# 12 The famine, the New York Irish and their bank[1]

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## INTRODUCTION

Economists and economic historians sometimes assume that the poor don't save, or don't save much.[2] Controversies about the trade-off between economic 'justice' and economic growth turn, in part at least, on this assumption. Social reformers, though, have long sought to make the poor save. The early savings bank movement is an important part of the story. That movement can be traced back to the bank set up by Reverend Henry Duncan in the Scottish village of Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire in 1810. In the following decades hundreds of savings banks were established throughout the United Kingdom. Ireland's first savings bank dates from just a few years later, and by 1830 there were eighty-one. Still, the charitable savings bank movement was far more successful in Britain than in Ireland, where the famine and a series of highly-publicized frauds impeded its progress (Pratt 1845; Porter 1849; Black 1960a: 152–3; O'Shea 1989).[3]

The savings bank idea spread quickly to the United States, where both Boston's Provident Institution for Savings and Philadelphia's Saving Fund Society were founded in 1816. New York obtained its first mutual savings bank three years later. The Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank, the focus of this chapter, was one of a score of such banks set up in New York State before the Civil War. Most authorities agree that these banks were founded and operated for a time on a strong philanthropic motive. Banks usually began by operating on a part-time basis with volunteer help, but gradually became more professionalized. They were managed by trustees seeking to encourage the habit of saving and industry among the poor: hence the common appellation, 'trustee savings bank'. Trustees were prohibited from using depositors' money personally other than to defray expenses, and were strictly limited in the range of assets they could invest in. Lending was constrained to government, state, or city securities, incorporated banks, and mortgages on real estate valued at twice the amount of the loan. Savings banks were also obliged to keep their books open for inspection by the relevant public officials and to produce an annual report to the relevant legislature. Yet by operating on a very tight margin between

borrowing and lending rates, the banks managed to offer both high interest and liquidity to their customers.

Their relatively high interest payments attracted many depositors who were by no means poor. The banks sometimes sought to discourage these by paying better rates on smaller deposits, by imposing maximum deposits and even by scrutinizing accounts from time to time and ordering money to be returned to wealthier depositors. In the United Kingdom, in the early decades, savings banks restricted individual savers to £30 annually and £150 in total. Yet though savers with deposits of less than £20 accounted for half of all United Kingdom savings bank accounts in the early decades, they made up only 10–12 per cent of the total deposited. In pre-famine Ireland savings banks catered disproportionately for the artisan and the lower middle class. Thus in Thurles, County Tipperary, in the 1840s farmers accounted for 56 per cent of all depositors reporting an occupation and labourers (a more numerous group in the community) only 29 per cent. In Ireland as a whole, in November 1846, accounts holding over £20 – or more than twice a farm labourer's annual income – accounted for 56 per cent of all accounts and 88 per cent of all deposits (Pratt 1845; Kniffin 1918: 12; Payne and Davis 1956: 32–5; Fishlow 1961; O'Shea 1989: 102; *Thom's* 1849: 194).

In New York by 1860 there was one savings bank account per four people (Olmstead 1976: 4). At the outset these banks were allowed to invest only in government and local state bonds, but that stipulation was gradually relaxed (Sherman 1934: 70–5). In 1831–2 the Poughkeepsie Savings Bank and the Brooklyn Savings Bank were the first to be granted legal permission to lend on bond and property mortgages. Such lending would dominate later. For good economic histories of the early savings banks see Payne and Davis (1956) on Baltimore and Olmstead (1976) on New York City.

The Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank was chartered in April 1850. It began to accept deposits in a rented two-storey, iron-fronted premises on Chambers Street[4] on 30 September 1850. Most of its customers were Irish immigrants. Much of the credit for its creation must go to John Hughes, the able and energetic Catholic bishop (later archbishop) of New York. It was Hughes who prevailed on a group of eighteen merchants and other prominent citizens, most of them Irish-born, to organize a safe deposit institution for immigrants, and to encourage the saving habit among them. For a community mostly new to urban life and to savings institutions, Hughes's leading role probably gave the new institution much-needed credibility. Chambers Street was a central location; the bank's opening hours in its early years – 5 to 7 p.m. Monday to Saturday – reflected both client needs and demands on trustees' time. The founding board included Fanning C. Tucker, who was president of the Leather Manufacturers Bank, which held the Emigrant Savings Bank's cash; Gregory Dillon, an ex-officio Commissioner of Emigration since 1847, and first president of the Bank;

and the prominent merchants Joseph Stuart, Andrew Carrigan and Felix Ingoldsby. Becoming the trustee of a savings bank was a fashionable form of philanthropy at the time (compare Orcutt 1934: 20–1). Unlike many savings banks in nineteenth-century Ireland and Britain the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank (EISB) was never threatened by corruption or mismanagement.

The EISB was an outgrowth of the Irish Emigrant Society, which had been founded by Irish immigrants in 1840, also at the behest of Bishop Hughes, and had built up a considerable bill business in sending emigrant remittances back to Ireland during the 1840s (Murphy 1983). Until 1865 the Bank's chief officers – president, vice-presidents and secretary – were unpaid. At the outset its depositors were mainly Irish, but as it expanded it became a more cosmopolitan institution. By the mid-1850s German immigrants and Irish-Americans accounted for about one-tenth of the accounts. By the early twentieth century 'every nation on earth [was] represented among its depositors', and some of the bank's clerks, tellers and guards were chosen for their linguistic as well as their other skills (Manning 1917: 181). Tables 12.1 and 12.2 (overleaf) give a sense of the bank's expansion. Growth in the twentieth century was more significant than in the nineteenth (again compare Payne and Davis 1956: 139), and the EISB did not open its second banking office until 1925.

The early records reflect the legal constraints faced by the savings banks movement. The bank was prohibited by charter from investing its money other than in bonds or in mortgages worth double the amount lent. At a meeting on 19 January 1851[5] the board protested:

> In consequence of the great abundance of capital and the very limited amount of those stocks for sale and their consequently increased price in the market, it has been found quite impossible to realize an interest exceeding four per cent per annum. It is believed that a much wider range of investment can be safely confided to savings banks. ... The Bank for Savings is authorized to invest in the stocks of any of the states of the Union (Act of 29 March 1830) and are in the practice of loaning money on it and upon property worth one third more than the amount of the mortgage – no loss, it is stated, has ever occurred from the use of these powers and this board is desirous that the same powers be confided to them. They are also of opinion that perfectly safe investments can be made in a certain class of the bonds of rail road companies of this state – they are readily taken up by the most cautious private capitalists.

