



THE LINDY CLAIBORNE BOGGS
CONGRESSIONAL WOMEN'S READING ROOM

★
A Witness to History



The Lindy Claiborne Boggs Congressional Women's Reading Room, 2016
COLLECTION OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*T*his historic space northeast of National Statuary Hall once served as an office for Speakers, Clerks, and Committees of the United States House of Representatives. A witness to more than two centuries of history, the Lindy Claiborne Boggs Congressional Women's Reading Room has hosted numerous celebrated figures, including Speaker Henry Clay and President John Quincy Adams. Since 1962, the suite has belonged to the Congresswomen of the House.



Lindy Boggs, Pat Schroeder, Barbara Mikulski, and Millicent Fenwick in Room H-235, 1981

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

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A ROOM FOR CONGRESSWOMEN

From 1950 to 1960, the number of women in Congress doubled. Their growing numbers brought to light the lack of women's restroom facilities anywhere near the House Chamber. In 1958, women in Congress began to press for a room of their own. Edith Green of Oregon was the first to officially suggest a "ladies retiring room."

In 1961, Speaker Sam Rayburn assigned a room to the women Members. But this was not a workable solution, as 17 women shared a single lavatory, which was far from the Chamber. The following year, the Congresswomen's petition for control of room H-235, later the Lindy Boggs room, was granted and gave them additional space and a new powder room.

While not as close to the Chamber as the Members' Retiring Room adjacent to the Speaker's Lobby, the Congressional Ladies Retiring Room, as it was first officially called, was a great improvement in convenience for the women. In 1991, room H-235 was renamed the Lindy Claiborne Boggs Congressional Women's Reading Room to honor Boggs's fifty-year association with Congress. It was the first—and, so far, the only—room in the Capitol named for a woman.

Today, the room serves as a gathering place for Congresswomen as well as a place for rest and refreshment. Its walls are now lined with photographs of all the Congresswomen who have served in the House.



EDITH GREEN PRESSES FOR A ROOM OF THEIR OWN

A ten-term Member from Oregon, Edith Green earned the nickname “Mrs. Education” for her accomplishments in advancing educational opportunities for all Americans—most notably through her championing of Title IX, the landmark provision prohibiting federally funded colleges and universities from discriminating against women. She was the first to press for a retiring space for Congresswomen, in 1958.

LEFT: *Edith Starrett Green*

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BELOW: *Maud Elizabeth Kee*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

ELIZABETH KEE APPEALS TO “MR. SAM”

In 1961, Elizabeth Kee of West Virginia appealed to Speaker Rayburn, on behalf of all the women in Congress, for a more commodious space for their use. Addressed to “Mr. Sam,” Kee’s letter states that while she “dislikes bothering [Rayburn] at home about this matter,” the women faced “an intolerable situation with reference to the Retiring Room for Women Members. We have a very small room with one lavatory for the use of seventeen women. Often some of us need to rest for a few minutes but there is no privacy and almost no facilities . . . [We] are in desperate need of this, Mr. Sam . . .”





FRANCES BOLTON OUTFITS THE SPACE

Representative Frances Bolton of Ohio was a Standard Oil heir and one of the world's wealthiest women when she won her late husband's House seat in 1940. Focusing her efforts on health care and foreign affairs, Bolton served in the House until 1969 and remains one of the longest-serving women Members. She took a particular interest in acquiring furniture and choosing upholstery for the new retiring room.

LEFT: *Frances Payne Bolton*

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BELOW: *Lindy Claiborne Boggs*

