CHAPTER

# 2

# The Colonel's Estate

## A Community of Thinkers

The man who had hired both Wallace and Paul Sabine, Colonel George Fabyan, was, in himself, as much of a challenge to the two men as the research they undertook. By some accounts a tyrant, by others a generous benefactor, Colonel Fabyan was a man of ideas, a man with whom to be reckoned. When Paul Sabine arrived at Riverbank in 1919, the colonel's far-flung interests and his drive for achievement had already made the Fox River estate, in his own words, "a community of thinkers." Perhaps more accurately, it should have been called a community of *doers*.

At one end of the sprawling property, prize cattle were being bred, and hybrid strains of various crops were being grown. On one floor of the laboratory building, Elizabeth Wells Gallup and her team of researchers looked for an answer to the Shakespeare-Bacon mystery, and on another, William and Elizebeth Friedman and their team of cryptologists tried to solve coded mysteries of a more immediate nature. In the field behind the acoustical laboratories, trenches and battlements still stood, reminders of Fabyan's contributions to the war effort only a couple of years earlier. Everywhere, above everything could be heard the screeches, howls, and sounds of Fabyan's exotic animal and bird menagerie.

There are many stories about the colonel and his estate: including tales of romance and war, pretty girls, international politics, adventure and intrigue, science, and the supernatural. Although a few stories were based on actual events that occurred at Riverbank, a greater share seem to have been conjured up solely for the sake of storytelling. What is even more interesting is that some of these tall tales might, in fact, have been dreamed up by Colonel Fabyan himself.

As architect and mastermind of all this chaos, Colonel Fabyan ruled like a


*Riverbank Laboratories Tuning Fork Facilities.*

feudal lord, walking the grounds; giving orders; and overseeing every project, no matter how small. A tall, handsome, athletic-looking individual — according to some an Ernest Hemingway look-alike — with compelling charm, Colonel Fabyan spoke in a low, gruff voice, in part the result of his chain smoking, and carried himself in an appropriately lordly manner. His attire at home, although perhaps not so lordly, was, at least, singular; either he wore a white turtleneck sweater, white shoes, white flannel trousers, and a blue blazer — yachting garb — or he dressed as an equestrian in jodhpurs and knee-high riding boots, even though no one at Riverbank ever remembered him climbing on a horse. It was not true that he drove a team of zebras pulling a buggy to the Geneva railroad station or the Arcada Movie Theater in St. Charles, Illinois. It has been verified that he did have a private box in the loge portion of the balcony at the Arcada, and he rarely, if ever, missed a movie; his favorites were Westerns. In business, as well as in his scientific pursuits, Colonel Fabyan was known to use his inherited, as well as his earned and established, wealth both frivolously and wisely. Whims and hunches, chance and intuition were as much a part of his decisions as calculated, precise planning.

Colonel Fabyan was a transplanted easterner. He was born on March 15, 1867, in Boston, Massachusetts. His parents, George Francis and Isabella Frances (Littlefield) Fabyan, were Brahmins, part of the city's upper class who belonged to all the right clubs and organizations and gave to all the right

charities. A senior partner in the Bliss Fabyan Company, a textile firm, the senior Fabyan also had business affiliations with Cordis Mills, the Thorndike Company, Metropolitan Storage Warehouse Company, the Old Colony Trust Company, and the Merchants National Bank of Boston. He was a trustee of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and had memberships in the Union Club of Boston, the Country Club of Brookline, the Eastern Yacht Club of Marblehead, the Metropolitan Club of New York, and the Jekyl Island Club of Georgia.

George Frances Fabyan was also a primary benefactor of the Harvard University medical school. With an original endowment of $250,000, along with many additional contributions of thousands of dollars, he was able to establish the George Fabyan Chair of Comparative Pathology in memory of his father, the colonel's grandfather. Later, because of the Fabyan Chair position at Harvard, the colonel had Marshall Fabyan arrange for Wallace Clement Sabine to come to Riverbank in 1913.

Young George was a nonconformist, forever rebelling against family protocol and tradition. In 1883, at the age of 16, George dropped out of Williston Seminary in East Hampton, Massachusetts, and headed westward. First, he acquired a position with the Kirby-Carpenter Company, lumber merchants in Menominee, Michigan. Soon after, he became a tie and timber agent for the Union Pacific Railroad. During this period, George met and married Nelle Wright of Walker, Minnesota. Shortly after his marriage in 1890, he became an assistant to a cotton broker in Tennessee.

In 1893, George made a significant career change. He decided to move to Chicago and signed on under an assumed name as a warehouse assistant for the branch office of the Bliss Fabyan Company. If the legend is accurate, what occurred next was both the stuff of novels as well as a monumental stroke of luck: George did so well in his new job that when the firm's senior partner, George's own father, paid a visit to the Chicago branch, he was introduced by the plant foreman to the ambitious young man who had been doing such wonders for the company. The next day, George was promoted to resident partner of the Chicago branch.

Once established as regional head of the Bliss Fabyan Company, George Fabyan began purchasing land. Eventually acquiring 600 acres in Geneva township he founded Riverbank. He became an aide-de-camp to then Governor of Illinois Richard Yates, serving him in various capacities, including as a member of the governor's military staff. Thus Riverbank became involved in a number of military projects.

The military projects included a project that led to the construction of military trenches similiar to the trenches on the western front. Various studies were conducted on trench warfare leading to the development of a trench mortar similiar to what is used today and a triton hand grenade. Another project involved studies of fougasse explosives and how to blow up various

*George Fayban.*

types of bridges. Then there were the projects that involved military code classes, the diciphering of military codes, and the analysis of air reconnascence photos. There was direct liasion between Riverbank and General John Pershing's staff including their scientific adviser Wallace Sabine. The colonel utilized both regular army, Illinois National Guard and his own employees to conduct the projects.

It was because of Fabyan's efforts with the Illinois National Guard and the

United States Army that Governor Yates officially bestowed on him the title of colonel, a title that George Fabyan cherished above all. In recognition of his contributions to the military, the governor designated a troop of cavalry scouts assigned to the 123rd Field Artillery Battalion as The Fabyan Scouts.

The colonel trained some of his field hands and men from the Geneva area and called them the Fox Valley Guards. He was in the process of seeing what was involved in having his Fox Valley Guards become part of the Illinois National Guard stationed at Riverbank when one of his recruiting demonstrations changed everything. As the story goes, the colonel's recruiting demonstration had such an effect on his own guards that most enlisted right on the spot, into the regular army or the Illinois National Guard that was headquartered elsewhere. The colonel was so overwhelmned by the patriotism of his "boys" that he threw them one of the biggest Riverbank parties ever.

