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BUSINESS WEEK

June 26, 1965

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The play's the thing . . .

Since it opened its Shakespearean Festival, Stratford, Ont., has attracted new, growing industry

First-time visitors to Stratford, Ont., the city Shakespeare helped rebuild, may get an initial feeling of relaxation from its tree-lined streets and relatively unhurried air. The relaxation, however, is only on the surface. For in the dozen years since Stratford opened its Shakespearean Festival with a production of Richard III, it has been caught up in a drama of economic rejuvenation that has reached into every aspect of its life.

In 1953, Stratford had a turn-of-the-century flavor. Today, a part of that still exists in the Victorian-style architecture of its park-like residential areas and in some of its major buildings. However, the telephone lines that used to slice through the air are now underground, and other changes have taken place.

Wherefore art thou, Romeo? Since the festival first opened (its 13th season began last week), 32 new industries have come to the city. Situated mostly in two industrial parks at Stratford's southwest and east edges (the latter named, appropriately enough, the Romeo Industrial Area), these industries now employ 3,000 of Stratford's total industrial work force of 4,700.

Sixty percent of these jobs didn't exist in pre-festival years. And now, according to Stratford's industrial commissioner Frank Goddard, unemployment is only 2.1%. This despite the fact that the city's population has risen from 14,500 in 1954 to 22,100 this year. Stratford, once 79th in per capita take-home pay, is now 35th.

Every man has business. In addition to industry—which is diversified—the festival itself has become an appreciable force in Stratford's economy. Each year, 100,000 tourists visit Stratford, leaving \$5-million behind. And Victor C. Polley, the festival's administrative director, estimates that 80% of its \$850,000 annual payroll stays in the city.

None of this was in sight the year before the festival started. The Ca-

nadian National Railways had just announced plans to phase out its 1,500-employee Stratford car shops, which then had 1,500 employees.

Then Tom Patterson, a Stratford-born Toronto newspaperman, proposed his dream of building a major Shakespearean festival. Industry, perhaps borrowing the bard's thought that, "This weighty business will not brook delay" (Henry VI), asked for a part.

The first theater was only a tent. But by 1956, construction had started on the modern Elizabethan showcase that now stands on a rise in 125-acre Queen's Park, near the downtown district. By 1957, the festival's fifth season, the \$2-million structure was ready. Since then, alterations have brought its seating capacity of 2,258.

Ornament of beauty . . . The park stretches along both sides of the Avon River, on the city's eastern end, and is a traditional spot for picnicking among Stratford regulars. The river has been widened along about half of its course through the city proper, and forms a long, narrow lake upon which swans preen.

Throughout all the bustle, business and theater have remained intertwined. The influx of new industry—and the flow continues—made possible the sound development of accommodations needed so badly for theatergoers. There are hundreds of motel units that were nonexistent 10 years ago, and new ones are constantly being added.

The city itself has not missed its cue. The numerous mid-Victorian houses with their white Colonial porches are sparkling. The downtown streets—such as broad Ontario Street, which has modern, low-lying shops with sedate window displays—have been spruced up. There are benches beneath the trees, signs are barred from protruding over the sidewalks, and off-street parking has made it easier to find a metered spot.