Pioneers, Passionate Ladies, and Private Eyes

Dime Novels, Series Books, and Paperbacks

Larry E. Sullivan, PhD
Lydia Cushman Schurman, PhD • Editors

Pioneers, Passionate Ladies, and Private Eyes: Dime Novels, Series Books, and Paperbacks

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Preface

The title of this volume is as much a lure as many of the titles for the dime novels, series books, and paperbacks discussed in the Library of Congress symposium where these essays originated. This forum and these papers address primary sources that document American popular culture. This is culture with a small letter rather than capital "C" in the sense of the term as used by Ruth Benedict or Bronislaw Malinowski and the social and cultural anthropologists who after them raised academic consciousness about the pervasiveness of cultural traits and habits that were once held in disdain, or at least were not considered worth studying or collecting. I can recall in my own experience as a department head for rare books and special collections when I ordered a series of Silhouete novels produced by a local author under a pseudonym, because we have an exhaustive local and regional history collection with a complementary regional literature collection. The two allowed researchers to investigate local and regional culture in depth from the mid-nineteenth century onward. My selection was contested by the acquisitions department, nonetheless, on the assumption that surely I had made a mistake or had succumbed to some mental disorder to add such books to special collections in this university library. My will prevailed, the books were ordered, autographed, and added to the collection where, to everyone's surprise, it became known that a clandestine authoress lived in their midst. Midwestern genteel values and pretensions were thus shocked, superficially anyway, while local culture was documented a little more fully than before. The legitimacy of this action was confirmed by respectable

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librarians and libraries like the Library of Congress collecting "trash" literature as well, which when aged properly, was regarded as the primary sources in which research can be fruitful and upon which modern scholarship can be based.

I thus thank Larry Sullivan and his colleague Lydia Cushman Schurman for orchestrating this symposium, and bringing about these published essays from its proceedings. They are a welcome contribution and are both enlightening and entertaining. While they reflect on another age, the authors remind us that the old juxtaposition of culture and Culture is with us still. Their contribution is especially relevant for modern popular culture studies, interest in literacy and readerships, library and publishing history, fiction and genre studies, and for literature if not Literature as a whole.

Lawrence J. McCrank
Series Editor
Primary Sources & Original Works

Introduction

Larry E. Sullivan

"It is not unknown to find counterfeiting and even murder springing from bad reading. . . . A child of ten . . . held up another and robbed him of three dollars. The robber had read dime novels from the age of seven. He was particularly interested in Jesse James, and knew more of him than of Washington." Thomas Travis wrote this in 1908 in *The Young Malefactor: A Study in Juvenile Delinquency, Its Causes and Treatment.* The view that lurid literature had serious antisocial effects was widespread in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Such a view is analogous to criticism of television and cinema sex and violence over the last half century. Anti-vice crusader Anthony Comstock in his *Traps for the Young* (1883) worried intensely that young readers would take the "pernicious" characters and stories as models for their own lives. The fact that reading figured so prominently in the moral or reform literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is significantly indicative of the class frictions of the era. The moralists believed that fiction should reinforce bourgeois ideals, especially the sentimentalized picture of sedate family life. Dime novels to them were replete with immoral violence, whether true or not. And dime novels and similar genres appealed to large numbers of the working-class public and often sold millions of copies. So the cultural elite took aim at them.

The rise of the dime novel after the Civil War came during a period of severe disruptions in society. It was a time of rapid industrialization and organization of businesses in trusts and monopolies.

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These economic developments brought not only new and great wealth, but also labor and class disputes, periodic depressions, political corruption, social dislocation with the rise of urbanization and the decline of the family farm and small-community life, and protests of women against their inferior status, among other changes.

The advance of industrial civilization provoked a moral, religious, social, and cultural crisis. Many observers worried about a decline in public morality and formed organizations to fight such symptoms as crime, deviant behavior, and the dissolution of the family. Intellectuals of the nation raised cries about the decline of polite culture and the corruption of American values and the national character. The major and complex social and cultural changes have been the subject of many scholarly works, but here we can briefly view the reaction of the dominant culture to these developments. This hegemonic social and economic class also comprised the cultural custodians who attempted to convey their values and assumptions to the rest of society, especially to the working classes. This elite attempted to maintain its moral authority through the instillation of such Victorian values as self-reliance and the work ethic. By having the working class internalize this morality the upper classes could keep control over the social and cultural order. Part of this attempt was through literature. The values portrayed in cheap fiction were antithetical to this elite's aims for a well-ordered society.

