

Drexel University

From the Selected Works of James Gross

Spring 2011

Social networking websites: A virtual playground for genealogists

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/jamesgross/58/>

CHRONICLES

JOURNAL OF THE JEWISH GENEALOGICAL
SOCIETY OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

VOLUME 28-1, SPRING 2011



JGSGP NEWS

With great enthusiasm, we pick up the task of communicating our love for genealogy while striving to share our knowledge, successes and genealogical challenges with each other.

On behalf of JGSGP, we want to extend a huge “thank you” to Mark Halpern, who single-handedly published and distributed *Chronicles* to our membership for many years. Today, that job is simply too much for any single individual, so your new editorial board, consisting of Evan Fishman, Ed Flax, Cindy Meyer, Selma Neubauer and Kaye Paletz, has agreed to work together on all aspects of *Chronicles*. Our efforts will include soliciting articles from members, searching for items we can reprint from other genealogical and general publications, graphics and design, editing, electronic and traditional mail distribution.

Many of us are computer literate and actively online, and consequently we are moving in the direction of distributing *Chronicles* as an electronic file, that will reach each of us more rapidly, appear in full color with online links to additional information and resources, and allow complete flexibility when it comes to the page-count and organization of our journal. Those who aren’t quite as computer savvy yet can still look forward to a print edition. We look forward to a continuing conversation with you, as we refine our concepts and consider your ideas and suggestions and to increased connections with our friends in the genealogical community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our love of genealogy with each of you. ♦

Your Chronicles Editorial Board

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Welcome to the return of *Chronicles*, with our new look and a new editorial board. Unfortunately we have been unable to publish *Chronicles* for some time, but we are now up and running. Our thanks to Mark Halpern, who for many years was our editor and did an outstanding job. He has given us a wealth of information that we will be publishing along with many new articles.

Our society has been very active. We hosted the IAJGS Conference in 2009 with over 1000 attendees from around the world. We received rave reviews for the programming and our volunteers. We continue to have monthly meetings with a variety of informative speakers at various locations; Keneseth Israel, Rodeph Shalom, Mikveh Israel and the Gershman Y.

Our new Strategic Planning Committee, chaired by Steve Schechter has great plans for us and has motivated many of us to get more involved. Steve has also created a Beginners Workshop curriculum that he has been teaching in New Jersey and other locations. Jim Meyer has volunteered to take on the improvement of our website. These are key projects to improve our member communication and outreach to the community.

Another exciting development is a project by Boy Scout, Ian Montgomery. For his Eagle Scout project Ian took on the enormous task of cleaning, photographing and indexing the graves at the now-closed Mt. Carmel Cemetery. Ian has given us his data which we are placing on the JewishGen JOWBAR site.

Again, I would like to give special thanks to Mark Halpern, Steve Schechter, David Mink, Evan Fishman, Ed Flax, Jim and Cindy Meyer and Stan and Shelda Sandler for their service to our society. More information to come in future issues of *Chronicles*. Looking forward to seeing you at our meetings.

Fred Blum - President

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LOOKING FOR ISAAC WAGMAN

a/k/a JSAK UGMAN

(my maternal grandfather)

by Selma Neubauer

It all began with Isaac's Certificate of Naturalization, saved by my mother, which led to his Declaration of Intent and Petition for Naturalization at the National Archives Mid-Atlantic Region in Philadelphia, PA. His Declaration gave all the necessary information, including the facts that Isaac left from the port of Antwerp, Belgium on May 6, 1902, on the ship "Philadelphia", and came to the port of Philadelphia on May 20, 1902. But, the ship "Philadelphia" did not leave from the port of Antwerp, nor did it come to the port of Philadelphia; it went to New York. The soundex of the name Wagman (and many spelling variations) did not lead to Isaac arriving at the ports of Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, etc.

As the years went on, I began to use the HIAS and Ethnic Bank records at the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center. I learned that on April 9, 1904, Itzek Wugman purchased a ticket for his son Josel at the Rosenbaum Bank. On June 29, 1904, Itzuk Wugman purchased another ticket for his son, Josel, at the Blitzstein Bank.



Isaac Wagman - Atlantic City, NJ

On his Declaration, Isaac said that he arrived on May 20, 1902. From the Bank records, I knew that he was in Philadelphia in April 1904. Another record at PJAC is called "Record of the Association of Jewish Passengers Arriving at the Port of Philadelphia". The records are handwritten, and are recorded by month, date, year, ship, names of Jewish passengers, sex, age, place of nativity, vocation, ticketed for (usually city, state). For nearly a year, three times a week, for ½ hour each time, I went through the films starting in 1901.

On May 20, 1903, there he was, ISAAC UGMAN, age 32, on board the "Switzerland", from Russia, no vocation,

High Holy Days and the Christians before Christmas, and before the yearly fire anniversary I have visited them all.

