

## The Laurel Name

Why was Laurel chosen as the name for the school that opened in 1906 in what was then, southeast Fort Collins and was expected to be a gem in that locale?

We cannot say with certainty, but it was common to name city streets east of the Mississippi by tree names. Hence, out west, many towns took that example and named streets after principally eastern U.S. trees. Laurel was one of them.

The Laurel Street School was named after the street on which it was located. In the Poudre School District, elementary schools are now named after principals or other significant educators. It was a bit different in the town's early history with some named after Presidents (Washington, Lincoln), some after educators (Harris), and some after locales (Timnath, Cache Le Poudre). Laurel was one of the latter.

The bush/tree is generally considered to be the *Laurus Nobilis*, Wikipedia says the "***Laurus nobilis*** is an aromatic evergreen tree or large shrub with green, glabrous (smooth and hairless) leaves, in the flowering plant family Lauraceae. It is native to the Mediterranean region and is used as bay leaf for seasoning in cooking. Its common names include bay tree (esp. United Kingdom), bay laurel, sweet bay, true laurel, Grecian laurel, or simply laurel."



Although largely gone from its native area, it still persists in various pockets and was brought west with the settlement of the New World. Its uses are ornamental and medicinal in addition to the tea its leaves have contributed.

It was a fitting name for the school since wreaths made of Laurel were symbols of victory and excellence dating back to Greeks and Romans. This unique award was given to champions of the Pythian Games as well as the Olympic games in ancient Greece. In the Roman Empire it denoted excellence in military campaigns. Laurel wreaths might be awarded to some who have shown



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academic excellence including poetry.

In language usage, we speak of a Poetry Laureate, a Baccalaureate program, and not “resting on one’s laurels.”

Some believe Laurel leaves inspire creativity. Perhaps that’s why Laurel School seems to have had a healthy dose of that attribute in its long and storied history.

Ed Castro

