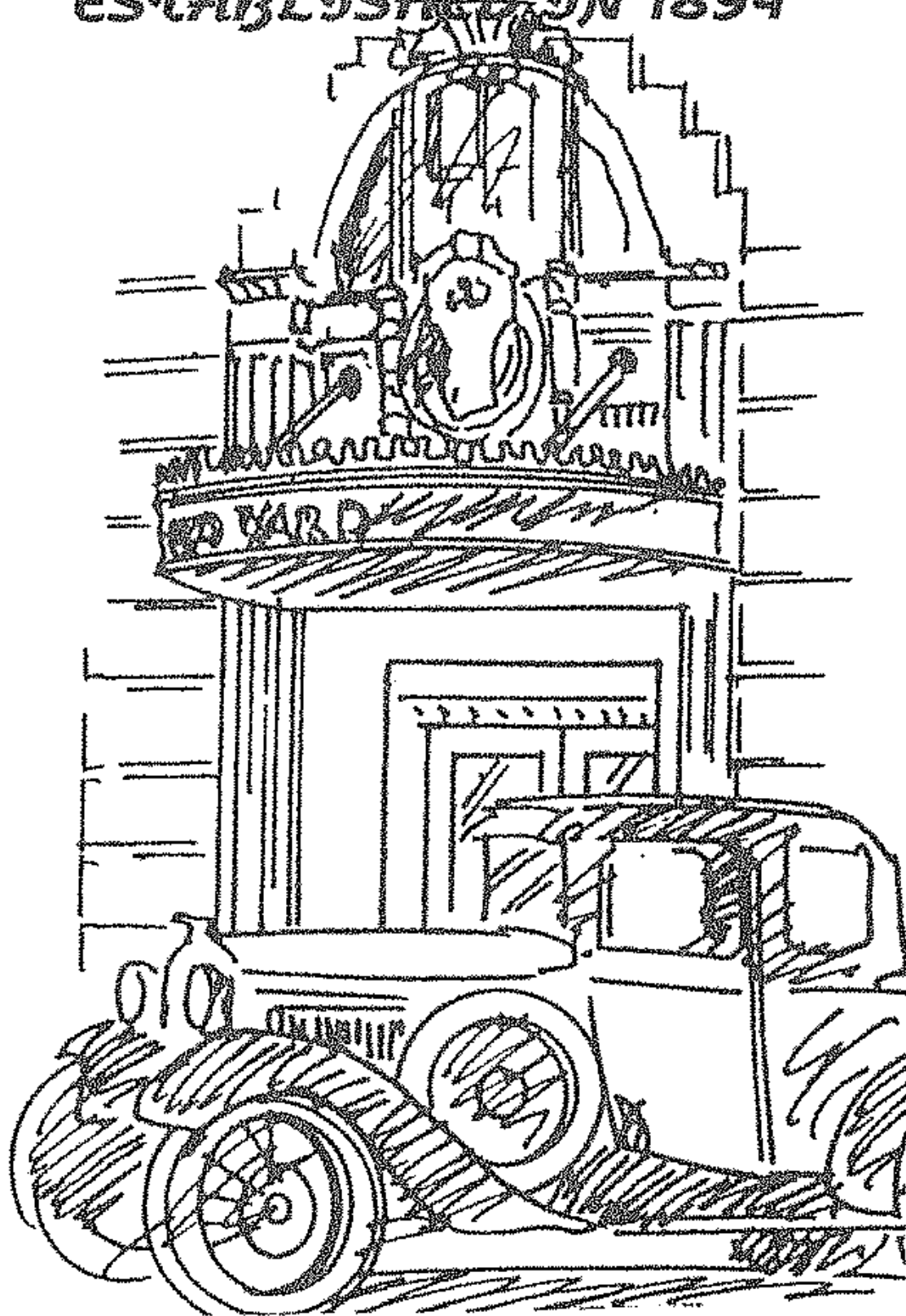


**THE HISTORIC**  
**ALONZO WARD HOTEL**  
**ESTABLISHED IN 1894**



**LOCATED AT**  
**104 South Main Street**  
**Aberdeen, South Dakota**



## THE HISTORIC ALONZO WARD HOTEL

*This book is dedicated to  
the employees and owners of  
The Ward Hotel - both past  
and present who have worked  
to keep the name of  
Alonzo Ward  
a part of the history of Aberdeen.*

