

**William Short correspondence, 1787-1838**  
**1787-1838**  
**Mss.B.Sh83**

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	American Philosophical Society
<b>Creator</b>	Short, William, 1759-1849
<b>Title</b>	William Short correspondence, 1787-1838
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1787-1838
<b>Call number</b>	Mss.B.Sh83
<b>Extent</b>	0.25 Linear feet 230 items
<b>Extent</b>	230 items.
<b>Location</b>	LH-MV-B-1
<b>Language</b>	French
<b>Container</b>	1
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>This correspondence is chiefly of a personal nature between Short and the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld concerning his desire to marry her and bring her to America. The Duchesse's letters describe life in a powerful, wealthy, and noble French family under the ancien régime, including events of the Revolution and the Reign of Terror, and life in France thereafter. The collection also includes letters from Lafayette, Count Luigi Castiglioni, Pauline Castiglioni, and the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt.</p>

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## Background note

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William Short (1759-1849, APS 1804) was a diplomat. He was Thomas Jefferson's secretary in Paris (1785-1792) before serving as resident minister to The Hague (1792-1793) and treaty commissioner in Spain (1793-1795). A native of Virginia, he spent the last four decades of his life in Philadelphia, where he devoted his time to philanthropy and the management of his investments.

Short was born in 1759 in Surry County, Virginia. He was the oldest son of the Virginia planter William Short and his wife Elizabeth Skipwith Short. In 1635 his great-great grandfather, also named William, had immigrated to Virginia as an indentured servant. By the eighteenth century, the Shorts were a prominent and wealthy Virginia family.

William Short attended a private school in Petersburg, Virginia, before enrolling at the College of William and Mary. He was an early member and president of Phi Beta Kappa (1778-1781), and in 1779 he was initiated into the Williamsburg lodge of the Masonic Order. He was a classmate and friend of James Monroe (1758-1831). One of his professors of law was William Wythe, who also taught future Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall (1755-1835, APS 1830) at this time.

Short was a distant relative of Thomas Jefferson; two of his uncles were married to Martha Wayles Washington's half-sisters. Short visited Monticello on several occasions, including possibly Jefferson's wedding in 1772. In 1781 he went with the Jefferson family to Poplar Forest to escape the British, and he later helped settle Martha's estate after her father's death.

After his graduation from college in 1779, Short moved to Richmond, Virginia, where he practiced law and came in contact with leading Virginians, including James Madison (1751-1836, APS 1785) and Patrick Henry (1736-1799). From the start, Jefferson, who referred to Short as "his adopted son," actively promoted his protégée's political and diplomatic career. In 1783, largely due to the support of Jefferson, he was appointed to the state's Executive Council.

In 1784 Jefferson invited Short to serve as his private secretary when he assumed his duties as Minister to France. In order to become fluent in French, Short decided to spend several months with a family in the village of Saint-Germain en Laye before joining Jefferson in Paris. In early 1785 he moved in with the Royers family, "a genteel family of modest means." There the twenty-six year old Short fell in love with the family's sixteen year old daughter Anne-Hypolyte-Louise, who was commonly called Lilite. Short wrote about his consuming love for the "Belle of St. Germain" in his journal and letters to friends. He visited her frequently after his move to Paris in the summer of 1785, and even after her marriage around the beginning of 1787.

In the French capital Short met John Adams (1735-1826, APS 1780), John Paul Jones (1747-1792), William Bingham (1752-1804, APS 1804), and several other Americans who lived and worked in Paris at the time. Short eventually traveled to London to assist Adams in reconciling difficulties in the U.S. – Prussian Treaty of 1785. Short also met many European members of Parisian society. For example, he made the acquaintance of the Italian naturalist Count Luigi Castiglioni (1757-1832, APS 1786), who had recently returned from a two-year sojourn through the United States. Short also met the Marchioness Paola Castiglioni-Litta (1751-1846), who later opened a famous salon in Milan. Short was a frequent

guest at several Parisian salons, including the ones of the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld d'Enville and the Mesdames d'Houdetot and de Tessé. The salons offered an opportunity for guests to discuss a range of topics, from economic matters and government, to literature and science. Short soon became particularly close to Louis Alexandre, duc de La Rochefoucauld (1743-1792) and his wife Charlotte Alexandrine, better known as Rosalie. Through them Short made contact with many eminent figures of the day, including the chemist Antoine Laurent Lavoisier and the Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834, APS 1781). Moreover, Short became the lover of Rosalie, who was described as a beautiful and intelligent young lady. She was in her early twenties when Short first met her, about thirty years younger than her husband.

In 1788 Short went to Italy, where he gathered information about a variety of culinary and cultural customs and objects, including information on the making of Parmesan cheeses, and data on grapes. He also returned with a mold to make spaghetti whose introduction to America is credited to Jefferson. In addition, he helped Jefferson prepare his *Notes on Virginia* for publication.

Prior to their anticipated return to the United States in 1789, Jefferson tried to persuade Short to settle in Albermarle County. However, Short instead accepted an appointment as chargé d'affaires to represent the United States at the court of Louis XVI. In this position, he helped secure commercial concessions from France, and he borrowed money and refinanced America's foreign debt at a lower rate. He had to perform these duties during the chaotic period of the French revolution between 1789 and 1792.

