



Death in a Prairie House: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Taliesin Murders

Drennan William R.

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The most pivotal and yet least understood event of Frank Lloyd Wright's celebrated life involves the brutal murders in 1914 of seven adults and children dear to the architect and the destruction by fire of Taliesin, his landmark residence, near Spring Green, Wisconsin. Unaccountably, the details of that shocking crime have been largely ignored by Wright's legion of biographers—a historical and cultural gap that is finally addressed in William Drennan's exhaustively researched *Death in a Prairie House: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Taliesin Murders*. In response to the scandal generated by his open affair with the proto-feminist and free love advocate Mamah Borthwick Cheney, Wright had begun to build Taliesin as a refuge and "love cottage" for himself and his mistress (both married at the time to others). Conceived as the apotheosis of Wright's prairie house style, the original Taliesin would stand in all its isolated glory for only a few months before the bloody slayings that rocked the nation and reduced the structure itself to a smoking hull. Supplying both a gripping mystery story and an authoritative portrait of the artist as a young man, Drennan wades through the myths surrounding Wright and the massacre, casting fresh light on the formulation of Wright's architectural ideology and the cataclysmic effects that the Taliesin murders exerted on the fabled architect and on his subsequent designs.

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