

CEMETERY

Remains of pioneers to be reburied in Arva

1990

A 148-year-old cairn at Wonderland Road and Highway 22, which marks the graves of several pioneers, will be moved with their remains to St. John's Anglican cemetery in Arva.

By Peter Christie
The London Free Press

Chipping away at the single cairn that now represents the old White Church cemetery, a London mason's chisel uncovers the words "Gone Home" at the top of London pioneer Robert King Fuller's 148-year-old tombstone.

Soon Fuller will have a new home.

Jerry Van Geffen, a mason for Geard Memorials in London, contracted by the city, carefully began dismantling the six-metre-high (20-foot-high) cairn with a hammer and chisel this week to prepare it for a move to a shady corner of St. John's Anglican cemetery in Arva.

NEEDED ROOM: London's city hall and the United Church have combined forces to orchestrate Monday's move of the remains of Fuller and the other long-dead pioneers under the cairn at Wonderland Road and Highway 22. The Anglican cemetery was the only place with room to keep the remains together.

The move allows the city to use 7.6 metres (25 feet) of road allowance that the cairn and the small square piece of cemetery land occupy, said city engineer D'Arcy Dutton.

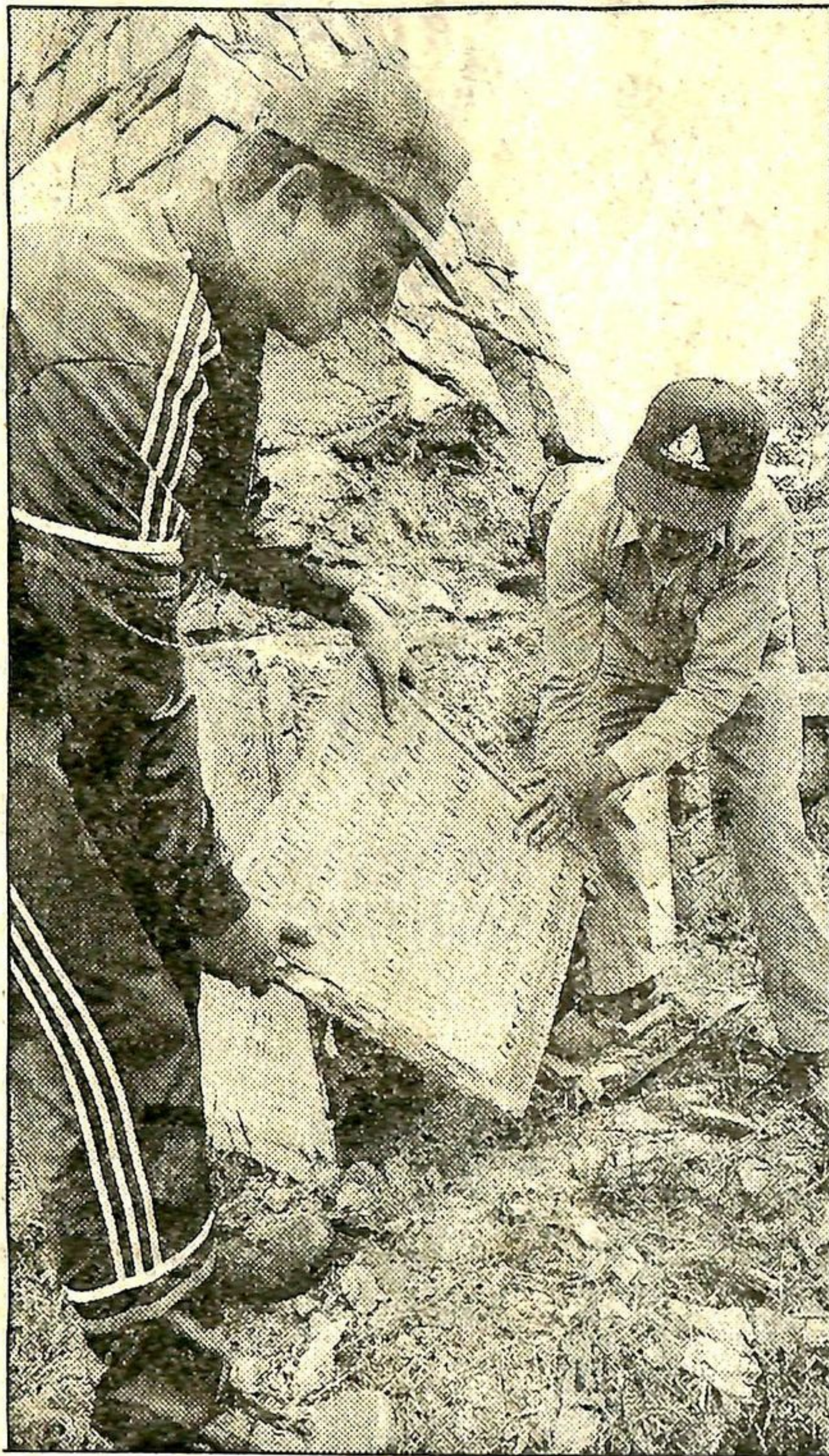
"It's quite an operation from what I understand," Dutton said. "We had a lot of negotiations with the church involved and we had to get provincial approvals. We spent a long time arranging this."

The project will cost the city about \$20,000.

EXHUMATION: On Monday, the Museum of Indian Archeology will begin to exhume the remains and bury them again at the Arva cemetery.

The short trip to Arva won't be the first time the remains of the estimated dozen or so people buried in the cemetery have made a move, said Bob Pearce, senior archeologist with the museum. In 1934, several decrepit graves and their contents were consolidated into one casket and the cairn was built to mark the spot.

The original cemetery, which once covered a much larger area, may have been established as early as 1828, Pearce said. But the earliest existing grave marker — that of pioneer Fuller — puts the plot's first funeral at 1842.



Sam McLeod/The London Free Press

Jerry Van Geffen, a mason, and his nephew Maryn Pennings remove the first tombstone from the cairn at Wonderland Road and Highway 22. The cairn is being dismantled and will be moved to St. John's cemetery in Arva.

The White Church, a Methodist church that stood beside the cemetery, went out of use in the late 1800s and eventually fell or was torn down.

10 TOMBSTONES: The cairn contains 10 tombstones with 12 names, Pearce said. But there may have been other wooden markers or stones lost or destroyed over time. He said as many as 20 people may have been buried in the cemetery.

"Two of the people are supposedly original settlers in the London Township . . . But as far as we know there's no surviving relatives now. In fact there were no surviving relatives in 1934 when they were moved the first time."

HOW TO MOVE A CEMETERY

The provincial ministry of consumer and commercial relations has these guidelines for moving cemeteries:

- The cemetery owner must be notified and approve of the move.
- The local municipality must agree.
- An application to close the existing cemetery has to be sent to the ministry. It must include any known objections to the move.
- Advertisements must be run in the local newspaper, once a week for four weeks, so the public can voice its concerns.
- Municipal health officials must be present when the remains are raised.
- "All operations . . . will be conducted with propriety, dignity, decorum and respect and care to avoid undue publicity and to ensure the public is not offended or disturbed."