

COLORADO MINERS – COMMUNITY LIFE

Holidays and Fairs

What do these photos tell you about the holidays miners celebrated?

Fourth Of July In Cripple Creek

This is a Fourth of July parade in Cripple Creek. The photo was taken in 1898.



Fourth of July Parade in Cripple Creek

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The Fourth of July was a major holiday celebrated in every mining town. It usually began with a parade down the main street. In many towns, someone also read the Declaration of Independence or made a patriotic speech. The miners put on drilling and other contests.

Their Own Words

"The drilling contests on the Fourth of July were always red-letter events attracting large crowds of both spectators and competitors. Piles of rocks were hauled into the town. Since [working] one drill required two men (one to hold the drill, one to strike it with a sledge hammer), they all "paired off" and each pair drilled a hole in a rock. Whoever drilled the farthest within a certain period of time received a prize."

Source: Bennett E. Seymour, quoted in Mary Grace Wall, "Recollections of Early Colorado," Colorado Magazine 16 (May 1939):106.

Firemen Race In Telluride

The people in this photo were watching a firemen's race. The photo was taken in Telluride on July 4, 1909.



Firemen Race in Telluride

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The Fourth of July was celebrated with contests as well as parades and public speeches. Firemen's races were always a popular event. Fire crews from various towns would race against one another. They tried to see which crew could get an agreed upon place, hook up hoses, and be the first to pump water on the imaginary fire.

Their Own Words

"The Annual Firemen's Meet was one of the big occasions in the state, and the rivalry between the teams of the different towns was keen. The Harry A. Milnix Team of Trinidad and the J.B. Orman Team of Pueblo were the outstanding brigades of the states and the greatest competitors. It was not an uncommon thing for a town to hire professional runners for these contests. There were two kinds of races: the hub to hub, a straightaway run; and the wet race, in which the teams made the run, unreeling the hose, coupled up, and the first to throw water was the winner. Del Norte at this time had three brigades: the Engine Company, with red shirts; the Hose Company, with gray shirts; and the Hook and Ladder Company, made up of younger fellows, with blue shirts."

Source: Robert Born (1934), CWA Interview Doc. 8/349, Colorado Historical Society.

The Ice Palace In Leadville

This is a picture of the Ice Palace at Leadville. A fair was held at this ice castle during the winter of 1895-1896.



Ice Palace in Leadville

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

During the winter of 1895, the people of Leadville built the Ice Palace and held a fair to attract visitors to their city. The palace was built of blocks of ice. It covered an entire city block. Inside was an ice-skating rink, a restaurant, and a ballroom for dancing. People came from miles around to meet friends, skate and have fun. The Ice Palace opened on January 1, 1896 and closed on June 1, when the ice began to melt.

Their Own Words

"We got two cuttings of twenty-inch ice from the Leadville lakes. Out on the lakes, the blocks of ice were sawed out with a hand saw, then hauled to shore by hooks, and loaded upon sleds, where they were pulled by four-horse teams to the ice palace, one and one-half miles distant. . . .

"After the ice- blocks had been trimmed, they were laid in the forms, and sprayed with water. In the place of mortar we used water which froze the blocks together into a solid wall. It was cold work, and I wore two coats most of the time. . . ."

"Day and night shifts worked for two months to complete the huge structure which covered five acres of ground.

"It was larger than any other house of ice that ever was built. . .

"It covered an entire city block. . . .

"The formal opening of the Ice Palace took place on January 1, 1896 The Palace lasted from January first until June first, when it began melting and had to be closed the first of July."

Source: James M. Murray, quoted in Mrs. James R. Harvey, "The Leadville Ice Palace of 1896," Colorado Magazine 27 (May 1940): 95-96, 97, 100-101.

Inside the Ice Palace

This is the Leadville Ice Palace's skating rink.



Skating rink inside the Ice Palace

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The ice-skating rink was the Ice Palace's main attraction. This large rink was two-thirds the length of a football field. The photo was taken during the daytime. At night the rink was lighted by electric lights.

