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## CHAPTER XVI

# THE BUILDING AS COMPLETED, FROM WALTER'S DESIGNS

**E**DWARD CLARK supervised the completion of the Capitol from the designs of Thomas U. Walter, leaving the building as it stands to-day. The terraces on the west, north, and south are a part of the general landscape scheme of Frederick Law Olmsted. The building consists of the central or old building, and two wings, or the Capitol extension, with the new Dome on the old building.

The cellar [Plate 220] contained space on the central western extension available for office and committee rooms. Other portions of the cellar are given up to the heating and ventilating apparatus, or are used for storage. Beneath the center of the Dome a vault was built in the cellar to contain the remains of George Washington, but because of the objection of the family to his burial in the Capitol his body never rested in the contemplated spot.

The basement story [Plate 221] is above the surface of the ground. The space in this story is utilized by the Supreme Court library, under the old Senate Chamber, the other rooms being divided between the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Supreme Court, and used by these branches of the Government for committee, office, or storage purposes.

The principal floor [Plate 222] contains the two Halls of Congress, in the center of each wing, with their necessary corridors and approaches, surrounded by lobbies and committee rooms. The Congressional Library was located in the central western extension of the old building. The south wing of the old building, in which was located the old House of Representatives, is thrown into a public hall for the display of statuary, and the north wing is given to the Supreme Court,

the old Senate Chamber being devoted to the court room and the west front being used by the court officials for office and robing rooms.<sup>1</sup>

The attic story [Plate 223] is so arranged in each wing that the public has access from its corridors to the galleries of the House and Senate Chambers, with provision for the press and committee rooms facing the exterior walls of the building. Document rooms are also provided on this floor.

Plates 224, 225, 225a show the eastern front of the building as completed, the principal new features being the porticoes on the wings, which are similar to the central portico designed by Latrobe. Although the original design of Thornton contemplated a central portico he did not contemplate the broad flight of steps which extends to the ground from the principal story, and it is a question of taste whether the original design would not have been more satisfactory, the broad flight of steps leading to a single doorway seeming a useless feature.

The character of the western front has been changed by the marble terrace and steps which replaced the old earth terrace, but the building remains as it was completed [Plates 261–262].

Entrance is obtained to the Senate wing by doorways on the basement story from the north and east. There was formerly an entrance from the west, which has been closed, the end of the hall being utilized as a room. The entrance on the east is into a vestibule [Plate 226] with square

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<sup>1</sup> The Congressional Library was demolished and committee rooms were created in 1900–01. The old Supreme Court was restored to its historic appearance for the Nation's 1976 bicentennial and is now used as a museum space to interpret the history of the Capitol Building.

white-marble columns, from which spring arches surmounted by domical ceilings. The side walls of this vestibule are paneled in marble.<sup>2</sup> This vestibule opens on the north into a reception room, on the south to the public stairway, and on the west into the principal corridor running east and west. The reception or public room has both side walls and vaulted ceiling painted in oil fresco by Brumidi [Plate 227]. The private hallway of the Senators is a dignified vaulted corridor with walls and ceiling painted in oil fresco by Brumidi.<sup>3</sup> The illustration of this hallway [Plate 228] shows clearly the character of the design adopted in the corridors and hallways, as well as the character of decoration adopted for the wall surface in the basement of the Senate wing of the Capitol.

At the east and west ends of the Senate Chamber are private stairways, with marble steps and elaborate, well modeled, and effective bronze railings, for the use of Senators [Plate 229]. On the south of the basement vestibule is an entrance to one of the principal public stairways. The design of this stairway is similar to the one used on the east and west of the House wing (see Plate 244), and there is a corresponding stairway on the east side of the Senate. In the Senate wing white marble is used in the steps, balustrades, columns, and cornices, as well as in the ceilings over the landings, while on the House side Tennessee marble is used, with bronze capitals to the columns. On the principal floor corridors with arched and vaulted ceilings surround the Senate Chamber on the south, east, and west; these corridors have simply

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<sup>2</sup>The east vestibule walls are not marble panels; they have a scagliola finish. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.

