

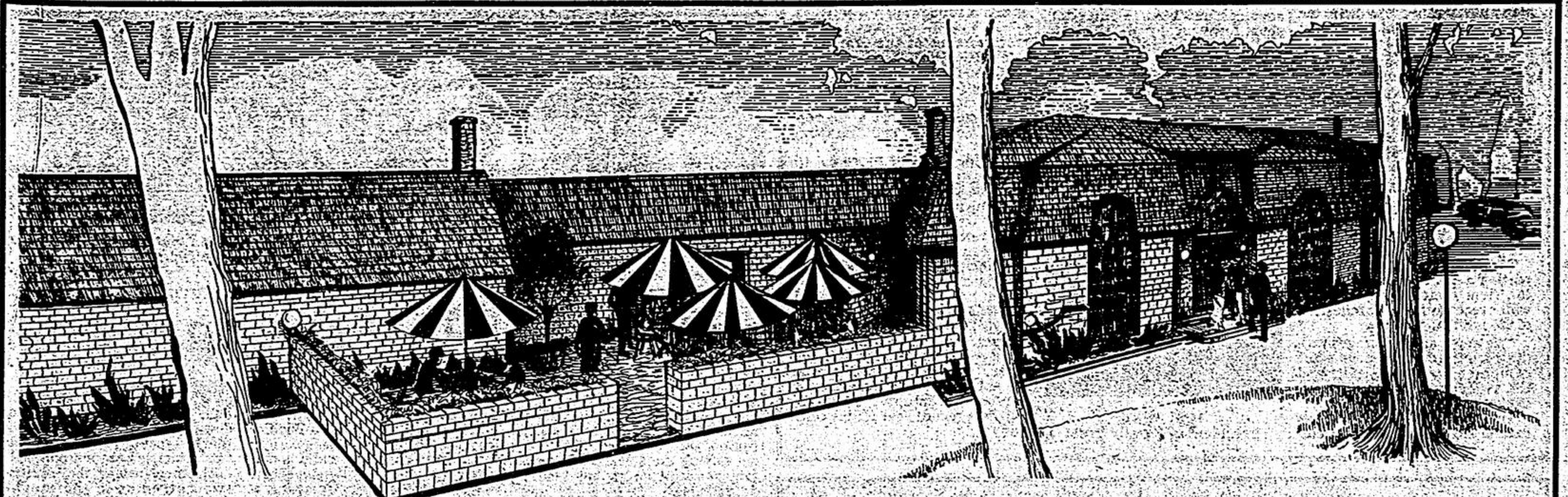
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Deer Park Inn expands

Dinner theatre comes to Stouffville

By DON ATANOSOFF
News Editor

Eric Farrell, owner and operator of the Deer Park Inn just outside of Stouffville has a bone to pick with Tourism Ontario.

Mr. Farrell feels his dining establishment should have been declared a "tourist attraction" a long time ago. Now that he is expanding his operations, he's even more convinced that the people who dole out the dollars for Tourism Ontario are discriminating against him.

"I'm really angry with the government because it says we are not a tourist attraction," said Mr. Farrell. "We brought in 180 buses two years ago and had to cut back somewhat because we couldn't handle them all."

"The government feels we are not in a tourist area so they won't provide any loans. I'm not asking for a handout, just loans at the same rate that other tourist operators receive."

Despite having to finance the expansion of his facility in other ways, it hasn't put a crimp in his plans to make the Deer Park Inn more than just a fine restaurant.

Already under construction is a new dinner theatre which Mr. Farrell hopes to have operational by September. In fact, Bill Austin, lounge manager at Deer Park, already has booked in his opening acts.

"We're going with the theme the 'British Are Coming' and we've booked four west-end London groups," said Mr. Austin.

"We're not looking at any one type of act either," he continued. "We'll have drama, comedy and variety type shows."

Mr. Austin added that the new dinner theatre might not always be used in that capacity. He's looking to book conventions, auto shows, commercial displays, seminars, etc. "Whatever the market will stand," he said.

Also included in the expansion will be a wedding chapel and an outdoor courtyard. The chapel will allow people already using the Deer Park Inn for a reception to conduct the entire day at the one location. The courtyard will make an attractive setting for lunches during the summer.

The new chapel will be a replica of an old-country church that was used for weddings before the turn of

the century. It will be furnished with some antiques and other period pieces to give it an authentic look.

"We already purchased antique pews," beamed Mr. Farrell. "We bought them from St. Simon's Church in West Hill."

The Phase II operation will add 7,000 sq. ft. to the 8,000 sq. ft. dining area and entertainment lounge currently occupy. But doubling the size of the operation won't be any obstacle to Farrell, he's solved many a problem since he first purchased the land on Hwy 47 north of Stouffville in 1970.

After overcoming many initial hassles including a land freeze for the then proposed Pickering Airport, Mr. Farrell finally obtained a building permit in 1974. But the delay cost him money.

Had he been able to build in 1970, the total price of dining and entertainment lounge would have been in the neighborhood of \$180,000. By the time all of the red tape had been cut and the Deer Park Inn opened for business in 1976, the price had risen to over \$250,000.

One of the reasons the price was kept at the quarter-million mark, however, was the cost of labor. Mr. Farrell didn't have to worry about strikes. He,

his wife, brother and father, drew up the plans, purchased the necessities, then built the place themselves.

Although they did not complete all of the technical end of the construction like the wiring and the plumbing, Mr. Farrell had a hand in the installation right up to the final connections. "It's amazing what you can do when you're back to the wall and there's no way out," he recalled.

The same determination that went into the initial phase of the Deer Park Inn has now carried over into Phase II. One might think that because the dining room and entertainment lounge became such a success, that contractors would have been hired for Phase II. Not so.

Once again, Eric Farrell, his family, friends and many of his employees have put their efforts in building the new portion of the complex.

If all goes well in his new undertaking, a Phase III calling for a hotel on the property may be undertaken. No one, least of all anyone at the Deer Park Inn, will be surprised to see Eric Farrell out there laying the foundation, slapping down the mortar, and laying the bricks for a new hotel.

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