

# William Short Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the  
Library of Congress

Prepared by Frederick Graboski



Manuscript Division, Library of  
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2009

Contact information: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Finding aid encoded by Library of  
Congress Manuscript Division, 2010

Finding aid URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010121>

# Collection Summary

Title: William Short Papers

Span Dates: 1778-1853

ID No.: MSS39891

Creator: Short, William, 1759-1849

Extent: 20,000 items; 64 containers plus 5 oversize; 26 linear feet; 32 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Secretary to President Thomas Jefferson, diplomat, and landowner. Diplomatic, financial, and personal correspondence, financial and business papers, memorabilia, and other papers relating to Short's activities as secretary to Jefferson, his diplomatic missions, and business interests.

## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### People

Adams, John, 1735-1826--Correspondence.

Carmichael, William, d. 1795--Correspondence.

Fulton, Robert, 1765-1815--Correspondence.

Gallatin, Albert, 1761-1849--Correspondence.

Godoy, Manuel de, príncipe de la Paz, 1767-1851--Correspondence.

Grayson, William, 1736-1790--Correspondence.

Hamilton, Alexander, 1757-1804--Correspondence.

Hull, Isaac, 1773-1843--Correspondence.

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826--Correspondence.

Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834--Correspondence.

Madison, James, 1751-1836--Correspondence.

Monroe, James, 1758-1831--Correspondence.

Morris, Gouverneur, 1752-1816--Correspondence.

Nelson, William, 1760-1813--Correspondence.

Paine, Thomas, 1737-1809--Correspondence.

Pinckney, Thomas, 1750-1828--Correspondence.

Randolph, Edmund, 1753-1813--Correspondence.

Robinson, M. M. (Merritt M.), d. 1850--Correspondence.

Rutledge, John, 1739-1800--Correspondence.

Short, Charles Wilkins, 1794-1863--Correspondence.

Short, William, 1759-1849.

Skipwith, Fulwar, 1765-1839--Correspondence.

Tocqueville, Alexis de, 1805-1859--Correspondence.

Washington, Bushrod, 1762-1829--Correspondence.

### Organizations

American Colonization Society.

### Subjects

Canals.

Debts, Public.

Finance, Public.

Finance.

Investments.  
Land speculation--Kentucky.  
Land speculation--New York (State)  
Land speculation--Ohio.  
Land speculation--Virginia.  
Railroads.

Places  
France--Foreign relations--United States.  
France--History--Revolution, 1789-1799.  
Netherlands--Foreign relations--United States.  
Russia--Foreign relations--United States.  
Spain--Foreign relations--United States.  
United States--Foreign relations--France.  
United States--Foreign relations--Netherlands.  
United States--Foreign relations--Russia.  
United States--Foreign relations--Spain.  
Virginia--Politics and government.

Occupations  
Diplomats.  
Secretaries, Presidential.

## Administrative Information

### Provenance

The papers of William Short, secretary to Thomas Jefferson, diplomat, and landowner, were purchased by the Library of Congress in 1898, 1910, and 1944.

### Processing History

The William Short Papers were processed and prepared for microfilming in 1977. The first two purchases were interfiled and bound chronologically in fifty-two volumes. The finding aid was revised in 2009.

### Related Material

A related collection of Short papers was acquired at the time of the 1944 purchase and is part of the Short-Harrison-Symmes Families collection in the Manuscript Division of the Library.

### Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of William Short is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

### Access and Restrictions

The papers of William Short are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

### Microfilm

A microfilm edition of these papers is available on thirty-two reels. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition.

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, William Short Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1759, Sept. 30	Born, Surry County, Va.
1776	Founder with others of Phi Beta Kappa (president, 1778-1781)
1779	Graduated, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.
1783-1784	Member, Executive Council of Virginia
1785-1789	Private secretary to Thomas Jefferson and later secretary of American legation, Paris, France
1789-1792	Chargé d'affaires, Paris, France
1790	Commissioned by Alexander Hamilton to handle debt funding
1792-1793	Minister at Hague, Netherlands
1793-1795	Joint commissioner with William Carmichael and later minister resident, Madrid, Spain
1795-1802	Resided in Paris, France
1802	Returned to the United States
1809	Appointment as minister to Russia rejected by the U.S. Senate
1809-1810	Resided in Paris, France
1810	Established residence in Philadelphia, Pa.
1810-1849	Amassed a fortune through investments and extensive land purchases
1849, Dec. 5	Died, Philadelphia, Pa.

