



*Female Enterprise Behind
the Discursive Veil in Nineteenth-
Century Northern France*

BÉATRICE CRAIG



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Introduction: Middle-Class Women and Business in Nineteenth-Century Northern France

Middle-class women? In business? In northern France? This subtitle will certainly cause women, business and even French historians' eyebrows to rise. The exclusion of this particular group of women from the economic sphere is indeed widely accepted, and attributed to the spread of the "separate sphere ideology". Early modern societies had been able to accommodate women in business. They had conceived gender as a hierarchy, and women were misbegotten males—not the "opposite" sex.¹ Men and women therefore could operate in the same spheres, as long as women worked under the authority of men, as agents of men, or as substitutes for incapacitated, absent or dead males—as "deputy husbands", to use L.T. Ulrich's apt phrase.² The late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, on the other hand, placed a renewed emphasis on a perceived opposition between the sexes, and men and women were reconceptualized as belonging to separate and complementary spheres. Men claimed for themselves the public sphere of politics, and by the same token constructed women as "non-public" beings, who naturally belonged to the domestic sphere.³ This new definition of women as exclusively domestic creatures gradually superseded the older ideal. In addition, in France, the separate sphere ideology was inextricably linked with the republican project—but conservative and even reactionary aristocratic circles espoused it as well.⁴

Northern France's female withdrawal from the economic sphere has been detailed by Bonnie Smith. Her *Ladies of the Leisure Class* was

published before gender entered the historian's analytical toolbox—but it could be read retrospectively in the light of later theories. Smith's study focuses precisely on the northern French women who are the subjects of this study. She describes an early nineteenth-century inhabited by petticoated captains of industry whose daughters and granddaughters turned their back on the man-made world of capitalism. They retreated into a parallel world controlled by natural and supernatural forces: reproduction and religion, and they used their activities to construct their own sense of *bourgeois* identity.⁵ Smith's work has become the standard depiction of French middle-class women.⁶ Cultural historians have even discovered a stridently anti-feminist discourse linking women in Parisian public spaces (*Palais Royal* galleries, market stalls and the stock exchange) with disorder. Women in public were public women—that is to say, prostitutes.⁷ This image of the fully domesticated nineteenth-century French middle-class woman is so prevalent that one historian has referred to it as a “truism”.⁸ More recently, Rebecca Rogers still noted that despite criticisms, Smith's work remains “the dominant interpretation of women from the French middle-class.”⁹

Local antiquarians told similar stories, describing early nineteenth-century northern French women in business—but almost never mentioning more recent ones.¹⁰ It is as if the railways and gas lights had chased them away. Late nineteenth-century women are described as good mothers, ladies bountiful and pious Christians. Mgr Baunard's characterization of the mother and sister of Catholic leader and manufacturer Philibert Vrau is typical of this trend. He depicts the mother, Sophie Aubineau, as faithfully helping her husband for 43 years. In his will, the latter had expressed the desire that she takes over the business after his death. But when he died in 1870, Sophie was 61 and suffering “atrociously” from chronic migraines. She had to retire, and she spent her remaining years in her bedroom, tended by her dutiful daughter Marie Feron-Vrau, who even slept next to her bedroom.¹¹ Marie Feron-Vrau, for her part, is described as a saintly woman, whose whole life was subsumed to those of her brother and her husband, who was also her brother's business partner. Marie's role in the business was the spiritual, and secondarily, the material well-being of the young female labor force.¹²

Late nineteenth-century sources were generally reluctant to admit that women of the better sort may have stooped to doing something as crass as making money, and the phenomenon was not limited to northern France. *Liqueurs Marie Brizard* (Marie Brizard Spirits) is named after the co-foundress. She and her partner, and soon-to-be nephew-in-law

Jean-Baptiste Rogers, built a successful distillery business using an original recipe for an anis-based liquor in the late eighteenth century. But as Bonin notes, their descendants could not accept—or be satisfied—with the fact that Marie had been a businesswoman. A 1912 family history states that she put her liquor, which claimed to have medicinal values, on the market out of charity towards sufferers who would benefit from the product: she was rich and did not need the money. Even a 1960 brochure about the company pays as much attention to her alleged charitable motives as to her business skills. The founding myth, concludes Bonin, mixed exoticism, “femininity and grace” (the liquor was marketed as a genteel beverage) and philanthropy (the liquor was good for the drinker), with initiative and business skills.¹³ Koleen Guy found the same phenomenon in Champagne. Widows ceased to direct champagne firms at the end of the nineteenth-century, when the champagne families ceased to reside on their estates. Contemporaries, however, found those still at the helm of the family firms before that time troubling. They could not accept them for what they were—entrepreneurs—and they recast them as weeping widows piously tending their husband’s legacies.¹⁴

At mid-century however, contemporaries were more willing to recognize women’s importance in business, and might have doubted that the shift to domesticity was a positive development. In 1852, local politician Pierre Legrand feared that the hard-working *Femme du bourgeois de Lille* belonged to a rapidly disappearing breed. Twenty years previously, daughters of merchants or nearby farmers hired themselves out as shop assistants in their teens, learned the trade, and then opened their own stores. This made them desirable marriage prospects. Marriage did not put an end to their activities, and they continued running their shops while their husbands pursued their own occupations. Everybody led a respectable and sedate life, where family dinners and outings to city parks and suburban villages were the main sources of entertainment. Prosperity resulted from all this hard work. Now, in the early 1850s, the men were sitting on councils or getting militia commissions. Their wives put into their heads that they had to have a social life, go to the theatre or to balls, and drop their visiting cards around town. But they still did their own shopping, haggled with the fishmongers over the freshness of their wares, and supervised shop assistants and workers during the day. The coming generation of young ladies, however, looked down on housekeeping, could not read fishes’ gills to save their life, and just barely bothered with the family business paperwork. The trades were clearly becoming gentrified, and were losing interest in lives in business. Peering into his crystal ball, Legrand saw the *petites*

bourgeoises of his youth metamorphosing into glittering socialites, and this made him uneasy. Hard work and thrift had made the city prosperous. Could female elegance and display, and male civic involvement succeed equally well?¹⁵ Women were deserting the economic sphere and retreating into a domestic and social one, and the men were increasingly getting involved in civic activities from which women were excluded.

For its part, the collective memory has little remembrance of businesswomen. Even a recent volume, produced deliberately to make invisible women visible, Bernard Schaeffer's 700-page *Dictionnaire des femmes du Nord*, lists only 21 large-scale businesswomen (at the head of manufacturing or trading firms) between the late eighteenth and the late twentieth centuries. All but two were born before 1875 and half of them died before 1900.¹⁶ The *Dictionnaire*, on the other hand, is full of female union leaders, *résistantes*, and women religious. Schaeffer's *Dictionnaire* is based not on archival work, but on questionnaires sent to people and organizations asking them if they knew any "women worthies", and on family and regional histories. Very few of Schaeffer's informants remembered any women of business.

French business historians, for their part, corroborate Smith, when they do not make her conclusions their own. They too argue that by the early nineteenth-century, business had become "male". Chassagne, for instance, is unambiguous about the separation of the spheres: "Firms often drew on the family for their managers and capitals, but were never coterminous with them; the sphere of capitalist production and the sphere of reproduction crossed each other, but did not overlap. Women (wives or widows), minor children, adults indifferent to business or untalented were excluded from the former."¹⁷ Verley notes the existence of "energetic business widows" at the beginning of the nineteenth-century who ensured a smooth transition from one generation to the next. But his discussion of later partnerships refers to widows entering into associations with their children or, when no son was interested, with an "employee able to manage the business." Widows, in other words, were no longer capable of managing a family business. Only men had the required skills.¹⁸ Women were merely sources of capital (for their husbands, who could use their dowries) or ways for fathers to acquire competent substitute sons (as sons-in-law). Some later historians, like Jean-Claude Daumas, in his work on the French woolen industry, explicitly and heavily draw on Smith to explain the roles of those entrepreneurs' wives: their place was in the domestic sphere and their role, reproduction.¹⁹

Historians of the “petty middle-class” (craftsmen and retailers) readily adopted the separate sphere paradigm and argued that this class modeled its behavior on the one of its social “betters”. The better-off members of the petty bourgeoisie became reluctant to visibly involve women in the business, and kept them in the back room doing paperwork.²⁰ Retailers and craftsmen may have been aping their betters as they became more “bourgeois”, as Legrand implied for Lille; or they adapted the male breadwinner ideology which was spreading among skilled and unionized workers.²¹ The range of trading activities in which those women engaged would have narrowed, and female retailers were increasingly ghettoized into small, short-lived neighborhood grocery stores and haberdasheries. The spread of the separate sphere ideal, then, did not necessarily lead to the demise of female retailers, but to their marginalization and immiseration.²² The only exceptions were dressmaking and millinery, high-end activities with a strong female presence.²³

Mimi Lamour (see chapter appendix), the creation of Alexandre Desrousseaux, the most famous mid-nineteenth-century dialectal song writer in and around Lille, may be a fictitious example of this change. In this city, workers and craftsmen were in the habit of gathering in singing societies and meeting in local pubs to perform their work, and that of others. Many of Desrousseaux’s songs were thumbnail sketches of daily life or portraits of real or archetypal characters. *Mimi Lamour*, written in the early 1860s, staged a young woman who was running a pub. Her lingering presence behind a counter in the 1860s could be explained by her social class (lower middle-class or “petty bourgeoisie”): It was only a matter of time before the likes of her would emulate their betters and withdraw into the parlor. Another reading of the song, however, suggests that Mimi may not have been so different from the *femme du bourgeois* as first seems. The very popular Desrousseaux was an upwardly mobile, mid-century working-class man. As such, he took working women for granted. But he had begun to imagine some of those working women as typical bourgeois: chaste, obsessed with cleanliness, caring, and non-mercenary. Like women of previous generations, Mimi operated in the “public sphere”. But does the song really depict her as a true businesswoman? She had been in business (as a linen draper—*marchande de toiles*), but as soon as her economic situation had allowed, she had given it up for a public form of domesticity. Sturdily beautiful, fairly young, and healthy (she had all her teeth and a good head of hair), Mimi was sweetheart, big sister, and mother rolled into one. A childless widow, she treated her customers

like her own children. She treated men who could not hold their liquor with indulgence—as long as they behaved suitably like helpless little boys. Despite her moniker, Mimi was no sleep-around; she was a respectable woman who tolerated no disruptive behavior in her pub. Desrousseau wanted us to believe Mimi had opened a public house because she enjoyed people’s company; he presents her as a nurturer of social relationships who paid scant attention to the bottom line. Profit had to take care of itself. In this respect, she was quite different from her male counterpart “Batisse”, the publican of the *P’tit Chav’tier* (The Little Shoemaker), a “good devil”, but an ambitious one. Batisse sold beer and cooked food, rented rooms by the week—no credit was given on rent—and was so rushed off his feet that he had no time to socialize with his customers. But surely, he would retire a landlord, and live off his means.²⁴ Batisse was in business to make money. He never lost sight of the bottom line; Mimi appears to have been oblivious to it.

But were the “spheres” as separate as those accounts suggest? Other sources tell a different story. Articles of association and family papers bear witness to Sophie Aubineau’s continuing involvement in the family business after her husband’s death, in flagrant contradiction of Baunard’s claim.²⁵ Sophie’s experience may not have been so unusual. According to the local city directory, one could find in Lille as late as 1890 female carpenters and cabinet makers, clockmakers, printers, housepainters, saddlers, coopers, farriers, lime makers, roofers, public contractors, public car operators and haulage contractors, not to mention three dentists, a pharmacist and an optician, as well as several spinning-mill owners, manufacturers and dye-work operators. They conducted their business alongside an even larger number of female retailers.²⁶ How then can we explain the contradictions between historians’ depictions on the one hand, narrative accounts, collective memory and fiction on the other, and the brittle pages of the directories and tax rolls, stubbornly listing women in business year after year till the outbreak of the Great War?

We may first rethink our understanding of the “separate spheres”. This ideology and its impact on women from the industrious middle-classes was most clearly articulated by Davidoff and Hall in their seminal *Family Fortunes* (1987 and 2001) and quickly turned into a paradigm, a ready-made set of lenses through which to understand and explain middle-class women’s experience. They asserted that in nineteenth-century England, class and gender had been mutually constitutive, and that this ideology hardened between 1780 and 1850.²⁷ The assets, and even the efforts,

of the women were often necessary for the men to succeed in the public sphere, but this contribution had to be carefully hidden. Their argument was however rapidly challenged on theoretical and empirical grounds by British and American historians. Far from being hegemonic, the separate sphere ideology was one prescriptive discourse among several, albeit a very loud, even deafening one. At a theoretical level, Amanda Vickery reminded us that one should not confuse prescription with description. The separate sphere ideology could have been a reaction to women's growing involvement in activities which took place outside the home.²⁸

Other historians have noted that gender definitions and gender relations, including the definitions of male and female "spheres", were not static, but were constantly challenged, reshaped and rethought, in words and in action. For instance, women reformers carved spaces for themselves in the public sphere by capitalizing on the notion that they were innately different from men.²⁹ Historians' new interests in culture and in consumption have also broadened our understanding of women's activities in the public sphere. They have uncovered middling and elite women who were producers and consumers of cultural goods, who were involved in political activities divorced from philanthropy and social reform, who were participants in the process of constructing national identities, and who were central to the "consumer revolution."³⁰

The revisionists, however, have been less interested in middle-class women's economic activities, with some exceptions. British historians have discovered that British women played a significant but discreet role in the world of investment and finance.³¹ Investing is not "business" in the strict sense of the term, but the existence of a significant pool of active female investors, some with important assets, is a reminder that, as Green and Owens noted: "Without recognizing the variety of means by which single women could acquire wealth, and the ways in which these means changed over time, it is difficult to argue convincingly about any shifts in the relationships between gender and economic activity."³²

Some historians have also shown that manipulating the separate sphere ideology could yield economic, as well as social or political dividends. Women could create commodities they were particularly well-positioned to sell: domesticity and femininity. The phenomenon occurred in the United States and allowed women to monopolize some trades like dressmaking and millinery, and later to play a key role in the development of the cosmetic industry.³³ Crossick and Haupt's synthesis hints that a similar process may have been at work in Europe: women were engaged in significant

numbers in millinery and fashion, both high-end forms of commerce.³⁴ Work on Britain and Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century supports this notion of an emerging feminine sector among high-end and mid-brow retailers.³⁵ The male/female and public/private dichotomies did not coincide, but it could be good business to pretend they did.

However, the strong sexual segregation of the business world depicted by those authors may indicate that women were not expected to engage in every kind of activity that struck their fancy, and were supposed to confine themselves to the ones appropriate to their sex. Women were allowed in the public sphere of trade as long as their activities reinforced gender stereotypes. Women who displayed “unfeminine” acquisitiveness or business ambition may even have been penalized by their suppliers in the United States, or have lost customers in Scotland, and German and Austrian women were channeled into “feminine trades” by trade regulations.³⁶ The line separating the spheres, then, may not have circled around the economic world, but divided it and created constraints which applied only to women. Or, as Joan Scott has suggested, one should not investigate the ways in which the spheres were separate, but the ways in which the economy was segmented and how gender was used for this purpose.³⁷

Let us read Mimi’s story again, this time not through the lens of the separate sphere paradigm, but in the light of the segmented sphere concept. Mimi’s story now looks quite different. What do we get when we strip it of its romantic garb? A person who sold a commodity called domesticity to men who may not have had an opportunity to enjoy it at home. Real-life Mimis probably did exactly that. Desrousseaux, a fairly sentimental person if his songs reflect his personality, may not have wanted to fully face the fact that the Mimis he knew sold ersatz homeliness to family-deprived males. The ambiguity of the last stanza suggests he may have been a willing dupe: Mimi lets men buy her drinks- and increase her sales- while pretending indifference. She had, after all, a head for business. Gordon and Nair, finding many single and widowed women (like our Mimi) engaged in public activities, including earning a living, in Victorian Glasgow, when the separate sphere ideology was supposedly at its zenith, similarly concluded that there were female public spheres, and that “the gendering of proper spheres of activity for men and women is not *necessarily* the same as equating the female with the domestic.”³⁸

Phillips, Barker, Kay and Aston, for their part, have challenged not only the existence of a boundary between spheres- but even the very existence of an economic sphere segmented along gender lines. Although

their work covers the same time span as *Family Fortunes*, they concluded that the separate sphere paradigm did not convincingly account for the activities of married women.³⁹ Phillips argues that the Public/Private dichotomy emphasizes conflicts and obscures cooperation. As far as the “middling sorts” were concerned, the “business of life” more often than not translated into a “life in business”,⁴⁰ and Barker reminds us that the maintenance of the family was a responsibility shared by husband and wife. As the family was the site of most economic as well as social activities, wives and daughters could easily engage in both. Neither did this mean, Phillips concludes, that women were restricted to “domestic” trades or supporting roles.⁴¹ The presence of women in business did not decline during the period she investigates, nor were women marginalized or ghettoized.⁴² Although most women were clustered in feminized sectors such as retailing, small-scale manufacturing, dressmaking and millinery, running schools and providing various services to a mostly female clientele, a not negligible minority was sprinkled over the “male” business sphere.⁴³ Barker, for her part, argues that women played a key role in running businesses and in the development of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century commerce and urban life. Her book describes middle-class women as “significant economic agents and not just [as] providers of a ‘hidden investment’ in the family firm, or as wives increasingly alienated from the world of business.”⁴⁴ One could then argue that gentility, symbolized by a withdrawal from visible economic activities, was not a compelling goal for this group, which could ill-afford idle wives anyway. This social layer valued women for their work ethic rather than for their domesticity. Barker’s and Phillips’s women did not operate in “separate” or “segmented” spheres—but in a joint one, alongside their husbands, as their helpmeets or deputies.⁴⁵ Kay’s were mostly independent operators, who did not cease to be respectable because they were in business. Not much had changed in the second half of the century, according to Aston, who found far more continuities than changes in Birmingham. Women also continued to be a strong presence in retail and in certain types of craft in the second half of the nineteenth-century. Gordon and Nair found out that more middle-class women were economically active in 1891 than in 1851 Glasgow. They were neither pushed out of retail, nor ghettoized in “feminine” trade, not marginalized. They were concentrated in petty retail, but continued to be scattered throughout other areas. However, they remind us, women’s activities had always been concentrated in those sectors.⁴⁶ The situation was the same in Edinburgh. But it does not follow

that women were men's equal in this public sphere of shared activities. For instance, Barker's and Phillips's women were *feme covert*, whose rights under the common law were extremely limited, and this forced them and their families to strategize and be creative to minimize those limitations.⁴⁷ Legal restrictions on married women's activities were the norm, not the exception, just about everywhere. The sphere of business was open to women, but legal constraints and gender norms defined the nature of their agency, and the law was a greater obstacle to married women's economic activities than to philanthropic or cultural ones: business persons need to be able to contract freely.

The findings of British historians parallel those of historians working on continental Europe, but contrary to what happened in the United States, European women never monopolized a retail sector, nor were they confined to "feminine" trades.⁴⁸ Hubert Bonin's study of the Bordeaux firm Marie Brizard in the nineteenth and twentieth century documents women's slow withdrawal from active business participation, but it was far from completed at the end of the nineteenth-century. Women as mere shareholders were rather an interwar phenomenon.⁴⁹ Eliane Richard's recent study on Marseilles businesswomen in the nineteenth-century reaches conclusions similar to Phillips's and Barker's, but for the second half of the century: Marseilles businesswomen were not getting rarer as the century progressed; neither were they corralled into suitably "feminine" trades. Manufacturers of consumer goods coexisted with retailers. Like Barker and Phillips, Richard stresses the interconnection between the domestic sphere and the economy, and concludes that the separate sphere ideology was not an inescapable reality, and perhaps not even the expression of an ideal.⁵⁰ Women entered the so-called "male" sphere of business with the approval of their family and entourage. In southern France, a life in business may have continued to be part of the business of life for many women of the commercial and industrial middle class well into the twentieth century.

Nonetheless, women in large-scale business are hard to find in the historiography. In 1891, women represented a tenth of the employers in Edinburgh and 20 % in Glasgow for instance, but the majority of those women (45 %) were in the garment trade (although the majority of garment makers were not women), followed by food retailers (30 %), lodging-house keepers (10 %), stationers and booksellers and private school heads.⁵¹ Barker similarly did not find any women in large-scale manufacturing. As Gambers noted, "studying the history of women in business (especially

in the nineteenth-century) means studying the history of small business, indeed the history of very small business”, an approach which is anathema to most business historians.⁵²

The small size of women’s businesses therefore did not encourage business historians to turn their gaze away from men, but this was not the only reason why they ignored women. Existing theories of the firm and entrepreneurship made businesswomen invisible, or even unthinkable.⁵³ Businesswomen were found in family firms or heading sole proprietorships, types of ventures business historians depicted as appropriate to the pre-industrial and early industrial age, but as obstacles to later growth and development and definitively anachronistic in the twentieth century.⁵⁴ They could not attract outside entrepreneurial skills and were incompatible with outside financing. Chandler’s famous *Visible Hand* and *Scale and Scope* elegantly argued that family ownership and control were not appropriate for the large-scale, capital-intensive concerns born of the second industrial revolution. Modern firms were shareholding corporations run by professional managers hired for the purpose. Family firms, especially family-run firms, characterized underdeveloped or stagnant economies; in more advanced economies, they were found in production sectors where older characteristics still prevailed: labor-intensive niche production where economies of scope and scale were not possible. The progress of the “separate sphere” ideology should have turned upper middle-class businesswomen into outcasts; the “managerial revolution” should have made the firms in which they could still be found archaic, if not anachronistic.

Challenges to the Chandlerian paradigm were surfacing among business historians at about the same time as the separate sphere paradigm was coming under attack. To a large extent, Chandler’s challengers rehabilitated family firms. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a complete reversal of attitude towards them, not only among scholars, but also among organizational scientists, bureaucrats, and even politicians. On the one hand, the four Asian “Tigers” irrupted onto the world’s economic stage on the back of family firms whose leaders were informed by traditional, if not Confucian values. On the other, economists and social scientists were becoming increasingly aware of the fact family firms were not disappearing in western countries either. Northern France, Belgium and Northern Italy in particular bypassed the Chandlerian American corporate model, and remained dominated by family firms, and those firms did not lag behind managerial ones in terms of efficiency and profitability.⁵⁵ Even in the United States, the majority of firms are family-owned.⁵⁶ Studying family

firms no longer meant studying a dying breed, but some very dynamic and nimble-footed structures.⁵⁷

But this did not bring women back onto the stage. The manner in which “the firm” has been conceptualized often leaves out a myriad of male- and female-owned business. Chandler, for instance, defined the firm as a

legal entity- one that signs contracts with its suppliers, distributors, employees and often customers [which suggests incorporation]. It is also an administrative entity. Once established, a firm becomes a pool of learned skills, physical facilities and liquid capital. Finally, “for profit” firms have been and still are the instruments in capitalist economies for the production and distribution of current goods and services and planning and allocation for future production and distribution.⁵⁸

In this perspective a “firm” is a corporate or quasi-corporate body—not a sole proprietorship. It has an autonomous existence, can be owned or be controlled by a family, bought and sold, and passed into the hands of a large number of shareholders and be controlled by professional managers. Business historians, in Chandler’s wake, have naturalized this equation.

Yet, in conventional economic theory, corporations are not the only firms; so are single proprietorships and simple partnerships. A once very commonly used textbook, for instance, defined firms as

a unit that makes decisions with respect to the production and sale of commodities. This single definition covers a variety of business organization from the single proprietorship to the corporation, and a variety of business sizes from the unshaven inventor operating in his garage and financed by whatever he can extract from a reluctant bank manager, to vast undertaking with tens of thousands of shareholders and creditors.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, the type of “firm” the above textbook chose as example of a tiny one—the unshaven, Steve Jobs-type inventor on the eve of founding Apple is revealing; why could not a day-care center or a pet-groomer have been chosen in its place? Instead, the firms that matter are the ones expected to become large corporations—and founders are assumed to be creative *men*. Furthermore, what underlies the decisions taken by all firms, big and small, incorporated or not, the authors is profit maximization. But as Lamoreaux has argued, only corporate bodies are profit maximizers. Individuals and families, on the other hand, are utility maximizers. Once

a specific income level is reached, they maximize other rewards (safety, security, leisure, prestige, Salvation, etc.) Corporations make profits to distribute dividends; single proprietorships make a living.⁶⁰

The firm in the above quote is headed by an individual who fits nicely into existing theories of entrepreneurship, theories which make businesswomen unconceivable. There is no universally accepted definition of entrepreneur in the literature (and several conflicting theories about his or her functions). Dictionary definitions are fairly gender neutral: entrepreneurs are people who conduct a business on their own account, taking financial risks in the hope of profits.⁶¹ Any self-employed person is an entrepreneur by that definition. In practice, economists and business historians are more restrictive. Mark Casson, one of the authorities on entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, explicitly distinguishes self-employment from entrepreneurship, for instance.⁶² The merely self-employed do not gain a higher income from their activity than they would have had they chosen to become employees. Entrepreneurs, he claims, increase returns, whereas “non-entrepreneurs” are limited to static low levels of consumption and leisure. In other words, they merely make a living, and a small one at that.⁶³

German female business historians points to the role language plays in making businesswomen invisible. German-speaking economists and economic historians, who have strongly influenced English language entrepreneurship theory, not only exclusively use a masculine term to refer to entrepreneurs (*unternehmer*), but have depicted them in stereotypical masculine terms (creative destructors, inventors, innovators, pioneers, first movers, managers).⁶⁴ The most influential is probably Joseph Schumpeter, whose theory deserves a close look because his influence goes a long way towards explaining, not the absence of women from the boardrooms, but their absence from the narrative.⁶⁵ Schumpeter’s entrepreneur is not a mere businessperson and is not the same as a manager. He is the one behind all dynamic changes in the economy, the “creative destructor” who wrenches it from the path of routine. He is an innovator who introduces new goods, or new ways of producing old ones, or finds new markets, or conquers (note the term) new sources of raw material, or implements new organization of an industry. He is thus distinct from the manager (although many entrepreneurs revert to managerial roles after their burst of creativity), and typically is the founder of a new firm, or new sector of production.⁶⁶ True entrepreneurs are rare because they need “super normal qualities of intellect and will” to impose changes.⁶⁷

The Schumpeterian entrepreneur is not motivated by profit, consumption or even social status. Instead, he is driven first of all by “the dream and the will to found a private kingdom, usually though not necessarily a dynasty. The modern world really does not know any such position, but what may be attained by industrial or commercial success is still the nearest approach to medieval lordship possible to modern man ... then, there is the will to conquer, the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others, to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success, but of success itself ... Finally, there is the joy of creating, of getting things done” In other words, he was a *condottiere* born in the wrong century.

Creativity, and the will to dominate and conquer, were considered typical male attributes at the time Schumpeter was writing (1911–1934). Men similarly had been the ones who owned fiefs, and started dynasties—successions of fathers and sons. Identifying women, any women, with the Schumpeterian entrepreneur was well-nigh impossible. The entrepreneur was the ultimate alpha male, and also operated in a social vacuum. Economic and business history models and theories were therefore constructed in highly masculinist terms, which made thinking of businesswomen as anything but “exceptional individuals” extremely difficult. The businesswoman is an oxymoron.⁶⁸

Entrepreneurs themselves have been complicit in this construction. Women’s invisibility in “the firm” is not an exclusively Victorian phenomenon, and is therefore more than a consequence of a separate sphere ideology. Mulholland found few women heading large family businesses in post-1945 England. She proposes a three-stage model of family firm creation to account for female exclusion among contemporary British businesspeople and relies on theories of patriarchy as an explanatory device. Women’s labor, skills, money, and networks are key resources during the start-up phase. They are available in part because asymmetrical gender-based power relations within the family make it possible for men to control women’s resources, but not the other way around. Women are marginalized in the second phase, which she calls wealth accumulation. This phase is characterized by the reorganization of businesses along bureaucratic lines, the establishment of managerial hierarchies and the professionalization of functions. Women may still be involved in the family business, but have no power over its direction. The “managerial revolution,” in other words, pushes them out. The third phase, wealth preservation, occurs when the transfer of the business to the next generation takes place. Fathers opt for primogeniture which “transcends the link between

wifely enterprise and direct ownership in favor of the eldest son and the male line.”⁶⁹ Mulholland then blames a combination of “patriarchy” and unfavorable inheritance rules (primogeniture and exclusion of widows) for this situation, which presents some uncomfortable resemblance to the one Davidoff and Hall described.

The spread of the separate sphere ideology alone is no longer an adequate explanation for women’s exclusion from the world of business, if ever such exclusion occurred. Conceptualizing the business world as a joint sphere strongly hierarchized along gender lines as Mulholland does could account just as well for this exclusion. However, critiques of existing business history or entrepreneurship theories raise the possibility that instead of being marginalized in business, women were discursively obliterated without disappearing from the scene, an hypothesis largely supported by the evidence that will be presented here.⁷⁰

Northern middle-class women played a greater economic role than historians have long believed, and that contemporaries were willing to admit. In the district of Lille, women did not disappear from the business world. The evidence from the city directories suggests a reality at odds with the femininity imagined by contemporaries. 13.7 % of Lille retailers were women in 1830, and 21 % in 1902; in 1830, 6.4 % of the wholesalers and manufacturers were women, and the long-term trend line remained flat till the early years of the twentieth century.⁷¹ In Lille (and in nearby Tourcoing, whose inclusion in this study will be explained later), women continued to run businesses large and small, and also to administer their estates and to invest. The retail sector was only moderately segregated: women ran every kind of store, and almost no retail sector was dominated by a majority of women. The ones whose activities we can document are only the tip of the iceberg. We are then faced with three groups of question. First, what role did northern French women actually play in retail and manufacturing in the nineteenth-century? Secondly, what can account for their persistence, despite the existence of an apparently dominant separate sphere ideology? Was it a matter of structural or legal factors? Lawrence Klein suggests we should ask what “the theory of actual practice” really was.⁷² What did women think they were doing when they stepped out of the parlor and into the counting house or behind the counter to engage in activities deemed “public”? Were they really crossing some invisible barrier between spheres when they left the domestic one? And finally, how and why were they erased from the collective memory? Was there a link between a (gendered) representation of the business person and class

identity? Twenty-seven women were heading industrial or wholesale trading firms in Tourcoing in 1911 (11 % of all such firms), and one had been at the helm since 1867. No one seems to know about them. Why?

Women's persistence in business and related economic activities was a matter of necessity (especially among retailers and very small businesses) and of economic organization, but also of broadly defined cultural factors. Practices changed little over the century because few people saw any reason to question time-honored ways of running a family business. The newly minted 'separate sphere ideology' did not give them pause because as far as they were concerned, there was nothing public about business. On the other hand, the manner in which sources were constructed, mid-twentieth century industrialists' dynastic discourses, and scholarly frameworks combined to erase those women from collective memory and history.

Businesswomen's invisibility in the literature and even in the sources calls for the use of a very wide methodological and theoretical net. The first step is to make those invisible women visible, which is best achieved using the methods of the 1960s and 1970s: quantitative history using routinely generated sources leavened with anecdotic and biographical evidence. The second and more analytical step consists in elucidating the factors that made women's economic activities possible—or difficult. It is tempting to follow the lead of social science historians and try to modelize the data. As we shall see, this would be more than reductionist. It would lead us to walk past a critical dimension of the phenomena—the extreme flexibility of gender norms which were easily modified to fit individual situations. Lastly, we need to explain why women in business have been forgotten and their very existence even denied. To do so, we must take another historiographical and epistemological turn. This erasure is the result of a later process of gender construction which recast entrepreneurs as individuals displaying quintessentially masculine attributes, and men from a certain socio-economic category as by definition entrepreneurs. Gender theories as they pertain to the construction of masculinity are helpful—but so are theories of entrepreneurship, and their recent feminist critique. The project thus takes us from the “women worthies” approach to postmodernism.

Before going further, we also need to clarify the meaning of some of the terms used. As the discussions above demonstrate, terms like “businessperson”, “firm” and “entrepreneur” are not transparent; neither are middle class/classes/bourgeoisie/bourgeoisies.

My working definition of “entrepreneur” is the dictionary’s—which makes no assumption about the sex of the owner, his or her goals, or the size and legal status of the enterprise. However, we should not too readily assume that women’s enterprises were almost by definition tiny. Although I will use the phrase “Firm of Husband&Wife” as a label for any conjugal economic partnership, I will equate firms in general neither with any business (as economic textbooks do), nor with corporations (as most economists and business historians do), for reasons that will be clearer in Chap. 2. Instead, I will categorize as firms businesses which were tangible, physical sites of production or trade, and which could be conceived by observers as entities distinct from the person(s) who owned them. Firms may or may not be incorporated, and in the region under consideration, they rarely were.

Bourgeois/bourgeoisies or middle class/classes are not transparent terms either—nor are they exactly synonymous. There is an abundant literature on both sides of the English Channel discussing who made up the “middle-class,” whether one should refer to it in the singular or the plural, when it rose to prominence as an economic or political agent, but also whether this “middle” was a class at all and whether it should be defined in structural-material or cultural terms.⁷³ This opens the door to another debate about what exactly constitutes a “class,” and, if classes must be conscious of their existence, what constituted this middle-class or bourgeois identity that defined it and how it was constructed. This, however, can easily lead to a dead end, as it presumes homogeneity among the “middle-class” (singular) that never existed. What did a butcher have in common with a judge, a high-school teacher and a foundry owner? My working definition of the middle classes (plural) is consequently a deliberately broad, generic one: everyone above wage-earner who was not an aristocrat. The majority of those people were the ones eighteenth century and early nineteenth-century England called “the middling sort” or middling classes, trading classes or commercial classes, and whom Margaret Hunt defined as “shopkeepers, manufacturers, better-off independent artisans, civil servants, professionals, lesser merchants, and the like. Those people were beneath the gentry, but above the level of the laboring classes; most of them worked for a living, although a growing number lived wholly or partially on rental income and other investments.”⁷⁴

This group includes the large scale merchant-traders of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, and even the wealthy yeomen who traded and put out material alongside their other activities. One can argue

with justification that they were not really “middling.” However, for all their wealth, they were not at the apex of the social hierarchy. In Old Regime France in particular, this place was occupied by the local gentry and office holders. And until the middle of the nineteenth-century, estate owners, whose fortune and income were not hostages to the vagaries of the business cycles, or to the war of the moment, were still considered the natural elite. The electoral system favored them, and it was among them that many a mayor was chosen, for instance.

Furthermore, the middling sorts were a variegated group which did not homogenize in the course of the nineteenth-century. By the end of the nineteenth-century, the largest manufacturers, now called “industrialists”, could not be considered “middling” by any stretch of the imagination. But those grand-bourgeois were descendants of middling out-putters or spinners, and their family’s wealth accumulation and simultaneous upward social mobility had an impact on their women’s (and men’s) economic activities. Consequently, they remain part of our story.

NOTES

1. Laqueur, *Making Sex*; Gray, *Productive Men and Reproductive Women*; Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*.
2. Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 36. The phrase does not imply that women were systematically and formally empowered (by a power of attorney), only that they were expected to do their husband’s work anytime he could not do it himself.
3. Clark, *The struggle for the breeches*, 8. Laqueur, *Making Sex*.
4. Darrow, “French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity”; Heuer and Verjus, “L’invention de la sphère domestique au sortir de la Révolution”; Landes, *Women in the Public Sphere*.
5. Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*.
6. Michelle Perrot, in her introduction to the diary of a young woman from the Parisian upper class, draws explicit parallels between Caroline Brame’s life and the ones of Smith’s “bourgeoises du Nord”: Perrot, “Caroline, une jeune fille du faubourg Saint-Germain...,” 433 fn 19; Earlier English-language authors who accepted this depiction include: Lynch, *Family, Class and Ideology in Early Industrial France*, 56; Accampo et. al. , *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform*, 45 and 197, fn67; Coffin, *The Politics of Women’s Work*, 8; Frader and Rose, *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, 13; Foley, *Women in France since 1789*, 54.

- Two synthetic works, one on French women in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the other on European women and work, use Smith's findings as examples of the changing position of French middle-class women: McMillan, *France and Women 1789–1914*, 60; Simonton, *A history of European Women's Work*, 156–157.
7. Thompson, *The Virtuous Market Place*.
 8. Auslander, "The Gendering of Consumer Practices," 79.
 9. Rogers, *From the Salon to the School Room*, 9.
 10. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*; Gaston Motte, *Motte-Bossut: Un homme, une famille*; [Gaston Motte ed.], *Motte-Bossut, une époque*; Toulemonde, *Naissance d'une métropole*; Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles du patronat textile*; Faucheux, *Mon histoire*, 377–379; *Peignage Amédée-Prouvost et Cie.*; Prouvost. *Souvenirs de notre famille*, 12; Eugène Motte, *Centenaire d'Alfred Motte-Grimonprez*, 19 and 93; Taillard, *Recueil d'actes des XII et XIII siècles*, 295; Briet, *Le droit des gens mariés dans les coutumes de Lille*, 32.
 11. Baunard, *Les deux frères*, 247–248.
 12. Baunard, *Une âme réparatrice*.
 13. Bonin, "Les femmes d'affaires . . .," 108–110.
 14. Guy, "Drowning her Sorrows," 505–514.
 15. Legrand, *La femme du Bourgeois de Lille*.
 16. Schaeffer, *Dictionnaire des femmes du Nord*.
 17. Chassagne, *Le coton et ses patrons*, 583.
 18. Verley, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs du XVIIIe au début du XXe siècle*, 78.
 19. Daumas, *Les Territoires de la laine*, 239–241.
 20. Crossick and Haupt, *The petite Bourgeoisie in Europe 1780–1914*, 87 and 92; Daumard, *La bourgeoisie parisienne de 1815 à 1848*, ch. 5 "Les femmes" esp. 361 and 369; Alter, *Family and the Female Life Course*, 106; Haupt, "The Petite Bourgeoisie in France, 1850–1914," 100; Davidhoff and Hall, *Family Fortune*, 240, 302, 312.
 21. Seccombe, "Patriarchy Stabilized"; Jordan, "The Exclusion of Women from Industry"; Frader, "Engendering Work and Wages"; for departures from this norm, see: Creighton, "The Rise of the Male Breadwinner Family"; Hanagan, "Family, Work and Wages."
 22. Crossick and Haupt, *The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe*, 87 and 92; Alter, *Family and the Female Life Course*, 106; Haupt, "The Petite Bourgeoisie in France," 100; Davidhoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 240, 302, 312.

23. Haupt, “*The Petite Bourgeoisie in France, 1850–1914*,” 100; Daumard, *Bourgeoisie parisienne*, 260; Alter, *Family and Female Life-Cycle*, 107; Crossick and Haupt, *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans*, 7; Crossick and Haupt, *Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe*, 72, 74; Davidhoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 240, 302, 312.
24. BN, Ye 7182–190 “L’cabaret du P’tit Chav’tier,” par la Société du petit couteau au “Jardin de la digue,” 1863 (Ah, the publican of the “Little Shoemaker” has known how to conduct his business).
25. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de sociétés, 6U2/653, 8-4-1871; Archives des établissements Vrau [AEV], PCI 28-13, Biography of Sophie Vrau by Camille Feron-Vrau; Lettres de Mme Vrau à Mme Feron-Vrau, 1876–1886.
26. Ravet-Anceau, ed., *Annuaire du commerce*, 1890.
27. Davidhoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*; a similar argument had been put forward for the United States by Mary Ryan: Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*.
28. Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres”; Linda Colley made the same point in *Britons, Forging the Nation 1707–1837*; see also Gordon and Nair, “The Economic Role of Middle-Class Women in Victorian Glasgow,” and *ibid.*, “The Myth of the Victorian Patriarchal Family.”
29. Evans, *The Feminists*; Offen, *European Feminism, 1700–1950*; Paletschek and Pietrow-Ennker eds., *Women’s Emancipation Movements In The Nineteenth-century*.
30. For instance (this list is not exhaustive!): De Grazia, and Furlough, eds., *The Sex of Things*; Auslander, “The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-century France”; Roberts, “Gender, Consumption and Commodity Culture”; Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*; Walton, and Jacob, “Feminine Hospitality in the Bourgeois Home”; Walton, *France at the Crystal Palace*; Brown, “The Gendering of Cultural Consumption”; Butsch, “Bowery b’hoys and Matinee Ladies.”

Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707–1837*; Morgan, “A sort of Land debatable”; Morgan, *A Victorian Woman’s Place*; Gurney, “The Sublime of the Bazaar”; Reidi, “Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire”; Aaslestad, “Material Identities: Tradition, Gender, And Consumption.”

Weatherill, “A Possession of One’s Own”; Finn, “Women, Consumption and Coverture”; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Rappaport, “The Halls of Temptation”; Nenadic, “Middle Rank

- Consumers and Domestic Culture”; Auslander, *Taste and Power*; Leach, “Transformation in a Culture of Consumption.”
31. Freeman, Pearson and Taylor, “A Doe in the City”; Beachy, Craig and Owen, *Women, Business and Finance*, 32; Preda, “The Rise of the Popular Investor”; Owens, “Making some Provisions ...”: Maltby and Rutterford, “She Possessed her Own Fortune”; Rutterford and Maltby, “The Widow, the Clergyman and the Reckless”; Wiskin, “Businesswomen and Financial Management”; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 211 and 278.
 32. Green and Owens, “Gentlewomanly capitalism?” 531.
 33. Gamber, *The Female Economy*; Gamber, “A gendered Enterprise”; Lewis, *Unexceptional Women*; Eldersveld-Murphy, “Her Own Boss”; Eldersveld-Murphy, “Business Ladies”; Sparks, *Capital Intentions*; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*.
 34. Crossick and Haupt, *Petite Bourgeoisie*, 93.
 35. Sharpe, “Gender in the Economy”: Kay, “Retailing, respectability and the independent woman”; Gordon, and Nair, “The Economic Role of Middle-Class Women in Victorian Glasgow”; Schötz, *Handelsfrauen in Leipzig*; Bandauer-Schöffmann, “Businesswomen in Austria”.
 36. Gammers, “A gendered enterprise”; Nenadic, “The social Shaping of Business Behaviour”; Bandauer-Schöffmann, “Businesswomen in Austria”; Bandauer-Schöffmann, “Wiener Geschäftsfrauen um die Jahrhundertwende”; Schotz, “Female traders and Practices of Illicit Exchange”; Schötz, *Handelsfrauen in Leipzig*.
 37. Scott, “Comment”, 242–249.
 38. Gordon and Nair, *Public Lives*, 234–235.
 39. Phillips, *Women in Business*; Barker, *The Business of Women*; Aston, “Female Business ownership”; Kay, *The Foundations of Female Entrepreneurship*.
 40. Phillips, *Women in Business*, 13.
 41. Phillips, *Women in Business*, 258.
 42. Phillips, *Women in Business*, 9.
 43. Aston, “Female Business Ownership in Birmingham”; Barker, *The Business of Women*; Burnette, *Gender, Work and Wages in Industrial Revolution Britain*; Kay, *The Foundations of Female Entrepreneurship*; Nenadic, “The social Shaping of Business Behaviour”; Phillips, *Women in Business*; American and Canadian historians have reached the same conclusions: Baskerville, *A silent revolution?*; Buddle, *The Business of Women*; Eldersveld-Murphy, “Business Ladies”; Gamber,

- The Female Economy*; Sparks, *Capital Intentions*; Lewis, *Unexceptional Women*.
44. Barker, *The Business of Women*, 3.
 45. Their conclusions are similar to the ones reached by Alison Kay for London and by Penelope Lane for the East Midland: Alison Kay *The Foundations of Female Entrepreneurship*; Lane, "Women, Property and Inheritance."
 46. Gordon and Nair, *Public Lives*, 186. The comparison is with Peter Earle's *London: A City Full of People*.
 47. Finn, "Women, Consumption and Coverture"; Finn, "Working-Class Women and the Contest for Consumer Control"; Sohn, *Chrysalides*.
 48. Bandauer-Schöffmann, "Businesswomen in Austria"; Jaumain, "La boutique à la fin du XIXe siècle"; Lemmens, "De Brusselse middenstandvrouwen in de tweede helft van de 19de eeuw"; Palazzi, "Economic Autonomy and Male Authority"; Piette, "Trajectoires féminines"; Schötz, *Handelsfrauen in Leipzig*; Schrover, "De affaire wordt gecontinueerd door de veduwe"; Van den Heuvel, *Women Entrepreneurship*; Van Molle, and Heyrman, *Vrouwen zaken vrouwen*.
 49. Bonin, "Les femmes d'affaires dans l'entreprise girondine."
 50. Richard, "Des Marseillaises en affaires...": "Ce qui commence à devenir aujourd'hui une évidence incontestable ne l'était pas il y a quelques décennies, quand la formule « aux hommes l'espace public, aux femmes l'espace privé » était communément admise, non seulement comme l'énoncé d'un principe souhaité, mais comme l'expression d'une réalité impossible à transgresser," 101. See also Richard, "Femmes chefs d'entreprises à Marseille."
 51. Nenadic, "The social Shaping of Business Behaviour."
 52. Gamber, "A gendered enterprise," 192.
 53. Gamber, "A gendered enterprise," 192; For other critiques, see Walsh, "Gendered Endeavour"; Galvez Munoz. "Challenging a gender neutral business history"; Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women*.
 54. Casson, "The Economics of the Family Firm": Colli *The History of Family Business*, 7–8; Chandler, "The US, seedbed of managerial capitalism"; Chandler, *Scale and Scope*.
 55. Colli, *The History of Family Business*; Colli, Fernandez Perez, and Rose, "National Determinants of Family Firm Development?" Casson, "The economics of the Family Firm"; Church, "The Family Firm in Industrial Capitalism"; Jones and Rose, "Family Capitalism";

- Nenadic, "The Small Family Firm in Victorian Britain"; Rose, ed. *Family business*.
56. Villalonga, "Financial Management."
 57. Theoreticians were also moving away from traditional models, and their new frameworks had room for mainstream family firms in industrial economies. Transaction cost theory can explain why family forms outperform managerial ones in some sectors, or in some specific historical or cultural contexts: they minimize agency risks. New Institutionalism and evolutionary theory undermines the "one size fits all" form of modeling bequeathed by modernization theory.
 58. Chandler, "What is a Firm?"
 59. Lipsey and Steiner, *Economics*, 6th ed., 174.
 60. Lamoreaux, "Rethinking the Transition to Capitalism."
 61. See for instance the Oxford University Dictionary or the Meriam Webster.
 62. Casson, 167; Casson, *The Entrepreneur: An Economic Theory*, 21.
 63. Casson, 167–168.
 64. Van de Kerkhof, "How Women Became Principals"; Lepp, "Verdeckt von Sombarts "Smarten Männern"?" See also Ogbor, "Mythicizing and reification in entrepreneurial discourse"; Bandhauer-Schöffmann, "Innovation und Männlichkeit"; Bandhauer-Schöffmann, "Unternehmerisches Handeln als Projektionsfläche moderner Männlichkeit"; Bandhauer-Schöffmann, "Der Schumpetersche Unternehmer"; Eifert, *Deutsche Unternehmerinnen im 20. Jahrhundert*.
 65. He is also still widely referred to. See for instance: "Global heroes-special report on entrepreneurship," *The Economist*, March 14, 2009 (special pagination).
 66. Swedberg, *Schumpeter, a Biography*, 52.
 67. Swedberg, *Schumpeter, a Biography*, 65.
 68. Bandhauer-Schöffmann, "Der Schumpetersche Unternehmer."
 69. Mulholland, *Class, Gender and the Family Business*, 4; Mulholland, "Gender, Power and Property Relations"; Mulholland, "Entrepreneurialism, masculinities and the self-made man"; See also Hamilton, "Whose story is it anyway?" and Crampton, "Is rugged individualism the whole Story?"
 70. Hamilton, "The Discourse of Entrepreneurial Masculinities (and Femininities)"; Crampton, "Is Rugged Individualism the Whole

- Story ... ”: Ogbor, “Mythicizing and reification in Entrepreneurial Discourse.”
71. Those figures are similar to the ones calculated by historians of the eighteenth century- before women were allegedly pushed out or took themselves out of the market sphere. Daniel Rabuzzi estimates that 5–10 % of the merchants engaged in overseas trade in Stralsund were women; Peter Earle, using insurance records, claims 10 % of early eighteenth century London businesses were run by women. Davidhof and Hall propose a 5–15 % range; Margaret Hunt’s and Earle’s estimates are lower: 6 %. Rabuzzi, “Women as merchants in Eighteenth Century Northern Germany”; Hunt, *The Middling Sort*; Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, 169.
 72. Klein, “Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century.”
 73. For a recent contribution of the debate, downplaying economic factors in defining the bourgeoisie, see: Harrison, “The Bourgeois after the Bourgeois Revolution.”
 74. Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 15.

APPENDIX

*Mimi Lamour**English translation (author’s translation)*

I. Mimi Lamour, a plump linen merchant
 Had lost her man, but she had money
 She followed her tastes, and opened a pub
 To make a living and enjoy herself
 Immediately this merry woman
 Chose in order to succeed
 “The friendly woman” as her sign
 One couldn’t find a better one.

Chorus

When you see her manners,
 You’ve got to say on the spot,
 That the queen of the publicans
 is indeed Mimi Lamour

II. Sh' is a widow, but don't imagine
 That sh' is ancient. She is not yet thirty-two
 And still has all her thirty-two teeth.
 Her round face has the freshness of spring
 All her hair is truly hers
 Her eyes, her lids are really so fine
 For strength, she's got no match
 She's got arms like fence posts.

III. Cleaning up every morning, that suits her fine.
 In casual: thick woolen hose and clogs,
 Sleeves rolled up, petticoat kilted at the rear
 a linen apron and the oldest of her caps
 What energy washing her place.
 How happy she is afterwards
 To see it as clean as her face
 And draws designs on the sandstone.

IV. At dusk, she puts on her best clothes
 To honor her night drinkers
 Sh' is ready, at a nod, to serve them,
 She trots, she runs between table and counter
 As there's only her to do all
 She has enough to rush and rush
 This doesn't prevent the goodwife
 from finding the time to knit.

V. Listening to me, I bet you think
 She pushes her drinks; well, people, hold it!
 On the contrary, she stops the expenses,
 When one overdoes it; if anyway
 A small stomach turns ill
 She tends him with open heart
 She makes lemonade for him
 And if not enough, green tea.

VI. But this brave woman, so good, so helpful
 Is not to have her toes stepped on!
 When an ornery drunk
 Wants to trouble the peace in her house
 Stop it, she says, you're wearing me down!
 If the man doesn't get the message
 you should see with what ease
 She puts him out the door.

VII. One speaks of the honesty of the people of Lille
 That, in justice, is our storekeepers' reputation.
 On that account, Mimi is worth a thousand
 To be the judge, offer her a pint,
 Without weighing her profit
 To be sure, she'll tell you
 More than six times: "you're welcome"
 "Whatever you want"

Dialectal original

I. Mimi Lamour, eun' gross' marchand' toilière,
 In perdant s'n homm', comme elle avot d'l'argent,
 Suivant sin goût, ell' s'a mis cabart'tière,
 Un moyen d'vive en a'iant d'l'agrémint.
 Aussiôt, cheull'femm'joyeuse,
 a pris, volant réussir,
 Pour einseinne: *A L'amiteusse ...*
 On n'povot point mieux queusir.

In veyant ses manières,
 On peut dir' sans détours,
 Que l'rein des cabar'tières,
 Ch'est Mimi Lamour.

II. Quoiq' déjà veuve, au moins, n'allez point croire
 Qu'elle est veillotte...Ell' n'a point trint'-deux ans!
 Ell' compte incor trint'-deux dints dins s'machoire,
 Et s'grosse'figure a l'fraicheur du printemps.

 Tout ses ch'veux sont bien à elle,
 Ses yeux, ses sourcils sont bien biaux;
 Pou' l'forche ell' n'a point s'parelle:
 Ses bras ch'est des vrais potiaux!

III. Tout nettoyer, chaq'matin, ch'est s'n affaire,
 In négligé: gros bas d'laine et chabots,
 Manches r'troussés, jupon r'levé derrière,
 Ecourcheu d'toile et l'pus vieux d'ses capots.

 Quelle ardeur à laver s'plache!
 Comme elle est heureuse, après,
 De l'vir prop' comm' sin visache,
 Et d'fair' des dessins dins l'grès!

IV. Quand vient la brune, elle' va s'mette in toilette,
 Pour faire honneur à ses buveux du soir.
 A les servir, à tout geste, elle est prête:
 Ell' trotte, ell' court, des tables à sin comptoir.

 Comme i n'y a qu'ell' pour tout faire,
 Elle a d'quoi s'délicoter ...
 Cha n'impêch, point qu'cheull' commère
 Trouve l'moyen d'tricoter!...

V. In m'acoutant, j'pari' qu'pus d'un d'vous pinse
 Qu'ell' pousse à l'vinte. Ah! mes gins, halte là!
 Tout au contraire, elle arrête l'dépinse
 Quand on s'écauff'...S'il arri', malgré cha,

 Qu'un p'tit buveau vient malade,
 Ell' le soign' d'un coeur ouvert,
 Ell' li fait de l'limonade,
 S'i n'va point mieux, du thé vert.

VI. Mais cheull' brave femme', si bonn', si complaisante,
I n'fait point bon qu'on li marche su' l'pié.
Quand un soulo', à l'humeur contrariante,
Veut, dins s'mason, v'nir troubler l'amitié,
 « Assez! qu'ell' li dit, cha m'lasse!»
 Si ch'l'hommm' n'intind point raison,
 Faut vir' comme elle a bonn' grâce
 A l'mette à l'por' de s'mason!

VII. On a parlé d'l'honnteté des gins d' Lille.
Avec justic' nos marchandes, ont che r'nom.
Mimi Lamour su chl'article in vaut mille,
Pour in juger, faites-li boire un canon.
 Sans péser sin biennifice,
 Soyez sûr quell' vous dira
 Pus d'six fos: « *A vot' service,*
 Savez!..Quand y vous plaira! »

Lille and Its Arrondissement in the Nineteenth-Century

Arrondissements are administrative subdivisions of *départements* created by the Revolution. The arrondissement de Lille covers 880 km², and now comprises 124 municipalities. The largest is Lille, the *département's* head town or *chef-lieu*, followed by Roubaix and Tourcoing, some 15 km to the north-east. The much smaller Armentières, to the north, is the fourth pole of the arrondissement.¹ The arrondissement of Lille, and the neighbouring one of Douai, correspond more or less to the three castellanies of Lille, Douai and Orchies acquired by Louis XIV at the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1669 and constituting the French (or Gallican) Flanders.

Louis XIV had acquired an economically advanced region, which managed to preserve its position till the de-industrialization of the late twentieth century. In the eighteenth century, its economy expanded thanks to the spread of proto-industrialization. In the nineteenth-century, the mechanization of textile production had a similar impact. Industrialization—that is, the mechanization of production and the introduction of the factory system—occurred in two steps. Machines were first introduced in spinning (late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century), then into most other aspects of textile production and a few other industries as well. Early spinning mills and their owners inserted themselves in the existing economic and social landscape without significantly modifying it. The transformations of the second half of the century had a different impact. The new modes of production and distribution

bore no resemblance to the ones existing at the beginning of the century. The range of available goods expanded qualitatively and quantitatively beyond compare; this, combined with steadily rising standards of living, led to the substantial growth and development of the retail sector. At the end of the century, the same families continued, on the whole, to dominate the social hierarchy—but they were factory owners rather than general traders like their great-grandparents. They were also considerably wealthier—and more ostentatious.

This study focuses primarily on two of the *arrondissement*'s towns: Lille and Tourcoing. Lille was chosen for an obvious reason: it is the *chef-lieu* or main town. Unfortunately, the city archives were destroyed by fire in 1916, and one has to piece its nineteenth-century history together from less reliable or less complete sources (the quantitative primary sources used in this study, and their limitations, are described in Appendix A). Tourcoing has excellent nineteenth-century administrative archives, and as the town grew at a tremendous rate as a consequence of industrialization, it is also a good locale to evaluate the impact of the latter on women's activities (Roubaix has a similar profile, and grew even more spectacularly). Armentières remained comparatively small and could not generate the critical mass of data needed for this study (see Table B1- Population in Appendix B). Tourcoing, and to a lesser extent Lille, thus provide the backbone of this study (and all the statistical data pertain to those two towns), occasionally fleshed out by qualitative information from other parts of the *arrondissement*. The availability, and amount of sources, very much determined the geographical scope of this study.

1 FROM GUILD PRODUCTION TO PROTO-INDUSTRY

The *arrondissement* was one of France's major textile districts in the nineteenth and twentieth century.² This did not happen by chance. The castellany of Lille had long shared several characteristics with other parts of Flanders: a precocious urbanization made possible by the very high productivity of the region's agriculture, and the production for export of high-end woolen cloth using English wool. When the demand for the "Old Draperies" collapsed in the fifteenth century, Lille switched to the "New Draperies", lightweight material using Spanish wool combed and spun in the surrounding countryside. The Lille weavers were organized in two guilds by 1500: one specializing in whole-wool material (*sayetteurs*) and granted a monopoly over this production; the other (*bourgetteurs*) made mixed material, a production that was not entirely prohibited to

non-guild weavers. Rural producers in and around Roubaix, Tourcoing, and in the Lys valley below Armentières immediately took advantage of this tolerance, and for the next two centuries they and the Lille guilds played a cat-and-mouse game. As soon as the guilds succeeded in having a specific material forbidden to rural producers, the latter invented a new fancy product not covered by existing rules. Conflicts were particularly acute and frequent in the mid-eighteenth century. The guilds nonetheless lost: their monopoly was revoked in 1762, although they managed to block the implementation of the law until 1777. Country producers also latched on early to a new and unregulated material: cotton. Roubaix and its neighbors began producing cotton fabric at the turn of the eighteenth century; Armentières was a cotton-producing center on the eve of the Revolution and Lille specialized in bleaching and printing linen and cotton cloth: the first linen- and cotton-printing factory (*indienne*) opened in 1765. Tourcoing, however, continued being an important producer of worsted, which was sold to extra-local hosiers and makers of braided fabric (*passementiers*).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the arrondissement was also producing large quantities of flaxen sewing thread, pillow lace and peasant linen smock-frocks (*sarraux*)—the first two for the regional and extra-regional markets. This production was orchestrated by Lille merchants. The other industries in the castellany processed local raw material for the local market: they made flour, beer, gin (*genièvre*), oil (this one had a national market), leather, soap, glassware, earthenware and china, bricks, roof and floor tiles, furniture, metalware, and river cargo boats. Agriculture was still extremely productive and commercial, putting on the market grains, root crops (potatoes were adopted earlier than in the rest of France), industrial crops (rape, poppy, hemp, camelina and flax seeds, flax, and some tinctorial plants like woad), fodder, vegetable, fruit, meat and dairy products. Most farmers rented plots of land on short leases from urban or aristocratic owners, although the better-off among them owned the small plots on which their houses and barns stood. The ideal was to be able to lease a grange or *cense*, a large, named holding with substantial farm buildings usually arranged in a quadrangle and surrounded by a moat. *Censiers* usually managed to keep the lease in the family for generations, and by the eighteenth century constituted a ‘*fermocra*’³.

With the exception of urban cloth-making, textile production was proto-industrial. The yarn used by the urban weavers and thread-makers was produced in the countryside, and regulations required that regionally spun worsted yarn be sold on the Lille market. The master-combers

(*maître-peigneurs*) purchased fleeces from local farmers or imported them (in the eighteenth century, most fleeces came from Holland); they had the fleeces cleaned and sorted in their sheds by the *détricheurs*, before sending the better wool out to be combed by domestic workers and then spun (by women) on Saxony wheels (*petits rouets*). The coarser parts of the fleeces were carded and spun (by men) on great wheels. Turning raw cotton into yarn required more labor; the fibre had to be disentangled, cleaned, blended, carded, turned into roving, then spun, plied and wound in skeins. This process was orchestrated by another group of merchants. Flaxen yarn was similarly labor-intensive. The flax had to be pulled, retted, scutched and combed before it was put on the market and purchased by merchants who had it spun, and wound into skeins. Merchant-manufacturers (*marchands-fabricants*) put out the yarn they had purchased to village and country weavers. By the late eighteenth century, the bulk of country weavers were pieceworkers, who did not even own the most important part of the loom, the heddle (the part through which the warp is threaded). Only in the Lys valley could one still find weavers who purchased their own yarn and sold their linen fabric (*toile*) on the local markets. The region's specialization in novelty fabric had made this development almost inevitable. Different fabrics required the use of different heddles, and only merchants could afford to keep an assortment of them. Weavers thus received from the merchants weft yarns and already mounted warps which they placed onto their own loom frame. Preparing warp was women's work, and this was often done by the merchant's wife. The fabric was subsequently sent to finishers in Lille for dyeing, fulling or calendering (Lille had also secured a monopoly on finishing country fabric). It was then sold on the local market or to *négociants* (wholesale general traders) who sold it on the national or international markets.

Thread-makers (*filtiers*) were also proto-industrial entrepreneurs; they were almost all located in Lille, like their labor force. They purchased spun flaxen yarn, had it twisted by (male) domestic workers, dyed in their shed and then wound into skeins by (female) domestic workers, before selling directly on the local market, or to *négociants*. Pillow lace, on the other hand, produced in towns or in the countryside, involved both independent lacemakers who purchased their own thread and sold the lace to merchants, and pieceworkers provided with thread, pillows and bobbins by the same merchants.

The production of woolen and worsted declined rapidly in the late eighteenth century, but cotton production surged. Changes in fashion led to

an increased demand for cotton material, and merchants quickly acquired jennies (called here *petites mécaniques anglaises*—little English machines). There were already 263 of them in the arrondissement in 1783. The 1786 treaty of commerce with England accelerated mechanization, as it allowed the entry of cheap English material into France. Merchants began to use machines to lower costs and resist this competition. The more productive mull-jenny was introduced in the arrondissement at the turn of the century. Machine spinning was an indirect beneficiary of the Revolution. The closing of the convents and the confiscation of aristocratic country houses put on the market buildings large enough to accommodate mechanized workshops. For instance, J-Bte Destombes opened the first cotton spinning-mill in Tourcoing in the former Ursulines convent in 1793, quickly followed by G. Desurmont at the Recollets'.⁴

The abolition of the guilds and of privileges of all sorts in 1790 made it possible for a greater number of people to engage in textile production and trade, and more importantly to carry those activities as they saw fit. Nonetheless, the Revolution and Napoleonic Wars had an overall negative impact on the local economy. They disrupted production, supply lines and access to markets; the Revolutionary paper money (*assignats*), soon devalued, had a similarly negative impact on trade. Lille was besieged by the Austrians in 1792, and the north-eastern part of the castellany was occupied by the Austrian and Dutch troops until the Battle of Tourcoing—in the center of the village—in 1794. The return of peace, accompanied by the loss of Belgium and the occupation of the region by the Saxons between 1815 and 1818, and the severe agricultural crisis of 1817–1818, further delayed recovery. The woolen industry in particular was severely affected and almost entirely disappeared, except in Tourcoing, which continued producing worsted yarn for trimmings and braided fabric (*passementerie*). There was, however, one positive legacy of the Napoleonic years: the sugar beet industry, which survived the resumption of West Indian imports.

The arrondissement thus has a long manufacturing past at the onset of the Industrial revolution. Hand-loom production was breathing its last in Lille, but a robust proto-industrial infrastructure was in place in the countryside, which bounced back quickly when peace was restored. Textile production was handled by well-established merchant families in Lille, and to a lesser extent, in the small surrounding towns. Merchants and rural producers also had a long history of adaptability and willingness to innovate and respond quickly to market demand. One of the consequences of large-scale rural production and declining urban crafts was a

precocious proletarianization of the labor force whose standard of living was very low.⁵ Country workers fared less badly as most had access to a garden plot and could keep poultry. Wool-combers even rented orchards: they hung the finished ropes of combed wool to dry on the tree branches after their final wash, and this gave Tourcoing a very bucolic look till the 1840s.⁶ But despite the setbacks of the previous decades, the Nord was the most densely populated *département* in the country at the turn of the century after the Seine, which included Paris, and it kept its position until 1841.⁷

At the dawn of the nineteenth-century, the bulk of the middling sort in the Lille arrondissement was composed of shopkeepers, craftsmen, and large leaseholders who engaged in other activities as well, of individuals living off their means (usually retirees), of merchants and *fabricants* (the name used for out-putters producing fabric). They were dominated by a small mercantile elite of mostly ancient and interrelated families, who had made their fortune in wholesale trade (*négoce*), and outside of Lille, often gained public office in recognition of their social status.

The Lille *négociants* were at the apex of the pyramid. They were the ones who purchased the bulk of the countryside's production and found markets for it. They did not specialize, although the nature of the local economy meant they traded mostly in textiles. Some also traded in commercial papers and provided credit.⁸ *Négociants* usually belonged to families who had been in this line of business for generations, and they were closely interrelated by marriage. Control of the town's government, however, had eluded them: the local nobility dominated the council of aldermen. They were not a close caste either, and immigrants from other commercial centers (like the Barrois), successful small-scale traders, and men from the countryside could integrate into it. Burgher rights, a precondition to becoming a *négociant* in the Old Regime, could be purchased for a relatively low sum (12 pounds) in the eighteenth century, and the town admitted 120 new bourgeois a year; women without husbands could even purchase burgher rights in their own name.⁹ François-Joseph Vrau, whose descendants we shall meet in subsequent chapters, was a good example of the country boy who found his fortune in town. The son of a merchant, and grandson of a *censier* from the vicinity of Tournai, he came to Lille in the late 1770s, where he joined two uncles, one of whom was a horseguard in the King's Marshalcy. He purchased burgher rights in 1780, and was listed as a *négociant* in the 1786 town Almanac. A younger brother, Jean-François, followed him,

and was admitted to the Surgeons' Guild in 1783. François-Joseph made his fortune during the Revolution brokering commercial papers without a license and speculating on *assignat*, and he used his profits to purchase confiscated Church and aristocratic properties. When the Lille exchange reopened in 1816, François-Joseph was able to post the required bond to become a licensed broker.¹⁰

Downward mobility was equally possible. The Scrive brothers, who set up a factory to mechanically manufacture cards (to card wool and cotton) in the 1820s and became quite wealthy as a consequence, reversed a worrisome trend. Their remote ancestor was a Brussels goldsmith who came to Lille in the fifteenth century; four generations later, their ancestors were house carpenters. Their father traded in second-hand clothing and made cards by hand.¹¹

In the hinterland, the economic elite typically emerged from the ranks of the *fermocratie*. Their lineage usually starts with a series of sixteenth- or seventeenth century wealthy leaseholders, who added other activities to farming: trading in sheep (their own and the ones of others), or in wool, milling, brewing, pressing oil, and putting out yarn to weavers, or a combination of the above. Economic pre-eminence usually led to some official appointment: steward for an abbey, police captain, alderman or mayor. This mercantile elite was also socially and even geographically endogamous: one married within one's network and one's parish or the neighboring ones. Existing family business histories all describe a slow but steady climb up the socio-economic ladder through the hard work of all family members, females included.¹² But the failures, the ones who sank into the ranks of smallholders or worse, and even those who manage to preserve their social and economic position without improving it, have been erased from the collective memory (and are generally ignored by genealogists).¹³

2 INDUSTRIALIZATION'S BEGINNINGS

2.1 *The Mechanization of Spinning*

Industrialization took off in the second quarter of the century, especially in the north-east quadrant of the arrondissement, and Roubaix and Tourcoing experienced extremely rapid growth as a consequence.¹⁴ The period between the Revolution and the crisis of 1827–1831 was the age of cotton and of the mechanization of spinning. Armentières and Roubaix

Table 2.1 Textile production capacity in Tourcoing, 1823

	<i>N</i>	<i>N of spindles</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>N of workers</i>	<i>Average</i>
Cotton spinners	24	57,084	2,379		
Wool spinners	14	11,650	832		
Master-combers	64			1,295	20
<i>Fabricants</i>	89			1,918	22

Source: AMTg, "Situation de la fabrique de coton, 1810–1840" 7F1C/14; Matrices de patentes, G1C1

produced little else. Lille made cotton, linen, lace and flaxen sewing thread; Tourcoing and the surrounding area, on the other hand, continued producing wool, in addition to cotton, but in the form of worsted sold on the Paris and Lyon markets. Woolen mills were fewer in number and smaller in size. (See Table 2.1)

The domination of cotton did not last. The economic crisis of the late 1820s convinced many Roubaix and Tourcoing spinners to abandon cotton and come back to wool, or to work both fibres. Cotton producers tried to compensate for their lower profits by increasing the volume of production, and until World War One, cotton mills remained significantly larger than woolen ones. Machine spinning had definitively replaced hand spinning by 1846. The first steam engines were introduced in the early 1820s, and their use spread rapidly. Their adoption encouraged growth and spinning mills got bigger and bigger. In 1823, Tourcoing cotton mills averaged 2,379 spindles; they grew to 4,600 spindles in 1852; woolen mills had only an average of 832 spindles in 1823, but 2,714 in 1852. Merchant-manufacturers (who organized the cottage textile industry) similarly employed a growing number of weavers, in sheds (*métiers réunis*), or in the home of the weavers (*métiers dispersés*): 5.2 per manufacturer in 1819, 72 in 1852.¹⁵

Armentières reverted to linen. Mechanical spinning was introduced in this industry in the mid-1830s, but the machines could only produce the coarser grades of yarn. The finer ones continued to be spun by hand. Lille remained less specialized and continued to produce cotton, linen, sewing thread and mechanical lace (an industry dominated by English entrepreneurs). Hand-lace makers, finding they could earn three times more money in any factory, or even twice as much winding thread at home, junked their pillows in a hurry. By 1840, there were practically none left in the urban areas.

The arrondissement of Lille continued to be one of the most densely populated, urbanized and industrialized in the country (255 hab/km² as opposed to 53/km² for the rest of the country in 1821). On the eve of the 1848 Revolution, 80 % of the population in Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing lived in *agglomérations*—or urban areas. The arrondissement alone regrouped 38 % of the *département's* industrial establishments, 60 % of its labor force, half its steam engines (300 in 911 factories) and accounted for two-thirds of the value of its industrial production. Half its population worked in factories or for manufacturers. And although 1.3 % of France's industrial establishments were found in the arrondissement, those were equipped with 12 % of the country's steam engines. The arrondissement also produced 5.6 % of the country's industrial goods (in value).¹⁶ (See Table B2 in Appendix B).

2.2 *Families with Businesses*

Until the Second Empire, enterprising families were carrying out a range of business activities rather than owning “a” family business. *Négociants* in particular were always on the look-out for opportunities to make money, and initially, machine spinning was nothing more than an activity among others. The language used in articles of associations reflects the slow and late emergence of the concept of the firm as an entity distinct from its owners.¹⁷ In 1813, J-Fs. Jh. Vannesburgh-Duriez, *fabricant*, Chrétien Fs. Delobel, and Jean Ant. Delobel, tavern-keeper, formed a partnership to “buy raw cotton that the association will have spun before reselling. The business will be located in a house the partners will rent for the purpose.”¹⁸ Twenty years later, not much had changed: in 1832, Chs. Henri Desurmont, wholesale trader in cotton and wool, and Paul Augustin Destombes, trader's clerk, declared forming an association “in order to operate two assortments of wool spinning machines, said assortments comprising the preparatory frames and eight fine-count mule jennies with their accessories. The business will be located in Tourcoing in a house rented for the purpose. The association may put out yarn to weave.”¹⁹ And in 1851, the brothers Alexandre and Henry Caulliez created a general partnership in order to “buy wool, cotton and other merchandise, and engage in any other commercial activities it will please them to carry out.”²⁰

As a rule, partnerships between merchants and out-putters were short lived; they were contracted for 3, 6 or 9 years, but were usually dissolved

early by mutual consent. At dissolution, each partner took back the money or equipment they had contributed and started another business, alone or in partnership. At the beginning of the century, being in business did not necessarily require much capital, and most of it was liquid, consisting in goods, commercial papers and accounts receivable. Machinery was not particularly expensive either and was portable, until manufacturers began equipping their shops with steam engines. When the Lille cotton spinner Michel Pennequin sold his machinery and merchandise to his daughter and son-in-law in 1806, the jennies were estimated at 36 Fr a piece. His spinning equipment (18 jennies, 10 spinning wheels, 8 pairs of cards, 2 winders, some baskets, scales with weights, and two stoves) were worth a total of 544 Fr. A 67 kg bale of raw cotton was worth 469 Fr (7 Fr/kg) and 35.5 kg of spun cotton 426 Fr (12 Fr/kg). A jenny therefore cost the equivalent of 5 kg of raw cotton and 3 kg of spun cotton.²¹ The following year, the widow Grenette, thread-maker, sold her business. Her equipment consisted of two twisting frames (one described as old) used to turn spun yarn into sewing thread, various fin-shaped weights (*ailettes*) to control the torsion of the thread and 10 winding wheels. The newer twisting frame was evaluated at 60 Fr; this was the equivalent of 6 kg single-ply bleached thread or a gross of finished skeins of white thread. It cost more to set up a spinning shed than a pre-industrial thread-making business, but not much more. Mid-century entry-level costs were still reasonable. The 1849 inventory of the *négociant* François Debuchy lists among others 156 kg of yarn in the hands of the weavers (851.23 Fr or 5.45 Fr/kg), 1,300 hectolitres of coal (2,301 Fr or 1.77 Fr/hectolitres), 46 Jacquart looms (3,450 Fr or 75 Fr a piece) and 230 heddles (230 Fr).²² On the other hand skills, know-how and social capital (one's own and one's family's good reputation, personal networks) played an important role in business. The success or failure of a flax or wool merchant, for instance, depended on his (or her) ability to correctly anticipate what quantity and quality of yarn could be obtained from a bundle of combed flax fibres or from a bag of unwashed fleece. Experience was therefore the best capital, and the required skills overlapped the ones of competent housewives (assessing the quality of natural products, building networks of trustworthy suppliers, and negotiating prices, for instance).

2.3 *Social Stability*

The mechanization of production in the first half of the century did not change the hierarchical nature of society nor homogenize the middling

sort into a unified bourgeoisie. There were nonetheless significant changes in their activities. It was the merchants, and usually, elite merchants, who brought mechanization to the arrondissement. Spinning cotton was a strategy adopted to increase production by putting on the market a material for which the *négociants* (wholesale traders) believed there was a growing demand. Therefore, most spinners were also *négociants* (and often continued calling themselves *négociants* until the end of the century) or out-putters who were trying to secure a more reliable source of material for their weavers. Not all branches of wholesale trading families made the switch—and those who did were not always successful. Those who were formed the core of the emerging industrial bourgeoisie, and some of their descendants operated some of the largest industrial concerns at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Tourcoing, they were joined by a significant number of middling families who successfully converted to mechanized production, or found new niches to exploit. But although upward mobility occurred, true rags-to-riches stories were extremely rare. The first phase of industrialization was like the proverbial sea that lifts all the ship as it rises (except that some of the ships capsized or were beached). The middle-classes (manufacturers, merchants, storekeepers, craftsmen, professionals and *rentiers*) also represented a stable proportion of households. In Tourcoing, 28 % of heads of household listed in the census were in this category in 1796, 26 % in 1821 and 30 % in 1851.²³ Lille was probably not significantly different. Its nineteenth-century censuses have not survived. One can however get an image of the social structure from Codaccioni's massive study of wealth distribution in Lille, based on the registration of post-mortem estate left by decedents 20 years old and above (even estates valued at zero were supposed to be registered). Middle-class people represented 40 % of all decedents in 1821 and 1856–58, dropping to a low of 33 % in 1873–75 and rising again to 40 % in the early twentieth century. The upper middle-classes (manufacturers, *négociants*, *propriétaires*, professionals) represented 7.6 % and 8.2 % of 1821 and 1856–1858 decedents (see Table B11 in Appendix B).²⁴ In Tourcoing, the proportion rose in the same way, from 7.8 % to 8.1 % between 1821 and 1851.²⁵

In the first half of the nineteenth-century, the Tourcoing middling sort was heterogeneous and stratified, but reported occupation was a very imperfect predictor of wealth and weakly structured social networks. Between 1815 and 1823, mule-jenny operatives (*fileurs à la mécanique*) left estates worth between 171 Fr and 18,000 Fr at death; wool combers

(wage-earners) between 46 Fr and 3,600 Fr; weavers, between 80 and 2,000 Fr; fleece sorters (wage-earners), 40 to 23,000 Fr, merchants and storekeepers, 408 to 66,720 Fr and *négociants* and manufacturers, 60 to 394,500 Fr. Half the latter however, left less than 10,000 Fr.²⁶ There was a considerable difference between the richest merchants and manufacturers and poor weavers and spinners, and 10 % of the deceased accounted for 65 % of the wealth—but the wealthier spinners (operatives), weavers or wool combers left greater fortunes than the poorer merchants and manufacturers. Codaccioni's study of Lille post-mortem wealth shows a greater spread in the value of estates left by decedents, but still a fair amount of overlap. In 1856, the estates of craftsmen and retailers never exceeded 250,000 Fr, but 15 % of those decedents left between 25,000 and 100,000 Fr and three, more than 100,000 Fr. On the other hand, 10 % of the *propriétaires* and 65 % of manufacturers and *négociants* left less than 25,000 Fr, and 5 % and 25 %, respectively, between 25,000 and 100,000 Fr. The differences between the wealthy and the very middling were greater in Lille than in Tourcoing and the rich were considerably richer (11 decedents left more than one million Fr), but wealth and occupation were not moving in lockstep.²⁷

Marriage contracts, which normally gave the value of the assets each spouse brought into marriage, tell a similar story.²⁸ Marriage contracts were still common among middling persons in the first quarter of the century. Between 1820 and 1829, Tourcoing grooms' personal estate was worth on the average 4,600 Fr and brides', 4,300 Fr (the median for both sexes was 1,500 Fr). Brides and grooms rarely owned any real estate. Wealthy brides and grooms were not necessarily merchants or manufacturers, nor even "bourgeois:" they included farmers, an apothecary, and a wool worker (*ouvrier en laine*), possessor of a tidy little fortune which likely helped him move upward on the social ladder. On the whole, men brought more than women into marriage. The men who signed marriage contracts in front of one of Tourcoing's *notaires* were not dowry hunters.

Wealthy brides and grooms were not *nouveaux riches* either. Nine spouses reported assets worth at least 40,000 Fr in their marriage contract during this ten-year period.²⁹ One of the grooms, Prosper-Chrétien Lepoutre, was a country merchant who chose to use the services of a Tourcoing *notaire*. He married a farmer's daughter, and settled outside of town. The other men were all descendants of pre-revolution Tourcoing persons of note; they included two Dewavrin brothers, Ubald and Philippe-Auguste, two Lemaire brothers, Auguste and Jacques, a Jean-Baptiste Desurmont, and

his cousin Antoine-Joseph Destombes. The two well-endowed women were out-of-town brides to those men. The Lemaire were the sons of a goldsmith who had emigrated during the Revolution and consequently lost his property; he bounced back after his return. In his poor days, he had married a servant.³⁰ His son Auguste, also a goldsmith, was marrying the daughter of the mayor of Roubaix, Camille Roussel. His other son, Jacques-Philippe, was a farmer, who married a demoiselle Requillard, also from Roubaix, and, like him, worth 50,000 Fr. J-Bte Desurmont could trace his family tree all the way back to Pierrard, a fourteenth century *cen-sier*.³¹ His genealogy includes burghers in nearby Tournai and Old Regime Tourcoing aldermen. His father, Gaspard Joseph († 1816),³² trader in wool, banker, and member of the municipal council, had married Marie-Anne Tiberghien, *négociante*, at the marriage of her son. He married a Lefebvre as well-pedigreed as him. The Destombes were also a patrician family, whose family tree goes back to the sixteenth century. Balthazar, born in 1550, was a miller and brewer; his descendants, and ancestors of Antoine, include a burgher of Lille and a Tourcoing alderman; his father, Pierre, who died in 1811, was a wool merchant and mayor of Tourcoing. Antoine's³³ mother was a Desurmont, a distant cousin³³ of the above J-Bte.; she was living off her means (*rentière*).³⁴ Antoine married a farmer's daughter. The Dewavrins were a more recent addition to the local elite, but nonetheless included among their forebears eighteenth century merchants and a surgeon who had been elected to the Estates General in 1789. Philippe Dewavrin married the daughter of another mayor of Roubaix, Delphine Bulteau.³⁵ His brother married the other wealthy bride in this cohort, Romaine Delebecque (80,000 Fr). She was from Ghent, but her family belonged to an ancient Tourcoing family. The very rich were therefore not new men, and often had already made their fortune before the Revolution. But they were not particularly snobbish, and did not mind being called farmers, or marrying servants when down on their luck.

The registers of marriages and births also provide a unique opportunity to identify the social networks in which individuals were embedded. The marriage register noted the name, age, residence and occupation of the bride and groom, of their parents and of the witnesses. In the case of the witnesses, their relationship to the bride or groom was also noted (sometimes in great detail, like "maternal grandfather", or "first cousin by marriage to the bride"). Birth declarations had to be corroborated by two witnesses (in addition to showing the infant, including those stillborn). In most cases, the father conscripted the constable on duty and a town-hall clerk to serve

as witness—but in a fair number of cases, he was showing up at the town hall escorted by family members or friends. Seventy-three manufacturers, merchants and *négociants* married in Tourcoing between 1820 and 1829; 37 had lost their fathers; 24 of the living fathers were manufacturers or merchants; but two each were craftsmen, farmers, or professionals, and five were landowners. The fathers-in-law were dead (38), merchants of manufacturers (21), farmers (6), craftsmen or shopkeepers (6), and one was a weaver. In the same period, the brothers, brothers-in-law, grandfathers, uncles and cousins who served as witnesses to marriages or births among manufacturers and merchants declared a wide range of middling occupations: wholesale general traders, ordinary merchants, manufacturers, master craftsmen, farmers, shopkeepers, *rentiers* (especially among grandfathers and great uncles) or traditional textile workers like weavers and spinners.

Not only did middling people have immediate relatives engaged in a wide range of occupations, but they themselves could shift occupations through their life, and they appear to have had a weak occupational identity. Brides and grooms did not necessarily declare the same occupation at the signature of their marriage contract and on their wedding day, although the two events usually occurred within a few weeks or even days of each other. For instance, the 31 men who identified themselves as *fabricant* (manufacturer) when they signed their contract in Tourcoing between 1820 and 1829 stated they were *fabricant* (13), farmer (one), wool sorter (three), merchant (one), *négociant* (one), carpenter (one), *propriétaire* (landowner, four), twister (one), weaver (four) and without occupation (two) when they showed up at the town hall. The situation was no different in the case of the brides, except that women alternated between having and not having an occupation. Forty-nine women reported no occupation when they signed their marriage contract. This was not because they were “bourgeoises” or aspiring bourgeoises. On their wedding day, two of those said they were “farmeresses” (*cultivatrices*, the feminine form of the noun), 23 *fabricantes*, 3 housekeepers, 7 seamstresses, dressmakers or milliners, 7 merchants, one spinner, one servant and two without occupation. The omissions therefore cut across social classes and occupational categories.

People’s occupational identity was therefore unstable. Among the women, the very concept of occupational identity was uncertain. This was not a new phenomenon—Natalie Zemon-Davis had already noted it in sixteenth century France.³⁶ Men knew they had an occupation—but did not always know how to define it. Weaver or manufacturer? wondered the

man who put out some work to a couple of men, but also wove on his own account. *Négociant* or spinner? wondered another who engaged in large-scale trade, but whose spinning-mill was doing a brisker and brisker business. As in the Old Regime, some probably carried out several activities simultaneously. One could be a farmer and a merchant, but also a farmer and a weaver, as weaving was still an overwhelmingly rural and home-based activity, which could be carried out during the agricultural off-season.

These hesitations and this instability could follow them their entire life. Ignace Beauque, a merchant's son, was a wool sorter when he married a shopkeeper in 1821. When he registered the birth of his children, he successively declared being a manufacturer, then a wool-sorter, and finally a foreman. Pierre Joseph Carette, also a merchant's son, was a wool-sorter too when he married a farmer's daughter (she was a *fabricante*). He then was successively, a manufacturer, a storekeeper and a tavern-keeper, before becoming a *fabricant* again. Women who gave up their trade upon marriage might resume it when widowed. Julie Defontaine, *fabricante*, married a physician in 1821. In 1852, the widow Wattel-Defontaine reappeared in the tax rolls as a *fabricante* (but was listed as a *rentière* in the 1851 census). In some cases, the children of a female manufacturer who had retired upon marriage picked up their mother's activity when reaching adulthood. Auguste Didry, farmer and then coal merchant, married the merchant Lucie Dubrulle in 1820; Auguste was identified as a farmer on his death certificate. Their son Albin was a manufacturer in 1852 and stayed in business for the next thirty years. Lucie, with whom he lived in 1851, was listed as a *propriétaire* (living off her means) in the census.

Members of the mercantile elite changed occupation or multiplied activities as easily as individuals lower on the socio-economic ladder. The Dewavrin brothers mentioned above, founders of a powerful industrial dynasty, were in turn *négociants*, manufacturers and spinners. Dewavrin-Bulteau died a *fabricant*; Dewavrin-Delebecque, a *rentier* (living off his means) in 1880. Jacques-Philippe Lemaire was in turn merchant, *fabricant*, spinner and *rentier* before becoming a sugar manufacturer. He died a flax spinner. Pierre-Joseph Pollet (d. 1822), whom we shall meet again in the next chapter, was a farmer who raised sheep, grew sugar beet, distilled gin, spun cotton and put the yarn out to weavers. His stepson, Joseph Philippe-Auguste Libert, alternated between being a gin distiller and a *fabricant* at the birth of his children. He was a spinner at the birth of his last child, and a salt-maker (*salineur*) when he died. Rather than run a specific business, those men (and occasionally their widows) took advantage

of any potentially profitable ventures that they came across, hence the absence of firm occupational identities.

The middling sorts were then composed mostly of masters who provided work for men in their shop, or put out material to be processed, or farmers who hired laborers. The difference between a merchant and an out-putter, a cooper or a carpenter, was not very big. The one between an out-putter and a weaver was not always clear either, and not necessarily permanent. Out-putters provided work, on the average, to only 3–10 weavers in the 1820s and 1830s, and the entry threshold in the activity was not very high.³⁷ And as we saw above, becoming a spinner did not require very large outlay of capital either, until the generalization of steam as power source. Pouchain even refers to them as “self-employed foremen,” as they did not market the goods whose production they organized, but sold them to *négociants*.³⁸

The social landscape was therefore dominated by a few very wealthy families towering over a mass of country merchants and craftspeople, some of whom later joined the ranks of the industrial bourgeoisie, and rural producers and merchants dependent on the Lille ones to find markets for a good part of their products. Tourcoing was very likely typical of the *arrondissement*, and the experience of the people discussed above was also probably typical of the one of all but the wealthiest *négociants* in Lille. Lambert Dansette’s study of Armentières and Pouchain’s work on industrialists in the *arrondissement* do not suggest otherwise.³⁹ As Pouchain notes: “most of the merchant-manufacturers belonged to rural lineages who had slowly improved their fortune from agriculture At that stage, it would be an exaggeration to speak of upward social mobility; only an opening of new horizons, whose promises were not yet fully understood.”⁴⁰ By the second half of the century, on the other hand, those slow social climbers reaped the benefits of their efforts—or their gambles on machines—and their fortunes expanded very rapidly. The tower was replaced by a pyramid as many rose in the social hierarchy and joined the ranks of the upper middle-class; on the other hand, significant upward mobility from the lower ranks of the middle-classes became increasingly difficult.

3 THE FACTORY AGE

3.1 *The Spread of Mechanization*

The second half of the century witnessed the mechanization of the other textile sectors. Manual wool-combing disappeared rapidly in the wake

of the 1845–48 economic crises, and the introduction of wool-combing machines in the late 1840s. Hand-weaving held out longer. In 1830, all weavers worked at home on handlooms, except for carpet weavers (in Tourcoing) and Jacquart weavers (in Roubaix). Merchant manufacturers were out-putters. Machine weaving did not become common till the 1860s, as a consequence of the American Civil War; the “cotton famine” it induced raised the price of cotton fabric. Sensing an opportunity, Roubaix and Tourcoing manufacturers put on the market cheap, light-weight woolen material, woven on power looms to cut down on production costs. Cotton manufacturers followed suit in the 1870s. Contrary to what occurred in spinning and wool combing, the machines did not immediately displace all hand workers. One must wait till the 1880s to witness a rapid and irreversible decline in the number of hand-loom weavers. Hand-weaving had almost entirely disappeared by the twentieth century. The type of fabric produced in the area made it possible for a small number of hand-weavers and small-scale producers to persist. The region made novelty fabric for the fashion industry; every season, manufacturers proposed to potential buyers new fabric designs, but only a few of them were ordered in significant quantities. The production of samples was usually subcontracted to small-scale manufacturers. The latter could also fulfill orders for small quantities of unusual material.⁴¹

As the century progressed, mills became larger (see Table 2.2). Textile firms also began to integrate, either horizontally, by processing different fibres, or vertically, by integrating some preparing activities, like carding, combing, twisting, plying, sizing or winding, by combining spinning and weaving, or by adding a dye works to the factory. The increased size and

Table 2.2 Mill size, Tourcoing, 1882 and 1911

		1882	1911
Cotton mills	N	11	20
	Av. nr of spindles	12,748	28,136
Woolen mills	N	29	39
	Av. nr of spindles	7,439	11,532
Power looms	N of looms	2,358	6,420
	Average per fabricant	196	238
Hand looms	N of looms	2,302	470
	Average per fabricant	71	36

Source: AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C, 33 & 60, 1882 & 1911

complexity of the factory did not spell the demise of the small producer. In Tourcoing, even in the 1880s, many of the auxiliary tasks were still being performed by small shops in town. A fair proportion of these small textile shops were added to another existing activity; for instance, a mechanic was listed in the business tax rolls as running a couple of twisting mills; a tavern-keeper was in the wool-picking business; some of those managed to permanently integrate the ranks of the industrialists. Others small factories were stand-alone business, sometimes combining several activities, sometimes limited to one.⁴² Very small spinning mills and small-scale merchant manufacturers survived too, probably focusing on niche production. Businesses supplying the factories with machine parts and equipment also appeared. And producing perforated cards for Jacquart looms (*liseur de dessins*) even became an independent trade, subjected to the business tax.⁴³ Trade in raw material or by-products expanded at a very rapid rate. For instance, in 1892, there were 48 spinning mills and 51 fabric manufacturers in town, alongside one maker of braided fabric and trimmings (*passemmentier*), four hosiers, one mechanical embroiderer, five mechanical wool-combers, 24 twisters (*retorderies*), three warpers (*ourdisseurs*), four pile drivers (*batteurs de laine ou de cotton*), seven winders (*dévideurs*), eight fleece sorters, one of them mechanical, four mechanical wool-scourers, three makers of loom parts (*lamiers-rotiers*), two *liseurs de dessins*, four commercial dye workers, two manufacturers of mechanical looms and eight makers of loom accessories. They carried out their activities alongside 65 wool wholesalers (*marchands en gros*) and 36 “half-wholesalers” (*marchands en demi-gros*, that is, merchants who also retailed small quantities), two wholesale “waste” merchants (*marchands de déchets*—*déchets* were a by-product of wool combing; they could be used to make woolen mattresses, but also coarse blanketing material) and 34 *déchets* “half wholesalers.”⁴⁴

Throughout the nineteenth-century, the overwhelming majority of factories in Roubaix and Tourcoing produced textiles, or supported the textile industry (chemical plants, machine factories, foundries). The balance was composed of establishments transforming agricultural products (breweries, distilleries, steam-operated flour mills, sugar refineries) and a few brickworks. Wholesale trade also evolved. Initially, wholesale traders (*négociant*) had bought and resold a wide range of products on their own account; at the end of the century, they were a minority, displaced by specialized traders, and in the twentieth, by a fast growing number of specialized brokerage firms and commission traders. At the beginning of the nineteenth-century, textile entrepreneurs had all been

négociants or out-putters (or both); they had orchestrated the productive activities of others, but had not directly supervised them, and those who were *négociants* also found regional, national or export markets for the finished products. At the end of the century, many of their grandchildren had become industrialists, who owned factories, organized production and managed the labor force, but usually entrusted the marketing of their products to firms specializing in this kind of activity.

Tourcoing was by and large a one-industry town through the century, and it filled its territory with factories and working-class housing as manufacturing grew. Lille presented a different image to visitors, and followed a different path. It grew spatially by annexing four suburban rural municipalities: Esquermes, Wazemmes, Moulins and Fives-lez-Lille in 1858. The south-western walls of the city were torn down to be rebuilt around the first three annexed municipalities (Fives remained *extra muros*). Moulins had been an industrial village, which owed its name to the large numbers of oil-mills planted on the sides of its hills. Esquermes and Wazemmes were thinly populated, as most of their territory was part of the military easement zone. There, one found commercial and private vegetable gardens, orchards, summer cottages, *guinguettes* (public entertainment houses, where one could eat, drink, bowl, practice archery, take donkey rides, listen to music, dance, or simply wander through the pleasure gardens), the Bernardine convent (a posh boarding school), and bleaching fields or crofts taking advantage of clean water supplies, as they were upstream from the city. After annexation, their territory was soon covered with factories and tightly packed working-class housing, or with comfortable bourgeois houses (*maisons de maîtres*) along the better streets.

The economy of Lille continued to be more diversified than that of the surrounding towns. Besides textiles, Lille also processed local and even colonial agricultural commodities: it made wheat flour, potato flour, cookies, chocolate, beet sugar, starch, vinegar and malt, brewed beer, distilled *genièvre* (gin), pressed oil seeds and later canned goods, manufactured earthenware and furniture, and later manufactured or distributed various modern appliances such as sewing and knitting machines, water closets (flush toilets), water heaters, or electric light fixtures. Crafts production did not disappear but occupied specialized niches: goldsmith, makers of church ornaments or restorers of paintings, for instance. Lille was also a garrison town, an administrative center, the seat of a judicial district, and the location of several *facultés* in the second half of the century. It could boast an opera house, and a resident orchestra and opera company. It became the seat of

a diocese in 1913. The city was also a communication center. It had been linked to Paris by railroad as early as 1846. Canals and canalized rivers connected it to North Sea ports like Calais, Dunkerque, Ghent or Antwerp, to the coalfields immediately to the south, to the metal-producing centers of Denain and Anzin, and to Paris. Lille acted as a redistribution center for the surrounding area, leading wholesalers, trading and brokerage houses, transportation companies, bankers and insurers to set up shop within its walls.⁴⁵

Forms of business organization other than family firms also became more common. Post-1870 Lille partnerships were linked to the expansion of consumption. Very few of the partnerships or joint-stock companies registered in Lille in the last third of the century or the beginning of the twentieth were textile or traditional manufacturing firms, contrary to what was the case in Tourcoing. The exceptions were breweries or firms set up at the initiative of people from outside of the region, and those tended to be located in the surrounding small towns like *Levers Brothers* who opened a factory in Haubourdin in 1910. Public companies (*sociétés anonymes*) could not be constituted without special government permission until 1867, and until then were limited to large concerns benefiting the public in general but beyond the capabilities of small groups of investors, like canals, railroads, and public utilities. After liberalization, Lille joint-stock companies were mostly financial institutions, insurance companies, newspapers, utilities, and transportation and mining companies. By 1910, this heteroclitic category also included building societies, leisure providers (a skating rink, a cycling track), car dealerships, a short-lived taxi service, a dairy, a manufacturer of disinfecting products, a department store and the Catholic Faculties. There was a much greater number of registrations at the Lille Tribunal in 1910 than previously (four boxes instead of the usual one), but many of them concerned corporations headquartered elsewhere which wished to do business in this town, as well as minor modifications to existing statutes or changes in the composition of the board of joint-stock companies. This type of material was rare in the nineteenth-century, reflecting the very recent growth in incorporation.

In Lille, simple partnerships usually brought together skilled and experienced individuals who pooled their efforts to buy, sell, distribute or install new or luxury consumer products or provide new types of services, from plumbing and bathrooms to photographic equipment and advertising material. Those who traded in more traditional goods operated at the high end of the trade (furniture, tapestry, decoration,

lighting appliances, or bronze objects, for instance), in addition to selling household linen and male and female apparel.⁴⁶ In Tourcoing, on the other hand, partnerships between retailers and tradespersons were much less common. This probably reflected the fact textile manufacturing and related activities occupied almost all the economic space, whereas Lille had had a well-developed retail and craft sector and had been a distribution centre for consumer goods for a long time. In Tourcoing, as in Lille earlier in the century, simple partnerships continued to bring together textile producers. The use of partnerships nonetheless may not have been exclusively a matter of economic or institutional development. Tourcoing industrialists also used partnerships to plan for the transmission of the business from one generation to the next. The paucity of partnerships for such a purpose in Lille may have reflected a different attitude towards estate planning.

There is no evidence that local incorporated companies were ever traded publicly; they usually had a very small number of shareholders, normally family members or senior executives. Two forms of economic organizations, then, coexisted in the arrondissement at the turn of the century. One, traditional and centred on family-owned firms and firmly turned towards production, and another, riding the expanding and increasingly diversified consumer market, readily adopting alternative forms of organization and financing.

3.2 *Emergence of the Family Firm*

The emergence of the firm, conceived as an entity distinct from its owners, accompanied industrial development. In the second half of the century, families that engaged in businesses became families with a business. New language appeared in articles of association as early as the 1840s: People were coming together to operate a plant with a physical presence, not an assortment of hand-operated machines that could be set up anywhere there was room. For instance, on January 1, 1841, Julie Sophie Louise Delahaye, widow of Ls. Jh. Delannoy, spinner, entered a general partnership with Charles Caulliez, “no occupation”, in order to

operate a spinning mill belonging to Mme Delannoy, and trade in cotton and wool yarn on commission. The two partners will each provide 20,000 Fr in order to build a steam engine for the association. The remainder of the sum will be used to purchase merchandises and raw material and tools, and if need be, pay the workers.⁴⁷

Factories equipped with steam engines immobilized capital. They became a family patrimony, and often constituted the lion's share of the family assets. Partnerships between parents and children, such as an aging father or a widow, or between siblings, to operate a family business then became more common. Partnerships purchased buildings and machinery, were extended, had their articles of association modified to allow the entry of new partners or the retirement of the parents, and therefore could outlive the original partners. By the end of the century, several rounds of modifications had often left the articles of association so confused and confusing that new ones had to be registered. In those cases, the legal papers sometimes stipulated that the procedure must not jeopardize the *être moral* (legal person) constituted by the business.⁴⁸ The articles of association may be new, the firm was not.

In some cases, business and family became inextricably linked; firms were family ones, and local business histories start with a genealogy. Local business historians also equate industry with family business.⁴⁹ The "Motte system," conceptualized by David Landes after conversations with Gaston Motte, is regularly given as a typical example of this relationship. The Mottes begat sons to place them at the head of stand-alone but complementary factories—and set up factories to establish their sons (and occasionally, sons-in law). The necessary capital was raised within the family, supplemented by the wives' dowries. The result was a powerful, but flexible, family-owned conglomerate. Landes identified the large families characteristic of this very Catholic textile entrepreneurial class as one of the component of its success.⁵⁰

Large sibships nonetheless did not necessarily lead to the creation of industrial conglomerate. Not all sons went into business either—however, those who did not tend to be ignored by family histories and genealogies. In many cases, it was not difficult to place all the sons in the family business, because there were not that many of them. Despite their reputation, industrial families were not that large.⁵¹ The size of Tourcoing industrial families actually decreased during the nineteenth-century. Tourcoing wholesalers and manufacturers who married in the 1820s had an average of 6.4 children (and the mother was 39 at last birth); those who married in the 1860s had an average of 4.7 (and the women had their last child at 34). The women from those socio-economic categories listed in the 1911 census who had been married 15–19 years had an average of 3.8 children—and those had all been born in the first ten years of marriage.⁵² Chantal Petillon found similar family sizes in her study of Roubaix.

Among the middle-classes (crafts, trade, white-collar workers, civil servants) the number of children dropped from 5 to 2.7 between 1820 and 1889; among the elite (entrepreneurs, *propriétaires*, professionals), it dropped from 5.5 to 2.5 in the middle of the century, and then rose again to 3.5. Roubaix's entrepreneurial families were therefore not very large, but the sample upon which her study is based is rather small (about 20 entrepreneurial families for the whole century).⁵³ No similar study exists for Lille; however, Codaccioni identifies the individuals who left estate equal or superior to one million, and lists their heirs. In 1891–93, the millionaires left an average of 3.07 children; in 1908–10, an average of 2.8.⁵⁴

A large number of children was not necessary to perpetuate a family business—nor necessary to create conglomerates. Partnerships could be used for that purpose. There were different ways of creating partnerships in nineteenth-century France: The *sociétés de personnes* included general partnerships or *sociétés en nom collectif* and *sociétés en commandite* (limited partnership). The general partners (*associés*) were liable on all their property for the debts of the association. This was by far the commonest form of partnership through our period, and the overwhelming majority involved parents and children or siblings. In the *société en commandite*, one or more party (the *commanditaires* or silent partners) provided one or more others (the *commandités* or general partners) with funds, but played no role in the managing of the business. In return, their exposure was limited to their investments. The *commandite* was therefore an early form of limited-liability partnership. A variant of the *société en commandite* was the *société en commandite par actions* (private shareholding company).⁵⁵ In this kind of association, the *commanditaires* were allowed to transfer their interests to third parties provided all the other partners agreed. They were never common in the region. Simple partnerships usually brought together widows and children, siblings or first cousins, friends in the same line of trade, or, alternately, an individual with money and another with specialized skills (a foreman, an engineer, a travelling salesman or even an accountant). But they could also be used to create industrial conglomerates, especially when one did not have a bevy of sons. Some general or limited partnerships became *commanditaires* in other partnerships, creating structures reminiscent of Russian dolls. The Pollet and Caulliez at mid-century, and the Tiberghien at the end of it, used this device. Changes in the modes of production therefore did not reduce the importance of family firms and even sole proprietorship. Ingenious uses of private partnerships made it possible to obtain outside capital without becoming a public company.

Incorporated companies (*sociétés anonymes*) remained rare in Tourcoing (see Tables B3 and B4 in Appendix B). Industrialists shunned them till the twentieth century, and when they finally adopted them, reserved the shares to the extended family, and to friends or business relations rather than selling them to the public on the stock exchange.

Through the nineteenth-century, the arrondissement was a region of family businesses, big and small, and the nuclear and extended family provided most of the capital and managerial skills. In particular, Tourcoing had been a city of relatively small businesses at the beginning of the nineteenth-century. A hundred years later, its economic landscape was dominated by a fair number of large firms, towering over an ever-changing swarm of small ones, who tried, failed, succeeded, diversified their activities, and were made obsolete—or made possible—by technological change.⁵⁶

3.3 *Precarious Businesses*

The relentless economic growth of the arrondissement in the nineteenth-century did not benefit all businesspeople. Some business activities turned into expanding firms—but the majority of businesses were short-lived. The business tax records bear witness to the failed attempts of many.⁵⁷ Two-thirds of the 1,402 manufacturers and wholesalers who paid the business tax in Tourcoing in any year between 1852 and 1913 were listed for less than ten years (see Table B5 in Appendix B). Businesses were at their most vulnerable when starting up: 14 % of their owners were listed only once, and almost half did not last five years. On average, the owners of those businesses were listed for 8.5 years. Attrition rates did not vary much across activities. Textile wholesalers were the least likely to survive their first year (one in five disappear from the lists after one entry). Surprisingly, small shops (*hoisiers*, knitted-fabric makers, garment makers, *passementiers*) were not more vulnerable than average, and the absence of 30-year-old firms among them may simply be due to their relatively late arrival in town.⁵⁸ The shoemaker Henri Courtois was a hosier and knitted-fabric maker between 1881 and 1906; his son Henri Courtois-Dumortier succeeded him at the same address until at least 1913. Tavern-keepers who opened a twisting mill were listed on average five times in the tax rolls—but Lossfeld-Housé, who began operations in 1899, was still listed in 1913. The mechanic Louis Noël and his namesake and also mechanic son operated a twisting mill from 1872 to 1912. Some very small weaving sheds also appear to have lasted a surprisingly long time. Augustin

Lamon-Lezy never operated more than ten hand-loom between 1852 and 1897! He was also representative of his trade on the *conseil de prud-homme* (labor arbitration board). He may have made samples for the larger manufacturers, or possibly produced highly specialized material, like Georges Sans-Duprez, who produced silk/cotton fabric on 13 hand-loom between 1905 and 1913. Only owners of integrated factories had a significantly lower attrition rate than average. Nonetheless, a third of them ceased to be listed within 10 years of starting in business, and only half lasted 15 years.

Not all those disappearing individuals failed: some died and some retired and transferred their business to others—their children, for instance (the source does not always make it possible to distinguish the father from the son, and conversely, to identify sons-in-law). However, deceased and retired individuals are unlikely to have been that numerous among those who were listed in the tax records for ten years or less. More likely, the business was not doing as well as expected, or needed, and the owner sold it to another who tried his (and sometimes her) luck instead. Here was Gustave Hocquet, who operated a few twisting benches at 35 Motte street in 1886 and 1887. He was succeeded on the premises and in the trade by Georges Declecq (1888–90), Henry Pecqueur (1891–94) and Juste Honoré (1896–97). What happened to those vanishing entrepreneurs is not known. If they failed, they may have been able to get hired as factory foremen.

3.4 *An Industrial Middle-Class Takes Shape*

The factory system had a greater impact on the social landscape than the adoption of jennies by cotton producers. Tourcoing again is a good locale to observe the impact of those changes on the middle-classes. By mid-century, an emerging industrial bourgeoisie composed of descendants of the old mercantile elite and successful members of the middling sort was pulling away from a petty middle-class of storekeepers and craftspersons. Dowries reported in marriage contracts increased very substantially—in part because people of modest means stopped making such contracts—and the data is therefore biased in favour of wealthier individuals. Spousal assets' average value jumped to 19,750 Fr for men and 15,150 Fr for women in the 1855 to 1865 period, but the more revealing median also rose from 1,500 Fr in the 1820s to 5,000 Fr in the later period.⁵⁹ Eight women and fifteen men brought assets worth at least 100,000 Fr in

marriage in the later period; none had in the 1820s. The large marriage portions belonged almost entirely to men and women from wholesale-trading and manufacturing families. After the middle of the century, the manufacturers were no longer born to craftsmen, merchants and wealthy farmers like most of their parents and grandparents; witnesses at marriages and births were drawn from a much narrowed social strata.⁶⁰ It was also much less common for the son or son-in-law of a manufacturer not to engage in this line of trade after marriage (20 % of the grooms left manufacturing in the 1820s, but only 10 % in the 1860s). Most of those who exited the ranks of the manufacturers opted for “bourgeois” occupations—or non-occupations (*propriétaires-rentiers*,⁶¹ professionals, civil servants, only very occasionally shopkeepers or farmers), whereas in the 1820s they were as likely to become out-workers. What is also striking among this group of brides and grooms is not their indecision as to what their occupation might be, but their refusal to admit to one. A quarter of the grooms declared having no occupation to both the *notaire* and the town officer registering their marriage, and those were not youngsters—many were in their thirties. One has to rely on the occupation of their parents to assign them to a socio-economic category. The following year, at the birth of their first child, they were manufacturers or wholesale traders, like their fathers, brothers, and uncles. The brides, for their part, ceased almost entirely to report any occupation. It seems that, by mid-century, men from the industrial middle-class were not considered autonomous economic agents deserving of an occupational title until they headed a family: many of those new fathers are not listed in the town’s business tax rolls either, suggesting they were still working alongside their fathers as unofficial partners. The other interesting phenomenon is the appearance of “*industriel*” (factory owner) as an occupational label (12 grooms out of 147). Most, however, still called themselves “merchants” or *négociants*, even when they were manufacturers.

Although descendants of the old elite still made up the bulk of the wealthiest class in the 1860s, some slightly less well-off couples with marriage portions ranging between 20,000 Fr and 50,000 Fr were hot on their heels. The Industrial Revolution had provoked a social upward draft which benefited the members of the middling sorts. The phenomenon was not unique to Tourcoing—a similar trend could be seen in Armentières as well.⁶²

By the early twentieth century, this momentum may have been lost. In Tourcoing, the proportion of all middle-class heads increased between

the 1851 and 1886 census from 29 % to 32 % of the whole—but dropped again to 29 % in 1911. The share of the upper middle-class, on the other hand (manufacturers, *négociants*, *propriétaires* and professionals), dropped from 6.1 % of all heads in 1886 to 4.4 % in 1911.⁶³ In Lille, the proportion of middle-class people among decedents dropped slightly in the 1870s to rise again at the beginning of the twentieth century, but upper middle-class decedents were wealthier and wealthier. In 1856, one industrialist in five and one wholesaler in 50 left more than a million Fr. In 1908–10, 65 % of industrialists, 12 % of *négociants* and 6 % of *propriétaires* were in that situation. No industrialist left less than 100,000 Fr. Even retailers and craftsmen were getting wealthier: a few managed to leave between 100,000 and 250,000 Fr in the twentieth century.⁶⁴ Everybody was getting richer, but some were getting much richer than others, and as we shall see later, the latter adopted a lifestyle commensurate with their income, and quite different from their grandparents’.

At the beginning of the nineteenth-century, the Tourcoing entrepreneurial middle-class had been industrious, frugal, and acting as if their fortune could evaporate overnight (which had been a reality through the eighteenth century). There was even a best-among-equals quality to the behaviour of most of those who belonged to its upper layer. By the early twentieth century, this upper layer was no longer part of the middle-classes—nor did it pretend to be. On the contrary, it took its social and economic position for granted and increasingly adopted a way of life that set it apart from the rest. Women’s roles in middling sort and later middle-classes families evolved over time—but were characterized more by continuities than changes. From the petty middle-class to the gentrifying industrial elite, women and their families adapted old roles to new circumstances rather than redefine dramatically new ones.

By 1910, the arrondissement was again undergoing significant changes. Some industrial concerns had grown very large—and some were beginning to transform into shareholding companies. A fast growing number of businesses were local agencies of corporations headquartered elsewhere and even occasionally abroad. The city directories doubled in size, reflecting both a significant increase in the total number of businesses listed and the advent of advertising. The number of advertisements grew rapidly—but also their size. Growth and diversification affected smaller businesses (retail, trade and service) even more than larger ones. A bewildering array of goods and services were now available to consumers. One could purchase electrical fixtures, refrigerating or heating appliances, plumbing,

bathrooms and water closets (toilets), bicycles and automobiles, or photographic equipment. One of course could also have those fixtures installed, one's bike or car repaired, or one's likeness taken. There were cinemas and restaurants and hotels promising the comfort of home. Insurance brokers, private security services, publicity agents, brokers, commission agents and representatives of all kinds offered their services. Bustling modernity had arrived, and in 1910, the arrondissement's residents may have been justified to believe the twentieth century was going to be an era of further growth and prosperity.

The dream was shattered by a pistol shot on a Sarajevo bridge in July 1914. Three months later, the Germans were occupying Lille, and they did not leave until October 1918. In the meantime, they requisitioned everything that could support their war effort—from stocks of raw material to civilians' brass curtain rods. The factories were pillaged, the machines sent to Germany, and the material that could not be moved smashed or blown up. Industrialists and their wives were taken hostage, the men to Lithuania and the women to southern Germany. The American Commission for the Relief of Belgium kept the population from starving. It was a *région dévastée* (a devastated region) that greeted 1919. Like the rest of the population, industrialists had to come to terms with the butchery of trench warfare and the loss of family members. In addition, they faced challenges they could not even have imagined ten years previously: runaway inflation which devoured their liquid capital (the franc was devaluated by 80 % in 1928), a massive wave of strikes in 1919 consecutive to fast-rising prices, the successful socialist revolution in Russia, and the failed one in Germany, followed by the founding of the French communist party in 1920, and the election of a left-wing government (*Cartel des gauches*) in 1924. Better tomorrows may have seemed possible in the first ten years of the century, but the 1920s were not propitious to optimism if one was a businessperson. Our industrialists sought reassurance in their history, their extended family, and a set of gendered values that came to define their identity.

NOTES

1. A nineteenth-century ordnance survey map is available at [http://www.geoportail.gouv.fr/donnee/56/carte-de-l-etat-major-en-couleur?l=GEOGRAPHICALGRIDSYSTEMS.ETATMAJOR40\\$GEOPORTAIL:OGC:WMTS%281%29&permalink=yes](http://www.geoportail.gouv.fr/donnee/56/carte-de-l-etat-major-en-couleur?l=GEOGRAPHICALGRIDSYSTEMS.ETATMAJOR40$GEOPORTAIL:OGC:WMTS%281%29&permalink=yes).

2. Unless otherwise specified, this section draws on the following studies: Lottin and Guignet, *Histoire des provinces françaises du Nord*, t. 3; Leuwers, Crépin and Rosselle, *Histoire des provinces françaises du Nord*, t. 4; Bussiere, Lefebvre and Vavasseur-Desperriers, *Histoire des provinces françaises du Nord*, t. 5; Trénard, *Histoire de Lille*, t. III.; Trénard, *Histoire des Pays-Bas français*; Pierrard, *Histoire du Nord*; Lottin, *Histoire de Tourcoing*; Hilaire, *Histoire de Roubaix*; Delsalle, *La brouette et la navette*; Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du commerce*; Pouchain, *Les maîtres du Nord*.
3. Jessenne et Hindie-Lemay, *Députés paysans*, 12.
4. Lottin, *Histoire de Tourcoing*, 104.
5. Pierrard, *La vie ouvrière à Lille sous le Second Empire*.
6. Delsalle, *La brouette et la navette*.
7. In 1801, the population density in the Nord was 134.9/km², as opposed to 50.9 for the whole country. Lille was the sixth city in the country in terms of population. http://www.insee.fr/fr/service/bibliotheque/tableaux_sgf/tableaux.asp?domaine=terr.
8. Pouchain, *Maîtres du Nord*, 29.
9. AML Registres aux Bourgeois de Lille- cote 964, Tome 12, 1756–1785; Guignet, *Vivre à Lille*, 103–105.
10. Théry, *Une famille de patrons*; Arch. Fac. Cath. Fond Vrau, Souvenirs, Paquet #2, Généalogie Vrau ; AML, Registres aux Bourgeois de Lille- cote 964, Tome 12, 1756–1785; ADN, Tabellion de Lille, 2144, folio 50; Tabellion de Lille, 2127, folio 2; Tabellion de Lille, 1560, Folio 139; ADN, Fo1.38/14, Domaines nationaux; AML, Fond Gentil, Carton 213, 15.355 (7163), 24 Messidor an 2 ; Collège des chirurgiens, 1793; ADP-de-C, Registre de catholicité, puis d'état civil de Bapaume, 1790-an 6; AML, registre sépultures de Sainte Catherine (Lille) 1768; Décès Lille, an 12; registre mariage St Pierre, 1754; registre de baptême, Saint Etienne, 1782–1792; État civil de Lille, an II, 1836.
11. Pouchain, *Maîtres du Nord*, 26–27.
12. For recently published histories, see Jessenne et Hindie-Lemay, *Député paysan et fermière de Flandres en 1789*; Leblan, *Histoire de la Blanche Porte* (Dassonville family); Boutry, *Itinéraire d'une bourgeoisie* (Boutry family) ; Petit, Grislain et Leblan, *Aux fils du temps – La Redoute*. (Pollet, Libert and Delobel families).
13. Boutry, who is considerably more detached from his subject (his ancestors) than most, on the other hand notes them; So does Gaston Motte, but those who use his material as a source do not seem to notice.

14. The population of Roubaix grew by 337.5 % and the one of Tourcoing by 114.5 % between 1801 and 1851. *Annuaire statistique du département du Nord*, 1801 to 1855 and census data from the Statistique Générale de la France, Territoire et population, 1800–1890 http://www.insee.fr/fr/service/bibliotheque/tableaux_sgf/tableaux.asp?domaine=terr.
15. AMTg, “Situation de la fabrique de coton, 1810–1840”, 7F1C/14; Matrices de patentes, G1C32 and G1C42. See also: Lottin, *Histoire de Tourcoing*, chap. VIII, IX, X; Daviet, “Le complexe industriel de Roubaix Tourcoing”; Toulemonde, “L’industrie de Roubaix Tourcoing”; A. Chanut, “La crise économique à Tourcoing”; Delsalle, *La brouette et la navette*; Toulemonde, *Naissance d’une métropole*; Toulemonde, “Notes sur l’industrie roubaisienne et tourquennoise”; Fohlen, “Crise Textile et troubles sociaux”; Fohlen, *L’industrie textile au temps du Second Empire*; Pouchain, “L’industrialisation de la région lilloise de 1800 à 1860.”
16. *Statistiques Générales de la France, Industries en 1840–45*, Imprimerie Nationale, 1847–1852, Tome I: Nord Oriental.
17. Phénomène aussi noté par Verley, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs*, 5.
18. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/13, 3-9-1813.
19. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/186, 18-9-1832.
20. ADN, 6U2/195, 5-10-1851.
21. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/9, 8-12-1806 and 23-2-1807.
22. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Greffe de Me Gruloy, J 1442.
23. AMTg, Population table 1821-1836, censuses, 1796 and 1851, F1D1, F1A1, F1A4-5.
24. Codaccioni, *De l’inégalité sociale*, 65, 74; Codaccioni, “Lille 1850–1914,” 160–161.
25. AMTg, Population table, 1821, F1D 1-4; 1851, F1A 4-5.
26. Destombes-Casse and Tiberghien, “Monographie de Tourcoing,” 142.
27. Codaccioni, *De l’inégalité sociale*, 67, 73, 75, 84.
28. ADN, Enregistrement des contrats de mariage, 3Q 538-2 & 5, 1816–29 and 1854–1865.
29. Ubalde Dewavrin, fabricant, brought 50,000 Fr; Philippe-Auguste Dewavrin, spinner, 50,000 Fr; J-Bte Desurmont, propriétaire, 50,000 Fr; Auguste Lemaire, goldsmith, 50,000 Fr; Jacques-Philippe Lemaire, farmer, 50,000 Fr; Antoine Destombes, propriétaire, 90,000 Fr; Prosper-Chrétien Lepoutre, merchant, 42,000 Fr; Romaine

- Delebecque, propriétaire, 80,000 Fr; Philippine Requillard, no occupation, 50,000 Fr.
30. The registers of baptisms, marriages and burials (till 1792) and of births, marriages and deaths (since 1792) are now available on-line on the site of the Archives départementales du Nord. All the genealogical material provided here is taken from the Registers, unless otherwise noted.
 31. Pouchain, *Maitres du Nord*, 170; One consequence of the antiquity of the Desurmont family is the proliferation of branches in and around Tourcoing, some wealthy and some quite poor. In the nineteenth-century, there were some Desurmont who were among the unskilled workers at some of the Desurmont factories.
 32. Pouchain, *Maitres du Nord*, 30–33; not to be confused with his cousin Gaspard François Louis Desurmont, 1791–1842, cotton trader and also member of the municipal council.
 33. Daughter of Jean-Fs and grand-daughter of Gaspard Desurmont-Lefebvre, 1699–1741. In Chap. 3 we will meet some of Antoine’s siblings: Constance who married Philippe Delepouille and then Philippe Durif, Thérèse who married J-Fs Motte, sister to J-Bte Motte Bredard. His mother Marie Jh Desurmont was a sister to Maximilien whom we will meet in the same chapter.
 34. Antoine, son of Pierre (1756–1811) and Marie Jh Desurmont (1760–1830), brother of Constance Duriff, of Thérèse who married J-Fs Motte, son of Motte-Clarisse and brother of Pierre Célestin who married Angélique Masurel.
 35. Pouchain, *Maitres du Nord*, 147; Philippe Auguste (1801–1872) son of Auguste Jh and Marie Catherine Dervaux, married Delphine Bulteau (1806–1836) daughter of Basile Fs, mayor and fabricant and Marie Julie Jh Florin in Roubaix on April 17, 1826.
 36. Davis, “Women in the Crafts in Sixteenth-Century Lyon.”
 37. AMTg, Matrice de patentes 1814–1830, G1G1.
 38. Pouchain, *Maitres du Nord*, 30.
 39. Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles du patronat*; Pouchain, *Maitres du Nord*.
 40. Pouchain, *Maitres du Nord*, 30.
 41. Descamps, “Les patrons de l’industrie textile,” 53.
 42. AMTg, Matrices de patentes, 1880–1910, G1C 31–60.
 43. AMTg, Matrices de patentes, 1852–1892, G1C 3–41.
 44. AMTg, Matrices de patentes, 1892, G1C 41.

45. *Almanach du Commerce des arts et métiers des villes de Lille, Armentières, Roubaix et Tourcoing*, (subsequently Vanackère), 1831, 1840, 1850, 1855; *Annuaire du commerce, de l'industrie, de la magistrature et de l'administration de l'arrondissement de Lille* (subsequently Ravet-Anceau,) 1855, 1860, 1870, 1881.
46. Tradespeople and retailers who entered into a simple partnership in 1910 Lille engaged in the following activities: locksmithing, plumbing and bathroom, piping and zinc work (*zinguerie*), machine building, “application of electricity”, construction, tiling, painting and sculpture, insulation and heating appliances, sale and repair of bicycles and automobiles, dentures, photography, cinematic projections, paint and varnish, paper and cardboard packing material, wholesale of canned goods and preserves, bookstores and stationery, wholesale confectionery, tavern-keeping, and finally pianos and organs. They also offered a range of new services: insurance, advertising, private security services, and the “setting up of equipment for exhibitions and celebrations.”
47. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/193.
48. A *personne morale* is any entity that has a legal existence separate from the one of the persons that constitute it. The term therefore covers a broader range of entities than corporate bodies. A *personne physique* (natural person) is a human being.
49. Pouchain, *Maitres du Nord*; Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles du patronat textile*; Bonte, *Patrons Textiles*.
50. Landes, “Religion and Enterprise.”
51. Bonnie Smith, who is often cited on that count, has claimed that the average family size among the northern French bourgeoisie went from five children at the beginning of the nineteenth-century to seven at the end (see her calculation in her appendix I). Unfortunately, she miscalculated the number of children born to one of her late century cohorts (7 instead of 5.2). The average number of children remained stable during the nineteenth-century, and went up only among couples married in the early twentieth- and only to 6.2 (as opposed to 5.3 for the previous century). Smith also does not distinguish between complete and incomplete families (the latter being the ones where the husband or wife died before the woman’s 45th birthday), and a decline in adult mortality could be behind the increase in the number of children, rather than an increase in fertility. Finally, the sources from which she drew her corpus—published genealogies—are

- biased in favour of larger families. Someone with a hundred great-grandchildren is more likely to appear in an ascending genealogy than someone with only ten. (Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*: 181–82).
52. Craig, “Catholic and Malthusian.”
 53. Petillon, “La population de Roubaix (1740–1889).”
 54. Codaccioni, *De l'inégalité sociale dans une grande ville industrielle*, 172–179; 335–344; There were 28 millionaires in the 1891–93 cohort, 2 of whom were under 50, and thus may have had more children if they had remained alive. In 1908–10, there were 51 millionaires, 5 of whom were under 50.
 55. In English this is translated as *Private company limited by shares*, but the term is really not very informative to non-specialists.
 56. AMTg, Fichier des entreprises, 7F3A to G; the data in this series was compiled by business and by year from the *matrices de patentes*.
 57. Pouchain noted the phenomenon as well. Pouchain, *Maitres du Nord*, 45, 76–77; the phenomenon was not unique to the area. A study of business mortality in 1843–1936 Poughkeepsie (NY) based on mentions in trade directories yields similar results: 75 % of manufacturers and 59 % of wholesalers lasted less than 10 years. Hutchinson and Newcomer, “A Study of Business Mortality,” 500.
 58. As the data ends in 1914, only firms started in 1883 or earlier could be 30 years or older at any given time.
 59. ADN, 3Q538-4 and 5; in 1840–1849, the average values were respectively 11,750 Fr and 19,6540 Fr and the median 3,000 Fr.
 60. AMTg, Registre des mariages, 1859–1868.
 61. Initially, a *propriétaire* was someone owning income-producing property, and a *rentier* was someone who lived off a state annuity or *rente*, but the term came to refer to anyone living off dividends and interests from bonds, in addition to annuities. As *rentiers* invested in real estate, and *propriétaires* diversified their portfolios, the terms *propriétaires* and *rentiers* were interchangeable in the nineteenth-century.
 62. Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles*, 333–35 and 727.
 63. The change is not due to the disappearance of *propriétaires-rentiers* and farmers from this population; if we take them out, the figures evolve in the same way. AMTg, censuses, 1851, F1A 4-5, 1886, F1A 12-17, 1911, F1A 40-43.
 64. Codaccioni, *De l'inégalité sociale*, 67, 75, 112, 127, 171, 190, 334, 362.

Manufacturers and Merchants in the First Half of the Nineteenth-Century

In the first half of the nineteenth-century, production in the *arrondissement* was still largely proto- or pre-industrial; mills were small, and often one of several activities—and not necessarily the main one—pursued by the businessperson. The Pollets, for instance, opened a spinning shed to secure a reliable supply of good-quality yarn for their weavers.¹ The bulk of textile producers continued to be out-putters—and some were even very small-scale out-putters. They were neither economically nor socially very different from contemporary storekeepers or craftspersons—to whom many were also related. Most businesses required few specialized skills and not much capital—even spinning mills were not very costly affairs till they began using steam as a source of energy. Businesses could then still be run from the kitchen or dining-room table and did not require the mastery of complex technical skills. On the other hand, the ability to take the right business decisions lacking adequate information and in the face of uncertainty was important, and this is something one develops with experience. Middling families were working families, and even the mercantile elite still believed in the necessity of hard work and frugality. One would therefore expect that women carried out the same kind of economic activities as their mothers and grandmothers. Married women could thus easily continue playing their traditional roles as “deputy husbands”, assisting their husband in his business when he was alive, and possibly acting as interim manager if he died before his sons could take over.

And indeed, it is easy to find women who were helpmeets, deputy husbands or caretaking widows, competently assisting and supporting the men of their family in their activities, and earning praise for it. The economic sphere was still very much a joint one. The evidence from the *arrondissement* sheds some light on the complexity of the tasks the “deputies” faced. Marriage in particular placed limitations on those women’s business activities. But it also shows those who were married were not necessarily deputies; alongside those “traditional” businesswomen were married ones running the family business in place of uninterested husbands—or running their own, and widows who left their sons to fend for themselves. On the other hand, some women were *not* interested in business and rather than continuing their husband’s activities, they chose to become *rentières*, that is, to live off their means.

I JOINT SPHERES

The antiquarian Brun-Lavainne claimed that the better sort of Tourcoing women normally engaged in business after marriage. Marriage was the rite of passage that introduced them to business responsibilities:

I have not said anything until now about the women, who do not deserve to be forgotten; but they do not show themselves much in Tourcoing. Young ladies, they are raised in the best boarding schools and then come back to ornament society for a while; then, they marry and retreat in the performance of their household duties, to which is added the continuous overseeing of manufacturing processes. Such an active life, coupled with deeply rooted religious principles, make it unnecessary to state that the mores are pure and libertinism unknown in Tourcoing, except among the lower classes.²

Economic responsibilities were in addition to their “duties” as wives: women ran their households *and* supervised textile production. Female activities in the joint sphere of business were, however, more complicated than Brun-Lavainne envisioned them.

1.1 *Deputy Husbands and Caretaking Widows*

It is not difficult to find examples of typical deputy husbands in the *arrondissement*, although most are not discussed in great detail. Marie Rose Ducatteau, a farmer’s daughter, married the general trader and out-putter Florentin Lefebvre in 1811. She kept the books, distributed raw materials and received finished pieces from the weavers, and singlehandedly

ran the out-putting part of the business when her husband was away on road trips to try to find new customers. When he died in 1833 (she was 44) she naturally took over and is credited for the success of a newly created line of very fancy waistcoat material. She won a gold medal at the 1839 Paris Exhibition. She handed over the business to her sons in 1845.³ Hermance Deledicque, wife of the peasant smock-maker Narcisse Faucheur, was similarly left in charge two to three times a year, when her husband was away for the same reasons. Like Marie Rose, Hermance received and inspected the products made by domestic workers and handled all the paperwork. As far as Faucheur was concerned, there was a direct correlation between a trading house's success and the wife's direct involvement.⁴

Wives who had assisted their husbands were particularly able to take over if he died prematurely. Success nonetheless could be elusive. Despite being the foremother of an industrial dynasty which founded a company that still exists (*La Redoute*), Pélagie Delobel encountered more than her fair share of difficulties. She had to weather two widowhoods and raise a brood of eight children mostly by herself. She was born in 1772, the descendant of a long line of *censiers*. Her father had been a Tourcoing's bailiff. In 1790, she married Jean-Philippe Libert, also a descendant of *censiers* (his family goes back to the sixteenth century). The young couple settled at the very substantial Pottenerie farm in Roubaix. They had four children before Jean-Philippe died in 1802. Pélagie took over the lease (she was probably a co-lessee; it was very common for farming husbands and wives to co-sign leases).⁵ Three years later, she married Pierre-Joseph Pollet, whom we met in the previous chapter; Pollet was the third son of a *censier* with as long a genealogy as hers. The Pollet-Delobels soon added distilling gin and spinning cotton to their activities. By 1816 they had given up the lease to the Pottenerie and moved to Tourcoing. Their cotton mill had 1,464 spindles and employed 60 workers, which was considerable for the time. Then, in 1822, Pierre-Joseph died. Pélagie, with the encouragement of her brother, the cotton spinner and manufacturer Louis-Joseph Delobel, continued the couple's various activities. Her oldest Libert son, who had married in 1821, took over the distillery (at that time, Pélagie was referred to as a *fabricante*, or out-putter). In 1832, Pélagie followed her eldest daughter and her husband back to Roubaix. She immediately took a business license and entered into a partnership with her children. Unfortunately, the business went under ten years later. Her Pollet sons rescued her, and she went back into business as a *fabricante* and moved back to Tourcoing. The 1851 census lists her as a *rentière*, living in the

same house as Rosine Pollet and her husband Cajetan Glorieux, *fabricant*, and their two children.⁶ She died in 1854, at 82, after a very long and very active life.

In most cases, we have no details about women's activities, owing to the lack of contemporary day-to-day documents. This is not the case of the two following women, who left a correspondence. Like Marie Rose, Hermance and Pélagie, their task was to help their husband when he was at home and substitute for him when absent. Our first example is the fairly well-known Alexandrine Virnot, wife of François Barrois, a Lille *négo-ciant*.⁷ The Virnots and the Barrois were definitely members of the urban patriciate, and enjoyed burgher rights before the Revolution. François Barrois, like most *négociants*, traded in a range of local products, but mostly in textiles. In 1790, business was stagnating; he decided to try to find new clients in southern France and Italy, and left for a six-month trip. He and 25-year-old Alexandrine had been married five years. Alexandrine was busy managing the household—in one of her letters, she mentioned she was supervising the laundry—in another, she had just made jam, and in a third informed François she had gone to harvest the apples from their orchard in Esquermes.⁸ She had to nurse a sick clerk who died, and then had to hire a replacement. She was taking care of their three children, not only nursing the baby, but supervising the playtime of the oldest, so that they did not break their toys. She visited and was visited by family members on an almost constant basis, and called upon to give advice of a personal or business nature. The family network was also a source of business information, about goods that could be bought and sold for a profit, but also about the trustworthiness of clients and suppliers. She was accepting orders for various types of fabric, purchasing unfinished material from the *fabricants* and sending it to the dyers; then, she had the material measured, packaged and sent to the clients in a timely fashion. She stocked up on fabric when she could get hold of good-quality material at a good price. She thus had to be a good judge of quality, and be able to know whether the material would take the dye well, but also evaluate the quality of the dye work when it came back from the finishers. In addition, she had to be able to anticipate demand for various types of fabric. She settled accounts, paid suppliers, sent invoices and collected payments. The financial aspects of the business were particularly tricky. Clients did not use much cash, and paid in commercial paper (bills of exchanges and drafts); she had to determine how easily she could redeem it and whether or not she should discount it. But in addition, she had to

deal with revolutionary paper money, or *assignats*.⁹ Fabricants wanted to be paid in cash, not *assignats*, but the Barrois-Virnots' clients were paying in *assignats*, which Alexandrine had great difficulties redeeming for cash.¹⁰ The correspondence is full of discussions as to the best way to handle this. At one point, her cash box full of *assignats* and commercial paper, but short of cash, Alexandrine resigned herself to borrow in order to get hard currency.¹¹ The couple was not sure what the best strategy was with regard to *assignats*. Both she and her husband expected the fledging paper money to rally once confiscated Church property began to be sold. They did not want to get rid of too many of them at too great a loss (this turned out to be a costly mistake).¹² Alexandrine at one point was negotiating with François-Joseph Vrau, *négociant*, exchange broker, but mostly speculator (and described by a historian of the region as a usurer¹³) to see if he could help her—but the offer was not to her liking.¹⁴ There was also the problem of the clients who were not paying on time. In one case, she reduced a debt by 25 % in order to have it settled on the spot. Her husband, on the other hand, would have accepted the client's offer of full payment over four years—secured by ... a guarantee from the client's wife.¹⁵

Négociants traded everything that could generate a profit. A relative informed Alexandrine that there was good money to be made in the oil trade at the time. She suggested to her husband that he secured oil orders during his journey. She could use those orders to settle some of her notes, instead of the *assignats* everyone was discounting.¹⁶ And when some Italian correspondent asked her for the price of starch, she offered to send him some against a commission.¹⁷ Yet, for all her activities, and her husband visibly treating her as an equal partner, she occasionally hid behind her status as a married woman. When pressed to conclude deals she did not like, she answered that she did not know whether her husband would approve.