The popularity of the dime novel also coincided with the advance of the social sciences in the United States, including scientific criminology and penology, which was most often used in finding the causes of crime. And reading could lead to either virtue or crime. Therefore, guided or controlled reading took on an important role in instilling moral rectitude. Ideally, the working class should read stories of self-help that emphasized the work ethic and the importance of the highly esteemed bourgeois family. To many of America's literary and educational establishment, dime novels, with their sensationalist prose, violent characters, convoluted plots, changing identities, and confusions of right and wrong, gave an improper message to impressionistic youth, and were therefore severely frowned upon. For instance, such writers as William Dean Howells believed that the youth of America would take literally the tales of sensation and fantastic literature found in cheap fiction and use

them as models for action. Howells thought that writers should concentrate on the more positive areas of American life.

Although many reformers inveighed against this literature because of what they considered its sensationalist character, most of these novels tended to conform to the tenets of the elite culture of the time. Little of this literature was revolutionary. Criminals received their just desserts in the end. Morality won out. But the struggle between good and evil made for a good read: even getting to a bad end could be fun along the way. Close readings of these texts show that these novels maintained the cultural hegemony, the moral order remained intact, and traditional values were preserved.

We should not think that all of the cheap literature of the day consisted of male-oriented detective or outlaw stories. Women made up a very large part of the reading public and much of this fiction, especially from story-paper romances, was aimed at women, including young girls. They, as much as the males of the day, were attracted to the popular fantasies of sudden wealth, mistaken identities, women shaking off their chains of marital bondage, and other adventures. The dime novel for both sexes evolved into the original paperback fiction of our age with both violent adventure stories and romance fiction.

In 1860 the Beadles issued the first dime novel, *Malaeska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter.* By definition, dime novels were cheap, paper-covered fiction, and usually sensationalist, featuring detective stories, westerns, outlaws, bandits, villains, lost love, damsels in distress, femmes fatales, and melodramatic plots, with many written in installments with cliff-hanging chapters. Much of this literature was considered counter to good moral order. But the characters and stories found in the dime novels also fed popular fantasies and populist mythologies. A product of contemporary industrial mass production with its growing social and economic restraints on individual freedom, the dime novel stirred up romantic mythologies of vanishing breeds, such as Western outlaws and Indians, that modernization itself was killing off. The Westerner, for instance, who triumphed through individual freedom, will, and merit, proved exotic and highly appealing to a public now far removed from this life. Jesse James became a modern Robin Hood, no matter the reality. For working-class women, confined either in

marriage or in a factory, the fantasy of escaping through romance and the sudden appearance of a rich savior was irresistible. Such literature obviously stirred up emotions during its heyday from the post-Civil War to the advent of motion pictures in the early twentieth century. Interesting is the fact that the emphasis and appeal of individualism came at a time when society was evolving from rugged, free-wheeling, burgeoning capitalism to the bureaucratic structure of the modern corporate world. In fact, by the time the last original dime novel was published in the second decade of the 20th century, the pressures of modern capitalism had qualitatively changed the structure of American life and culture.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, many viewed the popularity of such literature as immoral and dangerous to the minds of its readers, especially the young and the working class. "Serious" writers scorned such "hack" literature as many today scorn the popular original paperback romances that flood our supermarkets and newsstands. Because of the low reputation of this literature, it has largely been neglected until recently, with only a small number of scholars making extensive use of this material for studies in popular culture. What nobody can deny, however, is that these books sold a tremendous number of copies and thus had an influence far beyond their literary merit.

The study of popular fiction is now becoming more and more academically respectable. But as is the case with much that has been neglected in history, only a few farsighted souls have saved the literature for today's scholars. Unfortunately, publishers have always printed dime novels and paperbacks on cheap, self-destructing paper. The collections, therefore, do not always exist for scholarship. It is only in the last two decades that some librarians began a rearguard action to save pulp fiction.

