

# Naval Illustrators



## Frederic (Fred.) B. Schell: 'Special Artist' for Leslie's

By Gary McQuarrie

FREDERIC (FRED.) BOLEY SCHELL (1838-1902) worked for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (Leslie's) briefly (1863-1864) as a 'Special Artist' during the Civil War. Leslie's published 43 illustrations based on Schell's sketches and drawings, the tenth highest total for Leslie's and the fourteenth highest total for any identified 'Special Artist' among the illustrated newspapers during the war. Many of these illustrations based on his artwork were published in versions of *The Soldier in Our Civil War*, a 2-volume special-edition pictorial history of the conflict containing Leslie's illustrations, as well as in other Leslie's special-edition pictorial publications about the war.

Frederic B. Schell was born in Philadelphia on March 14, 1838. He came from a large family, having 6 brothers (including his older brother Francis [Frank] H. Schell, who would precede and outlast him as a 'Special Artist' at Leslie's) and a sister. The younger Schell was initially employed by a wool merchant, but then followed his older brother's artistic pursuits, apparently studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, becoming an illustrator and painter (favoring watercolor landscapes) and learning engraving.



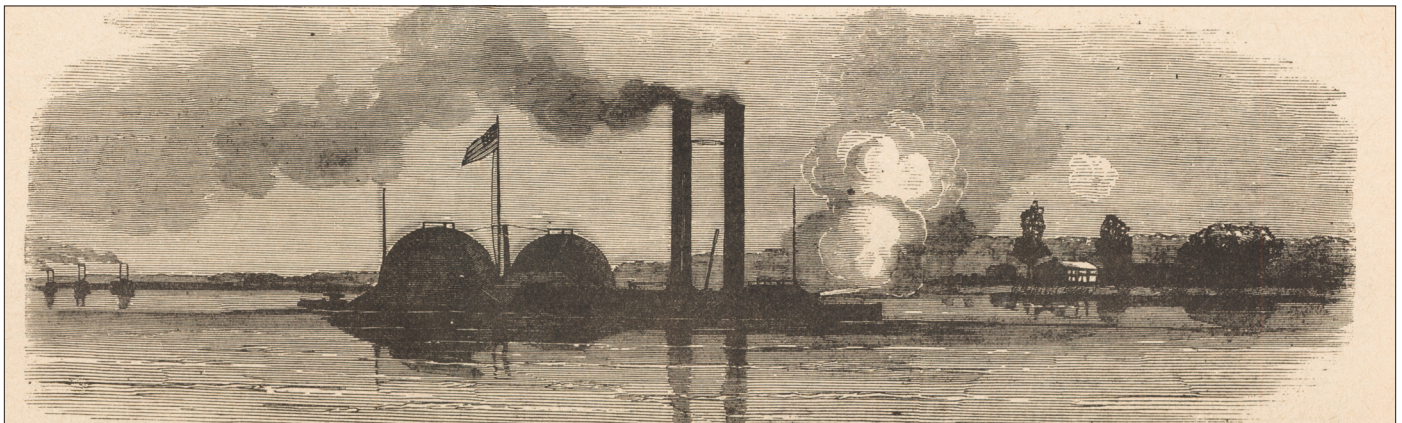
Frederick B. Schell, circa 1880s. Albumen silver print mounted in an album (Sydney, Australia). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick B. Schell, Jr. III (Schell's grandson and his grandson's wife), 1976.73.12.14. Courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

## Frederic (Fred.) B. Schell: ‘Special Artist’ for *Leslie’s*

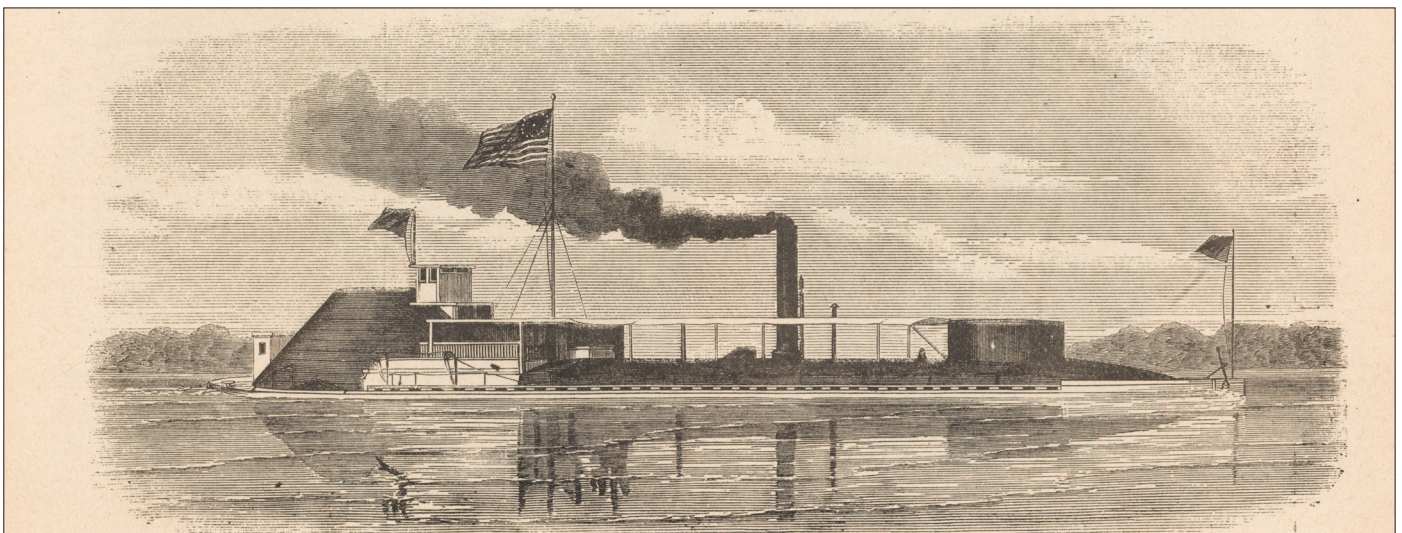
In May 1863, *Leslie’s* needed to replace Henri Lovie in the West and hired and assigned Schell to the U.S. Army at Vicksburg. His first credited war-related drawing, a 2-page spread of the Union attack on Confederate works at Vicksburg on May 22, was published in the June 20, 1863 issue of *Leslie’s* (Volume XVI, No. 403, p 200-201). Another 2-page spread of the siege of Vicksburg, Sherman’s attack on the rebel works on May 22, appeared in the July 4 issue (Volume XVI, No. 405, p 232-233), along with two other illustrations of scenes at Vicksburg. The next issue (July 11, 1863) featured his illustration of Sherman’s fight at Vicksburg with hand-grenades on June 13 on the cover of the issue (Volume XVI, No. 406, p 241), as well as two other

Vicksburg-related illustrations. Eight additional Schell Vicksburg-related illustrations appeared in the July 25 issue (a special supplement), and other of his illustrations of the siege at Vicksburg (including the meeting of Grant and the Confederate General Pemberton, Grant’s army’s triumphal entrance into Vicksburg) appeared in the subsequent three issues of the illustrated newspaper. As the younger Schell was illustrating the siege of Vicksburg, his older brother Frank H. Schell was sketching gunboats on the Mississippi River in Louisiana and Mississippi.

With the capture of Vicksburg in July and the opening of the Mississippi during August and early September, Schell moved downriver and illustrated Mississippi



The Gunboat Choctaw Holding the Rebels at Bay at Milliken’s Bend, June 7.— From a Sketch by Our Special Artist F. B. Schell. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 405, p 209, July 4, 1863.

