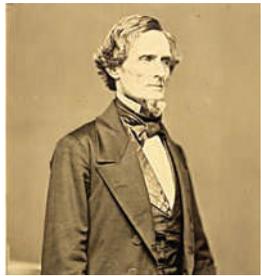


Not everyone signs his or her desk, Skvarla says, and “some of them sign it early on or on multiple [desks]. We have numerous **Truman** desks.”

In his unpublished memoirs, a Capitol employee says he saw Union troops bayoneting the desk of **Jefferson Davis** (D-Miss.) when troops lived in the chamber during the Civil War. It’s hard to tell where the desk was damaged, Skvarla says.



The “**candy desk**” is generally at the back of the Republican side along the aisle, where many senators enter the chamber. George Murphy (R-Calif.) began the tradition in 1965; today Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) keeps it stocked.



Inside his desk, **Strom Thurmond** (R-S.C.) carved the words “Spoke 24 hrs. 18 min. from this desk in 1957” to mark his filibuster against passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.



Furnishings in the Old Senate Chamber were damaged when the British set fire to the Capitol in 1814. In 1819, cabinetmaker Thomas Constantine was tasked with making new **mahogany desks**. (The Senate moved chambers in 1859.)

Today, **48 Constantine desks** are in use. Skvarla says most of those have not been identified, because new desks were made as other states joined the Union, and “they’re very similar in style.”

They were here

Senators leave signatures on chamber desks

BY KRIS CORONADO

It’s often a site of passionate debate and rhetoric, but there’s a lot more to the U.S. Senate than the 100 men and women who politic there. The chamber is packed with historical objects, most of which are still in use. “While I love all of our artwork, I have to say the desks are probably the most important artifacts we have,” says Senate curator Diane Skvarla. “They are used daily by the members, and 48 go back to 1819.”

Many politicians have made their mark on those desks — literally. A

number of desks bear the signatures of their former inhabitants. It’s hard to know when the tradition started, Skvarla says: “From the names that we see, it was definitely early 20th century.”

“We check the desks now every session to see if somebody has signed inside them,” Skvarla says. “We’re not always told when somebody signs. We do an inventory once a year to be sure that we haven’t missed any.”

