

# THE CAPITOL DOME



**The Capitol in the Movies**

**John Quincy Adams and Speakers of the House**

**Irish Artists in the Capitol Complex**

*Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*



## *From the Editor's Desk*

Like the lantern shining within the Tholos atop the Dome whenever either or both chambers of Congress are in session, this issue of *The Capitol Dome* sheds light in all directions. Two of the four articles deal primarily with art, one focuses on politics, and one is a fascinating exposé of how the two can overlap.

In the first article, **Michael Canning** reveals how the Capitol, far from being only a palette for other artist's creations, has been an artist (actor) in its own right. Whether as a walk-on in a cameo role (as in *Quiz Show*), or a featured performer sharing the marquee (as in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*), the Capitol, Library of Congress, and other sites within the Capitol complex have been used as important signifiers in cinema for the past 80-plus years.

The second article surveys some well-trod terrain in the landscape of American congressional history, but through a unique lens. Blending biography and institutional history with the colorful partisan and sectional politics of the antebellum period, British historian Dr. **Daniel Peart** demonstrates how *Representative* John Quincy Adams's temperament, political principles, and shrewd parliamentarianism were deftly deployed to accomplish real political goals.

Dr. **Paula Murphy**, like Peart, studies America from the British Isles. Her research into Irish and Irish-American contributions to the Capitol complex confirms an important artistic legacy while revealing some surprising contributions from important but unsung artists. Her research on this side of "the Pond" was supported by a USCHS Capitol Fellowship.

Another Capitol Fellow alumnus, **John Busch**, makes an ingenious case-study of the historical impact of steam navigation. Throughout the nineteenth century, steamboats shared top billing with locomotives as the most celebrated and recognizable motif of technological progress. Busch's article shows how that symbol was employed for geo-political "messaging" within one of the most significant paintings in the Capitol.

The editorial staff of *The Capitol Dome* hopes you enjoy this issue!

*William C. diGiacomantonio*

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**Cover:** Emanuel Leutze (1816-1868) painted *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*, located at the west staircase of the House wing of the Capitol, during 1861 and 1862. John Laurence Busch’s article in this issue (page 45) explores the context in which the painting was created. (Courtesy Architect of the Capitol)

# THROUGH A DOME DARKLY: THE CAPITOL AS SYMBOL, TOUCHSTONE, AND ADMONITION IN AMERICAN FILM

By Mike Canning



SEE NOTES FOR IMAGE CREDITS

Fig. 1. With the Capitol Dome serving as a standard backdrop, Secret Service agent Frank Horrigan (Clint Eastwood) pursues a potential presidential assassin across the roof of an apartment building on Capitol Hill in *In the Line of Fire* (1993).

*“It was a miracle of rare device, a sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!”*—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*

## I. EVOLUTION OF A LOCATION

If you see a motion picture with almost any Washington, D.C. context, you can almost always count on it: the shining image of the Capitol Dome, either the West Front glowing ivory from a midday sun or the East Front backlit by a setting sun, a cream-colored personification of our democracy (fig. 1).

This is the standard “establishing shot” of myriad movies, a ready shorthand that tells any audience in the world they are now in Washington, D.C. That image—which I also call the “postcard shot”—is used so often because it provides a ready symbol of our national capital and seat of government, the steadfast icon of our political life.\* Thus does that grand Dome, with its imposing architecture and layered history, perform

\* This essay on the Capitol in film focuses exclusively on standard Hollywood sound feature films released in theaters over the last 90 years. It does not include documentaries of any kind nor products made principally for television. However, many of the same points about our Capitol and our congressional politics could be similarly attributed to the burgeoning number of TV series using Washington locales.



Fig. 2. Billie Dawn (Judy Holliday, left) is led down the Capitol steps on the House side by mentor Paul Verrall (William Holden), who is providing her a crash course in democracy in the comedy *Born Yesterday*, in the days when access to filming at the building was more open (1950).

its symbolic function, one which Hollywood filmmakers have long grasped as a backdrop and signifier for our politics and government.

Before the days of genuine location shooting in Washington, studios resorted to photographic or filmic backdrops to evoke the capital. An early example was the anti-corruption drama *Washington Merry-Go-Round* (1932), which showed newsreel material of the era's Bonus Marchers and imposed protagonists against stock footage of the Capitol and its plaza. *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933) used newsreel footage of an actual presidential swearing-in (FDR's first inaugural on the East Front of the Capitol) to stand for the oath taking of a Depression-era radical reform president (Walter Huston).

The first major Hollywood production to use real—and extensive—D.C. location footage was Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), “the” Washington movie to which all subsequent D.C. films would be compared. (This film's Capitol content will be discussed in section II).

Between the years 1940 and 1960 there were many fewer movies made on location and outside the Hollywood studio system. It was also a much more open and innocent time, so, when movie companies considered shooting in Washington, the doors were rather open, as was access to the Capitol. Of course, the actual Senate and House chambers have *always* been off-limits (the nation's official legislative business must not be disturbed, after all), but other areas could be negotiated.



Fig. 3. Seen walking through the actual underground passage between the Capitol and a House Office Building are Rep. Joseph Gresham (Van Johnson, left) and journalist Alice Kingsley (Patricia Neal) in *Washington Story* (1952).

A good early example of sound location shooting came with the hit comedy *Born Yesterday* (1950). The filmmakers, headed by director George Cukor, went out of their way to use imagery from the city. Extended and didactic sequences inside the Capitol and at the Library of Congress underscored the film's theme of gaining civic consciousness, exemplified by the character of Billie Dawn, winningly played by Judy Holliday, a performance that won her an Academy Award.

Holliday was shown being edified about our democratic tenets by journalist Paul Verrall (the smooth William Holden) as they toured the Capitol (fig. 2). It shows the two of them walking on the East Front steps of the Capitol, then standing in the Rotunda, where the camera pulls up to view Constantino Brumidi's "Apotheosis of Washington" on the Dome's ceiling—surely the first time it was seen by millions of Americans.

Another good example of ample access in this more benign period was *Washington Story* (1952), a narrative that offered a basically affirmative view of a decent congressman. The Architect of the Capitol at the time, David Lynn, liked the script by director Robert Pirosh and said that it was the best one ever written about the seat of government, remarking that it might do a "lot of good" by showing people "just how Congress operates."<sup>1</sup>

The production received final approval for shooting inside the Capitol itself from legendary Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn. The company was allowed to shoot extensively in the Capitol, including scenes in the Rotunda and Statuary Hall, as well as in the Old House Office Building (now the Cannon Building) and its underground tunnel and subway (fig. 3). Most importantly, a version of the House chamber is featured in the film, but, with no access to the floor allowed, the production

used the reworked Senate set from *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Most tellingly, the production team even had an action sequence shot in the Rotunda, when, in a climactic moment, the congressman slugs an evil gossip columnist right under the Dome!

Although the filmmakers agreed to leave the Capitol as they found it—a condition of the shoot—the local *Washington Times-Herald* reporter who observed the filming noted that the production left the typically messy aftermath of location shooting, comparing it to that of 21 August 1814, when the invading British burnt the Capitol.<sup>2</sup> The reporter bemoaned the corridors littered with electric cords and the junky presence of movie paraphernalia, and then he went into down-and-dirty detail, stating: “Stacked in regular rows beside a doorway leading to the Statuary Hall were empty and half-empty soft drink bottles. And underfoot were partially smoked cigarette butts.”<sup>3</sup>

It was the last time that congressional authorities allowed filming inside the Rotunda.

If the interior of the Capitol became off limits, exteriors were still available to Hollywood projects. In the popular *A Man Called Peter* (1955), based on the inspiring real-life story of Senate Chaplain Peter Marshall (Richard Todd), we see the minister walk from the south side of the Capitol Plaza to enter the Senate side of the Capitol. Judy Holliday got to Washington and the Capitol one more time in the 1956 comedy *The Solid Gold Cadillac*. As a minor but outspoken shareholder of a New York company, Holliday comes to D.C. to see a defense contractor, and the film shows her walking up the steps of the Capitol on the Senate side.

Ample interiors and exteriors of the Capitol were also on view in *Advise and Consent* (1962). Though it didn't paint the most positive picture of individual legislators, director Otto Preminger's film, which centers on a controversial confirmation hearing for a new secretary of state, presented some of the Senate in a positive light, and extensive location shooting in and around Capitol Hill gives the movie a resonance that is still engaging after 55 years (fig. 4).

Though Preminger was a major Hollywood figure of the day, he, too, was denied access to the actual Senate chamber and had to resort to the classic *Mr. Smith* set that had been used 10 years before in *Washington Story*. The film is a cornucopia of locale spotting for Washington history buffs. It features on-location scenes around the Capitol, including the fabled Senate Caucus Room (site of the confirmation hearing), and the Senate's old

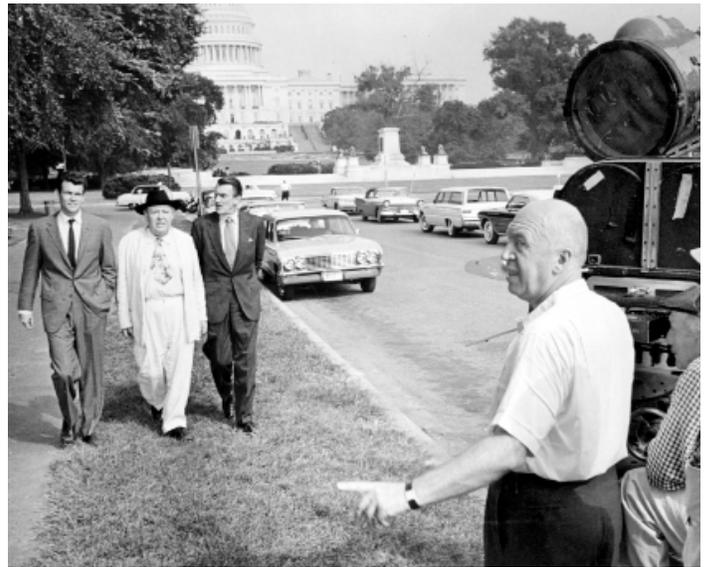


Fig. 4. Stars Don Murray, Charles Laughton, and Walter Pidgeon (left to right), all playing senators in *Advise and Consent*, stroll on the Mall as the film's director Otto Preminger trains his camera on the Capitol (1962).

underground monorail, as well as the East Front. There were also sequences in the Old Senate Office Building (now the Russell Building). *Advise and Consent* was the last motion picture where a Hollywood production had such significant access to the Capitol and Senate sites.

One kind of watershed in D.C. cinema was crossed in 1976 when the maverick actor-director Tom Laughlin, who had had a major success with his independent “hippy-western” *Billy Jack* (1971), came to town to film his version of *Mr. Smith* called, imaginatively enough, *Billy Jack Goes to Washington*. As in the earlier Capra classic, *Billy Jack* is a naïve westerner who is accidentally named a senator so he can be easily manipulated by political bosses back home. Laughlin's film, however, went off any number of rails, and apparently the director and his team were extremely arrogant and did actual damage in and around the Capitol. According to an informed location manager, “[Laughlin] was so rude to Congressional authorities that they refused any filming on the grounds” thereafter.<sup>4</sup>

Today, to shoot anywhere in and around the Capitol, authorities on the Hill, like the Speaker's Office or the Architect of the Capitol, must give their blessing, and it's not easy in coming. After all, lawmakers think their work is fairly important and should only be subject to disruption for very good reasons, a Hollywood movie not being high on the list of priorities. One of the city's long-time and best-known location managers,

Stuart Neumann, asserted to the author that Capitol Hill was the most difficult film location in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Complicating the filming of the Capitol, especially its interiors, is the big bugaboo of this century: security. Thus, in Billy Jack's wake, the large area around the Capitol, called the Capitol grounds, became effectively off-limits. The trauma of 9/11 certainly contributed to additional security concerns at the site, but it was the dramatic attack within the Capitol itself in July 1998 (when two Capitol Police officers were killed by a deranged gunman) that was the first major impetus for limiting access to the building.

Permission for filming the Capitol has been restricted over the last 40 years to 2nd Street on the east (crossing East Capitol Street), to First Street on the west (running by the Grant Memorial), down south to C Street, SE, and up north to the Union Station Plaza. Examples of how filmmakers must cope with these restrictions on either side of the structure can be seen in films like *Suspect* (1987), *The Distinguished Gentleman* (1992), *Random Hearts* (1999), *The Sentinel* (2006), *Casino Jack* (2010), *Fair Game* (2010), *White House Down* (2013), and the recent *The Post* (2017), where a shot of bound newspapers being tossed from a truck onto East Capitol Street can go no closer than the 200 block. The point is always to get the "money shot" of the Dome.

The limitations cited above mean that filmmakers who want the Capitol in the background often settle for shooting at the Grant Memorial directly west of the Capitol. This site is the dividing line between what constitutes the Capitol grounds and the National Park Service's territory, allowing an unfettered, if distant, vision of the Dome. This limitation could give audiences the impression that the memorial is one of the most important sites to discuss serious political matters. In reality, however, almost no one doing business at the Capitol would walk there; the grand statue is mainly a tourist attraction from which to watch birds in the reflecting pool or for groups to pose together on the steps for photo remembrances.

Exceptions to these limitations on the use of the Capitol grounds have been rare. In the 1978 film *F.I.S.T.*, starring Sylvester Stallone as a Hoffa-like Teamsters' union boss, there is a scene of a truckers' protest near the Capitol in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> The production was able to create a mass mobilization of vehicles just north and west of the Capitol. The makers of *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* (1979) were also allowed to show a touring school bus turning off First Street, NE to enter the Capitol

grounds (a shot that would be prohibited today).