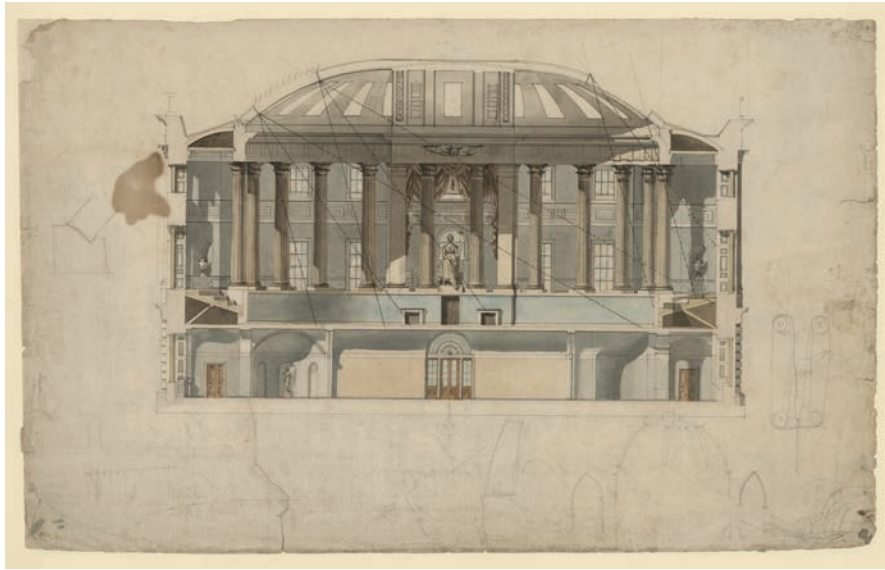
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

RENAMED ROOM HONORS LINDY BOGGS

After House Majority Leader Hale Boggs's airplane vanished without a trace over Alaska in 1972, his seat was declared vacant. His wife, Corinne Claiborne "Lindy" Boggs, announced her candidacy and went on to serve nine terms as the first woman elected from Louisiana.

Boggs admitted to employing Southern charm to implement ideas, notably the inclusion of gender and marital status to the list of anti-discrimination conditions in the 1974 Equal Credit Opportunity Act. Boggs's political skills—her ability to influence others, her connections with fellow Members, and her skill at negotiating compromise—are among the reasons why this room, where she and her colleagues held innumerable discussions and meetings over the years, bears her name.





U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., Section of South Wing, Looking South, BENJAMIN LATROBE, c. 1808
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

ARCHITECTURE AND DÉCOR

The historical importance of the Lindy Boggs room begins with its origins. With no records indicating that this space was rebuilt after the fire of 1814, it is probable that it is one of the few rooms that survived without major damage.

Designed in the Classical Revival style favored by its architect, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the main room has an unusual shape. The ceiling comprises three types of vaults—two half-barrels, a groin vault at the center, and a curved apse end. The masonry vaults were both stylistically attractive and important for fire-proofing—potentially a factor in the room’s survival.

The original décor was simple and included a brick floor and whitewashed walls with painted woodwork. At the turn of the twentieth century, the ceiling was painted with eagle heads, shields, and other decorative motifs. The chandelier, added around 1915, was purchased from Brook Brothers of Washington.

Before it became the Women’s Reading Room, the space was occupied by the Clerk, beginning in 1857. It was later used by the Committee on Banking and Currency (1874–1885) and the Enrolling Clerk (1915–1918).



SPEAKER'S OFFICE

When Statuary Hall was remodeled after the fire of 1814, this space became the Speaker's Office. Henry Clay was its first occupant and used the room from 1819 to 1821 and from 1823 to 1825. Clay had a long and illustrious career, in both the House and the Senate. He was elected Speaker on his first day in the House in 1811 and went on to transform the speakership into a powerful leadership post. During his first term, he led the “war hawk” faction that pushed the country into conflict with Great Britain in the War of 1812, though he later resigned from the House to serve as a U.S. commissioner to negotiate the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war. After reclaiming the speakership, Clay was instrumental in steering the Missouri Compromise of 1820 to passage.

