Using Windows 10 File Explorer
By Len Nasman, Bristol Village Computer Club

Understanding **Windows 10 File Explorer** is key to taking control of your computer. If you have ever saved a file and later had a hard time finding it, or if you have downloaded picture files and want to organize them into a manageable system, **Windows 10 File Explorer** will help. If you want to transfer files to or from flash drives or an external hard drive, **Windows 10 File Explorer** can make the job easy.

The **Windows 10 File Explorer** presents a significant change from ***Windows Explorer*** that was included with earlier versions of Windows. If you are bothered by the changes, fear not. If you spend a little time going through this document and learn to use the new **File Explorer**, you will find it easy to use and more powerful then the old ***Windows Explorer***.

Just as ***Microsoft Internet Explorer (or Edge)*** provides a method of accessing the ***Internet*** in an organized fashion, **Windows 10 File Explorer** provides a method of examining and organizing ***files*** in your computer. This tutorial is designed to provide the basic information needed to take control of your computer files through the use of **Windows 10 File Explorer**.

Computer Files

Nearly every bit of information in your computer is organized into files. The programs that run ***applications*** are stored in files. **App**lication**s** (**Apps**) are computer programs that allow you to do word processing, enhance pictures, read and write email, explore the Internet, or do anything at all with your computer. The data used to show the contents of an email message or a picture is stored in files. When you receive an email message from someone, the message is

Inside a hard drive

copied from a file somewhere in the world to a file in your electronic mailbox. If you want to be in control of your computer, you have to learn about the computer filing system.
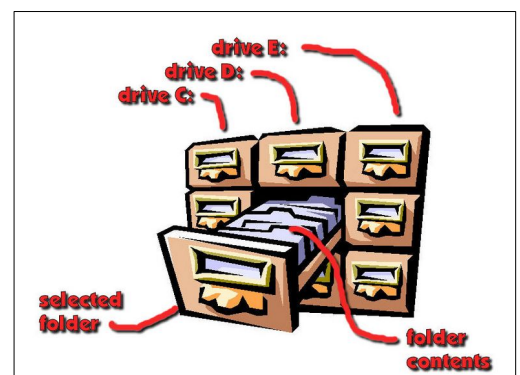
Computer files are stored on **disk drives**. Disk drives take the form of hard drives, CD and DVD drives, flash drives, memory cards, and, in the old days, floppy disk drives. The main storage location for most computer files are hard drives, and the main hard drive in a Windows computer is identified as **C:** along with a drive name.

It might help understand how computer files are organized by thinking of using electronic file cabinets. The different disk drives in the computer are kind of like different file cabinets. Each file cabinet can have several drawers, and each drawer can contain file folders where documents (or files) are stored.

In the electronic computer file cabinet, each disk drive can be organized into folders, and a folder can contain one or more files. It is also possible to have a folder inside another folder that is inside another folder and

so on. The tool that can be used to visualize how these electronic files are organized, and the tool that gives you control over all of these disk drives, folders, and files is **Windows 10 File Explorer.**

Each computer file has a particular ***format***, or method of organizing the bits of data that make up the file. When an application program (like a word processor or a graphics program) saves a file, it organizes the data in a manner specific to that program.

Figure 1 shows that hard drive C: is selected. It also shows a list of folders in drive C:, and the contents of a selected folder.

Data is organized differently in text documents than it is in picture or graphics files. To tell one type of file format from another, a three letter ***file name extension*** is added to the end of the file name. For example, if you save a document using a word processing program and name the document ***mine***, the name of the file that is saved will be ***mine.doc***. If

Figure 1: File Explorer with the C: drive selected.

