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The best country in the world: The surprising social mobility of New York's Irish famine immigrants

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UCD CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC RESEARCH

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**“The Best Country in the World”:
The Surprising Social Mobility of New York’s Irish Famine Immigrants**

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Immigrants

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ABSTRACT: We use databases we have created from the records of New York’s Emigrant Savings Bank, founded by pre-Famine Irish immigrants and their children to serve Famine era immigrants, to study the social mobility of bank customers and, by extension, Irish immigrants more generally. We infer that New York’s Famine Irish had a greater range of employment opportunities open to them than perhaps commonly acknowledged, and that the majority were eventually able to move a rung or two up the American socio-economic ladder, supporting the conviction of many Famine immigrants that the U.S. was indeed “the best country in the world.”

Keywords: famine, migration, Ireland, New York

JEL codes: N0, N3, J6, G21

Denis Sullivan and John Lane had a lot in common. Both were born in the early nineteenth century on the estate of the Marquis of Lansdowne in southwest Ireland not far from the small town of Kenmare in County Kerry. Both managed to survive the Great Famine which killed hundreds of their kinsmen and neighbors beginning in 1846. Both emigrated to America in 1851, with Denis arriving in Manhattan in March and John six months later. Both settled in an enclave of Kenmare-area natives in New York's Five Points neighborhood, with Denis choosing an apartment in a dilapidated two-and-a-half story frame house on Worth Street while John decided to board just around the corner in the large five-story brick tenement at 31 Orange Street. And like most Lansdowne immigrants, both Sullivan and Lane took jobs as menial day laborers upon arrival in New York.¹

While their lives to that point had so much in common, their experiences soon began to diverge. Sullivan worked as a day laborer for the rest of his life and in 1880, at nearly eighty years of age, he was still living in Five Points just a block from where he had settled upon arrival. Lane, however, decided to leave day labor behind and start his own business. One of the most profitable options in Five Points was the liquor trade, and around 1855 Lane rented retail space in his tenement and opened a saloon. He must have been a skillful entrepreneur. Many immigrants tried their luck as small business owners but failed and had to return to their original occupations. But John Lane was not one of them. In 1860 he remained in the liquor business, though he had moved his dram shop across the street. Ten years after that, Lane was still a saloonkeeper, though no longer in the Lansdowne enclave. His new watering hole was located across the street from the Hudson River docks at 357 West 16th Street in a tenement that Lane had purchased with proceeds from his downtown liquor-trade profits. Lane did so well that he was able to retire from the liquor business before age fifty and support himself for the last twenty years of his life on the rents paid by those who leased his retail and residential spaces.²



Fig. 1 *The large brick building in this photo is the one located at 31 Orange St. where John Lane lived in the early 1850s. In about 1855, when the thoroughfare was renamed “Baxter Street,” Lane opened a saloon in the tenement. Gustavus W. Pach, View in the Five Points, 1875, Image G91F179_046F, New York Public Library Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-1b4c-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.*

Few would dispute that the conditions facing the Famine Irish on arrival were harsh or that the employment opportunities open to them were limited. But reading the scholarship on the Famine immigrants, one might imagine that their plight was permanent—that stories like Sullivan’s were overwhelmingly the norm and those like Lane’s were exceedingly rare. In one of the first book-length scholarly studies of the Irish in America, *Boston’s Immigrants*, Oscar Handlin wrote that lack of opportunity for the Famine refugees “forced the vast majority into the ranks of an unemployed, resourceless proletariat...[F]or a long time they were fated to remain a massive lump in the community, undigested, indigestible.” One of the

definitive modern studies of the Famine Irish, Kerby Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles*, likewise paints "a gloomy picture of Irish-American deprivation.... In general, the Famine Irish experience in the New World was one of poverty and hardship." Other social historians studying the Famine Irish have come to similar conclusions. Economic historians have generally taken a less pessimistic view of Irish immigrants' financial fates, but historians of labor and immigration have ignored their work for the most part and typically portray the Famine Irish in America as trapped in lives of poverty and struggle due to discrimination, a lack of occupational training, and oversaturated job markets in the East Coast cities where most of them first settled.³

There is also a large social science literature on American immigrant socioeconomic mobility, but very little of it has looked at the Civil War-era or focused on the Famine Irish, and most of the recent historical work considers intergenerational mobility. Furthermore, no scholars to date have examined whether it is true that the Famine Irish were trapped on the bottom rungs of the American socio-economic ladder. Elsewhere, we have argued that the Famine immigrants—and even the day laborers among them—were able to accumulate more wealth (in savings and real estate) than historians have previously recognized. Does the Famine immigrants' somewhat surprising savings reflect heretofore hidden occupational mobility? If the Famine refugees were climbing the socio-economic ladder more than we have previously realized, what was the nature of that movement? And was geographic mobility a factor in occupational mobility?⁴

The databases we have created from the records of New York's Emigrant Savings Bank, which pre-Famine Irish immigrants and their children founded specifically to serve the Famine refugees, gives us a unique opportunity to answer these questions. When opening accounts at the Emigrant Bank, customers had to provide its clerks with answers to an unusually long list of biographical questions. Besides the typical items—name, address, and

occupation—required of bank customers in this era, Emigrant Bank depositors were also asked to disclose their precise birthplace in Ireland, the name of the ship that brought them to America and the date it landed, their parents' names (including their mother's maiden name) and whereabouts, and the names and locations of their siblings and children. The bank would periodically update this information, noting new addresses and occupations, spousal deaths, remarriages, and the like. These records are a bonanza for Irish Americans wishing to learn forgotten parts of their family histories (which explains why they are now available on Ancestry.com) and a goldmine for those who wish to accurately trace Irish immigrants' lives in the United States.⁵

The information in the bank records enabled us to track these immigrants with an unprecedented degree of certainty and discover their subsequent occupations and locations ten, twenty, or even thirty or more years after their arrival in the United States. Of the 8,300 Irish immigrants who left Ireland after the potato blight first struck in 1845 and opened accounts at the Emigrant Bank from 1850 (when the bank opened) to 1858, 5,000 were men. We focused on them because women changed their names when they married, making those who wed after they opened bank accounts very difficult to trace. Fifteen percent of these male bank customers never lived in New York City or Brooklyn (then a separate city), and we decided to exclude that group from this study so we could focus on immigrants who spent at least some time in the urban environments that scholars of the Famine migration focus upon. Out of the remaining 4,200, we were able to track 1,600 for ten or more years after their arrival in America. Measuring social mobility requires knowing how an immigrant's employment changed over time, so of those 1,600 men, we included in our mobility database only those for whom we have at least ten years of American occupational information. That left us with about 1,225 male Famine immigrants who at some point lived in New York or

Brooklyn and whose occupational histories we had traced for ten or more years. Of those 1,225, half could be tracked for a quarter century or more after leaving Ireland.⁶

One might imagine that the Emigrant Bank records would only help trace immigrants who remained in New York, but information in the bank records also facilitates finding the immigrants who left Manhattan. In most cases, for example, it would be impossible to track a New Yorker named Peter Lynch from 1850 to 1860, given that in the 1860 census there are 123 Irish-born Peter Lynches, dozens of whom are about the right age. (Because census takers in the nineteenth century were permitted to approximate the ages of the people they enumerated, one cannot narrow down the Peter Lynches by only considering those who were exactly ten years older in 1860 than the New York Peter Lynch from 1850.) The Emigrant Bank records, however, list the names and birth order of Lynch's five brothers and sisters, which is convenient because the 1885 Minnesota state census lists a Peter Lynch living in the township of Faxon with five siblings whose names and birth order exactly match those of the bank customer. One can use that information to conduct additional research to confirm that the Peter Lynch in Faxon in 1860 is Peter Lynch the New York day laborer from the 1850 census. Michael Egan, a day laborer and bank customer who also lived in New York in 1850, was traced in a similar but even more circuitous manner. There are 110 Irish-born Michael Egans and Eagans of about the right age in the 1860 census. But when one enters Michael's name into a genealogical search engine along with his wife's maiden name (found in the bank records), up pop two death records from the mid-twentieth century of Minnesotans whose parents had those exact names. This eventually allows us to determine that the Michael Egan found in the 1860 census in, of all places, Faxon, Minnesota is the New York Michael Egan from the 1850 enumeration. And we can make this link even though Michael Egan was only a customer of the Emigrant Bank for five months. Our longitudinal database is thus comprised of people who were bank depositors *at some point*, typically not for more than a

couple of years, rather than of people who remained customers of a bank in New York for a long time.⁷

Some might question whether bank customers such as those in our database could be representative of the Irish immigrant community overall, especially a community of Famine refugees renowned for their impoverished status upon arrival in the United States. But every available indicator suggests that the Emigrant Savings Bank customers were not very different than New York’s overall Irish immigrant population. Emigrant Bank depositors, for example, held pretty much the same jobs in pretty much the same proportion as other Irish-born New Yorkers. As Table 1 indicates, the bank’s customers may not have been a perfect cross-section of New York’s Irish immigrant community in terms of occupations, but they came fairly close. We account for this small difference in most of our analysis by not making assessments of the New York Irish community as a whole based solely on the Emigrant Bank’s customers. Instead, we primarily look at each strata of the city’s occupational hierarchy in isolation so that the fact that the bank had a high proportion of business owners or peddlers among its customers does not skew our findings.

