

IV.

Fitz Hugh Lane

WHEN FITZ HUGH LANE accepted the invitation of his friend Joseph L. Stevens, Jr., to visit the Stevens family homestead in Castine in the summer of 1848, the Gloucester painter was not only setting out to paint a new area of the New England coastline. Forty-four and at the height of his early maturity as a marine artist, Lane was also at a critical moment in his stylistic development, and this first of several journeys down the coast would transform his work by investing it with an elevated level of pictorial eloquence. In turn, the glowing Maine sunset and one storm picture he executed contributed to an original imagery and a new manner of painting in American art at midcentury. Three elements in his career up to this point were especially important in preparing him to paint the Maine coast with intensity and sympathy. Born in Gloucester and brought up on Cape Ann, he had already spent much time sketching along local shorelines, sensitive to the frequently changing effects of coastal light and atmosphere. Descended from a family of mariners, he came to observe closely the area's fishing and shipping industries, which further commanded his attention during his several years of training and practice in Boston in the late 1830s and mid-1840s. Above all, because of a lameness in his legs believed due to the polio he contracted as a child, Lane seemed to be most comfortable, physically as well as psychologically, traveling and painting on boats at anchor or cruising offshore. His paintings of Maine subtly fused observations of commerce and trade and the most delicate conditions of northern summertime light—images, in other words of place as well as of states of mind.

39. Looking towards entrance of Somes Sound

Lane had trained as a lithographer with William Pendleton in Boston during the mid-1830s, and subsequently formed his own printmaking firm with fellow marine artist John W. A. Scott. This experience had given Lane a solid technical command of drafting and tonal values, and, through extensive early production of sheet music and book illustrations, a feel for anecdotal detail. When he did supplement his graphic work with oil painting in the 1840s, Lane tended to fill his early pictures with narrative elements and incidental textures, all to record painstakingly the lively activities of the harbor. By the end of the forties most of his Gloucester scenes exhibited his preference for generally compact compositions and reportorial content, whether depicting shipbuilding on the wharves or fishing transactions along the nearby beaches. Up to this point, Lane as an artist was largely an observant storyteller. Shipping and village business would continue to interest him down east, but the new vistas afforded him when he stayed with the Stevenses in Castine and sailed the broad reaches of Penobscot Bay and Blue Hill Bay were to prove subtle but decisive catalysts for artistic change. Joseph Stevens, Jr., also belonged to an old Gloucester family, and doubtless his many civic and cultural interests proved to be common ground and helped forge his friendship with Lane. Manager of his family's dry-goods business in Gloucester, Stevens had broad and cultivated tastes. He promoted the American Art-Union and the local lyceum movement, and was an early purchaser and admirer of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, which he enjoyed discussing with Lane. Enthusiastically he declared, "If you have not read what that eloquent writer says of clouds, be exhorted to do so,"¹ an exhortation he could well have urged on Lane, who now made skies a critically expressive part of his canvases.

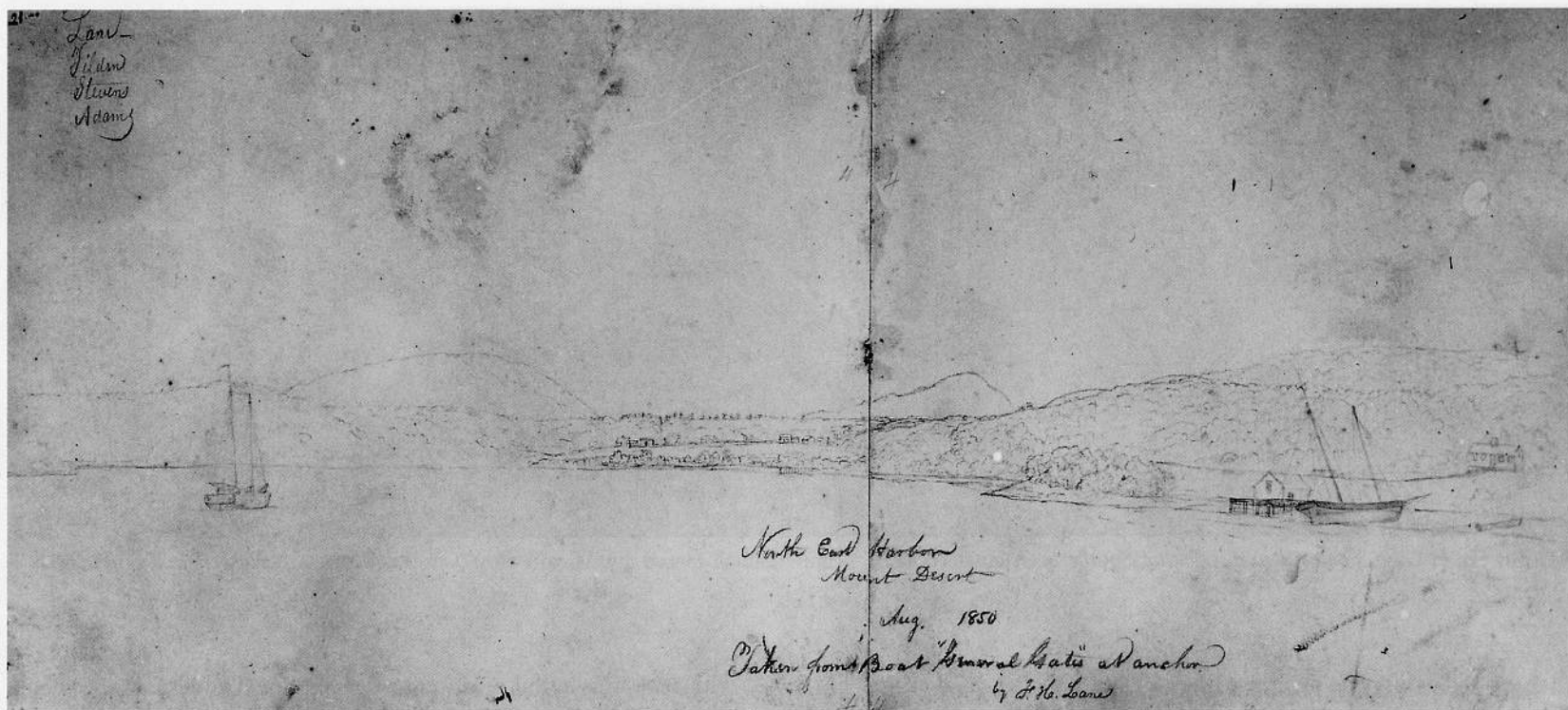
Joseph L. Stevens, Sr., was a doctor in Castine, and the family homestead was well up from the waterfront with sweeping views out to the Bagaduce River as it opened into eastern Penobscot Bay. The vantage point clearly impressed the visiting artist, who painted more than one view looking out over the town below. Often he inscribed small oils of local scenes as presentation gifts to the Stevenses; one charming vignette showed the doctor on horseback in front of the pale yellow Federal house, presumably about to set off on his local rounds, his wife glancing out an upstairs window.² Joseph L. Stevens, Jr., became more than an intellectual companion to Lane; he was also helpful and eventually indispensable in rowing the painter around harbors in order to secure desired views. Friends recounted that Lane was even "hoisted up by some contrivance to the mast-head of a vessel lying in the harbor in order that he might get some particular perspective that he wished to have."³ As Stevens later recounted,

For long series of years I knew nearly every painting he made. I was with him on several trips to the Maine coast where he did much sketching, and sometimes was his chooser of spots and bearer of materials when he sketched in the home neighborhood. Thus there are many paintings whose growth I saw both from the brush and pencil. For his physical infirmity prevented his becoming an outdoor colorist.⁴

Stevens' devoted companionship lasted until Lane's death in 1865, when as executor Stevens sorted and annotated more than one hundred of the artist's drawings with dates, locations, and other informative details. It is from these sheets, most of which have been preserved in the Cape Ann Historical Association, Gloucester, and related circumstantial evidence, that we can partially document a number of Lane's Maine trips. The first can be placed in 1848 only from his completion and exhibition the following year at the Art-Union in New York of four paintings, two of which had Maine subjects. The first was *View of the Penobscot*, and its location remains unknown; the second was *Twilight on the Kennebec*, lent by W. H. Wheeler of Lynn Massachusetts, which carried a description in the catalogue possibly provided by the artist: "The western sky is still glowing in the rays of the setting sun. In the foreground is a vessel lying in the shadow. The river sketches across the picture."⁵

Now in a private collection, this picture contains several elements that caught Lane's eye. First, it is a sunset image, painted in ranges of yellow, orange, pink, and lavender with the new cadmium pigments only recently made available to artists in greater variety and intensity. The strong but subtle color effects of the twilight hour would be a central motif of Lane's Maine canvases. Second, he gives attention to a broad-beamed schooner bottomed out near the foreground shore. Nearby, rowboats are pulled ashore alongside a platform of trimmed logs, all suggesting activities related to the transporting of lumber downstream from the interior wilderness. In the distance to either side of the shadowed island at the center are, respectively, another schooner under sail and a steamer moving upstream. This observation of vessels of different function and scale is an extension of pictorial interests found regularly in Lane's earlier harbor views of Gloucester and Boston, as if both to inventory and to celebrate the diversity of maritime industry in midcentury America. Finally, Lane notes that this is a river view, set on one of the major water arteries reaching north into the center of the state. The steamboat is a reminder of the means of travel Lane and Stevens almost certainly used to get from Boston to Portland and thence to Rockland at the southern end of Penobscot Bay. The lumber schooner, bottomed out on a flat muddy shore, indicates that Lane probably set this scene along the lower reaches of the Kennebec where the river widens north of Brunswick and Bath or opens out to the coast east of Casco Bay at Popham Beach. This area is tidal, and Lane's distilled composition appears to be a meditation on the confluent ebbing of both light and water. By contrast, we do not know where his *View on the Penobscot* was set, except that it refers to the other major waterway of central Maine, and took Lane to the great picturesque bay that would so vividly inspire him throughout his remaining career, and to the welcoming guest room in Castine, which he was to use almost as a second home.

Because there are at least a few known oils of Maine subjects dated 1850, it is possible that Lane returned to the coast in the summer of 1849, a year after his first visit. But he may also have been preoccupied in Gloucester then, having purchased a piece of property on Duncan Street overlooking the harbor, and set about building a seven-gabled stone house and studio on the site. Construction took much of the year, and Lane moved in with his in-laws soon after New Year's Day, 1850. From dated drawings we



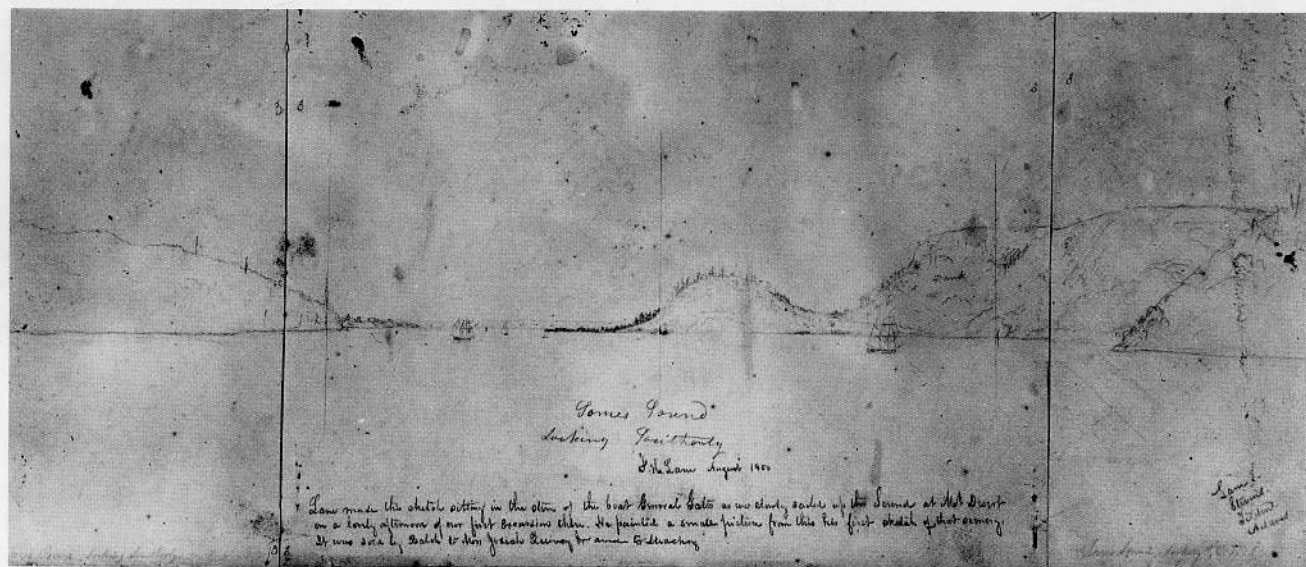
40. Fitz Hugh Lane, *North East Harbor, Mount Desert, August 1850*

do know that Lane and Stevens returned to Castine in August of that year, and at least a few of the paintings of that period clearly derive from sketches made on that trip, suggesting that this was his second major exploration of the coast. There he found the elevated vistas expanding in several directions. One drawing, titled *Majebigweduer Narrows from North Castine*, looked across to the profile of Blue Hill on the horizon; another, *Western View of High Head Neck*, centered on the distant outline of the Camden Hills.⁶ These vantage points, reminiscent of Parson Fisher's overlook of the village of Blue Hill (fig. 8), must have given him the concept for the format of his oil titled *Castine from Fort George* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), which looks down over the descending fields, roads, and houses to the broad riverfront and hills of Cape Rosier beyond. The other canvases of nearby locales resulted from this visit; they are significant because they pair sunlit and nighttime views of a sheltered cove at Brooksville: *Indian Bar Cove* (collection of Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson E. Davenport) and *Moonlight Fishing Party* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Both this last and the general Castine view must have

been well received, for Lane later made second versions of each.

