

Fig. 2. Lithograph, "CASTINE: From Hospital Island, 1855, Published by Joseph L. Stevens, Jr. F. H. Lane del.; L. H. Bradford & Co's. Lith." Courtesy of the Old Print Shop.

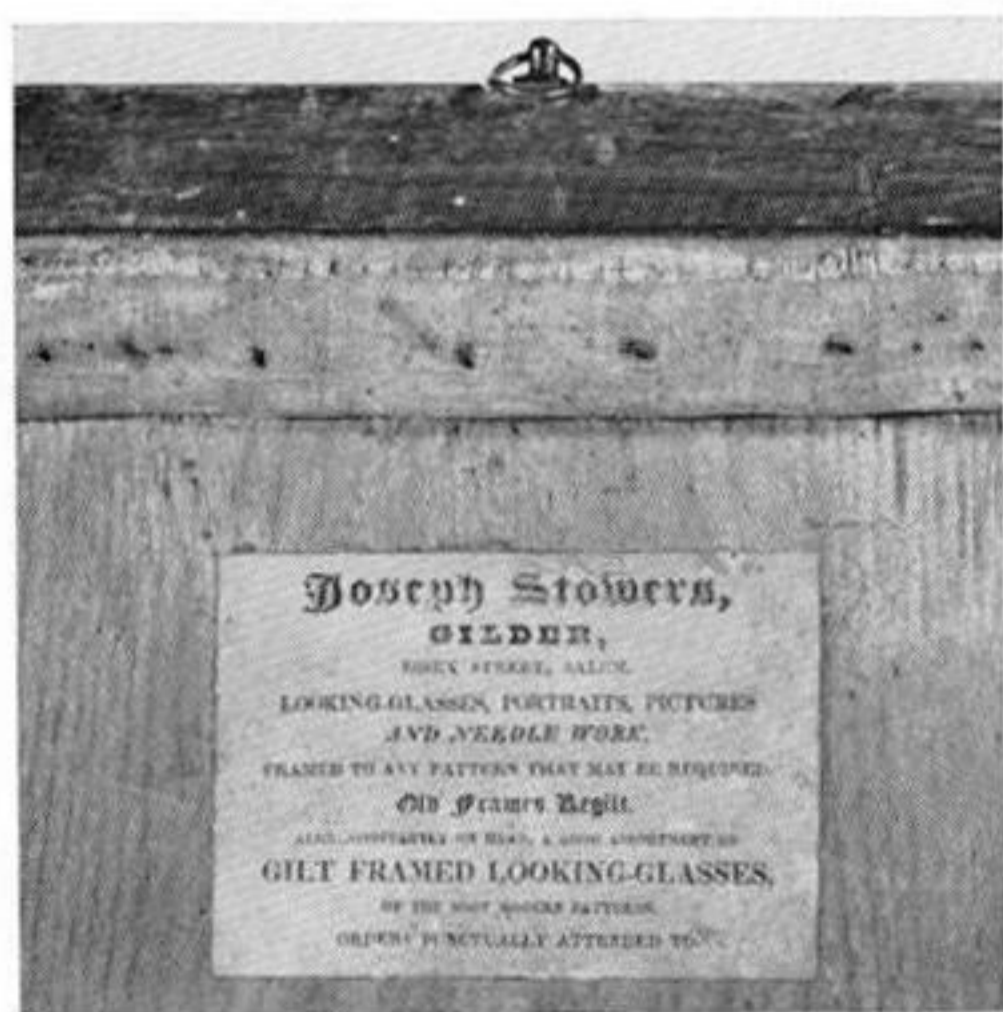


Fig. 3. Label of Joseph Stowers, Salem gilder, on back of frame of embroidered picture (fig. 1).

FITZ HUGH LANE:

Visits to the Maine Coast, 1848-1855

By FREDERIC ALAN SHARF

EVERY ACCOUNT OF FITZ HUGH LANE has emphasized this artist's crippling disease. It is interesting to discover that despite his handicap Lane developed into a prodigious traveler. From 1835 until well into the late 1840's, he made frequent trips from Boston to Gloucester, as well as detailed trips in and around Cape Ann. By the late 1840's, he seems to have become strong enough to undertake a trip down the east coast. Lithographs and paintings of such diverse places as Norwich, Connecticut, New York City, the Jersey Coast, Baltimore, and Puerto Rico provide documentary evidence of such a trip.

