

The Chicago Hebrew Mission (CHM) and their publication, *The Jewish Era*

I haven't been able to confirm whether Rev. J. I. Fles was acquainted with William Blackstone or just aware of him in the earliest years when the CHM began in the late 1880s. The Blackstone archive in Wheaton, IL said that they couldn't find Fles at all in their records. However considering that Fles must have had to go through Chicago's railroad station then, it seems likely to me that they had already met. Fles probably sought for like-minded, important individuals.

The CHM began publishing *The Jewish Era* in January, 1892. Their inclination towards premillennialism and Zionism was immediately evident; see the following images from it. From my paper; "The Synod of 1892 document said (Fles's) Classis Muskegon initiated a request 'to support the above mentioned Mission.'" Fles and the CRC began their Mission to the Jews in support of several other missions in various cities that same year.

Fles published an article about the restoration of Israel in the popular *The Volksfreund* lowan newspaper on July 8, 1886, right after that CRC Synod session. "Israel's Present and Future" was on Jeremiah 30:17 and said, "Israel will be so despised by the nations that it will not be looked after to help them out: no one cares for her."

Fles wrote another article in *The Volksfreund* on April 9, 1891. I doubt that this timing was a coincidence. Blackstone's letter to President Harrison was dated March 5, 1891. The *Volksfreund* printed an article about his Memorial on March 26 which favored Blackstone's "important petition ... born from a conference of Jews and Christians." (It had already been held in Chicago).

From the 1892 *Jewish Era*:

Hebrew Mission among the fifty thousand to sixty thousand Jews in Chicago, but hopes through friends of Israel to reach multitudes of Christians and awaken a scriptural interest in this work for God's ancient people, and thus under the blessing of God promote the mutual welfare of both Jew and Christian.

Information will be given of the remarkable unfolding of the divine plan for Israel as it is being revealed in the light of current events and the daily fulfillment of prophecy, and carefully prepared papers presented from time to time upon "The Covenants," "The Church and the Kingdom," and other subjects bearing upon the relation of Israel to the Gospel according to the Scriptures. And this paper will always be kept in tune to strike a chord of sympathy and relief in behalf of the sorrowing and persecuted, the sick and the helpless among the chosen seed.

He who "kept Israel—or compassed him about—as the apple of his eye," has also loved him with an everlasting love and has filled his word with covenant-promises which can no more be broken than the covenant with the sun and with the moon. Jer. 31: 35, 36; Isa. 54: 9, 10, and other Scriptures.

And the word remains as true to-day as when Balaam, against his wishes, testified of Israel "Blessed is he that blesseth thee." Under this benediction THE JEWISH ERA is presented as a Gospel messenger.

THEY SHALL PROSPER THAT LOVE THEE.

These words were spoken by the Psalmist of the city of Jerusalem, and the house of God in the midst of it; but they surely apply now to those who once dwelt in Jerusalem, and who, though scattered among the nations, are still "beloved for the fathers' sakes," as Paul urges in this very case that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." The prosperity of the Christian Church, its mission success, its growth in every virtue, its intelligent mastery of those social and rational problems involved in the bringing in of the Kingdom of God, are all vitally connected with the Jews. In a far-reaching sense it is as true now as in the time that Jesus spoke to the Samaritan, "Salvation is of the Jews." Such considerations led a few Christians in Chicago to plan the Hebrew Mission in the midst of the fifty or sixty thousand Israelites of this great

praise. MRS. HOWE.

ISRAEL.

Scattered by God's avenging hand,
Afflicted and forlorn,
Sad wanderers from their pleasant land,
Do Judah's children mourn;
And e'en in Christian countries few
Breathe thoughts of pity towards the Jew.

Yet, listen, Gentile—do you love
The Bible's precious page?
Then let your hearts with kindness move
To Israel's heritage:
Who traced those lines of love for you?
Each sacred writer was a Jew.

And then, as years and ages pass'd,
And nations rose and fell,
Though clouds and darkness oft were cast
O'er captive Israel;
The oracles of God for you
Were kept in safety by the Jew.

And when the great Redeemer came,
For guilty man to bleed,
He did not take an angel's name—
No; born of Abraham's seed,
Jesus, who gave His life for you,
The gentle Savior was a Jew.