Table 1 Irish-Born Males by Occupational Category: Emigrant Bank New York City Customers (1850-1858) Versus All New Yorkers in 1855

<i>OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY</i>	EMIGRANT BANK		ALL NEW YORK IRISH	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Professionals	20	0.4	16	0.3
Business Owners	397	8	310	6
Lower-Status White-Collar	370	7	260	5
Skilled Workers	1,738	35	2,022	38
Peddlers	255	5	90	2
Unskilled Workers	2,117	42	2,567	48
Others	91	2	73	1
Total	4,988	100	5,338	100

NOTES Left-hand columns based on Emigrant Savings Bank Depositor Database; right-hand columns are derived from a ten-percent sample of the 1855 New York State Census. Both are available at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/TK>. The “All New York Irish” columns do not include one of the city’s twenty-two wards because the returns for Ward Seventeen were lost.

Skeptics might also wonder if the Emigrant Bank's customers were the most upwardly mobile members of each occupational category in the New York Irish community. There is no evidence, however, to support the supposition that the Emigrant Bank's customers were more successful than other Irish immigrants. In recent years, social scientists have developed algorithms that track Americans from census to census and can therefore be used to create longitudinal databases for the measurement of social mobility over time. The most popular of these was created by a team led by Ran Abramitzky, Leah Boustan, and Katherine Eriksson. Another, which we feel generates fewer false links for mid-nineteenth-century Irish immigrants, was written by a team associated with the IPUMS project centered at the University of Minnesota. The Emigrant Bank customers were no more upwardly mobile from 1860 to 1870 than Irish immigrants living in New York who were tracked by these algorithms over the same period. In fact, the bank depositors were slightly *less* upwardly mobile. This finding, among others, gives us confidence that our database of Famine immigrants is fairly representative of New York's Famine Irish. Furthermore, because of the information in the bank's records, our database of tracked immigrants is far more reliable than any that an algorithm can generate.⁸

In order to understand the significance of where the Famine Irish were positioned at the ends of their lives in the American socio-economic hierarchy, it is important to determine where they started out. As far as we know, no scholars have previously identified the American occupations held by the Famine Irish at the point when they were still, in modern parlance, "fresh off the boat." But the unusual combination of data in the Emigrant Savings Bank records allows us to determine their initial occupational status in America with precision.

Table 2 Occupations Held Within One Year of Arrival in America by Male Irish Immigrants Living in New York and Brooklyn, 1850-1858

	PERCENTAGE IN EACH OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	MOST COMMON JOBS IN CATEGORY
Professionals	0.7%	Doctor, Lawyer
Business Owners	5%	Saloonkeeper, Grocer
Lower-Status White Collar	10%	Clerk, Civil Servant
Skilled Workers	31%	Tailor, Carpenter, Shoemaker
Petty Entrepreneurs	4%	Peddler, Huckster, Vendor
Unskilled	44%	Laborer, Waiter, Porter
Difficult to Categorize	4%	Nurse, Soldier, Miner
N	886	

NOTES This table includes 1) Irish-born adult males who opened an account at the Emigrant Bank from 1850 to 1858 within a year of arrival in America; 2) those who emigrated in 1849 or 1850 and were found in the 1850 U.S. census; and 3) those who emigrated in 1854 or 1855 and were found in the 1855 New York State census.

These occupational categories in our tables reflect our sorting of the immigrants’ hundreds of self-reported vocations into a meaningful yet fairly simple occupational hierarchy. Most of the categories are self-explanatory. The “Petty Entrepreneurs” category, however, consists of lowly vending occupations—predominantly self-described “peddlers” and street vendors—carried on by immigrants who did not rent a physical space for their businesses. The “Lower-Status White Collar” category is our name for an employment niche dominated by clerks, though it also includes civil servants, salesmen, and agents.⁹

Identifying the most notable takeaway from Table 2 depends on one’s expectations. Some might see the plurality of male Famine Irish immigrants, 44 percent, holding jobs requiring no prior training or capital investment as the most striking. Others, familiar with the historiography of the Famine Irish in America, might be surprised that *only* 44 percent of the Famine Irish held menial jobs upon arrival. A majority were either skilled tradesmen, non-manual workers of some sort, or traders.

Comparing the occupations of Emigrant Bank customers who opened accounts within a year of emigration to the vocations of bank depositors ten years after arriving in the United

States shows that it did not take very long for some Famine Irish men to begin finding higher-status—and usually higher-paying—work.

Table 3 Occupations of Male Irish Famine Refugees Living in New York and Brooklyn Who Opened Emigrant Savings Bank Accounts Within One Year of Immigration Compared to the Occupations of the Bank’s Irish-Born Customers Ten Years After Immigration

	OCCUPATION WITHIN ONE YEAR OF ARRIVAL	OCCUPATION TEN YEARS AFTER ARRIVAL
Professionals	0.7%	1.5%
Business Owners	5%	16%
Lower-Status White Collar	10%	11%
Skilled Workers	31%	35%
Petty Entrepreneurs	4%	4%
Unskilled	44%	29%
Difficult to Categorize	4%	3%
N	886	405

NOTES The “Ten Years After Arrival” column includes bank customers who emigrated from 1846 through 1855. Deaths do not account for most of the difference in the number of immigrants counted in the two columns. The right column records the occupations of fewer immigrants primarily because it includes only those immigrants whose occupations could be ascertained *exactly* ten years after their arrival in the U.S., but also because some of the immigrants in the left column provided too little biographical information to the bank, or had names that were too common, to allow them to be tracked with certainty. We counted those who left New York and bought farms as “business owners” because farming also involved investment of capital and the risk of its loss.

Ten years after arrival in America, the proportion of Famine immigrants in the ranks of the unskilled had fallen by a third, from 44 percent to 29 percent. Conversely, the proportion of business owners had tripled, to 16 percent. The size of the skilled Irish workforce had grown modestly as well.

Everyone in our database could be tracked for at least ten years in the United States, but 72 percent of them could be tracked for twenty or more years after their emigration. Comparing the last-known occupations of those tracked twenty or more years to the occupations of bank customers whose employment within a year of arrival is known shows a surprising amount of occupational mobility.

Table 4 Occupations of Male Famine Immigrants Living in New York and Brooklyn Within One Year of Immigration Compared to Occupations Ten Years After

Immigration and the Final-Known Occupations of Those Tracked Twenty Years or More Years¹⁰

	Occupation Within One Year of Arrival	Occupation Ten Years After Arrival	Last-Known Occupation of Those Tracked Twenty or More Years
Professionals	0.7%	1.5%	2%
Business Owners	5%	16%	31%
Lower-Status White Collar	10%	11%	11%
Skilled Workers	31%	35%	28%
Petty Entrepreneurs	4%	4%	2%
Unskilled	44%	29%	25%
Difficult to Categorize	4%	3%	1%
N	886	405	895

NOTES The number of immigrants counted in the middle column is smaller than that of the right-hand column because the middle column includes only those immigrants whose occupations could be ascertained *exactly* ten years after their arrival in the U.S. The right-hand column, in contrast, includes the final-known occupation of all immigrants whose vocations could be determined twenty or more years after they immigrated.

A quick glance at Table 4 might give one the impression that almost all the socio-economic mobility experienced by the Famine immigrants was upward. A closer look, however, reveals that there was a lot more movement between occupational categories (both up and down) than is readily apparent. Table 5 is an occupational transition matrix. The left-hand column shows the category of each male depositor's occupation when opening his bank account, while the top row shows his last-known occupation. The diagonal of the table shows what degree of persistence there was in each occupational category: for example, 69.4% of skilled workers remained skilled workers. The numbers below the diagonal show what rate of upward mobility took place from each occupational category, while the numbers above the diagonal show rates of downward mobility in each occupational category.

Table 5 Occupational Transition Matrix for Male Irish Famine Emigrant Savings Bank Depositors Who Opened Accounts from 1850 to 1858 and Whose American Occupations Could Be Tracked for Ten Years or More

First-Known U.S. Occupation	Total Persons	Last-Known Occupation (in percentages)						Difficulty to Classify
		Professionals	Business Owners	Lower-Status	Skilled Workers	Petty Entrepreneurs	Unskilled Workers	

				White Collar				
Professionals	11	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Business Owners	104	1.9	74.0	8.7	3.8	1.9	8.7	1.0
Lower-Status White Collar	102	5.9	45.1	46.0	1.0	0.0	2.0	0.0
Skilled Workers	444	0.2	21.2	4.1	69.4	0.2	4.5	0.4
Petty Entrepreneurs	66	0.0	27.3	13.6	3.0	28.8	24.3	3.0
Unskilled Workers	466	0.2	21.2	6.9	6.4	5.4	59.0	0.9
Difficult to Classify	10	0.0	10.0	10.0	20.0	0.0	40.0	20.0

