

THE INGERSOLL

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

REPORT

IN THIS ISSUE

Museum Enters Third Decade

New Trail Audio Tours

Restored Bust Now On Display

Masonic Sword Mystery

MUSEUM HOURS 2013

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 25–October 27, 2013). Suggested admission is only \$2.00!

MUSEUM ENTERS ITS THIRD DECADE

It's hard to believe, but 2013 will mark the beginning of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum's third decade of operation. I remember its first opening day—Saturday, May 29, 1993—with pellucid clarity. Our first visitor was Jean Millholland, then recently retired as executive director of the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism. The organization is now known as the Council for Secular Humanism, and the Ingersoll Birthplace Museum has been open each summer and fall during the last twenty years. The 2013 season will mark year twenty-one.

Among other things, this means that this “incarnation” of the Museum has been open longer than both of its predecessors combined. (The Ingersoll birthplace was restored and opened as a museum twice before, first in 1921 and again in 1954. In each case, funds ran out and the museum closed in less than a decade.) At twenty-one, the third restoration

(Continued on page 2)



FREETHOUGHT TRAIL NOW OFFERS AUDIO TOURS

A new dimension has been added to the Freethought Trail, the Council for Secular Humanism's celebration of west-central New York State's rich history of radical reform. Visitors can now enhance their experience of the Trail by means of an audio tour accessed on their cellphones or smartphones.

The Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee partnered with OnCell, a leading provider of audio tours for museums and historic parks, to develop an audio tour experience suited to the far-flung Freethought Trail.

The Trail includes fifty-nine sites, ranging from unmarked locations to full-fledged museums, and spread over several thousand square miles of Erie Canal country. Visitors can choose the sites they wish to visit and tour them in any sequence. This poses challenges different from a typical museum, where visitors might pass from one artwork or display to the next in a defined sequence.



Here's how the Freethought Trail audio tour will work. Starting May 25, 2013, from any mobile phone dial 716-799-1001. When prompted, dial the two-digit stop number associated with the Trail site you are visiting. (The Ingersoll Museum is 01—be sure to dial both digits!) You'll hear an audio message up to a minute and fifteen seconds long that presents interpretive information about the site.

Smartphone users: Scan the QR codes displayed at selected Freethought Trail sites. Or scan the Home QR code (reproduced with this article) to access the complete Trail audio tour on your touchscreen. Or visit www.myoncell.mobi/freethought to access the complete tour, or to activate GeoAlerts. GeoAlerts are

(Continued on page 2)

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MUSEUM ENTERS ITS THIRD DECADE *(continued)*

is going strong—it’s even branched out to include a Freethought Trail featuring fifty-nine historic sites all over west-central New York State.

2013 is full of new developments, ranging from the only known bust of Robert Ingersoll during his Peoria years—now fully restored and back on display at the Museum—to new cellphone and smartphone audio tours on the Freethought Trail. But the biggest excitement surrounds the 2014 season. We’re launching a bold new Decade 3 Campaign, seeking to raise up to \$75,000 to completely renovate the Museum’s interior, revamp and more widely distribute the Museum’s principal brochure, do some outdoor advertising, and hold a memorable 2014 celebration and freethought- history conference in the Finger Lakes region. The math is simple—the more we raise, the greater number of items on this list we’ll be able to deliver.

It’s in the nature of a museum to look backward—interpreting the past is what we’re all about. But as you’ll see in this newsletter, we’re also looking forward as never before.

—Tom Flynn
Executive Director,
the Council for Secular Humanism
Director, Robert Green Ingersoll
Birthplace Museum

FREETHOUGHT TRAIL NOW OFFERS AUDIO TOURS *(continued)*

special prompting messages that display whenever a user is adjacent to another attraction on the Trail. Clicking the link onscreen activates the audio commentary specific to that attraction. GeoAlerts operate with any smartphone with GPS enabled.

