

There is scant information in the public records concerning Lewis Zelner. He was born August 14, 1837 in Prussia, Germany. ^[1] His father's name might have been Murray and his mother's name was Rebacca. ^[2] He and his family immigrated into the United States in 1939 when Lewis was around two years old. He had been in the United States for sixty years by 1900. ^[3] He was naturalized in 1868 while living in New York City. ^[4] Lewis was married for twenty-six years to Elinor Aurelae in 1900. ^[5] The 1880 and 1900 United States Federal Census both list Lewis' home as Leicester, Vermont. ^[6] Since he enlisted in 1862 into a New York regiment that was raised exclusively in New York City, it is safe to assume that that is where he was living with his family since they entered the United States in 1839. When his enlistment ended, he was again mustered-out in New York City. When he migrated north to Vermont is not specifically known. The fact is, he was a resident of Leicester from 1880 to his death in 1902, and he lies buried in Leicester.

As for his service record, that too is spotty. When he first enlisted prior to April 18, 1862, he became a member of Company G, Enfants Perdus; Lost Children; German Legion; Independent Battalion of Infantry. This is the unit raised in New York City mostly of foreigners. At first, it consisted of six companies, A to G, which were mustered in the service of the United States for three years. These companies left the State April 18, 1862. It served in the Army of The Potomac assigned to various Corps throughout North and South Carolina during 1862 and 1863. On January 30, 1864, this regiment was disbanded and the enlisted men were reassigned to other units. Lewis went to the 47th New York Infantry. During its period of service, the "Lost Children" Regiment lost nine men killed in action, fifty-two from disease for a total of sixty-one deaths, one of whom died in enemy hands. ^[7] Lewis belonged to Company I of his new regiment. ^[8]

Twenty days after he was transferred, Lewis' regiment found themselves in the middle of a nasty little fracas called the Battle of Olustee in Florida. That confrontation cost the Union approximately 1,800 casualties while the expense to the Confederates amounted to about two hundred and fifty. ^[9] Lewis' 47th accounted for three hundred thirteen of those Union losses. Seventy-six of the Regiment were missing after the engagement on February 20, 1864. One of those missing was Lewis. Fortunately, he was paroled two

days later. This battle resulted in the highest number of casualties in the 47th New York in the entire war including well known engagements like Petersburg, Drewry's Bluff and Cold Harbor. ^[10] Lewis and the others of the 47th NY were mustered-out of the service during July and August of 1865 at New York City. ^[11] What Lewis did right after the war and where he was living is not revealed in any of the documents consulted so far. All that can be said with certainty is that he was living in New York City at 94 Allen Street in 1868 when he was naturalized. ^[12] Also, he applied for a pension on the twenty-fifth of August, 1873 which he was granted. ^[13]

Lewis' life in his adopted country seemed to pass with little fan fare. Even his military experience was fairly tame. It really wasn't until his death on August 11, 1902 that his story became more interesting. ^[14]

Lewis died without a will. A "friend" of Lewis stepped forward to manage the estate's affairs because, in his opinion, Mrs. Aurela M. Zelner was not competent enough to make her own decisions in regards to "business". So, Mr. Morse filed a petition with the Probate Court in Middlebury to have himself designated as administrator of Lewis' estate. He filed his petition in the Addison County court on August 14, 1902, just three days after Lewis' death. ^[15]

The total value of Lewis's estate, combining both real and personal property, only amounted to \$200 according to Mr. Morse. ^[16] Probate courts always require an inventory be taken of the deceased assets. The inventory has to be precise and detailed and each item must be assigned a monetary value. Mr. Morse's inventory of Lewis' possessions was submitted to the Court on October 9, 1902. It reveals a very modest existence: ^[17]

1 - House & Lot	\$125.00
1 - Horse	\$21.00
2 - Wagons	\$6.75
1 - Cutter	\$2.25
1 - Gun	\$1.75
1 - Tool Chest	\$2.30
1 - Washing machine	\$1.75

Tables	\$2.00
1 - Looking glass	\$2.45
Clock	\$1.05
Bedstead & Springs	\$3.50
Chairs	\$3.05
13 - Pictures	\$10.25
Hens	\$3.84
Cash on hand	\$36.50
Sundry articles	\$14.81

Total: \$138.25 (actually \$238.25)

On January 20, 1903, Mr. Morse wrote to the Honorable H. Bliss, Judge of the Probate Court, informing him that he had sold the personal property of Lewis and asked the judge for a license to sell the house and lot. He further stated that he could not find any certificate of marriage for Lewis and Aurelia and suggested that he might have to be appointed legal guardian of Mrs. Zelner in order to continue his duties as administrator. ^[18]

