

COLORADO FARMERS & RANCHERS – FOOD, CLOTHING & SHELTER

Food

What do these photos tell you about the kind of food people ate?

Cowboys Around a Chuck Wagon

This photo was taken on the plains of Eastern Colorado during a roundup. The cowboys are eating beside a chuck wagon. Cowboys ate a lot of beef during roundups. Cowboys also drank coffee and ate biscuits, beans and other vegetables.



Cowboys around a chuck wagon

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Colorado was a major beef-producing state. By 1880, cattle had replaced the herds of bison that once grazed on the plains of eastern Colorado. The cattlemen sold some of the animals to butchers who sold meat to people who lived in the towns and cities of Colorado. Most of the cattle were shipped to meat-packing plants in eastern cities.

Their Own Words

"The food on a roundup was always of the best. A fat calf would be killed for meat and this with potatoes, canned tomatoes, beans, and bread baked in a Dutch oven, would satisfy the appetite of the hardest riding cowboy. And one may be sure that after a hard day's ride with only a sandwich or two, and those eaten while riding, appetites were not lacking... Each man's grub would be handed out to him by the cooks, dished up on a tin plate. He found a comfortable seat on a rock or the wagon tongue and ate. At night each man crawled into his own tent or slept out under the stars, rolled in a blanket."

Source: Frank Loustalet (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/41, Colorado Historical Society.

Melon Day in Rocky Ford

This photo was taken at Rocky Ford, Colorado in the late 1800s. The women are eating watermelons. Rocky Ford was famous for its watermelons and cantaloupes. It celebrated the melon harvest each summer by holding a Melon Day festival.



Women eating watermelon on Melon Day in Rocky Ford

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Farmers in Colorado raised thousands of melons and cantaloupes each year. Melons grew well in the sandy soil of the Arkansas Valley. The town of Rocky Ford celebrated the harvest each year with a Melon Day Festival.

Their Own Words

“This is the first occasion of these festivities. . . . Large tables were built in the public square, on which were piled hundreds of specimens of the crisp and juicy fruit [watermelons]. The guests were also provided with a free dinner, composed of numerous other products of the Arkansas Valley. . . . The Santa Fe [Railroad] Company ran out several large excursion trains.”

Source: Denver Republican, September 15, 1888, quoted in Therese S. Westermeier, “Colorado Festivals (Past III),” Colorado Magazine, 30 (July 1953): 194-95.

Colorado State Fair (1893)

This photo was taken at the Colorado State Fair in the early 1890s. Farmers brought vegetables and other foods to display at the fair. These tables are filled with plates of tomatoes, potatoes, and other vegetables waiting to be judged.



Colorado State Fair

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The early settlers of Colorado grew most of the vegetables they needed. The rich soil produced large crops of tomatoes, onions, potatoes, and other vegetables. Some farmers specialized in growing vegetables. They sold them to the mining camps in the mountains and to towns and cities along the Front Range. Food grown nearby was cheaper than canned goods that had to be hauled across the plains. Vegetables still are an important crop in Colorado.

Their Own Words

"The first year there were but seven families in the settlement. . . . We managed to get in some garden: corn, melons, pumpkins, squash, Mexican beans and some hay, and cleared some ground of sagebrush. We raised quite a lot of chickens, ducks, and turkeys. By assisting each other we managed to raise and store away enough produce to run us part way through the winter, which was a very cold one."

Source: O. T. Jackson, quoted in Karen Waddell, "Dearfield... A Dream Deferred," Colorado Heritage, 2 (1988): 5.

Farmer In His Orchard

This photo was taken at a fruit orchard near Grand Junction, Colorado. The farmer was using a hoe to clear out weeds from around a peach tree.



Farmer and his peach tree

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

During the first years of settlement, fruit in Colorado was very expensive. Apples sold for \$1.25 each in Denver in 1859, which would be more than \$10.00 apiece today. Farmers in many parts of Colorado tried growing apples, peaches, plums, and other fruit. The Western Slope near Grand Junction proved to be the best fruit growing area in Colorado. It became famous for its fine peaches.