And though his own received him not,
And turned in pride away,
Whence is the Gentile's happier lot?
Are you more just than they?
No; God in pity turned to you—
Have you no pity for the Jew?

Go, then, and bend your knee to pray
For Israel's ancient race;
Ask the dear Savior ev'ry day
To call them by his grace;
Go—for a debt of love is due
From Christian Gentiles to the Jew.

MRS. ALLEN, in *Jewish Advocate*.

North Street Christian Reformed Church's (in Zeeland) first minister when they began in 1882-1883, Rev. Fles, and their second minister, Rev. Riemersma likely went to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair to witness about Jesus. Blackstone was a member of the World's Columbian Commission for the Chicago Fair, and met with President Grover Cleveland in that role. D. L. Moody held huge revival meetings nearby under a circus tent. In 1895, Riemersma became a trustee of the Chicago Hebrew Mission board. Now let me skip ahead, to 1897 and Theodor Herzl. He has been called the 'Father of Zionism' (so was Blackstone).

<https://jewishjournal.com/commentary/opinion/352005/theodor-herzl-launches-the-first-zionist-congress-in-1897/> .

MR. FREUDER reports a pleasant and successful quarter's work. Everywhere he was received with great kindness by Jews and Christians. Spoke July 10, at Baraboo, Wis.; July 17, Seward, Ill.; July 20, Rockford; July 29, Macatawa Park Assembly; July 31, **Holland**, Mich.; Aug. 7, Grand Rapids; Aug. 14, Hinsdale, Ill.; Aug. 21, La Grange; Aug. 24, Lake Bluff; Aug. 28, Joliet; Aug. 29, New Lennox; Sept. 4, and 5, Muskegon, Mich.; Sept. 11, Grand Rapids; Sept. 12, Grand Haven; Sept. 13, Spring Lake; Sept. 14, Milwaukee, Wis.; Sept. 25, La Grange.

I can't prove this list shows that a passionate insider like Fles chose which cities to visit. But page 122 of my paper notes other later examples of the same type of carefully selective fund-raising efforts.

<https://archive.org/details/amfmonthly1518amer/page/n1/mode/1up> The entire publication can be hard to maneuver!
<https://archive.org/details/amfmonthly1518amer/page/n301/mode/1up>

An issue of the Jewish Era, likely before December 8, 1893 had this image;

berry Bend" in the Italian quarter. The sights here fairly chilled us. Stiletto murders are frequent. Once or twice some of the "toughs" followed us and it was gratifying to not be alone. The hopeless thraldom of these masses, rushing along the "broad road to destruction," and fastening their environment of iniquity on their children and children's children, ought to arouse the optimistic post-millennialists, of our day, to a whirl of evangelistic activity, or, as Brother G. said, to cause them to cry out in the sensible words of the Holy Spirit, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

OUR CO-LABORER.

Mrs. J. E. Howland of Room 57, 107 Dearborn street, City, has been frequently called upon to speak of the Jews at Missionary meetings. She has always gladly responded.

Mrs. Howland was able to see very much of Jewish Mission work

May Jehovah prosper his journey.

HOLLAND FRIENDS.

Our Holland brethren take a Scriptural interest in the Jews. They love to pray and to give for work among Israel.

They have sent us contributions through one of their ablest ministers, Rev. Mr. Fles, of Muskegon, himself a converted Jew.

More than this, they try to do personal work among the Jews, according to opportunity.

This is in a letter to Mr. Angel from a Holland minister, who, referring to two subscriptions to the ERA, writes:

"The former is an Israelite. I have talked with him about the expectations of Israel and found that he as well as all Israelites are very hopeless on that point, as they are in fact without a Messiah. Of course, coming to the point, he had to admit that his position is

THE JEWISH ERA.

23

untenable. I felt very pitiful and advised him very strongly to study the Scriptures which I hope he will do. So much is gained anyhow that he subscribed for the JEWISH ERA. May the God of Israel make it a blessing to him and his family. Have you not something else which would be convenient for him to read? Have you not any tracts or other papers to distribute for me to reach the other Jews of this

PROPHECY AND FULFILLMENT.

