


APPENDIX

Marriage Records

 French demographic records offer a challenge to scholars of internal migrations. Unlike many nations in Europe, France did not develop population registers, and as a consequence migration (as well as immigration from abroad) must be inferred from other sources, such as censuses, civil status records, and legal and notarial documents. Despite these difficulties, two important and revelatory studies of internal migration in France have appeared in recent years. In *Les sentiers invisibles*, Paul-André Rosental employed the civil status and succession records of members of ninety-seven family lines from the enormous dataset of the “3,000 families” study; he was able to demonstrate that the French countryside was alive with movement and that the so-called rural exodus in response to crises and industrialization is a myth. The constellation of family ties, Rosental found, influenced whether and how far one moved. Although this study was able to trace a large number of family members, it could keep track of only a small proportion of women after marriage.¹

Jean-Claude Farcy and Alain Faure used France’s remarkably detailed conscript records to trace the movement of an entire cohort of men between the ages of twenty and forty-five. *La mobilité d’une génération de français* focused on those areas (départements) that sent men to Paris. Yet as the authors write of their revelatory study, “half the world is missing,” because the movements of women and other family members are by necessity absent.² In both cases available sources prevent an evenhanded treatment of male and female migration, and thus unwillingly perpetuate the assumption that the migrations of men and women are essentially the same, when there is indeed much evidence to the contrary.³ As is appropriate to their intent and design, neither of these large-scale, significant studies focuses on outsider or marginal groups in the French national

context, such as the Flemish, Alsatians, Bretons, or Basques. Unfortunately the multicultural past is ignored, and the implication of such omissions is that national groups—in this case in France—were relatively homogeneous.

This book investigates the lives of one migrant group, the Bretons in Paris, using the records of their marriages in two destinations (the Fourteenth Arrondissement and the banlieue of Saint-Denis) during four years: 1875, 1890, 1910, and 1925. I chose the locations for the economic and social differences that they illustrate and the dates to provide an evolution across a significant span of time, most of the life of the Third Republic. Every marriage of a Breton-born man or woman residing in Saint-Denis or the Fourteenth Arrondissement in those four years was recorded.

Marriage records are a source at once problematic and rich. They are problematic because they are not representative of the entire group of migrants, and it is impossible to know exactly how they are not representative. Certainly they do not include those too ill to contemplate marriage, too lacking in resources to enforce a marriage promise or to marry, or most of those without interest in the opposite sex. Migration usually begins when people are unmarried, so migrants in urbanizing Europe were disproportionately single. Marriage records catch few if any seasonal workers, who are especially likely to marry elsewhere. And wide swathes of ages are excluded: few marriage partners are under the age of twenty in this period, and only those who marry for the second or third time are likely to be over the age of thirty-five. Fortunately for the migration scholar, throughout history the majority of people who have moved have done so between the ages of twenty and forty-five—in France at this time, usually after the age of twenty or twenty-three for men at this time (depending on military service) and earlier for women. Most people migrate in their marriageable years, and so marriage records are best at capturing settling people.

But do migrants marry at their destination—in this case greater Paris—or at home? Custom held that marriages occurred in the bride's home commune. Moreover, Bretons had the reputation for marrying at home—but this reputation is not justified by the findings of my research, which demonstrates that many Bretons did marry in Paris, even when they married a compatriot; this is doubtless partly because time and money did not allow a return home for working people, as explained by Jean

Chabot, the son of domestics, and Yvonne Yven in reference to the wedding in 1895 of Jean's parents.⁴ The marriage records of some major sending areas in the Finistère and Côtes-d'Armor reveal virtually no mention of a Parisian residence for wedding partners.⁵ This suggests that Bretons left their home town after marriage, with a spouse, rather than returning home for a wedding after years in Paris. Indeed this fits the narratives related in this book by interviewees who spoke with Françoise Cribier, Catherine Omnès, Catherine Rhein, and Didier Violain; many departed for Paris soon after their wedding and were included here although their marriages records were not available.⁶

The *actes de mariage* set themselves apart from most sources by the wealth of information that they contain about not only the wedding partners but also their friends and family.⁷ Moreover, in many respects these records are unparalleled in accuracy, because the state insisted upon notarized documents to identify the bride and groom and to certify parental consent. Each acte includes the following information:

- The given name of the bride and groom;
- Precise dates and places of birth, assured by required copies of the birth certificates;
- The occupation of the bride and groom;
- The demographic status of the wedding partners, be they minors or *majeurs*, widowed or divorced; in the latter cases certification of divorce or death of the former spouse was required;
- Parents' consent (or grandparents' consent, in the absence of a parent), whatever the age or civil status of the wedding partners. Consent was communicated by the presence of those granting it or by a notarized statement of permission. If parents were deceased, a copy of the death certificate was in order or, in the alternative, testimony by the marriage partners, witnesses, or both to the lack of forebears. This rule, designed to assure the identity of the marriage partners, allowed three exceptions: Permission to marry for orphaned minors (under twenty-one) had to be sought from the *conseil de famille*, whose function it was to protect minors; the conseil met at the bidding of the cantonal court. Children born out of wedlock who were not recognized by their father or by both parents had only to produce their birth certificate. Finally, foreigners were not required to furnish this permission;

- Parents' domicile and sometimes occupation, if alive, and on occasion the place and age of death if deceased;
- Current domicile of bride and groom, and address of previous domicile if at the current address for less than six months. Minors were domiciled de jure with parents, even when they had a de facto address elsewhere;
- Addresses where banns announcing the marriage were published in the current arrondissement of residence and in the parents' commune, whether it was the commune of birth or not;
- The following information on four witnesses, who were required to be at least twenty-one, and until the twentieth century, male: name; age; domicile; usually occupation; and often the relationship between the witness and the wedding partner. The marriage records from 1910 are especially rich because after 1897 women as well as men served as witnesses. By 1925, however, only two witnesses presented themselves, and information on relationships was no longer noted;
- The existence of a marriage contract—or lack of a contract;
- The legitimization of children born before the marriage, although this was not noted by 1925;
- The signatures of the wedding partners, parents, witnesses, and municipal officers present.

