

# NCB Quarterly ARCHIVES

Nebraska Center for the Book

Vol. 4

Spring 1994

No. 2



*Bess Streeter Aldrich*  
1881-1954



## Board of Directors

The Nebraska Center for the Book is the 23rd state affiliate of the Library of Congress's National Center for the Book. The Center is a non-profit corporation whose purpose is to stimulate public interest in books, reading, and the written word. The Center acts as a catalyst, bringing together individuals and organizations to build the Nebraska community of the book. The Center serves as a partner and supporter of programs, events, and unique projects which celebrate the written word. The current board members are:

|                                      |              |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
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## Nebraska Center for the Book Board of Directors Meetings 1994

**June 2** — Host: Golda Bockbrader, NCB  
President-elect, Grand Island  
Program: Chautauqua

**September 2** — Host: Board Members,  
UNO  
Program: Lila Wallace Reader's Digest  
Fund Reading/Discussion Literature Project

**November 4** — Host: Carol Connor: Heri-  
tage Room, Lincoln City Library  
Program: Annual Meeting

**Note:** All Board of Directors Meetings are preceded by morning programs and committee work convening at 9:30 a.m. All NCB members are encouraged to join us for these activities and become more involved in our planning programs. Members may also attend Board Meetings in a non-voting status.

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## President's Message — Elaine Booth

On April 17 and 18, I will be in Washington, D.C., for the National Center for the Book's Idea Exchange Conference. During this time (thanks to you), I will be able to enjoy the network which exists among the Center and the state affiliates. This year, a majority of states will be represented, and under the direction of John Cole and Maurvene Williams, information and perspective regarding funding, programs, newsletters and special events will be shared. Although I know I will learn a great deal at this gathering, I must admit that I look forward to boasting about our own Nebraska Center, regaling everyone with our progress and luring them to some of the events and programs we are planning.

We have spent the past year in extremely productive endeavors. A sort of rhythm has begun to establish itself in our general operating procedures and our long-term planning is beginning to pay off. Our committees are actively pursuing new activities while monitoring and stabilizing existing ones. Thanks to these efforts, our governance and membership components are settling into a rational design and our financial picture is finally lending itself to a more predictable accountability. We have achieved a diversity of interest, culture and place in the composition of our Board of Directors and have initiated plans for elections, terms of office and executive responsibility. Some of the fledgling affiliates will admire these signposts of a thriving

organization and I will be pleased to "guide" them through our experience.

It is one thing to enjoy a steady and dependable "pulse," but it is even more gratifying to flourish. I now have the enviable opportunity to describe our successful programs and events in a variety of sharing formats. Copies of our *NCB Quarterly* will, of course, be prominently displayed in the Madison Building as a prime example of a publication which has survived the tests of time. We can be understandably proud of this printed record of our activities and collaborations, since it has not continued without a struggle and considerable upheaval. Each issue is triumph of cooperation and compromise, and our new editor Linda Dageforde has admirably accomplished the management of sometimes ill-prepared copy and an NCB president who is always late with the "message."

You can bet that I will truly relish my responsibility to enlighten state centers on the subject of NCB-sponsored festivals and events. I will keep the floor as long as possible in order to tell how our reading, writing and literacy (and now censorship) committee continually instigates visionary activities such as literacy conference partnerships and writing projects for senior citizens in eleven communities. Our literature festival is always an attention-getter, and this year, I intend to invite

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*Leaves From A Nebraska Notebook*, a 1989 project funded by the Nebraska Humanities Council included articles about Nebraska authors and was reprinted in 38 newspapers, reaching over 900,000 readers. Project directors were UNO English Professors, David M. Raabe, and John J. McKenna.

## Nebraska Hills, Winds, Corn, Provide Home for the Spirit

Carol Miles Petersen, University of Nebraska—Lincoln

“Cedartown sits beside a great highway which was once a buffalo trail. If you start in one direction on the highway — and travel far enough — you will come to the effete east. If you start in the opposite direction — and travel a few hundred miles farther — you will come to the distinctive west.”