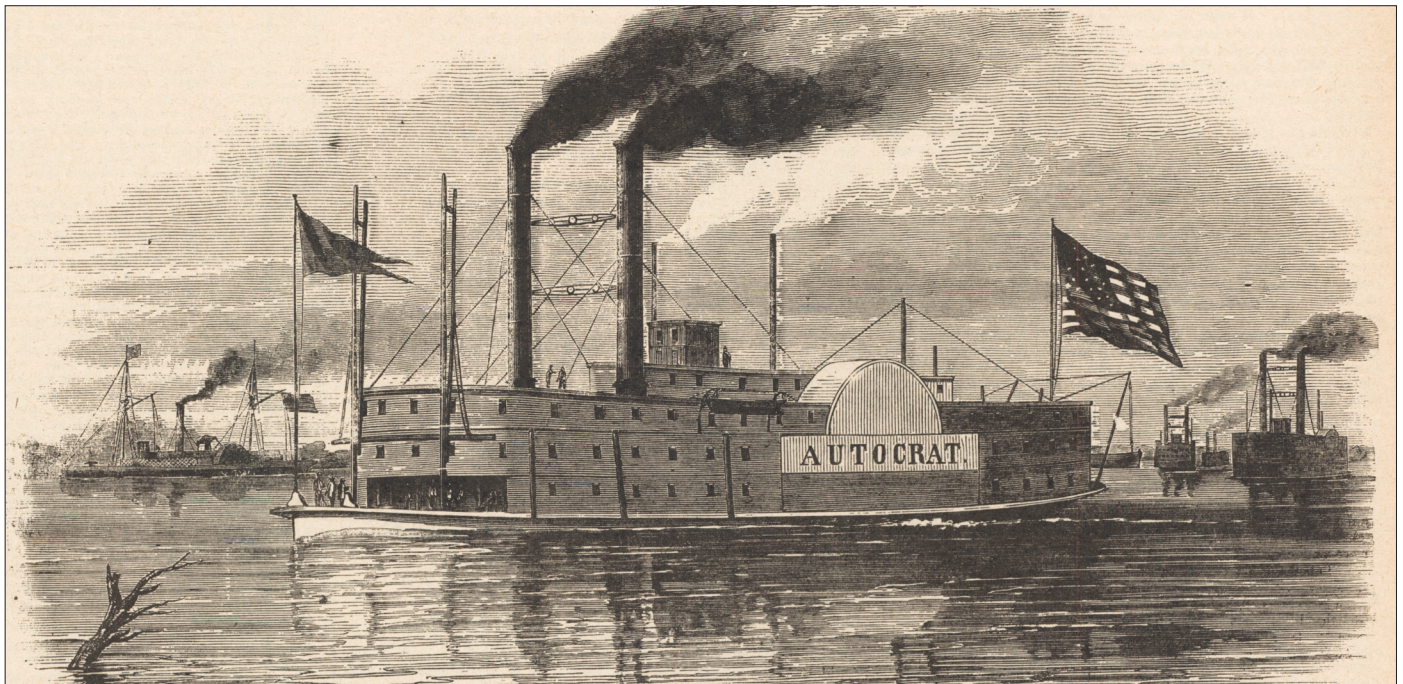


Our Iron Navy—The Monitor Osage, Recently Built at St. Louis.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, Fred. B. Schell. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 408, p 299, July 25, 1863.

Squadron gunboats; scenes of Port Hudson; slaves of the Jefferson Davis plantation arriving at Chickasaw Bayou; the occupation and scenes of Natchez, Mississippi; Snyder's Bluff and its fortifications by Grant; and the burning of the steamer *Ruth* and explosion of the *City of Madison* steamer (a number shown nearby). In October, a few more illustrations of Vicksburg events drawn by Schell appeared in *Leslie's*, while Schell was already following Union Brigadier General James McPherson's movements into Mississippi—illustrations of McPherson's advances and battles there appeared in *Leslie's* through the end of the year. In November, Schell traveled through northern Georgia and Tennessee, with his illustrations appearing in *Leslie's* issues in January and February. By sometime in January 1864, he was apparently back in Philadelphia—he wed in April and his first child was born in late October that year—he likely had enough of being away from home and enduring the travels associated with being a 'Special Artist' and felt the need to start a family and pursue a commercial artistic career. The April 30, 1864 issue of *Leslie's* included his illustrations of the photographer at Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, and an explosion of an iron foundry in downtown Philadelphia, a local event. His last credited illustration in 1864 was a scene at

