

UNSOLVED

COLD CASE FILE · 79-1142

# THE LIGHTHOUSE FERRY

*Tern Island, Maine · October 1979*

1-6 players

2-3 hours

35 documents

3 sealed envelopes

# HOW TO WORK THIS FILE

## YOU ARE THE INVESTIGATOR

A lighthouse keeper died in 1979. The county called it an accident. This box holds every document that survives. Nothing is highlighted, nothing is in order, and some of it does not matter.

## THREE ENVELOPES

Start with the documents marked **D**. When you can answer the question for Envelope A, open it and check your answer on its first page. Then do the same for B and C.

## PRINT IT

Print single-sided. Envelopes A, B and C are separate files: print each one without reading it and seal it in its own envelope. Spread the D documents on a table — the more you can see at once, the better.

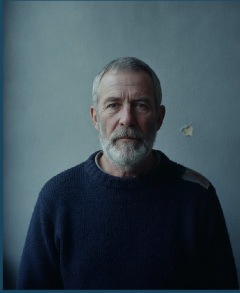
## NO HINTS

There are no hints and no detective notes. Every answer can be proved from at least two documents. Take notes, build your own timeline, and argue.

## THE QUESTIONS

- A.** Was it an accident? If not, in what time window did Silas Wren die?
- B.** How did the killer reach the island that night, and under what name?
- C.** Who killed Silas Wren, why, and what physical evidence proves it?

# PERSONS OF INTEREST



## SILAS WREN

Civilian keeper of Tern Point Light under Coast Guard contract since 1957, as his father was before him. 58. Found dead Sunday, October 14, 1979.



## NORA WREN

The victim's wife, 51. Runs the island post office counter.



## DALE BRODY

Deckhand on the Mary Ellen, 34. Also fishes his own lobster traps.



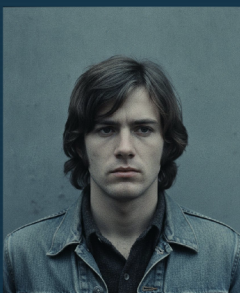
## INGRID SORENSEN

Visitor renting Gull Cottage, 29. Says she is a painter.



## EVERETT LUSK

Boston property developer, 45. Wanted to buy Tern Point.



## TOM WREN

The victim's son, 26. Lives on the mainland in Port Wescott.

# CONTENTS OF THE BOX

|      |                                                  |
|------|--------------------------------------------------|
| D-01 | Case Assignment                                  |
| D-02 | Incident Report – Knox County Sheriff            |
| D-03 | Medical Examiner – Summary of Findings           |
| D-04 | Keeper's Log – Friday, October 12                |
| D-05 | Keeper's Log – Saturday, October 13              |
| D-06 | Notice to Keepers – Lamp Clockwork               |
| D-07 | Coast Guard Group Radio Log – Oct 13/14          |
| D-08 | Mary Ellen Ferry – Timetable                     |
| D-09 | Ferry Manifest – Saturday, October 13            |
| D-10 | Statement – Nora Wren                            |
| D-11 | Statement – Dale Brody                           |
| D-12 | Statement – Ingrid Sorensen                      |
| D-13 | Statement – Everett Lusk                         |
| D-14 | Statement – Tom Wren                             |
| D-15 | Tide Table – Port Wescott, October 1979          |
| D-16 | Coastal Pilot – Tern Island Approaches (extract) |
| D-17 | Map – Tern Island and Port Wescott               |
| D-18 | The Wescott Courier – October 16, 1979           |
| D-19 | Letter – Northeast Mutual Life                   |
| D-20 | Letter – S. Wren to Coast Guard Group            |
| D-21 | Scene Photographs – Sheet 1                      |

Envelopes A, B and C are sealed. Their contents are not listed.

MAINE STATE POLICE • MAJOR CRIMES UNIT • COLD CASE REVIEW

Investigator,

In October 1979 lighthouse keeper Silas Wren was found dead at the foot of the tower stairs at Tern Point Light, Tern Island. The county ruled it an accidental fall and closed the file within a week.

A family member has asked us to look again. Everything we still hold is in this box. Nothing has been sorted or marked for you.

