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A previously unpublished note by young Joseph relates details of a summer day when he and Lane were in Castine.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 26, 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 1790, apparently from the same, though then un-named island, a British officer also sketched Castine (then Majasabuce). *3

Castine from Hospital Island, 1855, Fitz Hugh Lane

Recently a Castine diary of 1852 was given to the Wilson Museum. Kempt 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.
Our party consisting of F. M Lane and Joe S Leon Jr of Gloucester — Geo. F Tilden, Sam Adams & myself and Mr. Getchell-Pilot left Mr. Tilden wharf at about 11 clock in the good Slooper Superior — bound on an excursion among the Island of the Bay — the wind was northerly and the weather quite clear with a low cloud hanging down the Ship Channel towards “Isle Au Haut” — anchored off Isle Au Haut about 5 clock and Fished till about sun down — when we put away for Kimbles Harbour — but the wind died away and the tide landed us — so we turned back only in Shoal Water near the entrance of the Harbour — this has been a most Auspicious commencement to our trip and — our Excursion — and we enjoyed it highly — have done our own cooking and made landfall for the first time since the Siege of Geo. Tilden — whose talents in that line are the most prominent — Mr. Lane however has a decided knack for Frying Fish — and the specimen of fried cod for supper — which was most excellent — he enjoyed it much we all enjoyed it — and to us it gave our birth owing to the proximity of certain shoals and rocks — — Tuesday Morning Aug 17 — up early — prospects of another of Mr. Buck’s ashore about 2 miles for weed — which article we did not lay in a stock of — which gave us a somewhat ravenous appetite for our Breakfast which came off at that time and which we took on deck — as it was calm and beautiful — After Breakfast we weighed Anchor and with a light breeze of wind for “Saddle Rock” some 10 miles off — but did not make much progress — and finding a chance to run into “Isle d’Au Haut” — we took advantage of it — we saw a very pretty snug little place — dropped Anchor and landed and leaving Mr. Lane to take a Sketch we climbed on a Hill — from whose summit we had a fine view of the Sea and Bay — returning on board we started with a fine breeze for Saddle Rock — which we reached between 1 & 2 clock — anchored and leaving Mr. Lane and Getchell on board landed — I was myself with Mr. Burgess Keeper of the light — who welcomed us and showed us the lions of the Rock — we enjoyed the novelty of the Scene but the Rock seemed to have a strong desire to come ashore after us — there was a long and tedious “Wasting Spot” — so we embarked again and Stilling round the ledge — with a fine pleasant breeze — from the westward a smooth boat — delightful afternoon on record we put for “Lunts Long Island” passing eastward on the edge of the islands in the evening — we stretched ourselves out on deck snugly and read a little and enjoyed our life on the Ocean Wave — under a broad and pleasant sky — to our great content — about Sundown we reached Long Island harbor and anchored at a sheltered place for the first time since leaving home — after getting our supper we spent the night — Mr. Lane enjoying a “Smoke” — by myself — on deck before going to bed — the talking of cow bells on shore give promise of plenty of milk — — Wednesday Aug 18 — up by sunrise another fine morning — no signs of a fog — which we have been dreading — went ashore with our water cask and milk tub — landed near Squirt Lanes wharf and went to his house — but after knock on the door and go not successful in rousing any body but a dog — went to two houses near by — but none of them would sell us anything — then we were deserted — but after a while we spied a man lying in a corral with a horse for the harbor — and Joe & George steered off in —

along better than we thought possible — the climb up after we left the path was somewhat severe — as it was very hot and not even at the top of the Mountains was there a breath of Air Stirling — Lane got up an hour after the rest of us — fell about until we first got up but soon revived and I started off a cruise of about 3 or 4 miles in the Sun & Wind on the Summit — the thermometer being so low that we all seemed not to be very much — but still we held our spare for our labour — about the time we got prepared to descend it began to blow thunder in the distance and clouds began to rise — and by the time we reached our boat it was evident that a shower was near at hand so we put in a Smart Row and our good Slooper Superior just as the rain began to fall — and it soon came down in torrents and after a hearty supper — and a good Smoke being pretty tired we turned in early — Friday Aug 20 — Our good luck again for weather — Hoisted Anchor — and dropped down the tide with the tide — George and I went ashore and got some milk and went back on dinner on deck at a good dinner of Coffee and good Substantial edibles to match — and famous appetites — this is the way to enjoy life said wet the wind breezed up and we put all Sail and had a bit of a try with a Banger Slooper called a crank Sailer but she did not last us much — so we ran to North East Harbour looked after and ran out again and put for Bear Island — where we landed and visited the lighthouse — this is a high bluff little island — the Beach that we landed on appears from the top of Island of a perfect Crescent Shape — started again for Bear Island — and landed Mr Lane to take a Sketch and then proceeded for Northeast Cove — to afford an ancient Pilot an opportunity to visit his station — We all

