

COLORADO FARMERS & RANCHERS – TRANSPORTATION

Wagons and Carriages

What do these photos tell you about the different kinds of wagons and carriages farmers and ranchers used?

One Horse Carriage

This photo shows a woman driving a light carriage pulled by one horse.



Women in a horse carriage

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Most people in Colorado in the 1800s traveled by horse-drawn carriages and wagons. Small carriages like this one needed only one horse. Its leaf springs made of steel helped make the ride a comfortable one. Can you find the leaf springs?

Their Own Words

“We didn’t have a car at that time, and we lived on what was called the Hughes Ranch, and there were lots of horses. I drove this buggy, and sometimes I would drive our old horse and the buggy, and at other times Mr. Saunders would put up the horses—I would use one of his. His old horse was called Flaxie, and she was very, very hyper, as we say today. And oh, she was a problem. To get Flaxie into the shafts at the end of the day, and hitched up, and get those four children loaded in—I took the four, because I took my little half-sister and half-brother, Ada and Joe, and . . . I picked up Cora and Gretchen [Saunders].”

Source: Catharine Craig Coles quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed. Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950, (New York: Twayne, 1992): 190-91.

Two Horse Carriage

This photo was taken at livery stable in Trinidad, Colorado. It shows four people riding in a two-horse carriage.



Two-horse carriage in Trinidad, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Larger carriages like this one could carry four or more people. It took two-horses to pull this carriage. Livery stables like the one in this photo rented horses and carriages by the day or week. Many people who lived in towns could not afford to buy a carriage or keep and feed a horse. They rented a carriage when they needed it.

Their Own Words

“Another driving team [of horses] that I only heard tell about was a pair of wild pinto ponies. They were hitched to a spring wagon, a vehicle that served the same purpose as the pickup truck.”

Source: Hazel Webb Dalziel, “The Way It Was,” Colorado Magazine, 45 (Spring 1968): 106.

Wagons For Wheat (1904)

This is a photo of a wheat threshing operation on a farm. The farm was probably near Denver. One man is operating a tractor. The belts from the tractor supplied power for the threshing machine.



Wagons for wheat near Denver

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Parked near the tractor are two different kinds of wagons. One of these wagons appears to be carrying spare parts. The other is a water wagon. The photo was taken about 1904.