Work the file in three stages. Do not open an envelope until you can answer its question.

|                   |                                                                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Envelope A</b> | Was this an accident? If not, in what time window did Silas Wren die? |
| <b>Envelope B</b> | How did the killer reach the island that night, and under what name?  |
| <b>Envelope C</b> | Who killed Silas Wren, why, and what physical evidence proves it?     |

Det. Sgt. A. Kowalczyk

Cold Case Review

|                      |                                                                         |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Case no.             | 79-1142                                                                 |
| Date / time reported | Sun 10/14/79 · 06:50 (by telephone)                                     |
| Location             | Tern Point Light, Tern Island                                           |
| Reporting person     | Nora Wren (wife)                                                        |
| Responding           | Dep. H. Merritt, resident deputy, Tern Island (on scene 07:15, on foot) |

Deceased found face down at the base of the iron stair inside the tower. Lamp room door open. Tower entry door (ledge side) unlocked. No sign of forced entry. Deceased known to climb the stair several times a night to wind the lamp clockwork. Stair steep and worn.

Wife states lamp reported dark by Coast Guard during the night. Believes husband fell in the dark.

Disposition: Accidental death. Referred to M.E. No further action.

*Dep. H. Merritt #31*

|                 |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Decedent</b> | Silas Abbott Wren, 58 |
| <b>Examined</b> | 10/15/79, Rockland    |

1. Two depressed fractures, left rear of skull, approx. 3 cm apart, each roughly circular, approx. 2.5 cm across.
2. Multiple abrasions to forearms, shins and face consistent with a fall down a stair.
3. Fractured left wrist.
4. Blood alcohol: none detected.
5. Stomach contents: tea, bread, fish. Estimated time of death from body temperature and rigor: between 10:00 p.m. on 10/13 and 2:00 a.m. on 10/14.

Opinion: injuries are consistent with a fall. The two skull fractures are unusual for a single fall but may result from striking the stair edges twice.

*R. Chandler, M.D.*

| Time  | Entry                                                                                                          |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 06:48 | <i>Camp out at sunrise. Clockwork wound down. Lens cleaned.</i>                                                |
| 09:00 | <i>Wind SW 10. Brody's traps inside the channel markers again. Third time this month. Will write to Group.</i> |
| 17:30 | <i>Camp lit. Clockwork wound.</i>                                                                              |
| 21:30 | <i>Clockwork wound. Visibility good.</i>                                                                       |
| 01:30 | <i>Clockwork wound. Light fog.</i>                                                                             |

| Time  | Entry                                                                                                       |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 05:30 | <i>Clockwork wound. Fog lifting.</i>                                                                        |
| 06:49 | <i>Camp out at sunrise. Clockwork down.</i>                                                                 |
| 10:15 | <i>Mr. Lusk at the watch house again with papers. Told him the same as before. He did not take it well.</i> |
| 17:30 | <i>Camp lit. Clockwork wound. Wind light, NW.</i>                                                           |
| 21:30 | <i>Clockwork wound. Clear, cold.</i>                                                                        |
| 23:10 | <i>Small boat rounding the Point, no running lights, heading in toward the landing. Outboard.</i>           |
| 23:30 | <i>Camp checked. Burning well.</i>                                                                          |
|       |                                                                                                             |
|       |                                                                                                             |
|       |                                                                                                             |

## U.S. COAST GUARD • FIRST DISTRICT • AIDS TO NAVIGATION

Tern Point is one of the last First District stations still turning its lens by the original weight-driven clockwork; the electric drive failed in 1977 and will not be replaced before automation. Keepers of such stations are reminded:

1. A full winding drives the lens for approximately four hours and ten minutes. When the weight reaches the floor the lens stops turning and the characteristic is lost; the light must be reported as extinguished.
2. Clockwork shall be wound at four-hour intervals from lighting, without exception, and each winding entered in the log.
3. Stations are scheduled for automation. Inspectors may visit without notice.

| Time  | Traffic                                                                             |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 22:40 | <i>F/V Kittiwake outbound Port Wescott, fishing east of Tern Island overnight.</i>  |
| 01:52 | <i>F/V Kittiwake reports Tern Point Light not showing.</i>                          |
| 02:10 | <i>Telephone to Tern Point watch house. No answer.</i>                              |
| 02:40 | <i>Broadcast notice to mariners: Tern Point Light extinguished.</i>                 |
| 06:15 | <i>Telephone to Mrs. N. Wren, island post office. Asked her to check on keeper.</i> |
| 07:30 | <i>Knox County Sheriff advises keeper deceased.</i>                                 |

**D-08****MARY ELLEN FERRY — TIMETABLE****MARY ELLEN • PORT WESCOTT - TERN ISLAND • FALL SCHEDULE**

|                            |                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Leaves Port Wescott</b> | 7:00 AM • 3:30 PM |
| <b>Leaves Tern Island</b>  | 8:00 AM • 5:30 PM |
| <b>Crossing</b>            | about 40 minutes  |

The Mary Ellen is berthed overnight at Port Wescott. No evening crossings after October 1. Passengers must sign the manifest.

