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Genealogy and Family Culture

The Example of Illiteracy in Charleville Families (1740–1859)

Abstract: This article aims to explain how reconstructing genealogies and analysing generations are necessary to understand family cultures. For this purpose, it examines the inability to sign in some families over several generations from 1740 to 1859 in Charleville (today Charleville-Mézières in north-east France), an industrial town specialized in metallurgy, where the great majority of the population was able to sign during this period. The genealogical reconstruction of two families from a similar social background over three generations allows us to consider the social, economic, and familial factors that may have been at work in the reproduction of the inability to sign. Both male and female branches are taken into account to understand family dynamics. Beside this qualitative analysis, the observation and measurement of transmissions from genealogies require a reflection on the methodology for a quantitative analysis, in particular on the search for a threshold that permits to comprehend family transmissions as a real family culture.

Keywords: family culture, genealogy, family history, transmissions, illiteracy, Charleville

Introduction

Louis Henry and Michel Fleury have introduced genealogy as a method and a tool used in family history and demography in the 1950s and 1960s. The 1984 and 2000 issues of the *Annales de Démographie Historique* have brought to light how "quantitative genealogy", that is analysing a numerous sample of genealogies, was a *fruitful* method not only in family history but also in social history.[1] In his article in the 1984 issue, Alain Becchia emphasized that the analysis of generations is the only way to properly understand family specificity in terms of the transmission of behaviours: "The succession of generations reveals conventional behaviours, innovative or attached to the past specific to this or that lineage."[2]

We have chosen this methodology to study familial habits in Charleville, a small town in the department of Ardennes in north-east France, between 1740 and 1860. The city was

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1 Adeline Daumard, Les généalogies sociales: un des fondements de l'histoire sociale comparative et quantitative, in: Annales de démographie historique 1984, 9–24; Guy Brunet/Alain Bideau, Démographique historique et généalogie, in: Annales de Démographie Historique 2000/2, 101–110.

2 Alain Becchia, Étude des comportements démographiques et des mutations sociales à travers la reconstitution de lignées, in: Annales de Démographie Historique 1984, 25–44, 27.

founded in 1606 by Charles de Gonzague, Duke of Nevers, and integrated into the Kingdom of France in 1708. Charleville's population is estimated at 4,000 at the beginning of the eighteenth century, 8,000 in 1789 and 12,000 in 1873. The city is located at the border to Belgium and was specialized in weapon manufacturing (guns and rifles) with the royal manufacture, founded in 1675. It was also a trade centre for the Meuse valley and the Ardennes. In the nineteenth century, the town was mainly industrial. Factory workers and craftsmen made up a large part of the population, but there was also a great number of merchants: in 1790, it is estimated that 10% of household heads were merchants, 16.5% worked in metallurgy, 13.5% in the textile industry, 11.5% were day labourers and 8.5% worked in food production and trade.[3] In the first half of the nineteenth century, Charleville faced an economic crisis: the weapon manufactory was closed in 1836. However, with the opening of the Ardennes canal in 1842 and the railway to Paris in 1858, merchants and new metallurgy, glass- and brush-maker factories settled in the town.[4] Metallurgy workers accounted for the major part of the population, as was the case for many other Ardennes cities. Although we do not have exact figures for Charleville, we know them for Mézières, the directly neighbouring city: in 1847, metallurgy workers accounted for 72.7% of all workers.[5] Some of them must have been working in some of the many nail factories in Charleville.[6] It is fair to assume that the figures were similar in Charleville.

Charleville is an exceptional site for historical fieldwork because population censuses have been conducted here beginning at the end of the seventeenth century, which is unique for France. The aim of this research is to specify the notion of family culture, which can be defined as a set of values and practices transmitted more or less deliberately within a family over generations, without evidence of mechanical transmission according to the social group or geographic area to which the family belonged. The family is understood here as a group consisting of the father, the mother, and the children, but also grand-parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins who are blood related or linked by marriage. This study will illustrate a specific family culture by using the example of illiterate Charleville families over several generations. Reconstructing families and analysing their influences and dynamics, in this case in the context of an urban population, raises some methodological issues.

Family culture: the emergence of the notion in historiography

Many social scientists, in particular historians and sociologists, have studied familial transmissions and genealogy. Family cultures, as defined above, can be observed through the prac-

3 François-Joseph Ruggiu, "Quand ils ne partent pas…". Les grands garçons dans les ménages de Charleville au XVIIIe siècle, in: Isidro Dubert/Vincent Gourdon (eds.), Inmigración, trabajo y servicio doméstico en la Europa urbana, siglos XVIII–XX, Madrid 2017, 155–173.

4 Fabrice Boudjaaba/Vincent Gourdon, Quitter Charleville dans les années 1860–1870, in: Histoire & Mesure 28/2 (2013), 89–128.

5 René Colinet, Les hommes et les usines dans la métallurgie ardennaise des années 1840 à nos jours, in: Revue Historique des Ardennes 22 (1987), 23–40, 24.

6 For example, in 1848, the Charleville entrepreneur A. Lechanteur employed 840 nail makers, Ch. F. Lagard 1,140; in addition, there were several other manufacturers. Colinet, Les hommes et les usines, 25. There is a thesis in preparation about nineteenth-century Charleville by Jérémy Dupuy (Sorbonne Université).

tices of individuals. They differ from familial organizations, which Jean-Louis Flandrin has examined, because the latter (called "lignage" and "maisons") rely on the social and juridical organization of society;[7] they are not choices, so they do not vary from one family to another. Many historians have studied particular practices of families with the same social and geographical background. For example, Claire Châtelain, who has analysed the history of families of high-ranking officers during sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, shows that some families, such as the Berulles, had certain strategies to preserve their social status, for example by urging brothers and cousins for help and support.[8] Family history and memory practices seem important to forging a family identity. In fact, Mathieu Marraud has investigated the personal papers of a French merchant family from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which reveal a great awareness of familial identity.[9] In the late eighteenth century, a branch of the family, the Judde-Marsolliers, relied on the family genealogy to assert their right to inherit. One member, Jacques Judde, a former notary, "was the custodian of a written family chronicle, so kept, but also of oral memory, cultivated by his own parents or grand-parents, by longstanding relationships with his cousins".[10]

Family cultures can also be observed in choices made over several generations. In demographic history, Alain Becchia has shown that some lineages of winemakers in Issy-lès-Paris displayed specific demographic behaviours over several generations between 1750 and 1850.[11] The Bouilles had two to six children per couple in the first and second generation. One woman born in this family married a man from the Carbonnet family, and the couple had eleven children. The Carbonnet family was characterized by a large number of children (two to ten children) per couple over two generations, which led the author to conclude that "it therefore seems fair to assume that here the husband imposed the demographic tradition of his own family".[12]

More examples of familial traditions can be found in studies about migration. In fact, Paul-André Rosental reconstructed 97 genealogies among twelve departments in nineteenth-century France.[13] He coined the notion of "centrage", which roughly translates to "centring": it refers to the tendency of the members of one family to choose their marriage witnesses either among their own kinship or among the same few individuals (then they are called "auto-centered") or from outside of this circle (the "exo-centered" families). It appears that migrant families were more often "exo-centred". Intergenerational choices can also be seen in consanguineous marriages in central Italy between Rimini and Marche from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Michaël Gasperoni has pointed out that among three families in the Monte Colombo parish, the Giovanetto, Grazioso, and Ugolini families, the number of

7 Jean Louis Flandrin, Familles. Parenté, maison, sexualité dans l'ancienne société, Paris 1976, 80.

8 Claire Châtelain, Chronique d'une ascension sociale: exercice de la parenté chez de grands officiers, XVIe–XVIIe siècles, Paris 2009.

