



VIEW FROM THE HEADLANDS  
HARRISON CADY

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## HARRISON CADY

### A View from the Headlands

Affectionately known to many as the “bug painter,” Harrison Cady (1877–1970) was a much loved member of Cape Ann’s summer art colony throughout the 20th century. A prolific illustrator, a printmaker and a painter, Cady was also one of the last links to our nation’s Golden Age of Illustration, a distinction he earned through his independent work and his long collaboration with children’s author Thornton Burgess. Here on Cape Ann, Harrison Cady maintained a large and loyal following garnered through his outgoing personality, his warm embrace of Rockport and its people, and his whimsical outlook on life which frequently made its way into his artwork.

Harrison Cady was born in Gardner, Massachusetts, in 1877; he made his first visit to Cape Ann in 1901 and along with Parker Perkins, Gilbert Margeson, Eric Hudson and Aldro Hibbard is often referred to as one of the pioneers of Rockport’s art colony. Cady arrived in the town while granite quarrying was still going on, before summer tourists had discovered the area and while the entire Cape still retained its hardscrabble beauty. The artist colony was in its infancy and the Rockport Art Association had yet to be organized. Parker Perkins counseled Cady that the town was “too good to last” and, heeding the advice of his friend and fellow artist, Cady quickly made Rockport his permanent summer home.

At the time he discovered Cape Ann, Harrison Cady had already embarked on his long and successful career as an artist. In 1897, he had left his central Massachusetts home and made his way to New York City, finding occasional work selling illustrations to magazines and newspapers. Around 1900 Cady





landed a job as a staff artist for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*; as a self-taught artist, the position impressed upon him the importance of solid draftsmanship and the importance of meeting deadlines. From the *Eagle*, in 1907 Cady went on to work at *Life* magazine, an association that lasted into 1919. Cady did well at *Life* and by 1910 his highly elaborate and detailed pen and ink drawings were appearing frequently in the publication, sometimes spread across two pages. Bugs and insects, which had fascinated Cady since childhood, appeared regularly in his drawings, often dressed like humans and engaged in human activities.

While many of Cady's compositions that appeared in *Life* were humorous, others related to salient issues of the day including women's suffrage and child labor laws. Like many illustrators at the time, Cady's work on occasion reflected stereotypes and prejudices held by segments of the community. To viewers today, some of Cady's illustrations that appeared in the years leading up to World War I are tinged with anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant sentiments. In such cases it is not known if Cady shared the views of his publishers or if he was simply following through on his assignments. Many years later, looking back on his work at *Life*, Cady acknowledged the influence management had over his work when he wrote "It was impossible to work for our editor and not be affected by his likes and dislikes. Thus I found myself working into caricatures, turning out drawings that pointed up the current program pro this or con that..."

Harrison Cady's long collaboration with children's author Thornton Burgess (1874–1965) began in 1911 while Cady was still creating illustrations for *Life* magazine. For over a decade, Burgess had been working to establish himself as a writer. Burgess' love of nature and animals and writing about them dovetailed perfectly with Cady's skills and interests. The pair first published their work together in the *People's Home Journal* in 1911; two years later publisher Little, Brown and Company

hired Cady to illustrate *The Adventures of Reddy Fox* and *The Adventures of Johnny Chuck*, the first volumes in Burgess' Bedtime Story-Book series. The series was soon picked up by the *New York Tribune* and from 1920 to 1960 it appeared six days a week in the paper. Through their collaborative work, Cady and Burgess (and their wives) developed a strong friendship which lasted 50 years. Among the best known characters created by the team were Reddy Fox, Jimmy Skunk and an Americanized version of Peter Rabbit.



During his initial visits to Cape Ann, before his marriage to Melinna Eldredge in 1915, Harrison Cady was typically accompanied by his mother and the two would find lodgings in Rockport. Cady would sometimes slip over to Gloucester, exploring the city's gritty working waterfront and coming to know many of the artists who worked there. He later wrote about one such summer in his autobiography. "I spent a couple of summers in Gloucester before my marriage, leaving Mother in a Rockport hotel. My abode in the Rocky Neck section was a schooner's cabin that had been moved to a stone dock and left to its own devices. Sharing these unusual quarters was my old Brooklyn associate, Edward Hungerford. I gave him a desk for his writing, set my tools in a corner, and each of us went about his own business. Nearby was the studio of Gordon Grant, masterful painter of ships, fishermen, and a long series of Cape Ann watercolors."

