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### **Beehive Archive**

Welcome to the Beehive Archive—your weekly bite-sized look at some of the most pivotal—and peculiar—events in Utah history. With all of the history and none of the dust, the Beehive Archive is a fun way to catch up on Utah’s past. Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council, provided to local papers as a weekly feature article focusing on Utah history topics drawn from our award-winning radio series, which can be heard each week on [KCPW](#) and [Utah Public Radio](#).

### **“Tieing” Utah Together**

**Utah’s mountain ranges were raided and its rivers put to work in order to build the national railroad system.**

When the transcontinental railroad came to Utah in 1868 and 1869 – and as branch lines later spread through the territory – railroad builders faced a huge need for wood in order to tie the rails together.

Suitable wood was sparse, except in the forests of the Wasatch and Uinta Mountains. So, how was wood transported from the high mountains down to the construction sites? Roads into the timbering slopes were difficult to build and dangerous to use. Sometimes ice slides were made in winter to get logs to where they could be loaded onto sledges or wagons. But the easier way was to float the wood down the Bear, Provo, and Weber Rivers.

Railroad contractors would send in small crews to cut trees, hack them into the right shape, and stack the newly-hewn ties onto the river banks. During spring runoff, the ties were floated down the rivers to a location where they could be pulled out and transported to the crews laying track. Ties could be floated over 100 miles downriver, with annual “tie drives” lasting up to two months, depending on how long the high water ran.

Sometimes the river banks had to be built up or channeled out in order to keep the ties moving. Men known as “drivers” used poles to loosen jams. Sometimes the logs would be so tightly jammed that a man could walk on them for as much as a mile. The drivers wore hip boots and often worked in water up to their armpits. When the run-off ceased, ties were sometimes stranded until the next season. Utah’s largest tie drive happened around 1886, with 350,000 ties from various companies going downstream.

“Tie drives” were hazardous and made a significant dent in Utah’s forests. Without them, however, the construction of the national railroad network would not have happened.

*Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council. Sources consulted in the creation of the Beehive Archive and past episodes may be found at [www.utahhumanities.org/BeehiveArchive.htm](http://www.utahhumanities.org/BeehiveArchive.htm). Utah Division of State History © 2014.*

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