

## Peculiar and Proper Habits: The Use and Production of Academic Dress in Colonial, Revolutionary, and Federal Philadelphia

By Nicholas Heavens

### Prologue: Anatomist v. Centinel and Remonstrant

In 1767 and 1768, essays appeared in Philadelphia's leading newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, under the anonymous authorships of Anatomist, Centinel, and Remonstrant. Anatomist debated with Centinel and Remonstrant about the proposed appointment of a bishop of the Church of England for the American colonies. Centinel and Remonstrant were opposed, fearing that such an appointment would lead to non-Anglican Protestants in America being compelled to worship in or financially support the Church of England in colonies such as Pennsylvania, where it was not an established church. The purpose of the Anatomist essays was not to support the idea of an American bishop but instead to defend the faith and practice of the Church of England against the critiques of the Centinel essays while acknowledging the importance of religious freedom for Protestant Christians in the American colonies.<sup>1</sup>

What concerns us here are three references to academic and clerical dress by Anatomist and Remonstrant. In the first, Anatomist accused his opponents of calling, 'the habits of the CLERGY, Rags of the whore of Babylon ...'<sup>2</sup> Anatomist presumed Centinel/Remonstrant to be a Presbyterian and so described a change in the fashion choices of young Presbyterian clergy,

It ought to be observed, that this reproachful name has been chiefly laid aside since gowns and cassocks have crept into Presbyterian pulpits --- For now there is scarce a stripling that has been emancipated from college, and received hands of the PRESBYTERY, 'who does not strut and flaunt about in those once anti-christian and popish habiliments.'<sup>3</sup>

Note 'emancipated from college'. In 1768, faculty and students at the Presbyterian-run College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) were again ordered by their Trustees to wear the cap and gown on a daily basis, though the requirement made a decade earlier that faculty and upperclassmen do so had been repealed after only three years.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Elizabeth I. Nybakken, *The Centinel: Warnings of a Revolution* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, Newark, 1979), pp. 19–72.

2 [William Smith], Anatomist IV, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 29 September 1768.

3 Anatomist IV.

4 Donald L. Drakeman, "'Peculiar Habits': Academic Costumes at Princeton University", *TBS*, 9 (2009), pp. 59–79 (p. 59), doi:10.4148/2475-7799.1072. It has been claimed that gowns were worn at the College of New Jersey's first Commencement in Newark, New Jersey in 1748. See

A month later, Remonstrant recited an old grievance of the Congregationalists/Independents of Boston during the confiscations of the New England charters and the governorship of Sir Edmund Andros 'about the year 1680', which include an incident in which a Church of England minister forcibly entered a meeting house in 'his gown and book' to read the funeral service over a Congregationalist.<sup>5</sup> And when the minister was rebuked by a relative of the deceased, the criticizing relative was charged with a misdemeanour 'where they intended to ruin him, had not the unlucky Revolution prevented those designs.'<sup>6</sup> Or as Remonstrant described a similar intrusion, 'Here was a sample of the same persecuting spirit, from which the Independents fled to this wilderness.'<sup>7</sup> For Remonstrant, the clerical gown was an emotion-provoking object of dress associated with religious persecution.

For Anatomist, however, the opposition of non-Anglican Protestants to Anglican clerical dress was both repugnant to the opinions of the early Reformers and increasingly out of step with the practice of contemporary Presbyterians and Independents in British America. In December 1768, Anatomist made a fuller rejoinder to Centinel/Remonstrant that fully expressed the connection between the acceptability of Anglican clerical dress and prevailing European modes of academic dress:

On the present head of ceremonies and rites, I would not wish to be tedious. For some of those things, which were once so offensive to some among ourselves, are becoming every day less so; and never gave any offence to foreign Churches; such as the observation of holy days, Church music, the gown, the surplice, the square cap, &c.

As to the cap and surplice, Calvin blames Bishop Hooper for contending about them, and writes to Bullenger thus --- 'I wish that he (Hooper) would not contend so much de piles [the square cap] & veste linea [the linen surplice]. This advice I gave him myself not long ago.'

As to gowns and collegiate habits, Calvin was so strict, that he would have expelled some students, if they had not complied with his rules; and he once maintained a good scolding match with a zealous female saint concerning his own long garment; but it is said the female had the last word of him, and still held to her point, viz. that those long garments were the scripture marks of false prophets, &c. ---

In short, with respect to the clerical habits appointed in our Church, they cannot be called a novel invention. For they are of a truly ancient cut and make; and it is

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George R. Wallace, *Princeton Sketches* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1893), p. 1. The contemporary accounts disagree. Neither the account provided by the Clerk of the Trustees to a New York newspaper, nor the satirical poem of Lewis Morris, Jr, on the event mention the use of academic dress. Morris does mention the starched and dingy 'cravates' of the degree candidates but nothing else. It seems unlikely that an Anglican controversialist like Morris would have avoided jibes like those of William Smith in the Anatomist essays if academic dress had been worn. Moreover, a likely model for Morris's satire was Mather Byles's satire on Harvard commencements of the 1720s, where academic dress does seem to be mentioned, 'blooming youth in black array'. See David S. Shields, 'An Academic Satire: The College of New Jersey in 1748', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 50 (1988), pp. 38–51, and for a reprint of Shields' article with a transcript of Morris's poem attached, see <[blogs.princeton.edu/mudd/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2013/05/AC115B1F6\\_The-First-Commencement\\_Lewis-Morris-Jr.pdf](https://blogs.princeton.edu/mudd/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2013/05/AC115B1F6_The-First-Commencement_Lewis-Morris-Jr.pdf)>, [retrieved 13 February 2021].

5 [Francis Alison, George Bryan, and John Dickinson], Remonstrant iv, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 3 November 1768.

6 Remonstrant iv.

7 Remonstrant iv.

our antagonists that have introduced novelties, and changed the fashion; for some of them appear with short or half-gowns, some with long ones; some of one cut, some of another; some with Cassocks, and some without. Nay, I am told that even the square cap now begins to adorn the brow of every Presbyterian stripling of a Presbyterian college; a piece of intelligence I am no way displeased to hear, as it is a good omen of our getting over one matter, that once so much disturbed our antagonists, and seems to have greatly disturbed our Centinel himself, even of late.<sup>8</sup>

[E]very Presbyterian stripling of a Presbyterian college' is wearing the square cap. One imagines Centinel/Remonstrant crying from a secret lair in the caves to the northwest of the city, '*O tempora, O mores*'. 'Betrayed, betrayed', he might have said, 'by the Trustees of the College of New Jersey!'

Or one would, if one did not know, as Anatomist, Centinel, and Remonstrant all would have, that all three shared the buildings that housed the College and Academy of Philadelphia at the very heart of the colonial city. For Anatomist was the Scottish Presbyterian schoolmaster turned ascendant Anglican priest<sup>9</sup> William Smith, Provost of the College, while the principal author of the Centinel and Remonstrant essays was Francis Alison, the Old Side Ulster Presbyterian Vice-Provost of the College.<sup>10</sup>

Anatomist's references to Princeton aimed to split the collective authorship along the fault lines of debate within Presbyterianism in the aftermath of the First Great Awakening. And, no doubt, Smith's past experience with Presbyterianism and its politics in Scotland made him particularly skilful at exploiting these divisions or marshalling Presbyterian support for his personal objectives, being able to operate as an outsider while thinking like an insider. With the references to academic dress at Princeton, Smith may have hit a particularly sore point for Alison about Princeton's entire institutional direction.<sup>11</sup>

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8 [William Smith], Anatomist xvii, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 29 December 1768.

9 Smith was appointed as the schoolmaster of Abernethy in Perthshire by Perth Synod in 1748 and lobbied the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland for higher pay for schoolmasters over the next few years, See M. A. Stewart, 'Hume in the Service of American Deism', *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 62 (2007), pp. 309–43 (p. 325). Stewart is sceptical of the common idea that Smith adhered to the nonjuring Scottish Episcopal Church before his move to England and then America in the early 1750s. And indeed, such an adherence would have been a serious offence for a schoolmaster under the provisions of Article xxI of The Disarming Act, 1746 (19 Geo. II c. 39), forbidding Scottish schoolteachers to frequent Episcopal worship. Ironically, Smith had proposed the appointment of a bishop for the American colonies himself, though negative reaction may have made him wary of defending the proposition again in print. See Nybakken, p. 19.

10 Alison worked with others, notably the New Side Presbyterian George Bryan and the former Friend (Quaker) John Dickinson. See Nybakken, pp. 19, 62.

11 The reversals in academic dress regulations between 1746 and 1768 at Princeton may reflect the particular opinions and strategies of the Trustees and their chosen president. The years 1755–58 overlapped with the presidencies of New Lights/New Sides from New England, Aaron Burr, Sr, and his father-in-law, Jonathan Edwards; while 1768 marked the start of the Presidency of Scottish New Side John Witherspoon. While the presidents after Edwards and before Witherspoon, Samuel Davies and Samuel Finley, are generally classified as New Sides. Ashbel Green (Princeton president 1812–22) noted that the financial condition of the College prior to Witherspoon's presidency was such that it was advisable to avoid antagonizing the Old Sides in hopes of gaining their financial support. Green interpreted Witherspoon's election as president as a clear termination by the Trustees of friendly overtures to the Old Sides. As will be developed below, it is also possible that the closely spaced deaths of Aaron Burr, Sr, Jonathan Edwards, and Edwards'

## Introduction

Hidden in plain sight within the Anatomist and Centinel/Remonstrant essays is a very personal debate about the use of academic dress in the College of Philadelphia and in British America more broadly that did not split cleanly along Anglican vs Non-Conformist lines but instead pitted those who saw the cap and gown as the representation of privilege of and oppression by others (mostly Anglicans) and those who saw it as a symbol of the freedom to receive academic honours in opposition to the same privilege and oppression.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it was a debate that I will argue did not quiet at Philadelphia for two generations following the time of Smith and Alison and had aligned well with debates about clerical, legal/judicial, and academic dress since at least the seventeenth century: that these forms of dress are associated with European aristocratic institutions, a concern to excite visceral feeling among those religiously and politically opposed to the ancient regimes of the Old World.

This debate and its analysis, of course, were and are complicated by disparate understandings of academic and clerical dress and how they differed. I will try, where possible, to point out these complexities. But I am somewhat constrained by the circumstance that the most detailed information about what professional academics wore in and near Philadelphia is about people who were simultaneously working academics and clergymen active in religious communities outside their academic ones.

Parallel to and intermingled with objections to academic dress on the ground of its European and aristocratic associations were concerns about its production in the midst of debates between Great Britain and her American colonies about trade and taxation. British academic gowns were made of exotic, usually imported materials like silk and fur and used bright, expensive dyes. As long as the academic gown was considered a high-status item of clothing directly imported or produced from imported materials or with the help of imported tailors, its use would signal that the wearer was encouraging dependence on the mother country and all that it entailed.

But at the same time, the growing prosperity and sophistication of British America and of Philadelphia, its largest city and chief port, was generating disposable income for conspicuous consumption and encouraging artisans to produce goods the merchant and professional classes desired to display. High-quality finished textiles comparable with those imported from Europe now could be produced by American workers (particularly women) in cities and towns like Philadelphia.

The central purpose of this essay is to tell the remarkable story of how the academic gown won over Philadelphia and why it needed to do so in the first place. How in the generation before and after the American Revolution, faculty, trustees, and students at the College of Philadelphia and its successor institutions (now the University of Pennsylvania) helped develop the model for the use and production of academic dress in the United States today. How by 1792, students at the University of Pennsylvania

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daughter and Burr's wife, Esther Edwards Burr, played more of a role than New Light/Old Light controversy. See Howard C. Rice, Jr, 'Jonathan Edwards at Princeton', *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 15 (1954), pp. 69–89 (pp. 69–71); Varnum Lansing Collins, *Princeton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914), pp. 193–94; Ashbel Green, *Discourses Delivered at the College of New Jersey* (Philadelphia: E. Littell, 1822), p. 387.

<sup>12</sup> I will use the term British America to refer to all the British colonies of the Western Hemisphere prior to 1783.

wore ready-to-wear academic gowns at public ceremonies that were provided by the University for the occasion and produced by low-status workers. How William Smith established academic ceremonies as model occasions for public political expression and helped change the academic gown from a class marker of an aristocrat to one of an artisan. And how the fruits of Smith's success shaped discussions in the next generation about greater distinction in academic gowns that foreshadow the development of the Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume at the end of the nineteenth century.

Along the way, we will see hidden figures woven into the patterns of academic dress: brief glimpses of the skilled women who made early American academic gowns in Philadelphia and elsewhere. By doing so cheaply and in the shadows of the public record, they helped make and keep the American academic gown a clothing object of lower status, a status that mass production as well as the use of the zip and artificial fibres help maintain today.

### How academic dress came to Philadelphia

By around 1750, Philadelphia had surpassed Boston, New York, and Kingston, Jamaica, to become the most populous city of British America: a port of nearly 14,000 inhabitants living in a few thousand well-built brick houses clustered on the eastern side of the city's originally surveyed grid along the Delaware River.<sup>13</sup> And it was quickly developing into a centre of academic activity. By 1755, it would have a college capable of granting all degrees 'customarily' awarded in Great Britain.<sup>14</sup> A decade later, it had a school of medicine that required students to complete a practical course of rotations in the city's new hospital, making the College of Philadelphia a university in fact but not yet in name.<sup>15</sup> In 1779, the property of the College was confiscated by the revolutionary government of Pennsylvania to form the University of the State of Pennsylvania, a cause of controversy finally resolved by the union of the College with the University to form the University of Pennsylvania in 1791.<sup>16</sup>

Along with its nascent University, Philadelphia possessed in 1750 or would acquire by the beginning of the American Revolution: a subscription library (the Library Company of Philadelphia), a social and debating club for artisans (the Junto), and a learned society (the American Philosophical Society). All these institutions, including the hospital and the College/University, had been conceived and founded with the help of a local printer turned politician, Benjamin Franklin, a mostly self-educated polymath who had received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Oxford and St Andrews.

13 Gary B. Nash and Billy G. Smith, 'The Population of Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,' *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 109 (1975), pp. 362–68 (p. 366).

14 'College of Philadelphia: Additional Charter, 14 May 1755', Founders Online, National Archives, at <founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-06-02-0016> [retrieved 13 February 2022]. Original source: Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 43 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), Vol. vi, *April 1, 1755, through September 30, 1756*, pp. 28–37.

15 Mary D. McConaghy, Michael Silberman, and Irina Kalashnikova, 'Penn in the 18th century', University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center (2004), at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century/medical-school> [retrieved 16 November 2020].

16 McConaghy, Silberman, and Kalashnikova, 'Penn in the 18th century: From Franklin's Vision to Academy to University of Pennsylvania', at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century> [retrieved 16 November 2020].

(An academic professional society for physicians, the College of Physicians, would be founded without Franklin's initiative in 1787).<sup>17</sup>

But if Philadelphia was becoming Franklin's city, it had started as Penn's city, and that made it naturally hostile ground for academic dress if not necessarily for academic institutions. William Penn, the founder of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, was a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). In his youth, he had honoured his first induction into Non-Conformist sentiments by refusing to attend services at Christ Church, Oxford, and been sent down. Rumours that he had signified his objection to academic dress by assaulting fellow students and mutilating their gowns were contested by his descendants and their favoured historians in the late nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> But the story likely contained a germ of truth: Quakers and the gown did not mix.

For Quakers, a practical education in law, history, modern languages, the sciences, or medicine was acceptable.<sup>19</sup> But academic gowns (and the degrees they could signify) were a target of early Quaker critique.<sup>20</sup> Viewed generously, these critiques suggest that academic dress and hierarchy were objected to because they contradicted the Quaker testimonies regarding simplicity and equality before God. But these critiques often leverage the anti-Roman Catholic bigotry prevalent in seventeenth century England to attack the universities and the Anglican clergy who dominated them, such as the observation of Thomas Lawson that the command of Pope Pius IV for the clergy to wear gowns was still obeyed by English college students.<sup>21</sup>

Academic dress also potentially challenged the often mutable consensus of Quakers favouring simplicity in dress and other aspects of consumption, particularly stridently expressed by William Penn himself in his book *No Cross, No Crown*. As noted by Marla R. Miller, historians have noted a Quaker penchant for enjoining one another in religious texts to 'plainness' in dress and other aspects of life but privately consuming no differently than the rest of the population.<sup>22</sup> But as Miller also notes, they could be extremely specific in making sumptuary regulations about clothing as opposed to household furnishings, suggesting Quakers still would prefer dress that avoided 'ribbon ... lacebands ... rich embroideries ... silks' called out for condemnation by Penn.<sup>23</sup>

That said, Quaker sentiments about academic dress were only one part of the marketplace of ideas in Philadelphia; Quakers did not control it. The Religious Society of

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17 For broad background on Franklin, I recommend Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003). For broad background on Philadelphia and its institutions, I have relied upon Russell F. Weigley, Nicholas B. Wainwright, and Edwin Wolf, eds, *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982).