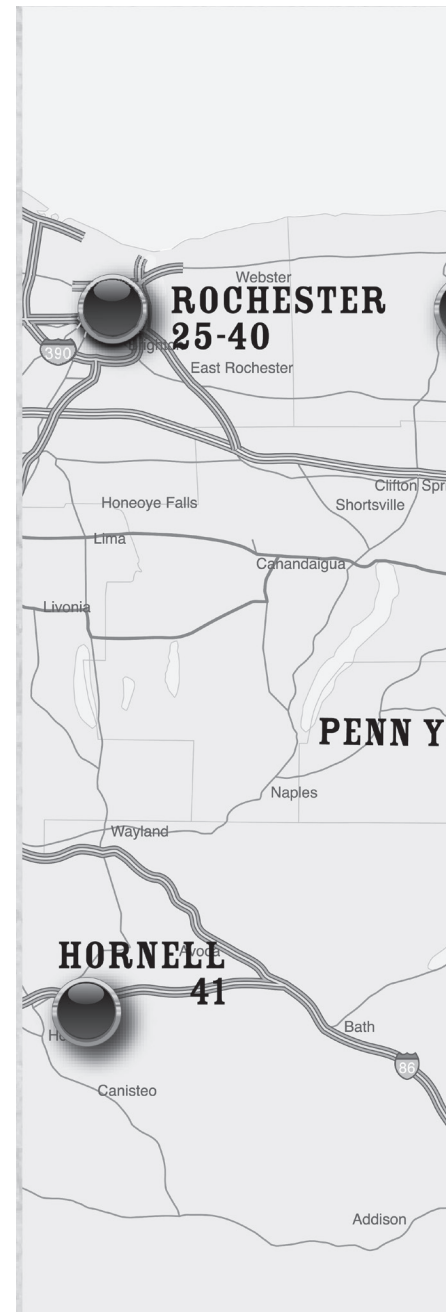
Complete instructions and a full list of stop numbers are listed in this newsletter. They will also appear on new Freethought Trail brochures and on the Trail website (www.freethought-trail.org).

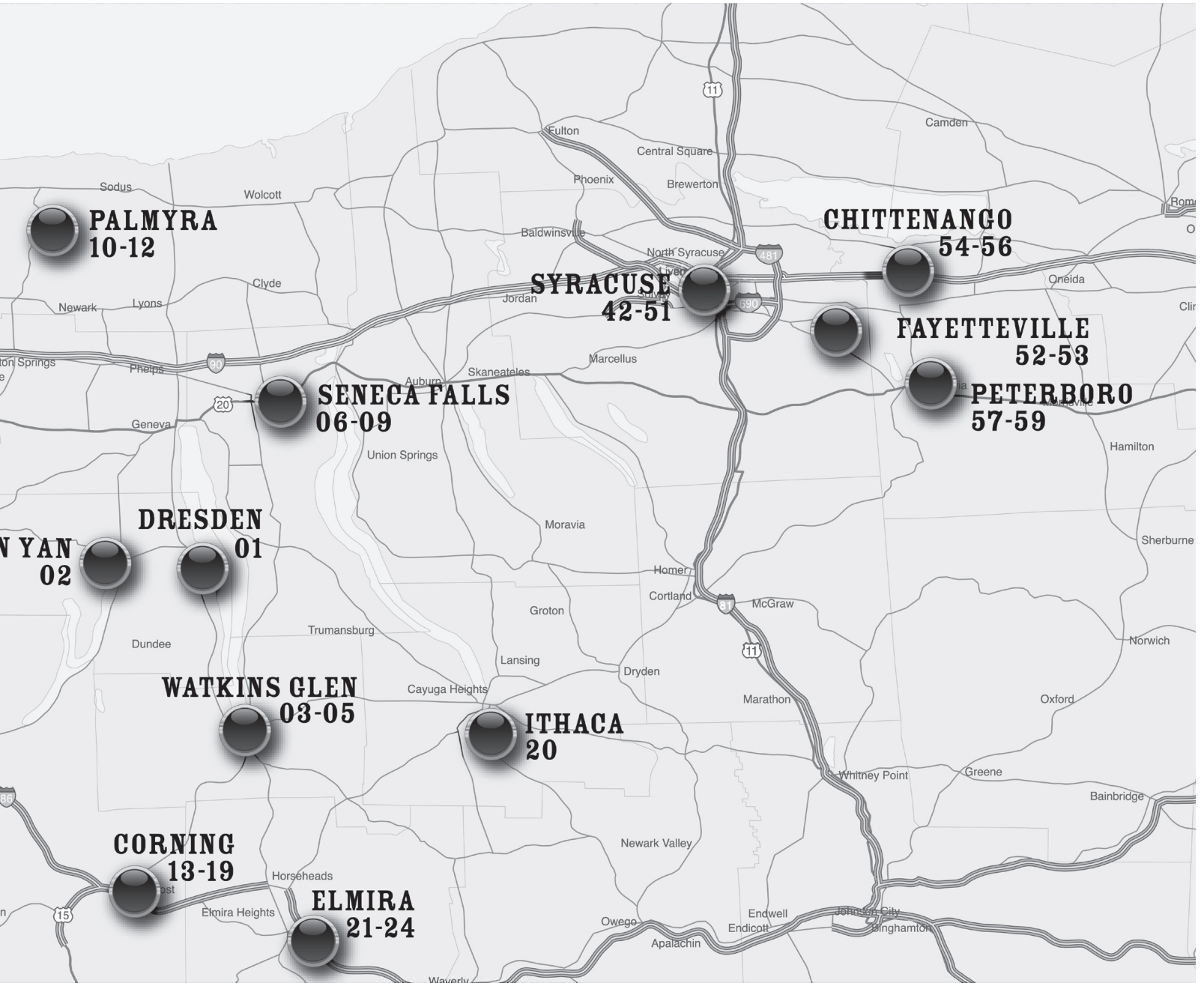
Audio commentaries were voiced by Museum Director Tom Flynn, Council for Secular Humanism Assistant Director Lauren Becker, and Center for Inquiry Vice President for Outreach Debbie Goddard.