Our second detailed example is François-Joseph Vrau's daughter-in-law, Sophie Vrau-Aubineau. The Barrois-Virnots were patricians. The Delobels, Pollets and Liberts were very ancient and well-to-do families. The Vraus were neither. We have already met François-Joseph, the speculator Alexandrine Barrois-Virnot approached for a loan, and who had become a licensed broker at the Lille exchange in 1816.¹⁸ That same year, the youngest of his three surviving children, François-Philibert, 24, started a thread-making business in his father's house, perhaps because François-Joseph had acquired the necessary equipment cheaply at a bankruptcy sale.¹⁹ Entering the thread-making business was easy, because the

initial capital outlay was small. But this also meant the field was crowded and failures frequent. There were 73 thread-makers listed in the 1829 Lille directory (the earliest post-revolutionary one); only 35 of those were still in business in 1840, and 6 by 1890. By then, the overall number of thread-maker had also dwindled to 27.²⁰

In 1827, François-Philibert joined the Industrial Revolution—perhaps to raise himself above the rest of the thread-makers instead of joining the failures. He transferred his business to a recently acquired eighteenth-century former aristocratic hotel, and bought a steam engine. He also entered into a partnership with a flax spinner, Houdoy-Bastide, who occupied part of his premises, and could provide him with a reliable supply of flaxen yarn. He went heavily in debts to do all this, mortgaging hotel and steam engine to secure the loans. In 1837, he had to take a second mortgage, which he was not able to discharge till 1869.²¹

In that same year, he also married the 20-year-old niece of his brother-in-law, the draper Jean Aubineau. The marriage was a love match for François-Philibert, and an escape for Sophie, the oldest of four children who had been orphaned very young. The siblings spent their childhood and youth in boarding schools. When François-Philibert met her, she was living with her remarried grandfather in Paris—and the second wife appears to have viewed the orphans as nuisances. The marriage was celebrated in October 1827; the new couple became parents of Sophie Nathalie in August 1828, and little Philibert Jules followed in November 1829.²² Sophie soon reciprocated her husband's feelings, as her letters bear witness. In December 1828, François-Philibert left for Paris and then Strasbourg, looking for new clients. Sophie became interim manager. Like Alexandrine half a century earlier, she took orders, had them filled and had the goods shipped to the clients; she paid and collected bills. Unlike Alexandrine, she did not have to deal with *assignats* of uncertain value. On the other hand, she faced a fiercely competitive buyers' market. Clients were trying to force thread-makers to undercut each other. Thread-makers responded by putting on the market a bewildering variety of threads of different qualities under a myriad of brands. Taking orders from merchants meant haggling over price and quality while convincing them one's products were better value for the money than those of one's competitors. To do this, one had to know exactly what the competition was selling and at what price; Sophie therefore collected samples and price cards.²³

Collecting payments was still not straightforward, as customers still paid in commercial papers and drafts on third parties rather than in cash.

One had to be sure that some of these papers could be redeemed before one's own papers came due. In January 1829, Sophie anticipated a cash-flow problem (a creditor needed the money the Vraus owed him to cover his own paper); to head it off, she transferred to her uncle Aubineau some paper on Lyon which he needed for his own trade in high-end fabric in return for some cash.

But however proficient she was at managing day-to-day affairs, she was not really in charge. She reported orders and payments in great detail to her husband (whereas François Barrois told his wife right away he was only interested in the business's general direction). She could not endorse commercial papers in his name, because he had not given her a power of attorney (Alexandrine had one), and had to send them to him.

Within a few years, Sophie lost interest in business. The reason for this was partly domestic. Around 1831, François-Joseph was expropriated and moved in with his son. He expected to be the center of the household, not an addition to it. Sophie responded to the change by slipping into invalidism (although she suffered from genuine migraines as well). Philibert spent a small fortune looking for a cure. Sophie claims she was cured only when she spent some extended time in the pine forest of Baden with her aunt and her two young children in 1835. The following year, her father-in-law died; and three years later, her last child, Marie Lucie Vrau, was born.²⁴

Sophie was also putting pressure on her husband to sell the business and move to Paris so that she could be closer to her sister and only surviving sibling.²⁵ François-Philibert finally offered it for sale at auction in 1842, but apparently received no satisfactory offer, and took it off the market.²⁶ Sophie consoled herself by traveling, visiting her sister near Paris, her aunt in Strasbourg, or going to the seaside in Ostend. It was only at the end of the 1840s that she went back to the office.²⁷ The parents had expected their son to second his father when he reached adulthood. Unfortunately, Philibert strongly disliked business in general and thread-making in particular, and he proved to be a very reluctant helper. Sophie therefore stepped into the breach and took over the paperwork. Philibert became his father's travelling salesman. Sophie did not enjoy her work. Much later, in a letter to her younger daughter, the recently retired Sophie acknowledged how happy she was to be relieved from the tedium of business.²⁸ Some women were deputy husbands under duress.

Neither Alexandrine nor Sophie could be called *entrepreneuses* in the narrowest sense of the term. Alexandrine was definitely managing uncertainty

in the context of very imperfect information and a volatile political situation. Sophie similarly had to make judgment calls on a day-to-day basis, also on the basis of imperfect information. But the two women's activities were part of the routine of a trading house and they were not seeking new solutions to current problems. That was what their husbands were doing. François-Philibert, on the other hand, turned out to be an innovator. He mechanized production early, and was one of the first Lille manufacturers to acquire a steam engine. In the 1850s, he broke with his competitors' price-based marketing strategy and adopted a brand-based one. He put all his products on the market under a single brand (contrary to his colleagues, who multiplied them), advertised it through posters in railway stations waiting rooms, distributed his thread through his own network of exclusive salesmen, and forbade the discounting of his brand. The strategy paid off and the business took off.²⁹ But François-Philibert's goal was not to create some industrial empire. There was nothing Schumpeterian about him. Rather, he did not want to leave debts behind him when he died.

1.2 *The Firm of Husband & Wife*

Wives could have more autonomous roles in the family business, but Parisian legislators soon found this objectionable and incompatible with the sacrosanct principle of *puissance maritale* (husbandly authority). Routine administrative sources produce examples of couples running a business in partnership in two locations, like the Delisle–Boulands. Jean Alexandre Delisle was a member of the firm Delisle et Cie, wine merchants in Bordeaux, where he lived. His wife, Marie Micheline Bouland, lived in Lille. In 1822, they registered Bouland & Co. with the Tribunal de commerce. The partnership included Delisle et Cie and Mme Bouland and its purpose was the sale of Bordeaux wine. Mme Delisle Bouland provided 36,000 Fr (10,000 Fr in cash) and Delisle & Co., 24,000 Fr, 6,000 in cash and 18,000 in Bordeaux wine.³⁰ Micheline Delisle-Bouland was at the very least her husband's agent at the other end of the country, and an autonomous partner.

Madame Delisle-Bouland was not the only married woman formally associated in a partnership including her husband. In 1832, Pierre-Antoine Desnoulet, master-cooper, his wife Euphrosine Prouvost, as well as Dame Victor Leloir, previously widow of Ferdinand Duvillier, currently postmistress in Peronne, and her sons Ferdinand and Edouard Duvillier, spinners, became partners to operate “at common expense a complete assortment

of cotton-spinning machines” under the name Desnoulet-Duvillier frères. The machines were located in a shed belonging to the remarried widow Duvillier. Two years later, Desnoulet withdrew and his son Pierre-Antoine and his daughter Lucie took his place, but only his son received the signature for the business.³¹ There was also Benoit Delannoy fils d’Antoine, founded in 1837 in Lille to manufacture sewing thread, and composed of Jacques-François Celestin Verstraete, *négociant*, his wife Rose Delannoy and their son Timoléon, all with signing rights.³² Or the Société Veuve Willoquet et Leman, formed for the purpose of spinning wool and cotton in March 1843 and which involved Hyacinthe Lecoutre, widow of Pierre Willoquet, wool trader, Charles Leman, wool trader, and Mme Victoire Willoquet, his duly authorized wife.³³

And then someone in high places noticed those husband and wife partnerships and put an end to it. A new article in the Civil Code stated that “spouses cannot waive any of the powers the husband has over the person of his wife and children, or the ones that belong to him as head of the family” and added that “women married in community cannot enter in a simple partnership with their husband, as such an association creates between the partners an equality incompatible with the rights the law gives the husband.”³⁴

And this despite the fact married women could not enter any partnership without their husband’s express permission and that he could revoke it at will. Women could be deputy husbands, and hold their husband’s power of attorney, but it was unthinkable they should seem their equal, even at his pleasure. Men were to be heads, whether they wanted to or not. Such a restriction did not apply to married women who were partnering with men to whom they were not married. They only needed their husband’s permission to enter into such an arrangement.

1.3 *And the Firm of Brother & Sister*

Middling-sort wives were expected to pull their weight. This was equally true of daughters. Middling families seem to have cut support to children, daughters included, as soon as they reached adulthood, forcing them to earn their own living. Most single businesswomen were part of sibling partnerships; these are elusive, because the partners often did not bother registering them, as the law required. For instance, there are seven *frère et soeur* entries in the 1840 Tourcoing tax rolls, but only one of those partnerships is registered (Desurmont frères et soeur). Siblings usually took

over the business of their deceased parents, or created their own. Sibling partners frequently lived together and the marriage of one or several of them often spelt the end of the partnership. The partnerships that lasted tended to involve siblings past customary marriage age. Among the oldest identifiable partnership was the one of Rahout brothers and sisters, who held a *patente* as manufacturers (*fabricants*) in 1818. In 1820, the business became Rahout sisters.³⁵ They were listed in the 1821 census as Justine, Amélie and Julie, aged 58, 56 and 47, and living with their mother Charlotte. A few houses round the corner, Benjamin Duriez, 48, lived with his mother and a 30-year-old sister who was also his partner in the firm of Duriez frère et soeur. They operated a cotton mill.³⁶

Destombes frères et soeur is a good example of a partnership established until the siblings married. It was constituted in September 1817 (and registered) by Augustin (born 1791), *fabricant*, Victoire (born 1793), without occupation, and Louis-Joseph (born 1796), also without occupation. They lived together, and the purpose of the business was to buy worsted to put out to weavers and sell the fabric. Their father was a *fabricant*, their mother died in 1819, and they had an older brother, Pierre-François, who was a roofer, and a younger one, Louis-Alexandre, who also became a *fabricant*. These Destombes were distant relatives of the top-drawer Destombes, who were aldermen and mayor, and married the Mottes (the common ancestor had lived in the mid-sixteenth century). The partnership was dissolved in January 1820. By then, Auguste had been married for six months to the *fabricante* Mélanie Leplat. Victoire was to marry the wool sorter Fleurisse Joseph Bouchart in November. A month later, Louis-Joseph married Angélique Corset, whose father was a roofer, her mother a *fabricante*, and her brother a glazier. Louis-Alexandre, who had not been a partner, married the flax merchant Rosalie Dervaux in September. Her father was a flax merchant, her mother a merchant and her brothers *fabricant* and farmer.³⁷ In 1833, Destombes-Corset was giving work to 13 weavers, Destombes-Leplat to 16 and Bouchart-Destombes, now a *fabricant* and master-comber, to 19 wool-combers and 40 weavers. But he went bankrupt during the economic crisis of the late 1840s and limited his activities to putting out weaving afterwards.³⁸ Those Destombes were therefore definitively middling sorts, contrary to their patrician distant cousins, and in their circles, women's lives were spent in business whether the business was theirs or not.

The year 1842 saw the creation of a second Desurmont frères et soeur partnership, this time between three of Louis-Dominique Desurmont's

children. Louis-Dominique had been a *fabricant*; one of his sisters had married the last pre-Revolution mayor of Tourcoing, Pierre Destombes. He died in May 1841, leaving a widow and five children: two married sons, as well as the still single Justine (born 1808), Norbert (born 1810) and Cyrille (born 1812). The unmarried sibling created the partnership the following year, to operate 12 wool-spinning frames. The mother was not involved. All had the signature for the business, but Justine would lose it, as well as her managing rights if she married, and her putative husband was prohibited for getting involved in the business. Cyrille married a few months later, and withdrew from the partnership in 1847. It lasted until Norbert's death in 1866; Justine then continued on her own, retiring in 1885; she died two years later at 79.³⁹

The restrictions that were imposed on Justine were still rare in early nineteenth-century articles of association. No such limitation was imposed on Flore Motte, for instance. On October 24, 1838, Flore, "without specific occupation", set up a simple partnership with her brother, Camille, to operate a wool- and cotton-spinning mill in Tourcoing under the name Camille Motte et soeur. Both partners had rights of *gestion* and *administration* (the rights to supervise the manufacturing process, and the right to handle the paperwork and to keep the books and the cash box.) Both had signing rights, but neither could borrow money in the name of the business without the other's permission.⁴⁰ The partnership was intended to last 9 years, but was not listed in the 1840 business tax rolls. When Flore married the merchant Louis Antoine Petit in 1842, she brought 9,000 Fr into the union, perhaps her share of the mill.⁴¹ She died in 1851; at the time her husband was identified as a master wool-comber, and her mother was living in Tournai. Camille had disappeared from the local records. Louis Petit soon disappeared too, probably the victim of the mechanization of wool combing.

2 DISJOINTED SPHERES

2.1 *Leading Wives*

All these women clearly worked as part of a family, and for its collective benefit. Married women were deputy husbands, and when it was still possible, could be officially treated as equal partners in the Firm of Husband & Wife, and single ones worked alongside their brothers in order not to burden their parents or other close relatives. Once they married, it was

assumed they would switch their efforts to assisting their husbands. Some women, however, were more independent, and occasionally entrepreneurs in the narrow sense of the term. Marriage was not necessarily an obstacle to female economic agency, either. Most women who were not in business with a husband were unmarried, but this was not universal.

Alexandrine and Sophie were not business leaders. The same cannot be said of the far better-known Pauline Motte-Brédard (1795–1871). Like the young ladies described by Brun-Lavainne, she was educated at Esquermes, the boarding school run by a few former Benedictine nuns, and which became later the very upscale Bernardine convent. After coming back home, she helped her parents in their business “to learn manufacturing and trade, as was the duty of all industrialists’ daughters and wives at the beginning of the century,” wrote her great-grandson Gaston Motte a century and a half later.⁴² Except, of course, that the Brédards were not yet industrialists, but out-putters. Pauline was in charge of correspondence.

Pauline’s maternal grandparents, the Desaints, were relative newcomers in Roubaix (they were from Belgium, like the Vraus). The same was not true of the man she married, Jean-Baptiste Motte, who could trace his family in Tourcoing back to the sixteenth century. His ancestors had been in trade since the seventeenth, his grandfather had been an alderman, and an uncle, Pierre Motte-Florin, mayor of Tourcoing. Motte-Florin and Jean-François Motte-Clarisse, Jean-Baptiste’s father, were among Tourcoing’s largest entrepreneurs and early industrialists.⁴³ They were spinning cotton during the Revolution. On Jean-Baptiste’s mother’s side, the ancestry was equally ancient and prestigious. The Mottes, like the Barrois-Virnots, were patrician. Contrary to the Barrois-Virnots and the Vraus, they were very formal, even stiff: parents and children, brothers and sisters used the *vous* form with each other, rather than the more familiar *tu* used by the other two families when addressing each other.⁴⁴

Jean-Baptiste’s brothers stayed in Tourcoing. He moved to Roubaix after his marriage in 1816, and appears to have taken over his in-laws’ business by the 1820s.⁴⁵ Gaston Motte describes him as a charming man who liked poetry and gardening, and would have willingly retired early to live off his means. But Pauline did not want to join the leisure class and, to quote Gaston Motte, Jean-Baptiste recognized that his wife “had all the qualities required to simultaneously run a household and a business, and had easily reached a compromise which left him to deal with external affairs and tend his garden, where he felt like the sole master.”⁴⁶ Pauline therefore ran a cotton mill in her backyard while her husband

tended his roses and was involved in a range of civic activities. She did not hesitate to shoo him away when he was in the way either; when a new pump had to be installed to feed the steam engine, and new pipes laid down in 1845, she wrote to her son; “All this has perturbed the dear father who worries easily over nothing, and we agreed he would not handle this matter.”⁴⁷

She also closely supervised the education of her five children, in whom she strove to instill a taste for trade and to nurture entrepreneurial abilities. Pauline’s eldest son, Louis Motte-Bossut, built the largest factory of the time in Roubaix (*la filature monstre*); the youngest, Alfred, studied to become a *notaire*, but decided instead to go into business. Only the middle son, Etienne, did not inherit his mother’s abilities. His businesses would have failed if his brothers had not rescued him to protect their social capital: the family name.

2.2 *Partners in Non-family Firms*

Women could not officially be their husband’s partners; however, nothing—except the lack of their husband’s permission—could stop them from being another man’s partner. And some were. Julien Thiriez, who founded a firm that lasted beyond World War Two, received the support of a married woman when he started his business. His father was only a foreman in Roubaix, and Julien therefore may not have had much family capital at his disposal. But in 1845, he and Jeannette Boyer, who was married in separation of property to Léon Couailhac (definitively not a northern name), started a cotton-spinning mill in Esquermes under the name Thiriez & Co. Both had the signature.⁴⁸ It is not clear what Mme Couailhac exactly did in the business.

On the other hand, we know what Cécile Joseph Roussel did. The wife of Charles Auguste Boivacq, merchant in Lille, she entered into a partnership with Adolphe Pironon, *rentier*, to manufacture and sell tulle in 1833. As required by law, Boivacq explicitly gave his permission. M. Pironon was to take care of the paperwork and the accounts. Mme Boivacq was to supervise the manufacturing process. The articles of association stated that Alphonse Pironon et Cie had nothing to do with the Auguste Boivacq firm, a thread-making business established in 1819. Boivacq ran into difficulties and in 1837, Cécile Roussel petitioned the Tribunal de commerce to have her property separated from her husband’s, something married women could do if their husband’s liabilities threatened their own estate.

Shortly afterwards, Boivacq allowed her to carry out “any trade she wanted in her own name and enter any partnership as she saw fit.”⁴⁹

This last association is interesting on several counts. Normally, women took care of the paperwork and account books. Here, the man was taking over the customary female responsibilities. Secondly, tulle manufacturing was a new industry recently introduced by English mechanics, who were dominating this sector of production. It is plausible that Cécile Boivacq understood machines and believed tulle making was a promising new sector. She raised the capital for her own factory by taking as a partner a *rentier* who limited himself to tasks that did not require technical knowledge. She then was an entrepreneur in her own right, and definitively an innovator. Her business used only her partner’s name—perhaps a way to protect the Boivacq name if it failed. Ironically, it is Boivacq who failed.

Single women similarly entered in non-family partnerships. Jean Alexandre Badard and Anne-Marie Thérèse Schelfthoudt set up a partnership in 1843 to press oil. He brought three-quarters of the capital and was entitled to three-quarters of the profit, and had sole signing rights, but she was in charge of the factory and required to live on site. Miss Schelfthoudt demonstrates that not only could women master technical skills (like Cécile Boisvacq) and market them, but that single women could be in business on their own account, and not solely work in their parents’ household. The *Messagerie de l’Éclair* (Speedy Courier Service), for instance, involved a Delle Elizabeth Jeanne Charlotte Durven, agent of Jacques Durven and Gerard Huyick, both in Antwerp, Michel Boulogne in Lille and Charles Dehausse in Paris. Elizabeth Derven and Michel Boulogne were the business’s directors.⁵⁰

2.3 *Independent Widows*

The Boivacq and Schelfthoudt examples also suggest that women were capable of mastering the technical knowledge needed to become full participants in the Industrial Revolution. English ladies appear to have been particularly technically competent. In 1841, the Veuve Selby et Cie society was created, whose partners were Elizabeth Hopkins, widow Selby, bleacher and finisher of tulle; Hannah Selby, widow of John White, without occupation; and George Hopkins, tulle manufacturer, to bleach and finish tulle. Hannah was to take care of the paperwork, George of the bleaching process and Elizabeth was to supervise the shop floor. The partners remained in business together till at least 1850, when they renewed

the partnership for another three years.⁵¹ The customary image of the early nineteenth-century businesswoman is the one of the widow taking over until her son(s) can succeed their fathers; Mmes Selby and White did not have sons who could go in business, and it seems that Elizabeth had been left to raise her daughter alone.

Widows with sons were not necessarily caretakers either; they could follow different agendas. Marie-Augustine Desurmont-Tiberghien (1766–1841) lost her husband Jean-Baptiste in 1810. They had five children; the oldest, a daughter, Augustine, was 17. The Tiberghiens and the Desurmonts were very ancient and very prominent Tourcoing families, going back to the sixteenth century. Marie-Augustine's father, Charles-François, was a wholesale trader and worsted manufacturer and had been an alderman before the Revolution. Jean-Baptiste Desurmont belonged to a secondary branch of the very patrician Desurmont clan. Marie-Augustine, her brother-in-law Louis-Joseph Desurmont (1768–1834) and his wife Marie-Anne Carton (1770–1832) registered their de-facto partnership to spin cotton under the name Desurmont frères in 1813. At the time, Desurmont frères had the largest cotton mill in Tourcoing with more than 5,000 spindles.⁵² The partnership was dissolved in 1825 and Marie-Augustine immediately entered into a new one with her son-in-law Henri Lezairé (who had married her daughter Augustine in 1813) and the widowed husband of her sister Marie-Anne (who had died in 1813), Jean-Baptiste Masurel (1772–1850). They spun cotton under the name Henri Lezairé et Cie, and the partnership was to last till one of them died. Marie Augustine died in 1841, in Seclin, and was listed as a *rentière* on her death certificate. Lezairé went bankrupt in 1848.⁵³ He died the same year in Anzin; he was then a commission and forwarding agent. What happened to Marie-Augustine's other children? Louis-Joseph (born 1801) was a *fabricant* when he married Justine Wattine in 1828. Edouard, born in 1803 and Charles, born in 1799, left together for the nearby town of Seclin in 1831, where they became spinners. At his mother's death, Edouard, who reported it, declared he was a *négociant*, a merchant-trader.⁵⁴ Marie-Augustine then had simply taken her husband's place in an existing association when she became a widow; she never associated her sons to the business, and when the initial partnership was dissolved, she continued in business not with any of them, but with her son-in-law and another relative of hers.

There was another interesting widow in the Desurmont clan. Colette Eugénie Apolline Debrabandière was born in Belgium in 1767 and

married Maximilien Desurmont (1761–1817) in 1790. Maximilien was Louis Dominique’s brother, and a nephew to the Motte-Brédards. Colette and Maximilien had four surviving children, two sons, Jacques-Joseph (1795–1876) and Marcellin (1803–1879), and two daughters, Louise Colette (1797–1882) and Amélie Colette (1799–1835). Maximilien was a coffee trader. He died in 1817. His widow was not interested in coffee. The tax rolls list her as a *fabricante*, employing ten weavers (which was a high number at the time) in 1819. Between 1823 and 1830, she was also a cotton spinner. Her factory went from 648 spindles in 1823 to 1,296 in 1829 and 1830 and then down to 864, probably on account of the cotton crisis.⁵⁵ She died in 1836 at 69. In the meantime, her daughters had married. Louise Colette, who gave her occupation as *fabricante* at the time, married a Roubaix *notaire*, auctioneer and farmer’s son, Louis Bernard, in 1820. She brought 9,500 Fr to the marriage, much less than her husband’s 17,000 Fr. Six years later, it was the turn of Amélie Colette, also *fabricante*; she married Denis Frys, from a patrician family. She brought 13,500 Fr, and he, 22,500 Fr.⁵⁶ Denis died in November 1835, followed by Amélie a few months later; they left four very young children. Louis Bernard died in 1831. In 1839, Louise Colette and her two brothers, who never married, set up Desurmont frères et soeur to spin cotton. The partnership lasted until 1853.⁵⁷ In 1852, theirs was the largest cotton mill in town. The 1851 census lists her as a *rentière*, heading a household composed of her 30-year-old son, a spinner, 27-year-old daughter, without occupation, her two brothers, spinners, and a Belgian servant.⁵⁸ She lived till 1882. Her son, Louis Bon, became a cotton spinner.

3 AND THE NOT-SO-INTERESTED WIDOWS

Some widows, however, preferred not to continue in their husband’s footsteps. Antoine Scrive-Labbé and his brother Désiré Scrive took over their father’s business, making textile cards by hand in 1808. In 1820, Scrive-Labbé heard that the English had invented a machine to make those tools. The British government, however, prohibited the export of machine tools, machine-tool parts and even the emigration of the workers who knew how to build them. Scrive-Labbé got himself hired as a worker in an English card factory, smuggled back the plans and the parts for the machine, and the brothers set up their own factory in 1821.⁵⁹ It was extremely profitable. When Désiré Scrive died in 1826, his widow, Charlotte Crépel, did not remain in the partnership. Instead, she sold her share of the business to

her brother-in-law for one million francs, and used the capital to build an impressive real-estate portfolio. She was not economically passive—but manufacturing did not appeal to her (or she did not get along with her brother-in-law!).⁶⁰

4 HOW MANY?

In the first half of the century, being female was no obstacle per se to engaging in mercantile and manufacturing activities in the Lille arrondissement. Some women performed conventional roles as deputy husbands or caretaking widows. But other women, independently of their marital status, could also be economic agents in their own right. At the other end of the spectrum, some wives would have preferred not to have anything to do with business at all. A life in business was therefore an unproblematic, but not a universal experience among women of the merchant and manufacturing classes. How common, then, were those women? And were their businesses smaller or shorter lived than the men's, as some have suggested?

To find out, we must turn to quantitative sources, which unfortunately are neither abundant, nor problem-free, for the period under consideration (see the methodological Appendix A for a more detailed discussion of the various quantitative sources). The only sources for Lille are the city directories. The Tourcoing sources are slightly better. They include the censuses of 1820 and 1851, complete business tax rolls for the year 1840 and every year from 1852 onwards, as well as some scattered and incomplete fiscal records for the previous years.

Although the overall proportion of women running a business in Lille increased in the second quarter of the nineteenth-century (see Table B6 in Appendix B), the proportion of manufacturers and wholesale traders who were women declined, from 7.3 % in 1830 to 5.5 % in 1840, 4.2 % in 1850. The decline was not a consequence of greater numbers of women joining partnerships instead of remaining sole proprietors, and being hidden under a male business name (like Cécile Boivacq). The proportion of partnerships involving women was also diminishing (see Table B3 in Appendix B). Three-quarters of those women in business were widows (except in 1840, when the percentage of widow was only 60 %—but this may be due to the high number of women whose marital status is not known). Married women always represented a small proportion of the whole.

The same trend occurred in Tourcoing. The (incomplete) early business tax rolls suggest a decline similar to the one identified in Lille, from 10.2 %

of textile business run by women in 1820 to 6.8 % in 1852 (and 5.1 % five years later) (see Table B10 Appendix B). The figures are higher if one takes all manufacturing businesses into account and not only the textile ones—but they still decline: 11.0 % in 1840 to 6.7 % by 1857. Figures for wholesale, on the other hand, fluctuate so wildly as to be meaningless. Female participation in partnership, however, did not decline until after 1850 (see Table B4 Appendix B). The censuses suggest a similar evolution. The 1820 Tourcoing census enumerated 278 households headed by a merchant, *négociant*, *fabricant*, *filateur*, processor of natural products (like a brewer) or a *propriétaire-rentier* (included because elderly manufacturers or fabricants sometimes became *propriétaires-rentiers*). Of those heads of household, 12.5 % were women. In 1851, there were 266 such households, 16.2 % headed by a woman. Inactive heads were very few in 1821 (3 men and 4 women, or 1.25 % and 10 % of those heads, respectively), and this was not because *rentiers* preferred living in others' households. There were almost no non-head *rentiers*. Inactive heads were more numerous in 1851: 27 men and 30 women, or 12 % of the men and 65 % of the women. Women were either less active, or less willing to admit to an activity.

Although not very consistent, these figures suggest that women's participation in mercantile or manufacturing activities may have declined. The reasons behind this are difficult to ascertain, because different sectors were differently affected in the two towns. In Tourcoing, women were equally represented in the different manufacturing sectors. In Lille, on the other hand, they were almost absent from spinning. Women were underrepresented in the new sectors. In 1831, only 2 cotton spinners (out of 62) and two tulle weavers (out of 46) were women; in 1840, one out of 37 and 6 out of 59. In 1850, there were no female cotton spinners, but one flax spinner (out of 19), 3 tulle weavers (out of 41) and one machine-tool builder out of 26. There, female-headed textile businesses were more likely to be found in older sectors, especially finishing, which was a well-developed activity before the Revolution (bleaching, dyeing, printing, calendaring). This also precludes lack of technical expertise or access to capital for the underrepresentation of women in spinning, as finishing was technically complex and required elaborate facilities—and deep pockets in the case of bleaching, an 8-month-long process.

The existing sources are not complete enough to determine whether female-run businesses were shorter lived than male ones (they do not appear to have been). But they seem to have been smaller. Between 1819 and 1830, female-owned spinning mills in Tourcoing were smaller than

Table 3.1 Average size of female-owned spinning-mills, Tourcoing, 1820–40 (in n of spindles)

	1820	1830	1840
All	1,863	1,464	1,641
Female-owned	1,188	965	1,525

Source: AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C 2

average (but the smallest were male-owned). In almost every year for which the data exist, the average female-headed mill was smaller than the overall average (see Table 3.1).

5 CONCLUSION

Middling-sort women remained actively involved in manufacturing and wholesale trade as daughters, wives and widows, and even operated their own business for most of the first half of the nineteenth-century, as they had in the past. There were several reasons for this. First, mechanization did not affect all sectors of production, and until the introduction of steam engines, spinning sheds remained small production sites, integrated in existing ranges of activities rather than displacing them. Second, most manufacturers and wholesalers were still people of rather modest wealth, whether they were newcomers in the manufacturing world or not. All those people had to work and needed the labour of all family members. As for the descendants of the old elite, the turmoil of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic years had taught them not to take their position for granted. They too believed in the necessity of work.

Women of the entrepreneurial middle class were therefore industrious and were probably expected to be so. They had to pull their weight whether in possession of a husband or not, and independent widows, and even independent married women, were not unheard of. There were nonetheless limitations to their activities. It went without saying that married women would continue shouldering all domestic responsibilities. Narcisse Faucheur made it a point to inform his readers he did not put his wife “on an allowance” (*à la pension*—that is, giving her a fixed sum for household expenses) because he had complete confidence in her ability to live within their means. Gaston Motte, like Brun-Lavainne and Faucheur, took for granted that women of that generation would run a business in addition

to her household duties. Jean-Baptiste Motte was no “househusband”. His lack of domestic and business responsibilities also made it possible for him to play an active role in the public sphere of civic activities—a sphere from which women were excluded, irrespective of talent. One then wonders whether all those *fabricants* and *filateurs* and other merchants who became aldermen and mayors, sat on welfare boards or became involved in the chamber of commerce, also had wives who did their work in their absence, but who, contrary to Pauline Motte, never got credit for it.

Women also suffered from legal restrictions which did not apply to men. Married women could not go into business without their husband’s permission. Their automatically falling under their husband’s authority the minute they married hampered their ability to enter into partnership when unmarried. Their associates could, with justification, fear that their marrying could result in their being in business with a male not of their own choosing, and whom they might find unsuitable. Hence escape clauses stipulating that women who married lost the signature, or even ceased being partners altogether. Married women’s ability to act as their husband’s agent was also restricted. Neither Alexandrine nor Sophie could perform basic business tasks without a power of attorney (in Alexandrine’s case, even to receive a registered letter). As married women, they could not contract without their husband’s permission. If they ran their own business, they could contract, but could not present themselves in a court of law without this permission. Traders and manufacturers may have thought they could escape some of those constraints through partnerships between husband and wife, but Parisian jurists closed that loophole which threatened the *puissance maritale* (husbandly authority). Local and national gender norms were therefore not necessarily identical (or the jurists’ and the businesspeople’s did not necessarily coincide).

Women were still a real presence in manufacturing and wholesale in the first half of the century—but one is left wondering whether those women were among the last of their breed. Lille appears poised to confirm various historical interpretations that claim upper-class women willingly or not, turned their backs to lives in business after mid-century. In Lille, they were already leaving—or being marginalized in the sectors which were on the cutting edge of the Industrial Revolution. A similar trend was not clearly in evidence in Tourcoing. Should we add “not yet”? Lille had been a large trading and manufacturing center for centuries. Tourcoing was just beginning the shift from small market town and out-putting center to industrial city. Should we expect it to follow the example of Lille, but with a delay? The next chapter will show that this expectation did not materialize.

NOTES

1. Petit, Grislain, Leblan, *La Redoute*, 31.
2. Brun-Lavainne, *Revue du Nord*, 1837, 169. Brun-Lavainne was director of the Archives Départementales.
3. *Peignage A. Prouvost et Cie, Plaquette du centenaire*, No page.
4. Faucheur, *Mon histoire*, 369 and 379; Toulemonde, *Naissance d'une métropole*, 39.
5. The farm consisted of a single 36-*are* block (nine-tenths of an acre), three-quarters in fields and one-quarter in woods and pasture, with farmhouse and ancillary buildings for the *consier* and castle and park for the owner. In 1806, it housed 23 people: the *consier* and his family, the gardener, his wife and three children, and nine farmhands. Pierre Pollet was one of three town dwellers allowed to graze his sheep on the town's commons. Petit, Grislain, Le Blan, *La Redoute*, 19.
6. However, hers was a separate household.
7. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*. Unless otherwise specified, the information about the Barrois-Virnot is taken from this volume.
8. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*, 94 et 265.
9. The *assignats* were treasury bonds issued by the revolutionary government in 1789 and which were used as currency from 1790 onwards. The *assignats* were guaranteed by expropriated Church land, but as the government printed them without regard to the value of the securities, they quickly lost their value.
10. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*, 75.
11. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*, 67.
12. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*, 94.
13. Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du commerce*, 345.
14. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*, 68.
15. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*, 62.
16. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*, 94.
17. Dubly, *Le caducée et le carquois*, 108.
18. Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du commerce*, 333–337. The exchange was a place where one could trade commercial papers such as bills of exchange.
19. Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du commerce*, 345.
20. Vanackere, *Almanach*, 1829–1855; Ravet Anceau, *Annuaire*, 1855–1890.
21. Théry, *Une famille de patrons*, 11–16; ADN, Actes de société 6U2/15 (1820–30).

22. AEV, PCI 28-13, “Biographie de Mme Vrau-Aubineau par Camille Feron-Vrau.”
23. AFC, Fonds Vrau, Lettres de famille; lettres de Sophie Vrau-Aubineau à François-Philibert Vrau, 1828–29.
24. AEV, “Biographie de Mme Vrau-Aubineau” ; Théry, *Une famille de Patrons*, 19.
25. In 1840, François Philibert wrote in his diary (which unfortunately was not preserved): “ Sophie ennuyée à Lille vient me retrouver à Paris. Depuis 6 mois, elle avait le spleen, occasionné par l’ennui des affaires et le désir de vendre la maison et de se retirer, mais avec la crainte cependant de n’avoir pas un sort assuré pour ses enfants. ” AEV, PCI 28–13, “ Biographie de Mme Vrau-Aubineau.”
26. Théry, *Une famille de Patrons*, 22–24.
27. AEV, PCI 28-13, “Biographie de Mme Vrau-Aubineau ” ; Théry, *Une famille de Patrons*, 34–35.
28. AEV, PVI, Lettres de Sophie Vrau-Aubineau à sa fille, letter #90, april 1861.
29. Théry, *Une famille de Patrons*, 46–49.
30. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/15 (1820–1830).
31. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/186 (1830–1836). The signature was a critical power, without which one could not financially engage the business nor enter into a contact in its name. Sophie then could manage, but did not have final say.
32. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/193 (1836–1839).
33. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2 195 (1840–1848).
34. Article 1388 (puissance maritale) in the 1872 version. No such restriction can be found in the original version of the Code—obviously, it had never occurred to jurists that women could be their husband’s business partners! And one no longer finds husband-wife partnerships in the second half of the century. This matter was settled by judicial decisions (*jurisprudence*) declaring partnership between husband and wife null and void in 1851 and 1856. Baudry-Lacantiniere, Le Courtois et Surville, *Traité théorique et pratique de droit civil*, 96–97; *Code Civil*, 1873, article 1388: “les époux ne peuvent déroger ni aux droits résultant de la puissance maritale sur la personne de la femme et des enfants ou qui appartiennent au mari comme chef” and

- “La femme mariée en communauté ne peut contracter avec son mari une société en nom collectif, qui confère à chacun des membres une égalité de droit incompatible avec les droits confiés par la loi au mari.”
35. AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C 1.
 36. AMTg, Table de population, 1821–1836, F1D1; Matrices de patentes, G1C 2-36.
 37. The demographic information is taken from the Tourcoing civil registers of births, deaths and marriages, ADN, État civil, Tourcoing, on line; AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C 1&2. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/13 and 6U2/14 (1815–1820).
 38. AMTg, 7F1 C12, liste des filateurs, marchands peigneurs et fabricants au 27/2/1833.
 39. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2 193 (1840–1848); AMTg, Matrices des patentes. 1842–1885.
 40. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2 192 (1836–1839). Their father, Jean-François Motte was a third cousin to J-Bte Motte Brédard; their mother, Victoire Duquennoy belonged to a well-to-do and well established family as well.
 41. ADN, Serie 3Q Enregistrement, Contrats de mariages, 3Q538 #4.
 42. Motte, *Les Motte*, 34 ; [Motte ed.], *Motte-Bossut, une époque*, 7.
 43. The second name is the wife’s. Hyphenating husband and wife’s names was extremely common, and was still the norm among store-keepers in the second half of the twentieth century. Jean-Baptiste’s brother, Jean-François, married a daughter of Pierre Destombes-Desurmont. Pauline was therefore an aunt through marriage to the *Desurmont frères et soeurs* met earlier.
 44. *Motte-Bossut, une époque*.
 45. Gaston Motte, *Les Motte*, 35.
 46. *Motte-Bossut, une époque*, 10.
 47. *Motte-Bossut, une époque*, 137.
 48. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/193 (1840–1848).
 49. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/192 (1836–1839).
 50. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/193 (1840–1848). I accidentally came across the marriage of M. Badard and Mlle Schelfhoudt in Moulins on March 31, 1852. Both were Belgian; he was a 53-year-old widower whose wife had died in 1849

- and declared being a *négociant*; she had lost her father shortly after her birth in 1813, and her mother in 1843. ADN, État civil, Moulins, online.
51. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/193 (1840–1848). According to the Lille registers of births, marriages and deaths, Hannah Selby was Elizabeth’s daughter; she had married London-born John William White in 1835, had a son (who died) and a daughter before her husband died in November 1840. Elizabeth, born about 1795 in Nottingham, died in Lille in 1871, widow of Thomas Selby, who had died in Nottingham. Selby was not present at his daughter’s wedding and declared absent for 17 years, letting one wonders whether he had deserted his wife and infant daughter in a foreign country. George Hopkins was born in 1800 in Nottingham, and was likely Elizabeth’s brother. There was also a William Hopkins in the records, born in Nottingham around 1799. John William’s father died in Lille in 1851. The Whites and the Hopkins were tulle manufacturers or bleachers. ADN, État Civil en ligne.
 52. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/11 (1813); AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C 1&2; *Nos ancêtres tourquennois*, vol. 2, 45.
 53. ADN, Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, Actes de société, 6U2/15 (1825); Toulemonde, *Naissance d’une métropole*, 186.
 54. AMTg, Table de population 1821–1836, F1D1; ADN, État Civil, Lille, Seclin and Anzin, on line.
 55. AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C.
 56. ADN, Contrats de mariages, 3Q538 #4; État Civil, Tourcoing, on line.
 57. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U2 193 (1836–1839); AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C3.
 58. AMTg, 1851 census, F1A 4-5.
 59. Anon., “Aux ouvriers de la fabrique de cardes Henri Scrive.”
 60. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U2/15 (1820–1830).

Merchants and Manufacturers After 1850

The story of the arrondissement's businesswomen unfolded in unexpected ways in the second half of the nineteenth-century and the early years of the twentieth. The trend detected among manufacturers and wholesalers in the 1840s was reversed, and the proportion of such businesses headed by women increased again after 1850 and reached early nineteenth-century levels by the turn of the twentieth in both cities. Women, however, were not entirely in the same lines of business as earlier, and in both cities the emergence and expansion of new sectors of activities contributed to the rebound. The proportion of women in the older manufacturing sectors never regained its former levels in Lille, contrary to Tourcoing, where the proportion of women in spinning and weaving declined, levelled off and rose again in the twentieth century. The two cities were clearly evolving along different lines. Women were still in business in the two cities, but not necessarily in the same types of business—and perhaps businesswomen no longer belonged to the same social categories; by century's end, new developments were occurring that adversely affected some women's ability to run a trading or manufacturing firm. Nonetheless, many of the arrondissement's women continued playing the same roles as their foremothers until the outbreak of World War One. There were deputy husbands and caretaking widows, independent married, widowed or single businesswomen and members of sibling partnerships as in the past.

I STATISTICS

The city directories remain our only source over the long term for Lille. At first, it seems as if women in Lille re-entered the manufacturing and wholesale trading sectors with a vengeance, even if we discount the figures for 1860 as source artifacts (see Appendix A—Sources and methods), and they did not leave them until the twentieth century (see Tables B6, B7 and B8 in Appendix B). However, a closer look at the type of business those women ran reveals a noticeable shift in their activities. The second half of the century witnessed the emergence and expansion of the ready-to-wear industry (*confection*) following the invention of the sewing machine.¹ This was a fast-growing sector: 10 % of all manufacturers and *négociants* in 1860 and one-third in 1880 were makers of ready-to-wear garments. It was also one with a strong—but not dominant—female presence (about one in five, almost all making female garments). Women clearly took advantage of a sector in expansion and serving a female clientele as they did in Scotland, the United States or Germany. Nonetheless, they did not dominate the ladieswear and ladies' undergarment industries. And if we subtract the garment industry from the manufacturing/wholesale category, the proportion of female-headed wholesale or manufacturing businesses drops significantly in the 1860s, but remains stable afterwards (3–4 % of all those businesses). The joint sphere of business was partly segmenting.

The number of businesses listed in the *Annuaire*s exploded in the twentieth century (there were already 12,500 businesses listed in 1890). New and fast-growing types of businesses, such as insurance companies, brokerage firms, agents of non-local firms, branch plants and utility companies and related activities were all men's businesses (although there was a female insurance broker in Tourcoing in the early twentieth century).² However, most of those enterprises were not truly family firms. The types of businesses in which women had been involved since the beginning of the century, on the other hand, remained overwhelmingly family firms: textile production and wholesale, the processing of agricultural commodities (breweries, distilleries, sugar refineries, oil mills, grist mills, etc.), the manufacture of bricks, tiles and earthenware or the fabrication of machines and machine tools for the local industries. The proportion of such businesses headed by women hardly changed between 1860 and 1925—and the proportion of garment makers was stable between 1860 and 1910, with the exception of a dip in 1900 (see Tables B7, B8 and B9 in Appendix B). After the war, the number of garment makers dropped, and the proportion of women among them rose.

The census figures for Tourcoing similarly suggest a decline at mid-century followed by a rebound, and as in Lille, a slightly downward sloping secular trend line. Of those declaring to the enumerators that they were manufacturers or merchants, 14 % were female in 1821, 8.3 % in 1851, and 10.4 % in 1886. In 1911, however, their proportion had dropped to 4.1 %. Whatever change that took place occurred at the very end of the nineteenth or early in the twentieth century.

The tax rolls tell a similar story for the nineteenth-century, but also suggest the 1911 census should perhaps not be taken at face value (Table B10 in Appendix B). The trend line also dips at mid-century, and then rises to reach early nineteenth-century levels after 1870; but there is no post-1900 decline—the proportions remains constant (9–10 %). If we take all class C business (manufactures) and not solely textile factories into account, we get very similar figures (11.3 % in 1911). The proportion of female-headed wholesale firms continues to bounce up and down without any apparent rhyme or reason (a high of 1.6 % and a low of 10.5 %); this was not due to small numbers—there were always more than fifty such firms after mid-century, and more than a hundred after 1880. On the other hand, the number of brokerage firms and commission agents expanded exponentially, as in Lille, and as in Lille, those were almost entirely operated by men. The growth of manufacturing had not been detrimental to women in business, but that of the new service industry was.

The post-1860 female resurgence was mostly the consequence of the increased proportion of firms specializing in preparation and finishing (cleaning, carding, combing, dying), or manufacturing new products (knitting yarn; yarn for the hosiery industry, hosiery, knitted goods and knitted fabric,³ and in the twentieth century, ready-made garments). Those firms were more likely to be headed by a woman than the spinning mills or the weaving plants. According to the tax records, after the mid-1850s, women were less likely to run a spinning or weaving mill than other types of manufacturing plant. The same uneven distribution is found in the 1911 census: 2.7 % of the industrial weavers, but 7.7 % of the hosiers and 13.5 % of those engaged in preparation and finishing were female. This is not because preparation and finishing, and the new manufactures were the domains of smaller firms: those sectors included some tiny workshops using hand frames, like the hosiers, but also very large concerns. Wool-combing, for instance, was almost always undertaken at the same time as the making of chemicals and soap. Women's activities did not narrow either. Businesswomen were peppered over the entire range of activities,

Table 4.1 Average size of spinning-mills (in n of spindles), Tourcoing, 1852–1901

		1852	1862	1872	1882	1892	1901
All	Cotton	3,890	8,101	12,554	12,749	16,687	27,090
	Wool	2,714	3,684	5,264	7,439	10,514	15,317
Women	Cotton	3,672	3,950	15,911	15,844	None	26,520
	Wool	2,360	3,133	4,799	4,001	8,630	25,212

Source: Matrices de patentes, G1C1 3-60

from machine building to flour making, and banking to public contracting. And some were in business for a very long time; Justine Campion, who inherited an industrial dye plant from her parents, was in business from 1865 to 1912.

The spinners, especially the cotton spinners, were among the largest businesses in town. Women's reduced presence in spinning and weaving was not accompanied by the marginalization of those who were still involved in those activities. Female-headed mills were usually slightly smaller than average (although not in every year), but were definitely not small, marginal factories (see Table 4.1). Although very large concerns were usually male-run, this was not always the case. For instance in 1877, the largest cotton mill was run by the widow Auguste Dewavrin-Duvillier (Henriette Justine Duvillier), in association with Paul Dewavrin-Lorthoix and Eugène Loridan-Dewavrin, her son and son-in-law, respectively (the second one lived at the same address as her). She died two years later. (In 1911, her daughter Henriette Loridan-Dewavrin was running a spinning mill—alone).

The same is true of other businesses which can be compared with at least one male-headed equivalent. Often, the second largest concern in a given industrial sector was registered in a woman's name. The brewery operated by the widow Liagre-Hauterive (whom we will meet again below) between 1877 and 1892 was the second largest in town (and the largest in 1882). The widow Odon Tavernier-Beuscart operated the second largest industrial dyeworks between 1885 and 1894. She had 30 workers between 1890 and 1894; the largest dye plant had 32. The widow Emile Beaudoin-Desrachinois was one of the town's two public contractors (*entrepreneur de travaux public*) in 1892. Contractors paid a business tax based on the preceding year's gross income. The widow's male competitor had done much better than her, with an income of 80,000 Fr against her 50,000 Fr. Nonetheless, in those days, a female

factory worker made 2.75 Fr a day, and a male *commis aux écritures* 1,500 Fr a year. Mme Beaudoin-Desrachinois's business was anything but marginal. In 1910, the firm was run by her children, Gaspard and Suzanne. Suzanne was in charge of purchasing and paperwork.⁴ In 1892 again, the largest wool-combing business was also in the hands of a woman, the widow Fouan-Leman; it included a soap and chemical factory. In 1911, the Fouan-Leman firm ranked third out of ten wool combers, dwarfed only by the massive Tiberghien and Masurel industrial complexes. The size of the business therefore does not seem to have determined the extent of a woman's involvement in the family business—and neither did its nature.

Tourcoing women continued to be partners. Simple partnerships were much less likely to include females at mid-century, but the trend also significantly reversed after 1880 (one in five partnerships included a woman in 1905–1911). (See Table B4 in Appendix B). The proportion of females who were partners was always lower than the proportion of partnerships including a woman: women were usually the only one of their sex in a group comprising several males. Male partners almost always had the signature, unless they were under age (and in the twentieth century, under 25 or unmarried). Female partners were less likely to have the signature, especially at mid-century (a low of 33 % in the 1870s), but by the twentieth century, at least 90 % of them had it. Partnerships and single proprietorships thus followed the same general trend. Tourcoing women were coming back into business.⁵

The trends in the two cities therefore display some similarities, despite women being engaged in different kinds of activities. One could find more women in new manufacturing sectors in both places. Women continued to be engaged in *négoce* (wholesale general trade), although to a lesser extent than in manufacturing. Their experience with wholesale general trade did not prevent brokerage firms and commission agencies from being male preserves. The mid-century marked the nadir of female presence in business, as sole owner, or as active or even non-signing partner in both cities. In the larger one, their resurgence was the result of the emergence and expansion of the garment trade; in the smaller one, of industrial diversification. The early twentieth century even showed signs of the consolidation of their presence in Tourcoing. It is of course impossible to tell whether this trend would have continued had the local industrial infrastructure not been destroyed by World War One. Generally speaking, then, the world of large-scale business was not shutting its doors to women.

Heading a business was probably a more common experience in the life of women of the manufacturing or trading classes than the percentages suggest. Most of the businesswomen found in administrative and fiscal records are widows. In 1851, 12 % of Tourcoing households were headed by widows—and it was extremely unusual for widows, especially those who were well-to-do, not to head their own households. Five to six percent of the town's textile firms were in a woman's name. If 12 % of the households which were or had been producing textiles were also headed by widows, this meant that 40–50 % of textile firms were taken over by the widow at the death of the male head (and one must remember that not all husbands predeceased their wives). In 1886, 12 % of the households were still headed by widows and so were 9 % of the textile firms, suggesting a succession rate of two-thirds.⁶ Running a business in one's own name was part of most of those women's life cycle. Widows, of course, tended to be older than the average business male, and therefore they stayed in activity for fewer years than the men, which depressed the percentage of female-headed businesses. But this did not prevent women's presence at the head of manufacturing firms from being naturalized by contemporaries.

2 TRADITIONAL ROLES: DEPUTY-HUSBANDS AND CONTINUING WIDOWS

Most of the women in the sources were widows, who probably were able to take over because they had worked alongside their husband when he was alive. Deputy husbands were almost invisible in official records—but not necessarily hidden from their contemporaries' sight, on the contrary. There is the misnamed *Relof frères et Jules Herbaux* constituted in 1865 to operate spinning mills in Roubaix and Tourcoing (there was only one *Relof* in the partnership—the brother was a ghost). *Jules Relof* was to supervise the Roubaix mill and take care of the paperwork; *Jules Herbaux* was to supervise that at Tourcoing and was in charge of marketing. *Mme Jules Herbaux* was not officially a partner but she “was granted all the necessary powers, including the right to sign by proxy for the partners; she alone will be in charge of the purchases of raw material, tools and equipment; the partners are specifically prohibited from making such purchases, which will be null and void.”⁷ Along the same lines, in 1868, the firms *Masurel frères* and *Veuve Jules Desurmont et fils* provided *Louis Ghesquières* and *Jean Bailly* with the necessary capital to set up a worsted mill. *Ghesquières* was the sole manager and only he had the signature, but

he was allowed to give his wife a power of attorney and if he died, she was to replace him.⁸

Then, there is the case of Alphonse Désire Darras-Lemaire, whose worsted mill doubled in size between 1857 and 1872. In 1870, he secured a 200,000 Fr line of credit from the Caisse d'Escompte de Lille.⁹ His wife was empowered to endorse commercial paper like him. The contract also stipulated that "in addition, Mlle Victorine Darras, no occupation, is authorized by her father and mother to endorse papers and cash them. M and Mme Darras thereby providing her with all the necessary authorizations".¹⁰ One can seriously doubt that Victorine Darras was "unoccupied." In 1873, Darras-Lemaire created a *société en commandite par actions* (joint stock company) to comb and spin wool. He issued 1,250 shares at 1,000 Fr each. He owned 233 shares, his wife 277 and their sons Paul and Ernest 10 each. The physical plant included a wool-combing factory, a spinning mill, a twisting mill (*retorderie*), a warehouse and a steam engine.¹¹ The business did not do as well as the shareholders expected and the following year, they forced the dissolution of the company. Darras-Lemaire, his wife and their sons, present at the meeting, all protested the decision.¹² Darras-Lemaire did not survive the end of his company very long. He was dead by 1881. His widow financed the eldest son, becoming a silent partner in his company in 1882.¹³ Wives therefore were not kept out of sight of the rest of the world, and Mme Darras-Lemaire shows that wives could visibly engage in the activities of a large firm—and fight the shareholders at the annual meeting. This example also shows that *demoiselles* remained active behind the scenes, like the young ladies described by Brun-Lavainne in the 1820s.

Helping wives were not necessarily treated generously. Their labor may have been taken for granted, instead of giving them any specific right or power. In 1887, Paul Dervaux entered into a partnership. *He* was paid 1,000 Fr a year on account of the work his wife was doing in the office—and if he died, Mme Dervaux could remain in the association but only as a partner without signature, and would have to hire an employee paid 5,000 Fr a year at her expense to replace her husband.¹⁴ Just as bad was the case of Mme Dutrieux. Casimir Dutrieux, a spinner, and François Grimonprez, foreman, were partners in a spinning mill. Grimonprez was in charge of the shop floors, Dutrieux of the paperwork and cash box. He was required to live on site and "to compensate the association for the free rent granted M Dutrieux, his wife will attend to the paper work, correspondence and book keeping, so that the association does not have

to hire a clerk.” Dutrieux, in other words, had been put in charge of work he could not or would not do, and it was expected his wife would do it instead of him.¹⁵ But that gave her absolutely no formal say in the way the business was run. Davidhoff and Hall believe that the spread of the separate sphere ideology had resulted in English families hiding from view the contribution of their women to the running of the family business in order to protect their respectability. The French families do not seem to have worried about that, and took for granted that their women would help.

This participation was still expected in the early twentieth century, even among the wealthy. As deputy husbands, wives were expected to substitute for absent or incapacitated males. They could also substitute for unwilling ones, or for failures. After the death of François-Philibert Vrau, the family firm became the possession of Sophie, her son Philibert and her son-in-law Camille Feron, who had married their daughter Marie. Germaine Bernard married Camille and Marie’s only surviving adult child, Paul Feron-Vrau, when she was 18. Like his uncle, 22-year-old Paul was really, but *really* not interested in thread-making. At a time when Camille was expecting his son to relieve him of some of his work, Paul heard a convenient call from God and he volunteered to help Abbé Masquelier set up a regional edition of the virulently anti-government daily *La Croix*, published in Paris by the Assumptionist brothers. The first end-of-year inventory in his hand was not an impressive piece of work—the columns balanced, but did not add up. Camille then marched his young daughter-in-law in the office and taught her bookkeeping, and probably a few other things about business. She took the inventory in 1897 and *her* columns added up.¹⁶ In 1900, the Paris *La Croix* was in great danger of being confiscated by the government as belonging to an unauthorized (and openly hostile) Congregation. The Assumptionists sold the paper to Paul Feron-Vrau, who ran it for the next 14 years. Germaine ran the factory in his absence, soon by herself, as Philibert died in 1904 and Camille the following year. According to her biographer, she was a quick student and an efficient director.¹⁷ She died relatively young, in 1926, of an internal tumor which crushed her organs. But before dying, she organized the succession. Paul and she had not had any children. Before the war, she had brought her younger brother (also called Paul) into the business as a partner. After the war, she brought in two sons of a sister, Jean and Michel Théry. In 1926, the firm became a limited-liability partnership (SARL) between Paul Feron-Vrau (one share), Paul Bernard (one share) and the Thérys (half a share each). After her death, Paul Feron-Vrau, who disagreed with his partners about the

running of the firm, and did not see why he should receive only one third of the profits when he had supplied all the capital, sued them for a bigger share. He naturally lost. The judge reminded him that he had signed the articles of association providing that the profits would be divided into three equal shares.¹⁸ The story in the family is that Germaine would never have allowed “her” men to get at each other’s throats in such a manner.¹⁹ It is also clear that Germaine turned Ph. Vrau et Cie. into a Bernard firm.

And when husbands failed, women might be expected to pick up the pieces, although with some help from their friends—or creditors. “H. Defontaine” was set up as a limited-liability joint-stock wool-trading company (*société en commandite par actions*) in 1875, and supported by 19 investors. Most of those were partnerships (four from Roubaix, 13 from Tourcoing, one from Paris, one from Antwerp and one from Marseilles), and top-drawer ones at that, like Anselme Dewavrin or Masurel fils. The general partner was Henriette Defontaine, separated as to property from her husband, the bankrupt Paul Defontaine, pursuant to a 1874 court decision. Henriette had to invest in the new business all the assets she could salvage from the bankruptcy. Her partners, who obviously had invested in Paul’s business, promised to do the same with their share of bankruptcy proceedings. Other creditors were invited to join the partnership. Henriette was entitled to a 4,000 Fr per annum managing indemnity; she had to “provide the labour of her husband at her expense”, and find a replacement if he died. If she died, her daughter Laure was to take her place (her son was under age).²⁰ Paul, a bankrupt, had lost his civil rights and consequently the right to engage in commercial activities. His creditors promptly put in place a plan to keep the family from becoming destitute and try to recoup their losses—but this plan could function only if the women of the family took over the business. “H. Defontaine” was dissolved five years later for reasons unknown.²¹

Involvement in the family business segued naturally into active widowhood. The Pollet-Caulliez women were typical deputy husbands who became continuing widows. In 1850, 28-year-old Pierre-Philippe Pollet married 24-year-old Eudoxie Caulliez; the couple eventually had 11 children.²² Two years later, Eudoxie’s brother, 33-year-old Maurice, married Pierre-Philippe’s sister Flavienne, who was 23.²³ By 1866, the two brothers-in-law were operating a spinning-mill bankrolled by their brother, the general trader Henri Caulliez. After 1879, the two men ran two businesses together, a heavily capitalized wool-combing firm under the name Pollet-Caulliez et Cie, and a wool spinning-mill under the name

Pollet-Delannoy et Caulliez.²⁴ The women assisted their husbands and brothers in the managing of the business, but we would not be aware of it were it not for three transactions in which they were involved. In 1878, Pierre-Philippe gave his wife powers of attorney. She used them to associate her sons Alphonse Pollet-Leman and Achille Pollet to the business in 1879 and 1880.²⁵ Philippe was not mentioned as being present. For his part in 1880, Maurice Caulliez-Pollet associated Flavienne to the cession of half their rights in the Société Pollet-Caulliez et Cie to their son-in-law Achille Delaoutre-Caulliez.²⁶ However, as Maurice was only alienating his own property, his wife's consent was not required.

Unsurprisingly, when Maurice died in December 1884 aged 67, Flavienne took his place in the Société. The two partnerships were subsequently dissolved. Flavienne took over the spinning and twisting mill, to which she soon added a wool-combing plant. The mill boasted 22,440 spindles in 1887, and this made it the largest of its kind in town. In 1892, Maurice Caulliez Jr (born 1855) took over from his 75-year-old mother. Pierre-Philippe, for his part, kept the remainder of the partnership's businesses, which he soon turned into a vertically integrated factory, which manufactured potash and soap, carried out wool-combing and dyeing, and had a small spinning and twisting mill and a weaving shed with 55 mechanical looms and four workers. He did not relinquish control till 1892 when his son Alphonse Pollet-Leman took over.²⁷ Pierre Philippe died in 1896—and his son in 1900 aged 47; Mme Pollet-Leman took over, and Alphonse Pollet, manufacturer of English-type fabrics (*tissus anglais*) was constituted in 1903 between Marie-Désirée Leman, *industrielle*, widow of Alphonse-Philippe Pollet, and her two sons, Alphonse Pollet-Terynck and Pierre Pollet-Lannoy.²⁸ The three partners had the signature. In 1905, they widened their range of activity to include cotton spinning. Mme Pollet-Leman was still in charge in 1911.²⁹ Women could thus be *de facto* partners of their husbands, and their natural successors.

Widows who took over from their husbands usually (but not necessarily right away) took their sons or sons-in-law as partners, like the Caulliez and Pollet women above. Some husbands—or couples—planned the take-over of the business by their wives for a variety of reasons. Some just did not trust the younger generation. This appears to have been the case of François-Philibert Vrau: Sophie, his wife, became her husband's successor, despite her poor opinion of business. François-Philibert died in 1870 aged 78; his wife was 61, his two daughters were married (one to a civil service engineer and living near Paris) and his son Philibert was 40.

François-Philibert had gone informally into association with his son and one of his sons-in-law, Camille Feron. A month after the settlement of her husband's estate in 1871, Mme Vrau-Aubineau, listed as proprietor and general trader (*propriétaire et négociante*), her son Philibert, general trader and son-in-law Camille Feron, also general trader, went into partnership. All had signing rights. Son and son-in-law owed all their time and industry to the firm. On the other hand, control and supervision belonged to Mme Vrau, who could take part in the management of the firm when she saw fit. In case of disagreement between the partners, Mme Vrau was to decide "in all sovereignty."³⁰ Mme Vrau was to get half the profits, and her two partners one sixth each; the last sixth was for workers' benefits. The two men were to shoulder a quarter of the losses each if there were any. Should Camille or Philibert die, the firm could be dissolved if it pleased Mme Vrau (*"S'il plait à cette dernière"*). The younger widows, if there were any, could only be silent partners. In other words, Mme Vrau was to reign by Divine Right over the family business. She could withdraw from the association any time she wanted.

Mme Vrau, however, was not as much of a martinet as the wording of the articles of association suggests. The family papers present us with the picture of a woman who spent a good part of her life keeping her family from falling apart.³¹ In 1870, Philibert was on his way to becoming a saint (literally; he has been the object of a canonization process). The ultra-sensitive, mercurial Camille worshipped Philibert, who could do no wrong in his eyes. Sophie Vrau had also smoothed the path between a very practical husband and a son who took ten years to "find himself" only to put into his head he wanted to become a monk (father nixed that idea on the spot: Philibert's duty was to succeed him). Mme Vrau and her husband may have been convinced that the "young" ones needed a tutelary figure, and should not be trusted too much with the family fortune. The men not only did not object, but could not imagine taking decisions without mother's approval.³²

Sophie Vrau was provided with daily and weekly business reports which she read very carefully, and which followed her everywhere she went: to visit her other daughter, her sister or her aunt near Paris, or at the spa. When she was in Lille, Sophie, who suffered from chronic migraines (she was very fond of chocolate and Cahors wine), did not leave her bedroom, where she held "board meetings" every day after lunch and where she summoned children and servants, foremen, bookkeepers and travelling salesmen. By turning her bedroom into the focal point of the household,

of the factory and of the firm's commercial network, Sophie had found a way of underscoring her powers. By and large however, she does not appear to have interfered with the younger men's decisions. Camille Feron stated that as long as one could justify one's decision or policy, she would go along with it.³³ She was, in other words, the chairwoman of the board, and her son and son-in-law were her directors. The ferocious clause in the articles of association was more insurance than by-law. Sophie's constant supervision may have played a role in the firm's continuing success: the men could not fall into a routine, or simply follow their instincts. They had to be able to articulate not only what they were doing, but why they were doing it. As for her daughter Marie, she was her mother's and her brother's private secretary—and a long-suffering one at that. Philibert downloaded most of his charity work onto her and mother expected her to run all her errands when she was away. Marie also ran the firm's charitable department.³⁴

Husband and wife might jointly decide what would happen after his death. Jean-François Flipo (1792–1867) and Adelaïde Holbecq (1803–1892) took over the cotton mill left by his parents in 1824. In 1866, Jean-François and his two sons, Charles Flipo-Desurmont (1829–1876) and Jean Baptiste (1833–1911), joined into a simple partnership which explicitly provided for his succession. Adelaïde was to take his place when he died; she declared, in writing, that she approved the articles of association and pledged to succeed her husband. No new articles of association would be required to continue the firm.³⁵ New articles of association were not signed till ten years later, after Charles's death. Adelaïde and Jean-Baptiste both had the signature, as well as the right to bring sons and grandsons into the business.³⁶ Adelaïde retired from the business in the year of her death. The entry about her in the *Dictionnaire des Femmes du Nord*, based on family papers, describes her as a hands-on businessperson who did not hesitate, despite her age, to replace Charles at the helm. She started the day at 5 a.m., when the factory opened its doors, then attended Mass, before coming back to the factory to supervise the female workers. She encouraged her sons to innovate, and after a stay in England, Charles equipped the factory with self-acting mules, apparently the first local spinner to do so.³⁷

Textile widows were not the only ones to be actively involved in the family business. Jean Joire had founded a bank in Tourcoing in 1826. In 1862, he formed a partnership with his sons Henri and François to operate the bank, which then had two branches, one in Tourcoing and one in

Lille.³⁸ He died in March 1865 at 64. Shortly afterwards, a new society was formed for three years between his widow, Sophie Desplechin, and the two young men. She did not have signing and management rights, but was listed as *associée principale* in the tax rolls. Mme Joire-Desplechin had no intention of spending her widowhood reciting the rosary.³⁹ In 1867, she was paying the business tax on a large cotton mill (which was run by a director). In 1877, she was second partner to Alexandre Joire-Requillard in the operation of this mill, and in 1882, Alexandre was listed as sole owner.⁴⁰ By that time, she was about 75.⁴¹ She was also an investor; in 1868, she was one of the founding shareholders of the *Agence des houillères de Roubaix et Tourcoing*, a firm founded to trade in coal.⁴²

François and Henri became sole partners in the new society, *Jean Joire*, in 1876.⁴³ Their widows could only be silent partners, or withdraw from the partnership. In 1882, Henri Joire-Pollet died. Forty-two-year-old Marie Pollet decided to remain in the society, and the articles of association were redrawn to give her managing rights (Marie is apparently not related to the other two Pollet families we have encountered). Her oldest son, Jules, who later succeeded his father, was 17.⁴⁴ She was listed as a banker in the 1886 census (Jules was without occupation).⁴⁵ Marie Pollet was obviously not satisfied with the purely passive role her husband and brother-in-law had envisioned for her, and she was able to renegotiate her position vis-à-vis the firm.⁴⁶

In 1893, the partnership was extended. If Marie died, her sons would take her place, but could only get the signature when they reached 27. If François died, his widow could replace him with the signature. Marie died in April of that year. Her eldest son, Jules, had just turned 27. François died two years later. Marie's second son was now 27 as well. François's widow, Cécile Vernier, chose to become a general partner in the business.⁴⁷ What is interesting here is that the widows were granted more, not fewer rights, as the years were going by and Cécile was immediately given rights her sister-in-law had to negotiate.

