

The Gunmakers Tour

We called it “The Gunmakers Tour,” as three generations of Potterfields made the trip “across the pond” to Hamburg, in northern Germany, then south – via rental car and train across the Swiss Alps – and on to Brescia, Italy – visiting four of the premier gunmakers of the world, along the way. As a bonus, we also visited the Mauser Museum in Oberndorf, Germany, and the Creative Art engraving studio in Brescia, Italy – The Gunmakers Tour!

After a short, but comfortable overnight flight from Chicago to Heathrow airport, in London, we were on to Hamburg, Germany, arriving mid-afternoon. Our hotel was only a block from the Hartmann and Weiss shop. After breakfast the next day, we simply walked there – and spent the morning. Mr. Gerhard Hartman and Mr. Otto Weiss organized their company in 1965, after training in Germany, England, and Switzerland; they’ve been making exquisite shotguns and rifles, ever since. Today, with the help of a very small group of craftsmen, they make a few rifles and shotguns each year, almost entirely by hand.

Driving south, we stopped for a picture in the small village of Battenfeld, Germany - ancestral home of our first known family member, Johannes Battenfeld – born there in 1688. (Note: our line of Battenfelds became Potterfield, in Virginia about 1770.) Then, farther south to Michelbach, where Johannes Battenfeld was living in the spring of 1750, when he left for America. The church where he was married and all his children were baptized, is still standing – though it’s been remodeled many times.

We continued to the town of Oberndorf and a quick tour of the Mauser Museum. It was here the Mauser brothers developed and built many of the famous Mauser bolt action rifles. Driving on, we crossed the border into Switzerland. Then up and over the alps into Italy, on the Bernina Express, thought to be one of the most scenic train rides in the world.

Brescia, Italy, has many gunmakers, the largest being Beretta. We visited only three, Fabbri, Piotti, and Rizzini. Creative Art, a small company that specializes in engraving, was also on our list, as they were to do the engraving on my pair of 12 bore Fabbri. It’s well accepted in the industry that Fabbri is the most advanced gunmaker in the world, in terms of design, materials and quality of manufacturing, an unbelievable experience. Great place to end the Gunmakers Tour.