The EISB's predicament is reflected in its first investment – a loan returnable on demand to W. & J. O'Brien at the modest rate of 4 per cent on the security of United States and New York State stock. This loan was called in on 8 February and replaced by one made to De Launay, Iselin and Clark

*Table 12.1* The growth of the Emigrant Savings Bank

| *Year* | *Deposited($)* | *Withdrawn($)* | *Due depositors($)* | *Dividends* | *Accounts open* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1850 | 39,665 | 4,766 | 34,899 | 35 | 265 |
| 1855 | 703,481 | 548,003 | 977,932 | 44,088 | 4,291 |
| 1865 | 4,038,134 | 3,413,994 | 4,876,941 | 215,721 | 16,076 |
| 1875 | 4,750,156 | 4,659,492 | 13,784,399 | 726,842 | 28,551 |
| 1885 | 9,871,608 | 8,809,468 | 30,124,245 | 943,011 | 57,161 |
| 1895 | 15,206,832 | 12,831,344 | 49,649,731 | 1,767,479 | 80,562 |
| 1905 | 25,977,716 | 18,819,473 | 85,096,972 | 3,028,826 | 109,785 |
| 1915 | 33,205,884 | 29,247,777 | 148,557,398 | 5,468,276 | 165,572 |

Source: Manning (1917:187)

*Table 12.2* The bank's first ten years

| *Year* | *Accounts* | *Deposited($)* |
|---|---|---|
| 1851 | 265 | 34,899 |
| 1852 | 1,098 | 186,313 |
| 1853 | 2,183 | 455,310 |
| 1854 | 3,661 | 813,996 |
| 1855 | 3,691 | 822,453 |
| 1856 | 4,291 | 1,001,233 |
| 1857 | 5,461 | 1,302,791 |
| 1858 | 5,698 | 1,348,730 |
| 1859 | 6,686 | 1,628,755 |
| 1860 | 8,487 | 2,172,873 |
| 1861 | 10,096 | 2,627,542 |

Source: Olmstead (1976: 159)

on demand at 5 per cent. At the end of February 1851 the EISB's assets were as follows:

| *Account* | *Sum ($)* |
|---|---|
| De Launay et al. | 20,000.00 |
| Jacob Little @ 4% | 10,000.00 |
| New York City stock 7% | 1,804.68 |
| Two loans on bond and mortgage at 6% | 10,000.00 |
| Two loans do. at 7% | 4,500.00 |
| Cash deposited in Leather Manufacturers Bank | 2,909.69 |
| *Total* | 50,414.37 |

Soon most of the bank's assets would realise about 7 per cent, allowing it to pay savers 6 per cent.

The amateurish ethos of the Bank in its early years is reflected in a letter

to board members in May 1858 pleading with them to attend, as business was increasing, and some meetings had to be abandoned for the want of a quorum. As the bank grew, professionalization was inevitable, and at a meeting in January 1865 it was resolved that in fixing salary levels,

> each one of the officers, with the exception of the porter, shall immediately devote their leisure time to become accomplished accountants, by taking lessons and instructions from competent persons, with the view of enabling them to fulfill the duties of others in case of temporary absence, and to be entitled to promotion in case of vacancy.

The high interest offered by the savings banks inevitably attracted customers who had little in common with the 'industrious poor' envisaged by the founders. Some banks sought to discriminate against such depositors, but in the case of the EISB such discrimination was never a feature. In August and September 1852 substantial depositors included American-born John Charles Cooley, an apprentice who deposited $1,150; Catherine Lyons, no occupation, $700; Rev. James Mackay of Ogdensburgh, $1,200; Rev. Patrick Prendergast of Carbondale, Pennsylvania, $1,400; William Caffrey, a Long Island boarding-house owner, $772; Sarah Lehman, London-born wife of Israel Lehman, $2,200. These were substantial sums, and note that some of the addresses were quite a distance from Chamber Street.[6]

However, the records of the EISB show that such depositors were atypical of EISB account-holders in its early years. Those records offer rich pickings for both historians of Irish-America and historians of banking and saving behaviour. Our focus here will be on the EISB in its early years. A preliminary canvass suggests that people with proletarian, blue-collar occupations were very much to the fore among both male and female account holders (see Table 12.3). One-quarter (fifty-one) of the first 200 or so (204) men to open accounts declared themselves to be in unskilled labouring jobs. Many more were in jobs requiring little skill or literacy. On the other hand, literate occupations such as clerk and clergyman, and self-employed or capitalist occupations also featured strongly. Among women the proportion in menial jobs was greater: forty-eight out of ninety-four were in domestic service and another nineteen in clothes making jobs. As the number of accounts grew, the savers became more representative of the community. By 1860 the EISB had 10,000 depositors, or about one in twenty of an Irish-born population of over 200,000 in New York and Brooklyn, but a much higher proportion of those in the age-groups supplying most of the savers.

The riches of the EISB archive are only now being tapped. A limitless quarry for genealogists, it probably also constitutes the single most important source available anywhere on the socio-economic history of the New York Irish after the famine. Test Book No. 1 shows, for example, that

*Table 12.3* Occupations of the early Irish account holders

| | |
|---|---|
| *Women* | |
| Domestic, cook, chambermaid | 48 |
| Dressmaker, seamstress, milliner, tailoress, vest maker | 19 |
| Nurse | 4 |
| Farmer's wife | 1 |
| Lady, no occupation | 3 |
| Washerwoman, ironer | 7 |
| Dealer, pedlar | 5 |
| Store worker | 1 |
| Factory worker | 1 |
| Porter house owner, boarding house keeper | 2 |
| Furniture store owner | 1 |
| Gaiter fitter | 1 |
| Waiter | 1 |
| *Men* | |
| Labourer, porter | 51 |
| Book-keeper, clerk | 17 |
| Dealer, grocer, pedlar | 16 |
| Carpenter, cabinet maker | 19 |
| Publican, cookhouse or hotel keeper | 14 |
| Plasterer, mason, bricklayer | 10 |
| Shoemaker | 9 |
| Clergyman | 8 |
| Gardener, clothing business, farmer | 4 of each |
| Machinist, morocco dresser, smith | 3 of each |

2 each of the following:
Combmaker, cooper, cigarmaker, bookseller, hatter, sexton, carriage-maker

1 each of the following:
Teacher, founder, pressman, ropemaker, parasol maker, sailmaker, marble sawyer, 'in telegraph office', barber, money collector, miller, rectifier, perfumer, moulding business, coffee roaster, musical instrument maker, cook, chandler, upholsterer, weaver, printer, print cutter, spinner/carder, policeman

Bridget White, the bank's first depositor, was the wife of a tailor living on Henry Street in New York's Seventh Ward. Born near Mountmellick in Queen's County (Laois), she had arrived from Ireland nine years earlier on the 'Fairfield' out of Liverpool. Her father still lived in Ireland, but her mother was no longer living. She had four brothers (whose names are given), three of them living in the United States, and three sisters. This is typical. The deposit account ledgers give individual savings histories. From the late 1850s onwards the age of the account holder is also recorded.

