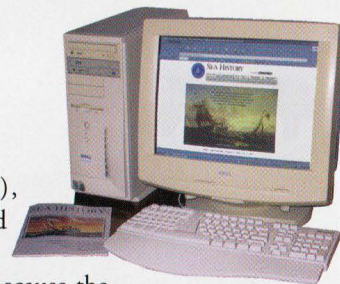


Maritime History on the Internet: Locating Library Books, Near and Far

by Peter McCracken



In previous columns, we've explored Web sites related to specific topics. Books, however, remain a critical resource for doing effective research. In this issue, we'll explore ways of doing more effective book searches. Obviously, library catalogs—especially those for large academic institutions—are great for identifying print resources. Nearly every library collects books about local history, so if you live in Nebraska but are interested in the Confederate Navy, try searching catalogs of major libraries located in the South. When you identify a title that looks useful, turn next to your local library (an academic library, if not too far, will prove your best bet) to see if they offer it. Nearly every library has a catalog you can access over the Internet, so it's very easy to find out if a local library has the book you need—before you get in the car. Remember that, even if you don't have borrowing privileges at a particular library, most libraries will allow you to read and photocopy to your heart's content. Be sure to check their web site carefully: membership in the library's Friends group may give you borrowing privileges. You probably don't want to visit an academic library during their break, when library hours are dramatically reduced.

If you don't know which libraries near you have a particular book, try using Open WorldCat from OCLC or RedLightGreen from RLG. Both OCLC and RLG are large, cooperative "union catalogs," showing holdings for thousands of libraries around the world. OCLC and Yahoo! have teamed together to put Open WorldCat in the Yahoo! Search toolbar. You can use these features by downloading the free toolbar at <http://www.oclc.org/toolbar> or by adding "site:openworldcat.org" to your Yahoo! Search terms at <http://www.yahoo.com>. Search RLG by going to <http://www.redlightgreen.org>, then type in the title or author, and select a library. In each system, after you identify your location once, the system will list the closest libraries with that title.

Google has received lots of attention recently for its latest huge project—scanning in millions of titles from five major libraries. Until it's completed, though, try Project Gutenberg

(<http://www.gutenberg.org>), which has been scanning in—and actually proofreading—the texts of thousands of titles for years. Because the titles are individually selected, most important copyright-free works are already accessible online. Other projects, specifically Google Print and Google Scholar, will provide most researchers with more useful information, though both are still in beta testing. Google Print (<http://print.google.com>) allows one to search the full text of many recent works, with the publishers' approval. Google has many limits on the ability to page through or print these works, but this can be a good way to identify a useful title. Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) is better and different—it offers freely-accessible, full-text, scholarly articles. Results can include relevant books (with links to OCLC's Open WorldCat, through the "Library Search" link), references, and full-text articles, in pdf or html formats. This qualifies as a *super-cool* service and should not be ignored! Note that results from a basic Google search (<http://www.google.com>) won't include content from journals indexed through Google Scholar.

Another valuable free tool, "Library Lookup," allows you to jump from a book's Web page on Amazon.com to the library of your choice to see if that library owns the book. (You can start at any page that includes an ISBN in the description.) Do a web search for "library lookup" and follow the instructions; it's not difficult but a bit too complicated to explain in limited space here.

Finally, don't forget the old standby: interlibrary loan. Libraries *want* to get you the resources you need. If they don't own it, they'll generally borrow it from a library that does. When they do, don't forget to thank them with praise and financial support!

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at shipindex@yahoo.com. See <http://www.shipindex.org> for a compilation of over 100,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals. ⚓

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