*written by  
Beverly J. Farnen*





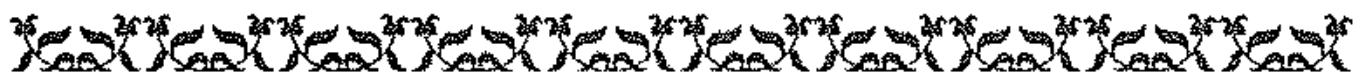
I hate history! All through school I often wondered why we had to learn about a lot of old places and dead people - and I bet I am not the only person out there with this type of attitude.

But then I aged. That does something to a person. It starts one thinking about all of the other people that have gone on before. For instance, Alonzo Ward, Sr. Who was he? Why was his life so important to Aberdeen? So I decided to take a closer look at the man and his wonderful building-The Alonzo Ward.

Alonzo LaRue Ward was born in Lima, Ohio on April 26, 1861. His parents moved to Troy Mills, Iowa three years later where they farmed. Obviously, this was not the career that Alonzo Ward had in mind for himself. As a teen, Ward moved to Huron, SD and worked in a restaurant. In 1883, at the age of 22, he moved to Aberdeen where he spent the rest of his life.

He arrived in Aberdeen with only a nickel in his pocket and a great ambition that would hold him in good stead with all that he was to face in the future.





In 1884, Mr. Ward started his first business in Aberdeen. It was nothing more than a little stand. "It was not much for looks and less for equipment" according to the newspaper account dated April 5, 1928. Ward served the coffee and meals himself, but that little place quickly became a center for much of the town's activity.

By 1888, Mr. Ward had a full-fledged restaurant called the Railroad Restaurant. On October 9th of that year, Mr. Ward had all the excitement that one restaurant could handle. According to the newspaper, the scene at the Railroad restaurant was beyond description. Sitting Bull, Gaul, Mad Bear, and John Grass - along with eleven other Sioux Chiefs came in to have supper. They sat at the oval counter while Mr. Ward served them. People crowded into the restaurant to catch a glimpse of the renowned Sioux Chief Sitting Bull - the one who defeated Custer.

Throughout the meal, the disorder caused by the sightseers, the Chiefs gave no sign of any kind that they even noticed the crowd.

T. C. Gage claimed this to be his biggest





memory of Alonzo Ward and his restaurant.

In 1890, L. Frank Baum (who went on to write THE WIZARD OF OZ) published the Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer. In his paper, Mr. Baum wrote a column called "Our Land-Lady". Since he and Ward were very close friends, Baum took this opportunity to take "gentlemanly gibes" at Ward.

In his column, the Landlady states her opinion of the state of affairs of just about everything. "Even the hotels is economizing. Don't it look bad for Al Ward to eat at the Sherman House and Jim Ringrose go sneakin' down to Ward's for lunch?"

"An' there's Al Ward who wants ter supply the city with pies."

An article concerning a social function which both men attended, Mr. Baum made the comment, "It was amusing to hear Al Ward yelling loudly for a waiter, as if he never wore an apron in his life."

On September 21, 1897, the news of the day centered around the new Ward Hotel to be opened on Monday, September 27th. The hotel had forty-four guest rooms - thirty





in the hotel proper, ten in the Northwestern Bank, and the remainder in "the old part" opened in 1894. Cost for these rooms varied depending upon "the tastes and inclinations" of the guests and patrons.

