

Erunmu

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Erunmu was the first town in which the first missionary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to Nigeria, David C. Babcock, settled when he came to the country on March 7, 1914.

Erunmu the Homebase of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria

Erunmu is located about 16 kilometers east of Ibadan, the capital of Oyo state of Nigeria. It is the largest (both in population and size) settlement in the Egbeda local government area of Oyo state with about 22,000 people. The inhabitants are mostly farmers, while some are traders who trade mostly in farm products. Today, there are about 96 churches in Erunmu. They include Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, etc. The core indigenes of Erunmu are Owu people who originated from Orile-Owu which was ruled by an Oba titled "Olowu of Owu" (one of the sons of Oduduwa).¹

Access to Erunmu is by road or rail. It was at the railway station where Elder David Caldwell Babcock and his team disembarked in April 1914 on their trip from Lagos.² The old Erunmu was a walled town and was destroyed during the Yoruba Inter-Tribal Wars. Around 1825 the town was resettled and the population was about 2,000 in 1914.² Today the population has grown to at least 22,000.³

Erunmu is the base of the dry port approved for the southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria by the federal government of Nigeria to decongest Apapa and Tin Can Island ports in Lagos. The dry port is expected to commence business activities very soon.⁴

The history of the Adventist Church in Erunmu is also the beginning of the history of Adventism in Nigeria. Although other Christian churches are known to have existed in Nigeria, particularly in the southern parts by the latter half of the 19th century, Adventism did not come until the early part of the 20th century.⁵

The first Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to visit Erunmu were Elder David C. Babcock, R. Dolphin (Ghanaian), and S. Morgue (Sierra Leonean). They came by train from Bodija Railway Station to Erunmu (then Lalupon) Railway Station in April 1914. One of the men who came with Elder D. C. Babcock learned the Yoruba language so quickly that within five months they were able to open a school where they taught people how to read and write.⁶

Elder D. C. Babcock had had a fair knowledge of the Yoruba language before he came to Erunmu. He came to Nigeria through Badagry. His message was not accepted in Badagry and Abeokuta. When they could not make it at Abeokuta, they came to Ibadan city, where they were also rejected, because their message was totally different from other Christian messages, especially concerning Sabbath worship on Saturday instead of Sunday.

At the palace of Baale (king) of Ibadan the high chief Aare Igintade advised them to go east of Ibadanland, along what is now known as Iwo Road. They boarded a train going to Iwo/Ilorin and stopped at Lalupon railway station (now Erunmu railway station). To the glory of God, the team was warmly received at Erunmu. After the Baale of Erunmu, Chief Oyetoro Oyelese, had consulted with other chiefs in Erunmu, they were allowed to settle in the town. That day they erected two camp tents—one for Babcock and the other for the other two men. These tents were set up in a place not far from the current Erunmu Central Mosque on April 7, 1914.⁷ Elder Babcock also sunk a well very close to this site and the well is still today known as the “Babcock Well.”

One of the sons of Baale who had earlier acquired western education, Samuel Oyeniyi Oyelese, soon became an asset to the team of missionaries. He was not only an interpreter, but also an instructor. Pa. Jacob Alao from Inisa, Osun state, was also an interpreter and instructor with the team.⁸

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was the first Christian denomination in Erunmu and its environs. The other religious bodies that were already in the town before the arrival of Elder Babcock and his team included the Muslims and African traditional religions such as Egungun (masquerade worshipper), Ifa, Aluku, Anlugbua (the worshipper of late warrior of Owu kingdom), Sango (god of thunder), and Ogun (god of iron), just to mention a few. The reactions of the leaders of these religions were mixed. Some of them embraced the doctrine of God as the Creator of heaven and earth and all that are in them. The early converts to Seventh-day Adventism came from among the African traditional religionists. However, some of them were not happy at the arrival of Christianity. The Ifa worshippers were the first to react negatively at one of their festivals late in 1914 when they began to sing “Aye laba ‘fa, Aye laba ‘mole, osan gangan ni ‘gbagbo wo ‘lu o.” “Aye laba ‘fa, Aye laba ‘gun, osan gangan ni ‘gbagbo wo ‘lu o.” Meaning, “African traditional religion has always been with us; and Islam has always been with us, but Christianity, a late comer, has suddenly shown up.” The intention of this song was to encourage the people to reject Christianity, but embrace the old religions. Their philosophy being, “The old is good, the new is bad.”⁹

In spite of this negative campaign, the Seventh-day Adventist Church made more and more converts with time. For example, more than 70 percent of Sangofunmilayo’s children became Seventh-day Adventists. This fact greatly disturbed the leaders of the other religions. Thanks to the Lord for the love that existed in Erunmu at that time. This could have resulted in religious violence, but it did not. Because of the hospitality, love, tolerance, and cooperation of compound heads, the negative reaction was minimal. At last the Baale, Oyetoro Oyelese, was converted and adopted the name Jacob. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was the only Christian denomination in Erunmu until about 1955 when the Christ Apostolic Church became the second Christian

denomination in the town. Most members of other Christian denominations that became established in Erunmu and its environs were formally Seventh-day Adventists.¹⁰

Pioneers

With the little seed sown in Erunmu in 1914, Seventh-day Adventist beliefs have spread to all the major parts of Nigeria. The church is found in all the 36 states of Nigeria and Abuja.

All efforts to lay hands on the first church record book failed. The first convert was Chief Jacob Oyetoro Oyelese, the Baale of Erunmu. The first people to be baptized were the following: Jacob Oyetoro Oyelese; Samson Adelowo Adekola, the first indigenous ordained elder of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Nigeria; Samuel Oyeniyi Oyelese; Adekunle Sangofunmilayo; Joseph Adebiji; David Babarinde Alabi, the first Erunmu indigenous pastor; James Kilanko; Ojewole from Ore; Kilanko from Ataari; Adios from Ore; Falowo from Ore.¹¹

The church that started with only 11 members now has spread across Nigeria. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is now blessed with thousands of members in the three union conferences of Nigeria.

Today, Erunmu, together with churches in the surrounding villages, form a district of churches with more than 500 baptized members. The district is made up of the following churches: Erunmu Church 1 with 347 members; Erunmu Church 2 with 48 members; Ore Church with 38 members; Ataari Church with 36 members; Alugbo Church with 36 members; Olubodun Church with 13 members.¹² Each of these churches has an appropriate church building. Today, many Erunmu sons and daughters are worshipping in many towns in Nigeria and in many countries of the world.

History of Physical Development

The early members started meeting under a palm roofed tent in a place not far from where the central mosque is today. It was on that spot that the first and second (50-seat capacity) churches were built. The third church was built in 1932. This church could hold 250 worshippers. It was built of mud and well cemented. It was roofed by Pastor S. A. Dare, who doubled as a well-trained, experienced carpenter and a pastor. This church has since been demolished and replaced with a modern church building. Reacting to the demolishing of the 1932 church building, S. A. Funmilayo had this to say:⁸

To my surprise I came to Erunmu one day and I found that the beautiful church I know with 1932 inscription has been demolished. The demolishing of the church is just like destruction of our history. It demonstrates the heart of many Adventist[s] both in and outside Erunmu. Those who demolished the 1932 church destroyed our past which was the glory of our late fathers and mothers who worked tirelessly to erect the contemporary of Gbongan Church. In those days, the saying used to be, "Enu ko iroyin Sosi Gbongan. O ko ti de Sosi Erunmu ni." Meaning, "You can only claim that Gbongan church is magnificent and beyond description, only if you've not

been to Erunmu Church.”¹³

The 1932 church has been replaced by the present church that was designed by Architect Isaac Babalola Adekunle. The work of Pastor J. D. Owolabi on the church building cannot be quantified. He will be remembered as a hard-working minister of the gospel.

Today Erunmu people worship in a modern and befitting church auditorium. The church will ever be thankful to God for the families of Olukowi and Adekola for donating the acres of land on which the church, primary school, and pastor’s residence are built.¹⁴

The Construction of the Present Church

In 1971, Isaac Babalola Adekunle, an architect, was commissioned to design an ultra-modern church building for Erunmu, the fourth in the series of church buildings at Erunmu since the arrival of Elder D. C. Babcock in the town in 1914. Architect Adekunle took up this challenge with enthusiasm and completed the assignment on schedule and to the utmost satisfaction of the church board. The church board subsequently approved the plan as designed and submitted. Architect Adekunle, an Adventist, designed the building and supervised the construction free of charge. He gladly donated his professional expertise, time, money, energy, and other resources toward the construction of the church building. The foundation of the church was laid on February 4, 1971, by the following people: Pastor J. M. Adeoye, Professor John Oyedokun Oyelese, Pastor C. O. Adeogun, and Pastor J. D. Owolabi. Pastor J. D. Owolabi was the resident pastor at Erunmu in 1971. His untiring efforts and unflinching support towards the erection of the sanctuary were unparalleled.¹⁵

The following people were the chair and members of the church building committee: J. O. Oyerinde (Chair), Elder F. A. Ajao (JP), Elder D. K. Olayinka, Elder D. F. Fatade, and Adetunji Adesina. The church was dedicated on Sabbath, December 23, 1995, and Pastor A. F. Oloyede was the local pastor and district leader then. The chair and members of the 16-member Church Dedication Committee were Dr. H. O. Adesina (Chair), Elder D. F. Fatade, Dr. Omotoso Owolabi, Chief Tunji Adios, Esther Adegunju, Elder D. O. Akinfenwa, Elder R. O. Ajao, Elder D. K. Olayinka, Elder Benjamin Funmilayo, Israel Adegbite, C. B. Oyerinde, Mrs. F. M. Onatoyinbo, Elder E. O. Ojo, Elder Fred Ajao, and Pastor A. F. Oloyede.

The ministers of God that officiated at the dedication ceremony of the fourth Seventh-day Adventist Church building on December 23, 1995, were: Pastor J. A. Ola, Pastor S. Chioma, Pastor Onaolapo Ajibade, Pastor J. B. Kio, Professor A. A. Alalade, Pastor E. Oyinloye, Pastor A. F. Oloyede, Elder D. F. Fatade, and Dr. H. O. Adesina.¹⁶

Members, both at home and abroad, contributed financially to the building of the new church. Pastor J. D. Owolabi, the resident pastor who started the project, found a way to contact all of them for their contributions. He even solicited financial assistance from non-members who hailed from Erunmu.¹⁷

Education

An elementary school was established by David C. Babcock in Erunmu in 1914 with seven pupils: Daniel Adepegba Adekola, Deji Babarinde Alabi, Samuel Babarinde Amao, Daniel Aremu Funmilayo, Johnson Oyelese, and J. Akingbade Oyedijo.¹⁸ The school was later moved to Sao in 1915 along with the seven pupils. In 1928 the Seventh-day Adventist Central School in Erunmu was established. At that time the highest class was standard four. After standard four, the students moved to Oke-Bola, Ibadan, for standards five and six. This continued till December 1944. In 1945 the primary school in Erunmu was upgraded to standard six. The pioneer students of the upgraded school were called "Historic Pioneers 46 of S.D.A. Central School Erunmu" and graduated on December 19, 1946, inside the 1932 church building.¹⁹

Among the 20 pupils that graduated were Isaac Babalola Adekunle, George Ayoade Fadele, Daniel Agboola, Felix Adeniyi Alalade, Joseph Adeniyi Adedokun, Juliana Fatade, Victoria Moji Alao (Adigun), Samuel Ajadi Ogundipe, Elizabeth Adunni Onatoyinbo, (Ogunniji), Ezekiel A. Akintunde, John Adebayo Kilanko. Their headmaster was Pa I. D. Ajayeoba. The Seventh-day Adventist Secondary Modern School started in 1955. Among the pioneer students were: Isaiah Agboola Adeniran, Simeon Funmilayo, Felix Amoo, and Hezekiah Adesina. The headmaster was Elder Daniel Faniran Fatade.²⁰

Pastoral and Lay Services

The first resident pastor was Pastor David Caldwell Babcock assisted by R. P. Doulphin. Other pastors who have served the church since then are: J. B. Oriola, S. A. Dare, J. A. Makinde, J. E. Adewoye, J. D. Owolabi, S. A. Kehinde, J. A. Odubrah, E. A. Akintunde, A. F. Oloyede, S. A. Ayinla, J. A. Adebomi, E. A. Okunola, and L. A. Adegbite, the current pastor of Erunmu district.²¹

Laypersons who rendered good services to the growth, development, and health of the early church in Erunmu are: Elders S. A. Ojewole, Kilanko from Ataari, Samson Adekola, Johnson Oyelese, John Olujesun, Daniel Aremu Funmilayo, and Daniel Faniran Fatade. All of them are deceased now. They spent their time and money serving the church. They spent more time serving the church than doing their personal work. They were very faithful to the church. Anytime we remember them we always say, "Awon wonyi se iwon ti won lee se, ki won to fabo fun Olorun." Meaning, "These people did the little they could do before they were called to rest in the Lord." Among other renowned leaders are James Niran Kilanko, his brother Joseph Ranti Kilanko, James Alade, Oyejide Oyerinde, Oyetade Oyerinde, Isaac Babablola Adekunle, Jeremiah Funmilayo, Joseph Adeweso Adekola, Sarah Latundun Faderera Amoo, Ayoade Babarinde, Hezekiah Adesina, and Adeyoyin Adebisi, just to mention but few.²²

Pastors of Erunmu Church

Pastor David Caldwell Babcock established the first church school. Some of his students who went with him to Sao in Kwara state include D. B. Alabi, Daniel Adepegba, Daniel Aremu Funmilayo, and many others. He built the first church (palm roofed tent) and the second church. He dug two wells. The Babcock Well at Ogba Teacher serves church workers, and the Moliki well served the entire community and helped to eradicate guinea worm and any other water borne diseases. He was a teacher, evangelist, and preacher.

Pastor S. A. Dare opened a mini clinic where he took care of and treated minor ailments. He was a very good farmer and an experienced and well-trained carpenter and builder. He built and roofed the entire 1932 church building. He was ordained in the church he built. His ordination was a special occasion in Erunmu.

Pastor J. D. Owolabi was the architect who designed and built the fourth church. He was also a hardworking minister of the gospel. Thank the Lord he was present for the dedication of the church he started.

Pastor Amos Folorunso Oloyede was the church pastor when the fourth church building was completed and dedicated.

Pastor S. A. Ayinla was pastor when the church parsonage was built. He dug another well to serve the church and pastor's residence.

Pastor Joseph A. Adebomi was a young and dynamic pastor. He started the Babcock Memorial Nursery and Primary School. He laid the foundation of the school building and built it to window level before he was transferred.

Among the laymen to be remembered for their contributions is Samson Adekola-ebo from Erunmu. He was the custodian of both church and community documents. There were a lot of committed laymen who sacrificed their time, talent, and money for the service of this church. Among them were S. A. Ojewole from Ore; Kilanko from Ataari; Daniel Aremu Funmilayo from Erunmu; John Olujesun from Erunmu; and Adepoju and his wife Ogbale from Erunmu.²³

Other Churches

There is no record of when and how other churches and branches were established. Today, other churches that grew from Erunmu church are in the villages such as Ayede, Isajin/Oyindola, Koloko, Ataari, and Ore.

The church holds baptisms at Osun River or Idogun River. Whenever people are to be baptized, the entire congregation follows the baptismal candidates to the river. They will sing from Erunmu via Ayede, Koloko, either to Osun or Idogun Rivers coming and going.²⁴

In the past the annual camp meetings used to be rotated from one district of churches to another. In those days, camp meetings were used for evangelism. Many converts were usually baptized during the camp meetings. Today the Oyo Conference Permanent Camp site at Erunmu is where annual camp meetings are held.

One of the major arms of the church at that time and even now (though with variation in name) is the youth ministry. This was a powerful channel through which the church propagated the gospel to the younger generation. It was not Adventist Youth Ministry (AYM) or Adventist Youth Society (AYS) then, but Junior Missionary Volunteer (JMV). Young people were trained to become missionaries. The major aim of the JMV was to win souls for Christ. It was through JMV and encouragement from people like Elder B. O. Funmilayo, with the assistance of others like Elder E. O. Ojewole, that many, including me, joined the church. Master Guide J. A. Tayo was a good model to the young ones at that time.²⁶

Apart from known worldwide hymns which the church used during regular worship, there are choruses carefully selected from worshippers' experiences with Christ. Reflecting on the above, Frederick Ajao observed as follows:

Christian songs at that time were not mixed with the world's songs and in those days the songs were spiritual and evangelistic. One of the songs was "Ko soju bi Oju Jesu," meaning, "There is no watch care that can equal that of Jesus." They were all inspiring songs. The choirs were very dedicated and brilliant.²⁷

Among the indigenes of Erunmu who served the church as choir leader was J. Oyejide Oyerinde, who was a two-time Education director of the West Nigeria Mission. During his tenure, Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA), and Adventist Grammar School Ede, were established.²⁸

Factors that Strengthened the Establishment of the SDA Church in Erunmu

The SDA mission was the first Christian mission in Erunmu, so there was no competitor.

The ability of Babcock and his team to quickly learn the Yoruba language.

The community development strategy adopted by Babcock and his team. For example, they quickly introduced education to the people, teaching them how to read and write. Babcock also dug wells to provide drinkable water, not only for his team, but also for the community. These projects endeared the missionaries to the community so they listened to the three angels' message the missionaries preached.

The early missionaries started to train indigenous people for missionary work as soon as they were converted. For example, they engaged people like Samuel Oyeniyi Oyelese and Jacob Alao in their missionary activities.²⁹

Pastors from Erunmu

The following are Seventh-day Adventist pastors who come from Erunmu:

Pastor D. B. Alabi was among the people who welcomed D. C. Babcock to Erunmu in 1914. He joined the ministry in 1928 and retired in 1962.

Pastor Rufus Oyeleke Akintunde was a convert from Islam. He started his pastoral ministry in 1988 before going to Babcock University for pastoral training from 1999 to 2002. He was Stewardship/Family/Trust Services director and Ministerial Secretary for the West Nigeria Conference from 2004 to 2010. He retired from active pastoral service on November 1, 2010.

Pastor Kolade Abiodun Durodola is still in active service.

Pastor Oyewole Oyerinde is still in active service.

Pastor Oluwaseun Akinpelu is still in active service.³⁰

While the church began in Erunmu and has since expanded across Nigeria, one thing that aided the growth of the church was the development projects. It is noteworthy that since the missionaries left, the development works of the church in Erunmu have stopped. Today the Erunmu people believe that if Erunmu had an institution like a hospital, secondary school, or university, the church would have grown larger and faster than it has.

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NOTES

1. A. O. Akintunde, *Seventh-day Adventism In Nigeria*, An unpublished document, 2014, 1-18 (in the author's private collection).
2. Personal knowledge of the author as an indigene of Erunmu.
3. Akintunde, *Seventh-day Adventism In Nigeria*.
4. Personal knowledge of the author as an indigene of Erunmu.
5. David T. Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa ((1888-1988): A Mustard Seed* (Ibadan, Nigeria: LASOB Productions, 2001), 24-29.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
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9. Akintunde, *Seventh-day Adventism In Nigeria*.
10. S. A. Funmilayo, son of one of the men who was converted through the efforts of David C. Babcock, interview by author, on May 29, 2018, at Erunmu.
11. S.D.A. Church 1 Erunmu Dedication Program, 1995, S.D.A. Church 1 records, Erunmu.
12. Pastor Lawrence A. Adegbite, the current pastor of Erunmu Church, interview by author, on May 29, 2018, at Erunmu.
13. S. A. Funmilayo, interview by author, on May 29, 2018, at Erunmu.
14. F. A. Ajao. His father was present at the reception of David C. Babcock in 1914. The interview was conducted by the author on May 30, 2018, at Erunmu.
15. S. A. Funmilayo, interview by author, on May 29, 2018, at Erunmu.
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17. Ibid.
18. Akintunde, *Seventh-day Adventism In Nigeria*.
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20. Ibid.
21. Erunmu Church Record.
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23. Erunmu Church Record.
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