Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France

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A nobility, at least in the estimation of its members, is an elite that draws cohesion from a historical sense of family achievements and glories. For those with a scarcity of ancestral magnificence or accomplishments there was more likely to be an exaltation of a genteel way of life sustained by the family for generations. Since the telling of family history is one of the most ancient forms of historical discourse, it may appear to be a primitive, almost childlike approach to the past. When recounted by nineteenth-century French nobles, it was also a narrative about a family name transferred in the male line, with much less attention to the female descent. Properly conceived, family history must establish whether this assumed and theoretical solidarity with blood relatives (“family spirit”) in fact existed in tangible forms, particularly economic.

The historian of French nobles cannot limit his curiosity to a sympathetic hearing of stylized family chronicles. Can we speak with any precision about the family wealth over time rather than the worth of individuals? Was the lineage rising in the social hierarchy or sliding down? Can we speak of family changes in religious, political, or professional attitudes? Any investigator faces a host of difficulties that are themselves conditioned by historical events, as in the case of those nobles whose property was confiscated and sold during the 1790s. Robert Forster’s work on the Saulx-Tavanes family from Burgundy and the Depont family from La Rochelle has shown the wealth of insight that can be drawn from a fully elaborated study.\textsuperscript{1} To establish what is the worth of a family at different moments in the nineteenth century, and what the outstanding claims of family members on the patrimony, is the first step towards setting the markers of success, but it is extremely difficult to do so. Information is almost always fragmentary about the varied forms of income and revenue, the costs of education, the liabilities for medical care or pensions, the level of charitable dona-
tions, the wages of servants, the burdens of living in the style expected by other nobles, and so forth.

These difficulties are evident in the following sketches of the wealth and strategies for its management followed by three families in the nineteenth century. Those “plans” to maximize prosperity, prestige, influence, and social authority of family members were, in each case, deflected or disrupted by unforeseen disasters: in one case by scandal, in another by want of heirs, and in the third by the July Revolution. All three can inform us about getting and keeping a foothold in the national and local elites in France. First are the Choiseul-Praslings, the wealthiest branch of the house of Choiseul, with its ancient and aristocratic attachments to the court. They traversed the Revolution with an adroit avoidance of serious economic loss. Second are the Raigecourts, an old, pious, wealthy family of Lorraine that only “arrived” at court in the 1780s with a marriage to a favorite lady-in-waiting of Mme Elisabeth de France, the devout, spinster sister of Louis XVI. The Raigecourts suffered grievously from Revolutionary confiscations and exactions. In 1789 the third family was respectable, but of obscure provincial noblesse, without court connections, and with only a modest income by Versailles standards. Their patrimony was not confiscated during the Revolution. Thanks to the brilliant powers of organization and conciliation of the head of the family, Joseph de Villèle, by 1830 he was a comte, peer of France, and member of the Order of the Holy Spirit. A number of his relatives and friends were to profit from his political rise by being named to a variety of local and national posts, most of which they lost after 1830. Each family moved along a different trajectory within the universe of noble aspirations, but each exemplified facets of noble life.

THE CHOISEUL-PRASLINGS

The Choiseul-Praslin family was but one of several branches of that illustrious and ancient house in the nineteenth century, but it was the richest. Its structure and wealth are harder to discern than the Raigecourt family’s because of the numerous collateral branches, which complicated all estimates of worth at any given time. There were larger numbers of males heading new collateral lines, and more offspring. Antoine-César, at the twenty-third degree, was born in 1756 and became a colonel in the Lorraine infantry regiment and a maréchal de camp in 1788. He represented the nobility at the Estates General in 1789, when he sat as a deputy for the Maine sénechaussée. However, by accommodation with the course of Revolutionary politics and not emigrating, he successfully safeguarded his fortune. His son studied at the Ecole polytechnique in the year IV of the Republic, entered the school of military engineering in the year VII, and was a sapper lieutenant by the
The extent of the family properties is revealed by the partage of the landed properties of Antoine-César’s father, Renaud-César-Louis, which took place on 30 thermidor v (12 July 1797). His marriage contract had been one of communauté des biens. The properties were worth over 12 million livres (see table 5). Such a division represented one of the rare occasions in each generation when an attempt was made to put a cash value on the family properties with a view to bequests. The documentation was so considerable that the notary bound it into a separate volume complete with an alphabetical index: “H: Habitation à Saint Domingue,” (bought in 1765 for 150,000 livres), and so on. Particles were dropped from the Choiseul-Praslin family signatures, although Amédée d’Hautefort used his. The table drawn up to show the claims on the estate according to the different customary laws shows the spread of the properties owned in France (see table 5). It also revived a flicker of Old Regime legal practice, since Antoine-César, normally resident at Auteuil, claimed that the entailments (substitutions) set up in his favor by his father remained valid, for his father had died on 5 December 1791, while the abolition of that legal procedure had taken

### Table 5. The Landed Succession of Renaud-César-Louis de Choiseul-Praslin (1735–1791), 1797 (30 thermidor V)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customary Law Governing the Properties</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Fortune</th>
<th>Values in Livres*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>1,922,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melun</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>3,288,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjou</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1,073,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>2,255,966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touraine</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>737,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poitou</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>875,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourgogne</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>493,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auxerre</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>486,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nivernais</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>1,136,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,270,846</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The notaries observed that 5 deniers (1) in these calculations of over 12 million livres had been “perdu par les fractions.” Numbers are rounded to the nearest livre.

Source: MC LVIII 597(bis): “Tableau des droits actifs de chacune des parties dans chacune des diverses coutumes qui regissent les biens.”
place according to decrees of 25 October and 14 November 1792. In April 1791 his father had bought up church lands of the former Abbey of Our Lady of Evron, so that the partage reflected advantages to be gained both from the old inheritance laws and from the new laws introduced since the Revolution. The senior heir, Antoine-César received 46.7 percent of the properties, while each of the three living siblings, together with the heirs of the fourth, received 8.9 percent.

This giant fortune had at its fulcrum the splendid château of Vaux-Praslin (today Vaux-le-Vicomte), which the Choiseuls acquired in the mid-eighteenth century and held until they sold it to a rich sugar refiner in 1875. For a century the family found a setting in rooms first built for the seventeenth-century financier Nicolas Fouquet. They would certainly appreciate his choice of a squirrel motif to represent the nimble movements required to keep and gain money: their own motto was “Success accompanies courage.”

In 1802 Antoine-César became a member of the Sénat conservateur and remained a member until his death at age fifty-two. In his will he expressed the hope that his children would share equally his properties as during his life they had shared his amitié—a characteristically restrained statement of affection in the aristocracy. They were, as the Michaud biography correctly put it while confusing father and son, destined by family tradition to power (“Voué par tradition de famille à la puissance de fait”), and indeed the Choiseul-Praslins survived and flourished under all regimes.

Antoine-César’s wife was Charlotte-Antoinette-Marie-Septimanie O’Brien de Thomond, daughter of a marshal of France. She also died before the end of 1808, and this led to an informative family partage in August 1810. There were two heirs of Antoine-César, his son Charles-Raynald-Laure-Félix (1778–1841), at that time “comte de l’empire chambellan de S.M. l’Empereur et Roi,” and his daughter Lucie-Virginie (1795–1834); two boys and a girl had predeceased them. Félix’s brother-in-law, Émile Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, also a graduate of the Ecole polytechnique, had become a diplomat and was made a baron of the Empire in 1810 amidst protestations of love and respectful devotion to the emperor and of his intent to marry and found a family. The weaving of the web of useful connections continued, whatever the regime.

