

Crow's Feet and Crimson: Academic Dress at Harvard

by Nicholas A. Hoffmann

*The corded crow's-feet, and the collar square,
The change and chance of earthly lot must share.*

— *Class Poem at Harvard College, 1835*¹

Harvard University, the oldest and perhaps most celebrated and prestigious university in the United States, has been a fixture of the Boston area for almost four hundred years. Founded a scant fourteen years after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, Harvard has grown from a small colonial school to one of the world's foremost private research universities.² Much has been written about Harvard's history, but this article explores one small aspect of this vast subject: the history and practice of academic dress at this (by New World standards) ancient institution. Harvard dress as it now stands owes a good deal to academic dress in English universities and therefore to the academic dress of medieval Oxford and Cambridge.

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¹ Quoted in Benjamin Horner Hall, *College Words and Customs* (Cambridge, Mass.: John Bartlett, 1856), p. 145.

² American universities can be broadly divided into 'public' and 'private' institutions. The latter were founded by private individuals, groups or churches, and derive most of their financial support from tuition, research funding and other grants and donations. Public universities were founded by governmental entities (usually by state governments) and are supported with tax money in addition to tuition, grants and donations. Also, a distinction can be made amongst American universities between 'research' universities whose faculty specialize in the conduct of advanced research and publication of scholarly works and who have well-established postgraduate programmes and 'liberal-arts' institutions, whose faculty specialize in teaching and focus more on baccalaureate education, specifically in the liberal arts.

The early years: 1634–1776

The Puritans who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony included many men with university degrees, most from Cambridge University, and many of these university-educated men became leaders of their new community in the New World.³ Due to this value placed on formal education, one of the first institutions created in the colony was New College, renamed Harvard College in 1639 following a bequest from John Harvard, another Cambridge graduate. Fifty-five of the first hundred graduates were sons of clergymen or magistrates, perpetuating the educated leadership class of the colony.⁴ The founders and early administrators of the university did recognize the need to offer places for ‘poor but hopefull scholars’, and used both private and public funding to provide financial aid for needy students.⁵ As a degree-granting institution, early Harvard soon became the pride of New England, especially after its degrees were recognized as equivalents to Oxford or Cambridge degrees.⁶

Mention of academic dress in accounts of Harvard’s earliest years is conspicuous by its absence. Authors have suggested that, owing to the school’s Puritan founders and early faculty and administration, there was a trend away from traditional academic dress with its pre-Reformation Catholic origin.⁷ For example, Increase Mather, the famed Puritan minister and Harvard president (1692–1701), is recorded as having refused to wear cap and hood while a graduate student at Trinity College, Dublin.⁸

In the mid-eighteenth century, Harvard academic dress was recorded as quite sober, being ‘relieved only by occasional gold-laced hats and coats, and a sprinkling of His Majesty’s uniform ...’.⁹ Not much has been written (or depicted) of Harvard

³ Bernard Bailyn et al., *Glimpses of the Harvard Past* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1986), p. 116.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1936; repr. 1964), p. 35. Morison has written much on the history of Harvard University, and his comprehensive volumes make due mention of academic costume throughout the school’s history. Unfortunately, Morison does not write anything more about this interesting point regarding early equivalency between Oxbridge and Harvard.

⁷ Arthur Wentworth Eaton, ‘Cap and Gown’, *The Harvard Register*, 1.7 (June, 1880), pp. 118–19 (p. 119).

⁸ K. B. Murdock, *Increase Mather*, quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1936), p. 61.

⁹ Morison, quoted in Cynthia W. Rossano, ‘Reading the Regalia: A Guide to Deciphering the Academic Dress Code’, *Harvard Magazine*, May 1999. Accessed from <<http://harvardmagazine.com/1999/05/ner.reading.html>>. Rossano’s article for the Harvard alumni magazine is one of the few pieces written exclusively on Harvard’s academic dress. However, it is a brief overview intended for the general reader, and does not go particularly in depth.

academic dress during this early time, though, something historian Samuel Eliot Morison readily admits.¹⁰ Some hints can be gleaned from looking at University regulations dating back to the seventeenth century. The College Laws of 1655 required students to wear ‘Coate, Gowne or Cloake’ when in public, and always to wear ‘sober and modest habit’. (This is not to say that students were only permitted black or grey garments. Morison notes that Puritans did not object to brighter colours, despite modern stereotypes.¹¹) Students were forbidden ‘excesse of Apparell’ and could only wear gold or silver ornaments with the permission of the College president. Additionally, students were not permitted to wear their hair long or powdered in the fashion of the times.¹² The Latin text of the College Laws of 1692 mentions students as being attired in a *Toga*, a then-common term in Latin for the academic gown. Morison writes (though he cites no evidence to confirm this) that this gown would have probably been similar to the Oxford and Cambridge ‘mourning gown’, a popular seventeenth-century alternative to the standard academic gown: a simple black robe with full ‘bishop’s’ sleeves and no indication of academic rank.¹³

According to Morison, academic gowns came into general use at Harvard in the eighteenth century.¹⁴ In 1712, an anonymous alumnus offered to provide students with academic gowns if the Harvard Corporation would require them to be worn, and the then governor of Massachusetts, Joseph Dudley, wrote that the ‘Ancient Statute’ could be amended to support the change. (The statute in question was probably the College Law of 1655 requiring students to wear a cloak or gown when out of their quarters, though what modifications would be necessary to this statute are also not clear. It is also unclear if the 1655 rule refers to academic dress or dressing gowns¹⁵ in its reference to ‘Gowne’.) Nothing came of this offer, however.

