

A Self Guided Walking Tour

of

**ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL**

WASHINGTON, DC



by **Gary C. Grassl**

4207 Oxford Drive, Silver Hill, Maryland 20746-3030.

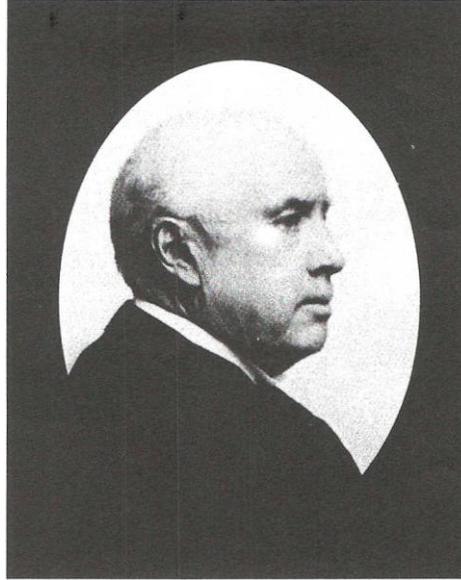
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## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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**Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899)** was the best-known orator and political speechmaker of 19th-century America. A hero of the Civil War nationally famed as an attorney, Ingersoll criss-crossed the country addressing packed houses on politics, ethics, human freedom, and religious topics. He spoke against slavery and opposed the Religious Right of his day. A Republican activist when that was the party of Lincoln, Ingersoll campaigned powerfully for every Republican presidential candidate but one from Grant to McKinley. His "Plumed Knight" speech nominating James G. Blaine for the presidency set a standard by which political oratory was measured for more than a quarter of a century. In the Golden Age of American oratory, no speaker was heard by more American men and women - nor sparked greater controversy - than Robert Green Ingersoll.

*From brochure, "Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum, Dresden, N. Y.,"  
Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee, Box 664, Amherst, N.Y. 14226-0664.*

# Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

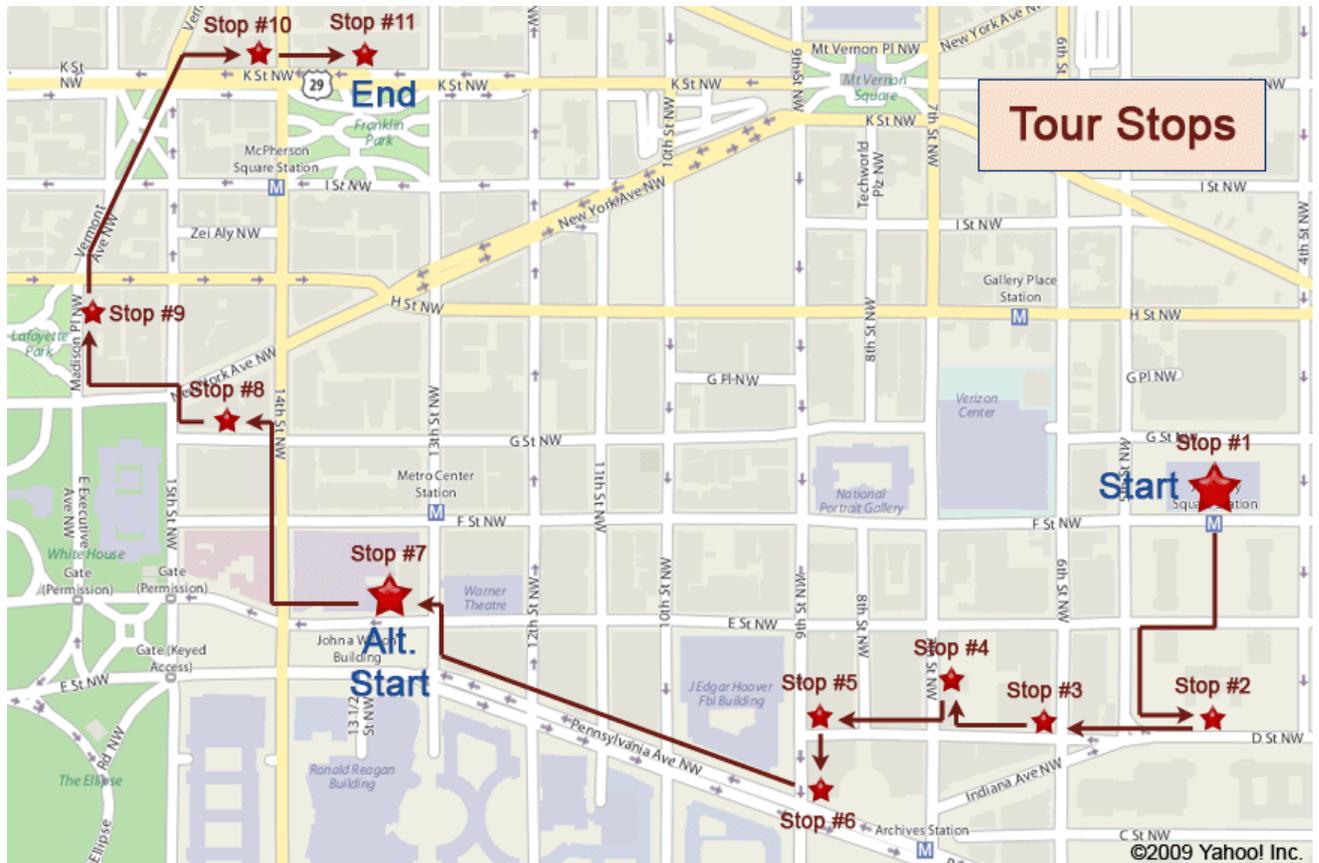
## A SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR ROBERT G. INGERSOLL'S WASHINGTON

