

Chapter 2 Antecedents of Federal Deposit Insurance

Insurance of Bank Obligations, 1829 – 1866

During the years immediately following the organization of the federal government in 1789, banks were chartered by special acts of state legislatures or the Congress, usually for a limited number of years. Initially, bank failures were nonexistent. It was not until 1809, with the failure of the Farmers Bank of Gloucester, Rhode Island, that people realized that such an event was even possible.¹ Any notion that this failure represented an isolated incident was dispelled after the first wave of bank failures occurred five years later. The ensuing economic disruptions caused by these and subsequent bank failures fueled demands for banking reform.

In 1829, New York became the first state to adopt a bank-obligation insurance program.² New York's program was devised by Joshua Forman, a Syracuse businessman. The insurance concept embodied in his plan was suggested by the regulations of the Hong merchants in Canton.³ The regulations required merchants who held special charters to trade with foreigners to be liable for one another's debts. Writing in 1829, when bank-supplied circulating medium was largely in the form of bank notes rather than deposits, Forman noted:

The case of our banks is very similar; they enjoy in common the exclusive right of making a paper currency for the people of the state, and by the same rule should in common be answerable for that paper.⁴

The plan conceived by Forman had three principal components: (1) the establishment of an insurance fund, to which all banks had to pay an assessment; (2) a board of commissioners, which was granted bank examination powers; and (3) a specified list of investments for bank capital.

The first two provisions were adopted virtually intact; the proposal pertaining to the investment of bank capital initially was rejected. Upon reconsideration during the 1830s, the bank capital proposal was modified and subsequently enacted.

From 1831 to 1858, five additional states adopted insurance programs: Vermont, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Iowa. The purposes of the various plans were similar: (1) to protect communities from severe fluctuations of the circulating medium caused by bank failures; and (2) to protect individual depositors and noteholders against losses.

¹Carter H. Golembe, "Origins of Deposit Insurance in the Middle West, 1834-1866," *The Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. LI, June, 1955, No. 2, p. 113.

²The term "bank obligation" refers to both circulating notes and deposits.

³*Assembly Journal*, New York State, 1829, p. 179.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 179.

Available evidence indicates that the first of these, concern with the restoration of the circulating medium *per se*, predominated.⁵

Nature of plans. In striving to meet these insurance goals, the states employed one of three approaches. Following New York's lead, Vermont and Michigan established insurance funds. Indiana did not; instead, all participating banks were required mutually to guarantee the liabilities of a failed bank. The insurance programs adopted by Ohio and Iowa incorporated both approaches. Although participating banks were bound together by a mutual guaranty provision, an insurance fund was available to reimburse the banks in the event special assessments were necessary immediately to pay creditors of failed banks. The insurance fund was replenished from liquidation proceeds.

Table 1 summarizes the principal provisions of the six programs which operated between 1829-1866.

Coverage. In the first four programs adopted, insurance coverage primarily extended to circulating notes and deposits. New York later restricted coverage to circulating notes. In the case of Ohio and Iowa, insurance coverage from the outset only extended to circulating notes. None of the six programs placed a dollar limit on the amount of insurance provided an individual bank creditor.

The extension of insurance coverage to bank notes in all of the six programs reflected their importance as a circulating medium. Because it was common practice for banks to extend credit by using bank notes, nearly one-half of the circulating medium before 1860 was in this form. In those states that limited insurance coverage to bank notes, the belief was that banks affected the circulating medium only through their issuance. Additionally, it was believed that depositors could select their banks, whereas noteholders had considerably less discretion and thus were in greater need of protection.⁶

Methods used to protect creditors of banks in financial difficulty. *Ad hoc* measures frequently were taken in some of the six states to protect creditors of banks in financial difficulty. Faced with the possible insolvency of several banks in 1837, New York State's Comptroller began redeeming their notes from the insurance fund. This action prevented the banks from failing and they eventually were able to reimburse the insurance fund. In 1842, New York faced a more serious crisis after the failure of eleven participating banks within a three-year period threatened the solvency of the insurance

⁵Carter H. Golembe, "The Deposit Insurance Legislation of 1933: An Examination of Its Antecedents and Its Purposes," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. LXXV, No. 2, June, 1960, p. 189.

⁶Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, *Annual Report*, 1952 (1953), p. 61.

Table 1
Principal Provisions of Bank-Obligation Insurance Programs in Operation 1829 – 1866

State	Period of Operation ¹	Obligations Insured	Banks Participating	Assessments; Size of Fund	Payment of Bank Creditors
New York	1829 – 1866	1829-42, all debts ² 1842-66, circulating notes ³	All banks established or rechartered subsequent to passage of act ⁴	Annually ½ of 1% of capital stock to maximum of 3%. If fund reduced, annual assessment not to exceed above rate until fund restored to maximum.	After completion of liquidation of failed bank.
Vermont	1831 – 1866	All debts ²	All banks established or rechartered subsequent to passage of act ⁵	Annually ¾ of 1% of capital stock to maximum of 4 ½%. If fund reduced, annual assessments not to exceed above rate until fund restored to maximum.	After completion of liquidation of failed bank.
Indiana	1834 – 1866	All debts ²	Branch banks ⁶	No specific amount; special assessments as necessary.	Within one year after failure, if liquidation proceeds and stockholder contributions are insufficient
Michigan	1836 – 1842	All debts ²	All banks established or rechartered subsequent to passage of act	Annually ½ of 1% of capital stock to maximum of 3%. If fund reduced, annual assessment not to exceed above rate until fund restored to maximum.	After completion of liquidation of failed bank.
Ohio	1845 – 1866	Circulating notes	Branch banks	Single assessment prior to opening of bank: 10% of amount of circulating notes. Thereafter, assessments at above rate applicable only to circulating notes, if any, issued by bank.	Immediately, through special assessments on solvent branch banks. Assessments to be repaid from insurance fund, and fund repaid from proceeds of liquidation of assets of failed bank.
Iowa	1858 – 1865	Circulating notes	Branch banks	Single assessment before opening of bank: 10% of amount of circulating notes. Thereafter, assessments at above rate applicable only to circulating notes, if any, issued by bank.	Immediately, through special assessments on solvent branch banks. Assessments to be repaid from insurance fund, and fund repaid from proceeds of liquidation of assets of failed bank.

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Notes:

¹ In a number of cases, the law was repealed subsequent to the terminal date shown above. In some of the states, closing dates may have preceded the date shown by one year.

² Included circulating notes, deposits and miscellaneous liabilities; excluded capital accounts.

³ Act of April 12, 1842.

⁴ Free banks, which were authorized in 1838, did not participate in insurance.

⁵ Free banks, which were authorized in 1851, did not participate in insurance. In 1842, participating banks were authorized under specified conditions to withdraw from insurance.

⁶ Branch banks were essentially independent banks that had their own officers, distributed earnings to their own stockholders and collectively constituted the "State Bank" in these states.

Source: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, *Annual Report*, 1952 (1953), pp. 62-63.

fund. The legislature authorized the State Comptroller to sell bonds sufficient to meet all claims against the insurance fund. The bonds later were redeemed from subsequent payments into the fund by participating banks.

Other states similarly grappled with the question of whether to assist or close a distressed bank. On several occasions, authorities in Ohio kept a number of distressed banks from closing by levying special assessments upon healthy participating banks. Indiana and Iowa also granted financial assistance to distressed banks.

Method of paying creditors of failed banks. Only the programs of Ohio and Iowa provided for immediate payment of insured obligations. Necessary funds were made available in those two states through special assessments levied on the sound participating banks. Creditors in New York, Vermont and Michigan were not paid until the liquidation of a failed bank had been completed. Indiana's program provided that creditors were to be paid within one year after a bank failed if liquidation proceeds and stockholder contributions were insufficient to cover realized losses.