**D-09****FERRY MANIFEST — SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13****MARY ELLEN • PASSENGER MANIFEST****7:00 AM from Port Wescott**

- 1 E. Lusk — Boston
- 2 M. Hollis — Tern Is.
- 3 Tom Wren — Pt. Wescott
- 4 (freight: 12 sacks mail, 2 drums diesel)

**5:30 PM from Tern Island**

- 1 E. Lusk
- 2 Tom Wren
- 3 R. & J. Pettengill
- 4 M. Hollis

Crew: Capt. W. Ames, deckhand D. Brody.



We live in the post office house in the village. In the season Silas spends his nights out at the Point, in the little watch house under the tower — it has the station telephone. I went to bed about ten. I didn't hear a thing — the Point is half a mile from the post office house and the wind was off the land.

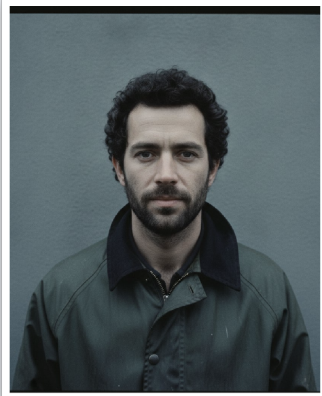
The Coast Guard rang me at a quarter past six. I walked out along the shore road — it's ten minutes — and found him at the bottom of the stair. I ran back to the store and telephoned Harold Merritt, our deputy, at ten to seven.

Mr. Lusk had been at Silas for a year to sell the Point. Silas wouldn't. It was his father's land and his grandfather's before that. I told Mr. Lusk it was Silas's decision, not mine.

Yes, there is an insurance policy. We took it out when Tom was born.

D-11

## STATEMENT — DALE BRODY



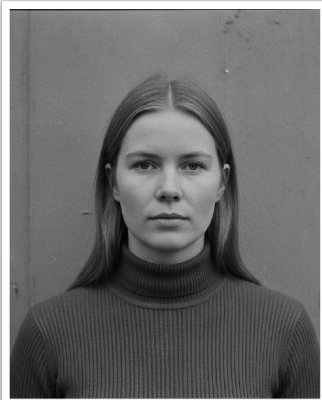
We tied the Mary Ellen up in Port Wescott about six-fifteen. I went home, had supper, watched the television with my wife and went to bed. I didn't go near the island.

Silas and me didn't see eye to eye about my traps. He wrote letters about me. That's no reason to hurt a man.

My own boat? The Sally B? You can ask anybody. She's been sitting in the boatyard all week.

D-12

## STATEMENT — INGRID SORENSEN

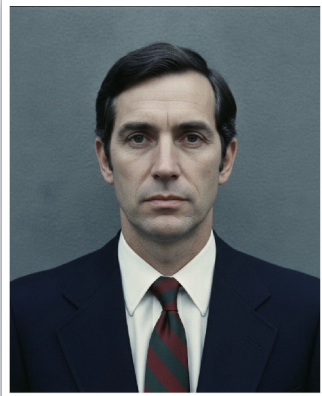


I'm renting Gull Cottage for the month to paint. I walked out to the Point on Saturday morning to sketch the tower and I heard two men shouting in the little watch house under the tower. One of them was the keeper. The other was a tall man in a navy blazer — far too smart for the island.

That night I was in the cottage. I went out once, around eleven, to look at the stars. The light was turning then. I didn't see any boat. I went to bed around midnight.

D-13

## STATEMENT — EVERETT LUSK



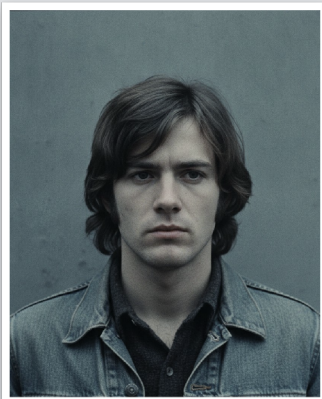
I went over on the morning boat to make Mr. Wren a final offer for the Tern Point parcel – a very generous one. He declined. I was disappointed, not angry.