The relationship between mother and son(s) with whom they shared the ownership of the business left by their husbands varied greatly. Not all widows wanted to remain indefinitely in control; some stayed long enough to ensure a smooth transition and were content to be mentors and advisors afterwards. Fifty-two-year-old Denise Colette Liagre-Hauterive, brewer, for instance, formed a partnership with her son Charles Tiburce, also brewer, in 1884. They both had signing and managing rights, and madame could appoint another of her sons or a stranger to replace her as

a co-manager. She was also allowed to transfer her share of the business to her sons Albert and Georges, who would not have signing rights. As long as she personally attended to the business, Charles would handle marketing (*les affaires du dehors*). Eight years later, though, she was listed alone in the tax lists.⁴⁸

Mme Liagre-Hauterive's original intention may have been to gradually withdraw from the business, as had her colleague Adèle Françoise Dubois, widow Brice in Lille. In 1867, Adèle and her son Charles Edouard set up a ten-year partnership to trade in iron, cast iron and ironware; it was extended for an additional six years in 1874. The articles of association were then modified, to allow Mme Brice to only devote to the business the time she judged appropriate. She could, if she wanted, limit herself to provide advice about the management and conduct of the business. She nonetheless kept the signature.⁴⁹ Men did retire from the business, transferring their rights to their children. Women did the same.

Being a businessman's son, however, did not guarantee business abilities, and this was perhaps why Marie Drummond remained firmly in control during her widowhood. Marie Munroe was the widow of one of Lille's English industrialists, William Drummond. She entered into a partnership with her son John William, identified as foreman of her factory, and with a building contractor, Louis Leleu, in 1854. The society was to spin flax and flax tow for 14 years under the name *Veuve Drummond et Cie*, in a village north of Lille, and in a plant leased since 1850.

Only Marie had the signature, and she could not delegate it. She was compensated for her duties by the exclusive use of a house and garden on the premises, in addition to free coal and lamp oil. John William, "under the direction of the said lady, his mother [remained] in charge of the internal management of the factory and the supervision of the workers" for 50 Fr a week. A final clause stipulated that the books had to be kept in French, and Mme Drummond was allowed to hire a clerk at company's expenses for the purpose, suggesting her command of the language was not adequate. John William, who dealt with the workers on a day-to-day basis, should have been fluent—but was nonetheless excluded from managerial and decision-making functions. Mme Drummond could decide in all sovereignty as well.⁵⁰ Was she afflicted by a son who was good on the ground but had no business sense?

Weaknesses in sons could create openings for daughters. In 1881, the widow Lehembre-Magnin, a hosier, and her son Narcisse, formed an association to spin and trade worsted yarn for the hosiery industry. Christiane

Lehembre-Magnin was 63, her son, who was married, 32, and she had been a widow for six years.⁵¹ Mme Lehembre brought 22,000 Fr, her son, half this amount. She was entitled to two-thirds of the benefits, and he, to one third. She was also allowed to transfer her rights, half to her son Henri (30, single, living with her), and the other half to her son Alfred (27, also single and living with her). She had a 34-year-old daughter, Julienne. Alfred may have proved to be dull, irresponsible or uninterested. Julienne may have proved to be all that Alfred was not. In 1885, Mme Lehembre and Narcisse modified the articles of association, substituting Julienne's name for Alfred's, as long as she was unmarried. She would enjoy the same signing and managing rights as her mother (Alfred had not died in the meantime). Mme Lehembre and Narcisse Lehembre remained listed in the tax rolls till 1890, and Narcisse alone in 1891 and 1892. There is no record of Mme Lehembre dying in Tourcoing.⁵²

And as in the first half of the nineteenth-century, some widows preferred retirement to involvement. Here is the example of Marie-Louise Destombes (1841–1913), widow of J-Bte Trentesaux († 1901), identified as *négociante* and listed first in Trentesaux and Destombes, a general partnership set up in 1902. The partnership included her brother [Louis] Carlos Destombes, and her son, Albert Trentesaux-Vaneslande. Only the men had the signature; the widow could manage when she saw fit, and transfer her interests to her other son. This partnership was the continuation of an earlier one created in 1877 between J-Bte Trentesaux and Louis [Carlos] Destombes-Dalle to trade in wool. The articles stipulated the widows had to remain in the partnership, but without signature.⁵³ Albert also became a silent partner in his brother-in-law Paul Jacquart-Vaneslande's cotton trading business. Paul unfortunately died the following year; Anna Jacquart-Vaneslande succeeded her husband as general partner in Widow Paul Jacquart.⁵⁴ Albert Trentesaux therefore had no difficulties with managing women; one then may surmise his mother did not have the signature because she was semi-retired and not particularly interested in having it. Being able to get involved in management when she felt like it was enough.

Some widows, on the other hand, may have preferred not to get involved, but been forced to do so. Georges-François Braekers d'Hugo, a garment maker with two workshops, one in Roubaix and one in Tourcoing, died in February 1910 leaving a widow and several daughters. The business went to the widow as stipulated by their marriage contract. Five months later, one of the daughters, Gilberte, married a fabric designer, Henri Meurillon.

Her dowry consisted of a one-third share of the business. Shortly afterwards, Meurillon and his mother-in-law became partners to continue the business. Meurillon was expected to buy half his mother-in-law's share in instalments and she could retire as a *commanditaire* in 1916.⁵⁵ She could continue living on the premises with her unmarried daughters, and the ladies could get their clothes from the business at cost. Jeanne Braekers d'Hugo may not have known enough about the business, or felt confident enough in her abilities to continue on her own. A rapidly acquired son-in-law solved her problem.

3 THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN: INDEPENDENT WOMEN

All these examples show that earlier women's roles in family businesses were still considered normal at the dawn of the twentieth century. Women were still viewed as natural deputies, substitutes and intergenerational bridges—but their long involvement in business meant that widows could and often were more than mere stopgaps. The same sanguine attitudes towards other women in business continued to prevail as well.

Women also continued to be independent businesspersons in their own right in the second half of the century, irrespective of their marital status. As in the past, they could be partners. People could enter partnerships at a very young age; the legal minimum age was 15. Until their majority at 21, those partners were, of course, passive. If they were at least 16, however, their parents or guardians could put an end to their minority. They were then referred to as *mineurs émancipés*. *Mineurs émancipés* could be authorized to trade as if they had reached their majority. This happened to Charles and Eugénie Delepoulle, who were emancipated and authorized to engage in commercial activities, including spinning, in March 1858. As their father had died in 1846, the man who emancipated them was probably their stepfather. In April, Charles and Eugénie had some articles of association drafted. They were to spin wool on commission in Tourcoing, which was not near the place where they had resided so far. Both had signing and managing rights.⁵⁶ As most children who were emancipated in order to go into business were orphans, one suspects this was a way for their families to relieve themselves of their support. Emancipating children to allow them to go into business, however, became increasingly rare in the last quarter of the century.

Partnership between unmarried siblings did not cease either—and the woman could be the main (or taxpaying) partner. Such was the case of the Dervaux: Cyrille, Henry and Catherine Dervaux, all adult, single and traders in Tourcoing, created a wool-trading house which was to last till 1888 under the name “Dervaux-Coine fils.” The unmarried partners could live rent-free at the firm’s headquarters, 119 rue de Lille (a nice , central address). Those who married would have to move, but would receive an indemnity of 500 Fr. All partners had signing and managing rights.⁵⁷ The firm lasted more than the intended eight years, and the three siblings were in apparently no hurry to marry. The firm appears in the city tax rolls from 1880 to 1897, with Catherine as its *associée principale*. Henry ceased to be a partner after 1892. The firm traded spun wool *en demi-gros*,⁵⁸ but also spun it (in 1880), operated a twisting mill and a dyeworks for most of its duration, and added a carding mill between 1881 and 1887.⁵⁹

Some single women also went into business on their own. Auguste Campion’s daughter Justine was a good example of a single woman who did reasonably well. Auguste Campion-Delplanque operated a dyeworks with four workers in 1857. By 1867, he was dead and his widow had taken over; she had five workers. Justine was in charge afterwards. By 1870, she had ten workers. In 1878–1879, she was a member of a short-lived association with Jean-Baptiste, Henry and Louis Campion, presumably her brothers; they had 15 workers, but from 1881 to 1912, Justine ran her business alone with 12 workers.⁶⁰

Married women doing business independently of their husbands did not go away either. Married women could still be independent agents, as they had been before 1850, as long as they had their husband’s permission—but very few appear in the records. Some were simply hidden under their husband’s name, like François Destombes’s wife. Destombes, from Roubaix, had entered into a partnership with the Parisian wholesaler, Auguste Allain, in 1868. The contract read thus:

However, it is understood that Mme Destombes may continue the trade in spinning mill supplies which she currently carries under her husband’s name. The latter owes all his time to the partnership and will not attend to his wife’s business. The same provision applies to Mme Allain. The partnership will not be responsible for the ladies’ liabilities.

Mme Destombes had her own business, separate from her husband’s, but in the eyes of the law, it was his and she did not exist. As theoretically

each partner could have prevented the other's wife from carrying out a business on her own, the *notaire* deemed useful to clarify the situation.⁶¹

Married women who ran businesses under their own name varied a great deal in terms of type and scope of activities, but many shared one unusual characteristic: they were married in separation of property. They also displayed some unmistakable entrepreneurial tendencies. Those were ambitious women—who may have married in separation of property in order to maximize their freedom of action. There was, for example, a Mme Leplat-Dewavrin from Roubaix who teamed up with Henri Desmarescaux, a foreman, to exploit a textile machine patent in 1866 (both had the signature).⁶² Elise Roye, wife of Denis Legrand from Lille, brought into her partnership with Théophile Demailly, mechanic, and Henri Bonte, office clerk, 10,000 Fr worth of equipment, including a steam engine. The men put up 10,000 each—but Demailly had to mortgage his property to raise the money. Bonte sold his share a few months later. Perhaps he should not have done. The business (a copper foundry and manufacture of reeds) did well enough for Demailly to discharge the mortgage two years later.⁶³

And then, there was the very ambitious Jeanne Marie Zacharie, machine builder (that was the occupation she declared) and wife of Joseph Drojas. In 1865, she registered the draft of the articles of association of a shareholding firm that would manufacture textile cards under the name Drojat et Cie. The capital would consist of 150 1,000 Fr shares. As she never called a general assembly to approve the articles, she probably failed to raise the capital. Her sex may or may not have been the problem: some men did not always succeed in attracting enough shareholders to incorporate their own company either.⁶⁴

Married women in business could even “turn the world upside down.” The authors of the Civil Code would probably have gagged at the behavior of some of them. Adeline Duquennoy and Blanche-Charlotte Dupriez were married to two brothers, Leon and Paul-Louis Vanoutryve. In 1861, they became partners with Louis Cauchy to spin flax, twist cotton yarn and manufacture reeds. The three partners had the signature. The articles of association also “authorized the Dames Vanoutryve to delegate the signature to their husbands under their personal responsibility. The husbands will in this case sign by proxy for them.”⁶⁵ And in 1895 Marie Josson, wife of Florimond Cauchin from Halluin started a shawl manufacture with funds provided by a silent partner. She was allowed to delegate her authority to her husband who became her agent. She was entitled to a 3,500 Fr management indemnity but she would “remain solely and personally

responsible for all appointments and remuneration due to Florimond Cauchin, her husband, authorized representative of the society.” Cauchin was also prohibited from engaging in any other business.⁶⁶ In both cases, the business was organized in a way that subordinated the men to their wives.

Business may also have been a way to solve marital problems. “Mme Martine, 15 rue de Roubaix, articles de filatures,” read the 1880 Ravet-Anceau. The articles in question consisted in engine belts, rollers, shuttles, rubber gaskets and gutta percha which the lady made or sold or both. She appeared for the first time in 1879, and was still listed in 1890, at that time, living with Gaston and Arthur Martine, who were listed as carrying out the same trade. Earlier, a Jean-Baptiste Martine was plying this trade at that address; in 1879, Jean-Baptiste was living in a different street, and listed as manufacturer of articles for factories. Were Jean-Baptiste and Mme Martine separated spouses? The directory does not tell.⁶⁷

Widows could also start independent businesses with non-family members, as did Eugénie-Fideline Vaneslande, *propriétaire*, and widow of Philippe Delepouille (She was Anna Jacquart-Vaneslande’s aunt). In 1878, she entered a *société en commandite* with a J.B. Briquet, twister (*retordeur*). Briquet provided his skills and time, and Eugénie-Fideline the necessary equipment and 10,000 Fr. However, from 1881 onwards, the widow Vaneslande was the one listed in the tax rolls, and she remained listed until 1892—suggesting she had decided to run the business on her own. (Had the original partnership continued, Eugénie, as a silent partner, would not have been a taxpayer).⁶⁸ In 1883, Adeline Pollet, widow Bouchard, *rentière*, started a general partnership, eight years after her husband’s death, with Pierre Delahousse (no occupation) to trade spun yarns and wines. They both had signing and managing rights. Delahousse was to do the travelling and Adeline was to keep the books and the cash box. Adeline Bouchard-Pollet was listed as a *courtier*, a broker, in the 1886 census. Like Mme Joire-Pollet, she was not trying to hide her activities.⁶⁹

Business could be a way to avoid a penurious widowhood living off one’s meager means. One suspect this was the reason the Mesdames Guilain, Cambiez and Ducatillon, three Cambrai widows, became partners and purchased M. Lefebvre’s garment factory in Tourcoing in 1910. Juliette Cambiez was to live above the shop with her children, and had to provide a room for her mother, Amanda Guilain. She was responsible for the store. Her youngest and still under-age daughter was to assist as an unpaid shop assistant. Her eldest daughter, who was of age, would earn

75 Fr a month supervising the workshop. The two other widows were responsible for purchasing supplies and material for the business.⁷⁰

Widows could also start a business as a strategy to establish a child. Catherine-Thérèse Tiberghien, widow of Jules-Louis Leclercq (1836–1871), inherited a tenth share in Tiberghien frères, following the death of her father and mother in 1885. She sold it to her siblings for 150,000 Fr. In 1888, she used that money to underwrite a manufacturer of upholstery material and draperies and became a silent partner in “Lemaître et fils” (which did not involve a Lemaître junior). Her status did not preclude close attention to the business. The articles of association specified that she could “watch over and control the activities of the association; specifically, she would be able to visit the office, examine the books, files and cash box as often as she saw fit.” Catherine had two children, including a 20-year-old son, Jules. Lemaître was required to take Jules as a trainee, to “teach him the trade and acquaint him with all the steps and all the secrets of fabrication.” Catherine could transfer her share to her son; in that case, the business would become a general partnership, and the profits divided equally. The partnership was a way to get Jules started in business, and Catherine gave herself the means to closely keep track of her investment.⁷¹

Our last example of an independent woman in business is a lady whose papers have survived, thus allowing us to reconstruct her life in business: Caroline Destombes-Versmée.⁷² She was born in Dunkerque in 1811, the daughter of a linen draper, and married a Destombes, Louis-François Marie Joseph (b. 1797) in 1834, who did not belong to the main line of Destombes seen previously. The couple had eight children in the next ten years. Louis-François was first a *fabricant*; in 1834, he, his father (also called Louis-François Marie Joseph), Edouard Lefebvre and Anselme Dewavrin (met in the previous chapters) set up a partnership to spin wool and trade in worsted. The factory was located in the rue Royale. The partnership was dissolved two years later, and Louis-François Jr became a partner in Victor Versmée et fils and in Versmée frères in 1838. The first firm was to weave fabric; and the second to spin worsted on order. In 1844 the partnerships were dissolved and Louis-François set up a limited liability company (*société en commandite par actions*), issuing 172 shares worth 100 Fr each. Destombes Versmée & Co. was to spin wool. Caroline Destombes-Versmée gave up her lien on the factory and steam engine, which she owned in common with her husband, so that he could mortgage them to secure two 7,000 Fr loans (one from Anselme Dewavrin).⁷³

There is no trace of dissolution of the association in the records, and Louis-François paid taxes on a spinning-mill till 1855. In 1857, however, he was a wholesale wool and oil trader; in 1862, he was listed as a wool trader and sugar refiner in the tax rolls; and he was not listed in 1867.⁷⁴ He died in 1871. Louis-François then shifted activities through his life, perhaps to take advantage of new opportunities, perhaps because his previous one was not doing well or well enough. His position in the business world appears to have been unstable.

This may be the reason why Caroline went into business on her own. She was listed as a haberdasher in rue Royale in the 1857 tax list. As her books have survived, we know that the “haberdashery” was in fact an upscale grocery store, boasting most of Tourcoing’s Who’s Who among its customers. She was also supplying some thirty smaller grocery stores in town. The business was underwritten by half a dozen Versmées and Destombes, to whom she paid 20 % in dividends (but she never registered a partnership). In the early 1860s, she added most of her husband’s activities to her own; she began to trade in wines, wool, petroleum products, shellacs, wrapping cloth and all sorts of oil (she did not refine sugar, though). She did well enough to sell the grocery line for 7,500 Fr in 1866. In January 1870, she associated her sons Gustave (b. 1835) and Paul-Emile (b. 1839) to the business—and again did not register the partnership. The collaboration was short-lived and ended in May 1872. When sent to Paris, Gustave had exceeded an already generous 4,000 Fr business account, and his inability or unwillingness to keep track of money may have caused a fall-out. Paul-Emile immediately found a partner with whom to go into the wool-trading business. He put up four-fifths of the 125,000 Fr capital. By 1875, he had become a sworn broker and one of 21 silent partners underwriting H. Defontaine and Co. mentioned above. Shortly afterwards, Paul-Emile married Flore Dannin, sister of René Dannin, who had married his sister Stéphanie Destombes. In 1881, Caroline Destombes-Versmée, *négociante*, Paul Destombes, broker, and René Dannin, *négociant*, were immediate neighbors, at 226, 229 and 230 rue Motte, respectively.⁷⁵ René Dannin then played venture capitalist to his brother-in-law Gustave in 1877 and provided him with the funds to exploit a leather-processing patent.⁷⁶ The business does not seem to have got off the grounds and Gustave also disappeared from the records.

The widow Destombes continued her business on her own. She meticulously kept her books and visibly mastered the art of double-entry book-keeping. She could tell how much profit she made on each and every

separate commodity she traded. Interestingly, her furniture was part of her business assets and her living expenses part of the costs. She ended every yearly inventory with the value of the profits “it has pleased God to give us.” The said profits were not negligible—and kept going up: in 1869, the business grossed 65,000 Fr and netted 5,700 Fr; in 1871, it netted 9,500 Fr, in 1888, 8,200 Fr and in 1895, 16,700 Fr—and this after paying her partner a 12,000 Fr salary.

By the mid-1880s, Caroline’s handwriting had become shaky, suggesting perhaps the beginnings of Parkinson’s disease. By 1899, her hand was so unsteady that her signature was barely legible. In 1887, the 76-year-old Caroline took a partner, a Belgian traveling salesman, Léon Simoens, from Menin. If she died, her daughter Julie (b. 1849), who lived with her, would take her place in the partnership, to the exclusion of her other heirs—including her son Jules (b. 1837), who lived with her, and never seems to have been in business.⁷⁷

Both partners signed the yearly inventory. In 1896, Léon’s son Ernest joined the firm with a 3,600 Fr yearly salary. The next year, the books’ handwriting changed (Ernest?). Ernest also married Caroline Dannin, daughter of René and Stéphanie Destombes, and thus became the grandson-in-law of his employer. In 1898, Caroline sold him a quarter interest in the business for 1,250 Fr.⁷⁸ She retired in December 1899; her share of the business amounted to 66,000 Fr (she also owned a very impressive and highly diversified stock and bond portfolio and was worth almost half a million). She died three months later.

The firm’s story does not end with the departure of Caroline Destombes. Léon’s eldest son René joined it when she left. In November 1904, Léon asked the Tribunal de commerce to dissolve the partnership, alleging that his relationship with Ernest, which had been difficult before, had become impossible. Ernest was taking more than his salary from the cash box, was refusing to let his father draw his, was disobeying his father and was trying to gain absolute control of the labor force. The Tribunal sided with the father, and so did the appellate court. Ernest was also forbidden to trade in oils in the Nord Pas-de-Calais so as not to compete with his father.⁷⁹ In 1906, Léon and René became partners. Should Léon die, his widow could take his place; he also reserved the right to transfer his interests in the firm to his unmarried daughter Alice, also a *négociante*, but not the signature.⁸⁰ He died in 1910 and the women took over his share.

Caroline Versmée had been active in business like her husband but independently of him, possibly to spread the risks. At the end of his life,

she took over the part of his business she deemed profitable, and turned out to be very successful. She concentrated on a unique niche, providing industrialists with the various types of oils and grease their activities required (she had no competition). She did not place family before business either. The unsatisfactory partnership with her sons was dissolved. Age and diminishing faculties did not convince her to retire; instead, she took a partner, who was totally unrelated, and was from a very modest background (his parents were factory workers). She likely selected him for his competence—and picked up her daughter as her successor (as the daughter did not succeed, she may have predeceased her mother). She departed from this line of conduct, with dismal consequences, in her dotage. The favors she bestowed on her grandson-in-law were misplaced. The young man imagined himself the righteous heir of the company and treated his father as an interloper. Léon Simoens had to go to court to get rid of him and subsequently leaned on his more amenable eldest son and on the women of the family instead.

4 CONCLUSION

Caroline Destombes-Versmée was not a lingering legacy from an earlier time when people travelled by stagecoach and women engaged in business in a matter-of-fact way. She would have been familiar with many women also engaged in business through her long career, and probably provided them with the industrial grease and oils needed to operate their machinery. The nineteenth-century was characterized more by continuities than changes when it came to women and business. But although there were still plenty of women in business in a wide range of capacities at the turn of the twentieth century, new developments were eroding some women's ability to stay in business, and could explain the different participation rates in Lille and Tourcoing.

NOTES

1. A song by dialectal author Charles Decottignie in 1857 took note of the arrival of the sewing machine. BN, Ye971.
2. Marie Vandenberghe, widow of Paul Lorthiois and Achilles Facon were partners in *VVe Lorthiois et A. Facon fils*, an insurance brokerage, between 1908 and 1910, ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/17, 19-3-1908 and 10-5-1910.

3. Hosiery (*bonneterie*) included only socks and stockings, and undergarments. Outerwear made of knitted fabric was referred to as *tricot*, and judging from the advertising in the local papers, ready-made women's *tricots* were tailored garments, not sweaters. The manufacturing processes would then have been quite different. Here, "*tricot*" is translated as knitted fabric to preserve the distinction with hosiery.
4. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/17, 31-8-1910.
5. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5, 1870-1911.
6. Unfortunately, one cannot do the same calculation for 1911—the other year for which data on the middle-class was systematically collected, as the census no longer gave marital status. We cannot distinguish between never-married women and widows.
7. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/648, 1865, #43.
8. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/650, 1-2-1868.
9. The lines of credits were used to convert commercial papers into cash.
10. ADN, Enregistrement des hypothèques, 4Q38 674, 1870.
11. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/655, 6-9-1873.
12. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/56, 1874.
13. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/4, 30-6-1881.
14. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/6, 11-1-1887.
15. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/4, 28-1-1882; A particularly egregious case of undervalued woman is the one of Virginie Vanwynsberghe. She was single and partnered with her brother Paul and her sister Pauline, a married woman, in a linen weaving plant in Halluin. Her bother was entitled to a 3,600 Fr managing indemnity; Virginie, who had to reside on site, was to get ... 600 Fr; ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/6, 11-1-1887.
16. AEV, Livres d'inventaires, 1889 and 1897.
17. Masquelier, *Une apôtre de la ligue patriotique des françaises*.
18. AEV, PV 17-8, Procès de Paul Feron-Vrau contre ses associés.
19. Communication from M. Xavier Théry (one of Germaine's grand-nephews and longtime director of Ets Vrau).
20. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/57.
21. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/3, 10-11-1879.
22. Not related to the Pollet of the previous chapter—at least in the male line. Pierre Philippe had been in business with his widowed mother since 24-4-1850 under the name Veuve Pollet Delannoy et fils to comb wool and weave. The partnership, set up for 20 years, was dissolved in 1852, ADN, 6U2/195. It was not Séraphine

- Pollet-Delannoy's first partnership. She had joined two other men in 1843, ADN, 6U2/193, 15-9-1843; her husband had died in 1838.
23. Eudoxie and Maurice were brother and sister to the Charles Caulliez met in the second chapter as partner to Julie Delahaye, widow of Louis Delannoy.
 24. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/649, 27-6-1866 and 6U5/2, 22 and 24-7-1879.
 25. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/3, 23-9-1880.
 26. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/3, 6-12-1880.
 27. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/5, 1 and 8-6-1883, 6U5/6 (1887-90); 6U5/7, 22-1-1892 and 7-6-1892.
 28. ADN, 6U5/7, 25-10-1892; 6U5/11, 1898, 6U5/13, 26-12-1903.
 29. AMTg, Matrices de patentes G1C/60.
 30. "Le contrôle et la surveillance appartiendront à Madame Vrau, qui pourra prendre part à la gestion quand bon lui semblera. En cas de désaccord entre les associés, Mme Vrau décidera souverainement." ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/653, 8-4-1871.
 31. AEV, PCI 28/13, "Récit de Camille Feron concernant Mme Vrau-Aubineau"; AFC, Lettres de Sophie Vrau-Aubineau à sa fille.
 32. Philibert said so explicitly in a letter to a business partner. AEV, Registre de copies de letters, 1868-1883, letter dated 31-10-1870; Philibert existential difficulties surface clearly in his correspondance. AEV, Correspondence between Philibert Vrau and Camille Feron, PII 17, 1849-1853.
 33. AEV, PCI 28/13, "Récit de Camille Feron concernant Mme Vrau-Aubineau"; PVI, Lettres de Sophie Aubineau à sa fille, 1876-1886.
 34. Baunard, *Une âme réparatrice*; Marie's various roles also surface in her mother's correspondance; AEV, PVI, Lettres de Sophie Aubineau à sa fille, 1876-1886.
 35. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/649, 9-2-1866.
 36. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/2, 3-2-1877.
 37. Schaeffer, *Dictionnaire des femmes du Nord*, 269-70.
 38. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/646, 18-3-1862.
 39. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/648, 10-4-1865.
 40. AMTg, Matrices de patentes, 1867-1882, G1C18 & 33.
 41. She was 44 in the 1851 census; her husband was 48.
 42. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/650, 16-3-1868.
 43. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/2, 31-1-1872.
 44. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/4, 20-7-1882 and 4-8-1882.

45. The other private banker in the 1886 Tourcoing census was also a woman, Mme Deherrigon.
46. She was following precedent: two Lille banks had been operated by women in the 1830s. Faucheux, *Mon histoire*, 379.
47. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/7, 19-10-1893 and 6U5/8, 11-1-1896.
48. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/5, 22-7-1884; AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C 41.
49. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/656, 18-8-1874.
50. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Étude de Me Gruloy, J 1442-33.
51. AMTg, 1881 Tourcoing census, F1A 7-11; ADN, Tourcoing État civil en ligne.
52. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/3 and 5, 31-3-1881 and 6-11-1885; AMTg, Fichier des entreprises, 7F3A to 7F3G, 1852-1913; ADN, Tourcoing État civil en ligne.
53. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/2, 27-7-1877 and 6U5/12, 28-02-1902.
54. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/13, 26-11-1904.
55. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/17, 1910.
56. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/197, 3-4-1858.
57. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/2, 19-12-1879.
58. *Marchands en demi gros* were transacting quantities between wholesale and retail.
59. AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C 33, 1882; G1C 37, 1887; G1C41, 1892; Fichier des entreprises, 7F3D and 7F3F. According to the census, Catherine was 50 and her brothers 40 and 35 in 1879; AMTg, Tourcoing Census, 1886, F1A 12-17.
60. AMTg, Matrices de patentes G1C 8 to 60, 1857–1911; ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/3, 3-1-1879.
61. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/650, 1868.
62. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/649, 30-4-1866.
63. ADN, Greffes de notaires, J 1472, 1887.
64. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/648, 1865.
65. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/645, 14-7-1861.
66. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/8, 1895.
67. *Annuaire Ravet-Anceau*, 1879-1890.
68. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/2, 20-3-1878; AMTg Matrices de patentes G1C 33–41.
69. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/5, 17-8-1883; AMTg, Tourcoing Census, 1886, F1A 12-17.

70. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 67U5/17, 22-1-1910.
71. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/5 and 6, 27-2-1885, 1-5-1886, 26-10-1888.
72. AMTg, 18Z, 1 to 7. The collection includes her inventory books/settling of accounts (livres d'inventaire et de situation), 1857–1900, a book containing her clothing expenses, and a personal account book 1900–1901.
73. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/186, 192 and 193, 20-10-1834, 24-1-1838, 6-8-1844.
74. AMTg, Matrices de patentes 1852-1867, G1C 3-18; Fichier des entreprises, 7F3A to 7F3G.
75. AMTg, 1881 census, F1A 7 to 11.
76. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/2, 10-4-1877.
77. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/6, 29-12-1887
78. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/10, 12-1-1898.
79. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/13, Jugement du tribunal de commerce de Tourcoing, 7-6-1904, confirmé par la cours d'appel 27-10-1904, transcrit dans actes de société du 18-4-1910.
80. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/17, 18-4-1910, Transcription in 1910 records. The 1906 records cannot be consulted.

Separating Spheres?

In the last quarter of the nineteenth-century and at the beginning of the twentieth, new developments had an adverse impact on some women's involvement in business. Some were structural: the emergence of firms, increased reliance on partnerships, and the appearance of shareholding societies. Others were social: planned successions and a form of the Bruddenbrooks syndrome. As the Firms of Husband & Wife gave way to Family Firms, the equation between the business and the couple slowly dissolved. Partners and shareholders could treat wives and widows as trespassers into their tight little club. Successions had to be planned to ensure an orderly transfer of power from father to son (or son-in-law). At the same time, some industrial families were becoming very rich and the younger generation increasingly wanted to enjoy its money. Business did not occupy all their waking hours: entertainment and social activities did—and orchestrating the family's social life could be a full-time job in itself. Even the men were devoting less time to business than their grandfathers had.

1 PARTNERSHIPS AND THE PATRIMONIALIZATION OF THE FIRM

Partnerships became more common from the middle of the century onwards, and to an extent, this was a consequence of the emergence and consolidation of family firms.¹ By the early twentieth century, some families

could look back to a century of business activities and to an almost as long history of factory ownership. They were the heirs of firms that had evolved organically out of their father's and grandfather's out-putting and trading activities. Those business dynasties tended to own heavily capitalized concerns with impressive physical plants. They also owned interests in quite a few smaller, complementary businesses as silent partners. Their grandfathers may have joined others in partnerships for 3, 6 or 9 years and dissolved them before their term ended; their fathers signed articles of association for 9 or 12 years and renewed the partnership when the original one came to its end. They, on the other hand, increasingly chose 99 years or "for ever"² partnerships (revocable every ten years). Attitudes towards business among those well-established families were also changing. It was now universal for general partners to draw a salary (and often a large one), which they called a manager's indemnity; they were also allowing themselves vacations. In addition to amortizing the buildings and machinery over 10 years, which had always been the rule, partners now set aside between 10 % and 25 % of the profits into a reserve. All this reduced the share of the profits distributed to the partners. This was in part compensated by the new and generalized practice of paying interests of 4–5 % on the capital (those interests were also deducted from the profits). Silent partners, for their part, traded profits for interests. Whereas in the past, they received a share of profits commensurate with their investments and nothing else, in the twentieth century, they increasingly received a 5 % interest on their investment and not much else (their share of profits could be less than 10 %, the rest going to the general partners). In large family firms, and in the limited partnership in which members of those families invested, the trend was therefore to guarantee to all involved (general and silent partners) a predictable income stream (salary, interests) and to ensure the long-term financial stability of the firm. A share in the profits was a bonus. Silent partners, and to a lesser extent general partners, were turning into *rentiers de l'industrie*—collectors of industrial ground rents. Smaller business partnerships, sole proprietorships turning into partnerships and start-ups, however, continued the nineteenth-century practices of distributing profits to silent partners. On the other hand, allowing the general partners to draw a salary became the norm among them as well. This replaced the older practice of allowing the partners to dip into the cash box and take advances on their share of the profits as needed to cover their housekeeping expenses.

In the 1860s and 1870s, intergenerational partnerships had involved primarily widows and their sons or sons-in-law. The father had died without

making any provision for succession; the widow came into her share of the couple's assets, and the children inherited the rest. A partnership was a way of reconstituting the business as it existed during the father's lifetime, a goal more imperative when the business of the family was viewed as a firm with an existence separate from its owners. Partnership was also a way to plan for an orderly transfer from one generation to the next. Widows reserved the right to associate other sons (or sons-in-law) to the business by transferring their interest to them; they also reserved the right to retire when they saw fit.

Partnerships between brothers, brothers-in-law, or unrelated males, for their part, became more common in the second half of the century.³ Until the late 1860s, they remained mostly short-term agreements conducted privately and including only the information required for registration: name, occupation and address of partners, address, purpose and duration of the new firm. They identified who had the signature. Most of the time, no provision was made for the death of a partner, or stated the partnership would continue with the surviving partner(s), or would be dissolved, without giving any details.

After 1860, it became increasingly common to go to a *notaire* to draft and sign articles of association, and the *notaire* planned for all contingencies, especially as partnerships were now set up for longer terms. Between 1860 and the end of the century, widows were given the option of succeeding their husbands as a general partner, without the signature, or become a *commanditaire* in the majority of cases (60 %). In a quarter of the cases, the widow could take over with signature. In the remaining cases, the partnership was to be dissolved, or the surviving partners could buy the deceased's share. In the case of father-and-son partnerships the different widows might be treated differently: the mother could continue with the signature; the daughters-in-law could only be silent partners. Known skills, experience, and the absence of small children may very well have been the determining factors. But almost all widows were given the choice to remain in the partnership or to leave it. As they often controlled a large share of the partnership's asset, they had leverage—and some used it, to have the articles of association rewritten in a way more favorable to them. Catherine Motte (mother to Anna Jacquart-Vaneslande) was not supposed to become an active partner in the wool-trading firm her husband Fidèle Vaneslande had constituted with his brother-in-law Philippe Flipo-Vaneslande. But when he died in January 1880, she not only decided to stay in the partnership, but was

given signing and managing rights. She was listed as *associée principale* in the tax roll until 1905.⁴ Such examples were, however, rare. Widows usually went along with the decisions that had been taken while their husbands were alive.

New and even more restrictive conditions began to be imposed on widows in the 1880s and later. If they remained in the partnership, they were not only denied the signature, but had to hire, at their expense, a “competent” employee to replace their husband, or compensate the surviving partners for the additional work, usually but not always increasing their share of the profits, or their managerial indemnity. More commonly, widows were expected to become silent (limited liability) partners or *commanditaires*.

The managerialization of the larger firms was under way. They were more complex to run than in the past, and informal, on-the-job training was no longer deemed adequate. As the same time as widows were shunted aside, the training of the sons began to change. Sons who came of age in the 1870s were kept in school till they obtained their *baccalauréat* (end-of-secondary-school diploma), and then sent to England or Germany to become proficient in the language.⁵ Some, like the Masurels, sent their young men to the Americas or Australia, the sources of their raw wool, before bringing them into the business.⁶ Technical knowledge was initially acquired through forms of apprenticeship, but not necessarily in the family firm: Masurel-Baratte (b. 1857) spent a year at the Société Alsacienne in Mulhouse to learn mechanical engineering (after spending a year in England).⁷ Public engineering schools opened in the arrondissement in the 1870s. Private business and engineering schools were added to the Catholic Faculties in the 1880s. All of this made it possible for young men to receive a more structured and systematic training. Tourcoing followed suit in 1886 with the creation of the (private) Industrial School, intended to provide the “sons of manufacturers and wholesalers” with the knowledge which would allow them to assist their parents in the conduct of the business, and subsequently to take it over.⁸ Daughters “of course” could not attend business or engineering schools; neither did they receive systematic training in the firm. Usually, they signed up for language classes after leaving the convent, and this was about it.⁹ I found a single case of a father training his daughter alongside his son (she was married, to a lawyer), but she did not succeed her father. He disposed of his business before his death.¹⁰

2 AND PLANNED SUCCESSIONS

Some articles of association explicitly gave fathers the right to hire their sons and sons-in-law as paid employees to train them in all aspects of the business—as well as to transfer part or all of their interests to them (which they usually did against monetary compensation). Fathers also gave themselves the right to retire when they wanted and devote to the business only as much time as they wished.¹¹ Articles of association might then stipulate that the sons could not become partners, or partners with signature, unless they had worked a number of years in the firm, received adequate training, were above a certain age—usually 24 or 27—or were married.¹² Those partnerships normally were not dissolved at the death of any of the partners, but continued with the survivors. As the concept of the firm was taking hold, and as the firm was becoming a patrimony associated with an industrial dynasty of some depth, measures had to be taken to ensure a smooth transmission from one generation to the next, and those planned successions were a way to prevent post-mortem distributions of estates from jeopardizing the firm. Effective control and ownership overlapped, but were not identical, and management went down the male line. Nonetheless, widows were not economically sacrificed to this project. Their rights to the family assets were protected by law (they automatically received one half of the *communauté* or conjugal estate); they could keep their portion in the business for a share of the profits and 5 % interest on the capital. They could also withdraw their money, and quite a few widows sold their interests in the business to one or more sons when the latter had secured the means of acquiring them. Widows also kept some residual powers inherited from their husbands. They could bring sons or sons-in-law into the business if that had not happened when their husband was alive. And like all silent partners, they could visit the premises, check the books and force dissolution if losses exceeded a specified threshold. Women in those families were no longer involved in the day-to-day running of the factory; neither could they take business decisions affecting its finances. They reigned but did not govern. But, like constitutional monarchs, they were assumed to take an interest in the affairs of the family and were given powers that allowed them to protect the family's long-term interests. A division of labor had occurred: women were the watchdog committees. Their role, however, did not reflect the conventional separate sphere ideology; neither was it compatible with a genuinely patriarchal social structure: mothers could keep their sons on a leash for most of their twenties.

By the late nineteenth-century, some successful business families owning large, heavily capitalized firms had a clear dynastic project involving the careful grooming of successors, meticulously planned successions and the diminution of women's economic agency. This, however, does not mean deputy husbands were pensioned off when their husbands died, to leave sons solely in charge. It is more likely that the women excluded from the succession had never been active managers in the first place and their roles had been purely advisory. There is no evidence that women who had been active in the business alongside their husbands were pushed aside to make room for adult sons.

A process similar to the one Mulholland uncovered after World War Two in England played out here but spread over several generations.¹³ Women played an active role in family businesses as long as the success of this process was uncertain. Women's labor, assets and networks played important roles in the building of family businesses—a process that could span several generations. In a second phase, which, like the first, was not limited to a single generation, managerial functions were formalized. Directors might be hired; managing partners might draw salaries. Systematic training, within the business itself, or in specialized schools—or both—became the norm. Women had no access to those schools, and if their families did not provide them with opportunities for on-site informal training, their ability to manage was seriously undermined.

In England, wealth preservation was synonymous with transmitting ownership and managerial responsibilities to a single (male) person. Partible inheritance and community of property made the process more complex in Tourcoing. Neither primogeniture nor the exclusion of widows were legally possible—not even desired. Successoral strategies therefore focused on the transfer of managing rights from males to males (fathers to sons or sons-in-law). Ownership, on the other hand, was more diffused and shared by non-managing sons, daughters and widows. Widows and non-managing heirs, as general partners without managerial rights or as limited partners, only enjoyed carefully circumscribed rights in the direction of the business, designed to ensure an orderly succession to the helm, and the protection of the family assets against incompetent managers. Non-managing co-owners were otherwise expected to be *rentiers de l'industrie*. But they kept the right to sell their interests to other co-heirs.

This emerging pattern was, however, far from being the new norm. Most firms were not partnerships, and most partnerships did not limit

widows' rights. Of the 174 textile firms listed in the 1897 Tourcoing business tax rolls, only 34 were partnerships (a low of 16 % among spinners and a high of 26 % among owners of vertically integrated mills). One-third of those partnerships restricted widow's rights—a proportion reaching 57 % among integrated mill owners. The trend depicted above was a significant one, but this behavior was far from universal. Most widows were not visibly restricted.

Not all ancient families were deliberately dynastic and trying to turn their firm into eternal industrial empires ruled by a succession of males. Industrial feudalism did not appeal to everyone. Among those families, women continued to play the same roles as their foremothers. Articles of association provided they would succeed their husband with all his rights, or nothing was planned and widows and heirs were left to work out the post-mortem arrangement that suited them best. This may translate into a mother-children partnership, or into the sale of the mill if the sons had struck on their own already; this was the case with the Vandenberghe-Desurmonts, for instance. Justine Desurmont had tried to sell her husband's business, and then held off because she could not get a satisfactory offer.¹⁴

In 1911, there were 28 industrial or wholesale trading firms listed in the city's tax rolls under a woman's name (11 % of all such firms). The typical female industrialist or trader was a widow (90 %), of any age (between 35 and 82), who was either the sole owner of the business (N = 16 or 60 %) or partner with signature (N = 8 or 30 %). Six of those widows belonged to ancient families (Flipo-Lezy, Herbaux-Hazebrouck, Loridan-Dewavrin, Lorthiois-Leurent, Pollet-Leman and Vandenberghe-Desurmont), and ranged in age between 55 and 82 (the very ancient and very patrician Justine Desurmont, married to the immigrant Polydore Vandenberghe, was 82). The last three were principal partners (hence the business being taxed under their name), with signature. In some cases, the taking over of the business by the widow had been planned (Pollet-Leman). They wove carpet (Flipo-Lezy), carpet and cotton, silk and wool fabric (Lorthiois-Leurent), combed and carded wool (Herbaux-Hazebrouck and Vandenberghe-Desurmont), ran a cotton mill (Loridan-Dewavrin), or a cotton mill, weaving plant and hosiery mill (Pollet-Leman). Others manufactured chemicals or soap (Debisschop-Vannoye, Fouan-Leman), operated a dye plant (Justine Campion, widow Tavernier-Petit, successor to Tavernier-Beuscart already mentioned) or a foundry (Wulfaert-Vandamme); Others were traders: the widow Léonce

Dupont-Ruffault traded in wool waste with her sister-in-law and had a 16-year-old daughter born in Leipzig. None of the widows was childless; five had adult sons, but only two were in partnership with them. The widow Lorthiois-Leurent waited till 1911 to share the signature with them, and even then, retained the exclusive right to sign letters of exchange and other such documents; the widow Boucher-Duterte set up a partnership with her two sons in the course of 1911 but gave herself a 2,000 Fr managerial indemnity.

Family firms could turn into male dynasties that only allowed widows limited regency rights—or they might cling to the Firm of Husband & Wife model. Neither the nature of the manufactured product, the size of the business, the age of the women or the presence of adult sons help predict the role widows would have played. One looks in vain for patterns, for independent variables that determine outcome. This absence of pattern suggests that there were no constraining norms, no powerful “separate sphere ideology” that kept women away from the office. There may have been, on the other hand, family cultures. The observant reader may have noticed that some names are mentioned more frequently than others. Some families relied heavily on their women, generation after generation (Pollet, Caulliez, VanEslande, Lorthiois). Others did not. Whether women wanted to be in business or not, they could find a model that suited them. Women in business were not an ideological issue.

3 SHAREHOLDING SOCIETIES

Family businesses and simple partnerships easily integrated women. The same may not have been true of shareholding societies (whether true shareholding companies or *sociétés en commandites par actions*), which may have presented some serious challenges to women’s direction, as the two following cases suggest.

Marie-Catherine Leman (b. 1840) had married Emile Fouan in 1859. The marriage contract stipulated she would receive the usufruct of half of her husband’s estate in the event of widowhood (and of all of it if they had no children) in addition to her half of the community. Emile Fouan was running a wool-combing factory with Pascal Duchêne (apparently a former skilled worker or foreman). In January 1863, the partners turned it into a *Société en commandite par actions*, investing their existing business, Emile’s own real estate and some cash, and some real estate his mother

gave him against his future inheritance. In the case of either Fouan or Duchêne's death, his widow would replace him with full rights. Emile Fouan died in 1867, leaving five children between 1 and 7. The wool-combing plant had nine machines. Twenty-seven-year-old Marie-Catherine used her right and continued the association. The shareholders' assembly, however, decided to seek a replacement for her husband, and this would have sidelined her. Marie-Catherine appears not to have been amused. She reappeared in the register of the Tribunal de commerce in 1874, when she bought out the last remaining shareholder, Pascal Duchêne, and dissolved the association.¹⁵ From then on, the Fouan-Leman wool-combing firm remained exclusively in family hands. The business did not expand significantly for many years, until her oldest son Auguste came of age. Then, it grew spectacularly. It went from 10 machines in 1877 to 16 in 1882, and 30 plus a potash factory in 1887. In 1892, it included a wool-sorting shed, and was the largest wool-combing plant in town; by 1901, it contained 76 machines, and still included the wool-sorting shed and potash factory. Does that mean that as a woman, Marie-Catherine could only preserve her husband's legacy? Probably not. She also had five very young children to raise, which took time. Expanding a business probably meant travelling to secure additional markets, something women did not do anyway. Marie-Catherine would have needed a male partner—but her past experience may have turned her off partnerships. Instead, she consolidated ownership. As for Auguste, he could not have expanded the business so rapidly without outside financing if his mother had not accumulated a considerable amount of capital. Marie-Catherine was listed as a *rentière* in the 1886 census, and 25-year-old Auguste was enumerated as an industrialist. His mother, however, was not as retired as this suggests. In 1888, Marie-Catherine Joseph Leman, *peigneur mécanique*, widow of Emile Fouan and Auguste Fouan, *célibataire majeur*, officially became partners in the firm *Veuve Fouan et fils*. The articles specified that "Mme Fouan will more particularly take care of the paper work, of the account box and of the internal direction of the shop floor, as far as the supervision of the workers and the care of the equipment are concerned." Auguste was to deal with customers and suppliers. She was entitled to 75 % of the profits. However, neither partner could take more than 10,000 Fr a year from the cash box; any surplus profit had to stay on account, and would earn 5 % interest. (This may be how Marie-Catherine had accumulated capital in the past). Marie-Catherine kept the right to bring her two other sons on board. They would each receive 25 % of the profits, like their older

brother. She gave herself the right to retire when she saw fit. She did so in 1906, age 66.¹⁶

Marie-Catherine Fouan-Leman managed to regain control over the family business and grow it into one of the town's major concerns. Céline Deherippon-Glorieux was not so lucky. H. Deherippon & Cie, a *société en commandite par actions* with a capital of 4 million francs, was founded in 1878 by Hyppolite Deherippon to operate the Banque Commerciale de Tourcoing. Hyppolite was the director, general partner, and one of the main shareholders, and several Deherippon ladies had also subscribed large amounts. Article 13 of the society's statutes stipulated that if Hyppolite died, a watchdog committee would be appointed until his heirs chose the new director. He died in 1882. Mme Deherippon chose the new director, a former *fondeur de pouvoir* of the bank (a manager with signing authority). The statutes were also modified, and a *société en nom collectif* was constituted between Mme Deherippon and the new director. Only he had the signature, however. The name of the company was changed to Veuve H. Deherippon & Cie. The two partners were guaranteed a yearly income, and the company rented Mme Deherippon's house as its seat. The shareholders' meeting expressed the hope that M. Deherippon's eldest son, who was 20 at the time, would eventually become co-director, and admonished the young man to work diligently to make himself worthy of the responsibility. Somehow, one gets the feeling that Mme Deherippon strong-armed her way into additional powers in the company, and the shareholders retaliated with passive aggression! In the meantime *Mme la co-associée* (she used this title when signing the new statutes) identified herself as a banker in the 1886 census. However, the following year, her handpicked manager resigned, and shortly afterwards the shareholders dissolved the society. The Banque Commerciale de Tourcoing was a memory. What exactly happened is unclear—but Céline Deherippon-Glorieux was no longer a partner in a bank whose director she had chosen.¹⁷

Were shareholding societies hostile to female management? One cannot of course extrapolate from two cases, especially as there were few shareholding societies in Tourcoing in the period under consideration. In the cases above, shareholders, even when family members, preferred male managers to widows. The "managerial revolution" which saw the hiring of non-related professionals to run family-owned firms could have been preceded by an internal one which favored the males of the family over the widows.

But—one is tempted to write “of course”—there is a counterexample. We know about it from the account of a 1909 meeting to increase a company’s capital which traced the history of the business.¹⁸ In September 1908, Bertha Ehrhart, widow of Jean Beaucarne, Léon Mahaut, trader in wool and Jules Descy-Gigon, general trader, met at Mme Mahaut’s house in Tourcoing to create a shareholding society for the purpose of manufacturing machine tools (*mécanique industrielle*). Her relationship to Léon is not specified. Mme Mahaut was chosen to preside over the meeting. “Mrs Ehrhart” and Jules Descy were chosen as voting supervisors/scrutineers and Léon Mahaut as secretary. It was nonetheless the widow Beaucarne who was entrusted with registering the firm once enough capital had been raised. A second meeting was held a week later at the same place under the same president. This time, members of the executive were appointed: Léon Mahaut was chosen as chairman of the board and Mme Beaucarne, as secretary. In March the following year, the shareholders met again to increase the capital. The account identified the five individuals who purchased additional shares: Aimé Ehrhart, factory director, Bertha Beaucarne, Descy and Mahaut, and a mechanic. The minutes describes the meeting in great detail. Mme Mahaut presided with professionalism: she was familiar with parliamentary procedures and followed them scrupulously. This group of people therefore had no difficulties with women in executive positions, and one of them was visibly experienced at chairing meetings. Different groups of shareholders clearly had different views of women’s proper place.

4 BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS

The growth in the number of partnerships and shareholding societies paralleled the growth in the number of larger and larger businesses generating greater and greater profits. The longevity of the firms could also induce a sense of security: what had existed for a hundred years surely would last several generations more. The frugality of the previous generations, insurance against political turmoil and economic crisis, seemed unnecessary. Business profits could be used to support more opulent lifestyles. And they were.

By the end of the century and the beginnings of the twentieth, some of the wealthiest members of this industrial-mercantile middle-class were gentrifying. This is visible in the Tourcoing property tax lists.¹⁹ In 1840 and 1852, no manufacturer or *négociant* occupied a house whose rental

value exceeded 1,000 Fr (the averages were 190 Fr for the former and 228 Fr for the latter); in 1887, 6 % occupied a house whose rental value was at least 1,000 Fr, but none exceeded 2,000 Fr; the average was still a modest 299 Fr. 1911 was a different story: the average rental value of the manufacturers' or *négociants*' houses was 1,881 Fr; 4 (1.6 %) had a rental value over 10,000 Fr, and 56 % above 1,000 Fr. The censuses also contain evidence of some manufacturers' grand-bourgeois lifestyle. More and more had servants: in 1821, 13.4 % of the manufacturers' households included one, and none had more than two. In 1881, 73 % had at least one, 24 % had two and 2 % more than two. In 1911, 65 % had at least one, 22 % had two and 12 % had more than two. As the size of domesticity increased, servants became specialized, suggesting rather high living, if not gentry aspirations. In 1881, the only coachmen were found in the household of a brewer, and were likely to be brewery workers. The only governess, a middle-aged Frenchwoman, was living with Denis Frys, a widower with eight children. In 1911, 20 manufacturer or *négociant* households out of 460 had at least one of the following: chauffeur, coachman, wet-nurse, English or German governess, chambermaid, valet, gardener and concierge. The industrialist Jules Dassonville and his wife had a 1-year-old baby, a child's nurse, a cook, a chambermaid, a chauffeur—and a car; their house was taxed on a rental value of 3,010 Fr. George Desurmont, another industrialist, had six children age 5–18, a valet, a cook, a chambermaid and a German governess. The widowed Felix Vanoutryve lived “alone” with a valet, a chambermaid, a cook, a gardener and a janitor. His was one of the four highest valued houses in town. Most of those households belonged to the Tourcoing Gotha. (Vanoutryve, on the other hand, was the illegitimate son of a Belgian woman.)²⁰

If we believe family histories, the trend had begun in Lille as early as the middle of the nineteenth-century. Sophie Vrau-Aubineau was already describing a very lively “season” in Lille in the first few months of 1864, and was joking that as her daughter Marie was not in town, her son would not have to spend his evenings escorting her here and there. Marie Vrau's evening wardrobe was quite fashionable, and included a ballgown ordered from Paris.²¹ Businessmen were also retiring to live off their means. Auguste Pollet-Richebé, who traded wholesale in colonial groceries, retired in his fifties (around 1860), had a mansion built in the aristocratic rue Royale district, had all his books rebound for his new library and started collecting paintings. His two daughters married lawyers and his son became a maritime broker.²²

More detailed descriptions of the “season” in the 1880s can be found in Aimée Boutry-Taveau’s correspondence (transcribed by François Boutry and included in the history of his family). The season went from New Year to the beginning of Lent. Aimée Boutry, then a young mother in her twenties, was out to some reception, ball or to the theatre almost every evening during said season. Her father-in-law, Henri Boutry, was throwing lavish receptions in his newly built house. In 1883, a particularly glittering evening included theatrical performances by Parisian actors, and music by a live orchestra.²³ The men were also involved in a wide range of civic, philanthropic and cultural activities, and later their sons developed a keen interest in aviation and purchased automobiles. The trend depicted by Pierre Legrand reflected reality. The women, on the other hand, do not seem to have been active in associative life. Delemers’s inventory of the town’s benevolent and philanthropic organizations lists only two nineteenth-century ones run by women—the *Société de charité maternelle*, founded in Paris in 1817, which helped poor women who were about to or had just given birth and the *Mutualité maternelle*, with a similar goal. To this, one must add the female branch of the *Société St Vincent de Paul*, which did not pursue practical goals. Organizations by lay women are, for all practical purpose, twentieth century creations. In the nineteenth-century, municipal and Church-run organizations practically monopolized charity and welfare, and they were run by men or by religious congregations.²⁴ Women were confined to auxiliary roles. Boutry describes Henri Boutry’s second wife (a Parisian widow 40 years his junior) systematically cultivating relationships with the *Dames Quêteuses* (ladies who collected funds for Church charities) in order to infiltrate the local high society. Aimée Boutry, on the other hand, shows no evidence of having devoted any time to such activities—a Parisian too, she had too poor an opinion of local society to waste her time befriending it.²⁵

Mentions of lavish lifestyles in Roubaix-Tourcoing surface a generation later—although Motte-Brédard and Joseph Pollet-Pollet (Pélagie Delobel’s son) had their portraits painted in oils in the 1850s. Joseph lived above the shop; his son, Charles Pollet-Duthoit, moved the family to Mouveaux, in the suburb of Tourcoing (in a district called “Petit Tourcoing”), where he had a large brick house erected in the middle of substantial grounds and perhaps pompously referred to as a “chateau”. An 1884 photograph shows the family in front of the house surrounded by their eight servants.²⁶ Petit, Grislain and Le Blan claim they were far from unique, and escapes to monumental houses in the suburbs from the 1870s

onwards marked a turning point in the lifestyle of the industrial family—and perhaps the appearance of the Bruddenbrooks syndrome:

Third generation entrepreneurs believed they were entitled to enjoy the fortune accumulated by their fathers, to show it off, to be proud of it, to display their optimism and confidence in the future and in the prosperity of the textile industry, even if it was occasionally shaken by a short lived crisis.²⁷

There was another reason to escape to the suburbs—one could hope to leave behind the demonstrations and violence often accompanying industrial action in the vicinity of the factories. In their suburban retreats, industrialists could continue to fancy themselves “sole masters, ruling with sovereign authority over their large family and domesticity.”²⁸ Those who did not move to the suburbs could acquire country houses for weekends and vacations where they too could imagine themselves Old Regime *seigneurs*, and the most curious example must be the Société anonyme des dunes de la Somme, created in 1905, which issued 225 1,000 Fr shares. They were subscribed by three Motte brothers and their brothers-in-law and three Tiberghien brothers, to whom they were not closely related, to purchase a country house and 600 ha (about 1,200 acres) on the Somme estuary. Using shareholding societies to purchase vacation homes was a rather creative use of this type of association.²⁹

Lifestyle lavishness increased with profits. Albert II Prouvost’s account of his family clearly shows the shifts from generation to generation. His grandfather Amedée (1820–1885) had a house built next to his factory, which comprised two drawing rooms, a large dining room, a billiard room and his wife’s office on the ground floor. Grandmother Josephine spent most of her time in this room, from which she ran the household and also organized social gatherings and parties. The couple escaped the noise and dirt of the town at a house in the immediate countryside. Grandmother stayed there from May to October, welcoming her grandchildren during their summer vacations.³⁰ Their son Albert I (1855–1916) married Marthe Devemy (1860–1937). They too had a large house built in town and took part in what their son called “a demanding social life.”³¹ They took part in the supper-party circuit every evening, except on Fridays, which were fast days, and on Sundays, which were for the family. Every other Sunday was spent at the Devemy country house, the Vert Bois, and on the other one, they had lunch or supper with the Prouvost family. Albert Jr claims their receptions were glittering and their table famous.³²

The young couple were very fond of drama. Albert turned the attic of the house into a theatre. Parisian actors and prima ballerinas from the Opera were invited to perform for its inauguration. The family staged its own plays, some written by Albert's brother, Amedée, a poet in his own right with a respectable reputation.³³ The bills for the performances were printed. The couple also went to Paris regularly, where they never failed to attend the *Comédie française*, as well as performances at other repertory theatres.

The Vert Bois was their nearby retreat, which they shared with other family members. The men hunted partridge and pheasants raised for the purpose, and in the evening everybody dressed up in full evening kit and gowns for a lavish multi-course supper. In summer, the couple and their children travelled and went sightseeing in France, Britain, Germany and Austria. In 1902, Albert bought a car.³⁴

Their son, Albert Jr, met his future wife, Rita Vanoutrye (Félix's granddaughter), at a car race in Royat. They married in 1905 and took a car trip for their honeymoon. Albert Jr and Rita's life was as hectic as his parents': guests for suppers, evening dances, extended weekends in Paris every other week—they too went to the theatre three or four times each trip, and vacations in August.³⁵

Such a busy social life left no time for the women to get involved in the business. Orchestrating all those activities, drawing up guest lists, ordering supplies and flowers for the receptions, booking the musicians, supervising the servants, packing or supervising the packing and unpacking for Paris or the vacations, and keeping the accounts for all those activities was in itself a full-time job. But one also wonders how much time the men could effectively devote to the business, with all this hunting and car riding and junkets to Paris and summer vacations. Such a lifestyle did not leave time to take care of the day-to-day running of a factory—this is why directors were hired. And business did not occupy all the hours of a business trip either. Jacques Desurmont, on an extended tour of the Americas for such a purpose, travelled with a camera, dark-room equipment, a phonograph and plates, attended social events most evenings or went to the theatre and the opera, not to mention doing a lot of sightseeing.³⁶ For industrialists, the Belle Époque was truly that—a beautiful era, and even a gilded age.

But again, there is no evidence that the whole industrial bourgeoisie danced its way through the said Belle Époque. Another look at the 1911 census shows that some manufacturing families with good names did not have any live-in servants for instance (which of course did not preclude

relying on charwomen and hiring help when they were throwing a reception: 35 % of manufacturers and industrialists had no live-in servants). Some still lived in relatively modestly valued houses, according to the tax records. Old-fashioned frugality was still in style.

5 CONCLUSION

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, some business families started behaving like the ones Mulholland has studied. Women were excluded, not from ownership, but from management. A minority of large business owners with increasingly dynastic ambitions planned their succession. They could not use wills for this purpose, as inheritance rights could not be reduced much and rights to a share of a *communauté* were inalienable. Instead, they entered into partnerships with the sons, or sons-in-law they had chosen to succeed them as managers, and specifically excluded widows and other heirs from managerial functions. Widows and other heirs could still access the books, visit the factory and call for the dissolution of the partnership if losses exceeded a predetermined level, but they played no active role in the running of the business.

Simultaneously, some of the families began to spend their money on something other than the business. They adopted a lavish lifestyle centered on a very active social life which left women—and even men—less and less time for business. Spheres were separating, but not because femininity and business had become incompatible. The model was not universal, either. Frugal Firms of Husband & Wife did not disappear, even among the very successful, and among those, women continued to play their traditional role.

NOTES

1. This description of the evolution of partnerships is based on the database described in the methodological Appendix A.
2. “pour une durée illimitée.” The 99-year partnerships would have just come to an end. Those people assumed a perennity and fixity of the economic, social and political order that turned out to be a fantasy, but was also belied by the rapid changes of the previous 100 years.
3. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 1850–1910, 6U2 and 6U5.

4. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U5/3, 9-11-1880 and 6U5/6, 15-6-1889; AMTg, Matrices de patentes, 1880–1905, G1C 31-54.
5. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 53; Scrive, *Antoine Scrive-Labbé et sa descendance*, 32; Bigo, *Généalogie de la famille Masurel*, 104–129.
6. Bigo, *Généalogie de la famille Masurel*, 110 and 129.
7. Bigo, *Généalogie de la famille Masurel*, 138.
8. Pouchain, *Maitres du Nord*, 164–165; Goblet, “Le peignage de la laine à Roubaix-Tourcoing...,” 206.
9. Boutry, *Itinéraire d’une bourgeoisie*, 227.
10. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U5/6, 25-7-1889 and 6U5/8, 15-9-1894.
11. Goblet, “Le peignage de la laine à Roubaix... ”, 121.
12. Here are, for instance, the conditions at Emile Leplat et Cie: Emile’s sons could become partners “provided they are knowledgeable enough to take a useful role in the business and are at least 24.” ADN, 6U2/15, 31-12-1906.
13. Mulholland, *Class, gender and the Family Business*: 4; Mulholland, “Gender, Power and Property Relations...,” 78–102.
14. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U2/12, 1902.
15. The *société* had issued 450 shares worth 50 Fr each; 180 were held by Emile Fouan to guarantee his investment; Fouan and Dechene held another seven each to compensate them for their work as managers. Marie-Catherine then had had to purchase 256 shares worth a total of 12,800 Fr. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U2-646, 9-1-1863, 11-3-1863, 15-4-1863, 2-6-1873 and 1-5-1874 and 6U5/6, 15-6-1888 and 6U5/10, 14-9-1898.
16. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U5/6, 15-6-1888 and 6U5/10, 14-9-1898.
17. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U2/3, 6U2/15 and 6U2/6, 20-7-1878, 25-3-1882, 10-3-1887 and 23-3-1887.
18. The 1908 register is damaged and cannot be consulted; we therefore do not have access to the original documents. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/16, 5-3-1909.
19. The property tax was based on the retail value of the taxpayer’s residence. Property taxes are listed in the same ledgers as business taxes. AMTg, Matrices de Patentes, G1C 2, 3, 38 and 60.

20. AMTg, Table of population, 1821; censuses of 1881 and 1911, FIA 7 to 11; Matrices de Patentes, GIC 2, 8, 38 and 60: 1840, 1857, 1887, 1911.
21. AFC, Lettres de madame Sophie Vrau-Aubineau, 1861–1868.
22. Foucart, *Une grande famille bourgeoise de Lille*, 35–38; See also Vanez, “Le creuset d’une dynastie,” which is mostly a study of industrialists’ housing as representations.
23. Boutry, *Itinéraire d’une bourgeoisie*, 187, 196, 202–03, 214.
24. Delemer, *L’assistance charitable à Lille.*; see also Goblet, who states that the “patrons” relied on public assistance to help the workers in difficulties, “Le peignage de la laine à Roubaix-Tourcoing,” 205; Van den Driessche, *Histoire de Tourcoing*, 154–155.
25. Boutry, *Itinéraire d’une bourgeoisie*, 173.
26. Petit, Grislain et Le Blan, *La Redoute*, 130.
27. Petit, Grislain et Le Blan, *La Redoute*, 131.
28. Petit, Grislain et Le Blan, *La Redoute*, 131.
29. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U5-14, 29-12-1905. The Mottes were Louis-Francois Motte-Van Ham, Joseph-Louis Motte-Van Ham and Pierre-Paul Motte-Van Ham (who had married three sisters), François-Christophe Motte-Duvillier and Bonami Wibaux-Motte; they all bought 30 shares. So did Charles Tiberghien-Van den Berghe; his brothers Paul Tiberghien-Toulemonde, Joseph Tiberghien-Flipo and Jean Tiberghien-Caulliez acquired only 15 each. The Mottes declared themselves spinners; the Wibaux and the Tiberghiens, industrialists.
30. Prouvost, *Souvenirs de notre famille*, 13–15.
31. Prouvost, *Souvenirs de notre famille*, 47.
32. Prouvost, *Souvenirs de notre famille*, 47.
33. And a deserved one-although not grand literature, his poetry is rather good.
34. Prouvost, *Souvenirs de notre famille*, 48–49 and 61.
35. Prouvost, *Souvenirs de notre famille*, 76.
36. Looten, *Lettres de Jacques Desurmont*, 16, 18, 24, 25, 106–107.

