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FOOD, CLOTHING AND SHELTER

FOOD

RAISING MOST OF THEIR OWN FOOD

“True, some canned foods were available [in 1900]. Dad bought crates (twenty-four cans) of peas, corn, and tomatoes. Most of our fruit came from our own orchard. Dad had set out apple trees that bore fruit from July on, and the long-lasting varieties kept until the next spring. We had currants, gooseberries, raspberries, cherries, plums, and pears. I can still see the glasses of jelly set up on the window ledge to catch and reflect the sun and be admired. Before the Mason jar, fruits were dried or preserved in sugar. Sugar and flour were bought in one-hundred-pound bags and lard in fifty-pound pails or tins. In the summer there was a large garden. . . . Meal preparations were always so much easier when the lettuce, onions, and radishes were big enough to eat. From then on there was a procession of vegetables to the cantaloupe and watermelon, and finally the parsnips.”


REFRIGERATING FOOD

“Dad had a unique arrangement for keeping milk and butter. An enclosed shed housed a long tank made of wood, which was insulated and lined with zinc. Two or three large cakes of ice were dug out of the cinders in the ice house, washed, and put in the tank. The milk was strained into tall cans and let down into the icy water. Fresh meat and butter were kept in it too. A tight lid, also zinc lined, kept the heat and dust out. Many a tasty dish resulted from this convenience: ice cream, lemonade, iced tea, pitchers of thick cream and milk, and pounds of sweet butter.

“The ice was "harvested" in the winter. Our lake was a reservoir for irrigation water brought from the mountains via a canal. . . . The water then was fresh and clean and the ice was cut from it when it attained a thickness of six to twelve inches. It was sawed out in blocks, loaded into wagons, stored in a deep hole, and covered with cinders. A house was built over the pit for protection from rain and sun. There was always enough ice to last all summer.”

BAKING BREAD

“Bread was made two or three times a week. Yeast was sold in packages of small dried cakes and, after soaking in warm water to which a little sugar had been added, was turned into a "sponge" and was always made up the night before baking day. After breakfast enough flour was added to make a firm dough and it was set out to raise. About mid-morning a piece of the dough was made into rolls and baked for dinner. The bread was baked in the afternoon. Nothing every tasted quite so good as a heel of fresh warm bread spread with butter and honey and eaten in the middle of a long afternoon.”


RAISING THEIR OWN FOOD

“We milked cows, churned our own butter, sometimes molding it into rectangular cubes, especially if we sold some of it. We made cottage cheese. We also baked bread and sometimes ground wheat for cereal. We butchered our own beef and pork during the winter, canned or cured the meat for use in warmer weather. . . . We had no refrigeration. We build an ice house which was a rectangular hole in the ground in which blocks of ice were placed in straw and then covered with straw then a board cover placed over it.”


DINNER PARTIES ON THE PLAINS

“Several families came from Eastern Kansas to Colorado to homestead that same year, and we had lots of good times together. We would all gather at one home for Sunday dinner. The men usually played cards while the women cooked and tended the children. The menu might be pinto beans, fried rabbit, roasting ears from the corn field and wonderberry pie for dessert.... We always danced until daylight so we could see the wagon trails across the prairie to go home, as there were no fences or roads.”


HOME COOKING IN THE 1880’s

“Mother raised chickens and Father had a garden. We always had lots of butter. The cowboys enjoyed Mother’s home cooking....”

A CATTLEMAN’S DINNER, 1878

“I washed the dishes, took a warm bath and then wrote to a friend; after that got dinner -- applesauce, beans, rice, roast duck, bread and tea, spent the evening finishing my letters. Fine Day.... Mice disturbed me at night by running over me and rattling things generally as we slept on the floor.”


ROUND-UP FOOD

“The food on a roundup was always of the best. A fat calf would be killed for meat and this with potatoes, canned tomatoes, beans, and bread baked in a dutch oven, would satisfy the appetite of the hardest riding cowboy. And one may be sure that after a hard day’s ride with only a sandwich or two, and those eaten while riding, appetites were not lacking. And table cloths and napkins were a minus quantity. Each man’s grub would be handed out to him by the cooks, dished up in a tin plate. He found a comfortable seat on a rock or the wagon tongue and ate. At night each man crawled into his own tent or slept out under the stars, rolled in a blanket.”

Source Unidentified

HISPANIC SETTLERS’ BLUE CORN MEAL

"The principal [corn] meal that they did grind was from a blue kind of sweet corn that they had brought from New Mexico and which they grew there to make their flour. . . .

"At that time I can remember my grandmother talking about the different classes of flour that they had grown in those days, after the grinding in the Blue Mill. . . . The first grade was always called the floor [Jamie, check this, could it be flour?] or best of the meal, the second was the "semeta," which is pretty fair and the third, which was the poorest grade, was the "salvado," which would make a kind of a course biscuit or cookie."

BEANS, CHILI, AND STEW

"Up to forty years ago, cookstoves were almost unknown among the Mexicans. Meals were prepared over fires outside, or during bad weather, at fireplaces in the house. . . . Brass kettles were the main cooking utensil, a family’s social standing, depending on the number and size of these vessels. Even today, a common sight in the Mexican towns, is a woman tending the fire under a large brass kettle in which beans, chili, or mutton stew is cooking or perhaps the family washing is being boiled."


FOOD AT DEARFIELD

"The first year there were but seven families in the settlement. . . . We managed to get in some garden: corn, melons, pumpkins, squash, Mexican beans and some hay, and cleared some ground of sagebrush. We raised quite a lot of chickens, ducks, and turkeys. By assisting each other we managed to raise and store away enough produce to run us part way through the winter, which was a very cold one."


HARVEST MEALS

"The one thing I especially enjoyed about harvesting was the meals. At harvest time, I was one of the crew, and being a crew member, I was counted as a man, and as a man I ate at the first table. It was not like Sunday dinner, when you had guests or were guests at the neighbors. Then there was always a second table and the kids had to wait, watching the chicken on the platter dwindle down to backs and necks, the biscuits, the mashed potatoes and chicken gravy, and later the pie, vanishing, and you drooling and slowly starving to death."


BUFFALO MEAT

"Shortly after we came to [Greeley,] Colorado [in 1872], father went down the Platte on a buffalo hunt. He was gone three or four days and brought back a load of buffalo meat. We took the meat off of the bones and rubbed salt and pepper into it and hung it on the north side of the house. It dried and was the best meat one ever tasted. We had wild meat all the time for many years."

KILLING BUFFALO

“I have seen herds of buffalo so large that they stopped the trains. The men would get out on the platform of the train and shoot them as they went past. Sometimes they would fire from the windows. They did it just to kill them. Every fall, my father would go down the Platte toward Fort Morgan and kill our winter supply of meat. Sometimes I went with him. I have killed fifteen buffalo. They had practically disappeared by 1876.”

Source: George A. Colbert (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/25, Colorado Historical Society

APPLE PIE DAY IN RIFLE

“The apple pies were furnished by the local women, who took great pride in displaying their culinary skill in these spicy, fragrant pies baked to just the right shade of brown.

“Upon long wooden tables under the trees in the most attractive spot available, the pies were ranked in pungent rows. Each huge pastry was cut into 5 pieces furnishing each person with a tremendous portion.”

Source: Mrs. Lynn Kennedy in “Colorado Eats,” WPA Files, Box 5, Denver Public Library
CLOTHING

MOTHER'S APRONS

"Mother's dresses were made with tight bodices and full skirts. She also wore checked gingham aprons. The number of things she could use these for was endless. One unforgettable sight was seeing her coming toward the house with the hem of the apron gathered in one hand. She might be carrying apples or plums or turkey eggs or baby chicks, or perhaps freshly picked corn or cucumbers. Indoors the apron was handy for grasping hot pans or taking something from the stove."


CALICO DRESSES

"One time Mr. Fisher took a pail of potatoes to Walsenburg, and there sold the potatoes for two calico dresses for me. Of the greatest pride were these two dresses to me. To have two dresses at one time, and these both of calico, placed me on a high level among the people of the frontier."

Source: Cynthia Fisher (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 344/13. Colorado Historical Society

A COWBOY’S OUTFIT

“. . . The outfit of a cowboy--buckskin breeches with wide fringes running down the legs, pants stuck in boots, spurs on their high-heeled footwear, blue flannel shirt, red bandanna tied loosely about the neck with the knot at the back, a wide-brimmed hat covering their usually unkempt hair, and a brace of six-guns strapped to their hips."

