

THE U.S. SENATE
REPUBLICAN
LEADER'S SUITE

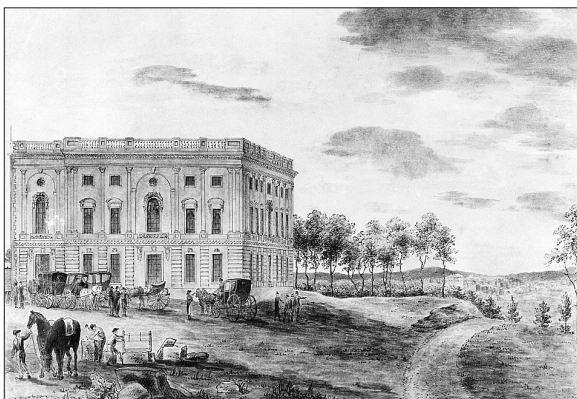


THE U.S. SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER'S SUITE



Historical Highlights

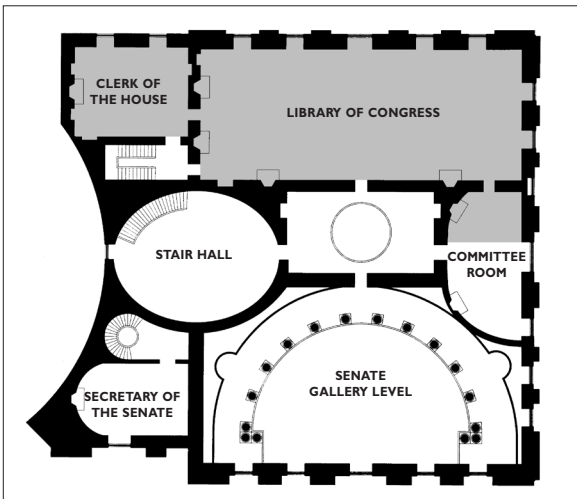
The Senate Republican Leader's suite is located on the principal floor of the United States Capitol, in the oldest section of the building. Only this north wing was completed when the federal government moved from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., in November of 1800. Over the past 200 years, these rooms have been rebuilt and modified numerous times and have been the scene of many important historic events. Here the House of Representatives first met; the Library of Congress was established; vice presidents conducted official business; and justices of the Supreme Court of the United States conferred on matters.



An 1800 view of the Capitol with the north wing completed

Originally one large room measuring 35 by 86 feet and two stories high with an upper gallery, the space first served as a temporary meeting place for the House of Representatives. On November 17, 1800, Speaker Theodore Sedgwick of Massachusetts gaveled the House to order for its first meeting in the new capital city. Three months later, the presidential election between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr was decided in this chamber. Both candidates had received the same number of electoral votes, and after 36 ballots the House broke the tie by choosing Jefferson.

In December 1801 the members moved into a temporary brick structure located on the foundations of the unfinished south wing of the Capitol. Shortly after, President Thomas Jefferson signed into law “An Act Concerning the Library for Use of Both Houses of Congress.” The legislation specified that books and maps recently purchased, “together with the books or libraries which have heretofore been kept separately by each house,” would be placed in the spacious quarters previously occupied by the House of Representatives. A contemporary account



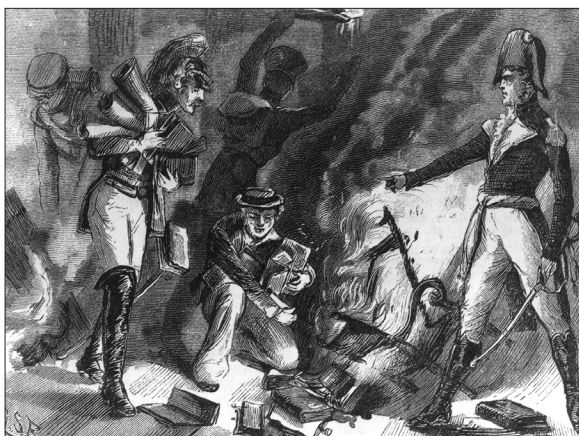
Second floor plan of the north wing of the Capitol in 1800; gray area shows current Senate Republican Leader's suite (conjectural reconstruction)

described the Library of Congress as “a spacious and handsome room, and although lately organized, already contained a number of valuable books in the best taste of binding.” The location for the library was short lived, however.

In order to build the south wing of the Capitol, architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe had to demolish the temporary House chamber and relocate members to the library. From December 1804 until March 1807, the “great apartment” on the west front of the north wing once again echoed with the debates of the elected legislators. By that time, the House had grown to 143 members representing 17 states as well as the territories of Indiana, Mississippi, and Orleans. In the fall of 1807, the representatives moved to their new chamber in the recently completed south wing.

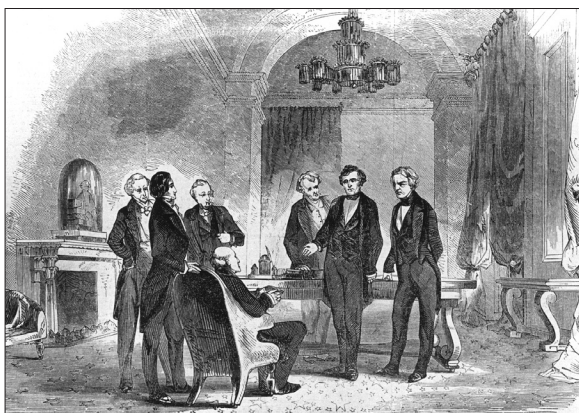
Latrobe then proposed a bold rearrangement and reconstruction of the north wing. The new design called for a one-story chamber for the Supreme Court of the United States on the ground level, with a two-story Senate Chamber directly above it. During the reconstruction project, the library was occupied by the Supreme Court, and later the Senate met there for the first and second sessions of the 11th Congress, from May 1809 through May 1810. When the work was completed, the Senate and Supreme Court moved to their new chambers, and the Library of Congress returned to its original quarters.

