

Simon M. Levy: West Point Graduate

By IRA ROSENSWAIKE

Maryland's representation in what has come to be regarded as the first graduating class of the United States Military Academy at West Point — a class of two men who were commissioned as lieutenants in 1802 — must be one of the least known figures deserving a prominent place in the state's historical annals. For decades the standard source of information about this early graduate, Simon M. Levy, was General Cullum's classic reference book, which gives the following brief "biography":

(Born Md.) SIMON M. LEVY (ap'd Md.)

Military History — Cadet* of the U. S. Military Academy from March 2, 1801, to October 12, 1802, when was graduated and promoted in the Army to SECOND LIEUT., CORPS OF ENGINEER, OCT. 12, 1802.

Served as Assistant Engineer on the Southern Coast, 1802-5
RESIGNED, SEP. 30, 1805

Civil History — Unknown
DIED, 1807, IN GEORGIA

* Appointed Cadet for his good conduct as Orderly Sergeant in the Battle of Maumee Rapids, Aug. 20, 1794.¹

Heitman's standard work yields the following data about Simon M. Levy:

Sergt 4 inf 1793 to 1801; Cadet M A 2 Mar 1801 (2): 2 Lt engr 12 Oct 1802; resd 30 Sept 1805; (died — March 1807.)²

Extensive research in the ensuing years turned up no positive identification for Simon M. Levy. But as more circumstantial evidence has come to light an identity may be inferred, and such an inference is presented based upon a summary of available information.

¹ George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point* (New York: 1879), vol. I, p. 91.

² Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, from its Organization, September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903* (Washington: 1903), vol. I, p. 629.

Foremost in importance to understanding the search for a possible identity are the memoirs of Levy's more renowned classmate, General Joseph Gardner Swift (1783–1865). Swift, who attained the rank of brigadier general during the War of 1812, achieved fame as a civil engineer in the years following his resignation from the army in 1818. Swift has recorded:

In July [1802], by transfer, I became a cadet of engineers . . . The number of cadets at the academy was twelve. Among them were Simon Magruder Levy, from a respectable Jew family of Baltimore, and formerly a sergeant in Captain Lockwood's company of infantry, and thence promoted to cadet for his merit and mathematic [*sic!*] attainments. He was now twenty-five years of age . . . On the first of September commenced the first public examination at the Military Academy . . . Cadets J. G. Swift and S. M. Levy were the graduates, and they were both commissioned to rank in the order just named from 12th October, 1802.³

Swift also indicated that in 1804 Levy received orders to report to Fort Jackson, in Georgia.⁴

The published records of the first federal census of the United States of 1790 indicate that only one family named Levy — a household headed by Benjamin Levy — resided then in Baltimore.⁵ Given the clues provided by the cited references, investigators interested in the background of S. M. Levy focused their attention upon this family. Benjamin Levy (1726–1802), a native of New York, was a well-known merchant in Baltimore in the latter part of the eighteenth century. He is known to have come to the city from Philadelphia after 1769.⁶ Since Philipson, among others, was of the opinion that Simon M. Levy was a member of this family,⁷ it seems mandatory that one review this possibility.

Maryland probate records do not reveal the existence of a will for Benjamin Levy. However, the will left by his wife, Rachel, who died in Baltimore on November 11, 1794, at the age of fifty-

³ Harrison Ellery, ed., *The Memoirs of Gen. Joseph Gardner Swift* (Worcester, Mass.: 1890), pp. 33, 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Heads of the Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790. Maryland* (Washington: 1907), p. 21.

⁶ Edwin Wolf 2nd and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia: 1957), p. 78; see also "Pearce-Levy Bible Records" in *Maryland Historical Magazine*, XXI (1926), 205; and, William C. Cochran, *The Memoirs of the Dead and Tomb's Remembrancer* (Baltimore: 1806), p. 248.

⁷ David Philipson, "Simon M. Levy" (typescript letter) in Maryland Historical Society Library, dated Cincinnati, February 16, 1915.

five,⁸ is of interest for what it does not contain. The document mentions her husband, Benjamin, and her children — Hetty, Nathan, Abigail, Jacob, and Robert — but has no reference to a son (or any other relative) named Simon.⁹

If Simon M. Levy was not related to the Benjamin Levy household could he still have been the son of a resident of Baltimore named Levy? As late as 1796 the *Baltimore Town and Fell's Point Directory* lists only Jacob Levy among the residents having this surname. As noted above, Jacob Levy was a son of Benjamin and Rachel Levy. But, in the next few years another family named Levy made its appearance in Baltimore. The Orphan's Court records dated November 21, 1799 indicate that one Joseph Levy was apprenticed by his father Levy Andrew Levy for a term of 10 months and 17 days to George Smith, to be taught to be a guilder and carver.¹⁰ Soon after, Levy Andrew Levy's name is included for the first time in the city directory. In the *Baltimore Directory and Annual Register: for 1800 and 1801* he is listed as residing at a boardinghouse at 95 Baltimore Street.