18 Howard M. Jenkins, 'The Family of William Penn. iv. William Penn: Childhood and Youth (continued)', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 20 (1896), pp. 158–75 (pp. 163–64).

19 Richard L. Greaves, 'The Early Quakers as Advocates of Educational Reform', *Quaker History*, 58 (1969), pp. 22–30 (p. 24).

20 Greaves, pp. 25–26.

21 Greaves, p. 26, quoting Thomas Lawson, *A Mite into the Treasury* (London: Andrew Sowle, 1680), pp. 46–47.

22 Marla R. Miller, *Betsy Ross and the Making of America* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2010), pp. 58–60.

23 William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown* (London: Harvey & Darton, 1842), pp. 195, 204, 225.

Friends was not an Established religious body in Pennsylvania and generally supported a high degree of religious freedom in Pennsylvania by eighteenth-century standards, including limited toleration of Roman Catholicism.<sup>24</sup> And Quaker power was beginning to wane in Pennsylvania. By 1751, William Penn's son and main successor in the government of Pennsylvania, Thomas Penn, had conformed to the Church of England.<sup>25</sup> In 1762, the main Quaker body (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting) enjoined its members to withdraw from politics.<sup>26</sup>

It was in this dynamic environment that the College of Philadelphia was founded. The College's seed was a charitable school and lecture hall founded by Philadelphians inspired by the preaching of George Whitefield in 1740. The charitable school was intended to educate working-class children in the English language and basic mathematics.<sup>27</sup> One of those Philadelphians was Benjamin Franklin, who in 1749 helped re-organize the corporation as an Academy for paying students of the growing middle class of merchants and prosperous artisans in addition to the charitable school (which finally opened).<sup>28</sup> In 1755, Thomas and Richard Penn granted a supplementary charter by their authority as Proprietors of Pennsylvania to 'the College, Academy, and Charitable School of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania', whose trustees were a mixture of Quakers, Anglicans, and Presbyterians.<sup>29</sup>

At the time of Franklin's re-organization of 1749, the daily use of academic dress was under consideration, for purposes of surveillance. Franklin proposed that students 'have peculiar Habits to distinguish them from other Youth, if the Academy be in or near the Town; for this, among other Reasons, that their Behaviour may be the better observed'.<sup>30</sup> William Smith, describing the College in 1759, made the gown sound more like an incentive for successful transition from the Academy to the College: 'Those who can acquit themselves to satisfaction ... are admitted into the Philosophy Schools, by the name of Freshmen or Noviciates, with the privilege of being distinguished by an under-graduate's gown.'<sup>31</sup>

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24 Sally Schwartz, 'William Penn and Toleration: The Foundations of Colonial Pennsylvania,' *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 50 (1983), pp. 284–312.

25 The date and nature of Thomas Penn's change of religion are a debatable point, but 1751 marks the dates of his marriage to a non-Quaker according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, which would have been severely proscribed by the Religious Society of Friends. See Howard M. Jenkins, 'The Family of William Penn (continued). ix. Thomas Penn,' *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 21 (1897), pp. 324–46 (p. 339).

26 Paul Buckley, 'Why Quakers Stopped Voting,' *Friends Journal*, 1 October 2016, at <[www.friendsjournal.org/quakers-stopped-voting/](http://www.friendsjournal.org/quakers-stopped-voting/)> [retrieved 16 November 2020].

27 McConaghy, Silberman, and Kalashnikova, 'Penn in the Eighteenth Century: The Charity School', at <[archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century/charity-school](http://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century/charity-school)> [retrieved 16 November 2020].

28 McConaghy, Silberman, and Kalashnikova, 'Penn in the Eighteenth Century: From Franklin's Vision to Academy to University of Pennsylvania', at <[archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century](http://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century)> [retrieved 13 February 2022].

29 College of Philadelphia: Additional Charter.

30 Benjamin Franklin, 'Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania, [October 1749]', Founders Online, National Archives, at <<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-03-02-0166>>. [Original source: Labaree, Vol. III, *January 1, 1745, through June 30, 1750*, pp. 397–421.]

31 William Smith, 'Account of the College, Academy, and Charitable School at Philadel-

But it is unlikely that students were wearing academic dress on a daily basis in the College during the 1750s. Contrary to Margaret Smagorinsky's claim or William Smith's promotional material, the earliest published regulations for student conduct in the College and Academy (approved by the Trustees on 10 March 1761) contain no regulations about dress.<sup>32</sup> It would seem odd for the Trustees to omit mention of a subject that was regularly legislated upon by its peer institutions in British America. Did undergraduates wear the gown?

Probably not. Indeed, William Smith may have not had the privilege of wearing the gown in his own College. In 1754, Benjamin Franklin wrote to Peter Collinson, an influential Quaker, draper, and scientist of London with strong ties to Pennsylvania and interest in its institutions:<sup>33</sup>

I am glad our Friend Smith has recommended himself to your Regards. He has, as you observe, great abilities, and indefatigable application; and I doubt not will be serviceable to this Country. As to his Gown, I think with you that it may not at first be proper to use it frequently in the Academy; tho' if it should prejudice the main design with some, it might perhaps advantage it as much with others.<sup>34</sup>

Collinson's letter to Franklin indeed had praised Smith highly and even mentioned a donation by Collinson to the Academy. Collinson, however, suggested Smith's youthful enthusiasm would be 'tempered by [Franklin's] prudent and cordial advice.'<sup>35</sup> Collinson's chief reservation was that Smith had been ordained in the Church of England and was wearing clerical dress,

Because it may give dislike to some to see one at the Head of the Academy in a Canonical ... and therefore he hopes that he will never or very rarely use that Dress. This I have mentioned to Him. From his good Sence, I hope he will not give offence.<sup>36</sup>

Collinson was giving a clear warning. Smith's wearing of clerical dress would signal Anglican control of the Academy. But Collinson's warning presents two questions. First,

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phia', in *Discourses on Public Occasions in America* (London: A. Millar, 1762), p. 115.

32 Margaret Smagorinsky, *The Regalia of Princeton University: Pomp, Circumstance, and Accountments [sic] of Academia* (Princeton: Trustees of Princeton University, 1994), cited in Drakeman. For the actual regulations, see Minutes of the Trustees of the College of Philadelphia, 10 March 1761, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, UPA 1.1. Minutes of the Trustees of the University of the State of Pennsylvania and the re-united University of Pennsylvania are in the same collection but will be cited to distinguish the Board in question.

33 Horace W. Smith describes Collinson as one of William Smith's two major advocates in England for obtaining funding for the Academy from the Penn family. The other one was Thomas Herring, Archbishop of Canterbury. See Horace W. Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, DD*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Ferguson Bros, 1880), Vol. 1, p. 28. Smith, in fact, did Collinson the service of carrying some of his correspondence back to America after a visit to England in late 1753. See Alan W. Armstrong, ed., *Forget Not Mee and My Garden: Selected Letters, 1725-1768, of Peter Collinson, FRS* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2002), pp. 174-75.

34 Benjamin Franklin, Letter to Peter Collinson, 28 May 1754, Founders Online, National Archives, at <founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-05-02-0090> [retrieved 17 February 2022]. Original source: Labaree, Vol. v, *July 1, 1753, through March 31, 1755*, pp. 330-33.

35 Peter Collinson, Letter to Benjamin Franklin, 26 January 1754, Benjamin Franklin Papers, American Philosophical Society Archives, Mss. B.F85, LXIX, 56.

36 Ibid.

what exactly was Smith wearing? And would it be possible for Smith to wear a form of academic dress that would not be read as clerical dress offensive to Quakers?

Collinson refers to Smith wearing a 'Canonical'. Read in its most literal sense, this term should refer to vesture according to the Canons of the Church of England, which would be mostly indistinguishable from a graduate's academic gown.<sup>37</sup> However, nineteenth-century writers, very often on the basis of eighteenth-century and earlier sources, identify two features that could distinguish a cleric from a non-cleric in academic dress (even in undress) in the eighteenth century: (1) the use of 'the standing collar' and (2) the wearing of the cassock underneath the gown.<sup>38</sup> William Smith's critique in the *Anatomist* essays about the variable dress of young Presbyterian clergy, 'some with Cassocks, and some without', strongly suggests Smith would have worn a cassock under a gown.<sup>39</sup> That neither Franklin nor Collinson suggest Smith should not wear a cassock (let alone a standing collar) suggests the subtle differences between non-clerical and clerical dress would have been entirely lost on Smith's critics. Strictly non-clerical academic dress would be interpreted incorrectly as Anglican clerical dress.

The appearance of Anglican control of the Academy and later the College would remain a frequently contested issue, as Smith wrote.

Had our College been opened on that Plan, the Students would indeed have been a very scanty Number. The People would not have borne even the Mention of such a Design at first ... [but] the Church, by soft and easy Means, daily gains Ground in it.<sup>40</sup>

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37 At least according to Canon LXXIV (1604) of the Church of England. See "CONSTITUTIONS AND CANONS ECCLESIASTICAL [...]" (1604) at <[www.anglican.net/doctrines/1604-canon-law/](http://www.anglican.net/doctrines/1604-canon-law/)> [retrieved 4 December 2020]. One subtlety of Canon LXXIV is that it required Priests and Deacons who were heads of colleges and holders of higher degrees (including Masters of Arts and Bachelors of Divinity and Law) in an ecclesiastical living to 'wear Gowns with standing Collars, and Sleeves strait at the Hands, or wide Sleeves as is used in the Universities, with Hoods or Tippets of Silk or Sarcenet, and Square Caps ... And that all other Ministers admitted, or to be admitted into that Function, shall also usually wear the like Apparel as is aforesaid, except Tippets only.' By being ordained and head of an educational institution, Smith had a contestable claim to wear the dress of a Master of Arts, as he had never graduated. (Being a graduate is assumed by the logic of this Canon and required by Canon LXVIII, though the possibility of being an ordained Scottish graduate is not admitted.) Smith advanced through the Bajan, Semi, Tertian, and Magstrand Classes at Aberdeen with a bursary but did not take the degree with his class in 1747. See Peter John Anderson, ed., *Roll of Alumni of Arts of the University and King's College of Aberdeen, 1596-1860* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1900), p. 73. By 1759, Smith's mysterious failure to graduate from Aberdeen required some elision by the Church of England bishops who recommended him for an Oxford DD, who noted, 'That the said William Smith was regularly bred at the University aforesaid and left the same in March, 1747, having resided the full term of years required.' Smith's quite personalized DD diploma of 10 March 1759 from Aberdeen addresses him as Master but makes no reference to him being MA of Aberdeen. Ironically, Smith's Oxford DD diploma of 27 March 1759 does name him MA of Aberdeen. See Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, DD*, Vol. 1, pp. 39, 198, 200-01.

38 Anonymous, *The Dress of the Clergy* (London: William Painter, 1842), pp. 6-15; William Henry Pinnock, *The Laws and Usages of the Church and the Clergy* (Cambridge: J. Hall & Son, 1856), pp. 925-29, 960-68.

39 *Anatomist* xvii.

40 1756 correspondence of Smith quoted in Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, DD*, Vol. 1, p. 143.

The final positive note should be read skeptically. The last-quoted correspondence was written to Anglican clergy in England, with whom Smith was trying to ingratiate himself in order to obtain funding for his institution and preferment for himself. Similar correspondence of 1756 mentioned that the Trustees were dominantly Anglican and emphasized twice-daily prayer and the use of the Church Catechism.<sup>41</sup> Yet what Smith said to Anglicans did not prevent him from befriending and mollifying Presbyterians. In 1762, he convinced Samuel Chandler, the Presbyterian minister of Old Jewry, London, to write a defence of Smith and the College for Francis Alison and others to circulate, which Smith summarized this way: 'let us have no Divisions or Jealousies in our College about Church People and Presbyterians—a Distinction I have carefully avoided.'<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, Smith's attempts to avoid 'divisions or jealousies' among Protestant sectaries at the College of Philadelphia had struck a chord with one of London's leading Baptists, the Revd Thomas Llewellyn of Bloomsbury. In 1764, he wrote to the Revd Morgan Edwards, the minister of the Baptist Congregation at Philadelphia, in praise of Smith after one of his fundraising trips to Great Britain and Ireland,

I congratulate you also on the extraordinary success of our common friend, Dr. Smith; you ought to welcome him home with ringing of bells, illuminations and bonfires. The Professors of the College, in particular, (for which he has collected upwards of six thousand pounds sterling) ought to meet him at least half way from New York, and from thence usher him into Philadelphia, with all the magnificence and pomp in their power. The scholars, students and fellows, should all attend the cavalcade, in their proper orders and habits; and the procession should march through the principal parts of the city, and terminate at the Lecture Room, or rather HALL, where Verses and Orations in various languages, should be delivered, in praise of the liberality and generosity of the mother-country, of the unanimity and harmony of Pennsylvania, and especially of the Catholic [in the sense of embracing many branches of Christianity] College of Philadelphia, with vows for its continual prosperity and success. [...] As a Baptist, as a friend of learning, &c. as a hearty approver of a plan so free and open, I would add my wish, *quod felix faustumque fit* [May it be lucky and propitious]! As a Graduate of the College, as a dutiful son of the Alma Mater, you will readily join in every act of rejoicing on this account.<sup>43</sup>

For Baptists like Llewellyn and Edwards, just like Presbyterians at Princeton, the old prejudices against academic dress and ceremonial because of their associations with the tyrannies of Anglican establishment were melting away. The atmosphere of religious freedom (at least for Christians) that William Penn had created in Pennsylvania made it possible for academic dress and ceremonial to be equally and happily shared among Christian scholars of all persuasions. Such was the impression William Smith could produce in non-Anglicans while fundraising.

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41 Ralph L. Ketcham, Benjamin Franklin and William Smith, 'New Light on an Old Philadelphia Quarrel', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 88 (1964), pp. 142–63 (p. 154).

42 William Smith, Letter to Richard Peters, 14 September 1762, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, William Smith Papers, UPT 50 S664 Box 2, Folder 51. A letter on this theme by Samuel Chandler addressed to the Trustees and dated 12 April 1764 is included in the Minutes of the Trustees of the College of Philadelphia, 14 June 1764.

43 Dr Llewellyn, Southampton Street, Bloomsbury [prob. Thomas Llewellyn (1720–83)], Letter to Morgan Edwards, 12 April 1764 quoted in *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 26 March 1788.

Fundraising and other political considerations aside, the 'Catholic' College of Philadelphia did allow a degree of religious latitude to its students that would have been unusual elsewhere. The regulations of 1761 make the form of twice-daily prayer a matter of choice for the member of the faculty officiating; and students 'conscientiously [word smeared in original] scrupulous of Attending those religious Duties [or those with parents who were so scrupulous]' could be excused as long as they did not play in the College Yard during prayers.<sup>44</sup> Appropriately enough, the Trustees were tolerating the very behaviour for which William Penn was sent down from Christ Church, Oxford.<sup>45</sup>

This use of a conscience clause in the 1761 regulations echoes a much later regulation of 1826: '16. On all public occasions, the professors shall be habited in gowns, and the students also, except those whose parents or guardians may object thereto.'<sup>46</sup> Even seventy years later, academic dress still was controversial in Philadelphia, at least among some parents.

Taken together, the absence of academic dress in the regulations of 1761, Franklin's and Collinson's concerns about William Smith not wearing the gown at the Academy in 1754, and the occasional references to academic dress in the controversial essays of William Smith and Francis Alison in the late 1760s all suggest the gown was not in daily use at the College of Philadelphia.

