

CAPE ANN Museum

FITZ HENRY LANE FACT SHEET



View of the Lane Gallery at the Cape Ann Museum. Photo credit: Al Malette ©2020.

Fitz Henry Lane (1804-1865) is one of America's most significant 19th-century artists and one of the premier interpreters of the New England maritime coast. Lane created his works within the particular social, historical and cultural contexts of Jacksonian and pre-Civil War America, which witnessed the rise of industrialism in New England, international trade, mercantilism, and America's first indigenous philosophical movement, Transcendentalism. Lane was born and lived most of his 60 years in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and the city's harbor, waterfront and the surrounding Cape Ann landscape offered Lane extraordinary inspiration in the form of vistas suffused with the interplay of light on the water and the granite shores of this bustling seaport. Painting during the relatively peaceful decades between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, Lane's paintings celebrate Americans' deep connection to the land they inhabited and conveyed the optimism and expansiveness of their aspirations and ambitions for the nation's future.

The Cape Ann Museum, situated in Lane's hometown of Gloucester, Mass., displays the largest collection of his artwork in the world—over 40 paintings, an extensive collection of preliminary drawings and lithographs, and an early and rare watercolor. The Museum's mission is to collect, preserve and interpret the rich artistic, cultural and industrial traditions of Cape Ann— from the first English settlement in 1623 to the present day—as seen through the works of the artists and artisans who lived and visited here. The Museum also exhibits major works by leading 19th- and 20th-century American

CAPE ANN Museum

painters and sculptors such as Winslow Homer, Cecilia Beaux, John Sloan, Stuart Davis, Paul Manship, Marsden Hartley, Milton Avery and numerous others. Its permanent collections showcase its extensive holdings of Lane's creations plus galleries dedicated to the history of Gloucester's famed fishing industry, and Cape Ann's granite industry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Lane collection is extraordinary not only for the sheer quantity and depth of the work—drawings, lithographs, paintings—which spans the artist's entire career, but also for the inclusion of so many of the finest, most significant examples of Lane's landscapes (e.g., the Brace's Cove and Norman's Woe series). Lane, with his almost exclusive focus on Gloucester, documents the city at a particular point in time, capturing the robust pulse of seafaring commerce and rugged village life as few other artists ever have. A characteristic element of Lane's paintings, particularly his early works, is the incredible amount of attention paid to narrative detail, attributable to his training in the field of lithography. Lane was thoroughly familiar with different kinds of vessels, the shapes of their sails, the length of their masts and spars, and the complex system of ropes, shrouds, and ratlines. His work offers a detailed portrait of 19th-century shipbuilding and fishing for the social and maritime historian as well as the general public. Lane's images of the harbor and the Cape Ann coastline illuminate how our lives are shaped by the contours of where we live and work.

Another unique feature of the Lane collection is the strong provenance of the vast majority of the Museum's holdings. A native son of Gloucester, many of Lane's paintings were originally commissioned by local families and were passed down through the generations. These works have never left Cape Ann and were donated to the Museum along with furniture and artifacts from the homes in which they were first displayed, allowing visitors to the Museum to encounter the works with companion pieces from their original settings. Moreover, much of Gloucester's historic waterfront and many of the natural vistas and landmarks that Lane painted have been preserved and can be re-experienced today. Lane's seven-gabled granite house with Gothic vaulted chambers still sits overlooking the seaport. One can still imagine Lane at work in his third-floor studio with Gloucester's radiant harbor views spread out before him.

Fitz Henry Lane has been the focus of much scholarship and international attention recently and the Museum's collection, including its Library & Archives, have been at the center of this renewed interest, exploration, and research. In 2004, to commemorate the 200th-anniversary of Lane's birth, noted curator and Lane expert, Dr. John Wilmerding, gave a lecture at the Museum in which he delineated some of the questions that remain about the artist's life and some of his paintings. Wilmerding's talk spurred archivists from the Museum and the City of Gloucester to go in search of new historical details. What they found in records from the 1800s attracted renewed attention to Lane. They discovered that

CAPE ANN Museum

when the artist legally changed his name in 1831 from Nathaniel Rogers Lane, he chose the name Fitz Henry Lane, not Fitz Hugh Lane as he had become known by scholars and the general public throughout much of the 20th century. (See Appendix #1 for the article “Fitz Who?”) Further research continues to fill in missing details of his history. The Museum’s 2007 exhibition, *Fitz Henry Lane and Mary Blood Mellen: Old Mysteries and New Discoveries*,¹ curated by John Wilmerding, explored the artistic relationship between Lane and Mary Blood Mellen (1817-1886), his best-known student. *A Scholar’s Gathering*, funded by the Terra Foundation for American Art, was held in conjunction with the exhibition to study the works in the show and consider previously unresolved questions about the artistic relationship of the two artists, including issues of attribution and collaboration, ultimately opening up new avenues for inquiry. The Museum’s 2017 special exhibition, *Drawn from Nature & On Stone*,² curated by Georgia Barnhill, was the first ever comprehensive exhibition focusing on Lane as a printmaker. A 2-day symposium, “Laid Down on Paper: Printmaking in America, 1800 to 1865,”³ featuring six presentations was offered in conjunction. The findings of the exhibition and related programming underscored the importance of printmaking to Lane throughout his artistic career.