9 Mathieu Marraud, De la ville à l'État. La bourgeoisie parisienne XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles, Paris 2009, 23–103.

10 Marraud, De la ville à l'État, 28.

11 Alain Becchia, L'extension du malthusianisme dans une commune de banlieue. Enquête sur les lignages d'Issy-lès-Paris de 1750 à 1850 environ, doctoral thesis directed by Jean Ganiage, University of Paris IV, 1978, Cited from Becchia, Étude des comportements démographiques, 25–44.

12 Becchia, Étude des comportements démographiques, 36.

13 Paul-André Rosental, Les Sentiers invisibles. Espaces, familles et migrations dans la France du XIXe siècle, Paris 1999, 150 and 156.

marriages between blood relations multiplied between 1750 and 1850.[14] Their exemption applications accounted for a third of all such requests in the parish. Marriages between cousins also reveal specific behaviours and practices of some families in the Bagnes Valley in the Swiss Alps between 1700 and 1900, as Sandro Guzzi-Heeb has shown.[15] From genealogies and network analysis, he concludes that families such the Bessards or the Bessons shared radical political opinions and had more illegitimate children than the rest of the population. Sexual behaviour and political views were part of family cultures: they were values transmitted from generation to generation.

> "In this sense the micro-analysis method allows us to interpret variables too often neglected in social and political analysis. Behaviours towards Catholic morality, the other sex and the transmission of social and moral values in kinship have become significant and influential variables".[16]

Aline Johner has also studied sexual behaviours and its links to religion and political opinions in first half of the nineteenth century in the canton of Vaud: she sees sex and births outside marriage recurring in some families as "consequences of a family culture".[17] All these historical studies identify the family and family traditions as one of the main (if not the main) factors to explain the choices of individuals, rather than economic and social factors.

Sociological studies can also shed some light on the question of how to understand family cultures. The concept has been first formulated in sociology in 1970: the American sociologist Reuben Hill has studied familial transmissions in Minnesota and Puerto Rico. He followed three generations of almost 2,500 Puerto Rican families from five rural and urban communities between 1900 and 1950, in the context of major social and economic transformations.[18] Hill used the concept of "family culture" to describe the transmission of familial planning, such as buying a house, a car, or having children. These decisions often persist as the generation goes by, but sometimes they do not, and this calls for an explanation. Sociologists often tackled issues similar to those highlighted by historians, such as the question of individual destinies and familial memory. Many sociologists wondered why individuals and families

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14 Michaël Gasperoni, Reconsidering Matrimonial Practices and Endogamy in the Early Modern period. The Case of Central Italy (San Marino, Romagna and Marche), in: Dionigi Albera/Luigi Lorenzetti/Jon Matthieu (eds.), Reframing the History of Family and Kinship: From the Alps towards Europe, Berne 2016, 203–231.

15 Sandro Guzzi-Heeb, Passions alpines, sexualité et pouvoirs dans les montagnes suisses (1700–1900), Rennes 2014.

16 Guzzi-Heeb, Passions alpines, 207.

17 Aline Johner, Sexualité, identités religieuses et politiques: concurrence sociale et comportements sexuels dans une commune rurale vaudoise de la fin de l'Ancien Régime à 1848, doctoral thesis, University of Lausanne, 2020, 188.

18 Reuben Hill, Family Developement in Three Generations, Cambridge, MA/London 1970, 536–551. Reuben Hill employs the expression of "family culture" in the presentation of his methodology: "With this device we could hold constant the family culture over time and note differences in family line by family line in each of the dimensions of family structure and functioning under study" (op. cit. 542). See also: Reuben Hill, Patterns of Decision-Making and the Accumulation of Family Assets, in: Nelson Foote (ed.), Household Decision Making, New York 1961, 51–88; Reuben Hill, Decision Making and Family Life Cycle, in: Ethel Shanas/Gordon F. Streib (eds.), Social Structure and the Family: Generational Relations. Symposium on the Family, Intergenerational Relationships and Social Structure, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1965, 113–139; Reuben Hill/René König, Families in East and West. Socialisation Process and Kinship Ties, Paris 1970.

from different backgrounds, but also those who shared the same social status, had different life trajectories. Familial legacy is a major point to understand how children are educated and, in particular, why some of them may fail at school. The French sociologist Bernard Lahire has examined the performance of CE1[19] students among 26 families. He concludes that the familial culture of reading and writing is crucial for the ability of children to learn these skills in school. Moreover, parents' moral education and disciplining allow children to learn how to behave in the classroom.[20] Thus, for Lahire, family culture consists of the parents' literacy and their rules; and this differs from one family to another at an equivalent cultural level. This was also at the core of Pierre Bourdieu's considerations: according to his theory, parents transmit cultural heritage and habitus to their children.[21] This habitus refers to our way of being in the world, consciously or unconsciously, forged by norms but appropriated in practice.[22] This explains why practices may vary within a given society, while they still conform to the rules of this society. By transmitting a certain habitus, such as the behaviour in class and the attention given to homework and school in general, the family provides the child with the tools that enable them to benefit from education.

A solid family identity and family history influence the choices and values of a child. Memory is an important factor because it allows transmission. Anne Muxel, a French sociologist, identifies this "reference-memory", which provides an individual with a frame of reference, as the foundation of the family.[23]

Family cultures, understood as a set of values and practices, and even as the feeling of identity and belonging to a family, explain how children can reproduce behaviours from their parents. They significantly influence their future. But this does not mean that family cultures are fixed or that they completely determine an individual's life. Anne Muxel has demonstrated that the influence of family cultures is by no means predetermined and can be redefined by the individual.[24] Therefore, family cultures are fragile: they are by nature prone to evolve, depending on the context and individual needs.

