

The Rise of Professional Women in France

Gender and Public Administration since 1830

Linda L. Clark



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1 Public roles for maternal authority: the introduction of inspectresses, 1830–1870

The inspection of nursery schools (*salles d'asile*) can be done usefully and correctly only by women . . . Inspectresses will intimidate less and will persuade more readily than men can.

Eugénie Chevreau-Lemercier (1848)

Madame Chevreau-Lemercier's appointment as the first national nursery school inspectress in 1837 was but one part of the July Monarchy's larger effort to address a host of social, economic, and political problems which might drive the populace to unruly behavior. Schools were a central concern of the government of King Louis-Philippe, the Orleanist installed after Parisian crowds doomed the second Bourbon Restoration king, Charles X, in July 1830. Education minister François Guizot sponsored the law of 28 June 1833, often dubbed the "charter of primary education" because it required each commune to provide a public primary school.¹ Four years later Salvandy issued official guidelines for a newer institution which combined educational and charitable functions, the *salle d'asile* or nursery school.² Each measure demonstrated the importance attached to education in a country facing not only the continuing problem of adjusting its political system to the ideals of liberty and equality enshrined by the Revolution of 1789 but also the substantial changes resulting from industrialization and urbanization in some areas. Schools could benefit both employers and workers in an economy where reading and writing seemed more useful than during an agrarian past.³ They were also a vehicle for inculcating moral values and disciplined habits, prized by government and employers alike, particularly as unrest among urban workers continued after the Revolution of 1830.

¹ Joseph N. Moody, *French Education since Napoleon* (Syracuse, 1978), 42.

² Jean-Noël Luc, *La petite enfance à l'école, XIXe–XXe siècles, textes officiels relatifs aux salles d'asile, aux écoles maternelles, aux classes et sections enfantines (1829–1981) présentés et annotés* (Paris, 1982), 66–74.

³ Furet and Ozouf, *Lire et écrire*. Literacy rates in some urban areas actually dropped during early industrialization.

The government's program for "the policing of families" also encompassed prisons and reform schools, hospitals and mental asylums, and protection of abandoned children and child laborers. While Michel Foucault and Jacques Donzelot emphasized how such institutions' repressive features enhanced the state's control over citizens,⁴ Katherine Lynch, Lee Shai Weissbach, and Jean-Noël Luc, among others, have argued that these institutions and related laws stemmed from genuinely humanitarian motivations as well as considerations of social control.⁵ Both concerns certainly figured in assignments for the government's inspectors and, eventually, for inspectresses.

In France, as in other western countries, industrialization increasingly separated the home from the place of work, although more often for men than for women. To be sure, many women had labored outside the home in Old Regime Paris and other cities.⁶ Against the post-revolutionary backdrop, old and new patterns of women's work produced greater concern about how women from the poorer classes might henceforth combine the roles of earning money and fulfilling domestic responsibilities. Some moralists simply condemned married women's work outside the home as a social evil causing neglect of children and demoralizing husbands, and they pronounced that women belonged in the private sphere of the home (the *foyer*) rather than the public sphere (the *forum*). The message itself was not novel. Rooted in Greco-Roman antiquity and Catholic moral teachings, it was also central to Rousseau's *Emile*. French revolutionaries formalized the gendered separation of spheres by denying women the new political rights conferred on male citizens, and

⁴ Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1979); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1967; French original, 1961), *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1973; French original, 1963); *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977; French original, 1975). On the state, see Rosanvallon, *L'Etat en France*.

⁵ Katherine A. Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology in Early Industrial France: Social Policy and the Working Class Family, 1825–1848* (Madison, 1988); Lee Shai Weissbach, *Child Labor Reform in Nineteenth-Century France: Assuring the Future Harvest* (Baton Rouge, 1989); Jean-Noël Luc, *L'Invention du jeune enfant au XIXe siècle, de la salle d'asile à l'école maternelle* (Paris, 1997); Patricia O'Brien, *The Promise of Punishment: Prisons in Nineteenth-Century France* (Princeton, 1982); Rachel G. Fuchs, *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany, 1984); Colin Heywood, *Childhood in Nineteenth-Century France: Work, Health, and Education among the Classes Populaires* (Cambridge, 1988); Giovanna Procacci, *Gouverner la misère: la question sociale en France (1789–1848)* (Paris, 1993).

⁶ Judith Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work: The Paris Garment Trades, 1750–1915* (Princeton, 1996); Dominique Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses: les femmes du peuple à Paris pendant la Révolution française* (Paris, 1988), 65–105.

Napoleon's civil code effectively circumscribed married women's rights.⁷

In the wake of political upheaval, the gradual but noticeable transformation of France's economic and urban landscape added new urgency to older notions about women's appropriate roles. Yet there were also commentators who warned that blanket denunciations of women's work outside the home were unrealistic, and even dangerous, because earning a living was an inescapable necessity for many women. Thus an Interior ministry inspector general, Charles Lucas, worried that the current European tendency to tell women to remain at home – a message that still seemed new in the 1830s – simply enlarged poor women's dilemmas. If women could not find respectable work, then the desperate might resort to prostitution or thievery.⁸ Lucas's fears represented a contemporary confirmation of historian Joan Scott's view that the rhetoric of domestic ideology was itself a cause of further gender segregation in the labor force and thus of lower pay for women than for men.⁹

The origins of French nursery schools (*salles d'asile*)

The problem of care for the very young children of women workers preoccupied private citizens as well as public officials, and during the later 1820s philanthropic women and men sponsored nursery schools as one solution. Needy youngsters' welfare was the central concern of founders of the *salles d'asile* – literally “rooms of asylum” – but by the later 1830s, judges their leading historian, the state also recognized their value for maintaining social order. Thus in 1845 Salvandy told the education administration's rectors that *salles d'asile* gave localities a means “to transform their populations, instruct them, form them, and replace their bad inclinations with principles of sound morality and habits of practical honesty.”¹⁰

⁷ Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1986), 213; Riot-Sarcey, *Démocratie*, 14–16. See also Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, 1981).