Their Own Words

“Most of our fruit came from our own orchard. Dad had set out apple trees that bore fruit from July on, and the long-lasting varieties kept until the next spring. We had currants, gooseberries, raspberries, cherries, plums, and pears. I can still see the glasses of jelly set up on the window ledge to catch and reflect the sun and be admired. Before the Mason jar, fruits were dried or preserved in sugar. Sugar and flour were bought in one-hundred-pound bags and lard in fifty-pound pails or tins.”

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

Shelters

What do these photos tell you about the kind of shelters they lived in?

House On The Q-T-5 Ranch

This photo shows the ranch house on the Q-T-5 ranch in Colorado. This two-story house was made of logs, with the spaces between the logs filled with plaster. The roof was made of wood split into shingles. The upstairs window can be seen above the back porch. The house was heated by a fireplace or by a wood-burning stove.



Q-T-5 Ranch in Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Many of the first farm and ranch houses in Colorado were built of logs. The logs came from trees growing along the streams and rivers or from pine trees chopped down in the nearby mountains. Log houses were cheap and easy to build.

Their Own Words

"When the few scattered settlers in the region heard that Father was building a cabin. . . they came and helped him. This cabin was about eighteen feet long and fifteen feet wide. It was built of round logs and smaller logs were used for the roof. A large ridge pole was put across the logs where the walls were high enough and then smaller logs were laid on this ridge pole, forming the roof. . . . "The floors were made of rough boards from the sawmill. After much wearing and scrubbing they became smooth."

Source: Attie Long Thompson, "Our Home in the Petrified Forest," Colorado Magazine, 11 (May 1934); 104, 105.

The Kilpatrick's Farm House (1915)

The house in this photo is a one-room log cabin on a farm near Craig, Colorado. The photo was taken about 1915. The men in the photo were digging a water well.



Kilpatrick's Farm House in Craig, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The log cabin in this photo was called a “claim cabin.” Settlers were allowed to claim 180 acres of land owned by the Federal Government. The farm cost them nothing if they built a house, improved the land, and lived on it for 5 years. The family that claimed this land near Craig built a very small cabin. It was a temporary house that they could live in until they owned the land.