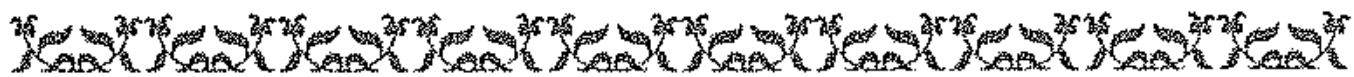
The original hotel had a reading and writing room, a Dining Room with a seating capacity of sixty, ample rooms behind and separate from the Dining Room for the new bakery, and rooms partitioned off for rental to businesses. The walls on the second floor were finished in faultless white and the woodwork was painted either white or buff. Carpeting was professionally laid, and the stairway was of solid oak.

There were several apartments designed for small families and were "greatly admired by all who had the privilege to "inspect" them. Every apartment was equipped with wash bowls of Tennessee marble with both hot and cold water at hand. There were two bath rooms on the second floor.

The ceilings were high to give the feeling of roominess, and the building was warmed with steam heat and lighted with both gas







and electricity.

One of the finest suites on the second floor facing Main Street was arranged and constructed especially for Mr. and Mrs. Ward.

In 1894, Ward was married to Caroline Paulhamus.

By 1900 business was excellent, and Mr. Ward realized that he needed more rooms. On December 2nd, 1900, the annex was begun. When construction started, it caught Aberdeen by surprise. No advance warning was given to the public. The winter was mild and, rather than wait for Spring when the contractors would be in great demand, Ward decided to take advantage of the opportunity to build.

Thus the hotel annex was born. It was added to the south side of the hotel proper (where the present Office Equipment Co. is located).

The management of the Ward Hotel made an innovative move in May, 1905, by purchasing uniforms for its employees. The Bell Boys were dressed in West Point gray with a matching cap. The coat was trimmed with





black braid and on the collar were the words "The Ward". The porters wore a blouse of dark blue and, the bus driver was furnished with a coachman's coat of dark blue with brass buttons and a high silk hat.

In March, 1907, Alonzo Ward decided to purchase a dynamo of his own to supply lighting for the restaurant and other parts of the hotel. A large fountain was also added to the restaurant to "hereafter run summer and winter".

On October 23, 1911, President William Howard Taft paid a visit to the city of Aberdeen. Thousands of people from North and South Dakota and Minnesota came into the city to hear President Taft's "most important speech of his South Dakota tour" which was to be made from the balcony of the Commercial Club located at 1st and South Lincoln. President Taft was a guest at the Ward Hotel where his long parade started and ended. There was a dinner party for 150 at the Commercial Club that evening.

As the Ward Hotel continued to prosper, it also continued to expand. In addition to







the restaurant, the Ward Grill was opened in June, 1912, along with a soda fountain. The idea was to cater to the businessman's needs for fast service for lunch. The soda fountain opened with great formality with music provided from 4 to 6 o'clock in the evening and again from 9 to 10 o'clock. "The openings under the Ward management have been most delightful affairs . . .". Souvenirs were given "to the ladies".

Times were great for Alonzo Ward - then disaster struck. On Thursday morning, November 24, 1926 (Thanksgiving morning) at 2:15 a.m. Officer Ole Solberg was making his usual rounds in the downtown area when he found smoke emerging from a basement window to the rear of the E. J. Bouchard department store housed in the Ward Hotel. The fire gutted the hotel destroying not only Bouchard's, but severely damaging the Virginia Restaurant, the Drake Barbershop, the Stag Cigar & Soft Drink Parlor, and the Wilson Pool Hall. The loss? \$300,000.00!

The fire was extinguished after a 10-hour fight by firefighters from Aberdeen, Redfield,





and Groton. It took the Redfield Fire Department forty-one minutes to arrive on the scene since the road between Aberdeen and Redfield had just been graded and graveled, but it took the Groton Fire Department forty minutes to go the twenty miles between Groton and Aberdeen because the road was chopped up by large ruts, and the lightweight Groton fire truck couldn't go more than twenty miles per hour to keep from going off the road.

When the fire departments arrived, they all faced the cold of 19 degrees below zero making the job very difficult at best.

