

20th CENTURY COLORADO – FOOD, CLOTHING & SHELTER

Food

What do these photos tell you about the different types of food Coloradans ate?

Montrose 4-H Club

These girls won a trophy and ribbons for the canned fruit and vegetables they exhibited at the Montrose 4-H Club Fair. The photo was taken about 1936.



Montrose 4-H girls club

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

People who lived in rural areas and small towns in the 1930s still raised much of their own food. An organization called the 4-H Club helped young people learn farming, gardening, and home-making skills. They exhibited their work every summer at fairs. Many young people today also belong to 4-H clubs.

Their Own Words

“Well, actually, as far as clubs, after we had over 200 people in Rangely [about 1939]—before that, why Mrs. Purdy used to have a little literary club that met, oh, maybe once a week . . . and in wintertime, why maybe once a month. . . . But when you live out on a ranch and you don’t have any transportation in [to town], other than a horse, why, I never was involved with any of the women’s clubs. Then after I moved to town my children were in school, so I became involved in the school activities with the children. I was 4-H leader for 10 years.”

Source: Stella La Force Rector quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed., Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950 (New York: Twayne, 1992): 147.

Logan County Fair

These vegetables were on display at the Logan County Fair in Sterling. The photo was taken about 1964.



Logan County Fair in Sterling, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Adults as well as children competed for awards for the fruit and vegetables they grew. The food displayed at this county fair included cabbages, beets, tomatoes, onions, turnips, and cauliflower. County fairs continue to be popular throughout Colorado.

A “Chow” Line

This is a US Army food or chow line. The photo was taken at Camp Hale (near Leadville) about 1943. The soldiers in this photo belonged to the Tenth Mountain Division, which trained at Camp Hale.



US Army “chow” line

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

By the 1940's, many people depended on farmers to raise food for them. The soldiers at this Army camp near Leadville lived on food raised by farmers in Colorado and elsewhere.

School Lunches

These children are eating lunch in the school cafeteria at Lincoln Elementary School in Sterling. The photo was taken about 1940.



Children eating their school lunches at Lincoln Elementary

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

By the 1940s, many children in Colorado ate meals that were not prepared at home. Sterling and other Colorado cities had school hot-lunch programs. Children who attended school in small towns and rural areas still had to bring their own lunch.

Their Own Words

School hot lunch programs began during the 1930s, as Ruth R. Burns, 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 kept the children from confiding in me.... A hot lunch program seemed the answer and soon the office wheels were turning. Government surplus foods were available to schools such as ours.”

Source: Ruth R., “Lunch-Less Lunch Pails,” in Margaret J. Lehrer, ed., Up The Hemline (Colorado Springs, 1975): 148.

An Outdoor Restaurant (Aspen)

This photo was taken in front of the Red Onion cafe in Aspen about 1950.



Red Onion cafe in Aspen, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

People living in cities or visiting resort towns like Aspen often had meals in restaurants. Sitting at outdoor tables was popular in resort towns, even during the winter.

Their Own Words

“New tourist attractions gradually are being added to keep visitors comfortable and occupied—and spending—while they enjoy the mountains and the climate. Dude ranches are on the increase. Motor courts are growing more elaborate. The historic old mining town of Aspen has been revived as a ski resort, complete with . . . movie stars, and now it is getting a theater and a folk ballad center as summer substitutes for snow.”

Source: Charles A. Graham and Robert Perkin, "Denver: Reluctant Capital," in Ray B. West, ed., Rocky Mountain Cities, (New York: Norton, 1949): 315.

Clothing

What do these photos tell you about the type of clothing Coloradans wore?

8th Grade Students In Denver

The 8th-grade girls in this photo are wearing knee-length dresses and skirts. The boys are wearing knee-length pants called knickers. The photo was taken at Columbine school in Denver in 1923.



8th grade students at Columbine School in Denver

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The 1920s saw a major change in the style of girls' clothing. The long skirts and puff sleeves worn in the early 1900s were no longer in fashion. Skirts and dresses came down only to the knees. Girls also were beginning to wear skirts and sweaters. Boys clothing changed more slowly. Knickers were still in style in 1923.

Their Own Words

“We didn’t buy ready-made clothes much then. We bought the material, and then there were seamstresses in town. . . . She would always be engaged a week ahead for fall and for spring, and she came and stayed about a week—coming and going—and would make up all the clothes for the next season. . . . You spent most of your time trying things on that week.”

Source: Jesse Fitzpatrick quoted in Maria M. Rogers, ed., In Other Words: Oral Histories of the Colorado Frontier (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996): 91.

A Keota Farmer

This farmer wearing bib overalls lived near the town of Keota. The photo was taken sometime during the 1930s.



