Armstrong State College

Levi Sheftall D'Lyon

A Preliminary Biography

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By

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Levi Sheftall D'Lyon

Levi Sheftall D'Lyon (b. Oct. 23, 1784-Savannah, d. Aug. 23, 1854-Savannah). A descendant of one of the 14 original Jewish families that settled in Savannah in 1733. A prominent attorney in Savannah from 1800 until his death, a member of the Georgia Legislature from 1810-22, and a city alderman: 1815-17, 1819-22, & 1827-19. He was a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas from 1830-41 and a City Court Judge from 1841-43. In the Georgia Hussars he attained the rank of colonel. D'Lyon was a lifelong Democratic Party activist. He married Leodora Delamotta in 1813, & then, after her death in childbirth, her sister Rebecca in 1820. He was the father of five children, including Leonorean D'Lyon, a professor of Languages, James W. D'Lyon, a Westpoint graduate, and Leonora Harby Randall, a Hebrew scholar.
I. Introduction

Levi Sheftall D'Lyon is a man who seems destined for obscurity. While his contributions to the city of Savannah and to Georgia are significant, after this brief moment of revitalization, they will again fade back into the mists of time. Although Levi D'Lyon faithfully served Savannah as an alderman for seven administrations and sat on the benches of the City Court and the Court of Common Pleas, there is no known portrait or photograph of him. While tracking his political and professional life proved uncomplicated, the documentation about his personal life contained gaps and errors. Perhaps some of the difficulty lay in the many variations on the spelling of D'Lyon. His handwritten will and two extant letters in the Georgia Historical Society reveal that he spelled his name “D'Iyon,” although almost all printed documentation about him and his family use the spelling “D'lyon.” Levi Sheftall D'Lyon is not even buried in the proper plot in the Laurel Grove Cemetery records. His grave is located next to his assigned plot.

'Glenda Anderson, the City of Savannah librarian, and her staff were very generous with their time in searching the City Hall Archives for a picture of Judge D' Lyon. Unfortunately, their efforts were unsuccessful.

'Writers Project (WPA) General Index to Keeper's Record Books, 1657-1939, Laurel Grove Cemetery vol. 1 (A-F) (Savannah: Works Progress Administration, Project # 485-311-146, 1939) Handwritten edition, no page numbers. Levi D'Lyon's plot is listed as 1401. A visit to Laurel Grove Cemetery on April 30, 1952, revealed that he is actually buried in the next plot, number 1402.
II. Family Background

Levi Sheftall D'Lyon was a member of a notable Savannah Jewish family. The history of the D'Lyon family in America is linked with that of Savannah Jewry from its beginning.

Until the years succeeding the Revolution, the Jewish history of Savannah was practically confined to the records of the families of Sheftall, Minis, and D'Lyon.

Levi Sheftall D'Lyon was the great-grandson of Abraham D'Lyon, one of the thirty-four original Jewish settlers of Savannah who arrived shortly after Oglethorpe.

On July 11, 1733, a tiny vessel rode the harbor of Georgia's first and then infant town of Savannah. Weary from their lengthy trip, they landed on the soil of Georgia. Abraham D'Lyon, fleeing the Portuguese Inquisition, Abraham D'Lyon was a vintner. His wife, Esther Nunez, and Rebecca, his oldest child, arrived later that year via London. Abraham D'Lyon attempted to begin viticulture in coastal Georgia, but was unsuccessful due to a lack of financial support from the Trustees for his endeavor.

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"Ibid., 168-9."


It is likely that the D’Lyons were the first Jewish family in Savannah to lose a loved one.

No special burial ground was at first provided by the Jewish settlers. One of the family of Delyon must have been among the first stricken, because a donor of that name dedicated a small tract of land for a family burial ground, and interments were made therein. This became known as the ‘Delyon Cemetery’... It is a local tradition that a Jew other than this particular family died, application was made for the use of the Delyon Cemetery and permission was refused.  

James Oglethorpe allocated land for a public Hebrew cemetery after this incident, according to tradition.  

Levi D’ Lyon’s grandfather, Isaac, was the fourth child of Abraham D’ Lyon and Esther Muner. Isaac D’ Lyon married Kinah Tobias of Charleston in September 1762. Their fourth child, Abraham D’ Lyon, was the father of Levi D’ Lyon.  

Abraham D’ Lyon married Sarah Sheftall on June 1, 1765 in Savannah. Levi Sheftall D’ Lyon is the fourth of this couple’s ten children and is named after his maternal grandfather.  

Like his D’ Lyon grandson and namesake, Levi Sheftall had also married into the Delamotta family. His bride was Rebecca Delamotta, the great-aunt of Levi D’ Lyon’s two wives, Leonora and Rebecca.  


Ibid., 172.

*Stern, Jewish Families, 57.


*Stern, Jewish Families, 56.
Early Life in Savannah

Levi Sheftall D’Lyon was born in Savannah on October 17, 1811.\textsuperscript{13} No records were discovered regarding his childhood or his education.\textsuperscript{14} In the spring of 1809, at the age of nineteen, Levi was admitted to the Bar in the Superior Court of Chatham County.\textsuperscript{15} Whether he practiced law alone or with a partner during his earliest years as an attorney is unknown. However, by July 4, 1812, he was in a law practice with Jacob DeLamotta, his brother-in-law and distant cousin.\textsuperscript{16} On that date, the law office of DeLamotta and D’Lyon was moved to "the room formerly occupied as the Georgian [newspaper] office over Messrs. Candry and Dulaure's confectionery store."\textsuperscript{17}

On June 29, 1829, Levi published a lengthy article in the Republican and Savannah Evening Gazette newspaper in which he proposed to publish written Superior Court decisions.

