

COLORADO FARMERS & RANCHERS – FAMILIES, CHILDREN & SCHOOLS

Families

What do these photos tell you about who posed in family photographs?

A Hispanic American Family

This family photo was taken near Trinidad, Colorado in the late 1800s. It includes the father, the mother, their daughter, and an older woman.



Hispanic American family

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Families in the 1800s often included more than two adults. The older woman in this photo may have been the girl's grandmother. Many households in Colorado at this time included an elderly parent who was no longer able to keep a separate home.

A Farm Family

This family photo was taken on a farm in Colorado in the late 1800s. It shows the family's house, outbuildings, and a team of horses hitched to a wagon. Photos of farm families often included the house and other family property.



Farm family in Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

In addition to the husband, wife, and three children, this photo included a second man. He may have been a relative, but could also have been a hired man. Men hired to help on a farm often lived with the family and were treated as family members.

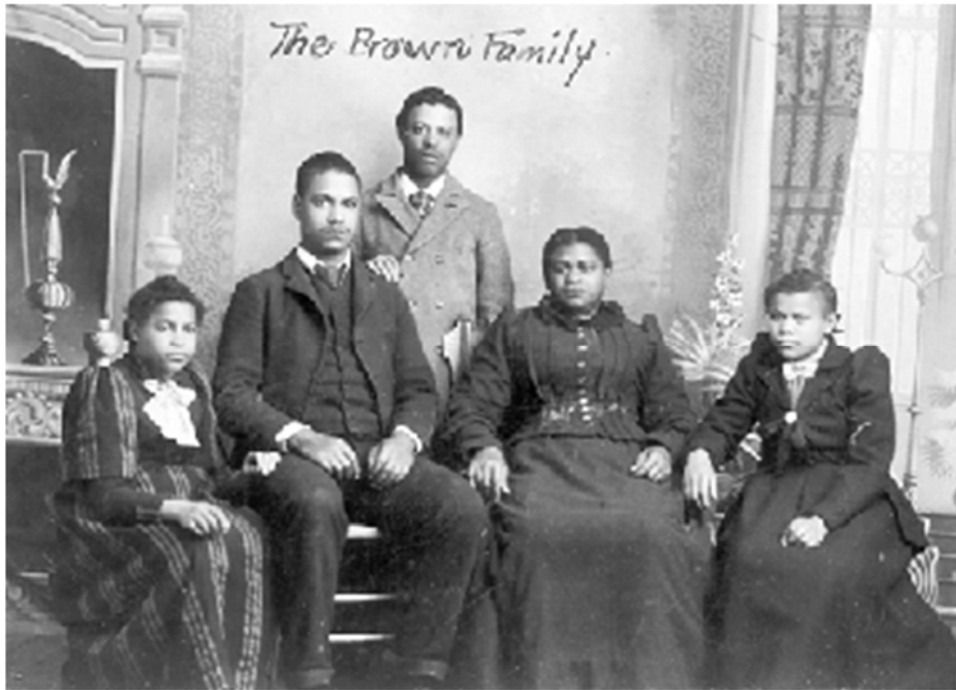
Their Own Words

"A dollar was a dollar in those days. We didn't think anything even in my time of going to help build a house or going to help do some plowing. The going rates a lot of times was about fifteen dollars a month and sometimes less than that for a man to work on a farm from sunrise to sunset and get fifteen dollar a month and his board and room. That was the way wages were. Money wasn't as necessary as getting some food, some clothing and so forth."

Source: Frank Miller quoted Maria M. Rogers, ed., In Other Words: Oral Histories of the Colorado Frontier (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996): 27.

The Brown Family

This photo of the Brown family was taken in the late 1800s. It was taken at a photographer's studio in Greeley, Colorado.



Brown family at a photographer's studio in Greeley, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Having a family photo taken was a special event in the late 1800s. Many people went to a photographer's studio to have their picture taken. There they chose a formal setting like the canvas backdrop in this studio. They dressed up to look their very best.

Their Own Words

"My father was a foreman on the railroad, and he farmed too. My older brother and mother did a lot of the farming because that was the only way we could make it. . . . I don't remember any of the women ever working out [of their homes], only at potato harvest time. . . ."

Source: Sarah Fountain quoted in Sue Armitage, Theresa Banfield, and Sarah Jacobus, "Black Women and Their Communities in Colorado," Frontiers, II (No. 2): 48.

The Walters Family (1885)

This is a photo of W. A. Walters family. It was taken at their home in Wetmore, Colorado about the year 1885.