Keota farmer

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

By the 1930s, the kind of clothes farmers and laborers wore to work also was changing. Most workmen of the 1890s wore pants and work shirts, the pants often being held up by suspenders. Forty years later, they were just as likely to wear bib overalls, like the farmer in this photo. But because of the severe economic depression in the 1930s, farmers like this one sometimes had to wear what they could get.

Their Own Words

“The big [economic] depression of the [nineteen] thirties is still a nightmare to many people. Stores and ships were forced to close. Poverty and despair reared their ugly heads. Again I became the teacher who ‘begged’ for her pupils. This time it was for wearable, clean clothing. At least once a week in my classroom, after school, I had a ‘If it fits, it’s yours’ party. Children and sometimes parents sorted through neatly folded piles of clean used clothing. It was really a kind of clothing exchange. Grim and bitter as were those years—we did not give way to despair and self pity. . . .”

Source: Catherine Hume, “The Winter of 1929,” in Margaret J. Lehrer, ed., Up the Hemline (Colorado Springs: Williams and Field, 1975): 123.

A Wedding Party

This photo shows wedding dresses and men's formal wear. The photo probably was taken in the 1930s.



Wedding party

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

During the 1920s, women's clothing styles changed. They wore shorter dresses, lighter clothing, smaller hats, and shorter sleeves. The wedding dresses worn by the women in this photo reflected those changes. The men's formal wear included dark coats and pants, with white shirts and bow ties.

Their Own Words

"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."

Source: Excerpt from Pueblo City Guide in "Racial Groups," Writers' Program of Colorado, Colorado Historical Society Library, [1941].

Poor People In The Great Depression

This photo was taken during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The children and adults are wearing plain, everyday clothes.



Poor people in the Great Depression

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Many people in Colorado were poor during the Great Depression. Plain ordinary dresses were all many women could afford. The boys in this photo are wearing either bib overalls or pants. The girl is wearing a dress that comes to her knees.

Their Own Words

“Children from homes in the lower wage bracket 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.”

Source: Theresa Lee, “The Depression Years,” in Margaret J. Lehrer, ed., *Up The Hemline* (Colorado Springs, 1975): 133.

Gates Rubber Company Picnic

The women in this 1930s photo are wearing print dresses or skirts and blouses. The boys are wearing knee-length play suits. The girl on the right is wearing a white dress.



Gates Rubber Company picnic

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

This photo was taken at a Gates Rubber Company picnic sometime during the 1930s.

Their Own Words

“Most of our clothes were long skirts. We didn’t dare show our knees, high-top shoes, and mostly skirts and blouses. Otherwise when we were in grade school if we had three dresses we were lucky, and they were mostly pinafores, below the knees for sure. We wore long hair.”

Source: Irene Smith Lybarger quoted in Maria M. Rogers, ed., In Other Words: Oral Histories of the Colorado Frontier (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996): 92.

Houses

What do these photos tell you about how their houses were like?

A Modest Denver Neighborhood

These new, one-story brick houses were built in Denver in 1938. They are located on the 1200 block of Grape Street in east Denver.



Denver neighborhood on Grape Street

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

During the early 1900s, many people moved away from downtown neighborhoods. They built new houses and new neighborhoods at the edge of the cities. They used streetcars and autos to commute downtown to work and to do their shopping.

Their Own Words

“Denver, in her general architecture, is more attractive than certain important cities to the eastward of her. Her houses are, for the most part, built solidly of brick and stone, and more taste has been displayed in them, upon the whole, than has been shown in either St. Louis or Kansas City. Like Kansas City, Denver has many long, tree-bordered streets lined with modest homes which look new and which are substantially built, but there is less monotony of design in Denver.”

Source: Julian Street, “Hitting a High Spot: Denver,” Colliers (November 7, 1914): 17.

A New Denver Neighborhood

This photo was taken in the Crestmore neighborhood in east Denver. The photo was probably taken during the 1930's.



Crestmore neighborhood in Denver

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Some of the new neighborhoods had more expensive houses than others. The houses and lawns in this neighborhood were much larger than those in the previous photo. Perhaps building larger, nicer houses was one result of relatively well-to-do people moving to Colorado. Many such people moved to Colorado because of its healthful climate.

Their Own Words

“Denver occupies distinctly a unique position in the fact that while geographically it is in the heart of center of the West, yet socially it is entirely composed of Eastern people. This fact may in part be due to the climate, which has no equal in the entire world. Great physicians, eminent surgeons, and other prominent and leading men and women come here in search of health.”

Source: Mrs. Crawford Hill, “East vs. West,” Harper’s Bazarre (May, 1910): 314.

Denver’s County Club District

This photo was taken in Denver's Country Club neighborhood. These houses were located next to fields in the countryside.



Denver's Country Club neighborhood

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Wealthy people also moved toward the outskirts of cities during the early 1900s. The Country Club neighborhood in Denver was built at the edge of the city. Wealthy people wished to associate with and live near other people of wealth and therefore moved to such neighborhoods. Open fields are visible on the right side of this photo.

