

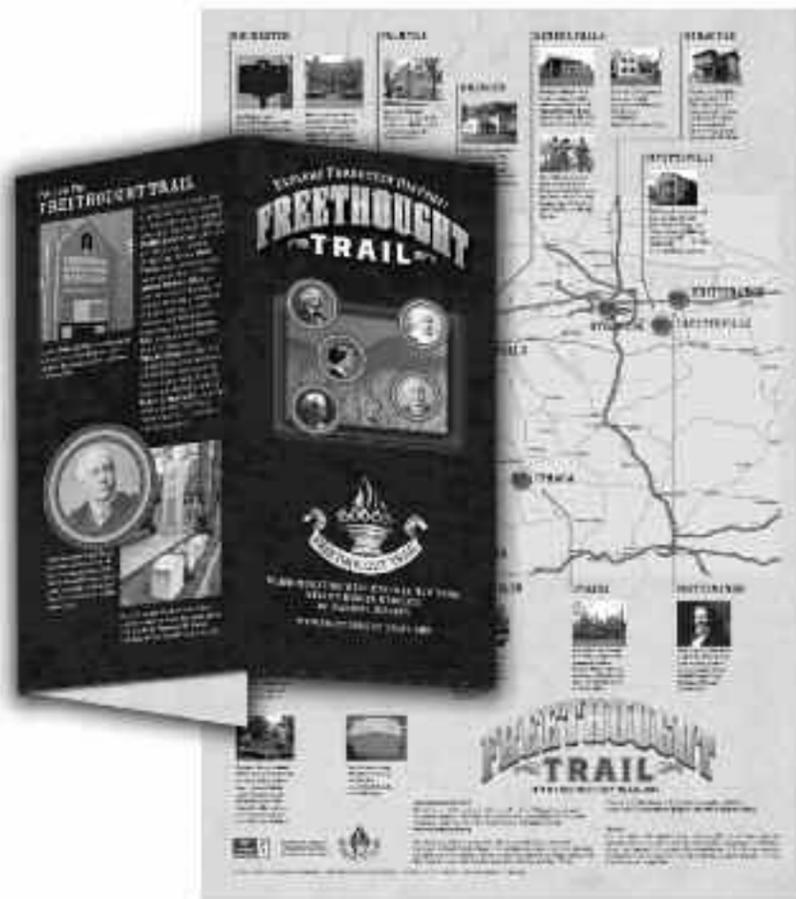
# FREETHOUGHT TRAIL

The Ingersoll Museum is proud to be a founding attraction of the Freethought Trail! In the 19th century, west-central New York was a hotbed of social, political, and religious innovation.

Fayetteville suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage called religion the enemy of women. Writing from Elmira, Mark Twain raised irreverence to an American art form. At Ithaca, Andrew Dickson White co-founded Cornell University, the nation's first secular institution of higher learning. In 1848 reformers and freethinkers of every stripe thronged Seneca Falls to demand new roles for women.

Corning native Margaret Sanger led the 20th-century birth control movement. Online at [www.freethought-trail.org](http://www.freethought-trail.org) (note the hyphen), the informal Freethought Trail now includes about eighty sites, marked and unmarked. All are within a two-hour drive of the Ingersoll Museum and all pertain to the region's rich history of radical reform: freethought, women's rights, abolitionism, sex radicalism, anarchism, and more. Visiting west-central New York this summer or fall? Let the Freethought Trail site be your guide to a fascinating, historical, and fuel-efficient visit. Choose the attractions you want to visit in the order you wish to visit them, and receive reliable turn-by-turn directions for your entire trip.

**JOIN US ... ON THE FREETHOUGHT TRAIL!**  
[WWW.FREETHOUGHT-TRAIL.ORG](http://WWW.FREETHOUGHT-TRAIL.ORG)



# THE INGERSOLL

The Newsletter of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum and the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee

REPORT

## MUSEUM HOURS 2010

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 29–October 31, 2010). Suggested admission is only \$2.00!

