

5-3-2018

A German History Experience

Rachel Walters

Harding University, rwalter2@harding.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/tenor>

 Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Walters, Rachel (2018) "A German History Experience," *Tenor of Our Times*: Vol. 7, Article 13.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/tenor/vol7/iss1/13>

This Special Report is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Humanities at Scholar Works at Harding. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tenor of Our Times by an authorized editor of Scholar Works at Harding. For more information, please contact scholarworks@harding.edu.



HARDING
UNIVERSITY

A GERMAN HISTORY EXPERIENCE

By: Rachel Walters

The Martin Luther hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” took on a new meaning for me while in Germany last summer. As a group of us climbed up the forested path to Wartburg castle, we saw firsthand the enormous castle that became a source of solitude and inspiration for Luther. Situated at the top of a hill overlooking the town of Eisenach below, this “mighty fortress” made it easy to imagine that this castle could have been the inspiration behind his well-known hymn. Instances like this when history comes alive and provides a new perspective, demonstrate how beneficial studying abroad is to developing a deeper and richer understanding of history.

In the summer of 2017, Harding’s History and Political Science Department offered two classes in Germany, through the help of several departments and the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. Dr. John Richard Duke, who spent several years teaching in Mainz, travelled to Germany with four students for a month. He co-taught a History and Literature class with a professor from the university in Mainz. This class gave us the opportunity to immerse ourselves into the German culture by experiencing a German university. The focus of this class was Southern women in American history and literature as we explored works by Kate Chopin and readings on Anne Scott that demonstrate the influence of women in the South. Dr. Duke also taught another class on War and Religion in Germany. This class involved traveling all over Germany, and parts of Poland, to see this history in person. We read and reviewed Martin Marty’s *Martin Luther: A Life*, as well as Dr. McLarty’s book choice for the campus this year, *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom. We used these books as our guide across Germany as we sought to bring what we read to life. These different yet complementary classes gave us a unique experience of Germany that allowed us to better understand her history and develop connections with German students while discussing our cultures from different perspectives.

The 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 Theses gave us the opportunity to find Luther nearly everywhere we went. Many times that was our purpose as we visited Eisenach, where Luther was secretly held at Wartburg castle, then on to Wittenberg to see where he nailed the Theses, and later to Worms where Luther was put on trial and refused to recant his writings against the church. As we travelled to these sites of major events in Luther's life, we were able to experience his life outside of the pages of a book and see the impact he had on Germany.

We immersed ourselves in the Cold War when we spent a day in Berlin. Going through the Checkpoint Charlie museum and seeing the remains of the Berlin Wall really made the Cold War a much more tangible piece of history. The remains of the wall scattered throughout the city leave a sobering reminder of the recent past. The Cold War is not the only history preserved in Berlin as there is a whole island devoted to museums, not to mention the Reichstag where you can climb inside the dome while learning the fascinating history of the building and get an amazing view of the city.

We visited Ravensbrück concentration camp where Corrie ten Boom and her sister were held. Not much remains of this camp which is much smaller than Dachau where we visited later. Both of these sites were powerful places of suffering and remembrance.

Our Cold War studies brought us to the shipyards of Gdansk, Poland where the Solidarity Movement was born. The Second World War was also present on our trip to Poland as we visited the site of the first shots of the war at Westerplatte. Poland was a real treat to experience and to learn more about her fascinating history.

Throughout our trip, we were given many opportunities to engage with the people in Germany. Our class through the university in Mainz gave us the opportunity to feel like students of the university as we learned side by side with German students in their classrooms and ate in their cafeterias. We met several people at the church in Wiesbaden, across the Rhine from Mainz, where we were invited to stay at their bible camp, Gemunden, for several days. As we travelled across the country, we worshiped with a church in Leipzig where a few Harding students were interning for the summer. While in Poland, we stayed with a missionary family and were able to meet and worship with their Polish

congregation. By being welcomed in homes and churches, and getting the opportunity to form friendships with these people, we were given a richer experience of the culture of these two countries.

Mainz was our home for the majority of our time in Germany. It has its own rich history as it is the home of Johannes Gutenberg and his creation: the printing press. Staying in Mainz for the majority of our trip, we were well situated to come in contact with some of the most beautiful aspects of Germany. Traveling just a short distance down the Rhine River, which runs alongside Mainz, brought us to a whole host of castles and stunning landscapes. As we travelled throughout this beautiful country and experienced so much of its rich history, I came away with a newfound understanding and appreciation for the people and their homeland.