



Dave Rasdal/The Gazette

R.J. Thorpe of Cedar Rapids looks at the July 14, 1815, copy of the Chelmsford (England) Chronicle that for some unknown reason was included in his grandmother's effects. He has wrapped the newspaper in archival-quality plastic.

C.R. man tackles history mystery

CEDAR RAPIDS — Among life's great mysteries are the artifacts the dead intentionally

RAMBLIN'



Dave Rasdal
The Gazette

leave behind, the empty matchbook cover, the 10-cent writing pen that no longer works, the flattened carnation wrapped in a napkin, the neatly folded newspaper that provides no clue to its significance.

R.J. Thorpe looks at the July 14, 1815, issue of the Chelmsford (England) Chronicle and wonders aloud.

"Why," he says, "did they

keep this silly thing?"

Why, indeed?

R.J., 54, who runs his own graphics design business, has examined the newspaper with a magnifying glass. He has scanned it into his computer so he can display small sections of it at a time onto a larger screen. He has copied this name and that to Internet search engines looking for the tiniest clue.

"I always think someone in here is a relation . . ."

Maybe. But so far he's come up empty.

This is a fine specimen of an old newspaper. It became the topic of an Aug. 1 story in the Essex Chronicle, the descendant of the Chelmsford paper. It is a newspaper that is nearly 190 years old, a newspaper that his mother

gave him after going through her mother's effects, a newspaper that in 1987 R.J. painstakingly unfolded to wrap in archival-quality plastic so it would last forever.

Some day he hopes to know why.

The joke, R.J. says, is that his grandmother used the newspaper as a drawer liner. But he thinks not. If that were the case, it's been lining a drawer an awful long time.

The newspaper came to R.J. by way of his mother, Patricia "Paddy" Bellamy Thorpe of Cedar Rapids, a World War II war bride. She was cleaning out the effects of her mother, Grace Caroline Thorogood Bellamy. There is speculation the newspaper goes

► **RAMBLIN', PAGE 5B**

Ramblin'/Family tree researched

► FROM PAGE 1B

back at least to her mother, Emily Munson Thorogood, who lived near Chelmsford, 80 miles north of London.

Maybe it had to do with her father, James Munson. For years, R.J. thought he was born in 1815, but until last week was unable to confirm that. Then, as his research continued, he learned James was born Oct. 14, 1814.

Scratch that connection.

"All I can think of is that there's somebody in here who's a relative . . ." He pauses. "It's infinite, going back."

R.J. learned that when in his 20s, an age usually too young to care about history. His father's brother, Ralph, enjoyed genealogy. When he gave R.J.'s father narrative, it piqued R.J.'s interest for a while. But he didn't do anything until 1985, when he and his wife, Karen, looked into family history.

"I didn't know much beyond my grandparents," he says. "It's like you said, 'Kids don't know.' But the best thing you can do is find someone who's already done this."

It was back to Uncle Ralph,

particularly since R.J. had much more success learning about his wife's family than his own. But his uncle's connections turned up family photos, and R.J. was hooked.

Then he got the newspaper.

"You find out the neatest stuff when you do this," R.J. says. "It's pretty rewarding."

It would be more so if he could only find out why.

■ Dave Rasdal's column appears Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. He can be reached at (319) 398-8323 or dave.rasdal@gazettecommunications.com (Previous columns at www.GazetteOnline.com)

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Page 1B