One issue on which the records throw interesting light is the regional pattern of emigration before and after the Great Irish Famine. The famine is likely to have produced a radical shift in the county and provincial origins of Irish emigrants to the United States. *Hard* data on this are

*Table 12.4* Emigrants and population by region

| | *Percentage of emigrants* | | *Percentage of* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *pre-1846* | *1846–52* | *population, 1841* |
| Leinster | 30 | 29 | 24 |
| Munster | 20 | 37 | 29 |
| Ulster | 35 | 20 | 29 |
| Connacht | 15 | 14 | 17 |
| Mayo-Galway-Clare-Kerry | 7 | 15 | 15 |

Source: New York Public Library, Emigrant Savings Bank Archive (II, 1). Based on all those emigrating before the end of 1852 who had opened an account by the end of June 1854.

lacking, though. Official emigration statistics begin only in 1849, and in any case are an unreliable guide for a few decades after then. Passenger lists provide only very partial data on county origin. The issue of origin is an important one, however, because the variation in the roles of excess mortality and emigration across counties and provinces has a big bearing on our understanding of the famine. The estimates of net county outflows during the 1840s derived by Ó Gráda and O'Rourke (1997) hinge on admittedly debatable assumptions about the degree of under-reporting of deaths in the 1851 census; alternatively, estimates of regional variation in excess mortality hinge on estimates of emigration during the 1840s. Hence the importance of other sources which shed some light on regional origins. One such source is the records of the EISB. As already noted in the early 1850s most of the bank's depositors were Irish, and most were recent immigrants. However, a considerable number of those attracted by the new bank were older Irish people who had been in the US for a decade or more, and they also included a sprinkling of German, British and French immigrants, and of native Americans. Test Book No. 1 provides the name and date (sometimes only the year, but usually the precise date and name of the ship) of arrival of many thousands of Irish-born account holders. Table 12.4, based on an analysis of over 4,000 names, highlights the difference in the origins of those arriving and staying in New York before the famine and those arriving from 1846 on. Before the famine Ulster and Leinster were over-represented and Munster and Connacht (particularly Galway, Roscommon and Mayo) under-represented. The numbers imply that the New York Irish were disproportionately from the east and north of Ireland before the famine. Pre-famine Sligo and Leitrim had also provided a higher number of account holders than might have been suspected: if Sligo is excluded from the reckoning, the number of account holders from the rest of Connacht more than trebled during the famine, though admittedly from a very small base. The poor contributions before 1846 of counties like Clare, Kerry and Mayo, which were devastated by the famine, are also noteworthy. Table 12.4 thus corroborates the claim that before the famine wealthier counties in the north and east of Ireland supplied most

*Table 12.5* The provincial origins of parishioners and EISB depositors

| *Province* | *Transfiguration Church (%)* | *EISB (%)* |
|---|---|---|
| Leinster | 235 (16.1) | 72 (15.3) |
| Munster | 606 (41.6) | 238 (50.5) |
| Ulster | 149 (10.2) | 35 (7.4) |
| Connacht | 467 (32.1) | 126 (26.7) |
| Total | 1,457 | 471 |

of the transatlantic emigration from Ireland (compare Adams 1932: 158–60).

Finally, some features of the shifting distribution are worth noting. Munster which, though relatively poor, had been greatly under-represented relative to their population before the famine, was over-represented during the famine. The same could not be said for Connacht, though the increased representation of four west-coast counties – Mayo, Galway, Clare, Kerry – is also noteworthy. For emigration to have been a truly effective solution during the famine, however, even more out-migration from the poorer counties would have been needed.

The marriage registers of the Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, located in the part of Lower Manhattan as the EISB, offer corroborative evidence on regional origins. Table 12.5 compares the regional origins of Irish-born brides and grooms for the 1853–60 period with those of EISB account holders living in New York's Sixth Ward (on which more below) in the 1850s. The province-by-province match is quite good.

## FLEEING FROM FAMINE: THE NEW YORK IRISH[7]

The interaction between the EISB and those living in its immediate neighbourhood is of particular interest. The bank was located next to the greatest concentration of poor Irish immigrants in North America. Moreover, during the bank's early years, emigration out of Ireland reached an all-time high. That emigration was in large part a product of the Great Famine; indeed the Irish famine is often described as having exacted a toll of 1 million lives and 1 million emigrants. Yet describing the cost of the famine in such terms risks hiding the sense in which, paradoxically perhaps, the migrants – or at least those among them who sailed for the United States – were the fortunate ones. They were certainly victims of the famine, but most of them were also people of some means, because the cost of the passage required some accumulated savings or other assets that could be converted into ready cash. During the winter of 1846–7 the head of the Board of Works in Dublin referred to the 'great delusion' about emigration. It was not the poorest who were about to leave, he complained,

but 'all the small farmers [who are] hoarding all the money they can procure in order to make a stock for the spring, when they intend to bolt, leaving the landlords in the lurch'. Such claims were common.[8] Reliable data on net migration flows by region during the famine are lacking, but modern estimates of the variation in excess mortality and migration rates across counties are consistent with such impressionistic evidence. In the hierarchy of suffering the poorest of the poor emigrated to the next world; those who emigrated to the New World had the resources to escape (Ó Gráda 1999: ch. 3).

Because emigration failed to target those at greatest risk of death, it was an inefficient form of disaster relief. Yet without the emigration option, famine mortality would surely have been even higher. It is unlikely, though not inconceivable, that the absence of distant outlets for emigration would have increased mortality by more than the number of frustrated would-be emigrants. A more plausible outcome would be the deaths of a fraction of those forced to remain. In addition, some migration would have been diverted to the already crowded cities of the United Kingdom. As matters stood, famine immigration placed considerable strains on the cities of Dublin and Liverpool, for example, and much of the excess mortality in Dublin was due to it. Most of the huge increase between 1841 and 1851 in the number of Irish-born living in Britain – from 417,000 to 727,000 – happened in the wake of the potato failure. Many of the Irish who fled from famine died in Britain in 1847, prompting middle-class sympathy at first and, soon, widespread fear and resentment. English vital statistics are consistent with a 'famine effect' in the late 1840s (Neal 1995, 1996). In sum, the impact of the Irish migration to Great Britain was bad as matters stood; in the absence of the safety valve of emigration to North America, it would have been much worse.

