Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France

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Despite the best efforts of historians since World War II, it remained possible for a 1983 textbook survey of French nineteenth-century history to insist that the 1789 Revolution resulted from the constraints on a dynamic and capitalist bourgeoisie and to see the nineteenth century as the era of triumphal implantation of the power of that class. Clearly, still more information and analysis is required to deepen our understanding of the alleged clash between, and knowledge of, those clusters of social power labeled, respectively, bourgeois and noble. The dichromatic contrast between bourgeois and noble may be seen as still too crude, since it does not distinguish between the interconnections of the financial, industrial, and commercial realms. How capitalist were the bourgeois, and how feudal the nobles? How rich were both sets of people, and what ranges of wealth were involved? While we are still far from satisfactory answers to these questions, we must survey what investigations have uncovered about the post-Revolutionary prosperity of noblesse, titrés, and aristocrats if we are to examine their political outlook and activities with any sense of their relative socioeconomic standings. Too much economic history of nineteenth-century France is written from aggregate statistics unconcerned with the collective attitudes towards economic activities among the population, especially the nobles. The historian is reduced to a rather thin harvest of individual biographies or studies of particular enterprises when he explores the motor relationship between social rank and economic dynamism in nineteenth-century France.

Is it possible in even a crude way to equate the local presence of nobles with industrial activity? Almost all of the seventeen departments with the highest indices of industrial activity in 1836—the greatest number of forges and mines, of electors paying the business premisses tax (patente), and that at its highest amounts—as calculated by comte
d’Angeville, lay to the north of the Saint-Malo/Geneva line. Of the top 20 percent of departments with the most nobles, almost as many lay below that line (Ille-et-Vilaine, Loire-Inférieure, Maine-et-Loire, Gironde, Haute-Garonne, Hérault) as above it (Calvados, Orne, Loiret, Seine, Seine-Inférieure, Seine-et-Oise, Somme, Pas-de-Calais). While residence in one department was no obstacle to heavy investment in another, there seems to be no grounds to suppose that at the national level the mere presence of nobles stimulated industrial advance. Did the more wealthy nobles, those with big landholdings who also, according to Mlle Daumard, invested in the most secure and profitable holdings on the stock exchange, show a special interest in capital investments? In the current state of knowledge those individuals are more easily generalized about than identified in any numbers.

THE WEALTH OF THE NOBLES

To the present day it is notoriously difficult to estimate accurately the distribution of wealth among the different social categories in France, and in their efforts to do so even for the recent past historians have been perplexed. In the case of nobles and bourgeois included among the wealthiest 5 percent of adult males between 1800 and 1848, the lists of notables and voters for each department provide the best readily available source, at least until a complete analysis of the mutation par décès and notarial records is completed. That enormous enterprise is still so remote as not to detain us further now.

Yet, under the Empire the lists of notables were always partial and inaccurate. The notable lists envisaged by the Constitution of the Year VIII (the 600 highest taxed; and departmental lists of notables) excluded those in political bad odor, but they provided only a rough guide to levels of wealth. The Seine department lists of the 30 highest taxed in 1806 and 1812 carried such indisputably aristocratic names as de Luynes, Choiseul-Praslin, d’Harcourt, d’Aligre, Lefèvre d’Ormesson, and Talleyrand-Périgord but no noble “representative of active capitalism,” to use Bergeron’s terminology for those whose wealthiest representative was a merchant goldsmith paying 27,431F in tax. Those aristocrats were from liberal families at the end of the Old Regime who participated in capitalist ventures, with families not averse to intermarrying with the offspring of financiers. Their names are not those of the petty service noblesse, scrimping to make ends meet and necessarily restricting their ambitions to military service and estate agriculture. Farther afield from Paris at the start of the new century we find less celebrated patronyms on the lists (whose fortunes, estimated by officials, were given as rounded figures). For example, on the Indre electoral list of 1809 are d’Aubert, “student, landowner” with a fortune of
100,000F; a retired major, Depoix, a landowner with 400,000F; and Crubelier-Chandaire, former trésorier de France on the departmental general council, with a 1,000,000F. The 1810 electoral colleges' lists of the arrondissements throughout the Empire were only a little more precise. One recent examination of 100,000 notables identified the annual revenues from real estate of 44,079 residents of the 1792 departments that were under 1,000F (27 percent), 1,000–4,999F (58 percent), 5,000F–19,999F (13.9 percent), and 20,000F or above (less than 2 percent). Nobles were scattered throughout this corpus but were most likely to be encountered in the top third.

Under the constitutional monarchies, particularly after 1820, the accuracy of reporting tax paid improved dramatically. The lists were open to genuine public scrutiny, and the opposition took a keen interest in their contents. As was intended, the lists systematically favored landed wealth and underrepresented commercial and industrial revenues. Electoral lists excluded minors, of course, and, what is more important, single or widowed women of rank who paid the land tax. The lists omitted adult nobles who did not pay the minimum tax required to figure among the electorate, which was 300F until 1830 and 200F thereafter.

Less often appreciated were the differences between departments when the 300F was expressed as a proportion of the net landed revenue (see appendix 1). The investigation by Allard from Carcassonne in the early 1830s, based on calculations from the July 1821 finance law shown in appendix 1, claimed that the range varied from a low point in the Seine (1,573F), followed by the Loiret (1,769F), and rose to the Ariège (3,260F) or Basses-Pyrénées (3,478F) in the eighty-sixth and last place of the French departments in 1830. He provided a theoretical example from his own department, the Aude, and Ariège, which was its neighbor, when he asked: "What would one say to an Ariégeois landowner who says that with my 2,150F revenue I am not able to be an elector, while my neighbor in the Aude, whose estate is not separated from mine save by a river or a path, is an elector with a revenue of 1,310F?"

Despite all these weighty reservations about treating the electoral rolls as a standard or complete source on noble wealth, recent quantitative studies based on them reveal that the nobles were the wealthiest social category among Restoration and July Monarchy voters. Moreover, when examining the patentés in the electoral documentation of the 1830s, Beck concluded that noble participation in business was inconsequential.

We are less well informed about the relative prosperity of the nobles as a part of the French population during the years of the Second Empire. The electoral system changed drastically; the rolls did not give the tax
paid. It thus is hard to know whether a higher proportion of nobles paid the *patente* tax at ten-year intervals as time passed. The question is thorny because nobles, and especially noblewomen, still affected a ritual disdain for the attitudes of the businessman despite the natural attraction for cash. Writing from his impressions, Beau de Loménie thought a significant percentage of all nobles turned to business after 1875, and future research may sustain that intriguing suggestion. However, between 1800 and 1870 the new forms of industrial and commercial activity had less influence on the wealth of French nobles than, perhaps, at the end of the Old Regime and than in the twentieth century.

**Noble Attitudes Towards Economic Activity, 1770–1870**

Nobles liked to imply that generosity, flair, and a chevaleresque disinclination to count the change characterized their attitude towards money. These quaint ideas suggesting that nobles managed their finances in an archaic way were popular with the readers of romantic novels and perhaps with those engaged in squandering their patrimony. If there was a collective archaicism, it was hardly in the direction of extravagance. The nineteenth-century noble could in fact invent and make shrewd investments; he could work for the state (from the army to the Post Office) or even run a suitable business, particularly the sale of agricultural produce. The noble was unwilling, however, to rub shoulders at the Café de la Bourse, to haggle over discounts, or to discuss deals freely with business equals. To nobles the “grocer mentality” was vulgarity personified, or so it was widely believed. Yet nobles were obviously eager, and indeed constrained, to secure sources of rising revenue.

