



NO CARD REQUIRED

**The New York Public Library offers
a large portion of its collections online**

We routinely use the internet to take care of tasks we used to have to leave the house to do. It's often a trade off between convenience and a personal, tactile experience.

Sometimes the trade is a no brainer. It's much easier to do your banking online than to go to the bank and stand in line. The same is true for paying bills.

Why write a check, buy a stamp and mail it when you can just click and pay from home.

With other tasks it's not so cut and dry. Online shopping can be the way to go for items you're familiar with and don't have to physically inspect. But for many things, you want to hold it in your hand, or try it on, before you buy it, and you just can't do that using the web.

Going to the library falls into a category similar to online shopping. Part of me wants to argue that you can't replicate the experience of going to the library in person and browsing

the stacks. But the truth is I've rarely visited a library since I left school decades ago. I've been able to conduct research and find reading material much more efficiently online.

The New York Public Library has made it even easier to avoid leaving your house to take a trip to the library. It has digitized more than 600,000 items from its collections — and it's adding more daily — and made them available for review and download at digitalcollections.nypl.org.

The homepage features a full-width slideshow of historic images at the top. Below that are galleries for recently digitized items and collections. Scroll down a little more and there are more galleries for featured collections.

The subjects of the collections are quite varied, with many of them focusing on images. For instance, in the recently digitized gallery there is a book of drawings depicting birds of America, an album of photographs of Japan, a collection of restaurant menus, an American anti-slavery almanac and a translation from Greek of the New Testament

Each gallery consists of a

horizontally scrollable series of thumbnail images accompanied by short, descriptive titles. Clicking on an image brings you to a page with thumbnails of all of the items in the collection. The number of items in each collection varies. Some may have just one or two, while others have thousands.

Complete information

Clicking on an item brings you to an information page. The page has a larger image of the item at the top. The title, type of resource (text, still image, video, etc.), genre (book, prints, photographs, etc.), the division of the library it's stored in, the author or artist's name and the date it was issued are all listed. There also are options to download various sizes of the item. There are links to the library division, the entire collection the item resides in and other places where you can find the item. Finally, there is information on the copyright status and a timeline showing when its creator was born, when the item was issued, when the creator died and when you found the item.

The ability to download high-resolution images, along with

having the copyright status of the items is particularly useful to designers or publishers. There's a section of the site devoted to material in the public domain. That means you can download an image or text and incorporate it into your own project without worrying about paying a copyright owner to use it. This section has several innovative tools for searching, using and learning about the collections within.

The Digital Collections site is nicely designed with a black, gray and white palette. The color scheme, combined with the historical images, give the site an old-timey feel that I associate with the libraries of my youth. I'm sure contemporary librarians will correctly assure me that today's libraries are high-tech resources, not musty old repositories of information. But when I pass the Albright Library in Scranton or visit the New York Public library on 5th Avenue, I'm transported back to a time and place that has the pleasant smell of old books.

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