

DR. VICTOR A. ADEGBITE

A JEWEL IN THE CROWN OF DC FREEMASONRY

A TRIBUTE BY MOST WORSHIPFUL BROTHER KWAME ACQUAAH, PGM



He was an exceptional young man, who knew his mind very early in life. Having distinguished himself at Achimota College in the Gold Coast, he was encouraged to consider attending a medical school in the UK. He declined and opted for the study of architecture in the US. It was not only his choice of career that was unusual in the 1940s in the Gold Coast, but also his decision to ignore the general antipathy to American education. He was already demonstrating the propensity for independent thinking and a willingness to depart from conventional attitudes that were to become the hallmarks of his life. His preference for the US was to prove visionary, as decades later, his old country developed admiration for, and acceptance of everything made in the USA.

As he worked his way to pay for his expenses at Howard University, he evinced another characteristic: that of being self-reliant, no matter the cost. I was to witness that attribute throughout our relationship.

Architect

His scholastic achievements at Howard University, and later at Bogota, Columbia, brought him to the attention of the fledgling administration of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who was at the time the Leader of Government Business under the colonial administration in the Gold Coast. Dr. Nkrumah sent an emissary to recruit him and implore him to return home and assist in national reconstruction. His recruitment was sealed by the two of them drinking a toast from a new bottle of Johnnie Walker whisky in a Washington DC hotel. I never found out whether it was that experience that made Johnnie Walker his whisky of choice for the rest of his life, whenever he allowed himself an adult beverage.

Mr. Adegbite arrived in the Gold Coast in February 1956, and discovered he was the first national to have earned an academic degree in architecture. Although it was not foreseeable at the time, seven months later, in September 1956, the colonial administration announced that the country was to become independent on March 6, 1957, under the new name of Ghana.

He was immediately commissioned to design and supervise the construction of multiple major public buildings and housing developments. Impressed with his skill and assiduity, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah appointed him the first African Chief Architect of the Ghana Housing Corporation, and in that position he was effectively the government's Chief Architect. His hard work, trustworthiness, dependability and reliability made him a favorite of President Nkrumah, who tasked him with special assignments including overseas missions to represent the head of state. In his favored station, he dealt with many major domestic and international personages of the era. Among his favorites were Ben Gurion of Israel, George Padmore, and Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois.

Certainly, he was first and foremost an architect, and I remain in bewildered awe of the account I have received regarding the vision, creativity, boldness and industry that Mr. Adegbite employed on his much talked about project: the State House Improvements Project, otherwise known as the *Job 600* project. The objective was to design and construct, within a year, a complex consisting of conference and banquet halls together with residential facilities for the meeting of African Heads of State attending the Organization of African Unity Conference scheduled for Accra in 1965. Consideration had been given to commissioning an international (foreign) architects and construction firm to undertake the project. Prior to a final decision, President Nkrumah inquired of Mr. Adegbite whether the project could be handled with local talent and expertise. Mr. Adegbite, with his characteristic boldness, answered in the affirmative.

Thus assured, the president authorized him to design and put a team together to build the complex. Given the time constraints, this undertaking would be difficult in an industrialized country, but in a developing country it was inconceivable. Mr. Adegbite designed the complex, and supervised the team that constructed, fully furnished, and delivered the conference and banquet halls and the twelve-storey executive suites with its roof garden, within ten months. The furniture and certain of the other furnishings were all produced in Ghana, a proud commitment to local artisans and industry not equaled to date in any building project in that country. The completed project was very well received for its craftsmanship, and for over fifty years has stood out as a historic landmark and powerful example of excellence in design, as it reposes in stately splendor, grandeur and magnificence.

Believing as he does in excellence in architecture and the nurturing of young architects to achieve this standard, Mr. Adegbite managed, during this period in Ghana, to become the driving force in the establishment of the Ghana Institute of Architects in 1962. For the 50th anniversary of the institute in 2012, Mr. Adegbite's contributions and achievements were heralded on many pages throughout the commemorative magazine, whose cover bore his iconic photograph with him resplendent in an elegant bow-tie and with his left hand stylishly holding his smoking pipe.