In 1905 Fabyan was selected by President Teddy Roosevelt to serve on the peace team that negotiated the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty, ending the Russo-Japanese War. During the negotiations the colonel played a principal role as adviser to Baron Jutaro Komura of Japan. The baron was the Japanese minister of foreign affairs and head of the Japanese delegation to the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, conference. For his part, Fabyan received the Order of the Rising Sun from a representative of the emperor and much admiration from President Roosevelt. Shortly afterward, Riverbank became host to many Japanese dignitaries, including General Kuroki, who was the commander of the land forces in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War and Kan In No Miya, the youngest son of Emperor Mutsuhito, brother of Emperor Yoshihito and uncle to Emperor Hirohito. A source stated "that it is thought that the Colonel acted as a temporary Consul for Japan in the Chicago area until a permanent Japanese Consulate was established."

Because the colonel was an official member of the state of Illinois Welcoming Committee, his home also served as a haven for visiting dignitaries. Among those who visited Riverbank were President Teddy Roosevelt, Admiral Byrd, Albert Einstein, Lilly Langtry, Mary Pickford, Billie Burke, Flo Ziegfield, Billie Dove, P.T. Barnum, Ernest Lawrence, Arthur Compton, Marshall Field, Colonel McCormack, Colonel Baker, and the Morton family.

The colonel's house, the villa, was originally a wood-framed farmhouse. Although somewhat typical of the frame homes of the period, it is reported that the original house contained features relating to an arts and crafts motif, where much of what existed inside was handmade. In 1907 the Fabyans commissioned the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright to do extensive remodeling. Wright transformed the dwelling so that it was in harmony with the natural Riverbank environment. A cruciform design emerged, sporting wide eaves, rich decorative detailing, and multipaned casement windows that echoed the gabled roof lines. Outrigger-type verandas reached out horizontally from the north, south and east sides. These modifications, coupled with

many interior changes, provided the qualities of a longer and lower profile with more available space and light typical of other Frank Lloyd Wright constructions in the Chicago area.

Inside, Wright's idea of furniture — built to fit — was used in a few rooms, and in accordance with one of the avant garde ideas of the day, Nelle had a few pieces suspended by chains from the ceiling. The design exemplified the vision of both Frank Lloyd Wright and the Fabyans.

When Riverbank was at its peak, if one stepped out on the east veranda of the villa, which sat high on the hill of the west bank of the Fox River, one could see a vast portion of the Riverbank estate as it extended far to the horizon. Beyond the distant hillside, opposite the east bank of the Fox River, were the east woods, standing ever so majestic, touching the sky with its many colored fingers. It was the Fox River, however, meandering southward through the middle of the colonel's well-groomed estate that immediately drew one's attention. Somehow, the river was always transformed from its more common murky image as it majestically rolled through the estate, as if ordered to do so by the colonel himself. The sunlight and the magnificent beauty of the manicured grounds combined to turn the typical brown tint of the river into a glittering, silverblue liquid ribbon. Once beyond the boundaries of the estate, the river returned to its original muddy color and continued toward a rendezvous with the Illinois River in Ottawa.

Once the spell manifested by the river was broken, the next intriguing sight was a full-scale, authentic nineteenth-century Dutch windmill perched atop the east bank. In 1914, the colonel purchased the structure from Fritz Runge, who owned and operated the mill in York Center, a township about twenty-five miles from Geneva. The colonel had it dismantled, each piece labeled, and then reconstructed at its current Riverbank location. The colonel bought the mill so that he could have fresh bread made from his own Riverbank-grown grain.

East of the large grain windmill was Route 25 and east of that a large natural forest. On the southern end of the forest, there was a farm. North of the forest stood a girls' detention center, which was demolished in 1984.

Also located on the east shore was a large Indian statue dedicated in honor of Chief Black Hawk. The colonel showed deep respect for the Native American by providing presentations on the Native American way of life on various occasions. He constructed replicas of Native American villages on the east bank and the island highlighting different tribes and their respective customs. Some contend that this reverence was for his wife, whose father was an Indian agent in Walker, Minnesota, her hometown.

North of the statue and below the windmill was the workmen's swimming pool, one of two main pools plus three reflecting pools located on the estate. The largest was a huge Roman-style pool located on the south edge of the island. This lighted pool was a magnificent work of art, with large steps and a

*The Large Grain Windmill and Lighthouse.*

peripheral colonnade supported by a double row of trellis-supported columns. The columns were actually crafted out of wood but were painted with a special sand mix that resembled early-Roman masonry. In the deck were embedded decorative glass disks, and an elaborate sculpted bench was set to one side.

Then, as now, the island could be reached from either shore via bridges. Originally, the bridges were made of wood and, on occasion, were lost or destroyed because of flooding. The girders and main span of one of the now existing bridges are metal with wood planking and concrete pilings; the other bridge is constructed entirely of metal and concrete. The latter bridge is also protected upstream by a roadbed built over a series of culverts. The area of water between the roadbed and the bridge was known as the cove and, in winter, was used by many for ice skating.

On the island was a large copper-domed lighthouse that flashed its beam in a sequence of two, then three, then two, then three, and so on. For years, this sequence didn't mean much to anyone until a newspaper article disclosed that it actually meant twenty-three from the old expression, "Twenty-three skiddoo," the colonel's way of saying keep off. Because the Fox River was considered a navigable waterway by the government, special legislation in the United States Congress was required before the colonel could construct

the second bridge, leading from the island to the east shore. This legislation prompted the colonel to construct the lighthouse in the first place. One theory is that because of the river's designation as a navigable waterway, the lighthouse was the colonel's way of mocking the government for its having refused him permission to officially declare the portion of the river passing through his estate as private property.

A short distance from the lighthouse is a high pedestal supporting a large sculpted eagle with outstretched wings. This eagle was identical to the tower eagle described earlier. Apparently, Silvestri used the same mold. Through the years, the island eagle deteriorated, and after the laboratory tower eagle was damaged by lightning, both eagles were duplicated (resculpted) and replaced. Not far from the island eagle was a fresh running "spring" that flowed from a multitiered masonry pedestal bedecked with flowers. Many were unaware that the spring was actually fresh cold water from an artesian well pumped from the boat house on the west shore which also supplied the water for the Roman-style pool. The combination of elements enhanced the beauty of an island that was appropriately called Isle of View, a name that spoken rapidly, doubles as a pronouncement of affection.