The public hostility of nobles to business ethics and activities under the Old Regime was often commented upon, although research revealed that a minority of the Second Estate was not prevented by those ideas from entering into business and capitalist activities. The indemnification records compiled from 1826 of losses suffered in Louisiana and Santo Domingo show something of the extent of overseas investment by nobles before the Revolution. The established view that nobles sought distinction, not lucre, and that they were opposed to the rise of capitalism during the eighteenth century has been vigorously attacked by Chaussinand-Nogaret, who went so far as to write that “among the economic elites the nobility, who in political terms represented one of the lines of resistance to kingly absolutism, stood in the first rank of the most dynamic minorities, and in terms of innovation and modernization nobles were among the leading activists.” A little later he added that if
nobles did not like to run family businesses, they were of qualitative importance “wherever the early forms of modern high capitalism were emerging. There they enjoyed a sort of monopoly.” More remains to be said on that score for the Old Regime. The political shocks of the Revolution slashed the profits of many pre-1789 enterprises or brought about their collapse. Emigration trampled down the earlier growth.

Historians of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries investigating the noble influences on the French economy have usually addressed one of two questions pointing in different directions: on the one hand, Who were the noblesse who wanted to engage or invest in commerce or industry? and on the other hand, Who were the businessmen who wanted to climb socially, either by stopping the activities that made them rich or, more unusually, by continuing them as titrés? The debate over the place of French nobles in business had gone on at least since the publication by abbé G.-F. Coyer of his La Noblesse commerçante of 1756. Much obscurity remains over the extent of the changed noble attitudes towards capitalist operations and trade during the nineteenth century. And how representative of businessmen was Ruinart, a wholesale merchant who from 1820 to 1828 was mayor of Rheims as well as a member of the departmental general council, or was he exceptional in his search for rank? Ennobled in 1817, he was made an honorary gentleman-in-waiting to the king and in 1825 became a vicomte, which was raised to a hereditary title in 1827 when he declared an annual revenue of 45,000£, drawn from land.

In proportion to their numbers in the population, did nobles take advantage of openings in an expanding economy at least as frequently as commoners? This was perhaps the case, but the statement needs qualification. Among the vast majority of bourgeois, few had the capital and skill to invest in the stock market or to set up new companies. The difference between the economic attitudes of the titled and those of the untitled was not that between landowner and capitalist but rather one of behavior and ethos. It flattered the urban shopkeeper or clerk without a share to his name to feel akin to the freewheeling investor who made a fortune. Such an individual certainly knew that he was not rich. He could scarcely convince himself that he belonged to the same social family as marquis de Dreux-Brézé. Conversely, the marked regional differences in the average wealth of noble families made the poorer all the more likely to stress what conjoined them to the richer aristocracy: the intangibles of a shared sociocultural heritage. In the nineteenth century, then, a noble like Greffulhe, with great wealth made in finance, was respected and easily accepted by the antique aristocracy, but a member of the provincial noblesse who tried and failed in either finance, commerce, or industry was somehow reproved by his fellows. The loss
by Henri de la Broise of nearly his entire personal fortune in the collapse of a mechanized weaving factory near Laval was interpreted by some of his neighbors as the result of a dérogance. The signpost that read dérogance pointed only down the hill of society, not to the ascent.

**NOBLES IN THE FRENCH ECONOMY**

During the slowdown in industrial development brought about by political upheaval, inflation, and war from 1790 until the end of the Napoleonic adventure in 1814, only cotton spinning made much progress, as a result of strenuous French efforts to service European markets now unsupplied by Britain. Apparently, this was not attractive to aristocratic investment. In the aftermath of the emigration that had touched one in twenty of the former second estate, real property seemed by far the safest place to put funds. One might speak of a real psychological falling back on landownership. In the provinces, hoarding of noble cash was noted by sharp-eyed contemporaries such as the Toulouse merchant who in February 1800 said that the peculiarly long-lived local Jacobin ascendancy had prejudiced both commerce and industry by frightening the nobles into living with the utmost frugality and into clinging onto their money, so that it went out of circulation. Moreover, the profits in agriculture appeared to justify this caution. In the present state of knowledge it seems wrong to speak of heavy aristocratic investment in capitalist enterprises under the First Empire. Recent experience made them wary. In its disruption of the national economy, the Revolution affected particularly the great seaports and shipowners. In the collapse of the old credit mechanisms, many aristocrats lost investments, and so did members of the provincial noblesse with interests in the Atlantic trade in places like Nantes, La Rochelle, and Bordeaux. Landed nobles were generally more fortunate than the leading Old Regime businessmen, many of whom were ruined and whose trade did not survive the chaos. The exceptions were those in finance.

The old business elite was largely replaced by men with new fortunes made from speculation, especially in real estate. Some of those with new fortunes became nobles after 1810. Louis Bergeron’s study of the Parisian bankers, businessmen, and manufacturers at the turn of the century informs us about fabulously wealthy men who themselves, or whose sons, became titrés, among them Greffulhe (comte, 1818), Seillière (baron, 1814), and Delessert (baron, 1810).

The Greffulhe family represents a particularly fascinating social trajectory for the subject concerning us as we examine the economic attitudes and permeability of rich bourgeois and nobles from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A Greffulhe (pronounced Greffeule, and there was no particle in the name) provided Proust with the model
for his character Guermantes, and he can be seen in the Paul Nadar photograph, staring into the camera with cool condescension. The Greffulhes originated in Languedoc, but the banker Louis at the root of the family rise to fortune was born in Geneva. His second wife was noble, Mlle Randon de Pully, of a family from Languedoc with various branches, all of which had prospered in the eighteenth-century financial system. Her father served throughout the Revolution (he was a divisional general in March 1793) and became a comte under the Bourbons in January 1815. Louis Greffulhe married her in London on 14 October 1793 and found the new family links highly useful. His son and heir Jean-Henri-Louis was born of his first marriage in Amsterdam in 1764. Jean-Henri-Louis already turned aside from the ruthless sharp dealing that had made his father so wealthy. He was mayor of his commune in the Seine-et-Marne and became a peer of France in 1818. He received almost 50,000Fr indemnity in the Emigrés' Billion for property mostly located in the Var. He married Mlle Vintimille du Lac in 1811, the year after his father's death. Their eldest son, Louis-Charles, born in Rouen in 1814, also sat as a peer of France and married into a ducal house, the La Rochefoucauld d'Estissac. In turn his son, Henri-Jules-Charles-Emmanuel, born in Paris in 1848, was the man whom Proust idolized. This brief outline of family history shows the eighteenth-century movement through Protestant commoner and commercial Europe to a nineteenth-century focus on high decorative office and luxurious living in Paris.

The Seillière family, originally from eastern France (Meuse), showed a parallel rise from banking and business to status. They included in the nineteenth century a member of the national Conseil général des manufactures, an advisory council on industrialization; a banker; and the president of the Salt Company of Eastern France. More than three-fourths of the descendants of the commoner couple who founded the lineage married nobles over the next two generations, with three weddings to commoners (14 percent) and two bachelors (9.5 percent). In Bergeron’s consideration of “the remodeling of the French economic space” during the early years of the nineteenth century, when the Parisian concentration of capital and entrepreneurs was obvious, more even than the emergence of Swiss and Protestants into the Haute-Banque, so also was the absence or feebleness of those Old Regime business nobles identified by Guy Richard. Their families did not—with a few obvious exceptions, such as the Solages family near Albi or the Wendel in Alsace—continue on the trajectory of commercial and industrial ventures started before the Revolution. The financiers and bankers showed most ability to prosper and to blend into the greatest families in the court aristocracy, just as they had done before the Revolution.
In 1814 the nobles began insistently to pursue the search for a political response to the economic needs of their despoiled members. The most straightforward demand was for indemnification of émigrés whose former property had been sold. At the Chamber of Peers on 3 December 1814 maréchal duc de Tarento suggested an annual indemnity payment of 12 million francs to compensate those émigrés whose property had been auctioned off. This pleasing prospect was obviously impractical in the tight postwar financial situation. A decade later the Villèle ministry tried to end continuing resentment over the losses caused by fidelity to the Bourbons—or simple bad luck—by introducing the celebrated Emigrés’ Billion project. The political storm of opposition to a measure that had the laudable aim of assuaging bitterness among the victims of Revolutionary confiscation seemed to the noblesse convincing proof of liberal malevolence towards them. The funds actually paid out were used largely for the rental of urban real estate. In any event, the Emigrés’ Billion did not radically alter the collective economic situation of nobles, although it provided compensation for individuals.

