

A Murder in Boston's West End

Hal Bookbinder, hal.bookbinder@ucla.edu

The 1910 Census showed Louis Tennis, my grandmother's 2nd cousin, in the Massachusetts State Prison. Prior to seeing this, I was not aware that he had been in prison, or the circumstances that led to his incarceration.

STATE Massachusetts } DEPARTMENT OF CO
 COUNTY Suffolk } THIRTEENTH CENSUS OF
 TOWNSHIP OR OTHER DIVISION OF COUNTY _____ NA
 NAME OF INSTITUTION Massachusetts State Prison
 (Insert proper name and also, name of place, or township, town, precinct, village, bonded, boat, etc. See instructions.)
 (Insert name of institution, if any, and location of same on the census schedule. See instructions.)

LOCATION.		NAME	RELATION.	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.												
Street, Avenue, Road, etc.	Block number (in case of tenements).	of each person whose place of abode on April 15, 1910, was in this family. Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Include every person living on April 15, 1910. Omit children born since April 15, 1910.	Relationship of this person to the head of the family.	Sex.	Color or race.	Age at last birth.	Married, widowed, divorced.	Number of years of present marriage.	Number of years of present marriage.	Number of years of present marriage.	Number of years of present marriage.	Number of years of present marriage.	Number of years of present marriage.	Number of years of present marriage.	Number of years of present marriage.	Place of birth of each person and give the state or territory.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
		<u>Thompson, Charles</u>														<u>Mass</u>
		<u>Tennis, Louis</u>														<u>Mass</u>



The Boston Globe, the Boston Post, and other newspapers covered his shooting of his wife, child, and himself. They provided lurid coverage of the crime, and blow-by-blow coverage of the criminal and divorce trials. Reading the coverage in different newspapers provided additional details and perspectives.

Although he was expected to die from his self-inflicted gunshot wound, he survived, was tried, pleaded guilty to manslaughter, and was sentenced to a term of 11 to 20 years in State Prison.

His wife had initiated divorce proceedings just prior to the killing, which appears to have precipitated the murder. She continued to pursue it after Louis was jailed. Mrs. Tennis was finally granted the divorce two and one-half years after initially filing for it.

Newspapers of that era often provided sensational coverage. The reporting on the two trials included details and commentary one would not likely see today.