⁸ Charles Lucas, “De l'éducation pénitentiaire des femmes et de ses rapports avec leur éducation sociale,” *Revue pénitentiaire* 3 (1846): 342.

⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, “The Woman Worker,” in *A History of Women in the West*, 5 vols., gen. eds. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, Mass., 1992–94), IV: *Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, ed. Geneviève Fraisse and Michelle Perrot, 419–44; French edition, *Histoire des femmes en occident* (Paris, 1991–92), IV: 399–426. See also Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 139–63.

¹⁰ Luc, *Invention*, 66; Luc, *Petite enfance*, 85.

The women and men who created the *salles d'asile* drew upon several precedents. The first was a late eighteenth-century initiative in the Alsatian parish of Protestant pastor Jean-Frédéric Oberlin, assisted by his wife and their housekeeper.¹¹ In 1801, the Marquise Adélaïde de Pastoret entrusted a nun with the care of a dozen young children in rented Paris quarters.¹² Across the Channel, Robert Owen, the philanthropic manufacturer-turned-socialist, opened an “infant school” for his workers’ children in New Lanark in 1816; and in 1818 London Whigs and Radicals launched the Free Day Infant Asylum. Another British effort was that of Samuel Wilderspin, a co-founder of the London Infant School Society in 1824. These initiatives impressed French visitors like Baron Joseph-Marie de Gérando, an educational reformer who publicized them in France.¹³

The most energetic promoters of nursery schools in Paris during the later 1820s were two philanthropists, Emilie Mallet and Jean-Denys Cochin. By birth and marriage Mallet (1794–1856) belonged to the Protestant bourgeoisie: daughter of the manufacturer Christophe Oberkampf and sister of a wealthy industrialist and politician, she married banker Jules Mallet. Meeting at Mme de Pastoret’s home in 1826, Mme Mallet, her niece Amélie de Champlouis, and nine other women formed a committee to launch a French equivalent of London’s “infant schools” for children aged eighteen months to six years. The Comité des Dames (Women’s Committee), led by Mallet as secretary-treasurer and Pastoret as president, sought public and private funding; and the Marquis de Pastoret and Baron de la Bonardière obtained a subsidy from the Paris public assistance board (Conseil Général des Hospices). Although Mallet, the founding committee’s driving force, and three other members were Protestant, they worked with Catholic women like Pastoret and secured the help of abbé Charles Desgnettes and two nuns to open the first *salle d'asile*.¹⁴

In the meantime, Cochin, a liberal Catholic and mayor of a Paris

¹¹ Jean Baubérot, “The Protestant Woman,” trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in *Emerging Feminism*, ed. Fraisse and Perrot, 202.

¹² Frédéric de Falloux, “Biographie de Madame de Pastoret,” *Annales de la charité* 2 (1846): 224–50.

¹³ H. C. Barnard, *A History of English Education from 1760*, 2nd edn. (London, 1966), 58–62; Harold Silver, *Education as History: Interpreting Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Education* (London, 1983), 66; W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators*, 2 vols. (London, 1967), I: 241–67; Luc, *Invention*, 17. See also Ann Taylor Allen, “Gardens of Children, Gardens of God: Kindergartens and Day Care Centers in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” *Journal of Social History* 19 (1986): 433–50.

¹⁴ Luc, *Invention*, 18; Henriette de Witt-Guizot, *Une belle vie, Madame Jules Mallet née Oberkampf (1794–1856)* (Paris, 1881).

arrondissement, utilized his own funds to launch a shelter for children in the working-class Gobelins district. He and Mallet's committee soon made contact, and they sent Eugénie Millet, an artist's wife, to study English infant schools in 1827. She then helped organize Cochin's model school and projects of Mallet's committee. Although an older historiography often termed Cochin the chief founder of nursery schools, Luc's definitive study demonstrates women's central role and the influence of their maternal experiences on the project.¹⁵ Indeed, the Conseil des Hospices explained in 1829 that requests from "several charitable women" prompted its support for *salles d'asile*, and it intended to retain women's help. Philanthropists of both sexes thus aroused public officials' interest.¹⁶

The Paris *salles d'asile* gradually lost their private character as the Conseil des Hospices provided more funding and the Seine departmental prefecture assumed a role. Paris had four *salles d'asile* in 1829 and twenty-four by 1836, when 5,000 children were enrolled.¹⁷ As of 1830 Millet was the city's *inspectrice générale des asiles* and helped train nursery school teachers (*maîtresses*).¹⁸

National direction of the *salles d'asile* resulted from three education ministers' decisions. Guizot placed them under the Ministry of Public Instruction and in 1835 gave the new corps of departmental primary school inspectors a role in their supervision. By then other efforts had created at least 102 nursery schools in 35 departments, mostly in urban and industrial areas; in 1837, there were 261. England, by comparison, then boasted of some 2,000 infant schools. Count Jean Pelet de la Lozère further integrated nursery schools into the administrative structure of primary education in 1836, but Salvandy's ordinance of 22 December 1837 was the veritable "charter of nursery schools," providing uniform regulations and outlining curriculum, qualifications for personnel, and supervision. Although more extended state control over nursery schools was consistent with other aspects of policy, Salvandy

¹⁵ Luc, *Invention*, 17–26; Jean-Denys Cochin, *Manuel des fondateurs et des directeurs des premières écoles de l'enfance connues sous le nom de salles d'asile* (Paris, 1833), 85, 148; Emile Gossot, *Les Salles d'asile en France et leur fondateur Denys Cochin* (Paris, 1884).

¹⁶ Luc, *Petite enfance*, 53. The Conseil oversight encompassed the sick and needy. On philanthropy, see Catherine Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie, pauvreté, action sociale et lien social à Paris, au cours du premier XIXe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1996–97).

¹⁷ Luc, *Petite enfance*, 54; Maurice Gontard, *Les Ecoles primaires de la France bourgeoise (1833–1875)* (Toulouse, n.d.), 16; Louis Trenard, *Salvandy et son temps 1795–1856* (Lille, 1968), 367.