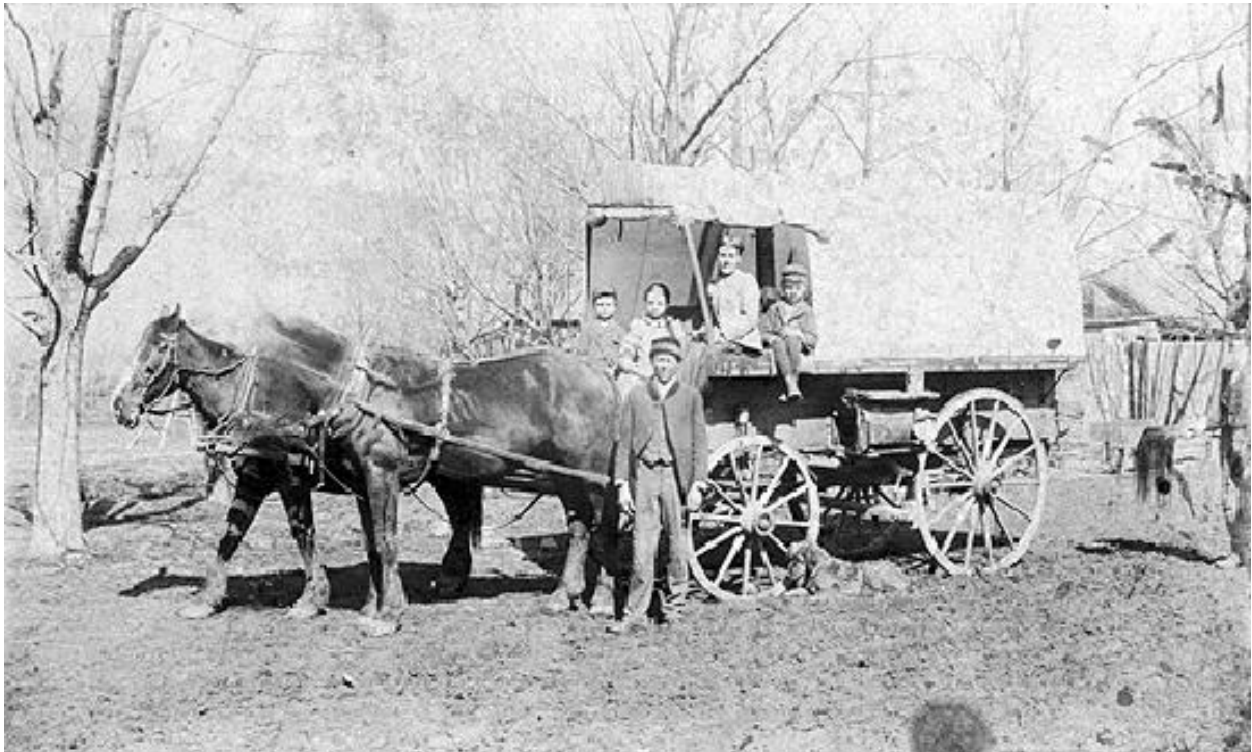
Their Own Words

"The threshing crew went from farm to farm with a well-worked-out itinerary. . . . The cook house [wagon] came first—a long narrow house built on wheels, with strips of screening covered with canvas curtains along each side which could be raised or lowered, and doors at both ends with removable steps for easy access. Under the windows were long wooden tables and benches where the crew had their meals. . . . After the cookhouse arrived . . . the water wagon would pull in and then we'd hear a whistle and the steam engine drawing the separator would come puffing up the road."

Source: Hazel Webb Dalziel, "The Way It Was," Colorado Magazine, 45 (Spring 1968): 108-109.

A Covered Wagon

This farm wagon had a canvas cover. Covered wagons were most often used for long-distance travel.



Covered wagon

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Most covered wagons were ordinary farm wagons. They were fitted with half-circle hoops that held up the canvas cover. Families often used covered wagons to move west.. Moving by wagon was less expensive than traveling and shipping household goods by train.

Their Own Words

“You could still get homesteads in Colorado [in 1918]. . . . We came in a covered wagon drawn by two flea-bitten gray horses. . . . We had a tent and a wagon, because there were four of us, and on the wagon . . . there was a water bag, which was made of canvas and hung outside where the air cooled the water and kept it cooled, because it was a little ways between towns. . . . There was a box on the back of the wagon that was called a grub box where the food was carried. My mother and I slept in the wagon, and my dad and brother slept under the wagon or in a tent. . . . So that’s the way we got along. It took us about three months to get to Colorado [from Texas].”

Source: Jarrine Sylvia Crosslen quoted in Maria M. Rogers, ed., In Other Words: Oral Histories of the Colorado Frontier (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996): 9.

A Stage Coach

This is a stagecoach pulled by three teams of horses.



Stage coach being pulled by three horses

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

People used stagecoaches when they had to travel long distances in a hurry. The coaches stopped at stagecoach stations every ten miles or so to hitch up fresh horses. Stagecoach travel was very expensive.

Their Own Words

"The [stagecoach] line was called the Ferguson Stage Company and the [coaches came] to Lamar from Dodge City, Kansas. [The coaches] consisted of hacks or light spring wagons with tops and seats, the sets running crosswise of the wagon. They were drawn by four horses. . . . Mr. Silver [her father] and Mr. Ferguson had barns at both ends and made a trip each way every day, carrying passengers and the mail. They also made special trips to other towns in that section of the country...."

Source: Josephine Silver (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 355/34, Colorado Historical Society.

Unloading Sugar Beets Wagons

This photo shows men using pitchforks to unload sugar beets from a horse-drawn wagon and from the back of a truck. You can also see horse teams in the tilled field in the background.



Unloading sugar beets

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

This photo was taken in about 1920, when both wagons and trucks were in use side-by-side. Still, a lot of the work in producing sugar beets was done by hand labor. Machinery for working sugar beets was not yet very wide spread.