Downtown Washington, D.C.

Preface. During this beautiful walk through the oldest parts of Washington, DC, you will visit the sites where Ingersoll lived worked, or spoke. However, due to enormous commercial development, most of the actual buildings have been replaced with modern structures.

**Note:** The downtown walking tour comprises about two dozen city blocks – 2 miles and takes about 2 hours. The starting point may be reached via Metro Rail at Judiciary Square station (Red Line). The walk ends near the McPherson Square Station (Orange and Blue Lines).

If you prefer a shorter walk, (12 blocks , about 1 mile and 1 ¼ hours) you could start at stop 7, The National Theatre (Metro Center Station - Red, Blue & Orange lines or Federal Triangle Station - Blue & Orange lines). (see Stop # 7 on page 7)



## Route for the Self Guided Walking Tour of Robert G. Ingersoll in Washington, DC

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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**Robert Green Ingersoll** (1833-1899) was America's foremost freethought orator. For seven years, from 1878 to 1885, he made his two Washington homes his base for his forays around the country delivering speeches on religion, politics and literature. During his Washington period, Ingersoll lectured mainly on "*Some Mistakes of Moses*," "*Hard Times and the Way Out*" and "*What We Must Do To Be Saved?*" He also spoke on "*Some Reasons Why*," "*Skulls*," "*Hell*," "*Orthodoxy*," "*Which Way*," "*Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child*," "*Robert Burns*," "*Myths and Miracles*," and "*The Great Infidels*."

**START: Take the METRO RAIL Red to the Judiciary Square Station and take the exit at the North end of the platform designated "F Street and National Building Museum". At the top of the escalator you will see:**

- 1. The National Building Museum** (formerly the Pension Building) **on F Street, between 4th and 5th Streets, N.W.**

This red-brick building, which takes up the entire block, was completed in 1887 to house the Pension Bureau that administered pensions for Union veterans. The 1,200-foot long, terracotta frieze by Caspar Buberl that runs around the entire building depicts a continuous parade of Union military units. Step inside to see this fabulous space.

During the Civil War, Ingersoll "assisted in raising and became colonel of the 11th Illinois volunteer cavalry regiment, which was mustered into Federal service on Dec. 20, 1861. His command saw duty in the Tennessee Valley campaign, at Shiloh and at Corinth, and was stationed in Tennessee in 1862 when on Dec. 18 the Confederate raider, Gen. Nathan B. Forrest, captured its colonel and some hundreds of its men. Ingersoll was soon paroled, and, having no hope of exchange, took his discharge from the army on June 30, 1863" (Dictionary of American Biography, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961, Vol. V, pp. 469-470).

**Go South 2 blocks through the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, cross E street and walk around the court building to D Street. (The address of site # 2 is officially 451 Indiana Ave., NW but it is actually on D Street..**

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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### 2. Superior Court of the District of Columbia, Building D, 451 Indiana Ave., N.W.

This Greek Revival building by George Hadfield, whose cornerstone was laid in 1820 by President James Monroe, was originally the District of Columbia City Hall and Court House. With its Ionic portico, it is considered an architecturally perfect example of the Greek Revival or Georgian style.

Among those tried here were John Surratt, one of the conspirators in Lincoln's assassination; Charles Guiteau, the assassin of President Garfield; and Albert Fall and Harry Sinclair, who were involved in the Teapot Dome scandal. Theodore Roosevelt had an office in the building when he served as Civil Service Commissioner. For a time before the Civil War, the building had served as a slave market. In 1861, a temporary addition was used for President Lincoln's first Inaugural Ball. Later, this addition served as a hospital for wounded Union soldiers. In 1863, the U.S. Government acquired part of the building for the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia, a Federal court.

Ingersoll practiced law before this court, notably as defense counsel for Senator Stephen Dorsey in the Star Route trial. This case, which lasted from June 1882 to June 1883, was "the most sensational case of the Gilded Age (and of Ingersoll's career at the bar)" (Frank Smith).