¹⁸ Guy Caplat, ed., *Les Inspecteurs généraux de l'instruction publique, dictionnaire biographique 1802–1914* (Paris, 1986), 507–08; AN F17 10852. A clerk's daughter, Millet worked until 1857 but was not a state employee.

was also responding to papal complaints about Protestants' conspicuous role in their early history. Furthermore, the ordinance sought to balance the often competing interests of local governments, local education committees created by the Guizot Law, and philanthropists, particularly in Paris where the Conseil des Hospices and a committee of patronesses had retained much control.¹⁹

The July Monarchy's encouragement of charitable women's continuing involvement with local nursery schools followed previous regimes' calls for such support for girls' schools.²⁰ Local primary education committees added nursery schools to their sphere of activity, and Pelet instructed them to treat "as indispensable auxiliaries, a certain number of ladies (*dames*) accustomed to dealing with children's needs" and offering "admirable devotion and unique aptitude." Salvandy, Mme Mallet's nephew by marriage, favored preserving this "mélange of municipal authority and maternal activity." As with primary schools, municipalities were responsible for nursery schools' funding and operation. Local committees could appoint either men or women to inspect girls' schools, but for nursery schools, stipulated Salvandy, they should designate unpaid "lady inspectors" (*dames inspectrices*) for "maternal surveillance over children."²¹ Each school's "lady inspector" would visit daily, aided by "lady delegates" (*dames déléguées*) whom she chose. Her duties included monitoring lessons and recreation, evaluating sanitary conditions and pupils' health, and recording information about pupils in a register. In addition, she could decide whether poor children needed clothing, to be distributed from donations kept in a trunk to which she held the key.

The Education ministry also endowed some women volunteers with the power to evaluate aspiring teachers. The 1837 ordinance required that the head teacher in a *salle d'asile* be at least twenty-four years old and possess a "certificate of aptitude" obtained through an examination by a departmental commission of "lady inspectors." Nuns, however, might substitute a "letter of obedience." Functioning under the auspices of each department's "academic council" or primary school "examination commission," the women's commission followed guidelines framed

¹⁹ Luc, *Petite enfance*, 58–74; J.-P. Briand, J.-M. Chapoulie, F. Huguet, J.-N. Luc, and A. Prost, *L'Enseignement primaire et ses extensions, 19e–20e siècles, Annuaire statistique* (Paris, 1987), 36; Stewart and McCann, *Educational Innovators*, 266; Trenard, *Salvandy*, 367; Eugène Rendu, *M. Ambroise Rendu et l'université de France* (Paris, 1861), 129. Ambroise Rendu and Cochin helped frame the 1837 ordinance.

²⁰ On 1810 Paris regulations for girls' schools, see Rebecca Rogers, "Boarding Schools, Women Teachers, and Domesticity: Reforming Girls' Secondary Education in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *FHS* 19 (1995): 156.

²¹ Luc, *Petite enfance*, 63–68, 77; "Ordonnance du roi relative aux écoles primaires de filles," 23 June 1836, *BL*, no. 447 (1836): 227.

by a “higher commission of examination for the *salles d’asile*” and approved by the Royal Council of Public Instruction and the education minister. Three women members should observe a candidate’s work in a nursery school and at least five assess command of prescribed subjects – religion, reading, writing, arithmetic, singing, and simple sewing.²²

By preserving women volunteers’ “maternal authority” in nursery schools, Salvandy not only maintained the vision of their philanthropic founders but also enlisted women in the service of the state. At the same time, the July Monarchy validated earlier formulations concerning women’s maternal role. Revolutionaries after 1789 had pronounced that women’s duty was to rear children imbued with the new national values and ready to fight and die for France. After 1815 conservatives wanted “mother-educators” to help realize their vision of a stable social and political order. Greater emphasis on child-rearing signified children’s new importance as individuals, not only in aristocratic and middle-class families with resources to devote to each child but also, argues Luc, in *salles d’asile* serving an age group not typically schooled in the past. In 1837 the Interior ministry also began granting allowances to some unwed mothers of infants, hoping to reduce public spending on abandoned children.²³

Regarding nursery schools as institutional substitutes for working mothers, Salvandy added a role for women beyond the local level by creating a supervisory Higher Commission (*Commission Supérieure des Salles d’Asile*) with a predominantly female membership. Princess Adelaïde, the king’s sister, became the “protectress” of nursery schools, and inspector general Ambroise Rendu, president of the new 33-member Higher Commission, endorsed women’s important guiding role: “where there are no women, there is something cold, rigid, dry . . . that should be removed from the regulation of institutions destined for the young” and requiring qualities of “goodness, grace, and . . . dedication.”²⁴ The Higher Commission included founders of the *salles d’asile*, most notably Mmes Mallet, Champlouis, and Pastoret. Other socially prominent members were the Countess de Bondy, wife of the former Seine prefect, and the Countess de Rambuteau, wife of the current prefect; Mme François Delessert, wife of a Protestant banker whose brother was the Paris prefect of police; and the wives of ministers Salvandy and Duchâtel. No other ministry had a comparable group of

²² Luc, *Petite enfance*, 68–73.

²³ *Ibid.*, 41; Yvonne Knibiehler and Catherine Fouquet, *Histoire des mères* (Paris, 1980), 174–89; Pope, “Maternal Education”; Lynch, *Family*, 159; Luc, *Invention*.

