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A Cruise With Fitz Hugh Lane

Fitz Hugh Lane, whose work was admired during his life and then almost forgotten for many years, is "now firmly and generally viewed as one of the truly pivotal and significant figures of nineteenth-century American art. His work occupies a central place in luminism. . . ." *1 Lane is of especial interest to those who know the Maine coast as some of his finest work was conceived while visiting the Stevens in Castine or while on trips with young Joe Stevens.

Fitz Hugh Lane was born in Gloucester, December 19, 1804. "When. . . a child before learning to walk, the nurse left him for a short while alone on the grass one day and he crept toward a bush of Apple Peru and ate some of its leaves which poisoned him. . ." Peru-apple was a common name for the very poisonous Jimson-weed. From this time Lane was crippled and never walked without crutches. *2

Joseph Lowe Stevens was also born in Gloucester but, though only fifteen years older than Lane could not have known him well until they met in Castine many years later, for Joseph Stevens was sent to Phillips Academy when he was twelve, thence to Harvard and Harvard Medical School, returning home only for brief visits. By 1818 he was practicing medicine in Warren, Maine and the next year was called to Castine where he lived and practiced the remainder of his life. A son, however, Joseph, Jr. returned to Gloucester to live and help in the family business. Despite the disparity in age Stevens, Jr. and Lane became great friends and when Joseph visited his parents in Castine, Lane frequently joined him. Lane's first visit was in 1848 and his last probably in 1862, three years before his death.

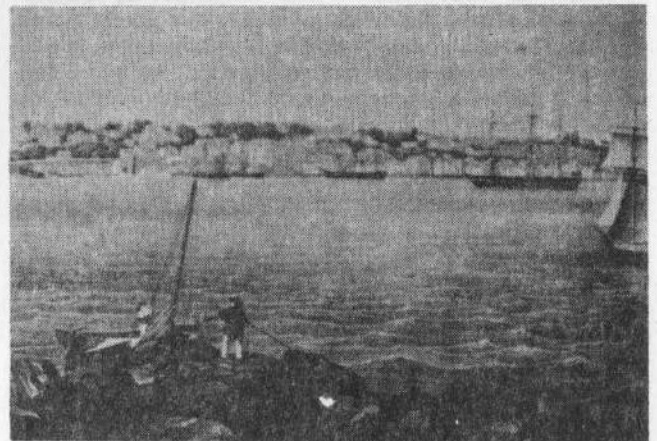
A previously unpublished note by young Joseph relates details of a summer day when he and Lane were in Castine. "The great granite boulder on the shore of 'Perkins' back pasture', though little known, bore the name of a Captain Hinckley, said to have been shot while cheering on his men from the top of it. (An event of the American Revolution).

On Saturday afternoon, August 11, 1855, with my friend the marine artist Fitz H. Lane of Gloucester, my young brother George B. Stevens, and his friend Charles A. Williams, I went to the rock and, aided mainly by Williams, painted thereon in letters that could be read from afar Trask 1779. (Israel Trask was a fourteen year old fifer who stood behind the rock to shelter from the fire of the British troops above.)

The large white rock of the young fifer's experience in the early morning of July 28, 1779, thus brought to notice, increased in public interest until it became a famous landmark, much frequented."

Also in 1855, Joseph, Jr. proposed "to have a Lithograph print of Castine struck off; similar to the sketch lately made by Mr. Lane to be executed in the best style in Boston, in plain dark & white, provided 100 copies are subscribed for at \$2.00 per copy." This resulted in the well known lithograph Castine from Hospital Island

It is interesting to consider that this was not the first such view. Twelve years earlier a View of Castine Maine from Hospital Island was lithographed by W. Sharp from a drawing by S. V. Homan. In 1780, apparently from the same, though then un-named island, a British officer also sketched Castine (then Majabaduce). *3



Castine from Hospital Island, 1855, Fitz Hugh Lane

Recently a Castine diary of 1852 was given to the Wilson Museum. Kept by William Howe Witherle it includes an account of a short cruise with several friends, including Joseph Stevens, Jr. and Fitz Hugh Lane. This account is printed here for the first time.

