



A Constant Presence: The Businesswomen of Paris, 1810–1880

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In March 1869, the Parisian Eugénie Bayoud, the widow of Adrien Commun, set up a general partnership with Pierre Manceau to manufacture and sell bronze items. Both reported being *négociants* (general wholesale traders). Mme Commun brought into the firm an ongoing bronze manufactory worth 154,750 Fr that she had acquired at auction the previous August. M. Manceau pledged to contribute the same amount in cash. Both partners had signing authority for the business and were entitled to a 3000 Fr a year salary, half the profits and 5 per cent interest on their contribution to the firm's assets; Mme Commun could continue living on the premises at no cost.¹

Mme Commun was very solidly middle-class and did not need to work. The more than 7000 Fr a year her money would have yielded had she invested it in treasury bonds rather than in a manufactory would have allowed her to live in very comfortable idleness. She either did not like being

¹ Archives de la ville de Paris, Actes de société, D31 U3 281 # 505.

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idle or wanted more money—or both—and went into business, taking a partner presumably to expand its operations. According to most historians of French women, Mme Commun should instead have opted for comfortable idleness. French women had been involved in various forms of business (craft, retail, manufacture or international trade) in the early modern period, but according to Bonnie Smith, middle-class French women, repulsed by capitalism, had retreated into the parlour by the middle of the nineteenth century, not to re-emerge until the middle of the twentieth century.² The separate spheres ideology that prescribed this withdrawal supposedly went unquestioned until the end of the nineteenth century when the ‘New Woman’ appeared, and long after Mme Commun went into business.³

The separate spheres ideology was not a uniquely French phenomenon, and various European and North American historians have challenged the extent to which it constrained women’s lives. In France, on the other hand, the separate sphere paradigm remains largely unquestioned among not only historians of women, but also of business.⁴ Consequently, there are almost no academic studies of nineteenth-century French middle-class women’s economic activities (with the exception of works on the petty middle classes that note the existence of shops kept by women or couples).⁵ Only Eliane Richard’s two articles on Marseilles and my work

² Bonnie Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Lille in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Michelle Perrot has described Smith’s bourgeois du Nord as the provincial counterparts of Parisian ones: Michele Perrot, ‘Caroline, une jeune fille du faubourg Saint-Germain sous le Second Empire...’, in Michelle Perrot (ed.), *Les femmes ou les silences de l’histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998): pp. 57–106, fn. 19 (p. 433). The following explicitly refer to it as a classic on the subject: Leora Auslander, ‘The Gendering of Consumer practices’, in Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough (eds), *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994): p. 79; Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the School Room, Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth Century France* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005): p. 9.

³ Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): p. 4.

⁴ Patrick Verley, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs du XVIIIe au début du XXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1994): p. 78. Serge Chassagne, *Le coton et ses patrons, France 1760–1840* (Paris: EHESS, 1991): p. 583; Jean-Claude Daumas, *Les Territoires de la laine: Histoire de l’industrie lainière en France au XIXe siècle* (Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2004): pp. 239–40.

⁵ Zorina B. Khan, ‘Invisible women: Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Family Firms in 19th Century France’, *Journal of Economic History* 76 (2016): pp. 163–195; Kolleen Guy, ‘Drowning Her Sorrows: Widowhood and Entrepreneurship in the Champagne Industry’,

on the Lille area (the very region Smith had investigated) directly contradict the paradigm.⁶ In both places, we found that women remained in business throughout the nineteenth century.

What should we then do with Mme Commun? Was she an exception that confirmed the rule? A deliberate transgressor? Or were Parisian women behaving like their counterparts in Marseilles or Lille? One will not be surprised to learn she was far from unique. Parisian women ignored the diktats of the (very real) separate spheres ideology when it did not fit their needs or aspirations—and their contemporaries were apparently quite sanguine about it.

THE CITY

Paris was never a city of smokestacks, as was, for instance, Lille.⁷ Instead, it was dominated through the century by small, and even very small, complementary workshops producing or finishing mostly consumer goods, especially for high-end markets. Some sold their products in the rest of the country, and even abroad: expensive locally produced trinkets were known as ‘articles de Paris’. As befit a capital city, Paris also attracted the headquarters of national firms, such as banks and insurance, railway or shipping companies. Large, non-Parisian firms may also have had agents in the city

Business and Economic History 26 (1997): pp. 505–514; Hubert Bonin, ‘Les femmes d’affaires dans l’entreprise girondine Marie Brizard: mythes et réalités’, *Annales du Midi* 118 (2006): pp. 103–120; Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, ‘The Petite Bourgeoisie in France, 1850–1914’, in Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds), *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth Century Europe* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984): pp. 95–119; Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, *The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe, Enterprise, Family and Independence* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): pp. 93–99; Jean-Paul Burdy, Mathilde Dubeset and Michelle Zancarini-Furnel, ‘Rôles, travaux et métiers de femmes dans une ville industrielle, St. Etienne, 1900–1950’, *Le Mouvement Social* 140 (1987): pp. 27–54.

⁶Eliane Richard, ‘Des Marseillaises en affaires’, *Annales du Midi* 118 (2006): pp. 85–102; E. Richard, ‘Femmes chefs d’entreprises à Marseille, une question de visibilité’, *Sextant* 5 (1996): pp. 47–58; Béatrice Craig, *Female Enterprise Behind the Discursive Veil in Nineteenth-Century Northern France* (London: Palgrave, 2017).