I suppose it must sound a bit crazy to do something like this, but as I came to know their stories and, in some cases their families, I began to feel a special responsibility to them, a responsibility that comes from the knowledge that I was probably the only person on earth who knew where they were and who cared about that. Over time what began as a commitment to visitation and remembrance grew into mega mitzvah of preservation and restoration as well.

It seemed so very wrong to me that their resting places were such a mess, I just felt the need to act. Somewhat spontaneously three summers ago, I could no longer stand by looking at 25-year-old Bessie Dashefsky's badly overgrown gravesite. So, with a pair of clippers in hand I started cutting until finally, three hours later, Bessie's grave, along with those of three others buried next to her, were free of thickets and vines. Her stone is still a broken ruin, but at least now her family can find her, pray for her and leave a stone atop what's left of her memorial.



Grave Keeper: HBO researcher, Michael Hirsch, spruces up the graves of Christian and Jewish victims of the Triangle fire.

Over time I have been able to restore the graves of Anna Altman at United Hebrew Cemetery; those of sisters Rose and Sarah Brenman and that of Beckie Neubauer at Baron Hirsch Cemetery, and to purchase a new headstone for Jacob Bernstein at Mount Richmond Cemetery. Recently this mitzvah of mine expanded again into an effort to convince local synagogues, churches, schools and community groups to adopt a Triangle victim's gravesite. More than 80 of their resting places are in serious need of repair and restoration, including 15 that never received a headstone at all.

Not long ago, I told my friend Leigh Benin, who is a cousin of Triangle victim Rosie Oringer, that through all of this I have come to feel a little bit that I, too, have become a kind of distant cousin to Rosie and the others. He said to me, "You know, one definition of family [is] the people who know your story." Maybe that's true.❖

Michael Hirsch is a researcher and co-producer of the HBO documentary film, "Triangle: Remembering the Fire," who recently identified the last six victims of the 1911 disaster.

Contact Michael Hirsch at feedback@forward.com

Social Networking Websites: A Virtual Playground for Genealogists

by James Gross

For those genealogists who seek to connect or reconnect with their known relatives, the development and popularity of online social networks may prove to be an invaluable resource.

Depending on when one began their genealogy research, some of you may recall a time in the not so distant past when communications with family members were primarily conducted via postal mail or the telephone. This began to change as the computer became more widely available.

I can recall a time back in 1985 when an Apple IIe was considered to be an amazing piece of technology. I first used a computer for dial-up back in 1988. It was a 386 laptop. I used it to log into user groups online with a dial-up modem. Eventually I upgraded to a faster computer. Computers gradually improved as the technology became more advanced. In recent years, dial-up access has been gradually replaced by cable. In 2007, I finally made the switch in my internet access from unreliable dial-up access to fast ethernet cable access.

Some readers may have similar experiences in terms of how they personally experienced the evolution of computer technology in their lives. This march in technology has resulted in faster computers, faster internet access, and increased access to online information and databases. People have found that computers can be very useful tools for communication and information retrieval.

And, as computer use has become more popular, the usage of email has emerged as a commonplace and accepted method of communication. Many people, including genealogists, have been quick to take advantage of this tool for communication with family members.

Recently, another communication forum has emerged which may serve to further enhance genealogy research and family contacts. It is the advent of the online virtual social networking website. These online social networks, which include such websites as *Facebook*, *Myspace*, and *Linkedin*, act as virtual playgrounds where people can choose to interact with their friends and colleagues. They can also choose to be known, or to be anonymous.

In my own social networking experience, I have found Facebook to be the most useful networking website for my goal of locating relatives. It is simply amazing to see how so many relatives, especially the younger ones, are on Facebook. For example, a blogger named Robyn recently posted the following timely comment: "I have often wondered if Facebook could be a good tool for today's genealogist." (4)

A similar view on the merits of Facebook was voiced by blogger Robert Ragan. Ragan, in his blog entitled, "How do You Feel about Facebook - Waste of Time or Great Genealogy 2.0 Online Social Tool," discussed the merits and advantages of using Facebook for locating relatives. (5)

Terri W. in a post on Robert Ragan's blog, commented, "*Facebook* has helped me keep in touch with cousins I haven't talked to in years. It also tells me when friends are online and allows me to 'chat' with them" (6) And, Aaron S., a sophomore at Vassar College, observed that *Facebook* had helped him keep in touch with his parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Suzuka commented that, "*Facebook* allows all of us to keep in touch, even though we are all over the country or in different countries." (7)

I will admit that the search engine options within *Facebook* may not be perfect, but with some perseverance, one can still manage to identify a number of relatives. I have found that *Facebook* contact is a much faster method of locating relatives, especially younger ones, as opposed to depending on slow postal mail.

