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 (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
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 handwriting—a passage that contemporary readers might find somewhat controversial.

In Georgetown University’s Special Collections: A five-page essay in Ingersoll’s handwriting.

In G eorgetow n U niversity’s Special Collections he found a five-page essay in what appeared to be 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 pens 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 American for Humanists Director Norm B. Allen Jr., Ingersoll Committee advisory board member and Committee for Skeptical Inquiry special research fellow Joe Nickell, and Museum Director Tom Flynn.

MYSTERY IN P REOIA—S OLVED

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 memorabilia by infuriated 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 Treibel 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 Triebel to create the statue, but a further $30,000 to raise the $90,000 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 Peoria, and installed at its dedication ceremony an ornament 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 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 “ragments” 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 year-stone, the face of life is not to be turned in the mirror.” 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 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. One “Years of Discression” 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 his brother Elon after attending a triple funeral in Peoria. The floristy, insistently rhythmic style that would capture a nation is clearly evident in its tone. Note also the “ghost text” in the first paragraph that Ingersoll had for many years filled 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 wind and shadowy landscape called the Past — back upon that waveless sea, with but a single shore —..."