Role of bank supervision. Bank supervision was an essential element of the insurance programs that operated prior to 1866. The function of supervision was essentially twofold: (1) to reduce the potential risk exposure of the various insurance programs; and (2) to provide some measure of assurance to well-managed banks that the unsound banking practices of badly managed banks would not go completely unchecked.⁷ Table 2 summarizes the principal provisions relating to bank supervision in the six insurance states.

Better supervision of banks was achieved by the programs with mutual guaranty than by the simple insurance fund programs.⁸ Under the mutual guaranty programs in Indiana, Ohio and Iowa, supervisory officials were largely selected by, and accountable to, the participating banks. The officials were given wide latitude to check unsound banking practices because the participating banks were keenly aware that the cost of lax supervision ultimately would be borne by them.

During the Indiana program's 30 years of operation, not one state-chartered bank failed. Indiana's success principally was attributable to the quality of bank supervision.⁹ A strong supervisory board was the cornerstone of the program. The board, which included four members appointed by the Indiana General Assembly and one

⁷Carter H. Golembe and Clark Warburton, *Insurance of Bank Obligations in Six States* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 1958), pp. I-9 – I-10.

⁸Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, *Annual Report*, 1953 (1954), p. 59.

⁹Golembe and Warburton, p. I-18.

Table 2
Principal Provisions Relating to Supervision of Banks Participating in Bank-Obligation Insurance Programs,
Six States, 1829 – 1866

State	Supervisory Agency	Bank Examination	Condition Reports	Supervisory Enforcement Powers
New York	1829-37: Three Bank Commissioners; one appointed by Governor, two by banks. 1837-43: Three Bank Commissioners appointed by Governor. 1843-51: State Comptroller. 1851-55: Banking Department; Superintendent appointed by Governor.	1829-43: Each bank three times per year; additional examinations if requested by three participating banks. 1843-66: Examination only when bank was believed to be insolvent or to have submitted false condition report.	1829-43: Annually to Bank Commissioners. 1843-66: Quarterly to Comptroller or Superintendent of Banking Department. Content expanded.	If bank insolvent or had violated law, could apply to court of chancery for injunction against continued operation.
Vermont	1831-37: Three Bank Commissioners; one appointed by legislature, two by banks. 1837-58: One Bank Commissioner appointed by legislature.	Each bank once per year; additional examinations if requested by a stockholder or bank debtor.	Annually to Bank Commissioners.	If bank insolvent or had violated law, could apply to court of chancery for injunction against continued operation.
Indiana	1834-55: Board of Directors of the State Bank of Indiana; President and four directors appointed by legislature and one director by each Branch Bank. 1856-65: Board of Directors of the Bank of the State of Indiana; four directors appointed by legislature, one director by each Branch Bank and President by Board.	Each bank twice per year; additional examinations if requested by directors of a bank.	Monthly to Board.	If bank insolvent, had violated law or was mismanaging its affairs, could close bank. Could regulate dividend payments. ¹ Could establish ratio, between specified limits, of loans and discounts to capital for any or all banks. Loans of deposited funds exempted.
Michigan	1836-37: One Bank Commissioner appointed by Governor. 1837-40: Three Bank Commissioners appointed by Governor. 1840-42: Attorney General.	1836-40: Each bank three times per year; additional examinations if requested by three participating banks. 1840-42: At Governor's request.	Annually to Bank Commissioners or Attorney General.	If bank insolvent or had violated law, could apply to court of chancery for injunction against continued operation.

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

State	Supervisory Agency	Bank Examination	Condition Reports	Supervisory Enforcement Powers
Ohio	Board of Control of the State Bank of Ohio; one member appointed by each Branch Bank; President elected by Board from outside its membership.	Left to discretion of Board; policy was to examine each bank annually.	Quarterly to Board; policy to require monthly reports to Board.	If bank insolvent, had violated law or any order of Board, could close bank. Could order any bank to reduce its circulation or liabilities to whatever level was considered safe. Could determine proportion of reserve to be in vault cash. ¹
Iowa	Board of Directors of the State Bank of Iowa; three directors appointed by legislature; one director by each Branch Bank; President by Board.	Left to discretion of Board; policy was to examine each bank twice per year.	Monthly to Board.	If bank insolvent, had violated law or any order of Board, could close bank. Could regulate dividend payments. Could order any bank to reduce its circulation or liabilities to whatever level was considered safe.