Thus, sociology and history – albeit using different terminologies – have highlighted the way in which family cultures were relevant and effective in explaining different individual and family trajectories in the same social environment. Far from being fixed and immutable, these family reference frames are adaptable and offer a range of possible behaviours and choices. Literacy or illiteracy can be understood as an indicator of family culture: it reveals family behaviour towards the use of writing and towards school. This inclination, transmitted across several generations, can explain why some families stay illiterate for a long time, sometimes longer than other families from the same social background. While not being completely disconnected from social and economic factors, the practice of writing and learning to write varies from one family to another.

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19 CE1 is the second year of primary school in France; the pupils are about seven or eight years old.

20 Bernard Lahire, Tableaux de famille. Heurts et malheurs scolaires en milieux populaires, Paris 1995, 80–93.

21 Pierre Bourdieu, Reproduction Culturelle et reproduction sociale, in: Social Science Information 10/2 (1971), 45–79.

22 Pierre Bourdieu, Habitus, code et codification, in: Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales 64 (1986), 40–44, 40.

23 Anne Muxel, L'individu et la mémoire familiale, Paris 2002, 17–18.

24 Ibid., 196.

Unlike sociologists, historians face the difficulty that oral sources do not exist for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, the written sources, such as marriage registers used in the following example, do not reflect the full extent of family situations and exchanges.

Illiteracy as an original familial transmission in Charleville

It is interesting to consider the ability to sign marriage certificates as part of family culture. Literacy has often been linked to familial transmissions and mutual influences between parents and children. Historical studies often take the ability to sign the marriage register as an indicator, because this source allows us to observe a whole community over a long period of time. Marriage certificates are chosen for this study because signatures or the mention that a person was not able to sign were always present in the acts in Charleville between 1740 and 1860. For practical reasons, here, "literate" (or "illiterate") qualifies a person who could (or could not) sign at his/her first wedding. Historians consider signatures as a medium indicator of literacy because signatures only prove a certain type of writing and because people may have learned to write later in their life.[25] The Maggiolo study of 1877 has been the first one in France to analyse this at a national level. This survey is named after the rector of the Académie of Nancy, who initiated this project on primary education and literacy in France from the ancient regime. Almost 16,000 schoolteachers made several enquiries throughout the country at the beginning of the Third Republic. Five periods (1686–1690, 1786–1790, 1816–1820, 1866, 1872–1876) were analysed by using marriage registers, and the indicator chosen was the ability of the spouses to sign their surname.[26] The results of these investigations were published in the *Statistics of Primary Education* and are considered by historians to be a reliable source.[27] Jean-Pierre Pélissier and Danièle Rébaudo also relied on the signing of marriage certificates in the "3,000 Families Survey" to measure illiteracy in France between 1803 and 1902.[28] They noted that there was a "very strong influence of familial environment on the ability to sign". Between 1803 and 1900, the signature rates of men and women were higher than those of their fathers: in 1803, around 45 per cent of the total male population were able to sign; among men whose fathers could sign it was 75 per cent. Writing about their students' memoirs on illiteracy of the population of 241 parishes between the eighteenth and

25 Gérard and Jeannette Larouche have shown that reconstructing life courses (such as baptism acts or burial records) gives a better understanding when based on different sources. Gérard Bouchard/Jeannette Larouche, Nouvelle mesure de l'alphabétisation à l'aide de la reconstitution automatique des familles, in: Histoire Sociale/Social History 22 (1989), 91–119. See also: Roger S. Schofield, The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England, in: Jack Goody (ed.), Literacy in Traditional Societies, Cambridge 1968, 311–325, 320–323; François Furet/Wladimir Sachs, La croissance de l'alphabétisation en France, XVIIIe–XIXe siècle, in: Annales E.S.C. 29/3 (1974), 714–737.

26 The limitation of the survey is that the population chosen was more often from towns than villages. See François Furet/Jacques Ozouf, Lire et écrire. L'alphabétisation des Français de Calvin à Jules Ferry, 2 vols., Paris 1977, vol. 1, 13–20.

27 Michel Fleury/Pierre Valmary, Les progrès de l'instruction élémentaire de Louis XIV à Napoléon III, d'après l'enquête de Louis Maggiolo (1877–1879), in: Population 12 (1957), 71–92, 89; Jacques Houdaille, Les signatures au mariage de 1740 à 1829, in: Population 32/1 (1977), 65–90, 88.

28 Jean-Pierre Pélissier/Danièle Rebaudo, Une approche de l'illettrisme en France, in: Histoire & Mesure 19/1–2 (2004), 161–202.

nineteenth centuries, Joseph Ruwet and Yves Wellesman have made similar observations for Belgium.[29] They too identified a connection between the familial environment and its consequence on illiteracy. Illiteracy of the father or mother is qualified as a "'hereditary' cultural handicap".[30] For example, in Bruges, 73% of boys and 91% of girls who had an illiterate father were also unable to sign.[31] When the mother was illiterate, the same was true for 67% of boys and 85% of girls. Several social historians have pointed out that literacy and education is related to familial dynamics. Véronique Nahoum, an anthropologist who analysed marriage signatures in the Champagne region, where Charleville is located, sees education as a process that not only affected children in school but also parents, siblings, and even friends: "Children can, in turn, instruct their parents and friends: this basic training – signing one's own name – may be passed on to those who are too old to go to school".[32]

Literacy is a process where every member of the family can influence one another throughout their whole lives. Family is involved in this education; for Harvey J. Graff learning to write is due to familial factors:

> "Moreover, as an agent of education and a link in the chain which results in attendance or non-attendance at school, the family and its condition play further important roles in the transmission of literacy and the value and uses of those skills".[33]

This is similar to what Bernard Lahire has written about familial influences on writing and reading. Researchers have also examined the importance of familial contexts and family dynamics on literacy. Writing about marriage certificates in nineteenth-century Netherlands, Adrianus M. Van der Woude has argued that illiteracy could have been a stigma affecting the choice of a partner.[34] However, concerning the French families of the "3,000 Families Survey", Jean-Pierre Pélissier and Danièle Rébaudo observed that at the end of the nineteenth century marriages of literate men with illiterate women were more numerous.[35] David Vincent comes to a similar conclusion: after describing family as a "cultural unit", he affirms that

> "detailed studies of the actual patterns of signatures and marks in English and Belgian marriages suggests that the new family units were far from consistent in their combination of skills. […] Lower down the social scale, the brides of artisans were at the beginning of the nineteenth century less literate than their new husbands, and

29 Joseph Ruwet/Yves Wellesmans (dir.), L'analphabétisme en Belgique (XVIIIe–XIXe siècle): travaux d'étudiants, The Library of the University of Louvain, 1978, 103–108.

30 Ibid., 106.

31 Ibid., 104.

32 Véronique Nahoum, En Champagne: signatures au mariage XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles, in: Furet/Ozouf, Lire et écrire, vol. 2, 187–216.