Antoine-César’s fortune later included one-fifth of his mother's estate (she died on 26 February 1806 at Courbevoie in the Seine department, where she lived with her married daughter, Mme de Grollier), which later passed to her grandchildren from César. The remaining four-fifths were split up in a complicated way among further relatives: three-quarters of another fifth went to the surviving children of her son Hippolyte (1757–93), whose wife was still alive, and the remaining quarter
was shared between her daughter Bonne-Désirée (1775–1865), who had married comte de Grollier in 1797, and the surviving daughter of Julie-Alix (b. 1777), who had married Amédée-Louis-Frédéric-Emmanuel, comte d’Hautefort. Three full fifths were to be left to her son, daughter, and granddaughter. The exactitude of this arrangement is easily understandable if we note that the estate of the old lady was worth 3,233,371F, enunciated in sixty-three articles in the inventory. This was reduced by claims on the estate of almost a million (980,704F). Among the debts, for example, were three fractions of rentes set up between 1768 and 1777 for Mme de Querhant and worth a capital of 98,000 livres which had come into the possession of Choiseul-Praslin’s widow. On that sum Jean [de] La Rochefoucauld [-Bayer] had a claim of 65,000F recognized by law in 1806 and 1807, in partial payment of which he received in January 1810 the sum of 34,417F from a professor in the Paris Medical School for an estate at Beaumoulin, Seine-et-Marne.7 The remainder included estates and four châteaux—in the communes of Randan (Puy-de-Dôme), purchased in 1781 for 920,000 livres; Quintin (Côtes-du-Nord); Lorgues (Côtes-du-Nord); and Brie (Charente-Inférieure)—plus the mere “habitation” at Beaumoulin (Seine-et-Marne). The furniture of the place where she died was valued at 55,589F. The entire estate was parceled out in the form of shares of both assets and liabilities to six family members, leaving one more, Mme de Grollier, with an unencumbered legacy of 520,471F. A further 283,371F was to be paid out to individuals without direct family ties. The undischarged liabilities were to pay an interest of 5 percent per annum. The assets immediately flowed into new obligations, as in the 21 June 1807 communauté marriage contract between her granddaughter Apollonie and Charles de Talleyrand de Périgord, both minors (see the discussion of marriage contracts in chapter 7). The future groom brought a promise of a quarter-million francs in due course, and Mlle de Choiseul-Praslin produced from the inheritances of her father, grandfather, and grandmother an estate in Mayenne (678,863F) and a capital of 298,633F, plus two annual revenues totaling 2,600F and a trousseau of 25,000F.8 In 1810 the senator’s sister sold the biens nationaux that had come from the Abbey of Our Lady of Evron (Laval arrondissement, Mayenne), which she had acquired in the family apportionment of 30 thermidor V.9 Now living either in Paris at 128, rue du Bac or at the Montgoger château in the Indre-et-Loire (itself an inheritance from a female relative née Elisabeth de Beauvaux), she decided to sell the property to André Guillet de Préau for the sum of 29,629F, and her brother, César-René, acted on her behalf in the sale.10 Another wing of the family drew up its accounts when the surviving
children of Hippolyte entered their inheritance of 1,080,915F each.\textsuperscript{11} His son Albéric was bequeathed a château and estate worth over 1 million francs at Chassy (Loiret/Yonne) plus two farms and a large house on the rue de Reuilly, not far from the Bois de Vincennes. This had been rented to a commoner since the year XIII, and the 1811 renewal of the lease for six years was to bring in 2,400F annually.\textsuperscript{12} In 1829 the same Albéric-César-Guy Dechoiseul [sic] was listed on the electoral roll of the Nièvre as a peer of France with a political residence at Couloutre (Nièvre) and paying in that department a tax of 4,224F.\textsuperscript{13}

The Choiseul-Praslins were an exceptionally wealthy and numerous house. The successive heads of the family were, at the twenty-third degree, Antoine-César (1756–1808) with four siblings; at the twenty-fourth, Charles-Raynald-Laure-Félix (1778–1841) with four; at the twenty-fifth, Hugues-Charles-Laure-Théobald (1805–47) with five, and at the twenty-sixth, Gaston-Louis-Philippe (b. 1834) with eight. The various relations constituted a network of credit that involved legal transfer of claims back and forth between them and their children. Félix, for instance, was paying a life annuity of 3,000F per annum to his younger brother Gilbert at the time of the latter’s 1806 wedding, as well as recognizing his 35,000F claim on the Praslin townhouse in Paris.\textsuperscript{14}

As figure 3 shows, the Choiseul-Praslins had far more marriages (twenty-one) in the direct line than the two other families considered in this chapter. There was an incessant recourse to the notary by the Choiseul-Praslins which showed that they relied more on precise legal terminology than on the spirit of family solidarity. Or perhaps it is fair to say that their family spirit was corseted by the notarial precision. In May 1843 Jean-Baptiste-François-Sales-Ambroise-Félix, comte de Choiseul d’Aillecourt, gave his legal permission for the enactment of the will of Félix de Choiseul, after deduction of 391,379F for the liquidation of the société des acquêts (common property of a married couple) in his marriage contract.\textsuperscript{15} Money entered from dowries, as in the case of César-René’s second wife and mother of three additional daughters to join the two with whom he was already blessed and his solitary son. In 1838 the second wife brought in her share of her mother’s (née de Lignerac) succession, which amounted to almost one and a half million francs.\textsuperscript{16}

These lateral exchanges were sometimes within the family. César-Hippolyte had married a cousin, Choiseul d’Esguilly, in 1780. Forty-six years later she died, on 1 June 1837, and the following winter division was made between her son and daughter of the 320,989F of the estate not already paid out in dowries and legacies. The properties in question were estates, buildings, French and English investments, and individual debts to her.\textsuperscript{17} In May 1837 there was a marriage (dotal contract) between comte Louis-Jean-Baptiste-Léon de Choiseul d’Aillecourt and
FIGURE 3. Succeeding Generations of Three Noble Families in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

CHOISEUL-PRASLIN (SOURCE: RÉVÉREND)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Birthdate of Senior Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XXIII</td>
<td>1756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIV</td>
<td>1778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXV</td>
<td>1805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXVI</td>
<td>1834</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RAIGECOURT-GOURNAY (SOURCE: RÉVÉREND)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Birthdate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XVII</td>
<td>1763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVIII</td>
<td>1804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIX</td>
<td>1827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX</td>
<td>1859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VILLELE (SOURCE: VILAIN, FOURCASSIÉ)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Birthdate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XXII</td>
<td>1749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIII</td>
<td>1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIV</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXV</td>
<td>1840</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Individuals are not listed in order of birth.
Léa-Marie-Régine Choiseul-Praslin.\textsuperscript{18} The property of the groom came from the partage of his father, composed of fractions of lands in the Orne (one third), mills (one sixth), and Seine-et-Oise lands (one third), as well as 1,000\texteuro\textsuperscript{ }rente in 3 percent, and six shares in the Banque de France, while from his mother, with whom he lived in the noble faubourg, came diamonds, furniture, a horse, and an annuity of 4,000\texteuro, as well as another income of 5,000\texteuro on a capital of 100,000\texteuro. These arrangements would thus yield annually at the least 10,000\texteuro without diminishing the value of the properties. His bride had farms and lands near Cherbourg and Valognes (Manche) which had been divided between her brother and sister from the premier lit by an agreement of 9 April 1834, an annual income of 1,350\texteuro in unspecified grains, and a one-third share with her brother and his wife of the inheritance of one-third of the estate of M. et Mme de Mauconvenant de Sainte Suzanne, their maternal great-grandparents. She further brought an annual 2,000\texteuro rente at 5 percent, 10,000\texteuro in cash “derived from her savings,” one-sixth of her rights to another estate (Fresnes), a listing of revenues amounting to 13,000\texteuro annually, diamonds worth 4,000\texteuro, an annual rente of 5,000\texteuro from a capital of 100,000\texteuro, and a trousseau worth 12,000\texteuro. In short, the couple had available in 1837 annual revenues of, at a minimum, some 32,000\texteuro, with additional wealth invested in a variety of lands and movables. Both were mature adults, and they seem not to have had children, so all this wealth would in due time return to the general family fortune.

In 1865, seven months after his wedding, a young sublieutenant in the second cavalry regiment garrisoned at Chartes, comte Horace de Choiseul, who lived at 42, rue Saint-Pierre with his young wife Joséphine-Beatrix, née Beauvau (1844–95) (who signed herself Beauvau, Censée H. de Choiseul), sold her lands in the Seine-et-Marne as a reinvestment of inalienable dowry funds for the sum of 350,000\texteuro.\textsuperscript{19} Later he served as mayor of Maincy and member of the Seine-et-Marne general council and stood for election in 1869, when he told the electors, among other things, that he would not forget that agriculture lay at the base of public prosperity and that as their representative he would concern himself above all with the rights and interests of those who produce and those who work.\textsuperscript{20}

Money, of course, flowed out and in, and sometimes across national borders. In September 1839 the sister of Régine, also adult, married a Belgian noble who lived near Tournay.\textsuperscript{21} He had a revenue of 3,000\texteuro on lands near Lille (Nord) and more in Belgium, as well as 5,000\texteuro on 100,000\texteuro held at 5 percent. For her part, she brought lands from the Manche, 5,300\texteuro annual revenue in 5 percent rente, 141\texteuro annual rentes in grain and money, one-third of the heaths owned in Seine-Maritime at
Vatteville and those at Heauville (Manche) together with a rence of 1,100F at 3 percent, 32,000F in cash, and diamonds worth 7,000F. The couple thus disposed of an annual revenue of at least 16,000F for life in Belgium. The marriage of Edgard-Laure-Charles-Gilbert to the daughter of a Prussian businessman, Schickler, brought the new family far higher rewards. The dowry provided some half a million francs to help with the expenses of their home at 17, place Vendôme, and at the death of Angélica Schickler nine years later the inheritance passed on to her surviving spouse and children was more than one and a half million francs.22 Several of Théobald’s children, including the heir to the title, married and lived abroad. His eldest son wed Miss Forbes in Geneva in 1874 and subsequently lived on the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England, for much of the time. Théobald’s last child, a daughter, married in 1858 (régime dotal) the Italian cavalry officer marquis d’Adda Salvaterra and lived in Milan. In 1863 she exchanged some dowry property which was inalienable, woods in the Aisne department, and rentes sur l’état for a house at 46, rue Jacob in Paris, purchased for 420,000F.23

