

Town native recalls Stouffville past

By Sheila McLeod
STOUFFVILLE—At the beginning of the century, these 'Old Contemplables', the maples of O'Brien Ave., were slim young sentinels. Uniform and erect, they stood before the substantial homes of some of Stouffville's most prominent citizens and lined the road in impeccable formation.

The Avenue, narrow, unpaved and cupped in thick grass embankments, carried the imprint of hoof and carriage wheel. It's north end, as it does today, keyed with Main Street commerce; at the south, the route diffused to a rural setting and the Elias Hoover farm.

From her Testavilla apartment on Albert St., Eva Hoover can look across at the familiar fields of her family's former farm. It's an amusing commentary on the area's changing facade that as a girl, she could gaze from the farm to where the apartments are now and see the old Stouffville Vinegar Works (later, the Goldfish Factory), where her father trundled apples for processing.

Born and raised in the farmhouse built by her grandfather in 1855, Miss Hoover, as a young scholar, walked the length of the Avenue countless times.

In those days, all

paths of learning led to the four-room Summitview Public School, an aging structure later razed by fire, which stood behind the site of the present building.

James Hand, a stern Scottish Presbyterian, presided over classes which began in the Lord's Prayer and a bible reading. Students were never allowed to sing because singing was considered a waste of time. Mr. Hand's idea of fun was a brisk spelling contest.

The east end of Stouffville, liberally laced with taverns in the early days, had earned the name "Brimstone Point". The Queens Hotel (Kamp's store) was still operating when Miss Hoover first attended school.

Just east of Hudson Florist was a favorite store with the ladies of the village. In an age when no one was considered "dressed" without a hat, Mrs. Fred Wilson's Millinery did a flourishing trade.

"There was always a special day when she showed her spring and summer collections," recalls Miss Hoover. "She had two or three assistants who helped to make the hats and trim them with feathers, artificial flowers and fruit.

They were real creations." The market was at the present post office location. On Thursdays the influx of farmers, a large percentage Pennsylvania 'Dutch' settlers, was referred to by the locals at the "Dutch Picnic."

A youngster, on her way home from school might not stop to store-gaze if it was wintertime and the toboggan slide, built at the east side of the park groundstand, was freshly flooded and ready for action. The stores, in any case, could wait. They stayed open as long as there were customers, sometimes past midnight.

In winter too, over at the Maple Leaf Arena, off Mill St., there was skating two evenings a week. Members of Stouffville's Brass Band played at these sessions and few will argue with Miss Hoover that "there was nothing like skating to the music of the band."

The same band played on Saturday evenings in summer on the Main Street, almost opposite O'Brien. "I remember that old bandstand well," Miss Hoover reminisces. "Saturday was the big night in Stouffville. The band played and everyone came to town to shop, chat and listen to the music. A popular shop with the young people on

these occasions was Dave Forsyth's Ice Cream Parlor where you could get a dish of ice cream and a small serving of cake for five cents."

Those were the days when Stouffville was a "Liberal hotbed".

Political rallies, so spirited that only the King, forced protagonists to a standstill, provided entertainment for the young folk as well as their parents.

Ratcliff Hall (south-east corner of Market and Main) was the centre of indoor entertainment. "The Bellringers" was a favorite touring troupe and concerts featuring local talent were plentiful and popular. The