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## A GRANDCHILD'S TREASURES: MUSEUM TO DISPLAY LONG-HIDDEN INGERSOLLIA

Beginning Memorial Day weekend, the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum will debut a major new exhibition entitled *A Grandchild's Treasures*. The exhibition comprises twenty-seven never-before-seen artifacts drawn from the collection of Robert Green Ingersoll's last surviving grandchild, Eva Ingersoll Wakefield. Ms. Wakefield, who edited the definitive edition of Ingersoll's letters (1951), was also the custodian of the extensive collection of Ingersollia amassed by Ingersoll's widow, her grandmother. In the fall of 2008, Connecticut residents John Alden Whritner and Barbara Youngstrom, longtime friends of the Ingersoll family, donated the collection to the Museum. A handful of items went on display in 2009; the rest of the collection was curated, preserved, and prepared for the new exhibition, which will be the centerpiece of the Museum's 2010 season. The collection includes:

- An album of family photos, many previously unpublished;
- The thick scrapbook compiled by Eva Parker Ingersoll, Robert Green Ingersoll's widow and Eva Ingersoll Wakefield's mother, containing hundreds of newspaper clippings concerning Ingersoll's death, his funeral, and memorials held in his honor across the world;
- A rich trove of Ingersoll memorabilia, including original lithographic plates used to print the frontispiece photographs in the multi-volume Dresden Edition of Ingersoll's collected works;
- Books and other items inscribed by Ingersoll to his family members, autographed Ingersoll sentiments, and a large amount of previously unpublished correspondence. Highlights include a letter Ingersoll sent to his wife just before a lecture in Stillwater, Minnesota, and a plea from the county Republican Committee in his old hometown of Peoria, Illinois, to add a stop there on an 1896 speaking tour. (Ingersoll complied.)

The collection was received and inventoried by docent Frances Emerson and preserved and curated by Museum Director Tom Flynn and Center for Inquiry Director of Libraries Timothy Binga. Doug Schiffer, compiler of the online Ingersoll Chronology, contributed research.

*A Grandchild's Treasures* will be on display throughout the 2010 season. The Museum is open Saturdays and Sundays from NOON to 5:00 P. M. from Memorial Day weekend through the end of October.



**A Political Plea.** In this letter from the Eva Ingersoll Wakefield collection dated October 1, 1896, the chair of the Peoria County Republican Central Committee implores Ingersoll to add Peoria to an upcoming political speaking tour, even promising him a special train. The plea succeeded; according to the online Ingersoll Chronology, Ingersoll delivered the political lecture "Gold" in Peoria on October 16!

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REPORT

# INGERSOLL

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## FOUND IN WASHINGTON: AN UNKNOWN INGERSOLL COMMENT ON RACE

Washington, D. C.-based Ingersoll aficionado Steven Lowe likes to search for forgotten Ingersollia in the many research libraries in and around the nation's capital. In Georgetown University's Special Collections he found a five-page essay in what appeared to be Ingersoll's hand — and surely seemed to be in his style. Titled "Prayer of a Negro," it blends humor and bitter irony to paint an unforgettable portrait of the contempt and subjugation that have been Christianity's principal legacy to black Americans. Certain passages cause contemporary readers to wince somewhat, notably the observation that conditions in Africa made it impossible for the inhabitants to "become intellectual"; even the word *Negro* grates on modern ears, though in Ingersoll's day it was the most proper and respectful possible term of address. Still, this essay exhibits a sophistication on race that is difficult to imagine flowing from the pen of many other white Americans of that time. As when speaking of the rights of women, the poor, or prisoners, Ingersoll was here perhaps half a century ahead of his time. Steven Lowe prepared the following transcription with research assistance by African Americans for Humanism Director Norm R. Allen Jr., Ingersoll Committee advisory board member and Committee for Skeptical Inquiry special research fellow Joe Nickell, and Museum Director Tom Flynn.

### Prayer of a Negro

Certainly a Negro who fails to see the hand of a kind and infinite Father in the history of his race must be the blindest of the blind. A Negro, whose heart is not filled with thankfulness every moment, must be a most ungrateful wretch. When he thinks of the infinite mercy shown his race through all the centuries gone what can he do but fall upon his knees and thank his heavenly father?

A Christian Negro made the following prayer, and it ought to be repeated every day by every colored person in the world.

