

...of Mrs. Mary B. Mellon. Following are the major ... of Sterling, Massachusetts, her parents, ... and Sally Blood. She was taught to use watercolors in ... place, at a boarding school conducted by Miss Thayer. ... afterward the Fryville Seminary in Bolton, Massachusetts. This lady married the Reverend C. W. Mellon. She was instructed by the late Fitz-Hugh (an error, for he was Fitz Hugh) Lane of Gloucester, Mass.; and as he was unquestionably one of the best marine painters in the country, it is no wonder the pupil received a high level of praise for her originals and copies. Her copy of Lane's "On The Lee Shore" has elicited warm encomiums of the press. Mrs. Mellon is so faithful in the copies of her master, that even an expert might take them for originals. Indeed, an anecdote is related of her, which will exemplify her power in this direction. She had just completed a copy of one of Mr. Lane's pictures when he called at her residence to see it. The copy and the original were brought down from the studio together, and the master, much to the amusement of those present, was unable to tell which was his own, and which was the pupil's.

I have been greatly interested in Lane's work, owned some of it myself, helped gather the Cape Ann Historical Association's collection of it, and watched the increasing importance accorded to his art, and the rise in prices paid for it. While he lived, he was known mainly as a marine painter, which he was, though landscapes now bulk large in the total of his work. His knowledge of ships, boats, craft of every kind was remarkable—sails, rigging, spars, the minutest details and his rendering of these details photographically true. Did Mrs. Mellon copy Lane's ships and boats as accurately as she did the shores and seas in the fine paintings named "After Lane by M. B. Mellon"? Only finding more examples of her work will settle this important question. That there must be some of it somewhere would seem almost certain. But where?

Alfred Mansfield Brooks
Gloucester, Mass.
September 2, 1959

F.H.L. Reconsidered

E.A. Sharf

ESSEX INSTITUTE Historical Collections



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ISSUED QUARTERLY BY THE ESSEX INSTITUTE
Salem, Massachusetts

detailed account of Mrs. Mary B. Mellen. Following are the major points of interest: "born in Sterling, Massachusetts; her parents, Reuben and Sally Blood. She was taught to use watercolors in her native place, at a boarding school conducted by Miss Thayer. She attended afterward the Fryville Seminary in Bolton, Massachusetts. This lady married the Reverend C. W. Mellen. She was instructed by the late Fitz-Henry (an error, for he was Fitz Hugh) Lane of Gloucester, Mass.; and as he was unquestionably one of the best marine painters in the country, it is no wonder the pupil received a large meed of praise for her originals and copies. Her copy of Lane's "On The Lee Shore" has elicited warm encomiums of the press. Mrs. Mellen is so faithful in the copies of her master, that even an expert might take them for originals. Indeed, an anecdote is related of her, which will exemplify her power in this direction. She had just completed a copy of one of Mr. Lane's pictures when he called at her residence to see it. The copy and the original were brought down from the studio together, and the master, much to the amusement of those present, was unable to tell which was his own, and which was the pupil's."

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FITZ HUGH LANE RE-CONSIDERED

By FREDERIC A. SHARF

MR. BROOKS' SIGNIFICANT DISCOVERY will undoubtedly heighten the interest in Lane's art, and stimulate the re-assessment of Lane which has been going on over the past two decades. Beginning with the Metropolitan Art Museum's large exhibit in 1939, "Life In America,"—put on as a Worlds Fair attraction—Lane's paintings have come to assume an ever greater place in the mainstream of American art. The Lane canvas included in the Metropolitan's show was valued primarily in connection with the exhibit's aim of showing "life as it has been lived in our country," though a review of the exhibit did acknowledge Lane's particular artistic importance, "his classic serenity and dignity."¹

Certainly, the scholarly interest of Mr. John I. H. Baur in the 1940's was instrumental in rediscovering Lane. In 1947, Baur wrote that Americans were "only beginning to comprehend the extent of his [Lane's] talent," and went on to say that biographical material had been recently collected which enabled the scholar to "see at least the outline of the artist's career."² Baur placed Lane, along with Martin J. Heade, at the head of a small group of mid-nineteenth-century landscape painters who first experimented with effects of light and atmosphere. It was Baur who brought Lane to the attention of Maxim Karolik, and it was Karolik's collection, catalogued in 1949, and first exhibited in Boston in October, 1951, which firmly established Lane's position as "the peer of the best native landscape painters from Thomas Cole to George Inness."³ For the first time, a selected group of choice Lane paintings was included in a major collection.