Women in Crafts and Retail

Sustained industrialization and urbanization created expanding demands for consumer goods and new services in the arrondissement.¹ Did female craftspeople and retailers benefit from this trend as they did in Britain, Germany or the United States?² Despite the Revolution deregulating trades, women remained rare in crafts in the nineteenth-century, except in the needle trades such as seamstressing, dressmaking, tailoring and millinery. The latter were the quintessentially nineteenth-century female crafts. Surprisingly, and contrary to what occurred elsewhere, those crafts did not attract large numbers of self-employed women in the two cities, and one hesitates to call those activities “business” as they seem to have been precarious and poorly rewarded. Taking in boarders, a common source of income for British and American women, also seems to have been uncommon here. On the other hand, there were a growing number of women running stores, and retailing clearly emerged as a lower-middle-class/upper-working-class strategy to increase household income. Furthermore, female retailers in Lille and Tourcoing were not ghettoized in unprofitable sectors by the century’s end. Nor do they appear to have created a female economic enclave by marketing femininity. No retail sector was monopolized by women in Lille (in the sense of women making up 50 % or more of the retailers in the sector in question); even clustering was weak. As in Britain and the United States, women remained present in all forms of retailing until the beginning of the twentieth century. But although retail

does not appear to have been particularly gendered, female retailers were gendered beings. They could not escape the constraints that bore on them as females in other aspects of their lives (the law; the job market; their responsibilities as mothers, for instance). This could shape their relation to retailing. Nonetheless, gender norms appear to have always been subordinated to the overriding goal of furthering the family's economic interests, as among the industrial middle class. Being female shaped women's relationship to trade, but gender was only one factor among others, and not necessarily the major one.

I ROADS LESS TRAVELLED: CRAFTS AND HOSPITALITY

The abolition of guilds and other such regulations in the late eighteenth century meant that anyone could enter almost any trade, but that did not translate into a noticeable entry of women in trades hitherto forbidden to them: less than 5 % of craftspersons (needle trades excepted) listed in the Lille directories were women through the nineteenth-century. In other parts of Europe, the abolition of guilds led to a "familization" of craft shops; craftsmen replaced paid journeymen with members of their family. The same probably happened here, but women were not taught the whole range of "male" skills. However, they could perform ancillary tasks in some crafts: clockmakers and jewelers cleaned and polished objects, cabinet makers polished and French-waxed pieces of furniture, saddlers, shoemakers and cobblers sewed and stitched, and so on.

The abolition of guilds put an end to any legal restrictions that may have existed against widows taking over their husband's workshop, and some did. Unsurprisingly then, most of the women in non-feminized crafts were widows who had been able to continue their husband's trade with the help of journeymen because they could provide them with a fully equipped workshop. Widows could also handle the administrative part of the business (dealing with customers; making and collecting payments). In particular, printing was a trade women easily took over. When M. Vanackère, of city directory fame died, his wife continued the business (but stopped publishing the directory). And occasionally, a woman took over from a husband whose business had failed. After obtaining a court-ordered separation of property from her husband, the plumber Georges Brame, Adèle Leclercq secured the backing of a Parisian wholesaler, Charles Duflos, in 1902 to "buy, sell, manufacture and install sanitation, gas and water appliances and bathrooms." Adele was a better businessperson than her husband—in 1910 the partnership was extended, with Duflos's widow.³ One

can safely assume that it was Georges who was installing and servicing the appliances. The ladies, on the other hand, as primary users of those domestic appliances, may have been more convincing salespersons, especially when dealing with female customers.

Dressmaking and millinery were the archetypal female crafts. It is difficult to assess what proportion of women engaged in them commercially. Newspaper advertising, used by British and American historians to identify women in those trades, is nonexistent in our towns. Seamstresses, dressmakers and milliners could recruit customers through word of mouth, and easily escape the attention of the directory canvassers. This may explain why their numbers fluctuated widely in city directories. Some women were listed as engaging in the needle trades in the Tourcoing censuses—and some were listed in the city's tax records, but as the ones doing exclusively bespoke work were not liable for the tax, the numbers in the censuses and business tax rolls are at great variance from each other. Twenty-nine women paid the tax as dressmakers, tailor(esse)s or milliners in Tourcoing's northern canton in 1911—but 57 persons reported those occupations in the corresponding census, in addition to four seamstresses, one embroiderer and one knitter.⁴ Most of those who paid the tax belonged to the second lowest tax category (class seven, on a scale of one to eight). The exceptions were milliners who had a store (class 5, like butchers and bakers) and tailors who also sold fabric (class 3, like *magasins de nouveautés*—fashion apparel stores). The majority of dressmakers, milliners and the like were single and almost none headed a household or was a widow (there was a class three widowed tailoress, however). Doing bespoke work in one's parlor was less a business than a way to contribute some additional money to a household income. Dressmaking and millinery became businesses when combined with the retailing of fabric, haberdashery or fashion accessories. As for garment-making (*confectionneurs*), none were listed in the directories before the middle of the century, and the percentage of women never exceeded 22 %. Even *confectionneurs pour dames* (manufacturers of ladies' apparel) were mostly males.

Taking in boarders was another way for women to make money. The Lille directories do not list any boarding houses till 1890. Identified as *pensions bourgeoises*, those very few establishments catered to a lower middle-class clientele of single and widowed women and men who did not want or could not run a household. In addition, there were *cabaretiers aubergistes* (keepers of taverns with rooms to let) and hotels. Pensions, inns and hotels were operated mostly by men.⁵ Women were no more visible in this sector in Tourcoing, and there are very few providers of

lodging in the tax rolls. Boardinghouse keepers had to pay the business tax, but evading it was easy if one had only one boarder, who could be presented as a relative. Only those publicly known to take in boarders paid the tax. The 1911 census sample lists 109 persons identified as boarders (*pensionnaires*). Seven were schoolteachers living at *Pensionnat Notre Dame*, a girls' boarding school. Forty-five were living in seven households with at least four boarders: one boarding-house keeper, one restaurant owner, four tavern-keepers, and one greengrocer—all headed by a male. The remaining 57 boarders lived in 48 households, 13 of which were headed by a woman.⁶ This evidence does not suggest that taking boarders was a widespread female business strategy. It was rather a means to earn some additional money, like bespoke dressmaking. The needlecrafts and provision of lodgings shaded into a makeshift economy which allowed lower-class people to survive. Petty middle-class women who wanted to go into business did not turn to female crafts or hospitality; instead, they ran stores or taverns.

2 RETAIL

2.1 *A Growing Presence*

The directories we have used in previous chapters also listed retailers. The numbers they provide do not suggest that women's presence in retail diminished over the century in Lille (see Tables B6, B7 and B8 in Appendix B). They represented 11 % of retailers in 1830, and 17 % in 1900; their proportion subsequently dropped to 14 %. As explained in the methodological Appendix A, the rise in the trend line may in part be a consequence of better reporting and information gathering—and the proportion of female retailers may thus have been higher in the earlier years. Nonetheless, the doubling of the percentage of retailers who were identified as women in the two series is striking. The numbers are also most likely underestimated, as many a woman was invisible for lack of a courtesy title. In the later part of the century then, perhaps as many as one retailer in five was a woman.

The Tourcoing census data tells a similar story. The proportion of retailers who were female went from 24 % in 1821, to 37 % in 1851 and 1886 and 41 % in 1911.⁷ In 1851, almost half the male retailers were assisted by their wives (who were listed as sharing their husband's occupation) and one-quarter of the stores were operated by a couple (unfortunately,

women working with their husbands were categorized as without occupation in subsequent censuses). The number and proportion of tavern-keepers (*cabaretières*) who were women increased noticeably. By 1886, about half the taverns were run by women, as opposed to 18 % in 1821. By 1911, two-thirds of the *cabaretiers* and *cafetiers* were women (in contrast to Lille, where they were always in the minority).

The Tourcoing business tax records confirm the trend uncovered in the census, as well as identify a way sources hide the activities of married women. The proportion of female taxpayers among retailers remained almost unchanged between 1852 and 1911: 13.6 and 12.0 %, respectively. Linking the tax records (*patentes*) and the censuses, on the other hand, shows that the proportion of stores in a man's name, but run by his wife was quite significant; she was the one listed as a storekeeper in the census, while he reported another occupation (see Table 6.1).⁸

The number of stores kept by women thus jumps from 13.6 % to 22.2 % in 1851–1852; from 14.5 % to 31.3 % in 1886, but only from 12.0 % to 17.0 % in 1911. In 1886, more than half the female retailers were hidden, against a little over a third in 1852, and slightly less than a third in 1911.⁹ In addition, a certain number of stores were in the name of a man whose occupation necessarily kept him away from home (skilled factory work, for instance). In 1886 there were about 50 such stores. Yet neither their wives nor grown children, when they had any, were listed as storekeepers. If all those stores were kept by the wife, the proportion of retailers who were female would have reached 40 % in 1886. In 1911, the proportion of stores without an identifiable storekeeper was even higher, and if they were run by the wife, they would bring the proportion of female-run shops to 34 %.

Although the information about female retailers in the Lille directory is not very reliable, it suggests the proportion of married women increased over the century. (See Table 6.2). The data also undermines the image of retail as the refuge of impoverished widows. A bare majority of female retailers were widows in 1830 and 1840 (55%). About a quarter were single; sisters (each group of sisters counted as one unit) accounted for about 10 % and married women made up the rest (7–15 %). The proportion of widows subsequently declined, to 45 % in 1910. The one of single and married women increased (29 % single and 23 % married in 1910). Widows, who made less than half the population were obviously over-represented—but retail was never a widows' preserve, and the growing presence of married women in retail is worth noting.

Table 6.1 Number of female retailers, Tourcoing, 1852–1911

	1852-Entire town		1862-entire town		1886-Canton Nord Agglomeration		1892 Nord ag.		1911-part of Nord ag.	
	Reported in patents	Corrected figures	Reported in patents	Corrected figures	Reported in patents	Corrected figures	Reported in patents	Corrected figures	Reported in patents	Corrected figures
	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Male-run stores	548	493	632	500	402	661	1,041	981		
Female-run stores	86	141	84	85	183	109	142	202		
Total	634	634	716	585	585	770	1,183	1,183		
% of women	13.6	22.2	11.7	14.5	31.3	14.2	12	17.0		
N of women retrieved from census		55			98			60		
% of women retrieved		39			54			29		
N of additional stores probably run by women					50			200		
Upper estimates—female-run stores					39.8			38.8		

Source: AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C 3,1,3, 37, 41, 60; corrected figures derived from linkage census—patentes

Table 6.2 Distribution of female retailers by marital status, Lille, 1831–1910 (%)

	1831	1850	1870	1890	1910
Single	21.4	26.9	27.6	25.9	28.8
Married	15.6	18.0	20.2	23.6	23.3
Widowed	54.9	45.2	46	47.4	44.8
Sisters	8.1	9.8	6.2	3.1	3.2
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Vanackère, *Almanachs*, 1831–50; Ravet-Anceau, *Annuaire*s, 1860–1910

The Tourcoing censuses also reveal a growing presence of married women in retail. The overwhelming majority of female retailers in the 1821 census were widows (83 %). In 1851, 1886 and 1911, two-thirds of the female retailers were married women; the rest divided between widows and a few single women.

The data from both cities therefore point in the same direction: a growing proportion of retail stores were operated by women through the nineteenth-century, and slightly declined in the twentieth.

2.2 *Ghettoized and Immiserated?*

Women did not disappear from retail, but were they confined to “feminine” sectors or to low-profit short-lived ventures? Again the evidence from the two cities contradicts this thesis.

No retail sector feminized in Lille. There were more women in food, textiles and clothing than in other sectors, but they never ran more than a quarter of those stores (except in 1900, when 28 % of the textile/clothing stores were in their hands) (see Tables B6, B7 and B8 in Appendix B). The majority of stores, whatever they sold, were run by men—or by a couple under a man’s name. Nor can one conclude that women were ghettoized in specific “feminine” sectors. It is true that the proportion of female retailers who were selling food or textiles never dropped below 73 % (and never below 85 % after 1850)—but at least three-quarters of the male retailers also sold those commodities till 1890; afterwards, they diversified slightly and only two-thirds of them retailed food and textiles. Female retailers therefore sold food, textiles and clothing because this was what the majority of retailers were selling, rather than because they were women. Although men dominated the heteroclitic and growing “miscellaneous” category, women were not absent from it either. As in Britain,

female retailers remained scattered through all categories of retail at the beginning as well as the end of our period. In 1910, Lille women were selling, among no particularly feminine goods, cutlery, clocks and watches (two—and an additional eight women were *horloger-bijoutiers* who sold jewelry in addition to clocks), sewing machines (2), custom-made furniture (8), hardware (5) and seeds and flour (one). Retail was only moderately gendered. Tourcoing was not significantly different, except that there, a smaller proportion of stores were not selling food or textiles, and this sector did not grow as fast as in Lille. Lille was the place to go if one wanted access to the newest forms of non-basic goods.

Were women, then, disproportionately represented among the poorer trades?

Let us start by comparing the retail scene in Lille in the upscale Grand Place, rue Esquermoise and rue Neuve, and in the three streets that crossed the derelict Saint Sauveur working-class district—the rues de Fives, des Etaques and Robled. In 1860, 268 retailers were located in those six streets (two-thirds in the first three). A quarter of the retailers in the upscale district were women, against 14 % in the other. In 1890, there were 253 stores in those streets (55 % in the best ones); fewer retailers were women—one in five in the upscale district and only 10 % in the working-class one. The upscale district attracted more female retailers than the working-class one. Unsurprisingly, retailers in the poor streets sold basic victuals, fabric, haberdashery and alcohol, whereas the rue Esquermoise offered customers a large and ever-widening range of consumer goods.¹⁰

Women were, then, not confined to the poorer districts of the larger city. Neither were they confined to the less profitable stores in Tourcoing. The tax list provides us with three approximate indicators to assess the profitability of a business and the standards of living of the retailers. The value of the tax, which varied with the rental value of the premises used by the business, can be used as a proxy for the store's profitability. The property tax lists allow us to know whether a retailer paid a property tax (meaning that he or she owned it), and what was the assessed value of this property.¹¹

Women were always a minority among retailers, and were even more so among high-end ones (class 3–5). The majority of women ran low-end stores (class 6–8), and by 1911, the proportion of female retailers in high-end stores decreased, from 24 % to 16 % (see Table 6.3). However, we should not run to the easy conclusion that women were being pushed out of high-end retail as the century advanced.

Table 6.3 Distribution of female retailers by tax category, Tourcoing, 1852–1911 (%)

	1852	1886	1911
Class 3–5	24.1	18.6	15.7
Class 6–8	75.9	81.4	84.3

Source: AMTg, Patentes, 1852, 1886, 1911 G1C 33, 37, 60

Other factors which had nothing to do with hostility to women in the public sphere were at play. First, low-end retailing expanded faster than high-end; it represented 69 % of the stores in 1852, 74 % in 1886 and 79 % in 1911. All things being equal, there should have been a greater proportion of female retailers in low-end stores in 1911 than in 1852. (The proportion of males in low-end retail also increased: 67 % in 1852; 71 % in 1886 and 79 % in 1911.) The low-end sector did not expand faster than the high-end one because retail in general was in difficulties—in the second half of the century, the situation of the French retail sector had in fact improved. Department and chain stores were still uncommon outside of Paris, and lesser towns did not feel the effects of those new forms of retail until the turn of the century.¹² Lille had department and chain stores in 1881 (although not many).¹³ Tourcoing did not, and the situation was no different in 1911.

The absolute and per capita number of high-end stores increased at the same time as the proportion of low-end retail stores, suggesting the growth of retail was skewed towards the low-end sector. Female wages began to increase in terms of purchasing power in the 1870s, and male ones in the 1880s.¹⁴ Codaccioni's study of patrimonies left at death in Lille between 1850 and 1910 also shows slight increases in the proportion of workers leaving property at death, and increases in the value of the retailers' estates.¹⁵ This slight improvement in workers' standards of living translated into their buying more basic goods. There were more stores in this category because the demand for their goods had increased.

Second, women were the ones who took advantage of the expansion of retail in the nineteenth-century. The proportion of high-end stores run by women went up, from 17 to 23 % in 1886, and dropped back to 12.4 % in 1911; the proportion of low-end female stores increased from 25 % to 34 % before declining to 18 % (see Table 6.4).¹⁶ By then, more high-end stores may have been run by men, because men were usually the ones

Table 6.4 Proportion of stores run by women, by tax category, Tourcoing, 1852–1911

	1852	1886	1911
Class 3–5	17.2	22.5	12.4
Class 6–8	24.5	34.3	17.9

Source: Same as Table 6.3

retailing the new, and more expensive, early twentieth century consumer goods (bicycles, photographic equipment, heating and lighting systems, paints and wallpaper, for instance)

The Tourcoing and Lille data therefore agree with each other. In the nineteenth-century, expanding retail sectors attracted women—and women progressed in the more “bourgeois” end of the sector as well. There were more retailers who were female at the end of the nineteenth-century, and female retailers were more and more likely to be married ones. The decline in the twentieth century may have been a source artifact, the consequence of a greater number of storekeepers whose sex is unknown. However, even if we assume all the unidentified persons were women, the proportion of high-end female stores still declines whereas the proportion of low-end stores still goes up. Women’s presence in retail may have begun to ebb—or high-end retailing may have become more attractive to men than in the past.

The feminization of the low end of the retail sector was due to the entry of “upper-working-class” wives into this sector of activity. Those women lacked the financial and social capital to open high-end stores. The ones who opened small grocery, beer or haberdasher’s stores in Tourcoing back-streets in the shadow of factories were not the wives, daughters or widows of the more prosperous main-street merchants or craftsmen—or even of the side-street butchers and bakers, but wives of skilled workers. When employees and highly skilled blue-collar workers became more numerous, so did storekeepers married to such men. Most of the hidden Tourcoing female storekeepers are found among the low-end retailers, and almost all married women operated a low-end store.

Marital status is less systematically recorded in the 1911 tax lists; widows, married women and women of unspecified marital status each ran one-third of the low-end stores—but 91 % of the known married women were operating a class 6–8 store. In other words, not much had changed.

Widows, on the other hand, appear to have been slightly over-represented among high-end stores: One in five of all women, and a quarter of the widows operated a class 3–5 store in 1886, and the figures are almost identical in 1911—but the numbers are very small and not very reliable.¹⁷

As low-end stores mostly retailed basic necessities (victuals, drinks, coarse fabric, notions), those were the sectors which ended up the most feminized. This can also explain the feminization of the *cabaret* in Tourcoing (By 1911, two-thirds of the Tourcoing *cabarets* were run by women). Breweries leased furnished premises and sold beer on credit to publicans. The only capital one needed to start a brewery-tied tavern was the right connections and a good reputation. This low threshold facilitated the entry of working-class people into the trade. Whatever segmentation of retail occurred therefore had little to do with sex-typing of stores.¹⁸ The changing face of retail and a slight shift in the distribution of wealth among the different social classes goes a long way to explain what at first looked like the erosion of women's position in this line of business.

Were female stores shorter lived than men's? The differences were not very large in Tourcoing. Between 1852 and 1862, men and women had about the same turnover rate (the women actually had a slight advantage). The differences between classes of retailers were not very large either: high-end male-run stores were more persistent, but not by much (see Table 6.5). Between 1886 and 1896, the persistence rate appears much

Table 6.5 Persistence rate of retailers by sex, Tourcoing, 1852–97^a (%)

	<i>1852 patentees listed in 1853</i>	<i>1852 listed in 1857</i>	<i>1852 listed in 1862</i>	<i>1886 patentees listed in 1852–62</i>	<i>1886 listed in 1887</i>	<i>1886 listed in 1892</i>	<i>1886 listed in 1897</i>
Men	92.5	66.3	50.8	4.7	82.6	38.6	25.4
Women	92.9	70.2	51.1	4.9	83.1	34.4	19.1
Total	92.6	67.1	50.9	4.8	82.7	37.3	23.4
Listed women	90.7	68.6	45.4	4.7	76.5	38.8	22.3
Listed and retrieved women	96.4	72.7	60	5.1	88.8	30.6	16.3

Source: Patentees linked with census

^aSimilar calculations were not done for the 1911 cohort, as the town was occupied by the Germans by the fall of 1914, and business ground to a halt

lower; however some of the disappearing storekeepers may simply have moved to the southern half of the town, as the data collected for those years only pertain to canton Nord (see Appendix A, Sources and method). Married women had the lowest persistence rate of all. And, unsurprisingly, low-end retailers had a lower persistence rate than high-end ones.

In the short run (up to five years) women had persistence rates similar to the ones of the men in their categories. In the long run (ten years and more) high- and low-end male retailers had a higher persistence rate, but half the storekeepers were gone from the tax records within ten years, and only 5 % of the retailers listed in 1886 could be found in the 1852–1862 database. Even if we could factor in death and out-migrations, the disappearance figures would remain high.

A very tiny number of retailers managed to move upwards, and became wholesalers (class 1 or 2), or went into manufacturing (tax rolls table C). For a few women, retail was a stepping stone to more profitable ventures. In the late 1860s, Adelaïde and Maria Boudville, two unmarried sisters who kept a store in Lille, started a partnership to dye and polish thread in a building leased from a banker. Each brought 8,000 Fr; they were to share profits and losses equally, and could take 1,500 Fr a year each from the business “for their need.”¹⁹ Appoline Bossart, who had successfully sued for separation of property from her husband in 1876 and gone into the grain trade, started a partnership with a potter in 1890, in order to manufacture and sell decorated earthenware and majolica. She provided two-thirds of the rather small capital, and did not give up her trading in grain.²⁰ On a larger scale, Clotilde and Palmyre Dubiez, storekeepers, and Oscar Dubiez, traveling salesman, joined Jean-Baptiste Desrousseau, carpet manufacturer, in 1882 to manufacture carpets. The Dubiez provided 40,000 Fr, Desrousseau his time and industry. The partners were prohibited from engaging in any other form of trade and industry, except the ladies who could continue running their store.²¹ Such individuals are, however, not statistically significant. In such a context, talking about the “greater” or “lesser” vulnerability of female-run stores is rather academic. Storekeeping was, almost by definition, a precarious activity, and this was true of males as well.

Retail may have allowed women—or their family—to own their house at the end of the century. They notably improved their position as property owners in absolute terms, and in comparison with male retailers between 1852 and 1886. In 1852, almost all the male retailers, and high-end female ones, but only half of the low-end female retailers paid the property tax.

Female high-end retailers owned property worth about one-third less than the men's. By 1886 men and women were liable to the property tax in the same proportion, irrespective of class, and high-end female retailers (or they and their husbands) also owned property with a higher tax value than the male retailers (about 20 % higher). In 1911, it still did not matter whether the storekeeper was a male or a female. The rates of property ownership were the same. However, low-end retailers of both sexes were less likely to own their premises than in 1886. High-end female retailers occupied premises with a higher taxable value than male ones; but the opposite was true of low-end ones. Petty-middle-class women, the ones operating class 3–5 stores, seem to have either improved their material position, or chosen to invest more of their gains in real estate than the men. On the other hand, life may have been a greater struggle for low-end retailers or either sexes. Sharp increases in real-estate values may have put ownership out of reach of the less well-off store owners (assessed property values tripled between 1886 and 1911, and access to property was probably more difficult).

Women continued to be a visible presence in high-end retailing, in part because they were able to raise the required capital. Formal partnerships were uncommon among retailers, but the few registered at the Tribunal de commerce offer a glimpse into the strategies women may pursue. They may pool resources. In Tourcoing Jeanne Montagne, wife of Henri Vanpachterbècke, traveling salesman, set up a partnership with her unmarried sister Léonie in 1901 to sell discounted fabric, linen, notions and fancy goods (*articles de Paris*). Jeanne provided the goods, valued at 5,000 Fr, and her sister, the use of a house. Jeanne was entitled to four-fifths of the profits. The partnership lasted three years.²²

In Lille, the very upscale *confiserie-glacierie* Meert (ice-cream parlour and confectionery shop) in rue Esquermoise was taken over in 1868 by Adèle Liénard, the 39-year-old widow of Michel Meert. They had been married three years and had one daughter. She and her brother Jules Emile, a recently married merchandise broker in Paris, entered into a partnership: he contributed 32,000 Fr; she brought her lease, stock and goodwill.²³ The partnership lasted till 1890, when Jules took over. He sold the concern ten years later, and died in 1907. She survived him by eight years.²⁴ Women were also financed by non-relatives. In 1907, Angèle Berthe Decaux, publicity agent, secured the backing of a *commanditaire*, a Lyon commercial assistant, to open an agency on Lille's Grand Place. He provided 1,000 Fr and was to collect 5 % interest a year on the amount in addition to his half of the profits.²⁵

Marriage, however, could be a problem for retailers, as it was for other women in business. Julie Allard, who took over the fashion store belonging to Alexandre Debisschop in 1873, was not allowed to marry for the next five years, and needed the permission of her *commanditaires* afterwards. When and if she did, her marriage contract had to formally and totally bar her husband from any possible involvement in the business. As far as one can judge from the tax records and town directories, Julie Allard never married. Her store was also one of the highest taxed in the city.²⁶ The obsession of Julie's partners with her marital status was nonetheless not universal. Louise Choquet of Armentières, whose *magasin de nouveautés* was underwritten by two Parisian spinsters in 1868, was not prevented from marrying—her articles of association merely contained a clause barring her future husband from getting involved in the business.²⁷ This type of clause—or the obligation to marry in separation of property—on the other hand, was fairly common, and remained so into the twentieth century.

Partnerships could be a way to accumulate capital on one's own. In 1911, Marguerite Lamerant of Tourcoing secured the backing of a silent partner, Marie Browaeys, wife of Victor Dorny, from nearby Roubaix, in order to trade in petticoats, corsets and lace. Dorny provided 10,000 Fr. Although she was a silent partner and thus legally barred from getting involved in the management of the business, Dorny was to take care of the paperwork, and be paid 500 Fr a year for her labor. She would not take care of the books as the firm was to hire a bookkeeper. Lamerant was entitled to 25 Fr a week (1,300 Fr a year), but had to leave half her share of profits in the business till she had accumulated a capital of 5,000 Fr. Presumably, the plan was for the two women to eventually become equal partners—Dorny would have withdrawn funds as Lamerant's share grew, a practice that was not uncommon among men.²⁸

The district also attracted women from outside. In 1910, the Belgian Camille Meyfroidt (a man) and Hélène Tuytten set up a partnership to sell food products under the retail banner *Fédération Laitière*. They operated four stores, two in Tourcoing, including one on the Grand Place and two in central locations in Lille. He was the general manager and she kept the books, but both would be paid 150 Fr a month (1,800 Fr a year). Their male assistant was paid the same as them, and the female cashier, who also had to visit the different stores, 100 Fr plus 25 Fr for traveling expenses. Tuytten had the option of taking over the entire business should her partner die. The following year, Meyfroidt and Tuytten turned the partnership

into a shareholding society, each receiving 25 of the 55 shares valued at 1,000 Fr. The remaining five shares went to five assistants, including the above-mentioned director and cashier.

These examples show not only that petty-middle-class women continued engaging in high-end retail, but that they were able to access the necessary capital. Wendy Gamber and Crossick and Haupt have argued that gender limited women's ability to secure business credit. It does not seem to have been the case here. These examples also suggest that people were not overly anxious about the consequences of those activities on middle-class self-definition or on the future of patriarchy.

2.3 *Retail as a Family Economic Strategy*

Tax lists, of course, do not tell us why female-run stores were shorter lived than men's. It may have been because they were less capitalized and less profitable, but the other indicators we have used do not suggest this really was the case. More likely, women operated stores when they—or their family—thought an additional income was desirable, and when the need passed women closed the shop. What those needs were is of course difficult to ascertain. At mid-century, Tourcoing female retailers were no more likely to have children too young to work than working or stay-at-home mothers, and they were no less likely than other women to have children of working age.²⁹ By 1886 most either had young children—or had none at all.³⁰ By then, there were much fewer jobs that could be done at home for pay than in the first half of the century. Most activities reported by working-class women in the 1821 census could be done at home, like bobbin-winding, twisting yarn and the like. Only 20 % declared an activity which had to take place outside the home.³¹ In 1886 and 1911, on the other hand, the tasks which could be done at home were scarce.³² Some of the wage-earners' wives went to the factory (if they had no young children, or older children who could take care of their younger siblings), and some—the wives of the better paid workers—became self-employed.

Wool-sorters' wives are a very good example of this situation. The wool-sorters, whose work could not be mechanized, and required a three-year apprenticeship, were among the better-paid manual workers. And yet, in 1886, 60 % of the wool-sorters' wives worked—and almost all were self-employed, as retailers, seamstresses or tailoresses. Those women did not “need” to work, in the way the wives of unskilled workers with young children needed to work. By 1911, the proportions were reversed and

two-thirds no longer reported an occupation—but the reported occupations remained the same. By 1911, two-thirds of the wives of unskilled or low-skilled workers did not report an occupation either (but when they did, they were most likely to be factory workers). Women of the “labor aristocracy” worked when an additional income was needed to feed young children, and when they had no young children to improve their family’s standard of living and finance the sons’ training or education. But as they were more likely to have some capital (savings, skills at needlework, connections), they could shun the factory or the day labor which was the lot of their poorer sisters. The increase in workers’ real wages at the end of the nineteenth-century may have relieved women from some of the pressure to generate a supplementary income. More and more men could support a family, especially as families were also getting smaller. If women’s small businesses were meant to be a solution to a temporary problem, not a career, this could account for the decline of female store-keeping in the twentieth century.

Retail was in some cases part of a successful strategy to permanently join the ranks of the middle classes. Flore Lemay, fabric merchant, Henri, Jean-François, Emile-Victor and Alphonse Desrumaux, respectively mechanic, merchant, cashier and traveling salesman, started a partnership for nine years in 1873 to buy and sell fabric and ready-made items (*confection*).³³ The capital (merchandise and goodwill), worth 13,893 Fr, was given to them in equal shares by François Desrumaux and his wife Catherine Bonnier. Flore was the only one allowed to sign for the business. Emile, the cashier, was to keep the books, and be paid 200 Fr a term for his work; Flore was to receive 1,200 Fr a term. If any of the male partners died, the partnership was to continue; if Flore died, it was to be dissolved. When the parents died, Flore had the option to buy out her siblings and continue on her own. These articles of association seem to describe an attempt by a lower-middle-class family to provide an unmarried daughter and step-daughter with a respectable occupation, generating an income similar to the one of her brothers. The boys had secured good wage-earning or salaried jobs; the daughter took over her parents’ business, backed not only by her future inheritance, but by her brothers’ as well.

The story one can reconstitute from the registry of births, marriages and deaths is, however, more complex.³⁴ François Derumaux, born 1794 (the spelling of his name varied from record to record) and Catherine Bonnier, born 1804, were both widowed when they married in March 1834 in Wazemmes. They had both lost their spouse in 1832,

the year of the cholera, and they were close neighbors. He had two surviving children under 12, and she, a 3½-year-old daughter, Flore. She was a seamstress, like his first wife, and he was a day laborer, like her first husband. At that time and in that place, there was not much need for dressmakers in Wazemmes and the two women were very likely pieceworkers stitching peasant smocks (*sarraux*) for Lille merchants. Neither spouse could sign the marriage registry. They settled in his house in Moulins, the oil-mill district of Wazemmes, in the rue de la Plaine, which crossed the road to Arras. They had seven additional children between 1834 and 1847, three of whom died in infancy; the survivors are the ones who partnered with Flore. At their birth, François was identified as a *portefaix* (a porter/dock hand carrying various goods on his back for merchants). He was still a *portefaix* in 1862 when Henri married. Catherine was occasionally listed as a seamstress. Despite their unskilled or low-paid work, the couple managed to keep their sons out of the workforce long enough for them to secure a highly skilled blue-collar job in the case of Henri, and respectable middle-class white-collar ones in the case of the three others. Emile and Alphonse needed more than clerical skills to succeed, but also good middle-class manners. They also needed to speak proper French, and their unschooled parents, born and raised in the country, almost certainly spoke dialect.³⁵ The only son from Deremaux's first marriage I could locate in the registers was a flax-comber in Moulins.

Not only were the sons climbing the social ladder, but the parents followed suit. The 1870 Lille trade directory lists Deremaux-Bonnier, fabric merchants, rue de la Plaine; in 1875, the store operated under the name Deremaux frères et soeur; it could still be found at the same address in 1905. In the meantime, two of the brothers left the partnership, or were bought out. Flore and Henri joined in a simple partnership capitalized at 22,500 Fr in 1891. The business did well enough to finance their retirement. In 1900, the two siblings, now identified as *propriétaires*, underwrote Céline Suin, a fabric merchant, who rented the store and a room on the second floor from Flore.³⁶ François had died a *propriétaire* (living off his means) in 1878 and Catherine four years later, in the house where they had spent their entire married life.

One can wonder how the Deremaux-Bonnier went from illiterate and unskilled workers to owners of a valuable business within ten years. The sources do not tell us, but the fact that the store was passed to Catherine's children, leaving out Deremaux's son by his first marriage, who was still

alive at the time (he died a *concierge* in 1886), suggests that some Bonnier inheritance may have provided at least some seed money. Being swallowed by the enlargement of Lille and finding oneself living round the corner from one of the main arteries of the enlarged city may have helped as well, especially if they had been able to acquire a day-laborer's house, with the customary large garden, when Moulins was still a straggling hamlet surrounded by windmills. They could have sold part of the property at a good price. It is not very likely that François Derumaux had much to do with a store dealing in fabric—but his wife should have known a thing or two about this trade and the one in ready-made articles. It is also plausible that Flore, like the young ladies described by Legrand, had learned the trade working in linen and fabric stores before assisting her mother. The Derumaux-Bonniers were placing their children in the middle-class, and the store came at the right time to secure Flore's position and ensure her independence.

Retail was not an option limited to women without husbands, as the quantitative data have shown. Some married lower-middle-class women chose to become retailers, despite having husbands who could support them. Even employees, who are supposed to have aspired to a bourgeois lifestyle, did not necessarily insist that their wives refrain from visible economic activities. In 1890, Paul Duflos, who declared being a cashier and liquor retailer, and his wife Reine Thomassin, mortgaged a house in a middle-class street; she had inherited a third from her parents, who kept a tavern, and bought the rest from her co-heirs before her marriage. The new loan was a replacement for two others, one for 6,000 Fr taken out by the couple, and one for 15,000 Fr in Reine Thomassin's name.³⁷ Duflos could not have retailed alcohol while working as a cashier, because he could not be in two places at once. It is more likely that Reine Thomassin continued her parents' activities from the house in question, and then married an employee, who did not quit his job to run the store. Nor did he expect his wife to close it to withdraw into her "sphere". Nonetheless, as a married woman Reine Thomassin could not borrow money without her husband's permission.

The Civil Code's restrictions on married women's autonomy forced couples to be creative. In 1900, Noëlle Lemoine, a single woman, partnered with Louis Pagniez, who called himself an industrialist and his wife Heloise Mio to run a dry-cleaning business (*teinture et dégraissage*). Noëlle had to devote all her time and industry to the business. Pagniez did

not have to get involved; he was to be represented in the association by his wife, to whom he gave full power of attorney as well as the signature. Each lady was entitled to 600 Fr a year salary and the profits and losses were to be shared equally between Lemoine and the couple. Pagniez, in other words, had set up a partnership to provide his wife with a job. One wonders what this “industrialist” was producing and how well his business was doing, to entice his wife to run a small business.³⁸

Running a business could be a solution to a succession of problems. Justine Delahodde was born near Boulogne in 1856, the daughter of a flour merchant who moved to Lille, became the business manager of St Joseph’s College (*économe*) and even taught there before he retired. In January 1880, she married 29-year-old Alphonse Destoop, a watchmaker’s son, but without an occupation of his own. Among the witnesses to the wedding was Edouard Lefort, a prosperous bookseller specializing in pious literature.³⁹ Two months later, Justine went into business, underwritten by Evariste Desoblain and Victor Delahodde, the first *propriétaire* and the second general trader (*négociant*), who provided 30,000 Fr each; Justine contributed 10,000 Fr, possibly the garment-making business she had just acquired from a dame Lepos, in one of Lille’s central streets. The association was a *commandite*. Justine, the unlimited liability partner, was to draw a 250 Fr a month salary (3,000 Fr a year), to be raised to 3,800 Fr if her husband made himself “useful around the shop.” She was allowed to give him a power of attorney.⁴⁰ When he died in 1883, Alphonse was a *négociant*. The couple had two children, a 2½-year-old girl and a 4-month-old boy. Ten years later, we find Justine setting up a simple partnership with Ernest and Marie Delahoodde, possibly some of her siblings. She had moved a few hundred meters away, to the better rue Nationale. She put 40,000 Fr in the business; the other partners were to provide 20,000 Fr each, 5,000 Fr at the time of the constitution of the partnership and the rest later. Justine was to get half the profits and the other two a quarter each. If Marie Delahoodde married, the other two could require that she married in separation of property and get from her husband the necessary permission to engage in the business without his legal supervision. Justine and her husband then started two independent businesses shortly after their marriage. This allowed Justine to support herself and her children during her premature widowhood. She still did well enough to accumulate capital and move to a better location over a ten-year period.⁴¹

Retail could also be a way to try to keep orphans afloat. In September 1890, Josephine Bartier, widow Langlemez, manufacturer of linen in Provin (to the south-west of Lille), emancipated her 19-year-old daughter Virginie and authorized her to trade.⁴² She then started a partnership with her. She provided all the capital (80,000 Fr) and was entitled to 95 % of the profits. She died six weeks later leaving four minor children: Virginie, Henri and Berthe (all emancipated) and 12-year-old Lucie. As the only one over 18, only Virginie could legally be a general partner; her siblings could only be *commanditaires* (silent, limited-liability partners).⁴³ The timing of the events suggests that Josephine knew she was dying. Setting her children in storekeeping in a large, bustling town with a robust retail sector, rather than let them try to continue an out-putting business in a village, was an attempt at providing for them beyond the grave.

Retailing was also a palliative to hard times for previously better-off women. Gustave Brevenne, who appeared in the partnership registry as a wholesaler in 1851, married Constance Lecluse, *cafetière*, in 1862. He died shortly afterwards. In 1864, Constance, now a *cafetière* in Tourcoing, entered into a partnership with Joseph Lemaire, wholesaler, to trade in wool and wool wastes. The business was to be known as Veuve Gustave Brevenne & Co. Constance had reverted to her initial occupation in widowhood (she may never have given it up). Her intention nonetheless was to follow in her deceased's husband's footsteps as soon as possible.⁴⁴ Even women from top-tier families did not disdain retail when in dire straits. This seems to have been the fate of Camille Dassonville. She came from a good Tourcoing family—her father Dassonville-Leplat had been a spinner. Her husband, Gustave-Achille Bouchard, was a trader's son. They both brought 105,000 Fr into their marriage in 1863.⁴⁵ Gustave-Achille was a *fabricant* at the time. She did not report an occupation. Bouchard-Dassonville subsequently became a wool-spinner specializing in commission work (*à façon*). But at his death in 1889, he was merely a trade representative (*représentant de commerce*). Camille still did not have an occupation. In 1890, she opened a wool and haberdashery store, underwritten by her brother, the wholesaler Louis Dassonville, who put up 3,000 Fr, and her brother-in-law Edouard Flipou-Bouchard, who provided 2,000 Fr. Mme Veuve provided the partnership with her stock in trade and goodwill. She apparently was an impoverished widow. The couple's assets were not sufficient to allow her and her seven daughters ranging from 6 to 24 to live off her means, and she had to start working.⁴⁶

3 CONCLUSION

Lower-middle-class widows and single women were most often free agents, working towards their own goals. They emerge from the sources as entrepreneurs in their own right, and we find them doing business like men—when not doing “men’s business”. The economic expansion engendered by industrialization and urbanization created opportunities for women in the arrondissement as it did in Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany or North America: more goods to retail, increases in the standard of living of all layers of the population and population growth translated into an expanded retail sector.⁴⁷ As elsewhere, women seized these opportunities, and it apparently occurred to no one that they should not. As late as 1890, women’s involvement in business remained unproblematic. Marriage contracts between retailers (*commerçants*) routinely stipulated that if any of the spouses was in business at the death of the other, or if both were running a store together, the survivor could continue it in his or her own right. In other words, the rights of the heirs to the property represented by the store were suspended.⁴⁸ The Lille middling sorts, like their counterpart across the Channel, continued to adhere to eighteenth century notions of women’s proper economic roles: they were not supposed to be an economic burden on their husbands or families.

The purpose of lower-middle-class married women’s economic activities may have been to improve the economic well-being of their family—and this may have provided ambitious and non-domestic women with an iron-clad justification to go into business. Married women did not necessarily see themselves as their husband’s agents either. Anne-Marie Sohn’s study of the relationship between men and women in late nineteenth-century France describes French women of modest means keeping a very sharp eye on their economic interests, and as a rule successful in preventing their husbands from curtailing them:

Wage earners, craftsmen and retailers violate the Civil Code daily [by allowing women powers the code specifically denied them]. The quiet legal indifference characterizing these families reveals the particular logic that guides them. In this framework, women have acquired power, when they have not wholly appropriated it. The men follow their wives’ reasoning, merely turning it on its head to suit their needs.⁴⁹

Married women worked because their husband agreed, or did not want to oppose their wives, or did not know they could oppose them.

Wool-sorters and other similar members of the “working-class aristocracy” did not act as if their wives’ work was undermining their masculinity; on the contrary.⁵⁰

Marital status, social class, type of business, and even individual choices all played a role in shaping women’s place in the retail sector, alongside gender. Retailers in Lille and Tourcoing were not insensitive to gender—rather they understood it in their own way. They perpetuated a gender system that put a priority on family’s economic goals, and insisted on seeing husbands and wives as partners, albeit unequal ones, not as members of “opposite” sex, meant to play totally different social and economic roles. But if married women could be economic agents, so could single and widowed women.

NOTES

1. The ratio of stores listed in the city directories to inhabitants dropped from 57 in 1830 to 31 in 1910. The figures exclude all taverns and cafés.

Inhabitants per store:

1830	1850	1870	1890	1910
57	40	44	35	31

2. Barker, *The Business of Women*: 68 and 70; See also Philips, *Women in business*; Kay, *The Foundation of Female Entrepreneurship*; Aston, “Female Business Ownership in Birmingham”; Lane, “Women, Property and Inheritance”; Edelswerld-Murphy, “Business Ladies”; Gambers, *The female Economy*; Lewis, *Unexceptional Women*; Sparks, *Capital Intentions*; Schötz, *Handelsfrauen in Leipzig*; Schrover, “De affaire wordt gecontinueerd door de veduwe”; Piette, “Trajectoires féminines”; Craig, *Women in business since 1500*, ch. 8 & 9.
3. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/713, 31-12-1902 and 25-5-1910.
4. Those were individuals who were listed in the census as employers or self-employed (“*patrons*”) or doing bespoke work (*à la journée* or *à façon*). One-third of women in the needle trades in the census were “*patronnes*”; one-quarter hired themselves out for the day or the task, and the remainder were working for wages.

5. Three out of seventeen *pensions* were run by women (two single and one widowed) in 1890. There were also 41 hotels, 6 run by women, and 46 *estaminets-auberges* (inns), one operated by a widow. Women did not make subsequent gains in those sectors.
6. There are 3,382 persons and 926 households in the sample. Six per cent of all regular households had at least one boarder identified as such (*pensionnaire*).
7. Those percentages are calculated on the entire population of retailers, which was collected separately, as there are not enough of them in the census samples (100 to 120 in each year) to calculate meaningful percentages (see methodological Appendix A). The overall trend line is nonetheless the same: 34 % of retailers in the samples were females in 1851 and 40 % in 1911.
8. And this despite the fact that only a minority of taxpayers can be linked with the census, and vice versa. In 1852, there were 634 retailers in the tax lists, 428 in the census, and 217 names that could be linked with certainty. This is due to the fact that the spelling of names is not consistent, making linkage by name difficult; street names changed, making linkage by street address uncertain; and people shifted from one kind of retail to another, and also moved from one part of town to another. To this can be added the predictable problems of tax evasion and census under-numeration.
9. By 1886 Ravet-Anceau were covering Tourcoing as well, and their proportion of female-run stores is almost identical to the one of female *patente* payers. *Patentes* and directory usually hide the same women. One has the feeling Ravet-Anceau used the *patentes* lists as starting points and made some minor modifications in the names of owners or the type of business run. If they under-reported female-run businesses in the same way in Lille, the proportion of female retailers in the latter city should then also have hovered around a third.
10. Annaires Ravet-Anceau, 1860 and 1890.
11. The tax rolls are organized by street and street number, and list each tax (property, business) separately under the taxpayer's name at the appropriate address.
12. Haupt, "The petite bourgeoisie in France, 1850–1914," 99.
13. The 1881 Lille directory lists only two *magasins à rayons* (department stores) out of 3,686 retailers. There were fewer than a dozen clothing/linen and similar stores belonging to a company, instead of an

- individual, suggesting a very limited penetration of chain stores. Tourcoing had one “*bazar*” (dime store), whose owners lived in Lille.
14. Béatrice Craig, “Salaires, niveaux de vie et travail féminin.”
 15. Codaccioni, *De l'inégalité sociale*, 126, 189, 362, 425.
 16. The percentages include women identified as storekeepers in the *patentes* and women retrieved from the census, but not stores without an identified keeper.
 17. 18.6 % of the women operated a class 3–5 store in 1886, but 26.5 % of the widows did so and the figures are almost identical in 1911.
 18. The only segmentation that could be attributed to gender concerns butchers’ and bakers’ shops, where there was always a male in the trade present: a male head, a late teen or older son, or a journeyman (*garçon boucher* or *boulangier*).
 19. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/650, 4-7-1868.
 20. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/673, 14-2-1890.
 21. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5-4 (1881–1882); very few women managed the transition from retail to wholesale or manufacturing; the same however was true of men. This particular partnership failed. In 1884, the Dubiez forced dissolution against Desrousseau in front of the Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/5, 14-2-1885. The demoiselles were then calling themselves *negociantes* and the gentlemen, industrialists.
 22. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/12, 31-1-01.
 23. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/650, 5-10-1868.
 24. The shop still looked the way it did in the 1860s and is registered as a historical building. One can visit it virtually at <http://www.meert.fr/>.
 25. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/701, 19-9-1905.
 26. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/652, 5-5-1870.
 27. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/651, 28-10-1869.
 28. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/18, 25-2-1911.
 29. AMTg, 1851 census, F1A 4-5.
 30. AMTg, 1886 census, F1A 12-15.
 31. AMTg, 1821 population table, F1D D1.
 32. AMTg, 1886 census, F1A 12-15; 1911 census, F1A 39-45.
 33. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/655, 19-12-1873; I was unable to find any of those people in the Lille civil registers to confirm the relationship, and genealogical sites were of no help either.
 34. ADN, Etat civil online, Wazemmes (1794–1843), Moulins (1834–1858) and Lille (1858–1893). Moulins was detached from

- Wazemmes to become a separate municipality in 1843; it was annexed to Lille in 1858 like Wazemmes. Tracing the family is complicated by the fact the spelling of Derumaux's name is unstable, and he can be Dereumaux, Desrumaux or Desreumaux (he is Deremaux on his birth certificate), and therefore is not necessarily listed where he should in the indexes.
35. Emile-Victor, accountant and fabric merchant, married a *rentière*—a woman living off her means—in 1876 (her parents were dead; her father had been a master-mason). His parents were listed as *propriétaires*. According to the marriage register, they signed a marriage contract—a very middle-class thing to do by that time. His witnesses were his brother Henri, mechanic, and Jean (François), shoe-manufacturer. The family was still climbing.
 36. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, actes de société, 6U2/690, 24-9-1900. A *société en commandite*, with Lemay and Desrumaux as silent partner and Suin as general partner, was created that year. The business records spell the name Desrumaux.
 37. ADN, Greffes de notaires, étude de Me Lefebvre, J 1472-304. Reine Thomassin and her husband had to co-sign the papers; the house, as real estate owned before marriage, was her sole property. Her husband could not alienate it without her permission. She was not allowed to alienate it without his either.
 38. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/662, 8-2-1900.
 39. ADN, Lille État civil on line.
 40. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/662, 3-2-1880; I could not find any information about the two partners.
 41. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/673, 11-4-1890; I could not find anything about the other Delahoode in the civil registers either.
 42. This meant that although under age, Virginie was legally considered an adult for most purposes. However, she still required the formal permission of a parent or guardian to go into trade.
 43. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/673 (1890).
 44. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U2/195 (1849–52) and 647 (1864).
 45. ADN, Enregistrement, contrats de mariages, 3Q538.
 46. Three of the girls married the following year; ADN, Tribunal de commerce, 6U5/6.
 47. Craig, *Women and Business since 1500*, ch.9, 114–126.
 48. ADN, Greffes de notaires, étude de Me Ducrocq, J 1442, 1889–1890; étude de Me Lefebvre, J 1472, 1889–1890.

49. Sohn, *Chrysalides*, 678.
50. This behavior was not unique to the working class, or to Lille and Tourcoing. Men acted in the same way in at least one other French industrial town, St Etienne. Hannagan found that the men asked for family wages only after women's opportunities for wage labor dried up. And Burdy et al. document women of a later generation opening stores, often at the prompting of their husbands. Burdy, Dubesset, Zancarini-Fournel, "Rôles, travaux et métiers de femmes dans une ville industrielle," 27-54; Hanagan, "Family, Work and wages."

Why a Continuing Joint Sphere?

The arrondissement, then, does not confirm the pattern depicted by earlier historiographies. Here, there is no gradual and steady decline of women's participation in the world of business from the beginning of the century. Female participation increased in retail, and possibly began to decrease on the eve of World War I. Among manufacturers, we witness an initial drop, followed by either a flat trend for the rest of the century, or a slight increase at the end. Even factors that could exclude women from the running of larger businesses—patrimonialization of the firm, the adoption of upper-class lifestyles—affected only a fraction of the industrial middle-class—and not even the entire top tier of industrialists. Traditional patterns inherited from the eighteenth century proved to be resilient, affected neither by transformations in the modes of production nor by the growth of businesses. They also visibly resisted the separate sphere ideology (in the case of the better sort) and the male breadwinner one (in the case of the petty bourgeoisie). Why did those women not conform to the gender norms that were supposed to have dominated the nineteenth-century? What was peculiar to Tourcoing, and likely the Lille region, that gave women access to this public sphere? Why could a woman be a public contractor or run a navy gang? Why could a woman not only handpick the next administrator of a bank, but force the shareholders' meeting to expand her power within the same bank? Why would grown-up men meekly defer to the sweeping authority of their mother and mother-in-law?

The enduring presence of women in business was the result of a combination of factors. The law, by default, treated couples as economic teams—and this was reinforced by local practices inherited from the Old Regime. This was coupled with a magisterial understanding of the “public sphere” defined as the sphere of activities involving the state, and with a conception of business as part of the household’s activities, which could be traced back to Aristotle’s *œconomica*. All this points to a fundamentally conservative *mentalité* among manufacturers, which was reinforced and legitimized by their intense Catholicism. The lower middle-classes, for their part, were economically too vulnerable to adopt any form of separate sphere ideology.

I THE LAW

The ability to own and exercise control over property was key to middle-class women’s economic agency. This ability was shaped by existing laws and prevailing ideologies which could overlay the legal system and intensify its impact. Davidoff and Hall, for instance, argued that in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, the separate sphere ideology made it increasingly difficult for women without husbands to manage their property. They were expected to leave it at the disposal of the males of the family and be content with an income. Husbands or fathers might stipulate in their will that the women would only get an income from the property set aside for them, and that the capital would revert to a male when they died or remarried.¹ Widows and spinsters were not entitled to economic independence, merely to support. Alastair Owen’s study of Stockport supports this hypothesis. Stockport’s businessmen left wills stipulating how their assets were to be distributed after their death. Except among the petty middle-class, the widows were not left in charge, but guaranteed support through widowhood.

But other work has also shown the extent to which the law could be circumvented when jurists’ ideals and household and individual needs did not coincide. Common Law decisions were not always as restrictive as the letter of the law required. As Margot Finn noted, the Common Law tended to exist in a state of suspended animation.² Secondly, evidence is mounting that the experience of Englishwomen of the middling sort probably did not change much in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century. Penelope Lane, for instance, argued that lower middle-class economic strategies assumed widows’ economic agency as businesspeople, landladies, investors and moneylenders, and that their money-making opportunities increased as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution.³ Family and individual needs for a source of income or for “respectability” could influence the law in one direction or another.

The impact of French law on women's economic agency has not generated the same amount of interest as the Common Law has among British historians. The 1804 Civil Code (*Code Napoléon*) has a bad reputation among feminists because some of its features are clearly unfair to women (the sexual double standards, among others) and because it specifically required married women to obey their husbands (art. 213).⁴ Those clauses, however, are in keeping with the culture of the time. Women were expected to obey their husbands even if the local legal system did not explicitly enjoin them to do so (the Common Law, for instance, allowed husbands to beat their wives). Under the Civil Code, unmarried women (widows and spinsters) could manage their affairs as they saw fit once they were of age (21). Married women, on the other hand, fell under the *puissance maritale*—their husband's authority, which for all practical purposes meant they were retrograded to the status of a minor.⁵ How much control married women could exercise over their property depended on their *régime matrimonial*—on the legal framework within which they were married. In the absence of a pre-nuptial agreement (*contrat de mariage*), spouses were married in community of property (art. 1400–1404—*communauté légale*). Real estate owned at marriage or subsequently inherited remained the sole property of the individual spouse (his or her *propres*). Personal estate owned at the time or subsequently acquired or inherited, as well as real estate acquired by the couple, and income from their other property constituted the *communauté* or common estate. All properties were administered by the husband (art. 1421); however, he could not alienate his wife's *propres* without her consent (art. 1443). Wives retained a lien on their husband's property for the value of their *propres* during their entire marital life. When husbands were tottering on the brink of bankruptcy or had been declared bankrupt, wives could apply for a separation of property to protect their *propres* (and seem to have always obtained it). When either spouse died, the survivor kept his or her *propres* and received half the common estate. If the community debts exceeded the value of the common assets, widows could forgo their share of the community, again to protect their *propres* against the consequences of their husband's bad management (*veuve renoncée*).⁶ Widowers, on the other hand, could not repudiate the community, and had to pay its debts out of their *propres*. Husbands could not diminish their wives' share of the community in a will, as it was not theirs in the first place (even if it had been theirs to squander when they were alive). The other half of the community and the predeceased *propres* were divided among the heirs. Children shared equally, irrespective of sex and birth order. They could not be disinherited,

their inheritance could not take the form of a life interest, and the rights of parents to favor one child—or even to bequeath property to non-heirs was limited: they could dispose of only one “child’s share”. That is, if they had one child, they could freely dispose of half their estate; if they had two, of one-third; if they had three, of one-quarter, and so on. Childless people, on the other hand, could will their property as they saw fit. If they did not leave a will, it went to their next of kin—not to their spouse. Wills in the Lille arrondissement were rare, and most of them were written by childless couples who bequeathed their estate to each other.

Couples who did not like the *communauté légale* could opt for other arrangements: the Code provided a dowry option (*régime dotal*) copied from the one that had been the norm in southern France before the revolution (art. 1540; the only people in the arrondissement who made use of this option were married people from the south), and made separation of property possible (art. 1536). Under separation of property, the assets brought into marriage, and the income they generated, remained the property of the spouse who brought them. Married women were allowed to manage their separate estate without their husband’s permission. This did not, however, include the right to acquire, alienate or mortgage the property, use it as security, give it away or accept any as a gift (art. 217). Plain separation of property was rarely chosen.

Existing regimes could be customized. Separation of property could be coupled with a *société d’acquêts* or partnership of acquisitions, thereby increases in each spouses’ estates after marriage were shared (the survivor received half the increases of the predeceased’s estate, less half the increases in his or hers—art. 1498). The *société d’acquêts* was not commonly used either, but its use increased at mid-century. The *communauté* could also be modified. Couples could decide to put everything in common (*communauté universelle*, art. 1526), or limit the *communauté* to what was acquired after marriage (*communauté d’acquêts*, art. 1498), or they could put some of their assets in common and reserve the rest as *propres*. Marriage contracts could also include testamentary clauses.

The code was therefore flexible, except on one point. Under no circumstance whatsoever could the husband give up or curtail his *puissance maritale* (art. 1388). Nor could he give his wife a general permission to manage her property as she wanted. Even women who had obtained a legal separation from their husbands (the closest thing to a divorce between 1816 and 1886) and who were automatically separated as to property still needed his permission—or a judge’s—to acquire or alienate property (art.

1499). And we saw in Chap. 3 that jurists forbade a business partnership between husband and wife because, in their eyes, this placed husband and wife on an equal footing.

One category of married women had greater control over their assets than the rest, even when married *en communauté: commerçantes* or traders (art. 217 and 220–25). Their business had to be distinct from their husband's (although it did not have to be different), and they needed his permission to trade. The permission could be in writing or not, explicit or not. Trading with his knowledge was considered as good as a formal permission. The husband could withdraw his permission if he saw fit, but could not do so in a way that would harm third parties without running the risk of being sued for compensation.⁷

Commerçants are not limited to storekeepers. The French commercial code has always defined as a *commerçant* anyone who habitually buys goods in order to resell them at a profit, with or without transforming them. Consequently manufacturers and industrialists are *commerçants* as well. Ford Motors is a *commerçant* under French law.⁸ Craftspeople may or may not be *commerçants*. Those who transform material provided by their customers are not; those who transform material they provide, even if working strictly on order, are. For instance, a nineteenth-century dressmaker who kept an assortment of ready-made garments was definitively a *commerçante*. Another who made only bespoke dresses, but out of material she stocked, was one as well. The one who turned fabric provided by her clients into clothing was not. Nor did providing material accessories to the transformation process (in this case thread, needles, hooks and eyes, interfacing, binding tape, etc.) turn a craftsperson into a *commerçant*.⁹

Married *commerçantes* could administer their property to the extent this was required to carry out their activity. How far this could go was an object of debates among jurists. Strict constructionists argued that only day-to-day activities did not require the husband's permission, because of their immediacy. Purchasing or leasing a property for the store or factory, for instance, did not qualify in their eyes. It seems, however, that the jurisprudence leaned towards broad construction, and this was not to everyone's liking. In 1861, for instance, a commentator deplored:

well, if the permission to trade enables the wife to perform any deed which from close or afar, directly or indirectly, may affect her business, one does not know how far this may go.¹⁰

On the other hand, *commerçantes* could not sue or defend themselves in court without their husband's permission.

In some parts of France, the Code conflicted with pre-revolutionary laws, and was evaded (this was the case in the south of France, where impartible inheritance had been the norm and where fathers had enjoyed considerable testamentary freedom). This was not the case in the arrondissement. In the years following the promulgation of the Code, spouses and their families showed some confusion as to how to best mesh tradition with the new system. By the 1840s, contracting spouses who did not adopt the *communauté légale* usually settled on the *communauté réduite aux acquêts*, accompanied by a usufruct to the survivor of all the estate of the predeceased, the usufruct reduced by half if there were children.¹¹ Alternately, the survivor received ownership of a quarter of the predeceased assets and a usufruct over another quarter. It was also common to grant the survivor a sum of money corresponding to the value of his or her wardrobe, jewels and furniture (which the survivor could collect in kind). This was called a *preciput* and was given the survivor before the distribution of the estate (therefore in addition to his or her share of community goods). Usufructs ended with remarriage, irrespective of the survivor's sex. In fact, marriage contracts were very symmetrical: what was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander. Among trading families, it was also common after mid-century to insert a clause in the contract stipulating that whatever trade the survivor was involved in at widowhood would be out of reach of the heirs, who could not ask for the partition of the trading assets. This was not limited to retailers—who by then were unlikely to have a marriage contract anyway. For instance, such a clause was included in the contract between Paul Feron-Vrau and Germaine Bernard (Feron-Vrau was the very wealthy grandson of Francois-Philibert Vrau and Sophie Aubineau, and heir to the business).¹²

Spouses brought into marriage assets that they had earned, that they had inherited from their parents, deceased unmarried siblings or other childless relatives, or that they had received from their parents at the time of marriage. The property transferred by the parents was referred to as a “dowry” in the marriage contracts but was in fact an advance on inheritance, to be deducted from the spouse's share of the estate of the first parent to die.

It was not unusual for “dowries” not to be paid immediately, in which case the young couple only received the interests on the sum until the parents judged they could spare the capital. This was useful for parents

in business who could provide for the newlyweds without starving their own business of funds. It was less advantageous for the young couple, who could not so easily strike out on their own. Nonetheless, dowries could be quite significant, and their values increased in the course of the nineteenth-century, as we saw in Chap. 2. Women from the middle and upper-middle-class therefore could easily become widows of means through dowries kept out of the community, inheritance and share of community. They normally walked away from the *notaire's* office in control of more than half the couples' assets, and benefiting from the usufruct of a good part of the remainder, whether they belonged to the industrial middle-class or the *bourgeoisie de la rente*, as the following examples show.

When Constant Vanderhaeghe, propriétaire in Lille, died in 1869, he and his wife were worth 436,543 Fr. They had eight adult children. The deceased's *propres* were worth 3,324 Fr; the widow's, 2,847 Fr. According to her marriage contract, she was entitled, in addition to her half of the community, to ownership of one quarter of her husband's *propres*, and to the usufruct of another quarter. She received 271,121 Fr in full ownership (or 62 % of the couple's assets), which she took in cash, stock, bonds, mortgage loans and one house, the one where she lived (the remaining of their real estate had been sold at auction a few months before). The children received 13,156 Fr each in full ownership and 6,294 Fr in *nue propriété* ("bare ownership" or ownership encumbered by a usufruct). The share of the three married daughters was reduced by the amount of their dowries.¹³

Léandre Richebé, "merchant-brewer", son of Louis Richebé, former brewer and mayor of the suburban town of Fives-lez-Lille till its annexation to Lille in 1854, died the same year. He left a wife, Sophie Angélique Delobel, and eight underage children. Sophie and Léandre had married in 1850 in *communauté réduite aux acquêts*. He brought 40,000 Fr into the marriage, and she, 30,000 Fr. The marriage contract was fairly typical and included a *preciput*, a usufruct on the share of *communauté* and half the *propres* of the predeceased. The inventory ran for several pages.¹⁴ The content of the house was worth 9,428.20 Fr, including 2,454.20 Fr of silverware; the *meuble industriel* (brewery machinery and other equipment), raw material and finished beer or beer in the making, 69,505.65 Fr. Accounts receivable (beer delivered but not yet paid) amounted to 74,322 Fr. The couple held 10,769 Fr worth of notes from publicans, a few mortgages, and a paltry 800 Fr in city bonds. They owed excise taxes on some of the beer, a 36,000 Fr mortgage on the brewery, almost 16,000 Fr to the

Caisse commerciale de Lille and almost 64,000 Fr to their suppliers. The personal estate of the couple was then worth approximately 5,000 Fr, not enough to cover the value of the spouses' *propres*. But the couple's other assets included a large house, a brewery, 5 pieces of farm land, 42 public houses, and Léandre's share of the not-yet-settled estate of his extremely wealthy cousin, Sophie Vanbrouck, whom we will meet in the following chapter. Sophie therefore received a *preciput* worth approximately 5,000 Fr and her dowry (30,000 Fr), and a usufruct on half of 40,000 Fr. She also received half of the considerable amount of real estate which was part of the *communauté*, as well as the usufruct of the other half, and a usufruct over the real estate which belonged solely to her husband's *propres*. Sophie Richebé-Delobel was therefore a rich widow, and in a position to carry on the business without difficulties, if she so chose. She so chose.

