COLORADO IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

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FOOD, CLOTHING, AND SHELTER

FOOD

FRUIT STANDS

“Every few miles along the way I encountered stands selling vegetables, fruit, and the local specialty--melons...of which there are several varieties. One is the cantaloupe, small and gray [on the outside] but very sweet and quick to ripen. Others are the casaba and honeydew. One melon provides a full portion for four and even six people... I fully provisioned myself with vegetables and melons. For a little more than a quarter I had sacks packed like I had never seen them, so that I didn't know where to put everything.”


COOKING OUT

“During my whole trip I rarely stepped inside a restaurant because I prepared my own food. I did so because of second-rate American cooking as well as for budgetary and health reasons.... I advise my readers who would like to travel by car throughout the United States to take along a gas stove and kitchen utensils. He or she will live cheaply and comfortably.”


SCHOOL LUNCHES

“Teachers in rural schools in the 1930s ate lunch with their students, as Lucille Dalton Boyd remembered:

Mrs. H. put home baked bread and fried chicken in my lunches. My pupils had a coarse home made bread and large chunks of mutton in their lunches. Mutton tastes better hot, so we would put it on top of the heater before lunch.”

BUTTER AND LARD

“We used to buy ranch butter, you know, we bought it for 15 cents a pound. And we used to get a pail of lard…. The butter we used sparsely for the toast, sometimes not even that…because [we had only] one pound a month for the whole family. But we used to use the lard instead, you know. And when we fry something, you know, we saved that [grease]…, especially a pork chop. Oh, my God, that was a luxury then.”

CLOTHING

DEPRESSION CLOTHING

“Children from homes in the lower wage brackets were often not able to come to school because of a lack of clothing, especially shoes. Many of the La Junta teachers contributed voluntarily to a clothing fund to keep such children in school, even though some of us were also helping our parents or sisters and brothers.”

SHELTER

KITCHENS

“Most evenings were spent in the kitchen—the only warm room. When it was time for bed we scurried upstairs and climbed in with a hot brick or hot-water bottle to keep the feet warm. Electric blankets and plug-in heating pads would have made our young years so much easier, but those weren’t invented yet.”


SPANISH-AMERICAN HOUSES

“The Spanish speaking people have built their own communities in various parts of the city, where they have erected their own homes of adobe, simple 2 to 3 room structures, with rough board floors. They settled in the older part of the city and along the banks of the Platte River.”

Excerpt from *Pueblo City Guide* in “Racial Groups,” Writers’ Program, Colorado, Colorado Historical Society Library, [1941?].
FAMILIES, CHILDREN, AND SCHOOLS

FAMILY LIFE

IMMIGRANT FAMILIES LEARN ENGLISH

“Few of the [immigrant] children in our school [in the 1920s] knew any English when they entered. Their parents paid scant heed to some of the subjects the children studied--but not so with English! The children were made to repeat English lessons at home--and in this way, of course, parents learned the language too.”


AN IMMIGRANT WOMAN

“I was hurt. I don’t like it here. I cry and cry. I don’t know anybody except my uncle and auntie, but even them I don’t see them for a long time..., and I cry and I tell you one thing, if the way wasn’t with the sea, with the water, I walk home.”


SPANISH-AMERICAN FAMILIES

“The Spanish-Americans usually raise large families, and strong family affection is a racial trait. The family is the important unit in society, and parental authority is highly respected. The children are trained in the all-too-often forgotten art of simple and gracious courtesies that are often neglected by Americans in the hustle and bustle of daily life.”

DEARFIELD FAMILIES

“There are now in Eastern Colorado 500 colored families on farms and 2000 Negro farmers and farm hands.

Dearfield settlement has laid a great foundation for the building of the wealthiest Negro community in the world. It is fortunate in its productive soil, its climatic conditions, its close proximity to water, fuel, railroads, and the vest markets, which always have a demand for available products.

This is merely a movement to promote the welfare of the Negroes and place them on a higher plane. Our settlement includes only hard working honest persons, who are willing to do their share of the work if they can reap; their reward in the form of a substantial living for themselves and their families.”

Oliver Jackson, quoted in *Denver Post*, [no mo. or day], 1917.
CHILDREN

COASTER WAGONS

“When I was a small boy [in the 1920s], not many kids rode bicycles, which were considered more of a means of transportation than a toy or a recreational vehicle. We had tricycles, coaster wagons, and homemade scooters. I don’t even recall any bicycle racks at the elementary schools I attended.”