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\textsuperscript{13}Stern, Jewish Families, 17.
\textsuperscript{14} Levi D’Lyon oldest son, Leonorean, graduated from Yale University "by special act" at the age of sixteen, according to Henry Cohen, "The Jews in Texas," Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, vol. IV (1896), 15. It is likely that Levi may have sent his son to his own alma mater, Yale was a popular institution with Georgia families in the post-Revolutionary days. Sheftall (c.f. interview, May 21, 1991) also suggested that Levi may have studied law under Judge Litchfield at his private school.
\textsuperscript{15}The Savannah Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger (Savannah, Georgia) May 2, 1829, p. 3, c. 3.
\textsuperscript{16}Stern, Jewish Families, 56, and Sheftall (c.f. interview, May 21, 1991).
\textsuperscript{17}The Savannah Museum, (Savannah, Georgia) March 18, 1833, p. 1, c. 2.
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or a private basis to interested subscribers." Apparently, this idea did not enjoy much popularity, as no documentation has been located indicating that Levi pursued it further.

The year of 1816 was a watershed for Levi D'Lyon. He began what was to become an all-consuming passion for politics with his appointment to fill one of the alderman seats left vacant by the resignations of six of the fourteen aldermen on the City Council of Savannah. His term of office began on April 24, 1816, with the full term of office running from September 11, 1815 to September 9, 1816. The first of Levi's many real-estate transactions occurred on April 1, 1816, when he bought a house at 13 (new numbering) east York street, between Brayton and Bull streets (Eastern half of Lot 3, Percival Ward). Levi was to live in this three-story brick house for the rest of his life. In July of 1816, Levi purchased his first Negro slave, a male by the

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18The Savannah Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger, (Savannah, Georgia) June 23, 1809, p. 2, c. 1.


20Chatham County Superior Court, (Savannah, Georgia) Deed Book 26, Folio 271.

21See Appendix B, Cadastral Survey for the Eastern half of Lot 3, Percival Ward. The Cadastral Survey prepared in 1937 describes a 3-story brick house in poor condition. It is a "leap of faith" on the author's part that this is a description of the D'Lyon residence, based upon the longevity of brick buildings and the age implied by its poor condition.
case of Ansell.** From September 8, 1818 until September 9, 1819, Levi served in another administration of the Savannah City Council as an alderman.**

Levi D'Lyon married seventeen year old Leonora DeLaMotta in Charleston, South Carolina on March 18, 1818.*** It is probable that the marriage was an arranged one, as this was a common Jewish custom at the time.*** The marriage settlement between Leonora and Levi brought him another house on Wight Square, along with two slaves.*** Unfortunately, the deed fails to indicate the lot number or street address of this property. The marriage was tragically brief. Leonora died of childbed fever on January 29, 1819, eight days after giving birth to their son, Leonorean.*** She is buried in the

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**Chatham County Superior Court, (Savannah, Georgia) Deed Book 19, Folio 113.

***Gamble, History of Savannah, 52.

***H. Levy, Savannah's Old Jewish Community Cemeteries, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1993) 41. See also The Charleston City Gazette (Charleston, South Carolina) March 22, 1818. Levy points out in the footnote on page 99 that Stern in First Families (51) has the date listed erroneously as March 1, 1818.

**Rabbi Arnold M. Belzer, interview by author, April 21, 1992. Congregation Mickve Israel, Savannah, Georgia.

***Chatham County Superior Court, (Savannah, Georgia) Deed Book 29, Folio 162.

***Chatham County (Georgia) Vital Records, Death Certificate of Leonora DeLaMotta D'Lyon. H. H. Levy points out in Savannah's Cemeteries, 41, that the Death Certificate date of January 29, 1819 cannot be correct as Leonorean was born on the next day (c.f. Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, February 1, 1819, p.2 c.3, indicates a date of January 30, 1819.)
After the funeral, Levi traveled to Charleston, where his wife’s parents lived, and returned to Savannah on February 25, 1819. It is not known if Levi ran for alderman in 1816 and was defeated or if the tumultuous events in his personal life forced him to suspend his political career temporarily. By August of 1819, Levi D’Ilyon revitalized his political career and made a bid for reelection to the office of city alderman. He was reelected one of fourteen aldermen on September 9, 1819 with 375 votes. In late October of 1819, Levi was appointed one of the managers of the Chatham Dispensary by the Savannah City Council. The Chatham Dispensary was a free medical clinic and pharmacy for the poor and was located at the apothecary shop of Dr. Frederick Kreager in Old Market Square. As Secretary of the Chatham Dispensary, 45.

Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, February 15, 1819, p. 3 c.2.

Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, August 7, 1819, p. 2 c.4.  

Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, September 9, 1819, p. 3 c.4.

Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, October 29, 1819, p. 3 c.2.

Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, July 20, 1820, p. 3 c.2.  