Their Own Words

"[The Mexicans] came in and worked the crops and hoed the beets. They used to top those beets by hand; they hoed those beets by hand. Those field would have twenty-five or thirty men, women, and kids out there. As soon as they was big enough to swing a hoe they were out there hoein' those weeds out of the beet fields. They didn't have cultivators and that stuff like they do now. They didn't have farm machinery. It was all done by hand."

Source: Jack Rowley quoted in Maria M. Rogers, ed., In Other Words: Oral Histories of the Colorado Frontier (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996): 12.

A Blacksmith Shop

This is a photo of a blacksmith shop somewhere near Denver, Colorado. You can see a number of different kinds of horse-drawn, buckboards, and carriages in front of the shop. Signs on the shop's walls say "Wagon and Carriage Shop" and "N.C. Thomson's Farm Machinery."



Blacksmith shop near Denver, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

While wagons and carriages were probably more reliable than early automobiles, they still needed to be repaired from time to time. That was a job for the blacksmith.

Their Own Words

“I used to spend quite a lot of my leisure time at the town blacksmith shop. The shop seemed always to be busy, shoeing horses, mostly during the summer, and repairing wagons, hay mowers, etc., during the winter when horseshoeing was slack. I was always fascinated by the blacksmithing, watching the operations of forging and fitting of the horseshoes, and watching the sparks fly from the various welding jobs. The blacksmith shop was owned and operated by a German whose name was Jacob Weiss. He always had a hired man as helper, and at one time they made several new wagons. Two or three were ore wagons, extra heavy, much heavier than the ranch wagons. They were nice looking wagons, too, after being painted.”

Source: George W. Champion, “Remembrances of South Park,” Colorado Magazine, 40 (January 1963): 24-25.

Early Automobiles

What do these photos tell you about what early automobiles looked like?

Auto Near Sugar Beet Field

The auto in this photo is parked in a sugar beet field. The field probably was located in eastern Colorado.



Automobile near a sugar beet farm

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Few farmers could afford an auto like this one. They were expensive to buy and to keep up. Auto drivers had to stop often to fix flat tires. This auto had spare tires mounted on the running board. It may have belonged to the wealthy factory owners who bought the farmers' sugar beets.

Their Own Words

“The automobile more than any other one thing has been the means of bringing the farmer in closer touch with the outside world. . . . The automobile is largely responsible for the present high standing of the farmer. With it he can get into the big cities, where he can see and find out what other people are doing and keep pace with their progress. There is, too, another angle that must not be overlooked, and that is that the automobile is a source of pleasure for the farmer’s entire family. We all appreciate a change of scenery once in a while. . . . The farmer has also developed into the shrewdest kind of a buyer—machinery and automobiles in particular. . . .”

Source: Akron Weekly Pioneer Press, July 18, 1913.

Main Street in Siebert, Colorado (1906)

This photo shows the main street of Siebert, Colorado. Siebert is on the eastern plains in Kit Carson County. It served as a supply and market town for the farmers and ranchers in the area. This photo was taken about 1906.



Main Street of Siebert, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In the photo, you can see several early autos. Early autos were faster than horse-drawn wagons, but they were not always as reliable. In most places, it was not easy for autos and horse to share the same streets. Noises made by the autos sometimes frightened the horses.

Their Own Words

In 1902, Webb Jay and a Denver Post reporter made an auto trip from Denver to Evans in three and one-half hours. Said the reporter: "We fairly shot over the road and left a cloud of dust behind that hung in the air for half a mile. . . . My particular duty was to get out and lead horses past the machine [because the car frightened the horses] and between Denver and Evans I had performed this little stunt no less than eight times."

Source: Denver Post, January 19, 1902 quoted in Le Roy Hafen, "The Coming of the Automobile and Improved Roads of Colorado," Colorado Magazine, 8 (January 1931): 6.

Main Street In Akron, Colorado (1912)

This photo of Main Street in Akron, Colorado, was taken in 1912. It shows a motor car with a canvas top. A man in the street is talking to the car's driver. The photo also shows some of the businesses that these men might be in town to visit on this day.



