

Windsor Chairs Graced the Copyright Office

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As Copyright Office staffers move into renovated space in the Madison Building, new chairs will be part of the ambiance of our cubicles and office areas. We will be sitting in chairs of a modern design from Steelcase, an international office furniture company headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

But for a short time in the past, some Crystal City offices were graced by, and some Copyright Office staffers sat on, oak Windsor chairs. Characterized by spindles for the back and a solid piece of wood for the seat, Windsor chairs are of 18th century rural English origin. A variety of designs remain popular in the United States to this day.

Some of the Windsor chairs that were used by the Copyright Office would now be valuable antiques. While some were of a “second generation” of chairs manufactured when the East Front of the Jefferson Building was extended, others were designed specifically as part of the original furnishings for the Thomas Jefferson Building by its last architect, Edward Pearce Casey, who assumed his position in 1892. Trained as an architect at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Casey supervised the decoration of the most important interior spaces. He designed many pieces of furniture, including 66 oak “sack back” Windsor chairs for use in the new Periodical Reading Room.

When the Copyright Office moved to Crystal City in 1969, furniture was needed to fill the temporary office spaces. Copyright Office retiree Bill Poole remembers foraging for furniture to take to Virginia. In a cellar of the Adams Building, in addition to metal desks, he located old wooden furniture, including a number of the original Windsor chairs. Fourteen were placed in a back elevator lobby of the Adams Building before making the trip across the river to be used by staffers, who enjoyed the comfort of their design. In 1979 the chairs were removed to the new Madison Building to “complement the decor of the Reading Rooms,” according to *Copyright Notices* (March 20, 1979).

And where are those antique chairs today? One has recently been located in the Interpretive Programs Office in the basement of the Adams Building. Clearly a sack back Windsor chair with a carved “ear” design on the side of the arm rests and the patina of age, the chair is identical to Casey’s drawing. If only the chair could talk! ©



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Designed by for use in the Jefferson Building's Periodical Reading Room, this “sack back” Windsor chair may have been used in the Copyright Office in the 1970s.