

# **A BRIEF HISTORY OF BOLAHUN AND THE WORK OF THE ORDER OF THE HOLY CROSS (OHC) MISSIONARIES, 1922 – 1975**

## **THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME “BOLAHUN” AS RECORDED BY THE OHC FATHERS FROM ORAL HISTORY**

**Father Robert E. Campbell:** The name has origin in the female named Mbolo who built her fishing house and made her garden near the river, but the village was destroyed many years ago before the arrival of the missionaries.

**Brother Edward Harris:** The mission town Bolahun was suggested by Chief Fofi Konneh of Massambolahun in remembrance of his grandfather’s wife named Jasambulu. His grandfather and Jasambulu lived in the one-house village not far from the river until they died, after which people began to refer to the place as “mbulu lahun.”

**Father Ralph T. Milligan:** The site of the mission had an old town before the arrival of the OHC Fathers. The head of the town was called m’bolo, and the town became known as m’bolo lahun, meaning the home of m’bolo.

## **THE LOCATION OF BOLAHUN**

Bolahun is located in Wanwoma Clan, Kolahun District, Lofa County in northwestern Liberia. The town is approximately 250 miles from the coastal area of Liberia. The establishment of the OHC mission in a once obscured village in 1922 transformed Bolahun into an academic center of learning in northwestern Liberia. The establishment of school, church, and hospital by the OHC missionaries led to Bolahun becoming a center of learning as well as spiritual and physical healing. The School educated students who have become prominent national leaders, educators, scientists, medical doctors, nurses, engineers, lawyers, social workers, and architects. The Church planted the seed of the Christian Faith that has positively shaped the minds and characters of generations

of Liberians and non-Liberians who have contributed immensely to the betterment of humanity. The St. Joseph Hospital, under the care of European and American medical doctors and local nurses, provided treatments for tropical and other diseases for patients from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The school, church and hospital catered to the needs of various ethnic groups and nationalities that came in numbers and settled in Bolahun. For more than half a century, the work of the OHC missionaries and the settlement of different ethnic groups and nationalities transformed Bolahun into a metropolitan center in northwestern Liberian hinterland.

### **Before the Arrival of the OHC Missionaries in Bolahun**

In April of 1921, the OHC in West Park, New York, announced that it has decided to “enter the foreign mission field” by sending missionaries to West Africa. The OHC decided to start a missionary work in Liberia with the permission of the Episcopal Church of Liberia under the leadership of then Bishop Walter Henry Overs. Bishop Overs accepted the idea of the OHC missionary work in Liberia in collaboration with the Episcopal Church. Bishop Overs later communicated with the OHC in New York that Liberia was created in 1822, but its hinterland was inhabited by indigenous people who were either Muslims or believers in African Traditional Religion (ATR). Bishop Overs noted further that OHC missionary work would be a welcoming effort because “children were growing up in the [Liberian] hinterland in vice and ignorance.”

### **THE SEARCH FOR SITE FOR THE OHC MISSIONARY WORK IN LIBERIA**

The first group of OHC missionaries were sent to northwestern Liberian hinterland in 1922 by way of Sierra Leone because of the lack of motor roads from the coastal area of Liberia to the hinterland. The group travelled by train to the Sierra Leonean-Liberian border and then entered into northwestern Liberia. They later arrived on February 22, 1922 in a predominately Bandi-Muslim town of Massambolahun. They were received by Chief Fofi Konneh, the Muslim Chief of Massambolahun town. Chief Fofi gave permission for the OHC missionaries to establish the first “Christian Prayer House” on the outskirts of the town in February

of 1922. Chief Fofi Konneh allowed the OHC Missionaries temporary permission to settle near Massambolahun until final permission from the Liberian government. The OHC decided to establish in Massambolahun because of two reasons. First, Chief Fofi Konneh was MOST RECEPTIVE to the idea of the OHC establishing mission near his town. Second, Massambolahun town at the time was a center of large population and therefore a town of considerable importance.

On May 2, 1922, prominent Bandi Chiefs, including Fofi Konneh and Njave Manjo, met in Kolahun in the presence of Western Providence Commissioner James Ledlum. They approved during the meeting the OHC request to establish a mission station in Bolahun.

### **THE OHC OFFICIALLY ACQUIRED LAND FOR THE CHRISTIAN MISSION**

On August 14, 1922, President Charles D. B. King issued official permit to the OHC to occupy a piece of land to “establish Church and School buildings.”

