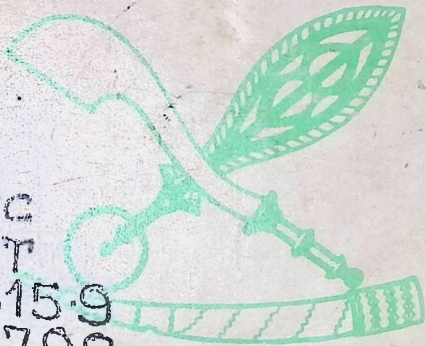


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ASABA: HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT

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- Page 7: (a) Amend "Roads and Comminucations" to read "Roads and Communications".
- (b) Amend "Rural Training Centre" to read "Rural Training Centre".
- Page 11, line 5: Insert asterisk after "50,000" and also asterisk before the last paragraph, which is a footnote, beginning with "The 1963 National Census."
- Page 26: Delete the headline "Asagba".
- Page 27: Delete the Footnote.
- Page 30: Delete the Footnote.
- Page 33: line 5; Amend "13th" to read "12th"

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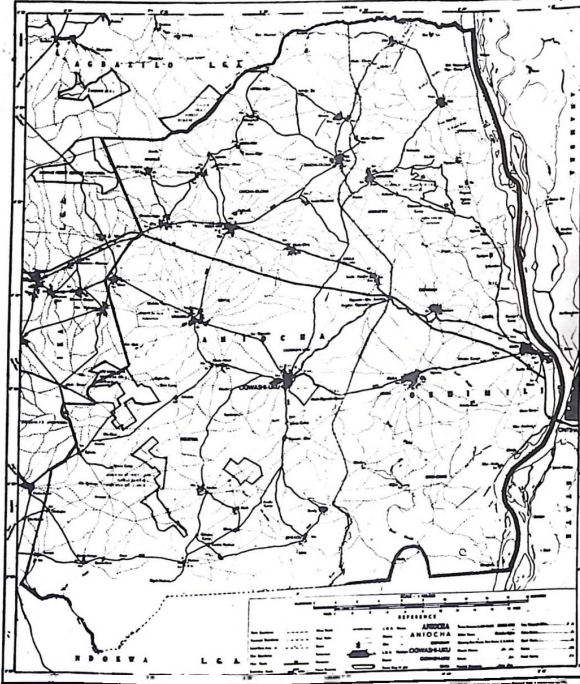
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ANIOCHA AND OSHUNLI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS



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ASABA: HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT

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PREFACE

This is the first of a series of future publications by which Asaba Development Association seeks to provide essential information about the ancient city of Asaba for the general public. And nothing could be more apt than the time this book is published. This is prompted at a time when certain changes and developments in the country's values are taking place. These changes and developments are not only political and social, but are also economic and even religious in nature. Besides, the cultural reawakening and rediscovery which spanned the entire spectrum of the society has no less impact on the publication of this book.

It could not have been otherwise. Apart from its enviably natural location, Asaba has unquestionably been acknowledged for its historic and cultural significance. It also forms a vital mesh of network in the economic and social activities of the States of the Federation.

It should, however, be noted that this publication was possible due in the main to an earlier publication titled "ASABA" by the Asaba Development Society in December 1965. That publication contains an abridged history of the city and the course of her growth and development. Not only that it was a source book, it became necessary to even lift many passages from that book. In this connection, we hereby express our gratitude to Mr. Olisa Chukwura, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, and the Board of Editors of that booklet.

Our gratitude also goes to Chief Dennis C. Osadebay, G.C.O.N., LL.D. the Ojiba of Asaba and former Premier of Mid-Western Nigeria, for writing an introduction to this publication.

The Association also owes much gratitude to Mr. J. Ilo. Okwudiafor, O.F.R., the Chairman of the Editorial Board of the present publication who, incidentally was the President of the Asaba Development Society (from 1964-1966). We wish to express our appreciation to the following for their contributions

towards the success of the publication: Mr. P. O. Nsughe, Associate Professor of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka for his write up on a chapter of the book, Obi J.I.G. Onyia, O.F.R., Asaba, for his useful corrections of the manuscript, and Mr. B. I. Odiachi, Public Relations Officer of the Bendel State Health Services Management Board for the technical aspects of the publication.

ASABA DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

FOREWORD

THE ancient town of Asaba stands on a hill by the West bank of the lordly River Niger overlooking the point where the Anambra River flows gracefully into the River Niger.

Asaba served Nigeria well before and after the birth of the country. When there was no country called Nigeria, Asaba was the civil headquarters of the Territory ruled by the Royal Niger Company, a British chartered Company which ruled and traded in the area. Lokoja, a town north of Asaba which stands at the confluence of the River Niger and its principal tributary, the River Benue, was the military headquarters. This is why when the British Crown took over control of the Territory from the Royal Niger Company on 1st January, 1900 the ARS, JUS, PAX, flag of the Royal Niger Company was lowered and the British Union Jack flag hoisted in its place at both Asaba and Lokoja.

Asaba was the cradle of Christianity and English education in the area. Over one hundred years ago the Anglican Church established its Mission at Asaba and from there spread westward. The Roman Catholic Church followed the Anglican shortly after and also spread westward from there.

This booklet by the Asaba Development Association is a brief record of the history and development of Asaba. It is a fascinating and exciting book which should be read not only by students of Nigerian history but also by those interested in the affairs of their country and by the general reading public.

DENNIS C. OSADEBAY, G.C.O.N.

Osadenis House,
Asaba.

GEOGRAPHY

ASABA lies quite close to the Equator, being only about 6° to the north of it and about the same distance east of the prime meridian. With an estimated area of 200 square kilometres and a population of about 50,000 the density of settled population per square kilometre ranges between 250 and 300 persons, although the actual spread on the ground is generally uneven, being higher or lower in places according to the distribution of farmlands, open-spaces and unproductive wastelands.

The town stands on an old river terrace and consists largely of sandy loam so that when the Niger goes into full flood, usually during the rains, considerable areas of land are inundated, leaving much of the river bank in swamps. But rich deposits of alluvial soil remain after the floods have quickly subsided, and these lie fallow for the next round of cultivation.

Up, on the higher grounds, which are far more extensive than the river basins, secondary forest vegetation flourishes. This is the zone where most subsistence farming activities take place, although river banks as has just been said are cultivated too. Farming in Asaba is the main occupation of men, unlike in some parts of Iboland where women are also skilled farmers. But Asaba women do some petty trade and were weavers of local cloth which they no longer do. Today both men and women have entered the professions and here Asaba has had better share of some of the rest of the national population.

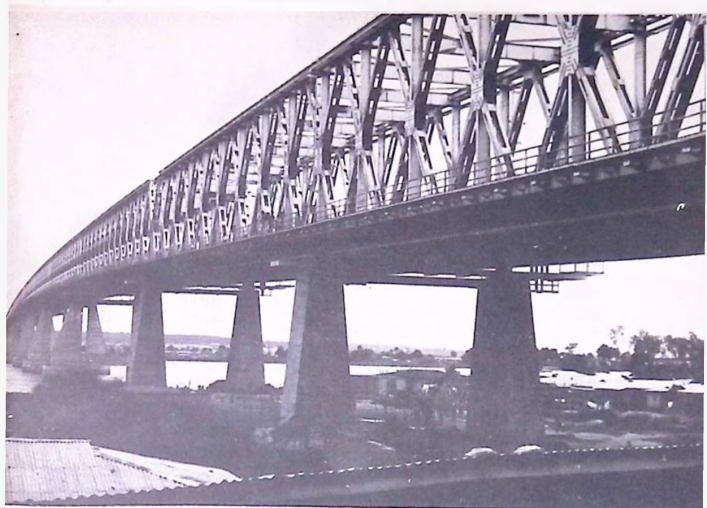
The 1963 National Census put the population of Asaba at 30,000 but with a whole decade of national increase and influx of young people into new schools and colleges and the new textile mill as well, the population would have more than doubled by now.

