



The Blue Star Memorial Marker Program

An Extended History of the
National Garden Clubs' Nationwide Tribute to
America's Veterans

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Forward and Acknowledgements

The purpose of this compilation is to gather and preserve a comprehensive history related to the over seventy-five-year development of the National Garden Clubs' Blue Star Memorial Program.

Primary sources used to compile this document included vintage issues of the *BULLETIN* of The National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc., *THE NATIONAL GARDENER*, and also *THE FLORIDA GARDENER*. The National Council's booklets marking their 25th and 50th anniversaries in 1954 and 1979 were also consulted as was the Garden Club of New Jersey's 40th anniversary chronicle, *THE GREEN CRUSADE - Forty Years with the Garden Club of New Jersey*, published in 1965. Additional information was found in back issues of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs' (FFGC) Book of Information and archives compiled by the FFGC's first few Blue Star Memorial Chairmen.

A special thanks goes to Jeannie Geremia, former President of the Garden Club of New Jersey whose shared vintage photographs and detailed articles in the November, 2011 and November, 2019 of the *GARDENER NEWS* provided a wealth of information about the origin of the Blue Star Memorial concept.

While serving as Florida's Blue Star Memorial Chairman, the very abundant guidance, inspiration and support generously provided to the editor of this document by NGC Blue and Gold Star Memorial Chairman Andrea T. Little was invaluable and very much appreciated.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided herein. However, in a few cases involving conflicting accounts a judgement call was taken. Therefore, any inconsistencies, though not intentional, are attributable to this editor.

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1. Unique Living Memorial Conceived in New Jersey

On May 1, 1929 the National Council of State Garden Club Federations (NCSGC), now known as the National Garden Clubs, Inc. (NGC), was formed with the participation of 13 state garden club organizations.

The purpose of the national organization was to assist the state federations, where possible, with national issues. One of the first of these issues was related to the ongoing expansion of the federal highway system through the public works programs of the 1930s.

Garden clubs across the country were concerned about the newly paved highways becoming increasingly cluttered with unsightly billboard advertising and roadside litter. The NCSGC began lobbying Congress in Washington, DC for legislation to limit billboards and to discourage littering. In this regard, the NCSGC established a Roadside Development Chairmanship, and also began encouraging their member garden clubs to help beautify our highways with roadside plantings.

The focus on fruit and vegetable “Victory Gardens”, which were planted in the early 1940s during World War II, gradually expanded into flower gardens planted specifically to welcome troops coming home from the war. As such, the Roadside Development activities became more oriented toward “memorial planting” projects along highways, at roadside parks, and at town or city entrances. A widespread appeal arose for garden clubs to substitute “greenery in place of statuary” to honor the war heroes. These initiatives became known as “**living memorials**” designed to pay tribute to veterans having served abroad.

During the spring of 1944, while General Dwight D. Eisenhower and his troops were preparing to land on the beaches of Normandy, Helen S. Hull, 1944-1946 President of the Garden Club of New Jersey along with this state federation’s Roadside Chairman, Mrs. Elizabeth Hood were meeting with Spencer Miller, Jr., New Jersey Highway Commissioner. Mrs. Hull and Mrs. Hood were both residents of Boonton, New Jersey – a small town located about 30 miles northwest of New York City. These two ladies and Mr. Miller



Mrs. Lewis M. Hull

jointly came up with the idea of creating a particularly unique living memorial to honor New Jersey’s World War II veterans. Their concept also sought to protect and preserve the beauty of the countryside for when their state’s war veterans returned home from serving overseas.



Mrs. Vance R. Hood

A specific plan emerged calling for a five-and-a-half-mile long planting strip of Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) trees in a landscaped area along US Route 29 (now US Route 22) between Mountainside and North Plainfield, New Jersey where all who traveled that road might “share in the beauty and homage to the troops.” The vision for this project was to provide a memorable viewing experience similar to Washington DC’s cherry blossoms, the Shenandoah Valley apple blossoms in Virginia and/or the Dogwoods at Valley Forge National Historical Park in Pennsylvania.

A goal was established by the New Jersey federation of garden clubs to plant one tree on the designated section of highway for each and every man and woman from New Jersey serving in the military during the war. With the support of local nurseries, the cost was set at \$1 for each five-foot tall Dogwood tree. Funds were raised initially from the Garden Club of New Jersey’s 1st annual state flower show. This was followed by a campaign beginning in June of 1944 inviting all New Jersey citizens to plant a tree in honor of their family members serving in the military.

The Garden Club of New Jersey was responsible for organizing, promoting, raising the funds, purchasing the trees and aiding in the planting design. The New Jersey State Highway Department agreed to plant and maintain the trees, including necessary replacements.

The project called for New Jersey legislators to designate the section of highway being planted as the **Blue Star Drive**. This name, originally suggested by Mrs. Hull, using the blue star was inspired by the blue star(s) in the approximately 8.5” by 14” service banner pictured at right.



During World Wars I and II, families would hang an Armed Forces Service Banner in the window of their home or business to indicate a family member serving on active duty. Originally authorized by the War Department (now Department of Defense), the banner, or service flag featured a blue star, or stars (depending upon the number of relatives serving), on a white background framed in red. The star symbolizes “hope and pride”. The service banner, still in use today, is the only flag flown on the same pole below the U.S. flag over the U.S. Capitol Building - and only on Veterans Day!

Research led by members of the Garden Clubs of Mississippi determined that the use of the blue star symbol to recognize heroism dates back to circa 400 BC when Alexander the Great used the blue star to honor the bravest of his soldiers.



With the slogan "A dollar plants a tree on the Blue Star Drive," the project in New Jersey was officially launched, and eventually about 8,000 Flowering Dogwood trees were placed along the selected portion of highway. On November 10th, 1944 this newly planted section of the highway was officially dedicated at Chapel island in Mountainside, NJ. A marker (pictured at left) designed by Carmen Davis was

unveiled at the ceremony by the New Jersey Garden Club, thus becoming the country's first Blue Star marker. On January 22nd, 1945, the New Jersey state legislature, by joint resolution, commemorated the Blue Star Drive as a state memorial in perpetuity. Subsequent legislation, provided for the acquisition of additional land bordering the Blue Star Drive to provide for more plantings.

Two of the most vocal and well-known advocates of the Blue Star Drive concept were New Jersey Garden Club member Mrs. Thomas Alva Edison and her son Charles Edison, past Governor of New Jersey, former U.S. Secretary of the Navy, and president of his father's New Jersey based company, Thomas A. Edison, Inc.

The Edison family donated funds sufficient to purchase many trees for the Blue Star Drive in honor of the Thomas A. Edison company's employees who had served, or were serving, abroad. At the far right of the photo at right is Elizabeth Hood presenting a certificate to Mrs. Edison and her son, Governor Charles Edison in recognition of their generosity.



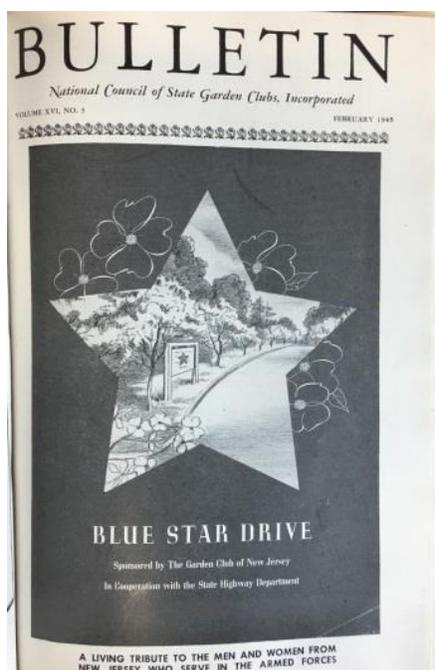
The New Jersey Garden Club expanded their Blue Star Drive project by having the entire length of Route 22 designated and memorialized by the State Legislature officially as a Blue Star Highway. On April 23rd, 1946, the Community Garden Club of Hunterdon County, NJ, in cooperation with Hunterdon County officials, dedicated the marker shown above along

Highway 22, making this the nation's "first commemorative highway memorial marker".

2. Living Memorial Activities Expand Across the Country

Although many garden clubs across the country individually had been beautifying highways and even memorializing segments thereof, New Jersey was the first state federation to take on such an initiative on a massive scale. In today's monetary equivalent this project would have involved a cost of over half a million dollars considering the land gifted, the labor involved and the cost of the plantings. New Jersey's effort prompted other state federations to follow suit. As an example, the November, 1944 edition of the *BULLETIN* of the National Council of State Garden Clubs, Incorporated (forerunner of *THE NATIONAL GARDENER*) reported that the Texas federation of garden clubs, following New Jersey's example, was "working hard to develop a state wide program of Living Memorials for World War II." The article went on to indicate that it was hoped that Texas and all other states would succeed with such work.

The beginning pages of the December, 1944 - January, 1945 edition of the *BULLETIN* featured an article by Mrs. E. Page Allinson, NCSGC Program Chairman, entitled "Post War Planning for Garden Clubs". In this piece she wrote, "The idea of living memorials and tributes to the heroes of this war is now, and will be for years to come, a challenge to us to see that instead of an unsightly and useless rash of granite, we produce parks and playgrounds, avenues and highway plantings – beauty and recreation for all. And we will not forget our old battle cry of preserving the unmarked beauty of our highways."



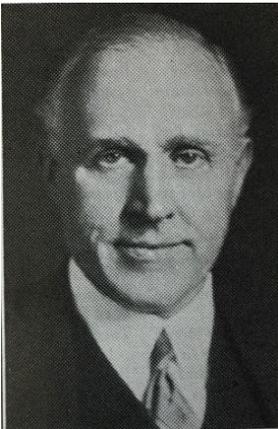
The cover page of the February, 1945 *BULLETIN* featured a copy of the Blue Star Drive brochure used by the Garden Club of New Jersey as part of the promotional campaign for their memorial highway initiative. And, the same issue of the *BULLETIN* included a three-page article by Mrs. Vance R. Hood which described in great detail how the project materialized, how it was funded, and what it symbolized. She concluded the piece by saying, "Let the Blue Star Drive be a pledge of our determination (to support our troops abroad) not to quit the battle until the real victory is won." By the time this was written Elizabeth Hood had been appointed the NCSGC's first Living Memorials Chairman. Mrs. Hood had previously

been NCSGC Chairman for Life Memberships.

Mrs. Charles L. Dean, the NCSGC's Roadside Development Chairman published an article titled "Planning Roadside Activities for 1945" in the April/May 1945 edition of the *BULLETIN*. In this article Mrs. Dean, while referring to the increasing numbers of America's soldiers returning from war, urged "garden clubs to plant beds, at modest expense, of petunias and/or orange marigolds along roads great and small and at the gateways to each farm across the country". She proposed this activity mentioning that often the service banners honoring the men and women serving abroad could not be seen from the streets, whereas the colorful display of blooms would be a pleasant and bright welcome along the soldiers' way home.

3. NCSGC Considers New Nationwide Project

In 1945, at the request of the U.S. government many large organizations cancelled their scheduled annual meetings in order to save fuel urgently needed in the war effort. The NCSGC followed suit and replaced their spring annual meeting with a greatly scaled back meeting (consisting of only the Board) held on May 16th in New York City. At the luncheon of the NCSGC Board on that occasion Mr. Spencer Miller, Jr., Highway Commissioner of New Jersey, was the guest speaker. He spoke of the Blue Star Drive



Spencer Miller, Jr.

collaboration between the Garden Club of New Jersey, the State Highway Department, and the State Government – all of which wholeheartedly backed the project. Mr. Miller "predicted that many more miles of New Jersey roads would be landscaped and that other states would carry on the idea." Mr. Miller further proposed that the National Council expand the New Jersey Garden Club's idea nationwide. More specifically, he suggested the creation of Living Memorials along the lengths of select interstate highways across the country in what might be described as the "Blue Star Memorial Highway System".

The National Council Board, under the direction of Mrs. William H. Champlin (Helen) - newly appointed President for 1945 to 1947, reacted favorably to Commissioner Miller's presentation and moved to have a project fleshed out which could be presented for full authorization at its annual meeting the following year. A Living Memorials Committee led by Mrs. Vance R. Hood as Chairman was formed to work out a comprehensive plan. The Living Memorials chairmanship was later combined with Roadside Development and renamed the "Blue Star Memorials" chairmanship.