HOME MADE TOYS

“Many children did not have nice toys. Jack Dempsey, who grew up in the San Luis Valley, described the toys he played with in the following account.

We never had any “store” toys. We had to make our own playthings. Chips of wood became boats, sticks became spears, bits of old rope became lariats. We were able to make fairly respectable bows and arrows. We had a lot of fun with these things.”


RUBBER GUNS

“Young people today don’t play with rubber guns. You took a Model A inner tube, cut it around like a big flat rubber band, notched the end of a wooden lath board, and stretched that inner tube from the notch back to a close pin trigger. When the trigger released, the rubber band flew toward the target. The longer the barrel, the better the stretch. A knot in the tube produced a distinct sting upon the human target.”

SCHOOLS

A SCHOOL OF THE 1920S

“The Cameron School of 1926 was quite different from the school of the '90s. We had no resident school nurse, no school library, no gym, and neither a kitchen nor a hot lunch program. No students were bused, and since we had an hour off at noon we walked home for lunch. We ate fast and got back to school in time for some playground time before afternoon classes started.”


SCHOOLS DURING DEPRESSION TIMES

“School hot lunch programs began during the 1930s, as Ruth R. Bruns, a teacher, remembered:

Two children from such a [poor] family arrived each day carrying shiny half-gallon honey pails for lunch baskets. When most of us gathered for lunch like one big happy family, these two asked permission to go off by themselves....The truth finally became evident. Those shiny lunch pails contained NO FOOD. Pride had kept the children from confiding in me....A hot lunch program seemed the answer and soon the official wheels were turning. Government surplus foods were available to schools such as ours.”


THE BOOKMOBILE

"'Here comes the Bookmobile!' was first heard throughout Pueblo County in 1948.... Pueblo's McClelland Public Library furnished the books for the [bookmobile] which visited the rural schools throughout the county.... The first truck had a metal floor and when the weather was really cold, ice would form on the floor and service was much speedier.... The youngsters didn't linger while choosing their books, as they loved to do on more pleasant days.”

PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

“The second year my sister and I decided we needed some swings and teeter-totters for each school. so we planned a program, a box supper and a small carnival....We had a fortune teller, a fish pond, stunts, jokes and many other typical carnival games for entertainment...

From the sale of the boxes and the carnival we took in about $70.00 which was considered a lot of money...

Our father, with our help, put up the equipment for both schools. These were the first schools on the prairie to have playground equipment.”

WORK AND WORK PLACES

HOUSE WORK

GIRLS’ CHORES

“The girls would help one another. My mother would get up and fix breakfast…and the girls would clean up the house and wash dishes. They [took] care of the inside and helped with the little children too.”

COAL MINING

THE COMPANY STORE

“Everything centered around the mine and the company that owned it. The miners weren’t paid in regular money, but in script [scrip]. Script was sort of a coupon. You would buy what you needed at the Company Store and pay for it with the script…. Anyway, the Company Store carried everything from soup to nuts. It was just generally understood that you traded at the Company Store. You could be blackballed and might even lose your job if you didn’t do your business there.”


DEATH OF A BOY MINER

“When the Vulcan boom came, we moved there. . . . My son, Johnnie, died there. He was working in the mine and contracted pneumonia and didn’t last but a few days. He was a good boy; I miss him.”

Mary Nichols Williams, (1934), CWA Interviews, Document 350/68, Colorado Historical Society

AN IMMIGRANT MINER

“I left Europe because my folks wanted me to become a priest, and I run away from there. It took me 38 days on a boat [and train] until we get to Trinidad and Engleville [Colorado]. I started work [in a coal mine]. I was a little over 18. Believe it or not, I cry many, many times, why did I come? My hands was full of blisters.”

FARMING

DRY FARMING
“The promise of the West—then as now—is not always what it seems…. Those golden grain fields usually are not what you might think: an annual phenomenon [event]. They are usually the product of two years’ rainfall accumulated through the practice of summer fallowing. There isn’t enough rain or snowfall to grow a crop every year with 13 inches of annual precipitation.”

Lee Olson, Denver Post, Jan. 27, 1980.

DUST STORMS
“It was so dark [during a dust storm] they let school out; Dad and I tried to drive just three blocks and we got lost…. The street lights went on at 2 P. M..... Dust blew in the attics of many houses, and the weight of the dirt caused ceilings to fall in. Even the birds were afraid to fly. Folks, that’s what a dust storm was, and once you have been in one, you’ll never forget it.”