Lane and Stevens then made ambitious plans to cruise east to explore the Mount Desert area for the first time. According to one drawing, they chartered the "boat General Gates, Pilot Getchell from Castine," and were joined by two other companions, Tilden and Adams. Stevens kept a detailed account of the voyage, which he later wrote up for publication in the *Gloucester Daily Telegraph*. Unlike Cole on his earlier trip from this area, Lane's group sailed from Castine, and after rounding Cape Rosier, they entered the long protected passage of Eggemoggin Reach, which separates Deer Isle from the mainland, but "baffling winds and calms, the first day compelled a stoppage for the night half way at Naskeag." The next day they crossed the south part of Blue Hill Bay, and approaching the great island, experienced the exhilarating sensations of the looming hills shifting in perspective before them:

It is a grand sight approaching Mount Desert from the westward, to behold the mountains gradually open upon the view. At first there



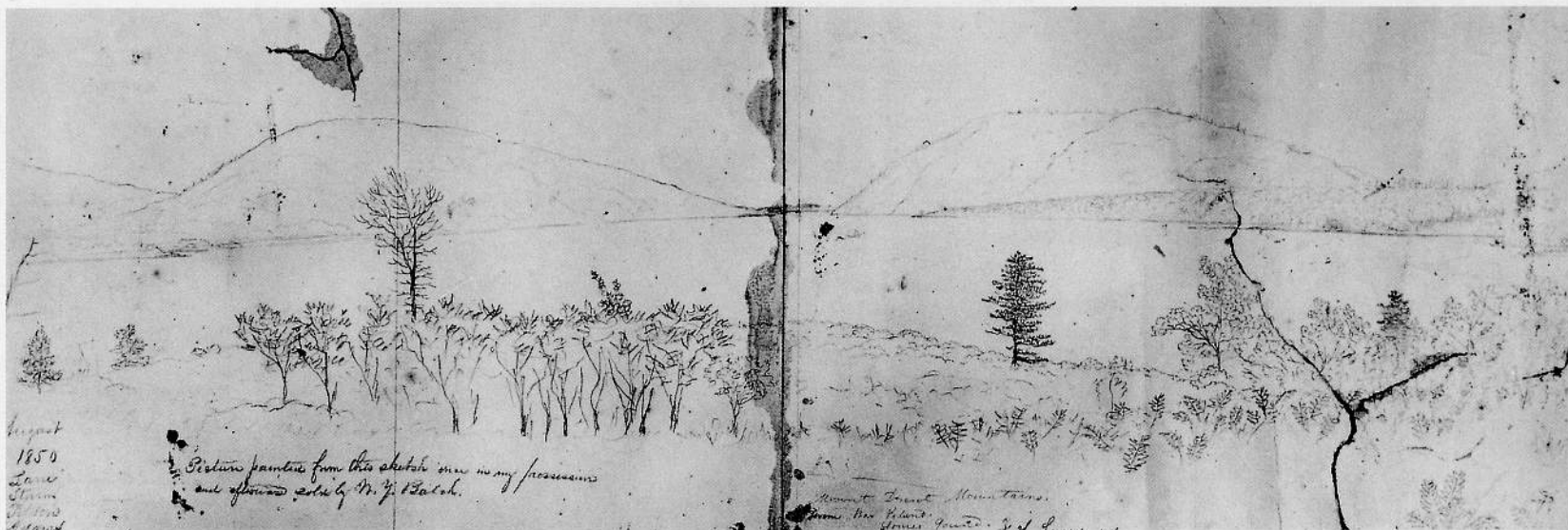
41. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Somes Sound, Looking Southerly*, August 1850

seems to be only one upon the island. Then one after another they unfold themselves until at last some ten or twelve stand up there in grim outline. Sailing abreast the island, the beholder finds them assuming an infinite diversity of shapes, and it sometimes requires no great stretch of imagination to fancy them huge mammoth and mastodon wading out from the main.⁷

Lane and Stevens were seeing this landscape from the water's level, and passing steadily by it as if before a moving panorama. The artist's first impulse was to capture in pencil the mountains' contours unfolding laterally across his view, so for most of his sketches he glued two and sometimes more sheets of paper together horizontally, continuing his lines depicting the shore fully across them. Given his infirmity, as Stevens noted, Lane with rare exceptions limited himself to carrying pencil and paper, presumably committing atmospheric and light effects to memory for later distillation in his studio at home. It is one of the greatest paradoxes, as well as sublime achievements, of his art that his drawings are of generally indifferent strength while his paintings contain both superb drafting and nuances of color almost unmatched for their sensitivity and expressiveness. At last passing through the Western Way into the Great Harbor of Mount Desert, the travelers now beheld vistas of unique scenic and geological interest:

With such a beautiful prospect to wonder at and admire, now wafted along by light winds, then entirely becalmed for a time, we were slowly carried into Southwest Harbor. Here, from what seems to be a cave on the mountain side, is Somes Sound, reaching up through a great gorge seven miles into the heart of the island. It varies much in width, the extremes being perhaps a half mile and two miles, is of great depth, and contains no hindrance to free navigation. An intervening point concealed the entrance until we had nearly approached it, and the sails passing in before us disappeared as if by enchantment.⁸

The group anchored off Northeast Harbor near the entrance to the sound, where Lane made a delicate drawing (fig. 40) showing some of the early houses in the village and two schooners, one offshore and another beached near the town steamer wharf. Lane became fascinated with the angles of vision on the sound's narrow entrance; the view was largely obscured until one was upon it, and then it swiftly rose within the dramatic confines of the fjord itself. Other drawings on this and later trips testify to Lane's fascination with the shifting changes of scale and depth, and the concealed entrance Stevens described would provide the viewpoint for one of Lane's most memorable paintings two years later (fig. 50). As so often happens during August, warm and gentle days favored the sailors' pleasures, which were jointly recorded by Lane's pencil and Stevens' pen: "It was toward the



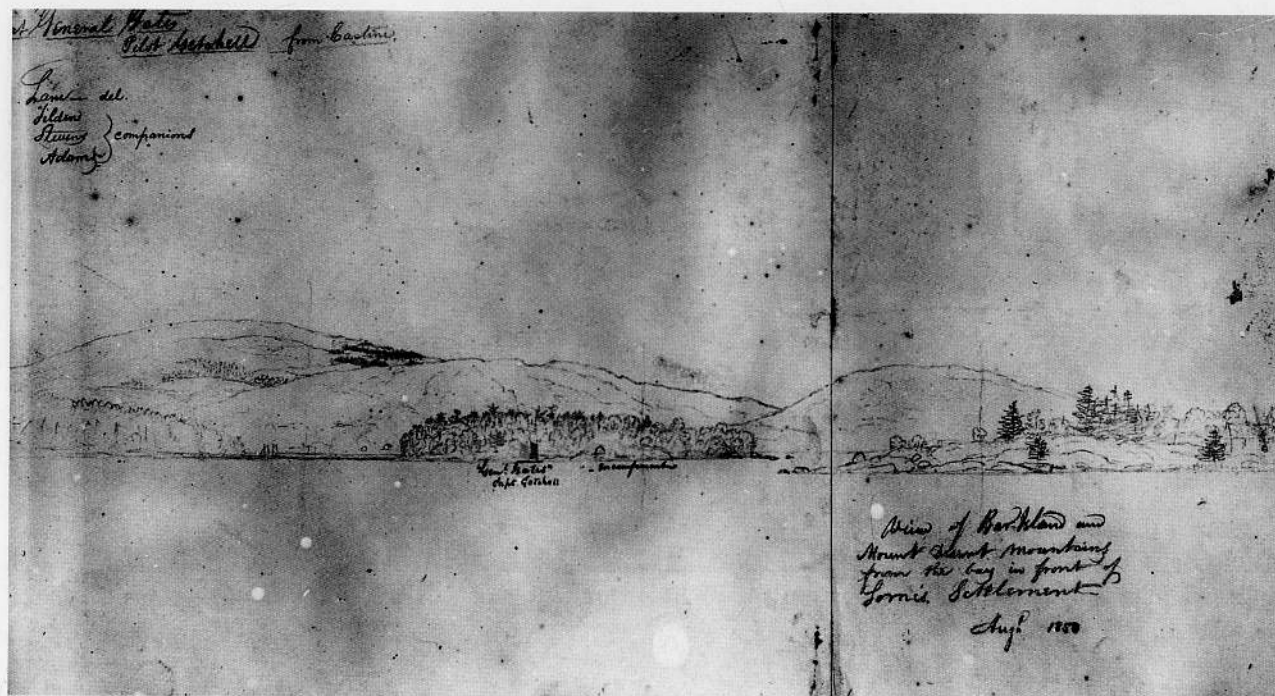
42. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Mount Desert Mountains, from Bar Island, Somes Sound*, August 1850

close of as lovely an afternoon as summer can bestow that we entered this beautiful inlet. Much had been anticipated, the reality exceeded all expectations. . . . the old boat went leisurely up the current, and so engrossed had we become in the grandness of the scenery on every hand.”⁹

Halfway up the sound Lane pieced three sketch sheets together to made his drawing *Somes Sound, Looking Southerly* (fig. 41), which Stevens later annotated: “Lane made this sketch sitting in the stern of the boat *General Gates* as we slowly sailed up the Sound at Mt. Desert on a lovely afternoon of our first excursion there. He painted a small picture from this his first sketch of that scenery. It was sold by Balch to Mrs. Josiah Quincy Jr.” This latter may be the small undated oil now in the Cape Ann Historical Association. For the party, time and space seemed to flow as gently as the sound’s limpid waters: “so illusive the distances were that it seemed as if we could be but halfway up the inlet when we passed through the narrows into the basin forming the head of the Sound. Just as the sun was setting we encamped opposite the settlement, at the entrance of the miniature bay, on an island well wooded and covered with a profusion of berries.”¹⁰ Once settled on this small island, Lane began sketching again, this time drawing the broad view looking south in *Mount Desert Mountains, from Bar Island, Somes Sound*

(fig. 42). Stevens noted that this too inspired a “picture painted from this sketch once in my possession and afterward sold by W. Y. Balch.” While the location of this oil is no longer known, another drawing of the area resulted in his first major canvas that does survive, his *View of Bar Island and Mount Desert Mountains, from the bay in front of Some’s Settlement* (figs. 43, 44). As the sketch indicated, the *General Gates* lay anchored off Bar Island, with the encampment nearby, while Lane was probably rowed ashore—almost surely shown in the two figures approaching the beach in the center foreground of the painting.

This was almost the same viewpoint Thomas Cole had chosen for his drawing during his stay in Somesville six years earlier (fig. 27). While Lane gives us the same mountain contours in the distance and the heavily wooded Bar Island at the center, his vision is more panoramic than Cole’s, both in the actual horizontal dimensions of his extended sheets and in the open, unframed sides of his composition. But in completing his canvas later at home, Lane did not fully carry out the implications of airy spaciousness he recorded on the spot. Rather, he stressed new anecdotal interest in the foreground elements of active figures, cut timber on the beach, and the grounded schooner with bright red long johns drying on the forestay. The composition too is more contained, and in this regard more conventional, with its stronger



43. Fitz Hugh Lane, *View of Bar Island and Mount Desert Mountains, from the bay in front of Some's Settlement, 1850*

framing devices of detailed promontories and ships set at each side. His cool palette of pale blues and greens and the general air of serenity do capture the character of Maine scenery, but his picture's arrangement remains little changed from his previous harbor views of Gloucester or from the formulas of Hudson River school painting as largely defined in the preceding years by Cole. Lane's evolution toward the glassy and expansive manner of the pure luminist style was just beginning, and would crystallize only with the further observations and meditations of the next two years.

