

CAPE ANN MUSEUM
ART HISTORY CULTURE

FITZ HENRY LANE FACT SHEET

Fitz Henry Lane (1804-1865) is one of America's most significant 19th century artists and one of the premier interpreters of the New England maritime coast. Lane created his works within the particular social, historical and cultural contexts of Jacksonian and pre-Civil War America which witnessed the rise of industrialism in New England, international trade, mercantilism and America's first indigenous philosophical movement, Transcendentalism. Lane was born and lived most of his 60 years in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and the city's harbor, waterfront and the surrounding Cape Ann landscape offered Lane extraordinary inspiration in the form of vistas suffused with the interplay of light on the water and the granite shores of this bustling seaport. Painting during the relatively peaceful decades between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, Lane's paintings celebrate Americans' deep connection to the land they inhabited and conveyed the optimism and expansiveness of their aspirations and ambitions for the nation's future.

The Cape Ann Museum, situated in Lane's hometown of Gloucester, Mass., holds the largest collection of his artwork in the world—39 paintings, 109 drawings, one watercolor and four lithographs. (Three additional major Lane paintings owned by the City of Gloucester and Addison Gilbert Hospital also reside at the Museum). The Museum's mission is to collect, preserve and interpret the rich artistic, cultural and industrial traditions of Cape Ann— from the founding of Gloucester in 1623 to the present day—as seen through the works of the artists and artisans who lived and visited here. The Museum also exhibits major works by leading 19th and 20th-century American painters and sculptors such as Winslow Homer, Cecilia Beaux, John Sloan, Stuart Davis, Paul Manship, Marsden Hartley, Milton Avery and numerous others. Its permanent collections showcase its extensive holdings of Lane's creations plus galleries dedicated to the history of Gloucester's famed fishing industry, and Cape Ann's granite industry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Lane collection is extraordinary not only for the sheer quantity and depth of the work—drawings, lithographs, paintings—which spans the artist's entire career, but also for the inclusion of so many of the finest, most significant examples of Lane's landscapes (e.g. Brace's Cove series, Norman's Woe series). Lane, with his almost exclusive focus on Gloucester, documents the city at a particular point in time, capturing the robust pulse of seafaring commerce and rugged village life as few other artists ever have. A characteristic element of Lane's paintings, particularly his early works, is the incredible amount of attention paid to narrative detail—probably due in part to his lithographic training. Lane was thoroughly familiar with different kinds of vessels, the shapes of their sails, the length of their masts and spars and the complex system of ropes, shrouds and ratlines. His work offers a detailed portrait of 19th century shipbuilding and fishing for the social and maritime historian as well as the general

public. Lanes' images of the harbor and the Cape Ann coastline illuminate how our lives are shaped by the contours of where we live and work.

Another unique feature of the Lane collection is the strong provenance of the vast majority of the Museum's holdings. A native son of Gloucester, many of Lane's paintings were originally commissioned by local families and were passed down through the generations. These works have never left Cape Ann and were donated to the Museum along with furniture and artifacts from the homes in which they were first displayed, allowing visitors to the Museum to encounter the works with companion pieces from their original settings. Moreover, much of Gloucester's historic waterfront and many of the natural vistas and landmarks that Lane painted have been preserved and can be re-experienced today. Lane's seven-gabled granite house with Gothic vaulted chambers still sits overlooking the seaport. One can still imagine Lane at work in his third floor studio with Gloucester's radiant harbor views spread out before him.

Fitz Henry Lane has been the focus of much scholarship and international attention recently and the Museum's collection, library and archives have been at the center of this renewed interest, exploration and research. In 2004, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Lane's birth, noted curator and Lane expert, Dr. John Wilmerding, gave a lecture at the Museum in which he delineated some of the questions that remain about the artist's life and some of his paintings. Wilmerding's talk spurred archivists from the Museum and the City of Gloucester to go in search of new historical details. What they found in records from the 1800s attracted renewed attention to Lane. They discovered that when the artist legally changed his name in 1831 from Nathaniel Rogers Lane, he chose the name Fitz Henry Lane, not Fitz Hugh Lane as he had become known by scholars and the general public throughout much of the 20th century. (See Appendix #1 for the article "Fitz Who?") Further research continues to fill in other missing details of his history. In 2007, the Museum mounted an exhibition, *Fitz Henry Lane and Mary Blood Mellen: Old Mysteries and New Discoveries*, an exploration of the artistic relationship between Lane and Mary Blood Mellen (1817-1886), his best-known student, curated by John Wilmerding. *A Scholar's Gathering*, funded by the Terra Foundation for American Art, was held in conjunction with the exhibition to study the works in the show and consider previously unresolved questions about the artistic relationship of the two artists, including issues of attribution and collaboration, ultimately opening up new avenues for inquiry.

Much remains unknown today about Lane's process and his influences. Two prominent Lane scholars, Karen Quinn, Kristin and Roger Servison Curator of Paintings, Art of the Americas, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and Marcia Steele, Conservator of Paintings at the Cleveland Museum of Art, are continuing to conduct scientific studies of Lane's paintings using infrared cameras to explore the relationship between his drawings, under-drawings and the completed paintings. This work should aid scholars looking into whether all the paintings attributed to him were in fact the product solely of Lane's efforts and not one of his students, or whether there was a collaboration where Lane may have worked from his sketches to produce the under-drawings and a student

may have completed the painting. Other questions regarding Lane include: whether he used a *camera lucida* to transfer his drawings to his canvases, as well as how his work was informed by contact with Emerson, other Transcendentalists, and other influential individuals of the day.

The Museum aspires to promote and advance further study of Lane. Toward this end, the Museum has taken on the essential task of creating a complete database of all of Lane's known paintings and drawings with research into the history of the 19th century coastal life he portrayed in his work. Each image of Lane's paintings will be accompanied by a brief commentary with links to extensive scholarly work on the particular work. This interactive catalogue raisonné, *The Complete Works of Fitz Henry Lane Online*, will also include an extensive digitized archive of rare historical documents, drawings, photographs and writings on Lane, plus newly commissioned scholarship and editorial work specifically designed for this project. When the project is completed in Spring 2015, it will allow the public and scholars to delve more deeply into the details of Lane's paintings and to view drawings, lithographs, paintings and historical documents currently not exhibited or too fragile to be handled.

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Images available upon request