THE COWBOYS’ CLOTHES

“It is the general impression among the people of the east, as well as with tourists of the great west, that the long hair, wide-rimmed hat, big spurs, fringed leggings, and other striking things in a cowboy's outfit and appearance are worn simply for show and bluster, but... the impression is entirely wrong.

...When the wind is blowing the sand like hot shot in our faces we would suffer greatly but for the protection afforded our eyes by the big-rimmed hat. When the mud is flying from the heels of stampeding cattle, or the terrible hail storms of the plains are pelting upon us, these hats are the best friends we have.

...As to our long hair, there are good reasons why we wear it. Our business is out of doors, rain or shine and in many changes of climate, and we have found from experience that the greatest protection to the eyes and ears is long hair. Old miners and prospectors know this well.

...[The big handkerchief] is frequently called into use as a veil during the fierce sand storms we encounter in crossing the country and that is why it is made so large. Being of inestimable service in the sand storms, we can't be too careful of the safety of our handkerchief. Tied about the neck it is handy and secure.

...The leather leggings of shaparajos--shaps, we call them--are worn by the cowboys to protect their clothes and limbs from the wear and tear of the heavy saddle, and also as protection against brushes with thorns, such as cactus, mesquite, and many other.

...Many people ask me why the cowboys wear such high heels on their boots. ...The heels on our boots are often two to four inches high, sloping greatly toward the sole of the foot. This is to keep our feet from slipping through the stirrups in times of danger; they are also kept in a comfortable position when riding. Our boots are made to ride in, not to walk.

Source: Broncho John H. Sullivan, Life and Adventures of the Genuine Cowboy. (1896). Western History Collection, Norlin Library, University of Colorado Library
LOG HOUSES

A LOG CABIN

“When the few scattered settlers in the region heard that Father was building a cabin...they came and helped him. This cabin was about eighteen feet long and fifteen feet wide. It was built of round logs and smaller logs were used for the roof. A large ridge pole was put across the logs were the walls were high enough and then smaller logs were laid on this ridge pole, forming the roof. ..

“In one side of this cabin there was a small window. The only doorway was cut in one end and the door itself was made of rough boards with a wooden latch that fit into a groove on the inside with a buckskin thong handing on the outside...In the other end of the room was a fireplace in which we burned pitch logs. One of these logs would burn all evening and threw out a cheery red glow. In addition to the fireplace, there was a small cook stove in one corner of the room and in another corner were two or three shelves to hold some dishes. We had a home-made table and a few broken chairs which Father had mended. There wasn't much room for furniture but we always had a trundle bed which could be pushed under the big bed in the daytime. We had an iron teakettle, iron pots, iron skillets, and iron handled knives and forks. We had one kerosene lamp and some candles that Mother made out of tallow, but we seldom used either as the fireplace threw out enough light for the small one-room cabin... The floors were made of rough boards from the saw mill. After much wearing and scrubbing they became smooth.”


DUGOUTS

"Some [of the first settlers] were in tents, some in dugouts and some just had a cave in the hillside. The first year there were but seven families in the settlement and we had only three teams [of horses].... That winter only two of us had wooden houses, and the suffering was intense. We had scarcely any wood to burn. Buffalo chips and sagebrush were our chief fuel. Three of our horses died from starvation and the other three were too weak to pull the empty wagon."

LOG CABINS

"Everyone in the earlier years [in Routt County] lived in log cabins with dirt roofs."

Source: E. A. Brooks, Routt County (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 358/25, Colorado Historical Society

ADOBE HOUSES

ADOBE HOUSES

"After a days travel over the arid plain...we have arrived at the...Mexican[-American] town known as Culebra....It contains only adobe houses, extending along for half a mile on either side of the road and all joined together. The adobe is made of a fine alluvial soil ground with water into a stiff paste. It is then moulded into forms about three times the size of an ordinary brick. These are baked in the sun for a few days, and then used for building. The walls of the houses are thick and only one story high. The roof is perfectly flat and formed by stretching poles across from wall to wall and covering them with the adobe. It never rains enough at one time to saturate these roofs and consequently they do not leak...."

"We are staying at the house of Amidor Sanchez, one of the old and rich men of the place....The house is quite splendid in its way. The walls are covered with calico. Instead of carpets, they use cowhides, dressed with the hair on. The floor is entirely covered with them. A cushioned seat extends entirely around each room, and the walls are well covered with small paintings, most of which represent the crucifixion or some event in the life of Christ. The house contains eight rooms, each about 12 x 20 ft....All the people in the place are Catholics. A cross is stuck up in the room of almost every mud house."


SOD HOUSES

A GOOD SOD HOUSE

"We had a good sod house and a barn in the side of a hill. We never went hungry and always had plenty of fuel to keep us warm. The Frenchman Creek crossed our land and there was a water hole that did not ever go dry. ...The coyotes yelped at night, but we soon got used to their cry. I brought a great many flowers with me from Illinois, and they did fine in our sod house."

Source: Mary E. Wood (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 341/48, Colorado Historical Society.
A FEW LEAKS

“As the pioneer built his sod house, he took thought only for the grossest
comfort. A few leaks during a heavy rainstorm were not unendurable hardships,
and a bit of dust shifting down from his roof boards was also no great matter. To
have endured the hardships of the overland trip in those pioneer days in the
canvas-covered wagon made a sod house appear the most perfect of shelters.”

Source: Clara H. Ehrlich, "My Childhood on the Prairie," The Colorado
Magazine, 51 (Spring, 1974), 120.

SOD HOUSE ROOFS

“The rafters ran lengthwise the building and the roof sheathing ran up and
down the slope of the roof, from a wall plate to the ridge rafter. Tar-paper was
laid over the sheathing and covered with the same type of sods which were used
in the walls, laid with the grass side down.

“Although hailstorms ruined nearly every other type roof, which was used
in the neighborhood, I never knew one of these sod roofs to leak during the
fifteen or twenty years that the buildings remained standing.”

(February 1965), 47.

WARM IN WINTER, COOL IN SUMMER

“When I was married in 1904, we went to live with my husband's
parents.... They lived in an old sod house in Godfrey Bottoms on the old Denver-
Greeley highway....

“The house was made of sod, with walls 2 1/2 feet thick, plastered outside
and in. Inside, we always papered the ceiling and walls. It was warm in winter
and cool in summer.”

Source: Mrs. Ernest C. Norris, La Salle, Colo., in Jack Foster, ed. Rocky
FRAME HOUSES

A HOMESTEAD CABIN

“An 8 by 10 [feet] plank house was erected with one door and one window, and all of the "built-in" features--a cracker box over the head of my bed for books and one over the table for dishes. The table and bed were stationary, made of up-to-date planks. A trunk, small stove and two chairs were the furnishings of one of the first domiciles [homes] where Holyoke is now situated.”

Source: Lizzie Gordon Buchanan (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc 341/18, Colorado Historical Society

SAW MILLS IN GREELEY

“Mr. Smith now [1872] had to go to work in the saw mills. There were three saw mills in Greeley making lumber for the houses that were being built. Logs were floated down from the mountains and made up into lumber and posts. Mr. Smith worked in the saw mill for three years.”

Source: Mrs. Pitt Smith (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/13, Colorado Historical Society
FAMILY ACTIVITIES

SATURDAY NIGHT BATHS

“Imagine if you can the simple matter of bathing. This was a Saturday night activity and started off immediately after the supper was cleared away. A wash boiler of water was put on the fire to heat, rugs and papers were spread on the newly scrubbed floor, and a galvanized tub was brought in and partially filled with warm water. The oven door was let down and a towel spread on it to warm. As I was next to the youngest I was second for the bath. My long braids were pinned on top of my head (One's hair was washed in daytime so it would dry before night. to go to bed with damp hair was sure to bring on a cold or some other illness. I was a long time getting over this belief.) My clothes were removed and I climbed in the tub.”

WOMEN

MOTHER DID NOT LIKE IT AT FIRST

“Mother did not like it here [Greeley] at first. She was born in Scotland of somewhat genteel parents and did not like a pioneering life. Many times I have seen her walking up and down the river bank crying as tho her heart would break. She disliked the monotony and the hardships. she became reconciled in a year or so, however, and never complained.”

