

David Atwood Wasson Biography

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Biography

David Atwood Wasson (14 May 1823-21 January 1887) was among the most radical of the post-Theodore Parker generation and an early advocate of nondenominational churches for free thinkers. As a contemporary of Octavius Brooks Frothingham and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, he promoted ideas that resulted in the Free Religious Association in 1867. Though never a member, he was a frequent speaker at its meetings and was considered a brilliant and witty man. Born on Penobscot Bay, Maine, of seagoing, shipbuilding people, he attended Phillips Andover Academy, Bowdoin College, and Bangor Seminary, where he was graduated in 1851. After a brief ministry at Groveland, Massachusetts, where he established an independent church, he briefly filled Higginson's pulpit in Worcester, Massachusetts. In 1865 he was called to replace the deceased Theodore Parker at the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society in Boston. His health forced him to resign within a few months. Virtually the rest of his life was spent in New York, at menial jobs, in declining health and with impending blindness. His aversion to Calvinism and the work ethic of his times strengthened his Unitarianism and rationalized Transcendentalism. As a political elitist he believed in a humane society led by secularized intellectuals. His contribution is the influence of his ideas upon his contemporaries who are still well known today.