

Local History and Community Ties: Insights into Library Co-operation and Solidarity with *Nyong Essien* Special Collections in University of Uyo Library, Nigeria

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Abstract

Libraries in academic institutions organise their collections essentially to cater for the information needs of immediate community. Interesting to note is the fact that such institutions also make provision for availability of 'non-regular' collections among their holdings for diverse usage. This paper intends to portray the uniqueness of typical rare book collections of Nyong Essien which by historical antecedent, formed the nucleus of the initial information resource in the metamorphosed University of Uyo (UNIUYO) library. Taking for granted that a people with local and communal interest can possibly find common ground through records of significant past, this unique collection of UNIUYO library connects its wide range of internal and external users with indigenous information spanning decades. The free-based services relatively forestall the library's community service goal and cooperation though aspects of the services rendered have nonetheless been challenged. This paper also relays promotional efforts to heighten collection awareness for potential user-community, and recommends indigenous knowledge centre to furthermore advance the course of this special library.

Key words: Archives, research, community, support, history, usage.

Introduction

Libraries are collections of books, multi-media and other information resources gathered for the purposes of reading, study, and reference. They are service organizations where individuals, organizations, and societies are provided access to quantities of information (Onwubiko and Uzoigwe, 2004; Aina, 2004). University of Uyo (UNIUYO) library of note has made ample effort to fulfil this role to its user-community, including her external audience as part of its service role to patrons. Basically, UNIUYO library fosters this responsibility through Nyong Essien (NE) special collections. The various endeavours to enhance utilisation of the rare collections are discussed while aiming also to portray the existence of these indigenous / rare collection yet to be placed in on-line public domain.

This study is significant considering the fact that no publication exists on this topic as found by the lead author who previously was responsible for overseeing the Special Collections unit. This was furthermore confirmed from literature in UNIUYO research repository, including online resources and research works from humanities and Social sciences. It is envisaged that through this publication, the collections will prospectively gain more visibility.

Local history focuses on a particular town or area with economic and cultural development of that locality, often using local records and resources (Oxford Living Dictionary, 2016). The local history of a people can amount to community ties when appreciated and discovered by those concerned. This paper considers the contributory efforts of UNIUYO library which stem from utilization of the rare Nyong Essien (NE) collections. This is with consideration to relative benefits by patrons, particularly external users (non-members of the academic community) whom possibly have established connections and found expression through heritage knowledge and other forms of local account at the NE unit.

Brief Account of UNIUYO

University of Uyo (UNIUYO) library metamorphosed through phases occasioned by various institutional developments. Few decades ago, the area where the university campus originally was cited, commenced as an advanced Teachers' Training College which transformed into a College of Education. Growth imperatives demanded for further advancements in educational sector with the plan to establish a University. Following this plan, the University of Cross River State came into existence in 1991 (Philip, 2017) while maintaining an Institute of Education to cater for the precursory college programmes. The 'new' university which was state-owned, provided veritable avenue for indigents and neighbouring states to pursue their higher education goals.

Later, University of Cross River State was re-named University of Uyo (UNIUYO) following its ownership from state to federal government. With the high standard of education already set in motion by same university with no other within the state, its new status of becoming a federal university, furthermore attracted new student in-takes from all over Nigeria particularly the Southern regions. UNIUYO presently operates multi-site campuses with the Town Campus library being the oldest, by reason of all the transitional phases undergone by the university.

Aims:

This paper is a milestone with the intent to convey vital and rare resources of Nyong Essien unit. Consequently, the objectives outlined are as follows:

- Highlight significance and variety of Nyong Essien collections
- Raise awareness of the collections being relatively unknown
- Highlight steps undertaken towards visibility of the collections
- Proffer recommendations towards their maintenance and sustainability

Nyong Essien Special Collections in UNIUYO

It is germane to render a brief account of the Elder statesman, late Chief (Hon.) Nyong Essien whom central library of UNIUYO is named after. He was a renowned legislator and deputy speaker of the erstwhile Eastern House of Assembly and pioneer president of Eastern House of Chiefs (nigerianwiki.com/nyongessien). He was also the first paramount ruler of Uyo division and was the first president of Ibibio State Union which by then, was the highest socio-political indigenous body in Akwa Ibom – Cross River region). It also marked the

beginning of indigenous participation in politics. Chief Essien was also among the Pan-Nigerian delegation to London conference for independence of Nigeria in 1960 (**Source:** manuscript of biography written by son of the deceased).

