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The Birth of the Stone Industry in the Ourthe-Amblève Region during the XIXth Century

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In the 19th century, and more precisely from the 1830s, the Ourthe-Amblève region gradually transformed into a leading quarry centre for the Province of Liège. The main materials exploited there are Devonian sandstones as well as Carboniferous limestones, more commonly called *petit granit*. These stones were widely used in architecture, public works, industry and funerary art of the time. Despite its importance and its valorization in local and regional territories (museums, memories, small heritage, industrial wastelands, etc.), the long history of this lithic industry has never been studied in detail. Indeed, for the period before the First World War, it is barely impossible to paint an evolving portrait of this sector which was then in full expansion. To summarize the state of the question, we do not know, or very little, or very approximately, the decisive initiatives in this area, the first sites which were exploited, or their managers and their sociological profiles (entrepreneurs, industrialists, master quarrymen, etc.). Until today, it is true that the fragmentation of data and the absence of specific archival funds linked to the quarries had not encouraged historical research, undoubtedly considered too time-consuming, too regional and not “profitable” enough. The exhaustive research that we have been carrying out for three years in the archives has, however, revealed numerous unpublished and unexploited documents, of a very heterogeneous nature, which now make it possible to reconstruct the first large-scale industrial history of the region. As a first summary, this communication focuses on sites, peoples, as well as industrial buildings which today constitute a heritage with an often fragile and uncertain future due to lack of knowledge and acknowledgement.

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