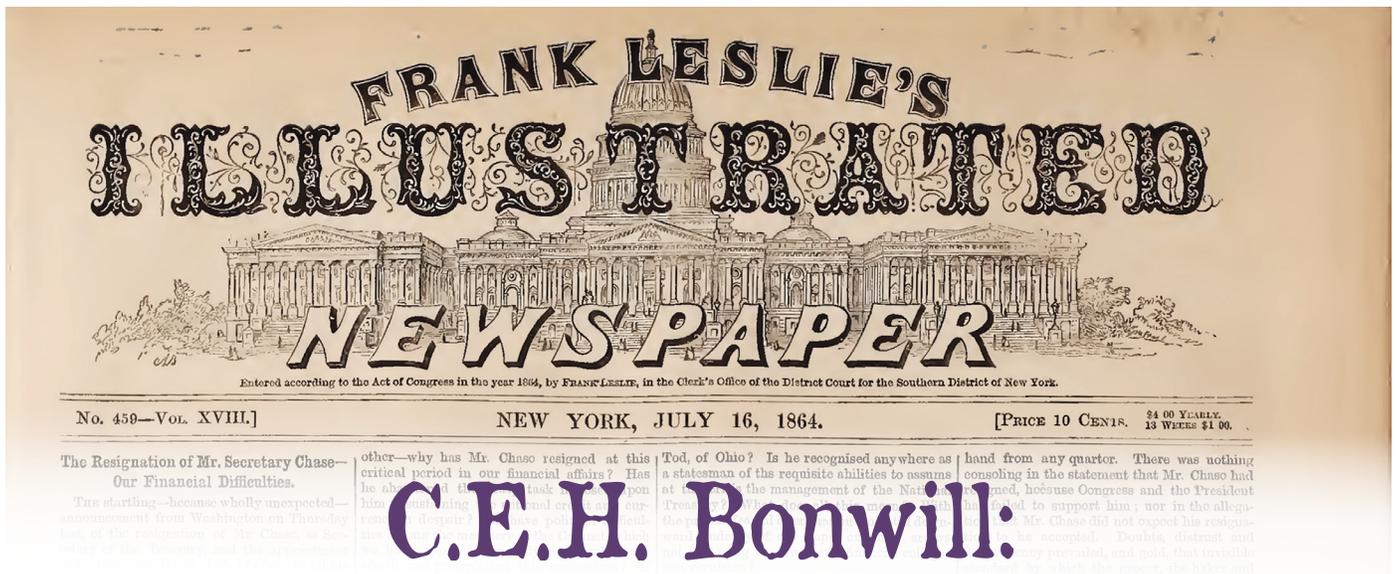


Naval Illustrators



C.E.H. Bonwill: 'Special Artist' for Leslie's

By Gary McQuarrie



Charles Edward Hall Bonwill, circa the Civil War period. Photograph from *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly Newspaper*, Volume CXVIII, No. 3053, p 263, March 12, 1914. Bonwill was noted for having a wonderful, full beard that was a source of personal pride.