But the regulation of 1826 mentions 'public occasions'. The first public occasion of import was the College's first Commencement (17 May 1757), when academic degrees were first conferred.<sup>47</sup> Academic dress was not mentioned as part of the preparations for the Commencement in the Minutes of the Trustees in that year.<sup>48</sup> It is not until 1759 that we hear anything about what was worn at Commencement, and the faculty and degree candidates were unambiguously wearing academic gowns. After a process of approving the candidates for degrees,

... the Trustees repaired to the Academy-Hall, preceded by the Candidates for Degrees, in their Gowns and the Members of the Faculty in their Gowns, and were followed by the Masters and Tutors of the several Schools of the Head of the junior Classes and the Scholars, who walked in Procession two by two ...<sup>49</sup>

In 1760, the other students of the College were wearing gowns, too.<sup>50</sup> But Commencement accounts of this period were not always so direct. In 1762 and 1763, there was no mention of academic dress.<sup>51</sup> In 1765, 'The Provost, Viceprovost, and Profes-

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44 'Rules & Ordinances for the Discipline & Good Government of the Students & Scholars, belonging to the College, Academy and Charity School of Philadelphia', II.9 (10 March 1761), Minutes of the Trustees of the College of Philadelphia (Vol. 1, p. 136 of the minute books).

45 Jenkins and Penn, pp. 163-64.

46 'Laws', Minutes of the College Faculty, University of Pennsylvania, 1 March 1826, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, College of Arts and Sciences. Faculty Minutes, UPB 1.1.

47 William Smith, *A Charge, Delivered May 17, 1757, at the First Anniversary Commencement in the College and Academy of Philadelphia, to the Young Gentlemen who Took Their Degrees on that Occasion* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin & D. Hall, 1757).

48 Minutes of the Trustees of the College of Philadelphia [hereafter Minutes of the Trustees], 11 April 1757.

49 Ibid., 6 June 1759.

50 Ibid., 1 May 1760.

51 Ibid., 10 May 1762, 17 May 1763.

sors, followed by the Candidates and Students entered next *in their proper habits* at 10 o'clock.<sup>52</sup> In 1766,

At nine o'clock this morning, his Honour the Governor, and a Number of the Trustees being met to attend the public Commencement, they went at 10 o'clock from the Library to the public Hall in Procession, viz first the Governor + other Trustees, 2nd The Provost, Vice-Provost, + Professors, followed by the Candidates in their proper habits.<sup>53</sup>

The phrase, 'in their proper habits' frequently would be used in descriptions of Commencements for years to come.<sup>54</sup> An honourable mention for elision goes to the description in 1783 of 'the faculty and graduates in their formalities', but 'proper habits' is the earlier usage.<sup>55</sup>

From the time 'proper habits' is first used in 1765, I would argue that it referred to a form of academic dress equivalent to the 'Gowns' mentioned in 1759 and 1760. First, this term of art was used in an early-eighteenth-century text by John Ayliffe to describe how Oxford scholars dressed for public occasions such as Encaenia and the Act.<sup>56</sup> Second, Esther Burr (a figure to whom we will return) uses 'Habbits' to refer to a form of dress she made for wear by degree candidates at the College of New Jersey.<sup>57</sup> Third, Benjamin Franklin used 'Habits' to refer to the distinctive form of dress he proposed for Academy students to wear so they might be better surveilled.<sup>58</sup> And fourth, a report about the 1771 Commencement mentions 'the different candidates in gowns', while a report about the 1783 Commencement speaks of 'the Faculty and Graduates in their robes'.<sup>59</sup> 'Habit' thus was a good euphemism to use around those for whom 'gown' or 'robe' was too bitter.

But there is another interesting aspect to the changes of language between 1759 and 1765. At the time of the Commencements of 1762 and 1763, William Smith was away from Philadelphia raising funds for the College in the British Isles.<sup>60</sup> Francis Alison was in charge of the College and was the primary liaison between the Trustees and the Faculty.<sup>61</sup> When Smith returned from his fundraising trip in 1764, he was elected Secretary of the Board of Trustees.<sup>62</sup> (The Clerk to the Trustees in 1760–64 was an un-

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52 *Ibid.*, 30 May 1765. The italicization is mine and indicates that these words were marked for insertion by a caret

53 *Ibid.*, 20 May 1766.

54 *Ibid.*, 21 June 1768 (first mention of medical students), 17 May 1775; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 31 May 1775.

55 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 23 July 1783.

56 John Ayliffe, *The Antient and Present State of the University of Oxford ...* (London: E. Curll, 1714), p. 131. The usage was common throughout the eighteenth century in sources too numerous to cite here.

57 Esther Burr, diary entry for 17 July 1755 quoted in Josephine Fisher, 'The Journal of Esther Burr', *The New England Quarterly*, 3 (1930), pp. 297–315 (p. 303).

58 Franklin, 'Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania.'

59 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 11 July 1771; *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), 9 July 1783.

60 Bertha Sprague Fox, 'Provost Smith and the Quest for Funds', *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 2 (1935), pp. 225–38 (pp. 227, 238).

61 For example, Dr Alison was in charge of presenting honorary degree recipients to the Trustees in 1762 (Minutes of the Trustees, 11 May 1762) and received the Mandate from the Trustees to confer degrees at the Commencement of 1763 (Minutes of the Trustees, 17 May 1763).

62 Minutes of the Trustees, 14 June 1764.

dergraduate and later tutor, Samuel Campbell.<sup>63</sup>) And thus, William Smith was the very person adding by caret, ‘in their proper habits’.

If these descriptions of early Commencements are read in the light of tension over academic dress between William Smith and Francis Alison that occasionally enlivens the arguments of Anatomist and Centinel/Remonstrant, it seems very likely that the use of the gown in public ceremonies was controversial both in the College and in the community that supported it. When Smith was around, so was the gown. But when Smith was away, Alison insisted the gowns stayed away as well.

There was much to bind Alison and Smith. Both had had Scottish university educations and had left their native countries to find opportunity as educators and Christian ministers in America. But because Scottish Presbyterianism had forced Smith to seek new opportunities becoming an Anglican and Anglicans had dispossessed Alison, their working relationship could turn to conflict as easily as comity.

In 1767, Alison became concerned enough with the Anglican leanings of the College of Philadelphia and the drift to New Side Presbyterianism at the College of New Jersey to found an Academy for Old Side Presbyterians at Newark, Delaware (now the University of Delaware), though he remained Vice-Provost of the College of Philadelphia (and quite willing to travel with Smith on College business) until 1779.<sup>64</sup> Was academic dress at Commencement an element of Alison’s decision? We simply do not know, but the timing of Alison’s decision just precedes the essays of Anatomist *et al.* and their references to disputes about academic and clerical dress.<sup>65</sup>

We also do not know what exact academic dress was worn. But it is most likely that simple black gowns were worn by degree candidates (whatever the degree), while some faculty members may have added a hood to signify a British degree, or in one known example, an American one. One line of evidence for minimal distinction in dress between faculty and graduates is a letter by Frederic Beasley upon his election as Provost of the University of Pennsylvania in 1813. Beasley recommended to the Trustees that ‘on all publick occasions ... the Professors should wear gowns suited to their rank and also that the students should appear at such times, dressed in their gowns.’<sup>66</sup> As Beasley noted, the University at that time provided gowns to the students and professors for Commencement. Beasley suggests professors and students could provide gowns at their own expense, if having distinctive gowns for professors and students and/or putting gowns to more frequent use would be too expensive.

The implication is that professors and students wore the same or similar academic dress in 1813. Beasley’s reference in the letter to the possibility that the University’s

63 University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, ‘Penn People: Samuel Campbell’, at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/samuel-campbell> [retrieved 8 December 2020]; Minutes of the Trustees, 10 May 1763.

64 Smith and Alison were sent to evaluate the estates in Perkasio (Bucks County, Pennsylvania) held by the College in 1778. See Minutes of the Trustees on 8 October 1778.

65 A contemporary portrait (c. 1750) of Francis Alison shows him in a coat and cravat. See ‘Rev. Francis Alison (1705–1779), portrait’, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, University Archives Image Collection, UARC20040505017, original in UPF 1.9 AR, Alumni Records Collection, Box 29, at <https://library.artstor.org/#/public/SS7732016\_7732016\_12332150> [retrieved 15 February 2021].

66 Frederic Beasley, Letter to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 11 October 1813, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, UPA 3, General Administration Collection pre-1820, Box 2, Folder 107.

provision of gowns could change suggests relative uniformity of dress dated at least to 1789, when the Trustees of the University of State of Pennsylvania first explicitly ordered gowns to be made for Commencement at the expense of the University.<sup>67</sup> And if uniformity of dress pre-dated the reunion of the University of the State of Pennsylvania and the College of Philadelphia, it likely pre-dated the American Revolution.

A counterargument could be made that there was a more formal system of distinguishing holders of different degrees prior to the Revolution. One positive piece of evidence is in the use of ‘proper habits’ introduced by William Smith. The adjective ‘proper’ in the work by John Ayliffe could be interpreted as ‘appropriate to the rank or order of the wearer’, who were in Ayliffe’s case, ‘all the Professors and Lecturers read in the several Arts and Sciences’ and thus referred to the use of distinctive gowns, hoods and other articles of academic dress to distinguish the degree of the wearer.<sup>68</sup> The use of ‘proper orders and habits’ by Thomas Llewellyn seems to have the same signification.<sup>69</sup> And William Smith did use the phrase emphatically after having recently visited many of the universities of Great Britain and Ireland.

But much of the textual evidence needed to sustain this argument is absent. No system of academic dress was discussed or sanctioned by the Trustees. Hoods, a key way of distinguishing degrees and faculty of study, were never mentioned in contemporary descriptions of Commencement. And if there were such a system sustained by the authority of the College Faculty in the time of Ewing or Smith, Beasley would have found it a helpful precedent to cite. But he did not.

Moreover, pictorial evidence of College of Philadelphia or University of Pennsylvania faculty wearing academic dress in the eighteenth century is extremely rare. A survey of images of faculty collected by the University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center shows only three faculty in some form of academic dress, all Provosts: William Smith, John Ewing, and John Andrews.<sup>70</sup>

It is thus fortunate that there exist two paintings made of William Smith towards the beginning and end of his career that may help calibrate the thin textual record.<sup>71</sup> (I

<sup>67</sup> Minutes of the Trustees of the University of State of Pennsylvania, 25 June 1789.

<sup>68</sup> Ayliffe, p. 131.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Llewellyn, Letter to Morgan Edwards, 12 April 1764.

<sup>70</sup> I surveyed all of the images compiled in McConaghy, Silberman, and Kalashnikova, ‘Penn in the 18th century’, at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century> [retrieved 13 February 2022] and searched for better-quality images of any paintings with suspicious garments or the paintings from which the engravings were taken, which was particularly useful in the case of John Ewing. Medical professor Benjamin Rush was painted in a red gown in 1783 by Charles Wilson Peale, but it is generally considered to be a dressing gown meant to convey healthy and leisurely scholarly reflection, and in no way resembles the AB dress of the College of New Jersey or MD dress of the University of Edinburgh to which he was entitled. See Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, ‘Franklin & His Friends’, (1999), at <npg.si.edu/exh/franklin/rush.htm> [retrieved 13 February 2022]; University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, ‘Penn People: Benjamin Rush,’ at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/benjamin-rush>, [retrieved 19 April 2021]. Ironically, the portrait of Frederic Beasley in the University of Pennsylvania collection is not wearing academic dress. See Agnes Addison, *Portraits in the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), p. 10.

<sup>71</sup> I thank Bruce Christianson and Alex Kerr for their help with reading Smith’s dress in these paintings, particularly their help with understanding eighteenth century Oxford norms. I also rely on Nicholas Groves, ‘Historical English Academic Robes: A Basis for a “National” System’, *TBS*, 4 (2004), pp. 59–62, doi: 10.4148/2475-7799.1032. But my conclusions are mine alone.

will discuss Ewing and Andrews later.) In 1757, Smith was painted by his protégé and Academy student, Benjamin West. The original painting is in the collection of Historical Society of Pennsylvania, having been donated by Horace W. Smith. By 1938, this painting had been ‘incompetently overpainted’.<sup>72</sup> An engraving of this painting was made before 1880 (Fig. 1) and was thought by William Sawitzky to be more faithful to the original painting than its state in 1938.<sup>73</sup> In the engraving, Smith is wearing a closed gown with wide, low-hanging, and open sleeves as well as ‘ministerial bands’. The sleeves look fuller in the painting than the engraving but still appear to be open. Smith is also wearing a hood with the lining slightly exposed. The engraver has stippled the lining to show that it is colour intermediate between the colour of the hood and the presumably white colour of Smith’s cuffs. In the painting, the hood seems to blend into the gown, suggesting it is probably black. Sawitzky therefore described the lining as ‘a purplish-pink silk ribbon stretched from shoulder to shoulder’.

Because in 1757, Smith was an Anglican priest with a Scottish MA that always requires an asterisk, we cannot even guess which British institution’s academic dress he might try to use. But the gown in this painting is inconsistent with British gowns of the period. It is closed in front, while British gowns were open. The open sleeves would mark it as a BA gown but their shape and dimensions are MA-like. The hood somewhat resembles an Oxford or Dublin MA hood, but the lining colour is somewhat off, neither quite the red of Oxford or the rose pink of Dublin. Scottish universities did not use hoods in this period, but an academic Anglican priest likely would have felt naked without one to put over his surplice, which was the customary practice for degree holders at both Oxford and Cambridge.

It has been suggested to me that Smith is wearing a strictly clerical ensemble, that is, a preaching gown like those preferred by George Whitefield, presumably worn over a cassock. However, portraits of Whitefield, by and large, show him wearing a gown with very wide, bell-shaped sleeves that is open enough to expose a cassock and a girdle but no hood.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Smith’s contemporaries among the Anglican clergy of Philadelphia always appear in portraits without hoods.<sup>75</sup> Most of these counterexamples can be explained away, but the absence of a hood in paintings of Jacob Duché is relevant, as he

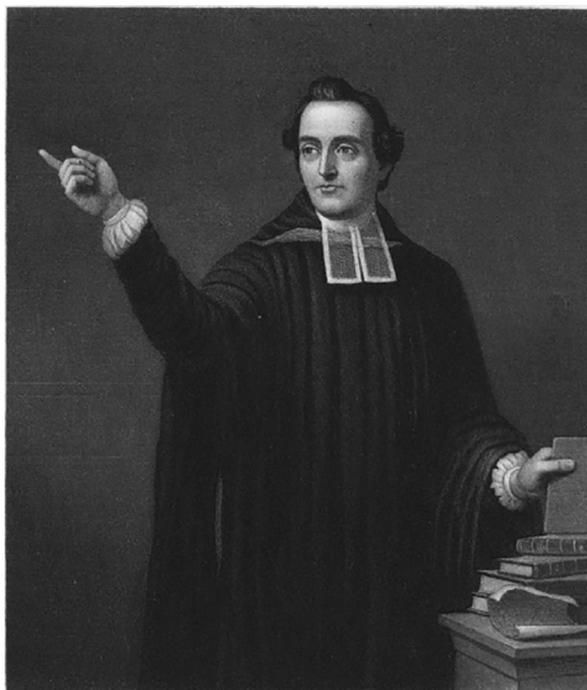
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<sup>72</sup> William Sawitzky, ‘The American Work of Benjamin West’, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 62 (1938), pp. 433–62 (p. 456).

<sup>73</sup> It is the frontispiece of Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, DD*.

<sup>74</sup> A good example of this kind of image of Whitefield is in the Reference Collection of the National Portrait Gallery (UK). See John Greenwood, ‘George Whitefield’, c. 1768, mezzotint published by Robert Sayer after Nathaniel Hone, 13 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. x 10 in. (354 mm x 255 mm) plate size; 14 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. x 10 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (360 mm x 259 mm), NPG D4777.

<sup>75</sup> I consulted extant paintings and engravings of Jacob Duché (AB, 1757, AM, 1760, Philadelphia; Professor of Oratory and Trustee of the College of Philadelphia and pensioner of Clare College, Cambridge) (e.g., at <npg.si.edu/object/npg\_1891.14\_HSP> [retrieved 13 February 2022], William White (AB, 1765, AM, 1767, Philadelphia, DD (hon.) 1783, State of Pennsylvania; Trustee of the College of Philadelphia and University of Pennsylvania) (e.g., at <www.nps.gov/inde/learn/historyculture/stories-religiousfreedom-white.htm> [retrieved 17 February 2022]), Richard Peters (matriculated at Wadham College, Oxford, 1731 but did not take a degree; DD, Oxford, 1770), (e.g., at <npg.si.edu/object/npg\_NPG.82.146> [retrieved 13 February 2022], which predates his Oxford degree), and Robert Blackwell (AB, New Jersey, 1768; DD, 1788, Pennsylvania), (e.g., at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/robert-blackwell> [retrieved 13 February 2022]).