²⁴ Trenard, *Salvandy*, 370; Rendu, *Ambroise Rendu*, 132.

women advisers. Although Rendu was Commission president, Mallet was its deputy secretary and most active member.²⁵

Women on the Higher Commission, like supportive officials, emphasized women's special "maternal" role in nursery schools. They thus provided an early French example of the "maternalism" recently traced for various western countries and characterized by the use of the language of motherhood to justify women's assumption of both voluntary and paid roles in the public rather than domestic arena. Although historians have typically linked maternalism with the impact of women reformers' efforts on the creation of the European and American welfare states and with some late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminist argumentation, emphasis on the social value of mothering had already marked the ideology of "republican motherhood" developed in the late eighteenth-century United States and France after revolutions.²⁶ During the 1830s and 1840s a group of elite men and women applied maternalist rhetoric to nursery schools and enlisted women to help maintain social order under a constitutional monarchy limiting voting rights to less than 3 percent of Frenchmen. At the same time, however, Saint-Simonian socialists cited the value of mothering to justify their goal of equality between the sexes based on the "complementarity," rather than identity, of male and female traits and roles.²⁷ In the 1830s, as in the 1890s or 1910s, maternalist arguments thus served more than one political purpose and might or might not have feminist overtones.

When women on the Higher Commission sent their first general letter in 1841 to the unpaid "lady inspectors" of nursery schools, they asserted: "There are in the work of *Salles d'Asile* minute and entirely maternal details that women alone can grasp and make understood by other women." Terming these schools a "work of faith, charity and maternal love," they framed a message suiting both patronesses and women teachers. They also advised local contacts to be "happy with the role given to us, and know how to profit from it, without surpassing the limits assigned to us."²⁸ Although some men initially taught nursery schools, by 1837 they were the exception to the "maternal" rule and

²⁵ AN F17 10875–76, Commission supérieure des salles d'asile; Luc, *Invention*, 153–56.

²⁶ Koven and Michel, eds., *Mothers*; Lynn Y. Weiner, "Maternalism as a Paradigm: Defining the Issues," *Journal of Women's History* 5 (1993): 96; Ann Taylor Allen, "Maternalism in German Feminist Movements," *Journal of Women's History* 5 (1993): 99; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, 1980).

²⁷ Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany, 1984), 41–87.

²⁸ Luc, *Petite enfance*, 82.

needed special authorization from the rector of an “academy” (the regional education administration).²⁹ After 1855, men could no longer be nursery school teachers.

The Higher Commission’s emphasis on nursery schools’ maternal function also prompted some members to voice concern about hiring nuns as teachers. Troubled that nuns were required to present only a letter of obedience, the Commission in 1842 asked local “lady inspectors,” in the interest of uniformity in lessons, to try to persuade heads of religious orders to encourage nuns to obtain the certificate imposed for lay teachers. At an 1845 Commission meeting, Mme Guerbois, a surgeon’s wife, asserted that only mothers or lay women who could become mothers should run nursery schools. Others complained that nuns took jobs away from lay women needing to support themselves, and the Countess de Rambuteau added that nuns in the classroom encouraged the “disastrous tendency” of the lower classes to send more daughters to convents.³⁰ Salvandy and Rendu, however, favored nuns’ role in public and private nursery schools, recognizing that their presence had helped end Catholic hostility to an institution once perceived as a Protestant innovation. In 1843, nuns comprised 19 percent of nursery school teachers, and by 1850 42 percent.³¹

The first inspectresses general of nursery schools

The role of substitute mothering assigned to the *salles d’asile*, well before the Third Republic renamed them *écoles maternelles*, brought into a public domain not only privileged women serving as unpaid volunteers but also the first school inspectresses on the national payroll. Although primary school inspectors had some responsibility for nursery schools, Salvandy in 1837 also invited each department to appoint – and pay for – a “special” nursery school inspectress (*dame déléguée spéciale*), as Paris already did. Finally, a new “general delegate” (*déléguée générale*) would carry out national missions, receiving orders from the education minister or Higher Commission president. Obligated to present reports to the Commission, the “general delegate” could not “order” or “prescribe” anything. Her title of *déléguée* also separated her from the

²⁹ Luc, *Invention*, 301–03. For educational administration France’s departmental subdivisions were grouped into *académies*, each headed by a *recteur*. There were twenty-seven academies before 1848, one academy per department from 1850 to 1854, sixteen academies from 1854 to 1860, and then seventeen when Chambéry was added. R. D. Anderson, *Education in France 1848–1870* (Oxford, 1975), 248.

³⁰ Luc, *Petite enfance*, 84; AN F17 10875–76 (March–September 1845, February 1846, January 1848).

³¹ AN F17 10875; Trenard, *Salvandy*, 367; Luc, *Invention*, 304.

prestigious inspectors general of education, introduced in 1802, although in practice she was often called the “inspectress general.”³²

The Seine department had set precedents for hiring women to inspect nursery and girls’ primary schools, but the first inspectress general, Chevreau-Lemercier, recognized her visitation of nursery schools throughout France as “the first time that a woman was officially charged with a task of this nature.”³³ The daughter of a former artillery officer and pharmacist, she worked until her death in 1867. To supplement her husband’s small income and support her ageing parents and three children, she had taught for at least fourteen years before 1837. Her publications and membership in a Paris literary society gained her a 200-franc stipend from the Education ministry’s fund for writers, and Salvandy added 500 francs to Guizot’s award before annulling it when he appointed her at an annual salary of 3,000 francs, plus travel expenses.³⁴

Chevreau-Lemercier termed her duties less a job than “an apostolate,” a description in harmony with the views of the Higher Commission. After a decade of inspecting, she was also well aware that many people doubted a woman’s ability to do the travel required by the position or to establish working relationships with local authorities. She responded to the doubters – some of them Higher Commission members – in her *Essai sur l’inspection générale des salles d’asile*, published in early 1848. Admitting that she had fears when she began inspecting, she now recorded confidence in her own and other women’s abilities. Praised by Salvandy for her “knowledge and zeal,” she could point to rewards for her efforts. She insisted that inspecting nursery schools could be “done usefully and correctly only by women.” Whereas most men disdained what was “not in the destination of their sex,” women inspectors, endowed by “nature” with a maternal “instinct,” could better understand and serve children and also give more help to women teachers, whom they intimidated less and yet persuaded more effectively than did men. The importance of maternal qualities likewise dictated Chevreau-Lemercier’s preferences for lay teachers instead of nuns, whom she accused of screaming at children, hitting them, and being neglectful when preoccupied with private prayers. Like many Higher

³² Luc, *Petite enfance*, 78; Caplat, *Inspecteurs*, 14.