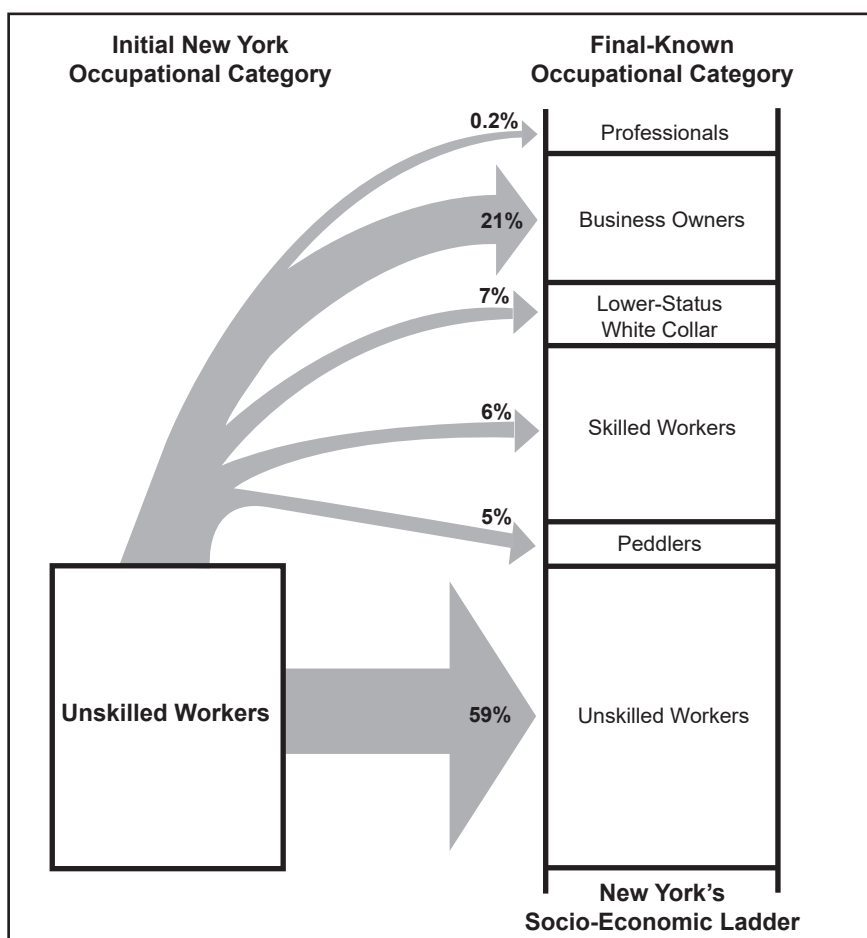
The occupational transition matrix reveals something not readily apparent in Tables 3 and 4, the fact that the Famine immigrants experienced both upward and downward occupational mobility. Yet the amount of downward movement is far lower than the upward movement. Overall, a third of the Famine Irish who lived at some point in New York or Brooklyn moved “up” the occupational ladder from their first-known American job to their last, while only 5 percent of them ended up lower than they started.¹¹

There was, however, significantly more occupational movement than a matrix can illustrate. Many immigrants moved in multiple directions on the occupational ladder over the course of their lifetimes. Peter Mathews from County Longford, for example, was trained as a millstone cutter and toiled in that trade in New York in the 1850s, but for much of the 1860s and early 1870s had to take work as a day laborer to make ends meet. Perhaps his marriage in the mid-1870s to Sarah Sillery (also a Longford native) and the six children they had in quick succession inspired Mathews to be more ambitious—by 1880 he had become a contractor and remained in that business until his death in 1893. Yet on the occupational matrix his stint in day labor goes unnoted. He is recorded as having merely moved up from skilled work to business ownership. Others had the opposite experience, initially moving up the ladder only to later fall back down. Edward Bradley from Donegal, for example, worked in New York as

a tinsmith before becoming a saloonkeeper in the 1860s. He had returned to tin work by 1870 but in 1880 he ran a junk shop before once again seeking employment as a tinsmith, the job he held in 1900 shortly before he retired. Bradley is recorded in the matrix as beginning and ending his life as a tinsmith, but his occupational history was far more complicated.¹²

The matrix—and Table 4 as well—also illustrate another important finding—the extent to which the proportion of immigrants in the unskilled category shrank, from almost half to only a quarter all Famine immigrants. That is a much larger decline than one might have imagined given the prevailing stereotypes held by both native-born Americans in the 1850s and academics today. By the ends of their careers, 40 percent of the immigrants who began in the ranks of the unskilled had managed to move up the socio-economic ladder.

Fig. 2 Final-Known Occupation of Male Famine-Era Irish Immigrants Whose First-Known American Jobs Were Unskilled and Were Tracked in the U.S. for At Least Ten Years



NOTES Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

One of the biggest surprises is how far these social climbers managed to ascend. More than two-thirds of those who advanced upward from the unskilled category moved into lower or higher-status “white-collar” jobs—some as clerks and agents, but most running their own small businesses as retail traders. About a quarter of these retail operations run by former unskilled workers were saloons, while grocery stores were the second most popular option (16 percent of all businesses opened by the unskilled). Patrick Wallace, for example, born forty-five miles north of Dublin in County Louth, emigrated to America at age thirty-three in 1846. He worked as a day laborer for most of his first decade in New York before opening a grocery on West 25th Street in 1856. He remained in business on that same street for the next quarter-century until his death at age sixty-nine in 1882. The third most common choice for unskilled workers who saved enough to become “business owners” was to leave New York City altogether and buy a farm in the Midwest—this was the business venture of about one-in-eight unskilled workers who became self-employed. That is what day laborers Peter Lynch and Michael Egan did when they moved to Minnesota.¹³

Not all Irish immigrants who made the transition to business ownership prospered—some operated very precarious enterprises. Ten percent of the unskilled who eventually opened a business kept junk shops, which were ubiquitous in immigrant neighborhoods, required very small capital outlays and, in most cases, produced very modest profits. Laborer John Harrington, a native of the Lansdowne estate who, like John Lane, lived for a time at 31 Baxter Street, had moved from day labor to the junk trade by 1863. He had to return to day labor to make ends meet in the early 1870s, but was back in the junk business in 1880. But others used the junk trade as a steppingstone to more lucrative retail operations. James Deasy from County Cork, who lived near the East River in Ward Seven, transitioned from day labor to junk sales during the Civil War, working in that business for at least eight years before

opening a “beer shop” and, by 1900, operating a hotel. Yet overall, junk dealers’ median savings were even lower than those of day laborers.¹⁴

It is important to recognize that even for the unskilled workers who remained on that rung of the socio-economic ladder for the rest of their lives, many moved from lower-paying, lower-status jobs in that category to occupations that paid significantly better. Large numbers of day laborers, for example, eventually became porters, cartmen, or coachmen, jobs that we have categorized as unskilled but which paid significantly better than day labor. Thomas Dundon, James O’Brien, Peter O’Leary, John Scanlon, and Michael Sullivan, all from County Cork, were a few of the day laborers who opened accounts at the Emigrant Bank and later became porters. Likewise, James Dunn from King’s County, Michael Molloy from County Galway, and Jeremiah Stokes from County Cork were day laborers who eventually worked driving a horse and cart. These jobs paid significantly better than day labor. The median porter saved 25 percent more in his Emigrant Savings Bank account than the median day laborer, and cartmen accrued 30 percent more than porters.¹⁵



Fig. 3 This advertisement contains a rare depiction of a mid-nineteenth-century porter at work. *Holbrook's Newark City Directory for the Year Ending April 1, 1877* (Newark, N.J., 1876), 2.

One rung above the unskilled on the Irish immigrant socio-economic ladder stood the peddlers, vendors, and hucksters. Those who have studied peddler's bank accounts might question placing them so low, because peddling could be *very* lucrative. The median savings of Irish peddlers with accounts at the Emigrant Savings Bank were more than double that of the skilled Irish tradesmen whom we placed one rung above peddlers on our occupational ladder. In fact, peddlers even accumulated 50 percent more savings than the clerks who dominate the "Lower-Status White-Collar" rung *two* levels above peddlers. Yet while the mean income of peddlers was high, this fact was not well known. Furthermore, because peddlers tramped the city streets (and often country roads) in search of sales in all kinds of weather with their goods often strapped to their backs, the rest of the community looked down on them. That they were renowned for shady dealings, shoddy goods, and lying to their

customers compounded their poor reputations. Consequently, peddlers' status in the community was quite low, and that explains their placement on our socio-economic ladder.¹⁶

Fig. 4 New York street peddlers as depicted in *Harper's Weekly* (September 19, 1868): 404.



