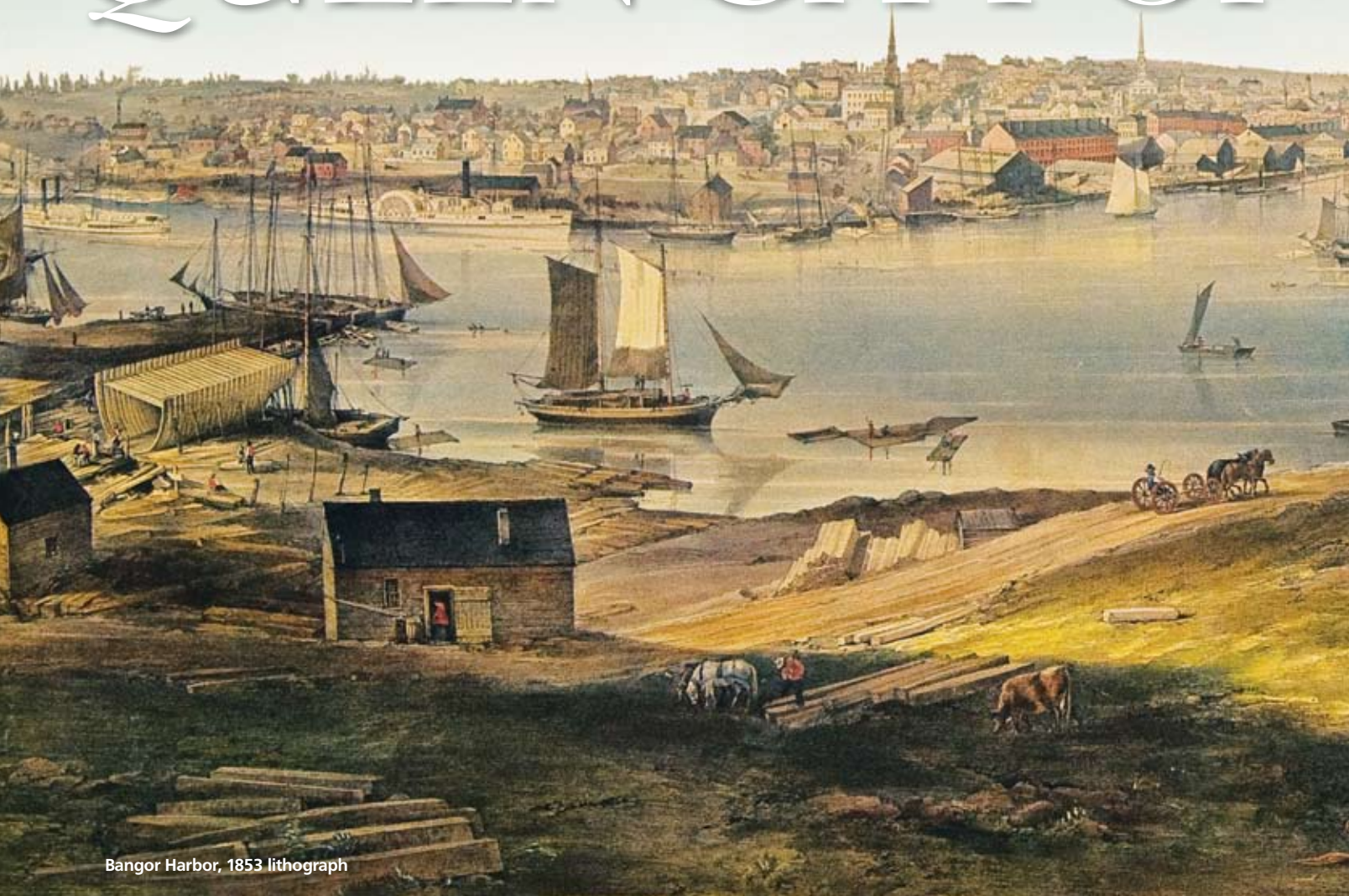


QUEEN CITY OF



Bangor Harbor, 1853 lithograph

“A little, dirty, insignificant village is now Bangor, which lifts its head in anticipated greatness, [and] speaks of Boston and New York as sisters.”

—1835 visitor to Bangor

Andrew Jackson was president, Samuel Morris had just rolled out an improved teletype machine, Louis Daguerre was about to create his first photograph, and Bangor, Maine, was the boomingest town on the East Coast.

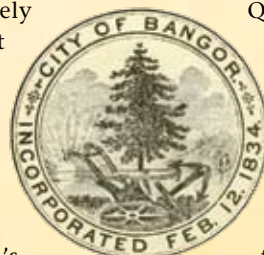
In context, Bangor’s boom years are even more impressive: In 1834, its year of city incorporation, there were only two states west of the Mississippi; and the vast, wild West was still largely unexplored. The East Coast was the hub of America’s universe, and Bangor was its shooting star.

At the time of its birth, the city of Bangor had all of the essential ingredients of progress: It had the nation’s

hottest commodity (wood), America’s only existing mode of mass transport (water), and a community teeming with ambitious minds and able hands.