³³ Chevreau-Lemercier, *Essai*, 5–8; Emile Gossot, *Mlle Sauvan, première inspectrice des écoles de Paris, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris, 1877); Linda L. Clark, “Women Combining the Private and the Public Spheres: The Beginnings of Nursery School Inspection, 1837–1879,” *PWSFH* 21 (1994): 141–50. Since this chapter was written, J. Luc has provided a copy of his article, “L’Inspection générale des salles d’asile, première voie d’accès des femmes à la haute fonction publique (1837–1881).”

³⁴ AN F17 3134, 10873, 22795.

Commission members, she wanted nuns to hold the same credentials as lay teachers.³⁵

Chevreau-Lemercier's book detailed her official duties and argued for extending the authority of the *déléguée générale*, whom she termed an *inspectrice*. She sought the power to make independent decisions about where inspections were needed, without awaiting ministerial orders. She also requested a special budget which she could tap to aid financially strapped schools. More than once she had initiated local fund-raising efforts, often putting her own name at the top of the donors' list, even though she could afford to give only small sums.³⁶

The nursery school's dual role of charitable and educational institution did prompt some criticism from Chevreau-Lemercier. Noting that benefactors enabled nursery schools to help feed and clothe very poor children, she nonetheless questioned the practice of public handouts to the poor. Like many in the middle classes, she believed that nursery schools could best help reduce poverty by teaching children good work habits and the lesson that one must work for a living. Over time, the Education ministry would place greater emphasis on nursery schools' educational rather than charitable functions, but public perceptions of them as charities long endured. In 1877 Chevreau-Lemercier's daughter, an inspectress since 1864, observed that many parents sent children to Lille's nursery schools primarily to receive free food and clothing and so only two-thirds of enrolled youngsters regularly attended.³⁷

When Chevreau-Lemercier penned her defense of inspectresses and recommended hiring more of them, there was only one other general delegate. Furthermore, most departments did not opt to appoint and pay their own "special" delegates – unlike the Seine which so designated Millet, raising her 2,400-franc salary to 3,000 francs in 1847. Also ignored was the Higher Commission recommendation that each administrative "academy" hire a woman "delegate," paid by departmental councils. Yet the sevenfold increase in the number of nursery schools between 1837 and 1847 and their enrollment of 124,000 pupils warranted more national supervision. The second general delegate, named by Salvandy in 1847, was Henriette Doubet, Rendu's daughter and wife of a Finance ministry official. Because Rendu wanted a 4,000-franc salary for her, Chevreau-Lemercier's pay was similarly raised.³⁸

³⁵ Chevreau-Lemercier, *Essai*, 5–8, 13–17; AN F17 10875–76 (February 1847–January 1848).

³⁶ Chevreau-Lemercier, *Essai*, 74–80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 128–35; AN F17 21354 (Monternault).

³⁸ Caplat, *Inspecteurs*, 311; AN F17 10852, 10873, 10875–76 (June 1845), 22836; Marc

Salvandy also named one other woman to an important post in 1847. Responding to Mme Mallet's repeated urgings, he created an institution to train nursery school teachers and inspectresses, placing it under the Higher Commission's surveillance. He also accepted Mallet's recommendation that the directress be Marie Carpentier (later Mme Pape-Carpantier), a nursery school teacher in the Sarthe department since 1834.³⁹ Opened at a temporary site in the Marais district, the Paris school was the first nationally funded public institution for women to be created since Napoleon I launched several schools for daughters of members of his Legion of Honor. Its four-month program provided new job opportunities for lay women at a moment when there were seventy-four departmental normal schools to train male primary school teachers but only ten for women. Because of religious orders' preponderant role in running women's normal schools, Salvandy predicted that the new institution would attract nuns, but as of 1867 they were only 11 percent of women trained there.⁴⁰

A prison inspectress for the Ministry of the Interior

The Education ministry's two "general delegates" had one counterpart at the Interior ministry during the July Monarchy. In 1843 Count Charles Tanneguy Duchâtel appointed an inspectress general whose duties also reflected prevailing assumptions about gender traits. The government had decided in 1839 that moral considerations dictated that the 4,000 women in central prisons be guarded by women rather than men. Some central prisons were single-sex institutions, and others not yet so converted had separate quarters for men and women.⁴¹ Inspector Lucas pressed for changing the guards, marshaling prevalent notions about gender and criminality: women's weaker emotional and physical makeup made them more impressionable and susceptible to being led

Ambroise-Rendu, *Les Rendu ou comment accéder à la bourgeoisie* (Paris, 1989), 90–92; Briand et al., *Enseignement*, 36, 42.

³⁹ Caplat, *Inspecteurs*, 536; Colette Cosnier, *Marie Pape-Carpantier, de l'école maternelle à l'école de filles* (Paris, 1993), 82; Mme Dupin de Saint-André, *Mme Pape-Carpantier* (Paris, 1894), 8–31; Luc, *Petite enfance*, 91. Salvandy was twice education minister: April 1837 to March 1839, February 1845 to February 1848.

⁴⁰ AN F17 10875–76, 10890; Rogers, *Demoiselles*; Anderson, *Education*, 30; Quartararo, *Women Teachers*, 36–53.

⁴¹ Claude Langlois, "L'Introduction des congrégations féminines dans le système pénitentiaire français (1839–1880)," in *La Prison, le bagne et l'histoire*, ed. Jacques-Guy Petit (Geneva, 1984), 129; Jacques-Guy Petit, *Ces peines obscures, la prison pénale en France (1780–1875)* (Paris, 1990), 266–302 and *Histoire des galères, bagnes et prisons* (Paris, 1991), 109–61. The state's central prisons became single-sex between the 1820s and 1850s; departmental prisons held individuals awaiting trial or serving short terms.



