

GEORGE C. MARSHALL FOUNDATION

TAPE #2: HISTORY OF THE FRIEDMANS  
ELIZABETH SMITH FRIEDMAN INTERVIEWS

THE MARSHALL RESEARCH LIBRARY

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

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This is a recorded interview with Mrs. Elizebeth Smith Friedman at the George C. Marshall Foundation in Lexington, Virginia on June 4, 1974 in which Mrs. Friedman discusses the history of the Friedmans with Marshall Research Library staff member Lynn Biribauer.

LB:

If you could just tell me how you became interested in cryptology and how it was that Colonel Fabyan even had at Riverbank people working on the Shakespeare Bacon controversy.

ESF:

When I was in college, when I graduated from college, I was totally unaware that there was such a thing as codes and ciphers, not even to call it by its scientific name, cryptography and cryptanalysis. My husband coined the word "cryptanalysis" to describe a new process later he did that, and then later he joined the two forming the word "cryptology, but all of that was in the future for me and I had learned of George Fabyan through the Newberry Reference Library in Chicago. I had majored in English literature in college and I learned the year after I graduated and was in Chicago looking for a job that there was a 1623 Shakespeare folio in the Newberry Reference Library in Chicago.

LB:

I think that we have this on the other transcript then, if and how you met Colonel Fabyan, if you could go on, how did he become interested in Shakespeare and Bacon controversy.

ESF:

How Colonel Fabyan became interested?

LB:

How Colonel Fabyan did.

ESF:

Well, it was in connection with the going to see the folio that I met this strange man, George Fabyan, who was thought to be a millionaire. He was a very, very wealthy business man with offices in Chicago and he had time and interest in a lot of things that were not connected with his business in any way. And can you stop that for a second. Is this a good place?

[Tape paused momentarily]

ESF:

Among other things, after I met him through the librarian, as I said at the Newberry Library, I learned that he had recently, in fact I think within the last six months, certainly within the last

year before that had prosecuted a case in Chicago court against Samuel Goldwin, the movie producer who was producing some Shakespeare plays with Norma Shearer as the heroine. Fabyan contended that Goldwin was injuring, I can't think of a better word at the moment, but was injuring his belief, Fabyan's belief that Shakespeare was not written by Shakespeare, and his particular claim was that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. As I recall it, the case was decided for Fabyan and Goldwin was, paid a fine or whatever, was fine I'm sure, no prison sentence, and so Fabyan returned to his estate and pursued his interest in the so called biliteral cipher of Sir Francis Bacon.

Well, after the trial visit that I made to Fabyan's estate called Riverbank at Geneva, Illinois, I learned that he had been the black sheep of the Fabyan family, his father being president of what was then the largest cotton goods corporation in the world, but George Fabyan had run away from home when he was a young boy in his teens and had grown up in the, I think largely, in the lumber regions up in Wisconsin, Northern Wisconsin and Minnesota and then he, of course, had had no schooling in the meantime and he apparently was restless for something else to do and he went to Saint Louis and got a job with the Bliss Fabyan company as a salesman, only he made the Saint Lois manager promise that his name would never be revealed to the head firm in Boston, in other words that the son, it should be kept secret that the son would work in the father's company but would not be known to the father. Well, that all worked out in time and he was reconciled with his family and he, of course, was also again recognized by the influential friends of his family in Boston.

In the meantime, he had become interested, being uneducated and indiscriminating in many ways, he had become convinced that Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare's plays, either that or he saw that it was being such a new subject and it was sort of like an avalanche crashing on the American public that.. There was this wonderful, wonderful cipher system that proved that Bacon had written Shakespeare, so he looked up Mrs. Elizabeth Wells Gallop in Detroit. She had been a teacher of English and was a very cultivated and very cultivated woman and a lady in every sense of the word. So he had brought her and her sister to his estate at Riverbank and what he wanted a young college graduate like me for was to head a group of young people who would be students of Mrs. Gallop's in either proving or disproving, he always claimed that he really was serious about the disproving as well as proving. Later events, of course, showed that he really wasn't sincere about the disproving because everything anybody tried to do to convince him that he was wrong he managed to get around them some way or other but for the time being we were, we young people were totally unacquainted with the whole theory of Mrs. Gallop. She had published a tremendous volume of what she called writings that she had deciphered from Bacon's work and Shakespeare's works and some other Elizabethan works as well, Spencer and Marlow for example. And so he took Mrs. Gallop and Miss Wells to his estate, Riverbank, which is about a mile out of the town of Geneva, Illinois which is a town on the Chicago Northwestern Railway.