Mrs. Wm. H. Champlin

In October of 1945 at the semi-annual conference (board) meeting of the NCSGC in New York City Mrs. Hood's Living Memorials Committee "suggested as a Nacional Council project, a coast-to-coast Memorial Highway dedicated to the men and women who served in World War II".

Because it was "State Highway Commissioner Spencer Miller, Jr., who first envisioned a nationwide tribute similar to the Blue Star Drive of New Jersey", the name BLUE STAR was chosen to designate the new project. NCSGC President Mrs. Champlin approved, the New Jersey Garden Club consented, and the Blue Star Memorial Highway System was endorsed by the Nacional Council Board.

The concept called for a system of connected highways with initial focus on one primary Blue Star Memorial Highway coast to coast route, and seven north-south tributary, inter-regional routes. The east-west route was planned to follow US 1 from Belfast, Maine to US 22 in New Jersey and then westward to US 40 in Ohio continuing



along US 40 all the way to San Francisco. And, the projected seven named north-south routes largely followed the entire lengths of US 1, US 31, US 51 (+65, 66 & 67), US 75, US 85, US 89 (+91 & 191) and US 99.

Initially, the Living Memorials Committee thought that the best approach to obtain memorialization of the selected federal highways would be by lobbying for an Act of Congress to this effect. However, after receiving advice from the U.S. Public Roads Administration, the decision was made to approach the task on a state-by-state basis with each of the NCSGC state federations taking the lead in their respective state's legislatures and road departments.

At the 1945 national conference of Highway Officials in Oklahoma, New Jersey Highway Commissioner Miller lobbied for, and "found a very genuine interest" for, the Blue Star Highway System. Then, in early fall of 1945 the map and plan for the highway system devised by the NCSGC's Living Memorials Committee were submitted to State Highway officials in all states involved. Apart from a few minor revisions, these plans were approved along with a commitment to cooperate with the NCSGC.

In December of 1945, with the full support of the Nacional Council Board (although in advance of the formal ratification of the program expected at the spring 1946 NCSGC annual meeting) Mrs. Vance R. Hood began corresponding with the presidents of the state federations of garden clubs outlining the first steps required to move the Blue Star Memorial Highway project forward. Her letters urged the federations to begin the process of having their respective state highway departments and state legislatures memorialize the chosen federal highways within their states.

4. NCSGC Adopts Blue Star Memorial Highway Program

Mrs. Vance Hood's article for the March, 1946 issue of the *BULLETIN* displayed the agreed map of designated highways and outlined the development of the plan for the NCSGC's Blue Star Memorial Highway System project which had already been shared with the presidents of the state federations the previous December. Her article was followed immediately by one submitted by Highway Commissioner Spencer Miller, Jr. urging "citizen cooperation" with Living Memorials (specifically highway beautification) projects following the Garden Club of New Jersey's example. Miller's piece was followed with another article by E.L.D. Seymour, nationally known gardening books author and Horticulture Editor of *THE AMERICAN HOME* magazine. Mr. Seymour also wrote passionately about the "transcontinental extension of the Blue Star Drive" projected by the NCSGC. Mr. Seymour had been previously on record as a strong supporter of the Living Memorial initiatives which garden clubs had been pursuing in previous years. In fact, he had suggested that a better description of these memorials to those serving in the war might be to use the term "tributes" as so often "memorials" were used to honor those heroes no longer living, whereas "tributes" apply not only to those fallen, but to those still serving. And, following the Seymour article, again in the March, 1946 *BULLETIN*, was a paragraph by the nationally syndicated sports writer Grantland Rice who, "with his typically elegant prose", suggested that the Living Memorials would be very fitting expressions of the nation's gratitude for the sacrifices and suffering made and incurred by the members of our Armed Services while serving during the war.

Meanwhile, the Rhode Island Garden Club Federation became the first state to implement the newly devised nationwide Blue Star Memorial Highway system. On March 11th, 1946 Rhode Island Governor John Pastore signed into law a joint resolution of the state's legislature prepared by the Garden Club Federation to designate the length of U.S. Highway 1 throughout Rhode Island as a "Blue Star Drive".

With all the encouragement and endorsements for the concept appearing in the March, 1946 *BULLETIN* it was no surprise that at its April, 1946 convention in New Orleans the National Council of State Garden Clubs membership delegates officially adopted the Blue Star Memorial Program as a nationwide project. The attendees were asked to consider a "ribbon of living memorial plantings traversing every state," to be called Blue Star Memorial Highways. The new project was depicted as a cross-country demonstration of roadside beautification in tribute to the WWII veterans; to show what could be accomplished through united strength; as a protest against billboards; to educate the public to higher standards of roadside development; and to determine how the National Council of State Garden Clubs could best work with the civil authorities for major achievement. This was the NCSGC's first project attempted on a national scale.

At the same 1946 annual NCSGC convention the Garden Club of New Jersey was awarded the Kellogg Medal for Civic Achievement in recognition and appreciation for their Blue Star Drive project. Mrs. Frederick R. Kellogg (Cornelia) was President of the New Jersey Garden Club in 1929 when that federation of clubs along with twelve other state federations joined together to form the National Council of State Garden Clubs. In 1930 Mrs. Kellogg was elected President of the NCSGC and later she was named NCSGC Honorary Life President.



Mrs. Frederick R. Kellogg

New Jersey State Highway Commissioner Spencer Miller, Jr. continued to promote Living Memorials along the nation's highways through his chairmanship of a Special Committee on Living Memorials for the American Association of State Highway Officials created in early June of 1946. A report prepared by this committee described the Living Memorial work along New Jersey's Blue Star Drive, mentioned the NCSGC's adoption of the nationwide memorial highway project, and urged State Highway Departments to commend, support and supervise, as necessary, these roadside planting initiatives. This report was unanimously adopted by the Executive Committee of the Association at their meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota on June 21st, 1946. Within a year Mr. Miller had been elected Vice President of the American Association of State Highway Officials.

At the NCSGC semi-annual meeting on October 1st, 1946 Commissioner Spencer Miller, Jr., once again, addressed the group at their banquet that evening. His eloquent and expansive remarks on "The National Aspects of the Blue Star Memorial Highway" were published on pages 9-14 of the November, 1946 *BULLETIN* of the NCSGC.

