

**1856**

Creation of the society Victor Poulet

**1875**

The children of the brickworks create the General Partnership "Victor Poulet fils et soeur". The factory first manufactures paving tiles and later porcelain stoneware tiles, with inlaid designs.

**1889**

The company changes its name and becomes the "Société Céramique de Chimay", before passing into " Société anonyme des carreaux céramiques de Chimay".

**30<sup>th</sup> April 1892**

With external financial support Victor Poulet creates the "S.A. La Céramique nationale." The company is in constant evolution, with the contribution of modern machinery, the important problem remains the supply of plastic earth. Better quality soils have to be imported in large quantities from Germany, England and France. In spite of this, the production remains insufficient to meet the demand (moreover there is no competition). Thus the company decided to establish a production headquarters in Welkenraedt, because at the time, the company officials realized that most of the raw material quarries (mainly clays) were situated in Germany. From then on, saving transport costs justified their decision to settle at the border station. This decision proved to be the right one as there are no more Belgian clays and almost all the raw materials come from Germany.

**27<sup>th</sup> April 1904**

The new S.A. Buys the property of the "Ferme Cerexhe" situated between rue Dickenbusch, the railway, rue de l'Usine and the Brickworks. Tiles for covering in earthenware and glazed stoneware will

be manufactured in Chimay, while tiles for paving in porcelain stoneware will be produced in Welkenraedt. The tiles with flowers, butterflies etc... are created to decorate the palaces of Chinese princes!

*9<sup>th</sup> March 1905*

By ministerial order, the minister in charge of transport authorized the Ceramique Nationale to use the connection of the Brickworks. The improvements and additions will be made but the railroads and the costs will be paid by the Céramique.

### ***31<sup>st</sup> May 1910***

The parent company in Chimay dissolved its activities in Welkenraedt and the production headquarters of Welkenraedt was erected on June 1910 as an independent limited company under the designation : LA CERAMIQUE NATIONALE. The capital amounted at 684.000 Francs.

### ***1915***

The company works in full production from October 25. to December 23. 1915. This does not improve the company's balance sheet which remains low.

### ***1916***

The company works from January 11. to the end of February , after that, the company does not produce any more tiles, only a supervision and maintenance of the company is ensured.

### ***1917- 1918***

The company is stopped, the German occupant multiplies the requisitions (of the tools, the machines the raw materials). When the German troops surrendered , the occupying forces wreaked havoc in the company

### ***1919***

Year of the reconstruction, recovery of requisitioned material, contact with German supply companies and raw materials. The production of tiles will start at the beginning of October 1919.

1920 The destroyed country must rise from its ruins. The demand for building materials became particularly great. In 1920 the turnover was already tripled and constantly increasing.

**1923**

Visit of Toussaint Bosch at the headquarters of Sinzig in Germany. He accompanied a delegation of the ceramics to examine the product intended for the manufacture ( quality , etc...).

***15<sup>th</sup> April 1928***

A fire destroys in the evening the buildings of the drying room of the national Ceramics. The cause of the fire is unknown but the damage is considerable. The dryers where the blocks of clay ready for the confection of paving stones of ceramics were fortunately in an isolated building but contiguous to the room of the machines where gas bottles were stocked.

## **1930**

Reorganization of the company and since July, agreement for supply with Switzerland.

## **13<sup>th</sup> June 1931**

Visit of the Minister of State Heyman – Minister for Industry, Labor and Social Security from November 22. 1927 to December 17 1932.

## **16<sup>th</sup> January 1934**

Press article : The miserable working conditions of the workers of the Ceramique Nationale in Welkenraedt.

## **From 27<sup>th</sup> April to 6<sup>th</sup> November 1935**

During the Universal Exhibition in Brussels, the Ceramique Nationale has been chosen to tile the Belgian pavilion. The Ceramique Nationale will also be present in a pavilion in common with the company Helman from Hemixen.

## **1936**

320 people produced monthly 36.000 square meters of ceramic tiles.

## **1940**

The second World War marked a new pause in the evolution of the society. The company was requisitioned to work for Germany and will be ruled by a German director, Blefert, domiciled in Herbesthal. They'll change the name. « Welkenraedter Mosaikplatten-Fabrik Aktien Gesellschaft Welkenraedt-Herbesthal ». The German direction won't hesitate to collaborate with the military so that part of the factory was occupied by the « Philipswerke » to manufacture transmission equipment for the Wehrmacht.

