

Prof. Bethwell A. Ogot  
**Kisumu 1901-2001**

FROM AN INLAND PORT TO FIRST MILLENNIUM CITY

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# History of Kisumu City

1901 - 2001

**Bethwell A. Ogot, Ph.D.**



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Bethwell A. Ogot  
*Yala Town, Kenya*  
*May 2016*



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## Introduction

The development of modern societies is inextricably linked to the process of urbanization throughout the world. Any understanding of the politics of the world must therefore take stock of this agglomerative process in so far as it has shaped the cultures, the economies and social institutions of all societies. Urban problems furnish insights into the connection between national and international politics, on the one hand, and the spatial articulation of economic, political, social and ideological relations, on the other.

As a process, urbanization may be said to have commenced with the Neolithic Revolution in food production, some ten thousand years ago. The mastery over food production freed a number of persons from direct subsistence activities and created a basis for a more complex division of labour, the concentration of population in one place, and the emergence of new forms of social inequality. In Africa, urbanization, contrary to certain beliefs, did not start with colonialism. In the Nile Valley, North, West and Eastern Africa, urban centres which predated the invasion of Africa by foreigners had developed and prospered.

The development of capitalism in Europe ushered in a new era of human history. The initial phase of mercantilism facilitated capital accumulation through trade, imperialist conquests, forced labour or slavery and plundering. This phase soon gave way to the era of competitive capitalism in the Nineteenth Century in which industrial cities and towns flourished, and new urban centres in the colonies were founded as centres of capitalist production.

Kisumu City is one of those colonial urban centres that were established at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The town was essen-

tially a railway terminus and a lake port. The railway was the outcome of the responsibilities accepted by the British Government at the Brussels Conference of 1892, convened by King Leopold II of Belgium to discuss developments in East Africa. It was initially known as the Uganda Railway because the Nyanza region was part of the Uganda Protectorate until March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1902. The parties to the conference were the United States of America, Austria, Belgium, Congo, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, Persia, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and more importantly, Zanzibar. The main object of the conference was the suppression of slavery in Africa.

The powers declared that among the most effective means for counteracting the slave trade in the interior of Africa were:<sup>1</sup>

“The construction of roads, and, in particular, of railway, connecting the advanced stations with the coast, and permitting easy access to the inland waters, and to such of the upper courses of the rivers and streams as are broken by rapids and cataracts, in view of substituting economical and rapid means of transport for the present means of carriage by men.

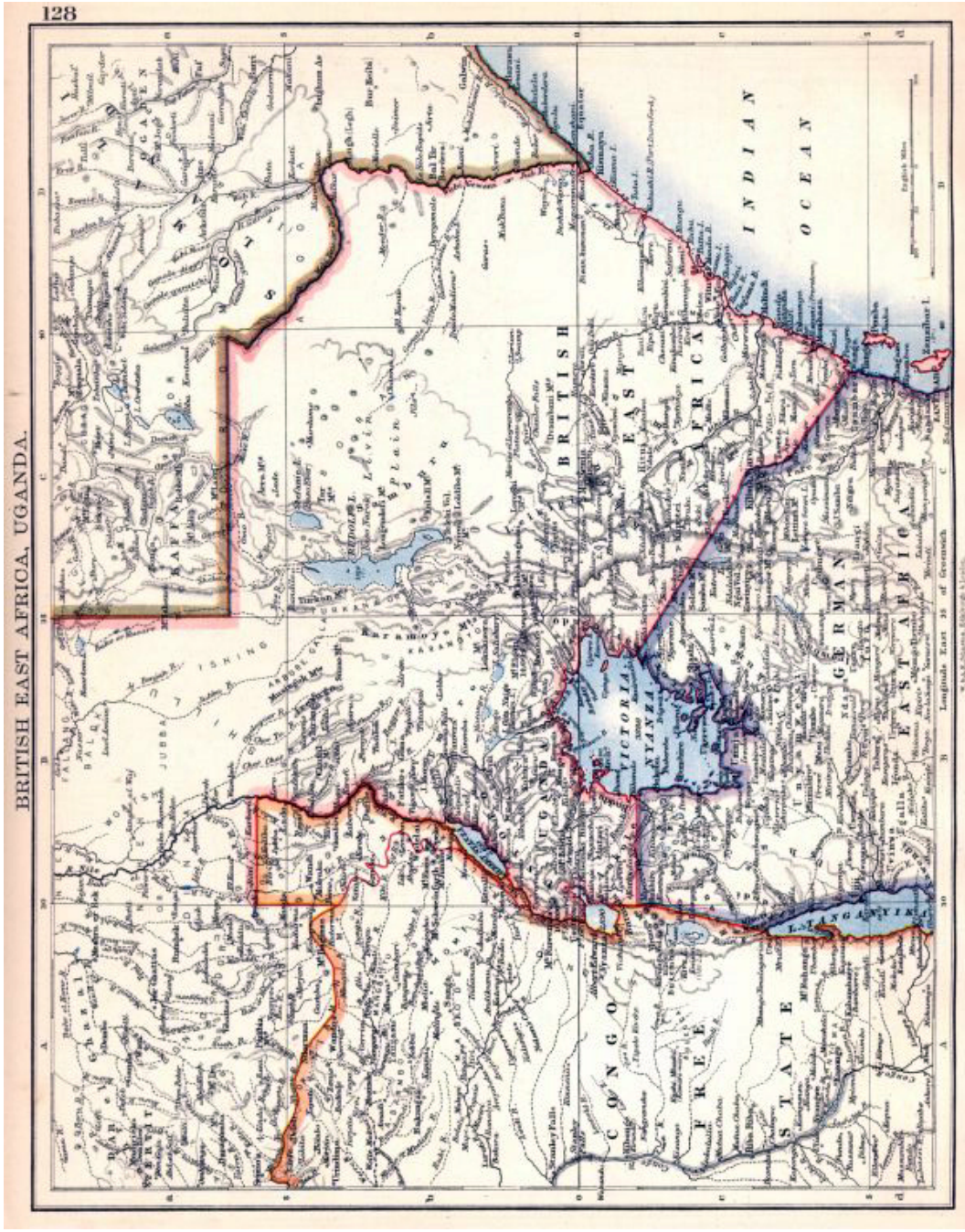
Establishment of steamboats on the inland navigable waters, and on the lakes, supported by fortified posts, established on the banks.