Another island farther upstream was called Pirates Island. Many of the Riverbank families would camp, fish, and swim off this island because of a natural sandbar and shade trees close to shore. Realizing that Pirates Island was washing away the colonel made a valiant attempt to save it by having a retaining wall built to its north, but, in time, the island was lost to the river.

During the winter of 1916, an early thaw caused one of the most damaging Fox River floods ever reported. Besides the high water, massive sheets of ice appeared as gargantuan monsters that gouged, dug, and ravished the surrounding land as they traveled downstream. The colonel's wooden bridges were swept off their moorings like toothpicks. A swimming pool was completely buried, and a boathouse was flattened. So much damage was done that, eventually, everything of aesthetic importance to Riverbank was either rebuilt, repaired, or replanted.

On the west shore, heading north from the main island road, was an icehouse. Farther down by the bridge was the boathouse that pumped water to the spring and the Roman pool on the island. Beyond this boathouse were two others. The first was the main boathouse. It was set back from the river and was reached by going through a thirtyfoot tunnel. Once inside the boathouse itself, the docking area expanded, revealing an area large enough to accommodate six boats. The ceiling was built to open, and various hoisting gears were used to raise the boats for storage on the second floor. A cement staircase led up and out from the docks to the main grounds.

The other boathouse was smaller and was located right on shore with its dock pilings in the river. The colonel had a motorized launch, a round-bottomed racing scull named *The Lady Nelle,* an eighteen-foot sailboat (eventual-

ly donated to the Boy Scouts of America), two Indian birch-bark canoes, and a handful of fishing boats and rafts. The rafts were used to haul supplies and cattle across the river in the farming areas primarily south of the main grounds.

The individual in charge of boating activities was Jack "The Sailor" Wilhemson, a tall, strong man who once sailed the high seas on Norwegian sailing vessels and had the seamanship credentials to prove it. A character straight out of folklore, Jack the Sailor could dance the jig and tie every sailor's knot known. Quite often, he would intrigue the workers, children, and guests with his tales and demonstrations of knot tying and rope splicing. He was responsible for weaving and erecting an enormous rope spider web that hung between two large elm trees on the estate, an eerie sight to the ladies but a delight to the birds and squirrels, including some imported European black squirrels, who ran and perched there.

Many of Riverbank's guests were treated to a boat ride on the Fox with Jack at the helm singing, spinning yarns, and acting as tour guide. In addition to his talents as an entertainer, he was most adept at handling and caring for the colonel's boats, cattle rafts, pumps, and pools.

Besides the river, perhaps the most breathtaking source of beauty throughout the entire estate were the countless flowers, many of them grown in the colonel's greenhouses and then displayed in arrangements suggested by Nelle Fabyan to Riverbank's gardeners — as many as twenty-five of them working there at one time. Of all the horticultural wonders at Riverbank, the Japanese garden attracted the most attention. Poetic in this peaceful and tranquil setting, it was designed in authentic Japanese style by Taro Otsuka. One published account stated that the services rendered by this professional Japanese gardener were arranged by the Imperial family as a gift of gratitude to the colonel for his efforts regarding the Portsmouth treaty, but this story has never been confirmed. Sumiko Kobayashi, the daughter of the colonel's Japanese gardener, Susumu Kobayashi, had reservations about the authenticity of the story, stating that her mother disputed the story when told about it. Sumiko stated that her father first met Taro Otsuka at the Chicago YMCA in 1917, where Otsuka was employed on a part-time basis, and that Otsuka designed many other gardens in the Chicago area before and after he designed the garden at Riverbank. If Taro Otsuka had any connection to the Japanese Imperial family, the Kobayashis surely would have known and would have discussed the subject during family gatherings. Indeed, such an honorable connection would not have gone unvoiced.

The Riverbank Japanese garden was intricate in detail, both in the physical sense and in the spirit of Japanese tradition. Completely enclosed, the garden allowed the individual spirit to communicate with its ancestral past and harmonize with nature. It was a place that allowed one to reflect on and separate the spiritual being from the physical and material things of life and assess one's inner virtues of honesty, dignity, wisdom, and humility.

When entering the garden through the Torii, a gateway commonly used to approach a Shinto shrine, visitors saw a miniature panaroma of hills leading to a replica of Mount Fujiyama. South of Mount Fujiyama were two goldfish ponds that linked under a half-moon bridge. Lanterns, plants, and other authentic Japanese elements, including a waiting bench chamber, three authentic gateways, and various pathways were spaced throughout.[4]

For fourteen years (1925-1939), the Japanese garden, as well as many of the other floral displays located throughout the estate, were the responsibility of Susumo Kobayashi. Much of what was grown in the greenhouses was cared for by Kobayashi. The Kobayashi family lived in a house located north of the villa and were highly regarded throughout the community.

In addition to the Japanese garden, sculptures and ornamental grottoes were located in the area immediately east of the villa. A few feet across from the largest rock grotto was a 200-foot long, two-section rose arbor that ran eastward from the middle north-south road. The arbor concealed a pathway under its canopy of roses and at the midpoint was a small, open area in which a pedestal-mounted sundial stood. At the far end of the arbor were two large ornamental gates; some say celestial-swinging metal gates. The gates opened to the bridge leading to the island.

Another grotto to the south featured a water-spewing lion's head, lilacs, and rock formations as well as floral plantings. East of the grotto was a trolley line, its rails extending north and south through the estate, part of the Aurora-Elgin Railroad commuter line that had three stops — stations 31, 32, and 33 — on the colonel's estate. It was reported that on occasion, the colonel would treat the passengers to refreshments, usually tea and cookies or, when it was extremely hot outside, fresh cold water or lemonade.

At the top of the west hill, just north of the villa, was an Egyptian-style sculpted armchair, bench, table, and pedestal emblazoned with various hieroglyphics and symbols. These structures most likely resulted from the discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamen in 1922, when Egyptian mania swept the country. The armchair, as grand as any pharaoh's throne, was created entirely of concrete by Fabyan's sculptor Silvestri. This chair, along with two others that were on the estate during Fabyan's life, were given consideration as *hell chairs,* seats reserved for those times when the colonel wanted or needed to sit and raise hell with the people who worked for him.

Besides the Egyptian throne, a wicker chair swing was on the veranda that was said to have been the colonel's primary roost when he needed to let off steam. Elizebeth Friedman, who spent a number of years at Riverbank, gives an account of how the chair got its name:

> There was a large wicker or reed armed chair held by chains which swung twenty or thirty feet from an enormous tree. This chair I soon came to know as "the hell chair." In it, the Colonel sat and swung back and forth, chain smoking and poking an enormous fire which burned even on summer evenings. Evening after

evening he sat there with anyone he could gather around, and if anyone in the conversation would displease him he would stand the offending person, guest or employee up before the hell chair and literally give them hell. Thus the name.