A 1726 illustration of Harvard Yard shows students and faculty wearing English-style black gowns, but Morison comments that this may have been taken from contemporary pictures of Oxford or Cambridge students rather than drawn from life.¹⁶ As of 1734, students were prohibited by the College Laws to ‘go beyound ye College Yar(d) or fences without Coat, Cloak or Gown’, and the punishment for

¹⁰ *Harvard College*, p. 85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹² College Laws of 1655 quoted in Morison, *ibid.* Morison also notes here that the prohibition on long hair was not merely a ‘roundhead’ Puritan trait, but additionally a vestige of the clerical tonsure required of the medieval monastic student, and was also enforced in contemporary Oxford and Cambridge. He provides no authority for his suggestion.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁵ ‘Dressing gown’ in this usage does not correspond to the modern notion of something worn over nightwear or pyjamas. Instead, this was a lightweight garment worn over shirt, breeches and waistcoat instead of the more usual coat for both indoor and limited outdoor wear.

¹⁶ Morison, *Three Centuries*, p. 106.

infractions was set at a maximum of two shillings.¹⁷ Bethell et al. quote Morison once again as stating that eighteenth-century Harvard students wore gowns ‘of any bright color, like those of eighteenth-century Oxonians’.¹⁸ (This is also somewhat incorrect—all undergraduates at Oxford except noblemen and the eldest sons of noblemen wore black gowns. Noblemen could—and did—wear full-dress gowns of any colour they chose.¹⁹)

A rather odd note dated 23 September 1747 seems to indicate a ritual behind bestowing gowns upon Harvard students. Signed by three upperclassmen,²⁰ the note states that sophomore Arthur Prescott ‘has paid sufficient Beverage’ for a new gown, ‘one Side of which is red Russel and the other Plad’. Morison infers that perhaps students of the times were allowed to buy and wear gowns upon buying sufficient amounts of drinks for upperclassmen!²¹ Such a custom is not mentioned in any college statutes of the time, and if it existed, was wholly unofficial. Once again, the garment mentioned (especially given the colouring—red with a plaid lining) may be a dressing gown rather than an academic gown.

Eventually, students began to follow prevailing fashion, and wealthier students began to one-up each other in finery. The Corporation attempted to put a stop to this in 1754, banning students from wearing gold or silver lace or brocade, and requiring them to appear in black, dark blue or grey clothing on commencement days, pointing out that the expenses borne by some students were discouraging poorer students from attending Harvard, and were not in keeping with the solemn academic environment.²² Additionally, students were prohibited from wearing ‘silk night gowns’ (i.e., dressing gowns), and any student violating these regulations ‘may not expect

¹⁷ Quoted in John T. Bethell et al., *Harvard A to Z* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2004), p. 122. This book then goes on to mention that ‘the academic gown ... had only recently been adopted,’ which contradicts Morison and the primary sources of the seventeenth-century College Laws.

¹⁸ Bethell, p. 122. Original citation in Morison, *Three Centuries*, p. 107. Oxford students were still bound by their own university’s academic dress regulations, though some eighteenth-century Oxford gowns were allowed to be in colours other than black. Bethell’s work is an encyclopaedic look at various aspects of Harvard student life, culture and history. It makes reference to academic dress on several occasions, and offers a decent overview of the history of academic dress at Harvard.

¹⁹ William Gibson, ‘The Regulation of Undergraduate Academic Dress at Oxford and Cambridge, 1660–1832’, *Burgon Society Annual*, 2004, pp. 28–30.

²⁰ ‘Upperclassmen’ refers here to students in their third or fourth year of study. An American bachelor’s degree is usually earned following four years of full-time study, though some students take longer and some degree programmes (such as architecture and pharmacy) require additional time and coursework to complete.

²¹ Morison, *Three Centuries*, pp. 106–07.

²² Josiah Quincy, *The History of Harvard University* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee & Co., 1860), p. 91.

his degree'.²³

An account from the 1760s makes references to gowns as well, but these may refer to 'nightgowns' or dressing gowns rather than to academic gowns. Students are reported as wearing long gowns of calico or gingham during the summer (lambskin in the winter) both on campus as well as in Cambridge, and that black gowns were permitted on public occasions.²⁴ Edward Holyoke (president 1737–69) referred to gowns in a letter of 1766,²⁵ mentioning that 'some years since viz when the Scholars first wore Gowns', though it is not clear (as with many of these accounts) if academic gowns are meant. A rare depiction of Harvard students of this period by the American artist, silversmith and revolutionary Paul Revere (dated 1767) displays black gowns worn open over contemporary fashions. Figures depicted have been identified as the president (wearing cap and gown and carrying a staff), seniors (in cap and gown) and freshmen (wearing gown only)²⁶.

Morison wrote that freshmen in 1773 were allowed to wear 'Black Gowns and Square Hats' to attend a funeral at Brown University, and that the townspeople seemed not to recognize the significance of the academic costume.²⁷

School uniforms to modern academic dress: 1786–1902

In 1786, to cut down once again on excesses in student dress and to instil discipline, Harvard instituted a system of uniforms for its undergraduates. Students could not wear silk, and were made to wear a blue-grey, nankeen, olive or black coat, waistcoat and breeches. In quasi-military fashion, class membership was denoted by features on the suit. Freshmen had plain buttonholes and no cuff buttons, while sophomores added buttons on the coat cuffs. Juniors had 'cheap frogs' on their coat buttonholes, but not on their cuff buttonholes, and seniors were allowed to wear frogging on all buttonholes, front and cuff.²⁸ Buttons were to be either black or of a material to match the coat. Students were forbidden to appear in public out of uniform, though outerwear (to include 'night gowns' or dressing gowns²⁹) was allowed, and juniors and seniors were entitled to wear black academic gowns.³⁰ Interestingly, these upperclassmen were encouraged to wear these gowns on all public occasions. Under these regulations, students were not permitted to decorate hats or clothing with gold

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Eaton, p. 119.

²⁵ Morison, *Three Centuries*, p. 106.

²⁶ Eaton, p. 119.

²⁷ Morison, *Three Centuries*, p. 107.