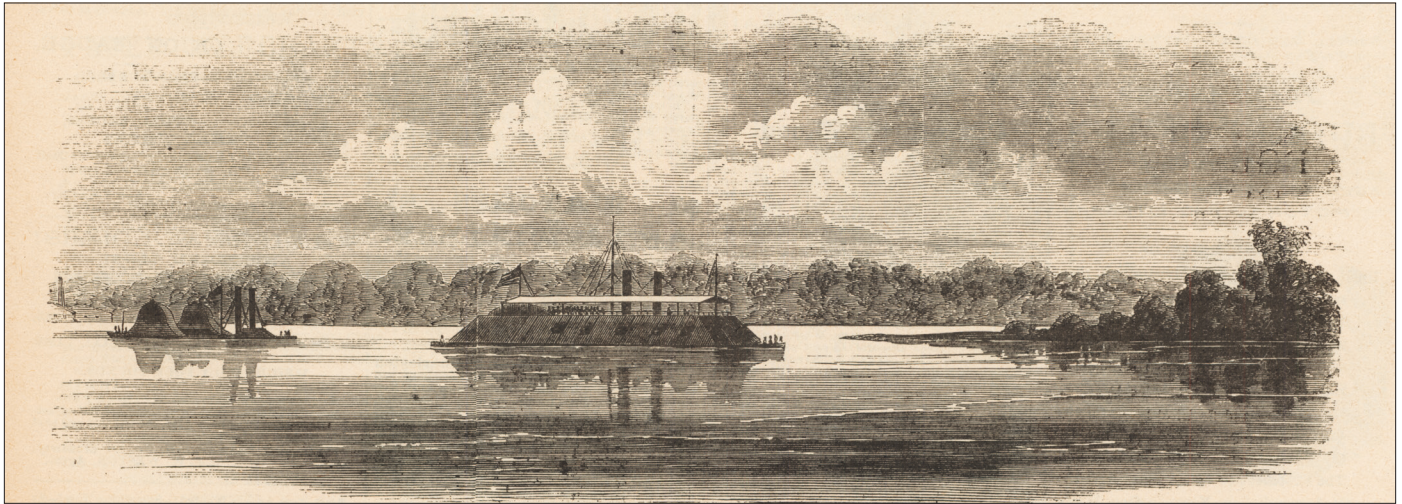
Nashville (September 24, 1864 issue of *Leslie's*), apparently drawn earlier while on assignment and in that city.

After the Civil War, Schell had a very successful career providing illustrations for dozens of books, including the well-known Moore's *The Night Before Christmas* (Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston Company, 1883), Tennyson's *Beauties of Tennyson* (Philadelphia, PA: Porter & Coates, 1885), and Longfellow's *The Village Blacksmith* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1890). In 1877-1879, Schell (and other artists) accompanied Ulysses S. Grant on his world tour, assisting the journalist-biographer John Russell Young, who wrote a two-volume account of the tour, by providing a large number of pencil drawings that were used for the engravings in the book set. Schell also produced drawings and watercolor paintings that were the basis for illustrations in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* and *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. From 1880-1883, Schell was in Canada, engaged as the lead artist-engraver in the production of the comprehensive *Picturesque Canada: The Country As It Was and Is*, 2 Volumes (George Munro Grant, Editor. Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1882), representing the



The Mississippi River—The 'Autocrat', Flagship of Brigadier-General Ellet's Marine Brigade, Patrolling the River.—From a Sketch by F. B. Schell. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 409, p 304, August 1, 1863.