To make the point of the value of these literary genres, in June 1995 the Library of Congress held the symposium, "Pioneers, Passionate Ladies, and Private Eyes: Dime Novels, Series Books, and Paperbacks." Twenty-one speakers presented a rich variety of papers covering the broad range of topics on the theme. The symposium stemmed from a discussion among Lydia C. Schurman, an independent scholar, Clark W. Evans, of the Library's Rare Book and Special Collections Division, and me (at the time Chief of the

Rare Book and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress) about the importance of collecting and saving this literature. We formed a symposium committee which, in addition to ourselves, included J. Randolph Cox, Deidre A. Johnson, and Edward T. LeBlanc. It is Johnson who thought of the title for the symposium, which we also use as the title for this book. The Library of Congress has one of the largest collections of dime novels in the country and is one of the few research libraries that systematically collects fiction initially published in paperback–the dime novels of today. During much of the history of the Library's Rare Book and Special Collections Division many have questioned the value of its large collection of dime novels, original paperbacks and similar literature. Was this the type of literature that should be in a repository better known for incunabula, Thomas Jefferson's library, and other highspots of Occidental civilization? My answer was always a resounding yes. Dime novels are important historical and literary materials. The Rare Book and Special Collections Division in the Library of Congress (or in any special collection in a research library) does not just encompass 15th-century books, but takes within its sphere the whole of history of the western mind, and we find important information in ephemeral sources, including the genres of dime novels, books-in-series, and paperbacks. To make our point on the value of this literature, we decided to highlight the material in a scholarly symposium. First-rate researchers in the field are now numerous in academia and elsewhere, and our main problem was narrowing down the number of qualified invited speakers. We made our choices and all invitees accepted with alacrity. On June 9-10, 1995, under the co-sponsorship of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division and the Library's Center for the Book, and under the direction of John Y. Cole, the symposium was held. The two-day conference was a great success. To make a lasting contribution to the printed literature on the subject, we invited the speakers to revise their talks for publication. The results of this endeavor are presented here in a rich assortment of articles that discuss the significance, genres, collections, research methodologies, and other matters related to the literature. The authors analyze texts, examine genres, describe collections and the collecting of the

literature, and discuss cultural and historical significance of a wide range and diversity of authors and topics.

We begin with descriptions of dime novels and collections of such literature. Edward T. LeBlanc gives the reader a brief history of dime novels in the United States and provides a background for the subsequent papers. His paper covers the period from 1860 to the last such original publication in the second decade of the 20th century.

Clark W. Evans skillfully sketches the history of the dime novel collection at the Library of Congress, and its colorful initiator and developer, V. Valta Parma. Parma himself, with his change of names, personality, and perhaps unethical behavior, could have sprung from one of the dime novels he so assiduously collected. But it is largely owing to his efforts that the Library of Congress has such large holdings of this literature. Alison Scott describes the pulp magazines and paperbacks in Bowling Green University's Popular Culture Library. She relates not only the importance of the content of these materials, but also the significance of the illustrations, especially the covers, for the study of consumer culture and graphic design. She importantly points out how library cataloguers traditionally omit bibliographical information about dustjacket art. She concludes by briefly describing Bowling Green's important digitization project of these covers. In a similar vein, Karen Nelson Hoyle discusses the bibliographical problems in collecting and controlling series books. She presents an articulate review of the literature on this material and the challenges and opportunities it presents to the collector, scholar, and librarian. She rightly highlights the literature's importance, growing popularity, and the need for cooperation among its constituencies to gain greater intellectual control over it.

Lydia Cushman Schurman's essay masterfully elucidates the significant role the history of cheap paper-covered fiction played in the study of the history of books and publishing. Her account of how Ainsworth Rand Spofford, Librarian of Congress in the late 19th century, argued effectively before Congress to raise postal rates for cheap novels covers a variety of issues in book history: copyright, economics of the books trade, and reading habits. Schurman highlights the recurrent theme in the reaction and reception of dime

novels–that bad literature leads to crime, makes vice attractive, and that fiction was the least instructive class of literature. The view, mentioned above, that cheap literature is immoral is a predominant theme in 19th- and 20th-century social control literature and this view recurs throughout these essays.

John T. Dizer surveys authors of dime novels and series books, distinguishes between the two genres, and focuses on five of the most prominent in the field: Edward S. Ellis, H. Irving Hancock, W. Bert Foster, Gilbert Patten, and Edward Stratemeyer. These names recur often in the history of the genres. Dizer also takes up the theme of contemporary reaction to this literature by social reformers and cultural custodians and its adverse effect on young minds. Dizer particularly singles out vice-reformer Anthony Comstock for his attacks on dime novels.