Another significant exception was granted in 1993, when Robert Redford's production of the drama *Quiz Show* (1994) was allowed to shoot on the steps of the House side of the Capitol, an exception specifically made for Redford after he came to Washington to make an in-person appeal to then-Speaker Tom Foley.<sup>7</sup> There have been no up-close Capitol shots since; every image of the icon is now from about three blocks away.

## II. REIMAGINING THE CAPITOL

Even given the security obstacles and other restrictions, filmmakers who aim to tell Washington stories will always try ways to incorporate the Capitol. The first major studio picture to fully feature Washington, D.C., *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, was also the first to create a Capitol vision of its own.

The film's director, Frank Capra, had planned some key sequences to take place on the floor of the Senate (including Jimmy Stewart's dramatic closing filibuster) and very much wanted to shoot there. Yet congressional rules then (and now) would not allow him to shoot inside the chamber, so Columbia Pictures spent \$100,000 to have a crack design team of 125 men recreate a duplicate chamber in Hollywood over several weeks. In his biography, *The Name Above the Title*, Capra extols his art director, Leslie Banks, and his team:

From ancient blueprints dug out of the Capitol's catacombs, and thousands of photographs, (Bank's) department of magicians was asked to conjure up, in one hundred days, exact replicas of what had taken one hundred years to build. In reconstructing the Senate chamber, seen by countless eyes and hallowed by a thousand traditions, even the omission of historic scratches on a desk might betray the imitation.<sup>8</sup>

This splendid, to-scale replica (fig. 5), which one magazine called "complete to the last acanthus leaf and arabesque," is one of the finest sets Hollywood ever produced.<sup>9</sup> When Smith wanders into it for the first time with awe on his face, his impression was certainly matched by the millions of American filmgoers who had never ventured to Washington and had never seen the chamber. Much of the authentic Washington flavor of *Mr. Smith* was aided by Capra's technical advisor on the film, James Preston,



Fig. 5. Director Frank Capra (lower left corner) looks over the masterful Senate set he had built in a Columbia Pictures studio for his production of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939).

who had been a long-time superintendent of the Senate Press Gallery (itself effectively reproduced in the film).<sup>10</sup>

That great *Mr. Smith* set was later revived for other film productions featuring Congress. It appeared in the obscure 1942 film *Tennessee Johnson*, wherein the impeached Andrew Johnson (Van Heflin) argues his case on the Senate floor (a pure Hollywood invention since Johnson never made such an appearance). The set was also dusted off and redesigned somewhat to appear in the above-mentioned *Advise and Consent*.

A number of films have used models, reconstructions, or stand-ins to present the Capitol. An early example was the miniature Capitol created by special effects wizard Ray Harryhausen for the cheesy science fiction feature *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956). The film ends with an invasion of Washington by a fleet of flying saucers, a carnage that climaxes in one saucer crashing into the House side of the Capitol and then a second one slicing off the Dome!

The sci-fi fantasy *Logan's Run* (1976) presents a futuristic world of 2274 when no one is permitted to live beyond 30 and from which the hero and his girlfriend escape. They end up in an overgrown jungle that turns out to be—the Capitol grounds! Peter Ustinov—as a leftover legislator—leads them around a set representing a weed-infested House chamber.

In Tim Burton's fantasy-farce, *Mars Attacks!* (1996), the Capitol again gets creamed. Militant Martians, having invaded a fantasy House chamber, zap all the

legislators with ray guns and leave a smoking Dome (a model). Burton considered his movie a tribute to Ray Harryhausen's monument-destroying effects in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*.<sup>11</sup> Worse was yet to come. In the disaster picture *Deep Impact* (1998), a renegade comet vaporizes a good part of the East Coast, including the District, but the movie ends with the surviving president (Morgan Freeman) standing in front of a devastated Capitol—now under reconstruction.

One noteworthy refusal to shoot within the Capitol was a turn down to director Stephen Spielberg when he was filming the period piece *Amistad* (1997). Since the film takes place in the years 1839–41, Spielberg wanted to use the site of the original Supreme Court in the basement of the Capitol, where a famous trial of slaves from the ship *Amistad* was actually held. Though the actual site might have made for great cinema (not to mention educating millions of Americans on this intriguing episode of history), the director was refused permission, apparently because of the disruption the filming might cause in the building. A special reconstructed set had to be used instead.<sup>12</sup>

On occasion, a film's inability to shoot in D.C. has turned filmmakers to other options, such as other capitol buildings. For example, in the aforementioned *Amistad*, Spielberg and company used footage of Rhode Island's look-alike State House to represent the exterior of the nation's Capitol, even though the latter's dome would not be finished until 1863. In *The Seduction of Joe Tynan*, the Senate chamber shown in the film is actually the Senate chamber in the Maryland State House in Annapolis (the small size and the marbled walls give it away).

Richmond, Virginia and its distinguished State House have done stand-in duty for major productions. In *Dave* (1993), a climactic scene has President Mitchell (Kevin Kline) speaking to a joint session of Congress in what is actually the House of Delegates chamber in the State House. The same space played a similar role in the Demi Moore vehicle *G.I. Jane* (1997) and was also used for the culminating scene in the 2000 political drama *The Contender*.

Most recently, the Richmond House of Delegates stood in very effectively for the 1860s House of Representatives in Spielberg's *Lincoln* (2012), perhaps the best commercial film ever in treating major landmark legislation. The muted backgrounds combined with the striking facial highlights of the congressmen in debate produced a mood both serious and dramatic (fig. 6).

(To note: the State House did double duty as a location in this film: its exterior stood in as a replica for the Lincoln White House.)

Farther afield, *Three for the Road* (1987), a brainless comedy starring Charlie Sheen as a Senate staffer, uses a credit sequence showing Sheen gunning his motorcycle towards what looks to be the U.S. Capitol—but something is off: the building has an slightly elongated dome and has a glass high-rise on its left. It is actually the State Capitol in Little Rock, Arkansas!

Similarly, for *Legally Blonde 2: Red, White, and Blonde* (2003), a Reese Witherspoon vehicle in which she plays a congressional aide, much of the filming was done in Utah, using the State Capitol in Salt Lake City as a stand-in. Specifically, the production used the building's House chamber, which appears far too small on screen. In another goof, each House member also had an individual desk, a perk which is only available in the real Senate.

Restricted access to the Capitol area jurisdiction means that movie companies have to improvise when it comes to presenting congressional buildings, too. In the 1985 Tom Hanks comedy, *The Man with One Red Shoe*, the protagonist and his girlfriend are supposed to be hurrying to a congressional hearing on Capitol Hill, but they are running up the grand southern steps of the National Gallery of Arts's classic West Wing. The Gallery is nowhere near the congressional office buildings. The director does get what he wants, however: a background shot of the shiny Capitol Dome six blocks away! Another judicious stand-in appears in the Eddie Murphy farce *The Distinguished Gentleman* (1992) about an accidental legislator (fig. 7). Murphy plays Rep. Johnson, who, when shown coming to a “House Office Building,” is actually entering the—just as impressive—Hall of Justice in downtown Los Angeles.<sup>13</sup>

Filmmakers use what they can to achieve a congressional feel (fig. 8). The suspense drama *State of Play* (2009) found sundry stand-ins for Hill scenes that were physically out of bounds. One shot shows a Rep. Collins (Ben Affleck) coming down the steps of the Library of Congress' Jefferson Building, which is clearly standing in for a House Office Building. Later, when Collins heads to his “office,” he instead runs into the impressive front of the Mellon Auditorium at 1301 Constitution Ave., NW (it carries a prop sign marked “Cannon” to refer to the oldest of the House Office Buildings). Finally, when a journalist friend is seen quizzing Collins in an “official” colonnade supposedly on the Hill, they are actually



Fig. 6. A spirited House debate in Stephen Spielberg's *Lincoln* is plausibly recreated in Richmond, Virginia's House of Delegates, which has served as a frequent stand-in for the Capitol (2012).

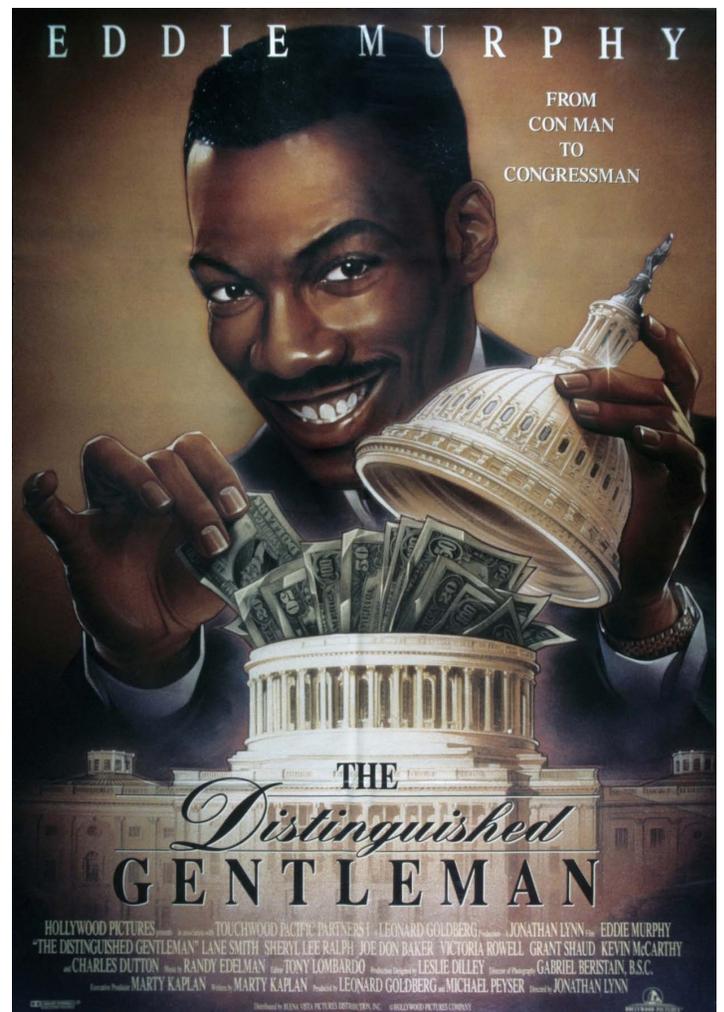


Fig. 7. The cynical film poster for the Eddie Murphy farce, *The Distinguished Gentleman*, typifies a long-standing and typical Hollywood pessimism about Congress—and the Capitol itself—as a “honey pot” for payoffs and graft by scheming politicians (1992).



Fig. 8. Perhaps the most sublime “goof” sequence in all D.C. movies comes in *Being There* when the tiny figure of Chance the gardener (Peter Sellers) walks south on the median strip of North Capitol Street—a place where no one would actually walk—with traffic flying by and the Capitol Dome in view (1979).

cruising the 12th Street side of the Federal Triangle in downtown Washington.

### III. THAT UBIQUITOUS DOME

In creating feature films, Hollywood can go to extreme lengths to incorporate the touchstone Dome no matter where the action of the screenplay takes place. In *Born Yesterday*, for example, when the trash magnate Harry Brock (Broderick Crawford) is surveying his suite at the Statler Hotel on 16th and K Streets, NW (now the Capitol Hilton), it has a lovely close-up view of the Dome. But this is an obvious process shot, since the Capitol is impossible to view from that site.

In *Protocol* (1984), a cocktail waitress-turned-State Department protocol officer played by Goldie Hawn is lying on a bed in The George Washington University Hospital, NW, when, on the phone with her mother, she says: “I can see the Capitol from the window!”—a clear impossibility. Just as impossible is the clear Dome view that an army colonel (Denzel Washington) sees from his room in the invented “Bethesda Arms” hotel in the military thriller *Courage Under Fire* (1995).

Even when a master director like Alfred Hitchcock needs a shot of that singular Dome, he can’t avoid messing with it. In his classic thriller *North By Northwest*

(1959) the single Washington sequence opens with a shiny reflection of the Capitol in the nameplate of the “United States Intelligence Agency.” The trouble is that, from the subsequent shot showing the Capitol’s West Front from a large picture window, it appears the Agency is located smack on the Mall, about the level of 4th Street, an ideal spot for a super-secret spy operation.

Thirty-five years later, that shot gets a wacky reprise in *Forrest Gump* (1994). As Forrest’s life-long friend Jenny is showing him around the “joint” D.C. headquarters of the Students for a Democratic Society and the Black Panthers, a window again reveals a full-frontal view of the Capitol’s West Front, placing both those radical bastions also in the middle of the Mall!

### IV. THE LIBRARY GETS ITS INNINGS

As part of the legislative branch, the Library of Congress—in particular, the original, splendid Jefferson Building—has appeared periodically in commercial films. (The other two Library buildings, named for John Adams and James Madison, have not appeared in any Hollywood film production.) Some major early films featured the Jefferson, such as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *Born Yesterday*, both of which showed their naïve leads discovering and being inspired by our



Fig. 9. In *All the President's Men*, Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman, left) and Bob Woodward (Robert Redford) leave the Library of Congress after doggedly researching information on the Watergate burglars.

founding documents.

In *Mr. Smith*, the newly-minted senator visits the Jefferson Building as part of a city bus tour. There he admires the elaborate Great Hall and marvels at the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights on the second floor, where they were located before their permanent transfer to the National Archives in 1952. In *Born Yesterday*, there is a similar discovery sequence where journalist Paul Verrall is introducing his protégé Billie Dawn to the Library. Billie's face lights up when she sees the draft of the Gettysburg Address in the back of the Great Hall; then she herself points out to Verrall the founding documents. Billie and Paul are also shown later conversing at the elaborate Neptune Fountain in front of the Library.