⁷A survey conducted in 1848 by the Paris Chamber of commerce counted 64,816 manufacturers, craft persons and other individuals transforming material for resale. Half of them worked alone or with one worker, and only 11 per cent employed more than ten workers. Chambre de commerce de Paris, *Statistiques de l’industrie à Paris résultat de l’enquête faite par la chambre de commerce en 1847 et 1848* (Paris: chez Guillemin et Cie, libraire-éditeur, 1851), pp. 11 and 33.

to more easily tap the national market. Population growth provided an expanding market for these small-scale industries. The city grew significantly through the nineteenth century, as a result of natural increase and in-migration, as well as the annexation of whole or parts of suburban municipalities in 1860.⁸

THE SOURCES : TRADE DIRECTORIES AND ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION

One major obstacle for a study of nineteenth-century Parisian businesswomen—and even of the history of Paris itself—is the lack of sources. The city archives and the courthouse were burned during the Commune of 1871. Business tax rolls have been preserved only since 1885. No nominal census of the city was taken before 1926. On the other hand, the registers of articles of association are intact—but partnerships were only a tiny fraction of all businesses (e.g. only 868 were registered in 1850). There are therefore serious gaps in the sources for the city's pre-1870 history.⁹

On the other hand, there are trade directories, which listed businesses (factories, workshops, wholesalers, retailers, tradespersons and service providers) located or represented in the city. First, there was the *Almanach du Commerce* (1797–1857) published by Jean de la Tynna, and after his death by Sebastien Bottin. In 1857 Bottin's heirs sold it to a competitor, Firmin Didot, who had been publishing an *Annuaire général du commerce et de l'industrie* since 1840.¹⁰ The directories were published in January and reflected the commercial landscape at the end of the previous year.¹¹ Neither

⁸ 622,636 in 1811; 1,053,262 in 1851 and 2,269,023 in 1881. Stephane Kirkland, *Paris Reborn: Napoleon III, Baron Haussmann and the Quest to Build a Modern City* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013); Sandra Brée, *La population de la région parisienne au XIXe siècle* (2015), <http://hdl.handle.net/2078.1/170167>

⁹ The city was exempted from taking a nominal census, which was deemed too burdensome on account of its size. (Archives de Paris, Finding aid I-4.1 Dénombrement de la population). Business tax records (*Matrices de patentes*) are available only for years ending in five or zero starting in 1885.

¹⁰ Alfred-B. Bénard, *Les annuaires parisiens, de Montaigne à Didot, 1500–1900* (Le Havre: Lemalle, 1897).

¹¹ The French National Library possesses an almost complete collection of the *Almanachs*, *Annuaire*s and *Almanachs-annuaire*s and they are available online. De La Tynna/Bottin, *Almanach du commerce de Paris*, 1798–1838, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32688404r/date>; Firmin Didot. *Annuaire général du commerce, de l'industrie, de la magistrature et de l'administration*, 1838–1856: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/>

publisher charged for inclusion in their directories; they relied on paid canvassers to create their lists. One could, however, pay to be more visible, and some entries include descriptions of variable length of the person's activities. The earlier directories contained a list by trade and an alphabetical list of the people included. From 1850 onwards, a list by street was added.

Directories unfortunately undercount women, who can only be identified when their name is followed by a first name or courtesy title (*Melle*, *Mme* or *Vve*). Genderless individuals are nonetheless not necessarily males. An unknown proportion of women are listed only under their last name or under their business's commercial name or under their husband's name: for example, it was the deceased M. Commun who was listed in the 1870 directory. The proportion of businesses run by women one can calculate from the directories is therefore almost certainly an underestimation.

In addition, the numbers of women are not the only figures to handle with caution. In some years, directories only enumerate the 'most important' businesses in some categories, such as *limonadiers/cafés* or hotels. On the other hand, not all businesses listed were physically located in the city, but were represented by an agent, like Krupp, for example, the German steel and artillery manufacturer listed in the 1859 directory. Finally, individuals who engaged in more than one activity might be listed more than once, and unless one was to transcribe the entirety of the directories, one cannot identify—or count—them. The directories therefore provide us only with broad-brush sketches of the local business world. One should not expect fine-grained pictures of any activity—and it is pointless to do more than calculate very basic statistics.

The registry of articles of associations can provide corroborative evidence. Partnerships and commercial societies of any kind did not legally exist until they were registered with the Tribunal de commerce of the district in which they carried their activities and published a summation of their articles of association in a newspaper of public record. The articles were supposed to provide the names of the partners (and in the case of women, their marital status), their address and occupation, the name of the firm, its purpose and duration, to identify who had signing authority and to give information about the firm's capital and the distribution of profits. Some documents also provided information about intra-firm relationships and dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

I tallied the number of people listed in the trades sections of the directories, broken down by reported sex and marital status, for every ten years, beginning with 1810. These were compiled into spreadsheets, available online.¹² The 1829 directory was substituted for the 1830 one, missing on Gallica, and the 1859 directory for the 1860 issue to sidestep the consequences of the annexation of the suburbs. A comparison between 1850 and 1859 on the one hand and 1870 and 1880 on the other, however, suggests that the enlargement of Paris had little impact on the overall distribution of occupations; large suburban businesses were already listed—and small ones were too few to have a noticeable impact on the overall numbers. Neither do the destructions caused by the Commune—the uprising of 1871—appear to have had a lasting impact.

