



Lincoln Lore

Number 1813

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GAUDY BOOKS SOLD CIVIL WAR MEMORIES

by Mark E. Neely, Jr.

The first generation of memoirs, reminiscences, and histories of the Civil War appeared in books with gaudy but often crudely illustrated bindings. Many of these works were published in the 1880s, a watershed decade in book design. Up to that time diesinkers decorated book covers, but artists came to the fore afterward, leading to a sort of golden era of illustrated bindings around the turn of the century. Most of the Civil War books, however, could be said to belong to a "golden era" only in that great amounts of gilt were applied to their covers and spines to attract buyers' attention. The illustrations, with rare exceptions and leaving aside those displaying symbolic devices and military insignia, tended to be crude.

These decorative cloth covers nevertheless lend the first editions of certain Civil War books a distinctive look — one that skilled browsers can pick out at great distances on the shelves of used and antiquarian book

stores. Thus there is at least one advantage to be gained by looking at the examples used in this issue of *Lincoln Lore*.

Might it not also be worthwhile to recognize the decorative bindings for their own sakes? It is not generally a good idea to collect books without any interest in their content. It perverts their purpose, skews their distribution, and is likely to lead to ennui and dissatisfaction. But it is somehow nice when good and useful books, like McClellan's memoirs or Sheridan's, are bound in covers with striking designs, appropriate to their subjects.

All of the books shown here are from the library of The Lincoln Museum (and therefore the customary photo credits have been dispensed with in this issue). There are many other examples, but these may at least spark an interest or prompt recognition of the next visit to a used-and-rare book dealer's establishment.

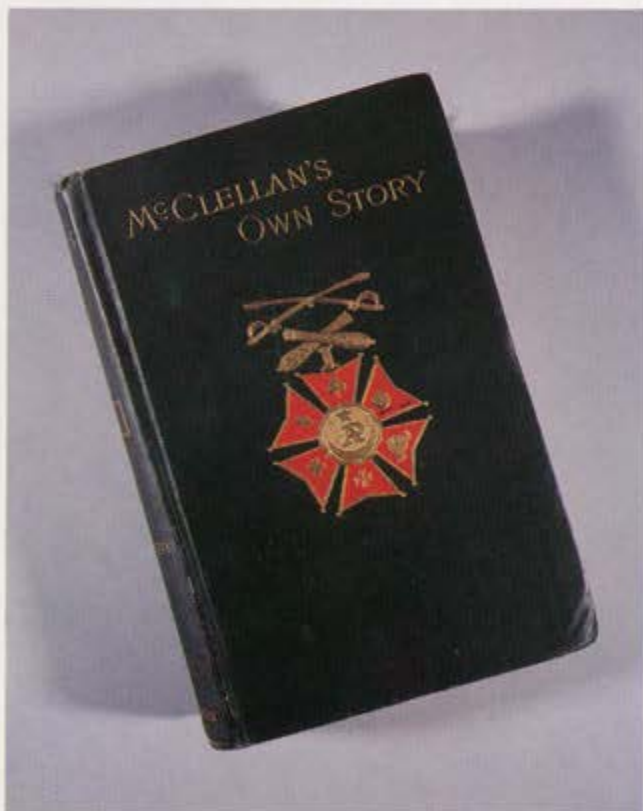


FIGURE 1. The insignia of the Army of the Potomac decorates the front of George B. McClellan's memoirs, published posthumously by Charles L. Webster and Company in 1887.