Colorado Historical Society

A WOMAN HOMESTEADER

“In 1886 I came back [to Colorado] and pre-empted one hundred and sixty acres on which a person was required to live at least six months and make certain improvements and pay $1.25 per acre. An 8 by 10 [feet] plank house was erected. . . . One night shortly after retiring, I heard someone walking towards the house. I was frightened. I knew by the noise--the boots striking together that it was not one of my people, but a stranger. He knocked on my door and asked to be directed to a near-by place. I sent him to my brother-in-law, B. F. Moore. This stranger told my folks ‘he guessed there was a woman alone in the shanty northeast of there for her voice sounded like she was scared to death.’ I thought I had done wonderfully well and had not given away that I was frightened. My door was locked and a very large trunk, a ‘Saratoga,’ was wedged in between the foot of the bed and door. . . .”

Source: Lizzie Gordon Buchanan (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc 341/18,
Colorado Historical Society
CHILDREN

A GIRL'S CHORES

“One of my chores was to pick the peas or beans and get them ready for cooking. . . .Sometimes I had to dig new potatoes too. . . .Gathering greens, washing and picking them over, washing beets, and peeling turnips kept me out of mischief all morning.”


GROWING UP ON A RANCH

“In 1870, my father filed on eighty acres of land near the present site of Kersey. Our cattle had open range and I herded cattle from as early as I can remember. In those days the first thing a boy did was to ride. . . .

“My father died in 1879 and the ranch was managed by my mother and my brother and myself.”

Source: CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/41. Colorado Historical Society

CHILDREN'S GAMES

“A favorite recess game was called "Shinny-in-the-hole." This required a circle some eight or ten feet in diameter. Around the circle were dug small holes, one less than the number of players. A larger hole was dug in the center. Each player had a straight stick. The puck was an empty, evaporated milk can. The object of the game was for the one who was "it" to knock the can into the center hole. If he succeeded, he could name the next "it." The boys in the circle tried to keep the can away from the hole. However, they had to guard the hole assigned to them by keeping the end of their stick in it. If the one who was "it" could get his stick in an unoccupied hole, the one whose hole it was, became "it" A satisfactory number of bruised shins, stamped toes, and hurt feelings resulted. The one difficulty connected with the game was finding suitable sticks in a country without trees. Broom sticks were favored but were hard to come by. Brooms seemed to last a long time.”

ROUGH AND TUMBLE GAMES

“These were rough and tumble games and not always safe for us smaller children. Andy Over was a ball game. Teams took up positions on the east and west sides of the schoolhouse. A rubber handball was tossed over the roof by one team with a loud shout of ‘Andy Over’ to alert the opposite team that the ball was coming over. If the ball was caught, the catcher ran to the other side as fast as he could to touch someone on the opposing team. If one was touched by the ball, he must join the ‘touching’ team. The game was won when all the players were on the same side. Since one never knew in which direction the throwing team was running, it was a strenuous game, and children were knocked down in the excitement. But the really rough game was Pull-Away. Again, two teams, each one behind its "line" a few feet from the school fence. The aim here was for one whole team to run across the opposing team’s line without being touched. Someone from the ‘it’ side stood forth and challenged his opponents with a taunt:

Pump, pump pull-away
If you don’t come
I’ll pull you away.

Then the effort to cross was made.

“This scramble could result in injuries as I well know, since I was hurt seriously in such a game when I was eight or nine. One of the oldest and largest boys fell on my right leg. . . . It was a very long time until I walked again unaided.”

Source: Clara Hinderbrand Ehrlich, My Prairie Childhood (Fort Collins, 1977), 41.
SCHOOLS

SUMMER VACATION FOR IMMIGRANT CHILDREN
"The parents would go to the school board and get a permit to take their children out of school early in May. They would go to the fields and work until November, sometimes until after Thanksgiving or after the harvest, nailing up their homes in Globeville before leaving for the fields."

Source: Mrs. Chopyak, a Polish immigrant. WPA Files Box 9, Denver Public Library

AN HISPANIC BOY
"As a boy I never had much schooling except what friends taught me. For a time I assisted my father in farming and the care of his sheep. In 1895 I went into the sheep business myself."

Source: Teodoro Abeyta (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 59/3. Colorado Historical Society

SCHOOL SPORTS
"School athletics were practically nil and were individual only as far as the boys were concerned and were confined largely to 'marbles,' 'tops,' 'foot and a half,' and 'jacks.' Later, the girls stole the latter. I don't remember Martha [his sister], or 'Mattie,' as we all knew her, as ever indulging in 'hop scotch,' nor do I know if it had been invented. Probably she and her associates were limited to such activities as 'charm string,' 'autograph albums,' and 'bean bags.'"


BUILDING A COUNTRY SCHOOLHOUSE, 1909
"The men set a day, brought their sod cutters, wagons, spades and carpenter tools and went to work. In a remarkably short time the building was up, the windows and door installed, and the two little frame structures out back, one labeled boys, the other girls, completed. A teacher was found and school was underway, All eight grades were taught in one room."

A SOD SCHOOL HOUSE

"I went to school in a sod school house near Latham. It had a rough board floor and a dirt roof. There was a window on each side and there was a window pane. The walls were about two feet thick and we used to pile our wraps in the windows for there was no place to hang them. Sometimes a button would strike against a pane and break it or the boys would throw a ball through. Whenever it rained the roof would leak for an hour or so afterwards."

Source: Mrs. Jennie Lucas (1941), "Pioneer Education," WPA Interviews, Box 5, Denver Public Library

BUILDING A SOD SCHOOL HOUSE

“The men set a day, brought their sod cutters, wagons, spades, and carpenter tools and went to work. In a remarkably short time the building was up, the windows and door installed, and the two, little frame structures out back, one labeled boys, the other girls, completed. A teacher was found and school was underway. All eight grades were taught in the one room."

CLASSROOMS

CLASSROOM BENCHES
"There were about twelve pupils. We sat in high straight benches that a carpenter had made. They were much too high and our feet seldom touched the floor. At class time we recited from a big long bench up near the teachers desk."

Source: Mrs. Jennie Lucas (1941), "Pioneer Education," WPA, Box 5, Denver Public Library

THE ONE-ROOM SCHOOL
"I still have a soft spot in my heart for the one-room school. It is true, perhaps, that you cannot have as many activities--of some kinds--as you can in graded schools. But, when you put eighteen or twenty kids, ages six to sixteen together, you will have plenty of activity. While one class was reciting, the rest were supposed to be studying. You usually listen in, however, to the grades ahead of you because you would be covering the same ground later on. . . .

"We had the usual spelling and arithmetic papers to hand in. We also had spelling bees and "cyphering" matches. The possibility of having someone younger or in a lower grade "spell you down" was a powerful incentive to study. Having older children help the younger ones with their lessons was also a useful learning tool. . . .

"At any rate, the system made schooling possible and it fitted the needs of our times."


A BAD DAY AT SCHOOL
"When I was six my folks decided I should go to school. This all ended quite tragically as the teacher didn't tell me about the sanitary arrangements which were about 100 feet back of the school house. So I ate my lunch at recess, wet my pants before noon, then walked home in sheer embarrassment and didn't go to school again at Fine Flats."

SPELLING BEE

“During the winter of 1887, school was held in a little one-story, one-room building, and one of the popular entertainments during that winter was a spelling school which was always held on Friday night and which not only the school children, but the entire population in and around Springfield attended. They chose up sides, getting everybody into the game.”

FARM WORK, TOOLS, AND TECHNOLOGY

IRRIGATED FARMING

LEARNING HOW TO IRRIGATE

“The Number 3 ditch [at Greeley] was surveyed by an engineer named Nettledon. It was made by teams and scrapers, and was a slow process. Water came down the ditch in 1871. There were no reservoirs [for storing water], the water being taken directly from the Poudre river near Fort Collins. The colonists knew little about irrigation or the running of water and much was wasted.”

Source: James McDonald (1934), CWA Interviews, Colorado Historical Society

RULES FOR IRRIGATED FARMING

“The mainstay of every crop on the farm, except for the wild hay meadow, was the irrigation ditch. Once the natural moisture left by melting snows and the spring rains had been sucked up by the greedy sun, the water from the Big Ditch must be brought to all the fields. No farmer could open his headgate whenever he saw the need for irrigating, nor could he use the water at will. The supply, not being limitless, was carefully apportioned so that every farmer ‘under the ditch,’ so the phrase went, would get his share, since the water was not free and each farmer paid for his share.

“The need for just distribution worked a certain hardship upon the farmer. During the period of days when the water was ‘his,’ he could use it night and day. If he were careless, he could, of course, shut his headgate at night and go to his rest, or he could set his water in a certain field and let it flow all night regardless of the needs of the plants. In an irrigated territory, an overabundance of water can be fully as harmful, or even more so, than the lack of it. All these factors impinging on a careful farmer's thoughts led to irrigating around the clock during those days when the water was available.”

