, Headquarters, Montreal
Kingston 26th January, 1814

Sir:

I have the honor to acquaint Your Excellency with the following information that has been relayed to me.

It is reported that the food supply at Niagara is getting very low. Partially due to the Indians being reluctant to go home as no food or game has been prepared for winter there.

At the present most of the respectable inhabitants of that part of the country have been interviewed for the purpose of inquiring into the resources the country offers for provisioning. It is reported that the harvest for two years past has been very light. Cattle are getting thin and little pork has been available for curing.

Such being the state of the resources for provisioning the Right Division of the Army, the Adjutant Commissary General having made a calculation that he had not nor could he procure a greater quantity of meat than would be sufficient for 7000 men for 86 days, a supply of pork should be sent up at the first opportunity practical.

Sir; Your Excellency's
most obedient humble servant,
Gordon Drummond, Lt. General¹⁶

Also reported in a dispatch marked "Private," dated January 5, 1814 and also to Sir George Prevost from Lt. Gen. Gordon Drummond at Kingston:

Our supplies for 1600 men are all drawn from the American side of the River (St. Lawrence). They drive droves of cattle from the interior under pretense of supplying their own army at the Salmon River and are so allowed to pass the guards and at night to cross them over to our side, the River being frozen. I shall be under the necessity of getting most of my flour from their side.¹⁷

The Fourth Raid

May 14, 1814

Before the sailing season opened in 1814, Sir George Prevost Commander-in-Chief of all British and Canadian Forces, communicated his ideas of how the Lake Ontario fleet might be used during this season to Lt. Gen'l. Gordon Drummond, who in turn wrote this to Sir James Yeo.

19th April, 1814

Confidential

It might be advisable if no co-operation is requested from the squadron in the transportation of troops that you would proceed down the American shore looking into the different creeks, particularly reconnoitering their supplies. When if you find an object and consider the marines of the squadron sufficient for the service, you might land and bring off or destroy whatever stores, craft or public buildings the enemy might have there.

After which the General would recommend your proceeding to Sacket's Harbour and endeavoring accurately to reconnoiter that place and if you should consider an attack upon the enemy at that place as offering any optimal hope of success, you might in that case dispatch a boat of fast sailing vessel to Kingston to alert additions.

Reports have been received of stores and provisions at Sodus and the Genesee River. Supplies are staged at Oswego and are stored at the falls above. There is rumor that the road to Sacket's Harbour is nearly finished. If no endeavor at Sacket's Harbour can be made perhaps attention is best focused on those ports to the west.

Note: This communication was not signed.¹⁸

The following report from an American deserter was sent to Commander in Chief Sir George Prevost in a letter from Lt. Gen'l. Gordon Drummond.

York 23, April 1814

Constant Bacon, late of the Army of Southworth, with a division of the American army at Niagara was born in the town of Scipio, county of Cayuga, State of New York. He has just arrived from Niagara. He reports provisions all along the Lake from west to east.

There is a depot of provisions on the Ridge Rd. at the Widow Smythe's, about nine miles from Hardscrabble. It consists of beef, pork, whiskey, and flour of ----- There is a large supply. He thinks there is at least 2000 barrels of all kinds of ammunition. There is no port but it is about 32 miles between Eleven Mile Creek and Buffalo.

The nearest depot to this one is at the mouth of the Genesee River, at the Upper Landing, exactly 4 miles up the stream. Large schooners can sail there. Large quantities of

beef, pork and whiskey are there. There are no batteries, guns or troops there.

The next lot of beef, pork and whiskey and flour is at Irondequoit, a few miles to the east and exactly four miles from the falls of the Genesee to the Irondequoit storehouse, and three miles from the Upper Landing to the Falls. The country is not well settled.

The next stores is at Pultneyville which is between the Genesee and Big Sodus. There are no men stationed there unless they have come lately. This depot is on the Lake.

There is a large depot at Sodus. There is also a large depot at Oswego. And there is a large depot at Ogdensburgh. He has no acquaintance with any person or information from that place.

His object in coming here is to get rid of paying some money which he owed for a cargo of liquor and stores which he had bought and which had been plundered from him by the American troops.

(signed) C. Bacon¹⁹

That this man's information was wrong was shown a month later when Commo. Yeo was fired on and had casualties at Pultneyville and the force at Genesee "appeared too be formidable to justify a landing," as stated in Drummond's letter of May 19, 1814.

That the British were intent on capturing the provisions and military stores along the south shore of the Lake is made clear by Lt. Gen'l. Gordon Drummond's letter to Sir George Prevost:

Kingston May 3, 1814

I have the honor to acquaint you with the following: that I propose embarking on board the Squadron as soon as the wind is fair and taking the following troops.

There follows a long paragraph listing the troops and the Officers in charge. Then the letter continues:

----- with 350 marines will make a disposable force of 900 men for the purpose of destroying, if possible, the enemy's magazines and stores at Oswego and also along the southern coast of Lake Ontario, bringing off however such quantities as it may be practical for us to do, particularly, of provisions for the relief of our Right Division.

To satisfy myself that as much is done on this occasion as can be, I propose embarking myself with Commo. Sir James Yeo, but the immediate command of the troops I have entrusted to Lt. Colonel Fisher of the Waterville Reg.

He closes his letter with what must have been the standard closing:

I have the honor to be,
Sir, Your Excellency's
Most, obedient, humble servant,
(signed) Gordon Drummond, Lt. Genl.