you create a picture using a paint program and name the picture ***mine***, the file that is saved might be ***mine.jpg*** or ***mine.png***. (There are several different formats for picture or image files including jpg and png.)When you want to retrieve your document or picture, Windows can tell from the three letter file name extension the difference between document and picture files, and knows which program to use to open the file.
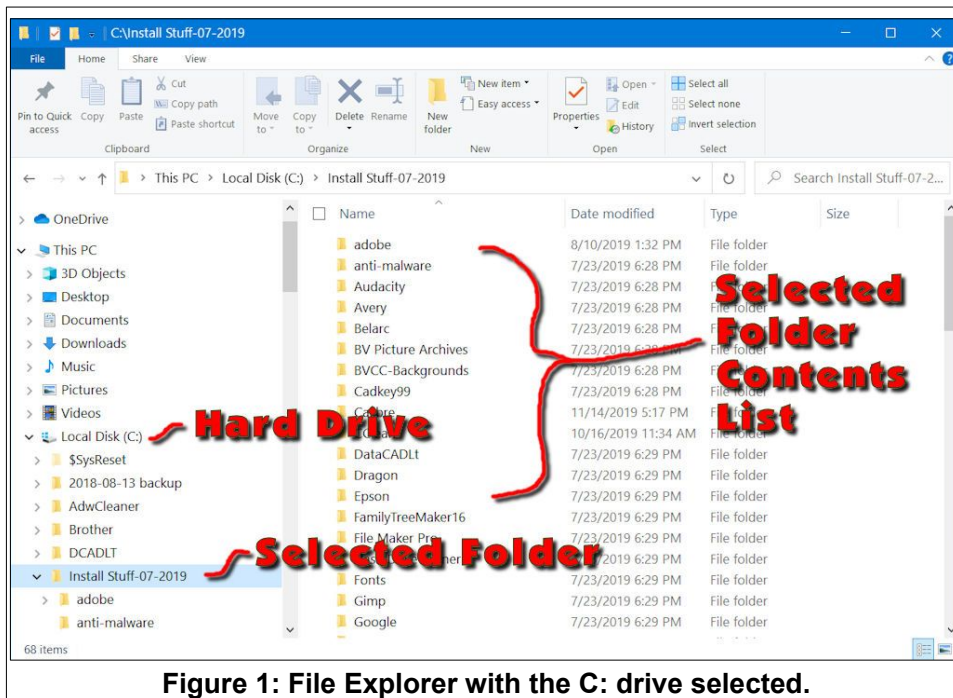
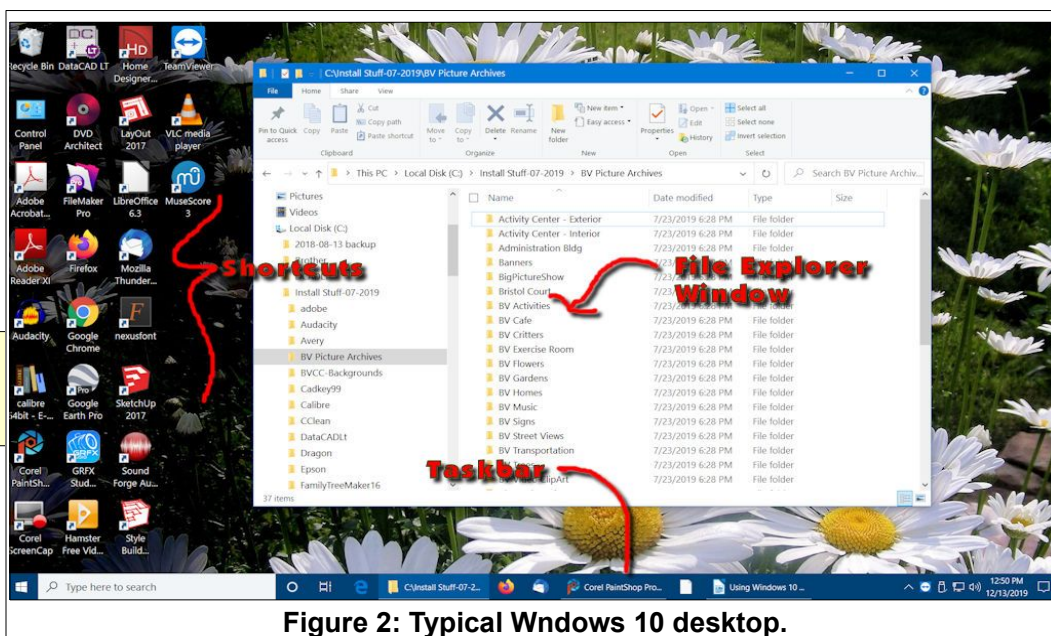Windows 10 uses a **Desktop** screen. The Desktop screen

Figure 2: Typical Wndows 10 desktop.

display will contain a number of **Shortcut** icons and has an area of the display known as the **Taskbar**.

The Taskbar is typically along the bottom of the display, but can be moved to the top, left or right of the display. When the *File Explorer* is open, the system will show a **File Explorer** window on the **Desktop** display.

Opening Windows 10 File Explorer

NOTE: In this document, *select* means to position the mouse pointer on an object and then click the *left* mouse button *once*.

Now it is time for you to start exploring the features of **Windows 10 File Explorer**.

NOTE: When you position the *mouse cursor* over a tool icon for a few seconds (hover), a **Tool Tip** will appear that describes the tool function.

Open Windows 10 File Explorer – Method 1

✔ Open **Windows 10 File Explorer** from the *Desktop* display by selecting the **File Explorer** *Taskbar* icon.

Figure 3: File Explorer Taskbar Icon.

Open Windows 10 File Explorer – Method 2

✔ Open **Windows 10 File Explorer** by holding the *Windows Key* down and, while holding the **Windows Key** down, press the **E** key.

Both of these methods have the same result, they open a new **File Explorer** window on the **Desktop**. Use the method that is the most comfortable for you.
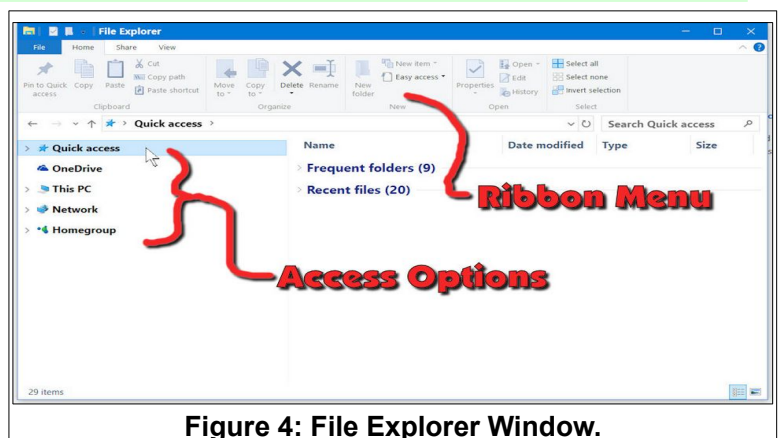

Figure 4: File Explorer Window.

