

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. Razed in 1929, 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 Wieting 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, Obadiah Dogberry) to print the Palmyra *Reflector*, a weekly newspaper he then edited. While at the printer's proofing his paper, Dogberry could also 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 and satire largely hold up today.



Rochester, New York, tore down one of Victorian America's most fabled lecture halls ... and put up the crummy parking structure at the end of this street-turned-alley. Shed a tear ...

Traveling to west-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.

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!

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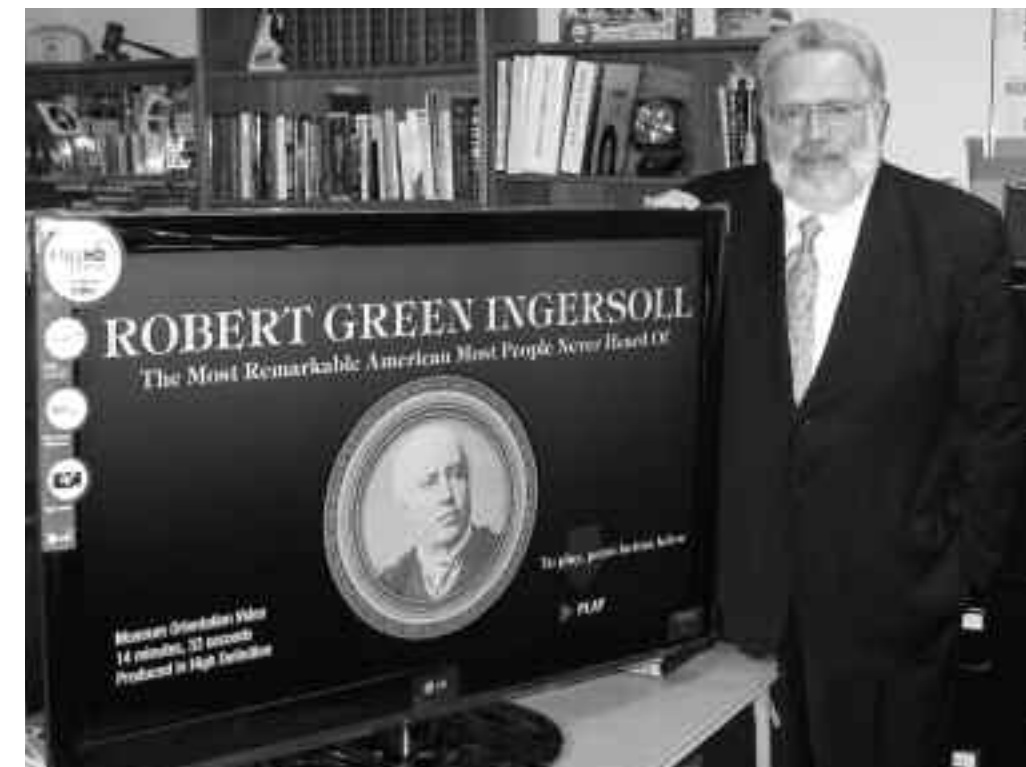
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**2009:
AN EPIC YEAR
FOR FREETHOUGHT
HISTORY**

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 in 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 Schleiffarth (died 1921), whose sheet music was rediscovered in 2003 by RGI admirer Martin Lifschultz. A piano performance by musicologist James Kurtz and an orchestral realization 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 Whritner and Barbara W. Youngstrom of Connecticut donated a treasure trove of Ingersoll documents, artifacts, and clippings from the collection of Ingersoll granddaughter Eva Ingersoll



It's bigger than the museum! Well, not quite, but this 47" widescreen LCD monitor will give Museum visitors an eyeful of the new High Definition orientation video. Museum director Tom Flynn tests the new monitor in his office at the Center for Inquiry / 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.

Wakefield, the editor of Ingersoll's collected letters. This collection includes many hitherto-private items owned 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 2009. 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.

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Rare 1878 Lecture Poster. Also in 2008, the Museum acquired a fabulous rarity: a broadsheet poster on cheap, high-acid paper promoting a specific Ingersoll lecture in 1878. Such posters almost never survive, but somehow this one did (see related story). After extensive archival preservation work, the poster has been restored and framed behind UV-absorbing glass. This exceptional specimen of Ingersollia will go on display in 2009.

Virtual Museum Online. The Virtual Ingersoll Museum, available online in a “beta test” version since 2005, was entirely redesigned and reprogrammed for 2009. Now “live” at www.rgimuseum.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!