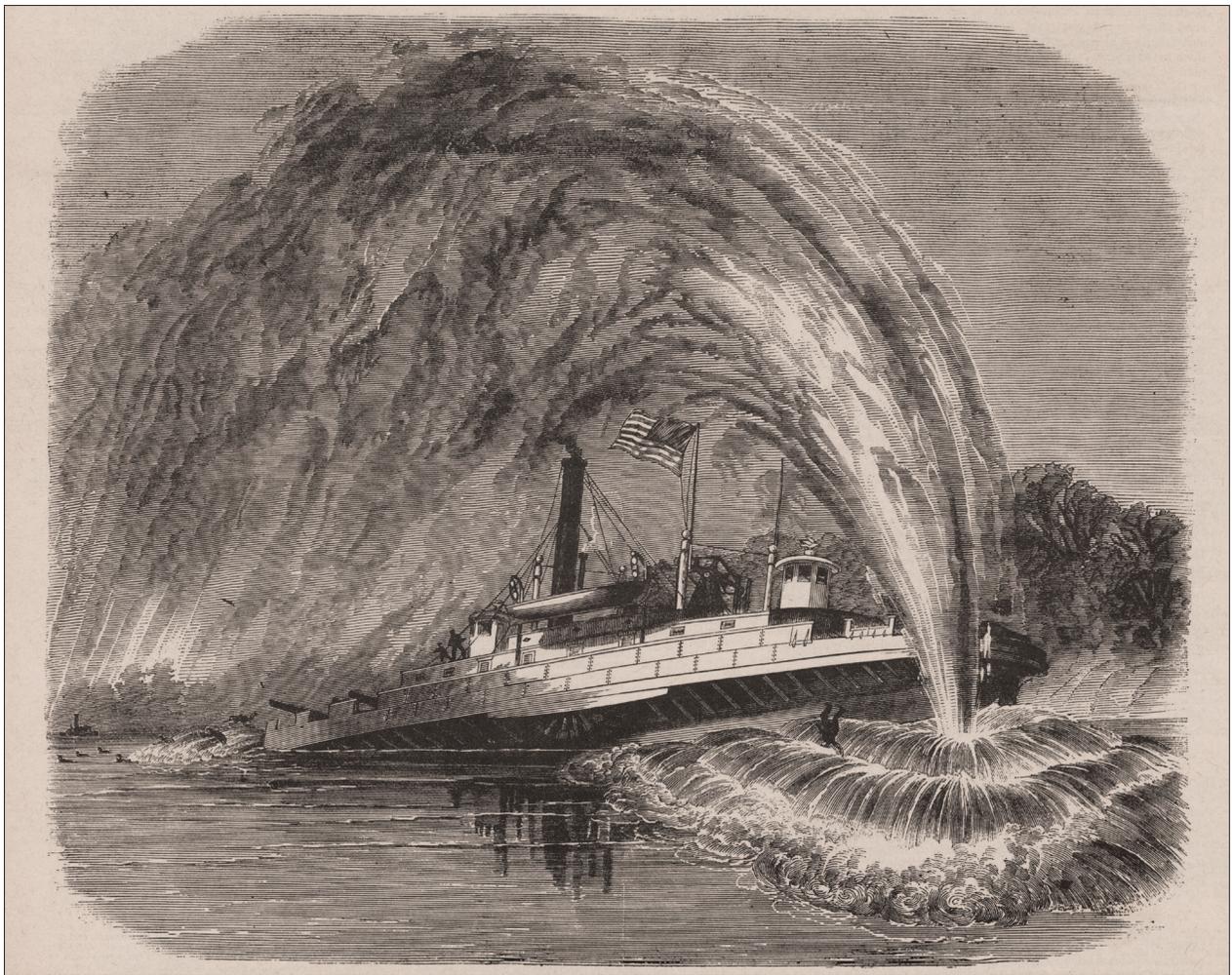
CHARLES EDWARD HALL (C.E.H.) BONWILL (1835-1918) (sometimes erroneously noted as 'Bonwell' or 'F.C.H. Bonwill' or 'Bonville') worked for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (*Leslie's*) as a 'Special Artist' during and for at least some period after the Civil War. *Leslie's* published 87 illustrations based on Bonwill's sketches and drawings, the sixth highest total for *Leslie's* and the eleventh highest total for any identified 'Special Artist' among the illustrated newspapers during the war. Some 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.

Charles E.H. Bonwill was born in Camden, Kent County, Delaware, on November 18, 1835. He had an older sister who died at the age of only three before Charles was born, and an older brother, William Gibson Arlington Bonwill, who became an academic and distinguished dentist in Philadelphia. His father, William Moore Bonwill, was a practicing physician. Little information is available on the younger years of Charles. In the 1850 U.S. Census, he was 14 years old and living at home in Delaware.

Bonwill apparently exhibited considerable artistic talent at a young age and pursued it accordingly. Several preserved letters from his father to him from 1852-1854 indicate that Bonwill left home at the age of 16 and was living in