Perhaps all three chairs — the Egyptian throne and the two wicker swings — served the colonel. The throne does provide the better location for looking out over the entire estate, but it is stone and stationary and surely not as comfortable as a swing. No definitive answer to the location of the so-called hell chair has ever been given, so speculation about it, as is the case with so much of Riverbank, continues.

Some other points of interest on the estate were a gazebo, a sunken pond, a tiered fountain, stone steps with ornate railings, a vineyard north of the villa, a perimeter multilayered limestone wall, yellow clay tennis courts, and Aunt Nelle's doll house. The ground also held various homes and quarters for the staff, a crew that numbered between 125 and 175 and was supervised by the colonel's secretary, Adele (Belle) Cumming, a perfectionist and ardent task master.

Then there were the animals. There were kennels full of dogs, some of them show-ring champions. There was an aviary with tropical birds and peacocks and a large cage where Louie, the Wolf, dutifully served as Riverbank's watchdog, howling whenever anyone approached. Deer romped in a fenced compound, and three bears, one named Mary and all lovers of pumpernickel bread, prowled about their large, barred cage. There was also an intricate circle of cages, known as the pie-shaped zoo, and a pit that served as a summer home to the colonel's alligators; in the winter, they were kept in the conservatory of the south greenhouse.

In addition to the alligators, bears, and birds, the colonel and Mrs. Fabyan also had monkeys, which they had leashed at different locations on the grounds and decked out in little red suits and small hats — or some other outfits — to perform their antics. One monkey was a kleptomaniac. Another had a special eye for picking out the pretty ladies and giving them a well-placed pinch. Another monkey would raise and lower a bucket from a shadoof well and provide water for those desiring a drink; however, if he didn't like you, chances are you would be doused rather than refreshed. The other animals loose on the grounds were on constant alert because the marauding monkeys enjoyed chasing them all over the place.

The youngsters of Riverbank had a paradise to play in. One such youngster was Riverbank Acoustical Laboratories' retiree Lionel (Don) Williams, who was born on the Riverbank estate on May 22, 1920. Don's father, Bert, was the Fabyans' chauffeur. He was also credited with being a person who could repair anything. The same accolade would be said about Don years later. Except for a four-year stint in the army during World War II, Don Williams and Riverbank have shared a life. At the end of 1985, he officially retired as a permanent Riverbank employee (thirty-five years with the IIT

Research Institute), yet by agreeing to stay on as a part-time consultant, in essence, his Riverbank career continues. His recollections of Riverbank are the source for much of the recounting in this book, including this story:

> On a winter day when he was still a boy, Don got angry at one of the colonel's alligators and decided to give the scaly beast a good thrashing. Without any thought of the consequences of his actions, young Don climbed over the retainer wall of the reptiles' greenhouse pit and was about to deliver a blow when he suddenly found himself flying backwards out of the pit and held dangling in the air. When he turned his head to see who would have dared do such a thing, he looked into the face of Jack the Sailor, whose quick actions more than likely saved the boy from losing a limb or his life.

Although the alligators and the rest of the Fabyan's menagerie attracted the most attention, the Fabyans owned an impressive amount of domestic livestock. Nelle Fabyan was a member of the National Livestock Breeders Association and had a box seat at the livestock show held annually at the Chicago amphitheater. Nelle developed many prize-winning animals in the scientific barn located south of the other laboratories. As for the other livestock, although some were sold, many ended up on the colonel's dinner table. A robust eater, Fabyan made sure his supply of hogs, cattle, sheep, ducks, chickens, turkeys, and geese was abundant. He also owned dairy cows and laying hens. The chickens were kept in a 500-foot-long chicken coop located just north of the laboratories. Most of the livestock were located on the perimeter of the farming areas, where wheat, oats, corn, barley, beans, rye, and hay were grown. Besides these crop fields, vegetable research plots were located throughout the estate and in the greenhouses.

During the colonel's life at Riverbank, the estate was not only a scientific community but a sort of public retreat as well, a place for local residents to get away from it all for a while. The scene depicted in Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte,* an idyllic, leisurely place for play and companionship, is probably an accurate representation of a traditional weekend on Colonel Fabyan's Fox River island. With so many area residents enjoying the peace and tranquility of the island as welcomed guests, it is no wonder that a great deal of attention was brought to the place and the man who owned it. Both the colonel and his estate became the subject of numerous newspaper articles.

A comparison of two of these articles indicates not only the awe Riverbank inspired in these journalists but also the way in which Colonel Fabyan was able to create different images of himself, playing different roles depending on his mood or purpose.

The first article, from the *Chicago Herald* dated July 12, 1915, was entitled "Col. Geo. Fabyan Soon to be a Miller De Luxe. Buys a Dutch Windmill and Will Turn it to Grinding Out Whole Wheat Flour. Music Trails Visitor, Breaks out in Spots All Over Estate from a Pergola to the Greenhouses":

Colonel George Fabyan, millionaire country gentleman, about to change identity and become the jolly miller deluxe of Geneva.

The deluxe end of his venture is best explained by the fact that the flour will be ground in the old primitive way — between stones — and will be worth about nine times the price of that which now goes to make up a considerable portion of the "high cost of living."

The colonel led the way to a knoll back of Fabyan Villa and pointed to a hill far across a wide expanse which took in dozens of greenhouses filled with growing roses, a big dog kennel filled with scores of animals, over the Fox River which sail and power boats were bobbing, to a hill a half mile away at one end of Riverbank. "That's where my flour mill is going to stand," he said.

The colonel continued walking, heading for a Japanese garden, a veritable wonder place of flowers, bubbling fountains and oriental skill, still discoursing on the wonders of the deluxe flour which he intends to mill.

Suddenly from a Japanese pagoda the Trinity chimes pealed forth. The music seemed to come from nowhere. As suddenly did it cease, only to break out on a porch of the villa, then over by the greenhouses, shifting from place to place and changing from classical to quickening ragtime at intervals. "Little hobby of mine," the colonel explained, half apologetically. "Both my wife and I like good music and like it all the time, so I had it arranged so it would follow us around if we wanted it to. It's produced by vibration on wood and is controlled from the villa. Listen to that. Isn't it pretty?"