Enclosed with the previous letter was this:

Report of Information 3 May 1814

Given by _____

There is a very large quantity of provisions about four miles up the Genesee River where they have few men to defend it and no kind of works to cover them. This the enemy has little doubt of our taking possession of before they could have time to move it. The informant knows nothing of the Lake Erie fleet. He has heard from the Officers at the Harbour that the forces stationed between the Genesee and Buffalo consisted of about 1400 men that did not leave with Gen'l. Brown and some militia but they were divided being at Genesee, Batavia, 12 Mile Creek, Buffalo and Niagara.²⁰

Lt. General Drummond's letter to Sir George Prevost written on May 19, 1814 stresses again the British need for collecting supplies; the reasons for the landings on the south shore of Lake Ontario. Although, the action at the Genesee is not described in detail, the letter reveals the conditions of the War at that time.

Kingston, May 19th 1814

Sir,

I have the honor to acquaint Your Excellency that Commodore Sir James Yeo, having sailed from hence with the Squadron on the 11th instant, on his arrival off Oswego, sent on shore to examine if any Publick stores had been transported thither since our former visit to that place, but none whatever could be discovered even in private warehouses or buildings. No troops are there at present, although a considerable body of cavalry, and a Regiment of Riflemen arrived there the day after we left it. They are now

employed in cutting a Road from the Falls (Note: those south of Oswego) to a Road already open to Sacket's Harbour and in the construction of strong carriages, for the conveyance of the guns to that place which, it is expected, will be completed in about three weeks or a month.

The enemy's new ship has one mast up. That on the stocks is not yet ribbed, but will be very soon.

On the Squadron leaving Oswego, a boat was directed to remain in the neighborhood, which captured a batteau laden with flour, and brought it in safely to this place.

Commodore Sir James Yeo on arriving off Pultneyville entered into an agreement with Brigadier General Swift to respect Private Property, provided all Publick stores were delivered up to him without opposition. Notwithstanding, which, on the last of the small quantity of flour found there leaving the shore, the enemy fired from the woods and I am concerned to say that Captain Short of the Marines was severely wounded in the arm, one Sergeant was killed and 4 seamen and marines, wounded.

At the Genesee, the appearance of the enemy was too formidable to justify a landing. They had a twelve and a six pounder, a strong body of militia, and about twenty dragoons. The commodore has understood since that the stores at this place, as well as at Sodus, had been removed.

I am happy to acquaint Your Excellency that Captain Mulcaster's wound continues its favorable symptoms.

Major General Riall reports nothing new on the part of the enemy, about 1000 or 1200 of whom appear at Buffalo. But I regret to state that there are no less than 69 cases of fever and ague in the King's Regiment at Fort Erie.

I have the honor to be

Sir, Your Excellency's

Most obedient humble servant

(signed) Gordon Drummond

Lt. General²¹

Commodore Yeo's letter to The Right Honorable Admiral Sir John Borlace Warren, Bart. Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Vessels, Halifax, does not mention the flags of truce nor the near loss of a gunboat.

Aboard the H.M.S. Wolfe
At Anchor, off the False Duck Islands
19th, May 1814

Sir:

I have the honor to acquaint you with this information concerning our recent activities on this Lake. Arriving off Oswego on the 11th inst. I sent ashore to ascertain if stores had arrived at that point after we had departed, but could discover none. A regiment of Riflemen arrived as we were leaving. All seem to be employed on the road to Sackett's Harbour that is close to completion.

I directed a boat to remain in the neighborhood when we sailed, to observe the activities on shore and movement of supplies on the water. Some flour was captured from a batteaux going into Oswego. The boat and the flour are now in Kingston.

At Pultneyville, twelve miles west of Big Sodus, U.S. Brig. Gen. John Swift, signed an agreement to give up Publick stores provided private stores were respected, which they were, but our Flag of Truce was fired on from the woods as we were loading the last of the small amount of flour we had found there.

It is with regret that I must report that Capt. Short of the Marines was severely wounded in the arm, one sergeant was killed and four seamen and marines were wounded.

At the Genesee, the Enemy had a substantial force. The uniform of the Niagara Regiment having been sighted in the woods. They had a 12 and a 16 pounder.

We departed to this place when the wind became favorable.

I have the honor to be
Sir, Your Excellency's
Most obedient humble servant
James Lucas Yeo
Commodore²²

The people in the villages of Charlotte and Rochester were fearful that the British fleet might appear again at the mouth of the River and come ashore in force. The stories of the massacres at Fort Niagara and the destruction of the surrounding towns were still fresh in their memories. The attitude toward the War changed to a stiff will to protect their land and themselves from invasion.

Besides the cannons they had acquired in April 1814 a militia of 40 or 50 men had been recruited by Capt. Isaac W. Stone. Elisha Ely was very much a part of the encounter with the British on May 14, 1814. He wrote a pamphlet entitled "Proceedings at the Annual Festival of the Pioneers" held at Blossom's Hotel on Oct. 12, 1848. He wrote:

It was soon known that the British fleet was on our own coast, and that it was at Oswego. Captain, now Colonel Stone of Porter's Volunteers, was commissioned to raise a regiment of dragoons. He had recruited about fifty men with whom he went to the mouth of the river. He directed the eighteen pounder to Deep Hollow Bridge. On the Sabbath we threw up a breastwork on the south side of the bridge, loosened all the planks which were pinned down, and finished our work in the evening.

About sundown on the 14th of May 1814, I received a message from Colonel Stone, saying the British fleet were in sight, and requesting me to notify the inhabitants; but that we need not come until the next morning. About 11 o'clock P.M. another messenger came requesting us to come immediately.

H. Ely and Co. had previously received fifty muskets and 3000 fixed ammunition; these were distributed among the inhabitants as far as was necessary. Each man took twenty-four rounds of cartridge.