<sup>3</sup>Brumidi's medium actually was true fresco for the corridor lunettes and room vaults, various mixtures for the walls, and tempera for the corridor ceilings. For information on Brumidi's technique and the recent conservation of his frescoes in the Capitol, see RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC. See also Barbara A. Wolanin, "Constantino Brumidi's Frescoes in the United States Capitol," in Irma B. Jaffe, ed., *The Italian Presence in the United States Capitol, 1760–1860* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 150–164.

tinted wall and ceiling surfaces [Plate 230]. On the north of the Senate Chamber is located the Senators' retiring room [Plate 231]. This is an impressive room with paneled walls, a colonnade and pilasters supporting a ceiling, all in white marble. To this room the Senators retire for conversation and the reception of special visitors. On the west of the Senate Chamber is another marble hall with a classical colonnade [Plate 232]. North of the public corridor and west of the Senator's retiring room is the public reception room.<sup>4</sup> This room has a flat domical ceiling resting upon flat elliptical arches [Plate 233]. The frescoing in this room was never completed. Brumidi has painted groups depicting Peace, War, Freedom, Agriculture, and in the corners of the room the virtues Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude are represented. The group on the south of the room shows Washington in consultation with two of his first Cabinet officers—Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State, and Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of the Treasury.

At the west end of the Senators' retiring room is located a room known as the President's room [Plate 234]. This is used by the President upon occasions when his services are required at the Capitol. It is more elaborately furnished and decorated than any room in the Capitol building. On the ceiling corners are fresco portraits of Columbus in the southeast, Americus Vesputius in the northwest, Benjamin Franklin in the southwest, and William Brewster, an elder of Plymouth Colony, in the northeast. The ceiling is decorated by groups representing Religion, Liberty, Executive Authority, and Legislation on the north, south, east, and west, respectively. On the walls are portraits of Washington and his first cabinet—Jefferson, Hamilton, Knox, Randolph, and Osgood.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>In the Senate wing the white marble was from Italy. The Senators' retiring room was finished in Tennessee marble, which has a brownish-red hue. The marble hall and public reception room are located on the east rather than west side of the building. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.

<sup>5</sup>This room was also painted by Brumidi. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.



CORRIDOR, BASEMENT NORTH WING.

Today this space is the east elevator lobby (related drawing, plate 216).





PUBLIC ROOM, NORTH WING, BASEMENT.

The Patent Corridor, one of the Brumidi Corridors, outside the entrance to S-116.



CORRIDOR BASEMENT, NORTH WING, FRESCOES BY BRUMIDI, PAINTER.  
The North Corridor, one of the Brumidi Corridors, looking east toward S-116.





SENATORS PRIVATE BRONZE STAIRWAY, NORTH WING,—T. U. WALTER ARCHITECT.  
Designed by Constantino Brumidi, modeled by Edmond Baudin, and cast by Archer, Warner,  
Miskey and Co. of Philadelphia, 1857–59 (related drawing, plate 213).



SENATE CORRIDOR, PRINCIPAL FLOOR.

View to the west toward S-224.





SENATE LOBBY OR RECEPTION ROOM.  
S-215, the Senators' Retiring Room, also called the Marble Room.





SENATE CORRIDOR, PRINCIPAL STORY.

View to the west, Senate Chamber doors. The space behind the screen of columns has been infilled with elevators (related drawing, plate 208).



PUBLIC RECEPTION ROOM, PRINCIPAL STORY, NORTH WING

S-213, the Senate Reception Room.





THE PRESIDENT'S ROOM, NORTH WING.

S-216. The room's appearance is largely unaltered; the original chandelier and furniture have been retained.



THE VICE PRESIDENT'S ROOM, NORTH WING.

S-214, now the formal Office of the Vice President. The painting of Washington has been moved to the restored Old Senate Chamber.





ROOM OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

S-211, now the Lyndon Baines Johnson Room, under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Senate.





NAVAL AND PHILIPPINE COMMITTEES ROOM, SENATE WING.

S-127, now used by the Senate Committee on Appropriations.



FIGURE 24



S-127, Senate Committee on Appropriations.



ROOM OF THE SENATE MILITARY COMMITTEE.