I came back on the 5:30 PM boat, checked into the Harbor Inn and stayed in my room all evening going over the figures. I was in bed by ten. I had an early call – breakfast on Sunday with the chairman of the selectmen – and I stayed on until Monday before driving back to Boston.

I'm six foot three and I don't go climbing lighthouse stairs in the dark, Sergeant.

D-14

## STATEMENT — TOM WREN



I went over to see Ma for the day and came back on the half-past-five boat. The same boat as Lusk – he sat at the stern and didn't talk to anyone.

I spent the evening in The Anchor. I owe some money around town, I won't pretend I don't. My father and I had words about it that morning. But I was in The Anchor until they threw us out.

## TIDE TABLE — PORT WESCOTT, OCTOBER 1979

| Date   | High  | Low   | High  | Low   |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fri 12 | 04:02 | 10:14 | 16:25 | 22:31 |
| Sat 13 | 04:51 | 11:03 | 17:14 | 23:20 |
| Sun 14 | 05:40 | 11:52 | 18:03 | —     |
| Mon 15 | 00:09 | 06:29 | 12:41 | 18:52 |

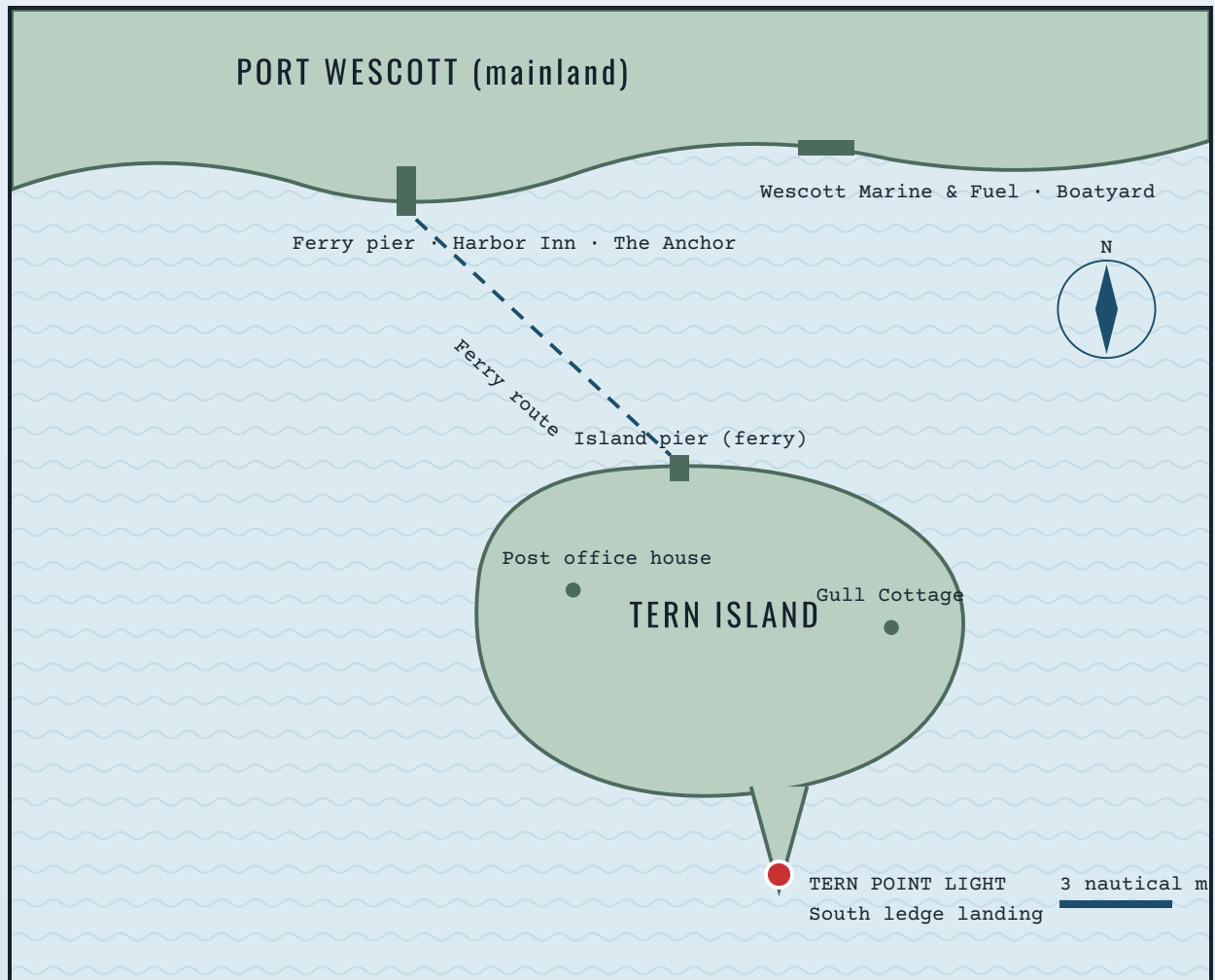
Times Eastern Daylight. Heights omitted.

