

Manresa

A Pickering sanctuary from the hurlyburly world

By JOE HORNYAK
PICKERING - In 1976, something in the neighbourhood of 3,000 men and women from all walks of life and faiths will enter the Manresa Jesuit Spiritual Renewal Centre. They will be at the centre from three to 30 days and they will all be there to find some time for some prayer and reflection.

"We accept everyone. Young and old, sisters and priests, men and women from all faiths," says Father Jim Farrell.

Among those groups which have sent retreatants in the past are Alcoholics Anonymous, university students and even police officers.

Many of those who come to Manresa are referred and in their time there, they are given talks on spiritual matters based on the works of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit

The Jesuit order got its beginning in 1533 when Loyola wrote his spiritual exercises in a cave at Manresa, Spain. From that beginning the followers of the Jesuit faith have trail-blazed their way all over the world and have played a historic part in history everywhere they have gone.

In Canada, for example, every school child is taught the story of Father Brebeuf and Lamont and their deaths at the hands of the Iroquois Indians.

Today in Canada there are over 350 English speaking Jesuits who work here and in places like India and Zambia.

According to Father Farrell at Manresa only one-quarter of the Jesuits are still in missionary work as other endeavours such as education have gained top priority.

The retreat in Pickering first opened its doors in 1949.

Prior to that, retreats were held at various locations in Toronto and even at the Martyrs Shrine in Midland.

Then in 1946, a retreat was set up in Erindale but

the demand grew so much that it was necessary to find a new spot and Pickering was the choice.

The property which was chosen was an 107-acre site which had a main house with 18 rooms, a second building with ten rooms, a seven-car garage, a bungalow and a dog kennel.

The property was first bought around 1910 by three English lords - Lord and Lady Hyde, Lord Sommers-Cox and Lord Sommers. However, with the outbreak of war, they returned to England and in 1920 the land was bought by a Mr. Victor Ross who then sold it to its last owner before the Jesuits, a Mr. Brian Newkirk.

The last vestiges of English nobility owning the property, were some trees which had been marked as planted by nobility who had visited the site, which have now disappeared.

Today Manresa boasts a lounge, a dining room, a chapel, and a 65-room hall for the retreatants.

However, in 1970, a debt of \$95,013 forced Father James Fleming to sell 70 acres to the Metro Toronto Conservation Authority for \$130,000 to pay off the debt.

Father Fleming was one of the guiding lights in the Manresa retreat. He had been involved with it from the beginning and with the sale of the land had looked forward to working with the retreats with no cares about the physical plant.

However, in January of 1973 he died and the thousands of people who remembered him came forward and, with the work of the Men of Manresa, the Fleming Memorial Fund was launched to perpetuate his memory. In addition, the main building—the centre of retreat activity, was dedicated to his memory and named Fleming Hall.

Donations, however, form the base for the retreat's income. Retreatants do not pay a fee and can if they wish

make a donation. The centre does rent out its facilities to organizations such as GM who would like to hold seminars but those who are on retreat are under no obligation.

The centre does have other sources of funds. One retreatant, John A. Tanti, sponsors the annual dinner which helps the retreat.

The Men of Manresa operate the Fleming Memorial Fund which serves as an investment for the centre and the Twelve Apostles Club is a group which provides monthly donations in return for a share in the masses and apostolic work on Manresa. In fact, all the money for the purchase of the Pickering site came from donations from the laity.

There are six full time Jesuits who work at Manresa. They are involved in the leading of the retreats in their spiritual exercises and one handles all the maintenance.

Planning for the retreat is done through a weekly Sodality which meets under the guidance of Father Royden Devlin. They not only meet for spiritual motivation but also to discuss the retreat apostolate and they are primarily responsible for the retreats and Father Farrell says that they are the vitality of the retreat movement and the state of the facilities at Manresa.

About 50 percent of the retreats at Manresa return for a second visit.

