

Gloucester At Mid-Century

The World of Fitz Hugh Lane 1840-1865

July 8, 1988-January 31, 1989

Cape Ann Historical Association

27 Pleasant Street

Gloucester, Massachusetts

The exhibition and catalog were supported in part by grants from the George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation, the Riley Foundation, the Plumstock Fund and the Bank of New England-Essex.

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Cover:
Fitz Hugh Lane (1804-1865), *Ten Pound Island, Gloucester*, c. 1850s; oil on canvas; Cape Ann Historical Association Collection (CAHA); gift of Bessie Stanwood in 1948.

Frontispiece:
Lane, *Gloucester Harbor*, 1847; oil on canvas (detail); CAHA Collection; gift of Samuel H. Mansfield in 1949.

Acknowledgments

From the time of Alfred Mansfield Brooks, the Cape Ann Historical Association has had a strong interest in the life and art of Fitz Hugh Lane. Professor Brooks was professor of fine arts at Indiana State University and Swarthmore College before his retirement in 1937 to the brick house on Middle Street in Gloucester. He had lived in Gloucester as a child and spent most of his summers here as an adult. He and his family were part of the well-to-do local gentry, the "codfish aristocracy."

He was 67 when he retired, and he lived to be 93. During those years he was a strong influence on the Cape Ann Historical Association, serving for many years as its president and curator. He recognized Lane as a master and knew his work ought to be preserved at the Cape Ann Historical Association. He had no problem convincing his wealthy cousin, Sam Mansfield, who owned all the Lane drawings that those drawings belonged at the Association. He had no hesitation in telling cousin Sam what Sam ought to do.

Sam Mansfield was not the only one told what to do, however. During the 1940s, Professor Brooks was able to influence many people in the community—some of them his relatives and friends from the codfish aristocracy—to give or leave their Lane paintings to the Cape Ann Historical Association where he said they truly belonged. And his was a voice of authority. He was, after all, a Harvard graduate, a professor of art, an author, and a world traveler.

The result is one of the great collections of beautiful and compelling paintings done by a single American artist. Professor Brooks knew what he was doing, and there was no doubt in his mind that he was right. Time has proved him correct.

Since Professor Brooks' time, other donors have been kind enough to think of the Cape Ann Historical Association, too. And the Association was fortunate that the leadership of the museum passed to Hyde Cox, a young friend of Professor Brooks. Under Mr. Cox's guidance, the museum developed in ways that Professor Brooks probably could not have foreseen. A new building was built, and the Lanes were beautifully displayed. More recently, all the drawings have been treated and properly matted to assure their preservation.

When the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston requested the loan of nine of our Lanes for a retrospective of the artist, we at first had great misgivings. But how could we refuse these great institutions when John Wilmerding, the deputy director of the National Gallery and the first to do scholarly work on Lane, was involved. Wilmerding did his earliest work at the Cape Ann Historical Association.

In this catalog and the exhibition it accompanies, the Cape Ann Historical Association hopes to supplement the exhibition of Fitz Hugh Lane paintings in Washington and Boston. The scope here is somewhat broader, concentrating on Gloucester's crucial period of development in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Our gratitude goes to Martha Oaks, curator, for organizing this undertaking and to Erik Ronnberg for helping to design and install the exhibition.

Simply to list the lenders to the exhibition is quite inadequate as an expression of our appreciation. Many have gone well beyond the call of normal expectation on our behalf, including Mrs. Philip S. Weld, Dr. and Mrs. James S. Mansfield, Mrs. Laura Estabrook Romine, Mr. and Mrs. Irwin E. Spalding, Mr. Philip S. Budrose, the American Antiquarian Society, the Gloucester Lyceum and Sawyer Free Library, the Library of Congress, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Peabody Museum of Salem, and the Sandy Bay Historical Society and Museums, Inc. Speaking for the Board of Managers, I wish to thank all of the lenders for their participation.

This project would not have been possible without the financial support of several contributors. The Cape Ann Historical Association is especially grateful for the support of the Plumstock Fund, the Riley Foundation, the George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation, and the Bank of New England—Essex. The support and encouragement of our members has also helped mightily with this exhibition.

Harold Bell
President



Lane, *View of Gloucester, Mass.*, 1855; lithograph painted over in oil by the artist; lithograph published by Bradford's Lithography, Boston; CAHA Collection.



Lane, *View of the Town of Gloucester, Mass.*, 1836; lithograph; published by Pendleton's Lithography, Boston; CAHA Collection.

Gloucester at Mid-Century: The World of Fitz Hugh Lane

For more than a century, the town of Gloucester has attracted a steady stream of artists to its shores. From early nineteenth century itinerant painters Susanah Paine and Alfred J. Wiggins, to William Morris Hunt and Winslow Homer in the late 1800s, to Edward Hopper, Marsden Hartley and John Sloan during the early years of this century, artists have been lured to the area by its natural beauty and the richly textured social fabric of the working-class community. As recent exhibitions have shown, understanding an artist's "Gloucester years" leads to a broader understanding of his or her overall career.¹ In the case of one particularly gifted artist—Fitz Hugh Lane—who spent virtually all of his life working in the town, to understand his Gloucester years is to understand the essence of the artist and of the community during an important period of its history.