Apparently, the effects of his illness were no longer as restricting as has always been believed. Certainly, his many trips along the Maine coast indicate not only the desire to travel, but the ability to do so. It is interesting to focus on these trips, both for the light they shed on his artistic interests, and because they reveal new aspects of the artist's personal life—particularly his friendship with Joseph L. Stevens, Junior.¹

It is inconceivable to think of Lane's trips to Maine without first considering Stevens, for he was Lane's closest friend and constant companion, and it was as the guest of Stevens' parents that Lane made the trips. Stevens came of an old Gloucester family, though his father had settled in Castine, Maine in 1819 as the town physician. While pursuing his medical career, the elder Stevens immersed himself in the life of the town. He was instrumental in establishing public education in Castine, in founding a town library, and he was active in popular movements for public health and temperance. His son settled in Gloucester, and although he assumed the practical responsibility of the family drygoods business, he inherited his father's breadth of intellectual and cultural interests.

1. The basic sources used in the preparation of this article were George A. Wheeler, *History of Castine* (Bangor, 1875); *Gloucester Daily Telegraph*, 1846-1859; and notes made by Joseph L. Stevens, Junior in the margins of the Lane drawings at the Cape Ann Scientific, Literary, and Historical Association. In addition to consulting standard works on the history of Maine, the author spent a week in Maine retracing Lane's travels in that state.

Joseph L. Stevens, Junior was involved in a wide variety of activities in Gloucester. He was the local secretary of both the American Art Union and the Western Art Union. He was one of the leaders of the Lyceum Movement in Gloucester. With the development of the great debate over the extension of slavery into Kansas and Nebraska, Stevens became an active participant in the cause of Free Soil. In 1853, he was a candidate to the Massachusetts Free Soil State Convention. He became so involved that in the summer of 1854 he sold the family store, and in March, 1855 Stevens departed for Kansas to see for himself what was going on.

An important part of Stevens' boundless energy was devoted to historical research. Following his trip to Kansas, Stevens spent the summer of 1855 in Castine recording the reminiscences of an early settler, and preparing a written history of the town. Certain clues to the town's early history were gained from a collection of ancient coins excavated near the town. Stevens preserved this collection of coins for posterity, later giving it to the Maine Historical Society.

Such a man as Stevens must surely have been out of step with the tenor of Gloucester life, where commercial matters occupied the attention of most citizens. Since Lane began to spend most of his time in Gloucester in the later 1840's, it was natural, from both men's point of view, that a close friendship should develop. Stevens became a close collaborator in Lane's artistic efforts. He rowed Lane around the harbor, and sailed with him along the coast from Beverly to Rockport. When Stevens returned home in the summer to visit his family in Castine, Lane went with him. At Castine, Stevens arranged trips for Lane to all the scenic spots in the Penobscot Bay and Mount Desert area. On Lane's death, Stevens was the executor of his estate, and it is to Stevens that we are indebted for the preservation of the Lane drawings now in the Cape Ann Scientific, Literary, and Historical Association, all carefully annotated by Stevens himself.

Unquestionably, the scope of Stevens' interests influenced Lane's intellectual development. After he moved back to Gloucester in 1849 to make it his permanent home, Lane interested himself in various aspects of Gloucester life. He was a director of the Lyceum for many years, and frequently contributed his artistic

talents to raise money for this worthy cause. Lane allowed his paintings to be exhibited from time to time at fairs to raise money for such projects as the library at the Female High School. Occasionally, he used his artistic ability for uninspiring tasks—a banner for the Beverly Temperance Society, or sketches of old Gloucester houses to be used as illustrations in Babson's town history.

Nothing so clearly reflects the influence of Stevens as the conscious role of town historian which Lane began to assume. His paintings recorded the town's changing face: decaying monuments such as the Old Fort, and types of trading vessels that were fast disappearing from the harbor as the town's maritime business slipped. This was a pictorial counterpart for Gloucester of Stevens' Castine writings.

Lane and Stevens probably traveled to Maine together in the summer of 1848. The evidence for such a journey consists of two Lane paintings, "Twilight on the Kennebec" and "View on the Penobscot," purchased by the American Art Union in 1849 for distribution to its members. Both of these paintings must have resulted from a trip to Maine, a trip which gave Lane his first taste of the scenic beauties he was to find so congenial.