The Library featured prominently in an obscure 1952 espionage thriller *The Thief*, whose plot turns on a American nuclear scientist named Fields (Ray Milland) who is passing atomic secrets to the Soviets. On three occasions the film shows Fields going into the Library and entering the Main Reading Room to make a "drop" of classified information into the stacks or into the card

catalog. The third time he tries he is tailed by an FBI agent. *The Thief* was an odd studio experiment at the time in that it had no dialogue, only music, live sound, and sound effects. It was not a hit.

The Library was again used as a site for espionage in *Scorpio* (1973), a routine Cold War thriller starring Burt Lancaster as a renegade CIA veteran. One sequence involving a surveillance tape shows a woman both entering and leaving the Jefferson Building, performing a suspected "drop." That same footage is replayed on video near the end of the picture, but this time the camera closes in for a juicy "reveal."

The aforementioned *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* achieved decent approximations for real Senate locations although the production could not shoot inside the Capitol or the Senate Office Buildings. However, the director effectively used spaces in the Library of Congress as stand-ins. Sen. Tynan, for example, is shown in his "hideaway office," supposedly in a corner of the Capitol, but which was actually shot in the basement of the Library. Further, there is a shot of Senate staffers walking in the impressive Great Hall, standing in for one of

the Senate Office Buildings.

After the late 1970s, however, there was almost no use of the Library in Hollywood films for some time, perhaps because of the bad taste left after an incident during the shooting of *All the President's Men* in 1975 (fig. 9).

Perhaps that film's most imaginative use of locales is the sequence when Woodward and Bernstein (Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman) visit the Jefferson Building to gain access to some records of books checked out by personnel of the White House. The core of the sequence is shot inside the famed Main Reading Room, where, as the reporters look through library checkout cards, the camera slowly backs up vertically to the very top of the Library's grand dome, with a view down on the now puny protagonists, rifling through cards. According to one source, the production "devoted three weeks to pulling apparatus up 600 stairs to achieve a dramatic upward pull-away shot."<sup>14</sup>

That dramatic shot almost never happened. According to a contemporary report in a local business journal, the company, after spending two weeks building a platform from which a camera could obtain a bird's eye view of the Reading Room, hit a snag. Then:

Forty-eight hours before the shoot, permission to film was suddenly revoked by an official who was horrified to see the platform hanging from pulleys attached to the Library dome. After hours of desperate telephoning, the producers finally reached...Jack Valenti (head of the MPAA). Valenti put them in touch with Congressman John Brademas, who sits on the Library committee of the House of Representatives. Thanks to Brademas' intercession, the scene was shot.<sup>15</sup>

The Library shoot for *All the President's Men* was also the scene of an unfortunate incident that affected future access to the building. Stuart Neumann was a production assistant during this filming and recalled the event in an interview: a member of the rigging crew was running cables up in a false ceiling with acoustical tiles when the ceiling broke and the fellow fell right on an office desk of a Library employee. The Librarian of Congress was not happy, and the building was considered off limits for a time for Hollywood film crews.<sup>16</sup>

After *All the President's Men* there was no commercial filming in the Library until 1993, with a tepid remake

of *Born Yesterday*. A sequence has the Billie Dawn character (Melanie Griffith) ensconced in the Main Reading Room with her journalist mentor (Don Johnson) dutifully learning to use a dictionary to understand civics texts. In more recent years, some productions have begun again to shoot in the Jefferson Building. Now, with recent films like the two *National Treasure* thrillers and Clint Eastwood's *J. Edgar* (2011) featuring its Main Reading Room, the Library has again become a supporting player in D.C. movies.

In the first *National Treasure* film (2004), there is a lengthy expository sequence in the Main Reading Room, with a nice pan from the Library's dome down to the two principals (treasure hunters) in the circular reading area. In the 2007 sequel, *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, the treasure hunters roam the upper levels of the Reading Room searching for the "lost pages" of John Wilkes Booth's diary.

J. Edgar Hoover actually worked at the Library for five years as a young man before joining the Justice Department. A scene in *J. Edgar* has the future FBI chief (Leonardo DiCaprio) introducing a young woman to the library's card catalog (fig. 10). This shoot took place in March 2011 and was described in the Library of Congress' house weekly *The Gazette*. The paper describes how director Eastwood and company took over the Great Hall and the Main Reading Room with "giant, helium-filled balloons floated about the floors... illuminating the scene."



Fig. 10. Library of Congress reference librarian Sheridan Harvey shows a production crew entries in the Library's classic card catalog during the location shooting of Clint Eastwood's *J. Edgar* (2011).

The article adds that “the crew also installed two rows of specially constructed card catalogs—more than 5 feet high and roughly 25 feet long but with only eight drawers that actually opened...,” all to get the atmosphere right.<sup>17</sup>

## V. THE CAPITOL AS A HOUSE OF ILL REPUTE

While that glorious Dome provides a cinematic shorthand for power and principle, as well as a hearty paean to democracy and representative government, when Hollywood looks inside the Capitol to depict its denizens themselves, it inevitably finds fecklessness and prevarication. The dominant theme of movies featuring the U.S. Congress is that our congressional politics is a thoroughly corrupting process, an enterprise for villains.

These are popular *dramas*, after all, filtered through a popular sensibility and duly mirrored by a pliant Hollywood. This viewpoint has been often heightened by the distance—physical and psychic—between L.A. and D.C., two singular outposts with vastly different mindsets and mores. This overall surly view allows, even encourages, filmmakers and script writers, as audience surrogates, to feel superior to their political characters and to usually endow them with either whopping ineptness or abundant cynicism.

In reviewing products of commercial entertainment, any reasonable observer must realize that Hollywood films are rarely *realistic* portrayals of our national politics. In his comprehensive study of U.S. political films, *Reel Politics*, professor Terry Christensen states that such movies “seldom point out fundamental defects in the system, and they rarely suggest that social problems can be solved by collective or communal action. They simplify the complex problems of a complex society and solve them quickly and easily so we can have a happy ending.”<sup>18</sup>

The American popular movie hero is, above all, a worthy *individual* who acts alone, who goes against the grain, who challenges the corrupt *organization*—one guy versus The System. He must vanquish—not just disarm—his opponent, and he sees any compromise as unmanly. Yet, of course, compromise is the very lifeblood of politics. Ergo: compromising politicians as a class are nothing but evil double-dealers, base betrayers of principle. Thus has show biz ever viewed—and condemned—political biz.

Further, popular art forms like the movies typically

presuppose a pointed conflict that can be tidily resolved. This means that whole untidy—or unobserved—spheres of basic legislative activity, such as committee hearings and meetings, report writing, inter-agency actions, bureaucratic relationships, constituent services, the nitty-gritty of campaigns, inter alia, have been effectively absent from films. The whole legislative “process” itself, with its arcane language and fits-and-starts, is most difficult to dramatize. Likewise, its committees, where veteran Hill watchers say the real business of Congress is conducted, have figured little in congressional cinema.<sup>19</sup>

It has been noted that real committee work—“slow, complicated, and undramatic—makes unpromising material for fiction films.”<sup>20</sup> One rare use of committees in Hollywood films is the sexy investigative hearing, like the built-in pugnaciousness of the 1950s House Committee on Un-American Activities, or HUAC, which has been featured in films such as *Big Jim McLain* (1952), *The Front* (1976), *Guilty by Suspicion* (1991), and *Trumbo* (2015). Another is the testy Senate confirmation battle, which appears periodically in films like *Advise and Consent*. Both these committees’ subjects make the cut because they have built-in potential for human conflict.

It really could not be otherwise. In reviewing American motion picture history, writer/critic James Monaco reminds us that “the homogeneous factory system of the studios...most subtly reflected (or inspired) the surrounding political culture. Because Hollywood movies were mass-produced, they tended to reflect the surrounding culture—or, more accurately, the established myths of the culture—more precisely than did the work of strongly individual authors.”<sup>21</sup> One long-standing premise of that culture deems much of our national politics as basically deceitful and politicians as barely redeemable.

Such a dismissive outlook on politics, and especially the Congress, is hardly new. A number of observers have remarked that “Congress-bashing is almost as old as the Federal Government itself,”<sup>22</sup> while historian James Sterling Young found that, even when our republic was new, Americans had “a culturally ingrained predisposition to view political power and politics as essentially evil.”<sup>23</sup>

More recently, political observers still note the Congress’ performance ratings are often very low. Their argument turns on the fact that “the legislative process is easy to dislike—it often generates political posturing and grandstanding, it necessarily involves compromise, and it often leaves broken promises in its trail. Also,



Fig. 11. Sen. Joseph Paine (Claude Rains, left) confronts Sen. Jeff Smith (Jimmy Stewart) on the Senate floor in Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, the most iconic Washington movie ever made.

Members of Congress often appear self-serving as they pursue their political careers and represent interests and reflect values that are controversial.<sup>24</sup> Polls over the years have consistently viewed the Congress negatively, dipping as low as 10 percent approval.

Sourness about politics has not been confined, of course, to just the average citizen. In the political science literature, negative views of the body have been chronicled regularly among academics, within the national news media, and certainly among campaign hopefuls—the latter ever ready to boost their own reputations at the expense of our own crass political institutions by “running against Washington.” Individual congressmen are forever disassociating themselves from the Congress itself.

The tradition is long-lived. In the archetype of congressional films, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), the pattern is set with a once-venerated Sen. Paine (Claude Rains) reduced to the role of a party hack and subject to the whims of a coarse political boss (fig. 11).

In the 1947 farce *The Senator Was Indiscreet* (1947), the lead is the bumbling Sen. Ashton (William Powell) who undertakes a run for the presidency with no qualifications for the office. In *Born Yesterday* (1950), a toadying congressman seeks largesse from a barely literate trash magnate. In Elia Kazan's biting drama *A Face in the Crowd* (1957), a cowed senator looks to be made media-savvy by a ruthless, populist hick, played malevolently by Andy Griffith.

*The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) offers one of the more obtuse and odious legislators on film, modeled on Sen. Joseph McCarthy at his coarsest. In the same year *Advise and Consent* presents a parade of Senate types, including Sen. Van Ackerman (George Grizzard), a venomous character who turns to blackmail to get a favored cabinet nominee approved (fig. 12). *The Godfather, Part II* (1974) features a slimy Nevada senator who has been bought by the Corleone family to help establish their gaming industry in the state.

The list could go on—and does. More recent exam-

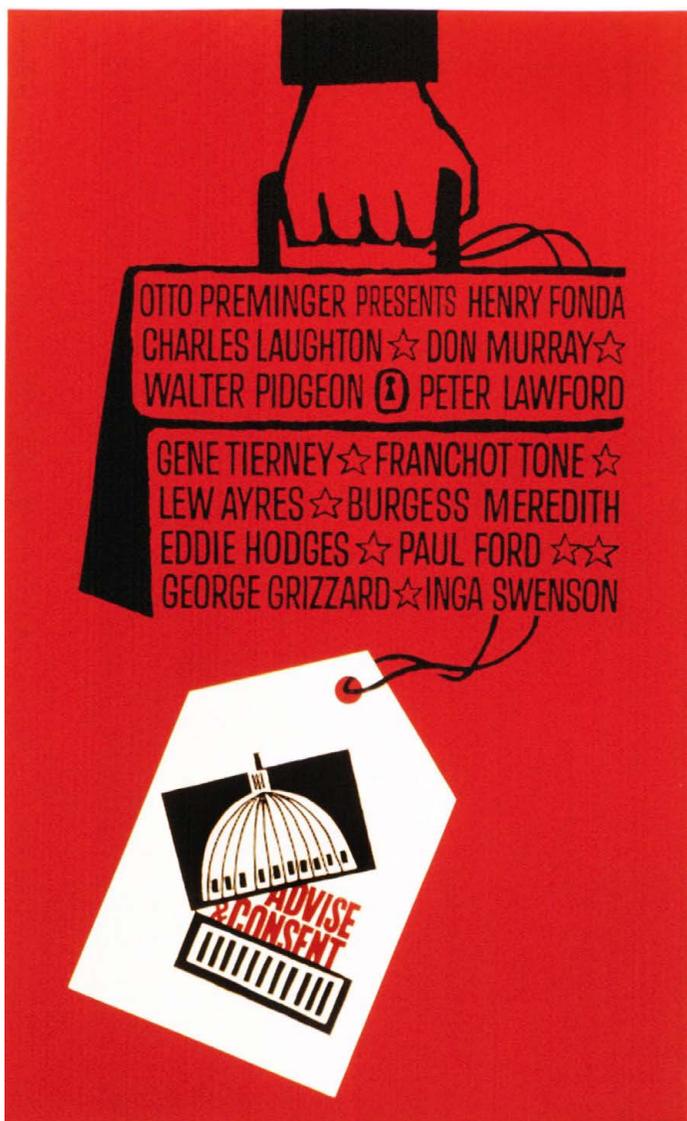


Fig. 12. Anticipating the image from *The Distinguished Gentleman* by 30 years, the poster for *Advise and Consent* shows the lid coming off a scandal-ridden Capitol (1962).

ples of base ineptness or immorality can be found in *Bob Roberts* (1992) which covers, in mock-documentary style, the rise of a national demagogue in the form of a conservative troubadour (Tim Robbins) running for the Senate in Pennsylvania. In the futuristic *Time Cop* (1994) a corrupt senator (Ron Silver) looks to take down the government and become dictator. Then there is the lascivious Florida congressman (Burt Reynolds) in *Striptease* (1996) who heads the fictitious “Subcommittee on Sugar.” Or *Bulworth* (1998), where the eponymous senator (played by Warren Beatty) is so politically disaffected that he hires a hitman to kill him. Or the mousy environ-nerd Sen. Finisterre (William H. Macy) in *Thank You for Smoking* (2006), pathetically challeng-

ing the tobacco industry. Or the slick right-winger Sen. Jasper Irving (Tom Cruise) who (somehow) generates his own privately-funded anti-terrorism force in Afghanistan in *Lions for Lambs* (2007).