Between 1840 and 1865, Fitz Hugh Lane (1804-1865) created a series of oil paintings and pencil drawings set against the backdrop of Gloucester, his birthplace and his home. As a group, the works provide visual documentation of the town's development. Moreover, they give viewers the opportunity to understand how an artist interpreted the natural and man-made world around him and how the geography of his surroundings influenced his work.

Fitz Hugh Lane is recognized today as one of America's preeminent nineteenth century painters and as one of this country's first marine painters of "real stature."² Although he was a popular figure during his lifetime, Lane's works went largely unnoticed in the 75 years following his death. It was not until the early 1960s that his works were "rediscovered." A series of exhibitions during the 1970s and early 1980s secured Lane's reputation as a major figure in American art.³ Perhaps most noteworthy among them was "American Light," an exhibition which examined Lane and contemporaries John F. Kensett and Martin Johnson Heade as the leading examples of this country's "luminist" painters.⁴

While research and published writings on Lane to date have done much to document the details of his life and artistic development, little analysis has been undertaken which considers Lane within the context of the community in which he lived and worked.

"Gloucester at Mid-Century" attempts to correct this omission by examining the social and economic climate of Gloucester during Lane's time and by exploring some of the artist's associations within the community.

Fitz Hugh Lane was born in Gloucester on December 19, 1804. He was one of four children born to Jonathan Dennison Lane, a sailmaker, and Sarah (Haskell) Lane. Jonathan Lane represented the fifth generation of the family on Cape Ann; his great-great-grandfather, Samuel Lane, settled in the town in about 1707 and, along with other members of the Lane family, figured in the settlement of the Lanesville in north Gloucester and in the early growth of the town's economy. Like the Lanes, the Haskell family was one of the oldest on Cape Ann, arriving in the area in the 1640s. During the latter years of her life, Sarah (Haskell) Lane, who lived until 1853, resided with her artist son.⁵

Surprisingly little information has been uncovered about Fitz Hugh Lane's youth. A brief passage in John J. Babson's *History of Gloucester* (1860), on which Lane is known to have collaborated, provides a biographical sketch of the artist's early life and recounts the onset of paralysis in his leg's which left him unable to walk without crutches.

At the age of eighteen months, while playing in the yard or garden of his father, (Fitz Hugh Lane) ate some of the seeds of the apple-peru (tomato); and was so unfortunate as to lose the use of his lower limbs in consequence, owing to late and unskilful (sic) medical treatment. He showed in boyhood a talent for drawing and painting; but received no instruction in the rules till he went to Boston, at the age of twenty-eight.⁶

By this time, the artist, who was christened Nathaniel Rogers Lane, had for reasons which remain unknown taken the name Fitz Hugh Lane.

As noted by historian Babson, Lane appears to have taught himself to draw and paint. Although several artists had traveled through Cape Ann during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there is no evidence that any full-time painters were living in Gloucester during the 1820s who may have provided Lane with instruction or inspiration. During the early 1830s, Lane began working at the local printing shop of Clegg and Dodge. After being employed there for a short time, in 1832 the young artist left Gloucester to serve as apprentice to Boston lithographer William S. Pendleton.⁷

At the time Lane left Gloucester, the town was undergoing economic hard times brought on by a number of events including a devastating fire (1830) which swept through much of the Harbor

Village and by a slow spell in the fisheries. An 1833 observer noted that the town was in "a truly dejectionable condition. No business whatever (was) doing. All the store-keepers (were) entirely discouraged. They do not sell a cents worth sometimes from Monday noon til Saturday night . . . if something does not take place soon for their advantage they must move away."⁸ This gloomy forecast along with Lane's own desire to further his career in an artistically more stimulating environment, led the artist to leave the town for Boston.

Lane's position as apprentice to Pendleton was an accomplishment for the young artist since Pendleton was among the better known lithographers of the day. In addition to learning the art of lithography, it seems highly likely that Lane also received guidance and inspiration from other artists associated with Pendleton's and working in the Boston area, including Benjamin Champney, who would later visit Lane on Cape Ann, and Robert Salmon (c.1775-1848).⁹

Despite Lane's restricted mobility, he did travel back and forth between Boston and Gloucester. It was during this time he did his first series of lithographic views of Gloucester. In 1836, Lane executed *View of the Town of Gloucester, Mass.* A bird's eye-view of the town done from the easterly side of the harbor, the work is rich



John W. A. Scott (1815-1907), *Pigeon Cove*, early 1800s; oil on canvas; Collection of the Sandy Bay Historical Society and Museums, Rockport, Mass.

in narrative detail and carefully records fishing and shipping related activities occurring around the waterfront. With its great concern for detail, the work is indicative of the later oil paintings Lane would do of Gloucester.

