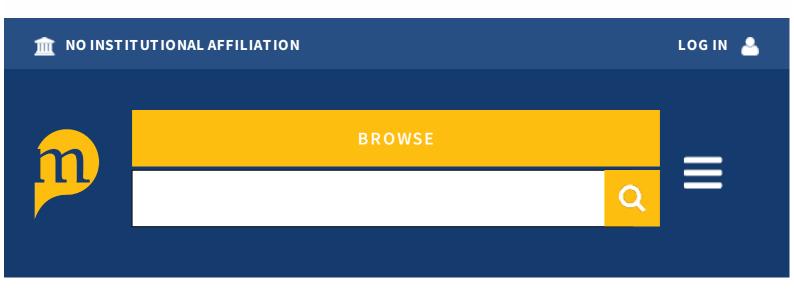
Not to be circulated: The Response of children's librarians to dime novels and series books.



Not to Be Circulated: The Response of Children's Librarians to Dime Novels and Series Books

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Not to Be Circulated:

The Response of Children's Librarians to Dime Novels and Series Books

Mark I. West (bio)

Recent attempts to limit children's access to controversial books have generally met with stiff opposition from librarians. Through its Office of Intellectual Freedom, the American Library Association has waged a vigorous campaign against censoring children's books. Librarians, however, have not always defended children's freedom to read a broad range of literature. There was a time when they felt duty-bound to censor certain forms of children's literature.

American librarians first took a serious interest in children in the late nineteenth century. Although most libraries did not hire special librarians to work with children until the 1890s or early 1900s, children's literature began attracting the generation of general librarians as early as the mid-1870s. An increasing number of librarians believed that children's reading materials shaped their young readers' minds, and because of this belief, some felt that it was their duty to make certain that children read nothing but "wholesome" literature. The positive effect of this attitude was a movement on the part of librarians to improve the overall status of children's literature. To achieve this goal, some librarians wrote books of literary criticism on children's literature and promoted the introduction of college courses on children's literature (Nesbitt 416-424). But at the same time, the idea that children should read only "quality" books caused a number of librarians to suppress children's books that they judged to be unwholesome. The leaders of this campaign frequently expressed their views on children's literature in articles in the Library Journal and in other periodicals intended for librarians. In these articles, the authors made it clear that they viewed young readers as fragile innocents in need of protection.

Librarians from this era worried more about dime novels than any other type of children's literature. Several argued that the exciting plots, violent action scenes, depraved villains, and omnipotent heroes found in many dime novels had a corruptive influence on the minds of juvenile readers, ruining their reading tastes and causing them to engage in

criminal behavior. The editors of the *Library Journal* reprinted a number of newspaper articles in which the reading of dime novels was cited as the reason that children engaged in wrongdoing. In "Dime Novel Work," for example, C. M. Hewins reported that a fourteen-year-old boy "shot himself during a period of mental aberration caused by reading dime novels" (92).

Librarians devised unique methods of discouraging children from reading dime novels. Minerva L. Saunders, who worked for the public library in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was one such librarian. In an article Saunders wrote for the Library Journal, she noticed that a number of children who used the library's reading room did not peruse books owned by the library. Instead, they read dime novels, which they concealed between the covers of bona fide library books. Whenever Saunders spotted children reading dime novels, she made it a point to tell them "the dangers of reading the stuff." Her lectures, however, "seemed to have little effect." In an effort to devise a more effective method of persuading children not to read dime novels, Saunders, together with W. R. Sayles, a trustee of the library, decided to employ scare tactics. Saunders and Sayles purchased a scrapbook which they filled with "clippings from newspapers at home and abroad, concerning the pernicious effect upon boys of reading such literature and especially items of police news . . . in which the dime novel was the inspiration to the unlawful deeds which brought the little fellows into the clutches of the police or into danger and trouble." After completing the scrapbook, Saunders would require every child she caught with a dime novel to read the clippings in her scrapbook. She reported that after reading these articles the offending child "was willing to give up his dime novel and be guided in the selection of his reading material" (105).

Most librarians who published articles on children's literature in the 1870s and '80s felt that librarians should guide children toward respected works of literature and nonfiction, such as...

censorship

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Episodic analysis of novels, non-residential premises give a larger projection on the axis than the popular cycle.

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