I have also noticed how these social networking sites appear to be a less invasive method of initial contact as opposed to using the telephone. As many of you know, in today's mobile society, not everyone has land lines, much less published phone numbers.

According to an online article reprinted from the National Genealogy Society newsmagazine, social networking sites such as Facebook, "provide a way for genealogists to quickly and easily share information about their research with their families, especially with people who think they are 'not interested' in genealogy." (8)

In order to use *Facebook* or *Myspace* to locate someone, you must

first sign up for a free account. After you are signed up, you can begin to locate friends and family, school buddies, college friends - the list is endless.

In terms of methodology, I have found it useful to begin by first locating relatives with obscure names and then attempting to mine their "friend's list" for other known relatives. This method has worked well for me, especially when faced with the alternative of a name search involving a common surname. The reason is that those users with common names, depending on their identified city and state, can be more difficult to identify as relatives.

Users of social networking sites, such as *Facebook*, should be aware of some current issues related to privacy concerns. Recently, there have been number of articles and blogs, including an article in PC World, regarding *Facebook's* decision to change their policy on user data. (9) The issue is how the user data is collected and how it affects user privacy.

User privacy can be a very important issue for some people. In fact, this issue is so important, that one consumer advocacy group, the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), recently filed a complaint with the FTC (10). Their complaint was focused on *Facebook's* recently proposed changes to their privacy policy and default user settings.

In addition, groups including the Consumer Federation of America, the American Library Association, the Privacy Rights Now Coalition, and Foolproof, also added themselves to the EPIC complaint. (11)

So, what is all the fuss about? An important issue deals with *Facebook's* decision to change user default settings. The new settings could result in more of the user's *Facebook* data to be preset to be public rather than visible only to friends. There is also the risk that some personal user information, could be deemed publicly available information and shared with *Facebook's* commercial software developers.

As social networking websites, like *Facebook*, have gained popularity, they have also exponentially increased the potential to attract dishonest people and schemes. As Jordan Jones noted, "the biggest concerns voiced about Facebook over the years have been about privacy and security..." (12)

Whether it is the inclusion of a town name, an identified organization, or some other identifying information, some *Facebook* users are becoming more concerned about personal safety.

Hopefully, social networking websites will soon realize the importance of ensuring that their users feel free to engage others without worrying about safety. Issues such as privacy mining and

human predators are real and should not be ignored by the user.

Of course, the ultimate guardian of privacy is the user. If social networking users do not want their potentially embarrassing activities made public, then they should keep their photos private, delete them, or take a few minutes to review their privacy settings.

In closing, social networking websites, such as *Facebook*, can be a real asset to one's genealogy efforts. While one should be cognizant of the pitfalls, social websites such as *Facebook* can be a real bonus for locating relatives. Privacy issues aside, I can attest to the usefulness and benefit of conducting searches for relatives on social networking websites. Even if you can only locate the younger relatives, they can often refer you to their parents or other older family members.❖

James Gross is a former micrographic technician with the National Archives in College Park, MD. He has worked on personal genealogy research since 1991. He can be reached at: larklane@juno.com

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Book Review

Historic Synagogues of Philadelphia
& The Delaware Valley: by Julian Preisler
The History Press, 2009, ISBN 978-1-59629-572-8
by *Steve Schecter*

While not the largest or the oldest American Jewish community, Philadelphia and its surrounding areas have long been a center of Jewish heritage and thought. Much of it is reflected in the neighborhoods where Jewish people lived with the synagogues they built and attended. Like Jewish communities everywhere, differences in interpretation of Jewish law spawned multiple synagogues in a neighborhood – ranging from degrees of Orthodoxy to Traditional to Conservative to Reconstructionist to Reform thought. Divisions carried from “the old country” of German, Russian, Hungarian, Litvak, Galitzianer, Sephardic, Rumanian, etc., etc., etc. backgrounds, interpretations and disagreements combined with “shtetl based shuls” to further increase the number of synagogues. And the migration of the Jewish population from neighborhood to neighborhood and from city to suburb along with continued mergers and congregational separations further enrich the mix.

Julian Preisler begins to tell of this rich history through pictures of many of the synagogues that were established. While buildings have been leveled or converted to churches, they still reflect the history of a vibrant Jewish population. Julian has documented much of this history in one of the more thorough picture collections of past and current Philadelphia area synagogues.

Using his acknowledged volunteers and local archives to supplement his personal collection, he provides 127 pages of black and white pictures of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey and Delaware synagogues. He documents much of the Jewish footprint left on this area ranging from the large better known congregations to the small shteiblach, from the “shuls” that are currently active to those formerly so.

Mr. Preisler, the son of Holocaust survivors, uses his experience as a genealogist and archivist to supplement his pictures with a