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April/May 2010

Publication Mail Agreement No. 40062922

# Cloudy With a Chance of...Genealogy!



LATELY, MY HEAD HAS been in the clouds. No, I haven't been consumed with impractical or unrealistic ideas. Rather, I'm taking to the virtual skies when it comes to my family history — experimenting with the latest phenomenon sweeping the genealogical community — a concept called “cloud computing”.

Just as with any other of the popular “buzz words” in technology today, there are any number of definitions for “cloud computing”, but in very basic terms, it consists of using applications hosted on the Internet as opposed to those downloaded or installed on your computer, and/or storing your data with an online service, either

for free, or for access prices based on a fee. (For a more technical explanation, see [www.infoworld.com/d/cloud-computing/what-cloud-computing-really-means-031](http://www.infoworld.com/d/cloud-computing/what-cloud-computing-really-means-031).)

Genealogists can utilize cloud computing in many different ways, from creating and hosting their family tree online, to keeping virtual photo albums or scrapbooks, to building a personal digital library, among others. It used to be that genealogy was a static activity: You'd type in a few search terms and wait for results to turn up. Now, with Web 2.0, the emphasis is on collaboration, sharing and interaction. For an excellent overview of the move from traditional genealogy to web-based

genealogy, you may want to view the slideshow by Thomas Jay Kemp, available for free on Scribd, [www.scribd.com/doc/21125904/Genealogy-Cloud-Computing](http://www.scribd.com/doc/21125904/Genealogy-Cloud-Computing).

I'll admit that at first, I was a bit skeptical about this new approach to family history. When it comes to my personal data and writings, I prefer to be able to quickly find information when needed and am a bit obsessive over making sure I have back-up copies of pretty much everything “just in case.” The idea of putting things “out there” in cyberspace made me a bit nervous, but as I learned more about the benefits of doing so, I thought I'd give it a try, especially because I travel a great

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deal for conferences and to do research, and I want to be able to access my data and files when on the road. I also use several different computers and sometimes it's inconvenient to take along an external hard drive or to keep saving files to a USB drive that I must remember to bring with me. If you're thinking of moving to an online protocol for your family history, this article will show you 10 ways I've utilized "cloud computing" for my own genealogy. Of course, this is just a sampling — there are many other possibilities. For a good overview of available web-based applications, consult the Learning In Hand website. <http://learninginhand.com/blog/labels/webapps.html> and the list of Top 100 Web-based applications for 2009 from CNET, [http://news.cnet.com/8300-13546\\_10929.html?tag=bc](http://news.cnet.com/8300-13546_10929.html?tag=bc).

### 1. Family Tree Building and Sharing Sites

I've tried several services which permit the building and sharing of family trees online, including Ancestry.com Member Trees, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com); Geni, [www.geni.com](http://www.geni.com) and ourFamilyology, <http://www.family-genealogy.com>. I've also created pages for ancestors (for free) at Footnote, [www.footnote.com](http://www.footnote.com), and Living Genealogy, [www.livinggenealogy.com](http://www.livinggenealogy.com). There are a host of other sites available. See past issues of *Internet Genealogy* for some reviews.

### 2. "Saved Searches" in Online Databases

Just like any genealogist, I utilize as many online databases as possible to search for my ancestors. My new favorite is FamilySearch Record Search, <http://pilot.familysearch.org>. However, I don't always have long periods of time to spend with these databases and often find myself doing searches on the fly. I'm glad that most of the major collections like Ancestry.com, Footnote.com, Ellis Island, [www.ellisland.org](http://www.ellisland.org), (and others) have some sort of facility for sav-

ing searches (as long as you have a valid account). While I always save images or information to my computer, I also like knowing that I can go back to these sites when I need to and quickly find the person or record I last looked at.

quently include: Dropbox, [www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com), which backs up your files and also copies them to other computers (a free account gives you two GBs of storage; and GoToMyPC, [www.gotomypc.com](http://www.gotomypc.com) (\$19.95/mo. or \$179.40 per year for

Above: Geni.com lets you build and share your family tree online. Below: Registered users of the Ellis Island database, [www.ellisland.org](http://www.ellisland.org), can save searches to their "Ellis Island" file.

Type	Title	Associated Passenger
Passenger Record	Mihaly Alzo	Mihaly Alzo
Passenger Record	Maria Alzo Kovaly	Maria Alzo Kovaly
Passenger Record	Rosalia Polecak	Rosalia Polecak
Passenger Record	Anna Fenyesak	Anna Fenyesak
Passenger Record	Erzsabet Fencsak	Erzsabet Fencsak
Passenger Record	Anna Bavolar	Anna Bavolar
Passenger Record	MIHALY SZTRAKA	MIHALY SZTRAKA
Passenger Record	Janos Straka	Janos Straka
Passenger Record	Mihaly Fluycsak	Mihaly Fluycsak
Passenger Record	Janos Kavulites	Janos Kavulites
Passenger Record	Janos Bodnar	Janos Bodnar
Passenger Record	Miklosne Matejesik	Miklosne Matejesik
Passenger Record	Jan Ragan	Jan Ragan
Passenger Record	Michal Ragan	Michal Ragan

### 3. Online Data Storage and Synchronization Programs

File storage/retrieval is probably one of my main uses of the "cloud concept". I find Mozy, [www.mozy.com](http://www.mozy.com), handy for back-up purposes (The "MozyHome Free" account offers registered users two GB of 100 percent free backup space; more space can be purchased for a fee). Two other programs I use fre-

one PC), so that I can access files on my home computer while on the road.