At the time there were but thirty-two men in the place; one was left to cart off the women and children if necessary, and another declined to go. The cart was the only conveyance in the place.

About two o'clock in the morning we started. It rained fast and was very dark; the roads were exceedingly muddy. We arrived at the mouth of the river soon after daylight in the midst of a fog. The lake was perfectly calm, and we could distinctly hear the British boats rowing about in various directions.

An old boat was lying near which had been used as a lighter. Colonel Stone proposed to Captain Francis Brown and myself to take some men, and see if we could not capture some of the British boats. Six seamen were soon found to man the oars, and twelve volunteers with muskets were stowed out of sight in the bottom of the boat. Captain

Brown stood upon one thwart, and myself upon the another, and then with muffled oars, we put to sea.

At the point a sentry had been placed, who hailed us. We did not answer and he fired. The ball passed between Captain Brown and myself and struck the water beyond us. We rowed on slowly and noiselessly into the lake.

When we were out a mile or more, a gun was fired from shore and soon another and another. We lay to, conjecturing what it could mean. The fog was disappearing very rapidly; we soon could see Colonel Stone on his white horse, and beyond us the topmasts of the fleet which lay at anchor in a line, up and down the lake. Directly, the fog had entirely disappeared, and we lay within range of the guns of the whole fleet, seventeen sail in all. We turned and rowed slowly toward the shore.

Soon a twelve-oared barge was in pursuit of us, and gained on us very rapidly. We feared they might have a swivel on board and they were so near us we could distinctly count their oars. After a moment's consultation, we concluded to head our boat for Irondequoit. The object was to give our 18 pounder on shore an opportunity to fire upon the pursuing boat. Brown observed to me, "Well, Ely, we shall have to go to Halifax!" I replied, "It looks very much like it." Jehiel Barnard, now of this place, raised his head, and with compressed lips said, "I hope you will let us fight first."

We had not gone far towards Irondequoit before the British boat stopped. Brown observed, "They think there is some trap." We stopped rowing; they soon commenced again, and we too. They pulled a few strokes and then turned towards the shipping and we to the mouth of the river. The guns from the fleet could have sunk us at any time.

About 10 o'clock a flag of truce put off from the flagship of the enemy. Colonel Stone asked me whether I was used to receiving a flag of truce. The answer was, "No!" Captain Brown was asked; the reply the same. Colonel Stone then told Brown and myself to do the best we could, adding, "Don't let them come into the river — don't let them land at all — their feet shall not pollute our soil."

Up the lake, a little above the mouth of the river, a very large tree had fallen into the lake where there was sufficient water for a boat to lie alongside. We went out on the tree and

tied a white handkerchief to a stick. The boat came alongside, the officer, who was in full dress and a splendid looking man, proposed going ashore. We told him our orders were positive; by this time twelve armed men made their appearance on the shore of the lake. The officer bearing the flag said, "Is it your custom to receive a flag of truce under arms?" We told him he must excuse us, as we were not soldiers but citizens; we however, requested the men to return. He then said he was commanded by his Excellency Sir James Yeo, to say that, "If we would give up the public property, private property should be respected." He then produced a paper signed by quite a number of citizens of Oswego, the contents of which, as near as I can recollect, were that, as the government had left a large quantity of stores and munitions of war at that place, without adequate force to protect it, they would not risk their lives and property to defend it.

It was arranged that Brown should stay with the flag officer and I return to our commander, Colonel Stone. I delivered the message and read the paper above alluded to, which the officer had handed me with a pledge to return it when read. Colonel Stone rose and said, "Go back and tell them that the public property is in the hands of those who will defend it."

Soon after the flag had returned to the ship a gunboat was seen coming from the fleet, towed by four boats. After a short consultation, Judge John Williams was requested to select twelve good riflemen and take a position under a ridge of gravel thrown up by the waves at the point on the east side of the river. A small boat was sent up to the turn of the river, out of sight of the enemy, to ferry the men across. Soon we saw them crossing the marsh through the tall grass and placed in the desired position — all lying on the ground, from which they were to rise on a given signal from Colonel Stone. Brown and myself were to occupy our position in the boat. The object was to let the gunboat get within reach of the riflemen, and then that we should go and capture her.

The lieutenant having charge of the cannon had positive orders from Colonel Stone not to fire until he was directed. By this time the gunboat was in thirty or forty rods of where we wanted her. The boats towing her opened to the right and left, and she fired a six pound shot, which fell into the

river several rods below the storehouses. The moment they fired, our cannon was discharged, and with it went all our hopes. Colonel Stone was standing within ten feet of the cannon. He turned, drew his sword, and I believe would have done serious injury had not his arm been arrested.

The first gun from the gunboat was evidently a trial shot. She would undoubtedly have come a little nearer the shore had we not fired, and if so we should have assuredly captured her. She was a vessel of from 90 to 100 tons, sloop rigged. I hardly know whether the incident is worth relating, but at the moment it was extremely exciting, for we considered the gunboat already our prize. She then fired fifteen or twenty sixty-eight pound shots, which did no injury except one, which struck one of the storehouses. Where they struck the ground they turned up a deep furrow, sometimes several rods in length. Some of the balls were used in this city a long time afterwards in breaking stone for buildings.

Soon after this occurrence General Porter arrived. About 4 o'clock p.m. another flag was seen coming from the fleet. General Porter sent Major Darby Noon, his aide, to receive it. The demand then was that if the property was not surrendered Commo. Yeo would land his army and 400 Indians and take it. General Porter answered that if he chose to send his troops and Indians ashore, we would take care of them, and that if they sent another flag he would fire upon it. General Porter appeared to be very indignant at the threat contained in the message from the enemy.

