

# THE INGERSOLL

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

REPORT

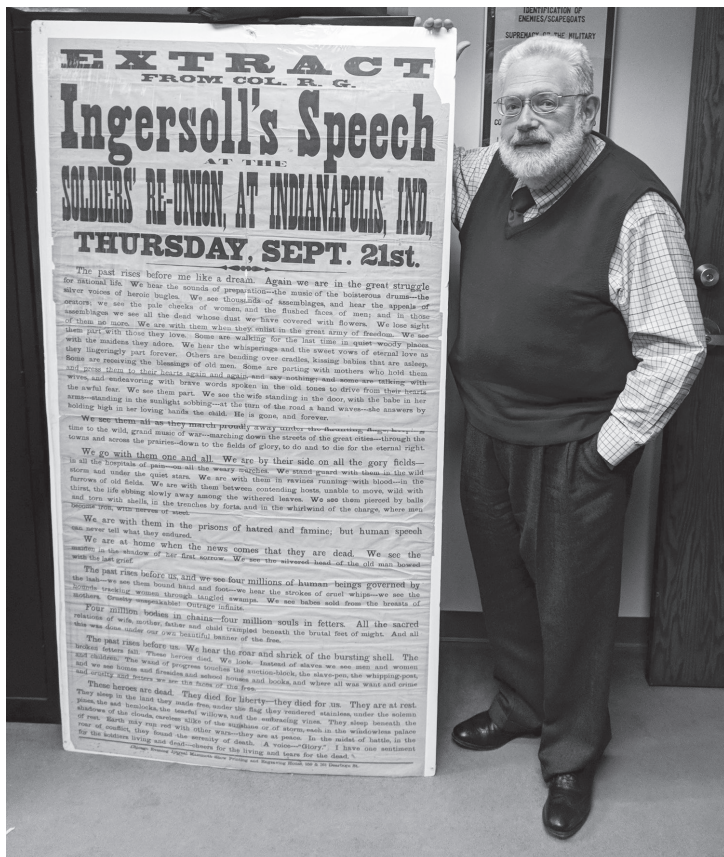
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### MUSEUM HOURS 2019

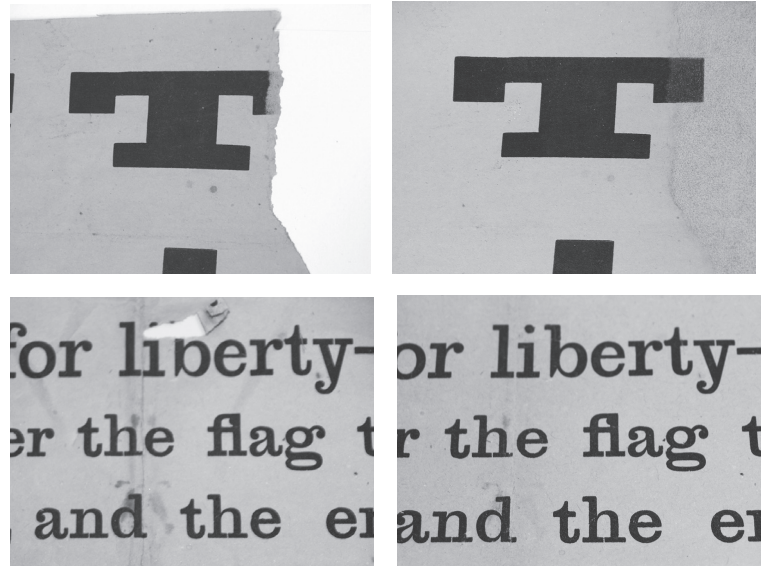
The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum will be open at 61 Main St., Dresden, New York, from 12:00 noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays from May 25 through October 27, 2019. Suggested admission is only \$8.00!

## 1876 POSTER IS LARGER THAN LIFE!



Museum Director Tom Flynn stands beside the broadside as originally received. Even with minor tears and tatters, it was in remarkably good condition. (The poster, that is.)

