

New England Renaissance

Industrial Expansion and Intellectual Advances



Fitz Henry Lane, *Three Master on the Gloucester Railways*, 1857. Oil on canvas. On deposit from the City of Gloucester, 1952. [DEP. 202]

Economic and Cultural Growth

In the mid-nineteenth century, America embarked on a period of economic and geographic growth as well as the expansion of democratic ideals. The Industrial Revolution changed the scale of production from homemade goods made by hand to factory-made goods made by machine. Improvements in transportation, the harnessing of new sources of energy (water, then steam power), and inventions such as spinning and weaving machines changed America into a modern urban-industrial state. Territorial exploration and expansion opened new lands and opportunities. Lewis and Clark reached California, the Santa Fe Trail opened from Missouri to New Mexico, and the Gold Rush began.

The broadening democratic impulse and experience gave rise to new ideas about human nature, the meaning of life, and human connection to nature and the Divine. Unitarianism, with its tolerance for secular activities and social concerns, and its emphasis on the inherent goodness of human beings, was established in New England at the end of the eighteenth century. The Lyceum movement spawned local institutions to educate and

bring culture to the growing middle class. American art reflected the intellectual and political philosophies of early post-Revolutionary times. The physical grandeur of the land that was becoming America, and the hopes and dreams of its inhabitants found expression in landscapes and seascapes painted by two groups of painters—the Hudson River School, centered in New York State, and a group who later became known as “Luminists,” working in New England. These painters were concerned with the sublime and with the spiritual aspect of nature. Their art had a moral mission and a transformational goal.

THE HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL & LUMINISM

The Hudson River School was an American landscape movement c.1825 to 1875. It was influenced by European Romanticism and its views of nature as symbolic. The artists painted grand panoramic views in which humans were dwarfed by the natural, awe-inspiring beauty and spiritual significance of the American wilderness. It was the first art movement native to the United States. Luminism was an outgrowth of this school.

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hurs/hd_hurs.htm

Cape Ann's Economic Boom

For much of this period, Gloucester experienced an economic boom. By 1851, Gloucester was a major maritime community with forty wharves in the harbor. Portuguese, Scandinavian, Irish and Nova Scotian immigrants looking for work were adding to the ethnic mix. Foreign commerce was at its height, specifically the lucrative trade with the Dutch colony, Surinam. The accumulation of wealth grew and with it, the development of a leisure class interested in culture.

By 1860, commercial fishing was rivaling and even overtaking trade as the city's major economic engine. Trade's pre-eminence would last until 1863 when the Dutch abolished slavery and the exchange of low-grade salt fish for Surinam's molasses ended.

The granite quarrying industry was also flourishing. Companies actively recruited workers from Italy, Sweden and Finland and brought them to Cape Ann, pro-

viding bare bones housing and company stores. Pay was usually subsistent forcing laborers to be constantly in debt to the companies for their passage, housing and provisions. Working conditions were dangerous, and many were injured in accidents or died of silicosis. Those who survived raised families in Pigeon Cove, Lanesville and Folly Cove and became a permanent part of the diverse social and cultural milieu of Cape Ann.

Cape Ann also took part in the emerging New England cultural renaissance. In 1830, the Gloucester Lyceum was founded to promote "useful knowledge and the advancement of popular education." The Independent Church of Christ (the Unitarian Universalist Church on Middle Street in Gloucester), the first of this denomination in America, was a leader in the fight for religious freedom and the abolition of slavery.



R.W. Phelps, *Bay View Wharf*, 1910. Photograph. [#1998.24]

Gloucester's Native Son

The work of **Fitz Henry Lane** (1804–1865), one of America's most celebrated marine painters of this period, is emblematic of the era's early themes and concerns. Lane was weakened by a childhood disease and was unable to walk unassisted. Prevented from participating in more active physical pursuits, Lane taught himself to draw. Christened Nathaniel Rogers, he formally changed his name to Fitz Henry in 1831. The next year, at age 28, he moved to Boston to work for the firm of William S. Pendleton as a commercial lithographer. Lane's years spent in Boston were intellectually and aesthetically formative for the artist. It was his first exposure to professional European art and artists, including seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes and seascapes at the Boston Athenaeum. These works were characterized by low horizons, large skies and prominent atmospheric effects, all of which Lane was to employ in his own work.

The Burning of the Packet Ship "Boston" is the earliest known work by Fitz Henry Lane and one of a very few paintings he did in watercolor. It was done in 1830 and provides interesting insights into the early stages of the artist's career. 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. In coming years, Lane would secure his bearings, quickly becoming a master at capturing sea and sky in the most realistic of styles.