Professions libérales, only some of which could be regarded as businesses, were not included. For most of the century, women could not get the required credentials or licences to practise them (e.g. physician, architect, sworn expert or stockbroker). Midwives were counted separately, as were people in the education field. Their numbers were erratic, and in the case of educators, the categories were inconsistent. Listed occupations were then regrouped into a small number of broad categories, based primarily on the labels in the directories, and secondarily on the descriptions the people listed gave of their activities as well as what is known of their trades at that time. Occupations listed as ‘*marchands de*’ were classified as retailers, ‘*fabricants de*’ and ‘*manufacturiers*’ as manufacturers and ‘*marchands et fabricants*’ as retailers/manufacturers. *Marchands en gros* and traders who obviously sold to other traders, craftspersons or manufacturers were classified as wholesalers. Those who sold alcoholic beverages were given their own category, as were hotel and restaurant keepers. Tradespeople such as plumbers, roofers and painters were placed in a ‘crafts and trades’ category, alongside craftspeople such as dressmakers, bookbinders and jewellers. So were artists and dentists, who almost all promised the best prosthesis in town (and there were occasional women

¹²The section of the directory used was ‘Professions des commerçants et industriels de la ville de Paris’. The spreadsheets containing the compilations from the eight directories, their code book, a more detailed source criticism and description of the methodology, and large tables that could not fit in this publication are available online; Béatrice Craig, ‘Nineteenth century Parisian women in Business’ (2019), <https://dataverse.scholarsportal.info/citation?persistentId=doi:10.5683/SP2/F5JO0U>, Scholars Portal Dataverse.

listed among the dentists). People who made musical instruments or worked precious metals and stones were all treated as craftspeople. Businesses that could not be categorised, including service providers, constituted the residual ‘others’. The distinctions are not as clear-cut as one would wish. Crafts and trades overlapped; for instance, some of the copersmiths who installed and serviced bathtubs and water heaters might also manufacture them. *Mécaniciens* could be metal lath-operators or running machine shops, but locksmiths are under this heading as well.

The articles of associations on the other hand presented no such methodological challenges but, based on the firms’ reported capital, partnerships were clearly skewed towards mid-sized businesses. People did not register a partnership unless some real money was at stake. I collected the data for the years 1810, 1830, 1850 and 1869 (instead of 1870 because of the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in the summer and the siege of Paris in the autumn).

LONG-TERM TRENDS

Parisian Businesses: An Overview of Male- and Female-Owned Firms (See Table 5.1)

Both sources confirm the assessment of the Chamber of Commerce: the bulk of listed businesses were small, consumer-oriented craft shops and manufactories. Year in, year out, one-third fell in the craft and trade categories, and a large proportion of listed manufacturers were merely commercial offices of

Table 5.1 Distribution of businesses listed by categories in directories—1810–1880 (% of all entries)

	<i>La Tynna or Bottin</i> Almanachs				<i>Didot</i> Annaires			
	1810	1820	1829	1840	1850	1859	1870	1880
Crafts and trades	29	33.4	32.3	39.9	37.2	35.4	31.4	27.4
Wholesalers	4.7	7.6	6	6.4	4.4	5	5.2	5
Hotels & restaurants	2.7	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.8	3.2
Alcohol trades	9.3	8.9	7.2	9.1	8.1	8.1	9.6	10.6
Manufacturers	6.5	6.2	13.4	6.9	8.4	11.0	10.3	11.7
Retailers	37.2	25.5	27.8	21.6	21.2	21.1	21.8	23.4
Retail and/or manufacture	5.1	8.8	2.3	8.5	9.8	7.2	6.8	6.2
Others	5.4	6.5	8.1	4.9	8.3	9.4	12.1	12.4
Total	99.9	100.1	100	99.9	100.1	99.9	100	99.9

Source: See footnote 11.

firms whose factories were located elsewhere.¹³ As the years went by, business-, commission- or advertising agencies, brokerage firms, financial services (even banking) and other such services became more numerous. General and silent partnerships convey the same image: they were normally created to start, or continue, an existing small business, and they engaged in one of the city's typical activities—small-scale production and trade in consumer goods, hotel and restaurant keeping and various trades. Partnerships were very rarely set up to operate a factory and rarely involved more than two partners, unless one of the parties was a couple. Shareholding societies were almost exclusively set up to build and operate railway companies or canals, open banks or insurance companies, publish newspapers or, in 1850, to mine gold in California. Although headquartered in Paris, the scope of their activities stretched beyond the local.

Long-Term Trends: Women in Parisian Businesses 1810–1880

No Separate Spheres

Neither source supports the notion of a significant permanent female retreat from the world of business in the nineteenth century. Past the end of the Napoleonic period, the secular trend line was almost flat (see Table 5.2). By 1880, the percentage of businesses listed under a woman's name was back to 1820s levels.

A similar trend emerges from the articles of association (see Table 5.3). There were almost no women managing shareholding societies, and therefore we can leave them aside. A few were managing partners in *sociétés en commandites*. The proportion of general partnerships including at least one independent woman (i.e. a woman whose husband was not a member of the same partnership as well) dropped in 1830, regaining lost ground later in the period. If we add general partnerships including a husband and his

Table 5.2 Proportion of known women among listed firms in directories

	<i>La Tynna or Bottin</i> Almanachs			<i>Didot</i> Annales				
	1810	1820	1829	1840	1850	1859	1870	1880
N all listed firms	14,769	19,250	30,715	47,883	56,138	71,796	111,493	131,630
N heads identified as female	1061	1332	2000	2628	3235	4805	7668	9056
% identified as female	7.2	6.9	6.5	5.5	5.8	6.7	6.9	6.9

Source: See Table 5.1

¹³For instance, 11 of the 27 cotton spinners listed in the 1870 directory mentioned that their factories were in the regions.