An exhibit on the Star Route trial, including a 19th century cartoon of Ingersoll, may be viewed at the U.S. Postal Museum at Massachusetts Avenue and North Capitol Street. Unfortunately, the "narrative account is quite wrong as to the facts," declared Smith. There was no conspiracy between a Post Office official and Ingersoll's clients to defraud the government. The defendants were acquitted. A contemporaneous cartoon shows a victorious Ingersoll leaving the courthouse with bags of counsel fees under his arms. In fact, his client Dorsey paid him a vacation ranch [in New Mexico] worth about \$15,000. "Whereas, a fee of about \$100,000 would not have been out of line in such a case."

In front of the Superior Court building stands a gray stone statue of Abraham Lincoln by Lot Flannery. It was erected in 1868 as the first public monument to the martyred President. It reminds us that Ingersoll was the great champion of the Republican Party, the party of Lincoln. With regard to the Great Emancipator, he declared,

Abraham Lincoln was, in my judgment, in many respects the grandest man ever President of the United States. Upon his monument these words should be written: "Here sleeps the only man in the history of the world, who, having been clothed with almost absolute power, never abused it, except upon the side of mercy." ("The Liberty of Man, Woman and Child" Dresden Edition. Vol 1. p 352)

**Go west 2 blocks on D Street. toward 6<sup>th</sup> Street**

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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### 3. Corner of 6th and D Streets, N.W.

The National Gallery of Art, West Building, may be seen 2 blocks south at 6th and Constitution Avenue. This was the site of the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad Station where President James Garfield was assassinated 2 July 1881.

Although Garfield was a minister, he supported religious freedom. Ingersoll campaigned for him in 1880 and headed the group welcoming the President-elect to 'Washington on the night of 23 November 1880. "The President-elect Received by 'Royal Bob' Ingersoll at Baltimore & Potomac depot," headlined the Washington Post. "Col. Bob advanced and extending his hand said in a hearty way: 'How are you General?' The General grasped his hand and replied in an equally hearty manner:

'Royal Bob, how are you?' "Ingersoll's diary entry for 1 March 1881 reads, "Met Garfield at B & P Depot at 5 AM. Had a sleepy time." Ingersoll consulted with Garfield in the White House, including the day before he was assassinated. The Garfield memorial stands at the foot of the Capitol next to the Botanic Garden.

**Go west 1 long block on D Street and turn right on 7th Street for one half block**

### 4. Odd Fellows Hall, 419 7th Street, N.W. (between D and E Streets).

Built in 1845, the Odd Fellows Hall was renovated in 1872 and turned into one of the city's most elegant Second Empire buildings. This three-story building housed shops on the first floor and a main hall (100 by 40 feet) on the second. It was razed in 1917 for the construction of the present seven-story Odd Fellows Hall.

Ingersoll was the main speaker at a suffrage meeting on 23 January 1880. "After speaking of the right of citizens to govern and select their rulers, he referred to the deprivation of suffrage here as an injustice," reported the Washington Evening Star. Ingersoll delivered a plea for universal suffrage as well as self government for the citizens of the District of Columbia. Speaking before an overflow crowd, he said among other things:

I do not believe that only the rich should vote, or that only the whites should vote, or that only the blacks should vote. I do not believe that right depends upon wealth, upon education, or upon color. It depends absolutely upon humanity... If any woman wants to vote I am too much of a gentleman to say she shall not.... This Government was founded upon the idea that the only source of power is the people. Let us show at the Capital that we have confidence in that principle....

**Go back down to D Street and turn right to go west 2 blocks to 9<sup>th</sup> St..**

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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### 5. Lincoln Hall at the NE corner of 9th and D Streets, N.W. (not extant)

Built in 1867, Lincoln Hall featured one of the finest auditoriums in the nation's capital during the 19th century. "Constructed of brick, stuccoed and scored to resemble stone," the 9th Street and the D Street facades "were identical in their symmetrical design." Lincoln Hall "was a massive, Victorian counterpart to the present-day Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts" (James M. Goode, Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1979, p. 357). Housing lecture halls and a theater, it was the cultural center of Washington and served as an opera house when it burned down in 1886. The site is today an office building with the Caucus Room Restaurant on the ground floor. (Sic transit Gloria mundi. - "Thus passes the glory of the world".)

Ingersoll was invited to address a mass meeting at Lincoln Hall on 6 May 1879 in sympathy with "Kansas colored emigrants." However, the YMCA, which controlled the building at that time, would not permit Ingersoll to speak there. Instead of appearing in person, Ingersoll sent a letter, which was read to the audience. He said that he would gladly have accepted the invitation to address his fellow citizens in Lincoln Hall but for the fact that the controllers of the building had passed a resolution denying him the privilege of speaking within its sacred walls. He enclosed \$100 "to aid a little so great a cause."

Four years later, things had changed. After being introduced by Frederick Douglass, Ingersoll delivered his famous civil rights oration on 22 October 1883 before a packed house in Lincoln Hall. He spoke in opposition to a recent Supreme Court decision upholding segregation (109 U.S. 3, 1883). His 50-page speech included the following statement:

What are the fundamental rights, privileges and immunities which belong to a free man? Certainly the rights of all citizens of the United States are equal. Their immunities and privileges must be the same. He who makes discrimination between citizens on account of color, violates the Constitution of the United States.