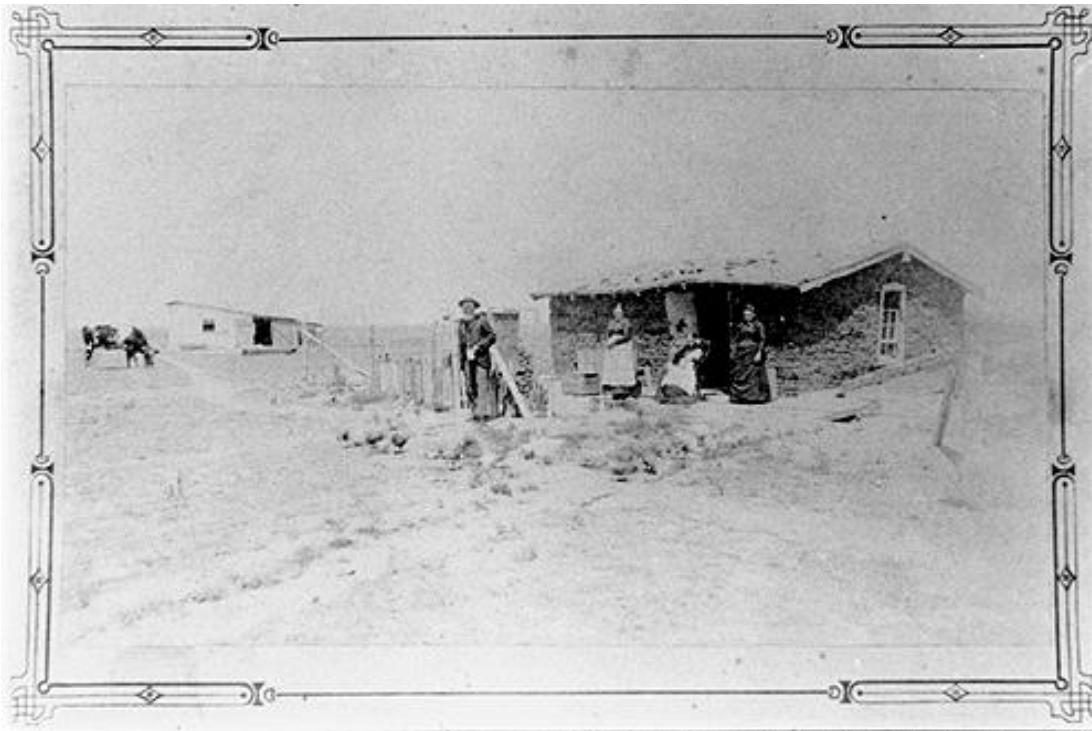
Their Own Words

“We had a home-made table and a few broken down chairs which Father had mended. There wasn’t much room for furniture but we always had a trundle bed which could be pushed under the big bed in the daytime. We had an iron teakettle, iron pots, iron skillets, and iron handled knives and forks. We had one kerosene lamp and some candles that Mother made out of tallow, but we seldom used either as the fireplace throw out enough light for the small one-room cabin. We could even read by the bright light from the pitch logs.”

Source: Attie Long Thompson, “Our Home in the Petrified Forest,” Colorado Magazine, 11 (May 1934): 105.

A Sod Ranch House

This is a photo of a sod house built by John J. Long near Sterling, Colorado. Mr. Long is standing in the center of the photo. His wife is seated holding their baby, Elizabeth. The photo was taken in 1889.



A photo of a sod house

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Logs and lumber were scarce and expensive on the treeless plains of eastern Colorado. Many of the settlers there built sod houses like the one in this photo. They cut strips of sod from the prairie, which they laid in rows to form the walls. Sod houses were cheap and easy to build.

Their Own Words

"We had a good sod house and a barn in the side of a hill. We never went hungry and always had plenty of fuel to keep us warm. The Frenchman Creek crossed our land and there was a water hole that did not ever go dry. . . . The coyotes yelped at night, be we soon got used to their cry. I brought a great many flowers with me from Illinois, and they did fine in our sod house."

Source: Mary E. Wood (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 341/48, Colorado Historical Society.

A Sod & Board House

The farmhouse in this photo was made of different kinds of materials. The side wall and roof was made of sod. The end wall was made of short boards.



Sod and board house

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Most sod houses also had a sod rood. The roof in this house was made of wood covered with sod. A thick, sod roof helped keep the house cool in summer and warm in winter.