Perhaps I ought to mention that Colonel Hopkins called out his regiment. Some companies came from the west side of the river, and many in small parties, so that the second day at night we had 600 or 800 men.

There was plenty of pork, flour, and whiskey, but nothing else, and we were without utensils for cooking. I well recollect, Esq. Scrantom as belonging to the same mess with me. We used to mix flour and cold water in little cakes and bake them on a common shovel. We toasted our pork on sticks over a fire and drank water for coffee. The thought never occurred to any of us belonging to Rochester that we could send home and get food.

It will be recalled that at this time the temperance reformation had not begun in Western New York. It was

considered quite unhealthy to drink Genesee water without whiskey; and the salt pork without vegetables made the men exceedingly thirsty. The result may readily be conceived. I saw a captain the third morning throw aside his sword and military coat and fight with one of his own men. It was a well-contested battle. The captain at length conquered his man, which was of course his undoubted right under military discipline. The third morning the fleet hoisted sail and stood down the lake, and we went to our homes.

Turner, though not a first hand account, gives more details of the inhabitants' preparation for this encounter in *The Phelps and Gorham Purchase*:

In addition to the force of Captain Stone, there was stationed at Charlotte a volunteer company, under command of Captain Frederick Rowe; the men, principally citizens of what are now the towns of Gates and Greece; and Colonel Atkinson's regiment, from what are now the north western towns of Monroe county, were either there previously or as soon as the exigency required.

The only fortification at Charlotte was a breastwork upon the bluff, near the old hotel, so located as to command the road leading up the bank from the wharf. It was composed of two tiers of ship timber with a space between the tiers filled with barn manure.²⁴

Brigadier General Peter B. Porter described the following to Governor Tompkins after the British had left;

Canandaigua, May 17, 1814

Sir:

I returned yesterday with Major Noon from the mouth of the Genesee River, where we were called on Friday last by information of the approach of the British fleet.

We saved the town and our credit by fairly outbullying John Bull. The discovery that we had troops without knowing their number, concealed in a ravine near the mouth of the river to cut off their retreat in case they entered it, together with the tone of the defiance with which we answered their demands (the last answer having been conveyed by our friend Major Noon), made them think it prudent to be off. We had, however, some excellent officers and good men well prepared, and in case the enemy had landed I had no doubt of a result creditable to the state.

When the enemy left Genesee they stood to the eastward and a cannonading has been heard in the direction of Pultneyville, whither I believe General Swift has proceeded with some volunteers and militia.

P. B. Porter, Brig. Gen.²⁵

Although written some 60 years later, and embellished with adult thoughts and philosophy, Edwin Scrantom's account of his journey on May 19, 1814, to see the camp at Charlotte, to see the War, enhances the picture of the situation. Edwin was eleven years of age at the time; he left his log home (now downtown Rochester) with two other boys who dropped out of the adventure along the way. He describes in detail the wilderness he passed through and the harrowing experiences he had along the seven miles to Charlotte. Some of his account tells of the army, the camp and the incidents at this time.

... a good many from the surrounding country had joined the gallant thirty-three, and to this band some hundreds of U.S. troops from Lewiston on the Niagara River had been added, so that the show was not altogether insignificant, though by some the whole were called, "a rag-a-muffin crew," whose officers could not be distinguished from the rank and file by anything they wore, nor by any knowledge they had of war and defense! The officers counseled with the men, and the men with the officers, as to the manner of defense, with an equality that knows no difference in the common danger.

It was in the midst of this alarm that this journey was undertaken, and one great reason for going was that my father was one of the gallant thirty-three who were at the mouth of the river and who would have "buckled on the armour" before they went if they had had any to buckle on.²⁶

His reminiscences include this description of the fortification that had been made at Deep Hollow.

Coming up to the spot we found an earthwork thrown up on the south bank behind which, not far apart, were two small cannon pointed through the opening, and so planted that while a company of men were crossing they could be mowed down like hail devastating a field of wheat. There were also several men stationed here to watch the enemy's

approach, so that when warned, their first work was to remove the plank from the bridge and then stand to their guns.

This fortification was called Fort Bender.

After a long description of all the experiences that had frightened him along the way, he continues:

I got through this slough, and reaching the top of the hill beyond, encountered army soldiers in uniform, filling the road. The camps at Charlotte had broken up; as I afterward learned, and the soldiers and citizens were returning. Great was the exultation, and loud and flippant the gasconade among the returning hosts, as they crowded along back.

. . . Nobody can tell my joy at this my first sight of Charlotte. The journey had been made through many difficulties, and these I supposed were now ended. Reaching to the top of the hill, I saw first a large building that seemed to me a splendid edifice; it was apparently new, and looked neat and spacious. It was a hotel, and kept by L. Spaulding. High up in the gable end was a handsome fan-light window, and above it in a circle was painted Mercantile or Commercial Hotel. . . . Along the top of the bluff running west from the Hotel, was an earthwork thrown up for defense, behind which our men sheltered themselves from the shells and other missiles which were repeatedly sent among them from the British fleet.