²⁸ Harvard University, College Laws 1790, p. 36.

²⁹ A c.1834–35 example of a lightweight calico dressing gown as worn in the summer by a late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth-century Harvard student can be viewed at <<http://ids.lib.harvard.edu/ids/view/325598>>.

³⁰ Harvard University, College Laws 1790, pp. 36–37.

or silver lace, and any violations were punishable by a fine.³¹ Home manufacture of these new uniforms was recommended by the administration.³²

Naturally, this policy was highly unpopular with the students, and fines were increased in 1789 to up to ten shillings per violation.³³ By 1796, this uniform regulation had ‘fallen into neglect’, and the following year the class distinctions were eliminated and students were instead told to dress in a blue-grey or dark blue coat and wear a black gown ‘if permitted’, though no mention is made of what a student would need to do to be permitted to wear a gown, or who would grant such permission. Gold or silver lace, cord or edging was still prohibited.³⁴ President Willard, the man instituting these reforms, was caricatured in 1798 by Washington Allston, a depiction including a black gown worn over black smallclothes (breeches and waistcoat).³⁵

An 1808 university regulation calls for students to attend the commencement procession ‘clothed in a black gown’ or in a blue, grey or black coat, and the penalty for not following this regulation was to be to ‘not (to) be admitted to his Degree that year’.³⁶ This seems both an echo of the 1796 rule and the older 1754 commencement rule. Blue-grey coats of contemporary pattern (similar to a modern full-dress evening tailcoat) along with academic gowns remained in fashion (and required) among early nineteenth-century Harvard students.³⁷

As of 1822, an ‘Oxford gray coat with “skirts reaching to the bend of the knee”’ was to be worn by students, along with a greatcoat ‘with not more than two capes’.³⁸ This is the coat which probably featured the first occurrence of the famous Harvard crow’s feet—this embroidery was placed on the sleeves to denote class standing (seniors wore three on each cuff, juniors two, sophomores one and freshmen a plain cuff).³⁹ These coats were required to be single-breasted, with a rolling cape (square

³¹ Harvard University, *College Laws* 1790, p. 37.

³² It is unclear why this was the case, as usually those who set forth a code of uniform or dress encourage purchase from an official source. Perhaps this was to avoid more ‘fashionable’ or non-regulation items being added by more skilled tailors than one could do at home, or perhaps it was to encourage domestic production and sourcing of materials. [In 1767, graduates of Harvard, Yale, and Brown wore homespun to commencement instead of clothes made from English cloth to show their resistance to English tariffs established under the Townshend Duties. Homespun was less expensive, which may have been one reason its use was promoted by the College. Lauren Weber, *In Cheap We Trust: The Story of a Misunderstood American Virtue* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009), pp. 26–27 — Eds.]

³³ Quincy, p. 277.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Morison, *Three Centuries*, p. 174.

³⁶ Rossano.

³⁷ Bethell, pp. 122–23.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Eaton, p. 119.

at the ends) and pocket flaps. A waistcoat with a standing collar, Oxford grey or black bombette trousers (white linen was also allowed) and a white or black cravat (no other colours permitted) completed this outfit.⁴⁰ ‘Nightgowns’ or ‘Banyans’ (i.e. dressing gowns) could always be worn in the Yard, but students could not appear in shirt-sleeves.⁴¹ Repeated violations of this dress code could be punishable by expulsion from the university—but, like previous efforts to force Harvard students into a uniform, these rules were not followed or enforced too strictly.⁴² Writing in 1880 about these uniform regulations and other contemporary rules governing Harvard student behaviour, Arthur Eaton (the author, Episcopal cleric, educator and 1880 Harvard graduate) blames the ‘English schools’ for the introduction of these ‘barbarous’ and ‘undemocratic’ customs of requiring students to wear uniform, and expresses surprise that British-style academic dress was not also to be found at contemporary Harvard.⁴³

In 1888, Andrew Preston Peabody, DD, a University chaplain and professor (and Harvard alumnus), wrote that his academic dress as a graduate in the 1820s (quite possibly a black gown over this grey suit) cost him two or three dollars and was poorly constructed.⁴⁴ Wearing a black gown for ‘public occasions’ was still to be seen in the first half of the nineteenth century. A freshman writing home in 1836 remarked that performers at one of these occasions ‘wore black gowns with sleeves large enough to hold me in, and spouted, and swung their arms, till they looked like so many Methodist ministers just ordained’.⁴⁵ As of 1848, every candidate for a first degree was to wear ‘a black dress and the usual black gown ...’.⁴⁶ Regulations in 1853⁴⁷ state that ‘On Sabbath, Exhibition, Examination, and Commencement days, and on all other public occasions, each student, in public, shall wear a black coat, with buttons of the same color, and a black hat or cap.’ By the time of the US Civil War (1861–65), most of these sumptuary laws were no longer enforced, and were eventually abolished.⁴⁸

The faculty began wearing academic dress during commencement in 1876, though students of that year still were to graduate wearing ‘dress suits’.⁴⁹ This was remarked in the President’s Report for the 1875–76 academic year as being a custom

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Morison, *Three Centuries*, p. 175.

⁴² Hall, p. 171.

⁴³ Eaton, p. 119.

⁴⁴ Rossano.

⁴⁵ Letter published in *Harvardiana*, November 1836, quoted in Eaton, p. 119.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Hall, pp. 171–72.

⁴⁸ Bethell, p. 123.

⁴⁹ Article in *Harvard Crimson*, 23 June 1876. Accessed from <<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=326676>>.