Establishment of telegraphic line, joining the communication of the posts and stations with the Coast and with administrative centres.”

Great Britain having placed British East Africa and Uganda, an area of 1.9 million square kilometres, within her sphere of exclusive influence was bound to give effect to the above provisions of the Brussels Act. This could be effectively achieved by building a railway from Mombasa to Victoria Nyanza – as Lake Victoria was called – with its attendant telegraphic line, and the steamers which would run from its lake terminus.

When the Brussels Act came into effect, the authority exercising jurisdiction in the British sphere of influence was the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) under the charter of September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1888. The Charter of this Company was revoked on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1893, and all the company’s property, rights and privileges within the territory comprised in the charter, including the lease in perpetuity of the rights of the State of Zanzibar on the Coast, were transferred to Her Majesty’s Government in return for a parliamentary grant of £250,000.





Source: British Empire, britishempire.co.uk

Figure 1.1 : 1897 Map British East Africa and Uganda

The construction of the proposed railway would now be undertaken by the British Government who attached great importance to the rapid completion of the line. Officially, the railway was being built to eradicate the slave trade, open up the region to commerce, and secure Uganda and the Nile Valley.

Preliminary inquiries carried out in East Africa had confirmed a lack of sufficient African labourers for railway construction. Negotiations were therefore opened with the Colonial Government of India for the supply of labourers. The India Office in London was reluctant to concede to the request for indentured Indian immigration by the Uganda Railway due largely to past abuses of the indentured system in other colonies such as Natal or the West Indies. However, the Railway Committee appointed by the Foreign Office concluded that "it would be hopeless to expect that the railway could be constructed at any reasonable cost and speed unless the India Office sanctioned the recruitment of labour in India."<sup>2</sup>

As a result, negotiations were opened between the two offices in London in October 1895 with a view to amending the Indian Emigration Act of 1883 to permit indentured immigration for the construction of the Uganda Railway. The Emigration Act was amended in May 1896. After lengthy discussions, an acceptable form of agreement for the indentured workers was finally adopted. The system was eventually abolished in 1917.

A Punjabi agent, A. M. Jeevanjee (1856-1939), was entrusted with the task of recruiting Indian personnel. Jeevanjee had previous experience in successfully recruiting men for the IBEA, including a 300 strong police force. In 1891 he established an office of his Karachi and Bombay-based firm at Mombasa and started business as contractors and stevedores – persons loading and unloading ships. Later in 1896 his firm obtained a major contract to provide workers for the Uganda Railways, initially for a period of three years, with the option of renewal or return back to India. The recruitment process continued until 1922.

Jeevanjee was also given contract to erect temporary buildings, undertake rock-cutting and other earthworks, fit up rolling stock and supply provisions for the Indian personnel. In 1899, Jeevanjee made a very profitable agreement with the Chief Engineer of the Uganda Railway, Sir George Whitehouse, to supply food-stuffs for the entire Indian labour force employed on the Railway. In the same year, he obtained another contract to build Ainsworth's house in Nairobi, providing him the



**Figure 1.2 : Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee, 1856-1939**

opportunity to establish businesses in Nairobi just in time to be among the founding-fathers of the Kenya's future capital.

Personnel to work in the railway were recruited from Punjab, Gujarat and Sindh. In all, 39,711 people were recruited from India for the railway project. By way of contrast, at the peak of construction work, the African workforce numbered only 2,600. Further, contrary to popular belief, only a minority of Indian workers were *coolies*. The majority were masons, carpenters, mechanics, boiler makers, locomotive drivers, land and quantity surveyors, telegraphers, accountants, nurses, photographers and cooks.

The appointed engineer, George Whitehouse, arrived in Mombasa in 1895. He had plenty of experience in building railways in Britain, India, Mexico and South Africa. The first plates were laid at Mombasa on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1896; and in February 1897, Ronald O. Preston arrived from India. He had spent many years working as foreman plate-layer on the Indian Railways and was placed in charge of plate-laying for the Uganda Railway. With him was his wife, Florence, who was to accompany him along the entire length of the track from Mombasa to the shores of Lake Victoria.





**Figure 1.3 : *George Whitehouse – Chief engineer for the Uganda Railway***

The work conditions of the railway line were very severe, causing the deaths of 2,493 Indians – twenty-eight of them eaten by lions, “The Man Eaters of Tsavo” – and 6,500 became invalids. Many Africans were also eaten by lions at Tsavo and others became invalid, but nobody bothered to record their numbers. The construction of the railway turned out to be a most difficult enterprise. It was beset by, among other things, delays in the shipping of construction materials from England. At that time, there was no direct shipping service between London and Mombasa.

Due to this and other delays, concerns were expressed that after two and a half years, only a third of the work had been done instead of the estimated half by the end of that period. Surveyors were sent to carry out further exploration. They found that the shortest and cheapest route from Mombasa via Central Kenya to Lake Victoria, was over the Mau Mountains Range, down the Nyando Valley to Ugowe at the head of



**Figure 1.4 : Florence Preston, wife of construction boss Ronald [or Robert] Preston symbolically hammers in the last key on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1901.**

Winam Gulf where the lake reaches its most north-eastern point. This new alignment would reduce the original route by 160 kilometres, thus making Kisumu the new terminus. Earlier surveys and plans had indicated the present Sio Port in Busia County, as the likely terminal of the Uganda railroad, with port equipment and transport staff arriving there in 1898.