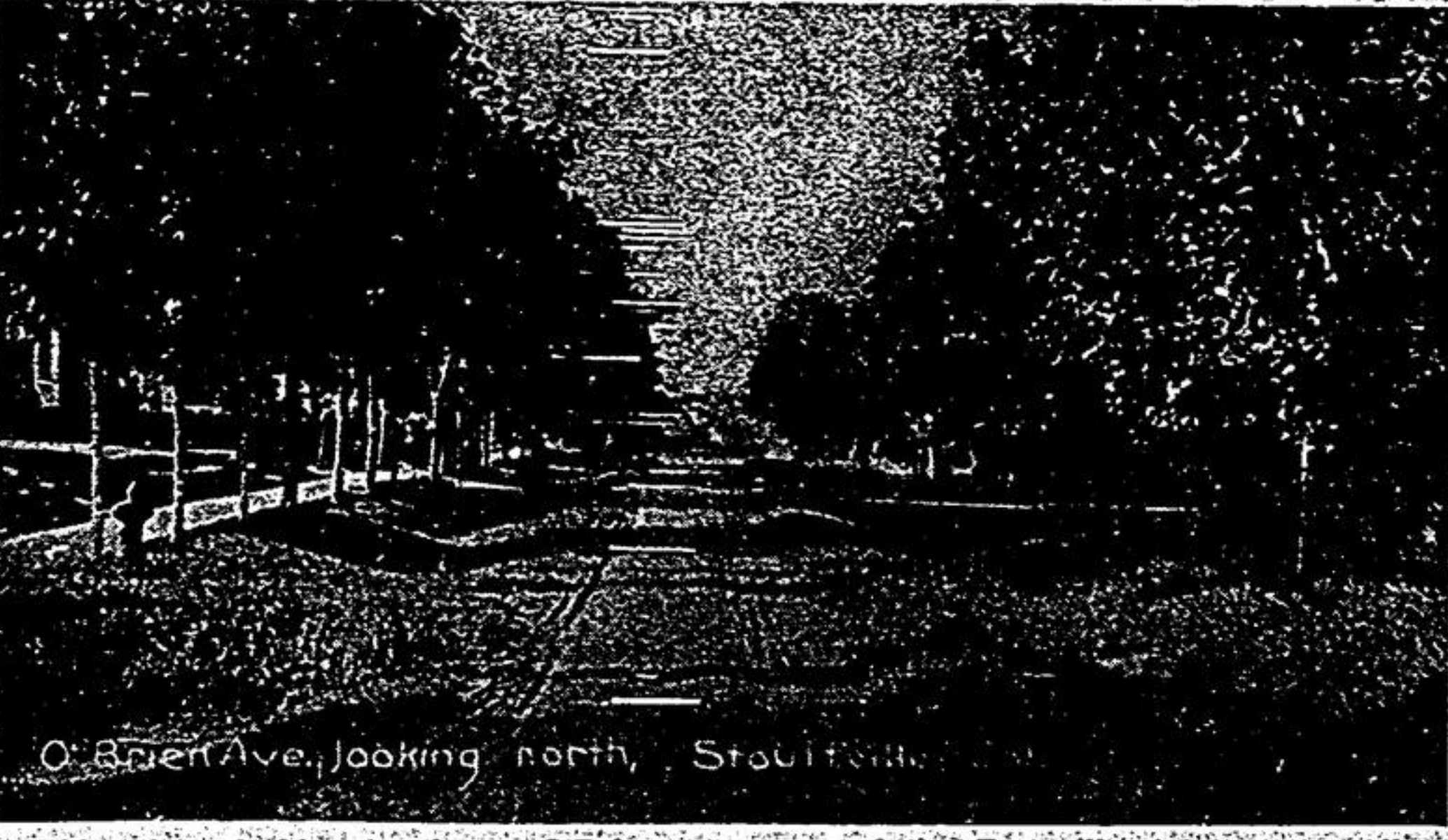
Chitauqua touring company, whose entertainment theme was supposed to be educational, came to town about the same time as the first "movies". It held its performances in a large tent pitched in the park.

The blaze of candle-watts illuminating today's park diamond would have sapped the resources of Stouffville's Electric Light Company (Smith's Welding). The plant supplied fitful electrical power to a village still predominantly served by other forms of light energy. When the plant closed down at midnight, so did the electricity.

New and more powerful services have strung a network of lines across Stouffville over the intervening years, bringing modernization, mechanization, and the city to within 30 seconds of local phones.

Many who remember the earlier years, like Miss Hoover, will regret that the spirit of community dissipates with the growth of a small village; that landmarks, trees and 'pockets of greenery' that once softened its features insidiously disappear.

Over on O'Brien, where the maples have grown old and worldly, the aura of the past remains.



