Frontier Fantasies: Imagining the American West in the Dime Novel

Enormously popular and critically maligned, the dime novel was one of the first forms of mass culture in the United States. The Western adventure story dominated the dime novel industry in the 1860s and 1870s. Tales of the frontier, wherever it was – upstate New York, the Great Plains, or the California gold country – helped to define a mythical American identity. Come see these “Books for the Million!” that justified Western expansion with mail-order myths of violent transgressions, passionate romances, and thrilling rescues.

The exhibition was curated by Laura Braunstein and was on display in the Class of 1965 Galleries from August 15 to October 14, 2008.

Materials Included in the Exhibition


4. *Tales, Traditions and Romance of Border and Revolutionary Times: The Little Sentinel; Tecumseh and the Prisoners; Horsewhipping a Tyrant; The Mother’s Trial*. New York: Beadle and Company, 1863. Dime Novels 219
5. *Tales, Traditions and Romance of Border and Revolutionary Times: Magnanimity of Rohn-Yen-Ness; Woman Capturing the Hessian; Battle of Bloody Brook; The Heroic Dog*. New York: Beadle and Company, 1864. Dime Novels 225