‘intermitted for a few years’, which perhaps refers to the Civil War-period lapse in the wearing of academic dress.⁵⁰ In 1886, the Harvard faculty appeared in academic dress in honour of the University’s 250th anniversary.⁵¹ An editorial published in the *Harvard Crimson* in 1876 is strongly in favour of adopting gowns for Class Day⁵² and commencement dress, and makes note of a stillborn attempt made by the Class of 1876 to adopt gowns for its commencement in the previous spring. The author of the editorial states that gowns are a more appropriate mode of dress than the evening dress tailcoats worn in his day (to a daytime event such as a graduation ceremony, when evening-style tailcoats had been out of fashion for daytime wear for several decades by the 1870s!), and are the traditional dress of the scholar as well.⁵³ Additionally, he cites the example of Columbia University, where gowns were then worn, and also argues that adopting academic dress would be fairly economical, as the school could hire out caps and gowns both to lower the costs for the students and to recoup their investment.⁵⁴

By 1880, even the traditional black gown was a rare sight at Harvard, being seen only on Class Day and at commencement,⁵⁵ when it was worn by some University officers and the speakers. Eaton notes that this was in contrast to Canada, where graduates proudly wore cap, gown and hood, and wondered if some day the traditional New England Puritan aversion to ceremony and ritual would be moderated so Harvard students could wear cap and gown to chapel and lecture. At least for now, he concludes, Harvard students must content themselves with the honorary title of ‘gownsmen’, as gowns were not actually worn.⁵⁶

Since at least 1892, Harvard students had worn white tie and tails under their gowns, occasionally forgoing the tailcoat due to warm weather at commencement. That year, when gowns were first worn for Class Day, the committee set forth rules for what was worn underneath academic dress, specifying a white shirt and bow

⁵⁰ President’s Report for 1875–76. p. 40.

⁵¹ Gardner Cotrell Leonard, ‘Costume, Academic’, *Encyclopedia Americana* (New York: The Encyclopedia Americana Corp., 1918), Vol. VIII, pp. 48–52. Interestingly, Bethell et al. cite this year as the time Harvard codified her academic dress, which is unsupported elsewhere. Most sources cite 1902 as the year Harvard adopted a ‘modern’ system of academic dress.

⁵² ‘Class Day’ at Harvard and some other American universities is a day of celebrations and speeches given by and for the graduating class apart from the official graduation ceremonies. These festivities began at Harvard in the eighteenth century, and were given the present-day name of Class Day in the mid-nineteenth century. The seniors form a committee to plan the events for Class Day.

⁵³ ‘Caps and Gowns’, *Harvard Crimson*, 20 October 1876.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Eaton, p. 119.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

tie to be worn with a black coat, black waistcoat and dark trousers.⁵⁷ As mentioned above when discussing the 1876 commencement, the outfit of tailcoat and white tie was worn on its own for commencement in previous decades. Seniors were not to adorn their gowns with ribbons or medals, and hats were to be worn at all times (and not tipped in greeting) when outdoors, but could be removed indoors. Caps and gowns were to be worn in the evenings as well, ‘unless removed to facilitate dancing’.⁵⁸ The gowns themselves were probably similar to the Oxford BA [b1] style—Gardner Cotrell Leonard notes in 1896 that this style was being worn at Harvard and was the ‘typical American college gown’.⁵⁹ In 1900, both caps and gowns were required to be worn by students attending chapel on Baccalaureate Sunday.⁶⁰

Owing to the renewed interest displayed in academic dress, in June 1893, the trustees of Princeton University proposed a uniform system of academic dress for American universities.⁶¹ This was soon followed by Leonard’s article in *The University Magazine* also proposing a uniform code for American academic dress. Developments such as these soon coalesced into the American Intercollegiate Code, which still directs academic dress in American universities.

Harvard was not a part of the meeting that finalized the American Intercollegiate Code in 1895—the institutions represented were Columbia, Princeton, Yale and New York University.⁶² Instead, Harvard academic dress was eventually codified a few years later, in 1902.⁶³ Some blame this lack of interest in academic dress on then-president Charles Eliot, who was opposed to English-style academic costume.⁶⁴ Others mention not only Harvard’s Puritan foundations but her nineteenth-century Unitarian influence that led to ‘an aversion to ritualism and other “high-church” accoutrements’.⁶⁵ As of 2004, Harvard lacked an official mace or presidential medallion and does not have a hooding ceremony for its honorary graduates.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ ‘Notice to Seniors’, *Harvard Crimson*, 23 June 1892.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *The Cap and Gown in America, Re-printed from the University Magazine for December, 1893* (Albany, N.Y.: Cotrell & Leonard, 1896), p. 5.

⁶⁰ Article in *Harvard Crimson*, 15 June 1900. Accessed from <<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1900/6/15/caps-and-gowns-pseniors-are-expected/>>.

⁶¹ Donald L. Drakeman, ‘“Peculiar Habits”: Academic Costumes at Princeton University’, pp. 62–63.

⁶² Stephen Wolgast, ed., ‘The Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume’, *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 9 (2009), pp 16–17.

⁶³ E. B. Boatner, ‘Pumps and Circumstance: A Guide to Academic Garb’, n.d. Accessed from <<http://www.commencement.harvard.edu/background/details.html>> Like Rossano’s article, Boatner’s overview is for the general reader or visitor at a commencement ceremony.

⁶⁴ Both Boatner and Morison state this, though I have not been able to find a written statement from President Eliot expressing this opinion.

⁶⁵ Bethell, p. 302.

⁶⁶ Ibid. It appears Harvard has adopted a rather modest-looking sceptre (a staff surmounted by the Harvard arms) subsequently.

Still, as in other American universities of the period, there was a popular interest in reviving and codifying academic dress customs at Harvard, which could be traced back to 1886, a year marking both Harvard's 250th anniversary and the 400th anniversary celebrations of the University of Heidelberg, where both occasions were coloured by the presence of British and European academic dress.⁶⁷ Thus, 1886 was the first year academic dress was formally adopted by the Harvard faculty.⁶⁸

In 1897, the Harvard Corporation formed a committee to 'prepare a scheme of gowns, caps and hoods to be submitted to this Board', and recommended to the committee all hoods be lined in crimson, the school's distinctive colour, which had been used for athletic teams since the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁹ This change became official in the regulations sent to President Eliot in 1902 by Marshal Morris Hicky Morgan, and were then adopted by the University.⁷⁰ These regulations have remained in effect until the present day with few changes, as will be discussed later. In 1897, the *Harvard Crimson* printed a notice that the firm of Cotrell & Leonard were to be the official Harvard robe-makers, and the gowns were to cost \$6.50.⁷¹

All gowns bore the distinctive Harvard crow's feet embroidery on the front facings (see Figs. 1–2), which was probably chosen since it had been a unique part of Harvard academic dress since 1822.⁷² The crow's feet feature a double loop on either side (treble for honorary LLDs and DDs—see Fig. 2) and are embroidered in the subject colour of the degree earned, as per the Intercollegiate Code.⁷³ The crow's feet were specifically added by Professor Eugene Wambaugh to the 1902 regulations to give Harvard's academic dress a distinctive and traditional feature.⁷⁴ The new gowns made their appearance at the spring 1903 commencement, and

⁶⁷ Rossano.

⁶⁸ Morison, *Three Centuries*, p. 362.

⁶⁹ Rossano.

⁷⁰ Boatner, p. 302.

⁷¹ 'Cap and Gown Notice', *Harvard Crimson*, 9 March 1897. It is not clear which gowns were supplied by Cotrell & Leonard from this time to 1902 when the present academic dress was adopted.

⁷² As stated before in this paper, the crow's feet were worn on a form of school uniform in the early to mid-nineteenth century rather than on academic gowns.

⁷³ G. P. Baker, 'The Spring Term', *The Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, 11.44 (June 1904), p. 542. The subject colours used in 1902 were:

Arts: White	Science: Gold-Yellow	Education: Light Blue
Philosophy: Dark Blue	Agriculture: Golden Brown	Veterinary Medicine: Grey
Dental Medicine: Lilac	Medicine: Green	Law: Purple
	Theology: Scarlet	

(The list is as given in 'Academic Costumes Defined', *Harvard Crimson*, 9 December 1902. Accessed from <<http://www.theharvardcrimson.com/article/1902/12/9/academic-costumes-defined-upon-the-recommendation/>>).

⁷⁴ Rossano.

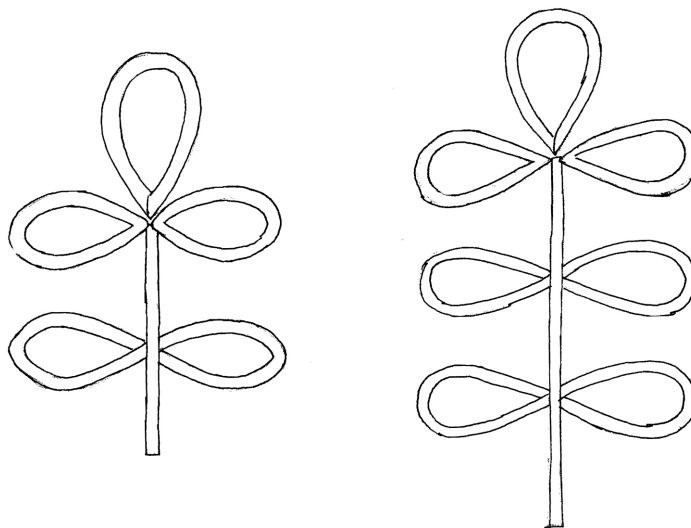


Fig. 1. Left: A line drawing of the standard Harvard crow's foot embroidery. (Drawing by author). **Fig. 2.** Right: The treble crow's foot as worn by an honorary DD or LLD degree holder. The author was unable to find a recent photo of this in wear. (Drawing by author).

were remarked in *The Harvard Graduates' Magazine* as being 'not the nondescript (gown) of the past'.⁷⁵

The gowns themselves, per the 1902 regulations,⁷⁶ are as follows (see Appendix for a list of degree abbreviations):

AB, SB and BAS:

Black worsted stuff with pointed sleeves

AM and SM:

Black silk or worsted stuff with long closed sleeves

PhD, SD, MDV, DMD, MD, LLB, STB, DD, LLD:

Black silk or worsted stuff with round open sleeves faced down the front with black velvet and with three black velvet bars on each sleeve.⁷⁷

Thus, with the addition of the distinctive Harvard crow's feet, the gowns are the same as those set forth in the American Intercollegiate Code.

The crow's foot also serves a practical purpose in denoting the field of study, as the Harvard hood is coloured the same for all graduates. The hoods are of Edinburgh

⁷⁵ Baker, p. 541.

⁷⁶ 'Academic Costumes Defined'.

⁷⁷ Baker, pp. 541–42.

simple shape [s4], in black material to match the gown (worsted stuff or silk), and lined in crimson silk. Bachelors' hoods are three feet long, masters' are three and a half feet long, and doctors, LLBs and STBs have four-foot-long hoods.⁷⁸ Honorary degree holders were to wear hoods of black cloth lined with crimson silk regardless of gown material.

All Harvard academic dress was to be worn with a black square cap and black tassel, though a black square velvet four-cornered soft cap was allowed for professors and members of the University Council.⁷⁹ Additionally, those members of the council not holding doctorates or Harvard degrees could wear a Harvard doctoral gown with a double crow's foot in the colour of their department.⁸⁰

Onward to a fourth century: 1902 to the present

The 1902 system of Harvard academic dress remained in place, with Cotrell & Leonard as the official robemaker, for the coming decades (with some exceptions—Cox Sons & Vining of New York were awarded the contract for 1907, for example⁸¹). The price did increase, though, with students in 1932 being charged \$7.50 (\$7.00 if ordered early).⁸² Cap and gown were required for Class Day as well as for the official class picture. The University continued to patronize Cotrell & Leonard, though in 1980 students at the University of Pennsylvania threatened to boycott the firm owing to a labour dispute.⁸³

As of 1939, degree candidates were to wear the academic gown 'appropriate to the degree to be conferred upon them' and 'the usual Academic Cap or "mortar-board."' All gowns are to be worn open, showing at least six inches of the wearer's chest, and be worn over a 'darkish and not too fancy suit' with the coat buttoned, along with a white or coloured shirt and collar and a 'fairly quiet' necktie. A sign of the fashion times can be seen in the admonition for degree candidates to wear black or dark brown shoes, and to avoid white or saddle shoes with academic dress.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Baker, p. 542.