In 1837, when Thomas Moore took over the lithography business of Pendleton, Lane remained with the firm, continuing to produce advertising cards and illustrations for sheet music. He also undertook lithographic views of several towns around New England including Norwich and Millbury, Connecticut, and Lawrence, Massachusetts. In 1845, Lane organized his own lithography firm with Boston artist John W. A. Scott (1815-1907) under the name of "Lane and Scott's Lithography, Boston."¹⁰ A painter as well as a lithographer, Scott, like Champney, would later visit Cape Ann, producing *Pigeon Cove* on one of his trips.

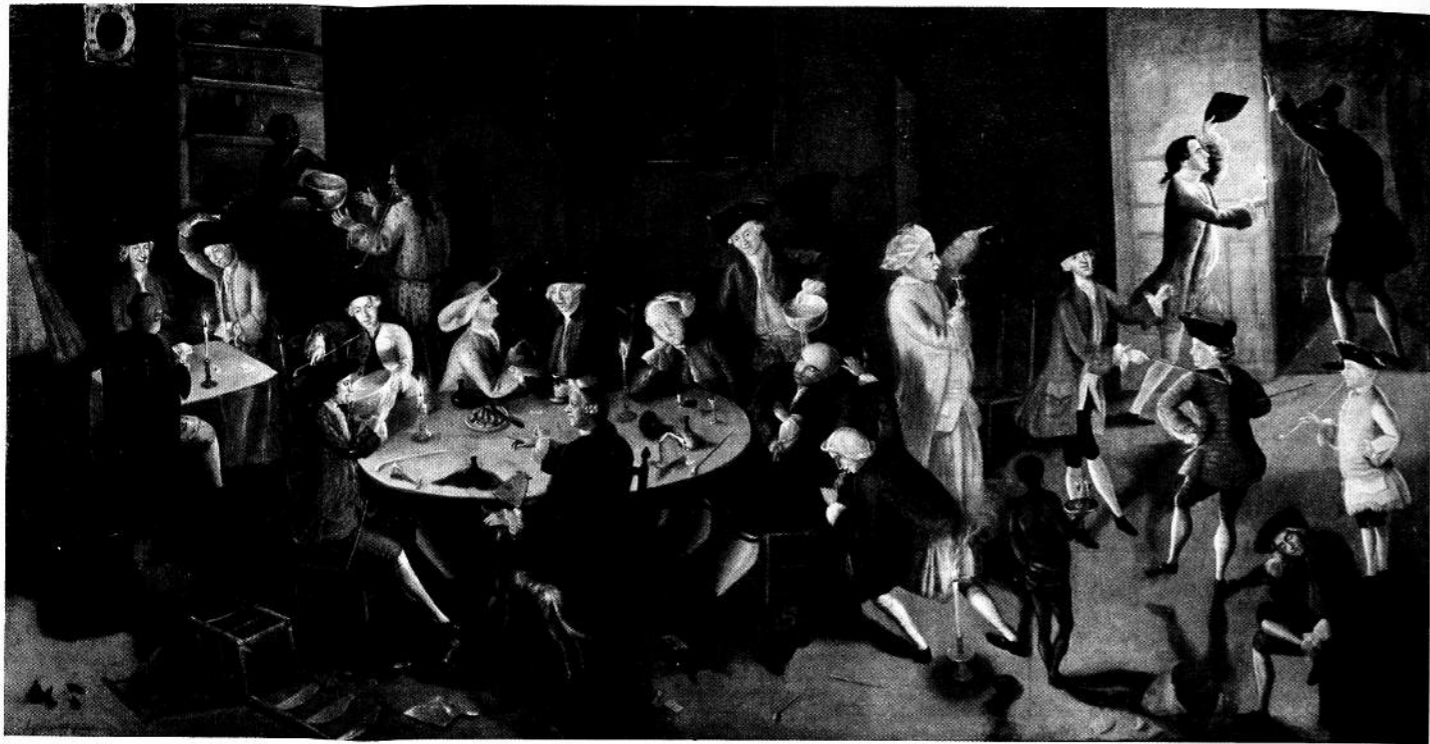
In 1846, while associated with Scott, Lane created a second panoramic view of Gloucester entitled *View of Gloucester From Rocky Neck*. The accuracy and detail of the lithograph drew praise from the people of the town, providing the artist with income through sales and strengthening his reputation. The attention Lane received for the accuracy of his 1846 work was typical of the praise he received for virtually all of his early works. "Our fellow townsman, Mr. Fitz H. Lane, has just published a splendid lithographic view of Gloucester, which we think is far superior to his former one (1836). It is one of the most perfect pictures of the kind we have ever seen, every house and object distinctly visible. Copies of it can be obtained at Mr. Charles Smith's Bookstore, at the reasonable price of \$1."¹¹

Late in 1847, at the age of 43, Fitz Hugh Lane left Boston and returned to Gloucester. By this time, the success Lane had realized through the sale of his lithographs made it possible for the artist to concentrate on painting rather than print-making. His decision to return to Gloucester at this turning point in his career suggests the town was an important source of inspiration to the artist and that he had continued to maintain a close association with the community during the years he spent working in Boston. The town Lane returned to was economically and socially quite different than the one he had left 15 years before.