Notes:

¹ Not stipulated in law but assumed by agency.

Source: Carter H. Golembe and Clark Warburton, *Insurance of Bank Obligations in Six States* (Washington, DC: The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 1958), pp. 1-8, 1-9.

representative from each of the participating banks, could close any member bank. The causes for closing a bank were: (1) insolvency; (2) mismanagement; and (3) refusal to comply with any legal directive of the board. The board's power was absolute since there was no provision for appeal to the courts or to any other state agency.

Supervisory authorities in Ohio and Iowa could issue cease-and-desist orders, as well as require banks to be closed. Ohio had four banks fail: one in 1852 because of defalcation and three in 1854 because of asset deterioration. While none failed in Iowa, it should be noted that Iowa's program operated during a period of more favorable economic conditions.

Assessments and the insurance funds. Insurance fund assessments were levied on capital stock or insured obligations. To provide a basis for comparison with later assessment rates under federal deposit insurance, previous researchers have computed the equivalent average annual rate on total obligations (*i.e.*, deposits plus circulating notes) levied by the five states that had insurance funds (Table 3). On this basis, Michigan's annual rate of one-tenth of 1 percent most closely approximated the statutory rate of one-twelfth of 1 percent (before credits) in effect under federal deposit insurance from 1935 through 1989. Other rates were substantially higher, ranging from one-fifth of 1 percent in Vermont to almost 2 percent in Iowa.

Three insurance programs had positive fund balances at the time of their closing (Table 3). The Vermont and Michigan insurance funds were deficient by \$22,000 and \$1.2 million, respectively. In both states the first failures occurred before the insurance funds were adequately capitalized. Michigan's program collapsed under the strain. Although Vermont's fund subsequently recovered, it had a negative balance at the time the program closed because of the payment of unauthorized refunds to banks previously withdrawing from the program.

Demise of the insurance programs. Two primary factors contributed to the eventual collapse of the state insurance systems. The first factor was the emergence of the "free banking" movement in the 1830s. This movement developed in response to the void created by the closing of the Second Bank of the United States in 1836. To fill this void, many states enacted laws designed to ease bank entry restrictions. The movement produced an alternative for insurance of bank notes, which permitted a bank to post bonds and mortgages with state officials in an amount equal to its outstanding bank notes. Banks taking advantage of this alternative were excluded from insurance.¹⁰ As the number of "free banks" increased, participation in state insurance programs declined. Consequently, the original intent to include all banks in the individual state insurance programs was thwarted.

The second factor in the collapse of the state insurance systems was the establishment of the national bank system in 1863. In 1865, Congress levied prohibitive

¹⁰This exclusion did not apply in Michigan.

Table 3
Insurance Funds and Assessments for States with
Bank-Obligation Insurance Programs, 1829 – 1866¹
(\$ Thousands)

	New York 1829 - 1866	Vermont 1831 - 1866	Michigan 1836 - 1842	Ohio 1845 - 1866	Iowa 1858 - 1865
Average fund size	\$192	\$19	\$0.3	\$759	\$196
Fund as a percent of –					
Total obligations	0.6%	2.0%	0.09%	7.7%	8.4%
Average insured obligations	1.0%	2.0%	0.09%	11.5%	21.4%
Balance or (deficiency) at close of program	\$13	(\$22)	(\$1,198)	\$815 ²	\$338 ²
Assessments and income available for insurance operations:					
Assessments paid ³	\$3,221	\$63	\$3	\$1,567	\$338
Interest received ⁴	3,120	63	3	1,567	338
	101	--	--	--	--
Used for insurance operations	3,208	44	--	722 ⁵	--
Refunded to banks or state ⁶	13	19	--	845	338
Assessments necessary to cover insurance costs	\$3,208	\$68	\$1,198	\$722 ⁵	--
Equivalent average annual rate of assessment on total obligations	0.24%	0.2%	0.1%	0.8%	1.8%

Notes:

¹ In Indiana the insurance system was one of mutual guaranty with no refund.

