

**BESS STREETER ALDRICH'S  
FRONTIER OMAHA, 1866-1868**

by  
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From the 1920s to the 1940s, Bess Streeter Aldrich (1881-1954) won national prominence as a novelist. Her most famous novel, *A Lantern in Her Hand* (1928) splendidly depicts life in rural eastern Nebraska from the era of the unbroken tall grass prairie in 1868 to the day of a settled, gentle, midwestern landscape sixty years later. Three later books, *Spring Came on Forever* (1935), *Song of Years* (1939), and *The Lieutenant's Lady* (1942) were historical novels.



Bess Streeter Aldrich

*Photo courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society*

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Bess Streeter was born and reared in the Cedar Falls, Iowa area and graduated from Iowa State Normal School (now the University of Northern Iowa) in Cedar Falls. She taught in Boone and Marshalltown, Iowa, and in Salt Lake City, and in 1907 married attorney Charles Sweetzer Aldrich, and moved to Tipton, Iowa, her husband's home town. Two years later they moved to Elmwood, Nebraska, a town of some 635 people about twenty-three miles east of Lincoln, where Charles ("Cap") Aldrich and his brother-in-law had purchased a bank. Here Bess Streeter Aldrich would live for the next thirty-seven years, rear her four children, and make a career as a novelist and short story writer.<sup>1</sup>

One of Bess Streeter Aldrich's strengths as a novelist was her descriptive ability—people's thoughts or moods; their physical appearance and dress; their surroundings, and the natural settings. As Abigail Martin, an Aldrich scholar has said, "Probably no American writer has been more delightfully graphic when it comes to settings. In her pictures of the country, Aldrich rivals Willa Cather, Mari Sandoz, [and] Ruth Suckow. One *feels* the country as she spreads it before one."<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Aldrich's novels are best known for their portrayal of rural and small town life in mid-America from the frontier period through the early decades of the twentieth century. Works depicting city life and an urban landscape are atypical.

A significant exception to this generally accurate image is found in Aldrich's last novel, *The Lieutenant's Lady* (1942). This work was what Mrs. Aldrich termed a "fictionalized version" of the diary of a "young woman" and depicts the experiences of "Linnie Colsworth," a well-bred young lady from the East who comes to Omaha in 1866 for an extended stay with her Uncle Henry Colsworth, Aunt Louise, and Cousin Cynthia. Beautiful, fun-loving Cynthia is soon betrothed to Norman Stafford, a handsome young Lieutenant of the Regular Army. In a short time, Lt. Stafford is posted to Fort Berthold, far up the Missouri River in Dakota Territory, but Cynthia—ill-suited to be an Army wife—cannot endure Norman's absence and the infrequency of letters. The impatient Cynthia then marries a young Omaha businessman of her social circle and implores cousin Linnie to break the news to Norman Stafford. Linnie could not bring herself to convey the dreadful news to Lt. Stafford by letter, for although she was reared with traditional victorian constraint in dealing with the opposite sex, she found herself attracted to Norman.

Omaha was a jumping-off place for travel to the upper Missouri country, and what follows is the up-river odyssey of Linnie Colsworth who, under the most unusual circumstances, returns at the end of the book to Omaha as the wife of Lieutenant Norman Stafford. In developing her story, Mrs. Aldrich used diaries and other historical materials to depict aspects of Army life on the remote upper Missouri in Dakota and Montana territories.<sup>3</sup>

The first part of *The Lieutenant's Lady* is set in Omaha in 1866-1867 and the vindication of Linnie's romantic journey occurs in Omaha late in 1868. The years 1866 to 1868 mark the end of the territorial period and Nebraska's attainment of statehood. In 1866, Omaha, the capital of Nebraska Territory and the eastern terminus of the Pacific railroad, then under construction, was striving to become a major center of the American West. Statehood in 1867 brought the loss of Omaha's status as Nebraska's capital, but this was a minor glitch in the town's development. During the years 1860 to 1870 Omaha's population rose from 1,883 to 16,083 as the young city emerged as one of the principal urban areas of the American West.<sup>4</sup> This was a flamboyant period in Omaha's history, and although less than one-third of the narrative of *The Lieutenant's Lady* has Omaha as its setting, Aldrich recreates this vitality with clarity and historical accuracy. To prepare this fictional portrait of Omaha, Mrs. Aldrich "combed" the town's newspapers for 1867.<sup>5</sup> In her other novels, Aldrich sought to keep her fiction in line with historical fact, but one scholar has concluded that "Perhaps the greatest amount of historical research was invested in *The Lieutenant's Lady*."<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this essay is to develop this point by showing specifically how Aldrich's images of frontier Omaha reflect historical fact and may serve as a springboard for historical interpretation.