The **File Explorer** window has a column on the left side that provides different file **Access Options** (see Figure 4). Each of these can be expanded by selecting the small arrow on the left side of each option.

The **File Explorer** window uses a *ribbon menu* style interface. This replaces the older drop down menu style.

The contents of the **Ribbon Menu** change when you select different **tabs** on the **menu bar** just below the window title..

NOTE: One of the file **Access Options** in Windows 10 is the *One Drive*. This is a collection of hard drives in the 'cloud' that are owned and controlled by Microsoft, and require an Internet connection and an active Microsoft Account to use. Because I am a control freak and want to own my files, I *never* use cloud storage. There may be some advantage for some people who do not want to maintain their own hard drives, or who need access to files from different computers in different locations. But, I prefer to have complete control of my files. Companies that offer cloud storage are taking control and ownership of peoples personal files, in my opinion a bad idea for most users.

The **Quick Access** option shows lists of recently accessed folders and data files. The Quick Access list can be opened or closed by selecting the small arrow to the left side of the Quick Access option.
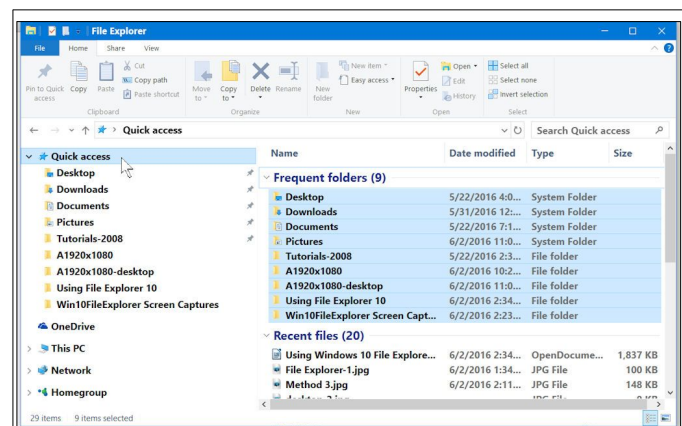

Figure 5: File Explorer Quick Access.

The **This PC** option shows a list of the different drives installed on the computer. If you insert a flash drive or a camera memory card, the drive will appear on this list. In Figure 6, a flash drive that has been renamed *LEN32A* is included on the list of drives.

You can rename drives. *Right click* on the drive in the list and select the *rename* option from the *context menu* that appears.
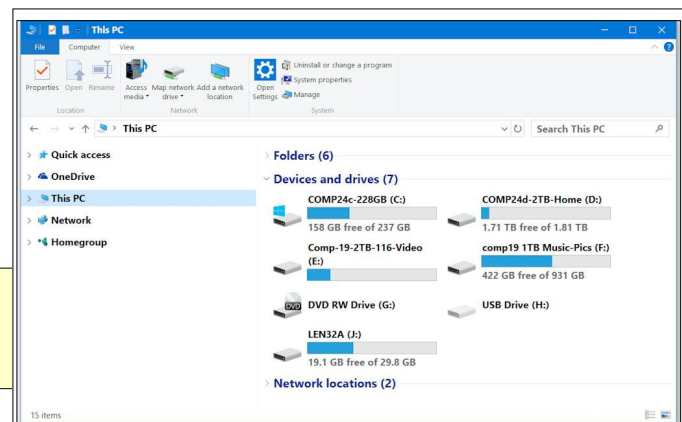

Figure 6: File Explorer This PC.

The **Network** option shows a list of the different computers available if the computer is part of a local network. The network administrator must set permissions on these drives before they can be accessed from a different network computer

Figure 7: File Explorer Network.

When a drive is selected, the **File Explorer** ribbon menu has several tabs: **Home, Share, View**, and **Manage**. Each of these tabs has a ribbon menu (see Figure 9).
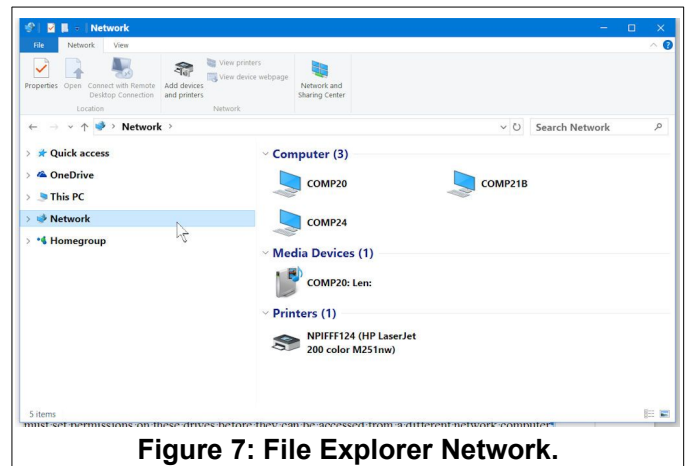
Each of the **File Explorer** ribbon menus contain a variety of tools. In the old Windows Explorer, using these tools required selecting from multiple pop down menus, and some tools now easily found in **File Explorer** ribbons were very hard to find in the old Windows Explorer.

