



JNF

HISTORY

When Theodore Herzl saw the anti-Semitism that was displayed at the Dreyfus trial in France, he realized that the Jewish people need a country of their own, a homeland, a place they could call home. As part of his efforts to secure the land of Israel as the national Jewish state, he convened the World Zionist Congress where he gathered many important people and leaders. At the fifth Zionist Congress, in 1901, with Theodore Herzl and Zvi Hermann Schapira (a German Jewish mathematician) at the lead, in Basel, Switzerland, the JNF (Jewish National Fund) was established. It was to be the organization that would purchase land for a Jewish state in Palestine.

Slowly, the JNF began to purchase lands in Palestine, leading to the founding of Tel Aviv in 1909. The Blue Box has been part of the JNF since its establishment, symbolizing the partnership between Israel and the Diaspora and encouraging Jews all over the world to give to the JNF and help support the important work they are doing.

The lands purchased in the early days of its establishment, during the British mandate were supported by many generous Jews who donated money so that the JNF would be able to make those purchases. Since then, the JNF has become the most significant environmental organization in the middle east. It has helped Israel become the global leader in soil conservation.

The JNF owns 13 % of the total land of Israel, it planted over 240 million trees in Israel, developed 250,000 acres of land and established more than 1,000 parks. In 2002, the JNF was awarded the Israel Prize for lifetime achievement and special contribution to society and the State of Israel.

Our History

Since its establishment in 1901, KKL-JNF has served as trustee in the name of the Jewish people over the Jewish lands of Israel. The activities of KKL-JNF in the first decades of Israel's existence have set the borders of the Israeli state.



First Decade: 1901-1910

- The Fifth Zionist Congress in held Basel, 1901, decides to establish Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF), as proposed by Professor Zvi (Hermann) Schapira, in order to purchase land in Eretz Israel for the Jewish People.
- Worldwide contributions pour in from [Blue Box](#) collections, Golden Book inscriptions and the sale of KKL-JNF stamps.
- The first land purchases are made in the Lower Galilee and in Judea.
- The Jerusalem Bezalel School of Art and Design is established on KKL-JNF-purchased land.
- KKL-JNF's first forest is planted at Ben Shemen and named after Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist Movement.
- KKL-JNF helps establish the first Hebrew city of Tel Aviv and Israel's first kibbutz, Deganya.
- KKL-JNF helps establish Haifa's Hadar Carmel neighborhood and purchases land for the Technion Institute of Technology.

Second Decade: 1911-1920

Almost ten years after its establishment, KKL-JNF could take pride both in the lands it had purchased and the fact that quite a few of them were already settled. They

included a city (Tel Aviv), a collective community or kvutza, (Kibbutz Deganya), a training farm (Moshav Kinneret), and educational projects (high schools in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa). Lands had been purchased for higher education as well: Jerusalem's Bezalel School of Art and Design, as well as the lands on which the Technion would be built in KKL-JNF's second decade, and the Hebrew University, in its third. Also during this period, KKL-JNF had planted its first forest, Herzl Forest at Hulda.

In 1910 Yehoshua Hankin, the well-known land redeemer who purchased lands for Baron de Rothschild's Jewish Colonization Association (ICA), bought up 3,500 dunams in the heart of the Jezreel Valley. This man – without whom, according to historian Alexander Bein, land purchase on behalf of the Jewish People would be scarcely imaginable – was well versed in the rules of the game. Calling on circuitous maneuvers in some instances, and sharp negotiations in others, he perfected the art of land purchase and title transfer.

During this period, the Ezra Association in Germany announced its intention to establish an institution for technological studies in Haifa. For this purpose, KKL-JNF purchased land in Haifa's Hadar HaCarmel neighborhood, on the slope of Mt. Carmel, and in 1912, laid the cornerstone for the Technion's first building.



The guns of August 1914, which opened the four-year long First World War, almost paralyzed KKL-JNF's land redemption activities. One hour before the border between Germany and Holland was closed, Max Bodenheimer succeeded in getting important Head Office documents onto two train cars bound for the west. Bodenheimer, who was a German citizen, resigned from his position as Chairman so as not to implicate the Fund as having German connections.