As of November of 1946, states which had formally designated the Blue Star Memorial Highway within their borders were: Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Texas.

By late 1946 the NCSGC Honorary Life President Mrs. Frederick R. Kellogg had donated the funds for a forging die and had created the design for a double-sided cast aluminum, polychrome painted memorial marker that would identify the designated highways. The United States Department of War (now Department of Defense) was consulted and approved of the design. Sewah Studios, founded in 1927 in Marietta, Ohio was named the exclusive manufacturer of the Blue Star Memorial markers. The marker, about 41" high by 45" wide, had an olive drab green background with burnished gold lettering and a robin's egg colored blue star.



The vintage photo to the left depicts America's **first Blue Star Memorial Highway marker** which was ordered and also manufactured using Mrs. Kellogg's design. The NCSGC Blue Star Memorial database confirms that on January 9th, 1947 it was the Texas (Federation of) Garden Clubs which ordered and later subsequently dedicated this historic Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker. Two such markers were placed along U.S. Highway 81 in the Austin area. US 81 became part of the NCSGC's seven selected north-south tributary routes. Years later when the Interstate Highway Defense System was completed in Texas, I-35 ran parallel to US 81 all the way from Oklahoma to the Mexican border for a few decades.

However, by the 1990s all but about 79 miles of the original US 81 had been eliminated, leaving only the segment between Decatur, Texas and the Oklahoma state line. Today this much smaller remaining portion of US 81 is still designated as a Blue Star Memorial Highway.

5. Program Develops and Expands Nationally Through 1949

At the May 6th, 1947 NCSGC annual meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma Helen S. Hull, co-originator of the Blue Star Memorial project, was elected President of the National Council of State Garden Clubs for 1947-1949.

Elizabeth Hood continued to lead the implementation and nurturing of the Blue Star Memorial Highway program for the National Council as the organization's first Blue Star Memorial Chairman also through 1949.

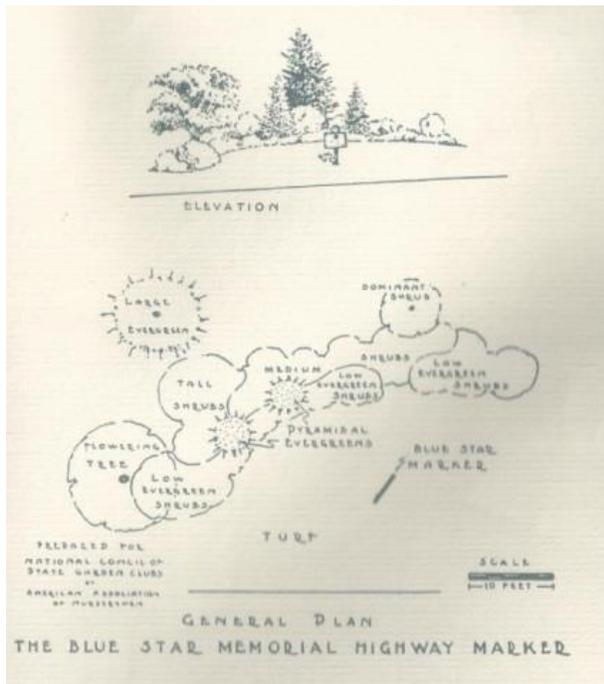
Mrs. Hood's update in the Aug./Sept, 1947 edition of the *BULLETIN* advised that seventeen state federations had joined the Blue Star Memorial Highway System. Twelve more states had approved a Blue Star Route - all of which were expected to be memorialized within the coming two years.



In the early years of the young program several of the state federations of garden clubs continued to follow New Jersey's lead by referring to highways designated for Blue Star Memorials as "Blue Star Drives". An artist's early conception of a typical section of a Blue Star Drive is pictured at left. But, by the mid-1950s the term Blue Star Drive (with the exception of New Jersey's Route 22) was dropped and universally replaced with the term: "Blue Star Memorial Highway".

In 1947 two committees were formed to assist Mrs. Hood with her chairmanship of the Blue Star Memorials. The first was the Advisory Committee Nacional Council which included, among others, Mrs. Hull, Mrs. Kellogg and Mrs. Champlin. The second was the Advisory Committee Highway Officials consisting of Hon. Spencer Miller, Jr., Chairman, Mr. D.C. Greer, Texas Chief Highway Engineer, and Mr. R.H. Baldock, Oregon Chief Highway Engineer. The efforts of Mrs. Hood supported by these committees resulted in a five-point work program of objectives designed to protect and develop the Blue Star Highways during 1947-49 and was approved at the Oct., 1947 NCSGC semi-annual meeting in Montreal. These objectives, which follow below, were in support of the stated mission: "To create a more beautiful America in Tribute to the Nation's Armed Forces of World War II."

1. Complete memorialization of Blue Star Routes where this has not been done.
2. Make a Survey of the Blue Star Memorial Highway.
3. Plan some memorial feature or features on each Blue Star Memorial Highway.
4. Promote protection of the Blue Star Memorial Highways.
5. Publicize the Blue Star Memorial Highways through press, radio, periodicals and etc.



In August of 1948 at the 73rd annual convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin of the National Association of Nurserymen the Blue Star Memorial Highways project was endorsed. From the start of the Blue Star Memorial Program the two-fold purpose was to pay tribute to the veterans by means of beautification initiatives the selected highways. The nurserymen's trade association, which was based in Washington, D.C., provided some very basic planting guidelines focusing on hardy, native, and low maintenance plant material with the latter in consideration of the workload of the

highway maintenance personnel. The nurserymen also worked up a "General Planting Design or Plan" for consideration by the garden clubs. (See sketch above.)

At the October, 1948 NCSGC semi-annual board meeting in Tucson, Arizona a Certificate of Merit (pictured at right) was awarded to twenty-three state federations for securing the memorialization of Blue Star Memorial Highways in their states. It was for this meeting that the Arizona Federation created a Blue Star Memorial flag, or banner. It was made of Pima cotton – a superior variety of extra-long staple cotton named for the Pima Indians who had assisted the USDA at an experimental farm in Sacaton, Arizona in the early 1900s. After use at several Blue Star dedication ceremonies the banner went missing.



