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Photos Available Upon Request

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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](#).

William Rishel’s Bike Ride

The 100-mile summer bike ride of William Rishel and Charlie Emise across the Great Salt Lake Desert almost ended in disaster.

In 1896, to promote his growing chain of national newspapers, publisher William Randolph Hearst cooked up a wildly extravagant plan to sponsor a transcontinental bicycle relay. Knowing the scheme would require local people to scout the best route, he recruited bike enthusiast William Rishel to investigate the Nevada-to-Wyoming leg of the coast-to-coast course.

On his way from Salt Lake to California, Rishel swung north of the Great Salt Lake, but quickly concluded that the northern route was too long to work for the relay. Scrapping that course, he instead decided to follow, at least roughly, the old Hastings Cutoff that many overland pioneers had followed to the West Coast. This southern trail would cut miles off the relay and hopefully speed the bicyclists on their way east from California.

Rishel arranged to have himself and his friend, Charlie Emise, dropped off at Terrace, Utah, a railroad town in central Box Elder County. With a few sandwiches, a questionable map from an old prospector, and four canteens between them, the two men set out on a southwesterly course toward Grantsville. At first, the going was easy over encrusted salt, but soon Rishel and Emise found themselves bogged down in the desert’s infamous mud flats. Then their water ran out. But by alternating between carrying and riding their bikes, the two men finally found the tiny spring in the Lakeside Mountains that had been marked on the prospector’s map. Evening fell as they rested at the spring, encouraging them on to their destination with its cooler air. Added encouragement was a view of the lights of the old Saltair Pavilion.

At about midnight, aching and thirsty, Rishel and Emise finally pedaled their way down Grantsville’s Main Street. A few weeks later, heavy rains forced a reluctant Rishel to scrap the southern course he had just traversed and reroute Hearst’s relay around the Great Salt Lake’s northern end.

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. Brandon Johnson © Utah Humanities Council 2014.

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