At the outset of the book, Bess Streeter Aldrich gives two contrasting but equally valid images of the Omaha of 1866:

An orator of the day said the young city stood there on the Missouri River like a goddess lighting the way to the territory's hospitable borders to the great west beyond. A disgruntled investor said the town wallowed in the mud like a harlot plucking at travelers' sleeves and begging them to stay with her.

Whatever the interpretation of it, Omaha sprawled over the Missouri flats and the river bluffs, muddy or dusty, sun-browned or snow-packed, but always lustily noisy with the vehemence of youth and growth.<sup>7</sup>

Compare the positive part of this image of Omaha as the gateway "to the great west beyond" with the words of that great advocate of the Union Pacific Railroad and Omaha, George Francis Train. Speaking at the ground-breaking of the Pacific railway at Omaha on December 2, 1863, Train exclaimed to the delight of his audience that

The President [Lincoln] has shown his good judgment in locating the road where the Almighty has placed the signal station at the entrance of a garden seven hundred miles in length and twenty broad. Look at the face of nature here—study the map, and point out, if you can, another place for the central station of the *World's Highway*. . . .<sup>8</sup>

The will of the President and the handiwork of the Almighty notwithstanding, Omaha was—as Aldrich indicated—a physically grubby place in the 1860s. Moreover, her metaphorical reference to “a harlot plucking at travelers’ sleeves” points to the rougher side of life in frontier Omaha. Aldrich never dwelt upon sordid subjects, but she deftly described the social stratification which was probably evident by 1866 on the streets of this young town: “Dressed in eastern styles, the wives and daughters of the leading citizenry picked their way daintily through slush, mud, or dust, while at their elbows calico-clad women in sunbonnets went in and out of the stores, all alike averting their eyes when the orange-haired ‘other kind’ went by.”<sup>9</sup>

A twenty-six-year-old journalist, Henry M. Stanley, later renowned for his African adventures, had a generally positive view of Omaha. In a February 4, 1867 dispatch to the New York *Herald*, Stanley remarked that

Omaha City . . . is beautifully located on a high, level plateau, forty feet above the highest water mark, on the west bank of the Missouri. A low range of hills, gradually rising to an elevation of eighty to one hundred feet above this plateau and about one mile from the river, affords fine locations for private residences. . . . The panoramic view from these hills, and especially from Capitol Hill, is rarely if ever surpassed in picturesque beauty, and even grandeur.<sup>10</sup>

On September 17, 1867, after a recent visit, Stanley was still taken by Omaha’s “beautiful location” and he described the community as a “wide-awake, energetic town.” However, he also wrote that

truth compels me to say . . . that no town on the Missouri River is more annoyed, even afflicted, by moving clouds of dust and sand—when the wind is up—than Omaha. It is absolutely terrific. The lower terrace along the river is a waste of fine sand, which is blown about in drifts, and banked up against the houses, like snow

in a wintry storm. For two or three days people have been obliged to shut themselves up in their houses for protection from the sand.<sup>11</sup>

The Omaha that Linnie Colsworth came to visit in 1866 was a place of many crude dwellings, but a few of the houses of the rough frontier pointed to the emergence of an elite. Indeed, in an 1857 book touting Nebraska to would-be settlers, James M. Woolworth, a leader in early Omaha, asserted that his community was in the vanguard of civilization:

The population of this place is made up of intelligent and enterprising men. They are generally from the cultivated and educated classes of the East. In the character of its society, as regards intelligence and culture, genteel, and even fashionable life, Omaha City rivals [the] best towns of twice her population which can be named in New York or New England.

To support his point, Woolworth noted a recent lecture series sponsored by a "library association," a "Territorial library," and the founding of churches of the principal denominations.<sup>12</sup> Nine years later, in 1866, Omaha's first city directory declared that "the towering steeples of our different places of worship bespeaks [*sic*] the refinement, liberality, and morality of our people."<sup>13</sup>

Aldrich describes the Colsworth home as having

a New England look . . . an upright and long wing with wide white-painted weather boarding and generous green blinds. . . . The shining new parlor was rather magnificent for anything in the territory: a fine flowered carpet, heavy mahogany furniture, dark tasseled drapes, Nottingham lace curtains, one of the new Rogers groups, pictures of nosegays in oval frames, steel cuts of famous historical events, a sturdy square piano brought up from St. Louis by boat, and, as the last touch in exquisite taste, a bust of Mozart looking down in supercilious silence on any potential performer.<sup>14</sup>