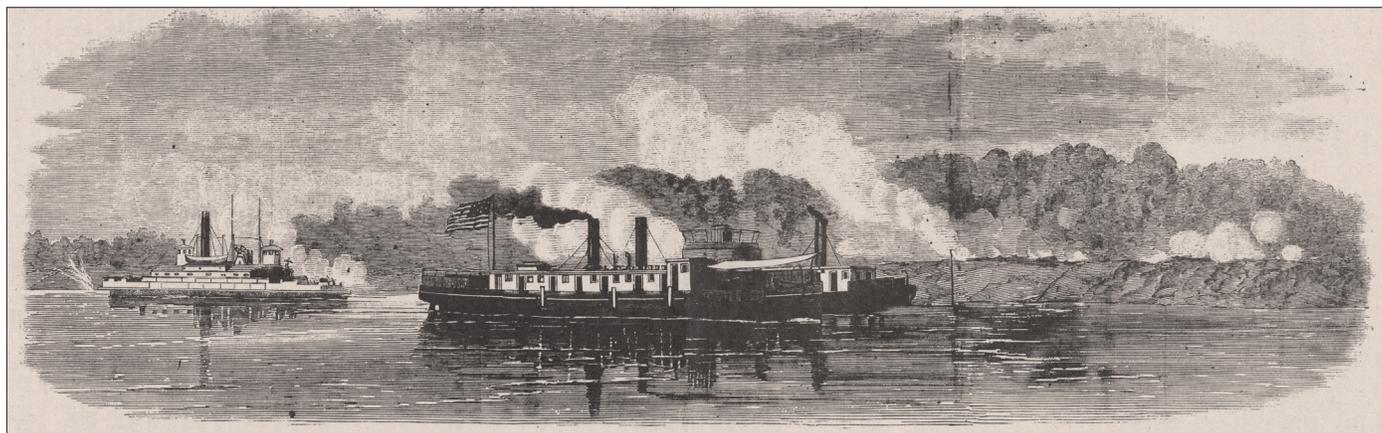
Philadelphia by April 1852, likely receiving further artistic training from and working for William H. Rease, a prominent lithographer of various types of prints. The letters were addressed to Bonwill first at Rease's business address at 17½ South Fifth Street (above Chestnut Street) and then later at Rease's subsequent business address (97 Chestnut Street, the northeast corner of 4th and Chestnut Streets), where his cousin also addressed a letter to him in 1859. His father's letters also suggest that Bonwill had a close relationship with William N. Wiatt, a bookbinder located very close to Rease's later business address. By at least 1854, his drawings were already being published ('The Day Boat on the Hudson,' *American Railroad Journal*, Volume X, No. 4, p 57, January 28, 1854). *McElroy's Philadelphia Directory for*

1856 listed Bonwill as a lithographer at the northeast corner of 4th and Chestnut Streets. In 1857, he illustrated and co-published Amsden's Maps of Scranton and Williamsport, Pennsylvania, with a fellow artist or lithographer, a 'McKinney' [unidentified], the business collaboration located at the 4th and Chestnut Streets address. In the 1860 U.S. Census, Bonwill (incorrectly transcribed as 'Bonville') listed his occupation as lithographer and was residing in the 5th Ward, Northern Division of Philadelphia. *McElroy's Philadelphia Directory for 1861* listed Bonwill as working at 57 South 4th Street (again, likely for Rease) and residing at 209 South 6th Street; he was not listed in subsequent city directories in 1862 or 1863, suggesting he had moved out of the city.

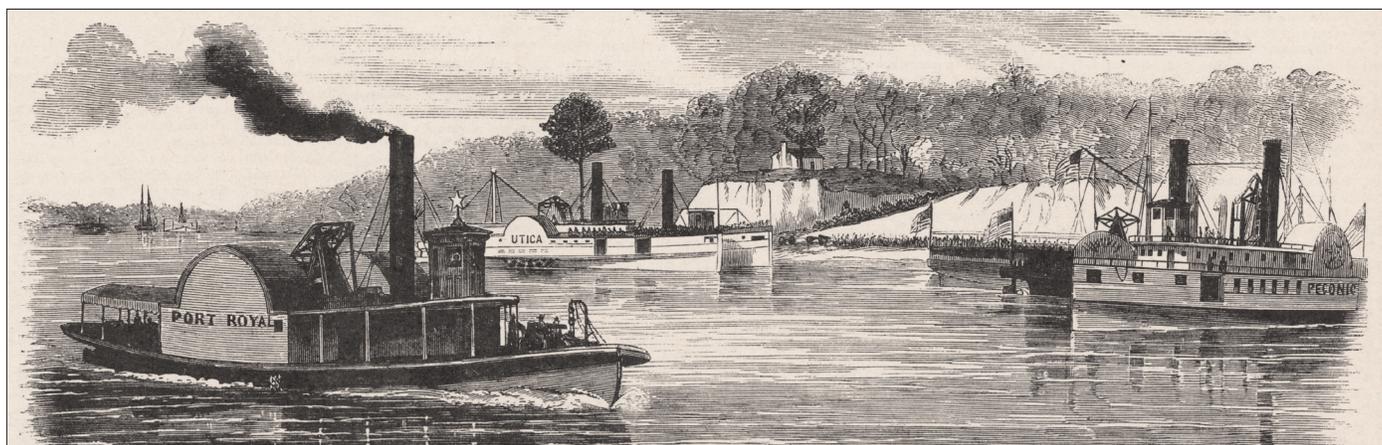


The War in Virginia—Explosion of a Torpedo Under the Commodore Barney, on James River, August 4.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, F.C.H. [C.E.H.] Bonwill. Illustration published on the front page of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 413, p 357, August 29, 1863.