**Fig. 1. 'William Smith', by John Sartain (1808–97), n.d. (en-graving, stipple and mezzotint on chine collé on off-white wove paper, after a painting by Benjamin West (1738–1820), 1757), 10.96645 x 9.36625 cm.**

Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Bequest of Dr Paul J. Sartain, 1948.23.697

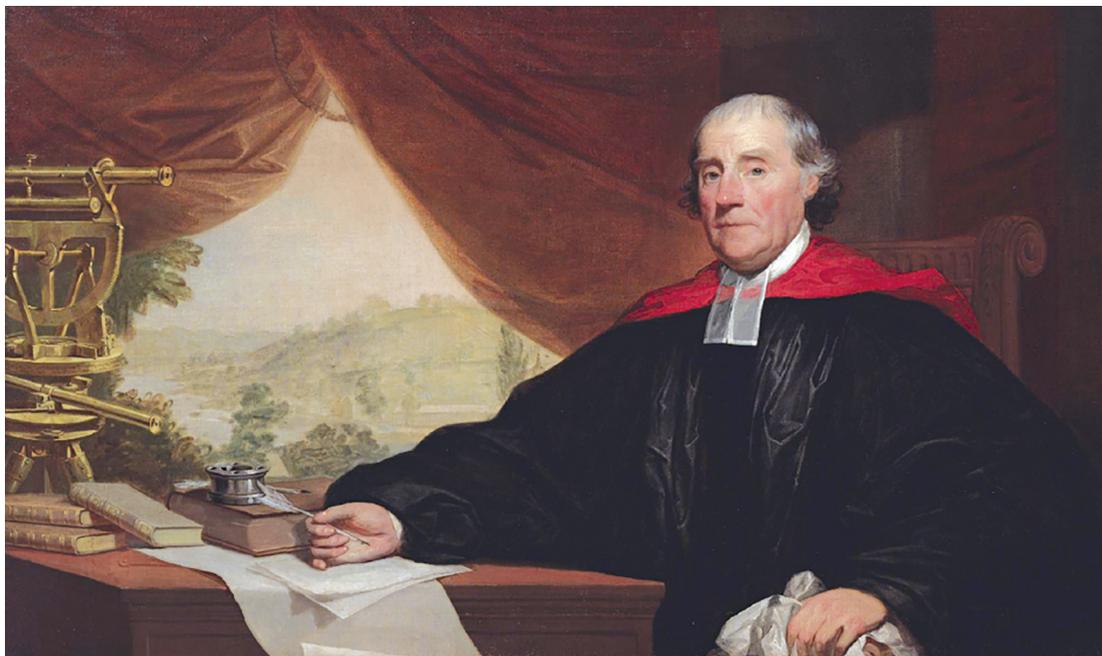
was an early alumnus of the College and painted in England while serving as a chaplain of a Lambeth orphanage.<sup>76</sup>

In 1801–02, Gilbert Stuart painted William Smith (perhaps for Smith's seventy-fifth birthday) wearing academic dress (Fig. 2).<sup>77</sup> Smith had not been Provost at the College since 1791 (and practically speaking, since the temporary abolition of the College in 1779). If the books in the scene are interpreted to be books published in the 1750s and 1760s (as well as a compilation of published works) and the theodolite and compass are read to refer to observations of a transit of Venus in 1769, it is likewise possible to imagine this is what William Smith wore as academic dress while Provost after receiving his DD degrees from Oxford, Aberdeen, and Dublin Universities during 1759–64.<sup>78</sup> Note that the clothing, furnishing, instruments etc. were sketched by Smith's

<sup>76</sup> University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, 'Penn People: Jacob Duché', at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/jacob-duche>, [retrieved 18 April 2021].

<sup>77</sup> See Carrie Rebora Barratt and Ellen G. Miles, *Gilbert Stuart* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), pp. 227–31, for an in-depth analysis of this painting, on which I partly rely.

<sup>78</sup> For Smith's Oxford and Aberdeen degrees (conferred while Smith was in London on business), see Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1715–1886*, 4 vols (Oxford: Parker, 1888), Vol. iv, p. 1321, and Anderson, p. 73. Transcripts of his diplomas are recorded by Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, DD*, Vol. I, pp. 200–01. Smith does not appear in the standard published records of graduates of the University of Dublin. The primary evidence for the degree is a diploma dated 9 January 1764 (when Smith was physically in Dublin) microfilmed in 1969 but since lost. See J. M. Duffin, Mark F. Lloyd, and Theresa R. Snyder, 'Finding Aid: William Smith Papers UPT 50 S664', University of Pennsylvania



Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, 2007.176; Photography by Dwight Primiano

**Fig. 2. 'William Smith,' 1801–02, oil on canvas, by Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828), 37 in. x 60 in.**

son-in-law, Samuel Blodget. It is known that Blodget introduced some anachronisms. He sketched a telescope from a 1791 catalogue that would not have existed in 1768.<sup>79</sup>

Stuart paints Smith wearing a closed black gown. The gown sleeve on his right arm (the left of the painting) may be open or closed but the sleeve on his left arm is too wide to be closed. The gown appears to have black facings, but with a definite glint. However, the apparent facings are likely a silk scarf or stole blending into the gown. Smith is wearing bands and a relatively broad scarlet hood without a lining of any contrasting color. There is no sign of headgear; his left hand holds a cloth, perhaps to wipe his face while sitting for the painter. Ellen G. Miles identifies the ensemble as the dress of a Doctor of Divinity.

However, what Smith is wearing does not correspond well to the academic dress of any of his British doctorates. His hood excludes Aberdeen DD dress. Hoods were not used at Aberdeen in this period. The scarlet hood colour is consistent with an Oxford DD and possibly Dublin (depending on how pink Dublin doctoral hoods became during the eighteenth century).<sup>80</sup> But we would expect to see black silk lining for a DD hood where

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Archives and Records Center, at <[archives.upenn.edu/collections/finding-aid/upt50s664](http://archives.upenn.edu/collections/finding-aid/upt50s664)>, [retrieved 13 January 2021]. A full transcript is provided by Smith, *Life and Correspondence ...*, Vol. 1, p. 331, and I read it (as Horace W. Smith does) as a degree by incorporation based on the presence of the Latin formula, 'apud nos Dublinenses, quem apud Oxonienses habet' [he has among us Dublinians what he has among the Oxonians].

<sup>79</sup> Barratt and Miles, p. 229.

<sup>80</sup> Bruce Christianson, 'In the Pink: The Strange Case of Trinity College Dublin', *TBS*, 4 (2004), pp. 53–58, doi:10.4148/2475-7799.1031.

the reverse of the hood is exposed off Smith's left shoulder, and there is no sign of this. The lining is likely scarlet as well, making it unlike a DCL or DM hood as well, which would have been lined pink or crimson. The form of gown appears to be the type of preaching gown sometimes considered ancestral to the American doctoral gown. This type of gown has been compared to the Cambridge DD undress gown that had fallen out of use at Oxford by 1800 but would be appropriate to Smith's period of familiarity with Oxford.

Moreover, even if we ignore the inconsistencies of Smith's ensemble with British norms and read the gown and hood as imperfect articles of DD dress (and the gown as an undress gown), the full ensemble does not seem to be consistent with Oxford DD dress according to the Laudian Code, or what would have been worn in the 1750s and 1760s when Smith was occasionally visiting Oxford.<sup>81</sup> The typical forms of doctoral dress were: (1) undress gown; (2) hood over surplice in church; (3) Convocation dress (i.e., a sleeveless scarlet cape over the MA undress gown for the DD); and (4) full doctoral dress with a special scarlet gown appropriate to the faculty of the degree and no hood. There are only rare instances known of doctors wearing hoods with undress gown, as here.

Smith's doctoral attire contrasts strongly with that of Myles Cooper, President of King's College (now Columbia University) from 1763 to 1775. In 1768, John Singleton Copley painted Myles Cooper in profile wearing collar, bands, and a brilliant scarlet robe with pink facings worn over a black garment (possibly a cassock) (Fig. 3). Cooper had received an honorary Doctorate of Civil Law from Oxford University in 1767,<sup>82</sup> and Cooper's attire is credible full-dress attire for that degree, except he has chosen, like Smith, to depart from eighteenth-century Oxford convention by wearing a hood.<sup>83</sup> Stuart's painting of Smith and Copley's painting of Cooper both depict Oxford doctors (with different degrees). But Smith chose to wear a less formal undress gown, while Cooper chose to wear a more formal full-dress gown. The wearing of hoods by doctors without surplices, however, seems to have been a quirk common to both men.<sup>84</sup>

81 Statutes of the University of Oxford (1636), Title xiv, Chapter 3 in G. R. M. Ward, *Oxford University Statutes: Volume I Containing the Caroline Code or Laudian Statutes Promulgated AD 1636* (London: William Pickering, 1845), p. 153.

82 Foster, Vol. I, p. 293.

83 This point is discussed in detail in fn. 23 of Wolgast, 'King's Crowns: The History of Academic Dress at King's College and Columbia University', *TBS*, 9 (2009), pp. 80–137, doi: 10.4148/2475-7799.1073.

84 As both men were Anglican priests in America and presumably wore surplices on liturgical occasions, one wonders if wearing the hood with the gown was a way of communicating their status as Anglican clergymen.



Art Properties, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, Gift of the New York Historical Society, 1820 (C00.735)

**Fig. 3. 'Portrait of Rev. Myles Cooper' (1737–85), 1768, by John Singleton Copley (1738–1815), oil on canvas, 76.3 cm x 63.5 cm.**

The quirks of Smith's outfits cannot be attributed to Smith being unfamiliar with the norms of Oxford or Dublin on account of receiving his degrees at a distance. For if anything, Smith fits the profile of an academic who always felt that he belonged at Oxford but was called elsewhere. According to a letter of Bishop Secker of Oxford (later Archbishop of Canterbury), Smith had considered living in Oxford in the early 1750s.<sup>85</sup> In 1759, while in England to appeal to the Privy Council concerning a dispute with the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, he convinced the Archbishop of Canterbury and five diocesan bishops (including Bishop Hume of Oxford) to recommend him to the University for a DD.<sup>86</sup> In November of 1762, while on a British fundraising tour, Smith specifically visited Oxford together with his opposite number from King's College, New York, James Jay, 'thinking it a compliment due to them to be both there.'<sup>87</sup> Smith was ill (perhaps nearly fatally) in Dublin from September 1763 to March 1764 but seems to have made enough of an impression with someone to attract a degree by incorporation.<sup>88</sup> If Smith had wanted, he would have had ample opportunity to see academic dress at Oxford and Dublin and talk with academics there about it. He also was in London frequently enough to obtain correct articles from the tailors.

My interpretation is that Smith's academic dress code was a compromise. He added a generic (and perhaps non-standard) hood to the American clerical gowns that were evolving during his lifetime. These gowns, unlike their British counterparts, were typically closed in front. In 1757, Smith wore a dynamic gown consistent with his youth along with a credible MA hood whose lining colour might have been correct for Oxford but is now distorted by overpainting. Or possibly the form of gown is a comment on the state of clerical tailoring in Philadelphia in the 1750s.<sup>89</sup> After receiving his doctorates, Smith added a generic doctoral hood to a type of gown now conventional for ministers from a variety of Protestant denominations to emphasize his multiple DD degrees and the accomplishments they represented but without emphasizing the aristocratic associations that the observer might assign to full dress or Convocation dress. Smith likely would have realized he was wearing undress-like gowns in contrast to the full doctoral dress worn by his counterpart and fellow Anglican priest at King's College, Myles Cooper, suggesting that wearing full-dress (for faculty who could) would have been more common or more acceptable in New York City than Philadelphia. It is possible that the practice of wearing gown with hood for both men also could be their way of signifying their academic credentials and Anglican clerical status simultaneously, as if communicating they could put on a surplice any time they wanted.

It would be tempting to read Smith's ensembles as strictly clerical dress and not academic at all. But this would require us to ignore his consistent and unique use of the

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85 Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, DD*, Vol. 1, p. 42.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

87 *Ibid.*, pp. 316–17. Jay and Smith raised £161 18s. sterling.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 331.

89 Admittedly, it is difficult to reconcile the quirks of Smith's gown shape in 1757 with his jibe in *Anatomist* xvii a decade later: 'For they are of a truly ancient cut and make; and it is our antagonists that have introduced novelties, and changed the fashion; for some of them appear with short or half-gowns, some with long ones; some of one cut, some of another; some with Cassocks, and some without.'

hood among his contemporaries, being painted with a hood by one of his students in 1757, and his association with books and a telescope in Gilbert Stuart's painting. Smith realistically could see himself as a preacher, sacramental minister, teacher, and natural and moral philosopher simultaneously. Dressing for these potentially competing identities was more likely to lead to hybridization of dress rather than adherence to the strict distinctions of British regulation and custom.

### The production of academic dress in Colonial Philadelphia

Just as we lack detailed information about the form of academic dress worn in the College of Philadelphia, we lack information about how it was produced and obtained by those who wore it. We instead must rely on: (1) the limited documentary record of how forms of dress like academic dress were produced or acquired in Philadelphia in the colonial era; (2) the equally limited documentary record of how academic dress was produced at the nearby College of New Jersey.<sup>90</sup>

In eighteenth-century British America, clothing was rarely purchased ready to wear. If one needed a garment, one (or one's tailor/seamstress/spouse/servant) bought or made cloth and then fashioned the necessary garment.<sup>91</sup> Thus, any account of garment production at this time must take account of both the cloth and the producer.

Extremely high-status garments could be directly obtained from England. In 1770, Benjamin Franklin arranged for the purchase of two gowns for the Speaker and Clerk of the Commons House of Assembly of Georgia, 'exactly such as are used by the Speaker and Clerks [of the House of Commons],' whose cost came to £19 4s. 9d.<sup>92</sup> The

90 Using the College of New Jersey as an analogue for the College of Philadelphia is easy to justify. New Jersey and Pennsylvania were both Middle Colonies with similar histories of settlement and similar types of settlers (including large numbers of Quakers). In 1766, Benjamin Franklin's son, William, was Governor of New Jersey. The Colleges of New Jersey and Philadelphia were forty-five miles away from one another, closer than Oxford to Cambridge or either English university city to London. And indeed the two Colleges were regarded as competitors from their earliest periods. Esther Burr crowed in 1757 about the arrival of new students: 'Some of em the Top of Philadelphia too' (Fisher, p. 307). The main difference between the Colleges was that the College of New Jersey was in the rural setting of Princeton (after 1756), rather than the urban setting of Philadelphia. But Philadelphia still was the nearest major oceangoing port to Princeton by land or water, thanks to the proximity of the Delaware River at Trenton.

91 Marla R. Miller, *The Needle's Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* (Amherst, Mass.: U. Mass. Press, 2006), p. 56. This situation was gradually changing in Britain, where the need that developed in the seventeenth century to produce large volumes of government-funded clothing for soldiers and sailors incubated a ready-to-wear production system for civilian undergarments and working-class outerwear during the eighteenth century. See Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), pp. 43-74.

92 Noble Wimberly Jones, Letter to Benjamin Franklin, 21 February 1770, Founders Online, National Archives, at <founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-17-02-0038> [retrieved 13 February 2022]. Original source: Willcox, ed., Vol. xvii, *January 1 through December 31, 1770*, pp. 77-78; Benjamin Franklin, Letter to Noble Wimberly Jones, 7 June 1770, Founders Online, National Archives, at <founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-17-02-0089> [retrieved 13 February 2022]. Original source: *ibid.*, pp. 159-60. The notes to Franklin's Letter to Noble Wimberly Jones of 7 June 1770 in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* say that the gowns were purchased from 'Stone and Schudell', citing Franklin's journal. Franklin almost certainly means the predecessor firm to Ede & Ravenscroft, Shudall and Stone, located in 'Hollywell Street [near the present High Commission of Australia], near the New Church in the Strand [St. Mary-

Speaker provided to Franklin his height and that of the Clerk, a fitting being impossible under the circumstances. Anglican clergy in Philadelphia were known to make similar orders. While in England in 1765, Richard Peters (assistant priest at Christ Church, Philadelphia and proprietary official) noted plans to purchase clerical dress for Jacob Duché, Professor of Oratory of the College of Philadelphia and assistant priest at Christ Church.<sup>93</sup>

Clerical dress could be obtained locally as well. In 1766, Paul Snyder advertised himself as a ‘Taylor, Lately arrived from London, BEGS leave to inform the Gentlemen and Ladies that he makes all Sorts of wearing Apparel, laced or plain, Parsons Gowns [a list of fashionable clothing follows].’<sup>94</sup> Presbyterian striplings, take note.

