

20th CENTURY COLORADO – WORK AND TOOLS

Manufacturing

What do these photos tell you about what 20th century Coloradans manufactured?

Inside A Steel Mill (1960)

This photo shows the inside of a steel mill. The mill was owned by the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company in Pueblo, Colorado.



Inside a steel mill in Pueblo, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Factories in Colorado during the early 1900s made many kinds of products. These ranged from Russell Stover's candies to automobile tires to steel rails for railroads. This photo shows steel being made at the

CF&I mill at Pueblo. The bright light on the left side is a river of hot, melted iron that is flowing out of a blast furnace.

Their Own Words

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

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

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

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

A Delta Canning Factory (1935)

These women are working in a tomato canning factory in the town of Delta. The photo was taken about 1935.



Delta canning factory

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Farmers in Colorado grew many kinds of vegetables. That made food processing and canning an important industry. The women in this photo are peeling tomatoes and putting them into cans. The cans were sealed and heated to keep them from spoiling. Canned food from Colorado was shipped to many cities and states.

Gates Rubber Plant (1925)

These buildings are part of the Gates Rubber Company's factory in Denver. The sign on the building in the background says GATES TIRES.



Gates Rubber Company's factory in Denver

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The Gates Rubber Company manufactured a variety of rubber products. When the above photo was taken about 1925, auto tires were the company's most important product.

Their Own Words

"The founding of the company in Colorado was an accident. The two Gates brothers came here after graduating from the University of Michigan as mining engineers to engage in mining. When this business did not pan out, they invested their capital of \$1500 in leather halters and gradually branched out into the rubber business. They formed a closed corporation and have developed a business, which in 1940 sold 16 million dollars worth of goods. Their payroll of \$4,3000,000 was distributed among 3,200 employees....

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

Source: "Gates Rubber Company," in "Industry and Commerce, Sketches of Denver," Writers' Program, Colorado, Colorado Historical Society Library, [1940].

Alexander Aircraft Factory (1928)

This photo shows the interior of the Alexander Aircraft Factory in Colorado Springs. This photo was taken in 1928.



Alexander Aircraft Factory in Colorado Springs

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In the 1920s, this Colorado Springs aircraft company was one of the largest non-military aircraft factories in the United States. The factory made different kinds of planes. The one known in the photo is an Eaglerock, a small plane with two open cockpits.

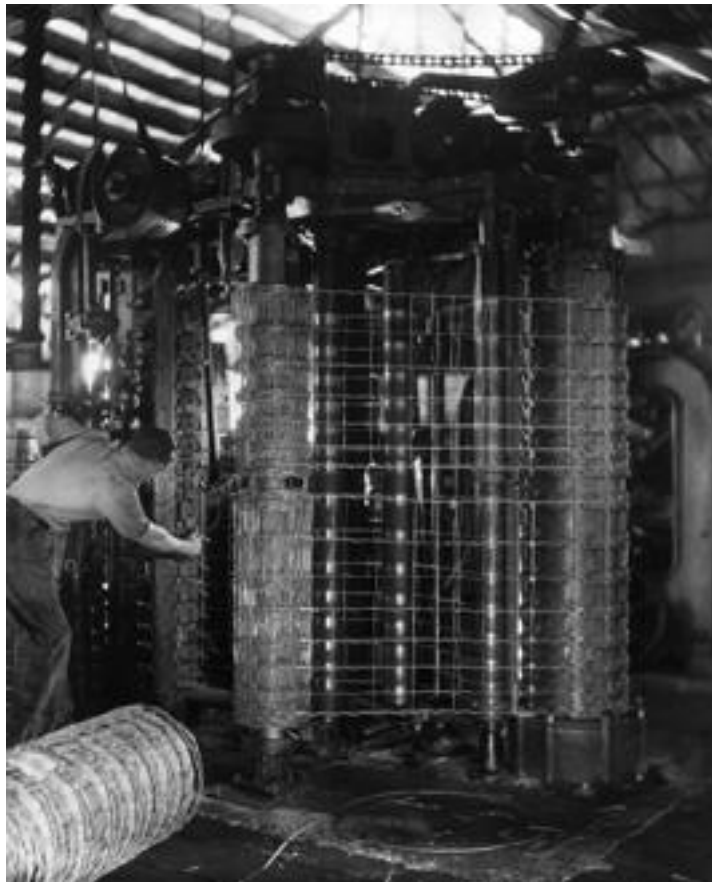
Their Own Words

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

Source: Robert Esterday, A Kid's-Eye View of Early Greeley (Greeley, CO: The Author, 1993): 39.