The history of University of Uyo library (UNIUYO) library is undoubtedly incomplete without mention of Nyong Essien Collection. The assemblage which mostly are print-based, were personal collections of the late Chief Nyong Essien bequeathed by immediate family members to the institution. The intent was for the collection to serve as knowledge resource for posterity and preservation purposes consequent upon the scourge of the Nigerian civil war, in the late 1960s. It is therefore interesting to note that the enduring collections have spanned through long periods to become the oldest collection in UNIUYO library. Consequently, the central library at UNIUYO Town campus is named ‘Nyong Essien Library’ with the personal collections of late Chief Nyong Essien kept in separate room at Special Collections Unit of the library. During Golden Jubilee celebration of Akwa Ibom State Library Association, this endeavour was once again reminisced and appreciated with a post-humus award to the late elder statesman on May 5, 2017. The collections presently serve as UNIUYO library’s non - current archival material, some of which are dated nearly a century ago. Significantly, no article has been written distinctly on Nyong Essien collections which comprises books, files on politics of various states/ districts, personal papers/ manuscripts, and political issues, parliamentary proceedings, addresses of other records (Source: uniuyo.edu.ng/phpfiles/library; accessed May 7, 2017).

Resources in Nyong Essien Unit:

Holdings in Nyong Essien Unit are in a particular room and are not placed on open shelf. Its books and other collections are not among ‘active records’ but function as archival materials which serve for legal, historical and evidential and purposes (Rare Books and Manuscript section, Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016)

It has rich variety on private records, parchment, books and collections of single pictures e.g. portraits, which capture significant events and involvements by the late elder statesmen (though most are worn out after a while). These primary sources give users a connection to the past, bridging the gap between often seemingly distant historical phenomena and the present. Some of the resources, particularly ones in files address the following:

- Native account: rare collections essentially robust in information on socio-cultural and historical significance. the records contain experiences of communities and related account. Some of the resources bear information on cultural identity for instance, as a guide to influence wide ranging decisions on identity and equitable distribution of resources, to civic instructions stated in vernacular. Bradley in Taib (2002) recommends the provision of not only current, but value-added information. IFLA manifesto upholds that as libraries serve diverse interests and communities, they function as learning, cultural, and information centres, addressing cultural and linguistic diversity. Section 1.4.6 of the manifesto states that It is particularly important that community information, involving data for everyday decision-making should, where possible, be provided in the language of the user.
- Politics: native politics of the post-colonial era and politics of the then South Eastern blog which late chief Nyong Essien was a key player, and Involvements in colonial rule.
- Edicts and resolutions from parliamentary proceedings
- Personal papers/ manuscripts of late Chief Nyong Essien containing communication with his contemporaries, some scripted by him in calligraphic hand-written form (the use of hand-written texts was more commonly used decades ago than print, more so as GSM

was not introduced). Reitz (2010) posits that unlike books which can be procured, ‘a handwritten diary of a historic figure from an archives... is irreplaceable’

- Materials portraying cultural diversity issues
- Records on traditional institutions and chieftaincy affairs
- Information about people and culture of then then mainland constituents of the Efik/Ibibio extraction which make up Akwa Ibom State and part of Cross River State in the Niger Delta region. Historical facts about Efik/Ibibio indigenes based on National Population figures, revealed that these were the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria.

Interesting to note is the fact that some statements and official releases are printed in old Efik-Ibibio linguistic form with accompanying signs e.g. slash, dotted alphabets and so forth to aid in pronunciation. Some of the characters used are rarely found presently in print form since they are not accommodated in modern computer lettering & symbols, except in some Efik Bibles and hymnals in vernacular. On the other hand, this becomes critical for consideration and review linguists and other language experts

One of the instructions from village council on civic responsibility some decades ago read ‘*Item mme ekpe tax: se enyenede ndinam ye se minyeneke ndinam*’. The first word ‘item’ is not an English term, but is pronounced as ‘eetehm.’ The entire words translates to ‘Guideline for tax payers: what you’re required to do and what you’re not required to do.

Below are some issues for user-interest among personal files and pamphlets of the late elder statesman Essien, with the following information:

- Crowning and Installation of Chief Eteta, Calabar province, dated 1926
- ‘A West African in the United States’ 1927 (Newspaper excerpt)
- Hand written ‘private’ letters by late Nyong Essien - 1928
- Court petitions, complaints – 1928
- Official Recognition of Chief Nyong Essien by other chiefs - 1930
- Minutes by Ibibio Union - 1934
- Correspondence over Amalgamation - 1939
- Pioneer Palm oil mill 1946.
- American Council on African Education 1947
- Report of revenue allocation - 1951.
- Education rating survey, dated - 1955.
- Medical report on maternal health and vaccination - 1958
- Discussion with His Excellency, Governor-General of Nigeria, Dr N. Azikiwe - 1963
- Resolutions on Old Calabar - 1963
- ‘Why we want House of Chiefs in Eastern region...’ (n.d.)
- ‘Rules Governing Award of Scholarship...’ - 1963
- Nigerian Goodwill mission to Ireland - 1947
- Minutes of Council of chiefs, Uruan - 1963
- Post- Election Report - 1961
- Igbo men and women (ethnic group) – Okrika riot (n.d.)
- Short life history of Nyong Essien (hand written)
- Political party convention - 1954
- Almanac of African leaders in early 1960s
- Eastern Regional Summit conference on Nigerian Constitution - 1953
- Land disputes - 1954

