



# RELICS

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## REACHING BACK IN TIME

“It’s a reproduction!”  
“It can’t be real!”  
“My goodness!”  
“What if it is...”

So were the exclamations of Society volunteers a few months ago as they ogled a framed letter resting on a table in the Society’s rear meeting room—a few minutes after some fellow volunteers had brought it down from the attic above. Somehow they all knew they were in the presence of something special and the chattering stopped abruptly.

The letter was dated January 12, 1776. It was addressed to “Dear Sister”—Miss Betsy Ivers at New York—and in perfect stylized penmanship reflecting its era, signed “Dear Sister affectionately yours, Mary Smith.”

This was only a few days after the Continental Congress passed a resolution calling on colonial committees to indoctrinate those “honest and well-meaning, but uninformed people” by expounding to them the “origin, nature and extent of the present controversy.” The body also calls for confirmed Tories to be disarmed and confined, if necessary.

Mary’s words (see letter) reflect a major concern for her sister and her family’s well being during those explosive and uncertain times. Were they Tories? Were they Patriots? Who was Mary Smith? Where was Mary located when she wrote this letter to Betsy? How did our Society end up owning such a precious letter? These and so many other questions came streaming into the volunteers’ minds and a discussion ensued.

They agreed that the first thing to do was to let our members know that we had found this rare item

and that we would keep them informed as to our future findings. That we did in the November 2008 issue of *Relics*. We said that we would prepare an article for this edition—and so we have. We hope you will find our initial research as exciting as we have.

The first thing we discovered was that Mary was by blood and marriage connected to many famous families of the American Revolution. The clues and leads we found were endless and we realized almost immediately that we had to create boundaries for what would be contained in this article. We decided that our initial attempt would focus on Mary, her sister Elizabeth, “Betsy,” and their father Thomas Ivers.

Our search led us to the Society’s library and archives, other libraries, interested genealogists and the Internet. The new *Early American Newspapers* site on the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society’s (NYG&B) website was of paramount importance to our search. Now, thanks to wonderful technological advantages, a member of the NYG&B no longer has to travel into New York City to comb through early newspapers. It can be done from the comfort of one’s own home.

Mary Ivers Smith was 23 years old when she penned the letter to Betsy. Born in New York City, on October 5, 1753, Mary was one of six children born of Thomas and Hannah Ivers. She would die at her parent’s house 22 days short of her 50th birthday on September 13, 1803 at Corlears Hook (where the island of Manhattan bulges to form a “hook” on the East River). The following was printed in the September 15, 1803 issue of the *Morning Chronicle*:

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