The first documented trip was made in September, 1850. Lane and Stevens apparently journeyed directly to Castine. It would have been necessary to travel by train from Gloucester to Salem, then on to Portland, Maine. At Portland, they would board a steamer bound for Rockland and Bangor. Since no boat sailed directly to Castine, it was necessary to take the Bangor steamer as far as Belfast, then cross the Penobscot on a smaller vessel.

At Castine, Lane stayed with the Stevens family. Their home stood on a ridge of land, with a magnificent view over the sloping fields to the shore and bay beyond. From this spot, Lane could see the commercial activity in the harbor, as well as the numerous trading vessels which dotted Penobscot Bay. The town was experiencing a last surge of prosperity in servicing the shipbuilding industry then at its peak along the coast from Rockland to Belfast.

In addition to the maritime activity which Lane would have witnessed in the town itself, the entire Penobscot Bay area was alive with ships. This area was a center for quarrying lime, granite,

ice and brick clay. All were transported by sea, making a colorful proliferation of ships plying the waters south to Portland and Boston. The most numerous and distinctive craft of all were the lumber loaded vessels which descended the Penobscot River from the Bangor area, sailing in long lines past the Camden Mountains southward to Boston, New York, Florida and the Indies.

Lane was fascinated by the entire area. From Castine, he made daily excursions into the surrounding countryside with Stevens, accompanied on at least one occasion by the elder Stevens. They climbed to the tops of neighboring hills to look out over the many coves, islands and necks of land. From such vantage points, intriguing patterns unfolded before Lane's eye, as pieces of landscape were juxtaposed in a way not seen from the ground level. On the western horizon, the Camden Mountains dominated the background; to the east, Blue Hill captured Lane's attention.

Farther to the east, beyond the eye's reach, lay the island of Mount Desert. Stories of its unique beauties had already filtered back to Lane and Stevens: the rugged, picturesque mountains; the fine harbors; the quiet bays and sounds. Such reports prompted Stevens to organize a party of local men to accompany him and Lane on a visit to the island. A sturdy boat was hired, with a reputable pilot. Sailing from Castine, Lane's party cruised through Eggemoggin Reach, a channel cutting through a neck of land, where their progress was slowed by "baffling winds and calms." At Naskeag, the channel's end, they decided to pitch their tents in the field of a local farmer, borrowing some of his hay to make their accommodations more comfortable for the night. In the morning, they were greeted amiably by the farmer, who thought they were a party of fishermen.

The sail across the open bay to Mount Desert proved an exciting event. "It is a grand sight," said Stevens, "approaching Mt. Desert from the westward, to behold the mountains gradually open upon the view." They headed for Southwest Harbor, a spot that Lane would paint many times. Without stopping, they cruised slowly up Somes Sound as the afternoon was growing late. Lane was seated in the rear of the boat sketching. According to Stevens, "the reality exceeded the expectations," and the entire party found themselves "engrossed in the grandness of the

scenery." They pitched their camp at Bar Island off the settlement at Somesville.²

The encampment at Bar Island served as the base of operations while they explored Mount Desert. Lane's party spent time at Somesville talking with the local residents. On one occasion, they attempted to climb one of the surrounding mountains, "a long and laborious scramble up among rocks and fallen trees," only to be stopped by a violent thunder and lightning storm which forced them to take cover on the mountain, and ultimately give up the climb. Such an experience did not dampen Lane's constant urge to seek higher vantage points.

Lane was by no means the first artist to delight in the scenic beauties of Mount Desert, nor was he the only artist sketching on the island in September of 1850. Stevens commented that Benjamin Champney and John Kensett were both sketching on another part of the island, and he knew of other important artists who had just left. Possessed of adventurous spirits, these artists were pioneers in discovering the indigenous beauties of American scenery, as they ventured to remote spots in their search for fresh material. Lane, too, in spite of his physical handicap, had the explorer's instinct.

The 1850 trip had acquainted Lane with Mount Desert, the northern boundary of Penobscot Bay. The next year, Lane and Stevens came to Castine in August. Once again, Lane explored the countryside around Castine, finding new aspects of familiar sights. With Stevens, he visited Fort Treble at the tip of the Castine peninsula. Here Stevens could dwell on the historical connotations, while Lane sketched Castine from a new angle. With Stevens, Lane went over to get a closer look at Blue Hill, anchoring in the little harbor at the foot of the town, and climbing a nearby hill for a panoramic view of the town. But most important, the 1851 trip exposed Lane to the charm of the Maine coast around Rockland, particularly the point of land known as Owls Head, at the southern boundary of Penobscot Bay.