Some of the ribbon tools will be gray, or ghosted, when they are not available. They will become available when particular files or folders are selected.

The File Option

When the **File** tab in the *File Explorer* window is selected, a number of options become available. One option is to open a new File Explorer window. Later in this document, an example shows how having two File Explorer windows open at the same time can be very handy.
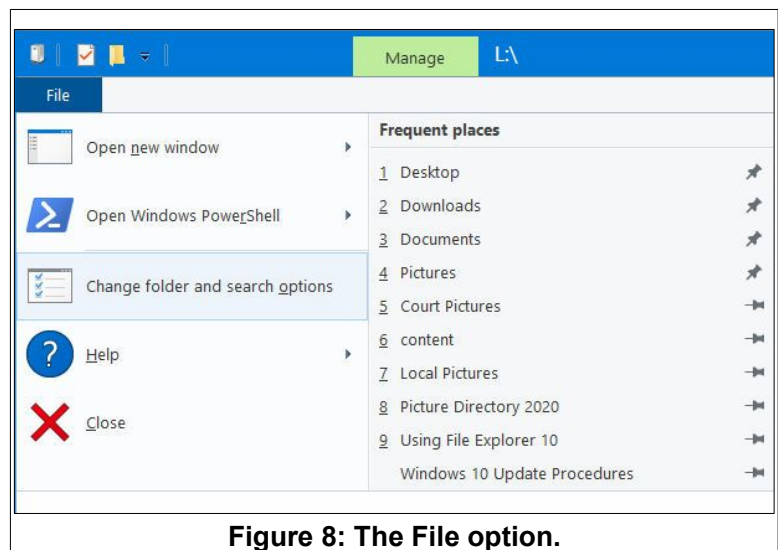

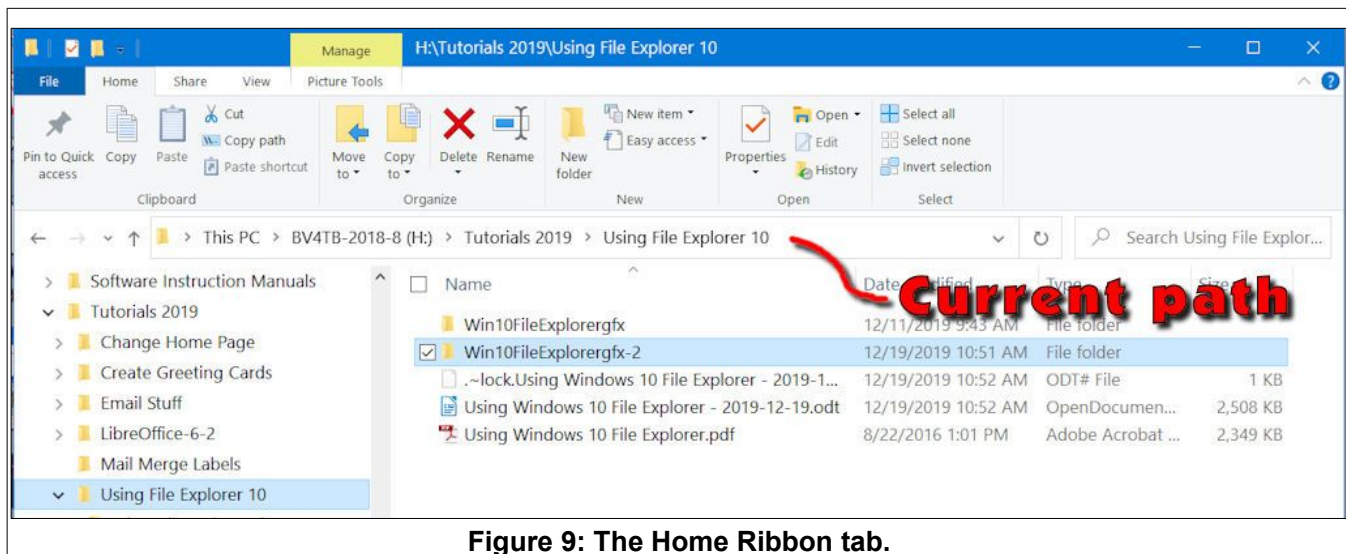**Figure 8: The File option.**

The Home Ribbon

Figure 9: The Home Ribbon tab.

Figure 9 shows the **Home** ribbon when a folder has been selected.

In Figure 9, a drive named **BV4TB-2018-8 (H:)** has been expanded. The **Current Path** shows that this drive contains a folder named **Tutorials 2019**, that contains a folder named **Using File Explorer 10**. The list area of the window shows what folders and files are contained inside of the **Using File Explorer 10** folder.

