Finding aid to the Donneter Lane papers relating to the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee, MS 3792

Finding aid prepared by Marie Silva
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2015
Title: Donneter Lane papers relating to the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee

Date (bulk): 1978-1980

Date (inclusive): 1964-2004

Collection Identifier: MS 3792

Creator: Lane, Donneter.

Extent: 4 boxes (3.4 linear feet)

Contributing Institution: California Historical Society

678 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA, 94105-4014

(415) 357-1848
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URL: http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org

Location of Materials: Collection is stored onsite.

Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English.

Abstract: The collection consists of papers collected by Donneter Lane concerning Peoples Temple and the 1978 Jonestown tragedy, the bulk of which were generated by the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee (GERC) between the years 1978 and 1980 and document the Committee's efforts to transport the unidentified or unclaimed remains of Jonestown victims from Dover Air Base to California for burial. Committee records include press releases, minutes, and memoranda; correspondence between the Committee and various agencies, including the United States Department of State; rosters of Jonestown victims and surviving family members; and records of the San Francisco Superior Court proceedings, Peoples Temple of the Disciples of Christ v. The Attorney General of the State of California. Also included are letters from family members of victims to the Committee indicating family wishes regarding the interment of loved ones or requesting reimbursement for burial expenses; and family survivor contact cards, which document communication between the Committee and family members and provide information about the status of burials.

Restrictions on Access

All researchers must sign the Peoples Temple Collections Access Agreement form. This document is available at the reference desk or can be sent electronically.

Records in the collection may contain personally identifiable information of a personal or confidential nature such as medical information or social security numbers. Publication or disclosure of such information is strictly prohibited, unless researcher can show proof that the person is deceased, or has provided proof of permission by the party named to CHS.

Correspondence from relatives of victims to the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee or United States Department of State is restricted until 2054 to protect the privacy of surviving family members. Redacted photocopies are available for research use. Relatives of victims should contact the manuscripts librarian for access to original correspondence.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Donneter Lane papers relating to the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee, MS 3792, California Historical Society.

Related Collections

Manuscript Collections:

Peoples Temple records, 1922-1984, MS 3800

Federal Bureau of Investigation Collection of Peoples Temple Papers from Jonestown, Guyana, 1931-1978, MS 3801

Moore Family Papers, 1968-1988, MS 3802

John R. Hall Research Materials on Peoples Temple, 1954-2003, MS 3803
Finding aid to the Donneter Lane papers relating to the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee, 1978-1980, MS 3792

Ross E. Case Collection pertaining to Peoples Temple, 1961-1984, MS 4062
Margaret T. Singer Materials on Peoples Temple, 1956-1998, MS 4123
Peoples Temple Ephemera and Publications, 1959-1979, MS 4124
Newspaper Clippings on Peoples Temple: photocopies, 1953-1978, MS 4125
Peoples Temple Miscellany Collection, 1951-[ongoing], MS 4126

Photography Collections:
Photographs from Peoples Temple Records, 1941-1983, MSP 3800
Photographs of Peoples Temple in the United States and Guyana, 1967-1978, PC 010

Acquisition Information
The collection was given to the California Historical Society by Fielding McGehee III in 2008.

Processing Information
The collection was processed by Marie Silva in 2015.

System of Arrangement

Biographical Information
Donneter Lane was the Executive Director of the San Francisco Council of Churches. With Rabbi Malcolm Sparer and Father John O'Connor, she was one of the principal organizers of the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee, formed on November 28, 1978, to coordinate an interfaith response to the deaths at Jonestown. In 1979, Lane and other Committee members communicated with family members of Jonestown victims concerning the interment of loved ones and reimbursement for burial expenses, maintaining careful records of approximately 200 telephone calls and letters. She continued to maintain the records of the Committee after its dissolution.

History of the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee
The Guyana Emergency Relief Committee (GERC) was formed on November 28, 1978, by members of the San Francisco religious community in response to the deaths of over 900 people at Jonestown, Guyana, on November 18, 1978. Composed of representatives of the San Francisco Council of Churches, the Archdiocese of San Francisco, and the Board of Rabbis of Northern California, the Committee had a two-fold purpose: to assist with the expeditious return of over 500 bodies from Dover Air Base, Delaware, to California for proper burial; and to provide counseling, pastoral services, and material assistance to grieving families.