In the last 75 years of U.S. cinema, only a handful of national legislators have been lead characters portrayed as positive or realistic role models. Way back when, there was the sweet but politically astute Swede who becomes a congresswoman played by Loretta Young in *The Farmer’s Daughter* (1947) and the decent, scandal-free Rep. Gresham played by Van Johnson in the little-seen *Washington Story* (1952). *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* (1979) showed a rounded portrait of a believable and flawed senator played by Alan Alda, and *The Contender* (2000) likewise had a credible Senate figure at its center, Sen. Laine Hanson, played understatedly and persuasively by Joan Allen. That’s about it. None of the films mentioned in the above paragraph, by the way, were big hits.

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The focus on Washington, D.C. as a source for Hollywood’s entertainment stories will probably continue to grow, continuing a trend from at least 1990, as our national politics, much more visible on many more outlets, continues to blend more thoroughly into our manic media environment. What probably will not change is the use of the facile shorthand of the Capitol Dome as the instant symbol of the city—rising majestically above its greensward—and the ongoing censure and mocking of the human machinations that take place below that Dome’s lofty confines.



**MIKE CANNING** has reviewed movies over 25 years for the *Hill Rag* newspaper on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., where he has made his home since 1965. He is also a freelance writer on film, public affairs, and politics and has written often on the depiction of Washington politics and the U.S. Congress in American feature films. His writings led to a commission for his book, *Hollywood on the Potomac: How the Movies View Washington, DC*, published by the Friends of Southeast Library (F.O.S.E.L.) on Capitol Hill and from which some of the material in this essay is adapted. In his first life Canning was a Foreign Service Officer for 28 years, working as a press and cultural officer in eight countries on four continents.

# NOTES

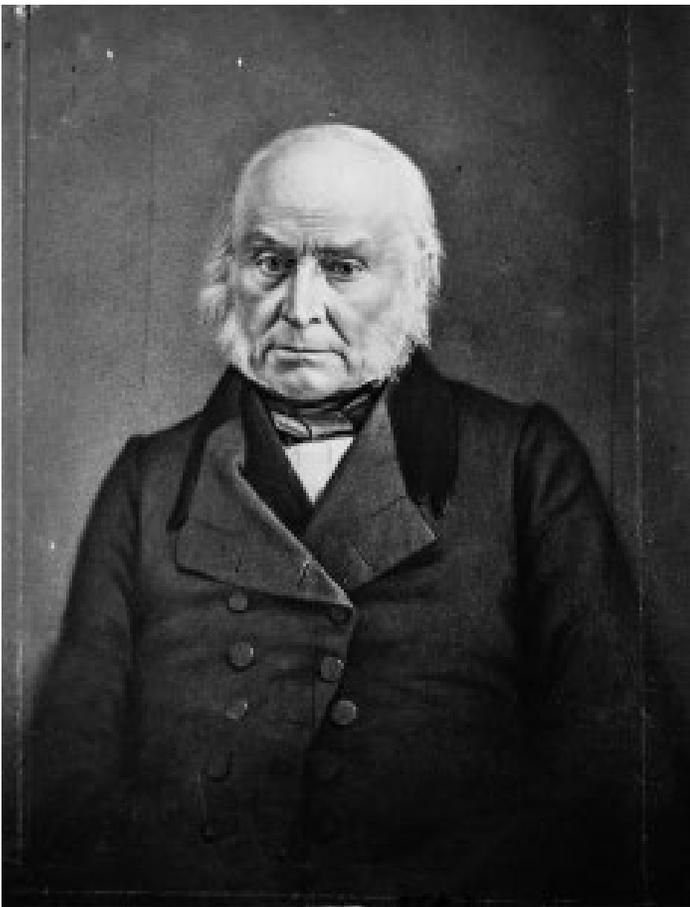
1. James H. Graham, "Movie-makers Finishing Film About Capitol," *Washington* [D.C.] *Times-Herald*, Sept. 1952.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Interview with Peggy Pridemore, location manager, 7 Feb. 2012.
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6. Telephone interview with Stuart Neumann, location manager, 29 May 2012. Neumann was particularly proud of the sequence, obtained with the help of a Senate staffer, which had a good portion of Capitol Hill closed down on a Sunday so that, when Stallone strode down the steps of the Russell Building, he saw in a wide panorama—literally hundreds of period (1950s) trucks and cars in all directions.
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- Fig. 10. Cheryl Adams
- Fig. 11. Everett Collection
- Fig. 12. Everett Collection

**“SO INDISPENSABLE IS SMALL MANAGEMENT  
IN THIS GREAT ASSEMBLY”:  
CONGRESSMAN JOHN QUINCY ADAMS  
AND THE SPEAKERS OF THE HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES, 1831–1848**

**by Daniel Peart**



*Fig. 1. John Quincy Adams, from a glass negative copy created between 1855 and 1865, from a Mathew Brady (1823?–1896) daguerreotype*

In 1838 the abolitionist Henry B. Stanton traveled to Washington to contribute his aid to the struggle against the Gag Rule, which sought to bar discussion of slavery on the floor of Congress. Upon arriving in the capital, he found most Northern representatives either sympathetic to the concerns of their Southern counterparts or browbeaten into submission. But there was one Member of the House who refused to acquiesce. “He coolly presented his pile of Anti-slavery petitions one by one,” Stanton would recall many decades later in his autobiography, “and scarified the Southern members who interrupted him. Mr. Polk, the Speaker, was annoyed, but could not help himself. Indeed, he was evidently afraid of Mr. Adams, the old man eloquent.”<sup>1</sup>

“Old Man Eloquent.” The admiring appellation that contemporaries and historians alike have awarded to John Quincy Adams (fig. 1) during his 17-year post-presidential career as a congressman conveys the impression that his reputation rests on superlative oratory. And yet there is no outstanding speech that we associate with Adams, no memorable turn of phrase to match Daniel Webster’s “Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable,” or Abraham Lincoln’s “Four score and seven years ago....” He lacked the statesmanlike comportment of John C. Calhoun, or the charismatic speaking style of Henry Clay; in contrast, those who observed Adams in action on the floor of the

House generally found him to be awkward in manner and prone to outbursts of anger “when the top of his head, which is usually white as alabaster, becomes as red as a carnelian.”<sup>2</sup> But the more perceptive among them also recognized that his real talent lay in his ability to seize the right moment for maximum effect. And this, in turn, was a product of Adams’s incomparable mastery of parliamentary procedure. As a colleague among the Massachusetts delegation explained to his wife: “When Mr. Adams rises, we are on the qui vive [lookout], knowing that something amusing or interesting will take place. He is a strange man—full of learning—most ardent in his temperament, with the most perfectly phlegmatic manner you ever saw. His passions seem uncontrollable—and yet he always has the most perfect self-command—in one respect. He always knows what he wishes and intends to say—and he always contrives to say what he intends to. No fence can be erected so high, that he cannot and will not overleap it.”<sup>3</sup>

And yet, as Stanton’s reminiscences remind us, there was someone responsible for policing Adams’s conduct on the floor: the Speaker. This office was established by the Constitution to facilitate the proceedings of the House of Representatives, and the eight men who filled it between 1831 and 1848 far more often than not found themselves in opposition to the venerable congressman from Massachusetts. Adams was a Whig during a period when six of the eight Speakers were Democrats,<sup>4</sup> and an outspoken critic of slavery when seven of the eight were either personally slaveholders or Northern men with Southern principles—“doughfaces” as they were derisively labelled by contemporaries, in reference to the game children made of covering their

faces in dough and scaring themselves by looking in the mirror. Consequently, a review of Adams’s legislative career, and his relations with the successive Speakers alongside whom he served, reveals the significant, and often underappreciated, advantages to be gained from knowledge of the rules of the House. We can learn not solely from what “Old Man Eloquent” said, but also from how he said it.

“I am a member elect of the Twenty-Second Congress,” wrote Adams upon receiving news of his election as a freshman representative in November 1830. “For the discharge of the duties of this particular station I never was eminently qualified, possessing no talent for extemporaneous public speaking, and at this time being in the decline of my faculties, both of mind and body.”<sup>5</sup> This statement appears extraordinary when considered retrospectively in view of the 17 years he would spend in the House and the many plaudits he would win there. The diary in which it was written is also extraordinary; spanning eight decades and 50 volumes in manuscript, it provides an unparalleled record of political life in the early United States and an invaluable source for this article (fig. 2). And yet neither is more extraordinary than the life story of the man who authored them.

Adams was born in Braintree (now part of Quincy), Massachusetts in 1767, the son of Revolutionary patriot and future president John Adams. He first traveled abroad at the age of 10 when he accompanied his father to France, commenced his famous diary the following year, and entered public life at the age of 13 with his appointment as personal secretary to the U.S. minister to Russia. He spent the next three and a half decades in and out of the diplomatic service, along with a brief stint in the Senate, before his elevation to secretary of state in 1817. Eight years later he earned both election



Fig. 2. On this page from John Quincy Adams’s “Diary in Abridgement” for 16 October 1837, Adams recounts a House debate in which he gets around a House ruling against mentioning certain proceedings by recounting them as if they took place in “a Legislature body elsewhere—any where—in the moon if the Speaker pleased.”



Fig. 3. “Old Hall of the House” (present-day Statuary Hall), from a c. 1834 print by William Goodacre (1803–1883)

to the White House and the enduring hostility of rival candidate Andrew Jackson. John Quincy’s presidency was, like his father’s, an unhappy one that terminated abruptly after a single term. Historians generally rate him as a below-average chief executive; ironically in light of his subsequent achievements as a congressman, the most common reason given for his failure is a lack of political *nous*. When Adams departed Washington on the eve of Jackson’s triumphal inauguration in March 1829, most observers doubtless assumed he was riding off into quiet retirement. It was therefore to near universal surprise—including, if Adams’s diary is to be believed, his own—that the voters of his home state chose the 63-year-old veteran to represent them in the Twenty-Second Congress, which would convene in December 1831, making him still to this day the

only former president to serve in the House of Representatives.

The first duty of the freshman Member from Massachusetts upon taking his seat was to participate in the election of a Speaker, as was required at the opening of every new Congress (fig. 3). The Constitution states that “the House of Representatives shall chuse their Speaker,” but left the powers and responsibilities of the office to be settled by the House. Historians have generally maintained that the Members of the First Congress sought their model in the British Parliament, in which the Speaker functions merely as an impartial moderator. Yet the significant powers that they allocated to the office suggest a more active leadership role, and one which over time would become a focal point for party competition. Chief amongst these was the power of



Fig. 4. Joshua Reed Giddings (c. 1855–65), Brady-Handy Photograph Collection

appointing the committees of the House upon which, as one lawmaker recorded, “the introduction, progress & conclusion of business depend much.”<sup>6</sup> The appointing power also provided a potent hold over Members who knew that relegation to an inconsequential committee might injure their chance of re-election. This was enhanced by the office’s other responsibilities, which included controlling access to the floor through the right of recognition, casting the decisive vote in cases of a tie, resolving disputed questions of parliamentary procedure, and policing the House chamber. According to Ohio’s Rep. Joshua R. Giddings (fig. 4), an ally of Adams in the antislavery cause, by the middle of the nineteenth century the powers of the Speaker were “perhaps, greater than those of any other officer of the government. He holds a position in which he wields far more influence upon the legislation of Congress, than the President of the United States.”<sup>7</sup>

The Jacksonian hold on the Twenty-Second Congress was such that both candidates for the Speakership

professed loyalty to the President, and Adams believed that “there is not the worth of a wisp of straw between their value.” He was soon to receive his first lesson in the power of the Speaker, however, when the victor, Andrew Stevenson of Virginia (fig. 5), announced his committee appointments. Adams’s stature as a former president and his diplomatic experience surely entitled him to the chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, but the Speaker could hardly entrust such an important post to someone not on cordial terms with the White House. Instead, Adams found himself at the head of the Committee of Manufactures, an assignment “of labor more burdensome than any other in the House; far from the line of occupation in which all my life has been passed, and for which I feel myself not to be well qualified.”<sup>8</sup>

This appointment was a calculated partisan ploy by Stevenson. The Committee on Manufactures had long been at the center of a bitter struggle between Northern factory-owners seeking enhanced tariff barriers against foreign imports and Southern planters demanding free trade for their cotton and tobacco exports. That struggle had now reached a crisis, with South Carolina’s Ordinance of Nullification threatening to expel federal customs collectors by force unless Congress renounced its

