

THE INGERSOLL

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



REPORT

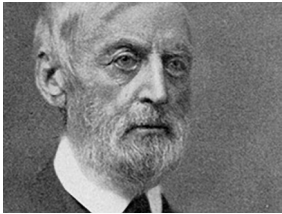
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MUSEUM HOURS 2017

The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum will be open at 61 Main St., Dresden, N.Y., from Noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays from May 27 through October 29, 2017. Suggested admission is \$5.00!

THE SENECA LAKE CONNECTION A TENT LINKS INGERSOLL TO GENEVA'S FREETHINKING PHILANTHROPIST



William Smith (1818–1912): entrepreneur, self-taught scientist, patron of the arts and sciences, partly closeted freethinker, and founder of a pathbreaking women's college.

“What’s most surprising about the Free-thought Trail is how densely its causes, organizations, and individual activists were interlinked,” said Trail Director (and Museum Director) Tom Flynn. “Time after time, this abolitionist will also have worked with this suffragist, or worked together with that freethinker, dress reformer, or member of a Utopian community.”

Robert Green Ingersoll shares two surprising links with William Smith, the famed woman’s rights supporter, philanthropist, and partly closeted freethinker.

One is Seneca Lake: Ingersoll was born in Dresden, which occupies a bluff overlooking Seneca Lake, while Smith led his whole adult life

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Smith built this Geneva observatory (behind garage) in 1888 and hired astronomer William R. Brooks to run it. Brooks discovered numerous comets.

FREETHOUGHT TRAIL COMPLETES GROWTH SPURT

In Spring 2017, the Freethought Trail completed its largest single enlargement project. An informal historic trail that recognizes persons, organizations, and sites



important to the history of radical reform within 120 miles of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum in Dresden, New York, the Freethought Trail now includes 108 marked and unmarked historic sites in twenty-six cities, towns, villages, and hamlets in the Erie Canal region between Rochester and Utica.

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Firemen’s Park in downtown Syracuse was called Fayette Park in the 1840s. On July 30, 1843, Frederick Douglass gave an antislavery lecture that turned into a four-day impromptu abolition conference. But it didn’t begin well. Douglass’s advance man, John Anderson Collins, worked for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society—but he was more interested in promoting the abolition of private property and an extreme Fourierist utopian community. Douglass was so incensed by Collins’s off-topic introductory remarks that he got Collins fired. Collins’s utopia, the ill-fated Skaneateles Community, lasted just three years.

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Jeff Ingersoll, Chair, RGI Committee
Thomas Flynn, Editor tflynn@centerforinquiry.net

The Museum is located at 61 Main Street, Dresden, NY (315) 536-1074, seasonal only. Send correspondence to Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee, PO Box 664, Amherst, NY 14226-0664 • (716) 636-7571, ext. 213, fax (716) 636-1733
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THE SENECA LAKE CONNECTION cont'd. from page 1



Minister-turned-freethought lecturer Charles B. Reynolds (1832–1896) wanted to conduct “free-thought revivals” in communities too small to have a meeting hall.

in Geneva, the small city at Seneca’s northern tip.

Their other link ... is a tent. Here’s the story.

Not everyone knew William Smith was a freethinker, but he did maintain a subscription to the nation’s foremost freethought periodical, *The Truth Seeker*. In 1885, Charles B. Reynolds—an Adventist-minister-turned-freethinker—placed a notice in *The Truth Seeker* soliciting gifts so that he could purchase a \$500 “revival tent.” Reynolds, skilled in the craft of itinerant preaching, now wanted to bring his message of freethought to rural communities too small to have a meeting hall

available for rental. Smith gave \$300 (about \$7,200 today), the campaign’s largest single gift. In a later issue of *The Truth Seeker*, Reynolds would praise Smith, writing, “Thanks to the princely liberality of such whole-souled friends of humanity and Secularism as William Smith, of Geneva, New York.”



William Smith gave \$300 toward the \$500 purchase price of Reynolds’s tent.

