

COLORADO MINERS – FAMILY, CHILDREN & SCHOOLS

Families and Children

What do these photos tell you about how miners' families and children were like?

A Telluride Miners Family

The family in this photo lived in the mining town of Telluride. The photo probably was taken in the 1880s.



Telluride Family

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The gold seekers who came to Colorado during the Gold Rush were mostly young, single men. Some were married men, but most of them left their wives and families at home. They came hoping to strike it rich and then return home. Families like the one in this photo were rare in Colorado during the early years of mining.

Their Own Words

"There is quite a number of Ladies here now which make things look so much more comfortable. There is one family lives close to us that have a cow, chickens &c. Every morning my ears are Saluted by the crowing of a big Shanghai Rooster that they have."

Source: David F. Spain to his wife, Arapahoe City, April 30, 1859; in John D. Morrison, ed., "The Letters of David F. Spain," Colorado Magazine, 35 (April, 1958): 110.

Two Cripple Creek Children

The children in this photo lived in the mining town of Cripple Creek. They lived there probably in the early 1900s.



Children of Cripple Creek

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Gold was discovered at Cripple Creek in 1898. Nearly all of the people who lived there during the next two or three years were adults. During the first years of a mining camp, miners gave children special treatment because they were so rare. This photo probably was taken a few years after 1900.

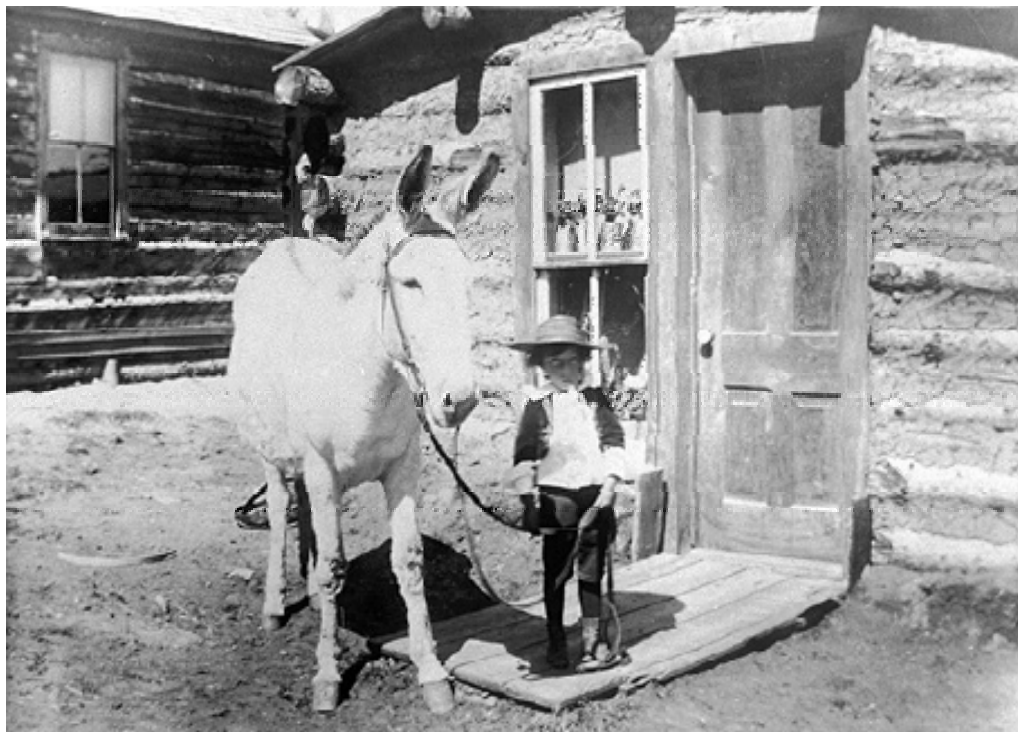
Their Own Words

"So, after a few months, we were again happily settled with our family and eat woman-cooked meals and sleeping in good beds. My wife used to curl May's hair and fix her up nice, and I would take her uptown on Sunday morning, and the miners would give her candy and gum and money to put in her purse so she would talk to them and dance a few steps.

Source: Frank W. Smith, "My Years in Colorado," San Luis Valley Historian, 4(Spring 1972).

A Child With Burro

This photo was taken in the mining town of Creede, Colorado. The boy is holding the reins of a burro.



Child with a Burro

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Burros were quite common in the mining camps. Miners used them to ride, carry supplies, and haul ore. Children even had burros for pets.

Their Own Words

"Burros were plentiful, and practically every youngster had one, or part ownership in one. These patient little animals were used to carry the coal and kindling wood which their owners 'rustled' in the railroad yards and other places."