New York was the main port of entry into North America for Irish famine emigrants. As the city's population grew rapidly during the 1850s, so did its number of Irish-born. By the mid-1850s greater New York contained almost as many Irish-born people as Dublin. Most of those who entered there during or just after the famine did so on their own money. The New York route cost more than the Canadian alternative, but it was safer and offered better prospects of employment on arrival. Nevertheless, Irish immigrants using the New York route in mid-century were much less successful than those arriving there from Germany or Great Britain. One important reason, as Joseph Ferrie notes, must have been their greater poverty on arrival, though the non-transferability of skills acquired in Ireland and discrimination in the markets for skilled labour may also have played a role. Ferrie's research confirms the accuracy of contemporary advice to would-be immigrants not to stay long in New York and, indeed, most of the new arrivals seem not to have stayed for long (Ferrie 1997: 108–9; Mooney 1851: 83–4, 93–4). One guide to would-be immigrants painted the following picture of employment prospects in New York:

> [T]hey are generally employed in buildings, either as masons, bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters, or as helpers and hodmen; they are found portering on the quays, repairing, cleaning, and watching the city; sawing wood, carrying packages; serving as waiters, hostlers, barkeepers in the hotels and boarding-houses, eating-houses, and provision shops; owning or driving carts, cabs, hackney coaches or omnibuses; working as hostlers, trafficking in the vegetable and fruit markets; carrying newspapers, dealing in paper, owning small fishing or ferry boats; at work in the tailoring 'sweating shops', in the printing offices, foundries; digging foundations or blasting rocks up town, mending the streets, digging sewers, and laying water or gas pipes for the corporation or other companies; plying on the river as firemen or boatmen, in the thousand canal and steam boats that flit too and fro on the Hudson and 'East River'; attending the merchants' auctions in Pearl Street, and buying an odd damaged bargain in a small way, which is peddled at a good retail profit in the suburban districts of the city; having a fruit and temperance stand in the summer season in a recess of the street, &c. &c.
>
> (Mooney 1851: 84–5)

Given the lowly nature of such employment prospects it may seem ironical that, as noted above, most of those who travelled to New York needed to be people of some means. Presumably the poorest of them were people whose passage from Ireland to America had been financed or subsidised by landed proprietors and by the government, most of whom had occupied smallholdings no longer viable after the failure of the potato. From a landlord perspective their removal meant a lower tax burden and estate rationalization. The architect of the most ambitious of these schemes reported that other estates, 'where no assistance is given, *retain their paupers* whilst *all the respectable Tenants are moving off*', while his own scheme resulted in the departure of 'none but abject Paupers' (Lyne 1992: 86). Migrants either formally transplanted by their landlords through emigration schemes or assisted by rent rebates accounted for only a small minority of famine emigrants, perhaps 40,000 or 50,000 of the half million or so who crossed the Atlantic because of the famine (Fitzpatrick 1989). But suppose more of the really poor had been helped in the same way? How different would the character of the flow have been?

A partial answer is offered by an analysis of the Irish community of New York's Sixth Ward in the 1850s. Many of the Irish living in the 'Bloody Old Sixth', located in lower Manhattan, east of Broadway and north of City Hall, in these years had formerly been smallholders on the estates of the third marquis of Lansdowne in south Kerry or of Lord Palmerston and Sir Robert Gore-Booth in Sligo. These landlords had paid their passages for them. As a result most of the Kerrymen and Kerrywomen who settled in the Sixth Ward had been born in a small, impoverished Irish-speaking area

in south Kerry, while the majority of the Sligo immigrants had lived on or near that county's north-west coast. That the Kerry emigrants arrived in a destitute state is borne out by several contemporary press accounts. One described tenants and their families 'without a penny of money ... mak[ing] their way on foot from Kenmare to Cork ... from whence their passages were paid to Liverpool, and thence to New York'. Another stated that the US Commissioners of Immigration had charged the carrier of one shipload of Kenmare emigrants $25 per head, the cost of their maintenance out of public funds in New York (Lyne 1992: 104–5).

Arriving in New York together was likely to induce former neighbours to stick together initially in the US. It may also be the case that the poverty trap which prevented more of their compatriots from leaving Ireland prevented some of these inhabitants of the Sixth Ward from moving beyond it. The Irish immigrants who remained in New York were numerous and some met with considerable success, yet they were a residual population. In Joseph Ferrie's sample of antebellum immigrants, which links passenger lists and manuscript census data, less than one-fifth of the Irish who arrived in the port of New York between 1840 and 1850 remained there on census day in 1850 (Ferrie 1997: 44–5).

Charles Dickens' *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842), local journalist George Foster's *New York By Gas Light* (1850) and other reports in a similar vein conjured up an image of the mainly working-class Sixth Ward as a virtual no-go slum area. To the evangelical missionaries who sought to reform its inhabitants in the 1850s, the Five Points was 'a synonym for ignorance the most entire, for misery the most abject, for crime of the darkest dye, for degradation so deep that human nature cannot sink below it' ('Ladies of the Mission' 1854: 34). But the 'new social history' has generated a revisionist response on the Sixth Ward. Carol Groneman Pernicone's University of Rochester dissertation contrasts the gap between the negative contemporary assessments of Dickens and others and the picture gained from an investigation of contemporary census data. Her main source, the New York city census of 1855, implied the presence of strong family ties among the Irish immigrants, as reflected in the high percentage of co-resident teenage children. It also indicated the dominance of nuclear family households, augmented, perhaps, by a boarder or two. The census also confirmed the unskilled character of the Irish labour force. Pre-famine immigrants were more skilled than recent arrivals but there was a negative association between skills and age (see Table 12.6). This curious outcome is presumably a reflection of selection bias in migration out of the Sixth Ward.

In 1855 Irishwomen specialized in the sewing and dressmaking trades (25.7 per cent of the total), in domestic service (36.3 per cent) and in taking boarders (31.9 per cent) (Groneman Pernicone 1973: 155, Table V–2). Groneman Pernicone's research offers a useful corrective to earlier accounts, but is probably marred somewhat by undue reliance on the 1855

*Table 12.6* Age and male skills in the Sixth Ward

| *Age* | *15–19* | *20–9* | *30–9* | *40–9* | *50+* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Unskilled (%)* | | | | | |
| Pre-famine | 31.4 | 25.8 | 40.2 | 43.9 | 51.6 |
| Post-famine | 39.5 | 56.6 | 54.6 | 64.3 | 73.4 |
| *Skilled (%)* | | | | | |
| Pre-famine | 55.7 | 51.0 | 37.0 | 29.7 | 28.3 |
| Post-famine | 52.3 | 33.7 | 33.6 | 23.1 | 16.0 |
| *Other (%)* | | | | | |
| Pre-famine | 12.9 | 23.2 | 22.8 | 26.4 | 20.1 |
| Post-famine | 8.2 | 9.6 | 11.7 | 12.5 | 10.6 |

Source: Derived from Groneman Pernicone (1973: 116, Table IV–13).

census, an imperfect enumeration which was most likely to miss the more marginal and unattached elements in the population (Ernst 1994). An even more revisionist gloss on the Sixth Ward Irish is offered by a recent archaeological survey of one of its most impoverished corners near the Five Points. In this federally funded exercise in 'the archaeology of domestic trash', the Irish struggle for stability and even a modicum of respectability is revealed in the 'pretty things' they left behind. This study goes much farther than Groneman Pernicone in its critique of the earlier sensationalist literature, and even exaggeratedly refers to the Five Points as a 'mythic slum' (Yamin 1997).