Figure 10 shows that a sub folder named **Win10FileExplorergfx** has been selected. When this folder is opened, the contents of this folder are displayed as large icons in Figure 10. The Current **Directory path** shows the current selected location.
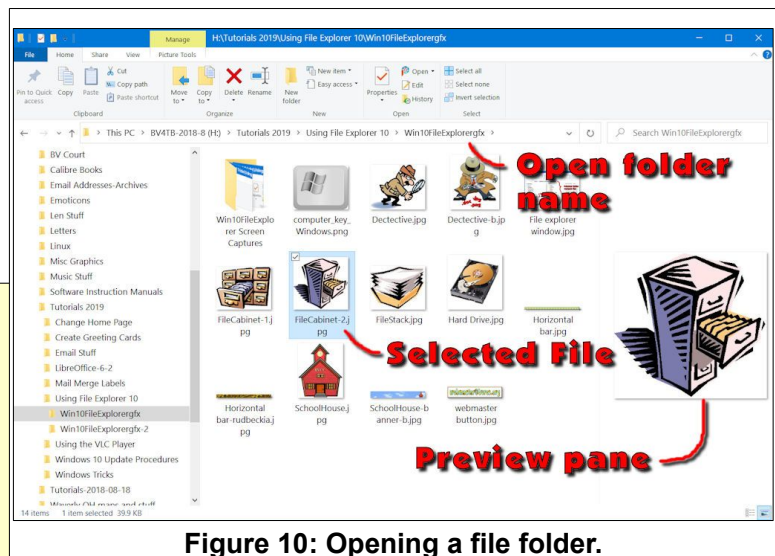

Figure 10: Opening a file folder.

Observe that to the left of each drive and folder shown in the **File Explorer** list there is either a ∨ or a **>** symbol. The **>** symbol indicates that there are sub folders in this listing. When the **>** symbol is selected, the contents of that listing will be expanded. When the ∨ symbol is selected, the list will be compressed.

The **Home** ribbon has 5 general areas, **Clipboard, Organize, New, Open**, and **Select**. The **Organize** area provides tools to **Move, Copy, Delete,** or **Rename** the selected folder or file.

Hot Key shortcuts: The **Clipboard** area of the Home ribbon includes tools to **copy** and **paste** selections. There are two keyboard shortcuts that you should memorize soon. The **Copy** shortcut is **Ctrl+C**, and the **Paste** shortcut is **Ctrl+V**. (**Ctrl+C** means hold the **Ctrl** key down and press the **C** key.)These shortcuts are not only be used in File Explorer, they can also be used in most application software such as Word Processing.

If you hover the mouse cursor over a tool, a **tool tip** will open that describes the function of the tool. The **tool tip** may also show a **hot key** shortcut to that function.
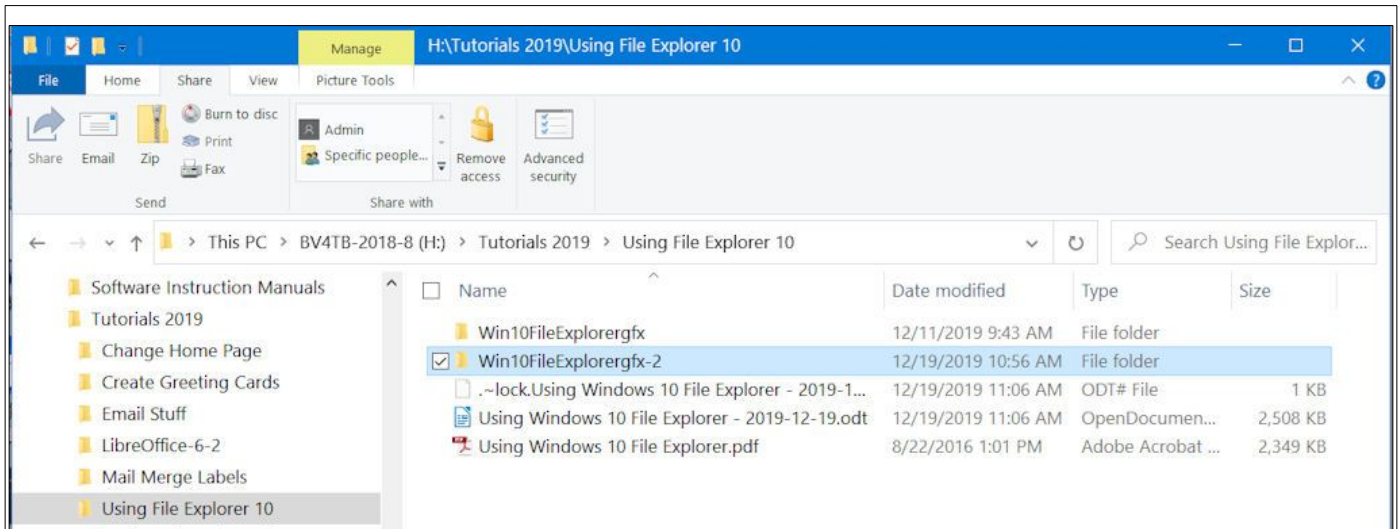
The Share Ribbon

Figure 11: The Share Ribbon.

If you want to email a file (or files) to a friend, use **File Explorer** to locate the file, select it, and then open the **Share** ribbon and select the **Email** option. This will open you Email program with the selected file (or files) attached.

Figure 12: The Share Ribbon email tool.