A large part of the fiction reading public consisted of women. Nancy Tillman Romalov expertly analyzes the effect of mass market fiction on young girls. She, too, notes how reformers campaigned to control the reading of youths. She also cogently argues how the reader of this literature used books to resist just such control. Librarians eagerly joined the campaign against cheap literature and much of this campaign was aimed at girls' reading habits. But girls resisted and, in fact, used reading to empower themselves through the fictional characters. Romalov enriches her essay with the use of marginalia in books to illustrate this point. Her descriptions of readers' responses written in the margins of the books give us a rare insight into how past readers understood and responded to the literature. It is fascinating to read how girls took the heroines in the books as models of behavior.

In a similar vein E. M. Sanchez-Saavedra writes on how the competition between publishers Edwin Brett and Frank Leslie highlighted the sensational character of the literature, the entertaining value of violence, and the glamorization of criminals and sociopathic behavior. Jesse James and other criminals became popular heroes and fueled the imagination of the public for the exotic West and the myth of the outlaw. Sanchez-Saavedra also contributes to the history of the book trade and publishing with his description of the piracy wars over cheap literature.

Perhaps one of the best-known dime-novel characters was Nick

Carter. J. Randolph Cox describes and surveys the literature of this popular detective. Cox starts with Carter's "birth" in 1886 as the "American Sherlock Holmes" and watches him grow up as he becomes the suave James Bond-type secret agent of the last half of the 20th century, proving that these characters, *mutatis mutandis*, appeal across a wide span of time. Importantly, Cox also gives the publishing history of the Nick Carter series. He describes the colored covers and provides a very useful survey of the major formats of the series that spanned the century from 1886 to 1990.

Adventure, war, and fighting were prevalent themes in popular fiction. David K. Vaughan writes of the adventure of aviation. The early days of aviation were heady ones and people eagerly snapped up accounts of flying. The pioneers of aviation symbolized determination, daring, new perspectives on the world, and even opportunities for youth. As stories of exploration dazzled readers in the 19th century, so did the daring exploits of aviators. But as Vaughan shows, aviation became more realistic with tales of war in 1930s Spain. The romanticism died out, and so did the appeal of the books.

But war could also spark the popular imagination, as M. Paul Holsinger deftly shows in his analysis of the popular literature of victory in World War II and after. These novels of military heroism glamorized the violence of war and the victory-at-all-costs theme. People did not want to hear about the depressing realities of war: they wanted idealized, romantic accounts, similar to the propaganda movies of World War II and later *Rambo*-type movies of our own age. Holsinger rightly points out that these books glamorized war, but the public had enough of the grimness of battlefield casualties in the journalistic accounts of the time. These books were to entertain, not to disturb.

Nothing symbolizes war so realistically as the combat carried out between two men in the prizefighting ring. The focus of Deidre A. Johnson's paper is the pugilistic struggle between the fictional John L. Sullivan and Gentleman Jim Corbett. This was the heroic age of prizefighting. It was difficult for fictional renditions to beat journalistic accounts of the thrilling 100-plus rounds of bare knuckle fighting in 100-degree temperature. Edward Stratemeyer, one of the most prolific of all dime-novel authors, attempted to fictionalize as well as to moralize the competition between two of the most famous

boxers of the age. Uncharacteristically, the fighters were moral exemplars whose stories of winning against the odds were intended to uplift the populace. As in Horatio Alger stories, hard work and a good life will lead to success. No matter that the real prizefighters could be rowdy, whoring, and hard-drinking battlers outside the ring. But fictional descriptions of fights could not compete against the real thing. Stratemeyer apparently learned this point all too well as Johnson shows how he lifted almost verbatim accounts of the prizefights from the newspapers. I think the point here is, although Johnson does not explicitly make this conclusion, that these fighters did not lend themselves particularly well to popular morality tales.

