

Locating Maritime Images

by Peter McCracken

Over the past few years, high-speed internet connections have made images a vital part of the online experience. Unlike text, which a search engine can index word-by-word, finding images online can be tricky work. Search engines can't (yet) interpret the content of an image—they can only read its description. Nonetheless, there are a number of web sites where you can find great images of ships and pieces of maritime history.

Saving images from one site to your computer is very easy, but you should at least be aware of issues associated with digital piracy—especially if the intent is to use the image in some published form. A number of the sites listed here offer images that can be licensed for use or images that allow use through the “Creative Commons” licensing structure. You'll discover, however, most images on the web have no information about copyright or how they may be used. If you are planning on using an image for anything but your own personal use on your computer, tread carefully and always inquire about rights and reproductions.

Every day, the **National Archives and Records Administration**, the **Library of Congress**, and other government agencies, from museums to NOAA to the military, are putting more and more images from their collections online and most of these are in the public domain.

Many companies online offer use of licensed images for a fee. **Corbis** (www.corbis.com) and **Getty Images** (www.gettyimages.com) both have enormous collections that can be viewed online and then licensed for specified use. Many, many terms are used to describe any given image; they also use large thesauri to link synonyms for search terms. Other sites, such as www.istockphoto.com or www.snapvillage.com (operated by Corbis), offer royalty-free images.

While Corbis, Getty, and others are professionally

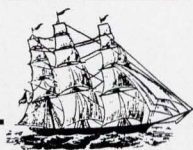
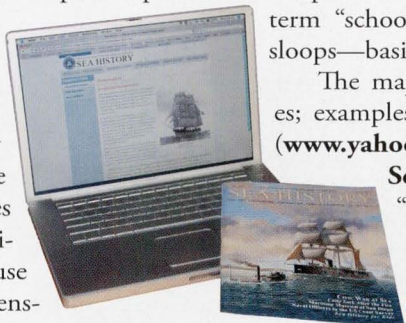
managed, a growing number of sites allow individuals to post and share their photos online, and anyone can search these collections. Examples include **Picasa** (www.picasa-web.com), **flickr** (www.flickr.com), **Fotki** (www.fotki.com), **PhotoBucket** (www.photobucket.com), and more. Your search relies on the tags assigned by those uploading the photos in the first place, and a lot of them will use the term “schooner” for barques, brigantines, yawls, ketches, sloops—basically anything with sails.

The major search engines have image-specific searches; examples include **Google** (www.google.com), **Yahoo!** (www.yahoo.com), **Ask.com** (www.ask.com), and **Live Search** (www.live.com). In each case, click on “images” to limit your search to that medium.

The **Wikimedia Commons** at www.commons.wikimedia.com offers a large collection of user-contributed images with information about their copyright status. **Creative Commons** (creativecommons.org/image/) offers a single site for locating images licensed under the Creative Commons license, which allows some reuse. A site called **stock.xchng** (www.sxc.hu) offers over 300,000 freely-available images.

A few maritime-specific image collections exist; one is the well-named **Pirate Image** archive at www.beej.us/pirates. Another, at www.shipspotting.com, contains thousands of images of ships, searchable by name. The **US Naval Historical Center** posts images from their collections online at <http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/org11-2.htm>.

Finding topic-specific images online is certainly not as easy as finding text-based resources. So much information that's encapsulated in an image cannot be searched by modern search engines, but that will likely change with time and new technology. Until then, the resources listed above should help some folks find useful and relevant images, not to mention provide a great time surfing those sites for lots of images you weren't looking for. ⚓



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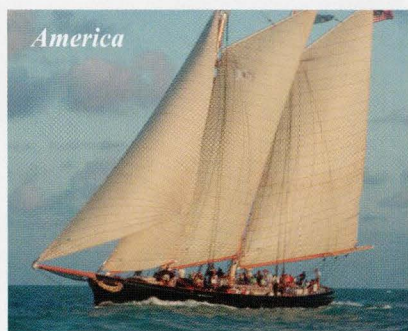


Photo by B. Hubert

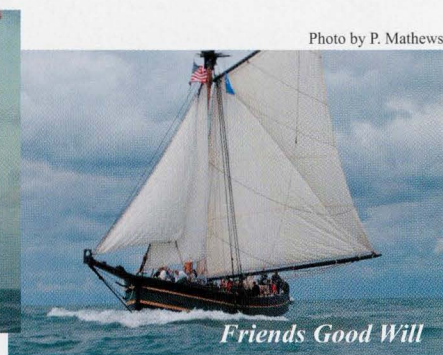


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