² Amount in fund in last year of full operation of insurance system.

³ Assessments paid and used for insurance operations other than administrative expenses except in Michigan, where amount paid was completely absorbed by such expenses.

⁴ In excess of amounts used to pay administrative expenses and amounts paid to banks. In Vermont, Ohio and Iowa, such expenses absorbed the whole of investment income.

⁵ Total of special assessments used to redeem notes of failed banks or aid operating banks, plus estimated amounts secured from assets in insurance funds of failed banks. Recoveries from other assets of such banks by insurance system are not known.

⁶ In New York, paid into Treasury; in Vermont, refunded to six banks withdrawing prior to close of system; in Ohio, refunded to one bank withdrawing prior to close of system and to all banks at close of system; and in Iowa, refunded to all banks at close of system.

Source: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, *Annual Report*, 1953 (1954), p. 58.

tax on state bank notes causing many state-chartered banks to convert to national charters in order to escape the tax. As conversions increased, membership in the state insurance systems declined, eventually to the point where these programs ceased to exist.

Guaranty of Circulating Bank Notes by the Federal Government

National bank notes were collateralized by United States bonds. More importantly, the primary guaranty for the notes was the credit of the federal government rather than the value of the posted collateral. Holders of notes of a failed national bank were to be paid immediately and in full by the U.S. Department of the Treasury regardless of the value of the bonds backing the notes. As the Comptroller of the Currency stated in his first report to Congress.

If the banks fail, and the bonds of the government are depressed in the market, the notes of the national banks must still be redeemed in full at the treasury of the United States. The holder has not only the public securities, but the faith of the nation pledged for their redemption.¹¹

So long as national bank notes retained their relative importance in the circulating medium, bank-obligation insurance was considered unnecessary. However, bank deposits soon overtook and then eclipsed national bank notes in importance. By 1870, deposits were about twice, and by the end of the century seven times, circulating notes. It was against this backdrop that efforts were renewed to provide for deposit insurance. Various proposals to that effect were introduced at the federal and state levels. Although the first attempts were made in Congress as early as 1886, the states took the lead.

State Insurance of Bank Deposits, 1908 – 1930

From 1908 to 1917, eight states adopted deposit insurance programs. Seven of the eight states were located west of the Mississippi in predominantly agricultural areas. Table 4 summarizes the principal provisions of the eight programs.

Coverage. Insurance coverage in the eight states extended only to deposits. Although the insurance programs were commonly known as “deposit guaranty” programs, the guaranty was that of a fund derived from assessments on the participating banks. In no instance did the state explicitly guarantee the deposits.

¹¹ U.S., Comptroller of the Currency, *Annual Report*, November 28, 1863 (1864), p. 58.

Table 4
Principal Provisions of Deposit Insurance Programs
Adopted by Eight States, 1907 – 1917