33 Harvey J. Graff, Literacy in History. An Interdisciplinary Research Bibliography, New York 1981, 271, cited from Adrianus M. Van der Woude, L'Histoire de l'alphabétisation comme histoire de la famille, in: Jean-Pierre Bardet/François Lebrun/René Le Mée (dir.), Mesurer et comprendre: Mélanges offerts à Dupâquier, Paris 1993, 541–561, 544.

34 Van Der Woude, L'Histoire de l'alphabétisation, 541–561.

35 Pélissier/Rebaudo, Une approche de l'illettrisme en France, 161–202.

amongst the farm labourers and unskilled urban workers, all kinds of patterns of signatures and marks were possible, and it remained so for much of the century."[36]

Thus, the familial context in general seems more relevant to literacy than spouse homogeneity.

These results of social historiography on family cultures and education confirm that families provide a framework for behaviours and values that allow children to benefit from education at school. This can be transmitted from one generation to another, more or less consciously, for example by neglecting school attendance (or prioritising *de facto* child's work) and by the inability of illiterate parents to practice writing at home and in everyday life. Helping children with their homework is more difficult for illiterate parents, thus parents' inability to sign is also a kind of handicap for their children's education. For practical purposes, we use the expression "transmitting the inability to sign" or "transmitting illiteracy" to make it short.

In order to understand why some families in Charleville were special in terms of their inability to sign over the course of several generations, it is necessary to present some context information on literacy in France and in the region of Charleville during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. People in northern and northeastern France signed more often during these two centuries than in the rest of the country.[37] From the mid-eighteenth century, the department of Ardennes was the most literate region in France, particularly the Vence valley where Charleville is located, with an average of 65% of men and 29% of women able to sign around 1750.[38] This rate increased rapidly: at the end of the eighteenth century, 82% of men and 44% of women could sign. According to the Maggiolo survey, in 1816–1820, around 90 to 100% of men and 50 to 60% of women could sign; in 1866, the percentage was estimated at around 100% for both groups.[39] In comparison: in Seine-et-Oise (department west of Paris; Paris excluded) around 70 to 80% of men and 60 to 70% of women had the ability to sign in 1816–1820.[40]

To compare the figures for Charleville with those of the Vence valley, a sample of families is used to illustrate the percentage of men and women able to sign, between 1740 and 1859. This sample of 217 families has been selected from all marriages formed between 1740 and 1779, with at least one spouse having a name starting with the letters B, G, M, N, P, R or T. Then, from 1780 to 1859, only marriages of the children of theses couples were selected, by following the lines of boys as well as those of girls.[41] In so doing, 217 families who had at least two generations married in Charleville between 1740 and 1859 were reconstructed. As the 1740–1779 marriage databases were compiled differently than the rest of the period, the

36 David Vincent, The Rise of Mass Literacy. Reading and Writing in Modern Europe, Cambridge 2000, 15; see also for England David Vincent, Literacy and Popular Culture, 22–24, and for Belgium Ruwet/Wellemans, L'analphabétisme en Belgique (XVIIIe–XIXe siècles), 106–108.

37 François Lebrun/Marc Vernard/Jean Quéniart (dir.), Histoire générale de l'enseignement et de l'éducation en France, vol. 2: De Gutenberg aux Lumières: 1480–1789, Paris 1981, 303–315 and 456–476.

38 Nahoum, En Champagne: signatures au mariage, 211. See also: Dominique Julia, L'enseignement primaire dans le diocèse de Reims à la fin de l'Ancien Régime, in: Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française 42 (1970), 233–296; Furet/Sachs, La croissance de l'alphabétisation en France, 714–737.

39 Furet/Ozouf, Lire et écrire, 61–62.

40 The limit of the survey is that the population chosen was more often from towns than villages. Ibid.

41 Between 1740 and 1779, some families already had two generations married in Charleville.

literacy calculation tables are presented accordingly (Tables 1 and 2 for men, Tables 3 and 4 for women). Looking at all spouses of this database – that is 2,827 husbands and 2,827 wives[42] – shows that literacy rates in Charleville were quite high from the 1740s onwards: 69% of husbands and 53% of wives were able to sign their name. Between 1850 and 1859, those figures increased to 93% and 82% respectively.

This increase can be explained, at least in part, by a new public policy of child instruction in the nineteenth century.[43] In 1816, municipalities were obliged to have a state school. In 1833, the Guizot laws, named after the Minister of Instruction, stipulated a state school for boys, which was partially extended to girl schools in 1836. It was only in 1850, by Falloux's law, that municipalities were compelled to have at least one state girl school. It also allowed them to propose free education. At that time, the state particularly encouraged the establishment of confessional schools to increase the number of schools in total.[44] In Charleville, many Catholic schools for both boys and girls were established from the eighteenth century onwards: boys could attend class in the school of Frères de la Doctrine Chrétienne from 1766 to the end of the nineteenth century, albeit it was closed during the French Revolution.[45] Girls could learn to write and read with the Soeurs Carmélites from 1633 onwards; this school was also closed during the revolutionary period and replaced in 1837 by the Institution Saint Remi. There was also the Filles séculières de la Providence, founded in 1694, which disappeared temporarily during the Revolution and reopened in 1802. In 1835, it was united with the Dames du Sacré Coeur. From 1851, another confessional school, the Soeurs de Saint Vincent de Paul, educated poor girls. In 1831, a state school was founded in Charleville; it provided Charleville and the Ardennes department with many teachers during the nineteenth century.[46] It goes without saying that this contributed to a large part of the population being literate. The school laws gradually reduced the number of children aged between six to twelve working in factories.

Children's factory work has probably been a major obstacle to school attendance. Indeed, children often worked in factories with their parents. Although we do not have exact figures for Charleville, we know that in general fewer children worked in metallurgy and glassmaker factories (8 to 12%) than in textile factories, with 18.3% in the cotton industry, according to an inquiry conducted in 1839–1845 on the industrial labour force in France.[47] René Colinet estimated that around 1,000 children in Mézières were metallurgy workers, which accounted

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42 We included all marriages of these decades, regardless whether individuals got married once or multiple times.

43 François Furet and Jacques Ozouf estimated that at least 20 per cent of literacy acquisition processes were not directly linked to schools. It depended also on other factors such as natural geography and access to school, economic ressources of the city, existence of local languages, and "psycho-sociological" factors. Furet/Ozouf, Lire et écrire, 305–306. Françoise Mayeur also pointed out that children learned at the workplace of their parents; they imitated them or received elementary education at the factory's school, if such schools existed. Françoise Mayeur, Histoire générale de l'enseignement et de l'éducation en France, vol. 3: De la Révolution à l'École républicaine, 1789–1930, Paris 2004 (1st ed. 1981), 250–258.

44 Mayeur, Histoire générale de l'enseignement, 332–333.

45 Marie-France Barbe, Les congrégations religieuses à Charleville et Mézières depuis le XVIIe jusqu'au début du XXe siècle, in: Revue Historique Ardennaise 38 (2006), 67–94.