## Scope and Content Note

The papers of William Short (1759-1849) span the years 1778-1853. They include a large amount of material dated between 1785 and 1795, the years of Short's diplomatic service in western Europe, as well as extensive documentation of his business activities after 1810. His papers consist chiefly of letters received, but there are also some copies of letters sent, 1785-1798, as well as various financial papers, including statements, receipts, checkbooks, and ledgers. Much of his correspondence while he was in Europe is with American diplomatic and political figures. There are also letters during this period from various European officials, chiefly in French or Spanish.

The collection is organized in [Bound Correspondence and Other Papers](#), [Correspondence](#), [Business Papers](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Oversize](#) series.

In 1790 Alexander Hamilton entrusted Short with the negotiation and management of European loans to fund the public debt of the United States, and the two men conducted an extensive correspondence on the subject. Other topics in Short's correspondence during his European years are conditions in Virginia under the Articles of Confederation, the events of the French Revolution, and incidents pertaining to American diplomatic relations with France and Spain. Short's correspondence reveals the obstacles to the conduct of foreign relations resulting from the vagaries of trans-Atlantic communication in that era. While residing in Paris following his diplomatic service, and again following his abortive mission to Russia (the Senate refused to confirm the nomination of any minister to Saint Petersburg), Short established a wide circle of foreign friends, with whom he conducted a correspondence for many years thereafter, chiefly in French.

After his return to the United States in 1810, Short successfully pursued a career in investments that resulted eventually in a personal fortune of over one million dollars. He speculated in land in Ohio, Kentucky, and western New York and Virginia; he bought stock in canals, railroads, and banks; he held mortgages and loaned large sums at interest. His Dutch bankers speculated in American bonds on his account. These varied business activities required an extensive correspondence with his land agents (including his nephew, John Cleves Short), bankers, stockbrokers, and debtors. In addition to these letters, his business papers also include bills, accounts, financial statements, checkbooks, and ledgers. Short's business papers provide considerable insight into the business practices and problems of an investor in the first half of the nineteenth century. They also include some information on Short's moral and financial support of the program of the American Colonization Society.

A significant number of Short's papers consist of his correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, who was, variously, his employer, adviser, and friend. Other correspondents of note include John Adams, James Madison, James Monroe (a classmate at William and Mary), Alexander Hamilton, Albert Gallatin, Don Diego de Gardoqui, Manuel de Godoy, the marquis de Lafayette, Alexis de Tocqueville, Michel-Guillaume St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, Thomas Paine, William Carmichael, William Grayson, Fulwar Skipwith (his nephew), Gouverneur Morris, John Rutledge, Bushrod Washington, Nicholas Trist, Robert Fulton, Edmund Randolph, Thomas Pinckney, Issac Hull, and two Virginia friends, William Nelson and Merit Robinson. There are also a few letters from his nephew, Charles W. Short, a prominent botanist, and other members of his family.

## Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in five series:

- [Bound Correspondence and Other Papers, 1778-1849](#)
- [Correspondence, 1783-1849](#)
- [Business Papers, 1782-1853](#)
- [Miscellany, 1779-1836](#)
- [Oversize, 1790-1831](#)

## Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-52 REEL 1-22	<u>Bound Correspondence and Other Papers, 1778-1849</u>  Official and general correspondence in bound volumes, including some copies of letters sent, and business papers and related material. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 53-56 REEL 23-26	<u>Correspondence, 1783-1849</u>  Official, general, business, and family correspondence. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 57-64 REEL 27-32	<u>Business Papers, 1782-1853</u>  Bills, accounts, receipts, and other financial papers. Arranged chronologically, followed by bankbooks, checkbooks, and ledgers Arranged chronologically, followed by bankbooks, checkbooks, and ledgers
BOX 64 REEL 32	<u>Miscellany, 1779-1836</u>  Short's catalog of Thomas Jefferson's library, list of Short's library, and extracts of letters and other miscellany. Arranged by type of material, followed by an oversize box containing Short's college diploma, his diplomatic commissions, and a letter.
BOX OV 1-OV 5	<u>Oversize, 1790-1831</u>  A report, maps, diplomas, diplomatic commission, and letter from Edward Everett. Arranged and described according to the series, container, or folder from which the items were removed. Oversize items were filmed in the location from which they were removed.

# Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 17,058

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-52 REEL 1-22	Bound Correspondence and Other Papers, 1778-1849  Official and general correspondence in bound volumes, including some copies of letters sent, and business papers and related material. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1 REEL 1	1778, July 8-1787, Jan. 7
BOX 2 REEL 1	1787, Jan. 8-June 24
BOX 3 REEL 1	1787, June 25-1788, Feb. 12
BOX 4 REEL 2	1788, Feb. 13-1789, June 30
BOX 5 REEL 2	1789, July 1-Dec. 28
BOX 6 REEL 3	1789, Dec. 29-1790, Apr. 11
BOX 7 REEL 3	1790
BOX 7 REEL 3	Apr. 12-June 25
BOX 8 REEL 3-4	June 26-Aug. 20
BOX 9 REEL 4	Aug. 21-Oct. 20
BOX 10 REEL 4	Oct. 21-Dec. 5
BOX 11 REEL 5	1790, Dec. 6-1791, Jan. 15
BOX 12 REEL 5	1791
BOX 12 REEL 5	Jan. 16-Feb. 17
BOX 13 REEL 5	Feb. 18-Apr. 13
BOX 14 REEL 6	Apr. 14-June 7
BOX 15 REEL 6	June 8-July 22
BOX 16 REEL 6	July 23-Sept. 13
BOX 17	Sept. 14-Nov. 24

# Bound Correspondence and Other Papers, 1778-1849

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
REEL 7	
BOX 18	1791 Nov. 25-1792, Jan. 25 <a href="#"><i>See also Oversize</i></a>
REEL 7	
BOX 19	1792
REEL 7	
BOX 19	Jan. 26-May 1
REEL 7	
BOX 20	May 12-Aug. 16
REEL 8	
BOX 21	Aug. 17-Oct. 22
REEL 8	
BOX 22	1792, Oct. 23-1793, Feb. 16
REEL 8	
BOX 23	1793, Feb. 17-July 12
REEL 9	
BOX 24	1793, July 13-1794, Jan. 9
REEL 9	
BOX 25	1794, Jan. 10-July 8
REEL 10	
BOX 26	1794, July 9-Nov. 5
REEL 10	
BOX 27	1794, Nov. 6-1795, Jan. 12
REEL 10	
BOX 28	1795, Jan. 13-Apr. 28
REEL 11	
BOX 29	1795, Apr. 29-Sept. 3
REEL 11	
BOX 30	1795, Sept. 4-1798, Aug. 24
REEL 11-12	
BOX 31	1798, Aug. 25-1802, Dec. 27
REEL 12	
BOX 32	1802, Dec. 28-1805, July 13 <a href="#"><i>See also Oversize</i></a>
REEL 12-13	
BOX 33	1805, July 14-1807, July 15
REEL 13	
BOX 34	1807, July 16-1810, Mar. 7
REEL 13-14	
BOX 35	1810, Mar. 8-1811, June 18
REEL 13-14	
BOX 36	1811, June 19-1813, Mar. 24 <a href="#"><i>See also Oversize</i></a>
REEL 14-15	
BOX 37	1813, Mar. 25-1815, Dec. 15
REEL 15	
BOX 38	1815, Dec. 16-1818, Jan. 22
REEL 15	
BOX 39	1818, Jan. 23-1819, Dec. 7
REEL 16	
BOX 40	1819, Dec. 8-1821, June 16
REEL 16	
BOX 41	1821, June 17-1823, Apr. 22