The fundamental underpinning of this family lay in land, mostly in the northern half of France in departments not far from the capital, especially Seine-et-Marne but also Côtes-du-Nord, Charente-Inférieure, Seine, Manche, and Seine-Maritime. Puy-de-Dôme was the most southerly location in 1800. How did they administer these far-flung properties? Essentially they relied on managers (régisseurs), who oversaw relations with tenant farmers, who were responsible for the fine details of running the property. Less than a month before her death the widow of Antoine-César, together with her son, dating the procuration 27 April 1808 at the Hotel de Praslin, at 79, rue de Grenelle in Paris, gave their instructions to the régisseurs des terres of Praslin (Seine-et-Marne), Gery (Nièvre), Thoisy (Nièvre and Côte-d’Or), Hardenges (Mayenne), and St. Denis d’Orques (Sarthe) reminding them that they could undertake new buildings “only upon written instructions from Paris” and added that they could neither ask for nor receive for any cause whatsoever any gratuities (pot de vin).24 Management of the Choiseul-Praslin estates was thus heavily dependent on written instructions and the obedience of subordinates to them. A lease from a large, 216-hectare farm in the Choiseul-Praslin network of properties drawn up in 1844, not too distant in either time or place from that of M. de Fleurigny discussed below in the section on the Raigecourts, provides a number of clues.25

César-Corentin-Ferri, vicomte de Choiseul-Praslin, described as a landowner (propriétaire) dwelling on the rue des Saints-Pères (in the noble faubourg of the left bank of the Seine) made a nine-year lease to
begin after Easter 1848 with M. Dosne, “cultivator,” and his wife (named as *dame* rather than the *Madame* of the document when speaking of the vicomtesse). Dosne and his wife accepted joint legal responsibility for the lease of the farm in Andonville commune, canton Outarville, in Pithiviers arrondissement in the Loiret department which actually belonged to Mme Jeanne-Adélaïde-Valentine de la Croix de Castries, wife of the vicomte. The couple had no posterity. From the detailed description, we know that the property included a house with lofts, barns, stables, sheepfolds, cattle sheds, pigsties, yards, gardens, and other “facilities and out-buildings” and a further 216 hectares 97 ares of arable land and woods. Dosne accepted that he did not need a more precise description than this, since he lived together with his father-in-law, “Mr [sic] Louis Laurent,” who had the enjoyment of the property in virtue of a lease (made by the same notary on 5 January 1837) which was to run until the beginning of the present agreement. The lessees agreed to execute in full the terms of the lease and to renounce any right to claim for a diminution of *fermage*. The terms provide a good overview of the links between Paris noble and provincial tenant and are quoted here in *extenso*:

1° De fixer leur demeure et résidence habituelle dans les bâtiments de la ferme louée, les garnir et tenir garnies de meubles meublans, ustensiles de ménage, effets, bestiaux et attirails de labeur nécessaires et en quantité suffisante pour l’exploitation, et pour répondre du loyer ci-après fixe, faire aux bâtiments les mêmes réparations locatives suivant l’usage, souffrir faire les grosses en cas de besoin; faire avec leurs chevaux, harnois et voitures l’approche de tous les matériaux nécessaires pour les dites grosses réparations et même fournir tout le chaume qui sera nécessaire pour l’entretien des couvertures des bâtiments et murs.

2° De bien et dûment labourer, fumer, cultiver et ensemencer les dites terres en temps, soles et saisons ordinaires, sans pouvoir les dessoler, refroisser ou désaisonner et les rendre en fin du présent bail en bon état de culture et en trois soles égales.

3° De resserrer dans les granges et bâtiments de la ferme tous les produits des terres, sans pouvoir les mettre ailleurs, de convertir en fumier toutes les pailles et fourrages provenant des dites terres, pour les enfermer et non d’autres et la dernière année du bail laisser dans les cours et bâtiments de la ferme les pailles et fourrages de la dernière récolte et même confusion de l’avant dernière sans pouvoir en enlever ni brûler ni divertir aucune.

4° De veiller à la conservation des biens loués, s’opposer à ce qu’il y soit fait aucune entreprise, ni usurpation et dans le cas où il en serait fait, d’en prévenir les propriétaires ou leur fondé de pouvoir dans la huitaine, à peine de dépens, pertes, dommages et intérêts.
5° De ne pouvoir prétendre aucune indemnité ni diminution de loyer pour cause de grêle, gelée, sécheresse, incendies, stérilité, inondation, et d’autres inovation, et autres événements de force majeure prévu et imprévu.

6° De faire en l’acquit et décharge de M. et Madame de Choiseul sur les chemins et routes qui peuvent traverser les terres de la dite ferme, les longer et y aboutir, toutes les plantations qui pourront être ordonnées par la loi ou par le gouvernement à leurs frais et de les entretenir, aussi à leurs frais et sans aucunes répétition contre les propriétaires en diminution de fermage.

7° De payer et d’aquitter annuellement pendant le cours du présent bail, en l’acquit et décharge de M. et Madame de Choiseul sans aucun recours ni répétion contre ces derniers, ni diminution de loyer; les contributions foncières et accessoires, tant de propriété que d’exploitation dont la dite ferme de Gondreville et toutes les terres et bois en dépendant, sont et pourront être chargés, en principal, centimes additionnels, taxes, subvention et à tel titre et sous telle dénomination que ce puisse être, à telle somme que le tout puisse monter et en quelque nature et valeur que l’acquit doive en être fait, en sorte que le prix du loyer de la dite ferme reste franc et sans aucune déduction à M. et Madame de Choiseul et de justifier annuellement de l’acquit des dites impositions par le rapport des quittances.

8° De fournir aux propriétaires, à leur première réquisition pendant le cours du présent bail, une déclaration exacte des biens loués par consistance de chaque pièce, nouveaux tenans et aboutissants dûment certifiée véritable.

9° De ne pouvoir cédé leur droit au présent bail ni sous louer en tout ou en partie sans le consentement exprès et par écrit du bailleur.

Outre ces charges, le présent bail est fait moyennant la somme de huit mille francs de loyer et fermages annuel que le Sr. Dosne s’oblige et oblige la dame son épouse solidairement avec lui, à payer à M. et Madame de Choiseul en leur demeure à Paris, ou au porteur de la graphie des présentes et de leurs pouvoirs en trois termes et paiements égaux les jours de Noël, Pâques et Saint Jean Baptiste de chaque année. . . .

Par ces mêmes présentes M. de Choiseul donne pouvoir au dit Sieur Dosne son fermier de veiller à la conservation de la ferme présentement louée et ses dépendances; empêcher et réprimer tous empiètements et usurpations; faire procéder et assister à tous arpentages et bornages, faire dans le cours de ces opérations tous dires, observations et requissions dans l’intérêt du mandant; former et défendre à toutes demandes, citer et paroître sur toutes citations en justice de paix, se concilier s’il y a lieu sinon suivre devant les juges compétents, faire exécuter tous jugemens.

Fait et passé à Paris en l’étude de M Fourchy l’an mil huit cent quarante quatre le vingt sept décembre.
Twenty years later the same lessor, still signing himself with the abbreviation of his title just as it appears on the earlier document—"Vte de Choiseul"—and still living on the rue des Saints Pères, made another arrangement to oversee his properties, this time not with the actual tenant. He empowered a fellow noble, Edmond-Maximilien Des Portes de Linières, mayor of the commune of Clermont Gallerande (Sarthe), who was also a director of the local agricultural insurance society, to regulate and administer Choiseul properties in the la Flèche arrondissement of the same department. He could make, renew, and cancel all leases with the price, clauses, and conditions that he thought suitable and repress all hunting offenses.

Both documents reveal that the vicomte himself took no part in the close, day-to-day running of his estate. His agricultural endeavors were seemingly limited to studying the clauses of his leases. Whatever agricultural innovation took place was here more in the hands of the tenant farmer than in those of the owner.

Enough has been said to indicate the complexity of family obligations among the Choiseul-Praslsins. Family members lived in scattered locations. When the fortune of the dowager duchess was divided in 1861, it was split between five males and five females living in Paris, a further eight family members six of whom were scattered among the departments of Manche, Eure, Seine-et-Marne, Haute-Savoie, Bouches-du-Rhone, and Aude and two more in Italy. Their homes, châteaux, and estates comprised a kind of collective wealth, a lode that sustained these aristocratic individuals during their lifetimes. Theirs was a model that other rich aristocrats in the period 1800–1870 emulated, just as it was one to which poorer nobles wistfully aspired.

**THE RAIGECOURTS**

We are quite well informed about the landed wealth of the Raigecourt family, a lineage that disappeared during the nineteenth century. They sprang originally from Metz. Numerous members of their family had held municipal office there, and in 1375 one maître-échevin, seigneur of Ancerville, was a chamberlain of the duc of Lorraine. From his progeny derived three branches, of which one continued into the nineteenth century.

Born at Nancy in 1763 to the second of his father’s three wives (all of whom produced children, to a total of eight), marquis Anne-Bernard-Antoine de Raigecourt-Gournay was at the seventeenth degree of his line. (An older brother from the first union took orders and outlived him, serving as the superior of the Rheims seminary.) The addition to the family name had been a condition of his grandfather’s wedding with the only daughter of the comte de Gournay. This was not the first time that
they had taken on a seigneurial name, for Spincourt had been added earlier; nor would it be the last, for they added that of Fleurigny in the nineteenth century. Anne-Bernard-Antoine, sublieutenant in the Royal Allemand regiment before the Revolution, in line with the strong military traditions of his family, married at age twenty-one in Paris on 28 June 1784 a woman five years his senior, Louise-Marie de Vincens de Mauléon, daughter of a marquis and a lady-in-waiting to Mme Elisabeth de France. This meant that she had an annual court income of at least 4,000 livres, not to mention income from her properties. She was at that time a dame chanoinesse of the chapter of Saint-Louis de Metz, recruited exclusively from noblewomen. He took an interest in public affairs and was a substitute deputy of the Nancy bailliage noblesse to the Estates General.