The favoured cloth for clerical dress mentioned in a 1768 advertisement seems to have been prunello, which was referred to in lists of imports arriving by ship as early as 1745, along with many varieties and forms of silk.<sup>95</sup> Prunello (or prunella) seems to have been a worsted and thus could be the ‘Spanish cloth’ mentioned in a report of a stolen clerical gown from a church in rural Pennsylvania in 1742.<sup>96</sup> It also was among the fabrics specifically advertised by the London robe-makers, Shudall and Stone.<sup>97</sup>

And for those who did not wish to pay the premium that a fashionable male ‘Taylor, Lately Arrived from London’ would command, less expensive, domestically trained female clothing workers with the skills to make even festal doctoral gowns were working in Philadelphia in the 1760s. Philadelphia had a clothing/textile industry of considerable diversity and specialization, where women could be independent tradespeople or employed in the workshops of male or other female artisans. Among the family of Philadelphiaian Betsy Griscom (later Betsy Ross, the legendary maker of the first American flag) were her great-aunt, Sarah, a maker of stays (the eighteenth-century equivalent of shape-wear), cousin, Rebecca, a mantua maker (maker of women’s clothing), and sister Deborah, who worked with her husband in the contemporary equivalent of dry cleaning.<sup>98</sup>

Betsy Griscom’s specialty was upholstery. Marla R. Miller writes of the work that Betsy Griscom would have undertaken in the workshop of the upholsterer, John Webster. Particularly relevant to making academic dress would be the work of cutting cloth for curtains and furniture covers; making trimmings, like those used for the ornamentation of gowns and hoods; and the making of tassels.<sup>99</sup> Ann King, under whose direction

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le-Strand]’ in 1769, approximately 0.7 miles from Franklin’s lodgings in Craven Street. See: Benjamin Cole, ‘DRAFT Trade card of Shudall & Stone, robe makers’, Heal Collection, 101.10, British Museum. See also: Anonymous, *The District Railway Guide to London, With Coloured Maps, Plans, etc.* (London: A. Boot & Son, 1888), p. 111.

93 I rely on a summary of: Richard Peters, Letter to William Smith, 19 August 1765, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, William Smith Papers, UPT 50 S664 Box 2, Folder 105. (See finding aid for the collection for summary.) But Peters’ handwriting is too atrocious to read the relevant text.

94 Paul Snyder, advertisement, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 31 July 1766.

95 Joseph Wood, advertisement, *ibid.*, 21 January 1768; Peter Turner, advertisement, *ibid.*, 26 September 1745.

96 *Ibid.*, 15 July 1742.

97 Cole, ‘DRAFT Trade card of Shudall & Stone, robe makers’.

98 Miller, *Betsy Ross and the Making of America*, pp. 51–56.

99 *Ibid.*, pp. 61–74.

Griscom probably worked in Mason's workshop, boasted of being 'the first American tassel [*sic*] maker that ever brought that branch of business to any degree of perfection', which Marla R. Miller helpfully contrasts with her competitor in tassel-making, the Edinburgh-trained upholsterer, George Richey.<sup>100</sup> And it is thought that Griscom would have done this work for a half or less of the rate of a male journeyman upholsterer.<sup>101</sup>

In rural Princeton, New Jersey, the initial academic gown makers were not professionals; they were the wives of the faculty of the College of New Jersey. As noted in the Introduction, gowns likely were introduced at the College of New Jersey in 1755.<sup>102</sup> One additional line of evidence for this date is what Esther Edwards Burr, wife of President Aaron Burr, Sr, and the daughter of Jonathan Edwards, wrote in her diary on 17 July. 'Our Youngsters that are to take degrees are to appear in their Habbits.--We have the pattern from England to make them by ...'<sup>103</sup> Burr made the same choice of usage that William Smith would make a decade later, calling them 'Habbits' rather than 'gowns.'

Burr also spoke of a 'pattern'. This would be a relatively early reference to a pattern for a standardized article of clothing that could be expanded mathematically to the proportions of the wearer during the process of cutting. While the principle of such patterns was published in Spain in the late sixteenth century, developed further in France in the seventeenth century, and certainly was in use in England by the late eighteenth century, patterns and the methods of applying them in this period have been typically described as a jealously guarded secret of tailors in major urban centres, like London.<sup>104</sup> The earliest detailed description of pattern-based cutting in English dates to 1769.<sup>105</sup> If university robe-makers in Great Britain or Ireland were using such techniques, it seems unlikely they would be sharing their intellectual property with Esther Burr. It is more likely that she was referring to a physical example of an academic gown. As the wife and daughter of Protestant clergymen of great fame and erudition, she would have known her Scriptures well and perhaps thought of Exodus 25.40 in the King James Version, 'And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount' where Moses is told to make the furnishings and fixtures of the tabernacle like those of the celestial tabernacle revealed to him on Mount Sinai. But there may be no need to be so grandiose. The term pattern seems to have been in general use in Burr's native New England to refer to informal methods of making garments based on garments made in the past.<sup>106</sup>

Though not a professional, Burr likely would have been highly qualified for making academic gowns in collaboration with other women of her class. As documented by Marla R. Miller, women of the gentry in her native Connecticut Valley regularly engaged in social activities centered around the production of clothing and other textile goods, even if they could afford imported versions. For instance, we have records of a party in 1769 attended by the diarist Elizabeth Porter Phelps that included a variety of women

100 Ibid., p. 70.

101 Ibid., p. 71.

102 Then still in Newark.

103 Fisher, p. 303.

104 Joy Spanabel Emery, *A History of the Paper Pattern Industry: The Home Dressmaking Fashion Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 1, 6.

105 Ibid., p. 6.

106 Miller, *The Needle's Eye*, p. 81.



Princeton University Art Museum, Carl Otto von Kienbusch, Jr., Memorial Collection, y1955-3222

**Fig. 4. 'James McCulloch', c. 1773, by Matthew Pratt (1756–1836), oil on canvas, 126.5 x 101.5 cm.**

from powerful Connecticut Valley families and resulted in the making of a petticoat. Two of these women were Betty and Sophia Partridge, great-granddaughters of Solomon Stoddard (father of Jonathan Edwards' mother) and so Esther Edwards Burr's second cousins.<sup>107</sup> Particularly skilled in quilting, ornamental needlework, and embroidery, the women of Burr's milieu would not have had all the specialized skills of professionals in Philadelphia but would not have lacked their ingenuity. Later, in 1755, Burr would be trying to turn one of her dresses into two.<sup>108</sup>

The only portrait we have of an American undergraduate in academic dress prior to the Revolution is the well-known 1773 painting of College of New Jersey student James McCulloch (Fig. 4). It seems to my eye that the gown in question is cut voluminously like an eighteenth-century women's gown as opposed to the closer cut of the tailoring of McCulloch's subfusc gentleman's suit, which might suggest a woman was in charge of its production. But academic gowns, of course, do tend to be more voluminous and loosely cut than fashionable clothing.

Esther Burr was economizing by turning one dress into two in 1755 because she was anticipating disruption of trade as Great Britain again went to war with France. The Seven Years' War indeed disrupted trade and many aspects of the colonial and British

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107 *Ibid.*, pp. 89–91.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

economies. It greatly damaged Peter Collinson's business as a draper.<sup>109</sup> And the vast expense it put on the British public purse encouraged higher taxation of the American Colonies by legislation such as the Stamp Act of 1765, leading eventually to the American Revolution.

Two incidents at Princeton in the wake of colonial protest against the Stamp Act are worth mentioning. The first occurred in 1765, just after the Stamp Act was passed, but before it went into force. Princeton degree candidates decided amongst themselves to appear at Commencement 'dressed in American Manufactures' and most managed to find clothing of the appropriate origin, except for four or five students who failed to do so 'entirely doing to Disappointments'.<sup>110</sup> It is likely that the students were dressed in ordinary formal attire (waistcoats, cravats, and breeches) rather than academic dress, so as to support the Trustees' attempts to maintain cordial relations with the Old Sides.<sup>111</sup> But the insistence of using homespun for these non-academic outfits is broadly relevant. *The Pennsylvania Gazette* (published by Benjamin Franklin) commended the students in question for their patriotism and further noted,

We can with Pleasure take this Opportunity further to inform the Public, that the Under graduates have agreed to follow this noble Example. If young Gentlemen of Fortune and Education, many of whom will probably shine in the various Spheres of publick Life, would thus voluntarily throw aside those Articles of Superfluity and Luxury, which have almost beggared us, and exert themselves for the Encouragement of Industry, it is not easy to conceive what a wide extended Influence their Conduct will naturally have on all the lower Ranks of Mankind.<sup>112</sup>

On one hand, such sentiments positively acknowledged the existence of an educated and wealthy elite. The ideal America envisaged by *The Pennsylvania Gazette* is one in which there is inequality in wealth, education, and participation in economic, political, and religious affairs, just as in Great Britain. On the other hand, there was an expectation expressed that these privileged few would set a good example for their social inferiors. In a mercantilist worldview, British North America needs to export as much as possible, import as little as possible, and underline its non-dependence on Great Britain for luxuries. Therefore, as long as non-dependence on European imports was of political importance, the use of academic dress would be controversial because of the conditions of its production, even among those who did not object to academic dress because of its connection with oppressive British social structures.

And then in 1770, James Madison, a future signer and architect of the United States Constitution, wrote to his father describing his support of the response of fellow Princeton undergraduates to New York merchants breaking their agreement not to import cloth from Great Britain. The New York merchants wrote to the Philadelphia merchants, asking them to end their boycott as well. The Princetonians gathered in their

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109 Armstrong, p. xxiii.

110 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 25 September 1765.

111 Green, p. 331. A detailed account of the College of New Jersey Commencement of 1764 avoids mentioning what participants were wearing, with the exception of the President opening Commencement 'capite tecto' (with covered head), as the presiding officers of a present-day Oxford Convocation do. See Green, p. 372. We therefore presume President Finley wore a hat during Commencements, though I have found no proof that he performed any ritual actions with it.

112 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 25 September 1765.

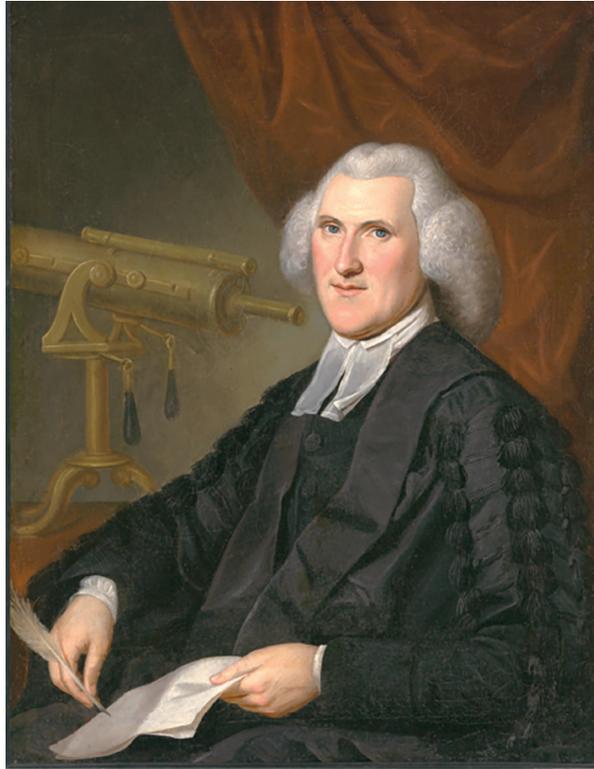


Fig. 5. 'John Ewing', 1788, by Charles Wilson Peale (1741–1827), oil on canvas, 95.3 x 69.9 cm.

Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, NPG.2001.5

black gowns to burn the letter ritually to the tolling of a bell. Madison writes proudly of the growth of the College and the stolid political principles of its student body, 'The number of Students has increased very much of late; there are about an hundred & fifteen in College & the Grammar School, twenty two commence this Fall, all of them in American Cloth.'<sup>113</sup>

Once its material changed to American homespun, the Princeton gown could become a symbol of rebellion against the British establishment just as much as the imported gown of a future Loyalist like Myles Cooper of King's College could signify the reverse. In the next section, we will see that William Smith's halfway compromise in academic dress was an accurate reflection of his compromising politics.

### Academic dress in revolutionary Philadelphia

In the turbulent years between the passage of the Stamp Act and the confiscation of the property of the College of Philadelphia, William Smith helped make academic dress and ceremonial an integral part of the life of the city.

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<sup>113</sup> James Madison, Letter to James Madison, Sr, 23 July 1770, *Founders Online*, National Archives, at <founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-01-02-0008> [retrieved 14 February 2022]. Original source: William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal, eds, *The Papers of James Madison*, 7 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Vol. 1, *16 March 1751–16 December 1779*, pp. 49–51.

Commencements in this period involved processions around the College's quarter-city-block campus, squeezed between the principal Anglican burial ground and the principal Quaker meeting house. In 1771, this procession likely could be heard throughout much of the city, being accompanied by the band of the Royal Scots Fusiliers.<sup>114</sup> The procession then would end in the Public Hall of the College, which had its own organ.<sup>115</sup> Those attending would be treated to a programme of speeches in various languages, dramatic works, and vocal and instrumental music interspersed with degree conferrals and examinations of doctoral dissertations in medicine.<sup>116</sup> In a city where theatres were still new, physically unattractive, and controversial (and like Elizabethan London, restricted to a suburban township known as Southwark), College Commencements were a dignified form of public entertainment in the heart of the city.<sup>117</sup> As Kevin J. McGinley has found, College of Philadelphia students seem to have been freer than others to stage dramatic productions within the city limits for purposes of oratorical education.<sup>118</sup> Commencement exercises likewise would have been an opportunity to train College students in public speaking, musical and dramatic composition, and the political uses of those arts. As we shall see, the role of Commencements as a legitimate form of public entertainment and as training ground for political actors would make them a model for civic processions in post-Revolutionary Philadelphia.

But it was a non-Commencement procession of great political significance for both the nascent United States and the College of Philadelphia that expanded the use of academic dress in Philadelphia. On 19 February 1776, the faculty and students of the College of Philadelphia marched in the funeral procession of General Richard Montgomery, who had died leading the early Continental Army in an invasion of Québec.<sup>119</sup> It was not a long walk. The German Church, where the funeral was held, was a block north of the College.<sup>120</sup> But the sight of William Smith, his colleagues, and his students in black gowns must have been impressive. College Commencements also had familiarized the city to academic dress. There is no record of confusion among the city's inhabitants like that which arose in 1773, when Harvard University undergraduates attended a funeral in Providence, Rhode Island, attired in academic dress.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>114</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 11 July 1771.

<sup>115</sup> George E. Thomas and David B. Brownlee, *Building America's First University: An Historical and Architectural Guide to the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 34.

<sup>116</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 11 July 1771.

<sup>117</sup> Heather S. Nathans, *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson: Into the Hands of the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 14–19; Odai Johnson and William J. Burling, eds, *The Colonial American Stage, 1665–1774: A Documentary Calendar* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), p. 54.

<sup>118</sup> Kevin J. McGinley, 'The 1757 College of Philadelphia Production of *Alfred: A Masque*—Some New Observations', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 77 (2014), pp. 37–58, doi: 10.1525/hlq.2014.77.1.37

<sup>119</sup> Benjamin Irvin, *Clothed in Robes of Sovereignty: The Continental Congress and the People Out of Doors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 122.

<sup>120</sup> For a detailed map of land ownership in Philadelphia during this period (including the locations of religious buildings and educational institutions), see: James M. Duffin, 'Mapping West Philadelphia: Landowners in October 1777', University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, at <maps.archives.upenn.edu/WestPhila1777/map.php> [retrieved 20 January 2021].