The **Share** ribbon also provides an easy way to burn files onto a CD or DVD. Simply select the files you want and then use the **Burn to disc** tool found in the **Share** ribbon.
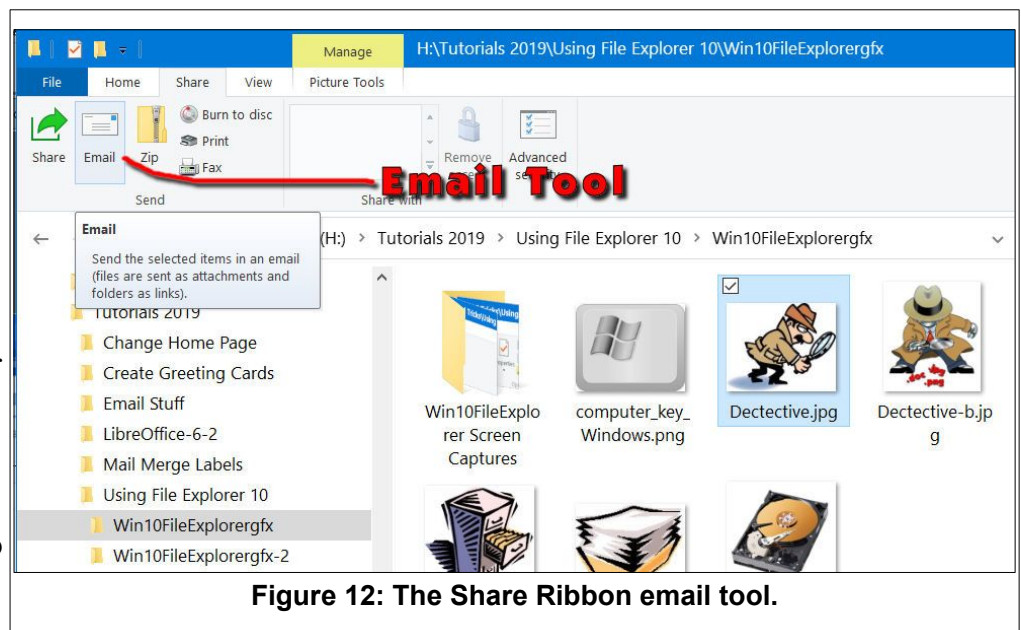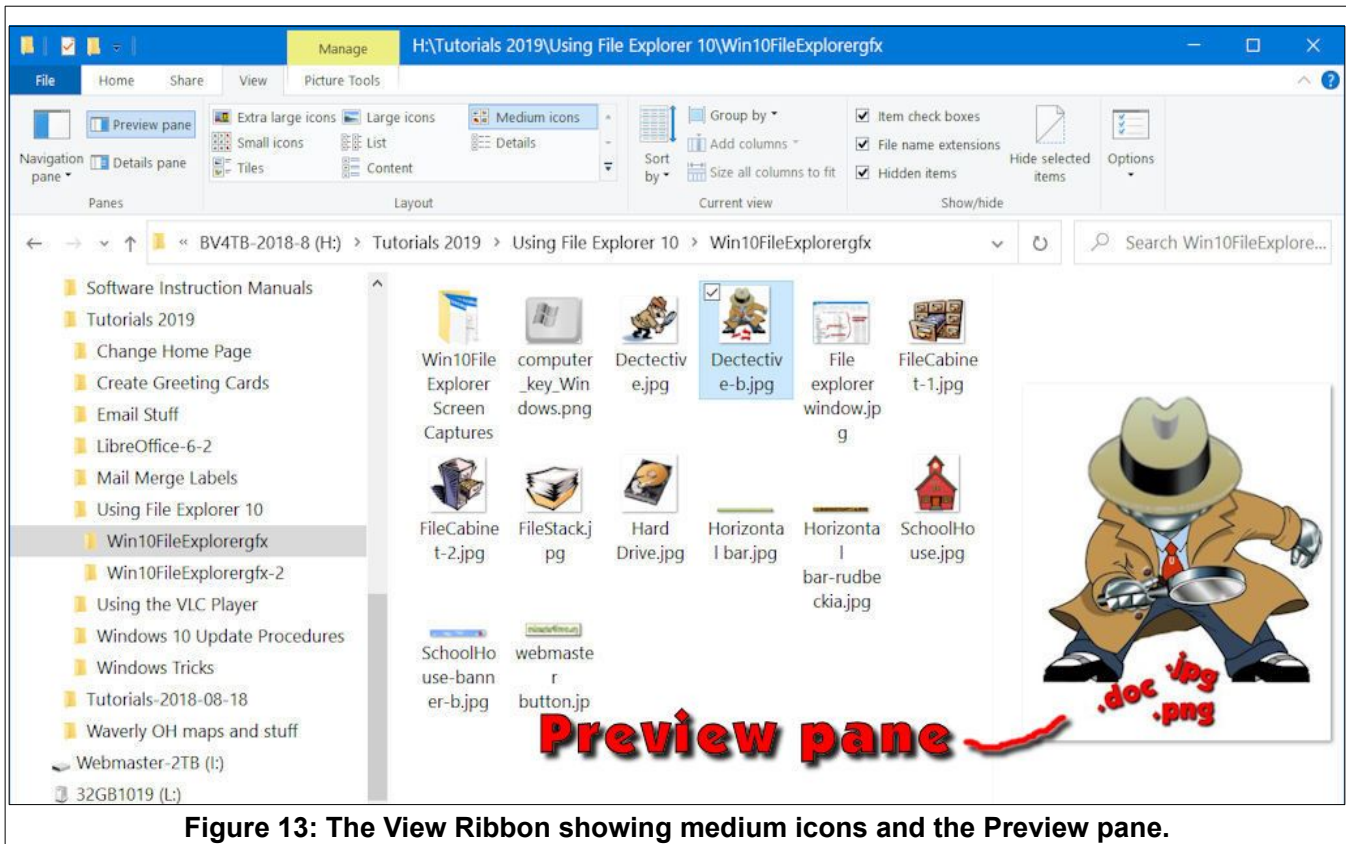
The View Ribbon

Figure 13: The View Ribbon showing medium icons and the Preview pane.