Thus a large bomb shelter is dug along the large courtyard near the main entrance.

« The Resistance » will partially occupy the factory and temporarily lock up civilian collaborators.

#### END OF SEPTEMBER 1944

The American Army takes possession of a part of the factory, they set up a camp for German prisoners and set up a popular food kitchen.

#### DID YOU KNOW

In 1940 the Ceramic will employ 400 workers. On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940, the occupying forces requisitioned the place for the internment of Belgian and Allied soldiers captured by the Wehrmacht .

Under the leadership of the director Mr. Blefert from Herbesthal, the production restarted and a part of the factory is occupied by the Philipswerke, to manufacture transmission equipment for the German army. To protect themselves from possible air raids, an underground shelter was built near the main entrance of the factory (under the garage).

After the Liberation, the resistance occupied partially the factory where uncivics were temporarily locked. American soldiers also created a prisoner's camp for Germans. In the unoccupied part of the factory, they reorganised as well as they could the production of the ceramic tiles.

1946

The « Ceramique Nationale de Welkenraedt » has appealed Italian workers for 3 years. They came from the region of Vicenza, Venetia in the North of Italy. The company covers the travel costs to Welkenraedt as well as the accommodation and food of the workers who earn 40 Francs a day .

1947

The sister Silvana and Angela Andriolo, aged only 15 and 16 are assigned to the tasks of ceramic workers just like Carlo Magrin and Raffaele Merlo, both aged 15.

1948 The youngest worker is Malvina Caron, aged 15. The Italian authorities approved to hire fifty men and women ceramic workers for a period of 2 years working 8 hours and six days a week. This was for a period of 3 years, from 1946 to 1948.

DID YOU KNOW ?

A male worker earned 0,38€ (15fr.) per hour, and a woman 0,30€ (12 fr.) per hour with a guaranteed minimum of 2,97€ (120fr.) a day. If the company covers the travel costs to Welkenraedt and provides accommodation for the workers, they have to pay 0,99 (40 fr) for accommodation and food.

Part of the Italians settle definitively in the area.

1945

New orientation, the modernization of the equipments required considerable investment, which the factory was unable to provide with its own funds. The production is reorganised.

1954

A German Ceramic company which already worked in the whole world, took a majority stake in the company's capital.

The financial intervention of the group AGROB registered in Munich, made a new start for the company possible.

1955

A fundamental modernisation of the manufacturing processes was organised. The most important changes were the replacement of the round ovens that worked in discontinuity, by three tunnel ovens working permanently in a continuous way. It was also the replacement of carousel presses by semi-automatic presses. There were 150 workers and 40 employees.

DID YOU KNOW ?

The cobblestones of the coastline, wear resistant, decorate most of the seaside resorts for many years. The Belgian sides make a point of using this material for the construction of our beautiful seafront promenades. The seawalls still exist in various places along the coast.



### *June 1968*

First pairing of Welkenraedt signed by the Mayors Hector Grosjean and Giuseppe Toniolo. Given the number of Italians working in the ceramic factory and coming from Veneto, it is no coincidence that the world famous town of Nove, the cradle of ceramics was chosen.

### *1971*

The monthly production is 50.000 square meters.

### *1973*

The company occupies 159 workers and 40 employees. Its monthly production is 59.000 square meters, 35 % of the production is exported to the Netherlands, Germany, France and Zaïre whereas the yearly turnover of the company is 130 million.

### *1<sup>st</sup> April 1974*

During one year, La Céramique Nationale will instal a new production line for glazed tiles that required an investment of 85 million Fr. This new tool, unique in Belgium at the time will make it possible to produce monthly thirty thousands square meters of glazed stoneware tiles in different forms and in extreme economical conditions. The exports turn to the USA, Hong Kong, Tunisia and Australia.

### *1975*

During one year, the oil crisis becomes an important preoccupation in the gestion of the company.

### *1976*

225 people work for a monthly production of 80.000 square meters.

