

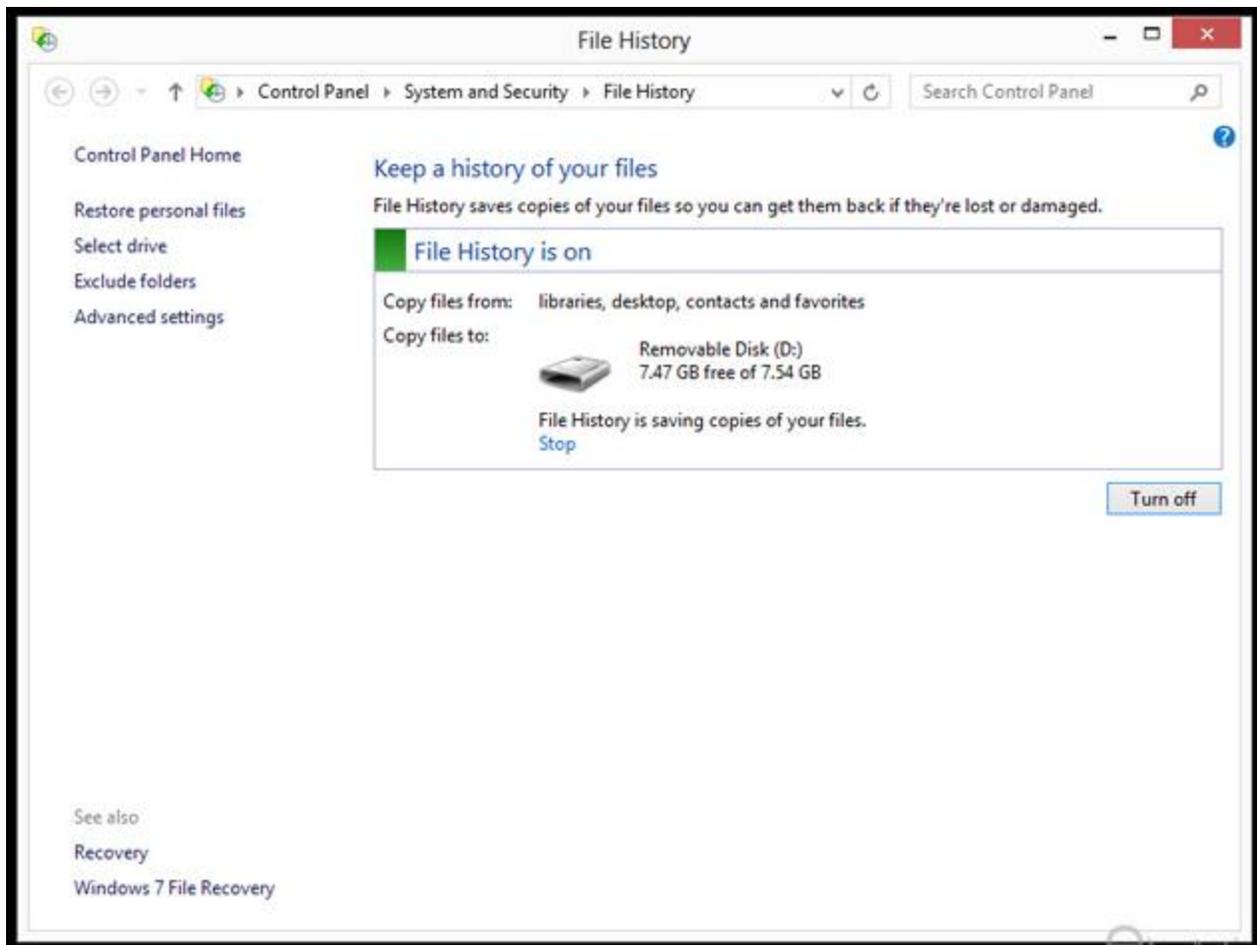
Everybody keeps harping on [Windows 8](#) being only suitable for tablets, but, in truth, Microsoft's latest desktop operating system brings some enticing new features for desktop users, too. My favorite is that it starts up way faster than Windows 7. There are others too, such as the File History feature, which performs a function similar to the Mac's Time Machine, letting you retrieve changed or deleted versions of files.

Windows 7 actually has a similar feature, Previous Versions, which you can see by right clicking in a Windows Explorer and switching to the Previous Versions tab in the resulting Properties dialog. Using Windows 7's version-saving feature depends on the creation of [restore points](#), and only works if restore settings are configured for it. But in Windows 8, File History gives you a true automated file backup system that doesn't depend on restore points.

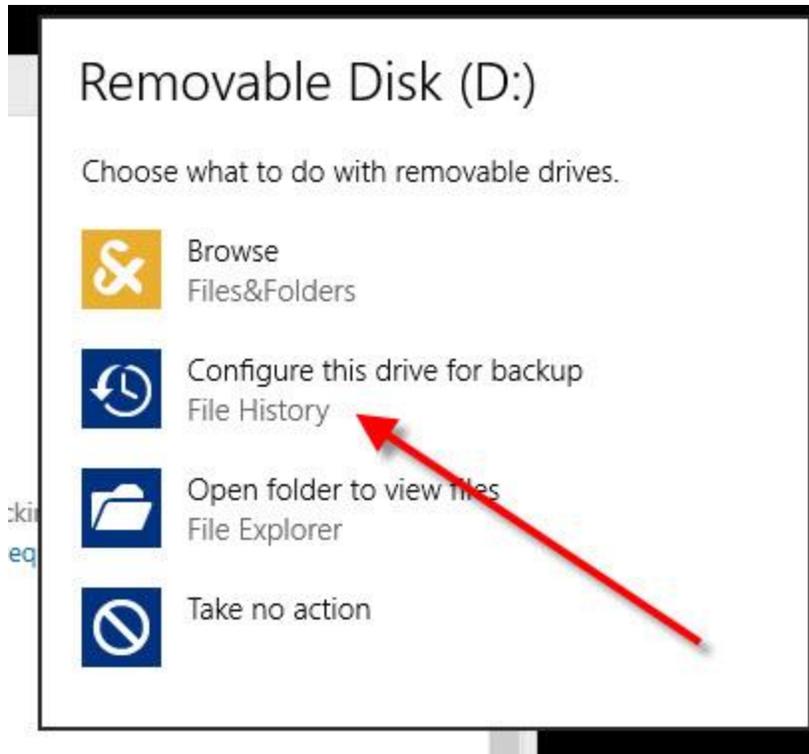


Set up Windows 8 File History Backup

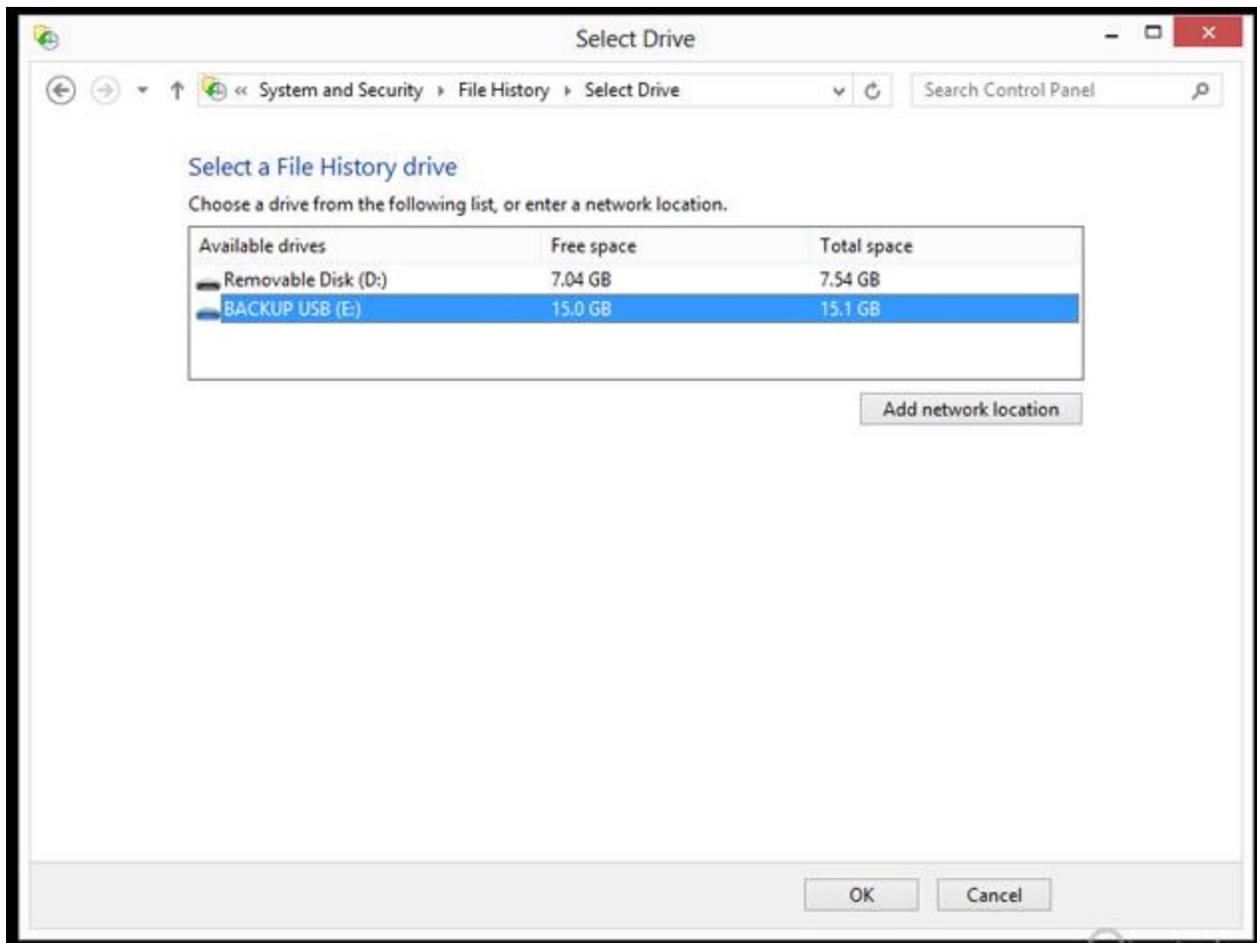
To get started, simply type File History from the Windows 8 start screen, and select Settings. Click on File History. From here, you can choose a storage location for your automated backups. As with any backup, it's a good idea to use an external or network drive instead of your PC's main hard disk, in case the system becomes unresponsive.



In fact when you first plug in a USB drive in Windows 8, a notification panel will pop up asking you how you want to use it. Choose "Configure this drive for backup – File History."