On December 19<sup>th</sup> 1901, the last rails were bolted. The following day, Mrs. Florence Preston was given the honour and privilege of symbolically hammering home the last spike of the 930 kilometre track. The terminus was then named Port Florence in her honour.

This great infrastructural achievement brought to an end the era of large and costly caravans of porters carrying loads on their heads from Mombasa to Uganda. The caravan porters had transported everything, from packages of barter-goods to major import and export trade items; from mail to parts of steamships. They were the labour force and the dis-

tributive agents within the transport system of the pre-colonial and early colonial system of East African trade. They thus served to link the subsistence and wage-oriented economies, and to bring the village markets together with the expanding and encroaching world economy.

The railway had had taken five years and four months to complete at a cost of £5.6 million. This single metre-gauge track was 930 kilometres long, and rapidly became the single most important development “tool” in the history of East Africa.

Of the 39,771 Asians who came to Kenya for the construction of the railway, 32,493 returned home and around 7,278 (18.8%) remained. Of these, only 10-15% were coolies. The remainder who were more skilled Asians renewed their contracts and remained in the protectorate to work. About 2,000 of them were kept in the railway employ, others were deployed in military campaigns and police work, with the majority engaging in commercial activities along the railway to open retail business inland up to Port Florence.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Playne, S. and Gale, F. H. (Editors), East Africa (British). Its History, People, Commerce, Industry and Resources. 1908-09. London: Gresham Press, 1909. pp. 195-196.

<sup>2</sup>Miller, Charles, The Lunatic Express, Baltimore Books Inc. New York, 1973, pp. 329-330.

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## Laying the Foundation for a New Town: 1901-1918

In the early part of 1899 Colonel Ternan (after whom Fort Ternan is named), head of the British colonial administration in Nyanza, ordered the removal of the administrative headquarters of Lake Victoria region from Mumias, where it had been set up some years earlier, to Ugowe, the present Kisumu. This was in anticipation of the arrival of the railroad at Port Ugowe, the chosen terminus. Charles William Hopley, a First Class Assistant at Mumias, was posted to Kisumu to establish the new town.

In July 1899, the first skeleton development plan of Kisumu town was drawn. It included the hastily erected series of grass huts on the northern side of the bay – the present Bandani and Otonglo areas. Hopley then commenced to build for himself a stone house, three staff houses, an office and store rooms, all grass-thatched. In May 1900, another plan was drawn on which plots were allotted to a few European firms and Asian traders who had travelled to Kisumu on contracts to build the Uganda Railway and had decided to settle at the terminus. The Asian traders occupied two rows of wood and iron shops on Mumias Road. Nearby was a village of round huts for Nubian (Sudanese) soldiers and their families.

Bandani area in the northern part of the bay was mosquito infested and unhealthy. It was nevertheless chosen by Hopley as the site for the new station as the area had been selected as the terminus of the railway line. However in 1902, the British Foreign Office accepted Hopley's request to move the railway terminus to a new site located to the south of the bay on health grounds. Over a period of about twenty years Kisumu town was gradually moved across to its present location.

## 2. LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A NEW TOWN: 1901-1918

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The northern site remained as the Old Kisumu (Bandani-Otonglo area), with a row of shops on Mumias Road. They were demolished in the late 1920s when new plots became available in Odera and Ogada Streets in the present Kisumu with the new shopping area acquiring the name, Indian Bazaar.

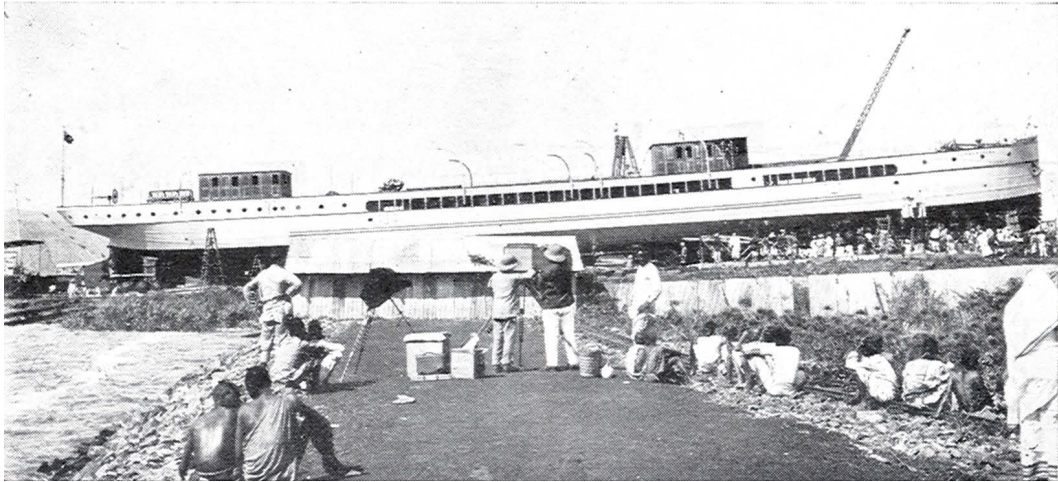
Hobley now drew up plans for the future development of a new town. A ship building yard, with all appliances and workshops necessary for the construction of iron or steel ships; a dry dock 350 feet long excavated out of a solid rock with 20 tonne steel shear legs; and a 10 tonne travelling erecting cranes. In addition, a pier 430 feet long and a wharf 300 feet long were constructed. Both had ample shed accommodation, sidings, crane and other essentials. The port was now capable of accommodating lake steamers. It had a minimum depth of eight feet at the lowest lake level. There were also a number of houses built, some of stone, others with iron and wood. In addition quarters were constructed for all the men employed on shore and for the crews of ships. Plans for the terminus included a flying boat jetty, later used by the Fisheries Department and other government institutions.