S-128, part of the suite now occupied by the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

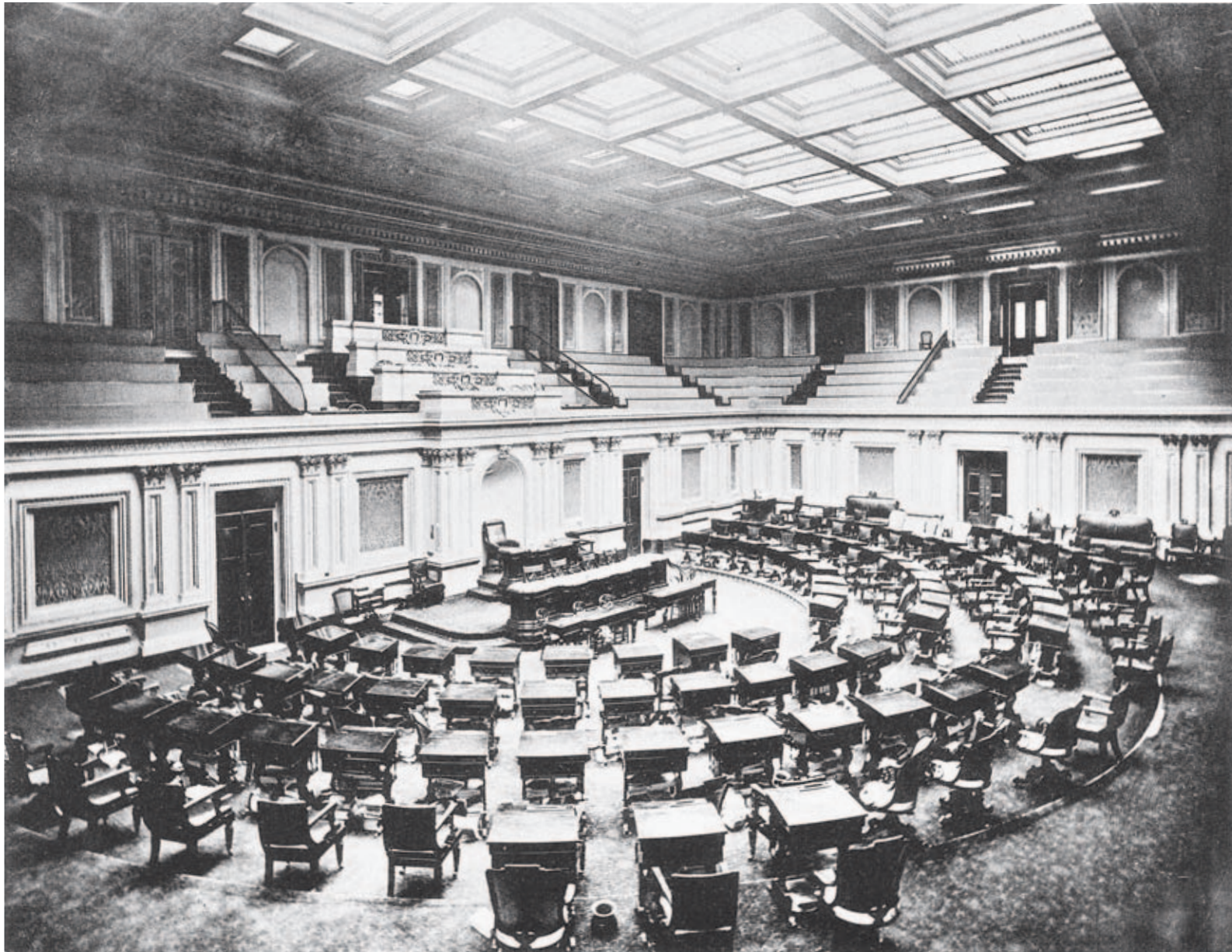




JUDICIARY COMMITTEE ROOM, SENATE.

S-126, now part of the suite occupied by the Senate Committee on Appropriations.  
The ceiling murals were later covered with other designs.





UNITED STATES SENATE CHAMBER.

Photograph illustrating the room's ambient skylight and rich decorative character prior to its remodeling in 1949.





The Senate Chamber at the end of the twentieth century.



BASEMENT HALL, SOUTH WING.

The Hall of Columns (related drawings, plates 205 and 207).  
The Mindon tiles have been replaced with marble.





NORTH CORRIDOR, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

View west toward H-323 on the third floor.



LOBBY OR CORRIDOR, SOUTH OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

H-212, 213, and 214, Member's Retiring Room. The center space was the original Speaker's office.





FOUR PRINCIPAL STAIRWAYS, SIMILAR IN DESIGN ON HOUSE AND SENATE WING.  
This marble staircase is located on the east side of the House wing between the second and third floors.



ROOM OF SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.  
H-211, now the Parliamentarian's office.





WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE ROOM, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

H-209, now shared by the Speaker's office and the House Parliamentarian.



