

# Leaders of the Mathematics Department

Washington State University

The First Seventy-Five Years

by

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On 28 March 1890 the first legislature of the state of Washington created the state's land grant institution, giving it the name: the Washington State Agricultural College and School of Science<sup>1</sup>. On 1 May 1891 the school's first Board of Regents (composed of five members) met in Tacoma and selected George W. Lilley as President and Director of the Experimental Station.

## George W. Lilley (1891 – 1892)

Besides his role as Leader of the College Lilley was named Professor of Mathematics and Physics. Since he was the only mathematician on the faculty — which was composed of six members — Lilley was defacto the first mathematics Chair<sup>2</sup>. Lilley's background included a two-year term (1884 – 1886) as the first President of Dakota Agricultural College (now South Dakota State University).

The Regents, in selecting Lilley as President, stated his term "shall be for one year and until his successor shall be elected". Possibly, the Regents were uneasy with their choice. Lilley's resumé was ambiguous in several places, especially with regard to advanced and honorary degrees. Born in 1854 he spent four years at Knox College in Illinois, but it is not clear if he received a bachelor's degree or not. In 1878 he obtained a Master of Arts degree from Washington and Jefferson College. He also spent a year studying mathematics at the University of Michigan.

There also were questions concerning some financial dealings in

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<sup>1</sup>In 1915 the name was changed to the State College of Washington and in 1959 to Washington State University. To avoid confusion we will use WSU when referring to the Institution.

<sup>2</sup>Originally, the leader of the Department had the title "Head". In 1946 the title was changed to "Chairman". Today, the title "Chair" is used. To avoid confusion we will use the last title.