



*The Peoples Temple recruited members from African American communities in San Francisco and Los Angeles; by 1973 there were more than 2,500 members. Some lived in communal housing and worked full time for the Peoples Temple, others contributed significant portions of their income and property to the church. Operations included real estate management, home care facilities for seniors and youths, publishing, and maintenance of a fleet of buses to transport members to services throughout California and across the country.*

## The Peoples Temple Collection

One of the top news stories of 1978 was the deaths of 918 people in Jonestown, Guyana, a small country in the jungles of South America. Members of the California-based Peoples Temple had developed an agricultural community in Guyana; California Congressman Leo J. Ryan organized a fact-finding mission to Jonestown

in response to questions raised by the U.S. media and former followers. His visit ended in tragedy: on November 18, a long-time member, Ryan, and three journalists were killed by Peoples Temple members. That day, more than nine hundred Jonestown residents died from poisoning, and four members died in Georgetown, Guyana's capital.

In San Francisco, surviving Peoples Temple members immediately filed papers to dissolve the church. The superior court of California appointed a receiver to oversee the winding up of the Peoples Temple estate, a process that took five years. In 1983, the receiver placed the official records at the California Historical Society. Since then, former members, relatives, and

# COLLECTIONS



*In 1973, the Peoples Temple voted to establish an agricultural and rural development mission in Guyana, South America, that became known as Jonestown. Early settlers cleared the land and began construction at the site, building a communal kitchen, housing, schools, farm buildings, and a medical facility and day-care center surrounding an open-air pavilion.*

scholars have donated additional materials related to Peoples Temple.

The Peoples Temple Collection currently contains more than 170 boxes of letters, documents, photographs, and audiotapes, including original items from the 1950s; government records from the FBI, CIA, and other agencies; and personal papers of for-

mer members and their families. Recent additions to the collection include papers collected by a psychologist who worked with former members of Peoples Temple and Jonestown survivors; nearly 1,200 slides of Peoples Temple activities in the United States and Guyana from the late 1960s to 1978; and nine hundred audiotapes of church services, amateur radio transmissions, and media broadcasts.

Recently, the collection has been featured in several new works that explore a wide array of perspectives on the Jonestown tragedy. In April 2005, the California Historical Society Press released *Dear People: Remembering Jonestown*, a selection of letters, personal histories, and photographs from the collection. This publication coincided with the world premiere of



*In 1977, former members and relatives organized a group called the Concerned Relatives to protest Jim Jones's treatment of church members. Child custody issues and living conditions in Jonestown were at the center of the conflict between the Peoples Temple and the Concerned Relatives. Media coverage of Peoples Temple practices and political activities led the government to investigate the church's financial and social welfare programs. The Peoples Temple closed many of its businesses, sold its properties, and relocated hundreds of its members to Guyana.*

Leigh Fondakowski's *The People's Temple*, a play based on contemporary interviews and archival materials, produced by Berkeley Repertory Theatre and Z Space Studio. A documentary about the making of the play, produced by KQED, San Francisco's local PBS station, will air in November 2005. In 2006 the PBS series *American Experience* will broadcast

award-winning filmmaker Stanley Nelson's documentary about the story of Peoples Temple.

The Peoples Temple Collection is available to researchers in the North Baker Research Library at the Society's headquarters in San Francisco. For current reading room hours, check the CHS website at [www.california-historicalsociety.org](http://www.california-historicalsociety.org).

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS ARE FROM THE PEOPLES TEMPLE COLLECTION AT THE CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY.