

The Société Géologique de Belgique: 150 years of history

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In Belgium like in many other countries, the need for a national geological society arose in the early 1870s. At the initiative of Gustave Dewalque, professor of Geology at the University of Liège, a group of 19 members—professors in the different Belgian universities or mining engineers—founded a scientific society. The *Société Géologique de Belgique* (SGB) was officially established in Liège on January 18, 1874. By the end of the same year, 326 geologists, mining engineers, naturalists, pharmacists, and other scientists were affiliated with the Society.

The first president of the Society was Laurent-Guillaume de Koninck and the first secretary-general was Gustave Dewalque. He held this position for 25 years and was the kingpin of the Society. Among the first members of the Society was Jean-Baptiste d'Omalius d'Halloy. Charles Darwin was an honorary member.

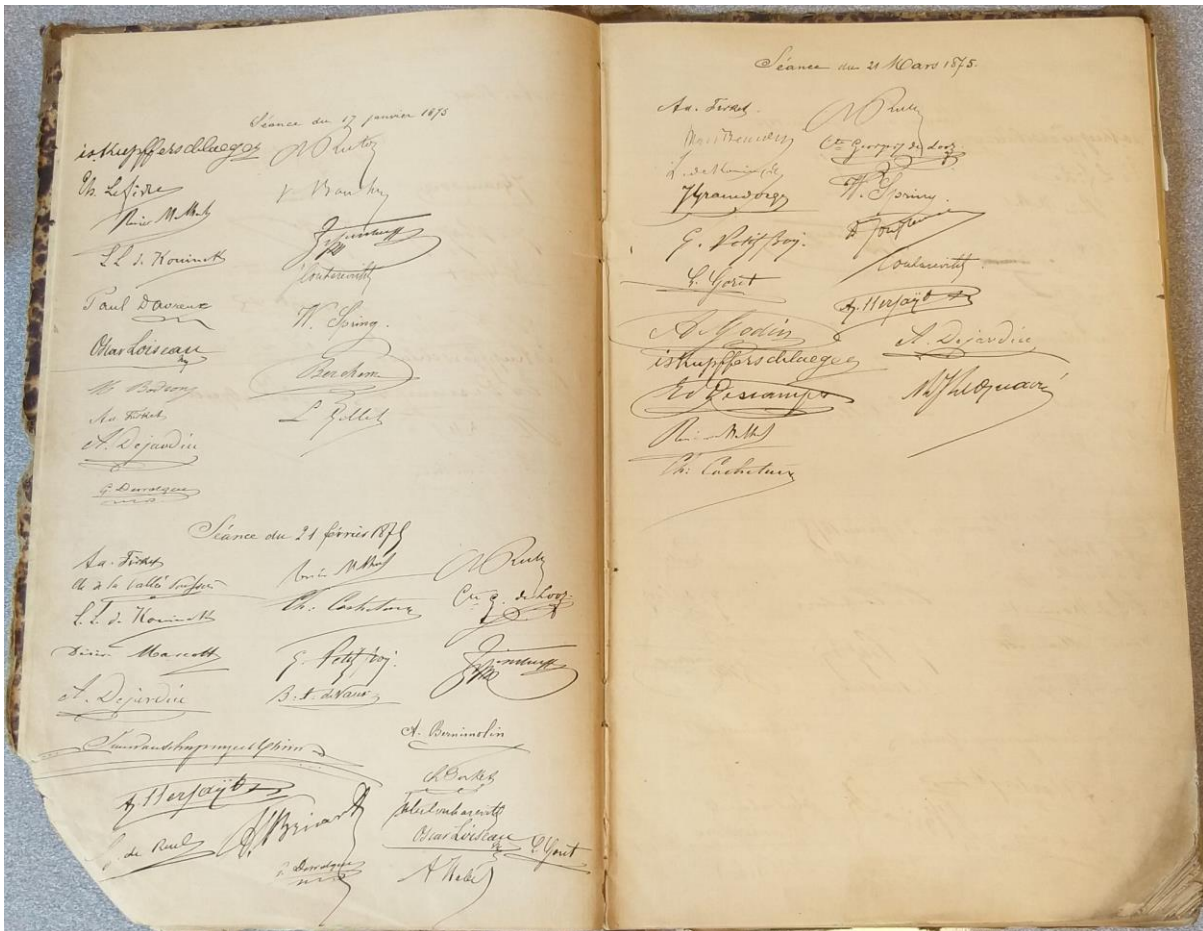
The Society aimed to gather knowledge and share discoveries about the country's geology, to inform industry engineers about advances in the earth sciences, and to promote the geological sciences. Weekly meetings were organised in Liège as well as an annual extraordinary session in the field. From the beginning, the society published a journal to spread the recent discoveries among the scientific community: the *Annales de la Société géologique de Belgique*. This journal was published monthly during the first decades then four times a year and eventually twice a year. The *Annales* were published continuously, except between 1914 and 1918, and 120 volumes were issued.

Due to different views about the large-scale geological map of Belgium, a dispute divided the Belgian geologists at the end of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s. This dispute led to the exclusion of several members of the SGB in 1887 and the foundation of a second geological society in the same year. This second society, the *Société belge de Géologie, de Paléontologie et d'Hydrologie*, held its own board in Brussels and published its own journal, the *Bulletin of the Société belge de Géologie, de Paléontologie et d'Hydrologie*.

This schism created unease within the Belgian geological community for twenty years. Over the years, this unease gradually subsided and the two societies organised, first in turn and then jointly, the excursions of their extraordinary sessions. This reconciliation began before the First World War and was confirmed in 1928.

In the 20th century, many geologists were members of both societies. The decline in the number of members in the community and the issues in organising activities for both societies and publishing two journals led the boards to merge the societies in the 1990s. The merger of the *Société Géologique de Belgique* and *Société belge de Géologie* resulted in the erection of *Geologica Belgica*, in 1994. The gradual pooling of all the activities of the former societies led to the cessation of their respective journals in 1997 and the publication of a new one, *Geologica Belgica*, in 1998.

Since the merger, the *Société Géologique de Belgique* has continued to manage its heritage (library, collection, prizes) and to promote geological sciences.



Signatures of the founders of the *Société Géologique de Belgique* at its first assembly in 1874.