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**From the Selected Works of James Gross**

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Winter 2013

# Cloud based storage: A brief look at dropbox

James Gross, *Drexel University*



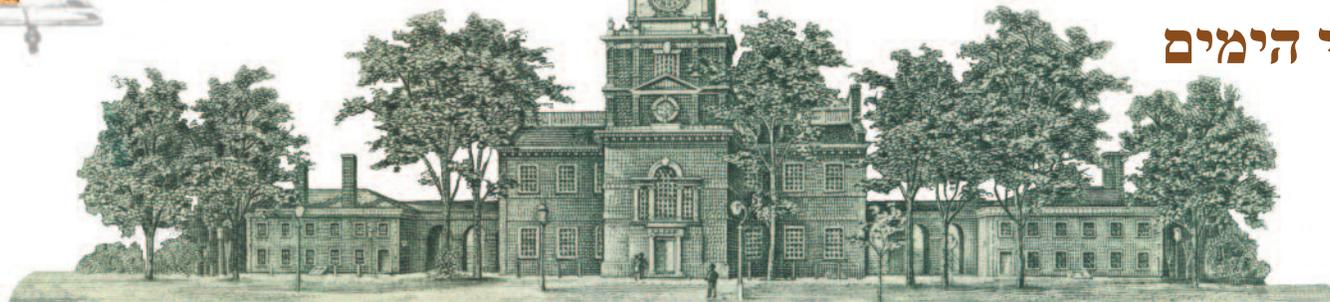
Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/jamesgross/53/>



# CHRONICLES

## JOURNAL OF THE JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

דברי הימים



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### REFLECTIONS FROM YOUR CHRONICLES TEAM

#### Reflections 2013



I'm writing this "Reflections" column in late December, as we approach the new calendar year. Many of us review our experiences of the past year at this time, and as genealogists, we're likely to include our research progress in this review, assessing our personal accomplishments: Did we break through a frustrating brick wall?; Did we identify an ancestor in a mysterious photo?; Did we locate extended family and actually meet them in person? I'd like to share my experiences in these three areas in this "Reflections" column.

I am fortunate to have had significant success in tracing the ancestry of both of my parents and have written about my father's family several times in *Chronicles*. I have found great joy in this work and consider it a gift to my children and their future children to be able to share family stories and important documents about their ancestors. My husband has patiently seen me off each time I head to an IAJGS conference or back to Boston to do yet more research.

Not everyone in my family, however, shares this treasure of a carefully researched family history. My husband grew up without knowledge of his father's family. As a child of divorce, remarriage and custody issues, David was faced with a challenging situation growing up. No one in his family would say much about his dad or his dad's side of the family. David's surname at birth was later changed to that of his stepfather, and his link to past generations of McMilans was broken. However, we genealogists know that though names were often changed, *(Continued on page 3)*

a previously unreadable detail. Much to my surprise he was registered as an alien which I found odd because by the time he registered he had graduated from Temple Pharmacy School. I definitely had the incentive to look further about his country of origin.

Step 1: Returning to FamilySearch.org, I found an index of Pennsylvania Eastern District Naturalization Indexes, 1795-1952. The index card for Uncle Herman, which included the numbers for his Declaration of Intention and Petition for Naturalization was online.

Step 2: Using these numbers, I searched FamilySearch.org again for Pennsylvania Eastern District Petitions for Naturalization, 1795-1931, found both documents as well as his Certificate of Arrival. Uncle Herman was born in Lonovitz, Russia, 192 miles west of Kiev. He left Antwerp, Belgium on the S.S. Finland and arrived at Ellis Island on June 12, 1907. He lived at 457 N. 6th Street in Philadelphia, less than a mile from my present home.

Step 3: Finding the actual manifest proved to be more difficult. The Shafer listed at Ellisland.org did not match my uncle. With the knowledge of the ship's name and the date of arrival I proceeded to Web Pages by Stephen P. Morse and found the Ellis Island Manifests (aka Missing Manifests) (1892-1924). Navigating through that site, I found the SS Finland with four members of the Safir family and my uncle, Chejum Safir who was nine years old. He was accompanied by his father, mother and older sister.



**Herman Samuel Shafer**

Uncle Herman lived a successful and productive life in the United States as a pharmacist and as a representative of the Abbott Drug Company. He was married to my aunt, Ida Lander, for thirty-one years and they raised their son Steve, a professor at Dowling College.

I conducted all the research and the story, without cost, from the comforts of my home. My great uncle Herman Samuel Shafer's family history would have been lost if I hadn't taken that one last look. ❖

*A former assistant principal in the Philadelphia School District, Walt currently serves as an educational consultant to various school systems in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He's an avid collector of historic Philadelphia-themed postcards (Chronicles, Vol. 28-4, Winter 2011-2012, p.15) and is proud of his roots in the agricultural colony of Woodbine, New Jersey. He now serves as a JGSGP vice president.*

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## **CLOUD BASED STORAGE: A BRIEF LOOK AT DROPBOX**

by James Gross



Traditionally, genealogists have accumulated piles of papers. Now we accumulate digital as well as paper files. This short article will address options for periodically backing up those digital files. After all, the alternative would be a catastrophic loss of data negating long hours of research and collections of family tree data.

lections of family tree data.

One potential problem with saving all of those digital files to the computer is that the computer hard drive can crash. To avoid this, some people use portable hard drives as a backup; but they can crash as well. Other people use large flash drives to store their files or burn data to CD's or DVD's.

Another stable, backup storage option which has emerged is the virtual online backup, or cloud based backup. One advantage of the online backup is that because the digital file is stored remotely, you have no risk of losing it if your computer stops working or is stolen. All software is installed on remote web servers which the user does not see. A second advantage of online backup is the user is a click away from being able to copy these files to other computers.

There are a number of fee-based and free remote backup services which are available. Five of these cloud providers which offer free access are summarized in the following table.<sup>1</sup> Additional storage or other features are also available from these providers for a fee.

## Cloud based providers

Company	url	Free storage
Dropbox	<a href="http://www.dropbox.com">www.dropbox.com</a>	2gb
Idrive	<a href="http://www.idrive.com">www.idrive.com</a>	10gb
Google drive	<a href="http://drive.google.com">drive.google.com</a>	5gb
Amazon cloud drive	<a href="http://amazon.com/cloudrive">amazon.com/cloudrive</a>	5gb
Opendrive	<a href="http://www.opendrive.com">www.opendrive.com</a>	5gb

Dropbox offers cloud storage and file synchronization and allows a user to create a special folder on each of their computers which it then synchronizes so that it appears to be the same folder, with the same contents, regardless of which computer is used to view it. Files placed in this folder are also accessible through a website and mobile phone applications, e.g., via iPhone or iPod Touch app.<sup>2</sup>

Dropbox keeps backups and restores damaged messages daily. User errors are even minimized. If a user clicks on “Delete”, the message is usually moved to a trash folder where it is kept for another thirty days before being truly deleted. The user can still recover accidentally deleted messages during that thirty day window.<sup>3</sup>

Users should be aware that an ongoing issue regarding on-line storage involves ensuring the encrypted security of the data. Several incidents involving unauthorized data access indicate that reliability and security continue to be concerns or issues when data is accessed and stored remotely with cloud computing in general.

For example, in July 2013, Dropbox revealed that hackers had gotten access to a very small percentage of users' accounts and accessed their files. The breach took place because these users had used the same username and password at more than one website, and when one of those sites was compromised, the hackers could get into their Dropbox account as well. As Goldsborough, the author of the article citing these security breaches has noted, “...hacking attacks can cause service interruptions...Cloud service providers are acutely aware of the reality...and are continually beefing it [security] up”.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, a smart reason to use cloud storage is to prevent data loss. After all, one cannot always predict when the computer will stop working. All data files which are uploaded to the cloud storage are stored on web servers that are backed up regularly. This gives users peace of mind which can be priceless in the event of a natural disaster such as flood or fire.

While no file storage company or service can guarantee 100% security and access, it is apparent that the that the five cloud

storage providers listed above represent another option for digital file backup. The reality is that the best backup option is a multiple backup plan. So, back up those digital files! ❖

### References:

1. Goldsborough, R. (2012). *Preparing for the next emergency*, *Teacher Librarian*, 40: 2, p. 68.
- 2.<http://online-data-backup-review.toptenreviews.com/dropbox-review.html>
3. <https://www.dropbox.com/help/115/en>
4. Goldsborough, R. (2013). *How sound is the cloud?*, *Teacher Librarian*, 40: 3., p. 68.

Author James Gross recently graduated with a Master of Library & Information Science (MLIS) from Drexel University. He has been working on his family tree since the early 1990s and is a periodic contributor to various genealogy newsletters. James also has a genealogy website: <http://tinyurl.com/gross-steinberg> James can be reached at: [navistar96@yahoo.com](mailto:navistar96@yahoo.com)

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## ANCESTRY.COM DATABASE: INS SUBJECT INDEX

by James Gross

In the last issue of *Chronicles* (Vol 30-3, Fall 2013), I wrote a short article regarding a lecture, “Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) Citizenship Records: Beyond the Basics” that I had attended at the 2013 IAJGS conference in Boston.<sup>1</sup> The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has ownership of immigration records<sup>2</sup> which have not been transferred to the National Archives due to privacy reasons. During his lecture Zack Wilske, a USCIS staff member, included a short reference to a secondary USCIS resource entitled, “U.S. Subject Index to Correspondence and Case Files of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), 1903-1959”.<sup>3</sup> I wrote an earlier article on this subject for *Chronicles* in 2011.<sup>4</sup>

This Subject Index has recently been digitized and added to the Ancestry.com data base.<sup>5</sup> Ancestry describes the contents of this database as “. . . files as kept by the Immigration and Naturalization Service for various individuals pertaining to immigration, emigration, and naturalization. You can find information like surnames, port and date of entry, date of birth and whether or not they came alone or with relatives. In rare cases, there can be a very substantial abstract of the correspondence or case file in the index”.

The Ancestry.com database also includes images of original