

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION OF LIBERIANS IN MINNESOTA

The organization of Liberians in Minnesota was originally formed in 1973 under a different name. Prior to 1973, there were few Liberians students living in Minnesota. Because the population of Liberians in Minnesota was so small, consisting mainly of students who were busy with their studies, the desire to form an organization did not occur in people's minds.

By 1973 the number of students and their spouses in Minnesota began to increase considerably. The Liberian community, realizing this growth, began discussions about forming an organization of Liberians. As a result of these discussions, the first organization of Liberians was formed and named "Organization of Liberian Nationals in Minnesota." The first president of the organization was Mr. Patrick Flomo, an aviation student, who later moved out of Minnesota to pursue his studies in Florida.

In 1974 the organization had its second election. It was reported that this election was characterized by irregularities. The chairman of the election committee was accused of spinning the elections in favor of Mr. Roger Nah by pulling out votes that were cast in favor of Mr. Eddie Manly. After the elections, Roger Nah was named president over his rival Edie Manly, thus becoming the second president of the organization. As a result of these events, the Liberian community experienced its first split.

Those who were dissatisfied with the action of the chairman of the election committee broke away from the Organization of Liberian Nationals in Minnesota and formed another organization. The newly formed organization was named the Liberian Student Association of Minnesota. Mr. Eddie Manly was named as its first president. Both organizations existed independently in a small community of Liberians. Because there were few Liberians in Minnesota at the time, members of the two organizations often attended the same social activities. However, they held separate events to mark the Liberian Independence Day celebrations.

Four years passed with these organizations having arguments and discussions at social events, with members of each group claiming to be the legitimate Liberian organization. Finally in 1978 the two groups decided to compromise and meeting was scheduled to find a solution to the problem. The meeting was held during the summer of that year, with a prominent Liberian citizen, Mr. Ninsel Warner, presiding. After more than eight hours of deliberation, a decision was reached, that the two organizations be merged. The names of the dissolved organizations were dropped and the name Organization of Liberians in Minnesota (OLM) was adopted by a majority vote of those present at the meeting.

In 1978, the newly merged organization held elections and Mr. Bennie Perkins, a now prominent businessman, was elected as the first President of OLM. He was a former member of the Organization of Liberian Nationals in Minnesota.

In 1979, Mr. Aaron K. Paye, who lost the election to Mr. Perkins in 1978, was elected president of OLM, becoming the second president. He was a former member of the Liberian Student Association group. Mr. Pay's election closed the book on the two groups' identity. OLM has had several presidents since Mr. Aaron Paye.

OLM PRIORITIES

In the early days of its existence, the organization's priorities included the following:

- A. Assisted bereaved families in transporting their deceased back to Liberia by collecting funds from the community.
- B. Assisted with funeral expense and activities if the burial was held here in the States.
- C. Established a burial fund account to make contribution in case of death to a community member.
- D. Followed up on Liberian Community member's Immigration issues if the leadership was informed and allowed to participate.
- E. Help to find employment for new comers through a buddy system.
- F. Prior to 1980. All Liberians moving into the twin cities were encouraged to attend some kind of training program or school.

PROGRESS

OLM became a chapter of the Union of Liberian Association in the Americas (ULAA) in the late seventies. Mr. Aron K. Paye first introduced the idea to this community at a meeting of the Liberian Student Association, long before OLM was formed. After his introduction of the idea and what the organization stood for, Mr. Lee K. Anderson, now pastor of Christ Universal Ministries Church opposed the idea of the Liberian Student Association joining ULAA. Mr. Anderson's analysis and prediction of ULAA was that this organization goals and objectives were not compatible with the Liberian Student Association.

OLM was the first chapter of the ULAA to have two presidents elected in succession to lead ULAA. Each one left before his term ended to return to Liberia after the 1980 coup.

Two of OLM's former president were sued to force a timely transfer of office documents and bank records. These cases did not materialize.

Currently, there are approximately twenty two thousand (22,000). Liberians in Minnesota. A significant percentage of this number has lived in the United States for a number of years. Many Liberians are US citizens, homeowners and professionals in

several different fields. These individuals have and are continuing to make their contribution to the economic and educational structure of Minnesota.

The growing population of Liberians has redefined the role of OLM. Although the organization still maintains its initial objectives, it now has the challenge of organizing Liberians into a cohesive unit, providing information and assistance to meet their socio-economic and educational needs and developing programs to make Liberians more productive.

PAST PRESIDENTS OF LIBERIAN ORGANIZATIONS IN MINNESOTA

1. Mr. Patrick Flomo 1972 – 1974 Organization of Liberian National in Minnesota
2. Mr. Eddie G. Manly 1974 - 1976 Liberian Student Association of Minnesota
3. Mr. Roger Nah 1978 - 1978 Organization of Liberian National in Minnesota
4. Mr. Bennie Perkins 1978 – 1979 Organization of Liberians in Minnesota
5. Mr. Aaron Paye 1979 – 1980 OLM
6. Mr. James Doma 1980 – 1981 OLM
7. Mr. George Garyu 1981 – 1982 OLM
8. Mr. Joseph Ketter 1982 – 1983 OLM
9. Mr. Bill Sannigular 1983 – 1985 OLM
10. Mr. Phillip Jarbah 1985 – 1986 OLM
11. Mr. Jefferson Leamah 1986 – 1989 OLM
12. Mr. Cyril E. Murray 1989 – 1990 OLM
13. Mr. Jefferson Bates 1990 – 1992 OLM
14. Mr. J. Comfort Clarke 1992 – 1997 OLM
15. Mr. Harris T. Meh 1997 – 2000 OLM
16. Mr. George Wuo 2000 – 2004 OLM