

***William Norris, Chief Signal Officer of the Confederate States Army,
Chief of the Signal Bureau, and head of the Confederate Secret
Service Bureau***



Born in Baltimore County, Maryland on December 6, 1820, he attended Yale University, graduating at the age of nineteen, the young adventurer pursued a number of interesting paths including practicing law in New Orleans, serving as Judge Advocate for the Navy's Pacific Squadron in California, and pursuing a romantic interest in Chile. He was successful in his efforts and married Ellen Lyle Hobson, daughter of the US Consul to Chile.

Returning to Maryland, he and his bride returned to the family's estate "Brookland" in Reisterstown. He became President of the Baltimore Mechanical Bakery, located at Howard near Pratt.

At the onset of hostilities, he and his family moved to Virginia where he accepted a position as a staff aide to Brigadier General John Bankhead Magruder. Assigned to learn signals, Norris's demonstrated aptitude led to his speedy promotion to Captain, having established a successful and efficient system of signals, using flags and colored balls, employed throughout the Virginia Peninsula.

Norris continued to be recognized for his competency and given greater responsibilities, being promoted to Major, and serving as the Chief Signal Officer of the Confederate States Army, Chief of the Signal Bureau, and head of the Confederate Secret Service Bureau. As head of the Secret Service Bureau, he coordinated a network of 1200 agents operating behind Union lines and in Canada and Europe.

In April of 1865, Norris was appointed Colonel with responsibilities as Commissioner of Exchange. Regretfully, Richmond would fall within a week and Norris would be taken prisoner.

Following the war, he and his family returned to their estate in Reisterstown, MD. He was active in absolving John H. Surratt of any involvement in the Lincoln assassination.

A man of strong opinion, he was so outraged by the post war conclusion that the USS Monitor had emerged victorious over the CSS Virginia that he published his eyewitness account, dispelling the myth, in 1874.

Norris suffered a fatal stroke on December 29, 1889, at the age of sixty-nine and is buried in historic All Saints Episcopal Church Cemetery in Reisterstown, Maryland.