<sup>121</sup> Nicholas A. Hoffmann, 'Crow's Feet and Crimson: Academic Dress at Harvard', *TBS*, 9

Smith, however, infuriated the Continental Congress and much of the rest of his audience with an oration that praised Montgomery as loyal to the British Crown and encouraged his audience to make peace with Great Britain. The Continental Congress rejected a motion of thanks for the oration and to print it as a pamphlet. Smith compounded his offence by having it printed himself after asking Benjamin Franklin and William Livingston for suggested corrections. Having been advised to remove the call for reconciliation with Great Britain, Smith retained it (along with a spirited defence).<sup>122</sup>

Montgomery's funeral was the last public use of academic dress in Philadelphia for a few years, an outcome that likely resulted in part from Smith's impolitic oration and his even more impolitic publication of it. As the Continental Congress considered whether to declare independence from Great Britain, the College of Philadelphia Commencement of 10 June 1776 was 'ordered to be a private one on account of the present unsettled State of public affairs'.<sup>123</sup> The degree candidates were dispensed from orations, dramatic productions, and the other typical public presentations at Commencements. And there is no mention of academic dress in the account of the Commencement in the Trustees' Minutes.<sup>124</sup>

A Constitutional Convention for the new sovereign State of Pennsylvania was held from July to September 1776 with Benjamin Franklin presiding.<sup>125</sup> Section 44 of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 emphasized the new State would take an interest in education,

A school or schools shall be established in each county by the legislature, for the convenient instruction of youth, with such salaries to the masters paid by the public, as may enable them to instruct youth at low prices: And all useful learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted in one or more universities.<sup>126</sup>

In 1777, there was no Commencement at the College, possibly because there were no students ready to graduate. From 28 June 1777 to 25 September 1778, the Trustees did not meet and instruction ceased on account of the British Army approaching Philadelphia, capturing it, occupying it, and then finally abandoning it to the advancing Continental Army.<sup>127</sup>

Five months after the Trustees resumed meeting, the disaster foreshadowed by Section 44 of the Constitution of Pennsylvania began. The State did not just intend to create a new university or two; it intended to confiscate and re-purpose the property of the College to do it. Trustee Thomas Mifflin informed the Trustees that the General Assembly

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(2009), pp. 38–58 (p. 42), doi: 10.4148/2475-7799.1071.

122 Christopher A. Hunter, 'William Smith's Catonian Loyalism, Race, and the Politics of Language', *Early American Literature*, 52 (2017), pp. 531–38 (p. 531), doi:10.1353/eal.2017.0048.

123 Minutes of the Trustees, 23 May 1776.

124 Ibid., 10 June 1776.

125 Paul Leicester Ford, 'The Adoption of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776', *Political Science Quarterly*, 10 (1895), pp. 426–59 (pp. 451–55).

126 Council of Censors of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, ed., *The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as established by the General Convention* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1784), p. 29.

127 Note preceding the Minutes of the Trustees, 25 September 1778, (Vol. II, p. 107 of the minute books).

of Pennsylvania had appointed a committee of inquiry into the College with the power of subpoena.<sup>128</sup> The Commencement of 1779 again was ordered to be held in private.<sup>129</sup>

But on 5 July 1779, when Commencement was due to be held, the President of the State of Pennsylvania, Joseph Read, requested that it not be held and the Trustees agreed to delay until they could determine why.<sup>130</sup> The reason was ominous. Some members of Pennsylvania's Supreme Executive Council were arguing that the Charter of the College was invalid in some way, negating the rights of the Trustees to confer degrees.<sup>131</sup>

Over the course of the rest of the year, William Smith and the Trustees worked with legal counsel (including Philadelphia's leading defence attorney and future US Supreme Court Justice, James Wilson) to defend the College Charter.<sup>132</sup> But on 27 November 1779, the famous hand of Thomas Paine, as Clerk of the Assembly, engrossed an Act of Assembly that effectively transferred the powers and corporate property of the College Trustees to a new Board of Trustees of the University of the State of Pennsylvania.<sup>133</sup> The core motivations of doing so were outlined in the report of the committee: (1) to make sure the institution was not controlled just by one or two Christian denominations; (2) to put the institution on a firmer financial footing; (3) to purge the Trustees and faculty of anyone of doubtful loyalty to the independent State of Pennsylvania.<sup>134</sup>

Two changes in the transition between the College and the University matter the most to the discussion of academic dress. First, William Smith, despite a strong letter of complaint to the Assembly, was replaced with the Reverend John Ewing, a Presbyterian and *ex officio* Trustee of the University by virtue of being the minister of the First Presbyterian Church.<sup>135</sup> (Even the leading Roman Catholic clergyman of the city was an *ex officio* Trustee by the Act of Assembly.<sup>136</sup>) Ewing's education would have introduced him to key proponents and opponents of academic dress. He had been taught by Francis Alison at his

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128 Ibid., 1 March 1779.

129 Ibid., 1 June 1779.

130 Ibid., 5 July 1779.

131 Ibid., 8 July 1779.

132 Ibid., 18 September 1779.

133 Thomas McKean, ed., *The Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Carefully Compared with the Originals: And an Appendix Containing the Laws Now in Force, Passed Between the 30th Day of September 1775, and the Revolution: Together with the Declaration of Independence; the Constitution of the State of Pennsylvania; and the Articles of Confederation of the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1782), pp. 250–56.

134 Minutes of the Trustees of the College of Philadelphia, 28 September 1779. The motivations of the Supreme Executive Council seem to have been similar. See: 'Message from the President of the Supreme Executive Council, to the Representatives of the Freemen of Pennsylvania in General Assembly Met' in the Journal of the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, 9 September 1779, in *Journals of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: Beginning the Twenty-eighth Day of November, 1776, and Ending the Second Day of October, 1781* (Philadelphia: J. Dunlap, 1782), pp. 362–64.

135 For Smith's complaint, see Journal of the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, 25 November 1779. For Ewing's first actions as Trustee, see Minutes of the Trustees of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, 25 January 1780.

136 Frederick Farmer, 'Senior Minister of the Roman Catholick Churches', took the necessary oath as a Trustee on 15 December 1779, two weeks after the first meeting of the Trustees of the State of Pennsylvania. See Minutes of the Trustees of the University of the State of Pennsylvania (Vol. III, p. 7 of the minute books).

academy in New London, Connecticut. He graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1754 but remained a tutor there until 1758, during the tenure of Aaron Burr, Sr.<sup>137</sup> While at the College of New Jersey, Ewing had notoriously argued with Esther Burr about the depth of friendship possible between women as opposed to that between men and wondered whether women had anything else to talk about but clothing and fashion.<sup>138</sup>

Ewing's positive attitude toward academic dress is demonstrated by a 1788 painting of him by Charles Wilson Peale (Fig. 5). Like Stuart's painting of Smith, Peale's painting also contains a telescope and shows Ewing holding a quill pen, making one wonder how much Stuart's painting of Smith was modelled on Peale's painting of Ewing. (Ewing was professor of natural philosophy at Philadelphia during the 1769 Venus transit.) Like Smith, Ewing is wearing bands and a preaching scarf (or possibly facings of his gown that look like them). But here the similarities stop. Ewing wears no hood. Ewing's gown (perhaps better named a robe) must be open, because we can see a garment with buttons underneath, possibly a cassock. And the open sleeves of the robe are highly decorated with black frogs running around the sleeve in several rows. Use of frogs (as Neil Dickson classifies them) or 'strips of braid with a tassel hanging from one end of each' as Alex Kerr describes them are well-documented in Scottish doctoral, professorial, and official gowns/robes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>139</sup> The Scottishness of the dress implied by the robe and absence of the hood is unsurprising. Ewing was DD of Edinburgh.<sup>140</sup> But the density of braid and tassels without gold or silver decoration is unmatched in the examples identified by Dickson or Kerr. William Robertson's gown as Principal of Edinburgh University in a painting of 1792 by Sir Henry Raeburn has two braid and tassel structures visible on each side of the front of the gown and one on the most visible sleeve.<sup>141</sup> Some frogging is reported on Scottish clerical gowns in the eighteenth century, not just for the Moderator of the Church of Scotland as today, but all of the examples I could find in portraiture are similar in density to that of Robertson's gown.<sup>142</sup> Ewing's sleeves are simply a different order of being.

While Ewing's gown has no close parallel in Scotland, College of New Jersey President John Witherspoon was painted in 1783 by Charles Wilson Peale wearing a gown

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137 University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, 'Penn People: John Ewing', University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, at <[archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/john-ewing](https://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/john-ewing)> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

138 Fisher, pp. 301–02.

139 Neil Dickson, 'Tradition and Humour: The Academic Dress of the University of Glasgow', *TBS*, 12 (2012), pp. 10–35 (pp. 12–13, 24–26), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1097; Alex Kerr, 'Hargreaves-Mawdsley's *History of Academical Dress* and the Pictorial Evidence for Great Britain and Ireland: Notes and Corrections', *TBS*, 8 (2008), pp. 106–50 (p. 142), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1066.

140 The University of Edinburgh, *A Catalogue of the Graduates in the Faculties of Arts, Divinity, and Law since its foundation* (Edinburgh: Neill, 1858), p. 244.

141 At <<https://collections.ed.ac.uk/art/record/502>> [retrieved 19 April 2021].

142 William McMillan, 'Scottish Ecclesiastical Dress', *Church Service Society Annual*, 19 (1949), pp. 25–32 (p. 25); The earliest example McMillan cites is a portrait of William Carstares, probably the one by John Aikman, c. 1712 in the University of Edinburgh Collection (EU00003) at <[ourhistory.is.ed.ac.uk/images/b/b4/Edi\\_uni\\_eu\\_0003\\_624x544.jpg](https://ourhistory.is.ed.ac.uk/images/b/b4/Edi_uni_eu_0003_624x544.jpg)> [retrieved 25 June 2022]. As Aikman was Principal of the University of Edinburgh at the time as well as Moderator, it is uncertain whether what office the robe was meant to signify.

with the same decoration on the sleeves.<sup>143</sup> Witherspoon was MA of Edinburgh and DD of St Andrews.<sup>144</sup> The conclusion I draw is that Witherspoon and Ewing plausibly viewed themselves as having most of the functions of the principal, chancellor, and rector of a Scottish university and had a robe of office designed to reflect this. The absence of a Scottish parallel suggests these robes most likely were made in America. And if so, they, like the paintings themselves, were made in Philadelphia. For as I have documented earlier in this essay, it was in Philadelphia that the upholstery skills required for such decoration were most developed.<sup>145</sup>

Ewing's interest in expanding distinction in academic dress seems to have been mostly limited to himself and on his own initiative. The Trustees gave no imprimatur to Ewing's robe of office, and as I have said, pictorial evidence for academic dress for other faculty is extremely rare but not entirely absent.

Unlike Smith, Ewing would have found support for the use of academic dress from his Vice-Provost from 1789, John Andrews. Andrews, who preceded Frederic Beasley as Provost in 1810–13, was painted by Thomas Sully about the time of his Provostship. He is wearing an open gown over a cassock bound with a girdle, bands, and a red hood with what may be a black lining exposed near the left shoulder.<sup>146</sup> A scarf may be present as a dynamic black strip on the left side. Except for the open gown and what it exposes as well as the possible black lining of the hood, Andrews' ensemble is quite close to William Smith's in Figure 2. Ewing, however, held only American degrees. He received BA and MA degrees from the College of Philadelphia in 1765 and 1767 and received an honorary DD from Washington College, Maryland, in 1785.<sup>147</sup> All of these degrees therefore came from institutions headed by William Smith, implying a direct connection between Smith and the form of academic dress used by Andrews.<sup>148</sup>

The second important consequence of the transition from College to University is that the financial records of the University during its first decade have survived in

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143 This painting is mainly known through a 1794 copy of the original by Rembrandt Peale in the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, at <npg.si.edu/object/npg\_NPG.91.81> [retrieved 19 April 2021]. The sleeves on both Witherspoon and Ewing's robes seem to have passed without notice in Peale scholarship, because they are clearest in the versions of the paintings currently in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., which were both long in private hands and probably unavailable to Lillian B. Miller or Charles Coleman Sellers. See, for example: Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Selected Papers of Charles Wilson Peale and His Family*, 2 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), Vol. 1, p. 515.

144 The University of Edinburgh, p. 207; Roger L Emerson, *Academic Patronage in the Scottish Enlightenment: Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews Universities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 483.

145 A more thorough investigation of these robes and their circumstances of production is left to a future study

146 Addison, p. 5. A colour version can be found at <artcollection.upenn.edu/collection/art/817/john-andrews-1746-1813/> [retrieved 19 April 2021].

147 University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, 'Penn People: John Andrews', University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/john-andrews> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

148 Smith founded Washington College soon after the suspension of the College of Philadelphia. University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, 'Penn People: William Smith', University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/william-smith> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

the form of a detailed, if sometimes mysterious cash book, providing insight into Commencement expenses like academic gowns, as I will detail further below.<sup>149</sup>

The University's first Commencement was held in July 1780, but only music is mentioned, not academic dress.<sup>150</sup> But by 1783, academic dress had returned, to newspaper reports at least. The Commencement of July 1783 was reported to include 'the faculty and graduates in their formalities' by one newspaper and 'the Faculty and Graduates in their robes' by another.<sup>151</sup> The most famous honorary degree recipient of 1783 was a Virginia planter, surveyor, politician, and military commander by the name of George Washington.<sup>152</sup> (He would become President of the United States in 1789.) Washington's degree was conferred *in absentia* at the Commencement and then presented to Washington with a sort of loyal address on 13 December 1783 while he was passing through Philadelphia.<sup>153</sup> So there is no report of Washington wearing academic dress in Philadelphia on this or any other occasion. But we do know that Washington's diploma cost £2 5s. in Pennsylvania currency (£1 7s. sterling) to write.<sup>154</sup> The College had died (or at least slept), but the University continued its traditions.

Any well-known use of academic dress by Washington would have given it a significant imprimatur, just as Washington's use of the Masonic apron while laying the foundations of the Capitol served as a counter-argument to opponents of Masonry in the nineteenth century.<sup>155</sup> The aftermath of the American Revolution would be an environment where the academic dress traditions of the universities of Great Britain and Ireland would be as contentious as they were in the middle of the eighteenth century. The Supreme Court of the United States, mainly sitting in Philadelphia in its first decade, originally wore and then abandoned in the face of controversy robes allegedly modelled on the LLD gown of the University of Dublin.<sup>156</sup> A nation whose highest judicial officers courted controversy with British doctoral gowns might not appreciate academics dressing similarly.

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149 'Cash Book—University of the State of Pennsylvania, Jan 1, 1780–May 23, 1791', University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, General Administration Collection (Pre-1820), UPA 3, Box 19, Folder 1519.

150 *Pennsylvania Journal*, 12 July 1780.

151 *Ibid.*, 23 July 1783; *Freeman's Journal*, 9 July 1783.

152 Minutes of the Trustees of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, 26 June 1783.

153 *Ibid.*, 12 December 1783. 'Address to George Washington and His Reply', Minutes of the Trustees of the University of the State of Pennsylvania (Vol. III, pp. 166a–66b in the minute books) with notes from E. W. Mumford, Secretary of the University (19 July 1932).

154 Cash Book of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, 20 December 1783. Conversions from Pennsylvania money to sterling or United States dollars are based on: Louis Jordan, *Colonial Currency*, University of Notre Dame Special Collections, at <coins.nd.edu/ColCurrency/index.html> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

155 Rob Morris, *William Morgan; or Political Anti-Masonry: Its Rise, Growth, and Decadence* (New York: Robert McCoy, 1884), p. 40.

156 'Centennial Celebration of the Organization of the Federal Judiciary', *United States Reports*, 134 (1890), pp. 711–62 (p. 712). See also Sandra Day O'Connor [associate justice of the Supreme Court, 1981–2006], 'Why Judges Wear Black Robes', *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 2013, at <www.smithsonianmag.com/history/justice-sandra-day-oconnor-on-why-judges-wear-black-ropes-4370574/> [retrieved 3 February 2021]. I am preparing a more detailed study of the connection between early Supreme Court dress and academic dress.

And from a few references in the correspondence of some prominent figures of the Revolution and the early Republic, it is possible to see that the academic gown was falling into disuse among undergraduates, at least among namesakes of George Washington.

In 1796, George Washington's adoptive grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, received an affectionate letter from his grandfather. The letter enclosed a ten-dollar bill to purchase a gown and a few other sundries, 'But as the classes may be distinguished by a different insignia, I advise you not to provide these without first obtaining the approbation of your tutors; otherwise you may be distinguished more by folly, than by the dress.'<sup>157</sup>

Of course, Washington is merely speculating that Custis might not need a gown at Princeton in 1796, though Donald Drakeman suggests the gown indeed had fallen into disuse at some point before the 1840s.<sup>158</sup> Abigail Adams in 1818, however, was quite sure the gown was not used on a daily basis at Harvard. She wrote to her daughter that her grandson, George Washington Adams (John Quincy Adams' eldest son) was starting his undergraduate studies. And like many doting grandparents, she was concerned to get him properly equipped,

The Weather is So cold, and he not without some Rheumatic twinges, that I Sent him to the Tailors to get him a plaid Cloak—formerly Gowns were used, but these are gone by—and a cloak was absolutely necessary to put on in a cold morning, to attend prayers.<sup>159</sup>

Nicholas Hoffmann has found that this period was transitional between academic gowns being in daily use at Harvard to falling out of use entirely.<sup>160</sup> It is interesting to note that Andrew Preston Peabody's quote of the cost of a Harvard gown in the 1820s of \$2 to \$3 would be within the budget provided by General Washington to his grandson in the 1790s.<sup>161</sup> The American dollar deflated roughly a third between 1800 and 1825, so Custis probably could have purchased a poor-quality gown for approximately \$5.<sup>162</sup>

### **Academic Dress in federal Philadelphia and its civic processions**

As we have discussed, the gown never had been in daily use in Philadelphia's university, except in the imagination of William Smith's fundraising literature. The use of academic dress was purely ceremonial and rarely used to communicate one's status as a working academic in the pictorial evidence from Philadelphia. Yet in the Federal period, the way William Smith had made Commencements into cultural moments in a staid Quaker city before the Revolution became the foundation of a tradition of civic ceremonial that

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<sup>157</sup> George Washington, Letter to George Washington Parke Custis, 15 November 1796, *Founders Online*, National Archives, at <[founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-00007](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-00007)> [retrieved February 2021].

<sup>158</sup> Drakeman, p. 60.

<sup>159</sup> Abigail Smith Adams, Letter to Louisa Catherine Johnson Adams, 20 February 1818, *Founders Online*, National Archives, at <[founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-03-02-3468](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-03-02-3468)> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

<sup>160</sup> Hoffmann, p. 42.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>162</sup> Morgan Friedman, 'The Inflation Calculator', at <[westegg.com/inflation/](https://westegg.com/inflation/)> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

became much broader than College of Philadelphia/University of Pennsylvania Commencements. And I will argue that it is this tradition of civic ceremonial that eventually would motivate academic dress in Philadelphia to evolve beyond plain black gowns and adopt distinction among gowns for different levels of degrees and disciplines of study.

In 1788, the ratification of the United States Constitution by the individual States inspired a remarkable series of civic processions in many American port cities.<sup>163</sup> The Federal Procession of 1788 (held on 4 July in Philadelphia) was the largest such event and a model for similar events held in Philadelphia until at least 1908, such as Washington's birthday centenary in 1832.<sup>164</sup> The Procession seems even more remarkable when one considers that the deciding ratification, which put the Constitution into force, had been executed only on 21 June in the State of New Hampshire and received by Congress in Philadelphia on 2 July. The gap of only two days between receiving the news and celebrating it suggests both significant preparation in anticipation of ratification and rapid last-minute execution.<sup>165</sup>

The Constitution had not been adopted without controversy. Many important figures of the struggle for American independence, such as Thomas Jefferson, had opposed it. The Federal Procession was an attempt to commemorate the coming into force of the Constitution, unite its supporters, and convince its opponents to contribute to the new constitutional order they had opposed.<sup>166</sup> In doing so, the organizers were conscious to avoid the street violence that had marked political events in Philadelphia during the 1760s and 1770s, a consideration that likely had motivated cancelling or reducing the scope of College Commencements in the previous decades.<sup>167</sup>

The strongest influence on the form of the Procession was likely the London Lord Mayor's Show. Common to both events was major material support from the city's craft guilds; the use of costumes in imitation of livery, allegorical devices, scenery, 'machines' or 'devices' (floats and animated figures), nocturnal illumination, and other theatrical devices; and oratory connecting the event with classical precedents (such as Roman triumphal entries) and exhorting the populace to virtues of industry, temperance, and prudence.<sup>168</sup> Joseph McMillan even has scrutinized the use of heraldic devices in the Processions in Philadelphia and other cities and their parallels with those used by British craft guilds.<sup>169</sup> The Processions therefore preserved many elements of the rituals originating

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163 Laura Rigal, *The American Manufactory: Art, Labor, and the World of Things in the Early Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 21.

164 David Glassberg, 'Public Ritual and Cultural Hierarchy: Philadelphia's Civic Celebrations at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 107 (1983), pp. 421–48 (p. 424).

165 Gary Lawson and Guy Seidman, 'When Did the Constitution become Law', *Notre Dame Law Review*, 77 (2001), pp. 1–2, doi: 10.2139/ssrn.278416. The centrepiece float for the Procession, the Federal Edifice, was completed in four days. See Francis Hopkinson, 'An Account of the Grand Federal Procession', taken from *The Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings of Francis Hopkinson, Esq.*, 3 vols (Philadelphia: T. Dobson, 1792), Vol. II, pp. 349–422, at <www.gunjones.com/4th-of-July-1788.pdf> [retrieved 9 March 2021], p. 5.

166 Rigal, p. 21.

167 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

168 For these elements of the Lord Mayor's Show, I largely rely upon Tracey Hill, *A Cultural History of the Early Modern Lord Mayor's Show 1585–1639* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 31–32, 38–39.

169 Joseph McMillan, 'American Guild Arms in the Constitutional Processions of 1788', *The*

from the country its organizers had rejected politically by particularly leveraging the rituals of the aristocratic republic of labour they saw in London and other British cities.

These parallels with British practice almost reached the level of irony. As with the Lord Mayor's Show, the Federal Procession also resembled the coronation procession of a British monarch. In the order of march were Philadelphia military units analogous to British ones, a herald, a mounted armoured knight bearing a shield emblazoned with the arms of the United States, and the marshal of the admiralty court bearing the silver oar: the traditional mace of the admiralty courts of England.<sup>170</sup> These marchers were followed by the representatives of the farmers and trade guilds; most of the officers of government followed the tradesmen, including the Supreme Executive Council of the State, the justices of common pleas, and the sheriff. These were followed by the barristers and law students, the clergy (including the local rabbi) 'linked arm in arm', the college of physicians and medical students, and 'Students of the university, headed by the vice-provost, and of the episcopal academy, and most of the schools of the city, preceded by their respective principals, professors, masters, and tutors; a small flag borne before them inscribed with these words, 'the rising generation'.'<sup>171</sup>

None of the descriptions of the Philadelphia Procession say what this group was wearing. But in the procession in New York City on 2 August 1788 with its similar order of march to Philadelphia's, Columbia University was represented by a flag bearer, two globe bearers, and 'The president and professors in their academical habits, followed by the students, bearing different kinds of mathematical and astronomical instruments ...'<sup>172</sup>

It was appropriate for the order of the Philadelphia procession to close with the students of the University and the schools, much like a College Commencement. The Federal Procession of 1788 would have been nothing without the rising generation of three decades before and the College of Philadelphia Commencements that marked their rise. This connection is best illustrated by the judge of the admiralty court who marched behind the silver oar and in front of the Federal Edifice and whose poetry was distributed by a local printer dressed as Mercury: Francis Hopkinson, the chair of the organizing committee of the Procession.<sup>173</sup>

Francis Hopkinson was not just deeply connected with the College of Philadelphia and the University of the State of Pennsylvania, he was deeply connected with Commencement itself, which had been an important forum for displaying his artistic talents. In 1757, he had been one of the first graduates of the College and possibly performed and arranged or composed music for the College production of *Alfred: A Masque* in that year.<sup>174</sup> In 1760, he received the degree of MA and served as organist at Commencement, the first person known to have played the College's new organ. A gifted musician, com-

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*Coat of Arms*, V, 3rd series, No. 218, pp. 65–79.

<sup>170</sup> Rush, pp. 57–59. For a close analysis of the use of the silver oar as the admiralty court mace in various British-influenced jurisdictions, see Joseph C. Sweeney, 'The Silver Oar and Other Maces of the Admiralty', *Journal of Maritime Law and Commerce*, 38 (2007), pp. 159–76.

<sup>171</sup> Rush, pp. 69–70.

<sup>172</sup> 'Description of the New York City Federal Procession', *New York Daily Advertiser*, 2 August 1788, at <archive.csac.history.wisc.edu/description\_of\_the\_new\_york.pdf> [retrieved 14 February 2022].

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>174</sup> McGinley, pp. 47–50.

poser, and poet, he is known to have contributed poems to several Commencements during the 1760s (often with political themes) and would later be a Trustee.<sup>175</sup> Hopkinson was joined in the organization of the Procession by many other faculty, alumni, and/or Trustees of the College and/or the University, such as Benjamin Rush, Thomas Mifflin, John Nixon, George Clymer, and Peter Muhlenberg.<sup>176</sup>

And, of course, the orator of the Procession, James Wilson, was a man deeply attached to the College and University.<sup>177</sup> Wilson had been a College tutor and honorary MA in the 1760s, helped write the Pennsylvania Constitution that supported higher education and unsuccessfully defended the College from loss of its property in the 1770s, and would become Professor of Law (and Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court) in the 1790s. In 1788, he was Trustee of the College (then in abeyance). The language of Wilson's oration further established the connection between the Federal Procession and an academic ceremony:

Public processions may be so planned and executed as to join both the properties of nature's rule. They may instruct and improve, while they entertain and please. They may point out the elegance or usefulness of the sciences and the arts. They may preserve the memory, and engrave the importance of great political events. They may represent, with peculiar felicity and force, the operation and effects of great political truths. The picturesque and splendid decorations around me, furnish the most beautiful and most brilliant proofs, that these remarks are FAR FROM BEING IMAGINARY.<sup>178</sup>

Wilson's words hinted that the Federal Procession was not only a ceremony of political initiation but also a Commencement, one in which a people educated by the struggle for independence were conferred with the privileges of sovereignty and entered into a life of ordered liberty. As we have seen, academic ceremonies (whether Commencements, funerals, or student demonstrations) at Philadelphia and Princeton were entertainments that instructed in the arts and sciences and conveyed political positions. Francis Hopkinson had written a Commencement ode in honour of George III and victory over the French in 1762<sup>179</sup> but likewise had designed an entire procession praising separation from his government in alliance with the French in 1788. And thus, Wilson may have been pointing quite specifically to the analogy between the Federal Procession and a University Commencement, when he said to the assembled citizens of Philadelphia that, 'The commencement of our government has been eminently glorious: let our progress in every excellence be proportionably great.'<sup>180</sup>

Thus, the Federal Processions, with American tradesmen aping London's livery companies opened a route to making academic dress into an acceptable element of life in the new American republic, a dynamic hinted at by Wilson's oration at Philadelphia

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175 University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, 'College Class of 1757: The First Graduates', at <[archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/class-histories/class-of-1757](http://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/class-histories/class-of-1757)> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

176 All have capsule biographies on the web site of the University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center.

177 University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, 'Penn People: James Wilson', at <[archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/james-wilson](http://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/james-wilson)> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

178 Rush, p. 73.

179 University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, 'College Class of 1757: The First Graduates'.

180 Rush, p. 73.

but first made incarnate in the academical habits of Columbia's faculty. This was not necessarily a dynamic carved in stone, for it relied on an elite that thought of themselves as intellectuals and a populace that saw the works of the intellect as a path to common prosperity. But as long as such a consensus held, the academic gown at least could be appropriate and patriotic attire.

Unlike the Lord Mayor, one could not inaugurate the Constitution every year. However, University Commencements were again an important regular ceremony in Philadelphia life, drawing on the desires for sober celebration and creative expression that more overtly political pageantry also fulfilled. On 30–31 July 1789, the University commencement once more included a procession to the German Church by students, graduating seniors 'in their collegiate dress', faculty, alumni, and Trustees (including the *ex officio* Trustees in Pennsylvania government); two days of orations and dialogues on themes such as 'on the advantages of living in a state of natural liberty', 'on the necessity and policy of encouraging American manufactures', and 'on the disadvantages of orders of nobility in republics'; and a few musical interludes.<sup>181</sup>

This Commencement also marked the first time we see College or University authorities involved with gown manufacture. On 25 June 1789, the Trustees of the University '[o]rdered that the Faculty have Gowns prepared for the Students at the Commencement' and authorized payment to John Connelly, a Philadelphia merchant and music theorist.<sup>182</sup> On 4 August 1789, Connelly was paid by the Treasurer £47 9s. Pennsylvania currency (£35 11s. 9d. sterling) 'for Silk to make Gowns for the Graduates'.<sup>183</sup> It is not entirely clear how many gowns were made. At this commencement, the University conferred degrees on seventeen Bachelors of Arts, three Bachelors of Physic (Medicine), one Doctor of Physic, and eleven Master of Arts degrees.<sup>184</sup> On 4 August 1790, the Treasurer disbursed money to purchase silk for gowns from Philadelphia merchant Isaac Hazelhurst for £31 4s. Pennsylvania currency (£23 8s. sterling).<sup>185</sup> There were nine graduates this year, suggesting that new gowns were being made for individual graduates each year.<sup>186</sup>

Silk is the only gown material that is referred to in the University records. The use of silk for gowns for degrees largely in Arts is surprising and perhaps a clue to how the values of the new republic were being expressed in academic dress. At Oxford, the gowns of BAs and MAs would be made of a black woollen known as prince's stuff.<sup>187</sup> The doctors and Bachelors of Physic would wear silk gowns, as well as undergraduates of noble or armigerous rank. Thus, using silk gowns for all graduates suggested to any observer familiar with British practice that all graduates were regarded to be of an equal, elevated rank.

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181 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 12 August 1789.

182 Minutes of the Trustees of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, 25 June 1789.

183 Cash Book of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, 4 August 1789.

184 McConaghy, Silberman, and Kalashnikova, 'Penn in the Eighteenth Century: Classes of 1780–1789', at <archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century/college/students/1780-1789> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

185 Cash Book of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, 4 August 1790.

186 McConaghy, Silberman, and Kalashnikova.

187 William Gibson, 'The Regulation of Undergraduate Academic Dress at Oxford and Cambridge, 1660–1832', *TBS*, 4 (2004), pp. 26–41 (pp. 28–31), doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1027; [Thomas Combe], *Costume of the University of Oxford* (London: R. Ackermann, 1815), pp. 16–17.

The University cash books not only tell us about the purchase of gown materials, they also contain one tantalizing clue pointing to who was making the gowns. Inserted between pages 29 and 30 of the University cash book (following the ledger items for 24 April 1790) is a loose sheet that seems to be two sides of a ledger calculating the same total but with different itemizations between sides (Fig. 6). (The reverse side has a variety of unlabelled calculations.) In Table 1 I reproduce a transcription of the front of the sheet in full.

Before identifying the gown expense, let us first consider the three people mentioned here. ‘Mr. Bryan’ was George Bryan, Secretary and Treasurer of the Board of Trustees of the University from 1779 to 1788.<sup>188</sup> ‘E. Fox’ was Edward Fox, Secretary and Treasurer of the Board of Trustees of the University from 1789 to 1822 and the presumptive bookkeeper here.<sup>189</sup> Examination of earlier cash book entries<sup>190</sup> suggests ‘Ridiger’ was likely William Rediger, the janitor of the University from 1782 to 1794.<sup>191</sup>

Bryan and Fox, likewise salaried employees of the University, seem to be owed back wages for seven and a half years (or thirty quarters) at £9 per quarter or £36 per annum. The division of funds on the left side between Bryan and Fox total to a number close but not exactly equal to the sum of the back wages and the contingent expenses bills itemized on the right side, but not the left. The mysterious expenses beginning with the letter ‘P’ are identical on both sides. Thus, if this missing 11s. 6d. of ‘contingent expenses’ is added to the gown making expense, it seems as if the gown making expense is being paid to William Rediger.

As janitor, Rediger would have been responsible for securing and maintaining University property and served as the liaison between the elite who governed the University and the working-class community that supplied it with basic necessities and infrastructure. On 8 February 1786, Rediger was ordered to ‘procure proper persons to remove’ some sort of ‘nuisance’ from University property.<sup>192</sup> He occasionally would write to the Trustees requesting authorization to make repairs to houses belonging to the

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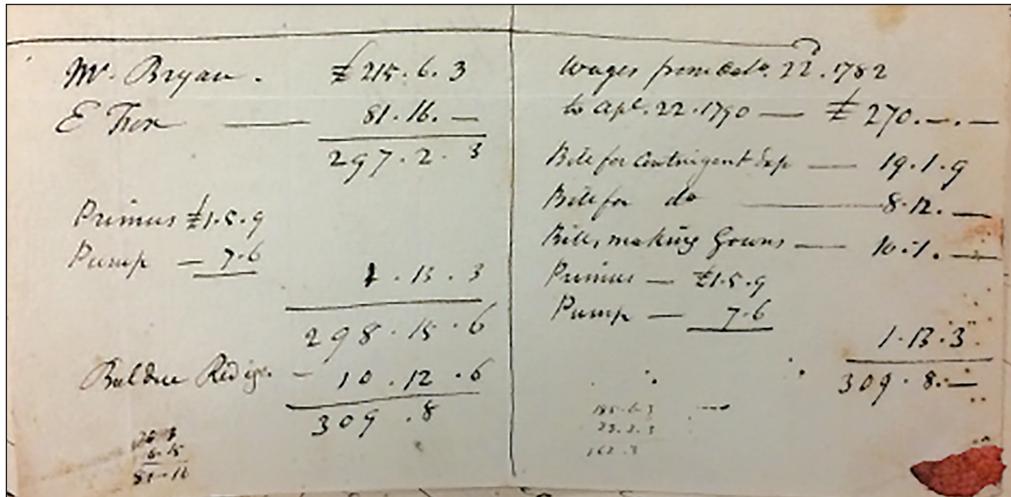
188 University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, ‘Penn People: George Bryan’, at <[archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/george-bryan](http://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/george-bryan)> [retrieved 3 February 2021].