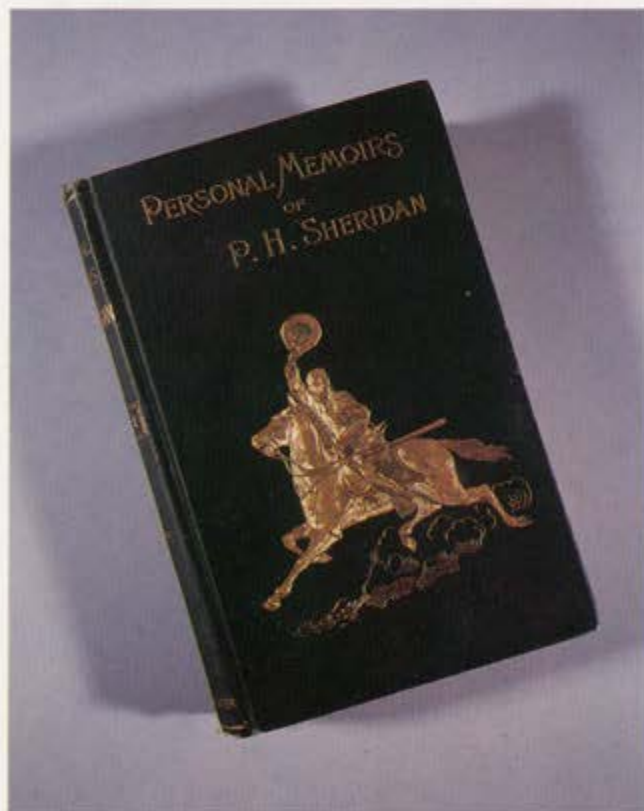


FIGURE 2. Philip H. Sheridan finished his useful memoirs three days before he died. The two-volume work, also published by Webster, showed the general on his famous ride at Cedar Creek.

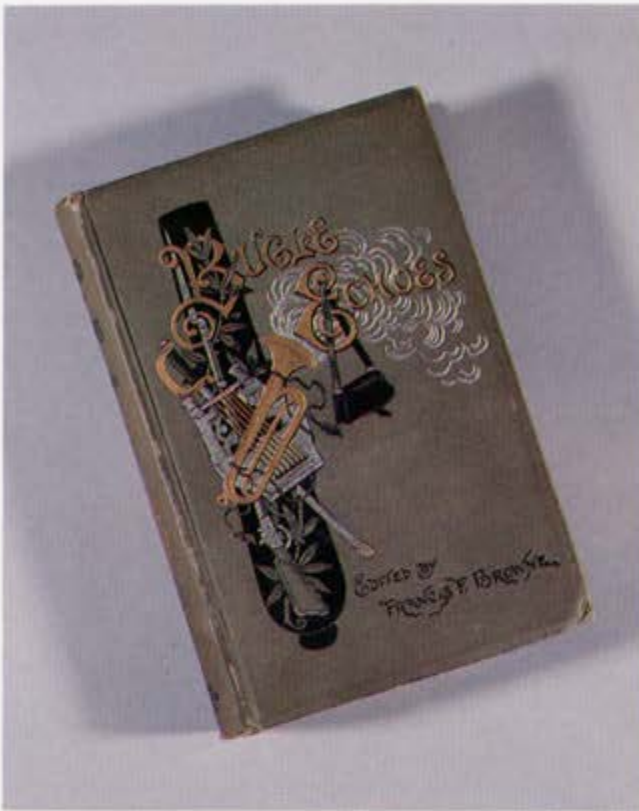


FIGURE 3. The poetic lyre is intermingled with martial artifacts on the cover of this collection of war poems by authors, North and South; it was published by White, Stokes & Allen in 1886.

