# INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Inside three private collections of spycraft, code-breaking, and cryptology

By Barbara Basbanes Richter

**LISTEN. I WORK FOR THE CIA. I'M NOT A FIELD AGENT. I JUST READ BOOKS. –ROBERT REDFORD AS TURNER IN *THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR* (1975)**

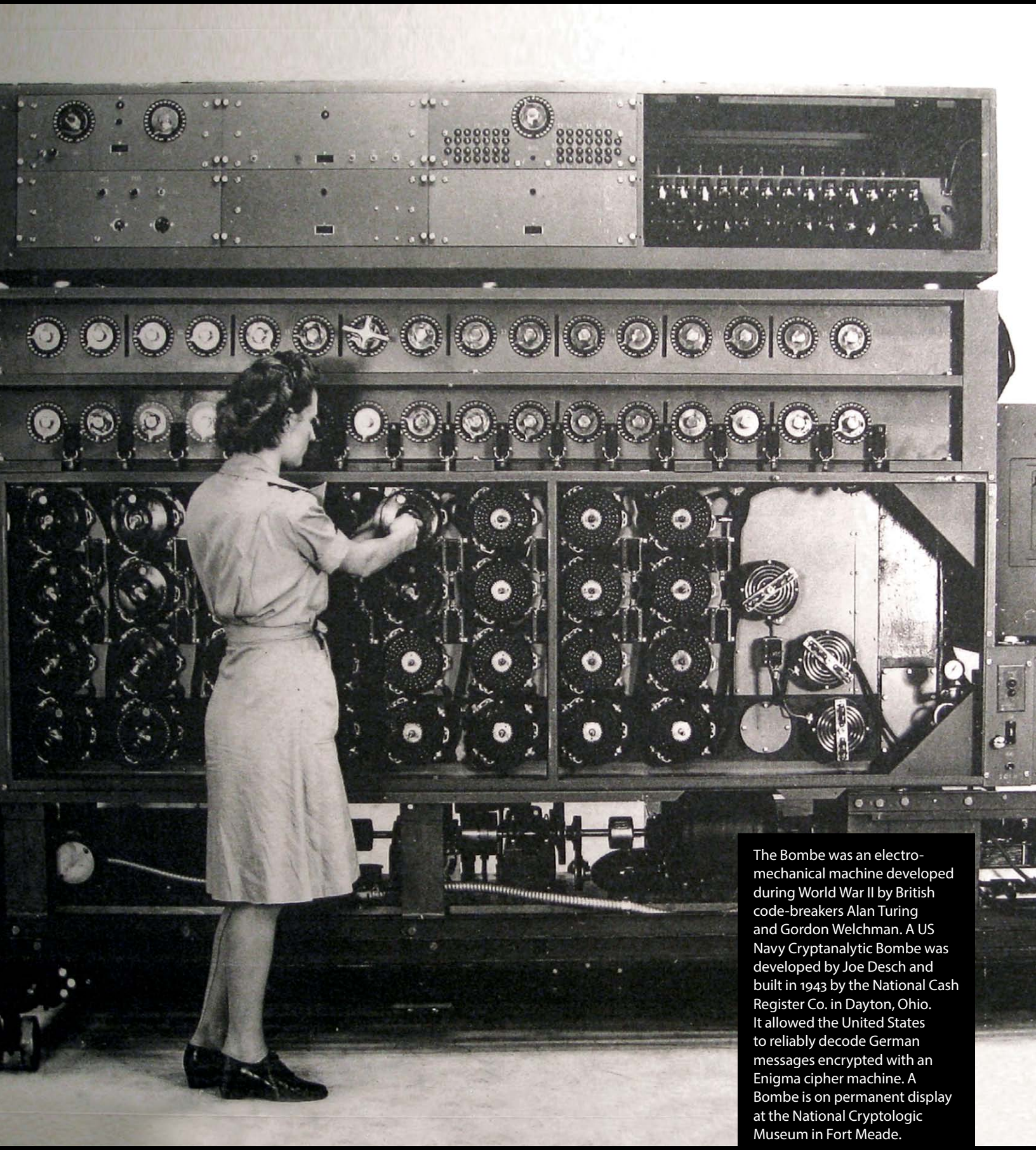
Our desire for cloak-and-dagger tales has led to a profusion of spy terminology in popular culture. Agents run *assets*, codebooks explain *enigmas*, covers get *blown*—these phrases have entered the lexicon through books and films dedicated to lifting the veil on the world of espionage. The appeal of this world has led many to careers in the business of gathering, sorting, and analyzing various materials of political, military, and economic value—a.k.a., intelligence. Some went a step further, building important personal collections around books and artifacts focused on clandestine service and tradecraft. The three men profiled here created intelligence collections for scholarly applications and professional reasons, but the root motivation for all was a passion for the topic.