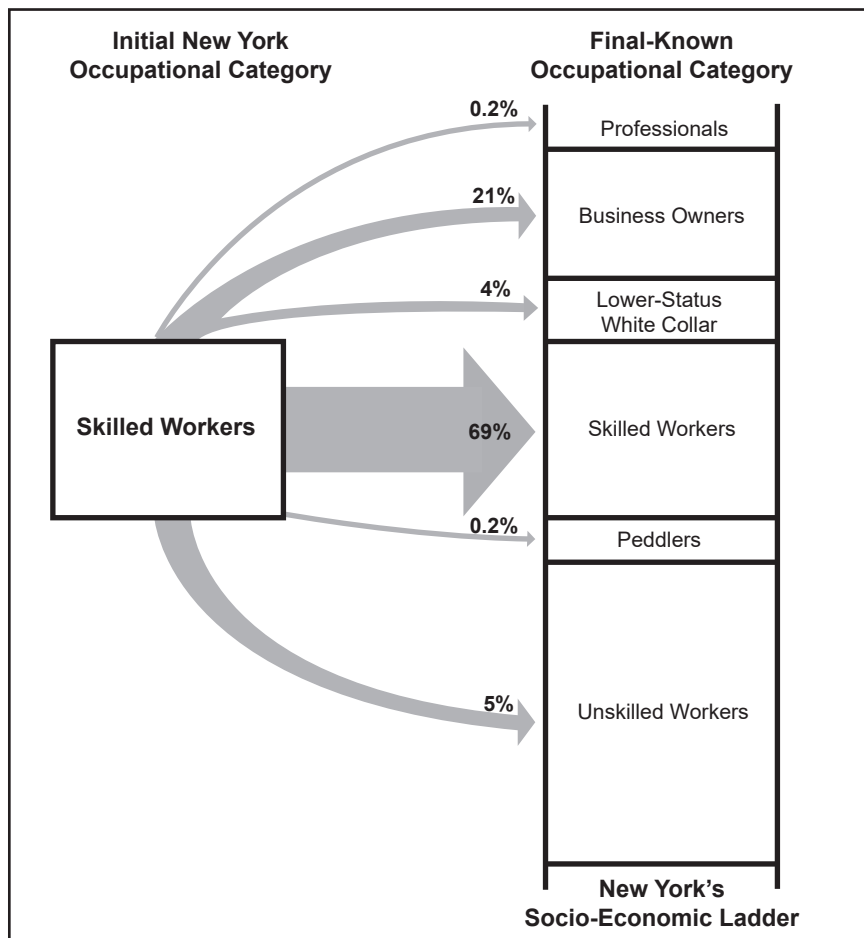
One of the reasons peddling was so lucrative was that peddlers could undercut their brick-and-mortar retail competitors—they did not have to pay the high rents other New Yorkers had expended to operate their businesses. Peddlers were also assiduous networkers. Newly arrived immigrants who decided to peddle would find a countryman with experience in the trade from whom to learn the ropes and find out which parts of the city or countryside were not already being served by other peddlers offering the same wares. As some peddlers became too old to tramp the streets themselves, they switched to wholesaling goods to newly arrived immigrants looking to peddle. Immigrants from certain parts of Ireland specialized in peddling certain goods. Newcomers from a single parish in County Tyrone in northern Ireland, for example, came to dominate the vending of charcoal throughout New York City, typically selling it from horse-drawn wagons.¹⁷

Most Famine immigrants who took up peddling probably did not intend to make it their life's work. This fact probably explains why only 29 percent of the Irish newcomers who started out in New York as peddlers were still in that line of work at the end of their working lives (by far the lowest rate of occupational persistence among all our categories). Many peddlers—41 percent of those who patronized the Emigrant Savings Bank—eventually moved into some kind of “white-collar” work. Some became clerks of one kind or another, but most took their peddling profits and sales experience and used them to open businesses with fixed locations. James and Michael Devlin from Tyrone, for example, took the \$1,100 they saved peddling charcoal in the 1850s, moved across the Hudson River to Jersey City, and built a “charcoal factory” in order to become suppliers to other charcoal peddlers. Yet peddling was a precarious enterprise—buying too much stock in a suddenly unpopular product or going into too much debt might cripple a trader's business and force him into wage work. Michael Hart from County Sligo, for instance, a self-described “huckster” in 1857, was working as a longshoreman by the end of 1870. A widower with two small children at that point, he may have sought the steadier income that wage work could provide. A quarter of the Irish immigrants who worked as peddlers when they opened Emigrant Savings Bank accounts ended their working lives, like Hart, in the ranks of the unskilled.¹⁸

Skilled workers occupied the rung above peddlers in New York's Irish immigrant socioeconomic ladder and among members of this group, too, there was substantial upward mobility. Sixty-nine percent of tradesmen—primarily tailors, carpenters, and shoemakers—toiled for wages in these fields for their entire American working careers. But of the remainder, five artisans moved up the socio-economic ladder for every one who fell to a lower category. Furthermore, there were certainly more “journeyman” shoemakers and tailors (who worked for wages) who became “master” craftsmen (employing others and selling their finished goods to wholesale and retail customers) than we can readily identify. In many cases

we can document through other sources the fact that artisans who continued to identify themselves to census takers as a “shoemaker” or “tailor” were no longer employees working for wages. Other such cases surely escaped our attention.

Fig. 5 Occupational Mobility of New York’s Male Famine Immigrants Whose First-Known Job in New York Was in a Skilled Trade



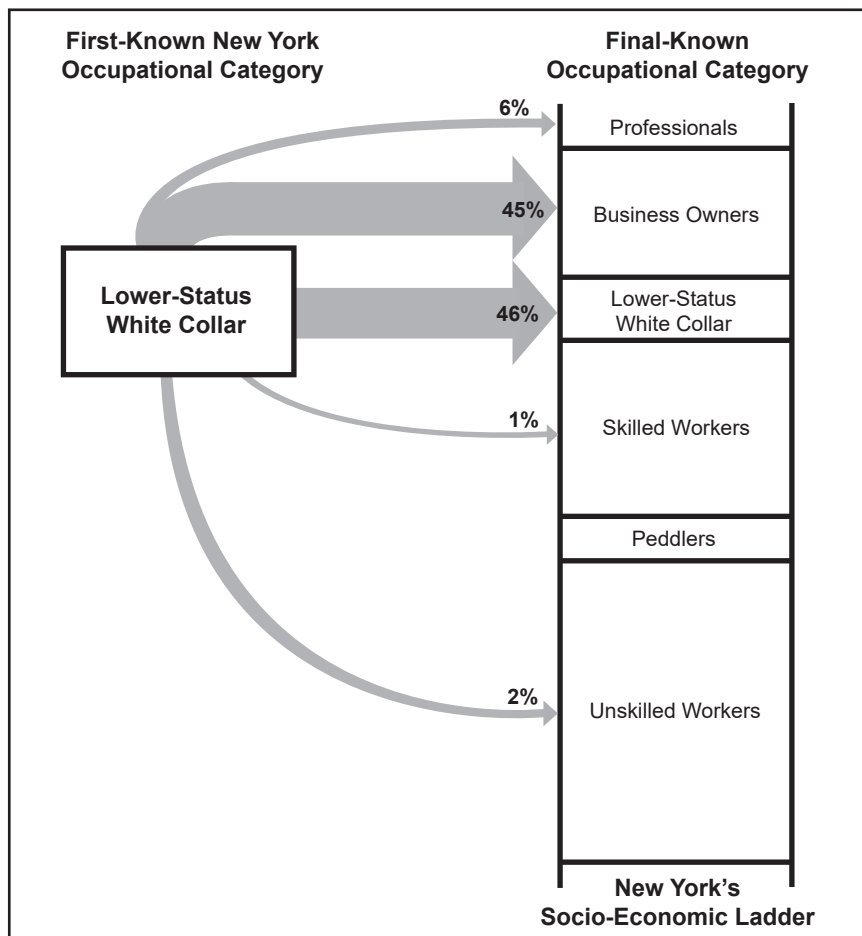
Those who moved up from the artisan category often turned their wage work into a business in which they sold the very items they had once made for other retailers or wholesalers. Dubliner Patrick J. Short toiled initially as a painter in New York, but by 1870 ran a Manhattan paint shop. Blacksmith Patrick McCusker from County Tyrone opened a stable. Bakers Bernard Callan from County Monaghan and Patrick Fitzpatrick from Queen’s County eventually operated Manhattan bake shops.¹⁹

But for every artisan who parlayed his artisanal training into a business, there were two whose choice of retail operation lacked such logic. Baker James F. Slattery from County Clare became a contractor. Shoemaker John Kernan from Longford became a hotel keeper. Carpenter John O’Shaughnessy from the city of Limerick became a grocer. And boilermaker

Francis Lawler from Queen's County, coffin maker Benjamin Callan from County Monaghan, gold refiner Edward Dooley from County Galway, painter John Keena from Westmeath, printer James Cleary from County Kildare, tailor James Doran from County Wexford, and wood turner John O'Flaherty from County Tipperary all became New York bar owners. It is understandable that so many tradesmen sought to become barkeepers—the liquor trade was a very profitable business. Irish-born saloonkeepers saved more money in their Emigrant Savings Bank accounts than all other Irish immigrants other than doctors and lawyers.²⁰

About one in ten male Famine immigrants began their American work lives one rung above the tradesmen on New York's socio-economic ladder as lower-status white-collar workers, a category made up primarily of office and retail clerks. Within this group, too, there was surprising upward mobility—more so than for any other group. Fifty-one percent of those who began in this classification moved higher still—primarily into the business-owners category. Indeed, about as many Irish immigrants who first worked in New York as clerks became business owners (45 percent) as remained as clerks. Some clearly spent their clerkships learning a business and then opened their own in the same field. Grocery clerk Peter Warren from County Roscommon started his own grocery. Drug clerk James Quin from County Antrim opened a drug store. Bookshop clerk Patrick O'Shea became a publisher, while liquor store clerk Michael McAnnena from Tyrone eventually operated his own dram shop. In most cases, however, it is not clear what kind of clerkship the newly arrived immigrants held before becoming business owners.²¹