One of the most sensational newspaper stories of the late 19th century was the murder case of Lizzie Borden. Kathleen Chamberlain provides a masterful analysis of how the fictional rendition of such a case supported the social and economic system and reaffirmed moral order in the world. Chamberlain skillfully analyzes how language reconstructs events to serve the needs of the hegemonic culture. Significantly, she also surveys how differently Borden is read as a cultural construct or text according to the era. Also, Chamberlain shows how such authors as the prolific Edward Stratemeyer used a counterfeiting plot in the Borden case and how counterfeiting posed a very real threat to the burgeoning capitalist economy. But in the end, after all the twists and turns of plot, this construction of reality reinforced the social order. My introductory quote from *The Young Malefactor* illustrates how seriously counterfeiting was taken and how contemporaries thought dime novels could easily lead to this crime.

Of the many authors of dime novels, the most famous and perhaps most surprising to the modern reader was Louisa May Alcott. Alcott was the writer who took to task the author of juvenile literature "Oliver Optic" (William Taylor Adams, author of over 125 books and 1,000 short stories) for his sensationalism, so it is all the more astonishing that we find her as the author of not one, but at least three sensational thrillers. In a plenary address at the Library of Congress symposium Leona Rostenberg and Madeleine B. Stern teamed up to discuss Alcott's activity in this disreputable literary field. Leona Rostenberg introduces the topic with a detective story of her own on her finding Alcott's dime-novel pseudonym while

doing research at Harvard's Houghton Library. Madeleine B. Stern then goes on to discuss Alcott's literary output in the genre she scorned. In this way Stern shows that a canonical author could, and did, easily cross lines into other genres, whether for money or for other reasons. Alcott used many of the themes and devices of the popular stories of the day, including drug addiction, mental illness, suicide, appearances and disappearances, mysterious visitors, femmes fatales, and the like. Alcott gave the dime-novel public what it wanted in the form of sensational, escapist fiction. Stern's documentation of Alcott's other literary life makes for fascinating reading and also for a reevaluation of the author who had her characters in *Little Women* sincerely believe that commitment to the work ethic keeps one from mischief and ultimately brings success, happiness and moral fulfillment.

H. Irving Hancock, a chemist, wrote numerous works, including detective fiction and especially juvenile series books. Many of his writings focused on physical fitness and the military. Elizabeth S. Frank concentrates on his *Conquest of the United States Series*. This series consisted of blatant propaganda for the war-preparedness movement before World War I and did not sell particularly well. Frank notes that many of these books had a somber or strident tone, and therefore their lackluster sales are not surprising. Juveniles wanted adventure stories, even if they glamorized or romanticized war. The case of the *Conquest* series, I believe, underlines how the best authors had to wrap their cultural and moral values in an interesting or even sensational story where the point slips through perhaps unnoticed but still absorbed. Hancock was unable to do this, and similar didactic and propaganda works just did not catch on with the general public.

Angela J. Farkas relates how Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller turned to writing novels for financial reasons. Her *Bride of the Tomb* was a great financial success. But the writing of the *Bride of the Tomb* carries more than just personal economic importance. Farkas shows how Mrs. Miller composed her novel from studying the weekly sensational story papers; she purposefully searched for and reconstructed a successful novelistic formula. Farkas's close reading of the *Bride of the Tomb* and indeed, of Mrs. Miller herself, brings out compelling evidence on the social, economic, and cultural suppres-

sion or "claustration" of women in the 19th century. Her equation of women buried alive with the social restrictions placed on them resonates throughout this literature. Farkas concentrates on the popularity of this fiction with working-class women, but middle-class women had the same feeling of suffocation, especially in their married lives. Nervous disease or neurasthenia was prevalent among bourgeois women at the end of the 19th century. One only has to read Charlotte Perkins Gilman's autobiographical short story "The Yellow Wall Paper" (1892) to see that all classes of women had similar feelings of oppression and the need for liberation.

H. Alan Pickrell, however, shows that males had very different perceptions of women than the claustrated, suppressed female of Mrs. Miller's writing. On the contrary, H. Rider Haggard's character, Ayesha, the "She-who-must-be-obeyed," in the popular novel *She*, is a powerful and beautiful leader of a matriarchal society in the fantasy land of Kor. Haggard's imagery of Ayesha as serpent-like, sinister and powerful, obviously fed the subconscious male fears of the succubus-like woman. The female danger to male civilization was perhaps reason enough to suppress women's desires. It is significant that such over-compensating males as Theodore Roosevelt took Haggard as their favorite novelist. It is also true that Haggard's Allen Quartermaine stories fueled the adventure fantasies of countless males, and to a certain extent, still do today. Pickrell also shows how L. Frank Baum used the character of Ayesha and other literary devices of Haggard in his popular Oz series. But Baum was able to transform the totally evil into something much more benign in his stories. Perhaps this is why Baum is still read today much more often than Haggard. The public can take only so much of the realities, or even fantasies, of evil beyond redemption.

