



Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall

This Week in History

August 10, 2015

One of Ontario's Oldest Catholic Churches is Destroyed by Fire

Forty-five years ago this week, one of our oldest churches and the original see of the Catholic Church in Upper Canada, St. Raphael's, was destroyed by fire. When the fire was finally put out on **August 11, 1970**, the roof, the steeple tower and all the interior decorations, including a statue of St. Raphael that had come from France in the 1800s, a large hand-carved cross and paintings of the Way of the Cross had been destroyed, all that was left were the stone walls.

Founded by Bishop Alexander Macdonell and built in 1821, St. Raphael's was unique in Canada in that it was built without pillars (see photo) instead using solid wooden rafters that were carefully stressed. In addition, wooden pins were used for construction rather than nails. The church which was 80 feet by 250 feet could seat 1000 people!!

The parishioners of St Raphael's ultimately decided to preserve what was left of the ruined church and build an unobtrusive modern church against its southwest corner.

Today, the diocese no longer owns the Ruins. However, the Friends of the Ruins (saintraphaelsruins.com) have taken over the preservation of this historical site. The Ruins are a beautiful piece of both our history and the history of Ontario and were declared a National Historic Site in 1999.



Concert in the Ruins, August 7/15



Father
Michael O'Brien
was parish priest at
the time of the fire.

