

The town Art built

From the land for Markham Stouffville Hospital to the gallery and community centres bearing his name, Stouffville's Art Latcham left a legacy of giving

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

Arthur Latcham, whose good actions live on after him in Stouffville, really appreciated a good audience.

But that's when he was being a magician. He was a little quieter about his role as philanthropist.

And his interest in magic led to the organization of a magic festival that put Stouffville on the map in the early 1980s.

From about the 1950s, Mr. Latcham's generosity led to the building of the Latcham Gallery and Latcham Hall, the town's outdoor pool, the tennis courts and main ball diamond in Memorial Park. He put in the bleachers and the first outdoor lighting at the diamond, his friend Ted Cadieux recalls.

It was the early 1950s and ball players, such as Mr. Cadieux, were there to appreciate the difference the lights made.

Mr. Cadieux operated a photography business on Main Street for many years.

The pool was the only one in town for around a half century until an indoor pool was built in the Lebovic Leisure Centre in 2001.

Mr. Latcham was also instrumental in building the picnic shelter in Memorial Park, which has since been replaced by the Lions Club and others in the community.

Mr. Cadieux would later become one of the administrators of the Art Latcham

Foundation, along with Wes Clarke and Mr. Latcham, through which many donations were made until a number of years after Mr. Latcham's death in 1979.

There's another connection between the Cadieux and Latcham families, as well.

Mr. Cadieux's mother-in-law, Laura Hutchinson, was an in-law to Art Latcham's mother, also a Hutchinson.

"He was just an unbelievable human being with common sense," Mr. Cadieux said. Mr. Latcham married Elaine, who had two sons, Robert and Larry.

While he never dressed "swanky", Mr. Cadieux recalled Mr. Latcham liked to drive Cadillacs and smoke a pipe and cigars.

SLEIGHT OF HAND

"He was very good at sleight of hand," Harry Schell, former president of Schell Lumber, said.

Mr. Latcham wanted the audience right around him.

On-the-spot magic was his forte. He wouldn't separate himself from his audience by going on stage.

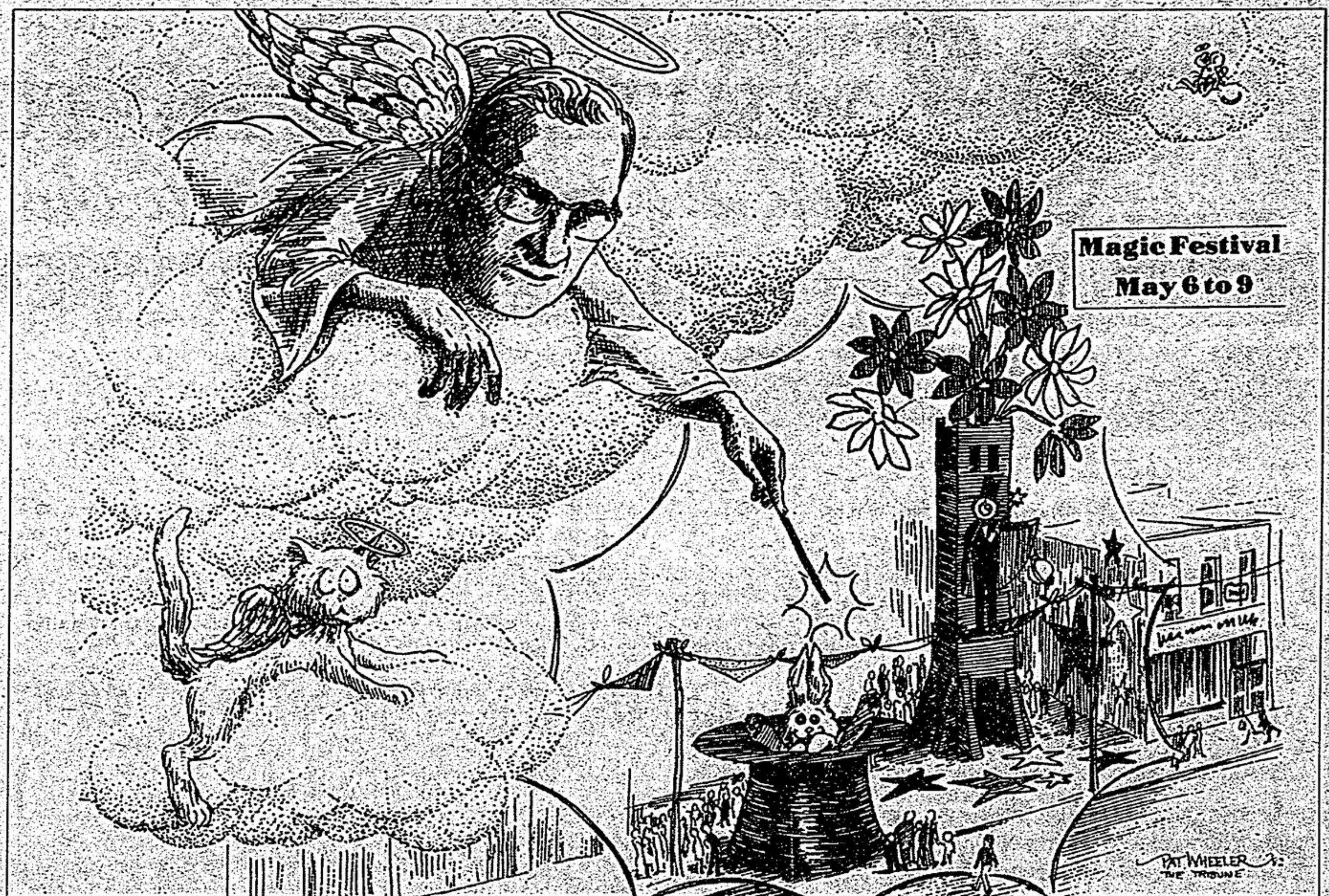
Mr. Latcham purchased a good deal of lumber at Schell Lumber for many of his projects, which include Latcham Halls in Port Perry and Zephyr.