"On October twenty-fifth, a group of twenty-five citizens headed by Douglass begged Ingersoll for a repeat of the address. He complied" (Frank Smith, Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life, p. 215).

**Go south 1 block on 9th Street.**

### 6. Corner of 9th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Ten blocks to the east may be seen the U.S. Capitol where Ingersoll argued cases before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1875 and 1876. (The Supreme Court sat in the Old Senate Chamber.)

Ingersoll was what was known as a "parliamentary lawyer" and as such he lobbied on Capitol Hill and appeared before administrative agencies. He was so often present on the floors of Congress that he was taken to be a member or former member.

**Go west (away from the Capitol) 5 blocks on Pennsylvania Avenue to Freedom Plaza.**

SHORT tour START:

Take METRO-rail to

Metro Center Station. From the Red Line's "Glenmont" direction platform, find and take the Exit at 12<sup>th</sup> Street and "F" Street. Walk on 12<sup>th</sup> St. downhill or south, for 1 block to "E" Street then turn right, or west, for 1.5 blocks to Freedom Plaza in front of the National Theatre.

Or

- 1) Federal Triangle Station. At the top of the only Exit, bear right then turn right and walk between the buildings. Cross Pennsylvania Ave. and step up to Freedom Plaza in front of the National Theatre

Freedom Plaza is a white marble platform that constitutes a public space between E Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, and between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW. From here you can see the US Capitol to the East, and the National Theater - our next stop - to the North.

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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### 7. National Theatre, 1321 E Street, N.W.

One of the oldest theaters in the United States, the National Theatre has occupied this site since 1835. The present building is the sixth National Theatre on this location. The fourth National Theatre was built in 1873, and it burned down in 1885. The fifth was built in 1885.

Ingersoll lectured in Washington on 12 December 1877, probably at the National Theatre, just before moving here. In all, Ingersoll delivered approximately 1300 lectures during his career and 28 lectures in Washington, DC. , 15 at this theatre.

Described by the Washington Post as the "plenipotentiary of his satanic majesty to the United States of America," Ingersoll addressed a standing-room-only crowd of 1600 on 24 February 1879 on "*Some Mistakes of Moses*." The National Theatre "was of course, brilliantly illuminated," reported the Post, and "the stage was set for a parlor scene, and on a centre-table, which was placed prominently in the fore of the picture, was a beautiful bouquet, the gift of Mr. George O. Miller," a police department detective.

The Washington Post reported that 1200 persons braved a "terrific storm" and walked through "blinding snow" to hear Ingersoll speak on "*Liberty for Man, Woman and Child*" at the National Theatre on 3 March 1879.

Ingersoll delivered his speech entitled "*Orthodoxy*" on 14 December 1884 at the National Theatre. "Posters advertising the lecture had been torn down and it was raining, but nevertheless the house was full. Several members of Congress were present." Speaking about the "power" of prayer, Ingersoll said, "They often pray for the impossible. In the House of Representatives in Washington I once heard a chaplain pray for what he must have known was impossible: I pray thee, O God, to give Congress wisdom. At this point the whole audience convulsed with laughter" (Smith, Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life, p. 239).

Ingersoll began his speech on orthodoxy as follows:

It gives me immense pleasure to say to this audience that orthodox religion is dying out of the civilized world. It is a sick man. It has been attacked with two diseases - softening of the brain and ossification of the heart. It is a religion that no longer satisfies the intelligence of this country; that no longer satisfies the brain; a religion against which the heart of every civilized man and woman protests. It is a religion that gives hope only to a few; that puts a shadow upon the cradle; that wraps the coffin in darkness and fills the future of mankind with flame and fear. It is a religion that I am going to do what little I can while I live to destroy. In its place I want humanity, I want good fellowship, I want intellectual liberty - free lips, the discoveries and inventions of genius, the demonstrations of science - the religion of art, music and poetry--of good houses, good clothes, good wages - that is to say, the religion of this world.

**Go west on E Street to 14<sup>th</sup> St. then \*, turn right and walk north 2 blocks to G Street. Turn left on G St. for one half block.**

**\*Restrooms can be found in the Willard Hotel across the street. Walk through the lobby and down the long corridor (called Peacock Alley). Restrooms are on the left. The stairs at the end of this corridor will take you up to F Street. Walk up 14<sup>th</sup> St. to G Street and turn left for one half block.**

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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### 8. Ingersoll's two law offices at 1417 G Street, N.W., (*not extant*) and 1421 New York Avenue, N.W.

Robert shared this office with his brother Ebon Clark Ingersoll. His brother, who represented an Illinois district in the U.S. Congress from 1864 to 1871, (7 years) had preceded him to Washington to pursue his political career and subsequently a law practice. (This site on the north side of G Street, a block east of the U.S. Treasury Building, is occupied today by an office building.)