By the close of 1948 thirty-two states had memorialized their respective portions of the Blue Star Memorial Highways or were well along in the process of doing so.

The price for the original Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker was set at \$100, which included up to two signature lines, plus \$2 to add the name of the garden club or other organization on a third line. The first two signature lines usually listed the state federation and the state road department.

One of the important issues faced by state federations of garden clubs along the US1 eastern corridor was that in 1947 the State Road Departments were still in the process of acquiring sufficiently wide right of way widths which, in some instances, required re-routing certain sections of US 1. This process of planned roadway improvements and road widening work meant that for roughly the next ten years the garden clubs' roadside beautification efforts would have to be carefully coordinated with the road departments in the eastern seaboard states.

In May of 1949 the NCSGC, at President Helen Hull's instigation, celebrated its 20th anniversary by purchasing 40 acres of giant redwood trees along US 40 and gifting the property to the California State Parks System. This grove was located in Humboldt County at what was designated as the western terminus of the selected primary east-west Blue Star Memorial Highway. The project was so oversubscribed that the following NCSGC administration added another 40 acres of redwoods also along US 40.

6. Intermediate Marker Added and Highway Marker Revised



In 1950 the NCSGC authorized the use of an "Intermediate" Blue Star Memorial Marker suitable for identifying the garden club plantings costing at least \$100 along the designated highways (usually in a roadside park) located in between the larger Blue Star Memorial Highway Markers. This smaller 8" by 12" one-sided marker, initially priced at just \$15, had room for only the garden club name, and was designed for mounting on brick

masonry or stone. This particular marker was designed by Mrs. Joseph E. Dvorak, the NCSGC's second Blue Star Memorial Chairman serving from 1949 to 1951.

By 1951 thirty-nine state federations of the NCSGC had memorialized the designated Blue Star Highways, in each of their respective states. And, during its early June, 1951 annual meeting in Missoula, Montana the NCSGC had adopted a final resolution to expand the Blue Star Memorial tribute (which had been limited to WWII veterans) to extend to "all men and women who had served, were serving or would serve in the Armed Forces of the United States of America".



The revised marker wording, presented by newly appointed NCSGC Blue Star Chairman Mrs. O.L, Seabaugh, was officially authorized at the fall, 1951 NCSGC board meeting in Hot Springs, Arkansas. All subsequent Highway Markers read, **“A tribute to the Armed Forces that have defended the United States of America”**.

The growing importance attached to the Blue Star Memorial Program was reinforced when the NCSGC President’s pin, designed in 1952, contained seven diamonds and one large sapphire – all symbolic of the Blue Star program.

After completing her tenure as NCSGC Blue Star Memorial Chairman in 1949 Elizabeth S. Hood once again put her dynamic leadership skills to use as Garden Club of New Jersey’s President from 1953 to 1955.

On April 6th, 1954 at the NCSGC’s 25th Annual Convention in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, for the first time an extensive Blue Star Memorial Highway Workshop was held with many NCSGC and other dignitaries participating including Mrs. Hull, Mrs. Hood, Mrs. Kellogg, and Mr. Spencer Miller, Jr. as presenters.

In 1956 the National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc. created a new annual award **No. 29: A BLUE STAR MEMORIAL HIGHWAY CERTIFICATE OF MERIT** which was intended to be awarded to a state federation of garden clubs, which is a member of the National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc., for the most outstanding Blue Star Memorial Highway completed landscaping program of the year.

7. Blue Star Highways versus National Interstate Highways

A major crisis arose in 1958 which potentially threatened the viability of the National Council of State Garden Clubs’ Blue Star Memorial Program. While serving as Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in Europe during World War II, General Dwight D. Eisenhower realized the strategic military importance of Germany’s autobahn network as an example of an important element of any country’s national defense. When he became President, Eisenhower threw his support behind an “interregional highway” concept which had been discussed in several prior administrations. As a result, Congress passed, and President Eisenhower signed, the Federal Highway Aid Act of 1956, which became more widely known as the **National Interstate and Defense Highways Act**.

In 1955 a map created depicting the proposed new interstate highway routes had been published which, in itself, began to alarm many members of the NCSGC.

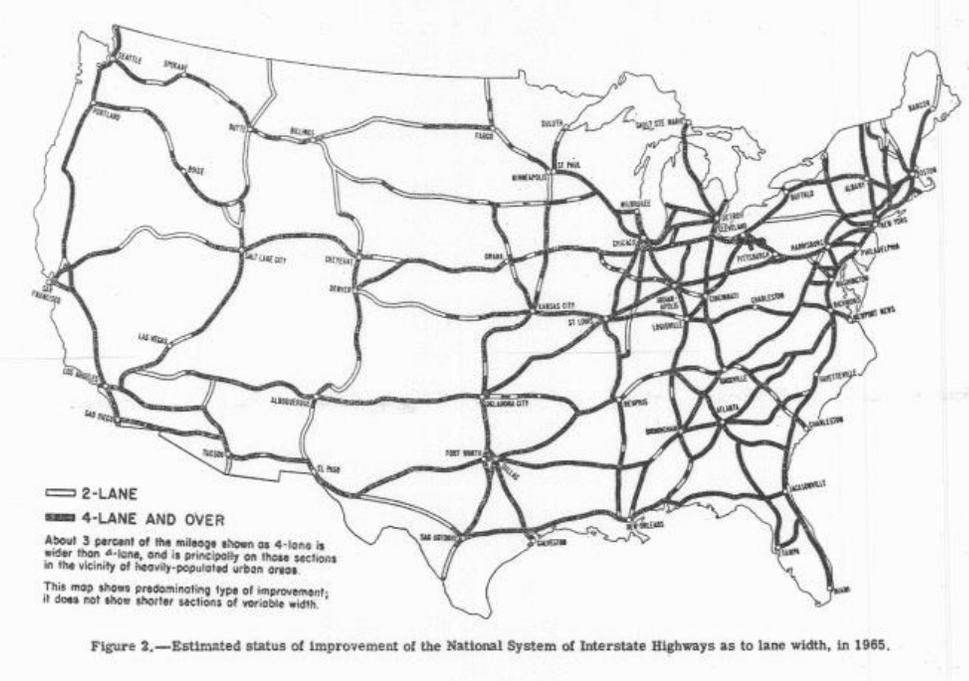
The proposed routes appeared to very much follow, or overlap, most of the originally proposed NCSGC Blue Star Memorial Highway east-west and north-south routes (see graphics that follow).