1 Marie Pape-Carpantier (1815–78), directress of the *Cours pratique* for teachers of *salles d'asile* (nursery schools) (1847–74), general delegate for *salles d'asile* (1868–78).

astray, but also made their rehabilitation easier. Yet he warned that female criminality was “more dangerous than that of men” because the wife and mother, “the axis of the family,” influenced her spouse and children, and her misconduct threatened “the moral and social order.”⁴² Many officials also believed that single women’s loss of chastity triggered a descent into prostitution or other crimes and so hoped that nuns could rehabilitate them by restoring a sense of shame and modesty.⁴³

Just as philanthropic reformers helped start nursery schools, so they also tried to influence prison policy. Sophie Ulliac believed that her officially authorized visit to the women’s prison at Clermont in 1837 had prompted changes, including the prison inspectress’s appointment. That claim overlooked, however, the impact of such figures as Lucas, Emilie Mallet, and the English reformer Elizabeth Fry, whose visits to France between 1838 and 1843 stimulated more women’s involvement in aiding women prisoners and delinquent girls. Although public officials gradually replaced unpaid “visitors” in prison inspection, as occurred with nursery schools, administrators also worked with philanthropic “visitors” to secure reforms. Lucas, an inspector general from 1830 to 1865, termed his work a mission of service to humanity, even as he advocated disciplinary policies which would later seem excessively harsh.⁴⁴

Nuns’ replacement of many male guards, beginning in 1841, created an administrative problem: nuns were often uncomfortable dealing with men not in religious orders, and congregational rules prevented men from entering establishments to which the state sent delinquent girls. Assuming that nuns’ “relationship with a person of their own sex” would provide “more expansion and more truth,” Interior ministry bureau chief Etienne Ardit recommended adding a woman to the corps of inspectors general, divided since 1838 into sections for prisons, public assistance, and mental asylums. Minister Duchâtel concurred, having previously favored introducing nuns rather than lay women as guards because he believed that the former could more effectively educate and rehabilitate prisoners.⁴⁵

⁴² Charles Lucas, *De la réforme des prisons ou de la théorie de l'emprisonnement* (Paris, 1836–38), quoted in Michelle Perrot, “Délinquance et système pénitentiaire en France au XIXe siècle,” *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 30, 1 (1975): 78; J. Petit, *Ces peines*, 209, 422, 447, 452; O’Brien, *Promise of Punishment*, 50, 65.

⁴³ Claudie Lesselier, “Les Femmes et la prison, 1820–1939, prisons de femmes et reproduction de la société patriarcale,” in *Prison*, ed. J. Petit, 116; J. Petit, *Ces peines*, 449.

⁴⁴ O’Brien, *Promise of Punishment*, 30, 192; Sophie Ulliac Trémadeure, *Souvenirs d'une vieille femme*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1861), II: 141, 228; J. Petit, *Ces peines*, 183–96, 211–18; Witt-Guizot, *Mallet*, 69.

⁴⁵ AN F1bI 272–4 L (Lechevalier); J. Petit, *Ces peines*, 422, 447–60; Raphaël Petit,

Antoinette Lechevalier, the Interior ministry's first and only inspectress general until the 1860s, was an artillery officer's wife with a background in charitable work. Secretary of a *patronage* started by Mme Alphonse de Lamartine, wife of the poet-legislator, to aid released women prisoners, she had helped found and direct its correctional school for delinquent girls. She was temporarily appointed in 1842 to inspect correctional facilities for young women and a year later also visited women in central prisons. With a salary of 4,000 francs and 2,000 francs for travel, she was one of the best paid women of the era, although she later protested the difference between her pay and that of male colleagues. Her title of *inspectrice générale* also conveyed more authority and permanence than that of the *déléguée générale* for nursery schools.⁴⁶

Lechevalier inspected the eleven central prisons housing women, departmental prisons' sections for women, refuges to which released prisoners were sent, and girls' correctional institutions. While she performed official duties, her husband joined the Society of Charitable Economy, whose concerns included prison reform; founded by Count Armand de Melun, the Society attracted male philanthropists, social Catholics, and Interior ministry inspectors. Mme Lechevalier took special interest in improving hygienic conditions in prisons and boasted of her efforts to combat cholera. She also recommended changes in the work regimen imposed upon prisoners because she believed that entrepreneurs who contracted with the state to use prison labor exploited the incarcerated "without teaching women a trade which could let them live respectably after their liberation." As she duly noted when summarizing her accomplishments, the administration did not adopt all of her suggestions.⁴⁷

Inspectresses and the mid-century upheaval

The rationales for introducing three national inspectresses reflected a preoccupation with moralizing and rehabilitating the working classes that would intensify after the Revolution of February 1848 toppled Louis-Philippe and ushered in the short-lived Second Republic

"L'Inspection générale de l'administration de Necker à nos jours," *Administration*, no. 133 (1986): 11; Langlois, "Introduction," 129–31.

⁴⁶ AN F1bI 272–4 L; "Société de patronage de jeunes filles détenues, libérées et abandonnées du département de la Seine," *Bulletin de la Société générale des prisons* 2 (June 1879): 727–29; Léon Séché, *Les Amitiés de Lamartine* (Paris, 1911), 308–12; Duprat, *Usage*, II: 755.

⁴⁷ AN F1bI 272–4 L; "Société d'économie charitable," *Annales de la charité* 3 (1847): 81, 240; *ibid.* 4 (1848): 380.

(1848–52). In April 1848 inspectress Doubet perceived the onset of a new social era, evidenced by the provisional government's efforts to enhance the laboring classes' material welfare and moral development. Because nursery schools lightened working mothers' burden, she anticipated reforms to benefit nursery schools as well as primary schools. After the June Days uprising by Parisian workers protesting plans to close the experimental "national workshops" which had hired many of the urban unemployed, Doubet and Chevreau-Lemer cier embarked on a special mission. Their orders specified that because of the year's "radical" movement, they must publicize official efforts to aid children of the "working classes."⁴⁸ By July, conservatives had replaced republican education minister Hippolyte Carnot and others in the first provisional government, and General Louis-Eugène Cavaignac, suppressor of the June Days, headed the government until the fateful December election.