Table 5.3 Women in articles of association

<i>Year</i>	<i>Shareholding societies: anonymes and sociétés en commandite par actions</i>	<i>Sociétés en commandite or silent partnerships (SC)</i>	<i>SC with female managing partners (without husbands as partners)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Sociétés en nom collectif or unlimited liability general partnerships (SNC)</i>	<i>SNC with women (without husbands as partners)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>SNC with couples (husbands and wives both listed)</i>	<i>%</i>
1810	0	13	3	23.1	125	19	15.2	12	9.6
1830	6	55	0	0	297	35	11.8	14	4.7
1850	168	197	12	6.1	534	85	15.9	28	5.2
1869	116	305	15	4.9	1078	159	14.7	26	2.4

Source: Archives de la ville de Paris, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, Registres, D32 U3/5 (1810); U3–12/13 (1830); U3–30/31 (1850); U3–50/51 (1869)

wife (with or without a third party), the proportion of businesses with at least one female partner follows the same trend as the figures derived from the directories: a dip followed by a return to earlier percentage. The drop in the proportion of partnerships involving a married couple at the end of the period is likely due to court decisions which, in 1851 and 1856, stated that women married in community of property (the default arrangement for people without a marriage contract) could not be partners with their husbands in a *société en nom collectif*, ‘as such an association creates between the partners an equality incompatible with the right the law gives the husband’.¹⁴ After mid-century, only women married in separation of property or under the dowry system could legally join their husbands in a partnership (on the other hand, they could have any other man they chose as a business partner, as long as their husband did not object to their being in business).

A greater proportion of people in the registers of partnerships were women compared to the directories. In part, this may be because the registers reported sex and marital status accurately. However, the registers may also include a greater proportion of better-off businesses than the directories, as general partnerships were usually mid-size businesses. This may indicate a similarity with the situation in England. In mid-nineteenth-century Manchester, Birmingham and Derby, women were more likely to run a business requiring a medium level of start-up capital than a high or low one.¹⁵ And two-thirds of the women who insured a London business against fire in 1851 and 1861 were also in the middle range.¹⁶ English businesswomen were not concentrated in undercapitalised, low-profit ventures but in medium-low ones, and the same may have been true of Paris—hence a stronger presence in partnerships, which are more biased towards that group—than in directory listings.

Who Were the Women in Business? Businesswomen by Marital Status

Widows were always fewer than half the total number of businesswomen (see Table 5.4). Their proportion dropped spectacularly after 1820. By 1859, two-thirds of the women listed in the directories were identified as

¹⁴ Article 1388 (puissance maritale) in the 1873 version. No such restriction can be found in the original version of the Code. J. Baudry-Lacantinière, J. Le Courtois et F. Surville, *Traité théorique et pratique de droit civil* (Paris: Larose et Forcel, 1887): pp. 96–97.

¹⁵ Joyce Burnette, *Gender, Work and Wages in Industrial Revolution Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): p. 287.

¹⁶ Alison C. Kay, *The Foundations of Female Entrepreneurship: Enterprise, Home and Household in London c. 1800–1870* (London: Routledge, 2009): p. 41.

Table 5.4 Distribution of women listed in the directories, by marital status

	<i>La Tynna or Bottin</i> Almanachs			<i>Didot</i> Annales				
	1810	1820	1829	1840	1850	1859	1870	1880
% married women	40.3	40.5	48.2	59.3	58.4	59.8	53.8	48.7
% single women	13.6	15.9	21.3	18.2	16.3	14.5	15	14.6
% widows	46.1	42.6	28.7	19.7	23.4	22.9	27.6	35.1
% sisters/groups of women	0	0.9	1.4	2.8	1.2	2.8	3.5	1.7

Source: See Table 5.1

Table 5.5 Distribution of women in partnerships

	<i>N Women</i>	<i>% single</i>	<i>% married</i>	<i>% widowed</i>
1810	20	65.0	5.0	30.0
1830	47	44.7	23.4	31.9
1850	103	49.5	30.1	20.4
1869	192	36.7	31.2	32.2

Source: Archives de la ville de Paris, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, Registres, D32 U3/5 (1810); U3–12/13 (1830); U3–30/31 (1850); U3–50/51 (1869)

‘Mme’, and although widows’ proportions rose again, they were just a third of the listed women at the end of the period.

The widows’ mid-century figures are peculiar—because, at some point in their lives, a fair proportion of married businesswomen must have become widows—and presumably did not stop working as a consequence. Two factors may explain this decline. There may have been more widows, especially younger widows, among the Parisian population, in the early years of the century on account of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. They would have been in business for a longer time period than older widows. In addition, women who started running a business when married may not have wanted to modify the name over their door to avoid confusing customers, whereas those who had run a business with their husbands under his name emphasised continuity by calling themselves ‘Widow X’.

The articles of association, which more accurately identify women’s marital status, show a decline in the proportion of widows among partners only in 1850. The more balanced distribution between the three categories of women is more credible. The trend is also clearly different—steadily fewer unmarried women, and after a dip at mid-century, more widows again (Table 5.5).

Partnerships between relatives—or at least people with the same last name—were not very common. Occasionally, one finds partnerships between sisters, or sisters-in-law, or brothers and sisters, or men and sisters-in-law as well as between brothers.¹⁷ In most cases, however, nothing suggests a family relationship between the partners.

What Kinds of Business Did Women Run?

Most businesswomen listed in the directories were concentrated in a small number of sectors, although few of those were feminised (50 per cent or more of listed people being female), and the rest of the women were scattered across a wide spectrum of enterprises. Year in, year out, 10–12 business categories included about 50 per cent of the listed businesswomen. The lists varied little from one target year to the next.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, the textile, fashion, culture and hospitality sectors were the ones attracting the largest number of women. Linen drapers, *marchandes de mode*, haberdashers, hotel/inn keepers and booksellers/reading room keepers appear almost every year in the lists of leading female businesses, as well as dressmakers from 1820 onwards. Selling food, on the other hand, quickly ceased to be among the women's most common business categories. In 1810, butchers, bakers and grocers were among those; in 1820, only grocers; subsequently, no food trade was in the list, until 1870 and 1880 when selling groceries was the ninth and then eighth leading female business (but attracting less than 3 per cent of the women in business).

