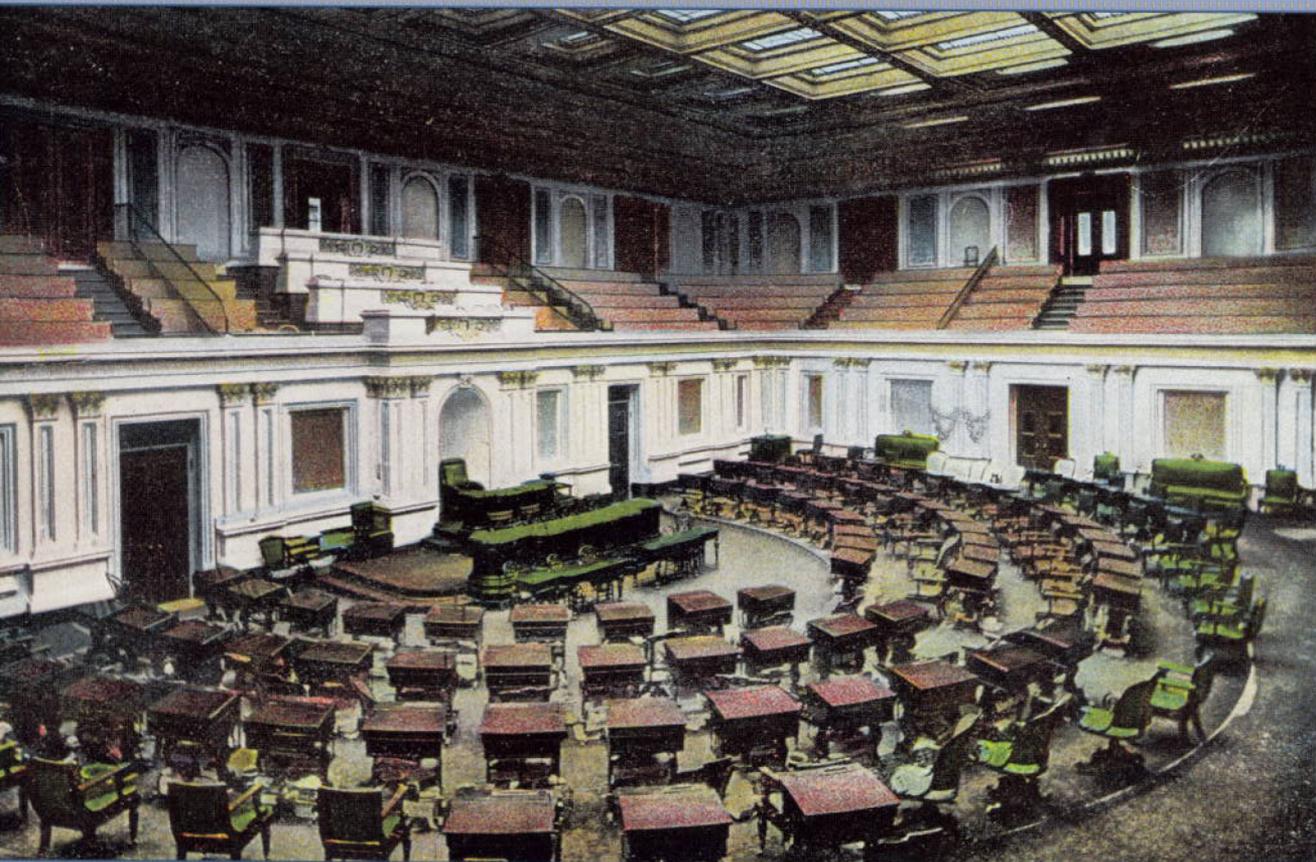


United States Senate Chamber

1859-2009



UNITED
STATES
SENATE

United States Senate Chamber

1859-2009

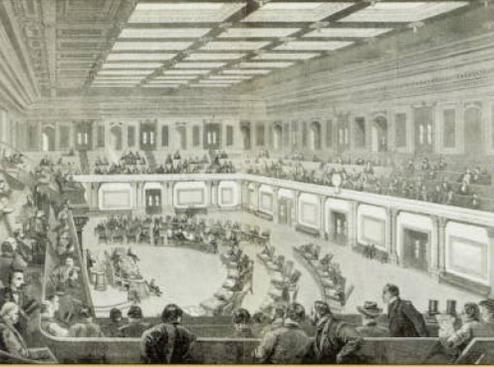


Prepared by the Senate Historical Office
Under the direction of
Nancy Erickson, Secretary of the Senate



1859

The Senate's new Chamber.



U.S. Senate Collection



Library of Congress

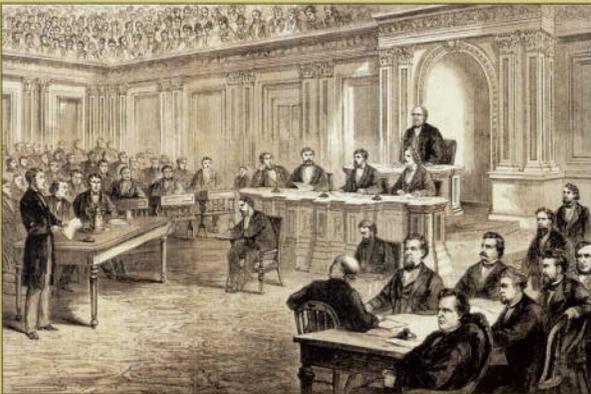
1870

Hiram Revels of Mississippi, the first African American senator.

UNITED STATES SENATE

1868

Senate impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson.



U.S. Senate Collection



U.S. Senate Collection

Swearing-in ceremony of Vice President Wheeler.

1877



U.S. Senate Collection

1894

The United States Senate in session.

1949

Senate Chamber with ceiling braces, 1940 to 1949.



Architect of the Capitol

CHAMBER: 150 YEARS

1921

Rebecca Felton of Georgia,
the first woman senator.



U.S. Senate Historical Office



U.S. Senate Photo Studio

Senators of the 110th Congress.

2008

United States Senate Chamber

1859-2009



For 150 years the Senate has occupied its current Chamber in the United States Capitol, a room that has witnessed some of the most significant events in American history. Measuring 114 feet long by 80 feet wide, and 36 feet from its floor to the highest point of its ceiling, the Senate Chamber retains an intimacy characteristic of a 19th-century legislative hall, while simultaneously evolving to meet the needs of modern legislators. Mahogany desks, snuff boxes, and spittoons from that earlier era coexist with microphones, computers, and television cameras, linking today's senators to their historical predecessors.

THE SENATE'S MANY CHAMBERS

Before this Chamber opened on January 4, 1859, the Senate had met in several different locations. When the federal government commenced in 1789, senators convened in a second-floor room in New York City's former city hall building, which had been remodeled and renamed Federal Hall. According to contemporary

accounts, it was "an elegant and grand building," and the Senate Chamber had been "well adapted for a senatorial presence [*sic*]." Here the Senate established its first quorum on April 6, 1789, and three weeks later George Washington took the oath of office as the nation's first president. The next year, the federal government relocated to Philadelphia, and the Senate moved into a second-floor chamber in Congress Hall, adjacent to Independence Hall. For a decade it operated there while Congress planned a separate federal



A rendition of the Senate Chamber in New York's Federal Hall, where the Senate met from 1789 to 1790.

district along the banks of the Potomac River. While in Philadelphia, the nation's first two vice presidents—John Adams and Thomas Jefferson—presided over the Senate's sessions. On May 14, 1800, the Senate held its last meeting in Congress Hall and prepared to relocate to its permanent home in the newly established city of Washington in the District of Columbia.

