

Who was Claire Duquénel d'Olimpré?

“A woman of heart – Madame Duquénel d'Olimpré surprises with her enthusiasm, her clear-headedness, her masculine intelligence, and the martial exuberance that animates her. One is struck by the firmness and penetrating insight of her judgment, even when passion takes hold.” This is how Charles Moreau-Vauthier describes the woman who seems to have touched the lives of many vulnerable beings, yet about whom we know very little.

We have no image of Madame Claire Duquénel d'Olimpré, but it is reasonable to assume that her attire might have resembled the costume shown here, typical of the 1880s.

Justine Claire Hainglaise was born in Nancy on November 13, 1832, to a notary father. She was also the granddaughter of General Henriod, governor of Lleida and hero of Napoleon's *Grande Armée*, whose portrait she would venerate throughout her life. She was also the niece of Victor Brisson, governor of Fontainebleau under Napoleon III, and of Colonel Hanglaise, director of the Saumur Cavalry School. With such a background, her strong temperament is not surprising and explains her favorite motto: "Act! Act! I want to act! I want to be useful!", a desire she would put into practice throughout her life.



She married Charles Emile Duquénel, a lawyer at the *Court de Cassation* and the *Conseil d'État*, on October 10, 1859.

Commitment to caring for wounded soldiers

During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, she volunteered and was placed in charge of a camp's ambulance unit for three months. During the fighting in the Loire Valley region, her team treated and cared for 600 soldiers. She also arranged for soup to be delivered to weary soldiers, at her own expense. Mr. Thiers, an eminent diplomat, told

her: "I do not wish to take away the credit for your generous action, but allow me, Madam, to add my voice to it." And he insisted on paying half the costs. Interrupted in this act of charity by illness, Mrs. Duquénel nevertheless continued to dedicate herself to the cause, distributing clothing and medicine to hospitals and field hospitals at her own expense.

In July 1871, she received a bronze cross and a certificate of honor from the Board of Directors of the French Society for the Relief of the Wounded. Although much later, in 1912, her devotion would again be recognized by the commemorative medal of the Campaign of 1870-1871, awarded by the Minister of War.



Commemorative medal of the 1870-1871 war

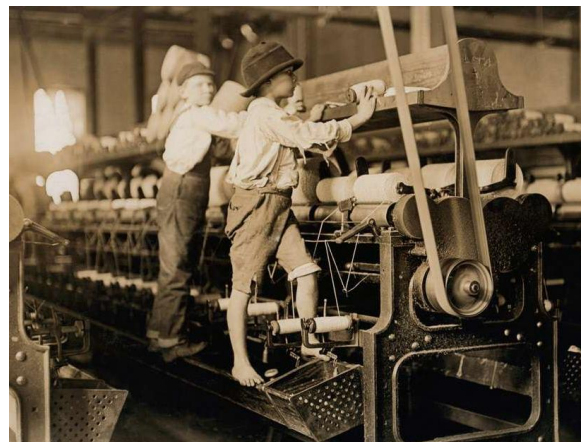
Becoming Duquénel d'Olimpré

Around 1871, all references to the benefactress refer to her as "Mrs. Duquénel d'Olimpré." We do not know the origin of this addition to her name, except that Olimpré is a hamlet near Château-Salins, in Lorraine, her birthplace. Did the family own property there? Is there a connection to her grandfather's military exploits? All of this is conjecture...

However, subsequent civil records make no mention of Olimpré.

Children protection

In the 1880s, Mrs. Duquénel d'Olimpré dedicated herself to another cause, that of apprentices and children employed in factories. She became president of one of the labor committees for this initiative. She resigned from this position in 1884.



Children working in a plant, ca 1880

Regular visits to Marlotte

It was around the mid-1880s that she began her stays in Marlotte, first at the *Hôtel Mallet*, then in a house she acquired on the road to Fontainebleau at the entrance to the hamlet, in 1896. This was the villa then called "*Tanagrette*", located at 66 rue Murger. A testament to the generosity that Madame Duquénel d'Olimpré showed to *all living beings*, she had a watering trough dug there, which she personally ensured was *always filled with fresh water for the thirsty dogs returning from walks in the forest*¹.

¹ Bulletins des Amis de Bourron-Marlotte n°6, 1979, p.34 et n°7, 1980, p.41

In 1891, her husband, Charles Emile Duquénel, died in Menton. At 59, Madame Duquénel d'Olimpré then seemed to become even more deeply involved in charitable activities of all kinds.

Multifaceted generosity



Toy dated end of 19th century

In 1894, she founded "The Toy Fund": *This was the time of year when mothers were busy renewing the joys of their babies. The founder of the Toy Fund, Madame Duquénel d'Olimpré, appealed to their generous support, asking them to set aside their old toys and send them to the ladies who distributed them to the poor children in the care of the Denfert-Rochereau orphanage.*

In 1896, she joined an initiative for "French beds at the International Hospital of Saint Petersburg." *A hospice for convalescents and the infirm of all nationalities was to be established in Saint Petersburg, under the august patronage of Her Majesty Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. To help this foundation, a charity sale was organized under the chairmanship of Countess Vera Tolstoy... who appealed to her painter and sculptor friends to send objects worth no less than 500 francs. Among the donors, Mrs. Duquénel d'Olimpré offered a fireplace screen.*

In 1900, Madame Quesnay de Beaurepaire² introduced Madame Duquénel d'Olimpré to the French Ladies' Association of the French Red Cross.

In 1903, her compassion for animals was further demonstrated through her participation in a movement opposing vivisection. She was among the members of the Society for the Protection of Animals (SPA), who embraced the anti-vivisectionist movement to oppose a leadership that at the time was partly composed of doctors and veterinarians. *She once interrupted a vivisection lecture by lunging at the professor, grabbing him by the throat...*³

That same year, she was awarded the President of the Republic Prize, amidst applause, at the SPA's annual meeting. *It was emphasized that Madame Claire Duquénel d'Olimpré had always provided tireless and selfless support to the society, regardless of the difficulties that arose.*

² It is worth noting that Mrs Quesnay de Beaurepaire regularly stayed in Marlotte, where she occupied the villa *Les Taillis*. See also *Alfred Quesnay de Beaurepaire - Militaire accompli devenu artiste* by D. Ricoult, Bulletin des Amis de Bourron-Marlotte n°64, 2022.

³ L'Abeille de Fontainebleau – December 8, 1911

In 1906, Ms. Duquénel contributed to reports of cruelty towards horses used by coachmen. Following these actions, 82 coachmen and grooms were charged during nighttime inspections by plainclothes agents⁴.

In 1912, she reacted angrily to a newspaper article⁵: “Dr. Toulouse, with his stories about microbes, lice, and fleas on dogs, is really nitpicking; let him leave our best friends in peace. Ah! If only poor animals could hold a congress, what would they have to say about human ingratitude and wickedness! The worst thing about a dog is its owner.”

Friendly ties in Bourron-Marlotte

During this period, she forged friendships with prominent figures in Bourron-Marlotte, such as the painter Olivier de Penne, at whose home *she spent entire days watching monkeys and stuffing them with treats*⁶, and Charles Moreau-Vauthier, to whom we owe a lengthy article on the women of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. She was also part of the Patronage Committee for the Art Visits then organized by Moreau-Vauthier.



Monkey by Olivier de Penne

⁴ The New York Herald – February 4, 1906

⁵ Excelsior – February 4, 1912

⁶ L'Abeille de Fontainebleau – January 26, 1912 - *Souvenirs de Mme de Penne* by Charles Moreau-Vauthier