“Cedartown is neither effete nor distinctive, nor is it even particularly pleasing to the passing tourist. It is beautiful only in the eyes of those who live here and in the memories of the Nebraska-born whose dwelling in far places has given them moments of homesickness for the low rolling hills, the swell and dip of the ripening wheat, the fields of elusively fragrant odor of alfalfa.”

These opening words of Bess Streeter Aldrich’s *A Lantern in Her Hand* describe the geography of a Nebraska town while emphasizing the sense of place we call home. Although she writes of the snow and sleet, the crop-parching winds, the “monotonous drouth and periods of dreary rain,” Aldrich also depicts “days so perfect that to the prairie-born there are no others so lovely by mountain or lake or sea.”

The importance of home, which can be considered as narrow as one’s house or as wide and deep as our Midwest, is central to Aldrich’s writing. The sense that place and home are interchangeable appears in her first full length novel, *The Rim of the Prairie*. One

of the characters, an old man named Jud, speaks of the farm he has husbanded for many years yet has now decided to sell. When he realizes that he is too deeply bound to his land to relinquish it and move away, however, he refuses to complete the sale. With stark finality, he sums up his feelings: “I belong.” Aldrich writes of the house and its “rafters that have stood the battering of the storm, the sheltering walls that have heard the roar of rains and the chimney from which has gone up the altar smoke of a home.” Home and its encompassing sense of place, Aldrich suggests, are more than simply landscape and weather; they embrace the spiritual, for the storms of which she writes are those of the spirit as well as those of nature.

Such response to house and landscape creates traits of character that are passed on to succeeding generations. For example, Aldrich writes of an outsider, who, after talking to one of the old pioneers, suddenly realizes that it took “the hardihood, the faith, [and] the courage of the people who stayed and saw the thing through” to produce the country we now are. Her books provide witness that the strength of those who came to Nebraska and stayed was passed on to succeeding generations. As Aldrich reports in the climax of *Spring Came on Forever*, there was “evidence everywhere of the Nebraska pioneer spirit which had not died out in the third and fourth generations.”

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Nebraskans in Aldrich's fiction reach out to others. They possess warmhearted hospitality, loyal friendship, and deep sympathy, because they possess a sense of home.

A sense of home is important to Aldrich herself. She writes about one of her own children who put his handprint with initials and date in every piece of fresh cement in town; she says that it would "be absurd to say that the sight of that traced hand outside my study window holds me here, but it may readily be a symbol of all that does." For, "you cannot break the radii which stretch out from the center of a good home. They are the most flexible things in the world."

Bess Streeter Aldrich wrote 11 novels and over 160 short stories, in many of which home in its most positive aspects is a primary theme and provides the sense of place. Aldrich's bestseller, *A Lantern in Her Hand*, is the story of first and second generation English speaking immigrants to Nebraska. It moves from the immigrants' experiences first of feeling small and afraid in the immense open space, to the commitment to make a home, and, finally, to the definition of a home. Her descriptions of what it was to come in the late 1860s into the raw, unfenced land beyond the Missouri were so real that people wrote to thank her for expressing what their parents had known.

*A White Bird Flying*, a sequel to *Lantern*, moves to the next generation of Nebraskans as they question the importance of Nebraska as place. *Spring Came on Forever*, the third novel set in Nebraska traces the coming of one of Nebraska's largest national groups, the Germans. In all of these books, Nebraska

is the geographic place, but in the broader sense, it is the inward dwelling place of home about which she writes. From *Lantern* onward, all of Bess Streeter Aldrich's novels reached the bestseller lists, and many have never gone out of print.

Bess Streeter Aldrich was born in Cedar Falls, Iowa, in 1881. She married Captain Charles S. Aldrich in 1907, and they moved to Elmwood, Nebraska, in 1909 after purchasing the American Exchange Bank of Elmwood. Charles Aldrich died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1925, leaving Bess Streeter Aldrich to raise alone their four children. In 1932 she received an honorary doctor of letters from the University of Nebraska. She remained in Elmwood until 1945 when she moved to Lincoln to be near her daughter and her family, and where, in 1954, Aldrich died. She was inducted into the Nebraska Hall of Fame in 1973, only the second woman at that time to be so honored.

