La loi constitutionnelle de 1982 fut signée à la Table du Constitution Act, 1982.

The Signing Table for the Proclamation of the Constitution Act, 1982
History

The Speaker of the Senate has a suite of rooms located at the east end of Centre Block which contain furniture and decorations bearing witness to defining moments in Canadian history. Among the pieces of furniture is the table at which the Proclamation of the Constitution Act, 1982, was signed by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, witnessed by the Prime Minister and future Senators Kirby and Pitfield, among others. This brochure briefly examines the table’s history: its significance, origin, features and how it came to its current location in the Senate.
Royal Proclamation

On Parliament Hill

On April 17, 1982, tens of thousands of Canadians gathered on Parliament Hill to witness an historic event: the Royal Proclamation of the Constitution Act, 1982. Like the Senate Chamber, the place where our head of state presides when on Parliament Hill, Parliament Hill itself took on a royal air.

The thrones for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness Prince Philip were taken from the Senate Chamber and were placed on the red-carpeted platform. To the left of the thrones stood an until-then ordinary table, the very one on which the Royal Proclamation was to be signed. By signing the Proclamation, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II made this document an historic jewel. The table on which it was signed also became a part of Canada’s heritage.

At that moment, Canada finally became a fully independent country, acquiring the right to amend its own Constitution.
The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, included in the new Constitution Act, strengthened the values of freedom and equality for all Canadians.

To the left of the thrones stood an until then ordinary table, the very one on which the Royal Proclamation was to be signed.
Each piece of furniture in the Parliament Buildings has its own history and origin. Some pieces date back to the late nineteenth century, while others are much more recent, having been introduced to replace damaged pieces or in response to changing tastes and functional changes in many rooms and offices.¹

Construction of the original Parliament Buildings began in 1859 and was completed in 1866. Thomas Fuller and Chilion Jones designed the buildings in neo-Gothic style. The furniture came from a number of sources, including the former capitals of Québec City and Toronto, and other pieces were specially acquired for the new buildings in Ottawa.²

A few pieces of furniture survived the fire that destroyed Centre Block in 1916.³ From 1916 to 1920, the Victoria Memorial Museum⁴ served as the temporary location for the Chambers
Furniture

of both the House of Commons and the Senate. Some of the pieces acquired during this transition period can be found in the Parliament Buildings today.

Following the fire of 1916, reconstruction of the Centre Block was entrusted to two architects, John A. Pearson and Jean-Omer Marchand. Pearson was in charge of the interior design. Most of the decorative art, designed either by or under the supervision of Pearson, was installed in the reconstructed building between 1919 and 1928. The Canadian-made furniture was crafted by approximately 20 cabinetmakers from Quebec and Ontario.
The signing table for the Proclamation of the Constitution Act, 1982, is currently located in the office of the Speaker of the Senate, near the north end of the Speaker’s suite. Ongoing research has yet to turn up the actual origin of the table, but there is no support for the claim that it was one of the few pieces of furniture to survive the fire. Also, the table is not consistent with the designs of John A. Pearson. The one thing that is known is that it arrived in the suite of the Speaker of the Senate in 1981.

This Victorian-style table has some interesting features. It has a turned central pedestal with four sharp-edged legs. The table design is fairly simple: a 40”x40” square top with a twisted rope apron and fluted corners, and hoof feet. The simplicity of the style indicates that it is definitely a Canadian-made piece. As tables with a turned central pedestal generally have a round or oval top, it is possible that the square top was added at a later date, with the two parts having different origins.
The reddish colour of the wood suggests that the table is mahogany or possibly walnut. However, the application of a stain also turns other woods red. In the Victorian era, Canadian-made furniture was crafted from various types of wood, depending on the region. Quebec cabinetmakers had access to mahogany, a hardwood transported by ship from the West Indies. In some regions, maple and butternut were the wood of choice. Ontario cabinetmakers worked with yellow birch, walnut and figured maple.

In fact, the table could even be made of different types of wood. The patina on the underside of the tabletop differs from that of the rest of the table, which is roughly assembled with pine blocks. The haunches under the square top definitely have the colour and structural character of walnut.
Parliamentary ceremonies which involve a royal presence, including the Speech from the Throne and the granting of Royal Assent to bills, are held in the Senate. The Upper Chamber is the chamber in which the three components of Parliament come together: the Head of State, the Senate and the House of Commons. As the Proclamation of the Constitution Act, 1982, involved a fundamental change in our nation’s history, there was widespread public interest, enhanced by the presence of the Queen. To accommodate this interest, the ceremony was held outdoors on Parliament Hill.

The Speaker of the Senate plays a special role in official ceremonies, ranking fourth in the order of precedence for Canada. When plans were being made for the Proclamation ceremony, which included moving the thrones from the Senate Chamber outdoors, it was natural to inquire whether the Speaker might have a suitable table available for the signing of the Proclamation of the Constitution Act, 1982. He did.
Once Queen Elizabeth II sat at the table and signed the Proclamation on its surface, this otherwise ordinary piece of furniture gained new significance and became a part of our history. Following the ceremony, the table was returned to the Senate Speaker’s suite, where it has remained since 1982. The table now has a commemorative plaque affixed to it, and a copy of the Royal Proclamation has been placed under a protective glass top. Successive Speakers have been proud to show visitors these two jewels of Canadian history.
Notes


4 Today, this building is the home of the Canadian Museum of Nature.


7 Audrey Dubé, The Suite of the Speaker of the Senate, Office of the Curator, House of Commons, Ottawa, n.d.


9 Ibid.