Scattered about the flood-basins of the Niger are good many villages and some towns: Ebu, Illah and Ugbolu are to the north of Asaba while Okwe, Oko-Anala, Oko-Ogbele, Oluodu, Ewulu, Ishiagu, Umuté, Abba, Adonta, Ejeme-Aniogo, Ejeme-U'no, lie on the south-western side. These flood-basin settlements contrast sharply with the rest of the former Asaba Division now known as Aniocha.

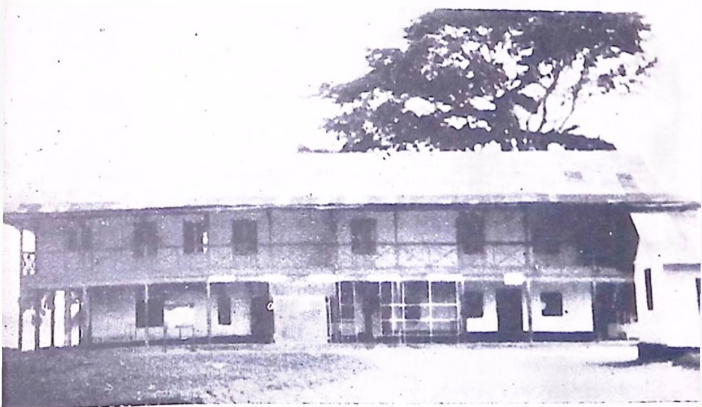
Asaba overlooks the important commercial city of Onitsha in Anambra State and stands strategically astride the trans-African highway which starts from Mombasa in Kenya. Thus, as a route-town, she links both East and West Africa directly as well as such politically and commercially important Nigerian cities as Lagos, Ibadan, Benin, Onitsha, Enugu, Port-Harcourt and Calabar.

The River Niger itself remains a vital link as it has done from earliest times between North and sub-Saharan Africa. Today, with the opening of the multi-million naira Niger bridge in 1966, Asaba has become an up-to-date route-town with great possibilities and scope for giving expanded services to far away lands. Indeed, as of now, she embraces all the four compass points in terms of accessibility and thus completes the link-up with most parts of Africa.

At Anwai, the highest point of the old city, stands a welcoming guest house for the travel weary who may wish to take a break in the pleasant grounds of the modern Rural Training Centre (RTC) for agriculture. The Centre was founded in the early forties by the Protestant Missions on the pioneer efforts of the Rev. Kenneth Prior, a Canadian missionary, for the purpose of training the young farmers of the future. Now, however, the Bendel State Government runs the venture under the new name of the School of Agriculture.



£10,000,000 Niger Bridge—view from the Asaba end.



Office of the Asaba Urban District Council. The Building is one of the Reliefs of the Royal Niger Company. It was used as one of the Offices of the Company (1886 — 1900)

History

Asaba has more than one popular tradition of origin. Three of these seem to point, as most traditions of many African communities do, to a people of mixed and plural origin. Although tradition has discerned three main lines of descent, in the course of the growth and development of the city, various alien groups mainly from Igala, Ishan, and Benin have mixed and mingled with the Ibo majority from across the eastern bank of the Niger as they settled among earlier groups and married into them.

The first of these three main descent lines is linked by tradition to the name of Ugboma* who is said to be the son of the founder of the village of Achala in Awka, east of the Niger. The name of Ugboma's father is lost to us although he is believed to be the earliest known settler on the spot where Asaba now stands. Ugboma's children, if any, must have been completely absorbed by a second independent main line of descent whose ancestor is known and called by the name of Anyanwu (later Ezeanyanwu) who in fact is generally regarded as the true and effective founder of Asaba. But even so, his own children too, although not completely absorbed, were later to be out-numbered and dominated by the third main line of settlers whose descendants now comprise the bulk of Asaba people.

The founding father of this third and larger group of settlers is Nnebisi. His children subsequently married and mingled with fresh streams of immigrants from Igala, Ishan, Bini and eastern Ibos mainly and in this manner enriched Asaba with the varied and virile elements of culture of which we boast today.

What follows below are some details of these three-main traditions of Asaba origin which we have just briefly discussed.

* *There is no known link with the village of Ughomanta of present-day Asaba.*

As we have already observed, so little is known about Ugboma save that he was a descendent of an earlier settler believed to have come from Achala in Awka. Although his name is lost, it is likely that some portion of his blood may well be circulating in our veins still.

Ezeanyanwu, the head and founder of the next group of settlers, is said to be of the royal line of Ezechima, the legendary ancestor of the numerous settlements to the west of Asaba who claim to have descended directly from him, just as Onitsha and Obosi on the eastern side of the Niger do.

In his youth, Ezeanyanwu was so comely to look at, which did him not much good, for as tradition tells us, he soon took to the excesses of youth with the attendant difficulties which his good looks provoked and that led him straight into trouble and eventually into banishment to west of the Niger, to the spot he later helped to found and to name Ahaba. (this in Ibo means 'well chosen' or 'a good choice'). The anglicised name is ASABA of the present day.

At Asaba, Ezeanyanwu married into Ugboma's household and soon began to prosper and to multiply. In the end he 'swallowed up' Ugboma's group, his children now being the ones remembered and known by the village name of Idumu Odikpe. Odikpe is believed to be the title-name which Ezeanyanwu in his new prosperity and influence had acquired.

The village of Idumu Odikpe worships its own separate ancestral shrine, this being one of the only two main ancestral shrines that Asaba people have had. These shrines point to the plural origin of Asaba people. The second shrine belongs to the children of Nnebisi in the same way as the first to the children of Ezeanyanwu. Nnebisi's own children constitute the third independent line of descent that in turn out-numbered and dominated Ezeanyanwu lineage.

According to tradition, Nnebisi's father came from Igala in the present Kwara State. He was a rebel prince banished from the Royal House of the Attah of Igala for plotting against the throne. Onojobo was his Igala name which was to be obscured later by the Ibo name, Ikenga, which he acquired from Ezeanyanwu.

Here is the story in brief: Onojobo and his small band of refugees had come down to settle at Asaba from Idah. There, they met Ezeanyanwu who had warmly received them into his crowded household. Ezeanyanwu called Onojobo 'Ikenga', meaning in Ibo 'gift of the gods' because Onojobo had special knowledge of the occult qualities of roots and herbs and spoke the secret language of birds and beasts. This power he put to use for the benefit of Ezeanyanwu and his household who had reason therefore to regard him as a god-sent, or Ikenga, the name that stuck on, displacing ONOJOBOb.

At first Ezeanyanwu and Ikenga served each other well, and their partnership flourished to their mutual benefit. Onojobo and his band acknowledged Ezeanyanwu's rights and privileges of prior settlement and in return received protection and a portion of land to settle on and to use.

It so happened that in Ezeanyanwu's household, there was a young Ibo maiden named Diaba, who was pawned to Ezeanyanwu by her parents. Her village of birth was Nteje near Awka in the present Anambra State. Ikenga took a fancy for this full-blossomed young Nteje woman and this interest led to their marriage. Diaba became pregnant by Ikenga. Perhaps from fear of Ezeanyanwu's anger or, as some believe, by the intervention of Diaba's own parents, she returned to Nteje to have her baby when her time was due. When the great event occurred, it was a baby boy and he was named Nnebisi in accordance with the circumstances of his birth.

Nnebisi (*'ka enebe isi mwá nkea'*, means 'Let us watch to see what kind of luck the head of this child

will bring. The child flourished like a tree planted by the side of a stream and in time proved to be a youth of great ability, out-matching the best of the village youth. Legend says that he made his peers look like beginners in all direct encounters. But they always mocked at his achievements because of the obscure circumstances of his birth, which made him miserable a great deal. One such activity was the custom which allowed any young man who caught a cow for sacrifice to have its tail when killed. Nnebisi joined in the exercise of chasing cows on three different occasions but although each time he caught the cow he was denied the tail of the cow according to Nteje custom. As a result of this incident in his life he confronted his mother and demanded to know his father. His mother then revealed his real identity, that his father was an Igala prince and he, Nnebisi, was born at a place on the west coast of the Niger now called the Cable Point, where his mother and his father met. She then directed him to Asaba.