Upon discovery of the fire, the Night Clerk, the Bell Boys, and the policeman, Ole Solberg, awakened the guests and evacuated the building. One gentleman took the time to dress, shave, and pack before leaving the building so he could catch his train ride later in the morning. A Bell Boy went back to rescue \$2000 in uncashed checks, but when offered 50 cents to go back in for a guest's coat because he was cold, the Bell Boy refused.





The only casualties of the fire consisted of a Groton firefighter overcome with smoke - he later returned to fight the fire further - and Mike Potopea. Mike made the mistake of criticizing the Redfield pumper, where upon one of the Redfield men "landed a soaker on the jaw of the talkative Mike which floored him for the count".

Mr. and Mrs. Ward, by this time, had two children - Elizabeth Ward (Jensen) and Alonzo Ward, Jr. - to be concerned about as well as themselves. This did not slow Ward down at all. He surveyed hotels throughout the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Nebraska to make note of all of the best things they had to offer.

On July 10th, 1927, Ward announced that a new six-story hotel - The Alonzo Ward - would be built on the site of the old Ward Hotel. All that was left of the old Ward Hotel was part of the south wall and the annex.

The hotel proper would be equipped with 140 rooms and the annex with 40. The plans were being designed by Ellerbe & Co. of St. Paul who was also working on an 18-story





building for the May Hospital at Rochester.

The new hotel became the topic of the times as it was being constructed. As it took shape and the interior was nearing completion, the newspapers once again gave the details.

While the top two floors would not be completed before opening day, the other floors took shape - and color. The rooms were finished in a colored, venetian texture plaster of buff, gray, orchid, green, and pink shades - one color predominating in each room. Buff was used in the halls and hotel proper. The mezzanine was colored in a two-tone tapestry coating of neutral gray and buff plaster. The Dining Room had a three-tone of buff, lavender, and green. The Ballroom was done in three-tone buff and orange colorings.

On Tuesday, May 15th, 1928, The Alonzo Ward opened with Mayor John Wade registering as the first guest. The hotel opened on a Tuesday to accommodate a dentist's convention that was in Aberdeen.

The Staff for the new hotel? There were





four clerks, one bookkeeper, one operator, two elevator operators, four Bell Boys, one engineer, one porter, one Night Fireman, one Chef, four cooks, a storeroom steward, a yard man, and two dishwashers with thirteen waitresses, one cashier, and Mr. Ward.

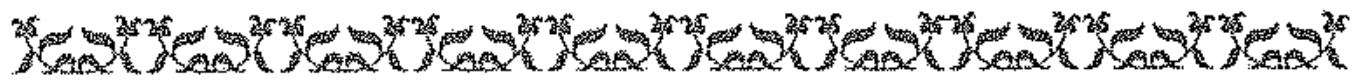
Although Mr. Alonzo Ward, Sr. was the manager, his son, Alonzo Ward, Jr., took over the active management of the hotel. Mr. Ward, Sr. had managed the hotel for thirty-four years and the original restaurant for ten years prior to the opening of the original hotel.

Mr. Ward, Sr., was a Mason and was affiliated with the Knights of Pythias and the Elks. He was a member of the Northwestern Hotelmen's Association.

A pioneer, Mr. Ward saw Aberdeen grow from a village to a city of 18,000. He was very involved in the growth of Aberdeen taking an active roll in civic betterment. He was known for his high standard of honorable business ethics.

Ward was well liked by the town of Aberdeen. He was known as one of the greatest





builders that Aberdeen had ever known. He always looked to the future, never letting tragedy get in the way. He was at all times a liberal giver to charitable and public enterprises.

Alonzo Ward, Sr., passed away unexpectedly on January 31, 1929, leaving his son and daughter the legacy of the man in the form of The Alonzo Ward.

Alonzo Ward, Jr., took over the duties as the General Manager of The Alonzo Ward. He, too, had to battle the fates to continue the operations of the hotel.

January 19, 1937, and The Alonzo Ward was hit by fire once again. This time the annex caught fire driving seventy guests out into 24 degree-below-zero weather. The fire started on the ground floor in The Smart Shop - a ladies' ready-to-wear shop.

