



Reverend William Blackstone

The Father of Zionism

"No enactment of man can be considered law unless it conforms to the law of God."

● Reverend William Blackstone



In the United States, as the Balfour Declaration hung in balance in Britain, Louis Brandeis, the head of the American Zionist movement, struggled with how to influence President Wilson. How could he gain American Presidential support for the Jewish National effort? The solution was brought to him by Nathan Stauss. Brandeis could not approach President Wilson to support the Jewish National Movement because he was a Jew. He could approach the President if the approach was made by a non-Jew, a Christian, Reverend William Blackstone.

Reverend William Blackstone was a nationally popular Christian writer, Restorationist, and Evangelical. He was deeply distressed by the horrific Russian oppression of Jewry in the late 1880's.

Working with feverish energy, born of humanitarian distress and religious fervor, Reverend Blackstone assembled a memorial to President Harrison. The

memorial was signed by 413 prominent Americans, business leaders such as J.P. Morgan, John Rockefeller, prominent Congressional leaders including William McKinley (a later American President), Thomas Reed Speaker of the House of Representatives, religious leaders, Christian and Jewish editors and publishers of Major American print media and even the Chief Justice of U.S. Supreme Court Melville Fuller. The Memorial called for American support, in concert with the world community, for the creation of a humanitarian solution to the Jewish suffering in Russia. His solution, permit the Jews to return to Palestine. The Memorial was formally presented to President Harrison March 5, 1891.

President Harrison received the Memorial and turned it over to the State Department where it was

“lost” in records. The State Department may have “lost” the Memorial but it was published in the major American newspapers and was widely known in Europe. The Memorial influenced British Foreign Policy when Queen Victoria interceded on behalf of Russian Jewry.

Straus told Brandeis about the Blackstone Memorial. Brandeis immediately recognized the extreme importance of the long forgotten effort 25 years earlier. Brandeis was deeply engaged in very delicate political maneuvering in Congress. President Wilson had nominated him to the U.S. Supreme Court. He was the first Jew in history nominated to the very high position. Confirmation was not certain. Anti-Semitism had reared its ugly head in the U.S. Senate and could block Brandeis’ confirmation. Brandeis was strained for time and had to keep a low profile during the delicate political maneuverings. Yet during his Supreme Court confirmation hearings, he personally undertook to research everything he could about the Memorial, about this very unusual and unknown to him Christian, Rev. William Blackstone.

Brandeis requested all the information that the State Department had on Blackstone and the Blackstone Memorial. The State Department came up with little to nothing. Brandeis acted on his own despite the extreme pressures on his time and his own political situation. Recorded in Brandeis’ personal records

are 47 pages of hand written notes about Blackstone.

Brandeis’ admiration and respect for Rev. Blackstone grew. Realizing the vital importance of what Blackstone could do for Zionism, he authorized Straus to write to Blackstone in his name.

May 8, 1916, Brandeis had Nathan Straus contact



Reverend Blackstone.

"Mr. Brandeis is perfectly infatuated with the work that you have done along the lines of Zionism. It would have done your heart good to have heard him assert what a valuable contribution to the cause your document is. In fact he agrees with me that you are the Father of Zionism, as your work antedates Herzl".

Brandeis was not a sycophant. He recognized what was truthful and accurate and had that information conveyed to Blackstone in the initial contact by Nathan Straus. What was incredible was that Brandeis, the head of the American Zionist movement acknowledged that Reverend William E. Blackstone, a dispensationalist Christian minister, was the father of Zionism. Brandeis said of (Blackstone's) work, "*you are the Father of Zionism, as your work antedates Herzl*".

Blackstone was an elderly man when he received Straus' letter. Blackstone was 75. He responded enthusiastically, immediately. It was the opportunity he was waiting for. Blackstone had deliberately returned from China where for years (1909-1914) he was engaged in missionary work. Blackstone sensed that with the outbreak of World War I, Ottoman rule over the Holy Land was nearing an end, prophecy was unfolding. He wanted to be back in America, to be present to support in any way possible the Biblical future he envisioned, the Restoration of the Jews.

Brandeis wrote to Blackstone in Los Angeles, under official letterhead of the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs, office of the Chairman, May 22, 1916. Brandeis confirmed the request to Blackstone to update and present a new Blackstone Memorial to President Wilson on behalf of the Jews.