landed and leaving Mr Getchell with his friends cruised up in the Hills after Blueberries — saw some girls there and approached them to buy their Berries — but they took fright and ran into the bushes — George Joe — the longest ladged and Desett of course gave chase while we got into a Rock to watch the result — both pursued and pursuer disappeared from our view — but presently we caught Sight of the Calico Flying through the trees — and next George at some distance towards Spring in to view and Souled out the — but seeing the Chase had gained upon him so much he gave up in dismay — the “Coup d’Oeil” was very striking at that moment and Engeemoggin emerged to the Flowers of Gown and Cape Bonnets in the distance — On the nice for Mr. Geo. & Joe pitched the first object that met our sight was — our “Ancient Mark” — got out full length upon the Grass — and faint and growing — and he had been taken Suddenly in a few minutes after we left and faintly away and had returned — we calmly to count out the — he had been complaining somewhat before — he was now so well off as soon as we concluded to leave home to right and call for him in the morning — So we started to take in Mr Lane at Suttons Island and then run down to South West Harbour and anchored — and went ashore and saw Mr Dugan & Mr Heath — Sarah A Crawford, 7 miles for Geo. & Joe pitched the last above to night and slept there but the rest of us prefured the old Sloop — Saturday Aug 21 — pleasant seems for Geo. Joe & myself — took breakfast this morning at the Island House — and a fine one it was — price 25 ct — Mr Lane took 2 sketches here — it was calm till about 9 o clock when it freshened and we beat up to Southers Cove — and found our “Ancient” recovered from his illness — So
we took him on and about 11 o clock Started with a fair wind homeward bound over Bass Harbour Bar and through the Reach — but the wind is light — and we do not get along very fast — Caught a couple of Haddock and had a chowder for dinner — got up off Deer Island about Sundown and anchored — as the tide was ahead and no wind — on the turn of the tide we weighed Anchor and drifted along the rest of the night and Anchored again on the Sedgwick Shore towards morning — Sunday — 22 Aug — pleasant as has been every day since we started and all feel certain that we have had the best time possible — The wind was light till about noon when it breezed up and we had a fine run home where we arrived about ½ past one o clock

*1 Fitz Hugh Lane by John Wilmerding, Praeger publishers. 1971. Background material on Lane is taken from this book.

*2 Wilmerding suggests that Lane was crippled by polio after having eaten from a tomato plant (Apple Peru). However tomatoes were not normally grown for they were, as Wilmerding correctly states, considered poisonous. Two tropical plants, Physalis and Datura Stramonium, naturalized in North America are known as Peruvain. Datura Stramonium, Jamestown or Jimsonweed is intensely poisonous.

*3 Reproductions of these views are in the Wilson Museum. We would be pleased to learn where the originals are.

*4 Mary Lowe Kimball was a sister of the younger Joseph Stevens and was also home for a visit.

MUSEUM NEWS - ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of Trustees of the Castine Scientific Society was held at the Wilson Museum on September 9th, 1974. The following Trustees whose terms expired were re-elected — Ellenore W. Doudiet, Roland M. Howard and Lucy J. Grossman. Trustees with continuing terms are — Helen A. Bartlett, Dorothy Blake, Marguerite Hale, Donovan Kvalnes, John Wiggins and Clara Wiswall. Sturgis S. Wilson is Honorary Trustee. Officers elected were — Ellenore W. Doudiet, President; John R. Wiggins, Vice President; Donovan Kvalnes, Secretary; Lucy J. Grossman, Treasurer.

The following were elected Members of the Museum Council for a term of one year: — Col. and Mrs. A. Bagot, Mrs. D. Dunfee, Mr. and Mrs. G. Dunham, the Rev. and Mrs. M. Eck, Bradford Emerson, Mrs. A. Fairley, Mrs. H. Farnham, Oliver Garceau, Miss Barbara Clidden, Hoyt Hutchins, Capt. J. Kennaday, Mrs. D. Kvalnes, Mrs. Starr Lampson, Mrs. D. McMaster, Miss M. O'Neill, Mr. and Mrs. C. Tolman.

REQUEST FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Anyone knowing of letters or documents concerning Josiah Bartlett, signer of the Declaration of Independence, please write the New Hampshire Historical Society, 30 Park Street, Concord, N. H. 03301.