Jean Carwile Masteller takes the prolific author Laura Jean Libbey as her subject. Masteller skillfully integrates elements of publishing history, reader reception theory, and literary history in her essay. She has mined the archival sources on Libbey to show just how successful a writer she was. Over 15 million copies of her books were printed–an enormous success by the standards of any day. Masteller explains Libbey's success with her formulaic fiction directed at working-class female readers. Exciting stories of the liberation of working-class women through romance and sudden

wealth could hardly miss. Libbey struck the same chord with the public as Mrs. Miller and *The Bride of the Tomb*, but with more success. Libbey's novels had the villains and plot twists of similar fiction of the time, with true love always winning out. Libbey succeeded in maintaining her popularity across the years by using topical subjects to keep her novels current. Masteller brings the story to the present times, first with her discussion of the ever popular Harlequin romances, and then with an analysis of the fiction of Jayne Ann Krentz. Masteller concludes that the romance novel changed to reflect different cultures and the evolving status of women in society, but the end remained the same: the search for and discovery of the right romantic partner.

The papers collected here reflect the varieties of interdisciplinary research current on these literary genres. The essays put to rest any lingering doubts on the scholarly value of collecting and studying dime novels, series books, and paperbacks. These scholars who first presented their papers at the Library of Congress symposium have made it clear that the study of this material is central to the understanding of American culture. Their work makes an important contribution to the redefinition of the role of popular fiction in American life.

A Brief History of Dime Novels: Formats and Contents, 1860-1933

Edward T. LeBlanc

SUMMARY. Irwin P. Beadle issued the first dime novel, *Malaeska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, by Ann Stephens, in 1860. Although the last original dime novel was published in 1915, reprints appeared until 1933, but long since the radio and motion pictures had replaced dime novels in the popular imagination. This paper will give a concise history of American dime novels, describe their various formats, and review their contents. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: getinfo@haworth.com]*

First it is necessary to define the term "dime novel." The meaning of the term has undergone many changes since its first use by Irwin P. Beadle in 1860 when he put his name on a series of paper-covered novels and called them *Beadle's Dime Novels*. The term has frequently and erroneously been applied to many inexpensive

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paperbacks. However, it is necessary to narrow the definition still further, since many British and American classics were published as inexpensive paperbacks in the nineteenth century.

Charles Bragin, the dean of dime novel collectors during the 1930s and 1940s, issued a dime novel bibliography in 1938 in which he defined the term "dime novel" as paper-covered "lurid literature of the [American] west, detectives, bandits, etc." (p. 29). Other collectors have used the phrase "blood and thunder" to describe dime novels. This description distinguishes them from the inexpensive paper-covered editions of the works of such noted literary figures as Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, and even William Shakespeare–authors whose works can hardly be called dime novels. So, in addition to format, which in many cases was the same for both types of publication, the definition of dime novels must incorporate the type of story being published.

Beadle was not the first publisher of paper-covered novels; they had been published in some form in the 1830s. These pre-Beadle novels were somewhat larger in size than dime novels and usually sold for 25c. However, twenty-five cents for reading matter was out of the reach of most people at a time when wages were $1.00 a day for most laboring positions and when farm labor was usually for room and board and very little else. Compulsory school laws had created a demand for reading material, and more of the general public could now read and write. In a society that had few sources of entertainment, the time was ripe for cheap novels.

Erastus Beadle, who had been publishing a juvenile magazine and song sheets in Buffalo, New York, migrated to New York City along with his younger brother, Irwin, where they began printing penny song books. It was Irwin Beadle who recognized a potential market and, in June 1860, launched his series of ten-cent novels, to be issued on a regular basis as *Beadle's Dime Novels* (1860-74). The series lasted for 321 issues. These early Beadle books, which were often referred to as "yellow backs," had covers of a distinctive burnt orange color. In 1874, the name of the series changed to *Beadle's New Dime Novels* (1874-85); it continued for another 309 issues, all reprints of the earlier numbers. The covers also changed:

they were now hand colored; the color was applied individually with stencils.