George Washington laid the cornerstone of the new Capitol in 1793, but when Congress arrived seven years later, only the north wing stood completed. Inside this small sandstone box-like structure, the Senate, the House, the Supreme Court, and the Library of Congress all managed to operate. On November 21, 1800, the Senate convened in the unfinished Capitol, in a chamber on the first floor that is now the Old Supreme Court Chamber. "I congratulate the people of the United States," said President John Adams to a joint session of Congress the following day, "on the assembly of Congress at the permanent seat of their government." The two-story Senate Chamber was described as "magnificent" and "grand," but senators found it small, dark, and chilly. By 1808, after the House had moved into its own wing of the Capitol, architect Benjamin Latrobe was designing a new Senate Chamber. The Senate took up residence in temporary space within the Capitol during the construction, until January 2, 1810, when it moved to the second-story room now known as the Old Senate Chamber, expecting to enjoy the benefits of a stately and permanent home.



The Senate met in a second-floor chamber in the Philadelphia County Court House, now known as Congress Hall, from 1790 to 1800.



The Senate Chamber inside Congress Hall has been restored by the National Park Service.



The Senate, the House, the Supreme Court, and the Library of Congress all managed to operate in the north wing of the Capitol when it opened in 1800.



British troops set fire to the Capitol on the evening of August 24, 1814, causing extensive damage to the Senate Chamber.

Within four years, however, the Chamber would lie in ruins, burned with the Capitol as an act of war by Great Britain. In protest over violations of American neutrality rights, Congress had declared war on Great Britain in 1812. On the hot summer day of August 24, 1814, British troops invaded Washington and set fire to the White House, the Capitol, and other federal buildings. The attacking forces piled desks, carpets, books, and portraits in the Senate and House Chambers and set them ablaze. A summer storm saved the exterior of the Capitol from destruction, but the interior chambers were severely damaged. Viewing the wreckage, Latrobe commented that the fire “burnt the marble columns to lime” and “cracked every thing which was of freestone.” Once again, the Senate moved to temporary quarters, first in a building known as “Blodgett’s Hotel,” on 8th and E Streets, N.W., and later in a hastily-built brick structure erected on the present site

of the Supreme Court. Over the next four years, architects Latrobe and later Charles Bulfinch oversaw the reconstruction of the Capitol, while the Senate met in a makeshift chamber of the “Brick Capitol.”

At last, in December 1819, the Senate returned to the Capitol and its beautifully reconstructed Chamber. That room would remain the Senate’s home for the next four



The Brick Capitol served as a temporary meeting place of Congress from 1815 to 1819.



The Senate met in this room, now called the Old Senate Chamber, during its Golden Era, from 1819 to 1859.

decades, years that corresponded with the Senate's Golden Era of memorable oratory and monumental debate. Forty-eight mahogany desks, constructed in six weeks during 1819 by New York cabinetmaker Thomas Constantine, contributed to the mood of elegance that inspired Henry Clay to describe the Chamber as "This Noble Room."

From 1819 to 1859, the Senate emerged as the principal forum for political discussion of the nation's most pressing issues: economic development, westward expansion, and the question of slavery. Above all of these debates hovered the essential question: "Was the nation a confederation of semi-sovereign states, or was it something larger—greater than the sum of its parts?"

In the Old Senate Chamber, senators of the magnitude of Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, John C. Calhoun, Thomas Hart Benton, Charles Sumner, and Stephen Douglas fought the legislative battles and forged the great compromises that desperately attempted to avoid, but only staved off, a civil war.

THE NEW CHAMBER

The rapid growth of the United States in the early 19th century, as the nation acquired, organized, and settled new territories, ultimately precipitated the Civil War. When these territories applied for statehood, the question of whether they would permit slavery caused heated political debate. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 drew a line between the North and the South, admitting

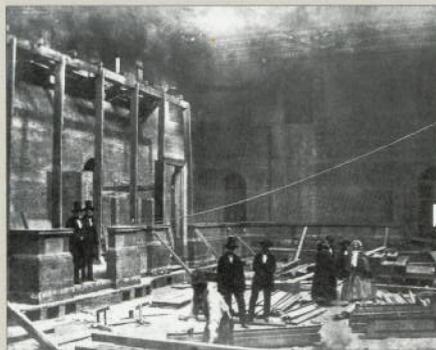
equal numbers of states above and below. The southerners argued for the right to import slavery into the entire western territory, while some northerners organized politically to stop the spread of slavery. As the territories became states, they also doubled the size of Congress. When the Senate first moved to Washington in 1800, 32 senators represented 16 states. By 1850, that number had grown to 62 senators representing 31 states. The recently enacted Compromise of 1850 had eased fears that the nation would soon break apart over the slavery issue. The resulting burst of confidence in the future of the Union prompted Congress to appropriate funds to build new Senate and House wings. Dominating both wings would be large legislative chambers, doubling the size of the Capitol.

On July 4, 1851, Daniel Webster delivered his last great public address at the ceremony to lay the cornerstone for the Capitol's extension. "Be it known," Webster proclaimed to the jubilant crowd assembled

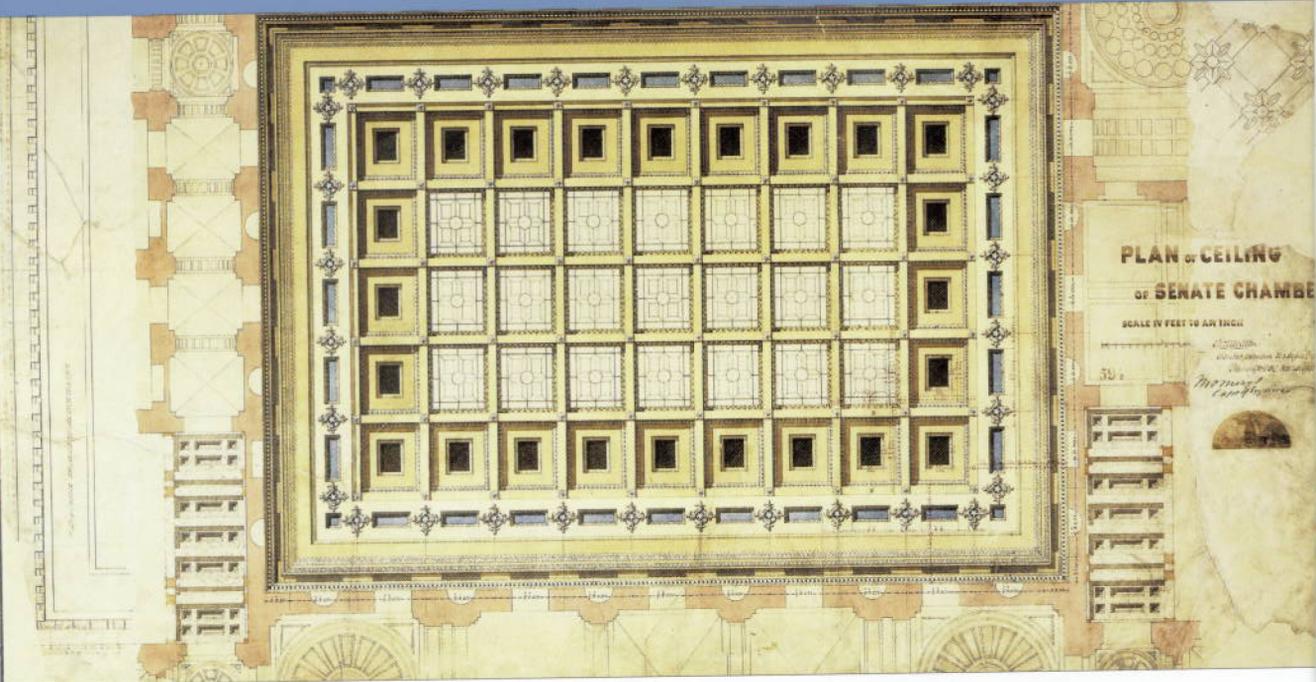
in the eastern plaza, "that on this day the Union of the United States of America stands firm." That year, Congress appointed Thomas U. Walter as the architect to design the Capitol extension, later joined by Army Captain Montgomery Meigs as superintendent of construction. Walter and Meigs designed a Senate Chamber based on the latest advances in lighting, acoustics, and ventilation. They placed the Chamber in the center of the new wing. Meigs believed that a room without windows would prevent outside noises from disturbing debate, and eliminate drafts that might affect the health and speaking voices of the senators. This positioning also permitted broad hallways surrounding the Chamber, which provided access to the floor and gallery from all sides. To compensate for the absence of windows, steam-powered fans provided a constant supply of fresh air. Sunlight was admitted into the room through an ornamental skylight decorated with stained-glass images, including "Industry" and "Agriculture."



The first known photograph of the U.S. Capitol, attributed to John Plumbe, Jr., was taken about 1846.



The new Senate Chamber, seen here under construction in 1857.



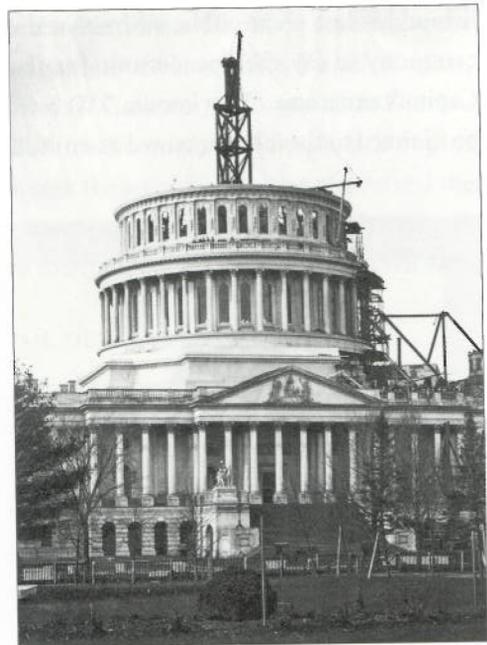
The Senate Chamber ceiling featured an ornamental skylight decorated with stained-glass images, which provided the principal illumination for the Chamber.

During the day, the skylight provided the principal illumination, while at night gas jets located above the glass ceiling furnished artificial light.

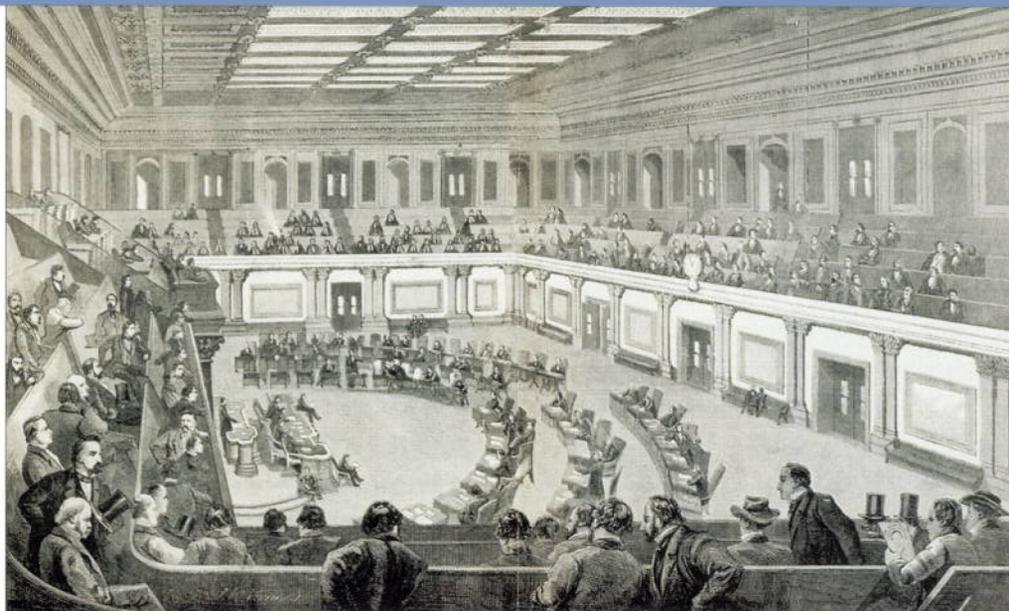
As work progressed on the Capitol's Senate and House extensions, which would more than double the length of the Capitol, it became apparent that the existing copper-covered wooden dome no longer suited the building's proportions. In 1855, Congress voted for its replacement based on Architect Walter's design for a new fireproof cast-iron dome. Workers removed the old dome in 1856; seven years later, on December 2, 1863, engineers bolted into place the final section of Thomas Crawford's bronze "Statue of Freedom," crowning the new dome.

On January 4, 1859, senators held a ceremony to mark their move to the new Chamber. On that day, Senator John Crittenden of Kentucky bid farewell to the Old

Chamber: "This place, which has known us so long, is to know us no more forever as a Senate." Crowds lined the hallways



Construction of the fireproof, cast-iron dome, seen here in 1861, began in 1856 and was completed in 1863.



The Senate moved to its new Chamber on January 4, 1859.

of the Capitol, as Vice President John Breckinridge led a procession of senators down the corridor and into their modern quarters—marking the beginning of a new era in Senate history.

In contrast to the intimate Old Senate Chamber, the new Chamber was spacious and grand. The *New York Herald* described it as light, graceful, and “finely proportioned.” Galleries lined the second level of the Chamber, accommodating up to 600 visitors, including journalists and foreign diplomats. Rococo and classical in architectural style and decor, the new Chamber featured Corinthian pilasters along with rich ornamental detail in cast iron and plaster. The subdued colors, accented by a floral-patterned carpet of deep purple hues, complemented the polished furniture, including the original 48 mahogany desks transferred from the Old Chamber and still in use today.

Immediately above the presiding officer’s desk, newspaper reporters who covered the

Senate’s proceedings occupied the central portion of the gallery. About 50 reporters held press passes at the time; today, the number exceeds 5,000. In addition to the press gallery, other sections were designated for “Ladies,” “Gentlemen,” senators’ guests, staff, and diplomats. Doorkeepers escorted visitors to the appropriate galleries and maintained order during Senate sessions.



Galleries lined the second level of the Senate Chamber, accommodating up to 600 visitors. Specific areas were designated for the press, “Ladies,” “Gentlemen,” senators’ guests, staff, and diplomats.

CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

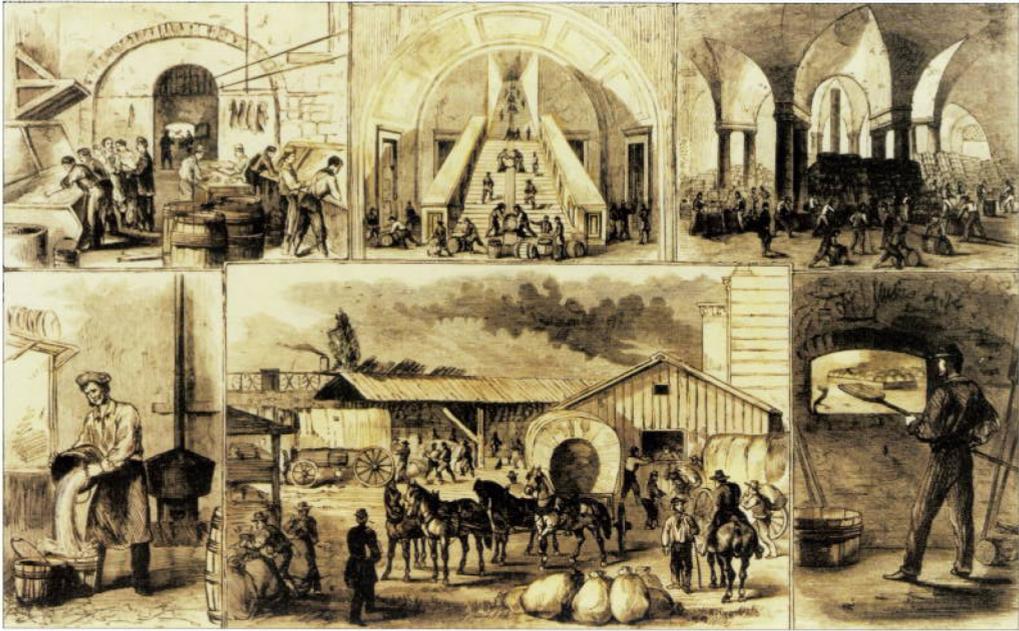
The Senate had barely settled into its new home before a national crisis struck. Within two years of the ceremonial procession, the carefully crafted compromises designed to preserve the Union had collapsed and made war imminent. On January 21, 1861, as senators representing states that were seceding from the Union prepared to return home, Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi led a more somber procession out of the Chamber. A fearful and anxious crowd had filled the galleries to hear the southern senators bid farewell. "I rise, Mr. President," Davis began, "for the purpose of announcing to the Senate that . . . the state of Mississippi . . . has declared her separation from the United States." Stunned silence followed Davis' short speech, broken only by the sound of

weeping from the galleries. "Men wept and embraced each other mournfully," one observer commented. "Scarcely a member of that Senatorial body but was pale with the terrible significance of the hour." As Davis and his southern colleagues solemnly left the Chamber, the remaining senators rose out of respect to their departing colleagues. Eventually, all but one senator from the 11 Confederate states left the Senate—only Tennessee's Senator Andrew Johnson resolutely remained.

On April 15, 1861, three days after the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 troops. Soon, the capital swarmed with volunteers who answered the president's call, prepared to defend the capital city against an anticipated Confederate assault. Precariously located south of the



Union soldiers, temporarily quartered in the Senate Chamber, drilled on the Capitol grounds.



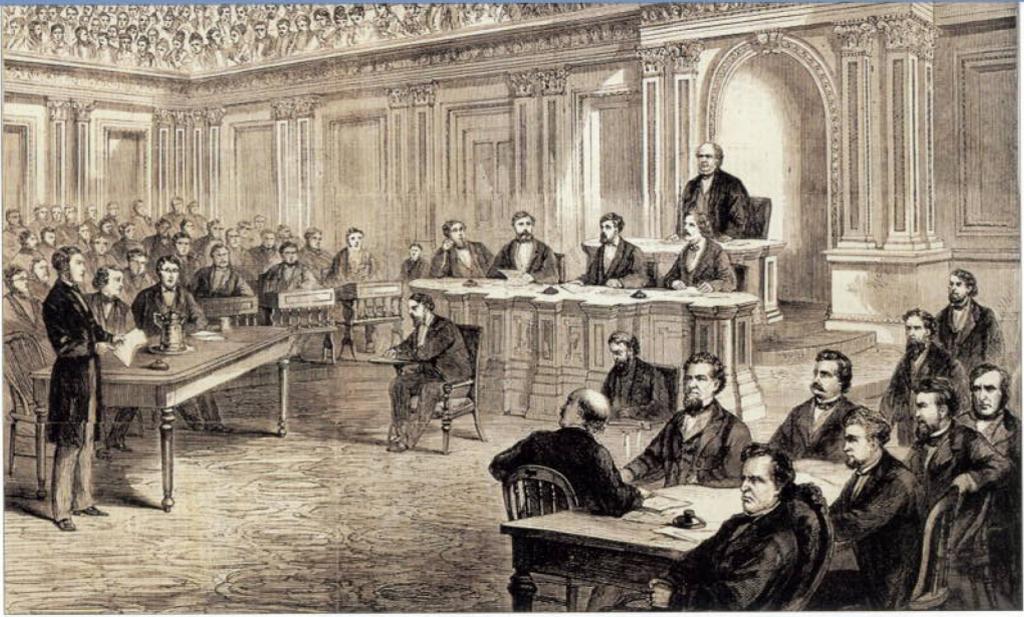
To feed the troops quartered in the Senate Chamber and throughout the city, the military quartermaster constructed bread ovens in small brick-walled rooms throughout the Capitol basement.

Mason-Dixon line, between two slave-holding states, the District of Columbia stood vulnerable to invasion. Consequently, the U.S. Capitol became an armed camp, as soldiers marched, slept, and ate in and around the building. More than 4,000 Union troops coursed through the Capitol's quarters during April and May 1861. In the basement, a master stonemason oversaw construction of 20 brick ovens, several of which individually produced up to 800 loaves of bread per day. Food lockers held flour, beef, pork, and crackers. Later, after the August 1862 Second Battle of Bull Run, congressional officials allowed the Capitol to be turned into a temporary hospital for 1,000 sick and wounded Union troops.

With Congress out of session in the opening days of war, the Senate Chamber

served as a temporary billet for the Union soldiers, who drilled on the Capitol grounds. The Sixth Massachusetts Regiment took up residence in the Senate Chamber following its bloody encounter with secessionists in Baltimore. Soldiers sat at the senators' desks, and slept beneath them at night. The human influx took its toll on the Chamber, described as filthy and "alive with lice." The return of Congress, when President Lincoln called it into special session on July 4, 1861, forced soldiers to vacate the Chamber, which was scrubbed and polished so the Senate could resume its legislative business. During that five-week session, Congress speedily enacted 65 pieces of legislation to meet the wartime emergency.

The Chamber also took on theatrical functions, beyond the purely legislative,



Spectators packed the Senate galleries to watch as the Senate voted on Andrew Johnson's impeachment.

between 1859 and 1866. In January 1863, a gala crowd turned out for a prominent actor's presentation of *The Sleeping Sentinel*. This narrative poem recounted an 1861 incident in which a Union soldier fell asleep at his guard post and was sentenced to be shot. In the Chamber's audience was President Abraham Lincoln, who months earlier had pardoned the young sentinel. With few other theaters of comparable capacity in Washington, the Senate received numerous requests to use its Chamber. Finally, members grew tired of the competition. On May 8, 1866, they permitted one final performance—a free public lecture on postwar reconstruction by Mrs. M. C. Walling, advertised as “the greatest female speaker of the age.” Then members unanimously adopted a rule, still in force today, “that hereafter the Senate chamber shall not be granted for any other purpose than for the use of the Senate.”

