

THE
STROM THURMOND
ROOM



UNITED
STATES
SENATE

THE STROM THURMOND ROOM



Since construction began in 1793, the U.S. Capitol has been built, burnt, rebuilt, remodeled, expanded, modernized, and restored. Dr. William Thornton, the Capitol's original designer, envisioned a building with a central section topped by a low dome with a rotunda, a conference room, and wings on either end to accommodate meeting places for each house of Congress and their associated committees. President George Washington praised the plan for its "grandeur, simplicity and convenience."



Northwest view of S-238

Since the completion of the original building, the Capitol has undergone several reconstructions, additions, and modifications, contributing to an ever changing interior configuration and allocation.

The Strom Thurmond Room (S-238) exemplifies the building's long and varied history. When the Capitol was first constructed, a room of similar size and location to S-238 did exist, but it was demolished to accommodate the expansion of the Library of Congress. The library space became obsolete in 1899, and S-238 took its present form during the subsequent renovation. Since then, S-238 has served as a committee room, a part of the Senate Majority Leader's suite, and finally as a private office.

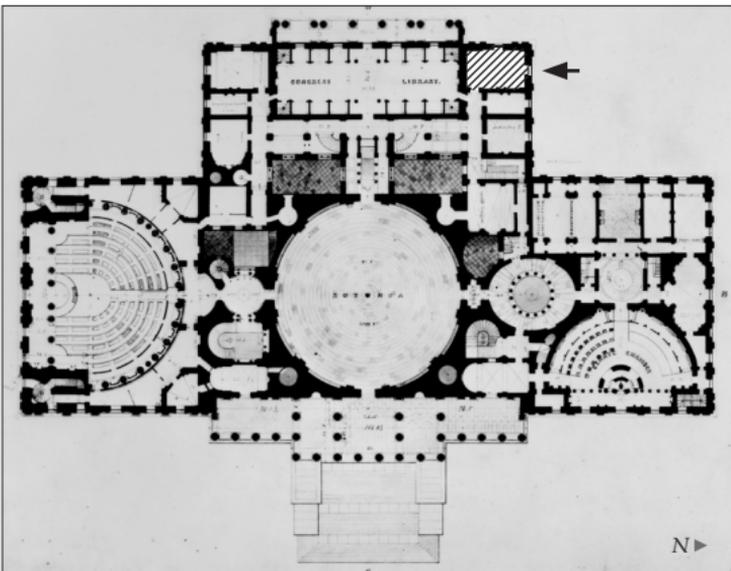
In 1991 the Senate adopted a resolution designating room S-238 as the "Strom Thurmond Room." This was in honor of Senator Strom Thurmond, one of the longest-serving senators in history who was elected first as a Democrat and then as a Republican from South Carolina from 1954 to 2003. During much of his tenure as president pro tempore (1981-1987, 1995-2001), Senator Thurmond used this room as a private office.



Strom Thurmond
by Frederick E. Hart,
1997

Historical Highlights

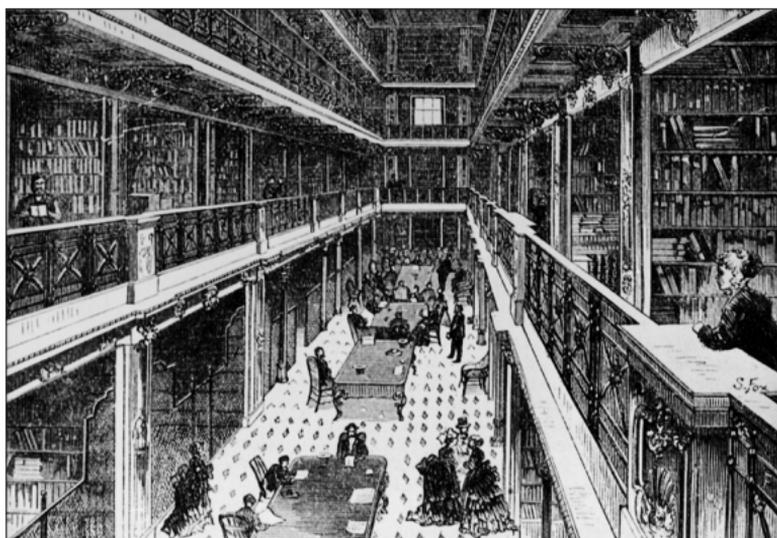
When Charles Bulfinch took over from Benjamin Henry Latrobe as architect for the Capitol in 1818, he inherited a building that had north and south wings, but no center section. Bulfinch added his own stylistic preferences to Latrobe's plans for the Capitol and finished construction on the central section in 1824. As completed by Bulfinch, the center section included a large Rotunda for ceremonial use, a two-story space for the Library of Congress that occupied much of the west front, and several committee rooms, including one for the Senate Committee on the Judiciary in the northwest corner—the location of the present Strom Thurmond Room.