Source: Clara Hilderman Ehrlich, My Prairie Childhood (Fort Collins, 1977), 31-32.

THE DEL NORTE CANAL

“The Del Norte [is] the largest in the world. The principal canal is one hundred feet wide, and has fifty-six miles of constructed channel…. It delivers two thousand five hundred cubic feet of water per second, or one billion six hundred twenty million gallons every twenty-four hours.”

THE GREELEY CANAL

“The ‘Big Greeley Ditch,’ as it is called, is on the north side of the Cache la Poudre River. It is thirty-six miles long, with three to three and one-half feet depth of water, and is twenty-five feet wide on the bottom at its head, diminishing to fifteen feet at Greeley…. The cost of this irrigating canal was sixty-six thousand dollars.”

DRYLAND FARMING

LEARNING TO FARM IN A DRY CLIMATE

“It was soon discovered that corn was an unreliable crop for dry land farming--I suppose any of the "old-timers" could have told us that, but we were not listening--and we gradually shifted to the grain sorghums (milo maize and feterita are the two I remember) and the more rapidly maturing small grains [used for livestock feed]. If we had a fairly good snow cover in the winter, a couple of good rains in the spring months would almost always produce a crop of wheat. Summer fallowing, a practice of leaving a field clean and idle for a year to allow moisture to accumulate, was talked about but never practiced. Land available to any settler was too limited.”


DROUGHT IN BACA COUNTY

“The spring of 1889 opened up as a very promising season and a large acreage of crops was planted.... The crops came up very well, however, but in June the hot southwest winds started in and literally burned the tender crops in the field. This drought condition persisted for a number of years and by the summer of 1890 the people had to move out and left in droves. The streams, which had been quite substantial creeks, dried up.”


THE DROUGHT IN YUMA COUNTY

“This [a drought] of course made many people leave Yuma County. They left in any way that they possibly could. Many left by train, others packed and walked out. Horses, cattle and hogs were turned loose to roam the plains at their own will. The river was almost dried up and all the lakes and ponds in the county were about dried away. . . . In 1890 there were about 2600 people in Yuma County and in 1900 there were only a few over 1700. This famine if it may be called was a boon to the dry country of the west because it helped to develop new methods in tilling the soil. New tools were made and different ways developed so that the farmer could make money out of the dry soil.”

Source: J. Oliver Graham (1934), CWA Interviews Doc. 352/3, Colorado Historical Society
THE DROUGHT IN EASTERN COLORADO

“Burlington, Colorado
August 11, 1894

Dear Grandma & Grandpa:

. . . A great many people have left the country, in fact, nearly all that could get away, for there are so many mortgages that compel people to stay; a few families left in the night. One man who did our plastering, went by moonlight, but he left his cattle and farm machinery that were mortgaged on the prairie. His horses were so poor that they had to be helped up, and one died the next morning. . . .

By the way, there are an abundance of potatoes near Colorado Springs and we talk of taking a trip in a wagon, and bring back a supply, for there wasn’t a sign of a vegetable raised here. I think it would be nice to see the scenery.

We don’t want to give you the “blues” so I’ll close.

Lovingly yours,
Leila Walters”
RAISING WHEAT

THRESHING WHEAT

“The very most exciting time of the whole year was threshing. . . . The water wagon would pull in and then we’d hear a whistle and the steam engine drawing the separator would come puffing up the road. Planks were usually placed across the bridge to reinforce it. The turn at the gate required some maneuvering as it was a sharp right angle and the road wasn't very wide. . . . Soon we'd hear a long toot, the machinery would start, and thus began an exciting time for all. Grain pouring from the side of the separator emptied into sacks one bushel at a time. There were two spouts. While one sack was filling the other was taken off and loaded into a wagon backed up close. Barbara and I were allowed to ride back and forth on these wagons, and sometimes we would help pull the sacks back into the farther bins in the granary where a man stood to dump them through a hole in the floor.”


THE EXCITEMENT OF THRESHING TIME

“The odor of the new wheat, the dusty grey appearance of the men, the noise, the bustle, and all the men working together in the joy of the harvest was an experience that a child could never forget. At dusk the whistle blew, and everything stopped.”


WOMEN'S WORK AT THRESHING TIME

“The women of the house had their share of the work. All the neighbors who helped with the harvest ate with the family in the house. In the very early days it took several days to thresh all a man's grain. Usually there were up to twenty persons for the noon meal.”

GROWING POTATOES AND SUGAR BEETS

POTATOES AS A CASH CROP

"We decided that our best crop should be potatoes, for potatoes brought a higher price than did other products. My husband had no shoes, and with winter at hand, we decided to sell some of the potatoes. I groveled out the biggest potatoes and filled a small wooden pail with them, then Mr. Fisher took the potatoes to Rye where he exchanged them for a pair of shoes. "One time Mr. Fisher took a pail of potatoes to Walsenburg, and there sold the potatoes for two calico dresses for me."

Source: Cynthia Fisher (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 344/13. Colorado Historical Society

DIGGING POTATOES

"When it came to digging the potatoes, we simply plowed out the row, took an ordinary old water bucket, dug and kicked around in the loose dirt to get all the spuds we could find. We threw anything smaller than a hen's egg in small piles about twenty feet apart and saved them for seed."


CHILDREN IN SUGAR BEET FIELDS

"Here was a farm chores seemingly designed exactly for us. Every June for years to come was devoted to the thinning of sugar beets. The timing was correct for parents who valued the schools and would not keep their children out on the slightest excuse. By the time the green rows were large enough for thinning, school was over and the long summer holiday had begun."

GROWING FRUIT AND MELONS

ROCKY FORD MELONS

"In 1874, I put out about 40 acres of land in crops of grains and vegetables, more as an experiment than anything else, to find out what would be the most adapted to our soils, climate, and altitude and found that all kinds of vines did well, especially the cantaloupe. . . .

"In 1877 I planted a small patch for market, about one quarter of an acre, which produced all I could sell in this market. . . . In 1880, I produced a cantaloupe something like what I wanted and from that by careful selection for many years we produced the present cantaloupe, which is know as the Rocky Ford Cantaloupe, that was near perfect as could well be."

THE HAZARDS OF FARMING

GRASSHOPPERS

“In the summer that we came [1872], the grasshoppers ate everything green. They came one afternoon like a great cloud, settled down on the ground and started eating. The ground was covered with them. Mother had a few cabbages out in the garden. She ran out and put them under some bunches of hay, but the hoppers found them and did not leave a piece. In a few days they were gone as suddenly as they came.”

Source: Jennie Lucas (1934), CWA Interviews Colorado Historical Society

THE WINTER OF 1872

“As we were but two and one half miles from town we thought it would be a good thing to start a dairy. So Mr. Smith [her husband] bought sixty head of milk cows and we expected to supply Greeley with milk. However, the winter of 1872 was a hard one. There was lots of snow and the cattle had to range out all the year. Ours had to range outside the colony fence and we lost all but one.”

Source: Mrs. Pitt Smith (1934), CWA Interviews Colorado Historical Society

A CLOUD OF GRASSHOPPERS

“To make matters worse, the grasshoppers came in the summer of that same year, 1872. They came in the afternoon about 4:00 and darkened the sky like a cloud. It is hard to believe but the chickens went to roost thinking it was night. They ate everything green and even ate the cloth screens from our windows. Even the wood on the side of the house was pitted. They were here only a short time and disappeared almost as soon as they came. They left their eggs, however, and the next spring when the wheat Mr. Smith had planted was about three inches high the young ones appeared. They cleared the field.”

Source: Mrs. Pitt Smith (1934), CWA Interviews Colorado Historical Society
RANCH WORK, TOOLS, AND TECHNOLOGY

CATTLE DRIVES

DRIVING CATTLE TO GREELEY

“In the spring of 1882, the New England Livestock Co. bought three thousand short horns in Southwest Texas, cut them into four herds and started them on the trail to Colorado. . . . Smith asked me to go with the herd at $30 a month and transportation back. . . .

“The drive up the South Platte was fine. We traveled for three hundred miles along the foothills of the Rockies, where we were never out of sight of the snowy ranges. We went out by way of La Junta, Colorado, on the Santa Fe [Railroad], and then to Deer Trail. . . . We arrived at the South Platte River near Greeley, Colorado about the tenth of August. . . .

“When we reached Cow Creek we turned the herds loose and begun building what is known as the Crow Ranch. I worked here thirty days and it seemed like thirty years.