With the advance of the Revolution, he found himself at odds with the new order. The family motto was “With honor,” and like others with courtier connections, he quickly emigrated and saw service against the Revolution with the Condé army. The liberal publication Biographie nouvelle des contemporains (1824) mentions an émigré M. de Raigeecourt arrested near Valenciennes “weapons in hand” and executed on 1 vendémiaire IV (23 September 1795), but I have not identified this individual. Anne-Bernard-Antoine became an aide-de-camp to the comte d’Artois.

At that time both he and his wife corresponded with the pious marquis and marquise de Bombelles; those letters were published at the end of the nineteenth century and revealed the sordid squabbles among the exiles. By 1792 Mme de Raigeecourt saw the misfortunes visited on French noble exiles in biblical terms, comparing the nobles to the Jews stricken by divine anathema and adding that both were guilty and impenitent. Raigeecourt became completely disillusioned with the possibility of returning as a member of a victorious army. His wife returned home in 1797 and tried without success to have her husband’s name removed from the list of émigrés. He came back in 1800, like so many others, in a chastened and constructive mood and was taken off the list without mishap.

He was now confronted with the realities of rebuilding the shattered family finances after the loss of his and his wife’s properties. He also had obligations outstanding to his half-brothers and half-sisters from his father’s first and third wives. Those who had taken religious vows renounced their claims on the paternal estate but still expected an annual rente, and the widow and son in Vienna also expected annual payments. Only scraps of the landholdings in Lorraine had not been sold, mostly woodland, and most of this was sold off by 1810. Again like so many others, he served Napoleon as a mayor.
At the time of his daughter’s wedding in 1809 the Raigecourts were living in the Saint Germain district (rue de Sèvres), and henceforth they were Parisians. They sought to acquire land close to Paris and in 1816 made their first major purchase in the fertile agricultural region of the Nièvre. Anne-Bernard-Antoine’s service as a mayor under the Empire was not held against him under the Bourbons. In August 1814 he became a maréchal de camp.

In 1816 he was named a peer of France, and he promised to set up a majorat. A reference to him in the biography of the peers compiled by Lardier says that he rarely took the podium. However, in March 1816 he opposed the continuation of ecclesiastical pensions to priests and nuns who had married or taken other professions since the Revolution. Ten years later, in April 1826, he opined against the form of the indemnity proposed for Haitian planters on the constitutional grounds that the king could not undertake its payment without the approval of the Chambers. And he delivered other speeches that showed that he had distanced himself from the ultraroyalists.

In 1824 he made over his pension as a peer in place of the majorat, an option taken by a number of members of the upper house. He had regained sufficient property to live in style. He would receive one of the larger indemnities of the Emigrés’ Billion, approaching 1 million but still not a true compensation for what had been lost, mostly in the Meurthe and Moselle departments. He protested against the fatuous undervaluation of the château at Friauville, which had been much dilapidated by its first owner after its confiscation and sale but which he believed was certainly worth more than the appraised 412F 50. Other property not regained by the Raigecourts included their townhouse on the rue Callot in Nancy, which in the nineteenth century was the property of the teaching order of the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine.

The Raigecourts retained a certain prestige in their ancestral city of Nancy, as was apparent in the November 1826 ceremony for the reinterring of the remains of the dukes of Lorraine dispersed during the Revolution. The pallbearers were representatives of the leading old families of Lorraine, who marched in a procession with drawn swords: one of them was the marquis de Raigecourt, together with the marquis de Lambertie, the comtes de Ligniville, de Ludre, d’Ourches, and de Mitry, and others. The ceremony must have had a certain pathos for Anne-Bernard-Antoine, since by then the family had in large measure relocated its landholdings in Burgundy. He had other relatives in the upper house. His wife’s brother, vicomte Vincens de Mauléon de Causans, took his seat in the same chamber in 1827, but he would be unseated in 1830 as one of the appointees of Charles X. Anne-Bernard-Antoine for his part was among the 210 peers named by the Bourbons.
who accepted the Orleanists. The news of 1830 was perhaps not a complete surprise to a man who had seen the comte d’Artois in youth as well as in age. His pious wife died at Draveil (Corbeil arrondissement, Seine-et-Oise) in March 1832, and he followed her to the grave in December 1833.

Anne-Bernard-Antoine had four children: his first son, born in 1790, died while still a child, and his second son, Raoul-Paul-Emmanuel, was born in Paris on 27 January 1804 after their return from emigration, when they lived on the rue des Saints Pères, Division de l’Egalité. His eldest daughter, Hélène, was born on 23 May 1791 and was baptized with royal godparents (Mme Elisabeth de France and the comte de Provence). The second daughter, Ernestine, was born on 13 March 1795. His only son had a military career during the 1820s and would inherit the titles and take public office (see below).

Hélène married on 6 April 1809 (with a marriage contract on 27 March 1809) Charles-Louis-Modeste de Beufvier de Paligny, a former naval officer and widower without children. His second marriage was also childless. She promised 50,000F payable at the first death of a parent, although in fact this sum may never have been paid, since she was separated from her husband by 1817. He brought to his second wedding “tous les biens, meubles, immeubles et droits à lui appartenant,” notably the La Sécherie château in Vendée, although in his 1811 will Charles spoke of the building as “my house de la Sécherie.” He also spoke of the “good and sincere friendship” that he felt for his wife and asked for four Masses to be said, and twelve paupers to be dressed in woolen cloth, immediately after his death, which ensued twenty-seven years later, in December 1838. In his mother-in-law’s 1817 will there were pointed allusions to her daughter’s great misfortune to be married to such a man, and she left a picture of her daughter’s godmother, Mme Elisabeth de France, who had been guillotined during the Terror, with the wish that it would inspire in Hélène the courage and resignation needed to endure her unhappy lot. The couple lived apart for many years, but during that time Beufvier felt no need to change his will’s provisions of 31,000F in cash (francs d’argent), which is to say real rather than paper money, that enduring phobia of the possessing classes who had known the ravages of assignats and mandats territoriaux during the Revolution. He bequeathed to his widow for her life the enjoyment of half his property.

After his death, Hélène de Beufvier in fact became a hospital nun of Saint Thomas of Villeneuve, although she lived either at home in Paris at 27, rue de Sèvres or at Draveil (Seine-et-Oise). Three of the four generations of the Raigecourt family shown in figure 3 included family members who took religious vows, whereas in the Choiseul-Praslin and
Villèle family branches discussed in this chapter nobody did so. Indeed, we can surmise that these vocations contributed to the extinction of the Raigecourts family name.

Ernestine married in 1816 marquis Stanislas de Las Cases, a member of the royal bodyguard. If Beufvier was reproved in his mother-in-law’s will, Las Cases was praised as being virtuous. The couple had six children. He was given permission to set up a majorat sur demande in June 1830 entailing his property in the Gironde. Ernestine died there, in the Léoville château, in 1872, eight years before her husband’s death.

Hélène’s share of the family wealth would pass through a donation she made to Ernestine’s daughter Esclarmonde, who married Athanase, marquis de Retz de Mallevielle. This transfer was not made without some litigation over a bequest from an aunt, Alexandrine, who was a half-sister to Anne-Bernard-Antone, which was most instructive about the arrangements with her niece. Mme de Beufvier, now a nun, had opposed the bequest of 40,000F to her own sister’s daughter. As a result of bequests from half-brothers and half-sisters of her father, various sums were owed to Mme Beufvier by her niece (as transacted before the notary Julia in Albi on 4 March 1840), and she was permitted by decision of the Seine tribunal to receive the amount of 14,739F cash, as well as various treasury bonds—“au grand livre de la dette publique”—directly from the hands of Raoul, and payment was made on 29 March 1844. Years later she declared that her intention had always been to make a donation of the amount of 40,000F specified by Alexandrine, or even more, to her niece. In August 1851 she enacted an outright gift of the estate she had bought in 1845 located in the Var. It yielded an annual gross revenue of 3,350F. This present was made on condition that it provided her subsistence (“ses faits personnels, à titre alimentaire”):

1° D’un grand domaine rural proprement dit le Domaine de Bénat, situé sur le Territoire de la Commune de Bormes [arrondissement de Toulon] département du Var, quartier de Bénat, consistant en Vignes, Oliviers, collines agrégées de pins, chênes-lièges, chênes-verts et autres essences de bois essarts, terres incultes et laborables, avec bâtiment de maître ou château, [my emphasis] Chapelle, Moulin à huile, logement de fermiers, hangar, écuries, bergerie, Cour et parc, fontaine, bassin, lavoir, jardin d’orangers et autres dépendances; le tout formant une contenance de deux cent soixante dix neuf hectares soixante deux ares soixante quinze centiares en y comprenant le bâtiment sur le bord de la mer et la partie de terre dite L’Acapte. . . .