In Somesville, Lane presumably continued his sketching while the others set off to climb one of the nearby hills, as recalled in Stevens' narrative: "An attempt was made the next day to ascend the highest and boldest of the mountains that skirt the Sound. But after a long and laborious scramble up among the rocks and fallen trees we had reached a peak but half way to the summit and stopped to rest there, when a thunder-storm burst with savage fury." One feels his ensuing description catches not only the mundane details of a typical late-afternoon storm in summertime, but also captures the nineteenth century's language of sublime drama. The image is of isolation, noise, near-helplessness, yet thrilling exhilaration:

We seemed to be in the very midst of the clouds and tempest. Advance we could not, neither could one recede in such darkness and blinding rain. Here then, in the bleak surface of the mountain, with no shelter but a jagged rock against which we could crouch when the wind blew strongly from the opposite quarter, we were forced to receive the drenching of a pitiless storm. Yet it was a scene of such sublimity up there where the lightnings seemed playing in their favorite haunts and the thunders reverberated in prolonged and deafening peals, among the trembling hills, that we were not unwilling occupants of this novel situation.¹¹

Stevens concludes by noting that Lane "made good additions to his portfolio," but that "many months would scarcely suffice amid such exhaustless wealth of scenery." Their discovery of this region had captivated their imagination so Lane returned to Maine the next two summers to concentrate and expand his vision.

In August 1851, Lane took advantage of his boat passage to Rockland by making sketches of the distinctive promontory marking the southern entrance to the harbor. He drew the unusual lumpy form of the headland from both sides, *Owl's Head from the South* and *Northeast View of Owl's Head* (Cape Ann Historical Association), "taken from steamer's deck while passing." Lane set



44. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Bar Island and Mount Desert Mountains from the Bay in Front of Some's Settlement*, 1850

to work directly the following winter to paint an oil of the southerly view, which he finished and dated in 1852. The other, which looked to the north (as was now becoming Lane's habit), was a view he would sketch again on another trip and paint more than once in subsequent years. Meanwhile, he made good use of his steam travel across Penobscot Bay en route to Castine. Just north of Rockland he made his first drawing of the Camden Hills, also from the steamer's deck, and again it would serve as the basis for both "a small painting" given to Stevens and other larger

canvases executed later in the fifties.¹² Once in Castine, he sought out new vistas around town, for example *Castine from Fort Preble*, and for Lane a rare combination of pencil and watercolor, *Castine Harbor and Town* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). From the start he must have meant to prepare for a full-scale painting, for he filled in his foreground with green washes, gave color to the hull of a lumber schooner offshore, and added careful touches of pink and green to some of the houses and the landscape of the town on the distant hillside. He even marked the faint letters *R, Y*,

and *B* near key buildings to indicate their colors in the final picture. Since Lane's first visit, the Stevens family had been urging him to execute a lithographed view of the town similar to ones he had previously completed of Gloucester. Joseph L. Stevens, Sr., wrote to Lane:

I have no doubt copies enough could be disposed of to remunerate you. . . . There are several points of view, which you did not see, and to which it will be my pleasure, next summer, to carry you. I know many of our citizens would be gratified to have this done by you. Our house we shall expect to be your home. . . . I will only say that my wife and myself will spare no efforts on our part to make your visit agreeable, and perhaps useful. You have not or did not exhaust all beauties of Mt. Desert scenery, and perhaps there may be other spots in our Bay, that you may think worthy of the pencil.¹³

Lane did not complete his Castine lithograph until 1855, after he had made additional visits to and further sketches of the area. In late summer 1851 he sailed east again, and turned his attention to the approaches to Mount Desert. Only one dated drawing is known from this part of his trip, a carefully composed and finished view of Blue Hill (Harvard University Art Museums), which Lane appears almost immediately to have begun translating into an oil (private collection). The painting has a light, airy quality, with a new sense of stillness, lateral emphasis in the composition, and concentration on leading the eye out toward the distant hillside and the sky beyond, all of which were subtle advances over his painting of Bar Island and Mount Desert a year before. Perhaps aware of the shifts his style was undergoing, Lane intensified his attention to the possibilities of Mount Desert subjects the following year. In particular, drawings of one new prospect and of a familiar locale, Mount Desert Rock and the entrance to Somes Sound, came directly to fruition as major canvases upon his return home. Fortunately this excursion is well documented by drawings and paintings dated to 1852 and a surviving diary kept by another cruising companion of Lane's from Castine, William Howe Witherle, who detailed a week's sailing adventure from 16 to 22 August: "Our party consisting of F H Lane and Jos L Stevens Jr of Gloucester—Geo F Tilden, Saml Adams & myself and Mr. Getchell-Pilot left Mr. Tildens wharf at about 11 'clock in the good Sloop Superior—bound on an excursion among the Island of the Bay."¹⁴

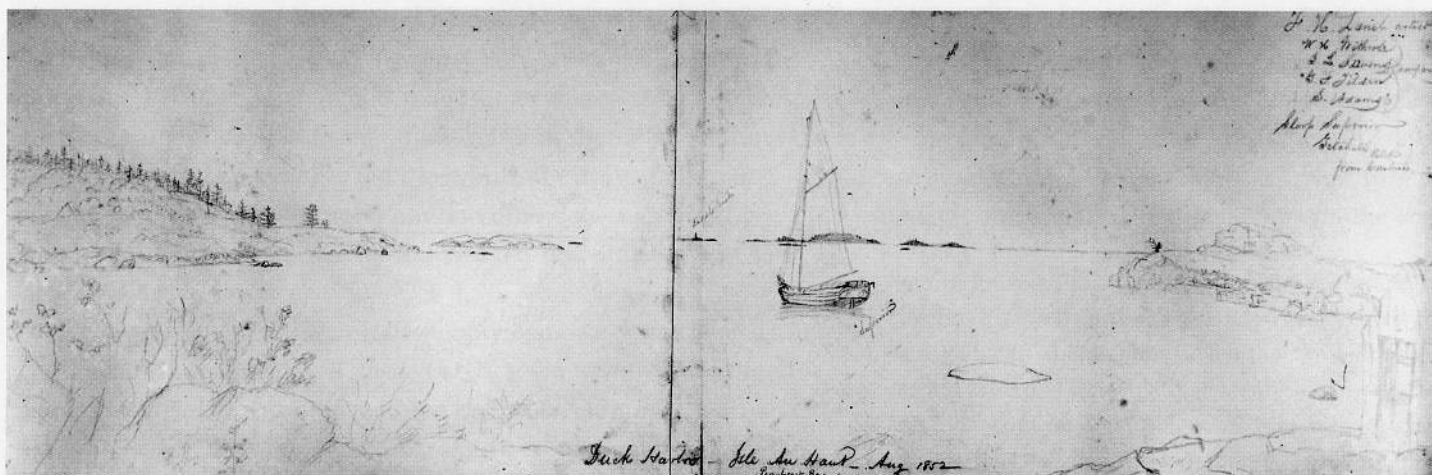
The group made first for the prominent island marking the southern turning point from Penobscot Bay into Blue Hill Bay, Isle au Haut, now largely, like Mount Desert, included in Acadia National Park. Witherle commented on Lane's equal talents with the pencil and the fishing line:

We had a charming run down the Chip Channel towards "Isle Au Haut"—anchored off Isle Au Haut about 5 'clock and Fished till about sun down—when we put away for Kimballs Harbour—but the wind died away and the tide headed us—so we were obliged to anchor in Shoal Water near the entrance of the Harbour—this had been a most Auspicious commencement to our Excursion—and we have enjoyed it highly—have done our own cooking and made out first rate under the Superintendence of Geo Tilden—whose talents in that line are the most prominent—Mr Lane however has a decided knack for frying fish and gave us a specimen of fried cod for supper—which was most excellent.¹⁵

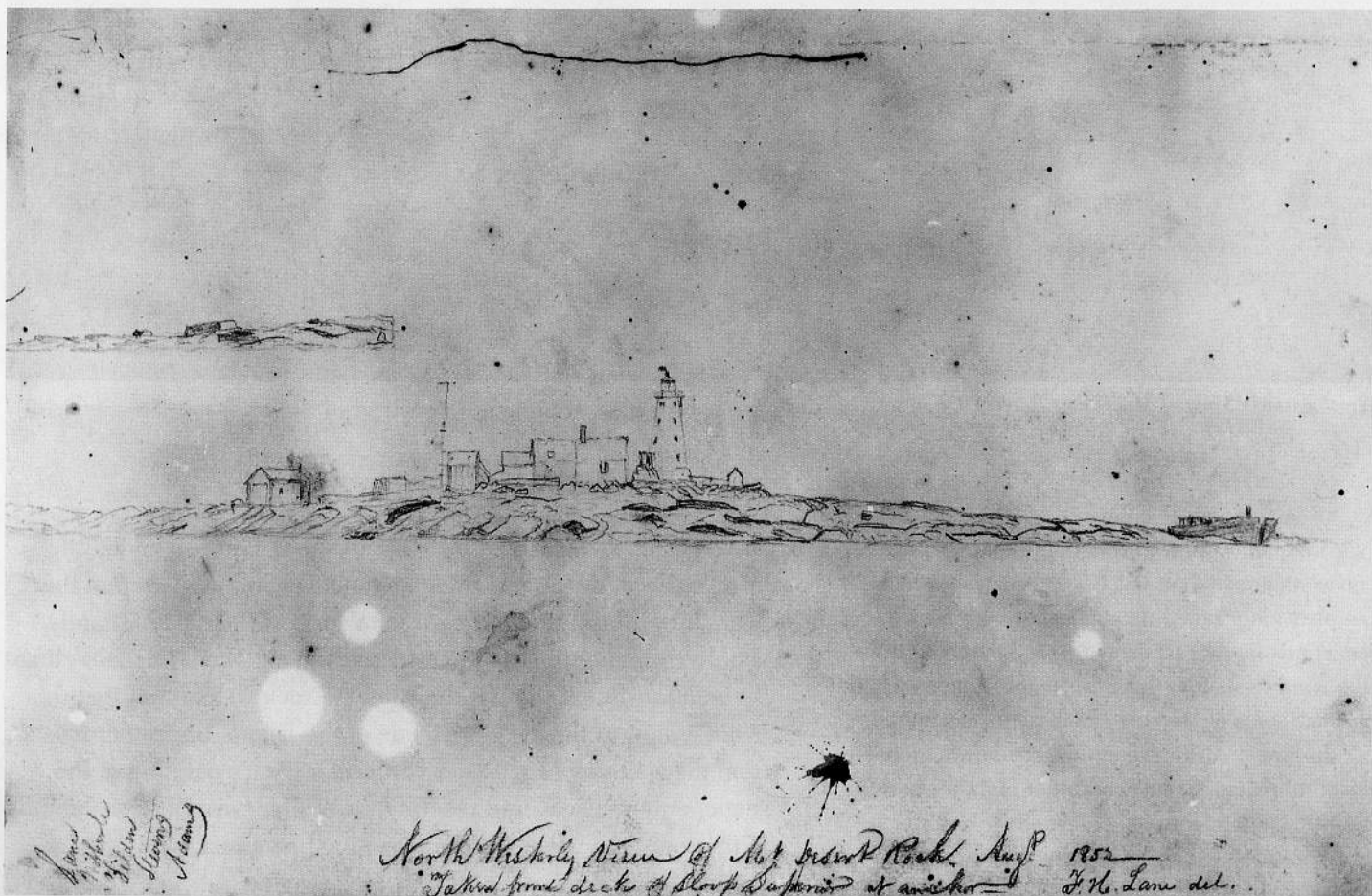
The next day, 17 August, "After breakfast we weighed Anchor and with a light breath of wind put for 'Saddle Rock' some 10 miles off—but did not make much progress—and finding a chance to run into 'duck Harbour' we took advantage of it and run in—a very pretty snug little place—dropped Anchor and landed and leaving Mr Lane to take a Sketch we took a climb on to a Hill."¹⁶