During the war the monies were used mainly to help the Jewish community in Eretz Israel get through the war, hunger, deportations, and also a locust plague. From the new offices in the Hague, funds began to flow to Jews on the brink of starvation, and to veteran colonies for the defense and protection of Jewish settlements and lands.

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Third Decade: 1921-1930

- **Yehoshua Hankin purchases large land tracts in the Jezreel Valley and Nahalal, and the first moshav (cooperative village) is established.**
- **Hovevei Zion's dynamic leader, Menahem Ussishkin, is appointed KKL-JNF Chairman and the head office moves permanently to Jerusalem.**

During this decade, the Fund undertook extensive amelioration of the lands it had redeemed, defraying all the costs of reclamation, including the wide-ranging drainage of swamps. Much – if not a wild – imagination was needed at times to even envision the many-hued landscape of cultivated fields that would replace foul, malaria-breeding water. To give life to the imagination, life had to be given to the soil as well, with hoe and pitchfork. Stagnant water had to be drained and clear water ducted to the Valley. The drainage of the Valley swamps began in 1922 on a scale of work unprecedented in Erez Israel. In the eastern part of the Valley, 16,000 dunams were drained and 35,000 restored in 50,000 man-day units of work. Mosquito-breeding nests were stamped out, the festering bogs turned into blossoming land and, like cinematography, yellowing frames of landscape gave way to color – white houses, red roofs, green fields.



Draining Fuara River at Haifa Bay, 1929. KKL-JNF Photo Archive

In his memoirs Ussishkin wrote that on his first visit to Palestine in 1901, he had already regarded the redemption of the valleys - a task he would complete in the third decade - as the great project of the Jewish People. Numerous obstacles, however, had stood in the way of purchasing the Zebulun and Hefer valleys. Only in May of 1929, the year of the Fund's sizable land purchases, did the Hefer Valley become KKL-JNF property.

In order to obtain funding to purchase the Hefer Valley lands, Ussishkin went on a fund-raising mission to Canada in 1927. He told his audiences about the chance to buy up another valley, where once the lands were reclaimed and swamps drained, new villages would be built, housing thousands of families. Canadian Jewry

responded warmly with donations for the new project. Ussishkin returned with the initial funding and pledges to raise additional amounts to purchase the Hefer Valley.

Sixth Decade: 1951-1960

- **Work begins on draining the Hula marshes, KKL-JNF's largest-ever public development project.**
 - The first stage of the Hula drainage project began in 1951 and lasted about two years. At this stage, "aimed at tackling the causes of the swamp," as specified in the work plan, the Jordan riverbed, which led out of it, was widened so as to allow stagnant water to drain and lower the sludge level. Work proceeded amid shooting incidents from across the nearby border with Syria.
 - The second stage began in the summer of 1953. Drainage canals were excavated in the valley and swampland, one to the east of the swamp, 15 kilometers long, and another to the west, along the 16 kilometers from the heart of the swamp to the town of Kiryat Shemona. A third canal connected the other two. Five years and three million tons of mud and peat later, the large marshland was gone. On November 1, 1957 a newspaper headline announced: "Huge Hula Drainage Project Completed. Hula Lake to Disappear Next Week."
 - All that was left of the swamp was the Hula Nature Reserve – a 4000-dunam lake to preserve the local flora and fauna. The rest became fertile farmland, expanding the sources of income and livelihood for thousands of residents of kibbutzim and moshavim in the Hula Valley and Upper Galilee.
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- **When the Hula Valley drainage project is completed the lands are developed for regional agriculture.**
- **Intensive afforestation is initiated in Upper Galilee and development continues in and around the Jerusalem Hills where Martyrs Forest are planted in memory of the Holocaust victims, as well as Jerusalem Forest.**
- **In 1960, the Knesset adopts a Basic Land Law, that rests on KKL-JNF's principle of national land ownership and the biblical perception whereby the land is owned by the Jewish People and may not be sold, but only leased for renewable jubilee periods of 49 years.**