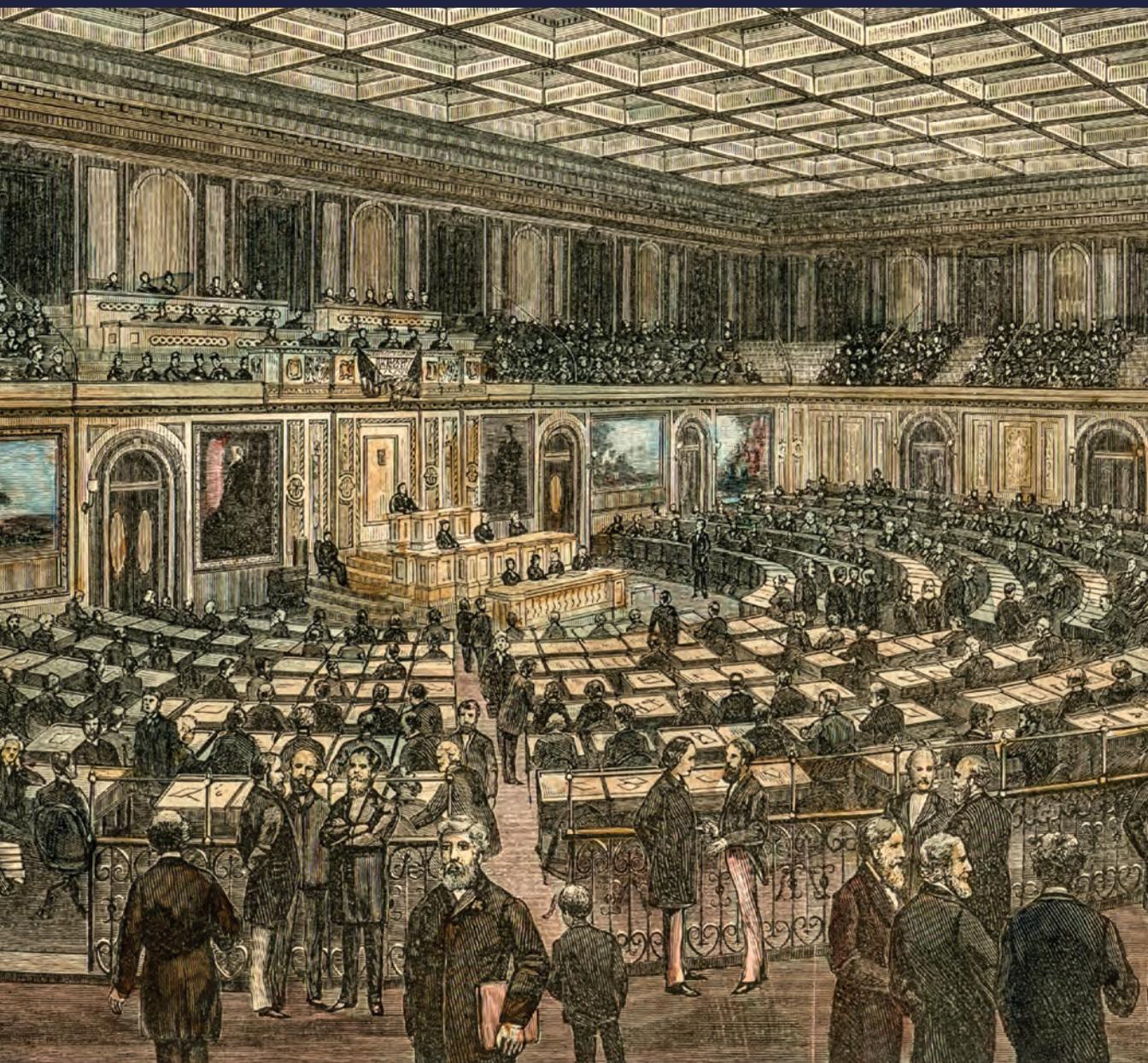


# THE PEOPLE'S HOUSE

A Guide to Its History, Spaces, and Traditions

United States House of Representatives



HISTORY, ART & ARCHIVES

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

On the cover: This scene by artist Samuel Smith Kilburn depicts debate in the House Chamber from 1884. At the time, large landscape paintings by the renowned artist Albert Bierstadt hung alongside the portraits of George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette on either side of the rostrum.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

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November 2018

# CONTENTS

## **BECOMING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE..... 2**

### **Beginning a New Congress..... 4**

Opening Day

Election of the Speaker

Dean of the House and Swearing-in of the Speaker

Administering the Oath to the Members-Elect

Announcing Party Leadership, Electing Officers, and Passing Rules

### **Seating in the House Chamber over Time..... 7**

## **HOUSE GEOGRAPHY..... 8**

### **Old Hall of the House..... 9**

Lindy Claiborne Boggs Congressional Women’s Reading Room

National Statuary Hall

### **1857 House Wing..... 11**

Current House Chamber

House Galleries

Press Gallery

Speaker’s Lobby

Rayburn Room

Board of Education

Members’ Dining Room and House Restaurant

Members and Family Room

Cloakrooms

### **House Office Buildings..... 15**

Cannon

Longworth

Rayburn

Ford

O’Neill

Modern Office Lottery

**INSIDE THE HOUSE CHAMBER.....18**

- Rostrum
- Gavel
- Inkstand
- Hopper
- American Flag
- Mace
- Fasces
- Washington Portrait
- Lafayette Portrait
- Electronic Voting System
- Televised Proceedings

**Other Artifacts in the House Chamber.....25**

- Daniel Webster Plaque
- Lawgiver Relief Portraits

**Additional Art in the House.....26**

- Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*
- Signing of the Constitution*
- Member Firsts and Milestones

**PEOPLE OF THE HOUSE..... 28**

**Leadership..... 29**

- Speaker of the House
- Majority Leader
- Minority Leader
- Whip

**Parties..... 33**

- Democratic Caucus
- Republican Conference

**House Officers..... 33**

- Clerk of the House
- Sergeant at Arms
- Chaplain
- Parliamentarian
- Chief Administrative Officer

**HOUSE PROCEEDINGS** ..... 36

Procession

Prayer and Pledge

House *Journal*

Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union

Assigning Debate

Adjournment

Bell System

Decorum

Joint Sessions and State of the Union

Electoral College

Joint Meetings



# THE PEOPLE'S HOUSE



Clerk William Tyler Page, speaking here to Members-elect in 1927, devised an orientation program for new Members in 1921.

*Image courtesy of the Library of Congress*

## BECOMING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE

In 1794 a young lawyer named John Quincy Adams accepted an appointment as Minister to the Netherlands, beginning what would become a lifetime of public service. Adams was only in his late 20s at the time, and over the next 35 years he compiled perhaps the most impressive résumé in American history, with stints as American minister to the principal European powers, as a Senator from Massachusetts, as Secretary of State, and finally as U.S. President from 1825 to 1829.

After four decades serving his country, Adams could have quietly retired to his home outside Boston. But in 1830 he ran for and won what he considered to be his greatest achievement: a seat in the United States House of Representatives.

Few descriptions capture the pride of serving in the House more than the diary entry that Adams penned shortly after his election that year: “My Election as President of the United States was not half so gratifying to my inmost Soul,” Adams confided. “No election or appointment conferred upon me ever gave me so much pleasure.”

At age 65, Adams, whom colleagues called “Old Man Eloquent,” was no ordinary newcomer to the Capitol. His vast experience stood in stark contrast to the 80 other new Representatives who entered the House with him as the 22nd Congress (1831–1833) convened in early December 1831. In the 19th century, it fell to leaders like Adams and other senior Members to provide both advice and example to the newly elected.

Formal new-Member orientations began only a century ago and were the brainchild of William Tyler Page, an innovative Clerk of the House whose decades of House service—he started as a 13-year-old messenger around 1881—made him a font of clerical knowledge. His career spanned 50 years, during which nine Speakers and nearly 3,300 Members came and went. When he retired in 1931, Page had served with nearly two-fifths of all the Members who had ever served in the House.

In a nod to Page’s professionalism, House leaders chose him as Clerk in 1919, making him the first Clerk since before the Civil War who was not a former Representative. Ever alert for ways to modernize the House, Page used his institutional knowledge to organize a “training school” for new Members. He had lived through the chaos that followed the 1914 elections, when nearly 120 new Members-elect, many of whom had never served in public office, descended upon the House and overwhelmed the modest number of congressional staff with inquiries about routine business.

With that experience in mind, Page hosted the House’s first formal orientation in the spring of 1921. Roughly 120 Representatives-elect of the 67th Congress (1921–1923) gathered in what is now the Cannon Caucus Room. One newspaper described it as a “school for rookie congressmen.” In this forum, and in subsequent orientations, the Clerk discussed the House’s daily rhythms and spent several hours fielding questions: How do I get recognized on the floor? Do Members have priority to obtain and distribute gallery tickets? What are the uses of official stationery and the

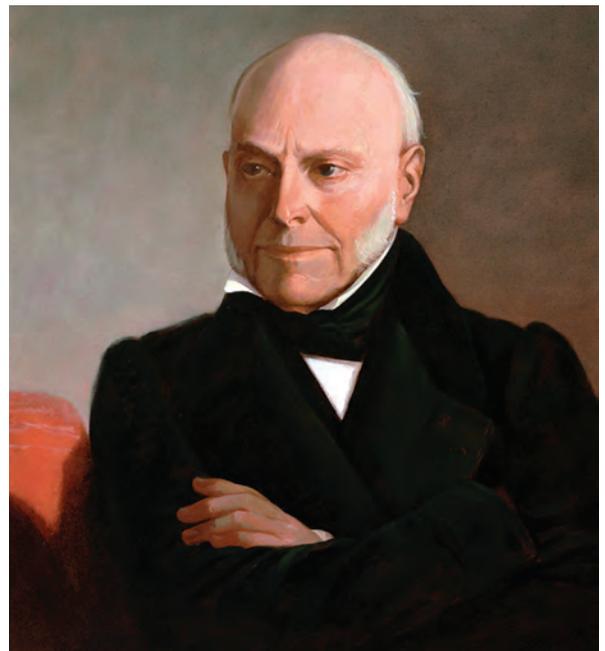
franking privilege? Can you please explain the travel-reimbursement process? May I bring a wardrobe trunk into my office? Can a Member eat lunch in the Speaker’s Lobby? Why are there mice in the House Office Building? Does the House hire an exterminator?

Over time, the orientation experience has evolved considerably. Today, the Committee on House Administration, House Officers, and House leadership conduct new-Member orientation shortly after each general election. Over the course of a busy week, Members-elect learn the basics about everything from voting on the floor to setting up a congressional office.

Since 1921 the aim of orientation has been the same: to provide Members-elect with an introduction to the unique legislative processes and traditions of the House as well as the resources available to them and their congressional offices.

John Quincy Adams is the only person in American history to serve in the House after serving as President. He represented a Massachusetts district from 1831 until he died in 1848.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*



Much like the orientation this booklet provides a jumping off point for new Members and their staff to learn the fundamentals of the House’s history, its people, geography, artwork, and proceedings.

## BEGINNING A NEW CONGRESS

As prescribed in the U.S. Constitution (Article I, Section 2), the House of Representatives begins a new legislative term every two years. Unlike the Senate, in which only one-third of its seats are ever up for election, the House’s 435 Representatives must stand for election every two years. While the Senate is known as a “continuing body,” the House adjourns on the last day of a Congress *sine die* (Latin for “without day”). It reconstitutes itself at the opening of each new Congress, electing a Speaker, swearing in the new Membership, approving a slate of officers, and adopting a rules package.

### Opening Day

On the first day of a new Congress, the Clerk of the House from the previous Congress calls the new House to order. What follows is a carefully choreographed proceeding that, in many respects, echoes the very earliest Congresses.

After the Clerk opens the session, the House Chaplain offers a prayer. In a 20th-century addition to the proceedings, the Clerk also leads the Members-elect in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Clerk then verifies the receipt of the Certificates of Election of the 435 voting Members-elect and directs that a quorum call be taken to verify that a majority of Members-elect necessary to conduct business is present.

For much of House history a reading clerk called the roll of Members-elect one by one. Today, Members-elect register their presence by inserting their voting cards into the electronic voting stations located throughout the chamber. The Clerk then announces the election credentials for the Delegates from each territory—the District of Columbia, Guam, the Virgin Islands,

American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands—and, when applicable, the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico (who is elected to a four-year term). The Clerk also announces any deaths or resignations of Members-elect since the general election.

### Election of the Speaker

The next order of business is the election of the Speaker. More often than not, the result is a foregone conclusion. Since the Civil War, the Republican Conference and the Democratic Caucus have chosen their respective candidates for Speaker in a secret party vote before the new Congress begins. Party leaders nominate these candidates on the floor on Opening Day.

After the parties put forward the nominations, the Clerk calls for a vote and appoints tellers from the majority and minority parties to tally the results. In modern practice, two Members-elect from each party—usually the putative chair and ranking member of the Committee on House Administration—and two other long-serving Members-elect serve as tellers.

