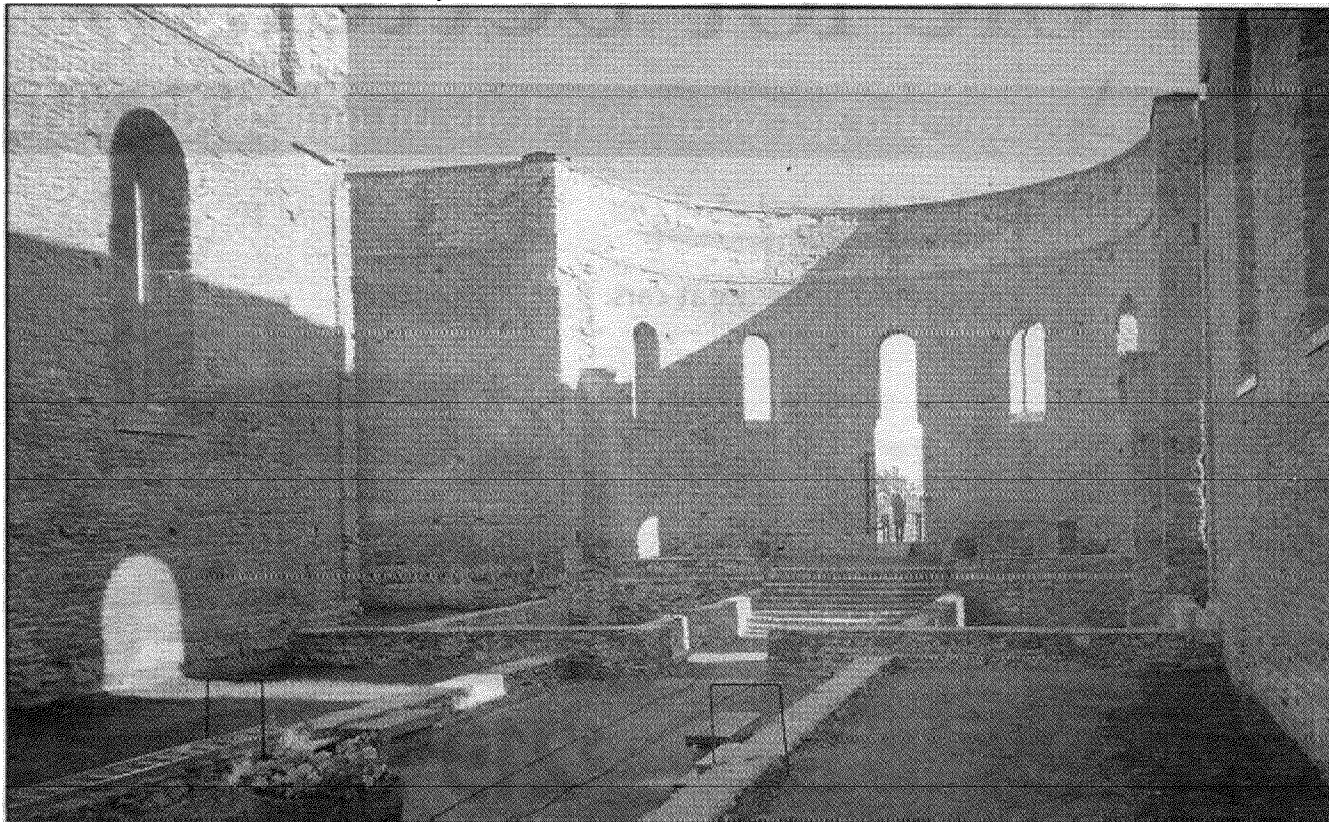


the VALLEY

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THE RUINS of St. Raphael's Roman Catholic Church are undergoing \$567,000 worth of restoration. The recently designated National Historic Site will open to the public at the end of the month.



Tom Van Dusen

Ruins ready for visitors

ST. RAPHAELS — On a late afternoon in early autumn, you can almost feel the ghosts rustling around the imposing stone church ruins here.

They can get inside, but human visitors can't. Locked iron gates have kept the public out since the ruins were declared unsafe back in 1993.

That's about to change by the end of this month when \$567,000 worth of restoration work will once again allow the curious back into the hallowed, open-air inner sanctuary.

Located in South Glenarrig County, the ruins were once St. Raphael's Roman Catholic Church which, in its heyday anchored the colony's largest parish.



**Tom
VAN DUSEN**

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Begun in 1815 and completed six years later with seating for 1,000 faithful, the massive church was built by Father Alexander Macdonnell, first Bishop of Upper Canada.

After a century and a half of weathering the elements, the church was gutted by fire in 1970. A decision was made at that time to preserve what was left as a walled, outdoor

meeting and concert site. Fortification and restoration projects followed.

In 1986, the municipality and the Ontario Heritage Foundation spent \$250,000 to cap the walls and complete some repointing of stones. That held for seven years until the interior was closed.

Then Friends of the Ruins Inc. stepped in. Last month, their efforts were officially recognized with a commemorative plaque confirming the ruins' special status as a National Historic Site, which opens up a whole new public funding realm.

That provided a morale boost for the latest restoration campaign coordinated by Friends, which has a total goal of \$875,000, said vice-chair Ian McLeod. To date, the federal government has contributed \$238,800 and \$146,000 has come in through the Mil-

lennium Partner Program.

That money was spent before and so was \$160,000 borrowed on the strength of the grants.

By the end of the month, \$500,000 worth of interior restoration will have been completed, with further funding required to repair the exterior.

"It's important to get to the site as soon as possible because the structure will be free to pass through existing cracks and undermine any tarring done inside," McLeod said.

He said visits inside the ruins will be controlled in order to keep writers and souvenir hunters out.

One of the priorities, McLeod said, is — through pledges and other fundraising schemes — to repay the loans which Friends directors are currently on the hook.