

Reading the weekly column written by a friend in Sweden reminded me that not every story is of the “here and now.” His account of the last Swedish duel sent me to the filing cabinet to look through my collection of old newspaper articles I had copied when I was writing weekly for a local newspaper. It also reminded me that it was Tuesday, and I had not yet written the latest in Monday essays that seldom are written early enough to be on our website on Monday. But, Tuesday is as close as I can get this week—or, most weeks, it appears.

I pulled out a copied page that I had evidently kept because of an article about a timber tract that would have been northwest of the homestead here on Coe Creek. But, that isn’t the account that caught my eye just now. Instead, it was one paragraph with a big headline and little local significance.

These days, when almost nobody we know smokes, this account might not have made it to the front page of a local weekly. But, this is what I read:

“A car load (a railway car) of cigarettes, made by the American Tobacco Co. of Durham, N.C. enroute for Shanghai, China, passed over the G.R. & I railroad last Thursday. The car contained six million cigarettes which is valued at \$687,000. It is very seldom that a car load so valuable, or one destined to such a great distance, passes through our village.”

Questions went through my mind: Why would a carload of anything headed from North Carolina to China be transported on an obscure railroad like the Grand Rapids and Indiana and go through the middle of Michigan? The only reason I can come up with, and it probably isn’t a very good one, is that it might have been headed for Sault Ste. Marie, then across to Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, and on to some port on Canada’s east coast. But, I have no idea if this was the reason or not.

Why, too, did anyone even know what was in that railway car?

And was it really worth that much in 1906?

And, who cared?

The article appeared in *The Tustin Times* of July 19, 1906. In the same paper, I read that one of my great-grandfathers, the only one of that generation of my male forebears who had been born in the U.S.A., had been at the local barber’s to have a shave to celebrate his 80th birthday. The barber said that Mr. Stevens was the first man 80 years old that he had ever shaved. He was, of course, long dead before I was born, but I remember hearing that he was not a very nice man, that he was very hard on my grandmother when she was a girl, while never punishing her sister.

Now, I am on a mission to search the wealth of old newspaper articles I have filed in the hunt for good stories. Donald Trump’s election—not the popular landslide he claims, but a valid election, anyway—has caused me to temporarily retreat from the larger sphere of society in dismay and horror at what our fellow citizens have done. Instead, I am going to immerse myself in the “very local,” in the newspapers and the stories of our locality, present and past. So, a thank you to Sune for reminding me, in his story of the duel, that there is more to write about than our national shames and triumphs.