

## **William Ward Orme (1832-1866)**

William Ward Orme was born on February 17, 1832, in Washington, D.C. His parents died when he was just 13 years old, and he went to live with his grandfather, who taught him to be a cabinetmaker. When he was 17, William moved to Chicago, where he worked as a bank messenger and studied law. He arrived in Chicago with only 25 cents, but he was determined to succeed.

In 1850, William moved to Bloomington. After briefly working with a partner, he became a deputy clerk in the circuit clerk's office under William McCullough. Here, he met important people in the legal world who would become his friends and mentors. At 20, William passed the Bar exam and became a lawyer. In 1853, he married Nannie McCullough, William McCullough's daughter. Soon after, he formed a successful law partnership with Leonard Swett, a well-known lawyer. His legal work was admired by important figures, including Abraham Lincoln and Judge David Davis.

Though Orme told his brother not to get involved in politics, he became interested himself. He attended the convention where the Republican Party was formed and helped with the Lincoln for President campaign. When Lincoln became president in 1860, Orme asked for political favors, writing letters and even visiting Washington, D.C.

During the United States Civil War, Orme helped create the 94th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment and was elected Colonel. Two of his brothers also served in the same regiment. In August 1862, the regiment left for active duty in Missouri. While away from his wife, Orme wrote long letters to her about his experiences. He described the boredom, long marches, and sicknesses many soldiers faced. Orme wanted a promotion to General, but President Lincoln told him he first needed to prove himself in battle. His chance came at the Battle of Prairie Grove, where he performed well and was promoted to Brigadier General.

Around this time, Orme learned that his father-in-law, William McCullough, had been killed in battle, and his brother Joseph had been killed by friendly fire. These losses deeply affected him. Orme also struggled with health problems, which were later diagnosed as tuberculosis. After taking some time off to recover, he returned to his troops and fought in the Siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi. His letters home gave detailed accounts of the battle and its aftermath.

As his illness worsened, Orme was assigned to command a Confederate prison camp in Chicago. The cold weather in Chicago made his health worse, and he struggled to focus on his work. He resigned from the Army and returned to Bloomington to rest. In 1864, he took a job with the Treasury Department in Memphis, Tennessee.

In 1865, shortly after President Lincoln was assassinated, Orme's health forced him to resign again. He passed away on September 13, 1866, at the age of 34 and was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois.

## **Nancy “Nannie” McCullough Orme (1834-1912)**

Nancy "Nannie" McCullough Orme was born on October 23, 1834, in McLean County. In 1853, she married William Ward Orme. They had four children together between 1854 and 1860: William, Bernadine, Lucy, and Edward.

Most of what we know about Nannie comes from the letters her husband wrote to her while they were often apart. These letters show that Nannie was a loyal, loving, and supportive wife.

After the difficult birth of their first child, William sent Nannie to stay with his family in Washington, D.C., for two months to recover. While there, she visited President Pierce, probably more than once, and might have helped her husband's career by representing him. William was very proud of her. By the time Nannie returned to Bloomington, she had received 32 letters from William.

In August 1862, Colonel Orme and the 94th Illinois Volunteer Infantry left Bloomington to fight in the Civil War, and he continued writing to Nannie. William asked Nannie to help him get a promotion to General by speaking to people like David Davis and Leonard Swett, who were friends of his. Nannie followed his instructions, sharing his letters with these friends.

Nannie must have worried about her husband's safety, and she likely told him so. In one letter, William joked, “You don’t want me to get back without going through a big battle, do you?” He later wrote her about the Battle of Prairie Grove, knowing she and their friends would be eager to hear about it.

Not long after, Nannie got the heartbreaking news that her father had died in battle in Mississippi. William was able to come home for a while. Then, Nannie received letters from him while he was in Vicksburg and New Orleans, where his health quickly worsened. When he was sent to Camp Douglas in Chicago, Nannie traveled there often to care for him, sometimes bringing the children. When William returned home, he recovered enough to take another government job, though his health continued to decline. Before he passed away, he told Nannie he wanted to die at home with her comforting words. And that’s exactly what happened.

At just 32 years old, Nannie was widowed. Fortunately, she was financially stable. Ten years later, she remarried Dr. Dunbar Dyson, a friend of William’s. Dr. Dyson died in 1893. Nannie spent the rest of her life watching her children grow up, marry, and succeed. She passed away on May 30, 1912, and was buried next to her first husband, William, and second husband, Dunbar, in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois.