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NEW DISCOVERIES IN AMERICAN ART

FITZ HUGH LANE, RALPH WALDO EMERSON, AND THE GLOUCESTER LYCEUM

The Luminist paintings of Fitz Hugh Lane (1804–1865) are considered by many art historians to be a visual corollary to Transcendentalist beliefs in God's presence in the world and man's harmony with nature and, by extension, God.¹ Until recently, only one document connecting Lane, a native of Gloucester, Massachusetts, with the Transcendentalist philosophy that flourished in nineteenth-century New England was known: Lane's name on a list of members of the American Union of Associationists, a Boston-based organization consisting mostly of former Brook Farm adherents who sought to unite Transcendentalism with social reform.² Additional evidence has since come to light that provides another link between the artist and Transcendentalism. Notices recently gathered from Gloucester periodicals establish that Lane was active in the Gloucester Lyceum after he returned permanently to his hometown in 1848 and that through his involvement with the Lyceum, Lane was exposed to the theories of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), who lectured there on numerous occasions.³

The lyceum movement was disseminated in the United States largely through the efforts of one individual, Josiah Holbrook (1788–1854). A Yale graduate with an interest in science, Holbrook very likely made a study of the British mechanics' institutes, the first of which opened in London in

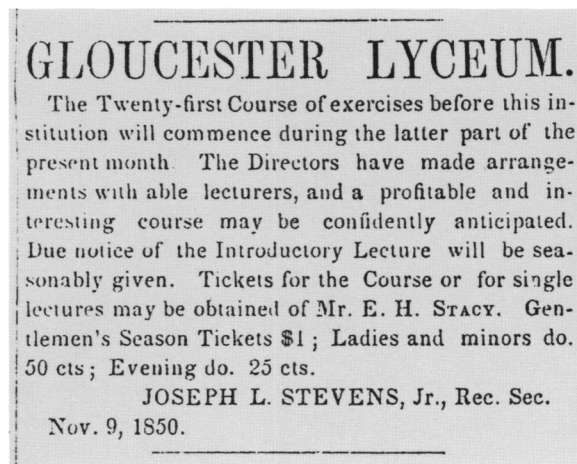


Fig. 1. Announcement of the "Twenty-first Course of exercises" commencing before the Gloucester Lyceum in November of 1850. Reproduced from the Gloucester Telegraph, vol. 24, no. 91 (November 9, 1850), p. 3. Collection, Sawyer Free Library, Gloucester, Massachusetts.

January of 1824. The main function of the British adult education movement was "to provide practical scientific instruction for workmen, and to have as a result a more intelligent worker as well as a better product."⁴ Seeking to establish an adult education program in the United States, Holbrook published a manifesto on lyceums in the 1826 issue of the *American Journal of Education*.⁵ According to Holbrook, public education was "intimately connected with the diffusion of intelligence, and with the elevation of character among the agricultural and mechanic classes; and to the friend of moral improvement, it offers a source of peculiar gratification, as a sure preventive of those insidious inroads of vice, which are ever ready to be made on hours of leisure and relaxation."⁶ The movement proved to be extremely popular. Within two years of the publication of Holbrook's plan and his creation of the first American lyceum, in Millbury, Massachusetts, groups

had formed in every state in the Union. Before 1890, there were approximately three thousand such associations in the United States.

Holbrook's manifesto contained a draft of a constitution that outlined the institution's mission and provided guidelines upon which communities throughout the nation could base their own lyceums. Newly formed groups adhered to Holbrook's model in many respects, including the appointment of officers and their responsibilities. According to Holbrook's constitution, officers were to be elected annually by members over eighteen years of age and were to oversee all the group's activities. One particular group of officers, the Board of Directors, was responsible for determining the program and lecture schedule. The lecture series became an important lyceum activity as the movement expanded its mission from the improvement of the common schools to a broader dissemination of knowledge.⁷

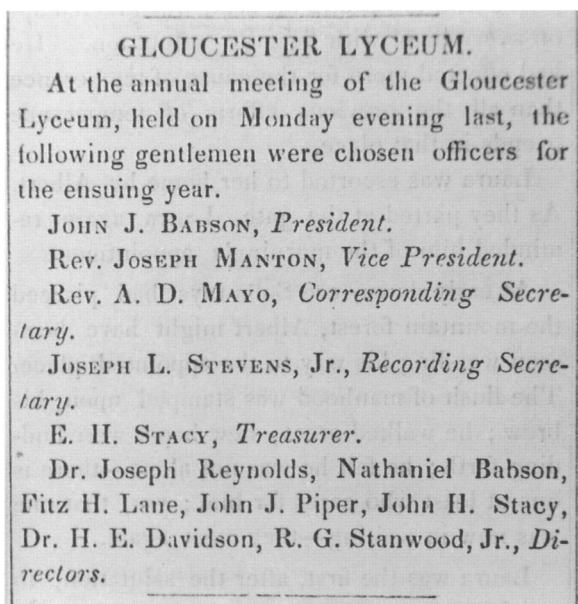


Fig. 2. Announcement of officers elected to the Gloucester Lyceum. Reproduced from the Gloucester Telegraph, vol. 23, no. 75 (September 19, 1849), p. 2. Collection, Sawyer Free Library.

