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Rededicating a newly restored 1908 oil painting by Augustus Cremonini at Durfee High library are: from left, John Branco, librarian; Raymond Thompson, member of the School Improvement Council; and Jean Staiti, director of fine arts. Not pictured is Belisario Almeida, chairman of the Fall River Arts Lottery Council, which provided a grant for the restoration. The Improvement Council provided funds for a new frame.

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# Cremonini work restored at Durfee

By Kathleen Durand  
Herald News Staff Reporter

FALL RIVER — A Cremonini painting that used to hang in the old B.M.C. Durfee High School has been restored to its past glory, and now graces a wall in the Keeley Library of the new Durfee.

The 5-by-7-foot oil painting is the work of Augustus Cremonini, the son of Ludovic Cremonini, the Italian master who painted the acclaimed ceiling murals and other works that adorned the old Notre Dame Church.

Those Cremonini treasures were lost in 1982 in the fire that destroyed the beautiful church, and it was only luck that saved his son's painting from being lost.

Jean Staiti, director of fine arts for the school system, said Augustus Cremonini painted the work in 1908, and it hung for many years in the study hall of the old school, which closed 12 years ago. At some point, the painting was moved to an art room, and in 1980,

when the building was no longer used as a school, Staiti discovered it in a corridor.

It showed the ravages of time. It was dirty and cracked, there was a tear in the corner of the canvas and the frame was warped, but she determined to preserve it. She had it moved to the library of the new school.

Thanks to funding provided by the Massachusetts Arts Lottery Council through the Fall River Arts Lottery Council, the painting was recently restored to its original beauty and rededicated.

The grant by the Arts Lottery Council was used to have the painting appraised and restored, a process that took about six months. An in-kind contribution by the School Improvement Council was used to purchase a new frame for the painting.

Durfee librarian John Branco, who wrote the proposal for the Arts Lottery grant, said Augustus Cremonini was born in 1890, so he was only 17 or 18 when he did the

painting. Executed in the classical style, Branco said the painting is a copy of a painting titled, "La Redemzione," which is owned by a Pennsylvania couple. The scene is of two well dressed women sitting on a stone settee in what appears to be Rome, greeting their two sons.

"It's a beautiful painting and we're so glad to have it," said Branco. "Many people come to the library for meetings and they recognize it from the old Durfee, and outsiders see it and say what an elegant school this is to have an art gallery."

The library staff has been diligently working to preserve Durfee history and has compiled an impressive archives of memorabilia, including books, souvenirs, diplomas and yearbooks dating back to 1912. "We have the elements here of a nice museum," Branco observed.

Pointing out that Durfee students of today have no recollection of the old school on Rock Street, Branco said the Cremonini painting and other library possessions, including a mural of the old school donated by the Class of 1939, provide a wonderful bridge between the past and the present and keep tradition alive.

It is not known who donated the Augustus Cremonini painting to Durfee, or what became of other paintings that once hung in the study hall. Staiti and Branco said they would love to know what happened to other art works from the old school. "There were other paintings in the study hall, and we don't know what happened to them over the years," said Branco, "but we're very very happy to have this painting restored. It now hangs very elegantly in our library."

The Cremonini family lived in Fall River while Ludovic Cremonini was working on his powerful ceiling mural, "The Last Judgment," and other paintings for Notre Dame Church.

Branco said the family lived at 286 Barnes St. in 1903-1904, 224 E. Main St. in 1905, and 432 Durfee St. in 1906-1910.

Augustus Cremonini was known to have been living in New York state in 1970, he reported.

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