Since its settlement in the 1620s, the people of Gloucester have relied on the ocean and maritime commerce for their livelihoods. While the first permanent settlement was located away from the water's edge, by the early 1700s development was beginning to take place around the shores of the town's deep-water harbor. By the mid-1700s the economic foundations were in place upon which a prosperous trade network and a world-renowned fishing industry would develop after the Revolutionary War.



Lane, *View of Gloucester From Rocky Neck*, 1846; colored lithograph; published by Lane and Scott Lithography, Boston; CAHA collection.



John Greenwood (1727-1792), *Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam*, c. 1758; oil on bed ticking; The Saint Louis Art Museum.

During the first half of the nineteenth century as many communities along Massachusetts' northshore were drawn into Boston's sphere of commercial influence, by continuing to invest men and money in its maritime businesses Gloucester was able to remain a distinct and prosperous entity. During the early decades of the century the investment was in the fisheries and the town's trade network with the Dutch colony of Surinam on the northern coast of South America. Later in the century investment would be almost exclusively in the fishing business.

The Surinam trade was a little known branch of New England's maritime commerce in salt fish and molasses;¹² the trade dominated Gloucester's economy during Fitz Hugh Lane's time and helped bring about social and economic changes which had lasting effects on the entire community. Much like Salem's involvement in the Zanzibar pepper trade, from the 1790s to the outbreak of the Civil War, the Surinam trade was carried on almost solely by Gloucester merchants. They owned the large square-rigged ships which plied the sealanes between Gloucester and the South American port; they arranged the outgoing and return cargoes; and they reaped the profits. The trade revolved around the exchange of low grades of salt fish, used to feed black slaves who worked the colony's sugar plantations, for large quantities of molasses. Packed in heavy casks, sometimes upwards of 40,000 gallons per ship, the molasses was transported back to Gloucester where it was processed into rum primarily at Pearce's distillery just below Front Street. The trade between Gloucester and Surinam reached its peak during the 1850s



Delftware China; brought to Gloucester from Surinam; CAHA Collection.

when local merchants realized from five to ten times their initial investments. In 1857 alone, 20 barques and brigs arrived in Gloucester from the Dutch colony, carrying a total of \$400,000 worth of cargo.¹³

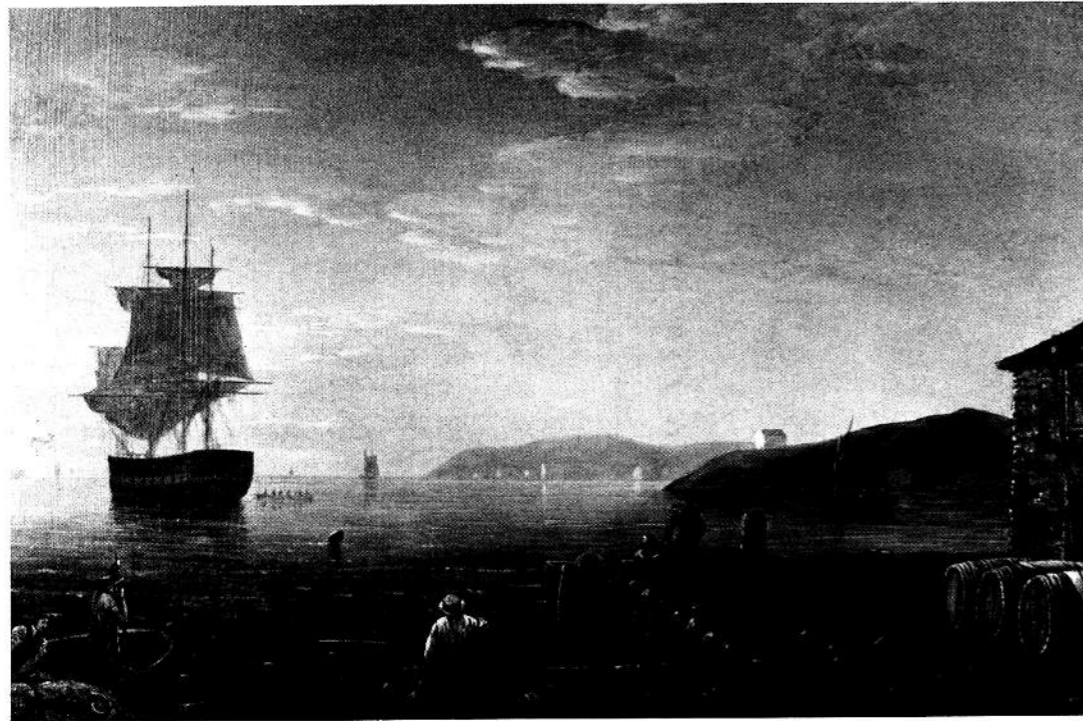
The Surinam trade added greatly to a lively, cosmopolitan atmosphere which existed in Gloucester during Fitz Hugh Lane's lifetime. In addition to exposing those who ventured to the colony to a foreign culture, the trade also brought many items to Cape Ann which would not otherwise have appeared in the New England port. In addition to molasses, oranges, cocoa, sugar and coffee were also carried aboard ship as was Dutch silver, china and furniture. Tradition holds that upon returning to Gloucester from Surinam, ship captains were frequently seen pushing wheelbarrows of specie or "lugging a sailor bag of plate" home through the streets.¹⁴