"As I was saying about the mill of mine, ..." The colonel's dissertation on flour was broken off by a wild yelp directly back of the visitor, which caused his hair to stand. "Only a coyote. Nothing to be afraid of. He's locked up behind you in that animal house," the colonel explained laughing. "That coyote doesn't make much noise. You ought to hear that tiger cat in the cage next to him scream once in awhile." The visitor looked toward the tiger and took in not only the "cat" but a couple of black bears, a bunch of chattering monkeys, a couple of wolves and a score of other denizens of the wilds.

"Just got in a case of ten foot snakes, ..." Suddenly, the visitor broke off the colonel's remarks with a shout. "Gee, there is a swarm of bees flying right in through the window of your house," he yelled excitedly. "Not so fast, not so fast," the colonel cut in and then broke into a hardy laugh. "Those bees are just going into the music room to deposit their honey. You see I didn't trust that particular bunch of bees," he continued in a jocular way, "so I had their hive placed inside the place (villa) and had it glassed in so we could watch them and see that they didn't cheat. They go in through a hole in the wall. It's made honest bees out of them — this constant supervision."

Besides the bees the colonel has other lodgers in his house, a baboon in a cage and a small dog that is the baboon's companion. The baboon grins at arrivals and the dog barks at them cheerfully just as they enter. The house is unique in having exterior screened compartments with large open fireplaces capable of holding sizable logs. They make delightful spots in the evening when the fire lights up the entrancing landscape and provides both warmth and illumination. Also, if a vagrant mosquito would get by the barrier, the wood smoke would drive him away.

The light house served as a warning to intruders with its twenty three skiddoo connotation, ... "seems to me a burglar wouldn't need much warning after he got inside the stone wall and found all these bears, wolves, tiger cats, about ninety men who knew how to handle pitch forks, not to say anything about the squad of bull dogs and other canines I saw over in the dog kennels," the reporter ventured. "Well speaking of those dogs reminds me that I want to get a couple of bloodhounds," cut in the miller, "once in awhile we have a thief or a highwayman in the neighborhood and they might come in handy."

"But as I was saying about the whole wheat flour," the colonel started again only to be interrupted by the mooing of cattle in an adjoining pasture. "All belong to my wife," he said, "that's her hobby — blooded cattle — that bull over there the herdsman is leading is Ocean Blue, the grand champion Jersey and the other one next to him is Grey Portia, a grand champion Jersey cow. Those over there are all blue ribbon winners" ... . The walk and talk "whole wheat flour" continued back to the villa, again on the way music began creeping up here and there, ... .

Here is another portrait of Fabyan, published six years later, April 22, 1921, in the Chicago *Daily News:* "Building Supermen at Fabyan's Colony. Scientists and Thinkers, 150 of them, Work on Many Things at Riverbank."

The colonel whisked out a cigarette case, drew forth a gold-tipped cigarette, broke it in halves and fed them to two monkeys in his private zoo. The monkeys shucked the paper off and complacently chewed the tobacco shreds. It was "Riverbank," one of the strangest and, at the same time, most beautiful country estates in America.

On both sides of the Fox River the estate spread. There was an old Dutch windmill, a mysterious $100,000 laboratory of acoustics, a barn made into an art studio, great hothouses, dog kennels, bear dens, lighthouse, zoo, farms, row after row of plows, Japanese garden, sailboats, champion hogs and cattle, open-air swimming pool and a great country house ...

"Yes," resumed the colonel, "a community of thinkers. There's 150 folks on this place, as I said, and every man, woman and child's doing original remarkable and humanitarian research work. Over there in that hothouse they're trying genetics on roses and tulips. What for? Why look at the average human being, a plighty pitiful contraption of flesh and bones. If we the Riverbank community can improve the human race by experimenting first with flowers and plants ... say, won't that be a wonderful thing? ... ."

"Community is right," he said, "we're all working together; no bosses, no time clocks, no cast iron regulations. I too am just a worker. Well, as I was saying, the best story here is our research work to find out what is wrong with the human body. Man started as a wiggling snake, became a tadpole, acquired shoulders somehow, grew into an antropodal [sic] ape, and then he decided to stand up, walk on his hind legs and become a man. But our stomachs were made to be carried horizontally; not vertically. Look at all the sickness that's come from defying nature! We want to see how nature's made revisions to meet this. The army training was all wrong, by the way. Everybody can live to be 100 years old. Just wait awhile. We're working it out."

Col. Fabyan's words were lost in the yammerings, cooings, growlings and screechings that rushed out through the doorway of the zoo-clinic. Cub lions, wolves, baboons, monkeys, bears, resplendent birds of the Amazon jungles — they all welcomed the colonel. He beamed and tweaked the ear of the black bear ... .

"How do you like my banana crop, young man?" There were clusters of green bananas hanging from trees. While the colonel told of the acoustics laboratory containing mausoleum-like buildings within buildings; of machines invented by scientists of the community for seeing and photographing sound; of organs that play by magnetic keys; of a brilliant girl who sat studying one single problem for eight months ... .

"Something new in sculpture," chuckled the Col. Fabyan! He nodded briskly toward figures of dancing women, eagles, lions, flowers. "You think they're chiseled out of stone, eh? Wrong! They're cement ..."

"Yonder we're studying the inefficient machine called man."

"The community flour mill" ... We grind all our flour for bread and pies, in the basement is a modern electric oven we bake everything on the spot.

"That's the Temple de Junk. Most important thing in the place ... Want to buy some plows? Here's seventy-five I'll sell you."

Col. Fabyan was dressed for his part of a millionaire country gentleman. He wore a frock coat, fancy vest, lavender stock around his neck and bowler hat. And unlike his fellow scientists he smoked no corncob pipe, but burned up rapidly many costly cigarettes. In the coat lapel he wore the rosette of the Legion of Honor of France. The colonel, you remember, backed Sir Francis Bacon as a "dark horse" against William Shakespeare in the famous Elizabethan sweepstakes. He also was the "father of the aue Fourth" idea in Chicago. He received the thanks of the allied military intelligence for his work in cryptography during the war.

Col. Fabyan acquired a large fortune through investments in Chicago and the development of his mercantile business . . . Bliss Fabyan & Co. 82 West Washington Street.

Don Williams commented briefly about the baboon and lions in relation to an expression dealing with the droppings of a bull. According to Don, there were monkeys but never a baboon and definitely no lions. Don had great difficulty in accepting the reason why some of these articles were included in this book and took many statements appearing within some of these articles to task. However, after it was established that the reason these articles were included was to point out why the colonel was so controversial, Don reluctantly accepted the idea, but with reservations. However, when reviewing these articles, Don still found it appropriate to reference the animal world often. Bull droppings were popular, as were hogwash and sheep dip. Thus let it be known that some of these articles do not please all those who knew the colonel or Riverbank.

