

CHRONICLE OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION AGUATA BRANCH*¹

Introduction

Between 1955 and 1970, a number of persons from old Aguata division were called to the Bar. Some of them took up employments in the civil service, while others established private legal practice in the cities. After the Nigerian Civil War, some lawyers from this area established offices at Ekwulobia. They included Barrister H.N. Ezeoka of Nanka and Barrister G.A.C. Ofor of Akpo. This was the position until the mid-eighties when other lawyers established their law offices at Ekwulobia. Notable among those who established offices at Ekwulobia in the mid-eighties is B.S. Nwankwo S.A.N. With the increase in the number of law offices at Ekwulobia, the number of lawyers who do business thereat also increased. Most of these lawyers belonged to the Awka and Onitsha branches of the Nigerian Bar. The other lawyers who did not have offices at Ekwulobia, but had substantial practices in courts at Ekwulobia and other towns in the old Aguata division. Most of such lawyers had their offices at Onitsha, Nnewi, Awka, Enugu and Aba. Most of the lawyers who established at Ekwulobia and those who had substantial volume of practice thereat were of old Aguata extraction. At a point, they desired to come together under one association to advance their welfare. One thing, however, militated against calling the association a branch of the Nigerian Bar Association. It was the fact that Aguata then, had not been carved out as a judicial division. It was still part of Awka Judicial Division.

The creation of Aguata Judicial Division

The creation of Aguata Judicial Division in 1992 gave an impetus to the desire by most lawyers practicing in courts in old Aguata division to come under an umbrella association. They started holding meetings under the umbrella of Old Aguata Lawyers' Forum. They discussed ways and means of obtaining a Charter for the establishment of a Local branch of the Nigerian Bar Association. Such meetings were held mostly at Ekwulobia and Onitsha. About 2001, a group of dedicated legal practitioners were elected as the pioneer officers of this branch association. The Chairman was Chief N.C. Nobis Elendu; the Vice Chairman was Late Chief C.O Ezeanowai – Obiezu KSJI, JP. The secretary was Barrister E.E. Umejiaku. The Public Relations Officers was Barrister E.N. Dim. The Treasurer was Mrs. Chinwe Ughanze (Nee Okoli). Sir R.O. Ezenwosu became the Leader of the Bar in the branch. With an amazing zeal, this group led by Chief N.C. Nobis Elendu obtained a Charter recognizing the association as a branch of the Nigerian Bar Association in 2001. The Charter was signed by Chief O.C.J. Okocha S.A.N, the then President of the Nigerian Bar Association.

Inauguration of the Nigerian Bar Association Aguata Branch

These pioneer officers of the branch ably led by Chief N.C. Nobis Elendu were able to get all hands to be on deck to ensure that Aguata branch of the Nigerian Bar Association was inaugurated in 2001. Therefore, precisely on the 29th day of September, 2001, the N.B.A Aguata branch was inaugurated by Chief Philip Umeh, the then General Secretary of the Nigerian Bar Association. Shortly after the inauguration, which was a huge success, the leadership of the branch relaxed so much that the branch went into limbo for some time. However, the branch bounced back to life through the efforts of Chief C.O Ezeanowai-Obiezu,

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Barrister E.E. Umejiaku and Sir R.O. Ezenwosu. These gentlemen practically went from house to house persuading members to start attending meetings of the branch again. They succeeded.

Period of growth and achievements of the Branch

(i) Chief C.O. Ezeanowai-Obiezu era (2004-2006)

Chief C.O. Ezeanowai-Obiezu KSJI, JP of the blessed memory, was a charismatic leader. He was acting chairman in 2003. In October 2003, he gave the branch a set of Bye-laws. The bye-law committee was headed by Barrister D.U. Umeobika. In October, 2004, Late Chief C.O. Ezeanowai-Obiezu was elected the substantive chairman of the branch with Prof. C.J. Ubanyionwu as the secretary. Chief Ezeanowai-Obiezu and his team so ably handled the affairs of the branch that members of the branch developed the habit of seeing one another as brothers and sisters and not just as professional colleagues. That habit has endured till date in the branch. Membership of the branch increased highly during this era. Chief E.N. Ezeonwuka motivated many lawyers to take up membership of the branch. Many of her members belong to the official Bar and the bench. This made for healthy and beneficial interactions among members in private practice, those in the official bar and those on the bench. The Executive committee of the branch under late Chief Ezeanowai-Obiezu, with the assistance of Chief M.C.Z. Aniazoka was able to acquire land for the building of Chief (Dr) Alex Ekwueme Bar Centre at Ekwulobia. The building project was also commenced with Barrister D.U. Umeobika heading the Building Committee. The branch also organized her maiden law week which lasted from the 26th day of October, 2005 to 30th day of October, 2005. It was a huge success. Chief M.C.Z. Aniazoka headed the committee that worked round the clock to ensure the success of the maiden law week.

(ii) Barrister E.E. Umejiaku era (2006-2008)

E. E. Umejiaku Esquire was elected Chairman of the branch in October, 2006. C. I. Okoye Esquire was the Secretary during the period. Membership of the branch continued to grow during this period. The regime ensured that the number of sitting judges in the Judicial Division got increased to three. This invigorated legal practice in the Judicial Division to the benefit of members of the branch and others.

