



A Closer Look: Fitz Henry Lane



Fitz Henry Lane, *The Burning of the Packet Ship "Boston"* 1830. Watercolor on paper.
 Gift of Samuel Mansfield, 1924. [#75.00]

Look closely at the painting. Respond to the questions below.

What do you see?

What do you think is happening in this painting?

What do you wonder about?

Writing prompt: Fire keeps us warm but can also be scary. I am afraid of...

Teacher Notes

Gloucester's native son Fitz Henry Lane (1804–1865) is one of America's most celebrated marine painters. *The Burning of the Packet Ship "Boston"* is the earliest known painting by Fitz Henry Lane and a rare and dramatic example of his work in watercolor. Painted in 1830, when Lane was in his mid-twenties, the painting reflects the efforts of an untrained but ambitious artist. The waves, the clouds, and the billows of smoke are all highly stylized, suggesting an artist just getting his sea legs, but also reflecting the influence of Asian art arriving in America via trade with China. While the composition is rich in detail, from the damaged standing rigging lying slack against the side of the vessel to the lifeboats full of survivors just visible in the foreground, the repletion of colors and shapes gives the work an overall sense of flatness. For all its naïveté, however, the work foreshadows the greatness Lane would soon achieve.

The ship *Boston* was built in Medford, Massachusetts, and used in the packet trade between Charleston, South Carolina, and Liverpool, England. In the spring of 1830, while under the command of Captain Harvey Coffin McKay (1787–1869) of Gloucester and carrying a load of cotton and passengers, the vessel was struck by lightning and eventually sank. The first mate on the ship was Elias Davis Knight (1804–1884), also of Gloucester. All of the passengers except one survived, and Knight was able to salvage the ship's log and water bucket before the vessel sank. Fitz Henry Lane was not on the *Boston* at the time disaster struck. Rather, he did this painting using a sketch done by artist Samuel S. Osgood (1808–1885), who was on board. He also had an oral description of the event provided by the first mate.

For more information about this painting see the Cape Ann Museum website at: <http://www.capeannmuseum.org/collections/> or visit <http://fitzhenrylaneonline.org>

Extensions

PreK–5 (Science) When lightning struck the packet ship *Boston*, it caught on fire. Describe this transfer of energy and predict the outcome, including evidence to support your answer.

6–8 (Math) The packet ship *Boston* was struck by lightning. If the ship was rebuilt, what are the chances that this would happen again?

9–12 (Social Studies) This vessel was carrying a load



Water bucket from ship "Boston", Unknown, c. 1830. Wood, brass, paint. Bequest of Marion Mansfield Patterson Livingston. [#2012.27]

of cotton and passengers between South Carolina and England. Describe the role that the packet ship *Boston* had in the U.S. economy in the 1830s.

Standards

Elementary School (Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework: Physical Science)

4-PS3-2 Make observations to show that energy can be transferred from place to place by sound, light, heat, and electric currents.

4-PS3-3 Ask questions and predict outcomes about the changes in energy that occur when objects collide.

Middle School (Common Core Standards: Statistics and Probability)

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.SP.C.6

Approximate the probability of a chance event by collecting data on the chance process that produces it and observing its long-run relative frequency, and predict the approximate relative frequency, given the probability.

High School (Social Studies)

USI.28 Explain the emergence and impact of the textile industry in New England and industrial growth generally throughout antebellum America. (H, E)

USI.29 Describe the rapid growth of slavery in the South after 1800 and analyze slave life and resistance on plantations and farms across the South, as well as the impact of the cotton gin on the economics of slavery and Southern agriculture. (H)



A Closer Look: D. Jerome Elwell



D. Jerome Elwell, *Burnt Ruins of Town House on Dale Avenue*, 1869. Oil on canvas.
 Gift of Harold and Betty Bell, 1980. [#2211]

Look closely at the painting. Respond to the questions below.

What do you see?

What do you think is happening in this painting?

What do you wonder about?

Writing prompt: When something gets ruined, it often leads to an opportunity to rebuild.
 If I could start over, I would...