Thomas Newton Jr. of Virginia swore in Speaker Henry Clay of Kentucky on Opening Day of the 16th Congress (1819–1821) on December 6, 1819, marking the beginning of the House tradition of the Member-elect with the longest continual service swearing in the Speaker.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*



Since 1839 the House has elected Speakers by voice (*viva voce*) in an alphabetical roll call vote. Before the Civil War, Speaker elections occasionally lasted many rounds of balloting. In 1856, for instance, it took the House two months and more than 130 ballots to elect Nathaniel Banks of Massachusetts as something of a compromise Speaker. The last multi-ballot vote for Speaker on the floor occurred in 1923.

At times, Members-elect will nominate additional candidates for Speaker on the floor. Usually they are fellow Members. But as the Constitution does not require that the Speaker be a Member of the House, Members-elect have at times cast votes for former Representatives or other prominent Americans rather than the party nominees.

To win election as Speaker, the successful candidate must receive a majority of the votes cast (not necessarily 218 votes). After the vote is tallied, the Clerk announces the result. The Sergeant at Arms from the previous Congress then announces the newly elected Speaker from the door at the center rear of the chamber, and a delegation of Members-elect appointed by the Clerk escorts the Speaker-elect to the chair at the top of the rostrum. There, the unsuccessful candidate for Speaker (customarily the Minority Leader) officially introduces the Speaker-elect. Following tradition dating to the First Congress (1789–1791), the Speaker-elect then delivers a brief speech.

## Dean of the House and Swearing-in of the Speaker

After the new Speaker's remarks, the Dean of the House—the Member-elect with the longest continual service—administers the Oath of Office to the Speaker-elect in a practice that dates to the 1820s and is derived from a much older ritual in the British House of Commons.

Virginia's Thomas Newton Jr. was the first Member to hold the office that is now called Dean, a title initially known as the "Father of the House." Newton served from 1801 to 1833—

with a one-year interruption in 1830 when an opponent challenged his election—and possessed unrivaled institutional knowledge. Late in Newton's career, *Niles' Weekly Register* remarked that the Tidewater Virginian, who served as Father for more than a dozen years, was "as well acquainted with [the House's] business as any other member—not much of a talker, but a zealous and honest doer,—knowing more of the public concerns than united hundreds of the babblers who have made their entrances and exits, and are forgotten as though they never had been, since he took his seat in that body."

While swearing in the Speaker was the only official role Newton and his successors played, colleagues came to value the Fathers of the House as institutionalists who kept above the partisan fray.

By the 1920s, the term Dean of the House began to supplant the use of "Father." While the reason for this change remains unclear, it is likely that the institution deemed the usage obsolete because of the presence of the first women Representatives.

## Administering the Oath to the Members-Elect

The new Speaker takes the responsibility for presiding over the House from the Clerk and administers the Oath of Office to all the Members-elect in a group swearing-in. Oaths of office and allegiance have been features of government for centuries. Today, Members of the House take an oath to uphold the Constitution.

The founders chose to require an oath for federal and state officials in the Constitution, but left it to the First Congress to determine the exact language. In its first act, Congress specified the wording: "I, A.B., do solemnly swear or affirm (as the case may be) that I will support the Constitution of the United States."

The form of the oath has changed several times since then. During the Civil War, for instance, Congress mandated that the "iron-clad" oath bar from office anyone who had been disloyal to



Speaker John W. McCormack of Massachusetts administers the Oath of Office to the 91st Congress (1969–1971) during the traditional group swearing-in ceremony.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives, Gift of David K. Hansen*

the Union. The oath used today has not changed since 1966 and is prescribed in Title 5, Section 3331, of the United States Code. It reads: “I, AB, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.”

Members-elect were first sworn in *en masse* on Opening Day 1929. Before then, the Speaker administered the oath separately to each state delegation in alphabetical order while other Members socialized and noisily milled about the chamber. Speaker Nicholas Longworth of Ohio changed the method because he hoped the mass swearing-in would better “comport with the dignity and solemnity” of the ceremony. According to other accounts, however, Longworth’s true intent was to avoid a potential attempt to challenge the seating of

Oscar De Priest of Illinois, the first African American elected to Congress in the 20th century. Subsequent Speakers reverted to the original method of swearing in Members on a state-by-state basis. But in 1937, Speaker William B. Bankhead of Alabama swore in the House *en masse*, setting the tradition that remains in effect today. Since the 80th Congress (1947–1949), Members have also been required to sign an oath, which is held by the Clerk of the House.

Following the official swearing-in, Members, joined by family and friends, often pose for individual photos with the Speaker in a space outside the chamber. During the photo they take a ceremonial oath, often using the Bible or other religious texts.

### **Announcing Party Leadership, Electing Officers, and Passing Rules**

After the Members take the oath of office, the parties announce their leaders, and the chair of the majority party offers a resolution nominating

his or her party's candidates for Clerk, Sergeant at Arms, Chaplain, and Chief Administrative Officer (CAO); the chair of the minority party offers a substitute list of candidates as an amendment. With the exception of the CAO, a position created in the 1990s, these offices date to the First Congress in 1789. Because the majority party controls the most votes, its officer nominees almost always prevail, and they are sworn in by the Speaker. Traditionally, the Chaplain is elected in a separate vote and is unopposed by the minority party. With the chief legislative posts filled, the new House then approves a set of rules of procedure before debating other administrative actions necessary for the function of the House.

## SEATING IN THE HOUSE CHAMBER OVER TIME

Before the construction of the first House Office Building in 1908, the chamber desk was a Member's entire office, his most permanent home in a transient city checkered with boarding houses. In the 19th century, after adjourning the House on Opening Day, the Speaker would ask all Members to retire behind the railing at the rear of the chamber for the desk lottery.

Picking a desk was often a practical matter. The best locations were close to the rostrum, where a Member could hear proceedings and be easily recognized by the Speaker. It seems as though, initially, the earliest Members to arrive had the right to select the best desks. A congressional guidebook from 1839 encouraged Members to arrive ahead of the session to secure a good seat by writing one's name on the desk itself. Traveling to Washington, DC, early had the added benefit of helping secure a quorum to conduct business.

Illicit desk trades and heavy-handed negotiations between Members caused enough frustration that the House adopted a desk lottery in December 1845. Over the next half-century, the lottery became a cherished ritual at the start of a Congress. A blindfolded Page—a young person who worked in the House and ran errands

for Members—drew slips of paper (and, later, numbered ivory balls) from a mahogany box to establish the order in which Members chose their desks. By the 1870s, the House honored a handful of Members—the deans of each party, former Speakers, elderly Members, and chairmen of important committees—by allowing them to choose their seats first simply by placing their hats on their chosen desk.

The desk lottery ended in 1913, when the House installed the modern theater-style seating, but the practice continues in the form of the current lottery for space in the House Office Buildings (see p. 17).

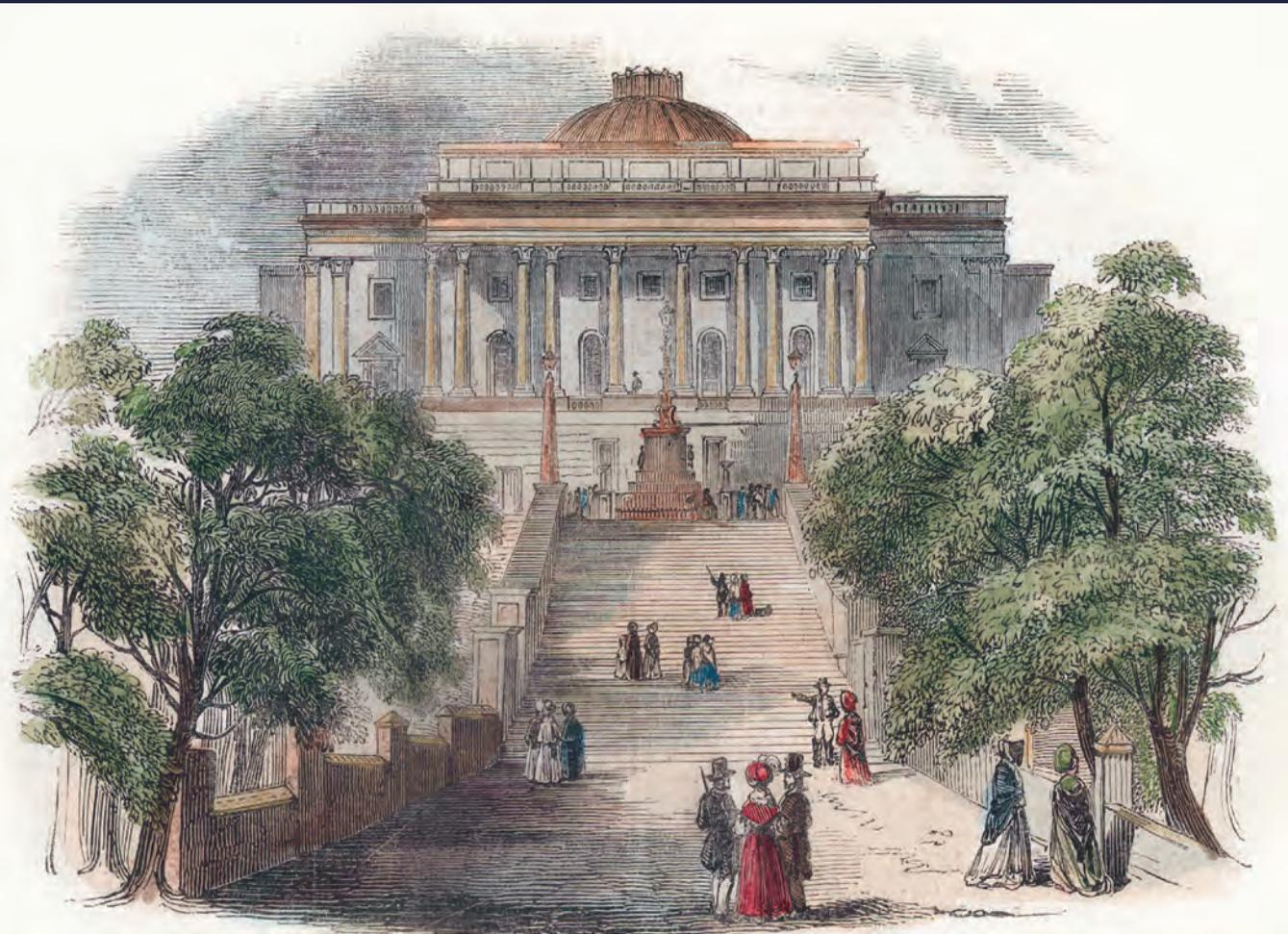
Similarly, the party-bloc seating tradition from the 19th century still holds true. Members had long clustered by state delegation, but by the 1830s, as party identities hardened, Whigs and Democrats sat in party blocs; Democrats placed themselves to the Speaker's right. Whigs and, later, Republicans sat to the Speaker's left.

Today, Members of the two major political parties continue to respect that tradition by sitting across the center aisle from each other. Seating is unassigned within the party sections, though some state delegations still tend to cluster together.

When the House's current chamber opened in 1857, it boasted 262 desks designed by Architect of the Capitol Thomas U. Walter in the latest Renaissance Revival fashion.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*





This 1842 hand-colored wood engraving of the Capitol depicts the building as it appeared during John Quincy Adams's House career. Instead of the grand white dome of today, the Capitol was topped by a low wood and copper dome designed by Architect of the Capitol Charles Bulfinch.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

## HOUSE GEOGRAPHY

When Congress relocated from its temporary quarters in Philadelphia to the permanent seat of government along the Potomac River in November 1800, very little of the Capitol building had been constructed. In fact, the House, Senate, Supreme Court, and the Library of Congress all occupied a small section of the north wing immediately off the modern Rotunda. Engineers relied mostly on local materials, such as the stone quarried downriver from the capital. An untold number of slaves did the physically demanding work of building the Capitol. They cut the sandstone, measured and framed the timber, and erected the seat of America's government brick by brick.

As the nation expanded during the 19th century, Congress and the Capitol grew in tandem alongside it. By the late 1850s, Congress opened the modern House and Senate wings after outgrowing its initial space. During the Civil War, Philip Reid, an enslaved African American, devised a way to cast the bronze Statue of Freedom in sections in order to set it atop the grand new Capitol Dome, completing that iconic symbol of democratic government.

As the federal government grew in size and complexity during the 20th century, the Capitol campus expanded rapidly. The first House office building opened in 1908, a second in 1933, and a third in 1965. As Congress's workload became more intricate, the House added professional staff versed in diverse policies. Today, in addition to the Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn House Office Buildings, committee and support staff occupy two additional buildings, Ford and O'Neill, at the base of Capitol Hill.

The East Front of the Capitol was extended in the 1950s, and the West Front underwent major renovations during the 1980s. In 2008 the Capitol Visitor Center, built under the East Front Plaza, opened as a central gathering place for the thousands of constituents and visitors who come to the Capitol every day.

## OLD HALL OF THE HOUSE

From 1800 to 1807, the House met in what is now the office suite of the Senate Majority Leader, an uncomfortably tight space for the growing number of Members.