Lane's double-sheeted sketch (fig. 45) looks out from the head of the small harbor, with the *Superior* anchored at the center and on the distant horizon the Saddleback Ledge and its marker. Soon the actual rock commanded their attention, for with a fair wind they sailed out to it and climbed ashore for a look before sailing on to "Lunts Long Island" to the east, where "we Stretched ourselves out on deck spun yarns—and read a little and enjoyed our life on the Ocean Wave—under such pleasant circumstances—to our hearts content." They passed much of the following day on Long Island before setting out on open waters to the southwest for Mount Desert Rock, notably visited and recorded by Thomas Doughty (fig. 10) almost two decades earlier. The passage seldom is calm; to them it seemed desolate and uneasy:

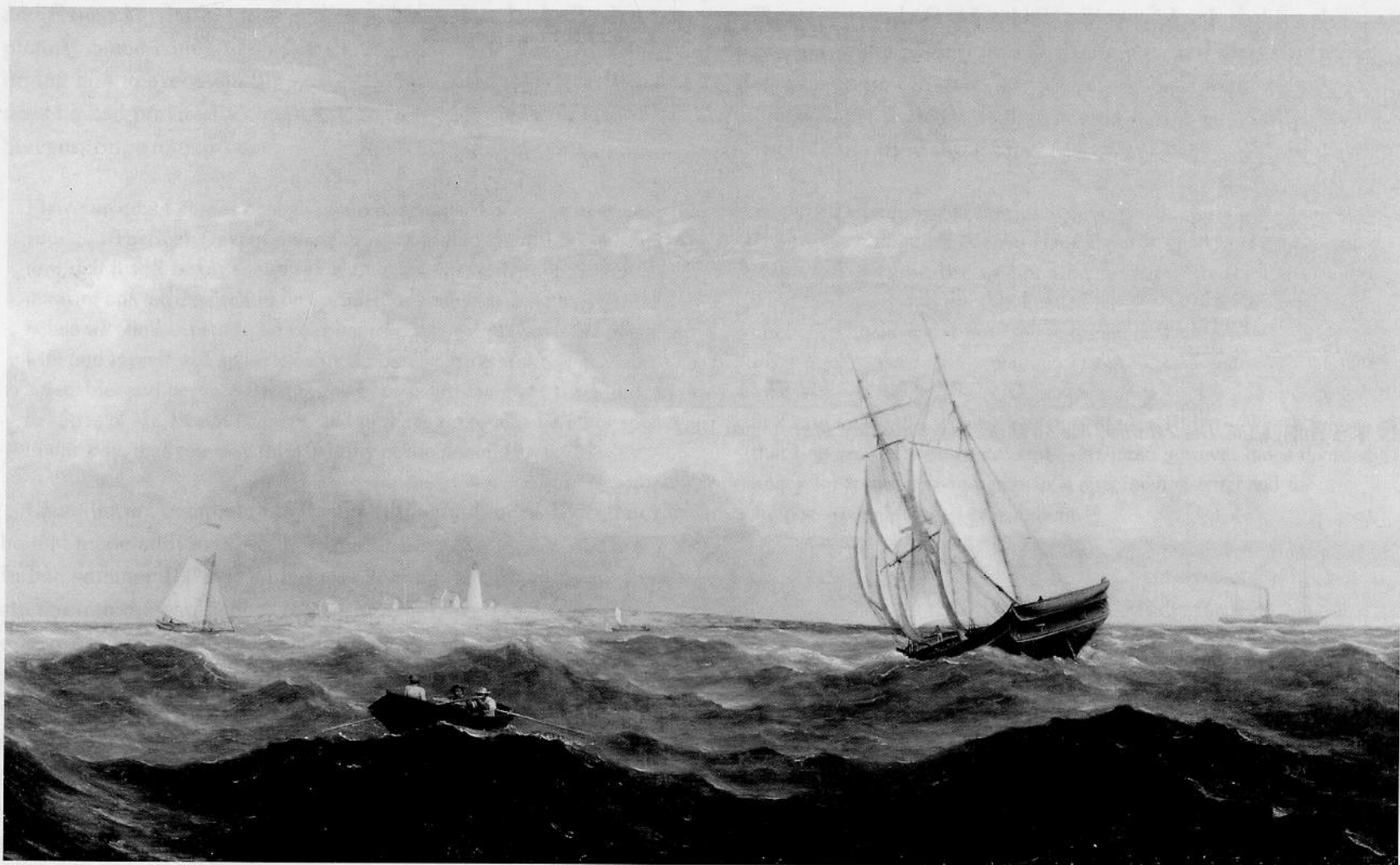
We started with a fresh breeze for "Mount Desert Rock" 18 miles distant—it was rougher than we have yet had it—being considerable swell but we got on finely—with the exception of George being sea



45. Fitz Hugh Lane, Duck Harbor, Isle Au Haut, Penobscot Bay, Me., August 1852



46. Fitz Hugh Lane, North Westerly View of Mt. Desert Rock, August 1852



47. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Northwesterly View of Mt. Desert Rock*, 1855

sick—which however we comfort him with the opinion that it will do him good—About noon we arrive[d] at the Rock. . . . we spent a couple of hours most pleasantly rambling about the Rock Examining a wreck of a Sch[ooner] was lately cast away there—watching the seas dash up onto the windward side—as a Fin Back Whale dash[ed] every now and then into Shoals of Herring which almost surrounded the rock. . . . we felt that we should have enjoyed two days there—but as we had proposed to reach Somes Sound that night we had to tear ourselves away—Mr Lane took two sketches while there.¹⁷

One of these drawings is titled and annotated *North Westerly View of Mt. Desert Rock*, “taken from deck of Sloop Superior at

anchor” (fig. 46). Using only a single sheet, Lane extended the thin profile of the ledges in an area above, and at the top of the page drew a brief undulating line to suggest the distant, barely visible distant outline of Mount Desert itself. From this as well as the relationship of the buildings on the rock we can tell that this is not a view *of* the northwest side of the island, but rather one from the south looking *to* the northwest. Lane’s painting of the scene, only rediscovered recently, carefully transcribes the details of the rock into a much more sweeping panorama, with our vantage point set further off into ocean swells (fig. 47). Possibly the sloop to the left is the *Superior*, while the single figure seated

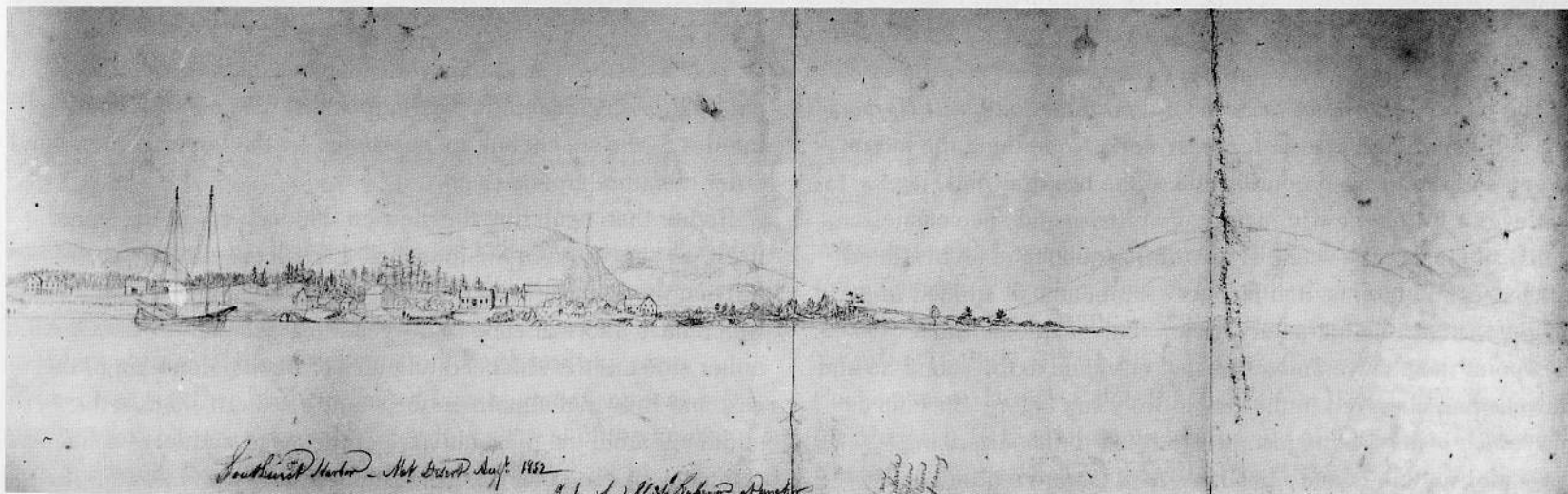
in the bow of the rowboat, turned by the two oarsmen accompanying him to look back at the view, may be Lane himself. The large number of schooners and the steamer on the right complete the inventory of coastal traffic at the time. While he still followed the impulse to enhance his paintings with narrative foreground elements, they are fewer here, and are diminished as well by being set on open water rather than on the firm stage of a beach or shoreline.

The experience of crossing the empty expanse from the coast to the rock, and the extended views there, seem to have stimulated Lane visually. He was now ready to paint both luminist light and luminist space, and his return to Somes Sound would provide the perfect opportunity. "We had a fine free wind for the sound—and the view of the Mt Desert Hills as we approached them was splendid—Mr Lane improved it to take a sketch of their outlines. . . . we had a fine sail up between the high hills which in one place are perpendicular—and we came to our anchorage above the 'Bar Island' just after sunset—after supper we went up in the Boat to Somes."¹⁸ The next morning they went ashore, now familiar from their earlier stay, fished for mackerel, and again climbed "one of the highest mountains." this time notably joined by Lane: "we found a pretty good path about $\frac{3}{4}$ the way up—we had to wait once in a while for Lane who with his crutches could not keep up with us—but got along better than we thought

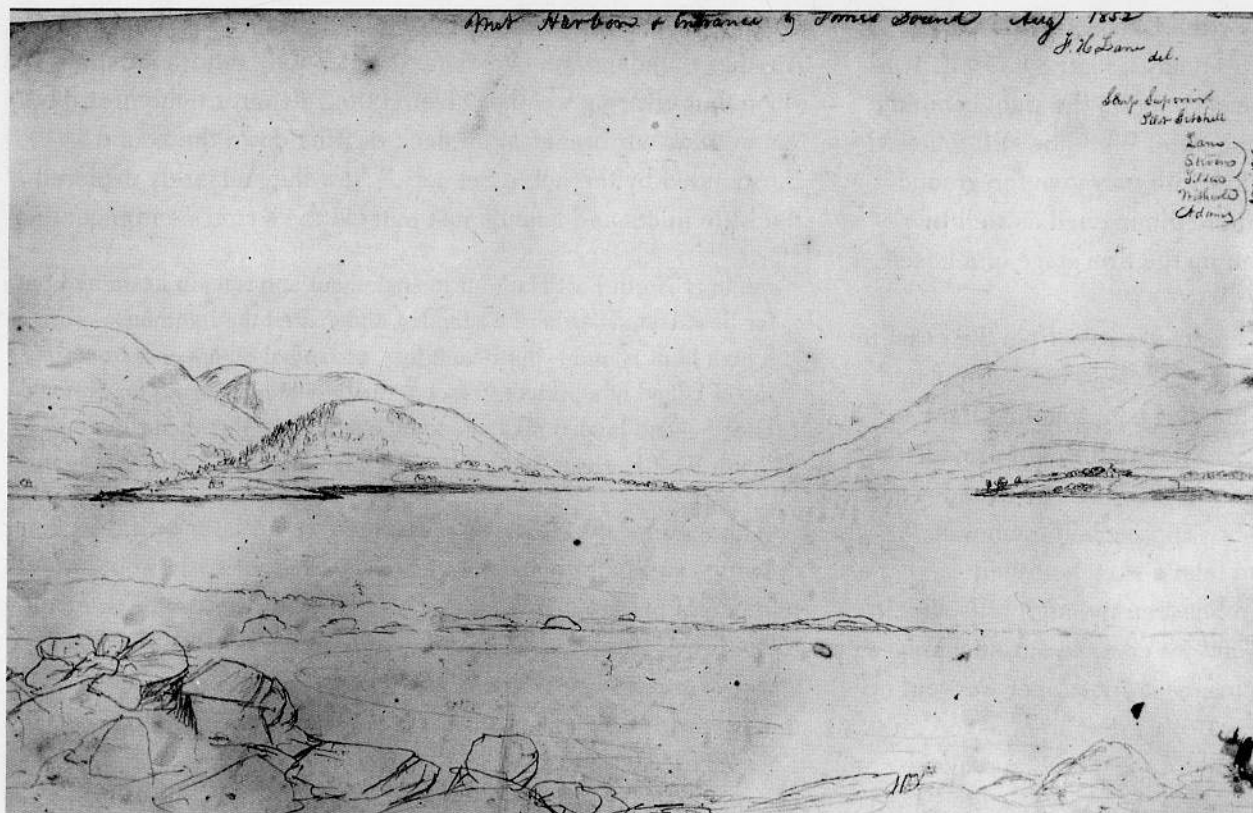
possible. . . . Lane got up about an hour after the rest of us."¹⁹ Another thunderstorm overcame them as they returned to the sloop, but clearing weather favored their departure the next day "as we took our breakfast on deck drifting down the Sound—Surrounded by the noble Scenery." Now they leisurely explored the little inlets and islands just outside the sound's entrance; they

ran in to North East Harbour looked about and ran out again and put for Bear Island—where we landed and visited the lighthouse—this is a high bluff island—the Beach that we landed on appears from the top of Island of a perfect Crescent Shape—started again for Suttons Island—and landed Mr Lane to take a Sketch. . . . then run down to South West Harbour and anchored—Mr Lane took 2 sketches here.²⁰