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War in Virginia—Action on James River, August 4, Between the Gunboats and River Batteries.—From a Sketch by F.C.H. [C.E.H.] Bonwill. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 414, p 385, September 5, 1863.



The War in North Carolina—Gen. Foster's Infantry Forces Disembarking at Winton. From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, F.C.H. [C.E.H.] Bonwill. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 413, p 368, August 29, 1863. Army transport steamers shown returning troops to Winton.

Sources suggest Bonwill began working with *Leslie's* sometime during 1861. At least one of Bonwill's surviving war sketches (unpublished) dates to June 1861, but during 1861 *Leslie's* did not credit illustrations by an artist's name and no illustrations were attributed to him by name in 1862, making Bonwill's association and possible early contributions to the newspaper difficult to impossible to clearly identify. In addition, typical historic sources describing the illustrated newspapers and their 'Special Artists' only mention Bonwill infrequently or not at all, and none provide any details of his early war coverage or details after his coverage of the Red River Campaign in 1864. His wartime drawings and credited published illustrations in *Leslie's* reflect

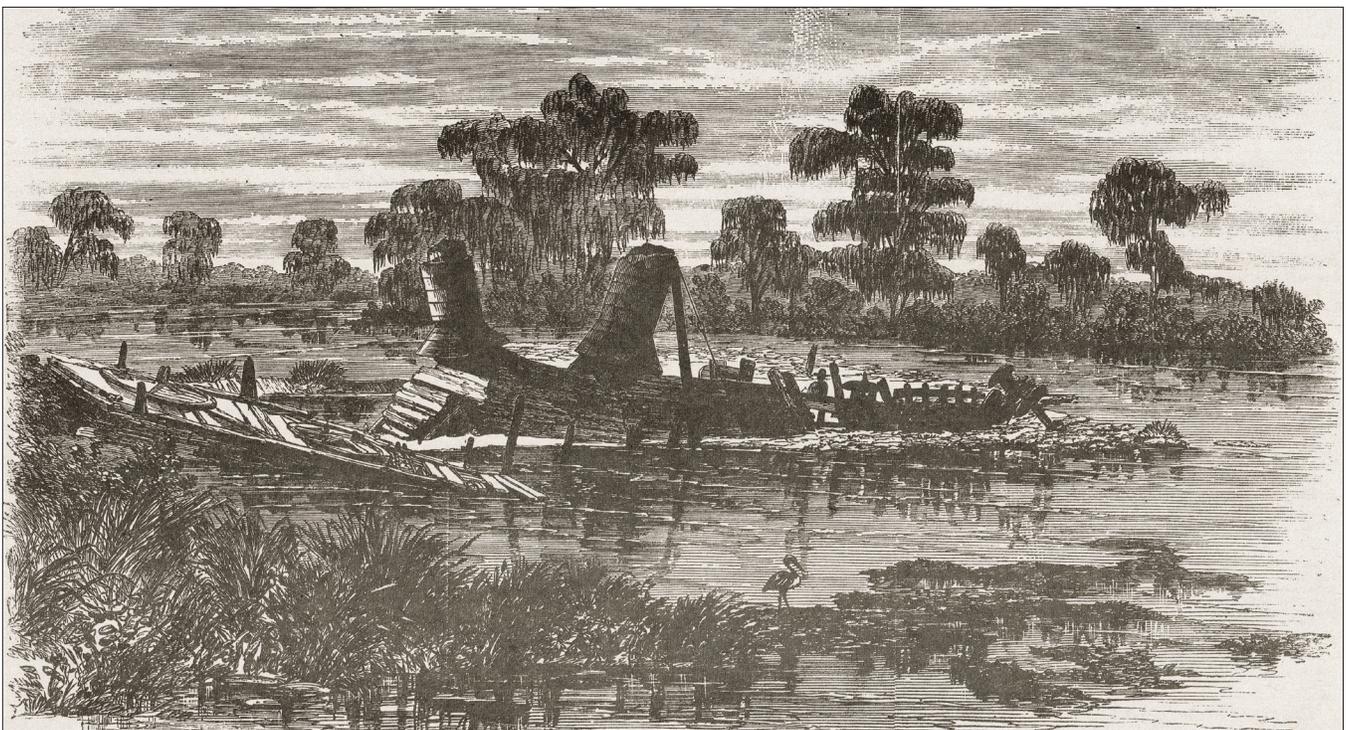
locations in Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Texas (along the Rio Grande River).