COMPLETE LIST OF FREETHOUGHT TRAIL SITES

Enter the two-digit site number for audio tour!

SITE No.	SITE NAME	LOCATION
01	Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum	Dresden
02	Penn Yan Woman’s Rights Convention Site	Penn Yan
03	Freethinkers Meeting Site (hall)	Watkins Glen
04	Freethinkers Meeting Site (park)	Watkins Glen
05	Watkins Glen Waterfront	Watkins Glen
06	Elizabeth Cady Stanton House	Seneca Falls
07	National Women’s Hall of Fame	Seneca Falls
08	Woman’s Rights National Historical Park	Seneca Falls
09	Anthony-Stanton-Bloomer Statue	Seneca Falls
10	Obadiah Dogberry’s Printer	Palmyra
11	C. B. Reynolds Palmyra lecture site	Palmyra
12	Obadiah Dogberry Residence	Palmyra
13	Columbus Hall	Corning
14	Dickson / Steuben Hotel	Corning
15	Margaret Sanger’s Birth Site	Corning
16	Margaret Sanger’s Family Church	Corning
17	Margaret Sanger’s Home Site	Corning
18	Margaret Sanger’s School	Corning
19	Saint Mary’s Cemetery	Corning
20	Andrew Dickson White House	Ithaca
21	Mark Twain Exhibit in Hamilton Hall	Elmira
22	Mark Twain Study	Elmira
23	Mark Twain Statue	Elmira
24	Mark Twain’s Gravesite	Elmira
25	Susan B. Anthony House	Rochester
26	Frederick Douglass Gravesite	Rochester
27	Frederick Douglass Newspaper Office	Rochester
28	Frederick Douglass Rural Home Site	Rochester
29	Frederick Douglass Statue	Rochester
30	Post Home/Western New York Anti-Slavery Society	Rochester
31	Susan B. Anthony Gravesite	Rochester
32	Central Church / Hochstein Music School	Rochester
33	Corinthian Hall / Academy of Music	Rochester
34	Emma Goldman Home Site 1	Rochester
35	Emma Goldman Home Site 2	Rochester
36	Emma Goldman Workplace	Rochester
37	Frederick Douglass Urban Home Site	Rochester
38	Lucy Colman Home Site, Rochester	Rochester
39	Lucy Colman School Site	Rochester
40	Obadiah Dogberry’s Publishing Office	Rochester
41	Metropolitan Hall, Hornellsville	Hornell
42	Charles De Berard and Harriet May Mills House	Syracuse
43	Clinton Square	Syracuse
44	Jerry Rescue Monument	Syracuse
45	L. Frank Baum Childhood Home	Syracuse
46	L. Frank Baum First Syracuse Home Site	Syracuse
47	L. Frank Baum Meets His Future Wife	Syracuse
48	L. Frank Baum Syracuse Home	Syracuse
49	Lucy Colman Home Site, Syracuse	Syracuse
50	Wieting Block	Syracuse
51	Wieting Opera House	Syracuse
52	Matilda Joslyn Gage Center	Fayetteville
53	Matilda Joslyn Gage Gravesite	Fayetteville
54	L. Frank Baum Celebration	Chittenango
55	Baum Brothers Barrel and Butter Firkin Factory	Chittenango
56	L. Frank Baum Birthplace	Chittenango
57	Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum	Peterboro
58	Gerrit Smith Estate	Peterboro
59	Elizabeth Smith Miller House	Peterboro