Nnebisi found his father at Asaba and great was their joy at meeting and mutual discovery. Father and son grew so close that despite the latter's long sojourn with his mother, he took a wife called Ujom from among his father's people in Igala.

Ezeanyanwu's own children and the children of Nnebisi seemed to have flourished together in peace although in the long run conflict developed as Nnebisi's own children multiplied and prospered while those of Ezeanyanwu declined. In the end, Nnebisi's line dominated Ezeanyanwu's to produce the picture of Asaba population structure of the present day.

Now, whatever legend may say about the origin of Asaba, it remains true that among the autochthonous groups there are today a number of settler-elements many of whom initially were of non-Ibo origin, although they have now become fully absorbed and integrated with the dominant Ibo population. Some of the settler groups migrated as we have already observed from neighbouring non-Ibo communities of Igala, Ishan and Bini. They still bear the tell-tale denominations

that point to their alien homes. Igala, Ishan and Bini remain Asaba's closest neighbours to her north and west, and we share with them still many elements of their cultures.

Ujom⁽¹⁾ begot the following children for Nnebisi: Onne (male), Ezeumune (male) and Ojife (female). Onne's wife, Ndo, begot Ezenei (male). Onne's second wife, Obowa begot two sons called Elibo-ocha (nicknamed Ajaji) and Elibo-okei (also nicknamed Onaje). Ezeumune's wife, Abame from Illah, begot Ugbomia (male) and Agu (male). (Illah is a town directly north of Asaba with strong historical links with Igala and Asaba people).

Nnebisi had a second wife, apart from Ujom, but her name is lost and the line of her only son, Iyagba, has also been lost. Lost too were three other seeds added to the six named earlier who are still extant, and together made the number of Asaba villages nine. Hence Asaba was formerly referred as "Ahaba Ebo Itenani". Of these nine, as we have already noted, four have disappeared or been wholly or partially absorbed by the present five villages which today dominate the indigenous population and are still euphemistically though incorrectly called 'quarters'. They are all exogamous groups, who, as we have seen, claim to be the direct descendants of Nnebisi. These five are now named as Umuezei, Ugbomanta, Umuagu, Umuaji, and Umuonaje.⁽²⁾ A sixth unit, called Idumu Odikpe, of independent origin and the oldest extant nucleus of Asaba now partially absorbed, settled initially at where we now call the Cable Point in which is situated their ancestral shrine. Today, many retired civil servants and recent stranger groups mainly of Eastern Ibo and Hausa origins live here in modern houses away from the five more or less rural village communities.

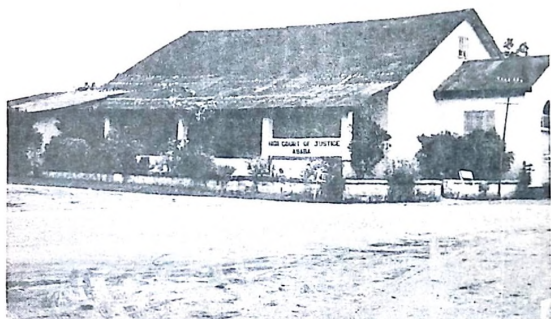
(1) *The former Asaba Girls Secondary Grammar School was renamed Ujom Girls Grammar School in memory of the mother of Asaba.*

(2) 'Umu' means 'children of', e.g., Onaje, etc.

The people of Asaba are proud of their past in everything. In the wars of ancient times, they distinguished themselves and are fond of quoting a legend that they drove the hordes of Benin away from Asaba land; and about 1833 they were victorious in a fierce encounter with the Aboh army. In education, it takes pride of place and is second to none in Nigeria. In fact, most people regard the town as the cradle of Nigerian education because "for many years it was the only source from which a local supply of suitable men could be counted upon to oust native foreigners from higher secretariat posts in government and commerce".

From 1880 A.D. to 1904, Asaba town was the Provincial headquarters of the Royal Niger Company and for these years its political and commercial importance was at its zenith. The town was the administrative headquarters of Asaba Division and the depot of the Company's armed constabulary. It held this position until 1904 when the Onitsha District was formed on the opposite side of the Niger and a large station was established at Onitsha town; but Asaba remained the District headquarters until 1910 when, as a tentative measure, immediately following the suppression of the widespread rising of EKUMEKU, the headquarters were removed to Ogwashi-Uku.

In the closing years of the last century, Asaba town as the headquarters of the Royal Niger Company was the virtual capital of Nigeria. When in 1900 the Company handed over the administration of the Government, Asaba town contained a large European settlement. There were also other outward manifestations of its position of importance, like the residences of the Chief Justice and Puisne Judge, and such other structures as the High Court (now rebuilt and still in use) the maximum security prison with its massive brick walls, the constabulary barracks, the military and civil hospital, the headquarters of the medical department, the experimental botanical gardens, as well as the European cemetery overlooking the River Niger



High Court of Justice, Asaba.



European cemetery, Asaba containing tombs and graves of European pioneers.

which is still in existence. Many people in their early middle age still remember these institutions, most of which have today so quickly passed into history.

From about 1904 when the Provincial headquarters were removed to Onitsha, a trend which was again emphasised by what was intended to be a temporary removal of the Divisional Headquarters to Ogwashi-Uku in 1910, the political and industrial importance of Asaba town had declined. It is noteworthy that the Mid-Western State Government in June 1975 deleted the name 'ASABA' from Asaba Division and renamed the Division Aniocha Division.(1) However, the former political status of Asaba was restored by the Bendel State Government under the Military Governor, His Excellency Commodore Husaini Abdullahi (NN), psc, when, on September 1, 1976, he proclaimed Asaba as the headquarters of the newly created Oshimili Local Government which was excised from Aniocha Division.(2)

(1) *Administrative Divisions (Establishment) (Amendment) Edict No. 9 of 1975, with the date of commencement as 30th November, 1974.*

(2) *Bendel State Legal Notice No. 80 of 1977.*

TRADITIONAL ORGANISATION

Family Structure

Asaba is made up of five Quarters called EBO, in the following order of seniority, namely, Umuezei, Ugbomanta, Umuagu, Umuaji and Umuonaje. Each quarter consists of a number of villages known as "Idumu" or "Ogbe" and each Idumu comprises smaller family units called "Umunna". The head of the Asaba community is His Highness the Asagba of Asaba and the head of each Eboh, Idumu or Umunna is called "Diokpa".

Each Ebo, Idumu or Umunna has its own administrative organisation. The Diokpa summons all meetings to discuss matters affecting his subjects. Such meetings are held in his residence or the meeting house called "Ogwa Ukwu". When disputes between individuals cannot be settled in Umunna appeals are made to the Diokpa of the Idumu and thence to the Diokpa of the Ebo and the Asagba's palace which is the final authority. Thus there is no appeal from Umunna direct to Ebo or from Ogbe to the Asagba.

The Ogbe is the customary unit of ownership of land. Land tenure accommodates both private and communal ownership and while land is owned communally, there is a measure of private ownership as well within the Ogbe. The individual families have their own land within the Ogbe which they can allocate to members of their family. In addition there is land owned by the people of an Ogbe in an undivided whole.

Age Groups

Traditionally and culturally, the administration of the town is based on age grades. Children born within a two-year period come within the same age group or "Ogbo". In ascending order of seniority they are as follows:

- (a) Nziza Ezi — Sweepers and cleaners:
- (b) Okwulagwe — Labour force
- (c) Anonno)
- (d) Ochokoloma) — Fighting force
- (e) Otuhaza — Ruling class grouped into four sections: Mbu Ewu, Ogbo-Ito, Ogbo-Nabo and Ogbo-Isi (leaders).
- (f) Ichiokwa) — The oldest age group.
- (g) *Kandum) Members act as advisers to the Asagba in Council.

Members of the Otuhaza constitute Asaba Parliament upon whom rests the administration of the town. This body consists of four age grades, ranging from about 58 to 68 years at the time they assume office and they serve for 10 years. The Otuhaza deliberate and take decisions on all traditional matters affecting the town. Their decision on any issue is referred to the Asagba who summons the ICHIOKWA and the OTUHAZA to discuss it. Any decision reached at the meeting of these bodies, with the Asagba presiding, which meeting is generally referred to as the Asagba in Council, becomes binding on the whole community.

