



Letter from the Boston Stone Jail, 1775

The large flat square cardboard package delivered to me today is from my sister Liz. I open it carefully, marveling at the cost of mailing it. Thirty-eight dollars she paid, which included insurance. What could be so valuable?

Inside the cardboard is a glossy plastic sleeve, and within that lie large, long pages, tan and so brittle with age that cracks mar their surface. Delicate handwriting spiderwebs across the pages, the ink faded to a dull brown.

I pull the two sheets out, holding my breath. “My dear boys” are the first words of the elegant, antique script. I turn the paper over and see the date, the flowing signature. “September 21, 1775. James Lovell.” I gasp. I know this writing, the wording, the content. I have read this letter— though I have never seen it before.

My sister had told me she found something, and she said it would be a surprise.

Was it ever that. I read the letter quickly. In good parenting fashion, Lovell’s letter warns his children to be well behaved, reminds them of God’s love for them, asks them to be kind to one another. He concludes, “Both my dear boys, be assured of the tokens of the continued love of your affectionate father.”

What anxiety, affection, and hope he expressed so long ago! And I know the story.

I have spent months researching the American patriot James Lovell. Lovell first beckoned to me from the pages of my grandmother’s journal. I followed the story of my great-great-great grandfather to Boston, then

to Halifax, NS, then to Washington, DC, and finally to Ithaca, NY.

An eighteenth century schoolmaster of the Boston Latin School, political prisoner, and statesman, James Lovell fell under suspicion of spying for the Americans following the Battle of Bunker Hill. Thrown into the Boston Stone Jail in June of 1775, he suffered the heat, flies, and filthy conditions of the British jail that summer and winter.

From the Boston Stone Jail, Lovell wrote to his two boys, Jemmy and Johnny, ages twelve and thirteen. The boys stayed with a family friend at Cambridge while the British occupied Boston.

In early spring, Lovell was taken to a British prison in Halifax, Nova Scotia, when General Howe evacuated Boston. Eight months later, in November of 1776, he was exchanged with a prisoner at the request of General George Washington. Lovell then joined the Second Continental Congress, where he served for five years as clerk and Secretary of the Committee for Foreign Affairs, longer than any other member of this war-time governing body.

During my research I obtained a copy of Lovell's letter to his boys from Clements Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan, written from his jail cell in Boston. Now, what I held in my hand was the original of that letter. The letter from the Clements Library was written in the even handwriting of a clerk. But here was the real thing, the beautiful antique script graceful and elegant.

My sister explains she found the old letter in a box salvaged from our grandmother's house in Andover, Massachusetts. Only a family's love would save treasures such as this for the future.

How did the research library obtain a copy of the letter? I must surmise that someone investigating James Lovell's story visited my grandmother's house, recorded the letter, then returned the original to the family. Possibly it was Helen Jones, who received her doctorate from Columbia University for writing *James Lovell in the Continental Congress, 1777-1782*, the only known longer work on James Lovell.

Amazingly enough, in the hundreds of pieces of research I gathered in my pursuit of the story of James Lovell, books, first person accounts, letters, and records from the Colonial British Office, I found no other piece that showed the deep feelings this revolutionary had for his children. The letter tells me more about the love and affection he held for his family than any other portion of the record. The actual letter James Lovell had written in that pest-ridden jail so many years ago speaks volumes of his love and loyalty.

The letter reveals the power of love. Following this story as I have for over three years, writing the story into a novel illuminating James's experience,

titled *The Remarkable Cause: A Novel of James Lovell in the Crucible of the Revolution*, I know this letter holds the secret to his efforts to help his country, his love for his family.