NAVAL COMMITTEE ROOM, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

H-219, now used by the House Majority Leader.





COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

H-144, now used by the House Committee on Appropriations. This was the first room frescoed by Constantino Brumidi.



H-144, the House Committee on Appropriations.

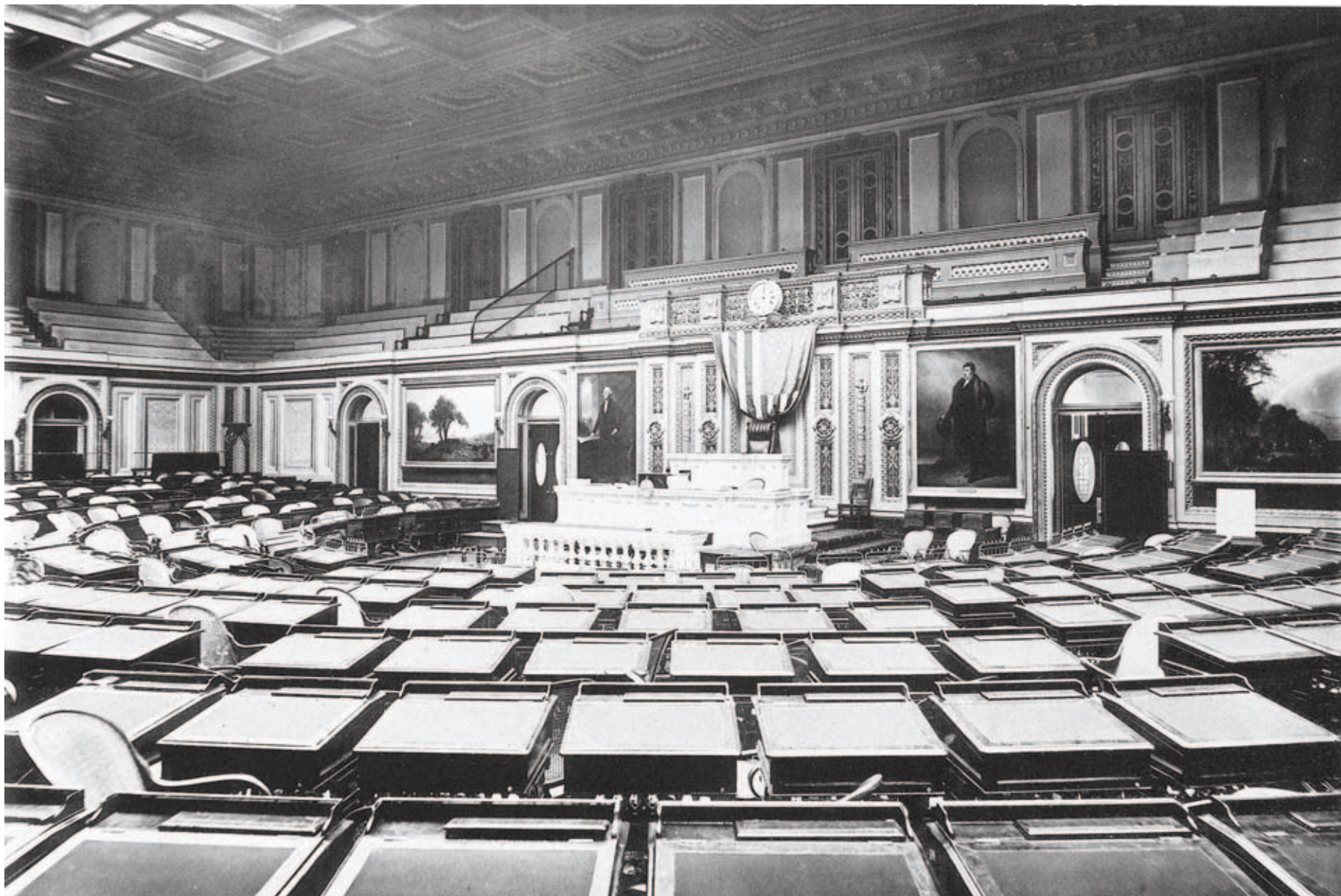




MACE OF SARGENT-AT-ARMS. UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

This mace is still used today in the modern chamber.





HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

A view from the House floor toward the Speaker's rostrum before 1901 remodeling.





The House of Representatives Chamber at the end of the twentieth century.





OLD CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY.

Photograph taken during the Library's demolition in 1900.





