

# Dime Novels Were Copyright Deposits

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Representative of an American reading and publishing phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century, examples of dime novels have recently been on display in the American Treasures exhibit in the Thomas Jefferson Building. The paperback books, generally about 70,000 words in length, are called “dime novels” because they sold for that price. The covers of the first such stories were printed on salmon colored paper and included a wrapper, but by 1877, that convention ceased.

The stories were originally reprints from earlier publications. The term “dime novel” started with the first in a series published by Beadle and Adams of New York that continued from 1860 until 1885. The first few books did not have illustrations, but soon the covers came to include woodcuts, some lurid in content, with shootings, strife with Indians, and other conflicts.

The stories generally involved adventure, frequently in the Wild West, and western heroes such as Wild Bill Hickock, Jesse James, and Kit Carson. By 1872, detective stories were added to the dime novel genre, which grew to include medieval romance stories, detective stories, and others. Authors cranked out new stories weekly, if not more frequently.

The Beadle and Adams series quickly acquired competitors, such as the *Rough Rider Weekly*, *Munro's Ten Cent Novels*, and the Fireside Series, and even competed with itself with the *Frank Starr's New York Library* series. The latter series later became the New York Library.

The Library of Congress collections include 40,000 dime novels that represent part of the cultural history of America's reading public and publishing industry. These items came to the Library because they were submitted as deposits accompanying applications for copyright registration. Copyright deposit continues to be a great source of materials for the Library's collections. In the past decade alone, the value of works transferred to the Library exceeds \$335,000,000.

Who knows what deposits being submitted today will be on display in the next century? ©

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