

COLORADO FARMERS & RANCHERS – COMMUNITY LIFE

Holidays and Festivals

What do these photos tell you about the holidays and festivals farmers and ranchers celebrated?

Melon Day In Rocky Ford (1893)

The women in this photo are eating watermelons at the Melon Day Festival at Rocky Ford, Colorado.



Women celebrating Melon Day in Rocky Ford, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

In the late 1800s, many towns in Colorado held a festival each fall. The festival advertised the special crops grown by the local farmers and was a time to have fun. The oldest festival was Rocky Ford's Melon Day, held on the first Thursday of September. It was begun in 1878 by Senator George W. Swink, an

Arkansas Valley pioneer. By the 1890s, thousands of visitors attended Melon Day each year. The farmers gave away all the watermelons and cantaloupes that people could eat.

Their Own Words

In the following excerpt, Sarah Savage Brillhart describes a "Watermelon Day" festival:

"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."

Source: From Mary Ruth Kauffman, Sarah, Her 100 Years [the Life of Sarah Savage Brillhart], (Boulder: Gambrill Properties Publisher, 1982): 24.

Colorado Spring Sunflower Carnival

This photo shows a horse-drawn float at the Sunflower Carnival at Colorado Spring. The people are riding in a hay wagon decorated with crepe paper, flags and flowers. The man standing in front is dressed like Uncle Sam.



Sunflower Carnival in Colorado Springs

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Colorado Spring had a Sunflower Carnival. Greeley had a Potato Day. Grand Junction had a Peach Day festival to celebrate the fruit for which it was best known. Former President William Howard Taft was the guest of honor at Peach Day in 1909.

Their Own Words

“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: From the Grand Junction News, Sept. 9, 1893.

Sterling Harvest Festival

This photo shows a parade on the main street of Sterling, Colorado during the town's Harvest Festival.



Sterling Harvest Festival in Sterling, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Sterling had a Harvest Festival, which it celebrated with a parade. Longmont had a Pumpkin Pie Day. Fort Collins had Lamb Day, which featured all the barbecued lamb one could eat. For many years, Boulder had a Strawberry Festival early in the summer.

Their Own Words

"In the 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."

Source: From Mary Ruth Kauffman, Sarah, Her 100 Years [the Life of Sarah Savage Brillhart], (Boulder: Gambrill Properties Publisher, 1982): 24.

Colorado State Fair

This photo shows a horse-drawn fire wagon in a parade in Pueblo, Colorado. The parade was held to celebrate the opening of the Colorado State Fair.



Colorado State Fair in Pueblo, Colorado

Photo: N/A

More About This Topic

In October 1887, the city of Pueblo held the first State Fair in Colorado. People came from many parts of the state to show off the fine vegetables, fruit, grains, and animals they had raised. It quickly became the largest agricultural fair held in Colorado, as it still is today. Local festivals, such as Greeley's Potato Day, also celebrated the vegetables grown in Colorado.

Their Own Words

"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 gentlemen of color imported from Denver, who superintended the dissection of the two oxen, which had been roasted to turn on bars of railroad iron over beds of glowing coals.... The roast ox was pronounced decision by those fortunate enough to secure portions. The potatoes were well baked, constituted a menu proportionate to the appetites of the multitude on this perfect October day."

Source: Denver Republican, 11 October, 1894, in Carl Ubbelohde, ed., A Colorado Reader (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Co., 1982): 295-96.

Vegetable Display At State Fair

This photo shows vegetables on display at the Colorado State Fair. The photo was taken about 1893.