46 Raymond Stevenin/Joëlle Fourreaux, Les débuts de l'école normale d'instituteurs des ardennes, in: Revue Historique Ardennaise 34 (2001), 219–253.

47 Colin Heywood, Childhood in XIXth Century France. Work, Health and Education among the "Classes populaires", Cambridge 1988, 104.

for 10% of all metallurgy workers in 1847.[48] Children in factories received a wage, but employers were not obliged to provide tuition or even instruction on professional skills.[49] Many other children aged 10 to 12 were apprenticed, often with their father or another worker. An 1848 major inquiry on labour in France found that most children were learning from their parents, even when no formal contract existed.[50] Contracts were often concluded before a notary: the master (a blacksmith or a nail maker, for example) was bound to teach the child professional skills for three years, as demonstrated by René Colinet for another Ardennes city (Nouzonville) in 1862.[51] These contracts usually did not mention writing and reading skills. It is possible, though, that some children attended school before starting an apprenticeship.

Table 1: Number and percentage of men able to sign at their wedding in Charleville genealogical corpus (1740–1779)

	Could not sign		Could sign		Absent or uncertain		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
1740–1749	108	31	245	69	0	0	353
1750–1759	63	22	221	77	2	1	286
1760–1769	81	24	261	76	1	0	343
1770–1779	89	22	299	77	1	0	389

Table 2: Number and percentage of men able to sign at their wedding in Charleville genealogical corpus (1780–1859)

	Could not sign		Could sign		Absent or uncertain		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
1780–1789	24	13	147	83	6	3	177
1790–22/09/1800	30	15	167	81	8	4	205
23/09/1800–1809	43	22	149	76	4	2	196
1810–1819	44	23	148	76	2	1	194
1820–1829	39	21	146	79	0	0	185
1830–1839	26	13	178	87	0	0	204
1840–1849	13	9	130	91	0	0	143
1850–1859	11	7	141	93	0	0	152

48 Colinet, Les hommes et les usines, 24.

49 Heywood, Childhood in XIXth Century France, 199.

50 Ibid., 200. This has been observed in several villages and small towns, and it is fair to assume that this also applies to Charleville, a medium-sized town.

51 Colinet, Les hommes et les usines, 26; René Colinet, Un site industriel: Nouzonville. Une dynastie industrielle de la métallurgie ardennaise: les Thomé, mémoire de maîtrise sous la direction de Pierre Barral, Université de Nancy, 1979.

Table 3: Number and percentage of women able to sign at their wedding in Charleville genealogical corpus (1740–1779)

	Could not sign		Could sign		Absent or uncertain		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
1740–1749	167	47	186	53	0	0	353
1750–1759	126	44	160	56	0	0	286
1760–1769	130	38	212	62	1	0	343
1770–1779	147	38	237	61	5	1	389

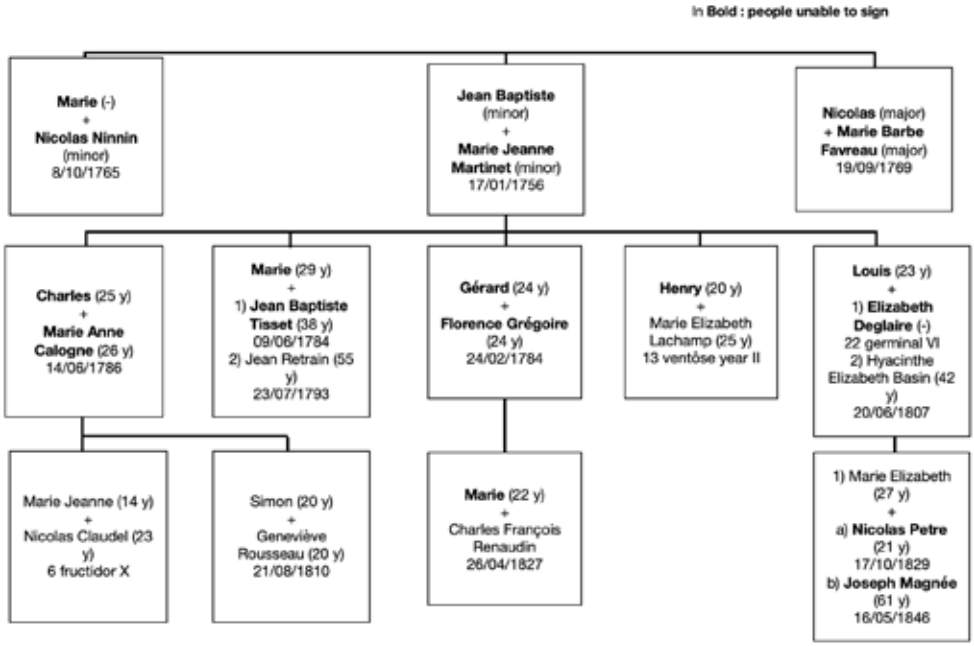
Table 4: Number and percentage of women able to sign at their wedding in Charleville genealogical corpus (1780–1859)

	Could not sign		Could sign		Absent or uncertain		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
1780–1789	42	24	129	73	6	3	177
1790–22/09/1800	44	21	142	69	19	9	205
23/09/1800–1809	55	28	136	69	5	3	196
1810–1819	61	31	131	68	2	1	194
1820–1829	44	24	141	76	0	0	185
1830–1839	52	25	152	75	0	0	204
1840–1849	33	23	110	77	0	0	143
1850–1859	26	17	125	82	1	1	152

Note to Table 2 and 4: The republican calendar, which began its first year on 22 September 1792, was in effect until 1 January 1806. The decades 1790–1800 and 1800–1809 are delimited by the beginning of the year IX on 23 September 1800.

