

[1944, April 13]

Weekly Report Week of April 13 Meridian Community Center Rita Schwarner

Although we expect to be receiving more material, none has come in this week, so we have been taking names and addresses of people who come up, and we will notify them when the cloth comes in. In the meantime we have been asking each woman who comes for cloth to sign the Freedom Registration.

The local girls and Lenora and myself have been making baby smocks out of scrap material, and distributing them to people who need them. The girls feel a great part of what is happening and they are, of course, performing a big service. Some of them have also been helping with the sewing lessons.

This afternoon, the children who came for story hour decided that it was too hot to put on a puppet show, so we did something else which I consider extremely valuable. I read them sections of a book called "All About Us" which explains very simply to children the differences, or rather lack of them, between races, and how prejudices build up. We talked about it and related the story to Meridian, talking especially about the separate schools and why they might exist. The answers came from the children, and we examined each possibility, either accepting or discarding it. The children then drew pictures of people of various colors working and playing together. We plan to place these pictures in the library.

We are extremely short of money—we just got enough from Jackson to pay our April rent, which we have been repeatedly asked for. Today we got a phone bill for \$82, which we are sure is phoney, since many of the calls on it were either placed collect or never made at all. On Monday morning Wickey will go down to the Telephone Co. to argue it out. We are all extremely angry about it.

The Mass Meeting on Wed. falls mostly under Wickey's report, but I did speak at it ~~at the~~ about the community center. We have gotten several people up here as a result. Tomorrow we will all be speaking at different churches.

Dr. Kameguy is working very hard on finding housing for the students, and we are starting to get results.

On Thursday there was a letter to the editor of the local paper which was supposedly written by a Negro, in which he spoke about the horrors of race amalgamation and suggested that every Negro should join together to tax out the student invasion. We were incensed by it, as was most of the Negro community, and Lenora and I composed an answer, which the entire staff signed and we mailed to the Meridian Star. We really don't expect it to be printed, but we decided to dare them to do so.

We have received numerous letters in the last few weeks from people who have heard about the center and want to help. We have written back, telling them of some of the things we need, and suggesting that if they have access to any of these items, through knowing some one who calls them, etc. they might try to send them. Interest in the center seems to be growing both here and in the North.

There is a white minister in Meridian, of the Episcopal denomination, whose church we visited several weeks ago. This week we spoke with him some more and he informed Wickey and Preston Ponder that he is attempting to get several Negro Episcopal families into his church as members. He expects opposition from some of his congregation, but says he is determined to do it. We'll see what happens. We, the staff, are debating asking him to be a part of the delegation to the National Democratic Convention, as we believe this should be an integrated delegation if possible.

Weekly Report—Meridian Community Center—Rita Schaefer—April 12, 1964

This week has been a highly profitable one in growth of the Center. Word has gotten around about our sewing project, and we have been swamped with women who want and need material, either to sew here or at home. We received one large box of cloth on Wed. from a personal friend of mine in Ill., and by Saturday afternoon it was all gone. Elisabeth Gadden, who was asked by Val Coleman, of Int. CORE, to make contacts for us with garment manufacturers has done and is doing an excellent job, and we have received several packages thru her. However, we still need more, and in every letter I write I beg for cloth. People have been sending us other related items, such as dress patterns and trimsings, and these we find extremely useful also. On W., evening, George Raymond brought down three old treadle-type machines which CORE obtained for us. One of them works beautifully, and need only adjustment, and we will have it taken care of as soon as we have some money, and the third appears to be hopelessly broken, but we will have it checked also.

Books are still coming into the library, and circulation has gone up. Classes are small, but attendance is fairly steady. One woman who has been training up on her sewing is now ready to make application at the downtown stores for a sales position. We discussed with her interviewing procedures and also some of the reactions which she might expect from white customers. Children made puppets from scrap material in the story hour Sat. Next week they want to stage a puppet show.

As there had been several instances at the local bus stations of Negroes being refused service at the previously all-white counters, we have staged several sit-ins, with

Lenora Hammond going with some local youths. Prior to each such sit-in, we had all participants take part in non-violent workshops. There were no arrests or incidents, except for some name-calling, etc.

The police are still not bothering us, except that they did pick up Mike on Wed. nite with one of the Canton men. They claimed first they were looking for a Negro and white escaped convicts, and when their stories checked they released them.

We are in need of money—to pay our forty dollar rent bill for April of the center. Also, Lenora had to see an eye doctor, who prescribed glasses which she was told she should have been wearing from childhood. The bill came to \$29, and we have been unable to pay it.