The concern was that construction of the proposed new interstate highways would wipe out much of the NCSGC's roadside beautification efforts which had taken place over the past ten years.

Proposed Blue Star Memorial Highway Routes



Proposed Interstate Highway System



In view of these developments concerning the Interstate Highway System Mrs. Truman Sanders (Dora), NCSGC Blue Star Chairman 1957-59, chaired a committee at the October, 1957 NCSGC Board meeting in Topeka, Kansas. The Board approved the committee's Directive IV which proposed securing federal legislation for memorializing the entire Interstate System of Highways. A directive urging state garden club federations to join this effort was sent by telegram from NCSGC President Mrs. Daniel J. (Evelyn) Mooney.

By mid-1958 the matter was elevated by the NCSGC to a "NATIONAL EMERGENCY". At the direction of the NCSGC President, Mrs. Daniel J. Mooney, the NCSGC Blue Star Chairman (Mrs. Sanders) sent out a letter marked "Urgent" and dated August 18, 1958 to all members of clubs belonging to the NCSGC alerting all to "a CRISIS which definitely exists at present and must have your immediate attention".

What prompted this communication was the publication of a new manual for Signing and Marking of the National System of Interstate Defense Highways adopted in February of 1958 by the American Association of State Highway Officials. On page 28 of this manual was the quote, "**Interstate highways shall not be signed as memorial highways**". This directive was interpreted as putting an end to memorial highways such as the Blue Star, Pan American, Jefferson Davis, and others. It was estimated that between two-thirds and three-quarters of the total mileage of the NCSGC's Blue Star Memorial Highway System would fall under the newly planned Interstate System of Defense Highways, thus jeopardizing the existence of the Blue Star Memorial work already in place. The NCSGC President called for all members to join an effort "to memorialize the entire (interstate) system at once".

The August 18th letter from NCSGC Blue Star Chairman Mrs. Sanders ended with the plea to help "Keep our Blue Star Shining". As a result, a flurry of activity took place throughout the NCSGC organization by means of extensive lobbying for their cause at state levels and with members of the U.S. Congress.

At the time of this crisis Mrs. Vance R. Hood was living in Washington, DC and had agreed to assist, however possible, with securing the necessary federal legislation.

On October 8th, 1958 at its semi-annual board meeting in New Bern, NC a Resolution of the NCSGC was agreed seeking the memorialization of the entire Interstate System of Defense Highways and allowing NCSGC Blue Star Memorial Markers to be placed along these highways.

The Resolution, signed by Mrs. Sanders and the rest of the members of the special Blue Star Memorial Highway Project Group, was published in the January/February, 1959 edition of *The National Gardener* of the NCSGC.

The matter of memorialization of the Interstate Highway System was essentially resolved when Mrs. Sanders published another letter in the May/June, 1959 edition of *The National Gardener*. This letter from Mr. D.C. Greer, Chairman of the Marking and Signing Committee of the Interstate System of Defense Highways, indicated that, in regard to the NCSGC's request, the Blue Star Memorial Highway Markers would be allowed strictly at rest area parks along the interstates and, as such, would not be in violation of the policy of the Interstate Highway Sign Manual. This opened the door for all NCSGC state federations to petition their individual state road departments to memorialize the sections of interstate highways within their state's boundaries and to then place Blue Star Memorial Markers at selected rest areas or welcome centers.

In a number of states the respective State Road Department confirmed there would be little, to no, impact on the state's memorial highways since the Interstate Highways were to be built almost exclusively on new paths set apart from the existing highways. As such, most numbered U.S. highways were to remain much as they were at the time. The end result was that the interstate highways had a far more negative impact on local businesses and smaller towns along the adjacent older U.S. highways than on the NCSGC's Blue Star Memorial initiatives.

8. Blue Star Memorial Program Developments in the 1960s

Another development materialized in 1958 when Florida's Blue Star Memorial Chairman Maud Roark asked the NCSGC Blue Star Chairman at the time about the feasibility of adding a fourth signature line on the Blue Star Memorial Markers in order to accommodate another entity which would have had some role in the acquisition or placement of the marker.



Prior to this time the markers were manufactured allowing only one, two or three signature lines immediately following the tribute to the Armed Forces lines. The marker's manufacturer, Sewah Studios, was approached and agreed to allow up to four signature lines with the third and fourth at a nominal additional cost each. However, Sewah advised that the font size of the lettering

may have to be reduced. The NCSGC Blue Star Chairman Mrs. Truman Sanders "did not feel the smaller print would be advisable".

Thus, the matter was dropped at the time. However, the issue resurfaced again two years later in 1960 when, by then, the proposed new fourth line was authorized by the NCSGC Blue Star Chairman. The first instance to use the four possible signature lines was for a highway marker dedicated on October 26th, 1960 in Perry, Florida as pictured on the previous page. In this example there are actually **six entities** listed on the four lines (Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Florida State Road Department, County Commission, City Council and two local garden clubs).

Under the direction of Mrs. J.B.A. Daughtridge, NCSGC Blue Star Memorial Chairman (1961-63), a promotional brochure about the nationwide project had been put together and sent to all state garden club presidents and state Blue Star Memorial chairmen in November of 1961. In the July/August, 1962 issue of *The National Gardener* Mrs. Daughtridge reported that in several states, due to highway widening or reconfiguration, many garden clubs had relocated their markers. She also stated, "No memorial is an honor unless it is a thing of lasting beauty." As such, a number of garden clubs refurbished their deteriorated markers, replaced markers which were beyond salvage, and/or re-landscaped their marker's living memorial surroundings.

In 1967 the NCSGC Blue Star Chairman advised the state federations that, "Alternate Routes (of Federal Highways) may be memorialized when the main route is designated Blue Star". The Chairman also cautioned that the NCSGC approved conventional inscription engraved on the marker cannot be changed!

9. Blue Star Program Expanded With By-Way and Memorial Markers

Unfortunately, the Vietnam War began to increasingly undermine the country's faith in its most respected institutions, particularly the military and the presidency. For years thereafter patriotic activities were muted to some extent. With this situation in mind, the NCSGC began looking for ways to keep up the momentum of the Blue Star Memorial Highway program. The result was an important expansion of the program.