François-Philibert Vrau, whom we already know, died in 1870 at 78. He left a 61-year-old widow, two married daughters and a 40-year-old son. François-Philibert had entered informally into association with his son Philibert and one of his two sons-in-law, Camille Feron. In his will, written three years before his death, François-Philibert asked that his wife gets control over all the goods that had been acquired since marriage (*la communauté*), and if this was not possible, that she receives the factory, equipment, merchandise, clientele and dwelling-house as her share of the post-mortem settlement. She could remain at the head of the firm, or go into partnership with Philibert and Camille, under the same condition as he had.¹⁵ Sophie, of course, could not legally inherit the entire *communauté*. The alternative settlement, however, is more or less what happened when the estate was settled six months later. The couple's real and personal estates (including the thread-making factory) were worth 1,027,547 Fr. Mme Vrau was entitled to 130,830 Fr (her 46,591 Fr dowry, and inheritances from her brother, sister, maternal grandmother and maternal grandfather). M. Vrau had brought considerable assets and even more considerable debts into the marriage. In other words, his *propres* were negative. The debts had been paid by the *communauté*, and consequently his estate owed the *communauté* 35,000 Fr. Mme Vrau received the value of her *propres* (130,830 Fr), half the *communauté* (448,359 Fr), and a quarter of her husband's estate, 140,733 Fr, for a total of 719,922f (70 % of the family assets), plus the usufruct of another 140,733 Fr. The three children received 93,822 Fr (less their dowries, and in the case of the unmarried son, of a 60,000 Fr loan) in full ownership, and 46,911 in *nue-propriété* (property subject to usufruct). Mme Vrau took the factory, the

equipment, most of the working capital and most of the goods in stock. The children shared the rest of the working capital and goods in stock.¹⁶

Late-century widows did not fare worse. Achille Lefebvre died in 1889, leaving a widow, Camille Mélanie Defresne, and three children: his son Achille, with whom he was partner in the firm Lefevre-Horrent; a daughter, Camille Louise, married to the brewer Victor Tesse; and a minor, Marie-Louise. The couple's personal estate was worth 902,440 Fr (including Camille Louise's dowry worth 100,000 Fr and a 60,000 Fr loan to Achille Jr). Camille Mélanie Defresne's *propres* were modest: 28,000 Fr, especially when compared to her husband's: 307,000 Fr (she had brought 10,000 Fr into the marriage and inherited 18,000 Fr; he had brought 254,000 Fr and inherited 25,500 Fr). The couple also owned rural, urban residential and industrial properties. Camille Mélanie received 426,880 Fr (47 % of the couple's personal assets), plus half their real estate (estimated at 173,000 Fr), plus a usufruct on half the *communauté*, and a usufruct over half her husband's *propres* (together worth about 505,000 Fr). At 3 %, the usufruct alone would have yielded a yearly income of 6,125 Fr.¹⁷

These four widows, from different segments of the middle-class, thus received a considerable share of what had been the couple's property. The composition of their share was very different, however: 85 % of Mme Vanderheaghe's consisted in stocks and bonds, loans and notes, and her house was worth an additional 10 % of her share. She and her children had decided to sell the remaining real property to settle the estate: two houses suitable for trade (*maisons à usage de commerce*), a tavern and a dwelling house. Of Mme Vrau's share, 39 % consisted of factory equipment and operating capital; another 22 % was represented by the factory building itself. She took all the stocks and bonds owned by the couple, but they represented only 8 % of her settlement. Camille Defrenne, on the other hand, received a more varied mix of urban and rural properties, money invested in her husband's and son's but also in her son-in-law's businesses, as well as stocks, bonds and government securities, which represented one third of the spouses' personal estate. But whatever the activity of the late husbands, the age and number of the children, and the composition of spousal assets, the bulk of a couple's assets was controlled by or tied for the benefit of the survivor until his or her death (or remarriage, in which case the survivor lost the usufruct). Children had to cool their heels and wait for their mother's or father's death not only to inherit those assets, but even to freely enjoy the legacy of the first deceased, encumbered as it was by the survivor's usufruct. Providing for usufructs made it easier to

continue the Firm of Husband & Wife after the death of either spouse, but this protection was achieved at the expense of the heirs, adult sons included. Often the heirs had little alternative but to enter into a partnership with the surviving parent.

Among the better sorts, widows were therefore the biggest capital holders after husbands who had received their full inheritance, and the capital they controlled could be indispensable to the continuation of the family business, or of their husband's *société en nom collectif*.¹⁸ Yet, widows could withdraw from both types of enterprises, and some did. The Civil Code was explicit: no one could be forced to keep his or her inheritance in a common pot. Partners were unsurprisingly not always willing to let a widow withdraw. Such a situation occurred in Lille in 1890 when Arnold Villain, one of the partners in the *société en commandite* Villain fils et Cie., died, leaving a widow and three children under age. The widow abandoned her rights to the *communauté* which had existed between her and her husband, and decided she and her children would withdraw from the firm. The remaining partners did not want her to, and gave her 48 hours to prove that the *conseil de famille* which oversaw the guardianship of her children allowed her to do so! She managed to gather in this short time the said *conseil*, who stated it did not think its permission was legally needed, but in view of the troubles the widow was experiencing, formally gave it. The share of the widow Villain and her children in the capital and profits of the partnership amounted to 13,021 Fr, which were then paid to her.¹⁹

The Civil Code was of recent vintage, as it had been promulgated in 1804 by Napoleon. It replaced a bewildering array of legal codes and practices: written (Roman) law in the southern part of France; customary laws in the northern part. The Code sometimes prescribed very different rules of inheritance from the previous systems, which disrupted time-honored ways of transmitting estates from one generation to the next. When that happened, families found ways to circumvent it and restore their old practices. The code differed in several ways from the customary laws that had been in force in the Castellany, but its overall spirit was not significantly different. The community of property with survivors' benefit was an attempt at perpetuating a practice that had been common under the Customs: favoring the surviving spouse at the expense of the heirs. Personal estate and real estate acquired since marriage used to be divided equally among the heirs, irrespective of sex and birth order—but only after the death or remarriage of the surviving spouse. In the meantime, this part of the estate was considered the property of the survivor, who

could dispose of it as he—or she—saw fit. In addition, in Lille and in several of the Castellany's boroughs, real estate was considered personal, and thus granted in its entirety to the survivor. If families did not depart from the Customs by marriage contracts or through a will, traders' widows had broad access to the resources needed to continue the business. Testamentary clauses inserted in the marriage contracts at the end of the eighteenth century were systematically more generous to the survivor than the Customs, and tended to be symmetrical: widows and widowers were given exactly the same rights. François Patou, who transcribed and commented on the various Customs of the arrondissement in the eighteenth century, noted that the practices had evolved in a direction more favorable to women (widows and daughters) over the years. There was no community in the strict sense of the term in the Customs, for instance, but the Customs had been applied in such a way that the result was the same. Daughters' right to inherit real estate, limited on paper to property their parents had acquired during marriage unless they had no brothers, had also been strengthened in practice.²⁰

The Civil Code changed children's inheritance rights the moment it was promulgated and placed them on an equal footing, whatever the nature of the property. The Customs, on the other hand, continued to apply to couples who had married before 1804, and there were still plenty of widows in the 1820s and 1830s who were claiming widows' rights under the old Customs—and in Lille that meant taking possession of the entire personal and intra-muro real estate.

The arrondissement's preferred marriage contracts attempted to recreate the conditions favoring the firm of Husband & Wife which had existed under pre-revolutionary customary laws. This resulted in putting lots of assets in the hands of the surviving spouse at the expense of the children, sons included. Here, generation trumped sex. Those choices reflected a culture in which gender was still a hierarchy, women were still deputy husbands, and as deputies, were naturally expected to succeed their husbands if they so desired.

2 HIERARCHIES OF GENDER AND DEPUTY HUSBANDS

Most of the women we have seen in the previous chapters fit into the model of females as deputy males. As we noted, few married upper middle-class women exercised an activity independent of their husbands. Independent female activities were much more common among the lower middle-classes or among skilled workers whose wives kept stores

and taverns, or did custom dressmaking, but most of those businesses were strongly gendered or too small to keep two adults profitably occupied. Better-off married women involved in the economy assisted their husbands, and succeeded them when they died. The deputy husband was a substitute male. François Philibert Vrau's will is exemplary in this respect. The family he depicts was a hierarchy: Father–Mother–Children. Monsieur Vrau *père* may have claimed in his will that he considered his son Philibert as the natural protector of his sisters and of the entire family, and expect him to fulfill all his duties, but he did not leave him much means to exercise those powers.²¹ The will was designed to ensure that when he disappeared, Mother replaced him at the helm. The patriarchal discourse could hide a matriarchal practice.

There was no pressure to depart from this Old Regime tradition, on the contrary. People believed, rightly, it turns out, that couples had been Firms of Husband & Wife since time immemorial. Nineteenth-century memorialists, commentators, antiquarians or legal theoreticians perpetuated the image of the wife as deputy husband, cornerstone of the region's historical economic prosperity. The concept was clearly understood by contemporaries. We have already encountered Brun-Lavainne and Pierre Legrand; Lambert-Dansette cites the nineteenth-century *académicien* Etienne Jouy, who commented: "Women frequently share the management of affairs with their husbands—in other words, they act as their understudies."²² Eugène Tailliar's 1849 commentary on medieval law reads like a backward projection of the situation he could witness every day:

In our region, the *communauté* marvellously fits the very nature of the conjugal association. In towns as in the countryside, women, closely united to their husband, actively contribute, sometimes with remarkable ability to the acquisition or increase of the common assets. Their collaboration is neither less useful nor less fruitful than the one of their husband; how many great industrial, commercial or agricultural fortunes have been in part founded by women endowed of a sort of genius in this regard?²³

He was echoed half a century later by Henri Briet in his thesis on the Customs of Lille and its Castellany:

In our region, women, especially from the bourgeoisie, were equal to their husband from the point of view of the family. In Lille, a trading city, women often managed the trading house alone while their husband cultivated clients outside; they were as significant a factor in the building of family wealth

as their husband, whose alter ego they were. Husbands were the heads of those associations of interests, and their wives their partners. Authors are keen to praise the intimate union of Lille couples and the respect given to women who, in return, were hard working, devoted and virtuous.

Later in his text, Briet reiterated the argument, using the present tense this time.²⁴ The concept of deputy husband still had currency at the dawn of the twentieth century.

3 WHAT WERE THE “PUBLIC” AND “PRIVATE” SPHERES?

Women would not necessarily have been excluded from the economy if this population had adopted the new concepts of “opposite sexes” and “separate spheres” either. Historians of women (and of business) have firmly equated the public with the non-domestic: it includes all that took place outside one’s front door. Our manufacturers seem to have drawn the line between the public and the private differently. Their public sphere was Klein’s magisterial one: the realm of relations between individuals and the state. As Hirsch has shown, their understanding of the location of economic activities was ambiguous. They wanted the state to protect them (against foreign competition) and even to set up institutions that protected their collective interests (like the Chambers of Commerce), but they were also adamant it should not interfere with the ways they were running their factories. Workplaces were to be black boxes the gaze of the state—and state regulations—could not penetrate. Manufacturers objected to the government trying to collect precise, quantitative information about industries. Releasing information would expose the inner workings of their firms to outside view—and this was intolerable. The manufacturers’ intense desire for privacy also discouraged most from seeking capital and managerial talents outside the immediate family.²⁵

A family business was the business of the family—and nobody else’s. Historians of this region have all noted the conflation between families and businesses.²⁶ Capital was drawn from the family—initially consisting in assets given to brides and grooms on marriage. The double-barreled names of the entrepreneurs have been interpreted as a way to advertise whose fortunes were behind a particular venture: a man added his wife’s name to his own as he pooled her capital with his. This practice identified the couple with the business and the business with the couple. Family assets

were business assets: in a downturn, the family silverware may be sold to pay for the latest wage bill, an invoice of raw material or new machinery. François-Philibert Vrau listed his furniture among his assets in his balance sheet—and amortized it.²⁷ So did Caroline Destombes-Versmée. In return household expenses were treated as business expenses. When Camille Feron-Vrau was taking the inventory and closing the books at the end of the business year, he signed his wife's household account book in the same manner he signed all the factory's books. Caroline Destombes-Versmée similarly included household furniture among her assets and household expenses among her business's overheads.²⁸ In the case of partnerships, the articles of association allowed the partners to take from the firm's cash box the sums they required for their needs and those of their family, to be deducted from their share of the profits at year's end. The practice ceased only among those who drew salaries at century's end. Craftspeople and storekeepers continued dipping from the cash box as needed.

Partners were frequently other members of the immediate family, and partnerships often united, in Hirsch's words, those who could not marry each other.²⁹ The desire for privacy may have been a reason why partnerships were not always registered: summaries of articles of association had to be published in the local newspapers. What was true of capital was also true of personnel till the end of the century. Firms seldom relied on outside talents, and drew managers and directors from their own ranks. Women were then inevitably drawn into the family business. Those families' unwillingness to allow outsiders even a glimpse of their affairs was an incentive to rely on wives, daughters, mothers, sisters-in-law and maiden aunts to keep the books, send out the bills, receive payments and take care of the correspondence.

Limited formal training for this was available early on in Lille. The Vanackère *Almanachs* for 1831–55 lists an English–French boarding school run by Mme Delacroix, who also taught Italian. Mme Duriez-Renier, who was first listed as a primary school teacher, was also teaching French, English and arithmetic, and giving evening classes to young persons planning to go into trade. By 1845, Mme Duriez-Renier was also running a boarding school, and in 1855, a French–English boarding school was run by a demoiselle De Felice, whose father was a language teacher and an official translator (*traducteur juré*). The De Felices, however, were Protestant, which would have severely limited their draw. The quality of those schools could of course leave much to be desired; nonetheless, one suspects that women who advertised their school's language

or mathematical training to the exclusion of anything else were targeting a clientele more interested in practical knowledge applicable to business than in ladies' accomplishments. Teaching congregations did not lag behind the competition. According to the requests for permission to open boarding schools filed by various religious orders in the 1850s and 1860s, the Dames de la Sainte-Union taught double-entry bookkeeping, "French and commercial studies with calligraphy" and foreign languages. The Bernardines, who catered to an upmarket clientele, offered bookkeeping to students whose parents were interested.³⁰ By the end of the century, manufacturers also underwrote the opening of six private—that is, Catholic—young ladies' commercial courses (*cours commerciaux privés de jeunes filles*).³¹ These taught calligraphy, elementary bookkeeping and commercial correspondence, and one may assume that at one point, they introduced typing and shorthand into their curriculum. Ladies' language courses (English, German, and some Italian) were always available. Young men always had better opportunities for training than their sisters, but the latter could easily learn office-work basics—and judging from Caroline Destombes-Versmée's books, master double-entry bookkeeping.

The conflation family-business was reinforced by the lack of physical separation between the two. The bulk of Tourcoing manufacturers, like their counterparts in the region,³² kept living downtown, using their suburban home (when they had one) for weekends or vacations. Women were then physically close to the family mill.³³ The business tax registers, which give not only the address of the business, but also of the business owner, are revealing on this point. In 1892, 56 % of the Tourcoing entrepreneurs reported the same personal address as their business, or at least, lived in the same street but a number or two away, and their house may have been part of the compound. Most of the others lived within half a mile. Escapes to mansions in Mouveaux or villas on avenue de l'Hippodrome or along the leafy avenues lining the routes of the Lille to Roubaix and Tourcoing trams, were late phenomenon and affected only a small number of families. The Mottes and the Pruvosts remained in downtown Roubaix, for instance. Downtown Tourcoing was nothing but a massive compound of mills, warehouses, industrial sheds, entrepreneurs' houses, artisans' dwellings, and back alleys for workers, with occasional retail stores, and dominated by a forest of chimneys spewing smoke and ashes. Except for a few genteel streets, Lille was no different. Factories had been shoehorned in wherever there was room, eliminating inner-city gardens, or had taken over older aristocratic buildings. The Frau's sewing-thread factory occupied an

eighteenth century hotel, and a nineteenth-century addition in the rear yard, and then spread to adjoining houses before colonizing the ones across the street. One of the latrines in the yard of the old building was for the use of the family and the other for the workers (the income from the sale of the latter's abundant content to the night-soil collectors was one of Sophie Vrau's servants' perks).³⁴ Women saw, heard and smelled business all day long, year in, year out. Some authors have suggested that the separation of home and factory contributed to the exclusion of middle-class women from managerial functions. In the case of Tourcoing, however, one wonders whether families did not decide to stay downtown despite the noise and the pollution so that their women could continue popping downstairs or next door to look over the shoulder of the bookkeeper or the foreman, or welcome potential suppliers or clients in the parlor.

The layout of manufacturers' houses was also designed to facilitate this mingling of business and family. The Pollets' mid-century house was fairly typical. One could enter the yard through a covered carriage entrance, or through a hallway with a stairwell that bisected the street-fronting building. On the right of the hallway, and opening onto the carriage entrance, were storage rooms and the room where sample books and ledgers were kept. On the left of the hallway and facing the street was the stock room, where hand weavers came to return their fabric and get a new mounted warp. It opened onto the yard-facing dining-room through a French door. A kitchen, pantry and laundry room were located in a side building at a right angle to the dining room. The stables brought up the rear of this side building. A flight of stairs connected the pantry to four bedrooms above. The parents' bedroom was located above the stock room, fronting the street. The rest of the second floor, extending over the passage to the yard, was the warp room, where female workers threaded the heddles for the weavers. The spinning mill proper was behind the stables, between the yard and the garden. The dining room was the central room in this layout, which was reproduced in other houses.³⁵ From this room, which then often served as a living room, the wife/mother could supervise the domestic servants, deal with the weavers as they came and went, easily retrieve the books, and keep an eye on the children wherever they were in the house. She had to step out of the house—but not onto the street, to go and see what was happening in the mill, and had a full view of the comings and goings of the workers. Later, when the factories grew so large as to dwarf the dwelling houses, offices and storage rooms migrated to the industrial buildings—but houses for the owners or the directors continued to be built on the perimeter of the property.³⁶

Socializing patterns also contributed to this conflation between family and business. The main social activity of the business class was the *réunion de famille*, the gathering of the family around the lunch or supper table on Sundays, holidays, or to mark a family event: baptism, first communion, engagement. Here people who were related by blood or marriage or both, but were also business associates or business colleagues mingled, irrespective of age and sex.³⁷ In particular, Sunday lunches at the grandparents' appear to have been a very widespread ritual. Children were not allowed at the table until dessert, at which time they made the rounds of the room to pay their respects to their elders. Once they were back from the convent or the college for good, they joined the adults for the entire meal and some found the conversation stimulating. Eugene Motte strongly believed in the educational value of those gatherings for the younger generation:

We, members of the younger generation made up the audience. We enriched our minds in the midst of those debates. We were getting used to the noble shock of ideas, and arguments were planted in our young brains to germinate and ripen. Those discussions in the years following the war of 1870 were the main courses at those family tables. There was a right, a left, a center and the situation was repeated through the whole of France.³⁸

Dubly similarly believed a “real education” was to be had around those Sunday dinner tables. Those gatherings contributed to the youngsters’ “intellectual, industrial and social upbringing.”³⁹ If the Motte correspondence was in any way representative of intra-familial exchanges, men and women were as likely to participate in the social as in the economic or political discussions.⁴⁰ The children of both sexes, all ears or yawning with boredom, absorbed, willingly or not, a tremendous amount of information about values, individual behaviors, business, technology, the economy or politics. The family and economic activities then not only belonged to the same sphere—they were the same sphere. Men and women belonged in the economy as they belonged in their family.

4 CONSERVATISM

What is left to explain is the perpetuation of an older model of gender relations. Why did not this class adopt the “modern” separate sphere model, which even affected champagne-making widows?

The petty middle-classes did not espouse a variant of the male breadwinner ideology, because in part, it was a luxury they could ill afford

and in part because this ideology does not seem to have made much headway in the region.⁴¹ The manufacturers were also prevented from espousing it by an ideological barrier. As they became a clearly distinct socio-economic group in the course of the nineteenth-century, they also became increasingly Catholic and politically ultra-conservative (contrary to the petty middle-classes which tended to be secular, if not anticlerical). The area had been a bastion of the Spanish Counter-Reformation (it was Spanish till 1668), and was bypassed by the Enlightenments—it was no center of intellectual life in the eighteenth century.⁴² In the nineteenth-century, its economic elite was Ultramontane—at a time when the popes were at best very conservative, at worse, reactionary. The Catholicism of the business class went much further than self-serving social control. For most, it stemmed from deeply held beliefs.⁴³ Historians have noted that levels of religious practice among French middle-class men increased in France through the century, and not necessarily, as some earlier ones have argued, because 1848 threw the middle-class into the arms of the Church.⁴⁴ Hilaire and Cholvy noted that the response to 1848 had been conservatism, not reaction.⁴⁵ Cholvy also points out that this religious reawakening was already underway by the 1840s, and that 1848 did not mark the end of anticlericalism either.⁴⁶ The process affected some regions more than others: the nineteenth-century French bourgeoisie was not a religious monolith. Beliefs, practices and attitudes towards religion varied in time and place. The Nord-Pas de Calais was one of several regions characterized by high levels of religious practice throughout the century.⁴⁷

Cholvy and Hilaire credit the influence of Chateaubriand and the Romantics, who proposed a “cultural alternative” to the deistic rationalism inherited from the Enlightenment. Chateaubriand played a particularly important role in this process. The father of Romanticism propagated a non-rational approach to religion. Cholvy and Hilaire also note the role of organizations like the Conference of St Vincent de Paul, and the impact of the expansion of Catholic secondary education for boys after 1850, reinforced by the extension of Catholic publishing (novels, magazines, newspapers, and after 1883, the penny press).⁴⁸ All these played a role in the *arrondissement*. The succession of an Ultramontane Bishop to the Gallican Mgr Belmas after the latter’s death in 1846 facilitated the spread of a more intimate and sentimental form of piety that could draw less than perfect Christians in, rather than marginalize them as the rigor of Gallicanism had. Unlike his predecessor, Mgr Giraud was also willing to

allow Catholic colleges (private secondary schools for boys) and religious congregations in his diocese. The Falloux Law of 1854 made it possible to easily and legally open boys' Catholic schools, and they proliferated. Girls' schools followed the trend. Lay girls' boarding schools gradually disappeared, their clientele captured by convent boarding schools.⁴⁹ After the war of 1870, the arrondissements' upper middle-class provided itself with a range of educational institutions and services which allowed its members to live in an entirely Catholic universe. Catholic faculties, including a faculty of medicine and one of law, were set up in the early 1870s. They were followed by the founding of a school of engineering and of a post-secondary business college (Philibert Vrau—and his money—played a key role in those developments). Catholic elementary and secondary schools could be viewed as a way to keep the children from rubbing shoulders with the ones from the wrong side of the tracks. There was no danger that this would happen in the auditorium of the public faculties, as only the elite sent their sons to university. One has, then, to take at face value their claim that they wanted to protect their sons from a “Godless” educational system which promoted a “Godless State”.⁵⁰ After the Press Laws were liberalized in the 1880s, Catholic newspapers also became available. Philibert Vrau was one of the shareholders of *La Vraie France*, a legitimist paper, and his nephew Paul Feron-Vrau lent his efforts to *La Croix du Nord*, a populist Catholic daily targeting the working class.⁵¹ In the last quarter of the century and the beginning of the twentieth the manufacturers of the arrondissement were able to function in a homogeneously Catholic environment, never exposed to alternative views of the world. School and pulpit told our business middle-class to be extremely wary of modern ideas. The Philosophers were on the *Index* of prohibited books. Most modern and liberal ideas had been condemned by pope Pius IX's *Syllabus*. There is no evidence that this social class tried to evade those restrictions. We can again point to the founding of the Catholic faculties as evidence of their rejection of liberalism and of the heritage of the Enlightenment and of 1789. The region's intellectual life seem to have been rather narrow, and limited to the dissemination of scientific and economic knowledge, and of moralistic literature.⁵² The heavy-handed censorship which characterized France until the very end of the Second Empire did not help either. Ultramontanism naturally went hand in hand with political conservatism. By inclination, this class was Legitimist, but it could accommodate itself with any conservative, authoritarian government. It took a Pope's marching order to force them to come to terms with the Republic—and not all

did.⁵³ Alfred Motte's early republicanism was an oddity, and drew the ire of his relatives.⁵⁴

A conservative mind-set does not predispose people to change their ways. This was a first strike against modifying their vision of the relationship between the sexes. Secondly, both Legitimism and Ultramontanism were hierarchical ideologies. Gender as a hierarchy was natural to them. Gender as separate spheres, on the other hand, may have seemed a rather strange concept, introducing distinctions that did not correspond to their life experience. Moreover, the notions that gender marked a separate sphere, that women were mothers and nothing else, were notions which seem to have been articulated most vigorously by unionists (especially by Proudhon) and by republicans.⁵⁵ This also would have made them suspect. The concept of the "separate sphere" could even be perceived of as one of those "modern" ideas they should treat with suspicion. Unaware that in other parts of the world, women were pushed into a "separate sphere" which they would appropriate to enlarge their powers and responsibilities, the manufacturers of the Nord continued to believe a good wife was a deputy husband and potential successor.

Nonetheless, one should not assume women could only be deputy males. The widow who stayed at the helm even though her sons were of age; the ones who started a new business; the ones who renegotiated articles of association drafted by their husbands; the young and not-so-young maids who went into business instead of bankrolling their brothers' activities all stepped out of their subordinate role. They were nobody's understudy. Women, in short, could become economic agents in their own right. And this society so used to women engaging in any kind of activities does not seem to have been willing, or able, to ask for their exclusion. Business could still be a woman's normal business. Gender as a hierarchy could open up opportunities for women which were denied them under the separate sphere model. It also provided those women with a shield against criticism, as long as they pretended to act solely for the benefit of their family.

NOTES

1. Davidhoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 207, 279–289, 315.
2. Finn, "Women, Consumption and Coverture."
3. Penelope Lane, "Women, Property and Inheritance."
4. *Code civil des français*, Paris, Garnery, 1806. All articles refer to this edition.

5. Actually, their situation was worse, because their husband was not legally bound to protect their interests to the extent a tutor or guardian was.
6. If they accepted their share of the community, they had to pay the debts out of their *propres*.
7. Lacour, *Précis de droit Commercial*, 63; Demolombe, *Cours de Code Napoléon*, 231–233.
8. Lacour, *Précis de droit Commercial*, 22.
9. Lacour, *Précis de droit Commercial*, 28.
10. Demolombe, *Cours de Code Napoléon*, 381.
11. Between 1840 and 1849, three quarter of the Tourcoing spouses who had a marriage contract chose the *communauté légale* and 22 % the *communauté réduite aux acquêts*. Universal community, the dowry system and separation of property accounted for the rest. The *communauté réduite aux acquêts* subsequently gained at the expense of the default *communauté*. Between 1856 and 1865, 44 % of the couples chose it (and 53 % settled for the *communauté légale*; a small number (2.2 %) of couples chose the *société d'acquêts*); ADN, Enregistrement, 3Q538/4&5.
12. ADN, Greffes de notaires, J 1022, Étude de Me J. Lefebvre, 21-10-1887.
13. ADN, Greffes de notaires, J 1472, Étude de Me E. Lefebvre.
14. ADN, Greffes de notaires, J 1472, Étude de Me Coustenoble.
15. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Étude de Me J. Lefebvre, J 1022, testament olographe de M. Vrau, déposé le 27/10/1870.
16. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Greffes de Me Jules Lefebvre, J 1022.
17. ADN, Enregistrement, 3Q 318/182, 7/6/1890.
18. Lambert-Dansette went as far as claiming the local inheritance system created a “matriarcat”. *Quelques familles*, 663–664.
19. ADN, Greffes de notaires, J 1472, Étude de Me E. Lefebvre, notaire à Lille, 19-6-1890.
20. Patou. *Commentaires sur les coutumes de la ville de Lille et de sa châtellenie* Patou, I, 279, 283, 647; II, 717 and 732; III, 412.
21. “Je considère mon fils Philibert comme le protecteur naturel de ses soeurs et de toute la famille; j’attends de lui qu’il remplisse tous ses devoirs.” ADN, Greffes de notaires, J 1022, Étude de Me J. Lefebvre, testament olographe de M. Vrau, déposé le 27/10/1870.
22. Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles*, 596.
23. Tailliar, *Recueil d’actes des XII et XIII siècles*, 295.

24. Henri Briet, *Le droit des gens mariés dans les coutumes de Lille*, 32 and 79.
25. Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles*, 582 and 415; Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du commerce*, 381; Hilaire, ed., *Histoire de Roubaix*, 128; Landes, "Religion and Enterprise," 41–86.
26. Landes, "Religion and Enterprise," 42; Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles*, 591–93; Pouchain, *Les maîtres du Nord*, 79–96; Barbier, *Le patronat du Nord sous le Second Empire*: 20–27; Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du commerce*, 281–318.
27. AEV, Livres de compte de François-Philibert Vrau, 1859–1870; Grands livres, 1859–1876; Budgets de ménage, 1863–1910.
28. AMTg, Fond Destombes-Versmée, 18 Z 2.
29. Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du commerce*, 313.
30. ADN, Demandes d'autorisation, Dames de la Sainte Union, 1T124; *ibid.* Dames Bernardines, 1T 117.
31. Mgr Baunard, *Les deux frères*, 359. Manufacturers also founded boys' commercial courses, to train employees, clerks, office managers and accountants.
32. Pouchain, *Les maîtres du Nord*, 94; Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles*, 588 and 591–593.
33. For the region, see Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles*, 692.
34. AEV, Correspondance de Sophie Vrau, 1876–1886.
35. Petit. *La Redoute*, 74. See also Le Blan, *Blanche Porte*, 26.
36. AMTg, Cadastre, 1886.
37. Lambert-Dansette, 718–719. For a description of similar activities among more modest *bourgeois*, see Pierre Legrand, *La femme du bourgeois de Lille*, 12–14; Scrive, *Scrive Labbé*, 18; Petit et al., *La Redoute*, 135; Motte, *Les Motte*, 45; Prouvost, *Souvenirs de notre famille*.
38. Motte, *Les Motte*, 12.
39. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 53.
40. Motte, *Motte-Bossut*.
41. See for instance Hilden, *Working Women & Socialist Politics in France*.
42. Lottin, *Lille, Citadelle de la Contre-Reforme*; Barbier, *Le patronat du Nord sous le Second Empire*, 4–6; For a good survey of the religious climate of Lille on the eve of the French Revolution, see Guignet, *Vivre à Lille sous l'Ancien Régime*, 174–208; and for the lack of response to Enlightenment thinking, *ibid.*, 376–396; also, Barbier, *Le*

- patronat du Nord sous le Second Empire*, 9; Darnton, *Bohème littéraire et révolution*, 195.
43. Landes, "Religion and Enterprise," 43; Pouchain challenges Bonnie Smith's claim that middle-class men were at best opportunistic Catholics, and not real believers. He believes anti-clerical bourgeois were isolated cases and unrepresentative; Pouchain, *Les maîtres du Nord*, 88, 92, 123, 134; Barbier similarly claims that Republicans, and non-practicing Catholics, were uncommon among the *patronat*, and usually newcomers to the region, or upwardly mobile individuals; Barbier, *Le patronat du Nord sous le Second Empire*, 28–32; Pierre Pierrard distinguishes between a Catholic *grande bourgeoisie*, including landed proprietors and industrialists, with Legitimist leanings, supporting authoritarians or cautiously democratic regimes on the one hand, and a liberal bourgeoisie, often anti-clerical as well, composed of shopkeepers, physicians, lawyers and journalists. The latter were numerically significant only in Lille. Pierrard, *Les diocèses de Cambrai et Lille*, 246 and 269; also Pierrard, *La vie ouvrière à Lille sous le Second Empire*, 428–432. Talmy, although very critical of a business class which could not or would not grasp the meaning of *Rerum Novarum*, never questions the sincerity of their beliefs: Talmy, *L'association Catholique des patrons du Nord*.
 44. Cholvy and Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France, 1800–1880*, 93–108 and 227–241; Cholvy and Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France- géographie XIXe–XXe siècle*, 52–55 and 139, and especially the map p. 46; Langlois, "Une France duelle? L'espace religieux contemporain."
 45. Hilaire et Cholvy, *Histoire religieuse de la France, 1800–1880*, 233–241.
 46. Cholvy, *Christianisme et société en France au XIXe siècle*, 107.
 47. Lambert-Dansette also believes that religious practice increased in the Lille arrondissement in the second half of the century; Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles*, 750–751.
 48. Hilaire et Cholvy, *Histoire religieuse de la France, 1800–1880*, 103–104, 229, 243–44, 260–64; Cholvy, 102–107.
 49. Girls' lay schools went from a peak of 32 in 1837 to 12–17 between 1848 and 1868 and less than ten, declining to one in the remaining of the century. Boarding schools run by religious orders fluctuated between four and six, but were larger. The closing of their schools in

- 1904 was followed by the creation of eight post-elementary lay Catholic girls' schools. Vanackère, *Almanach du commerce*, 1830–1855 and Ravet-Anceau *Annuaire*, 1855–1910.
50. A detailed description of the founding of “La Catho” is found in Mgr Baunard, *Les deux frères*, chapter X. Baunard was Rector of the Facultés Catholiques; sees also Masson, *La Catho*, 36–37 and Pierrard, *Les diocèses de Cambrai et Lille*, 254–55, who depicts the same motivations for the founding.
 51. Théry, *Le commis voyageur de Dieu*, 218–19; Visse, *La Presse du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais*, 155–160.
 52. Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles*, 735; Barbier, *Le patronat du Nord sous le Second Empire*, 32–34.
 53. Lambert-Dansette, *Quelques familles*, 751–753; Pouchain, *Les maîtres du Nord*, 106–107 and 117; Landes, “Religion and Enterprise,” 77; Barbier, *Le patronat du Nord sous le Second Empire*, 27 and 34; Ménager, *La vie politique dans le département du Nord*; Pierrard, *Les diocèses de Cambrai et Lille*, 270.
 54. Gordon, “Liberalism and socialism in the Nord,” 317.
 55. Some have argued that the republic was by essence masculinist and that the separate sphere ideology was one of its necessary underpinnings, for instance, Landes, *Women in the Public Sphere*, and Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship*.

Generating Incomes

The women we encountered in the previous chapters were active in big and small businesses. Occasionally, however, we had a glimpse of other wealth-generating activities: opting for the life of a *propriétaire-rentier* upon widowhood (the widow Scrive), lending money against mortgages and raising money through the same means (Reine Duflos-Thomassin), becoming a *commanditaire* (Catherine Leclercq-Tiberghien, Marie Dorny) and leaving their share of an inheritance in a family business they did not manage at 5 % interest. All this is a reminder that manufacturing, trade and retail were not the only ways for middle-class women (and men) to generate an adequate income.

Nineteenth-century economic transformations broadened and multiplied opportunities to generate this income. At the beginning of the century, investment opportunities were limited to annuities, mortgages, business partnerships, unsecured loans to friends and relatives and rent-generating properties. Stocks and bonds became more readily available in the course of the century, especially after 1867, when government permission was no longer necessary to set up an incorporated company (*société anonyme*).¹ Growing businesses also immobilized more capital and were therefore possible outlets for investments.

Urban and rural properties should also have provided increased opportunities to generate an income stream, if not to engage in capitalist calculations or even speculation. Population and business pressure on

urban properties drove prices up. Lille was a fortified city, and within its walls, space was at a premium. The Industrial Revolution made matters worse: Former convents and aristocratic residences were converted into factories and former private gardens turned into back-alley housing for the workers. Suburban spread was inhibited by the fact that the type of buildings that could be erected on the military easement was strictly regulated. Lille was then surrounded by a belt of commercial and pleasure gardens, country houses, dance halls and farmer's cottages. When the suburban villages of Fives/St Maurice, Les Moulins, Wazemmes and Esquermes were amalgamated with Lille in 1858, the southern and western sections of the city walls were torn down and rebuilt around the enlarged city. The site of the old walls was sold off as building land. Factories, warehouses, working-class housing and some institutional buildings like schools and hospitals replaced the former fields and gardens. The new Lille was four times larger, and the population of the city and the annexed villages jumped by 50 % between 1855 and 1870. There was, then, no lack of opportunities to make money in the expanded urban area.

The surrounding rural area offered other opportunities to make money from real estate. Most of the agricultural land was not owned by farmers, but by non-resident *bourgeois*, who leased the property for 3/6/9 years (this meant the lease was for 9 years, but could be broken by either party after 3 and 6 years). This was the same type of lease that was used for urban properties. Because this had been an open-field region, the rural plots were usually tiny. A 10 ha farm (20 acres) in 17 lots was not something unusual. Farmers consequently pieced together a viable farm through the renting of different plots from different owners. The luckiest, or richest, also rented *lieux manoirs*, farmhouses with outbuildings around a square or rectangular yard surrounded by a moat, a layout which makes old farms in the region look like little fortresses. A *lieu manoir* normally had a garden and an orchard, as well as some fields or pastures attached to it. Farm laborers rented *maisons à usage de journalier*—small cottages with enormous gardens, sometimes including fruit trees—but rarely from the farmers who employed them.²

In England, leaseholds, especially short ones, are usually associated with the growth of commercial agriculture. Short leases made it easier for landlords to adjust rents to reflect farmland prices and profitability—and even to rack rents if they were so inclined. The short leases of the Lille area could have reflected similar calculations on the part of the landlords. Whether proprietors owned urban or rural properties, or both, they were, then, in a position to make money by taking advantage of demand

for properties suitable for housing and factories, and of increased farm productivity. Landlords could easily be capitalist if they chose to be—and might even speculate.

How did the middle classes—middle-class women, in particular, take advantage of those opportunities? In England, middle-class women owned income-generating property and invested. They had played the market since the seventeenth century, to men's dismay.³ The separate sphere ideology, if it existed, was no obstacle to their continuing to do so in the nineteenth-century. Davidhoff and Hall believe that middle-class women were still able to play a role as lenders because this role was hidden and thus did not conflict with current images of women as natural dependants. Women, they argue, were a major source of small loans, supported joint-stock companies and played an important role in supplying mortgages for urban expansion.⁴ English middle-class women had assets, and if single or widowed, needed a source of income. Investing, besides being culturally more acceptable, was less troublesome and safer than starting one's own business if one invested in mortgages and well-chosen joint-stock companies. But as British historians have shown, not all female investors prioritized security, and some were boldly speculative.⁵ Did their counterparts across the channel do the same?

1 CASE STUDIES

How women responded to investment opportunities depended in large part on their social class—and sub-class. A few examples can give us a sense of this difference. The first one is the widow Meurisse. A former servant, Zéphirine Vary married the widowed tavern-keeper Jean-Baptiste Meurisse in 1824.⁶ She was 29 and he was 40. Their children did not survive. Meurisse died in November 1849, leaving four sons and two grandchildren from another son who had predeceased him in 1840, and the *Estaminet Meurisse* (or *Lion d'Or*), one of Wazemmes' two dance halls. The *Estaminet Meurisse* was a large structure with ten ground-floor rooms, bedrooms above and a dance hall at the rear. It was auctioned off, at the request of Angette Dublar, widow of his son Louis. Jean-Baptiste and Zéphirine had married in community, and acquired the *Lion d'Or* after marriage; she therefore owned half of it. Her husband's children were each entitled to one-fifth of the other half. Angette and her children demanded that the estate be distributed so that they could get their share, as the law permitted. Zéphirine Vary bought out her husband's heirs for 18,100 Fr.⁷ She obviously did not lack resources; a few months afterwards,

she successfully (and personally) bid on a block of four houses with a garden down the street. She paid 21,675 Fr for the lot. Two months later, she sold the largest of the four, less the use of the garden, for 7,000 Fr—obviously a profitable transaction.⁸ We do not know what else she did, as she did not resurface in my notarial samples. However, in 1869, the *Lion d'Or* was in the hands of another woman, the *rentière* Sophie Lemaire, who was using it as collateral for a mortgage.⁹

We know about the activities of the next three women from their post-mortem inventories. Anne Marie Wossar died at 78 in March 1830. She was the childless widow of Eugène Gobert, a *marchand chaudronnier*, who had died in 1816.¹⁰ She had continued his business and was described by the *notaire* as a *marchande chaudronnière*. She left behind 973.50 Fr worth of furniture, linen and clothing, 323.75 Fr in cash, 6 mortgages loans worth 12,200 Fr due in the next few years and a *rente perpétuelle* (perpetual or inheritable annuity) of 300 florins (old local money). She had been the beneficiary of three life annuities totaling 475 Fr a year, which died with her. She also left some yet-to-be-valued real estate. First was the house where she conducted her business, in a lower middle-class part of town, and acquired jointly with her husband in year 7 of the Republic; second, another house owned for 35 years; then, twin houses purchased in 1811; and finally 44 *ares* of farm land (about one acre) a short distance from the city, which she had purchased in 1820 for 4,776 Fr from a local noblewoman, Marie Pauline Taverne de Montiver.¹¹

Sophie Constance Duthoit, widow of Amable Crombez,¹² who died in 1869 in Tourcoing, was identified in the inventory as a merchant-trader and *propriétaire*.¹³ She had two sons and four daughters, one married and one who had taken the veil. Her furniture, linen and silverware were worth 6,200 Fr; she left 56,179 Fr worth of trade goods, and 12 loans worth 72,000 Fr. Her real estate, including a farm, a warehouse and half a merchant-manufacturer dwelling/business office, was worth 60,720 Fr.¹⁴ Like the widow Gobert, the widow Crombez supported herself in her widowhood through a mixture of business, real estate and investments, but in different proportions.

Not all widows followed the example of those two women, however. Marie Charlotte Planq, widow Dubar, who died in Wazemmes (district of Moulins) at the age of 66 in 1830, was not a merchant or craftsperson at her death but a *propriétaire*. Like the widow Gobert, she had no children. Her husband, an oil manufacturer, had died in 1809. She left 974

Fr worth of furniture and linen, 5,829 Fr in cash, three mortgages worth 7,400 Fr and five promissory notes worth 17,514 Fr. Her real estate was not yet inventoried, and not even listed at this point in the process, but one can deduce the nature of her holdings from the *notaire's* extremely precise description of her papers: a mill in Wazemmes rented for 1,000 Fr a year and a house in the best part of town and which had been part of her husband's patrimonial properties; some farmland in the country that belonged to her; the house where she lived, acquired jointly with her husband in 1791; another one in the city's business district, and some farmland also acquired jointly with her husband. She had acquired additional farmland during her widowhood, in what became Lille's south-east suburb.¹⁵

The twice-widowed Constance Genevieve Destombes, who died in Tourcoing in 1869, left two sons from her first marriage to Philippe Delepoulle, and a son and two daughters from her union with Philippe Durif.¹⁶ The oldest child was a physician; the youngest a member of the Bernardines, a teaching congregation. Mme Durif-Destombes left 10,174 Fr worth of furniture, linen and silverware, 45,465 Fr in stocks and bonds and 63,846 Fr in urban and rural properties. Before her husband's death, her second Delepoulle son and her son and eldest daughter from her second marriage had formed a partnership, first to manufacture linen, then to ret and spin flax. The children had borrowed money from their parents, and then from their widowed mother. They still owed her 33,865 Fr when she died.¹⁷

Although they were probably wealthier, and had children, the two later widows displayed some similarities with the earlier ones: all relied on diversified sources of income. Their portfolio mix, however, reflected the divergent strategies used by the different segments of the middle-class: only the widows from the industrious middle classes had money invested in production or trade. It also reflected the evolution of investment opportunities in the nineteenth-century; none of the 1860s widows benefited from an annuity; none of the earlier ones owned stock or bonds for instance. The widow Gombert owned a business, urban and rural properties, mortgages and annuities. The widow Dubar, accounts receivable, business premises, stock in trade and a limited amount of real estate. The widow Dubar also owned rural and urban real estate and put money at interest—but she owed no commercial assets of any kind. The widow Durif's assets consisted entirely in stocks and bonds and real estate except for the loan to her children.

2 INVESTMENTS VS. INCOME-GENERATING PROPERTIES

The women above followed paths similar to the ones of the men encountered in the previous chapter, whose assets mix was very much a matter of social class and sub-class. The industrious middle classes and the *propriétaires-rentiers* displayed significantly different attitudes towards investments. The possession of a mix of urban and rural real estate and of a variety of personal estate was typical of Lille *propriétaires-rentiers* through the century, but to a much lesser extent of manufacturers and *négociants* (who tended to sink most of their worth in their business) and of the lower middle-class, who had to work all their life to own a diversified portfolio. Codaccioni's massive study of wealth inequalities in Lille based on inheritance-tax returns (*déclarations de succession*) at different points of the nineteenth-century breaks down decedents' assets by categories. He found that in the 1850s, the estates of industrialists and *négociants* dying before age 50 included very little outside investment. Machinery, raw material, finished goods, operating capital and accounts receivable accounted for 80 % of the personal assets of the industrialists, and 90 % of the *négociants*. Real estate represented a quarter of their whole estate, but was limited to their house, factory or warehouse. Only industrialists who died past age 70 owned any significant non-business assets. By the end of the century, the composition of this group's portfolio had changed. Real estate still constituted a quarter of their wealth, but their businesses represented only 45 % (industrialists) and 51 % (*négociants*) of their assets. The rest took the form of various financial instruments. This socio-economic group was rebalancing its sources of income, and no longer ploughed all its profits back into the business.¹⁸

Rentiers and *propriétaires*, on the other hand, generally stayed clear of investments in businesses. They rarely owned interests in local businesses (except mortgages on the buildings). Beside income-producing real estate (55 % of their worth), they held annuities, mortgages, stocks and bonds in varying proportion at mid-century. Almost all their liquid assets consisted in annuities and mortgages (in roughly equal proportions). By century's end, half their portfolio was in stocks and bond (preferably government securities, railway and utility bonds). Mortgages and annuities accounted for 15–20 % each of their holdings. They owned less real estate (44 % of their worth) and fewer and fewer rural properties.¹⁹ In other words, they shifted from one type of secure source of income to another, and clearly preferred stability and predictability to the chances of better returns from dividends or shares of profits from a *commandite*.

At mid-century, the estates left by lower middle-class decedents (crafts-people and retailers) consisted in real estate (55 %), and merchandises, tools, accounts receivable and other business-linked assets. The real estate was usually their house. If they owned other liquid assets, they were in the shape of mortgage loans and government securities. But only 39 % of the lower middle-class decedent left an estate worth reporting. By 1890, half left an estate, whose average value had doubled (from 12,496 Fr to 24,348 Fr) and two-thirds of which consisted in real estate, usually in urban properties of relatively low value (working-class housing earning between 10 and 15 Fr a month in rents), besides their own house.²⁰ This was the business group who tried to seize the opportunities offered by urbanization.

Codaccioni's study unfortunately does not take sex into account (his interest was in social stratification and class distribution of regional wealth). My sampling of notarial records, however, does not suggest that women behaved in significantly different ways than men. Very few women, if any, and not many men built their portfolio from scratch. Portfolios were built over the years by successive generations of men and women, through inheritance, acquisitions as individuals or couples, and collecting shares of conjugal estates. This contributed to their homogenization within socio-economic categories. The estates of the widows Gombert, Dubar and Crombez were similar to those of the men from the same classes we met in the previous chapter. The widow Meurisse dealt with a forced redistribution of assets in a rather conventional way. The widow Durif, on the other hand, departed from the norm: the daughter and widow of manufacturers, she had become a *propriétaire*—but in the meantime, she had married a professional.

3 REAL ESTATE OWNERSHIP: SOURCE OF RENTS OR CAPITALIST INVESTMENT?

Although informative, post-mortem inventories have drawbacks. They only provide us with a static, end-of-life snapshot of people's assets. We can get a more dynamic picture of the way people managed some of their affairs from the real-estate transactions found in notarial records. Leases, sales and mortgages were signed in front of *notaires*, who were responsible for ensuring proper taxes were paid and transactions registered if required. There were a lot of *notaires* in Lille, and to keep this study manageable, I took two cross-sections from the records of Me Coustenoble

and his successor, Me Lefebvre, which will serve as convenience samples.²¹ Coustenoble and his successors had one of the largest clienteles of all the *notaires* whose archives have been preserved—and also one that included a large proportion of well-to-do people (including a few local aristocrats). The first sample includes everyone who sold, bought, leased (as a lessor, but not as lessee) or borrowed against the security of a mortgage in 1830–1833. The second sample covers the years 1871–1874. The contracts indicate who the parties were: their names (married and maiden names for women), addresses, occupations, and in the case of women, their marital status. The marital status of men mattered only when they alienated real estate belonging to their wife, or held in common with her as part of their marital assets. In those cases, the wife had to agree to the sale. However, it was not uncommon for couples to co-sign purchases and leases; in the case of leases, it guaranteed the survivor the right to remain on the property till its expiration.²² Finally, when a piece of property was sold or mortgaged, the contract usually indicated how and when it had been acquired, and often traced the chain of titles over two or three generations. People were free to use the services of any *notaire* they wanted—but they do not appear to have done much *notaire*-hopping. Families had “their” *notaire* who handled all their business, sometimes over several generations.

There were 753 people in the first sample, who engaged in 1,440 separate transactions, and 410 people in the second, engaged in 921 transactions. Most people appeared only once in each sample (69 % of the first cohort and 63 % of the second). A very small proportion (2–3 %) was extremely active, appearing more than ten times over the sample periods. The drop in the number of clients was partly caused by an increased number of *notaires* over the period, and partly by a greater geographic concentration of the clientele. In 1830–1833, slightly more than half the clients lived in Lille, and a little over a quarter lived in the suburbs. In 1871–1874, two-thirds lived within the old city limits, and slightly less than one-third lived in the annexed suburbs or in the surrounding countryside. In 1830–1833 there was a scattering of clients residing at considerable distances (as far away as Leipzig); those were gone in 1871–1874. The geographic base of the clientele had therefore narrowed.

In 1830–1832, 19 % of the clients were women and 76 % were men (the rest were groups of people). In 1871–1873, 15 % were women and 78 % men; the others were groups of people or corporate bodies (like railway companies, for instance) (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 Distribution of *notaires*' clients and transactions, by sex, by cohort

	1830–33				1871–74			
	People		Transactions		People		Transactions	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Men	569	75.6	1,070	74.3	320	78	677	73.5
Women	143	19	322	22.4	63	15.4	174	18.9
Minor children, families and corporations	41	5.4	48	3.3	27	6.6	70	7.6
Total	753	100	1,440	100	410	100	921	100

Source: ADN, Greffes de notaires, Greffes de Me Coustenoble and Lefebvre, J 1472

Table 8.2 Distribution of property owners by sex, occupation and period

	1830–33				1871–74			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Crafts, retail and tavern-keeping	174	30.6	25	17.5	88	27.5	13	20.6
Farmers	65	11.4	7	4.9	33	10.3	5	7.9
Manufacturers	101	17.8	7	4.9	67	20.9	1	1.6
<i>Propriétaires, rentiers</i> and no reported occupation	148	26.0	91	63.6	83	25.9	42	66.7
Miscellaneous	81	14.2	13	9.1	49	15.3	2	3.2
Total	569	100	143	100	320	100	63	100

Source: As for Table 8.1

In 1830–1833, craftspersons and retailers were the largest occupational category—31 %, followed by *propriétaires-rentiers* and people with no declared occupation (26 %), manufacturers (18 %) and farmers (11 %). In 1871–1874, craftspersons and retailers still made up 28 % of the clientele, followed by *propriétaires-rentiers* and people without occupation (26 %), and manufacturers (21 %). Farmers represented 10 % (See Table 8.2).

The occupational distribution was not the same for men and women. Among the two cohorts, 64 % and 68 % of the women, respectively, were listed as *propriétaires, rentières* or without occupation (against 25 % of the men). Fourteen per cent of the women, but only 2 % of the men had no reported occupation. The second largest female category

was storekeepers (18 % and 21 %), whereas over 25 % of the men were storekeepers and craftsmen. No woman was identified as a professional of any sort. At all times, then, male property owners were more likely to have an occupation than women, which was not particularly surprising. This would mean, however, that more women were exclusively dependent on their portfolios for a living than men, and this could have affected the way they managed it.

3.1 *The First Cohort: 1830–1833*

Men and women of the first cohort behaved differently on the real-estate market. Men were more likely to buy property than women (45 % of them against 28 % women), and they also bought more pieces of property than they sold (322 purchases and 250 sales), with an unexpected exception. Male *propriétaires* sold more than they bought (112 sales vs 67 purchases). With the exception of farmeresses, women sold twice as often as they bought. Farmers of either sex showed up at the *notaire*'s office to buy two-thirds of the time (See Tables 8.3 and 8.4).

Half the properties that were the objects of transactions were rural ones (*lieux manoirs*, gardens, pastures, orchards, but primarily fields), and in the case of *propriétaires*, they consisted mostly of tillage. Women appear to have owned lesser valued rural property than the men; the ones owned

Table 8.3 Types of transactions, by sex of property owner, 1830–33

	<i>Men</i>				<i>Women</i>			
	<i>N. of transactions</i>		<i>N doing</i>		<i>N of transactions</i>		<i>N doing</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Purchases	322	30.1	258	45.3	50	15.5	40	28.0
Leases (giving)	229	21.4	113	19.9	132	41.0	46	32.2
Borrowing against mortgage	269	25.1	128	22.5	41	12.7	23	16.1
Sales	250	23.4	146	25.7	99	30.7	56	39.2
All	1,070	100			322	100		
N of property owners involved			569	100			143	100

Source: As for Table 8.1

Table 8.4 Number of transactions, by owners' socio-economic categories, 1830–33

	<i>Men</i>						<i>Women</i>					
	<i>Purchases</i>	<i>Leases</i>	<i>Mortgages</i>	<i>Sales</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Purchases</i>	<i>Leases</i>	<i>Mortgages</i>	<i>Sales</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Craftpersons and retailers	82	26	146	54	308		7	16	2	12	37	
Manufacturers	77	29	60	60	226		1		3	5	9	
<i>Proprietaries</i> and without occupation	67	132	23	112	334		33	115	19	70	237	

Source: As for Table 8.1.

by men were leased for an average of 1.10 Fr per *are* (100 m² or 0.024 acre), and sold for 40 Fr per *are*.²³ Women-held tillage fetched 33 Fr per *are* when sold and 1 Fr per *are* when leased.

Male *propriétaires* were as likely to sell rural as urban properties; the opposite was true of women. Men were more likely to buy than sell houses and stores (140 purchases and 88 sales), whereas the opposite was true of women (18 purchases and 56 sales). Men also mortgaged property more often than women.

Different socio-economic groups managed their property differently as well. *Propriétaires* were, unsurprisingly, the largest source of leases. *Propriétaires* of either sex were also the least likely to mortgage any property; craftspeople and retailers purchased twice as many urban properties than rural ones—and the men very often mortgaged it. They rarely gave leases, but the type of income-generating property they acquired consisted mostly in working-class housing, let by the month rather than leased. One-third of the small number of female craftspersons/retailers in our sample, however, leased property. Manufacturers were selling rural properties and purchasing urban and suburban ones; they often took mortgages, but preferred mortgaging rural properties (See Table 8.4).

The patterns one can detect from the transactions seem straightforward. Men, whether living off their means or pursuing some occupation, acquired real estate through inheritance, or purchased it in adulthood. The ones not living off their means bought far more frequently than they sold, and were more likely to buy urban properties than rural ones. Professionals in particular bought and leased. *Propriétaires-rentiers* were beginning to modify their portfolio, and move away from property as a source of income. Women, for their part, usually acquired property through inheritance (from their parents or other relatives) or as their share of marital property when they became widowed. They were more likely to keep and lease rural properties, and more likely to sell houses, and commercial or industrial properties. When they bought property, it was usually agricultural. All types of property could generate income—but buildings required maintenance and had to be repaired occasionally. Repairs and maintenance cost money—and one had to hire someone to do it, get estimates and check on the results. Buildings therefore had to be managed. The same was not the case of rural properties. Fields and pastures required no maintenance or repairs. Standard clauses in leases prevented degradation to the property; leaseholders, for instance, were obliged to recycle all fertilizing material originating on the property into it; they had to keep

the ditches and fences in good shape. Additional clauses strictly limited the cutting of trees existing on the property, and trees dying naturally had to be replaced at the tenant's expense. Repairs on *lieux manoirs* were similarly the responsibility of the farmers, who could for example have to agree to re-thatch the buildings as a condition of the lease. Urban leases, on the other hand, might include clauses whereby the owner promised to carry out some repairs or modifications of the building. Leaseholds were nonetheless designed to simplify the life of the owners: leaseholders were responsible for the property taxes and all other servitudes; they had to insure the buildings against fire at their own expense. Landowners also frequently demanded entry fines from farmers (an additional payment equivalent to six months' worth of rent), various produce to be delivered to their houses (oats, hay, potatoes, eggs, butter of the best quality, and chickens—which might have to be “big, fat, plump, alive and with their feathers”—*gros, gras, dodus, vivants et en plumes*).²⁴ They also required the farmer to perform several days' worth of labor with a horse and cart for their benefit without payment—and if they did not require the farmer's services in one year, the labor duties were carried over during the remainder of the lease. Men were less likely to include such requests in their leases than women, who therefore seem to have tried to generate a worry-free income flow—and a supply of fresh produce from their holdings.

3.2 *The Second Cohort: 1871–1874*

Forty years later, the client base had narrowed: it was more urban and involved a lesser number of farmers. Although behavior had changed, there is no evidence that the enlargement of Lille led to widespread real-estate speculation, and owners of rural properties seem to have been rather unresponsive to the opportunities rising land prices could offer. Men and women bought and sold almost identical numbers of properties—but the men who sold were more likely to sell several (see Table 8.5).

As in the 1830s, different sub-categories behaved differently (see Table 8.6). Male *propriétaires-rentiers* continued to divest themselves of property (they sold 73 and bought 33); they were overwhelmingly selling tillage and other farmland, and buying a mix of urban, suburban and rural properties. Property owned by all categories of men, irrespective of occupation, was by now more likely to be urban (more than half if one combines Lille and the annexed suburbs). Female proprietors, on the other hand, sold rarely and barely more than they bought—and the property

Table 8.5 Types of transactions, by sex of property owner, 1871–74

	<i>Men</i>				<i>Women</i>			
	<i>N of transactions</i>		<i>N doing</i>		<i>N of transactions</i>		<i>N doing</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Purchases	173	25.6	124	38.8	17	23.6	17	27.0
Leases (giving)	149	22.0	71	22.2	21	29.2	21	33.3
Borrowing against mortgage	185	27.3	97	30.3	16	22.2	16	25.4
Sales	170	25.1	69	21.6	18	25.0	18	28.6
All	677	100			72	100		
N of property owners involved			320	100.0			63	100.0

Source: As for Table 8.1

was as likely to be urban as rural. Almost all the properties they leased were rural (mainly tillage).

Craftspeople and retailers bought twice as much as they sold, almost always bought urban properties, did not lease much, and frequently took out mortgages (women even more than men). Manufacturers sold more than they bought, still leased properties, and took mortgages more often than 40 years previously. We do not know why businesspeople took mortgages, because the contracts rarely say how the money was to be used. Sometimes, the mortgage was taken within a few days of purchasing the property (but not necessarily from the same person). This information is, however, rare. Non-agricultural real estate appears to have been increasingly treated as a reserve of capital: one could mortgage it to raise money for other ventures, or to ease temporary cash-flow problems.

The small number of females in the samples obliges us to be cautious as far as women are concerned. Women who owned urban properties may have followed the same strategies as the men: half the transactions involving such a property were the taking of a mortgage. Far more women continued to own rural properties (but did not make great efforts to buy any), almost always agricultural, and leased them off. Their rental value had increased—women charged an average of 1.40 Fr per *are* for rent on tillage and men 1.80 Fr—increases of respectively 40 and 64 % over 1830s rents. This did not fully reflect increases in their market value. Sale prices of tillage jumped from 40 Fr per *are* in the early 1830s to 114 Fr during

Table 8.6 Number of transactions, by owners' socio-economic categories, 1871-74

	<i>Men</i>						<i>Women</i>					
	<i>Purchases</i>	<i>Leases</i>	<i>Mortgages</i>	<i>Sales</i>	<i>Total number</i>		<i>Purchases</i>	<i>Leases</i>	<i>Mortgages</i>	<i>Sales</i>	<i>Total number</i>	
Craftspersons and retailers	44	12	62	24	122		4	4	14	4	26	
Manufacturers	26	37	72	66	201		0	0	0	1	1	
<i>Proprietaries</i> and without occupation	33	95	29	73	130		13	93	17	16	139	

Source: As for Table 8.1

this period (185 %). Either *propriétaires* were still bound by customary understanding of land value—or perhaps, farmers were unwilling to pay higher rents, preferring to buy when the opportunity arose. At any rate, the Old Regime world of *propriétaires-bourgeois* and tenant-farmers was being replaced by a world of urban *propriétaires-rentiers* and rural farmer-owners. Female *propriétaires*, however, appear to have been slower at making the transition. Women may have continued to see landownership as a source of ground rents, produces and services, whereas greater numbers of men moved away from landownership as a source of income.

3.3 *Mesdames Vanbrouck and Mulle; Messieux Savarin, Paquet and Gallois*

My two samples were crossed by several generations of women from the same extended family. Those women were also the most frequently mentioned proprietors. Like the most frequently mentioned men, they were representative of the trends just described.²⁵

Marguerite Vanbrouck died in 1832. She was the last surviving child of Gilles Vanbrouck and Anne Marguerite Mauroy, who were both dead by 1796. Gilles and Anne Vanbrouck were survived by six children. A son, Philippe, and a daughter, Henriette were the only ones to marry; they had one child each, Sophie Eléonore Vanbrouck and Aimée Simone Henriette Dupont. The other four, Noël, Antoine, Jacques and Marguerite, lived together. The four of them wrote wills designating the surviving unmarried siblings as their heirs. Noël died in 1803, Antoine in 1809 and Jacques in 1822, leaving Marguerite in possession of all their estates. Antoine, Jacques and Marguerite also purchased property in common, then Jacques and Marguerite did the same, and finally Jacques, Marguerite and Sophie Eléonore. Sophie never married either. Aimée Dupont married Jean-Telesphore Mulle, a *notaire*, who died in 1827. Subsequently, Marguerite, Sophie Eléonore and Aimée purchased some property together, but only farmland. Aimée sold some property, including a country house in the suburb of Fives which had belonged to her grandfather Gilles and which she had inherited in 1803. The sale occurred between the marriage of her only two children, two daughters who married two brothers in July and November 1831. The young men were the sons of a grain merchant from Blandecque, in the department of Pas-de-Calais, but originally from Fives. The young couples settled in Blandecque. Aimée gave each of them a 15,000 Fr dowry, and the marriage contracts stipulated she had to pay it

within a year. The girls in return agreed not to ask for their share of their father's inheritance while their mother was alive.²⁶

Then 86-year-old Marguerite died; she left a considerable amount of property (120 separate pieces) worth slightly more than 600,000 Fr, which was divided equally between her two nieces and heiresses, Aimée and Sophie. She had inherited half of this property from her brothers. Ten per cent came to her directly from her parents. She had purchased the rest by herself or jointly with either brothers or nieces. Her inventory, carried in July 1834, lists only rural properties, her house, and a perpetual annuity (*rente constituée*). Her two nieces continued buying property, together or individually after her death. They also sold some—and with rare exceptions they only sold urban properties. Aimée Dupont purchased a new country house almost immediately after her aunt's death. It was located in the village of Esquermes, and was much fancier than the simple two-storey, seven-room one she had sold two years previously. The sale contract also refers to orange trees, a boat, a donkey with its saddle and cart, an artificial fishpond, a small folly and some statues. Both Aimée and Sophie had inherited the properties they sold; they were not in the business of buying to sell later at higher price. They kept what they bought, and sold off urban properties they had inherited.

Sixty-eight-year-old Sophie Eléonore died in May 1848, and her inventory was taken in April 1849. She was worth slightly more than 800,000 Fr at her death, all in agricultural property, with the exception of her house. The child of her father's only married sister—that is, Aimée Dupont, was entitled to one half of her estate. The other half went to the two children of her mother's brother, Jean Baptiste and Sophie Corman. The Cormans were a family of brewers and Jean Baptiste and Sophie had married into another family of brewers, the Richebés. The two cousins, however, died before the estate was settled, and their share of Sophie Eléonore's property went to their nine children, and therefore was dispersed. Sophie Eléonore had left a will, in which she specified that Aimée Dupont's share had to include the property she had inherited from the Vanbroucks, and the Cormans' share, the property that had come to her from her mother. She also owned some furniture which came from her grandmother Mauroy: this was to be given to Aimée Dupont, who was also Anne Mauroy's granddaughter, in addition to her share. Sophie Eléonore had a very keen sense of dynasty.²⁷

Aimée Dupont lived long enough to reappear in the second sample. Looking backwards, in 1869 and 1870, one finds her leasing property, but

not doing anything else. In 1872, she appointed her son-in-law François-Louis Houzet (husband of her deceased younger daughter Henriette), her attorney—until then, she had handled the leasing of her property herself, showing up in person at the *notaire* for the signing of the contracts, and the leases stipulated that rents and produce had to be delivered to her house in Lille. In the last year of her life, Houzet took care of all this. Aimée Dupont moved with her other daughter, the widowed Sophie in Blandecque, and then with her grandson Auguste in nearby Wizerne, where she died in November 1872, age 85. She was survived by Sophie, who died in Blandecque in February 1873, and Sophie's and Henriette's eight children. She left an estate worth 1,730,161 Fr, consisting in agricultural properties, her Lille house, and the country house. The *notaire* estimated the property generated an annual income of 45,931.50 Fr (a return of 2.65 % on the investment). Sophie put the city house on the market right away, could not find a taker, and tried again a month later. She was able to sell off the country house a month after her mother's death, for 46,500 Fr, almost twice as much as her mother had paid for it some forty years earlier (there was no inflation in nineteenth-century France—this was pure capital gain). In 1872, Sophie, who had never appeared in Me Lefebvre's notarial records until then, also leased 19 pieces of tillage around Lille. And then, of course, she disappeared because she died. Her children used the services of another *notaire*—they are not in the sample.

The Vanbrouck and Dupont women looked at property as sources of ground rents, services and produce. They had acquired the bulk of their estate through inheritance, and kept only the type of property they liked. They disliked urban properties, which they sold off when they inherited them, and preferred tillage, pasture, orchards and farms, which they kept or purchased. Through inheritance and purchases, the women acquired considerable holdings. But they were a dying breed. There were no Marguerite Vanbroucks or Aimée Duponts in the making in the second half of the century. After they died, no other woman—and no man—appeared in the records owning this much land.

The busiest man in the first sample differs slightly from Mesdames Vanbrouck and Mulle. Charles Auguste Savarin lost his wife in August 1830; he died four years later. They had no children, and Savarin enjoyed a usufruct in his wife's share of the conjugal common estate. At his death, his and her properties were worth 850,000 Fr, and bringing in annual rents of 20,615 Fr (a 2.42 % return on the investment).²⁸ Savarin and his wife had acquired some property during their life together (including

five large farms); in 1824, he inherited 265,000 Fr worth of real estate, including five farms, from his brother. He continued purchasing rural property in common with his wife, as well as during his short widowhood. In the four years between his wife's death and his, he acquired 216,000 Fr worth of property. The estate devolved to numerous cousins on both sides, who sold everything to facilitate the division. Like the three women above, Savarin owned almost exclusively rural property. Like the women, he inherited a large part of his holdings. But he appears to have been a more aggressive buyer than they were, despite having no immediate heirs.