TEXAS LONGHORNS IN COLORADO

“Cattle were brought up from Texas over the old Overland Trail to Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana to graze for the summer. From these herds the ranchers along the route restocked their own herds. The cattle of the early days were all Texas longhorns; the white faces did not come in until later.

“Davis [a Colorado cattleman] held his steers until they were three or four years old and then shipped them from Cheyenne to Omaha and Chicago for beef. Others farther east shipped from Julesburg and Sidney, Nebraska.

“Iliff [another cattleman] herded his cattle north of the Platte and allowed them to range over all northeastern Colorado. His headquarters ranch was at Riverside on the Platte with other ranches at Pawnee and Sterling. . . .

“Other large outfits in northeastern Colorado north of the Platte were Jerry McGahan, called "Wild Horse Jerry" and Gene Thayer. There was never a lack of grass or water and cattle fattened quickly. The Indians gave no trouble.

Source: Asa McLeod (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/6. Colorado Historical Society,
A YOUNG TRAIL DRIVER

“It was only a few miles to Clayton, New Mexico, a small railroad town ahead, so I struck camp and left the boys with the herd and I went to town to see if I could get two or three trail men.

“When I got there I found there were no men in town, but I met an old friend of mine and he told me that there was a kid of a boy around town that wanted to get with a herd and go up the trail. . . . I hired him and took him to camp, and put him with the horses. . . . I got along fine for three or four months. The kid would get up the darkest stormy nights and stay with the cattle until the storm was over. He was good natured, very modest, didn't use any cuss words or tobacco, and always pleasant. . . . I wished many times I could find two or three more like him. Everything went fine until I got to Hugo, Colorado. . . . After dinner the kid come to where I was sitting and asked me if he could quit. He insisted, said he was homesick, and I had to let him go.

“About sundown we were all sitting around camp and the old herd was coming in on the bed ground. I looked up toward town and saw a lady, all dressed up, coming toward camp, walking. I told the boys were going to have company. I couldn't imagine why a woman would be coming on foot to a cow camp, but she kept right on coming. . . . When she got up within about twenty feet of me, she began to laugh, and said, "Mr. Houston, you don't know me, do you?"

“Well, for one minute I couldn't speak. she reached out her hand out to me, to shake hands, and I said, "Kid, is it possible that you are a lady?"

Source: J. Marvin Hunter, ed., The Trail Drivers of Texas (New York, 1963), I, 75-76.
CATTLE RANCHES

DIARY OF A COLORADO COWBOY

"Sunday, January 1, 1893
    I packed up one horse with my bed and provisions and horse feed and
    started up on the mountain [near Delta, Colorado] to hunt a horse that was
    snowed in. . . .

"Monday, January 2, 1893
    I went up on Kelso's point and rode as far as the beaver pond. Snow was
    between kneed deep and belly deep to my horse. I camped over night at Kelso's
    cabin. . . .

"Tuesday, January 3, 1893
    I hunted for a horse up in the snow. Rode on middle point and at the
    beaver dams I went back down in the pinyons and camped over night in the
    snow. Had a good fire out of pinyon and cedar wood, but it was fearful cold
    before morning. . . .

"Wednesday, January 4, 1893
    I rode around on the point until 12 o'clock and then I went down to Mr.
    Mursers. The boys had come up there to drift cattle down. . . .

"Thursday, January 5, 1893
    We rode Kelso's point Drove down about 130 head of cattle. . . .

"Friday, January 6, 1893
    We packed up and drove down to the big hill and put them [the cattle] up
    on top and branded the calves. Branded two AIV calves, one JHB calf and one
    IXV calf. . . .

"Saturday, January 7, 1893
    I went up to Delta. Got my mail, got some nails and two chains. Come
    back to camp and made a gate to the corral and fixed up the stable.

"Sunday, January 8, 1893
    I went up to Basslers to look after a horse that was cut in the wire. I came
    back to camp at 6:00. Read the new testament till 11:00 at night. Ate dinner at
    Basslers.

    Source: Diary of Jeff B. Dillard; Colorado Historical Society
CATTLE COUNTRY

“This part of the country in the early days was a vast expanse of territory which contained no fences except at a few homesteads adjoining the Platte River, the cattle grazed quietly, chuck wagons bounced on their way to roundups, cowboys singing to their stock, calves being roped and the pungent odor of burning cow hair as it came in contact with red hot branding irons, this was the picture in 1882. It was a cattle country and the cattlemen were the persons of importance. A few but not many, were running sheep. . . .

“Cattle drifted far in those days. They would come from the Lodgepole country and with cattle in this section in winter drift along the Arkansas River as far east as Dodge City, Kansas. In the spring cowboys would start after the cattle and drive them back to their ranges.

Source: [Unidentified person], CWA Interviews (1934), Doc. 341/40, Colorado Historical Society

CATTLEMAN JOHN W. ILIFF

“Cattle with many brands dotted the plains at that time. some of the well known brands that are only a memory now are the LF of the Iliff ranch owned by a one-time "cattle king" of Northeastern Colorado, John W. Iliff. The Iliff Cattle Company had vast holdings on Cedar Creek, Pawnee Creek, Wild Cat Creek, Crow Creek, and other tributaries of the Platte River. This company's range extended from North Platte to Greeley. The LF brand was thus: [reverse L with superimposed F].”

Source: [Unidentified person], CWA Interviews (1934), Doc. 341/40, Colorado Historical Society
RANCHER JARED L. BRUSH

“I started to work [at age 21] for Jared L. Brush July 15, 1882, and continued for four years. He employed from eight to fifteen men. [At] certain times of the year, [he] would have more men working than at other times--and I was one of the cow hands. . . .

“Mr. Brush would buy cattle and turn them in on the range to graze and feed until they were ready for market. I remember of him buying ten thousand head of yearling [one year-old] steers at Ogallala [Nebraska] and helping to brand them at Julesburg with the crew. I also remember the year I can here, 1882, that the LF ranch branded over eleven thousand calves during the summer.

“On cattle of the J. L. Brush ranches had been burned the brand JB [J with superimposed B]. It was in honor of Mr. Brush, who was lieutenant governor, that the nearby town of that designation was named. His cattle ranged from the North Platte to Fort Morgan.”

Source: [Unidentified person], CWA Interviews (1934), Doc. 341/40, Colorado Historical Society

THE JOHN WESLEY PROWERS RANCH

“His brands were the Box B, and the Bar X. he built up his herds until at the fall round-up of his ranch, the cattle shipment was a matter of train loads, not carloads. Sometimes as high as eight train loads left our ranch for eastern markets. At one time, the fall check-up showed 70,000 cattle bearing father’s brands.”


GOOD YEARS AND BAD YEARS IN THE 1880’s

“When we had good seasons, good grass and mild winters and good prices, cattlemen made money, but when dry seasons prevailed, followed by hard winters, it was a different story...."

THE END OF THE RANGE CATTLE BUSINESS
IN COLORADO

“The homesteaders gradually crowded the cattlemen out. They had a right to the land and during the '80s most of it was taken up. They fenced their land and much of it was plowed. With the disappearance of the open range, the cattle business became more or less unprofitable. That is, there was no big money in it. Then too, it was discovered that cattle would do better on the grass in Wyoming. It seemed to have more strength in it. After a summer on Wyoming grass the steers would be as fat as the corn fed [cattle]. So many of the cattle outfits moved to Wyoming. When that happened we started to raise horses for the cattlemen up there. They would come down here to get their cow ponies.”

Source: Frank Loustalet (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/41. Colorado Historical Society

HISPANIC RANCHERS

"Well, I think most of the Spanish people that I remember, or Mexican people, had some sheep and some cattle, some burros, and horses."

THE ROUND-UP

CATTLE BRANDS

“There were hundreds of head of cattle that roamed the prairies of open range in the early days. Everyone’s cattle roamed the range together, and it was an ordeal to sort them out, and could not have been accomplished if not for the brands on them.”

Source: Ormal Humburg testimony in Roleta D. Teal, Kiowa County (Kiowa Co. Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 32-33.

THE CHUCK WAGON

“The chuck wagon had a box built on the back with compartments of all sizes built in so the cook’s supplies didn’t rattle around on the trip. The front dropped down to make a table. One side of the box was for storage for pots and cookers, flour and potatoes. The cook had a set of pot racks he set up over the campfire. A good cook could fix a complete meal over a campfire, including sourdough bread.”


THE RULES OF THE ROUNDUP

“When the ranchers down there [Arkansas River Valley] were ready to start, they would send word and the ranchers up here would elect a representative, called a rep, to go down there and look after the stock that would be found. Sometimes one rep would be responsible for several brands. When the cattle were rounded up he would cut out those he was representing and start them toward the home ranch. Generally, several cowboys would be sent down to help him.