Unfortunately, some of this information lent itself to imprecise recording. In marriage records used for this book, this was particularly true of occupational and relational specifics. Many men, for example, were listed as “employé,” without an indication of whether they were clerks or employees of the railroad, and by the 1920s the term “sans profession” disguised many kinds of work for women—aside from the domestic service that women might have ceased to perform at marriage. When family relation was not specified for witnesses, as it was not in the 1920s, for example, it could sometimes be inferred from name, age, and occupation—but only inferred.

Moreover, it is impossible to know the quality of the relationship between a wedding witness and the bride or groom. Although name could imply a family relation and address a neighbor, beyond that the relationship is hard to tell. Repeated witnesses in the Fourteenth Arrondissement in 1890 suggest that there were a few men hanging around the

mairie whose signature could be purchased for the price of a drink; Jean Chabot and Yvonne Yven paid a few sous for witnesses because their friends, like themselves, had little time to be away from work.⁸ Even the presence of a less needy witness did not mean close friendship—one acute observer, Émile Zola, brought a cardboard box maker to witness Gervaise's and Coupeau's wedding in *L'assomoir*; this was arranged by the groom's sister although the witness had never met Gervaise. This witness was invited to lend the wedding a more distinguished tone, and it worked: he was the only member of the wedding party wearing “a real dress-suit with long tails, and passers-by stopped and stared at this elegant gentleman.”⁹ When kin, close neighbors, or workmates stood up for the bride and groom, we may be quite certain of acquaintance or even friendship, but more than that is difficult to know.

Marriage records, then, may be revelatory or opaque. At best, the acte de mariage can tell the history of two families and provide a rich story of migration and affective community at destination, but this was not always possible. Some records, on the other hand, reveal little, especially when occupational designations were vague or information about parents or witnesses was minimal. For this reason I have used the wedding records to demonstrate general patterns of occupational change, intermarriage, and the use of witnesses. In constructing emblematic cases to illustrate those patterns, I have employed pseudonyms in order to protect individual identities.

TABLE I. BRETON MARRIAGES IN SAINT-DENIS, 1890-1925

	1890		1910		1925	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Marriages between Bretons	32	65	67	53	48	32
<i>from same département</i>	30		53		25	
<i>from same arrondissement</i>	18		33		14	
<i>from same commune</i>	4		5		0	
Breton groom, bride born elsewhere	9	18	27	21	43	28
Breton bride, groom born elsewhere	8	16	33	26	61	40
Total	49	100	127	100	152	100

Département of Origin for Breton Wedding Partners in Saint-Denis (Percent)

	1890	1910	1925
Côtes-d'Armor	83	68	45
Finistère	6	12	25
Morbihan	5	9	15
Ille-et-Vilaine	6	6	5
Loire Atlantique	0	5	11
Total	100	100	100
Total number	81	194	200

Note: Because of rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Source: Archives Départementales de Seine-Saint-Denis, 1 E 66, 48, *Mariages de Saint-Denis*, 1890; Archives de l'État civil de Saint-Denis, *Mariages*, 1910, 1925.

TABLE 2. BRETON MARRIAGES IN THE FOURTEENTH ARRONDISSEMENT, 1890–1925

	1890		1910		1925	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Marriages between Bretons	16	19	52	26	78	30
<i>from same département</i>	10		29		52	
<i>from same arrondissement</i>	7		17		40	
<i>from same commune</i>	2		8		16	
Breton groom, bride born elsewhere	24	28	37	19	55	21
Breton bride, groom born elsewhere	45	53	108	55	125	48
Total	85	100	197	100	258	100

*Département of Origin for Breton Wedding Partners
in the Fourteenth Arrondissement (Percent)*

	1890	1910	1925
Côtes-d'Armor	52	30	22
Finistère	9	16	34
Morbihan	13	25	21
Ille-et-Vilaine	16	19	13
Loire Atlantique	10	10	10
Total	100	100	100
Total number	99	253	343

Note: Because of rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Source: Archives de Paris, E, Mariages, XIV^e Arrondissement, 1890; Archives de l'État Civil du XIV^e Arrondissement de Paris, Mariages, 1910, 1925.

TABLE 3. WITNESSES TO BRETON WEDDINGS IN SAINT-DENIS AND THE FOURTEENTH ARRONDISSEMENT, 1910

	<u>Saint-Denis</u>	<u>14th Arrondissement</u>
Weddings with a family member present (in percent)		
<i>Breton bride</i>	48	29
<i>Breton groom</i>	58	28
<i>Breton couple</i>	83	57
<i>All Breton brides</i>	60	31
<i>All Breton grooms</i>	51	32
Weddings with a bride's or groom's parent residing in Saint-Denis or Paris (in percent)		
<i>Breton bride</i>	21	12
<i>Breton groom</i>	4	17
<i>Breton couple</i>	19	12
Weddings with a female witness (in percent)		
<i>Breton bride</i>	64	67
<i>Breton groom</i>	4	17
<i>Breton couple</i>	19	12
Number of weddings		
<i>Breton bride, non-Breton groom</i>	33	101
<i>Breton groom, non-Breton bride</i>	26	36
<i>Breton couple</i>	68	58

Source: *Archives de l'État Civil de Saint-Denis, Mariages, 1910*; *Archives de l'État Civil du XIV^e Arrondissement de Paris, Mariages, 1910*.