Although most of these specific sites would later be subjects for drawings and paintings, it is these last two that Lane would distill into one of his greatest works of art. The first drawing, *Southwest Harbor* (fig. 48), is the more expansive in its view looking north across Norwood's Cove, perhaps from the Clark Point shore, while the second, *West Harbor & Entrance of Somes Sound* (fig. 49), is a slightly closer and more concentrated view, likely drawn from the tip of Greening's Island opposite the entrance to Somes Sound. Two paintings quite similar in composition but intentionally contrasting in mood followed almost immediately. The first is a glassy, sunlit image that Lane must have begun directly



48. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Southwest Harbor, Mount Desert*, 1852



49. Fitz Hugh Lane, *West Harbor & Entrance of Somes Sound*, August 1852

upon his return to his studio in Gloucester that fall, for he was able to sign and date it 1852 (fig. 50). The companion picture shows a more turbulent vista (fig. 51), with nature and vessels in action; it probably followed not long after the first, for it caught the favorable attention of a sympathetic critic two years later.

The painting *Entrance to Somes Sound from Southwest Harbor* (fig. 50) Lane's first classic luminist work. Combining the lateral sweep and the focused equilibrium of the two drawings, it achieves a fusion, new in his art, of stillness and spaciousness. Compositionally, the scene is an artful sequence of orchestrated echoes, counterpoints, and balances harmoniously unified in a magical, almost hallucinatory, vision. Lane exploits in his viewpoint the elusive and concealed entrance to the sound he and Stevens had observed in their visit two years before. Specific as his stance is here, he is just as interested in the surprising revelations of the island's beauties, as if it were a direct and accumulated experience. Indeed, the dramatic visual glories of

the sound proper are just out of sight beyond the point of Jesuit Meadow at the right, and instead we look across the compressed space of Norwood's Cove from the mundane activities of fishermen gossiping on the shore to the loading of a lumber schooner in the middle distance. These activities are now minimal in Lane's painting, but critical to it. The figures give human scale and interest to the scene, but are subsumed by the larger stillness and order of nature around them.

Rather than centering the view on the deep cut of the sound itself, as suggested in the drawings, Lane looks directly at the hills on the sound's western shore, Robinson and Dog mountains, which have a formal echo in the rounded rocks on the beach. To either side are the balanced hillsides of Beech Mountain to the east and Brown Mountain on the sound's eastern side. In the middle ground, the diagonal axes of the small and large schooners complement each other. Further linking foreground and background are the beached dory and its oar pointing across the



50. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Entrance to Somes Sound from Southwest Harbor*, 1852

lumber schooner, matched by its angled sails and bowsprit, and reinforced by two red-shirted figures. At the same time the geometric reflections of the masts and sail patterns cross the mirrored surface of the middle ground. Earth and sky seem further tied together by the reflected houses and evergreens on the far shore, by the dominant ascending vertical of the lumber schooner's rigging, and by the continuous translucent blue of water and atmosphere. This is nature (and, metaphorically,

America) at high noon, an image of self-confident equipoise also to be found in a number of other key American paintings of this period, most notably William Sidney Mount's *Eel Spearing at Setauket*, 1845 (New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown), George Caleb Bingham's *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri*, 1845 (Metropolitan Museum of Art), John Frederick Kensett's *Beacon Rock, Newport Harbor*, 1857 (National Gallery of Art), and George Inness's *Lackawanna Valley*, 1855 (National

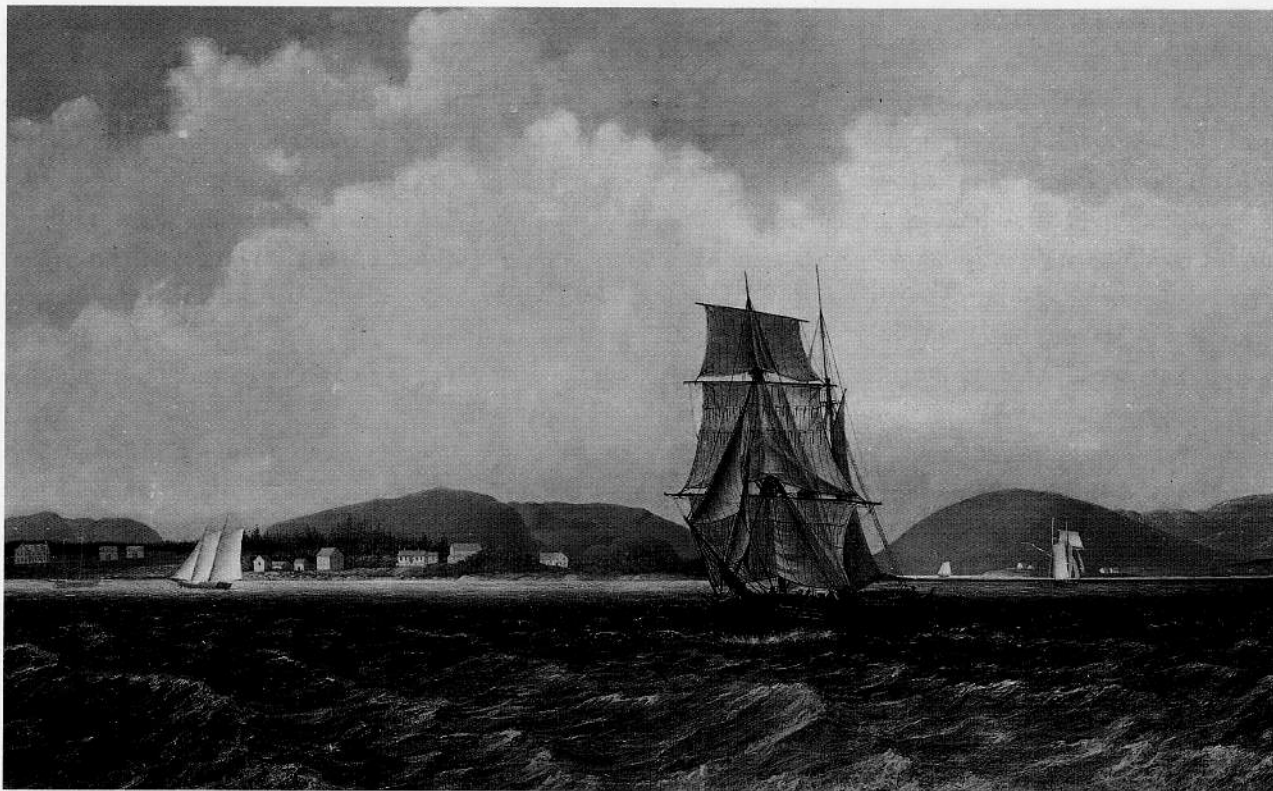
Gallery of Art). National expansion and prosperity were at a high point during this decade before the Civil War, when political tensions were for a time held in the stasis of compromise, and cultural expression reached an apogee of pure and abundant originality. Calling this moment the "American Renaissance," F. O. Matthiessen was the first to argue that in the years immediately surrounding the date of Lane's painting, several of the country's greatest writers published an unparalleled concentration of masterpieces. These included major works by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, as well as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.²¹ This elevated context is appropriate for Lane's achievement, his own poetic celebration of the self and the universe.

For all its grandeur of spirit, however, the picture is grounded in a specific time and place; this is evident in the prominence Lane gives to the loading of lumber at the center and to the bare mountains beyond. Before the arrival of the early settlers, most of Mount Desert Island, like much of inland Maine, was covered with forest. An occasional fire laid bare portions of the landscape. During the nineteenth century meadows and hillsides were cleared by sheep, and working farms were established. As early as 1806, William Gilley was cutting woodlands on Baker's Island to make "a tolerable farm," and two years later Captain Hadlock was settled on Little Cranberry Island with a "large fish business." By the 1830s Southwest Harbor was an active fishing and shipping port, and "the building of small vessels . . . went on in several little shipyards" around Mount Desert, two of which were located in Somesville. Deacon Henry H. Clark in 1835 was known as "the largest builder and owner of coasting craft on the island."²² Like Lane's native Gloucester, this and other areas he visited had industrious shipbuilding enterprises—for example, Rockland, which also saw extensive activity through the clipper ship era from 1845 to 1860. Local shipbuilding was one reason for the harvesting of Maine's forests; the transportation of lumber to the major ports to the south and west and to the rest of the world also stimulated the cutting of timber. As one historian remarked, "lumber carrying for Maine was a very important phase of the nation's commerce. . . . for over seventy-five years it equalled, and in some respects excelled, the thoroughly described whale fishery."²³ Nearby Bangor was a major exporter of lumber,

and numerous shipyards prospered there and all along the Penobscot River south to Bucksport at the head of the bay. From this area birch went to Scotland and other types of wood to Italy, Spain, and ports in South America.²⁴

Evidently the same preparatory drawings served as the basis for a second painting of this scene, usually known as *Off Mount Desert Island (Entrance of Somes Sound)*, but on the basis of contemporary exhibition records probably originally titled *Off the Coast of Maine, with Desert-Island in the Distance* (fig. 51). The viewpoint is shifted slightly to open water, just as several vessels formerly at rest are now under sail in the brisk air and shifting light. Executing companion pictures of nature in different moods or sequential moments had become something of a fashion at this time. Thomas Cole had painted his famous series *The Course of Empire* in 1836 (New-York Historical Society) and *The Voyage of Life* in 1840–1842 (National Gallery of Art), popularizing the precedent in these allegorical works. Soon thereafter, other landscape painters such as Jasper Cropsey and Sanford Gifford chose to depict the cycles of morning and evening and the four seasons, and art historians have made a convincing case for the idea that George Caleb Bingham's two major works of 1845, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* (Metropolitan Museum of Art) and *Concealed Enemy* (Stark Museum, Orange, Texas), are actually intended pairs contrasting the fashionable stylistic modes of Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa.²⁵ Lane himself painted other pendant canvases of similar size and title, such as *A Calm Sea* and *A Rough Sea* (Cape Ann Historical Association). In the case of the Somes Sound paintings, we sense that we have moved from stilled time and midday glare to the dynamic energies of people and nature at work. The lumber (or quarried granite, another local resource) having been loaded aboard a wide schooner, the vessel, now low in the water, plows out of the harbor. Like high tide and high noon, everything once held in gentle equilibrium is now in fluid motion, the world a place equally for contemplation and for action. Lane appears to have completed this complementary piece during 1853, following his dated work of the previous year and before its mention by the critic Clarence Cook in 1854:

A sea-piece, "Off the coast of Maine, with Desert-Island in the distance," is the finest that Mr. Lane has yet painted. The time is



51. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Off the Coast of Maine, with Desert-Island in the Distance*, 1850s