A movement to extend the Blue Star Memorial Highway program to accommodate memorial sites other than dedicated highways had begun to develop. Once again, the garden clubs in New Jersey initiated action which was eventually endorsed by the NCSGC. Many New Jersey clubs felt that there were locations off the major highways that merited beautification plantings which could also be marked with a Blue Star tribute. In 1971 the Verona Garden Club of New Jersey was the first to install in Verona Township what would become the forerunner of a by-way marker.



A similar marker in Watchung, New Jersey is pictured at left. The following year the New Jersey State Senate enacted a joint resolution to establish a project allowing garden clubs to “beautify unsightly places in their own areas” and mark them with a Blue Star “By-Way” marker. Coordinating with the New Jersey Department of Transportation,

a suitable location in each of the eight districts of garden clubs throughout the state was identified where new plantings could be installed and adorned with a small, single-sided Blue Star marker similar to the one in the photo.

At about the same time as New Jersey was moving forward with the new type of marker a few other garden clubs across the country had taken the liberty to use the Intermediate Blue Star Marker for similar purposes i.e., in locations other than along federal highways. In a number of instances, a garden club would add another smaller rectangular plaque below the Intermediate marker to indicate that the surrounding plantings were in tribute to our Armed Forces.



In 1980 the NCSGC arranged with the sole manufacturer, Sewah Studios, such that the Intermediate Marker could contain the words “Blue Star Memorial By-Way”. An example of this marker is seen at left for the Garden Club of Watchung, New Jersey. This modification later became known as BY-WAY MARKER #1 and was about the same size as the Intermediate Marker - which was eventually discontinued.

At the April, 1981 NCSGC annual convention in Atlanta, Georgia the decision was taken to officially introduce this modification as a new Blue Star Memorial **By-Way** Marker. It was agreed that this new marker would be appropriate to place in public areas such as parks, civic and historical grounds.

After some time, once again, garden clubs began purchasing from the manufacturer, Sewah Studios, a rectangular plaque which could be used along with the new Blue Star Memorial By-Way Marker to clarify for the viewing public that the “living memorial gardens” surrounding the marker were intended to honor our Armed Forces.



In 1988 the NCSGC's Deep South Region added a new award No. 19 THE LOUISE VINES BLUE STAR MEMORIAL HIGHWAY MARKER AWARD. This award, consisting of a travelling plaque and a certificate, offered by the Garden Club of Alabama was to be awarded annually to a club or group of clubs for the most outstanding program in erecting and/or restoring Blue Star Memorial Highway Markers. This award was discontinued the following year.



At its 55th annual convention in Stamford, Connecticut in May, 1994 the NCSGC instituted a new official design for the one-sided Blue Star Memorial By-Way marker, which at 12" by 20", was larger than the old BY-WAY MARKER #1. The new marker became known as BY-WAY MARKER #2 (at left).

Under the direction of NCSGC President Mary Louise Michie (1995-97) the importance of honoring our veterans receiving medical attention at Veterans' Administration facilities and resting permanently at all of the nation's national cemeteries was recognized. And, once again, the Blue Star Memorial Program was expanded in May of 1996 at the NCSGC annual convention in Traverse City, Michigan.



Mary Louise Michie



A collaboration between the NCSGC and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs resulted in a new type of the large size of Blue Star Marker. It was approved specifically for placement at select Veterans Administration facilities, and national cemeteries. This marker is identical to the Blue Star Memorial Highway marker, but it eliminated the word "Highway", and its original cost was set at \$890.

Another action taken at the 1996 Traverse City convention was to eliminate the BY-WAY MARKER # 1, and have the BY-WAY MARKER #2 become the only type of Blue Star Memorial By-Way Marker authorized for use.

On April 10th, 1997 the Arizona Federation of Garden Clubs, in association with the Phoenix Garden Club and the Scottsdale Reserve Officers Association, were the first to dedicate this new type of Memorial Marker (pictured at right) at the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona. NCSGC President Mary Louise Michie attended this dedication ceremony.



A Blue Star Memorial Guidelines Committee was established in 1997 under the direction of NCSGC Blue Star Chairman Mrs. Albert M. Johnson (Marjorie). This committee developed an extensive set of updated guidelines published in booklet format which, with periodic revisions, continues to serve as the basis for direction of the nationwide program to date and is now available in downloadable form on the National Garden Clubs website. Included within these guidelines is a recommended format for the dedication ceremony and a suggested dedicatory wording.

The NCSGC's Blue Star Memorial suggested dedication ceremony is almost identical in format to that of the dedication which took place at our country's first national cemetery on November 19, 1863 where President Abraham Lincoln gave his famous "Gettysburg address". Although not the featured speaker that day, Lincoln's iconic and enduring two-minute address was the actual dedicatory portion of the ceremony.

The NCSGC added a new award in 1999 designated as No.43 CERTIFICATE OF MERIT FOR BLUE STAR MEMORIAL MARKER. This was to be awarded to a State Garden Club, group of member garden clubs, or a member garden club for the most outstanding completed Blue Star Memorial Marker landscaping project on the grounds of a National Cemetery or Veterans Administration Medical Center.

As from 2001, when the National Council of State Garden Clubs was renamed the National Garden Clubs, Inc. (NGC), the wording in the medallion atop the Highway and Memorial Markers and at the bottom of the By-Way Markers was revised to reflect this name change.

After some debate, the scope of the Blue Star Memorial Marker, originally authorized in 1996, was expanded at the 2004 NGC Convention in St. Louis, Missouri to include placement at "other appropriate civic locations **as approved by the NGC Blue Star Chairman**".

By 2005 The NGC had consolidated their Blue Star Memorial Marker Award No. 43 into the previously existing Blue Star Memorial Landscaping Award No. 29. The latter now included a section for each of the three types of markers and three sub-sections under each type of marker applicable for a single club, a group of clubs or a State Garden Club.

10. Principal Financial Group Supports the Blue Star Program

In 2005 the National Garden Clubs, Inc. began a nationwide grant program sponsored by The Principal Financial Group, based in Des Moines, Iowa. Grants were made available to local garden clubs in support of civic projects specifically intended to honor those who serve our country.