Walters's family in Wetmore, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Large families were common in the 1800s. Mr. and Mrs. Walters had eight children, including seven boys and one girl. Some families had as many as ten or twelve children.

Their Own Words

"[In large farm families] every child as they grew up was given a responsibility and they were held to that responsibility. I can remember that I had the chickens to take care of when I was . . . maybe four or five years old. . . . But we grew into our responsibilities, and each and every one was expected to do what they knew they should do. . . ."

Source: Audrey Ruckman Oldland quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed., Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950 (New York: Twayne, 1992): 86, 87.

The Betts Family (1880)

This is the I. A. Betts family, who lived in Wetmore, Colorado. The photo was taken about 1885 by a traveling photographer. His studio was the tent in which this family is seated.



Betts family in a studio tent in Wetmore, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The Betts family included seven children. Families of this size were not unusual in Colorado in the late 1800s.

Their Own Words

"We were never hungry. My son Nick will tell anybody, 'There was a lot of us. We might not have fancy clothes to put on, but we never went hungry, never.' He said, 'Even if we just had noodles mixed with fried cabbage or something, we ate it, and it was good' We'd buy bacon, big slabs, and I'd buy eggs from somebody until I got chickens, 10 [cents] a dozen. Oh, I fried bacon and put eggs over, and [we'd] have bacon and eggs. We always had enough to eat."

Source: Julia Biskup Kawcak quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed., Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950 (NY: Twayne, 1992): 46-7.

Children

What do these photos tell you about what children were like?

Children At The Backdoor

This photo was taken outside the back door of a house somewhere in Colorado. The four children in the photo are dressed in everyday clothes.



Children at the backdoor

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The children in this photo probably were brothers and sisters. Having several brothers and sisters had its advantages. It was easy to find playmates. It also meant that the oldest child often had to take care of the younger ones. Sometimes young mothers relied on other family members, if possible, for help with small children.

Their Own Words.

“When I had been there [near Ft. Collins in 1871] about two weeks, Sister’s first baby was born. She told me long afterwards that she did not have anyone to stay with her except [her husband] Henry, and when he was outdoors working she needed someone in the house with her. She wanted me to keep up the fire for her. I was just nine years old, but I had been taught to work. Sister was only seventeen, and she was very sick, but she could tell me what to do. I could lift Baby around for her, wash his clothes, wait on her, and wash dishes and help my brother-in-law cook. I stayed with them until Christmas. . . .”

Source: Amanda Hardin Brown, “A Pioneer in Colorado and Wyoming,” Colorado Magazine, 35 (July 1958): 174.

Young Girl Feeding Chickens

This photo was taken outside a chicken house on a Colorado farm. The little girl in the picture is feeding the chickens. The chicken feed is in the can she is holding.



A young girl feeding chickens on a Colorado farm

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Children on farms and ranches had outside chores. Boys as well as girls fed chickens, hoed weeds in the garden, and helped with feeding and milking cows. Children like the one in this photo began learning these chores at a young age.

Their Own Words

Girls did other chores besides feeding chickens, as this woman remembered:

“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. ‘

Source: Hazel Webb Dalziel, “The Way It Was,” Colorado Magazine, 45 (Spring 1968): 111.

Farm Boys Pitching Hay

This photo was taken on a ranch in Colorado. The boys are removing hay from the haystack with pitchforks.



Farm boys pitching hay on a ranch in Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Boys on Colorado farms worked in the fields with their fathers. The boys in this photo are pitching hay from a haystack. Hay was fed to cattle and horses. Boys who grew up on ranches herded cattle from an early age.

Their Own Words

"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.

Boys Playing Stick Ball (1912)

This photo was taken in 1912 in the farm community of Ramah, Colorado. Ramah was a farm town in El Paso County. The boys are playing ball in a vacant lot.



Boys playing stick ball in Ramah, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The boys in the photo are playing stick ball. Girls also played ball games, such as the game of Andy Over. Click on In Their Own Words for a description of this game.

Their Own Words

Children also played a game called Andy Over, as this woman remembers:

“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 excitement.”

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

Classrooms

What do these photos tell you about how classrooms were like inside?

One Room Log Classroom

This photo was taken inside a log school house in Colorado. The log wall behind the students is decorated with pictures of women dressed in stylish clothes.



One room log classroom in Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In the first classrooms in Colorado, children sat at wooden benches or at desks made of wood and iron. The seats were nearly always lined up in rows. The teacher's desk was usually at the front of the classroom.

Their Own Words

"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 teacher's desk."

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

A Fort Lupton Classroom

This photo shows the interior of a classroom in Fort Lupton, Colorado. It shows children sitting in separate desks. The photo was taken about the year 1900.