Fig. 6. Occupational Mobility of New York's Male Famine Immigrants Who Held Lower-Status White-Collar Jobs When They Opened Accounts at the Emigrant Savings Bank from 1850 to 1858



In some instances, bank and other records make it clear that immigrants who arrived in America with enough money to immediately open their own businesses nonetheless chose to work as clerks upon arrival, probably to “learn the ropes” of American retailing before putting their own hard-earned savings at risk. Brothers Thomas, Peter, and Patrick Muldoon from County Louth had a rich uncle, Peter McLoughlin, who had settled in New York a quarter century before them and made a fortune in liquor sales and real estate investments in New York’s Irish neighborhoods. “This is the best country in the world,” McLoughlin wrote to his kin in Ireland in 1829. “There is no want; there is room and a living for all but you may depend they must work for it.” McLoughlin could have easily given or loaned his nephews enough money to start a business upon their arrival in New York in 1852. But all three brothers worked as clerks, for different employers, for three years before they opened a

grocery business together (just four doors down from where their uncle had operated a saloon) in 1855. They eventually ran a second grocery and a cigar shop as well.²²

Clerk-turned-business owner Peter Farrell also arrived in New York with more money than the typical Famine immigrant. A native of County Longford, Farrell was about twenty years old when he landed in New York on July 1, 1850 with his mother Mary and younger sister Rosanna. That they made the trans-Atlantic journey in a second-class cabin rather than in steerage like almost all other Famine immigrants indicates that they had significant savings. Twenty-six days after the Farrells' arrival, the census taker found Peter living in the heavily Irish Brooklyn neighborhood just west of the Navy Yard and working as a grocer's clerk. By 1853, when he opened an Emigrant Savings Bank account with an initial deposit of \$74, he was operating his own grocery in the same locale. Farrell apparently had a knack for business. In 1860 he reported owning \$7,000 in Brooklyn real estate and \$2,000 in other assets. Four years later, as the Civil War convulsed the nation, Farrell started two more businesses—a mortuary and a livery stable too. “Popularly known and widely respected” for his “unfailing good nature and cheery disposition,” Farrell managed all three businesses (with the help of three sons) until his death in 1894²³

Many of the Irish immigrants who began and ended their American careers as clerks made failed attempts to start a business. Michael Mara from County Tipperary, for example, had already worked as a clerk in Ireland before landing that same job in New York within months of his arrival in 1857. The bachelor was a determined saver—his bank balance rose from \$30 three months after his arrival in America to \$900 by the middle of 1861, at which point he invested most of his savings in two liquor stores in downtown Brooklyn and got married. The shops did not do as well as Mara had hoped, and after two decades in the liquor business (and not long after he was arrested for beating his wife) Mara returned to Manhattan

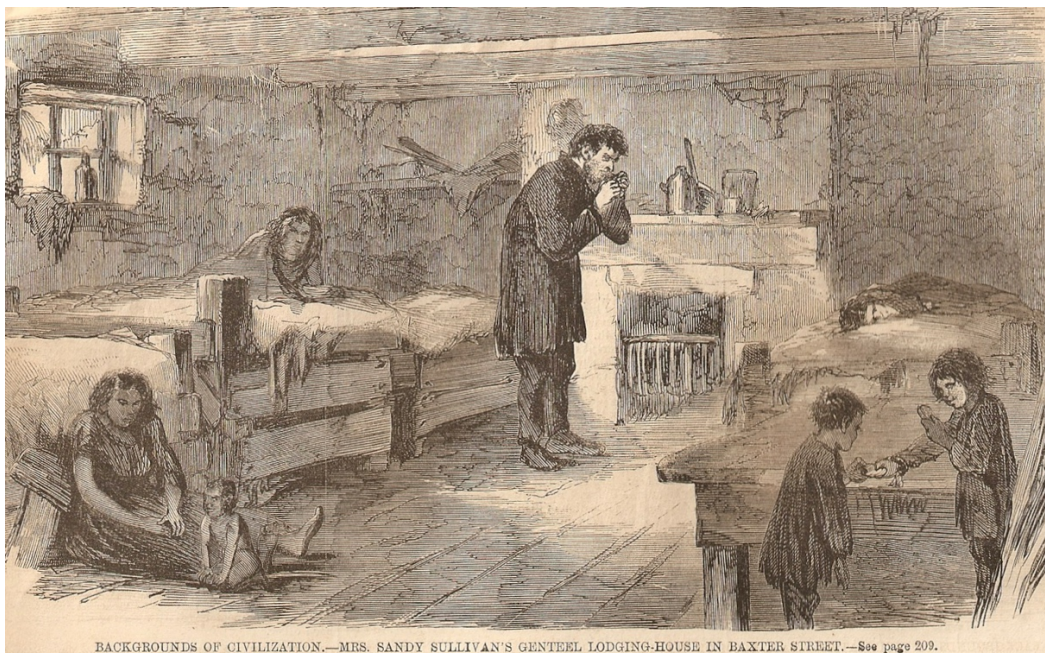
(with his wife and their five children) and worked as a clerk for the last fifteen years of his career. He retired a few years before his death in 1905.²⁴

Anthony Geraghty was another clerk who failed in business, but his story had a happier ending than Mara's. Geraghty arrived in New York at about age twenty-three in 1851 with his older brother Thomas, who found work as a day laborer. Anthony, however, landed a less physically strenuous job as a clerk, a position he held for most of the 1850s. In about 1858, Anthony opened his own business, becoming a produce dealer at the huge Washington Market, but a year later he converted his space there into a liquor shop and soon opened a second on the East Side. Yet Geraghty did not prosper in the liquor trade—by late 1860 he had gone out of business at both locations. Fortunately for Geraghty, who was still only thirty years old at that point, he was able to find a new career. Perhaps through the political connections he had made in the liquor trade, Geraghty landed a job in 1861 as a grammar-school teacher on Manhattan's Upper East Side. He turned out to be a gifted teacher and he remained at the same public school for twenty-six years until he died of heart disease in 1887. Geraghty's *New York Times* obituary called him "painstaking, energetic, and very popular with his pupils," surely an epitaph of which any teacher could be proud.²⁵

As one might expect, the only occupational group that experienced more downward than upward mobility was one that sat almost at the top of the socio-economic ladder. There were many circumstances that might knock a business owner down the ladder but, especially in the case of Irish immigrants, few realistic paths upward into the professions (the most common route up for this group was for druggists who became doctors). As one might expect, the downwardly mobile entrepreneurs came disproportionately from the ranks of those who operated the most precarious businesses—boardinghouses and junk shops. John McMahon from Kerry ran a boardinghouse by the East River throughout the 1850s, but by 1863 he earned his living as a day laborer. Charles O'Brien from the city of Limerick

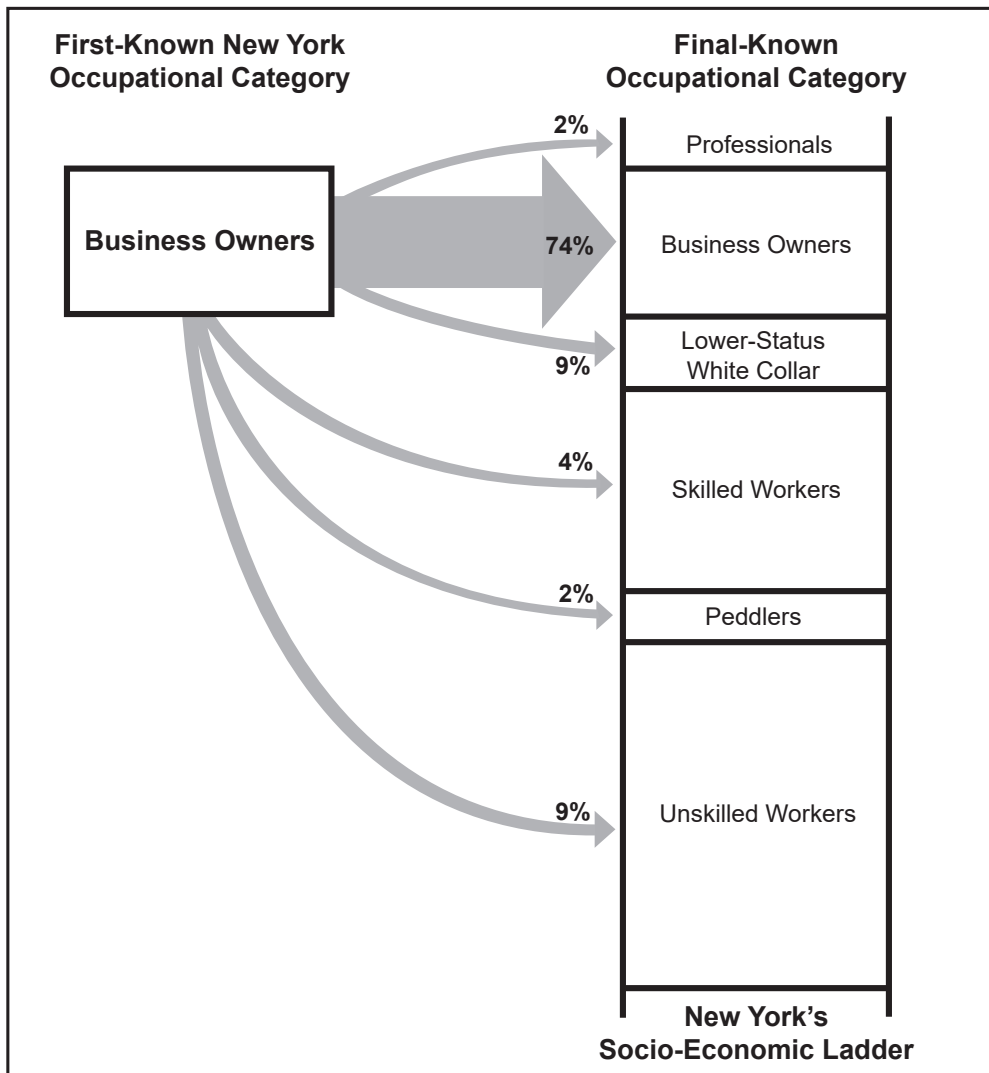
operated a junk store (also near the East River waterfront) in 1854, but in 1867 he too was a laborer. Even some saloonkeepers failed and returned to the ranks of the unskilled. One-time liquor retailer John Sharkey from Roscommon, for example, was supporting himself as a laborer in 1860 and as a cartman in 1870. Many of these failed businessmen must have worked in unskilled occupations when they arrived in New York, opened their bank accounts at around the time they went into business (thus making their business ventures their first-known American occupations), and then quickly fell back to the ranks of the unskilled when they discovered they could not keep their businesses afloat.²⁶