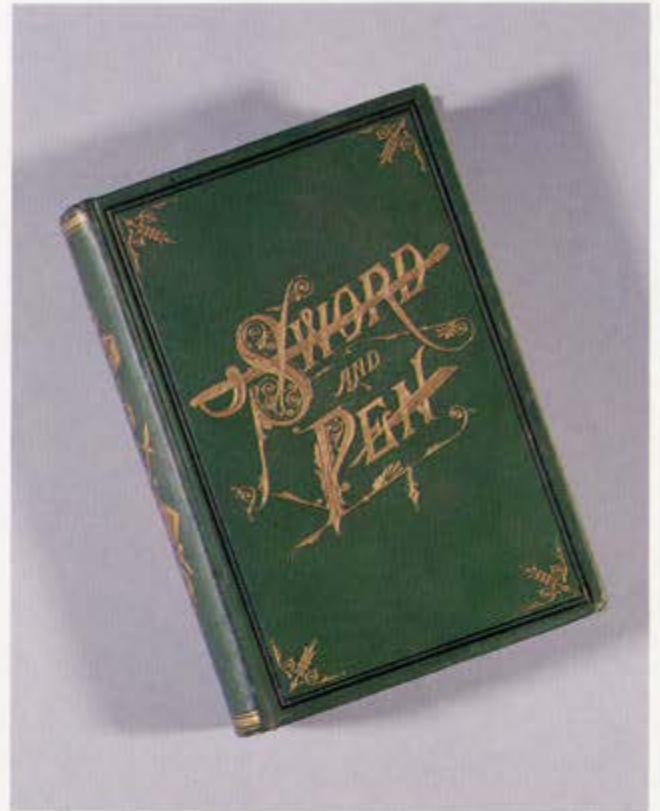


FIGURE 4. Symbols of art and war mingle also in this life of soldier-author Willard Glazer, written by John Algeron Owens and published in Philadelphia by P.W. Ziegler & Company in 1881.

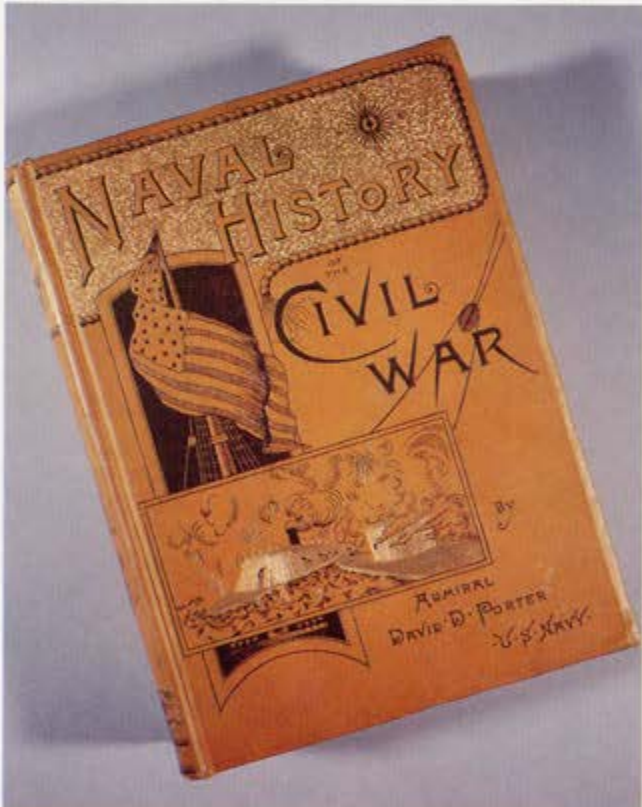


FIGURE 5. Yellow cloth, used here on the covers of Admiral Porter's lively history, published in 1886, was uncommon, perhaps because gilt did not show up well on it — and dirt did.