⁷⁹ Ibid. The University Council is a rather imprecise general term (not found in any official Harvard publications) for the governing boards of Harvard. More specifically, it includes the Harvard Corporation (President and Fellows) as well as the Board of Overseers. Both these governing bodies have been responsible for administering Harvard since the University's early days. This term is not to be confused with the Harvard Undergraduate Council and Harvard Graduate Council, which are student government bodies.

Additionally, this use of a black square velvet soft-cornered cap is an early example in the US of the tam being used as academic headdress.

⁸⁰ 'Academic Costumes Defined'.

⁸¹ Article in *Harvard Crimson*, 20 February 1907.

⁸² Article in *Harvard Crimson*, 26 March 1932.

⁸³ 'UPenn Considers Cap, Gown Boycott', *Harvard Crimson*, 5 April 1980.

⁸⁴ Harvard University, Academic Costume at Harvard, 1939.

A 1951 Harvard document gives illustrated particulars of the University's academic dress along with detailed instructions for wear. Bachelors' gowns are noted as being made of black material (cotton or worsted) and without facings of different material. These gowns are to end ten inches from the ground, and have 'open sleeves with the rear side ending in a point'. Masters' gowns are made of 'black silk or worsted stuff', faced on the front with the same material, ending six inches from the ground, and have sleeves of 'traditional master's type ending in a curved pouch and coming half-way from knee to foot, with slits breast-high through which the arms are thrust'. Doctoral gowns are also of black silk or worsted stuff, but are faced with black velvet. Like masters' gowns, they are to be six inches from the ground, but have wide, bell-shaped sleeves with three black velvet bars on each side.⁸⁵ These regulations echo the original 1902 version, but have more detail, e.g., in the length gowns must be from the ground.

Also interesting to note is the wide variety of degrees awarded for which each gown is authorized, which is identical to the 1939 list (see Appendix for degree abbreviations):

Bachelors:

Worn by AA, AB, AdjA, BAS, BArch, SB and SB in Engineering

Masters:

Worn by AM, AM in Teaching, CE, EdM, MArch, MBA, MCE, MCP, ME, MetE, MEE, MF, MLA, MME, SM, SM in Engineering, 'etc.'⁸⁶

Doctors:

Worn by ArtD, DCS, DMD, DMS, Doctor of Engineering, DrPH, EdD, LittD, LLB, LLD, LLM, MD, MDV, MPH, PhD, SD, SJD, STB, STM, STD, ThD.⁸⁷

Like their 1939 counterparts, the 1951 regulations instruct degree candidates to wear gown and cap for commencement ceremonies and prescribe the clothes to be worn with the gown:

The Gown should be worn over a suit of dark material, the coat buttoned; with a white or colored shirt, white or not too highly colored collar, and a necktie of plain color and pattern. Shoes should be black—never of any other color.⁸⁸

The regulations also mention that all Harvard gowns are to be worn open in front and 'should show a width of at least six inches of the wearer's suit, at the chest' and that caps are always to be worn with gowns, never doffed and removed only for

⁸⁵ Harvard University, Regulations Concerning Academic Costume, 1951.

⁸⁶ This intriguing 'etc.' is from the original document setting forth the academic dress for each degree.

⁸⁷ Harvard University, Regulations Concerning Academic Costume, 1951.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

prayers.⁸⁹ Field of study is denoted by the Harvard crow's feet in the appropriate faculty colour, double for earned degrees and treble for honorary degrees—the same as the 1902 regulations specified.

Hoods are listed as black, made of the same material as the gown, and lined with crimson silk. Doctorates and honorary degrees have four-foot hoods, masters' hoods are three and a half feet long, and bachelors' hoods are three feet long. This is slightly different from the original 1902 regulations, as now a uniform length is specified for honorary degree hoods (which presumably are no longer limited to be made out of stuff rather than silk even if a silk gown is worn), and no mention is made of certain degrees (LLB and STB) entitled to doctoral hoods. The 1951 statutes also make mention that Harvard officers and graduates are entitled to wear academic dress of other institutions at graduations and other academic ceremonies.⁹⁰

The most major change in Harvard academic dress between 1902 and the present came in 1955, when the Harvard Corporation approved the current crimson doctoral gown.⁹¹ The new gown further cemented the use of crimson as the school's distinctive colour. Crimson had been used by Harvard's rowing team ever since their victory at the Boston City Regatta in 1858, and was formally adopted by the University in 1910.⁹² Originally, only doctoral graduates from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences wore the crimson doctoral gown, but later all doctors (less JDs) were entitled to it.⁹³

In 1983, the University Marshal's Office released the pamphlet *Academic Costume* as a guidebook for graduates and degree candidates. Unlike prior regulations, the 1983 booklet states that gowns should be worn closed and that caps should be doffed 'on proper occasion'.⁹⁴ It is not known what prompted these changes, though informal study of American academic dress from photos over the years shows a trend towards wearing gowns closed as time progressed. Lengths of the gowns are the same as given in 1951, and the descriptions of the gowns also do not differ from previous regulations. Mention is made of 'gowns of marshals and officers of the graduating senior class'⁹⁵ as having red piping around the yoke and red tassels on

⁸⁹ Ibid. This custom of not doffing or tipping the hat may bear some comparison to the customs of the military and naval services, which also do not permit the doffing or tipping of official headdress. In a day where most men wore hats, not doffing or tipping an academic cap would be a departure from everyday hat-wearing practice.