Although the abolishment of slavery in the Dutch colony in 1838 resulted in the gradual decline of the Surinam trade, Gloucester continued to be a prosperous and active seaport through mid-century. Beginning in the late 1840s, many local merchants who recognized the trade was declining began to reinvest their profits in the town's fishing industry. As a result, the business grew rapidly making Gloucester the leading center for the cod, mackerel and halibut fisheries. After a slow start in the 1830s, the halibut fisheries in particular underwent a period of unprecedented growth during the 1840s. Much of it was attributed to the increased use of ice to preserve fresh fish aboard fishing schooners, and on improved transportation systems which facilitated the distribution of fish once it was landed in Gloucester. Being able to offer fresh fish in addition to salted fish resulted in expanded markets and increased profits for local fishermen. In 1847, during a span of just four months, 18 new vessels were added to the town's fleet bringing the total number of fishing boats in the port to 167; the same year so much halibut was brought into Gloucester "that the poorer quantities (were) thrown overboard in our harbor."¹⁵

As the Surinam trade flourished and the fisheries grew, an increasing number of men were needed to serve as crew on fishing vessels and foreign traders. As a result of this demand, in the years just prior to Fitz Hugh Lane's return to Gloucester, the town began experiencing its first taste of ethnic diversification. Young men from Canada, the Azores and Ireland filtered into the community, securing work aboard "Surinamers" in the autumn and winter months and on fishing vessels in the summer. Writing in the late 1850s, historian Babson noted that "before 1840, there were few persons of foreign birth or parentage residing in Gloucester. A single Irish family, or, at most, two or three, were all of that origin then living here, but within a few years after that time, a rapid growth of business commenced, and created a demand for labor, which only could be supplied from a foreign source."¹⁶ Census records confirm Bab-



Silver Candlesticks; brought to Gloucester from Surinam by George H. Rogers (1808-1870); private collection.

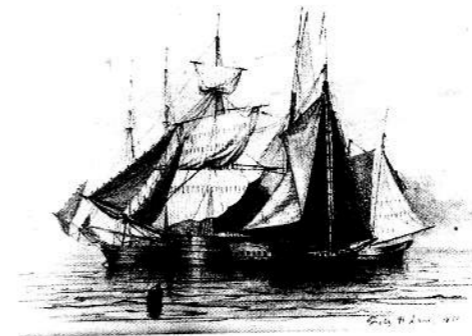


Lane, *On The Wharves, Gloucester Harbor, 1847*; oil on wood panel; CAHA Collection; gift of Jane Parker Stacy in 1944.

son's observations, revealing that much of the growth which took place in the town between 1840 and 1860 was attributed to an influx of foreign-born people. By 1860, just over 20% of Gloucester's population was made up of foreign-born inhabitants, an increase of almost 13% in just 10 years.¹⁷

As with many other New England towns that were experiencing ethnic diversification for the first time during this period, the emergence of a foreign element of the population in Gloucester during the 1840s had a sometimes unsettling effect on the community as a whole. All too often fishermen and particularly drunken fishermen became synonymous with Irishmen. Camps which were set up along the waterfront to accommodate the transient workers caused concern amongst long-time residents as did the noisier, more visible members of the town's working class who were frequently perceived of as a threat to the stability, even the safety of the town. Writing in 1847, a woman from one of Gloucester's upper class families noted that she was "afraid to walk except in the frequented streets" because there were "so many inebriates and so many Irishmen."¹⁸

As the population of Gloucester increased and diversified during Lane's time, the physical face of the town was expanded and upgraded. New streets and neighborhoods were laid out, while houses, commercial buildings and wharves were constructed. As early as 1840, the Harbor Village was the focal point of settlement with over half of the town's total population residing in the crowded streets and alleys which spanned out from the harbor front.¹⁹



Lane, *Study of Ships, 1851*; pencil on paper; CAHA Collection.

The pleasure expressed by one resident in 1847 over the town's growth seems to have been shared by many: "It is pleasant to walk around our town and see the improvements going on. New houses are being erected, old ones remodelled (sic) or repaired. New vessels fitting away for fishing and various operations seem to repeat prosperity. I rejoice in it. I believe that our town is looking up as the saying is. . ."²⁰ Quite a difference from the gloomy summations of 1833.