With the general peace from 1815 to mid-century, France resumed the economic growth so brutally stopped by the upheaval of the Revolution. Complaisant governments looked benignly on the search for profits by the political class that made up the electorate. Roads, canals, and stone and iron bridges yielded good profits at first, and from the 1830s the railroads became important motors of development. There were also opportunities abroad in which to invest as Algeria was taken over. Economic historians have pointed out how under the July Monarchy even agriculture became more businesslike, with an emphasis on lands as a commodity rather than an heirloom, stress on grain as a cash crop, and an indifference to customary and communal rights that were vestiges of another age. Nobles with the security of large estates were in a position where they too could dip into alternative sources of wealth with other shrewd investors.

Over the whole process of French economic growth, however, lay the pall of an inadequate supply of risk capital, as Fohlen and others have argued, which was only resolved with the rise of a banking system that combined the innumerable deposits of small savers into the large units of capital required for major investments. In 1847 the first bank notes of under 500F were circulated. During the Second Empire, with the vulgarization strictu sensu of banking, giant strides were made, but not by nobles. If nobles had a leading place in the old court capitalism, they were slower to find a niche in the new demotic capitalism of the nineteenth century. During the fifty years after 1800, nobles increased in per capita worth at a faster rate than other large categories in French society even as they fell in their absolute numbers. After 1850 their
Wealth was not directed into new investments on a sufficient scale to keep their favored position as their numbers fell relative to the number of commoners with large and growing fortunes.

In the remainder of this chapter I touch on noble economic activity beyond that based on land. Of course, to separate noble economic activity from agriculture is artificial, since landed wealth lay behind almost all nineteenth-century nobles who ventured into other economic realms. This is well exemplified by the liberal aristocrat duc de La Rochefoucauld Liancourt, the former grand master of the wardrobe, knight of the order of the Holy Spirit in 1786, and as close to being a friend of Louis XVI as a cautious king may permit a courtier to be, who found himself in 1802 after his return from emigration plowing up the parkland around his château and introducing English equipment from Suffolk to increase crop yields. He was also involved in the production of carding machines, currying leather, and wire-drawing machines, and in 1806 he was named inspector general of the École des arts et métiers. He later became a member of the Conseil général des manufactures, and in 1818 he joined with baron Delessert in setting up the caisse d'épargne before being stripped of his numerous charitable, local, and other appointments in 1823 as punishment for his liberalism. In 1826 he composed the *Statistique industrielle du canton de Creil*. In 1827 his coffin was carried by pupils of the Châlons École des arts et métiers; indeed, they dropped it during a scuffle with police. This great liberal seigneur and agronome of the Old Regime had thus shown after the Revolution an intense interest in new ways of making money and of assuaging poverty by providing employment. In his last writings he was at pains to underline that industrial innovations did no harm to agriculture but actually permitted thrifty workers to buy small allotments where their wives could cultivate food. Recent studies of La Rochefoucauld Liancourt have cautioned against some of the more enthusiastic and partisan contemporary praise, but they depict him as a man of practical intelligence who achieved a modicum of success.20 However, the revenue from his estates was always the real source of his affluence.

The most evident place to begin to search for revenue over and above land produce often lay close to the family château. Le Tellier de Souvre, marquis de Louvois and peer of France, constructed in his château park at Ancy Le Franc (Yonne) blast furnaces to produce high-quality iron, as well as a flour mill and a sawmill. He was known for a keen interest in railway technology, and in 1837 he took a patent on a method of navigating rivers at low water. Describing these achievements, an admiring baron Chaillou des Barres stressed the contrast between the “almost feudal manor house” and the great lord (“if such there are any left”),
who in the nineteenth century applied his thought, his leisure, and a part of his fortune to "the extension of social riches and of the well-being of all."21

Manufacturing initiatives that combined familial resources with seigneurial responsibilities were eminently respectable. Their localism and proprietary aspects of being linked to an estate made them very different from the predatory search for profit of mature capitalism. The marquis d'Hautpoul recalled his pleasure at combining the resources of his estates and the work provided for women and children of the neighborhood when he established in 1829 at Saint-Papoul (Aude) "a factory of common earthenware, yellow and brown, which would retail easily because its products were to be used by the lower class."22 In the 1850s Alfred de Vigny marketed eau de vie from his properties, and other nobles dabbled in similar ways.

Such additional revenues among nobles were probably as important as salaries or dividends received. In the provinces during the first half of the century only rarely were investments other than in property to exceed 5 percent of the total value of the largest noble patrimonies. This seems to have been the norm. In Mayenne the rise has been calculated as from 3.1 percent to 4.7 percent between 1800 and 1870.23 The generalization is less true of Paris, where northern nobles tended to establish their principal residences. They found more opportunities for placing the wealth accumulated from successful agriculture. The 1807 Commercial Code regularized the joint stock company and created the Société anonyme. Such vehicles made it easier for nobles to invest liquidity indirectly through the family notary. Probably the Parisian nobles (and perhaps those in more economically innovative cities) were always in advance of somnolent provincial cousins, particularly in the south. Much more study is needed to settle this point. The most reliable statistical source for measuring the proportions of real property to other forms of noble investment would be a large-scale use of the mutations par décès registers, although many studies already undertaken did not distinguish nobles as a separate category in the general population.24 This prevented observation of the difference in wealth levels between nobles and non-nobles and left untroubled the Marxist paradigm of social change.

In the absence of large-scale statistics, we must retreat to some exceptions: better-known nobles whose property other than real estate (mobilier) exceeded the 5 percent here suggested as the mean. The Aligre fortunes could perhaps be traced in British bank archives. Étienne-François, who had long presided over the Parlement of Paris, emigrated in 1789, having already transferred funds to English banks. Later he returned to the Continent and died at Brunswick in Germany
in 1798, leaving what was described by contemporaries as “a colossal fortune which his extreme avarice prevented him from enjoying.” His son Charles (1770–1847), who entered into this inheritance after 18 brumaire, was Princess Murat’s chamberlain and from 1803 to 1820 a member of the Seine general council. The Restoration made him a peer.25

More detailed information has been amassed on how funds were protected by foreign bankers for baron Auget de Montyon, the celebrated miserly philanthropist and former intendant of Auvergne, Provence, and La Rochelle who died in 1820. He left a giant fortune of almost 7 million francs to various academies and the hospitals of Paris. Before the Revolution he had owned considerable estates close to Meaux (Seine-et-Marne), and until 1793 he continued to purchase new properties with assignats as he steadily expanded his estates. He made numerous loans to other nobles, although he suffered the misfortune that many of these were repaid in devalued assignats. He also had the foresight to transfer very large sums of money to foreign bankers. This permitted him to continue to invest from the comparative safety of a village near the Swiss border, but he was forced into definitive emigration and was officially declared an émigré in February 1793. He lent large sums of money in Switzerland, which provided a revenue but also caused a lot of litigation over repayments. Late to emigrate, he was also late to return, arriving after Louis xviii in 1814. He was given a posthumous award of 815,292F in the Emigres’ Billion. Inside France his properties, investments, and the indemnity made up a total of 3,185,102F, but his foreign assets were still more considerable, attesting to his shrewd management of funds while in London exile. His executors reported the following assets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>32.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubeck</td>
<td>Insignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands, Russia, Louisiana</td>
<td>6.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saxony, Prussia</td>
<td>1.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuscany</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>8.89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Auget de Montyon was extremely careful in the management of his wealth, personally frugal to the point of tight-fistedness and industrious in watching over all of his interests. The loss of his government positions brought about by the fall of the Old Regime, the confiscation of his patrimony, and his exile first to Switzerland and then to England seem if anything to have stimulated him into still more financial exertions. Upon his return to France he repossessed some scraps of his family
property that had not been sold and wistfully surveyed the château that he loved so much but would never regain, even though he engaged a local notary to investigate whether it could be repurchased. He was a bachelor and produced no heir to his fortune, which was all to the advantage of the poor and the sick of Paris. 26