This view, looking north on O'Brien Avenue, was familiar to folks who once lived on this tree-lined Stouffville street. One such former resident is Eva Hoover, now of the Testavilla Apartments, Albert Street South. She vividly recalls the Stouffville of yesteryears in a Tribune feature by Sheila McLeod.

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Still no service

Everytime I am sitting in a traffic jam on the Don Valley Parkway and gaze upon the almost invariably empty railway lines, I boil. Why can't these rights-of-way be used to carry people? Why don't Ottawa and Queen's Park stop fiddling with technical excuses or futuristic dreams and make our existing public transportation systems work?

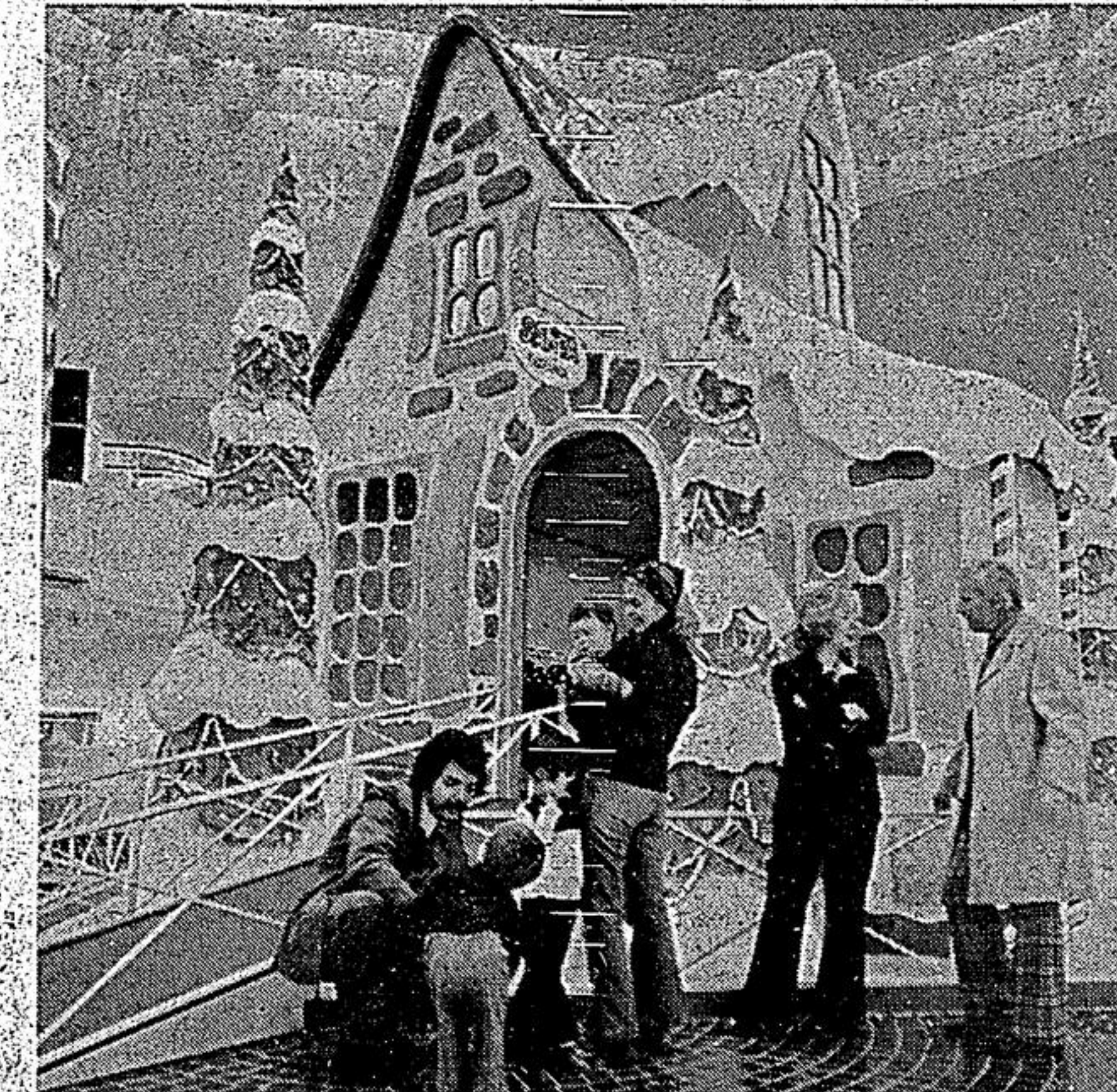
Until Ottawa takes over the ownership of rail rights-of-way, and stations and operates and improves them as it does airports and waterways,