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The War on the Mississippi—The Gunboats Choctaw and Benton Guarding the Mouth of the River.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, Fred. B. Schell. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 412, p 353, August 22, 1863.

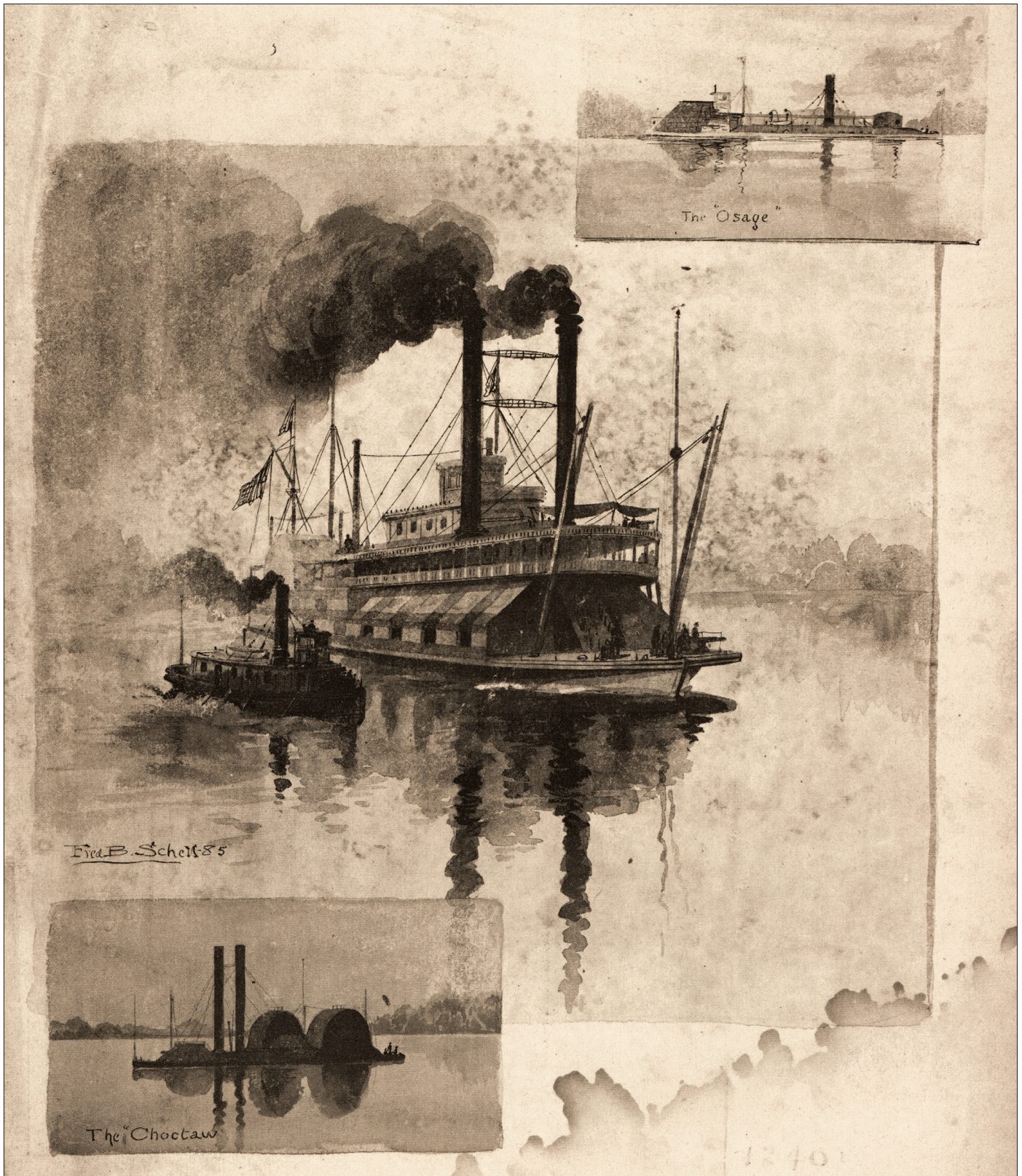
characteristic scenery and the history and life of its people. From 1886 to 1889, Schell was in Australia and New Zealand, along with the production crew that developed *Picturesque Canada*, to develop the 3-volume monumental work, *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* (Andrew Garran, Editor. Sydney, Melbourne, London, Springfield, MA: The Picturesque Atlas Publishing Company, Ltd, 1886-1888), which was undertaken to mark the first 100 years of Australia’s settlement. In 1889, shortly after returning from the 3-year art assignment in Australia, Schell succeeded Charles Parsons (who had also made a large number of drawings for Young’s book set on Grant’s world tour) as the art editor of the illustrated works of Harper and Brothers, New York, New York, moving to the Bronx, New York and living there for the remainder of his life. He painted often in watercolors and exhibited such works in major cities across the country.

