

RIVERBANK'S 1917 CRYPTOLOGIC
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNITED STATES
OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED AS
NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY
ADOPTS EDITOR'S SUGGESTION

After *Cryptologia* editor, Louis Kruh, returned from a visit to Riverbank Laboratories last summer (see A Cryptological Travelogue: Riverbank. *Cryptologia*. 1992, 17(1): 84-94), he wrote to the National Security Agency's Center for Cryptologic History. His purpose was to suggest that it officially recognize the cryptologic contributions of George Fabyan and his Riverbank Laboratories to the United States in 1917.

In the pre-World War I period, Fabyan had created a Department of Ciphers at Riverbank Laboratories to search for ciphers allegedly hidden in the works of William Shakespeare, which would prove that Francis Bacon was their true author. The Department of Ciphers included William F. Friedman, who would eventually head the army organization that broke the Japanese diplomatic cipher prior to World War II, and Elizebeth Smith, who later became Mrs. Friedman and a government cryptanalyst in her own right.

As World War I approached, Fabyan volunteered the services and knowledge of his Cipher Department to perform cryptanalytic work for the government and to train army officers in that art. The War Department eagerly accepted his offer while its own capabilities were being improved. For some six months in 1917, Riverbank performed that vital and unsung service while also training several groups of army officers.

When our editor visited Riverbank he discovered that in November and December 1917, Fabyan had received confidential letters from key United States officials. These included Secretary of State Robert Lansing and Colonel Ralph H. Van Deman, Chief, Military Intelligence Section, who thanked him for his patriotic service. Van Deman added, "...at a time when all of us lacked operators capable of coping with the subject [cryptanalysis], you came forward with an offer to do for the Departments work which they were wholly unable to do



NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY
FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND 20755-6000

13 July 1993

Mr. John W. Kopec
Riverbank Acoustical Laboratories
P.O. Box 189
Geneva, IL 60134

Dear Mr. Kopec:

According to information brought to our attention by Mr. Louis Kruh of Merrick, New York, you hold letters from the Secretary of State and others, applauding the service of Colonel George Fabyan and his Riverbank staff at the advent of World War I. Attention was drawn especially to the November 1917 letter from Colonel Van Deman, the "father of military intelligence," which contained these words: "The services you have rendered are not to be estimated in terms of money, and it is a source of regret to me that I am wholly unable to devise a method by which the sense of obligation, by the Intelligence Section in particular, may be fittingly evidenced." The subject carefully avoided in the letter was that of cryptanalysis and cryptologic training, now among the responsibilities of this federal agency. Noting that the seventy-fifth anniversary year coincided with the fortieth anniversary of this agency, Mr. Kruh suggested that we might undertake to afford recognition to the memory of Colonel Fabyan and his Riverbank staff.

We are therefore delighted to convey to you, as curator of the Riverbank historical collection and memorabilia, a plaque recognizing these volunteer citizen-cryptologists of 1917 and their assistance to the government at a time of critical need. I trust that you will find an appropriate place to display it, and will bring this belated recognition to the attention of the various organizations and friends of the Fabyans and Riverbank.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. M. McConnell".

J. M. McCONNELL
Vice Admiral, U. S. Navy
Director, NSA

Riverbank Laboratory Recognition by National Security Agency



NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY
FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND 20755-6000

19 July 1993

Mr. Louis Kruh
117 Alfred Road, West
Merrick, NY 11566

Dear Mr. Kruh:

On behalf of the Agency and our Director, VADM J. M. McConnell, USN, I am writing to express our appreciation for your suggestion that NSA fulfill a seventy-five year old debt to provide official recognition to Colonel George Fabyan and his Riverbank Laboratories staff. Your discovery that the modern Riverbank Laboratories held letters of appreciation (somewhat indirectly worded) from the secretary of state, the initial head of the army's World War I military intelligence organization, and his "overseas counterpart," as recounted in part in the January 1993 issue of *Cryptologia*, struck a responsive cord here. As a result, the Director has forwarded to Riverbank a letter (copy enclosed) conveying a plaque which I hope you will find acceptable for the goal you had in mind.

Under the seal of the National Security Agency, the plaque reads:

TO THE MEMORY OF GEORGE FABYAN
FROM A GRATEFUL GOVERNMENT

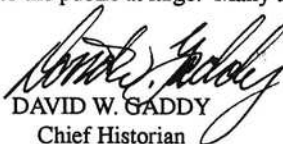
In recognition of the voluntary and confidential service
rendered by Colonel Fabyan and his Riverbank
Laboratories in the sensitive areas of cryptanalysis and
cryptologic training
during a critical time of national need
on the eve of America's entry into World War I
Presented to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary

by the

National Security Agency
United States Department of Defense

1917-1992

It has been a distinct pleasure filling in yet another gap in the record of America's cryptologic past, generally unknown to the public at large. Many thanks for your initiative and your concern.


DAVID W. GADDY
Chief Historian

Encls: a/s

for themselves, and with an unexampled generosity you have borne the entire expense of the proceedings." He further admitted, "... it is a source of regret to me that I am wholly unable to devise a method by which the sense of obligation by the Intelligence Section in particular, may be fittingly evidenced."

When Kruh wrote to NSA, he pointed out that 1992 was both the 40th anniversary of NSA's founding and the 75th anniversary of Fabyan's cryptologic contributions to the United States. He also noted Van Deman's regret at not being able to find a way to properly express their feelings. Kruh then suggested that it would be most appropriate for NSA to use the occasion to "devise a method" to officially recognize the invaluable assistance provided by Fabyan and fulfill the long delayed expression of appreciation by the government.

The agency enthusiastically agreed. It created a handsome plaque (see cover of this issue) which was presented to the present Riverbank Acoustical Laboratory where it will be displayed in a small museum they maintain.

We show the correspondence from the National Security Agency to Riverbank Laboratory and to Mr. Kruh.

Cryptologia is proud that the initiative taken by Louis Kruh has resulted in official recognition of a cryptologic landmark.