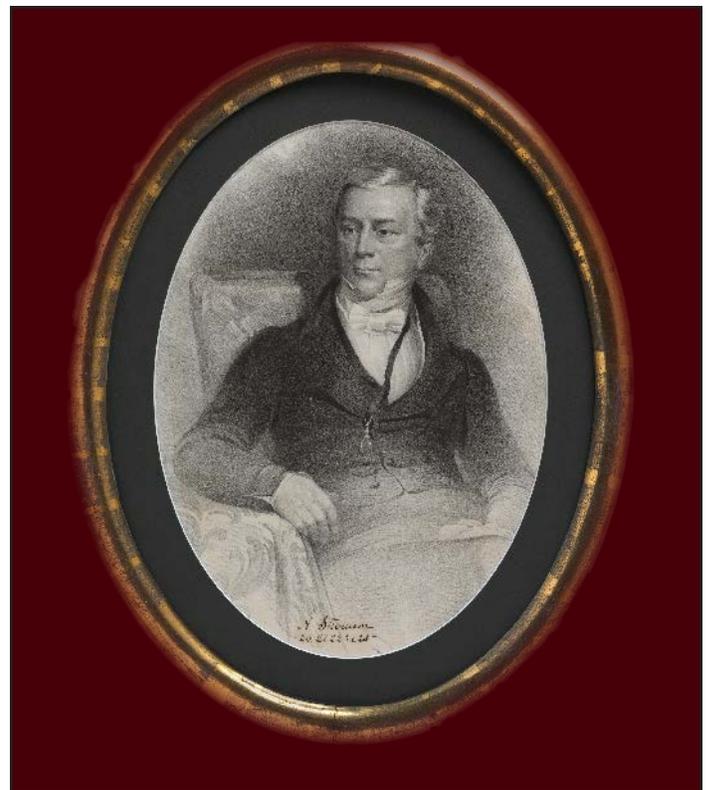


Fig. 5. Andrew Stevenson, in a lithograph (c. 1840) by Thomas Fairland (1804–1852)

policy of protection. It was this committee that would be responsible for presenting new legislation to avert the alarming possibility of civil war. There appeared little possibility that all sides could be successfully appeased, and so the Speaker placed the former president in the chair, hoping to make him rather than the current occupant of the White House the principal target of popular dissatisfaction. When Adams pleaded with Stevenson to exchange him for a willing colleague on Foreign Relations, the Virginian refused, disingenuously claiming “that he had no power over the arrangement of the committees after the appointments were made; that the House alone could excuse me.” “The humiliation of asking to be excused by the House I cannot yet endure,” Adams recorded glumly in his diary, “and I shall submit to my fate.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet Adams did more than meekly submit, he actually turned the Speaker’s partisan trick to his advantage. He employed his chairmanship, which gave him significant latitude in drafting the details of the legislation, as an independent base from which to forge a compromise between the Jackson Administration, which was inclined to concede almost everything to the slaveholders, and the opposition in Congress led by Sen. Henry Clay, who drunkenly boasted that “to preserve, maintain, and strengthen the American system [of protective tariffs] he would defy the South, the President, and the devil.” The resulting Tariff of 1832 won widespread approval; “all parties are claiming it exclusively as their own,” Adams proudly informed his wife after its passage.<sup>11</sup> Chairmanship also carried with it the prerogative to accompany any bill proposed to the House with a report in its favor, and Adams seized this opportunity to advocate for his pet project of federally-funded roads and canals, on the specious reasoning that this was a legitimate end to which the proceeds of customs collections might be employed and therefore within the remit of his committee. All this, as he well knew, was anathema to the Speaker, who considered congressional sponsorship of internal improvements to be unconstitutional, and Adams’s report provoked Stevenson into a public rejoinder in the press, which many commentators considered beneath the dignity of his office.

But Adams was not through with Stevenson yet, for it was around the same time that he also pioneered the use of a parliamentary ruse that would, over several decades, become the most serious obstacle to business that the House ever faced. One of the earliest rules passed by the First Congress compelled Members to vote upon

every question for which they were present. On 11 July 1832, however, Adams refused to vote on a resolution of censure against one of his colleagues who had charged the Speaker with having “shaped his course to suit the Executive will, with a view to getting an appointment to a high office abroad.”<sup>12</sup> The House declined to excuse Adams from voting, but when called upon by Stevenson he repeatedly refused, nor would he leave his seat to relieve himself of the obligation. This provoked another congressman to charge him with wilfully violating the rules, a serious crime but one that Adams reduced to a farce by pointing out that many other rules frequently went unobserved, and indeed his accuser had himself violated one by rising to make his charge from someone else’s seat. His critics were frustrated, and Adams reassured his wife that while the Jacksonian majority had been “in a towering passion with me,” the following morning “the House cooled down wonderfully” and the matter was conveniently forgotten.<sup>13</sup>

Yet Adams’s refusal to vote harbored far-reaching repercussions, as perceptive Members quickly realized. “Should this breach be passed over in silence,” one congressman warned, “it might hereafter be in the power of a minority to defeat the legislative functions of this body, by combining together in a similar refusal.”<sup>14</sup> This was the so-called “disappearing quorum.” The House of Representatives, like many legislative bodies, requires a majority of Members to be present and voting in order to make a quorum—that is, to do business. This sensible rule prevents a mere minority from hijacking the lawmaking power. But it also holds out the possibility for mischief-making. Imagine a small legislature with ten seats. The blue party has six members and the red party has four, but on a particular day two from each party are absent. A bill comes to a vote, and the four blue partisans cast their ballots in favor. If the two red legislators vote against the bill then it will pass regardless, four votes to two. But if they simply refuse to vote then the bill will fail for lack of a quorum, because only four ballots out of a possible ten will have been cast, and therefore only a minority of members have participated. This loophole effectively gifts the smaller party a veto whenever the larger party is unable to keep sufficient of its own representatives in their seats to make a majority independently.

To successive Speakers, the disappearing quorum—so-called because Members are counted as present right up until the moment they “disappear” on refusing to vote—was an indefensible contravention of the very

principle of majority rule which placed them in the chair. To Adams, who spent most of his congressional career in the minority, it was an indispensable weapon that might delay or even defeat bad legislation, and having grasped its potential he wielded it whenever the cause was important enough to convince sufficient of his colleagues to join him. The disappearing quorum, he recorded in his diary, was “the secret of the defensive strength of the minority—a strength the more impregnable as it consists in silence and precludes all disorder. The rage of the majority at this discovery was unbounded; but it was impotent.”<sup>15</sup> Not until 1890, when Speaker Thomas “Czar” Reed boldly broke with a century of tradition to count as present Members who refused to answer to the roll call from their seats, was the power of the disappearing quorum broken. Even then, Reed’s decision proved incredibly controversial, though it was eminently sensible; when one non-voting representative angrily challenged the Speaker’s authority to count him as present, Reed innocently replied, “the Chair is making a statement of fact that the gentleman from Kentucky is present. Does he deny it?”<sup>16</sup>

In June 1834 Stevenson resigned the Speakership, having finally received the nomination as minister to Britain that he had long been suspected of seeking. Adams was not sorry to see him go, convinced that he too often acted “for the mere wantonness of party spirit.” The new Speaker chosen to see out the remainder of the Twenty-Third Congress was John Bell of Tennessee (fig. 6), a dissident Jacksonian elected by opposition votes over the regular Democratic candidate and future president, James K. Polk—also of Tennessee (fig. 7). When Jackson heard of his favorite’s defeat, he reportedly canceled the party he had planned for that evening and retired to his room in a sulk. Bell was on the verge of defecting to the emerging Whig Party, and Adams considered him to be “on the whole, a good Speaker, and impartial as far as he dares, though occasionally subservient from timidity.” He did grumble, nonetheless, that Bell had appointed him “Chairman of the committee on the bill from the Senate fixing the northern boundary line of the States of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois—a service which it was impossible for me honestly to perform without indisposing bitterly against me three whole States of the Union and twenty-nine members their Representatives in the House. This has accordingly been the result.”<sup>17</sup>

The opening of the Twenty-Fourth Congress in December 1835 saw Polk gain his revenge over Bell in a



Fig. 6. John Bell, in a photograph (c. 1860–65) by Mathew Brady

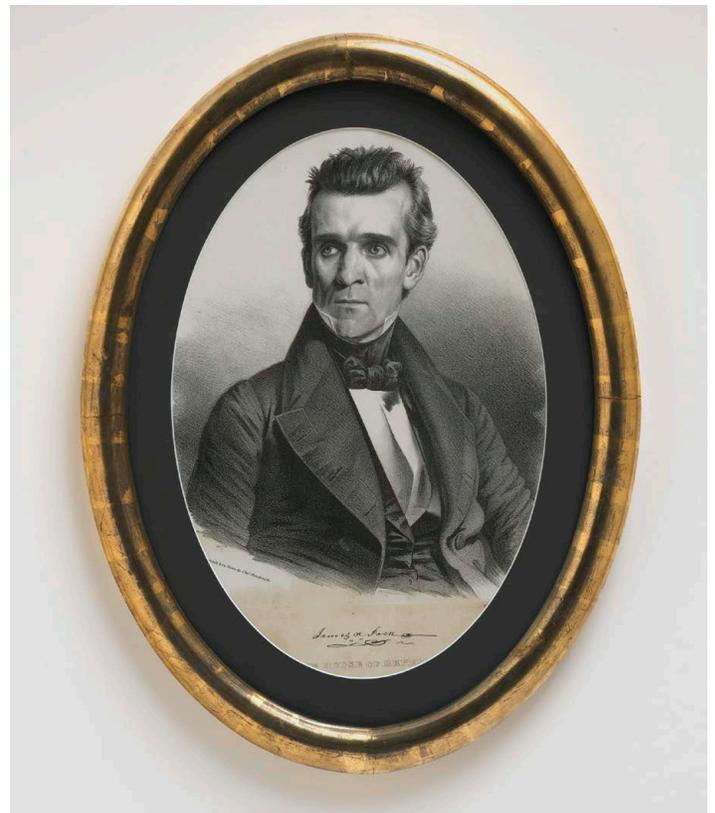


Fig. 7. James K. Polk, print from a life portrait (1838) by Charles Fenderich (1805–1877)

rematch for the Speakership. This was also the Congress which adopted the infamous Gag Rule and launched Adams's career as foremost champion of the cause of freedom in the national capital. Previously, as the Massachusetts representative recorded in his diary, all antislavery petitions presented to the House had been "turned over to the Committee on the District [of Columbia], with a Chairman and a majority of the committee slaveholders, and the House hears no more about them."<sup>18</sup> But a concerted signature-gathering campaign by abolitionist groups provoked Southern Members into overreaching by demanding that henceforth Congress refuse even to receive the offending documents. This demand struck their Northern counterparts as a violation of the constitutionally-protected right of petition, and they rejected the proposition. Like the previous crisis over the tariff, this seemed like a no-win situation for the majority Democratic Party, and as on that occasion their Speaker played a pivotal role in resolving it. Having consulted with the president on a suitable compromise, Polk appointed a select committee to consider the matter, stacked it with safe Administration men, and then rushed their recommendations through the House without debate, over Adams's cries of "Mr. Speaker, am I gagged, or not?" The crucial resolution, thereafter known as the Gag Rule, held that "all petitions, memorials, resolutions, propositions, or papers relating in any way, or to any extent whatever, to the subject of slavery, or the abolition of slavery, shall, without being either printed or referred, be laid upon the table, and that no further action whatever shall be had thereon."<sup>19</sup> Thus, petitions subject to the new rule would still technically be

received by Congress, notionally preserving the constitutional niceties, but would automatically be consigned to oblivion without discussion.

The adoption of the Gag Rule placed Adams and Southern Members of the House, headed by Speaker Polk, in a near-perpetual state of war. The Massachusetts congressman seized every opportunity to expose the Gag to ridicule, and his enemies "found it necessary to appoint sentinels from their party every morning, to closely watch Mr. A. that whenever he presented such papers, they were ready to move that they be laid on the table without reading."<sup>20</sup> On one occasion, for example, he rose to state that he held in his hand a petition "from twenty persons declaring themselves to be slaves. He wished to know whether the Speaker would consider this paper as coming under the rule of the House."<sup>21</sup> A witness to the scene from the public galleries writes that "the 'old man eloquent' stood erect, with placid demeanor and with calm composure, with a gentle smile on his visage" as "confusion and dismay among the friends of Slavery, became general throughout the Hall." Only after the latter had proposed a resolution of censure did Adams add that "if gentlemen had waited when he offered his petition until he had stated its object, they would have saved themselves much painful anxiety," for its prayer was for nothing more than his own expulsion. "If a clap of thunder had that moment struck the dome of the Capitol," the observer recalled, "it would not have occasioned more astonishment among the members of the House and spectators and galleries than this announcement of the accused. After a few moments of profound silence, the galleries became alive



Fig. 8. This satire on the gag rule, "Abolition Frowned Down" (lithograph by Henry Dacre [?], 1839), shows Adams prostrate, protecting petitions against slavery, before South Carolina Rep. Waddy Thompson, Jr.

with expressions of joy and merriment.” A few “giddy and brainless” Southerners insisted on proceeding with their resolution, but the majority “concluded that it was better and safer for their party to let ‘the old man eloquent’ have his own way. They learned that he had been too long accustomed to public life and too familiar with parliamentary tactics to be entrapped by political tricksters.”<sup>22</sup>

On other occasions it was Speaker Polk, whose office made him responsible for enforcement of the Gag Rule, who found himself the object of ridicule. Giddings recalled “an amusing incident” precipitated by Adams commencing an antislavery speech just as a vote was about to be taken. “This was entirely out of order,” and “the Speaker called louder and louder for ‘Order! Order! ORDER!’ but Mr. Adams continued speaking, as though a perfect silence existed around him.” Confusion reigned, “and the Speaker, rising from his chair, in great agitation and excitement, with stentorian voice called on the House to assist him in enforcing the rules.” Upon seeing this, “Mr. Adams suddenly dropped into his chair, and the uproar instantly ceased, before the Speaker had fully pronounced his desire for assistance. As Mr. Adams sat down, convulsed with laughter, Waddy Thompson, from South Carolina, possessing much ready wit, and being himself willing to raise a laugh at the expense of the Speaker, stepped up to where Mr. Adams sat, and with great shrewdness of manner said, in reply to the Speaker’s request: ‘I am here, Mr. Speaker; I am ready to help. What shall I do?’ The manner and tone of voice in which he spoke were perfectly inimitable, and threw the whole House into a roar of laughter.”<sup>23</sup> The deeper antipathy between Adams and Southern members like Thompson over the Gag Rule is illustrated in a contemporary cartoon entitled “Abolition Frowned Down” (fig. 8).