However exceptional the well-appointed parlor of the Colsworth home was for frontier Omaha, it was probably representative of the residences of Omaha's most prominent citizens circa 1866-1868. This house symbolized an Omaha where eastern amenities were replicated—not shacks, but homes built of brick and lumber. Omaha was entering a new stage of development, and as Aldrich said, "it was beginning to do something besides supply the emigrants' needs and quarrel over

local issues." Dwellings like the Colsworth home were well-suited to refined social life, and *The Lieutenant's Lady* shows some of the diversions of the young adults of Omaha's upper-crust.<sup>15</sup> Detailed evidence of the validity of this image is found in the letters of Joseph Barker, a young man from England who had settled in Omaha and who in 1868 was prominent in the town's social and business activity.<sup>16</sup>



Millard Home in Omaha, 1868-1887

*Photo courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society*

Linnie's Uncle Henry Colsworth was a civic mover and shaker--the embodiment of a successful town booster. Uncle Henry himself exuded the image of an Omaha bent upon material success:

He was a large man. Vitality exuded from every pore. His two-part whiskers were long and flowing, his vest expansive but seemingly held down by the huge gold links of a watch-chain and cigar-cutter.<sup>17</sup>

Uncle Henry is a fine fictional composite of what historian Garneth Peterson describes as "The Ground Floor Men"—the first generation of Omaha leaders. As she says, "These were the men who came to the frontier to speculate in land development or to provide the commodities the new cities needed to grow and expand." These "ground-floor," real-life equivalents of Uncle Henry—included men such as A.J. Hanscom, A.J. Poppleton, John I. Redick, and Byron Reed. If one looks at the pictures of these men and notes their enterprises, Aldrich's word-portrait of Uncle Henry assumes a great deal of realism.<sup>18</sup>

Uncle Henry was a lawyer, but as Aldrich writes, that:

was merely a title behind which to carry on multiple activities, buying and selling real estate, speculating in various commodities, constructing a new store building or two to rent, and, although he was not a member of the territorial legislature, doing a great deal of 'fixing' in back rooms behind closed doors.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, at Uncle Henry's law office "almost everything was done except law."<sup>20</sup>

Aldrich stated that Uncle Henry was one of Omaha's fifty-five lawyers. According to the city directories, Omaha had only twenty-five lawyers in 1866 and thirty-two in 1868, but it is possible that these works understated the actual totals.<sup>21</sup> However, Aldrich's general point is well taken, for the legal profession bears a close relationship to capitalistic enterprise and politics. Even before the advent of extensive formal legal training, lawyers were commonly leaders in the economic and political lives of their communities.<sup>22</sup> Uncle Henry is typical of that key figure on the frontier—the successful speculator. Law and speculation fit together nicely in the new towns along the Missouri River, and speaking of Doniphan, Kansas Territory, historian Daniel Fitzgerald said "The land office brought many speculators and lawyers to the townsite."<sup>23</sup>

Aldrich tells us that

Henry L. Colsworth had gambled on Omaha, and Omaha had won. So now, for every hundred dollars he had brought with him to the new west, he possessed several thousand.<sup>24</sup>

The image of men like Uncle Henry is not the standard image of "pioneers"—families moving west, securing land, breaking the prairie sod, and laying the groundwork for an agricultural empire. These are the pioneers of Aldrich's *A Lantern in her Hand*—people like Abbie Deal, the book's principal figure, her husband, Will, and their neighbors. But in the immediate wake of the Kansas-

Nebraska Act which opened the trans-Missouri country to settlement in 1854, townsite promoters-speculators- were in the vanguard of activity.<sup>25</sup>



Jesse Lowe



Alvin Saunders

*Photos courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society.*

Aldrich made Uncle Henry's law office a genteel cover for his entrepreneurial activity. But in actuality, nine persons in 1866, including George F. Train, unsurpassed as a colorful figure in Omaha's history, forthrightly listed their occupation as speculator.<sup>26</sup> The term, speculator, is laden with imagery which ranges from exploitation of a place by non-residents whose only interest is personal profit to residents who seek to benefit from higher land values. In a study of speculation in territorial Kansas, Rita Napier found the "settler-speculators" of early Topeka to be a more constructive group than "nonresident speculators" who were key figures in the early years of the towns of Kickapoo, Tecumseh, and Leavenworth.<sup>27</sup> Because Aldrich's Uncle Henry had tied his own future to Omaha's development, he might be taken to symbolize the "settler-speculator" whose fortunes would parallel those of his adopted community.