Those who signed the document of permission included:

1. Father Herbert Hawkins for OHC
2. Western Province Commissioner James Ledlum for the Liberian Government
3. Chief Fofi Jorkor Konneh for the people of Wanwoma Clan.

NOTE: The land was not own by the OHC, but it was to be used for Christian work and should be turned over to the local people at the end of their work.

### **The FIRST GROUP OF OHC MISSIONARIES ARRIVED IN MASSANBOLAHUN**

Father Herbert Hawkins – Head

Rev. Father Barnette

Rev. Father Hazzard – Official photographer

Rev. James Dwalu – a Liberian Priest (Vai)

Rev. Elwood Haines - Head of Episcopal Mission in Cape Mount

They were accompanied by Several Sierra Leonean Porters.

## **WHY THE OHC CHOSE BANDILAND AND BOLAHUN TO ESTABLISH THE MISSION?**

### **Bandiland**

It is centrally located in relation to the Kissi, Loma, Mende, Belle, and Gola. It was possible from this central point to exert Christian influence to the adjoining ethnic groups.

### **Bolahun**

The area was suitable because of the presence of natural features such as fertile land (for farming and gardening), a hill to build a Monastery, and a river to support the mission station. The area was also centrally located between two big Muslim towns of Massambolahun and Sosomoilahun and “a Christian colony” in Bolahun would radiate [Christianity] to counter the spread of Islam.

## **THE ARRIVAL OF THE SECOND GROUP OF OHC MISSIONARIES**

On October 5, 1922, the second group of OHC Missionaries arrived in Massambolahun Town, also by way of Sierra Leone.

### **THE GROUP INCLUDED:**

Father Robert E. Campbell - Head

Father Harold Manley – Mission Architect

Alan Sori (aka Kotor Sori)

Mr. (James) Salifu – Chief Chef

They were accompanied by Six Sierra Leonean Porters

## **The THREE PILLARS OF THE OHC MISSIONARY WORK IN BOLAHUN:**

1. **Church:**
2. **School:**
3. **Hospital:**

## **THE CHURCH AS INSTRUMENT OF CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM**

Father Hawkins told OHC, West Park, New York: “We need a Christian Colony in Bolahun and establish outside stations to prevent the Islamization of the whole of northwestern Liberia.”

Priests who serve should be lovers of the people, have the ability and capability to connect with them, be willing to reach out to them in their villages with the Gospel. Teach the local people to become evangelists who would teach their people in their own languages.

On March 27, 1923, the OHC relocated the Mission Station from temporary location in Massambolahun to Bolahun.

On October 11, 1923, Father Robert E. Campbell officiated the laying of the cornerstone of the first St. Mary Church in Bolahun.

In 1924, St. Athanasius Monastery established in Bolahun.

In 1929, the New Monastery was built and dedicated up the hill.

### **The OHC Established Outstation Churches**

1927 – St. Martin Church in Foya Dundu

1927 – St. Lawrence Church in Boawohun

1935 – Anglican Sisters’ first visit to Chief Gbaiya of Tagulahun

1938-St. Thomas Church in Ndambu

1943- New St. Mary Church dedicated in Bolahun

1948- St. Peter Church in Gondolahun

1948 - St. George Church in Vahun

-Holy Cross Chapel in Kolahun

-St. Andrew Church in Mbaloma

- Porluma Station

### **OHC Method of Christian Evangelism among the People:**

1. Try to learn and speak the languages of the local people.
2. Translate the Gospel into local languages.

3. Educate and train young men and women to become agents of the Christian Faith among their people.
4. Train local people in medical knowledge so that they would use their skills for physical as well as spiritual healing of the sick.

### **MISSION SCHOOLS AS INSTRUMENTS OF CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM:**

In May 1925, OHC Missionaries in Bolahun sent the following message to OHC, New York.

“A school in Bolahun will be the principal evangelical agent. It will mold the minds and characters of future leaders who would build a new society based on Christian Civilization that they have learned in the Mission School.”

Teachers of the school will use their knowledge of the Bible to teach the students about the Gospel of Christ and Christian way of life. Every member of the mission school staff has to be a practice missionary.

On September 1, 1923, the first school named St. Philip Elementary opened in Bolahun with total of 7 students.

First students enrolled: Fodi Konneh and Langama.

Uniform: Country clothes.

The first teacher: Thomas Hunter, a Sierra Leonean from Sherbro.

In January 1924, Father Harry J. Stretch was appointed first Headmaster of Bolahun School.