Georgian, July 15, 1820, p. 3 c.4.  

July 25, 1820, p. 3 c.4.  

July 27, 1820, p. 1 c.3.  

August 1, 1820, p. 2 c.5.  

September 23, 1820, p. 1 o.1.

dispensary, Levi D'Lyon issued many advertisements in the local newspaper. During 1819, his political activism took on another aspect with his joining a local militia, the Georgia Hussars as a second corporal. 

Savannah experienced a tremendous conflagration in January of 1820 when much of downtown was burned. Levi D'Lyon was listed in the newspaper as having lost personal property, but not his residence. His efforts on behalf of the Chatham Dispensary kept him busy in the spring of 1820, especially during the yellow fever epidemic that struck Savannah in 1820. At the Independence Day dinner of the Georgia Hussars, Levi D'Lyon made a political speech in praise of Andrew Jackson. Throughout the years, he would make many more impassioned political speeches and toasts on a host of subjects.

On August 26, 1920, seventeen months after the death of his first wife, Levi D'Lyon returned to Charleston and married her older sister, Rebecca. It was a traditional

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\[\text{Georgian, July 25, 1820, p.1 c.l.}\]

\[\text{Alexander H. Duncan, Officers and Members of the Georgia Hussars, (Savannah Morning News, 1895) 116.}\]

\[\text{Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, January 15, 1820, p.2 c.3.}\]

\[\text{Griffin, "Medical Assistance." 485.}\]

\[\text{Georgian, July 7, 1820, p.3 c.1.}\]

\[\text{Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, August 29, 1820, p.3 c.1.}\]

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jewish practice at this time for a widowed spouse to marry another sibling, whether or not the first marriage had been arranged." An innocuous but charming announcement in the Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette newspaper of September 2, 1820 noted that Mr. Levi D'Lyon returned from Charleston aboard the schooner Industry, "with lady."* The newlyweds settled into the house on York Street, with Rebecca taking over the care of her sister's infant son.*

By the time of the 1820 census, the D'Lyon house had grown considerably. Besides Levi, Rebecca, and the baby, Leonora, there was an additional white male between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six and a white female between the ages of twenty-six and forty-five.** Their identities are not known. There were also nine slaves: three males and six females.*** The only Chatham County Superior Court slave deed in Levi's name prior to this was for the male, Ansell, purchased in 1816, and two others that were his as part of Leonora's marriage settlement. The other six were either bought elsewhere, were already in Levi's possession, or were

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*"Rabbi Arnold M. Hester, interview by author, May 18, 1992, Congregation Mickve Israel, Savannah, Georgia.

**Ibid., September 2, 1820, p. 3 c.2.

***Levy, Savannah Cemeteries, 44-45.

****Georgia Census of 1820 (Chatham County) p.1.

**Ibid.
children of the other slaves. Four are listed as children under the age of fourteen.**

The political career of Levi continued with his reelection as an alderman with 431 votes on September 4, 1820.*** With the exception of the Chatham Dispensary, he was not particularly active on many of the various City Council committees. He was on the committee for Public Docks and the Fire and Bucket committee.** On November 27, 1820 Levi presented bills before the City Council to create a legionary corps and an organization for river pilots in Savannah.*** Levi also voted to stop support payments to the city's paupers.**

Subsequent events indicate that the office of city alderman was more than a stepping stone in the political career of Levi D'Lyon. However, just eight days after his election as alderman, the Chatham County Democratic Committee chose Levi D'Lyon as their candidate for the Georgia Legislature, and a somewhat lengthy (by the standards of the time) election campaign began.*** Seven months later, Levi

**Ibid. 1.

***Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, September 7, 1820, p.3 c.1.

****Georgian, September 14, 1820, p.3 c.1.

*****Daily Georgian, November 27, 1820, p.4 c.3.

******Ibid., March 16, 1821, p.3 c.5.

*******Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, September 12, 1820, p.2, c.5.
p'lyon was elected as a Chatham County Representative to the Georgia Legislature in Milledgeville, the state capital at that time.**

The Georgia Legislature during Levi D'lyon's term of office was faced with the effects of an immigration explosion. Georgia was growing rapidly by the 1820's and the white population had succeeded in displacing the Creek Indians from their tribal lands. Levi D'lyon voted to reimburse the Creeks for the confiscation of their lands.***

In modern times, a representative to the Georgia legislature has responsibilities that preclude the holding of other offices. However, such was not the case in the 1820's and Levi D'lyon began his reelection bid for City of Savannah alderman in August of 1821.** He succeeded in winning another term on September 7, 1821 with 371 votes.*** Obviously, local politics played as important a role in Levi's life as those at the state level.

On January 27, 1821, Levi received a gift of his first large tract of rural land in Irwin County (Flat 3, District 7) from the grandfather of his wife, Jacob Canter. He paid

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**Georgia, May 28, 1821, p. 2, c. 1.

***Ibid., August 14, 1821, p. 3, c. 4.

"Ibid., August 28, 1821, p. 3, c. 4.