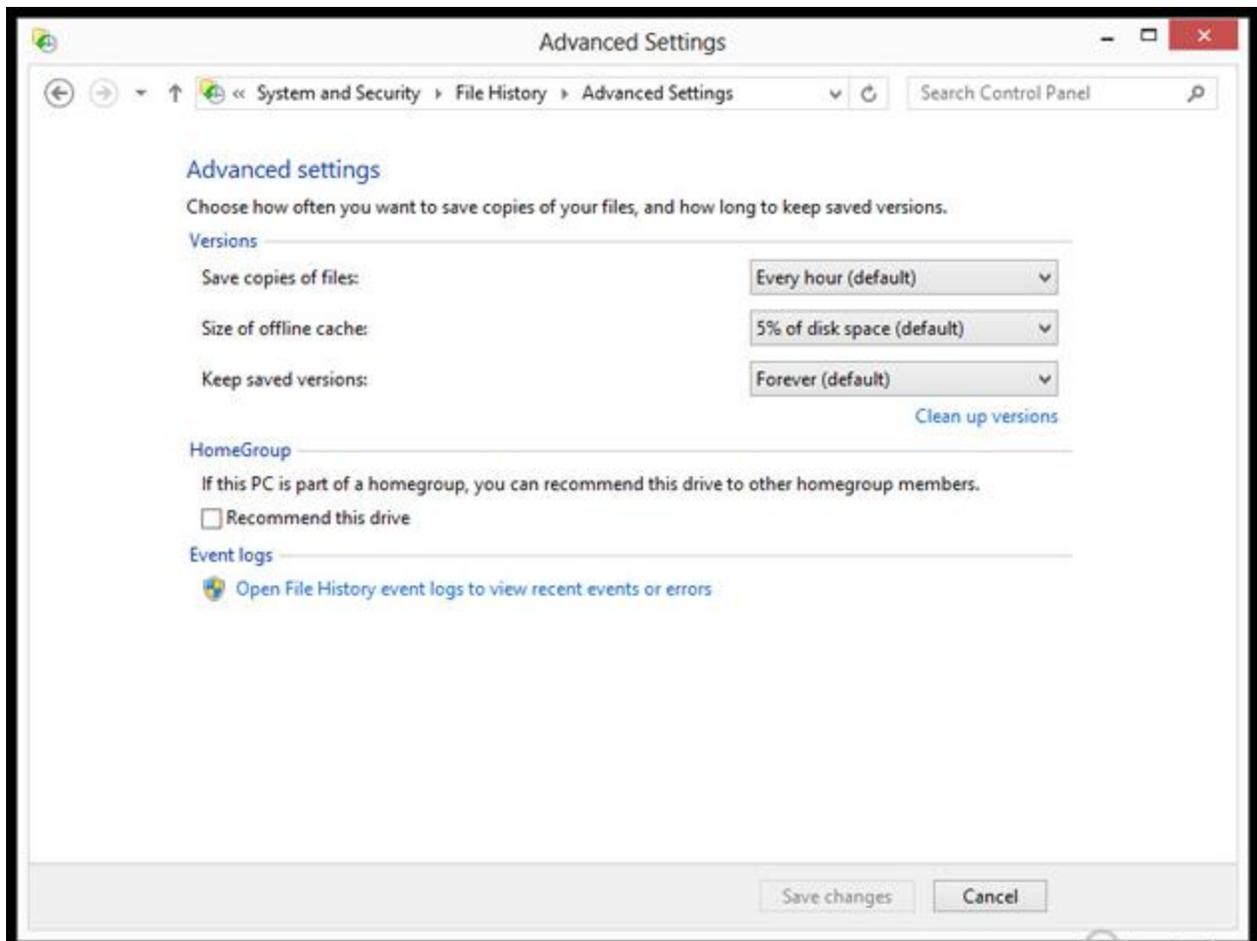


This will open File History's Select Drive dialog, and all you have to do is tap OK. The main File History dialog will then display, with a green mark followed by the text "File History is on." You can turn it off with a button at the bottom of the dialog.



You have some options for how this feature will work. You can change the backup drive and exclude folders from being backed up. By default, File History saves snapshots of all files in your Libraries, Contacts, Favorites, SkyDrive, and the Desktop. This makes sense, but you may have subfolders you don't want included in backup. One thing I find a bit puzzling is that you can't add any old folder you want—it has to be under one of these main folders. Of course, you can always add any folder to a Library, so that's a way around the problem.

You can get even more fine-grained by choosing Advanced Settings. Here you can choose how often you want files backed up: The default is once an hour, but you can set from every 10 minutes to daily. You can also set how much disk space to devote to the backup—from 2 percent to 20 percent.

