

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 2023

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–October 29, 2022. Suggested admission is still only \$8.00!

INGERSOLL MUSEUM CELEBRATES THIRTY YEARS OPEN

Mark your calendars: On August 12, 2023, the Ingersoll Museum will be celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of being open under the auspices of the Center for Inquiry. The only museum dedicated to freethought in the United States has been open as an RGI Museum twice before: first in the 1920s and then again in the 1950s. Both times the Museum closed, and the collections were dispersed.

The celebration will start with museum tours at 11 a.m. featuring new and expanded displays. A complimentary sit down lunch will be provided, and the new gazebo will be dedicated to long-time

museum director and editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine, Tom Flynn.

The highlight of the afternoon will be keynote speaker Seth Andrews. Andrews is known as the Thinking Atheist and is an award winning podcaster and author. He frequently quotes Robert Green Ingersoll and promises to give a memorable talk.

Seating may be limited, so please RSVP to Jeff Ingersoll at jingersoll@me.com.

See <https://www.facebook.com/RGIMuseum> for more details as they become available. ☺



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

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of when the Council for Secular Humanism (then the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism, or CODESH) opened the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum in Dresden, New York, to the public. The Museum is the only existing building with a strong association to Ingersoll—despite the fact that he only lived there for a very short time. There have been several attempts over the years to honor the legacy of Ingersoll with this space, which has been either as a public house or museum while open.

When Ingersoll was born there, the house was a parsonage connected to the church where Ingersoll's father, John, was minister. All in all, the Ingersoll family lived in the home for about six months, and Robert was born there three months after they arrived. The Ingersoll family eventually moved to Illinois.

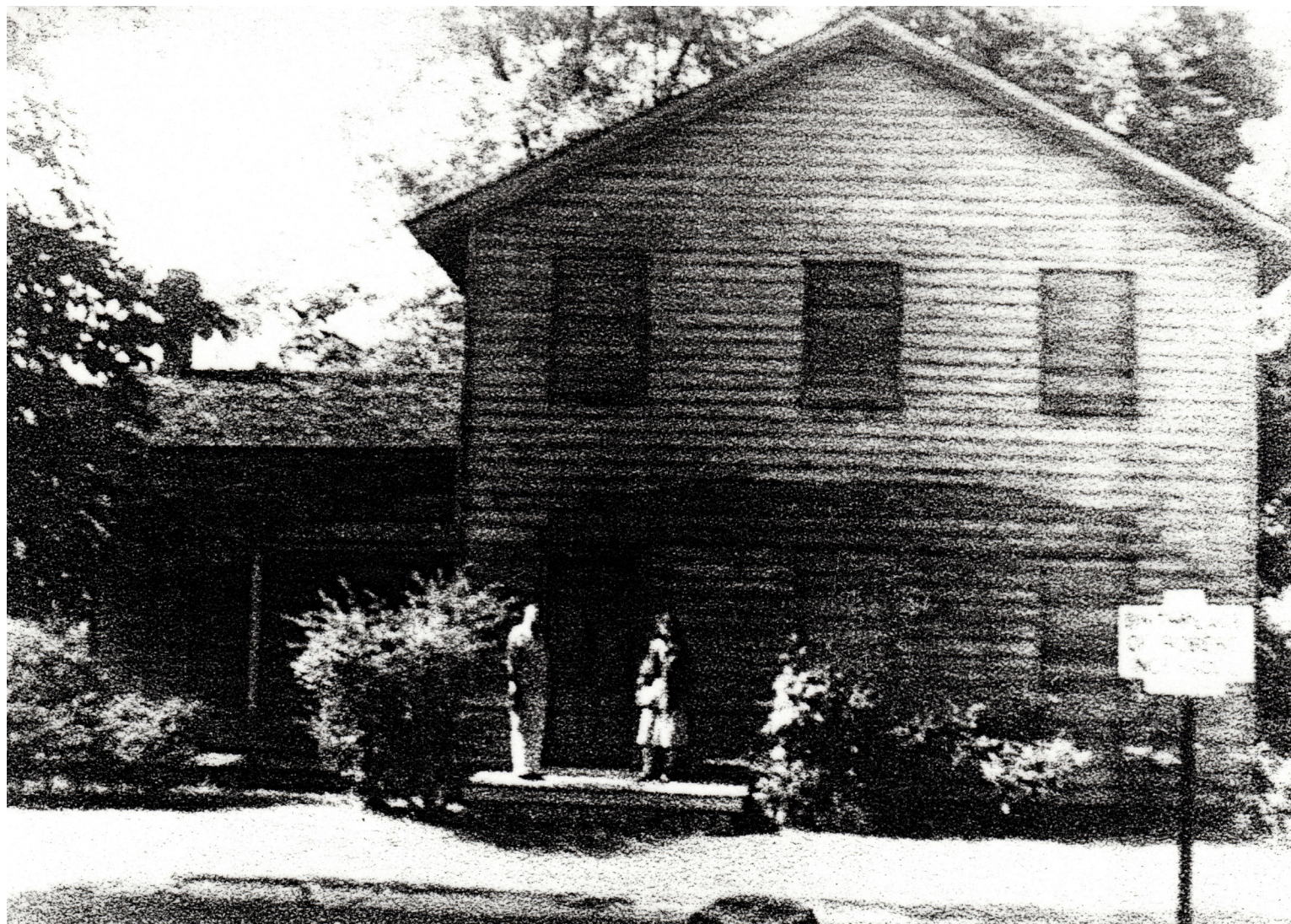
In the 1920s, Ingersoll's family decided to purchase his birthplace from the church and turn it into a community house or public house. The Ingersoll Memorial Committee was created to oversee the purchase and running of the home. It served in this