Not all newspaper accounts dealing with Colonel Fabyan were as complimentary and positive as the preceding two, and not all relied on the truth: One

example involved Helen Morton, the daughter of the Salt King, and her elopement with a jockey. Needless to say, a scandal ensued and because of his friendship with the Mortons, Colonel Fabyan became enmeshed in the affair by allowing Helen to stay at Riverbank. Once they discovered where the Morton heiress was, reporters swarmed the place, all looking for a scoop. However, all were denied access by the colonel's many able-bodied employees.

Frustration abounded among the journalists who were eager to talk with the girl — in a number of accounts, she was characterized as a prisoner, being held against her will — until finally one enterprising young man, a fledgling reporter for the Chicago *Evening Journal* named Lowell Thomas, published a story recounting a river journey; an interview; and a litany of miseries that the poor, lovesick Helen confessed.

The story created quite a stir, but, as it turns out, Thomas had fabricated the whole thing. In his book, *Good Evening Everybody, From Cripple Creek to Samarkand,* he explained how it all came about:

> Early in 1915, I got a chance to cover another big story — and this one almost ended my career in journalism for all time. That spring, every paper in the country was headlining the elopement of a Chicago heiress, Helen Morton, with Roger Bailey, her father's jockey. You can see the possibilities, a juicy scandal with everything from pathos to comedy — her father's jockey? The fact that the nubile Helen's father and his brother Joy were matter-of-factly referred to as the Salt Kings of America, and that her uncle, Colonel Fabian [sic] could be tabbed the Woolen King [cotton would have been a better choice] only piqued the natural appetite for every minute detail of this human drama. Alas! Helen and her horseman were caught in Kentucky — it was around Derby time — and the poor girl brought back in disgrace, and thereafter an iron curtain clamped down on her uncle's Fox River estate [Riverbank]. It was suddenly surrounded by a battalion of guards armed with pitchforks, and not a morsel of news trickled out to the hordes of waiting newsmen, of whom I was one; consequently there was no word, either of solace or spite, that we could pass on to the panting public. Day after day we sat around Wheaton, the nearest town [Many other towns, especially Geneva, are much closer. Either Mr. Thomas referenced the wrong town, or perhaps what he meant was at the time Wheaton was the closest passenger railroad station.], playing cards or shooting craps and waiting for lightning to strike.
>
> When it finally struck, Webb Miller of Hearst's Evening American and I were the ones bathed in its light of divine inspiration. Our stories were spread over page one of both our papers. We told how we had walked some miles up the Fox River by a circuitous route, found a flat-bottom scow and, hiding in the bottom, drifted downstream. Undetected, we managed to sneak ashore at the Fabian [sic] estate and, since such enterprise could not go unrewarded, we found the pensive Helen in a hammock, happy, at last, to be able to unburden her heavy heart. We were able to tell the world how she felt (melancholy) and what she thought about jockeys in general (not much) and hers in particular (she missed him). Anyway, she said, she believed in romance.

The story was a sensation, as well it should have been. During one of those waiting days, Webb, who didn't enjoy shooting craps any more than I did, had started us speculating on the "what ifs" that led to our farfetched yarn. We had simply invented the whole thing.

We might have gotten away with it, at that, if our papers hadn't insisted on photographs. The Mortons and Colonel Fabian [sic] were making no statements, acknowledging or denying nothing. But the morning after our big newsbreak, there was a fresh clutch of press people at the Wheaton railroad station, including the *Journal's* faithful Japanese photographer, Saito, hoping for a glimpse of anybody named Morton or Fabian [sic]. And as luck would have it, the kings — both salt and wool — showed up.

Little Saito scurried forward for a close-up, and the next thing I realized, one of the Mortons had him by the throat and his camera was flying through the air, to come crashing down on the brick platform. As no one else seemed about to intervene, and as poor Saito was, after all, my cameraman, I suddenly found myself flying across the station and, with the rage of the righteous, I began flinging Morton salt kings hither and yon. At least that's how Ben Hecht, who by then was with the Chicago *Daily News,* reported it. I only knew that when Saito and I got back to the *Journal,* my watch was smashed and I could otherwise tell that I'd been in a losing fight.

An hour later I was called to the office of John Eastman, owner of the paper. The Morton lawyers had already given him their version of the encounter; now he wanted mine. When I finished, he rather sourly said, "My boy, if we lose this case, we'll have to give them the *Journal* and owe them the rest."

Well, luckily we didn't lose it, or at least we won round one. In the Wheaton justice of the peace court a few days later, Saito, Miller and I confronted the Mortons and some of Chicago's most formidable legal talent. We won an assault and battery judgment against them for five dollars plus costs. I suppose you could call it an early test of freedom of the press, and Webb Miller and I, two vindicated, ink-stained wretches, celebrated our victory. Webb went off to Europe to become a top foreign correspondent and eventually head of the United Press London Bureau, and I went back to Alaska. But both of us, for years afterward, heard the rumblings of the Mortons' multimillion-dollar libel suits which, I believe, eventually outlived both our newspapers and all the Mortons.

The story at Riverbank is that while Helen Morton was a guest of the colonel, she was trained by his sculptor Silvestri in the art of sculpting. In the laboratory's second-floor conference room, above the fireplace, is a picture sculpted from cement that depicts a farm scene with various animals, a road, bunched corn stalks, pumpkins, a stream, a wooden fence, and a few other farm scene items. The sculpture is signed, Helen Morton.

In many ways, Thomas's tall tale, reads like a romance novel, but some of the tales told about alleged goings-on at Riverbank read more like novels of a steamier, seamier variety. Bringing into account everything from reform school girls to risqué scientific experiments, these often-related stories, when

taken together, paint a picture of Riverbank as a kind of exotic paradise and Colonel Fabyan as the satyr in charge.