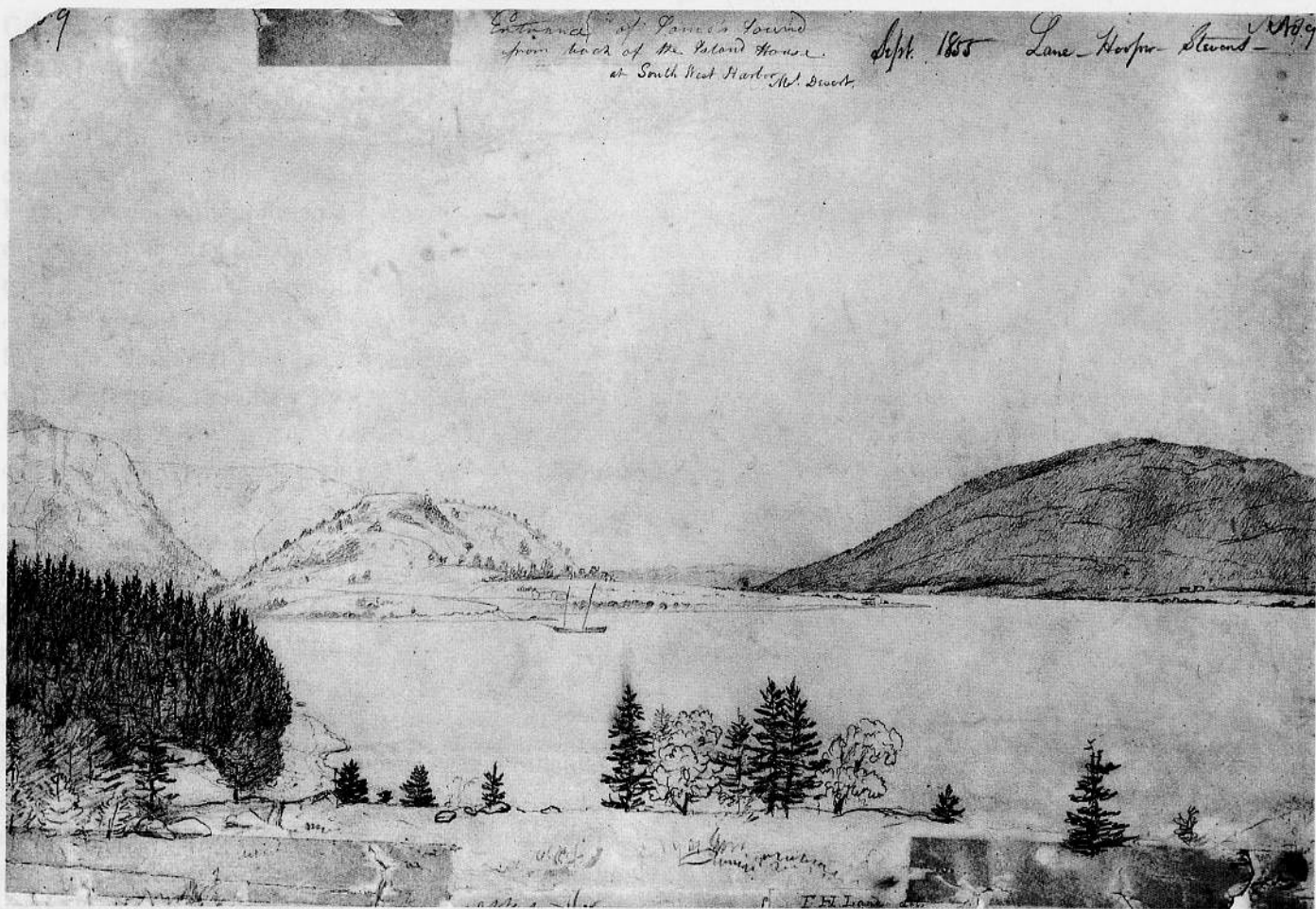
sunset after a storm. The dun and purple clouds roll away to the south-west, the sun sinks in a glory of yellow light, flooding the sea with transparent splendor. Far away in the offing, hiding the sun, sails a brig fully rigged, a transfigured vision between glories of the sky and sea. . . . In the foreground of the composition is an old lumber-schooner, plowing her way in the face of the wind; the waves are rough but subsiding; dark-green swells of water, crowned with light and pierced with light. . . .

I urged Mr. Lane to send this picture to New-York for exhibition. It could not fail to make an impression, and to call forth criticism. A finer picture of its class was never in the academy.²⁶

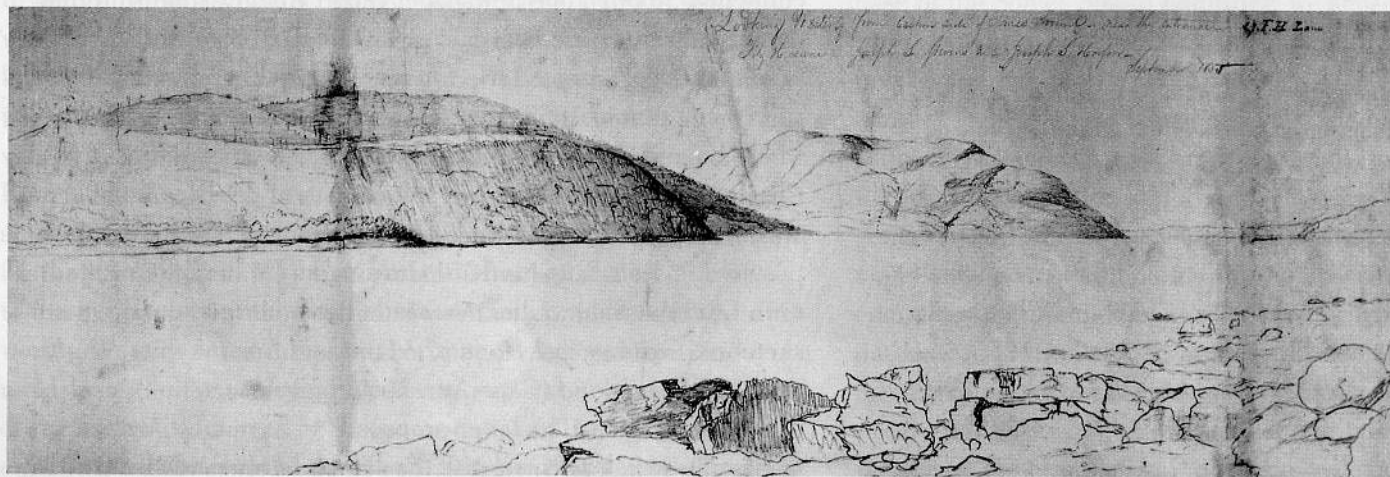
Whether because of his intense memory of Mount Desert on this 1853 trip, and its transfiguration into a luminous vision, or because of Cook's encouraging visit to Lane's studio, the artist returned to record the same prospect in September 1855. Cook had praised his special mastery of marine subjects, referring to "his new experiences and the new inspiration." During the winter of 1853 Mrs. Stevens wrote Lane from Castine that "the 'General Gates' is destroyed, yet [my husband] thinks Mr. Getchell will

have a better boat, but he hopes, as has been suggested, that you will be able to come down in your own yacht."²⁷ Lane was busy at this time painting views around Gloucester and in Boston Harbor, and only one painting of Maine is known to be dated 1854, a twilight picture probably of the lighthouse at Camden (private collection), though one newspaper report from Castine said that the artist "visits here nearly every summer."²⁸

The next documented trip for which a group of drawings survives is that of 1855. By mid-August Lane was in Castine, where he and Stevens, along with Stevens' brother George and Charles A. Williams, explored a local site of the Revolutionary War, "the great granite boulder on the shore of Perkins' back pasture."²⁹ Recalling his 1851 drawing and watercolor of the town from the water, Lane now made two other panoramic sketches, *Castine from Hospital Island* and *Castine from Heights East of Negro Island* (Cape Ann Historical Association), possibly at Stevens' urging. The latter proposed "to have a Lithograph print of Castine struck off similar to the sketch lately made by Mr. Lane to be executed in the best style in Boston, in plain dark & white,



52. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Entrance of Somes Sound from back of the Island House at South West Harbor, September 1855*



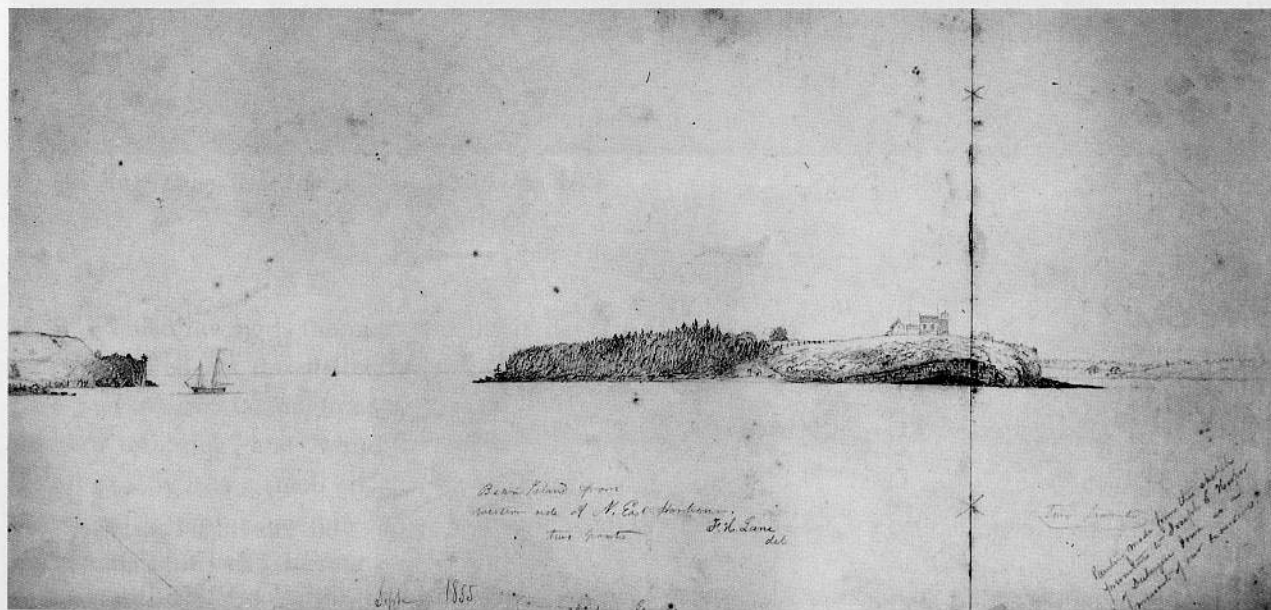
53. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Looking Westwardly from Eastern Side of Somes Sound near the entrance, September 1855*

provided 100 copies are subscribed for at \$2.00 per copy.”³⁰ The print was Lane’s last and most beautiful, more spacious and delicately drawn than anything before it. The composition views the town shoreline from a distance across the river; it is open at both sides, and Lane devotes over two-thirds of the sheet to a bright, thinly clouded sky. It reflects Lane’s new confidence in recording the Maine light and air with a refinement and economy of means that mark his best mature work.