Holbrook's constitution. Submitted by Joseph L. Stevens, Jr., the Lyceum's Recording Secretary for many years, the announcement states: "The Directors have made arrangements with able lecturers, and a profitable and interesting course may be confidently anticipated" (Fig. 1).

According to notices published between 1848 and 1865, the officers of the Gloucester Lyceum were elected in late spring or early fall, and members appointed Lane to the Board of Directors three times: in September of 1849 (Fig. 2), September of 1851, and May of 1858 (Fig. 3). Lectures commenced in early fall and continued until late spring. As no indication of summer activities has been found, the Lyceum's schedule probably followed that of our modern school year. As stipulated in Holbrook's plan, the Board of Directors very likely determined the lecture schedule.

As these announcements also indicate, Ralph Waldo Emerson was much sought after as a speaker at the Gloucester Lyceum. He lectured there on at least ten occasions between 1849 and 1863.⁹ Lane may have even attended a lecture given by Emerson. Indeed, since the Lyceum's Board of Directors most likely secured the speakers themselves, Lane may have been directly responsible for scheduling Emerson's lectures at the Gloucester Lyceum on February 13, 1850, and December 24, 1851 (Figs. 4 and 5), the two dates that coincide with his tenure on the board.

The evidence gathered from the Gloucester periodicals establishes not only that Emerson was a popular lecturer at the Lyceum there, but also that Lane was probably directly involved in contracting him to speak and also had numerous opportunities to hear the philosopher's lectures. The frequency of Emerson's lectures would also have contributed to the

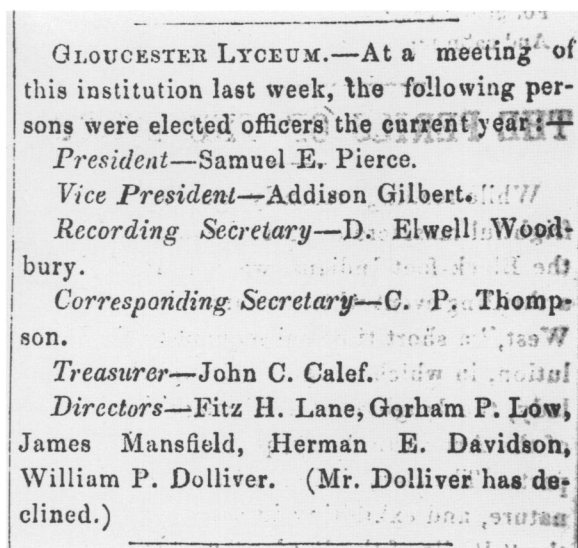


Fig. 3. Announcement of officers elected to the Gloucester Lyceum. Reproduced from the Gloucester Telegraph, vol. 33, no. 38 (May 12, 1858), p. 2. Collection, Sawyer Free Library.

The lyceum in Lane's hometown was formed in 1830 and appears to have been patterned after Holbrook's guidelines. Unfortunately, the records of the Gloucester Lyceum were destroyed by fire in 1864.⁸ Knowledge of its workings, however, can be obtained by examining lecture announcements,

listings of officers, and other notices of the group's activities published in the *Cape Ann Light* and the *Gloucester Telegraph*. An announcement in the *Gloucester Telegraph* on November 9, 1850, shows that, with regard to the selection of lecturers, the Board of Directors did, indeed, follow

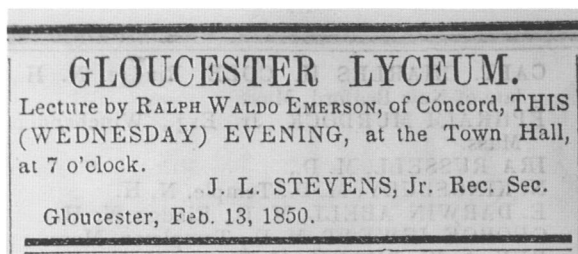


Fig. 4. Announcement of a lecture by Ralph Waldo Emerson before the Gloucester Lyceum on February 13, 1850. Reproduced from the Gloucester Telegraph, vol. 24, no. 13 (February 13, 1850), p. 3. Collection, Sawyer Free Library.