An article published in the September 1923 issue of the *Scientific American,* "A Small Private Laboratory," by Austin C. Lescarboura, Page 154, illustrates — if not establishes — the tone that accompanied these tales:

> There was much mystery connected with this laboratory. The staff in charge moved about like so many Egyptian priests of old guarding the darkest secrets. To deepen the mystery still further, a *pretty girl* was brought in. We were ushered into a small booth with dull black curtains for walls. It reminded us strongly of our psychic experiments back in New York, when we exposed one of the leading mediums after three sittings. At the command of the colonel, the demonstration got under way. In a few minutes we were astounded at what we were witnessing. It seemed unbelievable, yet it was there, in plain black and white. We had been brought face to face with certain facts regarding the human mechanism which we would hardly dared to have surmised in the absence of such a convincing demonstration. We were shown how — well, at this point we can go no further. Colonel Fabyan made us promise that nothing would be said about the nature of this investigation until some later date, when the experiments have progressed further. It may take weeks or months or years. Meanwhile the public must wait until the scientists reach a point somewhere nearer to their objectives.
>
> So, big, startling things are being done at Riverbank under the cloak of secrecy. It is such work as this, conducted by such an institution which will unfold to us wonders within the next few years. We shall learn more about the human body than ever before; we shall wrest certain secrets from nature which have never been suspected; a new epoch will most likely open up. Every so often the world reaches a point bordering on stagnation, because everything seems to be fully developed, just as a field, after being cultivated year after year, exhausts itself if fertilizer is not added. But the scientist, pegging away at the secrets of nature, sooner or later breaks down existing barriers, opens the way to a new field, and we are soon confronted with brand new opportunities for exploration.

Is your curiosity aroused? What Lescarboura actually saw was a girl standing behind an X-ray screen and the images it created.

Regardless of the truth or the validity of the experiments, the Lescarboura article was transformed through the years into a story beyond belief. As the yarn was told and passed on from teller to teller, the one girl highlighted in the story became naked. Later on, the one girl became many girls. Then, the Geneva detention home for delinquent girls, which was a neighbor to Riverbank, became a part of the tale, and the whole incident took an even more sordid turn.

Years earlier, the colonel had donated money to the Geneva State Training School for Girls for the construction of a new dormitory for the girls who resided there. The new building was located adjacent to the northeast corner of the colonel's estate. In appreciation for Colonel and Nelle Fabyan's generosity, school officials installed a sign above the entrance to the building

that simply said Fabyan, and the building became known as the Fabyan Cottage. Because of the name and the previous article and other, similar stories, local gossip eluded that the cottage bearing the colonel's name was a kind of recruiting station, and the girls who lived there were the colonel's private chattel. The story changed as years passed, and eventually, the cottage was no longer mentioned as part of the school but simply as a house the colonel built for attractive young women who were at Fabyan's disposal for special events at Riverbank.

In truth, the girls who lived at the detention home were brought to Riverbank but not for anything scandalous. Rather, they were part of a class sponsored by Nelle to improve the poise, posture, and etiquette of these wayward girls. The colonel's medical staff was also involved because of its studies regarding the physiology of the human body, and the likelihood of medical examinations exists. Although the examinations would have been relevant to posture-related studies, there is a strong possibility that the girls would have disrobed for the posture-related measurements, thus originating the sordid stories about what was truly a genuine scientific project.

Nelle Fabyan's class was a success. A few girls who were released from the detention center found a career in modeling. They were employed by agencies run by two of the women hired to assist in conducting Nelle Fabyan's class.

Although many of the myths that surrounded the colonel were just that, the story about mistresses, who at times resided on the estate and were known to Nelle Fabyan, is true. As the story goes, the colonel wanted a child, but Nelle was unable to bear any. Rather than leave Riverbank in the hands of strangers anxious to get their hands on the property after both the colonel and Nelle were dead, they decided it was imperative that they have an heir. Why adoption was never considered is a mystery, although it is possible that the colonel felt if he fathered a child, it would indeed be a Fabyan and have a legitimate claim to any inheritance. With one of his mistresses, he came close to having a child, but she lost the baby while in the hospital.

While his mistress was in the hospital recovering, the colonel learned that a woman who already had a very large family had just given birth to a daughter. Although it negates the notion that he had to be the child's natural father, Fabyan offered to buy the newborn. Because of the economic hardships of the Depression and because the colonel could provide wealth and an education for her child, the woman considered giving up the baby. However, motherhood and love for her daughter won out in the end, and the colonel remained childless.[5]

Even though he did not leave an heir, the colonel did leave a legacy rich in both the eccentric — as the previous stories attest — and the scientific. His reputation in the eccentric category is based on both truth and folklore, but his reputation in the area of science has a more solid, verifiable foundation.

George Fabyan was an idea man, intelligent and innovative. Although he lacked the technical and academic degrees and the scientific knowledge required to carry out a particular project, he was, nonetheless able to see the potential in a project and because of his wealth, he could go out and hire people who could get the job done. In addition to his contributions to the world of science, Colonel Fabyan was a patriot, an American who took pride in his country and who, again because his wealth allowed it, was able to contribute in spectacular ways to the nation, particularly to the military.

One summer weekend in 1918, the colonel opened up the west portion of Riverbank to the public and used his Fox Valley guards to stage a huge demonstration of modern wartime tactics. Included in the presentation were many foreign and U.S. military guest speakers along with area politicians and dignitaries. As one observer noted, the gathering of more than 4,000 people was "one heck of a recruiting show," an appraisal borne out by the fact and referenced earlier that many of the area's young men enlisted on the spot, and many more signed up the following week.

The colonel's patriotism was evidenced in other ways as well. Every day at Riverbank began with a bugler playing reveille and the raising of the flag. At sunset, taps was played, a small brass cannon was fired, and the flag was lowered and folded. Those who were not on hand to witness these ceremonies were reminded of their obligation by a sign posted next to the middle road that read, "Men Passing Here Will Please Salute the Flag."

By 1918, there were almost 100 regular army officers stationed at Riverbank. The primary purpose for about eighty of these officers was entirely different from the purpose of those participating in war games. Their involvement began when the British government, by way of Scotland Yard, sent a coded message to Washington. Accompanying the message was the statement, "Here is an example of the code England plans to utilize during this campaign, and as you can see, it is completely undecipherable." The British purposely failed to include a key. The United States was embarrassed because the country did not have a cryptography department or code facility. Fortunately, someone in government remembered that Colonel Fabyan in Geneva, Illinois, had volunteered his cryptography facility to the government. The coded messages were delivered by special envoy to Riverbank. Within three hours of receiving the messages, the code was broken by William and Elizebeth Friedman. Immediately, a message was cabled back to London in the British code, "This cipher is absolutely undecipherable," which was the original message received from the British. Needless to say, the British code was never used during the campaign.