**Ibid., September 6, 1821, p. 3, c. 1.
Jacob Cantor fifteen dollars at the closing for this tract of
land of unspecified size.** Much of Levi's law practice
involved the handling of business in guardianships for free
people of color. He purchased two-thirds of two lots 16 and
11 of Oglethorpe Ward for Catherine Mills in this capacity on
April 10, 1822.*** The Georgian newspaper of December 24, 1821
listed Levi D'Lyon as the winner of lot 51 in the Georgia
Land Lottery.**** Two slave transactions occurred in 1823 when
Levi D'Lyon sold a male slave named Daniel to Henry L.
Grovenstine for the sum of one hundred dollars, and later,
a sale of six slaves to T. S. Morel for nineteen hundred
dollars.***** After briefly resigning his membership in the
Georgia Hussars on February 22, 1822 at the rank of first
corporal, Levi was reinstated and promoted to third sergeant
in 1823.****** Within the same year, he was promoted three more
times, from third to second sergeant and on to first
sergeant, and finally achieving the rank of cornet.******

**Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia)
Deed Book 2K, Folio 254.

***Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia)
Deed Book 2L, Folio 101.


*****Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia)
Deed Book 2M, Folio 82.

******Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia)
Deed Book 2M, Folio 203.

******Duncan, Georgia Hussars, 194-114.

****** Ibid., 99-104.
As always, politics continued in the forefront of Levi D’Lyon’s life. Throughout August of 1822, Levi campaigned vigorously for reelection to the Georgia Legislature as a Chatham County representative. He was staunchly supported by a number of citizen’s groups, including one group who called themselves the “Radicals.”** At this same time, Levi was also running for another term as a City of Savannah alderman. It was surely a severe blow to his political aspirations when Levi lost his reelection bid for City alderman on Monday, September 3, 1822.***

The intensity of Levi’s political passion can be judged by a “letter to the public” he wrote, which appeared on September 14, 1822 in the Savannah Museum newspaper. In what must have been a highly explosive family situation, Levi published a refutation of political implications made by his brother. The brother involved was not mentioned by name. At a political meeting held at the shop of a Mr. Papote, Levi D’Lyon’s brother posted his name as supporting the election of Horaceal Sheftall, a cousin and professional rival, who was also running for the Georgia Legislature. Levi wrote in his letter that this was “entirely without my knowledge and certainly at variance with my wishes... We were opposed upon these points and all others for the last twelve years.”

**Savannah Museum. August 10, 1822. p.3 cl.
***Ibid., September 3, 1822. p.3 cl.
As for his brother, an obviously incensed Levi D'Lyce wrote, "he acts for himself and I am not accountable for what he does."** Whether this incident was a deciding factor or not, the people of Chatham County rejected Levi D'Lyce in his Georgia Legislature reelection bid in early October.* This was the end of state level politics for Levi. In the summer of 1813, Levi D'Lyce unsuccessfully attempted to regain a seat on the Savannah City Council as an alderman.*

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*Ibid., September 24, 1813, p. 3, c. 1.
**Ibid., October 16, 1813, p. 2, c. 1.
***Ibid., July 12, 1813, p. 3, c. 2.
The Middle Years

Rebecca Delamotta D'Lyon gave birth to her first child, son, Rebecca D'Lyon on January 24, 1824. Over the next five years, she was to give birth to three more sons: Isaac, born between November of 1824 and February of 1825; James Wayne, born December 18, 1826; and finally Clarence Graham, born on February 7, 1828. The latter years of the 1820's saw Levi once again in the political arena. He served two more terms as a City of Savannah alderman from September 9, 1827 until September 14, 1829. He also remained active in the Georgia Hussars until January of 1827. 

The Delamotta girls may have been delicate by nature or perhaps giving birth to so many children in such a short time took its toll on Rebecca, for she died ten days after the birth of Clarence, at the age of thirty. She was buried alongside her sister in the Old Hebrew Cemetery.

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"Tombstone of James W. D'Lyon, Lot 1422, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia.

"Tombstone of Clarence A. D'Lyon, Lot 1422, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia.

Gamble, History of Savannah, 130.

Duncan, Georgia Hussars, 46.

"Chatham County Vital Records, Death Certificate of Rebecca D'Lyon, February 7, 1829 (c.f. Levy, Savannah Cemeteries, 45).

"Levy, Savannah Cemeteries, 45 (c.f. personal visit to the Old Hebrew Cemetery, April 24, 1992).
Rebecca's death must have completely disheartened Levi; he never married again.

Levi D'lyon was never active in Congregation Mickwe Israel, although he was a member at least in name. Even at the time of his wife's death, when many other men would have sought solace in their religion, his absence from any temple records during this period speaks volumes about his distance from the religious life of the Jewish community in Savannah.**

A male slave named Charles was added to the D'lyon household in May of 1815, for whom Levi paid the sum of four hundred fifty dollars.*** One year later, D'lyon continued his slaving activities with the purchase of five slaves: Phoebe and her children, Lizzie, Sally, Peter, and Henry, for the sum of seven hundred fifty dollars.** The size of the household probably reached a peak in 1830, a year after the death of Rebecca. According to the 1830 census, the household had six white occupants, Levi and the five children, and twenty-three slaves.***

**Rubin, Third to None, 104 (Levi D'lyon is only mentioned as being a congregation member active in local government).

***Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia) Deed Book 2F, Folio 187.

**Ibid., Deed Book 2N, Folio 518.

***Georgia Census of 1830 (Chatham County) p. 24, entry 2K3.
About this time, a free woman of color came to Levi's rescue. Estelle Savage took over the management of the burgeoning D'Lyon household, and its five littlest occupants became her greatest mission. Obviously, she was a very special woman to Levi D'Lyon.** In his will, he spoke of Estelle Savage in the fondest terms and thanked her for her "care, attention, and kindness" to his infant children.***

The late 1820's and early 1830's witnessed the substantial growth of both Levi's law practice and personal assets. He ventured into the real estate market. In 1827, he sold a brick tenement (Lot 13, Jackson Ward) to his mother-in-law, Sarah Delamotta.** He bought and sold various properties on York Street in the immediate vicinity of his home on Wright Square.*** One piece of real estate on York Street (Lot 25, Liberty Ward) was bought from his father and sold, bought back, and sold through mortgages several times.