For Lechevalier, the 1848 Revolution and its aftermath also meant special assignments and additional volunteer work. She was part of a "large assemblage" of philanthropic women, including Mmes Victor Hugo and Mallet, who gathered at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 31 March, invited by minister Lamartine's wife to hear about de Melun's plans for aiding poor families. The provisional government also sent her and Mme Mallet to meet with unemployed women workers, then demanding larger allocations. Claiming that she persuaded the *ouvrières* that work was more honorable than accepting handouts which led to laziness, Lechevalier advocated national workshops for women – an extension of the program introduced by the Luxemburg Commission and the democratic socialist Louis Blanc. The workshops eventually employed some 40,000 Paris-area women to make shirts and trousers for the army and national guard, and Lechevalier, sometimes in the company of the wife of the minister of public works, made frequent inspections. She hoped to elevate "moral sentiments and encourage women to do work which offered a settled life," and she intervened after a fire in the Popincourt district atelier to help end a protest there and in several other workshops. Ordered after the June Days to calm agitated women participants jailed for their actions, she obtained assistance for many children left alone because of their mothers' arrest and recorded that she had secured pardons for many of some 190 incarcerated women. Later she helped create workhouses (*ouvroirs*) to replace some national workshops.⁴⁹ Unlike twelve of the twenty-seven interior inspec-

⁴⁸ AN F17 10841, 22795.

⁴⁹ AN F1bI 272–4 L; "Fondation de l'association fraternelle en faveur des pauvres," *Annales de la charité* 4 (1848): 97–107; William Fortescue, "The Role of Women and Charity in the French Revolution of 1848: The Case of Marianne de Lamartine," *FH*

tors and five education inspectors general dismissed because of political changes, Lechevalier, Chevreau-Lemerrier, and Doubet survived the transition to the Second Republic.⁵⁰ Their activities and perceptions in 1848 reflected their status as middle-class officials, ready to aid the unfortunate but also alarmed by working-class protest.

The determination to stabilize the threatened social order cast a long shadow over the history of the brief Second Republic and ensuing Second Empire (1852–70). Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon I, won the Republic's democratic presidential election in December 1848 and soon enjoyed a conservative majority's support in the new Legislative Assembly. Emblematic of the Second Republic's conservatism after 1848 was the Falloux Law of March 1850, which extended the Catholic Church's influence in public education and furthered Louis-Napoleon's bid for Catholic support for his own political ends, already illustrated by his sending troops to topple the revolutionary Roman republic in 1849 and restore Pope Pius IX's government. The Falloux Law allowed members of religious orders to teach in public schools without holding the *brevet* required of lay teachers, and it empowered departmental councils to excuse a commune from the obligation to found a public school if it already had a free private school. Girls' schooling was encouraged but not mandated: each commune with a population of 800 should create a separate girls' school "if its own resources provide the means."⁵¹ Because localities still paid teachers' salaries, many favored nuns, who were the traditional teachers of girls and less costly.

In December 1851, with military backing, Louis-Napoleon moved further toward creating another Bonapartist empire, dissolving the legislature and arresting 20,000 republicans. A year later he launched the Second Empire, thereafter a novel mix of authoritarian and democratic features, epitomized by the slogan "Liberty and Order." Mindful of the continuing weight of French revolutionary precedent and egalitarian ideals, Emperor Napoleon III combined reform measures with a strong grip on the reins of power.⁵²

11 (1997): 54–78. See also Michelle Perrot, "1848: Révolution et prisons," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* 49 (1977): 306–38; Rémi Gossez and Françoise Grée, "Ouvrières prévenues d'insurrection," in Société d'histoire de la Révolution de 1848 et des révolutions du XIXe siècle, *Répression et prisons politiques en France et en Europe au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1990), 47–63.

⁵⁰ Françoise Huguet, *Les Inspecteurs généraux de l'instruction publique 1802–1914, profil d'un groupe social* (Paris, 1988), 57; R. Petit, "L'IGA et l'histoire, une interaction continue mais discrète," *Administration*, no. 133 (1986): 29.

⁵¹ P. Chevallier and B. Grosperin, *L'Enseignement français de la Révolution à nos jours*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1968–71), II: 172.

⁵² Roger Williams, *Gaslight and Shadow: The World of Napoleon III* (New York, 1957).

The Second Empire and new inspectresses

The Second Empire enlisted women officials for duties like those defined by the July Monarchy, but it significantly expanded their administrative presence. Education minister Hippolyte Fortoul's decree of 21 March 1855 provided that each of France's sixteen education "academies" would have a woman "special delegate" (*déléguée spéciale*) paid by the state to inspect nursery schools.⁵³ Two more women were later designated "general delegates," one on an "acting" basis and the other, Pape-Carpantier, to supplement her direction of the Paris training course for nursery school teachers.

Fortoul's decree accompanied the substantial growth of nursery and primary schools, both affected by the Falloux Law's encouragement of Catholic involvement in public education. In 1850, 156,841 children attended 1,737 nursery schools, 60 percent of them headed by lay teachers. Eight years later, 242,574 were enrolled, but lay teachers directed only 37 percent of the schools; and by 1868, when there were 3,951 nursery schools, three-quarters were run by nuns. Girls' primary schools also became more numerous and, unlike boys' schools, more often engaged nuns than lay teachers. By 1866, 92 percent of 42,457 boys' and "mixed" schools were publicly funded, and 91 percent had lay teachers; but only 54 percent of 28,214 girls' primary schools were public, and 52 percent had religious teachers.⁵⁴

The increased numbers of nursery schools and nuns teaching supplied the rationale for adding inspectresses, and Empress Eugénie also took a special interest in their appointment. She was the designated "protectress" of nursery schools, which soon displayed her portrait. Fortoul, like Salvandy, praised "the charitable intervention of mothers" on the local committees enlisting several thousand patronesses; but as he expanded the state's control of nursery schools, he reduced women's role on departmental examination commissions by making them a minority of two, serving with male educators and a clergyman representing the religion of the applicant for the teaching certificate. Women members also had less influence on the supervisory "Central Committee" (*Comité Central de Patronage des Salles d'Asile*) which replaced the Higher Commission and was headed by an archbishop.⁵⁵

Fortoul addressed the professional qualifications of inspectresses, still

⁵³ Luc, *Petite enfance*, 103–12.