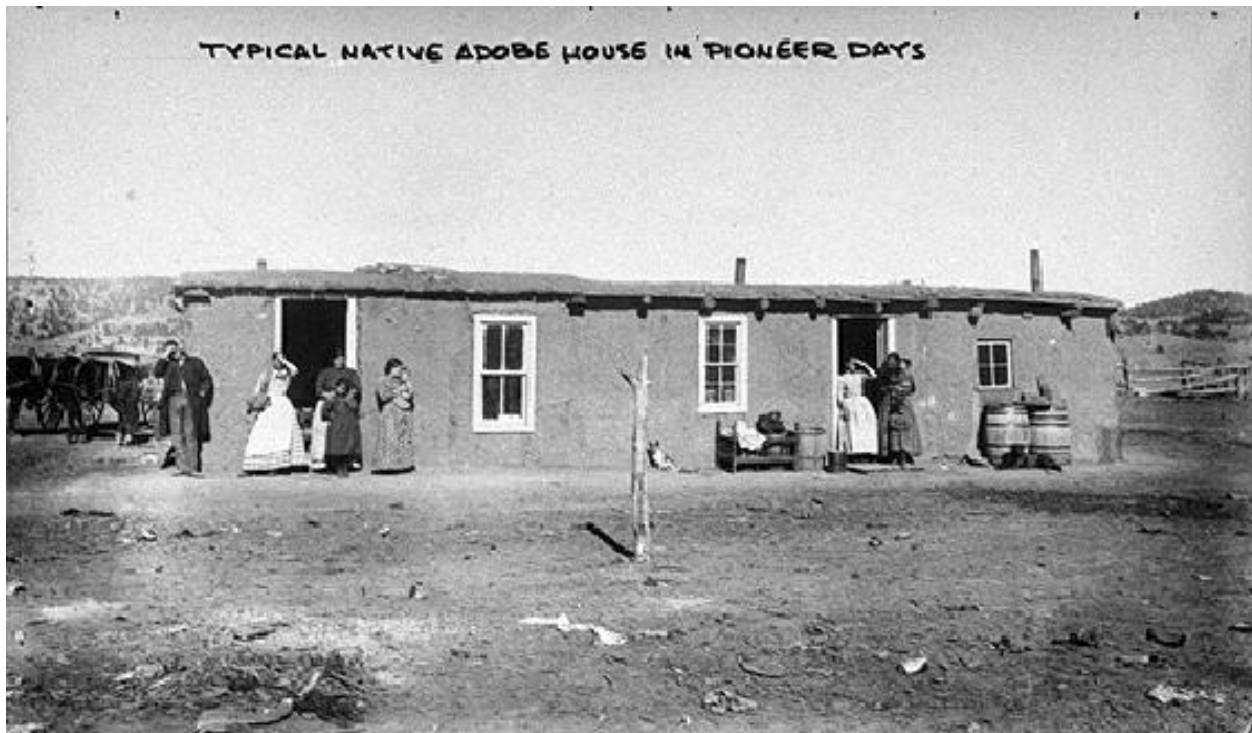
Their Own Words

“The rafters ran lengthwise the building and the roof sheathing ran up and down the slope of the roof, from a wall plate to the ridge rafter. Tar-paper was laid over the sheathing and covered with the same type of sods which were used in the walls, laid with the grass side down. Although hailstorms ruined nearly every other type roof, which was used in the neighborhood, I never knew one of these sod roofs to leak during the fifteen or twenty years that the building remained standing.”

Source: Morris N. Adams, “Old Sod Schoolhouse,” True West, 12 (February 1965): 47.

An Adobe House

The house in this photo was made of adobe bricks covered with plaster. This house may have been the home of two different families.



Adobe house in the Pioneer Days

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Most of the Spanish-American settlers in southern Colorado lived in houses made of adobe bricks. These were the kind of houses they had built in New Mexico before arriving in Colorado. The bricks were made of earth and straw hardened by drying in the sun. The outside walls were covered with plaster to keep the bricks from getting soft and crumbling when it rained.

Their Own Words

"After a days travel over the arid plain. . . , we have arrived at the . . . Mexican [-American] town known as Culebra. . . . It contains only adobe houses, extending along for half a mile on either side of the road and all joined together. The adobe is made of a fine alluvial soil ground with water into a stiff paste. It is then moulded into forms about three times the size of an ordinary brick. These are baked in the sun for a few days, and then used for building. The walls of the houses are thick and only one story high."

Source: "Nathaniel P. Hill Inspects Colorado: Letters Written in 1864," Colorado Magazine, 33 (October 1956): 267.

An Adobe House Near Trinidad

This photo was taken in southern Colorado near the town of Trinidad. The house and chimney were built of adobe bricks covered with plaster.



Adobe house near Trinidad

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The roofs of adobe houses were made of logs covered with earth. If you look closely you will be able to see the ends of the roof logs on the right side of the photo. The earth packed on top helped keep the house cool in the summer.

Their Own Words

“The roof [of the adobe house] is perfectly flat and formed by stretching poles across from wall to wall and covering them with the adobe. It never rains enough at one time to saturate these roofs and consequently they do not leak.”