The end of the Civil War in 1865 led to an era of reconstruction that occupied the Senate's attention for the next dozen

years, and caused a dramatic confrontation with the president of the United States. Former Tennessee Senator Andrew Johnson had become vice president, and then president following the death of Abraham Lincoln. Johnson's fundamental differences with Congress over reconstruction policies led the House of Representatives to impeach him and the Senate to conduct a trial. Throughout the spring of 1868, the Senate Chamber was transformed into a court of impeachment, with special tables brought in to accommodate the House managers, who served as prosecutors, and the president's team of defense lawyers. The demand for gallery space by visitors wishing to witness the historic event grew so intense that for the first time special “gallery passes” were issued. On May 26, the Senate voted 35 to 19 to convict President Andrew Johnson of “high crimes and misdemeanors,”—one vote short of the constitutional requirement of a two-thirds majority to remove him from office.



Admission to the Senate galleries for the impeachment trial required a ticket.

Reconstruction raised the question of how to reincorporate the 11 Confederate states into the Union while fulfilling the promise of freedom and equality to African Americans. Between 1865 and 1870, Congress sent to the states the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery, the 14th Amendment, pledging equal protection of the law, and the 15th Amendment,

prohibiting the use of race as an abridgement of the right to vote. The Reconstruction Era also brought the first African American members of Congress. On February 25, 1870, following a contentious debate over his qualifications for office, the Senate voted 48 to 8 to seat Hiram Revels of Mississippi. A college graduate, former Union Army chaplain, and state legislator, Revels had been elected to fill a seat vacant since 1862. He served a short term of just 13 months, but in that brief time he spoke in defense of freedmen's rights, in opposition to America's segregated schools, and for enforcement of federal election laws that guaranteed African American men the right to vote. Four years later, Mississippi elected the second African American senator, Blanche K. Bruce. Born into slavery in 1841, Bruce fled north during the war to pursue a career in education



Hiram Revels of Mississippi, the first African American senator, took his seat in 1870.



Blanche Kelso Bruce of Mississippi, the second African American senator, served a full six-year term.

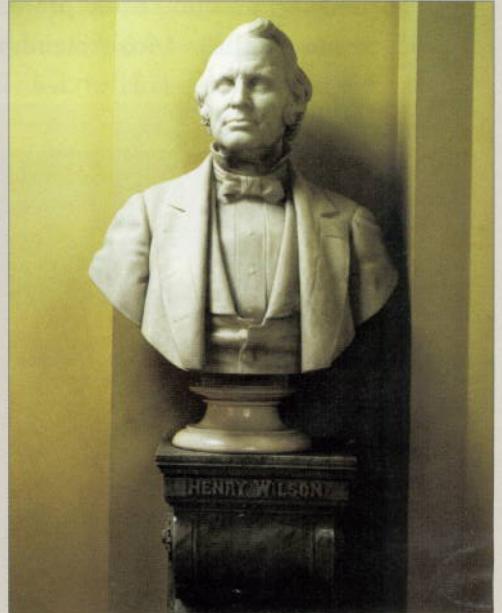
and politics. Bruce served a full six-year Senate term (1875-1881) and became the first African American to preside over the Senate.

THE ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

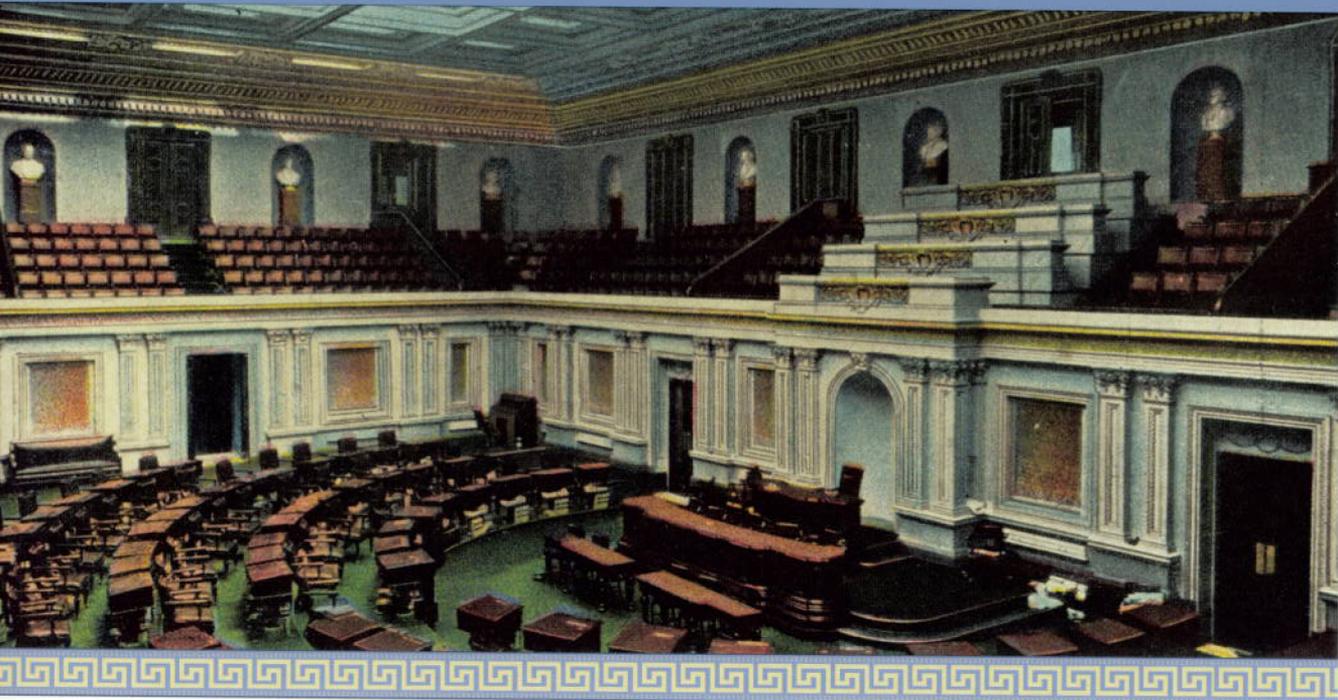
Throughout the 19th century, vice presidents of the United States regularly presided over Senate debates. Designated by the Constitution as president of the Senate, the vice president was provided with a room just off the Senate Chamber. Seen primarily as part of the legislative branch, no 19th-century vice president was invited to meet with the president's cabinet or play any role in the executive branch. Not until 1913 did vice presidents begin to attend cabinet meetings, and not until 1961 were they provided offices by the White House. Until 1937, when Congress moved inauguration day from March 4 to January 20, vice presidents were inaugurated in the Senate Chamber, where they took their oaths of office and delivered their own inaugural addresses. When Vice President Henry Wilson (a former senator from Massachusetts) died in his office at the Capitol on November 22, 1875, the Senate felt it had lost a respected colleague. He lay in state in the Rotunda and his funeral service was held in the Senate Chamber. In 1885, George F. Hoar of Massachusetts introduced a resolution calling for the installation of a memorial in the Vice President's Room to honor Wilson. The Senate commissioned noted sculptor Daniel Chester French to create a marble portrait bust of the late vice



The Vice President's Room, seen here in 1900, today serves a primarily ceremonial function.



