

Days.
FOMC:058
CRBIB# 001672
346/131142

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
FORT MCHENRY NATIONAL MONUMENT AND
HISTORIC SHRINE
BALTIMORE 30, MARYLAND

Report on Fort McHenry

Statue of Orpheus

Prepared by:

George C. Mackenzie
Park Historian

Fort McHenry National Monument
and Historic Shrine

October 28, 1959

Introduction

The following brief report concerning the statue of Orpheus, erected at Fort McHenry as a memorial to Francis Scott Key and the Citizen Soldiers, who fought at North Point and Fort McHenry, is not intended to do more than present some basic information about the legislative background governing the erection of this monument and to provoke thought as to its appropriateness. The report has been prepared within a most limited period of time, from sources within easy accessibility. It is believed that its content may prove to be of some assistance in determining what future disposition should be made of the Key Memorial in order to ensure this monument an appropriate place in the National Park Service, MISSION 66 program of development for Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine.

During the course of this investigation, it was evident that other sources of information exist in Washington; however, in the opinion of the writer the expenditure of additional time and money for such research should first be justified by administrative decision. While this report is then not considered to be definitive, it is believed that the factual information it includes, which has not previously been consolidated in one document, will accomplish the purpose intended.

THE STATUE OF ORPHEUS, NATIONAL MEMORIAL TO FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

The statue of Orpheus by the sculptor, Charles H. Niehaus, was unveiled at Fort McHenry, June 14, 1922. The ceremonies dedicating the statue were attended by President ~~Warren~~ C. Harding and other notable personalities of the United States Government and the State and City Governments.

✓ By one account we have the report on this occasion "Miss Katherine Ethel Breening, daughter of the Mayor and Miss Marie J. Niehaus, daughter of the sculptor Charles J. Niehaus, went toward the base of the Monument. They were dressed prettily in white and carried bouquets of pink roses. The cords were put into their hands, they tugged and the long flags parted, revealing the immense figure of Orpheus, god of music (sic) standing on the white marble pedestal with the madallion of Francis Scott Key upon it and the procession of allegorical figures around it."¹

? ✓ From the time of its dedication, Orpheus was incorrectly referred to as the god of music. Orpheus was in fact the son of Apollo and the Muse Calliope. "He was presented by his father with a Lyre and taught to play upon it, which he did to such perfection that nothing could withstand the charm of his music. Not only his fellow mortals but wild beasts were softened by his strains, and gathering around him laid by their fierceness, and stood entranced with his lay. Nay the very trees and rocks were sensible to the charm. The former crowded round him and the latter released somewhat of their hardness softened by his notes."²

1. Baltimore Sun, June 15, 1922.

2. Mrs. S. O. Bulfinch, Bulfinch's Methology (New York, 1947) P. _____

It was rather Apollo who was the god of music as he was of archery, prophecy, and healing. He was one of the great gods of Olympus and son of Jupiter and Latona. As the leader of the Muses, he was given the lyre which Mercury had invented and in turn gave music to woman when she was created. Apollo was the incarnation of the Greek ideal of youthful manhood.³ As a result of continued misrepresentation and false identification of Orpheus through the written and spoken word, he has seemingly all but displaced his father Apollo as the true god of music. One writer has borrowed from another and in so doing perpetuated the error.⁴

³.Ibid., 884-885.

⁴.Nancy Pilsch, "Fort McHenry Monument Stands Guard 30 years," Baltimore, XLV, No. 11, September 1932.

Public demand for the erection of a monument to Francis Scott Key and the defenders at Fort McHenry, dated at least from July 23, 1912, when Congressman J. Charles Linthicum introduced H. R. 25912, (62nd Congress, 2nd Session) for the erection of such a monument. There followed another bill H.R. 7305, (63rd Congress, 1st Session), providing for the appropriation of money for a suitable monument, flagstaff and memorial hall in memory of Francis Scott Key and the defenders of the nation during the War of 1812. A third bill H.R. 11174, (63rd Congress, 2nd Session) was introduced December 22, 1913 by Congressman Linthicum similar to H.R. 7305, introduced by him in the preceding session. Unlike the first two bills, this bill in addition to being referred to the Committee on the Library, as they were, was discharged by the Committee on the Library and referred to the Committee on Appropriations.⁵ Some progress was being made in the effort to win support for the expenditure of public money in the erection of a memorial at Fort McHenry.

Next, H.R. 16827 and S. 5711 (63rd Congress, 2nd Session) were introduced respectively in the House of Representatives and Senate. These bills were similar in wording and provided for the Appropriation of \$75,000 for the erection of a monument to Francis Scott Key, and the soldiers and sailors who participated in the Battle of North Point and the defence of Fort McHenry in the War of 1812.⁶ Again no action was taken, but it was only a matter of time before favorable action on this proposal would be taken.

⁵ Edmund B. Rogers, History of Legislation Relating to the National Park System Through the 82nd Congress, United States Department of The Interior, Washington 1958.

⁶ Ibid.

Through the medium of a General Deficiency Appropriation Bill, Public Law No. 155, which was approved July 29, 1914, \$75,000 was appropriated for the Francis Scott Key Memorial along with public money for many other purposes.⁷ The law was the result of a Conference Report in the House of Representatives and a Conference Report in the Senate by which agreement was reached on the form in which H.R. 17824, a deficiency appropriation bill, should be passed.⁸

By this law it was provided that the Secretary of War shall form a Committee, composed of the Mayor of Baltimore, the Chairman of the National Star-Spangled Banner Centennial Committee, the President of the Board of Park Commissioners of Baltimore and two other persons, to be designated by the Secretary of War. The function of this group was to prepare plans for the monument and select a suitable site.

