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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](#).

### **Joseph Hansen: Right-Hand Man of Leon Trotsky**

**The 1940 assassination in Mexico City of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky has an odd Utah connection in Joseph Hansen, whose journey took him from a childhood in Richfield, Utah, to the deathbed of one of the most important leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.**

When an assassin dug his axe into the skull of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, the man who rushed to Trotsky’s aid was his driver and secretary, Joseph Hansen.

Leon Trotsky was a leader of Russia’s 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, which put into place the world’s first communist government. But Trotsky was usurped by his arch-rival Josef Stalin, who deported Trotsky and his wife Natalia from the Soviet Union, and planted assassins on their trail. The couple’s exile brought them to Mexico in 1937. Still hunted by Stalin, they holed up with their most trusted comrades in a walled compound in Mexico City. Trotsky found respite from his worries by touring the countryside in search of rare cacti. His driver, Joseph Hansen, was chosen for his experience driving rural roads – the rural roads of his Utah home.

The afternoon of August 20, 1940 seemed routine. Natalia was making tea. Hansen was tinkering with the alarm system. And Trotsky was in his study with a visitor. Hansen later recalled that, “A fearful cry wrent the afternoon calm – a cry prolonged and agonized, half scream, half sob.” Hansen raced to the study and grabbed Trotsky as he collapsed, while guards subdued the visitor, an assassin sent by Stalin. Hansen stayed with Trotsky and took down his last words.

So, how did a boy from Richfield, Utah, become the right-hand man of a Russian revolutionary?

Hansen was part of a large working-class family of Norwegian immigrants, who had converted to Mormonism in search of a better life. Growing up, Hansen heard about the Russian Revolution and how it would benefit workers. By the time he graduated from the LDS Academy he was a socialist, and became Trotskyist at the University of Utah. But it was Hansen’s secretarial skills, honed as co-editor of the U’s literary magazine, and his driving skills, honed on the bumpy roads between Richfield and Salt Lake, that earned him a place at Trotsky’s side.

*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](http://www.utahhumanities.org) © Utah Humanities Council 2015.*

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