*Worshipful Brother Victor A. Adegbite
Master of Lodge Ghana No. 1588, SC (1965)*

Mr. Adegbite was also a major proponent and contributor to the development of an academic training program in architecture leading to the award of a bachelor degree at the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana.

In 1974, Mr. Adegbite relocated to the US to join the faculty at Howard University. In addition to the demands of academia, Professor Adegbite was engaged in the design or supervision of design and building of structures in the US and in a number of African countries. Among his projects were: homes, apartment complexes, community and recreational centers, hotels, hospitals, supermarkets, banks, office buildings, churches, libraries, schools, stadiums, gymnasiums, university campuses, townships, monuments, and an industrial facility.

During an architectural career spanning sixty years, the Adegbite style has been distinguished by beautiful proportions; clean straight lines, conjuring the nobility of the horizon; transparency, symbolizing clarity; qualitative use of lighting, evocative of exuberant spirit; generous indoor wind flows; untrammelled circulation; judicious use of interior and exterior

color; incorporation of the latest technologies to the extent that they were appropriate, and a general and acute attention to every detail to ensure that a completed structure would be fit in all respects for its intended purpose and that it could easily be maintained for many years.

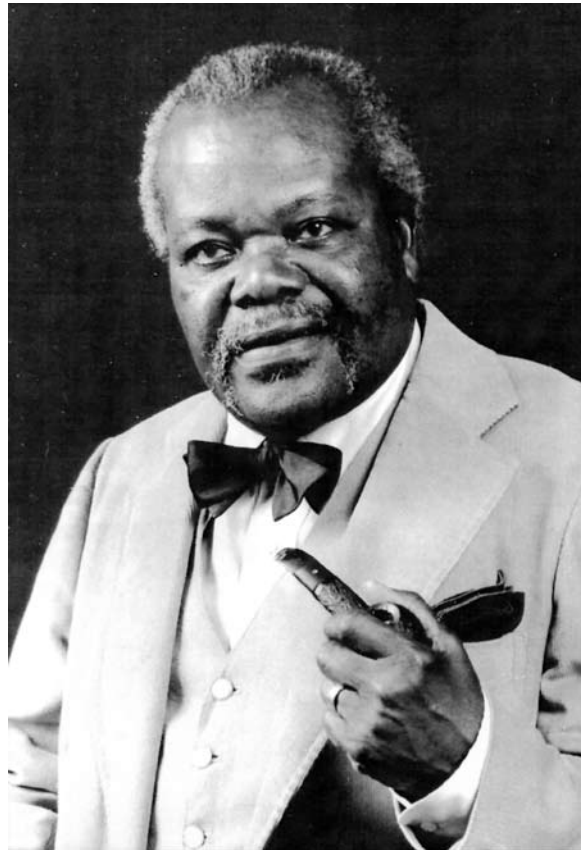
To many of us, it was, therefore, fitting that recently, Professor Adegbite agreed to put out a book to share his experience and expertise in architecture, more especially with respect to building in the tropics. The book, which is yet to be published, offers a Master Builder's designs, plans, principles and practical advice on the conceptualization, design and erection of public and private buildings. It should inform, inspire and instruct students and practitioners of architecture at all stages of their careers.

Freemason

RWBro. Adegbite's search for light led him to Lodge Unity No. 1466 SC in Accra, Ghana in 1959. He was an active member of that lodge and also of Lodge Ghana No. 1588, SC, of which he served as Master during the 1965-1966 Masonic year. He also affiliated with Lodge Academic No. 1550 SC, and was a founding member of Lodge Research No. 1671 SC. He was also active in Chapter Lodge Unity No. 759, SC, of which he served as the First Principal just prior to his relocation to the US.

In addition to his family and career, Masonry became the third pillar of his life, and remained so until the end of his days.

In Washington DC, he was to become a trailblazer in Freemasonry. If today, the Grand Lodge F.A.A.M. of the District of Columbia is integrated and embraces men of African descent, considerable measure of the credit for this achievement is due to the gentle courage and tenacity of Right Worshipful Brother Victor Adegbite and a small band of fellow Masons.