A short time after Beadle began publishing his dime novels, imitators and rival publishers emerged. The foremost of these was *Munro's Ten Cent Novels* (1863-77), published by George Munro, who had been foreman of the Beadle printing plant. Other publishers also entered the field: among them were Elliott, Thomes and Talbot, with *Ten Cent Novelettes* (1863-70); Robert DeWitt, with *DeWitt's Ten Cent Romances* (1867-73); and Norman Munro–brother of George–with *Ten Cent Popular Novels* (1870-75). They all used the original dime novel format: a small booklet, which ranged from 6 1/4" × 4" to 9" by 6", averaging about 100 pages. These cost from five to 25 cents–ironically, dime novels did not always cost a dime. This format lasted from 1860 through 1884.

Aimed at an adult readership, the earliest dime novels featured American subjects, either in the form of historical fiction, biographies, or novels of the contemporary American west. Stories of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the colonists' wars with Indians predominated. The Beadles published Revolutionary War titles such as "Gideon Gobold; or, The Faithful and Unfaithful of 1780. A Tale of Arnold's Treason" (Iron, 1862), about Benedict Arnold and Major Andre, and "The Schuykill Rangers; or, The Bride of Valley Forge" (Hazelton, 1865), which showed Washington at Valley Forge.

Some other representative titles illustrate the range of material covered: "Eagle Eye; or, Ralph Warren and His Red Friend. A Story of the Fall of Oswego" (Hamilton, 1865), "Big Brave, Scout of the Mohawk. A Story of the French-Indian War" (Wilton, 1873), "The Cruiser of the Bay. A Tale of the War of 1812" (Klapp, 1866). The Civil War was not forgotten, although most stories about the Civil War came later. Other popular subjects were sea stories and border romances, the latter with a heavy emphasis on Indian fighting.

In 1877 Erastus Beadle launched a new format which proved very popular. This was the quarto size, a standard sheet of printing paper folded to produce a 16-page pamphlet that measured approximately 8 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches. This was followed in 1884 by an octavo size, a smaller pamphlet of 32 pages that measured approximately 7 x 10 inches. They ranged in cost from 5 to 10 cents. Lurid

black-and-white illustrations decorated the covers; dime novels in this format are often referred to as "black and whites" because of the cover art. Beadle was one of the first to publish in the new quarto format, using it for *Beadle's Dime Library* (1877-1905) and *Beadle's Half-Dime Library* (1877-1905).

Other publishers soon entered the field: Frank Tousey with the *Wide Awake Library* (1878-1898); George Munro with the *Old Sleuth Library* (1885-1905) of detective stories about Old Sleuth and other detectives; Norman Munro with the *Old Cap Collier Library* (1883-99), yet another anthology series featuring dime novel detective stories. In the late 1880s, Street and Smith started the *Log Cabin Library* (1889-97), and the firm soon had a number of dime novel series in print, including the *Nugget Library* (1889-92), *New York Five Cent Library* (1892-96), and *Nick Carter Library* (1891-96). Beadle also added more dime novel series to the firm's publications: *Beadle's Pocket Library* (1884-93), *Beadle's Boys Library of Sport and Adventure* (1881-84, quarto; 1884-90, octavo), and *Beadle's Popular Library* (1891-92).

With *Beadle's Half-Dime Library*, the firm reached for a teenage audience, and soon most dime novel publishers were issuing series devoted to younger readers, though most also continued to feature some series for adults. The difference in price seems to be the determining factor in identifying audience: ten cents for fiction for adults, five cents for teenagers.

In 1877, Beadle also introduced the concept of a recurring hero in the dime novel who appeared in a series of stories at more or less regular intervals; his name was Deadwood Dick and his adventures were recounted in *Beadle's Half-Dime Library* until 1897 (Wheeler, 1877).

During the 1880s, Beadle also began featuring stories about Buffalo Bill, a western hero who had appeared in three earlier Street and Smith serials (Buntline, 1869; Buntline, 1872, March 3; Buntline, 1872, August 7). Soon Buffalo Bill was a popular hero, appearing in many publications including *Beadle's Dime Library*, Frank Tousey's *Wide Awake Library*, as well as Street and Smith's *New York Weekly*. In 1902, Street and Smith began a series called *Buffalo Bill Stories*, which lasted until 1912; it was succeeded by *New Buffalo Bill Weekly* (1912-1919), which was transformed into

Western Story Magazine, first in dime novel format, then in pulp magazine format. The stories from these publications were kept in print in pocket book form until 1932. Beginning in 1907, the stories were collected in the *Far West Library* (1907-1915), reprinted as *Buffalo Bill Border Stories* (1917-1925), and finally as *Great Western Library* (1927-1932).

Another popular dime novel hero was Nick Carter. He had first appeared in 1886, in a serial in Street and Smith's *New York Weekly* entitled "The Old Detective's Pupil." The pupil in the story was Nick. He proved to be so popular that in 1891 Street and Smith started a series devoted exclusively to his exploits, *The Nick Carter Library*, then continued them in the *New Nick Carter Weekly* through 1912, *Nick Carter Stories* (1912-1915), and in reprints in pocket form (mostly the *Magnet Library* and *New Magnet Library*) until 1933.

Other characters also gained popularity, including bandit Jesse James, who appeared in some stories in Frank Tousey's *New York Detective Library* (1883-98); Street and Smith's *Log Cabin Library* (1889-97); Tousey's *James Boys Weekly* (1900-03); Street and Smith's *Jesse James Stories* (1901-03); and Arthur Westbrook's *Adventure Series* (1908-33).

In 1896, Street and Smith made a major innovation in a new dime novel series by publishing the *Tip Top Weekly* (1896-1912) with colored pictorial covers. (It was succeeded by *New Tip Top Weekly*, 1912-1915.) Within a year most dime novels were being published with colored covers, and their content was mainly directed at the younger audience.

Early in the 20th century, Street and Smith published five major dime novel publications: *Brave and Bold* (1902-1911), where adventure was featured; *Tip Top Weekly*, Merriwell–sports and adventure stories; *Nick Carter Weekly*, detective stories; *Diamond Dick Jr.* (1896-1911), about a western hero in a more modern western setting; and *Buffalo Bill Stories*. Frank Tousey, the most successful dime novel publisher after Street and Smith, published what collectors call "the big six": *Pluck and Luck* (1898-1929), featuring adventure stories; *Work and Win* (1898-1925), where the sports adventures of Fred Fearnot appeared; *Secret Service* (1899-1928), where the adventures of the Bradys, detectives par excellence, were

featured; *Liberty Boys of '76* (1901-1925), a group of 100 young men who won the war against Britain and gained the colonies their independence; *Wild West Weekly* (1902-1927), where the heroic "Young Wild West" (better known as "Wild") tamed the West; and *Fame and Fortune* (1905-1928), stories of boys who made money, mostly in Wall Street. Both Tousey and Street and Smith also published many other short-lived series. The stories from these later ones found their way into other publications when sales of the originals dropped off.

Dime novels covered every possible subject imaginable: circus, railroading, firefighting, sports, mystery (with detectives of every kind), science fiction and fantasy, adventure in faraway places, sea stories (with polar exploration a favorite), westerns, mining camps of the gold fields. Some series also continued the trend of featuring recognizable recurring characters. Frank Merriwell, one of the most popular sports heroes of all time, and his brother Dick appeared in *Tip Top Weekly* for 850 weekly issues; his son, Frank, Jr., continued the adventures for another 136 weeks in *New Tip Top Weekly.* (The stories from these were collected in pocketbook format: Street and Smith's *Medal Library* and *New Medal Library* (1899-1915) and later reprinted in the Merriwell series (1921-30).) He had imitators, of course. Fred Fearnot, whose adventures were chronicled in Tousey's *Work and Win Weekly*, became his fiercest rival. Other imitators included Phil Rushington, Jack Lightfoot, Dick Daresome, and Jack Standfast.

Erastus Beadle died in 1894, his partner William Adams in 1896, and the business was sold to M. J. Ivers, who continued the libraries until 1905. Ivers also reprinted some series with color covers, but these were short-lived. The competition of Street and Smith and Frank Tousey was too much. In 1908, the Arthur Westbrook Company bought out the M. J. Ivers Company and continued to reprint some of the Beadle stories until the 1930s. From the late 1890s through 1915, when the last of the original dime novels were published, the field was primarily divided between Street and Smith and Frank Tousey. In the end, Street and Smith bought out the Frank Tousey line, using the names to continue in the pulp field with a new and different kind of story.

All through this period, the serial story papers also flourished.