189 University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, ‘Penn People: Edward Fox’, at <[archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/edward-fox](http://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/edward-fox)>, [retrieved 3 February 2021].

190 All references to Cash Book of the University of the State of Pennsylvania for the cited dates.

191 On 4 August 1790, there is entry for ‘Paid William Rideier [?] in full to July 22nd, £40 12s. 3d.’ Bryan seems to have been a clearer writer of his name. On 12 August 1783, ‘William Rediger’ first appears in an entry. The need for his replacement on account of his death was communicated by John Ewing to the Trustees on 1 April 1794. See John Ewing, Letter to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 1 April 1794, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, General Administration Collection Pre-1820, UPA 3, Box 5, Folder 401. He also was janitor of the American Philosophical Society. See Silvio A. Bedini, “That Awful Stage” (The Search for the State House Yard Observatory); in Randolph Shipley Klein, ed., *Science and Society: Essays in Honor of Whitfield J. Bell* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1986), pp. 155–99 (p. 176).

192 Minutes of the Trustees of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, 8 February 1786.



University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, General Administration Collection (Pre-1820), UPA 3, Box 19, Folder 1519

Fig. 6. Front of loose leaf inserted between pages 29 and 30 of the Cash Book of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, after the ledger items for 24 April 1790.

Table 1

Cash Book notation, University of the State of Pennsylvania, 24 April 1790.

[Left side]		[Right side]	
Mr. Bryan	£215 6s. 3d.	Wages from October 22, 1782	
E. Fox	£81 16s.	to April 22, 1790 --	£270.
	-----		
	£ 297 2s. 3d.	Bill for Contingent Expenses	£19 1s. 9d.
Primus [? breakfast?]	£1 5s. 9d.	Bill for do.	£8 12s.
Punch [?]	7s. 6d.	Bill, making gowns	£10 1s.
	-----	Primus [?]	£1 5s. 9d.
	£1 13s. 3d.	Pump [?]	7s. 6d.
	-----		
	£298 15s. 6d.		-----
Bill due Ridige [?]	£10 12s. 6d.		£1 13s. 3d.
	-----		
	£309 8s.		-----
			£309 8s.
[in smaller print]		[in smaller print]	
75 1		185 6 3	
6 15		23 3 3	
-----		162 3	
81. 16			

University<sup>193</sup> or to be advanced money (£5) 'to enable him to discharge sundry small contingent expenses and for which he is to account with the Treasurer'.<sup>194</sup>

Rediger thus would have been able to distribute patronage for providing services to the University. As the usual place of Commencements was the German Church (where he likely worshipped, having been married there and recommended for his post by the pastor), this patronage easily would have extended to Commencement.<sup>195</sup> It is possible that many of the German surnamed people paid by the Trustees after the Commencement of 1789 would have been engaged by and been connected to Rediger, such as Christian Schaffer, who repaired the University's outhouse on 5th Street; Adam Dor, who cleaned the German Church after the event; Henry Schmaltz (joiner of 11 Quarry St., who erected the stage); and John Edelman ('John Eddleman' labourer of 59 N 7th St.), who provided security.<sup>196</sup>

And it is in this context I propose to evaluate the gown-making expense of 1790. Rediger, who likely had charge of many procurement requests, found someone to make the gowns and asked for reimbursement of £10 1s. Pennsylvania currency, or £1 2s. 4d. per gown (if nine were made). Based on the direct payment to Rediger and odd book-keeping by Edward Fox, I would argue that the maker was Rediger's wife, Christina (née Greike).<sup>197</sup> Delegating the gownmaking expense to Rediger would suggest that the Trustees did not consider the vendor a social equal, unlike the merchants who provided the silk. That could be true of a male professional tailor. But, as we have seen, plenty of working-class men with potential connections to Rediger were mentioned in the cash book and corresponding Trustees' Minutes. Betsy Ross (now Elizabeth Claypoole) would have lived and worked as an upholsterer only three blocks away (0.3 miles) from Rediger's residence at American Philosophical Society headquarters (Philosophical Hall) and four blocks (0.4 miles) from the main University buildings, but the gowns may have been too simple to require her highly developed skills in embroidery and tassel-making. And she was working with her husband in those days, who likely would not have escaped mention in the Cash Book.<sup>198</sup> Unless Rediger made the gowns himself, the simplest explanation is that Rediger took the money (and the silk) and procured the gowns from the vendor most advantageous to himself: his wife.

Our best insight into the complexity of these gowns is their price. If we assume nine gowns were made in 1790, the total price of labour and materials was £41 5s. in Pennsylvania currency. This would be £4 11s. 8d. per gown, which would be equivalent to \$12.22. This price is significantly more than the Harvard gown quote from the 1820s, even accounting for deflation. But it is still in line with a relatively plain and unadorned

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193 Ibid., 9 February 1785.

194 Ibid., 5 November 1788.

195 'Pennsylvania Marriages, 1709-1940'. Database, FamilySearch (9 September 2020), at <familysearch.org> [retrieved 3 February 2021]. Minutes of the Trustees of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, 13 April 1782.

196 Ibid., 5 August 1789; Biddle, pp. 35, 113.

197 'Pennsylvania Marriages, 1709-1940'.

198 In 1790, Betsy Ross (then Elizabeth Ross Claypoole) would have worked out of her marital home and shop on Second Street, between Walnut and Chestnut Streets, three doors north of the City Tavern. See Miller, *Betsy Ross and the Making of America*, pp. 267, 273.

silk garment, being about a third of the unit cost of the Speaker's robes of the Georgia Assembly obtained by Benjamin Franklin earlier in the century.

By the late 1810s, the practice of making gowns for each graduating class had fallen out of use. Instead, a standard set of gowns had been made for University ceremonies rather than making new gowns for individual graduates each year. In 1817, the janitor, now William Dick, was reimbursed \$5 for payment made "To a Woman for mending the Silk Gowns for the Commencement."<sup>199</sup> In 1821, the Master of the Grammar School (the preparatory school of the University) asked the Trustees for permission to use the main Hall of the University and 'use of the gowns' for their own speech days etc. The Trustees approved use of the Hall, not of the gowns.<sup>200</sup> In 1822, the Trustees resolved, "That the Gowns or the use thereof be restricted to the use of the Graduates at the Public Commencements and to Speakers at Public exhibitions And that the Janitor be responsible for their Safe Keeping."<sup>201</sup> This repair bill and the Trustees' resolution suggests that the procurement of gowns and their care had remained a janitorial duty since the time of William Rediger but that the actual skilled work was definitely in the hands of anonymous women.

University of Pennsylvania Commencements by this period had become major municipal ceremonies with strong parallels to the Federal Procession of 1788. The Commencement of 1811 involved parties typical of the pre-Revolutionary Commencement such as students of the various schools, supplicants for higher degrees, faculty, Trustees, and 'the Janitor [probably George Smith] with the diplomas'.<sup>202</sup>

Following these were:

[T]he Clergy of the different denominations; the Marshal of the District; the Judge of the District and Attorney; the Sheriff and the Coroner of the County; the Judges of the Supreme Court; the prothonotary of the Supreme Court; the President and Assistant Judges of the District Court of the City and County; the President and Associate Judges of the Court of Common Pleas; the Prothonotary of the Court of Common Pleas; the Register [*sic*] and Recorder of the City; the High Constables of the City; the Mayor and the Recorder; the City Treasurer; the Aldermen; the Clerk of the Mayor's Court; the President and Members of the Select Council; the American Philosophical Society; the Gentlemen of the Bar; the College of Physicians; and Citizens.<sup>203</sup>

In 1812, the capital of Pennsylvania would move to Harrisburg, potentially interfering with the easy attendance of *ex officio* Trustees, such as the Governor of Pennsylvania, who remains an *ex officio* Trustee to the present day.

It is perhaps the regular presence of these officials at Commencement (or fear of their absence when the State capital moved to Harrisburg) that seems to have motivated the final innovation in academic dress at Philadelphia in the Federal period: the

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199 William Dick, 'Bill for Salary as Janitor, Candles, Mending Commencement Gowns, and Chimney Sweepers', 1 June 1817, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, UPA 3, General Administration Collection pre-1820, Box 4, Folder 319.

200 Minutes of the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 4 December 1821.

201 *Ibid.*, 2 April 1822.

202 '1811, 30 April, Arts and Medical 1811' (no source given), University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, UPG 7, Commencement and Convocation Programs, Box 2, Folder 1.

203 *Ibid.*

introduction of clear distinctions in academic dress between different levels of academic standing and degree. I return again to Provost Frederic Beasley's letter of 1813:

In concluding this article [on the chapel], the Provost would remark, that in his opinion, the Trustees should direct, that on all publick occasions, the Professors should wear gowns *suit'd to their rank* [emphasis mine] and also that the students should appear at such times, dressed in their gowns. These gowns may be provided by each Professor and pupil at his own expense, if it be inconvenient to have them prepared by the College. These may appear to some persons to be matters of minor importance and scarcely worth mentioning in a grave report, but they who think so have but little insight into the constitution of our nature and into those motives which for the most part, propel mankind into action. Upon the order and good government of a College, they have a most powerful and happy influence.<sup>204</sup>

In this passage, Beasley argues that academic dress and hierarchy in academic dress will serve a disciplinary purpose. That is, being dressed in gowns and having the more important people dressed in fancier gowns will encourage students to behave and study in hopes that they will be worthy of such honours. Or as Beasley put it in another place:

If you wish that the pupils should yield a ready submission to the authority of [the] College, & should be impressed with due respect for their Professors, give to the one all the formalities usual in such places, & to the others all the insignia of dignity & authority.

But there is another motivation. In one passage of the letter, Beasley proposed new academic ceremonies, which for the most part, replicated aspects of Commencements in the past and of the public examinations that had preceded Commencements in the pre-Revolutionary era. A new idea proposed was that Provosts should be inaugurated with elaborate ceremonial that would include an academic procession and solemn promises by Provost, faculty, and students to fulfil their duties to the University, a likely echo of inauguration and matriculation ceremonies at Oxford and Cambridge:

Such formalities as these would give an importance to the Institution which it will never attain without them, elevate it in the opinion of the publick, & have a lasting & powerful effect upon its order & government. This is the grand secret by which our Colleges to the North & East have attained to their present reputation & prosperity. The Governors of those states & all other officers of government sedulously attend their publick exhibitions, prove on all occasions that they are interested in their concerns & are ever ready to lend the aid of all their influence & authority in the promotion of their welfare. Let us resort to the same expedients & we shall surely find the results similar.<sup>205</sup>

Beasley's letter is very much in the spirit of the vision of the College of Philadelphia William Smith promoted to High Anglican donors in the mid-eighteenth century: of an institution modelled after British universities designed to capture the hearts and purses of the Republic's new elite. That Beasley felt bold enough to propose this model to the

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204 Frederic Beasley, Letter to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 11 October 1813, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, UPA 3, General Administration Collection pre-1820, Box 2, Folder 107.

205 Frederic Beasley, Letter to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 11 October 1813.

Trustees suggests a sea change in the power structures of Philadelphia, one that had put off Quaker simplicity and non-Conformist resentment of Oxford and Cambridge to pursue its outward forms and ceremonies with vigour. Just as Francis Hopkinson's organization and James Wilson's philosophical justification of the Federal Procession had raised the sophistication of civic ceremonial in Philadelphia while both drawing upon and transforming British ceremonial precedents, it was possible for University of Pennsylvania ceremonial and academic dress to grow in sophistication as well.

Beasley's proposals about academic dress largely were ignored while he was Provost. But two years after his resignation, the Trustees resolved on 10 June 1830 that:

It is required that the Students respectively will provide themselves with Collegiate Gowns--black, of silk or some other such stuff [word unclear] made in the customary Academic form and designating in the usual manner the class to which the individual belongs. The Students will be required to appear in their gowns--during their Chapel duties + at Commencements + other public collegiate occasions.<sup>206</sup>

Note the absence of a conscience clause. It is unknown what measures the faculty took to distinguish their academic dress from their students, but at least one other relevant aspect of Beasley's programme was realized. The Commencement of 1832 was attended by an even longer list of civil officials than 1811, as well as professors from other universities.<sup>207</sup> As at Harvard, Columbia, and Princeton, the use of academic dress at the University of Pennsylvania would wax and wane throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>208</sup> For example, the use of 'the Oxford cap and gown' was restored among medical graduates in 1879 but had been standard for the Arts graduates time out of mind.<sup>209</sup> But 1830 marks the moment when a hierarchical system of academic dress like that codified by the Trustees in 1887, eventually codified by the Intercollegiate Code, and in use today first received official sanction.<sup>210</sup>

## Conclusion

During approximately seventy-five years of major political, economic and social changes, the leading academic institution of colonial America's largest city changed from an institution where the Provost was advised not to wear academic dress in public (to the

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206 Letter of the Trustees of 10 June 1830 in '1830: Commencement', University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, UPA 3, General Administration Collection Post-1820, Box 9. The minute authorizing the drafting of this regulation can be found in Minutes of the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 1 June 1830.

207 '1832, 31 July, Arts 1832', University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, UPG 7, Commencement and Convocation Programs, Box 2, Folder 36.

208 Hoffmann; Wolgast, 'King's Crowns: The History of Academic Dress at King's College and Columbia University'; Drakeman.

209 'Philadelphia', *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, 100 (1879), p. 374. There is some uncertainty about the use of academic dress in medical commencements. The faculty wore academic dress in 1870 but not the graduates. See 'News and Miscellany', *Medical and Surgical Reporter*, 22 (1870), p. 265; Morris Stroud French, 'Philadelphia News', *Cincinnati Lancet and Clinic*, 2 (1879), pp. 147-48.

210 For an account of University of Pennsylvania's creation of a distinctive doctoral dress in the late nineteenth century and its influence on the development of the Intercollegiate Code, see: Stephen L. Wolgast, 'The Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume: An Introduction', *TBS*, 9 (2009), pp. 9-37, doi: 10.4148/2475-7799.1070.

approbation of the Vice-Provost) to one where students were expected to wear academic dress at religious exercises and at public academic ceremonies. One driver of this change was a changing religious landscape, in which higher education was accessible to a broader range of Christian believers than members of the established churches of the British Isles. But the leading driver seems to be the power of the academic ceremony and its forms, including dress. Academic leaders found these ceremonies useful for promoting the institution and their own political interests. Students saw them as a forum for the expression of their own creative powers. Members of the surrounding community saw them as opportunities to be entertained, enlightened, to see, and to be seen. And when students entered into political life, they recognized that the nascent United States needed pageants, parades, and ceremonies, just like older nation-states did, to unite its citizens behind the political order, just as academic ceremonies unite academic communities behind cultivating the intellectual inheritance of the past and creating new knowledge for the future.

The hidden variable in this story is the women, often anonymous, who produced academic dress in this period. Their role was twofold. First, their hidden, poorly remunerated work kept academic dress or the costumes used in patriotic processions at acceptable levels of expense. Early Friends had seen Oxford and Cambridge dress as vain luxury. American mercantilists saw imported fabrics like silk as a drain on the national wealth. The lower the labour costs required to make academic dress, the cheaper, lower status, and less objectionable they were. The same dynamic likely still affects American academic dress today, such as in the use of the zip and artificial fibres. Second, women largely cultivated arts such as embroidery and tassel-making necessary to make distinctive and attractive academic dress, once it was acceptable in America. While mass production techniques and industrial dyes, no doubt, shape how American academic dress looks today more than eighteenth-century craft skills, it was those craft skills mastered and honed by Betsy Ross and women like her that would have given eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American academics a taste for the colours, shapes, facings, and tassels whose mass-produced descendants we see at Commencements at Philadelphia and elsewhere in America today.