Cady's marriage in 1915 marked a turning point in his life and his career. While his livelihood would always depend on income from his work as an illustrator, from 1915 onward, Cady spent an increasing amount of time painting, capturing scenes of his beloved Rockport in oil and watercolor and experimenting with etching. He also began showing his artwork, including it in exhibitions at the Gallery-on-the-Moors in East Gloucester in 1918 and 1920, and later at the Rockport Art Association and the North Shore Arts Association. The transition from illustrator to artist was seamless for Cady who used his brush and his etching tools like a pen, creating compositions that were rich in detail and often humorous in nature. In 1934, a selection of his work in a variety of mediums, many of them done on Cape Ann, was





exhibited at the MacBeth Gallery in New York. In 1945, the National Academy of Design awarded Cady its Edwin Palmer Memorial Prize for *Grappling the Lost Anchor* (also known as *Salvaging the Anchor*), a dramatic painting showing fishermen struggling in rough weather to make fast an anchor. And in 1950 the Salmagundi Club organized a one-man show of his work. Writing in 1938 in the *Christian Science Monitor*, art critic Dorothy Graffy (daughter of the great portrait sculptor Charles Graffy) noted that Cady's work was "a fresh, gay bit of realism that should please two opposite types—the man who likes his art neat and accurate, and the man who delights in the whimsical."

In 1919, Harrison and Melinna Cady purchased "The Headland House" on Atlantic Avenue in Rockport and made it their permanent summer home. Harrison had been let go from *Life* magazine earlier that same year, however, his work with Thornton Burgess and his success at placing illustrations in magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*, *American Boy* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, gave him and Melinna the confidence to invest in the real estate. At about the same time, Cady had an old silo-shaped building that had once been part of the Annisquam Cotton Mill, located on Broadway in Rockport, lifted off its original foundation and moved to the end of Atlantic Avenue where he transformed it into a studio. A photograph taken in 1923 by Cady's old Brooklyn associate Edward Hungerford (who had joined him on Rocky Neck years before) shows Round House in its new location. Cady can be seen standing in front of the building and Rockport Harbor is visible in the background; perched on the top of the building was a weathervane shaped like an old Dutch ship that Cady had cut out of copper.

(far left) *Salvaging the Anchor*, c.1940. Oil on board. Private Collection. (above left) *Stage Fort Park*, undated. Watercolor on paper. Collection of the Cape Ann Museum, Gift of Harold Bell, 2006. (near left) *The Old Red Fish House*, 1908. Ink and watercolor on paper. The James Collection, promised gift to the Cape Ann Museum. (above) *Lane's Cove*, 1930s. Oil on board. The James Collection, promised gift to the Cape Ann Museum.



In 1940, the Cadys purchased a studio apartment in Manhattan at 27 West 67th Street on the west side of Central Park. Erected in 1903 specifically for artists, the building was a cornerstone of the surrounding artists' colony and a beehive of artistic activity. This was the Cadys' winter home for the rest of their lives.

It was during the 1920s that Harrison Cady fell into a daily routine that he would follow for the rest of his career: mornings were devoted to doing his illustrations (or dailies, as he called them) and then, after delivering them to the post office if he was in Rockport, or directly to his publisher if he was in New York, afternoons would be spent painting, visiting museums and galleries and socializing with friends. A journal that Cady kept in 1950 reveals that his social calendar was extraordinarily busy. Many of his acquaintances kept the same schedule he and Melinna did, winters in New York and summers on Cape Ann. This group included Max and Margaret Kuehne, Emma Fordyce MacRae, Yvette and Leon Kroll, Gifford Beal and his wife Marjorie, Kitty Parsons and Richard Recchia, and Oswald and Anna Knauth and their son Arnold. During the summer, Cady's circle of friends expanded further. In the July 29, 1950, entry in his journal Cady tells of spending an afternoon with sculptor Walker Hancock at his studio in the Lanesville neighborhood of Gloucester. Although Cady misidentified the train station where the work Hancock was just completing would be installed, it remains a remarkable passage and confirmation that the two men were

friends: “In afternoon to Walker Hancock’s for coffee and to view his house and studio in the Lanesville Forest and overlooking a small quarry. A very unique house, an interesting round fireplace, etc. His studio a distance away built of stone and a lovely little structure which can be used as a house. Saw his tall sculpture piece to be set in the Penn. Station in NY and his bust of Robert Frost poet.”