“The range country was divided into districts, agreed upon by the ranchers, and a rep would be sent to each district. The outfit consisted of a grub wagon bossed by a chief cook and several assistants. . . . Camp would be made near the center of a district by a stream. From there the cowboys would ride out covering about ten miles in each direction each day. The outfit was under the command of a chief who gave directions as to where to go and when. . . .”

Source: Frank Loustalet (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/41, Colorado Historical Society
SPRING AND FALL ROUNDUPS

“There were generally two roundups, one in the spring about May 10-15 when the grass started, and one in the fall, generally in September. Cattle were allowed to drift all winter and shift for themselves. Naturally they would drift south with the storms. In the spring some of them would be found as far south as the Arkansas river....

“The spring roundup was mostly for the purpose of branding the calves. Cows dropped their calves mostly in April or May though they dropped some late in the fall. The calves would be caught and branded, then let loose to run with the cows until fall....

“The fall roundup in September was called the beef roundup. It was then that the beef steers would be cut out for market, the sucking calves taken from their mothers and put in a separate pasture, and the cows allowed to range for the winter. Steers were generally sold when they were three or four years old. They brought about $30.00 per head.”

Source: Frank Loustalet (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/41, Colorado Historical Society

CUTTING OUT

“A few days after my arrival I witnessed what they call "cutting-out." A drove of two thousand cattle that had been selected as beeves from the herd, stood in a close bunch on the plain a couple of miles from the ranch-house. We drover over to see the fun, and standing well out of the way of the racing horses, swinging lassos, and scattering cattle, watched with interest. The fattest beeves were "cut out" from the herd and driven into a separate bunch, which was guarded at a little distance by watchful horsemen. One by one the finest cattle were separated. Some thirty horsemen were riding in all directions, swinging the long horse-hair ropes from their saddle-horns, digging their spurs into their horses' flanks, heading off the steers that were making for us, turning them from the herd, and driving them toward the bunch across the plain as though there was not a moment to lose.”

THE ROPER

“Before the branding season started it was a job for every rancher to train his string of saddle horses to work with a rope, and to hold a cow. When branding calves it was the responsibility of the roper to bring the calf as near to the men who were doing the branding as possible, throw the calf and call out the brand to the men who held the calf down. These men released the rope immediately, so that the roper could get another calf. This whole responsibility of placing the proper brand on a calf rested with the roper. It was he who must read the brand on the mother of every calf he roped. Such work required skilled men with a rope and also men who could quickly and accurately read brands.

“It was the practice to round-up the cattle in the morning and brand all unbranded stock in the herd in the afternoon.”

Source: Frank Hodgson, 1934, CWA Interview Doc. 33/343, Colorado Historical Society

THE COW HORSE

“We had four or five cow horses that were so good that the rider could drop the reins after he had clearly identified the critter he wanted and the horse would cut the critter out all on his own.”

Source: G. D. MacDougall, "The Two Bar Roundup and Famous Roundup Cook," Western History Collection, Norlin Library, University of Colorado

ROUNDUPS IN EASTERN COLORADO, 1880

“Very few people now living know what an old time Roundup was like. A cow outfit would consist of a mess wagon to carry out the beds and food, a cook, about eight riders (each rider had about four horses to ride -- a different horse for different kinds of work), a foreman, and a horse herder. The outfit would start to work about May 1st down in Kansas, east of the present state line. When all of the outfits got together there would be sometimes thirty or more wagons and 200 or more riders with five to eight hundred horses.... To tell all about what our work was would take too long and is another story. I followed this life for eleven years working for the same company all the time.”

ROUNDUP TIME

“Each outfit consisted of a mess wagon, bed wagon, cook, about twelve men (these being cow hands and bosses) and each cowboy had from seven to eight horses. There were “Reps” from other outfits with us, sometimes eight or ten with us, and they would go along with us to gather cattle for the outfit which they represented.”

CUTTING HAY

STACKING HAY
“Fanny [a horse] was used for plowing and cultivating the garden and for
pulling the hay up on the stack. . . . Stacking hay was one of the big operations
on the farm, requiring a crew of eight or ten men—two men for each wagon to
load the hay in the field and two or three men on the stack. . . . A farmer took
great pride in having his stacks uniform and straight and his hay still green and
sweet-smelling after a winter in the field.”

Source: Hazel Webb Dalziel, "The Way It Was," The Colorado Magazine,
45 (Spring 1968), 104-105.

TRADING HAY
“We used to cut from 200-300 tons of hay on the river bottoms in the early
days. Father would haul a load to Denver and trade it for flour. Often a load
would bring but one sack of 100 pounds.”

Source: Frank Loustalet, CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/41. Colorado
Historical Society

HAY FOR THE CATTLE
"All [in Routt County] seemed to think the great thing was to raise an
abundance of hay for the stock in the winter. No attention was paid to providing
pastures, for all that was necessary in the spring was to open the gate and let the
stock go to the hills. Old Routt County had the reputation of producing the best
cattle that went to market off the grass."

Source: E. A. Brooks, Routt County (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 358/25,
Colorado Historical Society
BUILDING TOWNS

TOWNS IN THE SAN LUIS VALLEY

"They stopped at Guadalupe--here they build the town. They build it in a circle with only two openings--one on the south and one on the north. Here they put what livestock they had for fear of the Indians which were in great numbers here at that time. They had come on ox carts and burros. They brought with them wheat, corn flour, beans, cattle, horses, sheep, hogs and chickens."

Source: Jesus Valasquez (1934), CWA Interviews Doc. 349/10, Colorado Historical Society
THE GENERAL STORE

SHOPPING AT THE GENERAL STORE

“Usually we found other farm teams with their wagons or buggies already tied to the [hitching] bars [in front of the store]. . . . Our parents scanned these horses and cried out to each other, if they recognized the team of someone known to them, and their faces lighted up at the thought of seeing some friend again, for a shopping trip was a true social occasion and was always leisurely and deliberate. . . .

“When we entered the store, the storekeeper. . . .would greet us all cordially. . . .and ask if we were good children and did well in school--if we said yes, as was usually true, he would give us each a bit of candy. . . .

“Now began our slow inspection of everything in the store. . . .Sugar came in hundred-pound sacks as did the flour. . . .Then there was jelly in its wooden pail with the wire handle. . . .The great stalk of bananas, suspended from the ceiling. . . .

“Sometimes shoes were tried on. . . . The dry goods shelves were a special pleasure--all those charming calico patterns, which we sometimes touched. . . . If it was late summer, some of this splendid yard goods would be measured off on the counter's edge, yard by yard, for our school dresses. . . .

“Last of all the kerosene for the lamp was bought. One of us was sent running back to the buggy to bring in the "oil-can," and we watched it being carefully filled with this precious fluid. . . .

“On the way home [father] would entertain us with an account of all the news he had gleaned, of the birth of a new baby or of the birth of an especially lively colt, of a family moving away or a new one moving in. . . .


SATURDAY AFTERNOON SHOPPING

“Now it's Saturday afternoon and time to take the cream and eggs to Richard's [store]. After visiting with other neighbors, you would buy what few staple groceries your family would need for the next week. That could be any or all of the following: soda, salt, baking powder, bucket of syrup, either white or dark, depending on how much the cream or eggs brought. . . . A spool of #50 black thread, a package of needles. Perhaps some dried fruit, of peaches, apricots, raisins, or prunes. Sometimes we would need a 50 lb. sack of flour, a 100 lb. sack of sugar or a sack of potatoes.”

CHURCH IN A GROCERY STORE

"Our first Sunday school and church was held in a grocery store. We had no building and wanted church services, and the grocery man kindly offered the use of his store. We would hold the services, then whenever 'church' was over, the grocery man began selling his wares to whoever wanted to buy."

Source: Angelina Fuller (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 350/38. Colorado Historical Society
CRAFTSPEOPLE

HARNESS MAKING

“When I was a small lad, every little town had its harness maker. He was important. The farmer depended on him. Henry Wiskow was the harness maker in Hugo…. Most important, he knew how to fit a collar to a horse. That’s the most important part of a harness: the collar.”

COMMUNITY LIFE

HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

THE FOURTH OF JULY AT THE McBROOM CABIN

“About mid-forenoon of the great day, country people began to arrive in farm wagons. A few were provided with "spring seats," but more with cross boards for drivers and youngsters, and chairs secured with straps or ropes for the older folks.