FREETHOUGHT TRAIL

COMMEMORATING WEST-CENTRAL NEW YORK STATE'S HIDDEN HERITAGE OF RADICAL DISSENT
WWW.FREETHOUGHT-TRAIL.ORG



INGERSOLL MUSEUM ANNOUNCES DECADE 3 CAMPAIGN

After twenty-plus years, the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum is due for a major renovation—and an unforgettable celebration. The Decade 3 Campaign is a bold effort to make both happen in the most responsible way—by attracting enough public support to pay for the entire project *before a single nickel is expended*.

THE MAJOR RENOVATION.

During its first twenty-one years, the Ingersoll Birthplace Museum's interpretive displays have evolved and improved, of course; but, the architectural backdrop for displays, the

physical design of exhibition space, the layout and visibility of artifacts, and the furnishings to protect them are all based upon decisions made before our opening in 1993. That evolutionary approach has been very cost-effective, but in some ways it has limited our ability to tell Ingersoll's story to contemporary audiences.

Therefore, we retained a professional museum services company—The Exhibition Alliance of Hamilton, New York—for a complete redesign of the museum's interior, displays, and interpretive signage. The exact cost of this renovation project will not be known until designs are finalized, but it could require as much as \$50,000. If this project can be funded, the Museum's interior will be reconstructed starting in November 2013, and the Museum will open on Memorial Day Weekend of 2014 *completely transformed*.

THE CELEBRATION

If we are able to move ahead with the renovation, we will want to announce it far and wide—and bring together Ingersoll's loyal friends for a once-in-a-lifetime special event in the Finger Lakes.

- ❑ The Museum's trifold brochure has looked essentially the same since its last major redesign in 2002. (Even in this online age, the humble brochure remains indispensable for outreach to motoring tourists.) In conjunction with the interior renovation, we'll redesign the brochure—and for the 2014 season we will dramatically expand its distribution. In addition to our usual placement at tourist information booths on the New York State Thruway and in selected regional attractions, we'll saturate brochure racks from Niagara Falls to Utica and from the Lake Ontario shore to the Pennsylvania state line, inviting a wider public to enjoy the Museum's new concept.
- ❑ Outdoor advertising will run on carefully selected billboards across the Finger Lakes region during the summer and fall of 2014.
- ❑ Finally, after a gap of more than a decade—and only if this campaign reaches its target in full—the summer of 2014 will see a freethought history conference and celebration of the Museum's new concept. Those segments of the event not held at the Museum will take place nearby, at a major conference venue in the Finger Lakes region.

HOW WILL THE DECADE 3 CAMPAIGN MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

The plan is as simple as it is audacious. Together, the interior renovation, new brochure, outdoor advertising, and conference will cost up to \$75,000. *We will do as much as the Decade 3 Campaign pays for*—and no more. If the campaign target is met in full, then everything will unfold as envisioned between November 2013 and the summer of 2014. If the target is met only partially, then we'll "greenlight" the interior renovation *first*—followed by the new brochure and its expanded distribution plan, if funding permits—then the billboards, if the money's there, and finally the conference.

In other words, we'll go down that list of goals from top to bottom, implementing as many of them as—but no more of them than—our fundraising permits. If the Decade 3 Campaign fulfills its target, the Ingersoll Museum will be prepared for a bright future. And Season 2014 will be a celebration no humanist or freethinker will want to miss.

