

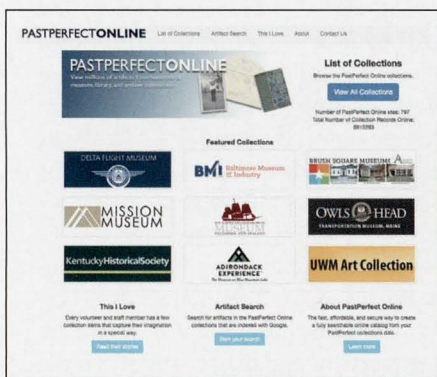
## Searching Museum Collections Online

In the 21st century, most museums track their artifacts through electronic inventory management tools that are similar to electronic library catalogs. More and more museums are taking advantage of these tools to make their collection inventories, either in part or in their entirety, accessible online. Quite a bit of interesting information can be gleaned about artifacts in a museum's collection; nearly every museum has many times more artifacts in storage than on display, and it can be useful to discover what items are in those collections, how one can access them, and what information the museum has about them. At **Mystic Seaport**, for example, one can start at [www.mysticseaport.org/research/](http://www.mysticseaport.org/research/), then click on "Explore the Collections" to search the museum's inventory. Most records are quite brief, but if you seek information about a specific person or vessel, you may discover something useful and find it's worth a trip to the seaport for an on-site research visit. Other museums have similar portals, such as the UK's **National Maritime Museum's** beautiful site of themed research paths at [www.rmg.co.uk/discover](http://www.rmg.co.uk/discover), or different paths to discovery in the **San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park's** collection at [www.nps.gov/safr/learn/historyculture/catalogs.htm](http://www.nps.gov/safr/learn/historyculture/catalogs.htm).

Several major museums take a very active approach to making these resources available online; the **British Museum** has over 2.3 million records available online at [www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/search.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx), and more than one million of those entries feature artifact images. The **National Museum of American History** has a similar search tool at [www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections), as do most of the other Smithsonian Institution museums at their respective websites.

When you're seeking an inventory system on a specific museum's webpage, try following links for "research," "explore," "discovery," or "collection," to locate its artifact collection. From the **New Bedford Whaling Museum** home page at [www.whalingmuseum.org](http://www.whalingmuseum.org), for instance, put your mouse over "Explore," then "Collections," then "Search Collections," and you'll end up at a search interface that will allow you to explore many of the museum's artifacts. Remember, however, that this database will almost certainly be a different database from the institution's library collection: The quality, interface, available information, and other data will vary greatly, and the library database itself for a specific institution may not be accessible online at all.

If you don't know where to start to do a search, one interesting source is [www.pastperfect-online.com](http://www.pastperfect-online.com), published by a company that creates and sells one of

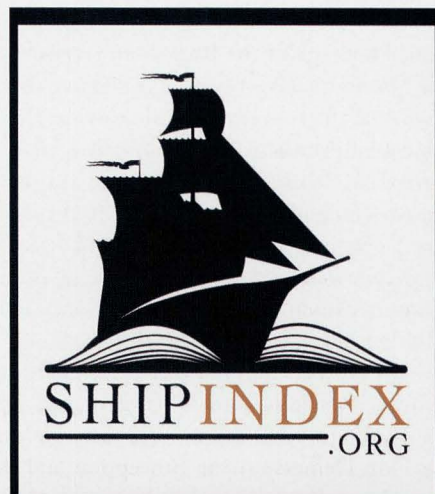


these collection management tools. Nearly six million records from nearly 800 collections are accessible here. Of course, it only includes collections that use the **Past Perfect** software, but it is a great way to discover collections that might be new to you. Through Past Perfect, I discovered the **Deltaville Maritime Museum**, in Deltaville, Virginia, for instance; its collection of artifacts is accessible at [www.deltaville.pastperfectonline.com](http://www.deltaville.pastperfectonline.com).

**NovaMuse** ([www.novamuse.ca](http://www.novamuse.ca)) brings together several hundred thousand objects from about 55 museums throughout Nova

Scotia, Canada, making selected portions of their holdings available online.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at [peter@shipindex.org](mailto:peter@shipindex.org). See [www.shipindex.org](http://www.shipindex.org) for a free compilation of over 150,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals. ⚓



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