

# “Lady of the Dunes” Identified: FBI’s Use of Investigative Genealogy Led to Major Break in Case

The Boston Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Massachusetts State Police assigned to the Office of the Cape and Islands District Attorney Michael O’Keefe, the Provincetown Police Department, and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Massachusetts, are announcing that after nearly a half-century, the oldest, unidentified homicide victim in Massachusetts, dubbed the “Lady of the Dunes,” has been identified as Ruth Marie Terry of Tennessee.

The FBI identified Ruth Marie Terry, previously identified by investigators seeking her identity as the “Lady of the Dunes” using investigative genealogy. This is a unique method that can generate new leads for unsolved homicides, as well as help identify unknown victims.

On July 26, 1974, Terry was found deceased in the dunes about a mile east of the Race Point Ranger station inside the Cape Cod National Seashore in Provincetown, MA. The cause of death was determined at the time to be a blow to the head and is estimated to have occurred several weeks prior. Her hands were missing, presumably removed by the killer so she could not be identified through fingerprints, and her head was nearly severed from her body.



## **RUTH MARIE TERRY**

Homicide Victim Provincetown, Massachusetts July 1974

For nearly five decades, investigators have worked tirelessly to identify this victim through various means, including neighborhood canvasses; reviews of thousands of missing-person cases; clay model facial reconstruction, and age-regression drawings. Since this crime was committed, many investigative and scientific techniques have either improved or been created through new advances in technology. One of these methods is Investigative Genealogy and combines the use of DNA analysis with traditional genealogy research and historical records to generate investigative leads for unsolved violent crimes. Recent FBI investigative efforts through genealogical examination of this infamous cold case have led to the positive confirmation of Terry's identity.

In addition to Tennessee, investigators believe Terry had ties to California, Massachusetts, and Michigan.

The case is being investigated as a homicide by the Massachusetts State Police assigned to the Office of the Cape and Islands District Attorney, the Provincetown Police Department, and the FBI.

The public is being asked to review [Terry's Seeking Information Poster](#) that includes newly released photographs.

If you have any information concerning this case, please contact the FBI's toll-free tipline at 1-800-CALL-FBI (1-800-225-5324) or the Massachusetts State Police at 1-800-KAPTURE (1-800-527-8873) or submit a tip online at [tips.fbi.gov](https://tips.fbi.gov) or [MSPTips@pol.state.ma.us](mailto:MSPTips@pol.state.ma.us).

## Resources

- [RUTH MARIE TERRY](#)
- [Remarks Prepared for Delivery by FBI Boston Special Agent in Charge Joseph Bonavolonta at Press Conference Announcing the Identification of the Lady of the Dunes](#)