

## Managing Your Bibliographic Data Online

If you have amassed a large collection of books, magazines, and other items related to maritime history (or any other subject), you may be looking for ways to manage all those items. It's now possible to catalogue your own collection, share that catalogue with people around the world, and then find others with similar interests and collections. When these online services first began, many of them were doing very different things, but as each expanded its functionality, they have grown closer and closer to the best aspects of each other's services. The one you'll want to choose will depend on which particular core activity is of greatest interest to you. You'll likely find that each company may be sufficiently good to do the other activities, too—and if not today, then perhaps tomorrow.

For managing a collection of print materials, the granddaddy of them all is a service called **LibraryThing** (<http://librarything.com>); commonly abbreviated as "LT". LT offers a free account for up to 200 books, then it costs just \$10 per year, or \$25 for a lifetime membership. You create a complete catalogue of the titles you own by searching for each book in the LT collection, plus nearly 700 other collections. You can then add any kinds of tags you want to each book, such as "whaling," "schooners," "to sell," "to read," or "shelf 12, left side." The brilliance of LT can be seen through the impressive data wrangling the folks at LT offer; you can compare your library to the rest of the LT universe and discover which users have the most similar collections. (You can also keep your library private, if you don't want others to see what you own.) If you've been rating your books, you can in turn get recommendations of other books you might enjoy, based on the ratings given by folks who liked the books you like. In addition to ratings, LT users can review books, discuss books, receive pre-publication books, look at other users' collections, and much more. Some libraries use LT, including the libraries at the Los Angeles Maritime Museum and the Alexandria Seaport Foundation.

**Mendeley** (<http://mendeley.com>) is a much newer tool; it's similar to LT, but focuses on helping individuals (primarily researchers) manage their collections of scholarly journal articles. It creates a social community that can help people discover others with similar interests. The social networking aspects of Mendeley and LibraryThing make them quite different from citation

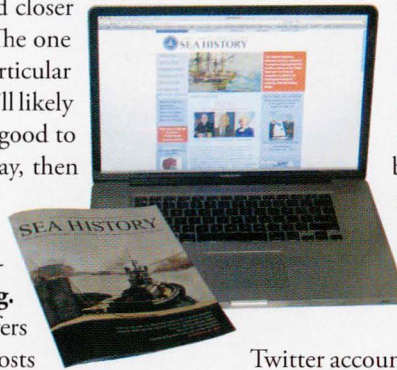
management tools, which include **Zotero** (<http://zotero.com>) and many others. Zotero only works with the Firefox web browser; it is a very effective way of organizing and managing references but without the social aspects.

For those primarily interested in reviewing and discussing books with others, **GoodReads** (<http://goodreads.com>) creates a community in which friends share their "bibliopinions" with each other. Participants note what books they're reading, what they've read, and what they think of those books, and then those comments are shared with their online community. If you rate books as you read them, GoodReads can generate suggestions of other books you might like, though of course the written opinions of people you trust is likely to be more useful than an algorithmic determination based on only the books you've added. GoodReads sends you regular emails with updates from friends, and you can also post your opinions to your Facebook or Twitter accounts. GoodReads is free and supported by advertising, though it's generally book-related.

**Copia** (<http://thecopia.com>) is a brand-new service that tries to bring together all of the above, and much more. Copia offers an online reader community, but also offers downloadable iPad and desktop apps, so you can annotate text as you're reading. Unlike any of the sites mentioned above, you can buy your ebooks through Copia, as well. The desktop readers are free, as is membership, but of course the ebooks are not. In fact, ebooks that are free elsewhere (for example, *Moby-Dick*) cost money when purchased through Copia. Originally, Copia was going to offer portable ebook readers—similar to the familiar Nook and Kindle—as well, but that seems to have been shelved, at least for the time being.

Each service is constantly expanding its offerings, and each service is overlapping others more and more. The strength of social networking is in its size; the "network effect" means that only a handful of sites will likely grow to maturity. But whichever site(s) you choose, you'll find that the act of cataloguing your books can help you discover all kinds of unexpected connections with other readers around the globe.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at [peter@shipindex.org](mailto:peter@shipindex.org). See <http://www.shipindex.org> for a free compilation of over 140,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals. ⚓





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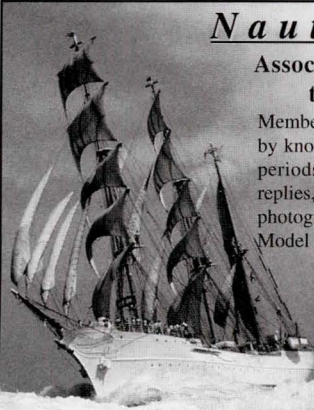

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