**"Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia) Deed Book J6, Folio 149."
****"Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia) Deed Book 20, Folio 141.

**"This, Deed Book 3W, Folio 16."
***"Deed Book 3R, Folio 284."
****"Deed Book 3F, Folio 122."
*****"Deed Book 3D, Folio 45."
******"Deed Book 3V, Folio 108."
*******"Deed Book 3W, Folio 201."
always at a substantial profit to Levi. On April 4, 1828, Levi purchased four slaves and the eastern half of Lot 26, Yamarraw Ward from his brother, Isaac. Slave transactions were also a source of income for Levi D'Lyon. Nancy, a forty-two year old female slave, was sold for three hundred dollars in November of 1827. Sally, another female, sold for four hundred dollars in 1830. He sold off the four children of his slave Phoebe in 1830, making a three hundred dollar profit over his original purchase price for all five slaves and keeping Phoebe in the bargain. The year 1835 saw four female slaves sold in two transactions for a total price of sixteen hundred dollars.

On March 1, 1832 Levi sold fifty-seven acres in two plots to prominent Savannahian, Henry McAlpin. This property was part of a large tract of land owned by Levi on Augusta Road that was bordered by McAlpin's land to the north.

*This, Deed Book 48, Folio 156.
" Deed Book 50, Folio 54.
" Deed Book 69, Folio 147.
" Deed Book 70, Folio 233.
" Deed Book 71, Folio 51.

**Ibid., Deed Book 20, Folio 479.

***Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia)
Deed Book 70, Folio 368.

**Ibid., Deed Book 79, Folio 238.

**Ibid., Deed Book 74, Folio 331.

**Ibid., Deed Book 27, Folio 210.
" Deed Book 27, Folio 282.

**Ibid., Deed Book 26, Folio 56.
and east. Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church bought his lot on Oglethorpe Square for seven hundred dollars on August 5, 1824. **

His passion for political life was mollified by Levi's activist in the Chatham County Democratic Party. His ardent belief in Liberty (but not for his slaves) and his speaking ability made him a popular guest at Democratic functions. His toasting of the patriots of Ireland at an Irish Democratic dinner attests to his popularity and political ideals. *** His zeal for Liberty turned Levi's attention to the fight for Texas Independence from Mexico. As chairman of the Texas sympathizers in Savannah, Levi arranged for a fund drive to assist the cause on September 2, 1835. **

The idea of a judgeship for Levi D'Lyon was first brought to light in November of 1836, when he received four votes in the Georgia Legislature for the bench of the Superior Court, Eastern District. What made this incident remarkable, was the fact that Levi D'Lyon was not a candidate. * In an election conducted in November of 1837, Levi was a candidate for the bench of the Court of Common

**Tbid., Deed Book 27, Folio 17.

***Georgian, March 19, 1831, p. 3, c. 4.


Eneas. Oyez and Terner. He lost to John C. Nicol.**

But it seemed that fate had determined that some day, Levi D’Lyon was destined to become a judge.

Perhaps banking was a field for which Levi D’Lyon was also destined. In February of 1836, his first major loan was negotiated, when he loaned Ebenezer Jencks the sum of $7,627.00. Repayment was to be in two equal payments one year apart.* In the rest of his life, Levi would make substantial profits loaning money against real estate.*

The period of 1836 to 1840 was probably the best time of Levi D’Lyon’s life since the tragic death of his second wife, Rebecca. His law practice, real estate and banking ventures were all highly successful. A register of the Free Persons of Color in Savannah, published in the Georgian on August 21, 1838 listed Levi as the guardian of fifteen different people and their families.** In April of 1838, Levi was selected to represent Chatham County at the state

**Daily Georgian, November 15, 1837, p. 2, c. 2.

**Charites County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia) Deed Book 20, Folio 53.

  Deed Book 20, Folio 418.
  Deed Book 19, Folio 172.
  Deed Book 18, Folio 213.
  Deed Book 17, Folio 112.
  Deed Book 16, Folio 234.
  Deed Book 15, Folio 496.
  Deed Book 14, Folio 69.
  Deed Book 13, Folio 472.
  Deed Book 12, Folio 484.
  Deed Book 11, Folio 302.