As a result of the Friedmans's brilliant success, the U.S. government contacted the colonel again and arranged for Riverbank to become the first U.S. military code school. Many of the officers assigned to the school later became involved in army intelligence. Although there are accounts stating that River-


*William Friedman.*

bank is the birthplace of the CIA, the connection is not obvious. If you include William Friedman's career you may make some connections from Riverbank to the Army Signal Corps, their code and cipher sections, G2-Army Intelligence, the signal intelligence service (SIS), the Signal Security

Agency (SSA), and the Army Security Agency (ASA, later part of INSCOM).

Establishing direct links to the Black Chamber Group, Military Intelligence Section M1-8, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is not obvious. However, as the National Security Agency (NSA) in 1993 recognized Colonel Fabyan for his pioneering effort in cryptoanalysis, perhaps a link between Riverbank and the CIA is possible, although unlikely. Although a few code-related documents were available before Riverbank became involved with codes for the army, navy, the U. S. State Department, the U. S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Post Office, Riverbank was the first institution charged with creating a cryptology curriculum and a textbook and, in essence, the science of cryptology. According to Elizebeth (Smith) Friedman, she and her husband, William, and others at Riverbank were pioneers, simultaneously teachers and students, working together to chart the course of this new science.

One of the first government tasks undertaken by the Riverbank codebreakers was to decipher correspondence between Germany and South America. To assist with the job, Colonel Fabyan brought in Spanish and German translators, and for eight months, the small group at Riverbank performed all code and cipher work for the government. It was also during this period that the army sent the officers to Riverbank for instruction, primarily in learning existing code structures and in writing codes. Although critics contended that the officers should have been taught how to decipher codes, it was the feeling of the Riverbank cryptologists that to be able to decipher codes, it was first necessary to know how they are structured and written.

Interestingly, Elizabeth Gallup, whose work with the Baconian ciphers was the genesis of cryptology studies at Riverbank, did not conduct any of the classes. Some surmise that at the time, it was unlikely a woman would be allowed to instruct military officers. Other accounts state that Gallup was well into her senior years at the time and preferred to remain in a side room and monitor the proceedings. When time allowed, she would consult with William Friedman, the instructor. Just how many classes were conducted at Riverbank is not known. Because there is only one graduation-day portrait, it is assumed that there was just the single class, but the colonel stated in a few articles that the picture represented the second graduating class from Riverbank. The first class consisted of four to six officers who came to Riverbank in the fall of 1917. Their primary purpose was to evaluate what the colonel and his Riverbank staff could provide in training the military in code work. One account said that all told, eighty officers graduated from Riverbank. The class shown in the photo had only seventy-one officers, including those from the initial group along with five civilians, which means there might have been a third class as well; this speculation is based on a file document stating that another eight to ten officers were involved in a code class offered after a much larger class of officers had graduated.[6]

Apparently, as the following letter suggests, the Riverbank graduates did quite well:

FM/V

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES
GENERAL STAFF, SECOND SECTION (G.2)

France, May, 14, 1918.
Colonel George Fabyan,
Riverbank, Geneva, Illinois.

My dear Colonel:

I have just received your valuable and interesting pamphlets on ciphers and wish to thank you, not only for them, but also for your generous interest in our work. Graduates of Riverbank are now doing the greater part of the work in our code office, and Colonel VanDeman has been requested to send us the other men recommended by you.

We regard this cipher work as of great importance, and thoroughly appreciate the value of your assistance and the patriotic spirit in which it is rendered.

Hoping for your continued support, I am, with best regards to both yourself and Captain Powell.

Very respectfully yours,

D. E. NOLAN,
Colonel, General Staff,
A.C. of S.(G.2)

By accounts of some of the officers at Riverbank, being stationed there was "like being stationed in paradise." Meals were served with all the finery that goes with elegant dining: candles, flowers, linens, fine silverware and china, and imported wines. The meals included homemade bread, pastries, fresh milk, eggs, vegetables, and meat — all from the Fabyans' farm. The officers were billeted in a hotel with all the luxuries afforded to VIPs. To top it off, there were various social events — parties, teas, box-lunch picnics, and trips — and many dances, including an exquisite military ball that was said to be equaled by no other, all of which were attended by many of the young girls from the area, invited by the colonel that they might do their part for the boys and the war effort.

One of the officers, a young soldier known only as the cowboy, was so smitten with a girl he met the night of the gala that he could not get her out of his head, and he told his fellow officers that his heart had been captured. Unfortunately, according to the cowboy, the girl's father controlled her life,

the mail, and the telephone, leaving him with only the memory of a wonderful evening at a marvelous dance with a golden-haired angel in Geneva, Illinois.

The signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918, effectively brought an end to the military code classes at Riverbank, and eventually, the U.S. cryptography facilities were assigned to Washington D.C. However, the end of the war did not bring an end to Colonel Fabyan's patriotism. Involvement in military affairs remained central to his life and to life at Riverbank.

Those who lived in nearby Geneva were certainly aware of what Riverbank had been during World War I. The serene way of life local residents cherished was clearly affected by the colonel who had no reservations about disturbing the peace and quiet of the Geneva area with his military projects. There were moments, to be sure, when many Genevans probably thought that the war had reached the city limits — especially when the soldiers arrived, trenches were dug, explosive research took place, and an army Flying Jenny biplane swooped in — but, there are no accounts of the colonel having ever been interrupted by community action or protest.

Riverbank was, in fact, considered a community unto itself by Geneva residents, a distinction that suited those who lived on the Fabyan estate because they viewed themselves as a separate entity as well. Not that there was any hostility between the two — it was simply a matter of pride, nothing more, nothing less. However, this atmosphere of mutual isolationism contributed to the Riverbank mystique. It was not until after World War II that Geneva extended the city limits to incorporate the Riverbank estate.

Fortunately, as far as the local residents were concerned, most of the military research after World War I was of the indoor variety that didn't affect the serenity of life in Geneva. Even after the death of both Fabyans, the research at the laboratories continued, the only post-World War II military project that created turmoil among the area residents was the development of a speaker transmitter for voice propagation from a low-flying aircraft to the ground. Because the recorders and monitors were located in the cubicle on the laboratory's roof, a B-26 aircraft made low passes from all four compass directions at different hours and under all weather conditions. On each flyover, a taperecorded message was transmitted. One day, though, because of mist and fog, the aircraft made a run at a much higher altitude, and the sound carried over Geneva. Unfortunately, the test message that day was, Damp dark places are bad for romance. Apparently all Geneva heard a garbled message that sounded like, "Damn dark places are bad for romance." Because few people were aware of the project, the voice from the sky was considered by some to be that of the devil itself. When it was learned that Riverbank and not Satan was responsible, the feelings toward the source remained virtually the same.