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**D**wood, this jumble of numbers and 2,921 pounds of gold, 5,100 pounds of silver, and \$80,000 worth of jewels could be yours. For more than a hundred years some of the best mathematical minds in America have tried to decipher this code and failed. In fact, it has become the largest, most costly treasure hunt in US history. But don't let that deter you. Cryptanalysts say a second-grader could break the ciphers if he lucked in on the documents on which they are based.

On September 8, a high-powered group of people will assemble in Washington to pit their wits against the writer of the three codes, a devious nineteenth-century Virginia gentleman by the name of Thomas Beale, who was a contemporary of Thomas Jefferson. At stake is more than \$11 million, the treasure's value today, and the honor of twentieth-century technology and brains.

At the one-day symposium of the 200-member Beale Cypher Association will be big-name computer experts—people like Dr. Carl Hammer, director of computer sciences at Sperry Univac, and Per Holst, head of research at the Massachusetts Foxboro Laboratories, one of the world's leading industrial data-processing firms. There will be top cryptanalysts from the National Security Agency and the CIA, like Carl Nelson, now retired, who won recognition during World War II working on Japanese and German codes. US District Judge George L. Hart Jr. is a member, as are Governor Albert Quie of Minnesota and David Kahn, author of *The Code Breakers*. What these prestigious intellects have in common is an obsession with unbroken codes and a dream of treasure in the hills of Bedford County, Virginia.

Thomas J. Beale, the man responsible for this impressive meeting of minds, was born about 1792 into a distinguished Virginia family. In 1668, King Charles II of England appointed a Beale ancestor commander of Point Comfort at the entrance of Norfolk Harbor. Though one contemporary described Beale as "a gentleman well educated, evidently of good family and with popular manners," he was, in fact, a no-good, gun-slinging genius who was constantly bailed out of scrapes by his more respectable brothers. Still, women loved him. A broad-shouldered six-footer, with swarthy complexion and jet-black hair worn slightly longer than fashionable, he was said to be "a model of manly beauty, favored by ladies and envied by men."

Indeed, the Beale treasure story may have been triggered when the Virginian

# TREASURE

## Beyond Your Wildest Dreams All You Have to Do Is Crack This Code

By Ruth Daniloff

BEALE CYPHER No. 1

CODE NO. 1

THE CODE BEHINDS THE GREAT GREATNESS OF THE GREAT GREAT THE "THE CODE" BEHINDS THE GREATNESS OF THE TREASURE IS HERE.

THE CODE BEHINDS THE GREAT GREATNESS OF THE GREAT GREAT THE "THE CODE" BEHINDS THE GREATNESS OF THE TREASURE IS HERE.

BEALE CYPHER No. 2

CODE NO. 2

THE CODE BEHINDS THE GREAT GREATNESS OF THE GREAT GREAT THE "THE CODE" BEHINDS THE GREATNESS OF THE TREASURE IS HERE.

THE CODE BEHINDS THE GREAT GREATNESS OF THE GREAT GREAT THE "THE CODE" BEHINDS THE GREATNESS OF THE TREASURE IS HERE.

BEALE CYPHER No. 3

CODE NO. 3

THE CODE BEHINDS THE GREAT GREATNESS OF THE GREAT GREAT THE "THE CODE" BEHINDS THE GREATNESS OF THE TREASURE IS HERE.

THE CODE BEHINDS THE GREAT GREATNESS OF THE GREAT GREAT THE "THE CODE" BEHINDS THE GREATNESS OF THE TREASURE IS HERE.

These ciphers may hold the key to \$11 million in buried treasure.

encountered woman trouble. There are several stories—some documented, some not. One story holds that in the spring of 1817 Beale used a pistol to settle an argument over a woman with a Fincaastle, Virginia, neighbor. Believing he had killed the man, Beale lit out for the frontier to escape prosecution. Beale's version of the story was that he and "thirty individuals of good character" were seeking danger and adventure, and left on a two-year hunting expedition for buffalo and grizzlies.

Whichever, a year later on the western plains, when Beale and his hunting cronies were preparing supper in a small ravine 250 to 300 miles north of Santa Fe, they discovered a strange substance in the rock. "Upon showing it to others," Beale wrote, "it was pronounced gold, and much excitement was the natural consequence."

In two letters, Thomas Beale described the gold find, its journey back to Virginia in two wagons, and its subsequent burial. He then placed the letters in an iron strongbox along with three coded messages. In March 1822, he left the box

safekeeping, instructing him not to open the box until 1835, and then disappeared. Morriss, who had fallen on hard times due to "heavy purchases of tobacco at ruinous prices," was the innkeeper of the Washington Hotel in Lynchburg, where he entertained such illustrious figures as Chief Justice John Marshall, Andrew Jackson, and Henry Clay. Morriss finally opened the box in 1845 but could not decipher the numbers on the scraps of paper he found there. In 1862, a year before his death, he handed the box and its contents over to James Ward, a trusted family friend.