Source: “Nathaniel P. Hill Inspects Colorado: Letters Written in 1864,” Colorado Magazine, 33 (October 1956): 267.

A Frame Ranch House

This photograph of a ranch house was probably was taken in eastern Colorado. It was a frame house made of lumber sawed into boards. The roof also was made of wood, which was cut into thin shingles. The house had a "factory made" screen door with wood decorations.



Frame ranch house in Eastern Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Most settlers on the eastern plains lived in frame houses before moving to Colorado. They thought of log or sod houses as temporary homes. They usually built a frame house as soon as they could afford to.

Their Own Words

"Mr. Smith now [1872] had to go to work in the saw mills. There were three saw mills in Greeley making lumber for the houses that were being built. Logs were floated down from the mountains and made up into lumber and posts. Mr. Smith worked in the saw mill for three years."

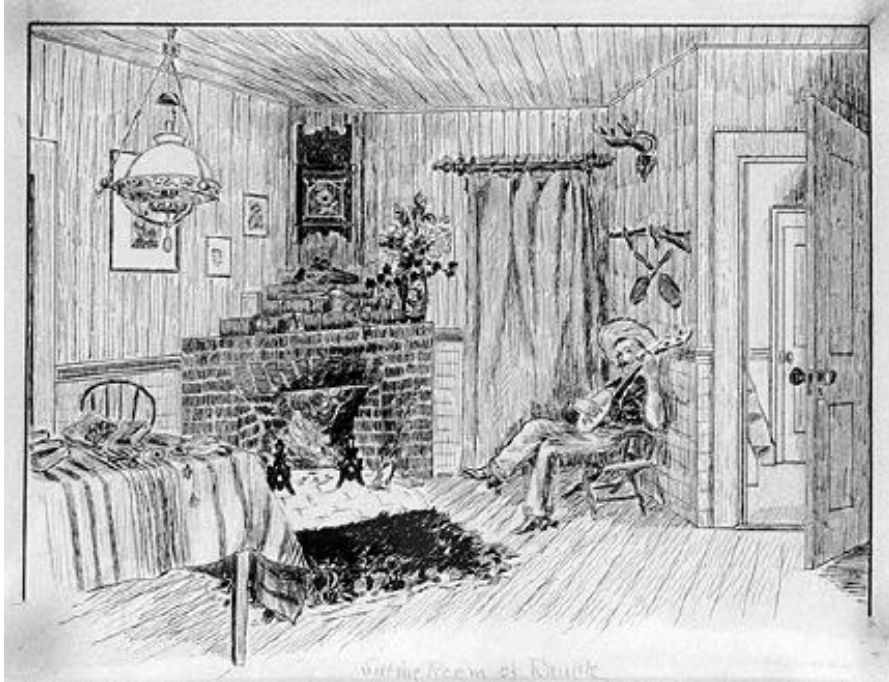
Source: Mrs. Pitt Smith (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/13, Colorado Historical Society.

Interiors

What do these photos tell you about what the houses were like on the inside?

A Ranch House Living Room

The room shown in this painting is a living room of a ranch house in Colorado. The picture was painted about 1889 by Edward Graham Hayes, who worked on the ranch. A wood-burning fireplace heated the room. The kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling provided light in the evening.



Living room of a Ranch house

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The interiors of houses tell us a lot about the people who lived there. This house was owned by a Colorado rancher. The badminton rackets indicate that he or other members of his family were interested in sports. The books on the table suggest that he or someone in the family liked to read. He had enough money to build a brick fireplace and to buy pictures to decorate the walls.

Their Own Words

"In the other end of the room was a fireplace in which we burned pitch logs. One of these logs would burn all evening and throw out a cheery red glow. . . . We had one kerosene lamp and some candles that Mother made out of tallow but we seldom used either as the fireplace threw out enough light for the small one-room cabin."

Source: Attie Long Thompson, "Our Home in the Petrified Forest," The Colorado Magazine, 11 (May 1934): 104.

