

# THE INGERSOLL

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

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## REPORT

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#### MUSEUM HOURS 2022

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 28–October 30, 2022. Suggested admission is still only \$8.00!

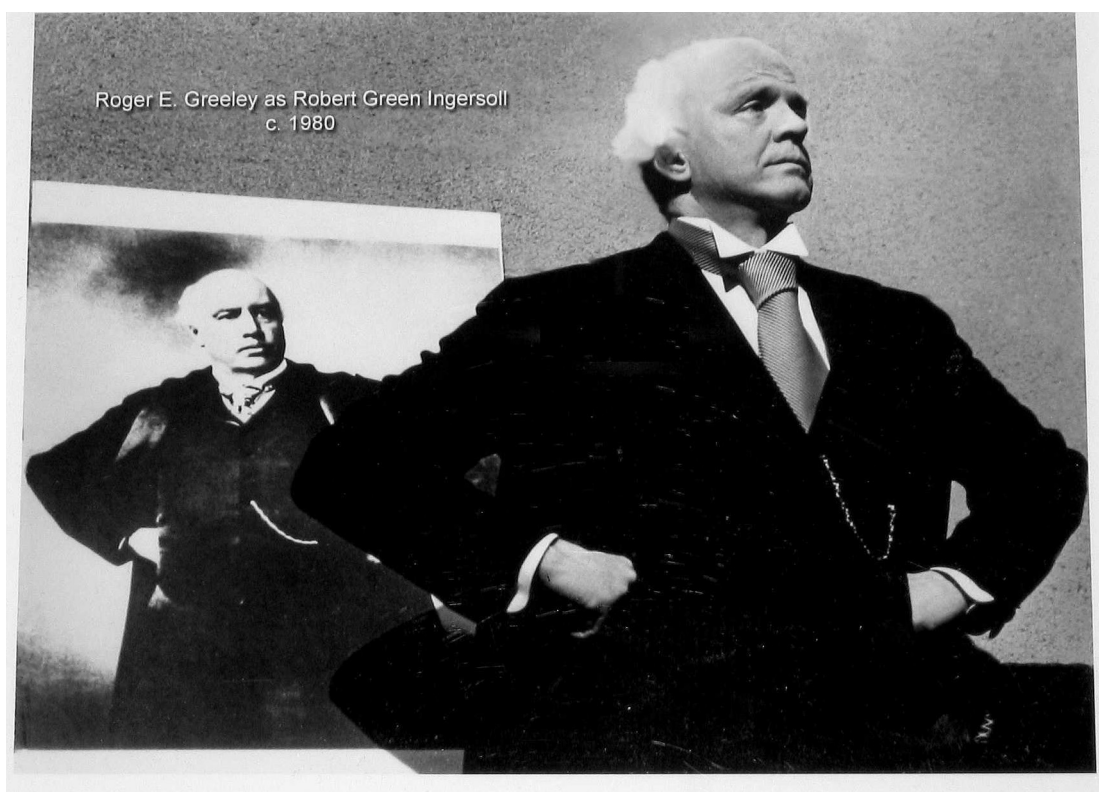
## REMEMBERING ROGER GREELEY, INGERSOLL ENTHUSIAST AND REENACTOR

Roger E. Greeley, author, editor, and Ingersoll Memorial Committee Chair during the early days of the Museum, passed away October 2021. According to his obituary, Greeley was a U.S. Marine, history teacher, and former Unitarian minister.

Greeley was the editor of several freethought-related books published by Prometheus Books, including Thomas Jefferson's Freethought Legacy (1995), The Best of Humanism (1988), and The Best of Robert Ingersoll (1983).

Greeley felt a special connection to Ingersoll. Not only did he write about Ingersoll, but he also read some of Ingersoll's works as Ingersoll himself (see photo; Greeley in costume and make-up as Ingersoll, circa 1980). He presented his "Evening with Ingersoll" for freethinking groups.

Greeley was also highly interested in the Beckwith Theater in Dowagiac, Michigan; Ingersoll not only was the first attraction at the theater when it opened, he was carved in sandstone as a part of the theater's decorations along with many other freethinkers or reformers. Greeley solved the mystery of what happened to the Ingersoll carving after the building was torn down in the 1960s. He found the freethinker in Michigan who had the carving in his



backyard and convinced him to donate it to the Museum! The carving was restored and shipped to the museum and installed by Greeley himself.

Greeley remained chair of the Ingersoll Memorial Committee until 2015, when Jeff Ingersoll became the chair, and Greeley became Chair Emeritus.

Thank you Roger Greeley for all you have done for Ingersoll and the RGI Birthplace Museum. ❧

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The Museum is located at 61 Main Street, Dresden, New York (315) 536-1074, seasonal only.

Send correspondence to Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee, PO Box 664, Amherst, New York 14226-0664; (716) 636-7571, ext. 210.

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## MUSEUM ACCESS AND IMPROVEMENTS

One of the basic principles of a museum is access. When planning displays, we have to think not only about how to see what the objects are, but describe and interpret them to give a better understanding of their context in both history and to the lives of those the objects relate. Access to these objects includes providing the basic information about them.

