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Leave it to a big northeastern financial journal to start blowing it around about an Irish sheep farmer finding a stash of old cigars worth a million bucks. Just as we woolie operators over here are so down on our luck that if we so much as found one stogie, it'd be loaded in gunpowder, we have to hear of the lucky Irish. The *Wall Street Journal* made it worse by adding it was one was of our countrymen who had the coin to give \$2000 for a cigar.

The paper went on to say the farmer was "lord over 1400 head of sheep." The smokes had been hidden in a cellar since 1860. The times must have had a good wool market to afford storing cigars. In West Texas, all the barns and houses link back to a livestock boom or an oil lease. So probably the lord of the flock in 1860 hit a big lick on his lambs, and

being of a thrifty nature, put the cigars back for leaner years.

Without knowing it, the newspaper authenticated farmer as a full-blooded, double bred sheep herder. At the *Journal's* press time, he had refused the million dollar offer. The last I heard, sheepmen under the Common Market in England and France were doing quite well for themselves. Nevertheless, it'd only take two days of rainy weather for those old ewes to contact wet weather fevers and the cellar to flood around the cigars, and wash off whatever was attracting the rich American to the trove.

It doesn't sound reasonable that the stogies were stored for 130 years without detection. Something's wrong. Those Travis Club Senators the Bosses smoked, after the sun through the pickup's windshield seasoned the stubs and the

air conditioner recirculated the fumes from the ashes, were strong enough to set off an evacuation of the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Folks downwind from the Irish farmer's cellar must have had hay fever too bad to detect the difference in the atmosphere.

Another thing risky about stalling is if a good shearing crew hits the neighborhood, the lord of the manor will be so excited ordering wool sacks and hiring extra help, he will forget his other business. Not that there haven't been lots of chances for herders to win big stakes. In 1936, for example, a rancher over at Barnhart won \$50 on a punch board. But instead of investing his windfall in stocks and bonds, he took off to a race meet at Del Rio and picked five straight losers in a row for 10 bucks a throw. Years later, lying under an oxygen tent over at the Shannon

Hospital in San Angelo, he admitted he still regretted he didn't use better judgment and wait until the tracks opened in New Mexico.

Perhaps I should explain what it's like to be a woolie operator, since the beasts are looked on as being only fit for coyotes to eat and old duffers like myself to own and manage. To offer proof of the obsession, the names in the story have to be omitted. But way back in the early part of the century, a family from Scotland migrated to Sherwood, Texas, the town across the river from Mertzon. The people owned few or no worldly goods. Somehow the Scotsman, however, managed to run a flock of ewes on the townsite and in the communal pastures, lambing them by hand and sleeping on their bedgrounds to keep coyotes and dogs away.

Things were so hard the eight year-old son left home and followed a tanking crew off up north in a big cow country. The boss of the outfit had fallen in disgrace for marrying a girl from a Fort Worth sporting house. Doesn't hurt to know her name was Rose, or the fact she took over the Scotch kid and taught him how to use a knife and fork and drink from a cup instead of a saucer.

Took those tankers a long time to finish using mules and scrapers to move the earth for dams and catch tanks. Rose and her husband grew so fond of the boy, they hooked up a buggy and drove to Sherwood to ask for adoption rights. I can't write in a Highland burr, but the old man roared, "No son of mine is going to live among people who don't have any sheep!"

Seventy years later, the son helped us put up wool down on the railroad. He was proud to be able to number the sacks into the hundreds. Rose, you see, taught him to count and read. She just didn't anticipate how important sheep are to being a good mother ...