Classroom in Fort Lupton, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In small communities, all the children used the same classroom. Larger towns like Fort Lupton could afford to build schools with several rooms. That does not mean that students the same age had their own classroom. This elementary school probably had four or five classrooms in which students were clustered by age.

Their Own Words

“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 lunch at recess, wet my pants before noon, then walked home in sheer embarrassment and didn’t go to school again at Fine Flats.”

Source: William T. Holland testimonial in Roleta D. Teal, Kiowa County (Kiowa Co. Bicentennial Commission, 1976): 185.

An Elementary School Classroom

This is another classroom in Fort Lupton. In front of the blackboard are twenty-eight students and two teachers. The room was heated by a coal-burning stove.



Elementary school classroom in Fort Lupton, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In this classroom, students also were clustered by age. The youngest appear to be 4 or 5 years old, the oldest 6 or 7. This community was not yet large enough to have a separate classroom for each age or grade level.

Their Own Words

"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."

Source: A. W. McHendrie, "Boyhood Recollections of Springfield, Colorado," Colorado Magazine, 11 (May 1944): 99.

Schools

What do these photos tell you about how schools were like?

Log School In Pine Grove (1892)

This photo was taken in Pine Grove, Colorado (now the town of Pine). It shows a one-room, log school house, 11 students, and their teacher.



Log school in Pine Grove, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The early settlers of Colorado thought the education of children was very important. A schoolhouse like the one in this photo often was the first public building in a community.

Their Own Words

"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."

Source: Glen R. Durrell, "Homesteading in Colorado," Colorado Magazine, 51 (1974): 101-102.

School House Near Limon

This is a photo of a one-room school near Limon in eastern Colorado. The photo was taken in June 1907 shows Mrs. Shanahan, the teacher, and her eleven students. The schoolhouse was built of sod.



Schoolhouse in Limon the eastern part of Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Many small communities in Colorado had one-room schools. Children of different ages sat together in a single classroom with one teacher. The teacher spent time with some students while others worked on assignments. Sometimes older students helped teach the younger ones.

Their Own Words

"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 one...."

"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."

Source: Glen R. Durrell, "Homesteading in Colorado," Colorado Magazine, 51 (1974): 102-103.

Log School Near Walden (1887)

One-room log school house near Walden, Colorado in North Park. It shows children in front of the school. Most of the children are on horseback. The photo was taken in 1887 or 1888.



One-room log schoolhouse in Walden, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In rural areas in the 1800s, most children walked to school. In ranch country like North Park, at least some children rode horses to school.

Their Own Words

"The school [on Ohio Creek] was a success from the start. Some of the children came eight or ten miles to attend but all of the ranchmen had ponies which were plentiful and cheap and even young children rode. It was decided that the school must have a library, so an entertainment was given at the school house to raise funds for the purpose. The entertainment was a great success; certainly the performers said so. All was by home talent except one friend who came up from Gunnison City to help us."

Source: H. C. Cornwall, "Ranching on Ohio Creek, 1881-1886," Colorado Magazine, 32 (January 1955): 23.

One Room School Near Ramah

This is a one-room school near Ramah, Colorado, a town east of Colorado Springs. The building is made of boards sawed at a sawmill.



One-room school near Ramah, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In many Colorado communities, the first schools as well as the first houses were built of logs or sod. Most people thought of them as temporary buildings. As soon as they could afford it, the community built a “proper” frame school building like this one in Ramah.