2° Et d’un Pré sec situé aussi sur le Territoire de Bormes . . . de la contenance de vingt trois ares trente centiares . . . les dits
This was certainly a handsome restitution of the 40,000F which had been sequestered from the estate. Hélène de Raigecourt, born in emigration in 1791, would not die until January 1884.

All of the family’s hopes for the perpetuation of the Raigecourt name were concentrated on Raoul-Paul-Emmanuel. His very pious mother’s will of 1817, written when the boy was thirteen, exhorted her children to walk in the path of virtue, to help and care for one another, and to uphold fraternal harmony while always remembering that true tenderness cannot be separated from “the politeness and urbanity which is a part of Christian charity.” Among other bequests to her son she included a “true cross” mounted on an ebony pedestal which she hoped would give the boy the strength to resist “the torrents of the world and to master his passions,” just as his father had done. She added that he should remember that “the finest titles that his ancestors have left him are those of a virtue and integrity which made them the arbiters of their neighbors. True pride is neither in haughtiness nor touchiness.”

Following in his mother’s family traditions of service at court, he became a page of Louis XVIII in 1820. He was an infantry officer at age 18 in 1822, he took part in the 1823 Spanish campaign, and he was in the dragoon guards in 1825. He married for the first time at age eighteen in Paris (21–22 November 1822). He brought to the marriage the gift from his parents of the 435-hectare estate of Germancy, near Nevers, in an area of large properties lying alongside the canal du Nivernais. There were a château, its adjacent buildings, and courtyard, as well as gardens, vines, barns, stables, meadows, ponds, heaths, and several farms and woods. The revenue from these properties was spelled out in more detail by the marriage contract:

plus deux rentes ou redevances annuelles dues par les nommés Perrin et Ve Hugot et toutes autres redevances qui peuvent être dues par les autres habitants des Bruyères de Lancy... ainsi que cette terre et ses dépendances se poursuivent entendent et comportent avec les fonds de cheptel, emblavures, empoissonnements et foins de réserve auxquels les propriétaires ont droit en vertu du bail cy après énoncé; sans par les donateurs en rien excepter, retenir ni reserver.

Cette terre est affirmée (à l’exception de quelques reserves faites par les propriétaires, notamment l’habitation d’une partie du château
et la coupe des bois taillés) à Bernard Geraud M^d de Bois et Jeanne Françoise Campanel sa femme pour douze ou seize ans, au choix respectif des parties, à compter du onze novembre mil huit cent vingt un moyennant un fermage annuel de six mille deux cents en numéraire payable en deux termes égaux les onze mai et onze novembre don le premier paiement a eu lieu le onze mai mil huit cent vingt deux, et les fermiers sont chargés en outre du payement des contributions foncières, le tout aux termes d’un bail passé devant Decray notaire à Decize le dix septembre mil huit cent vingt un, Enregistré.

In fact this estate was a recent acquisition and was thus a “conquest” of the legal community of property between the two Raigecourts. They had bought the Germancy estate in the name of their solicitor at a public auction at the Seine civil tribunal in the summer of 1816 which had been held at the demand of the Territorial Bank’s creditors. These creditors wanted to liquidate the assets, which included this property which had come into the bank’s hands because of a foreclosure on Jean-Joseph Sallonyer de Taunay (?Camnay) and his wife, Jeanne Prévost de Germancy, in early January 1804. Of the 140,000F purchase price, all save 18,742F 60 had been paid off by the Raigecourt parents at the time of the wedding. This valuable property had thus been acquired by the elder Raigecourt as an indirect result of the financial difficulties of the husband of the lady whose maiden name had been that of the seigneur (Germancy) before the Revolution.

Raoul’s wife, Louise-Françoise-Lucie de Leusse, brought a large dowry of 150,000F, to be paid in stages. A sum of 10,000F was handed over immediately; a further 40,000F came from the comtesse de Bézieux, who paid on the last day of 1825 to discharge a price of sale; and the remaining 100,000F were promised (and paid) within a year. Moreover, the marquis de Leusse made a “donation between living individuals as an advance of inheritance” to his daughter or to her descendants of the Poussery estate (Nièvre), although reserving to himself the usufruct during his lifetime (he died in October 1829). Through this Raigecourt-Leusse marital link to his mother-in-law, the 178-hectare Fleurigny estate (located in Sergines canton, near Sens, and worth 192,886F in 1854) came into the hands of the son of the Raigecourt-Leusse marriage via a bachelor uncle, the last of his line, whose will was made between 1839 and 1843. Once it was theirs the Raigecourts preferred the Fleurigny chateau to their other properties and thenceforth made it their principal estate. Hortense, sister of Lucie, who married a commoner, was scarcely remembered in the Fleurigny will, save for a few family trifles. Lucie had died within three years of her wedding day, but directly or indirectly, the union brought 1,605 hec-
tunes of prime agricultural land to her son by the time he came of age in the 1850s.

Uncle Leclerc de Fleurigny was a frugal man who, according to the inventory made after his death, had an apartment in Sens at 16 rue de la Charte which he rented for 500F per annum and the château at Fleurigny which the family had owned for three centuries. At his death he had 8,400F deposited with the Sens receveur particulier des finances and a further 47,705F in treasury bills, which with back interest at 3 percent amounted to 56,105F. It was from those sums that his legacies were paid, after which 15,461F remained. Marquis de Fleurigny also owned 165F in revenue from 5 percent bonds, of which 60F was bequeathed to the church in his own village and that at Fontaine-la-Gaillarde, so that 105F income reverted to young Raigecourt. The furniture in Sens was valued at 2,620F, and that of the château, at 20,861F. This property had come to Fleurigny because of an act passed:

devant M. Anjubault, notaire à Paris, le trente un mai mil huit cent six et contenant partage entre M. de Fleurigny et M. et Madame de Leusse de la succession de M. Antoine-Claude-Edouard Leclerc de Fleurigny, leur père et beau-père. [Inventory had been made by Bellaguet, notaries at Sens, 4 July 1778.] Par cet acte, pour fournir à M. de Fleurigny le montant de ses droits dans les biens compris au partage, il lui a été abandonné, entre autres choses, le château de Fleurigny et dependances, la ferme de la basse cour du château, et différentes pièces de terre et de pré. One été laissées en commun cinq cents hectares quarante huit ares soixante centiaires de bois sis aux finages de Fleurigny, Vallières et Villiers Romeux.

In the quite recent past there had been additions and subtractions of parcels of land to the property. In April 1791, represented by a wood dealer, the widowed mother of M. de Fleurigny purchased for 1,325 livres some nine and a half arpents, or approximately 4.72 hectares, of property confiscated from the former curé of Fleurigny. Some years later, in 1796, the wood dealer was described on a sale document as a landowner and cultivator when he bought the former priest-house, this time presumably for himself, while the widow Leclerc de Fleurigny, now noted as an émigrée, had ten arpents confiscated from her. They were sold off for the sum of 1,224 livres to a clockmaker from Sens. Thus in the early years of the Revolution the family followed the example of those who, like Marie-Antoinette, purchased church lands that had been put up for sale, but later on in the Revolution they suffered some losses themselves.

However, the property division of 1806 between Fleurigny’s heirs makes plain that this was very far from a spoliation of the family. In 1809 he was among the wealthiest fifth of the eighty nobles in the Sens
arrondissement. Young M. de Fleurigny also carried out adjustments to the surface extent of the estate after he took over, notably the acquisition of 15 ares 24 centiares, the exchange of 15 ares 81 centiares for 6 ares 96 centiares, and the purchase of a fragment of property measuring 5 ares 27 centiares, resulting in a slight extension of the estate by 11 ares 66 centiares. The uncle was a fastidious manager who kept good records, as can be seen from item 40 of the inventory: four documents dealing with an account between M. de Fleurigny and M. Chevillot about the sale to the former by the latter of potato crops and a colt. He preserved with equal care the papers proving the pre-Revolutionary noble status of the Fleurigny property, as well as information on the building of the chapel. The 1843 inventory noted that he had not paid an attorney who had acted on his behalf nine years earlier in a dispute with the commune of Fleurigny which unsuccessfully claimed a piece of land located on the limits of Saint-Martin-sur-Oreuse. He clearly felt a strong attachment to the family château which had come to the Le Clerc family in 1513. This moated, three-sided château with a chapel in the east wing was entered via a bridge to the north façade; the south was open. The moat was shown as filled with water in an 1838 illustration of the château. The desire of M. de Fleurigny to control his château beyond the grave was shown in his will: he specified that all construction under way at the time of his death should be carried out according to his instructions. His executor, L. B. Garsement de Fontaine, an old friend and noble who lived nearby in Sens arrondissement and who, like the deceased, was a former garde du corps of Louis XVIII who had refused to take the oath to Napoleon in June 1815, doubtless understood his sensitivities. So too did Gustave’s father, who in a letter of March 1841, two years before the old gentleman died, wrote to him that he agreed with all his heart that his own son should add the name and armorial bearings of Fleurigny to their own. “This name is too fine and too honorable for you not to wish that it be continued after you.” M. de Fleurigny’s body was interred on the château grounds in a funeral chapel blessed by the archbishop of Sens in 1844. (The Raigecourt nephew in 1863 requested imperial permission to add his maternal uncle’s name to his own, so that henceforth he was de Raigecourt-Gournay de Fleurigny.)