(iii) Chief M.C.Z. Aniazoka era (2008-2010)

On the 4th day of October, 2008, Chief M.C.Z. Aniazoka was elected as the branch Chairman. D. U. Umeobika Esquire was elected Secretary. This administration recorded resounding successes in many areas. The administration saw to it that:

- (i) A bar robbing room was provided at the High court, Ekwulobia.
- (ii) Continuing Legal Education lectures were held during branch meetings every month. Well researched lectures, were delivered on practice conscious topics including practice relating to investment in stocks and shares.
- (iii) A healthier Bar and Bench relationship evolved through the introduction of Bar and Bench Forum.
- (iv) A top class Law week was organized.
- (v) Compulsory rotational hosting of members at meetings among members was introduced. This helped us to know members' homes and places of abode.
- (vi) Chief Aniazoka's regime initiated the process of acquiring land at Mgbakwu for the branch and her members. It put in place the Land acquisition committee headed by Barrister Emmanuel Osunkwor.

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(iv) D.U. Umeobika era (2010-2012)

In October 2010, D. U. Umeobika succeeded Chief M.C.Z. Aniazoka as the Chairman of the branch. S. U. Anyia Esquire became the secretary. The decking of the Bar Centre building was commenced by this administration which put in place the iron structures for the decking. The regime organized a very successful law week. It maintained the relevance of the branch at the National level through a purposeful representation. Under this regime, the branch secured hundred plots of land at Mgbakwu, Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State for her members. Very cordial relationship existed between the Bar and the Bench in Aguata Judicial Division during this period.

(v) Chief E.N. Ezeonwuka era (2012-2014)

In October, 2012, Chief E.N. Ezeonwuka became the Chairman of the branch. G.U. Okafor Esquire became the secretary. The regime completed the decking of the Bar Centre building and proceeded to raise the house up to the level where it was ready for roofing. It organized a highly successful law week with the spectacular assistance of Ichie K.C. Ezeanyika and Sir Izu Nwankwo among others. The regime was able to take delivery of a bus donated to the branch by the Anambra state government. Membership of the branch continued to grow. The regime continued to make the branch very relevant at the National level of the Nigerian Bar Association.

(vi) Barrister S.U. Anyia era (2014-2016)

S. U. Anyia Esquire took over from Chief E.N. Ezenowuka in October 2014. Chief S.I. Oluoba became the secretary of the branch. The regime swung into action immediately and has through her efforts made the publication of the maiden edition of the Frontline Bar Journal a reality. Practice in Aguata Judicial Division became very vibrant and rewarding. More Judges and Magistrates were posted to the division. The regime kept the branch's record of good representation and relevance at the national level. S.U. Anyia made a record as the first and only non indigene of old Aguata division to become Chairman of the branch. He hails from Ula in Boki, Cross River State. He completed the Bar Centre building and commissioned it. Chief P.I.N. Ikwueto S.A.N and His Excellency Dr. Alex Ekwueme were highly instrumental to the completion of the Bar centre building.

(vii) Chief C. I. Okoye era (2016-2018)

Membership of the Bar grew appreciably during this period. The administration organized a highly successful Law week. The administration ensured that members of the branch were put into possession of their various plots of land at Mgbakwu. Under the administration the Orumba South Judicial Division was created. More magisterial districts were created which included Nanka Magisterial District. The administration saw to it that His Excellency Dr. Alex Ekwueme was accorded all respects deserving of his personality at his demise.

(viii) Prof. C. J. Ubanyionwu, era (2018-2020)

This administration ably headed by the indefatigable Professor C. J. Ubanyionwu with Chukwu Anugo Ofor as Secretary introduced the production of Branch Bar Diary. It saw to it that Touts who interfered with the administration of justice within our courts premises were arrested and stopped. The association took delivery of an electricity generating set donated to the Branch by Honourable Justice Peter Umeadi who was the Chief Judge of Anambra State then. This administration beautified the Bar Centre premises with flowers and ornamental plants.

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(ix) **Jim Abel Ofoma era (2020-2022)**

The Secretary was the amiable Mrs. Lizzy Anyonu. Membership of the Bar continued to swell during this era. Attendance at meetings increased despite the state of insecurity in the State at the time. Our branch became very relevant and highly respected at the National level and amongst all the Bar Branches of the NBA. The administration fostered cordial relationship between the Bar and the Bench particularly as it related to practice of law in Aguata and Orumba Judicial Divisions.

(x) **Honourable Victor Ezeonwumelu era (2022-**)

The administration of Victor Ezeonwumelu hit the ground running in June, 2022. The Secretary is Barrister A. E. Egbo. This team in a very short time acquired and secured another piece of land for sports facilities close to the Bar Centre building. It provided a robbing room in the Bar centre building. It employed a computer literate administrative Secretary for the Branch. In 2022, the administration gave branch members a second-to-none Bar Dinner. It is expect that this administration will take the Branch to greater heights before its tenure would end in June, 2024.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Bar Association, Aguata branch has come to stay. She is a very formidable branch of the Bar by all standards. She will continue to grow. We call on all who ought to belong to this Branch of the NBA to come and join in the making of history.