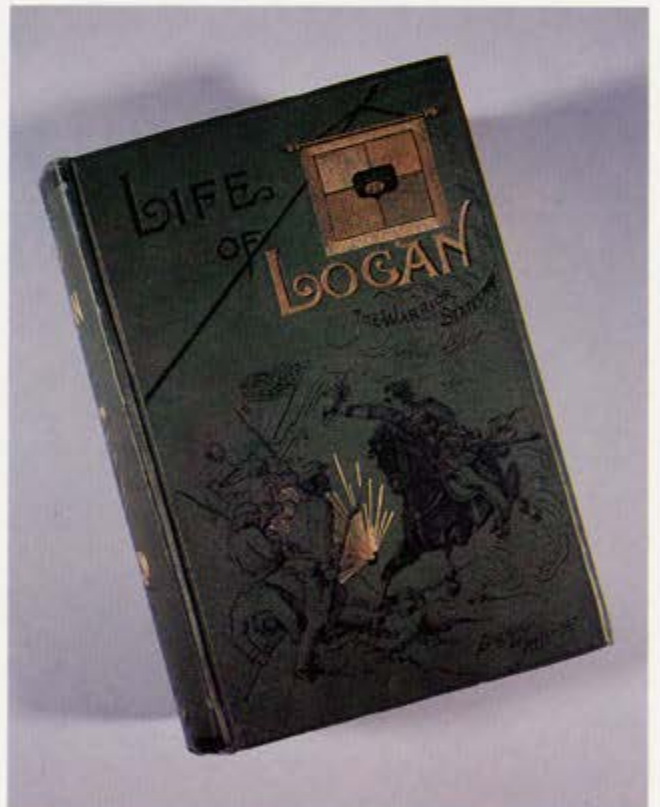


FIGURE 6. George Francis Dawson's *Life and Services of Gen. John A. Logan*, published by Belford, Clark & Company in 1887, relied more on gilt than artistic skill for its shelf appeal.

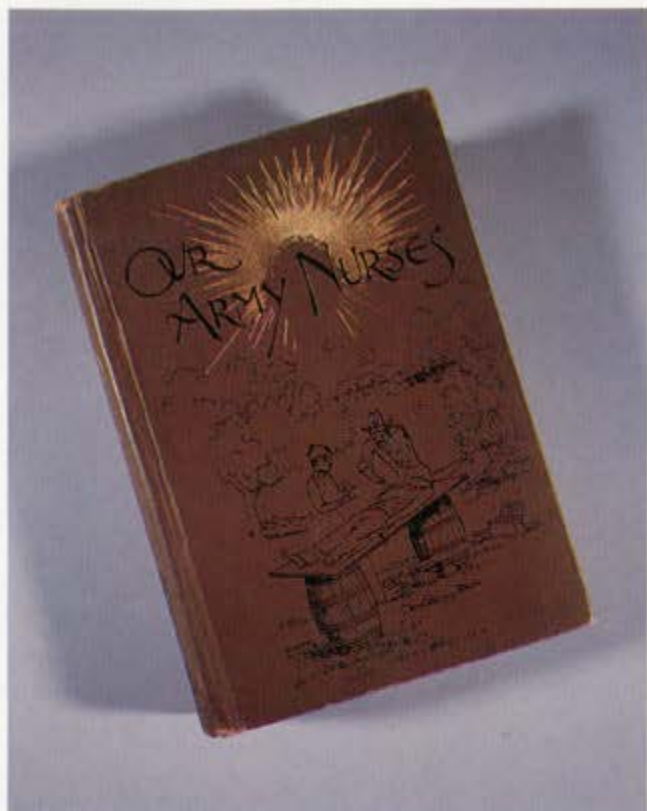


FIGURE 7. Crude sketches but elaborate gilt also served to hawk *Our Army Nurses*, published in Boston by Lounsbury, Nichols & Worth in 1897.

