

BOOKS FOR THE MILLION!

A DOLLAR BOOK FOR A DIME!!

This advertisement, printed in the *New York Tribune* for June 7, 1860, announced the birth of the dime novel. The first dime novel, *Malaeska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, was not an original work. It had been published in the *Woman's Companion* magazine in 1839. What was new about dime novels was the format and advertising.

Seth Jones was one of Abraham Lincoln's favorite characters. All over the country posters and graffiti asked "Who is Seth Jones?" and later answered with full-size portraits of the character. Written by Edward Ellis, then a nineteen year-old school teacher, *Seth Jones* sold over 600,000 copies and was translated into several languages. It marked the beginning of the mass-market sensational adventure!

Never before or since has book publishing held a larger share of the gross national product. It had the same relationship to youth culture as television does today. Beadle and Adams alone published more than 7,500 novels over 35 years. While there is no way to know the total amount of dime novels printed because of the use of cheap paper prone to deterioration, Horatio Alger accounts for about 250,000,000 copies.

For the first two decades the readership seemed obsessed with the frontier, and its semi-historical heroes and heroines. Public preference slowly moved to the crimes of the James Boys, *Frank James on the Trail* being typical in its sadistic details. This love of crime fiction led to detective westerns, then to city detectives, then to success fiction, and on to globe-hopping adventure. Buffalo Bill and others would continue to be printed throughout the medium's history, but dime novel publishing was defined by a progression of themes driven by an insatiable market.