Display of vegetables at the Colorado State Fair

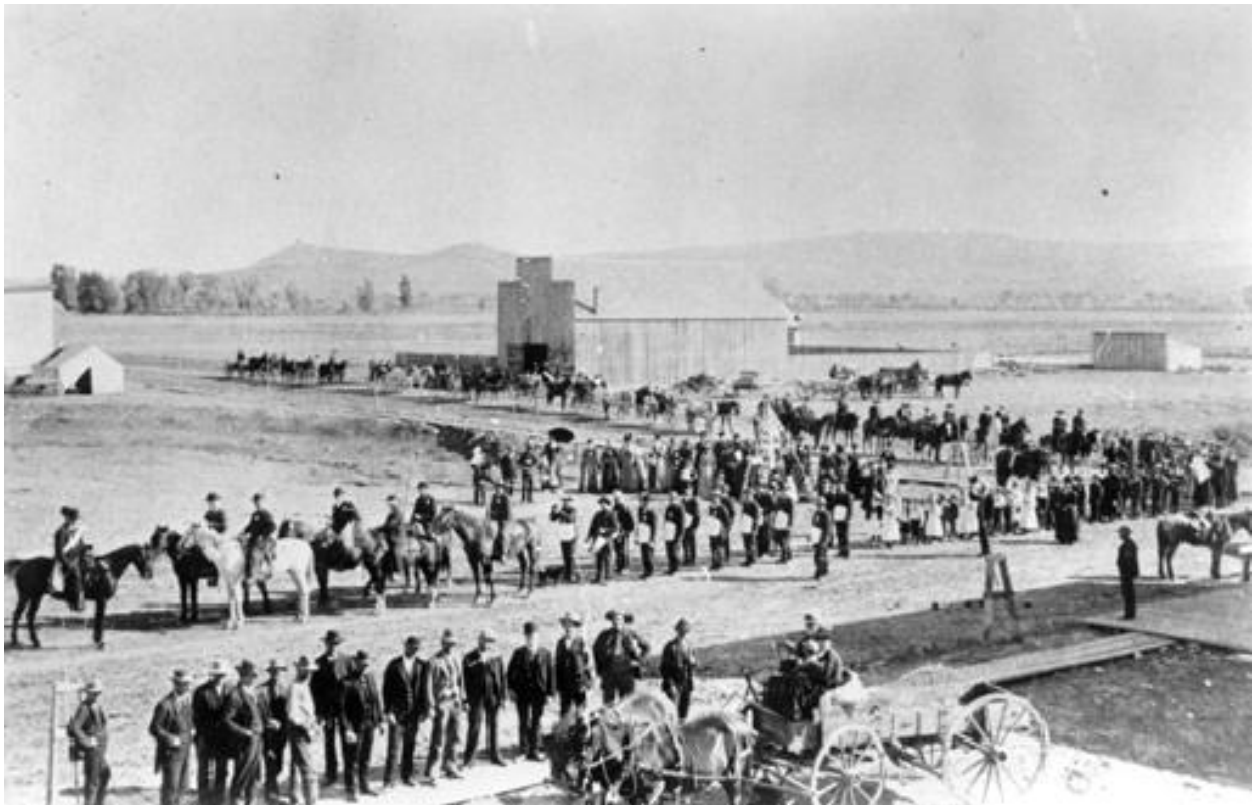
Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The State Fair helped to improve agriculture in Colorado. Judges gave awards and ribbons for the best produce or animals on display. Farmers who attended the fair could compare their field crops or livestock with the best raised in other parts of the state. The Fair helped them become better farmers or stock growers.

Columbus Day In Craig (1892)

This was the Columbus Day parade in Craig, Colorado. The photo was taken in October 1892. That was the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in America.



Columbus Day in Craig, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The towns in Colorado celebrated national holidays as well as harvest festivals. The Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Columbus Day were popular holidays.

Their Own Words

“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.”

Source: Mary Powers Hudnall, “Early History of Bent County,” Colorado Magazine, 22 (1945): 246.

Churches and Religion

What do these photos tell you about how their churches looked like?

A Greeley Church

This was the first Trinity Episcopal Church in Greeley, Colorado. The church had just been built when this photo was taken. The size of the young trees in front are evidence of that.



Trinity Episcopal Church in Greeley, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The early settlers brought their religion with them to Colorado. They held their first religious services in their homes, in schoolhouses, and even in grocery stores. It usually took several years to raise the money to build a fine brick church like the one in the photo.