The role of entrepreneurs who sensed the prospect of appreciating land values is clearly evident on Oscar F. Davis's 1866 map of Omaha. Ringing the town



beyond the area platted into city blocks are the land holdings identified by name of holder and frequently the acreage in a particular parcel. The Davis map is a guide to the real-life "Uncle Henrys" and the names encircling the young city include the most prominent of the "Ground Floor Men"—Jesse Lowe, Omaha's first mayor; Byron Reed, founder of an enduring real estate firm; Alvin Saunders, last Governor of Nebraska Territory; members of the banking families of Kountze and Millard, and George F. Train, to name but a few.<sup>28</sup>



George Francis Train

*Photos courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society*

Uncle Henry never tired of boosting Omaha, and in 1866-1868 boosterism was essential to the emerging city. The former year saw the publication of Omaha's first city directory—a benchmark of urban development in its own right—and that volume reflected the aggressive energy of the community leaders. Trumpeting Omaha's commercial prominence and its connections with the Rocky Mountain West, the *Directory* exclaimed:

Here can be found merchants who count their annual sales amongst the millions. The large deposits at our Banks is the best indication of the healthy business of our city. Our bankers buy more gold dust than all other[s on] . . . the Missouri river

combined, and a large portion of our capitalists and business men own controlling interests in the richest mines of Colorado, Idaho, and Montana.<sup>29</sup>

"Thus," said the *Directory* when a Nebraska City banker brought his operations to town, "one by one, Omaha gathers within her fold, the solid and wide awake business men of the Northwest. . . ."<sup>30</sup>

It is hardly surprising that George Francis Train, the chief booster of the Union Pacific Railroad, was the recipient of a full-page dedicatory message in the 1868 city directory.<sup>31</sup> In the meantime, George L. Miller was using his *Omaha Herald* to tout the virtues of his community in the East. Omaha was, he said, "The Future Chief City of the Missouri Valley."<sup>32</sup>

In Nebraska Territory, as in other frontier areas, communities rivaled one another for governmental institutions and anything else which might assure growth. A few miles downstream from Omaha was Bellevue, Nebraska's oldest settlement. Although Omaha's backers had secured the territorial capital for their community, Aldrich correctly notes that for a time there had been the possibility that Bellevue might become the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific.<sup>33</sup>



George L. Miller

*Photo courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society*

Nebraska entered the Union on March 1, 1867, and boosters like Uncle Henry made an unsuccessful effort to keep the capital in Omaha. In past years, each town and area in Nebraska Territory had developmental ambitions which were highlighted in politics. Late in 1854, with the heavy-handed action of Acting Governor Thomas B. Cuming, Omaha's promoters had gained the seat of government for their town. The rancor associated with the capital location controversy became a major component in a political division between Nebraskans living north of the Platte River and those who lived south of that stream. Omaha was well to the north of the Platte and political acrimony was heightened by the fact that the river was a significant physical barrier between the northern and southern portions of the territory. Indeed, there had been a movement in the late 1850s to add the area south of the Platte to Kansas. Given the anti-Omaha sentiment which had been part of Nebraska's political atmosphere, it is no surprise that efforts to relocate the capital would succeed in 1867.<sup>34</sup>

Uncle Henry, not taking defeat quietly, remarked that the legislators who had voted to remove the capital were "jackasses." When a committee settled upon the new location which would become Lincoln, he concluded that Nebraska's seat of government was to be "in some God-forsaken spot out on the prairie." Although Aldrich gives only enough detail on these struggles to help develop Uncle Henry as a character, her factual material is accurate and gives the reader a glimpse of the controversy over the capital issue. As Uncle Henry related the details of the political maneuvering to his wife, Aunt Louise, and to Linnie and Cynthia, true to an image of victorian womanhood, "they let it go in one ear and out the other."<sup>35</sup>

The construction of the Union Pacific Railroad gave Omaha a westward outlook and to this day Omaha's historical image is that of a western city. Yet in 1866, Omahans were also mindful of the need to develop rail links to the east, and this reality enters Aldrich's narrative. When Linnie Colsworth journeyed west, she was accompanied from New York by her cousin, Cynthia. They travelled by train as far as Denison, Iowa, where they had to transfer to a stage coach for a sixty-mile trek to Council Bluffs and a ferry crossing to Omaha. As Aldrich said, a major event came the following January when the Chicago and Northwestern line was finished from Denison to Council Bluffs.<sup>36</sup>

