Title VI: Romeo Horton and Father Kandakai

Brief Report from Liberian Collections Project to Title VI Librarians/Africana Librarians Council
African Studies Association 2008 Meetings, Chicago

The Liberian Collections Project is pleased to report that the project to microfilm the restored W.V.S. Tubman papers is nearly complete. Happily, microfilming is finishing about two months ahead of schedule and $3,000 – 5,000 under budget. Hudson Micrographics microfilmed all twenty-one boxes of Tubman materials, yielding a forty-seven reel set. Final service copy sets will be produced in early December.

Per the agreement with the Title VI Librarians, one set of Tubman microfilms will be deposited at the Center for Research Libraries. Title VI Librarians and CAMP participants are invited to purchase full sets of the microfilmed papers for their own libraries at cost ($1,350/set).

Coinciding with this budgetary surplus is an opportunity to acquire two additional sets of personal papers from Liberia: Romeo Horton was an important banker during and after the Tubman era; Father C. K. Kandakai, a well-known Liberian linguist, specialized in the Vai language and its indigenous script. Processing capabilities still do not exist in Liberia so the materials will be brought to Indiana University for arrangement and preservation. Estimated cost for packing and air freighting the approximately 30-40 boxes from Liberia to Indiana is $4-6,000.

The Liberian Collections Project requests that the Title VI Librarians consider re-allocating any unspent funds from microfilming the W.V.S. Tubman papers to underwrite packing and shipping the boxes from Liberia to Indiana. Verlon Stone is in Liberia from November 20th to 23rd on Indiana University and British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme project business. It would be convenient, but not mandatory, if he could ship the materials while in Liberia.

Romeo Horton, Banker

A. Romeo Horton (1923-2005) was best known in Liberia as a banker, the founder and former president of Liberia’s first indigenous bank, the Bank of Liberia (BOL). Horton was also a dedicated public servant, rising from Assistant Economic Advisor to President W.V.S. Tubman to become the first Secretary of Commerce, Industry and Labor. In the early 1970s he became the founding dean of the College of Business and Public Administration at the University of Liberia, which began training Liberian accountants, who soon took over accountancy in Liberia. Previously, most Liberian businesses hired Nigerian, Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean accountants to manage their accounts.

Committed to economic cooperation in West Africa until his death, Horton was one of the intellectual powers behind the establishment of the African Development Bank (ADB) and its subsidiary, the ECOWAS Fund. In the mid 1960s he approached President Tubman with the idea of establishing an African continental bank that would help accelerate development in Africa. Tubman agreed with him on the need for such an institution, and sent him to discuss the matter with several of Tubman’s colleagues, other heads of state in West Africa. The African leaders agreed, and appointed a Committee of Nine to further discuss the matter, naming A. Romeo Horton as Chairman. That is how came about. Today the African Development Bank is a multibillion dollar institution, one of the most viable financial institutions in the world and a close partner of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund Group.
Mr. Horton received his elementary and high school education in Liberia at the Ricks Institute, Booker Washington Institute (BWI) and the College of West Africa, where he graduated in the early 1940s. He then entered Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, his father's alma mater, where he graduated from college. (Among his classmates was Martin Luther King.) Mr. Horton earned a Master's degree in Business and Finance from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Finance.

He returned home in 1954 and started the Liberian Savings and Loan Association, which later became the Bank of Liberia. The BOL provided facilities to thousands of Liberians, many of whom could not even be considered by the only other bank in town, the Bank of Monrovia, which started as a Firestone-owned bank. The Bank of Liberia ran successfully until the April 12 1980 coup, after which the hostile government of Samuel K. Doe deprived the Bank of depositors and funds. In 1981 the government instituted involuntary liquidation and closed the Bank of Liberia.

Following the coup, Mr. Horton left the country with his family for the USA, where he was appointed president of Philadelphia Corporation for Development and Cooperation (PCDC) by the Mayor of Philadelphia. The PCDC was a development-oriented entity to help small businesses. As a senior consultant Horton also assisted in the founding and establishment of the United Bank of Philadelphia, the city's only minority commercial banking institution.

Prepared by Verlon L. Stone
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