*I thank thee O God, for all the blessings that thou hast showered upon our race; that thou placed us on the continent of Africa and so arranged the climate and production thereof that it was impossible for us to become intellectual, thereby saving us from the crime of heresy; that thou put it in the hearts of other nations to enslave us; that thou madest dogs to follow and capture us; that millions of our race were brought from our native land against their will; that husbands and wives were cruelly torn apart; that they were crammed in the slave ships; that thousands were given to the sharks; that thousands upon thousands were destroyed by loathsome and painful diseases.*

*We thank thee O God, that they were brought to the shores of America and made slaves; that for two hundred years they were paid for all their labor by marks of the lash. We thank thee, that mothers were sold from their babes upon the auction block; that thousands perished under the lash for trying to circumvent thy will by getting free. We thank thee for all the chains we have worn — for all the tears we have shed — for all the agonies we have endured.*

*We thank thee O God, that thou caused all other nations to detest and despise us. We thank thee for all our blood that has been shed, and thank thee for causing it to be shed. In all our pain we recognize the sweet and wonderful way of things. The beautiful law of compensation is clearly to be seen in all our history.*

*It was not best for us to have liberty. It was not best for us to have wives and*

*children and home. It was not best that we should reap the rewards of labor.*

*Thy ways are not our ways. If man should do as thou hast done we should know that he was the basest of beings; but cruelty in man is mercy in Thee. The crimes of men are virtues of God. The selfishness of man is the love of Deity.*

*We thank thee O Most Merciful God for our ignorance, and mental inferiority.*

Undated manuscript in Robert Ingersoll's handwriting found in Georgetown University Library Special Collections: 5 pages: items 1314-1318.

## MYSTERY IN PEORIA — SOLVED!

It is well known that the full-length outdoor statue of Ingersoll that commands Peoria's Glen Oak Park was dedicated on October 23, 1911. But the statue's genesis has been more mysterious. When was it commissioned? By whom? How were the funds raised? By coincidence, two primary documents examined within weeks of one another by Museum Director Tom Flynn flesh out the early story. One was a newspaper clipping — one of hundreds collected by Ingersoll's widow covering Ingersoll's death, funeral, and remembrances by freethinkers worldwide and preserved in the Eva Ingersoll Wakefield collection. Astoundingly, it was a story from the Peoria *Journal* of July 24, 1899, covering the very meeting at which a fifteen-member committee was formed to raise the Peoria statue!

The rest of the story came from a private monograph on the Triebel family, which produced several prominent sculptors of public monuments, provided to the Ingersoll Committee for research purposes by Terrence Ireland. As early as 1901, the Peoria committee had selected sculptor Frederick Ernst Triebel to create the statue, but a further decade was required to raise the \$10,000 for the sculpture and base. Appeals went to Peoria-area benefactors and to freethinkers nationwide by means of movement papers like *The Truth Seeker*. At last Triebel did his work; the statue was cast in bronze in Florence, Italy, shipped to



**All's Well that Ends Well.** The world's largest statue of Ingersoll, by sculptor Fritz Triebel, was dedicated on October 23, 1911. The site: Peoria's Glen Oak Park, where years before Ingersoll had bivouacked the regiment he'd raised before leading it off to the Civil War. Left to right: Walston Brown, Ingersoll's son-in-law; Mrs. Ingersoll's two daughters, Eva and Maud; Mrs. Ingersoll (seated); Mrs. Ingersoll's two grandchildren, Eva Ingersoll Wakefield (whose collection the Museum now displays) and Robert Ingersoll Brown; and George Curtis. Historical photograph from the Museum collection.

Peoria, and installed. At its dedication ceremony an oration was given by Charles F. Adams, grandson of U. S. president John Adams, and the statue was unveiled by Robert Ingersoll Brown, the orator's grandson.