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**NOTE:** Bess Streeter Aldrich Remembrance Day each year is the first Sunday in October at Elmwood, Nebraska. It begins with a dinner at the school, then the program in which one of Aldrich's books usually is discussed and is concluded with the raffle of a handmade quilt signifying one of Aldrich's books or stories.

The Aldrich home is available for guided tours on Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 2-5 or by appointment. Maxine Klein is the live-in curator at the house, and the telephone number is (402) 994-3855.

The Bess Streeter Aldrich Museum is open in conjunction with the tours. The museum contains manuscripts, scrapbooks, dust jacket paintings, and other memorabilia.



# GO BIG READ!

## The Nebraska Literature Festival is September 23 - 24, 1994.

The two day Nebraska Literature Festival is going to be presented to Nebraskans on September 23 and 24. Thursday evening, September 22, will also include nationally known author Ron Hansen reading some of his works at UNO.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha will be hosting the fourth annual Nebraska Literature Festival High School Day. This unique opportunity for young writers to meet one another, work together, and learn together will occur on Friday, September 23, 1994 on the UNO campus.

Actual activities for the day are still in the planning stages but it is hoped that 200 area high school students will share in drama or writing workshops with separate discussion groups devoted to specific works of Nebraska authors. Tillie Olsen will participate in closing activities on Friday. The day's activities are free for the students except for the cost of lunch which should be around \$5.00.

For more information on the Nebraska Literature Festival High School Day activities contact Linda Johnson at the Department of English, UNO, Omaha, NE 68182.

Friday night a humorous musical drama about a serious subject *Free Speech for Me But Not For Thee* will be presented on the UNO campus. It was written by the assistant director of the Des Moines Community Theatre, Tim Wisgerhof, about the topic of censorship and performed by the Des Moines Community Theatre. During the evening, the Hu-

manities Council will present the Sower Awards.

The musical is being presented in conjunction with the national display, "Bonfires of Liberty," showing at the downtown W. Dale Clark Public Library during the month of September.

Saturday's activities will be held at the Peter Kiewit Convention Center in downtown Omaha. The day will include two additional nationally known authors, Jonis Agee and Tillie Olsen who will be sharing their work with Festival participants. Tillie Olsen will be the special guest speaker at the luncheon on Saturday. She will also be involved in a discussion with Bill (UNO faculty specialist in labor history) and Linda Pratt (UNL English Department and interested in Tillie's work).

In addition to panel discussions on Nebraska authors (Loren Eisley, Bess Streeter Aldrich, Willa Cather, Mari Sandoz, John Neihardt and Wright Morris), current Nebraska authors will be reading from their own works throughout the day. Omaha author Carl Jonas will also be featured. Authors will be available to sign books at the Book Exhibit and Book Fair.

There will also be storytellers sharing stories for adults and children to enjoy together.

Writing workshops (Instruction and/or Advice on writing) will be available on Writing Mysteries, Romance, Journals, Science Fic-

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## 1994 John G. Neihardt Conference

"Neihardt as Western Historian" was the focus of the 1994 John G. Neihardt conference on Saturday, April 30th at the Neihardt Center in Bancroft, Nebraska.

Four scholars discussed Neihardt's reshaping of the history of the Great Plains through his writings. Speakers for this year's Conference were author and historian Joseph C. Porter, who examined Neihardt's views on the great leader of the Oglala Lakota tribe, Crazy Horse. Dr. Porter has been the director for the Center of Western Studies at Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum and Director of Publications for the Missouri Historical Society. He is currently residing in Texas where his latest biography on Crazy Horse is in progress.