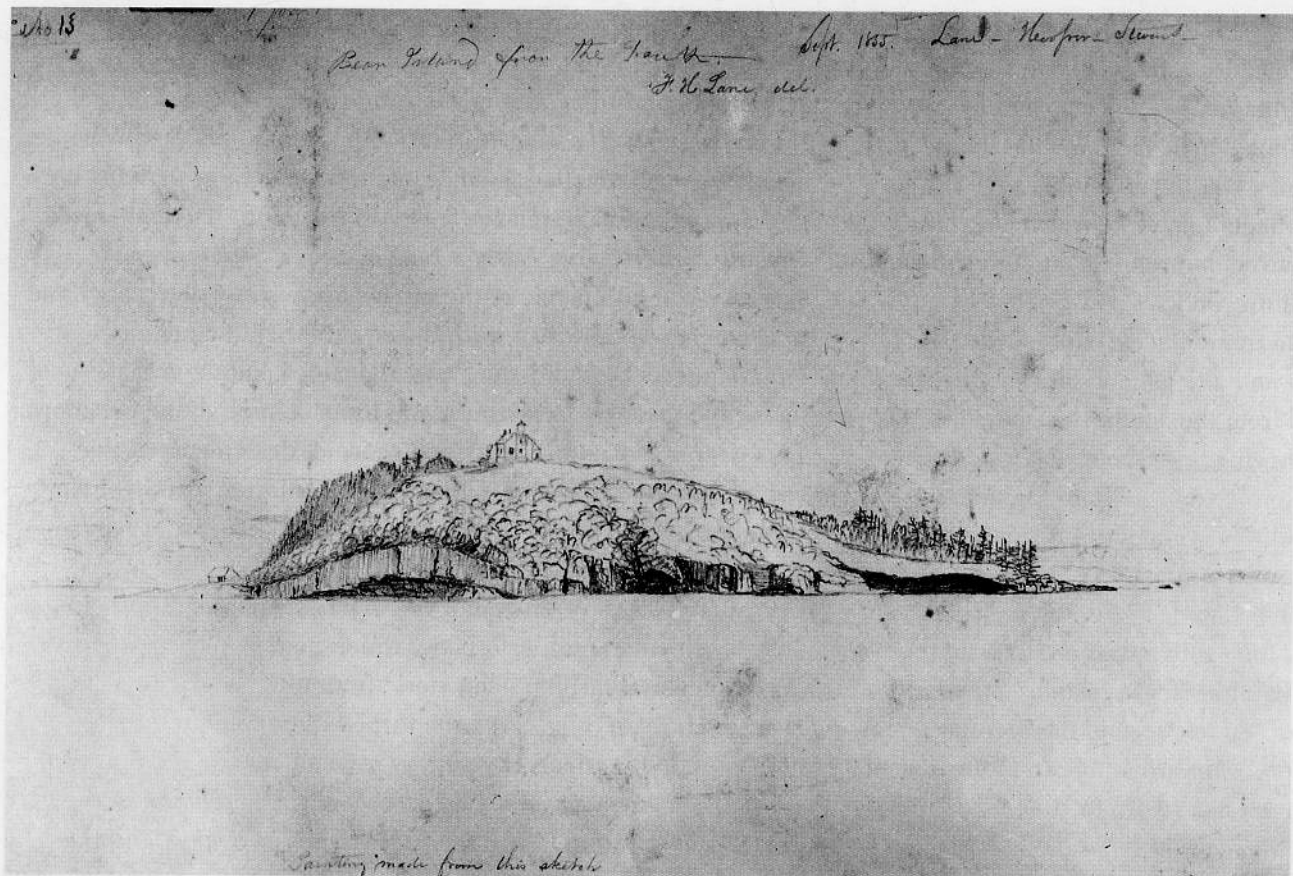
That September he cruised to three places, each of which stimulated a group of drawings and at least one oil. The first was Owl’s Head, which he outlined from the south, the southeast, and the north. Unlike his earlier drawing from the steamer’s deck, these were typically “made on our cruise. Taken from our boat in the early forenoon of a beautiful day lying north of Owl’s Head—on our approach from Rockland,” or from a nearby shore. Another series of four sheets looked at the Camden Hills from different compass points: the southwest, the south entrance to the harbor, “the Graves,” and the “North Point of Negro Island.” Stevens added whether these were done “on our second day’s cruise while going from Rockland to Camden,” “toward sundown of our second day’s cruise,” or “from the boat on our return to Rockland.”³¹ The third group took Lane back to Mount Desert, where he finished

two sketches of Somes Sound with an unusual degree of textural detail, tonal contrast, and variety of pencil stroke. The *Entrance of Somes Sound from back of the Island House at South West Harbor* (fig. 52) is a slight variant of the radiant 1852 canvas; he may have contemplated another painted version, or perhaps he just wanted to fix the image forever in his mind. Its companion, *Looking Westerly from Eastern Side of Somes Sound near the entrance* (fig. 53), is one of the artist’s most firmly delineated and well-composed drawings, with its asymmetrical balance of foreground rocks and distant mountainsides, subtle gradations of forest and geologic formations, and hints of sunlight and shadow. This degree of spatial clarity and sense of design surpassing casual observation is unusual among his working drawings, and this suggests the power of place in the strengthening of Lane’s late style.

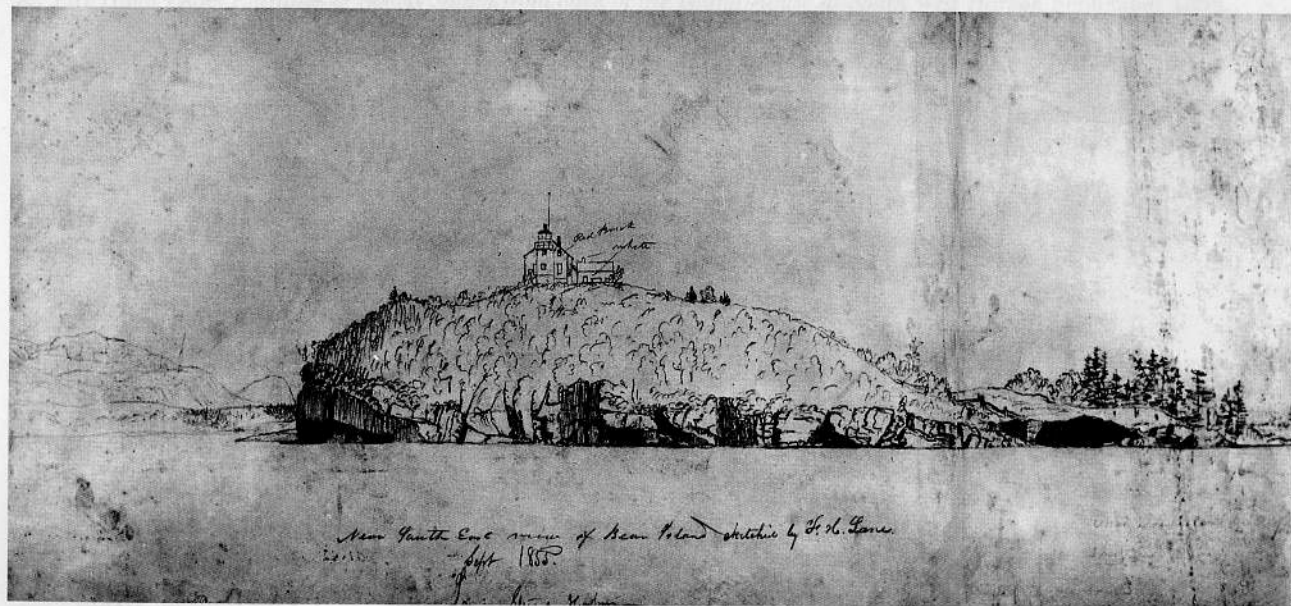
Just to the east of this point lies Bear Island, another rocky outcrop already familiar to Lane, which now prompted him to sketch in serial fashion. One view “from the western side of N. East Harbour” (fig. 54) Lane turned into a painting that he presented to his friend Hooper “as a memento of our excursion.” A second, more southerly view also resulted in a painting (fig. 55), as did the third, *Near South East View of Bear Island* (figs.



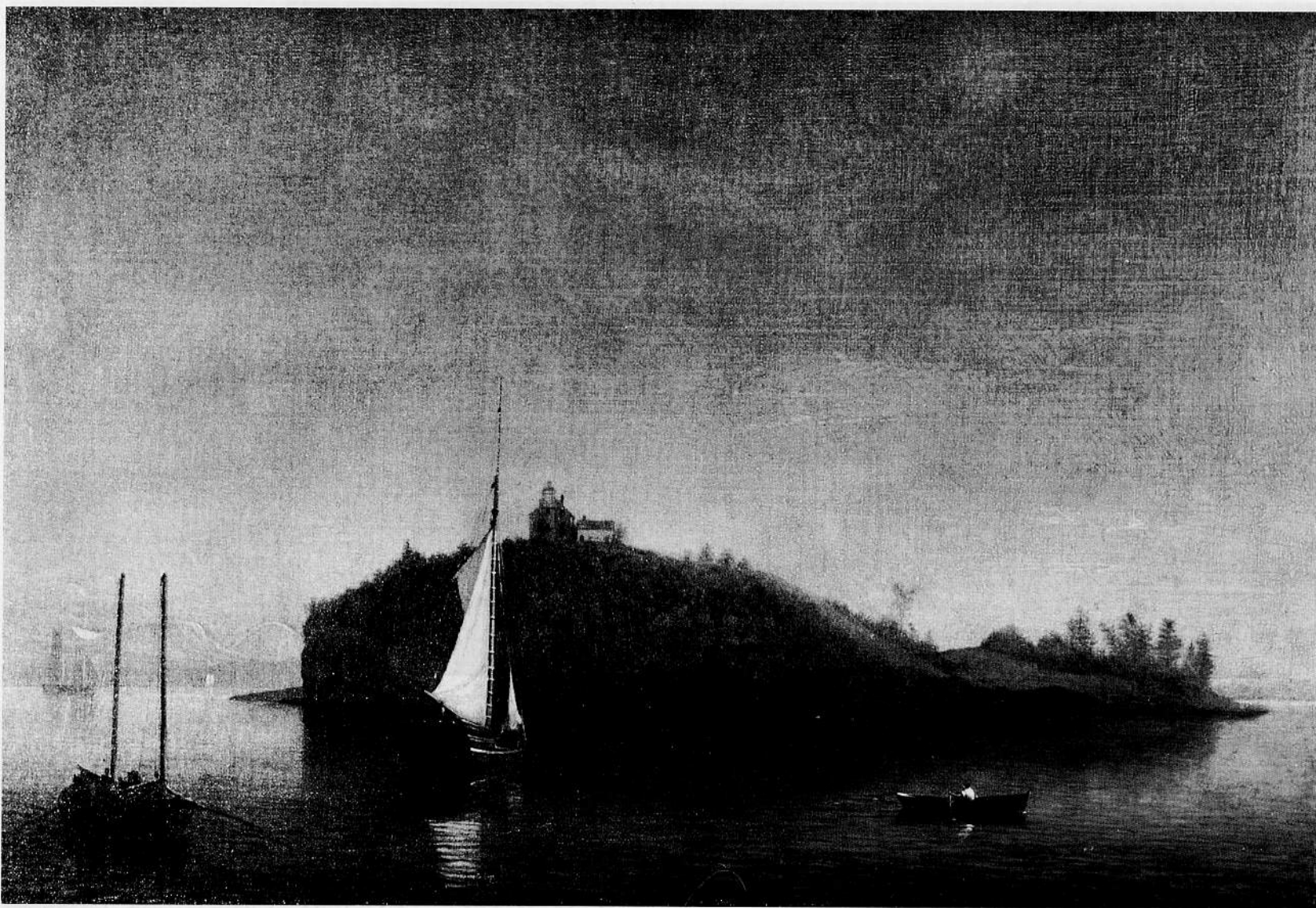
54. Fitz Hugh Lane,
*Bear Island from western side
of N. East Harbour, 1855*



55. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Bear
 Island from the South,*
 September 1855



56. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Near
 South East View of Bear Island,*
 September 1855



57. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Bear Island, Northeast Harbor*, 1855

56, 57). This drawing is the most specific in detailing the tree cover on the island, the distinctive striated cliffs at the water's edge, and the exact configurations of the lighthouse, additionally marked "red brick" and "white." At home Lane transcribed this almost exactly into a small oil, with two crucial modifications: the three small vessels placed in an arc to complement the island's contour, and the suffused orange atmosphere marking this as a characteristically dramatic summer sunset. Although the hillsides

