

## HISTORY OF THE BLUE STAR MEMORIALS

At the close of World War II, National Garden Clubs (called National Council of Garden Clubs at the time), like other public spirited groups, was seeking a suitable means of honoring our service men and women. Garden Club members visualized a living memorial, preferring to help beautify and preserve the country these men and women had fought for, rather than build stone monuments in their honor.

In 1944, Mrs. Lewis M. Hull, Garden Club of New Jersey President and future NCSGC President, and Mrs. Vance Hood, Roadside Chairman, had an inspired idea. One thousand flowering Dogwood trees would be planted along five miles of highway, which had been designated the Blue Star Drive by the Legislature. No billboards were to be allowed on the memorial stretch. The project was named for the blue star in the service flag which hung in windows of homes and businesses to honor service men and women.

The guest speaker at the 1945 National Council of State Garden Clubs Annual Meeting in New York City was Spencer Miller, New Jersey's State Highway Commissioner, who had helped to implement the New Jersey project. He proposed that the program be adopted by NCSGC. At the 1945 Fall Semi-Annual Meeting, the project was approved. A "ribbon of living memorial plantings traversing every state" called [The Blue Star Memorial Highway Program](#) was adopted at the 1946 Annual Meeting in New Orleans.

In 1947, Mrs. Frederick R. Kellogg (NCSGC President 1930-1933) designed a marker, which would identify the highways.

Clubs responded enthusiastically, with Rhode Island receiving the first endorsement. After official approval of the site, garden clubs would purchase markers and planting materials. Highway Departments would plant and maintain the area. This was the first program undertaken by garden clubs on a national scale.

While it originally began to honor World War II veterans, it enlarged its mission in 1951 to include all men and women, who had served, were serving or would serve in the armed forces of the United States.

The need for an extension of the program to accommodate other than dedicated highways became apparent. As a result a smaller By-Way Marker, to be placed in areas such as parks, civic and historical grounds, was approved at the 1981 convention in Atlanta. This marker was changed at the 1994 convention in Connecticut to be more descriptive by including the words "A tribute to the Armed Forces of America".

A third marker had been added at the 1996 convention in Michigan. This marker was identical to the original Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker, except for the removal of the word "Highway". This change allowed the marker to be placed on the grounds of a National Cemetery or Veterans Administration Center. At the 2004 Convention in St. Louis the scope of this marker was enlarged to include other appropriate civic locations.