Also on the program was James C. Work, Professor of English at Colorado State University, who examined Neihardt's use of history to invoke both image and feeling. Other speakers included Joe Green, instructor of English at Minden High School in Minden,

Nebraska, and Wynema Morris, independent Omaha Indian scholar and advocate for Indian education. These speakers focused on Neihardt's experiences with the Native Americans of the Great Plains and the legends of the American West and how he immortalized these through his work as Nebraska's poet laureate. All four presenters participated in a panel discussion open to questions from the audience.

Tours of the Sacred Hoop Prayer Garden, which carries out the symbolism of Black Elk's vision as shared with John G. Neihardt, were offered during breaks and following the noon lunch.

The conference was made possible through the support of The Nebraska Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Division of Humanities, Wayne State College; the John G. Neihardt Foundation and Center; and the Nebraska State Historical Society.

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tion, and Literature for Children. Preregistration is required as enrollment will be limited.

**Go Big Read** will conclude with a musical and slide presentation on Willa Cather written and performed by John Kunz.

Advance information and registrations will be available at public libraries during the summer and at bookstores in Omaha and

Lincoln. **Registration for the Saturday events is \$5.00. A separate ticket is required for the luncheon on Saturday, the reading on Thursday and the musical on Friday.**

**Go Big Read** is being presented in conjunction with River City Roundup in Omaha and will highlight writings featuring Nebraska Cowboy Heritage and Nebraska's varied ethnic heritage (African American, Hispanic, Native American, Czech and Irish among others).



## “Literacy in Changing Times” – CAL Conference

The Nebraska Coordinators for Adult Literacy will hold their State Conference at the Lincoln Airport Ramada Inn on June 10 – 11, 1994. After opening remarks by the Mayor of Lincoln, the Keynote Address, “Shoes Are Now Located Next to the Men’s Department,” will be presented by Evelyn Renner, Literacy Consultant.

Concurrent sessions including Family Literacy – Teresa Bergman, Leadership Skills – Nancy Eberle, Literacy Resource Center – John Dirx Listening Skills – Kay McKinzie, Literacy Links – Lane Plugge, and Multicultural Literacy – will be held throughout the day on Friday. Concurrent Roundtable Discussion groups will focus on New Readers, Literacy Providers and Workplace Literacy. The conference banquet will be at 6:30 on Friday evening with speaker Jim Swoboda of Swoboda Enterprises.

Saturday will begin with breakfast speaker, Tom Rother of Tecumseh Public Schools focusing on “Literacy in Malawi, Africa.”

Concurrent Sessions on Saturday include Literacy Programs – Evelyn Renner, Self Esteem – Stuart Wiley, Social Services and Literacy – Mary Dean Harvey, Student/Teacher Motivation – Marian Beethe, Valmont 2000 – Dr. Ken Jones, Learning Styles – Sue Schlichtemeier-Nutzman. The Luncheon Speaker will be Sue Brown, Extension Educator. The 1992, 1993 Maynard Jensen award winners for Excellence in Adult Literacy Providers will be introduced followed by the CAL business meeting and closing of the conference. For more information contact Golda Bockbrader at (308) 382-1748.



### *1994 Nebraska Writing & Storytelling Festival* **Recognizing Our Roots**

Northeast Community College Theatre — Norfolk, Nebraska — June 4, 1994

Hear 2 Nebraska Humanities Scholars: Margaret Frady Cathcart speak on “The Spiritual Journey of Nebraska Quiltmakers” and “Winfield Delle present Nebraska History in Cemeteries.” In addition workshops on: “How to Be Famous in Your own Lifetime: Recording Family History;” “Getting Published;” Writers’ Workshop: “Improve Your Writing Skills;” “Telling Tales from World Cultures;” “Recovering Our Roots Through Writing: Collecting Family Legends;” and Writer’s Workshop: “Recalling Our Roots.”

Have your writing critiqued, visit book exhibits and attend a concluding performance showcasing the best of writing and storytelling by participants in the conference.

**For more information: contact Karen Warner, NCC, 402-644-0515**



## Storytelling — A Demonstration

Connie Yost

The story of March 2nd began early for me as I headed east toward Beatrice along byways I had not traveled before. The capricious fog billowed and swirled, then wantonly ebbed out across the winter-dormant farmlands. It was a fine Nebraska morning rendition of Celtic flair and Gothic myth, a perfect cloak for a storyteller en route to the spring meeting of the NCB Board of Directors.

The weather delayed most everyone's arrival; however, Laureen Riedesel provided us with a memorable morning tour of the impressive public library which the community of Beatrice has constructed. Should you ever desire to research your genealogy, I would encourage you to plan a trek to this corner of our state and avail yourself of their resources. Laureen will be delighted to see you!

I had been invited to demonstrate some ways in which the oral tradition of storytelling is being utilized today in the classroom. I began with Celtic traditions and ended with a story of vandalism and subsequent rescue enacted by the fair Elaine Booth and the resourceful Jane Renner Hood. Chivalrous deeds beyond Camelot sprang forth that evening of the first Nebraska Literature Festival on the cobbled streets of the Old Market. I must promise, however, that the remainder of this space be devoted to those components of my short talk which you may find of some intellectual merit. Should you wish to hear the story of Jane and Elaine, simply ask any one of us to supply you the

details. In this manner, oral tradition shall indeed be maintained.

Inevitably, it seemed appropriate to begin with the oldest living story — the spiritual quest — the quest to find the inward thing that each of us basically is. I drew from the adventures of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight to illustrate the virtues of loyalty to the values of life in this world. From this legend may be intimated that the passage to fulfillment lies between the two temptations, the perils of desire and fear; fear to venture by oneself or reveal oneself, fear to set out one's imperfect work before it is an opus, fear of caring for another, fear one will run by (miss it), run out or run down. I next utilized Nietzsche's parable of the three transformations of the spirit. Childhood and youth is the time for obedience, receiving instruction and the information society requires of one in order to live a responsible life. The heavier the load carried, the stronger one will be during the period of self-discovery and coming to one's own realization. In individual life, this stage differs greatly. Some people are late bloomers and come to it at a relatively late age. Ultimately, one must use the rules and regulations in one's own way and not be inhibited by them, but move out of one's own nature, like a wheel impelled from its own hub. There cannot be creativity unless the bounded and the fixed are left behind.

Lastly, I shared with my listeners something I had gleaned from a talk I heard Kurt Vonnegut deliver about ten years ago. He said

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## Storytelling

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that he thinks we have to recognize our own depth — what it is we want from life, what it is that truly makes us happy. In order to do that, one needs to think of one's entirety, one's whole sphere of the psyche as a circle and understand that our energy comes not from our ego, but from our submerged center. It's quite possible to be so influenced by the ideals and commands of our culture that we don't really know what we really want and could be. One way to learn how to reach our center is to discover our own guiding motifs through the works of a good novelist — reading Thomas Mann and James Joyce helped provide that instruction for Vonnegut.

I ended my presentation with a personal his-

tory tale of my own, illustrating that for me, the search for self is immersed in humor. Then after guiding this auspicious audience along pathways others have utilized for their spiritual quests, and concluding on a note of laughter, I departed. I left them with a burgeoning agenda, a full itinerary of activities they are planning for the upcoming Nebraska Literature Festival which will be in Omaha this September. Also under consideration are the possibilities now made available by the renewal of the Lila Wallace Grant for 1994-1995 Reading Circles. I can readily verify to the readers of this publication that your NCB board does indeed work with fervent dedication and diligence to insure that we, in Nebraska, are provided with great programs celebrating the written word. A toast to them all and a fulfilling, continued spiritual quest for all of you!

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## President's Message

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everyone to the "festival full-circle," a celebration of persistence, optimism and risk-taking. Most of the plans for the "Go Big Read" event and the Nebraska Storytelling Festival to be held in June are so miraculously fleshed out that my oral summaries will be spell-bindingly specific. Naturally, I will be most gracious in my thanks to the Center for sharing the impressive "Bonfires of Liberties" exhibit with us just in time for our September festivities.