New in the Ingersoll Museum for 2019 is an 1876 broadside poster excerpting an Ingersoll speech. Almost six feet tall, it's one of just two known to survive. And it's proof that "A Vision of War," perhaps the best-loved single



Before and after images show the results of archival preservation of the broadside poster. Photos by Laura Schell.

passage in the Ingersoll repertoire, was recognized as special within days or weeks of its delivery.

On September 21, 1876, Ingersoll addressed tens of thousands of Civil War veterans at Monument Circle in downtown Indianapolis. Much of his lengthy speech was devoted to political bombast, savaging the Democratic Party ("waving the bloody shirt") and praising G.O.P. candidate Rutherford B. Hayes. But in one 970-word segment, Ingersoll took a different tack, weaving a lyrical, almost cinematic word-picture that captured the Civil War experience for those who fought and lived, those who fought and died, and for all those left behind at home.

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## RECALLING A FORGOTTEN APPRAISAL

TOM FLYNN

In S. T. Joshi's 2008 anthology *Icons of Unbelief*, I offered a 7,500-word article on Ingersoll in which I sought to counter the partisan "hagiography ... common ... among Ingersoll biographies." (A longer version of the article appeared in 2014, anchoring the Inquiry Press anthology *Religions Are for a Day*. To purchase, see the Marketplace in this newsletter.) It's a problem both Susan Jacoby and I had remarked on: we know Ingersoll mostly by the writings of avid admirers, which complicates the objective assessment of his impact.

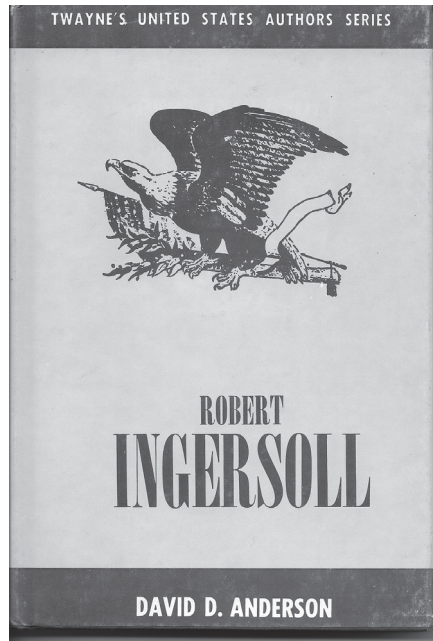
But it may be that I rushed in where someone better-informed would have seen less need to tread. I recently learned that a distinguished scholar took up the challenge of appraising Ingersoll objectively decades before in an obscure 1972 treatise whose existence was previously unknown to me.

*Robert Ingersoll* by David D. Anderson deserves to be better known among Ingersoll researchers. It was part of Twayne Publishers' United States Authors series, a sprawling series of short reference titles devoted to American writers and thinkers. (Twayne, once a major publisher of reference works, was bought out by Simon and Schuster sometime during the 1990s and is now a unit of Gale/Cengage Learning.) Anderson was a professor of English at Michigan State University, a 1963–1964 Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Karachi (Pakistan), and a founder of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. He published thirty-seven books, among them *Robert Ingersoll*.

In the book's preface, Anderson regretted that "recent studies and editions of [Ingersoll's] works are either admittedly or obviously partisan." He proceeded to offer historical and literary analyses of Ingersoll's legal career and several of his most famous lectures. Anderson concluded that Ingersoll "is deserving of much more than the obscurity to

which he has been relegated."

[Ingersoll's] importance in the movement toward secularizing America and his role in shifting the direction of man's thinking from the next world to this one must not be underestimated. He made those contributions with force, vigor, wit, and courage; and he expressed them as eloquently as man could possibly do. Determined to free men from the domination of dogma of the past, he made substantial contributions to that cause—and he did so not for the few of libraries and learned journals but for the many across the nation.



