University Libraries Receives Grant to Unlock Hidden Collections

The Council on Library and Information Resources has awarded the University Libraries, in collaboration with the Falvey Memorial Library at Villanova University, with a Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives grant for $448,893 to digitize its Johannsen Collection of dime novels and story papers.

Dime novels were the direct precursors to the pulp magazine and a close relative of the comic book, read by a wide audience that included working class people and children, who often could not afford conventional hardback fiction. Albert Johannsen (1871-1962) wrote The House of Beadle and Adams and Its Nickel and Dime Novels (1950), a history of the firm that perfected the cheap fiction formula that made dime novels such a sensation. As the leading publisher of the format and one of the most successful publishers of the 19th century, they also played an important role in the evolution of early American popular fiction, especially the Western. While working on his book, Johannsen amassed one of the largest private collections of dime novels and story papers in the United States, purchased by Northern Illinois University in 1967. This collection contains 6,593 publications issued by Beadle & Adams between 1852 and 1897.

Dime novels have received little scholarly attention relative to other formats of popular literature, in part because many of these novels have not been commercially available since the 1920s. Scholars interested in the format must have access to one of the few major research collections specializing in 19th century popular literature, limiting who is able to study this significant part of American history and culture. Mass digitization has begun to change who has access to these collections, democratizing scholarship in much the same way that dime novels themselves democratized reading.

NIU Libraries has been independently digitizing dime novels from its collections since 2014, with over 2,000 novels currently available through the site Nickels and Dimes. With this Hidden Collections grant, an additional 5,400 dime novels will be digitized and made freely available to read and download. The project will also work closely with Villanova University to incorporate metadata from Albert Johannsen’s bibliography, including relationships between stories, editions, and authors, which will be published as open linked data through the Edward T. LeBlanc Memorial Dime Novel Bibliography. The
project will culminate in a symposium at NIU in 2019 on the dime novels of Beadle & Adams. Principal investigators on the project include NIU’s Metadata Librarian, Matthew Short, and Curator of Rare Books and Special Collections, Lynne Thomas, as well as the Director of Library Technology at Villanova University, Demian Katz.

Hidden Collections is a program of the Council on Library and Information Resources, an independent, nonprofit organization that forges strategies to enhance research, teaching, and learning environments in collaboration with libraries, cultural institutions, and communities of higher learning. The Digitizing Hidden Collections program is generously funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Thank you to our Life Members (donating $1000.00 or more)

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10 Minutes with…
Jo Burke, Director, NIU Art Museum

What does your job title mean? What do you do, day to day?

My title is director, which should mean operating on the long term and visionary goals, hobnobbing with donors, visiting artist studios and guiding gently from a higher plane but in a small museum, totaling 2.5 of us on staff, we all do everything. So I find snippets of time to sporadically but repeatedly touch on these important matters, but most of my time is spent dealing with the day to day operations working alongside the rest of the crew developing exhibitions and accompanying programs, seeking partners, and attempting to reach audiences. Of course, there is also the payroll, accounting, report writing, grant proposals, and meetings…

No day is the same. We are open to the public so one never knows who will come in, and with them - whether on a guided group tour or as an individual exploring the museum on his or her own - questions, responses and discussions, and also, opportunities. I try to be open to all. The arts aren’t just for artists but are another means of examining and responding and engaging with our world. Not everyone who comes to the museum is as familiar with the arts so we try to find ways to make them feel welcome.

It is probably not healthy, but it is a job that for me is all consuming. The arts are more of a calling and it is nice to be able to earn my living surrounded by creative people and things I love. I approach what we do as a painter at a canvas and as a student in the tradition of Cézanne. Every stroke matters. It is not a linear process. I am continually looking at all parts of the operation such that one brush stroke here in the lower right must be counterbalanced there in the upper left to keep the whole of it in harmony.

What’s your background?

I grew up in an artistic household (my mother painted, my father sculpted), with lots of quality art materials available and frequent visits to the Art Institute of Chicago. My self-designed undergraduate major at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio was in Fine Art and Communications with my full time cooperative education stints in arts administration. My first career was in corporate communications working both freelance and fulltime for various audio visual production houses as graphic artist and as a producer, the coordinator between client and the graphic support team. Periodic travel and study let me have immersion as a painter and six months at the Marchutz School of Painting and Drawing in Aix-en-Provence, France gave me the desire to continue reading and writing about art so while serving as caretaker for my mom in St. Charles, I worked on my masters in Art History at Northern Illinois University. I was fortunate to receive a graduate assistantship at the NIU Art Museum and even more so, to be hired as Assistant Director upon graduation. My intent was to stay for three years but the job kept changing and always stayed interesting so as lives changed, I ended up serving as Acting Director, and then was appointed as Director which I have been since 2007.

