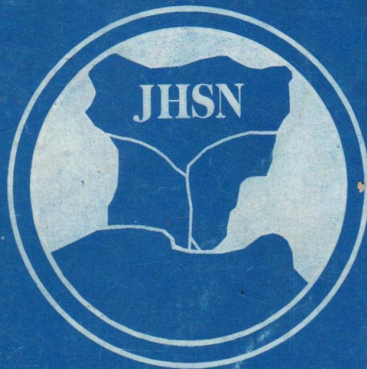


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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRIVATE RECORDS IN HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION

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Introduction

A society that is ignorant of its historical past in an endangered society. That is the reason institutions like museums, libraries and archives are established to locate, collect and preserve the country's historical records (National Archives Exhibition, 1980:1). This method of storing records ensures that the history and custom of a society is immortalized and preserved for future generations. The Nigerian government recognizes the significance of these storehouses of history and is a harbinger of several archives, both regional and state. Three regional archives, those at Ibadan, Enugu and Kaduna can be found in Nigeria with other states each possessing an archive. Collectively, the records preserved in these archives constitute documents from the colonial and post-colonial phase of Nigerian history (National Archives Exhibition, 1980:1).

The Calabar archive, our focus, is located in the present Cross River State of Nigeria and was established in 1986 during the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida. The archive is made up of twelve (12) Record Groups and a total of 14,082 files. The twelve Record Groups include; Ministry of Information (MOI); Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MFEP); Ministry of Lands and Survey (MLST); Ministry of Health (MOH); Governor's Office, Calabar (GOV.), Ministry of Education (MOE); and Federal Ministry of Labour (FMOL). Others are Office of the Special Assistant to the President (OSAP); Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB); Federal Electoral Commission, Calabar (FEDECO); Calabar District Office (CADIST) and Nigerian Palm Produce Board (NPPB). Of all the mentioned records, the Calabar District Office (CADIST) is endowed with the largest number of files totaling 2,855 and possessing documents from 1907 to 1966. The CADIST records are vast in several historical issues as they are exciting and cover economic, social, political, administrative, educational, religious and personal matters (private records). Their significance to historical documentation cannot be sufficiently stressed. In the light of the above this research examines the importance of private records that forms a part of the CADIST records, in historical documentation.

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Private Records

Private records are those records that deal with personal matters of individuals or private organizations. These records occupy a substantial number of files in the Cadist record grouping, and are relevant historical documents, which mirror the individual lives of people as well as the development of the society during an era. Private organizations, and individuals alike donated the private records found in the Calabar archives. They feature papers from firms like United African Company (1865 - 1897) and John Holt (1897 - 1900); missionary reports and the recollections of various individuals resident in Calabar. The latter group highlights issues such as petition writing, overseas students' files, estates of deceased persons and records concerning government scholars and their dependants allowance amongst others. Although these personal records may be tagged as unofficial matters, they are veritable sources of historical documentation. Their usefulness in interpreting the level of development of the Calabar society cannot be over-emphasized. Two of these subjects, Petition Writing and Records of Overseas Students will suffice to illustrate our point.

Petition Writing in Colonial Calabar

Records from the archives show that between 1939 and 1965, there were series of petitions by individuals and associations alike to the colonial administrators. This medium of communication was a way of displaying dissatisfaction, sometimes, towards colonial administrators and their policies. Petition writing in Calabar cut across various subject matters. For instance, between 1949 and 1952, the Ex-service men, at different times, petitioned the colonial government and demanded their arrears of payment (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/686). These war veterans of the First and Second World Wars were neglected for many years and this prompted them to form an association to press for their demands. From 1945, the Ex-service men had begun to form their union known as Ex-service Men's Union (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/343) in order to attract colonial sympathy towards its members. Similarly, in 1949, an indigene of Calabar, Eyo Ete E. Eyo II petitioned against the laying of foundation stone in Calabar (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/849). The same year, Master Otu B. Inyang petitioned the colonial authorities against his fractured leg sustained in a school team (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/850). Between 1949 and 1956, the domestic servants of the Catering Rest House, Calabar demanded for improved welfare. In December, 1949, a police constable, Peter Efiang petitioned against the wrongful termination of his service and pleaded for reinstatement and his emoluments to be released (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/877). Nsa E. Nsa, in 1962, petitioned the Governor over the overpayment he made to the Customs and Excise Department in respect of his imported goods. Instead of the twenty-five percent custom duty charged on his consignment, he erroneously paid fifty percent amounting to an excess of forty-eight pounds (Cadist