In October 1900, the 62-ton ship, SS William Mackinon made its maiden voyage to Entebbe, marking the beginning of the Lake Marine Services based at Kisumu. Its component parts had been lying at Mombasa since 1895 as all previous efforts to transport them having failed. For a considerable portion of the journey, the parts of this steamer had to be carried by porters. She was finally launched in June 1900.

The completion of the railway facilitated the rapid transport of parts required to build two additional ships: the SS Winifred and SS Sybil. Winifred made her first trip with passengers early in 1903 and the Sybil in 1904. Their main function was to shuttle between the rail head and the Uganda ports of Jinja, Port Bell and Entebbe. The tug Percy Anderson was brought from Kilindini at about the same time together with six lighters which had previously been engaged in off-loading railway stores at the coast. The railway line reached the pier in December 1901, and by February the following year, the line was opened for goods and passenger traffic.

By early 1906 the demand for transport on the lake was straining the capacity of the small fleet. Indeed, it was impossible to move the traffic on offer in a timely manner. Goods lay for months at the lake ports, particularly at Mwanza.





SOURCE: *East Africa Railways & Harbours Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 4, August 1955

**Figure 2.1 : Launch of the Clement Hill in December 1906**

The construction of a new ship, Clement Hill was started in May 1906. It was launched on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1906 and sailed on her maiden voyage on March 27<sup>th</sup> 1907. A year later, on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1907, another cargo ship the SS Nyanza, was launched.

The Nyanza had 1,146 tonnes displacement and was designed to carry 525 tons of cargo as compared with 150 tonnes capacity of the Winfred and the Sybil, and the 250 tonnes of the Clement Hill. However, the latter three carried passengers as well as cargo. During the years 1907-1908 the tonnage lifted was 13,858 with the steamer distance travelled rising to 49,317 miles.

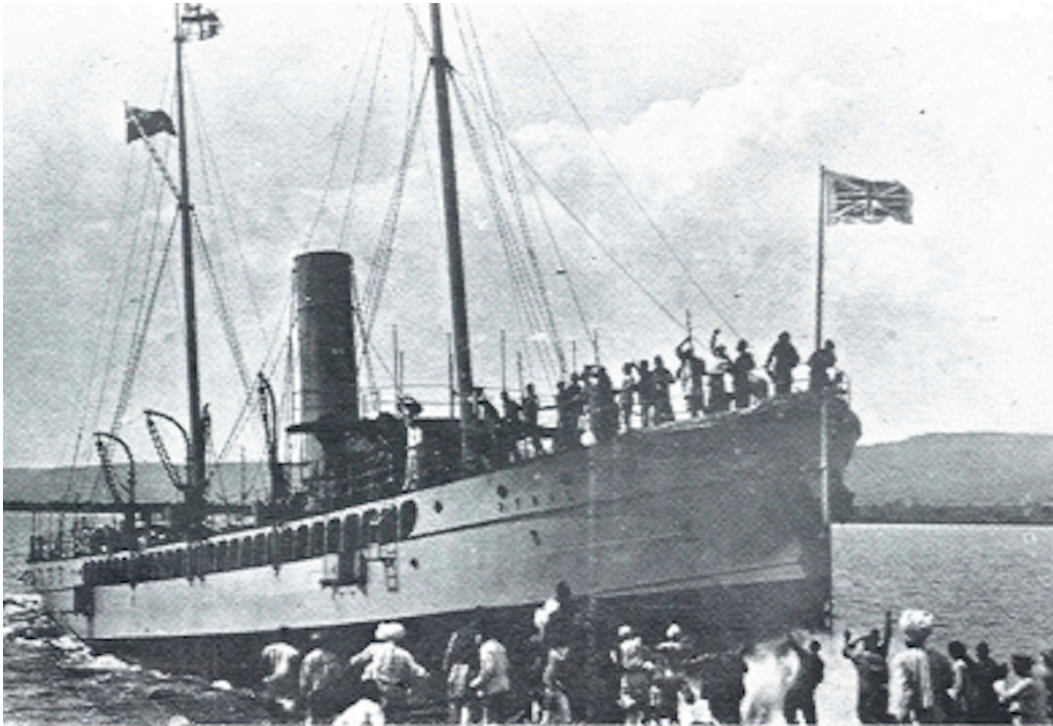
The demand continued to grow. As a result two new steamers – the Usoga and the Rusinga, and a tug – the Kavirondo, were built. The Usoga was placed in service in 1913, quickly followed by the Kavirondo and the Rusinga. Unlike their predecessor, the three new vessels burnt oil. They were among the pioneers in using this type of fuel, carried during this period to Kisumu in barrels. The successful use of fuel oil led to the conversion of the older ships and tugs, with the whole fleet using oil by 1914.

Besides maize and wheat from the Kenya highlands, the main cargo carried by the railway to Mombasa for export before 1914 was Uganda cotton. Bales were shipped across Lake Victoria from Jinja and Port Bell to the Kisumu railhead.