A Living Room or Parlor

This photo shows a wood-paneled living room. The room was furnished with an organ, bookcases, and a table. The walls are covered with pictures.



A photo of a wood-paneled living room

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Well-to-do people of the late 1800s bought a lot of furniture for their houses. It gave living rooms like this one a crowded look. They also decorated the furniture and covered the walls with pictures.

Their Own Words

“We are staying at the house of Amidor Sanchez, one of the old and rich men of the place. . . . The house is quite splendid in its way. The walls are covered with calico. Instead of carpets, they used cowhides, dressed with the hair on. The floor is entirely covered with them. A cushioned seat extends entirely around each room, and the walls are well covered with small paintings, most of which represent the crucifixion or some event in the life of Christ. . . . All the people in the place are Catholics. A cross is stuck up in the room of almost every mud house.”

Source: “Nathaniel P. Hill Inspects Colorado: Letters Written in 1864,” Colorado Magazine, 33 (October, 1956): 267.

Living Room In Granby Ranch House

This photo was taken inside a log, ranch house near Granby, Colorado. It shows a large living room furnished with rocking chairs, tables, and a bookcase. The room was heated by a wood-burning or coal-burning stove. The photo was taken about the year 1905. This photo was taken inside a log, ranch house near Granby, Colorado. It shows a large living room furnished with rocking chairs, tables, and a bookcase. The room was heated by a wood-burning or coal-burning stove. The photo was taken about the year 1905.



Ranch house near Granby, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

A log house could be a very comfortable place to live. The owners of this house must have liked the “natural” look of a log house. They furnished it wicker chairs made of willow branches woven together. They decorated the walls with pinecones and pine branches.

Their Own Words

“[The house was heated] by a coal stove. They had what they call the old potbelly stoves. I can remember there in the old log house at the ranch, they had it sitting in the corner, and behind it was a bench. We’d come in with our feet cold and . . . we’d pull everything off. . . . We’d sit there and rest our feet on the bottom ring around the bottom of the stove to warm up our toes—and usually wind up burning them. But all we ever had was just the coal heat, both for the kitchen, to cook on, and for the heat.”

Source: Jennie Steele Mott quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed. Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950 (New York: Twayne, 1992): 40-41.

Clothing

What do these photos tell you about the clothes they wore?

Woman In Print Dress (1900)

This photo was taken about the year 1900 on a farm in Weld County. The woman was wearing a print dress and a white apron. The dress had ruffles at the yoke or shoulders.



Woman in a print dress

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Long dresses with long sleeves were very much in style during the 1890s. Women wore long sleeves even during the summer. Aprons also were an important article of women's clothing. They wore aprons to keep their dress clean when they worked around the house. Aprons had many other purposes as well. Click on [IN THEIR OWN WORDS](#) to find out about other uses for aprons.

Their Own Words

Mother's Aprons

"Mother's dresses were made with tight bodices and full skirts. She also wore checked gingham aprons. The number of things she could use these for was endless. One unforgettable sight was seeing her coming toward the house with the hem of the apron gathered in one hand. She might be carrying apples or plums or turkey eggs or baby chicks, or perhaps freshly picked corn or cucumbers. Indoors the apron was handy for grasping hot pans or taking something from the stove."

Source: Hazel Webb Dalziel, "The Way It Was," Colorado Magazine, 45 (Spring 1968): 119.

The Brown Family (late 1800s)

This photo shows a well-dressed, middle-class family of the 1890s. They went to a photographer's studio to have the photo taken. They obviously wanted to look their best.



A photo of the Brown family

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The women in this photo wore dresses that were very much in style. The mother is wearing a long, full skirt with a tightly-fitted short jacket called a basque. Her daughters also are wearing jackets that match their skirts and blouses with frills. Sleeves puffed at the shoulders were popular during the 1890s. The man seated is wearing a suit with a vest. The other man is wearing a long, double-breasted coat called a sack coat.