Vol. 1, 3/3/882). The petitioner demanded for the refund especially as the Senior Collector of customs had refused to heed to his request. In 1951, B.I. Edem petitioned against the non-payment of his Army Clerk's Award. He decried a situation where the District Paymaster was biased in distributing these claims of arrears and reminded the Governor that in a situation where justice was granted to one and not the other was selective (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/879). The petitioner quoted Lord Balfour's old phrase that says, "Justice to the few is cruelty to many". He requested the Governor to intervene and hoped he would be paid his claims.

Petition writing increased over the years in Calabar, especially between 1935 and 1960. This necessitated a guideline and new set of rules for writing. The idea was to discourage the submission of unnecessary petitions, thereby decreasing the amount of time which government officers were required to spend in treating such correspondence (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/232). Accordingly, E.J.G. Kelly, Secretary of the Southern Province, on behalf of the Governor of Nigeria, requested that all petitions forwarded to the office was to be accompanied by a précis, stating the name and address of the petitioner and to whom it was addressed (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/232). The substance of the petition should then follow in a series of brief paragraph and finally the nature of assistance or relief being demanded by the petitioner. Furthermore, a new Government Notice, No. 925, was prepared and published in the Nigerian Gazette of 15th June 1950. This Notice made it clear that Anonymous Petitions; Petitions that were applications for employment; are illegible or meaningless or couched in abusive and improper language would not be responded to. Similarly, petitions that invite attention to previous petitions or repeated the substance of previous petitions without introducing new matters of relevance would not be replied (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/232; Cadist Vol. 11, 13/1/448). The Notice stated that petition writers must submit their petitions in accordance with some principles set out in the General Order (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/232). For example, petitions in respect of Supreme or Magistrate court cases should be submitted to the Chief Registrar or the court concerned. Those for the Legislative Council should be submitted through a member of council. Petitions to a Native or Local Authority or Local Government Council should be addressed to the Council concerned. All other petitions were to be addressed to the District Officer or a higher authority.

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that colonial administrators were distracted by volumes of petitions arising for the disenchantment of the several petitioners. This prompted the former to lay some guidelines and rules for petition writing. Nonetheless, these petitions demonstrate some salient points to researchers of history; the inhabitants of Calabar were not passive in matters affecting their welfare or administration. Considering that their only weapon of protest was through the writing of petitions, they utilized this method in solving problems. In addition, this method of protest reveals that they understood clearly their rights as citizens and demanded for justice in cases they felt was treated unjustly. The petitioner that quoted Lord Balfour's phrase is a glaring example. Colonial Calabar society can

also be perceived as mature and law abiding in its response to resolving personal and official problems. More importantly, these series of petition writing only manifested a society with a high level of literacy and educational enlightenment. The reason for this level of development cannot be far fetched. It would be recalled that the people of Calabar (with emphasis on the Efik), were one of the earliest groups to embrace Christianity and Western Education from 1846. Many of its indigenes learnt the art of reading and writing early, attended good institutions, and became the torchbearers of Western education in the Cross River basin. M.E. Noah in his various researches (See Noah, 1978; 1980) has sufficiently stressed this point, which need not detain us. In accordance with these educational footprints, one of the main features of the Calabar community between 1900 and 1970 was the rise of a literary culture (Akoda, 2004). Missionary established schools like the Duke Town School (1846) and the famous Hope Waddell Training Institution (1895), started literary and debating clubs which entertained the public through the staging of plays, concerts and operettas (Nyong, 1997: 28). The formation of the Calabar Dramatic Club in the 1940's and the African Club on Calabar Road were direct consequences of the rise of these social clubs. Plays like *Eyamba V* (1955) and *Oedipus Rex* (1963) were constant features of the African Club. These social activities were complimented by the emergence of literary works by scholars like James Ene Henshaw and E.A. Edyang along with the publication of several newspapers, some of them being the Nigerian Eastern Mail and West African Pilot. The commissioning of the Calabar Public Library and the training of librarians from the 1940's (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/117) only added impetus to the growing lists of literary feats. The activities mentioned above, did not only provide relaxation, but renewed interest in learning, improved the peoples knowledge of literary skills and created the ferment for education. The series of petition writing, therefore, developed in this kind of cultural milieu. It demonstrated that the Calabar society was literate, highly developed and sophisticated especially in the 1930's to 1970. This point is re-enacted in the next subtitle.