The registers of the Transfiguration Church report the ages and addresses of most brides and grooms, and their place of birth, in the 1850s. The records highlight not only a tendency for Irishmen to marry Irishwomen, but the remarkable strength of regional or local networks within the Irish community. Most marriages involved couples from the same or neighbouring counties in Ireland, particularly so for well-represented counties such as Sligo and Kerry. More than two-thirds of men reported as born in those counties married women from the same county, and most marriages involved couples from the same corner of the same county.[9]

Remarkably, in about one marriage in every four grooms and brides-to-be gave the same address to the church clerk. This is hardly evidence of cohabitation, however; even if practised, cohabitation would certainly have been concealed from the local clergy.[10] A more plausible explanation is that it reflects the tendency of immigrants from the same region in Ireland to live cheek by jowl in tenement housing. Certain addresses recur again and again in the records. For instance, thirteen men, mostly with different surnames and mostly from County Cork, married out of 5 Mulberry Street in the 1850s. The twelve men who married out of 22 Mulberry Street had come from a range of Irish counties but those living in 20 Mulberry Street

were mainly Sligo people, while between 1853 and 1856 three men with different surnames, but all from Rahamlish in county Sligo, married out of 10 Franklin Street. Number 31 Baxter Street supplied eight grooms, all from Kerry or west Cork, and five of them married women giving the same address.

Finally, how does the socio-economic profile reflected in the 1855 census and the Transfiguration Church registers square with that reflected in the EISB records? It turns out that although only a small minority of Sixth Ward inhabitants held accounts in the EISB, the occupational profile of Sixth Ward account holders in the 1850s reflected the social mix of the population rather well. Comparing the profile of Sixth Ward Irish male account holders with the results of Groneman Pernicone's analysis of the Sixth Ward Irish as a whole implies some bias among the account holders towards a residual 'other' category containing sales and clerical workers, petty entrepreneurs, storekeepers and white collar workers. This is to be expected. Still, the Sixth Ward savers were mainly unskilled workers and petty traders. Included among 563 savers identified as Sixth Ward addressees were eighty-nine labourers, thirty-six domestic servants, twenty-four washerwomen, nineteen porters, thirteen fruit dealers, twelve seamstresses, twelve pedlars, eighteen tailors, nine junk dealers, and one teacher. Martin Hogan from Limerick described himself as a 'fireman in Sweeny's saloon', while John O'Donoghue from Longford was a 'barkeeper at John Dempsey's'. John Shea of Tuosist distributed handbills, Jeremiah Daly of the same parish sold matches and Bridget Gilmartin from Rahamlish picked hair. It is interesting to find such people using the Emigrant Savings Bank.[11]

These profiles of the Lower Manhattan Irish in the 1850s prompt a few comments on the role of assisted migration during the famine. R.D.C. Black has shown that publicly-funded emigration schemes had commanded the support of a majority of economists since the 1820s (Black 1960a: ch. 7). Only a few such schemes had come to fruition, however, and landlord-assisted schemes were also few. The total number of paupers 'shovelled out' by Lansdowne, Palmerston and Gore-Boothe in the wake of the famine, though not known with precision, did not exceed more than a few thousand.[12] The large numbers of men and women from Kerry and Sligo in the EISB and Transfiguration Church records indicate that many of those who emigrated to New York stayed there in the 1850s. The 1855 census data suggest that there were few success stories among them in terms of skills acquisition. Taken together these bits of information suggest that an increase in the share of assisted emigrants would have reduced the geographical and occupational mobility of the Irish as a group. Further assisted emigration would have made the record of the Irish seem even worse than in the outcome of Ferrie's analysis, which shows them faring poorly relative to British and German immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s (Ferrie 1997: 203–4).

A comprehensive history of assisted emigration during the famine remains to be written. Some schemes, such as Major Mahon's in Strokestown, ended in disaster and earned lasting notoriety. Others were efficiently managed; the crown-financed emigration from Ballykilcline, next to Strokestown, seems to have been a model of its kind.[13] The assisted emigration of over 3,000 people from the Lansdowne estate in south Kerry in 1850–1 or so was the most ambitious scheme of all. By economizing on maintenance and concentrating the emigration on the low season, the organizer of the Lansdowne scheme, William Steuart Trench, kept its cost down to a modest £10,000 or so. Trench and his employer were criticized at the time, not unfairly, for their stinginess (Lyne 1992).

Yet surely the broader implication of the profiles painted by the statistical sources described above is that further schemes, properly timed and more humanely managed, would have been a viable form of famine relief. The possibilities must be kept in proportion. First, none of these sources captures conditions in the New York Irish slums at their worst. Heather Griggs notes that very few of the individuals recorded in the marriage registers were included in the censuses of 1855 or 1860, highlighting 'the necessity for using other primary sources to supplement census data' (Griggs 1996: 37).[14] The 'Ladies of the Mission' exaggerated the depravity and violence of the slum-dwellers, but the census commissioners almost certainly erred in the other direction by failing to include the most marginal inhabitants. Second, assisting people to emigrate in 1847–8 would not have eliminated the need for other kinds of public relief during the winter and spring of 1846 and 1847. Nor, third, could the very young and the very old have travelled; neither could heavily pregnant women or the mothers of very young children. Fourth, the absorptive capacity of New World and particularly its cities was limited; in the late 1840s the total population of North America was not much more than 20 million, and only 10 per cent of the total lived in towns and cities. Fifth, the capacity of the passenger trade in 1847 was already sorely stretched and probably subject to rising costs at the margin. Moreover, a significant increase in immigration from Ireland would undoubtedly have prompted increases in mortality in US cities as they did in Liverpool and Glasgow. Further immigration would have intensified anti-Irish feeling, already at an all-time high; in the New York mayoral election of 1854 the anti-immigrant Know Nothing Party candidate, James Barker, obtained about 31 per cent of the popular vote and came second in a four-way race. In the same year Know Nothing candidates won the mayoralties of Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco. Electoral support for the Know Nothings did not last, but at its peak it far exceeded that for even the most successful anti-immigrant movements today. Such considerations mean that mass migration was no panacea. Nevertheless, the assisted migration of, say, 100,000 Irish famine victims in 1847–8 would have almost certainly have saved many more lives in Ireland itself. An outlay of public money of, say, £1 million

(about 0.2 per cent of UK national income or 2 per cent of public spending) would have easily covered the cost of such a scheme.