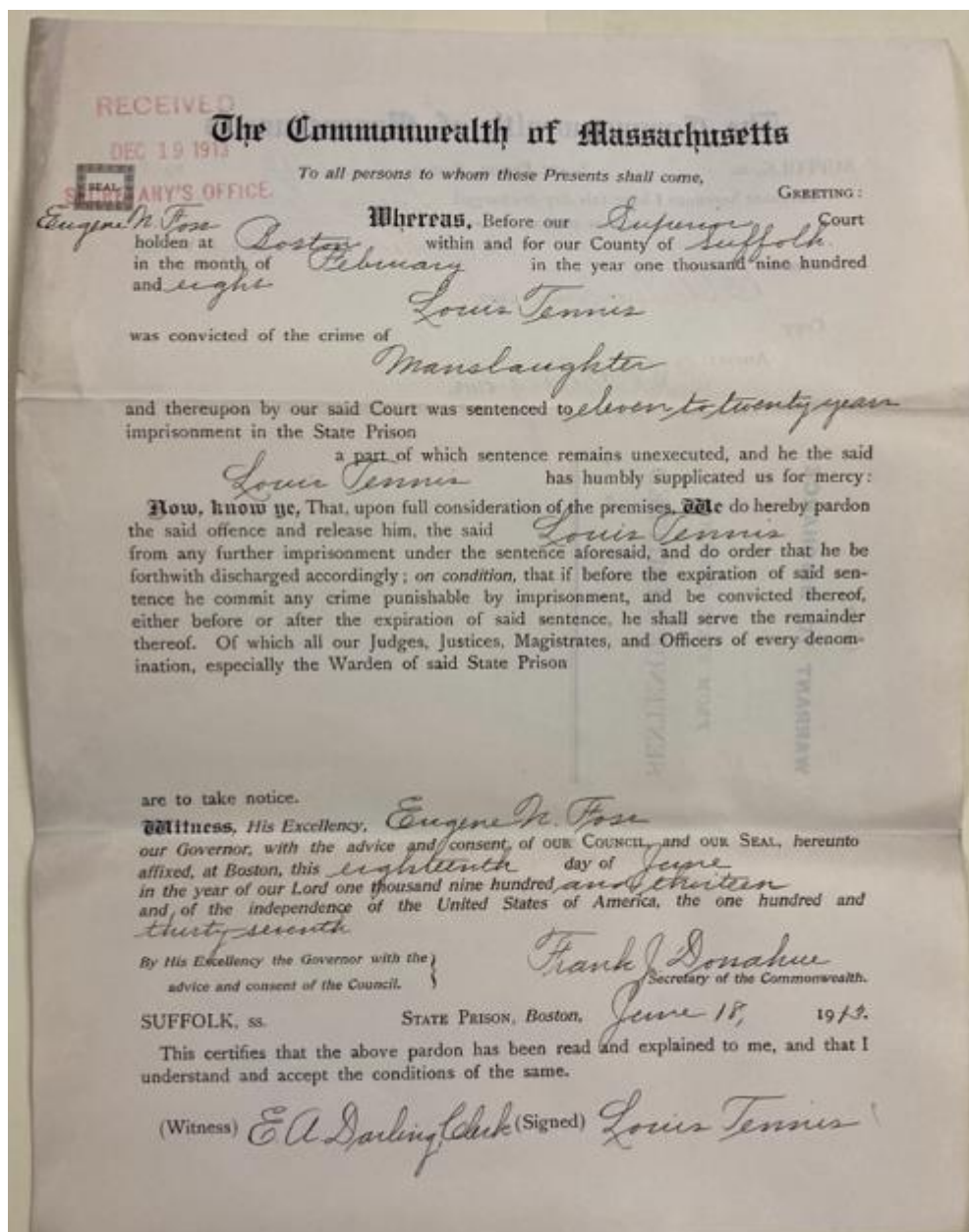
This presentation will show how old newspapers can be a valuable resource in providing coverage, context, and insight.



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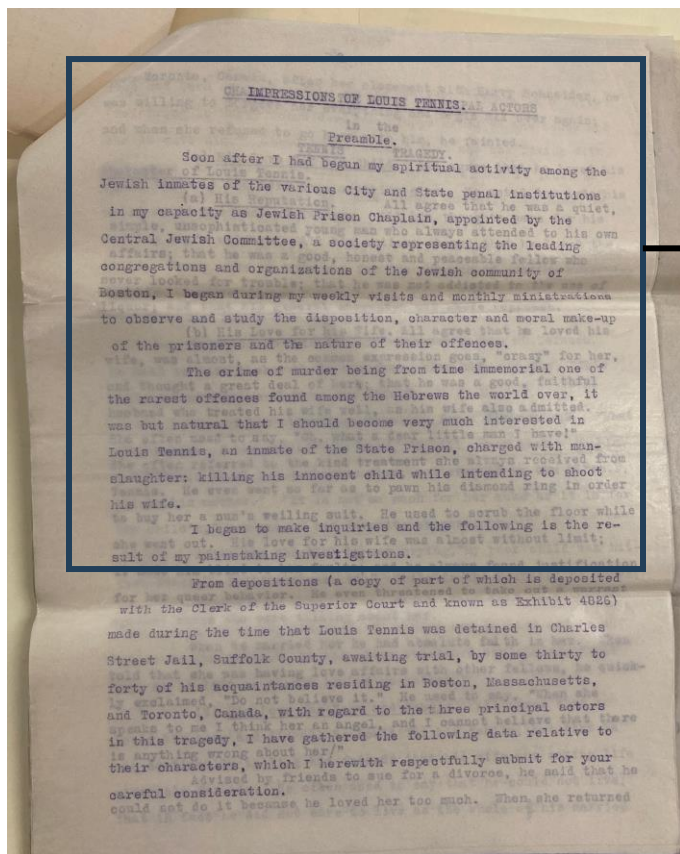
After 5 years in the Massachusetts State Prison, Louis Tennis was pardoned by Governor Eugene Fose. The back story of this pardon is fascinating and unique. The legal filings supporting the pardon permit me to share the story with you. Below is the pardon document, signed by the Governor, releasing Louis Tennis.