# Bound Correspondence and Other Papers, 1778-1849

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
REEL 17	
BOX 42	1823, Apr. 23-1824, Nov. 26
REEL 17	
BOX 43	1824, Nov. 27-1826, June 20
REEL 18	
BOX 44	1826, June 21-1828, Apr. 2
REEL 18	
BOX 45	1828, Apr. 3-1829, Nov. 13
REEL 19	
BOX 46	1829, Nov. 14-1831, Nov. 2
REEL 19	
BOX 47	1831, Nov. 3-1833, Nov. 4
REEL 20	
BOX 48	1833, Nov. 5-1835, May 17
REEL 20	
BOX 49	1835, May 18-1837, Aug. 10
REEL 21	
BOX 50	1837, Aug. 11-1839, Dec. 5
REEL 21	
BOX 51	1839, Dec. 6-1842, Dec. 30
REEL 22	
BOX 52	1842, Dec. 31-1849, Nov. 7, undated <u><i>See also Oversize</i></u>
REEL 22	
BOX 53-56	Correspondence, 1783-1849
REEL 23-26	
	Official, general, business, and family correspondence. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 53	1783-1814
REEL 23	
	(6 folders)
BOX 54	1815-1824
REEL 24	
	(7 folders)
BOX 55	1827-1837
REEL 25	
	(5 folders)
BOX 56	1838-1849
REEL 26	
	(6 folders)
BOX 57-64	Business Papers, 1782-1853
REEL 27-32	
	Bills, accounts, receipts, and other financial papers. Arranged chronologically, followed by bankbooks, checkbooks, and ledgers Arranged chronologically, followed by bankbooks, checkbooks, and ledgers
BOX 57	Accounts, bills, and receipts
REEL 27	

## Business Papers, 1782-1853

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 57 REEL 27	1782-1818  (10 folders)
BOX 58 REEL 28	1819-1827  (9 folders)
BOX 59 REEL 28-29	1828-1834  (7 folders)
BOX 60 REEL 29	1835-1842  (8 folders)
BOX 61 REEL 30	1843-1853, undated (including estate)  (4 folders)
BOX 61 REEL 30	Miscellaneous personal accounts; negative photocopies; and other financial papers, chiefly fragments, 1792-1803, undated
BOX 61 REEL 30	Bankbooks
BOX 61 REEL 30	Checkbooks
BOX 62 REEL 31	(2 folders) (5 folders)
BOX 63 REEL 31-32	(2 folders)
BOX 63 REEL 31-32	Ledgers
BOX 64 REEL 32	(2 folders) Ledger, 1834-1849
BOX 64 REEL 32	Miscellany, 1779-1836  Short's catalog of Thomas Jefferson's library, list of Short's library, and extracts of letters and other miscellany. Arranged by type of material, followed by an oversize box containing Short's college diploma, his diplomatic commissions, and a letter.
BOX 64 REEL 32	Short's catalog of Jefferson's library with a bound negative photocopy
BOX 64 REEL 32	List of Short's library
BOX 64 REEL 32	Extracts of letters, incomplete manuscripts, and negative photocopies, 1785-1836, undated
BOX 64 REEL 32	Diploma, William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Va., 1779, Apr. 15 <i><u>See Oversize</u></i>
BOX 64 REEL 32	Diplomatic commissions, 1790-1808 <i><u>See Oversize</u></i>

Miscellany, 1779-1836

*Container*

*Contents*

---

BOX 64 REEL 32	Letter of Edward Everett concerning the founding of Phi Beta Kappa, 1831 <i>See Oversize</i>
BOX OV 1-OV 5	Oversize, 1790-1831 A report, maps, diplomas, diplomatic commission, and letter from Edward Everett. Arranged and described according to the series, container, or folder from which the items were removed. Oversize items were filmed in the location from which they were removed.
BOX OV 1	Correspondence and Other Papers
BOX OV 1	Report of the secretary of the Treasury, 1792, Jan. 23 (Container 18)
BOX OV 2	Map of land belonging to I. B. Church, New York, 1803 (Container 32)
BOX OV 3	Platt map of Ohio lands, 1813 (Container 36)
BOX OV 4	Map of Town No. 6 in Scriba Patent, undated (Container 52)
BOX OV 5	Business Papers (Container 64)
BOX OV 5	Diploma, William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Va., 1779, Apr. 15 1779, Apr. 15
BOX OV 5	Diplomatic commissions, 1790-1808
BOX OV 5	Letter of Edward Everett concerning the founding of Phi Beta Kappa, 1831