John Ainsworth arrived in Kisumu in 1907 as Provincial Commissioner for Nyanza. He had served with the IBEA as its agent in Ukambani. On

## 2. LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A NEW TOWN: 1901-1918

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Source: *East Africa Railways & Harbours Magazine*, Vol. 1., No. 7, December 1953

**Figure 2.2 : SS Sybil launched January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1904**



**Figure 2.3 : SS Nyanza cargo ship launched December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1907**



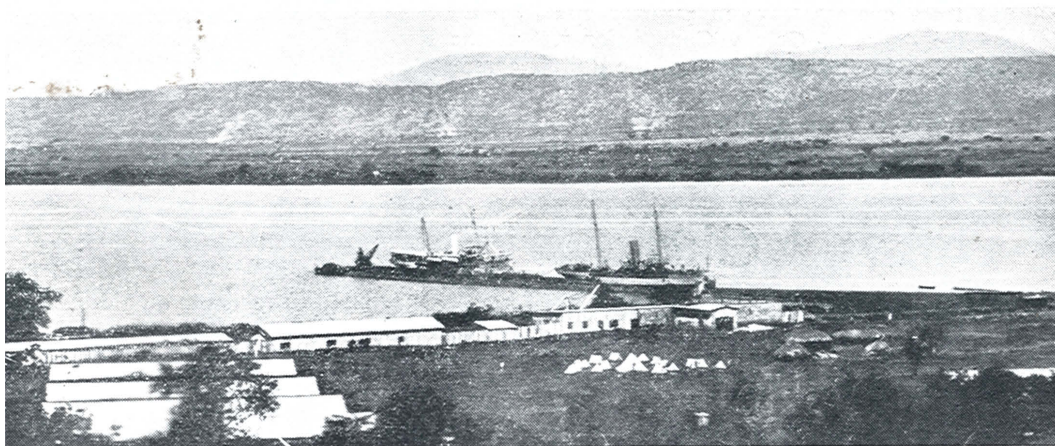


**Figure 2.4 : John Ainsworth – Provincial Commissioner for Nyanza, 1907 - 1914**

July 1, 1895, the British Government took over the territory from the IBEA Company and Ainsworth was appointed Sub-Commissioner in charge of a province that included Kikuyu country, Ukambani and Taita-Taveta districts. From 1899 to 1906 he was Sub-Commissioner at Nairobi and played an important role in the founding of the city. On arrival in Kisumu, he challenged the Luo and Abaluyia to provide freight for the new railway. Four years later, Ainsworth was able to record that Nyanza Province had exported £44,000 worth of farm produce on the railway. Earlier on it had been "written off" as incapable of exporting anything. Within four years, however, the Nyanza area had become the railways best customer.

Hobley was responsible for the present basic layout of the Kisumu and for the construction of a number of buildings, notably the former Provincial Commissioner's house – today the State Lodge – and the prison. A residential area was planned further inland, the present Millimani area, where flowing trees were to provide shade for passing inhabitants and have bungalows with compounds of about 1.5 acres: a bold vision in days when Ugowe was no more than a sandy, stony, and in parts, marshy area covered in undergrowth and trees.

The liberally conceived plans were worthy of the town's future standing as a market and depot for the products and requirements of British and German East Africa, the Nile Valley and Eastern Congo. Thus on the southern shores of the Bay of Winam, the foundations were laid for a new town which would soon become the business and administration center



SOURCE: East Africa Railways & Harbours Magazine, Vol. 1 No. 11, December 1954.

**Figure 2.5 : View of the port in 1900s. Two vessels in the picture are SS Winifred and SS Sybil.**

of Western Kenya and an important link between the countries bordering Lake Victoria. The new town officially adopted the name Kisumu from Port Florence in 1903 from a Luo word *sumo* which means a place where people went to seek relief from famine.

From a geographical and colonial administrative point of view, as well as from a historical and traditional point of view, the site of the new town possessed features which made it the obvious choice for a regional centre. The salt-lick at Ugowe features in the traditions of the people of Western Kenya, especially in the folklore of the Terik, the Gusii, the Maragoli, as well as in the traditions of the Luo. These different communities therefore share a common memory of having lived or grazed around the salt-lick near the present Kisumu International Airport.

We also learn from the traditions of the Luo that before the arrival of the Uganda Railway, the Kanyakwar clan, a section of the Jo-Kogelo in Alego – the clan to which United States President Barrack Obama's father belonged, was occupying much of the areas of the future colonial town. They had moved from their *gunda bur* (fortified site) in Nyang'oma in Alego, through Ng'iya and via Kit Mikayi in Seme, before arriving in Kisumu and settling by the lakeshore at Dunga. There they met the Kamoth and Kowodi fishermen. The Kanyakwar people themselves were farmers and livestock keepers.

By the time Hopley arrived at Ugowe, there were already six Kanyakwar villages and a market established near the present Lolwe Drive. This soon became an important barter market where trade developed

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among the diverse ethnic groups living in the region such as the Luyia and the Luo. Dunga village was the only Kanyakwar settlement located by the lakeshore. Mzee Osimbo, their leader, had established his village at the site of the present 15-storey Prosperity Building (former Provincial Commissioner's Office). His livestock grazed in the area around the barter market.

Another Kanyakwar elder, Otieno Alang'o built his village at the site of the present General Post Office on Oginga Odinga Street. The Kanyakwar people had a *jabilo* (medicine man and prophet) called Otieno Ayugo Adoyo who, upon his return from Kanyamwa in South Nyanza, re-joined his people in Kisumu and founded his village in the vicinity of the present United Millers premises at the northern end of Obote Road.

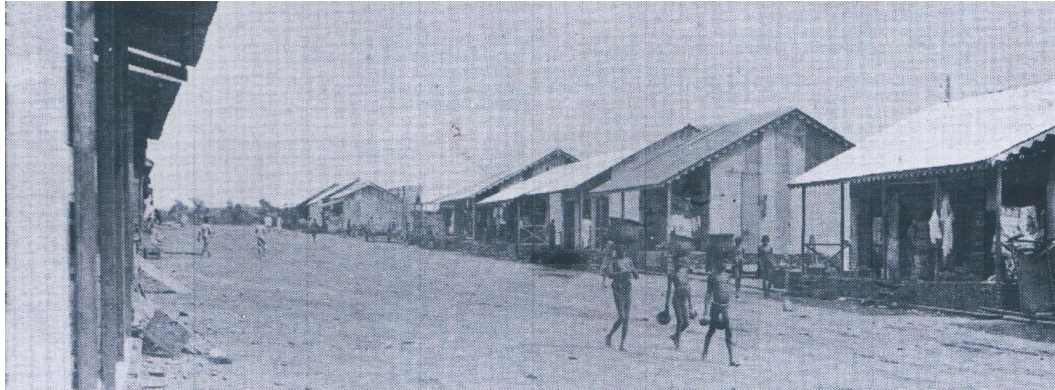
Another Kanyakwar village belonged to Okulo Polo, and was sited at the present bus park/Kisumu market. The largest Kanyakwar village was established by Riaga Ochich and was sited between the present Dala Hera and Migosi Primary School to the north-east of Kisumu City. The future Kisumu town was thus built on land that essentially belonged to the Kanyakwar people. It was on the basis of the existence of these villages that the Kanyakwar people were later in the 1930s to claim ownership of all land in the old colonial town.