Given that the population literacy increased significantly in Charleville between 1740 and 1859, two of the 217 reconstructed families are particularly remarkable because their members did not sign marriage certificates over several generations. Both families had a relatively poor social background. The first one, the Migeot family, counted three generations of married couples in Charleville between 1756 and 1829 (Figure 1). Jean-Baptiste did not sign at his wedding in 1756, and neither did his wife, Marie Jeanne Martinet, nor his father, who was listed as a witness to his son's wedding. His brother, Nicolas, and his sister, Marie, and their spouses did not sign marriage certificates either. There is no mention of their profession. In the second generation, when Jean-Baptiste's children got married, they did not sign either: Charles in 1786, Gérard in 1784, Marie in 1784 and in 1793, Henry in year II of the Republic (March 1794), Louis in year VI (April 1798) and in 1806. Among their seven husbands and wives, four did not sign. In the third generation, four grandchildren got married: Marie Elisabeth signed her fist marriage certificate in 1829 but not her second in 1846. Her husbands did not sign. Marie Jeanne and Simon, her cousins, and their husband and wife signed in 1809 and in 1810, but another cousin, Marie, did not in 1827 (whereas her husband did). This shows a change in the third generation during the 1820s. However, it is important to

Figure 1: Migeot family



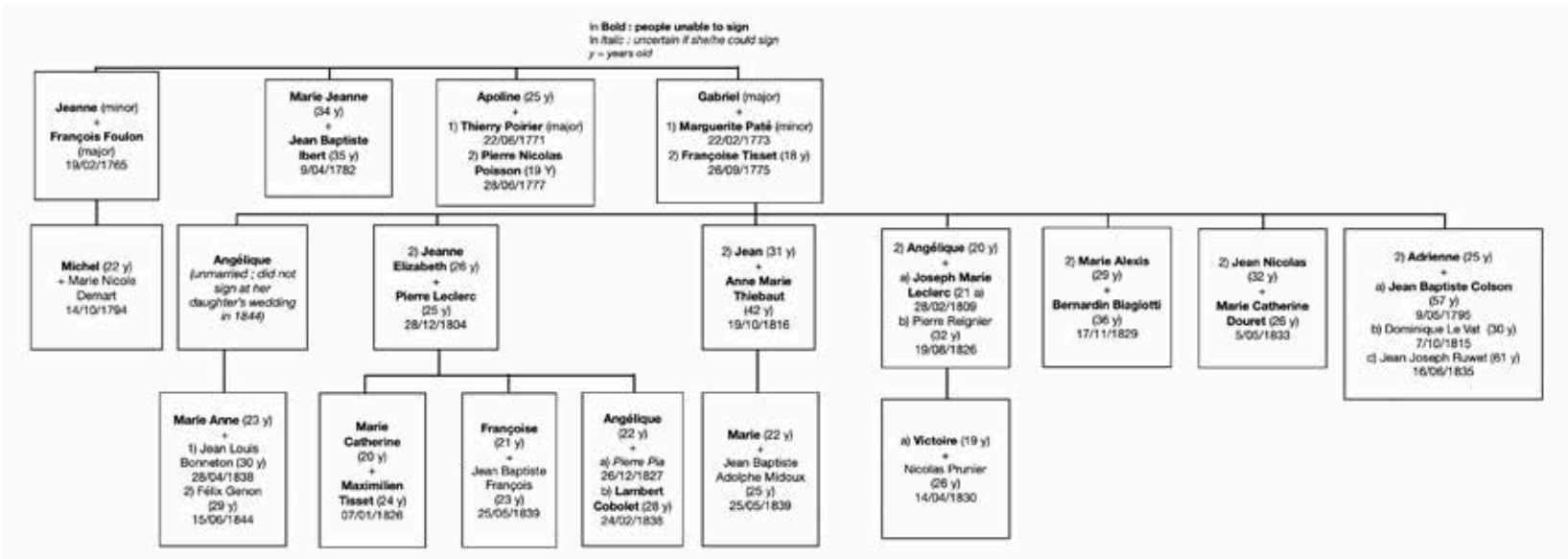
Source: Own illustration.

note that we have three 'mixed' couples: Marie, who was unable to sign, married to Charles François who could; and Marie Elisabeth, who also could sign, but who got married to men, Nicolas Petre and Joseph Magnée, who could not.

Many Migeots were day labourers or nailers. Of the first generation, Jean-Baptiste was a nailer. We do not know the profession of his brother Nicolas. This family worked in metallurgy and craft: Charles and Gérard were nailers, Henry was a gunsmith. His son-in-law Jean-Baptiste Tisset, however, was a butcher. Gérard became a tanner. His daughter Marie was a seamstress. Some of the men, such as Jean-Baptiste, Henry and Charles, were temporary day labourers. Charles' son, Simon, was a shoemaker. In the third generation, only one, Marie-Elisabeth, was a day labourer. The third-generation sons-in-law were masons, cavaliers, and wood turners. Most of them lived in the main streets with several shops – Rue du Moulin and Rue Saint Charles, – which both led to the Place Ducale, the town's main square; and Rue Saint André, near the weapon factory.

The second family are the Parliers: between 1765 and 1844, three generations got married and did not sign. The first generation consisted of four siblings, Jeanne, Gabriel, Apoline, and Marie Jeanne, who could not sign, and neither could their spouses (Figure 2). In the second generation, Jeanne's son, Michel, could not sign either, but he married Marie Nicole, who could. Gabriel's children (four daughters and two sons) could not sign, as their spouses, except for two of the three husbands that were married in 1815 and 1835 to one daughter, Adrienne. Another daughter of Gabriel was also not able to sign, but we know this from the wedding of her own daughter, Marie Anne, as she was a "natural child", born out of wedlock.

Figure 2: Parlier family



Source: Own illustration.

Including this last child, there were six children in the third generation between 1826 and 1844 and none of them could sign. Among the eight spouses of this last generation (eight because Marie Anne and Angélique got married twice), six of them could sign.

The family shows a transmission of the gunsmith profession from the first to the second generation and across the first generation (two sons). One girl also married a gunsmith. In the last generation, there was no gunsmith: children and sons-in-law were day labourers, copper smelters, or founders, blacksmiths, and coopers. This can be explained by the closure of the Charleville manufacture in 1836. However, descendants of the family worked in metallurgy, which is not that different from the production of firearms. But there is also a roofer and a marble worker among the sons-in-law of the third generation. Women were often seamstresses or day labourers, such as Adrienne. One woman, Angélique, had a child out of wedlock. Some of them also lived on Rue du Moulin, between the Place Ducale and the mill on the Meuse river, but most lived in several other neighbourhoods.

After having presented these two families, it is necessary to analyse if transmissions of illiteracy can be qualified as family culture. Reconstructing genealogies and determining family cultures are difficult tasks because of several methodological issues, which have to be kept in mind.

Methodological issues in determining family cultures

To begin with, it is important to determine exactly what qualifies as family culture. As defined above, family culture is a set of values and practices transmitted in a family across several generations. It can include a specific behaviour, which leads to certain choices in education. But a certain transmission is not enough to constitute a family culture: it is necessary to find the right threshold. We hypothesize that a familial transmission is a repeated practice between at least two individuals from the same family line of the same generation or two generations, who may have known each other during their lifetime. If this transmission has affected a large number of blood relatives or allies for at least two generations, then it can be defined as a family culture. The difference lies in the proportion of people in the line who have the same practice and experience the same duration of the transmission. Thus, we hypothesize that illiteracy is a family culture owing to an inability to sign for more than two generations and for the majority of family members; this inability signifies a resistance towards school and the use of writing.