We're also offering some unique naming opportunities, most of which will be offered *only* during the Decade 3 campaign:

- ❑ For a single gift of \$40,000 or more, the donor's name (or that of a loved one) will be permanently attached to the new interior renovation on a large metallic plaque in the Museum's Piano Room. (If we are able to hold the conference, this donor will be the guest of honor.)
- ❑ For a gift of \$25,000 or more, the donor's name (or that of a loved one) will be permanently attached to one of the Museum's four principal display areas: the Piano Room, the North Display Room, the Birth Room (upstairs) and the West Wing (Local History Room and Gift Shop).
- ❑ As always, for a gift of \$15,000 or more, the donor will be named Sponsor of an upcoming Museum season.
- ❑ For a gift of \$5,000 or more, the donor (or a loved one) will be recognized as an Extraordinary Patron of the new museum interior. The names of Extraordinary Patrons will be inscribed on a special plaque in the North Display Room. In addition, the first ten (10) Extraordinary Patrons will receive a copy of Susan Jacoby's new Ingersoll book *The Great Agnostic* personally autographed by the author.
- ❑ As always, gifts of \$500 or more will be acknowledged by engraving the donor's name on the Honor Board displayed in the Museum.

YES! I'd like to help keep the Ingersoll Museum ready for the future as it enters its third decade!

**ROBERT GREEN
INGERSOLL
Birthplace Museum**

SPECIAL GIVING/ACKNOWLEDGMENT LEVELS

\$40,000 or more: Name attached to the new interior

\$25,000 or more:
Name attached to the Piano Room North Display Room Birth Room West Wing

\$15,000 or more: Sponsor an upcoming Museum season

\$5,000 or more: Your name on a plaque of Extraordinary Patrons,
plus an autographed copy of Susan Jacoby's *The Great Agnostic* (limit 10)

\$500 or more: Your name engraved on the Museum's Honor Board

Enclosed is my gift in the amount of \$ _____

I need to make arrangements to make my gift as a pledge or a gift of securities, or I need other special assistance. Please have a development professional contact me.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Phone / E-mail address () _____ / _____

Check enclosed (only U.S. checks drawn on U.S. bank and denominated in U.S. dollars)

Bill my credit card AmEx Discover MasterCard Visa

Number _____ Exp. Date _____ Signature _____

MAIL TO: Council for Secular Humanism, P. O. BOX 664, AMHERST, NY 14226-0664 U.S.A.

FAX with credit-card information to (716)636-1733 or call toll-free 855-417-9930

Check payable to Council For Secular Humanism / Ingersoll Fund

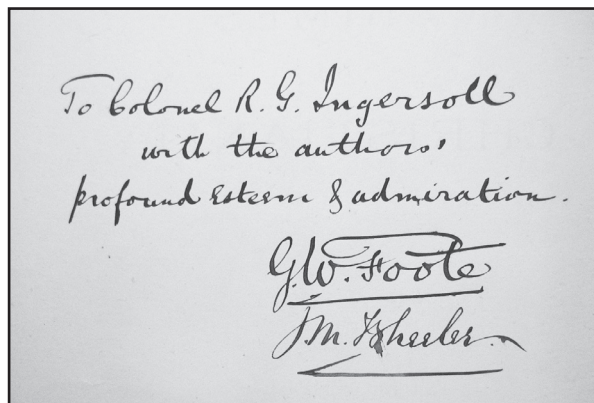
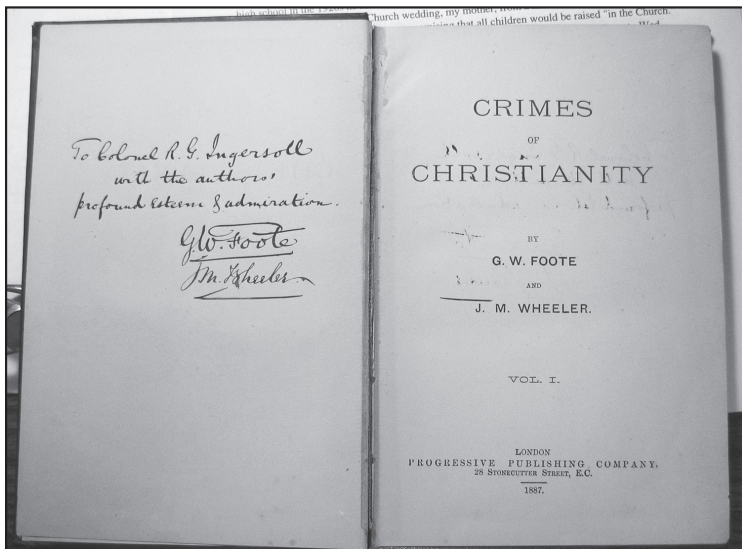
The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum is operated by the Council for Secular Humanism, a 501(c)(3) educational organization. All gifts are fully tax-deductible as provided by law. Campaign proceeds up to \$75,000 will be applied to the interior renovation, redesign and wider distribution of the Museum brochure, outdoor advertising, and a 2014 historical conference, in that order. Any funds received in excess of the amount required for these four planned activities will be placed in the Museum endowment.