Main Street in Akron, Colorado in 1912

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Although motor cars were first viewed as luxuries and fads for wealthier people, farmers and merchants in small towns soon began to view automobiles as a necessity. Because motor cars were faster than horses or horse-drawn wagons, farmers could get to nearby towns more quickly and easily.

Their Own Words

"Is the automobile a necessity? It is. It is proving itself so. It is owned by those who appreciate the motorcar as such. It is estimated that more than a third of the automobiles in use in this country are owned by farmers, or those who live in the country, and who find it necessary to make frequent trips to near-by communities to buy supplies or for other purposes. It is true the man in the country was able to get along, in some way, before the automobile came, but it is likewise true that his progress and advancement is dated from the time he was able to use a motorcar. Farm life changed from that time."

Source: Akron Weekly Pioneer Press, June 26, 1919.

Auto In Paonia

This was one of the early autos used on Colorado's Western Slope. The photo was taken in Paonia, Colorado.



Early automobile in Paonia, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Autos would replace horse-drawn carriages for family travel, but it did not happen over night. Early autos like this one were very expensive. Only wealthy people like the well-dressed man and woman in the front seat could afford to own one. By 1920, auto makers were making smaller cars that most families could afford.

Their Own Words

“If there is trouble in the field, if some part of your farm machinery is broken down, the automobile can bring from town the needed help or the parts that you need to get the machine in motion again. Again, the automobile brings the farmer closer to the market, whether it is the local or the distant markets, and enables him to market his product more rapidly and on better terms. The writer . . . says the purpose of his machine is pleasure, business and marketing; that he has hauled apples, potatoes, oats, eggs, butter, pigs, calves and hitched it [his car] to the hay rope to unload hay into the mow [hay loft]”

Source: Akron Weekly Pioneer Press, September 7, 1923.

Farmers Market In Denver

This photo, taken in 1915, shows an open air farmers' market in Denver, Colorado. It shows horse-drawn wagons and motor trucks near stalls where farmers sold their garden produce.



Farmers market in Denver, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Farmers took their produce to city markets like this one when they used only horse-drawn wagons. (Some of the farmers in this photo still used such wagons.) Even so, farmers' use of motor trucks allowed them to bring their garden produce to city and town markets more quickly. Speed prevented spoilage of garden vegetables, a benefit to both farmers and urban consumers.

Their Own Words

"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 enables 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. With all these advantages and with the absolute certainty of successful operation, there is no good reason why the American farmer should hesitate to purchase motor trucks today."

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

Farmer's Cat Stuck In a Creek

This photograph shows a farmer's car off the road and stuck in a creek.



Farmer's car off the road and stuck in a creek

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

While most farmers viewed motor cars and trucks largely as benefits, automobiles were not without their troubles. The first cars and trucks were not very dependable and roads were often not very good. Also, most people did not know how to drive and drivers' licenses were not required.

Their Own Words

“Nowadays . . . when automobiles glide along city streets and country roads at a speed far in excess of that ordained by municipal by-laws, one sometimes wonders if the children of the next generation will know what horses look like. . . . But fifteen years ago a horse was almost as necessary to an automobile as was gasoline. So many were the times when the machine persisted in landing itself in a ditch or, seeming without adequate cause or reason, in the center of the road, that it was never safe to get very far from first aid. Even now catastrophes happen sometimes, though not so often as formerly.”

Source: Akron Weekly Pioneer Press, November 8, 1918.

“Fender Bender” In Small Town

This photograph, taken in about 1905, shows the results of a crash between a truck and car in an intersection in a small town. A farmer is looking at the accident. Note that the truck's right front fender is dented and the front wheel is bent.



A “fender bender” in a small town

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

It is hard to imagine why auto accidents like this one occurred when so few motor cars were on the road and town streets were relatively wide. Car crashes may have been due to drivers' inexperience or inattention to their driving. Still, most vehicle accidents at this time were apparently not caused by motor cars and trucks.

Their Own Words

"One of the accident insurance companies recently published a statement showing that 'out of one hundred average accidents caused by the horse, the railroad, the automobile and the bicycle, eighty-two are attributable to the [horse], nine to the railroad, five to the motor car and four to the silent wheel [bicycle]'. More than sixteen times as many average accidents are caused by horses than by automobiles. . . . [Accidents caused by horses] are noted at the time they occur, but they are accepted as of course and are soon forgotten. Automobile and railroad accidents, on the other hand, are remembered for a long time; and, particularly those caused by automobiles are made the basis for arguments in favor of restrictive legislation."