However, the fact that a sector attracted a fair number of women did not necessarily lead to it being feminised. Many women were haberdashers for instance, but only one-quarter to one-third of the haberdashers were women. Many women also retailed wine, but they were always less than 5 per cent of all wine merchants. Few occupations had a majority of women: 2 in 1810 (dressmakers and *marchandes de mode* or milliners), 3 in 1820 (the same and linen drapers), 8 in 1829 and 1850, 14 in 1859, 13 in 1870 and 11 in 1880, and most were not among the leading female enterprises.¹⁹ After the middle of the century, the feminised business categories

¹⁷ Partnerships between sisters or brother and sister were even rarer (8 out of 159 partnerships in 1869).

¹⁸ See tables on Dataverse: BCraig_Occupations_with_highest_number_of_women_2019-04-05.

¹⁹ Trades represented by less than ten people are excluded to avoid the distortions caused by small numbers.

Table 5.6 Business categories in the directories including at least one female listing

	1810	1820	1829	1840	1850	1859	1870	1880
Total number of business categories listed	213	216	493	571	831	968	1426	2036
N including women	150	168	266	307	371	478	631	814
% with women	70.1	77.8	53.7	53.8	44.6	49.4	44.2	40.0

Source: See Table 5.1

accounted for a minority of listed women (33 per cent in 1870 and 25 per cent in 1880) and all but five were carried out by fewer than 50 people.²⁰ By mid-century, feminised sectors included, as expected, many in the needle and textile trades, but also jewellery trades and some odd areas like hypnotism. Women selling food were also scarce in the articles of association. In 1869, 9 of the 173 female partners sold food (3 sold tea and coffee, 3 cheese, butter and eggs, and one each fowl and game, bread and pastries and groceries and fruit); 8 sold wines and 6 were *traiteurs* (caterers). On the other hand, 32 sold textiles, clothing, lace and haberdashery.

The rest of the businesswomen were dispersed through a large number of sectors; in 1810, 70 per cent of the occupations listed in the directories (150 out of 213) included at least one woman (see Table 5.6). The proportion subsequently steadily declined—to 40 per cent of occupations (812 out of 2012) in 1880—but the decline may be in part a source artefact: as the years went on, the directories divided more and more activities into subgroups, and women were not necessarily spread evenly across these. Moreover, the number of occupations in which one finds women grew: women’s territory did not shrink, but men’s grew faster.

The distribution of women in the articles of association resembles that of the women listed in the directory: lots of textile, small-scale production and sales of consumer goods, little food trade, and many women scattered through the remaining sectors, including renting cars (*loueurs de voitures*), restoring mirrors (*étameurs de glaces*), manufacturing toys, umbrellas or electrical wires and trading in mustard seeds.

²⁰ See tables on Dataverse: BCraig_Feminized_occupations_2019-04-05.

A wide range of businesses was, then, accessible to women, even though very few engaged in each of them. The directories list women engaged in businesses that were definitively not 'feminine'. There were, for instance, female dentists. In 1870, Mademoiselle Larivee was listed as a women and children's dentist, 'who particularly cared for the first teeth, the straightening of teeth and gum treatment'. She made rubber (!), platinum and gold false teeth. There were still 18 female dentists in 1880 (4.7 per cent of the dentists listed). Women were also present in finance: nine women (all widows) were bankers in 1840, including the widow Thomas Delisle and Cie, who was listed for the first time in 1833 (her husband was listed in the previous years) at a good address (26 rue de la Chaussée d'Antin). The widow Delisle was mentioned for the last time in 1864 (there are no available directories for the year 1865–1869). She was in banking for at least 31 years. There were still four female bankers in 1859, although none in 1870 and 1880, unless they were hidden behind the name of their bank.

A lack of technical knowledge was no obstacle to being in business either. In 1810, the widow Lauriau was listed in the directory as a 'cordier de théâtre'; she supplied and installed the ropes used to hold and move background sceneries in theatres. In 1850, the widow Constant Decoudun was listed as a manufacturer of high- and low-pressure steam engines, locomotives and commercial laundry equipment; she also installed steam baths and steam heating and drying systems, manufactured all the necessary copper tubing, did repairs and shipped goods abroad. She had won a silver medal at an exhibition the previous year. Decoudun appeared as an ironmonger in the 1859 directory as 'Decoudun, Vve et Cie.', described as a provider of ordinary and special irons, cast irons and iron sheets of all sizes; she was also listed among the machine builders (*Chaudronniers mécaniques*) and heating engineers (*fumistes*). Her (presumably) son was listed instead of her in 1870; he was an engineer. Moreover, in 1880, we find Mme Bonis, manufacturer of high conductivity copper wires and winner of medals at various exhibitions in 1867 and 1873, among the 63 providers of equipment and supplies for telegraph.

The widow Saget's activities were so extensive that she was listed under three separate categories in 1859 (sheet metal, oil lights and gas light). She was described as the successor of Argand and Bordier-Marcet, successful tenderer of the contract to service the streetlights of Paris, maker of gas appliances, lamps, chandeliers, girandoles, lanterns as well as provider and installer of meters. She had won medals at various exhibitions and Argand oil lamps were the lamp of choice until the 1850s. Mme Saget tried not to

let technological shifts sideline her and positioned herself to cater to people preferring gaslights. She was still in business in 1870, but seemed to have given up on gas, turning to another source of energy. She was described as providing streetlights with equipment of her own manufacture, ‘patented petroleum oil lamps for street lighting’, and as the contractor for street oil light in the city of Paris. There was no listing for Saget in the 1880 directory.

Women adapted to new markets and could contribute to technological progress and they did not hesitate to advertise their innovations in the directories. In 1810, Mme Cosseron was listed as the inventor of ‘*peinture lucidonique*’—an odourless, semi-transparent and water repellent paint she had patented in 1802. In 1870, the widow Audoin, one of 40 electroplaters, informed the public that she was supplying the public works administration with improved marine glue, which could be applied cold onto all kinds of support, just like paint, to protect them from moisture. She had won medals at the 1855 Paris Exposition Universelle and again at other exhibitions in 1867 and 1868. Like men, these women listed the medals they had obtained at various exhibitions—any false/possible idea of feminine modesty gave way to business marketing nous.