Their Own Words

“The [social] clubs play an important role here [in Denver]. The Denver Club is the oldest and handsomest. Its annual ball is one of the great social events. (Here again we differ from other cities, as there is no [social] ‘season’; dinners, luncheons, balls, and dances are continuous throughout the year, as we are never forced to seek resorts [elsewhere] to avoid the summer’s heat and dullness.) The University Club and the Athletic Club occupy handsome buildings. The Country Club, with its tennis-courts, golf-links, and polo-fields, furnishes also a continuous source of outdoor amusement.”

Source: Mrs. Crawford Hill, “East vs. West,” Harper’s Bazarre (May, 1910): 314.

Denver’s Petertown Neighborhood

This photo shows housing in a lower-class neighborhood located near the railroad yards in lower downtown Denver. The photo was probably taken during the 1930’s.



Denver's Petertown neighborhood

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The poorest neighborhoods and cheapest housing usually were found in the oldest part of the cities. The houses in this neighborhood were built of railroad ties and used bricks. The residents seen in this photo were men who probably were unemployed at the time.

Barracks At Amache Camp

This was a barracks where people lived in the Japanese-American relocation camp near Granada, Colorado. The photo probably was taken in 1942.



Barracks at the Amache camp

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

During World War II, the United States government moved over 100,000 Japanese-Americans from California to relocation camps inland. It did not trust Japanese-Americans to be loyal to the United States during the war with Japan. One of these camps, the Amache Center camp, was located on the plains in eastern Colorado. The people forced to move there lived in barracks like the one in the photo.

Their Own Words

“When I first saw Granada [the location of the Amache internment camp], I thought ‘My God, is this it, or is this just another rest stop.’ I had never seen such a desolate place in all my life. There just seemed to be no one living there. But after awhile I realized there wouldn’t be any one there to hassle us like they did back home [in California], so that part of it would be okay.”

Source: Tom Shigekuni quoted in Robert Harvey, Amache: The Story of Japanese Internment in Colorado During World War II (Dallas, Taylor Trade, 2004): 77.

Home Interiors

What do these photos tell you about the way their home interiors looked like?

A 1960's Kitchen

This is a kitchen in a house in Central City. The photo was taken in 1960, but the kitchen dates from about 1900.



A kitchen in the 1960s

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In the early 1900s, kitchens were one of the most important rooms in the house. The woman of the house spent much of her time there. The photo shows the kitchen sink and work counter. The room was lighted by an electric lamp that hung from the ceiling.

A Sitting Room

This is the sitting room in the Bowman-White house in Georgetown. The photo was taken about 1945.



Bowman-White sitting room

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The sitting or living room was another important space in houses of the first half of the 1900s. People spent many of their evenings sitting beside a lamp table like the one in this photo talking and reading. Today, people spend more time in the family room watching television.

A Front Room

This is the living room of the Muriel Sibell Wolle house in Boulder. The room is decorated for Christmas.



Muriel Sibell Wolle living room

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

This photo shows a well-furnished living room. It has a chair, a bookcase, and an Indian rug on the floor. The room is decorated with pictures, wall candles, and Christmas decorations.

A Dining Room

This is the dining room in a house in Idaho Springs. The photo was taken through an archway from the living room. It is furnished with a table, chairs, and a buffet table against the wall. It is decorated with wallpaper, a mirror, candlesticks, and flowers on the table.



Dining room in Idaho Springs

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The dining room was an important room in many houses during the first half of the twentieth century. Middle class families usually gathered there for dinner each evening. Dining rooms then were not just places for special meals and dinner parties.

An Upstairs Bedroom

This is a bedroom in a house in Palmer Lake. The photo probably was taken during the 1940s.



A bedroom in Palmer Lake

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

This is a well-furnished bedroom from the mid-1900s. It has a four-poster bed with a satin bedspread, a vanity table with a mirror, and two other tables. The table against the wall has a radio on it.

A Barracks Room

This is a barracks room at the Amache Center near Granada. It shows a Japanese-American family that was forced to move there from California. This photo was taken in December 1942.



A barracks room at the Amache Center

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The barracks room in which Japanese-American lived at Amache Center were neither large nor well furnished. This photo shows Mrs. Ninomiya and her two sons. This bedroom-living room is furnished with a folding card table, a folding chair, bunk beds, and a dressing table and stool made from scrap wood.

Their Own Words

“It was crowded in my family’s room. We had seven people so we got the end unit. Of course, there wasn’t enough room for seven beds in the room, so we had to share beds. My mother and two younger brothers slept in a double bed we made and the three older boys slept in another double bed. My father got a single bed to himself.”

Source: George Hirano quoted in Robert Harvey, *Amache: The Story of Japanese Internment in Colorado During World War II* (Dallas, Taylor Trade, 2004): 87.