**Daily Georgian, August 21, 1838, p. 4, c. 2-6.
Democratic Convention. ** Always the dynamic speaker, Levi was asked to read the Declaration of Independence at the Fourth of July festivities in Savannah. ***

Without a doubt, the highlight of Levi Sheftall D'Lyons's long life took place in November of 1838. Levi was elected by the Georgia Legislature to the bench of the Court of Common Pleas, Oyer and Terminer. He beat his arch rival, Mordecai Sheftall, by a margin of nineteen votes. ***

In 1840, the D'Lyons household was still probably quite large. Unfortunately, it was not listed in the 1840 census. The children would still have been at home, with the possible exception of Leonore, who was twenty-one. The daughter, Leonora, was a strong-willed girl of fifteen when she went against her father's wishes and married Levi Charles Harby on January 31, 1842. Harby was a first lieutenant in the United States Navy, and was forty-two years old at the time. The couple were married in St. Mary's, Georgia by a Presbyterian minister, although both bride and groom were Jewish. ** Levi D'Lyons hated Harby, and Leonora was disinherited. ***

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**Ibid., April 29, 1838, p. 2 c.2.

* Ibid., June 29, 1838, p. 2 c.3.

** Ibid., November 13, 1838, p. 1 c.3.

** Chatham County Probate Court, Record of Marriages 1806-1851, Folio 29, marriage license number 2459, January 20, 1842. Issued marriage date as January 31, 1842 by W. Baird, Presbyterian Minister of St. Mary's, Georgia (c.f. Stern, Genealogies, 27 and 72).

** D'Lyons, Will, Folio 26. (c.f. Sheftall, Interview.)
Levi D'Lyon served as judge of the Court of Common Pleas, Oyer and Terminer, until February of 1845. His law practice was not neglected during this period. In a letter to fellow attorney, Colonel Alexander Atkinson, dated June 1, 1843, Levi D'Lyon refers to having business in the courts of Appling, Camden, and Liberty counties. As a lawyer, he was highly respected. Charles C. Jones wrote of him in the History of Savannah, Georgia:

His personal magnetism, his fidelity to his clients, his fluency of speech, and his ability soon drew him a lucrative practice. By his professional labors, he made a comfortable fortune.  

The politics of States' Rights gripped the country in the 1840's, and Levi D'Lyon was more active in the Democratic party than ever before. In the summer of 1840, he addressed any Democratic meetings and declared himself an enthusiastic supporter of Martin Van Buren for the presidency. His eldest son, Lechmere, spoke at these meetings with him. As with other Savannah notables, the public aspect of Levi D'Lyon's life is difficult to reconstruct during the

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10 Gamble, History of Savannah, 492.
11 Alexander Atkinson Papers, Georgia Historical Society Manuscript Collection, Manuscript 1198, Item 10, Folder 4.
13 Daily Georgian, August 14, 1840, p. 2, c. 5.
14 Ibid., August 19, 1840, p. 2, c. 5.
latter half of the 1840’s, owing to a lack of newspaper indexes for this period. On June 3, 1843, Levi, his brothers, Isaac and Mordecai, and his sisters, Anna and Rebecca appointed Abraham B. Fannin to take out a grant on a land lottery lot (Chatham County lot 325-18-3) of their father’s estate for them. Another real estate transaction was the sale of a large tract of land. On December 18, 1851, Levi sold a 103 acre tract of land known as the “Schoolhouse Tract,” surrounding the Isle of Hope Church to Stephen Dupen. The deed is an interesting one. The actual sale was for all the land surrounding the church, with the exception of the one acre upon which the church actually stood. It also provided an easement for access to the church.\(^{10}\)


\(^{10}\)Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia) Deed Book 11, Folio 216.
The Later Years

The 1850 census found Levi D'Lyon was the only white member of his household. This census gives a very intimate picture of his family's situation at the time. His daughter, Leonora Harby, lived in Savannah with her husband and three children. Leonora had taken up residence in Camden County. Isaac, the third child, was at this time untraceable. Clarence, the youngest son, was a hospital steward at the Savannah Poor House and Hospital. Lastly, James, a West Point graduate, was living in Savannah with his twenty year old wife, Elizabeth, and one daughter, Leonora. He was, at this time, the City of Savannah Surveyor.

Tragedy struck the D'Lyon family in 1854, with the death of Clarence. He had married Elizabeth Seabrook Curtis of St. Mary's, Georgia just ten months before, and left no children. Four months later, James D'Lyon died after a brief

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1. "Georgia Census of 1850 (Chatham County), entry 239.
2. Ibid., entry 96.
3. "Georgia Census of 1850 (Camden County): 9th District, entry 387.
4. "Georgia Census of 1850 (Chatham County), entry 1267.
5. Ibid., entry 86.
6. Stern, Jewish Families, 577. (c.f. Tombstone of Clarence D'Lyon, lot 1402, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia.)
illness. He left behind three daughters and a pregnant widow. Within two years, Levi's granddaughter, Elizabeth Josephine, the second child of James and Elizabeth, died at the age of six. At the time of "Little Lizzie's" death, James was reinterred in Laurel Grove Cemetery, along with his brother, Clarence. James had been buried in the Old Hebrew Cemetery, and Clarence was moved from St. Mary's, Georgia.