function from 1921 until 1927. Meetings and lectures were held here; it was a public library; and a piano was purchased for the house. It appears that funds became scarce for the house and that the caretaker, who lived next door to the museum, could not continue to maintain it.

The house languished for years and began to slowly decay from lack of use and caretaking. It was still on freethinkers' radar, but it took thirty years for the project to be undertaken again. Several sources indicate that the location was still open on occasion through the end of World War II.

The Ingersoll Memorial Committee was still working to care for the building, and the president of the committee at the time, Robert Ingersoll Brown, was working behind the scenes. In the 1940s, estimates to reframe the house and make general repairs were obtained.

Joseph Lewis, prominent atheist and freethinker, was involved with the Ingersoll Memorial Committee to the extent that its headquarters were moved to his address and the committee's



This was from the early 1950s. Mr. and Mrs. Cromwell visiting the house before he started working toward another renovation. Rare photo.

name was changed to Ingersoll Memorial Association. At the end of the 1940s, Lewis began in earnest to recreate the space as a museum to Ingersoll and freethought.

Lewis's friend, Arthur Cromwell (and his wife, pictured on previous page), was head of the Rochester Freethinkers and an architect. He agreed to help out at the building, so another campaign was created to raise funds for this endeavor. The results are lost to history, with the exception of the fact that the house was being sold in the late 1980s. The contents were mostly scattered, and the house was in bad shape.

In the 1980s, Phil Mass **[ANY INFO ON PHIL MASS WE CAN INCLUDE?-NS]** became interested in the house. He discovered the house was going up for auction and began raising funds to purchase it. Mass contacted the American Humanist Association (AHA) to assist with this project. According to Mass, the AHA was reluctant to participate.

Mass then turned to entrepreneur Paul Kurtz and CODESH. He convinced them to raise funds for this project and turn the house into a museum and educational center. Mass's timing was impeccable because CODESH was expanding into various outreach and grassroots initiatives at the time, and this one looked good to Kurtz. CODESH was one of two bidders for the property and won the auction in 1987.



Dedication Ceremony in 1988 with Tim Madigan, Paul Kurtz, Phil Mass, and Jean Milholland.

CODESH and the newly reconstituted Ingersoll Memorial Committee, with Mass as chair, began raising funds for renovation, furnishing, artifacts, and sustainability to allow the Museum to remain open. The site was added to the National Register of Historic Places and New York State's Register of Historic Places, and a dedication ceremony commenced on Ingersoll's birthday, August 11, in 1988.



Interior of the kitchen during the 1993 dedication.



"The Birth Room" during the renovation.

Mass, Ingersoll aficionado Dixie Jokinen, and former CFI Libraries Director Gordon Stein worked tirelessly to open the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum. After several years of renovations and several rounds of fundraising, the Museum was completed in 1993 and opened to the public on May 29. Originally, the Museum was open daily Wednesday through Sunday, but is now open weekends from noon until 5 p.m.

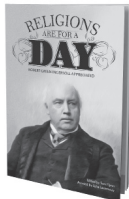
The Council for Secular Humanism, as CODESH is now called, has in recent years done what no other organization had been able to do: raise an endowment to ensure the continued success of the Museum and keep it open for future generations.

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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