Making Steel Fencing (1960)

This photo shows a machine at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company's steel mill that made wire fence material. The photo was taken about 1960.



Making steel fencing

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The steel mill at Pueblo made several steel products. Among these were rails for railroads, steel wire, and steel mesh for fences.

Making Cotton Cloth (1937)

These are knitting machines that made cotton cloth from white cotton thread. The photo was taken in 1937.



Making cotton cloth

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The factory in this photo was located at the State Penitentiary in Canon City. The workers are prisoner. The white cones on top of the machines are spindles of white cotton thread. The cotton cloth is flowing

into the boxes beneath the machines. The machines are powered by belts connected to the drive shaft in the center of the photo.

Mining

What do these photos tell you about how 20th century mining was like?

Child Coal Miners (1920)

The young boys in this photo worked in a coal mine. The photo was taken about 1920.



Child coal miners

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Coal mining was an important industry in Colorado from the 1880s until the 1940s. Boys as young as 10 to 12-years-old worked in coalmines in Colorado. Some helped shovel coal into carts deep in the mines.

Others picked rocks out of the coal after it was brought to the surface. The work, while not always dangerous, was unhealthy.

Their Own Words

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

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

Two Miners In A Coal Mine (1925)

The two miners in this photo are working at a seam of coal deep underground. The photo was taken about 1925.



Two miners in a coal mine

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Miners found coal in thick, black layers or seams underground. They removed it with air-powered drills and hand tools. The miner on the left in this photo is holding a small power drill. The man on the right is using a pick. The men are wearing carbide lamps on their hats. The lamps contained carbide and water. Carbide is a carbon compound that produces a gas when it comes into contact with water. When lit with a match, the gas creates a bright light.

Their Own Words

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

Source: Tillie Mayer interview, quoted from Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson, and Duane A. Smith, eds., A Colorado Reader (Second Edition, Boulder, 1982), p. 100.

Two Coal Miners

These men are coal miners dressed for work.



Coal miners dressed for work

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

This photo shows the basic equipment of a coal miner. The men have lamps on their hats. They are carrying picks and lunch buckets. The man on the left has a water canteen on his belt.

Their Own Words

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

Source: Ed Tomsic interview, quoted from Rick J. Clyne, Coal People: Life in Southern Colorado's Company Towns, 1890-1930 (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1999), p. 47.

"Buy Coal From Josephine" (1930)

This woman is Josephine Roche, the president of the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company. The photo was taken about 1930.



Josephine Roche

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The Rocky Mountain Fuel Company was the second largest coal mining company in Colorado. Its president was Josephine Roche. Unlike most mine owners, Ms. Roche paid her workers good wages. Their slogan was “Buy Coal from Josephine!”