Their Own Words

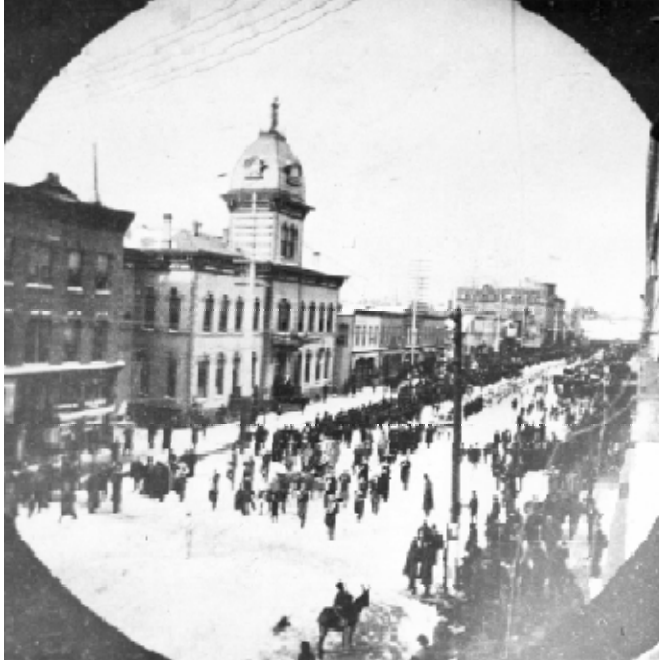
"The visitor to the Palace entered the north gateway, passed up a broad stairway of glistening ice, and found himself in the great ice rink. . . . The ice surface was eight feet wide and one hundred and ninety feet long. About the walls were pillars of ice and in the center of each was embedded an incandescent electric lamp, so that light radiated from them in all directions. . . ."

"From the Eighth Street entrance one came into the grand ballroom, fifty feet wide by eighty feet long, with an auxiliary ballroom and dining room of the same dimensions to the right of the rink. These two halls were houses built within the ice palace, kept at a comfortable temperature by large base-burner stoves. The parlors were furnished with easy chairs and settees for those who wished to rest from skating or dancing. . . . Here was also a restaurant, a kitchen, concession booths, to sell articles of every description. . . ."

Source: James A. Murray, quoted in Mrs. James R. Harvey, "The Leadville Ice Palace of 1896," Colorado Magazine 27 (May 1940): 95-96, 97, 100-101.

A Parade In Leadville

This parade celebrated the opening of the Leadville Ice Palace. The photo was taken on January 1, 1896.



Parade in Leadville

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The people of Leadville opened the Ice Palace with a parade down the city's main street. Visitors from Denver and other Colorado cities attended the parade. During the coming months, many visitors came to Leadville to visit the Ice Palace.

Religion

What do these photos tell you about what miners' churches were like?

Welsh Church In Central City

The small church in this photo was located in Central City. It was called the Welsh Church because it was built by miners who immigrated from Wales in Great Britain.



Welsh Church in Central City

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The first churches built in mining towns were small, log buildings like the one in this photo. This church served the Welsh miners who came to Central City to work in the mines.

Their Own Words

"I preach'd last sab[bath] in the a.m. in a log house in Leavenworth Gulch to a very good cong[regation] comparatively--nearly everybody turned out--Day--wet, cool. Preach'd with my overcoat on. In the P.M. at 5, I preached in a new building near the Express office, which was open at both ends, and 8 or 10 hands [workers] busily at work right close by joining the same building who made such a noise erecting a theatre that it was very difficult to speak or hear. Yet we had a good attentive cong[regation] . . . It is a very good field for Christian effort. Harvest great--laborers few. "

Source: Diary of Amos S. Billingsley, July 2, 1861.

Drawing Of Church Interior

This picture is a drawing of a Methodist church service at Central City. It appeared in an 1859 newspaper. The mining town was less than a year old.



Methodist Church drawing in Central City

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Miners brought their religion with them to the mining camps of Colorado. At first they held services in any building they could find. The church service in this drawing was held in a frame building. The benches were made on plain boards.

Their Own Words

"After breakfast all of us but Charley (who we left to keep house) went up the Ravine about half mile and listened to the first sermon ever preached in the Rocky Mountains (so far we know). How strangely I felt as I sat there Pine Stump listening to the discourse taken from the Ten Commandments."

"Surrounded by over a Thousand hardy rough looking miners, and while sitting there how many little incidents concerning my dear wife and little ones rushed through my mind. And as the discourse progressed in looking around me I saw the Tears rolling down many a rustic cheek. . . . Although it was a very plain old fashioned Methodist sermon, it made a greater impression than the most eloquent discourse I ever heard."

Source: David F. Spain to his wife (April 30, 1859) in John. D. Morrison, "The Letters of David F. Spain," Colorado Magazine 35 (April 1958): 108.