One of the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic is that cultural centers such as the Museum cannot only depend upon physical access to the artifacts. The Museum was closed in 2020 and had a shortened season in 2021. So we are going to embark upon a few projects that will increase access both physically and digitally.

The first was announced last year, and we created a fund drive campaign around it to honor former Museum Director Tom Flynn. He planned a project to add a driveway, parking lot, and sidewalk for visitors to the museum. Additionally, a gazebo created in honor of Tom will be built next to the sidewalk in the back of the museum near the parking lot. Parking for five or six vehicles and a driveway to connect to Avenue N is planned. As of this writing, we were able to raise the funds to complete this project through the donations of over 100 individuals. We will begin construction later this summer. Thank you for your support of this project!

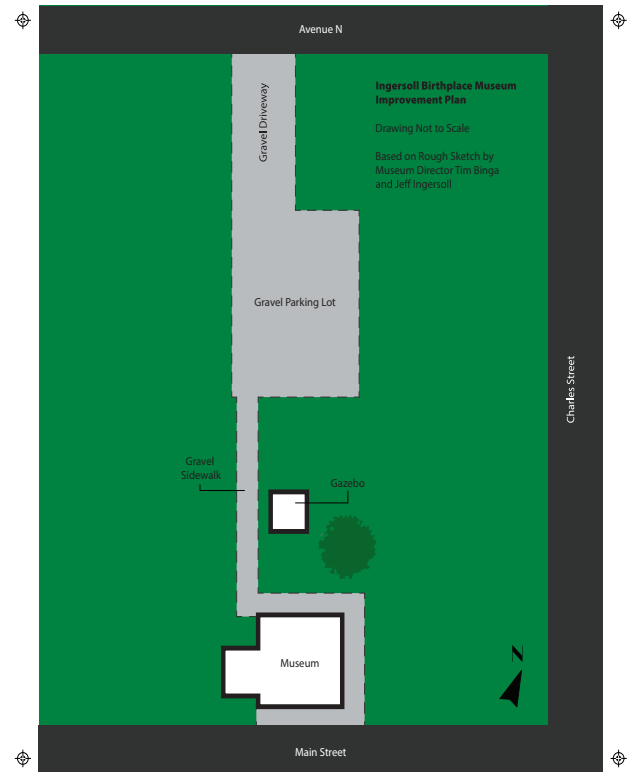
Now to the digital portions of this project. Several years ago, the museum website hosted a “virtual tour” of the Museum; it gave a tour of the building and had photos. However, the software that ran the tour became obsolete, and we were not able to continue using it.

As a member of the Board of Trustees for the Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC), I became aware of a pilot project they were running called Empire State Immersive Experiences (esie.space). The project helps folks create and host files created to run a “virtual tour” like we used to have on our site. Grants are available, and we are hoping to have some of the cost shared.

The software will help us create the tour, which includes hotspots for links, photos, and other media, and other enhancements will make an extraordinary tour experience for those who cannot visit the Museum in person.

The other announced digital project will be to create a more visually appealing and versatile website for the Ingersoll Chronology Database (<https://chronology.secularhumanism.org/>). This database was started years ago by Doug Schiffer and is currently hosted on our website. We are looking to add more visual enhancements, such as maps of the tours and look-ups that connect directly to maps. This helps personalize the various events and tours that Ingersoll took over his lifetime.

In addition the website enhancements, we are planning to install a couple computer kiosks at the museum. One will be loaded with the Freethought Trail website; the other will have the Ingersoll Chronology. It is important for visitors to have access to these two sites while they are at the Museum. ❧