The Eastern Railroad Company's decision to extend its northshore branch to Gloucester in 1844 was perhaps the best indication of the amount of economic expansion which was occurring in the town during Lane's time. The arrival of the railroad on Cape Ann, an event which coincided practically to the day with Lane's return from Boston, served to hasten the rate of growth in the area, particularly in terms of summer tourism which would blossom into a vital business during the latter half of the century.

Upon returning to Gloucester late in 1847, Fitz Hugh Lane chose to make his home and studio in the center of the town where much of the growth and expansion was taking place. The artist's decision reflects his desire to be in the heart of the community rather than to physically separate or isolate himself from it as some artists would later do.²¹ After briefly maintaining a studio house owned by his broth-

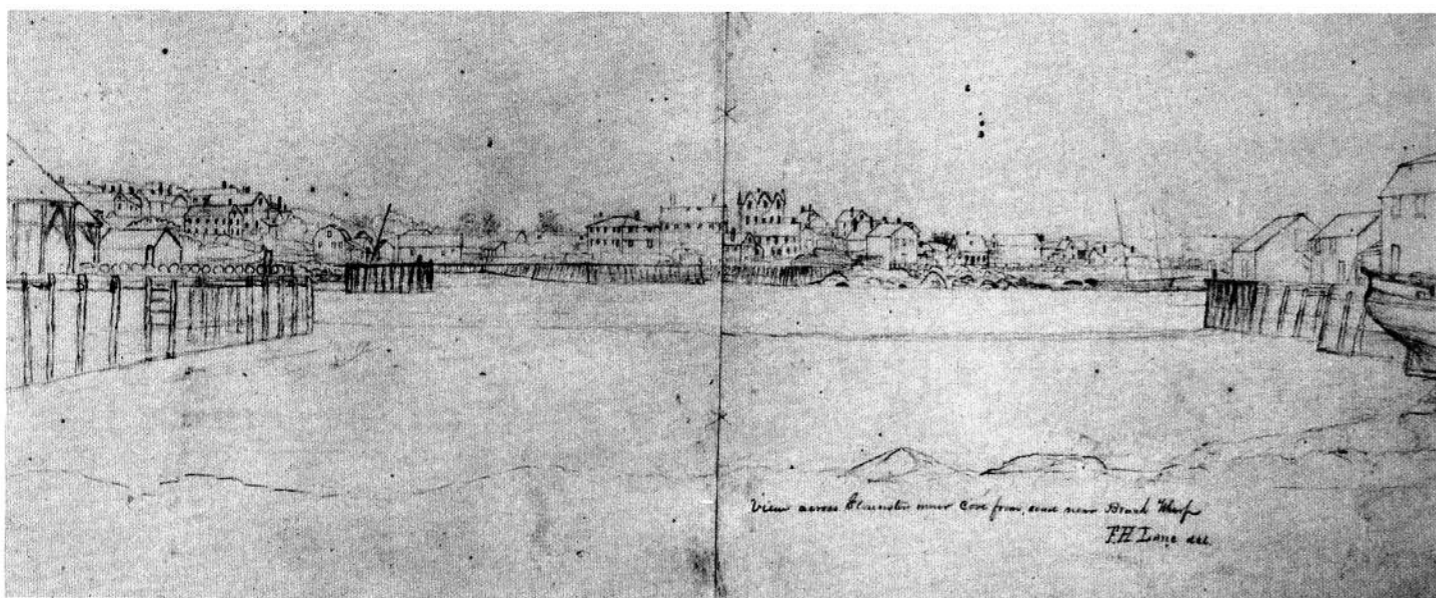


Lane, *A Smart Blow, 1856*; oil on canvas; CAHA Collection; gift of Jane Parker Stacy in 1944.

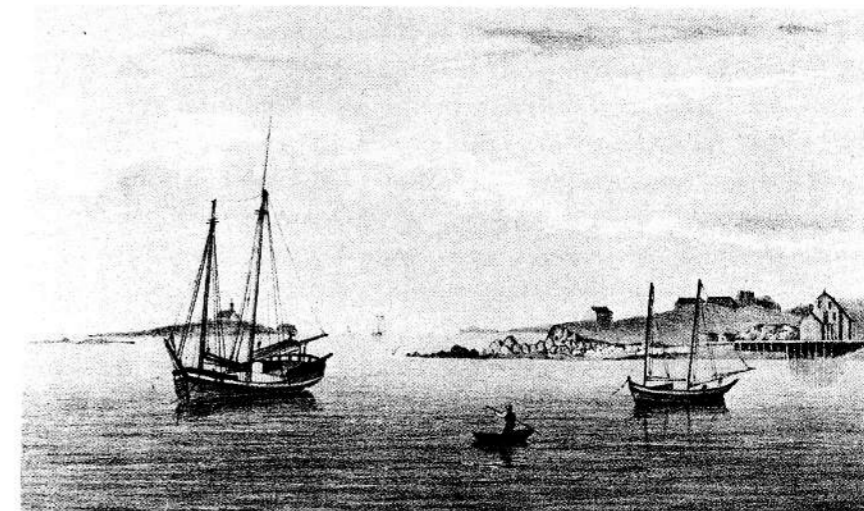
er, Edward Lane, and then in one owned by his sister Sarah, in 1849 Fitz Hugh Lane purchased a piece of property just up from the harbor on Duncan's Point in the heart of the Harbor Village area. With his brother-in-law, Ignatius Winter, who was a carpenter, Lane began designing and constructing a seven-gable, granite house on the site. The third floor of the structure was his studio. Lane, who never married, lived in the house until his death, sharing it for a time with Winter and his family.²²

