

# COLORADO IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



(Photo Credit: Colorado Historical Society)

## TEACHER'S NOTEBOOK

Doing History/Keeping the Past Project\*  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

This teacher's guide will help teachers and their students use the materials created by the DOING HISTORY/KEEPING THE PAST: A COLORADO HISTORIC PRESERVATION CURRICULUM PROJECT. The project was created in 1998 to develop a new generation of Colorado history and historic preservation education materials, which will be delivered to schools via computer-based technology. The State Historical Fund of the Colorado Historical Society has generously supported the project.

### **COMPUTER-BASED MATERIALS**

The materials created by the DOING HISTORY/KEEPING THE PAST PROJECT are available on CD-ROM disks and via the Project's Internet website (<http://hewit.unco.edu/dohist/>). The materials may be viewed on the website. The CD-ROM disks may be ordered at the address listed below.

### **HISTORY IS AN ACTION WORD**

The basic idea underlying this project is that history is something one does. It assumes that students should be engaged in creating their own historical understanding by using and interpreting a variety of primary sources and secondary materials. Then they should share their history with others by writing, speaking, drawing, acting out or otherwise presenting what they have learned.

### **HISTORY OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

The most accessible kind of history for young students is the history of everyday life. It is easy for them to related to, to understand, to document, and to do. It also is a very democratic kind of history, as it includes rich and poor, and ordinary and famous people alike. The history of everyday life encompasses at least the following topics:

- Food, Clothing, and Shelter
- Family, Children, and Schools
- Work and Work Places
- Community Life
- Transportation.

### **HISTORY OF PLACES**

Everyday life has a spatial dimension. It is set in specific communities, locations, places, buildings, houses, or rooms. Attention to the history of places and the interaction of people and places should make it easier for students to do history that is visual and concrete.

## **HISTORY CLOSE TO HOME**

School history often has focused on the history of people somewhat remote from students. It is, of course, important for them to learn about other people who once lived in Colorado. But they should also have an opportunity to do their own history, the history of their family, school, community, and town. It is easiest for them to document and preserve history that is close to home.

## **KEEPING THE PAST**

Doing history requires evidence from and information about the past. We cannot be doers of history without being keepers of the past. This project is designed to help students see this connection. It will help students get involved in doing history and keeping the past. It focuses especially on helping students keep the past that is physically closest to them—the past of their family, school, neighborhood, and community. This includes documenting and preserving sites as well as documents that have historical significance to them.

## **CLASSROOM ARCHIVES**

Students need a place to deposit the evidence that they are collecting about their family, school, and community. Some of it will go home with them at the end of the school year. Much of it belongs in the classroom as a resource and model for future students. Classrooms need a history archives. That could be either a filing cabinet or files and folders on a computer. Most of the evidence that students will collect can be keyboarded or photographed and scanned into a computer.

## **STUDENT WEBSITES**

Students also need to share with others the history they are doing. They need a forum, a source of inspiration and new ideas, a publication outlet, a form of recognition. One way to meet this need is to create websites in classrooms and at the project's office at the University of Northern Colorado on which students can share their best work with others.

## **PROJECT CONTACT INFORMATION**

To order computer-based materials or for further information about this project, contact Matthew Downey, Project Director, McKee Hall 318, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; toll free telephone, 1-800-224-0534; fax, 970-351-3159; email, [matthew.downey@unco.edu](mailto:matthew.downey@unco.edu); website, <http://hewit.unco.edu/dohist/>.

## **COLORADO in the TWENTIETH CENTURY**

### **OVERVIEW**

Much changed during the first half of the 20th century in the way Coloradoans lived, worked, and spent their leisure time. Comparing sets of photos from the turn of the century and 1950 makes many of these changes obvious. By mid-century, clothing styles, work places, the location of new houses, and modes of transportation were vastly different. They also are noticeably modern, more like those of the present than like those of the turn of the 20th century.

In many respects, the historical evidence for this topic constitutes a road map to modern times. Changes happened along the way. They took place gradually, even though the pace of change was accelerating.