NEWLY ACQUIRED

From supporter Bruce Robertson of Eleele, Hawaii, comes a wonderful curiosity—an English freethought book, published in 1877, and inscribed to Ingersoll by two of Britain’s most prominent nineteenth-century freethinkers.

In 1878 Ingersoll and his family voyaged to England. He went first to Edinburgh, where he visited all the sites associated with Scots poet Robert Burns; then to Stratford-up-

days in London Ingersoll met with most of the prominent figures in the vibrant English freethought movement. Two of them, George William Foote (1850–1915) and Joseph Mazzini Wheeler (1850–1898), had coauthored a slender book, *Crimes of Christianity*, whose first volume was published in 1877 by London’s Progressive Publishing Company. In 1878 Foote and Wheeler gave a copy to Ingersoll, inscribing it “To Colonel R. G. Ingersoll with the authors’ profound esteem and admiration.”



on-Avon, home of Shakespeare; then to London; and finally to Paris, where the Exposition Universelle, then the largest international fair ever held, was in full swing. (Ingersoll recounts the trip in an interview with the *Washington Post* reprinted in the *Dresden Edition*, Vol. VIII, page 5–ff.) During his

Presumably Ingersoll brought the book home to America with him. Mr. Robertson discovered the volume in his native Brooklyn before bringing it to Hawaii. Today it is in the collection of the Center for Inquiry Libraries in Amherst, New York, and after some needed restoration work, it will likely go on display in the Museum.

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FULLY RESTORED ONE-OF-A-KIND RGI BUST GOES ON DISPLAY

It's a detective story. It's a celebration of the restorer's art. It's an utterly unique specimen of classic Ingersollia. The plaster bust of Ingersoll at age forty, going back on display this season in the Museum's Piano Room, is all of that and more.

Its story began in August 2010, when the antiquarian bookseller C. E. Van Norman donated some fifty items to the Museum. The largest was a mysterious bust of Ingersoll more than twice the size of any seen before. The bust was displayed "as is" during the 2011 season before Museum volunteer extraordinary (and Ingersoll family descendant) Jeff Ingersoll arranged for the bust to enter the Art Conservation Clinic of Buffalo State College. There it was meticulously imaged, examined, restored, and refinished in a striking golden-black patina.

While the sculpture underwent its procedures, Jeff Ingersoll, Center for Inquiry Libraries Director Tim Binga, and Museum director Tom Flynn attacked the riddle of its history. The bust was signed "M. A. Breed Sc., 1873." ("Sc." is a common form to designate that the individual named is the sculptor.) In 1873, Ingersoll was 40 years of age, prominent in Illinois but not yet a national figure. Research revealed that Breed had resettled in Peoria in 1871 and opened a store devoted to "fine arts and fancy goods."

Whether Breed created this plaster bust as a simple tribute to Ingersoll – already one of Peoria's leading citizens – or whether he hoped to cast and sell copies of the bust to other prosperous Peorians may never be known. If the bust was a commercial venture, it was apparently unsuccessful, as no bronze sculptures based on this plaster model are known to exist. The 28-inch bust of Ingersoll entering middle age, his pate still tufted with hair, is a unique specimen – and star-



The Breed Ingersoll bust as fully restored. Photo courtesy Art Conservation Department, Buffalo State College.

tingly beautiful in its new, period-accurate finish. It furnishes a new highlight to the Museum's 21st anniversary year.

