

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

---

Documents

From D.C. to Kentucky:  
The History of the U.S. Senate Clerk's Desk

---

Spring 3-3-2020

## A Visual Analysis of the U.S. Senate Clerk's Desk

Olivia Renee Bowers

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/kym\\_sp\\_senate\\_desk\\_docs](https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/kym_sp_senate_desk_docs)



Part of the [American Art and Architecture Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Documents by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact [topscholar@wku.edu](mailto:topscholar@wku.edu).

## A VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE U.S. SENATE CLERK'S DESK

The desk's appearance is quite pertinent to the object's story. Upon first glance, one may note on its massive size, yet may not find anything remarkable to say about it otherwise. This is most certainly the intent of Walter's designs, which may also be a reason why the designs were chosen for the desks by Floyd. During the mid-nineteenth century in America furniture-making exploded due to the Industrial Revolution's mechanization of previously tedious workmanship. Because machines were able to build desks, tables, and chairs at rapid speeds, average Americans could own fine furniture that used to only exist in the homes of the wealthy. Revival styles of all kinds swept across the nation, such as the Egyptian Revival with its Nile-inspired motifs, or the Rococo Revival, which brought the furniture of Versailles into the homes of everyday Americans. Furniture made in these styles were heavily painted, gilded, and decorated with elaborate detailing that was unheard of before the advent of machines.

The desk completed by Slight in 1859 resembles none of these elegant, decorative styles. Instead, it can be described as solid, colossal, and sobered. Walter's designs for the Senate desks were most likely created in this fashion to reinforce the ideals of the Senate, a branch of the government characterized by its elevated composure. It is often viewed as the more judicious branch of Congress, and the desk's subdued nature reflects the body of government within which it resides. Its size may also reference the weight of the decisions that the Senate takes part in. Considering it is at the literal front and center of the Senate, it only makes sense for it to accentuate the defining characteristics of the Senate: tempered, diligent, and paramount to the U.S. Government. His subdued designs were another point of contention for Meigs, who preferred more decorative styles of art and architecture. He even called them pieces of "pulpit furniture" upon seeing the designs.