## SAVING IN THE SIXTH WARD

Banking archives containing information on customer accounts are few.[15] Exceptionally, the EISB deposit account ledgers contain complete details of all customer transactions in the early decades. Our focus here is on the 1850s. Movements in the numbers of accounts opened and closed between 1851 and 1863, the number of deposits and drafts, and the sums involved are described in Figures 12.1 to 12.3.

Besides highlighting the early growth of the EISB and the panics that beset it (in 1854, 1857 and at the beginning of the Civil War), they suggest the strong seasonality also apparent in Figure 12.4, where indexes of deposits and drafts by month (adjusting for month length) for the 1851–63 period are shown.

Drafts were subject to much more seasonality than deposits, with two major peaks in January and July. Deposits also peaked in July, though much less spectacularly. The number of accounts opened and closed also varied somewhat seasonally (Figure 12.5). We still lack a full understanding of these patterns, but the striking bi-annual peaks in withdrawals are a reflection of a form of 'coupon-clipping': a significant number of depositors regularly withdrew interest payments due without touching the principal. It is worth noting that the seasonal pattern of withdrawals from the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society studied by George Alter, Claudia Goldin and Elyse Rotella (henceforth Alter et al. 1994: 761) was quite different (see Figure 12.6).

How different EISB savers were in other respects remains to be seen. Meanwhile, a preliminary look at the savings habits of depositors in the Sixth Ward suggests some interesting features that should repay further study. First, most customers seem not to have used the bank to accumulate substantial savings. In thirty-four of 100 accounts opened in the bank's early years (1850–5) the last withdrawal was smaller than the original deposit, while in another twelve the sum withdrawn was the same as that deposited. In a further ten cases the advantage was $10 or less. Thus the image of account holders accumulating nest eggs which they then withdrew as they made an investment in situ or as they moved to another place is not typical in this case. One hundred and ninety-eight of 597 accounts opened between 1850 and 1854 and still open towards the end of 1854 had accumulated negative sums between opening and December 1854, 158 had added $0–$9.99, 133 had added $10–$49.99, had added $50–$99.99, 65 had added $100–199.99, and only 57 sums of $200 or more. Only two savers, a German-born essence maker and an Irish-born bread seller, had accumulated savings of over $1,000 when they closed their accounts. Nor,

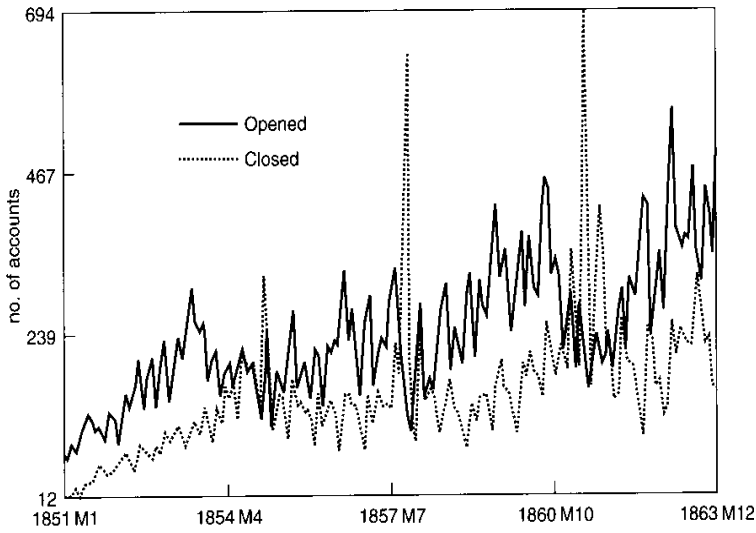


*Figure 12.1* Accounts opened and closed, 1851–63.

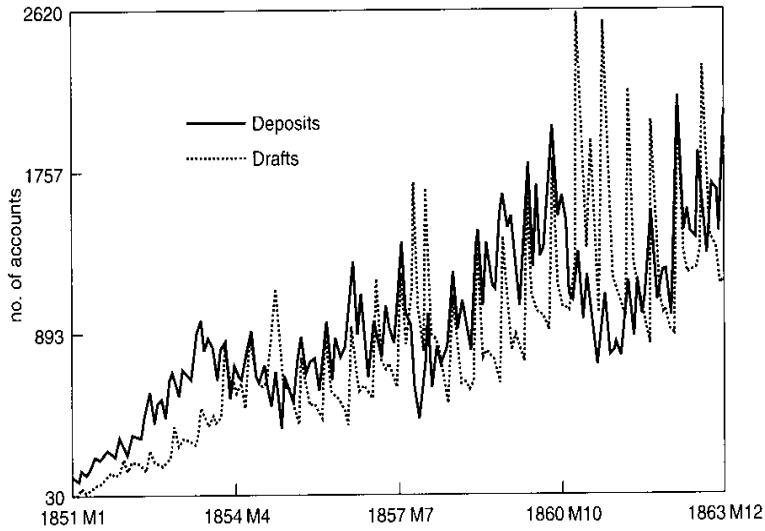


*Figure 12.2* Deposits and withdrawals, 1851–63.

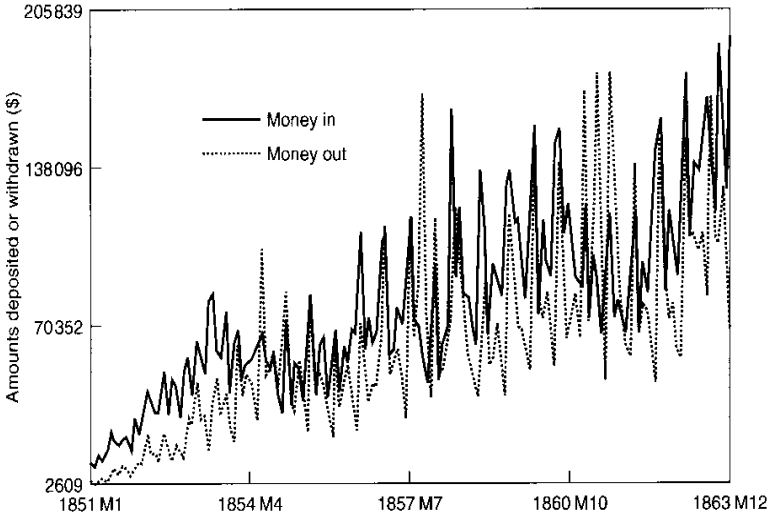


*Figure 12.3* Amounts ($) deposited and withdrawn, 1851–63.