The Fine Arts Commission of the Federal government then promoted a prize competition to determine which sculptor should have the honor of doing the figure for this monument. The figure of "Orpheus with the Awkward Foot" was selected from 34 models submitted. Following its selection discussion as to its appropriateness started almost immediately; such discussions still continue today. A reporter for the Baltimore Sun of that day stated: "So far as it having any particular meaning for Baltimore is concerned, or typifying the giving to the nation of the nation's hymn, the winning design might as well have been a stock design, kept on hand for competitive purposes and adapted to the needs of the occasion."⁹

⁷U. S. Statutes At Large, XXXVIII, Part 1, P. 568.

⁸ U.S. Congress, House Reports, 111, Report No. 1003 (63rd Cong., 2nd Sess.), July 22, 1914; U. S. Congress, Senate Documents, XXVIII, Doc. No. 514 (63rd Cong., 2nd Sess.), July 1914.

⁹ Baltimore Evening Sun, September 13, 1945.

Consideration was also given to locating the Niehaus Orpheus at Mount Vernon Place within a stone's throw of the site of the house where Francis Scott Key died. Other persons suggested placing him on Fort Carroll which by the time of the Civil War had superseded Fort McHenry as the principal harbor defence for the City of Baltimore. Objection was strong then as now to the ungarbed "Orpheus" which is so frequently falsely identified as the heroic figure of Francis Scott Key. Be this as it may, the sculptor, Charles J. Niehaus, claimed it was not possible to do a heroic figure in the manner he envisioned wearing clothes. Yet among the offerings of the 34 contestants two figures of Francis Scott Key were included.¹⁰

However, it is possible to find equally strong expressions of sentiment in favor of the Niehaus Orpheus. Writing for the journal Art and Archeology in 1917, Mr. Frank Owen Payne noted that the sculptor had not only paid a tribute to Francis Scott Key, but also through his representation of a colossal figure of Orpheus, paid tribute to the genius of music and done honor to the sublime art of music. To Mr. Payne, Orpheus was far more preferable than "one more unlovely portrait of mere man."¹¹

The question concerning the appropriateness of Orpheus as a fitting memorial to Francis Scott Key as a symbol of the man who penned the words to our National Anthem may be judged on entirely different grounds. It will be recalled from passages above that it is mentioned that Orpheus was noted for the great power of the music he produced to perfection with a lyre. Nothing whatsoever is known of Francis Scott Key's musical ability.

¹⁰. Ibid.

¹¹. Frank Owen Payne, "The National Memorial To the Author of The Star Spangled Banner," Art and Archeology, VI, No. 1 (July 1917), 5-6.

Moreover, the melody of the song "The Star-Spangled Banner" is the air "To Anacreon In Heaven", which is believed to have been originally composed ca. 1770, as a theme song of the Anacreonic Society in London. The most that one may credit to Francis Scott Key's musical ability is that he was familiar with this melody and requested of his music publisher that his poem be set to this melody.¹² He did have a sufficiently developed sense of rhythm which enabled him to write the unusual meter needed to fit the particular air. However, no true parallel is achieved between Francis Scott Key and Orpheus by whom he is allegedly symbolized.

In its present location the statue of Orpheus dominates the surrounding scene and is the first feature in the area to meet the eye of the visiting public. Instead of a view of the flag flying above Fort McHenry being the first impression, one receives on the entrance road, it is that of a usually unknown gigantic nude statue in "pigeon-toed" stance which remains meaningless until identified and even then the connection between the author of the national anthem and Orpheus remains obscure. Seemingly a more suitable place to locate the statue within the area could be found where it would serve to supplement rather than dominate the interpretive theme of the area.

¹². Joseph Muller, The Star Spangled Banner, Words and Music Issued Between 1814-1864 (New York, 1935), 44-45

Bibliography

Public Documents

- U. S. House Reports, Report No. 1003 63rd Cong., 2nd Sess., July 22, 1914.
- U. S. Senate Reports, Report No. 689, 63rd Cong., 2nd Sess., Vol. 11, July 17, 1914.
- U. S. Senate Documents, Doc. No. 554, 63rd Cong., 2nd Sess., Vol. XXVIII.
- U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. XXXVIII.

Books

- Bulfinch, Rev. S. G., Bulfinch's Mythology, New York, 1947.
- Deleplaine, Edward S., Francis Scott Key, Life and Times, New York, 1937.
- Muller, Joseph, The Star-Spangled Banner Words and Music Issued Between 1814-1864, New York, 1935.
- Rogers, Edmund B., History of Legislation Relations to The National Park System Through the 82nd Congress, United States Department of the interior, Washington, 1958.
- Rusk, William S., Art In Baltimore, Monuments and Memorials, Baltimore, 1929.

Articles and Periodicals

- Baltimore Evening Sun.
- Baltimore Sun.
- Payne, Frank Owen, "The National Memorial To The Author of The Star Spangled Banner," Art and Archeology, Vol. VI, No. 1, July 1917.
- Pilsch, Nancy, "Fort McHenry Monument Stands Guard 30 Years," Baltimore XLV, No. 11, September 1952.
- Vertical Files, Enoch Pratt Free Public Library, Baltimore, Maryland.