He went into his business office in Chicago usually, well not five days a week but three or four days a week, and in the meantime, when he came home from Chicago or the days he didn't go in, he spent working out schemes by which he was going to get this matter, this serious matter of the authorship of Shakespeare by Bacon, he was going to get the universities and colleges recognize it.

He invited constantly groups of visitors always among them writers or university professors who were in the English literature field and he would bring them out to Riverbank and drive them around. It was an impressive estate consisting of something over three hundred acres which stretched in three long strips of land, one on the east side of the Fox River, another stretch of it between the Fox River and the Lincoln Highway and the third strip was where he kept what he called his laboratories and his working people and there he had brought Mrs. Elizabeth Wells Gallop and her sister Kate Wells from Detroit to train a group of young people whom Fabyan proposed to bring there, teach them the biliteral cipher, and thereby not only confirm Mrs. Gallop's decipherments that she had made, but perhaps to develop new textual material which were the end result of deciphered writings. So he used to take these visitors around the estate and show them, well, the residences part of the estate and then the part that was west of the Lincoln Highway where he had his scientific laboratories among them an engineering laboratory that really did some valuable work and invented some small instruments that later were used in the war, and there was a genetics laboratory and some minor things but they were really producing some sort of worthwhile work there.

He established Mrs. Gallop and her sister in a house called the Lodge which I was taken to first when I first went to the estate. Later on, when, particularly when war was looming up and Fabyan realized that the government had no means whatsoever of deciphering enemy messages, knowing anything about what other nations were doing diplomatically or militarily or whatever, he began to bring on some translators and people whose technical, who were educated enough that their technical competence would be good in any field working on Mrs. Gallop's theories already proved at least as far as Fabyan and Mrs. Gallop believed and also to produce anything of value that could be brought out in the scientific laboratories there and he used to, I recall, beat his chest after he'd driven these visitors around and say "and here you see I have built up an institution of learning which will rival. Here I am a man of no education without even common school education, have built up this institution which will rival the universities, and so things got very busy around there. He hired translators and English teachers and mathematics teachers and all sorts of people and the genetics laboratory was going on with some very valuable experiments in connection with the...I'm not saying the word right so I'll just say fruit flies for sure. I can't remember that second name now, can you beat that?"

Well, at any rate the staff built up and we occupied two cottages on the estate, two frame houses that housed us all, and we were treated in a real manorial fashion. He always had Swedish or Danish servants. We had marvelous meals, beautiful food, our bed covers were always turned down at night. There was always a pitcher of ice water and a bowl of fruit by our bedside every

night, and we were treated very well indeed but he paid practically nothing. You could hardly have bought lunches off of what he was willing to pay, but practically everybody of the workers were, had the same characteristic I had, that I was so curious about all this, to see how it was all coming out, that I stayed on.

Well, it so happened that the United States government had no department, no division, no, even a single office that was devoted to the subject of secret messages passing between countries which were at war, and he was shrewd enough to figure out that Germany would be conniving with Mexico against us. So he persuaded.....

LB:

This is Colonel Fabyan?

ESF:

Colonel Fabyan was persuaded that the United States government didn't have any facility for finding out what was being said on the airwaves and so he established really what amounted to a cipher laboratory there. We were all really, dropped the biliteral cipher of Si Francis Bacon and went in for government work. And...

LB:

Were you married at this time?

ESF:

We were married during, well, we were married after we began to work for the government.

LB:

At Riverbank?

ESF:

Mhmm. And he convinced the officials in Washington that he would support entirely himself, free to the government, the carrying on of the daily correspondence passing between Germany and Mexico, being shrewd enough to figure out that they would be talking about the United States, and of course, sooner or later there came over the air that tremendous message that came from the German foreign minister to the German minister in Mexico City, which said in part that if Mexico would join Germany in her attack, Germany's attack, on the United States, we will give you back Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico.

LB:

This message was in code?

ESF:

Mhmm.

LB:

And how long did it take you to break that code?

