

Laurel School

Rooted in the Past, Reaching for the Future



Alex Keenan
with Ed Castro

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Published in the United States by Friends of Laurel, Fort Collins, CO

Manufactured in the United States of America
Fort Collins, Colorado
First Edition

Literary editor, advisor: Kim Lipker
Historical editor: Wayne Sundberg
Design: Michele Chu

*Front cover: 1931 student body in front of original Laurel;
Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, #H01966*

*Back cover: Original painting by Jana Hillstrom,
in honor of Laurel's centennial birthday;
Jana Hillstrom, Hayward, WI*

*Printed by Citizen Printing, 1309 Webster Ave.,
Fort Collins, CO, 80524*

DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to all those who
educate and to those who learn,
and sometimes they interchange roles...
to Laurel fans everywhere!*

Foreword



Since the first school class in an upstairs bedroom of Auntie Stone's cabin on the original fort site in 1866, Fort Collins has placed a high value on educating our youth. The first public school, built in 1870, on what would become Riverside Avenue, led the way to today's numerous schools within the city. A tremendous growth in the first decade of the twentieth century created a need for more school buildings. Three Schools: The original Fort Collins High School, 1903, (later Lincoln Junior High), LaPorte Avenue Elementary, 1907, and Laurel Street Elementary, 1906, joined the ranks of the city's educational institutions during that time. Only the Laurel Street building still stands. Protected with local historic landmark designation, it continues as an educational site—Centennial High School. This book takes a nice look at the Laurel School's transition into the twenty-first century.

Wayne Sundberg

Historical editor on the project

Preface



Hello! It's very nice to meet you. I'm Alex, and I'm afraid I've never written a preface before, so you'll have to bear with me. The Internet told me that some prefaces talk about how the piece you're prefacing came to be, so if you want the CliffsNotes 'behind-the-scenes' of this book, you've come to the right place. And just like Laurel Elementary, the story of this story starts in winter, though to be honest, I don't believe it was snowing the first day I met Ed Castro.

I was a student halfway through my senior year in college, and one who was in the common position of having no idea what she was doing. Luckily, my internship advisor had seen my ilk before, and had many helpful suggestions for what I could do during my last year of school while I tried give my life a starting place. One of these suggestions, as it turned out, was Ed. He was working on a project to write a history of the school he'd taught at for many years and had the research to follow through with it. All he needed was someone to physically put pen to paper, and I leapt at the chance for that someone to be me. So at my advisor's urging, I submitted some writing samples and showed up to an interview one sunny day in December. It's possible that I copped my way into the job, as I happened to be the only applicant, but I've decided to think of it as a stroke of luck.

Ed was enthusiastic, warm, and encouraging throughout the entire time that I was working with him, and I found myself often in the company of others such as Wendy, Tommi Sue, and Karen,

who were equally supportive whenever I dropped into Laurel and holed up in a corner of the library to work like some kind of hunched gremlin. Their dedication to their school was contagious, and it wasn't long before I, too, was loving Laurel as much as her faculty. I think it helped that I got to be in Laurel as I was researching the school, because I got to see the children and their teachers every week. Seeing them, the history that I read about was never 'just history.' It was always a memory which didn't take much effort to conjure, surrounded as I was by the same sounds which I imagine must've filled the halls of Old Laurel—the voices of children reading, talking to each other, teachers nudging them in the right direction, and asking for quiet just one more time.

I learned then, as I hope you already know, that Laurel is as much a feeling as it is a building. It's a place created out of the shared belief that education will always be integral to us as a society, and that it should always be something that a child looks forward to. Even I, a jaded, neurotic college student, started looking forward to my time at Laurel. Which was a good thing, as I was spending a couple hours a week there as winter turned to spring. I got to really sink into Laurel, to read about her exploits, to talk to her people, and to generally bask in the atmosphere created by those who most wanted to be there. Then I wrote about it. And the rest, as they say, is history.



Alex Keenan

Co-author

Acknowledgements



So many, so little space.

First and foremost, we thank the students who have passed through these doors, students who have made a difference in this city and beyond.