Their Own Words

“[Clothes are] one of the interesting changes in our life. You look about the same now whether it’s morning, afternoon, or night. But then you didn’t. If you went to church, you didn’t look like you did Saturday at home. If you went to a party, you didn’t look that way. You were dressed up. It was entirely different affair. You had your party clothes, and you had regular clothes. Now, you just have clothes!”

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 Farm Family (late 1800s)

This photo was taken on a farm in eastern Colorado in the late 1800s. It shows the kind of clothes that farm families wore when they dressed up. The little girls are wearing matching print dresses. The man on the right, who is wearing a work shirt without a collar, may have been a hired hand who worked on the farm. Farm families often included their house, outbuildings, and teams of horses in their family photos.



Farm family in the 1800s

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The clothes worn by most farm women and children when this photo was taken were home-made. The woman in this photo probably bought dress patterns and fabric at a dry-goods store for her and her daughters' dresses. After cutting out the cloth, she would have sewn it with a sewing machine or by hand. Sewing was an important skill for women in the 1800s. However, men bought most of their clothing ready-made from racks in stores.

Their Own Words

“Clothing by this time [1890s] was being manufactured in large quantities, especially for men and boys. But girls and women had to make their own clothes or hire a dressmaker. . . . The materials were mostly gingham and calico and each of us made her choice. Then she [the dressmaker] measured us and jotted down the figures in her little book. For winter we wore all-wool dresses covered with gingham aprons. . . .”

Source: Hazel Webb Dalziel, “The Way It Was,” Colorado Magazine, 45 (Spring 1968): 118-19.

A Ranch Family

This is a photo of a Colorado farm family. The women and girls dressed up to have their photo taken. The men are wearing work clothes.



A ranch family in Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The women and girls in this photo are wearing a variety of styles of clothing. The young girl is wearing a long, striped dress with puffed sleeves. Her older sister is wearing a somewhat shorter dress covered with pinafore. The mother is wearing a calico dress that has a white collar. The older woman has on a dark, striped dress. The woman at the right also is wearing a dark dress.

Their Own Words

Calico Dresses

“One time Mr. Fisher took a pail of potatoes to Walsenburg, and there sold the potatoes for two calico dresses for me. Of the greatest pride were these two dresses to me. To have two dresses at one time, and these both of calico, placed me on a high level among people of the frontier.”

Source: Cynthia Fisher (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 344/13. Colorado Historical Society.

A Ranch Family & Hired Hands

The people on the ranch in this photo are dressed in different kinds of outfits. The women and at least one of the men are somewhat dressed up. The women probably did not wear long black dresses everyday. The man on the right is wearing a white shirt and tie. However, the cowboys in the picture are wearing cowboy work clothes.



Ranch family and hired hands

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Cowboys wore practical clothing that suited their work. Like the cowboys in this photo, they wore long-sleeve shirts to protect their arms from the sun, broad-brimmed hats, and high-heeled boots. The hats kept the sun out of their eyes; the boots' high heels kept their feet from slipping out of the stirrups when they rode. Two of the men in the photo also are wearing leather chaps. Chaps protected the cowboy's legs when they were riding through brush.

Their Own Words

A cowboy named Broncho John explained why he wore broad-brimmed hats and high-heeled boots:

"When the wind is blowing the sand like hot shot in our faces we would suffer greatly but for the protection afforded our eyes by the big-rimmed hat. When the mud is flying from the heels of stampeding cattle or the terrible hail storms of the plains are pelting upon us, these hats are the best friends we have. . . "

"Many people ask me why the cowboys wear such high heels on their boots. . . . The heels on our boots are often two to four inches high, sloping greatly toward the sole of the foot. This is to keep our feet from slipping through the stirrups in times of danger; they are also kept in a comfortable position when riding. Our boots are made to ride in, not to walk."

Source: From Broncho John H. Sullivan, Life and Adventures of the Genuine Cowboy (1896). Western History Collection, Norlin Library, University of Colorado Library.