

# The Baton

Roy Scheele, Doane poet-in-residence, wrote *The Baton* in honor of the inauguration of 11th president Jonathan Brand.

*A medley of sonnets, traditional and nonce\*,  
For the inauguration of Doane's eleventh President,  
Jonathan Brand \*in a form made up for the occasion*

- I The relay runner, waiting for his turn,  
hearing the crowd applaud the passing by  
of the baton there on the track's far side,  
knows that he has a while to fidget here  
before he feels the light aluminum  
thrust firmly in his hand. And so he trots  
ten yards or so against the race's grain  
and ten yards back again, touches his toes,  
lifts up his knees and pumps them rapidly,  
then works his arms and elbows furiously,  
as if such effort were the apogee  
of that long arc of training that has brought  
him here, poised at the edge at last: about  
to hurl his body forward like a shout.
- II Thomas Doane walked on the windy hill,  
the grasses whispering all around him,  
as if the *genius loci*\* meant to sound him  
there where the last light deepened and fell still.  
Lost in thought, he stood on that windswept hill  
without a single tree or bush around him,  
but in the seething grasses vision found him:  
the emptiness was something he could fill.  
*\*the spirit of the place*
- And so, like naming Adam, he bequeathed  
unto the future what was his to give:  
and as that nascent creature learned to breathe  
and walk abroad at evening and so live,  
a miracle the Lord had raised from dust,  
he gave the land, and his own name, in trust.
- III Hauling them up the hill in trundling loads,  
the masons laid course after course of brick,  
judging them level by a length of string,  
using their trowels for scraping and for tapping.  
How to get back to that and take it in?  
The early photographs where buildings stand  
like orphans in a circle of new trees:  
Gaylord, and vanished Merrill that lives on  
in the fond words and measures of a song;  
Whitcomb and Lee, the chapel and the con,  
and Whitin Library, and Carnegie (gone);  
and all those high, stiff collars on the men,  
the women in long dresses with puffed sleeves:  
those times long gone now as a gust of leaves.
- IV *The Campus has beautiful winding drives  
bordered with shade trees. — Doane College catalog, 1880*
- She trims the lamp of learning as she kneels  
where the college puts its sigil forth, its seal,

this goddess who, like Gaia, represents  
the fount of being out of which or whence  
pure science, which is knowledge, pours in gleams,  
in pulsing images as from a dream,  
her chiton's\* folds rippling around her there.  
*\*ancient Greek tunic*

Those trees? The catalog was taking them on faith.  
They were mere saplings, set out just that spring  
and kept alive by many waterings  
all summer long, hauled up the hill on foot  
by one Frank Gilson Dean, who bathed their roots  
at the then going rate, ten cents an hour,  
augmented only by a few timely showers.

- V *...we need a telescope; we have the finest microscope in the  
state, but we want to look at the big things as well as the  
little. — Doane Owl, April 20, 1883*

Our species' need to look up at the skies  
has seldom been put better. "The big things"  
loom large before our wide, astonished eyes,  
the more so when pale Saturn and its rings  
(or any other sight the trained glass brings)  
come swimming into focus, into view,  
as if for us alone. Just as a spring's  
freshet clears a surging way into  
the sunlight on a hillside, so too  
the naked eye's bewildered for a spell  
until the sediment falls back anew,  
the cone stops spinning, all is clear and still.  
It was a modest glass Charles Boswell bought,  
but good enough for what the students sought.

- VI Let David Brainerd Perry stand for all  
the long succession of Doane's presidents:  
let them come forward as their names are called,  
neither too proud to answer, nor too diffident:  
Allen, Bennett, Dean, Stoffer, Drake, and Crawford,  
Typer, Heckman, Brown, adding now to these  
the name of one who has the law preferred,  
the spirit in the letter read with ease,  
whose wish is to enroll himself among  
their words as well as actions: Jonathan  
his given name, three syllables outstrung  
to bear the simple meaning "God has given,"  
his parents' joy reached like an outstretched hand  
Now add him to the roll: *President Brand*.

- VII There. It is in the hand. He lengthens stride  
as the runners fall away there at his side,  
now settling easily into his pace,  
the light breeze flowing all around his face,  
seemingly idyllic; yet he knows  
his mind must match his body as he goes,  
his breath comes deep and even for as long  
as he can manage.

Now the watching throng  
Leans forward in its seats and cheers him on,  
but he is deaf to that—he is all vision,  
his breathing deep and even as a bed  
of flaring coals. When he begins to tire,  
the shouts of teammates fan him into fire.