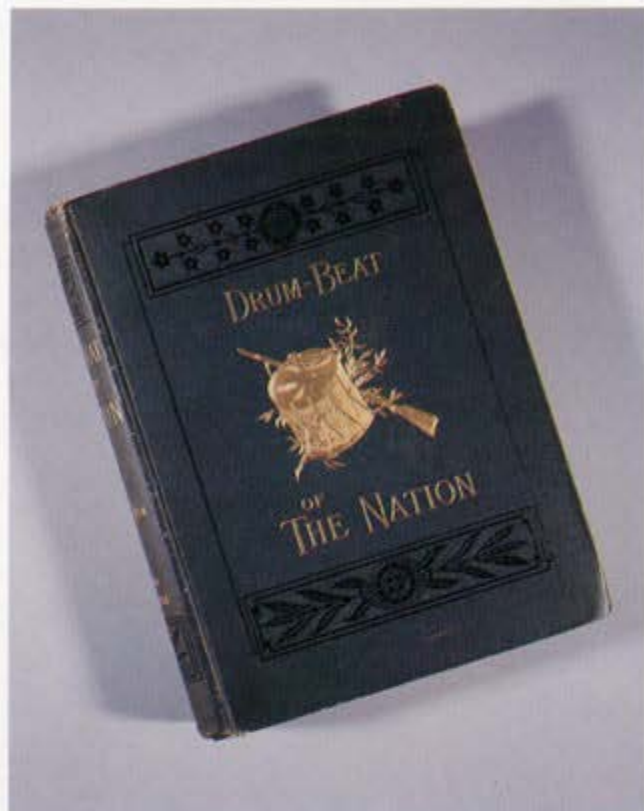


FIGURE 8. Charles Carleton Coffin covered the Civil War as a newspaper correspondent for four years, and several books derived in part from his experiences were his reward later. This one appeared in 1888.

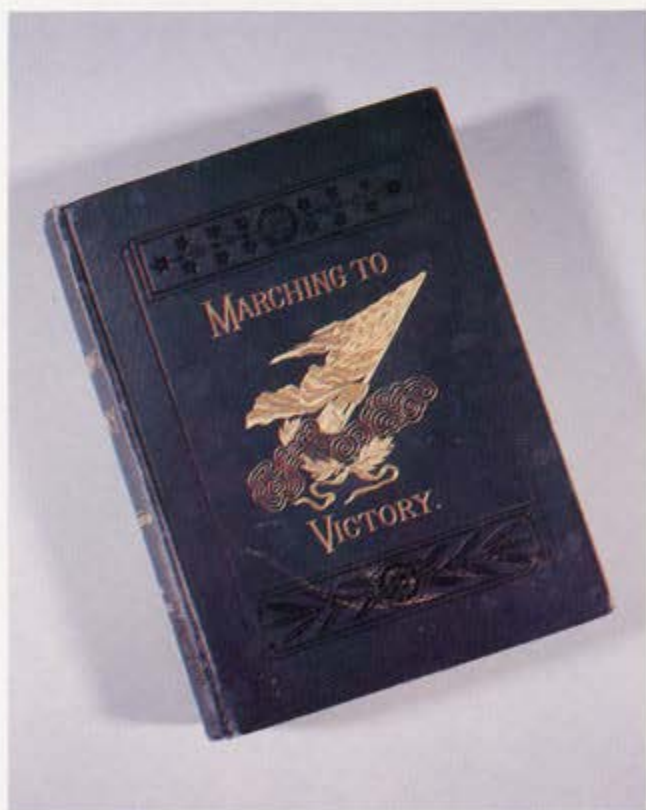


FIGURE 9. Coffin's next volume, covering the events of 1863, appeared the same year as *Drum-Beat*.

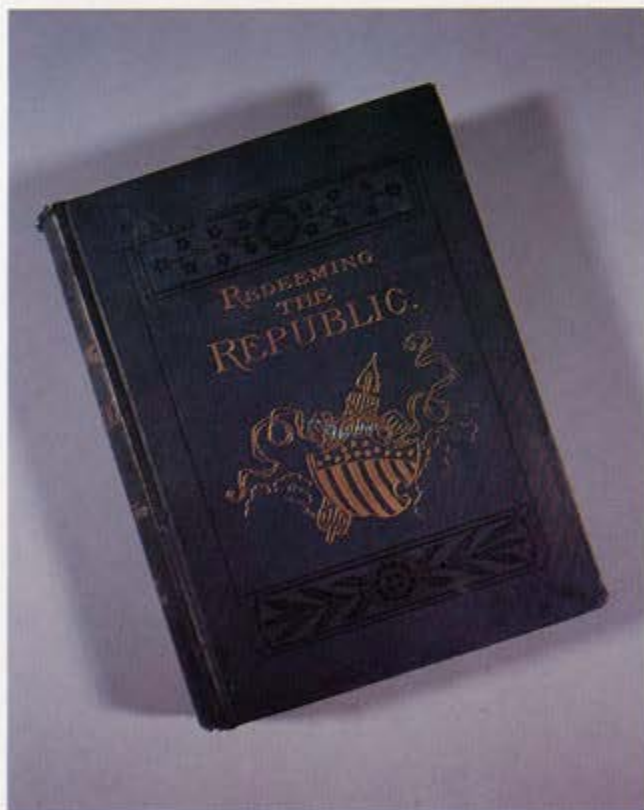


FIGURE 10. Coffin's *Redeeming the Republic* employed symbolic devices — and the usual gilt — to suggest the redemption of the Union in 1864.

