Linked Open Dime Novels; or, 19th Century Fiction and 21st Century Data

Matthew Short, Northern Illinois University
Demian Katz, Villanova University

2022 Digitizing Hidden Collections Symposium
What are Dime Novels?

• Cheaply produced popular fiction sold in the United States in the 19th century (ca. 1860-1915)

• Popular among working classes, immigrants, and children

• Often deal with issues related to gender, class, race, and ethnicity

• Also where many genres of American popular fiction first evolved, especially the western and detective fiction
Dime Novel Digitization

- CLIR awarded a Hidden Collections grant to NIU and Villanova in 2016 to digitize NIU’s Johannsen Collection
- Partnership expanded to include Stanford University, Bowling Green State University, and Oberlin College
- NEH Humanities and Reference Resources awards in 2020 for the Street & Smith Project and again in 2022 for the Tousey Project
Dime novels are always issued in a series, issues often contain multiple stories, and stories are sometimes serialized.

Stories are frequently reprinted or reissued, usually in different formats and with variations.

Stories are often attributed to pseudonyms, which may be shared by as many as a dozen real-world persons.

We usually know the real-world person responsible for a story through the work of bibliographers.
How We’re Using Linked Data

• Agree on a shared meaning about what entities exist, what properties they have, and how they’re related (an ontology)

• Use shared unique identifiers (in the form of URIs) in our metadata, so that we can easily recognize specific entities in our cataloging

• Enable harvesting of data for use within digital collections
Publishing dimenovels.org as Linked Data

- Existing schema conceptually similar to ontology, with “pretty” URLs for all entities (CreativeWork, Edition, etc.)
- Mapped existing schema to ontology
- Created alternate views through content negotiation to render linked data at “/rdf”

@prefix dime: <https://dimenovels.org/ontology#> .
@prefix dc: <http://purl.org/dc/terms/> .
@prefix rda: <http://rdaregistry.info/Elements/u/> .

<https://dimenovels.org/item/505> a dime:CreativeWork ;
   dc:title "The Bride of the Tomb; and Queenie's Terrible Secret" ;
   rda:preferredTitleForTheResource "The Bride of the Tomb; and Queenie's Terrible Secret" ;

https://dimenovels.org/Item/505

https://dimenovels.org/Item/505.rdf
NIU includes identifiers in MODS for names and subjects (through LC’s reconciliation service and $1).
These identifiers are used to match data between digital collection and dimenovels.org.
A custom import tool allows thousands of new dimenovels.org records to be created, uncovering numerous errors on both sides in the process.

Using Data from *Nickels and Dimes*
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Built a linked data harvesting tool called Murpoint (because existing tools were too aggressive)

- Harvests all linked data from a single Internet domain to a single file
- Data is loaded into a Blazegraph instance at NIU for querying
• Edition URIs are used to search NIU’s digital collection for digitized copies
• If multiple editions or parts exist, those are presented to the end user for browsing
• No need to consult bibliographies or other reference sources!
Useful Links

Nickels and Dimes: https://dimenovels.lib.niu.edu/
Edward T. LeBlanc Memorial Bibliography: https://dimenovels.org/
Villanova Dime Novel Collection: https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Collection/vudl:24093
Geeby-Deeby: https://github.com/demiankatz/Geeby-Deeby
Murpoint: https://github.com/FalveyLibraryTechnology/Murpoint