A bust of Vice President and former Senator Henry Wilson, who died in the Vice President's Room on November 22, 1875, became the inspiration for the Vice Presidential Bust Collection.



By 1898, the Senate Vice Presidential Bust Collection filled all of the niches lining the gallery level of the Senate Chamber.

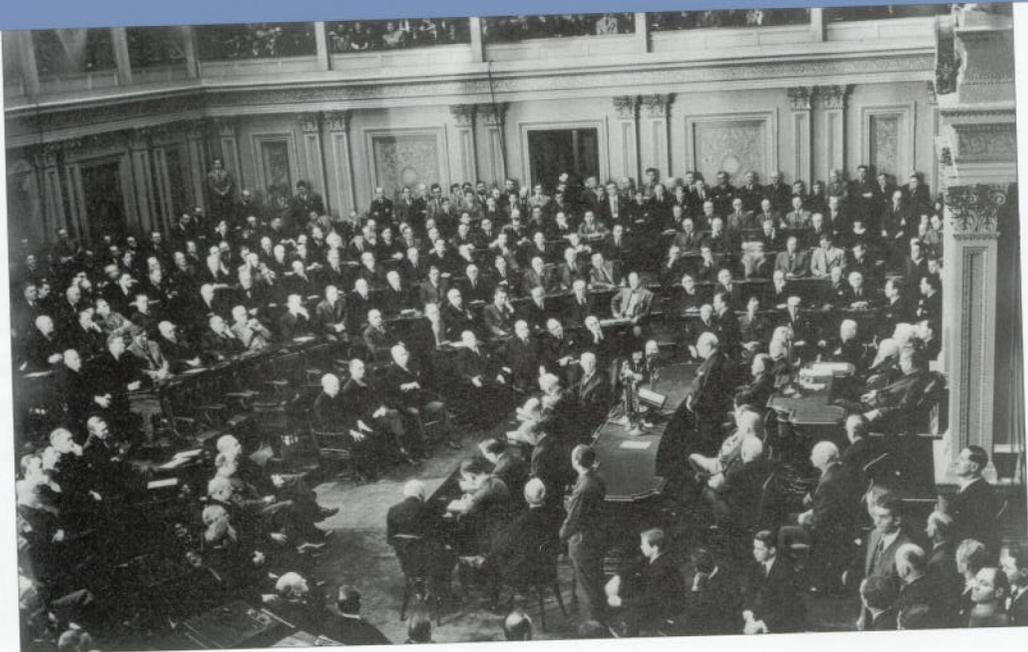
president. “The public services and the life of Mr. Wilson,” one senator noted, “. . . furnish a remarkable illustration of the working of our institutions. . . . That fame he largely achieved in this body, of which he was the President when he died.”

Completion of the Wilson sculpture inspired the Senate to recognize all vice presidents with a similar honor, creating a collection of vice-presidential portrait busts. In 1889, on its 100th anniversary, the Senate unveiled a marble image of Thomas Jefferson, followed by a likeness of John Adams early in 1890. Those sculptures still occupy prominent places in the niches that line the gallery level of the Chamber. By 1898, 18 more vice-presidential likenesses filled the remaining niches. Since then, additional busts have been placed throughout the Senate’s wing of the Capitol. Today, when a vice president leaves office, the Senate may

commission a portrait in marble to add to this collection.

PRESIDENTIAL VISITS

During the 19th century, presidents of the United States delivered their inaugural addresses from platforms on the steps of the Capitol. Otherwise, they appeared at the Capitol only to sign last-minute legislation at the end of their four-year terms, and for ceremonial occasions, such as state funerals. They refrained from personally addressing either or both houses of Congress. Presidents George Washington and John Adams had delivered their annual messages—now called State of the Union addresses—in person. Adams gave his last address in the Senate Chamber of the Capitol in November 1800, but Thomas Jefferson regarded the practice as too similar to the monarch addressing parliament and discontinued it. Instead,



Winston Churchill addressed a joint meeting of Congress in the Senate Chamber on December 26, 1941.

he sent his messages to be read by clerks of the Senate and House. For more than a century, every president followed Jefferson's lead. In 1913, Woodrow Wilson reversed this precedent. That year, senators marched through the Capitol to the larger House Chamber to hear him speak to a joint session. On January 22, 1917, Wilson addressed the Senate in its Chamber on the topic of war. Europe had been torn by war since 1914, and until then the United States had remained officially neutral in the conflict. As American relations with Germany deteriorated, Wilson sought the Senate's advice, he noted, "as the council associated with me in the final determination of our international obligations." He called for a "peace without victory" to bring an end to war in Europe. "Only a peace between equals can last," he told the Senate. The European belligerents ignored Wilson's proposals, and just three months later he returned to Capitol Hill to ask for a declaration of war against Germany.

After the Allied victory, President Wilson visited the Senate Chamber in 1919 to seek approval for ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. That pact formally ended the war with Germany and established a League of Nations to preserve the peace. The chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, led the opposition to the United States joining an international



Led by Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Henry Cabot Lodge, the Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and again in 1920.

peace-keeping body. After lengthy and emotional debates, the Senate rejected the treaty in 1919—and again in 1920.

The other presidents who have spoken in the Senate Chamber have been Warren G. Harding in 1921, Herbert Hoover in 1932, Harry Truman in 1945, and Richard Nixon in 1969. Distinguished foreign visitors, including monarchs, presidents, prime ministers, and ambassadors have also delivered addresses in the Senate Chamber. Most memorably, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill addressed a joint meeting in the Chamber on December 26, 1941, less than three weeks after the United States entered the Second World War.

WOMEN AND THE SENATE

Nearly 50 years after the Senate welcomed its first African American member, another milestone in Senate history brought the first woman senator to Washington. In October 1922,

the governor of Georgia appointed 87-year-old Rebecca Felton of Georgia to a vacant seat. Felton served for just 24 hours before her term expired. It was a symbolic moment that came two years after the Constitution's 19th Amendment had extended the right to vote to women. In her sole Senate speech, Felton predicted that more women would follow her into the Senate. "[Y]ou will get ability, you will get integrity of purpose, you will get exalted patriotism," she told her fellow senators, "and you will get unstinted usefulness." A decade later, in 1932, Hattie Caraway of Arkansas became the first woman *elected* to the Senate. Serving two full terms, she also became the first woman to chair a committee and to preside over the Senate.

A particularly noteworthy moment for women in the Senate occurred in 1999, when for the first time the long marble desk on the Senate dais for officers, clerks, and parliamentarians was staffed entirely by women,



Rebecca L. Felton of Georgia became the first woman senator on November 21, 1922, serving for just one day.



Hattie Caraway of Arkansas became the first woman elected to the Senate in 1932, and the first woman to chair a committee and to preside over the Senate.



In 1999, for the first time, a Senate session was staffed entirely by women, with Senator Susan Collins of Maine presiding.

with Senator Susan Collins of Maine presiding. As greater numbers of women have been elected to the Senate, more women have served as Senate officers and have held high-ranking staff positions. “Today’s remarkable occasion,” commented Republican Leader Trent Lott, “reminds Members how much the Senate’s collective face has changed and improved in recent years.”