Rest assured, the story of support and nurturing we have received from like-minded organizations will not go untold. I will report on our successful collaboration with the Nebraska Humanities Council and its generous funding of programming for board meetings

and especially for the literature festival. The Lila Wallace Readers' Digest fund has also provided us with opportunities for important growth. From the National Book Foundation Book Discussion Project obtained by the NHC last year, to our own grant for a literary heritage project already organized this year, we have benefited immeasurably from its generosity. (Please read the low-down on our current Lila Wallace-funded program elsewhere in this quarterly.)

By the time you read this message, I will have returned from Washington and will be anxious to share news of all the state affiliates as well as the National Center. However, I feel I must speak to the concerns all NCB members must feel after having read this article. In case you are worried that I stormed the Library of Congress in an arrogant frenzy of obnoxious bragging, let me just reassure you, "it was for their own good!"



## The Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Grant Reader's Circles

Participating public libraries are selecting five of the six available titles written by Nebraska authors — *My Antonia* (Cather); *Shingling the Fog* (Welsch); *A White Bird Flying* (Aldrich); *Old Jules* (Sandoz); *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt); and *Home Place* (Morris) — for discussions. The first discussion was held April 6 in Bellevue. Each site plans to have at least three sessions com-

pleted by the Nebraska Literature Festival on September 24, 1994. A leader from each site will lead a discussion at the Festival with all six titles being discussed. The series is to be completed by December 15. Books will be supplied from the Nebraska Humanities Council. Project director is Laureen Riedesel, NCB Board Member and Director of the Beatrice Public Library. [Phone: (402) 223-3584]

### Book Discussion Schedules

| Sites             | May                | June                 | July                    | August                 | September              | October                | November            |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| My Antonia        |                    | Broken Bow<br>June 7 | Ainsworth<br>(tba)      |                        | Minden<br>Sept. 11     |                        |                     |
| Shingling the Fog |                    |                      |                         |                        | Beatrice<br>Sept. 22   | Minden<br>October 13   |                     |
| Black Elk Speaks  |                    |                      |                         | Ainsworth<br>(tba)     |                        | Bellevue<br>October 17 | Beatrice<br>Nov. 17 |
| White Bird Flying | Bellevue<br>May 16 | Beatrice<br>June 23  | Minden<br>July 24 or 30 | Broken Bow<br>August 9 |                        |                        |                     |
| Old Jules         | Ainsworth<br>(tba) | Bellevue<br>June 28  | Minden<br>July 10       | Bellevue<br>August 11  | Broken Bow<br>Sept. 13 |                        |                     |
| Home Place        |                    | Ainsworth<br>(tba)   |                         | Bellevue<br>August 11  |                        | Beatrice<br>October 27 | Minden<br>Nov. 13   |

### *For Your Information . . . Centers for the Book in Other States*

**Colorado Center for the Book** sponsors Rocky Mountain Book Festival October 28-29, 1994 at Currigan, Colorado.

**Idaho Center for the Book** is publishing a literary heritage map, "Idaho by the Book".

**Illinois Center for the Book** cosponsored Year of the Lifetime Reader symposium "Linking Libraries with Other Agencies That Service Youth" with the State Library of Illinois; coposponsors Prairie State book project with University of Illinois Press to reprint classics of Illinois interest.

# Calendar of Events 1994

## **March 1994 — March 1995**

Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Grant  
Reading Circles

## **April 18, 1994**

National Affiliates Meeting

## **Saturday, June 4, 1994**

Nebraska Writing and Storytelling  
Festival, Northeast Community College  
in Norfolk

## **June 10-11, 1994**

Nebraska Coordinators for Adult Literacy  
State Conference

## **September 23, 1994**

University of Nebraska at Omaha – Ne-  
braska Literature Festival **"Go Big  
Read!"**

## **September 24, 1994**

Nebraska Literature Festival **"Go Big  
Read!"** – Peter Kiewit Conference Cen-  
ter, Omaha

## **November 4, 1994**

Annual Meeting Nebraska Center for the  
Book, Heritage Room, Lincoln Library

*The Nebraska Center for the Book*  
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