In 1807 the House first occupied its own chamber, the location of the present-day National Statuary Hall. But less than a decade later, in August 1814, British forces sacked Washington, DC, and torched a number of federal buildings, including the Capitol and the White House. For five years, while architects rebuilt the House and Senate chambers, Congress met initially at Blodgett's Hotel, near today's Gallery Place-Chinatown Metro stop, and then in what came to be called the "Old Brick Capitol"—a hastily built structure to the east of the Capitol, where the Supreme Court building exists today.

The rebuilt Hall of the House—designed by Architect of the Capitol Benjamin Henry Latrobe and constructed by his successor, Charles Bulfinch, between 1815 and 1819—is an early example of Greek revival architecture in America.

Modeled after an ancient amphitheater, the new legislative chamber featured a coffered wooden ceiling topped by a windowed cupola.

In the chamber, Members sat at desks arranged in tiered, semi-circular rows facing the Speaker's rostrum, a wooden structure along the southern wall. Above the rostrum hung a red draped *baldacchino*—a ceremonial canopy signifying the authority of the person stationed beneath it.

The amphitheater shape worked well to project sound from the rostrum, but when Members seated throughout the room addressed the House, their voices echoed from all parts of the chamber. Attempts to baffle the sound with red draperies failed, and for one Congress the House even reversed its floor plan, moving the Speaker's rostrum to the rounded end of the room.

In 1849 a visitor in the galleries during the all-night debate at the end of Abraham Lincoln's only term in Congress described a scene that was not unusual for the era: "Imagine 230 tom cats fastened in a room, from which escape is impossible, with tin cans tied to their tails—raging and screaming, and fighting, and flying . . . and you will have some idea of the last jubilee in the House."

The House Chamber occasionally resembled a frontier saloon more than a temple of representative government. Many Members chewed tobacco with gusto and availed themselves of the numerous spittoons throughout the chamber. A later House investigation said the spittoons made for "a most disgusting spectacle that would not be tolerated in a barroom of a mining camp."

When not jostling to address the House, Members often seemed oblivious to the constant din. They held private conversations, wrote letters back home, read newspapers, or even napped. By some antebellum accounts, there were as many as a dozen alcohol vendors in the Capitol pouring drinks when the House was in session.

For many years, Members wore hats on the floor—mirroring a practice in the British House of Commons that symbolized the legislature’s independence from the Crown. The House argued about hat wearing for 15 years, eventually banning it in 1837 because the forest of hats had grown so thick and tall that it had become hard to see, let alone hear, what was going on.

The growing animosity and heated debate over the expansion of slavery exacerbated what was already a combustible environment in the 1830s and 1840s. Shoving matches and floor fights were not uncommon. Sometimes these conflicts turned more violent as Members challenged one another to duels over matters of personal honor.

Since 1962 room H-235 has served as a retiring space for women Members. In 1991 the room was named in honor of Representative Lindy Claiborne Boggs of Louisiana.

*Image courtesy of the Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives*

## Lindy Claiborne Boggs Congressional Women’s Reading Room

The historic space known today as the Lindy Boggs Room (H-235), just off the Old Hall, is one of the oldest parts of the Capitol.

From 1819 to the eve of the Civil War, the space served as the Speaker’s Office. In late February 1848 it also briefly served as a makeshift infirmary after John Quincy Adams suffered a stroke and collapsed on the House Floor. Members eventually carried him into the Speaker’s Office and placed him on a small sofa. Adams fell into a coma and died there a few days later on February 23, 1848.



When the new House wing opened in 1857, and the Speaker moved to a room just off the chamber, the Clerk of the House took over the space. Later, the Committee on Banking and Currency (1874–1885) and the enrolling clerk (1915–1918) worked there.

As more and more women won election to the House in the 20th century, it became apparent that the Capitol, designed long before women could actively participate in lawmaking, could not accommodate their needs. There was no women’s restroom near the chamber, for instance. In 1958 women in Congress, led by Edith Green of Oregon, began to press for a retiring room of their own.

In 1961 Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas assigned a room on the first floor of the Capitol for women Members’ use. But this solution proved unworkable, as 17 women shared a single lavatory far from the chamber. A year later, Congresswomen gained control of the former Speaker’s room off the Old Hall.

In 1991 room H-235 was renamed the Lindy Claiborne Boggs Congressional Women’s Reading Room to honor Representative Lindy Boggs of Louisiana and her 50-year association with Congress. It was the first room in the Capitol named for a woman, and today it serves as a gathering place for Congresswomen. In addition to the Boggs room, the first women’s restroom near the House Floor opened in 2011; it is located on the opposite side of the Speaker’s Lobby from the men’s restroom.

## National Statuary Hall

After the 1857 completion of the new House wing of the Capitol (where the House continues to meet), the old, vacant chamber became both a thoroughfare between the Rotunda and the House Floor and a disorganized storage space. To make better use of the room, Congress turned it into National Statuary Hall on July 2, 1864. The authorizing legislation enabled each state to send

two statues, made of marble or bronze, of their “illustrious” or “distinguished” residents “worthy of this national commemoration.”

By 1935 there were 65 statues crowding Statuary Hall. Concerned about the structural integrity of the room, Congress decided that only one statue from each state would reside there; the remaining statues were displayed in other prominent places in the Capitol complex.

## 1857 HOUSE WING

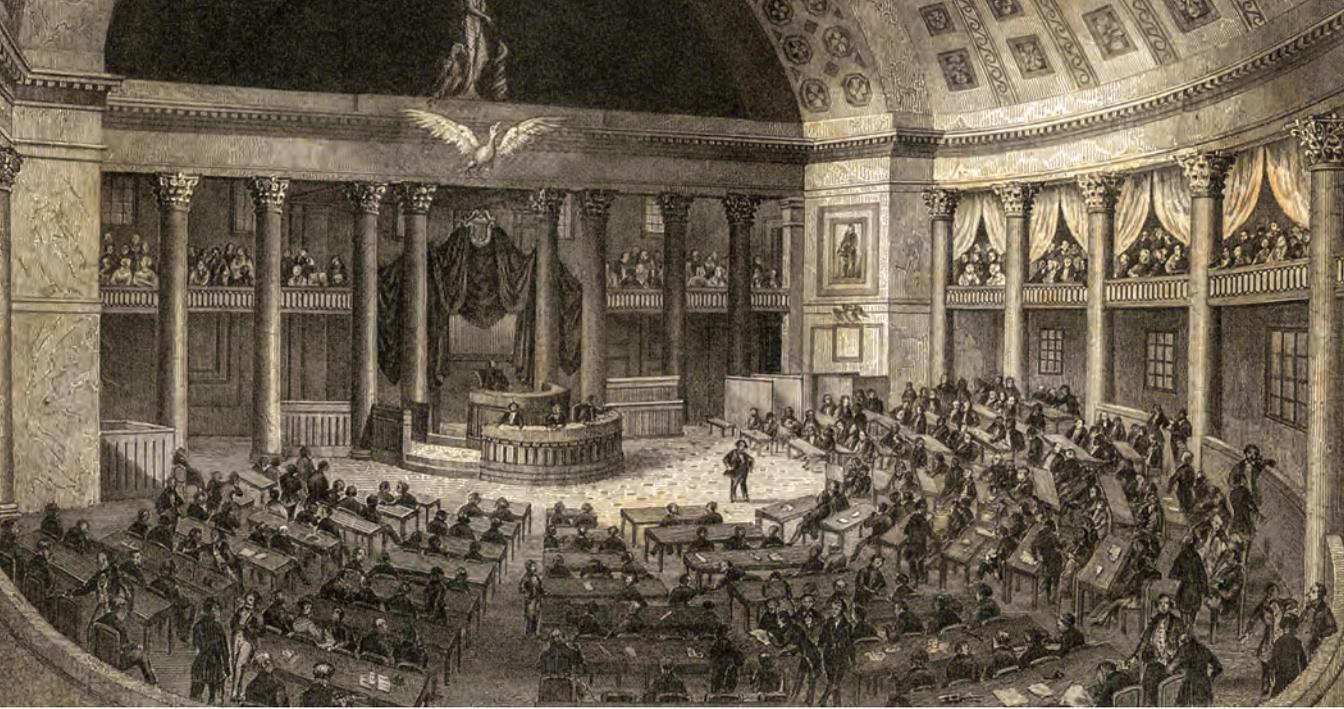
Although the Capitol was one of the largest and most impressive buildings in North America during the first half of the 19th century (approximately 350 feet long and more than 280 feet wide at ground level), by the mid-1850s it could not keep pace with the influx of Representatives and Senators from the newly admitted states.

On July 4, 1851, President Millard Fillmore laid the cornerstone for the expanded House wing. The new House and Senate additions more than doubled the length of the building.

## Current House Chamber

On December 16, 1857, just days after the 35th Congress (1857–1859) convened, the House met for the first time in its current chamber. Designed by Architect of the Capitol Thomas U. Walter, the expanded and elegant space was far more commodious than the cramped confines of the Old Hall and made for better acoustics.

Victorian decor prevailed in the new space. Steam-powered fans brought in fresh air. Massive stained-glass skylights with a central bald eagle motif, surrounded by the seals of every state in the Union, admitted natural light. The marble rostrum and painted iron decorative elements, which remained the same from 1857 to 1950, served as the chamber’s focal point. Two hundred and sixty-two oak desks decorated with images of America’s continental expansion were placed throughout the chamber.



Congress met in the Old Hall of the House—today’s Statuary Hall—from 1819 to 1857. Noted architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe designed the Old Hall after British troops burned down the first House Chamber during the War of 1812.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

Over the next 56 years, the House updated its furnishings about once per generation to accommodate an ever-expanding number of Representatives. Smaller and simpler desks with swivel chairs replaced the original ones in 1873. By 1900 the size of the House had grown to 386 from 241 in 1860. The standalone desks were removed in 1901 and replaced with curved rows of interlocking desks that formed something of a continuous surface. When the first House Office Building opened in 1908, providing each Member with space off the House Floor, the need for desks disappeared. In 1913 long rows of conjoined, upholstered chairs replaced the desks.

After World War II, the chamber underwent a major renovation, which lasted for much of the 81st Congress (1949–1951). During that time, the House met in the Ways and Means Committee Room in what is today the Longworth House Office Building. Among the many updates, a walnut rostrum, the focal point of the chamber, replaced the original marble rostrum. The new rostrum was bigger and decorated sparingly with symbolic low-relief carvings.

The House also used this opportunity to replace its Victorian decor with new furnishings based on early Federal styles and added modern lighting, air conditioning, and acoustic treatments.

## House Galleries

During the 18th century, the Continental Congress met in secret behind closed doors and the U.S. Senate adopted this tradition, too. As the legislative body closest to the people, however, the House has opened its business to the public from its earliest days.

The visitors’ gallery in the Old Hall of the House was cramped, and women were forced to crowd together on sofas on the House Floor separate from men in the galleries. As a remedy, the House set aside space for a “Ladies’ Gallery” in the 1830s, and continued the practice when the large new chamber opened in 1857. Today, the “Ladies’ Gallery” sign remains, but any visitor may sit there.

Largely barred from the Capitol around 1829, African Americans could again freely

attend sessions during the Civil War. After Reconstruction ended in 1877, however, the galleries were segregated by gender and race well into the 20th century.

To reduce the enormous crowds that had gathered for watershed events such as the contested 1876 presidential election between Rutherford Hayes and Samuel Tilden, the House instituted a gallery pass system. The experiment was such a success that by the following year all visitors needed a pass to enter the galleries.

## Press Gallery

Perched directly above the rostrum with a panoramic view of the chamber, the press gallery is reserved for credentialed reporters from around the world. A full-time staff manages the press gallery and keeps journalists informed about House activity. The press gallery falls under the Speaker's jurisdiction.

In the late 1870s, leading congressional reporters created rules to ensure that their colleagues in the gallery followed the profession's best practices. In 1879, with the support of Speaker Samuel Randall of Pennsylvania, the Standing Committee of Correspondents—the governing body of congressional reporters elected by congressional reporters—began issuing passes to credentialed journalists to regulate who could sit in the press gallery.

## Speaker's Lobby

Initially divided into three distinct spaces to house a Post Office, individual offices for the Speaker, and a separate room for the Sergeant at Arms, the Speaker's Lobby became the current airy, stately space from the simple need for better ventilation in the House Chamber. In 1879, after Members complained about the lack of fresh air, the House converted the three offices into a contiguous space. With all the doors thrown open, a breeze cycled through the House Chamber, and the Speaker's Lobby became a gathering place where Members could meet with

constituents and others with interests before the House. The lobby has also traditionally been a place where Members speak with reporters.

The lobby's ceiling has decorative elements that date to 1857. The center section retains the original gilded pendants in the shape of acorns and pinecones. The adjacent spaces have vaulted ceilings, with murals painted in 1903. On the lobby floor, floral and geometric tiles created a durable surface that replicated rug patterns popular during the Victorian period.