The *View* ribbon provides options for displaying files. This is where you can choose to show files in a detailed list or as different size icons.

You can open a *Preview pane* or *Details pane*. (The *Details pane* is shown in Figure 14.)

There is a toggle box to display check boxes beside each item. This provides an addition to highlighting an item to show it has been selected.

I always turn on the *File name extensions* option. Since the file name extension shows the type of file, I find this indispensable.
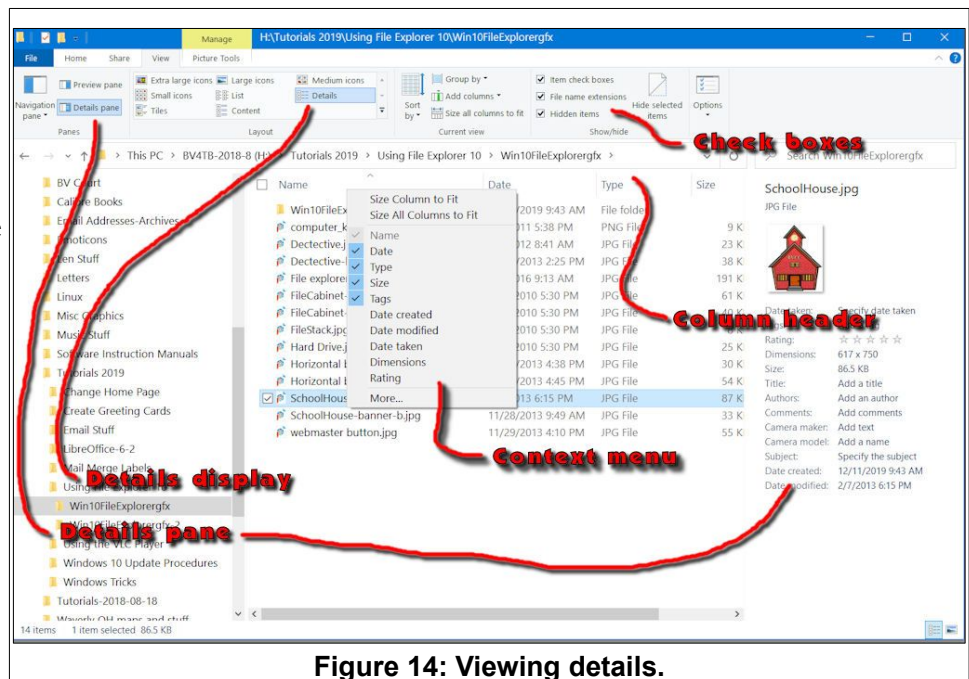

Figure 14: Viewing details.

I also alternate between the ***Details*** and ***Large icons*** layout view options. When I am looking for graphic images I use large icons. When I want to search for files by name or date, I use the ***Details*** option (not to be confused with the ***Details Pane*** toggle).

The ***Details*** option lists file information in columns. What columns are included is controlled by ***right clicking*** on the column header and then selecting options from a pop up ***context menu***.

Files can be sorted using the ***Sort by*** tool in the ***View*** ribbon. You can also sort files by ***left clicking*** on the desired column header. Each time you select a column header, the sort alternates between ascending and descending order.

> **NOTE**: The lower right corner of the File Explorer provide shortcut icons to alternate between displaying ***details*** or ***large icons.***
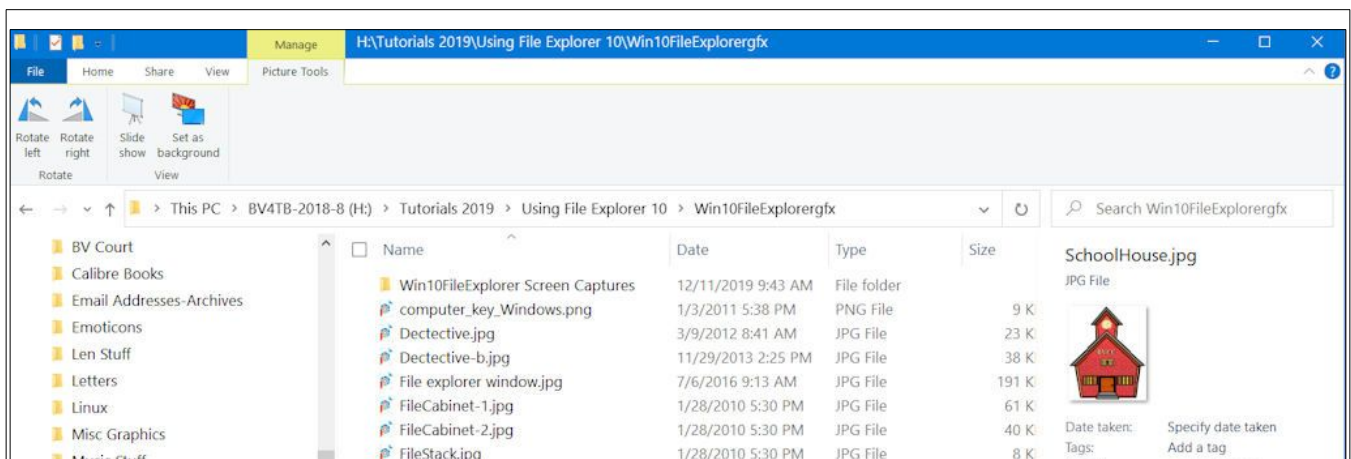
The Manage Ribbon