This first eastern rail connection via Council Bluffs was important, but Omaha's promoters knew that a railroad bridge was needed to assure the future of their city as a transportation hub. With a self-assurance not based upon a commitment of resources, the 1866 city directory announced that "The Missouri river [*sic*] is to be bridged at this point, which will give direct and uninterrupted communication with Chicago, and other eastern cities, lying on an air line route between here and New York."<sup>37</sup> But as Aldrich suggested, promoters like Uncle

Henry knew that they would have to take some initiative in obtaining the construction of a railroad bridge. As she noted, the final session of the territorial legislature authorized the City of Omaha to undertake such a project.<sup>38</sup> The subsequent work of men like George Miller and Joseph Barker in 1868 illustrate the efforts of Omaha's leaders to secure this link.<sup>39</sup>

Aldrich's fidelity to the facts was also demonstrated in her treatment of Omaha's northern transportation links. When Linnie Colsworth left Omaha for her journey to the upper Missouri, she travelled by steamboat. In late November, 1868, when she and Norman Stafford returned to Omaha, they made the last segment of their journey by rail from Sioux City to Council Bluffs.<sup>40</sup> In fact, this line—the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad—had been completed in March, 1868.<sup>41</sup>

After a ferry trip across the river to Omaha and a chance meeting with Uncle Henry and Cynthia, Linnie and Norman Stafford were the guests of the Colsworths. In Aldrich's words,

they soon found themselves in the double cutter, the bells jangling and the vehicle lurching first one way and then the other over the deep snow-filled ruts of the streets.<sup>42</sup>

Heavy winter weather in late November is not routine in Omaha, but 1868 was exceptional, and Aldrich's reference to "deep snow-filled ruts" was undoubtedly accurate.<sup>43</sup>

Uncle Henry disliked Democrats and Indians, and like many people on the western frontier, thought that the Army should "lick the hide off" the latter.<sup>44</sup> However, when Lieutenant Stafford said that he might be interested in obtaining a job with the pension bureau in Washington after he and Linnie returned downriver to Omaha in the autumn of 1868, Uncle Henry had a fit over the subject of military pensions. "Paying a man for doing his duty. I'd like some one to pension me one of these days for sticking to my business," he exclaimed at the breakfast table. The nation was now two billion dollars in debt, and Uncle Henry exclaimed that it would be "Citizens like me" who would pay the Civil-War pensions. As Linnie quietly listened to this tirade, she thought of how the lives of soldiers on the frontier contrasted with that of Uncle Henry:

The Regulars protecting the western country, fighting off Indian raids, going into far places where there was nothing but loneliness and danger! Sometimes without good equipment, lacking new guns and sufficient ammunition. All so that Uncle Henry could live in peace in the new west and get fat and paunchy

and buy Union Pacific shares and bank stock and Omaha property.<sup>45</sup>

Uncle Henry's acquisition of Union Pacific stock may be taken as symbolic of the dependence of Omahans upon a great national corporation. The specific location of the railroad bridge was critical to Omaha's welfare, and Joseph Barker stressed the need of cultivating the Union Pacific's New York-based decision-makers, particularly Thomas C. Durant.<sup>46</sup> In retrospect, this dependence led muckraking author George R. Leighton to suggest that Omaha was "a sort of kept woman enjoying the uncertain favors of the hundred-million-dollar sweetheart . . ." Truly, Omaha's elite—and many ordinary citizens—depended upon the Union Pacific.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout its history, Omaha's livelihood, like most other places, has been dependent upon the decisions of geographically distant leaders of business and government. A "central place system" was emerging, and just as Omaha and other population centers along the Missouri River were dependent upon investment from New York, Chicago and other great cities, so in turn would town and country depend upon the "gateway" cities of the Missouri Valley.<sup>48</sup>

In his February 4, 1867 dispatch to the New York *Herald*—less than four weeks before Nebraska entered the Union and just over twenty-seven months before the driving of the golden spike—Henry Stanley proclaimed that

Omaha is situated very nearly on an air line and almost half way between New York and San Francisco. Her commanding position as terminus of a railway destined to carry the great traffic between the Atlantic and Pacific, probably to revolutionize the Chinese and Japan[ese] trade of the world, gives her commercial advantages which, in the last twelve months, have doubled her population and which sooner or later, will make her one of the leading cities of the Great Northwest. . . .<sup>49</sup>

It is not hard to imagine Uncle Henry reading this article, slapping the paper, and loudly proclaiming Stanley's journalistic brilliance.