MASONIC MYSTERY DEEPENS

TOM FLYNN

One of the Ingersoll Birthplace Museum's most charismatic artifacts has always been mysterious: an ornate, apparently Masonic sword boldly engraved with the name ROBERT G. INGERSOLL. Presented to the Museum just prior to its 1993 opening by an Illinois collector, it allegedly dates to the earliest years of Ingersoll's public life, when he lived in Peoria and served as the first attorney general of Illinois.

Then as now, Masonic lodges required members to affirm belief in a supreme being. The adult Ingersoll was always vocal about his agnosticism, as author Susan Jacoby confirmed in her new brief biography *The Great Agnostic*. There was never a time when Ingersoll could have joined the Masons before his views on religion were known to those around him. So what's the story behind that sword? I decided to find out—with help from the Masons themselves.



The blade is elegantly inscribed with Ingersoll's name.

At a regional historians meeting, I met the Grand Historian for the Masons of New York state. In November 2012 I gave a presentation on the sword to a local Lodge in Dresden, where the Ingersoll Birthplace Museum is located. (No, I can't say what went on there.) As for the mystery, it just grew *deeper*.

Multiple authorities authenticated the sword. It is unquestionably a genuine post-Civil War Masonic sword, and the engraving of the name appears authentic. But it's not just any Masonic sword; it's a *Templar* sword, given only to advanced Masons who join the Order of the Knights Templar, whose requirement regarding religious belief is even more rigorous than that of the Lodges. To join the Templars one must affirm not just belief in a supreme being, but the divinity of Jesus Christ. How did Ingersoll get under *that* bar?

Given Ingersoll's success and prominence, it's always possible

(Continued on page 8)



With its ivory handle marked with a Crusader cross and its Crusader-armor motifs, the sword is unmistakably a post-Civil War Knights Templar sword.

that a Lodge in Peoria—or anywhere else he lived—might have been willing to “look the other way” on the religion question in order to add such a distinguished figure to its ranks. It’s barely possible that the Templar order might have done the same. Then again, it’s always possible that some believing Christian purchased a blank Templar sword and had Ingersoll’s name engraved on it as an expensive prank. Or—stretching now—there might just have been some other Robert G. Ingersoll who joined the Templars to whom this sword belonged. In this regard it would be helpful to

know for certain whether Ingersoll ever was a Freemason.

It’s a big challenge, since it meant I would have to prove whether Ingersoll had ever joined a secret society. There was only one thing to do—ask more Masons.

I made contact with the Grand Historian of Illinois as well, and the search was on. In April I heard back from the Grand Historian’s office. It was known that Ingersoll’s brother Ebon had joined the Peoria Lodge No. 15, but that Lodge’s records were incom-

plete. It could not be proven either way whether Robert had joined alongside his brother. The historian’s office also directed me to a reference work, William Denslow’s *Ten Thousand Famous Freemasons*, which confirmed Ebon Ingersoll’s membership and also claimed Robert as a Mason. The (admittedly slender) evidence: a passage in an 1877 speech given at San Francisco, in which Ingersoll supposedly recounted swearing on a Bible when he joined the Masons! Doug Schiffer’s ever helpful online *Chronology* established that Ingersoll spent several weeks on the West Coast in mid-1877 and presented several lectures in the City by the Bay. Schiffer himself helped narrow it down to his delivery of “My Reviewers Reviewed” at Wade’s Opera House on June 27, 1877. (This speech is the first item in Volume VII of the Dresden Edition.) The next day’s *Sacramento Daily Union* reproduced the speech verbatim—and Denslow’s claim evaporated. Ingersoll, it turned out, was quoting one of his clerical critics, one Reverend Guard who had made the absurd argument that the Bible must be moral because he, Rev. Guard, swore on it when he joined the Masons! Ingersoll quoted Guard’s account of his (that is, Guard’s) joining the Masons; Ingersoll did not say that he had done so himself.

So the mystery of Ingersoll’s Templar sword remains obscure—for now. For my part, I remain “in the hunt” for solid evidence as to whether, when, and where Ingersoll joined the Masons—and if he did, how that pesky religious requirement was finessed. ←

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