⁹⁰ While many universities allow faculty who are graduates of other institutions to wear the academic dress of their equivalent degree while teaching there, this is somewhat interesting in stating that academic dress from other universities may be worn at Harvard events.

⁹¹ Boatner.

⁹² Rossano.

⁹³ Bethell, p. 301.

⁹⁴ Harvard University, Marshal's Office, *Academic Costume*, 1983.

⁹⁵ These officials include elected representatives (one per House), Class Treasurer, Class Secretary and students on the Senior Gift committee.

their caps. Additionally, the bachelors' gown is prescribed for holders of the Associate of Arts degree in Extension Studies.⁹⁶

These regulations also mention the post-1955 crimson doctoral gowns, which 'are available from suppliers in several materials at different prices; the materials range from cotton poplin to silk.'⁹⁷ Holders of pre-1955 Harvard doctorates and those awarded doctorates from other universities may wear black doctoral gowns (with crow's feet for Harvard doctorates). Additionally, recipients of Harvard honorary degrees as well as candidates for Bachelor and Master of Law, Master of Theology and Master of Public Health are entitled to wear the doctors' gown.⁹⁸ A full accounting of the faculty colours is given in the 1983 regulations as well:

Arts and Sciences

(including Extension Studies, Engineering, and Applied Sciences):

Associate of Arts in Extension Studies:	White
Bachelors and Masters:	White
Doctor of Philosophy:	Dark Blue
Business Administration	Medium Grey (Drab customary)
Dental Medicine:	Lilac
Design	
(including Architecture, Urban Design, etc):	Yellow (Brown customary)
Divinity:	Scarlet
Education:	Light Blue
Government (Kennedy School):	Peacock Blue
Law:	Purple
Medicine:	Green
Public Health:	Salmon Pink

With the exception of the substitution of medium grey for drab for business and the use of yellow as 'has been the custom' for design students, all colours are in accordance with the Intercollegiate Code. For caps, the plain black square is the standard headdress for all degrees, though a 'soft cap' may be worn by both men and women. Tassels are black, with the exception of marshals and officers of the graduating senior class and graduate marshals (who wear red tassels), and for the presidents of Harvard and Radcliffe, who wear gold tassels. Faculty members may wear the academic dress of the highest (or 'preferred') degree conferred upon them by Harvard or another university.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Harvard University, Marshal's Office, *Academic Costume*, 1983.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. It is not clear if this unspecified 'soft cap' can be worn by all degree-holders or only by some. Radcliffe College was the all-women 'sister school' of Harvard which was integrated into Harvard University when the latter became co-educational. Women students could choose to affiliate with Radcliffe College until 1999, even though they had been full

As of 2004, academic dress was required for a few public occasions, including the installation of a new president, occasional out-of-season conferrals of honorary degrees, major University anniversaries and certain Commencement Week ceremonies (the Phi Beta Kappa Literary Exercises, chapel services and the graduation ceremonies themselves).¹⁰⁰ In addition to commencement and Class Day, Harvard students and graduates have traditionally worn academic dress following 1 May.¹⁰¹

The academic dress as worn by Harvard graduates in 2010 is listed below. For commencement that year, students were charged \$40 to rent bachelors' academic dress, while candidates for masters' degrees were charged \$75. Doctoral dress rented for \$155, though terminal theology degree and law degree candidates rented theirs for \$80.¹⁰²

Bachelors

Gown: The Code bachelors' pattern in black worsted stuff, with degree-colour crow's foot on both facings below the yoke.

Hood: Black worsted stuff Edinburgh simple [s4] shape, three feet long, lined with crimson silk. (Currently, Harvard does not issue hoods to her baccalaureate graduates.)¹⁰³

Cap: Black worsted stuff square with black tassel.

Masters

Gown: The Code masters' pattern in black silk or black worsted stuff, with degree-colour crow's foot on both facings below the yoke.

Hood: Same as bachelors', but three and one half feet long.

Cap: Black silk (not velvet) or black worsted stuff square with black tassel.

Doctors

Gown (all but JD): The Code doctoral pattern in crimson silk or crimson worsted stuff, with black velvet facings that continue around the yoke, and three black velvet stripes on each sleeve with pointed ends. The facings continue to the hem of the gown. Degree-colour crow's foot on both front facings (three pairs of loops for honorary degrees).

Gown (for JD): The Code doctoral pattern in black silk or black worsted stuff, with black velvet facings and sleeve bars. Purple crow's feet embroidery

members of Harvard since 1977 ('John Harvard's Journal', *Harvard Magazine*, November–December 1999).

¹⁰⁰ Bethell, p. 301.

¹⁰¹ 'Wearing of Caps and Gowns Begins Today', *Harvard Crimson*, 1 May 1906. Accessed from <<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=163806>>.

¹⁰² Harvard University, '2010 Cap and Gown Reservations', <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic260021.files/COOP_regalia_rental_flyer_2010.pdf>. The flyer lists doctoral degrees as the PhD, SJD, EdD, DDes and ThD while 'law and terminal divinity degrees' are the JD, LLM, ThM and MDiv.

¹⁰³ Rossano.

on both front facings.

Hood: Same as bachelor's, but four feet long.

Cap: Same as master's.

