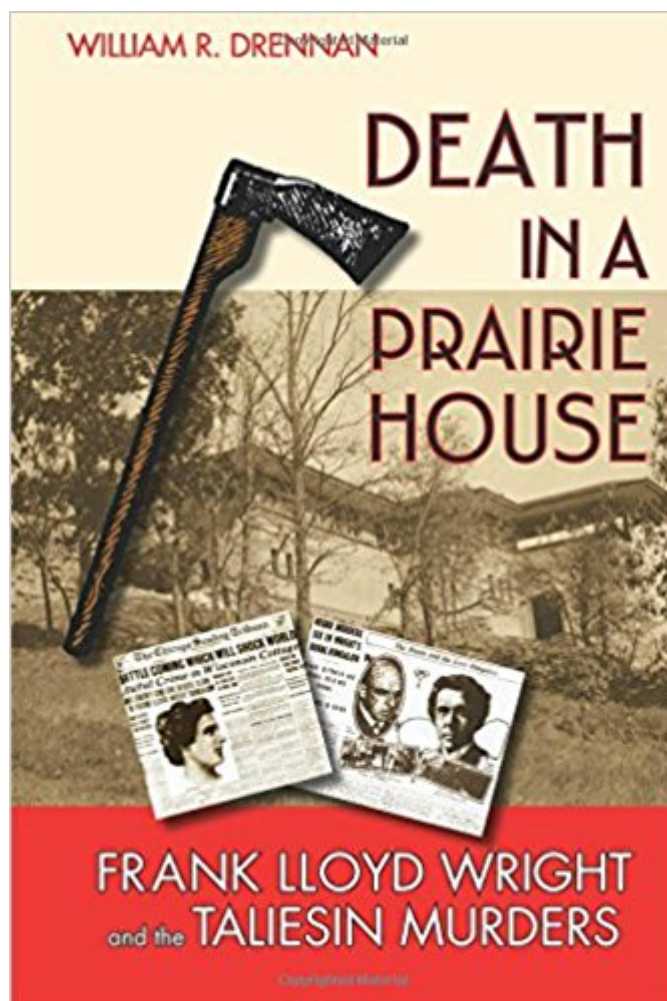


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# Death In A Prairie House: Frank Lloyd Wright And The Taliesin Murders



## Synopsis

~~~~~ 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. ~~~~~ Best Books for General Audiences, selected by the American Association of School Librarians, and Outstanding Book, selected by the Public Library Association

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## Customer Reviews

"Death in a Prairie House is a compelling argument in support of the theory that the Taliesin tragedy profoundly affected not only the future lives of those directly involved (not the least of whom was considered to be the most influential and gifted architect of the time), but likely, the whole course and development of modern architecture."â "Craig Jacobsen, Taliesin Preservation, Inc."The thoroughness of Drennan's research combined with the clarity of his logic and writing style paints a complete, colorful picture of the tragedy. He painstakingly addresses all of the questions and theories that have puzzled many for more than ninety years."â "Carla Lind, author of *The Wright Style: Re-Creating the Spirit of Frank Lloyd Wright and Lost Wright*"A fascinating, insightful examination of a Wisconsin 'crime of the century,' a bizarre and tragic event that changed Wright's life, his career, and perhaps even American residential and architectural design.â •â "Bill Christofferson, journalist and author of *The Man from Clear Lake*

Â Â Â Â 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 biographersâ "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*.Â Â Â Â 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).Â Â Â Â 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.Â Â Â Â 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.

This well-researched book is a must read for anyone who is enthusiastic about the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and the man behind it. It is particularly helpful in throwing light on Wright's childhood and the beginnings of his career. Wright's father gets kinder treatment than is often the case. The detailed analysis of the horrible death of Mamah Borthwick Chaney and its impact on

Wright is the best that has been done on that tragic event. However, while it answers some questions, it also raises new ones. This book is sure to be a classic among the many titles devoted to Wright and his work.

I bought the book at Taliesin, which we visited in September, and while I'm not a True Believer, one of those who knows everything about FLW, but I was interested to find that Mamah's death was central for Wright's work afterwards. I grew up next to a Wright-design house that was very much what his style became: small windows, hidden front door, and my 6'4" father refused to go there because he didn't fit in the corridors. The book was very well written, and as short as it was, it covered a lot of ground. I couldn't put it down.

a client left a copy of "Loving Frank" at my place of work so I read it and developed a new interest in Frank Lloyd Wright. When I saw this book title, I bought it with trepidation, fearing that it would deal strictly with the murders and not much else. I had hoped for more information on the life of Mr. Wright and his lady, and I was not disappointed. The author has done an almost painful amount of research and this book is thorough and filled with not only fact but also written in such a way as to become a thrilling novel that I found difficult to put down. I hesitate to use the word "gripping" because it is so overused, but for me, I couldn't wait to get back to it at day's end. The only thing I have a difficult time understanding is why the author went to such pains to study Mr. Wright when it seems, at least to me, that he has a very active dislike for the man and his lifestyle. When mentioning Frank he minced no words, referring to him as self-absorbed and irresponsible, whereas when his wife was mentioned, it was always "poor Catherine", "sad Catherine", "faithful Catherine". His lifestyle was at the time unacceptable to be sure, but it seems odd that Mr. Drennan would spend so many hours researching the life of a man he disliked. In any case, I'm certainly glad he did. A fine book, especially for students of the genius of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Drennan's "Death In a Prairie House" is as good a true crime novel as the best Ann Rule books. Drennan meticulously starts at the beginning, as any good true crime novel should, with the parents of Frank Lloyd Wright and carefully creates a profile that goes a long way to explaining the reason for Wright's adult behavior. It's fascinating. I first read about Frank Lloyd Wright and Mamah Borthwick in the book "Loving Frank." The story so fascinated me that I wanted to learn more about this strange and horrific tragedy. "Death In a Prairie House" goes a long way to filling in some of the blanks. What's more, Drennan's writing ability is amazing. What else has this guy written, because I

want to read it, gosh darnit! Each of his sentences are brilliantly crafted yet completely easy to understand. In addition, he is a true artist who uses vocabulary as his medium! His use and placement of words is truly breathtaking. I only wish there was more we could learn of Mameh, Lloyd's "feminist mistress." "Loving Frank" probably provides the best portrait, but it would be nice to know a bit more about her from a biographical standpoint. Drennan does not seem particularly sympathetic to Mameh, nor does he chastise her outright. I suppose he wants to leave it up to the reader to decide or maybe allow history to settle the score once and for all. What you will come away with after reading "Death In a Prairie House" is: an open jaw (how can something so horrific have happened?), a better understanding of Frank Lloyd Wright and the progression of his works, and a bit of jealousy for the author who can write so well, as well as a whetted appetite for more writing from him.

Awesome look-back into history, not only of famous architecture but of a powerful personality who never wanted to fit the mold and his rationale for refusing to live a molded life is riveting. He felt that family life conspired against his freedom to live the life that every human being is entitled to. It's a tragic story of an infamous love that superceded that of the love of husband and wife, father and children and eventually led to a tragic ending that contributed to the eccentric life of Frank Lloyd Wright.

A very well written book about the private life of a famous architect. Haunting.

As an architect I found this story to be a compelling bit of American history of which I was unaware. Such fun to read on my vacation through the back roads of my home state - Wisconsin!

The details produced by this author certainly speak to his exhaustive research to find the truth. After reading other books about Frank Lloyd Wright, this book sums up much of his life and love. I found it interesting, but also sad and heart wrenching.

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