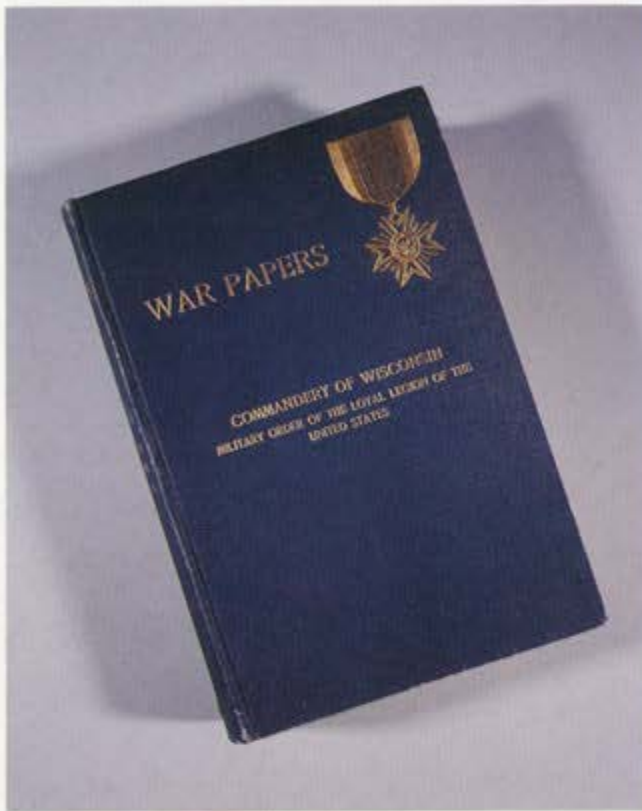


FIGURE 11. Representations of insignia, medals, and symbolic devices rendered the covers most pleasing to the modern eye — and appropriate, as well, for hereditary veterans' organizations like the Loyal Legion.

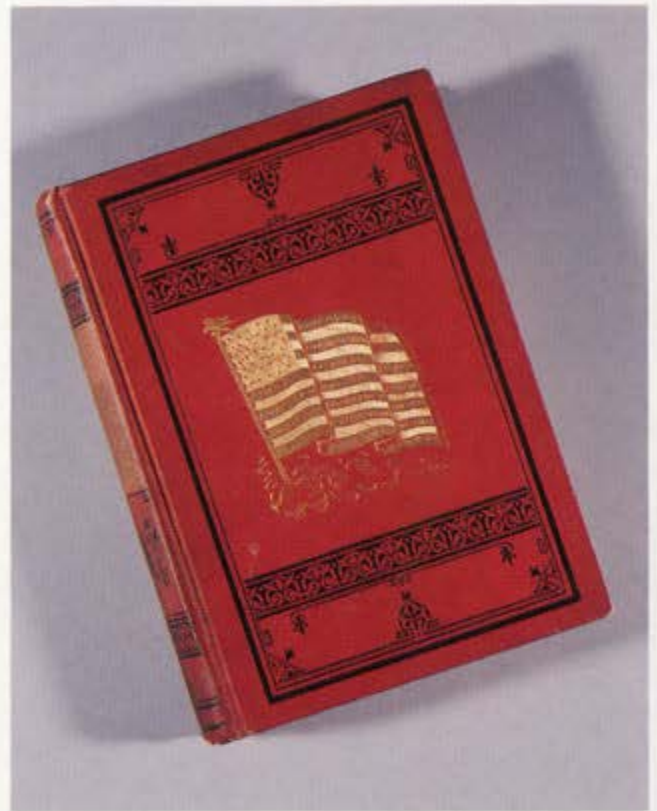


FIGURE 12. An American flag, in gilt of course, with battle honors provided the lure for the published memoirs of B.F. Scribner, Colonel of the 38th Indiana Veteran Volunteers.

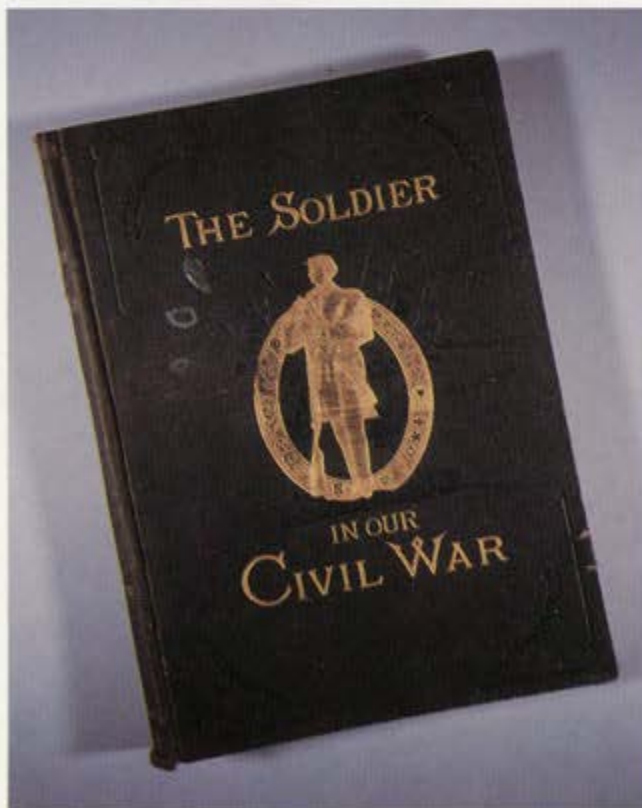


FIGURE 13. Large-format books, like Frank Leslie's *Soldier in Our Civil War*, employed the decoration to great advantage, here to advertise reporters' sketches that were a generation old.

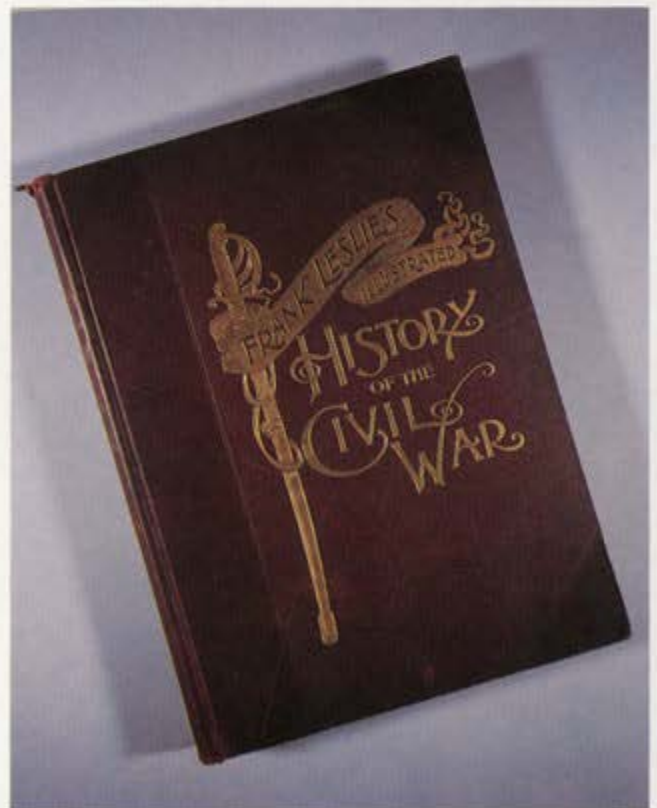


FIGURE 14. Frank Leslie's *Illustrated History of the Civil War*, with its beautiful saber decoration on the large-format cover, was published in 1894, one year after the *Soldier* book.