IMPACT OF DUST BOWL
“It was tough going in 1928, ’29, ’30, and through the Dust Bowl. That got rid of a lot of people. The years when the dust was blowing were the tough ones. I’ve seen brand new cars come through and were seriously damaged by the dust storms. Not just the paint, but the dust would get in the engines, too.:”


A BLOW OUT
“The hardships of the depression were [made worse] by the dust storms. A field that was green with wheat two inches high could be bare the next day after one of these storms hit, the wheat blown out by the roots. I remember one big storm. so dense was the dust that it [blocked out] the sun.”

SELLING

A DRY GOODS STORE

“The Simpson-Easterday Dry Goods Company owned by Robert Simpson and my father stood on the west side of Eighth Avenue.... The interior of the store was one big room, nearly two stories high.... The shoe department, especially, used high wall space to stack the many boxes of shoes.... A moveable ladder attached to a high rail allowed easy access to the boxes.”

MANUFACTURING

GATES TIRE FACTORY

“The automobile industry has brought to Denver a tire manufacturing concern, which produces 150 tires and 450 inner tubes a day. This production has grown from nothing to its present capacity in one year. This is the only tire factory west of the Missouri river and east of the Pacific coast.”


RUSSELL STOVER CANDIES

“Mrs. Stover’s Bungalow Candies were first manufactured by Mrs. Russell Stover in her “bungalow home” in September 1923. (923 Detroit, Denver, Colorado). She made fine home-made candies and then having built up a reputation—opened a small store in the Home Public Market, December 1, 1923. For two years, she continued making candies at her home; in the meantime, she opened several “black and white” stores—carrying the same black and white motif in the boxes used for packing the candies.

In 1926, a factory was built at 748 Lincoln and the first delivery “truck,” a motorcycle whose sidecar carried 300 lbs. Of candy, was purchased. . . . By 1931, the company had approximately 1,000 agencies in 38 states carrying “Mrs. Stover’s Candies” exclusively.”

GATES RUBBER COMPANY

“The founding of the company in Colorado was an accident. The two Gates brothers came here after graduating from the University of Michigan as mining engineers to engage in mining. When this business did not pan out, they invested their capital of $1500 in leather halters and gradually branched out into the rubber business. They formed a closed corporation and have developed a business, which in 1940 sold 16 million dollars worth of goods. Their payroll of $4,300,000 was distributed among 3,200 employees. .

Five thousand different articles are made by the company. About 30 per cent of the business is devoted to the manufacture of tires and tubes—70 per cent of the products being other types of rubber goods.”


PUEBLO STEEL MAKING

The steel is made in the open hearth. The “Ingot Buggy” carries away the glowing 11,000 pound mass. Tiny men manipulating huge tongs lower it into the roaring pit for an exactly timed stay, during which it is turned several times so the heat penetrates throughout.

White hot it dazzles your eyes as it's lifted from the pit, and dumped with a clang at the blooming rolls.

One of the features of any steel mill is the fewness of people. Here and there you see a person, dwarfed to doll size, moving amid the giant machinery. But the huge mill seems, on the whole, to move almost of its own will.

Roscoe Fleming in Rocky Mountain Empire Magazine (April 3, 1949).

PUEBLO’S SMELTERS

“In the afternoon we arrived in Pueblo, a very pleasant and interesting town.... One already sees here numerous smelters and factories, among which the most important is the one producing Bessemer steel; several train lines create locally an important communications nexus.”

ALEXANDER AIRCRAFT CO.

“One area manufacturer of planes about that time was the Alexander Company in Colorado Springs, which produced the Eaglerock plane. These aircraft...had more than their share of crashes. It got so bad that people made crude jokes about them such as: They call the planes Eaglerocks because they fly like an eagle and fall like a rock. Their track record finally became so bad that, as I understand, the authorities in charge of flying regulations banned further manufacturing of the Eaglerock.”

SERVICES

THE TELEPHONE EXCHANGE

“When an operator received a call from a subscriber he would shout to a boy stationed behind him, who would grab the plug and cord from the operator and run with it across the room, sticking the plug into the hold [hole?] designated. Often it took two boys to make the connection. The result was that these boys were running and jumping wildly about, crawling under each other’s legs, leaping frog-fashion over one another, knocking each other down, and raising such bedlam that the operators could not hear many of the numbers given over the wire.”

