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**From the Selected Works of James Gross**

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## Facebook as a resource for locating relatives

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/jamesgross/34/>

on nearby shtetls for cemeteries, arranged marriages and yeshivas.

Conversely, by having good relations with the locals, being self-sufficient, having transferable skills and being adept at blending in, village Jews were often the first to migrate. They were skilled at living by their wits, making do, and eking out a living, all of which made them well suited for carving a new life in America.

The story of villagers enriches our current view of life in the Pale and shows the diversity of its Jewish population. It also begins to explain why some genealogical records may not exist. ❖

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## FACEBOOK AS A RESOURCE FOR LOCATING RELATIVES

by James Gross

Many genealogists would agree that a practical option for genealogy research is to locate and contact living relatives. I'm sure that most of us have a whole list of genealogy questions which we just can't answer. Wouldn't it be great if we had the opportunity to pose it to a living relative? But, as we lose touch with distant relatives, this idea is can be a difficult if not an impossible task. Fortunately, with the advent of today's social networking sites there are online networks, such as Facebook which can help. In this short article we will take a brief look at how Facebook can help you reconnect with your long lost living relatives.

What is Facebook?

Facebook is an online social networking directory that connects people with friends and others who work, study, and live around them (1).

People use Facebook to keep up with friends, relatives, and learn more about the people they meet (2).

How does one get or subscribe to Facebook?

Facebook is an online website. It requires free online registration. The website is: <http://www.facebook.com>. Upon registering, you can logon and search for people using their first and last names.

Who uses Facebook?

Facebook is an avenue by which users interact with their

friends. It seems to be very popular with ages ranging from 18 - 25 (27 million users) and 26 - 34 (21 million users), with a respectable number of users in the 65+ age bracket as well (3).

One senior user (Vikki Woods) commented, "Too bad the data didn't mention those over 65!! There are a lot of us!!!! We use it to keep up with grandkids 'doin's', children scattered across the world..." (4). Generally speaking, although there are Facebook users in many age groups, it is understandable that locating a relative is contingent on their active usage of the computer. Based on my Facebook searches, I have had better success at locating younger, college age relatives, as opposed to locating someone in their parents' age group.

What does Facebook have to do with genealogy?

Good question. At the beginning of this article I referenced the desire to locate living relatives. I suggested that sometimes there are questions which you want to pose to a living relative. The reality is that any questions you might have would be better if directed to an older relative.

So, why bother trying to contact a relative on Facebook?

In my experience, there are multiple benefits to contacting any known relative on Facebook. If the relative is in a younger age bracket, he or she will be a future source of family information. And they can refer you to one of their parents or aunts or uncles. If you are lucky and locate one of your older relatives, then you can exchange pleasantries and ask them a question about the family. How does one locate a new relative on Facebook? This is where the main challenge exists. Facebook utilizes a name field to locate users. Now, if you have unique surnames such as Ehrenfeld or Godansky, chances are there won't be too many "hits" when you engage in a name search for your relative.

But if you have a more common surname, such as Goldstein or Goldberg, you may want to try and limit the search by using a Facebook search filter such as their city and state. The other option is to look for members of the family with unique spellings. I try to narrow my search results by searching for those relatives, or related family, with the unusual names. If the men have a common surname, one can try searching for the women if their married names are known.

There are two search locations on Facebook. The primary one (below) is located within one's Facebook homepage:



This search box is convenient for casual searches. There is another search box (below) which appears to return a more substantial number of returns or “hits.” It has a separate link within Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/srch.php>

And, if one is stymied with too many returns or hits, there is the option of filtering by city and state.



Once you locate a potential relative, use the “message” button on the screen (same link as above) to send them a short message. Explain your family connection, and include your name and email address. For security purposes, I would suggest omitting your phone number until a relationship is confirmed.

