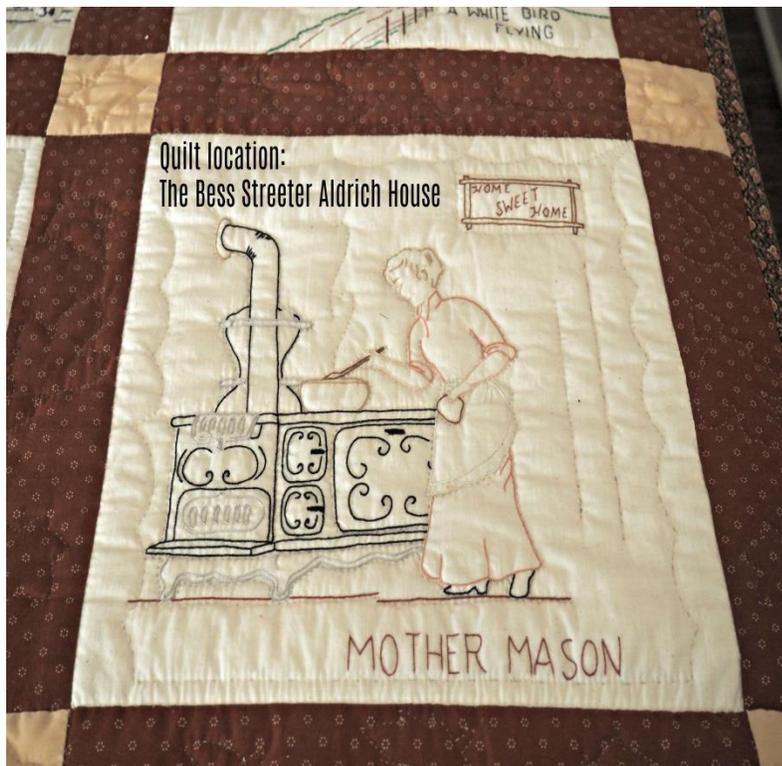


## Book Discussion Questions for *Mother Mason* by Bess Streeter Aldrich

Presented by Gretchen Garrison of "Odyssey Through Nebraska"

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.



Other items found in the *Mother Mason* book are on display in the "Mother Mason" room in the Southwest bedroom at the top of the stairs in the Bess Streeter Aldrich house.

### About *Mother Mason*

This Aldrich title started out as a magazine serial. Transforming the ten stories into a book was not an easy process. First of all, a new chapter was written to tell readers about the Mason family. Previously she had introduced readers to the family in every published story, but that would have been cumbersome in the book. Although an editor contacted Aldrich about the possibility of this story compilation, none of his suggested publishers worked out. So ultimately Aldrich was the one who pitched the book to additional publishers. According to biographer Carol Miles Petersen, "she had first offered the Masons to a publisher in 1920, and, finally, it reached bookstores in 1924. None of her books would take so long; nor would she ever have to write another such (publisher) list."<sup>2</sup> For more information on this book, please contact [aldrichfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:aldrichfoundation@gmail.com)

**Mother Mason Story Location:** Springtown—a small town that is a train's ride from the Capital City;

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

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Bess Streeter Aldrich by Carol Miles Peterson (page 35)

## Mason Family Character Descriptions

Mother	
Henry	
Katherine	
Marcia	
Eleanor	
Junior	
Bob	
Mabel	
“Tillie” Horn	

### ***Although Mother Mason is a book, really the stories play out chapter by chapter ...***

“Mother's Dash for Liberty”	Is there enough description in this story that one can picture who Mother is? Mother's name is rarely used. What does that tell us about her? Is this admirable or discouraging? How do we lose ourselves in our roles? Is individuality important?
“Introducing the Family”	Which character could you identify with the most? Did any characters rub you the wrong way? Should Mother have had more mention in this chapter?
“Katherine Entertains”	How does Katherine have a change of heart? Were either one of Professor Baldrige's actions surprising (specifically Keith's interactions with Grandpa and with Katherine)
“Tillie Cuts Loose”	Did Tillie's bout with freedom change her? What lessons did she learn? What lessons did Mother learn about Tillie?
“The Theatrical Sensation”	Eleanor has always been a tomboy. Will that change after her dramatic experience? Should her parents have been concerned about her?
“Proving Marcia to Have Been Born Lucky”	This chapter tells a lot about Marsha. Which words seem to typically describe her: careless, clueless or heartless? Do you think that Marsha's opportunities are a result of luck or something else?
“In Which Mother Renews Her Youth”	Do you think that Mother was glad that she went back to her college for a visit? Do you think the trip caused her to feel regret over her current situation or grateful for her life?
“Bob and Mabel Meet Tragedy”	Have you ever felt the weight of discontent that is prevalent in this chapter? Was Mother Mason's plan for action more helpful or hurtful in the long run? How do you gain perspective in your life?
“Junior Emulates Sir Galahad”	Do you think Junior was more apt to tell the story because of how he felt about the Thompsons? Junior seems to back and forth between lying and telling the truth. Could you tell which was which? Did Junior feel any remorse about spreading gossip?
“In Which Marcia Loses Her Job”	Other than the chapter full of introductions, this is the only chapter that was never published in a magazine. Why do you suppose this is? Why do you think Aldrich felt like this addition was necessary for the book?
“Father Retires”	Why do people retire at a certain age? Do most people enjoy retirement more or the idea of retirement more? What were the most compelling reasons that Father wanted to stay at the bank? Do you think he made the right decision? Why or why not?