The Otuhaza have two leaders called the ONOI and the OLOTO. The ONOI is the leader of the Otuhaza from UGBOMANTA and UMUAGU Quarters and he and the Otuhaza from the two quarters are greeted ONOI. He is also the President of all the Otuhaza in the town and thus convenes meetings of all the Otuhaza. The OLOTO is the leader of the Otuhaza from the other three Quarters (Umuezei, Umuaji and Umuona-je) known as UMUONE. He and the Otuhaza from UMUONE are greeted "AGBA". He convenes the meetings of the OTUHAZA of the three quarters.

* "Kandum" is of recent introduction. Members under this group may be greeted Chichi-Nokwai for the oldest set.

TITLES

In Asaba, as in every other area in the State, the society is stratified. A person's status or social class is determined not only by his age but also by the title he holds and, to some extent, the wealth he possesses. The Asaba community has two main groups of titles, one which is obtained by joining a Title Association and the other is conferred on an individual by the Asagba and is called Olinzele. The main Title Associations in order of importance are MKPISI, ALO and EZE.

Title Associations

MKPISI: This is the first cult into which any free-born male is initiated to confirm his citizenship. Every Asaba male citizen must undergo this initiation before he can take the ALO or Eze titles. MKPISI is taken once in every 20 years and is performed by the head of MKPISI in each ogbe or village called "NWA DINMO"

ALO: This is a prestige title which cannot be taken by one whose father is alive. It is a necessary qualification for taking the EZE title. The initiate, who is called "Mkpalo" must slaughter one cow which is shared among the title-holders in his Ogbe, hence he is greeted "Ogbuefi", meaning "killer of a cow". The initiate must also pay some fee for admission to this association and the fee varies and increases from one village (Ogbe) to the other ranging at least from ₦800 upward. The regalia of Mkpalo comprises a highly decorated leather fan and a small elephant tusk "Otu-laka". His staff of office is the ALO.

EZE: In English, EZE means "King". The title is the most expensive and prestigious and the highest title in Asaba, apart from the Asagba. The whole ceremony of taking the title lasts for about 40 days. For the first seven days, the initiate is rubbed with

white chalk called "Nzu" and is greeted every morning with the Royal Dance "Egwu Ota". On the final day he entertains his age group and every Eze-title holder has to dance to the tune of "Egwu Ota

The regalia of an Eze, who is also called Obi, includes a red cap or fez adorned with palm fibre and eagle feathers (hence the Ezes were called "Red Cap Chiefs" in the colonial days), a horse tail (Uya) used on ceremonial occasions, a cow tail (NZA) and a small elephant tusk (Otulaka). An Obi is surrounded with many taboos which make him highly respectable in the community. At all meetings in his Umunna of Ebo an Obi takes a second position after the Diokpa notwithstanding his age, and he takes precedence of speech over any other title holder except the Diokpa. When he arrives at any meeting and sits down, every other person stands up to greet him "Igwe"

Asagba

As the highest title holders in the town, the Obis sit next to the *Asagba* in all meetings attended by him and take their places in order of their age.

The title, OBI, should not be confused with the monarchical Obishop which is found in the neighbouring towns as Issele-Uku, Ogwashi-Uku, Ubulu-Uku, and others where the title holder is the king or traditional ruler of his clan. On the other hand, EZE or IGWE is an IGBO title which has its origin from the town Nri in Anambra State. Hence in the past the ceremony for Eze title would only be concluded in the presence of an Nri or Nshi priest.

Ogbuu

This is a title association which is taken without any restrictions as to age, or previous title. Originally, the title was awarded to warriors who had distinguished

themselves in war. The very name connotes a killer. Nowadays the title is taken by one who shows signs of possession by evil spirits or suffers misfortunes as the ceremony is believed to provide complete exorcism from evil spirits or usher in good luck to the initiate. The title holder enjoys most of the privileges of an Eze. In fact every Eze is required to take the title either alive or posthumously.

Individual Titles

In addition to the title associations, Asaba has titles which are conferred on individuals, among which are the Onoi and Oloto mentioned earlier, and also Omu and Ezeugbo.

OMU is the only title a woman can take in the community. The holder is greeted "Ogbuefi" because she has to slaughter a cow on installation. She is the leader or Queen of the women of Asaba and is assisted by a Council known as "Otu Omu". She has certain ceremonies to perform whenever called upon to do so for the welfare of the women or the community at large. Among her other functions is the administration of the markets.

• EZEUGBO title is held for 10 years and the tenure of office coincides with that of the Otuhaza. The holder, addressed as "Ayiwe", performs an annual feast connected with the town's medicine reputed to give the inhabitants immunity or protection from the attack of thunder and lightning, as well as death from blow of clubs or sticks. The title has many restrictions and if one completes his tenure of office he is rewarded with the Alo or Eze title. In view of the importance of his functions he is privileged to eat the "new yam" before the Ezes or Obis.

(1) *Olinzele* title was first introduced in Asaba in 1958.



HIS HIGHNESS OBI R.P. ONYETENU
Asagba of Asaba



HER HIGHNESS NWOJIGIDI O. OKOCHA
Queen of Asaba.

Chieftaincy or Olinzele Titles

In 1957 the Government recognised a number of Chieftaincy titles in Asaba in addition to the two which were then in existence, namely IYASE and ODOGWU. These titles were revised in 1976 and replaced by the following:

<i>Title</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
(a) Asagba	Agu
(b) Iyase	Onowu
(c) Odogwu	Abi
(d) Akwue	Omogwu
(e) Imagwe	Oboli
(f) Ojiba	Atah
(g) Oniha	Ogene
(h) Izoma	Onya
(i) Uwolo	Agba
(j) Isama	Ajie
(k) Olodi	Akpe

The position of Chiefs and Chieftaincy titles in Asaba is now being reviewed by a Committee appointed by the Asagba-in-Council under the Chairmanship of Professor F. N. Ndili, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Traditional Ruler

Originally, Asaba had a king called Eze, the first being one of the grandsons of Nncbisi. After six reigns, quarrels broke out owing to jealousy among the different quarters as to whose turn it was to take the title. This led to more than five men taking the title and the custom has now spread. As a result of this particular state of affairs the town's people decided to elect a head chief and thus the Asagba was born.

**"Kandum" is of recent introduction. Members under this group may be greeted Chichi-Nokwai for the oldest set.*

No one can say exactly when Asagbanship came into being but it is believed that Obi Nemmo of Umuagu Quarters became the first Asagba about 1780.

Among the rivals for succession to the sole Eze or King were mentioned such prominent people as Onyebuchi of Umuezei, Inalu of Umuagu and Afadia of Umuaji. Of these, Inalu was said to be the most powerful and influential and was accorded the status of "Eze ka eze" (the greatest of all the rival Ezes) and the one who would in fact have been the sole Eze but for the rivalry and the tussle for power. This led to the erroneous notion that Obi Inalu was the first Asagba of Asaba.

According to recorded history, the following were the holders of Asagbanship at one time or the other:

- | | | | |
|------|---------------------------------|---|----------------|
| 1. | Obi Nemmo of Umuagu | — | about 1780 |
| 2. | Obi Ofodu of Umuagu | — | about 1790 |
| 3. | Obi Diali of Umuonaje | — | about 1820 |
| 4. | Obi Monu of Umuaji | — | about 1850 |
| 5. | Obi Nwani of Ugbomanta | — | about 1870 |
| 6. | Obi Egbola of Umuaji | — | about 1890 |
| 7. | Obi Onyemenam of Umuaji | — | about 1910 |
| 8. | Obi Nwokolo of Umuezei | — | 1925-1932 |
| 9. | Obi Ije of Ugbomanta | — | 1937-1948 |
| 10. | Obi Emenashi Odiaka of Umuagu | — | 1950-1958 |
| 11. | Obi Okocha Nwokolo of Umuaji | — | 1962-1963 |
| *12. | Obi Umejei Onyetenu of Umuonaje | — | 1964 till date |

At the time the Asagbanship was first introduced the principle of rotation was not implied. The finding of the next Asagba was purely a matter of finding the next powerful Eze who would assume effective leader-

**It is doubtful if Asaba had only 12 Asagbas since the inception of this title. This seems to be on the low side, and it is possible that about three names of the previous holders may have been left out.*

ship of the Ezes. Thus, Obi Nemmo of Umuagu, the first Asagba, was succeeded by Obi Ofodu, son of Obi Ina!u, also of Umuagu. The system of rotation was introduced in 1925 following the recommendation of the Morgridge Inquiry and since then the Asagbanship is held in rotation among the five Quarters of Asaba according to seniority of genealogy in the following orders

- (a) Umuezei Quarter
- (b) Ugbomanta Quarter
- (c) Umuagu Quarter
- (d) Umuaji Quarter
- (e) Umuonaje Quarter

In 1925 the Asagbanship was recognised by the Government and in 1926 the Asagba became the Traditional head and ruler of Asaba, and also king of the kings.

