

“The Woman Who Smashed Codes: A True Story of Love, Spies and the Unlikely Heroine Who Outwitted America’s Enemies”, written by Jason Fagone

Fagone writes the fascinating story of the adult life of Elizebeth Smith Friedman, one of the United States most gifted “code breakers.” Elizebeth Friedman began her work in northern Illinois, working at Riverbanks Laboratories on a project founded in the concept that Shakespearean works were actually the writings of Francis Bacon. While at Riverbanks, Elizebeth met and married William Friedman, and as a couple they explored their mutual interest in cryptography, the study of encrypting messages through codes. The Friedmans quickly became skilled at identifying hidden messages, breaking codes and understanding how to identify styles of codes and coding machines. Both of the Friedmans found their talents in high demand, especially during World War I and II.

The story is in turn fascinating and frustrating. Elizebeth and her husband find their contributions are often credited to others, but recognize the codes they decipher and the information they share is vital during war times. Often they cannot discuss their projects, and William in particular, becomes very troubled by the work, to the point of having a nervous breakdown. Throughout the biography, Elizebeth is often in the situation of putting her own personal life on hold, seeing her first responsibility is to help protect both her country and her husband.