Henry Clay, GIUSEPPE FAGNANI, 1852
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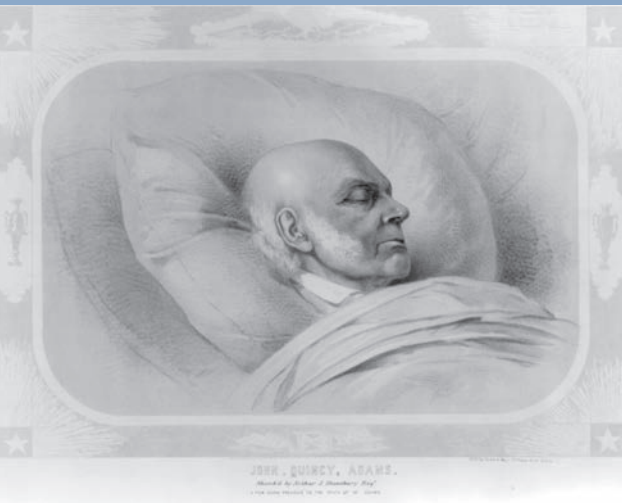
The Henry Clay portrait—the first Speaker portrait donated to the House of Representatives—was a gift from the Italian-born artist Giuseppe Fagnani in 1852.

DEATH OF JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

One of the significant events that took place in the Lindy Claiborne Boggs Congressional Women's Reading Room occurred on February 21, 1848, when John Quincy Adams suffered a stroke after casting a loud "no" vote in the adjoining House Chamber. "Old Man Eloquent" was carried to the then Speaker's Office, where he died two days later. Adams had been the nation's sixth President, and though he lost his presidential reelection bid in 1828, he went on to serve in the House from 1831 until his death in 1848. He considered his time as a Representative the happiest of his 50 years of public service.

In 1991, while reflecting upon the significance of Adams's death in this room, Lindy Boggs recalled part of the legendary correspondence between Adams's parents, Abigail and John. Abigail wrote to her husband as he helped draft the Declaration of Independence and instructed him to "Remember the Ladies and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors."

Concerning the rumors about Adams's ghost haunting the suite, Boggs said, ". . . poor John Quincy. He's suffering from the errors of his father . . . but I think Abigail's wishes are now being carried out. Her son will forever be surrounded by strong ladies."



John Quincy Adams on His Deathbed, AFTER ARTHUR J. STANSBURY, 1848
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Artist Arthur J. Stansbury sketched the last portrait of John Quincy Adams shortly before his death in the Speaker's office. The drawing was eventually made into a lithograph.



ADAMS BUST

A year after Adams's death, the House acquired a commemorative bust by John Crookshanks King, who had sculpted a clay version three years before Adams's death. A plaque beneath the bust, which is mounted on a wall in the Lindy Boggs Room, bears the following inscription: "John Quincy Adams who, after fifty years of public service, the last sixteen in yonder Hall, was summoned thence to die in this room, 23 February 1848."

John Quincy Adams, JAMES CROOKSHANKS KING, 1845
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John Quincy Adams Box Sofa, c. 1835
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ADAMS SOFA

The sturdy, Empire-style sofa on which John Quincy Adams died is still in the suite. The so-called John Quincy Adams sofa remained here for decades. It was removed to the Supreme Court sometime after 1857, but it was reclaimed by the House in 1931.

Curiously, while the sofa was located in the Supreme Court's space in the Capitol, a second government official died on it. On January 26, 1899, Attorney General Augustus Garland suffered from "apoplexy" while arguing before the Court and was brought into the Court Clerk's office, where he was placed on the Adams sofa. He expired shortly thereafter.

BOTANICAL MIRROR

The Rococo Revival mirror over the mantel of the main room came to the space in 1962. Dating from the 1860s and decorated with golden pineapples and ears of corn, this piece was formerly in room H-142, the first women's lounge. When the Congresswomen were assigned their new, larger quarters, they signed a discharge petition to have the mirror moved with them, stating that it was “especially meaningful” to them, and that “no other mirror would be appropriate in our new rooms.”

Botanical Mirror, 1860s

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LINDY BOGGS PORTRAIT

This portrait of Lindy Boggs hangs in the reading room's foyer. To show her deep love of history, it includes a small replica of the *Car of History* clock. The 1819 original is located just outside the Lindy Boggs room, in the old Hall of the House (now National Statuary Hall). Boggs's interest in history led her to chair the Commission of the United States House of Representatives Bicentenary. Boggs championed women's rights and was the first woman to chair a major political convention.



Lindy Claiborne Boggs, NED BITTENDER, 2004
COLLECTION OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



OFFICE OF THE CLERK
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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