

# Fort McHenry

National Monument  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## ORPHEUS

WHO IS HE ?

WHY IS HE AT FORT MCHENRY ?

These are questions that are often asked by visitors at Fort McHenry. He is none other than the Greek mythological hero of music and poetry "Orpheus". This classical monument is dedicated to Francis Scott Key and the soldiers and sailors who took part in the Battle of North Point and the defense of Fort McHenry during the War of 1812.

## THE HISTORY

The concept of the memorial was born on July 29, 1914 when Congress passed an appropriation of \$75,000 for the erection of a monument to Francis Scott Key. A competition was held by the "Fine Arts Commission" on May 28, 1916. One of the 34 entries was a statue by Charles H. Niehaus. His work, called Orpheus, was chosen. There was a delay in erecting the statue due to World War I. Finally the statue was completed and a dedication was held on Flag Day, June 14, 1922. The ceremony was attended by President Warren G. Harding.

## THE MONUMENT

The monument consists of a 15 foot high circular base made of white marble. This is decorated with a frieze in low relief, surmounted by a 22 foot high figure of Orpheus in bronze, shown playing a five-stringed tortoise shell lyre. The frieze starts with a portrait shield of Key and the dedication, and continues around the drum of the base with a representation of the classic muses paying honor to the army and navy.

## THE SCULPTOR

The sculptor, Charles H. Niehaus, was born in 1855 in Cincinnati. He was an influential late 19th century neo-classical sculptor. His early training was at the Royal Academy in Munich, Germany. He also studied in Rome. He returned to the United States in 1885 and by the 1890's he was in constant demand as a sculptor. His work on the doors of the Library of Congress in Washington and his Astor Memorial doors of Trinity Church in New York City helped establish his reputation. He expressed a very reformed and pure naturalism which was much in demand. There was so much interest in his work that he was awarded more federal commissions than any other sculptor.



## ORPHEUS TIMELINE

Jul 29, 1914      \$75,000 is appropriated under public law 155 for erecting a monument to Francis Scott Key

May 16, 1916      Fine Arts Commission competition held choosing Orpheus from 34 entrants

Oct 19, 1916      Charles H. Neihaus signs contract for \$75,000

Aug 26, 1918      Contract delayed because temporary hospital buildings cover proposed site

Sep 29, 1920      Relocated monument and fixed time when work should be commenced and completed

Nov 4, 1920      Work is started on the concrete foundation

Jan -, 1921      Foundation is completed

Nov 15, 1921      Work is started on approach roads, walks, post and drainage

Apr 15, 1922      Approach work is completed

Apr 4, 1922      Carving of marble pedestal is completed

May 24, 1922      Bronze statue is delivered

Jun 1, 1922      Bronze Statue is erected on pedestal

Jun 14, 1922      President Harding dedicates statue, Flag Day

Apr 10, 1928      Congress compensates Neihaus with \$33,121 for cost over runs

Aug -, 1962      Orpheus is relocated from its original location in the middle of the entrance road to its present location