After Ebon Clark's death in 1879, Ingersoll moved his law office one block north to **1421 New York Avenue, N.W.** (This site on the north side of New York Avenue is occupied today by an office building; with a cafe on the ground floor.)

Ingersoll's law office on New York Avenue was described as "capacious, fairly stocked on all their walls with an ample law library, with which, as if by some accident, a stray copy of Bishop Colenso on the Pentateuch and one or two copies of Robert's own lectures on 'The Gods' and the 'Ghosts' happens, as if to indicate that the philosophical bias of the 'attorney-at-law' who here received his clients is something neither to be obtruded nor concealed" (Van Buren Denslow, author of Modern Thinkers). On Ingersoll's desk was a life-sized bust of himself, near the fireplace a facsimile of the Magna Carta, and on the mantle a portrait of Ebon Clark, flanked by the "Vision of War" and Ingersoll's funeral eulogy of his brother (Smith, Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life, pp. 155-156).

While living in Washington, Ingersoll published several books. In 1878, he published in Washington The Gods. In 1879, he brought out Some Mistakes of Moses and Ghosts; in 1880, What Must We Do To Be Saved? A Study of the Christian Religion, Its Creeds and Its Sacred Book; and in 1881, Some Reasons Why. In the spring of 1882, Ingersoll published his Six Interviews on Talmage, a Presbyterian minister and vehement critic of Ingersoll, "the champion blasphemer of America."

Ingersoll wrote:

My creed is this:

1. Happiness is the only good.
2. The way to be happy is to make others so.
3. The time to be happy is now, and
4. The place to be happy is here.

Ingersoll published Lectures Complete in 1883, Orthodoxy and Prose Poems and Selections in 1884 and Myths and Miracles in 1885.

In an interview with the Washington Post in 1878, Ingersoll was asked, "Colonel, are your views of religion based upon the Bible?" He replied, "I regard the Bible, especially the Old Testament, the same as I do most other ancient books, in which there is some truth, a great deal of error, considerable barbarism and a most plentiful lack of good sense."

**Continue to walk west 1 block along G St. At 15<sup>th</sup> Street, turn right for ½ block to the intersection with New York Ave. ( Looking right or NE up New York Avenue, one can see where Ingersoll's second law office was located at 1421 New York Ave. There is a coffee shop there today.) Cross 15<sup>th</sup> Street and go west towards the White House for 1 block on Pennsylvania Avenue (a plaza). Tturn right (north), onto Madison Place with Lafayette Square to your left. Near the end of this block on the right is a 4 story light brown brick building which occupies the site of the Ingersoll townhouse.**

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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### **9. Ingersoll's first home at 25 Lafayette Square** near the N.E. corner of Lafayette Square. (*not extant*)

The original address of Ingersoll's house was 25 Lafayette Square. It was torn down in 1903 to make way for the present unnumbered 5-story, light-brown brick building. This building occupies also the site of the neighboring house which stood at 23 Lafayette Square. A plaque points to a former occupant, the Cosmos Club. It is now part of the National Courts building.

Ingersoll had spent time in Washington from 1875 on. Early in 1878, he moved his family from Peoria, Ill., to the capital, which had a population of about 180,000 at that time. The Ingersolls occupied their home on Lafayette Square for five years, until 1883 when they moved to a larger home on K Street.

Ingersoll's home was described as "a large brick house with heavy brownstone trimmings, generous halls and big square rooms. It was diagonally across from the White House. Next door was the old Dolly Madison house, and a few steps away stood the Seward mansion" (C. H. Cramer, Royal Bob: The Life of Robert G. Ingersoll. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952, p. 180).

A photograph of the Ingersoll House in the Photo Collection of the Library of Congress shows a townhouse with three stories, topped by a fourth with dormer windows. Two large windows faced Lafayette Square on each floor, except the first where the single window was paired with the front door. Five steps led up to this door, which was flanked by two round columns and a porch in the classical style. The Ingersoll House had been built in what had been the garden of the Dolly Madison House. This yellow house on the corner of H and Madison Place, with the wrought-iron balcony was the home of the President's widow from 1837 to 1849, as its plaque indicates.

The next house, with the wrought-iron balcony, at what was 21 Lafayette Square, is the Benjamin Ogle Tayloe House. Its plaque indicates that it was also known as "The Little White House" when Mark Hanna occupied it during the administration of President McKinley.

Next door, at 17 Lafayette Square, stood the Rodgers-Seward House, whose site is occupied today by the National Court Building/U.S. Court of Claims (designated 717 Madison Place). In 1845, this house was the temporary home of President James K. Polk and his family while the White House was being renovated. It was occupied during the Civil War by Secretary of State William Seward, who was attacked by one of the Lincoln conspirators. When Ingersoll was in Washington, it was the home of Senator James G. Blaine, whom Ingersoll had nominated for President at the 1876 Republican National Convention in his famous "plumed knight" speech.