⁵⁴ Briand *et al.*, *Enseignement*, 36, 42, 162.

⁵⁵ Luc, *Petite enfance*, 40, 101–08; Luc, *Invention*, 36, 171; Maurice Gontard, *Un ministre de l'instruction publique sous l'Empire autoritaire, Hippolyte Fortoul 1851–1856* (Paris, 1975), 250.

officially termed *déléguées*, by stipulating that “special delegates” must hold the certification mandatory for lay nursery school directresses. The special delegate followed itineraries set by an academy’s rector and submitted annual reports to each department’s chief inspector (*inspecteur d’académie*) and to the rector, who added his own evaluation before transmitting reports to Paris. Special delegates also maintained contact with teachers and local patrons and attended examinations for the teaching certificate. By mid-nineteenth-century standards, they were among the best-paid French working women. Whereas the government guaranteed public nursery school directresses a salary of 250 francs and free lodging, special delegates earned 1,600 to 2,000 francs. The two general delegates, paid 4,000 francs, coordinated activities with the special delegates and sometimes called meetings with local patrons. They reported directly to the minister and Central Committee and, as before, could “decide nothing by themselves,” for Fortoul ignored Chevreau-Lemercier’s plea for more latitude for the general delegate.⁵⁶

Who were the Second Empire’s special and general delegates who, like the July Monarchy appointees, set new precedents for women’s employment in public service? As Chevreau-Lemercier and Doubet’s backgrounds indicate, inspectresses, like male inspectors general for primary and secondary schools and universities, often came from bourgeois or middle-class family backgrounds. What was not similar was the social significance of a woman’s appointment. The inspector general’s employment was as prestigious as that of his father or more so, but the inspectress’s appointment frequently indicated downward social mobility.⁵⁷ Economic necessity drove most of the inspectresses whose backgrounds are known to seek work. Between 1852 and 1870, at least thirty-four women became special delegates, and three of the seven women who were imperial general delegates at some point rose from special delegate ranks. Of thirty-eight inspectresses, fourteen (37 percent) were single and often from families that had suffered financial reverses; at least ten (26 percent) were impoverished widows; one was separated from a spendthrift husband; and many of the married had husbands who were ill or not earning an adequate living.⁵⁸ The economic need which drove Chevreau-Lemercier to seek work also beset her daughter, Henriette Monternault, named a special delegate in

⁵⁶ Luc, *Petite enfance*, 108, 118–23.

⁵⁷ Huguot, *Inspecteurs*, 23–24.

⁵⁸ Data from Caplat, *Inspecteurs*, and *dossiers personnels*, AN F17 (general delegates) 3131, 3134, 20315, 20516, 21192, 22781, 22795, 22836, and (special delegates) 3129, 20068, 20268, 20605, 20621, 20753, 20794, 20818, 20954, 20966–67, 21354, 21379, 21383, 21634, 21699, 21843, 22723, 22818, 22831, 22865, 22999, 23007, 23013, 23045, 23088.

1864, after her husband's death left her with their two children and two nephews to support. Mlle Jeanne Geib, a special delegate from 1855 to 1879, pleaded financial distress after spending 51,000 francs – most of her inheritance – to create thirty nursery schools in the Moselle department. For her, inspection was a “vocation,” continuing her total dedication to needy children.⁵⁹

Applicants for inspectress posts, like male job seekers, often emphasized ties to Bonapartist officers or administrators. A third of the inspectresses cited the military record of fathers, husbands, brothers, or uncles; and three had attended one of the Legion of Honor schools for officers' daughters. Another third pointed to relatives' service as state employees. Amélie Ritt and Marie-Antoinette Danton were the widows of inspectors general of education, Doubet was a daughter, and Mlle Filon was an acting inspector general's sister. Monternault and Isaure-Eugénie Deyber (née René-Caillié) were inspectresses' daughters. The humbly born were a distinct minority among the middle-class inspectresses, but for at least four the appointment signified upward social mobility. Marie Adèle Lescot (later Mme Caillard), named a general delegate in 1857, was an innkeeper's daughter who began teaching school at age fifteen; special delegate Filon was a watchmaker's daughter who had run a girls' boarding school often praised as a model establishment; Anne-Marie Audcent was a printer's daughter who separated from her spendthrift writer husband and came to Paris at age forty-one to obtain nursery school teaching certification; and Emilie Bade was a primary school teacher's daughter who married a secondary school professor and was widowed with three children to support.⁶⁰

If family connections improved chances for an official appointment, the certificate of aptitude indicated a level of professional competence. Most inspectresses held the certificate, and some also had the *brevet* required for lay primary teachers. At least nine studied at Pape-Carpantier's *cours normal*, and others obtained comparable preparation elsewhere. Although information about inspectresses' early schooling or prior work is incomplete, nearly 60 percent (twenty-two) had taught in nursery or girls' schools or private households, some at one time involved in unsuccessful boarding schools. Monternault and Deyber first assisted their inspectress mothers; and Geib, Rocher-Ripert, Lescot, and Mme Verdin were former departmental inspectresses. Others, like Judith Cauchois-Lemaire and Geib, moved into inspection after acting as nursery school patronesses. The credentialing of inspectresses marked the beginning of professionalizing women's administra-

⁵⁹ AN F17 22795, 21354, 20818 (Geib).

⁶⁰ Caplat, *Inspecteurs*; AN F17 20315, 22723, 20068.