Despite its central location, as one of a very few granite houses on Cape Ann, the artist's new home, with its medieval style architecture, stood in sharp contrast to the rest of the houses in the Harbor Village. Why Lane chose such an unusual design, which seems to have been inspired by the House of Seven Gables in Salem, remains unknown. From its perch atop Duncan's Point, the house with its third floor studio commands a panoramic view of the town and the harbor. It was in this studio that Lane created many of his Gloucester drawings and oil paintings including his *View of the Old Fort and Harbor* (done for Babson's 1860 *History*) and *Ten Pound Island, Gloucester* done in the 1850s.

Once established in his new home, Fitz Hugh Lane began taking an active role in his community. Like his decision to live and work in the heart of the town, Lane's participation in cultural institutions such as the Gloucester Lyceum, and in political events and festive events reflects the artist's eagerness to contribute to and be a part of the world in which he lived. The recognition and praise



Lane, *View Across Gloucester Inner Cove from Road Near Beach Wharf*, c. 1850s; pencil on paper; Lane's seven-gable house, built in 1849, is visible just to the right of center; CAHA Collections; gift of Samuel H. Mansfield.

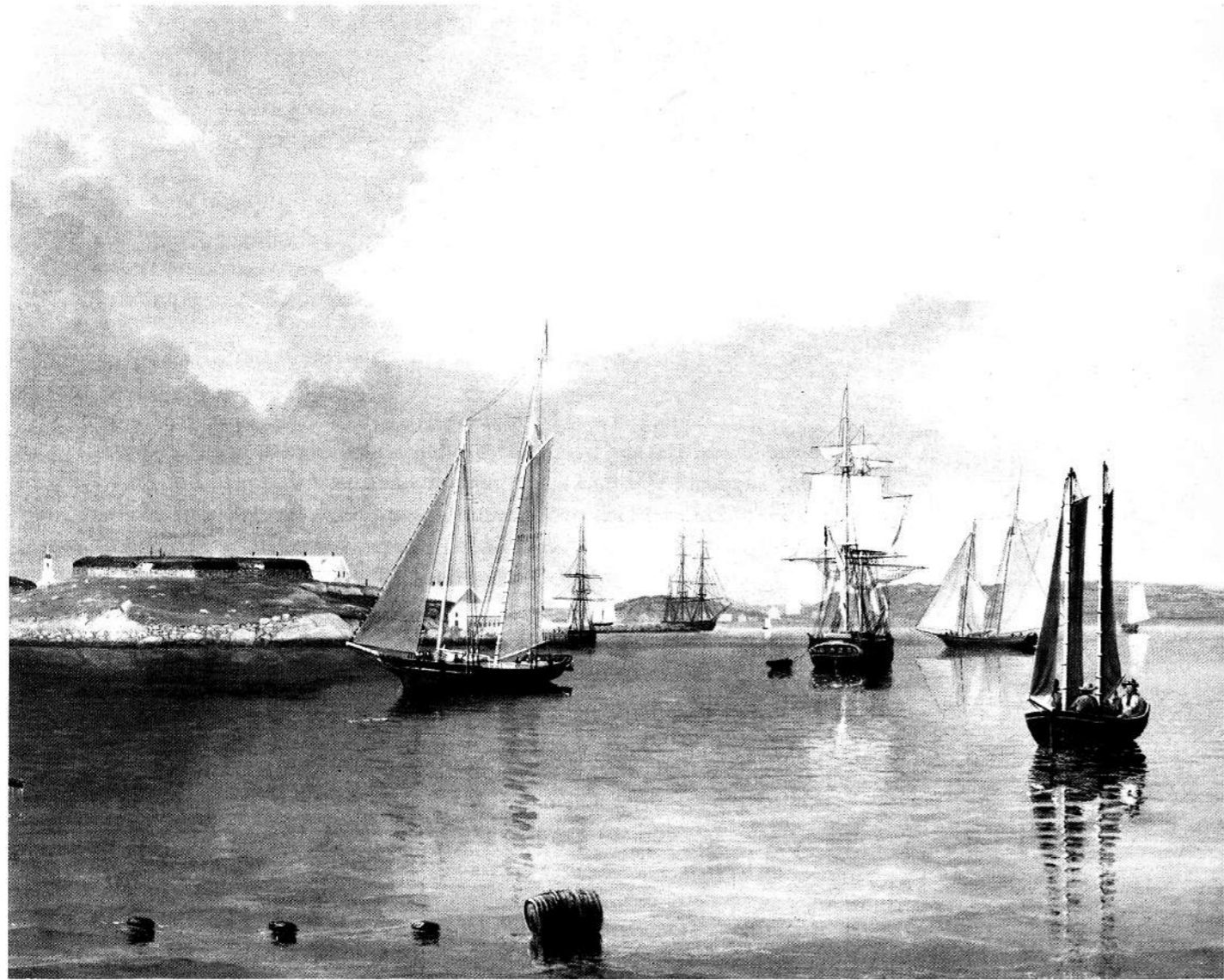


Lane, *View of the Old Fort and Harbor, 1837*; published in John J. Babson's *History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann* (1860).

he received from the people of Gloucester as a result of his involvement suggests that his attempts were successful.

In September 1849, two years after returning from Boston, Lane was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Gloucester Lyceum. Known today as the Gloucester Lyceum and Sawyer Free Library, the Lyceum was organized in 1830 "to promote the diffusion of useful knowledge and the intellectual advancement of the community by means of lectures and debates."²³ Eighteen years earlier, in March 1831, Lane had been one of the original 240 subscribers, joining the group at the time of its incorporation. Similar in its motives to other such organizations which sprang up around New England during this time, the Gloucester Lyceum was a self-improvement and educational group devoted primarily to developing the talents of its members. Weekly debates held among the members focused on topics of local concern as well as philosophical issues of the day. Early discussions included the economic advantage of encouraging the whaling industry to take hold in the town, the effects cotton manufactories would have on the community and age-old question of capital punishment.

The Lyceum also sponsored a public lecture series. Speakers during Lane's tenure as a director of the organization (1849-1852) included such well known literary and educational figures from the Boston area as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Richard Henry Dana, Horace Mann, Henry Ward Beecher and Henry David Thoreau. Lane's commitment to the Lyceum and the community it represented was attested to in February 1850 when he offered one of his paintings to be sold "for at least fifty dollars" to help raise money to build a library and permanent meeting place for the organization.²⁴ Un-