“McBroom welcomed each and all--directing where to "unhitch" and piloting the way for "women folks" to the tables were baskets and boxes of everything good to eat were piled up. By noon some specially invited guests had arrived "from town" and all were ready to feast. Then the motherly Cynthias and Mollies were busy distributing fried chicken, roast turkey, home-made bread and butter with other substantials. Later there were pies and cakes, jellies and jams of a half dozen varieties of wild fruits, while in the nearby cabin McBroom had a wash boiler brim full of hot coffee--"just his part of the treat"--as he expressed it.

“It was a time and place for visiting among women friends whose ranch homes were far apart. If among the men there had been disputes over division fences of irrigating ditches, all were forgotten in a very atmosphere of good fellowship. . . .

“Judge Ames read the Declaration of Independence and Judge H. P. Bennett followed with a speech of great eloquence on what the Fourth of July meant to the American people, and pointing to the old flag suspended between two great trees, said: "And it will not be long until another star will be added to that field of blue--the Star of Colorado."

A FOURTH OF JULY IN PHILLIPS COUNTY

"[It was] in 1886 that the thought came to us, that, although we were beyond the screech of the locomotive. . . and twenty-two miles from our nearest post office. . . we should celebrate in as becoming [proper] manner as possible the Fourth of July. . . . The word was silently send along the line, that at the Varney homestead, a fitting celebration would be held. . . . How the news was carried, unless assisted by the prairie dogs, sand lizards and rattle snakes, I cannot guess, but I do know that every human inhabitant in all that section came to this most enjoyable convocation [gathering]. . . .

"Your humble servant read the Declaration of Independence. There were recitations, singing, games, basket dinner and the regular program of a "Back Home" Fourth of July, however "sans" [without] fried chicken. In this connection I wish to say that I believe the privation [doing without] of having fresh meat, of any kind for so many months, was one of the greatest hardships of pioneer life on the plains."

Source: Charles Timberlake, CWA Interviews, Doc. 341/25. Colorado Historical Society

CELEBRATING THE FOURTH OF JULY IN HOLYOKE

"Holyoke celebrated 4th of July, 1888 with speeches by E. E. Branson, J. H. Painter, Reverend Richards and P. C. Westover, and [a speech entitled] "The Frenchman [Creek] Valley as it Was and Is" by E. E. Armour. Many games, such as climbing the greased pole, greased pig, sack race, baseball, etc. BIG TIME."


FOURTH OF JULY IN SPRINGFIELD

"The principal celebrations which I attended in Springfield in my boyhood were, first a celebration held on July 4, 1888, in a cottonwood grove at the confluence of the Cat and Bear creeks, about a mile and a half east of town. There was music by the newly orgnized Springfield Cornet Band. An oration was delivered.. and a recital of the Declaration of Independence by the writer hereof... There was a picnic dinner and in the afternoon foot races, horse races and a baseball game."

FOURTH OF JULY FIREWORKS

“The fireworks were furnished by a group of cowboys who rode in from somewhere on the Cimarron, arriving late in the afternoon or evening, and after having partaken somewhat bountifully of the liquid refreshments available in the town, emptied their six-shooters up and down the main street of the city until they had exhausted their ammunition.”


FOURTH OF JULY

“The Fourth of July was always the big celebration of the year. Dad was a Spanish-American War veteran and was quite patriotic. The flag was always flown at our house on all holidays and we boys competed for the honor of putting it up. . . .

“We always had firecrackers each Forth and when money, or eggs, were more plentiful, we sometimes had a few sparklers. Roman candles, and pinwheels. . . . We managed to get more "bang" out of our firecrackers by shooting them off in milk cans or barrels. We also learned of their power by shooting them off in holes in the ground, under piles of dirt, or under tin cans. . . .

“One Fourth of July celebration was at Eckhart’s grove. . . . The trees were tall enough to furnish shade for picnic tables and there was a rope swing in one of them. We always had a big picnic lunch, neighbors getting together in groups and sharing. Sometimes ice cream was made on the grounds. After the meal there were patriotic speeches and recitations, followed by a variety of races for the children: three-legged races, potato races, sack races, and sometimes horse races for the older "cowboys."


HOLIDAY DANCES

“Christmas, the 4th of July, New Years, and Thanksgiving were always the signal for a community party; we held them at the old hall, a block east of the present City Hall. There was always a big dinner, turkey, roast beef, wild meat; the long tables groaned under the load; and we danced until daylight. My husband was always a rather strict churchman; he did not approve of dancing or music. I loved both. I often played for the dances, and then I was young, I just couldn't help but dance. They were mostly square dances, and lots of fun. He was always cross about it, but I let him pout it out.”


THE SCHOOL CHRISTMAS TREE
“Christmas trees were scarce items [on the plains]. They did not grow in our area and if we wanted a real one, it meant a trip to Arriba, eighteen miles, and they did not always have them--nor did we always have the money, if they were available. The acceptable substitute was one made out of tumbleweeds--a big one for the base, a middle sized one in the middle, and a small one on top--much resembling a snowman in shape. The younger children made chains of loops of paper and of folded strips of paper, and both the tree and the schoolhouse were decorated with these. Popcorn strung on thread was also used for decoration.”


CHRISTMAS IN CATTLE COUNTRY

“And the Christmas parties! We could have the biggest tree the boys could cart in from the mountains; and the presents were real ones, not ten-cent store stuff, but diamond rings, gold watches, and sterling silver tea sets. The cattlemen had money and they really spent it.”

FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

PEACH DAY IN GRAND JUNCTION, 1893

"At half past two o'clock the pavilion was thrown open to guests and visitors and for a while the crush and jam was so great that it was almost impossible to move back and forth. There was enough for all, however, and if the visitors did not get their fill of fruits and melons, it was their own fault.

"'Wonderful! Wonderful!!' "Did you ever see the like?" 'Did that fruit grow here?' And all such expressions could be heard on every side as the visitors looked upon the display of tempting and marvelously beautiful and perfect fruit shown by the fruit growers. It was a beautiful sight and no mistake."

Source: Grand Junction News, Sept. 9, 1893

POTATO DAY IN GREELEY, 1894

"Several thousand hungry people ravaged the city of Greeley about noon to-day seeking what they might devour. A ravenous mob surrounded the great square inside of which a hundred men struggled with roast oxen, mountains of bread and cauldrons of coffee in a vain attempt to satisfy the universal appetite.... There were a hundred waiters, mostly young men, but they early lost their heads. The only self-contained individual was the presiding genius of the feast, a portly gentleman of color imported from Denver, who superintended the dissection of two oxen, which had been roasted to turn on bars of railroad iron over beds of glowing coals.... The roast ox was pronounced delicious by those fortunate enough to secure portions. The potatoes were well baked and with a cup of coffee from a monster tank and a big "hunk" of bread, constituted a menu proportionate to the appetites of the multitude on this perfect October day."


STRAWBERRY AND WATERMELON FESTIVALS

"In those early years in Colorado, strawberries grew profusely and were big and luscious. One of Boulder's activities each year was a big strawberry festival when all the strawberries and cream and cake you could eat were yours for the eating. . . . You never saw such baskets of berries! The first year we were here we got to go and eat all we could hold. This tradition was carried on for several years. In other parts of the state, a "Watermelon Day" festival was held in the fall as the bountiful muskmelon (cantaloupe, to you) and watermelon crop ripened. Wagon loads of the sweet juicy fruits were pulled into the center of towns like Rocky Ford and the countryside was invited to feast."

CHURCHES AND RELIGION

CHURCH IN A GROCERY STORE

"Our first Sunday school and church was held in a grocery store. We had no building and wanted church services, and the grocery man kindly offered the use of his store. We would hold the services, then whenever 'church' was over, the grocery man began selling his wares to whoever wanted to buy."

Source: Angelina Fuller (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 350/38. Colorado Historical Society

SUNDAY SCHOOL ON THE PLAINS

"In 1890, there was a little sod school house built bout a mile north of where the sugar factory now stands. No sooner was it finished than a Sunday school was organized with Mrs. Fuller as superintendent. There was no money to buy Sunday school supplies or song books, but they took their Bibles and song books they had brought from home."

Source: James A. Dawson (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 351/2. Colorado Historical Society

SUNDAY SCHOOL IN PHILLIPS COUNTY

"Thus, the first such [Sunday school] that I know of in the present confines of Phillips country was a Sunday school which met on Mr. Varney's homestead. . . . By a sort of "underground railway" service getting word to all the settlers within a radius of ten or twelve miles. . . . . "And then, when we did get together, we were so glad of human companionship that we forgot to ask "Are you Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic or Episcopal," but sang, read, and studied, and were, I am sure, much benefited by our association one with the other. It was really astonishing how many people would collect Sunday afternoons on these, apparently, barren plains. . . . At these meetings we exchanged any reading matter we might have received, or brought with us, returning the same next Sunday if possible, thus establishing a sort of primitive circulating library."

