

**For Immediate Release (July 28, 2014)**

### **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.

### **Speaking American**

**Utah's pivotal 1919 *Americanization Act* impacted the state's vibrant immigrant population.**

When the thirteenth session of the Utah Legislature closed in March 1919, new legislation included a \$4 million bond for new roads, a law preventing anarchist and communist labor agitation, as well as an *Americanization Act*, which required all non-English speakers to register for nightly language classes.

These bills point to an important moment in U.S. history. In the early Twentieth Century, the United States was, more than ever before, an immigrant nation. Cities hummed with immigrant energy and drive. By building new roads and infrastructure, Utah hoped to attract new industry, goods, and services. But roads bring people, and by the 1920s, not everyone was welcome.

Immigrants were viewed with suspicion – especially Eastern Europeans, who were former enemies from World War I. Worse, some immigrants harbored new and dangerous ideas, like communism, which was especially frightening in light of the recent revolution in Russia. These ideas seemed to spread via foreign language presses and pamphlets.

Utah’s *Americanization Act* – which became a model for legislation on the national level – seemed the perfect way to guard against foreign ideologies. So, not only did new immigrants have to learn English, they had to speak and act “American.”

Attendance at these nightly “Americanization” classes tested a new immigrant’s loyalty to the United States. Too tired to go after a long day’s work? You might be fined \$25. Worse, you could be branded an un-American parasite. For example, shortly after the new law went into effect, the *Price News Advocate* reported, “The aliens of Price do not want to become Americans...The state is providing a school whereby they may learn our language, laws and other matters that will make better citizens out of them and they are defying the new law.”

While some officials later recognized the undue hardship imposed by the law, the notion of language as a way of measuring national identity and loyalty continues to impact immigration policy and debate.

*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). Rebecca Anderson © Utah Humanities Council 2014.*

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