Washington had Doctor Church taken into custody, and he sought someone who knew how to solve secret ciphers. Washington found a few patriots skilled at solving enciphered messages. One was Reverend Samuel West, chaplain to a Massachusetts army unit. The other was Elbridge Gerry, an officer in the Massachusetts militia.

The “letter” gave the British information about the numbers of soldiers in the Revolutionary Army, and their casualties in a recent battle. It also told the British that the revolutionary spirit was growing in North America.