We are grateful to their parents, without whom a successful school is built. Their support and creativity has contributed to the amazing memories created over 100 plus years.

And the staff, ahhh yes. Where would we be without you? We wouldn't. You are all so amazing.

Thank you to all who have allowed us to interview them or written us a note, so that we might include their tales of days gone by.

Thanks to Wendy Reed, Laurel's Media Tech and caretaker of its history, for her invaluable advice and suggestions.

Gracias to Tommi Sue Cox, Laurel's current principal, for her encouragement and can-do attitude.

To our literary editor we owe much. Hopefully the satisfaction of a job well done will be sufficient. Thank you, Kim Lipker. A writer in her own right, she made the time to serve as our editor and advisor. As a Laurel parent, she is the kind of parent that has made Laurel an amazing school.

Thank you, Wayne Sundberg, "Mr. Fort Collins," for being our historical editor. He has been a part of Laurel's history since the 1980s. We value your knowledge and enthusiasm.

Our design and layout volunteer, Michele Chu, spent a huge amount of time in making this the most professional and enjoyable product possible. In addition to her own business, she managed to find the time to do this labor of love as a volunteer.

We appreciate the folks at the Archives of the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery. Lesley Struc, Jennifer Hannifiin and Sarah Frahm were invaluable.

Special recognition to parent, Bonnie Benham. She created the slogan that became our 100th year birthday motto. "Rooted in the Past, Reaching for the Future," is now part of the title.

Thank you Brad Randall of Poudre School District's Communications Dept. as well as the Records Dept. for your guidance.

Gratitude to the Poudre School District Foundation, the Laurel PTO, and the many fans of Laurel for sponsorship of the printing. We are so thankful for you!

An extra special note of gratitude for our principal author, Alex Keenan. As a senior in Colorado State University's English Dept. she came on board as an intern (Thank you, Cassandra Eddington) knowing there was no monetary recompense, and with no guarantee this project would see the light of day. Yet, she took it on as her own, and thereby earns the distinction of being an honorary Laurel Lynx! Thank you, Alex.

On a personal note, I'd like to thank my wife, Judy, for her patience and encouragement. A debt of gratitude is also owed to my God, who granted me the perseverance to complete this worthy task.

You have all been a tremendous team. Thank you!

Ed Castro

Laurel teacher (1979-2009)

Project Manager and contributing author

Introduction



Laurel School has had the good fortune of being a continually operating school entity since 1906. It did not go the way of Franklin School, Remington School and LaPorte School, all of which were torn down many years ago, with no one to take the baton from them. Laurel has morphed beyond the original building on Laurel Street to modular buildings on Locust Street and now a permanent structure on that site.

I found it unusual that a school such as this has not had more mention in local history publications. A school born soon after Fort Collins High School, having outlived several of its contemporaries, and educating children for over 100 years, surely deserves a small history of its own. Well, here it is! Imperfect and incomplete as it may be, it is, nevertheless, a valuable contribution to Fort Collins' and Poudre School District's educational archives, the story of a school that has educated this city's youth for well over a century.

It is nigh unto impossible to include all those one would like to include in such a publication. We endeavored to let all know of this project. We are grateful for the stories we did receive. Together they create the tapestry that is Laurel School.

The unique organization of this short book tells the story of Laurel as a story. It is not a dry retelling of basic facts. To that end, some liberties have been taken to create a more readable storytelling style. Nevertheless, the core facts are just that. For all this work we are eternally grateful to the principal author, Alex Keenan,

a graduate from Colorado State University's English Department. She took the research with which I entrusted her and made the story of Laurel come alive.

In this chronicle you will see the inception of a much-needed school in a growing town. You will see it grow and change with the times and challenges. You will see it become a school that attempted, and attempts, to meet the needs of a variety of students, whether the difference is rural or city, poor or rich, educationally challenged or educationally gifted, ethnically diverse, it mattered not. Laurel taught all who came within its walls. And sometimes Laurel would go out to bring them in. You will see the students carry their belongings from its original home on Laurel Street to its new home on Locust Street, and you will see it celebrate its centennial birthday in 2006.

One of the unique components of this project is the online feature on the school website that contains the emails, letters, maps, photographs, and more, that will add more flesh to this tale. Be sure to not miss the details in the addendum at the end of this book.

Laurel has gone by many variations of nomenclature: Laurel School, Laurel Street School, Laurel Intermediate School, Laurel Elementary School, Laurel-Harris Elementary School, and now, Laurel Elementary School of Arts and Technology. To all of us it is simply, Laurel.

We trust Laurel School: Rooted in the Past, Reaching for the Future makes Laurel fans everywhere proud of its rich history.

Ed Castro



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CHAPTER ONE

Laurel Origins



In January of 1906, the president of the Board of Education for School District #5, Edward D. Hall, sat at his desk, watching the snow swirl outside his window. As always, the holidays had been accompanied with a biting cold winter, but Hall was used to the weather at this point. It was frankly the least of his worries, as he was occupied with a new problem that reached beyond the tiny, heated room of his office.

After all, Fort Collins was in the middle of a booming growth spurt, one which Hall watched with utmost attention. At the turn of the century, he'd seen his small, western town blossom from a military and pioneer settlement built on tenacity and sheer grit to a bustling hub of activity. This was, in part, thanks to the burgeoning sugar beet industry that had taken root in the city, a new endeavor that had turned surprisingly profitable. A mere two years before that wintery day, the Fort Collins Sugar Manufacturing Company had scraped and saved to raise a factory in the northern part of town, which had now produced 1,200 tons of sugar just this past season. Following the rise of the sugar beet factory, the lamb-feeding industry, too, was now growing at a rapid pace, drawing ever greater numbers of the ranchers and their charges into the city's arms. All of this meant more trade, more revenue, and above all, more people filling Fort Collins' streets. And this included not only those born in the United States. As the sugar factory demanded more labor to

keep its windows lit, immigrants, particularly German-Russians, filtered into the town to work the sugar beet fields. The sound of their native tongue filled the shacks provided to them by the company, some holding multiple families at a time. The closeness bred there endured throughout the years to become Buckingham Place, a cozy neighborhood which still stands today.

But it was not the sugar beet factory which concerned Hall. He could not argue against any of these developments—after all, what was good for Fort Collins had to be good for his school district, which itself was only about 40 years old. Yet what was a boon could also be a burden, and this is what led him to ponder so deeply: The city’s population was swelling, threatening to burst its banks like the flooding river which led to the relocation of the original military post, Fort Collins, the town’s namesake. This was a simple fact, and a beneficial one, too. But while the town could extend its boundaries as it wished to relieve the pressure caused by the influx, the schools attended by the city’s children did not have



1904, Linden Street, Fort Collins.



Beet wagons with German Russians, about 1902, north of LaPorte Ave, on Mason St.

the same luxury. Hall’s school district currently encompassed three institutions in total: Franklin School, Remington School, and the newly-constructed 1903 Fort Collins High School. They were small, sturdy schoolhouses, and worthy successors to the small cabin of the elderly ‘Auntie’ Stone, where her niece, Elizabeth Keays, Fort Collins’ first teacher, had run her classes. No one could say they had not done their admirable best to keep up with the influx of children, but overcrowding was such a problem that overflow classes were being held in the basements of each school. While children crowded downstairs on dusty floors, many of the rooms above them held at least 50 students, with some larger classrooms housing 78 learning, growing minds at a time. Even by the standards of the day, the situation was untenable, and Hall was painfully aware of it.

“The general public has no idea under what difficulties [we] are laboring,” he muttered to himself. He knew what needed to be

done—the times had to be kept with, it was time to spread their wings, so to speak. It was time that another school be built in Fort Collins.

Luckily, Hall and the school board had come to the same conclusion hardly two months earlier. Back in November, they had met and unanimously passed a bond of indebtedness to build a new school. They now had \$20,000 to pour into the project, and had even chosen their location: The corner of Peterson and Laurel. Now all that remained was to make the building a reality, and Hall knew just the man for the job: Montezuma Fuller.

A Nova Scotian native, Fuller outlived his three elder brothers to come to New York in 1879. After traveling west, he worked as a carpenter, doing odd jobs where he could and learning from other contractors. He even enrolled as an unconventional student at the Colorado Agricultural College (now Colorado State University) in 1883, where he distinguished himself as an inventor and remodeler. Shortly after he earned his citizenship in 1890, Fuller was listed in the *Colorado State Business Directory* as something of a jack-of-all-trades between an architect, a contractor, and a builder. Yet in spite of his broad expertise, he would not be officially licensed for almost 18 more years. But he did not idle away the time between his listing and his licensure—Fuller filled much of Fort Collins with houses, schools, business blocks, and churches, his prolificacy earning him local renown along with the pragmatic and sturdy nature of his designs. As such, by the time the school board approached him in 1905 to design their new institution, he was more than happy to acquiesce to their request.

As planning and designing progressed, the new school blossomed from a standard four-room building into a two-story, eight-roomed affair, all the better to handle the children who would be

transferred from Franklin and Remington. The basement was even supposed to have its own heating system installed alongside the janitor's quarters and the toilets, which was a first for elementary school buildings in Fort Collins at the time. But the school board wasn't the only one monitoring Laurel's progress. Fuller and Hall had an audience in the entirety of Fort Collins. The city became so enamored with the burgeoning school, that the Fort Collins Courier said that it would be an "ornament to the southern part of the city." But to make this ornament a reality, the first task Hall had to tackle after putting Fuller on the job was to hire contractors to do the work.

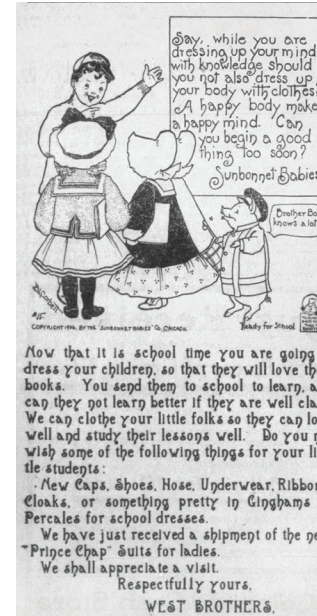
Bids for the school's construction opened in January of 1906, and a month later the heating contract was awarded to a local Fort Collins business: Barkley, Bouton & Crain Hardware Company. That same week, builders began to lay the bricks of Laurel's foundation,



Montezuma W. Fuller, architect of the Laurel School building, circa 1907.



FROM TOP: Aerial view of Fort Collins, 1899, a drawing; Laurel under construction, 1906; Gable of the Laurel Street School.



LEFT: Ad, hawking latest fashion for students, September 5, 1906. **ABOVE:** Helen Rutt's 4th grade class, undated. **BELOW:** 8th grade students, 1907-1908.



paving a large, rectangular base in the dirt at Laurel and Peterson. The stone was laid, and a copper box was embedded in the building's cornerstone as well, containing records and documents from the school board. After the initial work began, it progressed swiftly through the spring, and by May, what would become the Laurel Street School did not just have a groundwork, but a roof as well. By June, Superintendent Minor F. Miller was putting a request out into Fort Collins' newspapers for able-bodied teachers.

In August, the new principal and eighth grade teacher, George Wilder, met with the parents of those who would be attending his school, introducing himself and the building to his new community. As September drew near, local shops and stores also shamelessly hawked school supplies and the most fashionable clothes to the incoming students. They filled the newspapers with advertisements and their windows with eye-catching displays, until the excitement among Fort Collins' children reached a fever pitch. Then, at long last, after almost seven months of planning and preparation, the Laurel Street School opened its doors on September 4, 1906. That crisp, autumn morning saw 1,514 children go through Fort Collins' public schools' doors, roughly 400 of whom would go to Laurel by 1909. With almost a fourth of Fort Collins' children attending the new school, Halls' vision was realized, relieving the pressure that had strained Remington and Franklin. Thus it was that Laurel joined the ranks of Fort Collins' schools.