What was the courtyard of the Ingersoll House may be reached by walking through the gate leading to the National Court Building at 717 Madison Place. Once inside the courtyard, proceed to the left until you reach a patio with tables. A large, golden eagle is attached to the wall of the building that now occupies the site of the Ingersoll House.

The Ingersoll home comprised a large household. The census of 1880 lists twelve occupants of the house! These were:

- Robert (age 47), his wife Eva (39); their two teenage daughters, Eva (16) & Maude (15).
- Robert's mother-in-law, Harriette Parker (84).
- Robert's sister-in-law, Eva's sister, Sue (24), her husband Clinton Farrell (29), and their 5 year old daughter, Eva.
- Sue Sharkey (35), a housekeeper hired by the Ingersolls when the girls were little who remained with the family.
- And three Black servants: Georgie Brown (30), Fannie Evans (40), and ?? Vaughn (26).

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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At the entrance to the parlor was a bust of Shakespeare. On the head of the bust could be seen Ingersoll's hat at a rakish angle. In the summer, the hat was a white Panama; in other seasons, it was a black derby or a topper. Above the fireplace hung a portrait of Ebon Clark and next to the mantle was a bust of Ingersoll. In a bow recess stood a 3-foot cast of the Venus of Milo. A nearby Steinway Grand was played regularly at the weekly socials. In the library could be seen a profusion of art objects and family scenes. On one wall hung a portrait of Beethoven, and there were busts of Voltaire, Newton and Paine. "Lining the four walls, halfway from the floor to the ceiling, were shelves of books." On a center table "was a massive book in heavy morocco binding edged with gilt, the complete works of Shakespeare." Ingersoll called it his bible. (Orvin Larson, American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll, a Biography. New York: The Citadel Press, 1962, pp. 185-186).

A Washington journalist writing under the name of Ruhamah described Ingersoll's home as follows in his "Washington Gossip" column:

This prince of pagans occupies a handsome residence on Lafayette Square. On Sunday evenings the Ingersoll home is open to their friends, and these Sabbath symposiums are most enjoyable of all the weekly round of social affairs that any season can offer. Ease and hospitality liven the air from the square tiled hall into which the vestibule opens to the remotest sanctum. Before the church bells have ceased tolling the faithful to the evening service people begin dropping into this charming home and the smooth face and round head of the host appears to the visitor in the hall with unhackneyed and cordial greetings. Adding to his own social attractiveness Colonel Ingersoll has a delightful family to make it more inviting to his guests....

The house is admirably fitted for entertaining, with its three rooms opening into one another and the dining room beyond. The first parlor has crimson hangings, dull red walls and a dark Turkey carpet, with deep velvet furniture. The second parlor is in light colors, with cream walls, pearl-tinted carpet and a large book case where the works of Spinoza and Mark Twain stand jocularly side by side, and Matthew Arnold, agricultural reports and Max Muller lean together. The third room contains the piano and more books, while the walls all through are hung with paintings and fine engravings. For wit, eloquence and repartee Colonel Ingersoll finds no superior, and with a room full of friends about him his bon mots and epigrams are incessant.

In their home on Lafayette Square, the Ingersolls received ambassadors, diplomats, members of Congress, department heads, judges, writers, actors, musicians and notables like Frederick Douglass and Clara Barton.

The Ingersoll biographer Herman E. Kittredge wrote:

Thus in Washington, of a Sunday evening...men of national and international reputation - prominent members of the House and of the Senate, members of the Cabinet, etc. invariably formed part of the circle of which the great orator was the magnetic center. During "presidential years," it was not unusual to find in the Ingersoll drawing-room a half-dozen prospective candidates for the presidency, absorbed in the discussion of current political questions (Ingersoll: A Biographical Appreciation New York: The Dresden Publishing Co., 1911, pp. 435-436).

But it must be noted that Ingersoll received not only the famous and well heeled; he never ignored the poor and unfortunate who called upon him.

Another Washington correspondent wrote as follows about Ingersoll:

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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It is hard to write about the colonel and not indulge in what would seem to strangers to be extravagant praise. He is such a loyal-hearted gentleman, that one's admiration for his moral qualities are apt to dim the appreciation of his brilliant intellectual qualifications. No cabinet officer was ever more pursued by place hunters than the colonel by the public. The callers come before breakfast and besiege the house until nearly midnight. Everyone who comes gains admittance. The poor and the humble sometimes fare better than the rich and prosperous

One woman came to convert Ingersoll, wrote the correspondent. He invited her for dinner. After several visits, she told him, "I apologize. I do not care what you believe. You are leading more of a Christian life than I ever hope to accomplish."

Ingersoll had moved to Washington because it offered his law practice the larger field of federal litigation. He also thought that he could exert political influence here and gain an influential position for himself. While he did exert some political influence from his home in Lafayette Square, President Rutherford Hayes was too fearful of the opinions of the religious to offer him an office. The cold shoulder he received was expressed in this contemporary song:

*Ingersoll, Ingersoll, he's the man for me.  
We'll escort him to the White House  
And treat him to cold tea!  
Chorus: Yes, by God, we will!*

(George C. Blanchard, "A Reporter's Notes. Recollections of Ingersoll and Golden Days," The Truth Seeker, 2 April 1910.)

Several times in 1879, Ingersoll visited President Hayes in the nearby White House seeking a presidential pardon for D. M. Bennett. The publisher of The Truth Seeker had fallen victim to the quasi-governmental Society for the Suppression of Vice headed by Anthony Comstock for sending allegedly pornographic material through the mails. Ingersoll was, however, unsuccessful in persuading Hayes to pardon Bennett.

As mentioned, Ingersoll campaigned for Garfield in 1880, and he did so most energetically. After Garfield was elected, the Garfield-Arthur Club of Washington, preceded by a section of the Marine Band, paraded on November 5 through the streets for half an hour. It ended "with a celebration and serenade at the brightly lighted and decorated home of the Ingersolls. He came out and made a little speech, "that he had heard it said that the Democratic party had gone to a place that he did not believe in (long and continuous applause) but for the sake of argument if there was such a place and its tenant was the Democratic party all he could say was that he pitied the place" (Smith, Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life, p. 178).

In the interval between election and inauguration Garfield met often in Washington with his designated-Secretary of State Blaine. Since Ingersoll and Blaine were neighbors, Garfield frequently ran into Ingersoll at the Blaine residence [17 Lafayette Square]. It may be conjectured that if Ingersoll had requested a post in his administration Garfield would have complied. "But Ingersoll had good reason for not seeking an appointment in the government. It undoubtedly would have to be of cabinet or high diplomatic rank and might not survive a debate in the Senate. Besides, the constraints of public office were incompatible with his irreversible career in freethought" (Smith, Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life, pp. 180-181).

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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"Splendidly endowed as he was he could have won great distinction in the field of politics had he so chosen," concluded a reporter for the Chicago Tribune after Ingersoll's death. "But he was determined to enlighten the world concerning the 'Mistakes of Moses.' That threw him out of the race" (22 July 1899).

On 28 June 1881, Ingersoll consulted with Garfield at the White House concerning the Star Route trial in which Ingersoll was defending Senator Dorsey. "On July second Ingersoll spent the evening from eight to ten in conference with Garfield. In the morning, when they were to resume discussion, Ingersoll was late, driving up at the White House just in time to greet the president on his way to the trains to keep an out-of-town engagement. Ingersoll returned home. Some fifteen minutes later there were cries in the street: 'The President has been shot! The President has been shot!' Hurrying to the depot Ingersoll was admitted to the upstairs room where the wounded president lay stretched out on the floor. Garfield recognized Ingersoll, they exchanged a few words, and Ingersoll returned home" (Smith, Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life, pp. 182-183).

On 8 January 1882, Ingersoll delivered the oration, "*At a Child's Grave*," at the funeral of Harry Miller in the Congressional Cemetery, 1801 E Street, S.E. He was the little son of Ingersoll's freethinking friend Washington Police Detective George O. Miller, who lived at 1915 Vermont Avenue, N.W. Addressing preachers of hell fire, Ingersoll said, "No man, standing where the horizon of a life has touched a grave, has any right to prophesy a future filled with pain and tears."

On 14 January 1883, "as chairman of a lecture on Lincoln the lawyer, he stated his preference for direct experience of life as a better source of education than the colleges that Lincoln and he had not attended, "where brickbats are polished and diamonds dimmed" (Washington National Republican).

On 13 February 1883, the Ingersolls celebrated their 21st wedding anniversary at their home in Lafayette Square amidst some 500 guests.

**Walk north, crossing H Street, and along Vermont Avenue and diagonally across McPherson Square to 15<sup>th</sup> & K Streets, then turn right or east along K Street to 14<sup>th</sup> St.**

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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### 10. Home of Ebon Clark Ingersoll at 1403 K Street, NW. *(not extant)*

Currently the Tower Office Building with the DC Coast Restaurant on the ground floor.

Here lived Ingersoll's brother and law partner Ebon Clark. His elegant, 3-story stone house with a bay window was one of the six row houses of Franklin Terrace built c. 1875 by architect Adolf Cluss. It was razed in 1890, and the site is occupied today by the Tower Building, which houses offices. (Incidentally, the only major building in this area extant from Ingersoll's days is the Franklin School at the east end of Franklin Square. Erected by Cluss in 1868, it won a number of international awards.)

On 2 June 1879, Ingersoll delivered the funeral oration for Ebon Clark before his coffin in the parlor of his home.

"The house was crowded almost to suffocating, nearly all the distinguished men in Washington being present," reported the Chicago Inter Ocean. "The body lay in a velvet casket, and the casket sat upon two velvet pedestals in the center of the long saloon-parlor, the windows of which were darkened, and the chandeliers were blazing with light. The family and relatives sat about the casket, and Robert G. Ingersoll stood at the head while the lid was being screwed down. Then, drawing from his pocket a few pages of manuscript, he laid it upon the coffin lid and commenced to read. His voice trembled with emotion, and much that he said was scarcely audible. It was a touching tribute of brotherly affection.. ."