In 1903, the township boundaries were gazette and comprised the circumference of a circle two and a half miles in radius, with its centre at the Collector's (District Commissioner's) office. The total area including water was approximately 12,566 acres. This position remained until 1923 when considerably modified boundaries were gazetted reducing the area to 6,980 acres. This was further modified in the 1930s, reducing the area further to 4,780 acres.

Before Kisumu town was built, there was a path to Mumias going from the present roundabout in front of the Kenya Commercial Bank to the top of Winam Gulf. Halfway along the path the Mill Hill Mission got a plot on which they built their first Church in Kisumu town in 1903.

The map of Kisumu town in 1904 shows Victoria Road (now Jomo Kenyatta Highway) and Station Road (now Oginga Odinga Street) with a small "Native Hospital" where the Post Office stands today. There were some shops further down near the present Harveys, with only the Mill Hill Mission and a "Native Market" to the North. The land to the north of the present Otieno Oyoo Road was reserved for "European Bazaar", where the Aga Khan Hospital now stands. The old Mill Hill Mission plot on the





**Figure 2.6 : Streets of Kisumu in 1904**

crossing of Location Road (now Mosque Road) had been given to the Muslims in 1903. The Jamia Mosque was later built on the spot where the old Catholic Church stood.

From the beginning, Kisumu town was a foreign enclave for Europeans, Asians, Goans, Arabs, Waswahili, Nubians and Baganda. The number of Europeans was small number, largely in administration, business and mission work. Their numbers rose from 47 in 1908, to 125 in 1914 and 220 by 1930. The initial European arrivals came with the Uganda Railway and were surveyors, engineers and administrators. They were later joined by colonial officials, missionaries and businessmen.

One of the biggest European firms in Kisumu at this time was Boustead and Clarke Limited. It was in 1907 that P.H. Clarke established in Kisumu the business which was later known all over East Africa as P.H. Clarke Limited; and which later amalgamated with Messrs Boustead Brothers of Mombasa, under the name of Boustead and Clarke Limited. Messrs Boustead Brothers started their business in Zanzibar in the 1870s and opened a branch in Mombasa in 1892 where it acted as agents of various missions, including the Church Missionary Society. They were the proprietors of both Mombasa Club (which they built in 1897) and Nairobi Club which opened on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1901.

They later sold the two clubs to members. The firm was also the sole agents of the American Tobacco Company for British and German East Africa and Zanzibar; and agents for "Rubberoid" roofing, Benjamin Edgington and Sons; S. W. Silver Ltd – specialists on camp equipment; Henry S. King; Grindlay, Groom and Company; and the Commercial Union Assurance Company Limited.

Boustead and Clarke Limited in Kisumu carried a large stock of wines,



SOURCE: Kisumu Market, Kenya. Winterton Collection of East African Photographs, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston. Object 43-2-79-2.

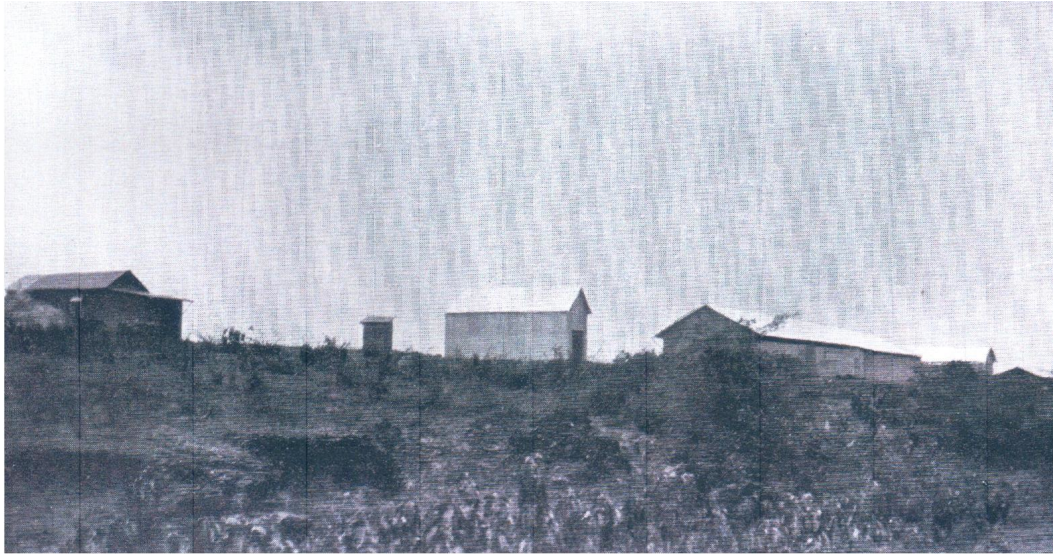
**Figure 2.7 : The "Native Market"**

spirits, groceries, soft goods and general merchandise. They occupied large premises of wood and iron covering an area of four acres. Another eight and a quarter acres were reserved for the Nyanza Market. The firm was a large exporter of country produce and were official brokers and auctioneers. The company was also an agent of all the mission societies in Central Nyanza. A. S. Milliken who came to East Africa in 1899 from England was the manager of the firm in Kisumu and was assisted by two Europeans, three Indians, one Arab and 130 Africans.