NORTH AND SOUTH HALLS, OLD CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY,—T. U. WALTER, ARCHITECT.

These sections of the library space, photographed during the Library's demolition in 1900, were originally built under the direction of Edward Clark in 1865–66.



DETAIL OF IRON WORK IN OLD CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY,—T. U. WALTER, ARCHITECT.  
Photograph taken to record this work before demolition in 1900.





CEILING OF WEST HALL, OLD CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY,—T. U. WALTER, ARCHITECT.

This photograph was taken to record the design of the ceiling and consoles, but it also shows the empty bookshelves in the abandoned library just before demolition in 1900 (related drawing, plate 210).

The room of the Vice-President [Plate 235] is on the east of the Senators' private room. This room has a domical ceiling resting upon flat elliptical arches, and in it hangs the noted painting of Washington by Rembrandt Peale.<sup>6</sup> The walls and ceilings are simply tinted.

The Senate Committee on the District of Columbia occupies a room north of the marble corridor [Plate 236]. This room has been elaborately frescoed by Brumidi, the principal groups representing History, Geography, Physics, and the Telegraph.<sup>7</sup>

Three of the most important committee rooms in the Senate wing are those of the committees on Agriculture, Military Affairs, and Naval Affairs. In the room of the Committee on Agriculture are frescoes of agricultural subjects, while the walls and ceilings of the room of the Committee on Naval Affairs [Plate 237] are decorated by frescoes suggested by work in Pompeii, which are neither pleasing in effect nor in keeping with the architecture of the Capitol. The room of the Committee on Military Affairs [Plate 238] is decorated by historical frescoes by Brumidi—the Consultation of Washington and Lafayette at Valley Forge, the Storming of Stony Point by Anthony Wayne, the Death of Wooster at Danbury, Connecticut, the Massacre at Boston, 1770, and Major Pitcairn at the Battle of Lexington.<sup>8</sup>

The Committee on the Judiciary occupies the room in the northwest corner of the Senate wing [Plate 239]. This is more simply

decorated than the other Senate committee rooms, the corners and ceilings being treated with scroll and line decoration.

The Senate Chamber [Plates 179, 240] is a rectangular room, 113 feet 6 inches in length, 80 feet 3 inches in width, and 36 feet in height. It is surrounded by a gallery which will seat 690 people. Under the galleries are private lobbies and rooms for the use of Senators. The Vice-President, acting as presiding officer, has his desk located on the south side of the hall. On the right is the seat of the Sergeant-at-Arms and on the left that of the Doorkeeper. In front of the Vice-President's desk is the table for the Reading Clerks, the Chief Clerk, and the Journal Clerk; below this are tables for the Official Stenographers. The seats and desks for the Senators are arranged in a semicircle, radiating from and facing the presiding officer, the different political parties being grouped together. The wall surfaces are treated with pilasters and panels enriched with ornaments in relief, decorated and gilded. The ceiling consists of glass panels resting upon heavy beams. The panels contain symbolic decorations of War, Peace, Union, and Progress. In the rear of the gallery of the Senate have been placed from time to time busts of the various Vice-Presidents who have presided over the Senate.<sup>9</sup>

The south wing of the Capitol is occupied by the House of Representatives, with its various corridors, reception, committee, and work rooms. The general arrangement is similar to the arrangement of the Senate wing, but the space occupied by the Hall is much larger and the space devoted to halls and lobbies much smaller.

The principal difference in the basement story of the House wing consists in the colonnaded hallway running through this wing from north to south [Plate 241]. This hall has a long colonnade of columns

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<sup>6</sup>This painting has been relocated to the restored Old Senate Chamber. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.

<sup>7</sup>Brumidi painted these frescoes when the room was used as the Senate Post Office. Today S-211 is called the Lyndon Baines Johnson Room. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.

<sup>8</sup>The former room of the Committee on Agriculture is in the House wing (H-144). The rooms for the Committees on Naval and Military Affairs are now used by the Senate Committee on Appropriations. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.

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<sup>9</sup>The legislative chambers were extensively remodeled in 1949-50. The Vice-President's desk is located on the north, not the south, side of the hall. The original desks and busts of the Vice Presidents were retained. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.



with marble side walls and ceiling in the form of lintels and panels.<sup>10</sup> The capitals are modeled from the capitals of the Temple of the Winds, Athens, the tobacco plant being utilized in the second row of leaves. The entrances to the basement of the south wing are on the east, west, and south, as well as one from the Rotunda on the north. North of the east and west entrances are located the principal stairways, similar in design to those in the Senate wing, which give the public access to the principal corridors. The private stairways [Plate 229] of the members are located in the south corridor.