Private Records of Overseas Students

These records inform us that a large number of Nigerian students of the Hope Waddell Training Institution left Calabar to study abroad between 1949 and 1965. It is interesting to note that although some of these students were indigenes, others came from distant lands. This can be rightly explained that the city of Calabar was cosmopolitan in nature and embraced people of diverse cultures and nationalities. With the city's reputation as a revered centre of Western education, students were attracted from diverse and distant places to the famous Hope Waddell Training Institution to obtain some form of education. E. U. Aye observes that Daniel Nelaingo came from Brass; Frank Bruce Jaja was from Opobo, Okotie from Sapele and Joseph Akwa from Fernando - Po (Aye, 1986: 3). The presence of these stu-

dents and the various migrant groups that came to inhabit Calabar from the second half of the nineteenth century raised the former to the status of a cosmopolitan town.

Nonetheless, some students went overseas for higher studies after graduation from schools like the Hope Waddell and Duke town Institutions. Edem Koofreh (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/694), Grace Duke (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/696), Gabriel Efiang (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/697), E. U. Ephraim (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/703) and E. J. Erete (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/707) belonged to the crop of Efik students that left for higher studies. With regard to the non-indigenes, there were names like K.E. Osu (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/749), D. C. Agbamorah (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/743), Ogali A. Ogali (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/783), G. A. Cooney (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/700), C. O. Odu (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/718), M. E. Obasi (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/709), I. O. Iruoha (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/748), P. K. Ogbonnaya (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/752), to mention a few. Some of them went as private scholars and few were placed on scholarship. Because of Nigeria's colonial affiliation to Britain, the United Kingdom became the destination for these overseas students. Only a negligible number went to the United States of America. Their choice of discipline varied, but many students were attracted to professional courses like Medicine, Law, Nursing, Engineering and Photography. Messrs. E. J. Eyomah (Cadist vol. 1, 3/3/699), G. A. Cooney, E. J. Erete and I. O. Iruoha were Medical students in the UK between 1949 and 1958. Edem Koofreh, Grace Duke and Gabriel Efiang were Law students in the UK between 1949 and 1955. Nursing students included M. E. Essien (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/698), and Evelyn Ephraim (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/704) while Electrical Engineering had E. A. Effiom (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/713), R. E. Ekanem (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/763) and E. E. Ita (Cadist Vol. 1, 3/3/792). The latter (Engineering students) studied between 1952 and 1959. Other disciplines that were offered by these Nigerian students overseas were Journalism, Shoemaking, Pharmacy, Secretarial Studies, Silver Smithing and Jewelry, Economics, Architecture, Mechanical and Civil Engineering. Some of the students returned after years of sojourn in the UK to serve their fatherland. Of note are late Justice Edem Koofreh and Engineer Richard Ekanem. The arrival of these students to Calabar after many years was usually marked with pomp and pageantry as that of Professor Eyo Ita on the ship M.V. Apapa in August 1933 showed (Duke Town School Magazine, 1933).

The above private records state thus; Because of early contact with the Europeans, much emphasis was placed on qualitative education. Although there were good institutions like Hope Waddell and Duke Town Schools in Calabar, schooling abroad was an index in measuring quality education. Returnee students, having completed their education, brought great pride to their families as they were employed in government parastatals.

Conclusion

In sum, we have examined the use of private records in historical documentation, using two case studies; Petition Writing and Private Records of Overseas Students. Indeed, it can be adjudged that the high level of literacy and educational awareness in colonial Calabar made petition writing a main feature of the society. The importance of education, and the awareness it created is also reflected in the large number of students that left the city for advanced studies abroad. Through these private records, therefore, we can discern a society that was cosmopolitan in nature, literate and highly sophisticated especially between the 1930's and 1970's. It is only hoped that this level of development would either be sustained or surpassed by future generations.

Notes

1. For the purpose of this research, emphasis has been placed on the Calabar Archives
2. I am indebted to the Staff of Calabar Archives for this information.

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