



**MONASTERY MEMORIES:** Omata man Reg Mace, with a Heritage Trail sign which has been erected to pinpoint an historic Koru Rd, Oakura, site where a Roman Catholic monastery used to stand. The monastery is believed to be the first in New Zealand. Mr Mace's grandparents and parents once lived in the old monastery. Photo: ADRIAN MALLOCH.

## New plaque marks monastery site

By **ROCHELLE WEST**

AN HISTORIC Oakura site which is thought to have been where New Zealand's first Roman Catholic monastery was built has been pinpointed with an official Heritage Trail sign.

The special plaque was erected at the Koru Rd property, north-east of Oakura, on Saturday.

About 50 people gathered on Koru Rd to witness the unveiling of the plaque which would teach visitors the area's historical significance, Okato and District Historical Society

co-ordinator Nola Corbett said.

The Koru monastery, which was destroyed by fire in 1915, was established in 1869 by Roman Catholic priest and Marist brother Jean-Baptiste Rolland as the first Catholic school for boys in Taranaki, and a monastery-type home.

Its main aim was to house bachelor and widower Irish ex-militia men in the hope of converting them to Marist lay brothers.

Closed in about 1874, it was burnt to the ground while being used as a farmhouse by the Mace family.

Eight confirmed bodies, believed to

be local early settlers, were still buried in unmarked graves somewhere on the property, Mrs Corbett said.

The Okato and District Historical Society, which had been established for only two years, organised the erection of the plaque to identify the property where the monastery once stood.

"A lot of people do not know this (the monastery site) is here. It is a unique site for Taranaki," Mrs Corbett said.

The Taranaki branch of the Historic Places Trust and Rotary Club of New Plymouth West helped with funds for the project.