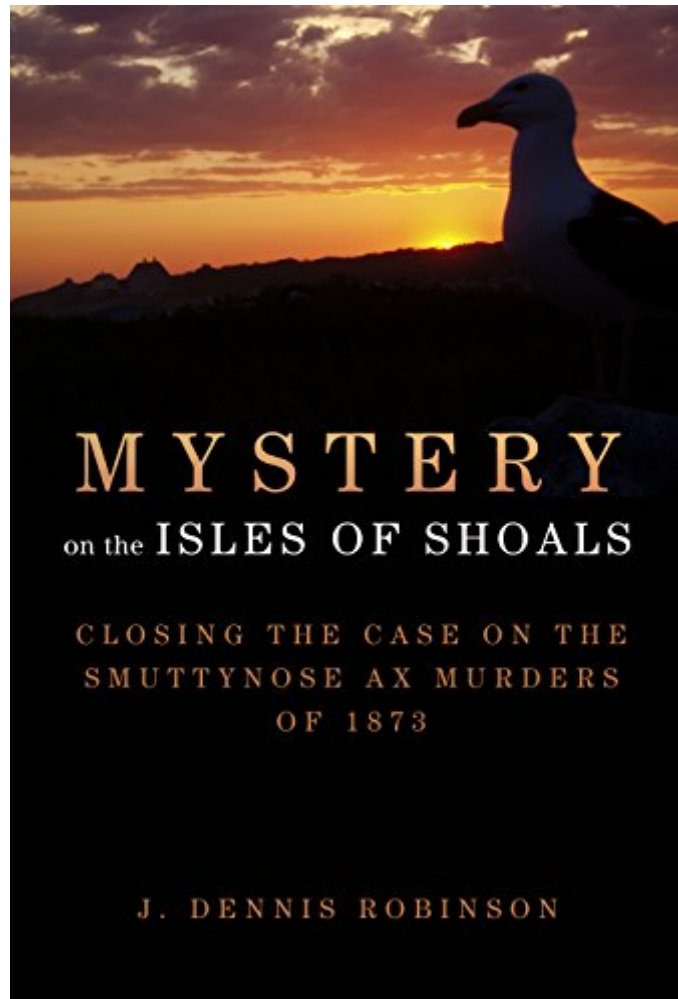


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Mystery On The Isles Of Shoals: Closing The Case On The Smuttynose Ax Murders Of 1873



Synopsis

For the first time, the full story of a crime that has haunted New England since 1873. The cold-blooded ax murder of two innocent Norwegian women at their island home off the coast of New Hampshire has gripped the region since 1873, beguiling tourists, inspiring artists, and fueling conspiracy theorists. The killer, a handsome Prussian fisherman down on his luck, was quickly captured, convicted in a widely publicized trial, and hanged in an unforgettable gallows spectacle. But he never confessed and, while in prison, gained a circle of admirers whose blind faith in his innocence still casts a shadow of doubt. A fictionalized bestselling novel and a Hollywood film have further clouded the truth. Finally a definitive "whydunnit" account of the Smuttynose Island ax murders has arrived. Popular historian J. Dennis Robinson fleshes out the facts surrounding this tragic robbery gone wrong in a captivating true crime page-turner. Robinson delves into the backstory at the rocky Isles of Shoals as an isolated centuries-old fishing village was being destroyed by a modern luxury hotel. He explores the neighboring island of Appledore where Victorian poet Celia Thaxter entertained the elite artists and writers of Boston. It was Thaxter's powerful essay about the murders in the Atlantic Monthly that shocked the American public. Robinson goes beyond the headlines of the burgeoning yellow press to explore the deeper lessons about American crime, justice, economics, and hero worship. Ten years before the Lizzie Borden ax murder trial and the fictional Sherlock Holmes, Americans met a sociopath named Louis Wagner; and many came to love him.

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Customer Reviews

This meticulously researched book tells the true story of a terrible 19th century murder on a barren, rocky New England island. Although the general details about the murders of two women in the middle of an early Spring night by an ax-wielding intruder are known in the region, a novel written by a well-known author has clouded the story to such an extent that even staid Yankees swear the fictionalized version is, in fact, the truth of the matter. A movie based on that novel quickly sank like an anchor, but it added to the messiness of the murder story, leading many people to believe an innocent man was convicted and executed while a cold-blooded murderess got away with it. The author has painstakingly researched this bloody crime, and has made every effort to present all he has learned in a fair, unbiased manner. When he expresses his own opinion, he does so clearly and with substantial backing. He carefully paints the scene, describing the typical lives of these hardscrabble fishing people, and through careful research gives brief histories of the region, the peoples (native and immigrant), the livelihoods. The reader feels embedded in this 19th century area, the pertinent towns of Portsmouth, N.H., Boston, Massachusetts, and Isles of Shoals, where the murders took place. By learning the history of the fishing industry with the subsequent decline of the fish, Robinson shows us the likely reasons for the murders, which probably were never intended but happened during the course of a burglary.

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