1834 floor plan showing the Committee on the Judiciary room

By 1842 the Library of Congress had established a law library in the former Judiciary Committee room, adjacent to the north end of the main library room. In 1851 a devastating fire destroyed the library's two-story room and 65 percent of its holdings. Miraculously the law library room survived the fire and was not impacted by Architect Thomas U. Walter's subsequent reconstruction of the burnt library. Walter's new library was an impressive three-story room, extending from the second floor to the attic, and featured extensive use of decorative cast iron as an elegant, inexpensive method of fireproofing.

As the library outgrew its west front space, plans for expansion involved building two multi-story rooms similar in design to the main library room, that would run perpendicular to the north and south ends of the library. That enhancement was initiated in 1865, and the law library room was demolished to make way for the north extension of the Library of Congress.



“Interior of the Congressional Library” from *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, December 1872

In 1897, after the Library of Congress moved out of the Capitol and into a magnificent new building across the street (the Jefferson Building), Congress spent two years discussing the fate of the immense iron rooms that the library had vacated. By 1899 Congress decided to make three separate floors out of this space. The attic floor would become a reference library while the second and third floors would be divided into offices, equally apportioned to the House and Senate. It was at this time that today’s room S-238 was constructed. Since its 1899 reconstruction, the room has undergone modernization, redecoration, and change in use, but no substantial structural alteration.

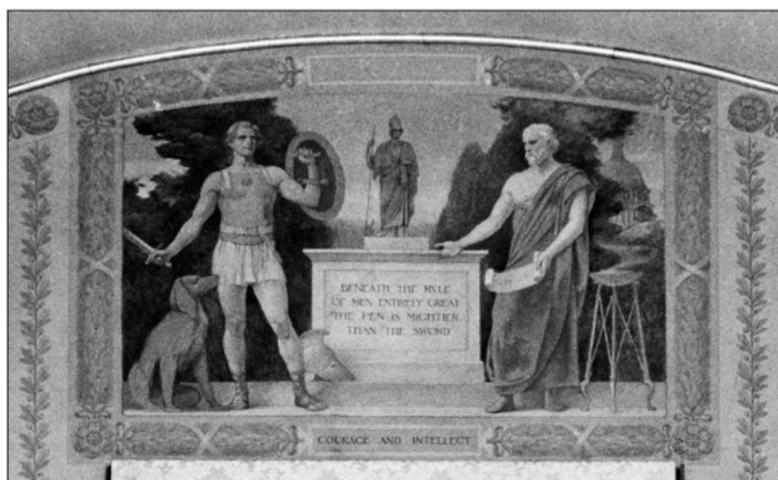
Art Highlights

For the 1899 redesign of the former library spaces, Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark directed

the work and approached it with the “paramount idea to preserve the sentiments and ideas of the old and historic central building.” He employed solid masonry construction with arches, cornices, and moldings copied from other parts of the building.

The rooms received new mahogany furniture, carpets, and draperies, all of which were specially designed. The floors were tiled with varied patterns, although no unique designs were ordered as the short construction period would not accommodate the manufacture of a special pattern. Mahogany “of the best possible grade and workmanship . . . finished nearly in the natural color of the wood” was used for the doors and frames, and the existing dilapidated windows were replaced. The mantels were Italian marble of special designs.

In 1901 New York artist Arthur Willett painted a series of murals designed by his colleague Elmer Garnsey, who oversaw the interior design of the rooms carved from the old Library of Congress space. Garnsey incorporated themes appropriate to the committee that occupied each room. Since S-238 was then assigned to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the decorative motif included depictions of *Justice*, *Prudence*, *Fortitude*, and *Peace* on the ceiling, with murals in the lunettes illustrating *Peace and Abundance*, *The Blessings of Peace*, *Courage and Intellect*, and *The Consequences of War*.



Courage and Intellect by Arthur Willett

Complementing the murals in S-238, Garnsey designed an ornate canvas wall covering stenciled in a brocade style. This type of wall treatment created smooth, decorated walls faster than the standard plastering process, and was popular in the early 1900s. It is the only known remaining example of wall canvas in the Capitol.

The original lighting in S-238 consisted of a single brass chandelier and matching wall sconces. The gilded Neoclassical Revival overmantel mirror was installed soon after the room's completion. Newer furniture was added over time, reflecting the room's transition from a committee space to an area supporting a more social setting. In 1997 a bronze bust of Senator Strom Thurmond by artist Frederick Hart was placed in the room.



Marble mantel and gilded mirror

Occupants of S-238 location

1819–1824	Construction of original room in northwest corner of central section
1824–1841	Committee on the Judiciary
1842–1865	Library of Congress Law Library
1865	Construction of the multi-story Library of Congress expansion
1865–1897	Room absorbed into the north extension of the Library of Congress
1897–1899	Vacant after the Library of Congress left the Capitol
1899–1900	Remodeled to present configuration
1901–1918	Committee on Foreign Relations
1919–1923	Committee on Naval Affairs
1924–1929	Committee on Inter-Oceanic Canals
1930–1938	Committee on Education and Labor
1938–1946	Committee on Naval Affairs
1961–1962	Majority Leader
1962–present	Private Office

1834 floor plan and *Courage and Intellect* courtesy Architect of the Capitol

Prepared under the direction of the Secretary of the Senate by the Office of Senate Curator.