ESF:

I don't think I remember. It certainly wasn't very long. It was not terribly... Oh we didn't break it, I remember now, we did not break the message, the British did. And the British held it for quite a while because they were in doubt about telling the United States Ambassador to Great Britain that this thing about giving territory, United States' states, back to Mexico, and finally in the spring of 1917 they called in Ambassador Page, United States Ambassador to Great Britain, and gave him the news in this message and he refused to believe it, so the British provided facilities for a man named Bell who was chief secretary to Ambassador Page to go to the British Foreign Office and decipher the message himself with the key that was furnished by Great Britain and so it was proved then, obviously, that it was correct and...

LB:

So then no one at the Riverbank laboratories had done that?

ESF:

No, no they had not done that but we, I really have forgotten the details of when and how we learned that, but that really should have come a little earlier in the story because it was of that that Fabyan was able to convince Washington that he should be allowed to run this cipher laboratory out there.

LB:

So it was because the British had done something that the United States hadn't that the United States panicked I guess and...

ESF:

Yes, actually. Of course, Wilson finally gave the, when Wilson also refused to believe it until he got this word from Ambassador Page and Bell himself, that it had been done themselves and therefore not something that had been concocted by the British, and so when Wilson went to Congress with that they declared war within three days and then Fabyan, I don't know whether he rushed down to Washington and put this through or not but here was something Fabyan had this growing concern of workers out there that could be used. Washington had nothing, no department of Washington had anybody knew anything about deciphering ciphers and codes so they consented to Fabyan to start this deciphering laboratory out there and he got in German translators and Mexican, I mean Spanish, translators, two of each I think, maybe there were three Spanish ones, and the messages were supplied from Washington. They were wired, or were they sent by radio, I can't remember now. I think they must have been wired, well I won't be too sure about that, anyway the messages were sent as rapidly, by as rapid a means as possible to Riverbank, and were usually deciphered within and on their way back to Washington within two hours because we had, we worked out their system. Completely.

LB:

What kind of a system was it?

ESF:

It was a polyalphabetic substitution cipher; that would be the technical term applied to it, that, and the number of alphabets used, cipher alphabets used, would be determined by the key word, the number of letters in the key words. If the key word had six letters in it, then there would be six alphabets used and they were taken from a big deciphering table called the Vigenere Table and it...

LB:

How would you spell that?

ESF:

V-I-G-E-N-E-R-E. It's a French name and it was Vigenere, the Frenchman, who invented that form of cipher, the date I can't recall without looking it up, and we of course were studying at the same time we were feeding these messages out, going back to Washington after being received in as short a manner as possible and most of the time, I'll say that for Fabyan's organization and the pressure he put on his workers, the translation of those messages was on the wire back to Washington within two hours, usually.

LB:

Was Mrs. Gallop helping with this also?

ESF:

No, no, Mrs. Gallop did not take any part in that because she didn't know anything about ciphers in general, so she went on in another building, in another office, she went on with her biliteral studies and we went on this.

LB:

How many of you were working on this?

ESF:

Well, somehow the name seventeen sticks in my mind. I think we probably built up to that because as the traffic grew heavier and heavier, the more people we needed.

LB:

Were you and Colonel Friedman the heads of these seventeen people?

ESF:

Yes, and I was, after a while I had to, I had to just take on certain duties because it was something that had to be done constantly and watched closely and I didn't, I wasn't the boss of the operation, the real head of it, but was really assigned a certain...

LB:

When a message would come over the wire, did each person take the message and go to their own desks and try to work on the solution or did you work on it as a group?

No we worked on it mostly as an individual. I, for example, might work on a message that was in Spanish going from Mexico City to Germany and I would have a Spanish translator by my side so that if I made the right assumption in a given spot but one letter was misplaced or wrong, or something or other, anyway he would catch it in the language part of the message, the decipherment, and then we'd go on from there. We turned out an enormous amount of work because we worked for the Army, the Navy, the Post Office Department, the State Department, did I say Department of Justice? And Department of Justice, all those divisions were feeding their...and it wasn't only the German messages because coming from all of those departments there were all kinds of things, there was even criminal stuff in the Department of Justice mixed up in that.

LB:

So it snowballed from the German Spanish to more...

ESF:

Yes and...

LB:

And all seventeen stayed at Riverbank? Nobody left to go to Washington?

ESF:

No, nobody left to go to Washington because...my husband applied for a commission and he failed the physical examination according to the reports. We learned later that George Fabyan's brother-in-law was the commander of the camp where my husband was sent for his physical examination and that is why he failed because they said he had a heart murmur and he had examinations from specialists privately and they said there was no such thing.

LB:

Well, the work that you had been doing at Riverbank, could have been done then in Washington if Colonel Fabyan had let you go? Was there any special machines there?