I had never before seen such a broad, extended surface of water as Lake Ontario, and I gazed out upon it and stood transfixed with wonder. The wind was high, and the white breakers were all along the shore like a selvedge of foam. Beyond this was the rolling motion of the waves, and way out, as I thought, a hundred miles, the surface of the water touched the sky. What, thought I — do I see the other shore, or what stops my vision? Gazing out upon the lake with this question unanswered, I was brought to consciousness by discordant sounds from the camping ground. A party of men were recklessly demolishing the tents made of boards that had been left standing by the army who had been on those grounds. It came back to my mind that I had not found my father, in whose company, and under whose protection, I purposed to return. A general disorder prevailed everywhere, and men in larger and smaller squads were wrangling and chasing one another, using profane epithets and

low slang, with that recklessness and abandon which always characterize the actions of men who neither know or care what they are doing. . . . And as I watched, I said to myself, my father is in no such company as this; and as I saw no man of whom I dared inquire after him: indeed, I made up my mind that he had left the ground, and that search for him would be useless.

The rest of his account tells of his race to get back to his home before nightfall. And he continues:

The gallant thirty-three had all arrived home also, and the mutual congratulations of fathers, mothers and children around all the village firesides, took the whole night to relate, and there never was such a night as that in Rochester . . .²⁷

May 19, 1814 was the last time the British fleet came near the Genesee River. The Treaty of Peace between the United States and Great Britain was signed at Ghent on Dec. 24, 1814 and ratified at Washington on Feb. 18, 1815. The War on Lake Ontario closed with the end of the sailing season and the fighting stopped in each place as the news of the Treaty was brought to it.



William Morgan

The Disappearance Of Captain William Morgan

First a sharp whistle broke the silence on the clear moonlit night of September 12th, 1826, then a man's voice screaming "Murder — Murder," shattered the silence of the sleepy village of Canandaigua.¹ The jailor's wife rushed to the window and saw two men hustling a third man into a yellow covered carriage which sped quickly down the cobblestone street. Little did she realize she had just witnessed an event that would rock the foundations of the state of New York, provide impetus for establishing a third political party and throw open to the people the opportunity to select political candidates rather than leaving the decision to a chosen few. The nation would long remember the disappearance of William Morgan.

William Morgan was a newcomer to the village of Batavia, not far from Canandaigua. He was born in Culpepper County, Virginia, in 1774. A stonemason by trade, he served under General Andrew Jackson at the battle of New Orleans, claiming to have received a commission as captain, though no official records substantiate the claim.² In 1819 he married Lucinda Pendleton, the sixteen-year-old daughter of the Reverend Joseph Pendleton, in Virginia.³ Small in stature with long blonde hair and bright blue eyes, she bore their first child in York (Toronto), Canada in 1823 where Morgan had invested in a local brewery.

Unfortunately, under somewhat suspicious circumstances, the brewery burned to the ground before any profits could be realized. The family moved to Rochester where he returned to stonemasonry.

In 1825 Morgan joined the Royal Arch Chapter of Freemasonry in LeRoy. Morgan, medium in stature with thinning brown hair and deep set eyes, enjoyed socializing with his brother masons, particularly at the local tavern, where it was not unusual for him to spend the night after participating in too many toasts to his fellow masons.⁴ During the birth of his second child he was spending the night at David Kingsley's tavern in Canandaigua and Kingsley kindly provided a clean shirt and cravat so he might be presentable when visiting his wife and newborn son.

Morgan's early experiences with the LeRoy Lodge were very favorable. He became a lecturer and delivered the Fellowcraft Degree with such enthusiasm that, when out of work (which was frequent), members of the chapter did not hesitate contributing to the support of his family. In 1825, Thomas McCully, a fellow mason hired Morgan to lay the foundation of a round house being built in Batavia.⁵ The family rented rooms in John Stewart's boarding house where they met fellow boarder, George Harris, an active member of the Lodge in Batavia. Shortly thereafter, Morgan petitioned to establish a Royal Arch Chapter in Batavia. Unfortunately, due to his drinking and somewhat quarrelsome nature when drinking, many of the local masons weren't too anxious to accept him into a newly established Lodge. When the petition was presented to the Rochester Grand Lodge, Morgan's name had been crossed out. Shortly thereafter, family support from the Masonic Charity was withdrawn; the reason given "Alcoholism."

Not all brothers felt Morgan should be denied membership. Samuel Greene, Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the town and, himself, a mason, years later recorded in his book: "It was a period of hard and general drinking and certainly it ill becomes Freemasons to charge men on this score for no body of men among us have done more from generation to generation to promote drinking habits than they."⁶

Morgan's outrage at this turn of events was no secret in the taverns throughout the valley. Upon learning that David Miller, editor and publisher of the *Batavia Republican Advocate*, was also a disillusioned mason and in the process of reprinting an early exposé on Freemasonry entitled *Jachin and Boaz*, Morgan visited

Miller at his shop. A deal was struck in which he would write an exposé and, with funds provided by two local businessmen, Russell Dyer and John Davids, Miller would publish the book.

In mid-May 1826 Morgan began writing *Illustrations of Masonry By One of the Fraternity Who Has Devoted Thirty Years to the Subject*. News of the proposed publication rocked the surrounding communities of LeRoy, Canandaigua and Geneseo. Even the Grand Lodge in Rochester became so concerned they sent Daniel John, a Canadian mason, to join the partnership and secretly report to them on the progress of the book. This was hardly the first time the secrets of freemasonry were revealed. As early as 1730 Samuel Prichard published *Masonry Dissected* in London, explaining in detail the three degrees.⁷ In all, there were five such publications during the eighteenth century.

