

“Appreciated the World Over”

Submitted by village of Richfield Springs historian Harriet Geywits

The daughter of French parents Jean deLussan and his wife, Zelig was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1863. Her mother being a professional soprano, Zelig had early training and first appeared on stage at the age of nine, but her parents forbade her to embark on a professional musical career. A Swedish singer, Christina Nilsson, heard her sing and persuaded her parents to change their minds. After training with her mother, Zelig made her operatic debut in 1884 in Boston in *The Bohemian Girl* in which she was an immediate success.

Next, she was engaged to appear in the first season at Covent Garden, London, with the

Royal Opera Company, performing with them from 1890 to 1910. During that period Zelig also performed in the United States with the Metropolitan Opera in 1900. Most critics of the day agreed that she made her audience not only applaud, but think. She was reported to have had a wide range of choice as a mezzo-soprano which permitted her to do justice to many parts dominating the stage and she was considered a rage of the day not only due to her singing ability but her beauty as well.

Zelig became a leading interpreter of the role of Carmen in Bizet's famous opera.

George Bernard Shaw was less enthusiastic of her performance saying that Zelig sang

in whatever language seemed to be the best for the moment. Her singing, however, greatly impressed Queen Elizabeth and she was invited to sing for the Queen several times.

In 1903, deLussan recorded five songs for the Victor Talking Machine Company in the second recording session for domestically published records for Victor's exclusive "Red Seal". Her recording of the Habanera from *Carmen* from this session is the earliest operatic aria recorded on a Red Seal disc.

She had performed the role of Carmen over five hundred times although this was far from the only opera she appeared in.

At one period it was

reported that she sang for three years without a single week's rest.

In 1907 she married her solo pianist Angelo Fronani and gradually retired. She was still performing on occasion in 1917. After her husband died in 1918, she continued to make her home in London.

Zelig taught for many years thereafter.

She died in 1949.

What did this famous opera star have to do with the Village of Richfield Springs? Zelig also performed here beginning in 1883 when she came to stay

at the New American hotel for the summer.

In an interview in 1902, she said that for over twelve years she spent her summers at the Springs in Richfield, forming a

large acquaintance and was often a dinner guest of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas R. Proctor. Her talent was appreciated worldwide.