State	Deposits Insured	Banks Participating ¹	Assessment on Insured Deposits ²	Payment of Depositors
<p>Oklahoma</p> <p>Act of 1908³ as amended or modified 1909, 1911, 1913</p>	<p>All deposits not otherwise secured and on which rate of interest was within limits specified by law.</p>	<p>Compulsory for all state banks and trust companies.</p>	<p>Annually 1/5 of 1% until fund equaled 2% of base. If fund reduced, special assessments at same rate annually.⁴</p>	<p>In cash by Bank Commission immediately upon taking possession of bank. If fund insufficient, in 6% certificates of indebtedness to be paid in order of issue. After 1913, certificates sold at not less than par for purpose of securing cash for depositors.</p>
<p>Kansas</p> <p>Act of 1909 as amended or modified 1911, 1921, 1923</p>	<p>All deposits not otherwise secured and on which rate of interest was within limits specified by law.</p>	<p>Voluntary for all incorporated state banks. Trust companies and private banks excluded. Banks organized after passage of Act eligible to apply after operating one year.</p>	<p>Annually 1/20 of 1% of base less capital and surplus until fund equaled \$1 million. If fund reduced below \$500,000, special assessment for amount necessary.</p>	<p>In interest-bearing certificates of indebtedness, reduced as proceeds of liquidation become available. Deficiency, if any, paid from fund.</p>
<p>Nebraska</p> <p>Act of 1909 as amended or modified 1911</p>	<p>All deposits except money deposited on a collateral agreement or condition other than an agreement for length of time to maturity and rate of interest.</p>	<p>Compulsory for all incorporated state banks.</p>	<p>Semiannually 1/20 of 1% until fund equaled 1½% of base. If fund reduced below 1%, assessment renewed and special assessments if necessary not to exceed 1% of base in any one year.</p>	<p>In cash from fund immediately after determination by the court of amount due depositors, less cash immediately available to the receiver for such payments.</p>

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

State	Deposits Insured	Banks Participating ¹	Assessment on Insured Deposits ²	Payment of Depositors
<p>Texas Act of 1909 as amended or modified 1921, 1923</p>	<p>Noninterest-bearing deposits not otherwise secured. Excluded public deposits, secured deposits, certificates of deposit, deposits made for the purpose of converting a loan into a deposit covered by the fund, and certificates of deposit converted to noninterest-bearing deposits within 90 days of failure.</p>	<p>All state-chartered banks required to choose between guaranty fund system or bond security system.</p>	<p>Annually ¼ of 1% of base until fund equaled \$5 million. If fund reduced below \$2 million, or below level of preceding January 1, special assessments not to exceed 2%.</p>	<p>In cash immediately, out of cash in failed bank and fund.</p>
<p>Mississippi Act of 1914</p>	<p>All deposits not otherwise secured nor bearing interest exceeding 4% per annum.</p>	<p>Voluntary until May 15, 1915. Thereafter, compulsory for all banks operating under state law, including trust companies and savings banks.</p>	<p>Annually 1/20 of 1% of average guaranteed deposits, less capital and surplus, until fund approximated \$500,000 over and above initial contribution. If fund depleted, special assessments at same rate not to exceed five in any one year.</p>	<p>In interest-bearing certificates of indebtedness, reduced as proceeds of liquidation become available. Deficiency, if any, paid from fund.</p>
<p>South Dakota Act of 1915 as amended or modified 1921</p>	<p>All deposits not otherwise secured. Deposits could not pay interest in excess of 5% unless authorized by the depositors guaranty fund commission, and in no case greater than 5 ½% per annum.</p>	<p>Compulsory for all state and private banks.</p>	<p>Annually ¼ of 1% until fund equaled 1½% of base. Resumed whenever fund reduced to 1% of base.</p>	<p>In cash immediately from fund. If fund deficient, Commissioner to issue certificates of indebtedness at 5% and not to exceed 7% if sold to secure cash for depositors.</p>

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

State	Deposits Insured	Banks Participating ¹	Assessment on Insured Deposits ²	Payment of Depositors
North Dakota Act of 1917 as amended or modified 1923	All deposits not otherwise secured and on which interest was within limits specified by law.	Compulsory for every corporation in business of receiving deposits or buying and selling exchange, except national banks.	Annually 1/20 of 1% until fund equaled 2% of base. If fund reduced to 1½% of base, assessments resumed. Special assessments at same rate at option of Bank Commissioners, not to exceed four per year.	In cash from fund after certification of net amounts due depositors. If fund deficient, in certificates of indebtedness.
Washington Act of 1917 as amended or modified 1921	Deposits subject to check or other forms of withdrawal and not otherwise secured. Payment of interest at rates higher than authorized by guaranty fund board subjected bank to loss of insurance.	Voluntary for all state banks including trust companies but excluding mutual savings banks.	Annually 1/10 of 1% until fund equaled 3% of base. If fund reduced, special assessments not to exceed ½ of 1% in any one year.	In warrants on fund issued on proof of claim. If fund deficient, warrants to bear 5% interest until paid.

