Laval University's mining department celebrates 80 years

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In March, the Department of Mining, Metallurgical and Materials Engineering at Laval University in Quebec City will celebrate its 80th anniversary.

Here's a look at its history.

In 1937, there were 20 gold mines in operation in Quebec and asbestos mining had developed into an important industry. Iron ores and large deposits of ilmenite were known and means for their exploitation were needed. As a result, a law was passed on March 18, 1938, in Quebec for the creation of a School of Mines, Geology, and Metallurgy, and Université Laval was assigned the responsibility of organizing it.

Gérard Letendre (1906–1988) from Saint-Germain-de-Grantham, a small village near Drummondville, had graduated from McGill University in 1932 as a metallurgical engineer. He went on to study metallurgy at the Royal School of Mines in London, as well as economics at the University of London. In 1938, he was chosen to create the Department of Mining and Metallurgy at the newly founded School of Mines.

The creation of the school was an effort by the then Union Nationale government led by Maurice Duplessis to graduate French Canadian mining and metallurgical engineers for the industry in Quebec. Duplessis himself was a Laval graduate. The School of Mines was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Mines of Quebec because the Ministry of Education had not yet been founded.

Construction of a building to house the school immediately started on Boulevard de l’Entente next to the School of Chemistry. In 1941, the building was officially inaugurated.

In 1970, Laval University was granted a new charter, which allowed it to be detached from the Séminaire de Québec. Over the years, the name of the department has changed to reflect its changing activities. It became the Department of Mining and Metallurgy in 1974, the Department of Mining and Metallurgical Engineering in 1980, and then the Department of Mining, Metallurgical, and Materials Engineering in 2000.

— With files from Fadi Habashi.