After exhausting effort, Ward succeeded in cracking cipher number two using a key based on the numbering of words in the Declaration of Independence. Beale had numbered each word of the Declaration from 1 to 1322 and then used the word's number as the cipher equivalent for the first letter of the words in his own message. Reading other people's mail was a common practice in those days, so codes frequently were used in writing letters. The correspondence of President

To attend the symposium on September 8, contact Dr. Carl Hammer, Beale Cypher Association, 2121 Wisconsin Avenue.

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Retired CIA officer Carl Nelson with two tools of the treasure-hunting trade: a metal detector and a topographical map of the treasure area.

though," laughs Frank Aaron, a Florida communications consultant who is writing a book on the treasure, which will include a how-to-get-the-treasure guide for future home-computer buffs.

Historical data are essential for solving the ciphers, says Carl Nelson, the veteran intelligence officer who has spent more than ten years trying to verify the story of Beale's expedition. Did Beale go west, as he claimed? Did he find gold? If so, what did he do with it?

Nelson's sleuthing has taken him all over the country, from Virginia courthouses to Kansas, Missouri, Texas, New Mexico. Name a record and he has investigated it: old newspapers, steamboat schedules, wagon-train routes, hotel guest lists, jewelry store receipts, church registries, and tax, school, and bank records. He even went to Spain to comb the Old Colonial Library in Cádiz for traces of Thomas Beale in the Spanish southwest territories. So far, with the exception of an April 1, 1820, notice in the *Missouri Intelligencer* saying a letter awaited "Thomas Beall," Nelson has found no conclusive evidence that Beale was where he said he was at the time. On the other hand, he has found no evidence that he wasn't.

"I tend to think it a hoax," says Nel-

stealing gold from his brothers."

Indeed, if Thomas Beale were put on a twentieth-century couch, psychoanalysts no doubt would conclude he suffered from unresolved sibling rivalry. After all, his brothers Charles and William owned 17,000 acres along the James River and the largest gold mine in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Thomas, according to an 1835 Fauquier County tax record, was taxed ten cents on his sole possession: a horse. He died a pauper in Montross, Virginia, in 1851.

"It's a puzzle. That's why it's so fascinating," Nelson says. He takes a photograph out of an envelope. Hoax or no hoax, his eyes light up. "This," he says, pointing to a rocky ledge surrounded by trees, "is where the treasure lies. It fits perfectly. As soon as I find time, I am going to dig there. I'm pretty sure it's the right solution."

And when technology and intellect are exhausted, the Beale Cypher Association is not averse to nonscientific methods of research. Scheduled to speak at this month's symposium is Frank Speh, a retired Department of Agriculture employee who will present a paper to the learned assembly on psychic treasure dowsing.

So far, Thomas J. Beale Esq. has the

One "solution," for example, gave instructions to go into a deep water pit in a disused mine on Purgatory Stream, 45 miles northeast of Roanoke; all the digging party found was a ninety-pound chunk of colonial-era iron ore, a treasure in its own right. Another fortune hunter wasn't so lucky. His metal detector went berserk over a rocky area in Bedford County, where his "solution" located the treasure. He hired guards, fenced off the area, and brought in a bulldozer—only to unearth a 1930s car.

Colonel J.J. Holland, a retired army officer, is convinced he has the correct solution, which he plans to reveal at this month's symposium. "Only the treasure has been removed," he says. "Probably by Beale himself." He is currently unraveling the last part of code number three, which he claims relates to the murder and mutilation of Beale's thirty friends. "They must have been stealing the gold. That's why their hands were cut off," he says.

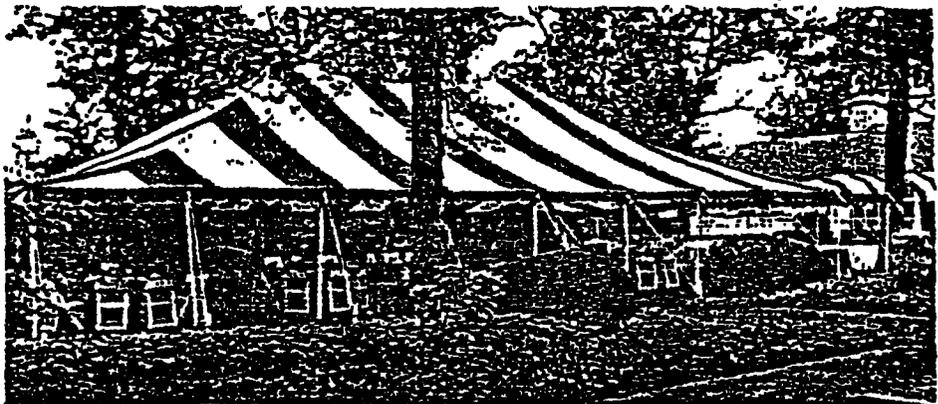
"Let's face it," laughs Hammer. "We are two hundred crackpots, but we have a lot of fun."

Farmers and landowners in Bedford and Botetourt counties, Virginia, are not so amused. They are exasperated by the "crackpots" who tramp their property with magnetometers, Geiger counters, and metal detectors. Cattle fall into holes left by bulldozers. Dynamite explosions frighten people. And, worst of all, under Virginia law the treasure belongs to the finder—even if he trespassed to obtain it—unless the original owner's direct descendant is identified within a year. Because Thomas Beale left no children, his fortune is up for grabs. Now that cheaper and better metal detectors have made treasure hunting a fast-growing American pastime, Bedford County locals fear an invasion. That's why they take potshots at strangers from time to time.

The big question, of course, is whether the treasure exists. Carl Hammer is sure it does. "Otherwise I wouldn't be doing all this work. I may be a crazy scientist, you know, but I'm not that crazy. Someone came back with two wagons of gold. Why would anyone have encoded three such elaborate ciphers otherwise?"

Author David Kahn, on the other hand, is not so sure. "It's unlikely that treasure in that amount could have come back from the West and been hidden in the Blue Ridge Mountains without having been discovered."

In the Beale Cypher Association, non-believers can be distinguished from believers by their willingness to share information. "If someone believes in the treasure, you can bet your life they are



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coded segments which, if deciphered, could throw new light on the history of his administration.

Finally, in 1885, his health broken and his family fortune dissipated by the effort, Ward gave up on cracking codes number one and three and decided to go public by printing a pamphlet of the Beale papers. To future treasure hunters, however, he issued a warning: "Devote only such time as can be spared from your legitimate business to the task, and if you cannot spare the time, let the matter alone."

Sound advice, but not the kind taken by the Beale Cypher Association or the thousands of other fortune hunters who have spent years scouring the countryside around Roanoke since 1885. Like obsessive gamblers or crossword-puzzle fanatics, they never give up.

"I can't leave old ciphers alone. I just love 'em," confesses Carl Nelson, as he sits in a basement office in his Arlington home surrounded by boxes of computer printout. Nelson combats cipher addiction by limiting his work on the Beale mystery to the winter months.

Suggest to Carl Hammer, who for fifteen years has been feeding millions of letter and number combinations into successive generations of Univac computers, that Thomas Beale has beaten the Univac 1108, and he bristles: "The computer has come up with solutions," he insists, "but not the correct ones."

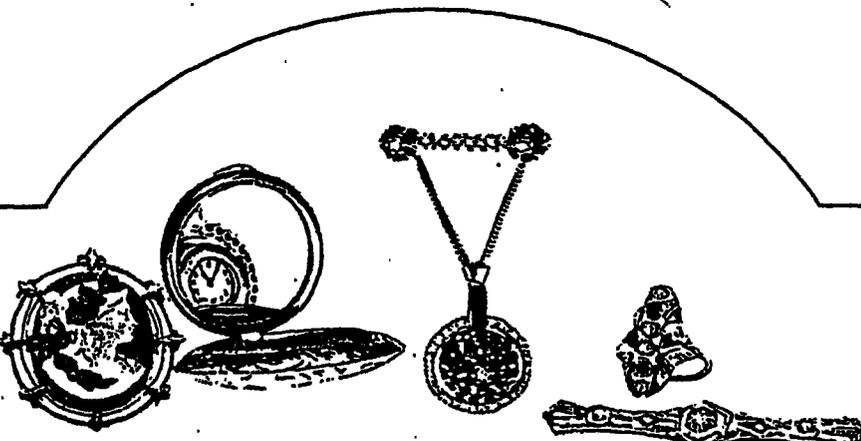
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**"Devote only such time as can be spared from your legitimate business, and if you cannot spare the time, let the matter alone."**

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Shakespeare's plays, the Bible, "The Star-Spangled Banner," the Louisiana Purchase, several versions of the Magna Carta, and many other documents and books familiar to Beale have been analyzed as keys to the code and rejected. What Dr. Hammer and the Univac 1108 have discovered, however, is that the codes are genuine; they are not just random numbers Beale pulled out of a hat after a night's drinking.

The trouble with multi-key, multi-alphabet codes like the Beale ciphers is that you can obtain different "solutions," depending on which document you use as the key, but only one can lead you to the treasure. Every time you have a "solution" you hot-foot it out to the Blue Ridge Mountains and try to match it to the geography with the help of histori-



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