The origin of Freemasonry is open to speculation. One theory traces the origins to the stonemasons who built King Solomon's temple, another claims sixteenth century Rosicrucians conceived the idea of such a secret society.⁸ William Vaughn in his book *The Anti-Masonic Party In the United States: 1826-1843*, claims: "... masonry developed from lodges created by stone masons who worked on the cathedrals, monasteries and castles of the middle ages. There were no guilds for stone masons so they formed lodges so they could have 'on-the-job' self discipline while removed from other forms of trade control."⁹

When cathedral building declined the latter half of the seventeenth century stonemasons opened the lodges to all trades and occupations. To distinguish between the two types of members, the actual stonemasons were "operative masons" and the tradesmen, "speculative masons." Modern Freemasonry began in England early in the eighteenth century at a time of political, social and economic upheaval. When King James II fled to France he established a lodge in order to accommodate his loyal supporters who followed him into exile. The French welcomed the opportunity for open political and social discussions within the lodge, discussions long denied by the ruling Jesuits who placed restraints upon all types of civil or religious discussions.

As the number of lodges increased throughout the continent those in authority grew uneasy. In 1753 Holland denounced all secret societies. Two years later Louis XV ordered all such societies be disbanded and Pope Clement XII threatened excommunication to any Catholics proclaiming to be masons. No similar restraints were forthcoming in Germany where, a young man by

the name of Adam Weishaupt would plant the seeds of modern communism, using freemasonry as his tool.¹⁰

Adam Weishaupt was born in 1732 in Bavaria and educated by Jesuit priests whose overbearing restrictions on any discussions of politics, religion or economics, created a strong resentment in the young man. In 1765, Weishaupt joined the Masonic Lodge Theodore of Good Counsel in Munich. Lodge Theodore, known for its eclectic Masonry, published discourses on economics and politics, professing "the great aim of Freemasonry is to promote the happiness of mankind by every means in our power."¹¹

In May, 1776, Weishaupt established the "Order of Illuminati" whose basic premise was "to unite by way of one common higher interest and by a lasting bond, men from all parts of the globe, from all social classes, from all religions, despite the diversity of their opinions and passions to make them love this common interest and bond to the point where, together or alone, they act as one individual."¹² Structure within the Illuminati extended from the Novice Degree to Magus Rex and all novices took the following oath: ". . . to make of the human race, without any distinction of nation, condition or profession one good and happy family." Should any member break his vow he would be "threatened with unavoidable vengeance, from which no potentate (could) defend him if he should ever betray the order."

Weishaupt's Illuminati spread quickly throughout Masonic Lodges in France and Germany. Lodge Theodore was frequently warned against breaking one of the solemn oaths made by every entrant into Freemasonry, that no subject of religion or politics be discussed at any lodge meeting. Still printed tracts from the Order of Illuminati found their way into many lodges throughout Europe. In 1783 the Bavarian Court of Inquiry ordered abolishment of the Illuminati and that all Weishaupt's papers be confiscated, only to discover Weishaupt had left the country and was now living in Switzerland, spreading his philosophy through "reading societies."

Freemasonry in the United States was little influenced by events taking place in European lodges, not until a slender little book written by Dr. John Robison in 1797, entitled *Roots of a Conspiracy Against All The Religions and Government of Europe Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Freemasonry, Illuminati and Reading Societies*.

Dr. John Robinson was secretary of the Royal Society in Edinburgh, Scotland and taught natural philosophy at the university. He travelled extensively and while studying in Belgium,

joined the Lodge at Liege. He was appointed Brother Orator at the Paris lodge and at one of the meetings was approached by a fellow mason who handed him a small black box and asked him to keep the box safe until his return. Ten years passed before Robison opened the box hoping to obtain some information as to the owner but, instead, found a complete transcript of the "Order of the Illuminati". Alarmed by the extent to which the organization planned to penetrate all aspects of society using freemasonry as its tool, Robison began writing his exposé.¹³

A year later, after reading Robison's book, the Reverend Jediah Morse in Dorchester, Massachusetts, delivered a series of sermons entitled "Dangers and Duties of Citizens of the United States," using the book as his text. In his sermons, he claimed the Illuminati was waging a diabolical plot to overthrow the government using freemasonry as its tool. Wary of any threat to the newly formed republic, Congress, in 1799, passed the Unlawful Societies Act, requiring all secret societies to submit lists of their members to the local Clerk of the Peace. The Act did little to deter the popularity of freemasonry which continued to thrive until William Morgan's disappearance in 1826.

Morgan began writing his exposé in Miller's print shop located in the most densely populated section of Batavia. It consisted of two rooms joined by a passage way called Printer's Alley. When news of the impending publication spread, special meetings of the local chapter were called to discuss ways of preventing the publication. When Governor DeWitt Clinton, former Grand Master of the New York Chapter, came to Batavia to confer with Eminent Commander, Judge Henry Brown, on August 10th, local chapters regarded the visit as a stamp of approval to their growing hostility towards Morgan. On August 11th, the LeRoy chapter appointed a vigilante committee "whose duty it shall be to act in cases of emergency, to guard the institution from imposition and prevent any innovations of the Body of Masonry, to correct irregularities and to amend as far as possible any infraction of the laws of our institution."¹⁴ Samuel Greene, who attended the meeting claimed he "never saw men so excited in my life . . . Committees were appointed to do this and that and everything went forward in kind of frenzy."¹⁵

Several days later the following announcement appeared in the Canandaigua newspaper: "If a man calling himself Wm. Morgan should intrude himself on the community, they should be on their guard particularly the Masonic Fraternity. Morgan was in this

village on May 1 and his conduct while here and elsewhere calls forth this notice. Any information regarding Morgan can be obtained by calling at the Masonic Hall in this village . . . Morgan is considered a swindler and a dangerous man. There are people in the village who would be happy to see this Capt. Morgan".¹⁶