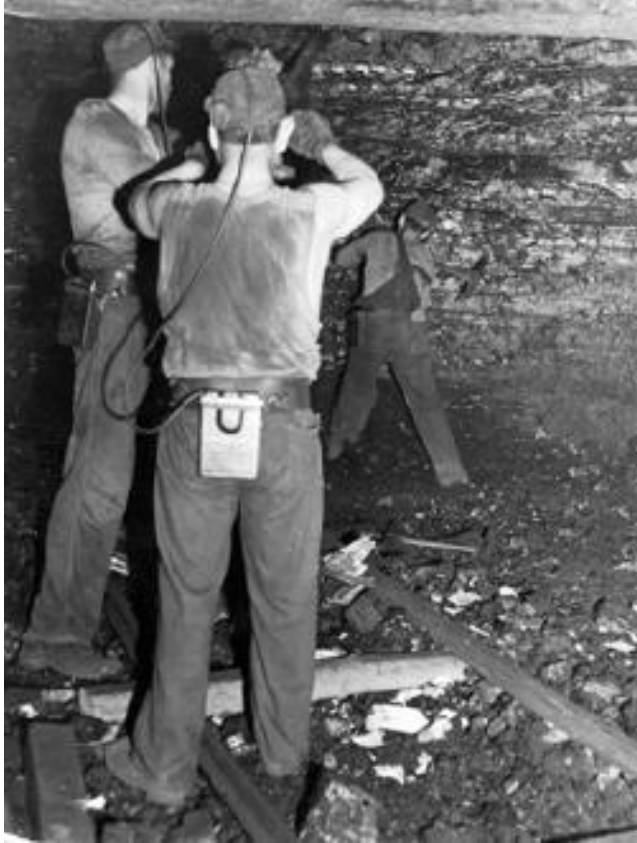
Their Own Words

“Josephine Roche signed a union contract, which was unheard of at that time. There was no Sunday work. When they needed coal, Josephine used to come out and crawl up on the rock pile—she always wore knickers and boots—and she’d say, ‘Now men, we need the coal. Will you work Sunday? We would like to have enough [men] to work. If you don’t work there will be no discrimination.’ And almost to a man, they agreed to work. She lived in Denver. She never asked some stooge to come out and ask us to work, she always come out herself. . . . In the fall of 1927 . . . she said she would sign a contract that had . . . to do with the American Federation of Labor. So we all joined the union, and I worked there quite a while. . . . By 1933 they all joined the union.”

Source: Lawrence Amicarella quoted Maria M. Rogers, ed., In Other Words: Oral Histories of the Colorado Frontier (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996): 39.

Working A Coal Seam (1930’s)

This photo was taken in the late 1930s in the Columbine mine near the town of Erie.



Working a coal seam

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The towns of Erie and Louisville were at the center of Colorado's northern coalfield or region. Two other important coalfields were those near Canon City and in the Walsenburg-Trinidad area.

Their Own Words

"It was none of it safe. . . . I done that up till [1940]. You didn't do nothin' but load coal; that's all you did. . . . All you did was shovel. That's all you had to do from the time you started in the morning till night; that's all you did. You'd be bent over all day, but it was high enough to where you could stand up, you know, if you wanted to rest. Why, it was about ten feet high."

Source: Jack Davies quoted in Maria M. Rogers, ed., In Other Words: Oral Histories of the Colorado Frontier (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996): 33.

Strip Mining Near Antonito

This photo shows mining at an open pit or strip mine near Antonito.



Strip mine near Antonito

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

By the 1950s, coal seams close to the surface were mined by power shovels like the one in this photo. This was called “strip mining.” Miners still went underground to mine the deeper seams. But after World War II, other sources of fuel undermined coal mining to some degree.

Their Own Words

“The coal miners had been important economically . . . and of course, with the freight trains being more numerous than ever the coal miners were all exempted from [World War Two military] service and the coal miners were going very well. Shortly after the war, within twelve months of the surrender, the [use of diesel fuel for] the motor power on the railroads was almost complete and that, of course, had a very adverse effect on the coal mines. There were eighteen of them running [in Boulder County] and by [1948] I don’t think any of them were operating.”

Source: Clyde Boyle quoted in Maria M. Rogers, ed., In Other Words: Oral Histories of the Colorado Frontier (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996): 40.

Farming

What do these photos tell you about how 20th century farming was like?

Breaking Plains Sod

The tractor in this photo is pulling a breaking plow. It is breaking and turning over the sod on the plains.



Breaking plains sod

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In the early 20th century, tractors like the one in this photo replaced horses to pull farm machinery. Farmers using tractors and breaking plows turned thousands of acres of grassland into wheat fields. But more production often decreased the prices farmers got for their crops.

Their Own Words

“The good years of the middle eighties ended with the dry years of 1889 and 1890. . . . There was a great exodus [departure] from this region in 1889 and 1890 and again in 1893-95. . . . In 1905 and 1906 settlers began to come in again and take up the land. They stayed on generally up to and through the World War [1914-1918]. During the war prices were high and we prospered. Since then there has been another slump and another exodus. Wheat now [1931] is down to twenty-five cents per bushel and times are pretty hard for the farmer. We have improved machinery and methods of farming that now

generally insure a crop. In the early years our chief concern was whether there would be enough rain to mature our crops. Now our main problem is to sell at a decent price what we raise.”