Short had hoped that his work in Paris would lead to an appointment as Jefferson's successor. However, in 1792, Short was instead appointed as minister to the Netherlands. Before his departure for The Hague, he predicted that internal conflict in France was inevitable. Indeed, he observed the developments in France with growing alarm, fearing that the radical Jacobins would soon raise a private army with which they would fight their critics. In May 1792 he wrote to his friend John Rutledge (1739-1800) that he "saw a storm gathering & inevitable to burst on the heads of those with whom I had lived & whom I loved in France." In this group he undoubtedly counted the de La Rochefoucaulds; indeed, three months later they were forced to flee from Paris. The Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld survived the Reign of Terror, but her husband Alexandre was stoned to death in 1792. Throughout Short's stay in The Hague, Short remained informed about events in France through his correspondence with Rosalie. He also tried, in vain, to help his friend the Marquis de Lafayette, who had been captured by the Austrians.

In 1793, Short was appointed minister to Spain. He negotiated the first treaty between the United States and Spain but was deprived of the triumph of a final agreement when President Washington chose Thomas Pinckney to conclude the terms of the Treaty of Lorenzo. He then returned to Paris to live with Rosalie. He intended to go to the United States to take care of business matters; however, Rosalie refused to leave France.

It was not until 1802 that Short arrived in the United States, without Rosalie. Almost immediately he paid a visit to President Jefferson in Washington in hopes that his old mentor might be able to secure him a diplomatic post. In 1808 Jefferson nominated him as minister to Russia. In anticipation of the appointment, Short traveled to Europe only to receive news that the Senate had voted not to send a minister to Russia. This decision created a breach in Short's friendship with Madison and Monroe who had failed to promote his nomination. In fact, Madison subsequently successfully lobbied for the confirmation of John Quincy Adams (1767-1848, APS 1818) to the same position.

To make matters worse, Rosalie announced that she would enter into a marriage of convenience to an elderly cousin, the Comte de Castellane. Undeterred, Short stayed in Paris until 1810, when he finally departed for the United States. He and Rosalie never saw each other again, but they continued a correspondence that altogether lasted for nearly five decades. Short also did not forget “the Belle of St. Germain.” While he did not stay in touch with Lilite, he frequently corresponded with her two sons Henri Raphael and Alexandre Marie. He contributed to their education in France, and later helped Henri find employment in New Orleans. In 1810, after a brief stay in New Jersey, Short settled in Philadelphia. He spent the remainder of his life with managing his investments in real estate, canals and eventually railroads. In addition, he was active in various philanthropic and learned societies, including the American Colonization Society, of which he served as vice president and president, and the American Philosophical Society. His Philadelphia friends included the linguist Peter Du Ponceau and Joseph Bonaparte, the former King of Spain.

During the last four decades of his life, Short avoided contact with his old friends Madison and Monroe. He never quite forgave them for their reluctance to further his diplomatic career. However, he maintained a close friendship with Jefferson, whom he visited several times in the years between 1810 and 1824. In the early 1820s, Short gave to the fund that was set up to assist the former president with his serious financial difficulties. After his mentor’s death in 1826, he helped the University of Virginia with the recruitment of faculty. With Jefferson’s death ended an active correspondence between the two friends that had spanned more than fifty years. In 1849 William Short, who never married and remained childless, died in Philadelphia. Although he did not bequeath anything to the American Philosophical Society, he did during his lifetime present it with several notable items, including Thomas Sully’s portrait of Jefferson, which had been commissioned by Short, and Jean-Antoine Houdon’s bust of the Marquis de Condorcet, that had been given to Short by Rosalie, the duchesse de La Rochefoucauld.

## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

American Philosophical Society

## Provenance

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### Acquisition Information

Purchased (\$1,000) and accessioned, 1952. See in-house list for additional accession information.

### Alternative Form Available

These letters are also available on microfilm (Film 1269).

## Indexing Terms

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### Family Name(s)

- La Rochefoucauld, Duchesse de.

### Genre(s)

- Diplomatic Material

### Geographic Name(s)

- France -- History -- Revolution, 1789-1799.
- France -- Social life and customs -- 1789-1815.

### Personal Name(s)

- Castiglioni, Luigi, 1757-1832
- Castiglioni, Pauline
- La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Francois-Alexandre-Frederic, duc de, 1747-1827
- Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves, marquis de, 1757-1834

### Subject(s)

- Americans Abroad
- Diplomatic History
- Marriage and Family Life
- Social Life and Custom

## Other Descriptive Information

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This large and rich collection of American diplomat William Short touches on matters personal and political. William Short sought, unsuccessfully, to marry the Duchess La Rochefoucauld. These letters chronicle this failed courtship. LaRouchefoucauld's correspondence also discusses the tumultuous events of the French Revolution, as told through the eyes of a wealthy noble. Short served as Jefferson's private secretary in France, and because of that, some of the early correspondence provides insight on the American delegation in France. The correspondence is largely in French, but the APS has an English translation of most of the documents. In addition to the Short-LaRouchefoucauld correspondence, there are letters from other prominent Frenchmen.



William Short translations.

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## Collection Inventory

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<b>Emgarth, Annette H., 1900-1992 Short, William, 1759-1849 B Sh83e William Short translations.</b>	<b>n.d.</b>	<b>1.0 Linear feet 1 linear foot.</b>	<b>Box 2</b>
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