Lane, *Gloucester Harbor*, 1852; oil on canvas (detail); on deposit at CAHA by the City of Gloucester.



Fitz Hugh Lane (1804-1865), late in life. CAHA Collection.

covering Lane's ties to the Lyceum gives added strength to the idea that during the 1850s the artist was influenced by the transcendentalist movement and that his mature style which emerged during that time strived "to reveal the spiritual content of nature."²⁵

In addition to his activities at the Gloucester Lyceum, Fitz Hugh Lane's participation in lighter events such as an 1840 political rally and the town's 1849 and 1853 Independence Day celebrations reveals an eagerness of the part of the artist to integrate himself into the community. A newspaper account of the 1849 festivities outlines the central role Lane played in the program, designing one of the banners to be carried in the parade and creating two paintings also included in the procession, "one representing the effects of Intemperance, and the other a sparkling fountain of pure water."²⁶

After (the Cadets of temperance) came the Chief Marshal of the Floral procession, Mr. J. J. Piper, accompanied by F. H. Lane Esq. in an open carriage. To these gentlemen succeeded (sic) the Banner of the procession, which was carried as were all the other banners, by boys. . . And under what more appropriate sign could we marshal our children than the portrait of the Patriot and Hero whose fame and whose memory are their pride? Encircled by a garland of Oak leaves the cherished features of Washington were surrounded an an Eagle, so perfectly designed and executed that we supposed it to be one of those which have been recently hovering o'er the Cape, perched upon the banner, until we were informed that it was the production of Mr. Lane assisted by a lady who is ever zealous in good works.²⁷

Earlier, Lane had taken an active role in an 1840 political rally in support of the practice of paying bounties to New England fishermen. Following the Revolutionary War, a series of acts had been passed by Congress allowing bounties to be paid to fishermen who harvested certain quantities and types of fish. The acts were designed to encourage the financially ailing industry which was frequently viewed as a "nursery" for seamen who could be called upon to serve in the merchant marine and navy in the event of war. During the first half of the nineteenth century, numerous attempts were made to repeal the bounty acts including a string of attacks against the practice led by Missouri senator Thomas H. Benton. In 1840 a rally in support of the bounty system was held in Boston to which Gloucester's Whig party sent a delegation. They carried with them a banner, "painted by Fitz Hugh Lane, on which was a large sea serpent, with the following inscription: 'The ocean feels that attack upon her interests, and sends her champion to the rescue.'" ²⁸ The sea serpent had held special significance to the people of Gloucester since it was first sighted in the town's harbor in 1817 and to the local Whig party seemed the appropriate symbol of their's and the town's support for the bounty system.

Taken together, Lane's decision to return to Gloucester in 1847, the site he chose to locate his house, and his participation in town-wide activities, suggest a feeling of close association between artist

