

## Reader Guide for *Miss Bishop* by Bess Streeter Aldrich

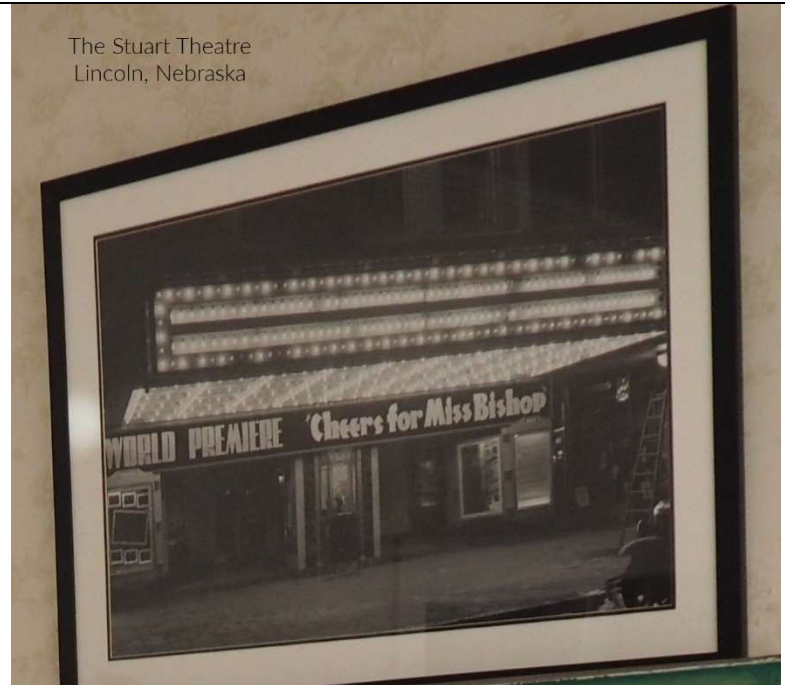
Presented by Gretchen M. Garrison of "Odyssey Through Nebraska"

This guide was funded in part by the Syracuse Library Foundation

**About the author:** Bess Streeter Aldrich was born on February 17th, 1881, in Cedar Falls, Iowa. She was the 8th child of James Wareham Streeter and Mary Wilson Anderson Streeter. Her closest sibling was ten years older, so she described herself as having the "world's record for the number of bosses over her."<sup>1</sup> As a young adult, Bess began entering story contests and even won several. She received her degree from Iowa State Normal School in 1901, then she taught for several years. During this time, she met Cap (Charles) Aldrich. They were married on September 24, 1907. In 1909, their daughter was born. Soon after, they moved to Elmwood, Nebraska, to run the American Exchange Bank in Elmwood with Bess' sister and brother-in-law. By 1920, the Aldrich family also included three sons. During these years, Bess would find snatches of time to write. She published many short stories in magazines and some of her serials became books. When her husband died in 1925, Bess' hobby became necessary for her family's livelihood. Over time, Bess wrote nine novels. Additional stories were combined into compilations. Bess died on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1954. In 1972, she was named to the "Nebraska Hall of Fame" and is now a part of the display at the Nebraska Capitol.

*Miss Bishop* was Bess Streeter Aldrich's sixth novel. This title was published in 1933 by Appleton, the same publisher as her previous titles. The reader gets to know Ella Bishop through the years. "She does not marry but remains as a teacher at Midwestern for fifty-one years. During this time, she is close to many students, assisting them, financially or emotionally, as individual needs require; in their youthful ways, they recognize her dedication and warm support."<sup>2</sup> This book was later adapted to become the movie, "Cheers for Miss Bishop."