### 4. Document Creation Tools

Gone are the days when you must purchase pricey software for creating text documents, spreadsheets, presentations, etc. The use of open source documents, such as those you can create using GoogleDocs,

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<http://docs.google.com> (a free Google account is all that is required), or Zoho, [www.zoho.com](http://www.zoho.com), is becoming popular.

### 5. Photo Editing and Sharing

If you have family photographs you want to edit, store and share, it's much easier to do using tools found online. For example, Flickr, [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) and Snapfish, [www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com), are common sites used to upload images. I've often used Picnik, [www.picnik.com](http://www.picnik.com), to edit photos on the fly and Google's Picasa, [www.picasa.google.com](http://www.picasa.google.com) to multitask (store, edit, share). For additional free photo editing sites, see the October/November 2009 issue of *Internet Genealogy*.

### 6. Networking

I've been using Facebook, [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), and Twitter, [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com), to connect with family and genealogy buddies all over the world. From sharing surnames or research tips to keeping up with the latest Gen-news, and following the happenings at genealogy meetings and conferences, these social media tools are where it's at in genealogy today.

### 7. Mapping Tools

I like to use Google Earth, <http://earth.google.com> to help narrow in on the locations where my ancestors walked. I also like the locality-based research tools for mapping ancestors offered at Ancestral Atlas, [www.ancestralatlas.com](http://www.ancestralatlas.com) (see the article on Ancestral Atlas in this issue) and Ancestral Hunt, [www.ancestralhunt.com](http://www.ancestralhunt.com).

### 8. Online Organizing and Notifications

I couldn't live without iGoogle, [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) (it's free and all you need is a Gmail account). It helps me organize my life (both my genealogy life and my everyday life)! I set up my various gadgets, such as To-do lists, sticky notes, apps for searching Ancestry or FamilySearch, and for my favorite genealogy blogs and podcasts, as well as more generic gadgets to keep up with the latest news, weather, etc. In addition, I

don't want to miss any of the news on my favorite Blogs or Podcasts so I subscribe to them via RSS feed. I use GoogleReader, [www.google.com/reader](http://www.google.com/reader). There are many others, including: NetNews wire, [www.newsgator.com/individuals/netnewswire](http://www.newsgator.com/individuals/netnewswire), and FeedDemon, [www.newsgator.com/individuals/feeddemon/default.aspx](http://www.newsgator.com/individuals/feeddemon/default.aspx).

### 9. Library/Note-taking

I'm hooked on Google Books, <http://books.google.com> (it has over 100,000 genealogies and local histories). I also utilize Internet Archive, [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) (150 billion web pages on Wayback Machine and 1,873,933 texts you can browse or search by keyword; 50,000 genealogies and local histories). Evernote, [www.evernote.com](http://www.evernote.com) is a great free note-taking program (for Windows, Macintosh, iPhone, and more), which has now replaced the piles of paper post-it notes that used to clutter my desk. The program lets you manually enter notes or copy-and-paste from other applications, and it has search capabilities. I like being able to install Evernote on multiple computers and handheld devices and the concept that any notes you enter on one machine or device are automatically copied to the others, and there is an encryption feature for sensitive data.

### 10. Publishing

Since I'm always writing, I often look for new ways to record and share family stories. One way is through private Blogs I've created using [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com). I also like Scribd, [www.scribd.com](http://www.scribd.com) and Slideshare, [www.slideshare.net](http://www.slideshare.net).

### ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO "CLOUD COMPUTING"

There are a number of advantages to storing information and data virtually. First of all, your data, photographs, and family tree are accessible from wherever you are (you don't have to be at your home computer or carry around an external hard drive or USB drive). Secondly, this option can be more economical — no expensive software to purchase or upgrade. However, there can be some disad-

vantages as well. Many individuals have concerns about data security and/or accessibility. There are still places where Internet access is hard to find, or if available, it's not free (for example, the exorbitant charges some hotel chains charge and airports where there's no free Wi-Fi). Security is an issue that is being debated. While some will argue that data is encrypted on most services (and the larger ones typically have safeguards for backing up data), and that it's less risky than storing it on your computer's hard drive or other media where it can be lost as a result of theft, fire, natural disasters and drive failure. But there are others who are wary of putting data "out there." Cost could also be a concern if you have a lot of data to store and if you want to sign up for several premium versions of popular data, photo or family tree sites. For an interesting discussion thread about genealogy and cloud computing, see Dick Eastman's posts at: [http://blog.eogn.com/eastmans\\_online\\_genealogy/2009/03/computing-in-the-clouds.html](http://blog.eogn.com/eastmans_online_genealogy/2009/03/computing-in-the-clouds.html) and [http://blog.eogn.com/eastmans\\_online\\_genealogy/2009/07/why-cloud-computing-makes-sense-for-genealogy.html](http://blog.eogn.com/eastmans_online_genealogy/2009/07/why-cloud-computing-makes-sense-for-genealogy.html).

### SUMMARY

Just as with any new development in the field of genealogy (such as DNA testing, social media, etc.), it may take some time for researchers to get used to the idea of storing family tree details, digital images, written family history or correspondence and other materials in cyberspace. But, as technology evolves, it seems inevitable that the way we research, document, store and share our family history information will as well.

For more on what may be in store for genealogists in the next 10 years, consult the article, "The Future of Genealogy" in the May/June 2009 issue of *Family Chronicle*.



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