Fig. 7 The boardinghouse run by the family of Emigrant Bank depositor Mary Sullivan Shea, as depicted in *New York Illustrated News* (February 18, 1860): 216.



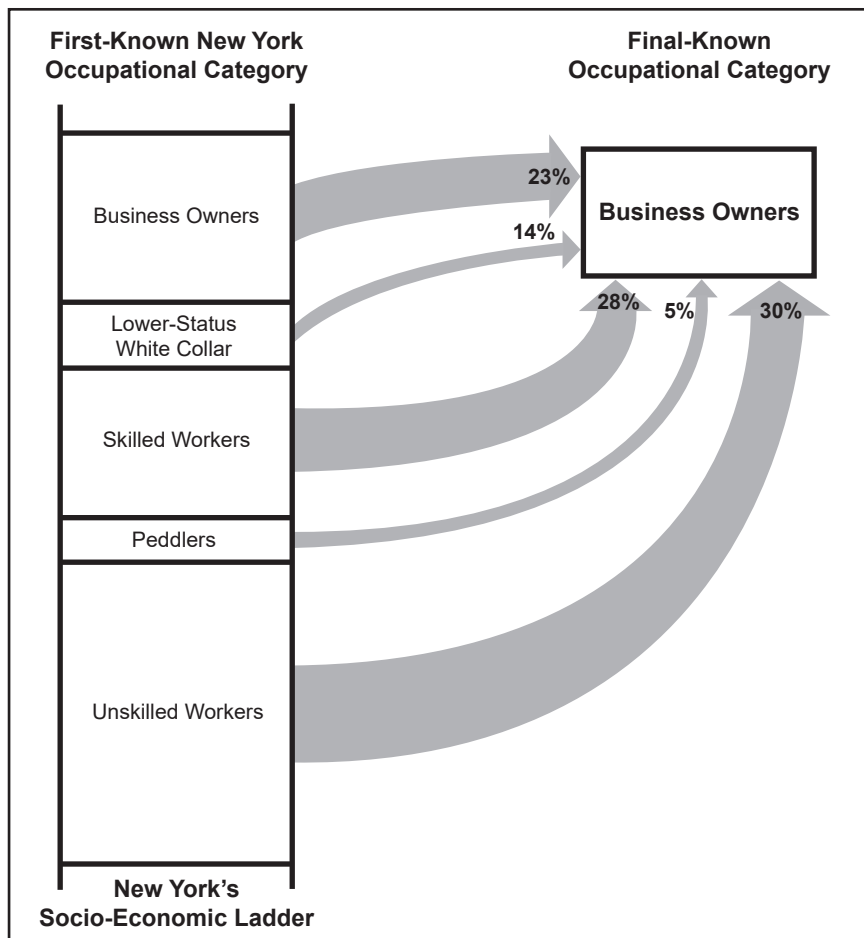
BACKGROUNDS OF CIVILIZATION.—MRS. SANDY SULLIVAN'S GENTEEL LODGING-HOUSE IN BAXTER STREET.—See page 209.

Fig. 8 Occupational Mobility of New York's Male Famine Immigrants Whose First-Known American Employment Was as a Business Owner



One of the most interesting aspects of Irish business ownership involves where they began their working careers. Only 23 percent of those who finished their lives as business owners started out in that line of work in America. Fourteen percent got their starts in New York as clerks, 28 percent had first worked as artisans, and 30 percent had begun in the ranks of the unskilled. Both the high proportion of Famine immigrants who ended their working lives as entrepreneurs and the diversity of their paths to business ownership are surprising and notable.

Fig. 9 Occupational Origins of New York's Male Famine Immigrants Who Ended Their Careers as Business Owners



Perhaps it is not wholly unexpected that the proportion of professionals among the Famine immigrants would rise over two decades, but some would be surprised to learn that any Famine immigrants who arrived in America as adults could become doctors or lawyers (one might consider priests a member of this category, but we excluded them from our database altogether). The socio-economic barriers to the professions were apparently lower back then than they are today. Patrick Keady, for example, arrived in New York at age nineteen in 1851 from County Roscommon and for the next decade supported his widowed mother Margaret as a house painter. Keady supposedly taught himself proper penmanship and grammar after arriving in America and around 1862 he managed to parlay those skills into a job as a stenographer for the *New York Daily News*. Soon after that, he became a reporter. Keady was also active in the city's workingman's rights movement, giving speeches at several outdoor rallies. This notoriety helped Keady, who like most of his fellow Irish

immigrants had joined the Democratic Party, win election in 1866 representing Brooklyn in the New York State Assembly, where he won praise for his advocacy of tenement reform and an eight-hour workday. Like Abraham Lincoln, Keady only manifested interest in becoming an attorney after his experience serving as a state legislator. Following the Civil War, the bachelor read law while clerking at a Brooklyn law firm and was admitted to the bar by 1870. Keady married soon thereafter and practiced law in Brooklyn for the next several decades. In 1898 the mayor appointed Keady to a city judgeship, which the onetime house painter held until his death in 1908.²⁷

Keady's case was unusual. Most of the future lawyers appear to have begun their American work lives fairly high up the socio-economic ladder as clerks. The only immigrant out of the 1,200 in our database who moved from the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder to the very top was Thomas O'Toole Hartigan, who emigrated from Rathmore (pop. 157) in rural County Limerick in 1849 at age twenty-seven. By 1853, Hartigan had married schoolteacher Ann Leonard and was living on New York's Upper East Side working as a "newspaper carrier." In that year he opened an Emigrant Savings Bank account with an initial deposit of just \$5, well below the median opening deposit of \$51. By the end of the decade, however, Hartigan had found work as a clerk and sometime during the 1860s the Hartigans moved to Massachusetts, where Thomas worked as a traveling salesman. After 1870 they relocated again, this time to Chicago, where Thomas managed to become a lawyer and later also a real estate investor and political operative. He remained an attorney there into his mid-seventies before passing away, at about age eighty-one, in 1903.²⁸

Could Thomas Hartigan have made his ascent from the very bottom to the pinnacle of the American socio-economic ladder had he remained in New York City? Even before the Famine immigrants began arriving on America's shores, New York newspaper editor Horace Greeley had begun telling those on the East Coast who had lots of ambition but little savings

to leave big East Coast cities and move west for the most opportunities to improve their circumstances. Native-born Americans believed that the Irish ignored such advice, “huddl[ing] together in the large cities of the seaboard” with “no plans for the future,” as one put it in 1855. Yet many Irish immigrants heeded Greeley’s call. More than a quarter of the residents of New York in our database can be shown to have left the city for some other locale, but only about one in six left the New York City metropolitan area. The true proportion of Famine immigrants who initially settled in New York and then moved away is certainly higher. Many Irish immigrants would have lived in New York for only weeks or months before settling elsewhere. Even among the immigrants who stayed in New York a bit longer and opened bank accounts, those who relocated before getting married are difficult to trace. So aside from figures we can derive through mathematical inference, we can never truly know what percentage of Irish immigrants lived in New York before settling in other parts of the United States.²⁹

Nonetheless, the lives of those whose moves we can document suggest that the west really did offer more opportunities for advancement, even for the Famine immigrants. Skilled workers were especially likely to leave New York—about a quarter of the Famine immigrants in our database who began their lives in New York as skilled workers relocated. These “movers” were a third more likely to eventually own their own businesses (and enjoy the prestige and enhanced income that came with that status) in their new locations than the “stayers” who remained in New York and Brooklyn. Leaving New York was even beneficial for the Irish who lacked vocational skills. Thirty-three percent of these movers became business owners, versus 18 percent of the unskilled who stayed in New York or Brooklyn. While we cannot compare the savings of those who closed their Emigrant Bank accounts and left New York to those who remained behind, real estate ownership is an alternate means of comparing the wealth accumulation of the two groups. In this area, the benefits of leaving

New York are even more readily apparent. Fifty-seven percent of the movers in our database managed to purchase real estate by 1870, compared to only 14 percent of those who stayed in New York and Brooklyn. Such purchases might not reflect a lot of wealth accumulation. Some Famine immigrants purchased land in states like Wisconsin or Minnesota for as little as \$150. Still, in this era, such investments were in most cases safer and more likely to appreciate than buying a business or (in the days before deposit insurance) putting the money in a bank.