## Rayburn Room

Completed in 1962 as part of the Capitol East Front extension and dedicated to Speaker Sam Rayburn, the Rayburn Room functions as a reception area where Members gather for events or meet with constituents.

Corinthian pilasters segment the walls and, as with the House Chamber, walnut paneling encompasses the room. A portrait of George Washington—which for years had hung in the American embassy in Spain before being transferred to the Capitol—fills the space between two Sèvres vases. The vases were gifts from France in thanks for America's alliance during World War I.

## Board of Education

Although small by Capitol standards, the room known as the Board of Education (H-128) functioned as a de facto leadership office for much of the 20th century. Members have used the storied space tucked away on the first floor to trade information, plot strategy, impart political wisdom, and enjoy any number of liquid refreshments.

In the early 1930s, Speaker John Nance Garner of Texas used it as something of a second home. Ettie, his wife and close adviser, often cooked meals there on a stove installed especially for them. When Henry Rainey became Speaker, the Illinois Democrat liked to work in the room's quiet and solitude.

When Sam Rayburn acquired the room as Majority Leader in the late 1930s, he brought in leather-buttoned chairs, sofas, a shabby rug, and a time-worn desk; he also had the seal of Texas painted on the wall. A veneer box at one end of the room hid a refrigerator, refilled each day with ice and seltzer water. A telephone table sat under the window well. On April 12, 1945, during a visit with Rayburn, who was by then Speaker, Vice President Harry S. Truman used that phone to return a call from an aide to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. After being summoned to the White House, Truman learned that Roosevelt had died and that he had become Commander in Chief.

By mid-century, with bottles of bourbon and Scotch concealed in the Speaker's desk, the room had become a gathering place for powerful House Democrats, the occasional journalist, and certain Senators, including Rayburn's Texas protégé, Lyndon Baines Johnson. Just around the corner, Republicans, gathered to unwind and socialize in their own room, dubbed "The Clinic," which Republican Leader Charles Halleck of Indiana ran for many years.

## Members' Dining Room and House Restaurant

For the first half of the 19th century, Capitol Hill was a humid backwater with scattered boarding houses and few restaurants. To compensate, Congress provided some form of dining service in the Capitol as early as 1834. In rooms called the "Hole in the Wall" and the "refectory," local restaurateurs served dishes of oysters, beefsteak, and partridge, along with coffee, tea, beer, and spirits.

From the mid-1800s to the early 1920s, the House favored a finer dining experience in the House Restaurant, which opened in its current location in 1858, shortly after the House occupied its new chamber. Well-known proprietors of high-end establishments, including George Downing of Newport, Rhode Island, who ran the Members' Dining Room from 1868 to 1876,

managed the House's food service. The press praised Downing for owning "one of the best restaurants in the Union" catering to "all lovers of good living." A pioneering African-American entrepreneur, Downing was as famous for his lifelong political activism as he was for his oysters. He crusaded for civil rights, school desegregation in Rhode Island, and equal access to rail travel.

The two largest House dining rooms are named for Ernest S. Petinaud and Representative Charles E. Bennett of Florida. Petinaud immigrated to the United States from Jamaica in the 1920s and took a job busing tables in the Members' Dining Room. After 50 years in the House, Petinaud retired as *maitre d'* in 1973. Bennett represented the Jacksonville area for 44 years. In 1991 he donated the chandeliers that decorate the room that bears his name.

## Members and Family Room

As far back as 1867, a "ladies' retiring room" existed in the House of Representatives for wives who visited the Capitol, a popular activity for politically savvy women in Washington. Members' entire families also used it as a place to relax or wait for work on the floor to conclude.

In the 1970s, the name changed to the more modern and inclusive "Members' Family Lounge," and later it was named for Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill of Massachusetts. The current room, H-324, continues to serve as a gathering space for Members' families.

## Cloakrooms

Located at the rear of the chamber on either side of the main aisle, the L-shaped cloakrooms provide private spaces for Members off the floor where they can take phone calls, rest, or grab a snack. Like the party seating arrangement in the House, the Republican cloakroom is located along the west wall of the chamber; the Democratic cloakroom is located on the east side.

## HOUSE OFFICE BUILDINGS

Until the construction of the first House Office Building, only the Speaker and certain committee chairs had access to private offices or employed a small staff. For all other Members, their desk on the House Floor was their Capitol Hill office. Consequently, the floor was a beehive of activity and the place where Members spent most of their time while the House was in session.

When the first House Office Building opened in 1908, however, individual offices gradually changed the institution's workways. With more space, Members hired assistants to handle the growing flow of visitors and correspondence from constituents back home. Members also spent less time in the chamber, relying on legislative bells—and later televised House proceedings—to know when to head to the floor.

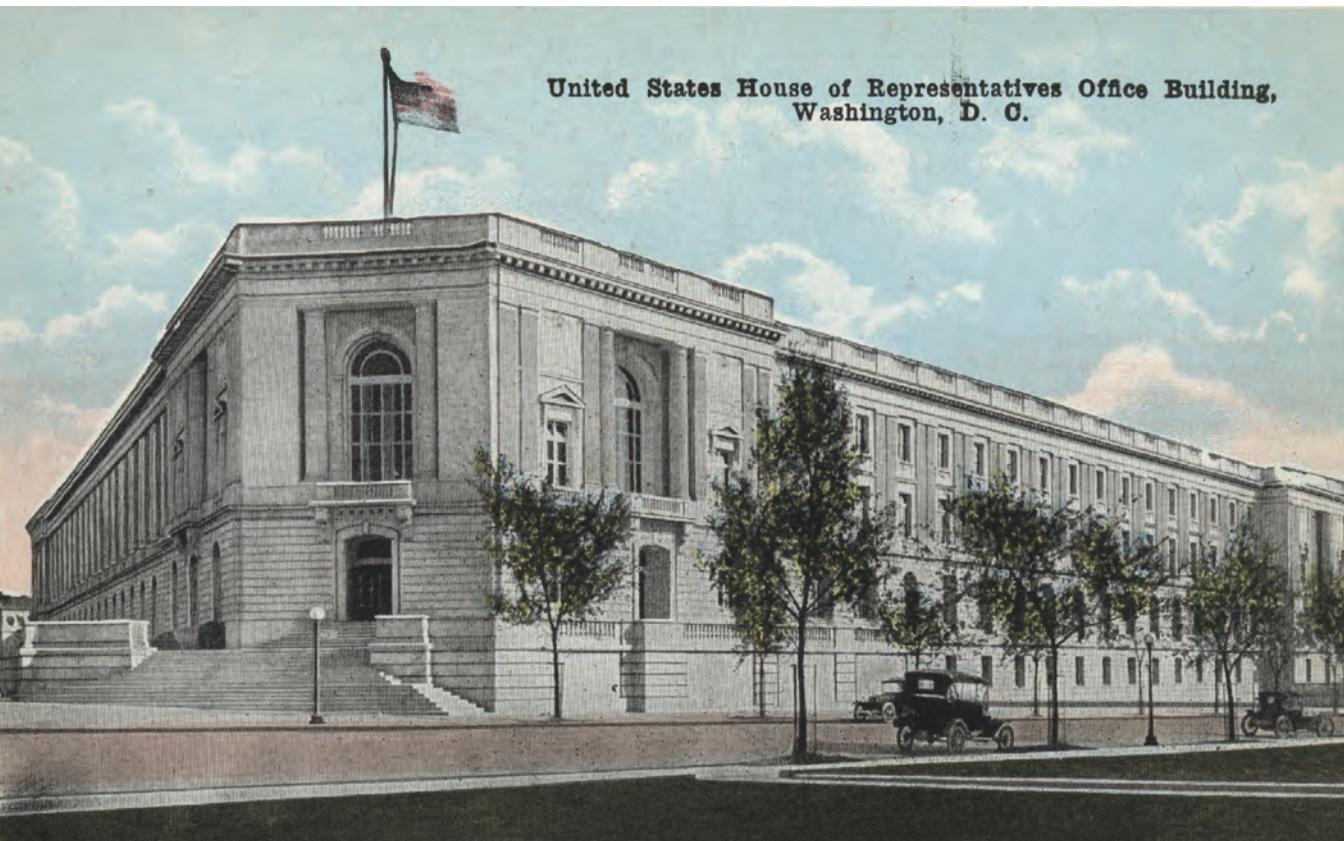
The Cannon House Office Building is the oldest congressional office building. When it opened in 1908, each Member received an individual office, which changed how the House worked.

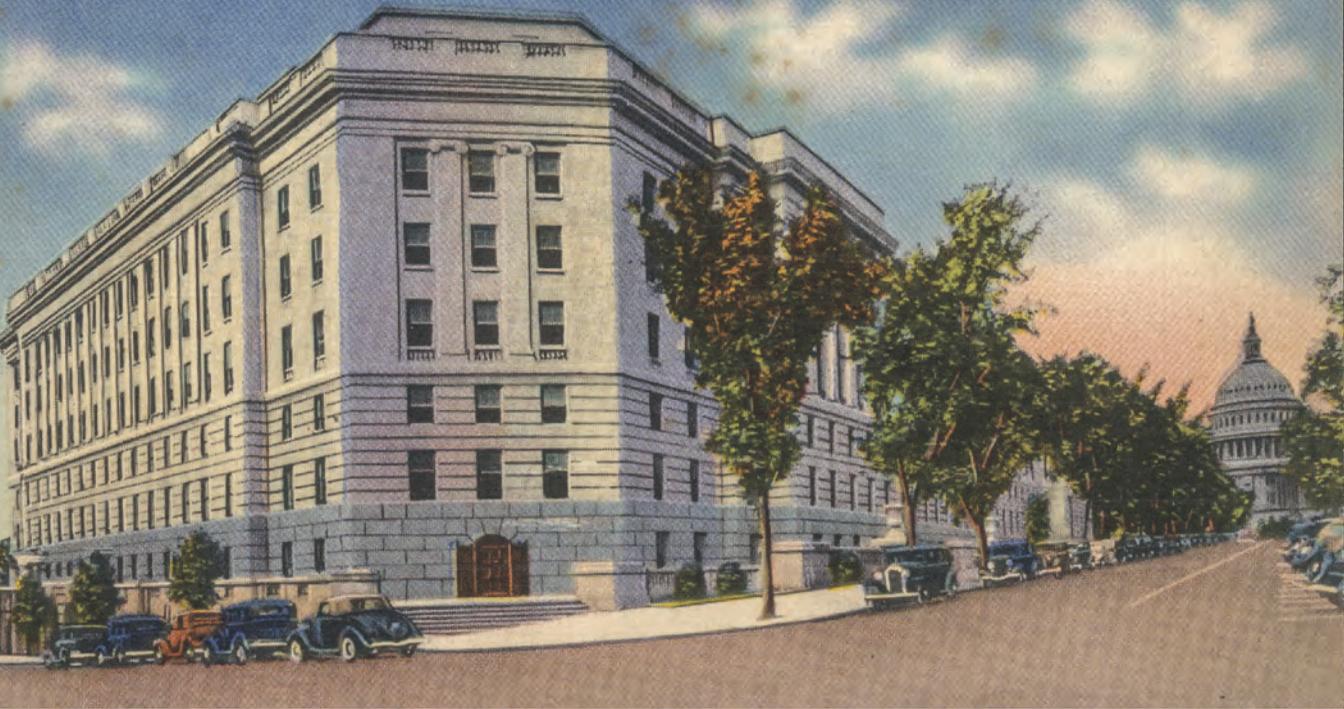
*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

## Cannon

Opened in late 1908, the original House Office Building was named in 1962 for legendary Speaker Joseph Cannon of Illinois, during whose Speakership it was constructed. The building was the start of what would become the modern Capitol campus, adding much-needed office space for a growing number of Members.

Designed as a modern workspace to support an old and venerable institution, the Cannon House Office Building originally featured 397 individual offices and 14 committee rooms. The carpeted offices provided space for more staff to meet the growing needs of the country. Conveniences, including sinks, forced-air heat, telephones, and electric light improved the physical workplace for Members, committees, and staff. The new large offices also provided visitors with room to





This postcard captures how the “new” House office building—today’s Longworth House Office Building—looked in the 1930s. Built in the Beaux-Arts style, the Longworth building appears in the foreground while the Capitol Dome sits toward the rear of the image down the car-lined street.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

meet with Members. For added convenience, the building was—and remains—connected to the Capitol by a tunnel.

The intricately designed Cannon Caucus Room on the third floor off the Cannon rotunda is the building’s primary gathering space, measuring 74 feet long by 54 feet wide. It has been used for many purposes over the years—party caucus meetings, receptions, lectures, and significant committee hearings that received national attention.

In order to modernize the Cannon building’s infrastructure and better serve the House community, it is currently undergoing a multiyear renewal project.

## Longworth

Less than 20 years after the first House Office Building opened, there was urgent need for a second. Overcrowding and an ever-expanding legislative calendar—more bills, more hearings,

and more markups—forced the House to hire an architectural firm to design an additional office building in the mid-1920s.