The Asagba is the traditional head and ruler of Asaba, and also King of the kings (EZE). Thus, a person selected or elected to be Asagba must first take the Eze title if he has not already done so. Among other qualifications, the Asagba shall be either Otureaza or Ichiokwa and a direct descendant of Nnebisi.

The Asagba is greeted "Igwe" like any Eze title holder and is also greeted "Agu" meaning "The Leopard", which is regarded as the king of animals. In all matters affecting Asaba, the Asagba must seek and take the advice of the "Otuhaza", the ruling class who, together with the "Ichiokwa", form the Asagba in Council.

The reigning Asagba, who comes from Umuonaje Quarter, is His Highness Obi Raymond P. Onyetenu, M.F.R. (Member of the Federal Republic). He was crowned and installed on May 15, 1964 and is the 13th Asagba of Asaba. He was a member of the Midwest House of Chiefs (M.H.A.) and the Deputy President of the Midwest House of Obas, Obis, Onogies and Chiefs. He is now a member of the Council for Traditional Rulers in Oshimili Local Government area which was inaugurated in 1977.

FESTIVALS

There are five major festivals in Asaba. They are:

ULO; This is a festival held bi-annually in July for cleansing the town of evil spirits, illness, misfortunes, etc. It is also concerned with the cult for productivity both of children and wealth. The festival was celebrated in July 1978.

Aja: means "sacrifice". This is a festival celebrated annually in August to mark the beginning of the harvest period.

Iwaji: takes place in September. It is a festival which shows that the new yams have become available in abundance. The feast is celebrated first by the AYIWE, the "Festival King" who then goes round the town to ask the Obis to do so.

Ekwensu or Ine: is held in October, after the Iwaji Festival. The festival is marked by military parade and war dances reminiscent of the old battles in which Asaba people distinguished themselves. The participants, dressed mainly in battle suits with spears, cutlasses and shields dance throughout the town calling on the ODOGWU and the IYASE, the war lords. Five

days are set aside for the celebration, a day for each Quarter or EBO.

Olia Oma: is a feast day, at the conclusion of the festivals for the year, in which each family offers sacrifices and prayers to their mothers who are dead.

LANGUAGE AND RELIGION

Ibo is the language spoken in Asaba and the neighbouring towns. The religion of Asaba people is like all African religions, ancestor worship. Christian Missions who followed in the wake of commercial adventurers have, however, made considerable headway, to the extent that christianity is nearly edging out ancestor worship.

The first attempt to plant christianity in Asaba was made by the Church Missionary Society. The Niger Mission landed at Asaba in 1875 and Anglican Christianity spread from here to the hinterland towns of Osamele and Oko. When the Niger Mission headquarters was removed from Onitsha to Asaba in 1879, it intensified missionary operations in Aniocha and Ika areas, and new stations were opened at Ogwashi-Uku, Atuma, Ubulu-Uku, Akwukwu, Onicha-Olona, Ezi, Idumuje-Ugboko, Agbor, Owa and a number of other towns, all these stations being under the superintendence of a pastor resident at Asaba. The missions in the former Asaba Division, Ika and Aboh Divisions comprise Asaba Archdeaconry with headquarters at Asaba. History was made at Asaba on 10th August, 1977 when the Most Reverend M.N.C.O. Scott, the Archbishop of West Africa, constituted and inaugurated the Asaba Archdeaconry the Diocese of Asaba and then installed and enthroned the Right Reverend R.N.C. Nwosu the Bishop of Asaba.

The Catholic Mission arrived at Asaba in 1884. When the Prefecture of Upper Niger was established Right Reverend Father Carlos Zappa, S.M.A., was then appointed the first Prefect Apostolic, with Asaba

as the headquarters. The first Vicariate ever to be created in this part of the country was named the Vicariate of Western Nigeria, later renamed Asaba Vicariate. It was established in 1918 with headquarters at Asaba. The first Bishop appointed to head this Vicariate was Bishop Thomas Broderick, S.M.A., and after his death in 1933 he was succeeded by Bishop Leo Taylor (later Archbishop of Lagos). Bishop Taylor was consecrated at Asaba in 1934 but he decided to move the mission headquarters to Benin City in 1937 on grounds of personal convenience, coupled with the fact that Benin City was then the Provincial Headquarters of Benin Province.

Even though Bishop Leo Taylor moved to Benin City he still retained the name "Asaba Vicariate" as a result of protests from the Asaba people for moving the headquarters from Asaba. The Asaba Vicariate was later renamed Asaba-Benin Vicariate in 1943. And from this Vicariate have been carved out the Diocese of Ondo (1943), the Diocese of Lokoja (1955), the Diocese of Warri (1964) and the Issele-Uku Diocese (1973). It was in fact what remained of the Asaba-Benin Vicariate after the creation of these Dioceses that was renamed the Diocese of Benin City.

The first Church to be built after the Catholic Mission was established at Asaba in 1884 is still in existence. And so also are the church which followed it, in which Bishop Leo Taylor was consecrated Bishop in 1934, and also the magnificent Cathedral which was started in the same year. The residences of Bishops Thomas Broderick and Bishop Leo Taylor still occupy prominent positions in the Mission compound today.

Asaba was also the headquarters of the O.L.A. Convent headed by a Reverend Mother. There had flourished a very large convent school, with boarding facilities, to which girls from all parts of Southern Nigeria flocked. The buildings are still in existence and the boarding facilities are still maintained.

In 1927 a Senior Seminary was established at Asaba. It was here that the late Archbishop J. Aggey of Lagos, Bishop Sanusi of Ijebu-Ode and others had a part of their studies before the Seminary was moved away. The Mission also opened the Catholic Maternity Clinic at Asaba in 1934, which was later rebuilt and is now flourishing.

It is on record that since the Mission Headquarters were moved from Asaba to Benin City, the Asaba people had been agitating for the creation of a Diocese of Asaba and the restoration of the Bishop's seat at Asaba. In fact the former Bishop of Benin City, Bishop P. J. Kelly, had promised the appointment of at least an Auxiliary Bishop for Asaba before the Nigerian crisis. The creation of Issele-Uku Diocese with headquarters at Issele-Uku is thus *volte face*.

Not only was Asaba the cradle of Roman Catholic Mission, it has of all the towns in the State produced the largest number of Reverend Fathers and Sisters. The first native of Asaba to be raised to the Sacred Priesthood is Very Rev. Monsignor Patrick G. Ugboko who was ordained at Asaba in April 1951. He was the Rector of the Saints Peter and Paul Senior Seminary at Ibadan for many years until he retired recently. Others are Rev. Father C. Chukwumah, who was ordained in January 1957, Rev. Sister Nuala Edozien, O.L.A. professed in 1966, Rev. Father Dr. P.A.C. Isichei, ordained December 1966, late Rev. Father John Umunna, ordained in 1970 (R.I.P.), and Rev. Father I.L.N. Nwanze (Dominican) ordained 1976.