With the prevailing development issues surrounding Niger Delta region of Nigeria, Nyong Essien special collections provide data and links to present-day issues which otherwise would have been lost. 'History not only tells us where we come from, it also contains valuable lessons. Thus...preserving history through the archive is vitally important' (Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town).

The resources in Nyong Essien unit by their nature are not updated, except to organise and repackage for more convenient usage.

Organization of Resources:

Books are classified as other regular books in central library using Library of Congress (LC) scheme. They are not to be loaned out and not on open shelves, though freely issued with the assistance of a library staff responsible for its services. Secondary sources e.g. indexes are developed to enhance access with encoded descriptions which serve as guides and provide understanding of the information in primary sources.

As such, manuscripts and other non-book materials are described slightly differently, to serve the standard purpose of a harmonized index/ finding aid, which highlight subject, names, places, events and so forth in consideration to users familiar with standard cataloguing code (Rare Books and Manuscript section, ACRL 2016). However, description of the contents was based on 'in-house' alpha-numeric codes' developed (based on subject theme) in order to easily update and adapt in future. This organization was particularly done with consideration to indigenous content in vernacular which ordinarily would not be understood by non- native speakers and others who may still grapple with traditional expressions. Society of American Archivist (2013) support that archival materials function as recorded memory thereof; they are original documents preserved by reason of their enduring value.

Some of the descriptions furthermore add indications of time frame and local region(s) in which a piece of item or content originates from, or identified with. Classification of picture collections is yet pending since they are just a handful quantity in strawboard containers which comprise collection of documents and discrete items (largely unpublished) must also be treated consistently within the institution's descriptive system.

Other contents hitherto expressed in esoteric terms, are treated same traditions, religion, chieftaincy, and terms exclusive to socio-cultural societies.

Managing records encompasses the procedural operations of controlling the quantity, quality and costs of records in consideration to space, equipment and staff required to administer the records (Chris, 2006; Ijaluola and Sotunde, 2006; Akporhonor, 2011. Proper records management go a long way in enhancing effective administration of a university.

Co-operation and solidarity: Reaching Users

This paper takes into cognisance the civic responsibility by UNIUYO library in extending indispensable services to both internal and external user- community through Nyong Essien unit. In this regard, UNIUYO library grants access to all persons interested to use content of the resources. Aside meeting information needs, available contents support user's quest for socio- political and cultural relevance; also strengthens role and identity with links to the past. Senturk (2013) holds same view, while noting that related materials have the ability to shed light on the past and the future. Kranich (2010) declares that academic libraries are encouraged to 'play a critical role in kindling civic spirit by providing not only information, but also expanded opportunities for dialogue and deliberation as a practice ground for democracy'.

Nyong Essien unit which presently is regarded as main archival collection of UNIUYO library, is found to be even more of interest to non-university community members since internal patrons particularly students, seem to be more concerned with recent curriculum-

based text (**Source:** observation and interactions made with users by lead author while serving as Head, Special Collections). despite timeless relevance of Nyong Essien collections, the materials are regarded as ‘outdated’ or does not have the appeal like other collections. Senturk (2013) notes that there is little doubt that primary sources can be of real value in the classroom. This stand-point was also found by Onah, Sambe and Omeje (2012) with regards to University of Nigeria, Nsukka. They found that though archives constitute source of research in university libraries since they contain vital facts that could be used to backup research findings and for the development of university education, archival resources seem under-utilised.

Also, available records from usage statistics indicates that most of the external users are indigenes from Akwa Ibom State where UNIUYO is cited. External users whose identity is established upon an ID being tendered followed by brief interrogation to determine needs, are permitted to use the collections which hitherto may not be available in the only public library available at the state capital, nor available elsewhere considering peculiarity of the collections. Unlike regular resources on open shelves which the university community comes to search for without necessary having a specified material to request for, patrons in need of Nyong Essien collections visit with a pre- determined notion of the kind of content to request for e.g. parliamentary proceedings in post-colonial era, South Eastern states of Nigeria. However, there have been apprehensions regarding certain information being ‘classified’ for restricted access considering the political climate of the Niger – Delta and other Southern regions in Nigeria. Nonetheless, compliments received from users whose needs are met, far outweighs the unusual. With UNIUYO library enabling this non-fee based service, solidarity and community relations is heightened.