The principal floor has simply tinted corridors. A public corridor surrounds the House on the north, east, and west. Plate 242 gives a clear idea of the character of these corridors. On the south of the House of Representatives is located the lobby, or retiring room of the members [Plate 243]. The public stairways from the principal story to the attic have steps of white marble, and balustrade columns and cornice of Tennessee marble with bronze Corinthian capitals [Plate 244].<sup>11</sup> The Speaker's room [Plate 245], on the south of the Representatives' room, is quite unpretentious and simply furnished, with plainly tinted wall and ceiling surfaces. The committee rooms of the House of Representatives are not as elaborately decorated as similar committee rooms in the Senate wing. The most effective rooms of this character are the ones occupied by the Ways and Means Committee [Plate 246], the Committee on Naval Affairs [Plate 247], and the Committee on Agriculture [Plate 248].

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<sup>10</sup> The side walls of the hall have a scagliola finish, and the ceiling is iron. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.

<sup>11</sup> The cornice is actually white Lee or Italian marble and the capitals are zinc painted to look like bronze. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.

<sup>12</sup> The mace is still brought out every time the House meets. RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.

Plate 249 shows the mace used by the Sergeant-at-Arms, which ordinarily rests upon a stand on the right of the Speaker's desk.<sup>12</sup>

The Hall of the House of Representatives [Plate 250] occupies the central portion of the south wing, being surrounded by a gallery—three sides being used by the public and the south side for private and press galleries. The room is 139 feet in length, 93 feet in width, and 36 feet in height. The ceiling is paneled with glass similar to the ceiling [Plate 192] of the Senate Chamber, the decorations consisting of stained-glass medallions depicting the coats of arms of the various States and Territories of the Union.<sup>13</sup> The cloakrooms are under the gallery, with doors opening into the Hall of the House of Representatives. The Speaker's desk [Plate 214] is on the south side of the room and below it is the desk for the reading clerk and official stenographers. The Members' desks are placed in semicircular rows, of which the Speaker's desk forms the center. The space beneath the galleries is utilized for private retiring rooms. The attic story of this portion of the building contains committee rooms, press rooms, and, to the north, the House document room.

The western central projection of the old building contained the area on the western front designed by Bulfinch for the Congressional Library. The interior of this portion of the building was destroyed by fire, together with three-fifths of its contents, December 24, 1851, when, as related in other portions of this work, Thomas U. Walter made designs for refitting the room, making the work, together with the shelving, of iron, so that the construction would be noninflammable.<sup>14</sup> The work as completed made an effective room, with central corridors

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<sup>13</sup> During the 1949–50 remodeling of the House Chamber, the original state seals were copied on the new ceiling.

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of the damage sustained by the Congressional Library in the 1851 fire, see *For Congress and the Nation: A Chronological History of the Library of Congress* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1979), 58; Charles A. Goodman and Helen W. Dalrymple, *The Library of Congress* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), 26.

and two tiers of galleries from which opened book alcoves. The western hall of the Library, which was first completed [Plate 251], was 34 feet in width and 92 feet in length. The north and south sections were completed at a later date [Plate 252]. The detailing shows clearly the character and method of construction [Plates 253, 253a]. The books were removed from the Capitol July 31, 1897, when the new Congressional Library building was completed and ready to receive them.

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<sup>15</sup> Removal of the book stacks and ironwork began on June 11 and was completed July 25, 1900. See *Annual Report of the Architect of the United States Capitol to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1901* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 5.

During the year 1900 the alcoves, shelves, and library fittings were removed and the space divided into two stories of committee rooms.<sup>15</sup>

The architectural features of other portions of the old building has been but slightly changed. The Senate Chamber has been changed for the use of the Supreme Court [Plate 103]; the old Hall of Representatives has become a Statuary Hall [Plate 101], and the old Supreme Court room is now a law library [Plate 94]. The lower portion of the Rotunda is unchanged, while the Dome has been added to the upper portion [Plates 97, 186]. The lobbies, halls, and stairways, as they appear at the present time, are shown in connection with the history of the old portion of the building [Plates 92, 96, 100, 101a, 102, 104].