

BOSTON · MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

*FitzHugh Lane*

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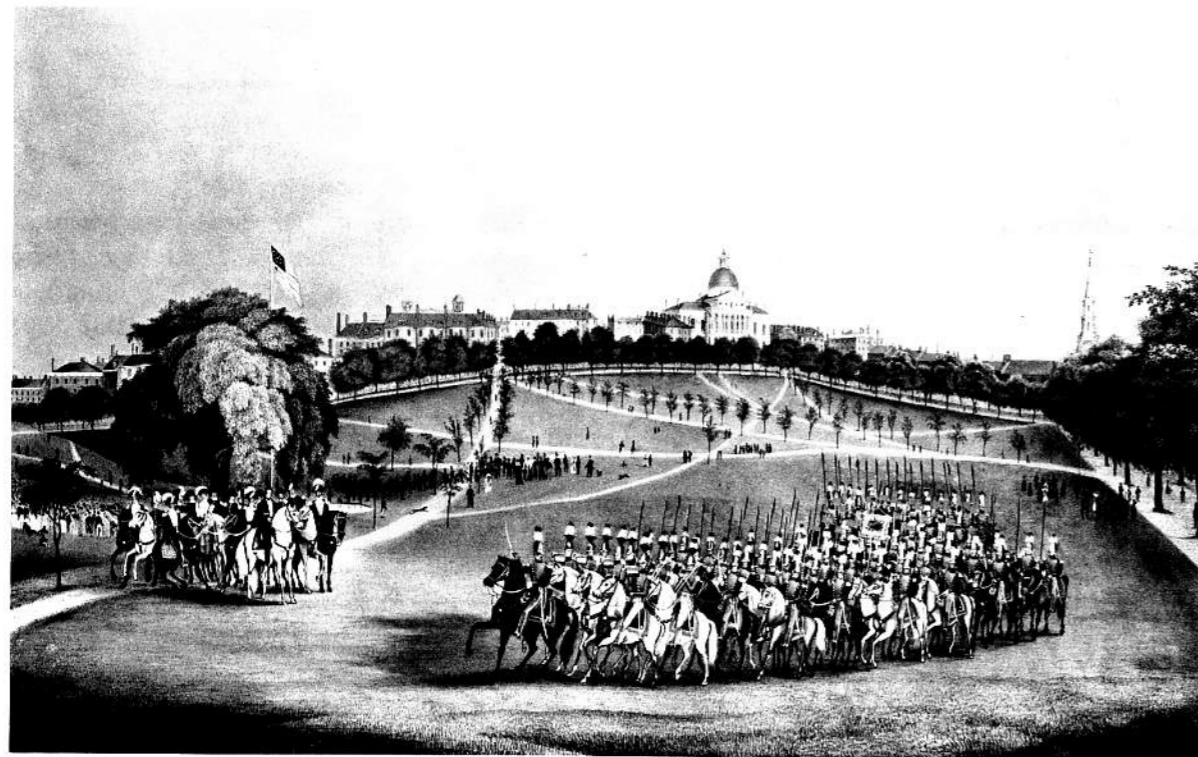
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FITZHUGH LANE 1804-1865

FITZHUGH LANE is one of the most lyrical of American painters. A realist in his approach to painting, his work, like that of Martin J. Heade, reflects a new sensitivity to the special qualities of American light. Though a hushed quiet pervades almost all his paintings, and his compositions in general have a marked sense of repose, there is nevertheless an intensity in the concentration with which he records what he sees that equally expresses his poetic feelings about the scene. The result seems today almost an understatement, so devoid is it of the paraphernalia of contemporary romanticism, yet it reveals with the same magical clarity which illumines all his painting a sense of the inner spirit and meaning in the everyday natural world which Emerson, Bryant, and Thoreau also found there.

Born at Gloucester, Massachusetts, on December 18, 1804, Lane became crippled as the result of illness in his early childhood and had to use crutches through-

out his life. He was, however, able to travel, and it is known that he made several trips along the coast of Maine. Although there is no evidence that he visited New York, Havana, or Puerto Rico, it would seem likely that he did so from the accurate and detailed paintings he made of the harbors there. As a boy, Lane sketched and painted in Gloucester, especially around the harbor with its variety of craft. He had no artistic training until he moved to Boston in the early eighteen-thirties and became an apprentice to Pendleton, the lithographer, who was soon succeeded by Thomas Moore. Benjamin Champney, who later became an apprentice in the same firm, wrote: "F. H. Lane, afterwards well-known as a marine painter, did most of the views, hotels, etc. He was very accurate in his drawing, understood perspective and naval architecture perfectly as well as the handling of vessels, and was a good all-round draughtsman . . ." Detailed lith-



*The National Lancers with the Reviewing Officers on Boston Common.* Hand-colored lithograph by FitzHugh Lane after Charles Hubbard, published by Thomas Moore, Boston, 1837. M. and M. Karolik Collection of 18th Century American Arts. 39.257

ographic views of Gloucester date from this period, and numerous copies have survived, indicating their popularity. About 1835 Lane formed his own lithographic business with J. W. A. Scot, a marine painter. Portraits of Boston landmarks such as the Commercial Coffee House, views of neighboring towns, and decorative poster-like lithographs calling attention to local institutions such as the Boston Riding Academy show the range of subject matter. The firm was active until after 1847. Lane then returned to Gloucester, and on August 4, 1849, the following notice appeared in a local paper: "Mr. Lane has now on exhibition at his studio, Elm St., four paintings, one a view of Gloucester Harbor. . . . Mr. Lane's Rooms are open at all hours of the day and we advise all our readers who have any love of art to call there and look at his paintings."

With the exception of a self-portrait, Lane confined his paintings to landscapes and seascapes and aroused great admiration among his contemporaries. For example, the *Gloucester Telegraph*, November 5, 1851, quoting the *Boston Transcript* said: "Since Salmon's

death, we have no one who can paint a ship and ocean prospect like him. His 'squalls at sea' are the best thing of the kind that we remember to have seen." Lane made numerous notes in the form of sketches during his trips and from his observations in Gloucester. Many are panoramic and portray in detail such towns as Blue Hill and Castine, Maine. They are often dated and inscribed with the names of those for whom the subsequent paintings were to be made. A large group of these, the Samuel Mansfield Collection, is owned by the Cape Ann Scientific, Literary, and Historical Association, Gloucester.

During his lifetime the artist exhibited at the Boston Athenaeum, the Charitable Mechanic Association, the New England Art Union, Boston; the American Art Union, the National Academy of Design, New York; and the Albany Gallery of Fine Arts, of which he was an honorary member. The last fifteen years or so of his life were spent in an unusual stone house, which he and his brother-in-law, Ignatius Winter, built according to their own interpretation of the Gothic style. He died there on August 13, 1865.



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE NATIONAL LANCERS ON BOSTON COMMON	<i>Frontispiece</i>
A MAINE INLET	1
GLOUCESTER FROM BROOKBANK	2
FRESH WATER COVE FROM DOLLIVER'S NECK, GLOUCESTER	3
NEW YORK HARBOR	4
SHIPS IN ICE OFF TEN POUND ISLAND, GLOUCESTER	5
OWL'S HEAD, PENOBSCOT BAY, MAINE	6
BRIG ANTELOPE IN BOSTON HARBOR	7
AT THE FISHING GROUNDS	8
IPSWICH BAY	9
BRACE'S ROCK, EASTERN POINT, GLOUCESTER	10