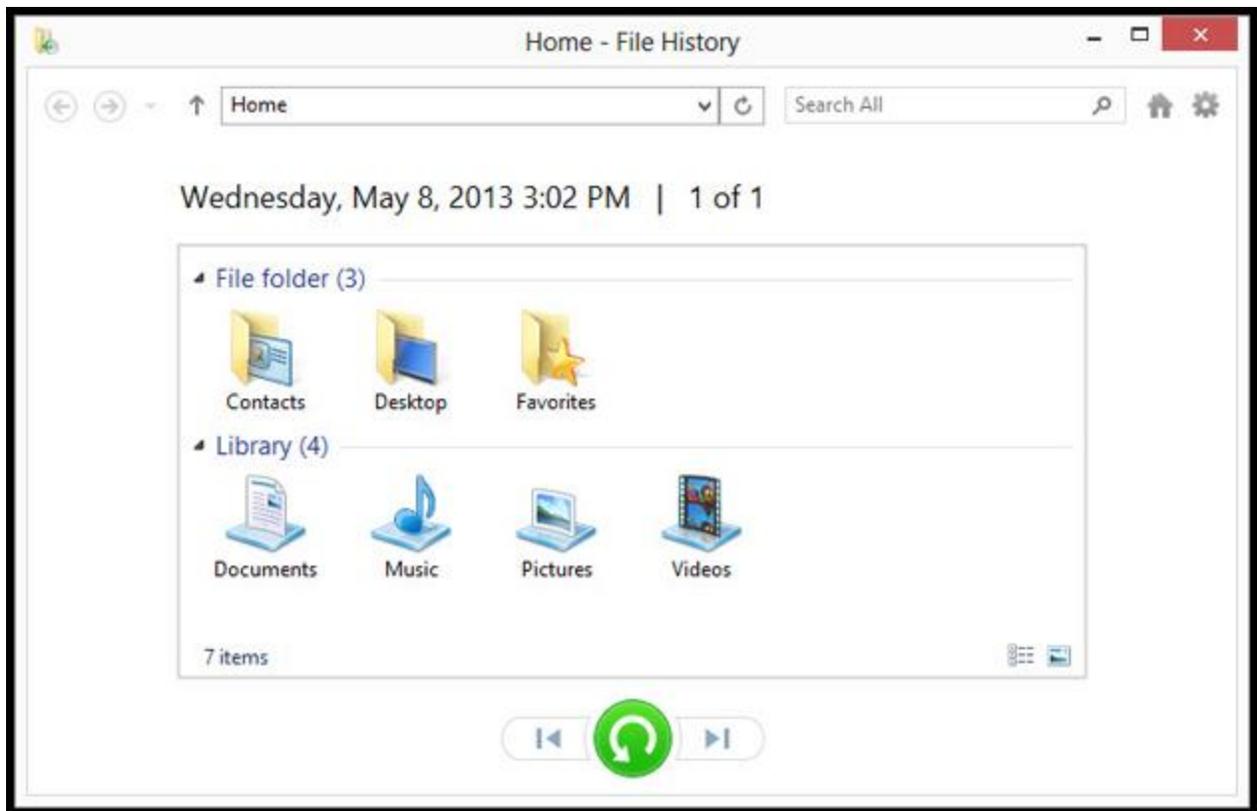


Another helpful option is the ability to set how long you want the system to retain backed up files. The default is "forever," which I like, but you can make the backups go away after 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, 9 months, 1 year, or 2 years.