Schell married Mary Elizabeth Owens on April 20, 1864, at the Cavalry Baptist Church, Philadelphia. Together, they apparently had five children who survived birth (Mary, Frederic Jr, Henry, Emilia Edith, and William Elmer). Schell died from of traumatic injuries on May 26, 1902, when he fell from a third-story window of his home in the Bronx, New York; he had been suffering for some years from paralysis (possibly from a stroke) and was sitting at the window—he may have lost his balance,

suffered another stroke, or possibly committed suicide. He was survived by his wife and four of his children and was buried at Monument Cemetery, Philadelphia—all interments there were removed in 1956 to Lawnview Cemetery, Rockledge, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Schell’s wife died in New York in 1923 and was interred alongside her husband.

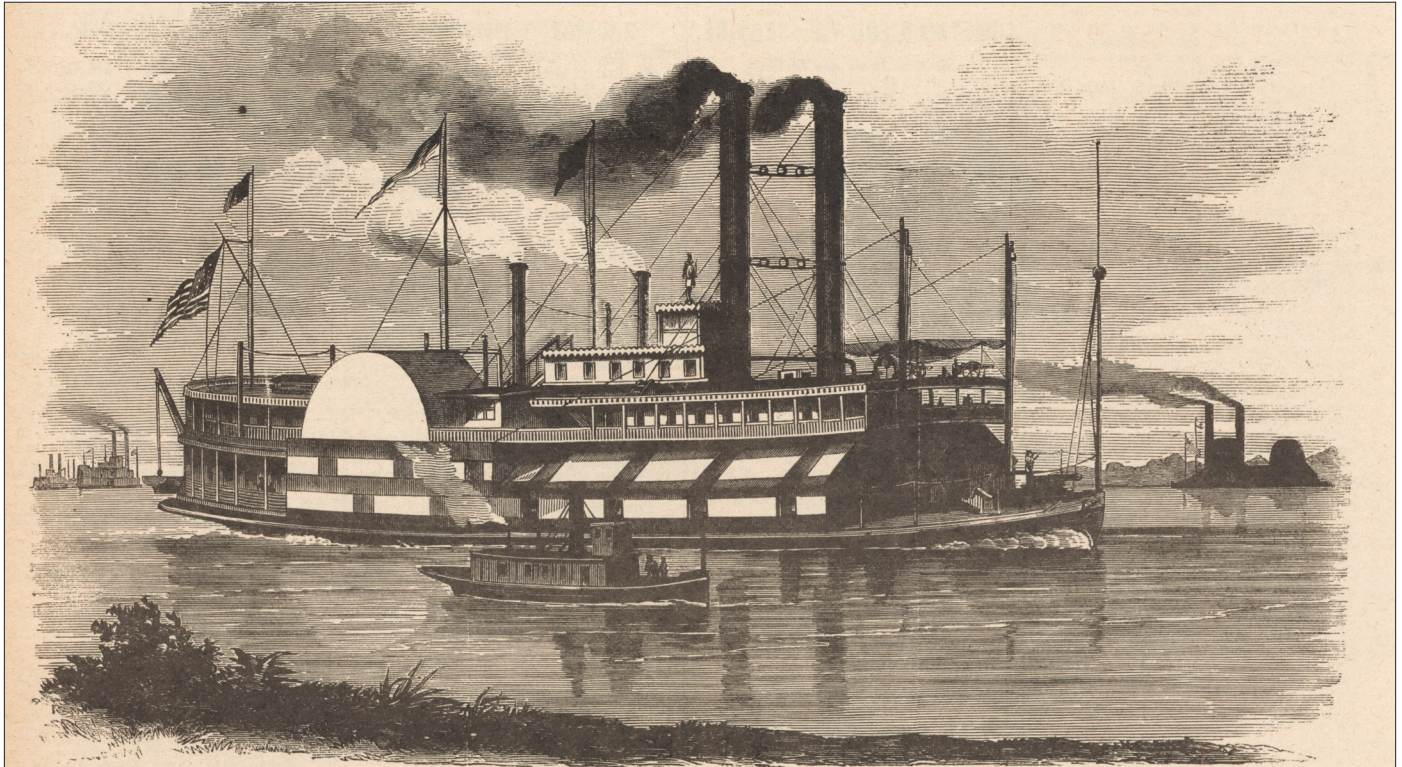
The Becker Collection of Drawings of the American Civil War Era (Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts) contains 7 wartime drawings made by Schell in Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee in 1863; the New York Public Library holds one of Schell’s wartime drawings; and the Australian National Maritime Museum holds 14 of his drawings and engravings. In 1992, Schell’s grandson, Frederick B. Schell, Jr, III and his wife donated several of his drawings and watercolor paintings to the Akron Art Museum (Akron, Ohio). Digitized versions of all these drawings from these holdings may be viewed online. Other of Schell’s original drawings, engravings, and watercolor paintings are in other museums, galleries, private collections, or lost to history.

In contrast to his older brother, Schell was a relatively minor ‘Special Artist’ for Leslie’s, working for the illustrated newspaper for perhaps not quite a full year—his principal contributions were a sizable group of detailed illustrations involving the siege and surrender of Vicksburg. While Schell’s drawings comprised a



Federal Warships on the Mississippi. This watercolor drawing by Schell shows Rear-Admiral David D. Porter's flagship, *Black Hawk* plus two shallow-draft ironclad gunboats, *Osage* and *Choctaw*. From: Stephen W. Sears, Editor. *The American Heritage Century Collection of Civil War Art* (New York, NY: American Heritage Publishing Company, Inc., a subsidiary of McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1974), p 235. Courtesy of American Heritage Publishing Company. The drawing was the basis for an illustration published in Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, Editors. *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York, NY: The Century Company, 1887-1888), Volume III, p 562.

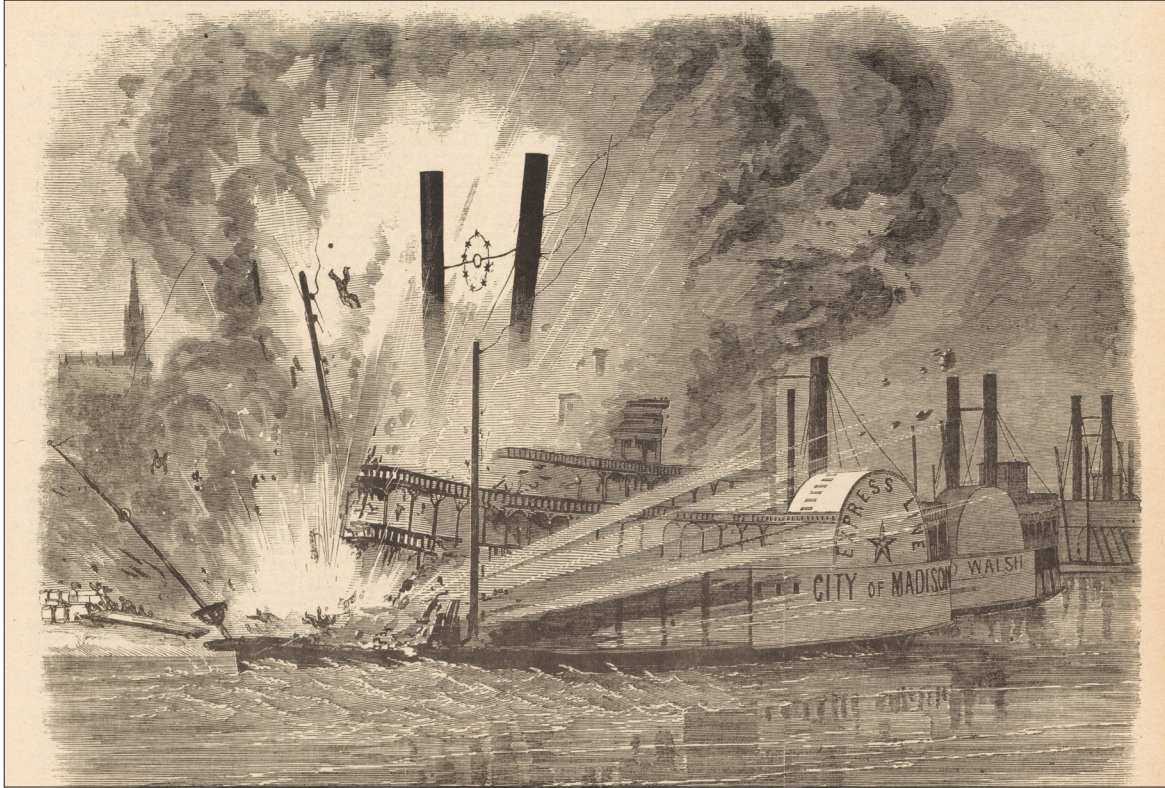
## Frederic (Fred.) B. Schell: ‘Special Artist’ for Leslie’s



The War on the Mississippi—The Black Hawk, Admiral Porter’s Flagship.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, Fred. B. Schell. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 413, p 369, August 29, 1863.



Burning of the U.S. Steamer Ruth on the Mississippi, August 3, 1863.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, F. B. Schell. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 414, p 384, September 5, 1863. The steamer left St. Louis for Vicksburg on August 3 with 200 passengers and Grant’s troops aboard. Near Island No. 1, a fire below decks was discovered. She was headed for shore on the Missouri side of the river when the fire drove the engineers from their posts—she struck the shore with great force and before many could jump ashore, she swung off with her engines running, ran down the river in flames. Over 80 perished. The fire may have been the work of rebel emissaries (p 386).



Explosion of the Steamer City of Madison at Vicksburg.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, F. B. Schell. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVII, No. 418, p 28, October 3, 1863. *City of Madison* was a steamer chartered by the U.S. government as an ammunition transport. She was being loaded with ordnance stores on August 19, 1863, when a box of percussion shells was accidentally dropped in the hold, setting off a terrific explosion. The steamer was completely destroyed, and 30 to 50 individuals were killed. The ship's heavy (almost one ton) anchor was hurled 75 yards up the wharf and buried nearly out of sight (p 23).

preponderance of army-related scenes, his assignments on the Mississippi River allowed him the opportunity to observe and produce a small body of detailed riverine naval illustrations. After the war ended, Schell continued to provide some artwork of the conflict, including a few drawings that were used for illustrations in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. Like his older brother, Schell's artwork was known for its detail and accuracy and his artistic talents were the basis for a very successful postwar career.

### Sources

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