

Bach Country Today  
Robert L. Marshall and Traute M. Marshall

Abstract:

Over the past few decades many of the most significant developments in academic Bach research fall under the rubrics of Historically Informed Performance and Reception History. Such efforts have properly focused above all on Bach's music. Less noticed, especially in this country, have been related activities carried out literally "on the ground" devoted to the composer's life and physical surroundings. Particularly since the 1989 re-unification of Germany, this dimension of Bach biography has benefited from a vigorous commitment to identify, restore and preserve – in an "historically informed" manner – any extant sites that played a role in the composer's activities.

We provide an overview, a status report of sorts, on the nature of this restoration activity in our recently published account, *Exploring the World of J. S. Bach: A Traveler's Guide*, undertaken at the invitation of the American Bach Society and published under their auspices by the University of Illinois Press. We survey in all 51 towns where the composer lived or is known (or presumed) to have visited as a performer, organ expert, or on family matters.

Our talk will draw attention to some of the more noteworthy projects that have been carried out in the heart of what we call "Bach Country" (namely, the former East German states of Thuringia, Saxony, and Saxony–Anhalt) to recapture, preserve, and make available the material traces of Bach's life. We will outline the several approaches to "Bach reception" reflected in the six current Bach museums, and will consider the public monuments and sculptures that have sought over the past centuries to define and capture, with literal icons, the character of the universal, "iconic," composer.