The cases of the widows Saget and Audoin show that they were considered appropriate partners by various public administrations. They were not alone. In 1870, the widow Charroy was supplying the Paris public schools with writing slates; the widow Collin and her son (tailors) provided Paris policemen, postmen and the telegraphists of the Orleans Railway line with uniforms, and the widow Sompert (also a tailor) clothed firemen and the National Guard. So long as businesswomen were reliable suppliers, their sex was no barrier to finding customers.

Women nonetheless had difficulties finding places in the new industries that emerged in the second half of the century. In 1880, 15.6 per cent of the types of businesses in the directories were new. These new types included the production, distribution or use of new forms of energy like gas and electricity, new technology and their applications such as photography, new machines, big and small, like sewing, knitting or duplicating machines and elevators, new products like rubber and waterproof material, glycerine, guano, celluloid, dynamite, Liebig and other brands of meat extracts, *water closets* and toilet paper and paper clothing patterns. Only 3.5 per cent of all businesses were in these sectors, and women were only a tiny proportion of even these. Although women accounted for 6.9 per cent of all listed businesses, they made up only 2.7 per cent of those in

the new sectors. The new emerging industries or sectors were not particularly open to women, whose more limited life experience did not expose them to innovations in the same way as men and whose upbringing and education did not particularly equip them to grasp their technical aspects or to get a good feel for their markets.

The Businesses of Widows

Widowhood appears to have had an impact on the sector of activity in which a woman engaged. Women who identified as widows were more dispersed than married or single women. Their ten leading business types never included more than 44 per cent of all of them, dropping to about 37 per cent in 1820, to 22–23 per cent at mid-century, and rising again to 28 per cent in 1880 (see tables online).²¹ Until 1859, those businesses were also different from the leading ones of single or married women, and included food trades, wholesale, manufacture and goldsmithing. In 1870 and 1880, however, the two most common enterprises of widows were retailing wines and groceries.

Widows in retail did not sell the same commodities as other women either. In 1880, just over 6 per cent of married and single women sold food or drink, compared with 18.5 per cent of widows, whereas 29 per cent of single and married women and 7.3 per cent of widows sold textile, clothing and haberdashery. Looking at it from a different angle, 55 per cent of the women in food and drink were widows and 33 per cent were married or single, whereas 85 per cent of the women in textile, clothing and haberdashery were married or single and 12 per cent were widows.

Moreover, widows were much less likely to be retailers than the married and single women, and more likely than them to be found in manufacturing and wholesale (see Fig. 5.1). In 1880, 45 per cent of single and married women were retailers and 4.5 per cent were manufacturers or wholesalers, compared with 30.2 per cent and 15.1 per cent respectively of widows. Widows were also more likely to be found in the new sectors than the rest of the women (2.8 per cent of the listed widows as opposed to 0.5 per cent of non-widows), and 73.8 per cent of the women in new industries were widows, who may have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills assisting their husbands.

²¹ See tables on Dataverse: BCraig_Feminized_occupations_2019-04-05.

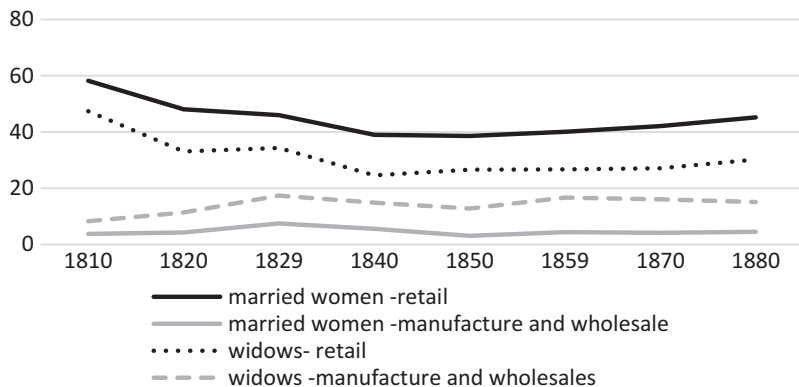


Fig. 5.1 Distribution of women by selected sectors and marital status. (Source: See Table 5.1)

The proportion of widows in manufacturing and wholesale was usually very close to the proportion of male/genderless listings in those two sectors. This could indicate that widows in business often took over from their late husbands, as we see elsewhere. The evidence from the articles of association, however, suggests caution. Sixty-four widows entered into a simple partnership in 1869, and only 11 of them did so with a daughter, son or son-in-law (17 per cent). Only 30 brought an ongoing business to the partnership, and it was not necessarily one they had taken over from their late husband. The other widows brought cash, technical skills or simply their labour into the partnerships. In addition, an unknown proportion of the businesses contributed by women to a partnership were the ones they were running on their own before becoming widows. When they did bring a family business, they sometimes had to purchase it from the estate, as did the widow Barden. Distiller and wine trader Jean-Baptiste Barden died in the autumn of 1868 leaving two children who were still minors. The business was sold at auction to settle the estate, and the widow bought and continued it. She remarried a few months later, this time in *separation de biens* (separate estates) and entered into a general partnership called ‘Ancienne maison Barden, Vaidis and Cie’ with her new husband, Désiré Vaidis.²²

²² Archives de la ville de Paris, Tribunal de commerce, Actes de société, Files, D31 U3 291 # 1771, Dec. 1869.

