

William Compton

William "Chief" Compton is Nebraska's earliest well-known bowman of European decent. He was born in Flint, Michigan in 1863. When he was seven years old, his family moved to Norfolk, Nebraska where he was "adopted" by the Sioux Indians. The Sioux taught him their hunting methods and how to make bows and arrows.

At age 14, Compton took his first deer. Many years later, he wrote, "The first deer I ever killed was with the bow in 1877...". While still in his teens, he took 20 deer, four antelope, two elk and a buffalo while on horseback Indian style.

In 1894, at age 29, Compton moved to Medford, Oregon where he worked in the shop of the master bowyer F.S. Barnes. There Compton learned to make the English style yew longbow, and how to cut and season Northwest yew trees for use as bow wood.

In 1913, after Barnes' final illness, Compton bundled up "an endless supply of yew" and moved to California. There he met and became friends with Dr. Saxton Pope and Ishi, America's last wild Indian. Compton taught Pope the English style of archery, which Pope adopted in place of the methods he had learned earlier from Ishi.

In 1915, Compton met Art Young at a Japanese archery gallery at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. Compton taught Young the art of shooting the bow and introduced Young to Pope and Ishi. Within the group, Compton was affectionately nicknamed "Chief" because of his kinship with the Sioux in Nebraska and his role as the group leader. For the next year, the four shot and hunted together before Ishi succumbed to tuberculosis in 1916.

During the following years Pope, Young and Compton hunted and shot together. Compton took Pope and Young on their first bow and arrow hunt for deer, a hunt on which all three bagged a buck. They took fish, birds, small game, bob cats, mountain lion, deer and black bear.

With the growing interest in Hunting with the Bow and Arrow during the late 1910s, The Archers' Guild was formed to supply the increasing demand for archery tackle. Compton was designated as the "Master Archer" of the organization. Charter Members of The Guild included Saxton Pope, Art Young, Cassius Styles and several other accomplished bowyers and fletchers.

While Compton was content to stay at home, give lectures on archery and promote the sport, Pope and Young ventured to Wyoming for grizzly bears and to Africa for lions and other game. Young also went to Alaska and took brown bear, dall sheep, mountain goat, and moose with the bow and later took polar bear and walrus in Greenland.

In his writings, Saxton Pope credited Compton with shots of birds in flight, running deer up to 75 yards, as "... a master at the judgment of distance and the speed of running game", as the "better shot of the three of us", as the better hunter, and as taking the majority of the deer that fell before their shafts.

In 1926, at age 51, Pope died of pneumonia and in 1935, at age 52, Young died of a ruptured appendix. In 1938, the first and last of archery's greatest trio, Compton, died of a heart attack at age 74.

In addition to Pope and Young, Compton's students includes an endless list of other well-known old time bowmen. After Compton's death, Ray Hodgson wrote, "Compton instilled in his archery converts a love of the hunt. Compton never went in for publicity. He quietly went about helping others. He was a grand instructor and an enthralling lecturer. We were all his pupils and all of us old timers speak of Compton as being responsible for it all."

In 1940 Cassius Styles wrote of Compton, Pope and Young, "Friendship, real and very deep, has always been the lifeblood of archery in its heroic chapters... it was the friendship of the hearty trio, Will Compton, Saxton Pope and Arthur Young, that made their broadhead a recognized big game weapon. I never heard one of the three cronies speak of any of the others but that he was lighted up by beaming happiness... Will Compton was indeed a hardy, flint-framed pioneer if I ever saw one... Indeed, everyone loved this stately bowman."

In 1947, the preeminent organization of hunting and field archers of the mid 20th century, the National Field Archery Association, (NFAA), created its highest award, the Compton Medal of Honor, in memory of Compton's life long contributions to the sport.

In May of 1999, in Omaha, Nebraska, during the weekend of the Pope and Young Club Banquet, traditional bowmen from across America met informally, laid the groundwork for, and passed the hat for, charter memberships in a new national organization for traditionalists. That organization became the Compton Traditional Bowhunters, so named in remembrance of Nebraska's pioneer bowman who was the root and source for field and hunting archery in America.

In 2010, 140 years after his arrival in Nebraska and his humble beginnings in archery, Will Compton, the Patron Saint of all Nebraska Bowmen, was honored as the first inductee into the Nebraska Archery and Bowhunting Hall of Fame.