Much remains unknown today about Lane’s process and his influences. In recent years, many of Lane’s paintings in the Museum’s collection have been examined using infrared photography to explore the relationship between his drawings, underdrawings and the completed paintings. This exercise has offered new insights into how Lane created his finished works and how he relied on his graphite drawings and his skills as a draftsman to create his masterpieces. In addition to expanding our understanding of the artist’s techniques, this work should aid scholars looking into whether all the paintings attributed to Lane were in fact the product solely of his efforts and not one of his students, or whether there was a collaboration where Lane may have worked from his sketches to produce the under-drawings and a student may have completed the painting. Other questions surrounding Lane include whether he used a camera lucida to transfer his drawings to his canvases, and the ways in which his work was informed by contact with Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalist movement and other influential individuals of his time.

To promote and advance further study of Lane, the Cape Ann Museum adopted the essential task of creating [Fitz Henry Lane Online](#), an interactive catalogue raisonné, to document all of Lane’s known paintings and drawings with research into the history of the 19th century coastal life he portrayed in his work. Each image of Lane’s paintings is accompanied by brief commentary, with links to extensive scholarly articles and research on the particular work. The catalogue also includes a digitized archive of rare historical documents, drawings, photographs and writings on Lane, plus newly commissioned scholarship and editorial work specifically designed for this project, allowing the public and scholars to

CAPE ANN Museum

delve more deeply into the details of Lane's paintings and to view drawings, lithographs, paintings and historical documents currently not exhibited or too fragile to be handled.

¹ The exhibition catalog for the 2007 show, *Fitz Henry Lane and Mary Blood Mellen: Old Mysteries and New Discoveries*, reproduces over 90 works by Fitz Henry Lane and Mary Blood Mellen and includes a lengthy essay by Lane scholar John Wilmerding. Published by the Cape Ann Museum, 2007. Available for purchase online at <https://www.capeannmuseum.org/shop/product/fitz-henry-lane-and-mary-blood-mellen-old-mysteries-and-new-discoveries>.

² The exhibition catalog for *Drawn from Nature & on Stone: The Lithographs of Fitz Henry Lane*, written by Georgia Barnhill and Melissa Geisler Trafton, features approximately 60 reproductions of Lane lithographs and related works drawn from 12 institutions and private lenders. Published by the Cape Ann Museum, 2017. Available for purchase online at <https://www.capeannmuseum.org/shop/product/drawn-from-nature-on-stone>.

³ Papers presented at the 2017 symposium *Laid Down on Paper: Printmaking in America, 1800–1865* were published by the Cape Ann Museum in 2020. Available for purchase online at <https://www.capeannmuseum.org/shop/product/laid-down-on-paper>.

The Cape Ann Museum, founded in 1875, exists to preserve and celebrate the history and culture of the area and to keep it relevant to today's audiences. Spanning 44,000 square feet, the Museum is one of the major cultural institutions on Boston's North Shore welcoming more than 25,000 local, national and international visitors each year to its exhibitions and programs. In addition to fine art, the Museum's collections include decorative art, textiles, artifacts from the maritime and granite industries, three historic homes, a Library & Archives and a sculpture park in the heart of downtown Gloucester. In Fall 2021, the Museum will officially open the 12,000 square foot Janet & William Ellery James Center at the [Cape Ann Museum Green](#). The campus also includes three historic buildings – the White Ellery House (1710), an adjacent Barn (c. 1740), and the recently acquired Babson-Alling House (c.1740), all located on the site at the intersection of Washington and Poplar Streets in Gloucester.

The Cape Ann Museum is located at 27 Pleasant Street in Gloucester. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, operating hours have been reduced to better protect the safety and well-being of visitors, staff and volunteers. The Museum is currently open Thursday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Timed tickets are required for all visitors at this time and can be reserved online at www.camuseum.eventbrite.com. Admission is \$12.00 adults, \$10.00 Cape Ann residents, seniors and students. Youth (under 18) and Museum members are free. Cape Ann residents can visit for free on the second Saturday of each month. For more information please call (978)283-0455 x110 or visit www.capeannmuseum.org.

MEDIA CONTACTS: Diana Brown McCloy
Teak Media
(978) 697-9414
Diana@teakmedia.com

Meredith Anderson
meredithanderson@capeannmuseum.org
(978) 283-0455 x115

For more information about the Museum, its programs, exhibits, and collections, visit www.capeannmuseum.org.