Adams also employed his mastery of parliamentary procedure to place antislavery statements on the official journal of the House, thereby demonstrating the futility of Southern efforts to suppress discussion of slavery. For example, when the Gag Rule came up for a vote in the Twenty-Fifth Congress, Adams once again refused to answer to the roll call and instead loudly insisted that “I hold the resolution to be a violation of the Constitution, of the right of petition of my constituents, and of the people of the United States, and of my right to freedom of speech as a member of this House.” Upon checking the following day, however, he discovered that Speaker Polk had ruled his interjection out of order and there-



Fig. 9. Robert M.T. Hunter, in a photograph (c. 1860–65) from Brady’s *National Photographic Portrait Galleries*

fore it was not included in the journal. He immediately moved that the record be corrected, and defenders of the Gag Rule rallied to vote him down. But they had rushed into a trap. In order to note the defeat of Adams’s motion, the journal had to state its exact wording, and as the author slyly noted in his diary, this “precisely answered my purpose,” for “the rejection of the motion as effectually secures the record of the protest as its adoption.” It was a trick that Adams would reuse time and again, in spite of Southerners’ vain cries that “something should be done to prevent this record of contumacy.”<sup>24</sup>

Polk retired at the end of the Twenty-Fifth Congress to run for governor, and his replacement in the next session was the 30-year-old Robert M.T. Hunter (fig. 9). Adams dismissed Hunter as “an amiable, good-hearted, weak-headed young man, prematurely hoisted into a place for which he is not fit, precisely for

his Virginia quiddities,” and the new Speaker continued his predecessors’ policy of sidelining the veteran Massachusetts representative in committee and on the floor.<sup>25</sup> The Twenty-Seventh Congress, however, saw the Whigs seize control of the House and elect John White of Kentucky to the chair (fig. 10). For the first time the former president would serve alongside a Speaker exclusively of his party’s choosing, and he was rewarded with appointment to the coveted station at the head of the Foreign Relations Committee. Yet while Adams considered White “a man of fine talents”—albeit prone to the irritating habit of “repeat[ing] the word ‘Sir’ at least every fifth word”—he was still “a slave-holding Speaker,” and their shared party affinity could not prevent further collisions over the continuation of the Gag Rule.<sup>26</sup>

One such memorable occasion, in February 1842, was witnessed by the abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld. Adams had presented a petition addressed from Georgia, praying his removal as Chair of Foreign Relations on account of his antislavery views. “The slaveholders instantly pounced upon it, as upon every thing likely to lead to discussion of slavery, and moved to lay it on the table,” Weld informed his wife, “but Mr. A. started the question of *privilege*, demanding to be heard in his own defence against an attack upon him as a member of the house and at the head of one of its committees.” As Adams knew, the rules of the House gave a Member raising a matter of privilege—that, is affecting their rights, reputation or conduct—priority on the floor, as well as great latitude in making his reply. “So the Old Nestor lifted up his voice like a trumpet,” flaying the institution of slavery, while scores of slaveholders gathered around him, “screaming at the top of their voices: ‘That is false.’ ‘I demand Mr. Speaker that you put him down.’ ‘What are we to sit here and endure such insults.’ ‘I demand that you shut the mouth of that old harlequin.’”<sup>27</sup>

Finally silenced by White, Adams retired to his seat, only to replay the entire episode a few days later when he provoked rash Southerners into a motion of censure over his presentation of a second petition, this time from Massachusetts, which called for the Union to be dissolved in order to sunder their connection to slavery. Once again, Adams demanded the privilege of defending himself, and this time he kept up his assault on slavery for nearly two weeks before his critics, realizing their mistake, agreed to table their motion. The result was that Adams remained as chair of Foreign Relations, while the entire Southern contingent of the committee

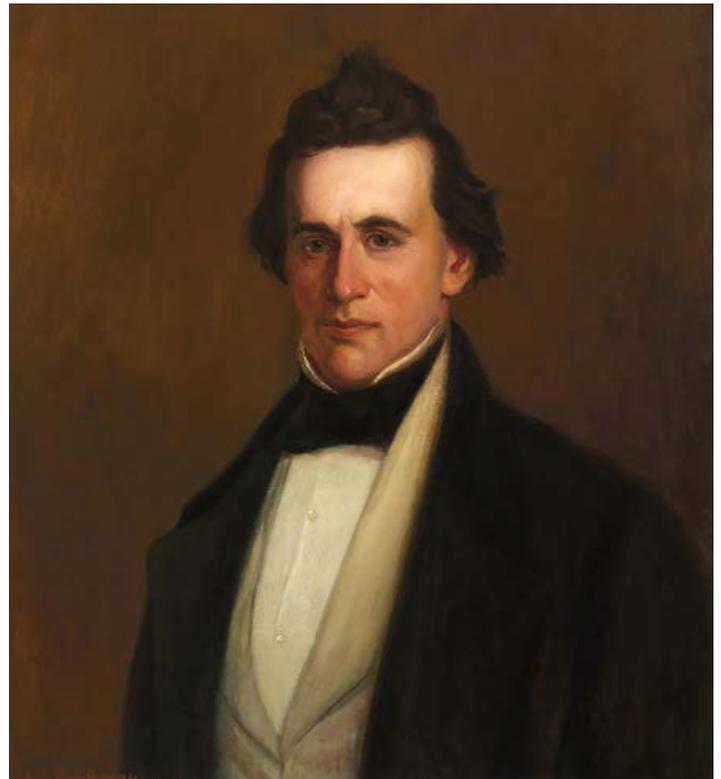


Fig. 10. William Gerard Barry (1864–1941) painted this portrait of John White (1811) from an unidentified original. This and other Speakers’ portraits from the same period (including figs. 11 and 12) were commissioned for an intended series including every former Speaker.

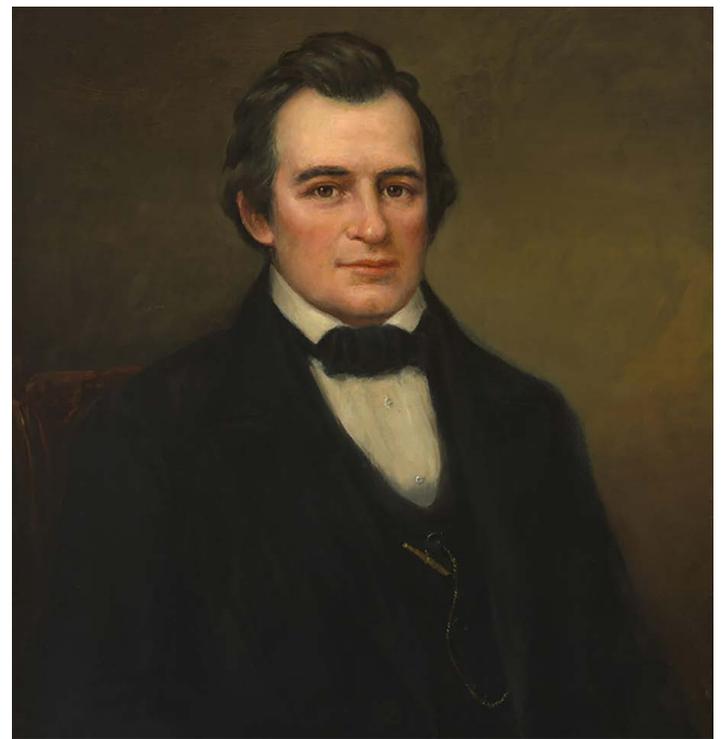


Fig. 11. John W. Jones (1811), by James B. Sword (1839–1915) from an original portrait by Louis Wieser



Fig. 12. There is no known source material for this 1911 portrait of John W. Davis by William D. Murphy (1832–1932).

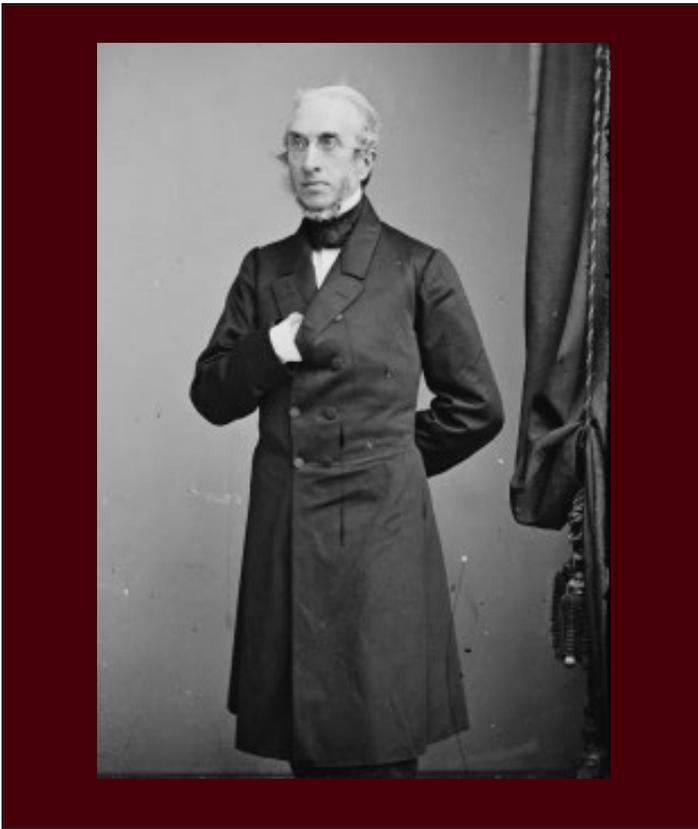


Fig. 13. Robert C. Winthrop, in an 1855 photograph from the Brady-Handy photograph collection

resigned in protest, to no apparent effect. “The triumph of Mr. A. is complete,” gloried Weld. “This is the first victory over the slaveholders *in a body* ever yet achieved since the foundation of the *government*, and from this time their downfall *takes its date*.”<sup>28</sup>

The real victory for Adams, though, would be the repeal of the Gag Rule. With every blow that he and his small band of allies in the House struck to highlight its injustices, it became harder for Southern Members to convince their Northern counterparts that the Rule was necessary, or even effective, to suppress discussion of slavery. But it would not be until the second session of the Twenty-Eighth Congress, under new Speaker John W. Jones of Virginia (fig. 11), whose conduct in the chair Adams considered “deeply tainted with slavery,” that the victory would finally be won. On 3 December 1844, eight and a half years after its adoption, the Gag Rule was finally repealed. “Perseverance has crowned the ‘old man eloquent’ with success,” cheered one Northern newspaper. In his diary, Adams concludes the entry for that date with a simple hosanna: “Blessed, forever blessed, be the name of God!”<sup>29</sup>

This did not mark the end of Adams’s trials in the House, of course. Jones was succeeded as Speaker in the Twenty-Ninth Congress by John W. Davis of Indiana (fig. 12), one of the “doughface” Northerners who had flip-flopped on the Gag Rule—to Adams’s disgust. Only with the election of fellow Massachusetts Whig Robert C. Winthrop (fig. 13), at the start of the Thirtieth Congress on 6 December 1847, would Adams finally be satisfied with the man in the chair. Sadly, he would not live long to enjoy it. On 21 February 1848, in the eightieth year of his life and his seventeenth as a congressman, Adams suffered a stroke and collapsed at his desk in the chamber (fig. 14).

“An exclamation was almost instantly heard—‘Mr. Adams is dying,’” recalled Winthrop, and “more than two hundred Representatives, in all parts of the Hall and from all parts of the country, were seen rising from their seats and pressing forward toward their beloved and revered associate, almost as if it were in their power to reverse the will of God and rescue him from the power of the great destroyer.” The former president was carried into the Speaker’s office off the old House chamber—what is now the Lindy Claiborne Boggs Congressional Women’s Reading Room off Statuary Hall—and laid gently upon the same couch which remains in that room today. There he lingered for two days before expiring peacefully; reportedly his last words were “this is the end of earth.



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### JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

SEIZED WITH A FIT IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FEBY 21<sup>ST</sup> 1848.