By the mid 1850's, Levi D'Lyon was an old and venerable member of the Democratic party in Chatham County. He was called upon to officiate at polling places and serve on Boards of Inquiry that dealt with such weighty matters as the terms of Judges. In May of 1857, Levi was once again chosen as a delegate to the state Democratic Convention. His law practice was still flourishing. One of his most important clients was the Timbercutter's Bank. It is not

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11 "Daily Georgian, March 1, 1859, p. 3, c. 4.
12 "Daily Morning News, October 3, 1858, p. 2, c. 4.
13 "Sheffall, Interview.
15 "Daily Georgian, December 1, 1855, p. 2, c. 2.
17 "Ibid., May 14, 1857, p. 2, c. 2.
18 "Ibid., January 29, 1858, p. 1, c. 1.
known when Levi went into private law practice. Jacob
peopleMotta, his law partner and brother-in-law, died in
1851. The Savannah City Directory listed Levi D'lyon's
office at 201 (new numbering) York Street at the eastern
corner of Abercorn and York Streets. Interestingly, for
all the property Levi owned on York Street (including the
entire block between Drayton and Bull Streets) he did not own
his office building. The Schenck Index indicated that this
property had several owners, but he was not one of them (Lot
1, Fourth Tything, Anson Ward).

In December of 1859, Levi was among a group of concerned
citizens who spoke out in favor of forming a "vigilance
committee for the better preservation of Southern Rights." The
following month, Levi, as a member of the Chatham County
Democratic Committee, called for a meeting at St. Andrews
Hall to discuss their ideas for the platform of the upcoming
Democratic Convention in Charleston. This was to be one
of the leastest and potentially most dangerous meetings in
Savannah history. The meeting was attended by quite a crowd.
Several people, including Levi, made eloquent speeches about
their choices for presidential candidate and states' rights.

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12 Sheffall, Interview.
13 Savannah City Directory of 1858, 24.
14 Savannah City Directory of 1859, 89 and 179.
15 Savannah City Directory of 1860, 64 and 169.
The crowd became so boisterous that it was feared a riot was about to ensue. Levi D'Lyon restored order by calling for a chairman to be elected to take control and nominating Richard P. Arnold. Mr. Arnold was quickly elected and calm prevailed. Two days later, another lively meeting was conducted to choose the delegates to the Convention. Once again, Levi could be found making political speeches. It was finally decided to allow the delegates to choose the presidential nominee for themselves, rather than send them with instructions to vote for Cobb.

At some time prior to 1860, Levi D'Lyon came into possession of a 110 acre tract of land that was once part of the Harrack Plantation. It was difficult to identify the location of this tract, but the description of the property on the deed from its sale at Levi D'Lyon's death indicates it was on Wylly Island. Levi gave five acres of this land to Annie Sheftall and her children on June 23, 1860, for the express purpose of building a summerhouse.

In January of 1861, Levi D'Lyon was once more elected to the bench. He became Judge of the City Court of Savannah. He was almost seventy years old and still very

124Ibid.
126Chatham County Superior Court (Savannah, Georgia) Deed Book 34, Folio 209.
127Ibid., Deed Book 31, Folio 337.
128Camble, History of Savannah, 454.
active in political life. Judge D'Lyon worked tirelessly for
orderly establishment of the new Confederate government after
the beginning of the War Between the States. As a member of
the committee to set up the Confederate court system, it was
his honor to inform Julian Hartridge that he had been
selected unanimously to be the nominee to the newly created
bench of the First District Court of the Confederate States
of America. **Julian Hartridge was an old friend and one of
the executors of Levi's will.***

At the age of seventy, Levi D'Lyon felt the time had
come to write his last will and testament. He did so on April
19, 1861. **His will, written in a clear and steady hand,
offers a great deal of insight into his character. He wanted
everything he owned sold at auction and the proceeds were to
be divided as follows: Leonorean and Isaac, his two
surviving sons, were to receive one thousand dollars each.
The rest of his money was to be invested into a diversity of
stocks and bonds. After five years, these were to be turned
back into the original capital and its earned interest.
Leonorean and Isaac were to share the interest, and the three
surviving daughters of James (Leonora, Rebecca and Josephine)
were to have equal shares in the original capital. The will
was very specific in stating that the granddaughters were to

**Daily Morning News, October 15, 1861, p. 1, c. 2.
**D'Lyon, Will, Folio 23-39, passim.
**Ibid., Folio 27.
have this money in their own right, without having to share it with any future husbands. This was surely a direct insult to his daughter, Leonorah Harby, who had married against his will to a man he despised. He went on to heap bitter 
reproaches upon Leonorah in the document:

My reasons for this course are well known, and I trust it will be as an example to all daughters who treat with contempt and utter disrespect, the kindest of parents, as well as the many prowlers upon society, who for selfish and base purposes, destroy the peace and happiness of humane families.\(^2\)\(^4\)

He also provided a lot in Currituck and one thousand dollars for his loyal housekeeper, Estelle Savage.

The property inventory of Levi D'Lyon's estate indicated that his most valuable piece of personal property was a twenty-eight year old female slave by the name of Anna D'Lyon and her five children. Their value was set at thirty-six hundred dollars. In his will, he bequeathed her and her children their freedom and commended them into the care of Estelle Savage. The reason for this is not given although Levi made the statement, "my children know why."\(^2\)^5 According to John Sheftall, Levi D'Lyon was the acknowledged father of numerous mulatto children.\(^2\)^6 At some time shortly before his death, Levi D'Lyon repudiated Judaism and became a member

\(^{2\text{a}}\)Ibid., Folio 26.