we shall never have good competitive passenger and freight service. The CP and CN will still be able to monopolize these invaluable and irreplaceable rights of way granted them a century ago to serve the public. Until Queen's Park stops diverting public attention by spending millions on fancy new concepts and concentrates on fully integrating and utilizing existing systems, we shall never get people out of cars and using public transit.

One would think that with the energy crisis facing us today, our political leaders in Ot-

tawa would stop wasting time with the CNR and CPR regarding better passenger service and logical freight rates and open up the rail rights-of-way to competition from those who can offer better value and service.

One would also think that the energy shortage would persuade Premier Davis to add his voice to that of the Western Premiers pressing for such action instead of spending his government's resources on futuristic systems. These systems might make sense after we are making full use of what we now have available.



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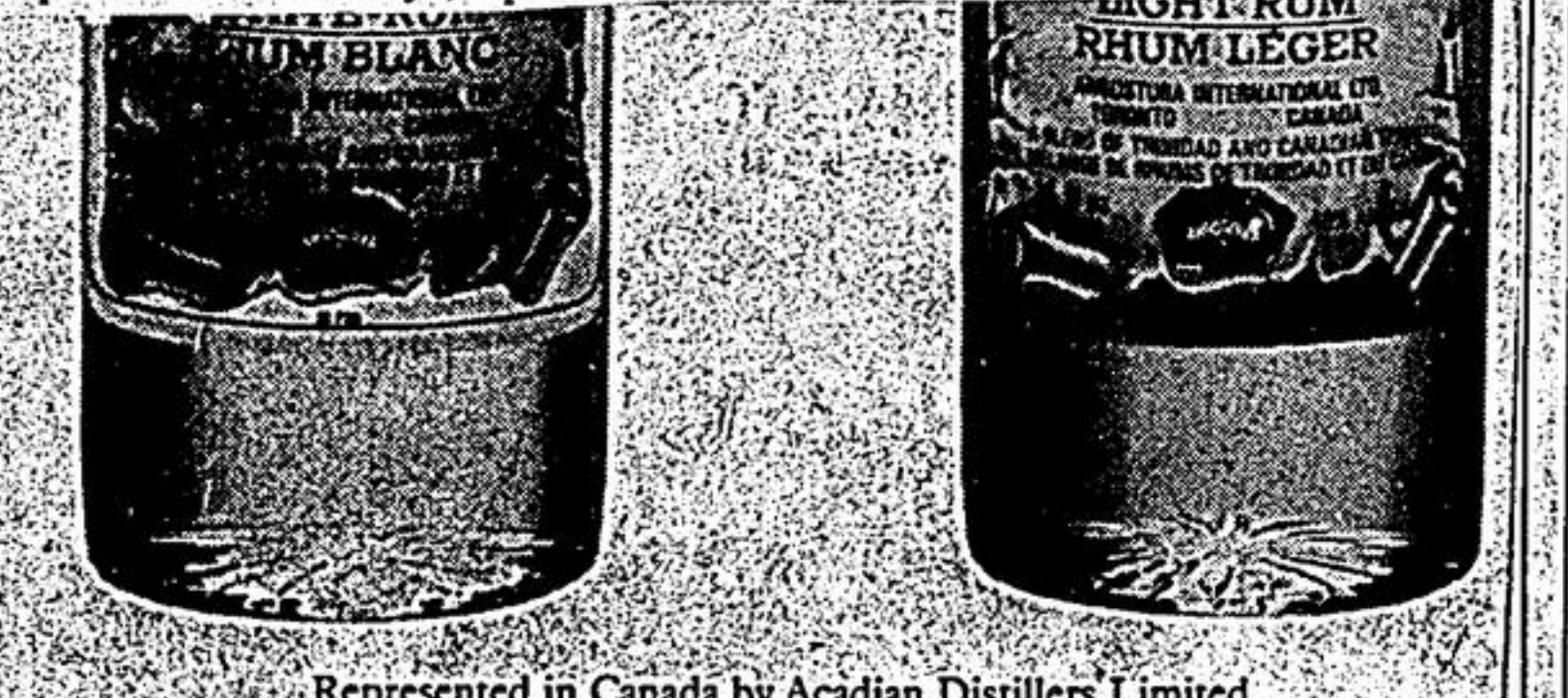


