

When the Regents of the State College of Washington met on August 21, 1944 they elected Wilson Martindale Compton as president, the fifth chief executive in the 54 years of the College's existence.¹ The event was notable not only to the institution and its clientele but, as Compton noted, it was auspicious to the state and the region. Drawing upon a deeply felt dedication to public service and a keen understanding of the economic potential of the region, Compton, upon accepting the presidency on October 5, 1944, wired to the Regents that he planned to develop "a great institute of technology. . . adapted to the abundant natural resources of the Pacific Northwest. . . ." He concluded with a challenge to the Regents that "with your help we can build a great institution for the people of the state and we can provide a great service to agriculture, industry and commerce in the Northwest."²

The least known of three Compton brothers who made the family name celebrated in scientific and educational circles--his brothers were Arthur and Karl, both well-known scientists and university presidents--Wilson Compton maintained that he welcomed this abrupt change in careers to educational administration. He was 54 years of age and for a quarter of a century had been the influential Secretary and General Manager of the National Lumbermen's Association. Compton underscored his eagerness to launch a new career when, according to a Seattle Times reporter he touched his lapel button which showed that he had two sons and a son-in-law on military duty and declared "I expect ~~that~~ I made that decision because my boys were in the service. It seemed to me I could do more good in this new capacity than in any other. Education must bear a major share of responsibility for seeing that this war is not repeated."³

The faculty had already seized the rare opportunity to participate in