

JOHN MUSSO - TIBURON'S BAKER

By Dave Gotz

"The best cream puffs in the Bay Area are made in a tiny shop called Musso's French Pastry in Tiburon," so said Herb Caen in his famous column in the San Francisco Chronicle in January 1947. Perhaps one of the most loved merchants in the history of Tiburon was this diminutive Italian immigrant who produced marvelous baked goods on Main Street for over 25 years.

The son of a winemaker, Giovanni (John) Musso was born in Torino, Italy in 1893. At age 19 he came to America, the only one in his family to do so. He made his first visit to Tiburon in 1913 looking for work and found it in the Northwestern Pacific Railroad foundry. Later he helped lay tracks through the redwoods near Willits. After a year of hard physical labor, he returned to the Bay Area to begin his career as a pastry chef.

For the next 16 years he worked at the Golden Pheasant, one of San Francisco's most elegant restaurants, known for its candies and pastries. In his first few years in the city, Musso struck up a friendship with fellow Italian and future movie star Rudolf Valentino who was working as a busboy at the Cliff House; he and John roomed in the same hotel. Valentino unsuccessfully tried to start his show biz career in San Francisco but moved to Salt Lake City where he was "discovered." Musso never saw him again but always enjoyed talking about how they would go to the dance halls on Broadway Street.

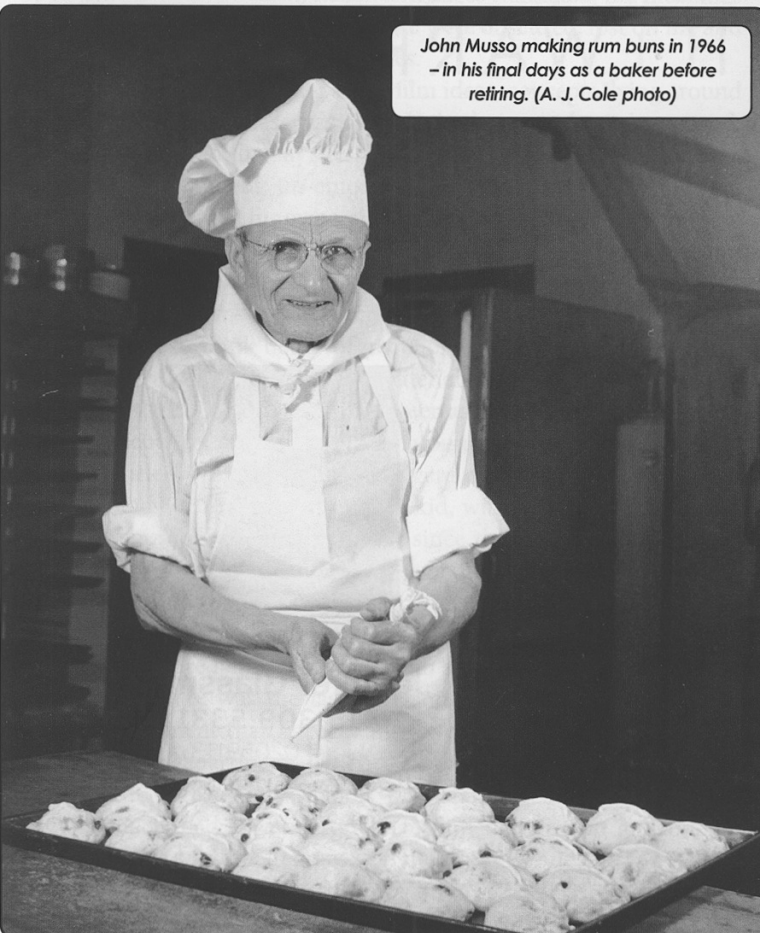
Musso went on to be a pastry chef at the Fairmont, Palace, St. Francis and Plaza hotels and the Olympic Club in San Francisco; and at the Hotel Senator in Sacramento. In 1940, he opened his own business, Musso's French Pastry, also known as Maison Musso Bakery at

15 Main St. in the old McDonogh/McNeil building, at the time known as the Corner Market (where Way Point Pizza is now). Among his early customers was Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower who was briefly based in Marin as an advisor at Hamilton Air Force Base. Eisenhower would come to Tiburon a couple times a week in his chauffeur driven car to buy donuts from John.

He was able to buy the corner property at Main St. and Tiburon Blvd. in 1944 and built his bakery there, opening in 1945. Musso's became known throughout the Bay Area for the fine pastries, wedding cakes, donuts and particularly John's rum buns, made with a generous amount of rum. In 1963, he rebuilt his corner store with the two story wood structure which remains there today. John took up residence upstairs and wound down his business, retiring in 1966. He remained a presence in the community in retirement, continuing his involvement with local organizations and being feted for his long life, which ended at the age of 92 in 1985.

John Musso was a fiercely patriotic man, proud to live in America (almost every photo of him there is a flag nearby), a land where even a working man such as he could save enough to buy property and prosper. Accordingly he gave back to his community. He was a founding member of the Tiburon Fire Dept. and served as volunteer fireman, a charter member of the Landmarks Society and Tiburon Recreation Center (now the TPC), and active in the Chamber of Commerce.

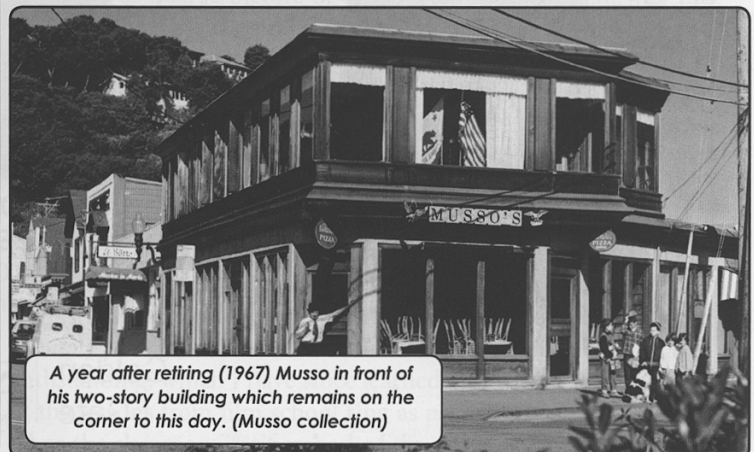
Please help the Landmarks Society to preserve our local history and keep it accessible to the community; visit our website at www.landmarkssociety.com or call 415-435-1853.



John Musso making rum buns in 1966 – in his final days as a baker before retiring. (A. J. Cole photo)



The earliest photo of Musso (1943) outside his first pastry shop at 15 Main St. with an unknown little girl.



A year after retiring (1967) Musso in front of his two-story building which remains on the corner to this day. (Musso collection)