Church In Lake City

This is the first Presbyterian church in Lake City, a mining town southwest of Gunnison.



Church in Lake City

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In time, the miners built churches. The first usually were made of logs, like the one in the first photo. In time, they built frame church buildings like the one in Lake City.

Their Own Words

"I remember sitting in church one Sunday and above the voice of the preacher I could hear the voice of three different men announcing the results of the games in as many different gambling houses."

Source: Recollections of John Henry Martin, Denver Post, November 15, 1905. Dawson Scrapbooks, Vol. 4, p. 107, Colorado Historical Society.

St. Mary's Catholic Church In Aspen

This photo was taken inside St. Mary's Catholic Church in Aspen. In the center are the priest, Father Downey, and the altar boys who helped him at Mass. The photo was taken in 1885.



St. Mary's Catholic Church in Aspen

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

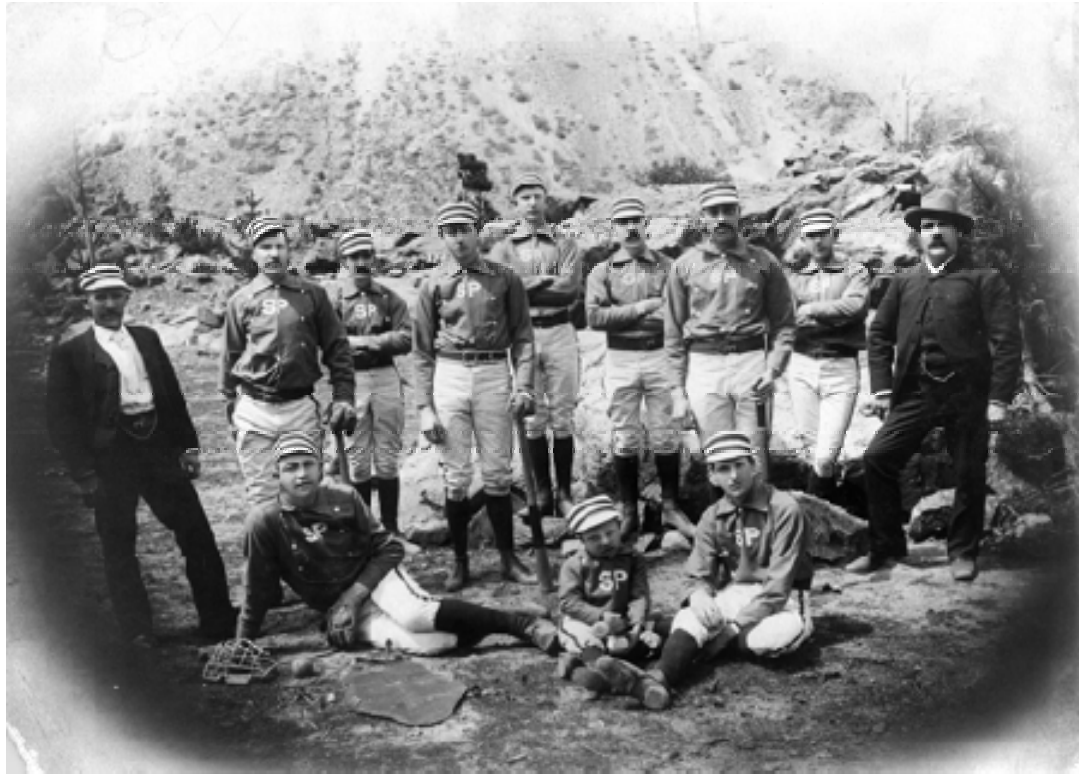
By the 1880s, the larger mining towns had several churches. There were Catholic churches, like the one in this photo, as well as Protestants churches.

Sports and Entertainment

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

Silver Plume Baseball Team

This is a photo of the Silver Plume baseball team. Silver Plume was a mining town near Georgetown.



Silver Plume Baseball Team

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Many of the mining towns in Colorado had baseball teams. The players were miners, merchants, and men who worked in the smelters. They played against teams from other towns.

Their Own Words

"There was quite a crowd at the ball game on Sunday afternoon, but as the home club walked away from the visitors in the first few innings, but little interest was taken in the details of the game, hence the scores of each club only are published.