Behind the Front Door: Shop and Family Dynamics

Articles of association occasionally allow a glimpse into the internal arrangements of a firm. There was no rigid model determining the structure of the mid-sized businesses that made up the bulk of the general partnerships, or the responsibilities of the partners, or the ways they were compensated. The most common arrangement, in the case of a woman independently pairing with a man (i.e. not being part of a partnering couple) involved a woman who brought an existing business into the partnership. The man contributed his industry, knowledge and sometimes clientele and money. Both partners had signing authority and shared the profits and losses equally. By 1869, most partnerships paid the partners a salary (called *appointements* ou *prélèvements*) before distributing the profits, and those were almost always the same for men and women. Those payments were not negligible; the great majority fell in the 1200–3000 Fr per annum range. Partners were also usually provided with accommodation above the shop and may even have received their board as well. Capital put at the disposal of the firm not infrequently generated 5 per cent interest, whether contributed by the man or the woman. In the second most common type of partnership, it was the man who contributed an existing business, equipment or patent and the female partner contributed money (this was a more common arrangement when the woman was single). Those women were slightly less likely to have signing authority.

Occasionally existing or potential spouses are mentioned. As in Spain (see Chap. 14 by Hernández-Nicolás and Martínez-Rodríguez in this volume), husbands or future husbands of female partners were usually categorically forbidden to meddle in the business in any way, shape or form. Wives of male partners might be excluded as well, even when the couple was listed as a partner, which is rather peculiar. On the other hand, partnership could provide—or even require—the involvement of the spouse, and women without signing authority may even have been given a salary. In 1869, Alfred Bloc, general trader, Celine Bloc, his wife, and Victor Lausier, sales representative, set up a general partnership to trade wholesale in fabric. Only the men had signing authority, but the next section of the document stipulated that Mme Lausier would have a power of attorney to sign for day-to-day matters, and that ‘as a reward for her contribution to the affairs of the association, she was granted a sum of 1,000 Fr a year, payable in monthly instalments’.²³ In the same year,

²³D31U3 279 #172, 28-1-1869.

Louise Horvet, wife Biscomte, corset and petticoat maker, took sales representative Emile Huvet as a partner. She provided the business and he, some cash. She would be in charge of fabrication and sales, and he would keep the books and cash box. He also pledged that his wife would actively collaborate with Mme Biscombe in the manufacturing and sale of the goods. Mme Biscombe was entitled to a 2000 Fr a year salary and Huvet, to 1200 Fr. They shared the profits equally. There was no mention of compensation for Mme Huvet.²⁴ Unlike Celine Bloc, she was neither a formal partner nor ‘rewarded’, although she clearly participated in the business.

Partners often downloaded their work onto their spouses. The widow Boisacq and Jean Gerard, both traders in lace, partnered in 1810. They both had signing authority, but Dame Alexandrine Michaud, M. Gerard’s wife, who would be given the signature, could represent him in the association.²⁵ Sauce for the gander is however also sauce for the goose. In 1850, Marie Madeleine Legoix took two male partners to operate a manufacture of steel supplies for umbrella makers. She contributed half the machinery. One of the men was to take care of the books, purchases and sales, and the other would supervise the shop floor. In 1848, Mme Legoix had successfully petitioned the court to separate her estate from that of her husband’s. Women married in community of property could do this when their husbands’ bad management or bad luck threatened the assets they had brought into marriage. Her assets safe, she did not intend to work in the firm. The articles stipulated that ‘Mme Legoix not being able to take care of the business, her husband, M. George Legoix will replace her and will take care of the fabrication of the tools’.²⁶

In other words, there were no culturally inescapable rules. Partners struck the arrangements that suited them, and the commonest was a partnership of equals in terms of responsibilities, powers, benefits, profits and risks. Concrete tasks within the firm however could be gendered. When articles of association spelled out who would do what, they usually put women in charge of the administrative work: correspondence, bookkeeping and control of the cash box. This last mattered: one set of articles of association granting the female partner control of the cash box stipulated that her male partner would get a duplicate of the key. Apparently, this was

²⁴ D31U3 281 #471, 18-3-1869.

²⁵ D31U3 6 #163, 25-08-1810.

²⁶ D31U3 169, #1707, 5-10-1850.

not a given. Generally speaking, women were in charge of ‘*les affaires de l’intérieur*’ (internal matters).²⁷ The men were in charge of relations with the outside world (*les affaires du dehors*) and were the ones who travelled. On the other hand, supervising the workers or the shop floor does not seem to have been gendered. These tasks appear to have been given to the partner(s) most able to do them based on their technical knowledge and experience—even if the trade was a typical male one.

CONCLUSION

Businesswomen were a constant fixture of nineteenth-century Parisian life. They were never numerous, even taking onto the account the fact they were undercounted in the directories. However, the proportion of businesses listed under women’s names barely declined after 1820. The long-term trend line is almost flat, sagging at mid-century to quickly recover. Together, directories and articles of association give us a range of 6–15 per cent of Parisian businesses operated by women throughout the century. Mme Commun was neither an exception nor a defiant transgressor of the separate sphere ideology, which she ignored, as did the other 7700 women listed in the 1870 directory. In her small street of 16 houses alone, 3 of the 52 other businesses were under a woman’s name: a jeweller, a hosier and a metal gilder.

Women in business were neither ghettoised in ‘feminine’ activities nor impoverished. Very few businesses were feminised, and those that were accounted only for a minority of all women’s businesses listed. Most women listed in the directories tended to be concentrated in the textile or fashion sectors but were far from being confined to them, and they did not monopolise them. A dozen occupations may have included half the listed women, but the remainder was spread very thinly over a wide range of occupations. Widows, in particular, were the most likely to be found in non-conventionally feminine sectors, and, although few women were in new sectors of activity at the end of the period, those who were tended to be widows. Neither were women’s businesses necessarily small. Widows were as likely as men to run larger firms (manufactories or wholesale trading houses). The articles of association also provide evidence that women

²⁷ Training was available—in 1880 the Paris Chamber of Commerce was offering free evening bookkeeping courses for ‘dames et demoiselles adultes’ *Annuaire-Almanach*, 1880, p. 856.

were not limited to very small, poorly capitalised and barely profitable businesses.