Lane apparently discovered Owls Head while on board the steamer coming from Portland. The route into Rockland runs up a channel shortcut passing between Munroe's Island and Owls

2. Stevens' description of the 1850 trip printed in *Gloucester Daily Telegraph*, September 11, 1850.

Head. Steaming up this channel, Lane was struck by the shapes of the two humps of land at Owls Head. They appeared conical when seen from an angle, changing as the boat moved closer, flattening out as the boat came opposite, and turned conical again as the boat rounded the bend into Rockland harbor. Sketches of the changing shapes, made as the steamer passed through the channel, attest to Lane's method of patient observation. Lane was a student of landscape, and the Maine coast provided aspects of landscape which particularly appealed to his keen eye.

August of 1852 found Lane and Stevens in Castine preparing for new explorations of Penobscot Bay. Stevens arranged a party of local men and hired a single masted sloop with the same pilot who had gone with them in 1850. As before, they set off down the Eggemoggin Reach, spending the first night in a cove along the way. The next day, emerging from the Reach, Lane's party rounded the Stonington Peninsula and headed south toward Isle Au Haut. They landed at Saddleback, off Isle Au Haut, where they anchored in a quiet inlet and spent the night.

At Saddleback, Lane had a chance to sketch Penobscot Bay from still another angle, with familiar landmarks like the Camden Mountains, Long Island, and Cape Rosier dotting the horizon in a new order. At the same time, he had an opportunity to acquaint himself with the life of the islanders, their loneliness, and their dependence on the numerous coasting vessels which came stocked with all sorts of merchandise. In the evening, the group listened to tales of the Bay told by their venerable pilot, everything from local legend to the names of the many small islands. One can sense the influence of Stevens' tastes: his love of history and his desire to know more about the way different people lived.

From Isle Au Haut, the travelers cruised northeast to Southwest Harbor on Mount Desert Island. Here the sloop anchored at the western side of the harbor, to give Lane a view across the bay, with the entrance to Somes Sound on the right, and the mountains next to the entrance forming a prominent backdrop for the sweep of the harbor. It is evident that the planning for these trips took Lane's artistic desires into consideration. For in choosing spots to anchor, they were careful to locate where Lane would be able to get interesting views.

The island cruise lasted one week. The party of six camped in

a tent and lived on basic supplies which they had brought with them, supplemented by the fish they caught. In addition to Lane, Stevens, and the pilot, three of Stevens' Castine friends rounded out the group. Two of these, Samuel Adams Jr. and William H. Witherle, were engaged in family enterprises in Castine. Their fathers, too, were public-spirited citizens, and they had inherited a breadth of interests similar to Stevens. According to Stevens, the group was a convivial one. Certainly, they must have been sympathetic as well as stimulating companions for Lane. The type of trip they arranged for him provided Lane with a wealth of background for his art. He came to know personally the material he sketched (and later painted), not merely geographically, but also historically. He knew the inhabitants and he knew the ships. This intimate knowledge enabled him to probe beneath the mere pictorial aspects of the scenes, and to create pictures that have a lasting significance.

According to the evidence provided by the Gloucester drawings, Lane next visited Castine in September of 1855. There is every reason to believe, however, that Lane was in Castine during at least one of the two intervening summers. In a letter written to the *Boston Courier* by a Castine correspondent in September, 1855, it is noted that "Mr. F. H. Lane of Gloucester . . . visits here nearly every summer . . .," which indicates a continuity in Lane's visits. It further implies that Castine considered Lane a regular member of its summer colony, and that Lane might have had a summer studio here. Certainly, the well documented trip made in 1855 marks the high point in Lane's Maine career.

Stevens apparently arrived in Castine in July, 1855 and spent the balance of the summer engaged in historical research. Beginning on August 1st, the *Gloucester Telegraph* carried a series of letters written by Stevens embodying the fruits of his research. "Few places in New England," wrote Stevens, "are of greater historical interest than this ancient peninsula of Magebigyduce. . . . holding on its southern slope the picturesque village of Castine." Stevens' letters describe the town's history period by period: The Indian period, followed by the French, then the pre-Revolutionary. Further letters deal with the Revolutionary years, and continue the narrative down to Stevens' own time. These letters, so

scholarly, so thorough, were the basis for later histories of the town, and are a tribute to Stevens' intellect.