As a result of the work of RWBro. Adegbite and his band of Masons, I can stand here and declare that I am a Mason and the first black Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, having served in 2009. He lived to witness another brother of African descent, MWBro. Teko Foly, serve as Grand Master in 2013.

It bears noting that RWBro. Adegbite worked for sixteen years, beginning from 1976, to remove the color bar that disallowed the admission of men of African descent into lodges and changed the face of Freemasonry in the Nation's Capital. His effort, and later that of others who joined him, culminated in the establishment of Sojourner Kilwinning Lodge

No. 1798 on May 13, 1992, with dispensation to work in the Scottish Modern Ritual, as approved by the Grand Lodge of Scotland. The Lodge had a rainbow membership of whites and blacks with heritage from the US, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

In 2000, RWBro. Adegbite, in pursuit of further diversity and universality in the Masonic experience in Washington DC, conceived and became the primary mover or founder of Fiat Lux Lodge No. 1717, with dispensation to work the Emulation Ritual, as approved by the United Grand Lodge of England, again with membership whose origins could be traced to various parts of the world.

Again, in 2000, in addition to the founding of Fiat Lux Lodge No. 1717, RWBro. Adegbite was a driving force in founding Sojourner Kilwinning Chapter No. 17, Royal Arch Masons and Sojourner Kilwinning Council No. 7. Cryptic Masons, both of which he was the *Primus*, the first presiding officer. He was also responsible for the establishment of Fiat Lux Chapter No. 19, Royal Arch Masons in 2005, of which, again, he was the *Primus*, and of Fiat Lux Council No. 9, Cryptic Masons, organized in 2007.

Illustrious Adegbite was the recipient of numerous Masonic awards and commendations. In 1980 he became a Vice Patron of the Royal Masonic Hospital in London. He was invested with the rank of Knight Commander Court of Honor of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, Valley of Washington, Orient of the District of Columbia, in 1999 and coroneted 33° Inspector General Honorary in 2004. On March 22, 2002, he was inducted as Honorary First Grand Sojourner, Supreme Grand Chapter Royal Arch Freemasons of Scotland. On June 7, 2002 he became an honorary member of the Edinburgh Defensive Band Royal Arch Chapter No. 278. He also received high awards from the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of the District of Columbia and the Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of the District of Columbia.

From the Grand Lodge F.A.A.M. of the District of Columbia, he received: in August 1978, the Grand Lodge Fidelity Medal for Sojourner Kilwinning Lodge No. 1798; its highest award, Grand Lodge Distinguished Service Medal in December 2005; and the rank of Honorary Past Grand Senior Warden in October 2009. In 1994, he was appointed the Grand Representative to the Grand Lodge of Senegal of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons.

RWBro. Adegbite served in various appointed positions in the Grand Lodge, and in that capacity he was at the center of a race question at a meeting of Masons in Maryland in the mid-1990s. He also served in various appointed positions in the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of the District of Columbia and the Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of the District of Columbia.

In May 1992, he received the 32° of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, Valley of Washington, Orient of the District of Columbia, where he was very active and served on many degree and educational teams. He became a member of the Royal Order of Scotland in October 1993. He also became active in the York Rite bodies of Washington DC, having affiliated with Mount Vernon Chapter in 1996; honored and chosen by Adoniram Zabud Council No.2 on June 28, 1999. He was ever present to assist and support me when I served as presiding officer in the various entities in the Scottish Rite and York Rite bodies.

RWBro. Adegbite has done more for me in Masonry than I could ever recount. He was with me from the beginning and stood beside me, taught me, guided me, advised me, helped me, defended me, encouraged me, and furnished me with many books, booklets, jewels and other supplies purchased with his own funds, for which he declined to be reimbursed. While he supported and assisted many Masons, he seemed to treat WBro Rev. Canon Daniel Darko and me as his adopted children. It was, therefore, my greatest honor that he lived to present me for installation as Grand Master in December 2008.

In life and in death, I was and remain proud to have called and continue to call him a Brother because he lived by the purest principles of piety and virtue valued by our Order.