The Winter, 1952, issue of *The Art Quarterly* carried the first full-scale biographical treatment of Lane, based on a careful study of local Gloucester sources, as well as of the available Lane paintings. The known facts of Lane's obscure life were set together in sequence: the early attack of infantile paralysis that left him

1. Forbes Watson, "My Country 'Tis of Thee," *Magazine of Art* XXXII (June 1939), 334.
2. John I. H. Baur, "Unknown 19th Century American Painters," *College Arts Journal*, IV (June 1947), 277-282.
3. James T. Soby, "Introduction," *American Painting, 1815-1865*, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1956.

a cripple; his apprenticeship to Pendleton's lithography firm in Boston during the 1830's; the formation of his own lithography firm with John W. A. Scott in the 1840's; his return to Gloucester by 1849, and the various trips he made from Gloucester to the coast of Maine in the 1850's. By May, 1954, when the special exhibition of Lane and Heade opened in New York at Knoedlers, Lane was no longer an unknown, and attention could be concentrated on the finer points of Lane's art: the mood of his paintings, his skill in handling meticulous detail, his sensitivity to light and atmosphere.⁴

Mr. Brooks' discovery has brought us back to the need for probing the obscurity which has always surrounded Lane's life. Old assumptions often conflict with one another. Was Lane in Gloucester during the 1840's, as local Gloucester legend would have it, or was Lane living in Boston until 1849? Beginning in 1841, the *Boston Business Directory*⁵ listed Lane at various addresses, prime evidence for the latter assumption. In 1841, 1842, and 1843, he was listed as having his residence at 7 Summer Street; from 1844 to 1849, his only listing was at Tremont Temple. Certain fresh evidence points more conclusively to his close participation in the Boston art world during these years.

In 1841, Lane was a charter member of a unique organization, the Boston Artists Association.⁶ Under the leadership of the well-known portrait painter, Chester Harding, the Boston artists revolted against the artistic domination of the aristocratic Boston Athenaeum. They needed an organization which would better provide for their needs.⁷ Primarily, they wanted an exhibition in Boston for their own works, one not so conservative as that which the Athenaeum annually sponsored. In 1841, Lane had had his first canvas hung at an Athenaeum exhibit. At the first exhibit

4. John I. H. Baur, "Introduction," *Martin J. Heade and Fitz Hugh Lane Commemorative Exhibition Catalogue*, M. Knoedler & Co. (New York, 1954).

5. cf. *Boston Business Directory*, 1841-1849.

6. cf. *Constitution of the Boston Artists Association* (Boston Athenaeum).

7. *Ibid.* "The artists of Boston, deeply impressed with the importance of their profession, and with the necessity of a systematic course of study for its successful cultivation; also with the advantages to be derived from mutual cooperation and support; resolve to form themselves into an Association for the furtherance of these objects."

of the Association in 1842, Lane was represented by three paintings. In 1843, Lane exhibited one, and in 1844, he exhibited five paintings. During these years, Lane's work, like that of other Boston painters, was absent from the Athenaeum Exhibition.

The 1844 exhibit was the last held independently by the Boston Artists Association. In that year, the Athenaeum accepted the artists' suggestion that they take over the management of the Athenaeum Exhibition and divide the proceeds with the Athenaeum. Evidently, the Athenaeum feared the loss of its long leadership in the Boston art world, while the Association probably found running its own show too expensive. In 1845, Lane once again exhibited at the Athenaeum Exhibition, as he was to do frequently for the rest of his life. His participation in the Association was indicative of his close bonds with Boston artistic life.

Further indications point to Lane's ready response to artistic opportunities in Boston. On May 6, 1841, the Boston newspapers announced that the Royal Mail Steamship *Britannia* had arrived twelve days late, because of an unprecedented storm.⁸ By August 28, a large painting of the *Britannia*, tossed by the storm, was on view in the window of a Boston music store. It had been done by Lane on commission from the ship's captain.⁹ A similar sequence occurred in 1846: in February a new captain was appointed to command the United States revenue steamer *McLane*;¹⁰ on April 6 the vessel sailed from Boston,¹¹ and on June 9th Lane's "View of a Steam Vessel (The Cutter *McLane*)" was exhibited at the opening of the annual Athenaeum Exhibition. The painting was owned by the ship's captain, who had allowed Lane to exhibit it at the Athenaeum. The brief time spans involved show that Lane was in Boston when the opportunities arose. He must have been well known in the field of ship portraiture, and undoubtedly derived much of his living from such paintings.

During those years Lane continued his interest in lithography, and formed a partnership with Scott. The *Boston Business Directory* does not list their firm until 1846, but certainly it was in business by 1845, when Lane and Scott issued their fine print of Bowdoin College. Their business address was Tremont Temple

8. *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 6, 1841.

9. *Ibid.*, August 28, 1841.

10. *Ibid.*, February 26, 1846.

11. *Ibid.*, April 6, 1846.