What aspect of the job do you enjoy the most?

What I have liked best about my job has been the freedom I have had to make it what it is, the collaborative opportunities I have had with my co-workers, and the exchanges I have had with artists, scholars, students and community members.

Can you tell us a bit about why the University Libraries matter to you enough to serve on the Board?

I am happy to help out where I might be able to be of use and service. Libraries and Museums are sister organizations with an overlap of roles in our service to the public and with similar
values, needs and issues. Libraries across the country have taken on a gut wrenching analysis of self
in order to remain relevant and of service in a time of huge technical changes and increased social
interactivity creating open communal study spaces and with shorthanded staff and volunteers busily
digitizing records. Museums are following suit once again exploring the nature of the continuum
between, as referenced by Duncan F. Cameron, being the “temple or the forum”. My preference
is always both/and rather than either/or but with limited resources, this is difficult. I do not have
complete faith in our ability to support the technological shift and properly maintain and keep up
with new data storage and retrieval systems. Paper, not quite as good as vellum, still remains a pretty
stable system. I also think that individuals’ various styles of learning and processing the world
demand that we still offer opportunity for quiet spaces for study and reflection, not just interactivity. If my being
part of the Board for the Friends of the University Libraries can help us be both/and, I will be happy.

When I worked in Chicago in the audio visual production field there was lots of overtime,
stressful deadlines and fast turnarounds. For me, the best way to relax was to go around the corner
to visit Stuart Brent’s bookstore where I could actually feel a physical change come over me and a
sense of renewal when I was surrounded by books. I enjoy a bit of the same in a library just walking
the stacks and being drawn to new discoveries. Granted, institutional-strength monochromatic
library-bound book covers are not as seductive and eye-catching as colorful slick graphic book
covers but one can still feel the weight and presence of all those voices and all that knowledge. It is
freeing and reassuring to know that one can access that.

What are you currently reading, or is there something that you read recently that really stuck with
you, and why?

I am currently reading James Joyce’s Ulysses on the iPad. My Cousin Ned, who just died last
year, was heavily involved in the Denver annual Bloomsday (June 16) including a large Irish breakfast
and public recitations from this socially and stylistically pivotal book, the narrative of which takes
place in a single day. At Antioch I had friends who took a college course based on this book. I am
going it alone, for now, enjoying the not knowing, the ride and the flow, figuring it out - who is talking,
what is happening – as I go; just relishing being in the moment...

I am also reading Paper Cadavers by Harvard History professor Kirsten Weld in paperback.
It is about the potential nature of archives and the myriad Guatemalan volunteers working to sort
through a recently discovered cache of government records of arrests and abuse to process them
and while doing so hoping to discover what may have happened to their missing loved ones, and
through the reading/viewing/handling, even simply the seeking, of these documents memorialize the
deceased.

Archival records like museum objects may have new meaning and understandings with time. Our history needs preservation to be a resource for the future.
Library Digitizes
First Part of Lee Schreiner Sheet Music Collection

Lee Schreiner donated a large portion of his sheet music collection—several thousand pieces—to Rare Books and Special Collections in 2014. Music in the collection covers much of the early 20th century, with coverage especially strong during World War I (1914-1918). Because most Americans either had access to pianos or watched performers at music halls, sheet music is an ideal medium for studying popular and visual culture. Pieces in the collection reflect popular opinion about the war, as well as the changing status of women and minorities. The first phase to digitize the Schreiner collection concluded in early 2017 to coincide with the centennial of World War I, with future plans to digitize more of the collection later this year.

Save These Dates for Friends Events!:

April 24, 2017: NY Times bestselling author Jeff VanderMeer will do a reading and Q&A for his new novel, *Borne*. 7:30 pm at Yasunas Meeting Rm, DeKalb Public Library. Co-sponsored with STEM Read.

Friday, May 5, 2017: Ice Cream Social and Annual Meeting. From 3-5 pm in Rare Books and Special Collections.

Member Benefits:

Receive a 10% discount on merchandise at the following stores:
- Ed Ripp Fine Art Books, Chicago

Friends tote bags! (email aschroeder@niu.edu) or call (815-753-8091) Angie Schroeder for details.)
Robert’s Rules is Not the Only Book About Parliamentary Procedure

When most people see the phrase “parliamentary procedure,” they think of the book, Roberts Rules of Order. While it is true that Robert’s Rules is one of the best known books on parliamentary procedure, it is certainly not the only one or even the oldest reference work on the subject.

