

William Short Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2009

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm77039891>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010121>

Prepared by Frederick Graboski

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2010

Collection Summary

Title: William Short Papers

Span Dates: 1778-1853

ID No.: MSS39891

Creator: Short, William, 1759-1849

Extent: 20,000 items

Extent: 64 containers plus 5 oversize

Extent: 26 linear feet

Extent: 32 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm77039891>

Summary: 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 LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Adams, John, 1735-1826--Correspondence.

Carmichael, William, -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.), -1850--Correspondence.

Rutledge, John, 1739-1800--Correspondence.

Short family.

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.

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

Date	Event
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

Container	Series
BOX 1-52 REEL 1-22	<p><u>Bound Correspondence and Other Papers, 1778-1849</u></p> <p>Official and general correspondence in bound volumes, including some copies of letters sent, and business papers and related material. Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 53-56 REEL 23-26	<p><u>Correspondence, 1783-1849</u></p> <p>Official, general, business, and family correspondence. Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 57-64 REEL 27-32	<p><u>Business Papers, 1782-1853</u></p> <p>Bills, accounts, receipts, and other financial papers. Arranged chronologically, followed by bankbooks, checkbooks, and ledgers Arranged chronologically, followed by bankbooks, checkbooks, and ledgers</p>
BOX 64 REEL 32	<p><u>Miscellany, 1779-1836</u></p> <p>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.</p>
BOX OV 1-OV 5	<p><u>Oversize, 1790-1831</u></p> <p>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.</p>

Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 17,058

Container	Contents
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 REEL 7	Sept. 14-Nov. 24
BOX 18 REEL 7	1791 Nov. 25-1792, Jan. 25 <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 19 REEL 7	1792
BOX 19 REEL 7	Jan. 26-May 1
BOX 20 REEL 8	May 12-Aug. 16
BOX 21 REEL 8	Aug. 17-Oct. 22
BOX 22 REEL 8	1792, Oct. 23-1793, Feb. 16
BOX 23 REEL 9	1793, Feb. 17-July 12
BOX 24 REEL 9	1793, July 13-1794, Jan. 9
BOX 25 REEL 10	1794, Jan. 10-July 8
BOX 26 REEL 10	1794, July 9-Nov. 5
BOX 27 REEL 10	1794, Nov. 6-1795, Jan. 12
BOX 28 REEL 11	1795, Jan. 13-Apr. 28
BOX 29 REEL 11	1795, Apr. 29-Sept. 3
BOX 30 REEL 11-12	1795, Sept. 4-1798, Aug. 24
BOX 31 REEL 12	1798, Aug. 25-1802, Dec. 27
BOX 32 REEL 12-13	1802, Dec. 28-1805, July 13 <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 33 REEL 13	1805, July 14-1807, July 15

Bound Correspondence and Other Papers, 1778-1849

Container	Contents
BOX 34 REEL 13-14	1807, July 16-1810, Mar. 7
BOX 35 REEL 13-14	1810, Mar. 8-1811, June 18
BOX 36 REEL 14-15	1811, June 19-1813, Mar. 24 <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 37 REEL 15	1813, Mar. 25-1815, Dec. 15
BOX 38 REEL 15	1815, Dec. 16-1818, Jan. 22
BOX 39 REEL 16	1818, Jan. 23-1819, Dec. 7
BOX 40 REEL 16	1819, Dec. 8-1821, June 16
BOX 41 REEL 17	1821, June 17-1823, Apr. 22
BOX 42 REEL 17	1823, Apr. 23-1824, Nov. 26
BOX 43 REEL 18	1824, Nov. 27-1826, June 20
BOX 44 REEL 18	1826, June 21-1828, Apr. 2
BOX 45 REEL 19	1828, Apr. 3-1829, Nov. 13
BOX 46 REEL 19	1829, Nov. 14-1831, Nov. 2
BOX 47 REEL 20	1831, Nov. 3-1833, Nov. 4
BOX 48 REEL 20	1833, Nov. 5-1835, May 17
BOX 49 REEL 21	1835, May 18-1837, Aug. 10
BOX 50 REEL 21	1837, Aug. 11-1839, Dec. 5
BOX 51 REEL 22	1839, Dec. 6-1842, Dec. 30
BOX 52 REEL 22	1842, Dec. 31-1849, Nov. 7, undated <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 53-56 REEL 23-26	Correspondence, 1783-1849 Official, general, business, and family correspondence. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 53 REEL 23	1783-1814 (6 folders)
BOX 54 REEL 24	1815-1824 (7 folders)
BOX 55 REEL 25	1827-1837 (5 folders)
BOX 56 REEL 26	1838-1849 (6 folders)
BOX 57-64 REEL 27-32	Business Papers, 1782-1853 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 REEL 27	Accounts, bills, and receipts
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)

Business Papers, 1782-1853

Container	Contents
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 (2 folders)
BOX 62 REEL 31	Checkbooks (5 folders)
BOX 63 REEL 31-32	Checkbooks (2 folders)
BOX 63 REEL 31-32	Ledgers (2 folders)
BOX 64 REEL 32	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 See Oversize
BOX 64 REEL 32	Diplomatic commissions, 1790-1808 See Oversize
BOX 64 REEL 32	Letter of Edward Everett concerning the founding of Phi Beta Kappa, 1831 See Oversize
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