Savarin had a counterpart among the men in the 1871–1873 sample: Agathon Hector Gallois, unmarried and living in Lille. During those three years, he leased off 18 pieces of rural property, sold some to the railroads (he may not have had a choice in this matter) and bought some additional tillage. He had inherited all the land he sold from his father, and is not mentioned in the records until 1870. Gallois appears to have been an old-style landowner, content to collect his rents. Ferdinand Paquet, the other most frequently mentioned man in the second sample, was not (21 transactions: 2 sales, 2 leases and the rest borrowing against a mortgage). First, Paquet reported an occupation: lumber merchant. Second, he appears frequently in the records because he not only sold and leased, but borrowed—a lot. In October 1871, he bought a piece of land at an auction with three houses under construction in rue Beauharnais, one of the new streets laid out on the site of the former city wall. He paid 56,000 Fr for them. In November, he borrowed 7,000 Fr. As collateral, he used a 110-*are* piece of land (2.72 acres) in Fives, with house, office, wardens' house and lumber yard on it, two merchant's houses in the same place, with five workers' tenements at the back, a block of three stores, and finally a house and workshop in Lille. He had acquired the land on which the lumber yard stood from a lumber merchant in 1859 and the other properties at bankruptcy auctions in 1858 and 1870. In November 1872, he mortgaged the property in rue Beauharnais for 48,000 Fr. There were now seven houses on the site. He leased one right away, for 1,800 Fr a year, and sold another the next month for 27,000 Fr. In August of the next year, he sold the one previously leased for 32,000 Fr, and finally in December 1873, he leased another one for 3,600 Fr. It seems clear that Paquet was purchasing property to resell at a profit—and he was doing this mostly on borrowed money. The plan could be very profitable. Less than two years after buying the property in rue Beauharnais, he had sold some of it for 59,000 Fr, and still had five houses on his hands, not to

mention his initial property. But this was risky, as the fate of the former owners of the property in rue Beauharnais shows. It had been seized in 1870 from the Demoiselles Van Imshoff, lumber merchants, for *délit de folle enchère*, which meant they bought at auction but could not pay.²⁹ And the property had been auctioned off in the first place because the previous owner, a carpenter who had started the houses, had gone bankrupt. Their case, however, shows that women in trade were not necessarily risk-averse.

There are no female Paquets in my sample—this does not mean no woman tried to take advantage of the building boom, but they seem to have operated on a smaller scale. In December 1868, Laure Destailleurs, *propriétaire* in Esquerme and widow of Arnould Meurisse, took out a loan from the widow Cuvelier-Mallet, secured by 20 workers' houses she had erected on a piece of land in Esquermes next to the Thiriez mill, and purchased the previous year (from another woman). And in 1869 and 1870, Héloïse Dufour, widow Tierfon, also *propriétaire*, mortgaged first two houses under construction and the land on which they stood and acquired three months previously, and then three houses also under construction on land she had purchased on credit. In both cases, the lenders were women. Although the bulk of the female *propriétaires* obviously shunned risk—at the cost of lesser income—some were a bit more daring. But none saddled herself with the amount of debt Paquet did.

4 CONCLUSION

Business was not the middle classes' only potential source of income. Investments and rents were the others (professionals and well-paid salaried employees were still few in numbers in the period). Investments and rents nonetheless played a significantly different role in the economic strategies of the different segments of the middle-class. Manufacturers owned income-generating properties which they leased—but property ownership appears to have been subordinated to the needs of the business (hence the frequent mortgages). Until the end of the century, the overwhelming share of their assets was tied into the business. They began to diversify their portfolio away from it at the end of the nineteenth-century, at about the time some of them were beginning to gentrify. Landlordship was the dream of the lower middle-class. Property was a source of income, unemployment and disability insurance and pension fund rolled into one. It was also a savings account, accessed by mortgaging the property when needed.

According to Codaccioni, more and more could achieve that dream as the century progressed, and the Deremaux-Bonniers in a previous chapter were a splendid examples of this.

The industrious middle classes invested to a limited extent in property, bonds and other financial instruments. For their part, born and bred *propriétaires-rentiers* shunned investments in industry, even the relatively safe *commandites*. The *bourgeoisie de la rente*—who lived off their means—and the industrious bourgeoisie, who worked for its living, were two economic, and even social silos (their upper ranks rarely married each other, with the exception of *propriétaires* marrying among brewers, distillers and sugar refiners). The *propriétaires* we have encountered in this chapter were all representative of a group of property owners who sought first and foremost a predictable income stream from safe investments. In the 1830s, this category of people was more numerous, and they were still enlarging their holdings. By 1870, they were living off what they owned but bought little. Large property owners were also dying out. This can explain why the number of *propriétaires*, and of transactions, in the records of Me Lefebvre was smaller than in the records of his predecessor. By the 1870s, people living off their means had other, more profitable but equally safe options: treasury, municipal, utility and railroad bonds, and stock in infrastructure. Bonds paid 3–5 % interest—higher than the returns on farmland, for instance.

Propriétaires-rentiers did not get rid of all their real estate—but they balanced their portfolios. They did not really take advantage of rising prices for agricultural land: they raised the rents, but not in proportion to increase in value; instead, they shed this type of property, which was snapped by the farmers. Perhaps *propriétaires* were held back by a sense of what was a “fair” rent; perhaps they could not find desirable tenants for the land at higher rents. They may have cautiously taken advantage of the opportunities offered by urbanization, as they shifted the proportion of their holdings in favor of urban rather than rural properties, but they were also slowly moving away from property in favor of other investments. There is little evidence of speculation among *propriétaires*—the only people who tried to leverage some assets to take advantage of the post-enlargement building boom, like Paquet, were all in the construction industry (architects, merchants, masons, carpenters). This was potentially very profitable, but success depended on a quick turnover of the property thus acquired. This was a risky business, vulnerable to cash-flow problems.

The women appear to have been even more risk-averse than the men—although this may have been a matter of age. We must keep in mind that the two groups were demographically different; married women did not administer their property—their husbands did it for them. The women we find in the notarial records are single (and probably not very young either), widowed, and occasionally separated. Logically, they should be older than the men. The behavioral differences may reflect age rather than sex. To find out, we should compare the behavior of widowers and widows, but the marital status of the men is not always specified. We cannot identify all widowers with certainty, and cannot compare their behavior with the one of widows: both may have been equally eager to minimize the work involved in managing a real-estate portfolio—and disposed of their urban property as they aged. The Demoiselles Vanbrouck and Mme Mulle nonetheless come across as throwbacks to the Old Regime, with their entry fines, labor duties and deliveries of food. But although all those female *propriétaires* appear very conservative, and avoided as much as possible anything remotely connected to business, they still managed their affairs in a very businesslike fashion. They carried out the various transactions in person, clearly made reasoned choices as to what to sell and what to buy, and based on the *notaires'* descriptions, left papers and account books in impeccable order. No airy disdain for those nasty money matters here.

NOTES

1. Until 1867, government permission was required to set up a joint-stock company, and those were normally given only to public benefit ventures that could not be financed otherwise, such as infrastructure development. Lefebvre-Teillard, *La société anonyme au 19e siècle*.
2. This description is derived from the ones of properties included in leases, sales and mortgages contained in notarial records.
3. Carlos and Neals, “Women Investors in Early Capital Markets”; Carlos, Maguire and Neals, “Financial Acumen, Women Speculators, and the Royal African Company during the South Sea bubble”; Ingrassie, “The Pleasure of Business and the Business of Pleasure”; Laurence, “Women Investors: ‘That Nasty South Sea Affair’”; Freeman, Pearson and Taylor, “A Doe in the City”; Green, and Owens, “Gentlewomanly Capitalism”; Maltby and Rutterford, “She possessed her Own Fortune”; Rutterford and Maltby, “The Widow, the Clergyman and the Reckless.”

4. Berg, “Women’s property in the industrial revolution”; Aston, “Female Business Ownership in Birmingham 1849–1901”; Lane, “Women, Property and Inheritance”; Laurence, “Women investors”; Ingrassie, “The Pleasure of Business and the Business of Pleasure”; Freeman et al., “A Doe in the city”; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 211 and 278.
5. Laurence et al., *Women and Wealth*; Green and Owens, “Gentlewomen capitalism?”; Maltby and Rutterford, “She possessed her own fortune”; Rutterford and Maltby, “The widow, the Clergyman and the Reckless”; Dawes and Selwyn, *Women Who Made Money*.
6. Although the notarial records identify her as a servant, her marriage certificate refers to her as a *cultivatrice*—a female farmer; her father was a farmer in a small village; as she was 29 at marriage, she may have worked as a servant in Wazemmes. She was literate; Meurisse was not.
7. ADN, Greffes de notaires, étude de Me Guloy, J 1442.
8. ADN, Série J, Greffes de notaires, étude de Me Lefebvre, J 1472, 1-7-1850, 20-7-1850 et 28-9-1850. The *notaire* who supervised the auction indicated who bid and whether they did it on their own account or in the name of a third party.
9. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Greffes de Me Gruloy, J 1442.
10. A *chaudronnier* is either a coppersmith, a brazer or a sheet-metal worker/boiler maker. In 1830, he was more likely to be the former.
11. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Étude de Me Gruloy, J 548.
12. Sophie Constance, (1791–1866) came from a lineage of *consiers* from the border with Belgium. She married Amable (1777–1849) in 1817; he manufactured wool, traded and was a police *commissionnaire*. Their youngest daughter, Sophie, born in 1835, married a son of Dewavrin-Bulteau.
13. See definition p61n61.
14. ADN, Enregistrement, tables de successions, 3Q527-57.
15. ADN, Etude de Me Musias, J 839, 25-1-1830.
16. Constance came from an ancient textile lineage. Her father was the mayor of Tourcoing, Pierre Joseph Destombes, her mother a Desurmont, and her sister Thérèse married Jean-François Motte, brother to Motte-Brédard. The Delepoules had been in trade since at least the late seventeenth century; the earliest known ancestor had been a baker in Tourcoing, and one of his sons, Delepouille-Lefebvre, an alderman in Tourcoing in the seventeenth century. On the other hand, her second husband, François Clement Joseph Durif, a native of Valenciennes who died in 1863, was a physician.

17. ADN, Enregistrement, tables de successions, 3Q527-57.
18. Codacionni, *De l'inégalité sociale*, 96, 154–55, 216.
19. Codaccioni, *De l'inégalité sociale*, 65, 171, 216, 333, 398, 436.
20. Codaccioni, *De l'inégalité sociale*, 74, 100, 102, 189, 211, 222, 227.
21. ADN, Greffes de notaires, étude de Me Coustenoble et successeurs, J 1472.
22. Among tenant farmers, one finds relatively frequently widowed mothers and son(s), or brothers and sisters co-signing leases for this very reason.
23. 1.10 Fr per *are*, and sold for 40 Fr per *are*; One *are* = 100 m² and 0.025 acre.
24. The latter was a frequent clause in the leases granted by Aimée Mulle-Dupont, who is discussed in greater detail below. See for example the lease given on February 15, 1830 to J-Bte Landredy, farmer in Bachy, who paid 69.75 Fr and “a couple of chickens” for 1 ha 37 a (3.38 acres) of tillage, and to Jules Billaud, farmer in Fretin on January 25, 1870, whose chickens had to be plump and with feathers. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Greffes de Me Lefebvre, J 1472.
25. All information about the Vanbroucks and Duponts is taken from the records of Me Coustenoble and Me Lefebvre, except Marguerite Vanbrouck’s will (registered in 1832), which is found in the records of Me Gruloy; the post-mortem inventories and most of the sale records document the properties’ chain of titles. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Greffes de Me Coustenoble and successor, J 1472; Greffes de Me Gruloy, J 1442; Births, marriages and deaths are taken from the notarial records and the civil registries.
26. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Greffes de Me Coustenoble, J 1472, 17-7-1831 and 9-11-1831; the country house was sold 14-10-1831.
27. The will, drafted on December 24, 1827 in front of Me Gruloy was registered by Me Coustenoble, who also reported her death, on May 24, 1848. ADN, Greffes de notaires, Me Gruloy, J 1442; Me Coustenoble, J 1472.
28. Savarin’s transactions are also reconstituted from Me Coustenoble’s records.
29. ADN, Greffes de notaires, greffes de Me Lefebvre, December 12, 1872. J 1472.

Behind the Discursive Veil

Women, then, remained in business, and even those who were not in business continued managing their portfolios till the end of the century and beyond, thus displaying their ability and willingness to be economic agents. Yet, collective memory does not remember women running large businesses, and historians of women and of business have been quick to assume they exited the economic sphere. This widespread collective amnesia calls for an explanation. Why were those women so quickly and thoroughly forgotten?

The erasure was largely intentional; several factors contributed to the process, but the spread of a separate sphere ideology similar to the one found in Britain was not one of them; women's involvement in business was taken for granted. The first factor is, as we have seen repeatedly in the previous chapter, the nature of the sources. Government agents had difficulties conceiving women as economic agents and usually overlooked them. Local, firm and family histories reinforced this invisibility as they were produced to cope with the social and political changes brought by industrialization, not to be sociological studies. Historians, (mis)informed by existing theories of gender or entrepreneurship, took those discourses at face value, when they did not outdo them. Bonnie Smith, who laid the ground for further studies of the nineteenth-century French middle-class, homogenized it, and presented the discourse reflecting the views of people living off their means as characteristic of the entire upper strata of

the middle classes. Business historians listened to industrialists, but the industrialists' discourse aimed at forging, promoting and protecting a very specific, time- and place-bound type of industrial masculinity. For social and political reasons, a number of local industrialists defined their group—the *patronat du Nord* in relentlessly dynastic, masculinist and paternalistic terms in the first half of the twentieth century. This redefinition could affect men, whose actions were recast in a new mold. It had a larger impact on women, who were mere extras in the cast of characters. Whatever was said about women was said in order to enhance the public image of the patrilineage: women were valiant founders' wives, competent widows preserving the firm in its infancy, charitable branches of paternalist enterprises, soulmates who provided strong moral support to the men, but *not* businesswomen in their own right. Women's business activities were ignored, minimized, used to emphasize those women's dedication to duty, or their ability to keep a cheery disposition in the face of adversity. Women, for their part, internalized this discourse that valorized piety and devotion to family, even when their duties or interests led them to depart from this model. The discourses on the *patrons* and their *dames* (ladies) silenced alternatives and shaped the historians' understanding of the culture and behavior of this class. They also infiltrated the collective memory, but although they hid women from view, they never prevented their activities

1 ANTI-CAPITALIST “BOURGEOIS” DISCOURSES

The women we have encountered may not have conformed to Bonnie Smith's picture because many were not the same women—not in terms of wealth, but in terms of the sources of their wealth and relationship to the modes of production. Attitudes towards capitalism were not uniform across the *bourgeoisie*. Yet, Smith did not distinguish between different categories of *bourgeoises*.¹ By doing so, she fell into the same trap as later historians who tried to define nineteenth-century French bourgeois identity.² The bourgeoisie was not a monolith, as Chaline amply demonstrated for Rouen.³ It included entrepreneurs, *professions libérales* (self-employed professionals like doctors, lawyers and architects), the salaried middle-class (engineers, teachers), *rentiers* and landlords, senior civil servants and army officers, as well as craftspersons and retailers. The different sub-categories had little in common, shared different lifestyles, socialized little with each other and infrequently intermarried. Their *habitus*, to use Bourdieu's term, were different, and those *habitus* confined them to their own pillar.

The women from those different groups consequently had different opportunities and expectations. The doctors' and *sous-préfets'* wives did not expect to assist their husbands, and certainly did not open their own business. *Rentiers'* and landlords' wives did not expect to work any more than their husbands did.

As we saw in the preceding chapter, the different segments of the Lille bourgeoisie derived their income from different sources, and this affected their attitude towards business. The ones who lived off their means could afford to be critical of a capitalism which did not seem to provide them with a living. The arrondissement's "intellectual" elite had nothing good to say about the current organization of the economy and society. Mathilde Bourdon, the widow of a Belgian *rentier* who had lost his fortune when he took the wrong side of the Belgian revolution in 1830, made a living producing a stream of moralizing publications. Those advocated a passive resignation to the will of God, and overwordliness. They glorified a patriarchal order where men and women lived off the land or off pre-industrial and proto-industrial crafts. When she remarried, to a local judge, she and her husband moved to a small town north of Lille famous for its linens and laces. Mathilde Bourdon viewed capitalism as a dark and evil force which corrupted and destroyed women in its factories, and drove men to drink.⁴ Better for women, she claimed, to stay home and take in sewing. The Lille printer–publisher–author Jean-Baptiste Horeman was equally negative. However, he proposed another form of escapism than that of Mme Bourdon; in his novellas, the new-style princes marry the new-style virtuous shepherdesses; in other words, the owner's son falls in love with a factory hand who has remained unsullied because she clings to old-fashioned moral principles. His views of the factory system, especially of its impact on women, are nonetheless similar to Mathilde Bourdon's. In *Le fleur de coton*, he has a foreman asking a now destitute young lady of the bourgeoisie why she wants to work in "those unhealthy shops, where virtue is in danger, where [she will] hear conversations which repulse modesty." He advises her to take in some hand-sewing at home instead. But the young lady had never been taught to sew ...⁵ Francois Chon, from an ultra-catholic Vendée family, appointed history teacher at the *Collège de Lille* in 1835, who also lectured in history for the *Association lilloise pour l'encouragement des lettres et des sciences*, and holder of an adjunct chair of history at the newly created *Faculté des Sciences* in 1835 did not write any novels, pious or romantic. On the other hand, he left a volume of *Souvenirs*, where he clearly pronounces himself against democracy and universal male suffrage,⁶ and a volume of *Rambles through Lille*.⁷ The Lille

of his *Rambles* has no factories, no slums, and no industrial working-class. But he sings the praises of those two archetypal working-class Lillois: the thread-maker and the lace-maker—who were already fast disappearing when he arrived in town in 1835. Democracy had turned the thread-maker from a hard-working breadwinner who bought sweets for his children into a drunk.⁸ The disappearance of the lace industry had deprived women of “a moralizing and delicate work appropriate to their sex,” which they plied at home. Now, women had to engage in “coarse and corrupting group work” in the factories, a social disaster in his eyes.⁹ He apparently did not know female factory workers earned two to three times as much as the lace-makers, and could only contrast the lace-maker at her dainty work with the textile workers in rags, covered with dust or worse.

Bourdon, Horeman and Chon were not untypical of local writers, and their positions, as prolific author, publisher or public lecturer gave their ideas at least a broad local audience. Their ideas were further legitimized by the attitude of the Church. As Y.M. Hilaire has shown, until quite late in the century, the hierarchy viewed the urban proletariat with the mixture of fascination and revulsion one usually derives from gazing into a snake pit. It left workers drift further and further away from the Church and preferred to focus its efforts on the rural population and the middle classes. The lay people who began to address the problem of the proletariat in the 1870s also rejected the new economic order and their solution was a return to a mythical past.¹⁰ The modern industrial-capitalist world was a world many members of the middle classes, male or female, wished would go away. Anti-capitalist revulsion was not limited to women. The image of women Smith derived from her fieldwork was congruent with the values conveyed by local fiction or leisure literature. It was not contradicted either by the families’ and firms’ histories published subsequently. The discourse on women (and men) was too consistent and coherent to suggest there could have been a discrepancy between representation and experience.

2 THERE IS NO DEFENSE LIKE A GOOD OFFENSE: INDUSTRIALISTS’ DISCOURSES

Industrialists did not wish the mills and their workers to go away; they were, however, constantly confronted with the problems caused by industrialization, and although they do not seem to have really grasped their causes, they were particularly sensitive to their consequences: strikes, workers’ adherence to anti-capitalist (socialist) ideologies and support for unions

and political parties that embodied those ideas. They started reflecting on their place in the socio-economic order when this one began to be challenged from below. The texts they produced between the wars or immediately after the second one used a normative masculinist vocabulary to bolster and legitimize their social and economic position and power, a vocabulary that sidelined women.

2.1 *Family Histories: Constructing Paternalist Dynasts*

The commonly stated goal of many of the documents written during the period was to prevent the loss of knowledge of the ancestors. Eugène Mathon collected documents and created family archives for the benefit of the descendants of Jehan Mathon, who had been a merchant draper in Arras ... in the fourteenth century! He was planning to write his memoirs for the edification of his grandchildren, but died before he could carry out the project. It was left to George Dubly to make use of this material.¹¹ Eugène Motte felt the need to write the history of the family wool-combing firm to counter what he saw as all too frequent amnesia among the younger generation: “One ignores one’s own origins, one’s family ties, the efforts of the ancestors. One believes that all this happened on its own, through Divine Right.”¹² The prolific Gaston Motte was similarly motivated by a desire to “prevent the break with the past the two wars could cause.”¹³ Even Jacques Bonte, son of an industrialist who wrote his book in the twenty-first century, did so out of a *devoir de mémoire*—a duty to remember.¹⁴

This desire to counter amnesia was inextricably linked with a strong dynastic sense. In his speech at the opening of the Roubaix exhibition of 1911, Eugène Mathon affirmed “our region’s strength rests on a continuous effort pursued generation after generation.”¹⁵ Gaston Motte’s *Les Motte* is a complete list of all the descendants of Motte-Clarisse to the fifth generation, 404 households in all.¹⁶ The late nineteenth-century Masurel genealogy includes ten generations; it also includes the descendants of the Masurel daughters and, unusually, the ancestors of the men they married.¹⁷ The Lorthiois boldly state that “the history of our firm cannot be separated from the one of the family,” and they trace their family tree back to Allard de Lorthioir, who married in Tourcoing in 1606. However, they date the beginning of the firm to 1780.¹⁸ Albert Prouvost’s *Souvenirs de notre famille* begins with a family tree which goes back to the fourteenth century, and ends with an exhortation to the younger generation to follow

in the footsteps of the older ones.¹⁹ His family history, like almost all those published in the first half of the twentieth century, aims at perpetuating a specific value system which he believed had until then been transmitted, intact, through a succession of fathers and sons. It included the love of work, duty to God and country, the desire, not to make money, but to create a new social order in which class conflicts would be unknown.²⁰ Eugene Motte similarly considered he was the heir of his forbearers' moral and intellectual wealth and it was his duty to increase it and hand it over to the next generation as he did with material assets.²¹ The Lillois Marcel Scrive said no differently in 1942. His writing aimed at preserving the memory of "what was done by our grandfather for the economic and industrial progress of northern France."²² Jacques Desurmont's letters were published after his death, also for the benefit of the family: reading them, his relatives would "see him [J-D] reflected in this book— [a] first-class document for the history of their family. They will more easily understand the fine essence that made the one whose too short life and tragic death will be, for those who will be born of his blood, an eternal object of pride and a lesson of patriotism."²³ (Jacques Desurmont was killed in an airplane accident during the war.) The same motivation drove Marie-Paule Fauchille-Barrois to write *Vos aïeux que j'ai connus* for the benefit of her children and grandchildren as late as 1974.²⁴

Local historians immediately adopted the dynastic discourse. Van den Driessche, whose 1928 book was long the authoritative reference work on the history of Tourcoing, claimed that dynasticism had been one of the keys to the region's success:

On the eve of the War, Tourcoing, thanks to its instinct for commerce and its industrial talents, thanks above all to the harmony within families that allowed some firms to continue for four or five generations, thanks to its work and its energy, had become an important element in the general wealth of the country ... [this was followed by a very long list of all those dynasties].²⁵

Family histories were generally written by family members to preserve family memory. Commemorations served the same purpose. At the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Alfred Motte-Grimonprez in 1927, his son Eugène exhorted his grandchildren to follow in the path of their great-grandfather. Eugène junior, on cue, took to the floor to respond to granddad's (*bon-papa*) call, "As the eldest of the

new generation and in the name of my Motte cousins and my brother - I respond to your call: the younger generation will follow the tradition with the sons and grandsons of your partners and collaborators; it will work and do its duty. Long live the Motte.”²⁶ Public celebrations, like the 1932 inauguration of a monument to Eugène Motte, who had been mayor of Roubaix, could also be opportunities to remind the clan of his pedigree and of the virtues of their forbears.²⁷

Why was family memory so important? For a few, it was a source of models to emulate. Auguste Bigo was very explicit; he compiled the Masurel genealogy in the hope that “the young Francois V, head of the tenth generation, may live up to their good reputation and outdo their successes.”²⁸ A few years later, Alfred Julien Thiriez’s sons were encouraged by one of the eulogists at their father’s funeral to follow in his footsteps: “may they find in the remembrance and example of their father the most fecund lessons to guide them in life and make themselves useful to their contemporaries.”²⁹ They were echoed half a century later by Marcel Scrive, who after tracing the family tree back to the sixteenth century, focused on the founder of the industrial empire, Scrive-Labbé. He stated: “At the time when Antoine Scrive-Labbé’s great-grandsons have reached or exceeded the age of fifty, I think it interesting to go over the memories of those who, like me, have known his sons, his collaborators, his successors, and to compile their story in a narrative that will allow the fifth and sixth generation to know what our ancestors have done for the economic and industrial progress of the north of France.”³⁰

Vanez Delphine, in her study of the Thiriez, dates the emergence of the *patrons’* self-consciousness to the last third of the nineteenth-century.³¹ Bigo, Thiriez’s eulogist, and Scrive were from Lille, and with the exception of Scrive, wrote at the turn of the century. Roubaix industrialists wrote in the twentieth century, and the discourse is subtly different. Among them, ancestors were more than role models. It was their blood that coursed in their veins, and it was this blood that made them who they were—and in particular fitted them for a life in business. Louis Lorthiois-Herbaux was described in the 1930s as “heir to the solid qualities of his father and possessing an atavistic commercial instinct backed by more than thirty years of experience.”³² Jacques Desurmont was born an industrialist “by atavism”³³—in other words, it was in his genes. So was Eugène Motte, according to one of his contemporaries, who declared that “he was an atavistic leader: the blood that coursed through his veins was the one of a factory builder, a creator of firms.”³⁴ Gaston Motte wanted to “bring to

light the personalities, the occupations, the ideals of those whose name and *imprint* we bear, and seek to ascertain to what extent we still have something in common.”³⁵ Eugène Motte had claimed that “*le conscient des pères est le subconscient des fils,*” according to another contemporary: the consciousness of the fathers becomes the subconsciousness of the sons—in other words, acquired traits were hereditary.³⁶ A father worked for his children, for the heirs “who will survive him, inherit his house, his land, his tools, the strength of his race, the strength of his blood as they were begotten by him and the faithful and valorous woman.”³⁷

The key role of “blood” was even more explicit in Dubly, who praised the Mathon archives because they revealed “the wise stability of provincial and family life, wellspring of virtues, earnestness, thrift, industriousness, measure, balance and this rootedness in the soil without which races degenerate and nations fall apart.”³⁸ Maurras was just around the corner.

Mathon was to the manor born. His father set him up in a factory in partnership with another industrialist and with a former employee when he was barely out of his teens.³⁹ Mathon’s relationship to business was also described in organic terms by his biographer: “This leader who feels his personal patrimony coincide with the patrimony of the House, his body and his soul in close communion with the life of the business.”⁴⁰ Dubly’s Mathon was more than a born industrialist, or creator of a firm. He was Schumpeterian: “He was driven by the need to break molds, to disturb routines, to invent new formulas. He was feared because in our region, conformity and mediocrity reassure. But HE did not reassure.”⁴¹

2.2 *From Dynasties to Corporatism: Paternalism’s Political Dimension*

Mathon was not wreaking his creative destructiveness solely on the organization of production or distribution—but on society as a whole. He despised parliamentary democracy and belonged to the *Action Française*, whose leaders he personally knew, until it was condemned by Rome in 1926. He condemned individualism and economic liberalism and viewed competition as nefarious for the economy and for society.⁴² Instead, he advocated corporatism.

Corporatism had emerged after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 as an attempt to prevent a repeat of the Commune insurrection.⁴³ Class warfare had been its cause; therefore the classes had to be reconciled—through benevolence and charity. Among those who wanted to achieve this reconciliation were counter-revolutionary monarchists, led by Albert de

Mun and René de La Tour du Pin. De Mun and La Tour du Pin blamed 1789 for all contemporary social and economic problems. More particularly, they believed the abolition of guilds had destroyed the connection between masters and workers. They looked back to a mythical past when all—masters, journeymen, apprentices and servants—knew each other personally, lived in harmony under the same roof, ate at the same table and, as one author claimed without a hint of irony in 1903, “*le patron tutoyait ses ouvriers*”—the master used the familiar “*tu*” form when addressing his journeymen. It did not occur to him that the workers may have resented this constant reminder of their subordinate position. The same author further deplored that the factory system had turned the companions into strangers one helped out of a sense of duty, instead of affection, and into workers who were not longer devoted to the firm.⁴⁴ Left adrift without guidance by the abolition of the guilds in 1791, the workers had lost their religion, become dissatisfied with their place in society and were listening to the sirens of socialism, which pitted class against class, in complete opposition to Christian brotherhood. By the late 1870s, de Mun and La Tour du Pin argued that the “superior class”, including employers, had a duty to devote themselves to working for the good of the “inferior class”. Consequently, they sought to re-create guilds. The new guilds were to be Catholic, hierarchical and occupation-based. Factory-based organizations would be federated by production sector at the regional level. All activities would be again organized and controlled from the top (carefully selected workers, however, were part of the directing committees). De Mun and La Tour du Pin wanted factories to be the site of the re-Christianization of the working class—and argued that the state had a duty to enact legislation in agreement with religious principles (like the prohibition of Sunday work).⁴⁵ The counter-revolutionary social Catholics insisted on the necessity of this hierarchical model. They viewed workers as children incapable of making the right decisions; the superior classes had a duty to take care of them, and in return workers had a duty to be deferent and obey. And indeed, employers frequently asserted that their factory was a family—for instance in 1886, Henri Scive claimed that the workers belonged to the *patron’s* family.⁴⁶

This corporate ideal was initially promoted in the arrondissement by Camille Feron-Vrau (Sophie’s son-in-law) and by the Congrès Catholiques de Lille (yearly conferences of the region’s Catholics addressing a wide range of issues).⁴⁷ The Vrau factory would simultaneously contribute to the salvation of its workers, be a building block in the reconstruction of Catholic France, act as a barrier against socialism, and finally, be an example

for others to emulate.⁴⁸ Genuine social benefits, however, were not provided by the factory, but by an outside institution started in 1885, the Corporation Saint Nicolas, a Lille trade organization along the lines advocated by de Mun and La Tour du Pin. It regrouped six textile factories (in a city where there were scores of them). De Mun, La Tour du Pin and the Vrau wanted to create an occupational family and fight individualism. Associations of workers and employers controlled by the employers were to be the instruments of this plan—but were *not* to discuss workplace issues!⁴⁹

The attempts at reintroducing corporations on a voluntary basis met with little success before the war. Although socially conservative, employers were not statist. They distrusted the increasingly anti-clerical republican regime and feared the government interventions in the inner affairs of their firms. One of their thinkers, Adolphe Sevin, for instance, argued that all social legislations passed by the “godless government” had to be rejected.⁵⁰ On the other hand, workers were flocking to socialist and autonomous Catholic unions. The mixed employer–employee associations and the hierarchical model advocated by de Mun and La Tour du Pin and adopted by Feron-Vrau was increasingly dated, even among Catholics. Christian Democrats advocated independent workers’ unions, and had the backing of the Pope. *Rerum Novarum* legitimized the workers’ desire to run their own affairs.⁵¹

After the war, corporatism evolved into a political doctrine opposing traditional liberalism and socialism. Eugène Mathon was one of its more vigorous advocates. He shared with many of his contemporaries a strong belief in leaders or chefs, a belief reinforced by Mussolini’s rise to power and his implementation of corporatist policies in Italy (and secondarily Salazar in Portugal). Mathon believed in a new political order resting on corporations—professional associations regrouping workers and employers, but under the exclusive control of employers and assuming parts of the functions of the state. In the meantime, workers’ trade unions, whether “collectivist” or Catholic, had to be resisted at all costs.⁵² Mathon promoted corporatism through his writings, like “*La corporation, base de la représentation des intérêts*” in 1923 and through his actions.⁵³ He was instrumental in setting up the Consortium de l’industrie textile de Roubaix-Tourcoing in July 1919 as well as a Commission intersyndicale de l’industrie textile in 1921, and appointed Désiré Ley as its secretary general. Ley was a hardliner (his nickname was “the dictator”).⁵⁴ Mathon and Ley were determined to break the back of the unions and their organizations refused to negotiate with strikers. They were particularly hostile to autonomous Catholic

unions—Mathon went as far as denouncing them to Rome for religious deviationism.⁵⁵ The project ended in failure. The Bishop of Lille sided with the strikers, and Rome sided with the Catholic unions against the consortium in 1928, which employers were beginning to leave anyway; it was dissolved in 1938.⁵⁶

The nostalgic, even reactionary corporatism of monarchists like Vrau and Feron-Vrau gave way between the wars to a strong-armed, right-wing, anti-parliamentary version promoted by Eugène Mathon and linked by some to some form of biological determinism. But this corporatism did not win unanimous support. The Roubaix-Tourcoing Consortium regrouped only *patrons* from the north-east quadrant; the ones from Lille did not join. And some of the Consortium's members soon kept their distance. They approved the organization's social measures, like the family bonuses, precursors of family allowances, but not its policy of systematic confrontation with the trade unions.⁵⁷ The coercive nature of Mathon's corporatist vision also put them off. For instance, Albert-Eugène Prouvost set up an association for the defense of economic freedoms in 1935 in opposition to the Consortium. Prouvost, like Mathon's brother-in-law Eugène Motte, was more paternalist than a corporatist in the Mathon mold. (Motte believed that those who hired men were responsible for their welfare.⁵⁸ Paternalism and corporatism overlapped but were not identical). And when those men made reference to "atavism", they also mentioned the deliberate—and not solely instinctive—will to live up to their ancestors. DNA was not enough.

Those descriptions of families and firms served a specific purpose: to reassure and legitimize. For all their self-assurance and claims that their workers were grateful for their generosity and condescension, this industrial oligarchy's economic and social position was vigorously contested. Leftist parties denounced them constantly. The government had imposed collective agreements in 1920; the Pope supported the autonomous Catholic unions. Achille Lienard, vicar of Tourcoing's Saint-Christophe, organized collections for the support of strikers—and despite this, was appointed Bishop of Lille in 1928 and cardinal two years later.⁵⁹ Strikes were numerous and particularly hard: the Halluin general strike lasted seven months, for instance. A Communist takeover did not seem impossible. The discourse of the *patrons*, which really was a discourse of Roubaisiens (and one dominated by some of the members of the Motte clan), served to legitimize the *patrons'* place in economy and society: they asserted they wanted what was best for their workers and were the best equipped to deliver it. But more impor-

tantly, it served to reassure them. Their role was foreordained, imprinted in their genes (in their blood) and nourished by their organic relationship to the soil. The durability of their dynasty was proof that they were the region's natural—inevitable, even—leaders. Camille Feron-Vrau and his brother-in-law sincerely believed that whatever the nature of outside threats to their position was, the Laws of God and Nature had placed them where they were for a Providential purpose no man could thwart. Mathon similarly believed that the *patrons* were by nature meant to be leaders, and there was no point fighting the law of Nature.

The Mottes were less inclined to believe in the inevitability of their position. Eugene's criticism of those who believed their social position was theirs by "divine right", or Gaston noting the critical importance of family networks for success, show that they did not take their position for granted. Yet it is also clear that in their mind, they had made a covenant with Fortune: they worked hard, took care of their workers and participated in the civic life of the city, and success should naturally crown their efforts and their virtues. The intensely voluntarist Motte believed industrialists' success was in their hands, even though their blood gave them a head start.

The dynastic and paternalist discourse was a way to erect a barrier between them and contemporary social problems. The flight to the suburbs was another. A manor house in a nice park was a way to escape not only the dirt and the smell of the towns, but social unrest, demonstrations and physical violence as well, as Petit, Grislain and Le Blan noted.⁶⁰ Living on the edge of town gave industrialists the illusion they were country squires and old regime-type patriarchs in control of their and their household's fate. Behavior could be as masculinist as discourses.

3 INDUSTRIAL FATHER—MOTHER DYADS

How did women fit into those dynastic, paternalistic or corporatist discourses? It is not surprising to discover that those gentlemen were paying scant attention to women, and when they noticed them, it was not because they ran businesses—with the exception of Gaston Motte, who made sure great-grandmother Pauline received the praise she deserved. Their images of women and of the roles they should play were extremely conventional. The Vrau cast their women in the role of the Old Regime's guild masters' wives. The vision which presided over their factory's organization was gendered. For Camille and others sharing his views,

the factory had to be reconstructed along the lines of a pre-industrial household or guild shop. They imagined those as little monarchies under the benevolent but unchallenged authority of the father/master. The master's wife had played an important, although ancillary role in those micro-societies: they had been in charge of the material welfare of the children, servants and workers, and watched over the morality of the women. She was imagined to have acted as a mother for all household members. The employer's wife was to play the same role in the Christian factory: she was the maternal figure, attending to the welfare of all. Marie Vrau (Camille's wife) was entrusted with the spiritual, moral and secondarily material welfare of the factory's young workers. She was assisted by members of the Notre Dame de l'Usine congregation who were attached to the factory.⁶¹

The Sisters supervised all aspects of the female workers' life. They visited the sick, enquired about the reasons for absence, strongly encouraged the adolescents to join Sunday activities in their parishes, and generally kept track of their behavior outside the factory. The Sisters reported to Marie, who could dismiss workers whose reputation left something to be desired, as well as distribute handouts for whatever reason she thought appropriate. Assistance went strictly to the morally deserving. After Marie died in 1913, her daughter-in-law Germaine took over those duties—in addition to managing the factory.⁶²

Camille also instituted some factory committees responsible for all issues affecting the workers but not related to production. There were two committees, one for the men and one for the women. He presided over the men's committee, which included the director, the foremen and elected representatives of the male workforce. The female committee, similarly formed, included in addition the head of the Sisters, and was presided over by his wife. This was the blueprint that Bayart presented to the Congrès des Catholiques de Lille—“*les dames des patrons*” (the bosses' ladies) were expected to take the direction of the female workers' groups, and had been vigorously encouraged to do so by the dean of St Christophe's church.⁶³

The early corporatists presented their wives as the equivalent of the medieval masters' wives, whose role was to take care of the wellbeing of a “family” which included workers, and give alms. Practices, however, could depart from the agenda. As we have seen, the women of the Vrau family were not limited to charitable roles, to being leaders of women's groups or reincarnations of medieval guildmasters' wives. They took active roles

in the management or direction of the firm, and in the case of Germaine, substituted for a husband who was not interested in the business.

Contemporaries less inclined to think in terms of social theories imagined their wives as ladies bountiful. In his biography of Amédée Prouvost, Lecigne equates wives with “the hand that reaches for the poor and distributes alms.”⁶⁴ Henri Scrive wished his descendants would be able to find good wives who would devote themselves to charity work (“*des compagnes bonnes et dévouées aux oeuvres charitables*”).⁶⁵ Scrive, like the Vrau and their biographers, relegated women’s other activities to passing remarks. Earlier in the text Scrive noted, for instance, that Mme Scrive had been responsible for the business’s paperwork for ten years. However in 1943, Marcel Scrive only discussed the women’s charitable activities. Similarly, Gaston Motte also describes the Motte wives as involved in a variety of charitable organizations (like their husbands—benevolence was also a male virtue).⁶⁶ The charitable discourse was still held in 1951; the Prouvost firm’s centennial booklet may have recognized the role played by hardy pioneeresses in the fortune of the firm, but it nonetheless described their descendants in cloying words: “At all times, the Prouvost enjoyed the priceless happiness of being powerfully assisted by their wives or daughters, models of courage, goodness and dedication ... moved by the determination to contribute, with all the tact their heart was capable, their share to the still so necessary work of social betterment.”⁶⁷

Gaston Motte was less inclined to be blinded by stereotypes. We owe him a fully rounded portrait of early *entrepreneuses*. His grandmother, Pauline Motte-Brédard, is not the only businesswoman he mentions. There is also Justine Duvillier, who took over from her husband François Motte, or Mathilde, daughter of Motte-Destombes, who married Louis Bouillet, helped her mother-in-law manage the family mill and then became her successor. She died in 1917. Gaston Motte was nonetheless still a man of an era when entrepreneurs were supposed to be men. He felt the need to justify his inclusion of women:

The astonishingly quick growth of the Roubaix-Tourcoing industry in the first half of the nineteenth-century rested on this close collaboration between the businessman and his wife. The evidence and impact of this triple role are particularly visible in the composition of each generation of the Motte family. We do not diminish the figure of our Motte forbearers to recognize this fact, which at the very least bear witness of the intelligence and care they applied to the choice of their life’s companions.⁶⁸

Women's abilities were a way to emphasize the talents of the men! Mathilde Bouillet-Motte is also described as a perfect mother who lived only for her children and the poor. Pauline Motte-Van Elslande's business activities are ignored; instead she is depicted as "this peerless educator who had transmitted to her children the principles which had guided her own life. Her perceptive and gentle daughters were perfect wives and accomplished mothers like her."⁶⁹

By the twentieth century, women were no longer exclusively ladies bountiful; they had become soulmates—and highly romanticized ones at that. Albert Prouvost rhapsodized about his wife and mother-in-law:

"I owe the same homage to my mother-in-law, her beloved daughter Marguerite my cherished wife: a marvellous heritage of moral values and exceptional qualities that made of each of them ideal wives and mothers was transmitted from mother to daughter and grand daughter."⁷⁰ Later in the volume, Prouvost describes his grandsons as industrialists but his granddaughters as "adorable young ladies and in their turn young mothers who will be presented as examples."⁷¹ The new descriptions reflected a shift in the contemporary concepts of marriage. Wives followed their husbands in their travels—Eugène Mathon made sure his daughters mastered English and German so that they would not be bored during those trips and insist on coming back home, thus jeopardizing trade. Wives accompanied their husbands to the concert, the theatre, and evening dances. They organized receptions and generally were the constant companions of his social life. They were not described as economic partners. Rita Prouvost-Vanoutryve acted as her husband's secretary in 1917 when the family was forced to take refuge at the firm's Argentinean branch office. This is not presented as a participation in the business, but as further evidence of Rita's spunky personality: "*Rita tapait avec entrain tous mes courriers*" ("Rita typed all my letters with zest").⁷²

4 IMAGES VS. REALITY: THE MALE DISCOURSE

The Lorthiois family offers a particularly clear case of the discrepancy between discourses and actions. In 1930, the Lorthiois cousins commissioned two anniversary books to celebrate what they presented as the 150th anniversary of their House.⁷³ Their great-grandfather Louis Lorthiois-Duquennoy, who died in 1810, was credited with founding the family business in 1780. One of his sons, Floris (1793–1872), started a carpet-weaving mill in 1838. He had three sons, who entered a partnership

to trade in wool and manufacture carpets in 1877. One of them left very early, leaving Jules and Floris, second holder of the name, in possession of the business. In 1893, the brothers began the process of dividing the firm and in 1898, the partnership was formally dissolved. Floris took over the trading branch—and soon added other activities to his business (under the name Lorthiois frères). Jules retained the carpet-making branch, which became Lorthiois-Leurent et fils. Jules's health was seriously declining, and in 1893, he had given his wife, Jeanne Lorthiois-Leurent, broad power of attorney to take his place in the firm. He died in 1898—and Floris, two years later.⁷⁴

The book's characterization of the Lorthiois men and women, and the description of their activities, are typical. The narrative takes the men's success as a foregone conclusion. They were businessmen by atavism too,⁷⁵ and Floris Jr. and his sons are described as energetic modernizers who took over stagnant businesses and turned them around (the term "dinosaur" is even used to qualify some of the ones they acquired). Floris Jr. opened wool-trading offices in Morocco, Uruguay and Australia to bypass European middlemen. His large brood was the prime motivation behind his desire to expand his business. He had to "prepare for each of his sons a future able to honour his name and his House."⁷⁶ The first two generations of women must have been actively involved—but this is barely mentioned. Lorthiois-Duquennoy left his wife, "who survived him more than twenty-five years, with the task of raising and guiding their eight children."⁷⁷ His son Floris travelled a great deal—presumably for trade—like Francois-Philibert Vrau, his contemporary. Someone had to run the business when he was away, and logically, this someone was his wife, but there is not mention of this activity. Floris Jr. married a Motte, Celina. She is depicted as "an attentive, pious and modest wife, and a brave mother who gave birth to eleven children."⁷⁸ The fact that she had eleven children is mentioned twice. Jeanne Leurent could not be so easily reduced to a couple of lines—but her business involvement was subordinated to wifedom and motherhood. She assisted her husband in the business and stood in for him when his health declined. And "it was she who groomed her two sons, Jules and Robert, for the industrial life that claimed them, and during the transitory period that followed her husband's retirement, she closely looked after the vital interests of this firm, which remained the object of her dearest preoccupation till her death."⁷⁹ The boys stepped into their father's shoes early on. Lorthiois-Leurent won a gold medal at the 1900 Paris exhibition, and the book

notes with pride that the jury had then praised Jules Jr., “who had been placed at the head of a large industrial concern at sixteen and a half on account of his father’s illness.”⁸⁰ Lorthiois-Leurent participated in the social benefits programs set up by the *Consortium*, and offered additional ones to its workers (on-site nurses, a cafeteria, and housing). After the war, Jeanne created a foundation to administer those various benefits, and named it to “perpetuate the memory of the one who had been able to combine to such an extent kindness with his industrial and administrative functions.”⁸¹

Under their descendants’ pen, the Lorthiois ladies were pious and devoted wives and mothers, who sometimes were forced by circumstances to substitute for their husbands. Like the Champagne ladies, Jeanne was a sorrowful widow who piously tended her husband’s legacy for his sons and erected a monument to his memory. Reality, however, was rather different. Céline probably played only a marginal role in the business. At her husband’s death, she took his place in the not yet completely dissolved partnership, but without the signature. But within months, she acquired an interest worth 100,000 francs in the Société en commandite Desurmont et Cie, a cotton spinning-mill. Her father bought into the same company at the same time, and she may have followed his advice. However, she could have kept her money in her sons’ business. She took a business decision. For her part, Jeanne was far more active than the commemorative book suggests. She is the one who negotiated the reorganization of the firm with her brother-in-law in 1893, and opposed Floris’s attempt to bring one of his sons into the business. The partnership may have been dissolved in 1898 because Floris and Jeanne did not agree with each other. Within months of her husband’s death, she emancipated her two still underage daughters. The following year (1899), she set up a partnership with her eldest son, 23-year-old Jules, under the name Lorthiois-Leurent et fils. Robert, two years younger than his brother, became a partner in 1901. Neither of the young men had the signature (but it would automatically devolve to them in case of her death); she did not let them have it until 1911, and not to contract long-term debts—only for the business’s day-to-day operations. She was in control—her sons were her managers.⁸² The commemorative book does not even allude to the fact the boys were on a leash till their thirties, and the reference to the Paris exhibition leaves the impression that they took over the firm in their teens. The history of the firms was clearly written in a way that fit into the current dynastic discourse about the *patrons*, one that minimized women’s business involvement or explained it away as an anomaly.

5 IMAGES VS. REALITY: THE FEMALE DISCOURSE

It is not certain that Jeanne would have written the book differently, however. Businesswomen appear to have been diffident about their activities. While Jeanne was taking charge of a carpet-making business in Tourcoing, a widow was running the largest locomotive-manufacturing business in Germany. Sophie Henschel took over when her husband died in 1894; he had bequeathed her sole ownership of the firm. They had an adult son, whose judgment and business competence they did not trust. Sophie made the young man a partner in 1900, but she did not relinquish control till 1912 (she died in 1915). Yet, the book published to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Henschel & Sohn in 1910 claims that at his father's death "the burden of the business rested on the shoulders of a still young man, who, with courage and resolve began his life's work." In the same volume, Frau Henschel had herself depicted, not as the woman in charge, nor even as a bridge between generations, but as a philanthropist.⁸³ In both the Lorthiois-Leurent and the Henschel cases, reality was set aside in favor of conventionally gendered narratives. Their authors cannot have been motivated by a desire to hide those women's activities from their peers. It is impossible that German industrialists did not know that Frau Henschel was in charge of Henschel & Sohn any more than contemporaries could not know Jeanne was the one running Lorthiois-Leurent et fils. Businesspersons knew whose signature was on documents—and whose was not. Those women were play-acting separate spheres while living a very different life.

They also appear to have perpetuated this conventional vision well past the Second World War. Marie Paule Fauchille-Barrois conveyed the same image in her account of her parents, grandparents, aunts and other close relatives.⁸⁴ She portrayed the women as very pious mothers of large broods (unless they were childless), exclusively devoted to their families and shunning idleness. All their spare time was spent knitting or doing needlework. Couples were steadfastly devoted to each other. *Bonne Maman* Barrois's life was devoted, in this order, to God, her children and grandchildren. She rose every day at seven, went to mass and received communion, and had breakfast on her return from church. After this, she gave instructions to the servants. The remainder of the day was devoted to reading, praying, knitting, and entertaining visitors. Her life, however, unfolded against a less staid backdrop. First of all, nobody in the family is described as doing any work, not even the men. Yet, *Bonne Maman* had purchased

a cotton mill from cousins to establish her sons when they reached adulthood. Parenting appears to have been an afterthought: Fauchille-Barrois was raised as much by a servant, a private teacher and *Bonne Maman* as by her parents—and she was a perfect little brat who called her grandfather a pig to his face and threw the mother of all temper tantrums at a wedding. The lifestyle was very grand bourgeois. The various family members had all the latest toys—a telephone, an automobile with a chauffeur—and some old ones (a greenhouse with orange trees). Everybody travelled a great deal—to Greece, Egypt and America. Fauchille-Barrois’s father (Henri Barrois) explored the world with the help of the *Baedeker*. Large family gatherings occurred on a weekly basis; *Bonne Maman* gathered her clan around her twice a week. Other family members organized frequent evening dances for the young people. Those families had a large number of servants (cooks, gardeners, chauffeurs, etc.), which were necessary “because the kitchen was in the basement” and “there were carpets everywhere.”⁸⁵ The Barrois clan seems to have enjoyed the same lavish and worldly lifestyle as the Prouvost, but Fauchille-Barrois chose to describe model Catholic mothers.

Fauchille-Barrois had clearly internalized the dominant discourse. Not only did she depict women in conventional terms, but she also stressed heredity, and one’s duty to transmit the values and reputation inherited from one’s ancestors to one’s descendants. Bonnie Smith’s informants, who were interviewed in the 1970s at about the time Fauchille-Barrois published her volume, and who were likely her contemporaries, also seem to have internalized this discourse. They belonged to a generation of women who grew up and were young adults when the *Querelle de l’Eglise et de l’Etat* (the war between the State and the Church) was at its fiercest. As children, they would inevitably have been told in church, in the classrooms of their Catholic schools, at catechism and even at home about the “heroic” women from the previous generations who had tried to protect religious congregations and the Church from the assaults of the impious government. They would have been encouraged to join the burgeoning lay associations which sprang up between the wars and aimed to bolster their faith and re-Christianize the masses.⁸⁶ Fauchille-Barrois, for instance, describes an aunt widowed very young and without children, who, in middle age, went back to her studies in order to obtain her certification as a teacher and be able to work in a Catholic school after the Sisters were prohibited from teaching. The challenges facing the Church may have led those women to view other activities, from running a house-

hold to running a business, as mere background noise. Masquelier's biography of Germaine Bernard also reflects this sense of priority. The book emphasizes Germaine's piety, devotion and obedience to God and His earthly representatives, and describes at length her numerous charitable activities and her involvement in the LPDF (*Ligue Patriotique des Femmes Françaises*). Germaine's running the family business is categorized as part of her wifely duties (*devoirs d'état*). However the irrepressible real Germaine keeps forcing her way to the foreground. Masquelier obviously preferred the adventurous and daring Germaine to the saintly construct he fabricated for the edification of his readers.⁸⁷ Women of a certain age and background, then, were likely to valorize and showcase faith and faith-based activities, and consider the rest too mundane to mention. In other words, women's activities may not have changed, but the discourse about women could have.

6 BUSINESS HISTORY'S RECASTING THE MOTTE: FROM VENTURE CAPITALISTS TO THE "MOTTE SYSTEM"

Some business historians, bent on modelization, have not only played a role in perpetuating this image of a dynastic, male business world, but at time gone beyond what their sources were telling them. Gaston Motte, self-appointed historian of a family with well-developed self-promoting talents, was the author of several volumes (history, genealogy, collections of letters), many of which were published privately for the benefit of the extended family.⁸⁸ He convinced David Landes to change his views on the relationship between Catholicism and entrepreneurship. Instead of being a brake on innovation and growth, Catholicism indirectly spurred those, as it encouraged high levels of fertility. This forced entrepreneurs to expand their business to provide for all their sons. The Motte turned this into an opportunity to create a flexible network of complementary factories, pairing competent technicians with their sons and providing them with start-up capital. The "Motte system" was a web of sons and then cousins bearing the Motte surname, and the blood ties minimized competition between the different units while preserving the advantages derived from their being stand-alone businesses.⁸⁹ This federated organization—the "Motte system"—has since been depicted as the key factor behind the northern industrialists' success.⁹⁰ Some business historians like Verley emphasize the pre-eminence of the Motte bloodline in this system. The Motte family conglomerate, he claims, marginalized partners who

were not family members, and unrelated partners were married to Motte daughters to prevent strangers from gaining control over the family assets. The Motte were also prone to marry their close cousins to prevent capital dispersion. In this narrative, men and women occupy clearly separate spheres. The women's is reproduction. Their function in the sphere of production is purely instrumental, as tools to recruit outside talents or channel capital towards other male family members.⁹¹

The phrase "Motte system", however, pre-dates Landes by half a century. It was coined by Paul Descamps in 1910 to describe something quite different—and not dynastic at all: a meritocratic system supervised by members of a wealthy elite.⁹² Alfred Motte, who developed it, used *commandites* to set up able young men in business running autonomous but complementary firms. There is no mention of the Motte sons being involved—nor of marriage between the *commandités* and Alfred's daughters. The Motte conglomerate, as Descamps describes it, was a purely business structure—a sort of holding. Yet, between 1910 and the 1990s, this Motte holding was recast into a tight, blood-based, highly endogamous and very patrilineal clan. Gaston Motte is not entirely to blame for this redefinition. He recognized Alfred Motte's role as a venture capitalist, and his genealogical work identifies only one sponsored young man marrying into the clan. It also shows that none of Alfred's children, nephews or nieces married a first or second cousin.⁹³

Regional business historians have relied on a wider range of printed sources than Landes apparently did, sources they have supplemented with surveys, interviews and insiders' knowledge, as several of them are descendants of business families.⁹⁴ They are less likely to view the Motte conglomerate as archetypal, or even as a representative family like Landes did, aware as they are that other forms of business organizations and behavioral patterns existed. Nonetheless, they identify a fairly uniform number of traits deemed characteristic of the *patrons du Nord*: hard-working, frugal, devoutly Catholic, family oriented, often times paternalistic and inevitably successful.⁹⁵ They too have fallen prey to the desire to modelize.

7 POST-INDUSTRIAL IMAGES

Corporatist projects and discourses disappeared after World War Two, as they were associated with the discredited Vichy regime. Pre-war paternalism, in the shape of benefits linked with employment in specific firms, also diminished, as the emerging welfare state made them less necessary.

But the dynastic and paternalist mind-set did not disappear—it merely mutated. Dynasticism and paternalism had, by World War Two, become a constitutive element of the *patrons'* collective identity. It still shaped discussion of firms in the 1960s. The 1966 *Nord Industriel's* special issue on centennial firms reiterated some familiar tropes: dynastic longevity reflected effectiveness in the economic sphere but also guaranteed stability—and responsibility towards the community.⁹⁶ In his contribution to this issue, Christian Delesalle compared the “familism” of French entrepreneurs in general and of the region in particular to Anglo-Saxon individualism: the French were more interested in ensuring the perpetuation of the firm and its transmission to their descendants, whereas the Anglo-Saxons sought primarily profit.⁹⁷

Thus, it is not surprising to see rising in society not only the pioneers, but also their children and grandchildren, all keen to prolong their fathers' actions. This is, in the liberal tradition, the perfectly sound, honourable, exciting engine of the free enterprise system, in which the more talented producers, the most active (—the luckiest too), far from being engrossers, create a movement that benefit the whole of population. The firms' embeddedness in the long term protected jobs and thus was beneficial to the workers.⁹⁸

Members of the *patronat* and individuals close to them continued to depict this paternalism as an intrinsic characteristic of the group until the twenty-first century. Bonte, whose father was an industrialist, insisted on the fact those *patrons* viewed laying off workers as both a business and a moral failure.⁹⁹ However, sociologist Rabier, who analyzed the interviews Bonte conducted for his book, noted a change in attitudes. The older generation still viewed the firm as an intrinsic part of the local social fabric and a means to an end: preserve the family group, and the social group composed of the employer and his workers. Employers also preferred living close to their factory. The younger generation, on the other hand, tended to view the firm as an end in itself. It had to be preserved, whatever the social costs, and that made them far more willing to shed workers. Rabier concluded that late twentieth century economic transformation (globalization) forced new forms of *patron/worker* relationships, which many older *patrons* had difficulties accepting because they departed too much from their traditions.¹⁰⁰ Paternalism and social responsibility also mutated. In 2009 *L'Express* discussed the *patrons'*

philanthropic inclinations, but the examples proffered comprise mostly support for the arts and culture.¹⁰¹

As the *patrons* shed their traditional paternalism, scholars became increasingly indifferent or critical of this *mentalité*. A second volume on *Entreprises centennaires* (in the 1990s) was more interested in those firms' ability to adapt to changing circumstances than in their search for stability and concerns for the social fabric.¹⁰² A new discourse has also appeared, a more "scientific" one which is replacing that of industrialists responding to denunciations by unionists and left-wing thinkers. Historians, economists, sociologists and management experts are more detached and more interested in the firm than in the people behind them. As they take their distance from issues of patronal identity, they are able to note the roles of women and analyze them. Two examples stand out: the commissioned histories of La Redoute¹⁰³ and of La Blanche Porte, published in 1985 and 1993, respectively.¹⁰⁴

Both books start, as they must, with genealogies, but in the case of La Blanche Porte, the founding family (the Dassonville) did not preside over the destiny of the firm until the end of the nineteenth-century; they sold to the Legrands, who were lawyers. Before 1870, there were false starts, failures and new beginnings in both firms. The decision to become a manufacturer was not even an economically rational one, as success was highly uncertain.¹⁰⁵ Some siblings did not become manufacturers but continued to be local merchants (of grain, for instance), brewers, or even farmers. Le Blan challenges the notion that those families initially pursued dynastic strategies—they merely made choices which happened to be the good ones, but without realizing they had chosen the ways of the future.¹⁰⁶ Both books stress the ability to adapt as the key to success. In those books that do not seek to document the rise of dynasties, but concentrate on the formation and evolution of firms, women are very active for several generations, until the family's wealth is sufficiently solid to adopt a grand bourgeois lifestyle. The layout of the residence-cum-warehouse-cum-factory helped: the business and commercial parts of the house communicated with each other, and the shop floors were in the yard.

Petit, Grislain and Le Blan wrote their histories at the demand of the firms. François Boutry wrote a history of his ancestors after he came into possession of a voluminous correspondence. He definitively does not romanticize his forbearers, and is even rather sarcastic about them. Success was initially accidental, and not the result of strategies.¹⁰⁷ This did not prevent the founder, towards the end of his life, to view his business as a family

one which would support an industrial dynasty.¹⁰⁸ Memory, says François Boutry, can be deliberately selective (*arbitraire*).¹⁰⁹ The mid-nineteenth-century Aimée Boutry, author of many of the letters, was no deputy husband. She and her husband were quickly at loggerheads. Boutry describes the husband as a petty domestic tyrant married to a woman determined not to be pushed around. Neither was Aimée a stereotypical “bourgeoise du Nord”. She was self-centered, headstrong, manipulative and snobbish. She was mildly religious, but blackmailed her daughter out of taking the veil. Boutry shows no evidence of her being charitable or engaged in philanthropic activities (in fact, this was because she looked down on the local women she would have had to work with). She also very quickly tired of bearing children, and her refusal to have sexual relations with her husband to avoid pregnancies seriously contributed to their estrangement. When her husband died, she was nonetheless prompt to exercise her succession rights and take his place in the family business. Her sons, however, did the work.

8 CONCLUSION

Pre-First World War *patronnes du Nord* did not fall victims to the spread of some separate sphere ideology—or even reorganization of the modes of production. Instead, their activities have been obscured by a twentieth-century discourse about male industrialists—*les patrons*—constructed for political reasons. Whereas in England, the female gender had been most visibly (even vociferously) reconstructed, here, it was the men who were the primary objects of attention. A very specific type of normative masculinity built around dynastic continuity was constructed to justify the power of a well-defined social group—the *patronat du Nord*. Businesswomen would have detracted from the image—and discussions of women come across as afterthoughts.

Women had their own script to follow in this performance, but they could be only peripheral characters, and like most peripheral characters were reduced to stock figures whose purpose was to further legitimize the roles claimed by men. The women shared the men’s class interests in promoting this image of the *patronat*, and thus had no particular reason to openly challenge their depiction. But as the discourse was for external consumption, they were not bound to it backstage. Gender was a performance; it called for the continuation of the dynast/lady bountiful dyad, but this performance was very much time- and place-bound.

By the 1980s, those discourses had become obsolete and even irrelevant. The Church had changed, and sought to work with people rather than for them. Factories were closing one after the other, and their production shifted to Asia or elsewhere. Paternalism did not resonate with the new generation, nor mesh with what it learned in business school. The sons and daughters of patrons also much preferred the independence and sense of achievement that came with freely chosen, individual careers. Having to take over the family firm had become a burden instead of a privilege. Firms and family historians were now free to rediscover the role women had played in building those firms, most of which were in the process of vanishing.

NOTES

1. In fact, Smith does not identify all her subjects, who are often referred only by initials; the reader therefore cannot categorize them.
2. For a recent contribution of the debate, downplaying economic factors in defining the bourgeoisie, see: Harrison, "The Bourgeois after the Bourgeois Revolution"; Harrison, *The Invisible Code*; Reddy, *The Bourgeois citizen in nineteenth-century France*; Rogers, *From the Salon to the School Room*; Maza, *The myth of the French bourgeoisie*.
3. Chaline, *Les Bourgeois de Rouen*. He defined the bourgeois in terms of wealth, income, occupation but also way of life, recognition by the rest of society, and self-consciousness—in other words, materiality, *habitus* or ingrained and unconscious behavioural patterns and imagination. The concept of *habitus* is taken from Bourdieu, *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*.
4. Mathilde Bourdon [Mathilde Lippens, dame Froment (pseud Mathilde Tarweld)] *Marthe Blondel, ou l'ouvrière de fabrique, étude populaire*, 1863; Schaeffer, *Dictionnaire des femmes du Nord*, 64.
5. Horeman, *Études de moeurs lilloises*, 21.
6. Chon, *Impressions et souvenirs*, 342.
7. Chon, *Promenades lilloises*.
8. Chon, *Promenades lilloises*, 69.
9. Chon, *Promenades lilloises*, 45.
10. Hilaire, *Le temps retrouvé*, 84. Gadille, *La pensée et l'action politique des évêques français*.

11. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 30; Also *Généalogie de la famille Mathon, commanditée par M. Eugène Mathon-Motte*.
12. Motte, Eugène, *Centenaire d'Alfred Motte-Grimonprez*, 16.
13. Motte, *Les Motte; Étude de la descendance Motte-Clarisse*, 7: "Deux guerres, un bouleversement complet du régime d'existence, l'adaptation difficile à des problèmes qui se renouvellent et se modifient d'années en années ont déterminé une coupure très nette avec le passé."
14. Bonte, *Patrons textiles*, 7.
15. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 133: "ce qui fait la force de notre région, c'est la continuité du même effort, poursuivi de génération en génération."
16. Five second-generation households, 24 third generations, 67 fourth generations and 307 fifth generations.
17. Bigo, *Généalogie de la famille Masurel*.
18. Lorthiois Frères, *Notice historique*, 8.
19. Prouvost, *Souvenirs de notre famille*, 149.
20. Prouvost, *Souvenirs de notre famille*; Prouvost, *Peignage Amédée Prouvost*.
21. *Monument Motte*, 12 "Eugène Motte hérita de toute cette richesse intellectuelle et morale qu'il devait transmettre, l'ayant augmentée encore, à ses nombreux descendants."
22. Scrive, Marcel, *Antoine Scrive-Labbé*, 9.
23. Looten, *Lettres de Jacques Desurmont*, 3.
24. Fauchille-Barrois. *Vos aïeux que j'ai connus*.
25. Van den Driessche, *Histoire de Tourcoing*, 204; The same argument is found in de Flers, *Historique de Roubaix-Tourcoing*, 64.
26. Motte, Eugène, *Centenaire d'Alfred Motte-Grimonprez*, 94–5: "comme aîné de la nouvelle génération et au nom de mes cousins Motte et de mon frère. A votre appel, je vous réponds: la jeune génération suivra la tradition avec les fils et les petits fils de vos associés et de vos collaborateurs, elle travaillera et fera son devoir. Vive les Motte."
27. "En souvenir de l'Inauguration du monument élevé à la mémoire d'Eugène Motte, 1932"; Baudus, "Eugène Motte," 190.
28. "puisse le jeune François V, tête de la 10^e génération, les éгалer en bonne renommée et les dépasser encore en succès," Bigo, *Masurel*, 3.
29. "puisent dans le souvenir et l'exemple de leur père un enseignement des plus féconds pour les guider dans la vie et pour se rendre utile à leurs concitoyens," *Alfred-Julien Thiriez*, n.p.