The Nyanza Market consisted of a large central shed for stall-holders, and an open space for African sales and barter business. The stall-holders, mostly Asians, did general business in soft goods, rice and African trade goods, and paid rent to the Company. The African traders paid fees in proportion to the value of produce.

The company also owned a lime works at Homa Hill in Karachuonyo. They had a steam launch which ran to the lime works, and was in great demand for hippo shooting on the lake. In addition, the company owned a farm of 110 acres at Nyang'ori, eight miles north of Kisumu where rubber experiments were carried out. By way of diversification, the firm





**Figure 2.8 : Cotton factory in Kisumu circa 1907**

owned a grinding mill in town with a capacity of four tonnes per day for maize and millet grain.

Another large European company that had a branch in Kisumu was British East Africa Corporation Limited (BEAC). It was registered in London in December 1906, with its principal object as the prosecution in British East Africa and Uganda of the work and policy of the British Cotton Growing Association. The latter was a society incorporated under Royal Charter to spread cotton growing within the Empire, and to establish cotton ginning factories, experimental and educational cotton plantations.

The work of BEAC commenced in early 1907. They explored the districts considered promising for cotton cultivation. Trained agriculturalists were sent to those districts with supplies of selected seed for distribution to the Africans who were given practical training on how to plant, cultivate and reap their crop. They were promised a minimum price for the output to guarantee them against loss. Ginning factories were built at Malindi and Kilindini at the Coast and Kisumu. Kisumu provided a natural collecting centre with cotton brought in by streamers from areas around the lake. Experimental farms at Malindi, Voi, Mombasa, Kibos and Kisumu were put under cotton and a large number of Africans employed.

BEAC's large estates near Kisumu were not confined to cotton. Rubber, sugar-cane and coffee were also planted. They also managed private owners' estates. Many of these owners were absentee landlords



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and were glad to place their estates in the hands of a firm specially organized for management work in this way. Clients included the rubber estates of Hugh Barclay (of Barclays Bank Limited) and the 1,000 acre cotton estates of J.H.S. Todd at Fort Ternan.

In the realm of travel, exploration and sport, BEAC organized a chain of supervised communication that carried the traveler from the Indian Ocean to the Nile, the Congo or Ethiopia. They managed this by means of its head office in Mombasa from which their representatives met every ship, through its allied firm the Boma Trading Company Limited in Nairobi, and through its branches under European management in Kisumu, Entebbe and Jinja. BEAC was also the East Africa and Uganda agents for the Army and Navy Cooperative Society of London and Bombay; the correspondents for Messrs Thomas Cook and Sons Limited; and the representative in Uganda of Messageries Maritimes Line.

However, it should be observed that Europeans were generally hesitant about investing in the on-going trade developments in and around Kisumu. The opening of the National Bank of India branch in Kisumu in April 1913 was a great convenience to the trading public. The bank was incorporated in the United Kingdom and established in 1863.

The European fishing industry was started by Messrs Arap and Attenborough. They however found it difficult to compete with Asian and African fishermen. Kisumu Hotel now owned by Maseno University was built in 1912. During the First World War, Messrs Smith Mackenzie and Company opened a branch in Kisumu. They were agents for various companies dealing in locomotives, mining machinery, electrical equipment, explosives, fertilizers, building materials, chemicals and pharmaceuticals.

Towards the end of the war, several other European companies established branches in Kisumu: African Mercantile Company Limited who represented Ingle of Mombasa and were dealers in imports and exports of hides and skins; and Singer Machine Limited sold their machines on higher purchase basis in the town. There were also two European law firms in Kisumu: Messrs Shapley and Schwartze and Messrs Harrison, Salmon and Cressive.

Other European Companies that later established their branches in Kisumu included Riddocks Motors Limited, distributor of a wide range of passenger and commercial vehicles and tractors; Mitchell-Cotts, worldwide traders; the Standard Bank of South Africa Limited, incorporated in



PHOTO: Geoffrey Nyaori

**Figure 2.9 : Club house of the Nyanza Club. Picture taken in 2014.**

the United Kingdom and established in 1862; Barclays Bank; Gailey and Roberts, specializing in the fields of agriculture and general engineering; and the Old East African Trading Company Limited – founded in 1903 – exporters of hides and skins, coffee, timber and general produce, and importers of textiles, building materials, rice and other foodstuffs and general merchandise.

For three decades the “official” European population in Kisumu exceeded the “non-official” European population in numbers. They headed all strategic areas of the colonial apparatus: the Provincial and District administration both centred in Kisumu as well as command of the Police Force, Prisons Service, Postal Service, Conservancy, Public Works Department, Medical Services, the Treasury, among others. They were mostly British and employees of the colonial administration. In that capacity, they tended to regard themselves as the rulers and the rest of the populations in Kisumu as their subjects.

The life of the British adult population in Kisumu revolved around the Nyanza Club that was founded in 1904. Initially, the Club was strictly for “Whites of British descent”. It offered recreational activities which included table tennis, darts, billiards, golf, cricket, swimming and tennis.

The British East Africa Police Force had established itself in Kisumu in 1905. The young men it recruited were among the first local people to come to town. During the First World War, many young people from

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the region were recruited into the army and received a short training at the Kisumu garrison on the site of the present Nyanza Picture Palace in Oginga Odinga Street.

As administration, railway and business enterprises expanded, there was an increased demand for African labour. For example, considerable industry was evident at the dockyard related to putting together steam boats sent out in pieces from England. In addition, steamers were repaired and altered at the docks, and a few dhows were constructed and launched there. In Kisumu Township, transport facilities consisting of bullock carts, pack donkeys and porters employed Africans. Bullock carts and porters were also used to move goods between Kisumu and the larger province.

