



The Bouchayers of Grenoble and French Industrial Enterprise, 1850--1970

Professor Robert J. Smith

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The son of a village nail maker, Joseph Bouchayer forged a new identity in Grenoble and left as his legacy a thriving metalworking firm--Bouchayer et Viallet. His sons made this enterprise the dominant French producer of pipelines for the hydroelectric industry before 1914. As the Bouchayers became grands bourgeois, however, leisure, largesse, and individual prowess gradually displaced work, frugality, and family ties as core values. Without imaginative entrepreneurship after 1930, the firm lost momentum and finally terminated its century-old manufacturing operations in 1970.

In *The Bouchayers of Grenoble and French Industrial Enterprise, 1850-1970*, historian Robert J. Smith explores a classic trajectory reminiscent of Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*. Drawing on family papers and business records spanning four generations, this narrative of the ascent of the Bouchayers and the eventual decline of their firm illuminates the complex relationship between family and class in the formation of modern industrial economies. Because France remained an essentially rural society until the twentieth century, its industrial development depended heavily on peasants and artisans who entered the middle class by founding family firms. An elusive thread in French history, the rise and fall of such firms reveals what was at stake for individuals, families, and enterprise in the transition to modernity.

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