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After contacting several archives in Boston in search of the court records, I found that these more-than-a-century-old records were held by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives. It was worth the effort! Almost 150 pages of trial documentation confirmed the accuracy of much of the newspaper coverage and provided significant additional detail. The Jewish prison chaplain provided a 14-page typewritten document supporting a pardon for Louis Tennis. His "investigation" and conclusions make fascinating reading. Below is the first page. It is extracted to the right.



"Impressions of Louis Tennis "Preamble

"Soon after I had begun my spiritual activity among the Jewish inmates of the various City and State penal institutions in my capacity as Jewish Prison Chaplain, appointed by the Central Jewish Committee, a society representing the leading congregations of the Jewish community of Boston, I began during my weekly visits and monthly ministrations to observe and study the disposition, character and moral make-up of the prisoners and the nature of their offenses.

"The crime of murder being from time immemorial one of the rarest of offenses found among the Hebrews the world over, it was but natural that I should become very much interested in Louis Tennis, an inmate of the State Prison, charged with manslaughter: killing his innocent child while intending to shoot his wife.

"I began to make inquiries and the following is the result of my painstaking investigations."

Chaplain (Rabbi) Louis Alexander

This presentation will share background of Boston's multi-ethnic, working-class West End in the early 1900s along with the story of the murder, divorce, pardon and subsequent life of Louis and Mally Tennis (ne Ascrazy).

It will also discuss the sources that I was able to successfully use, including arrival, citizenship, census, and vital records, along with old newspapers and archived court records. Tying together all these resources provided a complete picture...including the subsequent marriage of Mally and her lover in Chicago, far from Boston's West End.

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Resources

- **Ancestry.com**, and to a lesser extent, **MyHeritage.com** and **FamilySearch.org** for census, naturalization, marriage, and ship passenger lists.
 - While I used a personal subscription to **Ancestry**, most, if not all, of these records can be accessed through the library edition.
 - **As of August 16, 2023**
 - **AncestryLibrary** is available from within the Calabasas, Camarillo, Thousand Oaks, and Ventura County Libraries.
 - **AncestryLibrary** and **MyHeritage Library Edition** are available remotely through the LA Public Library,
 - **FamilySearch.org** is freely available, with registration.
- The historical **Boston Globe**, **Boston Post** and several other newspapers for reporting on the killing, the trial, the divorce, and the pardon.
 - I obtained a low-cost six-month introductory subscription to **Globe**.
 - The **Newspapers.com Library Edition** is available remotely through the Calabasas Library (as of 8/16/23)
- Any California resident may request a free library card from most California libraries, including all of those listed above.
- **Norman B. Leventhal Map Center** of the Boston Public Library for early 19th Century maps of Boston and of Boston's West End.
- **Encyclopedia Judaica, Second Edition**, Published by Thomas Gale, 2007, for historical information on the Jews of Boston.
- **The Last Tenement**, Published by the Bostonian Society, 1992, for maps and descriptions of the impact of urban renewal on Boston's West End.
- The **Jews of Boston**, published by Yale University Press, 2005, for pictures of the Jewish West End during the early 19th Century.
- The **Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives**, (617) 557-1087 archives@jud.state.ma.us, for the trial, divorce, and pardon documents.