Reynolds took his “good cotton cathedral” on the road and all went well, until July 1886 in Boonton, New Jersey. Locals outraged by Reynolds’s atheist message burned down his tent, and local officials arrested him on charges of blasphemy. An October 13, 1886, lecture (sans tent) in Morristown, New Jersey, netted a second blasphemy charge. On May 19, 1887, Reynolds had his day in court; his defense attorney was none other than Ingersoll. Ingersoll called no witnesses; he just delivered a summation several hours in length from memory, making an ironclad case that a free and democratic society had no place for blasphemy prosecutions. Reynolds was found guilty, and Ingersoll paid his fine; but in losing that battle the two freethinkers had won the war. Thanks in large part to the national media attention focused on Ingersoll’s impassioned condemnation of blasphemy prosecutions, local governments abandoned the practice almost entirely.

FREETHOUGHT TRAIL

COMPLETES GROWTH SPURT cont'd. from page 1

The enlargement includes two major new radical reform causes—Fourierist utopianism and dress reform—alongside greatly expanded coverage of reform activism directed toward the abolition of slavery. Persons added to the Trail include journalist and intellectual Orestes Brownson (who spent two years as a vocal freethinker before converting to Roman Catholicism); rogue abolitionist and Utopian activist John Anderson Collins; abolitionist and Utopian activist Benjamin Fish; Rochester freethought activist Elias H. Gault; abolition and woman’s rights activists Slocum, Emily, and Isabel Howland; Hezekiah Joslyn, father of famed feminist Matilda Joslyn Gage and an early abolitionist; suffragist Harriet May Mills; and dress reform activist (and America’s only female Medal of Honor winner) Mary Edwards Walker. The most remarkable addition may be William Smith, the Geneva, New York, philanthropist who founded William Smith College for Women (which continues today as part of Geneva’s Hobart and William Smith Colleges). Smith’s support for the causes of woman’s rights, education, and scientific research are well-known, but few know that he was also an active freethinker. Research



Orestes Brownson (1803–1875) is remembered as a conservative Catholic intellectual. But that was only the endpoint of a turbulent spiritual journey including three intervals of freethinking unbelief and a friendship with pioneer feminist radical Fanny Wright.

by Freethought Trail Director Tom Flynn, aided by Center for Inquiry Director of Libraries Timothy Binga and Geneva historian John Marks, has revealed that William Smith subscribed to the national freethought newspaper *The Truth Seeker*, attended an 1882 conference of the New York State Freethinkers Association in Watkins (now Watkins Glen), and—as noted in the preceding article—in 1885 paid most of the cost of a “revival tent” used by minister-turned-atheist Charles B. Reynolds for freethought lectures in rural communities.

Flynn conducted research through most of 2016, visited and photographed the sites, and wrote the new pages during fall 2016 and winter 2016–2017. In addition to the new pages, many of the existing biographies and site descriptions were enriched with newly developed information.

The Freethought Trail can be accessed online at www.free-thought-trail.org. The site is viewable on computers and mobile devices. It is a project of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum (www.secularhumanism.org/Ingersoll), which is owned and operated by the Council for Secular Humanism (www.secularhumanism.org), a program of the nonprofit Center for Inquiry (www.centerforinquiry.net). In addition to the online site, Freethought Trail brochures are offered at New York Thruway rest areas in the Finger Lakes region during the tourist season.

SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL STARTS FIRST IN NEW YORK STATE NUMEROUS EVENTS PLANNED FOR 2017



The Nineteenth Amendment secured the vote for women nationwide in 1920. But woman's suffrage dawned in New York State three years sooner. This means that 2017 marks the centennial of women's right to vote at the state level. From the Woman's Rights National Historic

Park in Seneca Falls to local communities across the state,

scores of special events are planned in observance of the Empire State's suffrage centennial. The Ingersoll Museum is in that mix; on Saturday, August 12, the Museum plans to host a suffrage centennial commemoration event cosponsored by the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee and the Yates County Genealogical and Historical Society, based in Penn Yan, some seven miles west of Dresden.

Check the Museum website at www.secularhumanism.org/ingersoll in early summer for more details on this event. If you're on the recipient list for this newsletter and we have your e-mail address, you'll receive advanced notice of the event by e-mail.