The governor of Vincennes château under the Restoration, marquis de Roux de Puivert, son of an Old Regime judge of the Parlement of Toulouse, held property in the Aude and Dordogne, various state bonds, investments in the insurance companies that attracted many nobles, and a share in a company that constructed iron ships. Some 63 percent of his income was drawn from property, but the remainder came from investments, so that his concerns were far from exclusively those of the soldier and landowner. 27

Later in the century we find some other examples of the balance between land and other investments in noble fortunes. The 1853 share-out of the property of Numance de Girardin, a former cavalry officer, revealed that of a total of 843,942F, 6.5 percent was in land, 2.3 percent in houses, 54.5 percent in loans and other properties, and 36.5 percent in investments in railways, coal mines, and above all gaslight (217,600F). 28 The share-out of the duchesse de Maillé’s property in 1852 revealed a different configuration. Of a total of 2,476,828F, 45.6 percent was in land, 9.9 percent in houses, 20 percent in loans and other properties, 17 percent unpaid legacies owing from her late husband’s estate, 6.64 percent in French and American bonds, and only 0.2 percent in commercial investments, in her case in the new form of urban transport, omnibuses. 29 Two years later a noble spinster in much less opulent circumstances left her nephew in Toulouse an inheritance of 75,762F, of which 12 percent was in land, 46 percent in a house in the best district of Toulouse, 33 percent in loans and interest, and 8.2 percent in furnishings. 30 The impression from a limited sample of ninety-three wills is that the number of Parisian nobles who held interests on the stock exchange or who put funds into banking probably increased during the century. However, the transfer of liquid assets to relatives often took place before death. At least one historian has suggested that the process is better traced in marriage contracts than in legacies. 31

Although the majorats sur demande of the Restoration established the entailments of their new titles on land, real estate, and rentes, a few of them gave information about other economic activities. Among the noblesse were T. G. C. Boissel de Monville, the political economist from a Norman family of the robe who owned a sheet manufactory in Elbeuf, and Riquet de Caraman, with two soap factories in Marseilles worth 121,422F (which included the equipment). Cazin de Honinchun had a quarter-share of the mines and glassworks of Hardinhem, while Posuel...
de Verneaux held forges at Varennes. Like Bellet de Saint Trivier, he also had shares in the Givors Canal, near Lyon, which although short made a good profit on coal, iron, and glass transportation. Mme Camus de Martroy had an interest in the Littry coal mines near Caen, worth an average return annually of 15,000F, which was mentioned as a component of her husband’s declared revenue. Among commoners who were given new titles, one owned a third of the Poullaouen mines, near Carhaix in the Finistère, and another had a factory producing bathtubs near Epinal, with an annual revenue of 15,000F, as the largest component of an income that included 10,000F in 5 percent rentes. Marriages also forged new links between old lineages and new money, like that of Choiseul with Fraulein Schickler, daughter of a wealthy Prussian magnate.

The nineteenth century thus saw an economic education of nobles that, like that for France in general, was slow and uneven but irreversible. What was rare was any willingness to advertise financial expertise, and it was even rarer to display commercial skills. The slave-trader Du Fou, the former mayor of Nantes (1813–15; 1815–16), descended from a family of Breton noblesse, was a distinct oddity when he gave his profession on the 1820 electoral list as “comte, wholesale merchant,” in that order. He paid 3,152F 36 tax in total, which placed him among the wealthiest 10 percent of electors in France. The child of nobles, in 1791 he married a commoner, by whom he had five children. His offspring married nobles, each one with the handsome dowry of 120,000F. He also became a business associate of his own father-in-law’s. Du Fou had acquired biens nationaux during the Revolution but was arrested in 1793. His departure from endogamy and his excursion into business followed that of his father, who in 1762 had married the daughter of a rich merchant. Du Fou was named a hereditary comte in October 1817. One of his sons became a consul at Bremen but also a merchant, while one daughter married a prefect of the Maine-et-Loire and another, an officer and municipal official. Here we see an individual strategy, that of Du Fou and his father, that enriched a family but did not divert it from its noble trajectory. In notarized wills, marriage contracts, leases, sales, the partages of family property, and other documents there are sufficient indicators to permit the historian to see favored investments for nobles. Some brief observations are made here on metallurgy, glass-making, transportation, and insurance, which especially attracted them.

**TEXTILES**

There was a striking absence of noble holdings in the flourishing textile business of nineteenth-century Paris, which has been described as the
cotton capital of France because of the number of looms in operation under the First Empire in response to the embargo of the Continental Decrees. However there was a considerable noble activity in textiles in the Norman wool and cotton business, as we know from Richard’s study of families in the first half of the nineteenth century of whom two-thirds had no links with commerce before the Revolution. Twenty-three of sixty-four enterprises were in the valley of the Andelle, located at the intersection of the commercial zones of Rouen and Paris. Richard looked into the cases of “nobles converted to industry” compared with “bourgeois converted to industry before ennoblement” and deduced that a significant number of noblesse had turned to cloth production. There seem to be no other examples of such a decisive regional engouement for industry, although a number of nobles were interested in metal production.

METALLURGY

The pre-Revolutionary noblesse’s metallurgical investments were mostly small ironworks on properties with mines, woods, and watercourses. The Old Regime aristocratic investors in Le Creusot who had owned shares of 2,500 livres each were still untypical even after the Revolution. Miners and metalworkers on the noble estates usually found most of their livelihood in local agriculture or even the seigneurial estate. The metal production was subsumed under other peasant activities. The noble owners of the ironworks were prone to see them as a seigneurial adjunct to their estate and took scant interest in improving scientific technology or making a real effort to increase profits. In part that was a natural consequence of the small scale of operations. As in other small businesses, the noble ironmaster could not concentrate sufficient resources to attempt research. The Revolution had not changed the situation of the small estate forges which had little or no rapport with the Paris Ecole des mines, and everywhere at that level technical advance was sluggish.

François-Godefroy de Saincthorent, a rich member of the noblesse who had been a deputy in the Conseil des Cinq-Cents, the political assembly created by the constitution of the year III (1795) and dissolved by the 18 brumaire coup in 1799, before his nomination as the Aveyron’s first prefect (1800–1808), was unusual among his local fellows in his passion for factories, blast furnaces, and watercourses, an eccentricity described by local critics as his “minérogamie,” almost as odd as his egalitarian outlook. The ironworks near Bourges belonging to the de Vogué family was equally unusual in its search to improve methods. Generally the rural nobility perpetuated a semiartisanal production of “sylvopastoral” Catalan forges along the Pyrenees, which used local
charcoal and ores like those from the open mine of marquis d’Angosse, peer of France, at Louvie (Hautes-Pyrénées). Nobles saw nothing peculiar in this, since neighboring commoner ironmasters were equally sunk in routine. The number of traditional Catalan forges along the Pyrenees increased from forty-three to fifty-seven between 1818 and 1848. The largest were in the hands of noblesse families such as the Saint-Jean de Pointis, the Astries, the Gudanes, and the Thonnel d’Orgeix. In the center of France there was a similar noble presence: in the 1820s Mme d’Osmond owned a furnace at Saint-Baudel, and Mme de Charost had five forges in the Cher. Nowhere, however, did nobles take a lead in improving an industry in which they were, at first glance, well represented.