"The theme for *Miss Bishop* was originally worked out in Aldrich's story entitled, 'The Woman Who Was Forgotten,' which appeared in the June 1926 *American Magazine*."<sup>3</sup> "The NEA (National Education Association) bought the story rights and backed production of the Miss Miller story into a movie which was released in 1931 under the same title, *The Woman Who Was Forgotten*."<sup>4</sup>



Stuart Theater in Lincoln, Nebraska, hosted the 1941 world premiere of the movie, *Cheers for Miss Bishop*. This picture is at the Bess Streeter Aldrich House. Please visit the website to see current tour hours. <https://www.bessstreeteraldrich.org/>

### ***Miss Bishop's* Family and Close Friends**

Ella Bishop	16 at start (born in 1860); A Midwestern grad, she teaches there for 51 years
Mrs. Bishop	Seldom finishes sentences; Widowed in 1875; moved from farm to town

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the *Bess Streeter Aldrich Scrapbook* by Vopal Gowman Youngberg (page 11)

<sup>2</sup> Petersen, Carol Miles. *Bess Streeter Aldrich*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. p. 120-121

<sup>3</sup> Petersen, Carol Miles. *Bess Streeter Aldrich*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. p. 121

<sup>4</sup> Petersen, Carol Miles. *Bess Streeter Aldrich*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. p. 122

Peters Family	Judge; Meek Mrs.; Sam; Chester; lived by the Bishops; Sam stays steady for Ella
Delbert Thompson	Formerly Chet's roommate – will partner in law office; plans to marry Ella
Cousin Amy	After her parents die, she moves in with Bishops; she steals Delbert away
Hope Thompson	The daughter of Delbert & Amy who lives with Bishops when her parents die
Stena	Moves into Bishop home temporarily to help with Hope; stays 51 years
Richard (Dick) Jones	Through a misunderstood connection, he meets & falls in love with Hope
Gretchen Jones	Dick and Hope's only child; lives with Ella to complete her schooling
Ronald Smith	Irene's grandson who ends up marrying Gretchen

**Miss Bishop Classmates** (information in quotations is from the book unless noted otherwise)

George Schroeder	Big-boned German boy; farmhand; little English; tied to German heritage
Albert Fonda	"small, weazened-face boy"; sharp at mathematics; astronomy; Bohemian;
Janet McLaughlin	Scotch; homely; lovable; to be Maynard teacher; later well-groomed, stylish
Irene Van Ness	Banker's daughter; Halfway engaged to Chester Peters – waits for him; ageless for a time; She marries Robert Hunt – has many children & grandchildren
Mary Crombie	frank and efficient; to be Maple City teacher – continues that – also wiry
Mina Gordon	Little, lithe and gypsy-like; to be married; grows - square body; 3 chins; 6 kids
Emily Teasdale	College beauty; to be married; becomes shadowy and non-descript
Evelyn Hobbs	Soft-spoken and shyly humorous; to be married; passes away before reunion

**Employees of the School (By Chapter Order)**

Chris Jensen	Dane; <i>maintenance man</i> ; marries Hannah ; stays at school as long as Ella		
Professor Samuel Peters	<i>spelling/Spencerian method of writing; Penmanship (only for short time)</i>		
Professor Loren Wick	<i>Mathematics</i>	Professor Byron Carter	<i>Grammar and literature</i>
Miss Emmaline Patton	<i>Geography and history</i>	President Corcoran	<i>Mental/Moral Philosophy</i>
Miss Susie McAlister	Music; "devoted to the goddess Euterpe" – Greek Muse of Music <sup>5</sup>		
Professor Cunningham	<i>Didactics</i>	President Watts	<i>Executive</i>
Alum Albert Fonda	<i>Astronomy</i>	Alum George Schroeder	<i>German classes</i>
Radical Professor O'Neil	<i>1 year – history</i>	Dr. Wittingly	<i>Pedagogy</i>
Professor Crooks	<i>History</i>	Miss Zimmerman	<i>Piano Department</i>
Professor Stevens	<i>English Literature</i>	Professor James	<i>English</i>
Only names are given:	Professor Hess, Professor Alderslot;		
President Melvin Bevans Crowder	"Young, efficient; progressive"		

**Miss Bishop Questions for the Reader**

- 1) This book was written during the Great Depression. Do you think that impacted the storyline?
- 2) Do you think Miss Bishop would have been happier if she would have gotten married?
- 3) Do you think Ella Bishop was self-sacrificing or a martyr?
- 4) Do you think Ella is glad that she kept teaching at Midwestern or do you think she wishes that she would have moved on at some point?
- 5) The movie posters portrayed this book as a love story. Do you agree?

<sup>5</sup> Euterpe Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster