Harrison Cady: View from the Headlands

by **Martha Oaks**

Affectionately known to many as the *bug painter*, Harrison Cady (1877-1970) was a much loved member of Cape Ann's summer art colony throughout the twentieth century. A prolific illustrator, a printmaker and a painter, Cady was also one of the last links to our nation's Golden Age of Illustration, a distinction he earned through his independent work and his long collaboration with children's author Thornton Burgess. On Cape Ann, Harrison Cady maintained a large and loyal following garnered through his outgoing personality, his warm embrace of Rockport and its people, and his whimsical outlook on life, which frequently made its way into his artwork.

Harrison Cady was born in Gardner, Massachusetts, in 1877; he made his first visit to Cape Ann in 1901 and along with Parker Perkins, Gilbert Margeson, Eric Hudson and Aldro Hibbard is often referred to as one of the pioneers of Rockport's art colony. Cady arrived in the town while granite quarrying was still going on, before summer tourists had discovered the area and while the entire Cape still retained its hardscrabble beauty. The artist colony was in its infancy and the Rockport Art Association had yet to be organized. Perkins counseled Cady that the town was "too good to last" and, heeding the advice of his friend and fellow artist, Cady quickly made Rockport his permanent summer home.

At the time he discovered Cape Ann, Cady had already embarked on his long and successful career as an artist. In 1897, he had left his central Massachusetts home and made his way to New York City, finding occasional work selling illustrations to mag-

Harrison Cady: View from the Headlands is on view through October 28, 2018, at the Cape Ann Museum, 27 Pleasant Street, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 01930, 978-283-0455, www.capeannmuseum.org.

ABOVE: *Lane's Cove*, 1930s, o/board, 19 1/2 x 29 1/2, The James Collection, promised gift to the Cape Ann Museum.
RIGHT: *Essex Shipyard*, 1920s, o/board, 24 1/4 x 29 1/2, The James Collection, promised gift to the Cape Ann Museum.
LEFT: *Animal Picnic*, w/c on paper, 16 x 23, private collection.

azines and newspapers. Around 1900 Cady landed a job as a staff artist for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle;* as a self-taught artist, the position impressed upon him the importance of solid draftsmanship and the importance of meeting deadlines. From the *Eagle,* in 1907 he went on to work at *Life* magazine, an association that lasted into 1919. Cady did well at *Life* and by 1910 his highly elaborate and detailed pen and ink drawings were appearing regularly in the publication, sometimes spread across two pages. Bugs and insects, which had fascinated Cady since childhood, appeared regularly in his drawings, often dressed like humans and engaged in human activities. While many of Cady's compositions that appeared in *Life* were humorous, others related to salient issues of the day including women's suffrage and child labor laws. Like many illustrators at the time, Cady's work on occasion reflected stereotypes and prejudices held by segments of the community.

In 1911, while Cady was still creating

illustrations for *Life* magazine, he began to work with author Thornton Burgess. For over a decade, Burgess had sought to establish himself as a writer. His love of nature, animals and writing about them dovetailed perfectly with Cady's skills and interests. The pair first published their work together in the *People's Home Journal* in 1911; two years later publisher Little, Brown and Company hired Cady to illustrate *The Adventures of Reddy Fox* and *The Adventures of Johnny Chuck*, the first volumes in Burgess' Bedtime Story-Book series. The series was soon picked up by the *New York Tribune* and from 1920 to 1960 it appeared six days a week in the paper. Through their collaborative work, Cady and Burgess developed a strong friendship which lasted fifty years. Among the best known characters created by the team were Reddy Fox, Jimmy Skunk and an Americanized version of Peter Rabbit.

During his initial visits to Cape Ann, before his marriage to Melinna Eldredge in 1915, Cady was typically accompanied by his mother and the two would find lodgings in Rockport. Cady would sometimes slip over to Gloucester, exploring the city's gritty working waterfront and coming to know many of the artists who worked there.

His marriage marked a turning point in

ABOVE: *Betty Ann, Inner Rockport Harbor*, 1930s, o/board, 20 1/2 x 31 1/2, The James Collection, promised gift to the Cape Ann Museum.

RIGHT: *Stage Fort Park*, w/c on paper, 10 x 12, Cape Ann Museum, gift of Harold Bell.

ABOVE LEFT: *Nor'Easter, Rockport*, o/board, 24 x 34, private collection.

LEFT: *Rocky Neck Marine Railways*, 1935, w/c on paper, 15 3/4 x 21 3/4, The James Collection, promised gift to the Cape Ann Museum.

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his life and his career. While his livelihood would always depend on income from his work as an illustrator, from 1915 onward, he spent an increasing amount of time painting, capturing scenes of his beloved Rockport in oil and watercolor and experimenting with etching. Cady also began showing his artwork, including it in exhibitions at the Gallery-on-the-Moors in East Gloucester in 1918 and 1920, and later at the Rockport Art Association and the North Shore Arts Association. The transition from illustrator to artist was seamless for Cady, who used his brush and his etching tools like a pen, creating compositions that were rich in detail and often humorous in nature. In 1934, a selection of his work in a variety of mediums, many of them done on Cape Ann, was exhibited at the Macbeth Gallery in New York. In 1945, the National Academy of Design awarded Cady

its Edwin Palmer Memorial Prize for *Grappling the Lost Anchor* (also known as *Salvaging the Anchor*), a dramatic painting showing fishermen struggling in rough weather to make fast an anchor. And in 1950 the Salmagundi Club organized a one-man show of his work.

In 1919, Harrison and Melinna purchased "The Headland House" on Atlantic Avenue in Rockport and made it their permanent summer home. Cady had been let go from *Life* magazine earlier that same year; however, his work with Burgess and his success at placing illustrations in magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*, *American Boy* and *The Saturday Evening Post* gave him and Melinna the confidence to invest in the real estate.

In 1940, the Cadys purchased a studio apartment in Manhattan at 27 West 67th Street on the west side of Central Park. This was the Cadys' winter home. Cady continued to divide his time between New

ABOVE: *Harbor Scene*, o/board, 19 x 29 1/4, Rockport Art Association & Museum, permanent collection.
RIGHT: *The Fishing Party*, 1962, w/c and ink on paper, 10 1/4 x 9 1/4, Rockport Art Association & Museum, permanent collection.
ABOVE LEFT: *Saturday Morning, Foothills of the Smokies*, c. 1950, o/board, 26 3/4 x 36 3/4, New Britain Museum of American Art, Harriet Russell Stanley Fund.
LEFT: *Grappling the Lost Anchor* (also known as *Salvaging the Anchor*), c. 1940, o/board, 25 x 30, private collection.

York City and Cape Ann for the rest of his life. In 1959, when he and Burgess announced that they would close out their syndicated column *Bedtime Story* the following year, it was front page news in *The Gloucester Daily Times*. "He makes all of us kids again," the paper proclaimed. When he died in 1970 at the age of ninety-three, Cady left the following instructions to his executors and family: "I wish that a memorial service be held in my studio in New York City, and let those who attend come with smiling faces and joy in their hearts as a tribute to a man who has had a supremely happy and wonderful life."