

More on John Murray, Universalist

Murray was resented in Massachusetts for his belief that Hell did not exist. His critics called his religion “nohellism.” They claimed he was a British spy sent to keep an eye on the Colonies, now in revolt. Fortunately, George Washington had confidence in Murray and made him a Chaplain in his army. Murray preached in Gloucester and in Boston with great success. He married again but his daughter left no living descendants. Murray suffered a debilitating stroke on October 19, 1809, which compelled him to give up preaching. He died in Boston, Massachusetts, on September 3, 1815. His wife, Judith Sargent Murray, collected and finished his autobiography which was published posthumously.

While Murray’s personal life was filled with sorrows, and he suffered a cruel upbringing, he had an outward and positive personality that meshed well with his religious views. He sought a religion that stressed human progress both in this life on earth and in an eventual union with like souls in heaven. Unlike the Unitarians, Universalists were trinitarians at the time of their foundation and did not challenge the divinity of Christ. Their heresy, according to most protestant denominations, was their rejection of predestination, salvation through faith alone, and a wrathful, punitive God. --Elof Carlson, Congregational Historian