In the 1840s, Lane began to paint in oil and within a year was listed in the *Boston Almanac* under "Marine



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

painters." In 1844, he set up his own lithography firm in Boston with colleague John W.A. Scott. Only four years later, Lane had established himself as an artist and was able to support himself through his own work. He returned to Gloucester in 1848 which was experiencing an economic boom, and a growing market for art. From 1849 to 1850, Lane had a granite house designed and built on Duncan's Point, which included a third floor studio. Dependent on crutches for mobility, Lane's devotion to his art manifested in the ways he pushed his physical limits to capture his subject matter. Lane began his paintings with outdoor sketches, often done with the aid of his close friend, Joseph L. Stevens, who would row him into the harbor to draw. He would also drag himself up the stairs to his studio where he could see Gloucester Harbor out his window.



Fitz Henry Lane, *The Burning of the Packet Ship "Boston"*, 1830. Watercolor on paper. See p. 2.9 for further study. Gift of Samuel Mansfield, 1924. [#75.00]

Lane's early works present an historical record of the harbors in Boston and other ports, and his paintings and lithographs are known for their accurate depictions of coastlines, buildings and ships. His patrons commissioned views of land their ancestors had turned from wilderness into prosperous ports, and provided Lane with a flourishing market. Lane continued in the same role in Gloucester, painting his town as an ideal vision of nature, human life and work in peaceful harmony.



Fitz Henry Lane, *Gloucester Harbor from Rocky Neck*, 1844. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mrs. Jane Parker Stacy, 1948. [#1289.1a]



Fitz Henry Lane, *New England Harbor at Sunrise*, c.1850. Oil on canvas. Gift of Judge Lawrence Brooks, 1970. [#2020.00]

A Spiritual Experience

Upon his return to Gloucester, Lane immersed himself in the community, taking an active role in civic and cultural events, including Independence Day celebrations, tableaux organized in connection with library festivals and other public happenings around Gloucester. Lane became a member of the Gloucester Lyceum in the mid-1840s and served as a director in 1849, 1851, 1852 and 1858. It was through his involvement in the Lyceum that Lane had the opportunity for direct contact with transcendentalists. Chief among them were essayists Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the most eloquent exponents of Transcendentalism—the idea that understanding of the world comes through individual intuition and imagination and that knowledge transcends what can actually be seen or heard or touched. How these men and their musings affected Lane is impossible to know for certain. However, the parallels between their thoughts and Lane’s paintings are readily apparent, particularly in canvases capturing sparse, wide-open vistas that invite us to view them as a spiritual experience.

Later scholars consider the 1850s to be the beginning of Lane’s luminist period, in which he began to concentrate on the transparency and reflective qualities of light.

Though not overtly aligned with Impressionism in France, both Impressionism and Luminism began after the development of new theories in optics and the invention of photography, and both focused on the depiction of light. Unlike the Impressionists, however, Lane and other artists of the 1850s and 1860s emphasized observation of all objects that came into view and continued the meticulous technique of colonial painters. Their work is characterized by stillness and an idiosyncratic American portrayal of light and space. They dealt with landscape in a subdued way, unlike their contemporaries, the Hudson River School painters. Both groups, however, used a panoramic format, one that emphasized a sense of endlessness, of geographical vastness, of the expansiveness of the new country.

By the time Lane entered his luminist period, he was painting for himself alone. Lane’s self-generated artistic evolution led him to pursue the spiritual in art, but in a different way from traditional religious paintings of familiar images and accepted beliefs. The Hudson River School painters aimed to convey spirituality through grandeur and travelled to the American west to find their subjects. Lane found his artistic vocabulary close to home.



Fitz Henry Lane, *Norman's Woe, Gloucester Harbor*, 1862. Oil on canvas. Bequest of Margaret Farrell Lynch, 1999. [1999.76]

The Natural World and the Divine

Lane's late paintings are characterized by skies that take up half of the picture, an expanse of water serving as a site for reflection, and precise technique. They often depict sunrise, sunset or dusk, all times of profound light. The sublime contemplative space they create contains a power that makes them great art. Fitz Henry Lane's work both depicted and transcended his subject matter, and by so doing, it offered a new way to think about the relationship of humans to the natural world and the divine.

Brace's Rock is a magnificent example of Lane at the height of his artistic powers. Lane was a master in the use of pink to create the glowing light of contemplative skies and soft reflections. The pastel shades are set off against the deep darks on the land, combining and contrasting the ethereal with the earthly. Detail on shore further offsets the space in the sky and sea. Note the lack of people, who became less prominent in Lane's painting as he went from focusing on accurate depiction to transcendence.

Completed as Lane was nearing the end of his life and the American Civil War was raging, the canvas possesses an intimacy in the scale that mirrors the actual cove.

The subdued light coupled with the listing hull of a shipwreck suggests the end of the day, perhaps foreshadowing Lane's own death a year later.

Lane was one of America's most important painters, and his work is still influential today. He was also a local icon whose paintings were heralded in the community and who received many visitors in his studio. His death in 1865 was a great loss to the citizens of Gloucester. Drama critic and Gloucester native William Winter was the most probable author of his obituary, which appeared in both the *New York Tribune* and the *Gloucester Telegraph*.

FITZ H. LANE. It is with no ordinary feeling of sorrow that we notice the decease of the distinguished artist, whose recent death deprived this community of a most estimable citizen, and the World of Art one of its noblest ornaments.

In the industrious, genial, and unpretending life of Mr. Lane we see an illustration most touching to all who knew him, of the great truth that genius is always energetic, cheerful, modest, and self-possessed; and that while it does not seek its own, it strives continually and patiently to beautify and enoble whatever comes within its influence.
-W.



Fitz Henry Lane, *Brace's Rock*, 1864. Oil on canvas. Gift of Harold and Betty Bell, 2007. [#2007.10]

“A Serious Woman Painter”

In the 1850s, Lane took on one of his few known students, **Mary Blood Mellen** (1817–1886). She was probably born in Vermont but grew up in Sterling, Massachusetts, where she attended a girls’ academy and learned to paint in watercolor. The circumstances under which Fitz Henry Lane and Mellen met seem destined to remain uncertain. While there is no evidence that Mary Mellen ever lived in Gloucester, her brother-in-law, W. R. G. Mellen, was invited to pastor Gloucester’s First Universalist Church on Middle Street in 1855, and in May of that year, he and his family moved into a house on Spring Street that overlooked Duncan’s Point and Lane’s house. At some time during her brother-in-law’s tenure in the town, it is presumed that Mellen came frequently to see her family and to study with Lane. Indeed, their relationship became so strong that they traveled together in August of 1859 to visit the Blood family residence in Sterling, Massachusetts, where they both created paintings of the Blood homestead.

Like many women artists of her generation, Mary Mellen began as a copyist, not only working under Lane’s tutelage, but apparently using his pencil drawings and his paintings as the basis of her own works.

Her stylistic faithfulness to Lane was such that, at a later time, even Lane himself appeared uncertain as to which work was his when both were shown side by side. To further confuse matters for scholars, it appears as though Mellen had a hand in completing parts of several Lane



Mary Blood Mellen and Fitz Henry Lane, *Coast of Maine*, 1850s.
Oil on canvas. Gift of John Wilmerding, 1978. [#2182]

paintings, or might have even sketched certain landscape views that would have been difficult for Lane to access due to his lameness. John Wilmerding discerns Mellen’s hand in portions of *Moonlight*, *Owl’s Head*, *Northeast View*; *Dana Beach, Manchester*; *Coming Ashore near Brace’s Rock, Gloucester, Massachusetts*; and *Brace’s Rock, Brace’s Cove*. While this has made attribution of her paintings a challenge, it speaks to Lane’s respect for her skills. It is clear, however, that as her apprenticeship progressed, Mellen graduated to painting alongside him, collaborating on at least one piece depicting the coast of Maine.

Mellen’s work emulates Lane’s but differs in palette, treatment of space and level of detail. In her later years, her style would loosen, seemingly melding Lane’s crisp luminism with softer brushwork and a more vivid color palette.

Mellen stands out historically not only for studying with Lane, but also for being a serious woman painter who painted nineteenth-century maritime subjects when there were few of the former and even fewer of the latter.



Mary Blood Mellen, *Field Beach and Stage Fort Park*, c.1850.
Oil on canvas mounted over board. Gift of Jean Stanley Dise, 1964. [#2019.2]



Kilby Webb Elwell, *Smoky Point and Head of the Harbor*, 1866. Oil on canvas.
 Gift of the estate of Una Parsons (Mrs. Carlton Parsons), 1951. [#1478]

Influenced by Lane

Two other later artists influenced by Lane were **Kilby Elwell** (1841–1916) and his cousin, **D. Jerome Elwell** (1847–1912).

Kilby W. Elwell was a well-known artist who lived in Gloucester his entire life, except when he served in the Civil War. By the time he was 21, he called himself a landscape painter. In the spring of 1864, the local newspaper, the *Gloucester Telegraph*, made note of the young man's skill, calling him "talented" and his work "second to none." Elwell worked in watercolor, pastel and oil and early in his career is known to have favored many of the same scenes Fitz Henry Lane did, including *Stage Rocks and the Western Shore*.

In addition to his work as a landscape artist, Elwell painted signs for local businesses. In 1862 James L. Shute and William T. Merchant opened a fishing business and commissioned Elwell to paint the sign. Elwell did several, including perhaps the one painted from Five Pound Island.

In 1867, Gloucester built a new town hall on Dale Avenue. The building lasted only two years before it was destroyed by fire in 1869. D. Jerome Elwell recorded the damage in an evocative painting that may 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.

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.



D. Jerome Elwell, *Burnt Ruins of Town House on Dale Avenue*, 1869. Oil on canvas. Gift of Harold and Betty Bell, 1980. [#2211] See p. 2.11 for further study.



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).

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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]