the entire abolition movement. It also hosted recitals by world-class singers and actors, speeches by figures ranging from Horace Greeley to Ralph Waldo Emerson, three Ingersoll lectures, and two important freethought conventions. Founded in 1892, the hall’s site was covered over in the 1960s by a dreary multistory parking structure, its only memorial an alleylike access road called Corinthian Street. Syracuse’s Winter Opera House had a similar history and an only slightly less shabby end: its location is now the unmarked site of a rather nondescript government building.

Among all the surprises on the Freethought Trail, perhaps the oddest is in the village of Palmyra, New York. There, a historical attraction operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is also a site on the Freethought Trail. (Needless to say, this wasn’t the Mormons’ idea.) The site is the Grandin Print Shop, where Mormon “prophet” Joseph Smith had printed the first edition of the Book of Mormon in 1830. This shop was also engaged by Rochester journalist Abner Cole (better known by his pseudonym, Othadah Dogberry) to print the Palmyra Reflector, a weekly newspaper he then edited. While at the printer’s proofing his paper, Dogberry could peruse pages of the Book of Mormon as they dried across the aisle. Dogberry was a freethinker, and shortly before Smith offered his completed scripture to the public, Dogberry used his paper to publish long quotations from the Book of Mormon and offer pointed criticisms. It was the first published debunking of the Book of Mormon, and its critiques satirize largely hold up today.

2009: AN EPIC YEAR FOR FREETHOUGHT HISTORY

2009 is the 110th anniversary of the death of Robert Green Ingersoll. Despite the economic downturn, it’s also turning out to be a landmark year for the Museum’s mission to preserve and interpret freethought history.

New Orientation Video. Starting in 2009, Ingersoll Museum patrons can begin their visit with an all-new 14½-minute orientation video on widescreen high definition (HD) video. Compared to regular video, HD presents 4.5 times more picture information in every frame, an almost cinematic level of detail. The new video was produced by Ingersoll Museum director Tom Flynn in the Center for Inquiry’s new HD video studio. It features professional narration, stunningly crisp graphics, and dozens of Ingersoll images and artifacts not available when the previous orientation video was produced. Its musical score is based on the 1882 Ingersolia March by composer George Schellfearth (died 1923), whose sheet music was rediscovered in 2003 by RGI admirer Martin Lifschultz. A piano performance by musician Robert Guillory were blended to provide a palette of musical backgrounds for the video’s presentation of Ingersoll’s life and times.

Eva Ingersoll Wakefield Collection. In the fall of 2008, John Alden Whittier and Barbara W. Youngstrom of Connecticut donated a treasure trove of Ingersoll documents, artifacts, and clipping from the collection of Ingersoll granddaughter Eva Ingersoll Wakefield, the editor of Ingersoll’s collected letters. This collection includes many letters to private owners by Eva Parker Ingersoll, Ingersoll’s widow, who passed much of her own Ingersollia collection on to her granddaughter when the latter began to act as the family’s de facto historian. Several of these items, including previously unknown newspaper clippings describing Ingersoll’s funeral, were incorporated into the new museum video. A few go on display for the first time in 2010. The bulk of this sizeable collection will be catalogued and preserved during 2009 in anticipation of a major exhibition at the Museum during the 2010 season.

TRAVELING TO W.E. CENTRAL NEW YORK? Plan to soak up some freethought history Visit the Trail website and use its interactive navigational features for all the information you’ll need.

INKERSOLL THE Newsletter of the Robert Green Ingersoll birthplace Museum and the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee

Rochester, New York, town down one of Victorian America’s most fabulous lecture halls … and put up the crum- my parking structure at the end of this street turned-ale. Shut a tour …

MUSEUM HOURS 2009
The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum will be open at 61 Main St., Dresden, N.Y., from 12 noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day weekend through Hallowe’en (May 23–October 31, 2009). Suggested admission is only $2.00!

IT’S BIGGER THAN THE MUSEUM! Well, not quite, but this 47” widescreen LCD monitor will give Museum visitors an eyeful of the new HD Orientation video. Museum director Tom Flynn tests the new monitor in his office at the Center for Inquiry’s Transnational in Amherst, New York prior to its delivery to the Museum in Dresden. To see the video for yourself, visit http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=ingersoll&page=video. As soon as the video begins to play, click the red HQ icon just below the screen to see it in near-HD quality.

TRAIL EXPANDS
FREETHOUGHT HISTORY

FOR FREETHOUGHT 2009: AN EPIC YEAR FOR
RATHER THAN RARE
An Extraordinary Poster’s Wild Journey
The Virtual Ingersoll Museum, available online in a “beta test” version since 2005, was entirely redesigned and reprogrammed for 2009. Now “live” at www.ingermuseum.org, the Virtual Museum enables the online user to view each room and display item inside the Ingersoll Birthplace Museum. If an artifact or sign catches your interest, click on it—and up comes a close-up image of the item and complete interpretive information. Often the interpretive information displayed online is more complete than space permits in the physical Museum.

Expanded Freethought Trail. Available online since 2005, the Freethought Trail—a guide to freethought and other radical-reform history sites within about 80 miles of the Ingersoll Museum—was also redesigned and expanded. Historical figures added to the site include Frederick Douglass and L. Frank Baum. Extensive additional research has revealed many additional sites, particularly in Rochester and Syracuse, strongly progressive 19th century communities which hosted an enormous number of freethought and radical-reform events (see related story). The National Liberal League and the New York Freethinkers Association, two of the period’s most important freethought organizations, held critically important conventions in Rochester and Syracuse, as well as in the village of Watkins Glen. It’s all online at www.freethought-trail.org.

“After the auction closed, I was able to line up a bit more funding,” Flynn recounted. “I contacted the successful bidder through eBay, asking whether the winner might possibly consider selling us the poster for a bit more than the winning price.” When the winning bidder—Al Szoperek, then of Illinois—realized that he’d been bidding against the Ingersoll Museum, he generously offered to donate the poster. “I genuinely said yes,” said Flynn with a deadpan expression.

The poster announced an unspecifed lecture at an unspecified City Hall on Friday, October 11. (The poster referenced a series of Ingersoll lectures promoted by impresario James Redpath in 1878 and 1879, October 11 fell on a Friday in 1878.) A check of Doug Schiffer’s lifetime itinerary of Ingersoll engagements[1] found no information about this lecture. But it showed that Ingersoll was in Boston on October 10, and that he delivered his lecture “Moses” at Boston’s Music Hall on October 13. “Presumably the October 11 lecture was given at the city hall of some community near Boston, maybe a town like Waltham,” Flynn speculated. But the poster’s journey was only beginning. Its next stop was Cat Tail Run Hand Bookbinding in Winchester, Virginia, where archival artisan Jill Deiss painstakingly cleaned the poster, removed the acid from the paper, and repaired numerous small cracks and tears along its edges. Finally the restored poster was mounted on acid-free archival board stock and framed behind UV-absorbing glass. “This poster was our big out-of-pocket project for the 2009 season, but it was worth it,” Flynn said. “I’ve never seen, or even heard of, a surviving broadsheet for a specific Ingersoll lecture. This artifact is rare as rare can be.”