Source: Millard Fillmore Vance, “Pioneering at Akron, Colorado,” Colorado Magazine, 8 (September 1931): 177.

Unloading Sugar Beet Trucks

This photo shows a long line of farm trucks loaded with sugar beets. The farmers are waiting to unload these sugar beets near Brighton, Colorado. This photo was taken about 1910.



Unloading sugar beets

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Most farmers harvested their sugar beets at the same time in the fall. As a result, they had to wait in long lines to deliver their crops to the sugar factory.

Their Own Words

“[A department of agriculture study] says in part, ‘the estimated cost of hauling in wagons from farm to shipping points averaged in 1918 about 30 cents per ton mile for wheat, 33 cents for corn and 48 cents for cotton; for doing the same hauling in motor trucks the averages are 15 cents for wheat or corn and 18 cents for cotton. The motor truck will make an average of 3.4 round trips per day over an average route from farm to shipping point of 11.3 miles, while wagons will make but 1.2 round trips over an average haul of 9 miles. The increased number of trips alone will place the motor truck in the lead and prove it economy. The fact of the matter is that, taking wheat as an example, the average wagon load was 56 bushels, while that of the load of the average truck was 84 bushels.’”

Source: Akron Weekly Pioneer Press, November 7, 1919.

Truck Loaded With Sugar Beets

This is a photo of a young farm boy. He is sitting in the back of a truck loaded with sugar beets. The truck is parked in a sugar beet field somewhere in northern Colorado.



Truck loaded with sugar beets

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Notice the shape and size of the sugar beets. Notice too that the sugar beets are displayed on a chained sideboard of the truck bed. Moving the side board up and down made it easier to load and unload the sugar beets. This photo was taken in about 1910.

Their Own Words

"Think of the uses to which a truck can be put on the farm! It will haul produce to market and bring a return load of supplies to the farm. It will haul water to the live stock; it will haul wood for fuel; bring the implements to and from the fields, haul manure to the fields and bring back a load of stones on the return trip; will haul baled hay to the barns, corn bundles to the silage cutter; handle the grain, that is, both the corn on the cob and the threshed grain to the bin. It will haul live stock to market, thus making a saving of 5 to 8 percent over the shrinkage caused by driving stock on the hoof."

"A motor truck offers the farmer the advantage of prompt delivery of his perishable produce, thus reducing waste through decay, as when handled by wagon or railroad, and turning into cash crops which would otherwise be lost. Through its speed it enable him to run his farm with less help, it increases the radius of land profitable for market gardening and small farms around the cities, and will pay for itself in the first six months of use through the actual net saving it will make on any modern farm."

Source: Akron Weekly Pioneer Press, November 7, 1919.

The Results Of One Dust Storm

The dark cloud in this photo is a cloud of dust from fields in which farmers had plowed up the grassland. The photo was taken during the 1930s.



Dust Storm

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Breaking the sod left thousands of acres of topsoil exposed. During the 1930s, a long period of drought and high winds on the eastern plains blew part of this soil away. It turned part of southeastern Colorado into a “dust bowl.”

Their Own Words

“It was so dark [during a dust storm] they let school out; Dad and I tried to drive just three blocks and we got lost.... The street lights went on at 2 P. M. . . .

Dust blew in the attics of many houses, and the weight of the dirt caused ceilings to fall in. Even the birds were afraid to fly.

Folks, that’s what dust storm was, and once you have been in one, you’ll never forget it.”

Source: Keith A. Cook, “A Whiskey Train and a Doughnut Day: Coming of Age on the Eastern Colorado Plains,” Colorado Heritage (Spring 1998), p. 4.

The Results Of One Dust Storm

This photo was taken in eastern Colorado in 1935. It shows drifted topsoil from nearby fields.



Dust storm drifts in eastern Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The dust storms of the 1930s put many farmers out of business. Their farms were part of the dust bowl.

Their Own Words

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

Source: Theresa Lee, "The Depression Years," in Margaret J. Lehrer, Ed., Up The Hemline (Colorado Springs, 1975), p. 133.