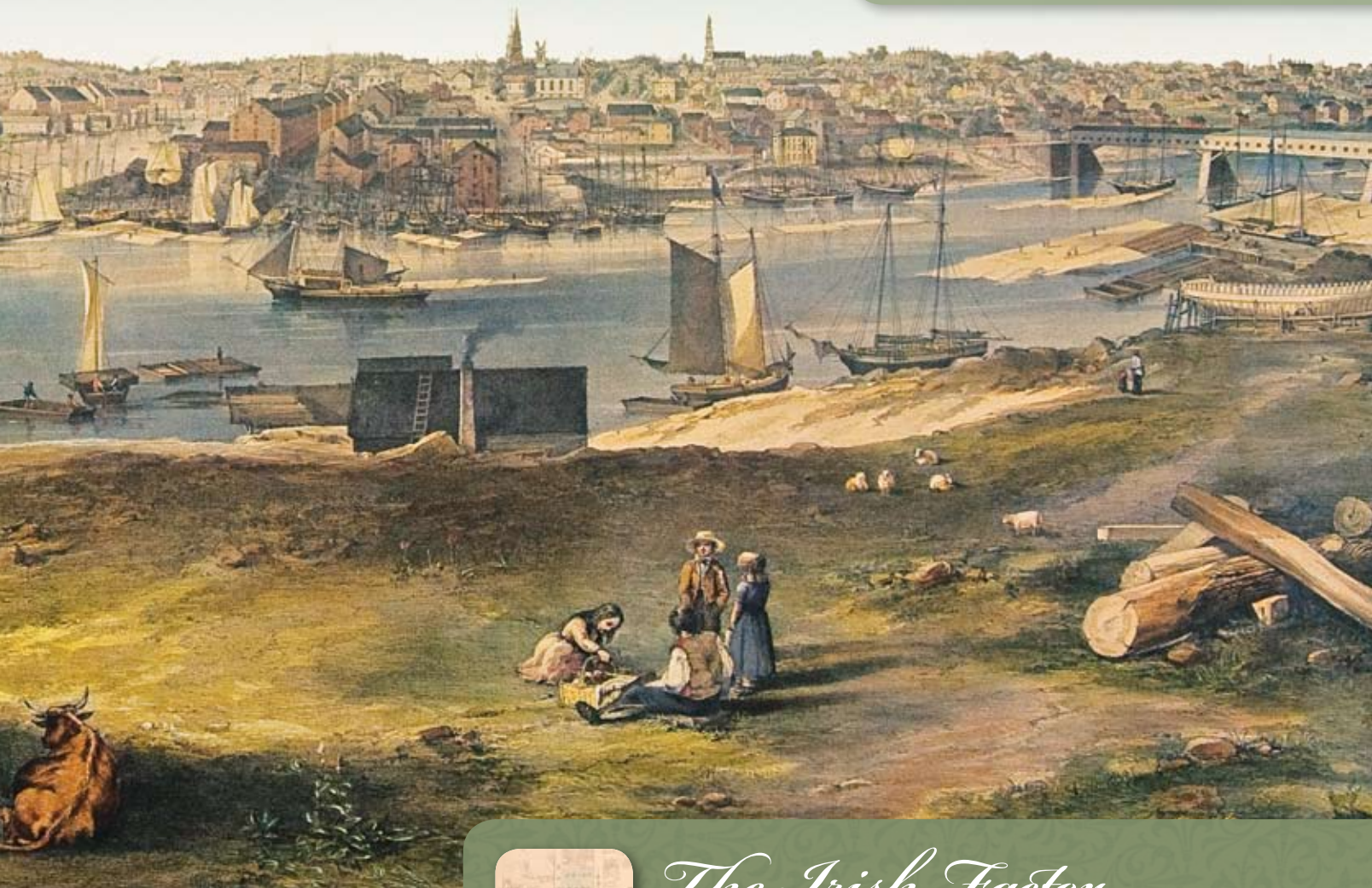
From 1830 to 1834, Bangor’s population soared from 2,800 to about 8,000. In 1833, over 500 homes and commercial buildings were built. Bangor, Maine, would soon become one of the first cities in the country to have railroad service, house an iron steamship, even lay its dead to rest in a garden cemetery. By mid-century, the

Queen City of the East (a name coined by *Bangor Daily Journal* editor Charles P. Roberts) had block after block of handsome architecture and a waterfront filled with manufacturing businesses. The total effect was so impressive that the press referred to Bangor as



THE EAST

In 1834, **Bangor** seemed destined to be the **next Boston**



“New York in miniature.” (*The Journals of John Edwards Godfrey, 1863–1869*)

By 1879, Bangor’s city fathers had done the math: Judging by its rate of growth compared with Boston, Bangor would have twice the population of Boston’s in another century—even if Bangor only grew at a quarter of its present pace. How could it not?

Their confidence was understandable, given Bangor’s great treasure of resources. While history got in the way of their calculations, no one could have convinced them otherwise at the time. Like the mythical city of Norumbega, which attracted the area’s first non-Native visitors, there was a zeitgeist during Bangor’s heyday that is both surreal and breathtaking to the modern citizen.



The Irish Factor

The influx of Irish helped spur Bangor to cityhood.

In the 1830s, a potato famine forced Irish citizens to look for sustenance across the pond. In July of 1832, hundreds of Irish refugees came over the newly erected bridge to Bangor. The refugees had survived a trek all the way from New Brunswick, via the Airline road. While many had pity on them during their journey, they were not exactly welcome upon arrival.

In Protestant Bangor, these foreign-born Catholics were looked on by many as “depraved agents of Popery,” and soon the influx of hungry workers put a dent in Bangor’s wages. In 1833, a worker’s brawl evolved into a riot that lasted several days and had to be quelled by the state militia. Realizing it needed a police force, the town incorporated as the City of Bangor in 1834. The new city charter meant more efficient governing with aldermen and council members representing seven wards, and an elected mayor.

Another wave of Irish immigrants came in the late 1840s. By some estimates, about one-third of the city’s 1850 population was either an Irish immigrant or the child of one. While other ethnic groups were part of the heyday landscape, none came close to the number who counted Ireland as the motherland.