While the lives of the Famine immigrants in New York were undoubtedly difficult, the view that most or all of these newcomers were locked into lives of “poverty and hardship” does not seem justified. Of the Famine immigrants who began their lives in New York at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder, 40 percent ended their careers on a higher rung—and most of these social climbers moved into white-collar occupations. Those who started their American working lives as peddlers or clerks enjoyed even higher rates of upward mobility. Skilled tradesmen only moved to a higher occupational rung about 25 percent of the time, but that fact may reflect more dedication to their trades than a lack of opportunity. Even so, among those who ended their American careers as business owners, more had started out in America as tradesmen than on any other rung of the socio-economic ladder. There was, to be sure, some downward mobility as well, especially among those who failed at running their own businesses. But six Famine immigrants experienced upward mobility in America for every one whose occupational status declined after arrival. By the 1870s, 44 percent of the surviving Famine immigrants had landed white-collar jobs as clerks, civil servants, or (in three out of four cases) business owners—primarily running saloons, groceries, other small retail enterprises.

New York's Famine Irish clearly had a greater variety of employment opportunities than scholars have previously acknowledged. Nearly half started out in the ranks of the unskilled, but they had strategies they could employ for moving up the occupational ladder, and large numbers of them successfully implemented those strategies. Despite the impression of most native-born Americans, these immigrants did have "plans for the future." A quarter of the male Famine immigrants, it is true, started at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy and stayed there for the rest of their lives. Those were immigrants like Denis Sullivan from Kenmare. His life story—involving decades of day labor in New York—was not uncommon, yet it was not the norm. The vast majority of the male Famine immigrants—the other 75 percent—either found higher-status work outside the ranks of the unskilled or were never consigned to the bottom rung of New York's socioeconomic ladder at all. They did not all enjoy the success of barkeeper John Lane, but most were not trapped in poverty either. Many were able to move a rung or two up the American socio-economic ladder, justifying the conviction of most Famine immigrants that the United States was indeed "the best country in the world."

ENDNOTES

¹ Testbook entries for Denis Sullivan and John Lane, accounts 6473 and 11910, Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank Records, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library (also available on Ancestry.com); Tyler Anbinder, “From Famine to Five Points: Lord Lansdowne’s Irish Tenants Encounter North America’s Most Notorious Slum,” *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 351-353, 360-365.

² For Sullivan, see testbook entries for accounts 38815, 45183, and 65681, Emigrant Bank Records; family 86, dwelling 16, district 5, ward 6, New York County, 1855 New York State Census, Old Records Division, New York County Clerk’s Office; family 1349, dwelling 271, district 2, ward 6, New York County, 1860 U.S. census; family 100, dwelling 22, district 6, ward 6, New York County, 1870 U.S. census; family 107, dwelling 42, enumeration district 41, 1880 U.S. census. For Lane, see family 156, dwelling 31, district 3 (second division), ward 6, 1855 New York State census; family 1213, dwelling 243, district 2, ward 6, New York County, 1860 U.S. census; family 81, dwelling 23, district 10, ward 16, 1870 U.S. census; family 408, dwelling 73, enumeration district 328, New York County, 1880 U.S. census; *Trow’s New York City Directory for the Year Ending May 1, 1861*, H. Wilson, comp. (New York, 1860), 489; *Trow’s New York City Directory for the Year Ending May 1, 1871*, H. Wilson, comp. (New York, 1870), 685; “Fought by the Deathbed,” *New York Sun*, June 4, 1894, 3. All U.S. census population schedules are part of Record Group 29 at the National Archives but are available online for free at Familysearch.org. The New York State censuses are available online at Ancestry.com.

³ Oscar Handlin, *Boston’s Immigrants, 1790–1880: A Study in Acculturation* (1941; repr. ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 55 (quotation), 69; Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York, 1985), 314-316 (quotation), 321-322; Hasia Diner, “‘The Most Irish City in the Union’: The Era of the Great Migration, 1844-1877,” in Ronald Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher, eds., *The New York Irish* (Baltimore, 1996). 98; Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City*. (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 223; Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970*.

(Cambridge, Mass., 1973), 89, 142-3, 247; Steven Herscovici, “Progress Amid Poverty: Economic Opportunity in Antebellum Newburyport,” *Journal of Economic History*, 57 (1997), 484-488; Joseph P. Ferrie, *Yankeys Now: Immigrants in the Antebellum U.S., 1840-1860* (New York, 1999).

⁴ Tyler Anbinder, “Moving Beyond ‘Rags to Riches’: New York’s Irish Famine Immigrants and their Surprising Savings Accounts,” *Journal of American History* 99 (2012): 741-770; Anbinder, Cormac Ó Gráda, and Simone A. Wegge, “Networks and Opportunities: A Digital History of Ireland’s Great Famine Refugees in New York,” *American Historical Review* 124 (2019), 1590-1629. Mobility has keenly interested economists, historians, and sociologists since at least the writings of Tocqueville, Marx and Weber. See Marco H. D. Van Leeuwen, “Social Inequality and Mobility in History: Introduction,” *Continuity and Change* 24 (2009): 399–419. Notable works on this subject by economists include Ferrie, *Yankeys Now*; ; Joseph P. Ferrie and Jason Long, “Intergenerational Occupational Mobility in Great Britain and in the U.S. since 1850.” *American Economic Review* 103 (2013): 1109-1137; Ran Abramitzky, Leah Platt Boustan and Katherine Eriksson, “A Nation of Immigrants: Assimilation and Economic Outcomes in the Age of Mass Migration,” *Journal of Political Economy* 122 (2014): 467-506; R. Chetty, N. Hendren, P. Kline, and E. Saez, “Where Is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129 (2014): 1553–1623; William J. Collins and Ariell Zimran, “The Economic Assimilation of Irish Famine Migrants to the United States,” *Explorations in Economic History* 74 (2019): 1-22; Dylan Shane Connor, “Class Background, Reception Context, and Intergenerational Mobility: A Record Linkage and Surname Analysis of the Children of Irish Immigrants,” *International Migration Review* 54 (2020): 4-34.

⁵ We created two databases that are pertinent to this study. What we call the “Emigrant Savings Bank Depositor Database” contains information on all 15,700 individuals who opened accounts from September 30, 1850 to October 2, 1858. In contrast, the “Emigrant Savings Bank Mobility Database” is comprised only of male Irish immigrants who arrived in America after 1845 at age fifteen or older, lived at some point in New York City or Brooklyn, and whose occupations in the United States could be tracked for ten or more years. Both databases are available in Excel format at dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/TK.

⁶ Emigrant Savings Bank Mobility Database.

⁷ For census enumerators being permitted to estimate ages, see *Eighth Census, United States—1860: Instructions to U.S. Marshals* (Washington, 1860), 14.

⁸ Ran Abramitzky, Roy Mill, and Santiago Pérez, “Linking Individuals Across Historical Sources: A Fully Automated Approach,” *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 53, no. 2 (2020), 94-111; Ran Abramitzky, Leah Boustan, Katherine Eriksson, James J. Feigenbaum, and Santiago Pérez, “Automated Linking of Historical Data,” *Journal of Economic Literature* (forthcoming 2021); Jonas Helgertz, Joseph R. Price, Jacob Wellington, Kelly Thompson, Steven Ruggles and Catherine Fitch, “A New Strategy for Linking Historical Censuses: A Case Study for the IPUMS Multigenerational Longitudinal Panel.” IPUMS Working Paper 2020-03, <https://doi.org/10.18128/IPUMS2020-03>. The algorithm used by Abramitzky *et al.*, as well as the census links generated by it can be found at <https://censuslinkingproject.org/>. We used version 1.0 of their dataset and a beta version of the IPUMS census links provided by the authors. The database tracking to 1870 Irish immigrants who lived in New York and Brooklyn as of 1860 that was generated by the Abramitzky *et al.* algorithm can be found at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/TK>, as can our database of Emigrant Bank depositors modified to show only those who could be tracked from the 1860 to 1870 censuses, making possible a true “like-to-like” comparison of results. A full analysis of selectivity bias issues in our mobility work can be found in an appendix to our work located at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/TK>.

⁹ We recognize that there are alternative occupational classification schemes, with the HISCO system being the best known. But ours is a bit simpler and better fits mid-nineteenth-century New York. Marco H. D. van Leeuwen, Ineke Maas, and Andrew Miles, *HISCO: Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations* (Leuven, 2002). A list of the vocations that we grouped into each occupation category can be found at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/TK>.