Harvesting Grain

This photo shows the first field of spinach harvested by Japanese-American farmers at Camp Amache near Granada.



Harvesting spinach at Camp Amache

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Many of the Japanese-Americans from California who were forced to move to Colorado during World War II were good farmers. They harvested this crop of spinach in June 1943.

Their Own Words

“The relocation of the Japanese to Colorado has been a ‘God-sent’ gift to the hundreds of farmers, particularly in the sugar beet districts. The evacuee laborers have aided in the harvesting of this essential product. . . . [The] farmers who have employed Japanese labor, frankly admitted that their relationship has been of first class rating. It has been reported that, since the standards of living of the majority of the Japanese were much higher than those formerly hired by these farmers, the evacuee laborers have contributed to the improvement of working conditions and housing facilities in general. We are in receipt of many letters of appreciation for the excellent work done by evacuee laborers everywhere.”

Source: Oski Taniwaki quoted in Robert Harvey, Amache: The Story of Japanese Internment in Colorado During World War II (Dallas, Taylor Trade, 2004): 67.

Harvesting Grain

The wheat field in this photo is being harvested by a self-propelled combine.



Harvesting grain with a combine

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Combine machines like the one in this photo replaced binders and threshing machines or separators. They cut the wheat and threshed the grain in one combined operation.

Their Own Words

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

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

Denver's Union Stockyards

This is a photo of the Union Stockyards in Denver.



Denver's Union Stockyards

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Cattle raising remained an important business in Colorado throughout the 20th century. This photo shows the stockyards in Denver, where cattle were brought to be sold and slaughtered. The buildings in the background are slaughter houses.

Their Own Words

"The DENVER UNION STOCKYARDS. . . . established in 1886, occupies 130 acres. . . . This is the largest receiving market for sheep in the United States. . . . more than 1,000,000 pass through the yards annually. The plant, centered on the Livestock Building. . . . has facilities for handling 70,000 sheep, 33,000 cattle, 10,000 hogs, and 2,000 horses or mules. The cattle-branding chutes have a daily capacity of 4,500. The Stockyards Stadium, E. 47th Ave. and Gilpin St., a large rambling brick and frame building seating 4,400, is the scene of the annual National Western Rodeo, Horse Show, and Livestock Show."

Source: Colorado Writers' Program, Colorado: A Guide to the Highest State (New York: Hastings House, 1941): 151.

Selling

What do these photos tell you about what sales jobs were like?

Stanley's Store In Keota

This photo shows the interior of Stanley's Store in Keota, Colorado.



Stanley's Store in Keota, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In the small towns of Colorado, general stores survived well into the 20th century. The goods displayed in this photo of Stanley's Store include books, fruit, canned goods, and soap powder.

Their Own Words

"I came here to Craig in 1908. . . . Well, next year, after we came here, you see, he had the J. W. Hugus Company down here on the corner [in Craig], across from our old bank. That was a general store. They had everything from toothpicks to binders and plows and everything. Then [Dad] got a chance to haul freight from Steamboat [Springs] to help pay our grocery bill. They let us have groceries—anything we needed—and he'd haul freight."

Source: Julia Biskup Kawcak quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed., Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950 (New York: Twayne, 1992): 19.

Poates Barber Shop (1930's)

This is Poates Barber Shop in Denver. The photo was taken during the 1930s.



Poates Barber Shop in Denver

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Haircuts were cheap during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The signs in the window of this barber shop say: "Hair Cuts 15 cents, First Class Work," "Children Hair Cuts 5 Cents," and "3 Barbers."

A Pueblo General Store (1910)

This is a liquor store and delicatessen in Pueblo. The photo was taken about 1910.



General store in Pueblo, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

This store did two kinds of business. The woman on the left side of the aisle is standing behind a delicatessen counter. The sign above her says: "Sandwiches and Lunches." The rest of the store is a food, cigar and liquor store. The items on sale include canned and bottled food, boxes of cigars, and bottles of wine and liquor.

Rio Grande Hardware Store (1928)

This is the interior of the Rio Grande Hardware Store in Monte Vista. The photo was taken in 1928.