Notes:

¹ National banks were prohibited from participating in state insurance plans by ruling in July 1908 by Attorney General of the United States.

² In terms of percentage of average daily insured deposits for preceding calendar year, unless otherwise noted. Excludes initial payments or contributions where applicable.

³ The banking laws of Oklahoma were codified, revised and reenacted May 25, 1908, with little change in guaranty law.

⁴ Special assessments in addition to regular annual assessments authorized 1914–1916.

Source: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, *Annual Report*, 1953 (1954), pp. 68-69

Methods of paying depositors of failed banks. In Kansas and Mississippi the depositors of a failed bank received interest-bearing certificates. Dividends on these certificates were paid from liquidation proceeds. Upon final liquidation of all assets, the balance due on the certificates was paid from the insurance fund. Mississippi law stipulated that if the insurance fund was insufficient to pay the depositors, they were to be paid *pro rata*, and the remainder paid from subsequent assessments.

In the remaining six states the deposit insurance law provided for immediate cash reimbursement by the fund, either in full or to whatever extent was practical. In most instances provision also was made for the issuance of certificates of indebtedness in the event there was insufficient money in the fund.

Role of bank supervision. A majority of the eight states granted authority to regulate banks.¹² Semiannual bank examinations were the norm. Banking officials could enforce capital requirements and issue cease-and-desist orders to bring about correction of various infractions. In four of the states, supervisory authorities could order the removal of bank officials for just cause.

Despite the powers granted to banking authorities, supervision often proved to be lax. Because of understaffing and insufficient funding, examiner workloads frequently were untenable. In other instances, banking authorities were thwarted when they tried to enforce existing laws. In a few cases, the authorities were the root of the problem. Oklahoma provided the worst example in that the bank commissioner's office itself became corrupt after 1919.

Assessments on participating banks. All of the insurance programs derived the bulk of their income from assessments. Both regular and special assessments were based on total deposits. The assessments levied ranged from an amount equivalent to an average annual rate of about one-eighth of 1 percent in Kansas to about two-thirds of 1 percent in Texas. Some states permitted participating banks to retain their insurance assessments in the form of deposits, subject to withdrawal by order of the insurer. Other states provided for the physical collection of assessments by the insurer or the state treasurer.

Adequacy and termination of insurance funds. The state insurance funds were unable to cope with the economic events of the 1920s. The depression of 1921, and the severe agricultural problems that persisted throughout much of the decade, resulted in numerous bank failures. The resultant claims on the various insurance funds generally exceeded their size. Although the Texas fund was able to meet all claims, the insured deposits in the other states that were never paid from any source ranged as high as 70 percent.

¹²An in-depth discussion of the role of bank supervision appears in Clark Warburton's study, *Deposit Insurance in Eight States During the Period 1908-1930* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 1959).

The first fund to cease operations was Washington's in 1921. By early 1930, all of the funds had ceased operation, including the Texas fund, which became insolvent after most of the participating banks withdrew.

Congressional Proposals for Deposit Insurance, 1886 – 1933

A total of 150 proposals for deposit insurance or guaranty were made in Congress between 1886 and the establishment of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation in 1933. Financial crises prompted the introduction of many of these proposals. In the 60th Congress, following the panic of 1907, more than 30 proposals for deposit guaranty legislation were introduced. Similarly, in response to the developing banking crisis, more than 20 bills were introduced in the 72nd Congress, which opened in 1931.

Another group of bills, similar in principle to deposit insurance, proposed to authorize national banks to issue circulating notes on the basis of various types of assets or as general obligations of the banks, backed by a guaranty or insurance fund to which all national banks would contribute. These proposals were numerous during the 30 years preceding establishment of the Federal Reserve System in 1913.