Omaha in 1866-1868 was entering the second stage of its development. The earlier era in which steamboats were the link to the outside world and the economy was based upon territorial government, wagon freighting, and the supplying of overland travellers was passing. The Union Pacific and other lines—soon to be connected by a bridge—were rapidly making Omaha a rail center. New local enterprises were indicators of entrepreneurial vigor which would serve

the city well. Indeed, aside from the founding of the community, no other period in Omaha's history would be more crucial than the years 1866-1868.

Bess Streeter Aldrich is remembered for her portrayal of natural settings and the human experience in places as diverse as the agricultural frontiers of Iowa and Nebraska, and the military frontier of Dakota and Montana. Her writings also provide memorable images of people and settings in the early twentieth century rural and small town Midwest. In *The Lieutenant's Lady*, she portrays Omaha in a limited time frame when a frontier town was fast becoming a city. Aldrich's use of this urban setting was only a small part of her total work, but the combination of historical fact and literary artistry in these pages adds an element of diversity to her stature as a writer.

## NOTES

1. For Aldrich's career, see A. Mabel Meier, "Bess Streeter Aldrich: A Literary Portrait," *Nebraska History* 50 (Spring, 1969), 67-95; Abigail Ann Martin, *Bess Streeter Aldrich* (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University Western Writers Series, Number 104, 1992); Vopal Gowman Youngberg, *Bess Streeter Aldrich Scrapbook* (Cedar Falls, Iowa: Cedar Falls Historical Society, 1989). See also Amelia Mabel Meier, "Bess Streeter Aldrich: Her Life and Works" (Kearney, Nebraska: Master of Science in Education thesis, Kearney State College [now University of Nebraska at Kearney]), 1968; Ruth Foreman, "The Fiction of Bess Streeter Aldrich" (Des Moines: Doctor of Arts dissertation, Drake University, 1982); William Patrick Keating, "Fulfilled Visions: The Life and Work of Bess Streeter Aldrich" (Indiana, Pennsylvania: Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1985); Emily Decker Lardner Jessup, "Embattled Landscapes: Regionalism and Gender in Midwestern Literature, 1915-1941" (Ann Arbor: Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1985), 119-152; Carol Miles Petersen, "Bess Streeter Aldrich - A Writer's Life" (Lincoln: Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1992). For village of Elmwood, see Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1910 Census of Population, Nebraska*, 25, and for name changes of Aldrich's *alma mater*, see *University of Northern Iowa Catalog 1992-1994*, LXXXXIII (September, 1992), 4.

"See Carol Miles Petersen's book, *Bess Streeter Aldrich* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

2. Abigail Martin, *Bess Streeter Aldrich*, 28. Martin's emphasis.

3. Bess Streeter Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Book, 1987, reprint of original work published by D.Appleton-Century Co., 1942), 2, *passim*; Amelia Mabel Meier, "Bess Streeter Aldrich: Her Life and Works," 104-106; Petersen, "Bess Streeter Aldrich," 233-241.

4. *Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled From the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 559; *Ninth Census, Volume 1. The Statistics of the Population of the United States . . . Compiled from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 197.

5. Meier, "Bess Streeter Aldrich: Her Life and Works," 105, quoting letter from Aldrich to Elizabeth Dickinson, Aug. 30, 1944, Bess Streeter Aldrich Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

The diary of Sarah Elizabeth Canfield, the inspiration for *The Lieutenant's Lady*, and that of her husband, Second Lieutenant Andrew Nahum Canfield, are crucial to much of Aldrich's

narrative, but do not provide an image of Omaha. However, these diaries note that the Canfields visited with friends in Omaha in their travels to and from posts in Dakota and Montana Territories and a few other details connect these diaries to the fictional details set in Omaha. See *Diary of Sarah Elizabeth Canfield* (typescript), 2 (March 23, [1867]), 3 (March 25, 27, [1867]), 28 (June 14 [1868]); *Diary of Andrew Nahum Canfield* [typescript], 17 (November 25, 26, 27, [1868]), MS 3263, Box 8, Beas Streeter Aldrich Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

6. Ruth Foreman, "The Fiction of Beas Streeter Aldrich", 48. See also 49-54. Other scholars also emphasize Aldrich's quest for historical accuracy in *The Lieutenant's Lady*. See Petersen, "Beas Streeter Aldrich," 235; Keating, "Fulfilled Visions," 148; Meier, "Aldrich - A Literary Portrait," 92.

7. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 2. In *A Lantern in Her Hand*, Aldrich gives a brief but lively description of Omaha in 1868. Aldrich, *A Lantern in Her Hand* (New York: Signet Vista Book, New American Library, 1983 [first published by D. Appleton & Company, 1928]), 53-54.

8. Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell, *The Gate City: A History of Omaha* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1982), 25-27. Train's emphasis. See also George R. Leighton, *America's Growing Pains: The Romance, Comedy & Tragedy of Five Great Cities* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 151-152.

9. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 3.

10. James W. Savage and John T. Bell, *History of the City of Omaha, Nebraska* (New York: Munsell & Company, 1894, reprint, Unigraphic, Inc., for Western Heritage Society, Omaha, 1976), 164.

11. Henry M. Stanley, *My Early Travels and Adventures in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Book, 1985, reprint of vol. I, *My Early Travels and Adventures in America and Asia*, 1895), 191-192. Omaha's mud, its swirling sand, and interesting vignettes of the non-genteel side of Omaha life are depicted in a poem entitled "Has Ever Been In Omaha," published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1869. The poem is reprinted in Larsen and Cottrell, *The Gate City*, 90.

12. James M. Woolworth, *Nebraska in 1857* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1857, reprint, Johnson Publishing Company [Lincoln], 1967), 95.

13. *Collins' Omaha Directory, June, 1866* ([Omaha], 1866), 27.

14. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 4-5.

15. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 6-14, 27-28, 41-42.

16. Charles W. Martin (ed.), "Omaha in 1868-1869: Selections From the Letters of Joseph Barker," *Nebraska History* 59 (Winter, 1978), 510, 516-520.

17. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 14.

18. Garneth O. Peterson, "Who's In Charge? A Framework for Examining Community Leadership in Omaha over the Past Century," *Nebraska History*, 72 (Summer 1991), 100. The roles of these leaders are chronicled in various works, such as Savage and Bell, *History of the City of Omaha*.

19. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 22. Meier, in "Beas Streeter Aldrich: Her Life and Works," describes Uncle Henry as "always boisterous and talkative. He is an opportunist, a fixer, a man-about-town, a glad-hander, and a bit unscrupulous." 125.

20. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 41.

21. *Omaha City Directory*, 187 ("Business Directory -Attorneys at Law"), and page-by-page check of occupations of Omaha residents; Charles Collins, comp., *Collins' Omaha City Directory . . . July 4th, 1868* (Omaha: Omaha Daily Herald, 1868), 7 ("Classification of Trades and Professions").

22. See Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 151-153.

23. Daniel C. Fitzgerald, "Town Booming: An Economic History of Steamboat Towns Along the Kansas-Missouri Border 1840-1860" (Lawrence: M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, 1983), 142-143. In treating early Leavenworth, Fitzgerald 156 quotes T.H. Gladstone, *The Englishman in Kansas*, who

said "Lawyers help the surveyors, and surveyors help the lawyers, while both together help the speculators."

24. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 4.

25. For a fine summary of the early development of the river towns of Nebraska Territory, see Norman A. Grabner, "Nebraska's Missouri River Frontier, 1854-1860," *Nebraska History* 42 (December 1961), 213-235. For the prominent role of speculators in the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, see Fitzgerald, "Town Booming," and Rita Napier, "The Spirit of Speculation: A Study of Town Site Preemption and Land Use in Four Kansas Towns" (Washington: Master of Arts thesis, The American University, 1969), and Napier, "Economic Democracy in Kansas: Speculation and Townsite Preemption in Kickapoo," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* XL (Autumn, 1974), 349-369.

26. *Omaha Directory, 1866*, alphabetical listing of residents. For details on George Francis Train, see J.R. [John Reuben] Johnson, *Representative Nebraskans* (Lincoln: Johnson Publishing Company, 1954), 182-188; Davis Britton, "George Francis Train and Brigham Young," *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Spring, 1978), 410-427.

27. Napier, "The Spirit of Speculation," 113. See also 57, 75-76, 106-112, 114, 120-121, 126-127, 138, 142, 153-156. Horace Greeley also used the term, "settler-speculators." See Joseph V. Hickey, *Ghost Settlement on the Prairie: A Biography of Thurman, Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 60, 264n.

28. Oscar F. Davis, Map of Omaha City, Nebraska (St. Louis: Gast, Moeller & Co., Lithographers, 1866), reproduction in possession of author.

29. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 14; *Omaha Directory, 1866*, 25.

30. *Omaha Directory, 1866*, 44.

31. *Omaha City Directory, 1868*, 3.

32. Wallace Brown, "George L. Miller and the Boosting of Omaha," *Nebraska History* 50 (Fall 1969), 277, 282.

33. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 4. For the details of the Bellevue-Omaha rivalry for the Union Pacific terminus, see Barry B. Combs, "The Bellevue Scare," in Jerold L. Simmons (ed.), *La Belle Vue: Studies in the History of Bellevue, Nebraska* (Marceline, Missouri: Walworth Publishing Company, 1976), 229-242.

34. James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 83-91, 122-133, 152-153; James B. Potts, "North of 'Bleeding Kansas': The 1850s Political Crisis in Nebraska Territory," *Nebraska History*, 73 (Fall 1992), 110-118; Potts, "The Nebraska Capital Controversy, 1854-59," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Summer 1988), 172-182; Potts, "Frontier Solons: Nebraska's Territorial Lawmakers, 1854-1867," *Great Plains Quarterly* 12 (Fall 1992), 269-285; David H. Price, "Sectionalism in Nebraska: When Kansas Considered Annexing Southern Nebraska, 1856-1860," *Nebraska History* 53 (Winter 1972), 446-462.

35. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 26-27, 39, 51-52. For a contemporary synopsis of the capital squabble, see Stanley, *My Early Travels and Adventures in America*, dispatch from Omaha of July 22, 1867, 151-153. Stanley came down on the side of Omaha and gives a real-life illustration of Uncle Henry's perspective.

36. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 8, 46. For a brief treatment of the building of railroads across Iowa, see Leland L. Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1974), 108-115.

37. *Collins' Omaha Directory, 1866*, 25.

38. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 46. Specifically, Council File 87, which received the signature of Governor Alvin Saunders on February 18, 1867, was "an act to authorize the city of Omaha to raise one hundred thousand dollars to secure a Railroad bridge across the Missouri River at Omaha." *Journal of the Council of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska*. Twelfth Session, 1867 (Omaha: Barkalow Bros., 1867), 156, 180-183, 211, 214.



39. Brown, "George L. Miller and the Boosting of Omaha," 287-289; Larsen and Cottrell, *The Gate City*, 65; Charles Martin (ed.), "Omaha in 1868-69: Selections From the Letters of Joseph Barker," 502-504, 507, 509.
40. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 212-213, 250.
41. William Silag, "Gateway to the Grasslands: Sioux City and the Missouri River Frontier," *The Western Historical Quarterly* XIV (October 1983), 408.
42. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 255.
43. Charles Martin (ed.), "Omaha in 1868-1869: Selections From the Letters of Joseph Barker," 517.
44. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 14, 21, 26. Aldrich has Lieutenant Norman Stafford replying to Uncle Henry that "There are good Indians and bad ones, just as there are good and bad white people." Stafford (Aldrich) also observed that U.S. Indian policy was inconsistent, 267. A brief summary of anti-Indian attitudes on the trans-Missouri frontier is found in Robert W. Mardock, "The Plains Frontier and the Indian Peace Policy, 1865-1880," *Nebraska History*, 49 (Summer 1968), 187-201. David J. Wishart, in *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), observes that "Settlers' attitudes towards the Nebraska Indians varied, because of diversity in both groups, but generally they viewed the Indians with disdain." 110.
45. Aldrich, *The Lieutenant's Lady*, 264-266.
46. Charles Martin (ed.), "Omaha in 1868-1869: Selections From the Letters of Joseph Barker," 503-504, 507-509.
47. Leighton, *America's Growing Pains*, 155-157, 162.
48. Silag, "Gateway to the Grasslands," 405-406, 413-414, puts the early development of Sioux City, Omaha, and Kansas City in a national and regional context. Larsen and Cottrell, *The Gate City*, 62-65, puts Omaha's development in the context of the ambitions of San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Chicago, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and other centers.
49. Savage and Bell, *History of the City of Omaha*, 165. Stanley's allusion to the significance of the Union Pacific as an international trade artery is noteworthy. In discussing the role of Stephen A. Douglas in opening the Nebraska region to settlement, historian James C. Malin emphasized "the global perspective" which was basic to Douglas's stress upon transcontinental railroad development. This is succinctly developed in Malin, "The Nebraska Question: A Ten-Year Record, 1844-1854," *Nebraska History*, 35 (March 1954), 1-15, especially 11-15.