BY REV. B. ANGEL.

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (the days of eternity, marg.) Micah 5:2.

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod,” etc. Matt 2:1.

In the above scriptures we have prophecy and fulfillment. When Herod asked the Sanhedrin where the Messiah should be born, they replied, “In Bethlehem of Judea.” This was the belief of the ancient Jews as based on the authority of the Word of God.

That Bethlehem Ephratah is the birthplace of the Messiah is also hinted at in the Talmud in the following story: “It happened once to a certain Jew, who was standing ploughing, that his cow lowed before him. A certain Arab was passing and heard its voice. He said, ‘O Jew, O Jew! unyoke thine ox, and loose thy ploughshare, for ...

From the above image, in their pages 22-23 ” ...through one of their ablest ministers, Rev. Mr. Fles, of Muskegon, himself a converted Jew. More than this, they try to do personal work among the Jews [of Chicago?], according to opportunity. This is in a letter to Mr. Angel from a Holland minister, who ... writes: The former is an Israelite. I have talked with him [unnamed] about the **expectations of Israel** and found that he as well as all Israelites are very hopeless on that fact without a Messiah. Of course, coming to the point, he had to admit that his position is **untenable**. I felt very pitiful and advised him very strongly to study the Scriptures which I hope he will do. So much is gained anyhow that he subscribed for the JEWISH ERA. May the God of Israel make it a blessing to him and his family. Have you not something else which would be convenient for him to read?” This section does not appear to be Fles talking.

That online source only goes up to 1896! So I’ve used the following one as well.

Twenty-five years of blessing : historical sketch of the Chicago Hebrew Mission, 1887-1912
(A hardcopy of it was kept on the shelves of Calvin’s Hekman Library.)

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112037757421&seq=5>

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112037757421&seq=52&q1=Fles&start=1>

I don’t think this second link provides the full view of their later years as I intended.

Term expiring 1893.

Col. Geo. R. Clark	Rev. Elwood M. Wherry, D. D.
Chas. E. Simmons	Rev. J. Shelly Meyer
E. P. Rice	Prof. Samuel Ives Curtiss, D. D.

Mrs. L. A. Calder

Term expiring 1894.

Mrs. J. M. Horton	Mrs. T. C. Rounds
Mrs. A. F. Wood	Geo. A. Mackenzie
Miss E. Dryer	Watts De Golyer

Mrs. J. E. Howland



ELECTION JANUARY 14, 1913

President, REV. CHAS. A. BLANCHARD, D. D.
Vice-President, WM. E. BLACKSTONE
Acting Secretary, REV. B. B. SUTCLIFFE
Treasurer, MRS. T. C. ROUNDS, 1425 Solon Place, Chicago, Ill.
Assistant Treasurer, SIMON DEKKER
Auditors, CHAS. VICKERS, C. W. C. CHANDLER
Superintendent, MRS. T. C. ROUNDS, 1425 Solon Place

Trustees term expiring in 1914:

Rev. Wm. Stuart
Wm. E. Blackstone
Prof. F. Risberg
Rev. H. B. Schuurmans
Mrs. Wm. Borden
Mrs. T. S. Smith
Miss E. Dryer

Trustees term expiring in 1915:

Simon Dekker
Mrs. T. C. Rounds
Chas. Vickers
Mrs. J. E. Howland
Rev. E. Gruenstein, D. D.

A. M. McConoughey

Trustees term expiring in 1916:

Rev. Chas. A. Blanchard, D.D.
Rev. B. B. Sutcliffe
J. P. Roberson
Miss Mary C. Howard
Rev. C. Kuyper
A. F. Gaylord
Rev. J. I. Fles

Executive Committee

Simon Dekker, *Chairman*
Wm. E. Blackstone
Rev. Chas. A. Blanchard, D. D.

Simon Dekker was an assistant treasurer. Fles's premillennial eschatology had probably also influenced the RCA minister, Rev. C. Kuyper. This likely influence may have been via RCA seminary professor, Dr. Egbert Winter, who had probably known Fles when both were in Iowa. - Per my pages 80 – 81, 90, and in other ones (by searching on his name).

A link to [that picture](#).