Source: Ivan Crawford, "School Days in Leadville," Colorado Magazine, 26 (July 1959): 224.

Children At Starkville School

This photo was taken in 1886 at a school in Starkville, a coal mining town in Las Animas County Colorado.



Children at Starkville School

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Mining regions that provided good jobs attracted men with families as well as single men. In time there were enough children in a mining camp to build a school. The children in this photo attended a one-room school in Starkville, a coal mining town south of Trinidad, Colorado.

Their Own Words

“The coal miners as rule all had big families. The family of five was a small family. But they went from there, but I wouldn’t say how high they went. I don’t really know. I’ve heard of families of 12 and 15 children. . . There were no child labor laws in those days and the boys were taken into the mine, 11, 12, 13 years old. And the girls, just as soon as they were able to take care of baby, were kept at home. They didn’t get to go to school much.”

Source: Martha Todd, in Eric Margolis, “Western Mining as a Way of Life,” *Journal of the West* (July 1985): 54.

Children Playing In The Snow

This photo was taken in Gunnison, Colorado during the winter. The children are riding and being pulled in sleds by burros.



Children playing in the snow

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Burros also help children in mining regions have fun during the winter. Three of the children in this photo are riding sleds pulled by burros.

Their Own Words

"I like to think of the great toboggan parties, made up of men and women as well as children, coasting down Aspen Mountain from up near the Aspen mine, down across the Midland [Railroad] tracks and on through the town, ending up at Hallems Lake or continuing on down the Roaring Fork [River] when it was frozen over. The sleds, which held ten or more, were sometimes pulled back up the mountain by a horse or burro."

Source: William W. Wardell, "Memories of Aspen, Colorado," Colorado Magazine, 30 (January 1958): 118.

Schools

What do these photos tell you about how the schools miners' children attended were like?

One Room School Near Telluride

The building in this photo is a one-room school near the town of Telluride, Colorado. Six girls, two men, and a boy on a burro are standing in front of the building.



One room school near Telluride

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The families who settled in mining communities wanted their children to have a good education. They built a schoolhouse as soon as they could. Small communities built one-room schools like the one in this photo.

Their Own Words

"We rode horseback to school, sometimes as many as three of the smaller children riding on one horse. Our saddles were hung on the side of the schoolhouse and our horses tied to nearby bushes. I was amazed when I saw the schoolhouse. . .It was made of logs and had been built in a day by the men in the settlement. The dimensions were about fourteen by sixteen feet. The logs were chinked and daubed with adobe mud. In many places the mud had fallen out. If a child wanted to look at anyone passing, he would peak between the logs."

Source: Nellie Carnahan Robinson, "The Recollections of a Schoolteacher in the Disappointment Creek Valley," Colorado Magazine, 51 (Spring 1974).

Catholic School In Georgetown

This school was located in the mining town of Georgetown. It was a Catholic school. The building was made of brick.



Catholic School in Georgetown

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Larger mining towns such as Georgetown built schools with more than one room. This Catholic school in Georgetown had at least four rooms. Georgetown also had a public school.

Their Own Words

“For three years we children, along with the boys of the Mexican population, were sent to a parochial school conducted by the Sisters of Charity. They were good women, but the only ones of them that remain in my memory to this day were the devout Mother Superior, who was the salt of the earth, and a young sister named Beatrice with a peaches and cream complexion, with whom we small boys were all in love.”

Source: James K. Hastings, “Boyhood in the Trinidad Region,” Colorado Magazine, 30 (April 1953): 105.

Brick School In Central City

This stone school building was located in the mining town of Central City, Colorado. The school was built in 1874.



Brick School in Central City

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The town of Central City served a large and prosperous mining community. In 1874, it built one of the finest schoolhouses in Colorado. It also was one of the largest buildings in town. This fine building showed how much the people of Central City valued education.

Their Own Words

"The period between 1870 and 1882, when I lived there [Central City]. . . . We all attended the stone schoolhouse on the hill. Some [of the boys] were good and others not so good. . . . We were all supposed to be studying. [Charles] Collier included, which was so unusual that The Little Squire, as we always called our principal, H. M. Yale, tiptoed to the rear of the room and came quietly behind Collier. Lo and behold, he was reading a Beadle dime novel concealed in his Geography! Mr. Hale grabbed him by the nape of the neck and seat of the trousers, carried him to his desk, and gave him a good paddling, much to the amusement of the class."

Source: "Boyhood Recollections of Central City in 1870s," Central City Weekly Register-Call, August 11, 1939.

Schoolhouse In Silver Plume

This is the first schoolhouse in the mining town of Silver Plume, Colorado. The photo was taken in 1884 or 1885. The children are holding books.