Mr. Latcham also donated halls other communities.

In Stouffville, he funded and oversaw the entire building process for Latcham Hall. As an honorary member of the Stouffville Lions Club, he made many of his donations through that organization.

"He was very involved with the Lions Club," Joe Cote, past president of the Stouffville Club, said.

He donated buildings and facilities that could be used by seniors to play cards or hold other activities and for



children and young adults to engage in sports.

Mr. Schell described Mr. Latcham as more as a man of action rather than a talker.

He lived in Stouffville from around 1950 until he died, almost 30 years later.

In 1972, the town honoured Mr. Latcham's generosity by declaring Dominion Day Art Latcham Day.

He was also awarded the Order of Canada and the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal.

Mr. Latcham certainly didn't start out rich.

He was born April 8, 1895 in the farming community of Glasgow in Uxbridge Township a few minutes east of Stouffville. He had four sisters and two brothers.

He worked on a neighbour's farm when he left school and homesteaded in Saskatchewan.

The long, dark Prairie nights were an ideal time to practise and re-practise sleight-of-hand tricks with coins and cards.

He joined the army at the start of the First World War and trained with 10th Canadian Mounted Rifles. He spent four years in France until he was wounded in 1918.

His skills in buying real estate soon became evident after he moved to Toronto.

He began amassing his fortune through land purchases and acquisition of golf courses, such as Meadowbrook, Rolling Hills and what's now Bushwood Golf Club.

"He was quite the entrepreneur," Mr. Cote said.

He had the foresight to purchase 50 acres at Hwy. 7 and Ninth Line.

He donated the land, which later became the site of Markham Stouffville Hospital.

The hospital recently created the Latcham Society of

donors willing money to its foundation.

He also funded the 1973 trip of the Stouffville bantam hockey team to Switzerland. Future NHLer Keith Acton was on that team.

Not all the money was used by the club. There was interest generated by those funds, which grew to \$1,100.

This money was used to defray an upcoming trip by the Stouffville Clippers major bantam team to the Czech Republic and Austria for a series of exhibition games.

"I hope the town doesn't forget him," Mr. Schell said. "He has done a lot for Stouffville and the community around."

A festival in Latcham's honour

The first magic festival was organized throughout Stouffville from May 6 to 9, 1982 in honour of Mr. Latcham, who was a member of the prestigious magicians' association, the Hat and Rabbit Club.

Magic was done on the street by conjurers, jugglers, mimes, escape artists and clowns.

