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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](#).

### **Uranium Stories**

**Those who journeyed to Moab during the uranium mining boom that swept Utah in the 1950s and 1960s changed the tiny town forever.**

When the Atomic Energy Commission wanted uranium in the late 1940s, its guarantee to purchase whatever could be found set off a major mineral rush on the Colorado Plateau.

One of the men who came exploring was Texas geologist Charlie Steen, who moved his family to the area twice in his hunt for uranium. Finding no luck the first time, the Steens left before returning in the spring of 1952 to give it one more try. Steen recalled that, “We arrived looking like *The Grapes of Wrath*, but we were in fine spirits and full of hope. We rented a tarpaper shack for \$15 a month, scavenged railroad coal to heat it, and our first night there, [my wife] came down with pneumonia.”

That summer, Steen found a deposit of high-grade uranium just south of Moab. The discovery drew people from all over the country and world. Geologists, prospectors, miners, as well as businesses supplying the boom, all hoped to “strike it rich.” The town of Moab was transformed by the influx.

Resident Billie Provonsha recalls, “I would wake up in the morning and ... look out the window ... It was nothing to have a car or two parked at the curb and [people sleeping in] bedrolls thrown out on the lawn...” People lived in tents, dugouts, and converted chicken coops. But housing wasn’t the only issue. Elementary school teacher Clara Copley Shafer remembers that, “Every time I turned around I would get a new kid ... I started out with 25 [students] and ended up with 40... There weren’t supplies. We ran out of desks. We were just making do.” Nurse Ferne Mullen recalls the day the hospital delivered 30 babies. New schools, a hospital, and a library were all built between 1955 and 1957. In the decade 1950-1960, Moab saw a population growth of 267%.

Many moved on after the market slowed, but tiny Moab had been permanently transformed.

*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). Museum of Moab © 2014.*

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