RENOVATION AND MODERNIZATION

Over the years, senators raised numerous complaints about the Senate Chamber. Because of the glass skylight, changes in the weather could sharply alter the chamber’s lighting and appearance. Although beautiful, the glass ceiling deflected sound and made it difficult for senators and visitors to hear debate. Thunder and the deafening sound of rain echoing on the skylight above the ceiling’s glass panels sometimes halted debate. During night sessions, the Senate relied on gaslights located above the ceiling,

until 1888 when electric lighting was first installed. Both means of illumination caused an uneven, shadowy glare on the desks below. Senators also spoke of the unhealthy air quality in the windowless Chamber. On July 6, 1861, after presenting a resolution requesting that a committee look into ways to make the Chamber more comfortable, Senator John P. Hale of New Hampshire complained that the Chamber “is the worst, the most inconvenient, uncomfortable, and unhealthy place that ever I was in in all my life . . .” He noted the following day that it was warmer inside the Chamber than it was outside in the scorching summer’s heat. Calls for correcting the problems, or reconstructing the Chamber, continued for decades.

In 1938, architects warned the Senate and the House that corrosion placed their Chambers’ 90-ton ceilings in danger of collapse. The Second World War prevented a prompt remedy. In order to maintain safe conditions until the needed repairs

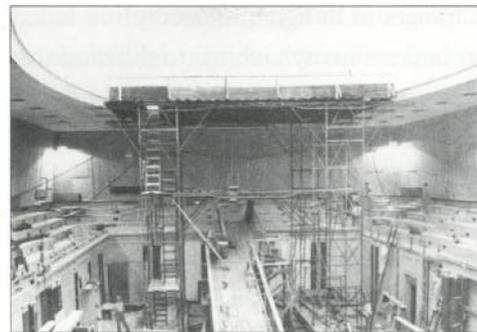


Special braces supported the unsafe ceiling of the Senate Chamber from 1940 to 1949.

could be made, engineers added a framework of steel girders to support each ceiling. For nine years, from 1940 to 1949, senators conducted business beneath these temporary braces, which some likened to “barn rafters.” Meanwhile, the Architect of the Capitol, on behalf of the Senate, contracted for studies on other aspects of the Chamber’s environment, including acoustics, lighting, and redecoration. Senators agreed to replace the old glass and iron ceiling with a plaster-and-perforated steel ceiling, along with indirect lighting, to ease the problems of both visibility and acoustics in the Chamber. Installing a new ceiling also provided an opportunity to improve the outdated heating and cooling system to rid the Chamber of the hot, stuffy air that had plagued it. Even after installation of air conditioning in 1929, sunlight beaming through the glass ceiling made hot summer days unbearable, causing the Senate to adjourn in the late spring.

Eliminating the skylight would reduce the heat in the summer and maintain warmer temperatures in the winter, enabling the Senate to carry on through all seasons.

During the Chamber’s reconstruction, which began in July 1949, senators returned temporarily to the Old Senate Chamber down the corridor. Extra chairs were needed to accommodate the larger number of senators, and only the majority and minority leaders could work from desks. The



The new ceiling, shown during construction in 1950, was designed to improve both acoustics and lighting in the Senate Chamber.

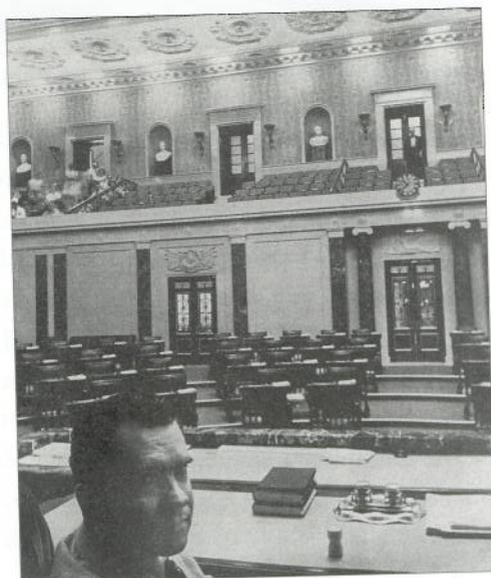
small gallery, jammed with air-conditioning equipment to make the room comfortable, offered little space for visitors or the press. For the 1950 session, the Senate returned to the current Chamber for six months, before heading back to the Old Chamber. In that historic Chamber, senators approved American membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a key defense alliance during the Cold War.

When the renovated Senate Chamber opened on schedule on January 3, 1951, visitors commented on its “theatrical splendor” and “technicolor” halls. Senators applauded its significant advances in acoustics and lighting. Gone were the old gallery seats, whose creaking noise—with the coming and going of visitors—imitated fields of chirping crickets. The renovated Chamber looked more modern and sleek. Desks fashioned from Italian marble, on a raised dais, replaced the walnut desks that had served the presiding officer and legislative clerks since 1859. Gone too were the ornate details of the Victorian era, replaced by the clean lines of the modern age. Yet, the new look also had its critics. Changes in design and decoration failed to impress many architectural historians, who regretted the loss of the glass-and-iron ceiling and other elaborate artistic details.

Despite these changes, the modern Chamber manages to retain many reminders of the Senate’s past. The senators’ original 1819 desks are still used alongside additional desks copied in the same style as those used by senators in the Golden Era. Other relics of the past include spittoons and two lacquered



The Senate met in the Old Senate Chamber during 1949 and 1950 while the current Chamber underwent reconstruction.



Vice President Richard Nixon posed in the recently renovated Senate Chamber in 1954.

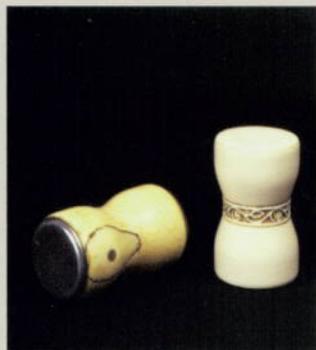
snuffboxes resting on marble ledges on either side of the presiding officer’s dais. Perhaps the most revered historic artifact is the Senate gavel. A small, handleless piece of solid ivory, less than three inches long, it was used by the Senate’s presiding officers from the 1830s until a late night debate in 1954, when the gavel fell apart as Vice President Richard Nixon called the Senate to order. A



The modern Senate Chamber features many relics from the Senate's past, including the original 1819 desks.

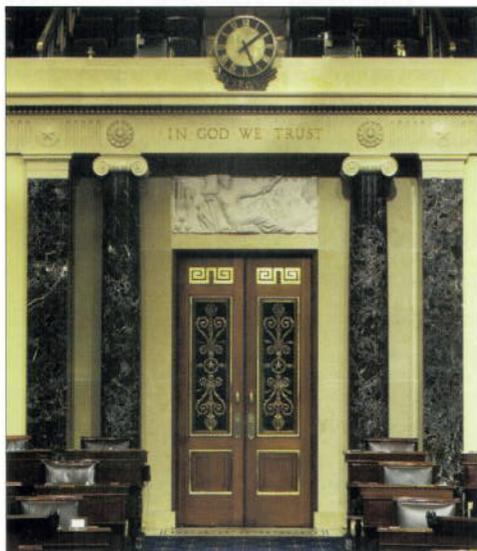


Two lacquered snuffboxes rest on marble ledges on either side of the presiding officer's dais.



The new Senate gavel (right) replaced the mended gavel (left) in 1954.

sufficient commercial source of ivory could not be located until the government of India, as a gesture of international friendship, had a new ivory gavel carved from a model of the old one and presented it to the Senate. Today, the two gavels rest together in a small box. At the beginning of each Senate session, a Senate page carries the gavel case into the Chamber and places it on the rostrum, ready for use by the presiding officer.