May 22, 1916

My Dear Mr. Blackstone:

I am very glad to know from your letter of the 15th of the Memorial which you are preparing to present to President Wilson, reviving the Memorial which you presented to President Harrison twenty-five years ago. That document, ante-dating as it did Theodore Herzl's own participation in the Zionist movement, is destined to become of historical significance: and I trust that you may be as successful in securing support for this new Memorial as you were a quarter of a century ago.

In view of the work being directly undertaken by the Jewish Zionist organization, your memorial would presumably be most effective if it derives its support from non-Jews.

I hope you will keep me fully informed of the progress that you are making, and will advise me in advance when you are purposing to present the Memorial, so that we may give such aid as may be possible in rendering it effective.

*With best wishes, Very cordially yours, Louis D.
Brandeis*

Blackstone successfully prepared another Blackstone Memorial for Brandeis to be presented to President Wilson. The second Blackstone Memorial was aimed with a specific target in mind.

President Wilson was a religious Presbyterian. Blackstone secured the support of the Presbyterian Church amongst other major mainstream American churches. What Blackstone had secured that was most important was a political mandate of broad American popular support for Zionism. President Wilson was a politician as well as a Christian. The second Blackstone Memorial gave President Wilson confidence of strong American popular political backing.

The Memorial was never publically presented. It was presented privately to the President by Brandeis and formally by Rabbi Stephen Wise in late spring 1917. Wilson accepted the memorial but agreed to wait until Brandeis advised him when it would best be used to publically recognize the intent of the Memorial. That public moment never arrived.

In Britain, the struggle for the “Balfour Declaration” hung in balance during the summer and early fall of 1917. The Balfour Declaration, as it would be known in later years, declared the British intent to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine if Britain should win the war.

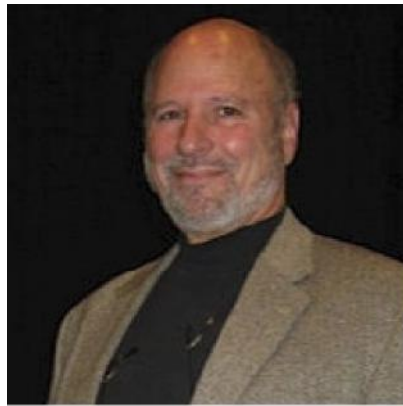
Forces lined up on both sides in Britain for and against the proposed Balfour Declaration. British establishment Jewry, represented by Edwin Montague in the cabinet, rabidly opposed the Declaration. Assimilated, yet very insecure, British Jews feared for their relatively recent hard won toleration, suffrage and even grudging acceptance in British society. Jews in many countries, not just Britain, were accused of dual loyalty and even duplicity. But without American support for the Balfour Declaration, the British war cabinet hesitated. The British feared reprisals by the Muslim world on Christians in the Middle East. The British desperately needed Jewish manpower support for the war effort. Yet they feared the threat to their oil sources in Middle East and the Suez Canal, their lifeline to India and the East. They could not go it alone. They needed to know of American intent.

That support came privately in October, 1917. The British Cabinet came to understand that President Wilson supported the ideas behind the Declaration. November 2, 1917, the British Cabinet, confident with American political support, publically issued the Balfour Declaration. The promise of Jewish restoration by the British Empire, if they should win the war, came to be. For the first time, in nearly 2,000 years of exile and suffering, the Jewish people would once again have a homeland.

Rev. William Blackstone did what no Jew could do.

I have become zealous with great zeal on behalf of Zion.

-- ZECHARIAH (8:2)



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Jerry Klinger is President and founder of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation. The Society has completed projects in 25 states and in four countries.

He was born in Washington, D C and is the son of Holocaust survivors. Jerry was Yeshivah educated and as a young man served in the Israeli army.

As an Associate member of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, in coordination with Chairman Warren Miller, built the Jewish Memorial at the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. President Obama visited the site in 2009.

Jerry periodically writes for the Jerusalem Post Christian Edition. He is the author of over seventy

articles on American Jewish History and Christian Zionist history. Jerry speaks on Christian Zionism and other topics at Churches, schools and Synagogue communities around the U.S.

He is founder of *To Save A Life*, a charity focused on helping small Israeli and American charities. He is a past President of his Synagogue.

Jerry has a BA, and MA degrees from the University of Maryland. He did Doctoral work at the University of Maryland as well. He recently retired as a senior vice president with Merrill Lynch/ Bank of America. Jerry is married to the former Judith Rice. They have three sons, five grandchildren and a small Cockatzu dog named *Norman*.

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