The Parisian business world seems to have been comfortable with those women's activities. Although there were likely a lot of Parisian women 'assisting their husbands' in their businesses, the largest numbers of women in the directories were married ones, and the articles of associations show clearly that they were independent individuals running their own businesses. Evidence from the articles of association also suggests women's competence was not questioned by their business partners, who were often male and unrelated to them, nor, therefore by society more broadly. The typical mixed-sex partnership was a relationship of equals: each had the same powers, the same rights to the profits and the same salary. For their part, unequal partnerships (in terms of power or share in the profits) did not necessarily reflect patriarchal attitudes, but unequal contributions of the partners to the firm's assets. Women who contributed mostly their skills and labour were less likely to have signing authority than the ones who contributed tangible assets (although the same was not true of men). Moreover, women were not always the weaker partners in an unequal partnership; some kept the signature for themselves. Women seem to have been free to conduct businesses in sectors we might consider masculine, but this did not prevent a gendered distribution of tasks within partnerships. Women appear to have been viewed as particularly suited to administrative and bureaucratic tasks, and to keeping accounts and tracking the cash (*tenir la caisse*), perhaps because this echoed what mistresses of middle-class households were expected (and trained) to do at home.

Was Paris unique? Parisian businesswomen shared many characteristics with their counterparts in Lille and Marseilles, as well as in north-western Europe: consistently present, and definitively not withdrawing into 'their sphere'. The proportion of businesses run by women in Paris was lower than in the Lille trade directories (around 10 per cent from 1830 to 1880), or in Vienna (6.5 per cent in 1837 and 18 per cent in 1869), or in Australia and New Zealand. It was similar, however, to estimates for various English towns in the same period from the same type of source (a low of 6 per cent in Leeds and Manchester in 1804–1806 to a high of 14 per cent in Coventry in 1892).²⁸ Most of those figures are not truly comparable as

²⁸ Craig, *Female Enterprise Behind the Discursive Veil*, pp. 266–67; Craig, *Women and Business since 1500*, p. 100; Irene Bandauer-Schöffmann, 'Businesswomen in Austria', in Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig and Alastair Owens (eds), *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth Century Europe, Rethinking Separate Spheres* (London: Berg, 2006): pp. 110–124.

they have been calculated from different types of sources (censuses, insurance policies, etc.), but suggest an overall range of 5–20 per cent of businesses being run by women. Paris is in this range, albeit at its lower end. As in Lille and Marseilles, Parisian female-owned firms were clustered, but not ghettoised, in a small number of occupations (a large proportion of women were outside those sectors), although they distributed differently across different sectors. This contrasts with the United States, where the majority of women were confined to feminised occupations.²⁹

Parisian women running manufactures or wholesale trading houses were more likely to be widows, but this does not mean that widows in business were mere placeholders for underage male heirs. Unlike Susana Martínez-Rodríguez and Carmen María Hernández-Nicolás' findings for late-nineteenth-century Spain (see Chap. 14 by Hernández-Nicolás and Martínez-Rodríguez in this volume), the majority of the people in the Paris articles of associations do not seem to have been particularly interested in creating *family* businesses: intergenerational partnerships were rare, and widows partnered with men whose last name was different from theirs or that of their late husband. Parisian partnerships were strikingly un-dynastic, compared with Tourcoing, a textile town neighbouring Lille. There, the bulk of simple partnerships brought together textile producers. Partnership was often a form of estate planning, ensuring that the factory did not have to be sold to settle the claims of the various heirs. Lille, however, resembled Paris more than Tourcoing after 1870. Besides being a major textile-manufacturing centre too, it could boast a well-developed retail and craft sector, and it was a major regional distribution centre of consumer goods. Increasingly, Lille simple partnerships brought together skilled and experienced individuals who pooled their efforts to manufacture, buy, sell, distribute or instal new or higher-end consumer products or provide new types of services, as in Paris. Moreover, as in Paris, the partners were usually not visibly related.

²⁹ Craig, *Women in Business since 1500*, pp. 114–140; Craig, *Female Enterprise Behind the Discursive Veil*; Richard, 'Femmes chefs d'entreprises à Marseilles'; Richard, 'Des Marseillaises en affaires'; Valérie Piette, 'Trajectoires féminines. Les commerçantes à Bruxelles vers 1850', *Sextant* 5 (1996): pp. 9–46; Marlou Schrover, 'De affaire wordt gecontinueerd door de veduwe, Handelende vrouwen in de negentiende eeuw', *Geld and Goed: Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* 17 (1997): pp. 55–74; Else Hlawatschek, 'Die Unternehmerin (1800–1945)' in Hans Pohl (ed.), *Die Frau in der deutschen Wirtschaft (Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte)* (Beiheft 35) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985): pp. 127–146; Jennifer Aston, 'Female Business Ownership in Birmingham 1849–1901', *Midland History* 37 (Autumn 2012): pp. 187–206; Kay, *The Foundations of Female Entrepreneurship*.

The pattern uncovered in Paris was consequently not a particularly French one, but linked with a specific type of local economy.

French women from the industrial middle-class may have gone in business to preserve the integrity of the firm and keep it in the family. Most of the Parisian businesswomen encountered here, however, like a growing number in Lille, operated in a more fluid, individualistic environment. A lesser proportion of their assets was immobilised in machinery and buildings (almost all the businesses in the Paris articles of association rented their premises). Interestingly, the consumer-oriented, individualistic businesses of Paris (and late century Lille) were as open to women in business as multi-generational, production-oriented family businesses, in all cases with the tacit approval of those with whom they had to interact. Moralists may have disapproved, but they were talking to the wind.

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