Figure 15: The Manage Ribbon.

Slide shows were never easier! The ***Manage*** ribbon provides a one click method for creating a slide show if you have selected a graphic file type. Just select one or more image files, and then select **Slide Show** from the ***Manage*** ribbon.

If the selection check box option is on, (see section on the ***View*** ribbon) you can use it to select picture files for the slide show. Once the desired files have been selected, just click on the **Slide show** tool.

Figure 16: Slide show context menu.

To stop a slide show, press the **Esc** key. When the slide show is running, ***right click*** to open a ***context menu***. This menu provides options for setting show speed and other functions.

The ***Manage*** ribbon also provides a tool to change the ***Desktop*** background picture. (This does the same thing as the ***Personalize, Desktop Background*** option that is opened by ***right clicking*** on an empty spot on the ***Desktop***.)

If you select a graphic file, you can use the ***Manage*** ribbon to ***rotate*** the image. This is useful if you have camera pictures that were taken with the camera turned to portrait mode.
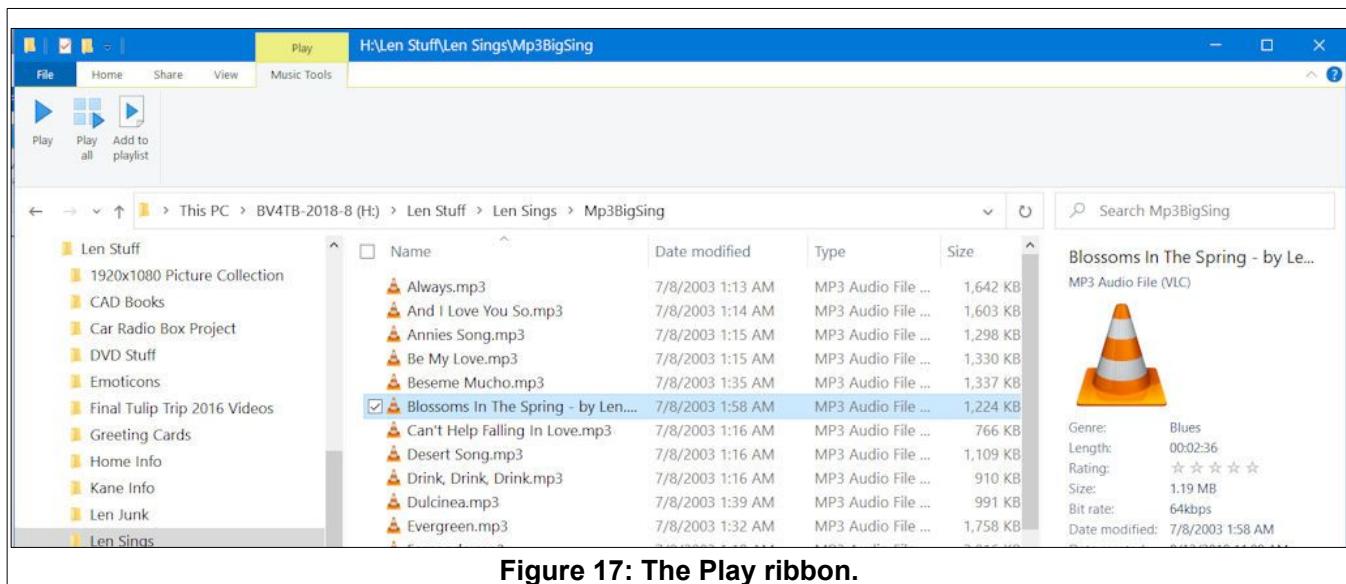
The Play Ribbon

Figure 17: The Play ribbon.

If you select one or more **music** files, the ***Play*** ribbon will appear.

When you select the ***Play*** tool, the system will open your default music player program and play the selected music files. When you select the ***Music Tools*** option, the ***Play ribbon*** provides options for playing a single file, all music files in the folder, or adding to a play list.

The ***Add to playlist*** tool, when used with the **Windows Media Player**, will help you create a new ***playlist***. The example shows the result of selecting the ***Add to playlist*** tool with the selections shown in the previous figure. ***Windows Media Player*** shows the selected files as an unsaved playlist and provides an option for saving the list. I believe that this is much easier

Figure 18: Windows Media Player.

than creating playlists in earlier versions of Windows.

Some folks might prefer using the free ***VLC Media player*** that is available for Windows 10.

This version was created December 21, 2019 by Len Nasman.

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