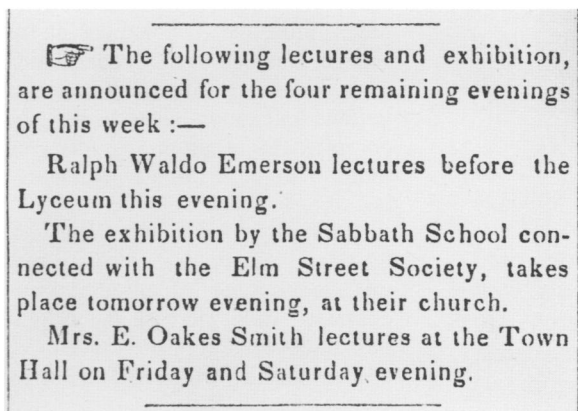


Fig. 5. Announcement of forthcoming activities in Gloucester. Reproduced from the Gloucester Telegraph, vol. 25, no. 103 (December 24, 1851), p. 2. Collection, Sawyer Free Library.

dissemination of Transcendentalist ideology throughout the Gloucester area and perhaps would have further influenced Lane. While we do not know whether Lane's exposure to Emerson through the Lyceum directly influenced his art, it is interesting nonetheless to discover that Lane was actively involved with the intellectual life of his community.

Mary Foley
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1. For more information on Lane and Luminism, see Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (New York, 1969); John Wilmerding, *Fitz Hugh Lane* (New York, 1971); Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape Painting, 1825–1865* (New York, 1980); Barbara Novak, *The Thyssen-Bornemisza*

Collection: Nineteenth-Century American Painting (New York, 1986); John Wilmerding, *Paintings by Fitz Hugh Lane*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C., 1988); John Wilmerding, *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850–1875; Paintings—Drawings—Photographs*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C., 1989).

2. Elizabeth Garrity Ellis, "Fitz Hugh Lane and the American Union of Associationists," *The American Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Spring, 1985), p. 89.

3. For their support of this research project, I would like to thank the faculty of the Art History Department at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and, most especially, William T. Oedel, Professor of American Art. My research was facilitated by a grant from the Alumni Fund, M.A. Program in Art History, University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

For his kind assistance in locating original copies of the Gloucester periodicals, I am grateful to David McArdle, Director, Sawyer Free Library, Gloucester, Massachusetts. For providing the photographs reproduced here, I wish to thank David Stotzer of Cape Ann Photography.

4. Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind* (New York, 1956), pp. 7–8. For more information on lyceums, see Josiah Holbrook, "Associations of Adults for Mutual Education," *American Journal of Education*, vol. 1 (1826), pp. 594–597; J. S. Noffsinger, *Correspondence Schools, Lyceums, Chautauquas* (New York, 1926); Cecil B. Hayes, *The American Lyceum: Its History and Contribution to Education*, United States Department of the Interior, Office of Education, bulletin no. 12 (Washington, D.C., 1932); Kenneth Cameron, *The Massachusetts Lyceum during the American Renaissance* (Hartford, Conn., 1969); and Willis D. Moreland and Erwin H. Goldstein, *Pioneers in Adult Education* (Chicago, 1985).

5. Holbrook, "Associations of Adults for Mutual Education," pp. 594–597.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 594.

7. Moreland and Goldstein, *Adult Education*, pp. 40, 47.

8. The records were lost when the building in which they were housed burned. See Paul B. Kenyon, *People and Books: The Story of the Gloucester Lyceum and Sawyer Free Library, 1830–1980* (Gloucester, Mass., 1980), p. 8.

9. According to announcements published in the *Gloucester Telegraph*, Emerson was scheduled to speak at the Gloucester Lyceum on the following dates: February 13, 1850 (see Fig. 4); January 22 and December 24, 1851 (see Fig. 5); March 9, 1853; March 29, 1854; January 31, 1855; February 6, 1856; March 18, 1857; and during the winter and spring of 1862 and 1863.

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF CHEVREUL'S COLOR THEORY IN AMERICA

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, most American painters were less concerned with color than with line. This was clearly expressed in the words of Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828): "Coloring at best is a matter of fancy and taste. . . . Good drawing is the life of all, without which coloring is moonshine."¹ Nevertheless, there were other American artists, especially the Romantics, who were interested in the use of color and its effects. Publications on the subject were issued abroad, and some