In order to obtain funds for the interment of unidentified or unclaimed bodies from Peoples Temple assets, the Committee participated in proceedings held in the Superior Court of California for the winding up and dissolution of Peoples Temple (Peoples Temple of the Disciples of Christ v. The Attorney General of the State of California) as an Amicus Curiae (“friend of the court”). The Superior Court ordered that a portion of Peoples Temple assets be set aside to pay for burial expenses, and approved the Committee’s plan for the removal, transportation, and burial of the bodies. Cooperating closely with the State Department, the Committee communicated with family members (representing over 547 Jonestown victims) by telephone and letter. On a case by case basis, the Committee ascertained the wishes of family members regarding the burial of loved ones, arranged for the shipment and interment of remains, and helped family members obtain reimbursement for burial expenses. On May 10, 1979, the first 50 unidentified bodies were buried at Evergreen Cemetery in Oakland, California. (Eventually, 412 unidentified or unclaimed bodies were interred at Evergreen.) According to the Committee’s final report, 101 bodies were sent to Los Angeles for burial. Two hundred and fifty-one identified bodies were shipped to Oakland Army Base; of these, at least 59 were claimed by family members.

Scope and Contents
The collection consists of papers collected by Donneter Lane concerning Peoples Temple and the 1978 Jonestown tragedy, the bulk of which were generated by the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee (GERC) between the years 1978 and 1980 and document the Committee’s efforts to transport the unidentified or unclaimed remains of Jonestown victims from Dover Air Base to California for burial. Committee records include press releases, minutes, and memoranda; correspondence between the Committee and various agencies, including the United States Department of State; rosters of Jonestown victims and surviving family members; and records of the San Francisco Superior Court proceedings, Peoples Temple of the Disciples of Christ v. The Attorney General of the State of California. Also included are letters from family members of victims to the Committee indicating family wishes regarding the interment of loved ones or requesting reimbursement for burial expenses; and family survivor contact cards, which document communication between the Committee and family...
members and provide information about the status of burials. (Information on contact cards may include whether or not victims’ bodies were identified or claimed, and where they were buried.)

The collection also contains a small amount of records created by the San Francisco Council of Churches between the years 1977 and 1979, most of which concern the Council’s role in organizing the Guyana Emergency Relief Committee, and papers collected by Donneter Lane concerning Peoples Temple, the Jonestown deaths, and other religious and social issues. Among Lane’s papers are correspondence, articles, and other papers documenting various religious responses to Jonestown; and newspaper and magazine articles reporting the tragedy and its aftermath, including extensive local newspaper coverage of the days leading up to and following November 18, 1978.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library’s online public access catalog:
Mass burials—California—Oakland.
Peoples Temple—Estate.
Peoples Temple—Trials, litigation, etc.
Guyana Emergency Relief Committee.
United States. Department of State.
Evergreen Cemetery (Oakland, Calif.).

Series 1: San Francisco Council of Churches records 1974-1979
Box 1, Folder 1  Records 1977-1979
Box 1, Folder 2  Newspapers and newspaper clippings 1974-1978, undated

Series 2: Guyana Emergency Relief Committee records 1978-1980
Box 1, Folder 3  Press releases and briefing notes 1978-1979
Box 1, Folder 4  Minutes and memoranda 1978-1980
Box 1, Folder 5  Personnel rosters and contact lists circa 1978-1979
Box 1, Folder 6-7  Burial proposals 1979-1980
Box 1, Folder 8  General correspondence 1978-1980
Box 1, Folder 9  Messages and notes circa 1978-1979
Box 3, Folders 1-4  Correspondence from relatives of victims 1979

Access
Restricted until 2054 to protect the privacy of surviving family members. Relatives of victims should contact the manuscripts librarian for access.

System of Arrangement
Arranged alphabetically by last name of the deceased.

Box 1, Folders 10-13  Redacted photocopies of correspondence from relatives of victims 1979

Access
Open for research. To protect privacy, names of relatives of victims have been redacted.

System of Arrangement
Arranged alphabetically by last name of the deceased.

Box 1, Folder 14  Victims rosters 1978-1979
Box 1, Folder 15  Family survivor rosters 1979
Box 1, Folders 16-23  Family survivor contact cards 1979

System of Arrangement
Arranged alphabetically by last name of the deceased.

Box 1, Folder 24  Notes on contacting family survivors circa 1979
Box 2, Folder 1  Final report circa 1980
Box 2, Folder 2  Robert H. Fabian correspondence and accounting 1979
Series 2: Guyana Emergency Relief Committee records 1978-1980

Box 2, Folder 3

Box 2, Folder 4

Series 3: Donneter Lane papers relating to Peoples Temple and other religious issues 1964-2004

Box 2, Folders 5-6
Religious responses to Jonestown 1978

Box 2, Folder 7
Rev. Lynn Hodges file on Peoples Temple 1977-1984

Box 2, Folder 8
Jonestown memorial services papers 2003

Box 2, Folder 9
Donneter Lane correspondence 1987-2004

Box 2, Folder 10
Articles about Peoples Temple and Jonestown 1964-1978

Box 2, Folders 11-12, OV-Box 1, Folders 1-4
Articles about Peoples Temple and Jonestown 1978-1980

Box 2, Folder 13
Articles about religious and social issues 1977-1978