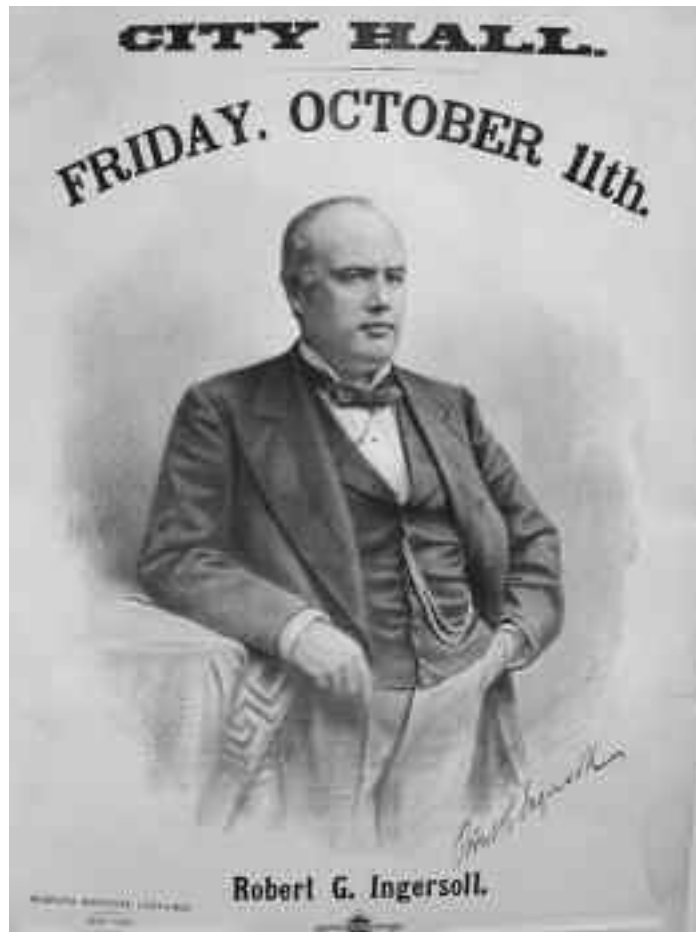
Expanded Freethought Trail. Available online since 2005, the Freethought Trail – a guide to freethought and other radical-reform history sites within about 80 miles of the Ingersoll Museum – was also redesigned and expanded. Historical figures added to the site include Frederick Douglass and L. Frank 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.

Expanded Brochure Outreach. Supplementing the Freethought Trail website is a spectacular full-color, 6 panel brochure. During the 2009 tourist season the new Trail brochure – as well as the existing full-color Museum brochure – will be more widely available to tourists than ever before. For the first time, all three of the New York Thruway rest areas that serve the Finger Lakes area and host official state tourist information stations will display the brochures. Also new: the brochures will be available in more than 200 display racks in high-traffic locations from Rochester to Syracuse, from Lake Ontario to the Pennsylvania line.

Credit Where Credit Is Due. The new orientation video, Virtual Museum and Freethought Trail website relaunches, Freethought Trail brochure, and expanded brochure distribution were all made possible by a generous grant from the James Hervey Johnson Charitable Educational Trust.

RARER THAN RARE: AN EXTRAORDINARY POSTER’S WILD JOURNEY

The eBay listing was incredible. Someone was auctioning an *actual poster* promoting a specific Ingersoll lecture from 1878. “These so-called broadsheet posters were cheaply printed on coarse-pulp paper with a very high acid content,” said Museum director Tom Flynn. “Of the few that weren’t immediately thrown away, most decayed away to nothing after thirty or forty years. It was just astounding to see one still in relatively good condition in the twenty-first century.” In short order, Flynn was locked in a bidding war with a single rival bidder, who ultimately prevailed.



“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 Szczepek, then of Illinois – realized that he’d been bidding against the Ingersoll Museum, he generously offered to donate the poster. “I generously said yes,” said Flynn with a deadpan expression.

The poster announced an unspecified 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’s engagements* 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 rarer than rare.”

*(<http://www.funygroup.org/Ingersoll/index.php>)

FREETHOUGHT TRAIL EXPANDS

The Freethought Trail (www.freethought-trail.org), an online tribute to west-central New York State’s vivid past, has been significantly expanded for 2009. The region within a roughly 80-mile radius of Dresden was a hotbed of social innovation and radical reform during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was the birthplace not only of Ingersoll, but of the women’s rights movement, the nation’s first secular university, several of Mark Twain’s most iconoclastic novels, Frederick Douglass’s abolitionist career, and, ironically, the Mormon religion.



The wholly-redesigned Freethought Trail website now features more than 60 marked and unmarked sites important to American reform history. Among the Trail’s sadder revelations: in both Rochester and Syracuse, lecture halls of enormous significance to reform history (as well as mainstream culture) had fallen to the wrecker’s ball, leaving few if any traces. Rochester’s Corinthian Hall was the site of the Frederick Douglass speech generally marked as the most powerful address of



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