

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

William Ward Orme was born February 17, 1832 in Washington, D.C. William's parents died when he was 13 years old. He lived with a grandfather who taught him to be a cabinetmaker. At age 17 William traveled to Chicago where he worked as a bank messenger and studied law. It was said that he arrived in Chicago with 25 cents in his pocket but while he may have been short of cash he was long on ambition.

In 1850 William came to Bloomington. After a short stint in private practice with a partner, Orme became a deputy clerk in the circuit clerk office of William McCullough. Here Orme would meet other men of the law who were to become his friends, allies, and mentors.

In 1852 at age 20 Orme passed the Bar and in 1853 he married Nannie McCullough, daughter of William McCullough. Shortly thereafter he went into a successful partnership with Leonard Swett, an established courtroom lawyer. Orme's legal work was admired by Abraham Lincoln, David Davis, and others who saw a bright future for him.

While Orme advised his brother not to "bother" with politics, he could not escape its appeal. He attended the convention at Majors Hall where the Republican Party was formed and he was involved in the Lincoln for President Club. When Lincoln was elected President in 1860 Orme did not hesitate to ask for political favors through letters and even a personal visit to Washington.

With the advent of the Civil War, Orme was instrumental in the formation of McLean County's 94<sup>th</sup> Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment and was elected Colonel of the Regiment. Two of his brothers also served in the same regiment. In August 1862 the Regiment left for active duty in southern Missouri.

When Orme was away from his wife, he wrote lengthy letters to her containing his thoughts, opinions, and daily activities. His descriptions of military life included many of the same complaints of other soldiers: boredom with inaction, tiresome marches, and camp illnesses. Orme had been campaigning for a promotion in rank to General. Because of his youth and inexperience, Lincoln's response to Orme's lobbying was that Orme first needed to "distinguish himself in battle." His opportunity came with the Battle of Prairie Grove. After that battle he was promoted to Brigadier-General.

In this same period, Orme learned that his father-in-law William McCullough had been killed in battle at Coffeyville, Mississippi. His brother Joseph was killed by friendly fire a short time later. Both deaths came as a severe shock.

Orme was suffering bouts of illness which was later identified as tuberculosis. However after a period at home to take care of family affairs, he returned to duty and soon moved with his troops to Vicksburg, Mississippi where he participated in the siege of that city. His letters home were quite descriptive of the action and the aftermath.

Illness plagued Orme and when he was no longer able to serve in the field, he was assigned to take command of the prison Camp Douglas at Chicago, Illinois. The cold and damp weather of Chicago aggravated his illness. Unable to concentrate on his duties there, he resigned from the Army and returned to Bloomington to recuperate. In 1864, he was appointed Supervising Special Agent of the Treasury Department at Memphis, Tennessee.

In 1865 shortly after Lincoln's assassination Orme's ill health again forced him to resign from his duties. He died at home in Bloomington on September 13, 1866 and was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, IL.

## Nancy “Nannie” McCullough Orme

Nancy “Nannie” McCullough Orme was born on October 23, 1834 in McLean County. In 1853 she married William Ward Orme. Between 1854 and 1860 the couple had four children: William, Bernadine, Lucy, and Edward.

Almost everything we know about Nannie comes to us through the letters her husband wrote to her during their frequent and long separations. Based on these letters it is safe to say that Nannie was a faithful, loving, and supportive wife.

After the difficult birth of their first child, William sent his young wife to Washington, D.C. to stay for two months with his family so that she could recuperate. While there, she visited President Pierce, probably more than once, and may have served as personal representative for her ambitious husband. William was obviously proud of her. By the time Nannie returned to Bloomington, she had received 32 letters from her husband.

In August, 1862 Col. Orme and the 94<sup>th</sup> Illinois Voluntary Infantry left Bloomington to fight in the Civil War and his letter-writing to his wife resumed. When William desired a promotion to General, he wrote to Nannie of his request that David Davis and Leonard Swett to use their influence with Lincoln in his cause. He knew that Lincoln thought well of him and he suggested to Nannie that she could also lobby for him with Davis and Swett and even instructed her on what to say. This Nannie surely did as she often showed his letters to Davis, Swett, and other friends.

Nannie would certainly have also feared for her husband’s personal safety and must have expressed those fears to him. In one letter he wrote, “You don’t want me to get back without going through a big battle, do you?” When he finally did get into the Battle of Prairie Grove he wrote the details in a long letter knowing he would have an anxious and appreciative audience not only in his wife but also in the friends with whom she would share the news.

It was shortly after this that Nannie learned of her father’s death in battle in Mississippi. This was devastating news to the family and William was able to get home for awhile.

Then came his letters from Vicksburg and New Orleans where his health rapidly deteriorated. When he was assigned to Camp Douglas in Chicago, Nannie traveled there frequently to care for him. Sometimes she took some of the children with her. When he left Chicago and came home it was surely through her tender ministrations that he recovered sufficiently to take another government position. Again, his health declined and he expressed his wish to die at home with his wife’s “sweet words of hope and consolation” in his ear. And that’s what happened.

Nannie was widowed at age 32. She was more fortunate than most women in that she was financially secure. It would be ten years before she remarried, this time to Dr. Dunbar Dyson, an old friend of William’s. Dr. Dyson died in 1893. Nannie lived out her life watching her children grow, marry, and succeed in life. She died on May 30, 1912 and was buried near her first husband William and next to her second husband Dunbar in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, IL.