COMMUNITY LIFE

SOCIAL LIFE

PARTY LINE PHONES

“Because the ranches were far apart, the social life was limited. I recall that twenty families were on the same party line. Before one finished his telephone conversation nearly everyone had joined in the chat. I was great for the long, lonely winter days, but a person had to be very discreet.”

CELEBRATIONS

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

“I recall that I had seen a toy steam-engine in Daniel's and Fisher's Christmas display would have liked it more than anything; but I realized it was beyond our means, so I asked Santa Claus only for a bag of marbles. When I arose in Christmas morning, I found on my dresser a set of toy soldiers and a bag of marbles.

After breakfast I was playing with the soldiers and Mother asked me if I was sure that I found all of my gifts, so I went into the bedroom and by the head of my bed saw a box which I opened and my heart almost stopped—there was my steam-engine!”


FOURTH OF JULY

“A week or so before the Fourth, Dad would take Margaret and me [to]...Eddie Weiss's "Noah's Ark." There he would oversee our purchases of fireworks and pick up the tab.... As the Fourth dawned we made sure that no neighbor was left unaware that our nation's birth day was no time to sleep. Our supplies of firecrackers were rapidly depleted....

By the time Mother called us three kids (including Dad) in to breakfast, all but our nighttime fireworks had gone up in smoke. After breakfast we would walk downtown to see the parade. Often we would take a picnic lunch to eat in the park.:

SPANISH-AMERICAN WEDDINGS

“A wedding of the Spanish speaking people is always an occasion for great celebration. The groom must furnish the bridal outfit, and if the bride is never again dressed in silks, she is attired in silks and satins for the wedding. The feast is also furnished by the groom, and as long as the cakes, the wine, and the meat last, the guests stamp happy feet to the guitar and accordion players’ own versions of classical and modern numbers.”

Excerpt from *Pueblo City Guide* in “Racial Groups,” Writers’ Program of Colorado, Colorado Historical Society Library, [1941?].

MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

“On Sept. 15th and 16th the Spanish speaking people hold a celebration commemorating the initiation of the Independence from Spain, and on May 5th the defeat of the French army in 1862 in Mexico. During these celebrations they select from a group of girls their most beautiful and most popular senoritas as Queen to preside over the festivities, while the other girls serve as maids of honor or condesas. The festival is celebrated with dancing and singing. Speeches are made relative to the event and in honor of the heroes of the date. In the singing and dancing the children take a large part.”

Excerpt from *Pueblo City Guide* in “Racial Groups,” Writers’ Program of Colorado, Colorado Historical Society Library, [1941?].
RECREATION

PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

“The second year my sister and I decided we needed some swings and teeter-totters for each school. So we planned a program, a box supper and a small carnival.... We had a fortune teller, a fish pond, stunts, jokes and many other typical carnival games for entertainment...

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Our father, with our help, put up the equipment for both schools. These were the first schools on the prairie to have playground equipment.”


DANCES

“Dances were special events for settlers on the plains during the 1920s, as Edith L. Stout remembered:

People came from miles around to the Saturday night dance. They brought baskets of food for a midnight snack. We danced until four or five in the morning.... A homesteader's life was hard. The dances were about the only relaxation. People were warm and friendly and they really took care of each other.”


DENVER 'S AUTO CAMP

“More people than constitute the population of the ordinary small town last summer enjoyed life in the open under the trees in the public camping grounds at Denver’s beautiful City Park. For in two years these attractive grounds became so widely known throughout the nation that during the summer months of 1916 they were utilized by 5,407 motorists.... There were 1,963 automobiles registered in the City park camp directory last summer and they came from thirty-seven different states, from Canada and the Philippine Islands.”

AN AUTO OUTING

“In the afternoon I had an invitation from the Edwardses...to take an automobile trip to Lookout Mountain. The outing was breathtaking because of the wonderful air.... After the outing all three autos dropped in at [the Edwardses] for supper.... And so I spent Easter.”

ENTERTAINMENT

DENVER’S MOVIE DISTRICT

“In 1915, when on a visit to Denver, Thomas Edison reportedly said that Curtis was "the best-lighted street in the world," between 15th and 18th. At night it was almost as bright as day--so bright in fact, that no city street lights were ever used.