Ingersoll included these famous lines in the eulogy of his beloved brother:

*He believed that happiness is the only good, reason the only torch, justice the only worship, humanity the only religion, and love the only priest.*

Ebon Clark was buried in Georgetown's Oak Hill Cemetery, at 30<sup>th</sup> and R Streets, N.W. His honorary pall bearers included Senator Blaine, then Congressmen Garfield and Adlai Stevenson (1835-1914), who was Grover Cleveland's V. P. (and grandfather of Adlai Stevenson III who famously lost his presidential bid to D. Eisenhower.)

**Cross 14<sup>th</sup> street and go east 1/2 block on K Street alongside Franklin Park.**

## Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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### 11. Ingersoll's Second DC home at 1315 K Street, N.W., ( *not extant*)

This site on the north side of Franklin Square (today Franklin Park) and in the middle of the block is today occupied by an office building. 1315 K Street is today the entrance to the Almas A.A.O.N.M.S. Sphinx Club.)

Moving to this larger house in 1883, the Ingersoll family lived here until November 1885. Here the Ingersolls hosted the Hungarian violinist Edouard Remenyi, who played pieces he composed in honor of his "Jupiter" Ingersoll, the English freethinker George Jacob Holyoke and Supreme Court Justice John M. Harlan, known as the "Great Dissenter" for voting against the Supreme Court majority upholding segregation.

In April 1883, Ingersoll delivered the funeral oration for his friend John G. Mills, a freethinking journalist and lawyer who lived at 940 K Street, N.W. The funeral was held at the home of his friend, Colonel Fitzgerald. "He was not a Christian," declared Ingersoll. "Humanity was his God; the human race was his Supreme Being. In that Supreme Being he put his trust. He believed that every pure thought, every disinterested deed, hastens the harvest of universal good."

Early in 1884, Ingersoll had told a reporter, "Washington was a beautiful city, a pleasant place in which to live, and that he expected to stay there the rest of his life" (Topeka Capital, March 15, 1884). "The election of 1884 [with the defeat of Blaine and the victory of Cleveland] had ended that prospect. He had turned his back on politics, and politics had walloped him. To the victorious Democrats he was anathema, to the defeated Republicans a deserter. His Washington law practice was drying up. What should he do? " (Smith, Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life, p. 244).

In November 1885, Ingersoll moved his family to New York City to be "nearer to the great clients and the enthusiastic audiences from whom he drew his living and his repute" (Dictionary of American Biography, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961, Vol. V, p. 470).

**END:**

**McPherson Square METRO station is 1 block away at 14th and "I" Street.**

# Robert Green Ingersoll in Washington, DC

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## Other Nearby Sites of Interest

**Georgetown University Library**, Ingersoll Collections in the Manuscript section.

**Library of Congress**, Madison Building, manuscript Division, Room LM101, and in the photo Division. Ingersoll's papers are available on microfilm. Ingersoll's voice is on a phonograph record that may be heard in the Library of Congress Music Division by appointment.

**Arlington National Cemetery**. The ashes of Ingersoll, (who died from a heart attack on July 25, 1899, (just 2 weeks short of his 64<sup>th</sup> birthday) and his wife; Eva (Parker), who died 26 years later, were buried in a grave, on 4 May 1932.

On the oblong tombstone are carved the words,

***"Nothing is grander than to break chains from the bodies of men —  
nothing nobler than to destroy the phantoms of the soul."***

The grave site, in **Section # 3 number 1620**, can be visited by taking a cab or private car to Arlington National Cemetery visitor's center, where one must go inside (with the grave number, the car's tag number and state) to get a vehicle pass and a map. With this pass and a map, drive past the security guard at the entrance to the cemetery and proceed to the gravesite. Or, from the Visitor's Center, take the Tourmobile (\$7 ) to the "Tomb of the Unknowns" Stop and walk approximately ½ mile to the grave site. A customized map with directions can be found at the following web page:

Information about Ingersoll's activities in Washington, D.C., is taken chiefly from Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life by Frank Smith (Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N.Y., 1990). Helpful information was also provided by David Henley.

Another excellent biography of Ingersoll is: American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll: A Biography by Orvin Larson ISBN 1-877733-33-4 (Citadel Press, New York, NY 1962)

## **Robert Ingersoll Memorial Committee:**

<http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=ingersoll&page=index>

**Ingersoll Chronology Project:** <http://www.funygrouop.org/Ingersoll/index.php>

Author: Gary C. Grassl; April 1995

Scanned, updated, digitized and reformatted by Steven C. Lowe; June 2009

Both are members of WASH (**Washington Area Secular Humanists**) [www.wash.org](http://www.wash.org)

Copies of this walking tour guide can be found at: [www.wash.org/Ingersoll](http://www.wash.org/Ingersoll)