For almost sixty years **David Kahn** has written exhaustively about cryptology, code-breakers, and code-makers. With eight books to his credit, he is perhaps best known for *The Codebreakers: The Story of Secretive Writing* (1967), the definitive work on the history of codes and ciphers and a finalist in 1968 for the Pulitzer Prize.

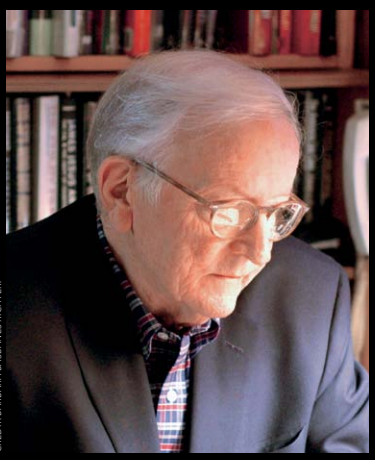
Over lunch at the Century Club in Manhattan, Kahn explained to me that his fascination with enigmas dates to his childhood in Great Neck, New York, when he visited his local library and borrowed what was then the only contemporary book on cryptology: *Secret and Urgent,* by Fletcher Pratt, a naval historian and newspaperman. "Pratt just totally turned me onto codes. I was thirteen, that golden age when kids discover something, and it becomes their passion for the rest of their lives. Mine happened to be codes, and it was my hobby for many, many years."

"In 1960, nobody had ever heard of the NSA, or codes," Kahn said. That year, National Security Agency cryptologists William Hamilton Martin and Bernon F. Mitchell defected to the Soviet Union, and soon after gave a press conference in which they condemned the United States' sophisticated surveillance programs that gathered electronic intelligence on enemies and allies alike. "After *The New York Times* printed the complete text of that press conference, I thought I would write a feature exploring in depth who these men were, and explain what they did." The piece he wrote for *The New York Times Magazine* led to a contract with Macmillan for what would later

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL CRYPTOLOGIC MUSEUM.



The Bombe was an electro-mechanical machine developed during World War II by British code-breakers Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman. A US Navy Cryptanalytic Bombe was developed by Joe Desch and built in 1943 by the National Cash Register Co. in Dayton, Ohio. It allowed the United States to reliably decode German messages encrypted with an Enigma cipher machine. A Bombe is on permanent display at the National Cryptologic Museum in Fort Meade.



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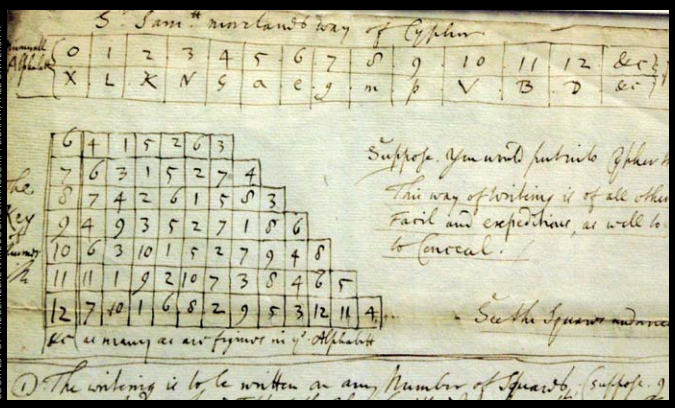
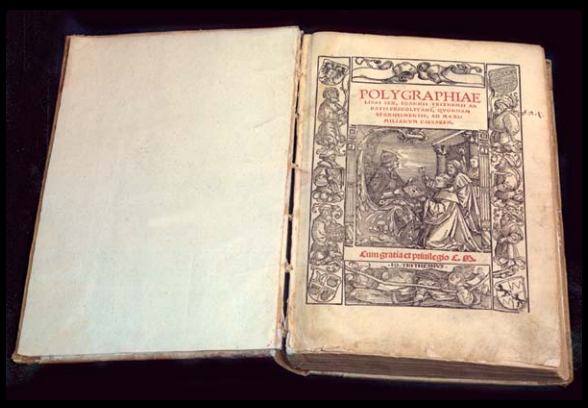
**Hayden B. Peake and, at right, the section of his intelligence library devoted to Kim Philby and the Cambridge Five.**



COURTESY OF THE BEINECKE RARE BOOK & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, YALE UNIVERSITY.