The U.S. national motto, In God We Trust, was inscribed over the south-central entrance of the Senate Chamber during the renovation in 1949-1950.

During the renovation, a series of inscriptions was added around the Senate Chamber. Over the presiding officer's desk appears the motto *E Pluribus Unum* (Out of Many, One). Above the doors are *Annuit Coeptis* (God Has Favored Our Undertakings) over the east entrance; *Novus Ordo Seclorum* (A New Order of the Ages) over the west entrance; and the U.S. national motto, In God We Trust, over the south-central entrance.

THE CHAMBER IN THE PUBLIC EYE

During its earliest years, the Senate Chamber was a popular setting for painters, illustrators, and political cartoonists. The advent of photography and motion pictures brought it new attention. During the mid- to late-19th century, Assistant Doorkeeper Isaac Bassett became a favorite subject for photographers, particularly at the end of a congressional session when he would use a broom handle to turn back the hands of the clock to give the Senate vital time to vote on last-minute legislation. Bassett, whose Senate service lasted more than six decades, worked in the Senate



Assistant Doorkeeper Isaac Bassett sometimes adjusted the Senate Chamber clock at the end of a congressional session to give senators more time to debate.

Chamber during nearly every legislative session until his death in 1895.

In the 20th century, introduction of high-speed film led to a proliferation of easily concealed pocket cameras. This made it possible for any visitor to the Chamber to snap candid photos and circulate or publish them. As a result, the Senate formalized its long-standing ban on cameras in the Chamber, just as it had banned sketch-pads and other artists' tools. In 1963, when the National Geographic Society, preparing a guidebook for the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, requested permission to photograph the Senate in session, the Senate suspended its rule and allowed the Society's photographer into the Chamber. Not all members were happy about the decision. "All senators like to have their pictures taken," commented Georgia Senator Richard Russell. "When I look around and see some of my colleagues and then view my

own physiognomy in the mirror, I sometimes wonder why?" Today, the Senate's photographic studio records a formal photograph of the senators in their seats once every two-year Congress.

Hollywood versions of the Senate Chamber further shaped public perceptions of the Senate. Frank Capra's 1939 motion picture, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, featured an authentic-looking Senate Chamber that was actually a Hollywood set. The Senate Chamber also appeared in Otto Preminger's 1962 film *Advise and Consent*. Based on Allen Drury's Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel of the same title, that work highlighted the Senate's unique power to approve or reject presidential nominations and treaties. When taking up matters of advice and consent, the Senate moves from legislative to executive business. For matters of personal privacy and national security, senators in



The Senate temporarily suspended its ban on cameras in the Chamber to allow for the first official photograph of the Senate in 1963.

the 19th century conducted all executive business behind closed doors, emptying both the press and public galleries before they debated and voted on nominees and treaties. This practice ended in 1929, and since then the Senate has conducted all of its business in public, except for matters of the highest security classification. In



Advise and Consent, based on Allen Drury's Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel, featured a Hollywood version of the Senate Chamber, seen here with director Otto Preminger.

1977 and 1978, two controversial treaties dealing with relinquishing U.S. control of the Panama Canal came before the Senate. Although much public sentiment ran against the treaties, Senate leadership organized delegations of senators to travel to the canal zone, meet with Panamanian government officials, and build assurances that Panamanians could continue operating the canal. After extensive hearings on the treaties, the Senate conducted six weeks of deliberation—the longest Senate treaty debate since deliberation over the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Hoping to educate the public and change negative attitudes towards the treaties, Senate leaders allowed unprecedented gavel-to-gavel radio broadcasts, live from the Senate Chamber. With some amendments, both treaties achieved the necessary two-thirds vote of the Senate and its consent to their ratification.

The radio broadcasts were facilitated by the installation in 1971 of microphones at each senator's desk, which made members more audible in debate. The problem of poor acoustics had continued even after replacement of the glass ceiling. Reporters of debates, who recorded the senators' remarks verbatim, sometimes had to sprint from one end of the Chamber to the other to hear distinctly the two senators engaged in dialogue. Microphones assisted the reporters and made both radio and television coverage possible.

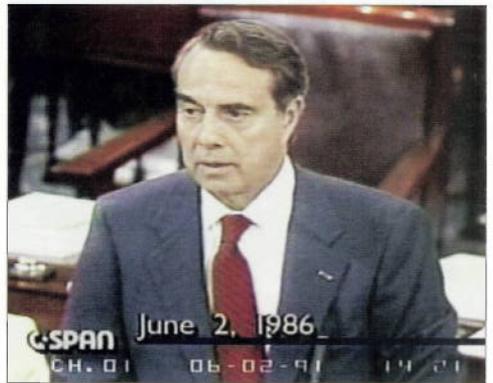
Although many senators had reservations about the intrusion of television cameras into the Chamber, television had become a fixture of Senate committee hearings since the first broadcast in 1947. From the crime investigations conducted by Senator Estes Kefauver in 1950 to the Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954, and the Watergate hearings in 1974, Americans became accustomed to viewing senators in action. When the Senate contemplated an impeachment trial for President Richard Nixon in 1974, the first television cameras were installed in the Senate Chamber. Since Nixon resigned before the Senate had occasion to convene a trial, the cameras were used only to broadcast the new vice president, Nelson A. Rockefeller, taking the oath of office in the Senate Chamber in December 1974. In 1979, the House of Representatives allowed gavel-to-gavel broadcasting of its daily proceedings, carried live by C-SPAN (the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network). Senators continued to resist, concerned that television

would significantly alter the conduct of Senate floor proceedings. Finally, Senate leaders Bob Dole and Robert Byrd proposed live television coverage of daily Senate sessions, and C-SPAN 2 began broadcasting from the Senate on June 2, 1986.

The arrival of television cameras, with their guarantee of a nationwide viewing audience, inspired a freshening of the Chamber's decor. A woolen carpet featuring a deep blue background replaced a less visually appealing light blue covering. Medium



Recently installed cameras in the Senate Chamber broadcast Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller's swearing-in in 1974.



Television cameras captured Senator Bob Dole addressing the Senate on June 2, 1986—the first day that C-SPAN began broadcasting from the Senate Chamber.



Senators of the 110th Congress.

blue damask fabric covered previously unadorned beige walls, and blue drapery served as an elegant backdrop for the presiding officer. The American flag moved to a new position on the presiding officer's right, and a newly designed Senate flag, featuring the Senate seal on a dark blue field, stood in a corresponding position to the left. In the rear of the Chamber, a mahogany balustrade created a separate seating area for staff whose duties require them to be accessible to members

TODAY'S SENATE: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Regardless of the renovations and introduction of new technology, much of what visitors see in the Senate Chamber today would have been familiar to those who visited the Chamber when it opened in 1859. Nineteenth-century senators would no doubt

be surprised at the diversity of the modern membership and intrigued by the technological advances. But they would sit at the same desks, hear much of the same formal language of debate, and recognize many of the rules being enforced. Although the issues have changed, the same lively legislative debate and consensus-building action shapes the laws of the United States of America.

Senators are "the representatives of the States of this mighty Union," said Senator John Crittenden on January 4, 1859, as senators prepared to move to their new Chamber. "[They] will be found always equal, I trust, to the exigencies of any time that may come upon our country. No matter under what sky we may sit; no matter what dome may cover us; the great patriotic spirit of the Senate of the United States will be there and I have an abiding confidence that it will never fail in the performance of its duty."

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Churchill addressing Congress: *U.S. Senate Historical Office*

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