

THE INGERSOLL

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

REPORT

MUSEUM HOURS 2021

The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum is scheduled to be open at 61 Main St., Dresden, New York, from noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays from July 3–October 31, 2021. Subject to change based on pandemic circumstances. Suggested admission is only \$8.00!

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MUSEUM TO REOPEN AFTER PANDEMIC PAUSE

The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum will reopen to the public over Independence Day weekend, circumstances permitting. The first day of operations is scheduled for Saturday, July 3. The Museum will reopen with new sanitizing and air filtration systems in place. Assuming pandemic conditions permit reopening as scheduled, the season will continue until Sunday, October 31.

Visitors will see the new interpretive signage prepared for the 2020 season but never installed. One poster-sized graphic profiles the seventeen venues within 100 miles of Dresden at which Ingersoll lectured. Only one, the Breese Opera House in Norwich, still stands. (More details at www.freethought-trail.org.)

The other large graphic sign highlights each of the state-wide suffrage conventions held between Rochester and Utica between 1890 and 1914. Between 1890 and 1914, the New York State Woman Suffrage Association (NYSWSA) held sixteen of its twenty-four annual conventions in west-central New York. This sign commemorates the centenary year of woman suffrage in the United States, 2020, but was always intended to become a permanent feature of the Museum. (More details at <https://freethought-trail.org/plan-your-journey/trail:woman-suffrage-conventions-trail/>.)



A look at one of the new supergraphics that will be displayed in the museum this upcoming season.

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AN ENERGY-EFFICIENT NEW LOOK

For 2021, the Ingersoll Museum will feature new, more energy-efficient light-emitting diode (LED) illumination. LED lamps consume much less energy, last several times longer between replacements, and maintain truer color over their lifespans than traditional incandescent lamps. LED lamps have been on the market for several years, but only recently did LED replacements for some of the specialized, narrow-beam reflector spotlights used at the Museum become available. The LED lamps will replace standard lamps in the existing ceiling-mounted track light fixtures, making the changeover even more economical. ❧

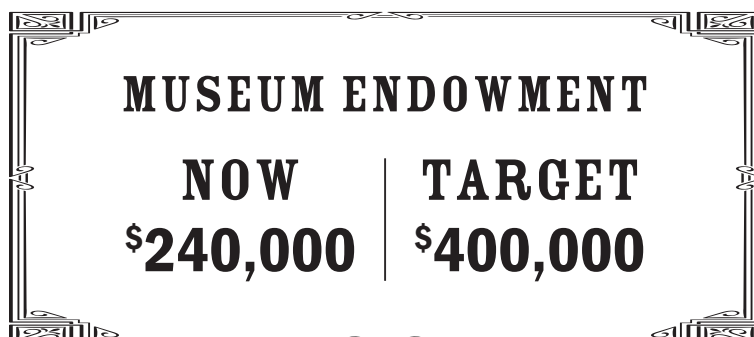
MATCHING CHALLENGE MARKS CAMPAIGN TO COMPLETE MUSEUM ENDOWMENT!

The Ingersoll Museum endowment fund stands at \$240,000—up from last year by more than \$38,000. That's well past the halfway point toward the fund's target of \$400,000. With an endowment fund that size, the Museum could meet its routine operating costs from investment income and would no longer require subsidies from the Center for Inquiry.

Museum Director Tom Flynn announced a special campaign to raise as much of the remaining \$160,000 as possible in 2021. In what will be for him a once-in-a-lifetime gesture, Tom will match the first \$40,000 of gifts to the Museum endowment during calendar year 2021.

Qualifying gifts can include cash, appreciated stocks and other financial instruments, paid-up life insurance policies, and gifts of real estate. Planned gifts and bequests qualify also. The Center for Inquiry's professional Development Department can work with you to help structure larger gifts for maximum donor benefit and maximum tax advantages.

Donors can contribute online at: <https://secularhumanism.org/rgi-endowment/> or call 716-300-8311 to speak directly to a development professional. ❧



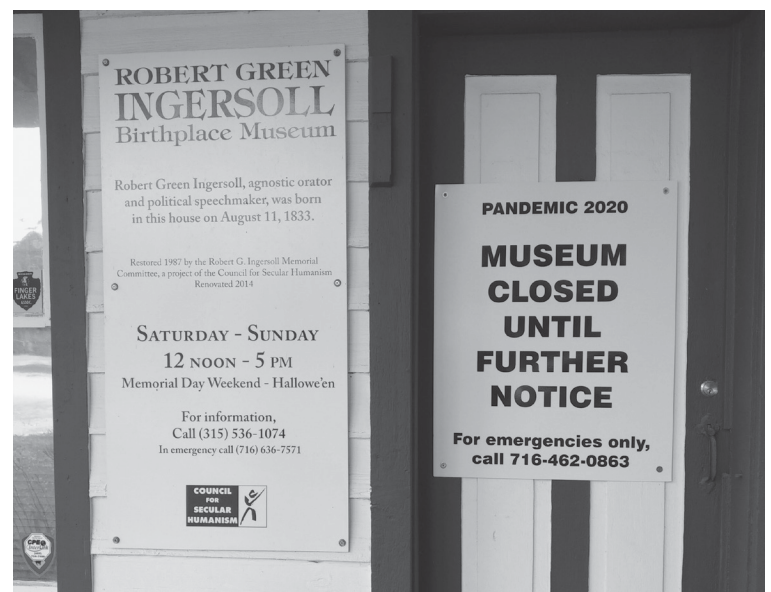
LOOKING BACK ON THE LOST YEAR

Twenty-twenty was a year of many harrowing firsts. Perhaps it is among the smaller consequences of COVID-19 that for the first year since its 1993 reopening, the Ingersoll Museum failed to greet the public over an entire season. A great, grim sign warned off would-be visitors—if there were any—remaining in place until (we hope) Independence Day weekend.

We'd had ambitious plans for 2020, the U.S. woman suffrage centenary year. It was also the first year after we had successfully plotted the location of *every* lecture Ingersoll delivered within a roughly 100-mile radius of the Museum. The new supergraphics we developed for 2020 will be unveiled in 2021.

If the Museum couldn't interpret Ingersoll to in-person visitors, that meant we could focus redoubled attention on our digital resources. The year 2020 marked the largest one-year expansion in the history of the Freethought Trail (freethought-trail.org), which celebrates radical-reform history (freethought, abolitionism, woman suffrage, dress reform, and more) across west-central New York. An entire new category of pages was added in March 2020, when 137 new Events pages went live. (Previously, the Trail had focused on historic sites and on persons and organizations.) Throughout the year, Event and Site pages were added to chronicle New York State suffrage conventions in the region, sites of Ingersoll lectures, and other new findings from historical research.

We all look forward to getting back in the museum business—hopefully, in time to celebrate Independence Day. Updates will appear on the Museum webpage, www.secularhumanism.org/Ingersoll. ❧



This grim sign greeted Museum visitors during the COVID-19 lockdown. Photo by Marty Jenkins.

THE STRANGEST INGERSOLL STORY YOU'LL READ THIS YEAR

Mary Edwards Walker (1832–1919) was a suffragist, a dress reformer, and one of the first female physicians to serve in the U.S. armed forces. She remains the only woman to receive the Medal of Honor. As it happens, she was also Robert Green Ingersoll's second cousin.

Walker wore a Bloomer-style costume (a mid-length skirt over Turkish-style pantaloons) as early as 1855. In later life, she routinely donned men's formal wear, including a top hat.

In his 1952 book *Royal Bob*, C. H. Cramer is the only Ingersoll biographer to recount a passing strange story. In 1881, Walker called on her cousin Robert Green Ingersoll at his home at 25 Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C. She was wearing Bloomers. Cramer recounts that Ingersoll "was a stanch defender of women's rights, but he was rigidly orthodox on the subject of female attire." Though famous for hospitably receiving every caller from prominent personages to cranks, Ingersoll denied Walker entrance. Whether Ingersoll knew at the time that Walker was his cousin is unknown.

This is one of the only known instances when Ingersoll refused someone entry to his home. It reflects his personal blend of theological radicalism and social conservatism. ❧



Mary Edwards Walker (1832–1919), shown in her Civil War uniform. Note the skirt over uniform pants.



Lafayette Square (today, Madison Place) as seen from H Street, circa 1899. The door to the Ingersoll townhouse is just behind the second tree from the left. Image courtesy of Steven C. Lowe.

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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