Two days later, Mr. Morse wrote again to Judge Bliss. It was in this letter that he declared Mrs. Zelner incompetent to make decisions pertaining to "business". He also raised the specter of relatives in New York City making claims on the estate's assets because there was no legal record found to confirm that Lewis and Aurelia were actually married. ^[19]

This dreaded challenge to the estate settlement never happened. On March 7, 1903, the administrator submitted to the Court a detailed description of the real estate owned by the late Mr. Zelner. As part of the filing, Mr. Morse clearly stated that "...Aurelia M. Zelner, widow of said deceased is the only person except creditors interested in the Estate of said Lewis....that would benefit from the sale of said property." ^[20]

Based on a letter written by Mr. Morse to Judge Bliss on March 11, 1903, it appeared that Mrs. Zelner would not sign the petition to sell the land and the house. So Mr. Morse appealed to the judge for help with the uncooperative woman. ^[21]The judge's response was revealing, so it is included in its entirety: ^[22]

March 28, 1903

Hiram N. Morse, Esq.

Dear Sir:

In the Zelner estate I think we had best not spend money for red tape. If you will send back the application for leave to sell real estate I will find that the widow has had personal notice, and will send you the license. You can then sell and get the proceeds; and I think we better keep the estate open till they are used up in support of the widow. You will have to support her any way and probably may as well do so as administrator while the estate lasts as to be at the extra expense of being appointed guardian.

Yours truly,

W^m H. Bliss

There was no evidence found that Aurelia ever received a widow's pension from the Government. In Mr. Morse's final accounting of the Zelner estate, he listed, several times, payments made to individuals who cared for Mrs. Zelner. He also charged the estate for the purchase of items like medicine and clothing, particularly dresses. In fact, on August 12, 1902, the day after Lewis' death, he bought in Brandon a dress, shoes, stockings, hat and a veil. My guess is that these items constituted Mrs. Zelner's funeral outfit. He also paid out \$3.37 for the services of an auctioneer - probably to get rid of all those very "expensive" personal possessions Lewis had that were listed on that inventory sheet that Mr. Morse submitted to the Probate Court. After paying all the creditors, including himself, the \$338.25 estate was reduced to a balance of \$31.48. This amount was decreed to the widow, Aurelia Zellner on January 8, 1904. ^[23]

NOTES

1. Ancestry.com, 1900 United States Federal Census under Lewis Zelner.
2. Ibid., Vermont, Vital Records, 1720-1908.
3. Op cit., 1900 United States Federal Census under Lewis Zelner.
4. Op cit., New York, Index to Petitions for Naturalization filed in New York City, 1792-1989.

5. Op cit., 1900 United States Federal Census under Lewis Zelner.
6. Op cit., 1880 and 1900 United States Federal Census under Luis and Lewis Zelner.
7. Independent Corps Light Infantry during the Civil War - NY Military Museum and Veterans Research Center, Unit History Project.
8. Fold3.com, Zelner, Lewis: Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans Who Served Between 1861-1900, image 4942470.
9. spinola.org/47ny/uhistory/battle/olustee.html.
10. 47th NY Infantry Regiment's battles and casualties during the Civil War - NY Military Museum and Veterans Research Center.
11. Wikipedia.org, 47th New York Infantry.
12. Ancestry.com, New York, Index to Petitions for Naturalization filed in New York City, 1792-1969.
13. Fold3.com, Zelner, Lewis: Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans Who Served Between 1861-1900, image 4942470.
14. Vermont in the Civil War.org/Cemeteries/Leicester/Brookside Cemetery/Zelner, Lewis/Individual Record/ Vitals.
15. Ancestry.com, Vermont, Wills and Probate Records, 1749-1999 for Lewis Zelner. A letter from H. N. Morse to Probate Judge H. Bliss , Probate Judge, dated Jan. 8, 1903 in which he said of Mrs. Zelner, she "...is not competent of doing any business".
16. Ibid., Vermont, Wills and Probate Records, 1749-1999.
17. Ibid., An Inventory of The Estate of Lewis Zelner, Vermont, Wills and Probate Records 1749-1999 for Lewis Zelner.
18. Ibid., Letter in Probate Records from H. N. Morse admin. to H.H. Bliss, Judge of Probate dated Jan. 26, 1903 in Brandon, Vermont.
19. Ibid., Letter in Probate Records from Morse to Judge Bliss dated Jan. 28, 1903.
20. Ibid., petition to the Probate Court of Addison County in Vermont, Wills and Probate Records 1749-1999.
21. Ibid., Letter, Morse to Judge Bliss, dated March 11, 1903, Vermont, Wills and Probate Records, 1749-1999.
22. Ibid., Letter from William H. Bliss, Judge to Hiram N. Morse dated March 28, 1903, Vermont, Wills and Probate Records, 1749-1999.
23. Ibid., Lewis Zelner acct - with H. N. Morse, Amin., Vermont, Wills and Probate Records, 1749-1999.