No negative consequences have been noted of these services which are without charge, except for a few times when patrons not familiar with operations of the unit, insist on loan services beyond the library’s policy for rare collections. Reprographic service within the library nonetheless, often ameliorates the situation.

More potential users within university system had to be reached in order to encourage awareness and patronage of collections that could meet their information needs. Steps undertaken to actualise this purpose began with targeting academics and researchers (usage statistics indicated their low patronage).

- ***SDI/CAS services*** were offered despite lack of an operational open source software. Contacts through email served as main medium of reaching as many academics and researchers as possible since nearly all of them have email account, unlike student users. Their contact was derived from the mailing list of Academic Staff Union of Universities (A constitutionally recognised body which serves the interest of academic staff in Government-owned universities nation-wide). These were provided with list of book titles, with added benefit of current journals not among Nyong Essien collections. For other category of users mostly students who frequent UNIUYO library but rarely have email address, guides and index to contents were provided on demand when they consult the library’s Special Collections Unit.
- ***Exhibition:*** An exhibition though periodic, was also conducted for three days during a book fair open to entire university community and other interested groups. Pictures of legends in fields of Art and Literature e.g. the late musicologist, Prof Samuel Akpabot, and late literary icon, Chinue Achebe best known for his award winning novel ‘Things Fall Apart’ were equally displayed as a side attraction.

- **Extension service:** Pictures of the late Chief Nyong Essien with associated activities showcasing him are rare to come by, except an effigy of him in central part of Uyo city, state capital of Akwa Ibom State. As a result of this rarity, UNIUYO library through the Special Collections section, lends few of such pictures alongside display boards to credible external users as a form of support to annual arts exhibition/ festival in the city.

Bahr and Bolton (2002) express that for communities to thrive, people need to find things in common about which to talk, share and explore ideas and their differences in that context. The authors furthermore recommend that a better way to start, is build a community of readers and thinkers who recognize their common humanity.

Challenges, Recommendations and Conclusion

The holdings of a library preserve facts, ideas, developments and accomplishments by man in diverse ways. Past records even more, are indispensable to the present and future generation. As such, maintaining intellectual and cultural heritage not only becomes a commitment to academic pursuit, but responsibility of the librarian that maintains the resources. Constant training of staff responsible for special collections and archival content is therefore required, to enable standard description of items and contents, for a harmonised filing system. An attempt in this regard is presently put in motion with Resource Description & Access (RDA) format.

Processing of the collections according to archival principles pose challenge for them to reflect a scheme based on structure, function and chronology. An archivist/ conservator with skills to manage rare books and other unique collections should be encouraged, raised and trained to actualise required benefits.

Concentration towards collection development of up-to-date materials to support curriculum which is fundamental to faculty accreditation, diminishes the expected attention towards maintenance of Nyong Essien collections. Apprehensions are sometimes raised too that the collections might pose health challenge since most of the back files have suffered threats by acidification, which in-turn dissuades staff from showing interest as other library collections. More continuous awareness activity targeted towards unique Nyong Essien collections should be put in place to encourage utilisation; this paper however is intended to serve such purposes too.

Every library is prone to deterioration; two kinds have been identified namely biological deterioration caused by insect attack/fungi growth. The other is environmental deterioration caused by extreme dampness, wide fluctuation of relative humidity, variation in temperature, light and atmospheric pollutant (Marvilla in Ikegune and Ogunsola, 2016). It is noted further that documents in libraries deteriorate due to several factors among which are poor storage, lack of trained and qualified personnel in management and preservation of documents, improper or careless handling and in-built problems of the documents. Consequently, for preservation and effective maintenance of Nyong Essien collections, a records management policy should be re-instituted to this effect.

While scholars like (Ikegune and Ogunsola, 2016) posit that print collection is time-tested, this notion would not necessarily apply for some of the collections attributed to late Chief Nyong Essien which have become brittle. However, minor preservation efforts such as reprography, has made the collections more handle-able, while single documents such as certificates, identity cards and other attestations are laminated.

Importantly, digitisation of the unique library collections will safeguard against loss, increase visibility and promote wide audience access to larger share of resources in multiple copies.

It'll also curb extinction by reason of wear and tear where some of the collections are already brittle. Suffice to say, availability and access to digital collections other than physical handling, will go a long way to actualise these benefits. Therefore, creation of an online inventory is recommended.

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