Lane did not come to Castine until September. Apparently, he made the journey from Gloucester in the company of Joseph S. Hooper, a young man of 28, who had moved from Manchester to Gloucester, and who would soon settle in Dubuque, Iowa. His presence on the trip and his friendship with Lane remain a mystery. It seems that Lane and Hooper met Stevens in Rockland. There, Stevens had arranged to hire a sailboat, in which Lane could explore certain scenic spots that he had seen many times from the deck of a passing steamboat. This excursion lasted two days.

The first day was devoted entirely to a detailed study of the scenery around Owls Head. Lane's first sketch was a view of Owls Head seen on the approach from Rockland Harbor, made, according to Stevens, "in the early forenoon of a beautiful day."³ They then sailed around to Munroe's Island, where Lane made a series of studies of Owls Head from various points on the island. At the northern tip of the island, he got a close look at the lighthouse standing on its pinnacle of land. The conical aspect of the land formation was most pronounced. A second sketch, made farther down the island, shows a more rolling landscape, while in a third sketch from the southern part of Munroe's Island, Owls Head, with a length of coastline, is seen from a distance. Lane was almost scientific in his method of studying all aspects of a scenic view that intrigued him.

Lane's party probably spent the night in Rockland. They set out the next morning for Camden. The Camden Mountains, because of their isolation and their steep rise directly from the shoreline, are the most distinctive feature of the landscape on the Penobscot Bay coast from Rockland to Castine. In Lane's drawings, they are an ever present background for almost any westerly looking view in the Penobscot Bay, whether taken from Castine or Isle Au Haut. In keeping with his methodical approach to scenery which appealed to his selective taste, the curious and adventurous Lane now wanted to study the Camden Mountains at close range.

The sketches made on the second day's excursion began with

3. Note made by Stevens on Drawing No. 11, dated September, 1855, at the Cape Ann Scientific, Literary, and Historical Association.

a view of the mountains from the southwest, showing the village of Rockport in the foreground. Further sketches were made on approaching Camden Harbor, from Negro Island in the harbor, and from the southern entrance to the harbor as they sailed back to Rockland. As usual, Lane insisted on viewing his subject from a variety of angles, and the excursion was planned around his artistic requirements. A final sketch of the Camden Mountains was made the next day from the deck of the steamer en route to Castine.

The two-day sailing excursion around Rockland was not the only traveling Lane did during his 1855 trip. Lane was now at the height of his artistic powers, and his appetite for sketching seemed bigger than ever that year. From Castine, he journeyed with Stevens and Hooper to Mount Desert. Here he did some sketching around Southwest Harbor, Somes Sound, and Northeast Harbor. Though familiar with this scenery from his previous trips, Lane did manage to discover new views, such as his sketches of Bear Island from various angles.

These side trips were of immense artistic importance to Lane, but the major project of the 1855 trip was the preparation of a large lithographic view of the town of Castine. Lane was commissioned by Stevens to undertake such a work, and the fine print which resulted, "Castine From Hospital Island," (Fig. 2) was published by Stevens. This venture could only have been motivated by love. The precarious fortunes of Castine would not have made such a print financially attractive to any of the Boston or New York lithographic firms which specialized in town views.

Lane's familiarity with Castine simplified the task. Yet, a sketch of the town from the heights east of Negro Island indicates the further care with which Lane studied the terrain. This sketch is also indicative of Lane's continuing urge to climb to high places for panoramic views. Castine was not an easy subject. Not only is the town spread out along the length of the peninsula, but in the heart of the town there are no prominent landmarks to catch the eye.

Lane mastered these problems with great skill. He managed to convey the diffused character of the town's layout, while concentrating attention on the central area, with its piers and boats in the harbor. Attention is focused by means of an oval design em-

bracing the rocky foreground, with the arresting figure of a man holding a pole; the boats in the harbor, at either side of the oval; and the town massed behind. This design transformed what might have been an uninteresting view of an uninteresting town into a skillful work of art. If for nothing else, this lithograph would have marked the 1855 trip as a key event in Lane's artistic life.

The 1855 trip was the culmination of Lane's Maine visits. In this one trip, he consolidated the knowledge gained on previous visits of the three areas of Penobscot Bay: the landscape around Rockland, Castine and Mount Desert had now become an integral part of his artistic experience. This trip also marked a fulfillment of his friendship with Stevens, for the Castine lithograph merged Lane's artistic skills with Stevens' attachment to the town of Castine. Lane was now at the height of his career. The trips to Maine had been instrumental in shaping his development both personally and artistically.