

# How to Store Two Tons of Books

GARY STRACHAN, although not quite ready to empty his barn, provides practical advice on acquiring, downloading and reading books of the digital variety.

RENOVATIONS OVER THE past couple of years have meant I've had to clear out a 30-year collection of books from my office. The majority now sit on two pallets in my barn. When you have to physically move 100 cases of books, you start to wonder if there might be a better way to store and access information.

Coincidentally, I've recently been downloading most of my book acquisitions from various online sources. I'm not yet completely convinced that I'd rather read from a computer screen than a printed page (but that's another story). And there's still something satisfying about knowing I can reach up to my bookshelf and pull down my tattered leatherbound copy of *Mackenzie's Receipts* whenever I need to know how to make soap or gunpowder from fireplace ashes.

As with anything involving computers, with e-books there's *another* set of jargon to learn, *another* new syntax and *another* list of websites. Some sites are useful and some of them are useless.

Before I started downloading books, my favourite site for acquiring books was Alibris.com. Alibris accesses a network of booksellers and typically has a listing for almost every book imaginable. I've also become partial to Amazon.com, which is also very good for finding new and used copies of almost anything. Better, many of the books listed on Amazon are available for preview, and some can be purchased for download.

Still, I recall my excitement when Project Gutenberg was initiated ([www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)). This not-for-profit foundation is attempting to scan and edit most books that are out of copyright. I've downloaded a couple of lovely old 19th-century viticulture manuals filled with drawings of the old grape varieties once

grown in the eastern United States. Another good not-for-profit site is Open Library ([www.openlibrary.org](http://www.openlibrary.org)), which claims to offer more than 1 million titles for free download. Google Books ([books.google.ca](http://books.google.ca)) is another popular source. It has a listing for almost any book ever printed. Many are free to browse, and a good selection is available to download.

I find it irritating that many e-books are listed at the same price as a printed copy, but I won't go into that. Rather, the real challenge occurs when you decide to download your first e-book. A bewildering list of incompatible file formats confronts you. PCs, Macs, tablets and e-book readers present a variety of format choices, some proprietary to the manufacturer.

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Finding content on the Web is the easy part. Just search by title, subject or ISBN. The tricky bit is getting the book from the website onto your computer in a useful format and then finding a comfortable way to read it. I think I'll still be buying and borrowing non-digital books for a while yet.

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~ Gary Strachan is a former scientist, technical writer, and consultant to the grape and wine industry based in Summerland, B.C. He can be reached at [gestrachan@alum.mit.edu](mailto:gestrachan@alum.mit.edu).

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## NEW MEMBERS

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### Welcome!

The Alcuin Society wishes to welcome the following new members:

*Jonathan Bengtson, Victoria, BC*

*Paul Chenard, Halifax, NS*

*Andrew Chesham, Burnaby, BC*

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*Tania Craan, Toronto, ON*

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Alcuin Society membership is open to any individual, institution or organization with an interest in the book arts, the history of books, book collecting and reading. An individual membership is \$50 a year, while institutional membership is \$75 a year. Students may join at the rate

of \$25 a year for up to three years. A patron membership is available at the rate of \$125.

Society members within Canada pay in Canadian dollars; foreign memberships must be paid in U.S. dollars. Payment may be made online using PayPal or via cheque or money order made payable to The Alcuin Society, P.O. Box 3216, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 3X8.