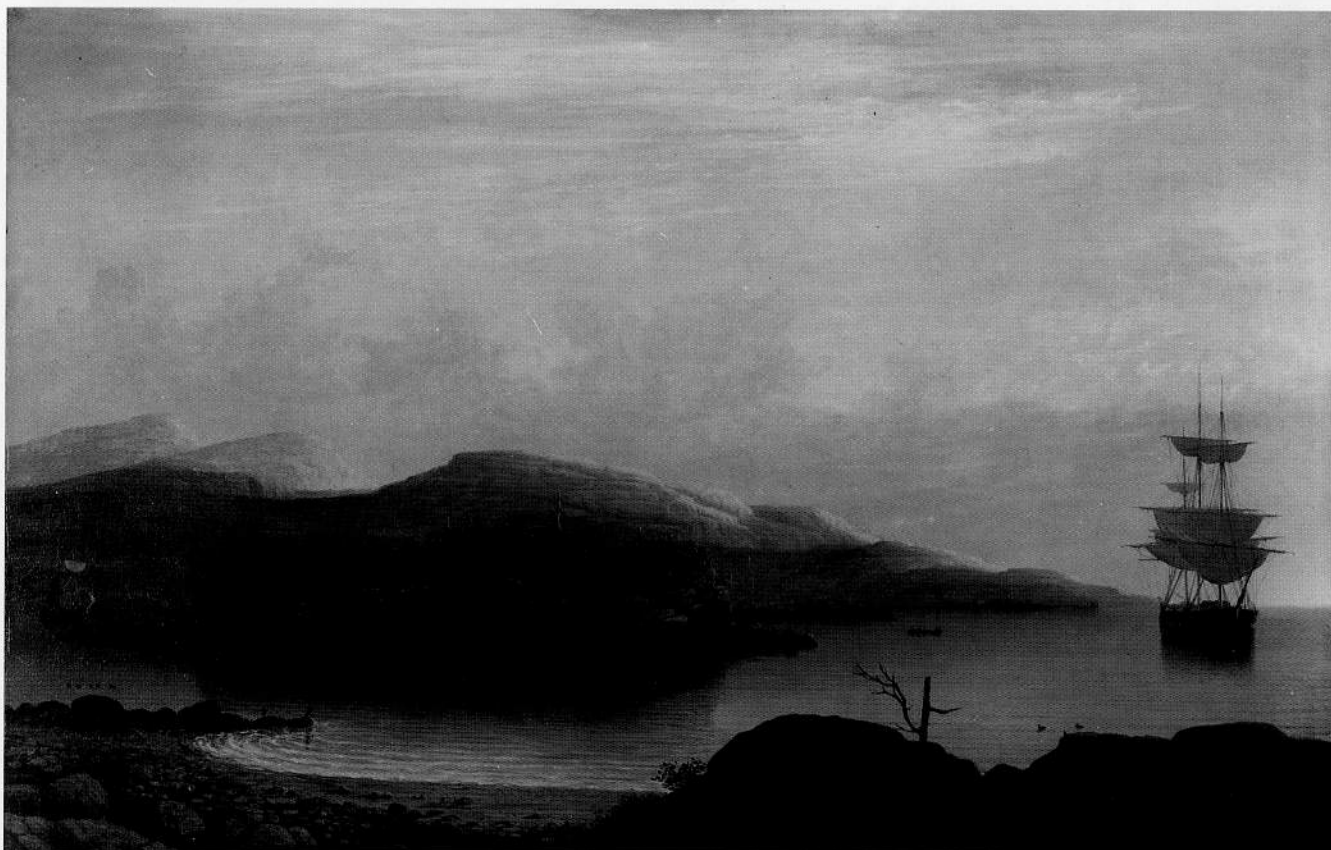
above the village of Northeast Harbor, clearly outlined in the drawing, are vaguely visible in the painting, the overall effect of enveloping light and colored moisture gives the finished work an almost mystical quality, as Lane seems to overlay observation with contemplation. With this picture and others like it done in mid-decade around Cape Ann and Boston, his style was decisively shifting in emphasis from the recording of specific fact and action to the creation of more general states of mind and feeling.



58. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Sunrise on the Maine Coast*, 1856

A few other sketches and paintings of the area probably date from the mid-fifties; one Stevens could only identify as “Mount Desert sketch” (Cape Ann Historical Association), and another loosely suggests the hills along Somes Sound (private collection). The two most important Maine canvases of this period are *Sunrise on the Maine Coast* and *Off Mount Desert Island*, both from 1856 (figs. 58, 59). Because of Lane’s intimate familiarity with the southeastern side of the island, both these works almost certainly show Mount Desert in the soft pink rays of sunrise, though no preparatory studies are known, nor can the exact geographic location be determined. Prominent in the foreground of the former is Lane himself, seated on the shore with his sketchbook, communing with the illuminated hillside beyond, his boat anchored nearby. The other, with a small rocky beach at low tide, slightly varies the composition, but equally emphasizes the

spiritual and cerebral experience of a purified landscape. Significantly, most of the Maine paintings that have been precisely located and dated from the late fifties and early sixties are versions of subjects Lane had initially composed several years before, namely *Castine from Fort George*, 1856 (Thyssen-Bornemeza collection), *Castine Homestead* and *Camden Hills*, 1859 (both private collections), *Castine*, 1860 (Timken Art Gallery, San Diego), *Owl’s Head*, 1862 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), and *Moonlight Boating Party (Indian Bar Cove)*, 1863 (private collection). Even a powerful sunset painting long thought to depict Christmas Cove in 1863 (private collection) is not positively certain as to location, time, or date, although its abstract design and brooding sense of transient light do place it as a late work. No drawings exist of documented later voyages to Maine, and we do not know if these later paintings are

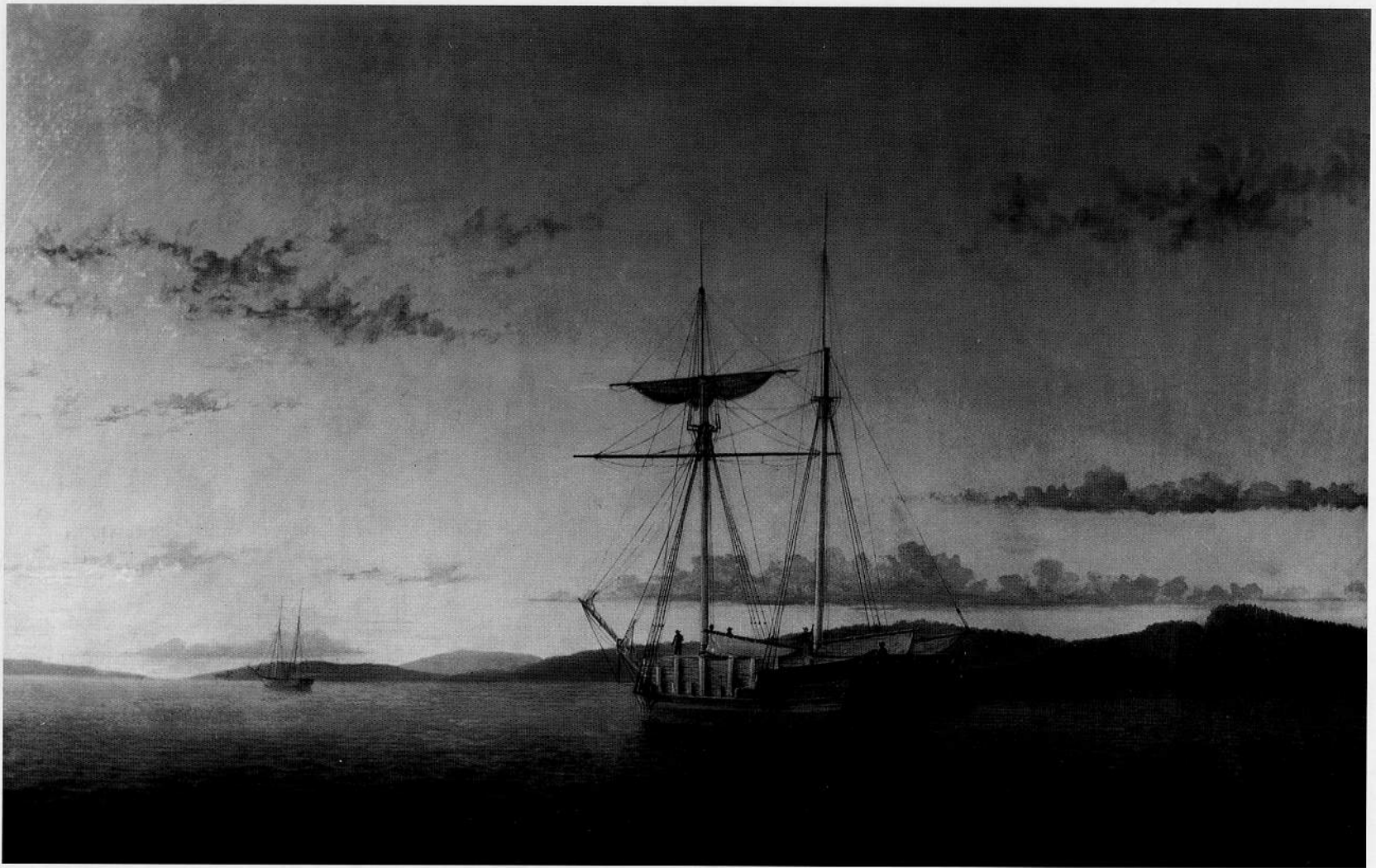


59. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Off Mount Desert Island*, 1856

the result of additional visits with Stevens or of those incandescent wilderness colors burning deeply in his imagination. Ironically, what does survive is the most explicit of images, a photograph: *Steamer "Harvest Moon," Lying at Wharf on Portland* (Cape Ann Historical Association), ruled off for transfer to a canvas captioned "Painting made by Lane for Lang & Delano, India Wharf, Boston, from this Photograph, introducing her into a sketch of Portland Harbor, Taken on our visit in August 1863." But no more is known of any touring work done on this trip. By this time Lane's health was failing, and coastal travel was impeded by the Civil War. The paintings of his last years would focus introspectively on the poignant wreckage of vessels on the starkly exposed rocks of local Gloucester ledges.

Two masterpieces of the early 1860s, however, crown Lane's Maine experiences. Both are set imprecisely on the now haunted

reaches of his beloved Penobscot Bay. A surreal air of dislocation fills one with the anxiety of a threatening thunderstorm; the other is an elegy to an exquisite twilight, suggesting impending loss, destruction, and desolation. Both show sturdy working lumber schooners at sea, but the familiar landmarks of the shoreline are distant and barely identifiable. *Approaching Storm, Off Owl's Head* (private collection) is unique in Lane's work, the only storm picture he made, undertaken just as the larger rumblings of national strife were reverberating across the country. On the distant horizon the headland looms up larger than it does in actuality, floating detached from the mainland and magnified by the mirage effects of the squall line fast approaching across the bay. Far off, two vessels with lowered sails pound in rough seas, while deckhands in the foreground hasten to furl and stow their sails in the eerie calm. We have no stable platform of beach or



60. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Lumber Schooners at Twilight on Penobscot Bay*, 1863

shoreline as a vantage point, but instead open, anonymous water. Lane's perfection of the luminist format is complete: the design is tight and orderly in its austere horizontal bands evenly marking off spatial recession, and intersected by the highlighted verticals in near-mathematical calculation. Everything seems frozen in place, yet threatened; the barometric vacuum of silence is about to crack and fill with turbulence.

Almost identical in size, and possibly conceived as a pendant, *Lumber Schooners at Twilight on Penobscot Bay* (fig. 60) is also

unusually attenuated in its horizontal proportions. The insistently lateral layout of vessels, shoreline, and evening clouds extends toward the setting sun, as if the glowing light was ebbing through the distant narrows. Again we are far enough from recognizable land to feel isolated and adrift in a moment of change. Heavily laden with neatly cut and stacked lumber, Lane's schooners sit idle as the wind drops, their bows pointed to the west, in which direction they will transport their cargo. The low sloping hills could be any of those islands edging Penobscot Bay or perhaps in

Jericho Bay closer to Mount Desert; Lane's image balances between the particular and the universal, between stopped time and timelessness. One historian has called 1860 the high moment of the lumber trade.³² It was also an era of thriving commerce in brick and granite, as productive quarries opened on Deer Isle and Mt. Waldo on the Bangor River, and later on Mount Desert. Lane often painted these same large vessels loaded with stone heading back to Boston to serve the current passion for Greek revival buildings.³³ But this was a commerce driven by a dying wind, and soon steam transportation would supplant the power of sails. In addition, just at this time Confederate cruisers were causing damage both at sea and on the coast, and near the end of the Civil War even Gloucester was for a time blockaded, causing disruption to Maine's lumber business and maritime trade. In this context, the expiration of light and air in this late painting takes on the somber cast of an elegy for a world Lane saw disappearing.

When he first visited the Maine coast and sailed into the great harbor of Mount Desert, Lane arrived with a sense of exhilaration, and his style captured the activity of northern New England's ports and waters. As this critical midcentury decade came to a close, the nation was moving toward crisis, and Lane himself sensed some of the uncertainties of age. His first Maine twilights were ones, we feel, of awe and reverence, thanksgiving for day's

fulfillment and the certainty of time's perpetual renewal. But his end of day in *Lumber Schooners* strikes a changed mood of wistfulness and acceptance of loss instead of gain. Spaciousness now approaches emptiness; sunset radiates with a different heat and passion. In painting his one thunderstorm at this time, he was creating an iconography for an anxious and conflicted nation, which his fellow painter Martin Johnson Heade would explore with unsurpassed drama in a series of storm paintings done on the Rhode Island coast. In creating this companion vision of burning twilight, he was moving toward a landscape that Frederic Edwin Church would make his own by turning the imagery of sunsets on Mount Desert into visual metaphors for no less than Abraham Lincoln's "fiery trial."

Lane's health evidently began to decline during 1864, though he was mobile enough to execute numerous sketches around Cape Ann that July and August, some of which are strikingly strong and might had led to compelling paintings. He finished and dated only a few oils that year, most notably those of Brace's Rock on Gloucester's outer shore. During the following summer he suffered some sort of seizure, and lay incapacitated for a week. Lane died on 14 August with, we may imagine, another summer sunset in the offing and a Maine cruise under deliberation.

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