Unnerved by all the publicity, Morgan demanded that a bond worth \$500,000 be drawn up by his partners. Though worthless, the bond gave impetus to Morgan to finish the book and on August 14th he applied for a copyright to his book entitled: *"Illustrations of Masonry: By One of the Fraternity Who Has Devoted Thirty Years to the Subject."*

Saturday, August 19th, Morgan was arrested for nonpayment of a debt to Nathan Follett.¹⁷ Since the sheriff was out of town, bail could not be accepted and he remained in jail until Monday. Miller, having received threats, purchased weapons which he stored at the shop and which deterred a group of masons who were prepared to confront Miller and demand the manuscript. On September 9th, Samuel Greene informed Miller that plans were being laid to set his shop on fire. Miller kept vigile all night and in the early morning hours noticed fire spewing from the side of the shop facing the river. Fortunately, a group of teamsters waiting to unload cargo came to the rescue and extinguished the fire. Miller immediately accused the masons who in turn offered \$100 reward if it could be proved masons were responsible.

On September 12th, Morgan was again arrested and charged with stealing a cravat and shirt from David Kingsley's tavern, the same shirt and cravat Kingsley had loaned Morgan to visit his wife and newborn child. He was hustled into a carriage which quickly raised the dust of the dirt road leading to Canandaigua. Miller and a group of supporters searched the village for the sheriff only to learn he was out of town and would be gone several days. Samuel Greene pleaded with the deputy sheriff to intercede but he refused claiming his duty was to remain in Batavia during the sheriff's absence.

In Canandaigua, the magistrate dismissed the charges for lack of evidence but immediately rearrested Morgan on charges of nonpayment of a debt of \$2.68 owed to an innkeeper in Batavia. Nonpayment of any debt was punishable by imprisonment, so Morgan remained in jail. Later the same evening, Nicholas Cheesboro, Master of the Canandaigua Lodge and Loton Lawson, also a mason, appeared at the jail, paid the fine and hurried Morgan into a yellow carriage driven by Colonel Samuel Sawyer,

a LeRoy mason. According to Samuel Greene who testified at the trial: "Morgan's abductors were respectable men . . . They were at the time holding the most important offices in church and state . . . It was perfectly apparent to me who knew the inside working of things, that what was going on in Batavia was no mad freak of low and drunken fellows."¹⁸

Early the following morning Lucinda Morgan visited the deputy sheriff and offered to release his papers in return for his freedom. He claimed it was not within his power but offered to take her to Canandaigua to visit her husband, being totally unaware of the disappearance. Upon their return Thomas McCully, Master of Batavia lodge, informed her she and the children would be provided for by the Masonic Charity Fund, adding, "Who shall say that Masonry is not a kind and benevolent institution after this."¹⁹ Lucinda vehemently refused and graciously accepted the help extended from fellow tenants at the boarding house, including George Harris, himself a disenchanted mason who warned Morgan there might be violence should he write an exposé.

Morgan's disappearance prompted public outrage in all the surrounding communities, each establishing ad hoc committees to investigate Morgan's whereabouts. The committee in LeRoy sent Timothy Fitch to obtain affidavits from anyone who might have seen him being taken from jail.²⁰ A group of clergy in Elba, New York, resolved not to support any mason running for town, county or state office. Two weeks after the disappearance, Governor Clinton offered a reward of \$2,000 for the apprehension of those involved in the disappearance and appointed a grand jury to investigate.

From October 1826 to June 1831, over twenty grand juries were held in five counties at which fifty-four masons were indicted, thirty-nine brought to trial with ten convictions ranging from thirty days to twenty-eight months in jail, the remaining preferring to pay the \$25 fine for refusing to testify. Cheesboro, Lowton and Sawyer admitted to the kidnapping but denied any further knowledge of his whereabouts once they delivered him to a group of masons in Lewiston. All three received light sentences since kidnapping was then classified as a misdemeanor.

At the grand jury hearings it was revealed that Morgan was taken to the Blockhouse at Fort Niagara situated at the mouth of the Niagara River and Lake Ontario. The original plan was to transport him across the river to Canada where a group of

Canadian masons agreed to provide land and \$500 if he promised never to return to the United States nor tell of his whereabouts except to his wife and children who would join him at a later date.²¹ Unfortunately, at the last minute, the Canadians reneged so Morgan remained in the blockhouse. It is unclear what occurred during the next six days.

On the morning of September 26th, 1826, Elisha Adams, caretaker of the fort, went to the blockhouse and called to Morgan but received no answer. Wary of entering alone, he summoned Colonel Jewett. Jewett, accompanied by two assistants, entered the cell and found it empty except for several empty whiskey bottles. They immediately notified Lewiston authorities of the disappearance. The lake and river were dragged but nothing was found. In October 1827, a badly decomposed body washed ashore at Oak Orchard Creek which flows into Lake Ontario. After inspecting the body, the coroner ordered it be buried along the side of the creek.²²

When news of the unclaimed body reached Batavia, David Miller, Thurlow Weed, editor of the *Rochester Telegraph*, a strong anti-masonic newspaper and Lucinda Morgan journeyed to Oak Orchard Creek and demanded the body be exhumed. All three declared it to be the body of William Morgan. Never one to miss an opportunity to further the cause of anti-masonry, Weed arranged for the funeral procession, led by the lovely widow, to travel slowly through all the villages en route to Batavia where a large crowd gathered for the burial.²³

Less than two months later, Mrs. Timothy Munroe, a Canadian, believing the body to be that of her missing husband, described in detail to the authorities the clothing he was wearing while fishing with his son on Lake Ontario. They declared the body to be that of Timothy Munroe, a new headstone was erected on the grave.