\(^{2\text{b}}\)Ibid., Folio 24.

\(^{2\text{c}}\)Sheftall, Interview.
of a Protestant denomination.** January of 1863 brought
the reelection of Judge D'Lyon to the bench of the City Court
of Savannah.*** Within eight months, Levi went into a
decline and died at his home on August 28, 1863.**** The cause
of death was given as inflammation of the bladder.***** He was
mourned by all of Savannah. The Chatham County Bar
Association published a "Tribute of Respect" in the Daily
Morning News in which they resolved to attend his funeral as
a body and to drape the City Court in mourning. The members
also "offered a willing tribute to his courtesy, industry,
and impartiality."**** Judge Levi D'Lyon was buried on Sunday
morning, August 30, 1863 at 10:30, in the family plot
(1402) in Laurel Grove Cemetery.**** His will was qualified
in Chatham County Probate Court on August 31, 1863 by his
executors: Thomas E. Boyd, Julian Hartridge, and George
Owens.****** Levi D'Lyon's personal and real property was
auctioned off in October of 1863, with his house on York
Street (Lot 3, Percival Ward) commanding the extraordinary

**Ibid.


****Ibid., August 29, 1863, p. 1, c. 1.

*****Ibid., September 1, 1863, p. 2, c. 4

******Ibid., August 28, 1863, p. 2, c. 4.

*******Ibid., p. 1, c. 3.

****W.P.A., Index to Laurel Grove, lot 1401.

******D'Lyon, Will, Folio 22.
His estate sold the remaining twenty-one slaves (excluding Anna and her children) for a total value of $23,800.00. The total value of his estate that was paid out and converted to stocks and bonds was $75,073.97. Levi D'Lyon's estate was closed out by his executors on September 14, 1856.

14*Chatham County Superior Court, Savannah, Georgia, Dees Book 30, Folio 16.

**D'Lyon, Will, Folio 37.

***Ibid.
vi. Descendants

It seems a tragedy that Levi D'Lyoun was never reconciled to his daughter, Leonora Harby. John Sheftall stated that it was a great irony that only Leonora of all Levi's children married a Jew, and her spouse was the one Levi D'Lyoun could not stand. She moved to Galveston, Texas with her husband Levi C. Harby, and was the mother of three children. Of all the D'Lyoun clan, Leonora Harby went on to become the most well-known. She was a Jewish scholar and set up the first Jewish Sunday School in Texas and founded the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society of Galveston. Her husband, Levi C. Harby, was the first Surgeon General of the Confederate Army. After the death of Harby, Leonora married a prominent Galveston physician, Edward Randall.

Leonorean never married and after his father's death, he also emigrated to Texas. He became a professor of foreign languages at the Justice School in Justice, Texas. The date of his death is unknown, but he was alive in 1875, when his brother, Isaac, died.

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***Sheftall, Interview.***


***Ibid.***


***Stern, Jewish Families, 93.***

***Savannah Morning News, March 3, 1876, p. 3, c. 2.***
Isaac also spent his life as a bachelor. Like his siblings, he moved to Texas, where he took up farming. His obituary states that he was at one time the editor of the Troupville, Georgia newspaper, the Watchman. On the afternoon of December 19, 1875, Isaac was killed instantly by a kick from a vicious mule. \(^1\)

\(^{1}\)Ibid.
VII. Epilogue

Levi Sheftall D'Lyon wanted to be remembered for his terms as a judge. He wrote his own epitaph in his will:

Levi Sheftall D'Lyon
Late Judge of the City Court of Savannah
Born at Savannah
October 29, 1791
Died at Savannah
August 26, 1863

John Sheftall, a first cousin of Levi D'Lyon many times removed, was kind enough to provide a great deal of insight about Levi. Unfortunately, Mr. Sheftall's interview came only a few days before the biography was due and writing was well underway. Time limitations restricted the further corroboration of the parentage of Anna D'Lyon's five children. John Sheftall stated that this information is located in the Baptismal Records of the Catholic Diocese of Savannah.

He also provided the name of a descendant currently residing in the Savannah area, a great-granddaughter of Josephine D'Lyon. I had a delightful interview with Ms. Pondrom on May 27, 1992 at her home in Savannah. She spoke of her great-great grandfather as a kindly and sociable man. Ms. Pondrom stated that there were many speculative stories amongst the D'Lyon descendants regarding the source of the animosity between Levi D'Lyon and Levi Harby. The most charming of these stories is one in which, prior to Mr. Harby's marriage to Leonora, he had been seen riding in a
carriage to the race in Charleston with a lady of questionable character. She also confirmed that Levi D’Lyon was in fact a member of the Trinity Methodist Church.

She had no portraits of Levi D’Lyon and knew of none in existence. I was shown a photograph of the three granddaughters: Leonora, Rebecca, and Josephine. The three were lovely young ladies with dark eyes and hair and fine features. Unfortunately, the inheritance that Levi D’Lyon bequeathed to them never materialized. It was lost between legal problems and the South’s loss of the war, which made Levi’s Confederate money worthless. To Ms. Fondron, her own great-grandfather, James W. D’Lyon, was the family member who probably ought to have been disowned. She stated that James never actually graduated from West Point, he was a “lousy student” and came home in disgrace.
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