W. Stanley Gough, groping through the smoke, put his head through a window and cut his face on the glass. He was on duty in the FBI Office located on the sixth floor in the main hotel when the smoke entered the hotel proper and alerted him to the danger.







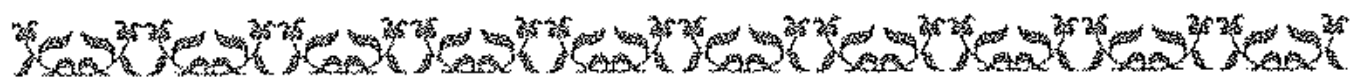
While the fire gutted the second and third floors of the annex, it did not reach the main hotel, but the smoke did. The 530,000 gallons of water used to quench the blaze flooded the basements of both the hotel and annex. While all the guests were evacuated safely, several residents had to leave their possessions behind.

The only other casualty of the fire was Dow Blankenbaker, a fireman who sprained his ankle. Fifty-one firefighters spent seven hours fighting the flames to keep the entire block from burning. The bitter cold caused the water to freeze almost as fast as it was shot into the flames. The firemen were hampered by the spray freezing onto their clothing making it difficult to move.

The losses were estimated at \$83,500.00, including damage to the hotel, The Smart Shop, The Mint (on-sale liquor store), The Alonzo Ward Beauty Salon, and The Gamble Store next door.

On October 14, 1936, The Gamble Store incurred a loss of \$25,000.00 when a blaze destroyed the interior of the store which





abutted the hotel annex, causing smoke and water damage to the Alonzo Ward annex. The annex had just been opened for use after repair from this fire.

At that time, Mr. Ward, Jr., decided that the reconstruction of the annex would depend upon the insurance settlement. It was considered possible that the hotel company might finish the fifth and sixth floors - virtually unoccupied since the building was built - instead of rebuilding the annex. At that time, the only occupants above the fourth floor were the Federal Bureau of Investigation and a radio station, KABR (the first in Aberdeen).

The annex was never rebuilt, and The Alonzo Ward continued on.

On April 29, 1964, the sale of The Alonzo Ward was announced. Ward and his sister, Mrs. Leslie Jensen of Hot Springs, had decided to sell the hotel to Mr. Louis Long.

After eighty years of building the Ward legacy, it was to be passed on to an unrelated person, but the history of the Wards will always be remembered by people who take the time to appreciate a great man, and his



family.

Mr. Long stated that the business would continue to be operated by Ward and the new owners would retain the present staff - there were sixty employees.

Mr. Long had been a resident of Aberdeen since 1942. He started the Aberdeen Block Company in 1946 and operated the Mercury Cleaners since March, 1952. Residents of Aberdeen were very pleased with Long's decision not to rename The Alonzo Ward. For years the hotel had been the center for social, commercial, and political events in the city. Many people in the area had great memories of the parties held there, the famous people they met there, and the warm home-town feeling of the place.

A short four years later, in 1969, the hotel was acquired by the Ward Hotel Corporation belonging to F. W. Hatterscheidt and Co. Five years later they sold the building to Richard Tarver - July 16, 1974. Tarver didn't make any comments to the local newspaper. At the time of the sale, the building was called "the Ward Hotel Motor Inn" still proudly



carrying Mr. Ward's name.

Quietly, The Ward Hotel again changed hands. In 1978 Bill Zirbel, the newest owner/manager, who had named the hotel "The Ward Zirbel", began a new project. On December 24, 1978, it was announced that Mr. Zirbel was trying a new approach to heating the hotel. He explained that flax pellets and coal were to be mixed - two thirds pellets to one third coal - to use in place of all coal. Zirbel said he started using the pellets as an energy source because they were "cleaner and cheaper than coal". They were, in fact, 50% cheaper. He hoped to try eventually using all flax pellets and eliminating the coal altogether.