Levy Andrew Levy — also known as Andrew Levy — apparently did not settle in Baltimore until shortly before the turn of the century. Nevertheless, there is evidence that he had lived elsewhere in Maryland. In the 1790 census Andrew Levy was enumerated in Washington County. His household then included, in addition to himself, 2 males under 16 years of age, and 6 females.¹¹ The historian John Thomas Scharf notes that "Andrew Levy" was a member of the board of health in Hagerstown, the Washington County seat, in 1793, and that "Levy Andrew Levy" was a conveyancer in the same town in 1795.¹²

Prior to his residence at Hagerstown, Levy Andrew Levy had been in business in Pennsylvania. In a letter sent from Lancaster in 1784 he wrote that "this place has been my first residence in America for nearly 38 years."¹³ Levy apparently came to Lancaster as a lad to join his uncle, Joseph Simon, who was the leading merchant in the town around the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁴ In the 1760's

⁸ Cochran, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

⁹ Annie Walker Burns, *Abstracts of Wills of Baltimore County, Maryland* (Washington: 1954), vol. V, p. 216.

¹⁰ Baltimore. Orphan's Court. Book no. 2, folio 312 (copy in Maryland Historical Society Library).

¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

¹² J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Western Maryland* (Philadelphia: 1882), vol. II, pp. 1138, 1171.

¹³ Wolf and Whiteman, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 49.

after the abandonment of the French forts in the West, trading activity surged and Joseph Simon and Levy Andrew Levy, operating out of Lancaster, were among the main suppliers of trade goods to be bartered for furs. Levy, according to one account, was among several persons taken captive by the Wyandot Indians during the siege of Detroit in 1763.¹⁵ Subsequently, Levy, with his uncle Joseph Simon, engaged in extensive operations in the development of western lands. They were original shareholders of the Illinois Company in 1773, and in 1784 Levy was responsible for the sale of thousands of acres of land in Indiana.¹⁶

The oldest surviving vital records of Pennsylvania Jewry, kept between 1757 and 1790 by the itinerant ritual circumciser Barnard Jacobs, have recently been translated into English from the Yiddish original by Malcolm H. Stern. The records indicate Andrew Levy had several sons, including Joseph, circumcised at Lancaster on September 3, 1779.¹⁷ This clearly was the Joseph Levy who was apprenticed in Baltimore in 1799. Of special interest, however, is the birth record of Andrew Levy's son Simeon, circumcised at Lancaster on January 25, 1774.¹⁸ If this son may be assumed to be Simon M. Levy then he would have been 19 years of age at the time his military career began, and 27 years old when he became a cadet at West Point. Although Simeon rather than Simon appears in the translated record, the difference in spelling is not of great significance. In fact, a broadside of "a meeting of the Corps of Engineers called for the purpose of considering the propriety of forming a Society for promoting Military Science," containing the proposed articles of organization, dated West-Point, 12th November, 1802, has among the ten signatories, the name *Simeon M. Levy*.¹⁹

Since Simon M. Levy died before the passing of both Levy Andrew Levy and his wife Susannah, even if wills had been recorded (and none seem to have been) perhaps no mention might have been made of Simon. The records of St. Paul's Parish of the Protestant Episcopal Church indicate that "Susanna, wife of Levi A. Levy," was buried on July 29, 1807.²⁰ Six years later, on October 4, 1813, the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 399.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 181.

¹⁷ Malcolm H. Stern, "Two Jewish Functionaries in Colonial Pennsylvania," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LVII (1967), 51.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁹ Photocopy of document at the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati (made available by courtesy of Dr. Jacob R. Marcus).

²⁰ Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths in St. Paul's Parish, Baltimore, vol. II, p. 520 (ms. in Maryland Historical Society Library).

burial of Joseph Levy in the same Baltimore cemetery is noted.²¹ A contemporary newspaper account of the latter event indicated that Joseph Levy "son of Levy Andrew Levy, died October 3, in his 35th year."²² Levy Andrew Levy was a widower for more than two decades, and died in Baltimore on January 11, 1829. He was described in a brief obituary notice as "in the 95th year of his age; for many years a respectable inhabitant of this city."²³

Although the wife and one son of Levy Andrew Levy were interred in St. Paul's cemetery in Baltimore, church records do not disclose Levy's own final place of rest, but it seems most probable he was buried beside his family.²⁴ Since Simon M. Levy, according to the existing accounts, died in Georgia, it is unlikely that burial information for Baltimore might furnish positive evidence of his relationship to Levy Andrew and Susannah Levy. Nevertheless, a very important clue is afforded by such records, although the tie that can be established still has many missing links. The prime connecting link, curiously, is Simon's middle name: Magruder. The *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser* of March 15, 1813 contained this notice:

Departed this life yesterday morning, Miss Christiana Magruder of this city in the 81st year of her age.

St. Paul's Parish records of March 14, 1813, indicate the burial of "Miss Magruder in Mr Levys lot."²⁵ A natural assumption to make is that since Christiana Magruder was buried in the Levy plot she may have been a close relative; accordingly, it follows the family may have been closely related to Simon Magruder Levy as well.

In summary it may be concluded that three major clues exist which link Simon Magruder Levy to Levy Andrew Levy. (1) General Swift wrote that his classmate's family lived in Baltimore. L. A. Levy is known to have settled in Baltimore by 1799. (2) Records show that L. A. Levy was the father of a son named Simeon, born in 1774. This date seems in reasonable agreement with that expected for S. M. Levy. (3) The L. A. Levy family of Baltimore had ties with the Magruders, as revealed by burial records for St. Paul's.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 538.

²² *Baltimore American and Daily Advertiser*, Oct. 5, 1813.

²³ *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 13, 1829.

²⁴ Names of all persons buried in the month in which Levy died are missing. However, the parish records of St. Paul's do provide another clue. They indicate that on June 8, 1827 "Levy Andrew Levy, A Jew, a very aged Man" was baptized. Register, *op. cit.*, p. 588.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 536.