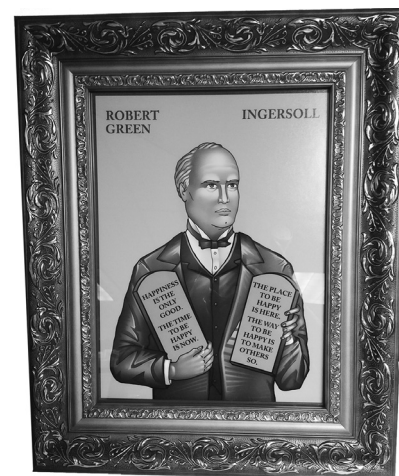
Not sure if your e-mail address is on our list? Just drop an e-mail to lfoster@centerforinquiry.net with "Ingersoll Events List" in the subject line. Include your name, mailing address, and e-mail address, and we'll update your record!

INGERSOLL GOES ICONIC: MUSEUM RECEIVES UNLIKELY GIFT OF ART

Artist Adam LaMonica has gifted a most unusual artwork to the Ingersoll Museum. In a full-color custom print, Ingersoll is depicted after the manner of some saint in a Greek Orthodox ikon, clutching stone tablets on which are inscribed perhaps his most famous words: "Happiness Is the Only Good. The Time to Be Happy Is Now. The Place to Be Happy Is Here. The Way to Be Happy Is to Make Others So." The Ingersoll print belongs to a series of privately distributed works, collectively titled "Unlikely Ikons." Others in the series include Giordano Bruno, Malala Yousafzai, the Flying Spaghetti Monster, and the Prophet Muhammad—look for that one on the cover of a future issue of *Free Inquiry!*

"There's something jarring about seeing Ingersoll portrayed in the style of Orthodox Christian iconography," said Museum Director Tom Flynn. "Then again, there's a dignity and authority to his bearing in this work that fits with the respect admirers have for the Great Agnostic."

The work will enjoy a place of pride in the Ingersoll Museum when the Museum season opens this Memorial Day weekend in Dresden, New York.



ENDOWMENT UPDATE

The Ingersoll Museum endowment fund stands at \$144,518.84—up from last year but "far from the pace of growth required to meet the fund's target of \$400,000," said Museum Director Tom Flynn. With an endowment of that size, the Museum could meet its routine operating costs from investment income and would no longer require subsidies from the Center for Inquiry.

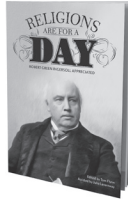
Considering a gift, large or small, to the Museum's endowment fund? The professionals at the Center for Inquiry's Development Department can assist you in arranging your gift in the way that can achieve your charitable objectives while achieving maximum tax advantage. Contact Vice President for Philanthropy Martina Fern at mfern@centerforinquiry.net or call (800) 818-7071.

**MUSEUM
ENDOWMENT
NOW
\$144,518
TARGET
\$400,000**

MARKETPLACE



Ingersoll Museum Mug: A three-color ceramic mug features drawings of Ingersoll and his birthplace museum. Around the rim is the bold Ingersoll quote, "The clergy know that I know that they know that they do not know." 11 oz. mug, hand-washing recommended. \$14.00



Religions Are for a Day: Robert Green Ingersoll Appreciated: Museum Director Tom Flynn chronicles Ingersoll's life and impact with many never-before-published details. Plus numerous accounts of historical mysteries solved during the Museum's more than twenty years of operation. \$15.00



A Visit with Robert Ingersoll DVD: Stage actor Richard McNally performs his one-man show as Ingersoll before a live audience in an authentic Victorian setting. A multi-camera professional production. Runtime approximately one hour. \$18.00

Museum Brochures: Museum visitors pick up these five fact-packed brochures about Ingersoll's public life, his Civil War service, and more. Now you can enjoy them at home! \$8.00



The Faith I Left Behind: First-person deconversion stories written by freethinkers from many walks of life that appeared in *Free Inquiry* during 2014, plus fourteen more pieces never before published. \$20.00

American Freethought: Four-part video documentary extends from Paine to early twentieth century. 3 hr. 43 min. 4 DVDs. \$39.99



<input type="checkbox"/> Ingersoll Mug	x _____
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