**An eighteenth-century cipher chart from Walter Pforzheimer's collection, now at Yale.**

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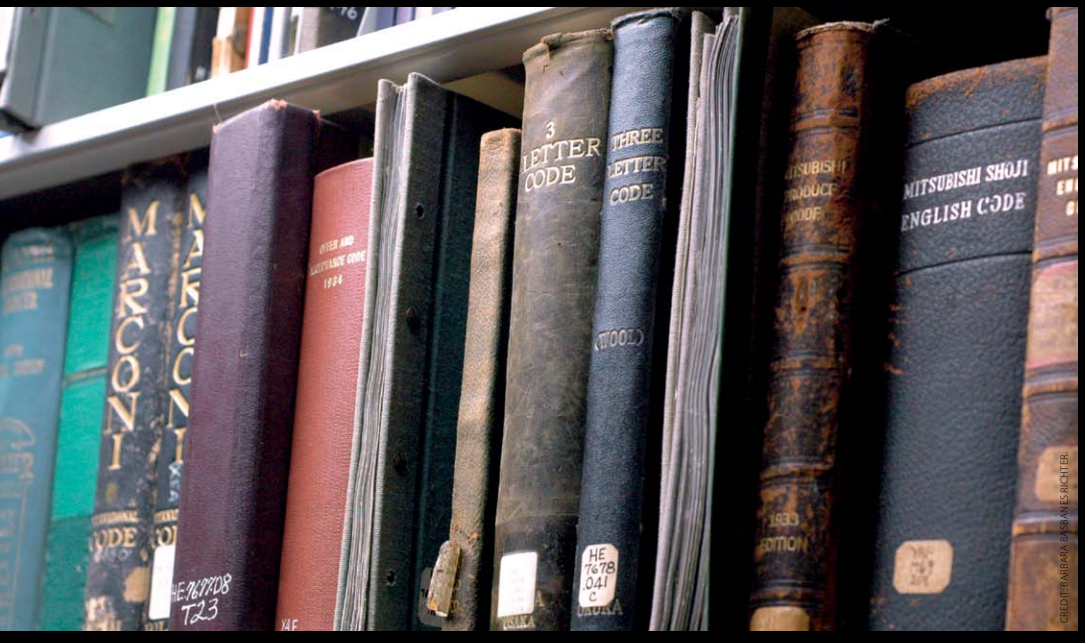
**One of the rare books acquired by David Kahn: Johannes Trithemius' *Polygraphiae Libri Sex* (1518), the first book to use polyalphabetic substitution in code-writing.**

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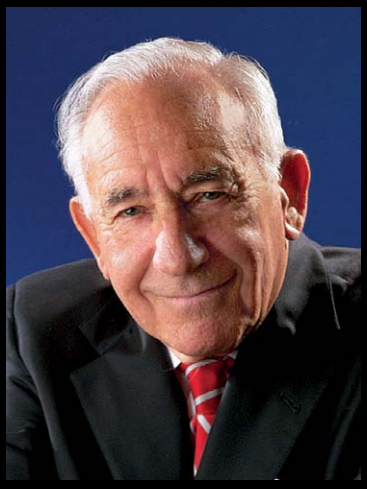

CREDIT: BOB ROWEN

**David Kahn and, at left, his collection of books about codes and cryptology, now at the National Cryptologic Museum.**

become *The Codebreakers*.

To unearth four thousand years of codes, Kahn traveled all over the world, conducting interviews with World War II code breakers, all while collecting books on ciphers. He accumulated thousands of pages of correspondence with intelligence and cryptologic personnel across the globe. Among the rare books Kahn acquired during this period include Johannes Trithemius' *Polygraphiae Libri Sex* (1518), the first book to use polyalphabetic substitution in code-writing. (Polyalphabetic ciphers employ more than one cipher alphabet to encrypt text, contrary to monoalphabetic ciphers that use only one replacement scheme.) Blaise de Vigenère's 1587 *Traicté des Chiffres*, a primer on secret writing, finds itself alongside the *Cryptographia* (1684) by Johannes Friderici. There is also an 1806 letter from Emperor Napoleon to his stepson Prince Eugène with instructions for spying on the Archbishop of Silesia.

