

## Sources for Maritime E-books—Both Free and Paid



In the last year, Google has made headlines in the library community through their project of digitizing much of the collections of several major research libraries. Initially, people thought that the digitized works would then be available—and searchable—for free, by anyone with an internet connection. In fact, because of the United States' arcane and unnecessarily restrictive copyright laws, only a small portion of what Google digitizes can actually be made freely accessible. In addition, the release of the contracts Google signed with these institutions shows that, in fact, even the institutions loaning the books will have somewhat limited access to the digitized versions of the works they actually own.

Despite this disappointing news, we can enjoy, for free, the many volumes that are available electronically, from old texts in the public domain to recently published works and even online-only books. Accessing books online offers some great benefits. The first is certainly searchability: now you can instantly search entire texts for mentions of specific locations, vessels, individuals, or concepts.

The originator in offering online books is **Project Gutenberg** (<http://www.gutenberg.org>), which has been putting electronic texts online since 1971—yes, for 35 years. Gutenberg's volunteer contributors scan texts with expired copyrights, proof-read them, and post the results for anyone to download. Gutenberg now has over 19,000 texts available for download—all for free. While searching by subject can be tedious, one can quickly and easily locate specific texts, such as *Two Years before the Mast*, by Richard Henry Dana, or *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, by A.T. Mahan. Works in Project Gutenberg are generally *plain text*, meaning that they can be viewed with almost any computer system, but they are not very enjoyable to read on the screen. Nevertheless, they can be easily copied and pasted into a word processing program for easier reading or even printing. More recent works can be viewed in *HTML* (**H**ypertext **M**arkup **L**anguage) or can be downloaded to handheld readers. The site

includes essentially all the classics of English literature not under copyright—including several editions of *Moby-Dick*.

The **Electronic Text Center** at the University of Virginia (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/>) contains over 2,100 free e-books, as well as resources for searching many additional collections they maintain, though not all offer unlimited access. The **Online Books Page**, hosted by the University of Pennsylvania (<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/>) contains links to over 21,000 e-books. **Bartleby.com** (<http://www.bartleby.com>), named after Melville's scrivener, also hosts classic texts online, plus many useful reference sources.

**Google**, of course, offers book searching at <http://books.google.com>, though there is a huge difference between what they have digitized and what one can actually view. **Amazon's** "Search Inside the Book" feature also offers a means to look for terms within a book. In many cases, the features from Google and Amazon are good ways of identifying useful titles, which you'll likely then need to purchase (from Amazon, they hope) or borrow from a brick-and-mortar library.

Many sites offer access to recently published works via subscription, usually through a library, but occasionally to individuals as well. **NetLibrary** (<http://www.netlibrary.com>), **ebrary** (<http://www.ebrary.com>), **History E-Book Project** (<http://www.historyebook.org>), and **World eBook Library** (<http://www.worldlibrary.net>) each offer access to many thousands of texts. Check to see if your local library offers a subscription.

While hunting for specific e-books can occasionally be taxing, once they're found, they can be valuable resources for research, analysis, or the occasional fact-checking—but rarely for curling up with in bed.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at [shipindex@yahoo.com](mailto: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.

—Peter McCracken