¹⁰ Note that because we do not know the jobs most immigrants had within one year of arrival in the United States, most of the immigrants whose occupations are conveyed in the right-hand column are not counted in the left-hand column. The first-known American occupations of the immigrants in the right-hand column are as follows: 8 professionals (0.9% of the total), 74 business owners (8%), 88

lower-status white-collar workers (10%), 347 skilled workers (39%), 45 petty entrepreneurs (5%), 325 unskilled (36%), and 8 (0.9% of the total) too difficult to categorize. We know the occupation within a year of arrival for only 11% of the immigrants in the righthand column. For another 11% of them, the first American occupation we can ascertain dates from nine to twelve years after arrival. The median is 4.5 years. We feel confident that if we were able to identify the first American jobs of all the immigrants in the right-hand column, they would not be very different than those of the immigrants in the left-hand column for whom this information could be determined.

¹¹ The median number of years that these immigrants were tracked from their arrival in the United States to their last documented American occupation was twenty-two years.

¹² Testbook entries for accounts 12602, 13007, 54928, and 59521 (Mathews), 11657, 18018, and 31406 (Bradley), Emigrant Savings Bank Records; for Mathews see family 1546, dwelling 469, district 3, ward 20, New York County, 1860 U.S. census; family 787, dwelling 265, district 6, ward 20, New York County, 1870 U.S. census; family 286, dwelling 75, election district 389, New York County, 1880 U.S. census; death notice for Peter Mathews, *New York Herald*, July 26, 1893, 1; family 51, dwelling 11, election district 271, New York County, 1900 U.S. census (for the Mathews' six children); for Bradley see family 1650, dwelling 302, district 2, ward 11, New York County, 1860 U.S. census; family 121, dwelling 41, district 23, ward 11, New York County, 1870 U.S. census; family 147, dwelling 31, election district 140, New York County, 1880 U.S. census; family 612, dwelling 68, election district 292, New York County, 1900 U.S. census; death certificate for Edward J. Bradley, May 18, 1912, Bronx, New York, in Index to New York City Death Certificates, Ancestry.com.

¹³ Emigrant Savings Bank Depositor Database. For Wallace, see accounts 1680, 11800, and 29538, Emigrant Savings Bank Records; family 353, dwelling 53, enumeration district 347, New York County, 1880 U.S. census; death notice for Patrick Wallace, *New York Herald*, August 27, 1882, 13.

¹⁴ Emigrant Savings Bank Mobility Database.

¹⁵ Emigrant Savings Bank Mobility Database. For comparative savings rates of New York workers in various occupations, see Anbinder, Ó Gráda, and Wegge, "Networks and Opportunities," 1615.

¹⁶ Very little scholarship exists on Irish peddlers, but their reputation can be gleaned from accounts in the New York press. See, for example, “Scene Around the Docks,” *New York Herald*, August 20, 1848, 3; “Labor and the Laborers: Street Trader,” *New York Tribune*, December 2, 1853, 3; “The Huckster-Women,” *The Harbinger* (October 25, 1845), 313-314..

¹⁷ For the propensity of immigrants from the Bodoney Lower parish of County Tyrone to become charcoal peddlers, see Emigrant Savings Bank Depositor Database.

¹⁸ For the Devlin brothers, see accounts 14349, 14350, 22353, 24319, 32352, 36322, and 53734, Emigrant Savings Bank Records; family 775, dwelling 148, district 8, ward 7, New York County, 1855 New York State census; family 1700, dwelling 409, district 5, ward 7, New York County, 1860 U.S. census; family 435, dwelling 130, enumeration district 1, Jersey City, Hudson County, New Jersey, 1880 U.S. census; “To Contest the Election,” *New York Tribune*, April 12, 1890, 1 (“charcoal factory”); death notice for Michael Devlin, *New York Herald*, July 8, 1890, 1; “James Devlin,” *Jersey City Evening Journal*, February 21, 1899, 8. For Hart, see accounts 14152 and 20279, Emigrant Savings Bank Records; family 2066, dwelling 419, district 1, ward 1, New York County, 1860 U.S. census; family 115, dwelling 69, district 1, ward 3, New York County, 1870 U.S. census; page 17, district 5, ward 3, New York County, 1870 U.S. census (second enumeration); family 263, dwelling 45, enumeration district 6, New York County, 1880 U.S. census.

¹⁹ Emigrant Savings Bank Mobility Database.

²⁰ Emigrant Savings Bank Mobility Database Average savings of saloonkeepers compared to other Irish immigrants from Anbinder, Ó Gráda, and Wegge, “Networks and Opportunities,” 1615.

²¹ The scholarship on clerks is rapidly expanding, but none of it focuses on Irish immigrants. See Thomas Augst, *The Clerk’s Tale: Young Men and the Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, 2003); and Brian P. Luskey, *On the Make: Clerks and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 2010).

²² Entries for Peter McLoughlin, *Longworth’s American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory* (New York, 1834), 461, *Longworth’s American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory* (New York, 1837), 410, *Longworth’s American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory* (New York, 1841), 468, and *Doggett’s New-York City Directory for 1845 & 1846* (New

York, 1845), 236; Peter P. McLoughlin, *Father Tom: Life and Lectures of Rev. Thomas P. McLoughlin* (New York, 1919), 10 (quote); “Death of Peter McLoughlin, Esq.,” *New-York Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register*, February 11, 1854, 5; “Sale of the Estate of Peter McLoughlin,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1864, 8. For the Muldoons, see Emigrant Savings Bank Mobility Database.

²³ Account 3819, Emigrant Savings Bank Records; entry for Farral family, manifest of the *Isaac Wright*, July 1, 1850, New York Passenger Lists, Record Group 36, National Archives, accessed via Ancestry.com; family 439, dwelling 233, ward 5, Brooklyn, Kings County, 1850 U.S. census; family 1607, dwelling 937, district 2, ward 10, Brooklyn, Kings County, 1860 U.S. census; entries for Peter Farrell, *The Brooklyn City Directory: The Year Ending May 1st, 1864* (Brooklyn, 1863), 146, and *The Brooklyn City Directory for the Year Ending May 1st, 1865* (Brooklyn, 1864), 133; family 151, dwelling 82, ward 10, Brooklyn, Kings County, 1870 U.S. census; family 67, dwelling 20, enumeration district 78, Kings County, 1880 U.S. census; “Peter Farrell Laid at Rest,” *Brooklyn Citizen*, February 17, 1894, 2; “Lucy Farrell,” *Brooklyn Standard-Union*, December 1, 1906, 12.

²⁴ Accounts 15621 and 46348, Emigrant Bank Records; family 196, dwelling 76, district 1, ward 2, Brooklyn, Kings County, 1860 U.S. census; family 368, dwelling 249, ward 11, Jersey City, Hudson County, New Jersey, 1870 U.S. census; “Mara’s Alleged Offense,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 22, 1879, 4; family 407, dwelling 344, enumeration district 94, Brooklyn, Kings County, 1880 U.S. census; death notice, *New York Herald*, November 26, 1905, 2.

²⁵ Accounts 5021, 10850, and 13569, Emigrant Bank Records; manifest of the *Silas Greenman*, August 8, 1851, New York Passenger Lists; family 479, dwelling 121, district 9, ward 11, New York County, 1860 U.S. census; dwelling 209, page 5, district 13, ward 12, New York County, 1870 U.S. census (second enumeration); family 62, dwelling 41, enumeration district 591, New York County, 1880 U.S. census; “Obituary Notes,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1887, 5.

²⁶ Emigrant Savings Bank Mobility Database.

²⁷ Accounts 10869 and 29146, Emigrant Bank Records; entry for Pat Keidy, manifest of the *Montezuma*, March 17, 1851, New York Passenger Lists; family 1224, dwelling 689, district 2, ward 10, Brooklyn, Kings County, 1855 New York State census; family 604, dwelling 474, district 1, ward 6, Brooklyn, Kings County, New York, 1860 U.S. census; “General News,” *New York Tribune*, April

8, 1864, 4 (workingmen's rights); "Several Gentlemen," *Brooklyn Times*, October 11, 1866, 2 (nomination); "From New York," *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, April 29, 1867, 2 (tenement reform); family 244, dwelling 258, ward 6, Brooklyn, Kings County, New York, 1870 U.S. census; family 301, dwelling 262, enumeration district 44, Kings County, New York, 1880 U.S. census; family 299, dwelling 111, enumeration district 61, Kings County, New York, 1900 U.S. census; "Won By an Epigram: Patrick Keady Gets His Long Deferred Reward at Last," *Brooklyn Times*, December 31, 1898, 2; "Justice Keady Dead," *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 7, 1908, 20. We excluded priests from the database because we could not be certain if an Irish-born priest was a true immigrant or instead considered himself someone sent temporarily abroad by the Catholic Church.

²⁸ Testbook entries for account 5373, Emigrant Bank Records; family 1327, dwelling 758, district 1, ward 18, New York County, 1860 U.S. census; family 676, dwelling 584, town of Dedham, Norfolk County, Massachusetts, 1870 U.S. census; family 81, dwelling 62, enumeration district 132, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, 1880 U.S. census; family 294, dwelling 249, enumeration district 841, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, 1900 U.S. census; death notice, *Chicago Tribune*, May 31, 1903, 7.

²⁹ Quotations from "Immigrants Should Go West," Middletown [Conn.] *Constitution*, February 14, 1855, 2. An attempt to determine the number of Irish immigrants who left New York in the 1850s can be found in Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The New York Irish in the 1850s', in Ó Gráda, *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Dublin, 2006), 153-156.

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