Kahn may be described as a scholar-collector, someone whose collection existed initially for research purposes. Now, those books, documents, and interviews—approximately 3,000 unique items—are at the NSA's National Cryptologic Museum (NCM) at Fort Meade, Maryland. He donated the collection with the intent of making the material accessible to researchers. "It makes me feel great that my stuff is useful to other people," he said. I visited NCM curator Rene Stein to see the Kahn collection firsthand. "With a few exceptions, any of these books are available for historians and researchers," she said. "David's gift doubled our holdings, and he is still sending books as he finds them."

Indeed, Kahn still collects, and his purchases go to the NCM almost as soon as he acquires them. I shadowed him at the 2014 New York Antiquarian Book Fair as he sought out material on codes and ciphers. As he was examining an item, former Apple executive Glen Miranker surprised his old friend. Miranker, whose collection on Sherlock Holmes is unsurpassed, has been profiled in this magazine and is a longtime friend of Kahn's. They both serve on the board of governance for the NCM Foundation and have teamed up on occasion to acquire materials for the library. Although Kahn found nothing in New York that day, later that spring in Paris he found a five-volume set called *Des Techniques Cryptographiques et Codes Secrets* by Alain Pelat. They, too, will go off to Fort Meade. "I expect some day they will be regarded as collectibles," he said.

Not far away, in a Virginia suburb of Washington D.C., **Hayden B. Peake** has spent a lifetime working for the intelligence community while also collecting books on the subject. He easily recalled the first book he acquired. "I bought David Kahn's book in 1968 when it came out and took it to Vietnam," Peake said during my recent visit to his library. He has served in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Directorate of Science and Technology and the Directorate of Operations, and now is the curator of the CIA's Historical Intelligence Collection. His reviews of newly published books appear in *Studies in Intelligence,* a quarterly journal published by the agency, part of which is classified and only available to those with the necessary clearances.

That first purchase of Kahn's seminal book has since evolved into a 10,000-volume collection, spanning nearly four hundred years of intelligence gathering. The oldest title is John Russell's *The Spy, discovering the danger of Arminian heresie and Spanish trecherie* (1628), a satirical poem aimed at religious heretics that uses the word 'spy' differently than we would today. *Memoirs of a Secret Service* (1699) by Matthew Smith, is the earliest example of material written by an actual intelligence professional. In it, Smith recounts how he assisted the Earl of Monmouth's attempt to implicate the Duke of Shrewsbury in a failed assassination of King William III.

During the 1940s and 1950s, British double agent Harold Adrian Russell "Kim" Philby was possibly the most notorious member of the spy ring known as the Cambridge Five. While working as a high-ranking official for MI6, he gathered intelligence for the Soviets and eventually defected to Moscow. Peake wrote a bibliographic essay on Philby and acquired around two hundred books on the topic. "Here's a book that has nothing to do with intelligence, but it's here because it belonged to Philby while he was at Trinity [College]," he said. "Somehow, Guy Burgess, another member of the Cambridge Five, got it, and it is signed by Philby. Burgess was one of the five Cambridge spies who also defected in 1951 and lived out the rest of his life in Moscow. To have a book signed by Philby, at Trinity—that's phenomenal."

Peake explained how he was able to prove that handwriting in the book believed to have been Philby's was actually that of his mistress. "The dealer listed this as annotated by Philby. I went through all the annotations, and the X's are next to comments about Philby and his family. These notations here are all about Donald and Melinda McClean, who had also defected to Moscow—but Melinda was having an affair with Philby. When the book came out, they went through it together. I recognized Melinda's handwriting in the sections where her name is mentioned. I provided the dealer with proof that the handwriting was in fact Melinda's and not Philby's, so I got a good deal on it, and it came with this great backstory." Included with the book is a note to Philby from the author: "Here's our book about you."

Duplicates are another sub-category, often noting minor edition changes, but some point to larger forces at work. Former intelligence officers are contractually bound to send documents intended for public consumption to the CIA for pre-publication review. "The most significant recent

purchase was *Operation Dark Heart*, published in 2010 by St. Martin's Press. The author, Lt. Col. Anthony Shaffer, published the book in this form with no black marks on it. Schaffer had sent a draft to the Army, who approved it [for public release], but they didn't send it up the channels in time. Then it was sent to NSA and CIA for review, but it was already published by then," Peake said. Subsequently, the Department of Defense bought up every copy of the first edition and destroyed them because the NSA/CIA review—which had not occurred prior to publication—identified several paragraphs that the spy agencies felt were compromising. The memoir was republished with every mention of the NSA, as well as operational names in Iraq and Afghanistan, blacked out. A third, unexpurgated edition was the last to be published.

Many books in Peake's collection trace their provenance to other high-profile members of the intelligence community. An entire shelf is filled with ex-libri volumes from Allen Dulles, the first civilian director of the CIA. After Dulles died in 1969, Princeton University acquired his library. When Princeton librarians culled its holdings, they contacted Dulles' daughter to see if she would like the books back. She did, and she subsequently sold a shelf's worth to Peake for $200. "Every one of these books had been inscribed to Dulles." One is by a German spy who worked for Dulles in Bern, Switzerland, during World War II and gave him a copy of his memoir.

William "Wild Bill" Donovan, the father of modern intelligence and first spymaster of the Office of Strategic Services, precursor to the CIA, was also a collector of espionage books, some of which are in Peake's collection. One example is a set of oversize books, beautifully bound in red leather called *Stephen's Facsimiles*. (Benjamin Franklin Stephens was a nineteenth-century American lithographer and bibliographer who spent almost thirty years traveling throughout Europe preparing facsimiles of documents pertaining to the Revolutionary War.) Peake points to the bookplate. "These were once Donovan's. I already have a reproduction copy, and normally I wouldn't purchase a second, but the provenance was too good." The books demonstrate, among other things, how Revolutionary intelligence officers gathered and provided information. "This one has a record of the first dead drop instructions. [A dead drop is a special location where spies leave materials for each other.] They are for a man named Edward Bancroft from his controller, Eaton. They instruct him to go to the Tuileries [in Paris] and find a specific tree where he should leave sensitive material, and do that undetected. There's some mention of secret inks as well. All of it relates to American intelligence gathering during the Revolutionary War."

All of Peake's books are meticulously catalogued in a digital database called "Ask Sam," software dating to the Reagan era. "It's functional enough, but I can't give a copy of my records to anyone since the company went belly-up. And I can't make copies of it." Peake's books are slated to go into the special collections at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Like Kahn, Peake envisions a working library. "George Mason is the only university in the area that has a budding intelligence program. But they don't have a lot of historical books." The university offers a minor (to American citizens only) in intelligence analysis, which focuses on research, methods, and analytical tradecraft.

Finally, Peake showed me the book of essays he edited in 1994 to celebrate the eighteenth birthday of **Walter Pforzheimer**, *In the Name of Intelligence: Essays in Honor of Walter Pforzheimer.* Among the contributors are former President George H.W. Bush, David Kahn, *The Sword and the Shield* author Christopher Andrew, and former CIA director and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. "The night we gave it to him, we had as many of the authors there as we could, and they signed copies. There were thirty-seven contributors." Gates signed a "tribute to a venerable bibliophile."

Both Kahn and Peake said that the only way to truly understand people who collect books on intelligence is to visit Pforzheimer's 20,000-volume collection, now at Yale University's Beinecke Library. The definitive profile on his collection was published in *A Gentle Madness* by Nicholas A. Basbanes (who is, I should disclose here, my father). When that book was published in 1995, Pforzheimer was still collecting materials in his Watergate apartment. When he died in 2003, a tractor-trailer hauled everything off to New Haven.

During a recent trip to the Beinecke, I saw some of the high spots of Pforzheimer's collection—most dramatically, the 1777 letter from General George Washington to Colonel Elias Dayton, a commander who established an American spy ring. Pforzheimer told Basbanes that this letter persuaded him to cross the line into serious collecting.

To get a greater sense of his passion, I also listened to Basbanes' 1990 interview with Pforzheimer and heard how much of his bibliomania was informed by the bibliophilic activities of his father and uncle, and how he created two intelligence libraries, the professional one he built at the CIA and his own personal collection that is now at the Beinecke. Beyond the obvious, what ties these collections—Kahn's, Peake's, and Pforzheimer's—together is that each now serves the needs of scholars instead of spies. As Kahn pointed out, "What's the point of keeping George Washington's military plans secret? We won that war. It's long over." &

Writer, translator and lifelong bibliophile **Barbara Basbanes Richter** taught French and Latin in Northern Virginia for seven years before moving to New York, where she now writes. Read her children's book reviews at literarykids.tumblr.com or connect on Twitter @literarykids.