ESF:

No, it wasn't a question of machines. It was a question of Washington just was in a confused state and everything was so mixed up that in the beginning they were very grateful for to Fabyan for doing this work out there and later they got impatient about it because it took so long, even two hours seemed a very long time to them, so they insisted on starting a cipher bureau in Washington and that cipher bureau was headed by Johnny Manly who was an old friend and acquaintance of ours because he had come out to Riverbank to examine the biliteral cipher first, he was the head of the English Department at the University of Chicago and so he was appointed, Cryptography had been a hobby of Professor Manley's all his life so he was appointed to this cipher bureau in Washington and this man named Yardley who had been a State Department code clerk., H.O. Yardley, whose future history was so unsavory but they built up a bureau of about seven people in Washington and took this cipher work away from Fabyan at Riverbank.

LB:

Had Yardley ever been to Riverbank?

ESF:

Ah, no, no he had never been out there, but Riverbank had been visited by many people such as Colonel Parker Hitt, who was the only man who had written anything in English on the solution

of ciphers before World War I. The word was practically unknown in the whole United States and Colonel Parker Hitt taught at Leavenworth which is an Army school, a Signal Core school, in Leavenworth, in Missouri isn't it?

LB:

Kansas, I think?

ESF:

Well, one or the other. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, you're right. And he had written

[Side A ends. Side B begins]

ESF:

Well, I'd have to look up the names. It was a very small bureau, this cipher bureau that formed and Yardley was made the head of it and then Professor Manly was there and I can't remember the names of the other, there were only about six people. Well, you see they got everything handed to them on a silver platter because they not only had the original messages that passed over the air but they had our solutions and our keys, they all went with the messages so they started off with a, under the most perfect conditions, they had a pony as it were, a complete pony for everything that was being sent over the air or by cable in those days from our work that had been done at Riverbank. Well, my husband was getting very, very impatient with Colonel Fabyan because my husband wanted to get into the military, he wanted to get into the war as an active person.

LB:

Did he want to go to Washington or did he want to go over to Europe?

ESF:

Well, he wanted to go into uniform wherever he might go, whether it was Washington or Europe, and as I said a while ago Fabyan managed to see that he was said at least to have a heart disability and was denied at first and then when, then Fabyan started training army officers for work overseas. I don't think I've told this story anywhere. There ought to be, here, here! That's one class of officers that...

LB:

That was trained at Riverbank?

ESF:

That's the Aurora Hotel in Aurora, Illinois. There was no housing that would take that many people at Riverbank so Fabyan paid all the expenses for all those officers living at the Aurora Hotel and here in front are we the staff. This is Colonel Fabyan on the end here and that's Cora Jensen who stayed with him until he died and took care of his library, and then I think that next one is me, and the next one a girl named Phyllis Rudd, a Cornell graduate who had come to work out there, and my husband on the end here. Now there's a cipher message, did you know that, in that picture? There's a cipher message.

LB:

Uh huh

ESF:

You did know that?

LB:

Yeah, I think that's on an earlier...

ESF:

Well, there is and it says "Knowledge is power." That's what the cipher message says. Well, now that...

LB:

This is the first class that Colonel Fabyan trained?

ESF:

Now that's the first class, yes. Now we had trained four young lieutenants, the very first four that went over in World War I and formed a cipher and code section at general headquarters in Chaumont, that's C-H-A-U-M-O-N-T, I don't know whether people know where the headquarters was in World War I or not. And they, I've forgotten most of their names except for Jay Reeves Childs, he's still alive. I'm still in touch with him. He became an ambassador later and before he became an ambassador he was with Herbert Hoover on that mission to Russia after World War I, you know the, they called it the food program.

LB:

Wasn't in a capacity...

ESF:

This was after the war?

LB:

This wasn't as a cryptographer?

ESF:

Oh no, he had merely gone along as an aide and something of a newspaper man, I think he was with the AP at the White House at the time and so on.

LB:

So then Colonel Friedman finally was able to go to Europe?

ESF:

Yes, then finally one day and I'm afraid I do not recall the exact circumstances, how he got the news or who told him but he did pass the examination, he was commissioned to first lieutenant military intelligence, that sounds like an awfully low grade nowadays when everything runs so high but for anybody to start off as a first lieutenant was unheard of in those days, anyway he went off to France and was in charge of the code, the deciphering code section, at Chaumont where GHQAFE was and Jay Reeves Childs was head of the cipher section but at the end of the war, Mr. Friedman was asked to stay behind and write the history of the section so he didn't get back to the United States until April of 1919 and we had no intentions, in the meantime I had left Riverbank, we had no intentions whatever to stay at Riverbank but I think I have already told...

