

Christmas during the Great Depression:

Read the following excerpt written by Ruth Lace, who lived during the Great Depression. After reading, **write a compare/contrast essay in which you compare the way people celebrated Christmas in the 1930's in comparison to how you celebrate it today.** Please be specific and detailed in your response, for example, choose 3 things that are similar to how you celebrate Christmas, and 3 things that are different from the excerpt. Or, write a thorough 2 paragraph response in discussing how your Christmas celebration is completely different from the primary source.

Responses may be NEATLY handwritten or typed and shared with me via googledoc at aschramm@isd186.org

The article can also be found online at:

<http://ruthlace.blogspot.com/2006/12/christmas-in-united-states-south-in.html>

Saturday, December 19, 2009

Christmas During the Great Depression.

People keep asking about growing up during the Great Depression. Specifically, "how was Christmas celebrated? "

Today we see Christmas decorations in stores before labor Day. When I was a child in the 1920's and 30's, we did not start decorating for Christmas in September. Neither we nor our neighbors had the time nor money to decorate for Christmas until Christmas week. Usually it was done on Christmas Eve.

Our Christmas tree was a pine tree brought in from a nearby wooded area between our house and the Yellow River. In my earliest memories of our Christmas trees,(late 1920's) we decorated the tree with strings of popped corn, red and green roping from the store and

home made roping made of colored paper rings as in the picture above.

I remember at least one Christmas when we had the red and green roping from corner to corner across the ceiling, coming down into a swag with a large Christmas green paper bell attached in the center! It was the kind of bell that folded up and made a round bell when spread open.

I remember as a child, lying in bed on Christmas Eve, trying to go to sleep so it would be Christmas when I woke up. Christmas was Christmas Day.

Children in my day didn't have as much reason to be excited about Christmas presents as children do today. Or perhaps they had more reason?

When I woke up, there would be a stocking (one of my knee stockings left on a chair beside my bed) filled with candy and raisins (dried on the stems), a large red apple and an orange. There would also be some stick candy and chocolate drops and nuts, walnuts, pecans and large Brazil nuts.

I might also receive a pair of warm gloves, a scarf or cap and a pair of roller skates. I loved skating and skating up and down the paved sidewalks was a common activity for children and youth. We had paved walkways as everyone walked. The first paved roads in my town are in my memory bank as the South began to recover enough to prepare roads for the a few cars that were appearing in the mid thirties.

We did not have bowls of fresh fruit and/or nuts on the table or in the fridge all the time as now. Of course, we had peaches, pears and country apples in season. But not large red "store bought" apples. Not oranges.

Oranges had to be shipped from Florida so were expensive and rare in the late twenties and early 30's. My mother (3-6-1885 - 12-07-1973) told me how she and her little sisters would sit and eat their once - a -year orange and excitedly swap slices with one another.

Bishop Arthur J. Moore, a prominent Methodist Bishop of my mother's generation told "if one fell madly in love with a girl, he might share one piece of his Christmas orange with her".

Cooking and sharing cakes was one of the special Christmas traditions in our area. Mama always cooked a Japanese Fruit Cake. I do not have the recipe but the three cake layers of the JFC would be put together with two fruit and nut layers.

Mama's chocolate cake (still the best chocolate cake I have ever tasted) with her homemade fudge icing was my favorite. She made favorites for family members and friends including a coconut layer cake, an applesauce raisin cake, and several other kinds. Cakes were ready to be served when neighbors and friend dropped by for a Christmas visit.

Mama always cooked a hen with dressing and a ham for Christmas also. Mama cooked only one turkey that I can remember. She bought the turkey alive (chickens were also bought alive in those days.) I remember that after Mama got the turkey prepared (it's head chopped off, plucked, cleaned, dressed, and cooked), she had lost her appetite for turkey.

I hate to say it, as some of you may be on your way to a Turkey Dinner, but Mama never wanted to eat turkey again. I think the ordeal of preparing a smaller bird was not quite as traumatic as preparing a big turkey.

I have seen Mama wring the neck to kill a chicken, then pour boiling water over the limp bird and pluck the feathers off a few at a time. Smelly! Then she would singe the smaller feathers and hairs off with a burning piece of newspaper, scrub the skin, and finally take the insides out.

Mama would never have been so "wasteful" as to skin the chicken, as I soon learned to do. This would delete the "singe the hairs off" step.

Also, being a city girl, I could never wring the chicken's neck but found it easier (and I thought more humane) to chop the neck off with an ax. Just thinking of this has helped to make me more and more vegetarian.