

10 August 1955

Colonel Mauleby Forrest
President, Riverbank Laboratories
Geneva, Illinois

Dear Colonel Forrest:

Our last exchange of letters seems to have taken place in May of 1954 but the other day I received, without any comment, a letter which was forwarded to me from a chap who wants to acquire some of those Riverbank publications. Please thank your secretary for the courtesy.

For some weeks now I have wanted to write you a letter to tell you of a radical change in my personal affairs. On 3 April last, just about a week after my return from a very fine trip abroad on official business, I suffered a coronary occlusion which put me in the hospital for a month. I was home convalescing and in the third week thereof I had another attack; again I was in the hospital for about a month. I am home now and appear to be getting along all right except that the hot weather has interfered with my progress somewhat, in regaining strength, for it has been much too warm to do any walking in the open air.

As a consequence of my illness and the necessity for slowing down a lot, especially at my age, it was deemed best that I retire from active Civil Service and I did so as of 1 August.

What prompts me to write you now is to recall to you our brief discussion in 1952 about a project of research which I thought I might like to undertake after I retired from active duty. You will remember, perhaps, that I talked about a "Voynich Manuscript" which has been known for several hundred years but which has never been deciphered. Now, it seems to me, would be an opportune occasion for me to write you to ask whether you would still be interested in supporting some research in an attempt to solve the secret writing in that manuscript. I would, of course, have the time for such a project, and the inclination to solve it has been one of many years standing, so that I think some good results could be obtained. Moreover, I believe that I know why this riddle has eluded all the savants and experts who have attempted to solve it for so many years in the past, which naturally means that I think I now know how to proceed in a real attempt to unravel the mystery.

I do not want you to become apprehensive at once, and shy away from entertaining the idea of Riverbank supporting such a project, on

the ground that it might involve a lot of money. That is far from being the case; a little money would go a long way because there isn't much involved except some very careful transcription of texts, some IBM tabulating, and then a goodly amount of solitary brain work and mental perspiration that goes with it. On the other hand, to solve the mystery would bring wide acclaim in the scholarly world anyway, if not in the world at large, for whatever institution would back the project, if I were successful.

Hoping to hear from you soon and with most cordial greetings, I am

Sincerely,

WILLIAM F. FRIEDMAN

P.S. I enclose a clipping of possible interest. Curiously, the announcement was made the very day I had my first heart attack -- but there wasn't any connection between the two events!

Incl:
a/a