Morgan's book was published in December, 1826, and sold for one dollar. David Miller never testified at the hearings which led some to believe he knew what actually happened to Morgan, but feared the discovery of his whereabouts would detract from the sale of the book. The book sold rapidly but provided no more detail of the secrets of freemasonry than those previously published. Two months after publication, a convention of former masons, known as the "Renouncers," was held in LeRoy where many more masonic secrets were revealed. Proceedings of the

convention were printed and distributed throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Vermont. In Rhode Island the legislature resolved that "The Masons owe it to the community, to themselves and (to) sound principles to discontinue the Masonic Institution."²⁴ Many of the lodges in the state disbanded, sold all tangible property and divided the assets among the members. A group of clergy in Lennox, New York, drew up "An Appeal to Christian Ministers in Connection with Speculative Free Masonry," reminding all clergy of their "obligation to uphold the teachings of the gospel and bind all mankind into brotherhood."²⁵

The first anti-masonic political convention was held March 6, 1828 in LeRoy. Unfortunately their first choice for a candidate for governor was Francis Granger who had already accepted the Republican nomination for Lt. Governor; so they chose Solomon Southwick, whose Albany newspaper was on the brink of bankruptcy. Southwick grasped the opportunity to further his prestige and gain the power that the nomination would provide. The Jacksonian democrats, wholly aware of Southwick's shortcomings were delighted. Four senate seats and seventeen assembly seats were won by the newly established party.

A second convention was held in Albany in February, 1830. The members publicly charged the Grand Masonic Chapter of New York with giving financial aid to the Morgan conspirators and proposed a special committee be established to investigate. The attorney general filed a "Quo warrant" requiring proof of the charges. Since only masons could provide the proof, the whole endeavor appeared futile, except that it did provide the impetus needed to call the national convention held in September, 1830, in Philadelphia. For the first time in American history a third major party selected a candidate to run for the presidency. The Anti-Masonic Party chose William Wirt as their leader. Though they only won a few seats in New England, they drew sufficient votes away from Henry Clay which enabled Andrew Jackson to win re-election. Four years later another precedent was set when at their convention, held in Philadelphia, the nomination of a candidate was thrown open to all the representatives rather than to a selected few which had previously been the practice. By this time much of their support had joined the newly formed ultra conservative Whig party.

It is not difficult to understand why the Anti-Masonic Party did not gain a foothold in American politics. Throughout the two

campaigns their goals never reached beyond anti-masonic sentiments; their slogan remained "Where is Morgan" and they failed to address matters of state such as passage of the tariff bill or the federal banking policies under Jackson's administration. Though they failed at the ballot box they did fulfill their objective in that freemasonry did not regain popularity until the onset of the Civil War.

What actually happened to William Morgan never fully came to light. Theories abounded. James Ganson, one of those tried, claimed: "He is not dead, but he is put where he will stay put until God Almighty calls him home."²⁶ Thurlow Weed, in his death bed testimony wrote "five of the brothers . . . drove to the Fort, took Morgan to the middle of the river, fastened weights on him and cast him overboard. Morgan grasped the side of the boat but was forced under the water." The most bizarre rumor was that sailors returning from the Middle East saw him in Smyrna, Turkey where he had renounced Christianity, had become a Moslem and acquired a large harem.²⁸ The most plausible theory revealed at the hearings was that Morgan was transported to Canada, that the Canadian masons refused to take him and he was put under the care of a tribe of Tonawanda Indians where he remained until his death three years later.

Supporting the theory of Morgan's death on the Indian Reservation is the fact that Lucinda Morgan, a beautiful, vibrant, young mother of two small children and daughter of a Methodist minister waited three years before marrying George Harris, a widower, whose children she had been caring for since the disappearance. They were married in November, 1829. Five years later they moved to Terre Haute, Indiana, where Joseph Smith, the leader of the Mormons, was in the process of establishing a Mormon community. Upon Smith's return from Ohio, he and his first wife resided with the Harris's while making plans to establish the Mormon community at Nauvoo, Illinois. It is unclear whether Harris died or whether he and Lucinda divorced, but according to the Mormon Book of Records Lucinda Morgan Harris became the third wife of Joseph Smith.²⁹

Freemasonry never regained its popularity prior to Morgan's disappearance. It did enjoy a degree of acceptability during the Civil War but a segment of society did not forget William Morgan. In 1880, the National Christian Association, established during the height of the Morgan hearings, began a fund drive to build a monument to Morgan.³⁰ Over 2,000 contributions were collected

and in 1882, a forty foot granite monument was erected in the cemetery in Batavia, New York. The south side of the monument is engraved with biographical details of Morgan's life, and the west side contains the following quote from his book:

"The bane of our civil Institutions is to be found in
Masonry, Already Powerful, and daily becoming
More so ** I owe to my Country an Exposure of Its
Dangers."

Copy edited by Hans Munsch.

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Enterprise	44 keel 49 overall 13 breadth value L 259	
	37 tons, sloop, rigging value	259
	re-named Drummond	
Lady Washington	_____	L 500
sloop, employed with the army (now at the head of the lake)		
re-named Consort , changed into a gunboat		
Value sail and mast		L 151
Batteaux		L 15
Durham boats		L 30
		L 1213 (sic)

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Back Cover: The title page of the first Rochester-printed edition of Morgan's book.

ILLUSTRATIONS
OF
MASONRY,

BY
ONE OF THE FRATERNITY.

WHO HAS DEVOTED THIRTY YEARS TO THE SUBJECT.

*"God said, let there be Light,
And there was light."*

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,
WILLIAM MORGAN.

1827.

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