30. Scrive, *Antoine Scrive-Labbé*, 9: “Au moment où les arrières petits-fils d’Antoine Scrive-Labbé ont atteint et souvent dépassé la cinquantaine, je crois intéressant de revoir tous les souvenirs de ceux qui comme moi, ont connu ses fils, ses collaborateurs, ses successeurs et d’en faire un exposé qui fera connaître à la cinquième génération et à la sixième ce qui a été fait par notre aïeul pour le progrès économique et industriel du Nord de la France.”
31. Vanez, “le creuset d’une dynastie”, 23 and 96.
32. *Lorthiois frères*, 29.
33. Lootens, *Lettres de Jacques Desurmont*.
34. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 96. “Chef, il le fut par atavisme. Le sang qui coulait dans ses veines était celui d’un bâtisseur d’usines, d’un créateur d’entreprises.” *Inauguration du monument Motte*, Discours de Fernand Carissimo, président de la chambre de commerce de Roubaix, 24.
35. Motte, *Les Motte*, 7: “Mettre en lumière enfin le caractère, les occupations, les idéaux de ceux dont nous portons le nom et l’empreinte et rechercher dans quelle proportion une commune mesure subsiste entre eux et nous.”
36. *Inauguration monument Motte*, Discours de Armand guillon, préfet du Nord, 30.
37. “... qui lui survivront, qui lui succéderont, qui hériteront de sa maison, de sa terre, de ses outils, de la force de sa race, de la force de son sang puisqu’ils sont sorti de lui et de la femme vaillante et fidèle,” *Inauguration du monument Motte*, Discours de Maurice Colrat, ancien ministre, 42.
38. “Cette stabilité sage qui représente la vie familiale et provinciale, source de vertus, de sérieux, d’économie, de labour, de mesure, d’équilibre, de cet enracinement au sol hors desquels les races s’abâtardissent et les nations se désagrègent.” Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*.
39. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 40.
40. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, “Ce chef qui sent son patrimoine personnel coïncider avec le patrimoine de sa maison, son corps et son âme engagés, par une communion étroite dans l’existence de l’entreprise,” 64.
41. “Il était mu par le besoin de briser les moules, de bousculer les routines, de créer des formules nouvelles. On le craignait, car dans notre pays le conformisme et la médiocrité rassurent. Et LUI ne rassurait pas,” Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 96.

42. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 110–11.
43. Mathon's father, for instance, had taken the 17-year-old Eugène to Paris to witness the damage caused by those events. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 40.
44. Goblet, "Le peignage de la laine à Roubaix-Tourcoing," 154.
45. Duroselle, *Les débuts du catholicisme social en France*; Guitton, *Le Catholicisme social*; Hoog, *Histoire catholicisme social en France*; Jarlot, *Le régime corporatif et les catholiques sociaux*; Lesage, *Le mouvement social chrétien dans le Nord*; Mayeur, *Catholicisme social et Démocratie Chrétienne*; Talmy, *Aux sources du catholicisme social*; Talmy, *Association catholique des patrons du Nord*; Cholvy, et Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*; Cholvy, *Christianisme et société en France au XIXe siècle*; LeGoff et Rémond, *Du Roi très Chrétien à la laïcité républicaine*; Mayeur, *Histoire du Christianisme*, tome II; Mayeur, *Des partis catholiques à la démocratie chrétienne*; Pierrard, *Les laïcs dans l'Église de France*.
46. *Aux ouvriers de la fabrique de cardes Henri Scrive*, 11. Lievin Hassbrouck—the workers are the other family.
47. Sevin, "Les patrons catholiques du Nord de 1881 à 1894"; Rapport de M. Bayart, industriel à Roubaix au Congrès Catholique de Lille le 3/12/1887; Talmy, *L'association catholique des patrons du Nord*; Baunard, *Les Deux frères*; Feron-Vrau, *Quarante ans d'action catholique*; Mabille de Poncheville, *Deux maîtres d'œuvres*; Dansette, *Histoire religieuse*, 198.
48. C. Feron-Vrau, *La maison Vrau et cie*, 14–15; P. Feron-Vrau, *Centenaire de la maison Vrau*, 12–13.
49. Masquelier, *Mme Paul Feron Vrau*; Théry, *La situation sociale et religieuse d'une entreprise à la fin du XXe siècle*; Feron-Vrau, *La maison Vrau et Cie.*; Feron-Vrau, *Centenaire de la maison Vrau*; Feron-Vrau, *40 ans d'action catholique*; AEV, *Carnet d'usine de Germaine Feron-Vrau, 1913–1922*; Feron-Vrau, "Notes sur mon père et mon grand père" (ms.); –"Notes sur ma mère" (ms.); Talmy, *Association catholique des patrons du Nord*, 67–70; Talmy, *Syndicalisme chrétien en France*, 26–27.
50. Sevin, "Patrons Catholiques du Nord," 18.
51. Talmy, *Le syndicalisme Chrétien en France*.
52. Dubly *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 110; Talmy, *Syndicalisme chrétien en France*, 141–155.
53. Reissued in 1934 as *La corporation base de l'organisation économique*. Paris, Berger-Levrault; Dumortier, *Le syndicat patronal*, 39–41.

54. Ameye, *La vie politique à Tourcoing sous la troisième république*, 168–183; Dumortier, 37–38.
55. Dubly, *Vers un ordre économique et social*, 177; Ameye, *La vie politique à Tourcoing*, 167.
56. Dumortier, *Le syndicat patronal*, 48–50 and 63; Ameye, *La vie politique à Tourcoing*, 177.
57. Dumortier, *Le syndicat patronal*, 68–69.
58. “En souvenir de l’inauguration du monument élevé à la mémoire d’Eugène Motte, 1935,” 9.
59. Talmy, *Le syndicalisme Chrétien en France*, 196–230.
60. Petit, Grislain, Leblan, *La Redoute*, 131.
61. AEV, PCI 28 (2) “Récit de M. Camille Feron-Vrau sur M. Philibert Vrau”; C. Feron-Vrau, *La maison Ph. Vrau et Cie*, 4–5; P. Feron-Vrau, *Centenaire de la maison Vrau*, 9–10.
62. C. Feron-Vrau, *La maison Ph. Vrau et Cie*, 14–15; P. Feron-Vrau, *Quarante ans d’action catholique*; AEV, Carnet d’usine de Germaine Bernard.
63. Bayart in particular was very explicit about the roles “*les dames des patrons*” were supposed to play—they were to take the direction of the factory’s women workers’ groups: Rapport de M. Bayart, industriel à Roubaix au Congrès Catholique de Lille, 3 December 1887, 6 and 10.
64. Lecigne, *Amédée Prouvost*.
65. *Aux ouvriers de la fabrique de cartes*: “Aussi, tout en restant dans les limites de la discrétion la plus grande, pour ne pas blesser la modestie des grand mères, des mères, des femmes de vos chers patrons, souhaitons tous ensemble, pour notre futur chef, une compagne aussi bonne et aussi dévouée qu’elles aux œuvres de charité maternelle, aux écoles chrétiennes et à bon nombre d’autres œuvres,” 25.
66. Scrive, *Antoine Scrive-Labbé*.
67. “De tout temps, les Prouvost ont eu le bonheur inestimable d’être puissamment secondé par leurs épouses ou filles, des modèles de courage, de bonté et de dévouement” ... “animée par la volonté d’apporter, avec toute la délicatesse de leur cœur, leur part d’initiative aux améliorations sociales encore si nécessaires,” *Peignage Amédée Prouvost et Cie*.
68. “C’est sur cette étroite collaboration du chef d’entreprise et de sa femme que s’est érigée, au cours de la première moitié du siècle dernier la croissance étonnamment rapide de l’industrie de Roubaix-Tourcoing. Les manifestations et les effets de ce triple rôle sont

particulièrement sensibles dans la constitution de la famille Motte à chaque génération. Et ce n'est pas diminuer la figure de nos aïeuls Motte que de constater ce fait, qui témoigne tout au moins de l'intelligence et du soin qu'ils ont apporté au choix de leurs compagnes d'existence," Motte, *Descendance Motte-Clarisse*, 22; Justine Motte-Duvillier is discussed on p. 47 and Mathilde Bouillet-Motte on p. 50.

69. "Cette éducatrice hors ligne avait transmis à ses enfants les principes qui avaient dirigés sa propre existence. Fines, douces, ses filles furent à son image des épouses parfaites et des mères de familles accomplies," Motte, *Descendance Motte-Clarisse*, 126.
70. "Je dois exactement le même hommage à ma belle mère, sa fille aimée Marguerite et à ma femme bien aimé: de mère en fille et à petite fille s'est transmis un merveilleux héritage de valeurs morales et de qualités exceptionnelles qui ont fait de chacune d'elles des épouses et des mères idéales," Prouvost, *Souvenirs de famille*, 64.
71. "Adorables jeunes filles puis à leur tour jeunes mamans que l'on citera en exemple," Prouvost, *Souvenirs de famille*, 150.
72. Prouvost, *Souvenirs de famille*, 80.
73. *Lorthiois Frères, Lorthiois-Leurent et fils*.
74. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U5-7 (1893), 6U5-9 (1897), 6U5-10 (1898).
75. "Louis Lorthiois-Herbaux (Floris jr.'s son) inherited his father's strong qualities and possessed an atavistic commercial instinct seconded by more than thirty years of experience," *Lorthiois frères*, 79.
76. *Lorthiois frères*, 18.
77. *Lorthiois-Leurent et fils*, 10–11.
78. *Lorthiois frères*, 3.
79. *Lorthiois-Leurent et fils*, 13.
80. *Lorthiois-Leurent et fils*, 13.
81. *Lorthiois-Leurent*, 81–82.
82. ADN, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, 6U5-9 (1897), 6U5-10 (1898), 6U5-11 (1900), 6U5-12 (1901), 6U5-14 (1905), 6U5-18 (1911).
83. Beachy, "Profit and Propriety."
84. Fauchille-Barrois, *Vos aïeux que j'ai connus*, the Barrois were the descendants of Alexandrine Barrois-Virnot.
85. Fauchille-Barrois, *Vos aïeux que j'ai connus*, 178.

86. Pierrard, *Histoire des Diocèses de Cambrai et Lille*, 283–287 and 306–311; Mayeur, *La vie politique sous la troisième république*.
87. Masquelier, *Une apôtre de la ligue patriotique des françaises*.
88. Motte, *Motte-Bossut*; [Gaston Motte ed.], *Motte-Bossut, une époque*; Motte, *Les Motte; Étude de la descendance Motte-Clarisse*; Motte, *Roubaix à travers les âges*.
89. Landes, “Religion and Enterprise.”
90. See the “Motte myth” on the site of the Société d’émulation de Roubaix: http://www.histoirederoubaix.com/?page=113&rubrique=roubaix_20&article=251; Verley, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs*; Daumas, *Les territoires de la laine*; Tilly, “Rich and Poor”; Sabel and Zeitlin, “Historical Alternatives to Mass Production.”
91. It is interesting that Verley does not mention Pauline Motte-Brédard’s role in building the Motte empire; he even calls her by a first name neither she nor her contemporaries used (when she married in Roubaix on July 7, 1816, she signed her marriage certificate “Pauline Brédard”).
92. Descamps, “Les patrons de l’industrie textile.” Descamps, a disciple of Le Play, conducted ethnographic studies in northern France in order to contribute to the school’s attempt at creating a typology of families; Savoye. “Les continuateurs de Le Play au tournant du siècle.”
93. He and his brother Etienne, on the other hand, married two sisters who were their first cousins.
94. This was particularly the case of Toulemonde, Lambert-Dansette, Pouchain and Bonte.
95. For instance Jacques Bonte, *Patrons textiles*, 59: “Probité, respect de la parole donnée, acharnement au travail, esprit de famille, solidarité et cohésion dans le milieu, sens social, telles sont les valeurs de référence que les dirigeants du début du siècle ont héritée de leurs pères et qu’ils transmettrons a leurs enfants. A travers les mutations, techniques, économiques et sociales, les crises et les bouleversements du siècle, ceux-ci s’efforceront de leur rester fidèles” (“Integrity, respect for the given word, dedication to work, family spirit, solidarity and cohesiveness of the social circle, social awareness, those were the reference values that beginning of the century leaders inherited from their fathers and passed on to their children. The latter tried to remain faithful to them through technical, economic and social mutations, and through the crises and turmoil of the century”).

96. “Pionniers. Nos entreprises plus que centenaires tournées vers l’avenir.” Numéro spécial du *Nord Industrie*.
97. Delesalle, “Les Grandes familles,” 33.
98. “Aussi n’est-il pas étonnant ... de voir s’élever en même temps dans la société non seulement les pionniers mais leurs enfants et leurs petits enfants, soucieux de prolonger l’action des pères. C’est là, selon la tradition libérale, le moteur parfaitement sain, honorable, exaltant du régime de la libre entreprise, ou les producteurs les plus doués, les plus actifs (les plus chanceux aussi) loin de jouer un rôle d’accaparement créent un mouvement dont profite l’ensemble de la population.” L’inscription des firmes dans la durée protégeait l’emploi et était donc bénéfique pour les travailleurs.
99. Bonte, *Patrons textiles*, 436–437.
100. Bonte, *Patrons textiles*, 483.
101. “Lille, le vrai pouvoir des Cathos,” *L’Express*, February 11, 2009.
102. “C comme centenaires” histoires d’entreprises centenaires.
103. Petit, Grislain et Leblan, *Aux fils du temps—La Redoute*.
104. Leblan, *Histoire de la Blanche Porte*.
105. Petit, Grislain et Leblan, *La Redoute*, 61.
106. Leblan, *Histoire de la Blanche Porte*, 24.
107. Boutry, *Itinéraire d’une bourgeoisie*, 134.
108. Boutry, *Itinéraire d’une bourgeoisie*, 198.
109. Boutry, *Itinéraire d’une bourgeoisie*, 8.

CONCLUSION

Women took the changes in the modes of production in their stride, transitioning seamlessly from out-putters to industrialists. They were still found heading large concerns at the turn of the twentieth century, and although their presence in those declined in Lille, it remained stable in Tourcoing. Women also seized the opportunities offered by the growth of consumption to increase their presence in retail; most sold basic goods to other women, but they were never completely absent from other retail sectors. Although changes in business organization and consumption patterns at the turn of the twentieth century appear to have begun to undermine their position, their experience was characterized more by continuities than changes.

Husbands and wives were expected to collaborate in the support of the family through the long nineteenth-century, and although subordinate, women were not supposed to be dependents, but helpmeets. How this cooperation played out depended on the segment of the middle classes they belonged to—and how far removed from the days of small-scale operations they were. Among the families inhabiting the shifting boundary between the “working-class aristocracy” and the lower middle-class, men went to the factory, where they could command relatively higher wages, and women used whatever financial, human and social capital they had to stay out of it. They chose the flexibility and autonomy of self-employment. Lower-middle-class women could not work alongside their husband if he was an employee, and faced very limited employment options: only 3 % of

single working women in the 1886 Tourcoing census were office workers or shop assistants. For those women, a “middle-class” job meant going into trade; retail was one of the few sectors where being female was not an obvious disability. Lower-middle-class women might also own their own business rather than assist their husband with his, in order to diversify sources of income and increase the family’s economic security.

Growth opened up opportunities for women in retail; diversification did not. Retailing the new consumer goods was largely in the hands of men, even when the product was more likely to be purchased or used by women; in 1910 Lille, no women sold prams and children’s carts, wallpaper, doormats, knitting machines, mineral water or antiseptic bandages, and only 7 % of the people selling sewing machines were women (but women ran 9 % of the hardware stores and 17 % of stationery and office supply stores). Their light presence in sectors other than food and textile cannot entirely be explained by the nature of the product or the sex of the clientele.¹

Families of the middling sort who became industrialists might still cling to the traditional understanding of the economic sphere as a joint one in which husbands and wives combined their efforts to support the family. Family firms continued to have room for women; daughters who had assisted their parents and learned the trade easily became deputy husband when they married, and natural successors when widows. Even women heading large businesses were not, as a rule, figureheads or placeholders waiting for a son or son-in-law to come of age. Those who took over usually remained sole manager or main partner for as long as it pleased them. Pre-industrial distribution of responsibilities within manufacturing households was thus not incompatible with factory production. Women might also operate their own business when their husband’s was not as profitable as desired—or because they preferred to be independent, like those who married in separation of property. Business families could be families with two businesses, his and hers, and the respectability of business activities embedded in a family economic logic was unassailable, even when carried out by women. There is no evidence that clients or suppliers shunned independent married businesswomen.

Gender norms were clearly subordinated to family economic imperatives, and generation continued to trump sex throughout the nineteenth-century—and even the beginning of the twentieth. Community of property made this possible; however, one should not automatically assume the law was the cause of women’s continued presence in business.

It is equally possible that northern manufacturers and merchant-traders accepted community of property because it was compatible with their understanding of efficient, fair, if not natural, ways of managing family assets.

The separate sphere ideology, as commonly understood, could not undermine the belief that supporting the family was a joint responsibility either. When they thought in terms of public and private, industrialists firmly placed their business in the private sphere, out of reach of the government's prying eyes. Their public sphere was Klein's magisterial one, encompassing only activities involving the state. Legally, anyway, there were no barriers between the household and the business. Unlimited liability placed everything within the reach of creditors. This explains why inventories included the value of the furniture (duly depreciated every year) and why household account books kept by the wife were signed by the husband—they were part of the firm's accounting. Family businesses were extensions of the household, making women's involvement natural.

On the other hand, when businesses left the household, they left most of the women behind. "Household" should not be understood here in terms of physical space, but in terms of social configurations. Women took part in the operations of a family business whether they lived above the shop, next door to the factory, or were taking the waters at a spa (like Sophie Vrau). Businesses that were not family-owned, such as agencies, branch plants or joint-stock companies, were normally staffed by individuals who owed their position to their varied experience and their formal training, not to their pedigree or marital bond with the owner. These were the businesses in which women were extremely rare. Women were not found in the new types of businesses that crowded the pages of the Lille directories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, whereas they remained in charge of the traditional industries that dominated Tourcoing through the entire period.

Dynasticism, with its emphasis on masculine lineages, especially linked with new conceptions of "the firm" as an entity with an identity separate from the owner(s), could negatively affect women's involvement. Heads may decide to plan the transfer of managing rights from fathers to sons, bypassing the widows and leaving them with only residual functions. The transformation of the family's activities into a firm and then into a patrimony also made gentrification possible, a transformation that also distanced women from the business. By the end of the nineteenth-century, some industrialists were increasingly behaving like industrial *rentiers*, -hiring

directors, motoring here and there and taking weeks off to go hunting, while their wives organized dinner parties, extended weekends in Paris and vacations abroad. The glittering socialites that worried Pierre Legrand 50 years previously were no longer an exclusively Lille phenomenon, but were found in the other towns of the arrondissement as well. The men advertised their success through their ability to spend only a few days a week at the factory—and through having wives who did not have to bother with the business at all. Nonetheless, one suspects that a good number of manufacturers—those who were always in the office when the bell rang, did not have live-in servants or still lived in their grandparents' houses—may not have looked approvingly on their socialite cousins and neighbors.

Dynasticism also led to the emergence of highly gendered archetypes in the twentieth century. Some of the industrialists viewed themselves as heirs to a culture, name, and even a blood line that biologically determined their social place long before they inherited the firm. They were fathers of biological families and protectors of occupational ones, when they were not heads of pseudo-guild organizations or lords of their little manors in the suburbs. It is difficult to fit a *businesswoman* into this vision of the social order, unless she belonged to one of the first generations that presided over the transition from agriculture, general trade or out-putting to factory production. Their descendants readily acknowledged those because they belonged to a pre-industrial era when women had been economically active. In their narratives, out-putting or trading couples were then replaced by male industrialists, and industrialists' wives were cast in stereotypical roles, independently of their real activities. First, they were depicted as ladies bountiful. Traditional paternalism called for “a hand that gives” and for time immemorial, this hand had belonged to women. Companionate marriage and even love matches with the sisters of friends or the friends of sisters then became common at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, and were idealized. Women's charitable functions took a backseat to their role as friend, accomplice and affective partner. They may still competently manage businesses, but this was not why they were appreciated, and consequently, this aspect of their life was ignored.

In the twentieth century, gender became a performance, and even a self-conscious one. Men and women of the industrial middle-class played their role on the life-stage in front of a skeptical, if not downright hostile audience of fractious workers and disapproving Church hierarchy, as well as in front of peers seeking reassurance in a shared discourse. Some may have internalized it and the values it carried, like the Motte grandsons

playing opposite grandad, or Fauchille-Barrois. Others rewrote history, like the Lorthiois-Leurents.

J-C. Dumas has argued that the dynasticism of the manufacturers was one of the keys to the success of the Roubaix-Tourcoing woolen and worsted industry. He opposes those dynastic capitalists to the “life annuity” capitalists (*capitalistes voyageurs*) of Normandy and Champagne who treated their business as a stepping-stone to something better—like living off their means, or making it possible for their sons to enter a profession. As a result, the industry stagnated or declined in those two regions, whereas Roubaix-Tourcoing became, by far, the major French wool-producing district. There, endogamy, large families, carefully prepared successions and a very strong group spirit produced clans of mutually supportive businessmen and long-lasting firms.²

The typology is valid to a point—but it also hides much of the complexity of Roubaix-Tourcoing industrialists, who were not clones of the Mottes as described by Landes. It also obscures the fact Roubaix and Tourcoing were only two components of the arrondissement’s textile industry, despite the fact the “*patrons du Nord*” archetype is often made to encompass all the areas’ textile producers. By the twentieth century, the Mottes and related families were certainly self-consciously dynastic. It is not evident that others, even equally successful families, were. The dynastic discourse was not one heard much in Lille, for instance, despite the existence of industrial dynasties in this town. The existence of a dynastic agenda has also been questioned in the case of Armentières. Wiscart wondered about it in the conclusion of his study of the Mahieu, a powerful Armentières linen-manufacturing family. Each Mahieu generation included sons who lived off their inheritance rather than worked; the daughters’ marriages were carefully arranged—to local aristocrats—but the men were left to their own devices. Training was haphazard, successions unplanned, and profits heavily invested in stocks, bonds and real estate. The Mahieus, in other words, acted more like “life annuity” capitalists. Were they the exception that confirms the rule? Although leaning towards that explanation, Wiscart is left with a lingering doubt. Was the image textile manufacturers sought to convey truly a reflection of reality—or merely an illusion?³

The families we have encountered in this study suggest Wiscart’s doubts are justified. It would anyway have been difficult for families to be dynastic for most of the nineteenth-century, before their fortunes were secure. The twentieth century textile families that attracted attention can indeed

boast of family trees reaching far back into the pre-industrial era. Each generation seemed to have built on the successes of the previous ones to achieve even more impressive results. The massive factory buildings, forests of chimneys and pervasive air and river pollution of the twentieth century were visual reminders of their economic importance. It was thus easy, looking backwards from the 1930s and even the 1960s, to view this march to success as inevitable. Teleology is after all the historians' Achilles' heel. Looking forward from the 1780s and even the 1820s, one gets an altogether different impression. No dynasties forging ahead like so many juggernauts here, but a landscape littered with the jetsam of ventures that did not work out as expected, and haunted by the ghosts of families, or branches of families, who disappeared from the manufacturing world, or moved out of textiles. We can think of Caroline Destombe-Versmée's husband, hopping from venture to venture and treading water, despite a one-time association with the powerful Dewavrin. Caroline did not choose her sons as successors, and grandmotherly softness ended badly. We can also think of the Dassonville who sold what became La Blanche Porte to the Legrand—two young law graduates.⁴ And there were all those who sank into the ranks of the working-class, or failed and never recovered. The Destombes siblings encountered in Chap. 3 did not become wealthy entrepreneurs, despite their ancient lineage. The roofer Pierre-François never surfaced in any of my databases and presumably remained a tradesman all his life. Destombes-Leplat and Destombes-Corset were down to giving work to five weavers in 1840; Destombes-Dervaux was never taxed for more. None were listed in the tax register after 1857, and Destombes-Dervaux was a spooler when he died in 1862.⁵ Destombes-Corset was a roofer in 1825 and a landlord at the birth of his last child in 1837.⁶ Fleurisse Bouchart, who had married Victoire Destombes, was a wool-sorter in 1820, a *fabricant* and wool-comber, giving work to some 80 people before he went bankrupt in 1847. He bounced back quickly, and was enumerated as a *fabricant*, alongside the four sons living with him in the 1851 census. He was giving work to 30 weavers in 1852, but disappeared from the tax rolls after 1854.⁷ In 1855, his son Jean, *fabricant*, married a hatter's daughter, whose two witnesses were her uncles, both *ouvriers en laine* (workers in wool). At his death in 1871, Fleurisse was without occupation. His son Ferdinand, who reported the death, was a traveling salesman.⁸ Fleurisse was also the uncle of Gustave Bouchart whom we met in Chap. 6, who brought 100,000 Fr into his union with the equally well-endowed Camille Dassonville—and who left her an impoverished

widow needing the assistance of her relatives to open a haberdashery in 1889. Bouchart-Dassonville was only listed in the 1865–1881 tax rolls.⁹ The normal fate of a nineteenth-century manufacturing firm was not to become the support of a dynasty, but to disappear within 10–15 years, if not sooner. Even those who eventually succeeded may have come close to failing. Gaston Motte mentions Floris Lorthiois, whose fortune fluctuated and who had to rebuild more than once (something the congratulatory Lorthiois commemorative books do not mention).¹⁰ The perceptive Motte rhetorically asked in the conclusion of one of his volumes: “For every spectacular success, how many obscure failures, how many firms went without a trace.”¹¹ We could add, for every Motte or Prouvost, how many Destombes or Bouchart? The number of early nineteenth-century manufacturing families who had no or very few descendants visibly in business two generations later is striking (otherwise, the number of textile manufacturers in Tourcoing would have exploded, instead of going merely from 140 in 1840 to a peak of 208 in 1887 and down to 155 in 1911).¹² Industrialists did not succeed because they were dynastic; they became dynastic after they had succeeded. The carefully planned successions did not appear until the later part of the nineteenth-century, once well-capitalized and profitable firms had become assets worth preserving: firms bred dynasties, not the other way around. But as we have seen, not all fathers planned their successions—many let the widows and heirs sort it out by themselves, suggesting a rather weak dynastic sense, and those firms did not do worse than the others.

Lineages were a key component of success because they created horizontal networks, and networks were indispensable: the age had no pity for isolated individuals, said Gaston Motte.¹³ Schumpeter’s archetypal entrepreneur, product of his own will, would not have lasted very long here. Family networks came to the rescue of those who floundered. Pouchain and Daumas present us with the case of Auguste Lepoutre, who would have gone bankrupt if his brother-in-law Charles Tiberghien had not loaned him 800,000 Fr to keep him afloat, money he borrowed from two widows.¹⁴ Motte-Bossut similarly rescued his brother Etienne, who had no head for business. Pélagie Delobel was rescued by her sons.¹⁵ Whether this behavior was dictated by a “family spirit”, and whether this spirit was the consequence of deliberate endogamy, remains to be seen. In days when bankruptcy was punishable by loss of civic rights, fines and even jail (Fleurisse Bouchart received a three-month sentence), a bankruptcy was a stain on the family brand. One could not afford a bankrupt brother or cousin, no

matter how deserving of failure he may have been. Better for all concerned to arrange for the honorable exit of the unlucky or incompetent. This willingness to rescue family members was therefore not entirely disinterested. As for endogamy, it was accidental as much as planned. Marrying within one's social group or one's parish is a very common practice in western societies. In a relatively small geographic area, like Roubaix, Tourcoing and Armentières, where the in-migration of middling sorts people had been limited, all the better families had married each other several times over by the beginning of the nineteenth-century, and manufacturers were inevitably all cousins to some degree. In addition, a cousin marriage is not necessarily proof of matrimonial strategies, and may simply reflect the fact the young people have been long acquainted with each other.

Economic, and even political instability (a recurrent problem in nineteenth-century France), and the fragility of success were good reasons to develop a strong work ethic, and made the husband-and-wife collaboration a necessity. Leisure might at some future point be a proof of success. In the meantime, it undermined the household's ability to shelter and feed its members, establish the children and provide for old age. All members had to pull their weight if the family was going to have a chance of surviving. The *arrondissement's* industrious middle-class was spurred by the same fear that drove the late eighteenth—and nineteenth-century English middling sorts. They too felt highly vulnerable to reversal of fortunes; they witnessed the failure of too many Destombes or Boucharts to become complacent. They too faced a world that “demanded an almost inhuman level of self-discipline from those who would profit from it—while offering no sure formula for success.”¹⁶ This work ethic became second nature, and generated what Nicola Phillips called, in the case of England, “a world of co-dependency rather than patriarchy.”¹⁷ The middling sort could not succeed without the active participation, in some form or another, of its women in the family economy. The spectre of failure kept even the very successful from abandoning their time-honored frugality and industriousness. It was likely this same fear of being swept aside by social unrest or political turmoil that incited some industrialists to construct the *patron du Nord* archetype.

The archetype obscured past and present practices, generated a fair amount of qualitative sources and simultaneously shaped collective memory. History and social memory can be viewed as antithetical.¹⁸ Here, the boundary between the two is not so obvious. Collective memory bled into the historical narrative, especially as a number of regional history volumes have been written by industrial family descendants, and their reading of

the sources has been influenced by family lore. As they are members of those families, their narratives in turn inflect social memory. History and collective memory have been mutually constitutive—and a reflection of their contemporary socio-economic landscape. The nineteenth-century was too busy surviving to be particularly self-reflective; the siege mentality of the mid-twentieth century industrialists produced quasi-hegemonic masculinist and dynastic discourses; women reappeared under the pen of historians of the 1980s and later, at the time when those firms were closing one after the other, and the last scions of the dynasties were moving into other activities. The discourse that had so effectively veiled women for most of the twentieth century was no longer necessary.

NOTES

1. Annuaire Ravet-Anceau, 1910.
2. Daumas, “Deux modèles de capitalisme familial,” 179–206.
3. Wiscart, *Au temps des grands liniers*, 306.
4. Leblan, *Histoire de la Blanche Porte*, 43.
5. AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C 2, 1840; Fichier des entreprises, 7F3 A-G.
6. ADN, Tourcoing État civil on line.
7. AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C3, 1852; Fichier des entreprises, 7F3B; 1851 census, F1A 4–5.
8. ADN, Tourcoing Etat civil on line.
9. AMTg, Fichier des entreprises, 7F3 B&F.
10. G. Motte, *Les Motte; étude de la descendance Motte-Clarisse*, 49.
11. G. Motte, *Les Motte; étude de la descendance Motte-Clarisse*, 139.
12. See Table B10 in Appendix B.
13. G. Motte, *Les Motte; étude de la descendance Motte-Clarisse*, 139.
14. Pouchain, *Maîtres du Nord*, 84–85; Daumas, “Deux modèles de capitalisme familial,” 185.
15. Petit, Grislain, Leblan, *La Redoute*, 61.
16. Hunt, *The Middling Sorts*, 217.
17. Philip, *Women in Business*, 5.
18. Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, 12–13 and 22–23.

APPENDIX A: SOURCES AND METHOD

QUALITATIVE SOURCES

This study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative sources. The bulk of the qualitative sources consists of pre-1950 descriptions or analyses: local and family histories, sociological or economic studies, commemorative material, correspondence and genealogies. A significant proportion is only available locally, some at the Archives départementales du Nord, and most at the Bibliothèque municipale de Lille, whose local history collection is second to none (I provide those sources' call numbers in the bibliography). Produced by members of the local elite proud of their region or by industrial families desirous to control their image, these sources collectively strove to construct the region's identity, and they describe a world of active men and pious women. This material has subsequently been used by twentieth century historians of the region's middle-class women (Bonnie Smith) and the industrial middle-class (Hirsch, Pouchain, Bonte, Daumas, but also David Landes), some of whom (Pouchain and Bonte) are descendants of the industrial families they describe.

QUANTITATIVE SOURCES

These form the backbone of this study: trade or town directories, censuses, tax registers and finally partnership regulation. Censuses and tax registers are not available for Lille, whose archives were destroyed by fire in 1916.

*Town or Trades Directories (Tables B6, B7, B8 and B9
in Appendix B)*

The first series of town directories (*Almanachs du commerce*) was published by the printer Vanackère and by his widow between 1829 and 1857. The second series (still being published) was the *Annuaire de l'arrondissement*, begun by the printer Ravet-Anceau in 1852. Initially, Ravet-Anceau only covered Lille; they gradually added the major cities in the arrondissement to finally include all municipalities. The directories include four main sections. The first provides general information on the *département* and arrondissements: its political, administrative, military, educational and religious structure, the names of personnel and a few statistics. Then comes a section listing businesses regrouped by categories, another listing the main residents (and businesses) in each street, and finally, an alphabetical list of all the people mentioned in the first two sections, with their address. Towards the end of the century, the directories began to carry advertising.

The town directories provide us with a long-range overview of the evolution of trade and industry, but are not without serious problems. The first is that of completeness. Both publishers claimed they canvassed the entire town to identify businesses, but still asked readers to signal errors and omissions.¹ The figures one can calculate from the two sources also do not mesh seamlessly. Vanackère and Ravet-Anceau both published a directory in 1855; Vanackère listed 4,047 businesses, and Ravet-Anceau, 4,331. Secondly, we do not know why the publishers decided to include certain categories of activities and not others—and they were not consistent from one directory to the next. The way the various occupations were regrouped was not consistent over time either. A cotton spinner might be listed under “cotton, spinners, weavers and traders” one year, and “spinners, wool, cotton and flax” the next. One can only compare broad categories like “manufacture and wholesale trade” over the whole time.

The directories' handling of women is problematic in its own right. They depress the number of women-headed businesses, because they normally provide a first name or courtesy title only for women (Mlle, Dame, Veuve). Men are normally listed under their last name only. It is almost certain that some additional women hid behind the last-names-only entries: some individuals listed without indication of sex in the selected years appear as females in the preceding and following years. Not infrequently, one also comes across a business under a last name alone one knows from other sources to be run that year by a woman. It is also clear, then, that in their earlier years in business, the publishers were more likely to masculinize women and to

neglect typically female businesses (dressmaking, seamstressing, laundering, etc.). Directories, in short, provide us with a minimum number of females in businesses. Women's visibility increases with time in both series, as both publishers improved the quality of their databases, and corrected errors. The growing proportions of women are thus part source artifact and part reflection of reality. As a consequence, one cannot build a single time series with the data from both directories, as it would create the false impression the proportion of female-run businesses dropped precipitously at mid-century when the *Annuaire* replaced the *Almanach*.

By the twentieth century, the number of entries in Ravet-Anceau is above 12,000, and collecting data became increasingly tricky. Businesspeople began to pay to get more noticeable mentions (larger fonts, bold characters, but also advertising boxes), which makes the pages visually confusing, and counting heads without missing any or counting any twice difficult. The range of businesses also increased very significantly, on account of the emergence and development of commission agencies, brokerage offices, insurance agencies, all sorts of professional and expert bureaux, private security services, publicity agents, and representatives of all kinds, as well as branches of businesses headquartered elsewhere. The number of women in those new services was statistically insignificant. For all practical purposes, women were found in retail, and in locally headquartered general trading-houses and manufacturing.

I counted the number of people, broken down by assumed sex and marital status, in each business category listed in the directories every ten years beginning in 1830. Starting in 1900, to minimize errors and keep the collecting of data manageable, I limited myself to the types of manufactures found through most of the nineteenth-century as well as general trading-houses, and left out the new sorts of business mentioned in the previous paragraph. The businesses kept include all processors of local natural commodities, such as brewers, distillers, oil pressers, brick-makers or tanners; all textile and garment producers; all manufacturers of machines or supplies for the above manufacturers (soap and potash makers, for instance). To make comparisons between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries possible, I then extended this category back to 1860. We therefore have three distinct series:

Vanackère 1830, 1840 and 1850—all businesses.

Ravet-Anceau 1860, 1870, 1880 and 1890—all businesses.

Ravet-Anceau 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900 and 1910—all retail; traditional trades and manufactures.

Censuses

Censuses are available for Tourcoing. I used the 1821–1836 population table and the 1851, 1886 and 1911 censuses. I used a one-in-three systematic sample for 1821, one-in-five for 1851 and 1886 and one-in-twenty for 1911; In addition, I collected all the retailers in the 1851 census, all the retailers in canton Nord for 1886, and all the retailers in the urban area of canton Nord in 1911 in order to link them with the tax records (see below), as well as all the manufacturers, *négociants* and *propriétaires* in 1851, 1886 and 1911 (a total of ten separate databases).

Population tables listed the entire population for a base year (in this case 1821), and provided information about age, marital status, nationality and occupation. Women are always listed under their maiden name, even when married. Births and new arrivals were interpolated, and deaths and departures noted on a yearly basis. The table was not very good with women's—and especially married women's occupations. This information was systematically collected in only one section of the town. In the others, women had no occupation, or all family members were given the occupation of the head, babies included. Fortunately, as the town was quartered like a pie for census purposes, the one section that systematically lists women's employment is reasonably representative of the whole.

In 1851, census takers were expected to ascertain the means of support of *all* the people they listed. They seem to have been conscientious. Women are thus listed as having no occupation or being housekeeper, having the same occupation as their husbands (listed as *ibid.*), or having their own occupation. Nonetheless, the census takers could only report the information people were willing to give them, and if one individual preferred to be a *rentière* rather than a manufacturer, there was nothing they could do about it. In 1886 and 1911, women who assisted their husbands were to be reported as having no occupation, and the census takers followed instructions. They only give occupation for single or widowed women and married women carrying an activity independently of their husbands. In 1851, about 20% of the women assisted their husbands (and more in retail). A similar proportion had an occupation of their own (I included wives of factory workers listed as factory workers among the women who had their own occupation). Through the century, the proportion of women with their own occupation remained almost unchanged. This suggests that the proportion of women helping their husbands probably did not change very much either, and that one in five economically

Table A1 Proportion of married women reporting an occupation in Tourcoing, 1796–1911

	1796	1821	1851	1886	1911
Numbers (<i>sampled</i>)	252	357	837	901	707
Did not report an occupation	10 %	64 %	64 %	80 %	76 %
Reported the same occupation as their husband	41 %	19 %	18 %	0	1.4 %
Reported an occupation separate from their husband	49 %	17 %	18 %	20 %	22.6 %

Source: AMTg, Population table 1821–36, F1D 1–4; 1796 census, F1A1; 1851 census, F1A4-5; 1886 census, F1A 12–17; 1911 census F1A 39–45

active married women had been erased from the picture by administrative decision.

The year 1911 introduced new useful information: whom a person worked for. One can thus distinguish between seamstresses working for wages, those working *à la journée* (hiring themselves by the day and working at their customer’s home) and independent craftswomen. On the other hand, this census no longer gives marital status; wives can be inferred from the context (appropriate ages; presence of children of the right age), but the marital status of female heads cannot always be ascertained. In many cases, married women are listed under their husband’s and not their maiden name, which reflects another shift in attitudes.

The retail designations are not as precise as one might wish. Some are very specific: milk merchant, huckster, for instance; too many people however are merely listed as “*marchand*” or “*marchande*” and for all we know, could even be wholesalers. This makes distributing retailers into categories according to the type of goods sold impossible (except in the case of the liquor trade).

Patentes or Business Taxes (Table B10 in Appendix B)

Since the Revolution, people in trade (*commerçants*) were required to obtain a yearly *patente*, a combination trade license and business tax, from the municipality where they plied their trade.² People in trade included all those who purchased goods or material to resell as is, or after transforming them. Under the law, manufacturers were traders—but craftspeople working on order or transforming the customers’ material were not. The exact amount of the tax varied, first with the classification of occupations

and the size of the municipality. All retail and wholesale trades were listed in Table A (manufacturing was in Tables C and D), itself subdivided in eight classes; class 1 and 2 covered the wholesalers (*marchands en gros* et en *demi-gros*).

Municipalities were required to keep a yearly list of all the *patentes*, called *matrice de patentes*, which was combined with the property tax register. The *matrice* are organized by streets, and indicate name, address, occupation of owner(s), address and type of business, size of business if applicable, name and address of hired manager, *patente* category and amount paid. In the case of a partnership, the main partner paid the full *patente*, and the associates paid a reduced rate. Married women were liable to the *patentes*, like everyone else. Tax records strove to be complete and accurate, and identify clearly women taxpayers by their maiden *and* married name *and* marital status. Céline Dupont, femme Leplat, was married. Colette Debrabandière, veuve Desurmont, no longer was.

Unfortunately, two factors reduce the visibility of married people in the register. First, when a husband and a wife were both liable to a separate *patente*, the couple was required to pay only the more expensive of the two. If it was the husband's, the wife did not appear in the book. Second, husbands often took the *patente* in their name anyway, and not all cases of such appropriation were as glaring as the one of the male wool-sorter who took a dressmaking *patente*! Only women married under separation of property were required to take a *patente* in their own name, no matter what. But this was an uncommon type of marriage contract. Although successive ministerial decisions and legislations exempted growing numbers of people from payment of a *patente*, this does not seem to have affected the urban retail trades.

The Tourcoing *matrices de patentes* have survived for every year starting with 1852. The year 1840 has also survived, and there are some partial lists (mostly manufacturers) for previous years. The Tourcoing municipal archives have produced an enumeration of *patente* holders by street (*Fichier des entreprises* F7F3A to 7F3G). The list was put together by different people (different handwriting) and as it displays some inconsistencies, I chose to use the data I personally collected, and to use the *fichier* as a supplement. I collected all the manufacturers for 1840, 1852 and every subsequent 5 years to 1897 and then 1901, 1906 and 1911.³ I collected the data on all retailers (Table A, class 3 to 8 of the *matrice de patentes*) for 1852, 1853, 1857 and 1862 (years zero, one, five and ten). In 1886 and 1911, however there was a much greater number of them, and I limited myself to the Tourcoing Nord-agglomeration—that is, to the

urban part of the municipality which was part of the canton of Tourcoing Nord (a canton was an administrative subdivision), to which I added the entire Grand Place (only one of its four sides was in canton Nord), and both sides of the streets forming the boundary between canton Nord and canton Sud. The boundary between the two cantons cuts across the center of town (Grand Place). Canton Nord is slightly smaller than canton Sud, and slightly poorer; in other respects it seems undistinguishable from canton Sud. This produced a list of 634 retailers' names for 1852, 585 for 1886 and 1183 for 1911. I also collected the data for 1886, 1887, 1892 and 1897. The major drawback of this approach, of course, is that one cannot trace retailers who moved from one end of the city to the other. I did not follow the 1911 retailers over time on account of the war (Lille was occupied in October 1914).

The *patente* data was then linked with the lists of retailers collected from the 1851, 1886 and 1911 censuses. As both the *patente* registers and the censuses are organized by street, I first linked the retailers by street. Then, I tried linking the leftovers by name, which allowed me to catch the ones who had moved; Finally, by comparing the residual lists, I was able to identify widows who succeeded their husbands, and children who took over from their parents (most married men are identified in the *patentes* by their last name, a hyphen, then their wife's last name, which means even sons-in-law and daughters who take over can be identified). I treated widows and children as equivalent to the original owner when calculating persistence. Occasionally, the *patente* register indicates that a taxpayer has taken a store out of town, or died. Because those indications are not systematic, I treated all those people as non-persistent, although logically they should be taken out of persistence calculations.

Partnership Registration (Tables B3 and B4 in Appendix B)

People could pool their resources to create firms, combining capital, equipment, skills or intellectual property like patents. They could join in unlimited liability, simple partnerships (*sociétés en nom collectif*), in *sociétés en commandites* (unlimited liability applied only to the managing partner(s) or *commandités*; the limited-liability partners or *commanditaires* were prohibited from getting involved in the running of the business, under penalty of losing their protection). Joint-stock companies (*sociétés anonymes*) required special permission from the government before 1867, permission stingily granted only to ventures in the public interest that could not raise adequate capital otherwise, such as canals and railroads. In the meantime,

would-be partners could opt for a *commandite par action*, which allowed limited partners to sell their interest in the firm with the permission of the other partners. *Sociétés à responsabilité limitée* (a private company limited by shares in the UK, and limited-liability company in the USA) did not exist until 1925.

By law, combinations of individuals for the purpose of trade and manufacture had to be registered with the local Tribunal de commerce (a body composed of judges elected among *commerçants*, as defined by the commercial code, and which had jurisdiction over conflicts among *commerçants*). Simple partnerships and *commandites* were registered where the partners' business was located. Joint-stock companies (*sociétés anonymes*) registered in all jurisdictions where they conducted business. The key elements of the articles of association or statutes also had to be published in local newspapers which published government and legal notices (*annonces légales*). Those included name, address and occupation and in the case of females, marital status, of the parties, purpose and duration of the partnership, distribution of profits and losses and identification of partners with signature. *Commanditaires* did not have to be identified by name. Dissolutions and modifications to the statutes similarly had to be registered and publicized. The purpose of this paperwork was obviously to ensure transparency in business matters. Modifications requiring notifications included the resignation or addition of a partner, a change in their power (acquiring the signature, for instance) and extension of the partnership. Joint-stock companies had to signal changes of direction, increases or decreases of capital, changes of address of headquarters and any other change that could affect other people's desire or ability to do business with them.

Partners could have a lawyer (*notaire*) draft their articles of association or spare the expense and produce the document themselves (*sous seing privé*). The private agreements usually did not contain more information than the minimum required by law. Articles drafted by lawyers were more detailed and became even more so as the century progressed. Lawyers wanted to plan for all contingencies: excessive losses, disagreements among the partners, death of a partner, with or without a spouse, with or without children, the right to bring children into the partnership as they came of age, conditions of their joining, and so on. They also increasingly detailed the origin of the assets put in common. The wordier articles of association thus provide us with a glimpse into the way the firm was managed and the partners interacted.

Initially, the Lille Tribunal de commerce served the entire arrondissement. Tourcoing and its hinterland were detached in 1870. I collected all notices of associations (constitutions, modifications, dissolutions, etc.) operating in Tourcoing or involving at least one partner residing in Tourcoing between 1800 and 1910 (1906 and 1908 are missing/not accessible, and no partnership was registered before 1800). I also collected all notices for Lille between 1790, when the registers start, and 1870, and then the notices every five years to 1910. I also collected separately interesting cases of businesses involving women in other localities served by those two tribunals.

Notarial Records

Notaires are ministerial officers whose function is to assist people in the drawing-up of private documents, and ensuring that they are registered and fees and tax paid if required. They are supposed to turn over their records to the local *archives départementales* after 100 years. Lille *notaires* did so; the Tourcoing ones did not. I was hoping that notarial records would contain information relating to the conduct of businesses, such as purchases of equipment or contracts for supplies, which would flesh out the picture of the Lille business landscape. I selected two notarial offices with a reasonably large and diversified clientele: Me Lardinoy and his successors Gruloy and Wesquin and Me Coustenoble and his successor Me Lefebvre. I collected all the transactions for two years every twenty years (1809–1810, 1829–1830, 1849–1850, 1869–1870 and 1889–1890). The data did not yield what I was looking for, consisting almost entirely of marriage contracts, wills, post-mortem inventory and estate settlements, partnerships, and transactions involving real estate (sales, leases, mortgages). The partnership documents were identical to those at the Tribunal de commerce. Otherwise, there was very little to shed light on the conduct of businesses in those documents, except for post-mortem inventories. They were, however, invaluable to get a sense of the standards of living, the material culture and evolution of habitat (from inventories) and personal relationships (from marriage contracts and estate settlements). The large number of real-estate transactions was also intriguing—and as the surface area of Lille quadrupled after its enlargement in the 1850s, I thought that the ensuing construction boom may have generated another kind of business activity (the southern sections of the city walls were demolished and the land auctioned off as building sites). Did people with resources speculate in real estate? I therefore took two four-year samples from Coustenoble and Lefebvre (1830–1833 and 1871–1874

(in the latter, I wanted to skip the war of 1870) to see what happened. The results were not promising enough to continue in that direction (the people in business were not the most active on the property market) and add the turn of the twentieth century to the project. The additional effort would have been disproportionate to results which would have been peripheral to my topic anyway. The analysis of the notarial samples however showed very clearly that there were different middle classes in Lille, and that those living off their means not only followed different economic strategies from those in larger businesses, but that the two groups constituted separate social pillars. This turned out to be pertinent for my study.

Demographic Data

Lastly, I used the information contained in the civil registers of births, marriages and deaths (started by the new regime in 1792). By law, births and deaths must be registered within three days at the civil registry office of the municipality where the event occurred. Marriages are not valid unless performed in front of a mayor or one of his deputies (religious marriages are not recognized). Consequently, all individuals leave at least two traces in the civil registers. Those are very detailed. Marriage records, for instance, include the name, address, occupation, birth date and place of the brides and grooms, names (including maiden names for the mothers), age, occupation, address of the parents—and their death dates and place if deceased (and in this case, name, address, etc. of the grandparents), as well as the names, ages, occupations, addresses and family relationship of the four witnesses (who at that time had to be male). Everybody is asked to sign, and those who cannot are noted. The books are indexed. If this material is more than 100 years old, it is available online from the relevant *archives départementales*. One can pick a surprisingly large amount of information about social relationships and economic life-history from those sources. When one is not sure where an event occurred, one can turn to genealogical sites (I used Geneanet, which is free), and, assuming the individual in question appears in someone's family tree, use it as a finding aid to the official records and then go and check. Interestingly enough, individuals whose business remained in the hands of their descendants and lasted until the later part of the twentieth century can be found in many posted family trees. The family members who did not go or stay in business are much harder to find. Genealogists are clearly biased in favor of the dynasties that have left the strongest marks in social memory.

NOTES

1. “Comme précédemment, nous avons visité en personne toutes les localités qui figurent dans notre recueil, et avons fait sur place toutes les rectifications et adjonctions nécessaires.” (*Annuaire* Ravet-Anceau, 1860).
2. The patente was created by a law of 6 Fructidor an IV. The most important texts relating to this tax are the laws of premier Brumaire an VII, 25 avril 1844, 26 Juillet 1860 and 15 juillet 1880.
3. Originally, this study was to stop in 1887. When I decided to extend it to the War I, I shifted the years in order to have *patente* data from the same year as the census.

APPENDIX B: STATISTICS

Table B1 Population Lille arrondissement and selected towns, 1789–1910

Year	1789	1806	1821	1836	1846	1851	1856	1866	1876	1886	1896	1906	1911
Arrondissement		236,079	261,949	317,087	356,795	371,000	404,172	523,211	591,134	680,951	785,066	821,205	855,721
Armentières	8,419	7,542	7,681	6,512	7,959	8,664	10,104	15,579	25,000	28,368	28,638	28,613	28,625
Roubaix	8,547	8,724	12,170	19,455	31,039	34,698	39,445	52,037	83,661	100,299	124,447	121,115	122,723
Tourcoing	12,184	11,999	14,661	19,966	26,834	26,331	29,646	38,262	48,634	57,621	73,353	81,671	82,644
Lille and suburbs annexed in 1858		68,797	72,779	85,265	95,781	100,501	130,000	154,749	162,775	188,272	216,276	205,602	217,807
Lille before 1858		61,464	64,291	72,005	75,430	75,795							
Esquermes		1,308	1,475	1,645	2,659	3,618							
Fives		956	1,147	1,563	2,792	3,127							
Moulins				3,120	4,417	4,875							
Wazemmes		5,069	5,866	6,932	10,483	13,086							

Source: Bottin, *Annuaire statistique*, 1806, 1815, 1828; Demeunynck et Devaux, *Annuaire statistique*, 1832; Vanaeckere, *Almanach du commerce*, 1830, 1850, 1850, 1855; Ravet-Anceau, *Annuaire*, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910
Censuses 1800–1890: http://www.insee.fr/fr/service/bibliothèque/tableaux_sgf/tableaux.asp?domaine=terr

Table B2 Industries in 1840–45, Lille arrondissement, Nord and France

	France	Nord (department)	Arrondissement de Lille	Nord as % of France	Arrondissement as % of Nord	Arrondissement as % of France
Total population	35,400,486	1,132,980	356,795	3.2	31.5	1.0
N of municipalities where industrial establishments are located	17,047	608	109			
N of industrial establishments	71,497	2,377	911	3.3	38.3	1.3
Total value of <i>patentes</i> (business tax)	4,543,450	406,706	214,379	9.0	52.7	4.7
Value of annual production	4,167,147,000	345,658,791	233,666,477	8.3	67.6	5.6
N of male workers	767,908	74,412	44,896	9.7	60.3	5.8
N of female workers	278,837	17,936	10,551	6.4	58.8	3.8
N of child workers	143,665	14,272	7,347	9.9	51.5	5.1
Total labor force	1,190,410	106,620	62,794	9.0	58.9	5.3
N of steam engines	2,494	581	300	23.3	51.6	12.0
N of looms and frames	311,119	28,679	23,103	9.2	80.6	7.4
N of spindles	5,093,839	763,550	686,338	15.0	89.9	13.5
Average daily male wages	2.07	1.73	2.04	83.6	117.9	98.6
Average daily female wages	1.02	0.86	1.03	84.3	119.8	101.0
Average daily child wages	0.72	0.64	0.59	88.9	92.2	81.9

Source: Statistiques Générales de la France, *Industries en 1840–45*, Imprimerie Nationale, 1847–1852, Tome I: Nord Oriental

Table B3 Lille partnerships, 1790–1911

	SA	SCA	SC	SNC	SNC	% SNC	N of	N male	N female	% female	Male	Female	% male	Female	% female
				including	women	including	partners	SNC	SNC	SNC	partners	partners	partners	partners	partners
				women	women	women	without	partners	partners	partners	signature	signature	signature	signature	signature
1790–1829	0	0	0	277	58	20.9	632	557	75	11.9	34	6.1	12	16.0	
1830–39	4	7	6	176	32	18.2	401	359	42	10.5	27	7.5	6	14.3	
1840–49	2	1	34	236	27	11.4	557	518	39	7.0	12	2.3	4	10.3	
1850–59	0	10	51	301	35	11.6	684	632	52	7.6	26	4.1	0	0.0	
1860–69	8	5	97	424	68	16.0	949	854	95	10.0	25	2.9	14	14.7	
Grand total	14	23	188	1,414	220	15.6	3,223	785	303	9.4	124	15.8	36	11.9	
1870	5	0	8	34	2	5.9	67	65	2	3.0	4	6.2	0	0.0	
1875	2	1	11	35	4	11.4	77	73	4	5.2	2	2.7	0	0.0	
1880	4	1	15	37	8	21.6	82	72	10	12.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	
1885	3	1	9	36	4	11.1	88	82	6	6.8	5	6.1	3	50.0	
1890	4	1	4	45	7	15.6	48	38	10	20.8	1	2.6	3	30.0	
1895	3	0	13	46	3	6.5	98	94	4	4.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	
1900	23	2	14	45	2	4.4	88	84	4	4.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	
1905	25	1	14	50	8	16.0	123	103	10	8.1	3	2.9	1	10.0	
1910 ^a	41	3	19	76	14	18.4	162	140	22	13.6	2	1.4	3	13.6	
1910 ^b	41	3	19	116	48	41.4	242	146	96	39.7	2	1.4	4	4.2	
Total	110	10	107	404	52	12.9	833	751	72	8.6	17	2.3	10	13.9	

Source: ADN, Tribunal de commerce de Lille, Actes de sociétés, 6U2 1790–1910

^aExcluding cafés and taverns

^bIncluding cafés and taverns

Types of partnerships: SA *Société anonyme* or Joint stock company; SC *Société en commandite*-Part or all of capital provided by silent, limited liability partners, forbidden by law from taking any part in management; SCA *Société en commandite par actions*-Silent partners may sell their share with permission of all other partners; SNC *Société en nom collectif*, or simple (unlimited liability) partnership

Table B4 Tourcoing partnerships, 1800–1911

	SA	SC	SCA	SNC	Total	SNC including women	% SNC including women	N male partners SNC	% female partners SNC	Male partners without signature	% male partners without signature	Female partners without signature	% female partners without signature	
1800–29				26	26	4	15.4	61	8	11.6	0	0	1	12.5
1830–39				28	28	7	25.0	60	8	11.8	0	0	0	0
1840–49	5	1	22	28	28	8	36.4	44	13	22.8	1	2.3	4	30.8
1850–59	8	1	46	55	55	5	10.9	44	13	22.8	1	2.3	4	30.8
1860–69	3	41	100	144	144	8	8.0	102	14	12.1	10	9.8	4	28.6
1870–79	1	54	3	120	178	7	5.8	271	15	5.2	7	2.6	5	33.3
1880–89	4	23	2	142	171	21	14.8	291	30	9.3	17	5.8	9	30.0
1890–99	20	45	1	149	215	23	15.4	341	30	8.1	11	3.2	4	13.3
1900–04	11	23	2	87	123	12	13.8	188	22	10.5	1	0.5	1	4.5
1905–11 ^a	20	28	3	97	148	20	20.6	155	24	13.4	1	0.6	3	12.5
Total	59	227	13	817	1,116	115	14.1	1,557	177	10.2	49	3.1	35	19.8

Source: ADN, Tribunal de commerce de Lille, Actes de sociétés, 6U2 1790–1870; Tribunal de commerce de Tourcoing, 6U5 1870–1911

^a1906 not communicable; 1908 missing

Table B5 Business taxpayers' longevity, Tourcoing, 1851–1913

No. of years	Individuals listed in business tax registry between 1852 and 1913 ^a				Wholesale traders	Preparation ^b	Wool-combers etc. ^c	Fabricants and spinners	Integrated factory owners ^d	Specialty shop owners ^e
	N	%	cumulative %	cumulative %						
less than 1 ^f	198	14.1	14.1	20.4	13.9	15.1	11.9	4.5	9.4	
1–4	463	33.0	47.1	57.3	49.2	47.2	41.5	22.4	56.3	
5–9	293	20.9	68.0	79.6	72.2	64.2	57.9	29.9	68.8	
10–14	157	11.2	79.2	90.0	82.7	69.8	72.1	44.8	81.3	
15–19	104	7.4	86.7	96.7	89.1	77.4	80.6	62.7	87.5	
20–29	119	8.5	95.1	98.1	97.4	96.2	92.2	71.6	100.0	
30–39	46	3.3	98.4	100.0	99.2	98.1	97.2	74.6	100.0	
40 and above	22	1.6	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Total	1,402			211	266	75	536	67	32	

Source: AMTg; Fichiers des entreprises 7F3A to 7F3G, 1852–1913.

^aIndividuals listed for the first time in 1913 not included; figures include textile and other industries

^b wool scourers, wool or cotton beaters, pile drivers, pliers, twisters, winders, wool sorters, yarn seizers

^c wool and cotton carders, wool combers, fabric dyers

^d Activités including at least two major processes such as carding or combing and spinning, spinning and weaving, weaving and dyeing, wool combing and manufacturing soap and potash, dyeing and manufacturing chemicals.

^eHosiery (*fabricants de bonneterie*), knitted fabric makers (*fabricants de tricotés*), garment makers, embroiders and makers of braided fabric (*passementiers*)

^fOne mention in registry

^gGrand total includes textile and non-textile business owners

Table B6 Proportion of female-run businesses, Lille, 1831–50

	1831			1840			1850		
	Total	N women	% women	Total	N women	% women	Total	N women	% women
All businesses except alcohol retailers	3,881	389	10.0	4,805	523	10.9	4,439	620	14.0
Bankers, wholesalers and manufacturers	926	68	7.3	1,025	56	5.5	810	34	4.2
Butchers, bakers, and upmarket food stores	240	20	8.3	265	25	9.4	260	27	10.4
Other food retail	405	32	7.9	610	67	11.0	693	86	12.4
Textile and clothing retail	508	73	14.4	696	119	17.1	766	171	22.3
All other retails	358	47	13.1	430	56	13.0	337	36	10.7
Total retails	1,511	172	11.4	2,001	267	13.3	2,056	320	15.6
Tailors, tailoresses and seamstresses	123	43	35.0	210	109	51.9	228	122	53.5
Alcohol trade (beer shops, taverns, cafés, wine shops, inns)		nd		144	47	32.6	483	53	11.0

Source: Vanactere's *Almanachs*, 1830–1850

Table B8 Proportion of selected manufacturing and wholesale businesses run by women, Lille, 1860–90

	1860		1870		1880		1890	
	Total	Women	% women	Total	Women	% women	Total	Women
Selected manufacture and wholesale	963	65	6.7	1,725	138	8.0	1,811	181
Garment manufacture	143	30	21.0	444	88	19.8	691	147
Selected manufacture and wholesale, less garment making	820	35	4.3	1,281	50	3.9	1,120	34
							1,557	134
							10.0	8.6
							21.3	22.3
							3.0	3.9

Source: Ravet-Anceau, *Annuaire*, 1860–1890

Table B9 Proportion of selected manufacturing and wholesale businesses run by women, Lille, 1900–25

	1900			1910			1925		
	Total	Women	% Women	Total	Women	% Women	Total	Women	% Women
Selected manufacture and wholesale	1,053	60	5.7	1,629	138	8.5	1,640	97	5.9
Garment manufacture	167	25	15.0	413	96	23.2	164	51	31.1
Selected manufacture and wholesale, less garment making	886	35	4.0	1,216	42	3.5	1,476	46	3.1
Tailors/tailoresses/seamstresses/milliners	574	356	62.0	503	252	50.1	394	182	46.2
All retail	5,603	948	16.9	5,625	833	14.8	5,394	779	14.4
Baker/butcher	793	53	6.7	733	44	6.0	676	28	4.1
Other food	1,978	410	20.7	1,844	346	18.8	1,587	295	18.6
Textile and clothing	1,334	370	27.7	1,330	333	25.0	1,221	294	24.1
Other goods	1,498	115	7.7	1,718	110	6.4	1,910	162	8.5
Alcohol	3,080	438	14.2	3,275	453	13.8	3,018	401	13.3

Source: Ravet-Anceau, *Annuaire*, 1900–1925

Table B10 Proportion of female-run businesses, Tourcoing, 1814–1911

	<i>All textile businesses</i>				<i>All manufacturers</i>			
	Numbers		% women		Numbers		% women	
	Spinning (out-putters and twisters)	Preparatory finishing processes ^a	Combination nations ^b	Total number of women	Spinning (out-putters and twisters)	Preparatory finishing processes ^a	Combination nations ^b	Total number of women
1814 ^c								
1818 ^d	21	65	17	17	2		11.8	
1820 ^e	15	87	6	108	11	6.7	7.7	14.3
1830	32				18.8			16.7
1833 ^f	26	61	15	154	15	15.4	3.8	13.3
1840	37	74	6	140	14	8.1	10.8	16.7
1852	50	53	15	136	8	6.0	3.8	13.3
1857	55	43	21	134	6	1.8	4.7	6.7
1862	59	43	32	149	12	6.8	0.0	20.0
1867	54	41	49	155	12	3.7	7.3	0.0
1872	52	39	44	151	15	7.7	2.6	0.0
1877	47	45	76	181	17	8.5	4.4	7.7
1882	43	40	78	178	20	14.0	0.0	9.9
1887	56	61	70	208	22	5.4	4.9	13.2
1892	42	51	78	195	21	7.1	5.9	17.6
1897	49	49	50	174	16	6.1	4.1	17.9
			26	26	16	6.1	4.1	20.0
			173	173	19	11.0	9.7	3.8
			169	169	13	7.7	8.7	10.0
			164	164	11	6.7	5.6	5.9
			185	185	14	7.6	9.5	4.5
			200	200	18	9.0	15.6	8.1
			194	194	17	8.8	14.3	0.0
			232	232	22	9.5	22.7	0.0
			230	230	27	11.7	13.2	7.7
			223	223	25	11.2	14.1	9.4
			214	214	21	9.8	14.3	17.6
			218	218	20	9.2	17.9	28.6
			218	218	20	9.2	4.2	10.6
			218	218	20	9.2	3.8	4.2

1901	37	44	60	33	174	16	2.7	6.8	16.7	6.1	9.2	237	22	9.3
1906	39	45	50	24	158	16	5.1	13.3	14.0	4.2	10.1	231	20	8.7
1911	36	42	36	41	155	16	11.1	2.4	19.4	9.8	10.3	204	23	11.3

Source: AMTg, Patentes registers, G1C1-60, 1814–1911; Liste des filateurs, marchands peigneurs et fabricants au 27/2/1833, 7F1 C12

^aTwisting, seizing, washing, combing, carding, dyeing, fulling, etc.

^bBusinesses combining two or more phases of the manufacturing process, or manufacturing and trading

^cSpinners and out-putters only (*filateurs et fabricants*)

^dMerchant combers, and out-putters providing work to more than five weavers only (*marchands peigneurs et fabricants a plus de 5 métiers*)

^eSpinners and out-putters only (*filateurs et fabricants*)

^fFrom report to the *prefet* dated 27/2/1833. Includes spinners, out-putters and merchant-combers (*filateurs, maîtres peigneurs et fabricants*)

Table B11 Distribution of Lille decedents, by social class, 1821–1910^a

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Years of death</i>					
	1821	1856–58	1873–75	1891–93	1908–10	
Upper middle classes	94	293	347	476	415	
<i>Propriétaires-rentiers</i> (living off their means)						
Manufacturers	6	20	46	55	48	
<i>Négociants</i> (merchant-traders)	17	52	92	98	160	
All	123	404	587	769	801	
Lower middle classes	246	191	485	677	864	
Craftspersons	61	177	199	263	366	
Food retailers	80	247	233	275	408	
Other retailers	387	1,616	1,510	2,231	2,665	
All	651	2,020	2,097	3,000	3,466	
All middle classes	1,626	4,947	6,465	8,240	8,688	
All social classes						
Craftspersons and retailers as % of all classes	23.8	32.7	23.4	27.1	30.7	
Upper-middle classes as % of all classes	7.6	8.2	9.1	9.3	9.2	
<i>Propriétaires</i> as % of upper-middle class	76.4	72.5	59.1	61.9	51.8	
<i>Propriétaires</i> as % of all middle classes	14.4	14.5	16.5	15.9	12.0	
Manufacturers as % of upper-middle class	4.9	5.0	7.8	7.2	6.0	
<i>Négociants</i> as % of upper-middle class	13.8	12.9	15.7	12.7	20.0	

Source: Codaccioni, *De l'inégalité sociale*, pp. 65, 74, 110, 126, 171, 189, 332; Codaccioni, "Lille, 1850–1914", p. 160

^aFemale decedents are listed in their husband's occupational category

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ADP-de-C—Archives départementales du Pas-de-Calais (Arras).
AML—Archives municipales de Lille.
AMTg—Archives municipales de Tourcoing.
AFC—Archives des facultés catholiques de Lille.
AEV—Archive des établissements Vrau (Lille).
BN—Bibliothèque nationale (Paris).

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 AMTg, Liste des filateurs, marchands peigneurs et fabricants au 27/2/1833, 7F1 C12.
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 AMTg, Matrices de patentes, G1C 1–60, 1816–1911.
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