Their Own Words

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

A Gillett Church

This is a photo of a Catholic church in Gillett, Colorado.



Catholic Church in Gillett, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Many of the early churches built in Colorado were small, like this church in Gillett. The size of this church also indicates that few Catholics lived in this community.

Their Own Words

"I done it. I'd maybe work till midnight sometimes. I'd be ironing till midnight before we could go to church. Otherwise, they'd [her 19 children] put on something without ironing to go do things outside. But I'd iron everything so we'd have it nice to come to church. We'd have to come on the wagon, you know. We'd leave up there at the ranch about five in the morning, to get down here for ten o'clock mass. . . . No, we didn't have church in the winter. Just summertime."

Source: Julia Biskup Kawcak quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed. Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950, (New York: Twanye, 1992): 48.

An Adobe Church

This is a photo of Our Lady of Guadeloupe church at Conejos in the San Luis Valley.



Our Lady of Guadeloupe church at Conejos

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The Spanish-American town of Conejos was one of the first towns founded in Colorado. Although the settlers were poor, they wanted to have a fine church. They began building Our Lady of Guadalupe church in 1858. It took them several years to complete it.

Their Own Words

"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: From Charles E. Gibson (1934?), CWA Interviews, DOC. 349/2, Colorado Historical Society.

Entertainment

What do these photos tell you about what they did for entertainment?

A Late 1800's Picnic

This photo shows a group of men and women having a picnic in a forest.



Picnic in a forest

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

People who lived in Colorado in the 1800s found many ways to entertain themselves. They got close to nature by hiking, mountain climbing, and camping out. To raise money, churches put on lawn socials during the summer and box suppers during the winter. Dancing was another popular form of entertainment.