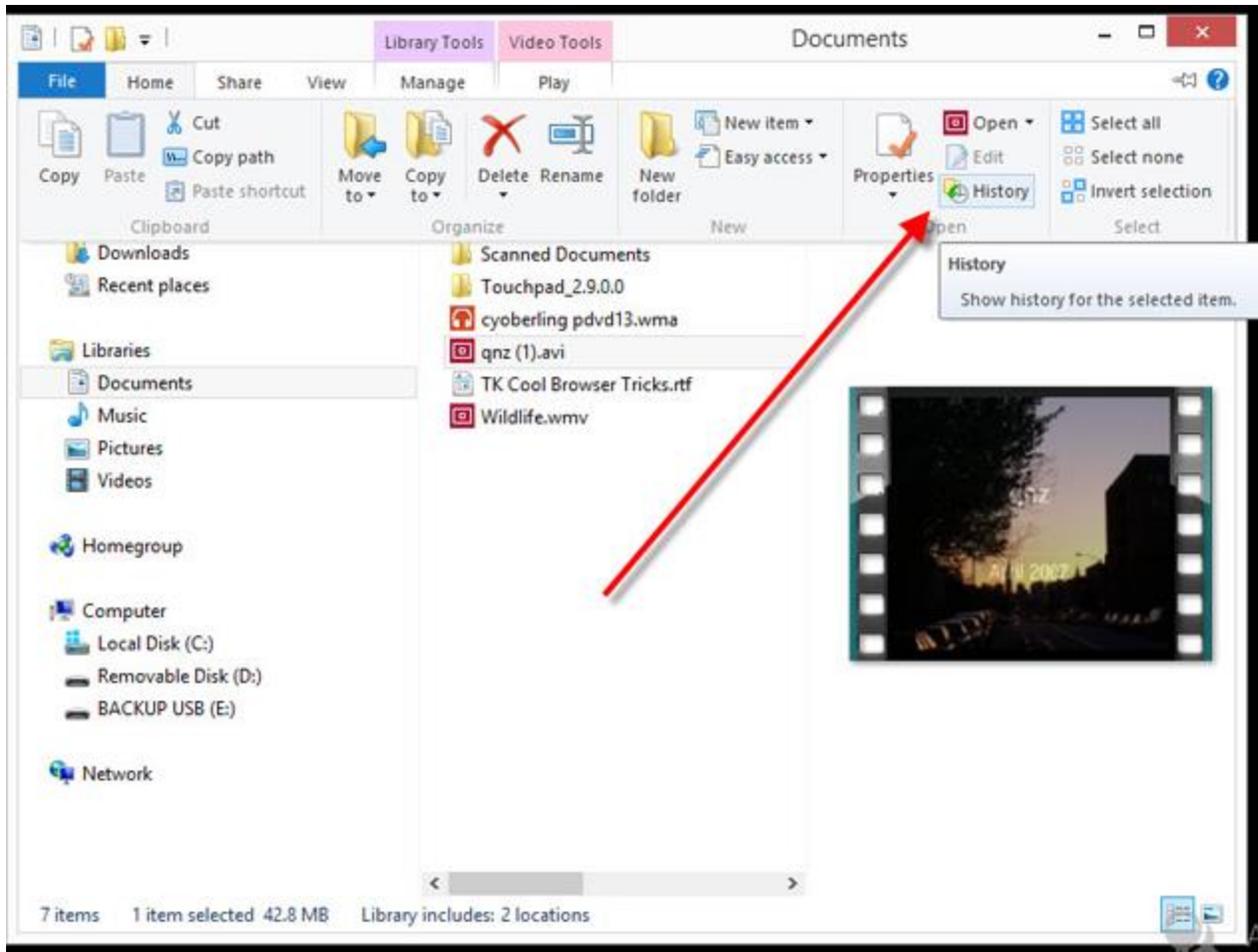
If you really want to get into the workings of File History, you can open its Event Viewer, which shows all the gritty details of what the feature has been doing.

Restoring Versions

Most people will simply want to get their missing files and versions back. To do this, you simply open the File History dialog (you can do so by just typing File History at the Start screen) and choose "Restore personal files." This will display all the covered folders—Contacts, Documents, and so on. You can restore whole folders or individual files if you drill down into the folders. The big green circular arrow will restore them to their original location, but you can also choose "Restore to" from a right-click menu or from the Settings gear to specify a target folder for the restored files.



Next to the green circular arrow are back and forward buttons, which let you choose the previous and next saved versions. If you click the back button, even deleted files will show up, available for restoration. You can also get to the File History dialog for restoring previous versions through Windows Explorer. With its ribbon set to Home, click on or tap the History button, at the bottom of the second-to-last column on the right. If you do this with a file selected, you'll be able to revert to versions of just that file; otherwise, you'll be able to retrieve the earlier versions of all files in the folder at once.



It's as simple as that! Now you can create documents and edit media files in safety, knowing that if you mess them up or delete them, you can turn to Windows 8's File History to put things right.