

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

Finding Luther: On the Reformer's Trail

derway on the village streets near the Lutherhaus in Mansfeld when he was called in to supervise the work. It was then he found, under the pavement, what is described as a cellar of the old house. Along with it, he discovered a pit containing thousands of small artifacts from the Luther family.

It was determined that the Luther family did not live in just one house, but in fact in a spacious estate with residential buildings, stables, and storage buildings. The excavations in Mansfeld initiated further research at the Luther House in Wittenberg where more excavations in the rear of the building were begun and continue even now. Luther lived here with his wife, Katharina, and his children, after 1525.

The newly-excavated finds are of great historical significance and have far-reaching implications. They include:

- Multi-colored tiles from Luther's residence in Wittenberg which were part of a heating stove. Two tiles found show the biblical Eve, along with an apple and the skull of Adam, as well as an unidentified person in princely dress (Frederick the Wise?). A dated fragment of the oven shows it was made in 1536—exactly the time Luther renovated the main room (Lutherstube) of the former monastery.
- Luther's childhood marbles? Maybe. Made simply of clay by hand, and probably heated in a kitchen fire, marbles were found in the excavations, along with a toy whistle in the form of a bird. The bird was filled with water through a small hole that could then generate warbling, bird-like noises.
- It has been established that the Luthers were well-to-do, and thus iron keys and padlocks, which likely secured chests or doors, were found in the diggings.
- Many window shards were found around the Mansfeld house. Because the Luther family received their income from the copper mines and mills in the area, they could afford window glass, but glass-makers of the period could not produce glass panes to cover whole windows. Thus, larger panes were made from small round panes and, with small lead bars, they were pieced together.
- Luther's mother's thimble perhaps, was found, and it is perfectly preserved. The metal to make it was poured into a mold, and then small holes were punched into the surface—every hole aligned spirally by hand. It is a work of high quality.
- Found, too, was a portion of an Aachenhorn, used on a pilgrimage to the sanctuaries of Aachen and Cornelimunster in the Rhineland. This artifact suggests a member of the Luther family traveled about three hundred miles and returned to prove his faith, or perhaps to buy an indulgence for a personal or family-related sin.
- A number of nails were also discovered—but they were not nails Luther used to hold up the 95 Theses. With short shanks, they were likely used as reinforcements for wooden shutters or chests, or they may have been left in wood the Luther family used for their kitchen fire, and then were disposed of along with the ashes.
- Large pins were dug up that were used to hold a woman's headdress, or to straighten clothing. In the pit, twenty-six complete and thirty-four fragments of these pins were found.



The Luther Memorial that stands on Wittenberg's Market Square.



Dr. Bjorn Schlenker, lead archaeologist on the Luther project, and Imes Vahlhaus, master of arts for the Pre-History Museum, hold a piece of pottery found at the Lutherhaus site in Mansfeld. These pieces were later cemented together to provide clues of how the Luther family lived.



Another musical toy found in the diggings was this clay bird, which when filled with water, makes a bird-like noise.