Every theater lobby was a dazzling place, jammed with waiting patrons. Marquees were ablaze with traveling electric words and signs. Blinking and intermittent spot and floodlights were on every business establishment and surplus World War I carbon arc anti-aircraft searchlights roamed the sky.”


HATTIE MCDANIEL: MOVIE STAR AS A YOUNG GIRL

“Her favorite teacher, Louise Poirson, often permitted Hattie to do what she liked best: to stand before the class reciting poetry or singing popular songs.... Hattie herself said that she sang so much as a child that it sometimes got on the household nerves. "My mother would say, 'Hattie I'll pay you to hush,' and she'd give me a dime. But in just a few minutes I'd be singing and shouting again."

SPORTS

BASEBALL IN MINING TOWNS

“[Baseball was] the only entertainment there was. Oh, a circus would come once in a while. But base ball, that’s all there was going on every Sunday…. Well, if you was a ball player, you’d get a job [in the coal mines]. They always wanted good ballplayers.”


FOOTBALL

“Our high school played a football game at Limon, and the entire team suited up in Hugo and we rode in the back of a stock truck to the game.”


WOMEN’S ATHLETIC SUITS

“I don’t mind telling you it’s not easy to race around the courts in those miserably hot, voluminous blue serge gym bloomers and long sleeved "middy" blouses we wear for the girls’ "phys-ed" classes we take turns teaching. I hate the floppy, wide collars on the blouses with a passion. I’ve almost strangled myself a couple of times when I caught my black tie in a low [tennis] shot.”

TRANSPORTATION

AUTOS

MODEL T FORDS

“Women who bought autos in the 1920s had to learn how to repair them, as Grace Fitzgerald remembered:

I could now go in debt and purchase a Model "T" Ford, crank and all.... Roads and tires were poor and I had to learn also to patch inner tubes. More than once I had to wrap my...shirts around my knees, and wiggle under the car... Colorado’s eastern towns were far apart and my Model "T" never broke down anywhere near civilization.”


RECKLESS DRIVERS

“Reckless drivers of automobiles and motorcycles are again occupying the attention of the police and drastic measures are being taken to abate the nuisance. Complaints are being received at headquarters daily concerning the manner in which many autoists are violating the speed regulations and other ordinance provisions.... It seems probable that within a few months motor machines will be forbidden along certain sections of Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth streets during the busy traffic hours.”

Denver Municipal Facts, Vol. 1, No. 34 (October 9, 1909): 13

A NEW MODEL T

“The car was tall. The wheel diameter was great and the body was designed to be high....Farmers and ranchers had no problem finding room for their tall hats.

The two features that most fascinated me were the crank and the horn. The horn had that powerful aah-OOO-ga sound that would delight any noise-loving boy....

That remarkable automobile was to be the motorized magic carpet that opened the way to many adventures for us.”

AUTO CAMPING

In the following account, a woman describes an auto camping trip she took in 1913.

“We took with us three “gold medal” cots and fiber mattresses—such as are in sue by the officers of our army,—sleeping-bags of eiderdown, soft, light but very warm, and blankets, with sheets for the hot nights when we slept on top of our bags. A seven by seven tent, two enamel wash basins and a pitcher, plenty of towels…. The camp was lighted by electricity supplied by a small but strong spot-light from the car. Often for greater illumination the headlights were used, but the spot-light, an acetylene lamp and candle lantern supplied plenty of light.”

Caroline Poole, A Modern Prairie Schooner on the Transcontinental Trail: The story of a Motor Trip (San Francisco, 1919): 1-3.
BUSSSES

TO DENVER BY BUS

“It is raining. After dinner we went [from Denver] by bus for five dollars to Colorado Springs, a summer resort in the mountains. We returned to Denver by bus at 9:15 P.M. Everywhere there are many used buses for sale.”

AIRLINES

AIRLINE STEWARDESSES

“The physical examinations are fairly difficult to pass and the majority of airline companies demand that their stewardesses be registered nurses. No young woman will be employed by a large airline company if she wears glasses, has ever had mastoid or sinus trouble, has had any broken bones, or has ever undergone a serious operation. . . . The airline hostess must be free from scars or deformities, her feet must be in good condition, and she must have excellent posture. At the time she applies for work, she must be between 21 and 26 years of age. She should be at least five foot, two inches tall, but not more than five feet, five inches in height.

Neither railroad nor airline companies will accept applicants who are married; nor will they permit their hostesses to continue in their employ after marriage.”