

Special Feature

A Christmas Doll

Many of us are planning to cut back just a bit on our plans for Christmas in our new Age of Austerity. As we pare the Christmas card list, forego a cashmere cardigan for hubby and settle for good, serviceable wool instead, I would like to remind you of long-ago days when a whiff of austerity had become a full-blown depression.



in the store. There were no quarters or dimes. But there was a contest! The Marengo Republican News announced a \$10 prize for the best festively-decorated house. Prize to be awarded on 18th December. Our tree was up, decorated and in the window by my birthday in mid-December. Mother scoured the house for candles and candleholders, which she put in each window.

That Ten Dollar Bill

In Northern Illinois in 1933, my mother began her holiday planning early. As was my wont, a Shirley Temple doll was the only item on my Christmas list. Although I was an only child, I was always abstemious in my letters to Santa Claus. One thing was all it took to make me happy. If there were others, well-Whoopee! Anyway, said Shirley Temple came in several sizes - small, medium and "How tall is your daughter, Madam? We can make it exactly her height!" The small one was \$10. And Mother saved until she had it by mid-November. She folded the bill carefully and slipped it under the liner in her middle dresser-drawer.

You can guess what happened. In a whirlwind of cleaning early in December, she even rearranged her dresser and put clean lining paper in each drawer. The old liners went out with the newspapers to be burned. And they were burned - along with the \$10 bill.

What to do? It was too late to put aside a quarter here and a dime there and besides, my father's grocery had been put into receivership with all the Christmas stock

She drove out to my uncle's farm and gathered pine boughs and holly. She fashioned these into large swags for each door and tied them with scarlet ribbons. On the night of the judging it had snowed and our house shone like a jewel in the frosty air.

My Shirley

She won, of course, and my Shirley was under the tree on Christmas morning. I was thrilled. I never liked big dolls. And, after all the trauma, what did Mother receive from Mr. S. Claus (alias Carleton Robb)? My darling mother, who needed underwear, stockings and a warm sweater, got red satin lounging - pyjamas with elaborate frog closures! Dad had seen them advertised in the Chicago Tribune and thought she would be pleased. He was rather surprised when she burst into tears. Still, it turned out very well. My resourceful Mama paired the top with an old black velvet skirt and wore the outfit for many Christmases after. No-one ever looked more glamorous.

As for me, I never knew there was a depression. That is the way parents like things to work out.

Trudy Yates