LB:

I think that was also in the car, I don't think that your ...

ESF:

That it's on tape?

LB:

Trials with Colonel Fabyan were on tape...

ESF:

Well, alright I'll go on then but wherever my husband went to get a job after he got back to the states that spring of 1919, he would be served with a telegram saying, "Come no back to Riverbank, your salary has been going on." So after he had interviewed with eight or nine companies, he wanted to go with an industrial company, he never got a chance because always

he'd get to a certain firm and was talking to an official who might or might not hire him, he'd get this telegram from George Fabyan " come on back, your salary has been going on."

LB:

So you feel like Colonel Fabyan was having you followed then?

ESF:

Yes, yes definitely we had that feeling and he had even sent that telegram, those very same words, to France before my husband left over there, saying come on back, your salary has been going on. Well, we finally went and talked to him and knowing that we would never shut him up unless we did and so we worked out a kind of compromise plan about going back to Riverbank, only we were not going to live on the place, we were going to live in a house in the town and we were going to keep regular office hours and we were not going to be used to do anything except to act in our trained, official capacity as students of cipher and all those subjects that had sort of been dropped suddenly at the beginning of the war.

LB:

Did you get your back salary pay?

Never, he never gave my husband a dollar of his back salary. I didn't expect anything of course because I left Riverbank; I left him and that ended the matter as far as I was concerned. And then he asked the impossible in many ways. If we tried an honest approach to someone who was exounding the biliteral cipher, Fabyan would manage in one way or another to make the man, the person, the stranger who came there, and make him completely skeptical of it and make fun of, Fabyan would make fun of everything that didn't agree with the theory of Bacon writing Shakespeare and that this cipher was contained in other Elizabethan writers, no matter what the subject discussed in the cipher was but like Peele, and Green, and Marlow, and Spencer, and all those. So two or three times we tried to leave and my husband charged Colonel Fabyan with not having kept his promise, that he'd never given him any of the, any back salary for anything, not even during the war and twice when we went to Fabyan to tell him that we were leaving, Fabyan would say what are they going to pay you and we'll say, this is not an accurate term but I'll say for example my husband would reply three thousand a year, remember this is back in 1919 or 1920, and he would say "well, I'll give you twice that."

Then we'd stay on a little while and no dollar would ever be forthcoming, any raise in salary or any back pay and after that had happened twice, the third time that Colonel Mauborgne, that name is spelled M-A-U-B-O-R-G-N-E, was, who was the head of the research and development division in the Signal Corps in the Army in Washington, and he was very, very anxious, he had known my husband, and he was very, very anxious to have us come to Washington and work for the Army and so I said, well this time we'll get away. The thing for us to do is not to tell him

until everything is packed and gone and we are dressed in going away clothes and then we'll go and tell him that we're leaving and that's exactly what happened. You know, Fabyan realized when he was beaten that he really was beaten and so we left and came to Washington and went to work on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1921 for the Signal Corps.

LB:

Did you bring all of your Shakespeare research with you?

ESF:

Well, there really wasn't much, wasn't any research that was worthwhile bringing because nothing was conclusive you see there was nothing that was really ever proved. Nobody's eyes ever saw what Mrs. Gallop's eyes saw. There just wasn't, wasn't any proof. All we had was our knowledge and we could reconstruct a sufficient amount of text and claimed cipher text to talk about it but...

LB:

Did you think at that time you would want to write a book on it?

ESF:

Well, we always thought that we would when Mrs. Gallop died. She was a, she was really a lovely person. She was a fine person, she was a real aristocrat personally, and she was sincere, absolutely sincere. She believed everything that she did and so we decided that we would write a book when Mrs. Gallop died but that until then we would not pursue that, we'd tell individuals or groups, if anybody wanted to know we'd tell them about it but we didn't publish anything about it because we felt we didn't want to destroy her last...

LB:

Did you keep in contact with her after you left?

ESF:

Well, yes, casually, but Fabyan kept her until she died.

LB:

And when was that?

ESF:

Oh dear, I'm afraid I don't remember.

LB:

Before World War II?

ESF:

Oh yes. Oh yes. It was well before World War II. Probably in the early thirties. I think she must have lived, well in the region, plus or minus ten years, from the time we left there which was 19...we left there in 1920.

LB:

Had you started at that time collecting some of your Shakespeare books or did you start doing that at a later date?

ESF:

I think we, see World War I came on so shortly after that, that we were involved in government work...

LB:

World War II

ESF:

To such an extent, oh yes, I was too, I went right to work on January the first, 1921 for the Signal Corps and we started building their codes, it was the first time that they had any really scientifically constructed codes for use by the doughboys.

LB:

Before you went with the Signal Corps you had never, you or Colonel Friedman had never, invented any machinery had you?

ESF:

No

LB:

You started doing that after...

ESF:

Well I didn't. I didn't invent anything. My husband did of course and experimented in many ways with many things. He started inventing almost immediately, see General Mauborgne was, at the time we came to Washington, Colonel in charge of research and development and that

meant developing devices, cipher devices and cipher systems for use by the Army because the Signal Corps at that time was the communications arm of the Army.

LB:

So when Colonel Friedman started trying to invent machinery, he as inventing things to code and not to decode? Which direction was he going in?

ESF:

Well, both processes have to be considered, and the idea is to invent something that is indecipherable or plan something that is indecipherable.

LB:

Oh, what I'm trying to ask is was his thrust toward inventing a machine that could break the enemy's code or to build up an undecipherable code of our own?

ESF:

It was to build up an indecipherable code of our own, cipher, codes and ciphers when it comes to... let's see, your question about a machine to break the enemy's ciphers, I'm trying to think. I'm sure there have been some but at the moment nothing comes to my mind except pencil and paper...

LB:

The Purple Code when that was broken was that by a machine?

ESF:

Well, yes, but that was because it was made on a machine.

LB:

Oh.

ESF:

And the machine was just reconstructed out of junk parts.

LB:

But we're getting ahead of ourselves there. What did you do then in the period between 1921 when you first entered the Signal Corps and World War II?

ESF:

You know I am trying to remind me of what I did and at this moment I can't tell you what I did between 1921 and 24. Oh it will come to me, I certainly was not sitting and twiddling my thumbs but for the life of me right now I can't remember. It was in 1924 that the Justice Department first got in touch with me about catching the rum runners, the people who were smuggling liquor from the Bahamas over to...

LB:

And they were actually using codes to do that?

ESF:

Oh, sure. Particularly a little later, not in, I don't recall in 1924 but a little later there were some of the most impressive codes and cipher systems you'd imagine that were used on the West Coast by the rum runners, by the smugglers, but we went to Washington in 1921 and my husband started to work immediately for the Signal Corps. I did work for the Signal Corps, I do remember now that I did work with him on a code, general system of codes, small codes that could be used for troops, for Army troops, Army field codes they're called. And that I worked on that for about a year and then I resigned and didn't intend to go back to work, but in 1924 then the Department of Justice persuaded me to start working for them, and then later the various law enforcement bureaus were, well there were a lot of law enforcement bureaus in the treasury department and they took over this, my type of work, they took that over from the Department of Justice too so I did all the work for the Treasury Department.

Six bureaus, there were six law enforcement bureaus in the Treasury Department and I headed that then from 46 to, we were taken over by the Navy during World War II and I resigned from the government at the end of World War II, I resigned in 1946, but my husband had gone on after we came here from one thing to another and tested machines that were submitted to the government, invented other small machines, developed all sorts of paper and pencil methods of codes and ciphers for different purposes. He also had a lot to do about drawing up rules for international communications, cable and telegraph and so on, and there were big conferences, big international conferences, one of them in Washington in 1927 and one that lasted four months in Madrid where there were 107 nations, I think, represented and they all discussed, all those countries, all together discussed communications between nations and this was for the purpose of getting friendly agreement to certain rules which cut out the chaos which had been existing because every country went every which way and not paying attention to anybody else about what methods they used or how they used cable or telegraph or anything like that.

LB:

Did you start collecting books at that time, in the 30s?

ESF:

Yes, I'm sure that when we, I don't remember exactly how soon after we came to Washington that he began collecting, but naturally we'd collect anything that we personally were working on which was not classified, anything which wasn't secret or confidential, we collected copies or mementos or one thing or another. And I remember Colonel Fabyan made one great gesture of giving that Porta book that he'd paid forty, thirty, three thousand dollars for, sorry, three thousand which is a book dating, I can't remember now whether it was 1400 or 1600 something like that and...

LB:

When did he give that to you?

ESF:

You know, I can't remember whether it was before or after we left Riverbank. But that was the one thing that I've even known Colonel Fabyan to give anybody. He usually extracted something in return if he gave anybody anything. He was sure he was going to get a return.

LB:

If we could go backwards, I meant to ask you, during World War I about the Riverbank publications, the little pamphlets, we have the collection here and they start at number 15. Why was that?

ESF:

Well, that is just queer, one of Fabyan's queernesses. He felt that he was going to publish a lot of stuff on the biliteral cipher, you see, and he wanted those to be, to reflect his first interest so he left the first fifteen numbers minus, they were never filled because nothing was ever written about Riverbank and the biliteral cipher. Except, oh well, there were magazine articles or something like that but nothing really very serious. But that was what he said.

LB:

Did the government ask you to, to print up those pamphlets?

ESF:

Well no, he did that. Fabyan did that. He, he was perfectly willing to get the recognition for, of course he didn't allow my husband's name on the thing and you notice they say copyright George Fabyan and published by...

LB:

Riverbank Laboratories.

ESF:

...Riverbank Laboratories, and thus giving himself the credit for them and I have forgotten when it was but it was after World War I that my husband discovered that the last and the best of the pamphlets he had written had been published by Fabyan in Paris and published in French.

LB:

That's publication number 22.

ESF:

That's right.

LB:

If you could, I'd appreciate all the facts that you could possibly give me about that particular publication. We have in the vault, at least four or five different editions with varying little quirks. One is in French. One is in English but was published in Geneva and one was in English and published in Paris. What happened with that particular publication?

ESF:

Well, he, I'm sure, had it published in France because he didn't want Mr. Friedman to find out about it, and it was some years, I think two or three years, before Mr. Friedman did find out about it, that it had been published in France. Oh, I know how he found out about it but I don't know where, I mean I don't know the means that was used but there was a French cryptographer named Snyder, Schneider, German rather, that's a German name but my impression is that it was one of the French, the numbers of the French publications, that Fabyan had had done over there that were attributed to this man named Schneider, S-C-H-N-E-I-D-E-R, and that Mr. Friedman stumbled on to that somehow or other, I can't remember now how he learned about it, that there was his pamphlet of which he had the rough papers, you know, the hand written manuscript, he had proof that he had written it and here was this person claiming that it was a production of this man Schneider.

LB:

Did Schneider know who had written it?

ESF:

We don't even know, personally I don't even know if there was a Schneider or not. It could have been some more of Fabyan's finagling.

LB:

I believe we have that copy downstairs that has Schneider on it, or written by. So it was published first in France and then it was later published in the United States?

ESF:

No, it was never published in the United States, even the English versions were published in France.

LB:

Everything was published in France? And this was in 1922, so Colonel Friedman wasn't even around to know what was going on.

ESF:

No, no.

LB:

When had he written it?

ESF:

Well, he had written it while we were still at Riverbank.

LB:

And Colonel Fabyan had held off until 1922 for the...and what about publication number 50 and 75 by a man named Nolan?

ESF:

Well, there again that was just a quirk of Fabyan's why he should give those extraordinary numbers unless he expected for the public to believe that he was a going publishing... nobody knows why but he simply chose those numbers. They didn't mean a thing.

LB:

Who was Mr. Nolan?

ESF:

Well, he was a Ph.D. in chemistry and what Fabyan wanted him for was for secret inks and experimenting with such kinds of secret inks as had been used in the past and trying to develop new forms of secret ink. That's Nolan, that man's name was Nolan, N-O-L-A-N.

LB:

Mmhmm, and did he stay at Riverbank?

ESF:

No, no he didn't stay long at all. He was a serious person who expected to get ahead in his particular section of the field of secret inks.

LB:

I notice that we have in one of those editions, either 50 or 75, about five of the pamphlets have his name as a byline and the rest don't. How did he manage to get his name on the front cover, do you know?

ESF:

Well, I you mean Nolan had? Well, he may have made that a condition of his accepting a job there; he may have made it a condition that he'd be credited with anything that was published. I don't know personally, I never saw Doctor Nolan, or never talked to him.

LB:

Oh, you never did?

ESF:

No, no.

LB:

He was there during World War I when you were away?

ESF:

No, I'd never even heard of him then.

[End of tape]