By the 1870s nobles were dropping out of the national iron industry. In the Cher the withdrawal was marked from earlier noble-owned ironworks at Mazières, Bigny, Chateauneuf, Mareuil, and Thaumiers. At Chailland (Mayenne) the marquis de Chavagnac bought an ironworks in 1834 from a count at the Swedish Legation in Paris for 1,400,000F, which constituted the bulk of his unusually substantial payment from the Emigrés’ Billion (his was the sixth largest award in the nation). He showed himself a bold exception by not following the usual tendency to place the money in real estate, land, or government bonds. Unfortunately for him, this venture turned out to be too risky. The Chailland works were persistently weakened by the same flaw as other smaller operations: dependence on charcoal. The ironworks survived for thirty years before its final closure, but it swallowed up de Chavagnac’s fortune.

In the Isère the Marcieu family regained in 1802 a blast furnace that had been confiscated during the Revolution, but despite their high hopes, it did not flourish under the marquis’s poor management. Bad accounting, as well as high fuel costs, meant that the Marcieus did not achieve the economies of scale and technical efficiency needed to make the enterprise profitable. The business crisis of 1839 shook the family finances. Despite the introduction of improved bookkeeping in the 1850s, the last pouring took place in 1863, and eleven years later marquis Gaston de Marcieu sold the remaining mineral rights in his possession to the Schneider Company of Le Creusot. Scattered evidence from different parts of France demonstrated continuing noble interest in metallurgy, but the enterprises were too small and cautious to achieve big success. The cheap imports allowed by the 1860 treaty with Great Britain eliminated a number of marginal producers struggling with the high costs of fuel and ores.

The decline of the small “sylvopastoral” ironworks brings into glaring contrast those few nobles engaged in large-scale industrial and cap-
italist operations. One outstanding titled entrepreneurial family of Lorraine, the Wendels, sprang from origins in the Low Countries.42 Their forges prospered in eighteenth-century Lorraine, where they purchased a seigneurie. During the early Revolution they stayed by the forges and did not emigrate, but after the execution for royalism of one of the family at Metz in 1793, the men left for Germany and Austria. Despite the prodigious efforts of the dowager Wendel to safeguard the ironworks by making them indispensable to the republican war effort, they were put up for sale, but in 1803 through a straw man (in the event a wholesale merchant of Metz) François de Wendel again took control of the forges. François profited from the Empire’s demand for war materials, and the growing labor force indicated that the momentum built up during the war was carried over into the Restoration. In 1811 there were 180 workers, by 1820 some 2,000, and by 1825 about 3,000. In loose principle François, like most nobles, was royalist, but like so many others in 1807, he agreed to serve the Emperor as mayor of the village where his seigneurie was located (Hayange), became a general counselor in 1808, and during the Hundred Days supplied the imperial armies with shells.

The Wendels were cosmopolitan in outlook, habitually speaking German with their workmen. They looked overseas to Britain for ideas on industrial innovation. In 1816 François visited Wales to examine metallurgical factories, and he lured some workers back to France. Charles, his son and successor, made a similar trip in the 1840s.43 The Wendels were proud of their nobility and married into respectable noblesse families. Charles ran his forges with real attention to the operative's welfare; under the Second Empire he was a deputy. His son Henri de Wendel graduated in 1865 from the Paris Ecole centrale, an institution with the most advanced engineering training of the time. Despite his emigration and his genteel symbolic royalism, François seems to have been snubbed by the local upper crust, while Charles was too engrossed in his factories and business affairs to investigate how well he was regarded by his peers. The Wendels were nobles by inclination and in fact, but in a manner that made their fellows uneasy.

MINING
Delving into the earth of one’s estate had long been acceptable to nobles. Baron du Bord, member of the Drôme general council, had quarries in the Montélimar arrondissement employing more than two hundred workers whence were transported by rail the stones used to pave the main street in Lyons during the Second Empire.44 More widespread than stone or marble quarries were those of coal, sometimes associated with related metal industries. Such property was vulnerable
to confiscation during the Revolution. As soon as he returned from emigration under Napoleon the marquis d’Osmond laid claim to his pre-Revolutionary ownership of considerable coal fields in the Loire estimated at sixty-eight square kilometers in 1786. His claims were upheld, and public authority aided him in reasserting his rights, but these were contested by the local people. In 1815 his agents were harassed by a demonstration of women led by the local curate and with the connivance of the tax collector. Local landowners also resisted mining activities. Doubtless the marquis felt relieved when he retreated from the most exposed position by relinquishing his rights to a new company called the Compagnie des mines de Roche-la-Molière. In return for a cash settlement of 132,000F and a share in the new company, in 1820 Osmond gave up any direct activity in the Loire coal fields. The company was then controlled by a former subprefect, a baron of the Empire disgraced for rallying during the Hundred Days who subsequently trained as an engineer: Jean-Jacques Baude.45

Similarly, in the Anzin coal company noble directors such as the duc d’Aremberg and the vicomte de Hocquart made only minor decisions, and after the withdrawal from management of the elderly and cautious vicomte Desandrouin in 1817 the other nobles, who constituted a quarter of the shareholders, were inactive in running the company. In 1833 more than a quarter of the shares were in the hands of nobles, among them Mme Mayneaud de Pancemont with 40,000F revenue in 1825 from her 1 12/19 share in the Vieux Condé shaft.46 The company increased profits and was at the root of the prosperity of various families, but nobles such as Louis-Alexandre-César Taffin de Givency, for example, simply enjoyed their revenues without busying themselves about the company’s management.47

The noble family whose long involvement in coal mining is perhaps best known is that of the Solages. Before the Revolution they owned the coal mines at Carmaux, 92 kilometers from Toulouse, and in 1810 the vicomte François-Gabriel de Solages set up the Compagnie des Solages with forty-eight shares divided among his two sons and three daughters. By the 1830s Achille de Solages realized the importance of a railway to ease transportation difficulties for the coal, and in March 1833 he was attempting to have a railway link Carmaux and Albi.48 At the transfer of the company from a family property to a capitalized company in 1853 there were fifteen owners, the descendants of the original six, all noble, with a predominance of women. As the historian of Carmaux has pointed out, they had little to do with operations but had a keen interest in the maximum income from the property.49 There was inadequate reinvestment or concern with capitalist enterprise. Administrators were selected on the basis of inheritance. After 1854, when the
company had gone public, the head office was moved to Paris, nobles and commoners bought stocks, deputies were named to the board of directors, and the Solages became few among the stockholders. Only when the company was taken out of noble hands, despite the good endeavors by some of the family, was the mine managed more efficiently. Indeed, one may generalize that in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the demand for fossil fuel was advancing by leaps and bounds, nobles lost their prominent and leading role in the coal industry.

A number of Paris aristocrats invested in the gas lighting of Paris, which was a side product of the coal business. In August 1841 an engineer, Selligue, set up a company for the lighting by gas of Batignolles until 1863 that included among its shareholders (with limited liability) baron de Girardin, baron de Montmorency, marquis de Boissy, marquis de Tilière, and the comte de Tilière, as well as two commoners, an avocat from Paris and a Lyon landowner. The capital was 410,000F, of which more than two-thirds had come from the noblemen. In 1842 the same engineer set up a company in Paris, with head offices on the avenue de Clichy, to light Batignolles, Monceaux, Montmartre, and surrounding communes. Marquis de Boissy, peer of France and a member of the Cher general council, lent the sum of 160,000F at 5.25 percent.  

