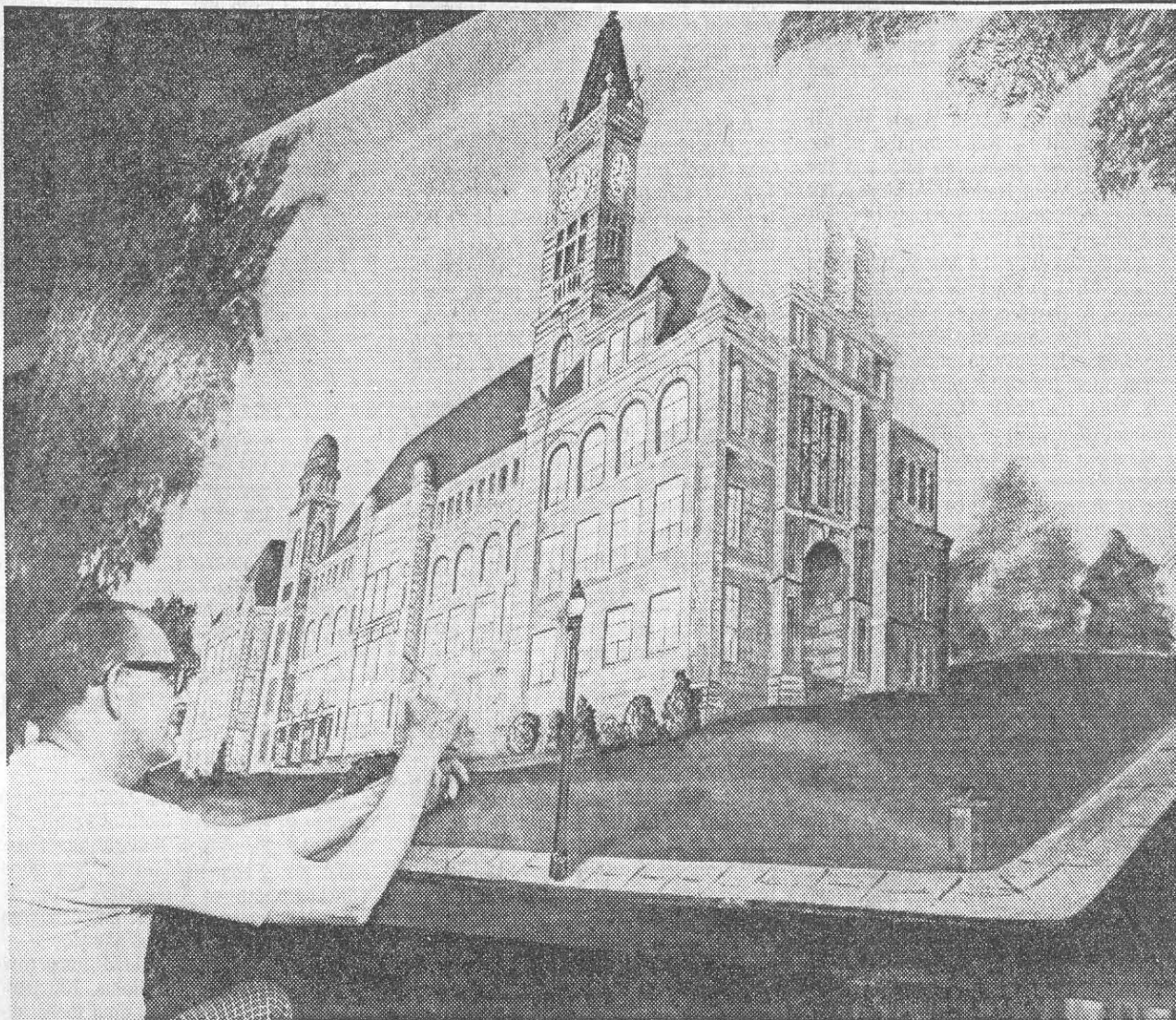


Massachusetts Journal

The Providence Journal, Section C — Friday, July 13, 1979



—Journal-Bulletin Photo by NORMAN A. SYLVIA

LABOR OF LOVE: Arthur Despres touches up his painting of the old B.M.C. Durfee High School.

Painting of old B.M.C. Durfee High a 'labor of love' for former student

By BERNARD F. SULLIVAN
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

NEW BEDFORD, Mass. — It is quite a while since Arthur Despres did the kind of painting that produced the 6-by-12-foot oil of Fall River's old B.M.C. Durfee High that rests now in his sign shop in the North End.

"It was a labor of love," Despres said. "I wish I had more time to do this kind of work, but I am too busy making a living and you can't make a living doing oil paintings."

The painting will be moved soon from Signcrafters, at 329 Coffin Ave., to the new, campus-style Durfee High School of Fall River, courtesy of the graduating class of 1939.

Despres, a graduate of Durfee High in 1936, was commissioned to paint the class gift and found it rather hard to refuse. The reason? His wife, Carmella, is Class of '39.

Fall River

The 61-year-old artist said his love for painting dates back to his early days when he was a young boy, one of eight children, growing up on Seventh Street in Fall River.

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"WHEN I WAS only about 13 years old, I remember doing some oil paintings of the old post office, City Hall, St. Anne's Church, all the well-known buildings in Fall River," Despres said. "I used to just scrounge some oil and look in barrels for old beaverboard to paint on. I still have some paintings at home that are on beaverboard. I couldn't afford to get painting supplies at the store."

Despres said he got his first formal training in art when he went to Morton Junior High in Fall River. It was, however, very brief.

"I remember the teacher told the class to paint something, and when I handed mine in, she told me to go in the back row and do whatever I wanted. Guess she figured there was nothing she could teach me. I just had a natural talent for it," Despres said.

He spoke of getting \$3 to buy sneakers when he was in high school and using the money to buy a book on how to paint signs.

"I got started in sign painting when somebody paid me a whole dollar to do a sign. I had made signs for four and five cents apiece, but now I saw the prospect of a good career," Despres said.

The idea of Despres painting the old Durfee High School came when he heard the class of '39 had considered getting a large photograph to hang in the new school.

"I enjoyed doing it and I was paid for it," he said. "It did make me wish I had more time for leisure painting, but I just don't seem to have it."