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Belleville Marine Yards Ltd. (2)

When the late Ontario Premier John P. Robarts, (1961-71), retired out of the political spotlight in 1971, his Conservative party members thought he deserved nothing less than a gift with a "made in Belleville" tag on it.

With much ceremony, the Conservatives presented Robarts a new, 31-foot fibreglass type sailing craft. At the time, it was listed at \$16,400, fitted and rigged with an extra \$5,000.

The boat was a Corvette Class yacht manufactured at the Belleville Marine Yards Ltd., a boat building company owned and operated for six years in the mid-'60s and early '70s by Ian Morch on the Dundas Street West property, where the Harbour Club and the Morch Marine are located today.

In 1939, the Morch family acquired the property that was already steeped in boat building history since the time the Atalanta was built in the late summer of 1881. This ship put Belleville on the map when it sailed out of the Belleville harbour to New York to contend for the prestigious America's Cup.

Built at a cost of \$2,100 at the time, the Atalanta was 70-foot structure and had a mast made of a single pine log cut from a hundred-foot tree. The Atalanta was the first and only challenger for the America's Cup to arrive in New York entirely via fresh water. Owned and designed by Capt. Alexander Cuthbert and partially financed by Senator Billa Flint, the Atalanta became one of the largest ships of her kind to sail the Great Lakes. Although she failed to win the America's Cup, she went on to win the Fisher Cup twice at a later date.

Decades later in 1966, the property's historic boat building legacy reappeared with the formation of Morch's company. It became the only one in the Eastern Ontario region to produce fibreglass yachts — a new concept in the local area at the time.

Ian Morch, who was already

operating Morch Manufacturing making tools and dyes and aircraft parts on the same property at the same time, said it was a combination of his interest in sailing, boat designs and the time he spent in the navy during the Second World War that led him into this other business of boat building.

The fibreglass boats manufactured at Belleville Marine Yards averaged at \$12,000 base price tag. Built inside the buildings that still exist on the property today — one of them currently houses the Harbour Club — they were fitted with aluminum mast, stainless steel rigging with comfortable living quarters for four.

The Belleville Marine Yards Ltd. launched the first Corvette yacht in June of that very first year of operation. Rapid production turned out the 29th by mid-September of 1966.

"The corvettes were the smallest ones among the sailing crafts that we produced here. We built 167 of these crafts. The next one up was a 36-foot frigate class followed by a 40-foot crusader," explained Morch. Prior to his company's production, boats that sailed on the