GLASS MANUFACTURE
The manufacture of glass continued to attract noble investment during the nineteenth century, less because of any romanticism about gentilshommes verriers than because of the linkage of bottles to vineyards. One such investor was the vicomte who possessed shares in not only the Carmaux coal mines discussed above and ironworks but also a glassworks on the grounds of his château at Blaye-les-Mines (Tarn). In 1810–11 the properties generated an annual revenue estimated at 20,000–60,000F. In 1862 the glassworks was sold to Ferdinand de Rességuier. By the last third of the nineteenth century the Solages had essentially withdrawn from the more commercial demands of being active in the glass business to the station of simply owning shares in the Carmaux coal mines and being at the pinnacle of local society.  

TRANSPORTATION
Nineteenth-century nobles enthusiastically took part in the biggest single capitalist venture in France: the modernization of the transportation system. After Napoleon’s fall the country was left with the dilapidated Old Regime roads, neglected for more than a quarter-century. Repairing and extending the network, lengthening the canals, and un-
dertaking the laying down of national railroads (a task that took forty years) involved colossal investments but promised enviably generous profits. The possibility of garnering wealth from transportation and communications excited astute nobles as much as it did the Saint Simons. The ducs de Doudeauville and Fitzjames and the vicomte de Chaptal put money into canal construction under the Restoration. Marquis de Louvois invested heavily in railways and canals. Particular nobles developed an almost seigneurial interest in branch lines. Baron de Damas invested in the Fougeres-Vitré line, marquis de Contades in that of Briouze-Macé, and Charles de Wendel had influence with the Eastern Railway Company, which was profitable for his forges. An 1844 pamphlet underlined noble involvement in transportation:

Take two or three deputies, two or three peers of the realm; these are absolutely indispensable, since the best way to make sure of operating within the law is to enlist the support of those who make it. Add to these about fifteen administrators, preferably titled, because the nobility has never enjoyed so much prestige as it has since it lost its privileges; take an advertisement somewhere on the fourth page of various newspapers since the fourth page is always devoted to financial news, which is read by everyone, and which best sums up the spirit of the age—and you will have as much money as you want.53

Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre, son of a former student of the Ecole polytechnique and equerry to Joseph Bonaparte, as a member of the general council of the Eure agitated for a railway line between Beauvais and Amiens. In 1866 he published a pamphlet on the importance of this “chemin de fer d’intérêt local.”54 Not all noble investment in railways was limited to France: an adventuresome member of the Machault d’Arnouville family included in his portfolio obligations on the Egyptian viceroy, shares in the Orléans railway as well as in that of southern Austria, and investments in the Crédit Foncier.55

INSURANCE

In eighteenth-century France there was a growing knowledge of the actuarial principles behind the tontines, and the first insurance companies were set up against fire, hail, and death. The Revolution not only saw the collapse of the existing companies but enunciated a noisy disapproval of the substitution of (counterrevolutionary) calculation for the warm fervor of republican humanitarianism.56 With the Bourbon Restoration there was a renewed impulse to set up insurance companies, starting most notably with a Parisian mutual company authorized against fire in 1816. Vicomte Pinon, comte Butler, and the marquis de Contaut-Biron were the leading figures. In the following year the former
émigré Breton noble Auguste-Casimir de Gourcuff, who had made a close investigation of the English insurance business, was associated with the foundation of a maritime, fire, and life assurances company. The movement gained momentum. Nobles invested in the insurance companies of the 1820s and 1830s: the Soleil-Incendie (1829), the Fraternelle Parisienne (1837), the Etoile, and the Concorde, or such provincial enterprises as the Toulouse company against hail (1826) or the Dijon fire insurance company. In 1836 Alfred Potier de Courcy translated Francis Baily's *The Doctrine of Life Annuities and Assurances... Investigated*, an earnest of his fascination with the mathematical theories of probability that lay behind the financing of the insurance business. His curiosity about this led him to produce a flood of publications, especially after 1860.

While it would be too much to say that nobles dominated the insurance business, they were certainly quick to see its lucrative possibilities. Alphonse Roullet de la Bouillerie (known as baron because his father had received a nonhereditary title in May 1830) presided over a board of directors of the Providence Fire Insurance Company in the second year of its existence, 1839. Fellow directors included such nobles as the marquis de Dreux-Brézé, the duc de Mirepoix, the marquis de la Rochejaquelein, and a more recent addition to the elite, the marquis de Pastoret. As befitted the descendant of Norman tax collectors who numbered in their recent lineage a baron of the Empire who became an ultra deputy in the Sarthe and a peer of France in 1827, Alphonse de la Bouillerie was a success: in 1843 he became president of the Paris-based consortium of insurance company directors. By 1847 the same company, with offices at 92, rue Richelieu, had a board of directors presided over by vicomte de Vaufreland, a former avocat général, as well as a duc (Mirepoix), two marquis (Barthélemy and Pastoret), four comtes (Hauterive, Pontgibaud, Biencourt, and Aubespin), two vicomtes (Saint-Priest and de l’Espine), two barons (Dudon and Frémiot), and two particles (de Bousquet and de Raineville). The other two individuals were MM. Roux and Arthaud-Beaufort. In 1847 the Compagnie française du Phénix included on its board of directors the son of an artillery sergeant and peer of France baron Gabriel Neigre, Joly de Bammeville, comte de Montesquiou, Anatole de Montesquiou, and comte Dumanoir. Under the Second Empire more than half of the Imperial Insurance Company’s eleven-member board were nobles: the duc d’Albufera, baron de Bonnemains, marquis de Chaumont-Quitry, the duc de Galliéra, comte Frédéric de Lagrange, marquis de Talhouet, and the duc de Valmy. Doubtless all these individuals represent the long-established fondness for *rentes viagères* in noble families’ financial practice,
together with the vivifying experiments by eighteenth-century financiers. Their activities were made possible by growing state benevolence towards their activities, especially under the Second Empire. If in 1819–20 insurances against fire emerged from under a cloud of official suspicion, again in 1864–65 there was a similar spurt of insurance against accidents. In 1865 a General Security Company against accidents was founded with fixed premiums; senator-baron Brenier presided over the board of directors, and comte Ferdinand de Lasteyrie, vicomte de Léautaud, comte Léopold Le Hon (deputy for the Ain department), vicomte de Villiers, and MM. Le Pelletier de Saint-Rémy (an administrator of the Colonial Bank), Besnier de la Potonerie, and others served with him. The relative security of return and low risk doubtless attracted investors who wanted a steady and anxiety-free income. Like government bond issues, insurance demanded of investors no unseemly fiscal agility nor unremitting attention if managed in a conservative way. Moreover, insurance was concerned with the kinds of properties held by nobles.

**NOBLES AND PROFESSIONS**

Collective attitudes towards labor and economic activity have fascinated historians since the days of Sombart and Tawney, and work and entrepreneurial attitudes are at least as important as the availability of skills, materials, and capital in explaining economic success or failure. Nineteenth-century nobles have frequently been seen as somehow embodying Catholic, monarchical, and landed values at variance with Judeo-Protestant, egalitarian, industrial, and commercial ones. Some writers have seen the contrast in political alignments between liberals and Legitimists. An honor roll call of nearly one hundred individuals involved in the 1832 adventure of the duchesse de Berry when she tried to precipitate a Legitimist restoration listed the professions of those implicated: baron de Chaulieu, former prefect of the Finistère and the Loire; chevalier de Léspinois, a former subprefect; the vicomte de Suleau, a former conseiller d'État; vicomte de Puységur, a former auditeur at the Council of State; comte de Jouffroi, a former magistrate. The soldiers included comte de Grive, former general of the Jura national guard; comte Curial, who had served in the artillery during the Algerian campaign; marquis de Lentilhac, a General staff officer; and the chevalier de Forceville, a former bodyguard of the king. Among these Legitimist paladins only one wholesale merchant (négociant) was listed, with the commoner name of Lahirigoyen. The assumption that business and moneymaking were, if not despicable, at the least sordid “bourgeois” pastimes, derided in literature from M. Jourdain to Ubu-Roi, was not restricted to the literati but was frequently found among, if
not actually derived from, the nobles. At least until the 1870s and perhaps afterwards, noble reticence to take up wholeheartedly commerce and industry fettered French entrepreneurialism.