Second, reconstructing descending genealogies of a population located in one place could potentially lead to a bias of analysis. In fact, constituting our sample of the Charleville population from marriage certificates has some consequences: it is only possible to measure literacy of married people, and we may not have included all branches of the family. Some individuals got married and moved to other towns, but they still might have been in close contact to the family branches in Charleville. This is indicated by the fact that some witnesses to a marriage were members of the family and were reported to live elsewhere. Moreover, some families got out of sight over time: in 1859, only 95 families, or 44% or our sample, had a descendant who got married in Charleville. A little less than 60% of the families disappeared from the town. Finally, the method of reconstructing genealogies over a long period of time may influence the comprehension of family culture: transmissions may be different when a family lives in

a place for a long time, or they differ in proportion to the members living there. Regarding to the two families of our sample, most spouses were from Charleville. In the Migeot family, only three marriages out of fifteen were with someone from elsewhere. The same is true of the Parlier family: seven people were not born in Charleville (five men and two women) at seven marriages out of a total of 24 weddings. Thus, it is possible that a couple's residence has more influence than the family who lives in the same place. Comparative studies on mobile families are necessary to provide conclusive results in this respect.

In order to prove that the two families presented transmitted the inability to sign as a family culture, two different statistical approaches are possible. The first is based on simple statistics on all family members to find a significant threshold. The second provides an analysis by generation to better understand changes over time. The challenge is to translate the habit of a family from the genealogy into a calculation that is representative.

For this purpose, we calculated signature rates for each family (Table 5). Rather than men and women, allies and blood relatives were distinguished to see whether the transmission is consanguineous. It appears that the difference is not very clear: the number of illiterate people is more or less equal.

Table 5: Number and percentage of allies and blood relatives able and unable to sign the marriage register of two families (Migeot and Parlier) in Charleville sample (1740–1859)

Family	Number of blood relatives able to sign	Number of allies able to sign	Total able to sign (% of all members)	Number of blood relatives unable to sign	Number of allies unable to sign	Total unable to sign (% of all members)	Absent or uncertain (% of all members)	Total of members
Migeot	3	6	9 (33%)	9	9	18 (66%)	0 (0%)	27
Parlier	0	8	8 (19%)	18	15	33 (79%)	1 (2%)	42

For the two families, all generations and members taken together, the percentage of people unable to sign is above 50%. For the Parliers, it even reached 79%, with all blood relatives being characterized by illiteracy. We can choose 50% as threshold, but we can also take as a reference the average rates for all men and women of our sample during the period from 1740 to 1859 in Charleville (Table 6).

Table 6: Number and percentage of men and women able and unable to sign at their wedding in Charleville sample (1740–1859)

	Sign		Did not sign		Absent or uncertain		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Men	2232	79	571	20	24	1	2827
Women	1861	66	927	33	39	1	2827
Total	4093	72	1498	26	63	1	5654

It seems that those families differ from the average by extraordinary rates of illiteracy. This confirms the first impression. However, these general figures do not show how the inability to

sign was distributed among the generations and how time affected the transmission. To refine the calculation, the distribution of the inability to sign has been differentiated by generations. For example, the Parlier family (Table 7) shows a total transmission for three generations if we only include blood relatives.

Table 7: Number and percentage of people unable to sign among all blood relatives of different generations of the Parlier family

	Generation 1	Generation 2	Generation 3
Number of illiterate persons among blood relatives	4 / 4	8 / 8	6 / 6
Percentage of illiterate persons	100%	100%	100%

When allies are taken into account, the profile is a bit different (Table 8). More and more people could sign as the generations passed. (The signature of only one husband has been set aside as inconclusive.)

Table 8: Number and percentage of people unable to sign among all members (blood relatives and allies) of different generations of the Parlier family

	Generation 1	Generation 2	Generation 3
Number of illiterate persons among all members of the family	10 / 10	14 / 18	8 / 13*
Percentage of illiterate persons	100%	77%	62%

* The signature of one husband is uncertain and thus set aside

This calculation is useful to put more emphasis on the transmission that passes across multiple generations. When people could not sign over three generations (for example, from the grand-parent to the grand-child), the transmission is stronger than if it only exists over two. It also gives an indication of how quickly the inability was disappearing. The limitation of this analysis is that this distribution does not indicate which relationships determined the transmissions. It is fair to assume that exchanges between parents and children are more crucial than those between children and uncles and aunts or the cousins, but this cannot be proved based on this approach alone. Another problem is that with each generation the influence of the spouse's family on the children increases. Nevertheless, simple proportion statistics can highlight familial trends and repetition over generations.

To complete this analysis, we can include other information provided by marriage certificates. The age of the groom and bride at the first marriage, mentioned in the figures for each family, varies significantly. This information does not reveal much about social status or a connection to literacy. In the eighteenth century, only the mention of "major" or "minor" is provided: during the ancient regime in France, the age of majority was 30 for a man and 25 for a woman. The exact age is given more frequently from 1780 onwards. In the examples, the last generation of the Parliers seems to be of lower age at marriage (between 19 and 23 years-old) than the first generation; the same is true for the Migeots, but there is a significant gap between two girls who got married at 14 and 27 respectively. This information does not

Table 9: Inability to sign in family lines descending from a couple where the husband was a gunsmith in the Charleville sample (1780–1859)

Surname	Generation 1		Generation 2		Generation 3		Generation 4		Total unable to sign	
	Husband signed	Wife signed	Children and spouses unable to sign		Children and spouses unable to sign		Children and spouses unable to sign			
			n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Petre	no	no	7/8	88	3/14	21	-	-	12/24	50
Noel	yes	yes	1/2	50	-	-	-	-	1/4	25
Brezol	yes	yes	2/10	20	0/12	0	0/2	0	2/26	8
Pinard	yes	yes	8/10	80	4/21	19	-	-	12/33	36
Pinard	yes	yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	0/2	0
Pinard	yes	yes	0/4	0	0/6	0	-	-	0/12	0
Desnoyers (Pinard)	yes	yes	1/2	50	-	-	-	-	1/4	25
Pierret	yes	yes	0/2	0	0/4	0	0/2	0	0/10	0
Nannan	no	no	-	-	-	-	-	-	2/2	100
Barnabé (Reo)	no	no	-	-	-	-	-	-	2/2	100
Damuzaux (Billy)	yes	yes	0/6	0	0/4	0	-	-	0/12	0
Bocquillon	yes	yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	0/2	0
Moniere (Motte)	yes	yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	0/2	0
Total	3/13	3/13	19/44	43	7/61	11	0/4	0	32/135	24

suffice to understand why generations kept being illiterate. We may also consider the hypothesis that the Migeot and Parlier families belonged to the poorest stratum of society and that illiteracy was a sign of social decline and a handicap hard to overcome. It could have been in fact an additional factor, closely linked to a family dynamic. But, on the other hand, we can see that eventually many individuals married a literate spouse and that these two families did not marry each other. This may be a sign that there was no major stigma attached to illiteracy, which would have completely cut them from the rest of society. It is also significant that many parishes set up schools to tackle this specific problem in poor families. Thus, resources were available, but some families seem to have chosen not to make use of them.