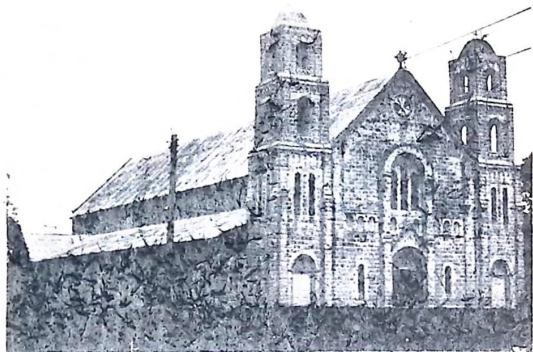
The missionaries have contributed to a great extent to the development of Asaba. Three of the four Grammar Schools at Asaba were built by them, one by the Anglican Mission and two by the Roman Catholic Mission. The fourth Grammar School, Osadebay High School, was built by Chief Dennis Osadebay, a son of Asaba, who was the first Premier of Midwestern Nigeria. The Missionaries also built eight of the ten primary schools in the town: four by the Roman

Catholic Mission, three by the Anglican Mission and one by the Pilgrim Baptist Mission. The imposing Cathedral built by the Roman Catholic Mission and the Convent buildings occupy prominent positions in the town as already mentioned.

The Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Missions had in addition built the Rural Training Centre, which the Bendel State Government has taken over and converted into the School of Agriculture. The Anglican Mission also built the St. Peter's Anglican Teacher Training College which was closed down some years ago following the reorganization of Teacher Training Institutions in Bendel State.



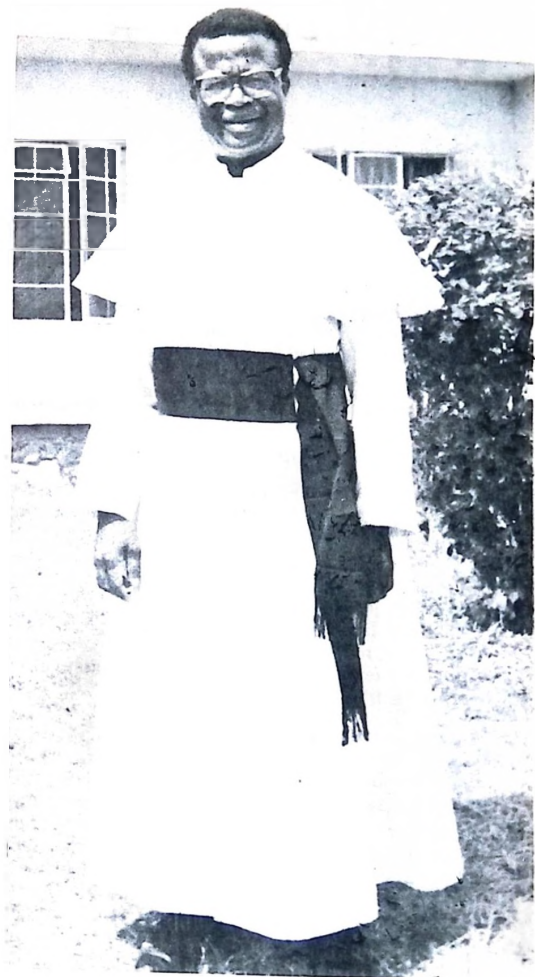
Catholic Convent, Asaba.



Roman Catholic Cathedral, Asaba.



Roman Catholic Mission House, Asaba where the founding fathers including Bishop Thomas Broderick (1918-1933) and Bishop Leo Taylor (1934-1937) lived.



VERY REV. MONSIGNOR PATRICK UGBOKO

JUDICIAL

The administration of justice flows naturally from political administration and was essentially in the hands of the Otuhaza age-group. This means that matters which cannot be settled by the family units and Ogbe, are taken before the town tribunal which was composed of Otuhaza and Ndichi Okwa. Apart from thus acting as a court of appeal in these matters, the two most senior age groups exercised original jurisdiction in cases of murder which the Ogbe had no jurisdiction to deal with. In all matters, the Ogbe acts through its Diokpa and as has been shown the judicial and administrative bodies are the same, that is to say: the Otuhaza and Ichiokwa age grades.

From 1880 A.D., it is best to record the accounts given by two learned authors. Dr. T. Oluwole Elias in "Makers of Nigerian Law" writes as follows:

"On the grant of a charter to the company on July 10, 1886 the man to whom Goldie turned as Chief Justice of the new administration was Sir James Marshall. The headquarters was at Asaba, courts of justice were established, and armed constabulary headed by British officers was constituted for maintaining law and order and protecting the territories against the encroachments of other European Powers".

"Various Regulations dating from 1886 to 1899 when the British Government eventually took over from the company, were enacted by means of which appeals lay from District Agents to the Supreme Judicial Officer in all matters whatsoever and the latter could even suspend by warrant the judicial powers of any District Agent. But after the appointment of Marshall as the first Chief Justice who held office during the company's pleasure, the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court over administrative officers' judicial

work was taken away by a Regulation of 1889 and given to the Agent-General or senior Executive Officer. Thus was initiated, during Marshall's tenure, the policy which Lugard later adopted for the Provincial Courts of Nigeria in 1900 and which, like the doctrine of Indirect Rule, was later extended to the rest of Southern Nigeria in 1914 and generally to all colonial territories thereafter".

Of the judicial decisions of those days is recorded this case in Sir Allan Burns' "History of Nigeria" 1948 edition at page 149:

"In 1887 a German merchant, named Hoehnigsberg, with the avowed intention of falling foul of the Company and 'bursting up their charter', entered the Niger in a vessel with a cargo of salt, which was seized on account of his deliberate infringement of the Customs Regulations. Arriving at Nupe, he began to intrigue against the Company, but he was arrested, tried at Asaba, and found guilty by Sir James Marshall, the Chief Justice of the Niger Company's administration, and ordered to leave the country."

It now remains to add that this Sir James Marshall held the highest judicial office in West Africa from 1879 to 1882 when he held the office of Chief Justice of Gold Coast Colony (which included Lagos).

In 1900 a native Court was established at Asaba with jurisdiction extending as far as Aboh. In 1957, as part of the Western Region, the native court was replaced with the Customary Court. There is today a revival of the early importance of the town. There are a High Court, a Magistrate's Court and a Customary Court at Asaba. There have been built the Judge's residence and the Magistrate's Quarters, both reminders of the late 1880's.

GOVERNMENT

Native Administration

Asaba has enjoyed urban or corporate status for many decades. It was first established as a Third Class Township by Order in Council made in 1917 and its direct contact with the British rule dated as far back as 1884 when the "Kings, Queen, and Chiefs" of Asaba concluded a Treaty with the Consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra on behalf of Her Majesty on the first day of November, 1884. The relevant portion of this Treaty is reproduced hereunder:—

"The Kings, Queen, and Chiefs of Asaba hereby engage to assist the British Consular or other officers in the execution of such duties as may be assigned to them; and, further, to act upon their advice in matters relating to the administration of justice, the development of the resources of the country, the interests of commerce, or in any other matter in relation to peace, order and good government, and the general progress of civilisation".

The people of Asaba were thus for the first time required to act upon the advice of the British Consul in matters relating among others to the administration of justice. And this could be regarded as the beginning of Indirect Rule in Asaba Town.

Before the advent of the British, the government of Asaba was in the hands of the OTUHAZA Age Group. Thus, the membership of the Clan Council and a grade "C" Court established for Asaba in 1934, composed mainly of about 150 members of the Otuhaza, headed by the Asagba as the President. Following a general re-organisation in 1942 in Asaba Division, a 45-man elected Council, 9 from each quarter, with the Asagba as the President, and a 15-man Committee selected from the Council, were established. A further re-organisation was carried out in 1951 when the Asaba Clan Council was renamed the Asaba Town Council comprising 33 members.

Asaba Urban District Council:

On June 2, 1954, a 30-member Asaba Urban District Council was inaugurated, with the Asagba as the President. The Council was one of the three District Councils which made up the 48-member Asaba Divisional Council established on July 21, 1954. The other Councils were the Aniocha and the Ika District Councils which were created on the 29th and 30th of June, 1954, respectively.

