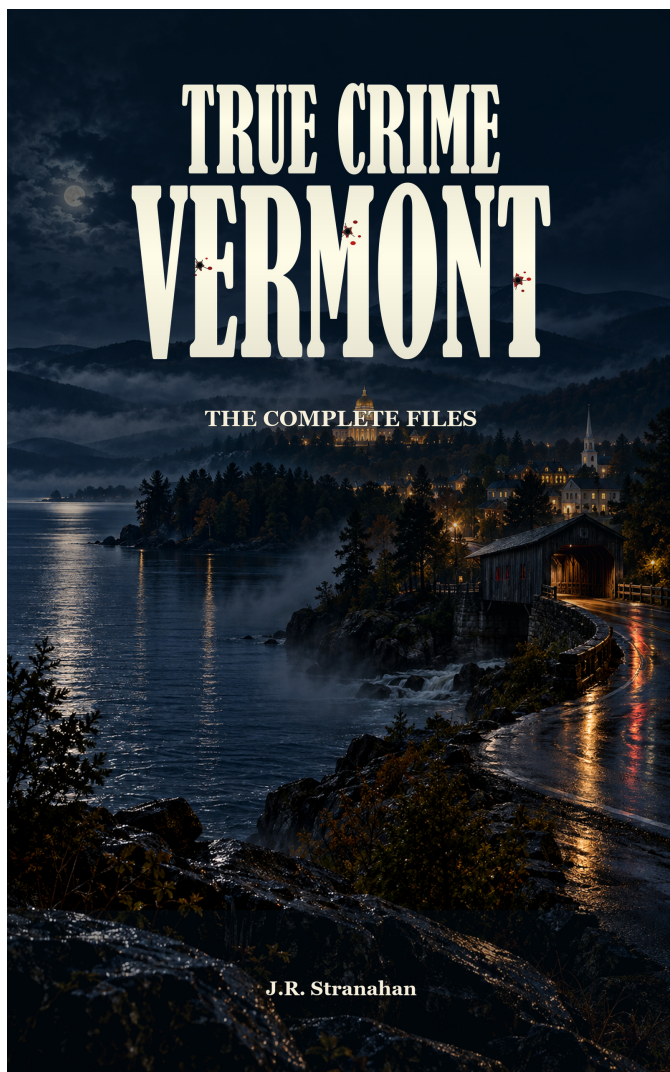




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J.R. Stranahan

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# File 1: The Murder of Rita Curran

**Place and period:** Burlington, 1971-2023

**Present legal status:** Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial.

This file belongs first to Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers. The public record is necessarily organized around investigation and adjudication, but a criminal case is not the measure of a life. The account uses the available record to describe what happened and how institutions responded, while avoiding invented biography where sources are silent.

## The human scale

Kindergarten teacher Rita Curran was found murdered in her Burlington apartment in July 1971. That fact is the fixed point for this portion of *The Murder of Rita Curran*. Begin with the person harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community that had to live with the absence. In Burlington, later retellings sometimes collapse the investigation and the judgment into one continuous story. The public record does not. It preserves the order in which information appeared and the forum in which it was tested. The present legal posture is stated separately: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial.

For Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers, the procedural vocabulary cannot be allowed to eclipse

consequence. Investigators preserved evidence, including a cigarette butt, long before modern DNA analysis existed. The detail belongs here because it changes the chronology, not because it supplies atmosphere. Begin with the person harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community that had to live with the absence. Keeping that boundary visible lets the reader understand both the institutional response and the loss that made the response necessary.

The 1971-2023 record from Burlington contains a point that resists shorthand: A renewed cold-case team developed a DNA profile and used genealogical research and documentary records to identify DeRoos. The present legal posture is equally specific: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial. Begin with the person harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community that had to live with the absence. One proposition may be established while a neighboring proposition remains disputed. Treating them separately is not hesitation; it is accurate reporting.

A headline can make this episode appear settled in a sentence. The underlying record is narrower. Police also revisited statements from 1971 and concluded that DeRoos had misled investigators about his movements. From there, the inquiry moves through source, timing, corroboration, and legal consequence. Begin with the person harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community that had to live with the absence. None of those steps authorizes invented dialogue or a claim about what Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers privately thought.

Location matters in this file. Burlington determined which agencies, courts, and communities carried the case, while 1971-2023 marks the span over which the public learned it. Closure by police answers an investigative question but is not a criminal conviction. Begin with the person harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community that had to live with the absence. The result is a chronology with identifiable

custodians rather than a collection of free-floating claims.

This part of the account begins with a modest question: what did the cited source actually establish? Its answer is plain: Kindergarten teacher Rita Curran was found murdered in her Burlington apartment in July 1971. The answer does not automatically prove motive, identity, or every charge in the case. Begin with the person harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community that had to live with the absence. The remaining status is stated without embellishment: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial.