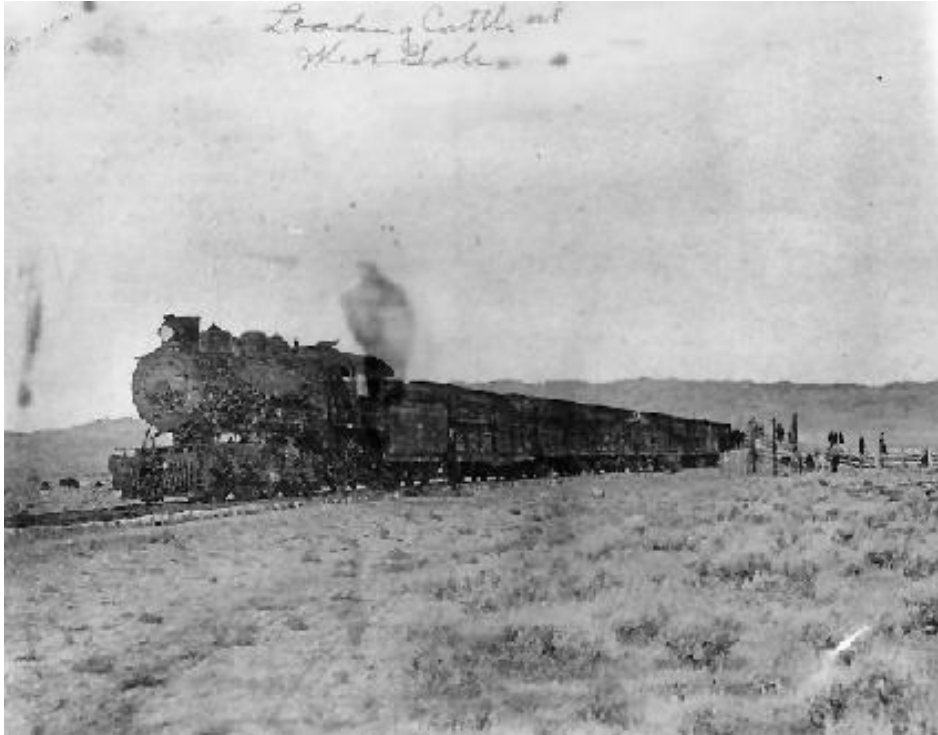
Source: Elbert County Banner, January 5, 1906.

Railroads

What do these photos tell you about why railroads were so important for farmers and ranchers?

A Train Of Cattle Cars

This photo shows a locomotive attached to cattle cars. The men standing beside the loading ramp are loading cattle into the cars.



A locomotive with cattle cars

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Railroads were very important to the cattle business in Colorado. Cattle trains like this one made it possible for ranchers to ship their cattle to markets in the east. They could make more money by raising more cattle than were needed locally.

Their Own Words

His [John Prowers] brands were the Box B, and the Bar X. He built up his herds until at the fall round-up of his ranch, the cattle shipment was a matter of train loads, not carloads. Sometimes as high as eight train loads left our ranch for eastern markets. At one time, the fall check-up showed 70,000 cattle bearing father's brands."

Source: Mary Prowers Hudnall, "Early History of Bent County," Colorado Magazine, 22 (1945): 246.

The Railroad Comes to Johnstown

This photo shows people gathered at a railroad in Johnstown, Colorado. They came to watch the first train arrive.



Arrival of the first train in Johnstown, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

Their Own Words

Railroads also were important to the farm towns of Colorado. Farmers came to towns located on railroads to ship their crops to market and to buy supplies from the storekeepers. Town that did not have a railroad connection did not survive for long.

Their Own Words

“My father came out the same year [1871] and they both [her brother had arrived earlier] lived in a little shack on the land. My mother and I and two younger sisters come out in March, 1872. We were just one week on the train. As we got off the train at Evans, my father and brother were there to meet us with a big lumber wagon.