The President of the Fellows of Harvard College (the formal title for Harvard's chief executive) wears a distinctive dress based on seventeenth-century clerical street dress (cassock, gown and bands). Non-Conformist clergy who eschewed any type of liturgical vesture which could be construed as 'Roman' would wear clerical street dress when preaching or conducting religious ceremonies, so naturally this would be the normal mode of dress, both everyday and ceremonial, worn by Harvard's early presidents. (Every president of Harvard from its foundation to 1828 had been a clergyman, and three of six Harvard presidents from 1828 to 1869 were clerics as well.) Nonetheless, Harvard presidents prior to 1828 are depicted as wearing a more conventional academic gown over a cassock.¹⁰⁴

The presidential costume in its present form dates back to President Abbott Lawrence Lowell (served 1909–33) and with slight changes, back to the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰⁵ The gown is made of heavy ribbed black silk, and has a narrow flap collar (similar to the contemporary Oxford lay gown) that continues as front edging. The yoke is braided with three rows of black cord in the back and one row across the front. The sleeves are joined to the gown at the shoulders with a row of fluting. There is an ornamental toggle on the back of the gown, which Hammond believes was originally used to fasten back the collar of the gown, and which was much larger in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁶ The sleeves are of 'hanging' pattern and are trimmed with bands of black velvet (once again, similar in shape to the Oxford lay gown). The gown is outfitted with strings in the manner of a Cambridge gown.

The gown is worn over a black ribbed silk cassock, which is closed to the waist with seven frogged buttons. The fastening of the cassock has varied through the years, and is chiefly what separates the current cassock from its predecessors.¹⁰⁷ The collar of the cassock is a low-stand collar with sloping sides, so as to display a collar and tie (or bands, in the case of nineteenth-century Harvard clergyman presidents). The cassock's sleeves end in turnback cuffs each decorated with three frogs and buttons. Both cassock and gown are floor-length. They are worn without a hood, though President Lowell is depicted wearing a Harvard hood (possibly that of his LLB, earned in 1880) over his presidential gown, as is President Lawrence Summers.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Mason Hammond, 'The Academic Costume Worn by the President of Harvard University', Harvard University Archives, MS HUB 3100 (c. 1985), p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5. This is similar to the official dress of Cambridge University's Vice-Chancellor, who currently does not wear a separate hood—and to the choir dress of an

In the past, Harvard presidents have worn gold tassels on their academic caps, and are usually the only ones to do so.¹⁰⁹ Masters of Harvard Houses have two-foot tippets on the left shoulder that are edged with House colours and embroidered with their House's arms.¹¹⁰ These tippets are four to four-and-a-half inches wide at the ends, and are three to three-and-a-half inches wide at sixteen inches above the front end, where they are held to the left shoulder of the gown by a button so that more of the garment hangs in the front of the wearer.¹¹¹ Marshals, graduate marshals and officers of the graduating class are entitled to wear red tassels on their mortarboards.¹¹² Members of the University Council who are not doctors or who do not hold a Harvard degree wear the Harvard doctoral gown with the crow's foot in the colour of their own subject studied. Officials at Harvard commencement who do not usually wear academic dress (for example, the local sheriff of Middlesex County) wear full morning dress with cutaway coat and top hat, and, in the sheriff's case, a sword and sword belt (a mode of dress so strongly objected to by Sheriff John Buckley in 1970 that he refused to attend commencement or perform his traditional role in the ceremony over having to wear morning dress and sword).¹¹³ The procession's marshals and their aides wear morning dress with white four-in-hand ties if men, and white dresses and crimson sashes if women.

Anglican bishop (rochet and chimere worn with no hood, though some prelates incorrectly do).

¹⁰⁹ Boatner.

¹¹⁰ Bethell, p. 301. Harvard Houses are modelled after the residential colleges of Oxbridge, but without as much of the academic functionality of the latter—Harvard Houses are student residences primarily for upperclassmen with some social and academic functions.

¹¹¹ Harvard University, Marshal's Office, *Academic Costume*. 1983.

¹¹² Bethell, p. 301.

¹¹³ Garrett Epps, 'Sheriff Cops Out on Commencement', *Harvard Crimson*, 10 June 1970. Additionally, the article makes mention of an apocryphal story told about colourful Massachusetts politician James Curley (governor of Massachusetts from 1935 to 1937) when he purportedly appeared at a commencement during his term as governor dressed in full eighteenth-century costume, including powdered wig and knee breeches. When challenged by university officials, he was said to produce a copy of Massachusetts Bay Colony regulations and state that he was wearing the proper apparel for his office, and he was the only properly dressed man at the ceremony!

Appendix: Degree abbreviations

(Most from 1915 Quinquennial Catalogue
of the Officers and Graduates of Harvard University)

AA	Associate of Arts	MArch	Master of Architecture
AB	Bachelor of Arts	MBA	Master of Business Administration
AM	Master of Arts	MCE	Master of Civil Engineering
ArtD	Doctor of Arts	MCP	Master of City Planning
BArch	Bachelor of Architecture	MD	Doctor of Medicine
BAS	Bachelor of Applied Sciences/ Bachelor of Agricultural Science	MDV	Doctor of Veterinary Medicine
CE	Civil Engineer	ME	Mining Engineer/ Metallurgical Engineer
DCS	Doctor of Computer Science/ Doctor of Commercial Science	MEE	Master of Electrical Engineering
DD	Doctor of Divinity	MetE	Metallurgical Engineer
DMD	Doctor of Dental Medicine	MF	Master of Forestry
DMS	Doctor of Medical Science	MLA	Master of Landscape Architecture
DrPH	Doctor of Public Health	MME	Master of Mechanical Engineering
EdD	Doctor of Education	MPH	Master of Public Health
EdM	Master of Education	PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
JD	Doctor of Law (replaced earlier LLB degree)	SB	Bachelor of Science
LittD	Doctor of Letters	SD	Doctor of Science
LLB	Bachelor of Laws	SJD	Doctor of Juridical Science
LLD	Doctor of Laws	SM	Master of Science
LLM	Master of Laws	STB	Bachelor of Sacred Theology
		STD	Doctor of Sacred Theology
		ThD	Doctor of Theology

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