The case file gives different kinds of information different weight. Investigators preserved evidence, including a cigarette butt, long before modern DNA analysis existed. A contemporaneous observation, a laboratory result, a charging allegation, and an appellate finding do not perform the same job. Begin with the person harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community that had to live with the absence. Describing those jobs plainly is especially important when the story concerns Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers.

## The first account

By the time *The Murder of Rita Curran* reached public memory, sequence had become easy to lose. Police also revisited statements from 1971 and concluded that DeRoos had misled investigators about his movements. Restoring sequence shows what investigators knew, what prosecutors alleged, what the defense contested, and what a court or jury ultimately resolved. Separate what witnesses reported at the time from what investigators later inferred. An older headline cannot replace the current status: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial.

There is no need to enlarge the evidence to make this file serious. Closure by police answers an investigative question but is not a criminal conviction. That proposition is consequential on its own. Separate what witnesses reported at the time from what investigators later inferred. The account therefore avoids borrowing certainty from unrelated defendants, other jurisdictions, or later cases that happen to resemble events in Burlington.

The public record speaks most reliably when attribution travels with the claim. Here is the supported proposition: Kindergarten teacher Rita Curran was found murdered in her Burlington apartment in July 1971. The source may recount an allegation, summarize trial proof, or state a judgment, and the language must match that function. Separate what witnesses reported at the time from what investigators later inferred. That practice protects the accuracy of the case and the dignity of Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers at the same time.

At this stage of the file, absence is also information. The available materials establish this much: Investigators preserved evidence, including a cigarette butt, long before modern DNA analysis existed. They do not establish every rumor that accumulated during 1971-2023. Separate what witnesses reported at the time from what investigators later inferred. Refusing to bridge those gaps with speculation keeps the unresolved portions visible instead of disguising them as narrative momentum.

Consider the detail in its proper scale: A renewed cold-case team developed a DNA profile and used genealogical research and documentary records to identify DeRoos. It is neither disposable nor self-executing. Its force depends on where it sits among the other records from Burlington. Separate what witnesses reported at the time from what investigators later inferred. A measured account can explain that relationship without turning legal caution into a repetitive disclaimer.

The language of this chapter changes when the legal posture changes. Police also revisited statements from 1971 and concluded that DeRoos had misled investigators about his movements. If the proposition came from an accusation, it remains attributed; if it survived adjudication, the judgment is named; if review altered the result, the alteration is carried forward. Separate what witnesses reported at the time from what investigators later inferred. The controlling endpoint is recorded separately: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial.

What happened to Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers generated records made for different audiences: investigators, lawyers, judges, jurors, officials, and the public. Closure by police answers an investigative question but is not a criminal conviction. Those records overlap, but they are not interchangeable. Separate what witnesses reported at the time from what investigators later inferred. Reading across them carefully prevents a later summary from erasing an earlier uncertainty or a later reversal.

## Building a chronology

The most useful context is the context that changes interpretation. Investigators preserved evidence, including a cigarette butt, long before modern DNA analysis existed. In the Burlington record, that detail helps explain why a particular investigative or legal step followed. Dates and sequence matter because later knowledge can make early decisions seem more certain than they were. General crime lore would add volume but not understanding, so it is left outside the account.

The end of a proceeding is not always the end of a case's public life. A renewed cold-case team developed a DNA profile and used genealogical research and documentary records to identify DeRoos. Families, institutions, and communities continued to live with the result after 1971-2023. Dates and sequence matter because later knowledge

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## Physical evidence

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## Witness evidence

Consider the detail in its proper scale: A renewed cold-case team developed a DNA profile and used genealogical research and documentary records to identify DeRoos. It is neither disposable nor self-executing. Its force depends on where it sits among the other records from Burlington. Credibility is tested through opportunity to observe, consistency, corroboration, motive, and cross-examination. A measured account can explain that relationship without turning legal caution into a repetitive disclaimer.

The language of this chapter changes when the legal posture changes. Police also revisited statements from 1971 and concluded that DeRoos had misled investigators about his movements. If the proposition came from an accusation, it remains attributed; if it survived adjudication, the judgment is named; if review altered the result, the alteration is carried forward. Credibility is tested through opportunity to observe, consistency, corroboration, motive, and cross-examination. The controlling endpoint is recorded separately: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial.

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## Digital and documentary trails

For Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers, the procedural vocabulary cannot be allowed to eclipse consequence. Kindergarten teacher Rita Curran was found murdered in her Burlington apartment in July 1971. The detail belongs here because it changes the chronology, not because it supplies atmosphere. Records can preserve timing and contact, but interpretation still depends on context and authentication. Keeping that boundary visible lets the reader understand both the institutional response and the loss that made the response necessary.