Source: Mrs. Jennie Lucas (1934), CWA Interviews, Doc. 343/26, Colorado Historical Society.

Loading a Railroad Boxcar

The men in this photo are loading bags of potatoes into a railroad boxcar. The two children sitting on the ground are watching the men load the cars.



Loading a railroad boxcar with potatoes

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Railroads were important to Colorado farmers. They used the railroads to ship potatoes and other crops to eastern markets. Like the ranchers, they could make more money by growing crops for distant markets.

Their Own Words

“H. R. Brady, traveling agent of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe [rail] road was interviewed in Denver last week by a [Rocky Mountain] News reporter and made the following statement: ‘Northern Colorado is undoubtedly the best region for potato raising west of the Mississippi River. The Greeley potato . . . will always bring the highest prices in the market. . . . I have been looking over the ground and estimate that the region will send out 1,000 or 1,200 [railroad] carloads of first class potatoes. . . . The output will probably be one of the largest the district has ever known and prices will be satisfactory. The potatoes are shipped in refrigerator cars.’”

Source: Greeley Tribune, November 11, 1897.

Loading Vegetables On a Boxcar

The men here are loading boxes of vegetables into railroad cars. The photo was taken in Longmont, Colorado.



Loading boxes of vegetables into railroad cars in Longmont, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

The railroad cars in this photo are refrigerated cars. These cars kept vegetables from spoiling when shipped to distant markets. They helped Colorado become an important vegetable-producing region.

Their Own Words

“We did vegetable farming at that time. . . . Mostly cabbage, tomatoes, pickles . . . onions. Then we had some sugar beets, too. You know, back in them days sugar beet was pretty widespread in the area. Then it just all went out. Oh, we raised about twenty acres of sugar beets and then the rest was vegetables, some alfalfa for rotation purposes. . . . We used to hire a lot of Mexican, Spanish people to help on the farm. . . . They used to just come and like chop onions, mostly piecework, pick pickles, chop onions.”

Source: Jack Miyasaki, quoted in Maria M. Rogers ed., In Other Words: Oral Histories of the Colorado Frontier (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996): 12.

Train Arriving In Paonia

This photo shows a train arriving at a depot in Paonia, Colorado. People are waiting on the platform to board the train.



Train arriving in Paonia, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Trains were very important to small towns. This photo shows boxes of fruit as well as people on the platform. Trains carried farm produce as well as people from small towns to Denver and other cities.

Their Own Words

“I came to Colorado from Kansas, landing at Kit Carson August 1, 1870. . . . In the fall of 1873 the Arkansas Valley branch of the Kansas Pacific Railroad was built from Kit Carson to the site of the present town of Las Animas. . . . I took a position with Prowers and Hough as forwarding clerk [at Las Animas].

That is, the southern merchants would order their goods from the East, and have them consigned to Las Animas, in care of Prowers and Hough. We received the goods from the railroad, paid the freight, hired teams, mostly ox teams, and shipped the goods in that way to their destination. Las Animas was a very, very busy place in those days, as there was a large territory south not yet penetrated by the railroad. . . ."

Source: P. G. Scott, "Pioneer Experiences in Southern Colorado," Colorado Magazine, 9 (January 1932): 25.

Train Leaving Nathrop

This photo shows a train leaving the depot at Nathrop, Colorado. It is a "mixed train" that includes a cattle car as well as at least one passenger car.



Train leaving Nathrop, Colorado

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Trains like this one made it easier for people to live in small towns and rural areas. They helped link people together no matter where they lived.

Their Own Words

“I had my heaviest shipment and sales [of cattle] in 1918, when I shipped and sold 2,200 head [of cattle]. We were in World War I and the market was good. My neighbor and I loaded a train of steers at Debeque (in Mesa County), where we were offered thirteen cents, weighed in Denver. We wired Kanas City and were told they would bring \$13.75 per hundred weight down there. Since it only cost ten centers per hundred weight extra freight to the River [meaning the Missouri River], we decided to go down. We fed at Pueblo.”

Source: J. N. Neal, “Ranching in Rio Blanco County,” Colorado Magazine, 34 (April 1957): 114.