NGC President Kitty Larkin (2005-07), pictured at right, was instrumental in orchestrating the relationship with the Principal Financial Group. The program awarded close to \$200,000 in funds related to The Principal Financial Group's theme, "Let Freedom Ring". The Principal Financial Group anticipated their donations would fund "civic projects (which) lend themselves well to VA hospitals, cemeteries, military establishments, schools and highways, many of which will be of historic value."



Kitty Larkin

"The National Garden Clubs, Inc. accepted applications from affiliated local garden clubs for grants to create new civic projects or restore existing ones that honor those who serve our country. The program awards grants up to \$3,000 for each project, which must begin after June 2005 and be finalized by May 2007." Many of the grants helped fund new Blue Star Memorial markers across the country.

11. NGC Sage and Roses Fund Created

In 2007 or 2008 the NGC established a special fund specifically intended to help promote and finance the purchase and the landscaping for Blue Star markers. Garden clubs were urged to send email greetings at holiday times in lieu of sending them through the regular mail. Savings by so doing could then be donated to the Sage and Roses Blue Star Memorial Marker Fund administered by NGC headquarters staff. Sage and Roses is the acronym from the phrase: **S**end **A** Greeting **E**mail and **R**ecognize **O**ur **S**ervicemen's **E**very **S**acrifice.

For each \$25 donated from a state one chance for a drawing was generated for that state to win a monetary award. At the Annual Convention in 2009 the first Sage and Roses winning ticket drawn by the NGC President was for a member from Rhode Island. The fund was discontinued after the NGC annual convention in Richmond, Virginia in 2017 when Florida was the last winner. Proceeds from the last Sage & Roses award were used to place a Blue Star Memorial Marker and memorial garden at the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs' headquarters in Winter Park, Florida within Mead Botanical Garden.

12. Manufacturing and Recent Wording Refinements

Older Blue Star Memorial markers typically exhibit a distinctive reddish/rust colored large circular spot in the center of the marker. This is actually not rust as the marker is made of highly corrosion resistant cast aluminum, nor is it a defect.



This particularly unique red feature was intentionally included by the manufacturer and was designed to gradually appear as the marker's paint weathered over an extended period of time. Over the years this special effect was no longer viewed as desirable. So, in 2007 at the annual convention in Boston the NGC Board recommended the manufacturer discontinue this characteristic. The motion was approved and Sewah Studios, the manufacturer, thereafter modified the production process to

remove the undesired feature from the markers.

Apart from the gold-colored embossed lettering on the Blue Star Memorial Markers, the background color originally authorized by the Department of Defense has always been olive drab or "Army Green" - the camouflage paint used by tactical military vehicles since during World War I. The modern clearcoat finish darkens the shade of green slightly and adds luster. Unlike the Navy Blue color of the star in the service banner, the star on the memorial markers is closer to a robin's egg blue.

For garden clubs which opt to have their Blue Star Markers refurbished locally it is essential to replicate the original colors and design accurately. In this regard the Winter, 2010 edition of *The National Gardener* advised that "...the California Federation of Garden Clubs had been successful in having Sherwin-Williams Paint Company match the original colors. Memorial Marker Green and Memorial Star Blue are available."

In 2013 the manufacturer, Sewah Studios, switched over to a powder coating process in place of the conventional painting previously used. The powder coating creates a hard finish which is tougher than conventional paint and which is more salt tolerant, thus extending the marker's surface coloring lifespan significantly. Unlike oil-based paints, powder coatings contain no solvents and release little or no amounts of volatile organic compounds into the atmosphere.



In the latter part of 2014 NGC Blue Star Memorial Chairman Andrea T. Little implemented a one-word change in the second line of the highway and memorial markers' tribute wording. The word "that" was replaced with the word "**who**". Under certain circumstances English grammar rules permit the use of either "that" or "who" when describing multiple people doing something.

However, when either word is permitted, using “that” when referring to people may be construed as depersonalizing. Using “who” is considered a “much better manifestation of human solidarity”. The word “**who**” had been used in the original tribute on markers from 1947 to 1951, as well.

13. Gold Star Families Memorial Markers Introduced



Andrea Little

Under the direction of NGC Blue Star Memorial Chairman Andrea T. Little (pictured at left) a new adjunct program to the Blue Star Memorial Markers Program was conceived. Chairman Little was approached by Mrs. Patti Smith, founder of America’s Gold Star Families, a not-for-profit organization, whose mission is to offer “honor, hope and healing” to families which have lost a relative while the latter was serving in our Armed Forces.

The Gold Star was also used during WWII on the service banner and displayed in windows of homes to indicate a fallen relative. Patti Smith (pictured at right) had noticed the Blue Star Memorials along highways and by-ways and believed the NGC and America’s Gold Star Families could collaborate by creating memorials to honor Gold Star Families.



Patti Smith

NGC Blue Star Memorial Chairman Andrea Little agreed and began the process of securing approval of the project from the NGC board. With the board’s authorization in hand, she approached the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In February of 2015 the VA communicated their agreement to the proposed expansion of the Blue Star Memorial Marker program.



Finally, at the NGC annual convention in Louisville, Kentucky in May of 2015 the NGC board of directors and attending delegates unanimously approved the Gold Star Families Memorial Markers Program. The program is restricted to Memorial Markers and By-Way Markers, as only Blue Star Memorial Highway Markers are allowed on the designated Blue Star Memorial Highways. The first Gold Star Families Memorial Marker was dedicated on May 14, 2016 in Peoria, Illinois.

14. Final Thoughts

It is most important to keep in mind the two-fold purpose of the NGC Blue and Gold Star Memorial program which is:

1. to offer **fitting tributes** across the land to the Armed Forces of the United States and their families, and
2. for garden clubs to utilize their horticulture knowledge and landscape design skills **to beautify with attractive “living memorial” planting material** the designated highways, veterans’ facilities, national cemeteries, parks, and other civic locations upon which the Blue and Gold Star Memorials Markers are erected and dedicated.

“The world should know of those who gave so much for liberty. The dearest thing in all the world to a father and mother – their children”
~ The Congressional Record, 1917

“I’m proud to be an American, where at least I know I’m free. And I won’t forget the men who died, who gave that right to me.”
~ Lee Greenwood, 1984

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