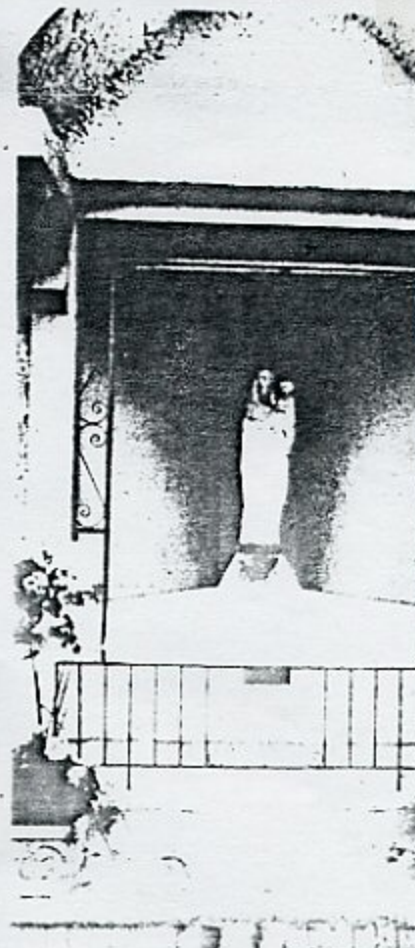
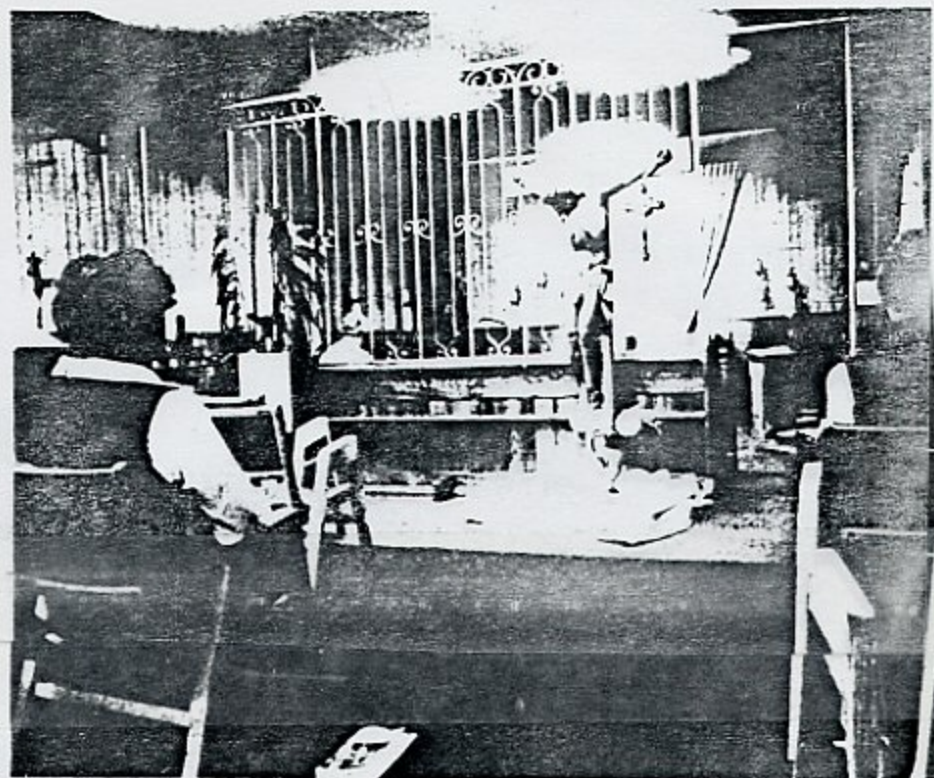
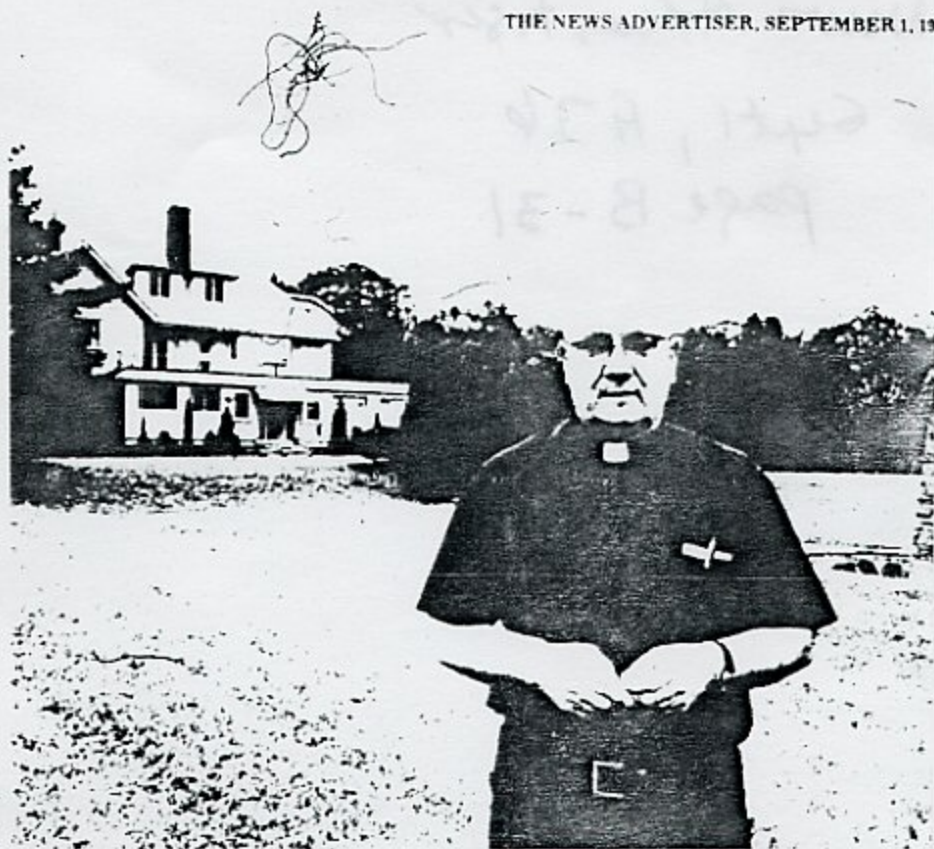
"These are people who have found solace here once and return again," says Father Farrell.

Some leave and never return again.

And some even return to tell Father Farrell that they have decided to become Jesuits based on their experiences at the retreat.

"We don't have many of those but we've had a few," he says.

"But I suppose the most gratifying thing is that we get the feeling that we are helping people. That's all we can ask for," he adds.



photos by Jim Pizzell

TOP: Father James Farrell of Manresa has been with the centre since 1966. CENTRE: The chapel at Manresa provides a place for retreats to indulge in some quiet prayer. BOTTOM LEFT: The Cross is one of the plaques around Manresa which preach the words of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit faith. BOTTOM RIGHT: One of the many religious figurines around Manresa.