Teacher Notes

In 1867 Gloucester built a new town hall on Dale Avenue. The building lasted only two years before it was destroyed by fire. D. Jerome Elwell recorded the damage in an evocative painting that might well stand for the state of the country after the Civil War. It was also a reminder of the loss the citizens felt until the current city hall was built on the same site in 1871. The following is a primary source account of the event:

At about six o'clock last Sunday morning, as Schooner Congress came into the inner harbor, her men discovered smoke proceeding from the Town Hall building. Hastily making the vessel fast, Capt. Warren and some of his crew ran up the street giving the alarm. The smoke had also been observed by Mr. Samuel O. Baldwin.... Upon coming into Warren Street, he heard a loud report, which was followed by a heavy volume of flame ...

The alarm now became general, and the fire department and a large concourse of citizens soon gathered. The sight presented was one of awful grandeur and sadness, and will not soon be forgotten.... It was clearly apparent that no early efforts could save the building from destruction, as the entire interior of the hall was one mass of seething flames ...

—*Cape Ann Advertiser*, May 2, 1869

D. Jerome Elwell certainly admired the work of Fitz Henry Lane. He must have gotten to know it when he attended high school in Gloucester. Afterwards, Elwell studied in Belgium (supported by Gloucester philanthropist, Samuel Elwell Sawyer) and traveled around Europe, spending time in Venice. There he became friends with James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), who painted Elwell's portrait in 1900.

Jerome Elwell's tastes were always refined.... He was deeply interested in art from the first, but instruction was not within everyone's reach in those days ... whether he ever received any instruction from Mr. [Fitz Hugh] Lane, the writer is not aware. He admired his work, and once said of a marine by Mr. Lane, "He painted that sky *con amore*, didn't he?"

—Helen Mansfield (1849–1933), no date.

For more information about this painting, see the Cape Ann Museum website at: <http://www.capeannmuseum.org/collections/>.

Extensions

PreK–5 (Social Studies) Firemen work hard to put out fires and keep people safe. Explore the ways fires were put out in the past and compare them to how firemen do their job today.

6–8 (Art) Study the artist's palette, paying close attention to his choice of hues and tones. Paint your own scene using a similar palette.

9–12 (Math) Gloucester City Hall was rebuilt in 1871. Design this new building, maintaining its original footprint.

Standards

Elementary School (Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework)

PreK–K.6 Identify and describe family or community members who promote the welfare and safety of children and adults. (C)

PreK–K.8 Give examples of different kinds of jobs that people do, including the work they do at home. (E)

3.12 Explain how objects or artifacts of everyday life in the past tell us how ordinary people lived and how everyday life has changed. Draw on the services of the local historical society and local museums as needed. (H, G, E)

Middle School (Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework: Visual Arts)

Elements and Principles of Design

2.7 For color, use and be able to identify hues, values, intermediate shades, tints and tones, and complementary, analogous, and monochromatic colors.

Demonstrate awareness of color by painting objective studies from life and free-form abstractions that employ relative properties of color.

High School (Massachusetts Math Curriculum Framework: Modeling with Geometry)

Apply geometric concepts in modeling situations.

3. Apply geometric methods to solve design problems (e.g., designing an object or structure to satisfy physical constraints or minimize cost; working with typographic grid systems based on ratios).

References

Avery, Kevin J. "The Hudson River School." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hurs/hd_hurs.htm (October 2004)

Pringle, James Robert. "History of the Town and City of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Massachusetts." Gloucester, Ma.: City of Gloucester Archives Committee; Ten Pound Island Book Co., 1997. First published in 1892.

Wilmerding, John, *Fitz Hugh Lane* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971)

Baigell, Matthew, *A History of American Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1971)

Quinn, Karen & Peters, Lisa N., *Painters of Cape Ann, 1840-1940: One Hundred Years in Gloucester and Rockport* (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 1996)

The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK

Fitz Henry Lane Online. Cape Ann Museum. <http://fitzhenrylaneonline.org>. 2018.

Unless otherwise noted all works of art and images are from the collection of the Cape Ann Museum.

Sources also include the artist files in the Cape Ann Museum Archives.



View of the Town of Gloucester, 1836. Drawn by F.H. Lane. Lithograph by Pendleton's Lithography, Boston. Gift of E. Hyde Cox, 1998. [#1998.36]