Thomas Jefferson published the first parliamentary manual in the United States on January 27, 1801 and then produced a second edition in 1812. Jefferson based A Manual of Parliamentary Practice on his experiences as presiding officer of the U.S. Senate while Vice-President. The Senate and House relied on Jefferson’s Manual in formulating their own procedures, but both chambers had to greatly revise their parliamentary rules as the nation grew. In 1844, Luther S. Cushing, the clerk of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, published his own Manual of Parliamentary Practice—adopting Jefferson’s identical title. Cushing, however, intended his work for use by private organizations and clubs not legislative bodies such as Congress. [See Darwin Patnode, A History of Parliamentary Procedure. 4th ed., West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2006, p.49].

Cushing’s Manual, as it is typically referred to—perhaps to distinguish it from Jefferson’s—became the standard parliamentary reference work for many small clubs and organizations through the latter half of the 19th century. Cushing’s son revised the Manual in 1877 and other authors kept the title in print until the mid-1960’s. Many older clubs and professional associations chartered in the late 1800’s likely still have a copy of Cushing’s Manual in their libraries.

In 1876 General Henry Martyn Robert, a U.S. Army Engineer, and Civil War veteran, published the first edition of Robert’s Rules of Order that would soon push aside all previous reference books on parliamentary procedure. Asked without warning to preside at a church meeting, Robert became frustrated and embarrassed that he did not know how to conduct himself during the meeting. Robert then spent nearly two years composing his now well branded rules, often relying on some previous established concepts from Jefferson, Cushing, and many others. Robert’s Rules became a best seller soon after the first printing was officially released on February 19, 1876.


The only real rival to Robert’s Rules on parliamentary procedure in the 21st Century is written by authors certified through the American Institute of Parliamentarians. The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), is sometimes derided as “Roberts light,” but at only 326 pages—including an 8-page glossary of terms—most readers will discover this book is much easier to comprehend and is more practical for use during meetings.

Whatever parliamentary manual you prefer, both Robert’s and the Standard Code, insist that a deliberative body formally designate a single reference work as its “authority” on procedural issues in the Constitution or
A Note From the Faculty Liaison

We have survived much of the winter, and the spring semester on campus is in full swing. Classes are coming to Rare Books and Special Collections, and events and activities for the Friends of the NIU Libraries are well underway.

I’m so pleased to announce that Josephine Burke, Director of the NIU Art Museum, has graciously agreed to join the Friends of the NIU Libraries Executive Board as an at-large member. We are featuring a brief interview with her in this issue so that you can get to know her better.

On Monday, April 24th, New York Times Bestseller Jeff VanderMeer will be joining us just one day before his latest novel, Borne, is launched into the world. Jeff is the author of the Southern Reach Trilogy, (Annihilation, Authority, and Acceptance), which won the Shirley Jackson Award. Paramount Pictures acquired the movie rights to these books that caused the New Yorker to refer to Jeff as the “weird Thoreau.” Jeff will be doing a reading and Q&A at 7:30 pm in the Yasunas Meeting Room in the DeKalb Public Library, followed by a book signing. Books will be available for sale through Anderson’s Bookshop.

We also have a date for our Ice Cream Social and Annual Meeting! Friday, May 5, 2017 from 3-5 pm, please join us in Rare Books and Special Collections for frozen custard from Ollie’s with all the trimmings, and the world’s shortest annual business meeting.

The Friends have designated $15,000 from our available expendable endowment funds to support expensive purchases for the libraries. Through annual cuts over the last 8 years due to declining enrollment and the lack of a state budget, the Libraries’ ability to purchase materials for our faculty, students, and community’s use has eroded back to levels not seen since the late 1990s. This has been exacerbated by the massive inflation in academic journal costs, which has significantly eaten into our book-buying budget. We hope that you will consider making a tax-deductible gift to the Friends Endowment.

Gifts to the Friends of the NIU Libraries can be made by credit card through the NIU Foundation (http://www.niufoundation.org/give). Select “A specific area,” then Select “Friends of the NIU Libraries.” You can also use the form in this newsletter, or contribute through estate planning.

We hope that you will join us for our Spring events, and as always, thank you for supporting the Friends of the NIU Libraries.

Lynne M. Thomas
Faculty Liaison
Yes! I/We wish to join the Friends of NIU Libraries at the following level:

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