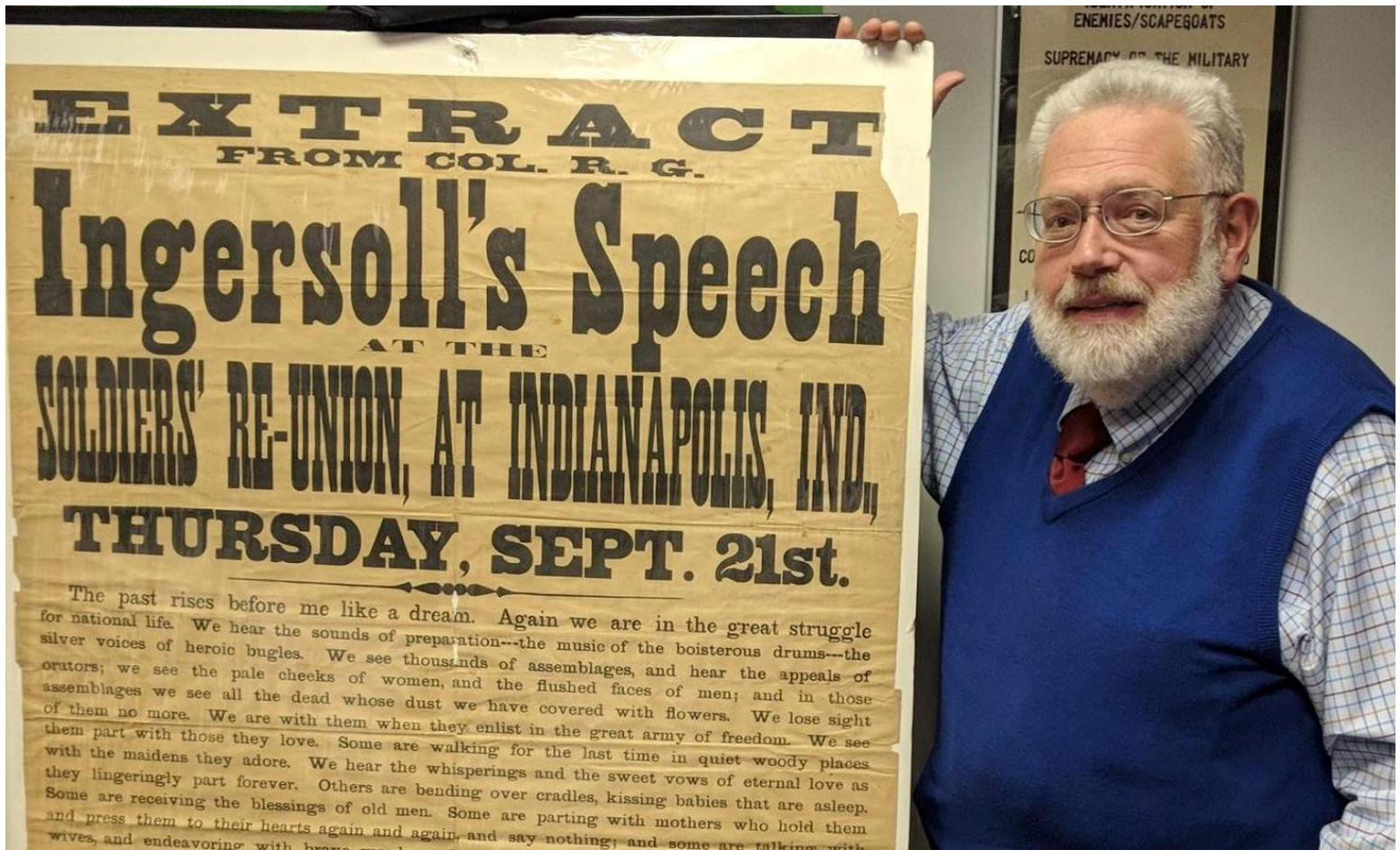
## ENDOWMENT FUND GOAL MET!

The Robert Green Ingersoll Museum has met the endowment goal of \$400,000 with the hard work of our Board and former Director Tom Flynn and through the donations made in Tom’s honor. This means the Museum will be able to meet our routine operating expenses through the investment income, from water and electricity to paying our docent.

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 our Development Department at (800) 818-7071. ❧







## TOM FLYNN AND ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL: REMEMBERED TOGETHER

The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum in Dresden, New York has seen several incarnations over the years. The Council for Secular Humanism took over the operation after several failed attempts to keep it running around 1986. The Council renovated the building for a few years and it opened to the public in 1993. Many luminaries associated with freethought were involved with the creation and running of the Museum over the years. Thomas Edison and Luther Burbank were involved with the first attempt in the early 1920s. Joseph Lewis was heavily involved in the 1954 attempt. This, too, failed after a few years.

When the Council purchased the Museum, Tom Flynn was pressed into duty and essentially designed the museum after the building was stabilized over the course of several years. He eventually became the director.

Tom went to the museum every spring to set-up the museum and back every fall to dismantle the displays for storage in Amherst. He acquired, researched, and created a database of the holdings; spoke about Ingersoll; wrote about Ingersoll; and was the authority on Ingersoll. He had encyclopedic knowledge of everything Ingersoll. There was no one more dedicated to the memory of Robert Ingersoll than Tom.

It has been about nine months since the sudden passing of Tom at his home in Williamsville, New York. As mentioned

elsewhere, I've known Tom for over thirty years and have been working with him in various capacities for the past twenty-five or so years. There were many things that we worked on: our old cable-access TV show, conferences, writing for the magazines, and researching various items for him, especially for *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006). I had also started working with him to eventually take over the Museum when he retired. We had worked together for almost two years preparing for it. But it happened far too soon.

Tom had started the campaign for the parking lot, sidewalk, and gazebo additions to the Museum grounds. While thinking about ways to honor Tom and his contributions to the Museum over the years, it was very easy to decide to make the project in Tom's honor and name our gazebo at the museum in his honor. In addition to remembering Tom for all the work he has done on behalf of the Council and the Museum, we want to intertwine his name with the Great Agnostic, and this project does just that.

A plaque will be placed in the Museum honoring those who contributed \$250 or more to this project when the project is completed.

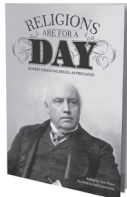
Thank you Tom Flynn. ☘

# 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



## American Freethought

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



## 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

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