Bonwill's first credited war-related illustrations appeared in the August 1, 1863 issue of *Leslie's* (Volume XVI, No. 409, p 304-305 [Invasion of Maryland Union army scenes]). The subsequent issue also had illustrations from the invasion of Maryland (Volume XVI, No. 410, p 312, 316-317, 321). Bonwill next covered army action in North Carolina (Volume XVI, No. 412, p 352 and No. 413, p 368 [Colonel Samuel P. Spear's cavalry expedition to Murfreesboro in July]). In August, he returned northward, covering action in Virginia on the James River (shown nearby).

Bonwill then traveled to Louisiana to follow Union Major General Nathaniel P. Banks's movements, with his surviving drawings of this coverage dating to the latter half of September 1863. His first illustrations from Louisiana appeared in the October 24, 1863 issue of *Leslie's* (Volume XVII, No. 421, p 76) that also included two trailing illustrations from his time in North Carolina. His army-related illustrations following Banks appeared in multiple issues during November (Volume XVII, No. 423, p 108; Volume XVII, No. 424, p 113, 117, 125; Volume XVII, No. 425, p 132) and December (Volume XVII, No. 428, p 188, 189; Volume XVII, No. 429, p 196; Volume XVII, No. 430, p 209), and included some of his most notable war coverage. His next illustrations were of the Oak Lawn Plantation on the Teche in the February 6, 1864 issue of *Leslie's* (Volume XVII, No. 436, p 316), followed by scenes of Opelousas, Louisiana, and scenes from along the Rio Grande River, including Matamoras, Mexico, just across the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas (Volume XVII, No. 438, p 337, 348, February 20, 1864 and Volume XVIII, No. 445, p 45, April 9, 1864), as lines of the river

were occupied by Banks's forces. The March 26 issue brought his illustrations of grand scenes in New Orleans (Volume XVIII, No. 443, p 1, 12), while his 2-page illustration of the restoration of the Union and inauguration of Michael Han as governor of Louisiana appeared in the April 2 issue (Volume XVIII, No. 444, p 24-25).

Bonwill continued to follow Banks's actions with extensive coverage of the Red River Campaign, with numerous illustrations appearing in the April 30, May 7, May 14, and May 21 issues. During the capture of General Robert E. Lee's headquarters' train on April 9 during the Battle at Pleasant Hill, Bonwill unfortunately lost private papers as well as numerous sketches that he had accumulated for a long time in the field and had prized highly; these might have provided even more detailed actions of Banks's expedition. The June 11 issue carried a full page of Bonwill's illustrations from Texas and Louisiana (Volume XVIII, No. 454, p 188), apparently ones he had previously sent before losing his papers on April 9. Only two more of his illustrations,



The War in Louisiana—The Wreck of the Gunboat Cotton in the Bayou Teche.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [C.E.H. Bonwill]. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVII, No. 424, p 125, November 14, 1863. After the fight on January 13, 1863, the Confederates could not escape with the vessel so they ran the gunboat *Cotton* ashore and set her afire, resulting in a nearly impassable obstruction in the river about 16 miles north of Berwick, Louisiana.

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from Texas and New Orleans, appeared in subsequent issues during the remainder of 1864. He appears to have left the field after the Red River Campaign ended and returned to New York to work at *Leslie's* office in the art department.

In the span of approximately one year from mid-1863 to mid-1864, Bonwill produced a very large number of illustrations, comprising the overwhelming and apparent majority of his illustrations known to have been published in *Leslie's*, suggesting this was the principal period of his contributions to the newspaper. *Leslie's* did have Bonwill illustrate the funeral services of President Abraham Lincoln in the East Room at the White House on April 19, 1865 in Washington, DC, in a two-page spread (Volume XX, No. 501, p 104-105, May 6, 1865)—this was the last illustration during the war credited to the artist. Details on his subsequent employment specifics are limited—he appears to have continued working for *Leslie's* as an artist until at least 1868 or 1869 (before subsequently being employed elsewhere or

becoming self-employed as an illustrator) based on his appearance in a caricatured depiction of *Leslie's* staff by Edward Jump published as a lithograph in 1868-1869.