Finally, as shown above, there are social and professional commonalities between the families: they were mostly day labourers, metallurgists, and artisans. One may question the influence of the professional factor and predominance of a particular culture associated with their profession, such as oral culture, which would be more valued than writing culture. Indeed, this could have been the case in manufactories: oral transmissions were a part of working-class culture.[52] It is, however, difficult to find relevant sources to prove this for Charleville,

52 Singing culture, for example, is well known in Roubaix textile factories between 1850 and 1914; see Laurent Marty, Chanter pour survivre. Culture ouvrière, travail et techniques dans le textile à Roubaix, 1850–1914, Lille 1982; Pierre Pierrard, Les chansons populaires de Lille sous le Second Empire, La Tour d'Aigues 1998.

Table 10: Inability to sign in family lines descending from a couple where the husband was a nailer in the Charleville sample (1780–1859)

Surname	Generation 1		Generation 2		Generation 3		Generation 4		Total unable to sign	
	Husband signed	Wife signed	Children and spouses unable to sign		Children and spouses unable to sign		Children and spouses unable to sign			
			n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Migeot	no	no	9/12	75	3/9	30	-	-	14/23	61
Pierson (Beguin)	yes	yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	0/2	0
Douay (Pia)	no	no	3/6	50	0/2	0	-	-	4/10	40
Naniot	yes	no	2/2	100	3/4	75	-	-	6/8	75
Tisset (Poirier)	no	no	-	-	-	-	-	-	2/2	100
Peret	yes	yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	0/2	0
Varloteau (Mabille)	yes	no	2/8	25	0/4	0	-	-	3/14	21
Dolne (Pinard)	yes	no	6/9	67	11/22	50	-	-	18/33	54
Desserre (Mabille)	yes	no	-	-	-	-	-	-	1/2	50
Total	3/9	7/9	22/37	59	17/41	41	-	-	48/96	50

particularly in metallurgy. Oral transmission was certainly also a main learning tool during apprenticeship. As it was often the form of transmission between father and son, having an illiterate father did not help learn how to write and read, if these skills were not acquired at school. Other families in Charleville with many members being metallurgists did not share the same profile of illiteracy. To verify this, it is possible to analyse couples between 1780 and 1789 (when occupational data were first mentioned) with husbands being nail makers (Table 9) or gunsmiths (Table 10).[53] Husbands were not always descendants of the founding couples of the years 1740–1779: this is why the wife's maiden name is given in parenthesis in these cases. Then, after establishing whether husband and wife could sign, the analysis examines their children and spouses of subsequent generations. Some couples did not have any children who got married in Charleville; others had up to four generations.

As shown in Table 9, when the husband was a gunsmith, most of the couples and their family line could sign. The Pinard family was very large and had many lines: this is why we have three very distinct lines (four including the Desnoyers). Three couples out of thirteen could not sign, with an exact symmetry between man and woman. Only two family lines had members unable to sign over two generations (Petres and one Pinard). In these cases, one couple of the first generation could sign and the other could not. So, we cannot constitute a clear-cut link between illiteracy and the profession of gunsmith.

As Table 10 shows, the same holds true of couples where the husband was a nail maker. Most husbands could sign, while the majority of their wives could not. Five family lines

53 There was no husband who was a day labourer, nor any husband whose father was a day labourer, in our sample before 1799–1809, and only three husbands who were day labourers even during this decade.

had descendants in Charleville. Among them, only the Migeots were unable to sign in the majority. Looking at the second generation of all families, 59% of them were unable to sign. However, there is a bias in these figurers: only the couples where one of the spouses was illiterate had descendants in Charleville. Thus, illiteracy of subsequent generations could be linked to other factors: the inability of the first generation mother (or mother-in-law for the allies), rather than the father's profession. Whenever the descendants could not sign, the mother was also unable to do so, while in some cases the father could sign (the Nianiots, the Varloteaus, and the Dolnes). In the third generation, only two family lines out of five had a majority of members unable to sign.

These two aggregated calculations show that, with the available data, it is not possible to establish a clear causal link between the father's profession (nailer or gunsmith) and the descendants' ability to sign.

In conclusion, the assumption that occupation and social background can explain familial transmissions does not hold. In Charleville, there were families with the same social background who became literate earlier in the century. The Parliers and the Migeots may show similarities in social status, but this does not sufficiently explain why the majority of members of these families were unable to sign over several generations, compared to other families and to the general context of a society in which the majority of people were able to sign marriage registers. Illiteracy is passed on to most of relatives over more than two generations despite successive alliances and the potential influence of the spouse's family. This can be partially explained by social and economic factors, but also by a specific family practice: a probable resistance towards school and an underuse of writing in everyday life.

Thus, illiteracy can be described as a "family culture". This case study has also highlighted the difficulties in studying transmissions within genealogy. Statistics can show trends, but in order to understand family cultures they must be supplemented by a microanalysis of family history, with indicators such as professional occupations.

Conclusion

This study could be further developed but some conclusions already stand out. In social sciences, several studies have shown how transmissions and familial strategies were important to understand family trajectories, and even that familial factors can explain individuals' choices and behaviours beyond socio-economic, religious, or other cultural determinations. The aim of this project was to prove that the notion of "family culture" is relevant in history by examining Charleville families in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Using the example of illiteracy in two families over at least three generations between 1740 and 1859 produces interesting insights: illiteracy in these cases is highly visible given that literacy in this region reached very high levels in the early nineteenth century. The sources used for this analysis are marriage certificates. As they derive from the same event, they have the advantage of being consistent over the two centuries so that signatures of family members are comparable (even if some of them got married several times). The long-standing persistence of the inability to sign over generations shows a significant trend. This transmission cannot be explained by mere social and economic factors such as marital age and profession. In conclusion, since illiteracy affected most of family members, regardless of their gender, and for more than two

generations, it can be inferred that it corresponded to a family culture. It was maintained in every generation, even if the children were in contact with other families. This opens up interesting and new insights into the organization of genealogies and the network of family influences, which could differ from one family to another.

Following this study, we are planning a statistical approach of literacy at another scale: we are going to analyse, in the entire sample, the variance of a familial habit by various criteria, such as the literacy of the father and the mother, or the number of generations living in the town. We will then explore other avenues of analysis, taking another implication of family history into account: transmissions and family cultures are not only subjects of interest for historians. Genealogy is also a hobby of many people today. The question of who we are and were we came from, the question of one's identity and history are more popular than ever before. Historians may have some concerns about this development, given the ambivalence between scholarly observations and conclusions and the familial memory or the emotional investment of individuals in their family. Illiteracy and family culture can be sensitive historical topics.