The Instrument establishing the Asaba Urban District Council was amended in 1958 to make provision for the nine holders of Chieftaincy titles, OLINZELES, who had been recognised by the Government on 21st August, 1958, namely Onihe, Ajic, Ogene, Izoma, Akwue, Imagwe, Isama, Odogwu and lyase. These were called Traditional Members of the Council. The OLINZELES were supporters of the Action Group, then the political party in power, and their injection into the N.C.N.C. dominated A.U.D.C. had the effect of transferring the control of the Council from the N.C.N.C. to the Action Group. This move was stoutly resisted by most of Asaba people led by Chief J.I.G. Onyia who took the matter to court. Following the report of the Ubaru Commission of Inquiry, the Government revoked the appointment of the nine traditional members but did not withdraw the recognition of their titles.

Towards the end of 1962, the functions of the A.U. D.C. were, by a default order, transferred to the Local Government Adviser, Benin, but this order was revoked in 1963 when the Council resumed its functions.

From 1964 till the outbreak of the civil war, the affairs of the Council were run by a Management Committee. During the war, the whole of Asaba town and other parts of the former Asaba Division were virtually war zones and, at one stage, the Divisional Office at Ogwashi-Uku had to be moved temporarily to Isese-Uku. When, however, conditions improved, the Divisional Officer was appointed a Sole Administrator, Asaba Urban District Council in 1969 and he

had a six-man Advisory Committee to assist him. After the war, that is on the 15th of June, 1972, to be precise, a 15-man Committee of Management, with His Highness the Asagba of Asaba as the Chairman, was established to run the affairs of the Council.

W.R.L.N. 20 of 1954

The Western Region Local Government Law, 1952

INSTRUMENT ESTABLISHING THE ASABA URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

1. In exercise of the powers conferred upon the Regional Authority by section 3 of the Western Region Local Government Law, 1952 (hereinafter called "the Law"), a District Council entitled the Asaba Urban District Council (hereinafter called "the Council") shall be established upon the 2nd day of June, 1954.

2. The common seal of the Council shall be the following device:



Provided that a rubber stamp bearing the words "Asaba Urban District Council" may be used until such time as a seal be procured.

3. The area of authority of the Council shall be Asaba Town.

Asaba Urban Development Committee:

The Asaba Urban District Council was succeeded by the Asaba Urban Development Committee, established by the Development Administration Edict, No. 26 of 1974 which introduced a development oriented system of local administration in the State, with effect from December 1, 1974. The Committee was one of the four Urban Committees, including the Benin City Development Committee, established in the State, the others being Sapele Urban and Warri Urban Development Committees. The Asaba Urban

Development Committee was composed of a President, who is the Asagba of Asaba, and 24 members including the Chairman. It was an autonomous authority with its own annual budget of revenue and expenditure.

Oshimili Local Government Council:

In 1976, the Federal Military Government published national guidelines for the reforms of local government in the country. These guidelines stipulated that the new unit of local administration would be called local government, the ideal minimum population of which should be 150,000 unless in exceptional circumstances where this figure might be slightly less. As a result the Bendel State Government created 19 local governments, including Oshimili Local Government, with effect from the 1st of September, 1976. The area of authority of Oshimili Local Government, which was excised from Aniocha, includes the following clans and areas, namely, Asaba and environs, Oko/Okwe, Ibusa, Illah/Ebu, Okpanam and Akwukwu/Atuma. Asaba was declared the headquarters of Oshimili Local Government and the Asagba of Asaba was the first out of the six Traditional Rulers to be appointed as the President of the Oshimili Council of Traditional Rulers and thus the first ceremonial President of Oshimili Local Government Council.

The Oshimili Local Government Council consists of 8 elected and 2 nominated members. Four of the members, including three elected members, as well as the Chairman, come from Asaba.

STATE & FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS

Bendel State Government Institutions at Asaba

The main Government Departments in Asaba include the following:

- (a) Judiciary comprising the High Court and two Magistrates Courts.
- (b) Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, including the School of Agriculture.
- (c) Ministry of Education:

- (i) Education Office, which is responsible for inspectorate duties and administration of the Unified Teaching Service.
 - (ii) Institute of Continuing Education.
- (d) Ministry of Finance:
- (i) Treasury Cash Office
 - (ii) Motor Licensing Office.
- (e) Ministry of Health:
- (i) General Hospital of ninety beds
 - (ii) Health Centre.
- (f) Ministry of Information, Culture and Sports:
- (i) Social Welfare, including Juvenile Court and Remand Home.
 - (ii) Information Office,
 - (iii) Sports Council and Stadium Committee.
- (g) Ministry of Lands and Housing:
Bendel Development and Planning Authority.
- (h) Ministry of Local Government:
- (i) Oshimili Local Government Council.
 - (ii) Oshimili Traditional Council.
- (i) Ministry of Works and Transport:
- (i) Principal Engineer's Office.
 - (ii) Water Board.

Federal Government Institutions

Police: Asaba is the headquarters of the Nigeria Police with the Divisional Police Officer in charge.

Labour: The Federal Ministry of Labour has an office in Asaba. This deals with labour and employment problems in this fast developing urban town.

Posts and Telegraphs: There is a main Post Office at Asaba which transacts all the business normally carried on in a post office, including postal, telephone, telegraphic and telecommunication services. The telephone exchange gives 24 hours service to all parts of the country. A sub-post office is situated at the Cable Point.

Electricity: The National Electric Power Authority (N.E.P.A.) has an office with an Engineer in charge. The town is fully electrified and the main streets are furnished with street lights.

EDUCATION

In keeping with the reputation of Asaba town as "the cradle of Nigerian education" regular instructions are given at all stages to about 12,000 persons. This accounts for 24% of the population of the town, and shows a high percentage of literacy. The institutions range from primary schools to Secondary Grammar and Technical Schools. Latest figures up to June 1977 are as follows:

Primary Schools

There are 10 primary schools with a total population of 8,000 pupils from Classes 1 to 6, some of which run double sessions. The oldest of these Schools is St. Joseph's Catholic School, now renamed Zappa Primary School, which was opened by the Roman Catholic Mission in 1888 after the Mission was established at Asaba. Thereafter were founded Our Lady of Apostles (Convent) School (now renamed Ogbeafor Primary School) in 1895, the Holy Trinity School (renamed Abuato Primary School) in 1896 and Government School (now Aho Primary School) in 1901.

Secondary Grammar Schools

There are four of these: two for girls and two for boys all of which provide instructions to the School Certificate standard. Nnebisi College in addition runs Higher School Certificate classes. The details are:

- (a) Nnebisi College (formerly St. Patrick's College) for boys has about 990 students. This was founded in 1944.
- (b) Osadebay High School for boys founded in 1965 by Chief Dennis Osadebay, *G.C.O.N.*, the first Premier of the Midwest Region of Nigeria. The school has a student enrolment of 800.
- (c) Ujom Grammar School (formerly called Asaba Girls Grammar School) founded by the Anglican Mission in 1963. Student population is 420 girls.
- (d) Oma Grammar School (formerly St. Brigid's Grammar School) founded in 1965 by the Roman Catholic Mission. Enrolment is 360.

Technical Institution

Before August, 1974, there were two privately-owned technical schools at Asaba, namely Electro Trades Institute (founded in 1960) and Niger Trades School, founded by Mr. B. Ndah. Following the re-organization of Trades Schools in the State, the Niger Trades School was closed down and Electro Trades School converted to Technical College, and called Asaba Technical College which now has 900 boys and girls.

Teacher Training College

The only Grade One Teacher Training College in the Midwest Region was established at the Rural Training College but this was closed down during the war.

There was also a Grade Two Teacher Training

College, St. Peter's Anglican Teacher Training College. This was closed down during the re-organisation of Training Colleges in the State. The buildings and premises are now being used as the headquarters of the new Anglican Bishop of Asaba.

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

One of the three major Bendel State Government Industries, the N8.4 million Bendel Textile Mill Limited, is sited at Asaba. This offers employment to about 1,000 workers. This company, which was incorporated on June 18, 1964, is a joint venture between the Government of the Bendel State, which owns 90% of the shares and an expatriate firm of Messrs Coutinho Caro and Company of Hamburg, Western Germany, holding 10% shares. The company manufactures printed cloth in a line of production which involves four different manufacturing processes, namely, spinning, weaving, engraving and printing/finishing.