After the Civil War, Bonwill had a successful career providing illustrations for illustrated newspapers and periodicals, including both *Leslie's* (postwar 1860s) and *Harper's Weekly* (occasional illustrations from the late 1860s into the 1870s); illustrated magazines such as *The Manhattan Illustrated Monthly Magazine*; and numerous books, including James Grant Wilson's 4-volume *The Memorial History of the City of New York* (New York, NY: The New York History Company, 1892) and Howard Hinton's *School Days at Mount Pleasant* (New York, NY: Henry L. Hinton, 1871). Bonwill exhibited his work at a variety of New York City art exhibitions, including those such as the Salmagundi Club and the American Watercolor Society (though he was not a member of either of these groups). Bonwill also traveled to Canada and his drawings of Quebec and Ottawa were used for engravings in the comprehensive *Picturesque Canada*:



The War in Louisiana—Scenes in Banks's Expedition—Ruins of Rebel Gunboat Hart.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, C.E.H. Bonwill. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVII, No. 425, p 132, November 21, 1863. *Hart* was an armed side-wheel steamer that was sunk in the Bayou Teche on April 14, 1863, to avoid capture.

The Country As It Was and Is, 2 Volumes (George Munro Grant, Editor. Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1882), representing the characteristic scenery and the history and life of its people.

Bonwill remained a life-long bachelor. He apparently lived in New York City at the war's end and afterward based on several city directories from 1873 (first appearance in the city directory, residing or working at



The War in Louisiana—Destruction of the U.S. Transport John Warner by Confederate Batteries on Red River, May 4.—From a sketch by Our Special Artist, C.E.H. Bonwill. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 455, p 197, June 18, 1864.



The War in Louisiana—Blowing Up of the U.S. Gunboat Covington on the Red River, Above Alexandria, May 4.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, C.E.H. Bonwill. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 455, p 200, June 18, 1864.

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The War in Louisiana—Admiral Porter's Fleet Above the Rapids of Red River.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, C.E.H. Bonwill. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 455, p 205, June 18, 1864.

7 Murray Street for a long period, listing himself as an artist) through the early 1900s. The city directories of 1893-1895 listed him at 447 West 23rd Street, of 1897-1898 listed him at 44 Clinton Place, and of 1900-1905 listed him at 22 East 8th Street—he no longer appeared in the city directory thereafter. In his later years, from at least 1909 based on a city directory (perhaps as early as 1905), he resided at 13 Vestal Street, Nantucket, Massachusetts. Bonwill appears to have moved to Nantucket to be close to his older, aging first cousin, Huldah Hoag Bonwill, a well-known Quaker activist who resided at 31 Vestal Street. Circumstantial information suggests that he moved there just before or around the time of her death (which occurred in early 1905), and that he was residing there at the time of her funeral services in April 1905 in Nantucket.

Bonwill died from chronic cystitis on January 25, 1918, at the age of 82, at the Nantucket Cottage Hospital. Bonwill was buried alongside his parents and siblings at the Christ Episcopal Church Cemetery, Dover, Kent County, Delaware. The will of his older brother, William, who died in 1899, stated, "To my brother, Charles Edward Hall Bonwill of New York, I would like that he is given something as a mark of my appreciation as my only brother and relative now living, that he and others may know that although we differed, yet we could feel

that we were of one blood and at peace with each other," suggesting there was some degree of estrangement either between the brothers or between Bonwill and his immediate family.

The Becker Collection of Drawings of the American Civil War Era (Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts) contains 18 wartime drawings made by Bonwill in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and Louisiana in 1861 and 1863 (the Digital Commonwealth [Worcester, Massachusetts] also holds the same 18 wartime drawings); the New York Public Library holds three of his wartime drawings or engravings based on his drawings and 22 postwar drawings or engravings based on his drawings (mainly of New York buildings)—he donated some of his drawings to the library in 1905; and the Library of Congress holds 8 wartime illustrations based on his drawings—many of the holdings overlap, having the same drawings. Digitized versions of these holdings may be viewed online.