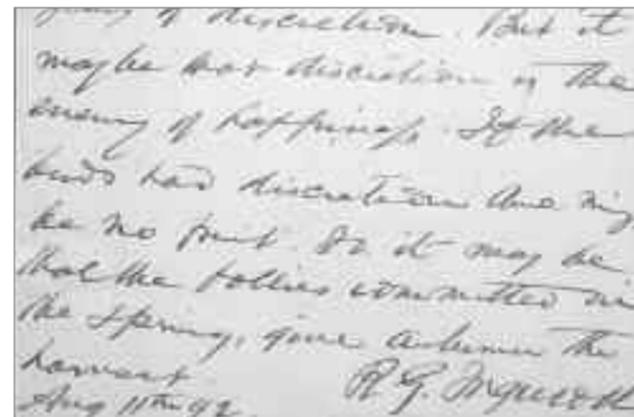
## THE INGERSOLL MUSEUM DEPENDS ON YOU!

Thanks to some outstanding contributions of artifacts, the Ingersoll Museum is able to mount a significant new exhibition in 2010. But gifts of artifacts don't keep the lights on. Neither, sadly, do gate receipts; despite its favorable location on a major Finger Lakes wine trail, the Ingersoll Museum doesn't greet enough visitors in the average season for visitor contributions to defray its operating costs. No, the Museum depends on visitors and friends across the nation who love Ingersoll and want to see his legacy preserved. Please, make your most generous tax-deductible gift to the Museum today. The Museum is a project of the Council for Secular Humanism, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt educational organization. Make checks payable to Council for Secular Humanism / Ingersoll and mail to P. O. Box 664, Amherst, NY 14226-0664. First-time donors of \$500 or more will have their names inscribed on our Honor Board at the Museum.

## A FRAGMENT RESTORED

In the final volume of Ingersoll's collected works, the so-called Dresden Edition, there's a section called "Fragments" that presents page after page of short texts by Ingersoll — one-liners, brief sentiments, and the like. One of them, listed simply by its date — August 11, 1892, Ingersoll's fifty-ninth birthday — reads: "Perhaps I have reached the years of discretion. But it may be that discretion is the enemy of happiness. If the buds had discretion there might be no fruit. So it may be that the follies committed in the spring give autumn the harvest" (Dresden Edition, Vol. XII, p. 355). As with many of the fragments, there is no context, no suggestion of where the comment was made, or in what form, or in what company.

Those questions remain unanswered, but we know one thing more about this particular fragment than we did before. Among the numerous sentiments in Ingersoll's hand included in the Eva Ingersoll Wakefield collection is the original sentiment "Years of Discretion." It is written in a bold hand on an unusually large scrap of paper — 8-1/2 x 10", closer to a full sheet than to the scraps on which Ingersoll usually scribbled sentiments to be given away.



One thinks of Ingersoll enjoying a birthday dinner with the family, taking a full sheet of paper from which perhaps just one strip had been torn off, and composing this passage as a message of love to his wife Eva. But that is only guesswork. We know that Ingersoll was at his summer residence, his son-in-law's palatial home at Dobbs Ferry, New York, from the 12th of August to the 23rd. Extant correspondence from Dobbs Ferry documents that. His whereabouts earlier in August are unknown, but it is highly likely that he would have been in Dobbs Ferry on his birthday unless business precluded it. Finally, it is likely that Eva Parker Ingersoll treasured this gem from her husband's hand in her extensive private collection; most of the contents of the Dresden Edition's later volumes were drawn from her many scrap books. Once "Years of Discretion" was set in type, it went back to rest in Mrs. Ingersoll's collection, which passed to her daughter and to her daughter, Eva Ingersoll Wakefield. And now it will be on display, framed behind UV-blocking glass on acid-free materials, at the Ingersoll Museum.

Also included in the Eva Ingersoll Wakefield collection was a letter the 41-year-old Ingersoll (not yet quite a national figure) wrote to this brother Ebon after attending a triple funeral in Peoria. The flowery, insistently rhythmic style that would captivate a nation is clearly evident in its text. Note also the "ghost text" in the image; the letter was stored for many years folded in half, and some ink transferred upside-down from the bottom half to the top, and vice versa.

The letter reads:

Peoria Dec 12, 1874.

Dear Brother;

Back, over the days and years — over that weird and shadowy landscape called the Past — back upon that waveless sea, with but a single shore — recalling the vain and ravished hours, those withered leaves beneath the tree of life — wandering sadly mid the ruined castles of the air — smiling at old hopes and expectations, and gathering again the tender remnants of half-forgotten dreams — All this today, while on my face were tears for the three sacred graves.