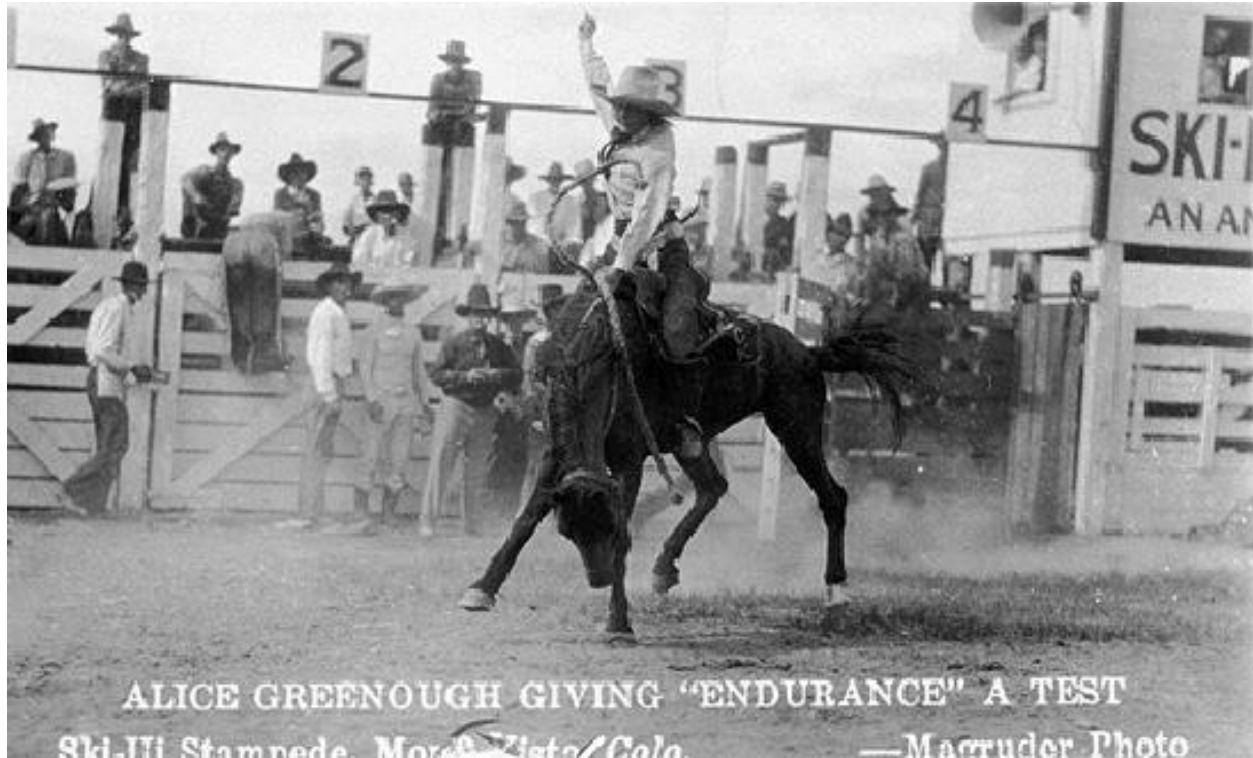
Their Own Words

"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 cornfield 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."

Source: Clara Watson, "Homesteading on the Plains," The Colorado Magazine, 38 (1961): 142.

A Rodeo In Monta Vista

This photo was taken at a rodeo in Monta Vista, Colorado. The bronco riders was Alice Greenough, a woman rodeo performer. Alice is trying to stay on a bucking bronco named Endurance.



Rodeo in Mont Vista, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Rodeos have been a popular form of entertainment in Colorado since the late 1800s. Cattlemen especially liked to watch cowboys (and cowgirls) display their skills roping calves and riding bucking broncos.

Their Own Words

“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.”

Source: From George A. Hodgson in Colorado Magazine 12, (1935): 75.

The First Brigade Band

This is the First Brigade Band of Greeley. The band members are posed with tubas, cornets, and other brass instruments.



First Brigade Band of Greeley

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Listening to men's brass bands was another popular form of entertainment in the late 1800s. Nearly every town had a brass band. They marched in parades and played in city parks on Sunday afternoons.

Their Own Words

“The arrival of a pretty, young and single female was of no small importance in the growing community [of Longmont]. On the scheduled day, the Grist Mill was shut down, stores closed, and as a result of much after work practicing, a creditable band composed of hopeful, young unattached males had been hastily put together. When the stage [coach] arrived bearing Miss Easton, she was welcomed by the loud, off-key blarings of the band and . . . smiling young men milling around her.”

Source: Havis C. Motisher, “The ‘Double Entry’ of Miss Easton,” in Margaret J. Lehrer, ed., Up the Hemline (Colorado Springs: Williams and Field, 1975): 11.

A Play In Craig (1894)

This is a theatre performance in Craig, Colorado. The photo was taken in 1894.



Theatre play in Craig, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The people of Colorado in the 1890s had no movie theatres or television programs. But they could go to theaters to watch plays put on by the local people. The actors from Craig in this photo was putting on a “western” play entitled “Nevada.”

Sports

What do these photos tell you about the sports they played?

Sterling Baseball Team

This is a photo of the Sterling, Colorado baseball team. The men's uniforms were long-sleeved shirts, pants that came to the knees, and long stockings.



Sterling baseball team in Sterling, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Baseball was a popular sport in Colorado. Many towns had a baseball team that played against teams from other towns. Some wore uniforms like those worn by the team in this photo. Often, groups simply got together at an empty field for a friendly game of baseball.

Their Own Words

"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 form[s] 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. . . . [They would] 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.

Playing "El Chueco"

This photo shows a group of men about to play the game of el chueco. The players are standing behind the two musicians.



Game of el chueco

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

In southern Colorado, the game of el chueco was a popular sport. Players used a curved stick (el chueco) to try to knock a small leather ball across their opponent's goal line.

Sterling Women's Basketball Team

This is a women's basketball team from Sterling, Colorado. These young women attended Logan County High School (LCHS). The photo was taken in 1904.



Sterling women's basketball team

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

At one time only men played team sports. That was no longer true by the early 1900s, when this photo was taken. Basketball was then a new sport, and women quickly got involved. Women's high school teams, like this one from Sterling, played against one another.