

## TWENTIETH CENTURY COLORADO

### **Overview:**

Much changed during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the way Coloradoans lived, worked, and spent their leisure time. Comparing sets of photos from the turn of the century and 1950 makes many of these changes obvious. By mid-century, clothing styles, work places, the location of new houses, and modes of transportation were vastly different. They also are noticeably modern, more like those of the present than like those of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In many respects, the historical evidence for this topic constitutes a road map to modern times. Changes happened along the way. They took place gradually, even though the pace of change was accelerating.

### **Food, Clothing, and Shelter**

The most telling symbol of the eating habits of most Coloradoans by 1950 was the tin can. For historical evidence of this, one need look no farther than the interior photo of Stanley's grocery store in Keota (See Work theme). Store-bought processed food--packaged in boxes, in bottles, and, especially in metal cans--were staples in both rural and urban kitchens. Of course, fresh produce still was common during the summer, and women still preserved vegetables and fruit in glass jars. But most food was processed food.

The photos of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century document a series of revolutions in clothing styles, especially in women's clothing. Men's wear changed more slowly. The styles of children's clothing tended to mimic those of adults.

In the larger cities, whole new neighborhoods appeared, mostly in what had been rural countryside. Housing contractors laid out new subdivisions accessible only by city buses or automobiles. Changes also took place in newer inner city neighborhoods, as brick houses came within the range of working and middle-class families.

### **Families, Children, and Schools**

Family life in 20<sup>th</sup> century Colorado reflected changes in the larger society. As the state became more ethnically, socially, and culturally diverse, the more varied were the experiences of Colorado families. The photographic evidence reflects this diversity. By mid-century, children had more educational and recreational opportunities than ever before, especially those living in urban areas. School architecture and classrooms changed slowly. Three-story brick schoolhouses and seats lined up in rows were common through the 1940s. However, even here change was accelerating, with the new suburbs taking the lead. There new, one-story, sprawling school buildings had made their appearance by the 1950s.

## **Work Places**

The people of Colorado faced a series of economic challenges in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The outcome would greatly alter the kind of work they did, how they did it, and where. The last mining bonanza, triggered in 1890 by the discovery of gold at Cripple Creek, was over by 1920. Thereafter men who listed their occupation as “miners” were mostly coal miners. Coal mining, centered in Boulder County and in the Canon City and Trinidad-Walsenburg area, was an important industry in Colorado through the 1930s. Farmers prospered during the early decades of the century, with farming becoming increasingly mechanized. Steam engines and tractors pulling multiple plows turned vast areas of the plains into wheat fields. By the 1920s, farmers, too, had come upon hard times. The dust bowl conditions in eastern Colorado during the 1930s demonstrated the folly of indiscriminately plowing up the grasslands. However, many new jobs were created in the growing cities of Colorado, especially in manufacturing and food processing. These jobs, too, were threatened by the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and lasted through the 1930s. The recovery of the World War II and postwar years made work plentiful once again. However, these new jobs were almost entirely located in cities, where manufacturing, retailing, and services were the engines of economic growth.

## **Community Life**

The things people did as members of communities also changed during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Special days celebrated by Colorado residents reflected changes in the ethnic and cultural makeup of the society. However, much remained the same. Religion continued to be important in people’s lives, with churches serving as major community gathering places. People continued to celebrate traditional holidays and to attend and participate in sporting events. Camping, hiking, and outdoor recreation remained popular. Yet modern technology was rapidly altering the recreational as well as the industrial landscape. Radio and movie theaters were successfully competing with band concerts and dramatic performances. Auto racing rivaled horse racing in popularity.

## **Transportation**

In Colorado, as elsewhere in the United States, modes of transportation by 1950 had changed radically. The electric streetcars that dominated urban public transit at the turn of the century had been largely replaced by gasoline-powered busses. The few remaining trolleys were valued mainly as historical artifacts. The interurban electric cars popular in 1910 had been replaced by busses. By 1950, autos, farm and delivery trucks, and tractors had largely replaced horse-drawn vehicles in urban and rural Colorado. Railroads, still a vital part of the nation’s interstate transportation network in 1950, were being challenged by bus and trucking companies. Airlines, still a novel transportation alternative in 1940, were becoming a major rival to the railroads for business travel ten years later.