Bonwill was a very productive 'Special Artist' for *Leslie's*, working for the illustrated newspaper apparently for almost the full duration of the war and possibly continuing beyond the war's conclusion (through at least 1868)—his principal contributions were a sizable group of detailed illustrations in 1863 and 1864 comprising a



The War in Louisiana—Commodore Porter's Fleet Before Alexandria, March 26.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, C.E.H. Bonwill. Illustration published in "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Volume XVIII, No. 448, p 88-89, April 30, 1864.



The War on the Red River—Admiral Porter's Fleet Passing Through Col. Bailey's Dam Above Alexandria, May 1864, After Safely Getting Over the Rapids by Its Means.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, C.E.H. Bonwill. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 459, p 264-265, " July 16, 1864. In mid-April 1864, when retreating back downriver, the Union fleet became grounded in the Red River as the water levels fell, stranding the flotilla in a stretch of the Red River at Alexandria. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Bailey, U.S. Army and a civil engineer in civilian life, proposed and then supervised construction of a set of dams that ultimately were broken and allowed the vessels to proceed downriver (Ron Soodalter. *A Dam Fine Solution: Union Army Officer's Ingenuity Rescues a Flotilla Trapped on the Red River*, *America's Civil War*, Volume 32, No. 4, p 28-35, September 2019).

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Burning of the Coast Trader Steamboats on the Levee at New Orleans, La., on the Night of May 27.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, C.E.H. Bonwill. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVIII, No. 455, p 212, June 25, 1864.

preponderance of army-related scenes, particularly following Banks's army in Louisiana and Texas—but his varied assignments allowed him the opportunity to observe and produce a small body of detailed riverine naval illustrations, including naval scenes along the James River and of the Red River Campaign. Though essentially overlooked and little mentioned by historic sources on the illustrated newspapers and their artists, Bonwill was a significant sketch artist whose artwork was known for its detail and accuracy and whose artistic talents were the basis for a successful postwar career.

Sources

Charles Edward Hall Bonwill. findagrave.com. Memorial 11900307.

Charles E.H. Bonwill, January 25, 1918, Death Certificate, "Massachusetts State Vital Records, 1841-1920" database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:23T7-2VP: 22 February 2021>), Deaths, 1918, Volume 78 Montague-Natick, Digital Image 339, State Archives, Boston.

Charles E.H. Bonwill and Huldah Hoag Bonwill. Ancestry.com.

Judith Bookbinder, Sheila Gallagher, Editors. *First Hand Civil War Era Drawings From The Becker Collection*. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title organized by the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston

College, September 5—December 13, 2009 (Printed by Kirkwood Printing, Wilmington, Massachusetts, Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2009), p 14-15 (Image of "Saturday afternoon at Frank Leslie's, 1868-69" with an updated list of identified individuals caricatured), p 55-56.

William P. Campbell. *The Civil War: A Centennial Exhibition of Eyewitness Drawings* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1961), p 107 (Appendix I: Numbers of Published Drawings By Known Special Artists of the Civil War).

"Dr. Bonwill's Will Probated," *The Morning News* (Wilmington, DE), October 5, 1899, p 3, col 2.

Cheryl A. Kasuba, Darlene Miller-Lansing, Alan Sweeney. *Images of America: Scranton* (Mt. Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), p 20-21.

"Leslie's Fifty Years Ago," *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly Newspaper*, Volume CXVIII, No. 3053, p 263, March 12, 1914.

"Obituary: Huldah Hoag Bonwill," *The News Journal* (Wilmington, DE), April 17, 1905, p 5, col 3.

"Saturday afternoon at Frank Leslie's, 1868-69." Lithograph by well-known caricaturist Edward Jump depicting the office and staff of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in the large reception room of its offices then located at Pearl and Elm Streets, New York City. Image ID psnypl_prn_905. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, Print Collection, New York Public Library Digital Collections. This image was reproduced in the December 6, 1915 issue (Volume CXXI, No. 3145, p 661) of *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly Newspaper* with a list of identified individuals in the caricature.

"Second Day's Battles: Bohemian Losses," *New York Herald* (New York, NY), April 24, 1864, p 1, col 3.

W. Fletcher Thompson, Jr. *The Image of War: The Pictorial Reporting of the American Civil War* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), p 84, 182.

William Moore Bonwill and Mary Baggs letters to Charles Edward Hall Bonwill. MSS 0099 F1122. Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Wilmington, Delaware.



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