Source: Charles B. Timberlake (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 341/25, Colorado Historical Society
EXCHANGING FARM MACHINERY
AT SUNDAY SCHOOL

“Later, these farmers cooperated in the purchase of some large equipment like a potato digger and a manure spreader. There was a joke that some men came to Sunday school only to find out where the manure spreader was and how soon they could get it for their use.”


OUR LADY OF GUADELOUPE

"Work on the new church [at Conejos] was commenced early in July 1858. Work progressed slowly, for the parishioners were poor and much of their time was needed tending their fields and flocks. However, the structure was completed, and in June 1863, Bishop Lamy returned to consecrate the church and to dedicate it to Our Lady of Guadeloupe, who was, and still is, the patron saint of the community."

Source: Charles E. Gibson (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 349/2, Colorado Historical Society.
ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORTS

LAWN SOCIALS AND WINTER SUPPERS

“The Ladies Aid Society was paying for the church pews with all sorts of social affairs. In the summer we had lawn socials with ice cream and cake or watermelon. In the winter there were chicken pie or oyster suppers. These were always well attended as the men would get together for man talk while the children ran and played, and the women talked a mile a minute while they served the food.”


HORSE RACING

“During all of the early days in Springfield, horse racing was a very popular sport. A half-mile straight-away track was laid out immediately west of the town and during the years 1887, 1888, and 1889, horse races were held nearly every Saturday afternoon. The horses were generally just cow ponies and the popular race was a quarter mile dash.”


HOE DOWNS

“All the young people of those days were married, so their social gatherings were at dances or “Hoe-downs” and every couple brought “vittles” or had box suppers. Their music was furnished by Mr. Middleton, who played the violin and sometimes other communities would send for him to play for them, as musicians were scarce. So sometimes he and Mr. Briggs would be sent for in Greeley, and once in a while they’d find someone who played a banjo, who’d play too.”

Source: Mrs. M. H. Laybourn, (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 353/23, Colorado Historical Society

SOCIAL LIFE ON THE PLAINS

“As to social affairs in our community [in the early days], we had a literary society and a Bible school, and occasionally just a social gathering where we laughed and chattered over nothing and feasted on "canned peaches" with cream--sometimes, cake.”

Source: Lizzie Gordon Buchanan (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc 341/18, Colorado Historical Society
DANCES

"Our only amusements were dances. We used to go to Evans once in a while for a dance, and sometimes the neighbors would clear the floor and have a dance. Everybody went, young and old, married and single. People always were friendly, everybody knew everybody else, and all had a good time."

Source: Mrs. Jennie Lucas (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 334/26, Colorado Historical Society

DINNER, CARDS, AND DANCING, 1915

"Several families came from Eastern Kansas to Colorado to homestead that same year, and we had lots of good times together. We would all gather at one home for Sunday dinner. The men usually played cards while the women cooked and tended the children. The menu might be pinto beans, fried rabbit, roasting ears from the corn field and wonderberry pie for dessert. We always danced until daylight so we could see the wagon trails across the prairie to go home, as there were no fences or roads."


BASEBALL GAMES AT THE COUNTRY STORE

"For the first two or three years [of a new settlement] there was very little to do on the homestead in the fall and winter, excepting hauling water and gathering fuel. The rest of the time was spent in visiting and various forms of amusement. At Wakeman's store, they had a croquet club. We had several baseball clubs and say, we could play ball in those days, hardly ever failed to make at least 20 to 40 tallies [runs] in a single game. And did we yell at those games! People came from every direction. We were not compelled to travel east or west, north or south, as we do now. No fences, no plowed fields, go where you pleased and how you pleased. People would come across the raw prairie, in wagons, in buggies, in buckboards, in carts, on horseback or on foot if they had no other way to go. Everyone came, father and mother, boys and girls, dogs and all. Everyone took "sides" in the game, especially the young women. Did you ever see Dora Summers, Anna Reynolds, Edna Mackey, Ada Gilmore, Mamie Whitney, Lillie Borland, Minnie Norris, and a dozen others, whose names I cannot recall at present, clap their hands and wave their bonnets at one of these games, when Curt Cauble missed the ball and fell down and ran over himself or when Sam Lomaster could not find the base, or when Ed Reynolds made a mistake and slid to a base over a cactus bed?"

Source: [Unidentified person], CWA Interviews, Doc 341/27, Colorado Historical Society

HAVING FUN IN CATTLE COUNTRY, 1890
“Among the ranchmen and in the smaller hamlets and villages, the chief sports among the men were rough athletic contests, riding bucking broncos, shooting at targets, etc., besides some gambling with cards and dice. During cold weather, dances would occur, which would be attended by people who would drive for 20 to 30 miles. The heads of households would bring their entire families. The children would play in one room while the adults would dance, chiefly square dances and reels like the Old Virginia reel. The host of the evening would generally furnish a keg of beer, but anything savoring of a rough house or drunkenness was extremely rare if it ever occurred. Doubtless, the women had many quilting bees, tea parties and the like with which I was not very familiar, being chiefly out on the range.”

TRANSPORTATION

HORSE-DRAWN VEHICLES

TO COLORADO IN A COVERED WAGON

“During the day we mixed the bread in a large tin bucket, let it rise, and then would bake it when we camped for the night. As soon as a stopping place had been decided on, the stove was set off and the children scurried around for wood or buffalo chips. In the morning we made only enough fire to get a light breakfast so the stove would not be too hot to load. Each of the family had a chair and Mother and I had a bed in one of the wagons with a spring and mattress. . . . Every two weeks we laid over a day and did the family washing, even scrubbing our chairs and cleaning everything just as if we were at home.”

Source: Mary Jane Cole (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 349/4, Colorado Historical Society

SPRING WAGON COACHES

"The [stage coach] line was called the Ferguson Stage Company and the [coaches came] to Lamar from Dodge City, Kansas. [The coaches] consisted of hacks or light spring wagons with tops and seats, the sets running crosswise of the wagon. They were drawn by four horses. . . .

"Mr. Silver [her father] and Mr. Feguson had barns at both ends and made a trip each way every day, carrying passengers and the mail. They also made special trips to other towns in that section of the country. . . ."

Source: Josephine Silver (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 355/34, Colorado Historical Society
COMING OF THE RAILROADS

COMING TO GREELEY BY TRAIN

“My father came out the same year [1871] and they both [her brother had arrived earlier] lived in a little shack on the land. My mother and I and two younger sisters come out in March, 1872. We were just one week on the train. As we got off the train at Evans, my father and brother were there to meet us with a big lumber wagon.”

Source: Mrs. Jennie Lucas (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/26, Colorado Historical Society

ARRIVING IN COLORADO BY TRAIN

“In the fall of 1887, [James Wood, her husband] and my son Warren, came to what is now Phillips County in an immigrant car [a railroad boxcar]. . . . In this immigrant car was three horses and a colt, three cows, two hogs, chickens, lumber, coal, fence posts, wire, sugar, flour, bacon and other groceries (almost a year’s supply), a St. Bernard dog, two cats and a pair of pigeons. We had many chances to sell the cats and dog, but did not.

“Two weeks later, myself, with the other three children came on the railroad train to Holyoke.”

Source: Mary Ellen Bagley Wood (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 341/48, Colorado Historical Society
GETTING CROPS AND CATTLE TO MARKET

SHIPPING APPLES

“. . . Yesterday afternoon I went to the offices and storerooms of the Grand Junction Fruit Grower's Association, where I was shown something about the way the fruit is packed and handled. Certainly the members of the Association do know how to pack their fruit! I noticed the apples particularly. They are put up in 3 different grades--Fancy, Choice, and Standard. The Fancy apples are supposed to be perfect, though you can find certain imperfections. However, they are carefully selected and graded and very carefully packed, so that the bottom and cover bulge out about half an inch. Thus it is almost impossible for an apple to move in the box. In the [railroad] cars the boxes are laid on their sides in regular tiers. These tiers are stripped with wooden cleats reaching entirely across the car. And then another tier laid on and stripped; and so on till the car is loaded, when a strong frame is placed in the narrow alley left across the middle of the car. Thus a well-loaded car will reach the end of its journey without a single box being shaken out of its place. At the same time, the air can circulate around every box.”