Dime Novels

Dime novels thrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States. Erastus Beadle published the first dime novel in 1860, and his quick success prompted many other firms to enter the market. Dime novels were short works of fiction, usually focused on the dramatic exploits of a single heroic character. As evidenced by their name, dime novels were sold for a dime (sometimes a nickel), and featured colorful cover illustrations. They were bound in paper, making them light, portable, and somewhat ephemeral. Publishers issued dime novels in series, numbering each novel individually. (This practice enabled publishers to take advantage of a postal loophole, and send their novels through the mail at the much cheaper rates established for periodicals.) Dime novels were read by literate adults of all ages, although over time young men and boys became the primary audience.

The Newberry has a small number of American dime novels (approximately 100). Most of the Newberry’s dime novels focus on the American frontier, cowboys, scouts, and Indians, which is fitting considering the library’s major collections on Western Americana and American Indians. The “first” dime novel (Malaeska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter, 1860) may be found at the Newberry, along with additional works dating up to 1909. We also have a number of major bibliographical sources useful for dime novel research.

The Newberry’s Online Catalog is the best place to check for dime novels and related items. If you are searching for a particular author or title, search under these headings first. You might also try searching under the publisher’s name or the name of the series. Bibliographies and reference works (below) may help you identify likely authors, titles, publishers, and series. The subject heading “dime novels” will uncover some items at the Newberry, but not all.

Bibliographies and Reference Works


*Dime Novel Round-Up, Bibliographic Listings*. Call Number: PS374 D5 D55 (specify year). See *Dime Novel Round-Up Bibliographic Listings* for a list of available bibliographies. The Newberry has *Dime Novel Round-Up* from 1931-present. Note: some items on this list are individually cataloged.


Selected Dime Novels at the Newberry


The Shadow Scout; or, Screaming Moses of the Fishkill Mountains, by Ned Buntline (i.e. Edward Zane Carroll Judson). Beadle’s Frontier Series, No. 41. Cleveland: A. Westbrook, 1908. Call Number: Ayer 438 B34 no. 41.


**Collections at Other Institutions**

- **DePaul University - Pulp Fiction Magazines.** There are 106 individual serial magazine titles in the collection. There are also over 50 pulp fiction book titles.
- **Northern Illinois University - Albert Johannsen Collection.** The Albert Johannsen Collection includes more than 50,000 dime novels.
- **Library of Congress - Dime Novels.** The Library of Congress has nearly 40,000 dime novels in its collection.
- **University of Minnesota - Hess Collection.** Hess Collection has a substantial collection of dime novels.
- **American Women’s Dime Novel Project.** This is a list of dime novel archives in the United States.

**Digital Resources**

- **American Women’s Dime Novel Project: Dime Novels for Women, 1870-1920**
- **Dime Novels and Penny Dreadfuls.** Includes a Dime Novel Timeline.
- **Dime Novels at the Library of Congress, including Meeting of Frontiers: Collections from the Library of Congress: Books and Serials**
- **Nineteenth Century Girls’ Series**
- **Street & Smith Dime Collection** at Syracuse University