On August 24, 1814, British troops marched on Washington and set fire to the Capitol. Books and maps from the library were used to ignite the flames, and the building was left a charred ruin. Latrobe was called to Washington to rebuild the Capitol. Prompted by the creation of the first roster of permanent committees for the Senate, Latrobe redesigned and divided the library’s single room into eight committee rooms on two floors.



In 1814 British troops used books and other materials from the Library of Congress to set the Capitol ablaze, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 1872

The rooms comprising the current Republican Leader's suite were created at this time. These new rooms were designated for Senate committees and staff, and one room was set aside for the vice president. One of the earliest vice presidents to occupy room S-231 was John C. Calhoun, who served under Presidents John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson before resigning to take his seat in the Senate. At times the vice president shared his quarters with the president, since no room in the building had been set aside for the chief executive.



President Pierce meeting in the Vice President's Room in the Capitol, now room S-231, *Illustrated News*, March 12, 1853

As the country grew, it became clear that more space was needed in the Capitol to house the expanding legislative branch. Construction began in 1851 on the extension of the Capitol which would ultimately include new north and south wings and a cast-iron dome. In 1859 the Senate moved into a new chamber in the north extension, and the vacated space became the Supreme Court chamber. To be close to their chamber, the officers of the Court moved to the rooms that are now part of the Senate Republican Leader's suite. These rooms were used as offices as well as a "Robing Room" and "Withdrawing Room" for the justices. From 1860 to 1935, some of the Supreme Court's most noted jurists frequented these rooms, including Salmon Chase, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Louis Brandeis, and William Howard Taft.



Room S-231 when used as the Robing Room of the Supreme Court of the United States, 1900

When the Supreme Court moved to its own building in 1935, the rooms were once again used as private offices by senators, committees, and staff. The Committee on Contingent Expenses met in room S-231 in the late 1930s, and later the space was used as the Minority Leader's office by Republican Senator William F. Knowland of California. Between 1959 and



Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen at work in room S-231

1969, rooms S-231 and S-232 formed the suite of Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois. In 1981 Minority Leader Howard Baker, Jr., of Tennessee was elected Majority Leader. Rather than relocate to the office of the Majority Leader around the corner, Baker decided to stay in his current office and designated the space for the Republican Leader, along with several adjoining rooms to the south. He claimed that he had “the second greatest view in Washington: the Washington Monument and the Mall.” In recognition of his years in the Senate, legislation was passed in 1984 to designate room S-230 the *Howard H. Baker, Jr., Room*. Today, the suite is used by the Senate Republican Leader, and his staff, to conduct policy briefings, work on legislation, and meet with members, constituents, and visiting heads of state.

Art Highlights

The ceiling decorations in room S-231 were completed in 1907 by German artist Maximilian Franz Friederang. He came to this country in 1889 and soon afterwards began work in the

Capitol. The design incorporates representations of the laws of the universe and the laws of the states, reflecting the tenets of the Supreme Court which occupied the space at the time the frescoes were painted. In addition Friederang portrayed the human race developing from primitive man to man at the dawn of the destructive age, the latter carrying a sword with a skull at his feet. The lunettes were originally executed with “a shimmering blue cloud effect, representing the sky on a bright day.” The frieze below the ceiling consists of 32 medallions highlighting significant lawmakers of Greece and Rome. Here Friederang utilized the “sgraffito” technique, where a dark coat of plaster is applied over a lighter-colored coat and the upper surface is then cut away to create a design. According to the artist, this medium was chosen “for the execution of excellent sharp and strong drawings with great simplicity,” and proved durable for both interior and exterior artwork. The technique appears in no other place in the Capitol. Other early decorative features include the anthemion frieze below the vaulted ceiling in room S-230.



Detail of eagle from the ceiling in room S-231

Several of the objects in the suite are among the oldest furnishings in the Capitol. The elegantly detailed marble mantels in rooms S-231 and S-232 date from the early 19th century when the wing was rebuilt by architects Benjamin Henry Latrobe and Charles Bulfinch following the fire of 1814. The chandelier in room S-231 was made by Cornelius and Baker of Philadelphia around 1847 and is thought to be the oldest in the Capitol. Originally gas burning, the chandelier features “pillar icicles” and flattened triangular prisms suspended from five tiers and eight branches. A similar chandelier hangs in room S-230 but appears to be later in date. The gilded rococo revival mirrors date from the second half of the 19th century and were placed in the suite sometime after the Supreme Court vacated the space in 1935.

1800 view of the Capitol, and burning of the library, courtesy Library of Congress

Second floor plan courtesy Architect of the Capitol

1900 photograph of Robing Room by Tenschert and Flack Photographers, Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States

Photograph of Dirksen courtesy Senate Historical Office

Prepared under the direction of the Senate Commission on Art by the Office of Senate Curator