Rio Grande Hardware Store in Monte Vista

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Every city had at least one hardware store. This one in Monte Vista displayed scissors and knives, axes, files, saws, metal pots, and toy wagons.

Their Own Words

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

Source: Robert Esterday, A Kid's-Eye View of Early Greeley (Greeley, CO: The Author, 1993), p.35.

Main Street Stores (1920's)

This is Main Street in Grand Junction. The style of autos indicates that the photo was taken during the 1920s.



Main Street in Grand Junction

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

A city's main street was also its main shopping district. The stores on Grand Junction's Main Street included an auto tire shop, a bakery, a hardware store, and a Piggly Wiggly grocery store.

Services

What do these photos tell you about the different service industries Coloradans needed in the 20th century?

A “Bandit Chaser”

This was a Denver police car of the 1920s.



Denver police car

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The Denver police car in this photo was called the "bandit chaser." It had a hand-cranked siren attached to the running board. It also was equipped with three spotlights and a large bell.

Their Own Words

"[Denver] is one of the best lighted cities in the land. She has the commission form of [city] government. (Also, as you will remember, she has woman suffrage, Colorado having been the first State to accept it.) Her Children's Court, presided over by Judge Benjamin Lindsey, is famous. She has no bread line, and as for crime, when I asked Police Inspector Leonard De Lue about it, he shook his head and said: 'No; business is light. The fact is we ain't got no crime out here.'"

Source: Julian Street, "Hitting a High Spot: Denver," Colliers (November 7, 1914): 16.

An Edgewater Fire Engine

This fire station was located in Edgewater, a community in Jefferson County near Denver. The station was located in the same building as the City Hall.



Edgewater Fire Station

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Fire fighting equipment changed rapidly after the invention of the automobile. This photo shows Edgewater's old hand-pulled hose cart next to its new fire truck loaded with hoses and other equipment. The photo was taken in 1927.

Wheat Ridge Fire Department

This hose truck was owned by the Wheat Ridge Fire Department. The photo dates from the late 1940s.



Wheat Ridge Fire Department

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

By the mid-1900s, fire trucks were bigger and more powerful. Compare the truck in this photo with the one in the previous photo.

A Telluride Bank

Banks also provided important services. This is the interior of the Bank of Telluride. The photo was taken probably in the 1930s.



The inside of the Bank of Telluride

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

This photo may have been an advertisement to show customers how safe it was to leave their money in the Bank of Telluride. Stack of silver dollars are lined up on the counter on the right. Next to the rolls of coins are two pistols. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many people lost faith in banks because so many failed or closed.

Their Own Words

“During [the Great Depression of the 1930s] when the banks were all closed and you didn’t have any money, people used to bring chickens and vegetables and things to the office [the newspaper] to pay [their bills]. That was the Depression. We look back and we weren’t happy about it, you know-we all had plenty to eat. I think as long as you’ve got plenty to eat, things aren’t too bad.”

Source: Lena Ely Stoddard quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed., Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950 (New York: Twanaye, 1992): 76-77.

Gilmore’s Funeral Home

These undertakers had their photo taken in front of their funeral home.



Gilmore's funeral home

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The sign in the window says Q. J. Gilmore Undertaker. The men standing in front are the owners and employees. They are African Americans.

Bell Telephone Operators (1930's)

This is the Bell Telephone Company's central office in Denver. The photo was taken during the 1930s.



Bell's Telephone Company

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In the 1930s, all phone calls had to be connected by an operator in a central office. The operator's job was to answer incoming calls, find out who the caller wanted to talk to, then connect the caller's phone line to that person's line. Phone companies usually hired women as phone operators.

Their Own Words

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

Source: A. G. Birch, "The Third Telephone Exchange Operated Anywhere in the World," Denver Post, Jan. 9, 1916.

Electric Home Appliances

This photo shows electrical appliances for the home that were available by the 1930s.



Electric home appliances

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The appliances in this photo include a washing machine (left), an electric iron on an ironing board (center), and an automatic ironing machine (right). The woman is using the ironing machine. This display was created by the Denver Gas & Electric Light Company, which encouraged housewives to use electric appliances.