From the estate records of Fleurigny presented in the accounting of tutelage (compte de tutelle) by M. de Fontaine, the executor—since the heir was not an adult at the time of entering into his inheritance—we can tell something of how a noble estate in the Yonne was operated around 1840. Annual payments had to be made on the rambling château with its moat and steep slated roofs: 150F annually to a roofer in Sens to keep it watertight, another 125F for leaf-raking and weeding in
the garden alleys, and 28F for insurance on the château farm against fire. At his death various repairs to the château, built at the time of Francis I on the site of an earlier château, were under way. Venetian shutters were being placed on windows, fresh paint applied, bannisters replaced, flagstones newly laid, and a parquet set in the study. Cosmetic touches were indulged: a new billiard table was ordered, ebony furniture was sent for fixing, and 1,530F worth of silver repairs were outstanding. Some of this may have been posthumously arranged to reduced the amount open to taxation. Or perhaps one can imagine the old bachelor sprucing up his château so that it might pass worthily to the young man who was to take his name. At all events, the executor had a cash account of 110,274F 92, of which he contrived to spend 107,102F. This left less than 3 percent of what had been on hand at the marquis’s death.

The agricultural yield of each hectare “cultivated as a garden” according to the 1839 estimate showed the arrondissement of Sens, where the château was located, as the richest in the department (Sens 1,800 F, Tonnerre 1,300F, Avallon 700F, Auxerre 550F, Joigny 500F). The kind of arrangements made with tenants can be seen from the nine-year lease concluded for the period beginning 23 April 1838 (St. George’s Day)—although for a meadow and woodlands to be cleared beginning 15 February—with M. and Mme Bourgeois for the farm of the backyard of the château, with its dwelling and work buildings. (By the end of the century this had been grassed over with flowerbeds as the main courtyard.) The property comprised 122 hectares 74 ares 84 centiares in forty-two pieces, as well as a further half-hectare governed by the usages of the commune of Fleurigny (and of which the enjoyment was to cease if the lessor died) and almost 15 hectares of woodland and meadow. The rental for this arable land close to the château buildings was the substantial amount of 2,840F in cash, to be paid to the communal tax collector on the first of each month against the tax bill of M. de Fleurigny, and after that was satisfied the surplus was to be paid to M. de Fleurigny. Also specified were the dates of payment of the noncash items of the lease, which included interestingly, a wide variety of other produce:

- 19.25 hectoliters wheat
- 44 hectoliters oats
- 13 hectoliters rye
- 775 bales grass fodder
- 400 bales wheat straw fodder
- 40 kilos butter
- 80 dozen eggs
- 24 chickens
- 5 turkeys
- 4 geese
- 4 ducks
- 8 days’ cartage (4 horses)
- 15 kilos white wool
- 3 hectoliters walnuts
In addition to the big property, there were other nine-year leases, such as that on 14 hectares 70 ares 92 centiares of arable land in forty-three pieces in the Vallières commune for an annual rental of 48F, 8 hectoliters of wheat, 10 hectoliters of oats, 30 kilos of butter, and 24 dozen fresh eggs. There was a lease of 1839 for 8 hectares 70 ares 23 centiares in thirty-one pieces for 25F and 7.5 hectoliters of oats and the same amount of wheat, 2 kilos of butter, and 6 chickens; and another on 6 hectares 53 ares 79 centiares in ten pieces for 60F, 5 hectoliters of oats, and 4 chickens. When the lease on the largest property was renewed in 1846, the father of young Raigecourt kept on the old tenants but also enumerated the twenty-nine specified subtenants and the rents they were to pay, all for a period of twelve years and for a rent substantially higher than ten years earlier—5,416F—but without the supplies which had been so considerable a part of the leases of M. de Fleurigny.

Fleurigny had also subdivided the estate woodlands into eighteen “cuts” of equal size: 5 hectares 6 ares 40 centiares, and another section of 82 hectares 22 ares divided into an additional ten “cuts.” The Nivernais had long found the provision of firewood for the capital to be extremely lucrative. Sixteenth-century letters from the Sens master of the woods and forests spoke of the woods of the community of inhabitants of Fleurigny. In 1843 M. de Fleurigny was selling the trees massively at high prices: on 4 hectares 22 ares, 1,600F; 187 trees, 325F; and the large 14,000F sale with the additional delivery to the château of 24 cubic meters of firewood, 700 tiles, and 100 bundles of laths. There was the sale of 163 poplar trees along the river for 1,650F plus the delivery to the château of 150 staves. More trees in the park and near the château were sold for 1,944F. Such a heavy logging seems to be the stripping of the estate by the last of the Fleurignys before it passed to the Raigecourts, for since 1840 the old man had received from them a rente viagère of 2,400F.

The estate yielded other produce after the death of M. de Fleurigny. The château gardener, who was paid 50F a month for his work, was steadily selling vegetables in 1845, while the maid Babet did washing and sold young pigeons. Extras were reported as coming in from the farms where the widow Bourgeois was responsible for the payments.

Emmanuel’s young wife Lucie had died in October 1828, two years after giving birth to her daughter Marie-Eléonore, who became a nun and whose will is discussed below, and to Gustave-Emmanuel-Louis, born in 1827. The family then lived in an apartment on the decidedly unfashionable rue Pot de Fer in Paris. Lucie’s will, which predated her death by just a few days, noted that she had 9,500F cash on hand and debts outstanding totaling 3,700F—500F to one tailor and 100F to an-
other, 100F to a carriage painter, 2,500F to a harness maker, and 500F for various provisions. No mention was made of her dotal property, which, in any event, now passed to her husband to manage in their children’s interests. After various deductions, the father’s responsibility to his children was fixed at 130,000F. 51

That dowry included the estate of Poussery in the pays Morvan (Nièvre), which enjoyed local renown during the nineteenth century as a model farm, a breeding center for livestock, and an orphanage to train “petits Paris”—parentless children from Paris—for agricultural life. The departmental agricultural society reminded readers in 1846 of the reason why it had decided to set up the model farm on Raigecourt property, 58 kilometers from the city of Nevers, even though many farmers subsequently complained that this isolation weakened the pedagogical value of the farm. When the idea was still in the planning stage and attracting only decidedly lukewarm support, marquis de Raigecourt had come forward and offered a reasonable annual lease of 11,500F without asking for a deposit, together with cattle valued at 25,000F. Nor was this all: he further undertook to build a sheepfold, a piggery, and an oven for preparing lime, as well as to pay half the price of any further buildings needed, a promise pregnant with future expense, since there was already talk of a school, a cowhouse, and the orphanage. The chateau needed repairs, since it was first built from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The marquis also subscribed 9,200F in shares towards the total 30,000F initially proposed to be raised to fund the school, of which only 116 shares at 100F each had been taken by other investors. 52

Raigecourt’s attitude contrasted strikingly with the caution and hypercritical attitudes of other landowners. Indeed, with his open-handed approach which permitted the establishment of the model farm, his example brought about a change of heart among the other landowners, and additional shares were purchased by them. For his limitless confidence in the project and his personal financial sacrifices for it, Raigecourt was cited as the very model of a concerned landowner. Although the fulsomeness of the version of how the model farm at Poussery was begun may seem rather excessive, it attests to a readiness to invest and show support in local agriculture by an aristocrat who sat on the departmental general council.