The chief demand for labour, however, came from the Railways and Public Works Department which in 1905 and 1906 employed 650 and 800 Africans, respectively. Employees of the Railways and Harbours services were among the first Africans to be allocated a permanent site for housing within the township: Baharia (called obaria by the Luo) Estate, situated on the slopes of the ridge above the harbour and railway station.

## **Administration of Kisumu Town**

In 1903, Kismayu, Kisumu, Lamu, Malindi, Mambui, Mombasa, Nairobi, Takaungu, Wanga and Witu were declared townships under the East Africa Township Ordinance. According to the ordinance, townships were to be managed by Advisory Committees consisting of nominated members under the control of government officers. Their responsibilities included the provision of sanitary services and the licensing of shops. Later their functions were extended to include roads, water, street cleaning and other social services and amenities.

In theory, the 1903 Township Ordinance was the legal basis on which Kisumu was gazetted as a township on September 7<sup>th</sup> 1903. According to that gazette notice, the administration of Kisumu town was to be done by a "Collector" (District Commissioner) and three Assistant "Collectors". Their duty was to supervise all matters connected with the District of Kisumu Town, including tax collection and the administration of justice. The then administration was obviously undermanned for such tasks. In March 1905, the first Town Magistrate and Judge, Robert Bobel, was appointed. During the following year Kisumu had its first Town

## 2. LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A NEW TOWN: 1901-1918

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Clerk. Further changes occurred in 1907 when the composition of the management committee was altered. It was now to consist of two non-official members, with the District Commissioner as Chairman. That was the theory.

In practice, however, the administrative work in Kisumu town was carried out by the Provincial and District Commissioners. In fact, the management committee was dissolved in June 1908, on the orders of the Governor who directed that henceforth, Kisumu Town would be under the direct rule of the Provincial Administration. A state of affairs which continued into 1909.

In response to the environmental health problems of the Nairobi Indian Bazaar, the Protectorate Government appointed Professor W. J. Simpson, a medical and sanitary authority, to recommend planning and sanitary measures for Nairobi and other East African towns. He recommended strict racial segregation for all East African towns as a basis for sound health and sanitary policies. He concluded that,<sup>3</sup>

“in the interest of each community and the healthiness of the locality ... it is absolutely essential that in every town and trade centre, the town plan should provide well defined separate quarters.”

The recommendations were accepted on both sanitary and social grounds by the Colonial Office in London. Health was now used in all Kenya towns to justify racial segregation.

Although Kisumu had lagged far behind other towns in its provision of African housing, it was nevertheless the first town to attempt the division into racial and “tribal” quarters because of the ravages of plague in 1908. In the following year, Nairobi Town Committee thought an African location was necessary because of the outbreak of small pox. The removal of the Indian Bazaar in Nairobi, again necessary because of the fear of disease, was represented as being conditional on the removal of Africans to a “native location.” Later in Eldoret in 1927, the insanitary condition of the “native” village was the cause of its removal.

In Kisumu, the local administration decided in 1909 that in consideration of the town’s sanitation, African settlements would no longer be allowed in the centre of the town. African villages were to be removed to Old Kisumu or other areas designated by the administration. Within the town, therefore, the three races of Africans, Europeans and Asians mixed at work, but never as equals. They occasionally mixed at worship,

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but resided separately: Europeans in Milimani Estate; Asians who constituted the majority of inhabitants, at or near the commercial or industrial areas; and Africans in the "labour line", Obaria and the Railway Land-hies or in their own homesteads around the town.

The planning and development of all Kenya towns during the colonial period was therefore based on the assumption that African workers were sojourners, migrants, who might work in the new towns, but could hardly expect to live in them. They could therefore be housed in shanty settlements away from other "civilized" races. It was only towards political independence that the colonial authorities reluctantly gave the Africans the right to be townspeople by for example, providing family houses.

Local government in Kisumu town was, however, handicapped by the existence of railway and government administrative zones. The Uganda Railway infrastructure included the railway yard and pier and ran parallel to the lakeshore on the slope from the Asian Bazaar and Milimani residential area. This enclave was managed by the Railway Authority, while the rest of the town was administered by the colonial government. There was therefore a polarity between the railways and colonial administration, as was the case in Nairobi, leading to policy conflicts, which did not end until 1929.

## **Economic Development**

The period 1902-1921 witnessed the consolidation of the Asian community as an economic force in Kenya. Their numbers rose from approximately 12,000 in 1911 to about 23,000 in 1921. They were engaged primarily in trade but also in the service industries, building and construction, transport, low to middle-level administration and in a variety of other skilled and unskilled occupations such as toilet cleaning in Kisumu town. Africans gradually displaced Asians as labourers.

In Kisumu town, the Asians controlled the economy right from the beginning. In 1908, for example, there were only five European companies operating in Kisumu. The demand for imported goods – clothes, blankets, tea, bicycles – was steadily increasing and eventually became the most important trade component. Imported goods came predominantly from Germany, the United States of America, India, the Netherlands and Ceylon. Sweden, France and England were also major sources of trade goods.



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**Kisumu 1901- 2001: From an Inland Port to First Millennium City** is the first book in the series, **History of Kenyan Cities and Towns**. The series looks at the people and events that have shaped the cities' and towns' development and the broader impact they have had on Kenya's history. The book follows the City's historical journey from 1901 (when it was known as Port Florence) to its centennial celebrations graced by Presidents Moi (Kenya), Mkapa (Tanzania) and Museveni (Uganda) in 2001 that paved way for its being recognized by the United Nations as the First Millennium City in 2006. The text is enriched with a large collection of photographs capturing the evolution of the City during its first 100 years.

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