As France moved slowly from a primarily agricultural economy to a more diversified one, the demand for a host of new abilities increased. In practical terms the insistent question for any noble family, particularly the younger sons, was what professions were suitable for those unable to live from the produce of the family estate. This makes it instructive to look at the range of professions nobles followed after 1800. Table 8 contrasts the stated professions of three groups of nobles identified in the years between 1816 and 1870. The table permits us to say something about how nobles made a living. Agriculture is clearly the most deceptive category here. We know from chapter 2 the overwhelming predominance of noble income derived from land. Use of the term landowner (propriétaire) was by nature a redundancy in connection with other labels like mayor, judge, officer, or barrister. Indeed, among the aristocracy any professional label verged on the downright rude in

| Profession             | Restoration
c | 1866b | 1854–70c |
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Town/village worker</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commerce/manufacture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central administration</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local administration</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>130</td>
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<tr>
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<td>42</td>
<td>11.9</td>
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<td>41.0</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>Court</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<td>116</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputies</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>213</td>
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\(^a\) AN BB 778–84. This includes past professions (sometimes plural) by candidates for majorats sur demande: 218 individuals.


\(^c\) Sample of 213 taken from Révérend.
good usage. To qualify one of the great names of France—particularly that of a family who thought they already possessed one—with an occupation was to imply that the latter was of equal importance to the name itself. That is why the term landowner is a redundancy, rarely used despite its ubiquity as the source of wealth. By contrast, we note the predictable prominence of military applicants for status under successive regimes; in 1866 it was double their presence among nobles at large.

One of the most durable effects of the Revolution was to initiate the process by which the French officer corps became increasingly lower-class, and the wars of the Revolution and Empire accelerated this, at least as much as the emigration of many officers drawn from the noblesse. Studying these changes in the social origins of French officers, one historian noted that “before giving ground to the thrust of the lower classes, the ruling classes put up a series of rearguard actions and long cherished the persistent hope of a victorious offensive return.” The continuing presence of the noblesse in the officer corps, although they almost never served below the rank of captain and remained for fewer years than did commoners, testified to the continuing prestige of the warrior rite of passage. It was also a station to be given up on the death of the family head, at marriage, or even in the face of a boring or unpleasant assignment. Among commoner officers there was a strong desire to gain a title to emulate aristocratic officers. The shrinkage in the number of nobles who entered the army probably paralleled but did not exceed the demographic weakening discussed earlier. On the other hand, there was always a strong demand for titles on the part of commoners in the armed forces.

Positions of authority in line with the service traditions of the noblesse were quite acceptable. Increasingly nobles were drawn to central and local administration. In 1866 nobles were listed as conseillers généraux, subprefects, mayors, and even municipality secretaries. State service remained the highroad to status. Other nobles held positions in the Ministry of Finance. There were various receivers and controllers of the direct and indirect taxes and indeed even mere tax collectors, as at Beauvoir (Deux-Sèvres). Haussmann was exemplary in his pursuit of rank. He began to ask for a position in the Legion of Honor as a young subprefect in the 1830s, received his baronial title when Seine prefect, and throughout his life was avid for foreign decorations and titles.67

Nobles were attracted by some completely new specialities, such as the postal service. In the 1866 directory of nobles we find the postal director at Alençon (Orne), the director of the Vannes (Morbihan) telegraph, and the much grander director general of the telegraph lines, vicomte de Vougy. Comte Ferdinand de Dürkheim-Montmartin was an
inspector general of the telegraph service in the same period. The postal service also gave noble spinsters positions, as in the case of the directresses of the post offices at Sap (Orne) and Petite Pierre (Bas-Rhin). Members of the judicial system were far less prominent than before 1789, their percentage falling steadily.

Medical practice was increasingly respectable to nobles, reflecting the rising prestige already obvious under the Old Regime. The king’s First Doctor in the eighteenth century presided over the medical corps of the kingdom, enjoyed the title of comte which was attached to his functions, and lodged inside the Versailles château. One historian noted six families of royal doctors and surgeons whose members became active in the financial system of the ferme générale, thus making lateral linkages with financiers, another group entering the aristocracy by marriage. Those doctors owed their status to their proximity to the body royal, but a century later there were many signs of the coexistence of distinction and medical practice. In the Bachelin-Deflorenne 1866 directory names of nobles such as de Beauvais, chevalier of the Legion of Honor and doctor on the Faculty of Medicine, or Besnard du Val, doctor at Rheims, appeared with some frequency. Scipion C. L. Corvisarts Desmarets, adopted son of the physician to Napoleon I who had been made an imperial baron, was himself “confirmed” as a baron in August 1859, and the title reverted at his death to his nephew Lucien, in turn physician to Napoleon III. Lucien’s wife was a Mlle de Romain.

In chapter 5 ecclesiastical nobles are discussed at more length, ranging from the almoner at the Poitiers prison to the vicar at Notre-Dame de Bonne-Nouvelle in Paris or the bishop of Toronto.

Few men are listed in 1866 as having a position in the world of manufacturing and commerce—less than half of 1 percent—although many (almost 17 percent) were in the liberal professions. One of the few merchants was identified in capital letters—MARCHAND—and M. d’Auteville was dropped from the 1868 edition. Négociants were more acceptable, especially the small group of wine wholesalers. There were other noble négociants at Paris, Arras, Nantes, Nice, Réunion, and Martinique. None were listed with a title or a coat of arms. There were related professions among those given: business agent (agent des affaires) or salesman, as in the case of a “representative” for the Folembray glassworks at Rheims. About ten nobles were listed as representing insurance companies in different places. Closmadeu was a Nantes shipper. Chollet owned blast furnaces, as did Adelsward. Another was underdirector of forges at Guérigny, in the Nièvre. Another noble directed the Viroigne mines near Béthune in the Pas-de-Calais. Bernadières directed the Lorient gas factory.