On June 25, 1932, Speaker John Nance Garner presided over the cornerstone-laying ceremony. With the stock market crash in 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, the designers of the new building favored economy over grandiosity, durable and affordable furnishings over stateliness. It was completed a year later and \$1 million under budget.

When the building opened, it accommodated the entire House telephone operation, with more than 30 switchboard operators overseeing more than 2,000 telephones—leading technology at the time.

The assembly room, the building’s largest space, seats 450 and has served as the Ways and Means Committee room since 1938. From 1949 to 1951, the full House met in this space while the chamber in the Capitol was being renovated.

In 1962 the House named the building for the charismatic and skilled Nicholas Longworth of Ohio, the Speaker at the time the building was first proposed.

## Rayburn

America's emergence as a global superpower after World War II had a profound effect on the House. As more staff came on board to handle Congress's immense workload, Speaker Sam Rayburn wanted a third office building that would convey the size and importance of the institution and reflect the modern aesthetics of mid-20th-century design.

The House settled on a simpler, classic look for the new building that featured clean lines and unadorned surfaces rather than the ornamental and traditional design of the older office buildings. President John F. Kennedy, who had served in the House from 1947 to 1953, laid the cornerstone in 1962, the year after Rayburn's death. The building officially opened in 1965.

The Rayburn building was laden with amenities: a three-level parking garage, a cafeteria that could serve 2,000 diners over a typical lunchtime, wiring for closed-circuit television, a pool, and a gym. A two-car subterranean electric train began running between the Rayburn building and the Capitol shortly after it opened.

## Ford

The Ford House Office Building started life as a quick fix for a growing federal government in 1930s Washington. When it opened in 1939, the pre-fabricated structure housed dozens of government projects, including the 1940 Census and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's endless rows of fingerprint files.

Following a series of congressional reforms in the 1970s, the House took over the building to accommodate the growth of staff needed for congressional oversight. The Congressional Budget Office and other House administrative

offices moved in to free up committee space elsewhere on the Hill.

In 1990 the House renamed the building to honor former House Republican Leader and later President Gerald R. Ford of Michigan.

## O'Neill

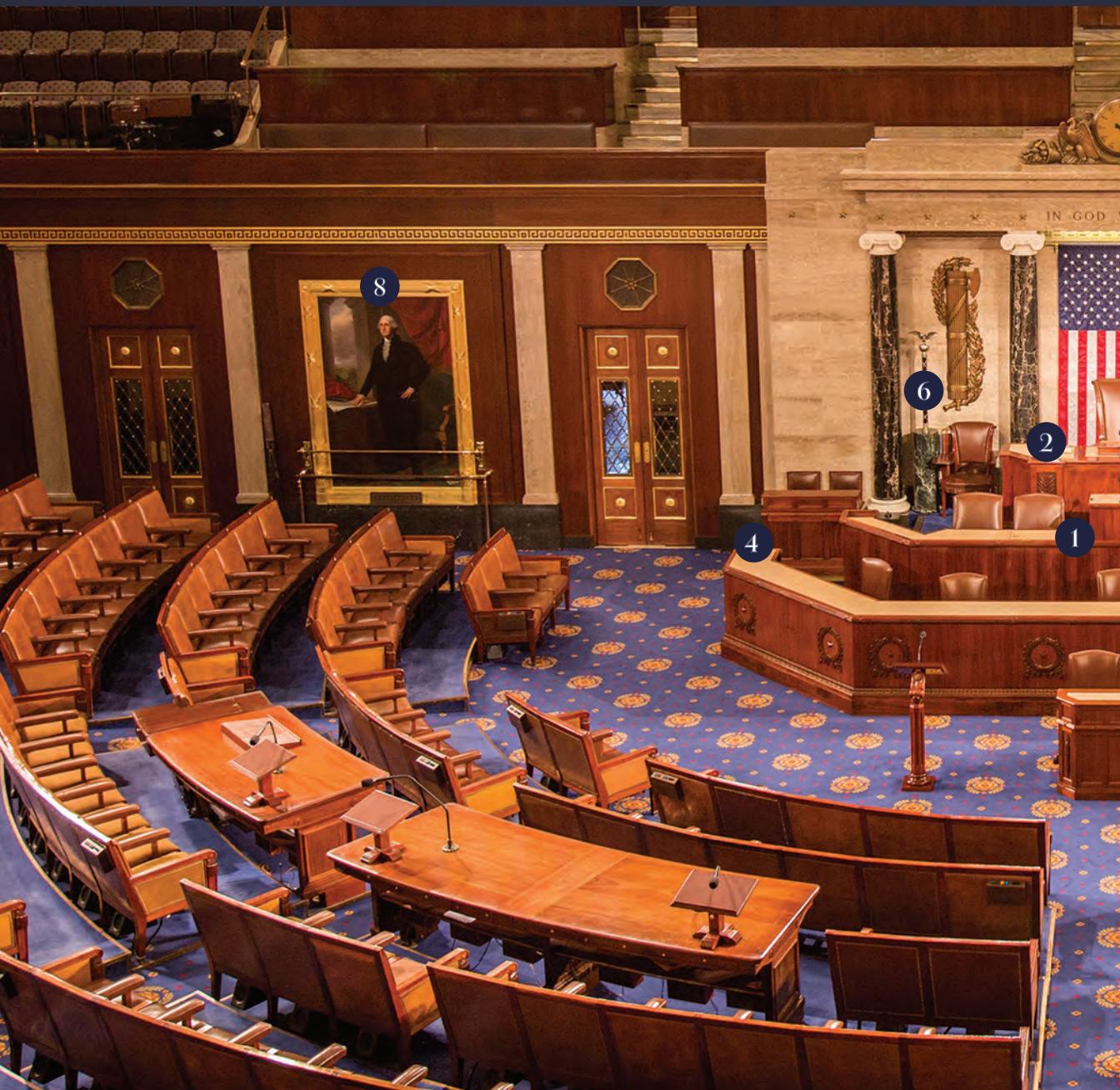
Built in the early 1960s, Federal Office Building #8, as it was originally called, housed research laboratories for the Food and Drug Administration. It was later renamed for former Speaker Tip O'Neill, and in 2014 it was renovated with new windows, skylights, and a green roof. The House officially took ownership of it in 2017. With the Ford House Office Building next door, a small sub-campus now provides office space for staff from committees, House Officers, and legislative support organizations.

## Modern Office Lottery

For more than a century, Representatives conducted business from their individual desks on the House Floor. As early as the 1840s, Members chose their desks using a lottery. When the House constructed the present-day Cannon building in 1908, it used a similar lottery system to distribute office space in the new building.

With Speaker Joe Cannon presiding, Representatives gathered in the House Chamber on January 9, 1908. They watched intently as a blindfolded House Page pulled numbered marbles from a box, drawing North Carolinian Claude Kitchin's number first. After consulting a large diagram of the new building, Kitchin selected a room on the fourth floor. This first lottery lasted hours; Speaker Cannon suspended it several times when Members watching the lottery in the chamber grew too raucous.

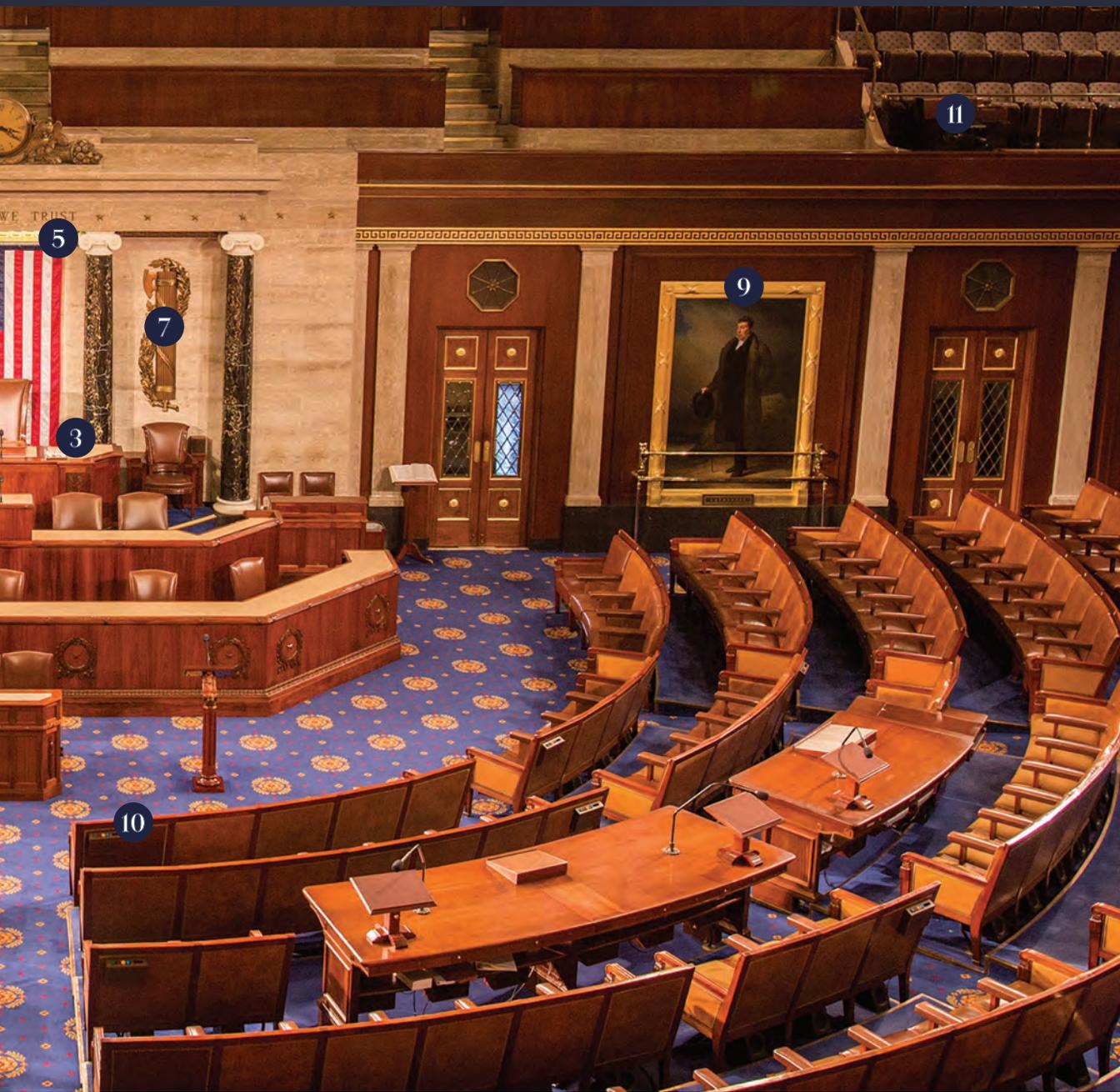
Today, before the start of each Congress, Members choose offices in the Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn buildings using the time-honored lottery, which is now conducted by the Architect of the Capitol.



*Image courtesy of the Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives*

## INSIDE THE HOUSE CHAMBER

The House Chamber can, at times, seem like a paradox. It can be simultaneously grand and yet remarkably intimate. The space carries the weight of the past, but it is also where Congress shapes the future. This section highlights artifacts located throughout the chamber that attest to this remarkable duality. Rich in history and laden with symbolism, these items continue to have prominent roles in the modern House.



**1** Rostrum

**2** Gavel

**3** Inkstand

**4** Hopper

**5** American Flag

**6** Mace

**7** Fasces

**8** Washington Portrait

**9** Lafayette Portrait

**10** Electronic Voting System

**11** Televised Proceedings



*Image courtesy of the Office of the Clerk,  
U.S. House of Representatives*

## 1 Rostrum

The three-tiered wooden structure along the front wall of the chamber is the rostrum, the hub of the legislative process in the House.

The top tier, where the Speaker presides, is carved with four laurel branches, a traditional symbol of victory. The bottom tier is carved with oak leaf wreaths, a symbol of longevity. The five constitutional aspirations inscribed on the rostrum's bottom level—"Union," "Justice," "Tolerance," "Liberty," and "Peace"—affirm the focus of the United States government.

The two lower tiers of the rostrum provide seating for staff, including the House *Journal* clerk, reading clerk, tally clerk, bill clerk, and parliamentarians. The top section is reserved for the Speaker or his or her appointed presiding officer. On most days, the Speaker or presiding officer sits in an exact replica of the imposing chair made for Speaker Sam Rayburn in 1941.

In a rebuke of the Cold War–era philosophy of the Soviet Union, the phrase "In God We Trust" was etched above the rostrum in 1962.

## 2 Gavel

The gavel is the wooden mallet the presiding officer wields to organize the House and control the tempo of debate. Gavels hold special significance in Congress: they are tools of order and decorum and symbols of power. Gavels have a long history in the House, and during the 19th century Speakers used them to control a chamber full of restless Members during heated debate. Speakers frequently pounded the wood gavels so hard they broke. Today, an accompanying sounding board amplifies the gavel and prevents damage to the rostrum.



