

## Dreams, \$35 are the legacy of activist

By Robert Anthony

When Bernice Copeland Lindsay died in a nursing home in November, all she left behind in her bank account was \$35.

Today the \$35 sits rather ironically as a symbol of the unfulfilled dreams of a woman who for decades was one of the loudest voices in Milwaukee's black community.

Those who knew her say the fact that only \$35 of her savings remains is more than ample proof of Lindsay's dedication to helping others.

The Creative Center, Lindsay's dream, exists today almost in name alone, a far cry from the extensive community arts center she envisioned when she founded it in 1963 in a home at 1108 N. 20th St.

Dreams notwithstanding, when the curtain rises Jan. 20 on the city's celebration of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday at the Performing Arts Center, Lindsay will be honored alongside two other prominent activists, James Groppi and Aurora Weier.

"She lived pretty well on what she had," said Alfreda Johnson, a long-time friend. "I just cared for her when she couldn't take care of herself. She was up and around until she got down here (Family Hospital Nursing Home)."

Johnson said Lindsay supported herself on a small pension at her home at 2518 N. Teutonia Ave. until she became incapacitated and moved to the nursing home about a year ago.

She said Lindsay's goal was to create a center for the black arts, a goal that seemed within grasp in 1972. Lindsay set her sights on the old Egyptian Theater at 3705 N. Teutonia Ave., gathered all her resources and bought it.

"She used all of her money," Johnson said. "Her husband was a railroad person. He was a red cap at (the Chicago and) North Western. He provided and saved money. She used that, her money and everything else. It never really developed into what she wanted."

The ancient auditorium was used but a few times. In 1983, after years of disrepair and vandalism, the building came down. With it came a large chunk of Lindsay's life's work, Johnson said.

"She was short of money. She had really used up her funds. Other people drained her. She got little help from the government," Johnson said.

Ald. Roy B. Nabors said he remembered Lindsay as a fighter.

"She was dedicated to the Creative Center," he said. "She wanted to make that a mecca for arts in the black community. She was a deeply spiritual person."

Nabors said Lindsay's only fault may have been that she was too ambitious. The theater building wasn't suited to the center's needs and would have required more than \$1 million to rehabilitate, he said.

Told of the \$35 Lindsay left in her bank, Nabors said he wouldn't be surprised if she had forgotten about the account.

"If she had known the money was there, she would have used it for the Creative Center," he said, only half-joking.

Nabors said although the King Day honor was well-deserved, "the tragic thing is that she won't be there to see it."

He said he remembered Lindsay, even in her old age, as "very firm, yet very thorough in her preparation. Unless you knew her very well you probably would call her bullheaded."

"Lindsay did most of her work in the '20s, '30s, '40s and '50s — before we were even heard of. I only knew her after she had gotten to be rather frail," Nabors said.

"She paved the roads on which we walk today."

David Reynolds, director of the Cosmopolitan Cultural Center, 2617 W. Fond Du Lac Ave., where the center now is housed, agreed.

"She was one of the pioneers in struggling for the betterment of the general population in the community," he said.

Reynolds said that as Lindsay's health failed, she had to delegate her duties to other people. Without her strong leadership, "things kind of weakened on her. It took someone of her caliber to do the necessary fundraising."

"We're working hard at making her idea of service ... come to reality here."

Lindsay's lifelong accomplishments run on for pages. Some include:

- She was the first black female graduate of Ohio State University's School of Journalism.
- Marquette University's Theta Sigma Phi chapter named her woman of the year in 1959.
- She was one of the founders of the Mary Church Terrel Club in 1933.
- The Wisconsin Black Media Association honored her in 1985.
- An original member of the Milwaukee Commission on Civil Rights in 1944, she was appointed to the Governor's Commission on Human Rights in 1957.

• As a tribute to her public service, the Common Council named a street after her.

• From 1928 to 1949, she was executive secretary of the North Side YWCA. She resigned after a policy dispute.

Today, in a bank within shouting distance of City Hall, where many of Lindsay's battles were waged, Lindsay's \$35 sits. Johnson said it was waiting for the day when it could be-

come the first \$35 in the next step in Lindsay's dream; possibly a scholarship fund, or the first dollars in a new building project.

Services for Bernice Copeland Lindsay, a community activist and former member of the governor's commission on human rights, was at St. Mark AME Church, 16th and Atkinson Sts.



Bernice Copeland Lindsay

## Burnside Community Council to Hold Open House

The Burnside Community Council will hold an Open House on Thursday, February 20, 1986 at 11:30 a.m. at 313 East Burnside to officially note the completion of our new emergency shelter space. The new facility is located in the West Wing of our building on East Burnside and enables the BCC to serve an additional fifty clients.

This project was made possible by the generous assistance of the Junior League of Portland, local businesses and local trade unions including the In-

ternational Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen Local No. 1, Sheet Metal Workers International Association Local No. 16, Tile Industry Apprentice and Journeymen Training Trust, Plumbers and Steam Fitters Local 290 and United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry, in addition "in House" volunteers under the direction of the BCC maintenance department contributed to our successful shelter renovation efforts.



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**Star-Kist Chunk Light Tuna**  
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Save Up To 61¢, No Limit! **58¢**



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