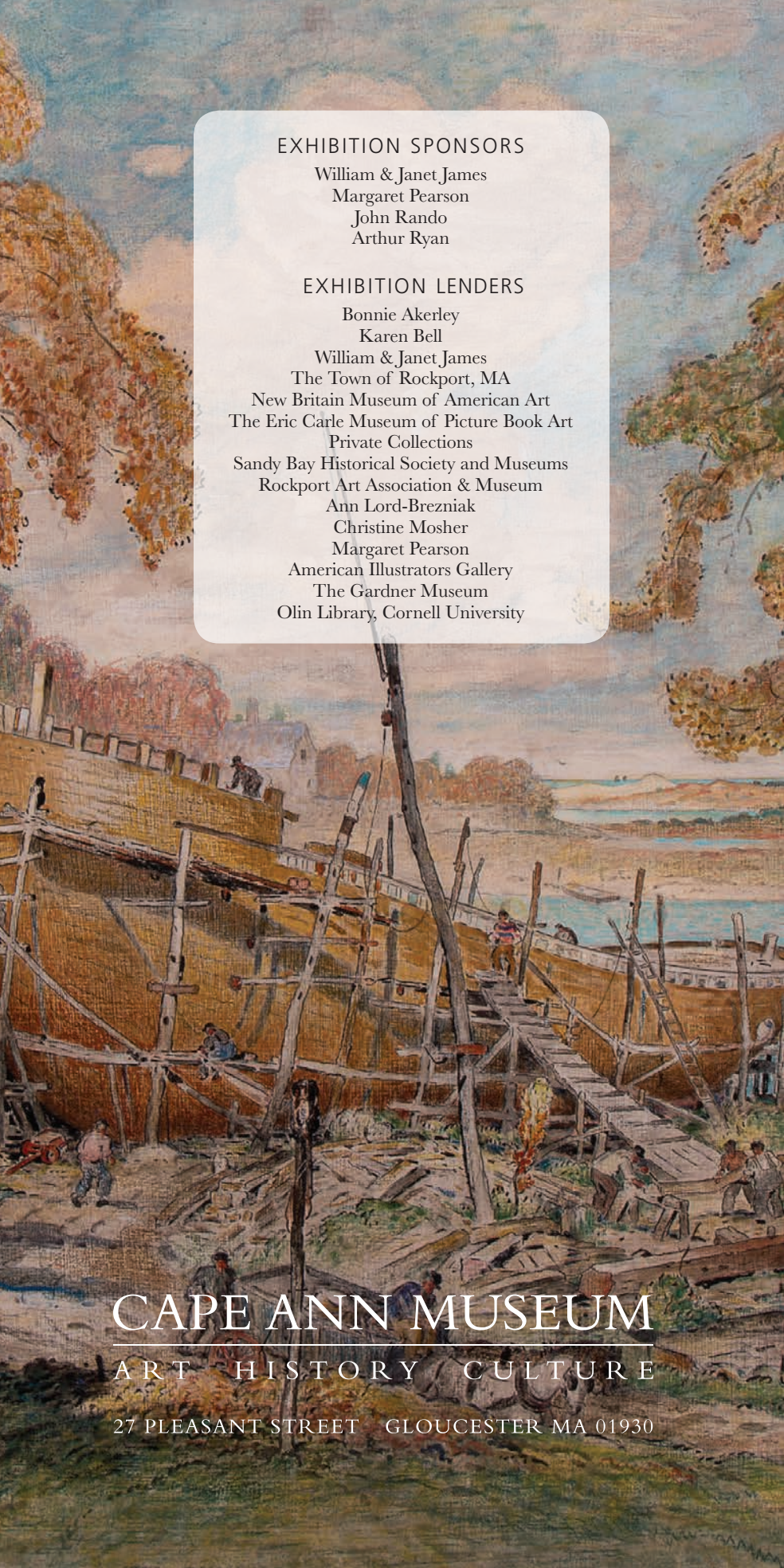
Harrison Cady continued to divide his time between New York City and Cape Ann for the rest of his life and became quite well known, particularly in Rockport. In 1959 when he and Thornton Burgess announced that they would close out their syndicated column *Bedtime Story* the following year, it was front page news—above the fold—in the *Gloucester Daily Times*. “He makes all of us kids again,” the paper proclaimed, still graciously inviting guests into the Headland House to admire his ship models and the antique furniture that he and Melinna had collected. When he died in 1970 at the age of 93, Cady left the following instructions to his executors and family: “I wish that a memorial service be held in my studio in New York City, and let those who attend come with smiling faces and joy in their hearts as a tribute to a man who has had a supremely happy and wonderful life.”

—Martha Oaks  
Curator, Cape Ann Museum

A note about sources: Information for this gallery guide was drawn from the Archives of American Art and the Archives of the Cape Ann Museum.



(top left) *The Fishing Party*, 1962. Watercolor and ink on paper. Collection of the Rockport Art Association & Museum Permanent Collection. (above) Round House, studio of Harrison Cady, Rockport, 1923. Photograph by Edward Hungerford (1875–1948). Collection of The Mariners’ Museum & Park, Newport News, Virginia. (front) Harrison Cady at Round House Door, c.1920. Unattributed photograph. Collection of the Sandy Bay Historical Society and Museums. (back) Detail of *Essex Shipyard*, 1920s. Oil on board. The James Collection, promised gift to the Cape Ann Museum.



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