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A headline can make this episode appear settled in a sentence. The underlying record is narrower. A renewed cold-case team developed a DNA profile and used genealogical research and documentary records to identify DeRoos. From there, the inquiry moves through source, timing, corroboration, and legal consequence. Records can preserve timing and contact, but interpretation still depends on context and authentication. None of those steps authorizes invented dialogue or a claim about what Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers privately thought.

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## Charging choices

By the time *The Murder of Rita Curran* reached public memory, sequence had become easy to lose. Police also revisited statements from 1971 and concluded that DeRoos had misled investigators about his movements. Restoring sequence shows what investigators knew, what prosecutors alleged, what the defense contested, and what a court or jury ultimately resolved. An indictment states allegations; a plea or verdict resolves only the counts and defendants actually adjudicated. An older headline cannot replace the current status: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial.

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Consider the detail in its proper scale: A renewed cold-case team developed a DNA profile and used genealogical research and documentary records to identify DeRoos. It is neither disposable nor self-executing. Its force depends on where it sits among the other records from Burlington. An indictment states allegations; a plea or verdict resolves only the counts and defendants actually adjudicated. A measured account can explain that relationship without turning legal caution into a repetitive disclaimer.

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## The courtroom

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The most useful context is the context that changes interpretation. A renewed cold-case team developed a DNA profile and used genealogical research and documentary records to identify DeRoos. In the Burlington record, that detail helps explain why a particular investigative or legal step followed. A trial is structured proof under rules, not a complete replay of every event or every rumor surrounding it. General crime lore would add volume but not understanding, so it is left outside the account.

The end of a proceeding is not always the end of a case's public life. Police also revisited statements from 1971 and concluded that DeRoos had misled investigators about his movements. Families, institutions, and communities continued to live with the result after 1971-2023. A trial is structured proof under rules, not a complete replay of every event or every rumor surrounding it. The legal status is reported in its own terms: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial. It does not imply that every question or consequence disappeared.

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## Appeal and review

A headline can make this episode appear settled in a sentence. The underlying record is narrower. Closure by police answers an investigative question but is not a criminal conviction. From there, the inquiry moves through source, timing, corroboration, and legal consequence. An appellate court tests legal error and the governing record, not whether judges would retell the case the same way. None of those steps authorizes invented dialogue or a claim about what Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers privately thought.

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# Uncertainty

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# Institutions

The end of a proceeding is not always the end of a case's public life. Kindergarten teacher Rita Curran was found murdered in her Burlington apartment in July 1971. Families, institutions, and communities continued to live with the result after 1971-2023. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families each occupy different roles. The legal status is reported in its own terms: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial. It does not imply that every question or consequence disappeared.

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For Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers, the procedural vocabulary cannot be allowed to eclipse consequence. A renewed cold-case team developed a DNA profile and used genealogical research and documentary records to identify DeRoos. The detail belongs here because it changes the chronology, not because it supplies atmosphere. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families each occupy different roles. Keeping that boundary visible lets the reader understand both the institutional response and the loss that made the response

necessary.

The 1971-2023 record from Burlington contains a point that resists shorthand: Police also revisited statements from 1971 and concluded that DeRoos had misled investigators about his movements. The present legal posture is equally specific: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families each occupy different roles. One proposition may be established while a neighboring proposition remains disputed. Treating them separately is not hesitation; it is accurate reporting.

A headline can make this episode appear settled in a sentence. The underlying record is narrower. Closure by police answers an investigative question but is not a criminal conviction. From there, the inquiry moves through source, timing, corroboration, and legal consequence. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families each occupy different roles. None of those steps authorizes invented dialogue or a claim about what Rita Curran and the family that waited more than fifty years for answers privately thought.

Location matters in this file. Burlington determined which agencies, courts, and communities carried the case, while 1971-2023 marks the span over which the public learned it. Kindergarten teacher Rita Curran was found murdered in her Burlington apartment in July 1971. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families each occupy different roles. The result is a chronology with identifiable custodians rather than a collection of free-floating claims.

## Status at manuscript lock

The controlling status for this account is: Burlington police closed the case in 2023 after DNA and genetic-genealogy work identified deceased former neighbor William DeRoos. Because DeRoos died in 1986, the investigative conclusion was never tested at trial. That sentence is deliberately narrower than a television summary. It does not merge co-defendants, convert accusations into findings, or imply that an appeal erased a human death. Later proceedings may change the legal posture, but they should not be projected backward onto the record described here.

# Sources from the edition

## The Murder of Rita Curran

- Burlington Police chief's report on the Rita Curran case: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6222/February-Chiefs-Report-to-Police-Commission> - Burlington 2023 annual report: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3206/Annual-Report-2023>

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