

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

Martin Luther came this way.

Yet it is Wittenberg, a feisty university town since the days of Frederick the Wise, that has never stopped proudly stating its claim as “Cradle of the Reformation.” Its name is officially Lutherstadt Wittenberg, and here he received his doctor’s degree; lived and taught for nearly forty years. Luther’s House (Lutherhaus, Collegianstrasse 54), the Augustinian Monastery where he resided with his family after its religious dissolution, contains Lutherhalle, the world’s largest museum of Reformation history. The Museum was opened in 1883 and renovated in 2003. Among other things it contains the pulpit he used and an old ironbound box with a slit in the top. Here, a jingle supposedly recited by a salvation-selling monk from Rome tells it all:

*“As soon as the coin in the coffer rings
The soul from purgatory springs.”*

For Luther, Doctor of Theology and Professor at the University of Wittenberg, this cash register of the Middle Ages represented all that needed changing in the Roman Church. To Luther, this money box for the Indulgences was,

in effect, the metaphorical last straw.

The pulpit formerly stood in the Parish Church of St. Mary where he was married and where the four-paneled Reformation altar in the Choir Room is attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472 to 1553), onetime mayor of the town.

Under the Communists, noxious factories lined the Elbe, and Wittenberg was called “Chemical-town,” but, to no one’s surprise, the name never caught on. Even as the Wall was coming down in Berlin and officials of the GDR were trying to fade away across the east, Lutherstadt Wittenberg was back.

On College Street, an oak tree marks the spot where Luther burned the papal bull that condemned him for the capital crime of heresy. The distance between the Palace Church and Luther House is now called the “Cultural Mile.”

As Wittenberg became Lutherstadt

For more information:

German National Tourist Office

Telephone: 212-661-7200

Website: www.cometogermany.com

Wittenberg, Eisleben is now Lutherstadt Eisleben and Mansfeld is Mansfeld-Lutherstadt. All are UNESCO World Heritage Sites today, and Saxony-Anhalt has adopted the subtitle “Luther’s Country” for its tourist promotions.

His commitment meant nearly constant traveling throughout central Germany. It was not an easy life, but he never hesitated to go where he was needed or to speak the doctrine to his people.

In the cold winter of 1546, Luther’s health was failing when he returned to Eisleben to settle a feud between two Protestant Counts of Mansfeld, and he contracted pneumonia in a snowstorm on the way. Desperately ill, he still preached four sermons in St. Andrew’s Church (Andreaskirche) though too weak to finish the final sermon (based on Matthew 11:25-30). He returned to his rooms across the street (Andreaskirchplatz 7) and died the next day.

The Sterbehaus where he died was restored and opened in 1894 as a memorial. It contains the pall that covered his coffin and one of the last letters he wrote to his wife. His funeral took place in Andreaskirche.

His body was returned to Wittenberg where he was buried in the Castle Church, later to be joined by his friend, the Greek scholar and reformer Philipp Melancthon (1497 to 1560). Statues of the two men stand in front of the High Renaissance Town Hall. Simple bronze plaques mark their graves.

In 1933, a “Luther Jahre,” was called to celebrate the four hundred fiftieth anniversary of his birth. The Nazis stopped this tribute to the Protestant Reformation, but in Halle, the University, founded in 1694 and united with Wittenberg (1502) in 1817, quietly changed its name to Martin Luther University.

Your own “Luther Jahre” will be whenever you come.



Wittenberg's Market Square, the historical Town Hall, and the towers of St. Mary's Church.

Wittenberg, Martin Luther University