## COASTAL PILOT — TERN ISLAND APPROACHES (EXTRACT)

Tern Point landing. A rock ledge on the south side of the Point, below the tower. Usable by small craft only within about two hours either side of low water; at other states of tide the swell breaks over it.

Distances. Port Wescott to Tern Point by small outboard craft, about 50 minutes in fair weather. The Mary Ellen uses the island pier on the north shore, not the Point.

Lights. Tern Point Light, white flash every 10 seconds, visible 14 miles.



# THE WESCOTT COURIER

## KEEPER DIES IN FALL AT TERN POINT



Silas Wren, keeper of Tern Point Light for twenty-two years, died early Sunday after a fall inside the lighthouse tower. He was 58.

Deputy Harold Merritt said Mr. Wren apparently lost his footing on the iron stair while tending the lamp. The light was reported dark by a fishing vessel shortly before two o'clock Sunday morning.

Mr. Wren leaves his wife, Nora, and a son, Thomas, of Port Wescott. The Coast Guard has said the station will be automated next year.

In other island news, the selectmen will hear a proposal from Boston developer Everett Lusk for summer cottages on the south shore at the November town meeting.

**D-19**

## **LETTER — NORTHEAST MUTUAL LIFE**

NORTHEAST MUTUAL LIFE ASSURANCE • PORTLAND

---

Dear Mrs. Wren,

We confirm receipt of your claim under policy 44-10937 on the life of Silas A. Wren. The policy provides a benefit of \$20,000, doubled to \$40,000 in the event of accidental death.

Payment will follow once the county's finding is received.

**D-20**

## **LETTER — S. WREN TO COAST GUARD GROUP**

Sirs,

For the third time I must report lobster gear belonging to D. Brody of Port Wescott set inside the channel markers off Tern Point, fouling the approach. I have spoken to him twice. I ask that the Group take the matter up.

Respectfully, S. A. Wren, Keeper



Photo 1 — Tower stair, looking up from the base



Photo 2 — Lamp room, 08:40. The winding crank is not on its hook.

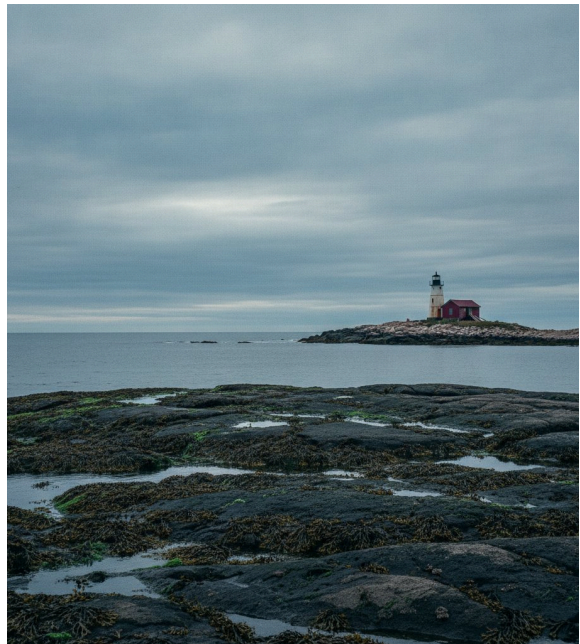


Photo 3 — South ledge landing below the tower, low water Sunday

# INVESTIGATOR'S WORKSHEET

Build your own timeline. Saturday, October 13 → Sunday, October 14, 1979.

17:00

---

18:00

---

19:00

---

20:00

---

21:00

---

22:00

---

23:00

---

00:00

---

01:00

---

02:00

---

03:00

---

04:00

---

05:00

---

06:00

---

07:00

---