Emmanuel’s second marriage, on 18 June 1835 also at Paris, was to Mlle Lefebvre de Balsorano, daughter of Charles, who subsequently became comte de Balsorano, but there was no issue from the union. She died in Naples in 1843. He took his seat as a peer of France (19 May 1845) and lived on the rue d’Astorg in Paris, close to the Elysée Palace. In 1854 the twice-widowed Emmanuel made an accounting of his stew-
TABLE 6. The Fortune of the Raigecourts, 1800–1870: Major Inputs and Outputs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Male Side</th>
<th>Female Side</th>
<th>Debit</th>
<th>Credit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Unsold woodlands</td>
<td>Unsold woodlands</td>
<td>49,127F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Beaufrevier dowry</td>
<td></td>
<td>50,000F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1809</td>
<td>Las Cases dowry</td>
<td></td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>Leusse dowry: Cash &amp; income</td>
<td></td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>Leusse dowry: Poussery estate (Nièvre)</td>
<td></td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>Raigecourt-Leusse dowry: Germancy estate (Nièvre)</td>
<td></td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>Indemnity award for confiscated property to marquis and marquise de Raigecourt</td>
<td></td>
<td>835,103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>Legacy from second wife of M. de Leusse promised</td>
<td></td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Legacy to Prince de Croy</td>
<td></td>
<td>33,528</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Leusse legacy*</td>
<td></td>
<td>235,784</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Fleurigny legacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>192,880</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Retz gift</td>
<td></td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Raigecourt-Caumont de Laforce dowry</td>
<td></td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Caumont de Laforce dowry</td>
<td></td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: MC CXI 513, LVIII 731, 822; A Gain, La Restauration et les biens des émigrés: La Législation concernant les biens nationaux de seconde origine et son application dans l’est de la France, 1814–1832, 2 vols. (Nancy, 1928); Decise cadastre. **“Consistant en un château avec cour, jardin et dépendances, moulins, terre labourable, prés et bois appartenant à Mr le M° de Leusse au moyen de l’acquisition qu’il en a fait... de L. A. François Bruneau, Marquis de Vitry tant en son nom que comme mandataire de maître Gabrielle de Reugny sa mère épouse séparée quant aux biens de Mr Pierre Etienne Bruneau” (see purchase, MC CXI 455, 22 August 1810).
ardship of the property of his children.\textsuperscript{53} The very detailed accounting ("M\textsuperscript{e} Gustave de Raigecourt : recettes et dépenses faites pour lui comme légataire universel de M. de Fleurigny depuis l’ouverture de la succession jusqu’au treize décembre mil huit cent quarante cinq, époque à laquelle il a accompli sa dix-huitième année") also included a “Compte de tutelle par M. le marquis de Raigecourt à ses enfants,” notification of a reduction of rente at 4.5 percent, and the “partage, licitation et arrangement de famille entre le marquis de Raigecourt et ses deux enfants.” This latter included a detailed valuation of lands. The Fleurigny, Pouligny, and Poussery estates totaled 1,378 hectares 33 ares 55 centiares, with a gross revenue of 40,053\textcent\textcurrency{f} 04; the net revenue after deduction of tax paid, upkeep (mostly the responsibility of the tenant farmers [\textit{bailleurs}]), and guard was 32,553\textcent\textcurrency{f} 90. The land value alone was 954,070\textcent\textcurrency{f}; with the cattle (40,000\textcent\textcurrency{f}) and interim improvement (\textit{mise en état}) it was given as worth 986,490\textcent\textcurrency{f}. These can be regarded as highly conservative figures drawn with an eye on the tax assessor.

Gustave, born in 1827, was at the nineteenth degree of his line. As an adult he lived on the Fleurigny estate and also in Paris, at 131, rue St. Dominique, in the heart of the noble faubourg. We can tell something of his adolescence from the accounts of his expenses: he traveled to the United States and Italy and took private lessons from a professor as part of his education. (His sister for her part had a governess). On 3 November 1855 he married the daughter of senator and duc Caumont de Laforce. I have not yet located the marriage contract, but we can be fairly confident that it was substantial, in the 250,000\textcent\textcurrency{f} range on each side. From this match he had three daughters but only one son, Emmanuel-Ghislain, who died before his tenth birthday, the last male in the direct line of descent. At the child’s health the dispersement of the properties held by the Raigecourts would begin, passing through the dowries of the surviving sisters, who in the 1870s and 1880s married active or former cavalry officers all of whom were noble. It was the youngest of these sisters who wrote a brief note of the history on the maison de Raigecourt.

Table 6 is an attempt to summarize the post-Revolutionary development of the family fortunes.

**THE VILLELES**

Several books by members of the local gentry from the fertile wheat-growing Lauraguais region, to the southwest of Toulouse, describe the running of estates during the first half of the nineteenth century. That by Picot de Lapeyrouse was translated into English in 1819, and that by Louis Théron de Montaugé appeared in 1869.\textsuperscript{54} More renowned among the local *noblesse* was Joseph de Villeèle, who had a brilliant but short
political career under the Restoration, when he made a profound and lasting impact on the organization of the national financial machinery of France. Here the aim is to sketch the cadet Campauliac branch of this seigneurial family as noble landowners on their property in the Car­aman canton of the Haute-Garonne from the Revolution to 1870.55

At the mid-nineteenth century the local nobles were the richest social category in the canton: Villeneuve-Crossillac at his death, at age 81, was declared to have a revenue of 28,613F, Marguerite de Beaumont at age 85 was declared to have 18,600F, and Joseph de Villèle was declared to have a mere 6,500F. Some commoners had incomes on that scale, such as Blanc, with 7,976F.56 These declared revenues were well below the true income. The remarkable thing about the Villèles, however, was their fixity on the same estate by contrast with the rapid turnover of the aristocratic Choiseul-Praslins and Raigecourts. As the century progressed, so, too, did the number of artisans and shopkeepers who bought a small sharecropping farm (or horde, as it was known locally), but the Villeles did not sell their lands to such newcomers to the canton. They were still managing their own property in the 1980s. In local agriculture wheat and maize cultivation predominated, whereas in the nearby environs of Toulouse and Muret a mixed cropping pattern was found—wheat, oats, barley, rye, maize, wine, and meadows. The Villele properties lay in the most commercialized area of local agriculture, that with the best return of crop to seed in the department but with the worst wine.57

The father of the future statesman, Louis-François-Joseph de Villèle, seigneur of Mourvilles, de Fourtonnens, et de Campauliac, could properly be called an agronome with an ongoing passion for agricultural improvement. In May 1777, five years after his wedding to the daughter of an avocat in the local parlement, he purchased the chateau of Mourvilles-Basses from the widow of the previous owner, who himself had bought it in 1770. The bill of sale stated that "la dite terre et seigneurie vendue consistant en la justice haute, moyenne, basse, directe et foncière, du droit d’établir le juge et autres officiers pour l’exercice d’icelle, rentes, cens, et en grains, argent, volaille, droit de lods et ventes, prêsta­tion et autres droits et devoirs seigneuriaux, droits utiles et honorifiques en dépendant."58 The new chateau itself lay over the hill from the Campauliac chateau, near Labastide de Beauvoir, where he had been brought up, and was a large building in the characteristic rosy brickwork of the area, halfway up a small hill overlooking another rise of ground in a gently rolling landscape. There were numerous outbuildings, a windmill, a forge, and a place to make tiles, as well as living accommodations for the workers.

He never left France during the Revolution, but he had his own
grievances. He was imprisoned in Toulouse from August 1793 to October 1794. As a model farmer he had further reasons to be against social upheaval, as he made clear to Fouché, then minister of the interior, in a letter written from his house in Toulouse on 15 August, 1799 in the aftermath of the insurrection of the year vii. This was a year later than the establishment of the departmental society of agriculture of which he was a founder member.

Citizen Villelé was a government agricultural correspondent and unlike in his last letter, which had dealt with the use of plaster as fertilizer, he was now denouncing an uprising that he characterized as the result of an “invisible and infernal outlook” resulting from Jacobin intrigue, as well as the “credulity” of the royalists, which had caused the local farmers to abandon their family and harvest and to converge on the largest communes or the chief places in each canton, against which they harbored resentment (“dont ils croyoient avoir à se plaindre”). He claimed that as a result of these insurrections he himself had been menaced by the insurgents, whereupon he had fled to Toulouse, but in that city he was pursued by calumny and animosity on the part of “some exclusivist and exaggerated men who claim to be patriots, and against whom I have resisted for ten years, laws and constitutions in my hand, to prevent them from ultra-revolutionizing the area [d’ultrarévolutioner le pays] and establishing themselves in the place of the landowners.”

Doubtless he was thinking of his petition of 28 October 1791 against the crowd of armed men led by a local municipal official which searched the château and house at Campauliac, or the hunt for arms at Mourvilles on 25 September 1792 and the dispute over taking down the weathercock, which was there displayed as a sign of privilege. He successfully defied the erstwhile egalitarians.

For his part he wished to work quietly on the materials he had been collecting for three years on the subject of the diminution of fodder by dessication and by the debris that are lost during haymaking, but he was arrested by a local official, the directeur du jury, and had his papers seized in the hope of compromising him “in order to apply to my much-envied properties the dispositions of the new law [punishing royalist insurgents].” At this point his wife and daughters fled from the Mourvilles-Basses château, where they had remained, despite the precipitate flight of the workforce, lamenting the unfortunate results that the workers’ departure might have for their persons, as well as regretting the bad effects on the crops of the land owner—if Fouché read this letter, this must have caused him an ironic smile—and Villelé protested that “at that time only the big landowners were threatened and the most peaceable were not distinguished from the guilty.”

Mourvilles had been plundered on 25 thermidor vii (12 August 1799)
by a hundred men of the Tarn detachment of troops under General Vicose, who were moving from the villages of Caraman to Bazière. They were, observed Villèle, “doubtless excited by someone from Caraman.” Oxen, prize bulls, heifers, and sheep waiting to be leapt by merino rams which the ministry intended to import from Spain were taken, and his furniture and prize agricultural specimen collection were damaged. He asked for an end to the plundering of his property. The minister of the interior was in fact sympathetic to Villèle and argued on his behalf. So, too, did the celebrated agronomist Parmentier, who described him in October of that year as a leading propagator of the potato in the Midi and asked the minister to allow the elder Villèle to return to his stubble fields and flocks. However, when the family returned home on 1 fructidor (18 August), worse was to follow, for the next day the house was violently searched by commissaires, who ripped open feather mattresses, smashed furniture, casks, and clocks, stole the kitchen copperware, and threw medecines—“so precious in an isolated country district”—on the floor. The library was also damaged. Villèle was a past master of written complaints, but even making allowance for possible exaggeration, there is a clear echo here of the sense of grievance among large landowners against vengeful arbitrariness on the part of small-town officials.