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Fig. 14. John Quincy Adams's collapse on the floor of the House, 21 Feb. 1848, in a lithograph by Kelloggs and Comstock (c. 1848-50)



Fig. 15. “Original sketch of Mr. Adams . . . as he lay unconscious in the Rotunda after suffering a stroke” (1848), by Arthur J. Stansbury (1781–1865)

I am content” (fig. 15). As arrangements were proposed in the House to escort his body back to Massachusetts, one Southern Member objected. When reproved by a colleague he replied, “what’s the use of sending him home? His people think more of his corpse than they do of any man living, and will reelect it, and send it back.” As a testament to the respect which even his fiercest critics held for his influence on the floor of the House of Representatives, it was all that Adams could have wanted.<sup>30</sup>

The relationship between Rep. John Quincy Adams and the eight men who served as Speakers of the House of Representatives during his 17-year career in that body highlights the importance of what the former president once referred to as “the tangle of rules of the House, always operating to obstruct, instead of facilitating, business.”<sup>31</sup> Through his mastery of these rules, Adams first became a formidable adversary to the administration of his old rival Andrew Jackson, and later a figurehead for the cause of freedom in a country

increasingly divided over slavery; Northern petitions against the Gag Rule “flow upon me in torrents” (fig. 16), he once recorded in his diary, while from the South he received “almost daily, letters of insult, profane obscenity, and filth.”<sup>32</sup>

The veteran congressman from Massachusetts also provided inspiration, or a “bad example” in the view of his many critics, to a younger generation of antislavery politicians. Joshua Giddings recalled fondly how, upon giving his maiden speech against slavery, and with the House “a scene of perfect confusion and uproar,” “the venerable ex-President laughed most heartily, and coming to my seat, advised me to insist upon my rights, not to be intimidated by the course taken by the Southern men.” His many parliamentary tricks, while often humorous to relate, were remarkably effective, whether that meant whispering to introduce a controversial petition before his enemies could catch on to his intent, or recounting a fantastical tale of a hypothetical legisla-

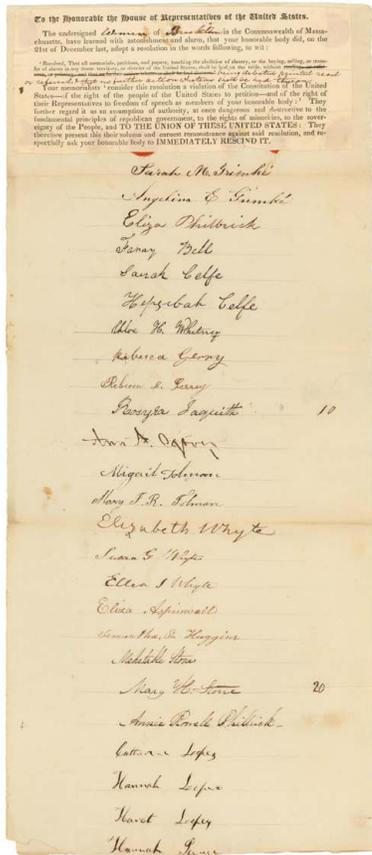


Fig. 16. Petition to rescind the Gag Rule, from the women of Brookline, Massachusetts, 14 Feb. 1838

ture on the moon to get around the House rule against referring to events which took place in committee (see fig. 2 caption). The honorary title of “Old Man Eloquent” is therefore somewhat misleading as to the real source of Adams’s power. It is no coincidence that the truly great orators of his age, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun, all transferred early to the Senate, where they encountered fewer competing voices and fewer restrictions on debate. To excel in the much larger House of Representatives with its complex “tangle of rules,” a different set of skills was required. Or, as the Old Man Eloquent himself once succinctly put it, “so indispensable is small management in this great assembly.”<sup>33</sup>



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## NOTES

1. Henry B. Stanton, *Random Recollections* (New York, 1887), 60.
2. John Fairfield to Anna Fairfield, Washington, 31 Dec. 1835, in Arthur G. Staples, ed., *The Letters of John Fairfield*, (Lewiston, ME, 1922), 47.
3. Leverett Saltonstall to Anne E. Saltonstall, Washington, 7 Jan. 1839, in Robert E. Moody, ed., *The Papers of Leverett Saltonstall, 1816–1845*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1978–1992), 2:159.
4. Robert M. T. Hunter (Speaker of the Twenty-Sixth Congress) was elected as a Whig, called himself independent, and would soon become a Democrat; Adams, with no patience for such nuances, always considered him as belonging to the latter camp.
5. Entries for 6, 7 Nov. 1830, in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, 12 vols. (Philadelphia, 1874–1877), 8:245–246.
6. Barnabas Bidwell to Thomas Jefferson, Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 28 July 1806, *Founders Online* (web-

site), <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-4095>.

7. Joshua R. Giddings, *Speeches in Congress* (Boston, 1853), 365. Giddings (1795–1864), a lawyer and state legislator, represented Ohio in the House, 1838–59.
8. Entries for 5, 12 Dec. 1831, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 8:431, 433.
9. Entry for 13 Dec. 1831, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 8:437.
10. Entry for 28 Dec. 1831, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 8:446.
11. John Quincy Adams to Louisa Catherine Adams, Philadelphia, 19 Jul. 1832, Reel 496, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. The Compromise Tariff of 1833, passed the following session, was far less popular at the time, although it monopolizes the attention of historians today.
12. *Register of Debates*, 22nd Congress, 1st sess., 3876.
13. John Quincy Adams to Louisa Catherine Adams, Washington, 13 Jul. 1832, in Charles Francis Adams Jr., “J. Q. Adams in Twenty-Second Congress,” *Proceedings*

of the *Massachusetts Historical Society* Second Series, 19 (1906), 526.

14. *Register of Debates*, 22nd Congress, 1st sess., 3906.

15. Entry for 24 Mar. 1840, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 10:242.

16. *Congressional Record*, 51st Congress, 1st sess., 948.

17. Entries for 2 Jan. 1832, 4 Mar. 1835, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 9:64, 214.

18. Entry for 7 Apr. 1834, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 9:124.

19. *Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st sess., 498, 505–6.

20. Gideon Hard Autobiography (manuscript, n.d.), New-York Historical Society, 94–95.

21. *Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 2nd sess., 162, and succeeding pages for the scenes that followed. Hard (1797–1885), a lawyer and state legislator, represented New York in the House, 1833–37.

22. Gideon Hard Autobiography, New-York Historical Society, 95–97.

23. Giddings diary entry for 13 Dec. 1838, in George W. Julian, *The Life of Joshua R. Giddings* (Chicago, 1892), 51–2.

24. Entries for 21, 22 Dec. 1837, and 21 Dec. 1838, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 9:545–555, 10:73.

25. Entry for 20 Dec. 1840, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 10:379.

26. Entries for 5 Jun. 1840 and 9 Jun. 1841, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 10:303, 476.

27. Theodore Dwight Weld to Angelina G. Weld and Sarah Grimke, Washington, [23–4] Jan. 1842, in Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds., *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld, and Sarah Grimke, 1822–1844*, 2 vols. (New York, 1934), 2:897–901.

28. Theodore Dwight Weld to Angelina G. Weld, Washington, 6 Feb. 1842, in *Weld and Grimke Letters*, 2:913.

29. Entry for 6 Jan. 1843, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 11:477; “Congressional Proceedings,” *New-York Tribune*, 5 Dec. 1844; entry for 3 Dec. 1844, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 12:116.

30. Robert C. Winthrop, “Historic Moments: The Death of John Quincy Adams in the Capitol,” *Scribner’s Magazine* 13 (Mar. 1893), 390; John Wentworth, *Congressional Reminiscences* (Chicago, 1882), 14.

31. Entry for 8 Feb. 1838, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 9:490.

32. Entries for 15 Sept. 1837 and 21 May 1842, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 9:377, 11:159.

33. Leverett Saltonstall to Anne E. Saltonstall, Washington, 7 Jan. 1839, in *Saltonstall Papers*, 2:159; Giddings diary entry for 13 Feb. 1839, in Julian, *Life of Giddings*, 70; entries for 17 Jun. 1840, 16 Oct. 1837, and 29 Jun. 1842, in Adams, *Memoirs*, 10:312–3, 9:413, 11:191.

## IMAGE CREDITS

Fig. 1. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-BH82- 5159]

Fig. 2. Massachusetts Historical Society. John Quincy Adams diary 33, “Diary in Abridgment,” 1 Dec. 1821–31 Dec. 1838 (with gaps), 355. *John Quincy Adams Diary: An Electronic Archive*, Boston, MA, <http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries>, accessed 8 Dec. 2018.

Fig. 3. Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Fig. 4. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-cwpbh-02822]

Fig. 5. Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Fig. 6. War Department records, Brady National Photographic Art Gallery (Washington, DC), U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (identifier: 528752)

Fig. 7. Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Fig. 8. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-USZ62-9916]

Fig. 9. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Civil War Photographs, [LC-DIG-cwpb-05604]

Fig. 10. Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Fig. 11. Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

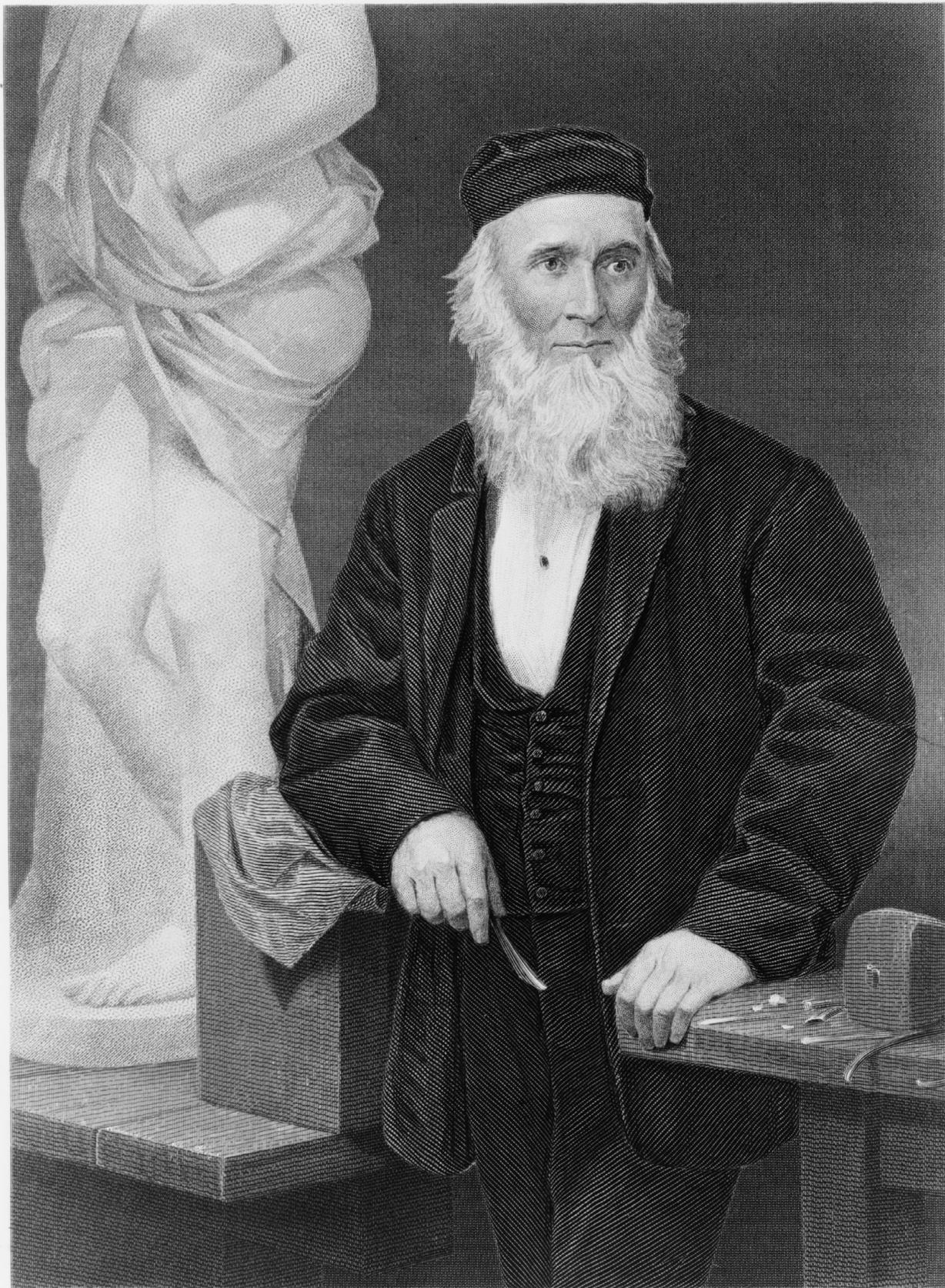
Fig. 12. Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Fig. 13. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-cwpbh-03026]

Fig. 14. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Fig. 15. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-USZC4-5205]

Fig. 16. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (identifier: 306638))



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# THE IRISH IMPRINT IN AMERICAN SCULPTURE IN THE CAPITOL IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

by Paula Murphy

Renowned American sculptor Hiram Powers (1805–73) was somewhat late in his career when he finally produced work for the Capitol. His statues of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were completed and installed in the Senate and the House respectively in the early 1860s. Powers had been credited with more than mere Irish ancestry some 10 years earlier, when, in 1851 on the occasion of the Great Exhibition in London, he was described as a “clever Irish sculptor,” who had become a naturalized American.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Powers (fig. 1) was born and raised in America, although his Irish connections dated far back to Walter Power, who emigrated to the New World from County Waterford in 1654. However, many of his peers in the profession in America in the nineteenth century had more immediate Irish links and could claim Irish-American status. Some were born in Ireland and were brought to the U.S. at a young age, while others were born in America to Irish parents. The contribution of these Irish-American sculptors to the narrative of American sculpture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is not inconsiderable and, as will be seen, is particularly manifest in the complex of buildings that forms the Capitol for which several of them carried out work. The range of their involvement comprises ideal sculptures, portrait work in the form of busts and statues, and architectural work including pediments, doors, and independent allegorical pieces—in marble and bronze and plaster.

It might be expected that a discussion of Irish-American sculptors in the period in question would identify Irish-born Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907) as the most significant name among them, but in

the case of work at the Capitol he must yield the position to Thomas Crawford (1813?–1857). Examples of Saint-Gaudens’s work there, some 30 years after Crawford, are limited to busts in the Supreme Court, but he did serve in a significant advisory capacity in connection with the sculptural work for the Library of Congress. Nonetheless, it was Crawford, undoubtedly, who received the most important commissions—many and varied—for the Capitol, and he would likely have been in receipt of even more if he had not died at such an unexpectedly young age. Much has been written about this aspect of Crawford’s *oeuvre* since it was put in place, and before that he himself, in his abundant correspondence, had much to say about the work in progress. However, it must be recognized that he never saw any of his work *in situ* on the building—not the East Front pediment of the Senate wing (fig. 2), not the bronze entrance doors, nor the allegorical figures of *Justice* and *History* inside, nor the colossal *Statue of Freedom* that surmounts the Dome. The extent of his involvement marks Crawford out as making a significant contribution to the aesthetic of the building, with the last of his works—*Statue of Freedom*—assuming iconic status. According to Lorado Taft there was probably no other American sculptor at the time “who could have done it better.”<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Crawford had a considerably greater claim on Irish connectedness than Hiram Powers, although published material on him only occasionally made such reference. Henry Tuckerman, for example, writing in 1867, refers to Crawford having “the ardor of an Irish temperament.”<sup>3</sup> Both of the sculptor’s parents were born in Ireland, and his father can be identified as arriving in

Fig. 1. Hiram Powers, painted by Alonzo Chappel (1828–1887), engraving published c. 1874 (left)



Fig. 2. Thomas Crawford's (1813?–1857) “Progress of Civilization” pediment on the East Front of the Senate wing of the Capitol was completed in 1863; some of its figures represent early American history.