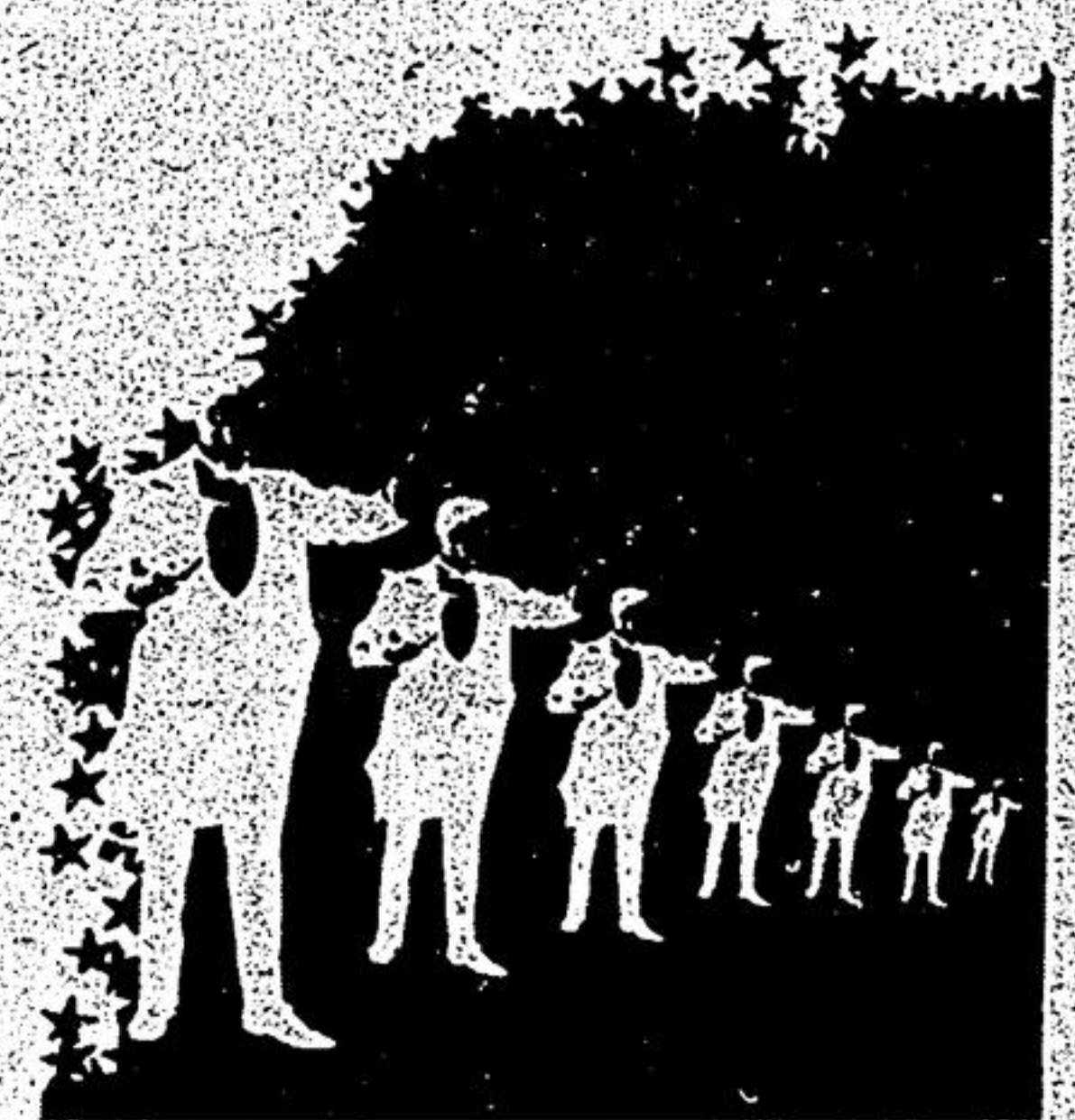
It was organized by the town's librarian George Schlukbier, who felt such an event would help counteract the publicity Stouffville was getting at the time for its dump at Hwy. 48 and Bloomington Road and bad water.

Mr. Schlukbier asked for funding from the Latcham Foundation to establish a rare magic book collection in the library. The Art Latcham Magic Collection was dedicated during the first magic festival on May 9, 1982. The festival only ran for a few more years afterwards.

Former local magician Dave Houston, who was known as the Shakespeare of Magic, called Mr. Latcham his mentor. He recalled how Mr. Latcham would walk around some of the golf courses he owned with a deck of cards or doing sleight-of-hand for golfers.

— Hannelore Volpe

THE STOUFFVILLE
MAGIC FESTIVAL



Poster promoting festival held in Stouffville in honour of local magician Art Latcham in the early 1980s.

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