Were nobles prominent among the inventors and technicians of the
time? Comte Hilaire Bernigaud de Chardonnet, who invented artificial silk; Philippe de Girard, who designed a novel flax loom; and de Lesseps, of Suez Canal fame, spring to mind. Their careers can scarcely be said to reveal a specifically noble approach to technology; rather, the fundamental question was how nobles entered the entrepreneurial milieu as equal actors and how their elders and relatives viewed their aspirations. Without many more studies of family correspondence, it is hard to say much about this. Certainly one investigation of the Second Empire’s leading corporate businessmen showed that prominent titled individuals sat on boards of directors: men like the duc de Galliéra, barons Rothschild, and many others on boards of companies of the second rank of corporate importance.⁷⁰

One profession to which French nobles inclined in the twentieth century appears to have enjoyed less favor in the 186os. This fitted into an evolution over centuries. Julian Dent argued that in the seventeenth century the financiers were separate from, and hated by, the feudal aristocracy. Towards the end of the century of Louis xiv the first marriages took place between financiers and nobles as the aristocrats pursued money. However, the noblesse continued to revile the “traitants” and to disdain commerce. In the eighteenth century, as Yves Durand stressed, there was an increasing number of marriages between financiers and aristocrats—usually the daughters of the former married the sons of the latter. Chaussinand-Nogaret, as mentioned above, saw the most capitalist and dynamically innovative economic faction in French life among the aristocracy that mixed with the Jacobites. The noblesse, however, still railed on against the financiers. The Revolution smashed the old “court capitalism,” and Louis Bergeron’s work seems to confirm that the aristocracy in the immediate post-Revolutionary trauma withdrew to the certainties of landownership. There was a timid continuation of the “proprietary enterprises” but no truly large-scale activity. Titrés for their part did not take noble titles as part of an industrial strategy: they were funded from state service and marriages. By mid-century the example of the peerage under the July Monarchy who invested heavily in the railways was timidly emulated by others.⁷¹ There was also increasing interest in the actual machinery of finance. By the twentieth century the residual noble prejudice against financiers and banking had ended. A sociological investigation found that in 1954, 29 percent of the elite positions in insurance and banking were in noble hands; in 1964, 22 percent, and in 1974, 12 percent.⁷² Indeed, a summer 1984 French newsmagazine identified the noble who then headed the International Monetary Fund as the most powerful Frenchman in the world.⁷³ In the 186os there were apparently far fewer nobles in a smaller banking industry, and then almost never from the noblesse:
MM. de Boucheporn, Bouillerie, and Bovée; baron A. de Seillière, an administrator of the Crédit Mobilier; E. de Werbrouck, a Paris banker; and de Waru were noted as former bankers.

The tendency of nobles to enter banking and the high financial bureaucracy had not become as evident as it would a century later. In his memoirs the duc de Broglie recalled an émigré who became a banker, “exercising this profession with a lot of probity, intelligence, and success but with too much generosity and the habits of a gentleman to make a great fortune at it.”74 This judgment by so liberal and open-minded an aristocrat speaks for itself on the residual prejudice, at least in the noble-commoner contrast, that existed against the banking profession in the mid-nineteenth century. We may also emphasize that he did not name the individual. It could not be the Auvergnat artillery colonel, comte de Pontgibaud, who as an émigré was already a millionaire with a thriving business in Trieste when he traded cotton during the Continental Blockade, as well as provided banking services for a variety of émigré and Napoleonic clients. Pontgibaud had done much better in foreign business than he might have hoped to do in military service at home, and in fact he did not return to France under the Restorations, preferring to remain abroad until his death. His fortune permitted his son, Armand-Victoire, who was made a peer of France in 1827, to marry a girl whose mother was a Dreux-Brézé. The grandson of the banker lived as a rich landowner in Normandy, where in 1852 he took the place of Alexis de Tocqueville on the Manche general council and continued to be reelected until his death in 1892. Pontgibaud père in Trieste carried out all his commercial and financial activities under the name of J. Labrosse. His ultra brother, self-evidently a less astute man, was at great pains to stress that if the family wealth had been repaired at Trieste, the family name of Moré de Pontgibaud was unsoiled by the taint of business.75 Only with the loosening of values under the Third Republic would this type of affectation change.

This cursory overview of professions exercised by nobles through two-thirds of the nineteenth century shows that nobles slowly changed. By 1866 they held positions hitherto unheard of, as well as hanging on to some old ones. Among those who ruled France, they held positions ranging from the presidency of the Corps législatif to the secretary-ship of an Algerian municipality. In law they sat from the Cour de cassation to the offices of barristers and notaries. In the Post Office their representation ranged from the director general of the telegraph lines to the spinster in charge of the district post office. They included the rector of the Bordeaux Academy and a librarian at the new Bibliothèque impériale in Paris. They were bankers and tax collectors. However, the distinct impression conveyed by the scarcity of commercial nobles in the Bach-
The slow modernization of France has sometimes been blamed on the extreme division between capital and love of rural property, both typical of nobles as much as of the French middle classes. Nobles can scarcely be portrayed as the only obstacle to national development in light of similar conservatism found among other wealthy and untitled notables. What they failed to do was to link their leading place among the wealthy and best-educated element of French society before 1870 to an equally commanding place among the most innovative sectors of the emerging economy. One finds little of the daring, capitalist impulses that Chaussinand-Nogaret espied in the closing years of the Old Regime but, significantly, documented in large part from the papers dealing with confiscations preserved in the T series of the Archives Nationales. Nobles remained wealthy thanks to their land and intermarriage, but non-nobles became equally, and in time more, wealthy through success in business and manufacturing.

The uneasy relationship between nobles and businessmen is perhaps best illustrated by Ternaux, who actually rejected the title given to him by Louis xvm, saying that he preferred to see his children follow an active, industrious life rather than emulate the useless laziness of the noble who looked down on commerce. Ternaux was a remarkable man who learned the textile trade very early in his father’s enterprises near Sedan, was forced to emigrate during the Revolution, and upon his return to Sedan in summer 1798 found the debris of his former business from which within twenty years he would have 1,100 looms in thirty factories employing 17,000 workers. One historian has estimated that at its height under the Restoration the Ternaux “empire” had some 20,000 employees at a time when Anzin had perhaps 5,000. Ternaux’s fortune was in part dependent on the dictates of court fashion: Napoleon had asked Josephine and her ladies to wear the shawls made of a mixture of fine wool and silk and known familiarly as “ternaux.”

In 1803 Ternaux had bought the Saint Ouen château, where he gave sumptuous garden parties for what has been characterized as the gratin of the liberal high society. On his main driveway he used the shoulders of the land to plant wheat. He was active in charitable efforts and particularly obsessed with recipes for cheap but nourishing soup for the indigent. His enthusiasm for the Bourbons was cooled by anger at the sacrifice of the interests of industry to large property revealed by a protectionist customs policy on wheat. He ended a remarkable career in acute financial difficulties resulting from his daring innovations and the overextension of his finances. He died in April 1833. Dupin, himself an ennobled commoner, saluted him as the greatest commerçant whom
France had produced since Jacques Coeur. Here was a man who was sought out by the Bourbons in the interest of political reconciliation but who showed the limits of the honorific policy when it placed in opposition the commercial and capitalist interests of the time.78

The nobles' view on capitalism which set them apart from commoners was reflected in their collective loyalty to the obligation of maintaining family status. Zeldin remarked that the divergence between the economic and social conduct of noble and bourgeois has been overdrawn, but it is plain that he reached his conclusion from looking at similarities between the haute bourgeoisie and late-nineteenth-century nobles.79 Beck's massive statistical labors on the July Monarchy's electoral lists showed that this was not the case for the different levels of participation in business during the 1830s. Detailed investigations of noble participation in business under the Third Republic which would show what changes had taken place are lacking. Of course the bourgeois had deeply-felt linkages to relatives but were free of the collective requirement to keep up the château, to support younger family members, and not to disgrace their ancestors. Nobles were trained in the correct ways of spending money even more than in getting it. As the task of getting money in the agricultural economy changed, and as the gap widened between the southern landowners and those of the northwest, more touched by the commercialization of French agriculture, nobles lagged in taking up new activities. As Beau de Lomenie put it:

> It is certain that since 1830 the “gens de noblesse” have hardly created dynasties of financiers or industrialists. They do not become specialists, and their intrusion into the business world remains, in their eyes, accidental. The destiny of their race, its pride, its style of life is elsewhere. And in each generation their lineages traditionally continue to furnish a good number of soldiers, priests, diplomats, and country gentlemen.80

The evidence at present available for the period 1800–1870 seems to confirm that judgment in large measure. At the same time, the attitudes of noblesse and aristocrats towards capitalism and the professions were not immobile or monolithic. Yet their socioeconomic behavior affected them as much as the inexorable pressures of demography.