

Tule Lady

TULE LADY

Visitors coming aboard Tule Lady at boat shows frequently ask "Is it a Stephens?" The reply that the boat is a LaBruzzi and not a Stephens usually results in a puzzled look and requires further explanation.

Dominico LaBruzzi was born in Palermo, Sicily on January 4, 1897 and one of the many Italian émigrés who arrived in San Francisco in the era joining the 19th and 20th centuries. A significant number of these immigrants were fishermen or in a related nautical profession. LaBruzzi was a builder of boats and established a boat works on Fishermans Wharf at 278 Jefferson. This site is adjacent to the Castagnola Restaurant and in 2019 was the mooring location of the sport fishing boats *Wacky Jacky* and *Silver Fox*.

This photograph of the LaBrussi boat works is from the website of Leasha LaBruzzi who is a Greatgranddaughter of Dominico.



The timing of LaBruzzi's arrival was fortuitous since he became the builder of the largest number of Monterey Clippers that replaced the traditional felucas in the 1930s. The boats in the photograph are Monterey Clippers that were built by LaBruzzi and the adjacent boat shop.

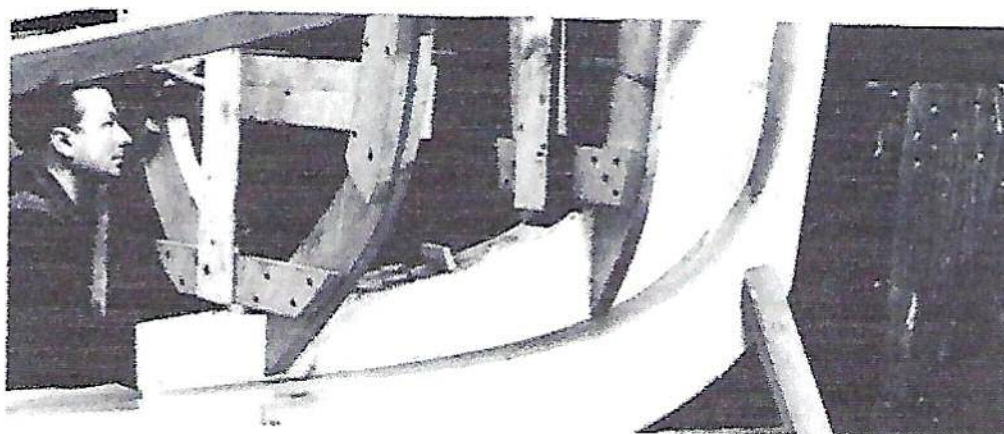
A Labruzzi Monterey Clipper is in the San Francisco Maritime Museum and is on display near the Hyde Street Pier.



This photograph was taken in 2019 from the same position as the upper one.

This photograph is of Dominic LaBruzzi working in the bow of what appears to be a Monterey Clipper.

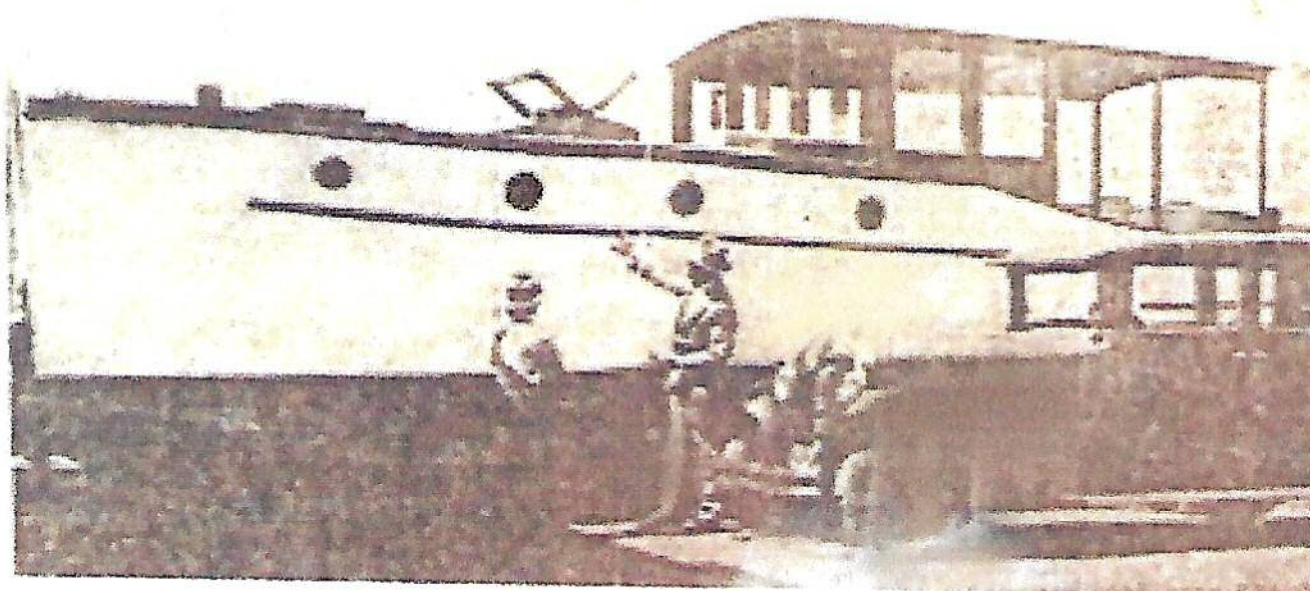
The picture is from the website of his greatgranddaughter Leasha LaBruzzi.



Walter Reubold was a nurseryman who appreciated quality. He was the owner of a Hupmobile of which he had the highest praise. He enjoyed boating and fishing so on the basis of LaBruzzi's reputation commissioned him to build a boat.

The August 7, 1927 issue of the San Francisco Chronicle included an article reporting completion of the boat's construction. The article contained a photograph of LaBruzzi, Reubold, Reubold's Hupmobile and the boat that was christened *Sunset*.

Sunset was a raised deck cabin cruiser 34 feet in length with a beam of 9 feet 6 inches. Her steam bent oak frames were planked with 1 & 1/8 inch Port Orford cedar and she was "powered by a gasoline engine complete with a self starter and generator".



This is the Chronicle photograph of August 7, 1927.

Lawrence "Larry" LaBruzzi (1924-2008) stated that his father only built 5 cruiser type boats and *Sunset* was the first.

Reubold's widow related in a letter dated Aug.18, 1979 that *Sunset* was used for cruising and deep sea fishing even as far offshore as the Farallon Islands. The necessity to care for his growing family in the darkest years of modern economic history probably was responsible for him selling the boat in 1931-1933.

Very little information could be learned about the craft in the years immediately following the sale other than the boat was renamed *Ewen* in 1933 and *Robert K* in 1941. The owner of *Robert K* apparently was from Marin since the boat was kept on the canal in San Rafael. *Robert K* became *Tule Lady* in 1955 and there are indications that she was berthed at the Corinthian Yacht Club.

In 1968 the boat was acquired by a Thomas Poston (not believed to be the comedic actor Tom Poston) and renamed *Little Bug*. Sometime during the ensuing 4 years it was moved to Oyster Point Marina in South San Francisco.

John Randall Anderson was a 22-year-old Maritime Academy student and part-time shoe salesman. He was a habitué of the Oyster Point Marina docks and was checking out the watercraft of "F" dock one day when he noticed *Little Bug*. In his own words this is what he saw. "She was a literal derelict. Half of the pilothouse missing and the rest propped up with plywood scraps crudely nailed in place. The port gunwale was missing and the entire rear cockpit was sagging on the verge of collapse. I could see the empty engine stringers and rusted out fuel tanks through the voids. A plank was missing on her port side and through a hole in the deck I could see inside. The interior was painted gloss fire engine red with flat black trim. She was a real mess. A floating hippie flophouse. But there was magic in the air. Her magnificent bow caught my eye even though her delicate bronze cutwater was partially missing. Her classic pedigree was apparent."

John borrowed \$750 and bought the wreck from a Steve Mattes on August 25, 1972. When stripping the interior he found a spare key marked "Tule Lady" which brought an immediate end to the name *Little Bug*. John saved *Tule Lady* from the wrecking yard with borrowed tools and a dedication bordering on fanaticism. His professional quality work was done with no formal training and using only his part-time salary for funds. *Tule Lady* attended the 1974 Opening Day on the Bay and shortly later was granted membership in the Classic Yacht Assn.

John continued to work on *Tule Lady* for 10 more years. His search for period equipment and hardware were rewarded by the finds of a magnificent brass searchlight, a two-burner kerosene cook stove and a kerosene hot water heater that required the installation of its own tiny smokestack. An autopilot utilizing a photocell mounted on a "floating" compass that controlled the boat's heading with the accuracy of a gps instrument of today and several tiny gimbaled kerosene lamps were other finds that enhanced the period of the craft.

The boat was moved to a covered berth at Garvie's San Rafael Yacht Harbor in 1978 and shortly afterwards the hull was painted black. The boat was instantly identifiable in the San Francisco Bay and Delta area by its unique hull color.



From the day of her acceptance by the CYA *Tule Lady* was at every San Francisco Bay nautical event and CYA function. The former \$750 derelict became the flagship of the Classic Yacht Assn. when John became National Commodore in 1986.

The vagaries and complexities of life forced John to part with his beloved *Tule Lady* in 1987 and she was sold to John and Cathy Curran from Carmel. It appears that the Currans were so taken by the boat that they neglected to consider the time necessary to drive from their home to the boat in San Rafael so their ownership was brief.

The new owner made several changes to the interior in complete conflict with the tasteful period elegance created by John Anderson. The most obvious was replacement of the tile in the galley by two sheets of stainless steel. Crudely formed strips of stainless steel were also nailed as step nosing on the two interior ladders. The alterations were not structural so the craft was basically in good condition when it was sold to Gloria Sams. Sams lived aboard in Sausalito and *Tule Lady* only left the slip for demonstrations. It was again advertised for sale and purchased by the current owners Jim and Carol Staley in July 1991.

Tule Lady was returned to her familiar slip in the San Rafael Yacht Harbor where she resides today. Standard maintenance has been supplemented by a complete refastening of planks from keel to rail. The faithful 75 HP Isuzu engine installed by Anderson in 1973 was destroyed as a result of an undetected oil leak in 2013 and replaced by an identical engine.

Engine access was through two trapdoors serving as the wheelhouse deck. The two doors were replaced by a single hatch consisting of a compass rose made of inlaid wood. The hatch was custom-made in Italy and installed with the help of Larry LaBruzzi. Larry also built cabinets in the galley and replaced a section of the port rail that had been cracked for years. Appearance of the craft was enhanced by resurfacing entire main deck and wheelhouse roof.



The Staleys have greatly enjoyed their 28 years with *Tule Lady* and have made every effort to keep her at the level of quality established by John Anderson.

Their time with the boat is coming to an end however since Jim will be 90 in September. They would enjoy showing *Tule Lady* to anyone interested in the possibility of acquiring this legacy of the Classic Yacht Association.