*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives, Gift of  
Elizabeth C. Udell in memory of her husband Gilman  
Grant Udell Sr.*



*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

### 3 Inkstand

Longstanding custom requires the silver inkstand to be placed on the lectern at the top of the rostrum before the Speaker calls the House to order. The inkstand, the work of Washington silversmith Jacob Leonard, is considered the oldest-surviving House artifact. Although its origins are unknown, it most likely came to the House around 1819. The tray contains three crystal inkwells and eagles adorn it on two sides. The feet of the tray take the form of fasces with snakes winding around them, a classical symbol of wisdom, authority, and strength.



*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

### 4 Hopper

Representatives introduce bills by placing them in the bill hopper, the square wooden box on the first row of the rostrum. The name refers to the bin where farmers store grain waiting to be milled. It is filled from the top and emptied from the bottom. When bill clerks retrieve legislation from the hopper, the Speaker—in consultation with the parliamentarians—refers it to committees with the appropriate jurisdiction.



*Image courtesy of the Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives*

### 5 American Flag

The American flag has long hung behind the Speaker's chair, and architects designed the space behind the rostrum specifically to display the flag in a place of honor. Earlier flags, sometimes purchased by the House and sometimes donated by outside organizations, were hung in pairs on short staffs; others were draped from the top of the press gallery railing.



*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

## 6 Mace

The mace is the symbol of authority in the House and is present whenever the House is in session. It is derived from the ancient battle weapon of the same name. To begin each legislative day, a staff member designated by the Sergeant at Arms carries the mace into the chamber and places it on the marble pedestal to the right of the Speaker. When the House resolves itself into the Committee of the Whole (see p. 37), the mace is placed on a slightly lower pedestal. To restore order in the chamber the Speaker may direct the Sergeant at Arms to take possession of the mace and present it before an unruly Member.

The mace is made of 13 thin ebony rods representing the 13 original states and topped by a silver eagle astride a silver globe. Crafted by New York silversmith William Adams, the current House Mace has been in use since 1841. British military forces destroyed the original mace when they burned the Capitol in 1814; a wooden mace was used during the intervening years.

## 7 Fasces

During the chamber renovation in the mid-20th century, a marble wall replaced the decorative cast iron panels that had framed the rostrum since 1857. The bronze fasces, classical symbols of civic authority and unity, are located on both sides of the American flag. The Roman fasces of antiquity consisted of an axe within a bundle of rods, bound together. Over time, the fasces came to represent a core ideal of American democracy: like the thin rods bound together under a common thread, the people achieve strength and stability through their union under the federal government.



*Image courtesy of the Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives*

## 8 Washington Portrait

## 9 Lafayette Portrait

The portraits of George Washington and his Revolutionary War officer and confidant, the Marquis de Lafayette, have hung together in the House Chamber since 1834.

French artist Ary Scheffer gave the full-length portrait of the French officer to the House when Lafayette toured America in 1824 and 1825. During his celebrated visit, Lafayette became the first foreign dignitary to address Congress. For more than a year the House displayed the painting in the Capitol Rotunda.

A decade later, John Vanderlyn, a leading American artist of the era, painted George Washington's portrait as a companion piece to Lafayette's. Vanderlyn, like many artists at the time, modeled his painting after Gilbert Stuart's authoritative portrait of Washington. This version shows the first President as a statesman; the sheathed sword at his side (below his left hand) indicates his retirement from the military and the hope for a peaceful future.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*





*Image courtesy of the Office of the Clerk,  
U.S. House of Representatives*

## 10 Electronic Voting System

The House held its first electronic vote on January 23, 1973. It took 15 minutes. Before 1973 the House had relied on roll call votes in which clerks called each Member by name, a time-consuming process that often took anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes per vote.

As part of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, the House installed electronic voting stations throughout the chamber, and each Member received a voting card. It was estimated that the new voting system would save 90 hours of voting time over the course of a session. To cast a vote, Members inserted their cards into the voting station and hit one of three buttons labeled yea, nay, or present. Today, wall panels above the press gallery post the result of the vote in real time.



*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

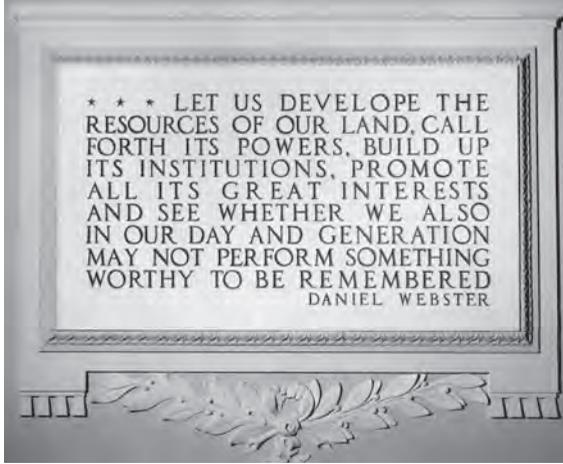
## 11 Televised Proceedings

The first live television broadcast of a congressional proceeding occurred on January 3, 1947, when the House allowed cameras into the chamber to cover the opening of the 80th Congress. It also was the last such broadcast for more than three decades. House leaders warily questioned how television would affect the institution. Congress occasionally allowed networks to broadcast major speeches by Presidents and foreign dignitaries, but by 1952 House leaders had effectively banned cameras from the floor and from committee hearings.

Post-Watergate transparency reforms and a spirit of governmental accountability provided new justification for televising proceedings. In March 1977, House leadership authorized a closed-circuit testing period. Within a year, the House approved daily televised proceedings and funded the establishment of its own television system. On March 19, 1979, public television and the C-SPAN network tapped into the House television system, beginning regular live broadcasts of floor proceedings.

## OTHER ARTIFACTS IN THE HOUSE CHAMBER

Located on the gallery walls above the House Floor, these artifacts are meant to inspire Members during the lawmaking process.



*Image courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol*

### Daniel Webster Plaque

The plaque hanging on the south wall of the chamber showcases a remark Representative Daniel Webster of Massachusetts delivered in 1825 on the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill. Addressing a crowd of thousands, including more than 40 veterans of that Revolutionary War battle, Webster said it was the next generation’s responsibility to preserve the republic the Founders had created. He urged his audience—and these are the words placed above the south gallery in the House Chamber—“Let us develop the resources of our land, call forth its powers, build up its institutions, promote all its great interests and see whether we also in our day and generation may not perform something worthy to be remembered.”



*Image courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol*

### Lawgiver Relief Portraits

Installed during the House Chamber renovation from 1949 to 1950, the 23 marble relief portraits located above the galleries depict philosophers and statesmen from world history who influenced the development of America’s legal system. The Lawgivers series includes notable 18th-century thinkers George Mason, Thomas Jefferson, and Sir William Blackstone, and others from earlier periods, including Moses, Hammurabi, Gaius, Solon, and Suleiman. The Library of Congress collaborated with outside scholars to choose the list of Lawgivers.

## ADDITIONAL ART IN THE HOUSE

The House side of the Capitol contains a rich collection of portraits, paintings, statues, and busts. The artwork featured in this section is located in the grand stairwells on the east and west sides of the chamber.



*Image courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol*

### ***Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way***

Painted by Emanuel Leutze in the Capitol between 1861 and 1862, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* hangs in the House's west stairwell and commemorates the United States' continental expansion during the 19th century. The massive mural (20 feet by 30 feet) depicts a wagon train crossing the Continental Divide on its way to the West Coast. The entrance to San Francisco Bay, the Golden Gate, is featured in the banner below the main image.



*Image courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol*

### ***Signing of the Constitution***

Conceived in 1937 as a way to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the Constitution, this painting, *Signing of the Constitution* by Howard Chandler Christy, was unveiled in the Capitol Rotunda in 1940 and now hangs in the House's east stairwell. Measuring 20 feet by 30 feet, it recreates the scene inside Philadelphia's Independence Hall on September 17, 1787, when delegates to the Constitutional Convention signed the United States' founding document.

## Member Firsts and Milestones

The stately marble stairwells on either side of the House Chamber feature portraits of four trailblazing United States Representatives. Along with the individual Member, each portrait also commemorates a landmark moment in congressional history: in 1870 Joseph Rainey of South Carolina (top left) became the first African American elected to the House; in 1877, when Romualdo Pacheco of California (top right) took the Oath of Office, he became the first Hispanic American to serve in Congress with full voting

rights; during her career in the House from 1925 to 1937, Florence Kahn of California (bottom left) became the first woman to serve on the powerful Military Affairs and Appropriations Committees; and in 1956 Dalip Singh “Judge” Saund of California (bottom right) became the first Asian Pacific American elected to Congress with full voting rights. Although these Members served long ago, their portraits are relatively new; each was unveiled in the first decade of the 21st century.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*





Sworn in as a Member of the House on April 2, 1917, Jeannette Rankin of Montana was the first woman to serve in Congress. She served two nonconsecutive terms in the 65th and 77th Congresses (1917–1919 and 1941–1943).

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

## PEOPLE OF THE HOUSE

The Constitution places few limits on who can serve in the House of Representatives. Among the three branches of the federal system, the House was always intended to be closest to the people. For more than 120 years, a House seat was the only federal office subject to frequent popular election. The Constitution requires that Members of the House be at least 25 years old, have been a U.S. citizen for at least seven years, and live in the state they represent. It has no requirement that Members must live in the district they represent. Article VI, Clause 3, requires that all Members take an oath to support the Constitution before they exercise the duties of their office.

“Under these reasonable limitations,” James Madison wrote in *The Federalist* No. 52, “the door of this part of the federal government is open to merit of every description, whether native or adoptive, whether young or old, and without regard to poverty or wealth, or to any particular profession of religious faith.”

Since 1789 more than 11,000 people have served in the House. For much of U.S. history, however, vast numbers of Americans were excluded from society, denied the right to vote, and prevented from

holding a seat in Congress. The House gradually became more diverse in the 150 years after the Civil War as previously disenfranchised citizens such as women and people of color fought for and won the right to vote and to hold federal office.

## LEADERSHIP

The leadership structure of the House has changed significantly since 1789. Early on, the House often operated on an ad hoc basis: individual Members spearheaded individual policies, and there was little in the way of a tiered leadership arrangement. During the 19th century, as the parties became more cohesive and the demands of the nation became more numerous, new leadership positions emerged to better manage the legislative process. The leadership offices featured here include the Speaker of the House as well as those created by both major parties more than a century ago: the Majority Leader, the Minority Leader, the Democratic Whip, and the Republican Whip.

### Speaker of the House

Established in Article I, the Speaker of the House is the first federal office articulated in the Constitution. As the head of the People's House, the Speaker is second in line to the presidency.

Despite the office's foremost status in America's founding document, the Constitution says little about the Speakership other than that "the House of Representatives shall chuse their Speaker and other Officers." The Framers left it to the Members to determine the role of the Speakership and the extent of its power.

The American Speakership is unique in world history. The office originated in the British Parliament and descended from North America's colonial legislatures, but the responsibilities of the House Speaker have changed greatly since 1789. Over the previous two centuries, the Speakership's powers have fluctuated, but it has nevertheless

assumed a vast role in our government. Among other responsibilities, the Speaker today is the parliamentary and administrative authority in the House, the leader of his or her party in the House, and the Representative of his or her constituents. The Speaker also performs ceremonial duties, including hosting Joint Sessions for the State of the Union.

Each Speaker is only as powerful as the House allows, and many of the earliest Speakers had little influence. They were, first and foremost, presiding officers and arbiters of House Rules. In the 1810s and 1820s, Speaker Henry Clay of Kentucky transformed the Speakership into the central fulcrum of the legislative process.

From the Civil War to the early 20th century, ambitious men with deep partisan fealty dominated the Speakership. Speaker Thomas Brackett Reed of Maine—whose outsized intellect and pugnaciousness seemed perfectly matched for the extravagances of the Gilded Age—dictated his own set of rules to empower the majority. But perhaps no Speaker before or since has been as powerful as Joe Cannon. Serving simultaneously as both Speaker and chair of the Rules Committee, Cannon maintained exclusive control over the fate of every bill in the House. While Reed had amassed power to move legislation, Cannon often used his power to stymie it. Critics accused him of being a czar and a tyrant, and in 1910 a group of Progressive Republicans joined with House Democrats to strip Cannon of much of his authority.

After Cannon's fall, the Speaker's power dispersed to party leaders and prominent committees. Charismatic deal-makers such as Nicholas Longworth and Sam Rayburn instead used the sheer force of their personalities and reputations to influence legislation as Speaker.

For much of the 20th century following the Great Depression, Southern Democratic committee chairs wielded disproportionate



Thomas Brackett Reed of Maine was one of the House's most influential Speakers. First elected to Congress in 1876, Reed was chairman of the Judiciary Committee in the 47th Congress (1881–1883) before serving three terms as Speaker in the 51st, 54th, and 55th Congresses (1889–1891 and 1895–1899).