Villèle’s prestige among his fellow landowners was revealed in a letter from his country neighbors who also lived part of the year in Toulouse. In a letter of 1 ventôse XI (20 February 1803) they proposed him as the president of the Caraman electoral canton assembly and emphasized:

Possibly citizen Villèle has been thought to live in Toulouse because he goes there sometimes and has a lodging; however, he lives and pays personal taxes at Mourvilles-Basses in Caraman canton, where he pays the highest tax and is one of the most zealous defenders of the interests of agriculture and the countryside, he who best knows the potential of the arrondissement [les forces contributatives] and who has drawn up and presented the best plans for assessment, and he is doubtless the best known under all these aspects in your agricultural and arts council and in the offices of the Ministry of Finance.

The brothers Martais thought it worthwhile to mention that young Joseph at the colony of La Réunion had victoriously combatted “the disorderly party of the independentists and the traitors who wanted to turn the island over to the English.” This official correspondence relating to Villèle senior shows something of the concerns of noble landowners in the southwest at the dawn of the nineteenth century. So, too, did his 120 contributions on the subject of local agricultural conditions to the Journal des propriétaires ruraux from 1805 until his death. This
TABLE 7. The Declared Revenue of Joseph de Villèle, 1816

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Tax Paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commune de Mourvilles-Basses, Caraman Canton</td>
<td>3,271.99F</td>
<td>2,497.10F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Château de Villèle</td>
<td>108.05</td>
<td>82.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Château de Campauliac</td>
<td>25.46a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune de Caragoudes, Caraman Canton</td>
<td>628.60</td>
<td>29.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune de Varennes, Montgiscard Canton</td>
<td>545.25</td>
<td>297.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune de La Bastide-Beauvoir, Montgiscard</td>
<td>211.65</td>
<td>189.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toulouse</td>
<td></td>
<td>36.58c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,765.54F</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,176.57F</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AN C 1215A (52), elections, 1816.

a Tax on 24 doors and windows. The doors-and-windows tax was a small payment based on the number of doors and windows in a house.
b Tax on 18 doors and windows.
c House tax, a small levy on the rental value of a dwelling.

publication was the organ of the Haute-Garonne agricultural society and was read by the most influential and substantial landowners of the region. The society had a number of nobles who served as presidents during the first half of the century. If they were much less wealthy than great aristocrats like the Choiseul-Praslins or even the Raigecourts, they were more closely involved in agriculture and the local community. They were also conscious of the place of the gentry in national agriculture. The elder Villèle was an active correspondent of the agricultural society of the Seine; in 1812 he was discussing articles to be sent for publication.62

The election of Joseph de Villèle gave rise to a formal estimate of his tax and revenue in 1816. (The breakdown is shown in table 7.) This statement of income is very much lower than the real values of farm income found by Fourcassié, which explains the astonishing ratio of revenue to tax.

In August of 1817, the year following the famine, the 340-hectare Mourvilles-Basses estate, with its fields, meadows, woods, and vineyards divided among fourteen métairies, was one of four proposed for the Haute-Garonne in a national competition to identify the best-run properties in each department. As a result we have a fairly complete description by the commissaires made at the same time as the tax declaration given above. This was published in the journal to which the
elder Villèle had been such a prolific contributor, and at a time when his son was in the ascendant as mayor of Toulouse and a member of the general council of the department and the Chamber of Deputies in Paris. The account enables us to see something of the noble landowner's view of labor relations at a time when the rural population was increasingly sharply.

Both father and son insisted on cultivation by maitres-valets, by salaried workers rather than sharecroppers. The commissaire wrote of "the profound conviction of the owners that one cannot obtain good cultivation by sharecroppers or colons partiaires." They added that the buildings of the maitres-valets (resident wage laborers who received lodging and fixed quantities of produce) were well-made and healthy. For his part the elder Villèle described how the maitres-valets should be employed as family units of one, two, or three paid men to work especially on cartage and plowing, with a pair of oxen for each, while adding that "one should try to have always, insofar as possible, a supernumerary member of the family who is unpaid." Those who were paid (gageés) each received four hectoliters of wheat and four of maize per pair of oxen, with further arrangements for the product of the poultry, piglets, and so forth. The Toulouse agricultural society had set up a system of prize medals for maitres-valets who had worked on the domaine for at least ten years, who were of unquestioned honesty, and who were extremely careful with the livestock. Two families at Mourvilles-Basses received medals (in 1809 and 1813). Joseph's oldest son took over the management of the estate when his father became elderly, but he was a much less talented man than either his father or his grandfather. However, in his own way he exemplified the patience vaunted in the family motto which stated that all comes to he who knows how to wait. He did not dissipate the properties that he had inherited. Over three generations and at a time of radical political oscillations in France, the Villèles retained their lands and their château at Mourvilles-Basses.

In the 1772 marriage contract Jean-Baptiste-Guillaume de Villèle (1708–78), at the twenty-first degree of the Campauliac branch, gave to his eldest son, the future groom, Louis-François (?1749–1822), "pour témoigner le plaisir qu'il prend du présent mariage" to a "noble demoiselle" an irrevocable gift of all his possessions—under the reserve that he was to retain their enjoyment throughout his life. Nevertheless, we see here something that the Villèle family repeated in the period that concerns us: the father gave to his eldest son the management of affairs before his own death. The 1772 contract spelled out different obligations for Louis-François. Unlike the Montesquieu branch, the Campauliac branch had not slipped into a large number of weddings with
commoners, and they had sufficient male heirs, which was not the case with the Caraman branch. The 1772 marriage had transferred responsibility to Louis-François and five years later he bought the Mourvilles-Basses château, which remained the family seat at the time of this writing. 66

In 1799 Joseph (1773–1854) married (communauté marriage contract) at the Island of La Réunion the eighteen-year-old daughter of a wealthy planter, and this without the approval of his father, for which he felt the need to apologize profusely. He had made an excellent match, however, and he returned to France a great deal better off than when he had left. This was important for the 1807 partage sale, when Louis-François passed responsibility to his eldest son. 67 Joseph’s younger brother joined him soon after the wedding, fleeing from conscription, and that young man soon married into his sister-in-law’s family. The younger man remained in the colony when his brother returned to France in 1807. In later years he made some bad investment and business decisions and greatly diminished the Villele colonial holdings by 1820. Meanwhile, in France Joseph advanced his political career while never losing sight of the details of his financial interests. In May 1817 he drew up a memorandum of money deposited with the Protestant banker Courtois, in Toulouse, and in February 1828 he took out fire insurance on his house on the rue Vélane in the city.

In 1829 it was time for Joseph’s eldest son Henri to marry. Arrangements were again made to begin the property transfer. An important new aspect of this marriage contract was that of the majorat for the title of comte which been set up by Joseph and which was to pass to his son with the hereditary title. Article 6 of the marriage contract specified that if his mother survived his father, the revenue of the Campauliac château was to be hers for the remainder of her life. Henri’s parents were thus speaking of their “intention to advantage him” but at the same time were maintaining the web of obligations between all family members. At the time of his 1846 will Villele reviewed the financial advances made since he had received the management of Mourvilles-Basses. He calculated that he had increased his fortune by 901,025F and that the total worth of his fortune, including the dowries paid for his daughters (régime dotal), was 1,370,000F. Joseph observed that, after God, the family owed this good fortune to “the moderation and simplicity of our tastes, to the exactitude and orderliness of our conduct . . . and to the kindnesses and the confidences with which I was honored by the two kings whom I have had the happiness to serve.” 68

Henri was a less able manager and farmer than his father or grandfather, and he also kept out of politics. “The desire to augment his revenues was not, in the management of his estates, his principal con-
cern” was how his 1883 eulogist put it. One can scarcely imagine such a remark being made of his father or grandfather! The eulogy continued that the key to his character was “the extreme modesty which throughout his life was the essence of his character and which always prevented him from having any desire to play a public role at any level.” Yet if he did not augment the family wealth, neither did he squander it, and at his death he passed on the same patrimony that he had received. Indeed, changes in the inheritance law notwithstanding, the Villèles kept the Mourvilles-Basses estate intact during the period 1800–1870. The head of the family recognized his debt to siblings, and for their part they did not foreclose or demand immediate payment of what was owing to them. The Villèles illustrated what such family forbearance could achieve.

The three rough outline sketches in this chapter suggest factors affecting how marital links and bequests moved property among nobles. All three families examined seem to have increased their net worth substantially after 1800, especially the Raigecourts. Less wealthy nobles were nearer to the details of field and farmyard than aristocrats. The elder Villèle moved between Toulouse and Mourvilles-Basses and Campauliac, the bachelor Le Clerc de Fleurigny between Sens and Fleurigny. Their knowledge of local conditions and personalities was more finely grained than that of the Parisian Raigecourts or Choiseul-Praslin. Yet all nobles venerated the rural basis of their social position. One recent study has aptly advanced the idea that the economic outlook behind the management of large noble estates could be characterized as a continuation of a physiocratic outlook in an age of nascent capitalism. Not all nobles were equally close to peasant life, as we saw in reviewing their residence patterns. Yet Parisian aristocrat and country gentleman alike had the same respect for land as the most valuable form of wealth, not necessarily in its cash value, but in its worth as the necessary sustenance of hierarchy in society.