Children holding their school books in Silver Plume, Colorado

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Silver Plume was Georgetown's smaller neighbor. It did not need a big, brick schoolhouse. Like other small towns in the mining regions, Silver Plume had a small, one-room school.

Their Own Words

[People who wanted to be teachers in Colorado in the 1870s had to pass this test.]

"Find the side of a cubical tank to hold 4,725 gallons of water. Find the least number which divided 3, 7, 11, and 21 leaves a remainder of 2 each time. Define syncope, epocope, ellipsis, and hyperbole. Make a proper use of capitals, arrange into verse, and punctuate the following: 'she continued moreover it is written that my race hewed ammon hip and thigh from arorer on amon until minnith here her face lowed as I looked at her' —tennyson. What are the departments of the U.S. government and their respective powers? Name the Cabinet officers. How many members of Congress has each state? Give the dates of the landing of the pilgrims, discovery of America, adoption of the Constitution, commencement of the Mexican War, and commencement of the late Rebellion. Define equator, earth's axis, parallels, meridians. Name in order of the location of the States that border on the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific."

Source: Colorado Territorial Superintendent of Schools, First Biennial Reports.

Leadville School Teachers

This photo was taken at the Ninth Street School in Leadville, Colorado. The principal and seven women teachers are sitting on the steps in front of the school.



Schoolteachers of Leadville

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

In the 1880s, Leadville was the largest mining town in Colorado. It also needed large schools. The number of teachers in this photo indicates that the Ninth Street School had at least seven rooms.

Their Own Words

“My childhood and girlhood were tied very closely with the Healy House. Miss Nelly Healy and my sister Saidee E. Edwards were dear friends. Both were teachers at the Ninth Street School. Another Leadville teacher I admired very much was Miss McMechen. . . . I considered her the prettiest teacher there. I can picture her now, an ideal for a little girl. Miss Healy, who later was my teacher in the B-6th grade, used to take me to see her young cousins . . . who lived in the house which is now called ‘Healy House.’”

Source: Mattie Edwards Stuthman, “High Altitude Memories,” Colorado Magazine, 24 (January 1952): 36.

Classrooms

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

Classroom In An Aspen School

This is a photo of a classroom in the mining town of Aspen, which began as a mining town in the 1870's. The photo was taken about 1885.



Aspen School classroom

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The first school classrooms in Colorado mining towns looked like the one in this photo. Children sat at wooden desks, with two students per desk. The classrooms were heated by an iron stove sitting in the middle of the room.

Their Own Words

"The school seats were made of lumber, two pupils always in one seat, sitting on a bench. The blackboard was also made of boards painted a shiny black. We never went by grades at school; you were either in first or so on to the fifth reader, and to finish the fifth was to know all there was to know. I managed to finish it, but never got through fractions. The tears I have shed over arithmetic!"

Source: Anne Ellis, Life of an Ordinary Woman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1929, 1980): 50.

Classroom In A Silver Plume School

This photo was taken in a classroom at Silver Plume about 1905. The students are seated at desks lined up in rows.



Children seated at their desks in Silver Plume School

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The desks in this classroom are more “modern” than those in the previous photo. The wooden desk top is attached to sides made of iron.

Their Own Words

“The schoolroom contained desks and seats of various sizes, two long benches, a table and chair for the teacher, a table piled with books and a Coles Hot Blast heater in the center of the room. I paused a few moments as I looked around the room and thought with a thrill—this is my very own domain for the next eight months.”

Source: Elizabeth Aiken, “Garland School,” in Margaret J. Lehrer, ed., *Up the Hemline* (Colorado Springs, William and Field, 1975): 74.

Classroom In Leadville High School

The students in this photo were eighth grade students at Leadville High School. These students are attending a mathematics class.



Leadville High School students in their math class

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Small mining towns only had elementary schools. Only the larger mining towns like Leadville or Central City had high schools.

Their Own Words

“The 1901 graduating class of the Leadville High School counted fifteen girls and four boys; for 1902 the figure was eight girls and six boys; for 1903, fourteen girls and one male. In 1904 more boys were present, the figures being twelve to seven, while in 1905 the girls shot ahead again—sixteen to four. In the writer’s class, that of 1906, there were eighteen girls and two boys. Boys left the High School before graduation, usually, to go to work in the mines and become breadwinners for their families. At the time, as the Superintendent so clearly and softly wrote, ‘Community ideas do not tend to the fostering of an educational spirit.’ This point is emphasized by the fact that from 1883 to 1894 there were only thirty-three graduates of the High School.”

Source: Ivan C. Crawford, “School Days in Leadville,” Colorado Magazine, 36 (July 1959): 224.