Three general methods of providing depositor protection were proposed in the bills. Of the 150 bills, 118 provided for the establishment of an insurance fund out of which depositors' losses would be paid, 22 provided for United States government guaranty of deposits, and 10 required banks to purchase surety bonds guaranteeing deposits in full.

Most of the deposit insurance bills introduced prior to establishment of the Federal Reserve System authorized participation of national banks only. After 1913, approximately one-half of the deposit insurance bills provided for participation of all members of the Federal Reserve System (national and state member banks). Only a few provided for coverage of deposits in nonmember banks, and then participation usually was optional.

Nearly two-thirds of the bills introduced prior to establishment of the Federal Reserve System provided for administration of the insurance system by the Comptroller of the Currency. After 1913, some of the proposals provided for administration by the Federal Reserve Board or by the Federal Reserve Banks under supervision of the Board. Other proposals called for the establishment of a special administrative board to oversee the insurance system.

Eighty percent of the bills provided for insurance or guaranty of all, or nearly all, deposits. The bills that provided for only partial coverage of deposits contained a variety of limitations. Generally, all liabilities not otherwise secured were to be protected by the insurance or guaranty system.

In nearly one-half of the bills, the entire cost of deposit insurance, and in about one-fourth of the bills the major part of the cost, was to be met by assessments based upon total deposits or average total deposits. The rates of assessment ranged from one-fiftieth of 1 percent to one-half of 1 percent per year, while in a number of cases assessments were to be adjusted to meet the total cost. The most common rate was one-tenth of 1 percent. Many of the bills provided for special initial assessments, or for assessments as needed, in addition to those collected periodically.

In a number of bills, assessments upon the banks were to be supplemented by appropriations from the United States government or, particularly in the bills introduced in the later years, by levies on the earnings or surplus of the Federal Reserve Banks. In several cases the cost was to be met solely by the United States government. In cases where the insurance was in the form of surety bonds, the cost of the bonds was to be borne by the banks.

Many of the bills called for a limit on the accumulation of funds by the insurance or guaranty system. In a few bills, assessment rates were to be adjusted by the administrative authority and were required to be sufficient to meet all losses to depositors or to maintain the fund at a given size. In some proposals, the fund was authorized to borrow if necessary, and in others to issue certificates to unpaid depositors if the fund were depleted.

Summary

The disruption caused by bank failures was a recurrent problem during the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century. Numerous plans were proposed or adopted to address this problem. Many embodied the insurance principle.

Insurance of bank obligations by the states occurred during two distinct periods. The first began in 1829 with the adoption of an insurance plan by New York. During the next three decades five other states followed New York's lead. Except for Michigan's insurance plan, which failed after a short period of operation, these plans accomplished their purposes. Nevertheless, the last of these insurance programs went out of existence in 1866 when the great majority of state-chartered banks became national banks.

Insurance of bank obligations was not attempted again by the states until the early 1900s. Eight states established deposit guaranty funds from 1908 to 1917. In contrast to the earlier state insurance systems, those adopted from 1908 to 1917 were generally unsuccessful. Most of the eight insurance plans were particularly hard hit by the agricultural depression that followed World War I. The numerous bank failures spawned by that depression placed severe financial stress on the insurance funds. By the mid-1920s, all of the state insurance programs were in difficulty, and by early 1930 none remained in operation.

The federal government, in turn, sought to secure the safety of the circulating medium through direct guaranty by the Treasury of national bank notes, beginning in the

1860s. However, the subsequent rapid growth of bank deposits relative to bank notes once again aroused concern regarding the safety of the circulating medium in the event of a bank failure. Consequently, 150 proposals for deposit insurance or guaranty were introduced into Congress between 1886 and 1933.

The basic principles of the federal deposit insurance system were developed in these bills and in the experience of the various states that adopted insurance programs. These principles included financing the federal deposit insurance fund through assessments; the use of rigorous bank examination and supervision to limit the exposure of the fund; and other elements, such as standards for failed-bank payoffs and liquidations, intended to minimize the economic disruptions caused by bank failures.