**Archaeology & History in Your Backyard**

**Dime Novels, Penny Dreadfuls & Pulp Westerns**

Hello Everyone! This is Archaeology and History in Your Backyard and my name is Dixie. X 88.7 FM and the Torrance County Archaeological Society are pleased to bring you a series of programs designed to acquaint you, our listening audience with little known people, places and events that took place in the past, right here in your own backyard. For the most part, we will be covering interesting facts, stories and legends about the past, and people that lived right here in the Estancia Valley and surrounding areas in central New Mexico. Our goal is to inform, educate, and possibly enlist your help in preserving and protecting our past.

Our show today will focus on dime novels also known as penny dreadful and pulp westerns.

This program was written by Dixie Boyle and produced by Bill Simms. Thank you for joining us today.

The term dime novel refers to the quickly written, sensationalized, short novels that sprang up after the Civil War. Americans were ready for a little diversion from the war years and were interested in the lives of the American outlaw, Indian tribes and more. In order to sell the novels, dime novel authors wrote more fiction than fact and this same information would leak into history books and newspaper articles. This is one of the reasons why it is so hard to research the lives of these early outlaws.

Ann Stephens published a novel about the Indian wife of a white hunter which is credited with being the first dime novel published in 1860. Stephens originally published the book as a serial for the magazine Ladies companion in February and March of 1839. This would be the first book in Beadle and Adams Beadle’s Dime Novel Series, which would soon explode into a major business as Americans consumed the books and wanted more and more.

These dime novel stories were taken from frontier tales reprinted from newspaper and magazine archives. Beadles Dime Novels were an instant success, especially with the young, working class of men who moved to the cities after the Civil War looking for opportunities. Also, the literacy rate in America was the highest it had ever been and more and more people were reading. Sensational newspaper articles and dime novels about the country’s outlaw gangs were popular reading during this era in American history.

In the late 1860s and 1870s, there was a lot of competition among publishers to sell these short, racy novels and publishers like Robert DeWitt and George Munro identified their books by title and the color choice of the paper wrappers on the books. During these years, Beadle & Adams established the Frank Starr line. The publication of dime novels was a major industry before the turn of the 20th Century.

Dime novels became even more popular after serial characters were introduced. One of the first to become popular was Frank Reade. Another story titled Old Sleuth would become the first detective novel and after this the writers would move away from the American outlaw and write mysteries.

In the 1870s, dime novels dropped their prices and became the popular nickel weekly. These weeklies were published in magazine-style publications with sensationalized stories about detectives solving unbelievable cases. Soon these stories were being marketed to young, blue-collar boys and the topics included adventure, mystery, romance, westerns and stories about sports.

Pat Garrett, the one time sheriff of Lincoln County and killer of Billy the Kid, wrote the Authentic Life of Billy the Kid. This book in many ways was to justify his actions in shooting the infamous outlaw in the back. When the book was distributed in 1882, the publisher did not send out as many copies as Garrett desired and as a consequence very few copies were sold. Garrett would make little money during his lifetime on the book.

In 1954, the fifth publisher had taken up his book and by this time it had become a major reference and history book on the life of Billy the Kid, unfortunately many of the facts in the book were not true. Publishers continued printing the book through a tenth printing in 1976. For over a hundred years after the death of the infamous outlaw, Garrett’s book was considered factual.

Although, present-day historians dispute much of the information written by Pat Garrett, many feel there would not have been any real information presented on the Kid if not for this book. It was a starting point for future historians who would research the information presented in the book. This would lead to a series of dime novels about Billy the Kid for the next two decades.

Over eight hundred dime novels were written about Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show. Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane both worked for Cody and they too soon became famous characters in these novels making them well known during their time. Both, Hickok and Calamity Jane often drank whiskey while talking about their lives and added many untrue details. When serious books about the American West began to emerge, it was difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction.

The characters in these types of books were out of the ordinary and never defeated in the end. A southwestern cowboy named Pecos Bill lassoed lightning and rode cyclones well into the 1920s. This would be the image the children of the 1920s grew up with and many began to believe these stories and tell them to their children and grandchildren. These books were eventually replaced with another form of pulp fiction in the Western Story Magazine.

Many of these pulp fiction books during this era were made up of western adventures, stories about the Texas Rangers, made-up frontier tales, and more and more flooded the market. In the 1940s Western paperbacks became the rage. In the 1930s Whitman Publishing Company began to publish smaller books with a comic book look. Although, this type of book has not been published in decades, they are highly collectible.

Since these early novels were some of the first written about the American West, many believed the exploits of these characters. Years later when more serious writers began to research the American West, it was not always easy to get at the truth. Many of the facts we learned as children are totally wrong but it seems no one wants to believe it.

This has been Archaeology and History in Your Backyard, a series that will take you through our area’s history in future episodes.

The Torrance County Archaeological Society meets at 7 PM the first Tuesday of every month from March through November. We meet at the East Torrance Soil and Water Education Building at 700 S. 10th Street in Estancia. Please come and join us.

You can listen to Archaeology and History in Your Backyard Tuesday at 7 PM, Thursday at 12:15 PM and Saturday at 4 PM. Thanks for listening!

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