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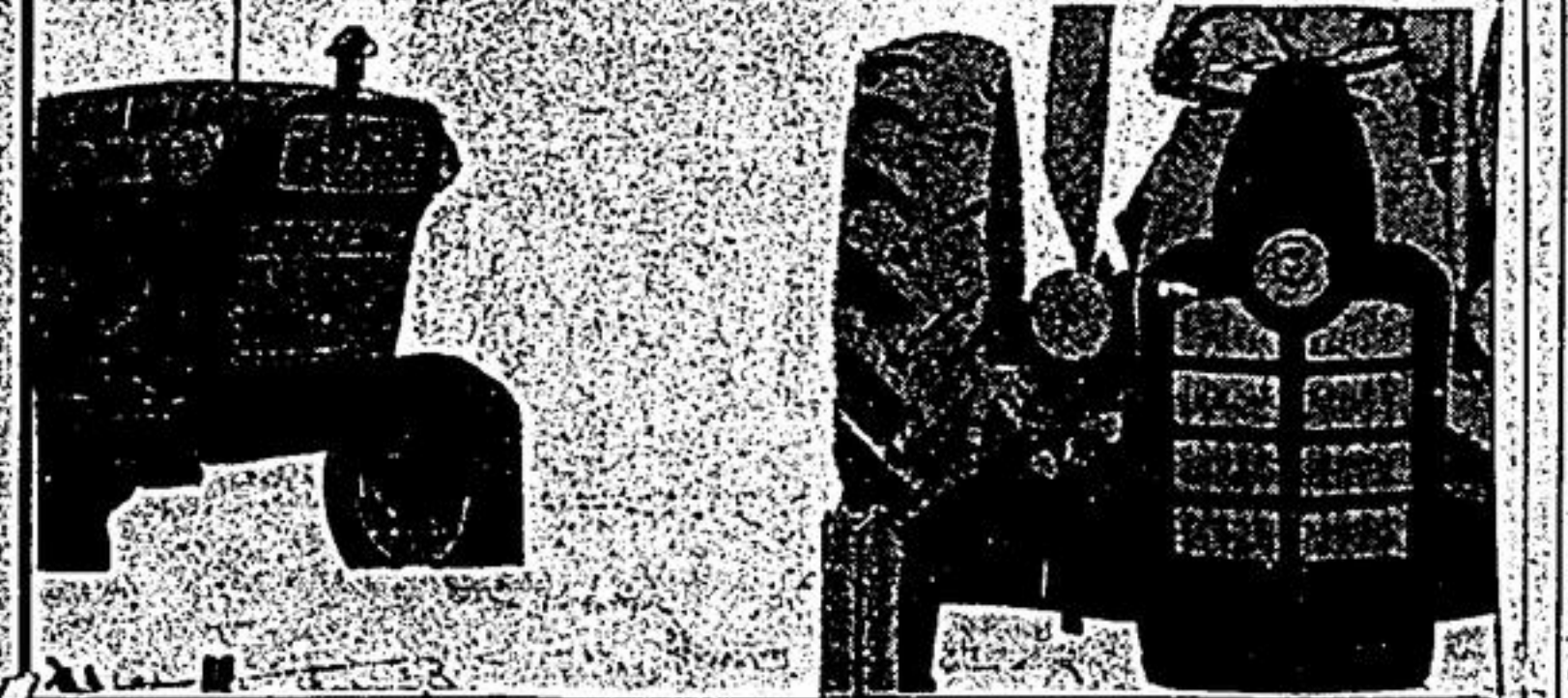
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