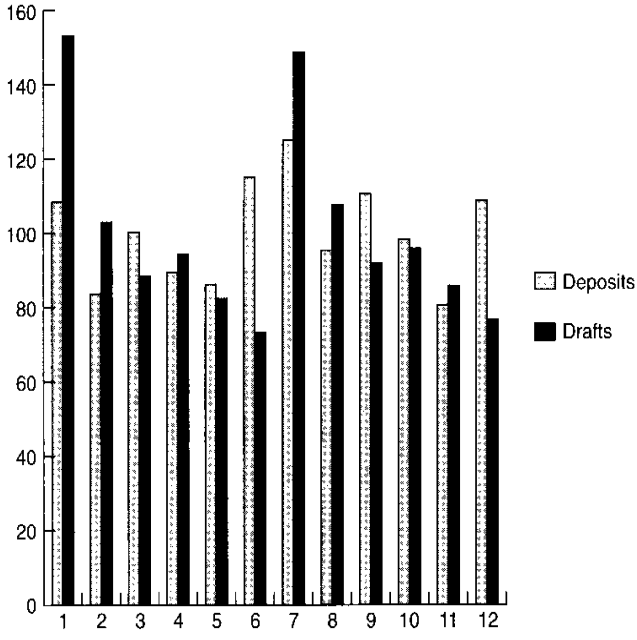


*Figure 12.4* Emigrant Savings Bank, deposits and withdrawals per month.

Note: Based on monthly data for years 1851–63.

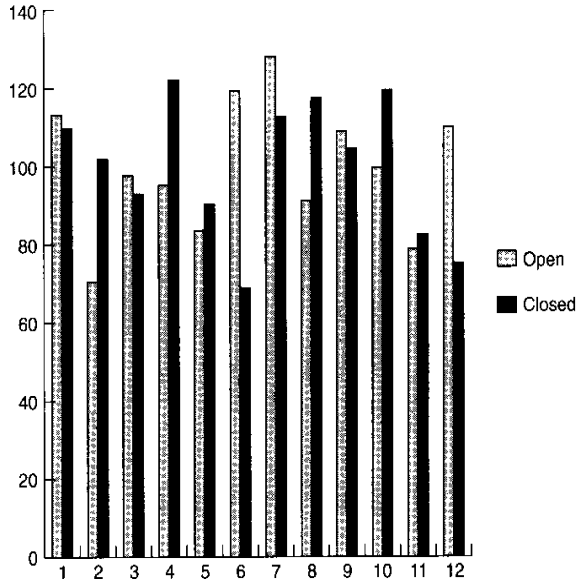


*Figure 12.5* Emigrant Savings Bank, accounts opened and closed per month.
Note: Based on monthly data for years 1851–63.

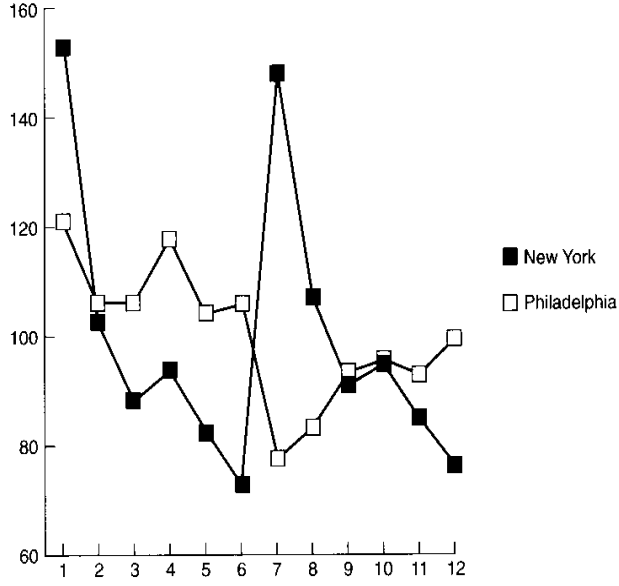


*Figure 12.6* Monthly withdrawals, New York and Philadelphia.
Note: Based on monthly data for years 1851–63.

*Table 12.7* Sums accumulated in accounts opened 1851–4

| *Sum accumulated ($)* | *Women (%)* | *Men (%)* |
|---|---|---|
| Negative | 30 (17) | 76 (18) |
| 0–9.99 | 54 (31) | 106 (25) |
| 10–49.99 | 52 (30) | 81 (19) |
| 50–99.99 | 18 (10) | 60 (14) |
| 100–199.99 | 14 (8) | 51 (12) |
| 200 + | 4 (2) | 53 (12) |
| Total | 172 | 427 |

*Table 12.8* Opening deposits

| *First Deposit ($)* | *Women (%)* | *Men (%)* |
|---|---|---|
| 0–9.9 | 7 (4) | 7 (2) |
| 10–49.9 | 66 (38) | 107 (25) |
| 50–99.9 | 49 (29) | 109 (25) |
| 100–199.9 | 26 (15) | 98 (23) |
| 200–499.9 | 21 (12) | 80 (19) |
| 500 + | 3 (2) | 24 (5) |
| Total | 172 | 425 |
| Average | 92.3 | 149.4 |

in contrast with the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society, does our preliminary canvas reveal that women savers were more likely to accumulate nest eggs than men. Further analysis of the same 594 accounts is shown in Table 12.7.

Should the EISB be characterized as a true, typical 'savings bank', or did other savings banks at the time also serve more of a 'current account' function than previously suspected? Further analysis and comparisons should provide a better understanding of why and how the poor saved.

Table 12.8 describes the sizes of opening deposits in the early years. On average women deposited less than men; 71 per cent of women's opening deposits were less than $100, but only 52 per cent of men's. The averages by origin were: Ulster $131, Munster $123, Leinster $118, Connacht $91, non-Irish $141, though these averages were subject to wide variation. Most accounts were held for a year or two, though a preliminary canvass suggests that many customers who closed their accounts re-opened them later. Some account-holders behaved in true Smilesian fashion, making small and frequent deposits, and allowing them to accumulate. Others made substantial and frequent deposits and withdrawals, never allowing more than a small balance to remain at Chambers Street. Compare the case of Ann Murphy who, inexplicably, withdrew the $85 she had deposited on 9 August 1854 a day later, and that of Mary Kelly, a washerwoman, who

*Table 12.9* Opening deposits by Irish women savers, 1850–1

| *Amount ($)* | *Number* | *Amount ($)* | *Number* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0–10 | 40 | 101–200 | 45 |
| 11–20 | 48 | 201–300 | 13 |
| 21–30 | 56 | 301–400 | 8 |
| 31–50 | 78 | 401–500 | 12 |
| 51–75 | 44 | 501–600 | 6 |
| 76–100 | 55 | | |
| | | Number | 415 |

Note: These accounts were among the first 2,000 opened at the Emigrant Savings Bank.

