As the social conventions surrounding tobacco faded, however, the smoking room gave way to other uses. Over the course of the years, it evolved into a venue for meetings and receptions.

In 1992, the Department of External Affairs and the Canadian branch of L’Assemblée internationale des parlementaires de langue française (an international organization of French-speaking parliamentarians) approached Parliament with a proposal to formally commemorate Canada’s ties to La Francophonie. The Senate agreed. On March 18, 1993, the former smoking room was officially designated “Le Salon de la Francophonie,” confirming the importance of this connection for Canada. It also serves as a pendant to the Commonwealth Room, the name given to the House of Commons’ former smoking room in 1965.

Today, the Salon de la Francophonie is located on the east side of the Centre Block of Parliament, a few steps from the entrance to the Senate chamber. Dedicated to Canada’s association with La Francophonie (the international union of French-speaking countries), it is one of the Senate’s most distinctive meeting rooms.

The room has an interesting past; it was not always identified with La Francophonie. Following the reconstruction of the Centre Block after the fire of 1916, it was used as a smoking room, where senators could relax and hold private conversations.

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Today, the room is decorated to reflect Canada’s francophone history and identity.

The decor also serves to complement the room’s distinctive architecture. Centre Block architect John A. Pearson designed the room in the Tudor Gothic Revival style, with its exposed wooden beams and the textured plaster finish of its walls. The oak paneling of the north and south walls is carved with gothic tracery and tiny bosses carved in the shape of flowers, gargoyles and human faces. The limestone fireplace is flanked by seating alcoves with half-vaulted canopies, each divided by a slender column that supports delicate open tracery. The coffered ceiling is divided by oak beams, some of which also feature carved bosses. The overall impression is one of strength, restraint and tradition.

Once a smoking room, the Salon de la Francophonie is today a valued formal venue for meetings and receptions. The sense of dignity and pride it exudes is a fitting reflection of Canada’s French identity.