

For Immediate Release (October 20, 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](#).

Utopian Dreams: Russian Pioneers in Park Valley

A group of Russian pioneers sought a place to build their religious colony far from cities and government interference. Where else would they come but Utah?

“Invest Dimes and Reap Dollars in Park Valley, Utah!” That was the promise of the Pacific Land & Water Company in its 1911 brochure promoting land for sale northwest of the Great Salt Lake. The Salt Lake company was one of many developers that purchased large tracts of land previously granted to the railroad and then marketed parcels to buyers from out of state. The brochure featured images of orchards, lush fields of grain, and plump sheep and cattle. The pitch was enough to persuade a group of twenty Russian families to purchase several thousand acres in Park Valley and move there in 1914 to create a self-sustaining farming community where they could freely worship.

These families were Molokans, religious dissidents recently exiled from Russia, who had settled in Los Angeles. But California – where civil law reigned – was not the utopia they had imagined. “In fact,” the *Box Elder News* reported, “it is to get away from American customs that the Russians are coming to [Utah]. [They] object to the check put upon them in California. They object strenuously to their young people adopting American customs ... and it is their intention to go to a partly isolated locality, where they will be free to follow customs such as prevail in the land of their birth.”

The Molokans traveled to Kelton, Utah by train and from there by wagon to Dove Creek, where they set about building houses, digging wells, and clearing land for farming. Of course, the dry sagebrush flats of Box Elder County was nothing like the lavish abundance advertised by the Pacific Land & Water Company. Fresh spring green turned quickly to hot summer brown. Despite being experienced farmers, their efforts were unsuccessful.

The last family abandoned Park Valley by 1917, and by 1920 all had returned to Los Angeles. The Molokans left behind their village and a tiny cemetery with graves marked in Russian, along with their dreams of utopia.

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. Megan van Frank © Utah Humanities Council 2014.

####

[The Utah Humanities Council](#) empowers Utahns to improve their communities through active engagement in the humanities. UHC is funded through gifts from individuals, foundations, and corporations, the Salt Lake County Zoo, Arts, and Parks Fund, the State of Utah, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Each year, the Council underwrites hundreds of educational and cultural programs throughout Utah. For more information, visit www.utahhumanities.org or www.facebook.com/utahhumanitiescouncil.