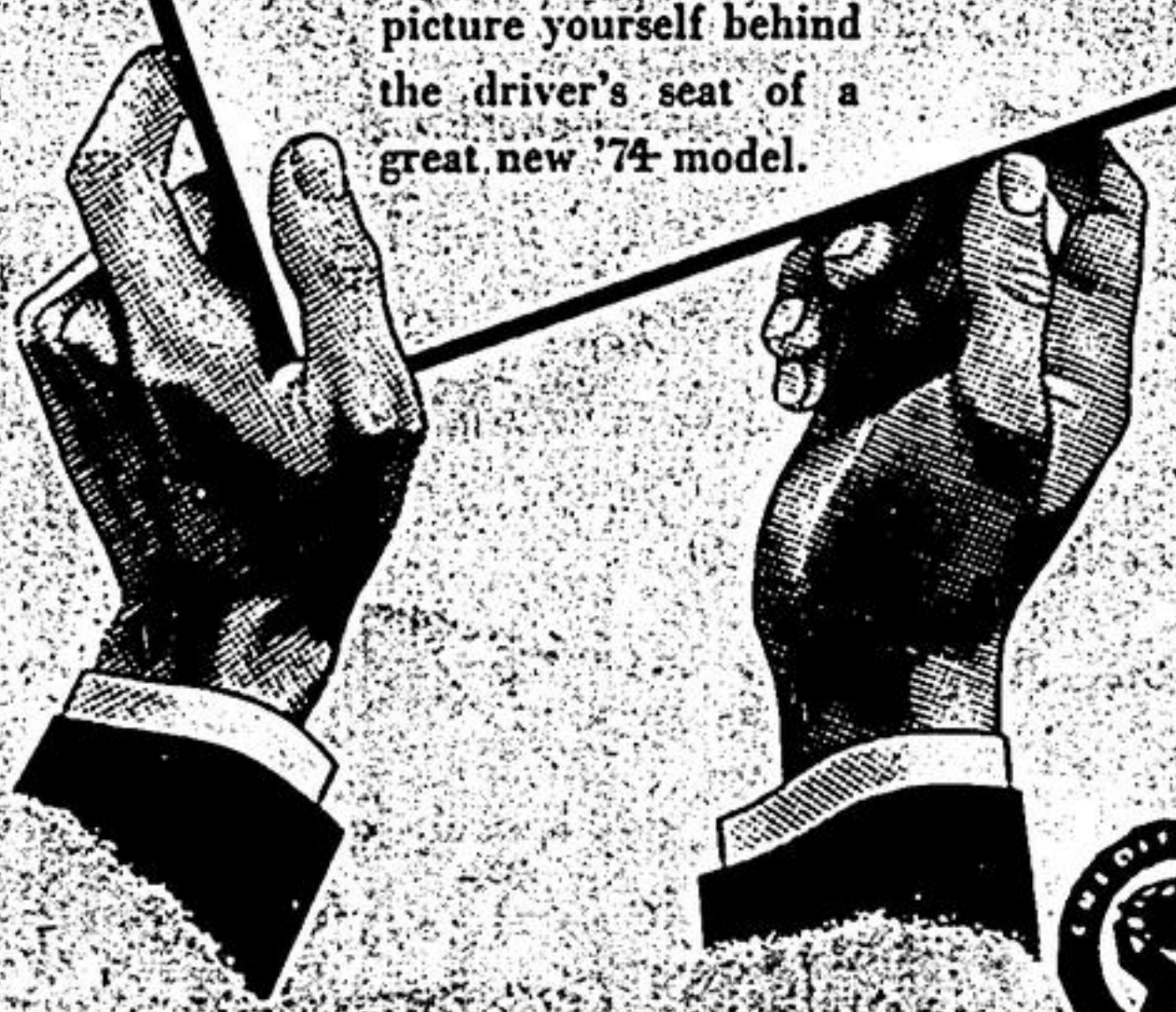


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