

The Committee Rooms

The Senate Committee on Appropriations originally occupied rooms on the second floor of the Capitol, Rooms S-219 and S-219A. In 1911, the Committee moved downstairs into what are now rooms S-127, S-128, and S-129. The move downstairs coincided with Francis E. Warren's shift from chairing the Military Affairs Committee, which had previously occupied S-128 and S-129, to chairing Appropriations. Thus, on that occasion, the chairman retained the same office space, while the committees moved. Appropriations has utilized these quarters ever since, with the addition of adjacent rooms S-125, S-126, S-130, and S-131.

Outside, over the entrance to the reception room, S-128, is a fresco entitled *Bellona, the Roman Goddess of War*, chosen because at the time it was being painted for the Committee on Military Affairs which occupied the room. Captain Montgomery C. Meigs of the Army Corps of Engineers, who oversaw construction of the new Senate and House wings of the Capitol in the 1850s, hired artist Constantino Brumidi to decorate the rooms. Brumidi, who arrived in the United States from Italy in 1852, had experience painting frescoes in Rome. He prepared designs and supervised the decoration of many parts of the Capitol from the 1850s until his death in 1880. Other notable examples of his work in the Capitol appear in the Rotunda and in the ornately decorated corridors on the first floor of the Senate wing known as the Brumidi Corridors. Brumidi was working on the frieze in the Capitol dome at the time he died.

Today, one can still enjoy the full beauty of the reception room's decorations, all in a military motif. Five frescoed lunettes by Brumidi, depicting scenes from the Revolutionary War, dominate the upper walls. The scenes are entitled *Storming Of Stony Point, 1779*; *Washington at Valley Forge, 1778*; *The Battle of Lexington, 1775*; *Boston Massacre, 1770*; and *Death of General Wooster, 1777*. These frescoes are attractively set off above plain painted panels of dark green. Between the panels are six pilasters painted by artist James Leslie in 1857 that show trophy weapons and military equipment of various historical periods, including swords, belts, shields, pistols, pikes, trumpets, powder horns, helmets, flags, battle-axes, muskets, and picks. The ceiling is ornately and symmetrically decorated with small scenes related to the Revolu-

tionary War, such as the death of General Montgomery. Around these images are cherubs, wreaths, flowers, arabesques, garlands, shields, and bundles of fasces. A large goldleaf mirror, designed for the room in 1859, occupies the center of one end of the room. It is decorated at the top with a shield with the Stars and Stripes and models of an artillery piece, drums, muskets, and pikes. From the ceiling is suspended a large crystal chandelier that replaces the original bronze gaslighted fixture.

The main Committee room in the Capitol, S-127, located to the north of the reception room, was formerly occupied by the Committee on Naval Affairs. The decoration is in a style derived from the remains of ancient Roman wall paintings in the Baths of Titus and the excavations of Pompeii. As originally designed by Brumidi, the walls were to be filled with depictions of U.S. naval battles, and later with illusionistic porticoes. Because of dissatisfaction with the artists who were to have carried out the work, only one was ever completed. The ceiling is painted in fresco and tempera and is highly ornate, dominated by seven Roman gods and goddesses of the sea, together with "America" in the form of a Native American. Interspersed throughout are scenes of mermaids and centaurs, eagles, Indians, and settlers. The walls are painted in oil and are divided into nine panels of maidens in flowing robes with various naval instruments—a compass, a map, a telescope, and other nautical objects. Three crystal chandeliers installed in the twentieth century complete the arrangement. Of particular interest to visitors is the 30-foot conference table that dominates the room, at which each member has a designated place. The room is carpeted in a rich red pattern studded with gold stars. A prize-winning restoration of the room, carried out between 1978 and 1982, included repainting some damaged areas of the walls and removing bookcases and other objects that detracted from its appearance. Brumidi's watercolor sketch for the room and cleaning tests showed that the backgrounds of the panels with the maidens were a vivid blue under layers of dark green overpaint. Conservation of the panels began with a study and then a pilot phase on one panel to verify that it would be possible to remove the overpaint and recover the original background. The conservators found that the most effective method was to remove the overpaint and yellowed varnish with scalpels. The conservation of all of the maiden panels was undertaken in the summer of 2004. Fortunately, the beautiful maidens painted by Brumidi were essentially intact, and the conservators were able to skillfully match the blue color in areas that had been replastered. The conservators also uncovered the original flowers below the maidens and recreated those

that were lost. A glass panel in the outer door enables members of the public to view this beautiful room when it is not in use.

The smaller room adjoining the Committee's reception room, S-129, was assigned to the Committee on the Library at the time Brumidi painted the ceiling frescoes in 1875. The design therefore represents allegorical figures of science, architecture, sculpture, and painting. "Of special note is the depiction of a bust of author Washington Irving in the scene representing 'sculpture,' and the drawing of the Capitol dome in the scene of 'architecture.' The other frescoes show 'painting' and 'science.'" Not until 1910 did Carl Rakemann, whose father had worked with Brumidi, complete the decoration of the room. Rakemann, born in Washington, D.C., in 1878, had studied in Europe and had exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Since the room was used by the Military Affairs Committee at the time he worked, he chose a motif in keeping with the adjoining reception room, painting four lunettes containing portraits of outstanding Revolutionary generals with historic flags.

The oval portrait in the east lunette shows General George Washington, flanked by helmets and military weapons of the time and flags of the colonial period—the Grand Union flag and a flag of the Revolutionary period of 1777. In the lunette to the south is a portrait of General Joseph Warren, a physician who, at the age of 34, was killed at Bunker Hill. On either side of the portrait are the Bunker Hill flag of 1775–1777 and the Pine Tree flag of the same period. On the west side of the room, the lunette contains a portrait of General "Mad" Anthony Wayne, hero of the victory at Stony Point. His portrait is flanked by the Massachusetts flag of the period between 1775 and 1777 and the Rattle Snake flag of the same period, with the famous inscribed warning: "Don't tread on me." The north lunette contains a portrait of General Horatio Gates. On the right is the Liberty flag of 1775–1777, and on the left an American flag of 1818.

Four less elaborately decorated rooms complete the Committee's suite. These include S-125, used for more than 40 years by the Committee on the Judiciary before being transferred to Appropriations in 1947, and S-126, assigned to Judiciary for 90 years until 1947. The original murals and frescoes in this latter room have disappeared; the present ceiling design was painted in the twentieth century, and the room underwent extensive renovation in 1992 and 1995. Room S-130, used during several periods by the Committee on the Library and from 1933 to 1941 by the majority leader, was assigned to Appropriations in 1943, as was Room S-131, also previously used by the majority leader. A lunette in the corridor over the door to S-131 contains an 1875 fresco by

Brumidi titled *Authority Consults the Written Law*, designed for the Committee on Revision of the Laws, which occupied the room at the time. In September 1996 the Senate designated S-131 as the "Mark Hatfield Room," in honor of the former Committee Chairman.