

## Discovering the

# Aberdeen Room

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**There's a small archive/museum in the heart of downtown Aberdeen where the past connects us to the present. The connector is made up of the many volunteers who catalogue, read, sort, display and prepare the materials that are donated. They are also the keepers of the stories bringing the facts of history to life for those who may have forgotten.**

The first person you are likely to meet at the Aberdeen Room is Charlotte Garretson Cronin. Charlotte is a treasure trove of knowledge about Aberdeen history. Through the Garretson family background, Charlotte inherited the love of railroads, with the tracks running behind her home while growing up. Her grandfather and father both worked for the railroad giving Charlotte the opportunity to travel the states by rail. With her marriage into the Cronin family, she enjoyed a keen interest in her local community through the Cronin's family-owned newspaper, "The Harford Democrat." Through her love of the arts encouraged by her father, Charlotte learned the value of sketching to "help her recall events." These varied paths led to her authoring the book, *Sketches of Village to Town to City: Recalling Aberdeen, Maryland*.

During my visit, I enjoyed a wonderful conversation with Charlotte and two very active volunteers at the Aberdeen Room, Mary Lee Plummer and Mary-Lynne Livezey. Along with displays of old photos, artifacts and books of Aberdeen history, the museum volunteers willingly share stories that will help to bring it all to life.

I browsed the sketches in her book choosing two that I might highlight by comparing to a photo of the same corner today. The first location is the northwest corner of West Bel Air Avenue and Howard Street. The original 1891 First National Bank of Aberdeen was located here. Also known as the "Tin Can Bank" because the organizers were mostly associated with the growing canning industry.<sup>1</sup>

In the sketch, you can see the Old Town Hall located behind the bank, and to the left is the 1896 E. Dell and Company Pharmacy.<sup>1</sup> When the brick structure was built around its predecessor, Charlotte comments that the bank did not lose one business day.<sup>3</sup> Today the building is the home of the Word of Life Christian Fellowship.

At the entry to the city of Aberdeen's downtown area is the corner of West Bel Air Avenue and, in 1919, Front Street, this sketch shows the Odd Fellows Building. Built after the 1918 fire, it housed the Blenheim Lodge, the Masonic Lodge, professional offices and the popular Bonnett's Newsstand. To the right you'll see the AACO Theatre, established in 1919.<sup>2</sup>

Today's photo shows Dee's Florist and a number of other businesses at the same corner of West Bel Air Avenue and Philadelphia Blvd. The theatre is long gone, replaced by the new Harford Bank building, as is the Bonnett's Newsstand. But the corner looks strikingly similar considering that following a gas explosion in 1976, it was again totally rebuilt. Charlotte recalls that the explosion caused one fireman to be blown, literally, right out of his boots!

The Aberdeen Room offers a plethora of information. There are specific displays recalling the railroad, banking, school and baseball history to mention just a few. The folks there are inviting and friendly, eager to share stories to help bring the facts to life. Should you be so inclined, they are always in need of volunteers.

Visit the Aberdeen Room at 18 North Howard Street, 410-273-6325. Tuesday and Thursday: 10 am - 1 pm; First Saturday of the month: 11 am - 3 pm Or visit their website: [www.AberdeenRoom.com](http://www.AberdeenRoom.com) Maybe I'll run into you there.

<sup>1</sup> *Sketches*, by Charlotte Garretson Cronin, © 2006, page 65; <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 68; <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 73