Three years later, in 1981, the hotel was again sold. A group of people, including the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Tonner, and Dr. and Mrs. Harvey Hart, purchased the Ward hotel. It was given the original name - The Ward Hotel - and it remains The Ward Hotel today.

On October 14, 1982, The Ward Hotel was officially declared a National Historic Land-





mark. When the Tonners and Harts bought the building it was in very poor condition. The previous owners had made no structural improvements, and the rooms were still done in the original furnishings. Keeping the building's history in mind, immediate renovation was begun. This included a new boiler system and air conditioning. The kitchen was remodeled and the Coffee Shop was restored for its original purpose. The Dining Room was remodeled and redecorated holding to the Spanish motif designed into the building in 1928.

The Ballroom was re-roofed and repaired to bring back its splendor. The Ballroom was one of the main features for qualifying as an historic landmark. It is the only one of its kind left in the area.

Renovation continues today as funds are available. The lobby has been returned to its original buff color with the original Spanish light fixtures still adorning the ceilings.

The Dining Room has been changed back to the 1920's Era when Mr. Ward managed it.







Looking at the north side of the building, one can still see the two-story window that must have been magnificent when the building was first open. The lobby was open, and the mezzanine had wrought-iron railing around the opening where there now resides a fireplace. This area can only be pictured in one's mind since fire codes won't allow it to be reopened.

Also to the north is a marquee over what was considered the main entrance to The Ward Hotel. At one time there stood a doorman opening the doors and welcoming ladies and gentlemen to the hotel, and also welcoming back the current apartment residents.

Now people are under the impression that the main entrance is from the East off Main Street. There is also a marquee at this entrance.

The Ward Hotel still rents apartments - modernized for the comfort of the residents. We have thirty hotel rooms - all designed with the original Ward Hotel in mind.

The Dining Room is now called The Back







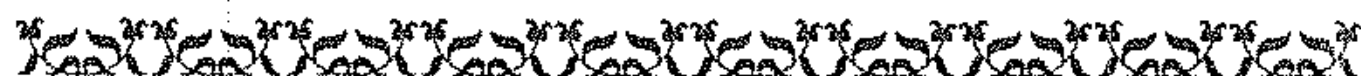
Room, the original setting of Mr. Ward's restaurant opened in 1884, is now The Coffee Shop, and the bar, which has resided in the Coffee Shop area, the basement, and where the current Dining Room is now, was established in part of what used to be the main lobby.

The Front Desk is the original 1928 desk. The crystal chandeliers in the Ballroom are the original ones hung at time of construction of the building.

The bathrooms connected to each hotel room has original black-and-white checked tile floors.

In days past, many famous people have stayed at The Ward Hotel including Jack Benny, Senator Robert Taft, Govenor Earl Warren, the late then Senator John F. Kennedy, Colonel "Billy" Mitchell, the founder of the U. S. Air Force, ex-outfielder of the Minnesota Twins, Bob Allison, and the famous criminal trial lawyer, Jerry Spence.

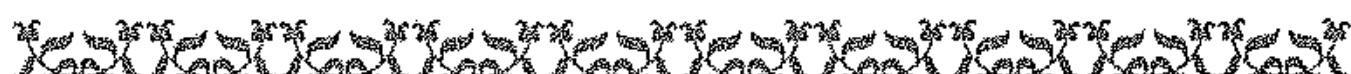
Also during its history, The Ward Hotel has played host to Lawrence Welk, Duke Ellington, and many other famous entertainers.





I may hate history classes, and maybe you do, too. However, when the subject is at hand - in this case a building in which I work, history isn't so bad. In fact, my admiration for Alonzo Ward, Sr., and his dream-come-true is hopefully reflected in these pages.

Maybe you, too, will say to yourself, "Now there's a man I can respect, and a building I will always admire."





All research for this booklet was completed at the Alexander-Mitchell Library. Most of the information was taken from newspaper accounts written in the Aberdeen American News and the Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer.

Thanks to all at the Alexander-Mitchell Library for your assistance!