**1982**

Installations of frescoes realised by the artists Marie-Claire Van Vuchelen and Daniel Hicter. The original decoration is unique in the Paris metro. The station is called « Liège » . Open in 1911 initially named « Berlin » , it has been renamed « Liège » on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1914 to honour the resistance of Liège during the German invasion in August 1914. Situated on the line 13 between the station « Saint Lazare » and the « Place Clichy » the station Liège highlights the province of Liège. Indeed, 18 frescoes of Welkenraedt represent places and monuments of the province.

**1984**

A new preparation of raw materials is subject to an investment of 30 million Fr.

***26<sup>th</sup> March 1984***

A violent fire destructed the totality of the general store « 15m x 8m » and all the spareparts in storage. The damage amounts to 15 million Fr.

***1<sup>st</sup> September 1984***

Inauguration of the painter Roland Materne's fresco . It is situated on the banks of the Vesdre, Quai Pierre Rapsat in Verviers. The ornamental work reminds us that water, wool and men's work made the wealth of the wool city. With their movements groups of people symbolise the very important activity of the city, based on textile. It features the drapers, the urine collectors, the workers in charge of sorting wool, the « ploquette » (tufts of wool in dialect) merchant in a universe of machines and wood weaving shuttles. 4.500 tiles of 10/10 com were necessary to realize the fresco. Unfortunately there is not much left today and it is totally abandoned to its sad fate.

**1984**

New construction for one year ; preparation workshop, general store, electricity workshop as well as two mechanic workshops.

**1985**

The staff consists of 165 workers and 40 employees.

***8<sup>th</sup> February 1985***

Project to install a new preparation unit of raw materials and a fifth tunnel oven this one constructed in ceramic fibers (the others are lined with refractories). This new production unit will allow to increase the production of 35%. On 4<sup>th</sup> February the company buys a strip of land located between the company and the railway with an area of 1.973 square meters. A new building will be constructed and house a new line. In 1987 a million of square meters were sold per year, both in Belgium and abroad.

***21<sup>st</sup> February 1986***

Inauguration of the ceramic energy recovery facility. The recovery system of calorific energy allowed the town to heat the sport center. The principle is based on the transfer of the calories recovered in a collector, starting from the chimney of the fumes of the furnaces, which it conveys to a transformer. Thus, the fumes from the furnaces do not disperse into the atmosphere. This ingenious device transfers thermal energy to the cultural and sports centers, which are 400 m apart as the crow flies. The heat from the flue gases heats a liquid and this hot water is channeled through an underground canal to the boilers in the basement of the cultural center which was under construction at the time. This project, unique in Belgium , is the result of the collaboration of the ceramic factory, the Walloon region, the Tubemeuse factory of Flemalle and the company Henkens of Henri-Chapelle. Unfortunately, the low profitability of this system did not meet the expectations of

users and was abandoned.

### **1988**

For four years important administrative investments were realized.( new office locations). Turnover fell by more than half and export markets were hit hard. Despite recovery efforts and the launch of new products such as polished tiles, the company did not manage to recover. The general opening of the borders and the arrival in force of products from Eastern European countries were to penalize it.

**1992**

The company was forced to reduce production capacity, cut staff, file for bankruptcy and recapitalize. The company went into receivership on 14 February and was subsequently taken over by Mr Demoulin, the head of Keramik.

**13th January 1994**

In view of the poor prospects and the excessive costs of the past, the shareholder decided to put the company into liquidation.

**End of February 1994**

The activities were restarted under the name of "Welkenraedt Ceramic nv". Production is limited to the activity of one oven and is reduced to 300,000m<sup>2</sup>/year.

There are about forty employees. Although it operates in a particularly difficult sector subject to strong competition due to overproduction in Europe (Italian and Spanish producers), Welkenraedt Ceramic S.A. spares no effort to maintain the durability and reputation of its brand. A challenge that has been taken up by this new dynamic company, which has not stopped improving the quality of its products and renewing the rubber since 1994.

**2000**

Part of the stock is sold at a reduced price from 15 June to 18 June.

**27th November 2000**

Final closure of the s.a. Welkenraedt Ceramic.

**2018**

New logo of the municipality of Welkenraedt made by Alan Laschet, municipal agent. He was inspired by the ceramic. On this logo the roofs of the factory, represented by W-shaped lines, have been restyled. The diversity of colors symbolizes the cultural mix and the

openness of the municipality towards the future, while maintaining a certain neutrality.