In 1927, Mr. Steven E. Manley became the second Headmaster of Bolahun School. He was previously a resident of Sherbro Island and teacher at the United Brethren in Christ School.

In June 1928, a Muslim Chief Mollie Farvander of Sosomolahun sent his son Munyai to OHC for school. He was given the name Herbert Munyai.

In July 1932, St. Agnes School for girls only started under the directorship of Sis. Clare.

In 1935, Girls and boys were allowed in St. Agnes School.

The school discontinued in 1941, due partly to WWII and Sisters have to leave for England, and restarted in 1946 thru 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

In 1933, Rt. Rev. Leopold Kroll to the OHC, New York: "When we opened the school in 1923, the government told the chiefs they must send boys to school.

The people of each village got together and decided who to send, not the parents of the students."

#### **The OHC Established Outstation Schools:**

1. 1940 –Vazela School opened
2. 1945 – Foya Dundu School opened
3. 1947 – Pandemai School opened
4. 1948 – Vahun and Gondolahun Schools opened.

In 1946, Rev. Father Raymond A. Gill organized the High School in Bolahun for boys only.

In 1947, St. Augustine High School opened with 5 boys.

In 1948, Girls were allowed in the High School. 48 students enrolled: 46 boys and 2 girls

Breakdown of Students by Ethnic groups: 19 Bandi, 14 Loma, 5 Kissi, 3 Mandingo, and 1 Mende

Father Bessom became the first principal.

After the opening of St. Augustine High, students were no longer sent to St. John in Cape Mount for further education.

## **THE HOSPITAL AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM**

Doctors at the hospital were to use their medical skills and knowledge as means to an end. The end will be to draw the souls of men and women to Him who alone can recover them from the mortal sickness of their souls. Doctors were to use their healing art to point their patients to the Great Physician, Jesus Christ.

In 1923, Father Allen arrived and began providing basic medical services at the hospital. He was not a professional physician but had basic training and knowledge in tropical first aid from Livingstone College in London. He started providing treatment for some tropical diseases.

Father Allen quoted one of the first patient he treated:

“White-man medicine strong too much.”

OHC Fathers told OHC, New York:

“Medical services will help to break the last vestiges of hostility or opposition to planting Christianity in Bolahun.”

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1926, Dr. Edgar Maas, an ex-Captain of German Army of WWI, arrived in

Bolahun. He was the first medical doctor in Bolahun.

In July 1927, St. Joseph Hospital in Bolahun was opened to patients.

1928-1929 – Dr. Germann worked with Dr. Maas at the hospital.

1931- 1933 – Dr. Werner Junge replaced Dr. Maas.

1933– 1936 - Dr. Joachim Kruger provided medical services.

1936– 1937 – Sister Dr. Joan Clatworthy provided medical services.

1938– 1939 – Dr. Roger Fowler served as the first American medical doctor.

1939– 1941 – Dr. Joseph L. Selden provided medical services.

1941- 1944 – Dr. E. P. Veatch provided medical services.

1944– 1951 – No resident medical doctor at St. Joseph Hospital.

Sister and trained nurse, Hilary Link, worked with Father Kroll, Brother Sydney, and Patrick Siafa to provide medical services at the hospital.



Patrick Siafa operated hernias and hydroceles after he had worked with various doctors for many years.

1951 – 1954 – Dr. and Mrs. William Rogers Beasley provided medical services.

He was trained in tropical medicine and treatment of sleeping sickness and leprosy. He established Mbalotahun for people with lepers.

1952 – Dr. Beasley introduced the first Landover Jeep in Bolahun by way of Guinea.

1954 – Rev. Dr. Joseph H. Smyth provided medical services.

1956 – Sister Una arrived and assisted with women medical cases.

### **SOME OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN FAMILIES IN BOLAHUN**

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Momoh

Children: James Karmo and Anna Sao Momoh

Mr. and Mrs. William Morlu

Children: Gabriel and Sembe Morlu

Zachariah Kpoto

Cyprian Ambulay and son Michael Karmo

### **THE OHC PRIORS OF BOLAHUN, 1922 – 1947**

The Rev. Robert E. Campbell, 1922 – 1925

The Rev. McVeigh Harrison, 1925 – 1926

The Rev. James H. Gorham, 1926 – 1932

The Rev. John S. Baldwin, 1932 – 1937

The Rev. Leopold Kroll, Jr., 1937 – 1946

The Rev. Joseph G. Parsell, 1947 – 1980s

**April 8, 1960 – President WVS Tubman officially opened the motor road to Bolahun.**

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