New York alone in 1812. As for the young Crawford, there is real uncertainty about the date and the location of his birth. In his lifetime and since, it was always presumed that he was born in New York, and Crawford himself made such a claim in 1835 in his letter of application for a passport to travel to Europe. A letter of support to the Department of State, from sculptor John Franzee, with whom Crawford had been studying, indicated a belief that the applicant's statements were “substantially correct.”<sup>4</sup> The silver plate on the lid of Crawford's coffin also stated that he was born in New York, giving an exact date of 22 March 1813.<sup>5</sup> But there is no official evidence to support this and, as yet, no such validated documentation has come to light—which makes a comment from a family friend at the time of Crawford's death particularly interesting (the claim being that the sculptor was born in Ireland and specifically in Ballyshanen [sic] in County Donegal).<sup>6</sup>

At the time that Crawford was establishing his career, the insistence on selecting American rather than foreign artists for commissions had become an issue of note.<sup>7</sup> It must also be said, the Irish were not universally popular on the East Coast of America. As his was to become a career of considerable repute, it is unlikely that Crawford would have found it opportune to proclaim any association with Ireland and perhaps even profitable to dissociate from it. Montgomery Meigs, who, as superintendent of the Capitol extension, oversaw Crawford's work for the building and maintained an extensive correspondence with him, has always been considered to have held the sculptor in high esteem. However, in a single entry in his journal, on 5 August 1856, Meigs revealed a certain cautious curiosity about Crawford's background. After a session with the sculptor looking over work at the Capitol, Meigs noted: “Mr. Crawford seems to me a man of somewhat rough manners. He has a pleasantness which is honest, no doubt,

but which looks like the effect of a rather rough early education. I have had it upon my tongue today several times to ask him from what state he came, but I was prevented by some turn in the conversation.”<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of being able to identify a certain uncouthness in Crawford, Meigs was able to recognise “graceful and beautiful design” from the hands of the sculptor and the extent to which his work at the Capitol would serve as an “imperishable monument.”<sup>9</sup>

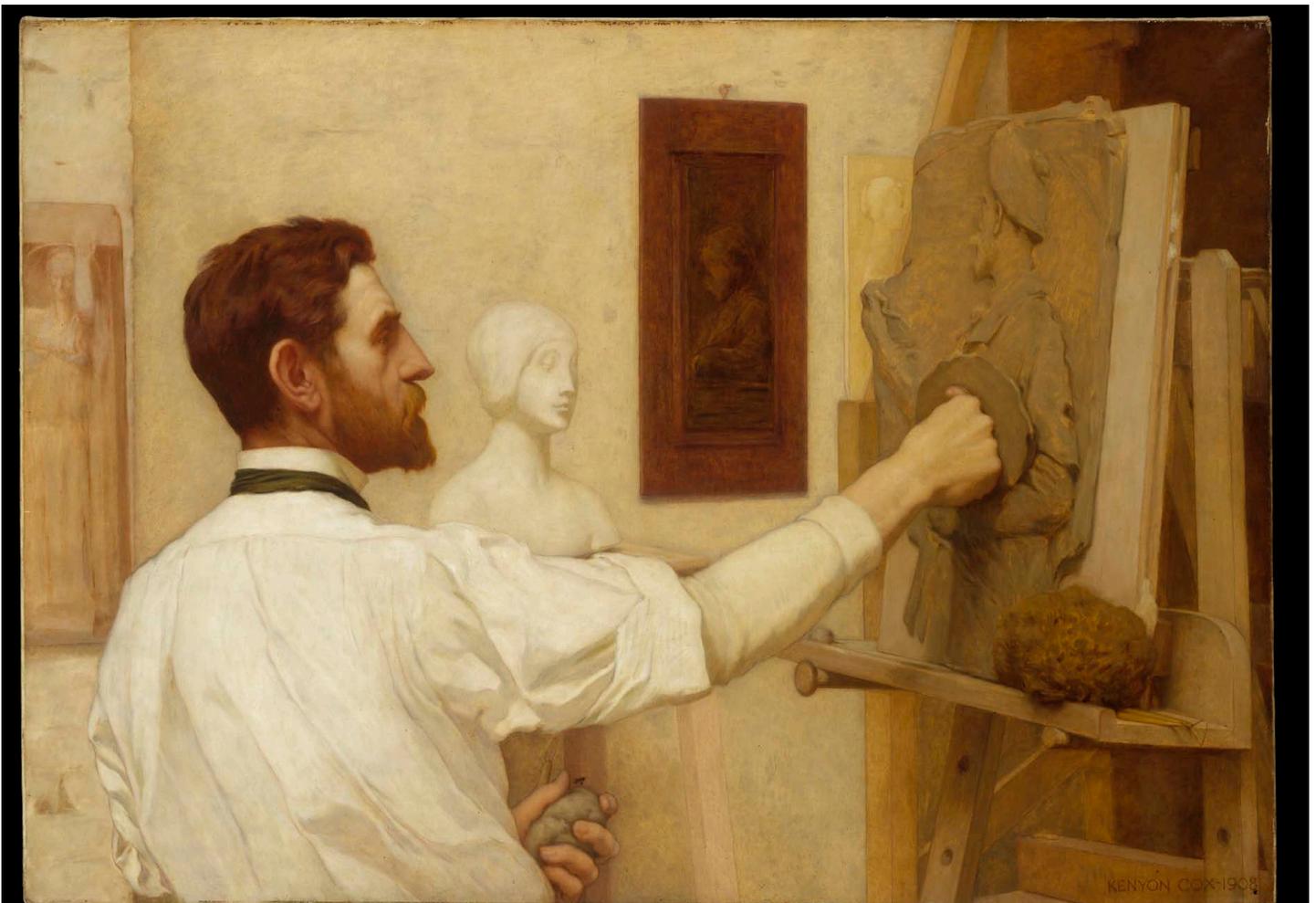
When it came time to choose a sculptor to carve the pediment at the House end of the building, Meigs found himself once more looking to Crawford after rejecting several other sculptors. But Crawford's early death ultimately ruled this out, and the commission was held in abeyance for several years while further names were mooted, one of which was Launt Thompson (1833–1894), who was made an offer of the commission. A fellow Irish-American, Thompson, born in the Irish midlands in Abbeyleix in Queen's County (now known as County Laois), had been brought to the U.S. as a teenager in 1847. He became a studio assistant to Erastus Dow Palmer in Albany, New York, before moving to New York City. In 1870, between trips to Italy—where Rome, from where he was recently returned, and Florence, to where he was about to depart, were his preferred destinations—and at his own instigation,<sup>10</sup> he was given the opportunity to make a design and model a group for the south pediment, “to balance that by Crawford on the north.”<sup>11</sup> Thompson chose *Peace and Abundance* as his theme for the pediment, a written description of which met with the approval of the then-Architect of the Capitol Extension Edward Clark, who invited him to prepare a sketch model.<sup>12</sup> However, the anticipated model failed to materialise and Thompson's opportunity passed ultimately—if nearly four decades later—to American sculptor Paul Wayland Bartlett who, in 1908, received the commission to carry

out the work. It is possible that Thompson, in the early 1870s, was absorbed with two of his commissions in hand—a Civil War Memorial dedicated in 1872 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and the statue of Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, completed in 1873, for the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home in D.C. But failure to deliver in connection with a commission for work for the Capitol seems more than neglectful and a lost opportunity of considerable significance.

It might have seemed inevitable that Thompson would not again be approached for work at the august location, and yet his name reappears among the group of “competent sculptors” invited in 1887 “to make a marble bust of each of the vice-presidents, to be placed in the niches of the Senate Chamber.”<sup>13</sup> W.A. Wheeler (nineteenth vice president) was the portrait commission assigned to Thompson. And yet the bust of Wheeler in the chamber, positioned there in 1892, is

the work of Edward Clark Potter. It appears, therefore, that once more Thompson failed to deliver. Augustus Saint-Gaudens (fig. 3.), also among this initial group of sculptors commissioned to carve busts for the Senate Chamber,<sup>14</sup> proved more dependable in the exercise, if not immediately gracious in his acceptance.

Saint-Gaudens was born in Dublin to a French father and an Irish mother, Mary McGuiness, who hailed from County Longford. Taken to America as an infant aged six months, he was raised in New York. Undertaking his initial training in art in that city, he was to spend much time in the course of his life traveling back and forth between the U.S. and Europe. However, in the course of his many trips, and often not far away in London, he never took the opportunity to visit Ireland. When, towards the end of his career, he was commissioned for a work to be located in the centre of Dublin, he proposed at that stage to visit the city of his birth. But



*Fig. 3. Kenyon Cox (1856–1919) painted a portrait of Augustus Saint-Gaudens in exchange for a bronze relief portrait of himself. Cox painted this replica in 1908 to replace the 1887 original, lost in a 1904 fire; he depicts Saint-Gaudens modeling a portrait relief of artist William Merritt Chase.*



Fig. 4. *Chester A. Arthur*, by Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907), 1891

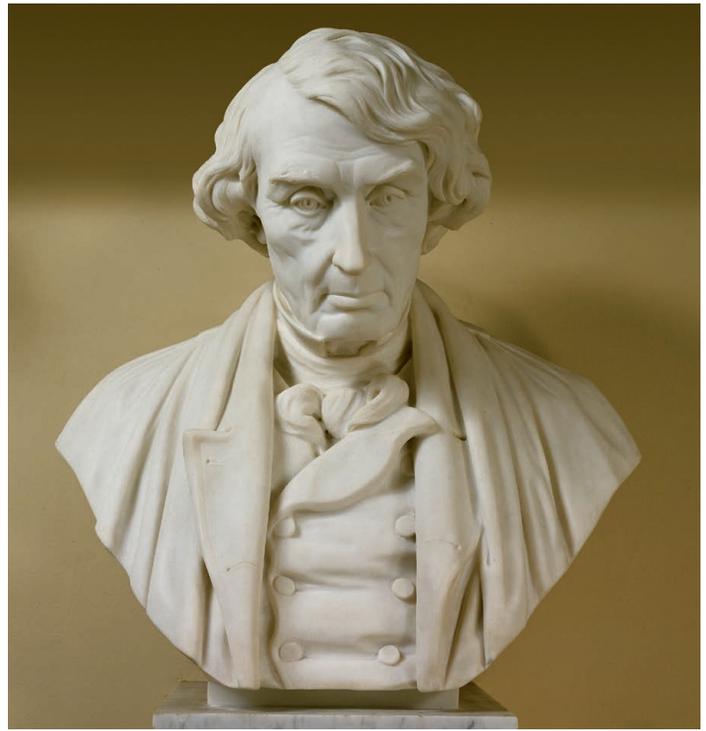


Fig. 5. *Roger B. Taney*, by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, 1876–77

it was not to be. He was diagnosed with cancer shortly after receiving the commission for the monument to Charles Stewart Parnell and, although he managed to complete the statue, Saint-Gaudens never made the journey and died before the monument was erected.

Among the Senate Chamber commissions, Saint-Gaudens portrayed twentieth Vice President Chester A. Arthur (fig. 4), who only served briefly in that office in 1881 before assuming the position of president on the assassination of James A. Garfield. It was Arthur who, the day before he died, chose that Saint-Gaudens would portray him.<sup>15</sup> Although honored to have been selected by the sitter, the sculptor was, nonetheless, unhappy about the \$800 that he was offered for the commission—the exact sum that all the chosen sculptors were to be paid for their busts—and refused to take on the work.<sup>16</sup> But, in a change of heart the following year, Saint-Gaudens accepted the commission “under the conditions [already] named,” on the basis that he could not commit to a completion date, such was the extent of his “present engagements.”<sup>17</sup> In spite of this agreement, Saint-Gaudens seems to have continued to dispute the proposed payment,<sup>18</sup> but did complete the bust, although not without making use of the assistance of a marble cutter.<sup>19</sup>

Other portrait work by Saint-Gaudens on site

includes the busts of Chief Justices Roger B. Taney and Morrison Waite for the Supreme Court. The Taney (fig. 5) was a controversial commission, and Taney himself remains a contentious figure. First mooted in 1865 and debated at length by Congress at the time, the bust was finally agreed to in 1874.<sup>20</sup> The commission to Saint-Gaudens in 1876, from the Joint Committee on the Library, was not for an original work, but came with specific requirements that the bust be a “faithful copy of the head” of William H. Rinehart’s statue of Taney in Annapolis.<sup>21</sup> It was also required of the sculptor that the head be turned to the left.<sup>22</sup> This last request was presumably related to the intended location of the bust. Reproducing Rinehart’s bust proved problematic for Saint-Gaudens because it was an idealised portrait and not the familiar features of the sitter that he would have preferred to depict.<sup>23</sup> The bust, with which Saint-Gaudens was not particularly happy<sup>24</sup> and for which he received \$700, was acquired for the Supreme Court in 1877. The Waite bust was purchased by the U.S. Government for \$1,500 in 1891 and was, according to Edward Clark, “much admired by all who have seen it.”<sup>25</sup> That payments to Saint-Gaudens for work at the Capitol more than doubled in the 14 years between 1877 and 1891 is evidence of his rise in stature within the profession over that period. By the latter date Saint-Gaudens was prob-