

1-1-2011

## ***Frank Lloyd Wright's Florida Southern College* by Dale Allen Gyure**

Theodore Trent Green  
*University of South Florida*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory>

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Green, Theodore Trent (2011) "*Frank Lloyd Wright's Florida Southern College* by Dale Allen Gyure," *Tampa Bay History*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol25/iss1/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tampa Bay History by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

*Frank Lloyd Wright's Florida Southern College*. By Dale Allen Gyure. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010. xvi, 237 pp. List of illustrations, foreword by Raymond Arsenault and Gary R. Mormino, acknowledgments, introduction, photographs, illustrations, drawings, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95, cloth.)

Frank Lloyd Wright was one of America's most celebrated architects at the beginning of the modern era in architectural design in the United States, and his notable works of architecture are well known. Little, however, has been researched and written about his accomplishments at Florida Southern College in Lakeland. Dale Allen Gyure's book *Frank Lloyd Wright's Florida Southern College* is an attempt to fill a literary and scholarly void on the protracted process and physical evolution of the school's West Campus from 1938 to 1957. This process culminated in "the largest unified collection of" Wright-designed buildings in a single location (1). Unlike many books that focus on Wright and his illustrious career, this book provides a timely and in-depth account of the working relationship between Wright and Florida Southern's dynamic president, Ludd M. Spivey. For Wright, this was the longest client/architect relationship of his career. Woven into the narrative theme of this book are the progressive philosophies on Protestant theology and higher education held by Spivey and the ideas about a modern, regionally based architecture held by Wright. Combined, these ideas influenced the design of both the West Campus and all of its buildings from inception.

The book focuses equally on the ongoing dialogue between Spivey and Wright, the design of the West Campus plan, and the design of eighteen individual buildings—eleven of which were ultimately constructed. Throughout the book, Gyure also reveals four of Wright's guiding philosophies that characterized his work during his almost twenty-year involvement with Florida Southern College. These philosophies include the relationship between man and nature, the significance of site and context as a design determinant, his beliefs in how buildings should be a reflection of democracy, and his shared beliefs with Ludd M. Spivey that higher education should be based on progressive ideals.

Throughout the book, the author draws a number of distinct contrasts between the de rigueur neoclassical or Beaux-Arts tradition of university campus planning and building design, and the modernist design approach Wright uses at Florida Southern College. However, in a seemingly contradictory manner in later chapters of the book, he draws several comparisons between Florida Southern and Thomas Jefferson's design for the University of Virginia. In summation, he describes Florida Southern as "a milestone in the history of American college architecture" (2) and the first college in the United States to be designed completely as a modernist composition.

From their initial discussions about the college, Spivey asked Wright to develop a campus plan that would thrust this small Methodist college "into the public consciousness" (2). In honoring this request, Wright expressed the need for a

type of regional modernism that best reflected the subtropical context of Lakeland. This perspective led to Wright's overarching design concept for Florida Southern's campus as "a child of the sun," where "buildings should seem to grow from the earth and belong as trees belong" (44).

For readers interested in Wright's design methods, Gyure suggests that Florida Southern was a transition point for Wright. After several drafts of the initial plan, Wright relied extensively on the 30° and 60° angle to establish a uniquely unorthodox plan order. This angular geometry also was used as a way to define the functional order of the campus and to "introduce a sense of movement that countered the stationary buildings" (42). Wright describes the use of this angular geometry as a type of "reflex angle"—a design concept based on "a diagonal that was more natural and therefore more fitting to human behavior than the right angle" (42). This approach indicates a clear departure from his use of orthogonal geometries in several previous commissions. In the final campus plan, this geometry served as a strategic armature for building placement and relationships. Wright's plan for the West Campus resulted in an academic complex that appears to be constantly shifting amid the backdrop of orange trees, the gentle slope of the site, and the Lake Hollingsworth waterfront and is "meant to be experienced from multiple points" (62).

Relative to individual buildings, Gyure utilizes a type of interpretive design analysis to describe Wright's approaches that are inspired by extracted patterns from the landscape. The physical manifestations of this inspiration resulted in buildings based on a number of different plane geometrical shapes, such as circles and hexagons as well as squares and rectangles. For the remainder of the book, Gyure provides a detailed account of all of the Wright-designed buildings, some of the materials and methods of construction used during the four eras of expansion, and other major events that defined the physical context of the college for the next twenty years. These time frames are described as: a period of struggle and initial growth (1938–1941); the war years (1941–1945), a period of minimal growth and a significant drop in student enrollment; the postwar years (1946–1957), characterized by new growth that represented Wright's ideas for a "Florida Form"; and, finally, a new era (1957–1959), or, more appropriately, the end of an era, as the school began to divert most of its resources to maintaining existing buildings when Wright died.

This book is a well-researched and well-written account of the evolution of how this small Methodist college gained widespread notoriety by having Frank Lloyd Wright as its campus planner and architect for almost two decades. Even though there is a wealth of information written about Wright and some of his more well-known commissions, this book provides a much clearer picture of the historical, cultural, and design importance of the Florida Southern campus. This book will appeal to educators, historians, designers, and the broader lay public that has an interest in Wright's contributions to the material culture of the country. As a scholarly document, Dale Allen Gyure's *Frank Lloyd Wright's Florida Southern College* is an important contribution to the literature on the long and illustrious career of one of the country's

greatest architects of the early modern era, as well as a lucid account of the evolution of the most acclaimed multibuilding design intervention of Wright's career.

THEODORE TRENT GREEN  
University of South Florida

*Cross Creek Kitchens: Seasonal Recipes and Reflections*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. By Sally Morrison. Illustrations by Kate Barnes. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. 224 pp. Prologue, recipe contents, illustrations, index. \$24.95, cloth.)

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings left behind a treasure trove of writings about Florida. Among the most illuminating of her books was *Cross Creek Cookery*, a cookbook with charming tales and anecdotes about Florida living and cooking. She also left behind her house at Cross Creek, made famous by her novel of the same name.

As caretaker of Rawlings's Cross Creek estate in the 1980s, Sally Morrison found the home lacking in amenities but not in charm. Inspired in part by Rawlings's legacy, Morrison penned her own cookbook in 1983 called *Cross Creek Kitchens: Seasonal Recipes and Reflections*.

Morrison and the artist Kate Barnes collaborated on the book, motivated in part by visitors' nostalgia for simple country living. According to the back cover's text, "their book features southern fare and local favorite recipes interlaced with stories of life in the small community made famous by Rawlings." They also hoped to provide an updated version of Florida cuisine for today's nutritional sensibilities: "Marjorie's cookbook emphasized 'company fare—on the rich side and not recommended for daily consumption.' Aware of the modern inclination for low-calorie, natural foods, we offer this lighter, more contemporary version of Florida country cooking as a companion to the earlier regional classic" (10).

The prose in this volume does its best to evoke Florida's seasons and local recreational activities. Morrison also highlights the social nature of food preparation and consumption, writing with a sentimental eye of quiet visits and large parties. There are breezy anecdotes about cooking and roughing it the way Rawlings did, but these stories rarely help the reader to understand the importance of certain products or preparations to life in Cross Creek. Instead, the anecdotes dwell largely on Morrison's own experience of visiting with friends and offering hospitality.

The black-and-white illustrations are competent and quaint, but mostly act as filler. The complete absence of photographs of the land or the prepared recipes themselves does nothing to make the book more appealing.

The book, in short, is a personal memoir of Cross Creek's caretaker, not a broad exploration of Florida cooking. There is little apparent influence from Rawlings