Industrial development in Asaba is otherwise dominated by the private sector and comprises such activities, as manufacturing and crafts, building and construction, transport, etc.

There are two markets in the town, Ogbegonogo at Ogbilo and Ogbolie at the Cable Point. The former functions daily but the latter functions mainly on Olie day (once in four days) and attracts market men and women from the neighbouring towns, including towns across the Niger.

Because markets have been and today are still largely a woman's affair, the organization is in the hands of women. Traditionally, the markets are under the OMU who has disciplinary power over offenders in the market.

ROADS & COMMUNICATIONS

Asaba is the gateway to the Eastern States. There was a ferry service across the River Niger to Onitsha provided by the Federal Inland Waterways Department. The first ferry called the "Shanahan" was put into operation in 1937 as a result of the Asaba community's petition sponsored by Asaba Union in 1936

to the then Lieut. Governor of Southern Nigeria, Mr. W. E. Hunt, then resident in Enugu. The ferrying of passengers and goods across the Niger was indeed an important aspect of business life in Asaba for many years.

The Inland Waterways ferry service came to an end with the opening of the ₦10-million Niger Bridge in January, 1966. Although the briskness of life appeared to have slowed down at the waterfront, river canoes still ply the river to Onitsha. Some of them are mechanised with out-board engines.

In Asaba Town there are in all about 100 roads and streets named by the AUDC. Thirty of these roads and streets covering 35 miles (56 kilometres) were regularly maintained by the AUDC while the Bendel State Government is maintaining a total of 16 kilometres of the roads.

The Bendel Intra-City Bus Service provides omnibus transport within the town, although it does not adequately meet the needs of the inhabitants. It is worthy of note that a Municipal Bus service was run by the Asaba Urban District Council many years ago. There is no reason why the newly created Oshimili Local Government cannot now provide and manage its own transport service.

There is a fleet of privately owned taxi cabs which ply within the town at 10k per trip or "drop". By arrangement, they can travel longer distances.

Rural Training Centre

The Rural Training Centre was opened in 1949, having been founded in 1947 by a Canadian Farmer, the Rev. K. H. Prior. The original purpose of the Centre was to help young people to become better farmers, teachers and citizens; to build more fully Christian Communities, productive farms, healthy bodies, pleasant homes and progressive churches. But the Centre later became enlarged on all sides with the inclusion of the following Colleges:—

- (a) The Rural Education College, providing a two-year course in Rural and General Science leading to Grade I Teachers' Certificate, the only such School in the then Midwest State.
- (b) Farm Institute, providing a course for farm settlers, but which was closed down in 1963.
- (c) Rural Development Training College which was opened in 1965 with a two-year course for Rural Development Organisers etc. The course was assisted with a grant from the Ford Foundation.

The Rural Education College and the Rural Development Training College were closed down during the war.

The Rural Training Centre, which covers an area of 1,800 acres, is a tourist spot with many attractive interests, including a poultry provided by the "World Neighbours Inc." of the U.S.A., a piggery, plantation of rubber, citrus, cocoa, oil palm, etc. fishponds, and market gardens. The Centre also has large areas under yams and rice.

The Bendel State Government, under the Military Governor, His Excellency Commodore Husaini Abdullahi (NN), *psc*, converted the Centre into a School of Agriculture on 10th January, 1977.



Ahor Primary School (formerly Government School) Asaba, founded in 1901.



Zappa Primary School, (formerly St. Joseph's Catholic School), Asaba, founded. 1888.



Nnebisi College (formerly St. Patrick's College), Asaba.



Ujoni Grammar School (formerly Asaba Girls Grammar School)
Asaba.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Sporting Activities

There are athletic and football teams organised in and managed by the educational institutions in the town, and there are also a few clubs run by groups of persons for the same purpose. Among these may be mentioned the Asaba Club, the Asaba Tennis Club which has produced a number of champions, and the Bendel Textile Mill Football Club which was the Bendel State Champion Football Club in 1974.

Stadium

A Sports Stadium has been built at Asaba through communal efforts. The Stadium has not been completed but about ₦50,000 has so far been spent. The main facility provided for in the Stadium is the football pitch in which a number of football competitions have been played, including the Nigeria Challenge Cup and the Giwa-Osagie Cup. The Stadium Hall is available for hire by individuals and groups in the community for social functions at reasonable charges. The Bendel State Government has given out contract for the completion of the Stadium which has now been taken over by the Bendel State Sports Council.

Banking Facilities

The following Banks operate at Asaba—Barclays Bank of Nigeria Limited, and the African Continental Bank Limited.

Hotel Services

There are some hotels of reputable standard in the town. These include the Bendel Hotels Limited, the International Hotel, the Ada Guest House, the McGregor Hotel and Maha Hotel.

ASABA DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

History was made in Asaba on the 2nd of April, 1972 when the Asaba Development Association launched the first phase of the town's ₦1 million self-help development fund. The aims and objectives of the Association are as follows:—

- (a) To promote and encourage the spirit of self-help in Asaba town;
- (b) To plan for the development of Asaba town;
- (c) To raise and administer funds for the development and improvement of Asaba town;
- (d) To co-operate with organisations, unions or associations with identical aims and objectives for the purpose of fostering the welfare, development and progress of Asaba town.

The greatest, self-evident and shining example of self-help which the Asaba Development Association had proudly brought into existence is the Township Stadium over which it has spent about ₦50,000.00. The Association is now undertaking the building of the Asagba's Palace estimated to cost ₦3000,000.00. The sum of ₦50,000.00 has so far been spent on this project.

In addition to the above projects the Association has disbursed various amounts for the following:—

- | | |
|--|------------|
| (a) Donation to the Midwest Military Government Development Fund | ₦4,000.00 |
| (b) Amount transferred to the Asaba Urban Development Committee | ₦17,000.00 |
| (c) Repair and furnishing of the Asagba's Palace | ₦1,000.00 |

It may be noted that Asaba people had been engaged in self-help efforts for many decades. The Ujom

(formerly Asaba) Girls Grammar School and the Nnebisi (formerly St. Patrick's) College could not have got off the ground the way they did without the financial contributions of the sons and daughters of Asaba. Various self-help projects were undertaken by several self-help rehabilitation and reconstruction associations during the civil war and soon after. The Asaba Town Self-help Development Fund was founded at Agbor in 1969 under the leadership of Mr. J. Ilo. Okwudiafor, which body may justly lay claim to have been the real precursor of the present Asaba Development Association. Others were the Asaba Youths Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Association at Ibadan and the officially-backed Asaba Urban Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee at Asaba. The Ezenei Hall (which houses the Chief Magistrate's Court), the Elibujor Hall, and the Odikpe Hall (which also houses the Customary Court) are the products of self-help both past and present.*

**Lecture on "The Constitution and Functions of the Asaba Development Association and other Developments in Asaba" by His Lordship, Mr. Justice Uche Omo, Judge of the Federal Court of Appeal.*

The people of Asaba are proud of their past in everything. In the wars of ancient times, they distinguished themselves and are fond of quoting a legend that they drove the hordes of Benin away from Asaba land; and about 1833 they were victorious in a fierce encounter with the Aboh army. In education, it takes pride of place and is second to none in Nigeria. In fact, most people regard the town as the cradle of Nigerian education because "for many years it was the only source from which a local supply of suitable men could be counted upon to oust native foreigners from higher secretariat posts in government and commerce".

From 1880 A.D. to 1904, Asaba town was the Provincial headquarters of the Royal Niger Company and for these years its political and commercial importance was at its zenith. The town was the administrative headquarters of Asaba Division and the depot of the Company's armed constabulary. It held this position until 1904 when the Onitsha District was formed on the opposite side of the Niger and a large station was established at Onitsha town, but Asaba remained the District headquarters until 1910 when, as a tentative measure, immediately following the suppression of the widespread rising of EKUMEKU, the headquarters were removed to Ogwashi-Uku.