In summary, one can make use of social networking websites such as Facebook as a tool to help locate far flung relatives. While there is no guarantee that your relative is a registered Facebook user, I have been extremely successful with using Facebook to locate relatives around the world. In my opinion, Facebook searches can be a very worthwhile supplement to one’s existing family tree research. ❖

#### References:

1. Answers.com (2009, November 19). Answernote: Facebook, retrieved 6/13/2011 from: <http://www.answers.com/topic/facebook#ixzz1PB2aRI87>
2. Ibid.
3. Burbary, Ken (2010, January 13). Dispelling the Youth Myth – Five Useful Facebook Demographic Statistics, retrieved 6/13/2011 from: <http://www.kenburbary.com/2010/01/dispelling-the-youth-myth-five-useful-facebook-demographic-statistics/>
4. Burbary, Ken (2010, January 13). Dispelling the Youth Myth – Five Useful Facebook Demographic Statistics, posted comment by Vikki Woods, retrieved 6/13/2011 from: <http://www.kenburbary.com/2010/01/dispelling-the-youth-myth-five-useful-facebook-demographic-statistics/>

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## SUPPORT REQUESTED FOR PROPOSED LEGISLATION IN PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE

In late September the Pennsylvania State Senate unanimously passed Vital Records Bill SB-361. This legislation, if also approved by the House, would enable those who do research in Pennsylvania to have easier access to birth and death records after 105 and 50 years respectively. Currently, these records are restricted, and a limitation is placed on who may access them—genealogists ARE NOT included in this select group.

The bill was scheduled to have its first hearing in the House Health Committee on November 15. Approval by one chamber, however, doesn’t insure approval in the other; there have been many instances in which a bill passed by one body unanimously died in committee in the other.

In other words, we still have to keep up the pressure. We need to urge the committee members, particularly the chair **Matthew Baker** (who decides if and when a bill is voted on) and the House leaders to bring the bill up for a committee vote and pass it. **State Representatives. John Myers, Vanessa Brown, Mark Cohen, John Sabatina, Kevin Boyle, Pamela A. DeLissio and Ronald Waters** from the Philadelphia area are also on the Health Committee.

IAJGS sent letters to each member of the House Health Committee in early October asking them to hold a hearing and pass the bill. Hearing from organizations within their districts, constituents and others (including out of state residents) could prove decisive in getting the bill brought up for a vote and passed by the Health Committee. We strongly urge JGSGP members and their friends to do likewise.

1. Click onto the following link to access a complete listing of PA House members:

[http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/member\\_information/representatives\\_alpha.cfm](http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/member_information/representatives_alpha.cfm)

2. Click on the name of the specific representative to access his/her contact information (snail mail, phone, fax) which will appear in the left hand margin of the page, below.

3. Compose an immediate message by clicking on the envelope icon under the “Stay Connected” section beneath the respective representative’s photo. Refer to:

<http://users.rcn.com/timarg/PaHR-Access.htm> which includes a sample letter for genealogists.

Collectively we can impact legislation that will enhance our research capability. ❖



# CHRONICLES

## JOURNAL OF THE JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

דברי הימים



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### REFLECTIONS FROM YOUR CHRONICLES TEAM

The Summer IAJGS Conference in Washington, DC was well attended by JGSGP members, with nearly thirty of us there for at least some of the week-long event.

For most of us, the opportunity to focus foremost on our personal genealogical quests was the main reason to attend. We were excited by the atmosphere, learned from experts, networked with other genealogists and shared our knowledge with others as small mitzvot.

The conference was well organized at the downtown Grand Hyatt Hotel. Volunteers from the host society, the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Washington (JGSGW) provided great support by assisting attendees with everything from translations of archival documents to advice on how to use the reading room as well as technical and computer help and guides for trips offsite.

The conference presented opportunities for research, many of which were unique to the Washington, DC area. Some of us took the opportunity to visit the National Archives collections or the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the only repository in the U.S. which offers access to the Red Cross' International Tracing Service (ITS) archives which are also not available online.

JGSGW also arranged opportunities for conference attendees to visit the embassies of Poland, France, Ukraine, and Israel. Embassy staff members gave presentations designed to enhance our understanding of their respective countries and foreign and domestic policies. They also provided insight

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