"Blues 5 3 0 2 6 10 16 * 42 [38 hits, 5 errors]

"Buena Vista 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 1 [4 hits, 23 errors]

". . . The Buena Vista boys all went down on the evening train not a bit crest fallen over their Waterloo defeat. Dick Phelan, second baseman for the Blues [the Leadville team] sent the ball clear over the center field fence. Dick is the first one to do so and he will be the recipient of a neat silver scarf pin made from the Robert E. Lee [mine] ore. . . ."

Source: Leadville Herald, July 18, 1882, reprinted in Carl Ubbelohde, et. al., eds., A Colorado Reader (Boulder: Pruitt, 1982): 98-99.

White Pine Brass Band

This was the brass band from White Pine, a mining town east of Gunnison Colorado.



White Pine Brass Band in Gunnison, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Brass bands were popular during the late 1800s. They played concerts in city parks and marched in parades.

Their Own Words

“Of those palaces of entertainment, one was called the ‘Red Light Dance Hall,’ while the other was known as ‘Fat Jack’s Place,’ both being a combination of saloon and dance hall. One of these....observed the Sabbath by requiring the orchestra to play sacred music on Sunday evenings for patrons to dance by.... These were the sort of patrons who celebrated every morning, Sundays included, at which time they tripped the ‘lights fantastic toe’ to the strains of such good old hymns as ‘Jesus, Lover of My Soul’ or ‘The Beautiful Gates Ajar.’”

“Other old-time sacred standbys, written to common or four-four time, also apparently served the crowd as satisfactorily while they went through the evolutions and convolutions of the old-time square dances. No stranger could set foot in one of these dance halls without being importuned to have at least one dance or to stand treat [buy a drink]—the “ladies” receiving a certain percentage on every dance or treat. As a rule they encouraged their partners to celebrate, while they partook of lighter refreshments that did not incapacitate them for dancing, as that would cut down on their earnings.”

Source: George A. Root, "Gunnison in the Early 'Eighties," *The Colorado Magazine*, 9 (Nov. 1932): 203-204.

Fiddle Player

This miner is holding a violin or fiddle on his lap.



Miner with his fiddle

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Nearly every mining camp had someone who could play the fiddle. The fiddle player was much in demand to play for dances and to play tunes wherever people got together.

Their Own Words

"An occasional dance was always a drawing card for many of the boys, although we had no original dance hall until after the cheese factory went out of business. It was then fixed up for a community meeting place and the floor finished off for dancing. There was no orchestra and music was furnished by whatever was available—violin, guitar and piano most of the time. I remember an old violin player that used to play for the dances. He was a colored man and worked at the charcoal kilns at Dake, on the east side of Kenosha Pass. . . . I don't ever remember hearing his last name. But he sure liked to play the fiddle and seemed to enjoy coming to Jefferson to play. He was always willing to come whenever the folks sent word to him."

Source: George W. Champion, "Remembrances of South Park," Colorado Magazine, 40 (January 1963): 23.

Silver Plume Marching Band

This is a photo of the Silver Plume marching band. The photo was taken at the Blue Ribbon Mineral Springs in the town of Idaho Springs.



Silver Plume Marching Band at Blue Ribbon Mineral Springs

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Popular brass bands traveled to play concerts in other towns. The band in this photo was from Silver Plume. It was playing at a mineral springs in the neighboring town of Idaho Springs. Mineral springs where people bathed in mineral water were popular gathering places. Brass bands also played at important public occasions.

Their Own Words

"The first train [to arrive in Central City] consisted of a dummy engine and a street car, which was welcomed to Central with a grand celebration. Fire companies, [brass] bands, fraternal societies, the Emmet Guards and hundreds of citizens were at the station in Central for this great event. . . ."

Source: C. H. Hanington, "Early Days of Central City," Colorado Magazine, 19 (January 1942): 13.

Mrs. Peyer Plays The Piano

This is a photo of Paul Peyer and his wife at their home in Leadville. Mrs. Peyer is seated at a piano.



Mrs. Peyer playing her piano

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Wealthy families in mining camps often had a piano. But less wealthy people often placed great value on music and owned instruments of various kinds. Gathering around the piano to play and sing was one way they entertained themselves at home.

Their Own Words

"But the lady . . . was a friend of ours, and I took music lessons from her. . . . She gave me music lessons--and that was one thing I had to do. Seems like everybody in those days gave their children music lessons or had a piano. My brother had to take lessons too. I had to practice, and that was probably my chore--that I had to do."

Source: Jennie Spence Brown quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed. Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950, (New York: Twayne, 1992): 90.