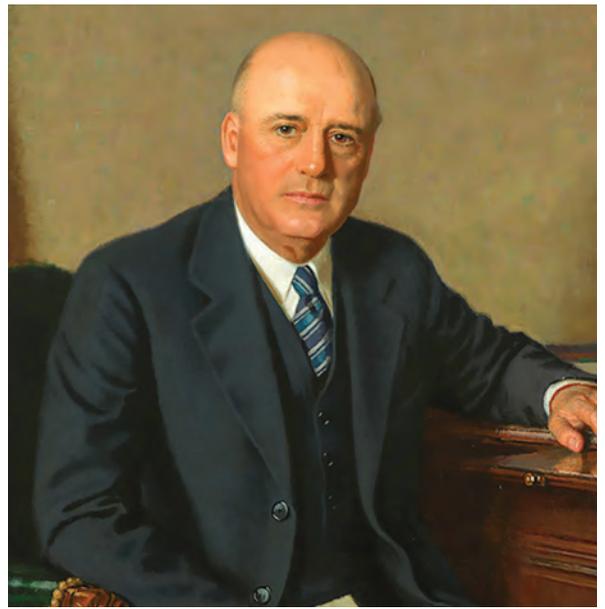
*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

influence in the House, stifling civil rights bills and forcing Speakers like Rayburn to develop creative legislative workarounds. But as earlier generations left Congress and greater numbers of women, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans won election to Congress, the institution came to better resemble the makeup of the country. In 2007 Nancy Pelosi of California became the first woman Speaker; through the 115th Congress (2017–2019), 54 individuals have been elected Speaker since 1789.

The tendency toward a more diverse and decentralized House in which individual Members exerted greater influence over policy continues to change the Speakership to this day.

## Majority Leader

With its large membership, the House of Representatives has relied on Majority Leaders since the late 19th century to expedite legislative business and to keep their parties united. The



Sam Rayburn of Texas is the longest-serving Speaker in American history. His 10 nonconsecutive terms as Speaker totaled 17 years (1940–1947, 1949–1953, and 1955–1961) and spanned a period from the eve of American intervention in World War II until the first year of the John F. Kennedy administration.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

Majority Leader schedules legislation for floor consideration; plans the daily, weekly, and annual legislative agendas; consults with Members to gauge party sentiment; and generally works to advance the goals of the majority party.

In the three decades following the Civil War, when America's current two-party system crystalized, the concept of the Majority Leader was far more informal than it is today. The majority party depended on powerful committee chairmen—traditionally from the Ways and Means Committee—to pull double duty as both chair and the person in charge of the majority's legislative agenda on the floor.

That arrangement began to change on the eve of the 20th century. Although the earliest party leaders continued to serve as Ways and Means Committee chairmen, scholars tend to agree that the Majority Leader became a distinct and uniquely powerful office in 1899.

Initially Speakers had the prerogative to appoint the Majority Leader. In 1899 Speaker David B. Henderson, a nine-term Republican from Iowa, selected Sereno Payne of New York to shoulder the responsibilities of serving as both Ways and Means chairman and Republican floor leader. When Democrats captured the majority following the 1910 elections, the party caucus maintained that dual arrangement, so that from 1899 to 1919, regardless of the party in power, the Ways and Means chair also served as Majority Leader. Following the example set by Republican Leader Frank Mondell of Wyoming in the 66th Congress (1919–1921), Majority Leaders more or less stopped serving on committees.

Democrats in charge of the House for the 62nd Congress (1911–1913) made one significant adjustment to the Majority Leader role that remains in effect: they made it an elected position. That year Democrat Oscar W. Underwood of Alabama became the first Member elected by his party to serve as Majority Leader. Republicans began electing Majority Leaders in conference in 1923. Today, Majority Leaders are elected in secret balloting of the party caucus or conference before the start of a new Congress.

## Minority Leader

The Minority Leader is the head of the “loyal opposition” in the House of Representatives and traditionally is the man or woman the minority party nominates as its candidate for Speaker. Often he or she is a senior Member that the caucus or conference selects before Opening Day of a new Congress. The Minority Leader has a host of responsibilities: party spokesperson, policy director, defender of the minority’s rights, critic of the majority’s agenda, and a legislative ombudsman intent on keeping the majority honest.

Regardless of party, the responsibilities of the Minority Leader are geared toward two goals: to stop what they consider bad legislation from becoming law and to capture a majority of the seats in the House in the next election. When

Democrat James Richardson of Tennessee was re-elected Minority Leader in early December 1901, he argued that his party had certain advantages despite its smaller size in the House. “If every member of this opposition will attend our session and answer when his name is called we will make our opposition effective, and oftentimes will be able to defeat our opponents in their efforts to pass unwise and improper measures.” He concluded by saying, “[I]f we have acted wisely and patriotically we will place our party in the position to deserve and to command a decisive victory in the Congressional elections of next year.”

About a dozen years later, after Democrats had taken back the House, the new Republican Minority Leader, James Mann of Illinois, used a parliamentary tactic on a routine vote to frustrate the majority’s legislative calendar. It was intended, Mann said, “to teach the other side that the minority is not to be trifled with.”

It is not clear when the Minority Leader became a formal position in the House, but scholars generally place it sometime in the late 19th or early 20th century. The tradition of the Minority Leader as simply the minority party candidate for Speaker does not apply to the decades before the Civil War. Party affiliations back then were not as concrete as they are today, and Speaker elections frequently had several candidates and lasted for multiple ballots.

Minority Leaders tend to prefer to be called leaders of their *party* rather than leaders of the *minority*. In 1980, for instance, Robert Michel of Illinois asked that he be called Republican Leader instead of Minority Leader. “I want to expel ‘minority’ from our vocabulary and bury it for all time,” he said.

## Whip

For both Democrats and Republicans, the Whip assists party leadership in managing the legislative program on the House Floor. In the House, Whips serve as a bridge between the

leadership and the rank-and-file membership, providing communication networks for Members and mobilizing them for important votes. The title comes from England, where the House of Commons has had party “whips” since the late 18th century. The British Parliament borrowed the term from foxhunting in which the “whipper-in” keeps the pack of foxhounds together.

The Majority Whip is the third-highest elected position in the caucus or conference, behind the Majority Leader and the Speaker. The Minority Whip is the second-highest position behind the Minority Leader.

Both the Democratic and Republican Whip organizations have grown over time as the legislative calendar has become busier and the issues of national governance have grown more complex. In modern practice, both parties’ whip structures include a number of deputies to help count votes and dispense information.

A 10-term Member of the House, Oscar W. Underwood of Alabama served as the first Democratic Whip during the 56th Congress (1899–1901).

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*



The first Democratic Whip was appointed in 1899 when Democratic Leader James Richardson of Tennessee chose Oscar Underwood.

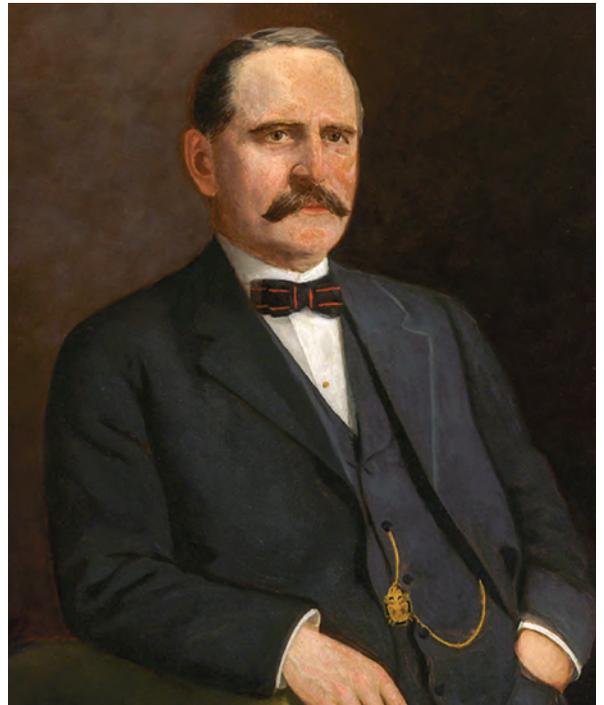
For much of the position’s history, the Democratic Whip had been appointed by the Democratic Leader. Beginning with Tony Coelho of California in 1986, the party Whip has been elected by the organizing caucus of Democratic Representatives-elect just before the start of a new Congress.

The first Republican Whip was James A. Tawney of Minnesota. Tawney kept track of the whereabouts of GOP Members for Speaker Thomas B. Reed and let him know when enough Republicans were in attendance to bring legislation to the floor for a vote.

Although it is unclear whether Reed appointed Tawney as the first Whip, the Republican Whip has been an elective post for most of its history. The selection usually comes during the organizing conference of Republican Representatives-elect just before the start of a new Congress.

Before chairing the Committee on Appropriations, James A. Tawney of Minnesota served as the first Republican Whip during the 55th Congress (1897–1899).

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*



## PARTIES

The Democratic Caucus and Republican Conference are the parties' organizational arms in the House. Both groups facilitate debate and discussion among their respective Members. Today, the caucus and conference meet separately on a regular basis to go over policy, pending legislation, and other matters of mutual concern within their individual parties.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the difference between a caucus and a conference was subtle but important. Caucus decisions could be made binding, but conference decisions could be only advisory. Although Democrats continue to meet in caucus, the decisions they make there are not necessarily binding.

### Democratic Caucus

The Democratic Caucus is overseen by a chair elected by caucus Members and is limited to two consecutive full terms.

Congressional scholars have been able to trace Democratic Caucus chairs back to the 31st Congress (1849–1851). For much of the 19th and well into the 20th century, Democrats primarily met in caucus only to elect party leaders. Meetings were infrequent, and the party had few internal rules to enforce cohesion on policy or legislation. In 1910 Democrats joined Progressive Republicans to strip Republican Speaker Joe Cannon of much of his power. A number of Democrats then voted with mainstream Republicans to maintain many of Cannon's other House Rules. In response to what many Democrats felt was a missed opportunity to strengthen their hand in the House, they agreed to new party rules to make caucus decisions binding.

Binding caucus decisions were gone within a decade, however, as U.S. entry into World War I divided Democrats. Rather than try to force antiwar Democrats like party leader Claude Kitchin to vote "yes" on America's entry into the Great War, Democrats simply did away with

the binding caucus rule. Today the Steering and Policy Committee makes recommendations to the House Democratic Caucus regarding much of the party's policy agenda and its internal concerns, including committee assignments.

### Republican Conference

The Republican Conference, which dates to the Civil War era, is overseen by a chair elected by Conference Members.

Congressional scholars have been able to consistently trace Republican Conference chairs back to the 41st Congress (1869–1871). In the 40th Congress (1867–1869), records show that three different Members chaired three separate Republican meetings.

The current Republican Conference dates to the mid-1920s. Before then, House Republicans occasionally switched between caucuses and conferences, depending on the issues at hand. In 1911, for instance, House Republicans lost the majority after 20 years in power. Rather than try to impose party unity with a caucus, they decided to form a conference. After a brief return to a caucus structure in 1925, House Republicans quickly went back to the conference.

Traditionally, House Republicans used caucuses or conferences sparingly to organize the party at the beginning of each Congress or to consider occasional legislation. In the late 1930s, however, Republican Leader Joe Martin of Massachusetts began using the conference proactively as a forum to debate policy and party tactics rather than simply as a means to elect leadership. Today, the House Republican Steering Committee handles many of the party's internal considerations, including committee assignments and committee leadership.

## HOUSE OFFICERS

Since the First Federal Congress opened in 1789, the House has employed officers to aid in the legislative process. From managing the written record of the House to providing security in

the chamber, from offering spiritual guidance to providing parliamentary instruction, House Officers have handled much of the institution's day-to-day operations.

## Clerk of the House

The Clerk is the head of the House's administrative functions and has been a House Officer from the very first day that the First Congress achieved a quorum. John Beckley of Virginia was elected the first Clerk of the House on April 1, 1789. The English-born Beckley had come to British North America as an indentured servant before studying law and fighting in the American Revolution.

Since Beckley's election, some of the Clerk's responsibilities have stayed relatively stable while others have changed considerably. On Opening Day of each new Congress, the Clerk of the preceding Congress calls the House to order, presides over the compilation of the roster of Members-elect, rules on procedural questions, and manages the election for Speaker. Following the announcement of party leaders, the House majority proceeds to elect a slate of new House Officers, with the Clerk at the top. For the remainder of the Congress, the Clerk must maintain the House *Journal*, certify the passage of legislation, transmit messages to the Senate, accept messages from the President, and manage any congressional offices that become vacant because of Members' deaths, resignations, or expulsions. In addition, the Clerk is responsible for maintaining the official records of the House.

## Sergeant at Arms

A House Officer whose history extends back to the First Congress, the Sergeant at Arms is the chamber's principal law enforcement official, charged with maintaining security on the floor and on the House side of the Capitol complex. With the Senate Sergeant at Arms and the Architect of the Capitol, the House Sergeant at Arms serves on the Capitol Police Board and the Capitol Guide Board.

Mandated under current House Rules, the Sergeant at Arms enforces protocol and ensures decorum during floor proceedings. The Office of the Sergeant at Arms maintains the mace, which symbolizes the authority of the House. On occasion, especially in the 19th century, the Sergeant at Arms has had to present the mace to Members on the floor to restore order when debate grew heated and tempers flared. The Sergeant at Arms is also empowered to compel absent Members onto the House Floor for official business. Over time, the office's duties have encompassed additional administrative functions, such as managing parking facilities and issuing identification badges to House staff.

## Chaplain

The election of the Reverend William Linn as the first Chaplain of the House in 1789 continued the tradition established by the Continental Congresses of opening each day's legislative proceedings with a prayer. The early House Chaplains alternated duties with their Senate counterparts on a weekly basis. The two routinely conducted Sunday services for the Washington community in the House Chamber.

The Chaplain also provides pastoral counseling to the House community, schedules guest chaplains, and participates in memorial services for the House and its staff. In the past, Chaplains have performed marriage and funeral ceremonies for House Members. Two Chaplains also served as U.S. Representatives—one before his service as House Chaplain and one after.

## Parliamentarian

The Parliamentarian is a nonpartisan official appointed by the Speaker to render objective assistance on legislative and parliamentary procedure to the House of Representatives.

The parliamentary law of the House of Representatives is derived from two primary sources: the Constitution and House Rules. These include not only the standing rules adopted from

Congress to Congress, but also *Jefferson's Manual*, a guide to English parliamentary practice that then-Vice President Thomas Jefferson compiled for his own use and which the House has incorporated into its rules since 1837.

Since 1789 the House has established its vast collection of precedents in one of two ways: either by the decisions of Speakers and presiding officers or by longstanding custom and tradition. In resolving questions of order, the Speaker and other presiding officers of the House, with the guidance of the Parliamentarian, adhere to the jurisprudential principle of *stare decisis*, a commitment to stand by earlier decisions. In the early 20th century, Parliamentarians began compiling and printing a record of parliamentary precedent which currently spans more than two dozen volumes.

House Officers pose for a photo in 1919. From left to right: Postmaster Frank W. Collier, Doorkeeper Bert W. Kennedy, Sergeant at Arms Joseph G. Rodgers, and Clerk William Tyler Page.

*Image courtesy of the Library of Congress*

The title Parliamentarian dates to around 1927 and is the most recent name for what has been a position in the House since 1857. Previous titles for the position have included “Messenger to the Speaker,” “Clerk to the Speaker,” and “Clerk at the Speaker’s Table.”

## Chief Administrative Officer

Created in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) oversees the financial and administrative functions of the House previously administered by the Offices of the Postmaster and Doorkeeper, and, for one Congress, the Director of Non-Legislative and Financial Services. Under current House Rules, the CAO manages House computer systems, finances, human resources, media, and procurement.





Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts presides over a 1926 House session. Representative Rogers succeeded her late husband in Congress and served for 35 years, from her election in 1925 until her death in 1960 (69th–86th Congresses).

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

## HOUSE PROCEEDINGS

Like other complex systems, the House of Representatives is governed by a set of rules that dictate its daily rhythms. Those rules are contingent upon a host of historic variables, meaning they are not set in stone. For its entire existence the House has designed and redesigned its parliamentary requirements for legislative business.

With hundreds of Members and many thousands of bills during each Congress, the House relies on a highly regulated process to introduce, debate, and amend legislation. A routine bounded by certain guideposts helps give structure to the proceedings of each legislative day. While not intended to be comprehensive, the following list highlights common procedures in the House.

## Procession

One of the last things the House does before adjourning for the day is to set the time for the next meeting. When that appointed time arrives, the House gathers in the chamber to begin a new legislative day. The east doors leading to the Speaker’s Lobby swing open and the Capitol Police officer guarding the center gallery doors yells, “All rise.” As Members, staff, and visitors in the gallery stand, an assistant to the Sergeant at Arms brings in the mace—the symbol of order in the House—and leads the Speaker to the rostrum. In accordance with House Rules, the Speaker subsequently knocks the gavel at the exact time established by the House at its last meeting and proclaims, “The House will be in order.”

Similar to many traditions in the House, the procession is a mixture of practices brought over from Great Britain and others grown at home. Much like the British speaker being escorted into the House of Commons, the Speaker of the U.S. House is led into the chamber to open the day’s proceedings. And much like when an American judge enters a courtroom, everyone in the House is asked to rise as the Speaker climbs the rostrum.

## Prayer and Pledge

Before the House begins each new legislative day, the House Chaplain or a guest chaplain delivers a prayer from the main lectern on the rostrum. Chaplains have served in the House since the First Congress, and guest chaplains—men and women from various regions and faiths—have occasionally offered the opening prayer since at least the early 1900s.

Immediately following the prayer, the Speaker or presiding officer asks that everyone in the chamber face the American flag hanging behind the rostrum and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The Pledge dates to the late 19th century, and Congress incorporated it into the “rules and customs pertaining to the display and use of the

flag of the United States of America” in 1942. Twelve years later, Congress added the phrase “under God” to the Pledge—changing the verse from “one Nation indivisible” to “one Nation under God, indivisible.” The Pledge did not become a part of the daily order of business in the House until 1988. The House officially added the Pledge to its rules during the 104th Congress.

## House Journal

The House *Journal* is the official written record of the House of Representatives. As required by the Constitution, it has been maintained every day the House has been in session since its first gathering on March 4, 1789. A team of clerks maintains the *Journal* and records only the most basic procedural decisions and legislative actions. The *Journal* includes no dialogue; the record of debate on the House Floor is instead transcribed by the official reporters in charge of compiling the *Congressional Record*, which dates to 1873.

Before the House conducts any legislative business, it must agree to the Speaker’s approval of the *Journal* from the previous day as the official record. If no Member objects, which is usually the case, the *Journal* is considered approved without being read or conducting a vote. When Members do object and call for a reading or a vote, it is often for another purpose.

## Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union

As its name suggests, the Committee of the Whole is the parliamentary means by which the House meets to debate legislation as if it were an extra-large committee made up of all 435 Members.

The practice of resolving into the Committee of the Whole dates back hundreds of years to the English House of Commons as a way to shield discussion from the British Speaker who, at the time, reported to the monarch. Like much of Britain’s parliamentary tradition, the Committee

of the Whole was exported to North America's colonial legislatures and then adopted by the First Federal Congress. Before the emergence of our modern standing committee system, the House used the Committee of the Whole extensively at each stage of the legislative process to develop ideas, instruct ad hoc committees created to draft bills, and amend measures reported back by committee.

## Assigning Debate

In modern Congresses, Members introduce thousands of bills every year. To ensure the legislative process runs efficiently, the House regulates time for debate and controls the clock down to the minute. The Rules Committee determines how much time each major bill receives, usually 60 minutes for debate.

The House considers and amends much of its legislation in the Committee of the Whole. Traditionally the time scheduled for debate is split between the chair of the committee reporting the bill (representing those in favor) and the committee's ranking minority member (representing those opposed). As the floor managers for the bill, these two individuals are then responsible for subdividing their time among other Members who wish to speak on the issue.

## Adjournment

The House closes for the day after it adopts a motion to adjourn. As soon as the gavel falls, the official reporter for debate—the staff member preparing the day's proceedings for the *Congressional Record*—calls out the exact time, which becomes the formal moment of adjournment. Clerks then pass that time to the cloakrooms, which send notifications to the Members of the Republican Conference and Democratic Caucus alerting the parties that House business is done for the day. Before the era of mobile devices and smart phones, House aides often sent adjournment announcements to hotels, boarding houses, bars, and restaurants where

Members gathered. If the Senate has adjourned as well, the lantern atop the Capitol Dome is turned off, signaling the end of Congress's deliberations for the day.

## Bell System

For most of the 19th century, House officials who needed to send a message to Members in the Capitol had to rely on word of mouth or ask House aides or Pages to deliver it. That changed in the 1890s, however, when the House installed an electronic bell system to announce floor action with a few simple rings. Initially controlled by the Doorkeeper or the Sergeant at Arms, the system employs a pattern of rings to convey information about what is happening on the House Floor. The bell signals changed over the years, but the system has had remarkable staying power. In 1963 electricians integrated a new bell system with an accompanying light display with the wall clocks around the House side of the Capitol.

## Decorum

Since 1789 the House has employed rules and regulations to monitor debate and maintain propriety and respect. Those rules have evolved and expanded from the earliest days of Congress in which personal honor and acerbic rhetoric occasionally led to duels among Members.

Modern standards of decorum instruct Members to focus on the issues and to avoid commenting on personal character. Because it is considered bad form to refer to any other Member by name, Members use the third person to address one another: the "Gentleman from Maryland," for instance, or the "Gentlewoman from Texas." The rules ask Members to be mindful of their language and to address the chair, rather than fellow Members, the television cameras, or anyone in the House galleries.

There are a handful of ways the House can enforce decorum. Members may call for a point of order if someone breaches decorum during

debate, which may elicit a warning from the presiding officer. Members may also ask that words be “taken down,” which results in a House clerk reading the targeted remarks to the chamber. The presiding officer must decide if what was said violates the rules. Members sometimes ask that those remarks be deleted from the *Congressional Record* entirely. Members may also raise a question of privilege, which asserts that the rules may have been violated.

## Joint Sessions and State of the Union

On occasion the House and the Senate assemble to carry out certain constitutional responsibilities. The two chambers sometimes meet in conference to reconcile legislative differences, or for ceremonial events, such as when they met to commemorate the completion of the Washington Monument in 1885. Most commonly, they meet

together for the Joint Session for the State of the Union and the Joint Session to count votes in the Electoral College. For a Joint Session to occur, both the House and Senate must approve a concurrent resolution. Joint Sessions almost always occur in the House Chamber given its larger size and seating capacity.

As required by Article II of the Constitution, the President “shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union.” For the vast majority of American history, what is now called the State of the Union was commonly called the “Annual Message.” Around the mid-20th century, it came to be known more popularly as the State of the Union.

Presidents George Washington and John Adams appeared in person before Joint Sessions of Congress to deliver their Annual Messages. But

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill addresses a Joint Meeting of Congress on January 17, 1952.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*





This 1881 print depicts the Sergeant at Arms, with the House Mace held aloft, retrieving Members from dinners, receptions, and other social events to lead them back to the chamber to achieve a quorum.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*

in 1801, Thomas Jefferson broke with precedent and instead sent a written Annual Message to Congress to be read by clerks in the House and Senate. Written messages became standard for the rest of the 19th century and into the early 20th century.

In 1913 Woodrow Wilson revived the practice of delivering the Annual Message in person. Since then Presidents, including Wilson, have still occasionally submitted written Annual Messages to Congress. When Presidents began appearing before Congress, the Annual Message became less of a retrospective report on governmental activity and more of a platform for the President to rally support for his agenda. With the gradual change from written to spoken delivery, Annual Messages dropped in length from as high as 25,000 words before 1913 to an average of around 6,000 words by the late 20th century.

Before 1934, Annual Messages were delivered in December around the start of the new Congress. After the passage of the 20th Amendment in

1933 set January 3 as the Opening Day of a new Congress, Annual Messages and States of the Union were moved to late January or early February. The first radio broadcast of an Annual Message occurred in 1923 and the first television broadcast in 1947. Joint Sessions for the State of the Union were moved to the evening in 1965 to better fit the television-viewing habits of the American people.

## **Electoral College**

Every four years following a presidential election, Congress must meet in a Joint Session in early January to count Electoral College votes. Unlike Joint Sessions for the State of the Union in which the House Speaker presides, the Senate president—the sitting Vice President—oversees the counting of electoral votes. Going down an alphabetical list of states and the District of Columbia one by one, the Senate President reviews the certificates of electoral votes. Two tellers from the House and two tellers from

the Senate (traditionally from the House Administration and Senate Rules Committees) record the results.

If no candidate wins a majority of the Electoral College votes, the contest goes to the House of Representatives, where each state delegation is given one vote. Since 1789 two presidential elections have been decided in the House of Representatives—first in 1801 when Thomas Jefferson emerged as the victor, and the second in 1825 when John Quincy Adams prevailed.

In 1877, for the first and only time in American history, Congress created an Electoral Commission to determine the victor of the contested 1876 presidential election.

## Joint Meetings

Unlike Joint Sessions, which require legislative action by Congress, Joint Meetings take place when either the House or Senate agrees to recess and meet with the other chamber. Traditionally, and especially after World War II, Joint Meetings have been used to hear addresses by foreign leaders. Joint Meetings have also been the venue for special commemorative events and to receive remarks by distinguished Americans. On December 10, 1824, the Marquis de Lafayette, the French aristocrat and Revolutionary War hero, became the first foreign dignitary to address the House of Representatives. Fifty years later, King David Kalakaua of Hawaii became the first foreign leader to address a Joint Meeting of Congress.

The House and Senate meet in a Joint Session on January 6, 1941, to count Electoral College votes and to receive President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Annual Message.

*Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives*



“...this call upon me by the People of the District in which I reside, to represent them in Congress, has been spontaneous ...I have received nearly three votes in four, throughout the district. My Election as President of the United States was not half so gratifying to my inmost Soul— No election or appointment conferred upon me ever gave me so much pleasure.”

John Quincy Adams, diary entry of November 7, 1830



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