*Table 12.10* Age of first-time depositors, 1862

| *Age* | *Number* | *Age* | *Number* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Less than 20 | 17 | 40–4 | 60 |
| 20–4 | 25 | 45–9 | 34 |
| 25–9 | 57 | 50–4 | 32 |
| 30–4 | 91 | 55–9 | 18 |
| 35–9 | 63 | 60 + | 10 |

deposited $140 in February 1855 and withdrew $500 in May 1869, after making many withdrawals and deposits in the bank. Overall, though, our preliminary analysis replicates Alter et al.'s finding for Philadelphia in 1850 of accounts opened as 'relatively large in size, brief in duration, and inactive' (Alter et al. 1994: 764).

An analysis of the sums deposited by those opening accounts implies that several had already acquired the saving habit before the creation of the EISB. Table 12.9 summarizes the situation for women among the first 1,000 account holders. Women savers accounted for about one saver in five. The median sum deposited was just short of $50, not an insignificant sum (about one-third of a male labourer's annual income in 1850). About one-third of the deposits were under $30 (compare Alter et al. 1994: 738), and the highest was $600. Table 12.10 describes the age distribution of first-time depositors in 1862, and shows that first-time depositors were most likely to have been in their thirties (the median here was 35 years). Only one in ten was under 25, and about two-thirds of first-time depositors were aged between their mid-twenties and their mid-forties. In Philadelphia account holders were considerably younger: well over a quarter of recently opened accounts in 1850 were held by people under 25 (compare Alter et al. 1994: 745–6). The predominance of immigrants in the Emigrant Savings Bank probably accounts for the difference.

## CONCLUSION

At the outset we noted that the savings bank movement had made only limited progress in Ireland before the Great Famine. Nevertheless, in the early stages of the famine, editorials in *The Times* and *Morning Chronicle* linked the savings banks and the developing disaster, highlighting reports from Ireland of increases in savings banks deposits as evidence of 'successful swindling' or welfare fraud on the part of the Irish people. In Killarney rumours that the local savings bank was about to fail allegedly induced workhouse inmates to escape in hopes of reclaiming their deposits (O'Rourke 1902: 214–5; Smyth 1844–9: III, 29). Such depictions of Irish 'character' fed on the kind of anti-social behaviour that invariably accompanies catastrophes such as the Great Famine. But they hide two more important truths. First, though the savings banks had managed to harness substantial savings in Ireland – their trustees had nearly £3 million invested in the national debt in 1846 – most of those at greatest risk during the famine are unlikely to have held accounts in them. Most account-holders in savings banks lived in the towns and the cities; the province of Connacht, poorest, least urbanized, and worst affected by the famine, accounted for 17 per cent of the population but only 5 per cent of savings in savings banks. Second, both aggregate data and individual case studies suggest that the economic shock caused by the famine dealt a serious blow to Ireland's savings banks. Between 1845 and 1849 aggregate deposits fell from nearly £2.9 million to £1.2 million, and the number of depositors from 95,348 to 44,919. On the eve of the famine, Great Britain contained nearly eight times as many savings banks as Ireland, yet of the forty-four savings banks in the United Kingdom that ceased business between 1844 and 1852, twenty-four were Irish (O'Shea 1989; Ó Gráda 1999: ch. 4; *Thom's* 1850: 195; *Thom's* 1851: 264; BPP 1852a, 1852b).

The famine which halved Ireland's savings banking sector also contributed to the rapid growth of the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank. Indeed, some of those who opened accounts in Chambers Street in the 1850s had almost certainly closed their accounts in some Irish savings bank before travelling. Such connections should not be pressed too far: as noted, most of the Emigrant's early account holders were recent immigrants from the rural, less commercialized regions of Ireland. Yet the early history of the Emigrant offers testimony of the adaptability of emigrant Irish, even the very poorest among them, and their eagerness to better themselves.

## NOTES

1 I am grateful to Mr Donald Kelly, Vice-President, for access to the Emigrant Savings Bank archives at head office on 41st Street, to Tyler Anbinder, Marion

Casey and Heather Griggs for sharing their knowledge of New York history with me, and to Máire Ní Chiosáin, Des Norton and Renee Prendergast for comments on an earlier draft. Most of the primary material referred to here is held in Room 238 of the New York Public Library. Some of this chapter describes the beginnings of a project on which I am engaged with Eugene N. White of Rutgers University.

2 See, for example, Boyer (1997: 65–8), and the sources cited there.

3 Black (1969) is an indispensable source on the pamphlet literature on the provision of saving and credit facilities for the Irish poor.

4 The property belonged to John Milhau, one of the original trustees. The contract was for a rent of $2,100 annually, with an option to purchase for $30,000. The Emigrant Savings Bank bought the property from Milhau in 1852.

5 Board minutes (held in ESB head office, 5 East 42nd Street, NY). I am grateful to Donald Kelly, vice-president, for allowing me to consult this and related material.

6 Ernst (1994: 133) refers to one deposit of $10,000 in 1856, which I have so far been unable to locate.

7 This section contains material also published in different form in Ó Gráda (1999: ch. 3).

8 Citations are provided in Ó Gráda (1999: ch. 3).

9 Ten of the fifteen grooms from Tuosist married women from the same parish, and three more women from the neighbouring parishes of Bunnawn and Kenmare. Eleven of the twenty-nine grooms from Rahamlish married women from the same parish, and another four married women from neighbouring Drumcliff.

10 The rules of canon law seem to have been enforced, if not too harshly. About one couple in eleven had to produce a baptismal certificate or certificates, but several couples were also given dispensations for consanguinity or a mixed marriage.

11 I am grateful to Heather Griggs for a copy of this data base.

12 As distinct from those assisted through rent rebates or sums granted in return for giving up their holdings.

13 On Strokestown and Ballykilcline compare Campbell (1994), Scally (1995) and Harris (1996).

14 Griggs's archaeological research concentrated particularly on a block of tenement houses in the Sixth Ward.

15 The kind of information described here does not exist for British (or Irish) savings banks in this period (compare Johnson 1985: 98).