

Martin Luther (der 10. November 1483—der 2. Februar 1546)

Wartburg Festung bei Eisenach / Wartburg Fortress

Facelift for the Wartburg

One of Germany's most celebrated medieval castles is being restored in time for the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth.

A lot of German history is bound up in the 800-year-old Wartburg, which is considered one of the finest medieval castles in Germany. It commands a hill, rising 1200 feet above the Thuringian Forest, outside Eisenach in the German Democratic Republic.

- It had as merry a medieval court as Europe ever produced, drawing minnesingers and poets from far and wide, including Walter von der Vogelweide. It was the scene of poetry contests, where the minstrels sang of noble lords and lovely ladies. One of these contests was immortalized by Richard Wagner in his opera *Tannhäuser*.

- Martin Luther took refuge there following the Diet of Worms, and it was there that he translated the New Testament from Greek with a fluid style that became the basis for modern German.

- It figures prominently in the history of the German student societies (*Burschenschaften*). A meeting there in 1817 so upset the rulers that the societies were banned for a period.

- The predecessor of the Social Democratic Party, senior member of today's ruling coalition in Bonn, was founded at a meeting there in 1869.

- The name "Wartburg" has been given to an automobile that the German Democratic Republic manufactures at Eisenach.

For all its fame, the Wartburg has suffered in recent years. Wind, rain, ice and the traces of millions of visitors have left the building somewhat the worse for wear. The centuries-old ceiling beams have so suffered from the ravages of insects and mold that they need a long soaking in a bath of artificial resin.

Officials have announced a major restoration effort. Masons, painters and restorers are now at work there, with most of the efforts concentrated on the inside. Much work is being done on the elegant Romanesque palace of the former Thuringian margraves, especially in the banquet hall, with its richly ornamented ceiling.

The purpose of all this activity is to have the castle ready for the celebration in 1983 marking the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth. Luther's stay there was clearly the biggest event in the castle's history. The leader of the Reformation had just made his celebrated appearance at Worms in 1521 where the princes of the Holy Roman Empire had demanded that he retract writings critical of the Popes and councils. He refused to do so: "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me!"