Anderson's analyses strike me as well-formed with a single exception. Somehow he got the notion that "Ingersoll's faith in science was not characterized by a belief in a rigidly determined naturalistic universe." In fact, Ingersoll was a hard determinist. Inspired by the German radical materialist Friedrich Karl Christian Ludwig Büchner (1824–1899), Ingersoll argued repeatedly that determinism, coupled with the then-prevalent belief that the universe was uncreated and eternal, ruled out the very possibility of a creator god. (I spell this out in my article in Joshi's book and in *Religions*

*Are for a Day*.)

Color me embarrassed: Some thirty-six years before I set out to address the "objectivity gap" in Ingersoll scholarship, David Anderson had plowed that field way ahead of me. How had I missed it? I ascribe it to two factors: Twayne Publishers' acquisition and associated passage into relative obscurity and the unfortunate fact that Anderson's book came out four years too late to be included in Gordon Stein's 1968 bibliography *Ingersoll: A Checklist*. In a time when organized freethought was in tatters, Stein's work had a huge impact; it's not going too far to say that it established the boundaries of the Ingersoll literature as later workers in the field would come to know it. Including me.

Anderson's *Robert Ingersoll* remains worth reading. It's accessibly brief at 141 pages and readily available on the used book market. (I snagged my copy through Abe Books for about \$10.) Check it out! ❧

## 1876 POSTER IS LARGER THAN LIFE!

continued from page 1

The haunting extract gained fame so quickly that within weeks it was reproduced in this oversized format, to be read on building walls and inside social halls and taverns. Soon afterward named “A Vision of War,” the extract was republished in numerous forms, from a pamphlet to a lavishly illustrated full-color edition with dazzling watercolor images.



**IN ONE 970-WORD SEGMENT, INGERSOLL TOOK A DIFFERENT TACK, WEAVING A LYRICAL, ALMOST CINEMATIC WORD-PICTURE THAT CAPTURED THE CIVIL WAR EXPERIENCE...**

“A Vision of War” was considered the foremost literary response to the Civil War, alongside Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, until the publication of Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895).

Framed in new wood carved in an 1870s pattern, the poster will be added to the James Hervey Johnson Display Room at the front of the Birthplace. This

room already contains the 560-pound sandstone bust of Ingersoll, the museum orientation video, and the pianoforte given by the Ingersoll family on the occasion of the museum’s first restoration in 1921.

The poster itself is exceptionally rare. Broadside posters of this sort were printed on high-acid pulp paper, which decays quickly unless stored under ideal conditions. It

has been professionally preserved and framed using museum-grade materials. Gifted to the Ingersoll Museum in 2018 by Saul Dunn and Susan Starr in honor of their brother William J. Dunn, who loved liberty and freethought, the poster was displayed prior to its preservation at the Ingersoll Museum Silver Anniversary Event in Syracuse, New York, this past August.

It is also one of two original broadside posters now displayed at the Museum, the other being a twenty-eight-inch poster promoting an October 11, 1878, Ingersoll lecture at City Hall in Lawrence, Massachusetts. That poster, the gift of Ingersoll aficionado Al Szczepek, joined the Museum collection in 2008. ❧

## ENDOWMENT CROSSES HALFWAY MARK!

The Ingersoll Museum endowment fund stands at \$201,483.21—up from last year by \$18,519.54. That’s past the halfway point toward the fund’s target of \$400,000. With an endowment fund 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 in 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.org](mailto:mfern@centerforinquiry.org) or call (800) 818-7071. ❧

**MUSEUM  
ENDOWMENT  
NOW**

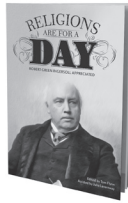
**\$201,483.<sup>21</sup>**

**TARGET  
\$400,000**

# MARKETPLACE



**Ingersoll Silver Anniversary Mug:**  
Handsome dark gray ceramic mug celebrates the Ingersoll Museum's 25th anniversary with a wraparound design. Mug interior is "Robert green" for a dynamic contrast. Top rack dishwasher safe. \$18.00



**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



**Ingersoll Silver Anniversary Museum T-Shirt:** Quality Gildan T-shirt celebrates the Silver Anniversary of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum. Three color imprint on front; two on back. Available sizes M - L - XL - 2XL - 3XL in limited quantities. \$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



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