### **FOOD, CLOTHING AND SHELTER**

The most telling symbol of the eating habits of most Coloradoans by 1950 was the tin can. For historical evidence of this, one need look no farther than the interior photo of Stanley's grocery store in Keota (See Work theme). Store-bought processed food--packaged in boxes, in bottles, and, especially in metal cans--were staples in both rural and urban kitchens. Of course, fresh produce still was common during the summer, and women still preserved vegetables and fruit in glass jars. But most food was processed food.

The photos of the first half of the 20th century document a series of revolutions in clothing styles, especially in women's clothing. Men's wear changed more slowly. The styles of children's clothing tended to mimic those of adults.

In the larger cities, whole new neighborhoods appeared, mostly in what had been rural countryside. Housing contractors laid out new subdivisions accessible only by city buses or automobiles. Changes also took place in newer inner city neighborhoods, as brick houses came within the range of working and middle-class families.

### **FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS**

Family life in 20th century Colorado reflected changes in the larger society. As the state became more ethnically, socially, and culturally diverse, the more varied were the experiences of Colorado families. The photographic evidence reflects this diversity. By mid-century, children had more educational and recreational opportunities than ever before, especially those living in urban areas. School architecture and classrooms changed slowly. Three-story brick schoolhouses and seats lined up in rows were common through the 1940s. However, even here change was accelerating, with the new suburbs taking the lead. There new, one-story, sprawling school buildings had made their appearance by the 1950s.

## **WORK AND WORK PLACES**

The people of Colorado faced a series of economic challenges in the 20th century. The outcome would greatly alter the kind of work they did, how they did it, and where. The last mining bonanza, triggered in 1890 by the discovery of gold at Cripple Creek, was over by 1920. Thereafter men who listed their occupation as “miners” were mostly coal miners. Coal mining, centered in Boulder County and in the Canon City and Trinidad-Walsenburg area, was an important industry in Colorado through the 1930s.

Farmers prospered during the early decades of the century, with farming becoming increasingly mechanized. Steam engines and tractors pulling multiple plows turned vast areas of the plains into wheat fields. By the 1920s, farmers, too, had come upon hard times. As machines enabled farmers to produce more and more crops, the prices for those crops tumbled and individual farmers had trouble making ends meet. Farmers in eastern Colorado (and other areas on the Great Plains) also faced environmental disaster. The dust bowl conditions in eastern Colorado during the 1930s demonstrated the folly of plowing up the plains' grasslands.

However, many new jobs were created in the growing cities of Colorado, especially in manufacturing and food processing. These jobs, too, were threatened by the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and lasted through the 1930s. The recovery of the World War II and postwar years made work plentiful once again. However, these new jobs were almost entirely located in cities, where manufacturing, retailing, and services were the engines of economic growth.

## **COMMUNITY LIFE**

The things people did as members of communities also changed during the first half of the 20th century. Special days celebrated by Colorado residents reflected changes in the ethnic and cultural makeup of the society. However, much remained the same. Religion continued to be important in people's lives, with churches serving as major community gathering places. People continued to celebrate traditional holidays and to attend and participate in sporting events. Camping, hiking, and outdoor recreation remained popular. Yet modern technology was rapidly altering the recreational as well as the industrial landscape. Radio and movie theaters were successfully competing with band concerts and dramatic performances. Auto racing rivaled horse racing in popularity.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

In Colorado, as elsewhere in the United States, modes of transportation by 1950 had changed radically. The electric streetcars that dominated urban public transit at the turn of the century had been largely replaced by gasoline-powered busses. The few remaining trolleys were valued mainly as historical artifacts. The interurban electric cars popular in 1910 had been replaced by busses. By 1950, autos, farm and delivery trucks, and tractors had largely replaced horse-drawn vehicles in urban and rural Colorado. Railroads, still a vital part of the nation's interstate transportation network in 1950, were being challenged by bus and trucking companies. Airlines, still a novel transportation alternative in 1940, were becoming a major rival to the railroads for business travel ten years later.