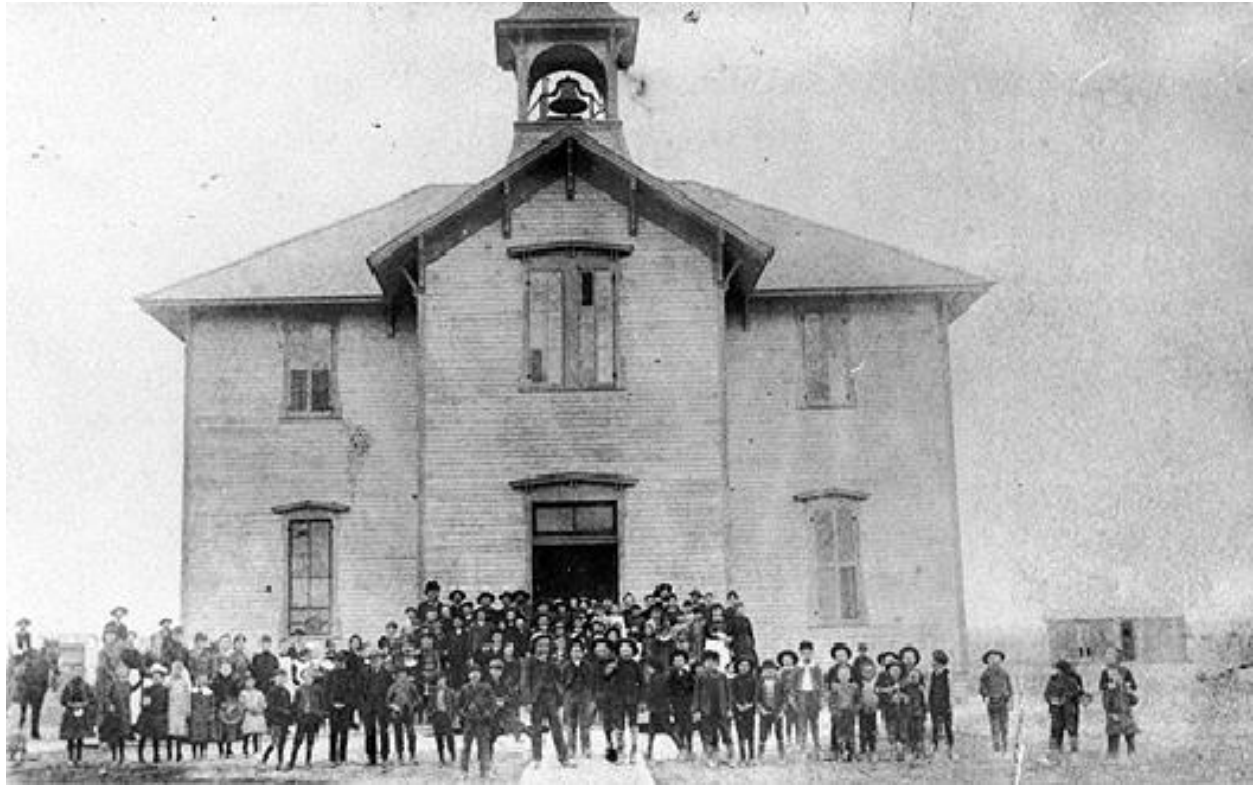
Their Own Words

“I went to school in a sod school house near Latham. It has a rough board floor and a dirt roof. There was a window on each side and there was a windowpane. 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.

Frame School In Sterling (1884)

This photo taken in 1884 shows the elementary school in Sterling, Colorado. It also shows students and teachers standing in front of the school. This was a large wooden frame building.



Elementary school in Sterling, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Towns like Sterling outgrew their one-room schools. They built larger frame buildings with several rooms. In the elementary school in this photo, two grades could share a room. The building had two large rooms on each floor. Only in big cities were schools large enough for each grade to have its own room.

School House At Mosca

This is a photo of the school at Mosca in Alamoso County, Colorado. It is a 12-grade school attended by students from grade 1 though high school. It was a wooden frame building.



Schoolhouse in Mosca, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

When Colorado was first settled, few communities had high schools. Most children quite school after the 8th grade. Those who attended high school had to move to a large town or city. Then, in the early 1900s, many smaller communities began building high schools. The town of Mosca built a school large enough for elementary and high school students to use the same building.

Three Schools In Craig

This photo taken in Craig, Colorado in 1917 shows three school buildings. The earliest school was the small building on the left. The two-story frame building on the right was built in 1891 or 1892. It would be replaced by the brick building, which was nearly finished when this photo was taken.



Three schools in Craig, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

As communities grew they built new school buildings. The first log or sod schools were replaced by wooden frame buildings. In time, most of those were replaced with buildings made of brick. This photo shows how the school in Craig expanded from a one-room school to a large brick building. Most of the school buildings built in Colorado after 1900 were brick buildings.

Their Own Words

“The new high school building of red, kiln-baked bricks, supporting sandstone trim, and date plate—1888—boasted hot water heating and furnace room. Tall, two-sashed windows admitted light through double panes [of glass]. Dark green shades with long, ring-tipped cords shut out the sun, provided the wind wasn’t blowing. The building itself reflected dignity—even a little grandeur—with side front doors, a spacious hallway leading to ground-floor classrooms, winding stairs, and a magnificent belfry topped by four ornately shingled arches beneath the swiveling lightning rod. The stairs rose to second-floor classrooms, superintendent’s office and large assembly hall.”

Source: Gladys Seevers, “Amo, Amas, Amat – Lamar High School – 1897,” in Margaret J. Lehrer, ed., Up the Hemline (Colorado Springs, CO: Williams and Field, 1975): 35.